

FRIENDS OF NORTHERN ARIZONA FORESTS



NEWSLETTER

March 2019

Meet Matt McGrath!



Matt is the new District Ranger for the Flagstaff Ranger District. He reported for duty during the Federal government furlough to an almost empty ranger station with very few of his staff around to welcome him. Fortunately, the furlough ended quickly thereafter. His appointment came after a surprisingly short search (for the Forest Service) in January, during the final week of the Federal Government shut down.

Matt has “hit the ground running” – our early meetings and experiences with Matt are extremely favorable and we expect FoNAF will enjoy strong support from Matt and his staff.

He replaces Mike Elson who was District Ranger when FoNAF was formed in 2009 and provided strong support to our organization over its first nine years. So his announcement last summer that he was leaving to be the Forest Supervisor of the Dixie National Forest was met with both happiness for him but a little anxiety about our future relationship with a new District Ranger.

After earning an undergraduate degree from Florida State University and while earning a Masters in Recreation Planning from California State University at Northridge, Matt volunteered with the Angeles National Forest (ANF) in the San Gabriel Mountains near Los Angeles. He soon transitioned from being a volunteer to a temporary employee at the ANF and then to a regular position as an Outdoor Recreation Planner for the Bureau of Land Management in Colorado and Utah.

Matt’s passion has been to deepen and strengthen the connection between people, communities, and public lands and his career to date reflects this. Since 2011, Matt has served as the Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail Program Manager based in Portland, Oregon.



In this role he provided leadership for an interagency, public-private program that required him to deal with a wide variety of issues related to increasing visitor usage with reduced resources available and impacts of usage on sacred sites and on wildlife, especially some endangered species. During the past eight years Matt completed two temporary assignments as a District Ranger – one on the Angeles National Forest and one on the Coronado National Forest.

His entire career has been in areas experiencing significant increases in visitor use with declining budgets. Matt particularly enjoys collaborating with volunteers, partners, and tribes in shared stewardship and sustainable management of our public lands.



When not at work, Matt enjoys hiking, biking, snowshoeing, or skiing with his wife and dogs somewhere remote and hard to find. Though he came to love the Pacific Northwest, he was excited to return to the Southwest and Flagstaff's four seasons and abundant sunshine. He believes life is better lived outdoors and will never turn down the opportunity for a meeting outside, going for a walk, or taking a hike.

Welcome aboard, Matt. FoNAF is looking forward to working with you.

Aspen Team's 2019 Schedule Fills Quickly

Given the government shut-down and the heavy snows in February, the Aspen Team has used the winter months to plan for the upcoming work season.

The process started at our board meeting on February 13th. Six Forest Service staff presented to the board specific project proposals that were then considered by most of the team members at a planning meeting the following week at Altitudes Bar and Grill.

The team plans to build three new aspen exclosures, replant aspen seedlings in two of the exclosures along Aspen Curve on US180, remove lots of old pasture fences and a few trick tanks, and continue to rebuild some pasture fences to make them wildlife friendly – all on the Flagstaff Ranger District.

We also hope to make two overnight trips down on the Mogollon Rim to build a new exclosure at Houston Draw and to rebuild or remove some old exclosures at Moonshine Spring and Kinder Draw. As soon as the weather permits the FS to open its roads, hopefully in April, we will ask the stewards to check their fences. After making any repairs we will tackle the list of projects typically going out one day each week – usually Friday or Saturday.

At the Altitudes meeting we were delighted to welcome five new members who indicated they would be joining the twenty-some of us who are continuing – and all of the new members have said they are willing to be a steward of one or more exclosures which means that once the assignments are made, all of our exclosures will have stewards.



We are always happy to have new members so if you have an interest or need some questions answered, please contact Dave Downes at dhdowndes@gmail.com or call him at 928-522-9207.

Below is a partial list of the planned projects for 2019 providing locations and details on each:

1 day	Cedar Ranch area	raise/replace bottom wire
1 day	Elden Spring Horse Camp	install 2 gates and make repairs to existing fence
2 days	FR9020 (F)	build new aspen enclosure
2 days	FR9234P (B)	build new aspen enclosure
2 days	TBD	build new aspen enclosure
2-3 days	US 180 at Aspen Curve	Assist with replanting of aspen seedlings - #62 & #63
2 days	Sheep & Lennox TT's - FR420	remove two old trick tanks
2 days	South of Walnut Canyon	rebuild Walnut TT
1 day	Pipeline Road	remove old barbed fence 3-4 mi.
1 day	Bonito Campground	make fence wildlife friendly -1 mi
1 day	Schultz Burn area - FR420	remove sheep fence corral
1 day	Watchable Wildlife areas	attach signage
1 day	T-Six Spring	install gate and fence wings
Jume 8-9?	Houston Draw (on MRRD)	build new enclosure
1 day	Brolliar Park Cabin	Acquire 30 logs for a rebuild by HistoriCorps before June 3
1 day	Kinder Draw (FR141 on MRRD)	remove old enclosure
2 days	Moonshine Spring (FR321 & FR321A on MRRD))	rebuild one enclosure and remove another
1 day	Angell Wildlife Water #2	rebuild a trick tank

Sled Fragments and “Snowslob” Garbage Removed by FoNAF Volunteers

The Abuse Problem:

Following the first heavy snow in February FoNAF volunteers went to Crowley Pit off Hwy 180 and spent several hours picking up trash, discarded sleds, and sled fragments. We filled 27 garbage bags and loaded three pickup truck beds with larger broken sled pieces. We estimated 200-300 broken sleds were left and that was just in the Crowley Pit area. Unfortunately the sled fragments cannot be recycled.



Possibly even more disturbing is vehicles driven off road through the forest up to the right of way fence and knocked a portion of the fence down to provide access to the sledding area. To get to that area, they removed the yellow caution tape strung up to discourage parking.

Some positive steps:

The City of Flagstaff installed a large dumpster at the Kendrick Park Watchable Wildlife Area for sled fragments and trash we remove. The Daily Sun had three items in their paper immediately after that weekend’s trashing. The Phoenix TV stations made brief mentions of the issue as well and asked Valley residents to do their part to keep the forests clean.

Michele Barton works at SMR on South Milton and her employer has a plan to gather up broken sleds, even offering money back from sleds they sold, and then grinding them up, melting them down and forming items such as the hand and foot devices used on recreational climbing walls. After a second trip to Crowley Pit we gathered up a truck load of broken sleds and took them to SMR's location for an initial test and determination of what sleds may be reused in this fashion. This is a wonderful program for mitigating some of the sled disposal problem.



Shannon Clark, Karen Malis Clark, Tom Mackin, Jim McGeorge, Bill Waters, Bruce Belman

381 Wilderness Access Permits Issued

One Saturday morning last month at Snowbowl's Agassiz Lodge the following conversation took place:

"We're planning to summit Humphreys today" the man told Tom. "Are you prepared with the ten essentials, avalanche beacons, shovels and probe poles?" Tom asked. "We have crampons and a cell phone" was the reply. "We just need the permits."

While most winter visitors to Snowbowl request a "Kachina Peaks Wilderness Access Permit" so they can ski or snowboard outside the boundaries of the resort, it's the occasional peak-baggers like this group that can make for an interesting morning. While Tom filled out the free permit forms he explained the hazards of backcountry travel to the group, pointing out the avalanche dangers above timberline and the problems of an unmarked trail in deep snow.

This season FoNAF volunteers issued 381 permits despite the government shutdown for 35 days in the middle of the season. This process takes place at Agassiz Lodge each Saturday and Sunday morning from mid December to mid March. We also are present at several Kachina Peaks Avalanche Center events and the annual Altitudes B&G event for the local ski/snowboard industry.



We believe we make a difference with this outreach program sponsored by the Flagstaff Ranger District. Each person we contact, however briefly, has at least some increased level of awareness of the inherent dangers encountered in wilderness recreation during the winter months.

PS: The group Tom encountered listened politely and went ahead with their plans anyway. We've no idea if they were successful in reaching the summit but at least there was no call-out for Search and Rescue that day.

Preventative Search and Rescue (PSAR) Scheduled again for 2019



Hundreds of people (and more than a few dogs) attempt to reach the summit of Arizona's highest mountain every summer. Almost all begin their trek at the Humphreys Peak trailhead at Arizona Snowbowl. Flagstaff Ranger District staffs an informational kiosk here each weekend from June to September to provide safety, weather and other information to these hikers. FoNAF supports this program by providing two or three volunteers that provide visitor contact both at the kiosk and on the trail.

While our main objective is hiker safety on Humphreys Trail we also provide information about alternative trail choices. Many of our forest visitors come to the trailhead seeking an opportunity to hike a shorter distance or find greater solitude than that on the busiest trail on the forest. The Aspen Loop Trail, Viet Springs at Lamar Haines and Big Leroux Spring are mentioned while those looking for great views are directed to the Kachina Trail.

Along the Humphreys Trail we often encounter visitors suffering from symptoms of altitude sickness. “Head downhill” is the first aid instruction of choice. Occasionally our assistance is required for minor injuries due to falls or twisted ankles from a stumble over a root-covered patch of trail. For those of us that enjoy interacting with others this is a rewarding opportunity to serve.

Last summer our hours were shortened by a forest closure that lasted into July. Even so our volunteers contributed approximately two hundred hours. In addition, a small group of FoNAF members spent two weekends in October at the trailhead providing not only safety information to hikers but alerting them to the best places to observe Aspen colors.

Volunteers are always welcome and appreciated, so if you’re interested contact Bruce Belman for more information: svaileen@hotmail.com



President's Corner

As I'm writing this I frequently glance out my window and it pleases me to see the snow and rain continuing to fall, a marked contrast to last year at this point. We had a very successful planning meeting last month with the various Forest Service representatives and I'm glad to see we have at least two dozen joint projects planned for this upcoming work season. At that level of activity it also means that FoNAF is going to need more volunteers and we've been very fortunate to not only have an excellent membership renewal rate this year but we've also attracted at least 5 new members in recent months.

Our planned activities are more diverse this year than ever before and while some are still in the early stages of seeing how we may be able to assist, like osprey nest monitoring, our goal is to be able to offer a wide variety of projects where each of our valued volunteers can offer their skills and keep their interest levels high.

In closing I want to thank our volunteers and all of the Forest Service staff for providing the opportunities to assist in improving and protecting the wonderful public lands that surround our community.



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Coconino National Forest information:

District Rangers: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/coconino/about-forest/offices>

Website address: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/coconino/>