

**Jason McMillen**  
*IVN Contributing Writer*

Fernando Dominguez, a formerly notorious Illinois Valley drug addict and criminal who lived in Cave Junction for 39 years, now finds himself in Medford filling a very different set of shoes—sober ones. With two years of clean time under his belt, a new home and a full-time job, Dominguez is ready to take the next step in his life; becoming a drug counselor so that he can help others step away from drug addiction and getting his daughter back from the Department of Human Services (DHS).

Should his councilor in training application be accepted, which is an occupation that favors former addicts since they have firsthand experience, he’ll need to

log 1,000 recovery group hours, perform a variety of assessments and conduct a multitude of one-on-one sessions with recovering addicts in inpatient facilities. “I’ll be teaching people in the early stages of recovery,” Dominguez said, eager to help people to turn their lives around.

After 31 years of addiction, most of it spent on the run from the police, Dominguez suddenly decided that he had had enough after DHS took his first daughter nearly immediately after birth. “I got sick and tired of being sick and tired,” Dominguez said, explaining that his daughter was just the tipping point in him seeking help.

Disillusioned with the lifestyle he was leading, Dominguez, who at the time had been dodging an arrest warrant for over three years, decided that it was the end of the line. “I let myself get caught. I knew the cops were

coming and it wasn’t just the cops who were coming. They used the RADE team to come get me... but I didn’t care so I stayed there. Every other time in my life I would have just left. I was done running.”

While serving his 15-month prison sentence, which was later reduced to 10½ months, Dominguez got to witness firsthand the effects of methamphetamine on his fellow inmates while being sober himself. “It kind of helped me with realizing that—‘wow, look at that,’” Dominguez said. Wasting no time, he started the process of getting custody of his daughter while locked up.

After getting out of prison with nothing but the clothes on his back, he immediately checked into OnTrack’s DAD program and reported to his probation officer—both a first for him. While there he took parenting classes, experienced his first Narcotics Anonymous

meeting and later completed the program. He now sponsors two people and will be getting full custody of his daughter this week. Dominguez added that the Family Nurturing Center was instrumental in the reunification process.

On a final note, Dominguez said that he knows people in Cave Junction that want to turn their lives around but that the recovery infrastructure, in his opinion, is simply inadequate compared to the bigger cities like Grants Pass and Medford.

“A lot of people are willing. They’re just stuck... After almost two years of being gone I drove through Cave Junction just to visit my mother for Christmas and the same people were standing in the same places they were the day I left.”

Big Pine is dead; Oregon campground’s fate up in the air

by Jeff Duewel  
The Daily Courier

GRANTS PASS, Ore. (AP) — For many years, the Big Pine held court over hikers, hunters, scouts and tree-lovers, standing 259 feet tall, 12 miles up Taylor Creek Road in the Siskiyou National Forest.

For a while it was the tallest known ponderosa pine tree in the world, and also boasted a 17-foot circumference.

It was also one of 61 trees around the country named a Living Witness Tree in 1987, selected because they were alive when the U.S. Constitution was ratified 200 years earlier.

It had interpretive markers, a sturdy wooden sign with thick timbers soaring 10 feet high, and a bronze plaque on a stone pedestal.

In the nearby campground were picnic tables, fire pits and even a rustic swing set, all surrounded by trails and signs to the tree.

Big Pine was a big deal.

Now the tree is dead. The campground and some of the nearby trails have been closed since 2014. The plaque and sign are gone, leaving just a fence and a ruined pedestal.

The Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest hasn’t yet figured out the fate of the tree, campground and trails. The campground is located in the heart of Briggs Valley, a 30-mile

drive via Galice Road and Taylor Creek Road from Grants Pass.

Complicating the issue, another dozen large trees in the campground area are also dying and a hazard to fall.

The possibilities include cutting the hazard trees and reopening the campground, or, simply leaving it as “just another spot in the forest,” said Wild Rivers District Ranger Matt Paciorek. “No plaque, no bathroom, no nothing,” he said.

If it’s not a designated campground, requirements for dealing with hazard trees don’t apply. There is another improved campground — Sam Brown, just a mile up the road — that has picked up the slack for campers.

Paciorek said public input will be taken and something decided hopefully this year.

The public asks about Big Pine often, said Chamise Kramer, Rogue River-Siskiyou spokesperson.

“It was a really popular campground and people really loved it,” Kramer said. “Sometimes people don’t understand why it’s closed.”

“Big Pine is a focal point of some of the most beautiful hiking and biking trails in Josephine County,” wrote Zach Goodwiler of the Southern Oregon Trails Alliance. “It holds a special place in our hearts as well as many community members, and we want to see it

thrive again.”

Brian Long, a recreation specialist for the forest, said he used to camp there frequently. He noticed the rotting trees a few years ago.

But he’s not sure cutting them down is the answer.

“My concern is we cut all those trees down and it’s not a place people want to go any more,” Long said.

Long said the trees at the campground have a fungus called Schweinitzi root and butt rot. Big Pine itself was killed by bark beetles. And it had been dying for a long time.

District Ranger Liz Apgaoa posed with the tree in a photo in the Daily Courier in August 1995. Apgaoa, now retired, later went on to supervise 14 national forests in the Southeast and Puerto Rico.

“It’s not going to die on her watch,” Forest Supervisor Mike Lunn said in the accompanying article.

The Big Pine still stands but it’s no longer the king of all it sees.

It has been surpassed by Phalanx, a 268-foot ponderosa located nearby by giant tree hunters in 2011.

Mike Oxman, a former tree surgeon in Grants Pass, got attached to Big Pine back in the 1980s while scouting for bicentennial trees for the Living Witness program, which led to

the bronze plaque.

“The purpose of the plaque was to get recognition of for the contribution of the tree to people,” said Oxman, who now lives in Seattle.

Oxman visited the tree in 2016 and took the plaque to Paciorek, who sent it to the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History in Washington, D.C.

No one seems to know the fate of the sturdy, artistic Big Pine sign, although former Siskiyou employee George Brierty of Cave Junction believes it was vandalized.

Long noted that some vandalism has occurred at Big Pine. In his most recent visit someone had replaced a Forest Service lock with one of their own.

The Big Pine will eventually topple, but its legacy will last.

Oxman delivered all of his documents on Big Pine to the Smithsonian, to go with the plaque.

He said there is no display in the Smithsonian — it’s just in a box “in the boneyard.”

“We usually just take care of a tree while it’s alive. Now the Smithsonian will take care of this tree forever,” Oxman said. “In the future, people will be able to find out an arborist made a commitment to take care of this tree and protect it.”

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