
THE WILD CASCADES

THE JOURNAL OF THE NORTH CASCADES CONSERVATION COUNCIL

WINTER 2011



In all fairness to these two square miles of tortured Earth, it should be noted that Harlan Ridge, or parts of it anyway, has started to green up a bit since John Roper captured its beauty in this view taken not long after Weyerhaeuser skinned it bare over two decades ago. Now part of the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest, the Forest Service is proposing to decommission some spur roads such as the ones seen here at midslope. But the worst offender, a ridgetop road system climbing to nearly 5000 feet, will be kept open, supposedly to facilitate a mysterious “collaborative restoration” project, about which no details have been released. This ridgetop road system provides a highway for ORVs to ride into the Wild Sky Wilderness, which is just on the far side of the ridge as seen here. There would be no need for restoration if these roads were closed back and barricaded. But the Forest Service instead says it can stop ORVs with a gate. If this works it could be the first instance ever of a gate actually succeeding at keeping ORVs out of a place.

THE WILD CASCADES ■ Winter 2011

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Harlan Ridge with Mount Fernow behind.
— JOHN ROPER PHOTO, see page 16

The Wild Cascades

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and Rick McGuire

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The Wild Cascades Editor
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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 half 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, the Wild Sky 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.

The NCCC is supported by member dues and private donations. These contributions support the full range of the Council's activities, including publication of *The Wild Cascades*. As a 501(c)(3) organization, all contributions are fully tax deductible to the extent allowed by law. Membership dues for one year are: Living Lightly/Student \$10; Individual \$30; Family \$50; Sustaining \$100; Other, \$_____.

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Founded in 1957
SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

The President's Report

Winter 2011

On several occasions I have used this space to discuss conflicts over access to back country. Typically there will be a particular road situation that is of concern to those of us that prefer to reach our favorite places by hiking or sometimes by horse, canoe, or kayak. Many times there is a road washout or other reason that a well-used road will become unavailable, making customary access to certain areas more difficult. Examples would certainly include the upper Stehekin, Suiattle roads, the Mountain Loop Scenic Byway, and even the Dosewallips road on the Olympic peninsula. In general, I think our members prefer to scale back such roads that have been determined to be too expensive, redundant or inappropriate by government agencies. Examples of these would include the eastern several miles of the Illabot road and the upper Middle Fork Snoqualmie road.

The dilemma facing environmental advocates is often the strongly held feeling by some, that scaling back road access to backcountry areas will detract from support for protecting these areas. The general belief here is that making access easier will provide a larger group of enthusiasts to work the political and administrative protection processes more effectively. The other side of the argument is, of course, that many of these areas need the physical protection from too many of these same enthusiasts. You get the idea.

Sometimes overlooked is the fact that often these very roads are the cause of severe environmental damage. One might also point out that the extraordinary sums of money to rebuild roads could certainly be put to work by these same agencies in much more suitable ways.

So what should we do? Should the North Cascades Conservation Council continue to advocate for keeping the road network at an environmentally and financially sustainable level? Should we support keeping existing and customary access to traditional areas more or less the same in order to keep a robust base of supporters?

You have likely guessed my opinions, but I would be interested to hear what the folks reading this article think. The editorial committee would appreciate receiving emails or letters with your ideas that could be printed in a later edition of this magazine.

Marc Bardsley

Time runs out for Alpine Lakes Wilderness bill

Despite determined last minute efforts by Senator Patty Murray, the Alpine Lakes Wilderness additions bill was unable to make it across the finish line in the closing days of the 111th Congress. The bill had passed the House earlier in the Congress, but was unable to clear the Senate. Both main sponsors, eight district Congressman Dave Reichert and Senator Patty Murray, have indicated their intent to make another run at it and reintroduce bills in the 112th Congress.

The bill would add about 22,000 acres to the western side of the Alpine Lakes Wilderness, including much low elevation old growth and mature second growth forest in the Middle Fork Snoqualmie and Pratt River valleys. It would also designate the Pratt and part of the Middle Fork under the Wild & Scenic River Act.

NCCC is of course disappointed that the measure was unable to make it all the way. But in the conservation business, patience and tenacity are not just virtues but necessities. Wilderness is the strongest legal protection any piece of land can have. It is difficult to enact, by design. But it is just as difficult to un-enact, which is why it

is considered the green gold standard of land protections.

The groups working on the effort intend to pursue enactment of the bill in the new Congress and again look forward to working closely with the sponsors. Good things take time, as the recent Wild Sky Wilderness effort showed. Look for updates in future edition of *The Wild Cascades*.

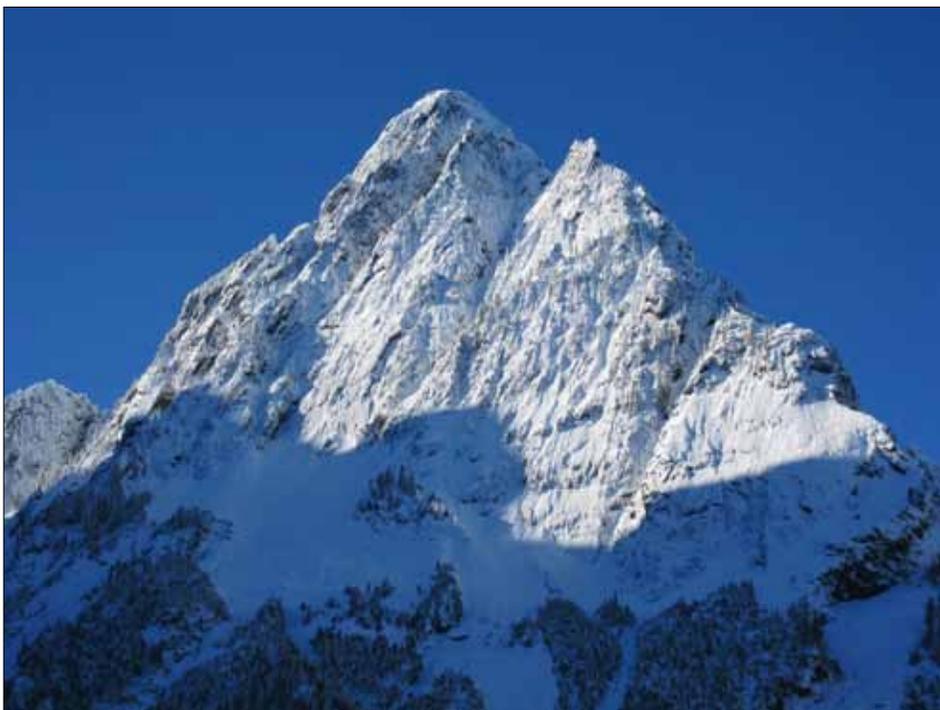
Hydro projects proposed for Hancock and Calligan creeks

Snohomish P.U.D. has filed for permits to construct hydroelectric projects on Hancock and Calligan creeks, both tributaries of the North Fork Snoqualmie north of Mount Si, at the very western edge of the Alpine Lakes region. Although the area in question is private land and not at all pristine, NCCC and other conservationists nonetheless regard the proposals with concern.

Experience has shown that once some projects like this get built in an area, others tend to follow once the infrastructure of roads and powerlines is put in. Although these two projects may not seem that harmful if looked at in isolation, many

other projects have been proposed in the North Fork Snoqualmie and in virtually every other major watershed outside of park and wilderness areas all around the North Cascades. Falling water is what gives the Cascades their name, but there are those who would like to see much of that water diverted into pipes and spinning turbines. The European Alps offer a unfortunate example of what can happen. Natural free flowing streams are a rare sight there since most of the water in streams big and small has long since been diverted for power generation. The sound of falling water, always somewhere in the background in the Cascades, is seldom heard there.

In Washington state many large dams have already been constructed on almost all major rivers. Small projects like those proposed on Hancock and Calligan produce only tiny amounts of energy compared with big existing dams, and the vast majority of what power they do produce is generated only during high spring runoff when need is lowest. NCCC believes Cascades streamwater is better left flowing over rocks rather than diverted through pipes, and questions whether the extremely small incremental increase in electricity supply is worth extending generation facilities like these into undeveloped areas of the Cascades.



Sperry Peak sporting a winter coat of rime and snow, December, 2010.

—TOM HAMMOND photo

Being Green

**“Annihilating all that’s made
To a green thought in a green shade”
Andrew Marvell — “The Garden,” 1681**

As Kermit, representing all the vanishing frogs in the world, said, “It isn’t easy being green!”

But for the corporate world it is getting easier. Partnerships! The Clorox Company, for example, now promotes its Green Works products through partnership with the Sierra Club. The Sierra Club imprimatur is supposed to lend credibility to the claim that the chlorine-free products really work. Established in 2008, the partnership has already added over \$1 million green to the Sierra Club coffers.

The partnership is not without dissent; the 35,000-member Florida chapter has been suspended for four years, and its leadership removed, for questioning the club’s decision. Not all conservation organizations have decided to go this way. The Natural Resources Defense Council, for example, does not accept fees or contributions from any corporation in the mining, oil, timber or other natural resource industry.

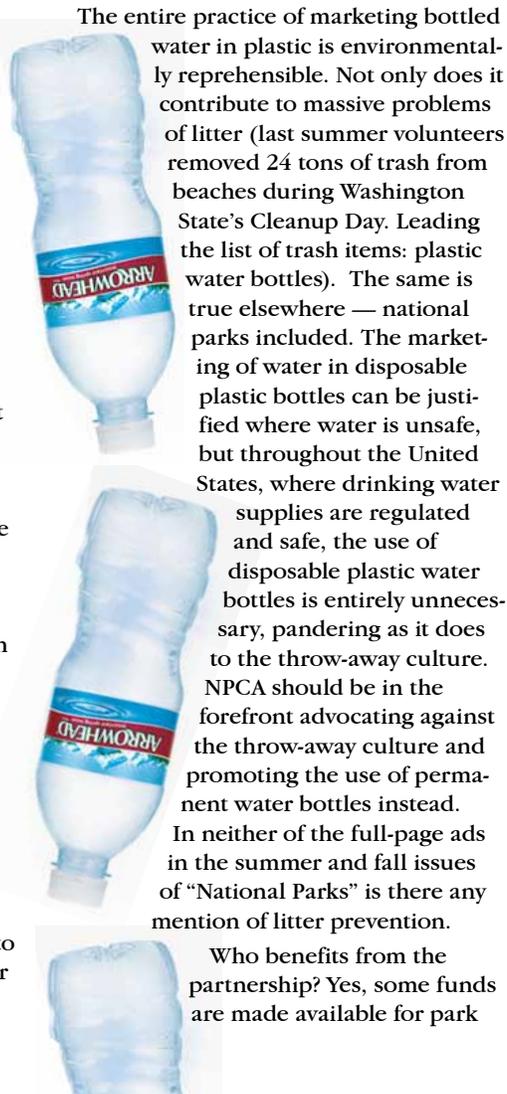
But Green Partnership is catching on. The National Park Conservation Association now has a cozy relationship with Arrowhead Mountain Spring (plastic bottled) Water (visit arrowheadwater.com). According to full-page ads in recent issues of “National Parks,” the NPCA’s magazine, Arrowhead is “working to protect those special places in nature you’ve grown to love,” but nowhere do we find mention of the need to ensure that the empties are taken care of. And only in tiniest of print is the true source of the partnership revealed: Nestlé Waters North America Inc. Nestlé! The company that promoted their baby formula in preference to breast feeding in Africa where the use of contaminated water caused widespread infant diseases. It matters not to the NPCA, it seems, that about 47 million gallons of oil a year are used to make plastic water bottles, of which only a quarter are recycled.

Having received a bland P.R. response to an initial email regarding the rationale for the partnership, I addressed the following letter (here slightly abridged) to the president of the NPCA.

October 9, 2010,

Dear Mr. Kiernan,

Some weeks ago I communicated by email my concern about the implications of NPCA’s new “partnership” with the Nestlé Bottled Water labels. I received a response that did not address the issues I raised. I then asked that my concern be brought to the attention of the governing body, but I have, to date, no response. I write as a member of NPCA who is active in conservation matters in Washington State, to ask you for the justification of the decision to enter into a partnership that flies in the face of environmental ethics at several levels.



The entire practice of marketing bottled water in plastic is environmentally reprehensible. Not only does it contribute to massive problems of litter (last summer volunteers removed 24 tons of trash from beaches during Washington State’s Cleanup Day. Leading the list of trash items: plastic water bottles). The same is true elsewhere — national parks included. The marketing of water in disposable plastic bottles can be justified where water is unsafe, but throughout the United States, where drinking water supplies are regulated and safe, the use of disposable plastic water bottles is entirely unnecessary, pandering as it does to the throw-away culture. NPCA should be in the forefront advocating against the throw-away culture and promoting the use of permanent water bottles instead. In neither of the full-page ads in the summer and fall issues of “National Parks” is there any mention of litter prevention.

Who benefits from the partnership? Yes, some funds are made available for park

maintenance; but at what price? Nestlé gets a much-needed greenwash and NPCA promotes the use of throw-away bottles. That partnership seems to me to be so lop-sided, that unless I receive convincing arguments for the partnership I will, albeit reluctantly, resign from membership in NPCA.

On November 23, 2010, I received the following letter:

“NPCA’s Marketing Department contacted me today to request that I thank you once again for taking the time to contact us about our partnership with Nestlé Waters.

As we indicated in our two previous responses to you, after careful consideration we determined that Nestlé Waters would be a suitable partner in support of our mission to protect and enhance our national parks for present and future generations.

For specific questions about Nestlé Waters environmental practices, please contact Rebecca Manikian at 617-939-8397 (email manikian@coneinc.com), or Lisen Syp at 617-939-8430 (email lsyp@coneinc.com). We appreciate the support you have provided for NPCA and our national parks.”

Sincerely,

Bruce Marshall

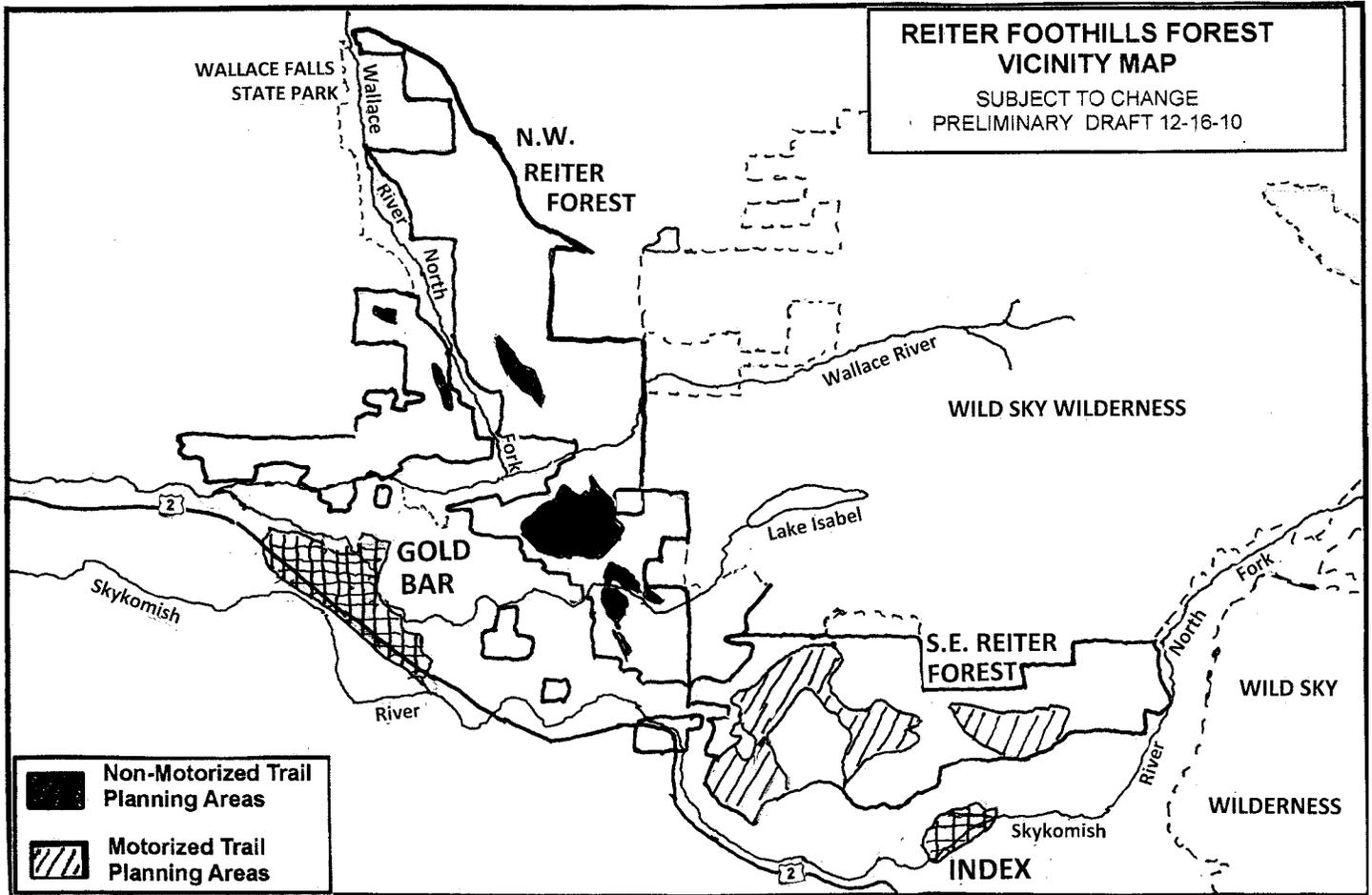
NPCA Member Services

By the time you are reading this, the NPCA will have received my resignation letter.

— The Disgruntled Bugcatcher

DNR launches SEPA process for ORV trail construction at Reiter Forest

By Karl Forsgaard



—PATRICK GOLDSWORTHY MAP

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is gathering public comment on its construction plan for a motorized trail system at Reiter Forest.

Under the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA), DNR issued a “Determination of Nonsignificance” (DNS) for the construction plan. This means that DNR does not intend to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for construction of the motorized trail system.

DNR is also designing a separate non-motorized trail system at Reiter, for use by hikers, equestrians and mountain bikers. The non-motorized trail system will be analyzed under SEPA later. Reiter’s non-motorized area is in the northwest portion of Reiter, closer to Wallace Falls. The motorized area is in the southeast portion of Reiter, closer to the Index Town Wall. The motorized area will be used by riders of

off-road vehicles (ORVs) including motorcycles, ATV “quads,” and 4x4s.

Local conservationists do not oppose construction of motorized recreation facilities and routes in Reiter’s motorized area under appropriate conditions. We do oppose substantive errors and omissions in the SEPA approval process. Conservationists are asking DNR to prepare a full EIS. The impacts from ORV use at Reiter are too significant to be called “nonsignificant” – which is why Reiter has been closed to ORV use for the past 15 months. It is only by providing for mitigation that the impacts can be reduced to acceptable levels.

Last year a coalition of nine conservation groups (listed below) supported DNR’s overall Recreation Plan for Reiter. DNR’s plan significantly reduced acreage open to ORVs, created the non-motorized

area, and provided some protections to nearby public areas: Wild Sky Wilderness, Wallace Falls State Park and Forks of the Sky State Park. Working with ORV users over the past three years in public, DNR-led meetings, the conservation community likes the non-motorized designations for the most environmentally sensitive areas of the Forest. Mitigation will help reduce ORV impacts on these public lands and streams.

We previously reported on these historic changes at Reiter, including the temporary closure of the whole Forest to all but foot traffic (The Wild Cascades Winter 2009-2010). We also reported that in mid-2010, the ORV community urged DNR not to reopen Reiter’s mainline road to ORV use until after the ORV trail system is developed, to avoid illegal ORV use that could “compromise the entire project” (The Wild Cascades Summer/Fall 2010). Their

extraordinary opposition to the proposed reopening reflects a cultural shift in the ORV community as its leaders recognize that past “traditions” of unmanaged, “dispersed” ORV use are not sustainable. It also underscores the importance of securing adequate dedicated enforcement before opening up an area to motorized recreation.

The problem is that the new SEPA documents issued by DNR omit too many key elements, such as details of how DNR will provide for enforcement when the new ORV system is opened. DNR also needs to provide adequate analysis on ORV impacts on wildlife and water quality, and detail its plans for restoration of areas damaged by past ORV use. A full EIS is necessary.

The ORV community agrees that adequate enforcement and restoration are essential to make the plan work. Reiter planning can have a good result for ORV users, quiet recreationists, DNR, and the land, water and wildlife that make Reiter Forest such a special place. But the planning needs to be done correctly, especially since DNR intends to use Reiter as a template for ORV planning and management on other state lands.

DNR's Reiter Forest ORV construction plan SEPA documents can be viewed at: http://www.dnr.wa.gov/ResearchScience/Topics/SEPAOthers/Pages?amp_sepa_oth_reitertrail_feb.aspx

At this writing, the nine-member coalition that submitted comments on the programmatic Recreation Plan a year ago are developing comments to submit to DNR regarding the ORV construction plan. These nine groups are Alpine Lakes Protection Society, Conservation Northwest, Friends of Wild Sky, The Mountaineers, North Cascades Conservation Council, Pilchuck Audubon Society, Sierra Club, Washington Trails Association, and Washington Wilderness Coalition. The SEPA comment period for the ORV construction plan runs from December 20, 2010 to January 31, 2011.

Specific recommendations:

- The EIS should analyze site-specific ORV impacts, past practices, and the restoration, mitigation, usage limits, enforcement and funding that will be needed in the future. In particular,

DNR must provide adequate enforcement resources, including a detailed enforcement plan, before proceeding with construction of this ORV trail system.

DNR must provide adequate analysis of impacts of ORV use on aquifer and water quality, and on wildlife habitat.

DNR must provide adequate analysis of future operations and maintenance, parking, and future phases of construction.

DNR must provide a restoration plan to address past environmental damage caused by ORVs.

- The impacts of ORV use on State forest lands have never been carefully analyzed under SEPA. Prior EIS documents referenced in the SEPA checklist are about logging, not ORV use. DNR should prepare a programmatic EIS for managing ORV use on DNR lands statewide.

- DNR's enforcement plan for Reiter needs to be spelled out in detail and referenced in the SEPA documents, including (1) who will be on site; (2) when it will be patrolled; and (3) the types of infractions that will be cited. Everyone – including DNR and the ORV community – agrees that adequate enforcement is key to making the Reiter plan work. Without enforcement, off-route ORV use will erode soil from the forest floor, damage trees and other vegetation, and bleed sediment into streams, degrading fish habitat. DNR's 2010 Reiter recreation plan said there would be an enforcement strategy “prior to” development of ORV sites and trails, but DNR's new site-specific SEPA documents fail to deliver on that promise. The SEPA checklist barely mentions enforcement, and by saying so little, it fails to say how future enforcement will be any different from the old approach that did not work. In other words, there is nothing to prevent recurrence of their inadequate management and the extremely adverse ORV impacts that led to the November 2009 closure of Reiter to ORV use. Enforcement is a key form of mitigation. It is ONLY by having an adequate enforcement plan (and designated resources) as mitigation that the significant, negative impacts of future ORV use can be reduced to an acceptable level. Uncertainty of funding is not an excuse for having no plan, since funding for enforcement is just as important as funding for construction, restoration, or any other form of physical mitigation.

- Postponement of detailed environmental review constitutes improper phasing (or “piece-mealing”) under SEPA. The SEPA checklist states that after Phase 2 is completed, there may be additional construction (in effect, an undefined “Phase 3”) including a campground, 3.5 more miles of trail, and an additional 4x4 challenge area. That planned future construction should be disclosed in detail and analyzed now.

- We support DNR's 2010 plan to

restore and repair the damage caused by past ORV use, both inside and outside the motorized area, and we commend the volunteers who have worked with DNR on restoration in the past year. However, the SEPA checklist says only that restoration will be undertaken adjacent to the new ORV routes; we know they are doing more. DNR should provide a detailed restoration plan for all sites significantly damaged from past ORV use, including a detailed map of where they are, regardless of whether they are adjacent to the new ORV routes. DNR's restoration plan should include monitoring of restored sites.

- DNR should provide more detailed analysis of ORV impacts on plants and animals, including owls, goshawks, peregrine falcons, salmon and steelhead, and a map of which streams are fish-bearing, showing locations of planned stream crossings (including locations of bridges and culverts). DNR's analysis should include a review of scientific literature on the impacts of ORVs upon wildlife, vegetation, soil and water. The SEPA checklist does not adequately address impacts from the construction of ORV trails in “Next Best” timber stands designated in the DNR's Habitat Conservation Plan as Nesting, Roosting, and Foraging (NRF) with the explicit objective to provide future habitat conservation for endangered species such as spotted owls.

- DNR proposes some ORV construction in the aquifer recharge zone that supplies water to the Town of Index. The impacts on the aquifer need to be analyzed in more detail.

- DNR needs to analyze stormwater flow control and water quality treatment for parking areas, trails, and challenge areas. DNR needs to follow County Code provisions for determining the required number of parking spaces. To improve safety, DNR should prohibit consumption of alcoholic beverages while operating ORVs at Reiter, and should designate Reiter Forest a “No Shooting Area” under the County Code.

- DNR needs to provide a detailed “Operations and Maintenance Plan” that provides for

- 1) specific maintenance actions as trails or facilities deteriorate;
- 2) routine monitoring of the entire length of the designated ORV route system;
- 3) routine monitoring of closed routes and areas; and
- 4) periodic preparation of publicly available reports noting trail conditions and any violations of rules, including off-route travel.

Bear

By Jim Scarborough



Middle Fork Paysayten
—JIM SCARBOROUGH photo

In the San Juan Mountains of southwestern Colorado, the grizzly bear is more ghost than reality. Well over a century of habitat degradation, overhunting and trapping have essentially extinguished the great bruin in what was its last southern redoubt. Sightings of grizzlies in and around the Weminuche Wilderness there, at least since 1979, are highly infrequent and unreliable. There may not be a single griz remaining in all of Colorado, even in that state's wildest corner.

The situation in our own North Cascades isn't quite as dire as that of the San Juans, but it's close enough to generate some serious angst among those still rooting for the grizzly's survival in the mountains of northwestern Washington. To the north, the province of British Columbia has rarely been accused of pro-grizzly policy, though a sufficient population has held on in the southern Coast Mountains and Columbia Mountains to theoretically repopulate the North Cascades over time.

The big hindrances to North Cascades grizzly migration from Canada, though, are the human-made obstacles which have effectively severed the north/south travel corridors used by these bears for ages. Often, these impediments to grizzly migration are narrow ribbons of asphalt or agriculture, yet severe enough to turn back even the most vigorous bear. Just as Yellowstone's grizzlies no longer have a viable route to Colorado's San Juans, a British Columbia griz must run the gauntlet to reach the otherwise high-quality habitat of the North Cascades.

We've seen the statistics. There are very few North Cascades grizzlies left, and perhaps fewer now than ever. Between 1983 and 1991, there were 21 confirmed griz sightings in the Cascades. Yet the last confirmed sighting on the U.S. side of the border was 15 years ago in the Glacier Peak Wilderness. Even on the Canadian side of the Cascades, there has been just one confirmed grizzly sighting over the past decade. Estimates range from zero to

20 grizzlies total on the U.S. side.

Bill Gaines, wildlife biologist for Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest, is currently studying grizzly populations hereabouts. His initial results are due this spring. NCCC board member Kevin Geraghty and I happened across Gaines and his assistants in the Middle Fork Pasayten River valley this past August, near where several hair traps had been set. According to Gaines, a "pretty good" but unconfirmed grizzly sighting occurred in 2008 in the Chiwawa River valley, again in the Glacier Peak area. One hopes his research will indicate the North Cascades griz is at least somewhat more substantial than a ghost.

When venturing deep into the North Cascades, it's sometimes hard to fathom that so few grizzlies reside there. The roadless lands are vast and available bear habitat is ample. Especially on the eastern slope of the range, the place practically bellows *ursus arctos horribilis*. The black bear population continues to

grow, though this by itself isn't necessarily encouraging for griz numbers, suggesting instead that black bears are exploiting habitat formerly dominated by their larger cousins. So the problem isn't what the North Cascades have to offer the grizzly bear, it's the getting there that's the issue.

In 2004, Bill Gaines, with Peter Singleton and John Lehmkühl, published an article which assessed possible migratory corridors for grizzly bears attempting to reach the North Cascades from adjacent areas of occupied habitat. Titled "Landscape Permeability for grizzly bear movements in Washington and southwestern British Columbia," the study concluded the Fraser-Coquihalla fracture zone is the most likely route for Canadian bears to travel to the North Cascades. Less promising is the Okanogan-Kettle fracture zone to the east. Both routes, unfortunately, are fraught with hazards, and neither rated as high in permeability as the Stevens Pass fracture zone, far south of the border at U.S. Highway 2.

For a grizzly residing in British Columbia's Coast Mountains, the long trip to the North Cascades would be a harrowing one, if not lethal. If said bear opted to venture from the Stein River, south to the Pasayten via the Fraser-Coquihalla fracture zone, she would have two unattractive options. One would be to head due south, past Harrison Lake to the Fraser River between Chilliwack and Hope. Aside from vacationers around the lake, the big hindrances come in quick succession on the valley bottom. After crossing moderately busy Highway 7, the bear would have to swim the Fraser, then immediately risk her life trying to get across Highway 1.

Highway 1 is the Trans-Canada Highway. Although not quite as heavily traveled as our own Interstate 90 (and with odds of a successful crossing improving late at night and in the non-summer months), this highway acts as a moat against southbound grizzly migration. Perhaps a clever bear would make her way under one of the short highway bridges along this stretch, but this is probably wishful thinking. A record does exist of a Coast Mountain grizzly relocated to the North Cascades three decades ago which returned to his home turf by this same route. Likely, after his journey was concluded, he was relieved to have made it back in one piece.

The second option for the Fraser-Coquihalla route would entail our bear swimming across the Fraser River farther north and upstream, perhaps in the vicinity of Yale and its remnant stands of Garry oak, where the river flows through an impres-

sive canyon. Before reaching the river, our grizzly would still need to cross Highway 1, though there's been considerably less traffic on this stretch of road since completion of the highway over Coquihalla Pass in 1986. And yes, beyond the Fraser and across the hills, the bear must still contend with speedy Coquihalla Highway 5.

The divided Coquihalla Highway was constructed with miles of fencing to funnel wildlife under the road prism at numerous points. These crossing mechanisms have reduced automobile collisions with wildlife to near zero, though appear to be used mainly by ungulates like deer and moose, rather than large carnivores. It may be that these underpasses are unattractive to grizzlies, though the Cascades grow increasingly wild south of the highway. There are also opportunities for passage to the south and west at lower elevations, where the highway repeatedly bridges the Coquihalla River, though the extent to which these are used by grizzlies is unknown. For a bear that makes it past the Coquihalla, one last, lesser impediment is the Crow'snest Highway 3 in Manning Park, which varies from season to season and time of day in terms of its treacherousness to wildlife.

Grizzlies in the Columbia Mountains of Canada, including a remnant population in and around the Granby River basin, as well as a finger of Selkirk Range bears dipping into the far northeastern corner of Washington, would at first glance appear to have a fair shot at reaching the North Cascades, assuming the considerable distance could be covered. Human communities on this big swath of land, especially on the U.S. side of the border, are generally small and well-spaced. Indeed, a confirmed grizzly sighting near Chesaw in 2003 probably originated from the Granby population.

The Okanogan valley, however, makes grizzly migration from the Columbia Mountains to the North Cascades virtually impossible. On the Canadian side of the border, vineyards, trophy homes and golf courses stretch for many miles up the Okanogan. On the U.S. side, such development has been much less aggressive, though one is hard-pressed to find even the smallest block of Okanogan River bottomland that hasn't been converted to agriculture. Grizzlies shy away from such modified landscapes as readily as they avoid busy highways. The few that reach the vicinity of the Okanogan River from the east almost certainly beat a hasty retreat before even contemplating an attempt at crossing nearby Highway 97.

Even with the preferred Fraser-Coquihalla route from the Coast Mountains, busy highways and a roiling river aren't the only concerns for the grizzly intent on reaching the North Cascades. Much of the route is hardly pristine. Although rugged and mostly free of permanent human habitation, this connecting region is laced with logging roads, clearcuts, mining operations, campers, ATV enthusiasts, hunters, and assorted yahoos. A griz here would do well to keep moving.

One might speculate that a far-ranging, young male grizzly is likely the only one of his kind to possess the motivation to undertake the risky journey from the Coast Mountains to the North Cascades. Upon reaching the vicinity of the international border and discovering the expansive habitat to the south, he might nonetheless soon realize that grizzly sows are scarce to nonexistent, thus prompting him to return north to mate. For Coast Mountain sows themselves, it's difficult to think of why they would be lured south aside from an excessive density of grizzlies in their home range. But the farther south one goes in British Columbia, the less intra-species competition a sow will experience.

Perhaps any grizzly seen in the North Cascades these days is just a stray male, searching fruitlessly for a chance to copulate. Bill Gaines' research may help clarify this. Yet it's clear that if the situation is this dire, active reintroduction is the only way to ensure this keystone species' long-term presence in the North Cascades. Scientists and managers overseeing this particular Grizzly Bear Recovery Zone, though, have been repeatedly stymied by budget shortages, agency inertia, hostility from state politicians and commercial livestock interests, and apathy from our 2nd District congressman. This, despite polls indicating broad support for the North Cascades grizzly among surrounding communities.

28 years after the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee was established, the North Cascades have yet to see an environmental impact statement to study the feasibility of reintroduction. Canadian officials have gotten closer to releasing new grizzlies just north of the border – bears which would almost surely travel into the wilder territory on the U.S. side – but political opposition to this proposal on both sides of the border has slowed it to a glacial pace. So it goes, as some of the finest grizzly habitat in the lower 48 states is left largely idle, and one is left to wonder whether the reddish-brown rump disappearing over the ridgeline was really there at all.

CASCADE ROADS: Crumbling Away

By Rick McGuire



Damage of this nature occurs to roads throughout the Cascades virtually every year. Repairing these roads costs fish even more than it does taxpayers.

—TOM HAMMOND PHOTO

It is a truth, though not yet universally acknowledged, that the immense road system carved across the Cascades in the latter half of the twentieth century is crumbling away, and poised to continue doing so at an ever-faster rate. The more heavily used pieces of it will continue to be maintained for some time yet, but the majority of roads will disappear, victim not so much of local decisions as of converging circumstances in the wider world. These look likely to alter, maybe even restore, much of the Cascades.

Cascade roads are the product of very different times. From 1950 to 1990, federal money to build them flowed freely. A powerful Northwest congressional delegation, including such legendary appropriators as Washington senators Henry Jackson and Warren Magnuson, and Oregon senator Mark Hatfield, brought home the bacon for the timber industry in the form of hundreds of millions of dollars yearly to the Forest Service for road construction. Those numbers still sound like a lot even now, but they were real money back then.

Also high on the list of ingredients was abundant cheap oil to fuel all the

big machines that made these roads. As anyone who has tried to move a boulder knows, it takes a lot of energy to move big heavy things. Countless tons of rock and dirt were dug up in constructing the road network, all of it by oil. In terms of earth moved, the National Forest road system must qualify as one of the bigger construction projects of all time.

Another part of the mix was the relatively strong price of timber during much of that period when the U.S. economy came to be based more and more on suburban construction. Timber sale receipts never came close to covering the real costs of

building these roads, especially if the “externalities” of environmental damage are considered, which they never were. But with lots of creative accounting, returns were high enough to allow the Forest Service to just about sustain the illusion that, at least in the Northwest, timber sales made money for the federal government. The reality is that they never did. Roads (the main expense) were never counted as costs, only as assets. The Forest Service road and timber sale program was in reality an expensive make-work project, a massively subsidized gift to a small segment of the timber industry.

Also worth considering is the unusually stable and benign climate that prevailed during the roadbuilding decades. (See accompanying article by John Edwards in this issue of *The Wild Cascades*.) Even though vast sums were spent, Cascade roads were still built on the cheap. “Side-cast” construction meant that material dug from mountainsides to make roadbeds was simply thrown downhill. Drainage structures were primitive, with undersized culverts and ditches, guaranteed to fail if not carefully and frequently maintained, which they seldom were. All that money purchased quantity, not quality. Results were measured in miles of road built. The longevity of these roads pushed across difficult terrain would be, and now is, someone else’s problem.

Things have changed since those days. The government faces a far different budgetary situation than it did during those decades of roadbuilding, and is starting to lose financial muscle. As recently as a decade ago, the United States was financially healthy, but the Bush administration saw fit to initiate two major wars while cutting taxes deeply at the same time. Debt multiplied, then really shot up as big banks and other entities that had constructed huge financial Ponzi schemes were bailed out after the crisis of 2008, a story of titanic private profits and even larger socialized losses. Big states, including California, Illinois and New Jersey, are now bankrupt in all but name, and rely on federal money to stay afloat. The debt burden at all levels has reached colossal size, and is growing at an ever accelerating rate. Should interest rates rise even modestly, the cost of servicing that debt will overwhelm those budgets. It can be difficult to come by hard numbers, but it appears that tax revenues cover only about half of government expenditures. The other half is from debt issuance, which has now reached such a scale that the United States is having trouble selling all its new paper. Money



TOP: Flood damage in 2006 resulted in the closure of popular Cascade River road a few miles from its terminus.

BOTTOM: By 2009, this multi-million dollar bridge/repair was in place. Note rip-rap at bridge foundation — commonly referred to as “bank armoring.” Structures of this type prevent natural stream channel migration, shifting river energy up and downstream. Ultimately the river will overcome such structures, and we’ll be paying for repairs again (and probably within a decade).

—TOM HAMMOND PHOTOS

ROADS: Crumbling Away *continued from page 11*

printing, or “quantitative easing,” now fills the gap. How well and how long that will work is an open question, but historical examples are not encouraging. Finding money to maintain roads in the Cascades will be difficult in such an environment.

Adding to road woes is the end of cheap abundant oil. It seems pretty well agreed that oil production worldwide probably peaked around 2006. Oil will never simply “run out,” but the costs and difficulties of extracting what remains are growing steadily. The energy return on energy invested, or “EROEI,” is declining. Big oil-field discoveries of the early 20th century, such as Spindletop in Texas and Ghawar in Saudi Arabia, boasted EROEI numbers of 100 to 1, or greater. Oil from these “gushers” didn’t even need to be pumped out of the ground, it simply flowed up on its own. The only cost was refining it into end products. That stands in contrast to most oilfields today, where 30 to 1 is a very good number, with most operating closer to 10 to 1. Even much-touted new finds like Tupi, off the Brazilian coast, will be lucky to reach 7 or 8 to 1, since pumping oil up from such great depths takes so much energy. Alberta’s tar sands, the “Saudi Arabia of North America,” barely manage 3 to 1, not to mention the utter devastation that the difficult, dirty process of mining the sands and cooking oil out of them leaves in its wake. It’s worth noting that tar sands oil now comprises 65 per cent of Alberta’s production, is piped to Puget Sound refineries, and is the source of part of the gasoline burned in Washington State.

Even more alarming than general tightening of oil supplies is a possible decline in the ability of the U.S. to pay for the more than two thirds of its oil consumption that is imported. Five percent of the world’s population in the U.S. burning nearly 25 per cent of the world’s oil production has long looked unsustainable. It is starting to look even less so now that the U.S. is printing dollars. How long the rest of the world will be willing to trade oil for those dollars remains to be seen, but again history is not encouraging. None of this bodes well for fueling the many large thirsty machines needed to maintain roads in the Cascades.

Another factor in the roads equation is long-term lack of demand for timber from high-cost national forests in the Northwest. With rising fuel costs mak-

ing suburban and exurban living steadily more expensive, and millions of McMansions of declining value now littering the landscape all across the country, demand for wood is likely to stay low for the foreseeable future. Northwest national forests never were prime timberlands, and more productive private timberlands, along with low-cost timber producers in places like Argentina and New Zealand, can easily meet projected needs for wood.

It is also now clear to all but the most die-hard, head-in-the-sand deniers that the climate, not just in the Cascades but across the planet, is becoming less predictable and more extreme. Rainstorms are getting fiercer and more frequent. Terms like “100-year flood” have lost all meaning. The cheaply built roads of the Cascades are under assault as never before, far beyond what they were ever built to withstand.

Since roads are the source of just about all things bad for wildlands, their disintegration bodes well for the recovery of wildness in the Cascades. Large parts of the range will see a decrease in human activity, with wild country making a comeback. The effects will be especially great when roads in main valleys like the Whitechuck, Suiattle, and others disappear. They may still be repaired a time or two more, but their days are numbered. A lucky few roads may be decommissioned, greatly lessening the harm they do to streams and fish. Most will likely just fall apart, doing considerable damage in the short term until nature can stabilize them. Road bridges are particularly expensive. Since they are the bottlenecks in the system, every one that is not replaced will likely be a big gain for wild country.

Not everyone sees the good side of this. Some roads allow high country to be easily reached for day hikes, and roads penetrating deeply into once-wild valleys make some hiking trips much shorter. The Whitechuck road, for instance, transformed Glacier Peak from the pole of remoteness into an easy weekend climb. Some guidebook authors, some hikers who like short trails to high elevation beauty spots, along with at least one prominent newspaper columnist, object frequently to what they see as the loss of “access.” Certainly it is something remarkable to be able to drive far up a road and start hiking at 4000 feet. But wilderness begins where roads end. Some may disdain wild

low elevation country, and hold to the view that high country is the only part of the Cascades worthy of attention. Others will appreciate and happily embrace the greater extent of wild country. Many more trails could be constructed in places that aren’t at the end of a long expensive road. It’s possible that some who lament the loss of easy motorized access deep into wild country may come to view that loss as one of their lesser worries as the wider world changes around them.

Ultimately it probably won’t much matter what advocates for roads or advocates for more wild country want. In the Cascades at least, it looks to be well past noon for the empire of the motor, even though the sun still shines brightly. Roads there are the product of circumstances unlikely to be seen again. The money, resources and ability to maintain them are slipping away. Why not make the best of it and take some satisfaction in the growing blank spots on the map of the Cascades? The forests, animals and fish will.

Cascade Roads HALL OF SHAME

Evergreen Mountain

Surely the Evergreen Mountain road in the Beckler watershed of the Skykomish Ranger District ranks near the top of anyone's list of bad roads that should never have been built. Constructed to access poor quality high elevation timber that was barely worth cutting even when practically given away, the road climbs nine precarious, failure prone miles from Jack Pass up to the 4200 foot level, turning the remnant trail to the Evergreen Mountain lookout into a short 45 minute stroll.

The Forest Service has thrown endless money at this road for over forty years now, obsessively trying to prove that they can triumph over washouts more numerous than anyone can remember. A powerful new buzzword, "stormproofing," was deployed in the epic struggle, but to no avail as the road just kept on blowing out. Possibly the lookout's status as a "profit center" for the agency (it is rented out nightly in summer for a small fee - never mind the cost of the road, that's a different budget!) has something to do with the quixotic fixation on keeping the road open. This road has been a textbook case of Forest Service willingness to keep repeating the same mistakes over and over again for as long as the money keeps flowing, decades in this case.

San Juan Hill

Standing on the opposite side of the upper Beckler from Evergreen Mountain, this classic "road to nowhere" has consumed countless thousands of dollars over the decades in fruitless attempts to keep it open. Without even Evergreen Mountain's justification of a trail at its end, the repeated expensive and pointless repairs to this road have been a monumental waste of taxpayers' dollars.

Canyon Creek

This tributary of the South Fork Stillaguamish once teemed with steelhead and salmon until the Forest Service punched in over twenty miles of mainline road and many more miles of spurs. Some of the spurs have been decommissioned but the Forest Service keeps doggedly trying to keep the mainline open to Tupso Pass, apparently to keep the Goat Flat and Three Fingers trail as a day hike. Proper decommissioning of this road would probably

yield more benefits to fish than just about any other, but it doesn't seem possible given current mindsets. The road will undoubtedly be abandoned once the money stops flowing. An alternate hiking approach to Three Fingers via Boulder River is not that much longer. One of the greatest salmon restoration opportunities in Washington State is going begging because of the Forest Service's fixation on keeping open a long road to a short trail here.

Squire Creek

A massive rockslide obliterated a large piece of this road some years ago, but the forest service keeps trying to find a way to reopen it. Apparently the extra mile and a half of now-pleasant walking needed to reach the Squire Creek trail is just intolerable to them.

Whitechuck River

Yet another example of a road that should never have been built, the Whitechuck road was punched far up the valley around 1960 to preclude its inclusion in what was to become the Glacier Peak Wilderness. It is but one of the numerous examples of "wilderness preventative logging/roadbuilding," where the Forest Service would use its limitless roadbuilding dollars to punch a road far up to the head of a valley, staking claim to all of it and settling the question of whether it might be preserved.

A massive flood in 2003 erased a large piece of the lower road about ten miles below its end. In a "cut the baby in half" decision, the Forest Service decided to give up on the upper five miles, a step in the right direction. But the lower part is still being repaired at great expense. Expect a repeat of the 2003 event someday soon.

Rat Trap Pass

This road climbing between the Whitechuck and Suiattle valleys east of Whitechuck mountain is apparently being kept open to provide a loop drive (much beloved of the Forest Service,) up one valley and down the other. As with so many other roads, its yearly washouts bring emergency repair money to the Forest Service, keeping budgets up as long as money flows from the other Washington. Rather than closing it as should be done, the Forest Service is instead proposing to

upgrade it, making it suitable for passenger cars. While they may be able to throw away money doing that in the short term, the road won't stay together for long.

Finney Creek

While some of the hundreds of miles of roads which were carved across the Finney block area have been decommissioned, this one continues to soak up dollars, perhaps because it offers a long drive to a very short trail remnant climbing to Gee Point. Such a long road to such a short trail makes little sense environmentally or monetarily.

Illabot Creek

The Illabot Creek road penetrates far into otherwise wild country off the northwest corner of the Glacier Peak Wilderness. It is yet another example of an expensive road built many miles into a once wild valley to keep it out of Wilderness. The Forest Service is considering decommissioning the most problematic upper parts of it, and it is hoped they will make the long overdue decision to put it to bed.

South Fork Nooksack

Yet another relic of the 1960's roadbuilding frenzy, this long route from Baker Lake into the upper South Fork Nooksack is in terrible shape and serves no real purpose.

Wells Creek

This route climbs from the North Fork Nooksack all the way to near timberline on Cougar Divide on the north flank of Mount Baker. The forest service has apparently chosen to simply let it fall apart as a "user maintained" route, ignoring the ongoing damage to the Nooksack watershed. Not only the road is a problem here. Four-wheel drive vehicles are going off the end of it, churning the area into a muddy quagmire.

Canyon Creek

The road up this northern tributary of the North Fork Nooksack cuts many miles into wild country. Apparently it is kept open to provide easy access to several remnant trail pieces. A number of steep failure prone spurs off it have been repaired time and time again.

Raging rivers, roads and recreation

By John Edwards

Nature never rests; its only constant is change. From local landslides to creeping continents and from tomorrow's weather forecast to millennial climate change, nothing in nature stays the same for long. Even living species come and go. And yet we see the landscape as eternal and our treasured access to the mountains a given — almost a human right. It may be time to stand back for a moment and ask whether the way we approach the mountains has to change too.

Earth and weather meet in our youngish Cascades. Their sharp topography confronts the moving air mass as it comes ashore from the Pacific Ocean to spill its load of water as rain or snow. That water works relentlessly at eroding the peaks and transporting the spoil to lower valleys as it returns to the sea. Ever since the great ice-cap of the last glaciation started to retreat northward around 15,000 years ago the annual cycle of the seasons has played out, with wide variations on the theme. The history of those variations at the broadest scale has been reconstructed from the record of fossil pollen, tree rings and sediments: after the ice retreated the climate was cold and dry. Vegetation returned to the bare post-glacial landscape. Later the area became warmer and moist, forest came to the Cascades and for the last 6000 years it has been predominantly cool and moist, as we know it. There were fluctuations nonetheless — the Medieval Warm Period from 950 to 1100 for example, and the Little Ice Age from the 14th to the 19th century that followed. In Europe roads and trails, even entire villages, were obliterated when the glaciers advanced during that well documented period.

Closer to the present, and at a finer scale, the western United States has warmed about 1 degree C (roughly 2 degrees F) during the 20th century. That may not seem much but it doesn't take much to change the weather. Our rainfall patterns are influenced by ocean surface temperatures far away in the tropical Pacific where cyclic fluctuations are recognized as the El Nino Southern Oscillation (ENSO). ENSO works, along with the Pacific Decadal Oscillation. Together, sometimes in phase, sometimes not, they give us our well-

known wet winters of La Nina years (the rain is pounding down and floods are expected as I write) and the drier winters of El Nino years. Has the intensity and frequency of wet winter storms increased in recent years? It certainly seems so, and the telling Disaster History of Washington State posted on FEMA's website (www.fema.gov/news/disasters_state.fema) bears this out. Its tabulation of flood events dating back to 1956 lists only one major flood year with landslides for the second half of last century, while five such years are listed for the young twenty-first century.

The major floods of the past decade have impacted many of the places we have been accustomed to visit for generations, with easy road access taken for granted, thanks largely to Forest Service roads. Roads have been washed out by floods in the Stehekin, the Skagit, the Sauk, the Suiattle, the Whitechuck valleys in the Cascades, the Dosewallips and others in the Olympics. In Mount Rainier National Park the West Side road has been closed since 1987 due to repeated washouts. The tremendous floods of 2006 washed out access roads along the Nisqually and Carbon Rivers.

Should all these roads be rebuilt to their former destinations? Or should we accept the fact that rivers do what they have always done, long before humans built roads and trails. They flood, they change course, they attack their banks, and they rearrange their beds. Decisions have been made for some roads. They have been truncated, leaving the old road beyond washouts to become trails as in the Whitechuck and the Carbon. Or they have been rebuilt as in the Sauk along the Mountain Loop, and the Nisqually access to Paradise on Mt Rainier. Other roads are in contention, as in the Stehekin and the Dosewallips. Detailed studies of recent weather patterns raise the probability of more frequent flooding. Given the prospect of limited funding for road repair or re-routing in coming years it may be that we should, albeit reluctantly, accept loss of access to some of our treasured destinations with good grace and recognize that some of our traditional weekend trips will become weeklong expeditions.

FOOTNOTE

The debate is over: the Carbon River road will be converted to a trail for hikers and cyclists, closed to motor traffic. The National Park Service has approved the closure of a road plagued by washouts since it was built in 1925, with major damage in recent years culminating in the disastrous 2006 flood. The conversion to trail will cost \$3.2 million. Rebuilding the road is estimated to cost \$11.4 million.

Superintendent Ueberauga and his staff deserve applause and support for this difficult decision. In limiting motorized access hikes will be longer, and Ipsut campground a carry, but closure recognizes the vulnerability of engineering to natural processes. Forest Service please take heed.

My early days on the Whitechuck road and trail

By Philip Fenner

We couldn't believe what we saw — a “freeway” of a trail with logs on either side laid 3 feet apart and gravel built-up between them a foot off the ground, and this went on for a mile or more from the road end, where in adjacent valleys the trails were narrow old tracks in need of maintenance. Something else didn't make sense: the clearcut just a few yards up the old road from the campground at the road's end. But unlike most nearby valleys we'd been up, there were very few patch cuts above the main river valley we left ten miles or more below. Then, here at the end, a swath with some seedlings sprouting around the huge stumps.

Welcome to the upper end of the Whitechuck River valley, ca. 1972. I was in high school, and as a benefit of being a “preacher's kid,” we took long summer family camping vacations, sometimes a month or more at a time, when Dad wasn't working. Preachers and teachers have that advantage. So all my growing-up years, I would go camping, mostly car camping and day hiking, for most of my summer breaks from school with my parents and older brothers.

We lived in Monroe at the time and had a great old pick-up camper, quite a step up from the old canvas tent I grew up with. We took that camper up a seemingly endless series of Cascade river valleys, one after another. The Mountain Loop was a favorite for its proximity and relative lack of traffic, so we went up most of its spur roads, sometimes for a week at a time. Those were the days!

The Whitechuck road and trail were just odd, somehow, I can remember thinking. Why on earth would they bother building this road so far up this valley just to cut a little patch at the end? And what a huge, elaborate trail the first part was, all built-up to withstand what might be a horde going to Kennedy Hot Springs and for climbing Glacier Peak. We ran into vast Boy Scout troops at Kennedy, churning the place up and literally disturbing the peace. It was a bit surreal, so far into very wild country.

Years later of course I learned that the road had been built not that long beforehand as a strategic move, a “pre-emptive

strike” against Wilderness designation, in the heat of the battle over the future of the lands surrounding Glacier Peak. Rather than build road and cut trees gradually up a valley as the Wilderness boundary came down from the upper end, and be shut-out of half the valley, the Forest Service had punched the road as far up as the commercial timber grew, and cut out a piece at the end, in advance, so they could log the rest of the valley whenever they chose. This came to be known as “legislation by chainsaw.” Since Wilderness by definition could contain no roads, they'd “captured the flag.” And doomed the entire valley's ancient forest. They partially succeeded, limited mostly by what Harvey Manning once described as ‘the limiting policy of No Logging Above Timberline.’

To add insult to injury, a huge wooden placard was erected on the Mountain Loop where there's an overlook of the flatlands near the Whitechuck's confluence with the Sauk. It was “propaganda overlook,” where you could survey the freshly clearcut alluvial terrace and read the Orwellian propaganda promoting the greatest good for the greatest number in classic Pinchot prose. I do sorely wish I'd taken a photo of it before it was removed a few years ago. You could look closely and see how some of the verbiage had been painted-over and re-written with the router to make it a little less revisionist at one point, and spray-painted with “LIES” once or twice.

Later, reading Harvey's *Wilderness Alps**, I learned the forest service had planned to extend that road to Kennedy Hot Springs, with a spur road to Kennedy Ridge for a drive-to viewpoint. That was back in the days when road-building was a craze, a mad delusion, and only Acts of Congress in the form of designated wilderness could stop it. The “freeway” of a trail was slated to become a real “freeway!”

When I hear discussions of new wilderness designations these days that result from long drawn-out negotiations and compromises with timber, mining and grazing interests, I hear the “environmentalist” faction described as the one that used to “make demands,” to which others were then roused to action to defend their rights. This, I'm afraid, is a very one-sided perspective, and there's no better place to see evidence of the other side of the coin

than the Whitechuck. The road itself was a quick end-run around the time required for the process of expanding a Wilderness Area. In a way, the shock of it galvanized the environmental movement and NCCC especially to work that much harder to expand the boundaries of the Glacier Peak Wilderness elsewhere.

Today of course the Whitechuck road lies in ruins, washed out in so many places as to be a total loss. The old campground we stayed in that summer at Owl Creek no doubt is likewise decrepit and Kennedy Hot Springs simply is no more, covered by several feet of mud and debris from flooding. When I hike the North Fork Sauk River, I meet Glacier Peak climbers who take an extra day to summit now, and actually tell me they're glad they do, because they are really getting a good “approach” experience, spending the first day in deep forest, ascending steeply on day two to White Pass, and starting the climb from there. Many probably are too young to remember the “freeway” to the mountain from the Whitechuck, but they, too, get the benefit of a proper approach to a remote interior volcano.

So in this case it seems the weather solved the problem, taking out a road that shouldn't have ever been built. In the case of the Whitechuck, too much “access” was definitely not a good thing. Of all the flood-damaged northwest forest roads, the Whitechuck should be permanently closed, as much as an icon of mismanagement as for any other reason.

**Wilderness Alps: Conservation and Conflict in Washington's North Cascades*, by Harvey Manning, available on the NCCC website at <http://www.northcascades.org/book.html>.

Harlan Ridge disappointment

The Skykomish Ranger District of the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest has proposed a road project that would decommission a number of stub and spur roads while keeping open a failure prone, high elevation “road to nowhere” climbing to the top of Harlan Ridge south of the Rapid River.

The Harlan Ridge area in question comprises two square mile sections that were picked up by the Forest Service about a decade ago as part of the Huckleberry Land Exchange with the Weyerhaeuser Corporation. The land exchange came under widespread criticism at the time since most of the land traded to the Forest Service from Weyerhaeuser was heavily logged. These two sections on Harlan Ridge were the worst of the worst, with hardly a stick of wood left standing anywhere, and much of the logging above 4000 feet. Harlan Ridge became a poster child for bad land trades.

The two sections are now bordered by the Wild Sky Wilderness on the south and east. ORVs are taking advantage of the road system (which closely parallels the wilderness boundary) to gain access to high elevation meadows inside the wilderness which they are churning into muck. The Forest Service claims that this project is designed to keep ORVs out of the wilderness. But it’s hard to see how they will be stopped, since they are proposing to keep the offending road open, merely adding a gate to it.

The Harlan Ridge road offers no access to any trails or recreational attractions. It makes no sense for the Forest Service to keep it open. It, and other similar roads to nowhere, divert money and resources away from other roads that do offer access to trails and amenities. Many believe that these kind of roads are kept open in part because they offer a continuing source of emergency repair money every time they wash out, which is often. Whatever the real reasons, merely adding a gate here will do nothing to keep ORVs out of the Wilderness. There has never yet been an instance of a gate successfully stopping ORVs in a remote, seldom patrolled location like this. They merely offer an additional challenge, are usually bypassed within a few days after being put in.

This Harlan Ridge project follows a familiar pattern wherein the Forest Service decommissions only stub and spur roads



Bellevue physician and climber John Roper has explored virtually every corner of the Cascades and has contributed many photos, mostly of the good but occasionally of the bad and the ugly, to conservation projects over the years. This view, taken from west of the Beckler valley, looks southeast to Harlan Ridge with Mount Fernow directly behind, and the snowy Chiwaukum mountains farther back to the left.

while leaving the real problem roads open. At the national and regional levels, the agency says it is committed to “right sizing” its vast, crumbling road network, but in almost every case it shrinks away from doing what is needed when actual projects are implemented on the ground. What is needed in this case is for the entire Harlan Ridge road system to be closed all the way back to its beginning, far below near Johnson Creek. Only “defense in depth” — a series of steep berms combined with many miles of decommissioned road, offers any hope of keeping ORVs out of the meadows currently being chewed up. But the Forest Service does not even consider such an approach, refusing to look at anything other than two ineffectual alternatives, one bad, the other worse, within a narrowly defined “Project Area.”

The Skykomish district has long been noted for its dogged commitment to keeping open precarious, failure-prone roads that have washed out more times than anyone can possibly remember, sometimes quite spectacularly. For several years the perennial repairs were touted as “stormproofings,” but that term seems to have inexplicably disappeared of late.

There was some hope that a recent change in leadership at Skykomish might lead to a more rational approach to the road network. But if this proposal is an indication of what to expect, it looks as though the old policy of fixing pointless roads year after year after year will continue. And in this case, ORVs will continue to turn the newly designated Wild Sky Wilderness into a mud wallow.

Flooding threatens old growth forest at Bumping Lake

By Marc Bardsley

The last issue of *The Wild Cascades* featured an alert from longtime conservationist and Cascades tree hugger Brock Evans about the danger to some 2800 acres of old growth forest at Bumping Lake, some of the most remarkable forest left on the east side of the Cascades. After a century of threats to raise the dam and flood these impressive forests, why has the situation become so dire now?

Supposedly Samuel Clemens once said that “whisky’s for drinking, water’s for fighting over.” The politics of water in the Yakima basin could fill a book, one that NCCC would prefer to steer well clear of. But someone else also said “you may not be interested in politics, but politics is interested in you...” Yakima water politics has taken a strong interest in the forests of the Cascades at Bumping Lake. With five large reservoirs already storing massive quantities of water in the basin, why is there now such a pressing need for yet more? The short answer seems to be that no amount of water is ever enough to satisfy irrigated agribusiness interests, and that the added pressure of sprawl development in Kittitas County is now sticking another straw into the glass that is the Yakima water supply and sucking up water via uncontrolled well drilling. Every gallon of water going on to the lawns and golf courses of Kittitas County is a gallon that doesn’t flow downstream, or nearly so. If raising the dam at Bumping Lake is seen as easier than facing the problems of irrigation waste and uncontrolled well drilling, that’s what will happen.

Huge amounts of water are wasted by Yakima agribusiness interests, through unlined canals, wasteful flood irrigation, aerial spraying and many other ways. It would be interesting to compare how much water it takes to grow a unit of food in the Yakima valley versus, say, Israel. But we are unlikely to ever get that number. Likewise, there are few or no limits on well drilling in Kittitas County, and once a well is in, the only limit on pumping is the cost of electricity, which is cheap. Agribusiness likes things the way they are and much prefers getting more water to

making what they already have go farther. And the ever multiplying residents of Kittitas County, many of them at least, seem to view unlimited groundwater pumping as their inalienable right. Ergo, the forests around Bumping Lake must go.

Other means of addressing the “problem” of not enough water for Yakima valley agribusiness have been mooted. Several sites have been considered for pumped storage projects, where a canyon would be dammed, flooding shrub-steppe grasslands, and water from the Columbia pumped uphill for storage. The laws of physics and common sense make these options unattractive to say the least. Yet another someone once said “water runs uphill toward money,” but not even Yakima valley agribusiness seems capable of mustering the titanic public subsidies that would be needed to build and especially to power these gravity defying monsters. They seem less and less likely.

Thus back to Bumping Lake. From a purely engineering standpoint, it’s much cheaper and easier to dam up water where it is already uphill rather than moving it there. Raising the dam at Bumping Lake to add storage there would cost orders of magnitude less than pumped storage. Only the old growth forests around the present reservoir stand inconveniently in the way.

So it appears that the state and Federal governments are moving inexorably toward a decision to raise the dam at Bumping, as the path of least cost and least resistance. It will, of course, be presented as part of a package that will supposedly include fish passage improvements at various places in the Yakima basin. But as with all such plans, who knows what devils will lurk in the details, and there are no end of details here. In particular, if the money to raise the dam at Bumping is appropriated, will the money for the other “good things” also be appropriated in a tangible, real-world, cash-in-hand kind of way? Past experience with such packages is not encouraging. The dam at Bumping will most certainly get dollars appropriated to raise it, but the other parts of the plan could well be “authorized,” but without hard cash, as has happened in many other

places. Perhaps we would someday hear, and not for the first time, how these other noble goals of restored fish passage are “aspirational...”

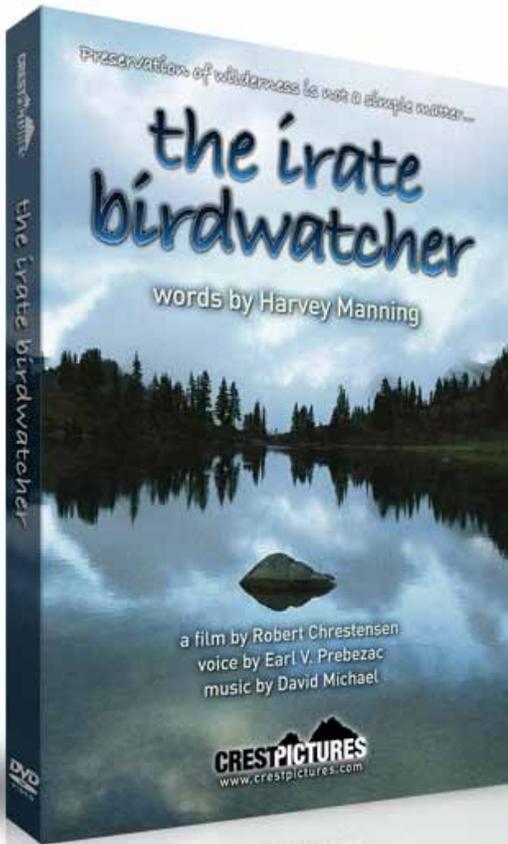
There also seems to be talk about “mitigating” the loss of the Bumping Lake old growth by some sort of protection for forests elsewhere. One candidate is apparently the old Boise Cascade timberlands in the lower Teanaway basin in Kittitas county. While the acreage in the Teanaway may exceed that of the area to be flooded around Bumping Lake, the two areas are worlds apart qualitatively. The forest around Bumping, as Brock Evans has explained, is an outstanding example of east side old growth, most of it with the added rarity of being on nearly flat land. The Teanaway “forest” is one of the most heavily cut over pieces of ground in eastern Washington, where a forty-year-old tree qualifies as ancient. The two are not comparable. It’s also worth noting that any “protection” for the Teanaway would almost certainly be limited to conservation easements to keep houses from being built. Logging would continue there as usual.

It’s no exaggeration to say that old growth forests like those around Bumping Lake are irreplaceable. Even in the unlikely event that every aspect of a Yakima basin package was fully and immediately funded, could it really be a good deal to trade them away for keeping houses (which may or may not ever actually be built) off of cutover land elsewhere? Would it be worth trading them for the promised installation of some fish passage facilities of uncertain effectiveness? Could it really be a good deal to sacrifice these forests while ignoring the unrestricted well drilling and wasteful use of water that are the real problems here?

•••

In our next issue, *The Wild Cascades* hopes to delve deeper into the Bumping Lake threat, looking in more depth at the remarkable forests at stake, and the historic decades-long opposition to flooding of them by Yakima-born Supreme Court Justice and Goose Prairie resident William O. Douglas.

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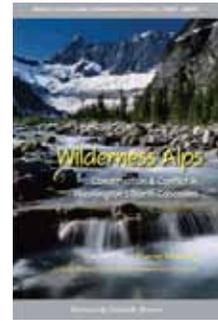
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BOOKS

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by HARVEY MANNING AND NCCC

Published by Northwest Wild Books
 2007 ISBN-13: 978-0-9793333-0-9

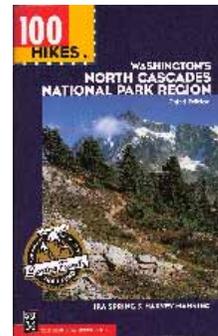


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A tale of two valleys

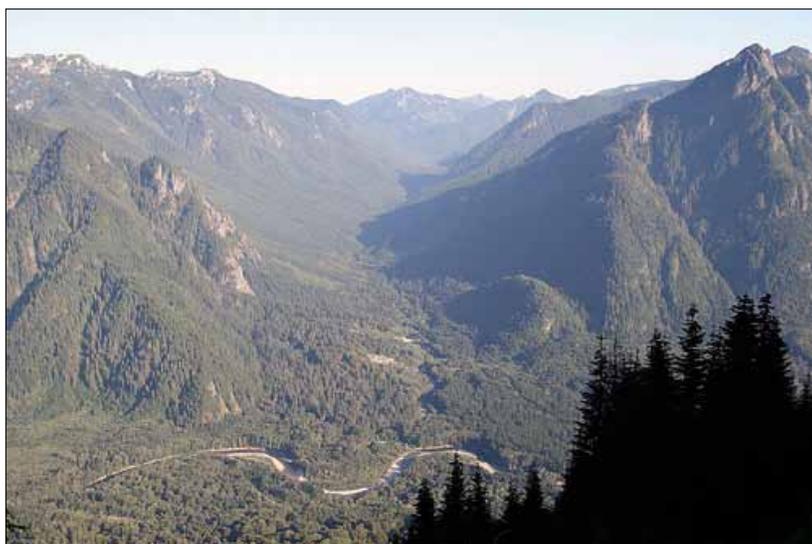
Most of the North Fork Skykomish valley is now part of the Wild Sky Wilderness, signed into law in May 2008. Its inclusion (other than a relatively narrow road corridor) in the Wilderness was groundbreaking in that much of the valley had been logged in the 1920s and is now covered in mature, natural second-growth forest. Prior to Wild Sky, wilderness in Washington State had meant almost exclusively "pristine" lands. Wild Sky broke that mold by inclusion of some 6000 acres of "less than pristine" land, most of it seen here in this view by John Roper looking south from Scott Peak, with Mounts Index and Persis in the distance. The inclusion of most of the North Fork valley in the Wilderness also meant that 25 miles or so of salmon streams were protected, another first for wilderness in the Cascades.

—JOHN ROPER PHOTO



Pratt River valley, seen here from Bessemer Mountain, looking southeast across the Middle Fork Snoqualmie (visible in foreground). Most of the lower elevations in the Pratt were logged in the 1930s. Like the North Fork Skykomish, it was never replanted (a very good thing) and grew back naturally with a mix of native species. If left alone it will be something approaching old growth within the lifetime of people alive today. Unlike the North Fork, it is not a salmon stream due to Snoqualmie Falls being downstream. Also unlike the North Fork, it is not (yet) protected as wilderness, although NCCC and other groups are currently working hard to change that. (See Alpine Lakes Wilderness additions update on page 4.)

—RICK MCGUIRE PHOTO



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The west side of Del Campo peak marks the headwaters for the South Fork Stillaguamish River. This area is currently inaccessible to motor vehicles due to yet another washout of the Mountain Loop road. —TOM HAMMOND photo

