

The 2008 National Forest Homeowners Convention. *(Report by Albert Pollmar)*

The Mission Inn in Riverside, California, site of this year's convention, is a National Historic Landmark. How fitting that seems in retrospect, given the issues cabin owners are now facing under the National Historic Preservation Act.

Meeting of the Cabin Fee Coalition. I arrived in Riverside Thursday afternoon, April 17th, in time to attend a pre-convention meeting of the Cabin Fee Coalition (also known as Coalition 2, C-2 for short). The Coalition consists of representatives from national, state and local cabin owner associations, who are working together to solve the related problems of unfair appraisals and sky-high fees. Members not physically present participated via conference call.

In late March, NFH Vice President (now President) Geoff Anderson and board member Pete Bailey (representing Coalition 2) traveled to Washington, DC to join NFH Washington Representative Aubrey King in meetings with USDA Under Secretary Mark Rey, who oversees the Forest Service, Director of Lands Greg Smith and other officials. The purpose of their trip was two-fold: First, to acquire specific, detailed information on the current round of appraisals, the first to be undertaken since passage of the Cabin User Fee Fairness Act of 2000 (CUFFA). Second, to impress upon Secretary Rey and others how serious we believe the problems with CUFFA to be and how determined we are that a fair and lasting solution be found.

Under Secretary Mark Rey understands that there are serious problems with CUFFA. He was scheduled to arrive in Riverside Saturday afternoon, in time to receive an award from NFH later that evening. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss recent events involving the Secretary, who had hoped to find an administrative solution to the appraisal/fee problem. Chuck Cushman, National Director of the American Land Rights Association, called from his home in Battle Ground (WA) and described what he considers to be the most likely consequence of failure: Cultural Genocide in the Forests! (That is, the demise of the Recreation Residence Program.)

Call-to-Action. It appears less and less likely that an administrative solution will be found, given the wording of CUFFA, which severely limits discretion. The Forest Service maintains, credibly I think, that they have little room in which to maneuver. We have now resolved to take our case to Congress. For that effort to succeed, we need elected representatives who will champion our cause in both the House and Senate.

The recent "Call-to-Action" letter, which most of you have received, is the opening volley in this campaign. It was sent to all cabin owners nationwide at a cost of roughly \$16,500. These are your dues and mine, working for our common benefit. Now it's up to us to follow through.

Annual Business Meeting. Outgoing President Roy Glauthier announced that NFH has 5,600 members, an increase from 4,800 when he assumed office six years ago but short of what he had hoped for. NFH is in good financial health, according to Treasurer Bob Warnock, with a reserve of roughly \$250,000.

The results of the recent mail-in election were announced: NFH Vice President Geoff Anderson was elected President. At the board meeting on Sunday, NFH Secretary Dick Burrows of Teanaway, Washington was elected Vice President, replacing Geoff in that position. Ted Filer, Washington Forest Homeowners' former treasurer, was reelected to the NFH board of directors with the highest vote total of any of the board candidates. (Congratulations to you all!)

CUFFA's Early Results. This was the main event on Saturday, the Forest Service versus the Cabin Owners. Fortunately, the combatants were unfailingly polite. Pete Bailey, NFH board member and spokesman for the Cabin Fee Coalition, stated the case for the cabin owners. He began his power point presentation with a simple question: Do we still have a problem? Yes we do, a big one! Pete went on to describe the flawed language in CUFFA, which prohibits appraisers from considering our permits' restrictions, and its real life consequences: for example, the quadrupling of permit fees at Turpin Meadows (WY) from \$4,900 to \$21,750. NFH Executive Director Mary Clarke Ver Hoef followed Pete, placing the issues in their historic context. Then it was Chief Appraiser Ted Freeman's turn. Not one to mince words, he rattled off a series of alarming statistics. The net result is that if these appraisals stand, cabin owners will be facing an average increase in their fee of between 100 and 300 percent.

These are average results. Some cabin owners will be hit much harder than others. When the Pettit Lake (ID) appraisal is released, it should give us a clear indication of how bad things can get. Closer to home, Lake Wenatchee is scheduled for reappraisal next year, as is White River.

The consensus of Coalition members, one echoed at the convention itself, is that we need to 1) seek a one-year moratorium on fee increases to save the most vulnerable cabins in places like Lake Wenatchee, and 2) work with Congress to pass corrective legislation. We must solve the fee determination problem once and for all or prepare ourselves for the inevitable demise of the Recreation Residence Program. It cannot endure this continuing stress and uncertainty.

Good Times. Conventions, even for beleaguered cabin owners, have their brighter moments. During my stay at the Mission Inn, I enjoyed the frequent company of Ken Leader and his dear friend and fellow adventurer Rena Irwin. We dined together, swapped stories, and did a bit of brainstorming on how to make WRRRA a more reliable partner of National Forest Homeowners. We've got some work to do in that regard. The proportion of WRRRA members who are also NFH members is low. We need to change that. Our cabins are at risk, just like everyone else's.

The banquet held Saturday evening was an especially pleasant occasion. Under Secretary Mark Rey was there to receive the NFH Outstanding National Service Award. His acceptance speech was informative and witty. He remains committed, he said, to working with the cabin owners through the end of the Bush administration. That was welcome news to most of those present. Secretary Rey went on to offer some amusing political commentary: Quoting Maureen Dowd, he observed that the Democratic race for the White House (Barack versus Hillary) is a contest of historic guilts. If there is no clear winner before the convention, the Democrats may end up searching for a smoke-filled room in a mandatory smoke-free environment. Finally, should the presidential race boil down to Obama versus McCain, it will be a competition between hope and experience, kind of like a second marriage.

The Changing of the Guard. I'll remember this convention for three things in particular: First, the beauty of its setting. The Mission Inn is an enchanting venue, with its classic Spanish architecture and tropical ambience. Second, the commitment of the NFH board of directors to resolving the appraisal/fee crisis, whatever it takes. And third, the retirement of Roy Glauthier as President of National Forest Homeowners.

Roy has been at the center of every NFH convention I've attended, always comporting himself with grace and dignity and just the right sense of humor. He has been an extraordinary leader and I wish him well.