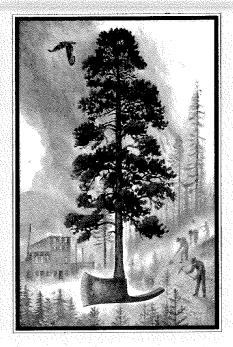


The Pulaski Project

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News Coverage of the 1910 Fire & Pulaski Project

Compiled by Jim See Wallace, Idaho 2012

Dedication

This collection is dedicated to the following:

Edward C. Pulaski

The hero of the Great Fire of 1910

Carl Ritchie

The U. S. Forest Service archaeologist who inspired the Pulaski Project

Grady Myer

The designer who created interpretative signs that tell the story

Forward

In the late 1980s, a friend of mine, Mike Green, led me on a hike on the US Forest Service trail entitled 'West Fork of Placer Creek Trail #38.' The trail followed the creek up the canyon to a 'secret' side trail that led to an abandoned mine portal. It was there that Mike told me about the story of Ed Pulaski.

Steven Pyne in Year of the Fires described the mine portal in the following manner: "It may be the most obscure site on the National Register of Historic Places. Rockfall and wild growth clog the entry. . . It has the feel of some mythical grotto, a sepulcher, an oracle, the source of a sacred spring like Lourdes. The Nicholson mineshaft is, in truth, all these, for here, on the 20th of August, 1910 flames burned through conifer stands like prairie grass and came over the ridges, as one survivor recalled, with the sound of a thousand trains rushing over a thousand steel trestles. One ranger said simply, "The mountains roared."

Over the years, the trail was not maintained and I was concerned that a significant historical site may be lost.

At the time, the bicycle trail, "The Route of the Hiawatha" was nearing completion. The efforts of a local citizens group who had been instrumental in saving the Taft Tunnel and the railway right of way for public use inspired me. If they could save the rail route, I could work to save this hiking trail.

I had also made contact with Carl Ritchie, archaeologist with the Forest Service. Carl had shown me old historic pictures of the 1910 fire stored at the Silverton office of the Forest Service. Carl had authored a Forest Service Cultural Resource Inventory entitled "Pulaski, Two Days in August, 1910" that located the tunnel site on the West Fork of Placer Creek trail.

In 2002, I talked to Robin Stanley about the idea of saving the trail and tunnel site. Robin helped me to organize a local citizens group of 'movers and shakers' to do just that. Thus the Pulaski Project was born.

I knew from the example of the Hiawatha group that publicity was a key factor in their success. Therefore, with the assistance of Ron Roizen, our executive director and 'word smith' we endeavored to garner as many news articles as we could by producing press releases and publicity activities that would highlight the 1910 Fire, the Pulaski story and the progress of the trail development.

The collection that follows documents the fruits of our efforts.

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Pulaski Project

A Division of the Greater Wallace Community Development Corporation
Box 469, Wallace, ID 83873
Phone: 208-556-1707 Fax: 208-556-1707



The Vision

The Pulaski Project endeavors to:

Educate the public about wildfires, fire fighting and fire prevention Educate the public about forest management theories and practices Recognize wildfire fighters Develop a recreational opportunity

The Mission

The Pulaski Project intends to generate support for the following developments:

Creating an interpretive trail to the Pulaski Tunnel

Creating a tribute to wildfire fighters, particularly the 1910 fire victims

Facilitate a public discussion of forest management perspectives to promote healthy forests Building and operating the Pulaski Wildfire Education Center

Board of Directors:

James See, President; Robin Stanley, Vice President; Dennis O'Brien, Secretary/Treasurer; Ron Roizen, Executive Director

Directors: Dale Lavigne, Jon Cantamessa, Karen Roetter, Dick Caron, John Amonson, Fred Traxler Past Directors: Harry Magnuson, Dan Whiting, John Martin, Mike Alldredge

Funding

The Pulaski Project in concert with the U.S. Forest Service has been awarded twelve grants totaling in excess of \$567,000 for the trail reconstruction and development. Grants have been obtained from: a Congressional Appropriation sponsored by Senator Larry Craig, Idaho Humanities Council, Resource Advisory Council to USFS, U. S. Forest Service Centennial Grant, Idaho Community Foundation, Idaho Department of Parks & Recreation, Inland Northwest Community Foundation and Shoshone County Title III funds.

Trail Project Description

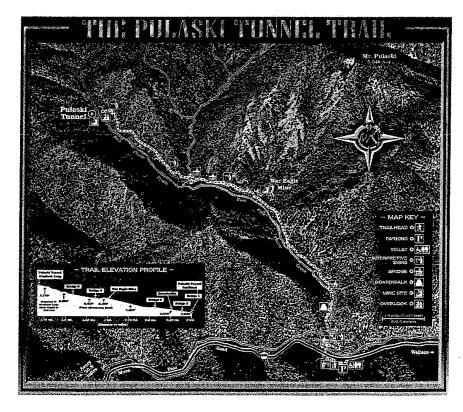
The Pulaski Tunnel Trail offers both the beauty and peace of a cool walk in a forested canyon by a cascading creek and an adventure into the past. The trail begins at a well-marked trailhead about a half-mile south of Wallace, soon after King Street leaves Wallace's city limits. The trail's two-mile course ultimately brings hikers to a spot across the creek from the historic Pulaski Tunnel, the abandoned mine where "Big Ed" Pulaski saved all but six of his 45-man firefighting crew in the Great Fire of 1910. The site's peaceful and idyllic setting belies the terrible events that etched this place into history almost a hundred years ago.

Until 2003, the trail was lost in overgrowth and erosion. The only signs of its former existence were two historical markers placed across the road from what is now the trailhead. A concerned citizens group organized to save the trail in October of 2002. Since 2003 the trail has been given new life. It has been cleared, graded, and where necessary, strengthened by durable engineering. It has also been equipped with twelve large-format porcelain interpretive signs and a number of bridges where the trail crosses the creek.

During the spring and summer of 2010, a trailhead sign was erected and development of the destination took place. At the overlook to the mine portal, a rock wall with three additional signs and a plaque and a pole fence was installed. The mine portal was recreated to represent the look of the mine just after the 1910 fire based on historical photographs. Other trail improvements are also completed.

Both the trail and the mine are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Pulaski displayed considerable heroism in leading his crew to the haven of the mine and keeping them inside through the night. Eventually, everyone lost consciousness from the fire's smoke and fumes. Within the firefighting community, Pulaski is also remembered for refining the two-bladed tool that bears his name.

The interpretive aspect of the trail retells this history and also provides an historical foundation for the search for a new policy consensus for our national forests. The trail also honors the courage, dedication, and self-sacrifice of firefighters past, present, and future.



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The Big Blow Up

"Not for more than thirty years, until its founding generation had passed from the scene, would the trauma of the 1910 fires begin to heal and would the nation's leading agency for administering wildlands consider fire as anything but a hostile force to be fought to the death."

- From Year of the Fires by Stephen J. Pyne, 2001.

The Man at The Center of the Big Blowup



of the fires of 1910 was Ed Pulaski

(left), who led a band of firefighters

to safety in a mine tunnel during

what was known as the Big

Blowup. Although considered a

hero, he was modest about his role

and refused to speak or write

Pyne tells it in *Year of the Fires*, Pulaski described the event only once, and that was in entering an *American Forests* magazine (then known as American Forestry) essay contest. Friends urged him to enter; the \$500 first prize could help defray outstanding medical costs. Pulaski, who later created the tool that bears his name, never wrote about his experiences again. He retired in 1930 and died a year later.

MY MOST EXCITING EXPERIENCE AS A FOREST RANGER — BY E.C. PULASKI

Winner 1st Prize, Ranger Story Contest, Reprinted from

American Forestry Magazine August 1923

During the summer of 1910 forest fires were everywhere in the Couer d'Alene Mountains of northern Idaho. For weeks there had been no rain and the woods were drier than I had ever seen them. The intense heat of the sun, combined witah strong winds which sprang up during the day, served to scatter the fires in all directions. Crews of several hundred men were working twenty-four hours a day throughout the mountains, endeavoring to hold back the fires.

The Supervisor of the Couer d'Alene National Forest, whose headquarters were in Wallace, Idaho, had detailed me to go from one fire camp to another to direct the men in the battle against the flames, and to see that the packers properly distributed supplies. Although we worked day and night and did everything that could be done to control the fires, little headway was made because of the dryness of the forest and those strong winds.

On August 20 a terrific hurricane broke over the mountains. It picked up the fires and carried them for miles. The wind was so strong that it almost lifted men out of their saddles, and the canyons seemed to act as chimneys, through which the wind and fires swept with the roar of a thousand freight trains. The smoke and heat became so in-

The infamous

mine tunnel where

Ed Pulaski led

tense that it was difficult to breathe. The men who were packing in supplies refused to go through to their destinations, dumped their loads, and fled back to Wallace. Thousands of dollars' worth of blankets and supplies were thus lost.

That afternoon the wind swept the mountains in circles and joined the fires. The whole world seemed to us men back in those mountains to be aflame. Many thought that it really was the end of the world. Under such conditions, it would have been worse than foolhardy to attempt to fight the fires. It was a case of saving our lives. I got on my horse and went where I could, gathering men. Most of them were unfamiliar with the country, and I knew that if they ever got out they would have to be led out; but those that I got together were so panicstricken it was very difficult to make them understand what I wanted them to do. Added to that, it had become very dark, although it was but little after midday.

I finally collected forty-five men. My voice was almost gone from trying to call above the noise of the fire and wind, but I finally succeeded in making them understand that if they would seize blankets from the camp stocks and do just as I told them, there was a chance of our saving our lives; otherwise they would be burned to death. Trees were falling all about us under the strain of the fires and heavy winds and it was almost impossible to see through the smoky darkness. Had it not been for my familiarity with the mountain trails, we would never have come out alive, for we were completely surrounded by raging, whipping fire.

My one hope was to reach an old mine tunnel which I knew to be not far from us. We raced for it. On the way one man was killed by a falling tree. We reached the mine just in time, for we were hardly in when the fire swept over our trail. I ordered the men to lie face down upon the ground of the tunnel and not dare to sit up unless they

wanted to suffocate, for the tunnel was filling with fire gas and smoke. One man tried to make a rush outside, which would have meant certain death. I drew my revolver and said.

"The first man who tries to leave this tunnel I will shoot."

I did not have to use my gun.

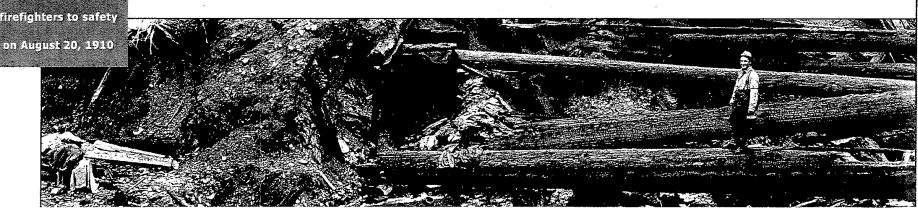
Two horses were in the tunnel with us. The horse I was riding I had given to an old man who could not keep up with us in the race to the tunnel. I often wonder what happened to the bear that came down that fiery trail with us and insisted on getting in our way. But at the time I gave no thought to bear or horses. Outside the tunnel the canyon was a raging furnace. The mine timbers caught fire, so I stood at the entrance and hung wet blankets over the opening, trying to keep the flames back by filling my hat with water, which fortunately was in the mine, and throwing it on the burning timbers.

The men were in a panic of fear, some crying, some praying. Many of them soon became unconscious from the terrible heat, smoke and fire gas. The wet blankets actually caught fire and I had to replace them with others soaked in water. But I, too, finally sank down unconscious. I do not know how long I was in this condition, but it must have been for hours. I remember hearing a man say, "come outside boys, the boss is dead." I replied, "Like hell he is." I raised myself up and felt fresh air circulating through the mine. The men were becoming conscious. It was 5 o'clock in the morning.

We tried to stand up, but our legs refused to hold us; so we dragged ourselves outside to the creek to ease our parched throats and lips. Our disappointment was terrible when we found the stream filled with ashes and the water too warm to drink. We counted our number. Five were missing. Some of the men went back and tried to awaken them, but they were dead. As the air outside became clearer, we gained strength, and finally were able to stagger to our feet and start toward Wallace. We had to make our way over burning logs and through smoking debris. When walking failed us, we crawled on hands and knees.

How we got down I hardly know. We were in a terrible condition, all of us hurt or burned. I was blind and my hands were burned from trying to keep the fire out of the mine. Our shoes were burned off our feet and our clothing was in parched rags. We were covered with mud and ashes. Some time during the morning a rescue party met us. These men had had a hard time themselves and were in a very poor condition to help us. Later, as we dragged our way down through Placer Creek, we were met by some women from Wallace. They had hot coffee and whiskey, and although we appreciated the kindness of those brave women, we could take nothing

We finally reached Wallace and were put in the different hospitals. Those who had died were later brought out on pack-horses. Part of Wallace had burned in that same fire, so when my injuries were dressed I insisted upon going to my home to make sure that my wife and little daughter were all right. I got a man to lead me, for the world was black to my eyes; but when I found my home and family safe, they sent me back to the hospital, where I stayed for nearly two months with blindness and pneumonia. My experience left me with poor eyes, weak lungs, and throat; but, thank God, I am not now blind. AF



AMERICAN FORESTS

135 Years of Conservation Leadership and Action

AMERICAN FORESTS, founded in 1875, has long been a leader in shaping federal conservation policy, from the creation of the National Forest and Park Systems to the Civilian Conservation Corps. Our Trail Riders of the Wilderness program pioneered ecotourism. We are the home of the National Register of Big Trees, now in its 70th year.

We are a leading voice for urban trees, ecosystems and green infrastructure, and our education programs and historic trees are used by teachers from elementary grades through high school. Since our first Global ReLeaf project 20 years ago, we have planted over 30 million trees in 629 projects, and become a world leader in tree planting for ecosystem restoration. We have planted 6.5 million trees to restore sites intensely burned by wildfire.

As wildland fire policy evolves, American Forests recommends open collaboration with a broad range of interest groups and organizations, commitment to monitoring and adaptive management, and promoting a locallybased restoration economy. We were a strong proponent for the recently passed FLAME Act to establish a federal emergency fund for the suppression of large and costly wildfires that often have devastating impacts on forests and communities.

Many wildfires today burn hot enough to destroy seeds and nutrients and compromise natural regeneration.

Planting trees is one part of a complicated – but critically important – strategy to restore healthy, thriving forests.

Thanks to Global ReLeaf, where every \$1 donated plants a tree, there is an easy and effective way for you to play a key role in the work to restore our forests.



USDA Forest Service matche many Global ReLeaf donations tree-for-tree.



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100	07-07-08	A Story, indeed: Our view: Silver Valley's history has much to offer others	Spokesman Review		127
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126	05-05-10	Exhibit on 1910 Fire now open – two pictures and caption	Shoshone News Press	Nick Rotunno	158
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