



John F. Butruille

1935-2025

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John Butruille had a long and distinguished career with the U.S. Forest Service, from Colorado and Wyoming to Alaska, Oregon and Washington, D.C. He retired as Region 6

Regional Forester, 1989 - 1992. John finished his earth journey in his home in Leavenworth, Washington on May 23, 2025.

John learned to love the outdoors growing up on a farm near Doylestown, Pennsylvania, where he helped his France-born dad in his grain business. Born to Elizabeth and Frank Butruille, John was the middle child between four sisters: Suzanne, Mary Lou, Anne, and Odette, his only living sister. As the tallest, skinniest basketball player in Lansdale Catholic High School, John guarded one opponent who kept yelling, “Hey Red, why doesn’t anybody pass you the ball?” The wise-guy’s name was Wilt Chamberlain, known even then to score 100 points a game. John bragged that he kept Chamberlain to 45 points. The encounter must have been good training in keeping cool under duress.

John studied business for two years at St. Joseph’s College (now University) in Philadelphia before heading west to study forestry at Colorado A&M (now Colorado State University) after reading a brochure that encouraged aspiring foresters to bring hunting and fishing gear. He took eight years to earn his bachelor’s degree in Forestry, working variously as a pizza restaurant manager, Forest Service summer work including hotshot fire crews, and two years in the U.S. Army as a military police in post-war Korea. Returning to CSU, John met a student from Durango named Susan in a bridge game. Susan, whose father and brother were foresters, lost the game — but won John’s heart.

Following graduation in 1962, John's early Forest Service career included assignments on forests in Colorado, Wyoming, Oregon and Alaska as well as regional offices in Denver and Portland. His favorite assignment was that of District Ranger on the Wind River District out of Dubois, Wyoming — a district heavily reliant on horses. John's early years included seasonal firefighting, including positions as fire boss and incident commander.

John's work increasingly took on a national focus, including forest planning, recreation, and legislation in the Pacific Northwest and national headquarters in Washington, D.C. He was instrumental in developing the National Forest Recreation Initiative, the Scenic Byway program, Wild and Scenic River designations, the Cascade Head Scenic Research Area in Oregon, legislation for the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area, and Alaska Lands Legislation on the Tongass National Forest.

John's assignment as Region 6 Regional Forester in 1989 came at a time of sudden program changes, including the listing of the Spotted Owl as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. John's colleagues credited his leadership with moving Region 6 forward during a turbulent time.

John's life after the Forest Service didn't look like retirement. He volunteered with organizations involved in community building and disaster relief, including the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Northwest Medical Teams in Portland, plus MEND and Faith Lutheran Church in Leavenworth, Washington. FEMA assignments included coordinating logistics after the 911 New York World Trade Center attack.

John's international volunteer work with Volunteer Overseas Cooperative Assistance (VOCA) took him to Estonia, Russia, Kazakhstan, and Honduras. His favorite FEMA assignment was in Russia's Ural Mountains. "We would go out into small towns who had requested our help," John remembered. "The people were friendly and gracious."

John's post-Forest Service activities included fishing trips with his sons; hunting and fishing with buddies in Oregon, Alaska and Australia; travel with Susan; and annual "floating poker games" with his poker pals on Lake Powell. In 2005, John and Susan moved to Leavenworth, Washington to be near their son Tony, his wife, Meleah, and grandchildren Sarah and Evan. Their son Frank lives in Anchorage with his wife, Cynthia, and twin sons, Matt and Sean. John's grandchildren considered Grandad to be the family's best storyteller.

"I've had a wonderful personal and professional life," John wrote, "not always easy, and many times challenging. Frequent moves were trying at times, but my family was supportive and each made their own way. Susan is a successful author and lecturer, and both of our sons have made us proud with their efforts and accomplishments. Without my family's support and help, my career would have been quite different."

The family suggests remembering John by donating to one of his favorite causes:

— Upper Valley MEND (Meeting Each Need with Dignity): uvmend.org or PO Box 772, Leavenworth, WA 98826

— The Pacific Northwest Old Smokeys Forest Service fund to assist employees who have recently lost their jobs: oldsmokeys.org — go to the Donate page, or PNWFSA, PO Box 5583, Portland, OR 97228-5583.