

Minutes of May 13, 2023, SBNF Cabin Coalition Meeting

The meeting was called to order at 10:03 am in the Community Room of the Big Bear Discovery Center. 13 cabin representatives were in attendance from the following 8 tracts: South Fork Santa Ana River, Metcalf, Southwest Shore, Pine Hill Drive, Polique Canyon, Minnelusa, Barton Flats and East Lakeview. Casey Shaffer, Special Uses Administrator, was present representing the Forest Service.

Forest Service Update

Staffing

Casey reported that there aren't a lot of staffing changes although there is a lot of activity toward filling open positions. She is now working in her office on the District Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday each week. Here is some news on staffing:

- Deputy Forest Supervisor – Kay Wiand has left the San Bernardino for another position and Amy Reid is presently Acting Deputy on a 3-month assignment.
- Permit Administrators -- Casey continues as the only Special Uses Administrator on the Forest and is the contact for all cabin issues. Hiring efforts are underway to add a second Permit Administrator.
- District Archeologist – It had been reported previously that the Mountaintop District now has a dedicated Archeologist, Jay Marshall. It has been clarified that Jay will not be working on recreation residence issues. These will continue to be handled by Heritage staff in the Forest Office.
- Law Enforcement Officers (LEO) – A new LEO is starting on the Forest this month, which leaves one open position. Contact data will be provided when available.

Staffing on the various Forest and District offices is as follows:

Forest Office

- Danelle D. Harrison [danelle.harrison@usda.gov, 909-382-2710] Forest Supervisor
- Uyen Doan [uyen.doan@usda.gov, 909-382-2658] Forest Archaeologist

Mountaintop Ranger District

- Freddie Duncan [freddie.duncan@usda.gov, 909-382-2830] District Ranger
- Joseph Martin [joseph.martin@usda.gov] Recreation and Public Services Staff Officer
- Casey Shaffer [casey.shaffer@usda.gov, 909-382-2872] Special Uses Administrator

Front Country Ranger District

- Joe Rechsteiner [joseph.rechsteiner@usda.gov, 909-392-2851] District Ranger
- Cheryl Williams [Cheryl.williams@usda.gov, 909-382-2907] Special Uses

San Jacinto Ranger District

- Susan Zahn, Acting District Ranger, 909-382-2921
- Rita Morris [rita.morris@usda.gov] Special Uses Administrator

Forest Service Dispatcher [24 Hour] 909-383-5654

Forest Service Law Enforcement: (open) Tyler Smith (temporary)

San Bernardino County Sheriff: Christian Cordoba, Deputy -- Call 911

California Dept of Fish and Wildlife:

- **Walter Douglas, Game Warden – 760-702-1062**
- **Or Rich Fischer, Game Warden – 951-288-7651**

Road Closure Order The Road Closure Order that went into effect on March 18, 2023, has been lifted effective May 5 with the exception of certain roads on the Front Country and San Jacinto Ranger Districts and some seasonal road closures. Road permits are no longer needed for travel on most Forest Roads.

Fire Issues

- **Prescribed Burns and Pile Burning** There have been some notices and electronic message boards regarding smoke from prescribed burns and burning of slash piles. These efforts will continue so long as the moisture levels remain high.
- **Annual Clearance Due June 1** Pine needle clearance is coming with the end of winter and is supposed to be completed by June 1. Casey has been asked to request an additional month to complete this work due to delayed cabin access this year. Cabin owners, however, should work to complete their fuels clearance as soon as possible. The minimum clearance distances are 30 feet from cabins and other structures and 10 feet from propane tanks. If you desire to extend your clearance further than 30 feet, this would need FS approval. Contact Casey.
- **Hazard Trees** These are trees which are dead or dying and would fall on a building or present some other danger.
 - **If a hazard tree threatens an electric line**, contact Bear Valley Electric Service at 800-808-2837. BVES has authority to clear their power lines without getting FS approval. If you have trouble getting a response from BVES, contact Casey.
 - **Hazard trees that threaten cabins but not electric lines** are the responsibility of the affected cabin owner. Email Casey to request permission to remove such trees and send photos of the tree(s) in question.

Cabin Inspections Casey noted that only change-of-ownership inspections are currently being done. She has expressed a desire to use volunteers from the cabin community to catch up on the backlog of inspections from the past several years but has found that a volunteer agreement must be done and that this requires a Job Hazard Assessment, which she doesn't have time to do. In the absence of formal inspections, it is suggested that residence tracts consider organizing either self-inspections or inspections by tract volunteers. In both cases these should use the Inspection Checklist which is on the "Recreation Residence" page on the Forest website -- <https://www.fs.usda.gov/.../recreation/camping-cabins/...>

Improvement Requests Casey reported that there are about five minor improvement requests in process presently which will be completed as soon as possible. These minor requests are for projects that involve in-kind materials – i.e. the same paint colors, the same roofing materials and color, or minor repairs – and do not require Heritage approval pursuant to the Programmatic Agreement between the California State Historical Preservation Office (SHPO) and the Forest Service.

“Major” improvement requests are those involving cabin additions and other significant work that does require Heritage approval. Casey advised that requests for major projects are not moving forward due to staffing shortages in the Forest Heritage office and that such projects could take from 3 to 5 years to obtain approval. Casey also informed us that architectural historians must now request a permit from Special Uses before they can undertake any work on assessing a new improvement project.

Casey asks that all improvement requests be sent directly to her at casey.shaffer@usda.gov. Be sure to send along photos of the existing cabin situation.

If you have submitted a Recreation Residence Proposal Request and don't know what's happened to it, email Casey to ask about its status.

Noncompliant Cabins Notices have been sent to a number of cabins that are not in compliance with various FS requirements. Among these are several that have been described as junkyards, surrounded by building materials and old appliances. Recipients are given a specified period to come into compliance. If the permittee does not come into compliance, the Forest Service will take action to revoke the permit, requiring that permittee to sell their permit. These permit holders are generally given no more than 90 days to achieve compliance, sometimes shorter, but may receive additional time due to the severity of this past winter.

Casey was asked if she could inform tract associations of noncompliant cabins and informed us that FS privacy restrictions prevent any sharing of such information.

New Business & Open Discussion

Permit Renewal All Recreation Residence Special Use Permits on the San Bernardino National Forest expire at midnight on December 31, 2028. The formal process for continuation of these permits will begin about two years ahead, or by early 2026. For cabin owners, the major focus of this process will be to ensure that each holder and their recreation residence are in compliance with the terms and conditions of their permit. This will involve an administrative review to ensure that fees have been paid and there are no open issues, and a physical inspection of the recreation residence and permitted lot to verify the authorized improvements. Recognizing that the Forest Service will not begin work on permit continuation on our forest for at least two more years, cabin owners should simply be aware that this is in our near future and be ready to participate when the formal process is initiated. In the meantime, permit holders can review the authorized improvements that are listed on the face of their Special Use Permits to make sure that none are missing or changed. Tract leaders should alert seriously deficient cabin owners to the 2028 deadline to bring cabins into compliance. Noncompliant cabins will not be eligible for new 20-year permits.

Fee Retention A key provision of the Cabin Fee Act is that the annual special use fees paid by recreation residence permit holders will be retained by the U.S. Forest Service beginning ten years after passage of the Act in late 2014, which will be fiscal 2025. While that sounds like it's about two years away, due to Federal budgeting processes this summer is when the Forest Service will be drafting their budget for how the first retained fees will be spent. Under a proposal submitted by National Forest Homeowners (NFH), which it is believed the Forest Service agrees with, 85% of the special use fees will be retained on the Forest on which the cabin is located. For the San Bernardino NF, these funds are expected to total from \$1.3 to \$1.6 million per year, beginning in the FY2025 budget year.

The attendees at the May 13 meeting reviewed and discussed a list of possible uses recommended by NFH and identified the following four expenditure areas for consideration by our Forest's management for the first year of fee retention:

1. Adequately Fund Administration of the Recreation Residence Program: On a per cabin basis, budget an amount to be determined by the Forest Service*, indexed annually, which represents the estimated cost to administer each cabin and the recreation residence program. (*This amount was estimated in 2010 by the USFS to be \$600-700 per cabin. Indexed by the IPD, this amount will be nearly \$900 in 2025.)
2. With 735 Recreation Residence permits on the San Bernardino Nation Forest, we recommend that at least two (2) staff positions be established and maintained with dedicated responsibility for administering the Program.
3. Plan and carry out fuels reduction and removal of hazard trees within recreation residence tracts and along access roads.
4. Fund specific training, including associated travel costs, of special uses staff in the administration of recreation residence permits.

Additionally, it was recommended that we ask to participate in the budgeting process regarding these retained Special Use Fees. Roy will draft a letter to be sent to our Forest Supervisor and circulate that draft for comment.

There being no additional business or questions, the meeting was adjourned at 11:50 a.m.

Setting Next Meeting Dates -- Our next in-person meeting is tentatively set for August 19, 2023.

Minutes Prepared 05/16/23

Roy Glauthier