



Burning Issues

November 2005

PROGRESS CONTINUES ON MONUMENT CARETAKING

With newly elected Group Chair Dave Mueller of BLM and Vice-Chair Bodie Shaw of BIA at its helm, the NIFC Monument Task Group is making progress towards finalizing a formal, comprehensive maintenance plan for the site. Implementation of the year round plan will involve the combined efforts of the NIFC Maintenance staff, "Friends of the Monument" volunteers organized by the Wildland Firefighters Foundation (WFF), NIFC employees, local university students, and fire crews passing through the area. Work appropriate to each group is being pre-determined in the plan depending upon frequency and complexity of each designated task.

Thanks to the initiative of Tim Murphy, the NIFC Governing Board liaison to the group, a new partnership was forged between NIFC and the Boise State University (BSU) Horticultural Department. BSU students will be involved with maintenance and continued development, particularly in the area of inventorying and identifying needs associated with the various species of trees, plants, and grasses within the monument.

The task group is also exploring options for repair and improvement of the waterfall, a major feature within the monument both visually and for the drowning of background noise in the surrounding parking lots. Vicki Minor, Director of the WFF, has offered to solicit bids and raise

funds to repair majors leaks and possibly improve insulating materials to allow year-round operations of the waterfall. The Foundation is also exploring options for refinishing the bronze patina on the three firefighter statues, another central focal point of the monument.

A renewed feature planned for the monument is a completed Walk of Honor, a long pathway displaying engraved bricks that have been purchased by monument supporters over the years. The new Walk of Honor is being redesigned to allow for regular maintenance and effective preservation of the honorary bricks. Bricks will continue to be sold by the WFF for future inclusion in the Walk.

At its next meeting, scheduled for late November, the task group will address effective long-term management of the numerous commemorative markers that line the walkways and outer perimeter of the monument. The group will be developing standards for placement of markers, as well as a plan for appropriate management of personal items left at the markers. A project is also underway involving combined efforts of the WFF and NIFC staff to map marker locations and catalog marker background information, for future use in an interpretive Visitor's Guide or self-guided tour.

Once standards are completed, the maintenance plan will be finalized

and the task group will begin work on a long-term vision and management plan for future decades. The task group includes representatives from NIFC partner agencies: BLM (Dave Mueller - Chair), USFS (Mike Apicello - Advisor), NPS (Pam Douglas - Finance Chief), BIA (Bodie Shaw - Vice Chair), FWS (Karen Miranda Gleason - Information Officer), NWS (Coleen Decker) and the NIFC Governing Board (Tim Murphy - BLM); as well as ad hoc members from NIFC Base Maintenance (Carl Hair) and a Bureau of Reclamation Landscape Architect (Lesa Stark); and ex officio member from WFF (Vicki Minor). Lesa Stark, Carl Hair, and Mike Apicello have been instrumental in developing the maintenance plan.

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BLM'S JOHN STEFFENS SAYS *AUF WIEDERSEHEN*

NIFC Employee Concludes 50-year Career In Federal Government

John D. Steffens, an instructional systems specialist for the DOI's Bureau of Land Management at NIFC, is wrapping up his remarkable federal career in style. Since making the decision to retire last January, John said work has been smooth sailing. "I've felt pretty relaxed, actually," he said. "I'm at the point where I'm pretty confident in what I do and the decisions I make."

John has every right to be relaxed and confident. After all, he has worked in federal service longer than the average federal employee has been alive! Steffens has the distinction of being in a pretty elite group: employees with 50 years of federal service.

Forester and More

Steffens began his career in 1956, as a forester with the USDA Forest Service, after getting a Bachelor of Science in Forestry from the University of Maine and serving a brief hitch in the Army. Elvis was just emerging as the king of rock n' roll, and the *entire* federal budget for the year totaled less than \$71 billion—which is not much more than what the natural resource management agencies alone are allocated these days. Steffens launched his permanent career as a GS-5, earning just over \$2.00 an hour.

Originally from New York, Steffens served in a variety of assignments in Idaho and Utah with the Forest Service, including stints in timber, range, and recreation, serving in several of these assignments as the

Assistant District Ranger. At that time, Steffens' career goal was to become a District Ranger.

"Up to the mid 1970s, I was very much intent on becoming a District Ranger in the Forest Service," he recalled. "All foresters in those days viewed being a District Ranger as the natural goal of working in the timber-oriented Forest Service."

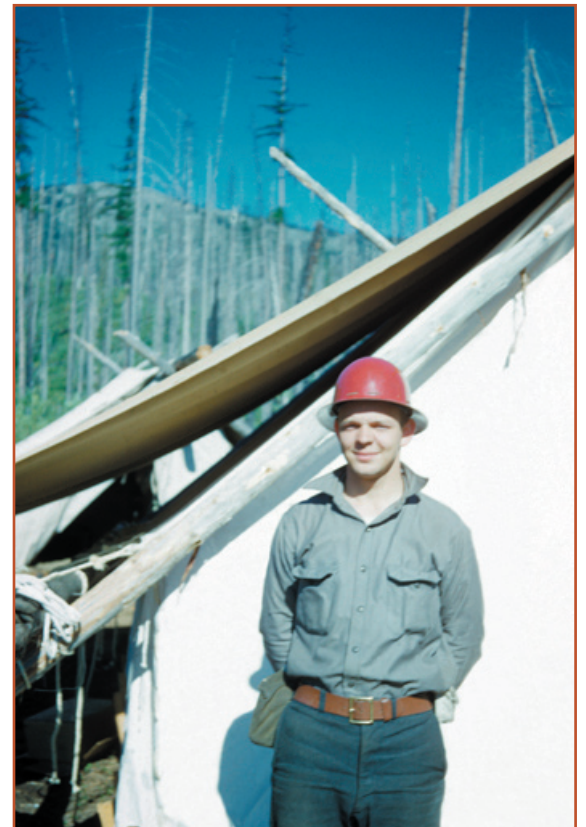
But in 1974, Steffens got some informal career advice from his supervisor. It was an era of change in the Forest Service, and opportunities to become a District Ranger were sharply narrowing due to a variety of social and political forces. Steffens' boss suggested he consider using his talents in a staff role, and John found himself agreeing with the advice. He too had seen the writing on the wall.

"I've often wondered if the wheels of government weren't already turning," Steffens mused. "Right after that conversation, I was offered an unexpected opportunity to work at the regional office in Ogden, Utah." This job, titled Regional Fire and Training Coordinator, was a staff position with responsibilities in training, prevention, mobilization, logistics, and communication. Steffens was already doing many of these kinds of activities as a collateral duty, and he was doing them well. Word had gotten around.

Career Transition to NIFC

Opportunity knocked again in 1979. Steffens was offered a newly-created position at what was then called the Boise Interagency Fire Center—now NIFC. "My job was to serve as a liaison between the Forest Service and the Interior agencies at NIFC in the realm of developing what we now call interagency fire training curricula." Life changed for Steffens at NIFC. Suddenly he was working at the national level, and his work now focused entirely on fire training.

Not only was the work different, the culture was different too. Steffens had come from a Forest Service that was still marked by a hierarchical, almost military mentality. Conversely, the Bureau of Land Management was far less formal—even relaxed and laid back in Steffens' view. It marks one of the tensions





BLM's John Steffens Says *Auf Wiedersehen*

in Steffens' career. "Experiencing the differences between the two agencies was culture shock," John said with a chuckle. "Being raised in the contexts of the Depression and World War II, and being a professional forester, I was totally comfortable with the Forest Service culture."

At first, Steffens' new job involved working in the Training Development branch of NIFC's Training Division. In this position, John helped write and organize the nuts and bolts of fire training courses used by all federal fire management agencies. In time, he shifted to working in the Training Division's Standards Office. In this role, John worked on the process of designing training so as to integrate consistent quality and depth in training curricula.

"In the Standards Office, our goal is to ensure that training materials facilitate learning," John said. "We want training curricula to help produce extremely well-qualified firefighters, fire managers, and fire specialists."

Designing instructional systems goes beyond developing training courses, much like designing a house goes beyond using a hammer and saw to actually build it.

"I've really enjoyed working at the Standards Office," John reflected. "Next to being a forester out in the woods, it's been the best part of my career."

Aside from exerting a steady influence on the quality of fire

training offered to literally tens of thousands of firefighters and fire managers over the years, John has also helped train thousands of U.S. soldiers and Marines for emergency firefighting duty. When asked about this, Steffens lights up. "It was really interesting," he said.

"When the Training Division at NIFC was first asked to train members of the military for firefighting, we had exactly one day to assemble the training materials. It took some scrambling, but we got it going."

John has also expressed his public service ethic in community involvement. He has enriched the lives of school children at neighborhood schools through the Partners-in-Education program. He has also been involved in service clubs, and he has lent his training expertise to hundreds of rural and volunteer firefighters.

What's Next?

Retirement will be a major step for a guy who has served since the Eisenhower Administration. What are his plans? "I plan on devoting some time to studying family history," Steffens says. "In fact, I'd like to travel to northern Germany to do some research." Steffens also has nurtured a goal of becoming bilingual. "I've always admired people who can relate to others in a different



Kathleen Clarke and John Steffens at the Wildland Firefighters Monument

language, so maybe I'll get serious about German." And, John says he will no longer have work as an excuse for putting off some projects around the house that have been waiting for his attention.

What Does it All Mean?

How does John sum up his career? "I've enjoyed the satisfaction of practicing my skills and using my mind," John says. "But there is another aspect to it. We live in a pretty great country... actually the greatest country in the world. I'd like to think that my work has been one small way to help this country remain great."

Anyone who knows John Steffens would agree that it has!

According to a recent Merit Systems Promotion Board report (*Managing Federal Recruitment: Issues, Insights and Illustrations*, Sept. 2004), the average federal employee is approximately 46.5 years old.



A TRIBUTE TO A PREMIER FIREMAN

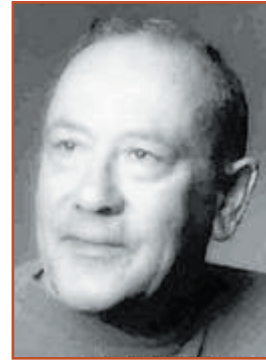
Joe Kastelic was “probably the premier fireman of the BLM,” according to Roy Percival, retired BLM Associate Director who worked at the National Interagency Fire Center from 1982 to 1989.

Kastelic was born in Ely, Minnesota on March 6, 1934. He worked as a seasonal forest fire control person in Alaska while attending Iowa State University. He moved on to permanent employment with the BLM after graduation, holding positions in Alaska, Oregon, Idaho and Nevada, retiring from NIFC in 1984.

“The Alaska Fire Service (AFS) owes its existence to Joe Kastelic,” says

Percival. He took the plan for AFS to Washington, D.C. and made it happen, effectively eliminating his own position as the Alaska Fire Management Officer.

On December 2, 1977, Kastelic received the U.S. Department of the Interior Honor Award for Meritorious Service from then Secretary of the Interior Cecil Andrus. In Washington D.C. on April 24, 1985, Kastelic received the USDI Honor Award for Distinguished Service from then Secretary of the Interior Donald Hodel and then at a White House ceremony Kastelic received



the Presidential Management Improvement Award from Vice President Nelson Rockefeller. These awards were in recognition of exceptional service in fire management and the development of more cost effective tools

in the suppression of wildfire for BLM and the Department of the Interior. Kastelic was the first and only BLM employee to receive the Presidential Management Improvement Award.

Joe Kastelic passed away on Monday, September 12, 2005.

THE NIFC TOP DOGS RAKE UP BOISE

The NIFC Top Dogs were proud to help another senior citizen with yard work.

November 12, 2005, was a cool, cloudy morning, typical for this time of year in Boise. Twenty people from NIFC gathered at the home of Eunice Wright, a sweet 92- year-old lady recovering from a heart attack and pneumonia.

Alice Forbes and Len and Ruby Bull arrived first. Alice always brings donuts, water, wipes, paper towels. She’s the perfect Girl Scout – prepared for any eventuality. Betty Percival came next with the leaf bags and Snickerdoodle cookies. Tina Boehle, Charles and Leigh-Anne Kazmir, Judy Crosby, Rich and Bev Schwab and their two girls, Deb Aiken and friend Cathy Hayter, Pam Douglas, Mark Hilton, James

Silverstone, Donna Denton, Mike Tuominen and Elna Black also joined in the effort.

Looking at the front yard made us wonder if we should have signed up for an additional yard since there didn’t seem to be much work to do here. Then we checked the back. A huge old maple tree had covered everything in inches-deep leaves on top of long, wet grass. We had a mission!

The gloves came out. Kaz got his ladder and worked on cleaning out the gutters. Pam Douglas broke out her brand-new chain saw and concentrated on branch removal and cutting back an ornamental shrub that was threatening to take over the house. Len Bull brought a leaf mulcher/blower and worked on the hidden areas behind shrubs and a

storage shed. Everyone else grabbed rakes and attacked the leaves. In something just over an hour everything was cleaned up and spiffy looking. Forty one leaf bags were filled and stacked near the street for pick up. Mission accomplished!

It was time for donuts, cookies, water and congratulations on a job well done. Mrs. Wright was recuperating at her daughter’s home in Vancouver, Washington during the event and was very happy when she returned. “On behalf of my mother Eunice Wright and myself,” Linda Bilbao (her daughter) said. “I would like to thank each and everyone of you for your kind generosity and thoughtfulness in raking and cleaning up her yard on Saturday. It looks just perfect and please know all your hard work is appreciated far more than words can express!”

Both articles by Betty Percival.



WOW - Women of Wildfire!

On September 24, 2005, fifty Women of Wildfire (WOW) representing the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) participated in this year's St. Luke's Women's Fitness Run/Walk Celebration. The indomitable Bridgit Downing, team captain, along with co-captain, Betty Percival, energized and recruited fifty co-workers, family members and friends for the annual event. The team members represented NIFC with enthusiasm and were rewarded for their efforts with fun, fitness and fame.

On this dreary misting fall morn, the WOW team donned their fire engine lime-green t-shirts (some sporting umbrellas) and joined almost 12,000 women running, walking or strolling the 5K route. Not letting the weather dampen their spirits, WOW team members trekked up Capitol Avenue to the Depot, across the rim and then cheerfully through the finish-line row of tuxedo-clad guys into Ann Morrison Park. This Celebration is not about speed or endurance, but about celebrating women's health and wellness. The WOW team continued to celebrate long after finishing the 3.1 mile route.

Fame was captured by the WOW team! During the post walk/run/stroll celebration, it was announced that Anne Jeffery, External Affairs, won second place in the runner's category – she has a medal to prove it! And, the WOW team was awarded a celebratory banner (now displayed in the foyer of the Jack Wilson Building) for having the largest government employees' team. Bridgit fully expects to double our team numbers for next year and bring home another banner – so don't lose those t-shirts.



Sue Vap and Deb Bahr show off the bright WOW t-shirts.



Pamela Burrows, Judy Pace, Mary Keim, Myrna Tihonovich



Cynthia Hung, Kimberly Johnson, Barb Sivey, and Kelly Jardine celebrate after crossing the finish line.



WOW participants: (back row) Cynthia Hung, Penny Barrowcliff, Judy Pace, Mary Keim, Myrna Tihonovich, Betty Percival, and Deb Bahr; (middle) Kimberly Johnson, Barb Sivey, Kelly Jardine, Pamela Burrows; (front) Pam Douglas, Deb Aiken, Kathy Hayter, Bridgit Downing, Anne Jeffery.