

Tributes to Fred Cooper (NCSB '62) for 25 years as a member of the NSA Board of Directors

At the conclusion of the Spring 2026 NSA Board of Directors meeting, NSA President Mike Bina honored longtime board member Fred Cooper upon his retirement after 25 years of dedicated service.

Fred played a key leadership role in the NSA's TRAMPS trail-improvement program for many years, while also contributing to numerous other initiatives. Several fellow board members joined President Bina in recognizing Fred's outstanding contributions during the meeting.

Mike McMillan (FBX '96)

Fred Cooper has given so much to the NSA since his own days spent smokejumping. Always an advocate for the profession, Fred is an excellent researcher, writer, historian and spokesman. He wrote a great manuscript that we worked on together to get printed, and we're proud of *Smokejumper Experiment*, a small but significant book that documents the origins of American Smokejumping. He truly put his back into his work with TRAMPS, an organization that accomplished a lot of great trail work in some of our most treasured forests. Thanks for all you've done for us, Fred.

Denny Breslin (NCSB '69)

Fred, you were the first person to welcome me when I joined the NSA Board of Directors in 2018. Since then, your gravelly, thundering voice has been unmistakable—even in a crowd of 600 noisy Missoula smokejumpers last summer at the 85th NSA reunion!

I was 13 years old when you started jumping in 1962. I'd wade the river just to watch your practice jumps and find a way to be nearby whenever there was fire activity. I won't say I was a pest... but I loved smokejumping and everything about it, including just hanging around as a young boy!

It doesn't seem like 62 years have passed, does it? I never imagined you'd be stepping away from the board so soon—I guess I just assumed you'd always be there. Thank you for your years as a smokejumper, and for the 25 years you gave in service on the board. You set a powerful example of what the NSA stands for, and why the next generation of jumpers should step up and carry on the legacy you've helped to build.

Jim Cherry (MSO '67)

A word for the Honorable Fred (Mister History) Cooper:

You and I have grown rather “long in the tooth” in our service on the NSA's Board of Directors. You began your service in 2001, and I in 2005. We are bested only by the 1995 start date of Chuck Sheley, and I doubt his record will ever be threatened. Our records of service certainly say something about being able to stick through the thick and thin of a challenge.

Unless you have been pulling the wool over my eyes (which I truly doubt) for these 21 years we have known each other and worked together on the NSA Board and in the TRAMPS program, I

can eagerly attest to the fact that you are both a gentleman and a gentle man in every way. I have only one regret, and that is the distance between Iowa and Montana that has placed a limit on the time we might have spent together.

We had our first contact through the **TRAMPS** program, even before it was known by that terminology. That trails program was the thing that brought me and many others “back into the fold” and allowed for renewal of long-silent friendships. When Jon McBride passed, you stepped forward and helped to shepherd the program to other levels, and I, in particular, appreciated your willingness to experiment with some joint **TRAMPS** and NSA scholarship attempts. Unfortunately, forces beyond anyone’s control (the covid epidemic, curtailment of government funding, and an aging population of volunteers) **have** reduced and shaped the program from its high point, but it continues to be a highly prized force in bringing together our comrades from years past into a common cause, and it’s a major component of our NSA mission statement.

Your passion for smokejumper and USFS history has been a blessing to another aspect of the NSA’s mission statement... namely, the preservation of our history and lore. I learned so much from reading your book *Smokejumper Experiment* that you did with Mike McMillan. History can be so easily lost without enthusiasts like you who are willing to dig into dusty old archives and bring past facts once again into the light of day.

I could run on for some time in the singing of your praises, but I fear your head might swell to a larger cap size. In short, Fred, as you have come to the point where you have determined it’s time for you to step down from the NSA board, I truly hope that we will continue to have some points of contact through the coming months/years. I am a better person for having had the opportunity to know and work alongside you. You have my humble thanks.

John Berry (RAC '70)

Throughout my 32-year career with the US Forest Service, I was acquainted with Fred Cooper and his wife, Cherie Cooper. My connection with Fred grew at several Forest Service Retiree Reunions, where I had the opportunity to interact with him more personally. During the Albuquerque reunion in 2015, Fred invited me to consider joining the National Smokejumper Association (NSA) board of directors. I accepted his offer, and later that year, I attended the board meeting in Seattle, Washington.

I have come to recognize Fred as an exceptional leader dedicated to Forest Service and Smokejumper history, lore, and a steadfast commitment to service. Fred was actively involved in the TRAMPS program, organizing and participating in trail and historic building projects. He is a committed member of the National Museum of Forest Service History board of directors and has authored several Smokejumper Base histories while compiling historical documents for archiving. Fred’s support also extends to the Museum of Mountain Flying in Missoula, MT. It is difficult to name anyone else who has contributed more to the preservation of the US Forest Service’s history and traditions. Fred’s contributions have been extensive and enduring, and we all owe him a debt of gratitude for his service.

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Fred is a quiet yet unwavering advocate for historical projects. He consistently urged the NSA to provide financial support to the National Museum of Forest Service History and the Museum of Mountain Flying. During discussions about funding and policy, Fred was always respectful and collaborative, yet he stood firm in his convictions. His approach exemplified teamwork without compromising his principles. Fred has been a valued colleague and friend. It is fitting that Fred was among the first Redmond Smokejumpers—a special band of brothers!

Rod Dow (MYC '68)

Wisconsin dairy farmer. Strong, dependable work ethic. Ethical, kind, respectful human. Friendly. Collaborative. Big smile. Thoughtful. Hard worker. Friend. Trusted and respected colleague. Detailed. Team player. Great *Smokejumper Experiment* book. Fantastic leadership of the Trails program. If I could hand-pick the 12-man/woman crew going into the “Fire from Hell,” I would want you there digging fire line with me. You have left your mark on smokejumping and have played a significant role in making the NSA what it is today. The board meetings will not be the same without you, Fred. Rest assured: you have done your job--- and have done it exceedingly well. My very, very best to you and Cherie. Be and stay well.