

Permit Renewals and the Cabin Program Restoration Act

By Meredith Randall, NFH President

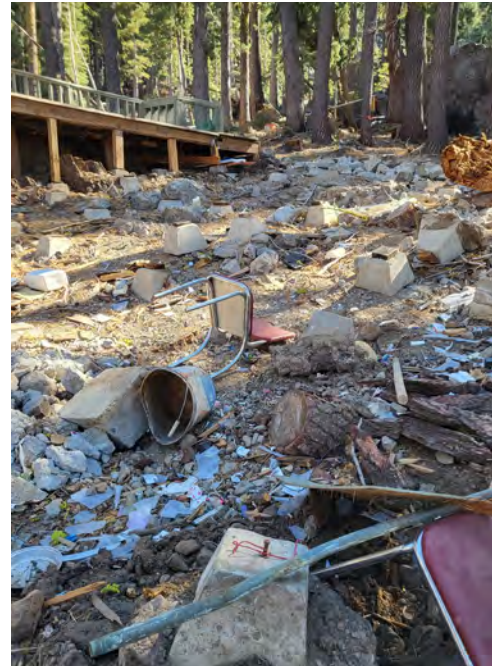
Almost all of our permits expire on 12/31/2028 or later. However, about one thousand permit holders on Eldorado NF have permits expiring this year. As their 12/31/2024 deadline approaches, the vast majority of permittees will get their new 20-year permits.

The new permit (dated 09/2020) is very different, with fewer permit holder rights and more liabilities. NFH objected to almost all of the changes in this permit released in 2023. The Forest Service addressed a few of our objections and pushed back on others. When continued discussions were unsuccessful, NFH drafted the Cabin Program Restoration Act (CPRA) and is working with Congress to get it introduced. The CPRA addresses multiple threats to the program: accelerated decline in cabin numbers (mostly due to wildfires), FS obstacles that hinder rebuilding of cabins, and ongoing erosion of permit holder rights.

What problems with the current permit will the CPRA ultimately solve, if passed?

- The CPRA restores our right to appeal unreasonable FS decisions that impact our permits and cabin use.
- FS policy regarding cabin size, outbuildings, and other improvements has changed over time. Improvements that do not conform to current policy may be listed on the face of your permit as “conditionally accepted.” The Eldorado NF Supervisor during permit renewal that conditionally accepted improvements in good repair and listed on the permit will continue to be listed on the new permits. Great! However, Forest Supervisors or District Rangers on other forests may choose to force compliance with current policy when permits are renewed in 2028. CPRA protects conditionally accepted improvements listed on the permit unless they are significantly damaged.
- On the Eldorado, the FS has agreed to let some permit holders use fire resistant materials for needed repairs. CPRA requires the FS to add fire resistant materials to their list of acceptable building materials.
- Almost half of all cabins have co-owners. The FS attempted to eliminate co-owners in an earlier proposed change to permit. NFH fought back and won on a technicality, but the FS could try again. CPRA guarantees that cabins can be owned by multiple parties.
- On the Eldorado NF, they used email for inspection reports, regular mail for a status letter, and a certified letter for deadlines on performing repairs and submitting an Operations & Maintenance (O&M) Plan in order to qualify for renewal. Currently, when a certified letter is not delivered, the FS is not required to use email or the phone. CPRA requires the Forest Service to use all means available to contact permittees.
- The 09/2020 permit requires automatic permit termination with no right of appeal for fee payments not recorded as received in full by the FS within 90 days of the due date. The CPRA restores the right of appeal regarding payment.
- The 09/2020 permit allows the FS to require a permit holder to secure a bond for work on their cabin. CPRA legislation prevents the FS from making such a requirement.

NFH will continue to work for you. More information can be found on our website.



Don't Pay Permit Fees Early

Forest Service to Delay Billing

The Forest Service will delay issuing 2025 fee invoices, for this year only. By paying after December 20, 2024, payments made to the 2025 invoices will go directly to the Forest Service per the Cabin Fee Act, and will help the cabin program. The corresponding due date for this year only will move out to February 1, 2025.

Photo: Caldor Fire, Eldorado NF 2021



President’s Message — Cabins and Mental Health

By Meredith Randall, NFH President

It’s autumn in the forest and this is the first time in three decades that I have enjoyed my cabin in October! Earlier this year, my husband and I moved from

Georgia back to California. Depending upon if you ask him or me, we moved to be close to his brothers or we moved to be close to the cabin. We are both right.

Fall cabin memories from my childhood came floating back. Crisp mornings and cool evenings. Leaves in their fall colors on trees, on the ground and floating down the stream. Fewer birds and bugs. Less sunshine and shorter days. And the South Fork of the American River, babbling like a lively brook instead of a roaring river.

One thing I didn’t have three decades ago was a cell phone. I looked at it this morning and was informed that today is World Mental Health Day. Mental health issues afflict millions and cabin owners are not immune. However, many of you may feel like I do, my cabin is my mental health stabilizer.

We have probably all read or heard about the benefits of nature on our well-being. I am a huge proponent of parks, but there is no comparison between a patch of green space in our urban world and the forest surrounding our cabins. We are extremely fortunate to have our cabins. I encourage all of us who have the privilege of a recreation residence to share it often and eagerly with family and friends. We all need the mental health benefits of a stay in the forest.

Three years ago, a family member of mine was diagnosed with stage four cancer. We took him to our cabin. That’s where he wanted to be. On days when he was strong enough, he sat on the porch smelling, hearing and watching nature. He would tell us about an osprey who flew up the river canyon and the snake he saw basking on a sunny rock. Some days, he couldn’t get out of bed. When the weather turned cold and we closed up the cabin, I silently thought he might never make it back but openly said, “Bye until next season.” The next spring he was still with us. We took him back up to the cabin. He still required care but spent more time on that porch and absorbed more of nature’s healing powers. He spent more time at the cabin that season than anyone in the family, but he wasn’t

strong enough to be there by himself. He wanted to fish in the river, but he was too unstable. We set a chair on a flat patch of dirt on the other side of our cabin so he got a different view, but he couldn’t walk any of the paths around the tract. This year he is doing so well, he can drive to the cabin. He spent a week there by himself. He claims he caught a 17” trout! There are lots of contributing factors, but undoubtedly the connection with the natural world was an elixir that fueled his fight against cancer.

My husband and I are the third generation of permit holders in my family. I encourage you all to bring family and friends to your cabin to feel the healing powers of being in the forest. Of course, maybe reserve some days for the pleasure of being at your cabin in solitude with only a noisy stellar jay to disturb an afternoon nap.

Tragically, some of you reading this newsletter lost your cabins this fire season or previous years to fire, flood and other disasters. Your favorite place in the forest is damaged and you harbor a sorrow that will take time to heal. You may be the cabin owner or the next generation or extended family. Being in the forest is healing but sometimes a little extra is needed also. NFH understands and we are here to help emotionally and practically. Please reach out.



American River, Eldorado National Forest

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.

NFH Staff

Sharon Leach, Executive Director
sleach@nationalforesthowners.org 800.669.9971
Melody Knox, Membership Administrator
mknox@nationalforesthowners.org 541.708.1434
Desiree La Maggiore, Field Director, Cabin Outreach
desiree.lamaggiore@nationalforesthowners.org

Highlight on a Cabin — Building Friends and Allies

In appreciation for their neighborly friendship, each year, our Walker Bay Tract in Minnesota puts on a picnic for our Native American neighbors. Residents of both communities enjoy the conversations and getting to know each other. The boundaries of the Chippewa National Forest and the Leech Lake Reservation are largely the same. The village of Onigum and 20 cabins are next to each other and some families have had close friendships over multiple generations since the cabins

were built in the early 1960s. The tribe is generous in allowing the cabin tract to hold their annual meeting in the community center and use their waste transfer station, while cabin neighbors provide funds for tribal youth and family activities.

Photos by Dave Hansen
2024 picnic, Chippewa NF



Oldest Association Celebrates 100th Birthday

By Joy Keen

Photos by Lewis Franklin

This year on August 24, more than 100 cabin owners from Government Mineral Springs Cabin Homeowners Association gathered to celebrate a momentous milestone. Thought to be the oldest association of National Forest homeowners in the country, this off-grid community of 44 cabins on the Gifford Pinchot National Forest in Washington turned 100 years old this year and we thought that called for a party. There were open houses so that all the owners could feel cabin envy for everyone else's cabins. Stories of trees falling and appliances breaking were shared. There was a happy hour at the 5 O'Clock Bridge, aptly named for just such an occasion, hosted by the Groth family. Ray Groth, who is almost 93, started coming to these cabins when he was 3 years old so his father could drink the healing waters from the now defunct spring.

On Saturday, there was a huge potluck and square dance. Everyone remarked about how happy they were to get together because now everyone in the community knows each other. The parties will continue and maybe someday the spring will flow again.





Engaging: Joining Together So We Can All Enjoy Disengaging

By Sharon J. Leach
NFH Executive Director

Why do we join a group? Some join groups on social media to get information and insights. Others join trade associations to keep up their credentials. What about National Forest Homeowners inspires and motivates our members to support our mission? What makes someone volunteer with this organization? Most of us are regular working Americans who love our families, public lands, and the outdoors. That’s our shared value system. At the same time, nearly every permit holder will run into complex difficulties with the program at some point, and as members of this association we benefit from each other’s support when dealing with these challenges.

We just completed an informative and fun gathering in Boulder, Colorado, our NFH Fall Forum. NFH leaders connected with cabin owners, heard their stories, and cabin owners learned about the association’s mission and activities. And there’s something else that happens when you engage with others who share your values. Something that goes beyond being informed. It’s a bond. By relating our stories to one another, sharing difficulty, and celebrating the rewards in cabin ownership, we make deep connections that reinforce common values. In this divided world, associating with others who have similar experiences and values is a needed resource that builds the resilience of our community. By joining forces on a mission, we are stronger.

Some have said that few are joining anything anymore. In his book *Bowling Alone: America’s Declining Social Capital* (2000), Robert Putnam looked at the decline in America’s social engagement, with reductions in participation in civic organizations, churches, voting and other means of connecting with community. The pandemic led to some documented declines in association membership rates. However, research also shows that after the pandemic, many associations saw a return of membership. NFH was fortunate, we saw little in the way of drop-off in membership despite national trends—our members are committed. Still, while there are signs that the younger generation is looking for connection, they are not as

ready to join a group as their parents. Just as with handing on the cabin itself, it’s imperative to pass down the commitment to connection, mutual support and advocacy that is part of belonging to our national association.

Knowing these trends, we are continually exploring new ways to interact and engage with our community. We adjusted to the pandemic by using Zoom for virtual meetings and have produced some online events. And while there is unquestionable added value when we meet in person as we did in Boulder this fall, we want to also respond to the needs of cabin owners who may not be able to travel to live in-person events and be responsive to a generation that participates online.

Over the past decade, we have created event content focused on how to educate the next generation—about the permit, regulations, forest health, cabin etiquette and more. We also created a membership category for cabin families, the Cabin Membership, to help your next generation get to know the ins and outs of this program. Our hope is that we will engage with the whole cabin family, demonstrate the value of national advocacy, and reinforce the bond of shared values.

In addition, NFH is developing new ways to provide access to information and engagement. Our website is undergoing a facelift to be announced sometime in 2025. In response to expanding use of mobile devices for connection and information, we look forward to improved mobile access and responsiveness. We’re exploring more online webinars, and research shows that the younger generation particularly uses the online world for learning and building skills.

As a cabin community, we know that it’s hard to engage in advocacy or develop your skills as a permit holder, when all you want to do is disengage and retreat to the quiet of the woods. It’s ironic that our mission is aimed at supporting that very disengagement—escaping the traffic of society and technology into the natural world of wind and trees, wildlife, and starry nights. So, while we encourage you to engage as part of our vibrant evolving national association and to urge your next generation to join now, our advocacy and education work is designed to support exactly that—your peace of mind and the joy of disengaging.

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Washington Update — An Average Cabin Owner's Perspective

By Paul Hugo, Fir Tract, Eldorado NF

Meredith Randall, Brian Gordon and I spent two days in D.C. in early September. As the Idaho Outreach Coordinator and a Board Director, Brian was in D.C. to represent all Idaho cabin families who are concerned that the program is in decline. My cabin was destroyed in the 2021 Caldor Fire along with 177 others. I wanted to share our collective struggles to recover which were made all the more difficult because of Forest Service policy.

We visited four Senate and five Representative's offices. Mark Dedrick and his staff from Summit Strategies set up the meetings and did a great job of navigating, introducing us, and setting the stage. Our primary goal was to secure co-sponsors for the CPRA. We were well received in all the offices. NFH's success getting the CFA passed 10 years ago, plus the excellent Economic Benefit Study NFH did in '22, and having bill language already being reviewed by Legislative Council made a big difference. Well, that and being revenue positive and not

requiring any new land didn't hurt. We hope the bill will be formally introduced in the lame duck session after the election. Meredith has been to D.C. many times with NFH, but for Brian and me, it was our first time actually wandering around Capitol Hill, in and out of Congressional offices. It seemed a little unreal and heartening that any average citizen can do this and meet with staffers and be treated like our concerns are important. At one point, while walking the halls of a Senate building, Brian caught sight of Idaho Senator Jim Risch and called "Jim" and had a brief chat. Senator Risch is one of the CPRA leads. Who would dream you could run into your senator and have a talk? It was also fascinating that there wasn't a hint at partisanship in any office. Even when we weren't constituents, we were treated as if we were.

The three of us and Mark each had talking points and we fed off each other and passed the baton seamlessly. All of the impressive staffers—gosh did I



Brian Gordon, Meredith Randall and Paul Hugo at the nation's capital.

feel old, as most of them were fairly fresh out of college—asked great questions. Without prompting, all the staff asked if the Forest Service was looking to "sunset" the cabin program, showing they understand our challenges with the agency, a bonus.*

It was an honor to represent all of you and to experience Congress functioning to help us.

**Editor's Note: While NFH sees challenges to this program, we have not seen any FS intention to end it.*



2024 NFH Fall Forum
Boulder, Colorado

Rocky Mountain "Hi!"

By Deborah Cowlshaw, NFH Events Committee Chair

The 2024 NFH Fall Forum was a wonderful afternoon! This year, our regional event was held in Boulder, Colorado at the Embassy Suites by Hilton on Saturday, September 28. It was a great turnout with eighty-three (83) people in attendance.

NFH President Meredith Randall talked about the key NFH advocacy objectives, including preserving permit-holder rights, building partnerships with key agency leadership, and working with Congress to ensure the cabin program's future in the face of challenges. Fire and natural disasters are an increasing threat to cabins and to the program. NFH is introducing legislation called the Cabin Program Restoration Act (CPRA) to address both program sustainability and permit holder rights.

Also addressing the Colorado audience was USFS guest speaker Brian Banks, USFS District Ranger on South Platte District of the Pike National Forest. Banks

spoke about partnership and fuel thinning to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires. Representing the USFS Rocky Mountain Region at the event was Albert Borkowski, Recreation Special Uses Program Manager who took part on the Ask the Experts panel.

Arriving ahead of the Fall Forum, NFH Directors and staff visited cabins at Meeker Park, Beaver Lake, Cold Springs, West Chicago, Hefferman Gulch and Empire. It is always a great privilege for us to receive cabin owners' hospitality and hear their cabin stories.

Filling out the weekend, early on Saturday morning prior to the forum, NFH Directors and staff organized and participated in a volunteer activity on National Public Lands Day. At the nearby El Dorado Canyon State Park, our group of 15 removed noxious and invasive weeds, including hound's tongue and mullein.

As always, NFH hosts our regional forums as opportunities for Recreation Residence cabin owners to meet with one another, find out about the pressing issues we all are facing on our national forests, and learn how we can work together collectively to preserve and strengthen the Recreation Residence Program. We enjoyed visiting with all of you in Colorado and look forward to staying in touch.

Ripples of Stewardship: Echo Lakes

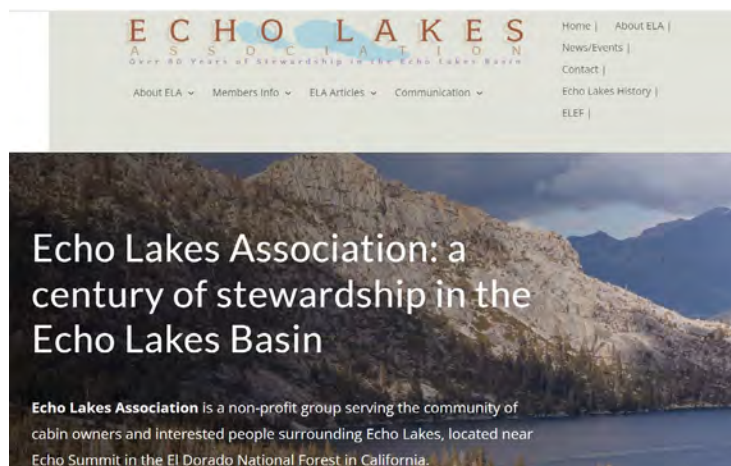
by Mary Liz DeJong

There are many Echo Lakes in the US. Ours is on the Eldorado National Forest of Northern California but because it drains into Lake Tahoe, this Echo Lake is managed by the USFS Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit (LTBMU). The Pacific Crest and Tahoe Rim Trails both run along the side of the Lake, and it is a popular entry point for the heavily-used Desolation Wilderness.

The Echo Lakes Association (ELA) was formed soon after the first USFS Recreation Residence cabins were built around the lake in the 1920s. A few site-specific features link Echo Laker together. The cabins have no road access or public utilities and there are only two parking areas for the Lake's almost 140 cabins and the general public. Regulations to protect the quality of water in both Echo and Lake Tahoe require all cabins to have self-contained toilet systems, so ELA dues support an effluent holding tank, maintenance of boat docks at the Chalet, and a USFS concession upon which Laker depend for everything from propane to ice cream cones.

At 7414 ft in elevation, the weather and lack of road access mean the cabins are truly "summer cabins." An irrigation district "owns" the top six feet of water and can start lowering the lake level after Labor Day. By mid-October, most boats are off the lake and cabins are closed before the snow begins. The USFS road to the lake is not plowed during the winter, and boat access is frequently not available again until Memorial Day.

Echo Laker value being good stewards of the land.



Given the proximity to major resorts and population centers (100 miles from Sacramento, 200 from San Francisco and a 15-minute drive from South Lake Tahoe), visitors to Echo are a mix of experienced PCT hikers, day visitors launching boats to go fishing or water skiing and people who have never been in the mountains or on a boat. Generation after generation, ELA has had great leadership that cares about steadfastly championing the Lakes' environment as well as the Echo community and our ongoing relationship with the US Forest Service.

The Echo Lakes Association website has information about Echo and links to various other sources of information about the area. <https://echolakenews.org/>



Picnic at Strawberry Point

Picturesque Strawberry Point —100% NFH Member Tract

Strawberry Point, with beautiful sand beaches on northern Minnesota's Cass Lake, is the newest NFH Member Tract (MT). The group of 11 cabins is on the

Chippewa National Forest, 100 miles south of the Canadian border. What is an NFH Member Tract and why does a cabin association become one?

Longtime Strawberry Point Secretary-Treasurer Maureen Tanis answers why, "The tract membership was appealing to our association. The convenience and cost savings helped motivate all 11 cabins to join." That's because members only write one check a year for both their local dues and NFH. Cabin owners no longer have to remember, in the middle of winter, to pay their individual dues to NFH and it all happens at once. Each member in a Member Tract also saves \$10 (ten dollars) a year by paying through their local association. Out of over 6,000 NFH members, about three-quarters are in Member Tract associations.

Cass Lake where Strawberry Point is located, is Minnesota's eighth largest and the Mississippi River flows through it, 83 miles from its source at Lake Itasca. Of the 11 cabins on the tract, all are now NFH members. To become a MT, 100 percent membership is not a requirement but is a target. When all are ready to sign up, that's ideal, but each cabin

association is different, and some associations will join with fewer to start with the goal of increasing membership over time.

Melody Knox, NFH Membership Administrator, says there are advantages to the cabin program with MT status. "We can reach and communicate with all cabins rather than just individuals. We share information and build a closer relationship—it is just more personal."

Maureen worked with Melody this past summer to get contact details for each cabin. It involves an initial effort to collect the information, and then to update annually if or when a cabin is transferred or a member changes their contact information.

For Maureen, her extra effort is well worth the convenience to cabin owners in the Strawberry Point community. "Our association believes in the mission of NFH and the impact it has on strengthening and maintaining the National Forest Recreation Residence permit program. We're glad to be a part of it and to support it."



Building a Framework for Planning— Preparing our Cabin Tracts for Emergencies

by Kevin Orth, NFH Stewardship Committee Chair

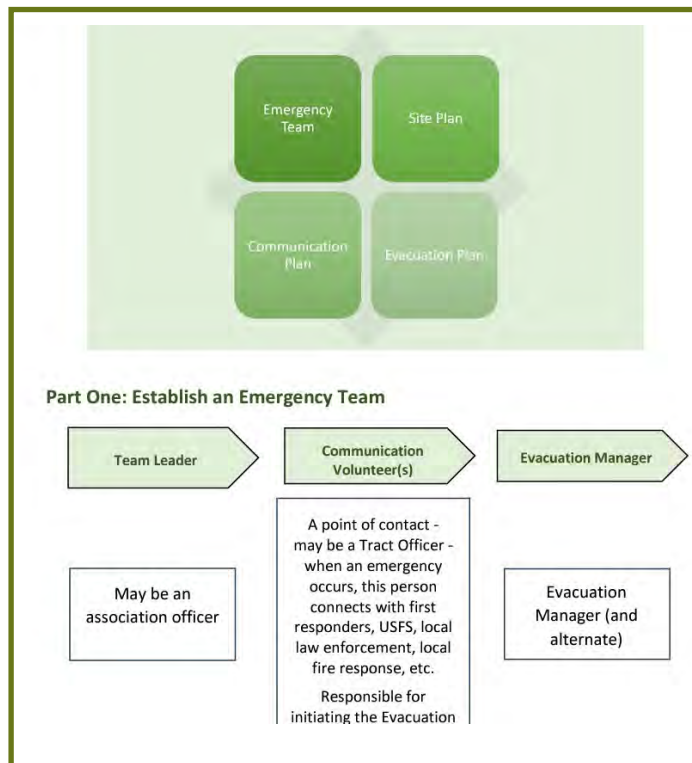
Last year, the NFH Stewardship Committee collected cabin owner input via a disaster preparedness survey on what they most wanted help with, to help us prioritize our efforts. What we found out was that most wanted our help with developing a local Emergency Preparedness Plan (EPP) for wildfire and other disaster events.

The Committee tackled development of this EPP guidance late last year. Because of the variety in cabin tracts across the country, in number of cabins, connectivity, proximity of first responders, area infrastructure and available resources, and types of disasters, we quickly determined that there is no single solution, no one EPP that works for all. We instead shifted our focus to develop guidance for how to create an EPP flexible enough that it can be adapted to different situations. We call this a Framework for Emergency Preparedness or FEP.

The FEP is a toolbox that focuses largely on Communications and Evacuation, but also covers a range of other topics, including developing communications and relationships with First Responders, how to develop proactive efforts with the Forest Service, and even guidance on post-disaster planning. The FEP provides pointers or tips on all these topics, and much more.

This FEP is posted on the NFH website under **Resources→Fire→Before a Fire** and is available to be downloaded. An example EPP from the El Dorado County Firesafe Council is also included on this web page and linked on the final page of the FEP. We will be sharing more emergency planning information with tract leaders and on social media in the near future.

We hope that you will find the FEP useful when establishing a Plan for your cabin, tract, and community. Please get in touch with any feedback about the guidance provided.



NFH Framework for Emergency Planning: a guide to creating an Emergency Preparedness Plan

NFH 2025 Election

Thinking Ahead

Each year in March, NFH holds an online election of our officers, directors and Nominating Committee members. Our winter newsletter includes information on the candidates and how to vote online. We appreciate your participation in choosing a strong group of leaders representing the interests of our members. To participate in the online election, you will need to sign into your NFH account, so it's always a good idea to try signing in before the election opens next March. Also, if you have difficulty with reading an online election ballot, you may request a mail-in ballot by February 25, 2025 by contacting NFH Executive Director, Sharon Leach at our main number 800-669-9971 or by email.



Can Submit Nominations For NFH Awards

Go to our website and choose **Engage→NFH Awards.**

Nominations due by December 31 for:

- Bob Ervin Outstanding Leadership
- Outstanding Volunteer
- Outstanding Communications
- Outstanding Tract Association
- Outstanding Stewardship
- James Sausser Recreation Advocate of the Year



National Forest Homeowners

P.O. Box 336
Talent, OR 97540

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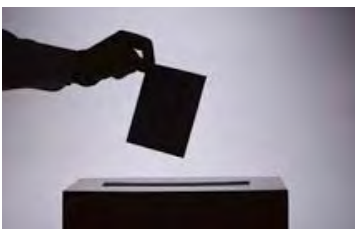
NFH Hotline: 800.669.9971

www.nationalforesthowners.org

To receive your NFH newsletter by email, please send a note requesting the e-newsletter to mknnox@nationalforesthowners.org

Coming Soon

MARCH 1-31, 2025 NFH ELECTION



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SPRING 2025 NFH CONFERENCE



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May 2-3, 2025
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Pasadena, CA