



FORESTRY NEWS



Lacapa's Lasting Legacy

Two years ago, the December issue of Forestry News covered the retirement of the Western Regional Forester. A black & white photo was included with the story that showed a young John Philbin in Whiteriver. Now this month, a portion of that same photo is included to honor another retiring forester.



Robert Lacapa didn't know it when this photo was taken, but he would become the Tribal Forest Manager, the BIA Forest Manager, and a BIA Superintendent in several places in New Mexico before completing his illustrious career. Robert is even written about in the 1985-2010 Fort Apache Forest History. It is amazing to know a "historical" figure! Interestingly, the Forest History named five new foresters coming to Fort Apache right as Robert took over the Pre-sale Section and none of those foresters are still around. Robert outlasted them all!

Robert also has the distinction of being the Fort Apache Agency Forest Manager twice. He held the position from 2000 to 2008 and then from 2011 through 2016. He was the Superintendent at the Mescalero, Northern Pueblos and Southern Pueblos Agencies between those times. Later, when reminiscing about the Superintendent positions, Robert stated that those jobs *"helped me see the bigger picture and to know that there is much more to forest management than just managing trees. It allowed me to better understand how important our jobs really are right down to the person who is in the field everyday. Without those people, very little else matters."* Robert was asked what kept him primarily in the forestry profession for most of his career. *"A love for the forest ... a love for the trees. You can't beat being in forest management,"* he responded, and, in fact, proved those words by returning to his Forest Manager position after the three years as Superintendent. When asked what words of advice he had for young foresters just getting started in their careers, Robert stated, *"Be committed, be persistent, look for solutions, and don't quit!"*



Robert Lacapa reviews a map of the Rodeo-Chediski Fire with Arizona Senator Jon Kyle, Fuels Manager Mark Jackson and Superintendent Ben Nuvamsa during a 2002 site visit to the fire

The 2002 Rodeo-Chediski Fire was just one of the major challenges Robert faced as Forest Manager. He was involved in every aspect of that maelstrom including the timber salvage operation that harvested over 92 million BF of fire-damaged timber in record time. How do you prepare for an event such as that? Robert relates the story of a time that he sat across the table from a doctor who asked Robert about his occupation. When Robert responded that he was a forester, the doctor seemed puzzled so Robert further explained that he grew trees. Finally, upon reflection, Robert summed up his profession as a "problem-solver". Lately, passing on some of his career knowledge has proved a delight to Robert who has worked with groups as diverse as third-graders

from Whiteriver Elementary to graduate students from NAU. Robert credits a forester's comment that "talk is cheap" to spurring him to return to school to earn his Forestry Degree. It is a comment that changed not only Robert's life, but also those fortunate enough to have been tutored or mentored by him.



Is a future Forest Manager somewhere in this group?