Okanogan and Wenatchee National Forests

Cascade Lookout

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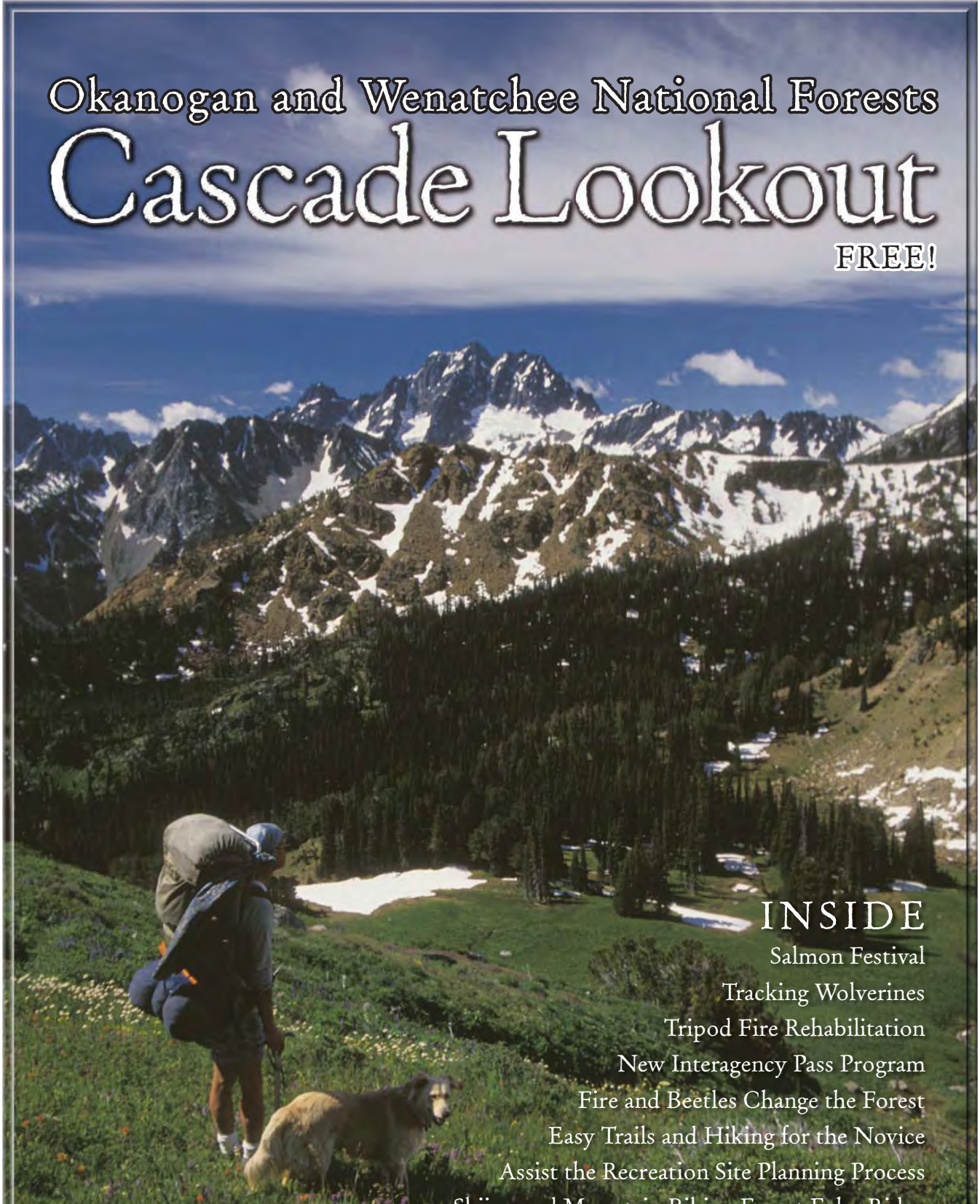

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Cascade Lookout 2007

A Publication of the U.S. Forest Service

Okanogan and Wenatchee National Forests

A Note from the Retiring Forest Supervisor

James L. Boynton

This edition of the Cascade Lookout newspaper is full of articles about past projects, current recreation opportunities, and planned events that will be occurring in the Okanogan and Wenatchee National Forests.

You can read articles about noxious weeds, tree diseases, fires, and more. These brief stories help us understand past and present events that have shaped the forests into what they are today.

A recent event is the Tripod Fire. This 175,000-acre blaze was the largest fire that has burned on the two forests since their establishment almost 100 years ago. The lightning-caused Tripod Fire burned for most of last summer on the Methow Valley and Tonasket Ranger Districts. The duration and complexity of this fire was due to the condition of the forest fuels—predominately dead spruce trees killed by insect infestations. There is more information about the Tripod fire and insect infestation on page 5.

A soon to occur event will be my retirement in June, 2007. After 40 years with the Forest Service I felt that it was time to retire. It has been a privilege to work with the fine men and women of the Forest Service, and an honor to represent the citizens who own these wonderful national forests. My replacement as Forest Supervisor will be Becki Heath, an experienced Forest Supervisor with a strong commitment to public service.

I'm excited about moving on to another stage of life with my wife Pat. I'll be seeing you out in the woods as I enjoy my retirement hunting and fishing in the beautiful Okanogan and Wenatchee National Forests! I hope you enjoy this edition of the Cascade Lookout! — Jim

This issue of the Cascade Lookout is dedicated to Paul Hart, Public Affairs Officer for the Okanogan and Wenatchee National Forests. Paul is retiring from the Forest Service in August 2007 after 30 years of public service. The publication of this newspaper for the past eleven years is due in large part to his efforts. Thank you from all of us, Paul.

The New Forest Supervisor

by Paul Hart

Becki Lockett Heath

The new Supervisor of the 4.1 million acre Okanogan and Wenatchee National Forests will be Becki Lockett Heath, current Supervisor of the Gallatin National Forest in Montana.

The assignment will be a homecoming for Heath, who served as Leavenworth District Ranger on the Wenatchee National Forest in the 1990's.

"Becki Heath will be a perfect fit for the Okanogan and Wenatchee National Forests," said Regional Forester Linda Goodman. "She is a seasoned Forest Supervisor with a strong commitment to public service. She has extensive background in natural resource management and has shown superb leadership handling complex wildland fires."

"My husband and I are excited to be returning to central Washington," Heath said. "I am honored and humbled to be asked to serve as the Okanogan and Wenatchee Forest Supervisor."

"The Okanogan and Wenatchee Forests have spectacular scenery and wonderful recreation opportunities. They also have areas of over-crowded dry forest that are susceptible to insects and wildfire. I'm looking forward to working with individuals and organizations that care very much how their National Forests are managed," she noted.

Heath is a career Forest Service employee who began working for the agency in 1977. She graduated from Oregon State University in 1976 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Recreation and Environmental Education. In 1979 she obtained a Master of Science degree in Forest Management from the University of Washington.

Her early years with the Forest Service were spent on the Mount Hood, Ochoco, and Umatilla National Forests in Oregon and included positions in timber management and silviculture.

She served as Leavenworth District Ranger from 1990 until 1999. While at Leavenworth, Heath gave special attention to watershed analysis and restoration, natural resource education, public involvement, recreation, and fire suppression.

In 1999 Heath moved from Leavenworth to Bend, Oregon, to become Deputy Supervisor of the Deschutes National Forest. In 2001 she moved from Bend to Bozeman, Montana, as Supervisor of the Gallatin National Forest.

During Heath's time on the Gallatin National Forest, she has been very successful in opening and enhancing lines of communication with individuals and organizations. Her accomplishments include being instrumental in addressing issues relating to the Yellowstone Ecosystem, the largest intact ecosystem in the lower 48 states, including the de-listing of the Yellowstone grizzly bear. She also finalized the Forest's travel management plan which addresses recreational uses on forest roads and trails. Heath was influential in the conservation of important species habitat through an aggressive land acquisition and exchange program, and in 2006 she led the Forest through an extreme fire season when over 250,000 acres of National Forest burned.

Heath and her husband, Monty, have one son, Evan, 18 years old. Monty Heath is a retired Forest Service recreation program manager. Becki Heath will begin her new job in Wenatchee on August 6. ■

Price Increases for Forest Service Maps

by Robin DeMario

Folks who don't get in to our offices very often may be in for a little surprise the next time they come in to buy a forest map. The price of Forest Service Visitor maps went up the 1st of March.

Due to an increase in production, printing, and distribution costs, the price of National Forest/Grassland visitor maps has increased from $6 to $9 for paper and $10 for plastic maps. Two-color Ranger District map prices increased from $4 to $5.

Visitor map prices were last increased in May, 2000. At that time the price increased from $4 per map to $6 for paper and $7 for plastic.

Map prices are set nationally and are based on an analysis of historical costs adjusted for projected costs.

The Forest Service is required by law to recover costs associated with making maps available to the public. Our map sales program is self-sustaining and full cost recovery is necessary in order to remain viable.

The Wenatchee National Forest map (last printed in 1996) will be revised and reprinted by late 2008; the Okanogan National Forest map is scheduled to be revised and reprinted in 2010; both maps will be printed on plasticized paper.

Maps of all kinds can be purchased (in person or by phone) at local district ranger offices and the forest supervisor's office in Wenatchee. ■

Learn About the New Interagency Pass Program

The new "America the Beautiful – National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Pass" combines the benefits of existing recreation passes from five federal agencies into one comprehensive Interagency Pass. The new pass covers recreation opportunities on public lands managed by National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Reclamation, and U.S. Forest Service.

Although access to most public lands remains free — the pass applies to those locations that currently have entrance or standard amenity fees.

The new program replaces the Golden Eagle, Golden Age, and the Golden Access Passports as well as the National Parks Pass. Existing passes will remain valid until expired, lost, or stolen.

"America the Beautiful" passes can also be used in lieu of the Northwest Forest Pass at trailheads. However, the Northwest Forest Pass is still a viable option and costs $30 for an annual pass which is good on National Forest lands in Oregon and Washington and also the North Cascades National Park.

ANNUAL PASS

(replaces Golden Eagle Pass) Cost: $80.00

- The Annual Pass is valid for 12 months from the month of purchase
- It is useable only at Federal sites
- At sites with a vehicle entrance fee, the Annual Pass admits the pass holder and accompanying passengers in a single private vehicle.
- Where a per person entrance fee is charged, the Annual Pass admits the pass holder and three persons, age 16 or older. Age 15 and under are free.
- Where Expanded Amenity fees are charged for facilities and service, only the pass holder will be given a 50% discount price reduction. The Annual Pass does not cover discounts on any Expanded Amenity or Concessionaire fees such as camping, RV hookups, boat launching, backcountry permits, parking at Mt. Rushmore, guided cave tours at Wind Cave National Park, or parking at some historic monuments or homes.

Motorcycle sticker

LIFETIME SENIOR PASS

(Replaces Golden Age Pass) Cost: $10.00

- The Senior Pass is available to anyone age 62 or older.
- It is valid for the pass holder's lifetime.
- The pass holder must be a U.S. citizen or permanent resident of the U.S.
- The Senior Pass must be obtained in person with proof of age and citizenship or permanent residency, may only be signed by the qualified individual, and is non-transferable.
- Photo identification may be requested to verify pass ownership. If the pass holder is deceased, their pass may not be transferred to another person such as a spouse.
- The Senior Pass provides the pass holder a 50% discount on some Expanded Amenity fees.
- The Senior Pass offers the same benefits as the Annual Pass, with the exception of no decals available.

LIFETIME ACCESS PASS

(replaces Golden Access Pass) Cost: FREE

- The Access Pass is for citizens or permanent residents of the U.S., regardless of age, who have been medically determined to have a permanent disability that severely limits one or more major life activities.
- Acceptable documentation: statement by a licensed physician, document issued by Federal agency such as the VA, Social Security Administration or Supplemental Security Insurance; or document issued by a State Agency such as Vocational Rehabilitation.
- The Access Pass must be applied for in person and signed by the qualified individual only. It provides a 50% discount on some Expanded Amenity fees, and it offers the same benefits as the Annual Pass with the exception of no decals available.

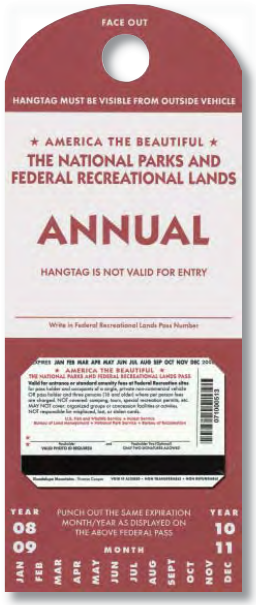
FREE ANNUAL VOLUNTEER PASS

(requires 500 hours of service on a cumulative basis)

- A Federal volunteer coordinator or fee manager must issue the pass to an individual in person.
- The Volunteer Pass offers the same benefits as the Annual Pass, with the exception of one free decal for open-top vehicle or motorcycle.

Definitions:

- Standard Amenity Fee: Combination of basic amenities such as picnic tables, trash receptacles, toilets, developed parking, interpretive signing, and security.
- Expanded Amenity Fee: Fee charged for specialized facilities and services beyond entrance fees and standard amenity fees such as camping, boating, and tours.



Example of the Annual Pass displayed in hangtag.

Where Did Your Recreation Fees Take You in 2006?

by Amy Tinderholdt

In 2006 … the Okanogan and Wenatchee National Forests received nearly $500,000 in revenue from the Recreation Fee program.

Explored the Backcountry…

If you hit the trails, the power of your recreation dollars could be viewed across both forests! Over 300 miles of non-motorized and wilderness trails and 320 miles of motorized trails were maintained with recreation fees last year. The Cle Elum Ranger District repaired and replaced trail bridges and constructed 300 feet of puncheon on the Shoestring Trail. Improvements were made at trailheads as well, with the installation of bear-resistant garbage cans at Irongate, Chewuch, Long Swamp, and 14-Mile Trailheads on the Tonasket Ranger District, and new improvements at ten trailheads on the Methow Valley Ranger District.

Had S'mores…

Photo: Tom Iraci

Like many families you may have found yourself cozied up to the campfire last summer. Your fee dollars helped to keep your treasured campgrounds maintained, provided facilities, and kept you safe and informed. Some notable accomplishments: Naches Ranger District installed a new vault toilet at Deep Creek Horse Camp, Entiat Ranger District provided campground hosts, Wenatchee River Ranger District refinished picnic tables, and Tonasket Ranger District outfitted their campgrounds with four new bear-resistant dumpsters.

Became Enchanted…

Magic abounds in the Enchantment area of the Alpine Lakes Wilderness. If it has cast its spell on you, your Enchantment Permit fees were used to employ wilderness rangers, maintain backcountry toilets, and keep the permit system running.

Photo: Roger Wallace

Photo: John Hutmacher

Set Out on a Nordic Adventure…

The snow was great this year at Echo Ridge Nordic Ski Area, and the views cannot be beat! The ski area, located on the Chelan Ranger District, has expanded over the last two years. Recreation fee funds have been used to install new toilets, expanded parking, and build miles of new trails. Fees also kept the 20 miles of classic and skate ski trails groomed all winter long!

Enjoyed the Land Around the Lake…

With ⅔ of scenic Lake Chelan accessible only by boat, docks are a key link to campgrounds and trails. Lake Chelan dock permits funded the maintenance and repair of 15 docks on Lake Chelan.

Experienced History…

Did you stay in a hotel or did you spend the weekend in a historic guard station or a rustic A-frame cabin? The Okanogan and Wenatchee

National Forests have four recreation rentals available, but the secret is out, so book early! These little gems are fully furnished and each offers a variety of amenities. American River and Teanaway Guard Stations can be rented for $40/night, Table Mountain A-Frame for $50/night, and the American River Lodge for $100-$150/night. Eighty percent of the money generated from recreation rentals stays in the Okanogan and Wenatchee National Forests Recreation Fee Program.

Recaptured a Family Tradition…

or established a new one by harvesting the perfect Christmas tree to brighten your home during the holidays. Christmas tree permit fees funded patrols and extended Forest Service office hours during the holiday season.

Capitalized on Your Investment…

The Okanogan and Wenatchee National Forests were able to use recreation fee funds to help secure grants totaling another $625,000 to operate and maintain campgrounds and other developed recreation sites, for trail maintenance and reconstruction, and for education and enforcement patrols.

All in All…

These funds were important in providing needed maintenance and operation funds for the Forest's trails, campgrounds, cabins, and other recreation amenities.

Thank You! ■

Blowdown and Bark Beetles Bring Changes to the Forest

by Connie Mehmel,
Forest Entomologist

This year we saw some big natural disturbances on the Okanogan and Wenatchee National Forests. Hundreds of thousands of trees were burned in the summer, and winter storms left many more trees broken or blown over.

Trees that are blown over by winter storms, or trees that are badly damaged but not killed, make excellent breeding grounds for some native bark beetles. By spring of 2008 we may see a large crop of Douglas-fir beetles, and by 2009 an equally large crop of spruce beetles.

Douglas-fir beetles and spruce beetles are both in the genus Dendroctonus, a word which means "tree killer". The adults are small (1/10th to 1/3rd inches long), stout, dark-colored insects with short, clubbed antennae and chewing mouthparts.

Each bark beetle specializes in the species of tree for which it is named. Colonies of these beetles can be found feeding on the nutritious layer of phloem just beneath the bark of a host tree. The host tree must be freshly dead, because phloem quickly decomposes once the tree dies.

Live trees may also be attacked, but live trees have many defenses against bark beetles. They have pitch which can physically block and trap beetles, and resins that are actually toxic. Bark beetles have their greatest success in trees that are almost but not quite dead. Large trees that blow over in winter are even better. When beetles begin flying in early spring, trees that blew down in winter still have plenty of fresh phloem but are unable to produce any defensive chemicals.

When large numbers of host trees are blown down, Douglas-fir beetles and spruce beetles will quickly find this abundant source of food and breeding material. The insects can then build up very large populations. If there are not enough newly downed or damaged trees to feed them, they will attack healthy trees. During these outbreaks, even vigorous trees can be overwhelmed by large enough masses of attacking beetles. Outbreaks of Douglas-fir beetles usually last about four years. Outbreaks of spruce beetles may last much longer, often killing most of the mature spruce over a large area.

Douglas-fir beetles take one year to complete their life cycle. As soon as the air temperature warms up in the spring, adult beetles fly off in search of food and a place to lay eggs. Female beetles are the pioneers. When a female finds a suitable host she drills through the bark and begins to feed. Then she emits a powerful chemical signal that attracts other beetles in the area. This is how a mass attack begins.

Adult beetles mate then feed in vertical galleries under the tree bark. Each female lays eggs in groups of 10 to 36 on either side of her gallery. The total number of eggs she can produce depends on the size and nutritional quality of the host tree. In a large susceptible host tree, the female may lay 800 eggs or more. The eggs hatch in a few days. The host tree is killed as feeding galleries cut off nutrient flow between the roots and the crown. Fungi carried on the bodies of adult beetles also interfere with nutrient and water flow, speeding the death of the tree.

By late summer, when larvae have reached mature size, most develop into pupae. This is the resting stage during which the larva is transformed into an adult. Pupation lasts about two weeks. Douglas-fir beetles overwinter under the bark, either as adults or as large larvae which will pupate and become adults in the spring.

The spruce beetle life cycle follows a similar pattern, but generally requires two years to complete.

If blown over or severely damaged trees are removed before the tree-killing generation of beetles matures, the likelihood of outbreak can be reduced. However, many places where storm damage occurs are remote, so removing scattered blowdown may not be possible. One of these places is the Tiffany Mountain area between Winthrop and Tonasket, where a 12-year outbreak of spruce beetles provided much of the fuel for last summer's Tripod Complex wildfires.

Bark beetles are major agents of change in forest ecosystems. During outbreaks of Douglas-fir beetles and spruce beetles, the largest, oldest host trees will be attacked. Extended outbreaks may kill most of the large host trees, leaving smaller, younger trees, or trees of non-host species. Eventually fire may follow, further changing the forest.

Bark beetles are native insects that have interacted with native trees for thousands of years. The beetles and their hosts have evolved together, producing a cycle of death and regeneration that ensures the survival of both species. ■

Most of the trees in this photo have been killed by beetles.

Below: Beetle feeding on a tree.

Stress-less Trails for Seasoned Seniors

by Doug Jenkins

The old legs aren't what they used to be, lung capacity is diminished, eyes are failing, hearing is limited, and the old ticker is always under some kind of stress—all these things make it more and more difficult to get around in the mountains for well seasoned seniors. Still, the urge, the desire to visit the wilds is always on the mind. But guess what? It is never too late to visit "stress-less trails" that take you to vistas beyond your expectations. Believe it or not, you really don't have to exert yourself that much.

For instance, a segment of the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) at Chinook Pass can be considered a "stress-less" trail. First off you will need to have an America the Beautiful Interagency Senior Pass or a Golden Age Passport to park at the trailhead along State Route 410. Be sure to place your card in a holder (with your signature facing out) and hang it from the rearview mirror.

The most difficult part of your hike will be up the trail to the PCT, or you can walk up the highway to the trail. Once you're on the trail you have a relatively flat hike around Naches Peak to where the trail drops down towards Dewey Lake (don't go that way or you will be stressed!) just continue up and around. Now, you have a tad bit of a hike up a very gradual grade for maybe 35 feet and then you level out about the time you enter Mt. Rainier National Park. Don't forget to stop along the way to take in the view of the little pristine lakes visible just off the trail, and the absolutely mind-boggling wildflowers.

Getting back on the trail you will round the corner and BAMB!! Mt. Rainier leaps out at you, and you just kind of stand there spellbound. Now, if you time this right, in late summer/early fall you can enjoy the changing colors and yes, huckleberries. While you're sitting along the trail gobbling these succulent morsels, don't forget to look up towards Naches Peak. It isn't uncommon to spot a Mountain Goat or two. You might even see a bear feeding on berries, too.

Not far down the trail you'll come to the highway and have to make the decision whether or not you want to head on down to Lake Tipsoo or hike up the highway and back to the trailhead. Oh, make sure you take along a bottle of cool water, a couple protein bars, your camera, and stuff a jacket in your backpack. This whole trip can take several hours, but you set the pace. I like to make a day of it taking pictures, identifying wildflowers and just taking it all in. Makes me feel young again. ■

Crowded Dry Forests and Fire

by Paul Hart

On a sunny spring day, a column of dark gray smoke rises above a green expanse of forest. In sweeping passes, a low flying helicopter is dropping ping pong ball-sized spheres that ignite after they land, spreading fire across a forested landscape.

Not far away, fire crews clad in flame retardant yellow shirts and green pants are using hand-carried canisters that spread droplets of flaming fuel oil on the forest floor. Firefighters who work all summer to attack and put out wildfires work with similar skill and dedication to light fires in the spring and fall. So, what's up with that?

The work they are doing is called prescribed fire. Fire managers are using fire on their own terms to burn brush, fallen trees, branches, and needles. They are using fire to prevent fire at a time when it can be carefully controlled and smoke can be carried up into the atmosphere and away from nearby communities.

"We have to recognize that our forest ecosystems were shaped by fire over thousands of years," says Dr. Richy Harrod, Forest Service Fire Ecologist on the Okanogan and Wenatchee National Forests. "Plants and animal species developed in an environment frequented by fire."

Growth rings in old stumps and snags contain a record of repeated, low intensity wildfire over more than 400 years. Old photos and research paint a picture of native pine and fir forests comprised primarily of widely spaced, large trees with thick, fire-resistant bark. Ground fires every 7 to 14 years kept the forest free of brush and fallen branches, encouraging the growth of grasses and removing most new seedling trees.

Nearly 100 years of successful fire suppression has had some serious unintended consequences in the forests of eastern Washington, Harrod said. "We are faced with serious overcrowding of trees, especially in the drier Douglas fir and ponderosa pine zones of both forests." Such forests often fall victim to insects, disease, and wildfire.

An extended period of drought and unusually dry summers has led to large, uncontrollable wildfires on the Okanogan and Wenatchee National Forests in recent years. In response, the Forest Service has been implementing a "Dry Forest Strategy" since 1995. It calls for thinning large areas of dry forest to provide protective buffers around local communities and important wildlife habitat. "This strategy uses logging to remove mostly smaller diameter trees, leaving larger, well-spaced trees that are resistant to fire," Harrod said.

Another key element of the strategy is the use of prescribed fire after logging and thinning to remove woody debris and brush from the area. Several times in recent years, such thinned and prescribed burn areas have been the place where firefighters could safely construct fire lines to halt the spread of very destructive wildfires.

A key obstacle to fire use is control of the smoke it produces, Harrod noted. "People seem to understand there is nothing firefighters can do about the dense, long-term smoke produced by wildfires… but they are much less accepting of short-term smoke from prescribed fire."

To better control smoke, fire specialists carefully monitor the moisture content of fuels and vegetation to be burned. They work with meteorologists to keep track of weather, seeking conditions that will result in the dispersal of smoke into the upper atmosphere and away from communities.

The Washington Department of Natural Resources must grant permission before each burning project is ignited. However, even with approval, the "burn boss" at the site may elect not to burn if local conditions do not meet conditions of the prescription.

The Forest Service may do such burning on more than 15,000 acres within the Okanogan and Wenatchee Forests in a good year. "That sounds like a lot but, unfortunately, more than 700,000 acres are overcrowded and would benefit from thinning and low intensity fire," Harrod noted.

Considering the enormity of the task, fire managers concentrate their efforts in strategic locations that create breaks in fire prone forest groves and provide protection to homes in rural areas.

"We've made some great progress in recent years," Harrod said. "People like the looks of thinned and underburned woods, and the result is a healthier, more defensible forest." ■

Education Camps, an Outdoor Classroom

by Annie Green
Soil Scientist

Okanogan 6th graders look at stream erosion. This is a popular mud fight locale at Camp Progress.

Sixth grade students from the Omak and Okanogan schools attend a week-long natural resource learning session every May at Camp Disautel and Camp Progress located on the Colville Indian Reservation.

Camp Disautel has plumbing and electricity while Camp Progress is rustic, with a generator and hauled water. Camp Progress has added excitement in having a creek with a perfect mud fight location and yearly sightings of scavenging bears attracted by the smells of homemade cooking--both good reasons to bring a camera.

Forest Service employees have taught courses at these camps since the 1970's. The learning activities in the soils classes are all hands-on and include discussions on Geology, soil interpretations, and soil awareness. Common questions students ask are, "Why are there round rocks up here in the mountains?" and "Does vegetation make a difference when it rains?"

The students get to do experiments to explain the effects of soil erosion, impacts of soil compaction, and learn about pre-historic Mount Mazama and its widespread effects here in Northern Washington. There are also discussions on glaciers and stream dynamics which help students learn why the Okanogan River is brown in the spring. An informative walk away from camp buildings gives students a chance to look at vegetation, soils, and geology and learn how they all interact.

Students receive handouts and posters, and the most promising scientists receive additional large posters and a hand lens. These camps provide an opportunity for students to interact with teachers in a real learning environment that is FUN!

Students are responsible for chores, group activities, and getting along with fellow campers in close quarters. Sometimes it is the first time students have ever camped. These camps expose students to subjects not normally taught in school.

Children all have different interests and while most of them enjoy the archery lessons, some really enjoy shaking soil sieves and acting as a rain cloud. The biggest reward for the teachers is receiving letters from students who really enjoyed the soils session and will remember the lessons for years to come.

The Forest Service also participates in a day-long camp for local 1st through 6th graders at Lake Owhi near Nespelem, and a week-long camp for Tonasket 6th grade students held at Camp Tokiwanee on the Tonasket Ranger District. Another program geared towards children is "More Kids in the Woods." This program is designed to engage kids in the outdoors, both through conservation education and recreation.

No matter the location, there are learning opportunities for young and old throughout the year on the Okanogan and Wenatchee National Forests. Come enjoy and have FUN! ■

Where Will I be Able to Use My Motor Vehicle in the National Forests?

by Vladimir Steblina

The Forest Service is working to complete a Travel Management Plan for all National Forest units by the end of 2009. The process will designate motorized travel routes on national forest roads and trails. Once that has been done, the forest will then be closed to all motorized travel except for these designated routes. The Okanogan and Wenatchee National Forests started the process late in 2005.

In June of 2006, the Okanogan and Wenatchee Forests held a series of public meetings asking for comments on the process and specific comments on which roads and trails should be open to travel by motorized vehicles. Over 500 comments were received from individuals and groups.

These comments have been compiled, along with specific route suggestions. Ranger District personnel are currently completing the analysis of the public comments as well as internal suggestions from fish and wildlife biologists, recreation planners, botanists, and other professionals within the Forest Service.

The process is taking a hard look at whether current and recommended routes meet safety criteria, resource protection needs, and are consistent with Federal and State laws and regulations. The analysis seeks to provide motorized recreation travel opportunities while also considering road and trail maintenance costs.

The analysis part of the process should be completed by June of 2007. At that point the Forest Service will hold a second series of Ranger District public open houses to share the analysis results.

Next fall the Forest Service will begin the analysis required under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The NEPA analysis will take about 12 to 18 months to complete. There will be additional opportunities for the public to comment through the NEPA process.

Following the environmental analysis process, the Okanogan and Wenatchee National Forests will produce a motor vehicle use map displaying designated roads, trails and areas for motorized use. The final decision will be published during the summer of 2009. Implementation of the travel plan will begin with the distribution of the Motor Vehicle Use map in late 2009.

Highlights of the national Travel Management Rule:

- Each national forest or ranger district will designate those roads, trails, and areas open to motor vehicles.
- Designation will include class of vehicle and, if appropriate, time of year for motor vehicle use.
- Once the designation process is complete, the rule will prohibit motor vehicle use off the designated system or use that is inconsistent with the designations.
- Designation decisions will be made locally, with public input and in coordination with state, local, and tribal governments.

The North Cascades Wolverine Study

The Wily, Rascally Wolverine Saga Continues

by John Rohrer
Wildlife Biologist

A scratchy, broken, and barely discernible radio transmission said, "We're getting a closed signal from the Twisp River trap."

After a 40-minute snowmobile ride, wildlife biologists Dan Russell and Blake Stokes approached the trap site on foot. Snow was falling so there were no tracks, but in front of the trap they noticed scattered wood chips, splinters, and a hole carved out of the lid and sill log. Afraid that the trapped animal had already escaped, Russell switched on a headlamp and peered into the hole.

A deep, low growl and a flash of teeth surprised him into a quick retreat and a big smile. We had trapped our first wolverine of the year! The 30-pound male wolverine, named "Chewbacca" due to his chewing efforts to escape the trap, now wears blue ear tags and a neck collar with two radio transmitters. Every minute one of the transmitters beams out a signal that can be received by satellites as they orbit the earth. If the same satellite is able to receive at least 4 of those signals on the same pass it is able to triangulate a reliable location point for Chewie.

In the steep, rugged North Cascades, this occurs about twice per week. The other transmitter is a VHF radio, standard in most wildlife telemetry studies. The location points will help biologists begin to understand the distribution and ecology of wolverines in the North Cascades.

The North Cascades Wolverine Study was initiated in January, 2006, through the joint efforts of the Pacific Northwest Research Station, the Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife, and the US Forest Service Okanogan and Wenatchee National Forests. Since last year, a fourth box-log live trap was deployed, improvements were made in the radio collars, North Cascades National Park joined as a partner in the study, and funding was received from Seattle City Light and the Seattle Foundation.

A couple weeks after releasing Chewie, and repairing the damage he'd done to the trap, a second wolverine was trapped at the same site. Xena, a young female wolverine, now sports red ear tags and her own radio collar.

Chewbacca and Xena have not been traveling together, but so far range over a similar area that includes portions of the upper Twisp River drainage, the North Cascades Highway Corridor, and the North Cascades National Park.

On Valentine's Day, this season's third wolverine was discovered. A small yellow tag in one of the ears identified this wolverine as a recapture--Melanie, a wolverine captured in 2006, had returned. She was a couple pounds heavier and a few inches longer than last year. In addition, several physical characteristics indicated that she was pregnant.

Chewie, Xena, and Melanie continue to travel over the high country of the North Cascades, while satellites occasionally pinpoint their locations. Our studies of these wily, rascally critters will continue; we hope to learn as much as we can to help preserve these interesting animals.

For more information about wolverines, visit www.wolverinefoundation.org. ■

Above: Wolverine in Yellowstone National Park.

Left: "Chewie" is released after being fitted with a radio transmitter.

Recreation Site Facilities Master Planning

You Can Help Define Your "Niche"

by Vladimir Steblina

Photos: Tom Iraci

Though some recreation facilities were constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930's, the majority of campgrounds and trailheads on the Okanogan and Wenatchee National Forests were built during the 1960's and 70's. These campgrounds and trailheads were designed to serve the public users of that time.

Camping with the family was the most popular activity on forest lands back then. Hikers and horseback riders were the primary trail users, and they were present in fairly small numbers. The start of fishing and hunting seasons filled the campgrounds to capacity and beyond. Overall though, it was a less crowded, simpler time.

In 2005, there were over 2.5 million recreation visits to the Okanogan and Wenatchee Forests. Of these visits 206,315 were camping-related. This represents 8.2% of the visits to the Forest. Campgrounds and trailheads have become important today as a base camp from which people start their recreational activities.

Since the 1970's, many new recreational activities have become common on the National Forests. On Forest trails, motorcycles, mountain bikes, and trail runners have joined the hikers and horsemen. In our campgrounds, the old canvas tent has been replaced by modern recreational vehicles.

To better serve the public, the Forest Service has initiated a national Recreation Site Facility Master Planning (RSFMP) process to ensure that our developed sites provide the right recreation opportunity in the right places.

The goals of the process are to:

- Improve customer satisfaction
- Provide recreation opportunities consistent with each Forest's unique recreation attributes.
- These attributes are defined as the "niche" the forest offers in terms of special places, opportunities, and possible experiences. An important element is public expectations for recreation opportunities in the Forest.
- Operate and maintain a financially sustainable developed recreation program to accepted quality standards
- Eliminate deferred maintenance at recreation sites

Forests will analyze each developed recreation site based on criteria such as how well the site supports the recreation needs of the public, the importance of the site to the local community, and its environmental impacts.

Developed recreation sites are expensive to operate. Fees and funds from Congress generally cover the operating portion of the budget, but there is no money for deferred or postponed maintenance. The Forest Service approach to maintenance has been similar to a homeowner who can temporarily patch a leaky roof, but does not have the funds to replace the roof. Campgrounds generally have a 20-year life span before major repairs are necessary. For most of our campgrounds on the Okanogan and Wenatchee Forests, maintenance has been deferred for more than 30 years.

The Forest Service will schedule public meetings in June and July to receive comments on desired recreation opportunities. These comments will help define a recreation focus or "niche" for the Forests which will then be used to rank and rate the developed facilities. After completion of the analysis the public will have another chance to comment on the planning process and facility priorities.

The goal of Recreation Site Facility Master Planning is to ensure that available recreation funding is allocated to support sites that best meet the needs of today's visitors. ■

Forest Plan Revision — What's Been Happening Lately?

by Debbie Kelly

Photo: Tom Iraci

Revision of the Forest Plans that guide management of the Okanogan-Wenatchee and Colville National Forests is in its fifth year.

These land and resource management plans provide strategic guidance for managing the National Forest. Each National Forest has its own plan which establishes the desired condition for the land and resources, and sets general management direction.

"Our goal is to develop a Forest Plan that sustains economic, social, and ecological conditions that are beneficial to both people and the land," said Jim Boynton, Forest Supervisor for the Okanogan and Wenatchee National Forests.

By law, Forest Plans must be updated every 10-15 years. Revision of the Forest Plan is necessary to account for changes which have occurred over the life of the plan. The current Forest Plans for the three national forests were implemented in 1990.

Since last March the Forest Plan Revision Team has worked closely with the Eastern Washington Cascades and Yakima Provincial Advisory Committees (PAC) on a very intensive collaboration effort focused on specific segments of the Plan development. The PAC is a federally chartered advisory committee whose members reflect a broad representation of public stakeholder interests. They developed a proposal for possible Forest Plan vegetation and recreation management themes. They also discussed Inventoried Roadless Area management.

"We have greatly appreciated the interaction, dialogue, and exchange of ideas that the PAC collaboration meetings have provided for this planning effort," Boynton said. "The discussions with PAC members have benefited the planning effort by helping us identify areas of common ground with some of our more contentious resource management challenges."

On March 30, 2007 the Forest Service was enjoined or prohibited from continuing Plan development under the "2005 Planning Rule." The Forest Service at the National level has begun efforts to address the Court's decision, including taking steps to declare a new planning rule in accordance with Administrative Procedures Act, studying environmental effects of a new planning rule as required by National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service under the Endangered Species Act.

As the revision proceeds, interested members of the public are welcome to contribute their ideas. Public meetings have been held since the start of the planning process. Information gathered from those meetings can be found on the Plan Revision website. Additional meetings will be scheduled once the draft plan is released—at that time the emphasis will shift to requesting specific feedback on the draft plan itself.

The project timeline has been extended. The new target for release of a draft is early 2008. For more information on the Forest Plan Revision please check our web site or contact us:

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Reducing Wildfire Risk in the Wildland Urban Interface

by Mary Scholz
Public Affairs Specialist

The Tripod Fire Complex of 2007 burned across 175,000 acres of the Okanogan National Forest and adjoining Loomis State Forest. Hundreds of homes in the communities of Twisp, Winthrop, and Conconully were threatened by the fire.

Vegetation management and hazardous fuels reduction projects on the Methow Valley and Tonasket Ranger Districts served as secure working locations for firefighters during Tripod Fire suppression efforts. These projects had opened crowded forest stands and reduced excessive forest fuel buildup, lessening wildfire risk in treated areas.

These treatment areas will also provide anchor points for fighting fires in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) where homes, cabins, and structures border forest lands. Firefighters start containment actions from anchor points (usually a barrier to fire spread from which to start constructing a fireline). Anchor points are critical to safe and successful firefighting operations. Forested areas near WUI that have been treated by vegetation and fuels management activities make good anchor points. They have less fuel on the forest floor to create a ladder for fire to climb into tree tops. The trees are also further apart, hampering fire spread.

The Solar Timber Sale on the Methow Valley Ranger District provided an excellent example of the value of fuels reduction work in WUI. In the 1990's, thinning to open up the forest canopy and reduce ladder fuels occurred in the Solar Timber Sale area, just east of the Chewuch River. These activities were completed by 2004, leaving light accumulations of slash in units closest to summer cabins (Brevicomis summer cabins are within 100 feet of that project).

Although fuels treatments with prescribed fire had not been completed when the Tripod Fire began, the openness of the stands, absence of ladder fuels, and low levels of slash enabled firefighters to safely and successfully conduct burnout operations, even with several homes nearby.

Several vegetation management and hazardous fuel reduction projects in WUI on the Methow Valley Ranger District have been used as firelines during wildfire suppression efforts:

- The 2005 Pearrygin Fire, which burned 4 miles northeast of Winthrop near private and state lands, burned into fuel reduction projects in the Ramsey Creek drainage. When the wildfire entered the treated area, fire intensity dropped dramatically. Trees experienced much lower mortality levels than outside the treated area. Suppression crews were able to enter this area quickly to contain and control the fire.
- During the 2003 Farewell Fire, which burned about 10 miles north of Winthrop, suppression crews used a recently thinned and underburned project as direct fireline for burnout operations, halting the fire's advance towards private property. Crews spread out over a ½ mile stretch of steep forested slopes to ignite fuels between the fireline and the fire, knowing that they had an extensive defensible space and anchor point behind them.

Besides increasing protection for firefighters and homes in the Wildland Urban Interface, these projects and future treatments are important because they improve stand survival and tree regeneration after a fire. They also help mimic the effects of repeated low-intensity fires historically present on the Okanogan National Forest.

Above: Smoke column from 2006 Tripod Fire rises above the Methow Valley Ranger Station.

What's next? Additional vegetation and fuels management projects are planned for the Gold Creek, McFarland Creek, Squaw Creek, Fawn Creek, Twisp River, Benson Creek, Ramsey Creek, and Leecher Mountain drainages. Future projects will focus on Eightmile Creek, French Creek, Finley Canyon, and Cub Creek drainages.

Stay tuned, more fuel treatments may be occurring in wildland urban interface areas near you! ■

Photo above shows untreated forest near Brevicomis summer cabins.

Photo below shows treated forest in the same area.

Tripod Fire Complex — Now a Forest in Renewal

by Carol Ogilvie

In early July of 2006, lightning struck and ignited what would become the largest wildfire in recent Washington State history. A forest already decimated from an outbreak of spruce beetle and Mountain Pine Beetle was ripe for such a fire. There was little that fire managers could do to stop the inferno from ripping through the dead and dying lodgepole pine and Engelmann spruce stands. Protecting private land and local communities from devastation was the primary focus for fire fighting crews.

This conflagration would eventually burn across more than 175,000 acres of forested land managed by the U. S Forest Service, Washington State Department of Natural Resources, Bureau of Land Management, and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. What it left in its wake was not only blackened stands of timber but over 50,000 acres of severely burned land and fire suppression scars subject to soil erosion and noxious weed invasion.

Before the ashes had cooled, a Burn Area Emergency Response (BAER) Team was called upon to evaluate the conditions and develop a plan to aid in the restoration of this fire-damaged environment. Of greatest concern were preventing soil erosion from water runoff that could potentially damage key watersheds and reducing the risk of invasive noxious weeds from infesting susceptible habitats were of greatest concern.

This team of experts in hydrology, soils, and noxious weeds planned a coordinated restoration effort. An aerial mulching effort dropped weed-free straw from helicopters in order to stabilize soil and prevent runoff on thousands of the most severely burned acres. Areas scarred by the creation of fire breaks and firefighter safety zones were seeded with a mixture of grasses to cover bare soil so noxious weeds would not get a foot hold.

Pre-existing noxious weed infestations were treated with herbicide or hand pulled to reduce seed sources. Because noxious weed seed can remain viable in the soil for years, a long-term monitoring plan had to be developed. Surveying and monitoring for noxious weeds under the BAER plan will continue for the next three years. Monitoring beyond the three years will occur as a Ranger District project.

"We are committed to doing what we can reasonably do to repair the damage and reduce future impacts from this mega fire," said Mark Morris, Tonasket District Ranger. "Left to nature alone, it would take decades, perhaps even centuries longer to regenerate the more severely-burned areas than it would if we helped them along with appropriate restoration efforts."

Healthy forests with a natural history of fire occurrence tend to have fewer disease and insect outbreaks, fewer noxious weed infestations, and greater biological diversity. In the years to come, this area will become more stable and resistant to the problems that have plagued it in recent history. "We may not see full recovery in our lifetime, but with the first new seedlings and sprouts of larkspur in the spring we will know that it's on the right path," Morris said. "For our part, planning, management and continued monitoring will certainly help the process along." ■

Tripod Fire Changes – but Doesn't Stop – Recreation

by Carol Ogilvie

2006 Tripod Fire burned through the Chewuch Trailhead.

The Tripod Fire of 2006 has changed the face of recreation in some of Okanogan County's most popular areas. "While there are still many opportunities to enjoy the activities that this area is noted for, it will be a different experience," said Michael Alvarado, Customer Services Staff for the Tonasket Ranger District.

Many historic structures, trails and trailheads were saved from fire damage. Unfortunately, the Chewuch Trailhead didn't fair as well; the hitch rail, unloading dock, picnic tables and sign had all burned. Many trails were damaged when log constructed water bars burned, fire killed trees fell, and roots burned out underneath trails. In some portions of the Tripod Complex, recreation trails were used as fire breaks. A bulldozer line obliterated a popular dispersed recreation site known locally as Sandy Camp; that site will no longer be accessible.

A substantial effort was made during the fall of 2006 to rehabilitate much of the fire suppression impact to recreation trails, but much more rehabilitation work will be needed in coming years. Management direction for wilderness areas does not permit reconstruction of buildings when naturally-occurring events destroy them. For this reason, there are no plans for rebuilding historic buildings such as Bighorn Cabin which was completely destroyed in the Horseshoe Basin of the Pasayten Wilderness

Volunteer groups, such as the Okanogan County Association of Snowmobile Clubs, have been helping to clear trails of fire-killed trees and re-establish trail routes. Members of Backcountry Horsemen and Oroville Trail Riders have also stepped forward with offers of assistance to help restore trails and trailheads. "We really value and appreciate the work that these volunteers are providing," said Mark Morris, Tonasket District Ranger and an avid fan of horseback riding. "Without them, it would take much longer to repair the damage. It's obvious how much they genuinely care for this popular area."

Tiffany Lake Trail

While visiting and recreating in the area can still be enjoyable, visitors need to be aware of the changes and potential hazards associated with recreating here. Contact Forest Service offices before leaving home to get current information on trail status or possible area closures.

When traveling through the burned area, it's recommended that visitors carry a saw or other tools in case a tree needs to be removed from a road or trail. Please note that power saws are prohibited in the Wilderness. Always let someone know where you will be, and when you plan to return.

There are many other enjoyable and scenic areas for recreation in Okanogan County. So, if visiting the fire-damaged area does not appeal to you, contact local Forest Service offices or visit the Okanogan County Tourism Council web site (www.okanogancountry.com) for ideas on where to go and things to do.

For those interested in volunteering to restore fire damaged trails or trailheads, please contact the Methow Valley Ranger District (509) 996-4003, Tonasket Ranger District (509) 486-2186, or Okanogan Valley Office (509) 826-3275. ■

Chelan Ranger District

There's a Dam at Chelan?

by Susan Peterson

When you visualize Lake Chelan you think of clear, clean water, tall mountains, fjord-like cliffs, remote communities, and recreation. This large 50-mile long natural lake is the third deepest gorge in North America. While orchards, vineyards and an array of homes dot the lower lake basin, the upper basin is home to ponderosa pine, rocky cliffs and few people or social amenities. But, what most people don't realize is that the 1,486 feet deep Lake Chelan is also operated as a reservoir for hydroelectric power production.

The first dam to raise the lake level was built in 1892. It provided for navigation to the city of Chelan and water for south Chelan real estate. By 1903 power generation became important and the "lights came on" in the city of Chelan. In 1927, a 40-foot high 490-foot long steel-reinforced concrete dam was completed on the Chelan River near the city of Chelan. Water flows through a tunnel to the powerhouse, where electricity is generated. The powerhouse is located in the town of Chelan Falls, nearly 400 feet lower in elevation than Lake Chelan.

The Lake Chelan Hydroelectric Project provides hydroelectric power and regulates the depth of the lake from a minimum elevation of 1,079 feet in winter, to "maximum pool" depth of 1,100 feet in summer.

When visitors see the lake drawn down they believe it's because the high mountain snows haven't melted, which is partly true. The lake must be regulated to capture mountain run-off while protecting the shoreline from flooding. Lake Chelan is a recreational magnet which provides many benefits including power generation, fish and wildlife conservation, recreation, water supply, and flood control.

A license is required for non-federal dams, such as Lake Chelan, to operate. The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) issues licenses for operation of hydropower projects under the provisions of the Federal Power Act. The Public Utility District No. 1 of Chelan County filed a Settlement Agreement in October, 2003 for relicensing to continue the operation and maintenance of the 48-megawatt Lake Chelan Hydroelectric Project. The new license (which lasts 50 years) was issued by FERC in November, 2006.

The settlement is very important for local communities and natural resource agencies managing lands and waters in the watershed. Large issues with significant natural resource and public impacts had to be addressed during the relicensing process.

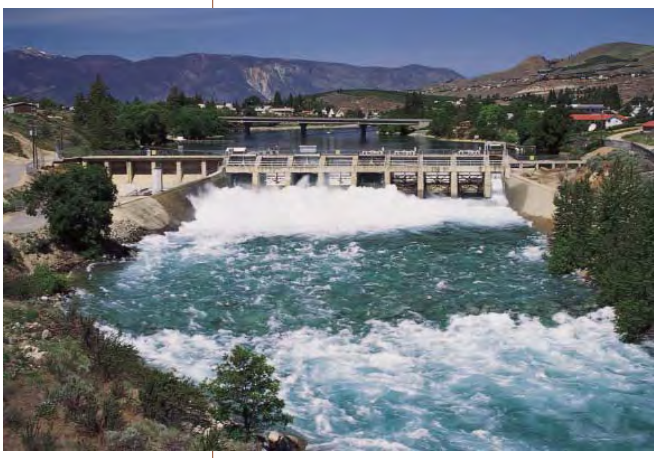


Photo courtesy of Chelan County P.U.D.

The settlement focuses on comprehensive plans for erosion control, large woody debris use, fisheries management in Lake Chelan and in the Chelan River (with primary focus on anadromous fish), management of lake level, wildlife and riparian habitat, recreational, and cultural resources.

The settlement will help keep Lake Chelan a special place to visit while providing resource stewardship opportunities. The Forest Service and National Park Service will receive funds to help support campgrounds and docks on the lake. Erosion control will be targeted first at campgrounds most used by the public.

Wildlife and fisheries benefits will occur over time as habitat enhancement measures are accomplished. Projects will benefit ecosystems that have been disturbed by past human activities. Managers will use prescribed fire to improve wildlife habitat. Wildlife will also benefit from habitat improvements such as planting and thinning browse and control of noxious weeds.

The public and agencies will continue to work together as partners to improve and preserve this unique watershed into the future. ■

Echo Ridge, "The" Place to Be

by Susan Peterson

Longing for fresh mountain air scented with pine and sage? Looking for outstanding panoramas of land, sky and water? Hoping that not everyone else in the world is going to be there too? If you've got the time, we've got the trail!

Echo Ridge Nordic Area is a series of highly scenic loop trails developed in 1992 by the US Forest Service, Lake Chelan Nordic Club, and the Washington State Interagency Committee for Outdoor Recreation. The third largest groomed cross country trail system in the state, the area operates under a cooperative agreement between the Forest Service and the Lake Chelan Nordic Club who maintain the trail grooming operation.

In winter, the snow is fantastic—that is if you like dry powder! At elevations of 3,100-4,000 feet, snows are consistent from December through March. Over 20 miles of trail are groomed for cross-country skiing. Recently, a trailhead and 2.6 miles of designated snowshoe trails were added. Gently rolling treks through diverse pine-dotted drainages offer panoramic views and a sense of comfortable solitude. The trail system is divided into a series of loops that come together at six major junctions. With names like Alley Oop, Lolli Pop, Tootsy Roll and Whoop-di-do, you know it's going to be fun.

The Forest Service has completed 80% of the major expansion project for this area, complete with improved road access, two new toilets, two new trailheads, new kiosks, signs, and expanded parking lots. Trails were widened to better meet the needs of skate skiers and beginner skiers. Snowmobiles have been re-routed and the No-Where to Hide trail is now a skier only trail. For snowshoe enthusiasts, in addition to the new 2.6 mile snowshoe trail, 6 miles of existing trails may be shared with skiers.

Although the main purpose of Echo Ridge is winter time fun, it has become an area hub for mountain bikes and for folks who want to hike and picnic with views of the Cascade Mountains and the Columbia River Gorge at their feet. Echo Ridge turned out to be a pretty good name too… the area echoes with fun.

Directions: Located just 9.75 miles from downtown Chelan, follow the Manson Highway (SR-150) 2 miles to Boyd Road. Follow the signs to Echo Valley Ski Area and Sno-Park. The county road ends at Echo Valley Downhill Ski Area. From here, follow the steep and narrow Forest Service road up to the two parking areas on the ridge. ■

Hiking... for the Novice

by Kim Larned & Terry Mahaffey

Photo: Tom Iraci

It seems like a concept so basic it hardly deserves mention. It is surprising to us who live and work in the woods, but hiking can be a very daunting and confusing undertaking for first-timers.

Following are some basic hiking suggestions, not only for the first-timers but also as a reminder for the "seasoned" hiker:

- Before setting out on any hike take a few minutes to research what items you will need. Make sure you understand the terrain you'll be hiking in, tell someone where you are going and when you'll return. Make sure they know what to do if you do not return and that they are responsible for notifying the authorities with your itinerary should you not return.
- Take as many essentials as you like, but take at least "the big 10" to get you through most situations. The following is a list of the ten items most often recommended:
  1. Map
  2. Compass (know how to use it!)
  3. Clothing – warm sweater or jacket, long pants (wool or synthetic, no cotton)
  4. Extra food and water
  5. Flashlight with extra batteries
  6. Waterproof matches/fire starter
  7. First aid kit with bandages, sun screen, insect repellent, medication for stings/bites
  8. Whistle
  9. Rain or wind jacket
  10. Pocket knife
- If you don't pack in your water you will need to boil or filter it. Drinking from a stream or lake can make you seriously ill.
- Learn where you can camp and how to set up camp in ways that will not attract animals.
- Learn to LEAVE NO TRACE and to TREAD LIGHTLY—this means pack out all garbage, bury human waste 6 to 8 inches deep in soil, preserve the quiet, use camp stoves whenever possible, stay on trails, and avoid cutting switchbacks which destroys vegetation and causes erosion.
- In the spring, trails sometimes take a while to melt out and harden. Give the ground some time to prepare itself for the peak summer use. Riding, hiking and driving on trails and roads that are too soft can cause resource damage that may lead to trail and road closures.
- Match your trail selection with your expectations. If you are looking for a lung-buster, find the trail that provides 86 switchbacks and gains 3,000 feet in 3.5 miles. If you are looking for a walk to take with your cautious three-year-old, seek out the flat meandering trails that are well maintained. Often resource damage and injuries occur when the trail is not what people were expecting and are either lured into cutting switchbacks, creating their own route, or hiking outside their ability level.
- Obtaining the correct permit can be very confusing for those trying to do the right thing before heading out on a trip. Call the local ranger station that administers the area you plan to visit and ask what permits you will need.

There are many elements involved in hiking that are not covered here. You can research hiking safety on the web, at your local library, or contact your local Forest Service office. For those who are properly prepared, hiking can be a wonderful experience enjoyed by people of all ages and abilities. We hope to see you on the trails this summer. ■

Salmon Viewing Trail Open for All

by Janie McQueen and Kim Larned

Photos: www.ybeep.org

Three years ago, a young man and his classmates came up from the Yakama Tribal School in Toppenish to see and learn about salmon spawning. This young man's legs are amputated above the knee and he utilizes a wheelchair to assist with his mobility.

These students knew the trail to the viewing site would likely not be passable to someone who uses a wheelchair, so they were prepared to help their friend through the really difficult parts. After many attempts, the group decided the rugged trail to the river's edge was too difficult to get a wheelchair through. This young man, however, was determined to see the salmon in the river. He set his wheelchair aside and walked on the stumps of his legs down the rugged trail. His tenacity and efforts were an inspiration to everyone.

For years, Bob Tuck of the Yakima Basin Environmental Education Program (YBEEP) has been taking groups of school kids to a specific point along the water's edge to view spawning salmon. Located on the banks of Cle Elum River, this site is a perfect place to teach about what happens during spawning season and throughout a salmon's life cycle. The riverside trail and seating area provide a bird's eye view of salmon spawning. Adult fish come to the same spot each year and provide a wonderful learning experience for all age groups.

To facilitate better access to salmon viewing sites and to make the trail more accessible to people with mobility issues, a group of local individuals, businesses and agencies got together to improve the condition of the trail. Local businesses donated heavy equipment, materials, time, and expertise. The Bureau of Reclamation constructed the trail, and Carson Arnold, a local Boy Scout, took on the seating construction as an Eagle Scout Project. The result—a new accessible trail and seating area!

This year, the Cle Elum Ranger District, YBEEP, and Central Washington University are teaming up to design interpretive signs and a brochure so people visiting the trail will be able to learn about salmon and their distinctive habitat.

When the trail was finally complete, the young man from the Yakama Tribal School returned and was the first person to use a wheelchair on the trail. The new trail meets all Americans with Disabilities Act requirements, including specifications on the gentle grades. The trail is not paved but it is a wide, graded level, graveled trail.

If you would like to visit the salmon viewing trail this fall to see salmon spawning, please contact the Cle Elum Ranger District at (509) 852-1100 for directions. ■

Entiat Ranger District

The Tinpan Story

by Susan Peterson

Lightning started the Tinpan Fire on July 5, 2006 in the Glacier Peak Wilderness on the Entiat Ranger District. By late September the fire had burned 9,216 acres.

Although not as large as other fires that burned last summer in north central Washington, the Tinpan Fire was a significant event because it was managed under a Wildland Fire Use strategy. This relatively new management option allows some naturally ignited fires to continue burning under careful supervision. This occurs under very specific conditions, within a predetermined area referred to as Maximum Manageable Area boundary.

Using a combination of natural features like rocky ridges and streams, plus hand-constructed firelines, firefighters were able to comfine the Tinpan Fire to a portion of the Glacier Peak Wilderness within the Entiat River drainage. Helicopters dropping water were able to help keep the fire in check when fuel conditions and weather showed potential for pushing the blaze beyond acceptable boundaries.

Fire managers were able to use the Tinpan Fire to restore healthy conditions to a large area of the Wilderness while ensuring the safety of nearby communities and protecting important natural resources. The fire killed many alpine trees that had begun to encroach into Entiat meadows, and established an effective barrier to the spread of wildfires that may occur in that portion of the wilderness in coming summers.

Fire is not new to the Entiat River drainage. It is one of the primeval forces that have shaped this land. Historically, fires ran freely and occurred more frequently, cleaning and cultivating the forest. These frequent smaller wildlfires removed the excess fuels instead of allowing them to accumulate.

Forested areas like those on the east side of the Glacier Peak Wilderness would have burned naturally every 35-100 years, creating a pattern across the landscape called a "fire mosaic." The openings created by fire became meadows and places in the forest where vegetation and habitat conditions nurture a variety of birds and wildlife.

A century of well intended fire suppression has created a dilemma. Forest vegetation has become more crowded and more vulnerable to insects, disease, and wildfires. Forest managers are now faced with un-natural fuel accumulations that result in large un-natural and devastating wildfires.

The challenge wilderness managers face today is to allow fire to play a role in wildland areas in a way that minimizes the risk to people and communities while achieving the benefits of natural fire. Wildland Fire Use is the tool that meets this challenge.

The Glacier Peak Wilderness is designated as appropriate for wildland fire use in the Okanogan and Wenatchee National Forests' fire management plan. Because the terrain is very rugged and steep, there would have been more risk to firefighters safety with more traditional suppression efforts. Lightning ignited the fire in a remote location where risks to communities and resources were minimal.

Taking these considerations into mind, District Ranger Karin Whitehall and fire managers made the decision to designate the first Wildland Fire Use Fire on the Entiat Ranger District. Today, Tinpan's benefit is being realized. Fuel loads have been reduced and fuel breaks were created. Weak and diseased trees were burned and wildlife habitat was enhanced. There is a reduced potential for future devastating fire within the fire's perimeter, and overall forest health will increase.

Tinpan proved to be a challenging learning experience for wildland fire use managers and firefighters. However, the benefits from this management tool are substantial. "Most of all, the Entiat Ranger District is grateful for the support of the Entiat community during this event," Whitehall said. ■

What's Been Happening in Silver Falls Campground?

by Matt Dahlgreen

If you've visited Silver Falls Campground during the last few years, you might have noticed several dead and dying fir trees between the lower loop and the main road.

Trees in that area are being killed by a disease that spreads between the root systems of susceptible trees, especially Douglas-fir and grand fir. Because this disease, laminated root rot, destroys their root systems, these trees are unstable and prone to falling.

Although some level of this disease is desirable—for the wildlife habitat and forest diversity it creates—its effects are unwanted in Silver Falls Campground because it will slowly kill most of the large Douglas-firs that help to create the beautiful setting and provide important habitat for the northern spotted owl.

In order to meet public safety, recreation, and wildlife objectives, employees of the Entiat Ranger District are working with forest pathologists to develop a strategy for limiting or halting the disease's spread through the campground.

Two short-term parts of the strategy were implemented between the fall of 2006 and spring of 2007:

- Within the infected area, tree species that are susceptible to the disease were removed and trees that are resistant to it were planted. One component of the tree removal consisted of removing all, small and large, susceptible trees from a 50-foot buffer strip between the infected area and the campsites. This eliminated root-to-root contact and is expected to stop the spread of the disease.

- The second step was to thin the disease-susceptible trees throughout the infected area in order to create conditions that are favorable to disease-resistant trees such as ponderosa pine, western larch and western white pine. Once thinning occurred we planted disease resistant trees in the new canopy openings.

The long-term part of the strategy involves excluding disease-susceptible trees from the infected area, especially the buffer strip, for several decades and caring for the disease resistant trees so they grow into the large trees that are so important to humans and wildlife.

It will be many years before this patch of forest looks like it once did. In the meantime, those of us who love Silver Falls Campground can enjoy watching the healthy, disease-free trees grow into large pines for our children to enjoy. ■

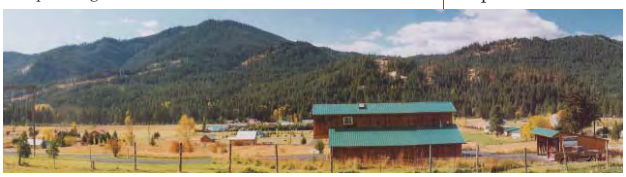
Disease resistant trees growing in the new openings.

Wenatchee River Ranger District

Back to the Future for a Healthier Forest

by Susan Peterson

Natapoc Ridge viewed from the town of Plain



After leaving the city of Leavenworth and driving through Tumwater Canyon, look towards the east as you drive towards Stevens Pass on Highway 2. This area is known as Natapoc Ridge. The Natapoc Ridge Forest Restoration Project is the District's largest project for 2007. It is comprised of 11,117 acres, with roughly 4,500 acres proposed for treatments to reduce fuels and wildfire risk.

By the time you read this, the Natapoc Ridge Restoration Project's Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) will be released and implementation planning will begin. The proposed project objectives are to reduce the risk of wildfire and to improve forest health and sustainability.

So why "Back to the Future" for a healthier forest? The Natapoc project incorporates changes that will allow the forest to retain more fire tolerant species of plants, and build an ecosystem that is self-sustaining. The goal is for the forest to once again resemble what it looked like prior to the last 100 years of fire suppression. Fire exclusion altered the forest composition by gradually allowing the survival of species of vegetation that are not adapted to fire.

Why is this important? Today, when we look at the Natapoc Ridge area, we see an increased number and density of trees per acre, and a high accumulation of fuels that did not exist a century ago. This poses an increased risk of large scale wildfire and a greater potential for trees to succumb to disease or insect attack.

After much analysis, input from community and other groups, a plan was selected that would restore forest health and reduce fuels and wildfire risk in the Natapoc area. The project may take up to 10 years for full implementation.

For more information on the Natapoc Ridge project contact Steve Willet, project leader at 509-548-6977 ext.228 or visit the website at: www.fs.fed.us/r6/wenatchee/projects/natapoc ■

Hypericum perforatum!! and other Incantations

by Susan Peterson

A weed is commonly defined as "a plant out of place."

Most weeds originated as native plants from some other part of the world. In their homeland they grew in balance with a host of other organisms--insects, diseases, and other plant predators--which kept them in check. Without that natural check and balance system in place, European or Asian weed species can quickly invade North American habitats and wreak havoc. A weed out of control is not only prickly, but can displace important components of native ecosystems--such as rendering vegetation in deer winter range unpalatable.

For this reason, the Wenatchee River Ranger District manages an aggressive program of hand-pulling weeds at wilderness trailheads, and, in a few instances deep within the wilderness. This daunting task is only made possible through the efforts of volunteer partnerships and hard working wilderness rangers and botanists. The goal of the Forest Service is to prevent weeds from becoming established in wilderness and to eradicate them where they do grow outside of wilderness.

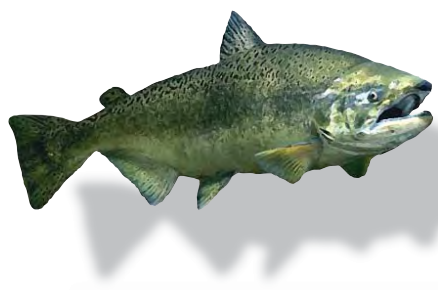
Volunteer partners include interns from the Student Conservation Association who spent three full weeks hand pulling plants with names like spotted cat's ears, diffuse knapweed, and Dalmatian toadflax. Another willing partner is the Washington State University 4-H Forestry Education program, which provides a crew of up to eight teenagers who spend a day or two each year blitz-pulling Canada thistle and St. Johnswort from an old logging unit near the Alpine Lakes Wilderness Boundary. St. Johnswort is the mystery plant named in the title of this article…Hypericum perforatum.

On any given day this task seems overwhelming to the point of hopelessness, but after 16 years of weed eradication, trailheads have transformed from being a sea of weeds to scattered plants removed in an annual maintenance program. One thistle population at Eightmile Lake went from 996 robust stems the first year, to just a few tiny stragglers which have to be searched out and destroyed each year.

Visitors can do their part, too, by being sure their footwear and gear is free of dirt and plant material before visiting the National Forest. Stock users can help by using weed free feed before and during their visit. Those who can identify weeds should feel free to pull them and pack out any flowering plants so seeds can't mature. Backcountry weed populations can be reported to the Leavenworth Ranger Station-- preferably by marking their location on a map. Any service group interested in a volunteer weed-pulling project can call the district wilderness manager at 509-548-6977.

Weeds, be gone!! ■

Wenatchee River Salmon Festival



This September, the Wenatchee River Salmon Festival has a special tale for you. Join us for the 17th year of this free weekend event, held September 22-23, 2007 in Leavenworth, Washington. Because there are so many wonderful stories about salmon and the natural world, this year's theme is, "A Salmon's Tale."

The Wenatchee River Salmon Festival is located on the Leavenworth National Fish Hatchery's beautiful campus, where it's a perfect match for providing high-quality resource education, promoting outdoor recreation, and sharing the cultural significance of salmon with the people of the Northwest. The festival appeals to every age — from toddler to senior citizen — for the many entertaining activities, outstanding physical setting, and unique approach to connecting with nature.

The festival has received many awards for its environmental education quality and community involvement. In 2006, one of our favorite activities, "Kids in the Creek," took the top honor for educational excellence from the National Association of Interpretation. This was possible because the festival takes people beyond just a bus tour or visiting a site—visitors become involved in the festival. For example, at the Kids in the Creek activity participants wear waders and spend time in Icicle Creek collecting, studying, identifying, and observing the aquatic ecosystem with actual field biologists who make it not only interesting, but fun.

Visitors enjoy Salmon Festival and combine it with a visit to the unique Bavarian-themed town of Leavenworth, (selected as the "Ultimate Holiday Town USA" from the A&E Network) located just a couple miles up the road from the festival.

Come and enjoy, learn and gain a better appreciation of our natural resource treasures, then relax and admire the beauty of the mountains, clear blue skies, and sparkling river.

For more information, swim over to the website at salmonfest.org ■

Presenting the NEW Clear Creek Falls Overlook

by Kim Larned

The Naches Ranger District has teamed up with Federal Highways Administration to rehabilitate and upgrade the popular but neglected Clear Creek Falls Overlook just below the summit of White Pass along Highway 12.

The overlook functions as a rest area and interpretive site which has unfortunately fallen into disrepair over the years due to dwindling maintenance and repair funds. A grant from Federal Highways Administration, together with the expertise of specialists at the Naches Ranger Station, will result in a first-rate pit-stop for travelers passing through the Washington Cascades.

The refurbished site will provide an accessible restroom and interpretive trail. Newly designed parking will allow access to picnic tables and nearly effortless viewing of the impressive 300-foot falls. New safety fencing, nearly a ¼ mile of new barrier-free trail, improved traffic flow, and a protective rock wall will make this site more enjoyable for everyone to use.

Visitors to the overlook will see Clear Creek Falls, Clear Creek, and down canyon views of Rimrock Lake and the surrounding hillsides. Upper Clear Creek Falls is poised just upstream from the main falls. These unique falls are among a few in the state that have horizontal as well as the familiar plunging attributes.

Clear Creek Falls tumble down to Clear Creek through cracks in the cliffs likely created by frost wedging. Frost wedging is a weathering process where water seeps into cracks in the cliff then freezes and thaws in a continuous daily cycle. Over time, the power of expansion and contraction fractures rocks off the cliff into the pool and streambed below.

For inquisitive visitors, interpretive information is posted along the trail. Some may catch a glimpse of a resident falcon at this overlook since Peregrine Falcons reside in the area and use the steep cliff faces as nesting sites. Similar in size to a crow, this falcon is relatively stocky with thin, tapered wings and a long tail.

A distinctive tree, Western larch, can also be found in the area. Larch is a deciduous conifer that loosed its needles in the autumn. Their bright green color in the spring contrasts delicately with the darker color of pine and fir. In the fall, its needles turn a brilliant yellow. Rotting cavities in older larch trees provide homes to songbirds, owls, flying squirrels, and woodpeckers. Several varieties of grouse eat larch buds and leaves.

Next time you find yourself traveling over White Pass, pull over, stretch your legs, and enjoy this superior viewpoint. ■

When did that Happen?

Fish Habitat Projects on the Naches Ranger District

by Karen S. Lindhorst
Fish Biologist

Next time you visit the Naches Ranger District you may notice some improvements in two popular areas—the Little Naches Road and the Nile Mill site.

The Forest Service is working on two restoration projects aimed at protecting and enhancing steelhead trout habitat. We are using a method described as "bio-engineering" to accomplish these projects. Bio-engineering uses natural materials and natural stream forming processes with the goal of improving habitat quality.

The Little Naches Road #1900 Restoration Project will protect the road from eroding away by utilizing bio-engineering methods. Above the South Fork Little Naches Bridge there is a location where the river is eroding its banks and has moved within 10 feet of the road edge. This area is routinely been used by spawning steelhead trout and this habitat needs to be preserved.

Preparation is underway to place many logs and log jams in several locations along the riverbank to direct the stream into some of the other available channels further from the road. This will allow the same logs to aid in pool formation and provide hiding cover for fish and other aquatic organisms. We are attempting to avoid the use of more traditional rip rap, rock barbs, or cement barriers as they do not appear natural and fail to provide quality habitat.

The Nile Mill site meadow, near the intersection of the #1600, #1603 and #1611 roads, is a popular recreation site utilized by a variety of folks with differing recreation preferences. Annual problems in managing this use include site expansion, stream degradation, and vehicles being driven across and in the stream (where migrating steelhead pass to spawn in upstream habitat).

At this site the Forest Service has been working on improving stream bank conditions. The process began with discussions with on-site users about activities that are causing habitat problems. Signs were also posted with notices explaining the problem and requesting people to modify their behavior. We have been monitoring use to see if conditions are improving at locations that had resource damage.

In the Nile Mill site, where the contacts and informational signs did not work, we began changing the access and availability of the recreation sites.

With help from Naches and Selah High School students we began a fence building project in the fall of 2006. We planted shrubs and built several sections of buck and pole fence to keep vehicles back from the stream bank and exclude vehicle and ATV use in the wetland areas. Further restoration actions include building fence to allow stream bank vegetation to recover. Forest Service employees will continue to talk with people recreating in the area and will continue to monitor the stream bank recovery.

So, the next time you visit the Naches Ranger District be sure to look for the bio-engineering improvements that have occurred at the Little Naches Road #1900 and at the Nile Mill site. ■

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Cover photo by Roger Wallace: Mt. Stuart viewed from the slopes of Mt. Cashmere
Back page photo: Peaks above the Enchantment Lakes area
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