

Gifford Pinchot National Forest: Early History

Gifford Pinchot National Forest has been known by many names since its creation as a forest reserve over a century ago - Pacific Forest Reserve, Mount Rainier Forest Reserve, Rainier National Forest, Columbia National Forest and since 1949, Gifford Pinchot National Forest. June 15, 1999 marked the 50th anniversary of the naming of the Forest for Gifford Pinchot, conservation leader and first chief of the US Forest Service. On July 1, 2008 the Forest will celebrate a century of caring for the land and serving people.

Forest Reserves: 1893 - 1905

The Forest Reserve Act of 1891 gave the President authority to establish forest reservations from public domain lands. Department of the Interior field inspections in 1891 and 1892 led to recommendations for a reserve that would protect the forests around Mount Rainier. By proclamation of President Harrison, the Pacific Forest Reserve was created in 1893.

The Pacific Forest Reserve included much of what would later become Mount Rainier National Park. The southern boundary was drawn along township lines through the upper Cowlitz River valley.

Gifford Pinchot came to the area in 1896 as a member of the special commission examining public timberlands in the west. His report made recommendations for a new, larger reserve that would include the Cascade Mountains south of the Pacific Forest Reserve.

By proclamation of President Grover Cleveland, Mount Rainier Forest Reserve was created on February 22, 1897, incorporating the lands previously set aside as the Pacific Forest Reserve. The new 2,234,880 acre reserve was one of 13 added to the national system as a result of the special forest commission study.

The Forest Management Act ("Organic Act") of 1897 provided management provisions and funding for administration of the reserves, under the Department of the Interior, General Land Office. The Act redefined the purpose of the reserves as forest protection, watershed protection and a source of timber supply for the nation.

In 1899, Fred Plummer, a United States Geological Survey engineer, completed the first comprehensive survey and mapping of the Mount Rainier Forest Reserve. Plummer's report, published in 1900, includes the first detailed descriptions of forest types and conditions, hydrology, fire history, and grazing in the area that would eventually become the Gifford Pinchot National Forest.

From 1893 through 1897 administration of the forest reserves fell to a small corps of deputy U. S. Marshals and General Land Office special agents. Spread thin with other duties, they could in no way serve as a protective force. It was not until 1898 that the Land Office received authority and funding to hire rangers for this purpose. In the summer of that year, Frank Gates, a settler living in the Cowlitz River valley above Randle, became the first ranger hired for Mount Rainier Forest Reserve. Gates used his homestead as headquarters, and had nearly all the forest lands in eastern Lewis County as his district. He served two or three seasons before leaving the area.

By 1900, the General Land Office appointed George McCoy to the position of Supervisor of the reserve.

Little is known of McCoy, who maintained reserve headquarters in Napavine, and, like the two or three rangers he hired, was a seasonal employee. During the following year, the Land Office appointed Dave Sheller, a Tacoma politician, as Superintendent to oversee administration of the three forest reserves in the state of Washington.

In 1902, Sheller hired three new Forest Rangers for Mount Rainier Forest Reserve. The first of these was Grenville F. Allen. Trained as an engineer at Yale, G. F. Allen had previously worked for the U. S. Geological Survey and on logging operations in the forests near Mount Rainier. Allen was initially offered the position of Supervisor of the Forest Reserve, but turned it down in order to first gain a season of work experience as a Ranger.

Allen spent much of his first season traveling about the reserve, working together with Horace Wetherell and John Schmitz, the other new rangers. Wetherell, a Carson area homesteader, was the first Forest Ranger on the southern part of the reserve. Schmitz, too, was a homesteader, living at Sulphur Springs, near present-day Packwood. He filled the vacancy left by Frank Gates in the Cowlitz valley

G. F. Allen became the first full-time supervisor of the forest reserve in the fall of 1902. In the following year, he added Charles E. Randle and W.W. Cryder to the ranger force. Randle was the son of a pioneering family for whom the town of Randle was named. Summer work consisted of posting boundary notices and fire warnings, surveying and marking the boundaries of homestead claims, investigating timber trespass, trail improvement and construction, grazing inspections and fire patrols. Rangers went all over the reserve to assist each other with work projects.

Other rangers appointed to Mount Rainier Forest Reserve under the General Land Office administration included Alfred B. Conrad and William McCullough, assigned in 1904 to cover the Nisqually and Carbon River districts. Until 1906, their duties also included Mount Rainier National Park. Homer Ross was hired in 1904. He worked from his home in Glenwood, dealing mostly with grazing issues. Elias J. Wigal replaced Horace Wetherell as Ranger in 1904 in the Wind River valley.



A.B. Conrad, early ranger on
Mount Rainier Forest Reserve

Forest Service Administration under Gifford Pinchot: 1905-1910

In the spring of 1905 Congress transferred the Forest Reserves from the Department of the Interior to the Department of Agriculture, and in July of 1905 the Bureau of Forestry was renamed the Forest Service.

Gifford Pinchot was appointed the first Chief Forester for the newly created Forest Service, having sought the transfers of the reserves from the time he was appointed chief Forester of the Division of Forestry in the USDA in 1898. Pinchot drafted instructions on managing the reserves, stating that "All of the resources of the forest reserves are for use...under such restrictions only as will insure the permanence of these resources." These regulations were first published in 1905 as *The Use Book*.

In 1907 the federal Forest Reserves were renamed National Forests, in order to correct the impression that they were withdrawn from use. In 1908, Rainier National Forest was split into Rainier National Forest on the north and Columbia National Forest on the south.

Beginning in 1905, the Forest Service required applicants for forest ranger positions to take practical written and field examinations. Questions were asked to determine the applicant's knowledge of basic ranching and livestock, forest conditions, lumbering, surveying, mapping, cabin construction, and so on. The field examination required the applicant to demonstrate his practical skills such as how to saddle a horse and ride at a trot and gallop, how to pack a horse or mule, how to tie a diamond hitch, accurately pace the distance around a measured course and compute the area in acres, and take bearings with a compass and follow a straight line. In early years the applicants were also required to demonstrate accuracy with firearms. The applicants were not furnished with equipment, horses, nor pack animals - they were required to have them for the test and for the job, at their own expense.

Columbia National Forest: 1908 - 1949

Early History by Districts

Columbia National Forest was established by Executive Order of President Theodore Roosevelt on July 1, 1908, created from the southern districts of the Rainier National Forest. The headquarters were initially located in Portland, Oregon. In 1927, they were moved to Vancouver, Washington. H.O. Stabler served as the first supervisor of the Columbia National Forest.

For administrative purposes, district stations were also established as field headquarters for Forest Rangers. Initially, field personnel were organized under nine separate "districts." Within several years these had been reduced to three: Hemlock Ranger District (later Wind River), Guler Ranger District (later Mt. Adams), and Spirit Lake Ranger District. Today's Mt. Adams Ranger District incorporates the former Hemlock and Guler Districts. The administrative boundaries of today's Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument incorporate the former Spirit Lake Ranger District.

Hemlock/Wind River Ranger District

The Ranger in charge of Wind River District between 1904 and 1911 was Elias J. Wigal, who homesteaded in the Wind River Valley in 1891. Wigal initially worked out of his home, which was located between Hemlock and Carson, but by 1906 he constructed the first District office on the south side of Trout Creek, close to the Wind River Lumber Company's Camp 3. One of Wigal's duties was to administer the timber sales sold to the Wind River Lumber Company, the first of which was in May of 1906. This sale was one of the first large commercial timber sales on Forest Reserve lands in the Pacific Northwest.

E. J. Wigal's one room office was the first Ranger Station constructed on the reserve. It was designated Hemlock Ranger Station, due to the large number of hemlock trees in the vicinity. In 1908 Wigal built a second Ranger Station at Hemlock, next to the first. This cabin was two stories high and constructed entirely of hewed cedar logs.

Several Ranger Stations were established on Wind River District to aid in administration, including Race Track, Trapper Creek, Howe, Trout Creek, Summit Springs, McClellan Meadows, and Panther Creek Ranger Stations.

Elias Wigal resigned in 1911, and Fritz Sethe served as Ranger from 1911 to 1915. Sethe was seriously injured in 1915 while clearing for the Wind River Nursery, and left the Service. He was replaced by George Williams, who, like Sethe, began his career as a Ranger in the Lewis River country. Later Rangers at Wind River included Axel Erickson, Clifford Welty, James Huffman, Ross Sheppard, Carlos Brown, J. H. Wood, William Johnson, and Don Fechtner.

Wind River Nursery

Plans were drawn up in November of 1909 for the Wind River Nursery, located at the site of the Hemlock Ranger Station. This area had been burned in the Yacolt fire of 1902, and was partly logged in

a timber sale purchased by the Wind River Lumber Company in May of 1906.

The nursery's primary purpose was to grow trees to reforest the Bull Run watershed, the source of the city of Portland's water supply. Approximately 8000 acres of this watershed had burned in the 1890's. The secondary purpose of the Nursery was to reforest other large burns, as a future financial investment in timber production.

Forest Ranger E. J. Wigal hired three men to work on clearing the five acre Nursery site in 1910. This required blasting stumps with stump powder, clearing away the stumps, filling the holes left behind, plowing and replotting the ground, burning or removing the remaining roots and debris, and leveling the land by means of scraper, shovels, harrow and float.

By April of 1910 Assistant Forest Ranger Charles Miner had been hired and placed in charge. The first seed beds were installed in 1910, and the 5 acres was planted to black walnut, shagbark hickory, pignut, white ash, mulberry, box elder, black cherry, black locust, red oak, Scotch pine, European larch, maritime pine, western white pine, Douglas-fir, noble fir, red cedar, and Norway spruce.

The first seedlings were shipped in 1911, and in that year Miner was replaced by Arthur Wilcox. At this time all the Rangers and Guards on the Forest were pulled in for Nursery work at certain times of the year, particularly during the months of March, April, and November.

In 1912 all seedlings and transplants were dug with a long-handled spade, with one man lifting and one man digging. For transplanting seedlings the "Michigan" planting board was used. It consisted of a 1" x 6" board, 7' long, with narrow slots sawed into 1/4" holes bored 1/4" from the edge of the board and placed according to the desired spacing. The board was placed over a trench, the seedlings placed in the holes and then the trench filled as the board was lifted.

William F. Will took charge of Nursery operations in 1920, and remained until his retirement in 1944. Will was responsible for many innovations at the Nursery.

By 1925, 14 acres had been cleared for nursery use. Seeds were still broadcast in 4' x 12' frames. Seedlings were lifted with the root pruner, pulled by two horses. Cover crops of oats and vetch were planted and plowed under to provide nutrients to the soil. A new Cletrac tractor was purchased in 1927 for nursery use, equipped with a hoisting drum for operating the tree lifter. This replaced the Nursery's horse team, which was sold for \$140.00.

Forrest Deffenbacher became Wind River Nursery's director in 1946. Under his direction the nursery expanded rapidly and became more mechanized. Old 4' x 12' seed bed boxes were removed and long rows of seedbeds were sown with a seed drill attached to a tractor, referred to as the Wind River seeder. Machine sowing allowed six to seven million seeds to be sown in a day. A tractor cultivator was used for weeding. Deffenbacher designed and built tables with moving belts for grading the seedlings. Women formed an integral part of the nursery workforce.

The Wind River Nursery closed in 1997, after 88 years in operation. Forest nursery practices throughout the west are founded on pioneering research conducted at Wind River Nursery.

Wind River Experiment Station

In May of 1912, C. R. Tillotson was sent from the Washington Office to direct experimental work at Wind River Nursery. The decision was made to locate an experiment station in conjunction with the nursery, since nursery practice and planting techniques were important areas of research. During that first season a laboratory was constructed, which also served as a residence for the employees, along with a greenhouse for seed tests. Early experimental work was aimed primarily at improvements in nursery practice, such as sowing, shading, mulching, irrigating, and planting. A Douglas-fir seed source study was initiated; along with several other studies.

The first trees were officially planted for the arboretum in 1912, making it one of the oldest arboretums in the Northwest. The original purpose was to test the suitability of non-native species for forest planting in the Pacific Northwest. Between 1912 and 1913, the experimental work was part of nursery operations. In 1913, the Wind River Experiment Station was officially established, with J. V. Hoffman as Director.

When the Pacific Northwest Forest Experiment Station was formed in Portland in 1924, the Wind River station was redesignated as a fieldwork center. Research activities ebbed during World War II, but expanded after the war with an emphasis on timber harvest and regeneration problems. By the late 1950's the role of the Wind River station as a primary research location declined, and since that time studies have been administered from the Forestry Sciences Laboratories in Olympia and Corvallis.

Silvicultural concepts, cutting practices, reforestation methods, and genetic studies developed at the Wind River Experiment Station form the basis for modern forestry practices.

Guler/Mt. Adams Ranger District

Homer Ross may have been the earliest Ranger to work on the Mt. Adams Ranger District. Ross, who began his career with the Forest Reserves as a Forest Guard in 1904, made his home in Glenwood, which served as his headquarters.

In 1909 there were several Ranger Stations in what later became the Mt. Adams District. These stations were strategically located across the Forest, often within a day's ride of each other. Some, such as Ice Cave, Cultus Creek, Wicky Creek and Goose Lake, merely served as base camps where water and forage were available. Others served as "headquarters" for the early "districts."

The earliest "headquarters" was probably Peterson Prairie, where the abandoned homestead cabin of the Peters family was used as a Ranger Station as early as 1907. Harrison DeVoe was Forest Guard stationed at Peterson in 1909.

The first Ranger Station cabin constructed by the Forest Service on the Mt. Adams District was the Gotchen Creek Ranger Station, built as summer headquarters in 1909. The cabin was connected by wagon road to Glenwood, where Forest Ranger Homer Ross maintained district headquarters in his home. Almost all of the sheep entering the Forest did so by way of the road past Gotchen Creek, where they could easily be counted by the Ranger stationed there.

Although not considered "headquarters," small patrol cabins were also built at Dead Horse, Ollalie, South Prairie, Morrison Creek, and Twin Buttes by 1910.

Assistant Ranger L. E. Lucas, with headquarters at Guler in 1908, is the first Ranger on record to be stationed in the town that we now call Trout Lake. It is likely that Lucas, along with Orville W. Pierce in

1909 and 1910, worked from their homes in Guler, since a Ranger Station headquarters wasn't established there until 1917. Harvey Lickel, the Ranger stationed at Guler between 1912 and 1918, was probably responsible for constructing the first District Ranger's headquarters at Guler, a combination office/residence that still stands at the Mt. Adams Ranger Station. Lickel's successor, Jesse Mann, built a barn at the Station in 1920. The six men that assisted him represented the entire permanent work force of the Columbia National Forest in 1920.

Harvey Welty served as District Ranger between 1923 and 1933. He was succeeded by Karl "K.C." Langfield, who served at Mt. Adams District for 23 years.

Spirit Lake Ranger District

Mineral-bearing rock was found in the Spirit Lake basin, near Mount St. Helens, in 1891, and the following year prospectors flocked to the area to stake claims for gold, silver, and copper. Tunnels were opened, cabins built, and by 1900 the wagon road from Castle Rock extended up the Toutle River to the shores of Spirit Lake.

Mining claim development was in full swing during the early years of Mount Rainier Forest Reserve. With forest protection a concern, a Forest Guard was stationed at Spirit Lake during the summer, beginning in 1907. Herbert L. Hurd of Centralia, was the first, reportedly "sent out by Gifford Pinchot." In 1908, Edgar B. Johnston held the job. During that year the St. Helens Ore, Milling and Power Company was at work building a flume line at Spirit Lake. One of the men employed in the construction was 25-year old Erasmus E. Robertson. An enthusiastic and conscientious worker, Robertson took the Forest Guard job from 1909 through 1912, and again in 1915 and 1916. An abandoned homestead cabin, described in 1909 as "hardly habitable," was used as the first ranger station at Spirit Lake.

Robertson was joined in 1911 by George Williams, the first full-time district Ranger. Like Robertson, Williams had also worked for a mining company at Spirit Lake. In 1910, Williams entered the Forest Service as Ranger with headquarters at the Toutle Ranger Station, which he built in that year. A new guard station was also built at Spirit Lake, which did not become the district headquarters until 1913. Williams' salary was \$100 a month and he was required to furnish and feed three horses. His fire patrol district included Green River, Spirit Lake, Meta Lake, Goat Marsh, Butte Camp, and the Lewis River. In 1911 he covered the Forest with W.G. Hastings on classification surveys, spending 30 days afoot and covering 300 miles. Besides fire patrols, Spirit Lake Guard and Ranger duties involved trail work, mineral claim inspections, boundary surveys, and the examination of forest homestead claims.



Summit Lookout, Mount St. Helens 1922

In 1909 the Lewis River country was administered by Forest Guard Fritz Sethe, whose headquarters were at Cougar. Sethe spent most of his time with trail work and fire patrol. The Lewis River Ranger Station was established sometime before 1910 near the homestead of Ole Peterson, about three miles east of the community of Cougar. The Lewis River station was used by rangers, guards or packers traveling to the Lewis River area from the west side. In 1931 a new guard station was built, along with a garage and barn.

Over the years, Spirit Lake became a popular summer getaway. Rangers Cliff Welty (1918-1921), Jim Huffman (1921-1925), Monty Mapes (1925-1927), Al Wang (1927-1934), and Harold Samuelson (1930-1946) saw the complete decline of mineral development and a steady increase in recreation use during their time in service at Spirit Lake.

In 1948, the Lewis River Ranger District was officially created as a separate district because of the extensive timber sale development planned for the area. Heath V. Hall was the first District Ranger, with summer headquarters at the Lewis River Guard Station and winter headquarters in the Post Office building at Kelso.

The Rainier National Forest Districts

Lands that are today administered by Cowlitz Valley District, Gifford Pinchot National Forest, include three former Rainier National Forest districts not originally part of Columbia National Forest: Randle Ranger District, Packwood Ranger District, and Mineral Ranger District.

Randle Ranger District

When Mount Rainier Forest Reserve was created in 1897, over 50 settlers had already established homesteads in the Cowlitz River valley, within the reserve. The small town of Randle had emerged in the 1890s as a center of commerce for the pioneer families. The town was named for James L. Randle, its first postmaster, who had settled there in 1886. Randle's son Charles, hired initially as a ranger under the Department of the Interior, was the first Forest Service ranger stationed at Randle to oversee the Cowlitz District. In 1906, Randle transferred to the Wind River area and was replaced by Alfred B. Conrad, from the Nisqually District. With help from Nisqually Ranger William McCullough, Conrad built the Silver Creek Ranger Station in 1907. The cabin became headquarters for the newly established Randle District in the same year. From 1908 until 1933, the district was part of Rainier National Forest.

Alfred Conrad was replaced in 1909 by John Kirkpatrick. Kirkpatrick saw many accomplishments during his twenty-three years as District Ranger at Randle. Buildings were added to the administrative site, located a mile east of Randle and currently the headquarters of the Cowlitz Valley Ranger District. Guard stations were established at Tower Rock by 1909 and the more remote Chain of Lakes in 1913. The first fire lookout on the district was constructed on Kiona Peak, in 1917. In 1926 two other lookouts were built, one on Cispus Peak and one on Badger Peak. Early trail projects included the 1911 reconstruction of the Klickitat Trail, an old Indian travel route, and the building of a trail to Blue Lake in 1919.

Administrative duties also included the inspection of homestead claims, mining claims, grazing allotments, and timber sales. Most of the prospecting and mineral claim development was in the McCoy Creek area. Sheep allotments were established on ridges burned by the fire of 1902, including Juniper Ridge, Blue Lake Ridge, East Canyon Ridge, and Hamilton Buttes.

The earliest timber sales were for cedar in the Cispus River valley. Cedar trees were felled, cut into shingle bolts, and floated downstream to mill locations. The first large commercial sale was made in 1909 to the Metcalf Shingle Company from Kelso. The company established a camp near Tower Rock Ranger Station, and continued to cut cedar in the area for several years. For a short time, the Cispus Ranger District, with a staff of four men headquartered at Tower Rock, was administered separately.

In 1918, over 30 percent of the district burned in a tremendous wildfire known as the Cispus Burn. The small body of rangers and guards could do little to halt the fire's advance. Army troops were sent from Fort Lewis to combat the blaze. Rains eventually put the fire out in the fall of the year.

In 1933 the Randle District was added to Columbia National Forest. John Kirkpatrick retired the following year, and was replaced briefly by Harvey Welty, who had been the Ranger at Trout Lake. Melvin M. Lewis, a Randle native, took the job from 1935 to 1945. When Lewis retired, Harold Chriswell became District Ranger.



The First Ranger Station at Randle, built in 1907

Packwood Ranger District

When Mount Rainier Forest Reserve was created in 1897, the only community in the upper Cowlitz valley above Randle was then known as Sulphur Springs. In 1907, the Cowlitz District of the Rainier National Forest was split into two smaller districts. One of them became the Sulphur Springs District. Harry Cunningham was appointed as the first Ranger of the District in 1908, initially making his headquarters in a cabin on the homestead of Ed Dixon, north of present-day Packwood. Cunningham built the first ranger station at the Skate Creek administrative site in 1909.

The next year, the town of Lewis was established across the Cowlitz River, retaining that name until 1930, when it was changed to Packwood to avoid confusion with Fort Lewis. The Ranger District was known both as the Lewis District and Upper Cowlitz District in the years between 1910 and 1930. Until 1933, the district was part of Rainier National Forest. In 1933 it was added to Columbia National Forest.

In 1910, Jules L. Hagon was hired as Forest Guard to assist Ranger Cunningham, and was stationed all summer at the Davis Coal Mines on Summit Creek. William Sethe was hired as a Forest Guard in 1911, eventually succeeding Cunningham as Ranger four years later. Sethe retired from his position as District Ranger in 1947. His brother Fritz worked as Assistant Ranger at Wind River in the early days, and brother Herb was a Ranger at Mount Rainier National Park.

The original ranger station burned in a 1919 fire, and a new house was built. In 1923, the station was moved into an old store in the town of Lewis. This served as the Lewis Ranger Station until 1930, when an office and warehouse were built on newly acquired property at the east end of town, on the main

highway. A residence was added to the complex in 1931. Until 1998, when the District consolidated with Randle, this was the site of the Packwood Ranger Station.

During the early years of the Packwood District, the principal activity was trail construction. The Skate Creek Trail, Cowlitz Pass Trail, and Johnson Creek Trail were among the earliest projects completed. A log cabin at Packwood Lake, built in 1910 for a power development company camp, became one of the first guard stations in the district. Berry Patch Guard Station, at Chambers Lake, was built in 1916. Remote Hawkeye fire lookout was the first to be built on the district, in 1927. Clear Fork Guard Station, in today's La Wis Wis Campground, was built in 1928.

In the early 1920s, Packwood District supported 11 sheep allotments and three cattle ranges. By 1937, Packwood District maintained 411 miles of trail, 116 miles of telephone line, 10 fire lookouts, five guard stations, employed 12 Forest Guards and maintained a fine string of pack mules.



Rangers inspect the Goat Rocks area, 1930's

Mineral Ranger District

Mineral District initially incorporated the Puyallup and Nisqually River drainages, and was originally known as Nisqually District. William A. McCullough was the first District Ranger, appointed under the General Land Office in 1904, and serving until his retirement in 1922. McCullough administered the district from his home near Ashford. In 1906 the Ashford Addition, lying west of Mineral, was added to the Nisqually District.

The Ashford Addition, also known as Tilton District and the "Mineral Addition," was administered separately from 1913 to 1922. For several years an office in Morton was used. When again combined with Nisqually District, Tilton District Ranger Jules Hagon replaced William McCullough as ranger of the new Mineral District. Hagon continued to work from an office established in Mineral.

The district was part of Rainier National Forest until 1933, when it was added to Snoqualmie National Forest. The first official ranger station was developed by the Civilian Conservation Corps near Mineral in 1934. In 1969 the district was dissolved and administration transferred to Gifford Pinchot National Forest.

The name of the district comes from the community of Mineral, indicating one of the resources of commercial importance in the early days. Four miles west of Mineral was the town of Ladd, adjacent to the Forest boundary along East Creek. Ladd was a company town, established by 1905 as the headquarters of an anthracite coal mining operation. The East Creek Mines were the largest development, with a network of tunnels extending over a mile into Forest Service lands. A massive landslide in 1919 closed the mine, which had employed 250 men during peak operation.

The first commercial timber sale of note was underway in December, 1910, along the Nisqually River. This was a shingle bolt sale, where cutters took cedar trees that grew close to the river, bucking them into sections called bolts. When winter rains created high water, the bolts were floated downstream to a shingle mill. In the 1920s, railroad logging was first undertaken in the West Fork Tilton River drainage.