

Eldorado losing its forest supervisor

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – After less than two years on the job, Kathy Hardy is about to retire as forest supervisor of the Eldorado National Forest.

While the 605,000-acre forest does not include parts of the Lake Tahoe Basin, it once did. When the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit was created, the Eldorado lost the Lake Valley portion of its jurisdiction.

Years ago Hardy worked for LTBMU. And at that time she was a member of Soroptimist International South Lake Tahoe. She returned last week as a guest speaker to the group during a lunch at Harveys.



Kathy Hardy will be retiring this spring from the Eldorado National Forest.

Photo/Provided

Ecological restoration is one of the main focuses of her job. This includes dealing with timber stands and various issues that affect rivers and streams.

When the Forest Service was created, trees were thought of as

a crop. That's why it falls under the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The Eldorado includes four rivers, parts of two wilderness areas (Desolation is one), 888 lakes-ponds-reservoirs, 57 campgrounds, 700 miles of non-motorized trails, and 2,600 miles of roads. "Which is too many," Hardy said of the roads.

There are 155 National Forests and 20 National Grasslands in the country.

"They are managed for multiple uses. There is a lot of conflict with each other," Hardy said.

While recreation is often what people in Tahoe think of when being part of the forest, playing outdoors can have impacts on other goals of the Forest Service. This is because the resources of the forest also need protection – whether it's the plants or animals.

Ensuring the watersheds provide a continuous flow of clean water is another mandate of the Forest Service.

Fire has long been an issue within the Forest Service, with policy changing throughout the years. Now it's about managing the forest so the threat of a devastating fire is lessened. More recently letting some fires burn as they would do naturally is being allowed because research shows this is better for the ecosystem.

Of the 360 employees in the Eldorado about two-thirds are permanent employees, with the other third seasonal summer workers. Half of the workers are firefighters. They are deployed throughout the country as needed.

When Hardy started with the U.S. Forest Service in 1981 there were not many women. While she is the first woman to lead the Eldorado, of the 18 National Forests in California, 10 have a woman at the helm.

While budget cuts continue to impact Forest Service operations, she said the department anticipated sequestration by implementing 6 percent budget cuts at the start of the year.

But she also said she doesn't know how the cutbacks will completely be absorbed. It's possible some campgrounds won't open.

This summer Hardy plans to spend more of her time playing outdoors with her husband, Bruce Ungari, who has already retired. Camping, skiing, rafting and fishing are some of their favorite activities. A tip she told Soroptimist – check out the Big Meadows campground near Georgetown.

“It's just beautiful,” Hardy said, and her favorite in the Eldorado.