

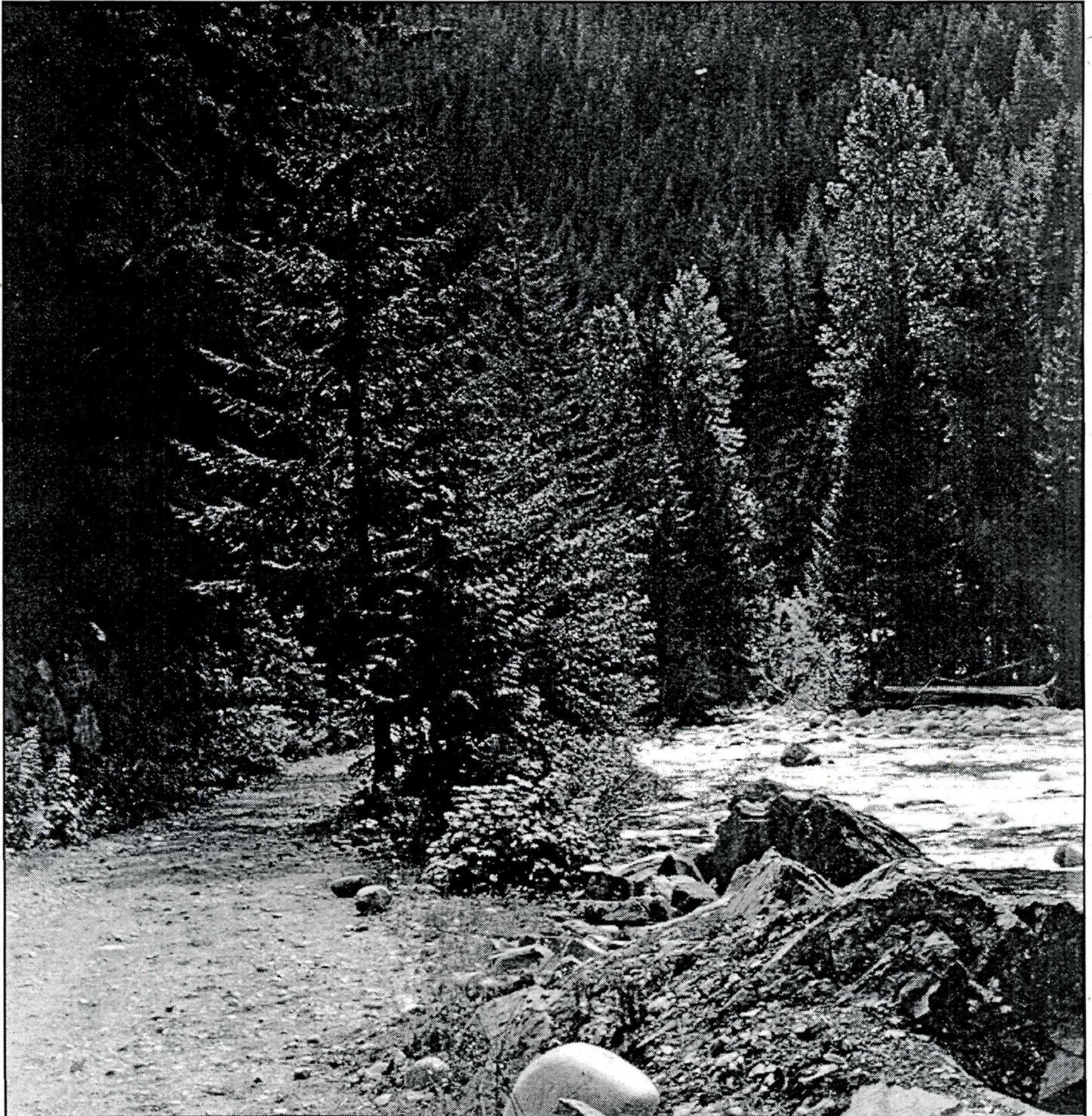
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# THE WILD CASCADES

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THE JOURNAL OF THE NORTH CASCADES CONSERVATION COUNCIL

SPRING 1997



STEHEKIN RIVER ROAD-TRAIL, *(It was a road that shouldn't have been, is now a trail that shall be)* —SANDY WALKER PHOTO

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## The Wild Cascades

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*Journal of the North Cascades Conservation Council*

EDITOR: Betty Manning

Printing by EcoGraphics

*The Wild Cascades* is published three times a year (Spring, Summer and Fall). NCCC members receive this journal. Address letters, comments, send articles to:

*The Wild Cascades* Editor  
North Cascades Conservation Council  
University Station  
Seattle, WA 98145-1980

The North Cascades Conservation Council was formed in 1957 "To protect and preserve the North Cascades' scenic, scientific, recreational, educational, and wilderness values." Continuing this mission, NCCC keeps government officials, environmental organizations, and the general public informed about issues affecting the Greater North Cascades Ecosystem. Action is pursued through legislative, legal, and public participation channels to protect the lands, waters, plants and wildlife.

Over the past third of a century the NCCC has led or participated in campaigns to create the North Cascades National Park Complex, Glacier Peak Wilderness, and other units of the National Wilderness System from the W.O. Douglas Wilderness north to the Alpine Lakes Wilderness, the Henry M. Jackson Wilderness, the Chelan-Sawtooth Wilderness and others. Among its most dramatic victories has been working with British Columbia allies to block the raising of Ross Dam, which would have drowned Big Beaver Valley.

### MEMBERSHIP

The NCCC is supported by member dues and private donations. These support publication of *The Wild Cascades* and lobbying activities. (NCCC is a non-tax-deductible 501(c)4 organization.) Membership dues for one year are: \$10 - low income/student; \$20 - regular; \$25 - family; \$50.00 - Contributing; \$100 - patron; \$1000 - Sustaining. A one-time life membership dues payment is \$500.

■

The North Cascades Foundation supports the NCCC's nonpolitical efforts. Donations are tax-deductible as a 501(c)3 organization. Please make your check(s) out to the organization of your choice. The Foundation can be reached through NCCC mailing address:

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Founded in 1957  
SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

## Spring, 1997

Most of you reading this message have received an appeal for donations to carry on the work of the North Cascades Conservation Council and the North Cascades Foundation.

I am pleased to report that about half the membership has responded with generous donations which totaled over \$4000. It is the intention of the Boards of Trustees of both organizations to use this money in the most efficient manner possible. In particular, we want to continue our initiative to minimize grazing in the North Cascades and to follow through with our effort, so far successful, to keep condominiums out of the Stehekin area. We can feel good about our impact on the Chelan County elections which will hopefully help the general land use situation in the eastern Cascades. This must be pursued. And of course, we still intend to publish Harvey Manning's book on the history of the North Cascades. Thank you for your generosity and commitment.

Having said that, I would like to make a request to you all, and this request is, in my mind, even more important than your financial support. I ask that you all make a sincere effort to recruit a new member for the NCCC. While money is extremely important, the physical and moral support of additional folks such as ourselves will truly have an even greater impact on our projects. My vision of the future would have people swarming throughout the Cascades, ready to blow the whistle on small hydro projects, sheep and cattle mangling our trails and streams, and new roads replacing trails and wild areas. Most of us have a friend or relative who share our values and who might be willing to be a member. They could help achieve our goals by writing an occasional letter or they might be the type who is out hiking every weekend and sending us reports from the field. It isn't always easy to convince people to join groups of any kind, much less a politically active organization, such as the North Cascades Conservation Council.

Please make the effort. Our common cause truly needs your help.

*Marc Bardsley*

# US Forest Service Knows Better than Nature

RICK MCGUIRE

Near Interstate 90, a few miles west of Snoqualmie Pass, stands a sign eerily reminiscent of the timber company ads of a decade or more ago. The sign was placed by the U.S. Forest Service as part of the "South Fork Thin" timber sale. Stylized "before and after" portraits depict the nearby woods. The "before" picture shows a dark and gloomy place, where sunlight never reaches and one can easily imagine evil spirits lurking. The "after" picture, thanks to Forest Service timber planners, is a scene of happiness and safety. Contented little critters scamper about and majestic birds soar above the sunny, open groves of well spaced trees. It's a place where families can come without fear that toddlers will fall victim to the unspeakable horrors which surely await them in the unmanaged forest.

Welcome to the brave new world of Forest Service timber sales. Although the presence of too many tree huggers in the nearby cities has made the Forest Service (at least on the frontline Mt. Baker - Snoqualmie) rethink the liquidation of all old-growth, which it had long planned, the timber beasts are far from dead. Indeed, now they tell us that they can improve on nature, and speed up the process of turning younger forests into old-growth, by, of course, cutting trees.

It was only a few years ago that the forestry profession viewed old-growth forests as "biological deserts," fit only to be cut down, burned and replaced with a monoculture of supertrees, just like any cornfield. Only the most unreconstructed dinosaurs still cling to that view, at least publicly. But these same folks who once derided old-growth forests as worse than worthless now tell us that they can produce old growth faster and better, by thinning what they call "overstocked" young stands. That there is vastly more speculation than science behind this idea dents their confidence not a bit.

The New Age timber planners would have us believe that by thinning out naturally dense stands of young trees they

will "release" the remaining trees from competition, allowing them to grow faster and thus form an "old-growth" forest sooner than would happen otherwise. There is little or no evidence for this. No human has ever created, or even hastened the development of, a true old-growth forest.

It is true that in some cases, thinning out stands of trees will cause those left behind to grow faster, if they don't blow down. This is what is sometimes called "timber stand improvement" and is very different from creating old-growth forests. This technique may produce sawlogs of a certain size, though of inferior quality, faster than nature. But this is very different from the processes which work to produce old-growth forests.

Old-growth forests, by their very nature, form slowly. That some trees may grow faster in the new, improved forest is at best irrelevant and possibly even harmful. Slow growth is what produces the dense, strong wood that has made old-growth trees so prized by the same timber industry which has so reviled old-growth forests.

Many naturally regenerated forests on the westside go through a stage where young trees compete vigorously with one another, sometimes for extended periods. There is every reason to believe that this process is the very means by which old-growth forests are formed. Old-growth forests also formed without having roads constructed through them, and without the soil disturbance and compaction caused by heavy machinery. And old-growth forests never evolved having a substantial portion of their biomass cut down and hauled away instead of dying and remaining in place to slowly rot and nurture fungi and various other life forms which are just as much a part of the forest as the big trees themselves.

Perhaps the worst conceit of all here is the belief that people can walk into a forest and decide which trees have the right genes, have what it will take to survive over the long term. In natural,

"unmanaged" second-growth forests it is often the trees appearing largest and dominant which will be seen to die off over time, making way for others which didn't start so fast but may be better adapted for the long haul. The New Age foresters would have us believe that they can look at trees and pick the winners and losers better than the test of centuries. But they can't look into cells and read DNA. The reality is more like some guy with a can of spray paint wandering among thousands of trees, quickly deciding which ones look worth keeping. These almost always are the ones which happen to be biggest at that particular moment. They may or may not be the ones which, left alone, would survive on the forest's timescale.

There are people in the Forest Service who are trying to do a better job of laying out timber sales than was done in the past. But timber sales have no part in growing old-growth forests, and shouldn't be sold as such. Unfortunately, virtually all of the financial incentives for the Forest Service are still driving it to cut trees above all else. Budgets have been cut back and many positions, often in timber, eliminated. But in far too many cases, even though it was timber jobs that were cut, the people holding those positions had more seniority and have "bumped" other less senior employees out of jobs in wildlife, fisheries and recreation. This has resulted in the loss of those newer people more open to change, and the retention of the old guard, often with new titles. This has stifled the agency, and greatly hindered the process of change.

Recent estimates have put the losses to the U.S. Treasury from the Forest Service at nearly a billion dollars per year. This is essentially a form of corporate welfare for the timber industry. Until this is changed (there have been a few encouraging signs of late) we will have an agency which believes in cutting trees as the answer for everything, and even puts forward the proposition that cutting trees is how you get an old-growth forest.

# Spider Meadow

## — A Grassroots Success Story —

The U.S. Forest Service has announced the \$730,000 purchase of approximately 335 acres located northeast of Leavenworth, in and adjacent to the Glacier Peak Wilderness. The property, known as Spider Meadow, is in the Phelps Creek drainage and is located 25 miles up the Chiwawa River north of Lake Wenatchee. Spider Meadow is one

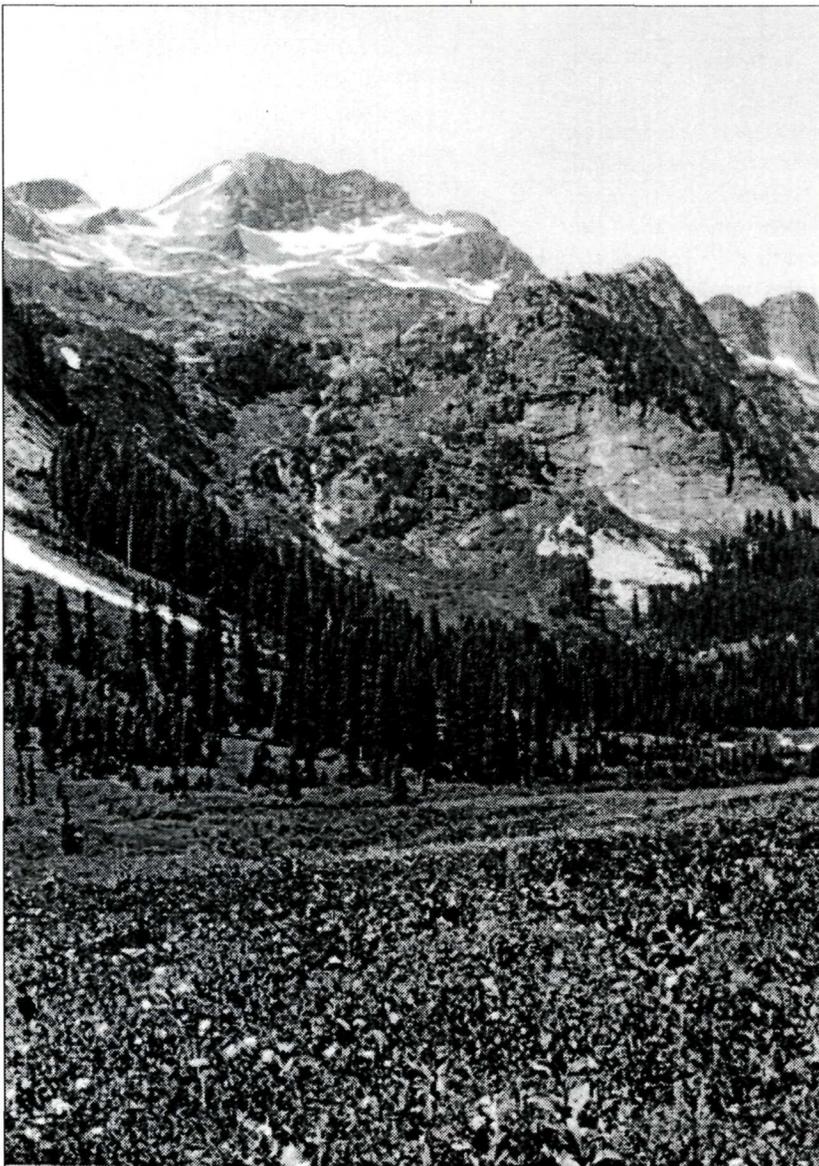
of the most scenic and popular hiking areas in Central Washington. When the property was scheduled for logging nearly two years ago, hundreds of Washington outdoor enthusiasts called for protection of the area.

A congressional appropriation from the Land and Water Conservation Fund was necessary to allow the Forest Service to purchase the property. The

Wenatchee National Forest will manage Spider Meadow as part of the Glacier Peak Wilderness. Another section of property will be managed as late successional forest (old-growth) as described in the Northwest Forest Plan, also known as the President's Forest Plan.

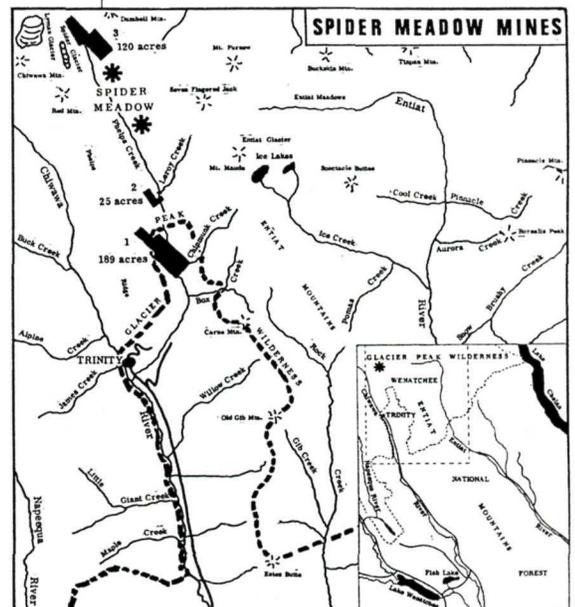
The protection of Spider Meadow was facilitated by the non-profit Trust for Public Land (TPL), which purchased the property and held it for nearly a year while helping to secure the permanent conservation stewardship of the site.

Many individuals and outdoors groups contacted TPL when they heard of the threat to Spider Meadow in the spring of 1995. The extraordinary show of concern demonstrated on both sides of the Cascades indicated how many people treasure Spider Meadow. The public enthusiasm and financial support for this project were essential to TPL's decision to buy and hold Spider Meadow — despite the unfavorable terms of the sale.



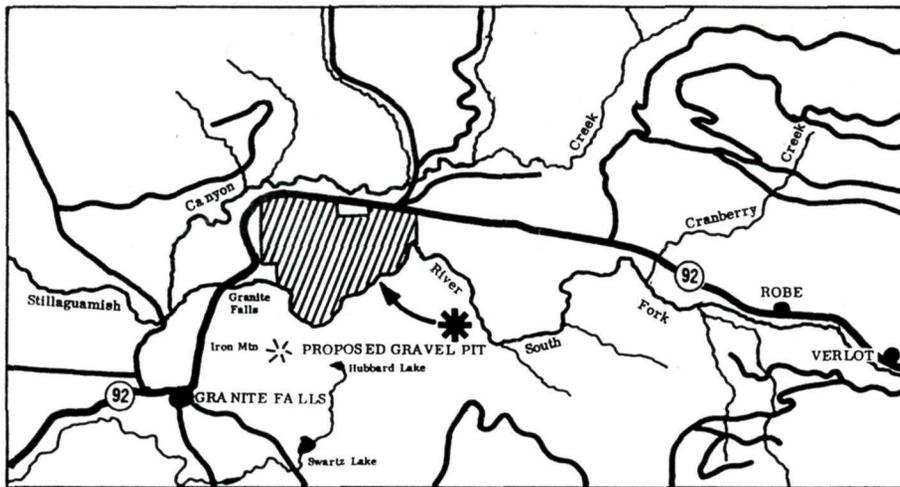
Spider Meadow

—LEONARD FLANAGAN PHOTO



—PATRICK GOLDSWORTHY MAP

# Status of the Great Big Stillaguamish Gravel Mine



—PATRICK GOLDSWORTHY MAP

## Associated

Last July Associated Sand & Gravel Company requested a stay in its second Superior Court appeal against John Galt's EIS/permit decision for its proposed massive gravel pit and quarry along the Mountain Loop Highway, east of Granite Falls, saying it would rewrite its flawed EIS instead. Judge Thorpe, who had denied Associated's first appeal, saying that he "could not understand Associated's Alice-in-Wonderland reasoning," granted a six-month stay. In November Associated requested a six-month extension for the stay, citing "unexpected delays" in the off-site alternatives analysis demanded by John Galt and required by state law. Until backing away from the second appeal, Associated had been strenuously fighting the necessity of providing the off-site alternative analysis.

So it is not likely that there will be a new supplemental draft EIS for the proposed project until about April or May. There is no timetable or time limit for the writing of the new draft EIS.

The Stillaguamish Citizens' Alliance (SCA), heading the fight against this project at the head of one of Puget Sound's most fabulous recreation areas, had written Associated's parent company (CSR America, the U.S. manager for the Australian owner, CSR) detailing the numerous insurmountable problems with the site, and urging the parent company to stop efforts

to permit this atrocity, but instead to look elsewhere. CSR America has apparently decided to spend additional time and money at the Granite Falls site, rather than start the permitting process anew elsewhere. Apparently they have not stopped to realize that they would be hard pressed to find a more environmentally sensitive location than the proposed site, wedged between a National Scenic Byway and a salmon-spawning river, and therefore one that generates so much widespread opposition.

In October Bruce Barnbaum met with Associated and learned that the new EIS will still ask for hard-rock blasting and quarrying in addition to gravel mining, but will not ask for night hauling. But, as we all know, night hauling could be requested from County Council at a later date if the project is permitted.

## Green Mountain

The draft EIS for the Green Mountain gravel pit — the new kid on the Mountain Loop Highway — was released September 16. The 87-acre site, located on the north side of the National Scenic Byway 3 miles east of the associated John Hancock site, would produce 60-80 gravel truck trips per day. It would run for 30 years. If both the Associated and Green Mountain projects are permitted, more than 700 gravel trucks per day would travel down our National

Scenic Byway. What a fabulous recreational attraction that would be!

The Green Mountain DEIS was remarkable for the little information it presented, and the important information it avoided. It failed to mention the steep 6-8 percent grade of "Sand Hill" that all loaded trucks would descend just west of the project site. It failed to mention the road and subsurface damage (to sewers and storm drains) its trucks would contribute to Granite Falls. It failed to mention the further disruption to school classrooms. It made no mention of the cumulative effects of its project either with the Associated project, or with the existing quarry projects in and around Granite Falls.

Because the Snohomish County Planning and Development Services Department (PDS) had limited the scope of the EIS to traffic alone, the DEIS failed to mention any off-site alternatives to the project. The project requires a rezoning of the site from "forestry" to "mineral land," thus an off-site alternative analysis is required by law, just as it was for the Associated project. PDS again ignored clearly written law, and failed to act in the public interest. It's *deja vu* all over again!

Furthermore, the DEIS avoided any on-site alternatives. No geological or hydrological information was presented. There was no analysis of visual impacts. In short, it presented almost no information about anything.

SCA, however, brought up all these points — and many others — in its 21-page comment letter (plus appendices and an addendum) to the DEIS. SCA protested the limited scope of the EIS, showing that SCA had not been notified by PDS of the scoping process despite a clearly written request in advance to be a full participant on all phases of this project. SCA dealt with all aspects of this huge project that demands total public disclosure. Should the final EIS fail to address the issues that SCA raised, it will appeal the adequacy of it, just as it did successfully with the Associated EIS. SCA may need financial or other help later to prevent industrialization of this region.

—BRUCE BARNBAUM

# Letter from Stehekin

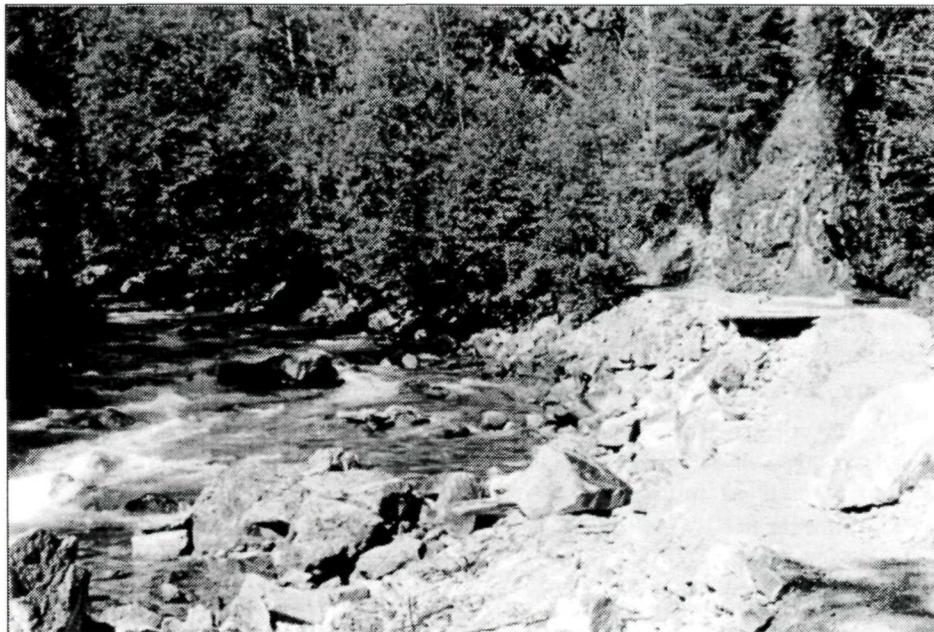
OCTOBER 31, 1996

As I write, the employees of the National Park Service are blasting rocks from what they recently named Dead Man's Curve and moving them into the bed of the Stehekin River at Car Wash Falls in the North Cascades National Park. This action is the latest development in a story that has its origins in the history of human use of the Stehekin River valley and its recent roots in the long and contentious development of the most recent General Management Plan.

The General Management Plan was concluded and signed in the summer of 1995. One of the most commented upon and controversial issues was the "preferred alternative" to close the Stehekin Valley Road beyond High Bridge to all motorized traffic. This was a proposal to return a large section of the valley to an earlier condition, protecting the natural resources from the continued erosion caused by vehicular traffic. For many years the public had been accustomed to a park-run shuttle bus taking them on a primitive road for approximately 12 miles into the park, and the local residents (ranging from about 100 in winter to 400 in the summer) were able to drive private vehicles on the road. As most people know, Stehekin is not accessible from the highways by car, so the number of vehicles that could use the road was extremely limited.

The road has been a primitive road running close to the river. The river floods periodically and requires major repairs about every five years. It is closed by mid-November and reopens usually sometime in June. The annual expense of maintaining the road is normally about \$30,000, according to the park superintendent.

In response to the large public outcry on its proposal to close the road, the NPS in its final discussion on the GMP decided to keep the road open to Bridge Creek (about half of the upper road) and to allow limited traffic from there to the road's traditional end at Cottonwood Camp. It can be noted



*Stehekin Road washout area. (View of trail through what used to be road at Carwash Falls. The river channel now occupies the old road in three places.)*

—SANDY WALKER PHOTO

that the conservation community itself was divided on the issue of the road. Many felt that closing the road deprived them of their traditional enjoyment of the park (a one-day round trip to Cascade Pass from the Stehekin valley) without a significant improvement to the protection of the environment.

All of this occurred before the flood of the fall of 1995, the largest flood in recorded history. That flood washed out major parts of the road in the park, most seriously a section around Car Wash Falls and another section 2 miles down river from Cottonwood Camp. In the summer of 1996 the NPS proposed during a 30-day comment period to rebuild the road at Car Wash Falls at the expense of \$120,000 to \$140,000 by using rock from a sharp curve (Dead Man's) in a the road that was relatively close-by. In its 1996 proposal there was no mention of the damage to the road further up the valley or what was to be done about that.

When the proposal to rebuild the road came out, I made the trip several times by

bike and foot up what was now only a trail. I was thrilled as well as surprised to find a wonderfully enhanced natural area. In recent years I had rushed by the bulk of the beauty of the valley in order to get to the climax of the whole park: Cascade Pass. The most glorious section of the trail was right there at Car Wash Falls and on the mile or two of road that had been so severely damaged beyond it. In earlier years it had been rather unpleasant to walk this section or camp in its associated camp sites (like Dolly Varden) because one was always so close to traffic and dust and lack of privacy. Now the full glory of the landscape was revealed, and I hiked right along in the power and splendor of the river's bed.

I might add that there was this summer an increase in use of this area by bicyclists. The exhilaration that I felt was shared by everyone I met on the trail.

When I realized what a wonderful change the river had given us, I wrote and submitted my response to the park proposal while encouraging others to do so as well. I

also requested a meeting with the Superintendent.

I advocated a "no action" decision. Thanks to the flood and at no expense to the public the visitors' experience and the resources' protection was greatly enhanced. It seemed like a simple and obvious conclusion. In addition, annual costs of maintaining the road would be greatly reduced.

I finally met with the Superintendent on September 13, in Stehekin. The day before that I had received his decision in the mail to go ahead with the proposed construction at Car Wash Falls. He made it very clear to me that the issue of the road had been very contentious and already decided a year ago in the GMP process. He saw no reason to revisit the issue. I contended that the flood of '95 had created new circumstances and required a new process including EIS and public hearings. I had hoped at least to delay construction while the public could debate the issue.

Following my meeting with the Superintendent I wrote the Deputy Field Director to argue my belief that the cumulative affects of the entire road repair project should have been analyzed. He denied my contention after consulting his "compliance people." Thus the work began on October 1 and will continue until the snows stop it for the winter.

The environment and the people who use the park have lost a great opportunity. I feel the judgment of the Park Superintendent and the Deputy Field Director are wrong. They clearly could have decided for "no action" and given us a beautiful new trail while protecting the environment and saving us large amounts of money. Why did they not do this? They did not because the NPS has become too responsive to political pressures and has strayed from the mandate of the Park Service. The job of the NPS is to serve the visitors and protect the resources. The public at large does not even have access to cars in the Stehekin Valley — only a few residents and the Park Service do. Keeping the road open only serves the few and at great expense to the interests of the general population. However, those few are the ones who made the most noise in the

comment period, so they got their way.

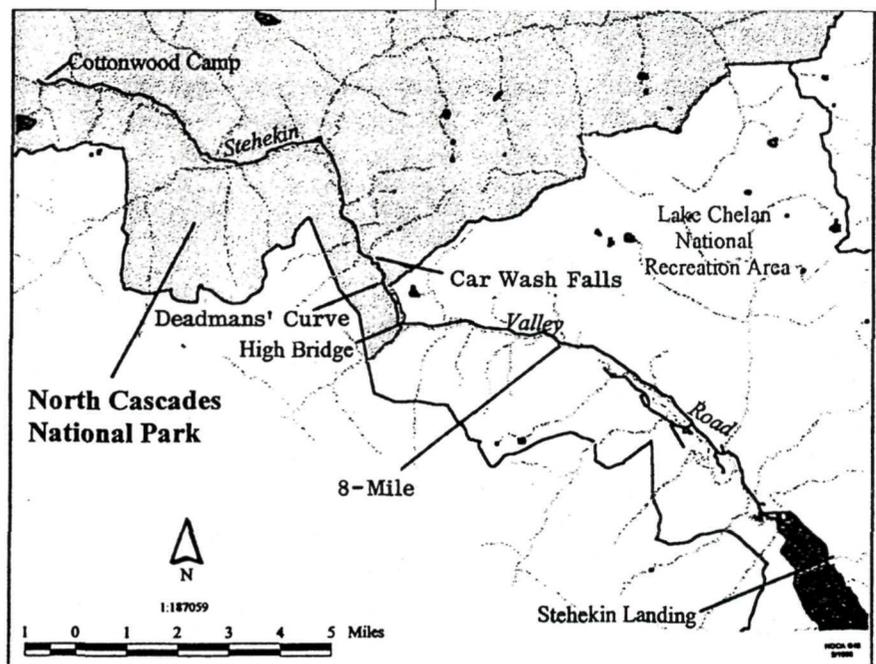
Why has the NPS lost its soul? Why has it betrayed its mandate in the North Cascades National Park? The NPS should not need to have the NCCCs and Sierra Clubs, etc., always reminding it of what its job is. But sadly, they are needed and those organizations need to be made up of individuals of good will with clear vision and fair voices. In this case, the conservationists' responses were woefully inadequate.

What happened here? We need some self-examination on all sides, and we need to correct this situation. It is still not too late to close down the road construction. My points are still valid: The existing conditions for the decision regarding the road are very different now than they were when the GMP was written. The NPS should acknowledge this along with the fact that the public was not properly informed about the damage to the whole road when it was asked to comment on construction at Car Wash Falls.

*The public was not told that this repair will have to be followed by another larger and more intrusive repair in the future before the road can be opened to Cottonwood Camp as it was in the past.*

I urge you and others with whom you communicate to lend your voice and time to let the NPS from the Director down to the North Cascades National Park Superintendent Paleck as well as your congressional delegates know that you want the decision on the Stehekin Valley Road reversed.

Sandy Walker  
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Oakland, California 94611  
510-444-7215  
PO Box 307  
Stehekin, Washington 98852



—PATRICK GOLDSWORTHY MAP

# ADDENDUM

Some while ago, on a day of late spring, I hoisted the Kelty at High Bridge and set out up the happiest valley trail in all the drainage basin of Lake Chelan. the Stehekin River road, that is. A *footroad* it was that day, made so by slides, washouts, and lingering winter snows. In afternoon I camped, next day post-holed snow to Cottonwood, and the third day returned to High Bridge. On other trips over the years, in the four seasons, I've walked the full length of the Stehekin in blissful freedom from wheels, and lo it is very good, it is all very very good walking, none better than upvalley from High Bridge.

Find out for yourself this summer, while the 5 miles beyond Bridge Creek may still be automobile-impossible, and the final 2 miles from Flat Creek apparently certainly so. Wait until October and revel in the most glorious show of fall colors this side of New England.

Before or after, see *Wilderness Alps of the Stehekin*, Dave Brower's award-winning film which helped mightily to obtain the North Cascades National Park. Walk with the camera along what Dave describes in the narration as "the road to nowhere." Understand why the North Cascades Conservation Council, speaking for itself and the entire consortium of organizations it served as spearhead, strenuously sought to have the park master plan specify the upper road be reverted from foot-road to trail.

New to the scene in 1968, the National Park Service got the point. These were to be *Wilderness Alps*, not *Alps Alps*. The "Yosemite of the North" was *not* to be an amusement park.

We of the NCCC and the consortium who brought the National Park Service to the North Cascades don't understand what happened. We took pride, in 1968, not only in gaining protection for a wildland but in reviving an idea which had so languished that there had not been a major addition to the national park system in a quarter-century. We felt we had provided the National Park Service the reinforcement it wanted and needed. We look, now, at its failure to comprehend the importance of a machine-free upper Stehekin to the essential character of the park and wonder, how did things go so wrong? *Who* went so wrong? *Why*? We put this failure together with such others as that of the Stehekin air strip (see the latest report elsewhere in these pages), and ask what can be done to correct the current course?

By H.M.

First, what can and should the Park Service do? Obviously, it must return to the vision of 1968, which is to say it must reaffirm what the National Park is all about.

Second, what can lovers of the North Cascades do? Obviously, many ought to engage in serious soul-searching. Is their love based on the gratification of personal pleasures to the exclusion of preservation of the qualities that are loved? Do they comprehend what it is they love? Do they recognize the dangers of too much love — and of the wrong kinds of love?

A climber we used to know (check that: a wilderness mountaineer, a rather different thing) devised a classification of scenery-lovers. At the top he placed pedestrians, these separated into several subspecies ranging downward from the Misery Trip/Brushbuster. Lowest he put those decal-collecting travelers who cannot enjoy natural beauty except equipped with a number of tons of metal and hydrocarbons. The range is from the Winnebagger who "does the park" via the North Gollydarn Highway in half a day, upward to the Fourth-Class Tourist who stops at turnouts to look at waterfalls, the Third-Class who rolls down the window to snap a photo, the Second-Class who opens the door and steps out, to the First-Class who lets go of the door handle.

Many of us belong at one time or another to many if not all the categories, and no need to apologize. However, for each activity there is a proper place, and an *improper*. "In wildness is the preservation of the world," said Thoreau. Hyperbole to make a point that may be, but surely, in wilderness is the preservation of the spirit of the upper Stehekin Valley, and of the souls of those who love it. The public officials presently assigned responsibility for managing the Stehekin like to cite in support of their current policy the testimonies of valley residents and visitors who enjoy afternoon rides up the road, perhaps for quick walks to Cascade Pass, and of hikers who take pride in the stunt of walking in from the North Gollydarn or the Cascade River, riding the shuttle to the Landing, and catching the plane home, thus "doing" the valley in a day and being as proud of it as Little Jack Horner.

The merciful comment on those people who by their addiction to speed, the quick trip, shrink the wilderness is, they just don't know any better, "Forgive them, they know not what they do." However, no mercy can

## Hey, Mr. Babbitt, What About the Stehekin Air Strip? The Stehekin Road?

From: *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*  
Wednesday, January 1, 1997 A3

### Grand Canyon overflights restricted — for a starter

BY JAMES STERNGOLD, *The New York Times*

LOS ANGELES — The Interior Department took a look yesterday toward eliminating human intrusions into the Grand Canyon, restricting aircraft overflights in a harbinger of an overall plan to restrict even automobile traffic at the canyon and in some of America's other heavily traveled parks.

Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt yesterday announced new restrictions on flights by small airplanes and helicopters that carry tourists over the Grand Canyon. But the rules are just part of a long-contemplated strategy that, if planners have their way, would eventually all but eliminate cars from the Grand Canyon, and, one day, from other popular national parks. If the plan is executed, it would amount to a dramatic rethinking of how parks . . . will be managed. The postwar vision of the parks as an extension of the uniquely American automobile culture of freedom and convenience is disappearing.

"In some ways, this says, no more, we are not going to remain slaves to the automobile, as we have been," Rob Arnberger, Grand Canyon National Park's superintendent said in a recent interview.

. . . Currently, about 45 percent of the area is banned, and that would grow to about 82 percent under the new regulations. The Park Service would also impose a curfew on aircraft, from 6 p.m. to 8 a.m. during summer. The rules take effect May 1.

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be allowed the Park Service. This is the agency that is supposed to know where and why it is, supposed to know what it is doing.

As for those members of the organizations which formed the consortium of 1968, and now, as individuals or organizations, fail to remember what 1968 was all about, the North Cascades Conservation Council can only say, in sadness, "Shame on you."

*Note: A detailed response to specific parts of the Stehekin Road Environmental Assessment has been made by Dave Fluharty elsewhere in this issue.*

# Close the Upper Stehekin Road Permanently, Mr. Paleck

## A commentary on the National Park Service Stehekin Road environmental assessment

### Stehekin Road Update

BY GREG JOHNSTON

P-I REPORTER

The National Park Service is recommending that all but the final two-plus miles of the flood-damaged, 23-mile Stehekin Valley Road be repaired. The gravel road from the isolated town of Stehekin at the head of Lake Chelan provides access to several trails and camping areas in the Lake Chelan National Recreation Area.

After it was devastated by floods in November 1995, some hikers and environmentalists urged that the upper portion of the road be turned into trail; others argued that it provided necessary access to North Cascades wilderness and should be fixed.

An environmental assessment issued by the Park Service earlier this week recommends that for the time being, the road be repaired all the way to the most damaged portion near Flat Creek, a bit more than two miles short of its end at Cottonwood Camp. If and when the river changes its course, moving away from the road bed near Flat Creek, the road would be repaired all the way to Cottonwood.

The Park Service hopes that by sometime this summer the road will be repaired at least to Bridge Creek, where the Pacific Crest Trail comes down from North Cascades National Park, about five miles from the road end.

The Park Service is taking comments on its plan through April 11. Write: Superintendent, North Cascades National Park Complex, 2105 State Route 20, Sedro-Woolley, WA 98284-9314.

Seattle Post-Intelligencer  
Thursday, March 13, 1997

Note:

Excerpted from a letter sent to interested parties by the National Park Service, North Cascades National Park, Sedro Woolley, Washington.

### National Park Service Environmental Assessment Stehekin Valley Road Flat Creek to Cottonwood Camp

#### SUMMARY

This environmental assessment evaluates alternative actions proposed for a damaged section of the Stehekin Valley Road, North Cascades National Park. In November 1995, the largest flood recorded on the Stehekin River since gaging began in 1911 caused extensive damage to the Stehekin Valley Road from High Bridge to Cottonwood. This assessment considers the impacts on the environment of proposed actions on the most severely damaged section of road; a 3000-foot section above Flat Creek, approximately 20 miles above Stehekin Landing. During the flood, the river flowed out of its banks and down the road, deeply eroding the roadbed and establishing a new river channel. This channel enters the road from the southwest, flows down the roadbed for approximately 2000 feet, then leaves the road to the northeast and flows parallel to the road for

another 1000 feet before again crossing the road back towards the rest of the river. Approximately 60% of the total river volume flows down the entire 3000 feet of road during high spring and fall runoff. . . .

Due to the severity of the damage and the current activity of the river, we are considering four alternative treatments to the road above Flat Creek: A-No Action; B-Rebuild the Road; C-Temporarily Close the Road Until the Return of Acceptable Conditions for Rebuilding (Preferred Alternative); and D-Remove the Road from Flat Creek to Cottonwood. Additional alternatives considered, but rejected are discussed at the end of this document. . . .

Written comments should be submitted no later than April 11, 1997. . . .

Signed/ William F. Paleck, Superintendent

### The NCCC Position

*NCCC's position is to permanently close the upper portions of the road. As we argued on the GMP, the road should be closed precisely because of the difficulty and expense of keeping it open and because of the opportunity to restore the area to wilderness character. Write to obtain your copy of the environmental assessment. Ask for a reversal of this decision.*

DAVE FLUHARTY  
BOARD MEMBER

National Park Service Environmental Assessment  
**Erosion Control  
on Company Creek**  
—The Company Creek Road—

SUMMARY

The purpose of this environmental assessment is to evaluate alternative actions proposed to protect two erosion prone sites on the Company Creek Road, Lake Chelan National Recreation Area (LACH) (Figure 1). In November 1990 and again in November 1995 major flood events on the Stehekin River damaged a section of the Company Creek Road at mile 2.2 (Site 1; Figure 2). According to calculations by the United States Geological Survey (USGS), a flood of the magnitude of the 1990 event is expected to occur every 10 years, while that of the 1995 flood is expected to occur on average once every 100 years. As a result of the 1995 flooding, the river washed away 225 feet of road. The National Park Service (NPS) constructed an emergency reroute of 300 feet immediately adjacent to the riverbank to provide access for the private residents beyond the flood damaged section. The NPS also riprapped 300 feet of riverbank during the emergency repairs. To complete the emergency work a temporary easement was granted by the owner of the property over which the reroute was constructed and the bank riprapped. Despite the riprap, this section of road remains vulnerable to erosion. In 1995 the Environmental Impact Statement for the General Management Plan for Lake Chelan National Recreation Area concluded that rerouting the Company Creek Road was inappropriate as it would destroy one acre of riparian habitat and would require building numerous bridges over existing food channels.

At a site a few hundred feet downstream(\*Site 2, Figure 2), another

section of this road has experienced repeated flood damage, including deep scour and loss of surface gravel, since the early 1970s. In response, the NPS built a log crib to protect the road in 1976. The crib was extended in 1981 and an earthen levee was added. In the 1990 flood this section of road sustained extensive damage, after which a hydrologist evaluated the cribbing and determined it was being undermined by the river. This determination prompted the NPS to seek alternative solutions to protect the road.

ALTERNATIVES

**ALTERNATIVE A:**

**NO ACTION** (Existing Condition)

**ALTERNATIVE B:**

**REBUILD IN PLACE WITH BANK  
BARBS AND BIOENGINEERING**  
(Preferred Alternative)

**ALTERNATIVE C:**

**ARMOR THE BANK WITH RIPRAP**

**ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED, BUT  
REJECTED:**

1. Reroute the road away from the river and onto federal property.
2. Close the road at mile 2.1 and convert the old roadway to a trail.
3. Abandon the road at mile 2.1.
4. Construct rock barbs at Site 1 and elevate the road downstream of the levee to divert water into the flood channels.
5. Construct rock barbs at both sites, construct a hump in the road, but do not lower the levee.
6. Construct rock barbs at Site 2, lower the levee and install erosion control on the road, but abandon the road above that point.

**Company Creek Road**  
—The NCCC Position—

February 17, 1997

Mr. William F. Paleck, Superintendent  
North Cascades National Park Complex  
2105 Highway 20  
Sedro Woolley, Washington 98284

Dear Supt. Paleck:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the "Draft Environmental Assessment: Erosion Control on Company Creek Road Stehekin Valley." I am very unhappy to report that I find this document deficient in virtually every respect for its defense of the status quo, its failure to protect and respect natural processes, its lack of innovative problem solving, its enormous expense, and its likely short (10-15 year) lifetime. The most discouraging part of the exercise is its hiding behind the skirts of the 1995 general management plan for Lake Chelan National Recreation Area in terms of alternatives considered. The NPS ignored NCCC comments on the 1989 Company Creek road relocation and its comments on the 1995 GMP with respect to the road system in the Stehekin Valley. Intervening rain on snow events have demonstrated the validity of the natural process based approach NCCC encouraged the NPS to take. The proposed action continues the NPS philosophy of attempting to do the impossible in a high energy, mountain landscape. The whole project resides within the 100-year flood plain of a major river, yet it pretends to believe that management actions can significantly alter the course of natural history in the Stehekin Valley. I urge you to reconsider your proposed action and to fully evaluate all options with a full Environmental Impact Statement. The 1995 GMP EIS does not deal adequately with the specifics of this management option.

Sincerely,

David Fluharty, NCCC

3621 NW 64th St.

Seattle, Washington 98107

# The Stehekin Air Strip Game

*The trees now are up by 2: two airplanes downed the last 2 years (watch for the next innings)*

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE RELEASES  
DELAYED REPORT ON STEHEKIN  
AIRPLANE CRASH

**Editor's note: NCCC was not able to print this article in the Fall edition of *The Wild Cascades*. For unexplained reasons, the NPS failed to release their accident report to NCCC within the time frame required by the Freedom of Information Act. The names of private parties mentioned in the NPS report were, interestingly, blacked out by the NPS.**

THIS IS A VERBATIM REPRINT OF THE  
NPS REPORT:

AIRPLANE ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION

Investigator — Cheryl Farmer, Park Ranger

On 07/23/96 at approximately 1300 hours, \_\_\_\_\_ departed the Lake Chelan Airport enroute to the Stehekin Airport aboard a rented Cessna 152, which he was piloting. There were no other passengers on board. \_\_\_\_\_ successfully landed at the Stehekin Airport on the down slope of the runway in a SE direction. \_\_\_\_\_ then turned the plane around and prepared to takeoff in a NW direction. According to \_\_\_\_\_, the wind shock (sic) at the Stehekin Airport was straight down. \_\_\_\_\_ stated that he cleared the runway and the top of the trees but could not get enough lift and struck the trees. The plane became caught in the branches and then a fire ignited in the engine compartment beneath the firewall.

\_\_\_\_\_, a paint contractor for the Stehekin School, was driving down Company Creek Road when he came upon the airplane accident. (\_\_\_\_\_ stated that he did not observe the crash). When \_\_\_\_\_ arrived, the nose of the plane was on the ground, the tail was in the air, the wings were no longer intact and the plane was burning. \_\_\_\_\_ saw \_\_\_\_\_ on

his hands and knees crawling away from the plane with his pants legs on fire. \_\_\_\_\_ ran to \_\_\_\_\_ and helped him put out the fire by rolling \_\_\_\_\_ on the ground and patting the fire with his hands. \_\_\_\_\_ drove \_\_\_\_\_ to the NPS maintenance yard where maintenance worker Mike STORY was working.

At approximately 1350 hours, STORY reported the airplane accident to the Stehekin dispatch office. STORY responded to the Stehekin airport, did not see the plane, and continued up the Company Creek Road. STORY passed \_\_\_\_\_ and his water tender truck and signaled \_\_\_\_\_ to follow him.

\_\_\_\_\_ was drafting water from Company Creek prior to grading the road. When STORY arrived on the scene the plane was fully engulfed in flames. The fires from the plane started a 1/4 acre wildland fire. NPS personnel responded and the fire was contained (see attached fire report).

At approximately 1408 hours, Ranger Cheryl FARMER arrived at the maintenance yard. FARMER examined \_\_\_\_\_ and found he had third degree burns to the lower portion of both legs. \_\_\_\_\_ also has second degree burns to both hands. \_\_\_\_\_ refused treatment except for the placement of ice and cold packs to the burn areas (see attached EMS run sheet). FARMER and \_\_\_\_\_ flew via Chelan Airways float plane to Chelan. \_\_\_\_\_ refused transport from Chelan EMS Medic I and was transported by FARMER'S private vehicle to Lake Chelan Community Hospital. \_\_\_\_\_ was later transferred to the Intensive Care Burn Unit at Harborview Hospital in Seattle, WA.

These are the basic facts. However the report lacks background and context. Superintendent Paleck and the NPS have now narrowly missed watching over three deaths and two wildfires due to two airplane crashes in the past two years. The crashes both occurred during attempted

take offs from the Stehekin landing strip. Both planes crashed in the same area. The strip has already claimed six lives. It may be the most dangerous regularly used landing strip in the lower 48. But no one would ever know because no one is taking responsibility for the situation. The NPS begs off with a line in its General Management Plans saying that, "The airstrip is used by pilots at their own risk. Any liability attaches to the Washington State Department of Transportation, Aeronautics Division." It is unclear whether the Aeronautics Division cares or even knows what is going on. Mr. Paleck told NCCC Chairman Patrick Goldsworthy that the NPS was not passing its accident report on to the State because the accident did not produce a fatality. Mr. Paleck does not have the bearing of a man who avoids responsibility. The NPS's inaction suggests there is more behind this story. The Washington Pilots Association is a well organized group that may hold more power than Paleck and the NPS want to tangle with. And NPS non-management of the situation suggests it does not care to tackle the situation, whatever it really may be. In the General Management Plan, the NPS acknowledges that the airstrip's role as a nursery to non-native plants that spread throughout the valley is a "major impact." The NPS also states that, "Good beaver habitat is locally rare in the valley." Yet it allows maintenance of the fly zone that the NPS states will "adversely affect wetland functions. Cutting of wetland vegetation would cause losses of food, cover, nesting wildlife," including beaver." Despite the NPS having its own first hand data and evidence, NCCC has never seen any leadership on the part of the NPS to remove what it admits is a major ecological impact on the valley (not to mention visual blight) that happens to also take human lives and encourage valley wildfires. Some might argue that pilots have a right to risk their lives just as climbers on Sahale or bicyclists on the Stehekin road do every year. (Yes, people have almost died in bike accidents in Stehekin.) NCCC believes that the pilots have every right to risk their lives as they wish. But a National Park area is not the place for crashing airplanes on a landing strip full of knapweed. NCCC does wonder what the NPS believes.

—KEVIN HERRICK

(Kevin Herrick is a former Stehekin NPS seasonal ranger and a current member of the NCCC board)

# Conrad Meadows and the Goat Rocks Wilderness Survive Yet another Forest Service EIS

—LEONARD FLANAGAN

The Forest Service has abandoned a potentially disastrous plan to build a major horse camp and staging facility at Conrad Meadows, the main trailhead to the east slopes of the Goat Rocks Wilderness high country. Instead, the Forest Service will construct comparatively minor trailhead “improvements” at the site. The entire episode is a lesson in waste and misplaced priorities.

The main access point for the eastern side of the Goat Rocks is Trail 110, which begins at about 4100 feet in a large and beautiful subalpine meadow on the upper reaches of the South Fork of the Tieton River. The trail continues upvalley for about three and a half miles, where it splits into a loop about five and a half miles around, ascending to the head of the valley on either side. The south leg of the loop climbs to Surprise Lake near the ridgetop at about 5300 feet. The lake, though pleasant, has been badly damaged by overuse, horse traffic, and impromptu backcountry construction projects.

Near the head of the South Fork Tieton valley, at about 5600 feet, a short spur trail takes off from the main loop trail and climbs another 500 feet to a glorious alpine meadow bench. This is a delicate necklace of meadows, streams, and tarns cradled between the treeline below and the glaciers of Mount Curtis Gilbert a few hundred feet above. The meadows stretch from near tiny Warm Lake south over a distance of about three miles Cold Lake at the foot of the Conrad Glacier. This alpine meadow bench is, beyond question, a rare and sacred place that needs care and protection.

The trailhead and most of Conrad Meadows itself sit on a privately owned parcel of land in an area of checkerboard ownership bordering on the Goat Rocks Wilderness. Conrad Meadows is used by the owners for seasonal cattle grazing. Historically, the owners have always



*Mt. Gilbert, Goat Rocks Wilderness*

—LEONARD FLANAGAN PHOTO

permitted public access to the trail by crossing the meadow on horse and foot from a road-end parking area and gate at the east side of the meadow. While there is apparently no public-use easement across the meadow, there is no indication that the owners intend to restrict access. Adjacent to the existing road-end at Conrad Meadows is an informal camping area, also on private ground. This campsite can accommodate a large number of vehicles and campers and is used heavily in summer months by horsepackers and backpackers. On a busy weekend last August, during an annual barbecue and gathering held by members of the Backcountry Horsemen of Washington, the author estimated at least thirty vehicles (trucks and motorhomes) with horse trailers using this undesignated camping area.

The initial plan for the trailhead “improvement,” developed by the Forest Service in partnership with Backcountry Horsemen of Washington, was to install a camping area with 30-pull-through slips accommodating horse trailers, a parking area for 10 more vehicles and trailers, a total of 6 vault toilets, 2 stock-loading ramps and watering areas, highlines on National Forest lands, along with a new

system of connecting trails bypassing the privately owned portions of Conrad Meadows. Justification for establishing a new camp on National Forest land was found in a citizen request for a toilet at the existing road-end parking lot. The Forest Service apparently reasoned that a new facility was needed, because it could not build in the existing camp, as this would be an expenditure of public funds to benefit private land. The bill for the proposed federal toilet plus camping amenities outlined previously was expected to come in at over \$470,000.

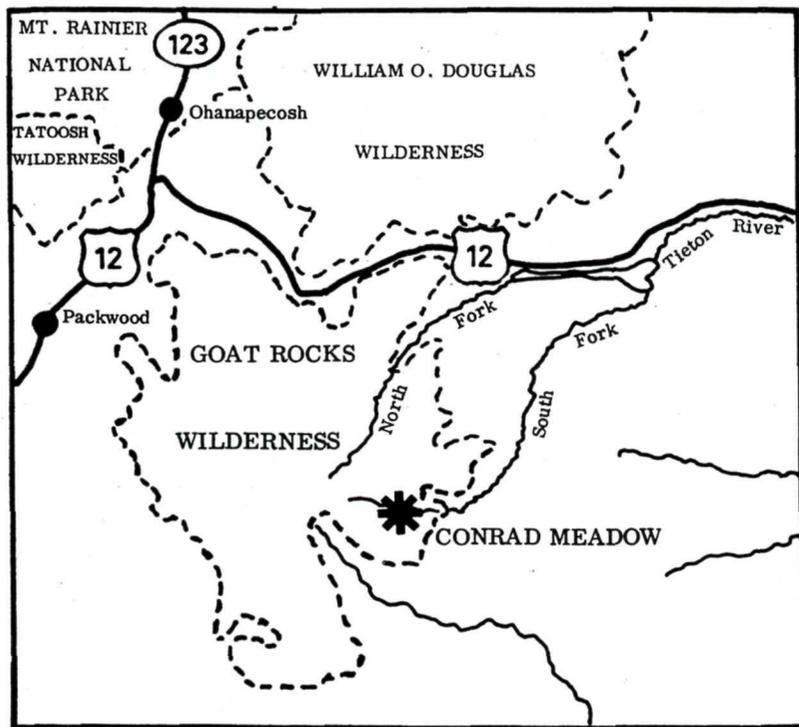
From the standpoint of excessive use and potential damage to the high alpine meadows of the Goat Rocks (not to mention impact on Conrad Meadows and Surprise Lake), the utter absurdity of the proposal was readily apparent. Since the existing informal campground is on private land, overflow use from the fancy new facility would surely take advantage of the old site, and the Forest Service would have no way of preventing this. In effect, the Forest Service/Backcountry Horsemen proposal would have doubled or even tripled the trailhead capacity for horse and foot users.

At the same time it was proposing to

increase capacity at the trailhead, the proposal contained no meaningful plan to minimize the impacts of increased horse and foot use on the fragile high country terrain in the Goat Rocks. Proposals in the Environmental Assessment ranged from installing an “interpretive kiosk” at the trailhead bearing educational signing on low-impact recreation on the one hand, to selling commemorative trowels inscribed with the words “Naches Ranger District” for campers on the other. While vague ideas like “enhance non-wilderness trail opportunities to take pressure off the wilderness” were floated, it appears that no serious consideration was given to alternatives such as no action at all, obtaining the money to acquire Conrad Meadows and surrounding areas, purchasing an easement over Conrad Meadows, prohibiting horse use above Surprise Lake, limiting all access, and so forth. Faced with such common-sense alternatives, the Forest Service simply recited its mantra: “Outside the scope of this analysis. . .”

According to the Environmental Assessment, between 1992 and 1995 a likely average of 919 people entered the Wilderness Area through Conrad Meadows annually. The actual permit records show 331 hikers and 223 horse users. Juggling the figure by applying a permit compliance rate of 90 per cent among hikers and 40.5 per cent among horseback riders, the Forest Service concluded that 551 horse users entered annually and 368 hikers. Peak documented use for horsemen was 20 people with 40 horses, in early September, and 32 hikers in early July. The author knows for a fact that peak use by horsemen now exceeds these figures.

The high alpine meadows have suffered cruelly from overuse of all sorts, and most of that clearly from horse use. The problem is not limited to simple erosion. Portions of the alpine meadow near established camps are badly damaged from horse grazing. The destruction ranges from numerous bare and eroded rings around trees used as tethering posts to simple lack of diversity and lushness in areas frequently grazed by horses. Horse manure is to be found in camps, in the



—PATRICK GOLDSWORTHY MAP

meadows, and in and adjacent to the streams and tarns. Worst of all, construction work and logging requiring axes and saws is common and increasing in the small groves scattered about the meadows. This trend is particularly distressing given the fragile nature of life for the dwarf trees at this altitude. New horse camps are evolving where none existed before, and the number of uncouth campers has increased. For the past several years, for example, the author has unearthed large caches of trash (about 20 pounds each) from shallow holes consisting of cases of beer cans, pop cans, bean cans, corn cobs, and assorted detritus from heavy supplies which could only have been hauled up on horseback.

Fortunately, common sense seems, for the most part, to have won this particular battle. Having spent untold thousands on public scoping, a feasibility study and environmental assessment, having fielded a barrage of criticism and comment of its plainly absurd plan, the Forest Service has elected to proceed with a modest small-scale program of “improvements.” It intends to install two vault toilets, a hitching post, and a 15-car graveled

parking area in the Forest Service road easement near the existing camping site, after obtaining an agreement from the landowner. Apparently the possibility of increased, excessive use of the Wilderness Area from the new facility plus likely overflow to the existing informal campsite weighed heavily in the decision. The shameful part of the story is that all of this effort and money had to be wasted on a patently ill-advised plan to make the land more convenient for a few people, rather than a plan to help preserve this fragile place for its own sake.

# NEWS UPDATE

## Midfork of Snoqualmie Developments

RICK MCGUIRE

The citizen planning process for the Middle Fork Snoqualmie Valley near North Bend continues to move forward. Representatives of various interest groups are uniting behind a plan to develop the valley for safe recreation and drive out the garbage dumpers and troublemakers. It is hoped that a land exchange between Champion Timber and the State Department of Natural Resources will keep moving, thus leading to DNR control of most of the lower valley. DNR managers have indicated their intent to post the lower valley as a no shooting zone, which could greatly transform the

place. This will hopefully put additional pressure on the Forest Service to do more to clean up their portion of the valley. The Forest Service has so far been reluctant to make any changes, and has even appeared at times resentful of all the public attention which has focused on the valley. Continuous public pressure will have to be applied to bring them around, since no plan for the valley will be successful if they ignore it.

## Goodbye Intruder

PHIL ZALESKY

Will there be peace in the valley? Will there be peace at the passes? Will there be peace on the mountain? It looks as if this may be the case. An announcement in *The Herald* for February 26, 1997, indicated that

the Navy is retiring the Grumman A-6 Intruder. This was the plane capable of ground-hugging flight, night or day and in good or bad weather. It has been the plane that has proved to be the audio menace to those seeking the peace and quiet of wilderness in the Cascades. These subsonic planes are being retired from Whidbey Island Naval Air Station as of March 1, 1997. They are also being retired from the other bases that support them.

What now? They are being replaced by F/A-18 Hornets and in some cases F-14 Tomcats. Whether these planes will be stationed at Whidbey is uncertain at this time. What has been replacing the Intruder is squadrons of ground-based surveillance aircraft.

## Membership Application

Be part of the North Cascades Conservation Council's Advocacy of the North Cascades. Join the NCCC. Support the North Cascades Foundation. Help us help protect North Cascades wilderness from overuse and development.

NCCC membership dues (one year): \$10 low income/student; \$20 regular; \$25 family; \$50 Contributing; \$100 patron; \$1,000 sustaining. A one-time life membership dues payment is \$500. *The Wild Cascades*, published three times a year, is included with NCCC membership.

Please check the appropriate box(es):

- I wish membership in NCCC**  
The North Cascades Conservation Council (NCCC), formed in 1957, works through legislative, legal and public channels to protect the lands, waters, plants and wildlife of the North Cascades ecosystem. Non-tax-deductible, it is supported by dues and donations. A 501(c)4 organization.
- I wish to support NCF**  
The North Cascades Foundation (NCF) supports the NCCC's non-political legal and educational efforts. Donations are tax-deductible as a 501(c)3 organization.

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**NORTH CASCADES CONSERVATION COUNCIL**  
 Membership Chair L. Zalesky  
 2433 Del Campo Drive ▲ Everett, WA 98208

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