

## Arizona Nominee for BLM Legends Honor

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### Tom Folks

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Tom Folks is the Recreation, Wilderness and Archaeology Team Leader for the BLM Arizona Strip District. As a visionary leader with high integrity, he motivates a team that continually and successfully produce quality recreation experiences and benefits for the public land visitor from remote natural resources northern Arizona, including the Grand Canyon-Parashant and Vermilion Cliffs National Monuments and eight wilderness areas. Tom's worthy management of the public's changing recreation needs through the years has led to quantifiable improvements in recreation opportunities, increased reliance upon partnerships with for-profit and nonprofit organizations in the private sector, the use of creative solutions and programs, sharing of creative solutions within the agency, and community support for his work, especially in the destination tourism and community area markets. The wilderness and dispersed hiking, equestrian, historic interpretation, environmental education, off highway vehicle, and scenic touring market niches have particularly benefited with enhanced outcomes. These efforts deserve recognition as one of BLM's Legends Honorees.

A most notable achievement is the multi-criteria conception and creation of a three-way partnership with the Arizona Strip Interpretive Association (ASIA), Northern Arizona University (NAU), and the BLM, to manage visitation experiences in Paria Canyon and Coyote Buttes as one of the original 18 national BLM fee demonstration projects in 1996. His creative solution continues to allow the BLM to focus on providing site enhancements, resource protection, and recreational fee reporting requirements through the agency's Arizona Strip (Vermilion Cliffs National Monument) and Kanab Field Offices (Utah BLM), while ASIA manages the issuance of Special Recreation Permits, primarily by hosting the agency's first self-service online permitting system and both a paid and volunteer staff to respond to walk-in requests for permits, information, interpretation, and environmental education, plus make fee collections in the field.

Meanwhile, NAU, key to the initial computer development of the online permitting system using the latest technologies of the time, still continues to provide state-of-the-art resource condition monitoring and assistance on special projects and research. The monitoring techniques perfected though these tasks are shared and become standards throughout Arizona. The partnership remains very successful. Lessons of the automated permit system, shared with the agency, resulted in maintenance of the Bureau's Information Technology architecture to bring more recent technologies, security, and user satisfaction with the automated permit system to other permit-managed areas. It also resulted in the cross-linking of internal databases and fiscal systems, and an interface with US Treasury, all of which have increased efficiency in fiscal management, lowered permit costs to the public participant, and ultimately lower costs to the BLM. Another development was the design of an automated lottery system to manage overwhelming numbers of permit applications. This design is now in use with the National Park Service and will soon be handling the international demands for a few available permits to experience "The Wave" of Coyote Buttes. Support for these efforts comes not just from the local community, but is evidenced by hundreds of correspondence from an international market. The demand is indicative of the quantifiable increase in recreation experience opportunity production for this one area alone brought about by Tom's efforts and leadership.

Another of Tom's efforts to share news of creative solutions within the agency was his 1999 internal publication, "Managing Remoteness on the Arizona Strip". In an effort to guide the implementation of their land use plan, the document shared with fellow staff and managers the then-growing concepts of how management settings influence a visitor's experience outcomes and benefits. It still provides a "how to" management guide for transportation, access, levels and types of information, interpretation, facilities, and services appropriate to produce the experiences visitors desire utilizing a zone approach. Visitors are directed to the zones appropriate for their equipment and experience. Tom continues to share this technology to this day through assisting in the design and teaching of a National Training Center course titled "Recreation Planning, Effective Engagement in BLM's Land Use Planning Process". His knowledge and leadership in the application of recent BLM planning guidance and strategic direction has lead the development of the RMP and EIS for the Arizona Strip Field Office and monuments, serving as a template for all other recreation planners in Arizona, and through teaching is sharing it with all recreation planners in the agency, resulting in the community embracement and support of our planning efforts.

Tom increased non-traditional use and accessible recreation opportunities in remote locations such as Stateline Campground, at the northern terminus of the Arizona Trail. Through successful competition for construction grants, he organized volunteer groups to construct several miles of the Arizona Trail, install directional signs and interpretive signs and do numerous cleanups, for which the equestrian and hiking communities afforded him special recognition. With these and other partners he accomplished interpretive kiosks for the Honeymoon Trail and a backcountry route inventory of the entire Arizona Strip District. The Vermilion Cliffs Highways project, a regional interpretation and education experience along 110 miles of state and federal highways in northern Arizona, was constructed this past winter and is accessible to all.

The local community appreciates and recognizes Tom's work in going the extra mile in working with them to authorize the local "Rhino Rally" with the Wizards motorcycle racing club. After this yearly competitive race, letters come into the office thanking Tom in particular.

Tom's performance has been exceptional throughout his 29-year career with BLM. He has worked as a park ranger, cartographer, outdoor recreation planner, instructor, and team lead. He is one of the BLM's experts on the Wilderness Act and the management of wilderness, recreation resources, and the application of benefits-based management to recreation. Tom conducted some of the BLM's first wilderness inventories and has kept pace with the ever-changing world of technology and the internet to bring these advances into creative use. Tom is an avid outdoorsman, wilderness hiker, backpacker, camper, mountain biker, and motorized vehicle user among his community.