

# The big blowup

By Elers Koch

Set an airplane course from Clark Fork, Idaho, south 25 degrees east, approximately along the axis of the Bitterroot Range, and fly on this course 160 miles to Moose Creek on the Selway River.

On 70 percent of this flight you would be flying over the 1910 burn, with the burned area extending an average of 25 miles on either side of the line. Even then you would have seen only three-quarters of the burned area. You would have to go through the South Fork and the North Fork of the Flathead, and westerly across the Kootenai and Kaniksu forests to see the rest of the fire-swept area.

Three million acres of forest burned, most of it in two terrifying days, Aug. 20 and 21, 1910.

In 1910, the territory now in the Coeur d'Alene and St. Joe Forests was under the direction of Supervisor W.G. Weigle, with headquarters at Wallace. Owing to proximity to settlements and the large number of fire crews out at the time of the big blowup, the Coeur d'Alene (National Forest) suffered more in loss of life and property than any other forest.

Through May, June and the first half of July, numerous fires were

**Editor's note:** The U.S. Forest Service is 100 years old this year, and to help celebrate its centennial, you'll find in the Handle Extra throughout 2005 a series of reminiscences by people who joined the agency in its youth and served it and the people of the United States through its early years. The reminiscences were compiled by Handle Extra correspondent Carl Gidlund, a retired smokejumper and former public relations officer for the Idaho Panhandle National Forests.

Today's installment is by Elers Koch, a native of Bozeman who was a graduate of the Yale School of Forestry. He worked for the Forest Service from 1903 (when it was under the Department of the Interior) until his retirement in 1943 as supervisor of the Lolo National Forest in Missoula. He assembled accounts of the 1910 fires in 1942.

William G. Weigle was supervisor of the Coeur d'Alene National Forest in 1910. Shortly after the disastrous fires, he transferred to Alaska.

The account is from an undated mimeographed brochure titled "When the Mountains Roared. Stories of the 1910 Fire," published by the Idaho Panhandle National Forests.



Photo courtesy of US Forest Service

A trail crew stands where they were assigned to open trails through the massive deadfall left by the 1910 fires that swept across the West.

Continued: **Blowup/14**

## Blowup

Continued from 9

started from lightning, campers and two railroads that traversed the forest. Most of these were put under control. Outside the forest, the Pine Creek Fire to the west, burned all through the latter part of July and was a continued threat.

On July 23, a severe electric storm passed over and set numerous fires. These were manned as rapidly as possible, but with new fires starting daily and high winds that threw brands a great distance, conditions got

steadily worse. On Aug. 13, even though the nearest fire was six miles from Wallace, numerous pieces of burning bark as large as man's hand fell in the streets, setting awnings on fire in three different cases. By this time there were 1,800 men fighting fire on the Coeur d'Alene besides two companies of soldiers.

With Pine Creek 10 or 12 miles west of the city afire all through the latter part of July and the first of August, and with numerous fires to the south, just across the St. Joe divide, the people of Wallace were badly worried. On Aug. 14, a newspaper reporter stated that all insurance men had

*On July 23, a severe electric storm passed over and set numerous fires.*

all their clerks busy writing fire insurance policies but were not refusing any business.

On Aug. 20, a high wind arose about noon. All existing fires flared up and new ones were started. Great thunderheads showed to the south and west as the fires rushed to uncontrollable proportions. It was obvious that a

holocaust was impending.

Since the greatest danger to Wallace was from fire coming down Placer Creek, Supervisor Weigle took a saddlehorse and started up the creek to reconnoiter. He was caught in the rush of the fire and had to abandon the horse and take refuge in a mine tunnel. He did not succeed in getting back to Wallace until 10:30 that night, with his eyebrows and clothes scorched from his close encounter with the flames.

With the adjacent hillsides all ablaze, the fire broke into town at 9:15 Saturday night. The whole eastern part of the city burned,

and before the flames were under control by the Fire Department, approximately 100 buildings were burned, with an estimated loss of \$1 million. Two lives were lost in the fire.

A relief train on the Northern Pacific started from Wallace about 10 p.m., loaded with women and children. They picked up many more refugees at Mullan and Saltse and arrived in Missoula Sunday morning.

All day Sunday new reports of terrible loss of life came in, as the scorched and burned survivors of various firefighting crews stumbled wearily into town with tales of terror and disaster.

# Region

IDAHO EDITION

## Trail to mine honors Pulaski

Ranger a hero of huge 1910 blaze; site honors wildland firefighters

By James Hagengruber  
 Staff writer

WALLACE, Idaho — Ranger Ed Pulaski, known to be a gruff, no-nonsense woodsman, would have probably felt uneasy at Saturday's ceremony naming a trail in his honor.

Speeches were read recounting his heroic deeds. Top dignitaries described him in mythical terms. White-gloved honor guards and a bagpiper were on hand at the mouth of the West Fork of Placer Creek.

Near the very same spot on the same day 95 Augusts ago, Pulaski and his men were running for their lives from a firestorm that unleashed as much energy every two minutes as the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima. The "Big Blowup" of 1910 killed at least 85 people, destroyed entire towns and burned 3 million acres along the Montana-Idaho border.

The event became the 9/11 of wildland firefighting, prompting the young U.S. Forest Service to declare total war on wildfires for the better part of the next century. On Saturday, the anniversary of the blowup, a new two-mile trail was dedicated that leads to the remnants of the mine shaft where Pulaski is



Rene McCormick of the U.S. Forest Service Honor Guard, holding a pulaski tool, stands guard at the Pulaski Trail dedication.

credited for saving 39 of his 45 firefighters from the flames. "History was made here," said U.S. Sen. Larry Craig, R-Idaho, who helped secure \$300,000 from Congress to pay for the

trail. Another \$147,000 in private funds was raised for the trail to the Nicholson Adit.

Moments after Pulaski and his crew reached the narrow, abandoned mine shaft, fire swept over the creek valley. The tunnel filled with gas and smoke. Some men panicked and cried, and others prayed, according to Pulaski's 1923 account of the fire, which was about the only time he ever publicly described the event. One of the firefighters tried to flee, prompting Pulaski to pull his government-issued revolver and say, "The next man who tries to leave this tunnel I will shoot."

Inside the mine, timbers caught fire. Pulaski and the crew passed out, waking hours later, burned and suffering from lung damage. Pulaski's men actually thought he was dead, with one firefighter remarking, "Come on outside boys, the boss is dead." Pulaski famously replied, "Like hell he is."

The trail to the mine starts about a half-mile south of Wallace on Moon Pass Road. Construction won't be completed until early October, but leaders of the Pulaski Project said they wanted to hold the dedication on the anniversary of the fire. A narrow, steep path had previously led to the site, but the path crossed private land and dangerous talus slopes, and the Forest Service stopped maintaining it about five years ago.

The new trail is safer, flatter and follows the bottom of the

Continued: Pulaski/B2

### Pulaski: Stump from fire included

Continued from B1

creek valley, said Jack Dorrell, the Forest Service employee who helped design the new route. "It's going to be a nice trail, a pretty walking trail," he said.

The Pulaski Trail also includes interpretive signs. The mine shaft where Pulaski and his men took refuge is now blocked with steel bars for safety reasons, but portions of the route pass trees that were charred in the fire.

The dedication ceremony featured a massive, burned cedar stump from the 1910 fire. A green ribbon circling the stump was cut with a holy relic of wildland firefighting: Pulaski's own pulaski tool. The combination ax and hoe invented by Pulaski is the main tool of thousands of wildland firefighters today. The sight of the weathered tool — still razor sharp — prompted some gasps in the crowd of at least 125 people. After

the ceremony, Forest Service officials posed for photos with Pulaski's pulaski.

During the ceremony, members of the Forest Service honor guard carried shiny chrome-covered pulaskis with military-like precision and reverence. One such tool was presented at the event to Jim See, the Mullan High School guidance counselor who spearheaded the three-year effort to secure funds and build an interpretive trail to the site.

The trail is meant to honor the firefighters killed in 1910 and ensure the events of the day do not fade into history, See said. "We honor them with this trail," he said. "We honor all wildland firefighters past, present and future with this trail."

The trail is central to the history of the Forest Service, which was only five years old when the fires took place, said U.S. Department of Agriculture Undersecretary Mark Rey.

"The 1910 fires gave the new agency a defining purpose: To demonstrate that destructive wildfire could be controlled and prevented," Rey said at the dedication ceremony. "In hindsight, perhaps based on what we know now, they performed that particular task a bit too well. But upon that single achievement rests the whole practice and the entire science of sustained forest management, and that we must never forget."

Until the Forest Service could demonstrate that fires could be controlled, the notion of replanting trees on charred land was viewed as a "fool's errand" and not worth a dime of tax dollars, Rey added. Only recently has the federal government begun rethinking its ways. Today, the Forest Service is struggling to find a way to restore fire to the West's overly thick forests while trying to prevent fires with the same force as those of 1910.

"We will be judged and remembered on the basis of whether, during the remainder of our watch, we meet this challenge," Rey said.



Arthur Fay 1910. Photo courtesy of Historic Wallace preservation society.

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## USFS dedicates Pulaski Tunnel Trail

Forty-six men survived 'The Big Blowup' in 1910 by staying in Nicholson Mine

By ERIKA KIRSCH  
Staff writer

WALLACE — It was a fitting tribute.

On the centennial anniversary of the United States Forest Service and 95 years to the day after the worst forest fire in American history, the Pulaski Tunnel Trail was officially dedicated Saturday.

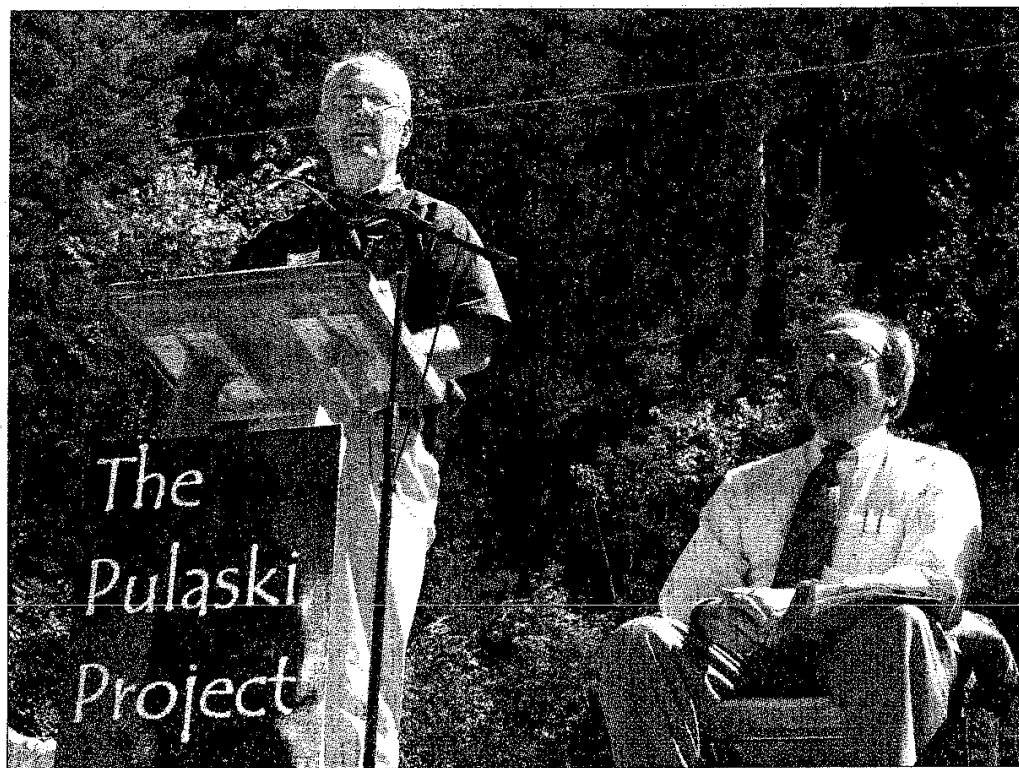
Several community and family members and dignitaries came out for the ceremony honoring the man, USFS Ranger Edward Pulaski, who saved the lives of 39 men during "The Big Blowup" of 1910 in the forested lands blanketing the area between Wallace and Avery. The firestorm trapped 1,800 men. The devastating fire forever changed the lives of the people in the Inland Northwest. The firestorm that swept through the land chased Pulaski and the 45 men he could corral into an old, abandoned mine, the Nicholson Mine south of Wallace.

The fire traveled at 60 miles per hour and burned an estimated 9 billion board feet of timber across 3 million acres of land.

The men stayed in the mine with the threat of being shot by Pulaski if any man attempted to leave. Pulaski stayed at the entrance of the mine attempting to keep the approaching fire at bay. Six of the 45 men perished in the mine, the survivors suffered burns.

Pulaski and his men were honored Saturday afternoon two miles from the mine where they spent the night on Aug. 20, 1905. Several dignitaries came out for the event to honor the men who fell and the men who made it home. U.S. Sen. Larry Craig helped secure funding for the Pulaski Tunnel Trail. Craig spoke at the event and was flanked by the Department of Agriculture Under Secretary Mark Rey,

See DEDICATION, Page 8



— Photos by ERIKA KIRSCH

Above: Senator Larry Craig addresses the crowd at the Pulaski Tunnel Trail Dedication on Saturday afternoon in Wallace. The United States Department of Agriculture Under Secretary Mark Rey is sitting. Right: John Amonson chops a ribbon with a Pulaski tool for the dedication ceremony at the Pulaski Tunnel trail-head on Saturday in Wallace. Shoshone County Commissioner Sherry Krulitz holds the ribbon. Amonson is on the Pulaski Project board.



## DEDICATION

Continued from Page 1

Eric Thomson of the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Ranotta McNair of the USFS Region I, Wallace Mayor Ron Garitone and the USFS Honor Guard was also on hand to give a bagpipe tribute to the dedication.

"The national significance of this event is extremely important to the community and the state," Craig said. "We need to grab a hold of these historical sites and I'm extremely happy to be a part of this. It's a lot of fun."

Jim See, president of the Pulaski Project, first came up with the idea to rehabilitate the Pulaski Trail about 10 years ago. But it wasn't until 2002 when See and Mullan School District Superintendent Robin Stanley organized the Pulaski Project committee. The group has been working steadily toward the goal of honoring the firefighters of the 1910 fire ever since. See gave a speech while the audio of a consuming fire played in the background at the dedication ceremony. See was then presented with a certificate of appreciation and a chrome Pulaski tool. The Pulaski tool was invented and presented to USFS supervisors by Pulaski in 1911. The tool is a hybrid of an ax and a mattock and is widely used today in fire suppression efforts.

"Many of the reports said the fire sounded like 1,000 trains going over 1,000 trestles, everybody talked about the sound of the fire. The men went stark raving mad. Some ran straight into the fire, some shot themselves," See said. "Men were crying and praying and some were unconscious." [Pulaski] had burns, he lost his eyesight. We honor him with this trail, we honor the six men who died, we honor all the wildland firefighters with this trail past, present

and future."

"The fallen firefighters have paid the ultimate price, we honor them with this trail," See said.

The Pulaski Project came to fruition with the cooperation of many officials and groups including: the USFS, the Bureau of Land Management, HECLA, Stimson Lumber and East Shoshone County Water Company and the project is also a part of the Greater Wallace Community Development Corporation.

A bridge has been placed to access the two-mile trail leading to the mine where the men retreated during the firestorm. There will also be interpretive signs along the unfinished trail. A parking lot will also be located near the trailhead.

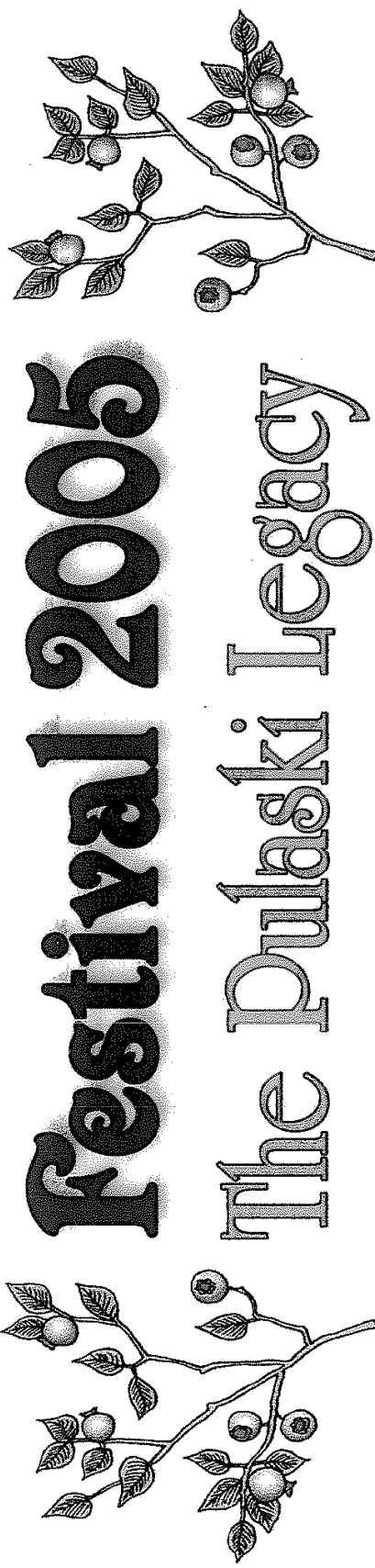
"Now there will be a place where folks can come to learn what happened that fateful day," said Ranotta McNair from the USFS Region I. "Yes, we are proud that Ed Pulaski was a part of the USFS history and the other men and women in the forest service."

A ribbon cutting christened the site when a green ribbon was placed over a burned-out tree and chopped with a Pulaski tool. The USFS Honor Guard ended the ceremony with a march and bagpipe music.

A reception was held at the Wallace Inn following the dedication ceremony. Jim Petersen, a former resident of Kellogg and publisher of Evergreen magazine, was the keynote speaker at the reception. Evergreen magazine, established in 1986, was started to help advance the public understanding and support for forestry and policy.

"The Pulaski Project is really a terrific forestry story," Petersen said. "It brings to light the health, productivity and history of the forests. I don't know where we're headed in this brave new world of forestry, but I suspect we're headed in the right direction."

# Huckleberry Heritage



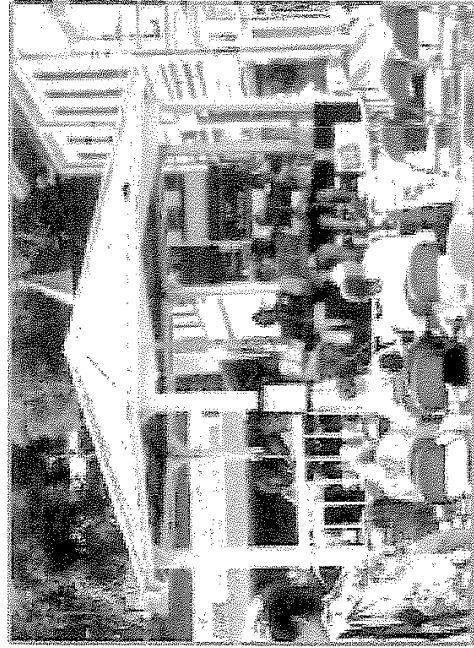
## Festival 2005

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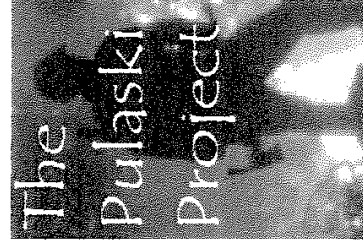
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Trail  
Dedication

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Saturday 7:00 am- 11:00am

Mine Heritage Dedication

We reached the mine

# Pulaski Tunnel Trail Dedication

"The next man who tries to leave the tunnel I will SHOOT!"



Militant Murray in front of the Nicholson mine tunnel just after the Big Fire.

**August 20th - 1:00 p.m.**  
**Trailhead**  
**Wallace, Idaho**  
**Huckleberry-Heritage Festival**

The  
Pulaski  
Project



[www.pulaski-project.org](http://www.pulaski-project.org)

## History Is Alive and Well in Wallace, Idaho: The Pulaski Story

... of fear, some crying, some praying.

### The Story

On August 20<sup>th</sup>, 1910 hurricane force winds blew together a number of smaller forest fires into a conflagration of epic proportions. Forest Ranger Pulaski's crew of firefighters were trapped in the Big Blowup until Big Ed led them the Nicholson mine, known locally as the Pulaski Tunnel. After barely surviving the night, this trail became their escape route.

### The Dedication

Signs at the trailhead, along the trail and at the tunnel site will tell the story of Pulaski, the Big Burn and the formative impact these events had on the fledging U. S. Forest Service.

Senator Larry Craig, Forest Service representatives, and Pulaski Project members will dedicate the trail at a public ceremony using the original pulaski tool.

### The Festival

Special displays and activities related to the Pulaski Legacy theme will be held throughout the Huckleberry-Heritage Festival.

... from the terrible fire and I had to...ly sank down unconsc...it must have been f...bess is dead." I...air circulating th...ck in the morning...refused to hold...ase our parched...n we found the...ink. We count...back and tri...became clear...our feet and...logs and...on hands an...Ranger

# Idaho SPOKESMAN-RE

AN EDITION OF THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

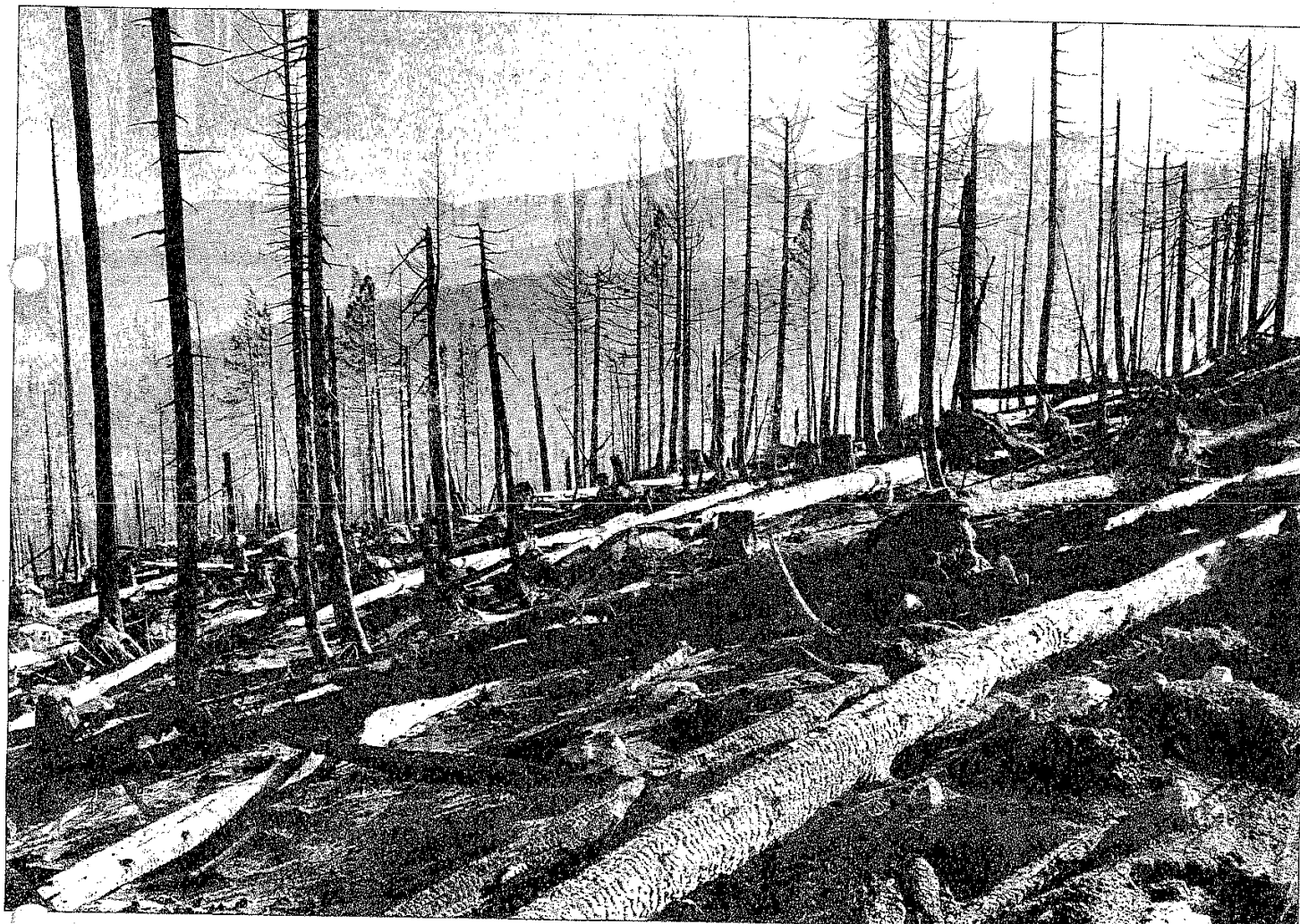
SUNDAY

100 YEARS OF WILDFIRES • THE NORTHWEST'S WORST

AUGUST 28, 2005



## Hall of flame



1967: Downed timber and skeletons of trees marked the aftermath of the Sundance Fire, which blackened 55,910 acres in the Seikirk and Cabinet Mountains. The Spokesman-Review photo archive

### Federal agency in Boise keeps rankings based on speed, acreage burned, deaths

By Tom Lutey  
Staff writer

Some wildfires are remembered for their size. Others for lives lost.

And then there's that rare measurement that pushes a blaze to the top of the list - speed. North Idaho's Sundance Fire, a drag-race of an inferno that narrowly missed Bonners Ferry in 1967, was started by lightning 38 years ago today. The blaze made its big run on the first day of September.

The National Interagency Fire Center in Boise keeps a tally of the worst fires, and the list is a reminder that - so far - this year's fires haven't been so bad. But we're not out of the woods yet.

Larry Stone, a retired Forest Service employee from Sandpoint,

remembers the Sundance Fire well.

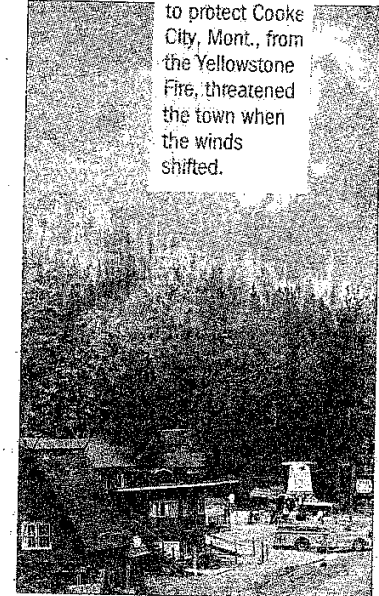
"It started its run Sept. 1 at 1 p.m. and grew from 4,000 acres to 55,900 in less than 12 hours. It burned a square mile every six minutes from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m.," he said.

The evening of the big burn, Stone was dispatched to chase some people out of the woods. Drought had plagued North Idaho that season; its forest was a green tinderbox. The public had been banned. A lookout had spotted headlights on a mountainside. Stone decided to intercept the careless travelers.

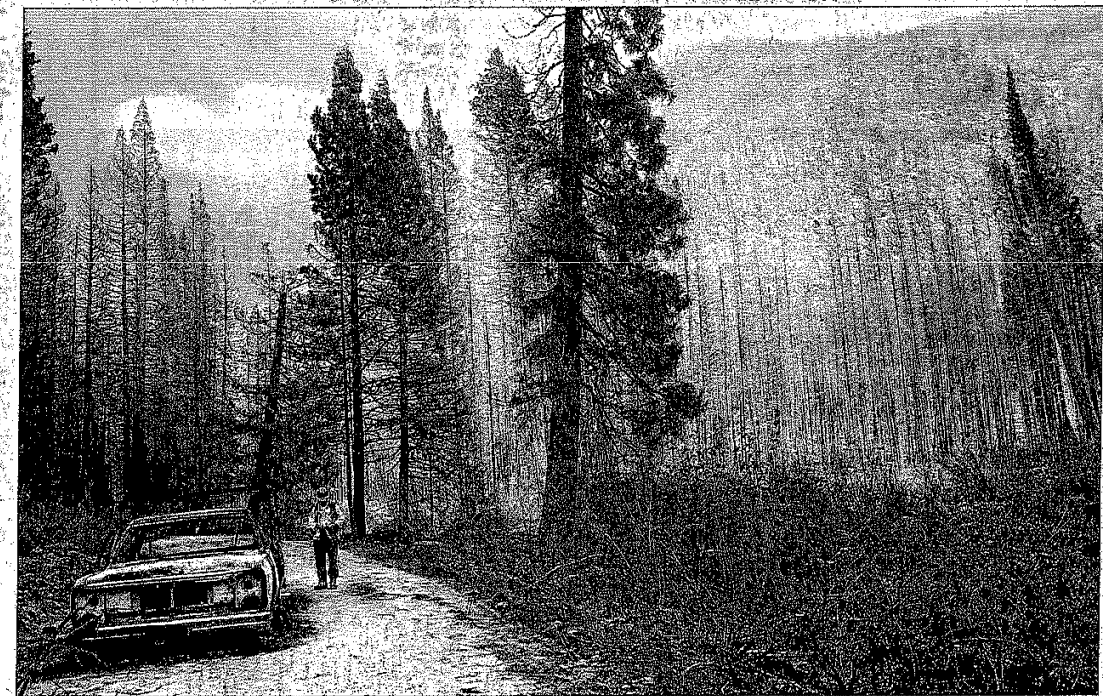
En route to the reported traveler sighting, Stone listened to the progress of the Sundance Fire on his

Continued: Fires/A12

1988: A backfire, intentionally set to protect Cooke City, Mont., from the Yellowstone Fire, threatened the town when the winds shifted.



Billings Gazette



2001: Ron Gross, of Twisp, Wash., takes Global Positioning System readings where four firefighters died in the Thirty Mile Fire near Andrews Creek in the Okanogan National Forest. The July blaze blackened 10,000 acres. Associated Press

# Fires: Largest have an impact on U.S. policy

Continued from A1

two-way radio, and the reports didn't make sense. Flames were racing past area drainages like his own truck raced by mile markers. He was convinced the lookout calling out the update had it wrong, but it was Stone, and many other tuned-in doubters, who misunderstood.

When the run was over, a two-man bulldozer crew cutting fire line had burned to death. A 19-year-old Forest Service worker at Roman Nose Lookout survived by abandoning his post and crouching in bare rocks as the flames raced by.

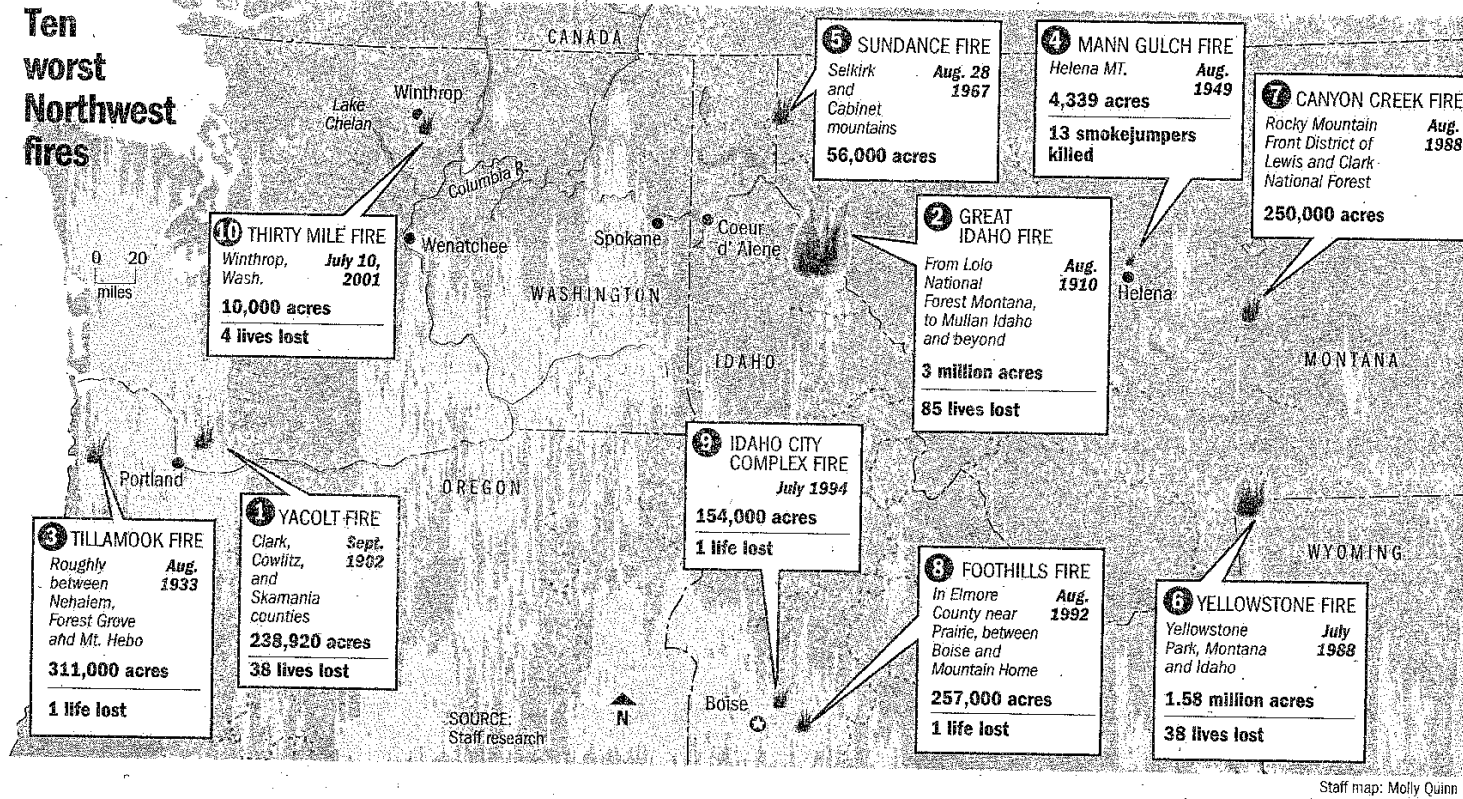
The blaze stopped expanding at 55,910 acres, roughly 6,000 acres larger than this year's School fire near Pomeroy, Wash., but Sundance burned on until fall frost and rain stole its punch. Sundance ranks fifth among the West's worst wildfires, a sprinter among the marathoners. The 3 million-acre Great Idaho Fire of 1910, which ranks second among the West's worst wildfires, is the only Idaho fire ranked above Sundance. The only fire smaller than Sundance to rank among the top 10 is the 1949 Mann Gulch Fire, which burned only 4,999 acres but killed 13 smokejumpers about 20 miles north of Helena, Mont. Mann Gulch ranks fourth based on tragedy.

The 1902 Yacolt Fire, northeast of Vancouver, Wash., ranks first because of its terrifying mix of acreage and fatalities: 238,920 acres, 38 dead. Oregon places one fire in the top five, the 1933 Tillamook Fire, which killed only one person but burned 12 billion board feet of timber, enough to build more than 5 million homes, according to Tillamook County records.

But the West's largest fires share more in common than acres and lives. Professor Penny Morgan, who studies wildfires for the Natural Resources College at the University of Idaho, said most of the fires considered the region's worst also raised national awareness of wildfire disasters and changed national forest policy. The year following the Great Idaho Fire, Congress enacted the Weeks Law, which marked the nation's first attempts at nationally funded, organized firefighting.

The 1910 fire got more press particularly on the national level than the '88 fires in Yellowstone," Morgan said.

She is currently studying the effects of global climate change on wildfires in order to better forecast fire seasons. Morgan relies on tree rings to tell the forest's tale of drought and fire cycles.



## Northwest's worst wildfires

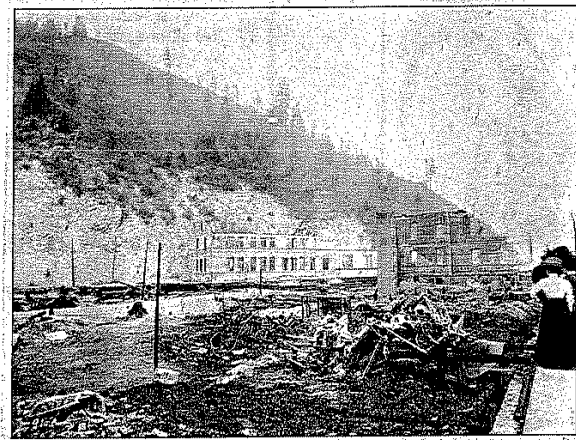
**Yacolt Fire, Sept. 1902.** The worst fire in Washington's history, the Yacolt Fire burned 238,920 acres in a matter of days. It devoured homes around the town for which it was named and killed 38 people, according to Clark County historical records. Legend has it that at mid-day the sky was so dark a riverboat navigated the Columbia River by searchlight.

**Great Idaho Fire, Aug. 1910.** "A truly terrible red demon from hell" is how forester Edward Stahl described the Idaho fire that devoured 3 million acres of North Idaho and Western Montana timber and killed at least 85 people. It wasn't one fire, but several. Between 1,700 and 3,000 fires were counted Aug. 20 and 21 when the fire blew up. It destroyed about a third of Wallace.

**Tillamook Fire, Aug. 1933.** Between Nehalem, Forest Grove and Mount Hebo, Ore. The Tillamook fire charred up to 311,000 acres and 12 billion board feet of timber, enough to build 5 million homes. It was the start of the six-year Tillamook jinx. Two more fires followed the 1933 fire exactly six years apart. Doug Decker, project leader for the Tillamook Forest Center, said collectively the fires, which burned 13.1 billion board feet, resulted in the largest reforestation project in the Northwest if not the world. "It involved the hand-planting of 72 million seedlings and 10 billion seeds dropped by helicopter," Decker said.

**Mann Gulch Fire, Aug. 1949.** Twenty miles north of Helena. The Mann Gulch Fire burned 4,999 acres but made the list because it killed 13 smokejumpers. Spokane resident Robert Sallee, not even 18 at the time, was one of only three smokejumpers to survive the fire. It was his first fire jump.

**Sundance Fire, Aug. 1967.** Bonners Ferry. "It was total consumption," said Larry Stone, a retired Forest Service employee. "You might as well say there wasn't a blade of grass left. There were big granite boulders, big ones, that split in half. When the fire got going, it created its own wind. It ripped cedars out of the ground and tossed them like matchsticks." The 55,910-acre fire advanced 50,000 acres in nine hours.



1910: The Great Idaho Fire made quick work of the Union Pacific Station in Wallace. The building had just been constructed and was two weeks away from opening. Eighty-five lives were lost in the blaze, which claimed about one-third of the town and about 3 million acres of forest.



1988: Nearly 50 fires started in greater Yellowstone Park in 1988. Above, little was left standing after the fire swept through in August.



## Northwest's worst wildfires

**Yellowstone Fire, July 1988.** Yellowstone National Park. According to the National Park Service, Yellowstone received generous rain early in the year, which bolstered undergrowth that later died in June and July. Lightning sparked a series of fires in the park at July's end, which quickly spread to 99,000 acres. By August, the fire was making 150,000-acre runs in a single day. About 1.58 million acres were scorched. Less than a million acres actually burned in Yellowstone Park. The rest burned outside park boundaries in Idaho and Montana. A firefighter and a pilot died fighting fires outside the park.

**Canyon Creek Fire, Aug. 1988.** Canyon Creek, Mont. This fire, which consumed 250,000 acres and destroyed private property, forced Congress to back a national fire plan.

**Foothills Fire, Aug. 1992.** Located in Elmore County near Prairie, between Boise and Mountain Home, this fire consumed 257,000 acres and killed one person in a severe drought year. According to the Elmore County disaster coordinator, the Foothills Fire was the worst fire in one of Idaho's worst fire years. Ignited by lightning, the fire destroyed habitat and eliminated a population of rare, intermountain sulfur butterflies.

**Idaho City Complex fires, July 1984.** Idaho City northeast of Boise. The Idaho Complex fires burned 154,000 acres and killed one person.

**(Special Mention) Thirty Mile Fire, July 2001.** The National Interagency Fire Center list does not include any fires occurring after 2000, but based on the number of lives lost, Thirty Mile Fire near Winthrop, Wash., deserves mention. The fire trapped and overran 14 firefighters and two civilians in a steep, narrow canyon along the Chewuck River in the Okanogan National Forest. Four people died. Four other crew members and the two civilians were injured. The blaze burned 2,500 acres in 2½ hours and eventually spread to 10,000 acres.

**(Special Mention) Biscuit Fire, July-Sept. 2002.** National Interagency Fire Center spokeswoman Rose Davis recommended adding the Biscuit Fire to the list. Located 20 miles northwest of Cave Junction, Ore., the fire became Oregon's largest after burning 499,695 acres.



**1949:** An aerial photo shows the Mann Gulch Fire near Helena, which took the lives of 12 smokejumpers and a forest ranger when a wall of flame raced up a steep hillside. The blaze burned more than 3,000 acres and required the efforts of more than 400 firefighters to control.

Associated Press

100 YEARS OF WILDFIRES • THE NORTHWEST'S WORST

# Forrest Ownbey a legend of the name game

*Fire managers enjoy the chance to express their creativity*

**By Christopher Rodkey**  
*Staff writer*

Recipe for naming a forest fire: Mix Sourdough Canyon and a blazing forest fire. Add humor. Makes one Burnt Bread fire.

Summer fire season means that, like hurricanes, forest blazes are known by their names. But instead of following a strict set of alphabetical first names set by a central agency, fire commanders have some leeway in bestowing a title.

"Oh, we always try to have a little fun with it," said Steve Harris, who fights

fires for the state Department of Natural Resources, with a chuckle.

Many forest fires are named because they're close to a certain geographical location or they start near landmarks — some with catchy names. This summer, the Dirty Face fire burned on the south side of Dirty Face Mountain. The School fire started near School Canyon.

"There's a lot of geographical places out there with interesting names, which makes it pretty easy to have fun," Harris said. Fire managers often look to a map for distinctive place names, or sometimes

they'll come up with something completely unique.

A legend within fire manager circles, Forrest Ownbey had his own methods for naming forest blazes that kept crews guessing.

One year, Ownbey named fires after the artist of the song playing on the radio when the first call came in. Another, he named for various beer makers. He could produce names like "Mount Spokane Journey," "Cusick Mellencamp" or "Lone Mountain Blue Ribbon."

"We thought for sure management was going to crack down on him," Harris said. "He was probably the most creative on naming them."

The search for the best name for a fire is an unspoken competition, said Phil Carroll with the National Interagency Fire Coordination Center.

"We get some real creative firefighters and dispatchers who look for some way to make it something other than the Goat Creek fire or something boring," Carroll said. "There are some creative folks out there that have two nearby

creeks that they can put together and make something funny out of it." Sensitivity is always a concern when naming fires, Harris said. Fire managers don't want to appear flippant when some fires could burn homes or harm people.

But for the firefighter who gets to name the blaze, it can be an opportunity for a lighter moment on the job.

"In this job, sometimes there's not a lot of opportunity for artistic expression, so firefighters look for opportunities like this," Carroll said.

# Hike into history

## Pulaski Trail leads to survival tunnel of Big Blowup

Today, it doesn't look like much more than a dark hole in a patch of lush green ferns along the West Fork of Placer Creek.

But it will forever mark a defining chapter in fighting fires on public lands. The greatest legend of the hellish Big Blowup of 1910 was born in this Nicholson adit.

Soon, anyone who can hike two miles up a moderate grade will be able to visit the mine opening, which is more commonly known as the Pulaski Tunnel.

It's the place where Wallace District Ranger "Big Ed" Pulaski held his crew of firefighters at gunpoint as an insatiable firestorm swept over the St. Joe/Coeur d'Alene divide on a collision course with a backfire set to protect what remained of the town of Wallace.

Pulaski and Co. were fleeing the unprecedented fire and headed toward Wallace, but were pinned between blazes when the ranger, who had prospected in the area, led the crew to the Nicholson adit. The mine opening was barely large enough to stand up in, but it was the only hope for the crew and its two horses.

Pulaski, having already lost one straggler, stood guard with pistol in hand at the opening of the adit. He threatened to shoot any panicked crew member who tried to leave.

The fire sucked the living air out of the tunnel. Everyone passed out.

When the smoke began to clear hours later and the men slowly awoke, someone crawled to the mouth of the tunnel and checked on the motionless Pulaski.

"The boss is dead," the crew member said.

As the legend goes, Pulaski disagreed, answering, "Like hell he is."

Pulaski's actions saved the lives of 39 men from the raging furnace outside. Still, five died in the tunnel.

## The Project

As the Pulaski legend grew with passage to the next generation, the actual tunnel disappeared.

"I think they lost track of it in the 1920s and 1930s," said James See, a leader of the Pulaski Project.

Part of the confusion in confirming the mine location was that Pulaski had told his men during the fire that their only chance was to flee to the War Eagle Mine, which had a 1,300-foot tunnel.

But they didn't get that far. The War Eagle was still a mile away when Pulaski and crew made their fateful stand in the mine with a 75-foot tunnel.

U.S. Forest Service archeologist Carl Ritchie researched several accounts of the ordeal to confirm that the Pulaski Tunnel was indeed the Nicholson adit and not the War Eagle mine.

See, a guidance counselor and media communications teacher at Mullan High School, was introduced to the lost mine and reminded of the Pulaski story in the 1980s.

During the next decade, he dreamed of a memorial trail to the historic site, which author and fire historian Stephen J. Pyne describes as "obscure as any on the National Register of Historic Places."

See helped form the Pulaski Project committee, which secured seed money and gained support of the Idaho congressional delegation.

U.S. Sen. Larry Craig spearheaded a congressional appropriation of \$300,000 for the project.

The Pulaski Tunnel and Trail is scheduled for completion in the fall.

## The Trail

The two-mile trail passes three

antique rock dams constructed by the East Shoshone County Water District in the watershed of the city of Wallace.

Most of the trail follows the scenic West Fork of Placer Creek.

Even in the heat of the year, hikers will enjoy the air-conditioning effects of the adjacent creek and the shady canopy overhead.

But hikers will break a sweat in places where the trail breaks into the open on the moderate ascent.

The trail crosses easements from timber, water and mining companies.

Along the way, four interpretive signs will be erected to inform visitors about Pulaski, the 1910 fire, early Forest Service and early mining.

About a mile into the hike, a short trail heads of about 200 yards to the War Eagle Mine. The adit there is long gone, but a compressor tank and flywheel still mark the old mining claim. Back on the main trail lies the rusting remains of the War Eagle's buffalo pump, which was a water-driven ventilation system.

The clear creek with its many melodious cascades is enough reason in itself to take the walk.

"There's not much snow this year," See said. "It's amazing how much water these mountains gather."

Suddenly, the trail eases onto a shelf and allows a view of the adit from across the creek.

Viewers observe the tunnel in respectful silence, mindful of the place where heroic firefighters lived — and died.

While remnants of the 1910 burn are visible for those who know how to recognize them, the once-burned out valley is lush with life.

Meantime, the folklore that emerged from the Pulaski Tunnel is more enduring than the hard rock from which the it's carved.

# SHOSHONE NEWS-PRESS

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### More to be honored for Pulaski Trail Dedication

We would like to express our warm and heartfelt thanks to everyone who helped out with our Pulaski Tunnel Trail dedication ceremony on Aug. 20.

We honored some of the persons and institutions that made contributions at the event itself. Time did not permit, however, to mention many more folks who made significant contributions.

Thank you Chris Stuecker

for helping shovel gravel in a hot August sun to prepare the celebration's site. Thank you Sue Halley and the Sierra Mine Tour for the use of the trolley to transport dignitaries to and from the dedication. Thank you Ray DeMotte and the Sterling Mining Company for your wonderful magnanimity in minting and donating a supply of silver rounds to commemorate the

trail's dedication. Thank you Herb Zanetti for letting us use your splendid flatbed trailer as our stage and for transporting it as well to and from the site. Thank you Nancy Hanks for showing "The Greatest Good" film at the Melodrama in the morning and filming the dedication ceremony in the afternoon. Thank you Mike Green and Larry Passantino for taking video

of the historic event. Thank you Chris Stuecker, John Fritz, Axel Carlson, and Ray Hansen for bus and traffic control. Thank you Wallace Civic Auditorium Association for lending us the folding chairs for the event. Thank you contractors Mike Jensen (DJ&A, Missoula) and Ben Caceres (Wesslan, Spokane) for allowing us to spread a gravel surface on the ceremony site. Thank you Garren Taylor for

See TRAIL, Page 6

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## TRAIL

Continued from Page 4

an excellent job on the sound system. Thank you bus drivers Pam Dechand, Nida Dodge, and Carol Combes for transporting our many guests from the Wallace Jr./Sr. High

School to the trailhead and back. Thank you Shoshone County Sheriffs Department and US Forest Service Law Enforcement for supplying road control and security. Thank you Shoshone County Public Works for picking up 1910 snags and bringing them back to the dedication site and for road control planning. Thank you East Shoshone County

Water District for providing the venue for our event and an electricity supply. Thank you Savanna Talley and Beverly Hammond for running the Pulaski booth downtown. Thank you Tom Durbin for setting up and taking down the sound system at the Wallace Inn. Thank you Rick Shaffer and staff at the Wallace Inn for an excellent reception event

after the dedication. Thank you U.S. Forest Service personnel — including Linda McFadden, Steve Kratville, Larry Shepherd, Jack Dorrell, Cort Sims, Robyn Frank, and others — for countless contributions. Thank you Shoshone News-Press for the excellent coverage. Thank you Jim Hegengruber for your article in the Spokesman-Review as

well. Finally, thank you Jon Cantamessa for an excellent job serving as MC for the occasion.

The event was a smashing success, we thought, because everybody's contributions came together just as planned and

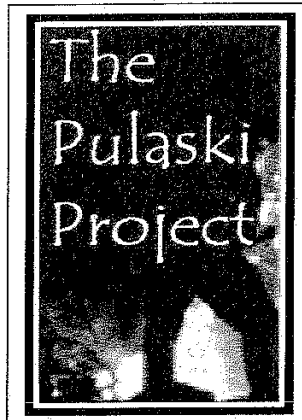
hoped.

What could be better?

Jim See and Ron Roizen  
Pulaski Project  
Silver Valley

**Project Status Report**

**Pulaski Tunnel Trail  
Idaho Panhandle National Forests  
(September 15, 2005)**



**Trailhead Area:**

The subcontractor has been concentrating on constructing the block retaining wall and associated trail work on the north end of the bridge. The current schedule anticipates the block work will be completed by September 23.

Other work that is scheduled to be completed by the end of the week of September 23 includes; erecting the guard rail system to protect pedestrians moving from the parking lot to the highway crossing, constructing the trail from the parking lot to the highway, and rough grading the parking lot.

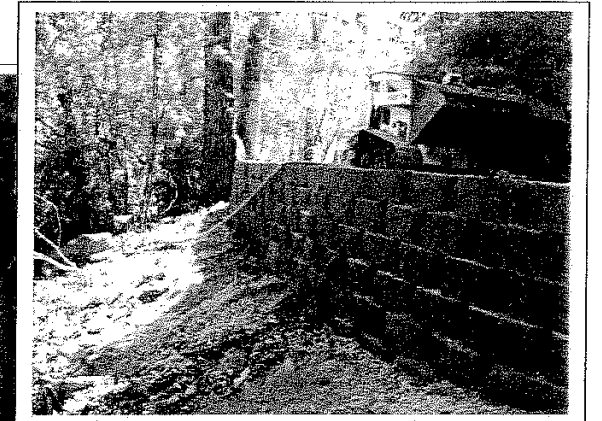
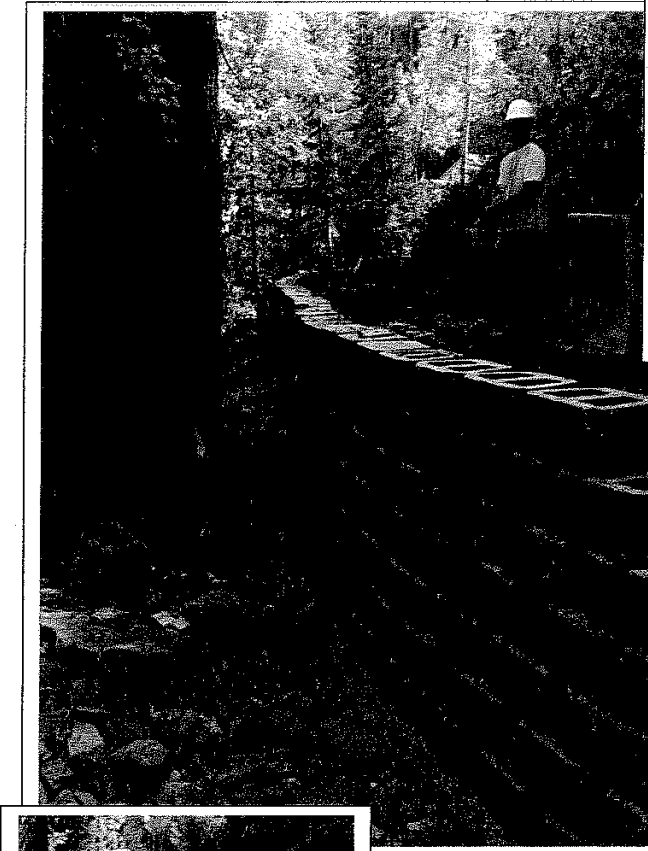
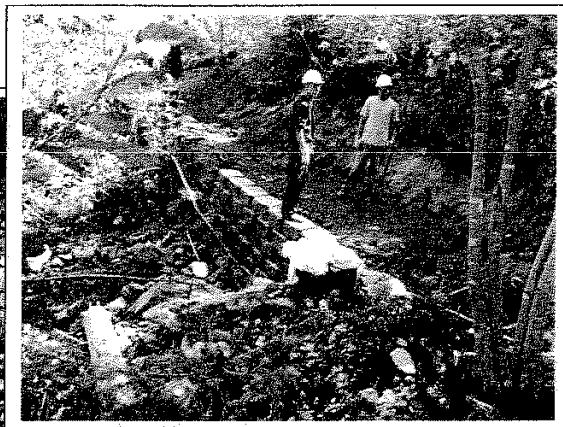
At this time we are planning for paving to take place during the first week of October.

Trailhead construction is behind schedule based on the original planned completion date of September 30, 2005 but should be completed by mid-October.

**Trailhead Construction**



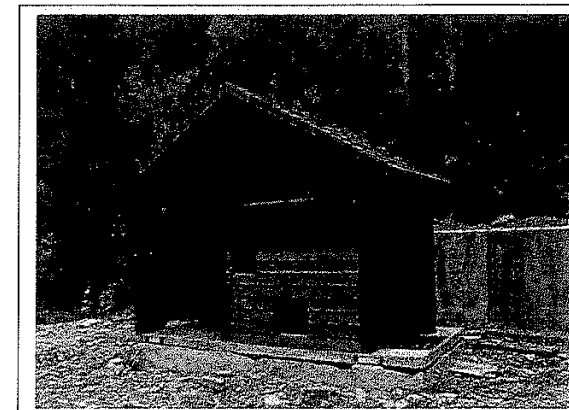
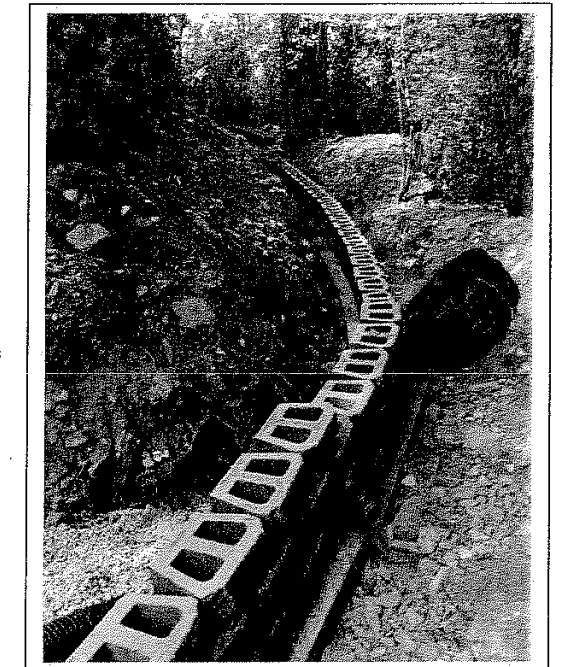
Workers placing concrete for block wall footing. Upper picture is modular block wall nearing completion at same location.



This section of completed modular wall will be over 7 foot high. At same location, the lower wall section is backfilled with embankment as illustrated in upper picture.



Various stages of modular block wall construction, including installation of the wall drain system.



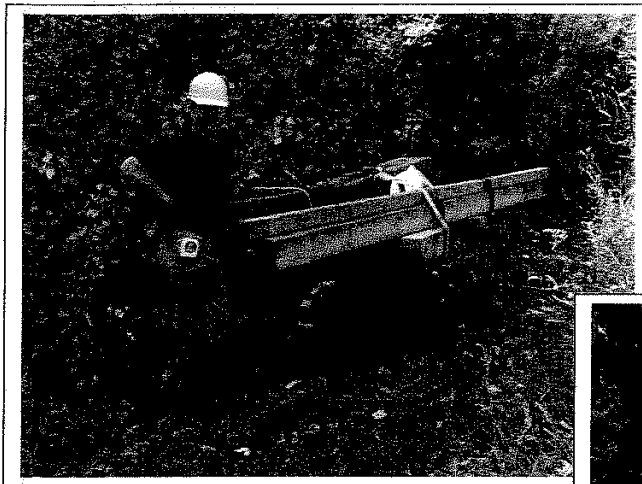
The upper section of the toilet was re-set but sustained damage in the manufacturer's plant and was not accept. The entire toilet is schedule to be replaced.

**Trail Reconstruction**

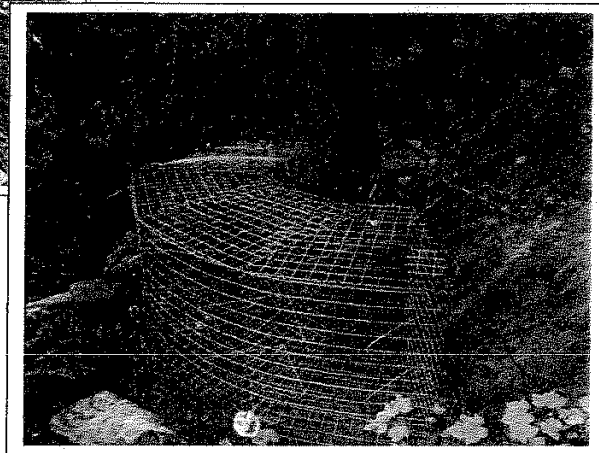
Approximately 1 mile of trail has been constructed with the exception of some of the smaller timber structures. Materials for the treated timber trail structures were delivered on August 30<sup>th</sup> and the subcontractor has erected two of the small puncheon bridge sections.

The subcontractor has been working on removing a rock points and constructing gabion baskets to complete the "switchback" area on the lower section of trail.

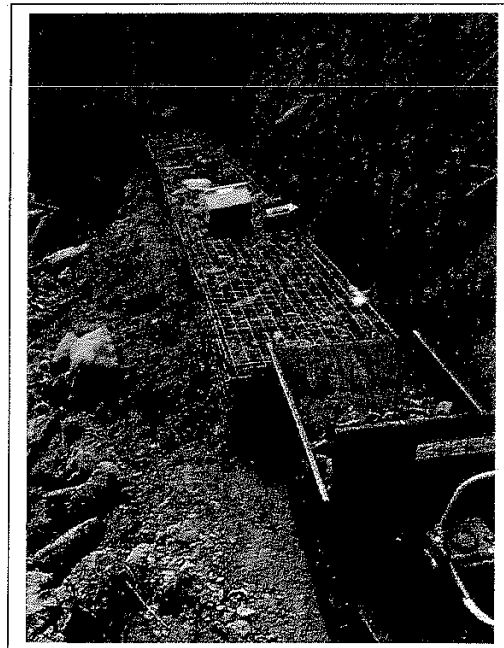
Trail construction has fallen behind schedule from the planned September completion date and is expected to continue through October and early November. A realistic trail opening will be in the spring of 2006 with the onset of winter.



Trail Subcontractor transporting treated timber materials for construction of one of the trail puncheons



Partially completed gabion basket section at the base of switchback



**Pulaski Trail Construction**



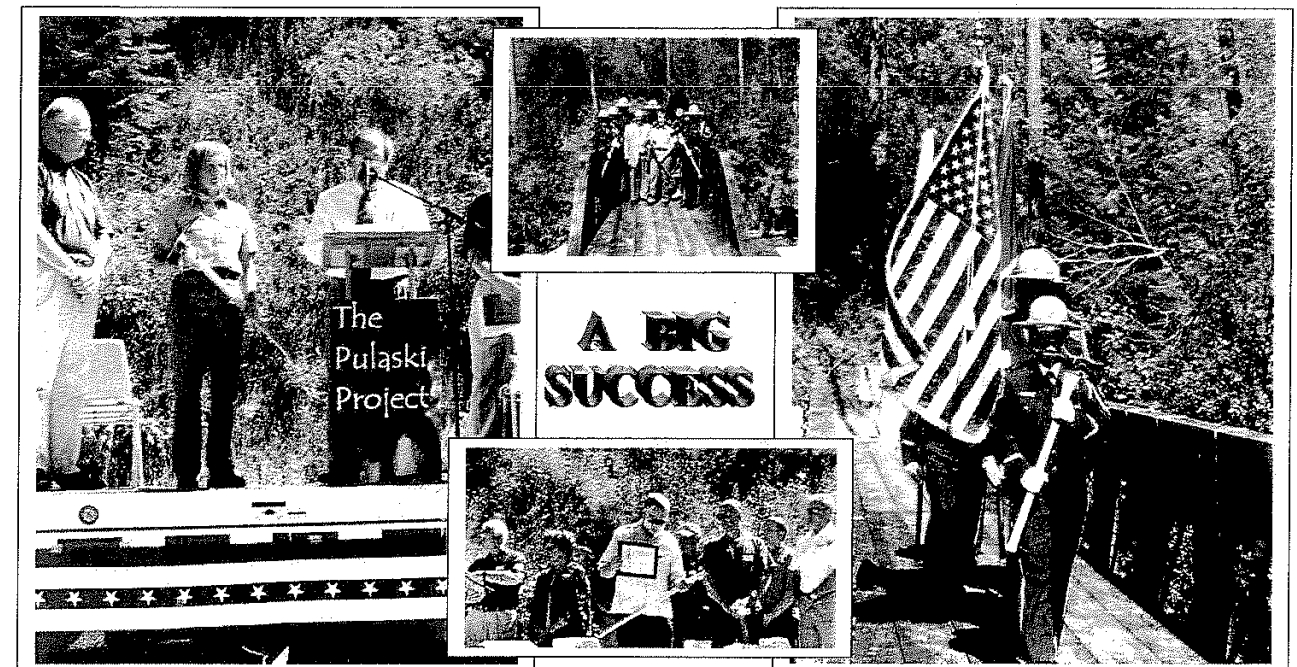
The Forest Service has finalized the locations of the interpretive signs and processed a modification to the contract for installation of interpretive signs, with a planned completion date for interpretation by June 15, 2006. Interpretation signs may be installed in conjunction with public use of the trail facility next spring.

**Pulaski Tunnel Trail Project – Multi-Agency Effort**

The Idaho Department of Lands (IDL), Bureau of Fire Management recently made a contribution to the Pulaski Tunnel Trail Project with the donation of the 21 Pulaskis estimated at an approximate \$1000 value. The pulaskis will be used in conjunction with project interpretation. The IDL also contributed the labor to treat (weatherproof) the Pulaski handles and provided an IDL truck for hauling Government supplied materials. We want to express our appreciation to Justin Muhlhauser (IDL Fire Cache Manager).



**August 20, 2005 Dedication Ceremony:**



## Project Status Report

### Pulaski Tunnel Trail Idaho Panhandle National Forests

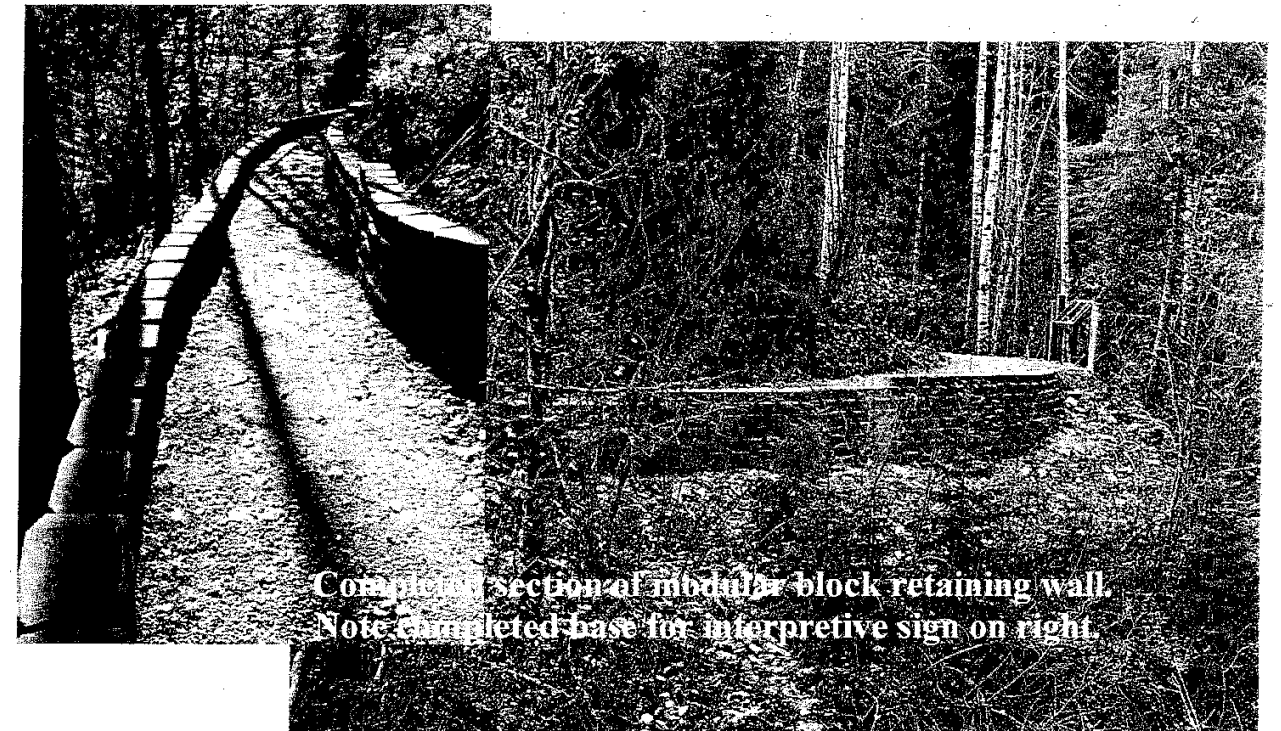
(October 31, 2005)



#### Trailhead Area:

The subcontractor (Wesslen Construction, Inc.) has completed all winterization work on the trailhead area and has pulled off of the project for remainder of this year. Recently completed tasks include: construction of all segments of the block retaining wall, furnishing and placing crushed aggregate base for the parking lot and trail, erection of permanent signs, erection of sign bases for interpretive signs, replacement and re-installation of the Cascadian toilet, installation of the bollards at the bridge, minor landscaping, and general clean up.

All remaining work will be completed as soon as weather will allow in the Spring of 2006. This work will consist of paving the parking lot and trail, installation of pin-down curbs, and painting permanent traffic markings for the cross walk and parking stalls.



Completed section of modular block retaining wall.  
Note completed base for interpretive sign on right.



Workers placing concrete for upper modular block retaining wall footing.

## Trailhead Construction

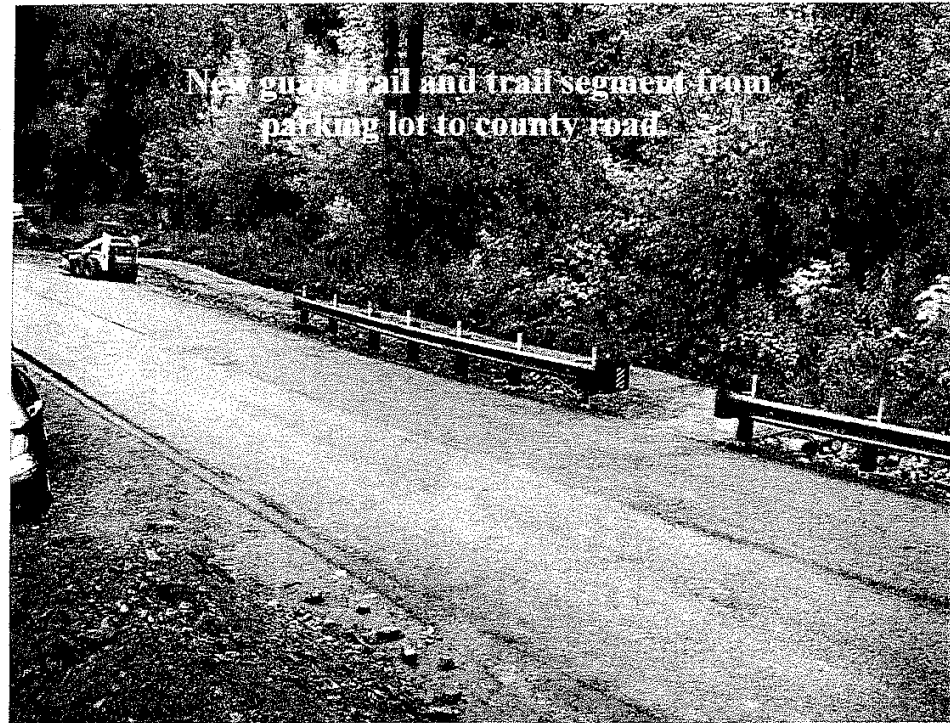


Compacting trail subgrade after construction of upper modular block wall.



Stone Mason Constructing Entrance Sign Base

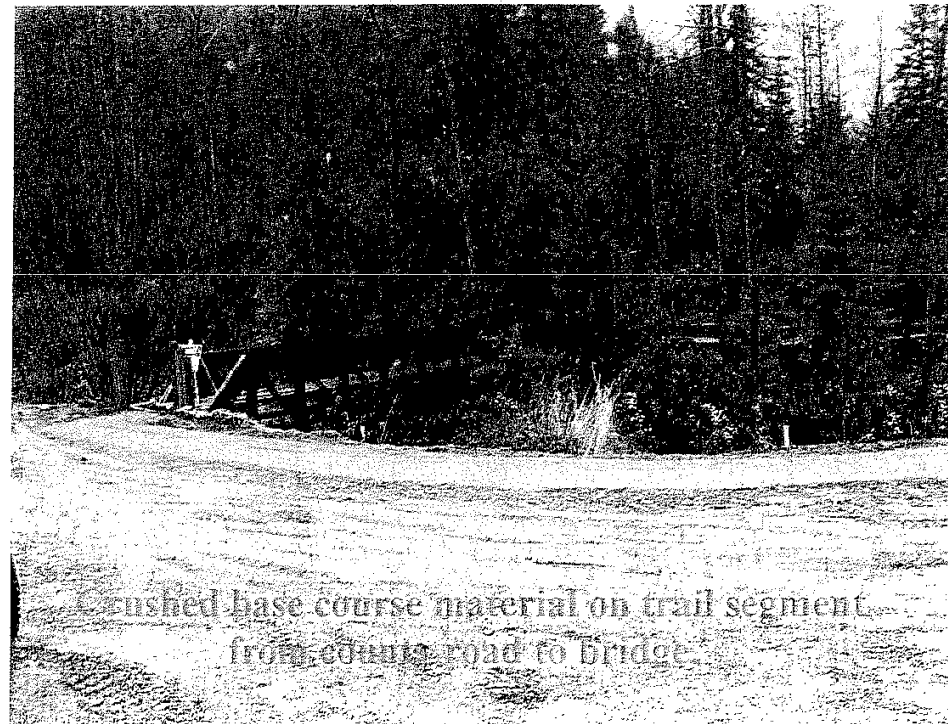




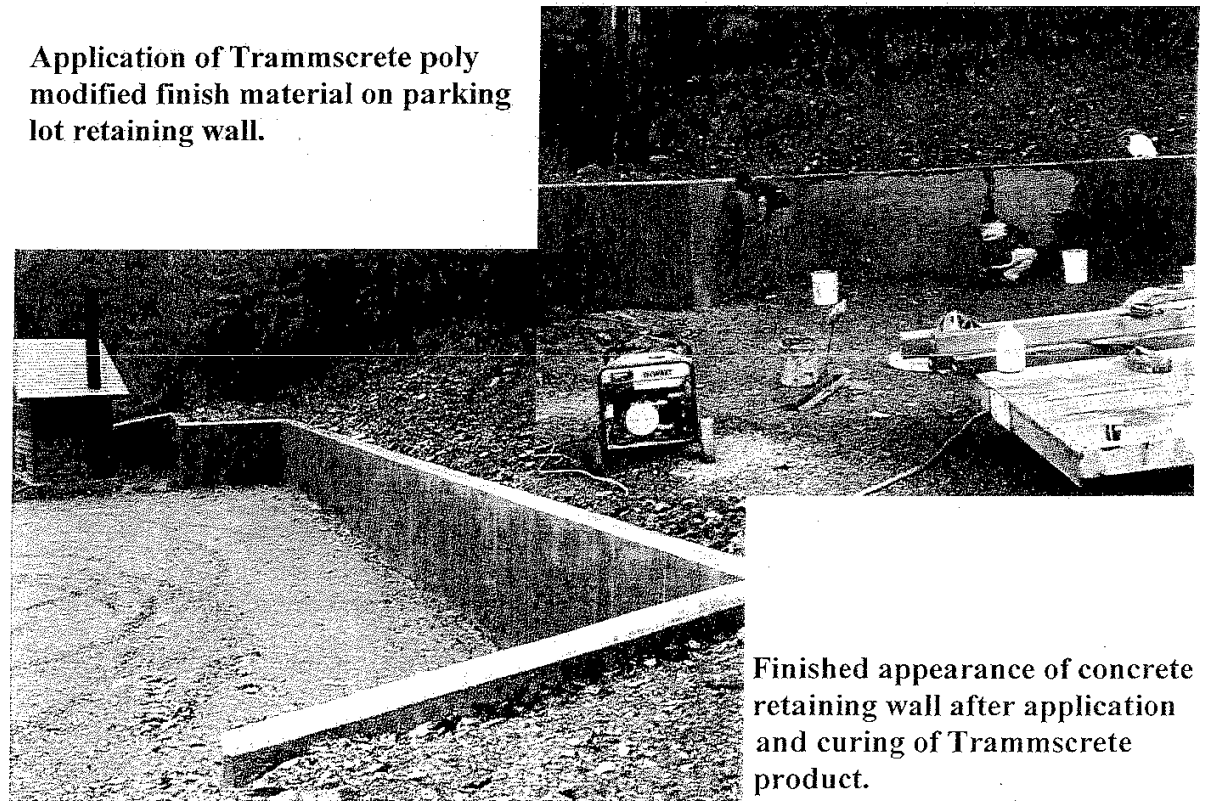
New guardrail and trail segment from parking lot to county road.



Crushed aggregate base material being Placed in the parking lot.

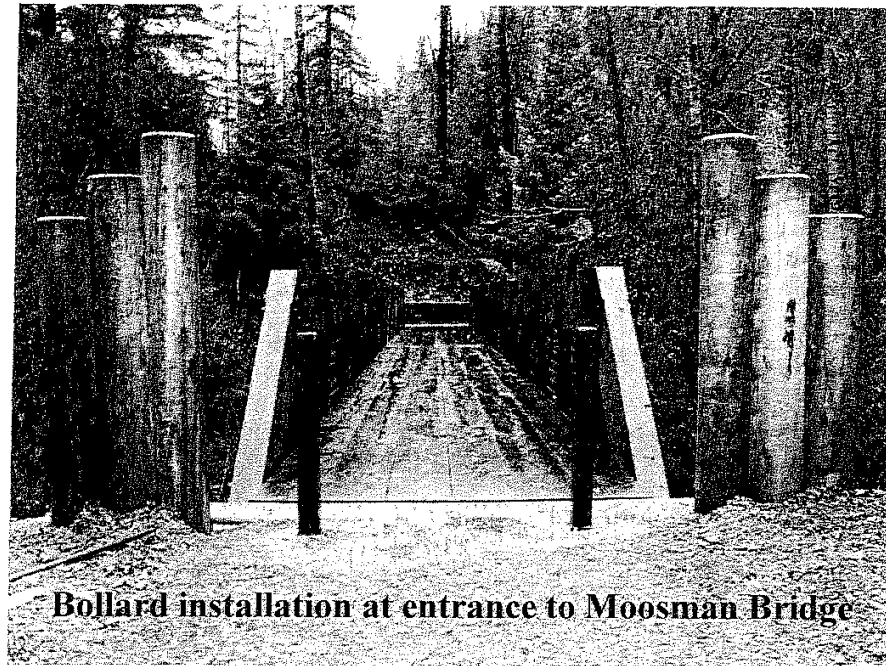


Crushed base course material on trail segment from county road to bridge.



Application of Trammscrete poly modified finish material on parking lot retaining wall.

Finished appearance of concrete retaining wall after application and curing of Trammscrete product.



**Bollard installation at entrance to Moosman Bridge**

**Trail Construction:**

The subcontractor (KD Construction) continues to work on pioneering of the new trail and, weather permitting, hopes to complete this work by mid-November. After completing roughing in the trail to the overlook area, or when weather prevents working on the upper portion of the project, the subcontractor intends to begin erecting the two lower treated timber bridges near the trailhead area. Final trail construction is anticipated to be complete by June 15, 2006.

**Pulaski  
Trail**



**Completed Treated Timber Pylon Structure**