

Allen retires as Deschutes National Forest Supervisor

By Jim Cornelius
Correspondent

John Allen wanted a job where he could work outside — and he wanted to make change. For the past four decades, he’s had both of those desires fulfilled beyond his expectations. This month, the long-time Deschutes National Forest Service Supervisor is retiring.

Allen has been a significant presence in Sisters, as the area has grappled with growth and changes in forest use — and a series of massive wildfires that have had a major impact on local communities.

“Sisters had been at the tip of the spear for the past 15 years when it comes to wildfires,” Allen told *The Nugget* earlier this month.

Under his leadership, the Forest Service has undertaken a major effort to reintroduce healthy fire into the landscape through prescribed burning and to protect outlying communities from the threat of wildfire. The projects in Sisters Country have had an impact. Allen noted that the work helped keep the 2017 Milli Fire out of forest subdivisions like Crossroads and the Edgington Road area.

“I’m not saying that our prescribed burning saved those subdivisions, but they sure gave us the chance to knock that fire down and keep

it from burning into those subdivisions,” Allen said.

He noted that the community of Sisters has, over the years, become more and more supportive of Forest Service efforts. That’s a reflection of the values that Allen brought to his work. For him, collaboration and the building of trust among staff and affected communities was always paramount. Building trust was key.

“I think Bill Anthony, the (former) Ranger in Sisters, did a great job of that,” Allen said.

He boiled down his own style of leadership to a simple premise — and an African proverb.

“I think I’ve tried to be an individual with a vision of what is possible,” he said.

How you achieve what is possible is where the African proverb comes in: “If you want to go fast, go alone,” Allen said. “If you want to go far, go together.”

Allen notes that there are many people to “go together” with across Central Oregon.

Allen contributed to the development of the Deschutes Collaborative Forest Project and Deschutes Trails Coalition where members of diverse interests work together to provide input to the management of the Deschutes National Forest. Allen is known for his focus

not only on the management of national forest lands but also for his belief in the power of relationships, partnerships and collaboration.

Many of those relationships are found here in Sisters.

The Deschutes National Forest is under tremendous pressure as more and more people flood in to enjoy its beauty and recreational opportunities. Balancing ecological health and the public’s wants and needs has occupied much of Allen’s thinking and planning for the past several years.

“My goal is to keep the quality of the experience as high as possible,” he told *The Nugget*.

That is the purpose behind a controversial permitting system that will soon go into place, restricting access to sensitive — and highly trafficked, wilderness areas.

Allen cited the Peterson



PHOTO BY JIM CORNELIUS

John Allen had a significant impact on the forests of Sisters Country.

Ridge Trail system in Sisters as an example of how multiple goals can be met, utilizing a compact profile that controls the impact of heavy use.

“That trail system didn’t exist 10 years ago,” he said.

“Peterson Ridge is a good example of how you build new trails to accommodate increased use and try to mitigate impact on wildlife,”

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