

Leaders

We Would Like to Meet

Wildland Fire Leadership Development Program



Interview with Glen Stratton

by Jennifer Hinckley



“It occurred to me as began to write the traditional "goodbye, I'm moving on to retirement" email, that email wasn't invented in 1985 when I started my career with the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service, only the Jetsons had cell phones, Google was something you would say to an infant, and if you said “Twitter” in mixed company your mamma would slap you. I wonder how folks will say goodbye in 2045?

I have been very blessed to have had an absolutely awesome career crisscrossing this great country of ours turning green acres black, managing our habitat and “doing what’s right for the critters” as Sam Hamilton would say.

The adrenaline filled adventures; hurricanes, wildfires, shuttle recovery (two of those) and prescribed burning – yes, I assure you prescribed burning on Merritt Island NWR and Key Deer NWR are adrenaline filled from start to finish and where Ole’ Jeff Schardt coined the phrase “prescribed firefighting”. In 30 years of adventure two events changed my life, hurricanes Charlie and Katrina both humbled me to my soul. I have had many memorable, great adventures but I must say, hands down, the two days I spent at Wichita Mountains NWR rounding up longhorns on horseback were perhaps the most memorable of all, thank you Rob Wood. I would be remiss if I didn’t mention the Rim Fire (Google or YouTube it) a once in a career fire and no better example of managing chaos 24/7. I have never been more proud to be a part of the Blue Team, I’ll miss y’all. The friends I made along the way are invaluable to me; I plan to stay in touch. Last but certainly not least, I met my very best friend (my wife Kelley) at Lake Woodruff NWR on a prescribed burn 14 years ago and things went north from there, literally!

I am very grateful and proud to have had the privilege to work for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. It is truly a great outfit to work for. Heck, if it wasn’t for all the annual mandatory training you really wouldn’t even know it’s a federal agency. Now as my career comes to an end the only thing left to do is click SEND!

Keep up the good work, always stay safe and enjoy today.”



Glen Stratton

“Through life we all make mistakes; however, it is only a mistake if you do it twice.”



Glen's Career:

7/1985-9/1996 – Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge, Equipment Operator

9/1996-3/2001 – Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge, Fire Control Officer

3/2001 - 6/2008 – Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge, Acting District Fire Management Officer

6/2008-3/2010 – Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge, District Fire Management Officer

3/2010-6/2012 – Atlanta, GA R4 Regional Office, Regional Prescribed Fire Specialist

6/2012-12/2015 – Hadley, MA R5 Regional Office, Regional Fire Management Coordinator (R3 & R5 RFMC from 4/2014-10/2015)

He was also the primary Operations Section Chief on the Southern Area Blue Type 1 Team.

What makes you want to follow someone?

Humble, Vision, Trust, and Respect.

Who do you think is a leadership role model and why?

Really tough question here....there is so many to choose from.

We can learn a lot from some of the great Native American Chiefs, Red Cloud, Chief Joseph, Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse. These

Chiefs cared a great deal about the greater good, the people and their well-being and the preservation of their life style that they were themselves willing to pay the ultimate price.

Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson was a great leader and showed all traits in question one and three.

If you were to pick the three most important character traits for an effective leader, what would those be?

1. Ability to listen
2. Ability to make a decision
3. Ability to change course.

Are leaders born or made...explain?

I do believe leaders are born with the trait and life brings it to the surface. Through life we all make mistakes; however, it is only a mistake if you do it twice. The first time is learning opportunity, if you take advantage of the opportunity then you have the ability to learn, lead and make decisions based on your best knowledge.

Regarding leadership, what quote comes to mind?

"We know not the worth of water till the well runs dry" - Benjamin Franklin

Who are some of the individuals that had a significant influence on your life?

My grandfather
Kelley Stratton, my wife
Ray Farinetti
Bob Eaton

Thinking back to your youth, what other influences helped you become a leader?

Hard work.
Being poor monetarily but rich in family.
My sense of adventure.
Not being afraid to take a step into the unknown.

What do you consider your strengths to be?

I feel I can make a decision to move forward and change course if needed. I don't consider myself egotistical.



What do you consider your weaknesses to be?

I am terrible communicator. I have great difficulty explaining my intentions.

Since you started in 1985, what are the biggest improvements you have witnessed in the wildland fire service?

Training in leadership, equipment for the troops, unified standards in qualifications and the 'go/no-go' document for prescribed burning.

What do you consider the worst changes you have seen in the wildland fire service?

Reductions in budget, thus reducing the new recruits and development of our future leaders. Eventually the lack of recruiting will have severe impacts to the fire programs of all agencies.

By far the worst possible change is the prescribed fire complexity analysis, the worst document in all the federal government.

Describe a few of the toughest decisions or dilemmas you have faced? Hands down the two toughest decisions I have ever had to

make involved adverse actions (removal) of employees.

What helped to guide you through those situations?

I had to stay focused on the program and what was best for the program.

Why do think people follow you?

I never ask anyone to do anything that I would not do myself.

When did you realize that you had a significant influence on others?

When I retired, I guess?

What handful of "lessons learned" would you offer to a young leader today?

1. A refuge manager (Mike Bryant) once told me (in the context of prescribed burning) to always have a plan, have an approved plan and stick to the plan. I have applied this advice to many situations not just prescribed burning and it has served me well. I would add to it that if/when the plan changes communicate the change in the plan.
2. Always apply Duty, Integrity and Respect to life, it will never steer you wrong.
3. Always listen to subordinates.
4. Never surprise your supervisor.
5. Don't let distractions of the past blur your vision for the future.
6. Communicate....communicate.
7. Don't be afraid to pick up the phone and call to discuss important issues. Don't let email rule your life!
8. Change is a chance at new opportunity and risk is healthy.

What is a book you have read recently that you would recommend to others?

“The Heart of Everything That Is” The story of Red Cloud, the only foe to defeat the United States in a war.

What ideas or projects are currently working on?

Well, I’m retired from the fire service. I plan to raise bees, make maple syrup, hunt, and build furniture.

How do you go about initiating a new idea in order to put it into practice?

I try to start with the field and get “buy-in” if you will, I learned long ago the if folks feel a part of the decision/plan then the plan stands a much greater chance of success.

Do you think a legacy is important and if so, what do want your legacy to be?

This is an interesting question. On one hand I do not believe a legacy is as important from a recognition standpoint. On the other hand, for me it is important that when it’s all said and done that I have contributed something for the greater good and the past 30 years were not a waste of time.



Glenn Stratton interviewed by Jennifer Hinckley, March 2016.