

No honeymoon period for LTBMU chief

By Kathryn Reed

Lake Tahoe is no ordinary forest. And Jeff Marsolais wouldn't have it any other way.

The 40-year-old is now at the helm of the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit. As forest supervisor he is responsible for managing the 191,000 acres that surround the lake itself. This encompasses about 80 percent of the land in the basin.

This is small by national forest standards. However, with its encompassing two states, being in the heart of one of the most regulated areas of the country, and the economic-environmental tug-of-war being a constant struggle, he has his work cut out for him. Plus, with the powers that be – at least on the South Shore – on the recreation bandwagon, that will impact the forest system.



Jeff Marsolais, Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit forest supervisor, is eager to tackle the issues ahead.
Photo/Provided

Recreation, according to Marsolais, is one of the key issues facing LTBMU.

“It impacts resources and infrastructure as a whole,” he told *Lake Tahoe News*. “It is one of the most densely used national forests in the nation.”

With 5.7 million visits a year, LTBMU is already overused.

“What does sustainable recreation mean? We need to have that dialogue,” Marsolais said.

Public lands can hold only so many people. Parking then becomes an issue at recreation sites.

“We need to look at ways to protect sensitive resources and provide access,” Marsolais said.

He said staff is working on a conceptual recreation plan for the South Shore.

Having been the assistant forest supervisor since 2011, Marsolais is intimately familiar with the issues concerning the area. He has worked on seven forests since the mid-1990s. Before that he was employed by the Bureau of Land Management. Had he not been chosen to replace Nancy Gibson, who retired in January, Marsolais said he was planning to stay in Tahoe – he’s that committed. (The permanent deputy director for LTBMU has not been named.)

Marsolais spent nine months last year on assignment with another forest, which he said has allowed him to bring a fresh perspective to local issues.

Immediate things Marsolais wants to cross off his to-do list include getting Heavenly Mountain Resort’s Epic Discovery

project going, finalizing the Forest Plan, and inserting himself into collaborative discussions about the basin whether they are about fire, cap and trade, or how to fund projects going forward now that the Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act money is gone.

Collaboration, he said, is critical to get things done. Marsolais was not here for the 2007 Angora Fire when collaboration seemed to be a foreign word to most of the powers that be. That devastating fire that reduced 254 houses to ash eventually brought people together to work on issues for the greater good instead of being obstructionists. That collaboration is getting stronger and something that Marsolais embraces.

Marsolais is also excited to have the science community in the basin.

“We have to listen to the science community even if it doesn’t support the beliefs we have in all cases,” Marsolais said.

He praised the local Forest Service staff for their knowledge – some of whom are the best in their respective fields.

Paying attention to sensitive species and forest health are at the top of his list of concerns.

“We need big strategies to protect the resources,” Marsolais said.

But it’s not all about work for Marsolais. He is not happy to just be sitting behind his desk at headquarters in South Lake Tahoe. He is an avid fisherman. Fly and ocean fishing are his passion. He refused to disclose where he specifically likes to go.

“I go back to the Inyo forest where I came from. There are secret haunts I like to visit,” Marsolais said. The trout he lands is the reason he goes back there year after year.

With his family he likes to go camping and hiking. Downhill and cross country skiing are other activities he enjoys, though doing so has been limited lately because of the conditions. At home, it's gardening that Marsolais enjoys. But he admits he wishes he had his grandmother's green thumb because she could grow anything.

For now he is tasked with ensuring the public lands are fertile for everyone – people, animals and flora.

“At the end of the day it is the responsibility of the forest supervisor to look broadly at the issues and concerns to determine where to be personally engaged in the decisions that can make a key difference,” Marsolais said.