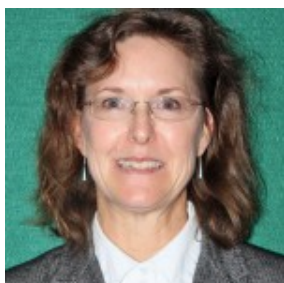


USFS supe brings experience, forward-thinking to basin

Publisher's note: Lake Tahoe News sent Nancy Gibson, who came on board in April as supervisor of Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, a series of questions. She obliged us with the following responses in between countless meetings and unpacking boxes.

Name?: Nancy Gibson



Nancy Gibson

Age?: Umm. How about, I have 33 years of Forest Service experience in three regions (Region 1, Montana; Region 6 Oregon; and Region 5, California) working with multiple administrative and natural resources staffs in both National Forests and a Regional Office. I've lived primarily in rural communities in Missoula and Stevensville, Montana; Dufur, Oregon; Yreka, Eureka and, now, South Lake Tahoe, California. I was born and raised in Tucson, Arizona.

Why did you apply for the supervisor position of Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit?: Being a line officer somewhere in the Western United States has been a long-held career goal of mine. When I took a 120-day temporary assignment to the Lake Tahoe Basin in the winter of 2007, this place went to the top of my list for a unique place to live and work. My tenure on the Six Rivers National Forest was a particularly valuable springboard because of the concerted restoration activities

and key emphasis on hydrologic systems in the coastal range. I believe my administrative schooling and natural resources-based experiences mesh very well for the leadership tasks of this position.

What do you anticipate will be the most significant differences between being a deputy supervisor and now being supervisor?: Any differences will be subtle given my emphasis on teamwork between these two positions. Typically, there isn't a legal distinction in delegated authorities between the deputy forest supervisor and forest supervisor. I will provide leadership direction in determining program priorities while working closely with the deputy to ensure we are speaking with one voice. From an organizational standpoint, the deputy will tend to focus on operational functions and the supervisor will focus on external relationships. Again, these functions will, at times, be interchangeable. This is a successful model I've witnessed in my past two assignments and will likely adopt here.

In the Six Rivers National Forest where you last worked the archaeological dig programs at the Chinese mining camps were popular for the public to participate in. Do you think doing something like that in cooperation with the Washoe Tribe might be instituted in the Lake Tahoe Basin? Why or why not?: The Passport in Time program is a valuable avenue for engaging the public in understanding past experiences for better cultural awareness. Whether or not we would look at local participation depends on a number of factors, including the desire of local partners, such as the Washoe Tribe, current staffing availability, and funding via appropriated dollars or partnership contributions. I'm somewhat familiar with the very successful Conservation Education program of the basin and will delve deeper into these and other opportunities as I progress in my tenure.

The U.S. Forest Service was responsible for safety on rivers like the Smith in your former jurisdiction. Might the USFS

look into doing something like that on the Upper Truckee River? Why or why not?: Public safety is a shared responsibility of a variety of public entities. Again, I will become more familiar with such local cooperative agreements in the months ahead. Generally speaking, the Forest Service takes a lead role in natural resources management and protection within its boundaries while other agencies take the lead, and we assist, with regard to public safety. Oftentimes, due to our remote administrative sites, Forest Service personnel are “first responders.” However, this doesn’t preempt the responsibilities of other public resources such as city/county fire departments, search and rescue, and the like for whom we play a supporting role.

Fire lookouts generated cash at your last job as overnight venues for backpackers. Could you see implementing some sort of backcountry hut system in Desolation Wilderness or in cooperation with an entity like the Tahoe Rim Trail Association? Why or why not?: My familiarity with the Lookout Rental Program stems from experiences on the Bitterroot and Mt. Hood National Forests (Montana and Oregon, respectively) with respect to existing decommissioned administrative sites (lookouts). Again, the management of such sites presents a future commitment of staffing and funds and, if penciled out, could very well be self-sustaining and worth looking into. With respect to the Desolation Wilderness, much depends on what infrastructure already exists and whether or not any proposals are in keeping with the spirit of the Wilderness Act. Of course, pursuing these opportunities is best done with an eye toward partnerships, which, through local commitment, is one of the best ways to ensure a good idea sticks.

What are your thoughts about engaging the public in being volunteers on National Forest lands? Most of the Desolation Wilderness volunteers are from outside the basin and some inside the basin who have tried to participate have had negative experiences.: The Volunteers in the National Forests

Act of 1972 was designed especially for the purpose of engaging local volunteers in the recreational and conservation education activities of the National Forest. I'm a true believer in the benefits of this act and have used this authority many, many times. I'm curious to hear any specifics regarding the negative experiences because I believe volunteer programs of the Forest Service are of real benefit to both the Forest Service and our rural communities in terms of gaining experience and understanding of our public service role.

Money is always an issue. The federal government – of which your agency is part of – almost shutdown this spring. Funding for projects in the basin is evaporating as cash from the Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act dry up, plus the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act reauthorization is languishing in Congress. How do you cope with a stagnant or declining cash flow?: In general, we operate on annual appropriations and it is always a challenge if the pendulum of federal funding swings too quickly in either direction. The best we can do is spend a bit of concerted effort in workforce planning to forecast anticipated resources needs and obligations while developing a skilled workforce to match those needs. Target accomplishment is not only specific to meeting the current needs as designed through these appropriated or other funds (such as SNPLMA) but also to insure we are well positioned for resources challenges five- to 10-years out.

Each person who occupies the White House seems to change the rules about roads on Forest Service property. What is your philosophy on roads?: A common adage for roads is nobody likes them, but everybody uses them. My philosophy is best depicted as the wise management of roads that can be maintained, both environmentally and financially, over time. That being said, what we can't necessarily afford today may also be the best level of access needed in a fire suppression activity, as well as a resources restoration and monitoring activities, today and into the future. Like many things driven by the uncertain

nature of the natural world, it is sometimes best to take heed on a case-by-case basis without unnecessarily jeopardizing future opportunities.

The Tahoe National Forest has two people who work on avalanche forecasting. LTBMU has zero. Any thoughts about increasing the basin's number?: We're fortunate that the Sierra Avalanche Center, a partnership with the Tahoe National Forest, actually forecasts for the entire Central Sierra, including the Lake Tahoe Basin. The Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit features a link to the center's advisories on our main webpage, to assist those planning backcountry excursions.

Fuels reduction has been a hot topic in the basin following the destruction of 254 houses in the June 2007 Angora Fire. Most of the 3,000-plus acres that burned on the South Shore belong to the USFS. What is your philosophy when it comes to preventing a catastrophic fire?: Prevention, on the part of public and private landowners, is key and I will continue with the basin's focus on an aggressive hazardous fuels reduction program. Prevention carries with it a dual responsibility. I am very familiar with the idea of defensible space, but, for my own benefit as a prior landowner, prefer the term "survivable" space. I would hate to see a firefighter or any emergency responder die or become seriously injured in the course of protecting property that has, by the nature of its location, created an extreme vulnerability. For my own property, I did brush work that didn't require anyone to "defend" it. Rather, I created fire protection zones that, should a fire come through, the structure would likely survive or, if it didn't, I would know I did what I could and no lives would be lost. We can only operate within the scope of public lands (and public land interface) within the funding established for this purpose. Other property owners must heed the risks they're willing to take in managing what fuels exist in their immediate vicinity along with the building and landscaping materials they use in their structures.

What type of outdoor recreation activities do you like to partake in?: I do, and have done, many things on a seasonal basis. Typically, I take day hikes, camp, and generally like to explore the surrounding areas, both indoors (museums, lighthouses, historical sights) and outdoors (mountain peaks, lakes, rivers and streams). I also mountain bike, though am an admitted novice. In Montana, I regularly ice fished and cross country skied throughout the winter months and backpacked during the summer. Now, on many of my free weekends, my husband and I like to arrange visits with our children; son, Brady, in Klamath Falls, Ore., and daughter, Brenna, in San Francisco.