Sara Irving has taught classes in the visual arts at NMSU-A since 1999. She was head of the photography program at NMSU-A for over 18 years. Sara is now retired from full-time teaching and is an adjunct Professor Emerita, teaching online courses in art history. She received her BFA in painting from Massachusetts College of Art in Boston and her MFA in photography from New Mexico State University, Las Cruces. Her photographic work is in documentary landscape photography.

Sara grew up in New Hampshire and moved to New Mexico in 1980. That was the year she first saw the Gila National Forest, when backpacking the Continental Divide Trail from Mexico to Canada. Two years later she was hired as a seasonal employee in the Gila and has worked as a fire lookout there for forty summers. There is a long history of women staffing fire towers, and Sara is mentioned in an article in Smithsonian Magazine that came out last year during Women’s History Month.

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/female-fire-lookouts-have-been-saving-wilderness-over-century-180977352/>

Sara works on Mogollon Baldy Lookout. The lookout lies in the middle of the half million-acre Gila Wilderness, the largest wilderness area in the American Southwest. The shortest trail access is twelve miles along the high-altitude crest of the Mogollon Mountains. The Gila has a short but intense fire season that runs from late April until the rainy season arrives sometime in July. Lookouts provide early detection of fires. An experienced lookout who knows the landscape can quickly and accurately pinpoint the location of a new smoke, as well as provide updates on changing fire and weather conditions. This information is vital to successful firefighting efforts and firefighter safety.