

## JIM POSEWITZ PROFESSIONAL CONSERVATIONIST AWARD

2018

ALEX SIENKIEWICZ

Who knew that just doing your job would cause such a ruckus? Or, result in the Cinnabar Foundation honoring Alex Sienkiewicz as the second recipient of its *Jim Posewitz Professional Conservationist Award* for holding his ground and helping to create precedent with national implications — historic public access is legal and it matters.

As a professional in the U.S.D.A. Forest Service, Alex was especially well suited to his 2011 assignment as Yellowstone District Ranger in an area dominated by rugged and wildlife-rich Crazy Mountains and by controversy as private landowners fought the public's historic access to spectacular high country. Armed with leadership skills, a law degree and doctorate in forestry, he was the perfect person to stand up to these landowners.

In recent years, blocked gates and no trespassing signs had increasingly greeted public trail users who wished to cross small sections of private land to access the people's forests. Those access points had been in public use for decades — some for as long as 100 years — yet these landowners shut out the public to gain exclusive access to the Crazies and their plentiful herds of elk and deer.

Each year as District Ranger, Alex instructed his staff on Forest Service protocol for public access. He posted informational signs urging trail users to refrain from signing documents that granted them permission to use historic trails to access public land because these documents could then constitute legal precedent for the landowners' unlawful claims of permissive access. Each year these government signs were removed and replaced by locked gates and no trespassing signs, which he and his colleagues immediately replaced with new signs spelling out the public's right to access and then reopened the gates. Alex knew he stood on solid ground since agency regulations clearly recognized the public's right regarding the historic use of trails. He simply defended the public's right to historic access to the Custer-Gallatin National Forest against a barrage of challenges from landowners, commodities groups, and politicians.



Alex Sienkiewicz holding his award with presenter Jim Posewitz

Even when Senator Steve Daines and Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue sided with the landowners. Even when, with no evidence of wrongdoing, Alex was summarily removed from his positions District Ranger and reassigned to the forest supervisor's office.

Alex's exile didn't last long. An internal investigation soon found that his management was consistent with the existing policies and direction of the Forest Service and the Office of General Counsel, and Alex was transferred back to his position as Yellowstone District Ranger.

Alex Sienkiewicz's recognition for standing tall in defense of the principles and idealism at the core of the U.S. Forest Service was accompanied by a special grant of \$5,000 from the Cinnabar Foundation, which he designated to be shared equally between Bitter Root Land Trust, Bighorn River Alliance, Montana Conservation Corps, Montana Raptor Conservation Center, and Gallatin Valley Land Trust.