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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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June 15, 2020

**Prestigious Bronze Smokey Bear Award Goes to Forester Supervisor
of Smokey Bear Historical Park
Capitan, NM**



Santa Fe - The Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department Forestry Division is proud to announce that Ms. Bennie Long, Forester Supervisor for Smokey Bear Historical Park in Capitan, New Mexico, is the recipient of the prestigious Bronze Smokey Bear Award. The USDA Forest Service (USFS) Cooperative Forest Fire Prevention (CFFP) Committee for the National Smokey Bear Program grants this annual award to individuals, organizations, or teams for outstanding wildfire prevention service that has a significant impact within a state.

The Forestry Division believes Ms. Long's dedication to educating the public about the dangers of human-caused wildfires, the value of protecting our precious watersheds, and love for the enduring legacy of Smokey Bear makes her a perfect candidate for the Bronze Smokey Bear Award.

"Bennie embodies the spirit of Smokey Bear and the principles of shared stewardship in her quest to build partnerships to support Smokey Bear Historical Park," said State Forester Laura McCarthy.

Each year, tens of thousands of people from across New Mexico, the nation, and the world visit Smokey Bear Historical Park in Capitan, New Mexico, which is the birthplace, and resting place, of Smokey Bear the living symbol. Bennie has made it her personal mission to connect with all visitors to the park, with the help of her staff, to ensure that the entire 75 year history of the Smokey Bear wildfire prevention campaign leaves a lasting impression on children and adults of all ages.

This year Bennie organized an upgrade the interpretive signs at the park to reflect the current history of the unwanted wildfire and how they might be prevented. She also worked with the local friends' group of the park to raise \$43,000 to install the only memorial in New Mexico dedicated to remembering wildland firefighters that have died in the line of duty, which was dedicated May 4, 2019 at Smokey Bear Days. The Memorial will serve as a continual reminder to visitors of the potential cost of unwanted, human-caused wildfires.

The Smokey Bear Historical Park outdoor memorials and interpretive gardens are currently open to the public with COVID-19 protocols, including the use of masks by guests and employees, in place. For more information go to <http://www.emnrd.state.nm.us/SFD/>.

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