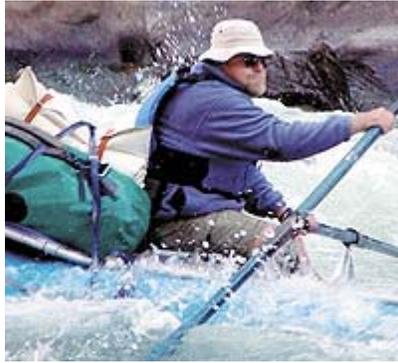


## National outdoor school recognizes Price BLM field officer with stewardship award

By CHARLES MCMANUS  
Sun Advocate reporter



Dennis Willis picks his way through Salmon Falls, a class four rapid, on the Salmon River in Idaho last fall. Willis enjoys all manner of outdoor sports.

The National Outdoor Leadership School awarded local United States Bureau of Land Management officer Dennis Willis with the group's stewardship award last weekend. Willis works as the outdoor recreation planner for the Price field office of the BLM and has been a member of Carbon County outdoor recreation for over 27 years. "I grew up doing a lot of family outdoor activities," said Willis. "My dad was an old desert rat and I always thought the guy I saw driving around in the green pickup truck whenever we were camping had a pretty good job."

Willis is referring to the older BLM service trucks that are known to many here in Castle County. "I got into this work very young because I just always loved outdoor activities," said Willis. Being from California, Willis grew up around the Mojave Desert and the eastern slopes of the Sierra Nevada Range. He attended the University of Nevada-Reno and received a degree in renewable natural resources. After college, Willis worked seasonal jobs for the US Forest Service in Utah and Idaho. His work with the BLM began in Winnemucca, Nev. as a range conversationalist. In 1979, Willis transferred to Price. And discovered what he calls the wonders of the Green River and its canyons.

NOLS chose to honor Willis for his ability to provide high-quality outdoor experiences for visitors while remaining steadfastly committed to protecting and providing balanced management of the Green River as it flows through Carbon and Emery Counties, cutting through the fossil-etched rocks of Desolation Canyon, arguably one of the most spectacular canyons in the country, according to the NOLS. "Willis has been instrumental in helping our program grow and continue to provide service to the Desolation Canyon corridor," said Phil Henderson, NOLS Utah River Program Manager in Vernal. "He has helped our field staff understand the importance of managing public lands and the risk involved while recreating and teaching on those lands."

The NOLS Stewardship award has been presented annually since 1990. It recognizes land managers who have demonstrated exceptional stewardship of the wild lands entrusted to their care. According to an NOLS press release, their school was founded in 1965 by mountaineer Paul Petzoldt. NOLS is the leader in wilderness education and sets the industry standard for responsible, high quality educational expeditions.

“The Green River and its canyons just really seemed like a place where I could make a difference, where I could make a commitment,” said Willis. Working closely with local recreation and wildlife specialists initiatives were started to improve the grazing along the river corridor and the retirement of all the grazing permits in Gray Canyon and the associated plateau. This opened the door for the reintroduction of native Bighorn sheep that had been eliminated in the 1920s. The grazing problem and solutions played out over a period of 11 year and included agency administrative actions, litigation, partnerships and buyouts and even shooting the last of the cattle.

More recently Willis has been perusing project aimed at controlling invasive species and archaeological resources inventory. He just finished an eight day expedition, helping a team of archaeologists find and document sites. “The site is most likely a Fremont Indian village,” said Willis. “So far we have found nearly 20 sites with rock shelters, masonry walls and ceilings. A very good find.”

He is a member of the River Management Society and was recognized as the manager of the year in 2002. However conservation is not all there is to Willis. Willis is known as Judge Graft to his friends in the Castle Gate Posse, a cowboy action shooting team here in Carbon County. He is president of the organization and aids in the multiple shooting events the club puts on each year.

During action shooting competitors are timed while shooting 10 pistol rounds, 10 rifle rounds and then anywhere from 4 to 10 shotgun rounds at targets within a given scenario. Each participant takes on an alter-ego that matches the time period of the mid 1800’s.

While Willis enjoys being Judge Graft his true passion does remain with wilderness conservation. “We are doing some good projects,” concluded Willis. “But budget constraints stop our organization from doing some things that could make a big difference in this area.”

## **NOLS Awards BLM Manager with 2008 Stewardship Award**

Date: October 13, 2007

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Lander, Wyoming —This Saturday, October 13th, the National Outdoor Leadership School will present its 2008 Stewardship Award to Dennis Willis, Outdoor Recreation Planner for the Price Field Office of the Utah Bureau of Land Management in Price, Utah. Dennis has worked for the Bureau of Land Management for 30 years, 27 of which were in Price.

NOLS chose to honor Dennis for his ability to provide high-quality outdoor experiences for visitors while remaining steadfastly committed to protecting and providing balanced management of the Green as it flows through Carbon and Emery County and cuts through the fossil-etched rocks of Desolation Canyon, arguably one of the most spectacular canyons in the country.

“Dennis has been instrumental in helping our program grow and continue to provide service to the Desolation Canyon corridor,” said Phil Henderson, NOLS Utah River Program Manager in Vernal, Utah. “He has helped our field staff understand the importance of managing public lands and the risk involved while recreating and teaching on those lands.”

Dennis’s commitment to the natural integrity of public lands and continuing support for extended rafting, kayaking, and canoeing courses demonstrates a quantifiable commitment to outdoor education as a critical land management tool. Such support has been apparent in his personal work with NOLS on several self-guided service projects.

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