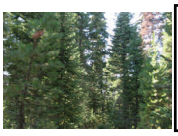

Intermountain Trails

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Forest in Focus: Manti-La Sal National Forest

Forest Supervisor – Allan Rowley

Manti-La Sal National Forest Supervisor, Allan Rowley

Let me introduce the Manti-La Sal National Forest to you with two unique attributes of the forest. First, it is not commonly remembered that in the early days of the Forest Service local communities sometimes could or would lobby for the creation of a Forest Reserve, or later National Forest. Both the Manti National Forest, now the Ferron/Price and Sanpete Ranger Districts, and the La Sal National Forest, now the Moab/Monticello Ranger District, had local community support groups that lobbied for their creation. In both cases, improving watershed conditions and protecting the community water supply were the driving interests. These interests continue to be a high priority for the Forest.

Second, each of the three Ranger Districts still carries that strong sense of community pride, identification with their local communities, and independence that comes with those communities. It is a pleasure to work with a group of employees who care about the resources they manage with personal pride and who work in communities where managing natural resources is so valued.

Welcome, and come experience some of the world class recreation opportunities and breathtaking scenery we have to offer on the Manti-La Sal National Forest.

Visit the Manti-La Sal National Forest website:

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

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TRAIL STORIES

The Whole Enchilada

(see page 2)

The Whole Enchilada

Mention the words "Whole Enchilada" to mountain bikers and they won't be thinking of spicy Mexican food. Instead, they will be dreaming of challenging and diverse singletrack bike trails that take them from the alpine terrain of Burro Pass at 11,200 feet to the banks of the Colorado River at 4,000 feet. This epic trail drops 7,000 vertical feet over 26.5 miles and crosses through every life zone on the Colorado Plateau. You can pedal past a black bear in the morning and coast by rafters on the Colorado River in the afternoon.

The trail is not for beginners. It takes considerable skill and stamina to complete. If you are up to it, the "Whole Enchilada" provides one of the most unique mountain bike experiences on the planet. Several access points allow users to exit the trail and create shorter, easier rides.

Some riders opt to be guided by an authorized mountain bike guide who provides tours of the trail or uses four authorized shuttle companies to access the trailhead. This has provided an economic boost for businesses in Moab. The Forest Service works closely with these companies to only allow use when the trail is dry. Guides also teach their clients about trail etiquette.

The "Whole Enchilda" begins on lands managed by the Moab/Monticello Ranger District of the Manti-La Sal National Forest and ends on lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Moab Field Office. Trail management is coordinated between the two agencies. Local riders and Trail Mix, a county trail advisory group, volunteer with Forest Service trail crews to help maintain the trails.

Featured in many major cycling magazines, the "Whole Enchilada" has become the ride to do in the Southwest. High levels of use are becoming a management challenge. District recreation staff are working to balance a world class biking experience with the needs of other non-motorized recreationists and wildlife.

Stuart Guard Station Becomes Part of History, Again

Stuart Guard Station was built in 1933 under the direction of Ranger Lee E. Young by local craftsmen and young men from the Ferron Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp. He knew the guard station was needed to serve the growing numbers of coal miners, loggers, livestock operators and campers using Huntington Canyon. Stuart was beautifully restored in 1996 and converted into a popular visitor's center on the Huntington-Eccles Canyons National Scenic Byway.

Stuart Guard Station reflects distinct Forest Service building plans from the 1930s.

When fire spread rapidly up Huntington Canyon on June 26, 2012, the guard station was in peril. Firefighters knew that gusting winds and spot fires made confronting the fire head-on impossible, but they were determined not to lose Stuart Guard Station. As fire engines and crews arrived, spot fires surrounded the buildings on three sides. A plan was made to conduct a burn-out, which then was cooled with water supplied by three engines. When the main flame front arrived, it stopped at the burned area and swept around the guard station.

"At that point, we didn't know how big the fire was or even where it was," said John D. Pell, Senior Firefighter, Engine 1031. "We knew we had weeks and weeks of hard work ahead of us on this fire. But we knew one thing: Stuart Guard Station would still be standing in the morning" The firefighters' work saved those buildings, and they showed the same commitment to saving privately owned cabins during the Seeley Fire.

Huntington Canyon — in and immediately below the Seeley Fire area — will remain closed because of the continued danger of post-fire flooding. However, Stuart Guard Station will be open on weekends and Mondays between Memorial Day and Labor Day. Visitors can learn about the Seeley Fire and the post-fire recovery efforts from returning Stuart Guard Station volunteer hosts Linda and Reynolds Duncan.

"We knew one thing: Stuart Guard Station would still be standing in the morning."

The flame front moves past Stuart Guard Station.

The Seeley Fire and Post-Fire Flooding Hit Hard

Debris flow moved boulders onto Highway 31. Note the UDOT loader in the background.

The Seeley Fire began early in the morning of June 26, 2012, on a steep and remote slope in the Left Fork of Huntington Canyon. It was started by lightning on a day when fuel moistures were at an all-time low. Then the wind began to blow hard. The fire raced up the canyon and by the next day it had spread 8 miles and burned over 23 square miles. When the fire finally was contained on July 18, it had burned 48,050 acres (75 square miles), primarily on the Manti-La Sal National Forest.

Intense summer monsoon storms triggered six major debris flows after the fire. The worst of these occurred on September 1. It was a rare 75-year event that put 1,600 cubic feet per second (cfs) into Huntington Creek (by comparison, the worst creek flooding on record is 1,800 cfs during the spring runoff in 1983). The flooding caused rocks, logs, ash and silt to pour out of side canyons.

Every fire creates lasting change, but dealing with the after-effects of the Seeley fire is now a focus of the Ferron/Price Ranger District and local communities. Huntington Canyon connects residents with the Forest both economically and culturally. The Forest has four operating coal mines; three are within this watershed. Together, these mines produce 7.5 million tons of coal annually and contribute $20.3 million dollars to the US Treasury.

The Energy Loop: Huntington-Eccles Canyons National Scenic Byway on Highway 31 is a favored recreation area with 8 campgrounds and 20 trails, including the Left Fork of Huntington National Recreation Trail. The highway is also used by hundreds of area commuters. The flooding damaged campgrounds, washed away trails, and caused nearly $900,000 in damage and repeated closures.

The flooding killed fish in the Huntington Canyon Blue-Ribbon Fly Fishing area. The debris flows intermittently blocked the water diversion structure for the Huntington Cleveland Irrigation Company and put mud into farmers' irrigation pipes.

100-foot long log jam in the Left Fork of Huntington Creek threatened a campground and Highway 31. Emery County removed it using Resource Advisory Committee (RAC) funding.

Debris flow through a campground. All campgrounds are now closed due to safety concerns.

Seeley Post-Fire Recovery Efforts

Natural log debris rack in Engineer Canyon, a tributary of Huntington Canyon.

A BAER (Burned Area Emergency Response) Team completed an assessment of the effects of the Seeley Fire before the fire was contained and when post-fire debris flows had already begun. The goal was to identify ways to reduce safety risks, prevent resource damage and protect downstream values on and off the Forest. It focused on providing protection for Highway 31 and downstream facilities from increased flows from future storms. The team proposed treatments that decreased the chances of debris and sediment blocking culverts, damaging structures and entering Huntington Creek. The area's steep topography and side drainages restricted standard treatment methods typically used for post-fire treatments.

Overflow debris basin in Nuck Woodward Canyon, the major tributary to Huntington Canyon.

The goal is to effectively control the effects of post-fire flooding by working close to the source of that flooding. The Forest worked extensively with other organizations in managing post-fire effects. These include the Utah Department of Transportation, Emery County, Carbon County, the Huntington Cleveland Irrigation Company, Utah Division of Wildlife Resources and local water conservancy districts. Backcountry Horsemen have also assisted in extensive trail stabilization efforts. These groups have implemented a series of treatments designed to work within this particular setting.

For example, the BAER team observed naturally created log debris racks during the emergency assessment. Logs that were deposited by flooding across stream channels, in turn, caught other flood debris. It was determined that similar structures could be constructed at a relatively low cost from on-site materials. Sixty of these structures have proved to be effective at filtering large debris from drainages. Additional treatments include three sets of overflow basins and grade control structures in the mouths of six canyons. As the landscape continues to recover, these structures will naturally blend with the native environment.

Constructed log debris rack in Nuck Woodward Canyon, effectively holding back rock and other debris.

Grade control structure at the mouth of Pole Canyon, in Huntington Canyon.

Conservation Days: Fourth Graders Learn about Recovery after the Seeley Fire

"We love the different stations where our students get the chance to have hands-on experiences they can never get in the classroom. Conservation Days complements our core curriculum for environmental education and lets the students have fun while learning."

— Mr. Tyler Grundy, Bruin Point Elementary

The Manti-La Sal's new Fire Prevention trailer includes generators that power video presentations.

Each spring, over 370 Carbon and Emery County fourth graders, teachers and parents spend the day with Manti-La Sal National Forest employees at the Old Folks Campground. About 125 students arrive daily and rotate through five half-hour long stations. This marks the 22nd year of the program — thousands of fourth graders have already enjoyed the innovative learning of Conservation Days.

Miraculously, the Seeley Fire skipped over the Old Folks Campground in Huntington Canyon. This presents a unique opportunity for students to safely learn about the Seeley Fire and how the burned landscape will recover and change.

This year's Conservation Days helped students see the dramatically altered landscape of the Seeley Fire burn area with new eyes. To some, the thousands of burned spruce and fir trees are overwhelming. The students learned that spruce/fir forests of this kind only burn about every 200 years during very dry conditions. These fourth graders are now part of history because they will witness the emergence of a new forest. Students also looked at "tree cookies," thin slices of tree trunks. The tree rings on the slice indicate the age of the tree and can be used to measure periods of drought and fire.

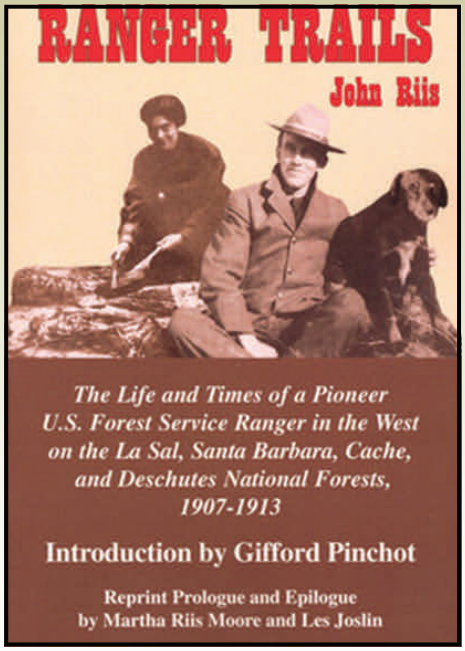
"Tree cookies" illustrate how some tree species are more vulnerable to fire, including spruce and fir.

Students learned how to recognize the small signs of recovery. They observed grass on the canyon slopes. Wildflowers will soon appear where shade from spruce trees had prevented their growth. The spruce forests will return at a very slow rate. Students learned how aspens have adapted to fire and saw how their root systems are sending up thousands of small trees. Aspen stands will slowly spread in the next decade, providing good habitat for birds and wildlife and creating new beauty in the area.

Safety Tip: Don't Feed the Animals

Feeding wild animals can condition them to expect or depend upon food from humans, as well as endanger the ones doing the feeding.

Ranger and Newspaperman John Riis



Many people have heard of Jacob Riis, the noted social journalist and photographer who exposed the poor living conditions of New York tenements in his book *How The Other Half Lives*. But did you know that Riis was a friend of Theodore Roosevelt and the father of a La Sal National Forest ranger? His son John, born July 30, 1882 in Brooklyn, set out for the West in 1902. He eventually found work on the Cunningham and Carpenter ranch in La Sal, Utah. On February 28, 1907, he received his first Forest Service appointment as an assistant ranger on the Monticello Division of the La Sal National Forest.

Despite his promotion to Forest Supervisor (1908-1910), John Riis seemed to struggle with finding his niche. He left the La Sal in early 1910 and worked briefly as a ranger on the Targhee and Santa Rosa National Forests. He returned to Utah later that year as Deputy Supervisor of the Cache National Forest. Riis relocated to Oregon to work on the Deschutes National Forest (1911-1913), followed by stints as State Deputy Game Warden and as secretary in Bill Hanley's bids for the Oregon governorship and US senator. After Hanley lost both races, Riis sought reemployment with the Forest Service but had no luck.

Riis left the West in late 1914 for Winston-Salem, North Carolina where he wrote numerous editorials and newspaper articles calling for forest protection. His attention to this topic led to a temporary appointment (1915-16) with the Forest Service in North Carolina. Before long, Riis was on the move again, this time to Georgia where he was the superintendent at a utopian school (1916-18) and a manager of a plantation (beginning in 1918).

In the early 1920s, Riis finally found his calling as a newspaperman in Richmond, Virginia. He excelled as a writer and, in 1937, wrote *Ranger Trails,* a book about his experiences in the Forest Service. In it, Riis detailed — often with a thread of humor — the personnel and community members he encountered while working on the La Sal National Forest. Les Joslin reprinted the book in 2008, adding extensive biographical information about Riis, who died September 28, 1946.

Richa Wilson

Regional Architectural Historian

The Forest Ranger Exam

"For two days the examiners harried us. We rode to demonstrate our horsemanship and shot at a post while on the gallop to prove our marksmanship. We packed a horse and threw the diamond hitch, did some simple surveying, cut down trees, trying to fall them on a stake set by the examiner, mapped and estimated timber land, made out bills of lumber, camp supplies and many other things."

— John Riis, *Ranger Trails*

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