

The United States Forest Service Turns 100!

By Amy Teegarden, Community Outreach Coordinator

Throughout 2005, the USDA Forest Service is celebrating its 100th anniversary. On July 1, 1905, the Forest Service was created as an agency with a unique mission: *to sustain healthy, diverse, and productive forests and grasslands for present and future generations.*

The first Forest Reserves in Montana were established in 1897 not long after Montana achieved statehood. These early reserves, the Bitterroot, Lewis & Clark and Flathead were large and remote. Forest Reserves and later National Forests continued to be established in abundance through 1908. In these early days every little mountain range was its own separate Forest reserve. By 1908 new National Forests were being established from consolidations with names of some of the early Reserves being eliminated in the process. By the 1930's most of the major changes and consolidations had taken place in Montana and a map of the various Montana National Forests would have looked much more like the present one than one from the 1910 era.

The present day Helena National Forest was established in 1908 from the consolidation of the Big Belt Forest Reserve (established 1905), the Elkhorn Forest Reserve (established 1905) and the Helena Forest Reserve (established 1906). Later additions came from the accumulation of public domain in the Blackfoot Valley and portions of the Lewis & Clark, Missoula and Lolo National Forests in the present Scapegoat Wilderness areas. Substantial boundary adjustments resulted from the south end of the Big Belts going to the Gallatin National Forest, a small portion of the Elkhorns going to the Deerlodge and a large portion of the original Helena Forest Reserve to the Deerlodge.

Today, the Helena National Forest surrounds Montana's Capital City and offers close to one million acres of distinctive landscapes. The Forest is administered by District headquarters in Lincoln, Helena, and Townsend, with the Forest Supervisor's Office located in Helena.

The Scapegoat Wilderness occupies the far northwest portion of the Forest, about ten air miles

north of Lincoln, Montana. Almost eighty miles of the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail stretch through the Helena National Forest, extending from the Scapegoat to the adjacent Deerlodge National Forest. Numerous mining claims were patented over the years, and many of these private inholdings are now homesites. Managing this intermingled wildland/urban interface has



become one of the Forest's primary challenges.

The Big Belt Mountain Range lies east of Helena, extending south to Townsend. The Gates of the Mountains Wilderness area is situated on the north end of the Big Belts and takes its name from the distinctive cliffs along the Missouri River noted in the journals of Lewis and Clark. Much of the Big Belts are dissected by rugged limestone canyons and provide scenic enjoyment for hikers and motorists.

South of Helena, the Elkhorn Mountains are home to the only designated Wildlife Management Unit in the National Forest System. The mountain range is managed cooperatively with the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, Deerlodge National Forest, and the Bureau of Land Management to optimize wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities.

Reaching across six counties, the Helena Forest provides considerable stimulus to the area's economy while offering a host of recreational opportunities in close proximity to area residents. Forest employees are committed to providing quality visitor information, education, and community outreach programs. Many Forest employees work

with a variety of agencies and conservation partners to accomplish these goals.

The history of the Forest Service is a proud one. The Helena National Forest has partnered with the Montana Historical Society and other community partners to recognize this significant milestone by sponsoring a community lecture series. Anniversary events kicked-off with a showing of

the Forest Service centennial film, "The Greatest Good: A Forest Service Centennial Film". This was followed by a performance featuring a re-enactor personifying Gifford Pinchot, the first chief of the Forest Service; and a presentation by Forest Service historian Gerry Williams, reflecting on the history of Forest Service through political cartoons.

On May 12th, 7:00 pm, the series will conclude with an "Evening in the Elkhorns", at the Myrna Loy Center, celebrating the hundredth anniversary of the Elkhorn Forest Reserve. In addition to informative speakers, the

program will include the debut of a documentary film featuring interviews of people who have lived, worked and played in the Elkhorns. The evening also includes the opening of an exhibit featuring works from artists who have participated in the Forest's Artist-Forest-Community program, as well as a re-enactor featuring President Theodore Roosevelt and a reception.

Local centennial special events will continue into the summer and fall, culminating in December 2005 with the opening of a special exhibit at the Historical Society, "Splendid Was the Trail: Photographs of the National Forests by K.D. Swan."

The creation of the Forest Service initiated a century of change in managing public forests and grasslands, with introduction of a new conservation ethic and professional workforce to carry it forth. As the agency approaches its centennial, we ask that you join us in reflecting on the organization's proud history and traditions and exploring ways to move into a new century of "caring for the land and serving people." As we celebrate the past, may we examine where the agency has been and where it's going in its new century of service.