

THE NATIONAL SMOKEJUMPER  
ASSOCIATION

QUARTERLY MAGAZINE  
APRIL 2025

# SMOKEJUMPER



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**Front cover**

*Jumping from Beechcraft, Cave Junction,*  
*1960 (NSA files)*

## RECEIVE SMOKEJUMPER ONE MONTH EARLIER

Many NSA members are switching to the digital version of *Smokejumper* delivered by email instead of the printed edition. It is sent as a PDF identical to the hard copy issue. Advantages include early delivery (a month ahead of USPS), ease of storage, and NSA postal expense savings.

NSA Director Fred Cooper (NCSB-62) says: "I will opt to have my magazines delivered electronically rather than via USPS to save us direct \$ in printing and mailing, not to mention your hand labor in processing."

To request email delivery, please contact Editor Chuck Sheley [chucksheley@gmail.com](mailto:chucksheley@gmail.com).

## YOUR CORRECT EMAIL ADDRESS IS VERY IMPORTANT

In order to save the NSA time and money, Chuck Sheley is sending renewals and the merchandise flyer via email. Sending via email is a good cost-efficient move. To see if we have your correct email address, go to the NSA website at [www.smokejumpers.com](http://www.smokejumpers.com). Click on "News and Events" at the top of the page. Click on "Jump List" on the pulldown, type in your **last name**.

Please contact Chuck if we need to update your email. His contact information is on this page.

## IF YOU MOVE OR ARE "TEMPORARILY AWAY"

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Please notify us of any change in your mailing address. If you are going to be temporarily away, we could send you a PDF of that issue saving us all mailing expenses. Please send any address changes to [chucksheley@gmail.com](mailto:chucksheley@gmail.com).

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## *Smokejumper base abbreviations:*

Anchorage..... ANC	Fairbanks..... FBX	La Grande..... LGD	Redding..... RDD
Boise..... NIFC	Grangeville..... GAC	McCall..... MYC	Redmond..... RAC
Cave Junction..... CJ	Idaho City..... IDC	Missoula..... MSO	West Yellowstone WYS
			Winthrop..... NCSB



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# Hoot Owl Biology and the US Government

by Dr. Bob Zybach (Associate)

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IN CHARLES DARWIN'S 1859 *Origin of Species*, he describes "race" as members of the same species that typically develop different characteristics when separated geographically over time. Human races were the common focus and "scientific" discussions reflected the bigoted prejudices of that time.

In 1942 a German ornithologist, Ernst Mayr, defined animal species as "genetically distinct populations of individuals" capable of mating with one another and producing viable offspring.

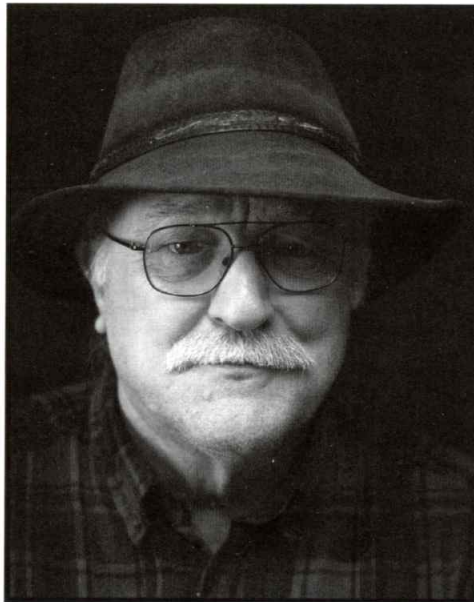
These were the definitions my classmates and I were taught in public grade schools in the 1950s, and in public high schools and colleges in the 1960s.

When the Endangered Species Act (ESA) was adopted in 1973, 36 birds, 22 fish, 14 mammals, six reptiles, and six amphibians were initially listed: 84 animals in all, and each a distinct species. Today there are more than 1,770 designated ESA species listed as threatened or endangered in the US, and more than 635 foreign species: 2,400 total!

Of these totals, only 57 species that have been considered "recovered" and 11 considered "extinct" were delisted in the past 51 years. This is a success rate of less than 3%; and an average of listing more than 47 new ESA species a year, while removing only one. The cost to taxpayers can be measured in the billions or trillions of dollars, depending on accounting method.

The barred owl is the most common brown-eyed owl in North America and has been popularly known as a "hoot owl" for many generations. Sometime by the 1950s these birds began expanding their range into the Pacific Northwest and breeding with native spotted owls, producing viable young called "sparred owls."

The spotted owl had been listed by the ESA as endangered in 1990 and the supposed cause of its low population numbers was claimed to be logging. This determination resulted in dozens of successful



**Bob Zybach** (NSA file)

"environmental" lawsuits being filed from that time to the present with the specific focus of stopping the sale and harvesting of commercial timber, and particularly on public forestlands.

In 2007 US Fish & Wildlife hunters began systematically killing barred owls and sparred owls on an "experimental" basis. The sole purpose was to control the breeding process to maintain genetic purity. Only these were wild owls, not domestic plants or animals, and ethical concerns were raised immediately. And then ignored.

A little over 10 years ago I wrote about this problem in a lengthy article that I also posted to a national blog of (mostly) retired US Forest Service professionals for discussion. I then presented this perspective in two lectures to graduate students, staff, and professors at the College of Forestry and then the Department of Fish & Wildlife at Oregon State University.

These efforts resulted in some meaningful discussions in the public forums, but immediate and adversarial claims of being a racist during my university lectures. Which was my whole point.

I had used polar opposites of the human species—a Pygmy and a Swede—to compare their differences in physiology, vocalizations, diet, coloration, appearance, and preferred habitat with those of spotted owls and barred owls. I was challenging current scientific theory and government policies with documentation, but my work could be safely ignored because someone called me a name.

The cost to US society for the purpose of keeping these brown-eyed cousins from having sex has simply been too great for too many years. The massive economic damage from spotted owl lawsuits—almost entirely funded by taxpayers—is generally well recognized: tens of thousands of lost jobs in the forest industry and US



Forest Service; hundreds of sawmill closures; billions of dollars in lost revenues to the US Treasury, states, counties, and schools; and the resulting degradation of our rural communities, roads, parks, and services.

And, as predicted, millions of acres of so-called “spotted owl critical habitat” have gone up in flames, killing millions of wildlife and polluting the air with deadly smoke.

My thought remains that we need to stop playing God with hoot owls and let nature take its course. As Darwin pointed out, nature favors the “survival of the fittest,” and in this instance that seems to be sparred owls.

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## Gary “Gramps” Johnson The Early Years

by Kris Kristofors (Redding '64)

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I ONLY KNEW **Gary Johnson** (RDD-69) by his nickname, “Gramps.” When the 1972 movie with Robert Redford came out about Jeremiah Johnson, many of the jumpers began referring to Gramps as Jeremiah Johnson, a rugged mountain man who lived in the Western Wilderness. I first met Gramps after I came back to jumping after two fire seasons on the Mendocino NF and a tour in Vietnam. Gramps came out of the Six Rivers area and either had or was completing his degree in forestry. Back then, the only avenue to higher positions with the USFS was entering the service as a Junior Forester (JF) and working one’s way up the ranks. Other degrees were not recognized. The problem was that the universities were putting out more graduates in forestry than there were JF positions to fill. This probably determined the career path for Gramps in fire management.

Gramps was a highly competitive person. I remember his constant competition with **Ed Smith** (RDD-68) and other jumpers on the morning run. I could never get the best of them. Ed left sometime afterward to work for the California Dept. of Forestry. We jumped many fires together, studied, and passed the FAA quiz to get our riggers licenses. **Dave Nani** (RDD-63) once told me he liked using me in initial attack situations, but that Gramps was better at overall fire management. I never discussed this with Gramps as it was an unneeded area for competition.

The early 1970s was an active time for the Redding Smokejumper Base, with regular jumpers and retreads coming in and out and the occasional jumper ground pounder. I remember flying into Palm Springs around midnight when the temperature was about 100 degrees.

The next morning, Gramps led us on a hike up the side of Mount San Jacinto to fight a fire near the top.

A couple of incidents come to mind. One season, we received a dispatch to Alaska to jump fires in the tundra. Gramps missed the trip as he was out of town. Those of us who went had an enjoyable experience. When we came back, we went to work with our Alaska T-shirts. That unleashed a barrage of cuss words from Gramps. He never forgave us for that display.

The second incident was the Redding Airport Rabbit Hunt. I awoke late one night in the barracks to the sounds of shootings and screeching tires near the runway. I don’t remember if Gramps was involved, but he certainly knew about it. **Jim Klump** (RDD-64) may have been the instigator. I remember **Dick Tracy** (MSO-53) being as mad as ever I saw him the next morning. I put the hungover crew through a heavy workout that morning. Klump weaseled out of the workout as he reported late to work.

After leaving the jumpers, I saw Gramps on several fires over the years, once at a fire camp in Pasadena and later on the Sequoia, where I worked my fire crew out of Kernville with jumpers who Gramps led. On another fire on the Shasta-T, I had the Hobart Hotshots. Gramps flew in with a big helicopter and broke out his shaving kit to get cleaned up. I told him we had a fire to fight and no time for shaving. He did not take my comment too kindly.

I last saw Gramps when we ran the Napa Valley Marathon in the early '80s. Gramps finished ahead of me. He went on to important fire management assignments in Redding, Redmond, and elsewhere. These are my recollections of my early days with Gramps.





# ODDS AND ENDS



Congratulations and thanks to **Dave Rosgen** (MYC-61) and **David Zuares** (RDD-91), our latest Life Members.

**Mike Pepion** (MSO-82) on Rudy Yellowtail (MSO-87), whose obit is in this issue: I jumped a two-manner with him in his rookie year, out of RAC on the Willamette, big ponderosa, good jump spot, good deal, except for the cargo. Cargo got capped on a big 150-foot tree. Guess who's going up the tree.

Since he was a rookie, we went over everything a good climber does. "Rudy, this letdown rope ties off to the *CARGO STRAP, NOT THE PARACHUTE!*" Rudy puts on the spurs, ready's up the rope, moves right on up the tree, and hits about the 50-60 ft mark. There are no limbs yet, and his knees get a little wobbly nervous. Coach Pepion gives him lots of pointers and encouragement, the basics.

Rudy gets to the cargo eventually, ties the end of the letdown rope to the parachute, cuts the Kevlar cargo box strap, and down comes the box . . . WHAM! We could use the broken Pulaskis, pick through scattered blasted-apart food, gulp down what water was left, enough to scrape line and mop up our small smoldering needle burn. Good deal, fire!

**Pat Cole** (MSO-73): When I first met **Floyd Whitaker** (RDD-65) in '73, he looked rough to me. Big rugged men, both he and Lloyd. By and large, by the time I completed training, all the class of '73 came to realize they were princes of men but without the finery. The first time I jumped with Floyd we both were injured. The second time I jumped with Floyd, we were injured again. The third time I jumped with Floyd, we were hooking up to the static line when he looked at me through his facemask, and a shit-eating grin crossed his face. "Hell no!" he said. "Whaddye mean," I managed weakly.

"I ain't going out the door with you again. Just unhook and sit down!"

"Uh, uh, uh," I stammered. He sounded as serious as a heart attack.

A rumble of laughter passed through the Doug as he said over his shoulder, "race ya to the hospital, Shit Head." I loved that Giant.

**John Blackwell** (MYC-64): Chuck, the Harry A. Merlo Foundation will direct a charitable contribution of \$5,000.00 to the National Smokejumper Association. Your admirable educational work documenting smokejumper history and the efficacy of initial attack and immediate suppression, along with healthy forest management, reinforces our Merlo Foundation conservation area of giving. Keep up the good work!

**Karl Brauneis** (MSO-77): I made an error or was not clear in my picture collage (Oct. 2024 Smokejumper). General Gavin and others in the army did study the smokejumper program but it was Major Lee who visited the smokejumpers in Montana. My error. Please print my error in the next issue along with my sincere apology.

**Ron Thoreson** (CJ-60): Chuck and KG-Just a long overdue note to thank you for 25 years of Smokejumper magazine. Many of us live our lives in disconnected segments, losing track of friends and neighbors along the way. In my case I've lost most contacts with Marine Corps buddies, college friends, first marriage friends and neighbors, and most work associates. The only segment of my life which endures is smokejumping, largely because of your administrative support of the NSA, reunions and the smokejumper magazine. A heartfelt thank you for all you've done and continue to do to keep jumping such a treasured part of life for myself and many others.

**Swede Troedsson** (MSO-59) has written and printed *Smokejumper Vol 2-More Stories*. If you are interested in adding another good smokejumper-written book to your collection, contact Swede at [swede\\_axolotl@yahoo.com](mailto:swede_axolotl@yahoo.com).

The Oregon Geographic Names Board recently changed the name of Negro Creek in Douglas County to Triple Nickles Creek. Federal maps will be updated. **Malvin Brown** (PNOR-45) was killed 8/6/45 while making a letdown on a fire on the Umpqua N.F. **Dr. Bob Zybach** (Assoc.) was a key person in getting this name change through the process. Thanks Bob for all your work.