



Open Forest Investment Closeout

March 2, 2021



U.S. FOREST SERVICE
Caring for the land and serving the people

BETA

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THE U.S. FOREST SERVICE


OPEN FOREST

invites you to obtain a permit from participating national forests


Special Uses Permit Applications

Non-Commercial Group Use Permit

- A free permit for activities of 75 or more people
- No entry fees can be charged
- Primary purpose isn't selling goods or services
- Application Time: Appx. 20-30 minutes
- You will need: Event details such as date, time, etc.


Sign in with  to apply

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Temporary Outfitting and Guiding Permit

- For outfitters and guides who charge a fee
- Short-term, non renewable
- Application Time: Appx. 1 hour
- You may need: Certificate of good standing or equivalent, operating plan, liability insurance and more (see "Learn More")

Sign in with  to apply

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1. Background

Open Forest Vision

As the first two-way interaction-focused Forest Service online application, Open Forest will strengthen the connection between the public and the National Forests. The application will broaden and increase the public's responsible access to public lands through online availability; a predictable, responsive and friendly experience; and reduced administrative burden. These enhancements will drive increased customer satisfaction and quality of public engagement.

The Forest Service will use agile development methods and modular procurements to develop the application, ensuring an adaptive process that responds to emergent user needs and changing requirements.

The Problem Being Solved

Existing administrative systems restrict, rather than facilitate, responsible use of the forest, and reduce the time spent on stewardship-oriented business and engaging Forest users. These processes and systems result in sub-optimal customer satisfaction, less business, and less of a connection between people and their environment. We aim to help build an agency culture that welcomes the public consistently (across units, despite being decentralized), focuses on customer service that connects people to the land (over trying to protect the land from them), and is open to change.

Hypothesis

From a product perspective, we believe that by digitizing the permitting processes for the public, we will allow Forest Service staff to focus on their primary job and help correct the current overemphasis on restriction rather than facilitation. And, we believe that this will lead to better customer satisfaction and more permits being issued.

In terms of process, we want to move to a modular approach to procurement, emphasizing user centered design, agile product development, and modern DevOps practices. This approach will allow us to make incremental improvements, ensure value is being delivered every step of the way, more easily adapt to changing requirements, and ensure long-term success by building a flexible and maintainable product.

2. Project and Product Objectives

- Demonstrate effectiveness of and build capacity for modular contracting within the Forest Service
- Build product ownership within the FS
- Build capacity to manage modern digital service projects with internal or contracted resources

Product

- Provide the public with more flexible and online options for obtaining permits to use their public lands
- Provide faster, more usable service to the public
- Eliminate doubt and uncertainty during the permitting process
- Standardize aspects of the permitting program across forests, resulting in an experience that is perceived as more fair
- Reduce the workload for employees involved in the permitting process, so they can spend their time better serving the public, the land, and the agency
- Drive related business process improvements

3. Reason for Closing the Project

Overview of Mission

The mission of the Open Forest investment was to Implement a modern, web-based interface for the Agency's customers to obtain forest use permits is perhaps one of the most important opportunities the FS has to improve its service to the American public. Not only will this project improve the type and quality of service to the public, it represents a tremendous opportunity to advance the Agency's ability to engage the public in the digital age. Americans utilize digital services in virtually every aspect of their lives and the inability to obtain authorization to utilize the Nation's forest resources and recreational opportunities via modern digital services is a critical gap. Benefits to the public can be directly tied to the objectives of Strengthening Communities and Connecting People to the Outdoors. Special uses, forest products, grazing, and minerals permits are the economic connectors between communities and the Forest Service. Improving the quality and efficiency of those connections will inherently improve the Agency's ability to help maintain the economic and social resilience of rural communities. Furthermore, as the Agency shrinks its physical footprint and thus opportunities for direct engagement with the public, particularly in rural areas, the need for effective digital services becomes more critical. As District Offices close, rural residents need to travel longer distances to obtain a permit, resulting in unnecessary time and expense, anger, and increased incentive for illegal use. An electronic permit service via a web browser will enable people to be served more efficiently and have a positive, convenient experience.

Pilot effort

To initiate the Open Forest investment, it was decided to pilot a Christmas Tree permitting (first year on 4 Forests, second year on 13 Forests) and 2 Special uses permits on 1 forest the Mount Baker Snoqualmie. Thus, from a production perspective the pilot as intended was accomplished with a second year of Christmas tree expansion from 4 to 13 Forest which was beyond the initial pilot scope.

Project and Investment Closing

In FY20 National Forest System (NFS) leadership decided that Christmas Tree permits should be sold to the public using the Recreation.gov service and not the Open Forest Service [USDA Forest Service Moves Christmas Tree Permits to Recreation.gov for the 2020 Season](#), Indicating that NFS consider Open Forest a testbed. Since the Open Forest mission is intended to be an enterprise wide production level service it was determined that from a project and investment perspective Open Forest could not fulfill the Mission as planned.

The special uses permits pilot at the Mount Baker Snoqualmie was successfully implemented in December 2020. The has system continuously operated since that time is planned to be taken out of production on April1st 2021. There are currently 2 substantial issues that drive taking the system out of service. **1)** there is no product manager or product owner roles filled by NFS special uses staff and subsequently there is not plan to scale-up the Open Forest services and the cost to maintain a system for one forest is not considered a sound IT investment **2)** the system is currently hosted at Cloud.gov and USDA cybersecurity staff do not consider that environment acceptable form a cybersecurity perspective.

Items 1 and 2 above coupled with migration of Christmas Tree and possible the work done by the Open Forest team toward Firewood permitting to Recreation.gov has resulted in the closing of the Open Forest investment and the associated projects.

Overall, there is more desire in NFS to use Recreation.gov than Open Forest as a permitting solution thus there is not enough demand to justify the continuation of the Open Forest Investment.

4. Highlights, Innovations, Lessons Learned

There were substantial highlights and innovations made by the Open Forest Investment that are providing best practices information for both 1) information and technology managers and 2) those who strive to understand organizational dynamics, policy and funding.

Information and Technology Best Practices

The Open Forest effort has a strong focus on implementing solutions based on Agile Methodologies [Agile Manifesto](#). The Open Forest team placed a strong emphasis on sharing best practices related to Agile [How Open Forest Works](#).

One policy level aspect of Agile practices being transferred from Open Forest to NRE CIO occurred through the development NRE Governance Operating Model. One of the Open Forest Product owners went on to use the skills and methods learned in Open Forest to frame the NRE Governance Operating Model. Open Forest also lead the way by pioneering efforts in the following areas that were later identified by the USDA Centers of Excellence as essential best practices.

- [Discovery and User Research, Human Centered Design and User Experience \(UX\)](#)
- [Agile Contracting](#)
- [Cloud Implementation](#)
- [Open Source Code](#)
- [Continuous Integration Continuous Deployment/DevSecOps](#)
- [Forest Services Web and UI standards](#)

Many of these process and standards have been refined by and or adopted by the CIO Enterprise Application Development staff (EAD) and the Natural Resources Managers Office (NRM) application development teams. Most recently the NRM ADMOO is considering using the Open Forest Web UI and UI Standards and NRM leadership is leading a discovery research process with GSA's 18F for the modernization of the USFS Grants and Agreements system. The Open Forest Team was also recognized with USFS Chief's Award for efforts related to Special Uses Modernization.

Organization Practices and Funding

The Open Forest system was stood up in the NFS organization and their were several key lessons learned related to organization and funding in the following categories:

- preference for fee for service funding model (not appropriated funds)
- preference for programmatic leadership model (not integrated Open Forest Model)
- preference for managing contracts as non-IT governance model associated with Recreation.gov
- timelines associated with creating a new Investment with a hosting environment that required cybersecurity reviews did not align with those of the NFS business area deployment of the service.

5. Project Performance

The project performance is considered successful and documented as such especially in relation to examples information technology best practices and in deploying successful pilot effort for both Christmas Tree permit sales and accepting special uses applications for both Non-Commercial Group Use permits and Temporary Outfitting and Guiding permits. The many successful accomplishments are shown in detail in the [Product Roadmap](#) and in the [Christmas Tree Retrospective](#)

6. Hand-off to Operations

The open-source code and associated information used to develop the code for the Open Forest system is stored in a [Open Forest System Code Repository](#) and available for future use. There is also an effort to move the system to a holding area or “development” type of environment in the event it is needed in the future.

10. Project Closure Review and Approval-March 2

Title	Name	Concurrence
Business Owner	Brian Schwind	Yes
CIO PMO Branch Chief	Simon Strickland	Yes
Investment Manger	Aaron Burk	Yes