

Nomination for the John McGuire Award

Forest Supervisor Craig Bobzien

Black Hills National Forest

Custer, South Dakota

INTRODUCTION

Craig Bobzien has served as the Forest Supervisor of the Black Hills National Forest since 2005.

The Black Hills has always been a strong multiple use Forest from its inception. The Forest is 1,252,749 acres of which 176,267 acres are in Wyoming and the remainder in South Dakota. Managing and leading a strong multiple use Forest requires an individual that knows and understands the resources, knows how to lead people from many different disciplines, and also knows how to work with external interests in a way that is clear, firm, and fair. Craig has accomplished that task in an outstanding manner in his tenure of 5 years. He is recognized by his peers, other federal and state government officials, and his employees as one that is "present", a leader, and a person that sees getting results as important.

CHALLENGES

The Black Hills has a long history of meeting commitments while at the same time managing the resource for the long term. The organization is strong in its commitment to the above. Items of significance are:

1. The necessity of working closely with tribes within the Black Hills and to honor their sovereign nation status.
2. The large timber program; which is important not only in providing material for the nation, but managing the land to stay healthy in light of the Ponderosa ecosystem makes it imperative to have active management and to stay on top of insect and disease epidemics.
3. The Forest has a huge special use workload as well as many energy permits for exploration
4. The recreation use is legendary. The Forest is a mecca of gatherings which includes RV shows, people that visit Mt Rushmore (the Forest surrounds this national park), the Sturgis motorcycle rally, and many other organized events that run constantly all summer. Couple that with the enormous pull every summer of individual recreationists to the Black Hills, there is an entire industry devoted to tourism surrounding the area. There has been virtually no back off of visits and managing the many campgrounds, law enforcement activities, and general influx of populations during the 3 seasons is a major challenge.
5. The Forest is one of the few that has a Department of Agriculture sanctioned Advisory Committee. Managing this and ensuring that it is working in an effective manner lies directly on the back of the Forest Supervisor
6. The Black Hills have an active Forest in terms of fire activity. With over 200 fires a year, they have to be able to respond quickly and "keep them small" because of the huge interface that is building throughout the Forest and the inflammatory fuels types that the Forest has historically had.

7. With the location of the Forest being in South Dakota and not surrounded by other Forests, it stands out in terms of external interests. Historically the Governor and his Staff have an active role in what goes on within the Forest as well as many external interests from the counties, special interests, as well as concerned citizens. The customer base is huge and it requires constant attention to details and a strong leader to convey the present program as well as future commitments.
8. Maintaining a strong internal Forest Service organization that can maintain the above challenges is difficult these days within the Forest Service. The Forest Supervisor needs to keep a pulse and provide strong leadership to do so.

SUPERVISOR BOBZIEN

Craig, in his tenure of 5 years, has accomplished the above challenges in an exemplary manner. He initially learned the Forest in a quiet manner and then proceeded to ensure that all the challenges are met with personal care that is not seen on a regular basis within the Forest Service. The most notable point is that the Forest has high morale when the agency overall does not. He has managed to overcome challenges to the commitments promised when so many other Forests struggle.

Over a period of five years Craig led his own staff, the public, and the leaders of key interest groups to prepare and implement perhaps the most significant natural resources conservation and protection decision a Forester can make in one career. Craig personally wrote and edited the 29 page Record of Decision that is guiding motorized use of the Black Hills for the foreseeable future. No one on his staff had ever seen the level of commitment, personal engagement, and depth of understanding of both people and issues related to this consequential act that would close over 6,000 miles of motorized roads and trails, stop cross country motorized use on 840,000 acres, and accomplish all of that with the informed consent and active support of those most affected by the decision. The Staff on the Forest and the public called the travel planning effort the "long conversation". Craig worked tirelessly to build personal relationships with everyone remotely connected to the decision. In the end, the document he wrote was his, a masterful decision, built not from intrigue and politics, but from compassion and understanding.

One of Craig's duties is to serve as a member of the Black Hills Advisory Committee that was designated by the Secretary of Agriculture. He serves as the leader, and he ensures that the committee is functioning within its charter and that they harmoniously work on projects that effect the Black Hills. The members believe that this particular committee functions exceedingly well in part due to the leadership of Craig. His style of seeking results while at the same time involving people ensures that they meet their objectives in a cooperative manner. Although there are many such committees in force, not many of them reach the kind of harmony that this operates in.

Craig has labored tirelessly to build a new foundation for sustainable forest management in the Black Hills, finding money to fight bark beetles, partnering with others to acquire special lands including the Lady C Ranch for future generations to enjoy, and worked side by side with the National Park Service and the states of South Dakota and Wyoming to form a group called the Conservation Leaders to fight insect outbreaks and fire. He has consistently met or exceeded his annual target in spite of the difficulties of working through those that try to stop the Forest Service in completing its mission of multiple use. The Forest, with Craig's leadership, has ramped up the treatment acres and ensuing timber targets because of the changing insect infestation. In the last 3