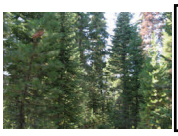

Intermountain Trails

USDA Forest Service—Intermountain Region March 2013 Volume 2, Issue 3

Forest In Focus: Sawtooth National Forest

Forest Supervisor– Becky Nourse

Sawtooth National Forest Supervisor, Becky Nourse

The 2.1-million-acre Sawtooth National Forest occupies a large portion of south central Idaho, stretching from the Salmon River in the north into the Raft River Mountains in northern Utah.

I have been struck by the variety of recreation use on the Forest. The Sawtooth National Recreation Area is known in the state as the "Crown Jewel of Idaho" and its spectacular scenery often turns up in statewide publications, websites, and features. The Sawtooth provides a wide spectrum of recreational opportunities and skill levels from family-oriented activities to professional sports.

Our trail system has something for everyone, and we continue to maintain, improve, and add to it through a variety of very exciting partnerships. The Magic Valley ATV Riders and Backcountry Horsemen are very active in the southern part of the Forest, and the mountains near Fairfield contain some of Idaho's best motorized single track trails. Those drawn to solitude and quiet can find remote backcountry trails in the Sawtooth Wilderness and White Cloud Mountains. The Wood River Valley, home to the world-famous Sun Valley Ski Resort, provides a seemingly endless source of interest and help for Nordic ski trails, hiking, horseback and biking loops, and even the new mountain bike flow trail called "Forbidden Fruit" where the goal of riding it from top to bottom is to never put on your brakes. While I enjoy using a lot of our trails, this is one I'm going to leave to the experts!

The Sawtooth is an amazing forest. Nearly every project we do, whether a new opportunity or maintenance of a trail or facility that the public has been enjoying for decades, incorporates an element of landscape restoration in the work.

Come visit the Sawtooth National Forest and experience the spectacular outdoor recreation opportunities that draw millions of people here!

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Visit the Sawtooth National Forest website:

http://www.fs.usda.gov/sawtooth

TRAIL STORIES

Warm Springs Trail (See Page 2)

Warm Springs Ridge-Osberg Ridgeline Trail

The Osberg Ridgeline Trail on the Ketchum Ranger District provides eight miles of newly constructed trail and four miles of reclaimed trail on Warm Springs Ridge. The new trail has greatly reduced the severely eroded sections of the trail. "The new trail is great, we were really worried about sediment issues and the hard work has really paid off, we will love this new trail forever." -Kurt Nelson

This trail is the longest and often considered the flagship trail on the Ketchum Ranger District.

Forbidden Fruit "Flow Trail"

The 1.5-mile-long Forbidden Fruit "flow trail," located within the Adams and Eve Gulch drainage on the Ketchum Ranger District, was designed to give advanced mountain bikers the opportunity to "get air" on a trail that leads the rider from one feature to the next on a nearly brakeless decent. The trail incorporates banked turns, rolls and tabletop jumps while still being tame enough to allow beginner riders the fun of safely rolling through the features with their tires firmly on the ground.

Originally proposed by local mountain biking advocates from the Wood River Bike Coalition, the final design was a product of input from representatives of the International Mountain Biking Association, Payette and Sawtooth National Forest trail designers, and the late Duncan Mackenzie of Whistler, British Columbia. Duncan, a visionary trail designer and bike racer, generously donated much of his time and enthusiasm to keeping the project afloat and tagged the trail with the amusing name of "Forbidden Fruit."

Since the trail was constructed in 2011, it has been maintained through the Adopt-A-Trail Program by the Wood River Bike Coalition.

This summer, Forbidden Fruit will no doubt be drawing crowds from the National Downhill Mountain Biking Championships, held in Ketchum for the second year, as well as from visiting and local riders, as its popularity continues to grow.

Minidoka Ranger District National Public Lands Day

Over the last few years, National Public Lands Day (NPLD) has become a tradition on the Minidoka Ranger District. Several different projects have been completed with help from a wide variety of groups and individuals. Projects have included building corrals for horse friendly campsites, improving designated campsites in a dispersed camping area, reconstructing motorized trails, and clearing Nordic ski trails.

In September 2012 NPLD was held in the Albion Mountains and hosted by the National Pioneer Hall of Fame and Pommerelle Ski Resort. Approximately 30 volunteers and employees worked on planting native species to improve habitat for the Christ's Indian paintbrush, (a rare perennial endemic to the Albion Mountains) built fences at Bennett Springs Campground, and worked on the Skyline Motorcycle Trail.

Due to the efforts of Sawtooth National Forest employees with the help of volunteers, the Christ Indian Paintbrush was considered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), to no longer warrant listing, and was removed from candidate status in November 2012. The forest, through a memorandum of agreement with the USFWS continues to implement conservation actions and long-term monitoring. Volunteers participating in NPLD and other events continue to be a part of preserving this unique plant on the Sawtooth National Forest.

Blaine County Recreation District

A truly unique public-private partnership assists with the management of a trail system on the Sawtooth National Forest.

The Blaine County Recreation District (BCRD) is the entity that partners with the Forest to make the trail system a world class destination. Without their help, it would be nearly impossible to provide daily maintenance and development of new trails to our customers. The BCRD utilizes their website to educate residents and visitors with a daily recreation report, and information on washouts, blowouts, and all the updates that trails users need to know about.

The Harriman Trail is a shining example of community and public agency cooperation. The BCRD began construction of the Harriman Trail in 1991 with a pledge from the Mary W. Harriman Foundation. In partnership with the US Forest Service, the BCRD manages and maintains the trail year round. Framed by the majestic Boulder Mountains, the Harriman Trail is a four-season, non-motorized, recreational pathway that follows an 18-mile course through nature's wonderland. Named in honor of W. Averell Harriman, this magnificent route provides hiking, biking, equestrian, and wildlife viewing opportunities for all. In winter, the trail is groomed for Nordic skiing by the BCRD and serves as a vital link for the entire BCRD Nordic Trail system. **For detailed trail information, visit http://wintertrailink.bcrd.org/**

"Without the assistance from the Blaine County Recreation Department, we just would not be able to provide this type of experience. We are truly fortunate to have the District serving our community and a partner with the Sawtooth National Forest." -Kurt Nelson, Ketchum District Ranger.

Friends and Fires

The two words that best describe the 2012 trail season on the Sawtooth National Recreation Area are "Friends and Fires." The summer started off rather routine, with trail crews clearing as far as snow and high water would allow. Soon crews were on a roll, partners were in place, and trails were looking good. Then fire season hit!

The Halstead Fire, 2012.

With a month of work under their belt, crews were on track to complete the Little Casino Trail reconstruction by fall. But the Halstead Fire charged downriver and area closures went into effect. Crews were evacuated and pack strings backhauled gear. Despite the setback, crews made significant progress and work is ready to resume in 2013.

As the Halstead rolled on, crews relocated to Stanley Lake and started work a year ahead of schedule. Thanks to help from a Sawtooth Society license plate grant and a hardy American Hiking Society volunteer, crews completed saw and tread work.

It takes more than a busy fire season to keep our partners away. The Idaho Trails Association, with support from the Sawtooth Society and Mystic Saddle Ranch, trained up on their crosscut saw skills and "adopted" the popular wilderness trails on the Alice-Toxaway Loop. Volunteers sawed trees, moved rocks, rebuilt tread, cleaned campfire rings and cleaned 256 waterbars.

Pole Creek ATV trails also saw progress. Saw and tread work, road relocation, and rehabilitation were accomplished; two bridges and several puncheons were installed. ATV users will have a great trail experience when work is completed in 2013.

Trail contractors made headway on the west side of the Sawtooth Wilderness, despite the Trinity Fire and more trail closures.

Summer's end didn't mean the tools were packed away. As the snow began to fly, the Blaine County Recreation District, Sawtooth Ski Club, Salmon River Snowmobile Club, and Sawtooth Snowmobile Club were still hard at work, getting 150 miles of trails ready for winter.

Between forest crews, volunteers, partners and contractors, 482 miles of the 750-mile trail system on the Sawtooth National Recreation Area were maintained and progress was made on several projects in 2012.

Trail crew wokers using a cross-cut saw to clear a tree from a trail.

"With plenty to keep us busy next summer, we're hoping for a little quieter fire season and we're inviting our friends back again!" -Jay, Trail Foreman, Sawtooth National Recreation Area

Family Snowshoe Tours on the Sawtooth National Recreation Area

The Sawtooth National Recreation Area (NRA) Visitor Center became a SnowSchool site in 2012. SnowSchool is a non-commercial, science-based education program made up of various nonprofit groups that are all unique but share one main goal:

exposing kids to the fun and wonder of their winter environment.

A group snowshoeing at the SnowSchool site.

The snowshoes (for both adults and children) were ordered through the Winter Wildlands Alliance, a nonprofit organization in Boise that provides support and logistics in setting SnowSchool sites up and getting them running. All SnowSchool sites are nonprofit entities, whether they are governmental, private, or educational.

We began our educational programs in the winter of 2012 by offering "Family Snowshoe" programs on the weekends at North Fork near the visitor center. These tours were offered to attract families from the area for an inexpensive way to enjoy the outdoors and learn about winter ecology and animal tracking, and to perhaps enjoy snowshoeing for the first time.

"Snow Adventure Day" is a festival at the Sawtooth NRA where children of all ages are invited to participate in several winter ecology activities including puppet shows, arts and crafts, snow science experiments, snow cave building, animal tracking stations, scavenger hunts, and a snowshoe hike. The festival was popular with over 70 children and 35 adults attending last year. Thanks to the grant from the Sawtooth Society, we were able to offer snowshoe tours at the festival with free snowshoe rental for adults and children.

For our second SnowSchool season in 2013, we had 15 adults and children participate in two of our snowshoe programs and two school groups with a total of 21 schoolchildren. Several more snowshoe programs are planned, including three additional family snowshoe programs before spring returns.

We hope to educate more school groups in the future and anticipate that the educational snowshoe program on the Sawtooth NRA will expand and be an asset to the local community and out-of-town guests, including public and private schools, pre-schools, organized camps, and other community groups that wish to expand opportunities for learning in this beautiful winter landscape that we call home.

-Susan Kranz

Safety Tips: Be Prepared

Wear proper clothing and always take a first aid kit when you plan to visit your National Forest. Always take someone with you; if something happens, you want someone there to help you.

Sawtooth National Forest
History Column

After the 1848 discovery of gold in California, hundreds of Basques immigrated to the American West where they found work raising sheep to supply miners with mutton. Their numbers grew over subsequent decades with many arriving to work under contract with the Western Range Association between the 1950s and 1970s. Basques played a significant role in the sheep industry, especially in the high desert country of Nevada, Idaho, and Oregon where many left traces in the form of arborglyphs. These carvings, typically found on aspen trees, capture the sentiments and yearnings of sheepherders who often experienced long periods of solitude.

Sheep belonging to A. H. Brailsford of Hagerman Valley, Idaho, grazing at loading corrals at Horse Creek near US Highway 93. Forest officer Robert S. Monahan talks with Basque herder Felix Madarieta about range use.

Anyone familiar with the Trailing of the Sheep Festival through Ketchum, Idaho can understand the significance of sheep in the Sawtooth National Forest's history. Basque sheepherding is a key part of that heritage. Forest officers who recounted interactions with the Basques often commented on the sheepherder's loneliness and willingness to share a meal, even when they did not share a common language. The Sawtooth sought to address communication difficulties, as explained in the following excerpt from the February 7, 1969 issue of the *Intermountain Reporter*:

> Bridges are being built across the language barrier that exists between Basque sheepherders and Forest Service personnel on the Sawtooth National Forest. Recently, the second annual meeting was conducted by Forest personnel to explain the uses of National Forest land to local Basque sheepherders who do not understand English. A former sheepherder, Mr. Joe Bengoechea, who is a Basque and speaks English very well, acted as interpreter. Mr. Bengoechea explained to approximately 25 men about the many other uses—besides grazing—of National Forest land and the need for regulations. . . . Fred Baugh, range staff assistant on the Sawtooth, expressed hopes that similar educational meetings will continue to be held each year. He explained that problems often arise because the Basque herders associate Forest Service personnel with the policemen they have feared for many years in their home country.

For more information about the Basques in southwest Idaho, check out "Basques in the West," a video at http://youtu.be/oK6GXxD62eA . You can also see some arborglyphs at http://www.fs.fed.us/wildflowers/communities/aspen/carvings.shtml

-Richa Wilson, Regional Architectural Historian

Regional Forester's Message

We are now entering into another field season as the weather changes. This can be an exciting time of year as we find ourselves in such diverse landscapes to do our work across the region. As you prepare for the coming year, I would like to ask each of you to take to heart the need for open and clear communication between each other and supervisors. During this seasonal time of transition, here are a few things that should come to mind in relation to staying safe and ensuring everyone makes it home each night.

Agreements - Have frequent conversations with co-workers and your supervisor around the activities you practice in carrying out the work. Are your actions and behaviors consistent with your leader's intent to get the job done? Often times we assume a practice is acceptable and understood by our supervisors to later find out they are surprised, or even shocked by the way we do something. Dialogue will help supervisors and employees reach a higher level of **agreement** on critical issues such as, what safety means, what risks are acceptable and what risks are not.

> **"Take to heart the need for open and clear communication between each other and supervisors."**
>
> *-Nora Rasure*

Strategic Risk Assessments - By having discussions and empowering employees to share experiences and mistakes, co-workers, project planners and supervisors get a fuller and a more accurate **understanding of the real risks** employees are facing. This process day-lights the gap between work as practiced verses work as perceived. While this can be uncomfortable, it is also essential if we are to realistically approach risk strategically.

Awareness and Preparation - Discussions will bring awareness of the risks we face in our day to day work. This **awareness** is helping us plan better, **prepare** for and mitigate risks more completely.

Learning - Six years ago, an external assessment of our agency (Dialogos' Diagnostic Memo) found the agency's ability to learn was impaired, specifically that, "The agency has in general difficulty making error objectively studied and transparently discussed as a source of learning and improvement." (Dialogos Review pg 12). By increasing our conversations around the risks we face, we have a better chance to directly address this "impairment" and is a very positive force vectoring the agency ***towards a learning culture***.

During our Safety Engagement sessions over the last few years, we were introduced to these practices outlined above. Through discussions, I challenge each of you to become more familiar with these practices to the point of habit. Talk to your co-workers and supervisors often about the environment you face. Through sharing and learning, I know we will have a great summer field season.

Nora Rasure
Regional Forester