

PALOUSE RANGER DISTRICT
90TH ANNIVERSARY (1906-1996)

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The Palouse Ranger District of the Clearwater National Forest marks it's 90th Anniversary. Until 1906, the whole St. Joe National Forest was part of the Coeur d'Alene National Forest located at Wallace, Idaho. In the fall of 1906 the first Forest Officer, called the Deputy Supervisor, came to the District headquarters, which was then the Princeton Ranger Station at Princeton, Idaho. The Princeton station was occupied from 1906 until 1961. Tents were used for living quarters at the Ranger Station, and later a small office building and residence was built from salvage materials. In 1961 the new Ranger Station was built just west of Potlatch, Idaho.

In the early days of the Forest Service, the Rangers did not work a full season and needed other off-season work. So trappers and prospectors were attracted to Forest Service jobs. But they did work six days a week from sun up to sundown. The Ranger's stock was wintered over each year, and salaries for top woodsmen were \$70.00 a month. The public forests then, were wild and remote. Forest Rangers were as rugged as the lands, skilled with horses and experts in the woods.

William Daugs was the first year-long Ranger on the Palouse District. Dispatchers, scalers, and Ranger Alternates were hired for just the summer months. In 1942, the Ranger Alternate was hired for year-long work. In 1944, the first office space was rented in Moscow, with work done in Princeton during the summer and in the Moscow office in the winter. In 1960, the Moscow office became the main office. A Work Center was established at Elk River in about 1961. It was closed in 1971 when all records were centralized in the Potlatch office, with an office remaining in Moscow for Information and Educational purposes. In 1995 with the appointment of District Ranger Carmine Lockwood, Potlatch was designated as the official duty station for the Ranger. The Palouse District continues to financially assist the Forest Research Lab in Moscow to provide public information and permit sales.

The first improvement work on the district was a pack trail which started at the Ira Kinman ranch and climbed over Gold Hill. One of the duties of the Ranger was to check on homesteaders to see that they stayed on their claims. When the Forest Reserves were proclaimed, the land within was withdrawn from all forms of entry, except mineral, subject to all valid claims. Thus, further homesteading was barred, but those living on the land under what was known as squatters' rights, could remain on their claim and eventually obtain a patent.

Bringing homesteading to a sudden halt on large areas was not in accordance with long established customs, nor did it meet with the approval of local people. In 1906, a law provided that some lands valuable for agriculture were to be opened to homestead entry. This placed the burden on the Department of Agriculture to examine all National Forest lands and list valuable farming land available for mineral entry. Some problems occurred when homesteads were abandoned later--after schools and roads were built at great expense.

Mining was what brought many of the early settlers to the Palouse even before the timber resource was discovered. Between 1906 and 1942, there was some gold dredging activity along the North fork of the Palouse River above Laird Park. The remains of the dredging are still visible in 1996. This has become

a popular dispersed camping area. Many mining claims remain active in the Gold Hill and North Fork of the Palouse River in 1996.

Forest Service boundaries were usually drawn on the basis of fire protection. During the severe fires of 1910 in Idaho and Montana, which resulted from an early summer drought, there were no lookouts, little means of communication, and access was difficult. President Taft authorized the use of the regular Army for fire fighting during the 1910 fires.

Following the fires of 1910, it became evident that the Forests were too large for efficient management. Another positive result of the fire was the development of the fire fighting tool, the pulaski-- a combination of hoe and axe, which is still in use.

The first fire lookout on the District was built on West Gold Hill around 1910. Between 1910 and about 1950, there was an average of about 12 lookouts that were manned each year on the District. In 1943, the first women lookouts were hired. In 1966, only three lookouts remained on the district--Bald Mountain, Gold Hill Lookout and Elk Butte. Gold Hill was abandoned after 1966. Only two lookouts remain on the District today, Bald Mountain and Elk Butte neither are manned in 1996. Fire protection for the district is provided for the area by the Idaho Department of Lands with an office in Deary, Idaho. Fire detection is now accomplished with the use of airplanes, satellite, and reports from the public. Bald Mountain Lookout is being refurbished in 1997 for use as a rental. Although it will still no longer be used as a main resource for fire detection it will be available to the public to relive the nostalgia of the early fire lookouts.

Until 1927, there were few trails on the district. Most of the trails were built by prospectors and homesteaders. The big trail construction program started in 1927, and for several years trail work was done and more new lookouts were added. Today in 1996 the recreational trail system on the district is increasing in usage. In the summer months they are used by day hikers, backpackers, horseback riders, motorcycles, and an ever increasing number of mountain bikes. Special use permits are issued for large horseback rides, mountain bike races and other special events. In the winter, some trails are groomed and marked for cross-country skiing and snowmobiling.

In 1928 Rollo Perkins came to the district. Rollo's positions held on the district ranged from Alternate Ranger, work in fire control, land exchanges, trail crews, and as Timber Technician just before his retirement in 1967. He kept accurate diaries of work done on the District. Rollo spent the major part of his life working on the Palouse Ranger District. His unselfish efforts in furnishing information, photographs, and valuable records, made this history possible.

In 1933, the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) camps were started and they did mostly blister rust control work, to save the Western White Pine trees. In 1934 and 1935, the CCC crews built the first roads on the district. During the summer of 1935, work was begun on Laird Park Campground, and opened to the public in 1937. In 1961 the Little Boulder Creek Campground was completed, after the project was initiated by the Deary Booster Club. The Giant White Pine Campground was opened to the public in 1968.

During the depression years (1930-1939) much land in Latah and Clearwater Counties passed in to county ownership and then was acquired by the National Forest. Large acreages were also acquired by the National Forest from timber companies. Potlatch Lumber Company donated land including

Laird Park to the Forest Service. On some of these donated (acquired) lands, the mineral rights were reserved.

In 1947, the first tussock moth spray project was carried out with successful results. In 1965 another eradication program to prevent this insect from invading North Idaho's valuable timber stands, was completed.

In 1949, the first radio was installed on the District at Bald Mountain Lookout. More were added the next year. In 1952, District Personnel began taking down telephone lines, when radios replaced telephones.

By 1951 the Idaho Department of Lands took over fire protection responsibilities of the southern and western parts of the District. The District still maintains a seasonal 20 person firefighting crew. This crew works on trails or other crews until called to respond to fire.

Timber sales were made after World War II, around 1945, usually when someone wanted a sale. After 1954, small sales were prepared and advertised, and larger sales were put up for bid. The 1960's and 1970's were a boom time for the timber industry. In 1968 the District had 22 active timber sales. In 1978 the District sold 44.2 million board feet of timber, and in 1995 only 2.5 million board feet was sold.

The Palouse District was reduced in size in 1955 when the Santa Creek and Charlie Creek drainages were transferred to the Clarkia District.

In 1971 The Palouse District became administered by the Clearwater National Forest headquartered out of Orofino. This was the same year the Elk River Work Center was closed and the two Foresters working there were transferred to the Potlatch Office.

In the 1980's new controversies arose in the Timber Industry. Some of the issues were how to preserve the threatened and endangered species and plant life, maintain the economies of the timber dependent communities, and sustaining and reclaiming forest health.

In 1995 the debates escalated when President Clinton signed a timber salvage bill allowing the Forest Service to advertise and sell dead and dying timber without the possibility of appeals. This sparked a large controversy bringing the Chief of the Forest Service, Jack Ward Thomas to the District to see for himself the White Pine Timber Sale that had been through the appeals process many times and was now advertised under the Salvage Bill.

When logging began on the St. Joe National Forest, logs were removed by horses. Now, sophisticated equipment, such as high lead logging, forwarders, and helicopter logging is being used in certain areas. Thus road building is not necessary, and erosion damage is reduced.

The District is maintaining a very aggressive replanting program. Forest Service crews on the Palouse District, and contracting planting crews planted 350,000 trees on the District in the spring of 1980. About 320 acres of trees were thinned for better growth. In 1996 planting crews planted 700,000 new trees.

Due to the energy crisis of coal and oil shortages, and high prices, the District began issuing free firewood permits to gather wood on National forest lands. In 1973, only 200 permits were issued on the district. In 1980, nearly 4,000 permits were issued. In 1983 the Forest Service began charging per cord for personal use firewood permits. In 1995 the district issued 730 permits. Wood is still available and efforts are being made to make it accessible and meet the demand and need.

1982 was the beginning of a long and heated battle when a hydroelectric project at Elk Creek Falls was proposed. In 1987 the project was denied due to the with the management direction of the Elk Creek Falls Recreation Area as developed by the US Forest Service. The debate was again rekindled in 1988, but January 12, 1989 Federal authorities revoked a Lewiston developers application for a license to build a dam at Elk Creek Falls. This action was again appealed by the developer. In 1989 Senator Steve Symms toured the controversial site. The final ruling came in 1990. After a lengthy and expensive debate what finally sealed the decision was a recommendation by the Northwest Power Planning Councils recommendation to ban development at the falls to protect the Coeur d'Alene Salamander. The largest remaining population of the rare amphibian was found along Elk Creek.

In April 1986 due to budget cuts the Palouse District was forced to close White Pine and Little Boulder Campgrounds. They remained closed until June 1986 when a Latah County wide volunteer program helped open the popular camping areas. The Latah County Commissioners picked up the bill for garbage and volunteers took care of the maintenance and other duties.

Nature has played a significant role in the history of the district.

- *1910 was the year of "The Big Fire". Close to three million acres was burned throughout the Region. The greatest loss of timber was on the St. Joe.*
- *The winter of 1932-1933 was a large snowfall year followed by heavy rain. This caused failures of the rail line and bridges in the Morris Creek area. This same event occurring again in 1993 sent 7,100 cubic yards of material down a draw and into Elk Creek.*
- *1980 the volcanic eruption of Mt. St. Helens disrupted operations causing administrative leave for the District. Today in 1996 you can see the effects with ash still visible on the ground and in trees.*
- *1990 brought an incredible wind storm requiring the District to sell the down timber. This is probably what increased the volume of timber sold in 1991 to 36.1 million board feet.*
- *1991, 1994, and again in 1996 were dry years and most of the district's crews and personnel were off District fighting fire.*
- *The floods of 1996 isolated the town of Potlatch making it impossible for many of the personnel to report to work. Road crews were kept busy inventorying and repairing landslides that closed miles of National forest roads and trails.*

Remodeling of the bunkhouse at the Potlatch Ranger Station was completed in 1995. This project made the bunkhouse a true co-ed facility with separate bathroom facilities for both male and female employees who call "Krebs Hilton" home for the summer. The bunkhouse was named "Krebs Hilton" for Fire Management Officer, John Krebs who worked on the District and lived in the residence at the station for 30 years retiring from the District in 1995.

In December 1995 the Palouse District along with most other federal employees was furloughed for three weeks when Congress and President Clinton failed to agree on a budget.

The Forest Service continues to struggle with fewer employees, lower budgets, and the same amount of forest lands to maintain. Hiring practices have greatly changed with emphasis being given on relocating Forest Service employees that have lost their jobs due to positions becoming excess. The buzz words now being heard are buyouts, early retirement, and downsizing. The look of the Forest Service has changed.

Today instead of the need to be an excellent horseman and woodsman, the Ranger is expected to be an Administrator, Facilitator and a Communicator with skills in new technologies. We have specialists in areas such as Silviculture, Hydrology, Planning, Timber, Recreation, Business, and Wildlife Biology. These people work as a team together with the Ranger and public opinion to maintain the health of National Forest Lands for multiple use. With all of the cut backs there is still a sense of pride among the employees of the Palouse District. After the floods of 1996 Laird Park sustained damage to the campsites and swim area. A day was set aside and employees from all areas of the district worked together to get the campground ready for the Memorial Day weekend.