

Forest Service trails specialist focuses on Sisters

By Craig F. Eisenbeis
Correspondent

Although her official title is “Recreation Team Leader for the Sisters Ranger District,” Amy Racki is the Forest Service’s new face for public trails and recreation in the National Forest for the Sisters area.

As sort of the “new kid on the block,” Racki is anxious to meet community members and partners who want to work with the Forest Service on trails, in wilderness, and in all forms of forest recreation. She also plans to be around for quite some time and wants to get to know more of the people in her new home district.

An avid hiker herself, Racki is working with the community to better understand trail needs. She arrived in Sisters from the Tonto National Forest in Arizona, where she served as the Partnership Coordinator and Recreation/Wilderness Team Leader.

A native of the Buffalo/Niagara Falls area of New York, she worked in Arizona for 15 years before moving to Oregon. While in Arizona, she held positions with county, state, and federal governments, as well as putting in time as a private consultant. She has a bachelor’s degree in earth science and geology from The State University of New York (SUNY) College at Buffalo, and a master’s degree in recreational management from Arizona State University.

Here in Sisters, her duties encompass a broad sampling of forest activities.

“Program areas I serve are trails, special uses, lands, developed and dispersed recreation, congressionally designated wilderness and also Wild and Scenic Rivers, grants, agreements, contracts, partnerships, and volunteers. I consider myself a technical advisor and program leader. I also fill in all gaps where we are missing staff.”

Not surprisingly, Racki’s personal interests run pretty much along an outdoor theme.

“You’ll catch me outdoors on my days off,” she said. “I love many outdoor activities, including backpacking, biking, skiing, fishing, wake boarding, kayaking, camping, soaking in hot springs, caving, and reading by a lake.”

She has a favorite outdoor companion, too — a 12-year-old rescue dog named Buddy, whom she says “looks like Frankenstein.”

The move from Arizona to Oregon was a perfect fit for Racki’s personal and professional interests.

“I love the Sisters Ranger District because it provides vast wilderness, Wild and Scenic Rivers designations, winter and summer recreation, an engaged community and partnerships, and a challenging job in working toward sustainable recreation,” she said.

Racki says that many of the National Forest system’s goals are the same, regardless of where the forest is located.

“Both the Deschutes and Tonto National Forests have year-round high recreation use; and, although the challenges are similar, there is always a unique local

complexity. Whether you are in Arizona or Oregon the objective is to work toward a sustainability of the land that is responsive to forest and community needs through partnerships, collaboration, stewardship, and restoration.”

Racki was drawn to Central Oregon for the quality of life here, and she plans to take full advantage of it.

“This is a place that I am proud to call home and is a very special place,” she said. “The Deschutes National Forest is a treasured gem with glaciers, waterfalls, springs, and thriving populations of plants and animals. There is a strong sense of community and support for local small business and the ability to backpack and kayak nearly within walking distance.”

Racki finds that working at the ranger district level is a perfect fit for her.

“I love working at a district office for the Forest Service because it provides me the greatest connection to land and people,” she said. “It is fascinating to continually learn about the dynamic interaction between land and people and the diverse values people have on the landscape.”

Some key features of the Sisters Ranger District include a developed recreation infrastructure with 70 developed recreation sites for boating, hiking, sno parks, interpretive sites, recreation rentals, horse camps, and more. Special-uses programs



PHOTO BY CRAIG EISENBEIS

Amy Racki is the Forest Service’s Recreation Team Leader and principal contact for trails in the Sisters Ranger District.

also include 270 permits for guiding services, resorts, and other types of land and recreation permits. The district includes Whychus Creek and the Metolius River, portions of which are designated as Wild and Scenic Rivers; there are more than 85,000 acres of wilderness, a Scenic Byway, Scenic Bikeways, and a National Recreation Trail. The Sisters Ranger District also includes nearly 400 miles of trails.

“So,” Racki says, “when I think about goals for trails, I think about a sustainable system of roads that can connect you to trailhead and trail, a trail system that serves many user types with access to scenic destinations where people find their special place.”

She says that any trail system must consider environmental, economic, social health, and sustainability. Most importantly, however, she stresses that goals for the trail system must be embraced by the community and partners who invest in and care for it.

“I love Central Oregon and am impressed that the community has such great passion and respect for the land,” she said. “I will be around for a long time, so get to know me! I’m an extrovert, so I love getting to know people.”

Those seeking information about trails and recreation projects in the Sisters Ranger District are invited to contact Racki at 541-549-7730.

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