

## A WINDOW TO THE PAST, PRESENT, and FUTURE

---

Between 1938 and 1940, the Civilian Conservation Corps built several structures at Big Goose Ranger Station on the Bighorn National Forest. For health and safety reasons one of these, Building 3507, is scheduled for removal so now is a good time to show how this building is part of a large story.

### **Public land management and the Bighorn National Forest**

The story actually begins with the American Revolution (1775 - 1783) when land owned by the aristocracy was transferred into public holdings. These holdings were the beginning of a new and enduring concept: lands managed by a representative government for the benefit of the nation. Under provisions of the Forest Reserve Act, presidents could select additional lands and in 1897 President Grover Cleveland created the Bighorn Forest Reserve. These Reserves were transferred into the newly created Forest Service in 1905. Forest Service direction was to preserve a perpetual supply of timber for home industries, prevent destruction of the forest cover which regulates the flow of streams, and protect local residents from unfair competition in the use of forest and range. In practice this meant that forest rangers often lived at remote stations to protect watersheds, suppress fires, and monitor grazing, mining, and timber harvest. In 1907 Gifford Pinchot, first Chief of the Forest Service, wrote that rangers must:

“thoroughly know the country, its conditions, and its people ... be able to take care of himself and his horses under very trying conditions; build trails and cabins; ride all day and all night; pack, shoot, and fight fire without losing his head. He must know a good deal about the timber of the country and how to estimate it; he must be familiar with lumbering and the sawmill business, the handling of livestock, mining, and the land laws...it is not a job for those seeking health or light outdoor work.”

This approach to forest management could be described as custodial rather than active and it lasted until economic and environmental disasters forced change.

### **The Civilian Conservation Corps**

These disasters were the Dust Bowl and the Great Depression and the Civilian Conservation Corps, or CCC, was created in response. The Depression began in 1929 and during the economic collapse up to 25 percent of the labor force was unemployed and millions lost their homes. At the same time, severe drought and deep plowing caused the Dust Bowl. This and less dramatic environmental conditions indicated the need to change how we used natural resources. When Franklin Roosevelt became president in 1933, he created the CCC to address both economic and environmental problems. Between 1933 and 1942, nearly 3 million men worked for the CCC. Men between 18 and 25 years of age could enroll for food, clothing, and shelter and up to \$30 a month. Each person could keep \$5 a month while the rest went to their families.

The CCC was placed under the supervision of the military and was organized similarly. Companies of 200 men lived in self-sufficient camps that were scattered across the country. The following table lists the companies that worked on the Bighorn National Forest.

Company	Year	Nearest post office
841	1935	Ten Sleep
849	1936	Ten Sleep
853	1934	Ranchester
855	1936	Dayton
874	1933	Buffalo
875	1936	Worland
1807	1934	Buffalo
1811	1937	Ten Sleep

These companies built infrastructure that is still in use today: roads, bridges, ranger stations, fire lookouts, reservoirs, telephone lines, campgrounds, and trails. Less obvious but just as important was access to education. Through on-the-job training and formal classes men learned auto mechanics, cooking, carpentry, forestry, journalism, and bookkeeping. In Wyoming the CCC and the University of Wyoming offered English, math, biology, social sciences, typing, and shorthand courses. The impact of this is illustrated by the fact that 57,000 men learned to read and write while they were enrolled in the CCC.

## Rustic architecture and Big Goose Ranger Station

For efficiency the Forest Service developed Standard Plans for administrative buildings that required skilled craftsmanship but could be built quickly. By the late 1930s these were replaced by Acceptable Plans, which increased flexibility and allowed the design to be influenced by local vegetation, climate, traditional architecture, and materials. This approach produced rustic buildings that blend with the regional setting. Use of both the Standard and Acceptable Plans established a degree of uniformity that came to be identified with the Forest Service.

Three of the original buildings at Big Goose Ranger Station are good examples of the rustic style developed for the western mountains. Rustic buildings are usually one-story tall, with rubble stone foundations, and have saddle-notched log walls, rectangular or L-shaped plans, gable roofs, and wood shingles. Offices and dwellings often have open roughly squared stone porches and cobble stone fireplaces. Vertical board doors were typical on both houses and garages. Windows with multiple small glass panes were standard while wood shutters with a pine tree motif were common. High levels of craftsmanship were needed to notch wall logs, and construct rock foundations; well-finished cabinets and finish trim carpentry are evident. Recent photographs of Buildings 3513 and 3504 at Big Goose illustrate all these features. On the other hand, Building 3507, the one scheduled for removal, differs in several ways. Most notable are the poured concrete perimeter wall foundation, stick-built walls, and milled wood sheathing.

We hope this narrative has shown how a small building played a role in and reflects our history from the creation of public lands to national responses to economic adversity and changing environmental conditions. Further, sites like Big Goose are evidence of the CCC's lasting contribution. Since the beginning this Station and others like it have been home and office to district rangers and their families, and the many fire fighters, recreation specialists, engineers, foresters, and range specialists who help manage the Bighorn National Forest.