

BOARD OF FORESTRY AND FIRE PROTECTION

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News Release

TAHOE NATIONAL FOREST SUPERVISOR POSTHUMOUSLY HONORED FOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO CALIFORNIA FORESTRY

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SACRAMENTO--Geri Bergen, former Tahoe National Forest Supervisor, was posthumously awarded the Francis H. Raymond Award by the California Board of Forestry and Fire Protection (Board) on November 6, 2019. This award is given to the individual, organization, agency, or company who has contributed the most to the management of California's natural resources. Criteria includes volunteer participation and achievements reached as a professional.

Throughout Bergen's life, she was recognized as 'the first woman' - in her professional schooling, career promotions, and professional organizations. She attended the University of California, Berkeley as it was the only forestry school that accepted women at that time, and she was the first woman to attend Forestry Camp at Cal after receiving the Dean's permission to attend. She began her career with the Forest Service in 1967 in the Pacific Southwest Regional Office. She was the first woman promoted to a line officer position as the Deputy Forest Supervisor of the Tahoe National Forest in 1978. In 1985, she was selected as the first woman Forest Supervisor in the nation and continued her work in the Tahoe National Forest. She was the first woman in the Society of American Foresters (SAF) to become Fellow and was one of the first two women to be elected to the SAF Council. She was also one of the first woman to become a California Registered Professional Forester and later served on the Professional Licensing Committee.

Bergen was nominated for this award by the California State Society of American Foresters. At the award ceremony in Sacramento, Bergen's daughter Kathy Schermerhorn accepted the award on behalf of her mother. Bruce Van Zee, former Tahoe National Forest staff officer and member of the Society of American Foresters, gave a presentation highlighting Bergen's career and achievements. Board Chair Keith Gilless provided a stirring tribute to her and Board Member Rich Wade later stated, "It was a lovely and touching ceremony highlighting Geri's strengths and trailblazing accomplishments."

The Board's mission is to lead California in developing policies and programs that serve the public interest in environmentally, economically, and socially sustainable management of forest and rangelands, and a fire protection system that protects and serves the people of the state.

Bergen simply loved being outdoors. Her fondness for nature helped spur the direction of her career and she continued that admiration and care in her daily living after retirement. She spent many hours in her forested yard, making sure it was fire resistant, tending to the plants and trees, and watching the birds and squirrels nosh on treats she provided to them. She loved walking her dog Jenna along the canals and forested trails of Nevada County.

In a recollection Bergen wrote for the SAF, “One Woman’s Journey,” she stated, “It was a great career. I was fortunate to have many opportunities to prove myself and my abilities and to savor the rewards of my efforts. In both my career and my professional accomplishments, I feel I really did achieve my goal of being a practicing conservationist.”

Geri Bergen passed away October 12, 2018. As the first woman line officer in the Forest Service, she must have found satisfaction in seeing women rise to the level of Regional Forester and to the head of the agency as Chief.

For more information on Bergen and her career, contact Julie Lydick, California Society of American Foresters awards chair, at djlydick@comcast.net or (916) 207-8305.

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