

Where I Have Worked

Ed Shepard, CF

I am one of the lucky few who had an idea of what I wanted to do as an adult, pursued that idea, and fulfilled that idea with a successful career. In 1963, I a fifth grader at my elementary school in the small town of Hubbardston, Massachusetts. My class went on a field trip to the Cooks Canyon Wildlife Sanctuary in Barre that was run by the Mass Audubon Society. We met a forester who was conducting the thinning of a stand of pine. As he explained what he was doing and why, I thought that his job was pretty cool.

That summer my family took a three-week vacation to Nebraska to see family and where my dad grew up. On the way we ventured to Lac Du Flambeau, Wisconsin, to visit family. My uncle Sulo Koski was a forester for the Bureau of Indian Affairs on the Chippewa Reservation, and my dad, brothers, sister, and I accompanied him while he worked in the woods. We watched an aspen timber sale being logged; I was hooked from there on and knew I wanted to be a forester.

I spent high school working on a dairy farm and spent as much time in the woods as I could. My senior year, I took an ecology class and that piqued my interest in learning about forest science. I landed a summer job with the Massachusetts Department of Natural Resources (now the Department of Conservation) after graduating and worked for the Leominster State Forests for the next four summers.

I started my college years at Colorado State University (CSU) in 1970, majoring in range and forest management. Beyond a very good education, I made many friends, many of whom I still see occasionally to this day. It was at CSU that I learned of SAF when I was asked by an upper classman to go on a wood cut to raise money for the forestry club. I joined the Alpha Student Chapter and have been involved with SAF ever since.

After graduating in the spring of 1974 with a BS in range and forest management, I went to work for a real estate developer in the Red Feathers Lake area northwest of Fort Collins, Colorado. I worked for several months logging rights-of-way and working on mountain pine beetle projects.

That fall I was offered a job as a soil scientist with the Rawlins District of the Bureau of Land Management and after a few years took over as the resource area forest manager. Throughout my time in Rawlins, I also worked in fire management. The district had a small forestry program with only a couple foresters, and I worked in every aspect of forest management on the district. I also attended the USFS Continuing Education in Forest Ecology and Silviculture (CEFES), which held sessions at the University of Montana, Washington State University (WSU), and the University of Idaho. After completing CEFES, I continued with my studies, while working, to complete a Master of Science degree in forest ecology and silviculture from WSU.

I enjoyed my time in Wyoming but wanted to see some bigger timber, so I transferred to the Medford District of BLM in 1981 where I oversaw the Grants Pass Resource Area's silviculture program. This was an eye-opening experience and much different from the predominantly lodgepole pine forests I worked on in Wyoming. Not only was the timber much bigger, but I was

intrigued by the diversity of forest types in southwest Oregon. This was my first experience working in the O&C Land Grant Lands, and I gained an appreciation for the close connection of the 18 O&C counties with these lands because of the uniqueness of the O&C Act that mandates that the lands be managed for permanent forest management and the timber receipts from the lands be shared equally with the counties. It was also where I first heard of northern spotted owls.

In 1985 I moved into management area by becoming the area manager (now called field manager) of the Drain Resource Area in the Roseburg District. I would have to say that this was one of the most enjoyable jobs I had. I could have one foot in the field while placing a toe of the other foot into the forest policy arena. I found I enjoyed policy work, which was fortunate because it became a large part of my duties for the rest of my BLM career.

In late 1988, I transferred to the BLM Headquarters in Washington D.C. to serve as the lead O&C Forester and deputy Chief of Forestry. I went back to DC planning on a two- or three-year assignment to “get the big picture” on how BLM worked on a national scale and then return to the field. I ended up staying seven years.

During those seven years, I gained a lot of experiences and had opportunities I could not have gotten anywhere else in BLM. During my time I served two Congressional Fellowships, one with Representative Bob Smith from Oregon and one with Senator Conrad Burns from Montana; was assigned twice to the Assistant Secretary’s Office to advise on forestry issues; participated in the Seventh World Forestry Congress in Paris as a technical advisor for the U.S.; represented BLM on the North American Forestry Commission (U.S., Canada, and Mexico); and represented the BLM and Department of the Interior on several multiagency task forces. I also staffed the BLM Director on President Clinton’s Northwest Forest Plan. I was also promoted to Chief of the Division of Forestry during my time in Washington. It was a very fulfilling assignment, but I was ready to leave DC and go back to the West.

The opportunity to head west came in July 1995 when I was appointed as the BLM’s Coos Bay District Manager; it was good to get back to Oregon and closer to the forests. Implementation of the Northwest Forest Plan was beginning, and it was a challenge for the staff to work through the new, overly complicated, and numerous procedural requirements of the plan. We did the best we could to make it work and were successful until legal challenges made implementing the plan as designed nearly impossible.

Fire management had been a big part of my positions when I joined BLM, and I always advocated to make fire management a part of resource management. In 1997 I was asked to apply for the Deputy Director of the BLM’s Office of Fire and Aviation at the National Interagency Fire Center in Boise. In this position I was the second in command of BLM’s wildfire management program. This was just before the announcement of the National Wildfire Plan (NFP) and we were beginning to put some of the pieces of the NFP together. At this time there was an emerging recognition that wildfire suppression and resource management needed to work more closely together to effectively address the worsening fuels/wildfire situation.

In 2000, I returned to Oregon BLM as the Deputy State Director for Resources and Planning in the state office in Portland. This position directed the management of all the natural resource programs, the lands and minerals programs, and the wildfire management program for all BLM-managed lands in Washington State and Oregon. While in this position, I was appointed by the BLM Director to the Forest County Payments Committee. This Congressionally established committee was comprised of elected school board members and county commissioners from across the country to look for ways to generate revenues for schools and counties after the drastic reduction in federal timber harvest from National Forest System and BLM lands that occurred in the 1990s. In addition to the elected officials, the statute establishing this committee required that a representative from the Forest Service and BLM with expertise in sustained yield forest management also be appointed. I served on this committee from 2000 until it ended in 2007.

In March 2002, I was accepted into the Senior Executive Service (SEC) Candidate Development Program, a yearlong training session to train managers to move from the managerial to the executive ranks. As I started this program, I received a call from the Deputy Assistant Secretary in Washington, D.C. detailing me to the Assistant Secretary's Office to provide technical assistance to the Interior and Justice Departments for settlement discussions on a timber lawsuit carrying over from the Northwest Forest Plan. I spent the next several months working with DOI officials and attorneys to develop a settlement that was accepted by the Court. While on this detail to Washington, I had the opportunity to play an integral part in the development of President Bush's Healthy Forest Initiative and the Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA). One of the highlights of this detail was the opportunity of being on stage with several other BLM and Forest Service officials and firefighters as President Bush signed the HFRA into law.

As I completed my SES training the BLM Director asked me to remain in D.C. as the Assistant Director for Resources and Planning. I was unsure I wanted to do a second tour in Washington after spending seven years there on the national forestry staff; however, after some prodding, I reluctantly said yes. I don't regret that decision at all; it turned out to be another very fulfilling assignment. I was directly responsible for the oversight of all the BLM's renewable natural resource programs, recreation, cultural, science and resource planning programs. This job required a lot of time on the Hill working with Congressional staff and testifying before the various committees on proposed legislation and on oversight of BLM activities; as well as working with the Office of Management and Budget and the Interior Department.

In the late summer of 2006, I got called into the BLM director's office and was informed that she wanted me to take a reassignment to the State Director position for Oregon and Washington. I gladly accepted the assignment and returned to Oregon that fall. I directed all the employees in the state office and ten districts across the two states.

The State Director was the pinnacle of my career and I decided that I would retire from BLM in May 2012. In my retirement message to my employees, I said that I was leaving BLM after 38 years, but not leaving forestry and land management. Since retiring I have advocated for public lands and active forest management through my work consulting, working with SAF, and serving the last as the president of the Public Lands Foundation.

SAF has been a big part of my career since I joined as a student in the fall of 1974. I owe a lot of my success to the network that I formed through SAF involvement and the mentoring I received from many members. Of course, I also owe a lot to my wife Terry and family who supported me through nine household moves over the years, and to the many employees who I had the opportunity to work with over my time with the BLM.

Ed Shepard, CF
SAF Fellow