

Randy Charles

On behalf of the U.S. Forest Service, it is a pleasure to be here, and I'm glad that GLIFWC invited us to be a part of the panel. And to all of the members of the GLIFWC, truly over the last few years we have developed pretty good working relationships with those GLIFWC members.

The U.S. Forest Service in Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota has about eight million acres of land, just a little under eight million acres of land. In one of the earlier panels, one of the real good questions was 'What do we do in the future?' Another of the questions was about habitat management. Habitat management is going to be key and that's one of the key reasons that working with GLIFWC, over these next few years, is going to be that much more important for us, as well as all of you out in the audience.

When we first developed the Memorandum of Understanding, one of the things that we would do is we would come and get together with the Voigt Intertribal Task Force, members from the various tribes, and GLIFWC members and start talking about how to implement the MOU.

When we came in, one of the best things about being from Forest Service was that we weren't part of the Wisconsin DNR. One of the things as we started to implement the MOU we really realized that we in the Forest Service were arrogant. We had been managing these lands for 100 years, so we really knew a lot about it in our minds, so why would we want to start working with some other people. As we began to learn and mature, we learned that other people had been managing those lands maybe a little bit longer than we had, maybe hundreds of years longer than we and there were benefits. One of the toughest things for us was to get our own people to realize that there are other people out there that we would work with and could learn from. We could help to manage those lands in a way that was beneficial to the tribal members, to the resources and still we're not doing anything wrong for the American public that we represent as well.

How do we get our folks to really buy into this? One of the key things we had at the time were the managers at the core supervisor and regional office levels. They bought into this, but how do we get our folks to actually buy into it. We did training, we did things with them. We started working more with the Great Lakes Indian Fish & Wildlife Commission with the tribal wardens and with the GLIFWC wardens. As we worked it didn't take much for people to start realizing we had the same mutual interests. That arrogance went away and we truly learned that working with those folks was to our benefit. We've done so much.

In the recent times, we have done the wild rice planting and harvest and species monitoring with combined Forest Service and tribal members input. We have done cooperative law enforcement things that have done phenomenal. This year Fred Maulson worked with youth and brought them to educational camps within the Forest service. Those are things that we hadn't done in the past.

We're working with various tribes to hire tribal members. We have openings to try to recruit tribal members because they have a lot of the same interests. Tom Maulson probably ten years or more said, "How are you going to work to help us keep our youth around here? There isn't a lot to keep the young people around here." They said, "You guys are one of the only agencies that are around here." But truly we were one of the only agencies around. We weren't hiring, we had cutbacks, pretty severe cutbacks and stuff like that. We've got a lot of people that

are, like me, getting older in the organization and are leaving, so we're attempting to reach out and recruit folks. That's one of the key things we can do. If you're interested in natural resource opportunities, the Forest Service is one of those sources and I urge you to talk to your local Forest Service people. We have those opportunities. We're trying hard to reach out to a lot of the tribes to recruit them.

We're working together the best we can. I started working with GLIFWC when we were negotiating the MOU. We came from the part where we are a bunch of administrators talking to administrators to starting to get people that care about land, talking to people that care about the land. Now, the real success is having the folks that really know what they're doing out there. I'm not one of them that knows what they're doing with natural resource management. It's the biologists, the law enforcement people; it's our educators, our public affairs people. They work together. They're the folks that are making this work. We in the Forest Service really are excited and looking to the next 25 years and we wish GLIFWC nothing but success in the future at work and we're glad to be a part of it.