

E.N.F.I.A Name TBA

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The Eldorado National Forest Interpretive Association (ENFIA) is a nonprofit organization that is dedicated to helping the Eldorado National Forest serve the public.

A message from the President

Dear friends, members and docents,

As I write this message in mid-July, we are certainly in difficult and trying times. I hope that you all are having the opportunity to enjoy the forest while practicing the safe guidelines as issued by the CDC. We continue to await the OK from the USFS to once again provide services at Carson Pass and the Ranger District offices, although this looks less likely as the summer is now progressing well into July.

Our ENFIA Retail Manager, Keli Gwyn, has been working tirelessly since January to revamp our retail operations and introduce a new Point of Sale system that will streamline our retail management and provide greater flexibility. I hope we all have a chance to experience the system soon.

In the meantime, Keli has greatly

expanded our online store on our Website. Check it out . Now would be good time to update any maps, books or clothing that you may need as it will also provide some needed income to ENFIA. Carl Gwyn has done a masterful job with our new website and continues to add new information about the Forest regularly. The Board has been able to successfully update our Bylaws to reflect our changing environment. Thanks to all of you for your contributions, memberships and support during this time. Stay safe and healthy this summer.

Larry Moore President ENIFA

"Climb the mountains and get their good tidings. Nature's peace will flow into you as the sunshine flows into the trees"

John Muir 1901 Interpretive Training

WHAT: Join ENFIA members, Carson Pass docents, and forest volunteers for a series of mini interpretive training sessions this summer. We will explore core concepts of interpretation in 3 segments that will cover (1) Informal Interpretation (visitor information contacts & roving); (2) Guided Walks; and (3) Interpretive Demonstrations. WHEN: Saturdays 9:00 – 11:00 AM on July 25, August 1, and August 8 – (these live sessions will also be recorded for viewing at a later time) WHERE: Virtual live training on ZOOM via your internet device of choice (phone, tablet, computer) HOW: Go to our website <u>enfia.org</u>, log into your membership account and click on "Upcoming Events" on the Home page.

The Oxen's "Tale" By Frank Tortorich

Having a newsletter is so important to keep the energy of any organization alive and connected to the membership. I am very honored to be asked to write a series of articles for the newly reactivated ENFIA newsletter. I have chosen the series title of "The Oxen's Tale" because it was that noble beast that pushed the wagons that carried the belongings and supplies of most of the pioneers and gold rushers venturing to California.

Oh, if only the oxen could talk, what grand "Tales" could they tell? In some of the trail literature many writers seem to have given a "back seat" to the oxen, who think it was the horse or mule that was the primary draft animal during the early days. But my research shows it was the mighty ox as the preferred draft animal for a variety

of reasons. Foremost, it was stronger than the horse or mule and being a browser, it could survive on most of the vegetation found along the California Trail. The horse and the mule are grain fed, which would need to be carried or purchased along the trail and as a draft animal tended to break down under load after about 800 or 1,000 miles. Also, the horse and mule travel about $3\frac{1}{2}$ to 4 miles per hour; much too fast for the walkers. Whereas the ox plods along about two miles per hour on flat land, a much more comfortable walking pace. This was convenient, as most of the pioneers walked the 2,000 miles to California or Oregon.

By the mid-1850s more horses and mules began to be used as draft animals because of settlements popping up along the trail allowing folks to trade their tired animals for fresh. Another reason for choosing the ox might have been the cost. In the mid to late 1840s, an ox would sell for about \$25, the mule about \$75, with the horse costing upwards of \$150. So, for the price of one horse, one could buy six oxen. However, the horse and mule provided transportation for many. The scouts and outriders needed the horse or mule.

Were horses and mules ever used as draft animals during the gold rush? The answer is yes, but they were in the minority. Many horses and mules gave out and died along the route. But then so did some oxen; however, ox tasted better than horse and mule meat.

Two oxen make a yoke. There were usually three yokes of oxen for each wagon, thus six animals pushing the wagon along. Yes, pushing is the action the ox exerts upon the voke. The voke rests upon the neck in front of the shoulders of the ox and therefore the ox pushes against the voke. Attached to the voke was a chain that connected the team's front or lead team yoke to the middle or swing yoke, on to the rear or wheel yoke which then connected to the wagon's tongue. It is the chain that does the pulling. (Just some technical trivia, but people will continue to say the ox "pulls" the wagon. Well, I will not.)

The left front ox, the best trained and smartest, was called the lead ox. The ox to the right was called the off ox. The drover walked on the left side of the lead team with his goad or whip and gave commands of gee, haw, whoa or get-up, meaning go left or go right, stop, or go. When the wheel team moved to the left or right that action moved the tongue which turns the front wheels of the wagon in the desired direction of travel.

So, what is an ox? It can be of any breed of cattle that mated a big strong bull to a big strong cow hopefully yielding an offspring that would grow big and strong. The young male offspring would be neutered and would be trained in a small training yoke. These were called working steers. When fully trained they were now bestowed the high honor of being referred to as an "ox."

Name the Newsletter Contest

Years ago, ENFIA produced a newsletter called "The Interpreter". We haven't had a newsletter in a while. This is the new, revised version and it needs a new name. Send all suggestions, by 8/31. to <u>rsandperl@gmail.com</u>. I'll compile them and send them to the ENFIA board for selection. The winner will receive ENFIA swag from our retail store!

A Little History of the Carson Pass Station



Carson Pass shack was actually a converted old outhouse before the station was built. This is maybe early 90s. The VISITOR INFORMATION

sign you see still hangs outside the station.



Construction started in 1991 and the Station opened for business in 1993. This was an epic effort especially considering this was all volunteers. That building has a 6 foot foundation due to the rocks that had to be pulled out. The building kit also didn't come with any instructions or hardware. ENFIA volunteers beat all those obstacles.

Fire's Place in the Forest By Lester Lubetkin

The Caples Creek area is a very special place within the Eldorado National Forest for many reasons! While it is not a truly "alpine" setting, and it does not have a big developed campground or deep, clear lake, it does have beautiful meadows, large granite walls and wonderful groves of majestic pines, cedars and other mature conifers, some of which are more than four hundred years old. **Placerville District Ranger Scot Rogers** said of these magnificent legacy conifers that they "take your breath away." Much of the Caples Creek drainage is a roadless area with over nine miles of trails, lots of dispersed camping, a babbling, clear-flowing stream and a story to tell about "fire's place in the forest."

You may remember last Fall there was a fire in the Caples Creek Canyon. This fire started out as a "prescribed burn" but turned into a wildfire because of heavy winds and quickly drying conditions. This is the story of why Eldorado National Forest staff



intentionally started a fire in this beautiful area, and what it takes to prepare for a controlled burn. California's forests depend on fire to remain healthy. That may seem like an odd statement in light of recent wildfires throughout the State that have destroyed tens of thousands of acres of forests in the Sierra Nevada. But those large, destructive fires are in large part because we've been putting out smaller, natural fires over the last 100 years or more. The Caples Creek canyon is filled with a mixed conifer-oak forest (conifers are cone-bearing evergreen trees like pines, firs and cedars) interspersed with brushfields, aspen groves and large open subalpine meadows. The mixed conifer forests have adapted to thrive with fires every 10 to 15 years. With frequent fires the duff and understory vegetation does not get dense enough for the fires to get too hot while many of the tree species have bark that protects the trees from fire damage. Oak trees have adapted to survive fires by sprouting new growth from their stumps. With frequent fires, the large pines and cedars are naturally well spaced and are not



competing with smaller trees for the limited water and nutrients in the dry summer. And frequent fires release needed nutrients back into the soil.

The forests that European settlers found in the mid- to late-1800s were described as "parklike" with trees widely spaced and easily traversed because of the lack of down trees and shrubs in the understory. Native Americans had been using fire for thousands of years to improve access to food, which also helped to keep the forests healthy and resilient. And the wildlife came to depend on those natural, fire-dependent forests. But folks were concerned that forest fires were destroying the trees, so by the late-1800s, there was a strong effort to suppress fires. In fact, the Forest Service had a policy by the early part of the 1900s to try to put out all fires as quickly as possible. The result was that the forests became denser with a more closed canopy and many small trees competing with the grand, mature trees. And even the mix of tree species started to change--whereas pines, cedars and oaks were the dominant species originally, white fir (a shade-tolerant tree) started to become more prevalent. The amount of fuel accumulating on the forest floor has been increasing significantly and now there is what is called a "fuel



ladder" allowing fire to spread from the forest floor, up the smaller trees and tangled

branches into the canopy of the large, legacy trees.

So, back in 2016, staff from the Eldorado National Forest decided to take the bold step to try to return fire to over 4,000 acres of forest in the Caples Creek area. To do this, Forest staff committed to creating fuel breaks to control the fires that would be intentionally lit. Those intentionally lit fires (referred to as "prescribed" fires) would be lit under very controlled conditions with specific criteria as to weather, fuel moisture, air quality, etc. And to avoid damaging too many of the grand legacy trees, the duff and ladder fuels around legacy trees was to be removed prior to burning. In other areas with high concentrations of down trees and limbs or dense pockets of small trees, the vegetative material was to be cut up and piled and the piles burned. Forest staff expected they would need to conduct multiple prescribed burns over the next 15 years or so in order for the mixed conifer forest to return to a more natural, fire-resilient condition.

A lot of preparation was needed before fire could be reintroduced- -fuel breaks needed to be constructed by clearing swaths along the ridgeline, piles of branches and small trees were made in areas that were too dense, the moisture level of the vegetation was monitored, and smaller areas were burned to create control lines for the larger prescribed burn.



And there were many volunteers from El Dorado County and beyond that came to help prepare for returning fire to the forest. These volunteers worked with Forest Service fire crews to cut down small trees next to the grand legacy pines and raked needles and duff away from the bases of these 400 to 700 year old giants. Because fire had been suppressed for so many years, an enormous accumulation of shed bark, fallen branches, needles and other organic material had collected right at the base of these pines that were over 5 foot in diameter. Had a fire come through this stand of trees, the duff at the base of these trees would have burnt through the thick bark and girdled the tree,

killing it. Or, had the tree survived the fire, the shallow roots would have been destroyed, prohibiting the tree from taking in the water and nutrients needed to survive and ward off insects. This secondary impact can be just as fatal to the trees. After raking duff and removing woody debris around the trees, each person felt a kinship with these trees from the past and hoped that their efforts would be what it takes to give these trees what they need to survive.

Finally, on September 30, 2019, some of the piles of branches and small trees were lit. There was snow on the ground in places and the weather was cool with some



rain anticipated. Then, on October 4th, the prescribed burning shifted to an "understory" burn, in which the fire is allowed to creep along the ground,

consuming the duff and litter on the forest floor and killing some smaller trees. The fuels



were lit along the ridgeline on the

north side of the canyon with the fire creeping downhill towards Caples Creek.

The conditions at the time that the burning was started met the requirements for the prescribed burn, although a warming trend was expected and afternoon winds were forecasted for later in the week. Fire managers projected that they may be burning well into the latter part of October, weather permitting. But, the weather pattern shifted with some afternoon winds driving the prescribed fire to the east. And then on October 10, very strong, shifting winds started blowing with burning embers flying beyond the area prepared for the understory burn. This led to spot fires starting up ahead of the fire front. At that time, the "prescribed fire" was declared a wildfire. With that declaration, additional firefighters were called in to help control and extinguish the fire. The wildfire was eventually contained by late October.



Overall, a little over 1,000 acres were burned during the

prescribed fire phase, and another 2,300 acres burned as a wildfire. The area burned included mixed conifer forest as well as adjacent brushfields. So now when you hike the Caples Creek trail out to Jake Schneider Meadow or Government Meadow, you see blackened tree stumps, barren patches devoid of brush, and ash on the ground. But actually what you are seeing is a forest returning to a natural condition.



It would once have been common to see the evidence of recent fires. There would naturally be pockets that burned fairly hot and so created openings. Hazy skies and smoke were a common occurrence in the Sierra Nevada 150 years or more ago, as described in many of the gold rush emigrants' diaries. Studies are ongoing as to the effects and benefits of the fire, looking at both the prescribed fire and the subsequent wildfire.

Interestingly, the prescribed fire met many of the objectives of protecting the large legacy trees, reducing the excessive amount of vegetative material on the ground, and killing some of the pockets of dense young trees (particularly some of the thickets of white fir). While the areas that burned under the wildfire had a greater loss of the large legacy trees (nearly one quarter of the trees larger than 30 inches in diameter were killed by the wildfire whereas none of these larger trees were killed in the area of prescribed fire), the wildfire did a better job of reducing some of the dense patches of young trees, creating openings needed in a healthy forest. It certainly wasn't the desire for the fire to progress to a wildfire, but the area overall has moved towards conditions that are closer to natural conditions for a mixed conifer forest.

Come back to the Caples Creek area and you will have the opportunity to see a forest that looks much like forests did several hundred years ago before the efforts at suppressing fires ignited by lightning and other causes.

B-17C

By Adrienne Starkey

Imagine walking through a forest in hot July, the afternoon light slicing through the trees, thorny gooseberry bushes snagging your skin through your jeans, and as you step around a fallen tree whose roots are taller than you are, you see . . . an airplane?

There is a B-17C bomber in the middle of the Eldorado National Forest. Or pieces of it, at least.

It crashed almost 80 years ago, in 1941, en route from Reno, Nevada to Sacramento, California. A storm, unexpected and brutal, tore the plane apart piece by piece--in the air. Left wing tip. Fuel tank. Landing



gear. Tail section. Scattered in fragments across the fallen evergreen needles, soft ferns growing at a distance around the shredded metal. A small plaque bolted to the plane tells only part of the story: amid a cascading series of instrumentation failures, the pilot, Lieutenant Leo Walker, kept control of the spinning plane just long enough for his crew members to pull on their parachutes and escape. He was unable to do the same for himself.

We hiked to the crash site Independence Day weekend. Someone had placed an American flag over the engine nacelle where one of the propellers would have been. It seemed



a fitting tribute--all eight crew members survived thanks to Lt. Walker's sacrifice.



The plane's coordinates aren't posted by the United States Forest Service, and for sad reason--parts of the crash site have been vandalized: graffiti dating back to the 1950s and onward are scratched or pencilled onto the wreckage. Worse yet, parts of the plane have been stolen and carried out of the woods outright. We were only able to find the largest part of the wreckage: the right wing, which is upside down. You can still see the original green paint, including the Army Star insignia, and strips of



fabric. We found a small frog inside the engine nacelle.

If you do venture into the forest in search of the B-17C, and you manage to find it, keep its location secret. A brave man died to keep his crew alive. The plane tells his story. And it is a story that should not be forgotten.



Contributors Wanted

Members are one of the best assets of ENFIA! If you have been to a cool spot in the Eldorado National Forest, or if you have some great tidbits of history, then YOU are just the person to contribute to the new ENFIA newsletter. If interested please contact Robyn Sandperl at <u>rsandperl@gmail.com</u>

