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Friends of the Forest Celebrates 15 Years
By Georgia Munsell

Friends of the Forest celebrates 15 years of service to the Red Rock Ranger District of the Coconino National Forest this June.

The idea for Friends of the Forest (FOF) came out of a forum sponsored by the Sedona Academy in early 1994 entitled "Building Partnerships with the Forest Service."

Original Friends of the Forest member, Rusty Swavely, recalls the 3-day forum as an intense process. "We had to read a number of research documents before attending the forum, and then we worked in discussion groups on a variety of issues."

The topic for the forum was selected for several reasons. Swavely explains, "Getting 3-4 million visitors a year to this beautiful area was putting a huge strain on the forest and on the Forest Service's ability to manage that impact."

In addition, there were differences of opinion among the Sierra Club, the Sedona community and the local Forest Service. Jim Eaton, another original FOF member, explained, "We really wanted to figure out how to bring people together because we knew the Forest Service had a lot of work to do but they didn't have sufficient manpower or money."

As committed as the first members were, the group would not have succeeded had it not been for two other events happening at the same time. "First," as Eaton recalls, "with the new Clinton administration, there was a changing of the guard at the National Forest Service and the objective to prioritize recreation moved from the bottom to closer to the top. Second, the Red Rock District got a new district ranger, Ken Anderson, who was community-oriented and willing to listen."

The new group of nine worked feverishly the first half of 1994 to write the by-laws, set goals, write press releases, design a logo, and incorporate as a 501-3C non-profit. New members were quickly added because many people wanted to help make a difference on what seemed like a much neglected national forest. The first FOF President, Mary Lee Dunning, explained in the [Red Rock News](#), "The primary goals of Friends of the Forest are to help the Forest Service maintain trails and cultural resources, reduce the damage caused by increasing human use, assist in education and improve communication with the community."

Fifteen years later, those goals have not changed. As current President Roy Julian states, "I believe that due to the vision and foresight of our founding leaders, the mission of the Friends today is essentially unchanged. The one thing that has changed is that because of the tremendous increase in visitation in the Sedona area, our mission is even more vital and challenging today than it was 15 years ago."

One of the six first committees was Trail Maintenance and Construction, headed for 9 years by founding member, Norm Herkenham. "There were so many trails and most were not maintained," Norm explains. Norm mapped out all the existing trails and then

met with Red Rock District staff, where together they selected which trails to upgrade and maintain, including building links where it made sense for trails to connect. In recognition of Norm's hard work, the Forest Service named a trail starting at the high school and connecting to the Old Post Road Trail in his honor, the Herkenham Trail.

Friends of the Forest now has 25 committees with diverse volunteer opportunities to meet individual talents and interests, including patrolling trails; staffing the Visitor Center; guiding visitors at Palatki and V-V cultural heritage sites; and conducting weekly water sampling at Oak Creek.

Friends of the Forest Sedona is highly regarded nationally for what volunteers have accomplished and for the synergy between the volunteers and staff of the Red Rock Ranger District. Appreciation of that relationship is expressed by current District Ranger, Heather Provencio, "The FOF are the heartbeat of the Red Rock District, the glue that holds us all together. The public demands on this District are heavy and sometimes feel insurmountable, but working side by side with the Friends, there hasn't been anything we couldn't accomplish. And it isn't just work that the Friends help us accomplish, they simultaneously boost our employees' morale and keep us anchored to what the public at large desires from the Forest Service."

Having contributed over 200,000 volunteer hours and \$135,000 to projects in the Red Rock Ranger District, Friends of the Forest can be proud of many significant accomplishments in its 15 years of existence.

If you are interested in making a difference, become involved with Friends of the Forest. For more information, visit www.friendsoftheforestsedona.org or contact the Red Rock Ranger Station at 928-203-2900.

Georgia Munsell is a member of the Friends of the Forest Publicity Committee.

Highlights of 15 Years

- 1994 June 1, Friends of the Forest (FOF) officially forms as a 501-3C non-profit
- 1995 FOF volunteers complete Soldiers Pass Trail and Forest Service installs plaque at trail head thanking FOF. Membership grows to 153
- 1996 FOF receives national recognition for volunteer efforts from Forest Service Chief
- 1997 Volunteers finish work on 3 trails - Jack's Canyon, Courthouse Butte & Broken Arrow
- 1998 Bell Rock Trail dedicated. 11,000 annual volunteer hours
- 1999 16,620 annual volunteer hours.
- 2000 FOF volunteers restore Van Deren historical cabin
- 2001 Volunteers begin work on Munds Wagon Trail
- 2002 Orchard Committee created to save and care for trees at West Fork
- 2003 FOF receives 4 matching grants of \$7,000 from the National Forest Foundation
- 2004 FOF gives Red Rock Ranger District \$25,000 for projects.

- 2005 22,300 annual volunteer hours
- 2006 FOF gives \$9,800 for Brins fire rehabilitation and \$5,000 for materials to help rebuild Sterling Pass & N. Wilson Mt. trails
- 2007 FOF begins support for River Rangers cleaning up Verde River
- 2008 FOF receives \$460,000 in grants. 24,000 annual volunteer hours. Membership grows to 384
- 2009 In 15 years, FOF has contributed over 200,000 volunteer hours and over \$135,000 to Red Rock Ranger District projects