

Allegheny Forest Alliance

Spring 2005 Newsletter

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ANF Supervisor Reassigned

Word was received in late February that Kevin B. Elliott, the supervisor for the Allegheny National Forest had been reassigned to the Ashley National Forest in Utah. The news came as a bit of a surprise given his limited tenure and the fact that he had planned to continue serving well into the new forest plan era. By all accounts he fell short of that expectation since the new planning era will not commence for at least two more years.

Although somewhat of a lightning rod, Mr. Elliott was able to maintain a steady and predictable course while serving the ANF. In a closed meeting with him on April 8, 2001, he outlined four priority goals that included: 1) honoring existing commitments and mandates; 2) ramping up the vegetation management plan (27.9 mmbf in 2002 to 53 mmbf in 2005); 3) moving the forest plan forward; and 4) developing and implementing a recreation strategy. His commitment to thorough, methodical planning, however, seemed to hinder his ability to achieve those expectations.

Mr. Elliott will be succeeded by Acting Forest Supervisor Geoff Chandler, who comes to the ANF from the Chequamegon-Nicolet NF in northern Wisconsin. Mr. Chandler is a landscape architect by training with a strong planning background. He is currently serving as group leader overseeing many areas of forest planning and analysis. It is hoped this strong background will enable the forest planning process to continue to move forward while the USFS works to fill the supervisory position.

The AFA wishes both men success in their new assignments.

Certification Proposed for ANF

An announcement was made recently by the USFS that six national forests are targeted for certification field-testing as a tool to demonstrate commitment to sustainable forest management. The Allegheny National Forest is one of the six.

The primary reason for certification is to fulfill the requirement in the new planning rule calling for an Environmental Management System (EMS) for all forest plans by 2008. The certification programs being considered for field-testing are the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) along with "gap analysis" by the Sustainable Forest Initiative (SFI). Third party auditing systems characterized by these two programs will be used to strengthen the Forest Service's ability to formulate an EMS.



In recent months, the Forest Service has become more and more sensitive to the global notion that certification signals a strong commitment to sustainable forest management. Wood products from our national forests are being increasingly scrutinized around the world with respect to environmental concerns.

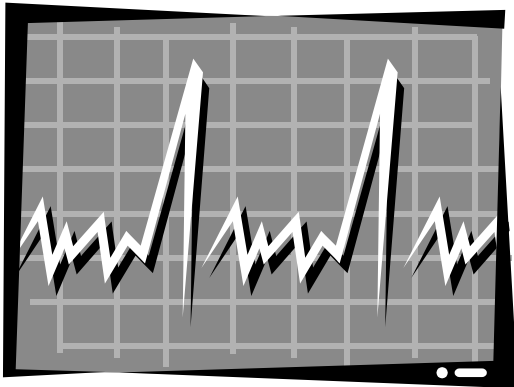
It is important to note, however, field-testing will not result in certification for any of the six national forests. It will be used strictly to study how current forest management activities align with these systems. Only time will tell what real impact certification will have on forest management both locally and nationally.

Recommended Reading: "The Agony of an American Wilderness"

Sam MacDonald, a native of Ridgway, came home in 2002 armed with a fellowship from the Phillips Foundation to research and write a book about the complexities of managing the Allegheny National Forest to the satisfaction of a wide variety of benefactors. He spent the better part of three years doing it.

The book is titled, "***The AGONY of an AMERICAN WILDERNESS***" and was recently published by Rowman & Littlefield. It features a collection of anecdotal accounts of interviews, personal experiences and observations Sam made while traveling about the forest. He avoids personal conclusions, but rather lays out an interesting dialogue, which allows the reader to determine what issues plague the ANF.

The AFA encourages anyone who is even remotely interested in learning about all the issues affecting management of the ANF to pick up a copy of Sam's book and read it. You will enjoy the presentation while raising your level of awareness.



An AFA Pulse Check

It is important now and then to take stock of the ways the **AFA**, representing a wide variety of local constituents, has supported the Forest Service's planning and management responsibly. Just to mention a few of the ways, the **AFA** has:

- Offered a consistent point of view reflecting the customs, culture and socioeconomic well being of local communities.
- Supported timber sales, recreation projects and survey/studies by in large with comments and/or participation.
- Cooperated in all phases of forest planning including scoping events and field trips.
- Encouraged AFA constituents through faxes and newsletters

to participate in forest planning activities of all types.

- Challenged the Forest Service to be more proactive with respect to sustainable forest management.
- Engaged in efforts to increase funding targeted for timber production.
- Intervened on behalf of the Forest Service in several lawsuits defending the right of the Forest Service to manage the ANF in accordance to the forest plan and prevailing regulations.
- Promoted production rather than preservation as the basis of the Forest Service mission.

Quite likely there are other issues worthy of this list. But regardless of their number, it causes one to consider how the Forest Service has compensated local constituents for their overwhelming support.

Storm Clouds are Forming

Hearings were held recently in the United States Senate regarding reauthorization of PL106-393, popularly known as the "Secure Rural School Act." You may recall back in 2000, President Clinton signed the bill, which was designed to provide safety-net funding for rural communities faced with rapidly declining timber receipts. PL106-393 is scheduled to sunset in 2006. The guaranteed funding stream flowing to school districts, townships and counties will cease in two years. The question of the day, month and year is, "What will happen in 2007?" The Senate hearings were scheduled to shed light on the dilemma.

Tough questions were asked during the hearings, particularly by Senator Larry Craig (R-ID), co-author of PL106-393. He expressed concern for continued funding of what was to be a short term safety-net, designed to help until the USFS returned to more reasonable harvest levels. He appeared particularly frustrated by the fact that the USFS budget had risen to over \$5 Billion while the agency's revenues had dropped to only \$210 million, less than a 5% return. He wondered if PL106-393 might have actually contributed to the continuing decline.



In fact, after having surveyed Forest Supervisors across the country, Senator Craig concluded county commissioners and school superintendents are less engaged in forest related activities than prior to PL106-393. Does "take the money and run" come to mind?

This and other indicators lead him to believe reauthorization is in serious jeopardy for a very fundamental reason. Given the tight budget constraints facing the federal government, failure to significantly address the timber receipts dilemma (which could help fund the safety-net) casts a pall over reauthorization.

Proponents of PL106-393 will be scrambling over the next 12 months to come up with answers that will convince at least 60 Senators at budget time that reauthorization is justified. More importantly, the argument must be made that this one and a half billion dollar appropriation is more worthy than say aid to the farming community, refurbishing urban infrastructure and the like. Remember, 60 of the 100 Senators must sign on for this effort to be passed on to the House of Representatives.

Oh, yes, that brings up another problem....

Consider Getting Involved

As the saying goes, "You can't win, if you don't play." Nothing could be truer regarding management activities on the ANF.

The *National Forest Management Act of 1976* provides the opportunity for "affected citizens" to participate in rule-making, decision-making, and planning with respect to public lands through public comment. It has become an integral part of the management process at all levels of federal land management. The problem is, too few affected citizens actually get involved.

The degree of complexity relative to projects or policies is irrelevant. Public comment is essential for all planning activities ranging from relatively mundane things such as trail enhancement all the way up to the forest plans, rules and regulations. Whether by mail, fax, email or public meeting, the opportunity to be heard is certainly available.



Just since the beginning of this year the local Forest Service has extended opportunities to comment on several projects such as; Forest Renewal, Crop Tree Release, Eagle Wind Mills, West Branch of the Tionesta, and Russell City Trail Connector. More importantly, public meetings have been and will continue to be held to promote the development of the new forest plan. This important document will serve as the blueprint for planned activities well into the future.

Comments from local residents are particularly critical since they are the citizens most affected by the final decisions. To allow the process to move forward at the whim of people from outside the region is unconscionable. Rarely are their interests synonymous to ours.

Please become cognizant of the local news media announcements and get involved in this important process. You can make your wishes known as the law allows or you can abdicate the right and take your chances. The choice is yours.

Reminder: Keep your membership current. Payment helps to ensure that your voice is represented in advocating multiple use of the Allegheny National Forest and other public lands. Thank you!

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