

## JIM POSEWITZ PROFESSIONAL CONSERVATIONIST AWARD

2021

ORVILLE DANIELS

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Orville Daniels has received the sixth *Jim Posewitz Professional Conservationist Award* for his distinguished 37-year career with the USDA Forest Service. During his tenure, Orville focused on doing right by the land using ecosystem health principles, building relationships, leading with integrity, and promoting sound forestry management practices even when it meant bucking the national office and risking his career.

As Supervisor of the Bitterroot National Forest in 1972, Orville led efforts to design the nation's first official prescribed Wilderness fire program to allow natural processes to occur "unimpeded but the hand of man," a change that required both Forest Service and Congressional approval. He spent countless hours building trust and understanding of the need for prescribed natural fire with local communities and regional and national agency leaders before launching the now-common policy of "let it burn" by allowing the first prescribed natural fire in the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness Area.

While Supervisor of the Lolo National Forest in the late 1970s, Orville's hands-on leadership led to the first multiple-use forest plan submitted for public review under the National Forest Management Act. The Lolo Forest plan became a pilot for the region, and Orville's commitment to sound ecosystem dynamics prompted him to guide the Lolo in creating one of the early and successful ecosystem management programs.

Like much of the West, the Lolo Forest was laid out in a checkerboard pattern with private lands. In the late 1980s, the Forest Service was directed to harvest as much timber as possible, and the timber industry was happy to do its part. Plum Creek, the largest private landowner with lands



intermingled with the Lolo, scalped its property in a drainage where the ecosystem could not viably bear further loss of its overstory. As Forest Supervisor, Orville placed a harvest moratorium on all adjacent Forest Service lands to compensate for Plum Creek's over-cut. Lumber mills, politicians, leaders in the Forest Service regional and DC offices all were outraged, but he stood fast, backed by public opinion and staff support. Everyone involved figured Orville's days as Lolo Supervisor were numbered, especially when the Chief of the Forest Service dispatched his deputy to Montana. Thinking out of the box, Orville ordered a plane from fire dispatch to show the deputy why it was impossible to meet forest standards for ecosystem health if the prescribed harvest was allowed to proceed. The show-me tour took place on a bluebird day in early spring when the checkerboard of snow-covered clear-cuts appeared in stark contrast to the green forests of the Lolo. That flyover and conversations with local community leaders convinced the deputy chief that Orville was right. Through his quiet diplomacy, Orville had found a way to stop the cut by modeling his credo: "Do what's best for the land" and nurture understanding relationships with the public.

Fully committed to the value of diversity within the Forest Service as well as the landscape, Orville brought some of the first women rangers to the Region and welcomed diversity employees to leadership positions throughout his career.

In his role as Lolo Forest Supervisor, he also created the first wildlife interpretive program under the national Watchable Wildlife initiative, started the Missoula Trails program, was instrumental in the creation of the Arthur Carhart Wilderness Training Center, and maintained his connection to the community through participation in a variety of non-profits and foundations. Since his "retirement" in 1997, Orville has stayed engaged by training and consulting with natural resource agencies and organizations on matters of leadership, fire, strategic management, and organizational effectiveness.

Orville's recognition for his lifetime commitment to the value of relationships and doing right by the land was accompanied by a special grant of \$5,000, which he has designated to be split between Great Burn Conservation Alliance and the Selway Bitterroot Frank Church Foundation for their fire management program.