

Visitor Center rebuild gets \$2 million in federal funds

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Efforts to rebuild the Schulman Grove Visitor Center in the Ancient Bristlecone Pine Forest were given a boost with the recent award of nearly \$2 million in federal funding for the project.

Inyo National Forest Supervisor Jim Upchurch announced Friday that the visitor center was one of only five projects to be awarded with a Forest Service Facility Capital Improvement grant in a nationwide competition.

Upchurch and Debbe Eilts of the Easter Sierra Interpretive Center said that the large public outpouring of support for the new center was a major determining factor in winning the allocation.

Eilts said that the newly allocated funds along with those from private contributions will make for “an amazing facility – we’ll be able to have excellent educational and interpretive exhibits.”

Eilts wanted to stress how impressed the center and Forest Service are with the public support of the center in these dire financial times.

Bristlecone Pine Forest Ranger John Louth and Forest Service staff have been working on initial design and engineering plans for the new center, but now with this major funding, these plans will now be completed.

The new visitor center will be a log-cabin design, roughly the same size, in the same location as the old center that was suspiciously destroyed by fire last September. The new center is also being designed as a “model of energy-efficiency,” according to a press release, utilizing the latest in “green building practices.” Louth said some of the improvements that visitors will see are the state-of-the-art solar power system and updated exhibits addressing the impacts of global warming on the ancient trees. In addition, plans have been completed and work has begun on replacing many of the outside exhibits, interpretive signs, patio and much of the boardwalk that was destroyed in the fire. That work should be completed by the busy summer tourism season.