

**CONCLUSION OF CREATING THE GATEWAY TRAIL
The Forest Service and****the conservationist**

Part five of five

By Kathy Medina

In June of 2009, Drew Braugh identified a possible funding source for the Gateway Trail: proposals for federal Recreational Trails Program Grants were due by September 30th. Joe Wirth arranged for Braugh to receive a modest stipend from the Trail Association to write the grant.

"Joe was the hero," Priscila Franco said, drawing attention away from her own substantial efforts to make the Gateway Trail a reality.

With just three months to learn everything he could about trail construction, Braugh began contacting those knowledgeable in the region.

Two people who were instrumental in getting Braugh up to speed were Anna Laxague (pronounced Loc-sog) in Hood River, Oregon, who is the Pacific Northwest Regional Director for IMBA; and Brian Sindt, Program Officer for Livable Communities for the McConnell Foundation in Redding.

Anna Laxague had a Mount Shasta connection. She had graduated from Mount Shasta High School. An avid mountain biker, she knew the area's potential. Anna also knew the Recreational Trails Program would be looking for her support in the grant application. With Anna's guidance, Braugh learned everything that IMBA publications like "Trail Solutions" could teach him about sustainable trail construction.

Brian Sindt, who has planned and supervised the building of a hundred miles of trails in Redding over the last 15 years, came to Mount Shasta to walk the site with Braugh and Raley. Sindt understood the trail requirements for flow and slope, and, with GIS data from the Forest Service, mapped the proposed trail.

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Meanwhile, back at the Forest Service, Ranger Priscila Franco had engaged the bureaucratic gears and was moving toward making the trail a reality. In October of 2009 she listed the trail on the Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions, notified relevant landowners, and advertised for public comment. On Febru-

ary 4, 2010, she signed a Decision approving the Gateway Trail as a Categorical Exclusion, which meant the project would not have a significant effect on the environment. She felt confident in doing so, based on the extensive Environmental Assessment of the trail site already completed in 2002 for the Mountain Thin Project.

However, just a few weeks earlier, Denise Boggs, founder of an organization called the Conservation Congress, had officially notified Sharon Heywood, Forest Supervisor for the Shasta-Trinity National Forest, that she would litigate any project that, in her opinion, failed to protect the northern spotted owl.

Perhaps every public entity has its watchdog. For the Shasta-Trinity National Forest, that person is Denise Boggs, a resident of Montana and sole employee of the Conservation Congress, a \$100,000 a year organization she founded in 2004 to represent "the voice of the natural world."

Boggs has an impressive list of environmental credentials. She previously directed the Glen Canyon Institute in Utah and was the founding director of the Utah Environmental Congress. Boggs created the Conservation Congress in California specifically to watch over the Shasta-Trinity National Forest.

Boggs previously lived in California and has a special affinity for the Shasta-T, as she calls it. "The forests in Northern California don't belong to just the people who live near them. National forests are federal public lands belonging to all Americans and we all should have a say in their management," she said.

Boggs believes the Shasta-T receives less public scrutiny than other National Forests. A tireless reviewer of public actions entered into by the Shasta Trinity, Boggs knows how to gain standing on a proposed action; if she doesn't comment, she can't appeal and if she doesn't appeal, she can't litigate. She routinely cites the National Environmental Policy Act to challenge the Forest Service and will go to court to stop projects if she believes the project may impact the northern spotted owl or its critical habitat.

Boggs has a record of success in the courts. Twice she has prevailed in contests with the Shasta Trinity National Forest and has two actions pending against them at this writing. In Utah, she won three lawsuits over what she considered a lack of forest management. Presently, she is contesting a timber sale and fuels reduction project that Six Rivers National Forest in Trinity County has had in the pipeline since July of 2007.

Sharon Heywood, Forest Supervisor for the Shasta Trinity National Forest, took Denise Boggs' threat of a lawsuit seriously. Working on a fixed public budget with 2.1 million acres under her purview, Heywood could not afford to go to court over the proposed Gateway Trail. At Supervisor Heywood's direction, Ranger Franco rescinded her Decision approving the Gateway Trail. To continue their support of the Gateway Trail Project, the local unit of the Forest Service would need to perform a complete Environmental Assessment.

By June of 2010 the State Department of Parks and Recreation had awarded the Trail Association the funds to construct the Gateway Trail; Drew Braugh and Shawn Raley had a promise of \$100,000 but less than a year to satisfy the environmental requirements of the grant.

"It was nerve-wracking," Drew Braugh recalled. "We hoped that we would have an official decision approving the trail in hand in time to accept the funding and build the trail."

Ranger Franco brought together an interdisciplinary team of 12 experts on her staff and asked them to complete the Environmental Assessment.

With 400,000 acres of forest to manage and 1,000 miles of trails to maintain, as well as deadlines for required government studies, surveys and annual counts, "their plates were all ready full, so this was above and beyond," Franco explained.

Franco's team of Forest Service specialists, especially Cindy Diaz and Emelia Barnham who coordinated the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) process, Recreation Manager Kai Allen, Biologist Debbie Derby,

and Hydrologist Steve Bachman, worked countless hours over and above their detailed and demanding work schedules to see the environmental analysis and evaluation of the trail site through.

The Environmental Assessment was completed and published nearly a year after her initial decision had been rescinded in March of 2010. On January 28, 2011, Ranger Franco published the final Decision Notice, a Finding of No Significant Impact, and approved the Gateway Trail.

Then came the 45 day appeal waiting period. By then, many community members were heavily invested in the trail. They all held their breath; but no one contested the project. At last the state could be notified that all conditions had been met.

The Trail Association contracted with professional trail builder Randy Martin of Trailscape of Auburn, California, to build the trail. After three years of effort, in September of 2011, trail construction began and took about two months to complete.

Was it worth it? According to John Schuyler, the trail budget was small compared to the value added to the forest and community, even with the additional investment of Forest Service staff time.

Recreation Director Kai Allen, who came from Colorado and is a mountain biker himself, is philosophical about the process. "Everything done on public lands involves public involvement; everyone gets to have a say, so it takes time and process. Some people say it slows things down or makes things difficult but this is the process we have. It's messy, hard, and time consuming; but it is a core value and our heritage in a democracy."

For Debbie Derby, Forest Service biologist, who has ridden the Tunnel Trails for 20 years, the extra effort was a chance to give back to the community.

Hupp and Schuyler, both retired rangers, understand how hard it is for the Forest Service to be responsive to evolving recreational demands on National Forest lands. "The Forest Service is used to providing trails to destinations but the forest-urban

interface is a hard one for them. It takes them a long time to warm up to and embrace a new use like Mountain Biking, even 30 years after the fact," Schuyler said. "The irony is that if a new generation of users doesn't get out into the wilderness, they won't value the experience. They won't fight to preserve it."

In 2001, journalist Steve Casimiro who calls Mount Shasta, "the Bay Area's Everest," spent a weekend following a couple of mountain bikers around the area. His assessment: "the Shasta region doesn't have an extensive town-based trail network. Nevertheless, when I got my hands on a Siskiyou County cycling map, I could see Shasta's potential: there are literally hundreds of miles of trails in the area."

The Trail Association intends to translate the potential into reality. The Association has just received a new \$30,000 planning grant from the Shasta Regional Community Foundation to develop a plan for a larger network of mountain biking trails with Drew Braugh again leading the effort. Braugh and the Trail Association will employ an IMBA contractor to assist them in developing a regional plan for mountain biking.

Braugh is working hard to the raise additional funds to translate the new plan into reality. His goal is to build 100 miles of trails in the next 10 years.

"If you have an idea for the community," Shawn Raley believes, "you should try to make it happen because things won't just happen on their own. For me, Gateway means the gateway to partnerships for more projects like this to happen on the mountain."

• *Kathy Medina (Polkinghorn) is a local writer, retired from a career in history at the University of California. She and her husband, Bob Polkinghorn, have lived in Mount Shasta since 2008. Mt. Shasta Area Newspapers thanks Kathy for contributing her excellent "Creating the Gateway Trail" series of articles for publication in the Mount Shasta Herald, Weed Press, and Dunsmuir News.*