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2007 Forest Service *Engineers of the Year*

The votes are in for the Engineers of the Year. The winners will be traveling to Washington, DC, in April for the awards ceremony.

Congratulations:

- Sonja Bergdahl—Managerial engineer of the year
- John Bell and Peter Wagner—Technical engineers of the year
- Brenda Martin—Engineering technician of the year
- Janet Kekich—Engineering technology applications employee of the year

A summary of the winners' accomplishments follow:

Sonja Bergdahl—2007 Managerial Engineer of the Year

Sonja Bergdahl has been the forest engineer for the Angeles National Forest since November 2000. She is responsible for more than 600 buildings, 56 water systems, 697 miles of trails, and 1,032 miles of roads. Sonja oversees the fleet maintenance program for the Angeles, Cleveland, Los Padres, and San Bernardino National Forests.



Sonja currently is working on the plans for the new Santa Clara/Mojave Rivers Ranger District Office in Acton, CA. Plans for reconstruction were underway even before the office burned during the Buckweed Fire on October 21, 2007.

The buildings and site will comply with the Forest Service guidelines, incorporate elements of the local community design standards, and meet the silver LEED (leadership in energy and environmental design) requirements set by the U.S. Green Building Council.

Sonja has worked at the Angeles National Forest since 1980, when she graduated from UCLA with an engineering degree. She has worked in most aspects of engineering, including preconstruction, construction, facility operation and maintenance, water system operation, and road and trail maintenance. Sonja also served as the acting forest recreation and land staff officer from December 2006 to December 2007, while maintaining her forest engineer duties.

John Bell and Peter Wagner—2007 Technical Engineers of the Year

John Bell is the program manager for road system operations and maintenance, signing, and traffic safety in the Washington Office.

John's first Forest Service job was with a survey crew at the Shasta-Trinity National Forest, outside Weaverville, CA, in 1965.

In the summer of 1967, John worked as a career-conditional construction inspector on the San Luis Canal



(California Aqueduct) for the U.S. Department of the Interior Bureau of Reclamation in California. John just wanted a summer job, but he completed his senior year at UCLA in Federal leave without pay status.

John graduated from UCLA with a bachelor's degree in civil engineering in 1968 and from Stanford University with a master's degree in civil engineering in 1979. He is a registered civil engineer in California. After college, John went to work for the Forest Service U.S. Department of Agriculture, full time. Here's a summary of his career:

- 1968 to 1972—Civil engineer, Lassen National Forest, CA. John was drafted in 1968 and spent 2 years in the Army as a military policeman.
- 1972 to 1976—Civil engineer, Plumas National Forest, CA
- 1976 to 1978—District engineer, Yolla Bolla Ranger District, Shasta-Trinity National Forest, CA
- 1979—Civil engineer, Truckee Ranger District, Tahoe National Forest, CA
- 1980 to 1986—Assistant forest engineer, Klamath National Forest, CA
- 1986 to 1991—Assistant forest engineer, Rogue River National Forest, OR
- 1991 to 1998—Forest engineer, Kaibab National Forest, AZ
- 1998 to 2008—Program manager for road system operations and maintenance, signing, and traffic safety in the Washington Office

Peter Wagner is the bridge engineer for the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest, which stretches 160 miles from the Canadian border south to Mt. Rainier National Park along the western slopes of the Washington Cascades. Since the early 1990s, Peter has been the lead technical engineer



for preconstruction and construction engineering for all the road and trail bridges on the north half of the forest. He is the contracting officer's representative for most of the contracts.

In the late 1990s, his work expanded to the entire forest. He also provides interagency assistance to the North Cascades National Park, which is collocated in the Sedro Woolley, WA, office. He's worked on more than 65 bridge projects during his career. Since 2002, he has also been the bridge program manager for the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest, which has about 200 road bridges and 200 trail bridges.

Peter graduated from the University of Idaho with a bachelor's degree in civil engineering in 1976. He has been a registered professional engineer in Washington since 1986. He began his Forest Service career at the Flathead National Forest in 1977. Peter has worked at the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest since 1983. He specialized in geotechnical engineering during the first half of his career and still has some geotechnical duties along with his bridge duties.

Brenda Martin—2007 Engineering Technician of the Year

Brenda Martin became the Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest's assistant forest engineer in 2002. She contributes engineering expertise and leadership to a 1.8-million-acre national forest.

Brenda's role is critical for the engineering, recreation, lands, and fleet programs. She has responsibilities in budget, program development and analysis, facilities management, program accomplishment oversight, and engineering and forest reports.



In 1973, Brenda began her Forest Service career as a temporary employee. She worked as an engineering aide helping survey land lines and tabulating P-line survey data. She later served as assistant operations engineer, forest geometronics coordinator, operations engineer, assistant program engineer, and program engineer. From the 1970s through 1994, she supported fire operations at the Medford Airtanker Base and in a supervisory position at expanded dispatch.

Brenda remains active in the community, mentoring young people and volunteering with civic groups on fundraisers such as the diabetes and arthritis walks. She also has volunteered in the “Neighborhood Youth Corps” program for disadvantaged young people.

Janet Kekich—2007 Engineering Technology Applications Employee of the Year

Janet Kekich is the current Northern Region Infra program manager and serves as the region’s representative and spokesperson at national Infra meetings, workshops, and conferences. She coordinates policy development and implementation of Infra and I-Web with the Washington Office and other regional Infra program managers.

Janet began her career with the Forest Service in the late 1960s and had worked with the agency for 3 years when her husband was transferred out of Montana. She received a bachelor’s degree from William Paterson College in New Jersey and taught elementary school in Virginia, New Jersey, and Wisconsin.

When Janet returned to the Missoula area in 1984, she was reinstated with the Forest



Service. Janet worked for the Northern Region planning, budget, and fiscal staffs before joining the engineering staff in September 2004.

In her free time, Janet and her husband, Brian, enjoy international travel, visiting Australia, China, England, Finland, Italy, and Scotland. In addition, they both enjoy golf, downhill skiing, and spending time with their family.