

# **US Forest Service in Red Feather Lakes**

## **Addendum #1**

**Program transcription from June 14, 2019  
at the Red Feather Lakes Community Library**

**Transcription by Linda Bell**

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**Red Feather Historical Society program:  
US Forest Service in Red Feather Lakes — Past History and Future**

My name is Ray and the last name is Mehaffey, and that's an Irish name which I'm very proud of. I graduated from CSU in 1960 in June in forest management. Now I started school at Colorado A&M, but unfortunately the A&M didn't stick and we went to a university. I guess they get more grants that way. There were only roughly 4,000-5,000 people at that time. Now we are approaching 30,000.

Things have changed and one of the things that changed when we were here, when we came to Red Feather in 1963 — we'd been out in Oregon for a couple of years with the Forest Service out in central Oregon — we came here in '63 and we lived at the ranger station. We lived in the house on the hill, to the left as you go in there. We stayed here until 1967 because there was a new district ranger and he wanted to live in Fort Collins and not up here. We ended up moving to Fort Collins in 1967 and we've been there ever since. At the time we came to Red Feather there was a ranger, myself as assistant ranger, we also had one forester with us. Dean Rassmussen was the ranger at that time. He was a graduate of Iowa State. We razed him a little about the corn stalks and how could he manage trees up here. But that ended up being my job, so.... We also had a forester from Purdue University (Don Mitchell). In addition we had a GDA who was Ed Denning, or our General District Assistant at the time. And then in the summer we had anywhere from 8 to 10 seasonals who stayed at the bunkhouse up on the hill in close quarters. We had an equipment/storage shed out in the back which was called the sheep shed and that stored all our equipment. We stored equipment not only for our own use but two different crews operated out of that also. One was the road crew when the US Forest Service did all the road maintenance up here, all the forest roads and even opened up the road to Deadman lookout every spring because the snow was still pretty deep up there and we needed to get to the lookout. The other crew was the recreation campsite crew and they were in and out of here. They did a lot of the campground construction down on the Poudre River as well as here.

I'll go through this the way that I did — in my responsibilities when I was at Red Feather for the five years. I was responsible for forest management and I'll go step by step as far as the divisions that I was responsible for.

## **Forest Management**

You may not realize it but we had between 8 and 10 long log trucks with 32' logs coming down the road every day, from sales near Deadman to the Panhandle.

Then we had some shorter log trucks that also came from particularly over near Sheep Creek, Nunn Creek. Altogether in a year we'd harvest from between 10-12 million board feet which is enough to build approximately 10-12,000 homes at that time. There was basically one big logger and then several smaller ones. The larger one was run by George Ribelin and his company. They'd moved here from Grand Mesa and Uncompagre and when they left Colorado they moved out to Arizona and worked down there until he retired. As I mentioned, we had basically 10-12 million board feet that we harvested and we supported a number of local saw mills. There were two small ones here in Red Feather. Cagle's sawmill and Marion's sawmill. Marion was along the creek here and Cagle's was west of there, on the road to Crystal Lakes. The majority of the logs went down to a company on the east side of Fort Collins and another mill was at the Y in Fort Collins, Spaulding Mill. There was another one, Fred Bachman's Mountain View Lumber. I'm trying to think of some of the names of places that are there now — Ponderosa Liquor is the only business I can think of.... And not because I go there!

Dayton Robinson down here had a mill and he cut small house logs. There are several homes around here that have those house logs in their buildings.

We also had three or four Christmas tree people. We harvested between 2,000 and 3,000 Christmas trees each year. We had posts and poles operators, who cut bolts and poles. We had one person that cut strictly mine props and he'd haul those to the mines down by Lafayette-Dacono and that area. There were a couple of mines there. The Eagle Mine and I can't remember the name of the other one.

There were a lot of things happening up here in forest management and because they were doing all that, we had the opportunity to do good forest management by thinning areas, reducing fire hazard, and that kind of thing.

We had fires here too. Not many big ones, thank goodness. We had from anywhere between 8 and 12 fires a year. Roughly two were man caused, and the other were lightning caused. We never had a fire over half an acre during that period of time that I was here. We had crews that responded in a hurry. People think you only have fires in the summertime, but there were actually fires year round because of some of the things people did when they shouldn't — like burning when they shouldn't, or where they shouldn't, that kind of thing. Most of them were in the summertime and fall.

I'll mention the (Deadman) lookout. Bernice George, I don't know if you've heard that name, but she was our regular lookout and she'd been doing it since World

War II. She was still here in the '60s. She left in about '68 or '69 because the lookout was closed at about that time. Bernice was very good at finding fires. She could see smoke very well. She was very alert. She spotted a fire clear over by Turkey Roost. I don't know how she spotted it, but she saved at least a 500 acre fire from happening. It could have burned right up to an area of Douglas fir. There was reproduction with pine tipmoth in it.

I'll might mention one thing about Bernice. It wasn't on my watch, but during World War II there was a POW camp over in Nunn Creek basin. I'm not sure how many people they had, I would guess around 40 or 50. They were from Otto Lumber Company out of Laramie. Bernice was in the old lookout at that time. I don't know if you're familiar, but there was a wooden lookout and then there's a current steel structure. Bernice was in the old lookout and the ranger at that time brought her up a baseball bat. This was for her protection in case one of the POWs tried to crawl up. Anyway, Bernice used to tell that story. She thought it was really funny. She never had a bit of trouble. The POWs seemed very content to stay there.

One thing we did have up here in '63 or '64 was a 30-man fire crew. When they weren't out fighting fires, like the Hot Shot crews of today, they had to have work to keep them busy so we had them busy thinning up in the Panhandle, or disposing of slash, and doing that kind of thing. Now they reduced it from a 30 man crew to a 20 man crew because it was more efficient for transportation, I think probably is why they did it.

I got a little bit of fire experience because they sent me to other areas. That was one of the things they did with employees. I ended up going to Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, as well as Colorado, eventually ending up as a fire boss — what they called them at that time — on large fires. That was basically because of the experience I received. Now one fire we had locally, that was a small fire down here on the Manhattan caused by a power line when a tree fell across it. We jumped on that and got it out really quick, but the only reason I mention it is, a week before this we had a fire simulator training down in Fort Collins with the same scenario. So we actually jumped on it and did real well. It was very small too.

## **Recreation**

During the time I was here we redeveloped the camp grounds with private contractors doing the work — the North Fork of the Poudre, Bellaire Lake, Creedmore Lake, both shores of Dowdy and Westlake. That was in 1965. We put in toilets, tables and grates. I don't know if they've been redone since that time or not — I presume they have. I know the entrances are different and that kind of thing. That was a big project and it was administered by the district ranger here, Dean did that.

## **Grazing**

I might mention we had grazing at that time. We had quite a few cattle coming through in drives in the summertime. Basically from Josephine Lamb, Ed Hansen and the Mapelli brothers all drove cattle up the road onto their summer range. On the other side of the hill, Brackenbury had sheep that he put up on the forest. I don't know if you knew we had sheep on the forest, but we did have at one time up here. Dick Brackenbury had the ranch. The Lower, Middle and Upper Cherokee Park wildlife units were all at one time Dick Brackenbury's property or grazing lease.

Somewhere along in there, about 1967, about the same time I moved to Fort Collins, we got a new ranger. Roan Anderson. He used to say, Roan — like the horse. He came here from clear down in southwest Colorado and he didn't want to live in a small town anymore. So we were all moved down to Fort Collins. Our summer crew stayed here in the Ranger's house, there by the office, and they received better quarters out of it, rather than the cramped quarters they had.

One thing I did forget to mention. We had a half-day secretary at that time. I don't know if you remember Ruby Blakney or not. She was one. And then Marcene Bra, when she and her husband Cal came back up here to Parvin Lake. And Bub Sutton and his wife Geri came after them and she was our secretary. We had a house fire at Parvin Lake and it burned the house down, around 1964. The fire department wasn't much at that time. I think it's significantly better at this point in time.

During that time a land and water conservation fund came into being. We were required to administer it although we received no additional funds to do it. The permit was only \$7 a year at that time. I'm not even sure what it is now — about

\$10 or \$12. That was a bit of a shock because we had to do all the collection with our existing crew — they were pretty busy anyway — we had three people on recreation, three on timber improvement doing thinning and slashing, two as a timber cruising crew, and one fire control aide. If Bernice had the day off, he'd take over for two days and man the lookout for those two days. During that time, while I'm mentioning the lookout, but I don't know if you're aware of it, the way the wind blows, and it does blow occasionally up here (laughter), that lookout tower, the steel structure, does loosen up. Fortunately we had the road crew which had some young fellows on it and they were the ones who climbed up and tightened all the bolts every four or five years depending on how much wind we had and that kind of thing.

We didn't have cell phones, we had radios. And the radios were pretty good size and they didn't get (reception) everywhere. But we did manage. We had radios in the pickups too. We had a weather station — for forest fire conditions — here. The secretary took the readings off it every day and we'd call those into Fort Collins and they transmitted them elsewhere. Not only to the supervisor's office but to the regional office in Denver so they could keep track of the fire danger up here. They have since changed the system. I was an advocate of the old system. I think it was better than the new system, anyway.

We had a great time up here. We had some cooperatives too. We ran the snow survey course in cooperation with the Soil Conservation Service. It was up there on the North Fork of the Poudre. I don't know if they read that any more or not. But we did go up there and we had to snowshoe to get up there, there was no other way. I might also mention, speaking of snowshoes, that Bill Hurd — you all know Georgie I'm sure. Bill took Ed Denning's place when Ed retired. Bill and I snowshoed up to the snow course one time and I happened to have an Irish setter that wanted to go along with us. She spent the day standing on Bill's snowshoes. Bill said "You brake trail." So I broke the trail, but he had to fight the dog standing on his snowshoes.

We also had a cooperation with the Division of Wildlife at that time and that was when we read transects for wildlife to determine how much browse there had been. They used (the results) in some formula to determine the number of deer licenses issued during hunting season.