

THE WILD CASCADES

THE JOURNAL OF THE NORTH CASCADES CONSERVATION COUNCIL

WINTER 2015



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COVER: Looking east up Middle Fork Snoqualmie valley from possible new trail viewpoint on lower Quartz Mountain near Middle Fork campground. Stegosaurus Butte at center right. —KEVIN GERAGHTY PHOTO

The Wild Cascades

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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 administrative, legal, and public participation channels to protect the lands, waters, plants and wildlife.

Over the past half century 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.

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NORTH CASCADES CONSERVATION COUNCIL

Founded in 1957

SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

THE PRESIDENT'S REPORT WINTER 2015

This issue of *The Wild Cascades* illustrates significant accomplishments that you, as NCCC members, helped to bring about through your support of NCCC. It is also full of reminders of what is left to be done.

It's exciting to see the new Wallace Falls bridge connecting the State Park's popular trail system with the new trails across the river in Reiter Forest. I remember hiking up to the bridge site from the Reiter side five years ago, starting from the Reiter Road gravel pit and using downed trees to cross May Creek. Soon you will be able to get to Wallace Falls with a shorter hike from the new County trailhead on May Creek Road, as well as from the State Park trailhead. On the Reiter Forest side of Wallace Falls, there's more work to be done to protect the new trail corridor from logging. There's also the opportunity to protect forest just upstream from the bridge as a future expansion of Morning Star Natural Resource Conservation Area.

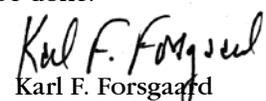
The new additions to Alpine Lakes Wilderness resulted from a long campaign in which NCCC was always engaged. My own memories include looking down the upper Pratt River valley from the summit of Pratt Mountain, as well as reaching the lower end of the Pratt River by wading the Middle Fork in early autumn's low flow, before the new trail from the Gateway bridge was built (the remnants of the prior trail were a slower route, but not too hard to follow). I personally thanked Congressman Reichert for his Wilderness expansion bill when he first introduced it, and had to wrangle with some of its early opponents.

The same defense bill that gave us the Alpine Lakes additions also gave us a setback on the Stehekin River. I've enjoyed hiking and biking the length of the river from Cascade Pass to Lake Chelan on several trips, and I can see why the National Park Service wants to let nature take back the upper valley beyond the inevitable recurring washouts of the road. We need to continue educating everyone about why the road should not be relocated and rebuilt in the upper valley.

In our advocacy against the worst parts of the Yakima Plan, NCCC succeeded in getting the State Legislature to require a benefit-cost study, and in December the study results were released, showing that the proposed Bumping and Wymer dams do not make economic sense. We need to continue educating elected officials and the public about the benefit-cost study results, as well as the environmental damage entailed in these projects.

Last but not least of our future work assignments, off-road vehicle impacts on hiker-horse trails of Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest just moved into a new stage. With the status quo as a baseline, future changes to designated routes (including whether motorcycles are allowed on a particular trail) will be addressed by the Districts within the Forest. For starters, there are some large ATV loops being proposed on Forest roads between Highway 2 and Canada. We need on-the-ground advocacy in each watershed and in each District.

Thanks everyone for your support of NCCC, helping to accomplish this progress, and helping with all the work that remains to be done.


Karl F. Forsgaard

Index-Galena road fix price tag escalates

By Rick McGuire

The price of keeping roads together in the Cascades continues to spiral ever higher. It now appears that the cost to replace a mile of the North Fork Skykomish road (aka Index-Galena road) where it was washed out in 2006 about six miles above Index, has reached \$27 million dollars.

Yes, you read that right, \$27 million for a mile of road. It's hard to say just what is causing such runaway price inflation. Partly it is because the engineer/bureaucrats at Federal Highways Administration know only one way to build a road: vastly overengineered. The plan for this road is a 40-mile-per-hour design speed. Just why it has to be built this way has never been explained.

Apparently FHWA is looking at other alternatives, such as (God forbid!) building a lesser road, or putting money into the Beckler River - Jack Pass route into the

upper North Fork. Either would be a major change from FHWA, which is famous for its rigidity. Complicating matters is the fact that the North Fork river is pointed straight at the road a mile or so below the existing big washout, and it seems to be only a question of when, not if, it will take away the road there. Could it be that even FHWA understands that spending \$27 million right above the next place to go might not be a wise investment? Might Snohomish County finally realize that spending such a huge sum for the convenience of a couple dozen cabin owners might not make sense when roads are falling apart all over the county?

The Beckler River also looks poised to take out the Beckler road not far above the Highway 2 turnoff. What to do? NCCC and others have proposed a program of intensive trailbuilding in places not

dependent on precarious road access. \$27 million might buy as much as 500 miles of new trails. Don't hold your breath, though. The "access" lobby has the Forest Service paralyzed with fear. The ever-shrinking budgets are guaranteed to go toward heroic, and doomed, attempts to keep almost every road open.

And in trying to keep them all open, they will end up with close to none of them open. For many years now, the cheaply built roads of the Cascades have been falling apart one by one. As the wood and organic debris they were built on rots away, the failure rate is accelerating. As they disappear, the crowding in the still-accessible places gets worse and worse. An entirely new approach is needed, but it appears things will have to get much worse before that can be contemplated, if ever.

Thinning proposed at Deception Pass and Dugualla State Parks

By Dave Fluharty

Washington State Parks, in a poorly advertised "Forest Health Initiative," asked for comments on proposed thinning of portions of Dugualla Bay and Deception Pass State Parks [Hoyopus Unit]. NCCC responded with a letter opposing the action because of the connections between these key coastal forests and mountain ecosystems via river corridors. The integrity of the North Cascades ecosystem is integrally connected to intact and preserved coastal forests. Therefore the forests of Deception Pass and Dugualla State Parks are of critical interest for preservation as well as recreation.

Before responding, NCCC reviewed the documents provided and members visited the sites. In our considered opinion, the forest health in the two sites is not significantly different than that found in other parts of these and other similar State Parks. In fact, natural processes of succession appear to be occurring as would be expected and there is no justification

for accelerating the process in the name of "forest health." The main points cited by NCCC in its letter are:

The jury is still out for use of thinning to "enhance" natural processes. Most often the result is vulnerability to wind throw and other natural threats for the remaining trees. The ground disturbance, too, does not lead to a net benefit for the site.

State Parks seem to ignore the inclusion of these areas as part of what appears to be the presence of Late Successional Reserves under the USFS Northwest Forest Plan, which is relevant to the habitat needs of Northern spotted owls and marbled murrelet.

State Parks should provide leadership in support of allowing natural processes to achieve forest health as opposed to mechanical intervention.

A substantial infestation of holly, an invasive species, would justify efforts to eradicate the plants before they proliferate further.

No effort is being made to mitigate the impact on public. Both proposed actions include the prime public access routes and trails in each area.

Thinning, as proposed, actually costs State Parks because the amount of trees removed does not cover the cost of the logging operation. With the enormous budget cuts sustained by State Parks, is this a wise use of scarce funds?

Based on our review, NCCC opposes the proposed thinning projects in Deception Pass and Dugualla State Parks. In addition, NCCC argues that State Parks and its Commission as well as the general public should be appraised of the forest health initiative and be provided opportunity to evaluate and comment.

David Fluharty summarized these comments and thanks Fayette Krause, Phil Fenner, Rick McGuire and others who supplied information and commented on the thinning.

Sustainable roads – the next steps

By Ed Henderson

Mount Baker Snoqualmie National Forest has 2,500 miles of roads, and the U.S. Forest Service has a budget to maintain only about 25% of them, or 628 miles. The Travel Management Rule (36 CFR part 212.5) requires the Forest Service to provide a Minimum Roads Analysis by September 30, 2015. The USFS Sustainable Roads project is part of the response to this regulation. Already, the Forest Service staff has produced a pair of Motor Vehicle Use Maps and an INFRA database. The next, more difficult action is to develop a strategy for evaluating which roads to close and which to keep open with the limited funds available.

To engage the public in developing this strategy, in 2013 the Forest Service conducted public meetings attended by almost 300 people and received over 1,800 responses to an online survey. Municipal agencies and tribes gave input, and Forest Service internal requirements also provided guidance. Reducing the mass of data produced by this process to meaningful results took longer than expected.

Two factors are apparent in the reported results. First, there was a strong message from the public that the maintenance of roads should be cost effective and all roads should be subjected to a strict cost/benefit analysis. Second, there aren't any roads on the maps that don't have at least some interest to someone.

Now the collected information is being placed on maps showing the roads, usage and destinations. The USFS Washington DC office has directed the local Forest Service to produce maps of roads likely needed and not needed for future use. How will this translate into a strategy for maintaining a sustainable road system on the Mount Baker Snoqualmie National Forest?

As an NCCC board member engaged in the project, I will be lobbying for a three-step process. The first step is to develop a comprehensive set of criteria that clearly identify the benefits, access, level of use



—ED HENDERSON PHOTO

and necessary administrative control and the cost of maintenance and risk of environmental damage due to erosion, landslides and washouts. The criteria in WTA's State of Access report are a good starting point, although other factors will need to be considered and added (See *TWC*, Spring 2013.)

Second, each and every road on the forest must be evaluated by these criteria and assigned a value based on cost/benefit. To be effective, this process must be comprehensive, rational, and include on-site inspections to assess the current conditions and potential risk of many roads.

Assembling a ranked listing of all the roads from best to worst would be step three. It should be easy to identify the top and bottom of the pile—roads that must be kept open and maintained and roads that can and should be closed and decommissioned. Ranking the ones in the middle will present the real challenge.

NCCC is committed to remaining engaged in the Sustainable Roads Project. This is an opportunity to reduce and control the environmental damage being caused by the crumbling roads on the forest that were built on the cheap for resource extraction and have outlived their usefulness. Our primary criteria will be environmental restoration, the closing and decommissioning of roads with high risk of damage due to landslides, erosion and washouts, along with the removal of culverts which block fish passage and are in danger of becoming blocked and creating flood conditions. Of secondary concern is the large number of short, dead-end spur roads built only to give access to specific timber sales which are no longer needed and should be closed. NCCC will work toward a balanced program providing reasonable motorized access while minimizing the environmental impact of the crumbling roads.



NCCC Actions

JULY 2014 —
FEBRUARY 2015

*Advocacy carried out by
dedicated NCCC volunteers
in the last eight months to
protect and preserve the
North Cascades' lands,
waters, plants, and wildlife.*



EXPANDING, ESTABLISHING, AND PROTECTING WILDERNESS AREAS

Why it matters: federal land designation as Wilderness and Park is the gold standard of ecosystem protection, precluding most damaging industrial and commercial exploitation.

- Filed a FOIA request and met North Cascades National Park staff to express our opposition the Park's recent use of helicopters for trail construction near Cascade Pass, and its plans for motorized trail work in Wilderness in 2015.
- Continued advocacy to protect Alpine Lakes Wilderness in the Icicle Work Group process regarding increased water storage in wilderness lakes.
- Participated in celebrations of the Wilderness Act's 50th Anniversary in Albuquerque and Seattle.
- Continued participation in the Cascades Wild campaign for new wilderness.
- Displayed history of North Cascades at Braided Rivers' launch of new book/advocacy tool, *The North Cascades, Finding Beauty and Renewal in the Wild Nearby*.
- Signed joint letter opposing the attachment via "rider" to the Defense Authorization bill of a plethora of Wilderness-related actions, some good and some bad, and separately advocated against the bad Stehekin River Road provision.
- Signed joint letter to Congress opposing HR 399, a bad bill abolishing environmental protections within 100 miles of the U.S. border including in wilderness areas.



ENVIRONMENTALLY SOUND RECREATION IN WILD AREAS

Why it matters: balancing access with economics and Wilderness preservation, we evaluate motorized use and places where it needs to be limited to reduce land impacts and recurring road repair costs.

- Testified as a co-appellant before a Snohomish County Hearing Examiner to require a full Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the proposed motocross racetrack complex on the Mountain Loop Highway.
- Served as a member of DNR's statewide Recreational Trails Policy Committee.
- Submitted comments to Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest on its Proposed Action under the Travel Management Rule, designating roads and trails open to off-road vehicles and banning cross-country travel by ORVs. Also provided input to the Forest and other conservation nonprofits regarding new proposals to create loop routes for ATVs on Forest roads.
- Submitted a letter to the U.S. Forest Service advocating the inclusion of Over-Snow Vehicles (snowmobiles) in the Travel Management Rule.
- Met twice with Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest staff and other conservation nonprofits to discuss recreational management and environment protection.
- Participated in a joint work party with National Park and National

CONTINUED



PROTECTING ANCIENT FORESTS AND PROMOTING RESPONSIBLE FOREST MANAGEMENT

Why it matters: like real estate, they're just not making ancient forest anymore. We seek to restore watersheds and fisheries damaged from decades of heavy logging and road building and protect significant forests from degradation.

- ✓ As a result of our advocacy, the State Legislature-mandated benefit-cost study of Yakima Plan component projects was released by the Water Research Center, showing that the proposed Bumping and Wymer dams miserably fail a benefit-cost test. Began publicizing the WRC results, including placement of an op-ed in the *Spokane Spokesman-Review*. Testified against a water projects funding bill SB 5628 in the State Senate. Lobbied Congress and agency officials in D.C. Testified at the Columbia River Policy Advisory Group meeting. Submitted comments to the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation on the Cle Elum Lake Pool Raise DEIS.
- ✓ Continued participation with Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest on the Sustainable Roads project.
- ✓ Submitted a letter to Washington State Parks opposing its proposed "thinning" of coastal forest at Deception Pass and Dugualla State Parks.
- ✓ Signed joint letter commenting on the DEIS for control of invasive species in the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest.
- ✓ Signed joint letter commenting on the worldwide importance of carbon sequestration in the Tongass National Forest.

RECREATION IN WILD AREAS, CONTINUED

- Forest staff in the Maple Pass Restoration Plan.
- ✓ Attended a public meeting on the potential for National Park fee increases.
- ✓ In *Mountaineer* magazine, explained NCCC's long-standing commitment to developing environmentally sustainable and user-friendly trails.
- ✓ Signed joint letter with scoping comments on proposed trails on Frog Mountain and to Alpine Falls.
- ✓ Signed joint letter with conservation group comments on Aesthetics and Recreation Management Plans submitted for the Enloe Hydroelectric Project.
- ✓ Gave a presentation to a retirement community about hiking the Pacific Crest Trail.



PROTECTING WILDLIFE AND HABITAT

Why it matters: from microscopic fungi to top predators, the wilderness ecosystem's living members are interdependent, so keeping viable populations of each species is essential to preserve the ecosystem for future generations.

- ✓ Signed joint letter to Congress opposing delisting the wolf under the Endangered Species Act.
- ✓ Signed joint letter supporting additions to Morning Star Natural Resource Conservation Area, which aligns with our ongoing advocacy for protection of adjacent Wild Sky Wilderness, Reiter Forest, and Wallace Falls State Park lands.
- ✓ Submitted comments to the National Park Service on its EA for Replacement of Administrative Facilities in the Stehekin River floodplain.
- ✓ Continued as a party in the Enloe/Similkameen Falls water right appeal.
- ✓ Signed second joint letter to the Northwest Power and Conservation Council to strengthen the Protected Area Program.
- ✓ Signed joint letter to Senator Murray thanking her for support of Restoring America's Watershed Act (S. 2916), which included support of the Legacy Roads and Trails Remediation Program.
- ✓ Signed joint letter to the U.S. Forest Service requesting inclusion of Legacy Roads and Trails language in its 2015 budget request.
- ✓ Signed joint letter commenting on the scoping of proposed geothermal leasing near Mount Baker.
- ✓ Signed joint letter requesting that BLM hold at least one public west-side meeting for its draft Eastern Washington Resource Plan.



Yakima Plan update

By Karl Forsgaard

A significant accomplishment of our Yakima Plan advocacy was the State Legislature's 2013 funding of a benefit-cost study of Yakima Plan component projects, including proposed irrigation dams. This was necessary because the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation had refused to prepare a benefit-cost analysis under the federal Principles and Guidelines for each water project in the Plan. The State-mandated study has now been completed, and it identifies those projects in the Yakima Plan that are not economically sustainable.

The Legislature directed that the study be conducted by the State of Washington Water Research Center (SWWRC). Established by the U.S. Congress in 1964, the SWWRC is one of 54 water research institutions or centers in the United States. The Water Resources Research Act Program is administered by the U.S. Geological Survey under the general guidance of the Secretary of the Interior. SWWRC's Director, Jonathan Yoder, is a respected Professor of Economics in the WSU School of Economic Sciences. The SWWRC report mandated by the State Legislature was released December 15, 2014, and can be reviewed at:

swwrc.wsu.edu/documents/2014/12/ybip_bca_swwrc_dec2014.pdf

The SWWRC report concluded that most

Yakima Plan storage components miserably fail a benefit-cost test:

"Based on moderate climate and market outcomes, storage infrastructure projects implemented alone and without proposed IP instream flow augmentation result in the following estimated out-of-stream net present value and B/C ratios, none of which passes a B-C test":

- Bumping Lake Expansion: Benefit/Cost (B/C) ratio of 0.18 [i.e. a return of 18 cents on the dollar]
- Wymer Dam and Reservoir: B/C ratio of 0.09 [i.e. a return of nine cents on the dollar]
- Keechelus to Kachess Conveyance: B/C ratio of 0.20 [i.e. a return of 20 cents on the dollar]
- Kachess Drought Relief Pumping Plant: B/C ratio of 0.46 [i.e. a return of 46 cents on the dollar]

These results are discussed in the guest editorial published in the *Spokane Spokesman-Review* and reprinted in this issue of *TWC* on page 9.

Meanwhile, State Senator Jim Honeyford (R-Sunnyside) introduced SB 5628 to create a \$3.8 billion grant program to fund irrigation water storage and flood control projects. It provides that in ranking projects for grants, Ecology "shall prefer projects that are consistent with or designed to

implement an integrated plan, as defined in RCW 090.38.010" (which specifies the Yakima Plan). The funds would be raised with a new statewide property assessment ranging from \$35 on a single-family home on less than one acre to \$375 for a commercial property on more than five acres. The bill provides that the assessment would be submitted to voter approval in a statewide referendum. In January 2015, NCCC testified in the State Senate Ways and Means Committee hearing on the bill, citing the SWWRC study results and opposing the raising of property taxes to fund uneconomical and environmentally damaging dams. It is unclear whether the bill will move out of committee.

As we went to press, a public comment period was underway for the 842-page Draft EIS for two I-90 components of the Yakima Plan, the Kachess Inactive Storage Pumping Plant and the Keechelus-to-Kachess Conveyance (a.k.a. K-to-K Pipeline). NCCC intends to submit comments by the March 10 deadline. The Bureau of Reclamation's Kachess-Keechelus DEIS is available for review at: www.usbr.gov/pn/programs/eis/kdrpp/index.html

Former NCCC board member Brock Evans on the Bumping Lake Trail.

—KARL FORSGAARD PHOTO

Public can't afford to subsidize new water projects

By John Osborn and Ken Hammond

The Spokane Spokesman-Review, January 4, 2015

Water is political currency. Politicians hold hostage worthy public programs in exchange for public funding of money-losing water supply projects. A case in point is the Central Arizona Project or CAP – the largest, most expensive aqueduct in the United States.

In the 1960s, President Lyndon B. Johnson horse-traded approval of CAP in exchange for votes to enact civil rights legislation. While LBJ's goals were worthy, it is a fact that taxpayers got stuck with most of the bill for CAP.

Similar subsidies apply to federal projects all over the West, including Eastern Washington.

To protect the public purse, objective economic analysis of water projects is a powerful tool. Two recent studies shine light on Eastern Washington's two major federal irrigation projects: the Columbia Basin Project and the Yakima Project. Productive irrigated agriculture and local economies depend on these federal mega-projects. But the two projects have not paid for themselves – far from it. State and federal budget leaders should take heed.

A 2014 study by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (“Availability of Information on Repayment of Water Project Costs Could Be Better Promoted”) evaluated irrigation district repayment for 130 federal water projects in the Western U.S.

At Grand Coulee Dam, the Columbia Basin Project pumps uphill 3.3 million acre-feet of river water for delivery to 670,000 acres across the Columbia Plateau. This massive project cost \$2.4 billion to construct. (In today's dollars, the cost would be enormously higher.) Of that, \$685 million was allocated to irrigated agriculture. But \$495 million – nearly 75 percent – has been written off for payment by Bonneville Power Administration ratepayers, socializing the costs to millions of people paying their utility bills.

As reported by the GAO, of the \$190 million left to be repaid by the irrigators, only \$60 million has been paid, with payments stretched over 50 years at zero interest. On balance, irrigators have paid less than 5 percent of their share.

The Yakima Project stores and diverts 1.2 million acre-feet of water from five

reservoirs in the Cascade Mountains, serving irrigation districts in Kittitas, Yakima and Benton counties. Here, construction costs total \$286 million, with \$149 million allocated to irrigators. The GAO reports slightly better repayment. Still, Yakima Valley irrigators have paid less than 10 percent of the total costs.

Crops grown in these federal projects don't pay for the existing water supply infrastructure, loudly signaling that expanding these irrigation projects won't cover costs either. Nonetheless, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation has partnered with Wash-

Federal irrigation projects in Eastern Washington don't pencil out. It is time to end wasteful feasibility studies, close the chapter and move on.

ington's Office of the Columbia River to pursue multibillion dollar expansions of both the Columbia Basin and Yakima projects.

Fortunately for taxpayers, federal guidelines now prohibit federal funding for water projects when costs exceed benefits. A recent economic study of expanding the Columbia Basin Project into the Odessa Subarea forced the bureau to decline funding that project.

Instead, the Office of the Columbia River has stepped into the gap to assess whether, and how much, Odessa Subarea farmers can pay to pump and deliver water to their farms. Depending on size, state subsidies of several hundred million or a few billion dollars would be needed to replace groundwater with river water for this small group of potato farmers.

The proposed Yakima water projects are similar. To expand in the Yakima, large state subsidies will be required to replace traditional federal subsidies to pay for the

excess of costs over benefits.

In 2013, the cash-strapped Washington Legislature wisely tasked independent economists to study the latest Yakima Basin proposal. In December, a team of Washington State Water Resource Center economists concluded that costs of water supply projects in the Yakima Basin – including new dams – outweigh benefits by 90 percent or more. In contrast, proposed fisheries enhancement projects of importance to tribes and the general public are cost effective. (Read: “Benefit-Cost Analysis of the Yakima Basin Integrated Plan Projects.”)

Public subsidy for new irrigation projects needs to end. Dust Bowl-era justifications no longer apply to an increasingly corporate agricultural sector. Governments struggle to pay for public necessities such as education, health care and even maintenance backlogs for existing dams and water projects. New and expanded water projects are simply not affordable.

We are at the end of the water frontier. Water-project proponents in Washington, D.C., and Olympia must acknowledge that federal irrigation projects in Eastern Washington don't pencil out. It is time to end wasteful feasibility studies, close the chapter and move on. There are more affordable means of sustaining profitable agriculture in Eastern Washington.

Spokane physician John Osborn is a conservationist with the Center for Environmental Law & Policy and the Sierra Club who has worked closely with NCCC to oppose the worst parts of the Yakima Plan. Ken Hammond is retired professor and chairman of the department of geography at Central Washington University and has been active for decades in water planning.

Pratt River Valley and environs now in Alpine Lakes Wilderness

By Rick McGuire

On December 18, 2014, President Barack

Obama signed the National Defense Authorization Act, a catchall “must pass” bill with many provisions unrelated to defense. The Alpine Lakes Wilderness additions and Wild & Scenic rivers bill, previously introduced and sponsored in the Senate by Patty Murray, and in the House by Dave Reichert and Suzan DelBene, were among many items tacked on to the NDAA, some good and some bad. Since its first introduction in 2007, the Alpine Lakes bill had previously passed both the House and the Senate, but never in the same Congress. Last minute deal-making finally put it across the finish line in the final days of the 113th Congress.

The Alpine Lakes bill’s flagship provision is the addition of the large, low-elevation, heavily forested Pratt River valley to the Alpine Lakes Wilderness, a longtime goal of conservationists. It also added some adjacent areas along the Middle and South Forks of the Snoqualmie to the Wilderness, all of it adding up to a 22,000 acre increase. It also designated the Pratt and part of the Middle Fork Snoqualmie as Wild and Scenic rivers.

NCCC’s history with the Pratt goes way back, starting with efforts, alongside others, to incorporate it and other low-elevation areas into the original Alpine Lakes Wilderness in 1976. NCCC members were active in opposing the Pratt timber sale in the late 1980s, and in the later campaign to add to Pratt valley to the Wilderness, and to protect and encourage proper development in the entire Middle Fork valley.

The original 1976 boundaries of the Alpine Lakes Wilderness, expanded now for the first time, reflect the politics of the era when it was established. Although the



Mt. Baker Snoqualmie National Forest had been overcut for years and the end was in sight for the heavily subsidized, one-time “harvest” of invaluable ancient forests, the timber industry still called many of the shots. The Forest Service never much liked Wilderness, and the together the industry and the agency managed to keep most of the forested valleys out of the Wilderness. The Alpine Lakes Wilderness, probably more than any other, came out looking like a starfish, with protection extending out along ridges but intervening valleys excluded. Nowhere was this more evident than in the Pratt valley, which the subsequent Alpine Lakes Plan said had been kept out of the Wilderness on account of being “high value timberland.”

And it is, although people today prefer the word forest over timber, which has usually meant something waiting to be cut down. The Pratt River joins the Middle Fork Snoqualmie at an elevation of less than a thousand feet, and its location at the very western edge of the Cascades means it has a true lowland climate, just the kind of place needed to round out and complete the Alpine Lakes Wilderness and fix those starfish boundaries.

Garfield Mountain—described by Fred Beckey as a “bazardous, puzzling enigma”—towers above the Middle Fork Snoqualmie near Taylor River. —MONTY VANDERBILT PHOTO

A land shaped by logging

Much of the lower and middle elevation terrain in the Pratt valley was railroad logged in the late 1930s. Because early day logging was less thorough than “modern” cutting, much legacy survived and no artificial replanting took place. The forests of the Pratt regenerated on their own, with a natural mix of species, and are well on their way to becoming old-growth, ancient forest once again.

Due to low wood prices, only the best quality trees were worth cutting during those Depression years. The higher elevations, and anyplace difficult to reach, were uneconomic to log, and left alone. Thus many areas of forest survived untouched. Today in some places one can see what Harvey Manning called the “bathtub ring,” where second-growth forest on lower slopes meets old-growth forest on upper slopes, although this effect is becoming

less noticeable as the trees of the younger forests catchup to the old growth.

Just above the confluence of the Pratt and Middle Fork, where the Pratt River trail starts up the Pratt valley, lies the interesting “high grade” area. It is basically an old-growth forest, but not “virgin” forest, because it was very lightly logged. The few stumps present do not even look to be the remains of the biggest and best Douglas firs, which is what would be expected.

Clearcutting was the universal method of logging in those days, and it is hard to fathom why anyone would go to the considerable effort of cutting, and especially of hauling out just a few trees from such an area, while leaving most of the potential profits standing. The stumps are scattered thinly throughout the whole area and it does not look like a place where someone started at one end and went bankrupt before finishing up. The only theory that seems plausible is that it was some sort of Potemkin “demonstration” forest where Boy Scouts, or other parts of the public, could be taken to show them what logging was supposed to look like, but of course never did except in this one unique place. We may never know the

real story. Those responsible have passed away. Maybe an old article offering some clue sits in an archive somewhere. But whatever the reason, the “high grade” forest is an attractive and interesting place to visit today.

The Japanese were paying good prices for scrap iron during the late 1930s, and most of the rails were pulled up and sold as logging finished up in successive parts of the Pratt valley. This gave rise to a North Bend and Snoqualmie legend that was repeated around many a Middle Fork campfire, that the rails from the Pratt River logging

went to building Yamamoto’s fleet that attacked Pearl Harbor. The final logging operations came to an end in 1941, and other than trees growing back, not much happened in the Pratt valley for nearly five decades until the Forest Service proposed a giant timber sale there in the late 1980s.

Pratt timber sale galvanized conservationists

The Pratt timber sale set off a firestorm of opposition. The Forest Service proposed to construct a new bridge over the Middle Fork Snoqualmie and build close

to two dozen miles of new logging roads, targeting both the remaining old-growth and regenerating second-growth forests. The sale proposal came just as the wheels were coming off the Forest Service’s program of liquidating all of what was left of the old growth forest. Awareness of the many values of ancient forests was spreading, and support for its taxpayer-subsidized destruction was falling rapidly.

The campaign to “Save the Pratt” took off. Every weekend, conservationists would take people across the Middle Fork Snoqualmie in canoes to visit the endangered Pratt. Then-Congressman John Miller, Republican of Seattle, took an interest in the valley and introduced a bill to designate the Pratt River as Wild and Scenic. Although the bill did not go anywhere, it helped the overall effort to keep logging out of the Pratt. As opposition intensified, the Forest Service bowed to public pressure and cancelled the sale. In the early 1990s the authors of the Northwest Forest Plan recognized the values of the Pratt valley by designating it as a “Late Successional Reserve.”

After the Pratt timber sale was stopped, opponents began to realize that the real prize was not just the Pratt, but the entire Middle Fork Snoqualmie valley. The closest mountain valley to Seattle, it had degenerated into a place where vandalism, wild shooting and garbage dumping were common. Open dead-end spur roads were a continuing invitation to all kinds of nastiness, and the valley had

a well-deserved reputation as a place to avoid.

It quickly became clear that allowing the Middle Fork to remain a mountain slum was intolerable. NCCC members and other formed the Middle Fork Outdoor Recreation Coalition (“MidFORC,”) to take back the valley.

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NCCC’s history with the Pratt dates to 1976, starting with efforts to incorporate it into the original Alpine Lakes Wilderness.



View toward Russian Butte. —MONTY VANDERBILT PHOTO

Pratt River Valley

Continued from page 11

A concerted campaign over 25 years has made huge progress. Almost all of the Middle Fork is now in public ownership. A new campground was funded and built. The Middle Fork road to Taylor River is currently being paved. New trails and facilities are planned or under construction. Closure of the many dead-end spur roads did more than anything else to rid the valley of the dumpers and shooters.

A seven-year legislative push

The conservation community, including NCCC, never gave up on the goal of adding the Pratt valley to the Alpine Lakes Wilderness. Opportunity came in 2007 when U.S. Representative Dave Reichert, Republican of Auburn, took an interest in protecting the valley, then located in his eighth Congressional district. In the next Congress he was joined by Senator Patty Murray, who introduced a companion bill in the Senate. Senator Maria Cantwell also signed on. After redistricting moved the Pratt into the first district, and Congresswoman Suzan DelBene was elected to that seat, she signed on also.

There were the usual ups and downs, and the frustrations of seeing it pass one house of Congress but not the other. The hostile House Resources Committee chair Doc Hastings held things up for years. Hastings couldn't be bothered to do anything for his fellow Washington state Republican colleague, Dave Reichert.

Finally, in 2014 things started moving. Hastings was retiring, and at long last there was the possibility he might let the Alpine Lakes bill through in exchange for something he wanted. After years of effort, he finally allowed a hearing and the bill was reported through. On the Senate side, the opportunity was the NDAA. It was turned into a Christmas tree, with all kinds of stuff added on to it since the expectation was that it "had" to pass. Some of its provisions were appalling, including a transfer of 70,000 acres of prime old growth forest from the Tongass National Forest to Sealaska corporation, guaranteeing its doom. A mine on an Arizona site sacred to the Apache tribe was thrown in by Senator John McCain, once thought of as one of the few environmentally friendly Republicans. Doc Hastings got an authorization to change Wilderness boundaries to allow building of a new road in the Stehekin valley. Fortunately, no money was attached.

Senator Murray and her Washington co-sponsors saw an opportunity to get the Alpine Lakes measure through. Although Murray has not commented on the mechanics, it is probably fair to speculate that she knew the NDAA would go through, and that while she did not like or support any of its bad provisions, she could either stand by or add her own good provision in the form of Alpine Lakes. It is unfortunate that Congress now works that way, but there is a word that describes it: politics. And there is another word for members of Congress who fail to adapt to it: ineffective. Patty Murray has proven that she

is anything but ineffective. The "mom in tennis shoes" has done more to advance the cause of Wilderness and public lands than any other Washington member in many years.

Probably everyone who worked toward passage of the Alpine Lakes bill would have preferred to see it go through on its own, not as part of such a package. Law-making was famously compared to sausage making, supposedly by Otto von Bismarck, although actual evidence seems to be lacking. During the last campaign, the Republican "Pledge to America" promised to "end the practice of packaging unpopular bills with 'must pass' legislation..." It's good to know that many in Congress are pledging to be good, and it will be interesting to see if this time is really different.

Even though the manner of its final passage was not all that might be hoped for, at least it is over with. The Pratt valley is now part of the Alpine Lakes Wilderness. It's time to move on to the next, even greater challenge, which will be to manage the tidal wave of humanity headed for the Middle Fork. Ways need to be found to accommodate vastly increased use levels. More trails and facilities need to be built, while protecting important wildlife areas. Facilities require money, which is ever harder to come by. At least the Stehekin road looks unlikely to find funding. But sources of funding need to be found, and soon, to keep the Middle Fork from being loved to death.

Member profiles needed

Tell us about yourself!

We'd like to feature YOU on our new website! Email us a short profile of yourself and tell us why you're an NCCC member. Email philf@northcascades.org and include a photo if you'd like. Thanks!

The original "starfish"

It took 12 years for Alpine Lakes to be designated after the passage of the Wilderness Act, and what we got looked like a starfish on the map. Its boundary followed the ridges out and back and excluded the valleys full of ancient forests at the behest of the timber industry.

Similar problems arose when setting boundaries of other Wilderness Areas, but Alpine Lakes was the poster child for what NCCC's late founder Phil Zalesky also liked to call "Wilderness on the Rocks." That's one reason the 2014 Pratt and Middle Fork additions are so signifi-

cant and took so long and so much work to get. Like Wild Sky, these additions broke through the barrier at last and saved low-elevation valley forests long coveted by the timber industry.

NCCC knows of several other valley forests adjacent to Wilderness that escaped the chainsaw or have "late successional reserves" that deserve to be added to our Wilderness areas in the future - hopefully before it's too late! Want to learn more? Email ncccinfo@northcascades.org

—Phil Fenner

A rough winter for glaciers

The winter of 2014-2015 has been the worst for snowpack in my 30-plus years of observing the North Cascades. While there have been several similar low-snowpack years where I've done winter ascents, none has seen as little snow, and as many days with record-setting high temperatures (six at time of press).

In Phil Fenner's photo (right), taken during the 2013-2014 season, note the snow loading at elevations from 2,000 to 5,000 feet. In Thom Schroeder's photo (below) taken February 14, note the lack of snow along the entire length of the forested ridges on the Pyramid-Colonial-Snowfield group, which rise above 7,000 feet. Most telling and troubling is the lack of avalanche snow in Ladder Creek valley (center of image) in what is traditionally the snowiest time of the year.

It should be an interesting summer for fish, farmers, glaciers and people—including those on the North Cascades Glacier Climate Project.

—Tom Hammond



A late afternoon spot of sunlight on Perry Creek valley (winter 2013-14).

—PHILIP FENNER
PHOTO



Pyramid-Colonial-Snowfield peaks (winter 2014-2015).

—THOM SCHROEDER
PHOTO



Mother Nature, not the National Park Service, closed the Stehekin Road

By David Fluharty and Carolyn McConnell

Contrary to the belief stated by advocates like Linda Evans Parlette (*The Seattle Times*, December 2, 2014), the forces of nature and not the National Park Service have closed the Upper Stehekin River Road. The NPS has carefully reviewed the status of the road and determined that the costs—both environmental and fiscal—are too great to justify trying to maintain the road. This reverses a trend where the NPS can be seen as more than heroic in trying to keep open a road that for all intents and purposes should never have been built or maintained for public purposes.

Let's back up. A track was bulldozed without engineering expertise to support an unsuccessful episode of speculative mining in the headwaters of the Stehekin

River in the late 1940s. That track fell into disuse until 1968 when the North Cascades National Park and Lake Chelan National Recreation Areas were designated by Congress. The National Park Service upgraded the track to a bumpy gravel road as far as Cottonwood Camp below Cascade Pass. When the Bridge Creek log bridge gave out in the late 1960s the road was closed for several years until the NPS built another bridge at considerable expense.

Over the years the NPS has dealt with rebuilds of bridges at Bridge Creek and Tumwater Creek as well as continued maintenance of a constantly eroding road surface. Total costs of these activities amounted to millions of dollars. In 1995 much of the upper three miles of the road was eroded down to bed rock and other areas badly damaged. That led the NPS

to the conclusion to close the road above Park Creek as unrepairable. Restoring road access from Park Creek to Cottonwood Camp would mean building a whole new road in ancient forest above the flood plain, with serious environmental and fiscal costs.

The 500-year floods of 2003 were a similar wake-up call, washing out multiple additional sites in the Stehekin Road below Park Creek, notably at Milepost 15 and Car Wash Falls. Based on a full Environmental Assessment process that included hydrological and geological assessments,

Hiker on PCT section proposed for Stehekin River Road relocation.
—KARL FORSGAARD
PHOTO

the NPS concluded that it could no longer justify trying to maintain the upper Stehekin Road.

Thus, we are in a continuing debate between some local and regional citizens and public officials advocating to reopen the road to provide access to the Upper Stehekin Valley while others like NCCC, Washington Trails Association, National Parks and Conservation Association, and Pacific Crest Trail Association, to name a few, support the NPS decision to close the road.

Because Stehekin can only be accessed by foot, ferry or floatplane, it has maintained its unique character as one of the most remote inhabited areas in the contiguous United States. Starting in the tiny "village" of Stehekin 55 miles up Lake from the city of Chelan and ending 25 miles farther up-valley below Cascade Pass, the Stehekin Road is a road from nowhere to nowhere.

Locally owned private vehicles or NPS vehicles brought up lake on a barge are the only motorized vehicles, which means that traffic to the Upper Stehekin Valley was always extremely light and hardly justified the considerable investments in bridge building, and road maintenance and repair that the NPS incurred after it took responsibility for the road from Chelan County.

It is also important to note that when Congress designated North Cascades National Park and LCNRA it deliberately did not authorize road access down Bridge Creek from the North Cross State Highway

(Highway 20) as development interests urged. Thus, Congress voted to maintain the isolation of Stehekin.

Under these baseline conditions, it is not surprising that 95% of all visitation to the Stehekin Valley takes place in the Lower Stehekin River area where there are

modest accommodations, visitor services, park interpretation, and the ferry landing. The 5% that heads for the Wilderness is not a large component of the Valley economy. In fact the NPS monitoring data show that public use of the Upper Stehekin Valley has actually increased since the road closure.

Advocates of rebuilding the Upper Stehekin Road obsess over the limitation placed on willy-nilly rerouting of the Stehekin Road by suggesting that we should simply revise the Wilderness Act boundary to allow the routing above the river. What is not revealed are four key facts. First, in order to accomplish this reroute, the NPS would have to rebuild the Pacific Crest Trail in that area. For that and other reasons conservation groups, including Washington Trails Association, opposed the change in designation. Second, to build the road to NPS standards would mean significant environmental impacts. Third and most important, the site of the reroute and other portions of the road still are subject to continued erosion by

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NCCC and others ask, how can such expenditures be justified for a road serving relatively few persons and with such limited access?

Driving to Stehekin

By Ed Henderson

As part of the recently passed National Defense Authorization Act, Congress tacked on a little gift for retiring Representative Doc Hastings, a well-known, vocal opponent of Wilderness. The legislation gives the National Park Service authority to move the Stephen Mather Wilderness boundary in the North Cascades National Park in order to relocate the washed-out road in the upper Stehekin River valley. The upper 10 miles of the old road has multiple washouts and landslides above High Bridge. Over 3,000 feet of the old roadbed is now the riverbed. Building a road on a new alignment would be both expensive and absurd.

However if this new road is built, anyone wishing to drive up the valley to Cottonwood Campground at the eastern foot of Cascade Pass will face a challenge. This is a classic example of "You can't get there from here!" — at least not by driving your vehicle. Stehekin, at the head of Lake Chelan, is isolated; no roads go there. So, to drive on this expensive new road one needs to transport a car to Stehekin. Here are some suggestions for how to do that:

Call upon the US Navy and Marine Corps' amphibious capability; get a landing craft to carry your car 55 miles up Lake Chelan. When the bow ramp drops at Stehekin, drive off onto the beachhead and on up the road.

If the Navy and Marines aren't available on landlocked Lake Chelan, perhaps the Army's airborne parachute riggers could prepare your car to drop into the landing zone from a C-130 Hercules.

Maybe your car's springs and shocks can't withstand the impact of a parachute landing. Then you may want to try the Air Force's short landing strip air transport capacity. You could assure the pilots that there is almost no chance of hostile ground fire on the approach to the Stehekin airstrip. They will only need to thread between high mountain peaks and passes.

Or, you could take the classic Himalayan expedition approach. Disassemble the car and hire porters to pack the parts across Cascade Pass down to Cottonwood Campground. Or if porters can't be

found, smuggle the pieces up the lake on the commercial ferryboat to Stehekin. Of course, some assembly will be required once you arrive.

After you've enjoyed a drive on the 23-mile long road, what will you do with the car? Well you can't drive it home anymore than you could drive it to Stehekin. The roads don't run that direction either. You could retrieve the car the same way you got it into Stehekin, except of course for the parachute drop. Or perhaps the NPS will have finished with those helicopters they are using to transport trail construction loads up to Cascade Pass; maybe they could pluck your car out. Or you could just sell the car and leave it in Stehekin. But there's not much use for a car in Stehekin, so the market value will be pretty low.

If this all sounds silly and expensive, so is relocating this road from nowhere to nowhere. The best idea is to leave the road closed, your car at home and walk, enjoying the Wilderness in the upper Stehekin River valley.

New dams and diversions in Alpine Lakes Wilderness?

By Rachel Paschal Osborn

The State Department of Ecology's Office of the Columbia River (OCR) is funding and sponsoring proposals to increase water diversions from seven lakes in Alpine Lakes Wilderness that flow into Icicle Creek: Colchuck, Eightmile, Upper and Lower Snow, Nada, Upper Klonaqua and Square Lakes.

In 2012, OCR funded Chelan County to form a "collaborative" Icicle Work Group (IWG), ostensibly to solve instream flow problems in Icicle Creek while obtaining more water from the system for out-of-stream uses.

The impetus for creating IWG comes from a City of Leavenworth lawsuit against Ecology regarding quantification of the City's water rights. That lawsuit is on hold while Ecology uses the IWG process to attempt to find water for Leavenworth. If the effort fails and the lawsuit moves forward, a court decision could undermine Ecology's authority to quantify water rights that pre-date the 1917 water code. The statewide implications are substantial; presumably Ecology would prefer to settle and vacate the lower court orders.

Funding IWG

To implement Leavenworth settlement efforts, OCR entered into a \$700,000 contract with Chelan County to run IWG and pursue water development projects. Chelan County subcontracted with Aspect Consulting for investigations (\$506,000); Dally Environmental Service for meeting facilitation (\$16,000); Cascadia Law Group (\$\$ unknown); and Icicle Peshastin Irrigation District (IPID) (\$25,000 per year for two years). OCR is now seeking another \$3.5 million to fund IWG into the 2015-17 biennium.

IWG Goals

In addition to finding water for Leavenworth, IWG goals include improving instream flows in Icicle Creek, making the Leavenworth National Fish Hatchery sustainable, protecting tribal rights to fish at the Hatchery, improving water reliability



Snow Lakes and Enchantments from Wedge Mountain.

—KARL FORSGAARD PHOTO

for agriculture, and improving ecosystem health.

All this must occur while achieving compliance with state and federal laws, including the Wilderness Act – no small feat.

IWG is a "quid pro quo" process. This raises the question whether ecosystem benefits, including water quality improvements and restoration of instream flows for endangered species, may only be achieved if new water supply is provided for Leavenworth (along with other IWG goals). This in turn raises questions about whether state and federal laws (for example, Clean Water Act and Endangered Species Act permits) may be superseded by a stakeholder-based collaborative process.

Overview of Alpine Lakes Water Projects

Three current proposals relate to Alpine Lakes: (1) Eightmile Lake Restoration-Storage; (2) Upper Klonaqua Lake pipeline; and (3) Alpine Lakes Optimization-Automation. The latest consultant studies are on the Chelan County website.

IPID holds grandfathered easements and water rights to store and divert water from the lakes. Leavenworth Fish Hatchery (owned by U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, operated by U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service)

also holds a water right for Snow and Nada Lakes. The scope of these interests is a matter for evaluation.

Eightmile Lake Proposal

The Eightmile Lake Restoration and Expansion proposal evaluates the ability to increase water storage in Eightmile Lake by rebuilding a dam, increasing pool level and/or drawing the lake down further.

The original dam and control works for the lake have collapsed and current usable capacity

is 1,375 acre-feet of water.

The Eightmile Lake Storage Restoration Draft Appraisal Study (Nov. 2014) evaluates four options for increasing storage capacity: 2,000, 2,500 (2 options), and 3,500 acre-feet. All four options include re-building the dam to its original height, or higher, as well as drawing down Eightmile Lake pool below its current, semi-natural outlet. The proposal is based on assumptions about water rights and easements held by IPID, which actively manages four of the Alpine Lakes to serve water to about 7,000 acres of orchards and converted lands in the Wenatchee Valley.

IPID holds water rights dating from 1926 to store water in and divert from the lakes. The Eightmile Lake water right was adjudicated in 1929 at 2500 acre-feet annual volume, and 25 cfs rate of diversion. However, the Eightmile dam collapsed and IPID has not used the full (artificial) storage capacity for many years. There are questions about relinquishment of water rights over and above what IPID needs and has used in the past. At a minimum, Ecology would have to issue water rights for new and increased uses.

IPID holds easements that allow it to "store" water in several Alpine Lakes, although the scope of the easement for Eightmile Lake does not cover the entire lake. As described in a Review of Eight Mile Lake Storage Authority (Aspect Consulting, March 2014), IPID's easements cover only a portion of the lake.

Any increase in storage capacity would require U.S. Forest Service approvals. Section 4(d)(4) of the Wilderness Act of 1964 requires Presidential approval to establish and maintain reservoirs within wilderness areas.

The appraisal study hypothesizes that the easement language will allow and perhaps even require the Forest Service to approve an expansion of Eightmile: "In performing maintenance, repair, operation, modification, upgrading and replacement of facilities, [IPID] will not without prior written consent of the Forest Service, which consent shall not unreasonably be withheld, materially increase the size or scope of the facilities."

The proposal raises questions about the scope of impacts on riparian zones and wilderness surrounding the lake, including trails, campsites and other public amenities. Eightmile Lake is one of the more popular trail destinations in Alpine Lake Wilderness, partly because of its easy accessibility. However, the Forest Service has not yet provided a public position regarding proposals to expand or draw down Eightmile Lake.

Upper Klonaqua Pipeline Proposal

The Klonaqua Lake proposal involves installing a siphon or pump or blasting a tunnel to drain Upper Klonaqua Lake into Lower Klonaqua Lake, detailed in the draft Bathymetry and Topographic Survey of Upper Klonaqua Lake and Conceptual Release Options (Aspect Consulting, Nov. 2014).

IPID holds some form of water rights and easements for Upper and Lower Klonaqua Lakes. IPID has never accessed water from Upper Klonaqua, and according to the report, has used only 1,600 acre-feet of its 1926 water right to 2500 acre-feet from Lower Klonaqua Lake. Nonetheless, the Upper Klonaqua study evaluates the natural storage capacity of Upper Klonaqua, including how much water could be obtained by drawing down the lake.

Issues with this proposal include that any new water project in a wilderness area would require approval of the U.S. Forest Service (and, according to the Wilderness Act of 1964, possibly the U.S. President). And because this proposal would increase diversion from the Klonaqua Lakes, Ecology would have to evaluate relinquishment, and issue new water rights to accomplish the goal. Neither the Forest Service nor Ecology has expressed opinions yet about the viability of these proposals.

Alpine Lakes Optimization/Automation Proposal

The current IPID and Hatchery diversion methods are primitive: drain holes and gates at the lakes are manually opened and closed at the beginning and end of the irrigation season by IPID and Hatchery staff who hike into the Wilderness.

The Alpine Lakes Optimization and Automation Appraisal Study (O/A Study) (Aspect Consulting, Nov. 2014) evaluates the potential to install telemetry equipment at each of the seven lakes to allow IPID and the Hatchery to remotely control the water release structures from their offices. Rather than uncontrolled drainage, automation would allow the water users to fine-tune the quantities of water they remove from the lakes to meet both consumptive use and instream flow requirements. This would increase efficiency and potentially drain the lakes.

More sustainable water solutions for Icicle Creek include aggressive water conservation, moving IPID's take-out point 6 miles downstream, and promoting water markets that facilitate selling and trading water rights.

The original concept for the study was to evaluate more efficient use of water and refill rates. However, the scope of the O/A Study has expanded to include analysis of increasing storage at Snow and Eightmile Lakes. The study evaluates increasing storage at Upper and Lower Snow Lakes by 5 feet and drawing down Lower Snow by an additional 3 feet. The study also evaluates two options at Eightmile Lake. The first involves rebuilding the dam to its original height (adding 4 feet to current pool); the second adds another 1 foot above that. Both options also evaluate lowering the Eightmile Lake outlet by 19 to 22 feet below current drawdown levels.

The O/A Study then evaluates the water supply opportunities should six of the seven lakes be fully drained each year. (At present, IPID diverts on a rotating basis from the four lakes to which it holds rights.)

The proposals to install automation equipment, manipulate lake levels, and increase diversions from the lakes seem likely to require approvals from the U.S. Forest Service and the State Department of Ecology. To date neither agency has indicated their positions regarding these proposals, although as discussed above, Ecology's OCR has provided substantial funding to study new dams and diversions from the Alpine Lakes.

Alternative Conservation Proposals and Public Outreach and Environmental Processes

Rather than divert additional water from Alpine Lakes Wilderness, water solutions for Icicle Creek could be found through more sustainable approaches. Approximately 117 cfs of new instream flow could be added to a 6-mile length of Icicle Creek (downstream of Snow Creek) by moving IPID's take-out point downstream to the Wenatchee River.

Water conservation opportunities are substantial. Rather than looking to Alpine Lakes as the first option, the City of Leavenworth and other users should adopt an aggressive water conservation plan. These actions, combined with promoting water markets that facilitate selling and trading water rights, could supply future water uses, but they have received minimal consideration.

Manipulating lake levels and allocating new water rights from Alpine Lakes Wilderness could be controversial. Although IWG was asked to create a Wilderness subcommittee, that idea was eliminated without discussion in December 2014.

Chelan County held a public meeting in Seattle in 2013, and a similar meeting was held in February 2015. Meanwhile, scoping under the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) will be scheduled for spring or summer 2015. National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) processes are unknown at this time.

In addition to Alpine Lakes storage and water right proposals, IWG is evaluating several other projects to improve instream flow and habitat in Icicle Creek. There is also movement afoot by other water users in the Wenatchee Valley to capture Icicle Creek (including Alpine Lakes) water for downstream uses.

The ultimate "package" of projects will require public scrutiny and input.

Excerpted from Naiads blog by Rachael Paschal Osborn, a Spokane water lawyer who works closely with NCCC on the Icicle and Enloe/Similkameen matters.



Okanogan-Wenatchee Travel Management update

By Karl Forsgaard

In late December 2014, Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest released its Proposed Action under the Travel Management Rule, designating roads and trails open to off-road vehicles (ORVs) and banning cross-country travel by ORVs.

The Proposed Action was an abrupt reversal of the approach undertaken by OWNF for more than nine years to implement the 2005 Rule (which had a four-year implementation timeframe). After conducting rounds of scoping in 2007 and 2009 with public meetings and detailed maps of proposed new ORV routes, OWNF had been moving toward a Draft EIS that would have included a range of alternatives (such as a pro-wilderness alternative, and a pro-ORV alternative) on which the public would have commented.

Rather than the full DEIS that we had been expecting, OWNF simply opted to memorialize its existing system of roads and trails open to motorized use. No

new mixed-use roads were proposed, and going forward such a proposal would be made at the district level.

This looks similar to the approach taken by Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie, Gifford Pinchot and Olympic National Forests with the 2005 Travel Management Rule – they merely memorialized the status quo regarding motorized routes. MBSNF and ONF did so without public meetings (those forests did not have to deal with the extensive ORV use present on OWNF lands). GPNF does have extensive ORV use and it took the extra step of holding public meetings, but ended up merely memorializing the status quo.

A primary feature of the 2005 Travel Management Rule is the ban on cross-country travel, whereby areas and routes are closed to motorized use unless posted open (as opposed to the opposite paradigm, where many forests previously had a rule of open unless posted closed). There is value in implementing that paradigm shift nationwide.

NCCC submitted comments on the Proposed Action, urging OWNF to revise it to

affirmatively state a strong commitment to serious analysis of environmental impacts and recreational balance in the districts' future decision process about routes open to ORVs. This is especially needed in roadless areas where ORV use became entrenched without any analysis of ORV impacts, including the Teanaway, Mad River-Entiat and Lake Chelan-Sawtooth roadless areas.

There have been recent proposals by All-Terrain Vehicles (ATV) proponents for large ATV loops of 50 miles or more to be established on Forest roads, outside of the Travel Management process and without compliance with NEPA, reportedly seeking to have the loops opened by the summer 2015 riding season. We are concerned about the negative environmental impacts of such ATV loops, including increased traffic and potential facilitation of the very same off-route travel and resource damage that the Travel Management Rule seeks to eliminate. NCCC asked OWNF to clarify how these ATV loop proposals will be handled under the Travel Management Rule.

NCCC board member Thom Peters at Mad Lake. —KARL FORSGAARD PHOTO

Morning Star additions and Reiter connections

By Mike Town

NCCC advocacy has played a key role in expanding recreation possibilities near Wallace Falls. Thanks to our advocacy, a new footbridge over the Wallace River gorge will allow hikers, equestrians and mountain bikers to travel between Reiter Forest and Wallace Falls State Park for the first time in decades. Near the bridge, a proposed expansion of the Morning Star Natural Resource Conservation Area (MSNRCA) will add 2500 acres of protection next to the Wild Sky Wilderness.

The non-motorized trail system of Reiter Forest, on the western edge of Wild Sky Wilderness, is a big win for conservation. Reiter is a State Forest managed by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). For decades, Reiter was literally over-run with off-road vehicles and had suffered extensive damage. Over the last few years, NCCC has led efforts to identify and repair the damage as well as design a more sustainable trail system for both motorized and non-motorized users.

In March 2011, we co-signed a letter supporting DNR's application for a NOVA grant to construct the Wallace River bridge. We wrote of "the tremendous potential for the development of a low-elevation trail system which is accessible all year long and is located close to the rapidly growing Puget Sound area. Reiter has potential for trails which access historic artifacts, mature forests, and viewpoints overlooking numerous waterfalls and the Puget lowlands. ... A potential trail along the old rail grade to the east side of Wallace Falls from the Reiter Foothills area will also significantly decrease the overuse of the neighboring Wallace Falls State Park." Funding and constructing the new bridge "would greatly expand nonmotorized trail opportunities and provide the critical linkage.... recreational users will be able to hike, mountain bike, and ride horses between Wallace Falls State Park and the DNR-managed lands of Reiter Forest."

The new bridge over the Wallace River gorge is located just above the Upper Falls of Wallace Falls. The bridge is 75 feet high



New footbridge above Wallace Falls with Reiter on the left and Wallace Falls State Park on the right.

—KARL FORSGAARD PHOTO

and 120 feet long and can be reached by a three-mile hike in Wallace Falls State Park. From the bridge there are views of the river, falls, Snohomish Valley and out to the Olympics. We believe that once this bridge is "discovered" it will bring a large increase of hiking visits to the State Park. The bridge will be completed this spring but closed at the Reiter Forest side until the Reiter trail system has been completed. Ultimately, the main trail will connect the bridge with the new Snohomish County trailhead off May Creek Road. However, right next to the trailhead will be the 200-acre DNR timber sale, and the new trail will be routed through the clearcut. As reported in *TWC* Spring/Summer 2014, the County asked DNR to hold off on the

timber sale, to explore ways to protect the trail corridor (the Reiter lands closest to the Wallace River) from logging.

In February 2015, NCCC also supported the expansion by 2,500 acres of the Morning Star Natural Resource Conservation Area (MSNRCA), just a short walk upriver from the new bridge. It has been approved by the State Legislature and should be funded this year. We also called for a more comprehensive long-term view for public land management in this area where a State Park, federal Wilderness Area and Washington State NRCA are adjacent. Connecting these areas in a multi-agency management plan could greatly enhance the goals of the State's NRCA program by:

- protecting habitat for Murrelets and Spotted Owls as well as other species dependent on old forests
- providing a corridor of connectivity for wildlife between the Wild Sky Wilderness, Wallace Falls State Park, and MSNRCA
- enhancing the recreational experience for hikers accessing this area from Wallace Falls State Park, Wild Sky Wilderness and the new trailhead in Reiter Forest.

A second legislative proposal seeks to add an additional 2500 acres to the MSNRCA through the Trust Land Transfer (TLT) process. These sections are either too high to support sustainable logging, and/or their steepness poses significant access problem, and/or they contain a number of failing logging roads too expensive to repair and maintain. Using the TLT process to add these adjacent lands to the MSNRCA (while compensating the trust through the acquisition of land more suitable for logging) will better serve beneficiaries of the trust and maximize ecosystem services to society. Adding the adjacent areas could be done in a piecemeal fashion or all at one time.

We believe that these boundary changes will enhance the social and ecological values of the current MSNRCA proposal and will allow for the best suited use for these areas.

The Corvid's eye

National forest lands along the west slope of the North Cascades are once again a riot of green from edge to center. Nearly a quarter-century has passed since the post-World War II logging frenzy on the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie (MBS) and other national forests in the Northwest came to a merciful end, following listings of the northern spotted owl and marbled murrelet under the Endangered Species Act. Well over four decades of intensive cutting on mostly lower elevations of the MBS had by then reduced much of this temperate rain forest to but a shadow of its primeval grandeur. Gifted writers have described the results as resembling a moth-eaten coat or a dog with mange, though probably no simile has fully captured the level of wanton destruction that occurred here. One needed to see it firsthand, with the usual involuntary reactions of solastalgia and nausea, in order to grasp at some level the horror which had transpired.

The Divine's own face, against its will, had been shorn of much of its whiskers.

Time may not heal all, though none can dispute its capacity to soften life's hard edges. Patience remains virtuous. Scientists and historians have marveled over the reforestation of New England, for instance, since that region's agrarian peak in the 19th century. By comparison, recovery of national forest land in the North Cascades is still in its fairly early stages, yet already there is evidence of a powerful resilience and rebound, arguably as impressive as the natural forces still at work in the North Appalachians. Ground that seemed an appropriate set for a dystopian tale of nuclear winter as recently as 1990 may now reasonably be called young

forest. Here, in 2015, we encounter vigorous conifers and hardwoods now towering over the tallest man, reassertion of natural hydrology among the countless streams, and gradual recolonization by shy, retiring creatures. Remnant wildlands in the heart of the range no longer seem so much like forlorn islands, but instead as the primitive core of a much grander whole. The great alpine areas of the North Cascades are of little consequence without an unbroken carpet of forest stretching well beyond them.



An illustrative example of this auspicious phenomenon is the oft-overlooked swath of MBS land rising south of the Skagit, west of the Sauk, and north of the Stillaguamish rivers. Known colloquially as the Finney Block, after the Skagit tributary creek that effectively bisects it, this roughly 150 square miles of relatively gentle terrain was a prime target of the 20th century's bad old days, when U.S. Forest Service policy was essentially to liquidate all old-growth forest under the purview of the agency. Consequently, the Finney Block was hit especially hard, with logging roads and their resulting clearcuts metastasizing to seemingly every formerly remote basin, mowing down forests which in many cases had not seen a

stand-replacing fire since first taking seed after the last ice age. Even here, though, the chainsaws and bulldozers didn't quite get to all of it. Roadless areas centered around Higgins and Pressentin creeks, as well as a sizable extent of old forest in the uppermost North Fork Stilly basin, somehow survived the carnage, and now form wild anchors within a small but rollicking sea of forest regeneration happening all across the Finney Block.

What then is to be done with all this recovering forest on the MBS? The ques-

tion is absurd on its face, since the correct answer is obvious: let it grow, left to its natural evolutionary trajectory. Ah, but the corvid knows his humans, and particularly those humans prone to the foibles of forestry; the softest of sciences. No day is complete without some proclamation that younger forests left to the whims and carelessness of Ma Nature are doomed to eternal mediocrity, or at best will develop far too slowly for the refined tastes of the Very Serious foresters, their political allies, and certain hangers-on. Without chainsaw intervention via commercial thinning (plus lots of logging trucks), we are told, these second-growth forests will never reclaim their original stature. Never mind how preposterous the notion is of a hubristic, savannah-evolved species going back to "fix" the forest it previously destroyed, and think not of the parallels of the thinners' arguments to the theory of burning a village in order to save it. And when confronted with the claim that more thinning will also translate to an economic panacea for struggling rural communities, do resist the temptation to point at the scalped hills under private and state ownership while asking why foothills denizens aren't already dressed like J. Paul Getty.

Esteemed readers of *The Wild Cascades* are well-versed on the thinners' chicanery by way of numerous incisive articles

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Board members, Park managers discuss helicopters near Cascade Pass



New trail (R) cut into fragile alpine meadow on Sabale Arm above old trail (L) as part of helicopter-supported trail construction last summer by NPS.

—CRAIG ROMANO PHOTO

Following up on a complaint by a member whose backpacking trip to Cascade Pass was ruined by helicopter flights supporting Park trail and campsite construction work (see *TWC* Fall 2014), four NCCC board members met with North Cascades

National Park (NOCA) Superintendent Karen Taylor-Goodrich and staff in November 2014 to discuss helicopter use in the Steven Mather Wilderness.

Helicopters and other mechanized equipment are prohibited in the Wilderness, but the Park Service had chosen to use them under a “Categorical Exclusion” (CE), a clause of NEPA which when invoked by the agency means it’s not required to give advance public notice or take comments. We expressed strong concern that the CE was not appropriate in this case because the work was not minimal maintenance but trail relocation and campsite construction requiring heavy materials not available on site. We asked whether NOCA expected to use helicopters to complete or expand this project, and they said yes, they are already planning to do more chopper runs there next summer.

We hope to have further meetings soon to try to negotiate a mutually acceptable alternative to helicopter use. Further, we want to determine if any mechanized work is being contemplated elsewhere inside Stephen Mather Wilderness (which comprises over 95% of North Cascades National Park) under a CE, so that we can alert our members and the public and hopefully “head it off at the pass.” We’ll keep you informed here in *TWC* and on our Blog and Catalyst e-newsletter.

Polly Dyer birthday



*Polly Dyer enjoyed celebrating her 95th birthday in February with many friends from the northwest conservation community, including NCCC, of course. With her is David Flubarty, former NCCC President and current board member. (See *TWC* Fall 2014 for more info about Polly and her appearance at the National Wilderness Conference.)*

The Corvid’s eye

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featured over the years in this publication. There is neither space nor need for the corvid to reiterate those important points, made with the authority inherent in NCCC’s careful observation of Cascades forests since 1957. It is enough to remind readers and fellow skeptics that commercial thinning is an act with no natural analogue that requires a large network of harmful logging roads. It is an anthropogenic disturbance that invariably retards forest development, particularly on the wet west slope of the Cascades. Moreover, there is no need for the resulting wood from our national forests. Currently,

private timberland corporations are shipping much of their raw, unprocessed logs overseas (to the clear detriment of rural communities), as domestic demand does not approach the supply. What then are our national forests for? They are priceless resources, functioning as critical carbon sinks, reliable sources of clean water, sensitive wildlife habitat, genetic reservoirs for unfettered evolution, and low-impact recreation compatible with other goals. In this day and age, that is more than enough. Let us then allow our new forests on the MBS and elsewhere to mature unimpeded.



Holden mine remediation to continue at least one more summer

Holden Village has announced in the Winter 2015 issue of their newsletter that they will not be open for guests again next summer, as remediation of the mine there continues for a fourth consecutive summer season, and all guest rooms will again be occupied by remediation workers from about May-October. The partially-below-grade retaining wall, a herculean project designed to 'forever' prevent leachate from the tailings piles from reaching Railroad Creek, long made sterile by pollution from the now-50+ year-old copper mines there, and the water treatment plant, crucial to making Railroad Creek non-toxic again, remain to be completed. Work also continues on upgrading the Village's infrastructure in parallel with the remediation. See www.boldenvillage.org for Holden Village's ongoing reporting. NCCC remains convinced that the extent of the work required to contain (not "clean up") the damage mining caused there, deep within the North Cascades Ecosystem, is a prime example of why mining and mineral exploration should not be permitted in settings such as this.

For more information on Holden and other current mineral threats to the Cascades, visit www.northcascades.org/word-press/mining.

An overview of the Railroad Creek realignment project just before water was released into the new bed. On the right is Tailings Pile 3. The former creek bed is in the middle and the new creek bed is on the left. —HOLDEN VILLAGE PHOTO

North Cascades grizzly bear EIS process launched

The National Park Service, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) have launched a public process to plan for the restoration of a grizzly bear population in Washington's North Cascades Ecosystem.

Public comments for the Grizzly Bear Restoration Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process were gathered during a series of open houses held in March in Winthrop, Okanogan, Wenatchee, CleElum, Seattle and Bellingham. Through March 26, public comments can be made online at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/NCEG>, or via regular mail or hand delivery at: Superintendent's Office, North Cascades National Park Service Complex, 810 State Route 20, Sedro Woolley, WA 98284.

The agencies stress that a range of strategies and alternatives will be considered, and local communities, residents and stakeholders will have opportunities for input on the development of the recovery plan going forward.

Less than twenty grizzlies likely remain in the North Cascades. While a few grizzly bears have recently been sighted in the Canadian part of the North Cascades, no grizzly bears have been sighted in the United States portion for several years. There are as many as 50 grizzlies in the Selkirk Mountain Ecosystem northeast of Spokane, Washington, and confirmed sightings have occurred in northcentral Washington in recent years.

If the North Cascades grizzly population is successfully recovered, the region will once again have populations of all the native predators that were present prior to the turn of the 19th century, something possible in very few places in the continental United States.

Stehekin Road

Continued from page 15

the Stehekin River and would not represent a permanent solution. Natural forces are still very active at the toe of the slope below the reroute, and it would only be a matter of time before the reroute would have to be rerouted. Finally, in order to accomplish the proposed reroute, the boundary of the Mather Wilderness would have to be adjusted.

The Defense Authorization Act which passed in 2014 was used to authorize a change in the Wilderness boundary for Steven Mather Wilderness, much to the chagrin of NCCC. Besides setting an unfortunate precedent, the Act will increase pressure to rebuild the road and open an additional 10-12 miles. Furthermore, advocates say that building a new road on a new alignment in a different location will cost \$1.3 million. But the cost of rebuilding the road on the current alignment, which is now a river bed, to NPS standards and with full compliance with the National

Environmental Policy Act's environmental review requirements for floodplains and wetlands protections, is estimated at \$6.6 million. Because both estimates are now ten years old, costs are likely to be much higher. NCCC and others ask, how can such expenditures be justified for a road serving a relatively few persons and with such limited access? When we consider the enormous needs of communities in North Central Washington following this summer's catastrophic fires it seems the height of folly to focus funding on a road from nowhere to nowhere. Surely the regional priorities for both community-based economic stability and environmental hazard protection have to be higher in North Central Washington than the Stehekin Road ever will be.

What is even more galling is that members of Congress suggest that this unjustified measure was approved to thank Representative Hastings for his service in Congress. "Doc" Hastings has actively sought to weaken the Endangered Species Act. He has blocked Wilderness designations across the country. He has been truly

anti-environment from day one based on any objective review of his voting record and leadership as Chair of the House of Representatives Natural Resources and Parks Committee. In an ironic sort of way the ill-advised proposal to rebuild the upper Stehekin Road would be a suitable statement of his legacy of anti-environmental advocacy, but is it right? NCCC and others argue that it is not! Further, to propose that rebuilding the road would honor former Governor/ Senator Dan Evans seems quite contrary to his overall record in support of Wilderness protection in Washington and his pragmatic engineering and budgeting expertise.

It is notable that Congress attached no funding to the Upper Stehekin Road legislation in order to pretend that this is a simple Wilderness boundary adjustment. This is misleading and irresponsible. It further leads to asking why the National Park Service should be second-guessed by politicians when applying the laws that have been set for its operation including prioritization of funding. Stay tuned.



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Whitehorse (L) and Three Fingers (R) loom over Puget Sound from Guemes Channel in a rare showing of full snow-coat, earlier in the winter. —PHILIP FENNER PHOTO