



Phil Aune bicycling through his neighborhood in Nine Mile Falls, Washington

Rebuilding the Forest Service: Part 2

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An interview with Forest Service Retiree, Phil Aune

Phil Aune is a U.S. Forest Service retiree and a member of the *Evergreen Foundation* Board of Directors. He lives in Nine Mile Falls, Washington with his wife, Diane.

He graduated from Humboldt State College in Arcata, California in 1965. He holds a Bachelor of Science Degree in Forest Management. To address job shortages in fields related to science,

technology, engineering and math, Humboldt State changed its name to California State Polytechnic University in 2022.

Aune's interest in outdoor career possibilities blossomed in 1956, during his freshman year at Simi Valley High School in Simi Valley, California, about 40 miles east of downtown Los Angeles.

"I went on a weeklong forestry trip for students attending Ventura County schools," he recalled. "I found it very interesting and fell in love with the idea of outdoor work in my future. Then, in my senior year, the Forest Service came into the picture with a tour hosted by the Los Padres National Forest."

The Los Padres tour included a visit with an Oregon State University student working on a fire engine crew, a presentation by a Fire Prevention Technician at the Piedras Blancas Guard Station who put tour group members to work cleaning fire prevention signs.

"I thought, wow, what a great job," Aune recalled.

But there was more. At the Mt. Pinos Ranger District office in Frazier Park, he met Assistant District Ranger, John Warnock, who was working on a timber sale. The sale had been purchased by the Big Bear Lumber Company mill at Redlands. They must have been very large logs because they were transported by a combination of large off-highway trucks and smaller highway trucks.

"We also had to estimate how many acres it would take to graze a cow-calf pair for one month on Mt. Pinos grasslands," Aune remembered. "I guessed five acres and won a small set of dominos. Little did I know that John Warnock would be the first District Ranger I worked for when I went to work for the U.S. Forest Service on the Coffee Creek District of the Shasta-Trinity National Forest in 1962 before the start of my junior year at Humboldt State.

Aune's stellar career with the U.S. Forest Service reached its pinnacle in 1993. Based on his performance as Program Manager at the agency's silviculture lab at Redding, California, he was named Program Manager for the 11-million-acre Sierra Nevada Ecosystem Project based at the University of California campus at Davis.

"We produced a massive four-volume report describing conditions and political issues in the Sierra Nevada region," Aune recalled. "I doubt than anyone working for the Forest Service today even knows of the report's existence."

In this interview, Aune answers a series of questions that show how different today's Forest Service is from the Forest Service he joined as a temporary summer employee in 1962.





summer job was surveying section corners on the Shasta-Trinity National Forest. Although the Forest once supported a significant timber industry, it also provided recreation opportunities, including hiking and rock climbing. Here, the Castle Crags, a granitic formation that dates from the Jurassic Period, some 65 miles from Interstate 5 south of Dunsmuir. U.S. Forest Service

Evergreen: Phil, what was your first Forest Service job?

Aune: It was a 1962 summer job. I was part of a two-man section corner crew on the Shasta-Trinity National Forest. We were relocating survey corners established around 1880 to 1890 as part of the U.S. General Land Office survey. The Shasta-Trinity had a checkerboard ownership pattern as a result of the 1862 Pacific Railway Act. The Act gave builders of the transcontinental railroads every other square mile of land each side of the railroad line for partial payment in building the railroads. President Lincoln signed the Act

Evergreen: It's our recollection that President Lincoln, who had been a railroad lawyer, saw the Act as a way to link the nation from coast to coast. It meshed nicely with the Homestead Act, which Lincoln also signed in 1862. Any citizen or emigrant could claim 160 acres of public domain land in the West for a nominal filing fee and the promise to make improvements. Lincoln saw the act as a way of encouraging western settlement.

Aune: That's correct – and the railroads and the communities they built were key to the westward expansion that Lincoln and Congress envisioned.

Evergreen: Do you recall anyone telling you what the Forest Service's mission was during your years as a summer employee.

Aune: I don't have a clue, nor was one presented to us at that time. The "Caring for the land and serving people" motto came much later.

Evergreen: Did you enter a training program or have mentors?

Aune: In college, we all had a pretty good background in surveying and field practices, and I think that is one of the reasons we were hired. Humboldt State produced good on-the-ground field-oriented foresters who were ready for introductory career work.

One senior Humboldt student recruited four of us to work on these crews and we were supervised

by the Assistant District Ranger, Hal Sebring, who basically cut us loose without any mentoring or training.

Hal was always available when we had a problem, and he helped us immensely in solving those problems. The only official training program I had that summer was going to basic fire school for one week in Hayfork, California.

Evergreen: Were you encouraged to get involved in local civic groups?

Aune: During my summer work, that never came up. The only thing we were encouraged to get involved in was firefighting, and we loved it. As I progressed into my permanent job after graduation, we were encouraged to join and become active in the Society of American Foresters. We were allowed to take government vehicles to meetings when I was on the Six Rivers National Forest.

Most of my early assignments were in remote areas of California. Groups like Rotary or Lions were not locally available. When I went to Kernville on the Sequoia National Forest, the District Ranger and Ted Stubblefield were members of the local Rotary club.

It was fairly obvious that becoming part of local service clubs was one of the keys to success, especially in the 70's and 80's as I advanced in my career.

Evergreen: How were promotions made?

Aune: As foresters in the 1960's and 70's, we were actually tied to the Regional Office in San Francisco. When we were hired, we were pulled off rosters in the Regional Office, [RO]. When we were annually rated for performance, the results went to the RO for ranking all foresters for future positions based up our performance ratings.

Forest Supervisors would request foresters for vacant positions, and they were given the three top candidates to consider. The candidate foresters were ranked by a three-based performance system that had performance elements for each of the three performance factors. Performance elements like "accepting responsibility and initiating actions" were rated against the three performance factors and I cannot remember exactly what the three factors were except the last one was a combination of the first two.

If you got an A rating in the first two standards, you got an A rating in the third. If you got a B rating in one of the first two, you got a B rating. If you got C overall, you might just as well start searching for a new job.

When you got a job offer under this system, you could only turn down three according to popular wisdom. If you turned down the third, you became a lifer where you were. Under this system, I received my Junior Forester position in 1966; my promotion to Mad River, where I again worked for

John Warnock, in 1970; and my Forest Silviculturist position in 1975.

Evergreen: It sounds as though the Forest Service kept close track of its "A" rated employees.

Aune: It was a very paternalistic system until the 1980's. Then performance rating and position applications all changed. The agency dropped its rating system and started using "Vacancy Notices." As an example, I had to apply to the Pacific Southwest Research Station Vacancy Announcement in 1987 for what became my Research Program Manager position.



a Junior Forester on the Sierra National Forest in 1966. His helped prepare timber sales. These logs are destined for the Big Bear Lumber Company operating in southern California. U.S. Forest Service photo

Evergreen: Did you expect to be transferred frequently or infrequently?

Aune: Early in my career yes. If you wanted to be a District Ranger, you needed experience on a couple of different Ranger Districts, preferably on at least two National Forests.

However, when I was promoted to Forest Silviculturist on the Tahoe National Forest in 1975, I did not expect to be transferred quickly. Technical staff in the Supervisor's Office were not transferred often. I stayed on the Tahoe for 12 years.

When I landed the Program Manager's job in Redding with the Pacific Southwest Research Station, it became a dream job, and I stopped looking for higher positions. I stayed there from 1987 until I retired in 2000.

I was tempted to apply for the Assistant Director for Forest Management Research job in the Washington Office [WO] but after family discussions we decided it would not work for us. I'm glad I stayed in Redding because it was during the time when Mike Dombach was named Chief. He came from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and wasn't well respected by Forest Service leadership.

Evergreen: What was "Job 1" in the Forest Service when you were hired?

When I was a seasonal employee, Job 1 was finding as many survey corners as possible every day, accurately pin pricking their locations on aerial photos, and carefully recording our findings of property corner record cards with Rapido Graph Ink Pens.

When I was a permanent Junior Forester on the Sequoia National Forest, Job 1 was sale preparation for 25 to 30 million board feet timber sales.

When I became the District Silviculturist at Mad River Job 1 was to insure successful planting and reforestation of about 1,000 acres annually. We also aerial sprayed herbicides on about 1,000 to 1,500 acres annually to control brush and hardwood growth in our plantations. The goal was to make sure our seedlings had sufficient sunlight, soil nutrients and moisture.

Later, I assumed responsibility for silvicultural prescriptions for our 50 million board foot timber sale program. The point here being that Job 1 changes with every position you hold.

Evergreen: You predate the era of Decadal Forest Plans, when the Forest Service motto - Caring for the Land and Serving People – devolved into a mish-mash of conflicting missions statements and confusing rules and regulations that work against any possibility that the agency can care for land or serve people.

Now the expanded motto or mission statement is to "Maintain the health, diversity and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations." Yet today more than half of the nation's 193-million-acre federal forest estate is dying, dead or burnt to a crisp. What the hell has gone wrong here?

Aune: Many things. Several years ago, I wrote an essay describing my history in forest planning. It's too long to include in this interview, but I can give you good examples of the three types of planning that I was personally involved in during my career.

Editor's Note: *Phil Aune's summary version of his forest planning history provides a detailed insider's perspective on the political and administrative failures that have made it impossible for the Forest Service to meet its motto and its mission. We are including it as a separate PDF file attached to our interview. We encourage you to read it and think about what might be done to unravel what the late Forest Service Chief, Jack Ward Thomas, called the "Gordian Knot."*

Rebuilding the Forest Service

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Aune: As your readers will see from my history summary, the forest planning process was turned upside down and the whole idea of tying harvest levels to management plans was lost. Prescriptive management by objective with goals, performance standards and accountability disappeared.

Evergreen: What you're saying is that the whole notion of getting out the cut was a great deal more complex than the Forest Service's critics thought.

Aune: The planning process was very complex and setting the potential cutting limits was carefully done under the political conditions of the day as emphasized by the Administration. They set the possibilities and Congress set the funding. Once Congress set the funding levels, and hence the priorities, most of us working from the 1960s up to the 1990s understood that we had to get out the cut to insure that our management plan succeeded.

My point is that "getting out the cut" was after the planning process no matter if it was the old Timber Management Plans, the National Forest Management Act plans, the Northwest Forest Plan, or the Sierra Nevada Framework Plan. We even had processes to accelerate the cut levels in any given year or decade.

Every plan called for Non-decline, Even Flow. You could depart from your Non-decline Even Flow ASQ number, but you had to show where and how you would make up this "departure." I do not know of any forest in Region 5 that had to depart from the Non-decline ASQ because of Administrative pressure or Congressional financing that increased the cut.

Evergreen: Did the Forest Service employ "ologists" in your early years?

Aune: Early in my career, most of the "ologists" were stationed in Supervisor offices. There were range ecologists, wildlife biologists and hydrologists. But on the Sequoia National Forest Cannell Meadow Ranger District we also had a hydrologist because we had highly erosive soils.

We also had a benchmark watershed study to examine the effects of harvesting on these erosive soils. The study included establishing weirs to collect data on water flow, sediments, and nutrients. I think this was all done as part of the 1959 Kern Plateau Management Plan in response to questions and public concerns. I don't recall any publications, even the benchmark before harvesting, that were ever published concerning this study.

Early in my career, when we were under Ranger District Multiple-use Management Plans and before NEPA, when I was a Field Timber Sale Layout Forester, we would bring in an "ologist" to help us if we ran into a particular problem.

Before NEPA was implemented we had to write reports that were called something like the "Multiple-use Plan for the XYZ Timber Sale." These reports were generally less than ten pages and were reviewed by the "ologists" in the Supervisor's Office.

Evergreen: Did this reporting process follow you when you left the Sequoia National Forest?

Aune: When I arrived on the Six Rivers National Forest in 1970, it had a larger crew of 'ologists' and where there was more than one in a particular discipline, they were assigned to work from the Supervisor's Office in Eureka.

Michael Rains, who you know well, was the hydrologist for the Mad River Ranger District. One of the big issues on the District was unstable soils and slopes and subsequent road failures, so we had geologists available to help our sale layout crews, logging engineers and road locators avoid unstable locations.

As a result, we started pulling our roads out of the bottoms of draws and using ridgetop locations for the vast majority of new road construction. The role of the "ologists," even before NEPA, was to assist us in developing the best timber sale possible because these sales were the major land management activity.

Evergreen: How about the Tahoe National Forests. Same story?



*Range near the Tahoe National Forest. Phil Aune was transferred to the Tahoe in 1975. The experience lead him to his most important assignments
rest Service photo*

Aune: When I moved to the Tahoe National Forest in 1975, NEPA had already become a major factor in timber sale layout, ski areas, range management, road maintenance and all of the other active forest management programs.

NEPA, the EIS process, NFMA Land Management Plans, the Clean Water and Air Acts and the Endangered Species Act all amplified our need for more ologists of varying disciplines: Landscape architects, archaeologists, fisheries and plant biologists, general ecologists, and a whole suite of specialists that came out of the Northwest Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines and the Sierra Nevada Framework and Forest Plan.

One group that was often overlooked in the “ologists” clan was our civil engineers. Road location, logging and bridge planning and construction were their specialties. They worked with us on locating and building roads, and planning for bridges. It's also wrong to say that our relationships with our true “ologists” were adversarial. Like the engineers, they helped us in the successful completion of all of our projects. It was that way until I retired in 2000.

Evergreen: Were there internal conflicts over the Forest Plans you were developing?

Aune: Generally, no, especially those who had more than five years with the Forest Service. Preservation-based wildlife biologists, especially the younger ones, were the most difficult to work with.

Evergreen: What career track did you follow until your retirement?

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first Region 5 class in advanced Forest Ecology and Silviculture and I became either the first or second Certified Silviculturist in Region-5 that year.

To earn your certification you had pass the advanced silvicultural course and defend two silvicultural prescriptions before an exam team that included the Regional Forester's representative, the Timber Management Office, the local District Ranger and a non-timber specialist.

Dr. John Tappeiner, who was our Regional Silviculturist, led the all-day field exam for prescriptions. Shortly after that I transferred to the Tahoe National Forest and Dr. Tappeiner asked me to serve on the exams team as a Regional Forester Representative.

Given all that, and my 12 years on the Tahoe, I was overjoyed when the Pacific Southwest Research Station created a Program Manager position at the GS 13/14 grade level. I was named Program Manager of the Redding Silviculture Laboratory. We had four major research teams and lots of research underway.

I was also part of the Station's Executive Management Team. The late Dr. Hal Salwasser, who later appointed Dean of the Oregon State University College of Forestry, was the last of the five Station Directors that were my immediate supervisors. Hal worked with Chris West and me on the Tahoe National Forest developing California Spotted Owl management options. Hal was terrific – a great example of the “ologists” that were trying to help us be successful.

In 1993, I was assigned the Program Management responsibility for the congressionally mandated \$6.5 million Sierra Nevada Ecosystem Project. It mandated an independent panel of scientists to

review the 11-million acres of the Sierra Nevada and develop a report for Congress. The focus was on late succession and old growth forest conditions, similar to the focus of the Northwest Forest Plan.

We completed the project and prepared a massive four volume report on the conditions and issues of the Sierra Nevada. As I said earlier, I'm sure that hardly anyone currently in management of Region 5 even knows that the report exists.

presents the kind of work produced by the Forest Service's Silviculture Lab at Redding, California. It depicts the aftermath of the 2002 Cone Fire that hit the experimental plots in the Pacific Southwest Research Station's 10,000-acre Blacks Mountain Experimental Forest, a long-term biodiversity study in the Lassen National Forest. The fire was contained in areas where no thinning had occurred, killing 99 percent of the trees, but when it reached areas where thinning and prescribed burning had occurred, it died to the ground and did little damage to the trees. California's Richard Pombo, then Chair of the House Natural Resource Committee, used this illustration to argue for ecosystem-based management during Healthy Forests Restoration Act [HFRA] congressional debate. President George W. Bush signed the Act in December 2003.

Evergreen: Today, there seems to be lots of planning for its own sake – analysis paralysis some say – and no on-the-ground execution. True?

Aune: Paralysis by Analysis came into focus after the Northwest Forest Plan was approved. New concepts like Survey and Manage, Adaptive Management Areas, Late Succession Reserves and others all required further analysis before anything could be done on the ground. All this did was provide more ground for frivolous appeals and litigation.

You need look no further than the Sierra Nevada Ecosystem Management Plan and the subsequent Sierra Nevada Forest Plan in the early 2000s to see what has happened. During my years with the California Forestry Association [CFA 2000 to 2005] paralysis by Analysis became the standard method of operation. Appeals and litigation dominated most Forest Service projects in Region 5.

Evergreen: Is the concept of execution well understood in the Forest Service?

Aune: It varies. During my five years with CFA the Eldorado and Lassen National Forests were staffed by experienced people who knew and understood execution. People working on other forests, like the Six Rivers and Sequoia, had lost all hope of executing projects. The lack of knowledgeable line officers – Supervisors and District Rangers- spelled the difference between success and failure.

Beginning in 2006, I monitored three National Forests for the American Forest Resource Council: The Colville and the Okanogan-Wenatchee. The Colville had good line officers and a good program. It was actively supported by the widely praised Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition [NEWFC]. In 2005 the Colville sold around 20 million board feet but by the time I retired in 2012 their program had jumped up to 42 million board foot sold.

nal Forest planning and timber staffs developed the A-to-Z forest restoration project with two management objectives in mind: reduce the risks posed by fire and improve overall forest health. Vaagen Brothers Lumber Company, Colville, did the thinning work. Phil Aune had high praise for the Colville staff.

Conversely, the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest was offering around 25 million board feet annually from a forest twice the size of the Colville National Forest. Much like the Region 5 forests I mentioned, the Okanogan-Wenatchee had poor or inexperienced Line Officers.

Evergreen: Many refer to today's Forest Service as "the fire service." Is this a fair assessment?

Aune: The U.S. Forest Service has abandoned its 10 A.M. fire policy. For decades, it symbolized the agency's determination to extinguish all forest fires as quickly as was humanly possible.

By any common understanding of the definition, the old Forest Service *was* "the fire service," but the meaning of the term has been changed to reflect the fact that the modern-day Forest Service has abandoned its 10 o'clock fire policy in favor of "managed wildfire" for ecosystem benefit." It isn't working and it won't. You can't "manage" a wildfire. You can herd it around landscapes but there is a high probability that it will escape its handlers.

The critiques that you, Michael Rains and a few others have written help underscore the shift in the Forest Service budget from forest management to simply fighting fires. The Forest Service's mission statement – *Caring for the Land and Serving People* – has gone out the window.

Who is served by what's happening today. *What* public benefit is served by what is happening? And what congressional action specifically authorized the shift from forest management of

managed fire? In my opinion the answers to these questions is "nothing and no one."

In my opinion, the Forest Service has abandoned the concepts of service that guided forest and rangeland management for more than 100 years. No one is served by this.

Evergreen: The Forest Service seems to have given up on a science-based, time-tested and proven thinning and prescribed fire. Can the next Forest Service Chief reverse course?

Aune: He or she could do it in one executive order. You need a management prescription featuring quantifiable objectives, an Environmental Assessment per NEPA, a contractual and enforceable agreement that details harvesting and post-harvest assessments or evaluations.

Managed fire for ecosystem benefit lacks any similar requirements. There is no requirement to determine what basal area managed fire for ecosystem benefit will achieve. But we had to precisely document in our timber sale plan.

The results of this shift are easily seen today. Millions of acres of black sticks "thinned" by a managed fire for ecosystem benefit. Are there any quantifiable measurements of the pre or post burn results for even moderate or light severity burns? I haven't seen them. For severe burns, the answer is easy. It's zero.

You referenced prescribed burning in your question. It has problems too that need to be addressed. One is liability and the other is smoke management. The number of burn days is limited in many states because the public does not like smoke. So why does "managed wildfire for ecosystem benefit" get a pass?

Evergreen: There doesn't seem to be much "resource benefit" in allowing Threatened and Endangered species habitat to be purposefully burnt to a crisp. Likewise, old growth and "future old growth." Or any of the other aesthetic values the public treasures. What am I missing here?

Aune: I don't think you are missing anything.

You can't harvest timber in a spotted owl no-harvest reserve, but it's okay to burn through a set aside and kill every owl nest tree with a managed fire? Harvesting is generally forbidden in buffer zones of varying widths on fish bearing streams, but it's okay if a managed fire completely destroys one of these zones? The hypocrisy is breathtaking.

Evergreen: Many believe the Forest Service has become rudderless ship. If you could take the helm today, what orders would you give for an immediate course correction?

Aune: I would immediately issue a directive to promptly put out all fires and return to the ten a.m.

policy. Then start by focusing on Line Officer Leadership by eliminating all Diversity, Equity and Inclusion requirements. We'd hire the best qualified people regardless of race, color or creed and promotions would be based on experience, performance and merit.

We would implement strong accountability procedures focused on work program priorities, annual budgeted financial goals and objectives, and internal and external relationships.

All of this can be done in one day. Next we will move Washington Office personnel to places near where actual forest and rangeland management is occurring. Denver and Salt Lake City come immediately to mind because they have major airports and the cost of living is much lower than it is in San Francisco, Seattle, Portland or Denver.

The only staff left in DC should be the Deputy Chief for Legislative Affairs and the Administrative Staff needed to deal with daily administrative and congressional activities. The Chief, Associate Chiefs, and resource area Deputy Chiefs should be moved to closer to the daily activity associated with managing the National Forests and Grasslands. The one exception might be the Deputy Chief for State and Private Forestry. Since Fire is now in this Deputy Chief's arena, the responsibility should be transferred to one of the Associate Chiefs.

One other area that should be retained in DC is International Forestry because it works with the State Department and foreign delegations stationed in DC.

The bottom line test for those who stay or go from DC should be whether or not their work can be more efficiently and effectively closer to forests and rangelands with periodic DC interaction via teleconferencing, ZOOM meetings.

Centralized decision making must be replaced by decentralized decision making that occurs much closer to the forests and rangelands that are the Forest Service's responsibility. To do this as quickly as possible, we need to eliminate the regional offices.

Evergreen: We have sensed this need for some time. But how?

Aune: I would combine the authorities of the current Regional and Supervisor's offices and establish Regional Provinces. For example, I would merge the the four southern California National Forests into one with the current authorities of the Regional Office and Land Management Planning.

Project decision making authority would go directly to the Ranger Districts with oversight limited to the Province level.

Other Provinces in the old Region 5 area could be the Sierra Nevada Province, the Klamath

Province, and an Eastside Province. The Sierra Nevada Province would include the Sequoia, Inyo, Sierra, Stanislaus, Eldorado, Tahoe, Lake Tahoe Management Unit and Plumas.

The Klamath Province would include the Mendocino, Shasta-Trinity, Klamath, and Six Rivers plus the Region 6 Rogue-Siskiyou National Forest. Another Province would be the Eastside Province that would include both R5 and R6 National Forests including the Lassen, Modoc, all the eastern Region 6 forests in Oregon and Washington.

What we've really done here is combine forests and regions that have quite similar forest ecosystem types. We would staff these provinces with people who have the most knowledge and experience with these ecotypes. There is no need to change the names of these forests or their boundaries. We're simply combining ecotypes. We'd do the same thing with every National Forest Region in the nation.

Evergreen: This almost makes too much sense.

Aune: My thinking begins with larger scale planning efforts with which I'm familiar: The Northwest Forest Plan, the Interior Columbia Basin Project and the Sierra Nevada Framework. The provinces actually define themselves based on their ecotypes and what services the public wants or needs. In the Southern California province it's Wildfire Protection [a need] and Recreation [a want].

In the Sierra Nevada Province it's Fire, Recreation, Water and Forest Products. All four wants and needs go hand in hand. In all of the provinces, wood fiber becomes a byproduct of plans that protect the other forest and rangeland resources.

Evergreen: What happens at the District Level where the actual on-the-ground work gets done?

Aune: We cannot eliminate or reduce the size of any Ranger District. If anything, they'll have more ologists because this is where most of the forest and rangeland management decision making will occur.

Evergreen: Your reorganizational plan reminds us of something we said in jest to a Forest Service retiree a couple of years ago. In reply he enthusiastically said, "That's not a bad idea!"

Aune: What was your idea?

Evergreen: Dismantle the Washington Office, except for a few bean counters and a half-dozen experienced people who are capable of communicating with members of Congress and their staffs.

Then buy a used Falcon 2000 jet that becomes the Chief's office. He has two enforcers who travel with him three out of four weeks every month. They each have two or three cell phones. They travel from region to region, making impromptu visits to RO's, SO's and Ranger Districts. What

would have happened if this crew had walked into your Mad River office or your Redding laboratory unannounced?

Aune: We would have welcomed you with open arms, held a brief gathering in the office for introductions and immediately taken the Chief and others out in the field to look at our most current projects with the most complications and external coordination efforts. The effort would have been to make sure they were aware of what was going on. We would not necessarily be looking for decision support, but increased awareness of what was complicating our daily lives.

A good example of that was when Chief Jack Ward Thomas visited Region 5 on issues related to the Salvage Rider. The environmental community was taking the Region to task for including "trees likely to die" or for sanitation intermediate cuts. The issue was elevated to the Secretary of Agriculture's office.

Later, I was on detail in the Washington Office and visiting about the Sierra Nevada Ecosystem Project when Chief Thomas saw me and asked me to sit in on a meeting with the Secretary of Agriculture.

When the Salvage Rider and trees likely to die issue came up, Jack looked the Secretary in the eye and said something like, "Mr. Secretary, I just came back from California, and I have viewed the trees likely to die issue and the foresters are doing the right thing by removing those trees."

Evergreen: Good for Chief Thomas. The only piece of the puzzle that I could not solve was what to do with State and Private Forestry, the Forest Inventory and Analysis [FIA], the Forest Products Research Lab at Madison or International Forestry. During the Clinton-Gore years, I was always afraid Gore would find out about FIA and the Madison lab. We've been using FIA data for over 30 years and we hosted many logger tours of the lab when the late Chris Risbrudt was its executive director.

hemical engineer in the Forest Products Lab's unit of Fiber and Chemical Sciences Research, holds a glass jug of cellulose nanocrystals while discussion in construction products, specifically concrete. Incorporating the material, which Houtman likens to "magic pixie dust," would lower the overall lucing the amount of lyme needed to cure concrete. Forest Service photo

Aune: FIA and Madison have done cutting edge work for the Forest Service for a long time. I'd keep them under State and Private Forestry, housed at the Forest Products Lab on the University of Wisconsin campus in Madison, Wisconsin and I'd leave International Forestry in DC because it has close ties to the U.S. State Department, doing important research work in many countries around the world.

Some fine tuning is needed. The Research and Development branch has moved away from applied research. When I was still working for the Forest Service, we looked for the universities that could best complete the work we needed: Oregon State, UC Berkeley, UC Davis and Cal Tech come to mind. Today, I would include the Massachusetts Institute of Technology [MIT] on the list of those who could help us with decision-making tools using Artificial Intelligence. [AI]

Over time, the emphasis on applied research in the Forest Service has declined and it has hurt the interdisciplinary aspect of forest management issues. It's time to get back to the long-term effects of on-the-ground forest and rangeland management.

You could easily take an in-depth look at all resource-based applied science. For example, how do you best manage southern forests for red cockaded woodpeckers? Or spotted owls or Mexican spotted owls. Or just about any other critter that lives in our forest and rangeland environments. Same for fisheries. Leave the basic research to universities and return to applied science and development.

As far as National Forests are concerned, an alternative to what I previously mentioned would involve consolidating Washington Office ground management activities into two major regions, one

east of the Mississippi and one west of the Mississippi, leaving the WO with Administrative and Congressional relationships. Again, a great emphasis on decentralizing on the ground decision making.

Central planning is killing the Forest Service. One-fourth of the 21st Century has passed and the agency is still in a downward spiral. What is the best organizational structure for the next 75 years? How does the this 120-year-old agency get back to "Caring for the Land and Serving People?"

We start by decentralizing the Forest Service, moving decision making out of the Washington Office and back to the "boots on the ground" world. Put decision making in the hands of the folks who are doing the work at the District Ranger level, then give them the leadership and the tools they need to be successful.

Evergreen: What a fabulous and hope-filled conversation, Phil. Many thanks for your time and your long years of service to our nation's federal forests and the lands we all love.



AUTHOR



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Jim Petersen is a co-founder of the non-profit Evergreen Foundation, and publisher of Evergreen, the Foundation's periodic journal.

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