

THE WILD CASCADES

THE JOURNAL OF THE NORTH CASCADES CONSERVATION COUNCIL

WINTER 2009-2010



THE WILD CASCADES

■ Winter 2009-2010

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Cover: Reiter Forest Chainlink Falls on May Creek, January 2010. —PHOTO KARL FORSGAARD

The Wild Cascades

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North Cascades Conservation Council
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THE NORTH CASCADES

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

Over the past half century the NCCC has led or participated in campaigns to create the North Cascades National Park Complex, Glacier Peak Wilderness, and other units of the National Wilderness System from the W.O.

Douglas Wilderness north to the Alpine Lakes Wilderness, the Henry M. Jackson Wilderness, the Chelan-Sawtooth Wilderness, the Wild Sky Wilderness and others. Among its most dramatic victories has been working with British Columbia allies to block the raising of Ross Dam, which would have drowned Big Beaver Valley.

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North Cascades
Conservation Council
P.O. Box 95980
University Station
Seattle, WA 98145-2980

Executive Director, Jim Davis
1-360-296-5159

NCCC Website
www.northcascades.org

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The President's Report

Winter 2009-2010

As we travel around the state, discussing the advantages of completing the North Cascades National Park, people are always asking, "why bother?" Isn't everything okay now and if it ain't broke, why fix it? This is a legitimate question that needs to be examined. It might be argued that the logging industry is not gobbling up national forests as much as in the past and this is somewhat true. Timber prices are fairly low now and much of the demand is being handled with private land.

The problems in the North Cascades that many see as the worst are not only old ones such as mining, maintaining habitat and connectivity for wildlife, and off-road vehicles but new ones that are being brought on by our changing environment. Small-scale hydro projects that many consider to be "green" are in fact likely to be developed in our more undeveloped mountainous areas, particularly near existing power transmission lines. The necessary construction of roads, power-line corridors, and unavoidable aquatic impacts, etc., is certainly a threat to our pristine forests. Due to changing climate, there is likely to be a large demand for water impoundments for crops, primarily east of the Cascade crest, and for drinking water reservoirs in the western areas near urban developments (think Middle Fork Snoqualmie). In fact, a proposal for a dam on the Similkameen River just east of the Pasayten Wilderness is now being circulated.

Besides these more obvious reasons for protecting more of the North Cascades is one that I like to think of as a long-term "sleeper". That would be, in my mind, the inadequate availability of front country (close to the road) amenities that bring the public into contact with nature. By this, I mean, more fairly short, environmentally friendly trails, interpretive centers, nature walks, overlooks, campgrounds, wildlife viewing and the like that get people out of their cars. I feel that it is crucial in the long term, to get more of the public outside interested in the natural environment and away from the TV and video games. The North Cascades do not need advertising or promotional efforts from those of us that are already believers. The natural wonders that those of us reading this already know and love need to become just as loved by the rest of the public so that they can help us protect our favorite places.

Marc Bardsley

Board members highlighted

Philip Fenner *New NCCC Board member*



New board member Philip Fenner was born in a small town in southeast Washington, grew up in "exile" in the Deep South, moved back in 1968, and has lived in Washington in the Seattle area since 1978.

He camped and hiked with his family growing up, and has carried on that tradition with his twin children. He recalls hearing the blasting of Hwy 20 over the North Cascades from Winthrop before the highway was opened. He hiked trails from the 100 Hikes books in western Washington starting while in Monroe in the mid-70s.

He has a geology degree from Whitman College in Walla Walla, and has lived in Seattle since graduating. His parents lived their retirement summers in a cabin near Mazama and he's hiked, backpacked and XC skied that area extensively. He works in medical engineering in the Seattle area and gets out into the Cascades and Olympics, as he says, "every chance I get."

John S. Edwards new conservation chair *(The Mountaineer, February, 2010)*



—Dee Boersma

An entomologist, teacher and "collector of ecosystems", John Edwards has accepted the role of chair of The Mountaineers Conservation Division Executive Committee.

Edwards joined the public policy wing of the club last spring and has worked

with the Alpine Legacy Project in the North Cascades.

He possesses a doctorate in Zoology from Cambridge, was a faculty member at Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio for five years, and a faculty member of the University of Washington for 35 years where he is still active as professor emeritus.

He serves on the board of the North Cascades Conservation Council as well as the Washington Environmental Council and was president of the board of Gallery Concerts.

Besides nerve regeneration, his interests include alpine, volcano, arctic and antarctic ecology. And besides collecting ecosystems, the New Zealand native said his other fancies are early music, gardening, hiking and skiing.

Secretary Salazar Applauds Senate's Confirmation

Jonathan Jarvis Selected as Director of the National Park Service

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar praised the Senate's confirmation of Jonathan Jarvis to be director of the National Park Service.

"This is a great day for the National Park Service and for the American public," Secretary Salazar said. "Jon Jarvis is a career professional who has consistently stood up for protection of national parks. He brings great wisdom and three decades of experience to the job."

Jarvis, a 30-year veteran of the National Park Service, has served since 2002 as regional director of the agency's Pacific West Region, where he was responsible for 54 national parks in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, California, Nevada, Hawaii and the Pacific Islands of Guam, Saipan and American Samoa, as well as a host of NPS community revitalization programs that serve those states.



—NPS photo

"America's National Park System is a gift from past generations to this and succeeding generations. I look forward to working with Secretary Salazar, the Congress, our partners, and the extraordinary employees of the National Park Service as we prepare for the next century of stewardship and excellent visitor experiences," Jarvis said today.

Jarvis has served as superintendent of Mount Rainier National Park in Ashford, Washington, Craters of the Moon National Monument in Idaho, and Wrangell-St. Elias National Park & Preserve in Alaska. A trained biologist, he was also Chief of Natural and Cultural Resources at North Cascades National Park. Jarvis is currently the co-leader of the Children in Nature taskforce with the National Association of State Park Directors.

A native of Virginia, Jarvis has a B.S. in biology from the College of William and Mary and completed the Harvard Kennedy School Executive Program in 2001.

Implications of Retreating Glaciers for Our Cascades

In the last issue of *The Wild Cascades*, the 2009 field season of the North Cascades Glacier Climate Project was featured. While that article focused on the actual trip and data returned, only a small portion covered the implications of retreating glaciers in detail. A couple of the most significant implications are debris flows during storms, and reduced summer flows in our rivers.

Debris Flows

Debris flows, slurries of mud, gravel and rock, are a product of mountain erosion wherever glaciers are found. As glaciers retreat, they leave behind tons of unconsolidated "till" — silt, sand, gravels and rocks, and huge boulders. Examples of the present-day debris flow dangers were recently featured in a front-page article by Sandi Doughton in the *Seattle Times*, January 4, on 2010, based on an interview with Paul Kennard, a Park Service geologist. This article is based in part on some of its content.

The Park Service at Mount Rainier has battled for years with the impact of debris flows on the now closed West Side road and the precarious Carbon River road. The recent major floods on Mount Rainier, especially the November 2006 deluge that delivered 18 inches of rain in 36 hours, worked on gravel and rock on steep unstable slopes laid bare by ongoing glacial retreat. (Mount Rainier has lost 20 per cent of its glacial area, and considerably more volume in the last 100 years). The downhill transport of debris, not only mud and gravel but huge rocks too, is in stark evidence at Longmire where the Nisqually riverbed is now about 30 feet above the ground level of the NPS buildings and the venerable Inn. The White River too is raising its bed (aggrading) as sediment accumulates, leaving towns such as Pacific vulnerable to floods. Present-day dramatic increases in storm frequency and sediment transport only magnify processes that have been wearing the mountain down since its birth. From the 30s until the early 90s of last century Pierce County attempted to mitigate flood damage by dredging gravel from the Puyallup River, only ending the almost annual ritual when the conservation of fish habitat took precedence.



Colonial Creek. —PHIL FENNER PHOTO

The North Cascades are less vulnerable to massive debris flows because they are mostly thrust-faulted mountains composed of harder (typically metamorphic and intrusive) rock, but Mount Baker and Glacier Peak are very similar to Rainier, just more remote from population centers. The demise of Kennedy Hot Springs and multiple washouts of the Whitechuck road in the 90s were clear examples of what these debris flows can do.

Widespread glacial retreat throughout the Northern Cascades has laid bare huge quantities of glacial grindings so that accelerated transport to rivers must be expected. Disintegrating roads only add to the problem throughout the North Cascades. Hundreds of miles of logging roads have turned into channels of till and together with the countless landslides they've triggered, become huge sources of river siltation, dumping tons of material into our rivers.

Water Supplies in our Rivers

The 2007 field report from Lyman Glacier outlined the fact that Lake Chelan has lost an input of 15,000,000 cubic feet of water since 1989 due to the recession of the Lyman Glacier on Chiwawa Mountain.

One need only look at the multiple hydroelectric projects this water (no longer) flows through, or the miles and miles of fruit orchards supported by summer flows, or the fishing/recreation opportunities, or the very communities the waters of our Cascades support to recognize the importance of glacier retreat.

As important as the hard numbers of lost water volumes, are changes in the timing of the seasonal flow of rivers through the year. Dr. Mauri Pelto recently sent the NCCC an extensive report on the impact of retreating glaciers on the Skykomish River. The largest (remaining) glaciers feeding the Sky are the Columbia, the Lynch, the Hinman and the Foss. Fifty years ago, the Hinman Glacier was the largest glacier south of Glacier Peak. Now it is virtually gone — literally 90 percent has melted away. The retreat of the Columbia and Lynch are perhaps the most chronicled on the planet, with 26 years of direct, intensive scrutiny. Across the glaciers, a 46 percent reduction in glacier area has led to a 40 percent reduction in glacier runoff. Annual ablation measurements indicate glacier runoff has declined 40 percent between 1958 and 2009, in total a sobering 50,000 cubic meters per day. Combined with stream data gathered by the USGS, a clear picture emerges. Summer flow in the Skykomish at Gold Bar is down 35 percent (1950-2006), Spring flow is down 15 percent and Winter flow is up 11 percent.

It All Adds Up

It's a cumulative problem. We're losing the winter snow and ice input to the glaciers that form our natural summer water storage system, as we watch it all flow away as rains, not snows, in the winter. Glacier retreat means more exposed till, so those stronger winter floods mean more and larger debris flows caused by the increased portion of precipitation that falls as rain on that exposed till — meanwhile disintegrating roads add to river siltation. These effects of climate change and human impact can stack-up, with implications for all of us who live in the Pacific Northwest and love its wild places.

—John Edwards, Phil Fenner and Tom Hammond

Book Reviews

PLAN B 4.0 for Mobilizing to Save Civilization

John S. Edwards

Lester R Brown, Earth Policy Institute, Norton & Company, New York, 2009
ISBN 978-0-33719-8 (paperback), \$16.95

While we concentrate, as we should, on the northwest of the Northwest, Lester Brown looks at the whole earth with his recently published *PLAN B 4.0 for Mobilizing to Save Civilization*, by saving the planet. President of the Earth Policy Institute, Brown is famous for his clear vision and exposition of how *Homo sapiens* can effectively take action to rescue the earth's environment from the mess that we have created during the last 200 or so years. He is concerned with the survival of civilization but it is axiomatic that civilization will not survive unless we restore the environmental health of the planet.

He outlines the challenges: population pressure on land and water, climate change and energy transition, and the necessary responses such as stabilizing climate through a revolution in energy efficiency and a shift to renewable energy. He addresses the challenges to redesign cities for people, eradicating poverty, feeding people and stabilizing population.

Most importantly for our concerns he considers the challenge of restoring the earth, giving first place to protecting and restoring forests and soils and thus air and water. He is of course not alone in addressing these issues but like Gus Speth (whose book, *The Bridge at the Edge of the World*, which was reviewed in the Winter 2008-9 issue of *TWC*), he has the gift of clarity in setting out the complex challenges and then addressing solutions.

His treatment of global forests is typical of his approach, and worth our attention as a context for the future of Northwest forests. Here are some examples of the provocative figures he presents: Since 1990, earth's forest cover has declined by about 32 million acres in developing countries. Regrowth of 15 million acres in industrial countries leaves a net loss of 17 million acres. Despite the ecological and economic value of intact forest only about 716 million acres of global forest areas are protected. A further 3.6 billion acres are not vulnerable because of inaccessibility or low wood value. Of the remaining

unprotected area about 1650 million acres are not yet disturbed by humans, while nearly a billion acres are semi-natural, that is, not in plantations. As of 2005 the world had about 500 million acres in forest plantations.

In recent years the shrinkage of tropical forests has annually released about 5.5 billion tons of carbon to the atmosphere. Expanding forests in temperate regions absorb nearly 1.7 billion tons of carbon; the net release is obvious. Much of the loss in South America is due to clearance for crops now in demand for fuel and food — palm oil, soybean and sugarcane.

There are early signs of change for the better. For example the Billion Tree Campaigns in Kenya, Ethiopia, Turkey and Mexico have planted millions so far. Uttar Pradesh state in India planted 10.5 million trees in a single day in July 2007.

Brown concludes with his prescription for mobilization to save civilization. Like Speth, he is an optimist and like Speth,

he sees the critical need to build a new economy in the race between political and ecological tipping points. A wonderful quote from Oystein Dahle says it all: "Socialism collapsed because it did not allow the market to tell the economic truth. Capitalism may collapse because it does not allow the market to tell the ecological truth".

After addressing plausible specific proposals for mobilization to save civilization Brown concludes with a resounding statement: "The choice is ours — yours and mine. We can stay with business as usual and preside over an economy that continues to destroy itself, or we can adopt Plan B and be the generation that changes direction, moving the world onto a path of sustained progress. The choice will be made by our generation, but it will affect life on earth for all generations to come".

Plan B 4.0 can be downloaded without charge from the Earth Policy Institute: www.earthpolicy.org.

Wilderness in National Parks: Playground or Preserve?

Phil Zalesky

Miles, John C., University of Washington Press, Seattle and London, March 2009. \$35.00.

The beautiful Burns PBS series on national parks showed only half the history of the national park system. The other half concerns the history of wilderness and the debates and conflicts within the Park Service and with the public. Two major factors against the concept of wilderness have been the Organic Act, and Stephen Mather's approach to wilderness. The Organic Act does not use the word "wilderness" and that, along with Mather's philosophy for parks has led to much of the conflict. Mather felt that areas not to be roaded and developed could be left for scenic viewing, but not for wilderness. That is, it could be left until such time as it became prudent to develop. With this philosophy undeveloped lands could be

changed whenever the Park Service saw a "need".

Miles does a meticulous and methodical job of showing how park personnel struggled to come up with a definition of wilderness, and also the internal struggle within the Park Service over zoning for wilderness. He shows how in some cases rangers in field positions and some superintendents wanted wilderness, but management in Washington D.C., rejected the idea. He tells how frustrated conservationists and wilderness advocates became about inadequate wilderness reviews. The struggle to establish wilderness in national parks would ultimately settle with the 1970 Wilderness Act, but even today the Park Service retains an antipathy toward wilderness. Miles shows how the NPS finesses wilderness management plans. Only 14 out of 58 national parks that con-

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The Bridge to Nowhere, Almost

John Edwards

The great flood of October 2003 changed a lot of rivers in the Northwest. In the Suiattle valley the raging floodwaters carried logs and debris over the deck of the boundary bridge and changed course toward the left (southwest) bank where it washed out the bridge abutments, leaving the old cast-in-place girder bridge ending midstream as a sad stub from FR 25. The route from the Suiattle over Rat Trap Pass to the Whitechuck river road FR 23 was thus a dead end in mid-river and access from the Suiattle to land south of the river was cut off. Since then the river has found its way back into its previous bed, beside the Suiattle river road FR 25, now flowing past great piles of debris in mid-valley. Pressure from tribal and private landowners and from river runners for access to the lands south of the Suiattle has now reached fulfillment with the erection of a prefabricated steel truss extension, completed fall 2009, that sits on the old bridge

and spans the river to a pier set in the left bank. Built for about one million dollars, it would not take a prize for aesthetics, but it does establish a one-lane connection. The Suiattle river is on the Wild and Scenic register, which precluded the construction of a pier in the bed.

The Rat Trap Pass road to the Whitechuck valley is now impassable. There are plans to rebuild it when conditions allow in the spring 2010. That road will then restore a connection from the Suiattle to the Whitechuck at the point where FR 23 now ends as a result of the 2003 floods.



Looking toward the Suiattle River Road (north-east). The new platform sits on the old bridge and spans about 100 yards to a new concrete support within the southwest bank. The Rat Trap Pass road will be opened next year (leaving the Whitechuck Road at its new terminus) to make a loop to the Suiattle.

—JOHN EDWARDS PHOTO

Travel Management on the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest

Below is a December 2009 update from the Forest website. On November 2, several of us met with Forest Supervisor Becki Heath to discuss this. They plan to release the DEIS in spring (i.e., a few months from now).

<http://www.fs.fed.us/r6/okawen/travel-management/>

Update of the Travel Management Planning Process December 2009

In March 2009, a Proposed Action for Travel Management on the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest was released to the public for review and comment. This proposed action identified a system of roads, trails, and areas to be designated as open for motorized use. Once a system is designated, motorized use off the system would be prohibited by regulation.

Public comments to the Proposed Action were received in April/May 2009. Over 500 individual responses identified a variety of issues and made additional proposals for adding or deleting routes from the proposed action. Some of the issues included: effects of the proposed motorized system on resources, effects of the proposed system on the local economy, and need for more motorized recreation opportunities.

In June and July of 2009, the planning team reviewed the public comments. Issues, identified as part of that review, were used to formulate a range of alternatives to the proposed action. Public route proposals were screened to ensure consistency with the forest plan and adjacent landowner management. All proposals that made it through the screening are now part of a pool of routes that could be chosen to define alternatives. The range of alternatives is important to ensure that all of the issues with the proposed action and all of the route proposals have been considered.

Also during the summer of 2009, field surveys for different resources that could be affected by the motorized use alternatives were performed. These surveys included cultural sites; aquatic resources; sensitive plants and animals; and other resources. In fall 2009, the planning team concentrated on defining the alternatives, that is, the different ways the motorized system would look across the forest.

The planning team will spend winter 2009 analyzing the environmental effects of the alternatives. The Draft Environmental Impact Statement will document this analysis and is expected to be available to the public in spring 2010. The new designated motorized system would not be implemented until summer of 2011.

Wilderness in National Parks

Continued from page 6

tain wilderness have developed wilderness management plans. Yosemite, Grand Canyon, Glacier, Yellowstone and Olympic are among those without wilderness management plans, to the consternation of local conservation organizations.

Olympic and North Cascades national parks stand in contrast with respect to how management accepts its role toward wilderness. Manage almost exclusively for wilderness and you have North Cascades National Park, with a wilderness management plan since 1974, but develop a general management plan with wilderness secondary to development and you have Olympic National Park, even though both were established for wilderness values.

I recommend John Miles' book, especially to conservationists for an understanding of the historical context in their roles as wilderness advocates for both national parks and forest service lands.

Looking Back: A Backpack in the Northern Cascades

Bob Albrecht

A 1961 backpack trip through the North Cascades by Bob Albrecht (who was an NCCC board member in the early 60s) and his wife Margie, was recounted in his article in the April 1962 issue of the now defunct **Summit Magazine** (1955-96). The following is a condensed version of that account. As we gear up for the campaign to complete the American Alps legacy, we can look back to times 40+ years ago when there was no park.

—John Edwards

Our trip consisted of a trail hike from the end of the Hannigan Pass road near Mount Shuksan, through part of the North Cascade Primitive area and the relatively wild land north of the Glacier Peak area to the head of Lake Chelan. The 85-odd-trail miles, plus numerous side trips, were accomplished in two weeks of easy hiking.

On July 29, 1961, we started up the trail from the end of the Hannigan Pass road. Four miles of continuous climbing brought us to the pass, which is on the western boundary of the North Cascades Primitive Area. There are open flower meadows on both sides of the pass and snow-covered Mount Ruth is on the south side of the pass, with its wonderful views of Mount Shuksan and the great Nooksack Cirque. On the east side of the pass the trail descends rapidly, first through meadows, then through open forest, seven miles down to U.S. Cabin, an open Adirondack-type shelter.

On the second day of the march, the trail followed two more miles down Chilliwack Creek, then branched to Whatcom Pass. The approximately five miles from the confluence of Bush Creek and Chilliwack Creek are delightful travelling. Whatcom Peak was very much in evidence. Arriving at Whatcom Pass was a great experience and definitely one of the high points of the trip.

We took care in setting up our camp at the pass (or rather, slightly above the pass) so that we could have a good view of Mount Challenger, a major peak on the northern end of the Pickett Range. So wild, wild and beautiful was this mountain that we spent three days looking at it, and when it was time to leave we hadn't seen enough of it. All too soon we had to begin the 27-mile hike to Diablo Dam where we

were to pick up supplies for our second week. As we picked up our packs and looked around the pass for the last time this trip, we hoped that the next time we would see this place it would still be as wild and beautiful and free of man's works and trash.

The trail to Twin Rocks shelter, about two miles east of Whatcom Pass, is good but parts of the next five miles up to Stillwell shelter were brushy. We camped that night at Stillwell shelter on the north side of Beaver Pass, by Beaver Creek. Early next morning we started up over Beaver Pass. Thursday night was spent at Ten Mile shelter. In hiking the trail below Whatcom Pass to Ross Dam, you travel through a beautiful forest such as once covered the entire western slope of the Cascade Mountains. With vigilance on our part, other generations may know their solitude and experience the joys and challenge of wilderness travel.

Friday we hiked to Ross Lake and then to Ross Dam. We had many fine views of the southern Picketts during the five-mile hike along Ross Lake.

The start of our second week of hiking was bright, clear, and cool. The U.S. Forest Service guard at Reflector Bar Guard station didn't know the condition of the Thunder Creek Trail, but told us he thought it had been worked a year ago. When we got two miles up the trail, we found a little sign, "Trail Abandoned beyond this point." Just beyond that the trail disappeared into a sea of ten-foot-high brush. To get around it we climbed the ridge on the east side of the river and contoured around above the brush line. After about three-quarters of a mile the valley floor was again covered with trees and we descended and found the trail. Later the brush resumed again, but this time access to the ridge was not so easy and I was forced to employ the mad bull approach. This technique, which is not generally recommended and is rarely enjoyable, worked fairly well here because there was enough of the trail left to serve as a runway.

We were soon happily back in the forest again and enjoyed easy walking. We finally made camp by some abandoned mine buildings and a USGS snow survey cabin.

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Mike Ronne photo

NCNP 101 - A History Lesson: Thunder DAM

Philip Fenner

Dam-nation and Thunder-ation

Just imagine... the canyon of Thunder Creek where it met the Skagit had already been drowned under the Diablo reservoir, creating "Thunder Arm" and forever silencing the namesake thunder of the creek. Then in the early 60s, City Light and others were actively planning to raise Ross Dam and further flood the upper Skagit valley, drowning Big Beaver's ancient forest (more on that in a future post).

AND plans were underway to build a new dam on Thunder Creek, just upstream of where it meets the Diablo reservoir, drowning Thunder's ancient forest. In fact, it wasn't just going to be submerged, it

Backpack

Continued from page 8

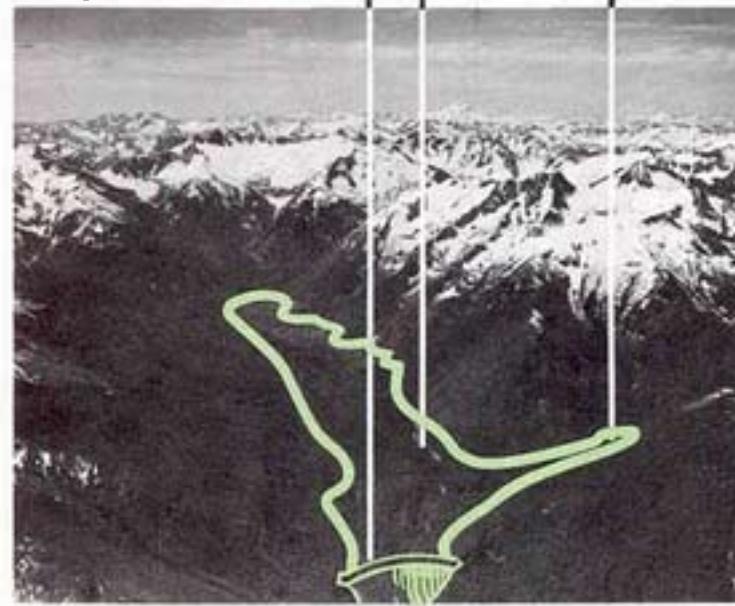
The following day we continued toward Park Creek Pass, views of the high country were more frequent and we were excited about getting back to timberline. It is the world of alpine meadows, snow, rock and sky that we dearly love, but this forested wilderness approach gave depth, meaning, and background to the alpine country we were approaching. About five miles below Park Creek Pass the forest becomes more and more open, with rock slides accounting for most of these open spots. Not until we were within about three-and-a-half miles of the pass, just below timberline that the brush got really bad again. The next couple of hours were spent crashing through, walking around, and crawling under very high and tough willow brush. It took two hours to travel one mile between the edge of the timber and the alpine meadows.

The next day we proceeded toward Park Creek Pass through open flower meadows. At noon we reached another high point of our trip — the summit of Park Creek Pass, a rather narrow defile between mountains Buckner and Logan. On the north side it is steep and rocky. On the south side there are lovely meadows and numerous camping spots. We roamed these meadows and climbed the surrounding ridges for several days.

As our two-week tour neared its end we regretfully picked up our packs to walk the remaining seven miles to the Stehekin River Road and thence to Stehekin Landing.

A potential dam site on Thunder Creek just below its junction with McAllister Creek, shown on the right. If constructed, the project would inundate about 1,500 acres of commercial timberland. (photo FS X-7)

Proposed Thunder Creek dam site Thunder Creek McAllister Creek



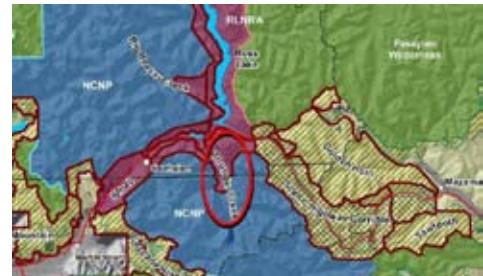
The North Cascades Study Report, 1965, USGPO

would have been logged before the dam was built.

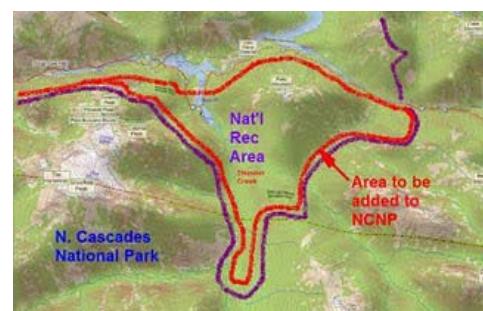
Note the original photo caption above refers to it as "1,500 acres of commercial timberland." This was the same treatment given to the upper Skagit for Ross Dam/Lake: "Cut it down, dam it up!"

The artist's conception published in the Federal study report of 1965 (above) shows what this disaster would have looked like. Thanks to NCCC, this project, as well as High Ross, were stopped in their tracks.

BUT — look at the map below right... the blue color of the National Park at Thunder Creek today (circled) still has a big "dip" where Ross Lake NRA is shown in purple, going around this phantom reservoir. Why is that boundary bump still there today? Does it matter? Well, you bet it does: national recreation area is NOT the same as a national park, and the ancient forest of Thunder Creek deserves national park protection now as much as it ever did.



Ken Wilcox



*Base map © 2006 DeLorme
(www.delorme.com) Topo USA®*

Looking Back continued on page 10

Looking Back

Continued from; page 9

Reprint from *The Wild Cascades*, 1971 Issue

What's Going On Under Vesper Peak?

Bren-Mac Mines Ltd., a Canadian company, is threatening to despoil a section of the North Cascades lying between Stevens Pass and the Glacier Peak Wilderness. We have been informed that this company owns 98 mining claims and sixteen state mineral leases located in Sultan Basin. . . . They have identified a mineralized structure which they call the Sunrise Breccia Pipe, located under Vesper Peak. . . . Bren-Mac stated that they anticipate that, from a strictly economic standpoint, they could now set up a plant for a 10-year operation, handling 20,000 tons a day and employing 800 people. . . . We are greatly concerned over the possible development of the South Fork of the Stillaguamish. The City of Everett seems to have mixed feelings, since they would like the jobs, but do not want a mine in the city's watershed.



Mike Ranée photo

UPDATE: American Alps Campaign

The American Alps Legacy Project is rapidly gaining momentum and support. The more people learn about the campaign, the more they want to help make it a reality. Following is a quick snapshot of where we are today. Your participation and support for American Alps would be most welcome. One way for members of NCCC to help the campaign is to recruit new NCCC members. If we all find just one new member, we will double our strength.

We have nearly completed the public input phase of American Alps. Feedback from more than 100 people has led us to focus the project specifically on national park expansion, leaving wilderness additions for other groups to pursue. We have received excellent recommendations for new park boundaries and will be incorporating many of these ideas into our American Alps proposal. The proposal will also recommend designation of several pristine riversstreams for federal Wild and Scenic River status.

The list of organizations supporting American Alps is growing. In addition to the North Cascades Conservation Council and The Mountaineers, major partners in the campaign now include Seattle Audubon and Republicans for Environmental Protection. Multiple other groups have formally adopted resolutions expressing support for the American Alps campaign.

We have begun collecting information and putting together components of the American Alps Legacy Project proposal. One major section will focus on the many biodiversity benefits of protecting more of the North Cascades as national park. We are also developing a list of new visitor amenities that will be part of the American Alps proposal. The list includes new visitor centers on both the east and west sides of the park, additional family-friendly front country trails, and a major expansion of national park interpretation opportunities (e.g., waterfall tour, ecotourism sites, cultural highlights, and others).

A major effort is underway to quantify the economic benefits of the American Alps proposal for local gateway communities. The study is examining the local economic effects of direct park expenditures (e.g., new visitor centers), increased park staffing, and significantly increased park

visitation. Initial results are very promising and indicate that an enhanced North Cascades National Park could become a major economic driver for rural communities surrounding the park.

In addition to all of this excitement, we are also ramping up our education and outreach efforts. An American Alps PowerPoint presentation is available for showing to conservation, recreation, and other organizations with an interest in the North Cascades. Short and long versions of an American Alps print article are available for publication in the newsletters of these organizations. If you belong to other groups, please promote the presentation and article for those groups.

Tours of the American Alps study area will be available this spring and summer. Experienced hikers and climbers would like to share their passion for the North Cascades. If you are interested in visiting some of the magnificent areas included in our proposal, contact us and get on the list for these tours.

American Alps is continuing to pursue media coverage via news and feature articles in newspapers and magazines. Look for articles in your hometown paper or favorite outdoor magazine. We are also slowly moving into the 21st century with electronic communications: an enhanced American Alps website at www.americanalps.org and a brand new blog at americanalps.blogspot.com. Check it out and contribute.

Local support is critical to the success of the American Alps campaign. We have begun meeting with potential supporters in gateway communities (e.g., local business owners, community organization leaders). Information on American Alps is also being made available to local, state, and federal elected officials. We expect to see strong support for American Alps when we are able to fully document the conservation, recreation, and economic benefits of an enhanced North Cascades National Park.

We would like to extend a special thank you to The Mountaineers Foundation and the Tulalip Tribes for their generous support of the American Alps Legacy Project. Your contribution would also be welcome.

Please contact us if you want to be part of this exciting program (jimdavis@north-cascades.org).

POLLY DYER DAY

Celebrating Polly Dyer's 90th Birthday

Rick McGuire

Well over two hundred people gathered at The Mountaineers clubhouse at Sand Point on Saturday, February 13, 2010, to celebrate Polly Dyer's 90th birthday. Over the course of about three hours memories were shared and stories told of the multitudinous conservation battles that Polly has been at the center of for well over half a century.

A succession of speakers was barely able to scratch the surface of Polly's remarkable history, and her encouraging effects on those around her. One after another, people related how Polly had managed to pull off one or another conservation coup, many of which had been regarded as impossible dreams until Polly came along.

Polly has always had the gift for quietly transforming things once thought impossible into things not only possible, but real. All across the landscape of the Northwest, place after place now colored dark green on the map got that way because of Polly. It's hard to think of anyone else who has played more of a role in protecting more places than Polly. For longer than many of the people in that room on Saturday have been alive, wherever there has been a conservation issue to work on, Polly has been there.

Polly's onetime employer at the University of Washington's Institute for Environmental Studies, Gordon Orians, related how Polly, as one of his most productive full time employees, seemed to accomplish more, not only at work but also when away, than anyone he had ever known, something he could not scientifically explain. His only hypothesis was that Polly was actually a set of twins, or more likely, triplets, since she seemed to be everywhere and do everything. He is still pondering the mystery.

It's probably fair to say that everyone in the room had one, or many, Polly stories that could have been told. Tim McNulty of Olympic Park Associates related how as a young apprentice tree hugger, he once followed Polly through corridor after corridor, down into labyrinthine subterranean passages far below the U.S. Capitol, finally

winding up in the staff room for one of the Congressional Interior committees. Everyone there knew and respected Polly. McNulty went on to learn that a subtle but powerful weapon at his disposal when things weren't looking well politically was to just quietly say, "you know, I don't think Polly would like that...." after which, quite often, things would start looking better.

The passage of years hasn't slowed Polly down one bit. Polly is continuing to take on tasks that would wear out people a third her age. The bio-diesel powered car with the "Marmot" plates can be seen in place after place. Wherever there is important conservation work being done in Washington state, there you will find Polly Dyer.

Polly Dyer at 90

John S. Edwards

Saturday, February 13, 2010, was designated Polly Dyer Day by proclamations from both King County and the City of Seattle. Polly learned of this at her 90th birthday party at The Mountaineers, where over 200 wellwishers gathered to celebrate her and her long history of achievements in conservation. Pete Mills, representing Congressman Jay Inslee brought a personal letter from Inslee that acknowledged Polly's role in working to conserve our wilderness heritage.

Governor Dan Evans called Polly by phone from Arizona and many at the party had the opportunity to speak and celebrate Polly, among them Norm Winn for The Mountaineers, Bob Freimark for The Wilderness Society, Donna Osseward and Tim McNulty for Olympic Park Associates, Charlie Raines for the Sierra Club, Joan Crooks for the Washington Environmental Council, Allen Gibbs, the Forest Service, and Gordon Orians, her "boss" when she worked in the Institute for Environmental Studies at the University of Washington. Brock Evans sent his admiration via an e-mail read to the party, and old friends spoke too, Jo Roberts and Phil Zalesky among them. Ken Wilcox



—Karl Forsgaard photo

provided backdrop slides of Polly in action.

Marc and Lynn Bardsley brought abundant birthday cake adorned with mountains and greenery which Polly cut to the tune of "Happy Birthday, Dear Polly". Polly responded with a brief history of her conservation career, in which she emphasized the prime role her late husband John played in bringing her to conservation and working for so many years together. By Polly's wish the occasion was a fundraiser for the American Alps Heritage Project.

Historic Changes at Reiter Forest

Karl Forsgaard

In late 2009 and early 2010, we achieved significant breakthroughs in our campaign to protect Washington State's Reiter Forest from damage caused by decades of rampant unmanaged use of off-road vehicles (ORVs).

In November 2009, the state's Department of Natural Resources (DNR) temporarily closed the entire 10,000-acre Reiter Forest to all motorized use. When it reopens in mid-2010, DNR is planning to limit ORV use to 1,100 acres, thereby prohibiting ORV use on about 8,900 acres of the forest, despite vigorous opposition from ORV users. It is the largest ORV closure in almost 20 years in Washington State.

Two years ago, ORV users believed that DNR would be designating the entire Reiter Forest as an ORV sportspark. We avoided that outcome through effective advocacy, by participating with our adversaries in many management planning meetings; lobbying agency officials; drafting comment letters and articles; publishing ugly photos of ORV-caused damage; and organizing many ground-truthing field trips with volunteer activists. Our campaign was assisted by the ORVers' own YouTube videos of themselves doing the damage, and the credibility we gained with our track record of successful ORV litigation in Washington State.

The Place

Reiter Forest stretches between Gold Bar and Index on the north side of Highway 2, and it borders the west end of the federal Wild Sky Wilderness of Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest. Its northwestern end borders the popular Wallace Falls State Park; its southeastern end borders Forks of the Sky State Park, including the Index Town Wall and Zeke's Wall, famed rock-climbing areas. In Reiter Forest along May Creek are the main routes to Lake Isabel in Wild Sky Wilderness.

There are non-motorized trails along the upper May Creek waterfalls, along the top of the Index Town Wall (the Vertigo Rim Trail described by Harvey Manning in *Footsore 2*), and to the east side of Wallace Falls. If developed by DNR and/or Washington State Parks, these trails can provide year-round, lower-elevation recreation



Lake Isabel in Wild Sky Wilderness, just uphill from Reiter Forest.

—ALL PHOTOS BY KARL FORSGAARD

to many people. The state's surveys have always shown that non-motorized trail recreationists are the majority, and greatly outnumber ORV recreationists. Many sites at Reiter reflect the history of mining and logging, such as an old Pelton wheel, and some routes follow old logging railroad grades.

ORV Problems

For decades Reiter Forest was essentially unmanaged, with very little DNR presence on the ground, and thus it had been overrun by ORVs: 2-wheel motorcycles, 4-wheel quad ATVs, and 4x4 jeeps had carved hundreds of miles of routes in the state trust lands. The rock-crawling 4x4 "tube buggies" do the worst damage. They kill the trees by stripping the bark off the trunks as they squeeze through the trees. The users of these machines are always trying to create new cross-country routes through the forest, because they want "the challenge" and they find it boring to stay on established routes. Sediment runoff is also a big problem, because there is much damage in Reiter stream and streamside habitats, and the streams flow into salmon and steelhead spawning grounds of the

Skykomish River. Due to vandalism and general lawlessness of ORV users at Reiter, non-motorized recreation like hiking has been displaced from these lands. Fortunately, DNR is now addressing these problems.

Getting Organized: DNR's Advisory Committee Process

In early 2008, DNR launched a two-year process to develop a Reiter management plan under the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA). When the process began, it appeared headed toward designation of Reiter as an ORV sacrifice area – a dedicated ORV sportspark. DNR appointed a Reiter advisory committee that met 12 times over the next year to help DNR develop the plan. At first the deck was stacked, with conservationist Mike Town outnumbered 6-to-1 by motorized users, and we strongly objected to the committee's imbalance and the resulting unfair dynamic. In mid-2008, DNR admitted its error and added three more environmental reps (Thom Peters, Leesa Wright and Cate Burnett), to achieve more balance on the advisory committee. Mike and Thom are both NCCC Board members.

For ground-truthing, and to help people understand the damage, we took photos and published them in newsletters of The Mountaineers, NCCC and ALPS, and emailed them to DNR officials. We hiked there a lot, especially Mike and Meg Town, so we knew some parts of the forest better than the agency did. Ben Greuel and Mike organized group hikes with Sierra Club, WTA and The Mountaineers to get more people to see it firsthand. We urged DNR to review YouTube videos of ORVs damaging Reiter. We submitted a Public Records Act request for DNR's enforcement documentation at Reiter, discovering that no tickets had been written for environmental damage.

By 2009, our efforts began paying off in the advisory committee meetings. DNR staff vetted a series of maps defining non-motorized areas separate from the motorized area (as we had suggested), with separate trailheads, plus a "further study" area in between them. This resulted in a plan for reduced ORV acreage, despite ORV objections. We asked the motorized reps how they plan to control the reckless individuals whose machines continue to cause so much damage and sedimentation into salmon streams, and the motorized reps said "we don't know."



This is on DNR land, but DNR was unaware of the Pelton wheel until NCCC board members showed it to them.

Summer 2009 brought management changes on the ground. Deer Creek Flats and the area north of May Creek were closed to ORV use (and DNR began to publicly acknowledge the “damage”). Temporary camping areas were designated at the main gravel parking area on Reiter Road, and in the upper ORV staging area. New signs and flyers explained the rules, and concrete barriers were used to block closed routes. DNR enforcement officers began issuing citations rather than mere warnings for illegal activities.

The 2008 election of Peter Goldmark as the state’s Commissioner of Public Lands (and head of the Department of Natural Resources) helped provide this new direction. We owe thanks to Llyn Doremus and other Sierra Club volunteers who worked on the Goldmark campaign. We took the new Commissioner on a tour of Reiter in August 2009, so that he could see the ORV-caused damage firsthand (see *The Wild Cascades*, Summer/Fall 2009).

The November 2009 Closure

In October, DNR announced a temporary closure of the 10,000-acre forest to all but foot traffic, effective November 2, 2009. It is the first time that the entire forest has been closed to motorized use. DNR said closing the area in winter and spring 2010 would allow it to repair ORV-caused damage from unauthorized routes, and “design and build trails in more sustainable locations.” DNR announced its intention to reopen the area “as soon as possible in 2010,” but to its credit DNR refused to set a date for the reopening, despite demands from ORVers and local legislators to do so, because DNR wants to take as much time as the restoration needs.

As noted above, the temporary closure will likely become a permanent closure of almost 9,000 acres to ORVs, because for ORVs the reopening will only apply to the new 1,100-acre “motorized area,” assuming the final plan does not change the proposed ORV acreage. ORVers claim that they had been using at least 4,000 acres at Reiter (some of the forest is too steep or inaccessible for ORV use). The last time an area this large was closed to ORVs in Washington was when the North Fork Entiat and Pyramid Mountain area was closed to ORVs in the 1990 Wenatchee Forest Plan.

As you can imagine, the Reiter closure was very unpopular with motorized users, and their internet discussion websites exploded with angry chatter. For example, this illuminating thread on “Thumper-talk” prints out at 58 pages: <http://www.thumper-talk.com/forum/showthread.php?t=833689#post8708274>

Cracks in ORV solidarity appeared, as many riders of 2-wheel off-road motorcycles (“dirtbikes”) blamed the 4x4 “tube buggies” that did most of the damage at Reiter and caused the closure. They blamed other ORVers more than they blamed DNR or the “enviros.” Some defended 4x4 users who volunteer for DNR workparties, and complained that dirtbikers don’t volunteer. Some ORVers recognized that due to the damage, another agency (Fish and Wildlife, or Ecology) could have forced DNR to close the area, and they felt it better to let DNR close it on its own terms. Some proposed that DNR open a nearby municipal watershed (Sultan Basin) to dirtbikes in order to separate the different ORV types, but DNR has rejected that idea.

After announcing the closure, DNR held a public meeting on October 22. The Everett Herald reported that the 250 people attending expressed “doubt and dismay with the state’s plans to redraw the riding trails on a smaller parcel of land.” The ORVers pressed DNR to define criteria for reopening Reiter, and DNR used the opportunity to recruit volunteers for its restoration work parties during the closure.

The Draft Recreation Plan

After implementing the closure, DNR released its draft “Reiter Foothills Forest Recreation Plan” on November 10, 2009 for public comment under SEPA.

NCCC and its allies submitted a comment letter supporting DNR’s plan to limit ORV use to 1,100 acres of the 10,000-acre forest, due to extensive past damage caused by ORVs, to prevent future damage throughout Reiter Forest, and to prevent ORV trespass into the adjacent Wild Sky Wilderness, Wallace Falls State Park, and Forks of the Sky State Park.

We supported DNR’s plan to restore and repair the horrendous damage caused by ORVs at Reiter. Restoration efforts need to be closely monitored to determine whether or not they are succeeding, and whether any new ORV-caused damage is occurring anywhere in the forest. Area closures, signage, fencing and barriers also need to be closely monitored for effectiveness. We supported DNR’s temporary closure of Reiter to ORV use, to allow for restoration in winter and spring. When Reiter is reopened, DNR should not allow off-road use of 4x4 “tube buggies” that have killed many trees at Reiter by stripping the bark off the trunks as they squeeze through the forest.

We supported DNR’s plan to provide non-motorized recreation at Reiter, in areas separate from those open to ORVs, with separate trailhead facilities. We asked that DNR and/or state parks develop non-motorized trails along the upper May Creek



Reiter view of Wild Sky peaks from atop Index Town Wall.

waterfalls (May Creek Cascades Loop), along the top of the Index Town Wall (Vertigo Rim Trail described by Harvey Manning in *Footsore*), and to the east side of Wallace Falls. These trails will provide year-round, lower-elevation recreation to many people. The state’s surveys have always shown that non-motorized trail recreationists are the majority, and greatly outnumber ORV recreationists. We also asked DNR to study the merits of creating a Wild Wallace Natural Resource Conservation Area (NRCA) in the portion of Reiter Forest between May Creek and Wallace Falls.

We objected to the SEPA Determination of Nonsignificance (DNS), because it does not take into account the significant adverse impact on the environment that will result from any continued ORV use at Reiter Forest, especially off-road use of 4x4s which have caused horrendous damage to our public resources at Reiter. Before re-opening Reiter Forest to ORV use, DNR needs to prepare a full Environmental Impact Statement

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Changes at Reiter Forest

Continued from page 13



Signs at the main entrance to Reiter Forest reflect the change in management.

LEFT, January 2009, and, RIGHT, November 2009.

(EIS) to analyze site-specific ORV impacts, past practices, and the restoration, mitigation, usage limits, education, enforcement and funding that are needed in the future.

The ORVers' comments that we saw often failed to acknowledge the on-the-ground damage that needs to be repaired, and how this need for restoration is driving much of the siting decision. The reason the draft plan reduces the acreage open to ORVs is because ORVs did too much damage to the land, the trees and the streams.

In early January 2010, DNR issued a notice of delay in issuing its final SEPA threshold decision, due to the large volume of comments received (more than 300). As we went to press the decision had not yet appeared.

Restoration Work and Trail Planning During the Closure

After the closure, DNR conducted a series of volunteer workparties to begin restoration efforts on stream crossings and Reiter Pond, as well as impacted trail surfaces. They also removed user-built structures such as an unsafe bridge made of logs and chainlink fencing over May Creek. The majority of the volunteers have been 4x4 recreationists including members of the Reiter Trail Watch volunteer

maintenance group, which has its own website at: <http://www.reitertrailwatch.com/forum/>

In early February 2010, DNR reported that "for the most part, people are complying with our temporary closure of Reiter. We've had very few reports of illegal activity in the area. We had great turnout on January 13 at our workshop in Monroe. More than 100 people showed up to sign up for volunteer projects, help plan trails, and hear more about what's going on . . . DNR crews and volunteers have been busy this winter stabilizing streambeds and doing recreation projects in Reiter." DNR is launching a new Reiter Work Group of interested citizens to meet periodically to provide input to DNR on its planning efforts.

DNR conducted a field tour of restoration sites on February 6, including streambanks, wetlands, areas of soil compaction and tree damage, and extreme erosion. At these sites we heard from reps of Fish and Wildlife, Ecology, and the Tulalip Tribe, as well as DNR.

More DNR field tours to focus on trail development at Reiter were scheduled for February 20 (motorized trail area) and February 27 (non-motorized trail area). DNR is hiring one or more consultants

to assist with designing trail systems for the motorized and nonmotorized areas. At Reiter we have a very rare opportunity to help land managers develop a system of non-motorized trails on public lands previously occupied by ORVs. The new Reiter trails opportunity looks similar to the strategic development of the Issaquah Alps trail system a generation ago. We're proposing 15 miles of trail in the non-motorized area at Reiter, including the May Creek waterfalls loop, and the eastern approach to Wallace Falls traversing on an old logging railroad grade. Our proposed trail developments fall within the trail study provisions of the Wild Sky Wilderness Act. Come on out and help us ground-truth these and other proposed trails.

Volunteer Forest Watch program

DNR is launching a volunteer Forest Watch program of citizen patrols to help improve public safety and protect the environment. Patrollers will observe, document, and report illegal activities. In addition, volunteer patrollers educate and communicate with fellow outdoor recreation enthusiasts about rules and appropriate conduct for recreating on DNR-managed land.

The Forest Watch program was discussed in DNR's 2009 Sustainable Recreation Work Group process as a statewide concept, but for now DNR is starting small with the Ahtanum, Reiter and Tahuya forests. If successful, the Forest Watch program may be replicated in all state forests. DNR said that at Ahtanum (near Yakima), "Early reports show that because of the volunteer presence in the area, visitors are feeling more comfortable leaving their cars parked at the Sno-Park, with fewer break-ins. Forest watch volunteers hand out maps, answer questions, and provide assistance."

On January 30, four of us nonmotorized reps and 18 motorized reps spent the day in Sultan in DNR's volunteer Forest Watch training for Reiter Forest. The Reiter plan for educating users is still being developed, and we are giving input to the agency.

What You Can Do

To protect Reiter we need volunteers to hike the trails and re-establish the non-

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Reiter Forest

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motorized community's presence in the area. Reiter today is similar to what Tiger Mountain was in the 1970s, and look at what Tiger has become – thanks to the many people who built and designed a trail system which allowed the area to become known by the hiking community, which led to NRCA status for part of Tiger.

You can also attend restoration work parties by day and planning meetings by night, or join Forest Watch patrols, or go on ground-truthing trips and document the conditions you observe. We need to give input to the agency on many topics, either by writing or in meetings. Or you can just go there and hike, which always helps. If you'd like to help and want more information, e-mail NCCC's Reiter team at: ncccinfo@northcascades.org

You can **VIEW** **ONLINE:**

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“We are inundated these days by eco-porn: prettified, commoditized, and often garish scenery in calendars. ‘The Irate Birdwatcher’ in contrast is sensitive and lyrical to the eye and the ear from the inimitable pen of Harvey Manning.”

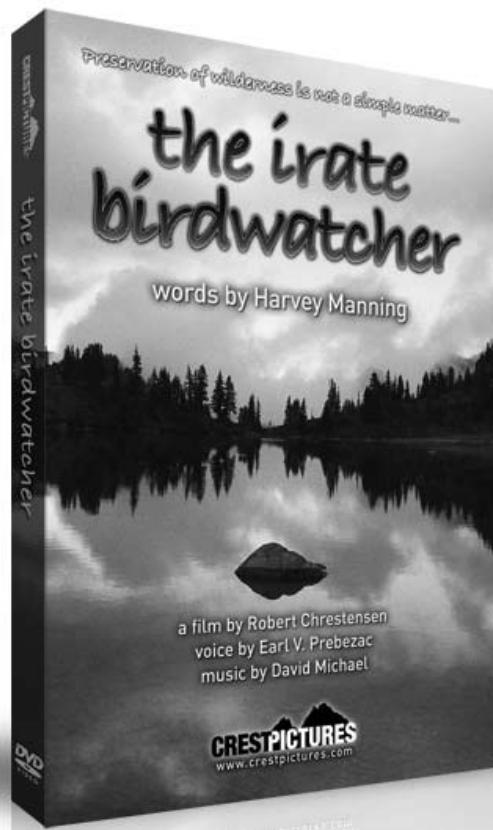
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“The gorgeous wilderness cinematography in ‘The Irate Birdwatcher’ provides the North Cascades imagery that was missing from the Ken Burns film on National Parks, and it’s a fitting visual counterpart to the words of wildlands defender Harvey Manning.”

— KARL FORSGAARD

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THE NORTH FORK

—Forgotten Stepsister of the Snoqualmies—

Rick McGuire

Gazing eastwards to the Cascades from north and central Seattle, a large chunk of the vista one sees is the mountains of the North Fork Snoqualmie country. Far less frequented than its more glamorous, or at least more popular sisters, the Middle and South Forks, the North Fork Snoqualmie is probably the least known region of its size anywhere near Seattle. Its obscurity can be alluring for seekers of solitude but has also meant a dearth of defenders.

The three forks of the Snoqualmie come together below the western walls of Mount Si a couple miles north of North Bend at King County's appropriately named, and very attractive Three Forks Park. The Middle Fork takes pride of place among her sisters, with a much larger watershed contributing fully three quarters of the average flows of what becomes the mainstem Snoqualmie. While perhaps not quite the spectacle of the Fraser and Thompson rivers joining at Lytton B.C., the confluence of the Middle and North Forks still rates as one of King County's more interesting if unheralded sights. The Middle Fork, with claybeds in its lower valley coloring its waters clear green at moderate flows and cloudy green when high, effortlessly swallows the usually clear North Fork before taking in the similarly clear South Fork a half mile or so below.

The South Fork is by far the most visited and best known of the three Snoqualmie valleys. The low elevation of Snoqualmie Pass made it the natural choice for a cross-Cascades highway. Although most just pass through, Interstate 90 brings far more people in a day to the South Fork valley than both other forks see in years.

The Middle Fork, once frequented by garbage dumpers, drunken shooters and the like, has been the subject of a nearly two-decade campaign to "take it back,"



Divide Lake

—KEVIN GERAGHTY PHOTO

consolidating public land ownership and developing recreation. Today, as regular readers of The Wild Cascades will know, a bill to protect the valley of its largest tributary, the Pratt, as Wilderness and designate part of the Middle Fork as a Wild and Scenic river is working its way through Congress. The Washington State Department of Natural Resources has just recently completed the designation of nearly all its more than 20,000 acres in the Middle Fork as Natural Resource Conservation Area, a remarkable move. Both the Middle and South Forks are very much on the map.

UPPER VALLEY

But not the North Fork. A trip down from its headwaters in the Mount Baker Snoqualmie National Forest really has two beginnings, one at the start of Lennox Creek, and another where the stream that maps call the North Fork begins. Of the two, Lennox Creek is slightly larger even though it lost out on the name. The North Fork proper begins near the north end of Lennox Mountain before curving south in about five miles to meet up with Lennox Creek just below the National Forest boundary. Lennox Creek begins near the southern end of Lennox Mountain and runs almost due northwest to meet the North Fork. At 5894 feet in height, seldom-climbed

Lennox Mountain stands just high enough above its neighbors to be noticeable from Seattle, especially in spring and fall when its open upper slopes hold more visible snow than forested nearby mountains. The dome shaped knob of Phelps Mountain on the North Fork Snoqualmie — South Fork Tolt divide is another distinctive landmark as seen from Seattle.

The Lennox Creek and upper North Fork valleys are of similar size and orientation, located in one of the wetter parts of the western Cascades.

Both valleys are forested mainly with western hemlock and silver fir, Douglas fir being found only toward their lower ends. Both were victims of colossal 1960s Forest Service budgets, when roads were punched in nearly to their heads, all in the cause of cutting mostly low value timber. This "wilderness preventative" logging was seldom profitable but did accomplish its main goal of keeping all but the very headwaters of both valleys out of the Alpine Lakes Wilderness when it was designated in 1976.

The lack of high quality timber on the National Forest lands in the two valleys meant they were largely left alone after what little valuable forest was initially in them was cut out. Around 1980, a timber sale targeted a small but impressive area of old growth Douglas fir forest that had managed to survive in the lowest part of the federally owned North Fork valley just above the boundary with private land. The "Fly" sale sparked one of the earlier skirmishes in the struggle to save Northwest old growth, the forces for good led in this case by Doug Wechsler of Seattle Audubon.

After a long battle and bad publicity, the Forest Service finally agreed to a bad humored retreat, moving most of the timber sale upvalley, cutting

smaller trees but more acres. Bristling at having been overruled by his superiors in Seattle, the then North Bend district ranger later exacted revenge by sending in a crew unannounced to cut some of the largest trees in the best part of the grove which had supposedly been spared. Ostensibly this was done to obtain bridge stringers. They can still be seen lying there, the most lasting tribute to his otherwise forgotten reign.

Despite that insult, those few dozen acres of old growth Douglas fir at the lower end of National Forest lands in the North Fork are still perhaps the most impressive area of car-accessible old growth near Seattle. The remainder of the uppermost North Fork valley features little of note. Not every Cascade valley can be a scenic marvel, and this one isn't. Just about all of the more valuable forest was cut out, and most of what old growth remains is brushy, open canopy hemlock dominated forest of only middling interest. A four-mile-long road to nowhere climbs into the valley. This road, which provides no access to any kind of recreational facilities or attractions, is yet another of the countless examples of a road which should never have been built. It should be decommissioned and closed, with the valley left to rewild. But the Forest Service never gives up on roads easily (roads equal maintenance equals money in their world), and it will no doubt be a long struggle to get this one put to bed.

The next-door valley of Lennox Creek is altogether more interesting. Sheer rock walls tower dramatically to the south as one enters the valley. More old growth has survived compared to the upper North Fork, and more of it comes in the form of walkable closed canopy forest with open understory rather than brush. The forests here are about as close to fireproof as can be, and most of the valley has seen no large fire since about the year 1308. The road is driveable for about two-and-a-half miles into the valley, washed out just beyond the beginning of the Bare Mountain trail. It has never been repaired above there, and the valley above has been rewilding for well over a decade now. Hopefully it will continue to do so, though as ever the Forest Service would love to reopen the road if it had the money.

The Bare Mountain trail offers a pleasant hike to a good viewpoint, much of it through an 1860 vintage burn. It did not burn a large area, but must have burned hot since it is still mostly ferns and flowers rather than forest. Another little used trail climbs from near the end of the defunct upper Lennox Creek road to the head of the valley, and it is possible there to climb to



Looking down the North Fork valley from where it leaves National Forest lands. Sunday and Philippa creeks enter far downstream on left.

—KEVIN GERAGHTY PHOTO

ridgetops offering views into the neighboring West Fork Miller and Taylor river valleys. Little known Lennox Lake features palisades of strange basaltic looking rocks nearby.

Both Lennox and the upper North Fork valleys are reached only after a long rough drive. The North Fork county road starts in North Bend and crosses the heavily logged landscapes of the Hancock Snoqualmie Tree Farm, its long 15 miles the only access to this part of the National Forest. The road's length and usual state of disrepair tend to keep visitor numbers on the low side. Gates block all roads from it on to Hancock's Tree Farm. Motorized access on to the Tree Farm is possible only by purchasing an expensive and restrictive permit. Nonmotorized access is not restricted.

MIDDLE VALLEY

Below the confluence of Lennox Creek and the North Fork, the valley takes on a very different look. The National Forests were designated around the beginning of the 20th century, but only after the timber industry selected the lands it wanted. There must have once been an immense volume of valuable timber in the North Fork. Weyerhaeuser got it and cleaned every stick of old growth out of the valley bottom from the 1920s through the 50s, finishing up the ridgetops in the 70s and early 80's.

Weyerhaeuser has since sold out and the Snoqualmie Tree Farm is now owned by Hancock Timberlands. There was a brief window of a decade or two when the return of second growth made parts of the Tree Farm a rather nice place. A carefully composed shot of the reforesting North Fork

valley even appeared in a Weyerhaeuser ad around 1980. But Hancock is fast removing the second growth, logging right up to the National Forest boundary in many spots. The second growth is even vanishing from the ridges, some of it cut at less than 30 years of age.

A number of small areas of old growth were left standing during the original logging as seed sources, often on top of knobs or other hard to reach spots. They provided some biological legacy and scenic interest in a landscape where it was badly needed. Sadly, Weyerhaeuser cleaned them all out as it started in on the second growth in the late 80s, and today they are all gone.

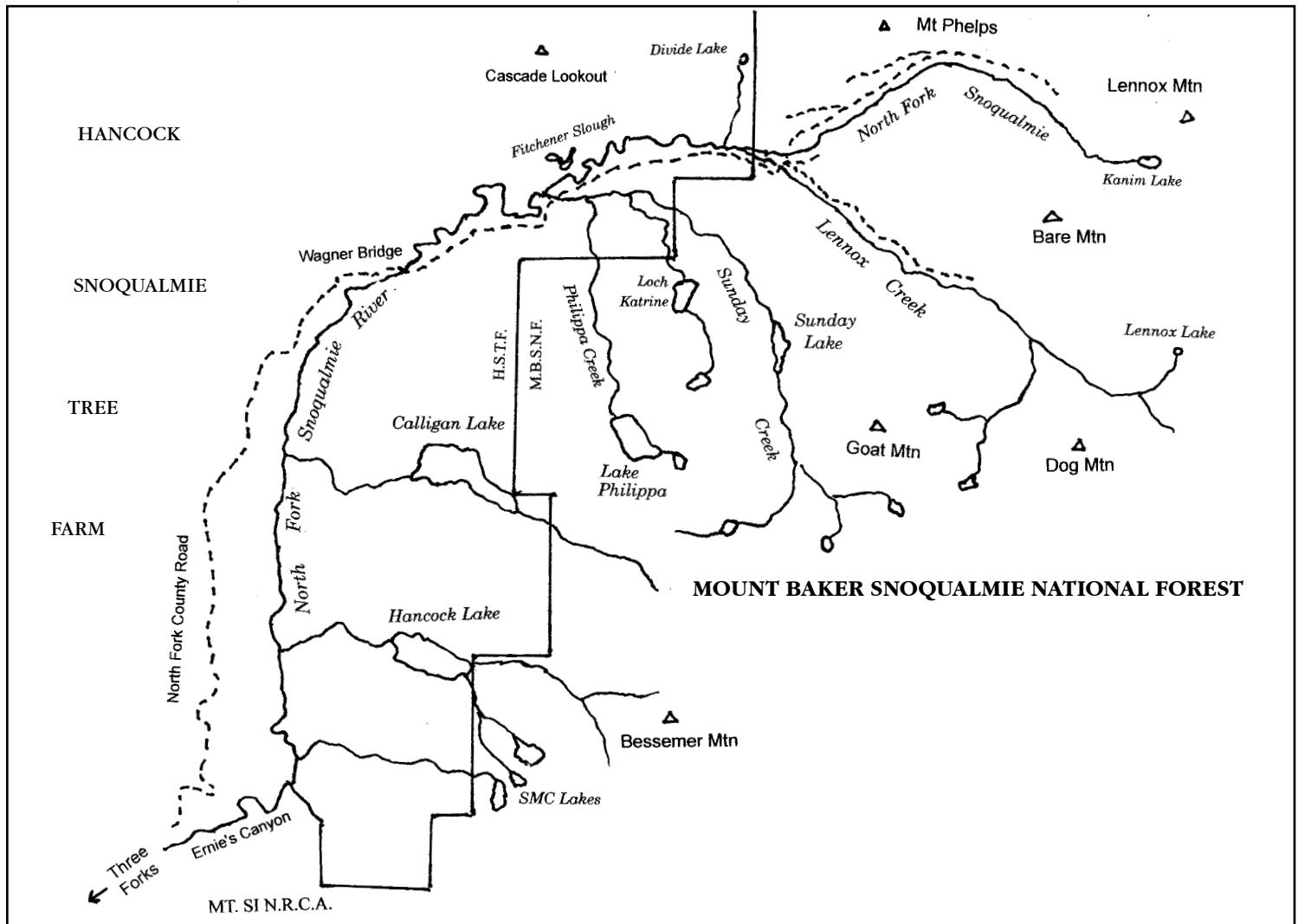
It would be an exaggeration to say that all the North Fork watershed below the National Forest boundary is an industrial wasteland; but not much of an exaggeration. The level of logging is so thorough and ongoing that it is hard to find much that can be called scenic. Those who work to preserve "forestlands" such as this from subdivision and development — a worthy cause — are fond of saying "the worst clearcut is better than the best subdivision." The sentiment is irrefutable, but even steady repetition of the line doesn't make it easy to see beauty in such a landscape.

The Snoqualmie Tree Farm comprises about 90,000 acres between the lower Snoqualmie valley (and towns from Fall City to Duvall), and the Cascade mountain front. As the last big piece of flattish, undeveloped land in King County, it has been the object of a number of schemes, good and

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Snoqualmies

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bad, none of which have come to fruition. It was considered as a site for a major new airport to supplement Sea-Tac back in the days (15 or 20 years ago), when air travel was predicted to keep expanding forever. Its proximity to the mountain front and resulting bad weather, much wetter and cloudier than Sea-Tac, made it a poor choice.

The Tree Farm has also been looked at as a route for a new outer ring freeway, "Interstate 605," which would follow and extend from the present route of Highway 18, crossing the Snoqualmie River then running north through the tree farm to Snohomish County. It would cross the Skykomish River east of Monroe before curving northwest to rejoin Interstate 5 somewhere near Arlington. As such, I-605 would be a sprawl lovers' dream come true, and the development it would spawn would seal the fate of the Seattle area as Los Angeles North.

I-605 may sound unthinkable, and with the long overdue collapse of debt driven

suburban growth as the engine of the economy, perhaps it now is. But it was only a few years ago that bills to study it were introduced in the state legislature. With Peak Oil upon us, and major changes needed if there is to be any chance of maintaining something like life as we know it, any decision to build it would surely rate as colossal folly for the region. With the United States in deep denial about the coming end of the Happy Motoring era, nothing can be ruled out.

In response to the development threat to the tree farm, a group called "Evergreen Forest" attempted a decade or so ago to get legislation through Congress to allow non-profit forest conservation trusts to issue tax-exempt "Community Forest" bonds in the cause of land conservation. The Evergreen Forest effort would have used such bonds to purchase the tree farm from Weyerhaeuser, then used revenue from gentler touch logging to pay off the bonds. Unfor-

tunately, legislation introduced by then 8th district Congresswoman Jennifer Dunn to allow such bonding never made it through Congress. Groups elsewhere are still trying to get it through. Some felt that Evergreen Forest was jinxed after it announced the plan with much fanfare as virtually a done deal when it was nothing of the sort. But Dunn was ultimately unable to get her bill through the House and Weyerhaeuser sold the land to Hancock, which is where things stand today.

But not quite all was lost. King County, led by then executive Ron Sims with support from county council members, including Larry Phillips and others, subsequently put together a deal to buy the development rights to most of the tree farm for \$22 million. The purchase applies strictly to development rights and the county has no say at all on what kind of logging happens, or how much. Thus there has been no new era of kinder, gentler logging as Evergreen Forest

had hoped to bring about. But it was still quite a coup, greatly lessening the threat of I-605 and the paving over of King County's last flatlands, and hopefully keeping the door open for another Evergreen Forest-type effort in the future.

Although there is little of note in the way of forest below the National Forest boundary, the "middle" North Fork is quite interesting from a topographic perspective. The Cascades are a range with mostly narrow, often canyon-like valleys. The middle North Fork valley stands out as broad and flat, with unusual looping river meanders and oxbow lakes found in and around the Fitchener Slough area. The surface geology appears to be mostly sands and gravels, and if there were any glacially dammed lakes here they didn't produce extensive claybeds like those found on the Middle Fork.

"Snoqualmie Bog," sandwiched here between lower Sunday Creek and the North Fork, is remarkable for its size, its hundred plus acres making it probably the largest peat bog in or near the Cascades. Along with mosses, a broad expanse of wetland plants such as Labrador tea, carnivorous sundew, and others carpet a large extent of the valley floor. Several tarns can also be found, and picturesque, gnarled dwarf pines and cedars. There are even a very few old trees on its margins, although it appears that rising water levels in recent years, perhaps the result of nearby road construction, have now killed many of them. The bog is a state Department of Natural Resources Natural Area Preserve, though unfortunately the NAP boundaries take in little more than the actual bog itself.

The major tributary Sunday Creek joins the North Fork below Snoqualmie Bog. The Sunday valley has seen no logging above the old, pre-land exchange National Forest boundary, its near total lack of Douglas fir sparing it from the onslaught. Douglas fir, with its superlative wood, was the money tree sought by early day timber cruisers. Other than the occasional cedar, anything else was just in the way. A map of private versus public lands in the central and north Cascades is virtually a map of the local distribution of Douglas fir. Timber interests wanted the places thick with Douglas fir and had no use for places where it was scarce, much or most of which later became the National Forests. Anyone who has spent much time exploring Cascade forests will have had an all too familiar experience time and again when descending slopes forested with hemlock and silver fir. As soon as one drops down far enough to start seeing a few Douglas firs, a line is soon crossed into private land, where once plentiful Douglas



1967 view looking south from Cascade Lookout on the North Fork Snoqualmie — South Fork Tolt divide. The North Fork Snoqualmie flows away from the viewer toward the Mount Si massif in the center background, seen here in an unusual view from the north. At the foot of Si the North Fork turns right to join the other forks at Three Forks park.

fir has long since been cut out.

Of course there are exceptions, but Sunday Creek is a prime example of this. Its lower reaches, once forested with Douglas fir, were selected, privatized and cut by Weyerhaeuser long ago. Poor quality timber has always been the best protection for valleys in the Cascades, and is why Sunday's middle and upper reaches have been left alone. In 1976 those parts of the valley became part of the Alpine Lakes Wilderness, and still remain the lowest-elevation land in the Wilderness. A trail follows the creek up to Sunday Lake and a short distance beyond before fading away. Upper Sunday Creek, with its thick but not very valuable forests of hemlock, cedar and silver fir, and nearby Goat and Dog mountains comprise a sizeable but seldom visited corner of the Wilderness. Other than the trail to Sunday Lake, no paths penetrate the area, making it a forgotten, undisturbed refuge, its peaks within sight of Seattle.

Another curious feature high above the North Fork's middle stretch is a small nameless lake, north almost exactly on the divide with the South Fork Tolt, just west of the National Forest boundary. The lake is unusual in that it has hardly any watershed feeding it to speak of, sitting as it does almost directly on a ridgetop. Yet it still has a small but steady stream flowing out of it even in late summer. Where the water comes from is anyone's guess. It's also unusual because Weyerhaeuser, master of scorched earth, take-everything-but-the-squeal logging, actually left some mountain hemlocks around it.

West of this lake, one of the last remaining old style wooden tower fire lookouts stood until recently on the westernmost high point of the North Fork Snoqualmie - South Fork Tolt divide ridge. "Cascade Lookout," built in 1967, was in precarious

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Looking NE across Hancock Snoqualmie Tree Farm from Snoqualmie Point View Park. The North Fork flows left to right behind isolated Fuller Mountain in the middle foreground, and the Mt. Index summit is at left background. The remains of Weyerhaeuser's Snoqualmie Mill complex can be seen in the left foreground. Over three quarters of a century it consumed all the forests on land seen here plus much, much more. —RICK MCGUIRE PHOTO

Snoqualmies

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condition after decades of exposure to the elements. The DNR was trying to find a home for it in order to avoid demolishing it, but it collapsed in 2008.

LOWER VALLEY

The North Fork flows generally westward through its broad, flat middle reach before gradually turning south to run along the base of the mountain front down toward North Bend. This eight- to ten-mile stretch of the North Fork is notable in that it occupies the exact same course as a vastly bigger river that flowed right here as the Ice Age started to end. It's thought that the Puget ice sheet forced all the rivers from the western side of the Cascades north of here, including perhaps the Fraser, along with meltwaters from the ice sheet itself, into one giant river dwarfing even today's Columbia. Squeezed between the ice sheet and the Cascade front, this massive stream flowed along this course on its way south around the ice sheet, at times going as far south as today's Cowlitz valley.

Below the recently replaced "Wagner" bridge, where the North Fork county road crosses the river, today's much diminished North Fork starts to take on a different character. Most kayakers take little interest in the slow glides and meanders of the middle stretch, but below Wagner the livelier river

becomes more attractive to them. It should be noted that boaters have an entirely different set of names for the various reaches of the North Fork from those used here.

The river quickens its pace below Wagner as tributaries Calligan and Hancock creeks enter from the left. The heavily logged mountains at the heads of the two valleys occupy much of the Cascade skyline east of Seattle. Both valleys contain sizeable lakes. Hancock Lake is ringed by cabins, but lonely Calligan Lake has been home to nesting loons in recent years, perhaps the only ones in all of Washington. It also had a rustic floating cabin for many years.

Below the "Spur 10" road bridge to Hancock Lake, the North Fork gets even faster and steeper, entering the cauldron of whitewater known as "Ernie's Canyon," a difficult run highly regarded by skilled and daring boaters. Local folklore has it that some Weyerhaeuser employees once tried to navigate it, wisely giving up before going all the way through, and spending some cold and miserable hours beneath cliffy sidewalls awaiting rescue. Crowds tend to stay away.

Most of the lower river course is still within the Snoqualmie Tree Farm, but below Rachor (pronounced "rasher") Creek the left bank is part of Washington DNR's Mount Si Natural Resource Conservation Area. The NRCA lands are worlds apart from the monotony of the tree farm. Here they are notable for extensive mature second-

growth forests along and east of the North Fork. These slopes were highgraded (only the choice trees logged), from a road cut across them probably in the 1930s. Bigleaf maples were of little value then and many old, mossy, wide spreading specimens survived on the gentler slopes here below the cliffs of Mount Si. It's lucky that maples were so often bypassed, as they are now one of the glories of the regrowing lowland forests here and especially in the Middle Fork. They are particularly attractive in April and May when long hanging racemes of flowers scent the air.

Although these surviving maples look impressive today they pale in comparison to what once grew not far below here, between North Bend and Snoqualmie. In one of his lesser known writings, John Muir described those he found here around the year 1890, and it is worth quoting at length:

"Not even in the great maple woods of Canada have I seen trees either as large or with so much striking, picturesque character. . . . it attains a height of seventy five to a hundred feet and a diameter of four to eight feet. The trunk sends out large limbs toward its neighbors, laden with long drooping mosses beneath and rows of ferns on the upper surfaces, thus making a grand series of richly ornamented interlacing arches, with the leaves laid thick overhead, rendering the underwood spaces delightfully cool and open. Never have I seen a finer forest ceiling or a more picturesque one, while the floor, covered with tall ferns and rubus and thrown into hillocks by the bulging roots, matches it well. The largest of these maple groves that I have yet found is on the right bank of the Snoqualmie River, about a mile above the falls. The whole country hereabouts is picturesque, and interesting in many ways, and well worth a visit by tourists passing through the Sound region, as it is now accessible by rail from Seattle."

At the very northwesternmost corner of the NRCA, on a bench just south of Rachor Creek and right above Ernie's Canyon, several dozen acres of untouched old growth still stand. A number of tall old-growth Douglas firs, those rarest of trees, can be found there. No other tree commands attention like old growth Douglas fir. There are some prime examples here, few in number but quite impressive, their thick trunks rising clear a hundred feet or more. Judging by their thick, muscular limbs, always a more reliable indicator of age than tree size or height, they must be well over 500 years old. This may be the closest such area of undisturbed old growth to Seattle. A cliffy band above this patch kept it just out of reach of the logging show that worked the

slopes above, and Ernie's Canyon protected its western flank.

Unfortunately, a very large and old holly orchard occupies the flatlands not far below, and for decades now birds have been spreading countless berries from these heavily laden trees into the NRCA, where it is now a serious problem. Holly is one of the few plants able to strike roots down through beds of moss, and most of the second growth forest in this part of the NRCA is becoming heavily infested. It has even invaded the old-growth patch, an alarming development. Despite its PR image of decked-out halls and holiday cheer, if left unchecked holly forms thickets that are dark, sharp, sterile and ugly, crowding out native vegetation.

Unfortunately, holly growers have so far managed to keep it from being legally classified as a noxious weed, which it most certainly is. Even in its native Europe it is considered an undesirable plant, with Swedes currently battling its warming induced advance north. The DNR is aware of the problem on the North Fork and hopes to tackle it, not just here but elsewhere, including Tiger Mountain near Issaquah. Plants like holly and ivy are a ticking time bomb for Cascade forests. Strenuous efforts will be needed in future to keep the forests we now know from being overwhelmed.

Below Ernie's Canyon the North Fork slows down again. Entering suburbia, it flows past houses at the northwestern base of Mount Si. This north-facing canyon must be a dark and cold place to live from October through March, but it must be to the liking of some, since a number of houses have sprung up there recently. The river flows a short ways past the holly orchard and some fields and bottomland woods down to Three Forks Park, and its confluence with the Middle Fork.

THE FUTURE

The North Fork and its watershed deserve more attention. In the upper reaches, the threat of greatly increased logging on the National Forest lands is likely low, at least for now, considering that the Forest Service has a very hard time selling any of its current timber sales. Long haul distances and lack of good local markets for wood will hopefully keep it that way. The main immediate goal for NCCC and sister organizations in the upper watershed is to close the unneeded road in the uppermost North Fork valley, and to stop any senseless reopening of the upper Lennox Creek road. The current North Bend District ranger has reportedly shown interest in doing that. Hopefully he won't get the chance to waste taxpayers' money on it, but one never knows.



Looking up Lennox Creek valley from hillside just above its confluence with the North Fork. The National Forest-Tree Farm boundary is exactly on the left side of the patch cut seen on right.

—KEVIN GERAGHTY PHOTO

All of the upper North Fork valley can and should be added to the Alpine Lakes Wilderness and its useless road-to-nowhere put to bed. The entirety of the Lennox Creek valley apart from the narrow corridor along the road to the Bare Mountain trail should also be added to the Wilderness.

The sloughs and meanders of the middle reach would be delightful again if left alone for a few decades, but it will take the advent and success of another Evergreen Forest-type initiative for that to happen. For the foreseeable future, logging on the tree farm will continue on ever shortening rotations. Forest practice regulations have made a difference along rivers and streams, but it remains to be seen how many successive generations of 30-year-old Douglas fir the soil will be able to yield up. For now, about all there is to do is be thankful that King County has secured the development rights, and keep repeating "the worst clearcut is better than the best subdivision. . . ."

The most serious threat to the North Fork and its tributaries is from dams and water diversions. In the mid 1980s the City of Bellevue made an attempt to build a big dam on the North Fork that would have impounded a large reservoir. The idea was to secure a water supply for Bellevue independent of Seattle, which supplies water to most of King County. Many regarded it as bureaucratic empire building, since there was (and is), no problem with Seattle's water supply.

Luckily, it was turned back, but Bellevue and other eastside cities have since formed the "Cascade Water Alliance" and are still looking for new water supplies. They have purchased rights to water diverted from the White River, but the reservoir where it is stored at Lake Tapps is overrun with jet skis and motorboats, and ringed by hundreds of houses with septic tanks, many old and fail-

ing. Bellevue and its partners maintain the water from it can be treated and made just as clean as Seattle's water. After all, New Orleans drinks the effluent of half a continent. Seattle has refused to allow water from Lake Tapps to be commingled with the water that Seattle supplies. Although they say it is off the table, it remains to be seen whether the Cascade Water Alliance will attempt someday to draw new "pristine" water from the North Fork.

More recently, Weyerhaeuser tried to put North Fork water from above Ernie's Canyon into pipes to turn hydroelectric turbines. Fortunately that did not come to pass either, but the threat continues. Although it sold the tree farm, Weyerhaeuser still retains a large water "right" on the lower Snoqualmie, something worth worrying about. At least one North Fork tributary, Rachor Creek, already has a diversion on it. These projects tend to produce very little power compared to the amount of disturbance they cause.

The North Fork is probably more vulnerable to these threats than many other rivers because Snoqualmie Falls keeps salmon out, and because it is so little known. Other than the small number of people who make the drive from North Bend up the North Fork road, the occasional hiker of Bare Mountain, and the handful of kayakers who float the waters, hardly anyone knows the place even exists.

Letting the North Fork slumber in obscurity is probably not the best option. The dam threat means that NCCC, its sister groups such as Alpine Lakes Protection Society, and river protection groups need to get it on the map, make it better known. New destructive schemes will come along, possibly sooner rather than later, and the valley will need defenders. This stepsister needs to be a little less forgotten.

Easy Pass to Fisher Basin in September: Early Snow and a Bunch of Bears

Philip Fenner

We'd planned a late summer trip into Fisher Basin over Easy Pass, and sat-out the late August heat anxious to get going. Just as the day finally arrived the weather turned to winter seemingly overnight. Temperatures dropped from the 70s into the 50s in the city, lower in the Cascades, of course. We would regret not taking the cold trend more seriously. Easy Pass was named somewhat tongue-in-cheek of course, but it's neither as easy or as tough as its name and reputation imply. Sure it's uphill all the way but what pass isn't? The good news from the chilly weather was some early autumn foliage to admire, vine maple and mountain ash along the way colored things nicely. As



Blonde bear guarding Easy Pass.

we were huffing up the final switchbacks, a couple were huddled by a big boulder looking fitfully up toward the pass. A short Q&A session revealed they were intimidated by a bear that they said was blocking the way, and were going back down without making it to the pass. This wouldn't be the first bear we'd stared-down, so we slowly worked our way on up. There it was, a golden-brown beauty. A blondie! We held back and observed the proper etiquette by not staring it down. It got a good whiff of us and I was glad my camera had a decent zoom lens. Ultimately it was foraging among the blueberry bushes at the base of a cliff and went

back to business and ignored us. But for a moment there, I'm sure it was thinking "What is this strange 2-legged beast invading my territory? Ah, well, back to my lunch."

The pass saddle was under a few inches of new snow and the wind really hit us. That single layer of fleece with a rainshell over it was going to be just barely enough. Had I taken the weather reports seriously... "Well, I'm pretty sure I have at least one lightweight pair of gloves..."

I realized I had hiked up a huge valley wall and that I only now, finally, at the high pass, was entering North Cascades National Park. It made no sense to me whatsoever – what I had just passed-through was every bit as spectacular and deserving of protection as any National Park. Only later when I read Harvey Manning's "Wilderness Alps" would I discover why: the many compromises that were made at the time. It



View north across Granite Creek valley from Easy Pass (this entire valley and the peaks beyond it are not protected!).

was a real eye-opener, and one reason I joined the American Alps team, to expand the Park and protect this spectacular area.

The clouds had lifted enough to reveal the valley of Fisher Basin and the surrounding peaks, so every switchback was a photo stop on the way down. It was a long way down into Fisher Basin, and it seemed to get colder as we went. That evening we ate early and jumped in our sleeping bags in our tents to keep warm. But not until we set-up our bear bag. We really did try to get it up at least



A rare Pacific Fisher watches us in our camp in Fisher Basin.

as high as we typically do, having seen Big Blondie on the way in, and figuring it was not alone. That night we were awakened by several episodes of "Scratch-scratch... WHUMP!" Next morning there was evidence of a bear scratching against the adjacent tree then falling into the bushes – we could picture it swinging for our food like some sort of bear piñata!

Next morning as we were eating we heard, then saw a rare Pacific Fisher bounding through the tree branches above our camp. Perhaps Fisher Basin was named for them? He looked like a fox, only smaller, and after we got back I looked it up and there's no doubt from my photo, that's what it was. It's a species that is almost entirely dependent on old growth forest, and was near the upper end of its range there. What a thrill to see one of these wily creatures!

Despite the chill and clouds, we had a great day the next day working our way up toward the headwall of Fisher Basin, and we saw so many bears we lost track. All were at significant distance, and after seeing them several times it became no longer quite so exciting, more routine. The sloping meadows were amber with autumn blueberry leaves, and the day was spent just soaking up the quiet, beautiful surroundings. The basin gets more barren and rocky as you hit the upper cirque, and some tamaracks, still green, reminded us of how much more fall beauty was a few weeks away. One more night in the basin, then we split up. My brother was going down-valley following Thunder Creek, and ended-up marching out after two straight days of rain (we'd left his rental at Colonial Creek campground). I climbed back out of the basin and back to my car over Easy Pass solo, which I enjoyed immensely. I saw no bears on my way out.

For a full-color photo album, go to:
<http://picasaweb.google.com/pfitech.seanet.com/20060917EasyPassFisherBasin#>

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Approaching Easy Pass from Granite Creek to the north. See article on page 22.

—PHILIP FENNER PHOTO

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