

FoNAF News

Friends of Northern Arizona Forests



Issue 10

Fall 2015

The President's Corner

It seems like only yesterday that I was composing this column for our spring newsletter but with the FoNAF annual meeting already in the books and the aspen already losing their golden leaves, I know that fall is here. Our 2015 field season was remarkable. Following a mild winter, we did not have many repairs needed for our 50-60 aspen exclosures and so we were able to devote our time to other efforts.

We welcomed the arrival of the new Flagstaff Ranger District silviculturist, Mark Nable, from the Kaibab NF and we quickly filled his plate with construction tasks. Included were two new aspen exclosures near Wing Mountain and two more near Mormon Lake. Mark was invaluable getting preparation done at both of these sites, working with fire crews in removing snags and conifers, as well as ripping the soil to stimulate sucker growth.

We also planted almost 300 aspen suckers in the third and final propagation study to find browse resistant clones, and we teamed with the Forest Service and Arizona Game and Fish Department wildlife crews and other volunteers from the Arizona Antelope Foundation and Arizona Elk Society to modify miles of range and allotment fences to make them more wildlife friendly and easier to traverse. This project will continue for a few more years as wildlife staff has identified over 50 miles of fences needing improvements.

An important program we initiated this year for Preventative Search and Rescue (PSAR) was setting up an information table weekends at the base of the Humphrey Peak Trailhead to give hikers safety recommendations and information for hiking this trail. It was so successful showing a decrease in rescues necessary, that the program may be expanded next year to include the Mount Elden Trail.

Our membership has also improved this year with almost a 10% net increase in members and, hopefully, with the diversity of our projects and activities, we can continue to attract folks that want to be a part of the solutions we work on. At our recent annual meeting we elected two new board members, Tony DeCou and Bill Waters, both very active volunteers for some time now. Unfortunately we also bid goodbye to two longtime FoNAF supporters, Mary Natali and Bill Rahr and they'll be sorely missed. I'm very proud to be a part of this organization and I want to thank each and every member and supporter for all of their dedication and hard work.

Tom Mackin, President



Our prez with Smokey

FONAF Board Members

Tom Mackin, President
Marty Lee, Vice President
Bob Dyer, Secretary
David Downes, Treasurer
Tony DeCou
Ralph Baierlein
Bruce Belman

Ed Clark
Keith Greenwalt
David Hall
John Holmes
Bill Kluwin
Curt Knight
Anthony Quintile

Bill Rahr
Sheila Walsh
Bill Waters
Justin Loxley is the
Flagstaff Ranger District
Volunteer Coordinator

FoNAF Initiates a Preventative Search and Rescue (PSAR) Project



FS volunteer Darcy Lewis with Fox family, Flagstaff

“Hi, climbing to the Peak today?” I try this opening in an effort to catch their attention. It’s a few minutes after 10 am and already the Snowbowl parking lot close to Mt. Humphrey’s Trailhead is nearly full. The young couple walking past the Preventative Search and Rescue table gives a half-hearted laugh. “Well, we are going to try,” she says.

There are lots of people, young and not so young, standing around their vehicles in the parking lot organizing their hiking gear. They make a few last checks then head towards the trailhead. Some have the gear nailed. They are clearly experienced mountain hikers. Sturdy boots, modest but well-worn backpack, sun hat. Others look more like they are out for a picnic wearing sandals or bright colored running shoes, shorts, no headgear, holding a bottle of water and, well, a smart phone. The couple I had just tried to engage is somewhere in between. At least they have

hats. “Have you hiked up Mt. Humphreys before?” I ask.

“No,” he says, “but we hike the mountains in the valley.” I know that there are ten mountain trails around Phoenix and Scottsdale but the highest is Camelback at 2,680’ and is the only one rated difficult. It’s nothing like Mt. Humphreys.

“Great,” I say. “It takes most experienced hikers six hours roundtrip. You are starting at 9,300’ and will climb 3,300’ in five miles to reach the peak at 12,633’. The temperature at the peak will be about 15 degrees colder than here, but will feel much colder ‘cause the wind is up.”

They hesitate and walk over to the table. “Oh, well, we will try but might turn around if we get tired.” I think they are beginning to understand that climbing this trail is a big challenge. “Well should you want to try another great trail in the area, one that is beautiful but not so difficult, I’ve got some recommendations.” In the end, they decide to hike up Humphreys for about 30 minutes then try another local trail. They seem happy with their decision. I’m glad too. They came all the way from the Phoenix area, and going home without having a fine experience in the high mountains around Flagstaff would have been a disappointment. But climbing Mt. Humphreys Trail unprepared is dangerous. I think I did my duty as a FoNAF member and USFS Preventative Search & Rescue volunteer. by *Bill Waters*

Join Us Helping at High Altitude

While writing this on a beautiful fall morning with an expected high of 70 degrees, I am finding it hard to think about snow. But I know it is coming, and with it is our commitment to assist the Forest Service in issuing backcountry permits. The folks at Snowbowl have already announced that they will open on November 20th with artificial snow if Mother Nature does not provide sufficient snow pack. So we will soon be looking for volunteers to staff the table at Agassiz Lodge on weekends and holidays.

On winter weekend mornings, 9:00-11:30, when Snowbowl is open, FoNAF volunteers issue free permits at Agassiz Lodge. Before issuing a permit, required to go into the backcountry, we provide applicants with information on the dangers they face related to weather and avalanches, and on essential equipment they should carry with them. After hearing our presentation, a few applicants change their minds about venturing outside the boundaries. Most others proceed, but with a lot more information about the risks and the precautions they should take. We who issue the permits and provide recipients appropriate warnings and information may never know if we are responsible for saving a life or two, but we probably are. If you are interested in becoming a backcountry permit issuer, please contact me dhdownes@gmail.com or 928-522-9207. You do not need to be a skier or a snowboarder, nor do you need to have ever been outside the boundaries of Snowbowl in winter – you just need to be willing to commit a few weekend mornings to a rewarding activity.

Dave Downes, Backcountry Permits Coordinator

PSAR Project Partnership Proves Positive

The PSAR project involved 20 FoNAF volunteers that were organized by FoNAF board members John Holmes and Marty Lee to support the USFS Flagstaff District project to reduce search and rescue incidents on the trail up Arizona's highest peak, Mt. Humphrey. Brian Poturalksi, Recreation and Wilderness Staff Officer, with Laura James, Forestry Technician/Recreation, and Darcy Lewis, a seasonal volunteer, were the drivers within the USFS to encourage FoNAF to lead the volunteer program. Marty Lee linked this program to her forestry students at NAU recruiting Mike Suggs, a graduate student in forestry, to be project head for the PSAR effort.

As volunteers our mission was clear. We were to be at Mt. Humphrey's trailhead each Friday, Saturday and Sunday from 10 am to 2 pm mid-May to Labor Day, to provide those starting the climb with information that would help them make good decisions. We were "encouragers and informers" not "cops." We spoke with hikers both at the trailhead and as we hiked the trail. We received training from the USFS staff as well as excellent information from SGT Aaron Dick, Coconino County Sheriff's Office Search and Rescue coordinator.

Every day was something new. There was snow, wind and cold during May. July 4th brought crowds from the valley to beat the heat. August monsoons meant rain and lightning. There were runners, campers, sightseers, photographers, novices and hardcore climbers, families, those with disabilities, and many more. Many were ill prepared. Some needed to be rescued. But at the end of this first season, the results are clear that the program has been a success. Fewer search and rescue efforts were required in spite of some days with as many as 450 passing through the trailhead. And equally important, we helped thousands enjoy a safe and memorable adventure.

The program will continue next year, and as our volunteer numbers grow, PSAR coverage will increase in hours per day and expand to Mt. Elden. If you are interested in joining us, please contact me at flyingbill1@me.com.

Bill Waters

Friends of Northern AZ Forest Volunteer

This Season Saw the Aspen Team Busier than Ever

2015 has been one of the most productive years since FoNAF's inception for the Aspen Team. We built five new exclosures for aspen: two at Maxwell Spring, two at LaNegrita Tank and one off FR151 for the aspen propagation project. In addition we built a large exclosure at Buck Spring (Mogollon Rim District) to protect a riparian area and a small exclosure near The Nature Conservancy; both contain some newly planted Bebb willows. This past summer also found us constructing two log-worm fences, one at Brolliar Park and one at Babbitt Spring. Working with some of the wildlife crew, we rebuilt several miles of pasture and right-of-way fences, replacing the bottom strand of barbed with smooth wire to facilitate the passage of pronghorn on the Flagstaff District. We did all of this while monitoring and maintaining more than 75 exclosures on the Flagstaff and Mogollon Rim districts. Our Aspen Team is now at 20 and we were delighted to welcome five new members this past season – Ron Bauman, Mea Stees, Trevor Hinckley, Vince Stento and Chuck Adams. We can always use more so feel free to contact me if

this might be an activity of interest.

*Dave Downes, Aspen Team Coordinator,
dhdownes@gmail.com*



Volunteers at work on pronghorn fence.

Introducing New Board Members

FoNAF is happy to welcome two new members to its board, Tony DeCou and Bill Waters. Tony, besides being a retired NAU professor with a PhD in electrical engineering, also brings to our organization plenty of practical experience gained from his boyhood on the New Jersey farm where he was raised. Bill, retired from the Navy after 30 years and then again from the corporate world, has shown great enthusiasm for working in the woods, helping fix fences and providing information to summer and winter visitors to keep them safe in the Peaks area.



New board members, Bill Waters (left) issuing backcountry permits and Tony DeCou (far right) fixing fence.

Check us out at www.friendsofnazforests.org



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