

### Wildfire & Cabins

By Kevin Orth, Mt Baker-Snoqualmie NF, WA

There are more and more wildfires every year threatening Recreation Residence cabins across the country. At this writing, as many as 180 cabins were lost to wildfire this summer in California and Arizona and more may be identified. Even Minnesota was impacted by wildfires!



Many forests were closed to recreation, too. At one point this summer, all National Forests in California were closed due to safety concerns from active wildfires and the threat of more.

Over the last year, we've been updating the NFH website with new pages on topics like **Before, During and After a Fire**. There are links to information on Firewise® and how to become a fire-adapted community. Plus, you can engage in the new Fire Forum section of the Ask the Community forum, where members can ask questions and get input from experts or other members who have gone through similar experiences.

NFH leadership conducted a number of Fire Summits for fire-impacted cabin tracts both in 2020 and in 2021. It can be confusing, frustrating, and time-consuming to understand the recovery and rebuilding process after a fire. At times, it can take longer than a year to get a rebuilding decision from the Forest Service. The Fire Summit sessions provide a lot of region-specific information for impacted cabin owners, and offer a forum to share experiences and for live Q&A.

Financially, NFH has created the Fire Relief Fund, which solicits donations from the cabin community to support the rebuilding process in impacted areas. This is in all our best interests, as it's vital to keep the program strong and not lose cabins permanently! NFH has donated to the 2020 Fire Relief Fund and currently provides free membership to those who have recently lost cabins to wildfire.

More recently, NFH opted to include a session about the post-fire experience in our 2021 Virtual Conference. Working from prior experience of our NFH leadership and community, this new session covered some of the post-fire process for cabin owners, plus a little bit about replanting of forests following wildfires from Luis Vidal, with American Forests and the Sierra Nevada Alliance.

We hope members will take advantage of these great tools and sources of information, and that many of you were able to attend our 2021 Virtual Conference.

### NFH Economic Benefit Survey

**Please Take the Survey!**

Last NFH Economic Benefit Survey = 2009

**In 2009, totals spent:**  
 \$111.2M on cabins  
 \$109.1M locally  
 \$33.9M govt. revenue

**In 2009, visitor days:**  
 5.1M

**In 2009, per cabin:**  
 \$2,300 taxes & fees  
 \$3,500 maintenance  
 \$754 insurance

Things have changed; help us get up-to-date!

The survey is open to all cabin owners, both members of NFH and non-members, no need to sign in.

*Read more on page 5.*



# President's Message

## The Existential Threat

By Doug Gann, NFH President, Lake Wenatchee Summer Home Association, WA

If the title of this article seems familiar, you would be correct as my Fall Newsletter article a year ago was titled the Next Big Threat. To quote famous baseball manager Yogi Berra, "It's like déjà vu all over again." The COVID-19 pandemic didn't fade away as we had hoped, and major 2021 wildfires grew in quantity, intensity, and destruction from what was an unprecedented year in 2020.

Also, while we had high hopes of returning to an in-person conference this fall, ongoing COVID-19 concerns and the devastating Caldor Fire near Lake Tahoe caused our plans to change to a virtual conference format. I extend my thanks and congratulations to the NFH staff and Events Committee for adapting to changing conditions and transitioning to a highly successful online event. Feedback from members who attended has been overwhelmingly positive.

As the summer progressed, we began monitoring several large wildfires. During the last ten days of August, I was alarmed by the size, intensity, and proximity of major wildfires to cabin tracts.

In addition to visiting the InciWeb fire tracking website daily, I watched video incident briefings on the Caldor, Dixie, and Schneider Springs Fires. It was frightening to see the fire maps grow as fires approached and overtook dozens of tracts, threatening hundreds of cabins. As much as we were hearing key phrases like "structure protection" from firefighting teams, it became obvious that avoiding cabin loss was not possible. In early September, the reports on cabin losses began rolling in. Our unofficial count reflects a loss of 192 cabins this season.

Since 2018, over 440 cabins have been lost to fire. This represents over 3% of the cabin program. While we would hope that all 440 cabins will be rebuilt, the harsh truth is that some will be rebuilt, and some won't. The cabin program cannot sustain this trend of loss for long without major consequences. The impact of this fire season has confirmed wildfire is the *existential threat* to the Recreation Residence Program.

The Forest Service has and we expect will continue to authorize most lots for rebuilding. We, however, are

recognizing the rebuilding challenge lies more in the hands of cabin owners. Some cabins are not covered by insurance, which pushes the cost to rebuild out of reach for those cabin owners. Constructing replacement cabins to current local building codes is more challenging and expensive than many cabin owners realize. In some cases, the destruction of the forest surrounding cabin tracts makes it less desirable to invest in a new cabin. NFH will always advocate for replacement of cabins, but we also respect it's the individual cabin owner's choice to make.

So, what is NFH doing to help? To begin with, we see our role as providing leadership and helping to organize cabin-owner efforts to overcome this challenge. We all have to work harder at prevention, from creating more defensible space around our cabins through programs like Firewise, to working with local National Forests to advocate for more forest thinning projects to help restore forest health.

The actions needed to restore forest health are expensive. The Forest Service has the expertise to do it, but often lacks the resources. NFH is stepping up our efforts to lobby Congress, combining our grassroots efforts with our actions in Washington D.C., to advocate for more forest-health restoration funding.

On a more tactical level, we've reached out to impacted cabin tracts to offer our assistance. We've held several virtual Fire Summit meetings for impacted cabin owners to help them with post-fire actions and expectations by sharing lessons learned from previous wildfires.

I would be remiss if we didn't take this opportunity to thank all Forest Service and CalFire firefighters for their bravery and effort to protect cabins, while suppressing fires. There are approximately 1,000 cabins within, or directly adjacent to, the Caldor Fire perimeter. While it's no consolation to those who lost cabins to fire this season, for every cabin lost, many more were saved through the direct efforts of firefighters, for which we are truly grateful. And, as much as we personally and collectively grieve over the loss of cabins, there has never been a loss of life to fire by a cabin community member. Cabins can be replaced—people can't.

## NFH Mission Statement

National Forest Homeowners is a member-directed organization representing cabin owner recreation residence permittees on our national forests. NFH provides leadership, member information and assistance, and advocacy for continuation of all recreation residence cabins. It is dedicated to educating its members and others in sound science stewardship of our national forests.

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# Highlight on a Cabin— Camp Senia

By Liza McClelland, Camp Senia

About 13 miles from Red Lodge, Montana, along the West Fork of Rock Creek, lies Camp Senia where our cabin is located. My grandparents, Al and Senia Croonquist, developed the camp as one of the first dude ranches in Montana. Both loved the outdoors and looked for a place to build a fishing camp and dude ranch. They found it high in the Beartooth Mountains at the foot of Silver Run Peak where the creek widens and the surrounding forest opens to a meadow.

Construction started in 1917 and the first guests arrived in 1919. At first dudes slept in tents on platforms, but soon log cabins were built for staff and guests in what was called the “western rustic” style—half walls of native stone topped with logs and gable roofs. The main lodge originally included a kitchen, dining room and large living area where guests gathered around the stone fireplace in the evening. Later a separate cabin was built and served as dining room and kitchen. A bath house with showers came in 1921 and laundry was done in an adjacent open porch.



Guests relaxing by the Lobby fireplace

The camp accommodated 40 guests, who came from as far away as the East Coast, some staying as long as a month. Al guided them on horse pack trips to fish the high lakes nestled in the surrounding mountains. Senia was the chief cook and managed day-to-day operation of the camp with the help of her two sisters and Finnish friends from Red Lodge. Young men were hired as wranglers. Guests rode several miles into camp by horseback or in wagons as my grandfather wouldn't allow automobiles.

Camp Senia flourished throughout the 1920s, but after the stock market crash in 1929 and the Depression that followed, it was no longer feasible as a dude ranch. Faculty from the Geology department at Princeton rented the camp from 1933-35 for their summer field school. In 1938, families from Billings formed the Camp Senia Corporation and the cabins became private residences. Nine cabins, six guest cabins and the bath house remain. Since Camp Senia is located in Custer-Gallatin National Forest, each cabin owner has a Forest Service Recreation Residence permit.

Improvements have come gradually over the years—electricity didn't reach Camp Senia until the early 1960s and there's still no phone service or cell coverage at camp. The rocky gravel one-way road from Red Lodge to camp was eventually paved halfway and remains so today.

My family purchased our cabin in 1955 and we are fortunate that our children and grandchildren love to go to there every summer to fish and hike, roast marshmallows,



Al and Senia Croonquist, founders of Camp Senia

and play “double-sol,” (solitaire with four or five players) as we did years ago. We still cook on the old Home Comfort wood stove, grandpa's pancakes are the best! The cabin is heated by the kitchen stove, living room fireplace, and a small wood stove. We only had cold running water until seven years ago when we added a hot water heater and half bath.

In 1988, my mother, Senia Croonquist Hart, with the help of the Carbon County Historical Society, was instrumental in having Camp Senia listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

In 2007, the area experienced a microburst that caused lodgepole pines to fall like toothpicks in a blowdown. A year later the Cascade fire destroyed one cabin and a guest cabin and several nearby cabins. Thanks to the quick response of local volunteer fire fighters and the Forest Service, most of Camp Senia survived to continue making memories far into the future.



Al Croonquist and his children with wranglers at Camp Senia



# Sharing Information & Advocating for Priorities with the Forest Service

By Sharon Leach  
NFH Executive Director

This year—and for many years—NFH has been in close contact with Forest Service leadership particularly during times of program change and times of crisis and loss. If we learn something that cabin owners

need to know, we communicate with our membership. We also communicate to the Forest Service the priorities and questions our membership share with us.

For example, we've learned about recent Forest Service changes in billing. It's that time of year and permit fee bills are coming your way. Last year, the Forest Service launched a new Central Billing Office for all regions and all forests. It was not well-communicated with permit-holders. Partly in response to our concerns, their lead staff on billing Joseph Holzinger contacted us to share several phases of the billing cycle this year.

By now, you should have received a postcard from the Central Billing office. The postcard encourages you to update your contact information. USFS permit fee bills will be coming to cabin owners with emails on file. Be sure they have your current email. Bills should be arriving around the

time of this paper's publication. All should arrive by early December and are due on January 1, 2022. Also, watch your regular mail for an invoice from the Forest Service.

The Forest Service also looks to NFH when there is a crisis, like the recent Caldor Fire that burned over 200K acres and 181 cabins. As the highway was about to open up, the Forest Supervisor of the Eldorado NF reached out to us to talk about cabin owner access. We warned that if the highway opened and these cabin owners didn't get in, the last remnants of their cabins and histories could be picked up by vandals. So, he opened the Forest to them right away.

Unfortunately, there are many who are still unable to use their cabins overnight due to forest closure, and we're listening to those members' concerns. When I hear these frustrations, I share them with NFH leadership and we convey issues like this to the Forest Service. Sometimes, because we're NFH, we are heard. But when we speak with the strength of all of you behind us, it makes all the difference.

We partner with the Forest Service so we can speak up when we hear the community raising a concern. We also partner with the agency to ensure that the community has all the information needed to enjoy cabin life especially in time of change.

## What Do Cabin Owners Think

By Jane Van Dyk

NFH's Heritage Committee conducted an online survey of cabin owners in July 2021 to determine their attitudes and opinions about historic preservation and their understanding of the rules and regulations permittees on forest lands must follow. The Committee also hoped to identify issues of concern to cabin owners. The survey was completed by 744 cabin owners for a response rate of about 10 – 15%.

Cabin owners are strongly divided into two camps. Nearly half (42%) of the respondents enthusiastically endorsed the benefits of having a historic cabin, while

one-fourth (25%) listed many negative aspects and frustrations with the historic designation. One-third held a neutral opinion.

The 388 cabin owners proud of having a historic cabin identified 537 benefits, citing a belief that preserving the character and integrity of an old cabin is important in itself and hoping that being historic might help reduce the risk of the USFS revoking their permit.

Find more about this survey on the NFH website.

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# Proving the Value of the Cabin Program

## Your Help Needed—Please Take the Survey

What a year—with the pandemic, forest closures and wildfires, you might wonder what you can do to preserve your cabin and your cabin way of life. We have one step, one very important action you can take today.

Take the **NFH Economic Benefit Survey**. With a click of a button and about 15-20 minutes of your time, you can help us protect the cabin program. This important survey **opened on November 1<sup>st</sup>** and the link is on our website now. In addition, you may have received an email from us, so don't wait any longer.

Why are we doing this Economic Benefit Survey and why is it critical to preserving our program?

- **Data is influential.** Your survey responses give us the hard data we need when speaking with decision-makers who manage the cabin program. Data educates and influences those in the Forest Service and Congress who make decisions that ultimately impact cabin owners.
- **Value of the cabin program.** Data from the survey can show the monetary and non-monetary value that cabin owners bring to rural economies, to agency funding and to the forests themselves.

Last year, NFH leaders wrote this key goal into the NFH Strategic Plan, to do a rigorous study of the economic benefits of the Recreation Residence Program. Back in 2009, we did an economic study and that data was instrumental in the advocacy that successfully led to passage of the Cabin Fee Act. One important way this new survey will improve on the last is that we're using economic analysis tools that are also used

by the Forest Service. This will enhance the legitimacy of our results.

How will the data be used? We won't sell information to third parties. We will use the data to support the mission of NFH and our advocacy efforts, including the following priorities:

- **No net loss.** With losses to wildfire, we see losses to the permits in the program. Some will be rebuilt, but some won't. As cabins dwindle away, the program may be threatened by loss of our numbers. Strength in numbers is real! We need to show that losses to the cabin program also mean losses to rural economies, stewardship and agency funding.
- **Program preservation and viability.** In the past, NFH has responded to threats to the cabin program. In the future, NFH advocacy will be required to influence leaders in Washington, D.C. and to speak up about the value and viability of this recreational program.

So, please, grab your cabin files, whether electronic or on paper and visit the NFH website to take the survey. If we are going to influence Forest Service decisions and garner congressional support for our program, we need the data only you can provide. The survey is open to all cabin owners, both members of NFH and non-members, no need to sign in. Thanks for being part of this effort.



SUMMIT  
STRATEGIES

## Washington Update

By Mark Dedrick

Washington has faced a packed legislative agenda over the past month, with much of the talk focused on infrastructure. The discussion has featured a large bipartisan agreement on infrastructure spending, parliamentary maneuvers, and disagreements between the moderate and progressive wings of the Democratic party as President Biden seeks to implement elements of the Build Back Better framework he campaigned on last fall.

The two major pieces of legislation in play are the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), and an additional funding package through the reconciliation process. These various infrastructure packages include many elements of interest to cabin owners, and

National Forest Homeowners.

The Senate passed the \$1 trillion IIJA in early August with 19 Republican votes, which provides \$550 billion in new spending. However, the IIJA has been sitting in the House since then as Speaker Pelosi negotiates an intraparty dispute between moderates and progressives over an effort to simultaneously advance the \$3.5 trillion budget reconciliation spending package. The domestic spending bill includes many elements of President Biden's Build Back Better framework.

Relevant provisions in the IIJA pertaining to NFH include:

- \$3.4 billion directed to the U.S. Forest Service and the U.S. Department of the Interior to reduce the threat of wildfire on federal lands through mechanical

thinning, timber harvests, prescribed burns, community wildfire protection grants, and collaborative led projects;

- \$2.1 billion for ecosystem restoration, particularly after wildfires;
- \$100 million to restore, prepare, or adapt recreation sites on Federal land; and
- \$250 million over five years for a new Forest Service Legacy Roads and Trails program to prioritize maintenance of authorized roads and trails within the National Forest System.

While negotiations on the reconciliation legislation remain ongoing, the House Natural Resources Committee passed its portion of reconciliation on September 9. This package includes \$900 million for wildfire protection. It also includes \$450

continued on page 7

# When Times Get Tough —Bringing Grace and Honesty

Friendliness, knowledge of the recreation residence guidelines, attentiveness to cabin owners, and an efficient approach are common themes for our two James Sauser Recreation Advocate Award winners. Debbie Butler works on the Idaho Panhandle National Forests in Idaho and Heather Westfahl on the Medicine Bow-Routt National Forest in Colorado. Both women have been effective communicators and advisors for cabin owners in their districts.

For his leadership in working with the FS during and after the Bobcat Fire, Ben Fitzsimmons, President of the Big Santa Anita Canyon Permittees Association on the Angeles NF in CA received the Bob Ervin Outstanding Leadership Award for his work. NFH is grateful for the efforts of all three of these outstanding leaders. If you would like to read more about these individuals, information is available on the website.



As this season comes to an end, think back to those who have made the cabin program and our experiences in the forest even better. Maybe you had a terrific experience with your Forest Service permit administrator; perhaps an NFH member assisted you with a frustrating problem; maybe someone in your tract went above and beyond with communications in an emergency for your area.

It only takes a little time to go online to the NFH website and select **Get Involved** → **Awards** to review the qualifications for each award and to nominate someone. We will be accepting awards through January 31, 2022, but don't wait until the last minute and get caught up in the press of the holidays. Many who are involved with NFH deserve to be recognized, and it is up to you to fill out a nomination and make sure they are!

## 2021 NFH Virtual Conference

This year's conference theme was *Restoration*. Forest restoration or landscape restoration can be defined as a new management approach that is designed to mimic something older in an effort toward resilience. But restoration can also refer to the process of repairing or rebuilding after something of value has been lost, destroyed, or damaged.

Our national annual conference offers the opportunity to learn, get answers to questions, and connect with other members of the Recreation Residence Program. We presented topics ranging from important knowledge about our permits, impacts and processes after a wildfire, and a special presentation about a cabin restoration project.

### Program Highlights

The 2021 NFH Virtual Conference opened with a **Kickoff & NFH Business Meeting** on Friday, October 22. Following this, two sessions were offered on Friday. The first was **Permits: Fact v Fiction**. What are the rules and rights that go with holding a permit? This breakout session was interactive and attendees were able to answer quiz questions.

The final session on Friday was **Restoring the Past**. We heard a personal story of what was done to restore a historic recreation residence cabin. This is a unique and extraordinary story about a cabin located on an island that has been restored into a beautiful treasure. The opportunity

to test one's knowledge about what is and is not allowed in cabin restoration projects was also included in this session.

On Saturday, October 23, there were two sessions. **After a Fire: What's Next?** provided key take-aways from our collective past experiences with wildfire impacts on the cabin community and a look at what happens to the forest. This session's presentation included information from NFH leadership that have firsthand experiences and Luis Vidal, a Forest Restoration Fellow that worked on the 2014 King Fire in the Eldorado National Forest.

The virtual conference closed on Saturday with our popular **Ask the Experts Panel & Forest Service Leadership** presentation. This was an opportunity to interact, ask questions and get informative answers. For those who missed the conference, or for those who would like to review information provided, video recordings of all presentations will be available to those who registered right away and to NFH Members starting on December 1.



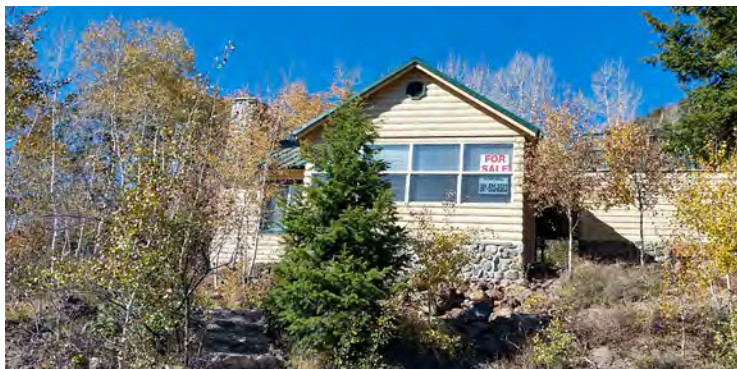
# Changing Ownership

It's a hard topic to discuss. It's hard for us to bring up. What's going to happen to your cabin down the road? Will someone in the family's next generation be able and willing to step up? What happens if not? Will you need to sell? No matter what decision you make, preparing for it could make things easier when the time really comes.

If you are selling or just trying to pass the cabin to someone else's care, the first item on an agenda should be repair. Whether the cabin needs a new roof, a paint job, or a new toilet, doing the work prior to any change in ownership helps everyone. If a transfer is in the future, make sure the cabin's septic system is in compliance with state standards. And, if there is no septic system, an approved liquid-waste-disposal system may be required.

Once the decision has been made to transfer ownership, review the permit and Maintenance and Operation Plan in detail with the new owners. If family, they have grown up with, but may not understand permit nuances. But when the new owners have never owned a USFS recreation residence, it's likely they do not understand that it is nothing like owning fee simple property. Taking time to fully educate the buyer will help them get off on the right foot!

NFH can play a role and make your job easier. Start



by introducing the new owners to NFH, perhaps with the **About Permits** page of the website.

Talk with your permit administrator to let them know there will be changes at your lot. In addition to the transfer fee that's incurred with any ownership change (to family or not), your National Forest may have other requirements. It is likely you will need to be in compliance with all aspects of your permit before the transfer can happen. That's another reason to start working on this a year or more ahead of the change.

If ownership will stay within your family, consider who will hold the permit. Only one person may be listed on the permit as the permit-holder. This has many implications for responsibilities and should be thoroughly discussed. If a trust needs to be initiated, discuss that with the permit administrator and with a lawyer. There are several trust information documents on the NFH website by choosing **Resources→Trusts and Multiple Owners** that can help with the process.

Although an ownership change can be challenging, taking a few preliminary steps will make it proceed more smoothly. NFH members may post a cabin for sale on our website. You may also want to consult with a real estate agent on areas for improvement if you do plan to sell in the future.

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## Cabin Connections

By Jane Van Dyk, Montana Outreach Coordinator

I'd heard a lot about Camp Senia (see story p. 3) but it wasn't until Desiree LaMaggiore, NFH Field Director, nudged me to make a contact to promote NFH that I actually met a cabin owner there. "Call or email Liza McClelland," I was told. She is Senia's daughter, and Senia is the one for whom the camp is named. Cold calling folks gives me the shivers, but I girded my loins and called Liza. "I know you," she said, "I'm in the church choir with you!" Sure enough, we'd been singing together for a couple years, she an alto and me a soprano, but we had never actually talked to each other about our cabins.

That was the start of a delightful friendship, sharing cabin stories over a cup of tea. Like Camp Senia, my Montana

cabin is on the National Register of Historic Places. I visited the Camp in September and was absolutely blown away by its charm, beauty, and uniqueness. And, I made a new friend for life.

Have you had a surprising cabin connection? A city neighbor with a cabin in your neck of the woods? A classmate from 40 or 50 years ago with a cabin? Someone who married the guy/gal in the cabin next door, on whom you had a secret crush .... Email a 150-word story to Karen Norton, Newsletter editor, norton75@swbell.net, and become part of the new Cabin Connections series.

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**Washington Update** continued from page 5

million for the Forest Service's Legacy Roads and Trails program and \$100 million to fund maintenance investments for level three, four, and five roads.

This legislation still needs to be finalized to pass the

House and the Senate, but infrastructure and maintenance needs on our National Forests have been recognized by Congress, and actions are being taken to address these critical needs.



# National Forest Homeowners

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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

NFH Hotline: 800.669.9971

[www.nationalforesthowners.org](http://www.nationalforesthowners.org)

To receive your NFH newsletter by email, please send a note requesting the e-newsletter to [mknnox@nationalforesthowners.org](mailto:mknnox@nationalforesthowners.org)

## Upcoming Events

### FALL/WINTER 2021

ECONOMIC BENEFIT SURVEY  
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**STOP-LOOK-LISTEN**

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Important advocacy tool.

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Become an event sponsor.  
Contact us to learn how!

### SPRING 2022

NFH 2022 CONFERENCE  
Friday & Saturday  
April 29-30, 2022



The Heathman Lodge  
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