

# History of National Forest Homeowners & the Cabin Program (rev 2023)

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## 1. THE FIRST CENTURY: 1870-1947 - ORIGIN OF THE CABIN PROGRAM

The origins of the cabin program on lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) can be traced back to the late 19th century. Even before the establishment of the USFS, people ventured into the woods and constructed small fishing or hunting huts, also known as *cabins in the woods* or *summer homes*. The earliest recorded summer homes were built in the early 1870s.

In 1891, Congress authorized the President to establish forest reserves, which are now known as national forests. That same year, President Benjamin Harrison created the first national forest at Yellowstone. However, this act did not provide any provisions for the use or protection of the reserved forest lands. In response, the Organic Act of 1897 was enacted to protect all the resources of federal lands and allow their use for specified purposes, including cabins for recreation.

While an increasing number of cabins were permitted and built between 1903 and 1908, this investment was seen by many as risky because of permit limitations imposed by the Act.

Permits were issued for only one year and while they could be renewed until termination, there was no guarantee of renewal or extension. Although these permits were mistakenly referred to as *99-year leases* due to their indefinite renewability, they lacked a specific expiration date. Some of the early cabins from this period still exist today, and their owners are members of the National Forest Homeowners (NFH) organization.

On March 4, 1915, Congress passed the Occupancy Permits Act, which allowed permits to be issued for up to 30 years. At that time, the USFS managed millions of acres of land in the Western United States with very few public users. This contrasted with the National Park Service, which had a higher number of visitors. To attract more people to the national forests, tracts of land near lakes and streams were surveyed and divided into lots designated for recreation cabins. Newspapers in nearby large cities advertised these cabin lots, with annual costs ranging from \$10 to \$25, enticing people to build and enjoy the forests as vacation destinations. Many families built their cabins between 1916 and 1920.

During the 1920s, Congress passed an act that authorized 25% of Forest Service permit fees to go back to the county where the cabin was located, while the remainder went into the Federal Treasury. These payments began under the Secure Rural Schools Act (1908) recognizing that counties did not receive any taxes from federal lands and needed these funds. Congress stabilized the payments in 2000 with future payments coming from the U.S. Treasury.

Recreational cabin use on national forests remains a valid and cherished activity, providing a forest experience for entire families and friends, especially those who are very young, elderly, or physically handicapped.

### **1948-1986: ORIGIN OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION - HOW NFH CAME TO BE**

Following World War II, there was a significant increase in public recreation in national parks and forests, which led to the emergence of businesses providing recreational services on forest lands. In 1948, a group of businesses holding permits from the USFS to provide recreation services established the National Forest Recreation Association (NFRA). As commercial recreation in the forests grew, NFRA developed an internal organization to better serve these enterprises. Divisions were established for winter

sports (skiing), resorts and camps, outfitters, packers, guides, river rafters, and campground concessionaires.

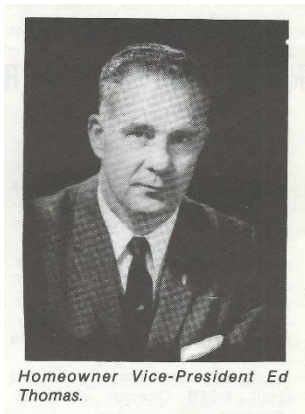
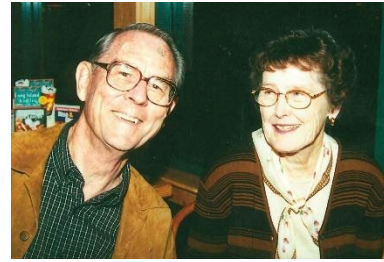
In 1962, the NFRA board of directors invited summer homeowners to join them by creating a new division called the Homeowners Division (HD). Although no records exist from the 1960s, there was moderate interest in this invitation. Several factors influenced this interest, including Congress directing the USFS in 1955 to obtain fees for the use of federal land based on fair market value. In 1956, an act amended the 1915 Act, granting authority for a maximum 30-year permit term. However, the individual forest supervisors had not received any direction from the USFS Washington Office (WO) regarding the implementation of these changes, resulting in negative consequences for many summer homeowners.

In 1969, as a result of the efforts of HD members, USFS Chief Edward Cliff appeared before a congressional hearing to address the concerns raised by summer homeowners regarding the lack of term permits being issued. In a compromise with these permittees, he announced the introduction of 20-year permits. In exchange, the USFS would initiate a system of appraisals every five years to determine lot values, and the annual fee would be set at 5% of that value. Although the proposal offered a lease fee lower than the "market" rate, it aligned with the longstanding practice of using 5% as the rental fee for federal properties since the late 1800s.

The mid-1970s saw significant congressional activity centered around the management of federal lands and resources. The enactment of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) in 1976 directly influenced how the USFS managed public and private uses of national forests. During the 1978 NFRA Convention in Tucson, a joint resolution was established between the Forest Service and the NFRA, forming a joint Long Range Planning Committee (LRPC). The LRPC aimed to bring together leaders from the NFRA commercial divisions and the USFS Washington Office. Meeting several times a year, the committee discussed proposed policies as well as the effectiveness of existing policies. The resolution involved the USFS and the NFRA.

Initially, the LRPC primarily included leaders from the commercial divisions. However, due to the significant representation of permit holders in the HD, they were granted two seats on the committee a few years after its formation. Particularly during the early years of NEPA and NFMA, which were USFS-driven policies, inclusion in the LRPC was highly crucial.

The HD's active involvement commenced in 1977 when *Bill Worden (left with wife, Pam)* from Southern California was elected as the NFRA Vice-President representing the HD. *Don Coons (below right with wife, Elizabeth)*, an Oregon permittee who had established their state group in 1975, served as the NFRA President from 1979 to 1981, becoming the only homeowner to hold that position.



Homeowner Vice-President Ed Thomas.

In 1981, *Ed Thomas (left)* of Sacramento, CA, was elected as the NFRA Vice-President for the HD. During the 1981 convention, the NFRA bylaws were amended to allow the Homeowners Division to elect its own Board of Directors responsible for governing and managing the affairs of homeowner members within the NFRA structure. At that time, the HD had a membership of 3,100, and cabin owners were simultaneously negotiating with the USFS regarding the new recreation policy while facing challenges with the appraisal system used to

determine use fees. The HD's efforts to address the appraisal issues were primarily led by Joan and Phil Oakes of Sacramento. In the first year, the HD operated with a budget of \$1,000, with NFRA providing \$1,000 and the HD expending \$949.61.



NFRA honored Elizabeth and Don Coons as he concluded two years as the association president.

The first minutes of the Homeowners Division's meetings were recorded during the NFRA meeting in Las Vegas in 1982, which included the adoption of the HD's first budget. It was also during that convention that NFRA decided to hold two conventions in 1983, testing a new meeting time frame in March/April to better accommodate their members.

The 1983 NFRA Convention held at Lake Tahoe was the last convention held in the fall. Bob Ervin was elected as the Vice-President for the HD. However, the fee issue remained unresolved, with a growing discrepancy between HD recommendations and the USFS's position. Homeowners convinced Senator McClure (R-ID), to support their position and protect his constituent summer homeowners at Priest Lake to sponsor a bill precluding the USFS from increasing summer home permits fees until the entire policy matter including fees was settled.

During the following years, the HD went through some organizational changes. They established their own news insert in the NFRA Newsletters, with Merle Lowden of

Diamond Lake Oregon taking charge of gathering and editing material. The HD also started billing and collecting dues from its members independently. In 1985, at the San Diego convention, USFS Chief Max Peterson proposed the formation of a committee comprising USFS and HD personnel to address the policy and fee issues. This committee, known as the *Chief's Committee*, began meeting in Washington, D.C., in 1985.

In 1986, Bill Worden of Southern California was elected as the President of the HD. The Treasurer, John Rohde of Central California, reported the financial status of the HD, including the number of members and budget information. In the 1986-1987 budget year, the HD had a budget of \$42,775. Kent Delana of Idaho presented a new organizational plan for the Division, providing even more independence from NFRA, to allow the Division to continue to grow and better service its members.

### 1987-1996: NFH IS BORN

In 1987, the Homeowners Division changed its name to the National Forest Homeowners (NFH). An active executive committee worked on developing bylaws and procedures, and Bob Ervin, the former NFRA Vice-President for the HD, was hired as the full-time executive for NFH. Extensive work was done on the new policy through the Chief's Committee, including reaching out to all permittees for their input.

USFS Chief Peterson retired in 1987 and Associate Chief Dale Robertson was appointed Chief. Fortunately, he was a friend to cabin owners and continued the work of the policy committee now led by Ken Myers, Assistant Director of Lands.

In 1988 in Reno, Nevada, NFH inaugurated its very first membership convention. At this first convention, the members re-elected Bill Worden as the President of NFH and adopted bylaws establishing a 30-member board, each director serving for 3 years. The Recreation Residence Policy was finally published in the Federal Register, granting cabin owners new rights and benefits. NFH organized workshop-seminars across the West to familiarize permittees with the new regulations. The term *summer homeowners* was changed to *recreation residence permit holders* during the negotiations.

In 1989, problems arose when some retired USFS employees appealed the new policies as being overly biased in favor of recreation residence permit holders. A major contention was that permit holders were allowed to participate in the development of the policies in violation of the Federal Administrative Procedures Act. As a result, cabin owners were not included in the revision of those policies and the Agency has been extremely careful to maintain this separation ever since. Assistant Agriculture Secretary Dunlop upheld several contentions of the appellants, leading to further frustrations. NFH hired Washington lobbyist Scootch Pankonin and retained an attorney to help with the legal battle over the policy.

In 1990, NFRA passed new bylaws, eliminating the commercial divisions and establishing only two divisions: Recreation Services and Homeowners with equal representation on the NFRA Board of Directors. Bill Worden was re-elected president and John Rohde continued his work as Administrator, managing the database and dues billing. NFH's budget for that year was \$83,615.

During the early 1990s, NFH experienced both growth and frustration with the recreation residence policy. The close collaboration between NFH and the USFS was hampered by a ruling that limited their interaction. In response to membership requests, cabin owner meetings were organized in various cities, allowing local permittee association presidents and officers to participate. These smaller regional meetings were called area forums.

At the 1992 annual meeting, Bill Worden was re-elected as the NFH President. However, in the fall of 1993, John Rohde passed away, and Ray Neetzel took over as Administrator. The USFS published a draft of the revised policy, and the final Recreation Residence Policy was sent to all permittees in June 1994.

Before the 1994 NFRA Convention, conflicts arose between the Recreation Services and Homeowners Divisions, leading to the recommendation that NFH become an independent entity. H.P. Waters was elected president and NFH was incorporated in June 1994, and the 1995 NFH convention was held separately from NFRA.

Shortly before the 1996 NFH Convention, Ray Neetzel, Treasurer, died and Marcella Fescina was hired as a part-time database manager. At the convention H.P. Waters was re-elected president only to die six weeks later. He was succeeded by Clare Engeseth of Sparks, Nevada.

### **1996-2000: FEE REFORM BEGINS - CABIN USERS FEE FAIRNESS ACT (CUFFA)**

Implementation of the Cabin Users Fee Fairness Act (commonly known as CUFFA) in 1996 marked the beginning of a series of challenges. As scheduled, the 20-year appraisal cycle commenced, and conventions held from 1996 onward placed significant emphasis on updates and workshops regarding the appraisal process. Permittees were encouraged to actively participate in their appraisals. To assist our members, NFH collaborated with the USFS to create a booklet outlining the appraisal process, which gained popularity among both USFS personnel and our members.

By the summer of 1997, problems with the appraisal process started to surface. Property values were being assessed as high as \$660,000 per lot, resulting in exorbitant annual fees of \$33,000, with many fees skyrocketing by 250-500%. Rep. Smith (OR), Rep. Helen Chenoweth (ID), and Sen. Larry Craig (ID) promptly came to

our support. They successfully passed a bill through Congress, stipulating a one-year notice for implementing the new fees and, if there was an increase of over 100%, requiring the increase to be spread evenly over a three-year period. They also stressed the importance of unified advocacy from various permittee organizations for effective assistance.

During the 1998 convention in Vancouver, WA, the NFH Board appointed Lee Kaupke and Mary Clark Ver Hoef, the new chair of the Legislative Liaison Committee, as NFH representatives in a homeowner association coalition known as the Cabin Coalition. The coalition consisted of representatives from organizations such as the American Land Rights Association (ALRA/NIA), California Forest Homeowners, National Forest Homeowners, Oregon Forest Homeowners Association, Sawtooth (ID) Forest Cabin Owners Association, and NFH lobbyist Scootch Pankonin. The Northern Sierra Summer Homeowners Association (CA) and White River Recreation Association (WA) provided input, and CFH president Bill Worden served as the Chair.

Over the following three years, numerous permittees testified at three Congressional hearings, as well as hearings held in Idaho, Nevada, and Oregon. The coalition hired a highly qualified consultant appraiser named Richard Betts from Oakland. Betts, along with the coalition and the staff of Sen. Craig, particularly Dan Whiting, reviewed approximately 16 sets of Instructions to Appraisers from various forests, regions, and the USFS Washington Office. They collaborated to draft a bill that provided specific instructions to the USFS regarding the appraisal process. The bill successfully passed Congress and was signed into law by the President in October 2000. NFH and Rick Betts continued their work with the National Institute of Appraisers and the Forest Service to develop detailed instructions for USFS appraisers. As per the Act, the Forest Service was directed to establish regulations for implementing the new Cabin Users Fee Fairness Act of 2000 (CUFFA) within two years of its signing.

### **CONCLUDING THE FIRST CENTURY: DECLINE IN CABIN NUMBERS**

During the first century of the cabin program, the program was consistently growing until the late 1960s. But that would change. In 1968, the Chief of the Forest Service decided to impose a moratorium on the development of new recreation residence tracts, and in 1976, the creation of new lots in existing residence tracts became prohibited. At that time, the number of permitted summer homes stood at approximately 20,000.

Since then, the nationwide number of permittees has steadily declined, reaching a total of 13,800 active permits in 2015. This decline can be attributed, in part, to the USFS's decision to terminate permits based on factors such as higher use, abandonment or being an isolated single cabin, not in a tract; also not allowing rebuilding of cabins destroyed by fire or other natural disasters. A number of tracts, however, have been allowed to execute land exchanges which has been encouraged in many areas by the

USFS where a tract was adjacent to private land as the USFS tried to consolidate forests and eliminate a checkerboard configuration.

## **THE SECOND CENTURY: 2000-2009 - STABILIZING NFH AND THE CABIN PROGRAM**

Throughout the year 2000, NFH remained stable under the leadership of President Clare Engeseth and Executive Director Bob Ervin. At the 2000 NFH Convention in Sparks, Nevada, a major focus of discussion centered on a draft Special Uses Handbook that had been released before cabin leadership had an opportunity to discuss it. Also that year, dues were raised by ten dollars at the September Board of Director's meeting. This brought dues to \$40 for regular members and \$25 for associate members.

In 2001 at the annual convention, Bob Ervin decided to retire after serving 16 years. After a nationwide search, Scotch Pankonin was hired as Executive Director and Lobbyist. Over the course of the next year, it became evident that combining the two positions simply was not workable. Scotch again became the lobbyist. A part-time Field Director Liz Arnold was hired to assist in membership development, fund raising and assisting the Executive Director as needed. In 2002 Hans Johnson was elected Executive Director. Marcella Fesina, Database Manager retired and Barbara Warnock became the Database Manager. Simultaneously, the Angeles National Forest witnessed two fires that burned down 110 cabins. While a few cabins were allowed to be reconstructed, the majority representing around 106 or 107 permits, were permanently lost, foreshadowing a recurring trend over the next two decades.

In 2003, changes continued as Hans Johnson and Scotch Pankonin, the legislative representative, stepped down due to increased commitments elsewhere. Furthermore, budgetary constraints led to the elimination of the Field Director position. In September 2003, Mary Clarke Ver Hof took over as the Executive Director, presiding over some of NFH's most challenging times. Less than three weeks after the NFH convention, the USFS published draft rules, regulations and guidelines for implementation of CUFFA that was passed in October of 2000. Serious problems were identified in the rules and efforts were immediately undertaken to make changes. NFH took the lead in attempting to address these issues.

The 2004 conference was held in Sacramento, CA with the highest attendance to date. Roy Glauthier was elected President. Early in Roy's first presidential term in 2004, the board concluded a two-year exploration into whether NFH should remain a 501(c)4 organization or revert to a 501(c)3 status. Ultimately, the decision was made to retain the 501(c)4 status to ensure that the focus remained on the cabin program instead of fundraising. Another pivotal development was the tradition established during a

conference in Denver, where the Board embarked on tract tours, offering insights into various residence tracts.

The need for NFH and the Recreation Residence Program to regain a foothold in Washington DC became evident. In 2005, NFH enlisted the services of Aubrey King from Bowie, Maryland. Aubrey, who also served other Forest Service clients, possessed established connections with Forest Service staff, the Washington office, and Congressional members. He played a significant role in guiding NFH through the enactment of the Cabin Fee Act in 2014.

The education of the Board continued during the 2005 NFH Convention, where the Board, together with Juliette Denton, the Washington Office Special Uses Program Manager with the Forest Service, visited four tracts in the San Bernardino National Forest. This marked Juliette Denton's first tract visit.

A challenging period began in March 2006, with the publication of the Final Rules for CUFFA's Implementation, 5.5 years post-CUFFA's passage and 2.5 years after the comment period's closure. Despite input from NFH and others, minimal changes had been made. While grappling with the CUFFA situation, NFH worked on creating an appraisal handbook for members to assist them through the process. The majority of the NFH convention time in 2006 and 2007 was centered on CUFFA and the appraisal process.

Election procedures for officers underwent a shift in 2007, moving from convention-based elections to a Vote by Mail (VBM) system. VBM aimed to enhance member participation despite the additional cost of sending out ballots.

The unique Mission Inn in Riverside, California, provided a distinctive backdrop for the 2007 NFH Convention. During this event, Geoff Anderson assumed the presidency, and NFH presented its inaugural National Service Award to Mark Rey, Under Secretary of the Department of Agriculture. Distinguished figures like Regional Forester Randy Moore (subsequently Forest Service Chief in 2022) and Forest Supervisors from various Californian forests attended the banquet.

The 2009 NFH Convention in Seattle witnessed Pete Bailey's thought-provoking talk titled *Cabins in Crisis*. This presentation served as a wake-up call, shedding light on various CUFFA issues, including burdensome cabin fees exceeding \$20,000 annually. During the convention, a workshop provided insights into the 2008/2009 permit, which contained unfavorable modifications. Despite the desire to address both CUFFA and the permit issue, resource constraints dictated a focus solely on the fee matter, with the unfavorable aspects deferred for later review.

In pursuit of a more effective CUFFA solution, NFH commenced data collection. An Economic Impact Survey was conducted, yielding a publication that highlighted the value of Recreation Residences to local economies. The survey, including updates, played a vital role in NFH's endeavor to resolve the fee crisis.

## 2010-2019: CALMING THE WATERS

The advent of CUFFA introduced an existential threat to the cabin program due to escalating fees arising from appraisals. Almost immediately upon its implementation, NFH embarked on a decade-long journey of lobbying and networking to address the escalating fee crisis. The fee issue had ballooned to the point where some permit-holders were being billed an astonishing \$30,000 for a single year's use fee. NFH's efforts in this regard culminated in the introduction of new legislation on fees, later materializing as the Cabin Fee Act.

The foremost task at hand was to establish a committee to spearhead this initiative, leading to the formation of C2. The abbreviation stood for *Coalition 2*, as a previous coalition of cabin associations had played a role in the passage of CUFFA in the 1990s. Around 2006, C2 was restructured to tackle the challenges arising from CUFFA. State cabin organizations, NFH, American Lands Rights, and various individual tract associations comprised the C2 membership. The significant fundraising endeavor for the Cabin Fee Act yielded remarkable success.

While C2 worked towards revising CUFFA, NFH simultaneously addressed other responsibilities. During the 2010 NFH Conference in Reno, alongside introducing the first version of the Cabin Fee Act (CFA), workshop sessions were held to educate cabin owners about the CUFFA process and how to appeal unjust appraisals. As appraisal figures reached tract members, this information proved immensely valuable. The Board also embarked on crafting a new Strategic Plan, successfully approved in September 2011.

In January 2012, dues were universally raised by \$5, effective from January 2013. This provided time for communicating the change to all tracts prior to its implementation. Additionally, NFH staff transitioned from independent contractor status to NFH employees, aligning with current labor laws.

The 2013 NFH Convention marked the launch of a new integrated website-member management system. This system expanded online interactions between members and NFH, including event registration, dues payment, donation acceptance, and an improved email platform. After this new website was implemented, NFH communicated more frequently using emails as a primary communication channel.

At this same convention, Mary Clarke Ver Hof resigned as Executive Director after navigating NFH through some very challenging times. After a comprehensive search, Ernie Atencio from Taos, NM, assumed the position of Executive Director.

The pivotal year of 2014 was dominated by the Cabin Fee Act (CFA). Early in the year, NFH leadership and USFS staff engaged in discussions to find common ground on CFA provisions. These discussions were crucial in garnering USFS support for the CFA. Subsequently, a delegation comprising Jay Tripathi (the newly-elected NFH President), Brad Aspell, Doug Gann, and Pete Bailey journeyed to Washington D.C. in June. Their meetings with the USFS Washington staff and Congressional Offices, facilitated by Governmental Affairs advisors Aubrey King, Heath Heikkila, and Michelle Guigerre, led to a consensus on the final CFA language.

After extensive negotiations, a budget-neutral bill was integrated into the National Defense Authorization Act during the penultimate day of the Congressional session. This marked a monumental achievement for all cabin owners, particularly for the diligent members of the C2 committee. The passing of the CFA represented a significant success, showcasing the important role the NFH team played in lobbying Congress.

In January 2015, changes occurred within the NFH staff. Barbara Warnock, the Database Manager, resigned, and Sharon Karr assumed the newly-named role of Membership Administrator. Additionally, a bylaws change, ratified at the March convention, officially renamed the annual NFH meeting from convention to conference, effective from 2016. Following the convention, Ernie Atencio stepped down as Executive Director, and a search committee hired Sharon Leach from San Cristobal, NM, as the new Executive Director.

With the enactment of the CFA, NFH turned its attention not only to its implementation but also to subjects such as cabin historic preservation, water systems, and fire prevention. At the same time, the USFS began focusing on CFA implementation, including an inventory of recreation residences. By December 1, 2015, they documented the existence of 13,955 permitted lots. Nearly a year later, NFH recalibrated this estimate, settling on 13,810 permitted lots after discovering that several forests in Region 5 had included vacant lots in their 2015 cabin lot counts.

Summit Strategies, LLC was chosen as NFH's new Government Affairs Representative in late 2015, enhancing the organization's government relations efforts. Mark Dedrick, the primary consultant, assumed this role as NFH's key lobbyist and legislative consultant from January 1, 2016.

By the conclusion of 2016, the extensive project of updating the NFH database had concluded, incorporating contact information for almost all cabins. This expansion more than doubled the original database's size, reaching over 15,000 contact records, all linked to corresponding tracts, associations, and lot details. This database expansion

facilitated enhanced outreach, aiming to engage all cabin owners, whether or not they belonged to NFH.

Tragedy struck NFH on December 17, 2016, with the sudden passing of its Treasurer, Glen Hildreth. Glen, a certified CPA, had served as treasurer for five years, contributing his accounting expertise and deep attachment to the cabin program to ensure robust financial accountability and reporting. Following his death, Eric Johnson, a director from Priest Lake, ID, was elected Treasurer by the Board to complete Glen's term.

During the 2017 NFH Conference, the organization's bylaws were amended to permit online voting for directors, officers, and nominating candidates. This adaptation was made while keeping in mind future technological advancements. This paved the way for the introduction of online voting during the 2018 election.

With the near completion of NFH's database, opportunities for outreach expanded significantly. Seizing this potential, Desiree LaMaggiore was brought on board as a part-time Field Director. Her primary task was to construct a comprehensive cabin outreach network, concentrating particularly on engaging non-members and previously unconnected tracts within NFH's sphere.

On June 27, 2017, NFH was deeply saddened by the passing of its founding Executive Director, Bob Ervin, due to a heart attack he suffered at his cabin. Despite stepping down from the role of ED in 2000, Bob had maintained an active involvement with NFH until his passing. In recognition of his enduring legacy, the Board commemorated Bob Ervin's memory in 2019 by renaming the NFH Award for Leadership to the Bob Ervin Leadership Award.

In August 2017, Sharon Karr resigned from her position as the Membership Administrator. To fill her vacant staff role, Melody Knox was brought into the team.

The experimental nature of the 2018 NFH Conference provided a distinctive backdrop. The Board decided to pilot the concept of a one-day conference format. While this initiative recorded successful attendance figures and financial outcomes, it was evident that many participants felt the allocated time was insufficient, advocating for the retention of the traditional 1.5-day conference model. The conference also witnessed Doug Gann's election through the inaugural online voting process. Recognizing varying preferences among the members, the option of mail-in ballots was introduced for those without internet access, and a handful of members began voting online.

The menace of wildfires was becoming an increasing concern and impact for cabin owners, and 2018 brought this threat into stark reality. Two major wildfires in 2018 resulted in the loss of 66 cabins. The Donnell Fire on the Stanislaus National Forest in Central California proved the most devastating, destroying over 50 cabins. The Holy Fire in the Trabuco/Holy Jim Tract on the Cleveland NF in Southern California

consumed 12 cabins. In 2016 Executive Director Sharon Leach visited this tract to discuss an objectionable permit clause that prevented rebuilding of any cabins lost in a fire if the cabins were in a floodplain. Despite the fact that there was no identified floodplain from FEMA, the Forest Service engaged their staff biologist to draw lines near the creek as a floodway map of record. Cabins destroyed within that area were not allowed to rebuild on this basis and those appeals are still unanswered as of 2023. As a note, the fire that destroyed multiple cabins was started by arson. A couple years later, the USFS started another fire in the same canyon when they used explosives to detonate and dismantle check dams in the creek, but no cabins were burned.

During the fall of 2018, NFH President Doug Gann, Immediate Past President Jay Tripathi, and Executive Director Sharon Leach traveled to Washington, DC. Assisted by Mark Dedrick from Summit Strategies, these meetings with Congressional staff and senior Forest Service management aimed to reinforce NFH's government affairs endeavors.

Fortunately, 2019 experienced a relatively tranquil fire season. However, due to the cabin loss in the preceding year's fires, NFH staff engaged with USFS representatives to explore rebuilding options for the cabins lost in the Holy Jim tract. This dialogue recurred in other forests over the ensuing years.

Beyond updating the 2011 NFH Strategic Plan, the Board approved a dues increase and diversified membership options. Regular Member dues increased to \$55, and Associate Member dues to \$35, with Member Tract dues set at \$50 and \$30, respectively. The updated payment options included:

- Legacy Membership for outstanding contributors to the cabin program. A free lifetime membership award.
- Lifetime Membership for a single \$1,000 payment.
- Cabin Membership bundling a Regular Membership and up to 4 Associate Memberships at a discounted rate.
- A 3-year membership with discounted pricing for a three-year upfront payment.

## **2020 - TODAY: THE PANDEMIC AND BEYOND**

The era from 2020 onward ushered in a new set of challenges and adaptations for NFH in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the evolving landscape of fire-related concerns.

Due to the pandemic, the planned NFH Conference in Vancouver, WA, was postponed. Instead, NFH organized a free virtual event on the Zoom platform. This innovative approach featured six online sessions over two days, accommodating a wide array of

topics, breakout sessions, and an Ask the Experts panel. A remarkable 359 members participated, with around 240 attending at least one session, and an average of 150 to 160 attendees per session. Given the circumstances, this virtual conference was hailed as a success. Moreover, the technological expertise gained during this event offered NFH an additional avenue to engage with its members.

In the wake of adopting the new 2019 NFH Strategic Plan, the organization established two new committees. The Heritage Committee, under the leadership of Palmer DePaulis, was focused on aiding cabin tracts in preserving their historical significance. The former Environmental Committee was revamped into the Stewardship Committee, led by Kevin Orth, with a renewed emphasis on responsible management.

However, the relatively quiet fire season of 2019 was overshadowed by the devastating fire season of 2020. As if the pandemic was not enough, 2020 witnessed the destruction of 165 recreation residences across California, Oregon, and Arizona. NFH's response included a series of online Fire Summits. These summits aimed to assist those affected by the fires by sharing insights from previous post-fire experiences and addressing ongoing challenges. NFH also initiated the NFH Fire Relief Fund, gathering donated proceeds to be equitably distributed among impacted tract groups for rebuilding encouragement. The fund's first year raised over \$20,000, complemented by a \$10,000 matching donation from NFH for shared expenses among affected tract groups.

In September, the Forest Service introduced proposed changes to the Recreation Residence Permit terms, some of which took NFH by surprise. While certain modifications were anticipated, the omission of the Impaired Access regulatory language required by the Cabin Fee Act disappointed NFH. Subsequently, NFH engaged legal representation to assist with formal comment on behalf of the cabin community. In 2023, the responses to public comments were posted in March and all but one of our concerns were overlooked and the objectionable permit changes remained.

Under the direction of Vice President Meredith Randall, NFH initiated a fresh Economic Benefit Study (EBS). The insights derived from the survey were compiled and published in 2022, aiming to bolster the case for the pivotal role of Recreation Residences in local economies.

Although initially envisioned as a one-time occurrence, the virtual conference format persisted due to the Delta variant of COVID-19 and the destructive Caldor Fire near Lake Tahoe. The planned NFH Conference at Lake Tahoe was consequently modified, mirroring the format of the 2020 event. There was a small ticket price of \$49 to attend. This event attracted 141 NFH members, with session attendance ranging from 100 to 130 attendees, including individuals new to NFH conferences.

Unfortunately, 2021 brought a further loss of nearly 180 cabins due to multiple fires, adding to the 165 cabins lost in 2020. This cumulative loss severely impacted the cabin program. To support those affected, additional virtual Fire Summit meetings were convened.

Leveraging technology, in 2022, NFH held a partially-hybrid conference at the Heathman Lodge, a favored venue for NFH events. During this conference, Meredith Randall assumed the role of President, unveiling the Economic Benefit Study's results. The findings demonstrated that cabin owners contributed over \$140 million to communities near their cabins, generating a total economic impact exceeding \$200 million. Subsequent to the conference, NFH published and shared an *At-A-Glance* one-page EBS and a comprehensive six-page summary document to cabin owners, the Forest Service, political contacts, and other interested parties. These documents were also shared during an NFH leadership visit to Washington D.C. in July, involving Forest Service leaders and key Congressional contacts.

The year 2022 witnessed devastating wildfires, with the most significant occurring in northern New Mexico. The Hermit's Peak/Calf Canyon Fire consumed over 300,000 acres, making it the largest fire in New Mexico's history. This fire was especially troubling as it resulted from two Forest Service prescribed burns going awry, triggering discussions about reparations. Although numerous and sizable wildfires occurred in 2022, only seven cabins were lost, all attributed to the Hermit's Peak/Calf Canyon Fire.

In an unexpected turn, the winter of 2022-2023 brought substantial snowfall, reaching historic levels. Some cabins were buried under 15 feet of snow, providing relief from drought conditions but presenting access challenges for cabin owners. The NFH Conference at Palisades, Lake Tahoe, took place against the backdrop of snow-covered surroundings, defying expectations.

The Lake Tahoe conference was well-attended, centered around the theme of Resilience. Forest Service leadership from the Washington Office joined virtually to make presentations. NFH hosted a hybrid format for the general NFH Business Meeting session and the Tract Leaders meeting. Recording all sessions proved challenging, prompting consideration of contract assistance to realize a fully hybrid event. Representative Tom McClintock (R) was honored with a National Service Award for his ongoing support of the program and his efforts in securing FEMA and state funds for post-fire cleanup.

Despite the positive response to the in-person event at Tahoe, some members expressed a desire for continued virtual access. The event planning team contemplated holding virtual events biennially and in-person conferences on alternate years, with the eventual aim of becoming fully hybrid when conditions permit.

APPENDIX A: HISTORY OF NFH ELECTED OFFICERS

Office	Name	Dates
President	Bill Worden	1987-1994
	H. P. Waters	1994-1996
	Clare Engeseth	1996-2002
	Roy Glauthier	2002-2008
	Geoff Anderson	2008-2014
	Jay Tripathi	2014-2018
	Doug Gann	2018-2022
	Meredith Randall	2022-present

Office	Name	Dates
Vice President	Anne Keefe	1993 - 1995
	Clare Engeseth	1995 - 1996
	Dean Abbott	1996 - 1997
	Evelyn DeGhetaldi	1997- 2002
	Phil Janz	2002 - 2003
	Mary Lou Christensen	2003- 2007
	Geoff Anderson	2007 - 2008
	Dick Burrows	2008 - 2011
	Sarah Dahl	2011 - 2013

<b>Office</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Dates</b>
Treasurer	Dick Barhite	1994-2000
	Richard Almy	2000 -2001
	Dick Burrows	2001 - 2002
	Robert Warnock, Sr.	2002 - 2003
	Robert Warnock, Jr.	2003 - 2006
	Chuck Fitzgerald	2006 - 2007
	Robert Warnock. Jr.	2007 - 2010
	Sharon Karr	2010 - 2012
	Glen Hildreth	2012-2016
	Eric Johnson	2017-2018
	Linda Ballantine	2018 - Present
Secretary	Wanda Abbott (5)	-1999 <sup>1</sup>
	Kay Waters	1999 - 2005
	Dick Burrows	2005 - 2008
	Mary Lou Christensen	2008 - 2009
	Mike Hoover	2009 - 2013
	Meredith Randall	2013 - 2017
	Paula Hoiland	2017 - 2017
	Deborah Cowlshaw	2017 - 2023
	Don Satterquist	2023 -

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<sup>1</sup> Prior to 1999 the position of secretary was appointed by the board, not elected.

APPENDIX B: HISTORY OF NFH STAFF

Office	Name	Dates
Executive Director	Bob Ervin	1987-2001
	Scotch Pankonin	2001-2002
	Hans Johnson	2002-2003
	Mary Clarke Ver Hoef	2003-2014
	Ernie Atencio	2014-2015
	Sharon Leach	2015-present

Office	Name	Dates
Database Manager	John Rohde	1984-93
	Ray Neetzel	1993-1996
	Marcella Fascina	1996-2002
	Barbara Warnock	2002-2015
Membership Administrator	Sharon Karr	2015-2017
	Melody Knox	2017-present

In 2017, NFH hired a Field Director, Desiree La Maggiore, who has served from that time to present.

APPENDIX C: HISTORY OF ASSOCIATION DUES  
*(for more information on these member types, see NFH policy on the website.)*

Year	Regular Member	Regular Tract Mbr	Associate Member	Associate Tract Mbr	Cabin Membership	3-Year	Lifetime
Start:	\$30		\$15				
2000	\$40		\$25				
2013	\$45	\$40	\$30	\$25			
2019	\$55	\$50	\$35	\$30	\$110	\$150	\$1000
2024	\$65	\$50	\$45	\$30	\$130	\$180	\$1200

*See NFH web pages for the history of NFH Awards and NFH Events.*