This winter, the global community will focus on Vancouver, British Columbia for the winter Olympic Games. While just over 100 miles away, another community of plants and animals goes about daily life in the sanctuary of Olympic National Park. Over 2,700 years after athletes competed in the original Olympic Games in ancient Greece, English explorer Captain John Meares was sailing off the west coast of North America. In 1788 he sighted the glacier-clad high point of a coastal mountain range and named it Mount Olympus, after the mythical home of the Greek gods. This moniker was later applied to the whole range, the peninsula, a national park, national forest and countless regional businesses, schools and products.

But more than labels and geography tie the winter games to the Olympic Mountains. Just as the games test the endurance, precision, strength and grace of the world’s elite athletes, the diverse species in Olympic National Park are tested and shaped by heavy rain, howling winds, pounding surf, avalanching snow, and the voracious mouths of hungry animals. Just as the competition and team cooperation of the games reflect years of training, the biological world reflects millennia of competition, cooperation and shaping by natural forces. But unlike Olympic competitors, many of the Olympic Peninsula’s native resident “athletes” compete in both winter and summer games. To win a medal in the natural world is to survive and perpetuate your species.

**Citius, altius, fortius**

The Olympic motto, which translates to swifter, higher, stronger, could also be the maxim for species in Olympic National Park. To survive—to win their medal—prey need to either outwit or outpace their predators as well as adapt to their environment.

**Swifter**

For a salmon that means avoiding an orca that can swim over 30 miles per hour. The swiftest human swimmers would be left in the wake of that chase, even at the world record pace of just over 5 mph.

Though the majority of a bear’s diet is plants, they can sprint to 35 mph to test the fitness of a black-tail deer. Both species would leave Olympic sprinters—who can reach 22 mph—in the dust, though speed skaters, at 33 mph, might keep up.

**Higher**

Higher, for a tree, means racing their competitors to the sun to avoid being left in the shadows. Though growth rates slow with age, with enough time a conifer can reach world-record size. In the protected old-growth forests of Olympic National Park, some specimens reach over 200 feet tall and 40 to 50 feet of furrowed girth.

For a cougar higher means being able to bound over 16 feet straight up, much higher than the 7.7-foot leap of the best human high jumper. Snow fleas are even more impressive. Despite its name, this is a tiny springtail that feeds on pollen and other tidbits deposited on the snow surface.

Using a lever-like tail appendage, they catapult themselves to safety, springing an inch or more into the air, a dizzying height for something smaller than a pinhead.

**Stronger**

What competitor could best an ant for strength? We’ve all heard of their prodigious feats, how tiny ants can lift 20 or more times their weight as they forage in the old growth forest, while weightlifters struggle to lift four times their weight. But this comparison is unfair to those grimacing human contenders, some of whom manage to hoist nearly 1,000 pounds. The geometry of being small gives ants a natural advantage—physics.

Whether it’s a sprinting elk or a limpet clinging to surf-pounded rocks with untiring strength, the rich communities in Olympic National Park ecosystems protect myriad natural athletes. As we gather around televisions this winter to admire the grace and skill of competitors from around the world, perhaps we can also appreciate the other Olympics going on in our back yard every day.
A winter visit to Olympic National Park’s mountains, coast and forest can be magical, but it is also challenging. Roads and facilities normally open may close due to snow, high water, downed trees, or reduced staffing. Call (360) 565-3313 for road and weather updates.

**Emergencies**

Dial 911 in an emergency or call (360) 565-3000 ext. 0 between 7 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. or (360) 417-2459 after hours.

**Entrance and other Recreation Fees**

Entrance fees apply year-round in main spur road areas (Elwha, Olympic, the Hills, Hoh, Ozette, Sol Duc), a small fee is charged for park map and fishing regulations; and providing staff at entrance stations and wilderness permit locations. Your support of the park program is very important. Thank you.

**General Park Information**

For park information see the park website: www.nps.gov/oly or call (360) 565-3138, or in the Port Angeles area tune to 1610 AM. Wilderness permits, bear canisters, and information on sales and staff to help you plan a visit. Wilderness camping, hiking and fishing regulations; and providing staff at entrance stations and wilderness permit locations. Your support of the park program is very important. Thank you.

**Services and Facilities**

**Snowshoe with a Ranger**

Join a park ranger at Hurricane Ridge to experience the wonders of winter on snowshoes. If you can walk, you can snowshoe! The National Park Service provides snowshoes and instructions on this ranger-led program. A $5 donation per participant helps the park provide snowshoes and replacement.

**Lodging and Food Service Outside the Park**

Local communities provide lodging and food service all year. Contact local Chambers of Commerce or the Olympic Peninsula Visitor and Convention Bureau at 1-800-492-4402, www.visitolympicpenninsula.org.

**Lodging in the Park**

Lake Crescent Lodge: Roosevelt Cabins open weekends in winter (no food service). Lodging fully open May 7 to October 17, 2010 with lodging and food service, (360) 928-3325, www.lakencrescent.net.


**Volunteering at Olympic**

Last year over 1,100 volunteers donated 63,000 hours to Olympic National Park for projects that tap a grant from the National Park Foundation through the generous support of the Coca-Cola Foundation, a Proud Partner of America’s National Parks. This grant will allow the park to start an adopt a park program focusing on stewardship and front country trail work in our gateway communities.

Partners like the Washington Trail Association, Washington’s National Parks Fund and Backcountry Horsemen also provide ongoing short and long term volunteer opportunities with projects such as trail maintenance, citizen science monitoring, and internships.
Hurricane Ridge Area in Winter

Before heading out, check at the Hurricane Ridge Visitor Center for current avalanche conditions. Wear avalanche beacons, carry a probe, snow shovel and the 10 essentials (see page 8), and avoid avalanche terrain such as cornices and steep lee slopes.
Cross-Country Skiing & Snowshoeing

With its easy access and over 20 miles of trails and routes, Hurricane Ridge is the focus of cross-country skiing and snowshoeing in Olympic National Park. Though winter visitors of all abilities can enjoy the area, flat, easy beginner ski terrain is limited to the meadows above the Hurricane Ridge Visitor Center. Backcountry skiers can explore several slopes and bowls in the area. No trails are groomed or marked; however, two routes are unroped roads which can usually be navigated.

NOTE FOR SNOWSHOERS AND SNOWBOARDERS: Skiers, snowshoers and snowboarders can safely share this area. Walkers and snowshoers, please stay to one side to avoid damaging skis tracks on trails, and do not snowplow or walk through the downhill ski area.

Before heading out on any trip remember to check at the Hurricane Ridge Visitor Center and check current avalanche conditions. Below are descriptions of routes in the Hurricane Ridge area.

### Most Difficult

**Hurricane Hill Route** 1.6 miles one way

This route starts at the end of the Hurricane Hill Road and climbs 700 feet to the summit of Hurricane Hill. There are several very steep sidehills, so use extreme caution under icy or avalanche conditions. As an alternative, skiers and snowshoers can follow the ridge line. Be careful to stay off cornices. Under good conditions, advanced skiers will find this a rewarding trip with good views and some nice bowls on the north side of the ridge. Check with the information desk before venturing out.

**Obstruction Point Road: Waterhole to the end** 4.3 miles one way (Obstruction Point is 7.8 miles one way)

This route begins at the midway point on the unplowed Obstruction Point Road. In the first 0.5 mile the route climbs steadily 900 feet to above treeline. In clear weather, views are spectacular but steep sidehills and exposure to storms makes this a difficult route. It is recommended only under good conditions for experienced skiers. Travel beyond Obstruction Point can entail steep terrain with high avalanche potential.

**Sunrise Ridge** 2.1 miles one way

Begin this route by crossing below the intermediate rope tow and climbing to the right of the ski hill (right of the trees). From the top of Alpine Hill, above the downhill ski area, this route follows a narrow ridge toward the south side of Mount Angeles. The path crosses avalanche prone areas at several points and is not recommended under unstable conditions. Be especially careful to stay off cornices along the ridge. Several nice slopes on the east side of the ridge descend to the Hurricane Ridge Road.

### More Difficult

**Hurricane Hill Road** 1.3 miles one way

Beginning just west of the visitor center, this trail first descends steeply, then follows the rolling, moderate ridgeline along the snow-covered Hurricane Hill Road. Experienced skiers can use this trail to reach the Hurricane Hill Route (see Most Difficult), as well as several bowls that are good for backcountry skiing. The Wolf Creek Trail is seldom snow covered in the lower elevations and skiers must often walk the last several miles. Check current snow levels. The Deer Park Road may provide skiing or snowshoeing in the Hurricane Ridge area.

**Obstruction Point Road: To Waterhole** 3.4 miles one way

A pullout on a curve along the Hurricane Ridge Road 0.5 miles below Hurricane Ridge Visitor Center marks the beginning of this route (park below the curve). After descending a steep but short hill, the trail follows the snow-covered Obstruction Point Road. The first 1.5 miles of the trail are relatively easy and shaded by fir trees, but the rest of the trail climbs steeply, exposed slopes which may be icy and difficult to traverse. After Steeple Rock the trail flattens and meanders through subalpine forest. Beyond Waterhole, the trail climbs steeply.

### Easiest

**The Meadows**

The meadows above the Hurricane Ridge Visitor Center offer gentle, easy terrain for everyone and excellent views in fair weather. Because the meadows are exposed to the wind, they are sometimes icy or wind-packed.

**Hurricane Ridge Road** 8 miles one way to Whiskey Bend

This route begins 0.6 miles west of the visitor center along the unplowed Hurricane Ridge Road. Experienced skiers can use this trail to reach the Hurricane Hill Route (see Most Difficult), as well as several bowls that are good for backcountry skiing. The Wolf Creek Trail is seldom snow covered in the lower elevations and skiers must often walk the last several miles. Check current snow levels. The Deer Park Road may provide skiing or snowshoeing in the Hurricane Ridge area.

**Obstruction Point Road** 1.3 miles one way

This route begins at the midway point on the unplowed Obstruction Point Road. In the first 0.5 mile the route climbs steadily 900 feet to above treeline. In clear weather, views are spectacular but steep sidehills and exposure to storms makes this a difficult route. It is recommended only under good conditions for experienced skiers. Travel beyond Obstruction Point can entail steep terrain with high avalanche potential.

### Other Areas

Depending on the snow level, other roads and trails in both the park and in Olympic National Forest may be snow covered. Check at the visitor center for current snow levels. The Deer Path Road may provide skiing or snowshoeing opportunities. For safety, this steep, narrow road is closed at the park boundary, 9 miles from the Hurricane Ridge Visitor Center. The route descends through avalanche prone areas at several points and is not recommended under unstable conditions.

**Snow Play**

Snow sliding is a favorite pastime for some, but it has also been one of the most dangerous activities at Hurricane Ridge. Serious injuries, even permanent disabilities have occurred when people collided with trees, other skiers, or lost control and ended up in the road. For your safety, sliding is permitted only in the designated Small Children’s Area near the Hurricane Ridge Visitor Center. Further downhill, children eight and under may slide. The “Snow slidey area has been closed due to hazards associated with the site. These include:

- The site’s location next to the road, which has led to children and adults actually sliding into the road.
- The lack of parking, which has resulted in both vehicles and pedestrians using the road’s travel lanes for parking and walking, creating extremely hazardous conditions during the icy and snowy winter months.
- Plowing and sanding operations are impossible when people and vehicles are on or in the road.

If conditions are too icy to allow safe sliding at the Small Children’s area, that area will be closed. For the safety of participants, metal or hard plastic runner sleds and wooden toboggans are not permitted. Compressed air for inflating inner tubes is not permitted. Plastic runner sleds and wooden toboggans are not permitted. Compressed air for inflating inner tubes is not available. To be as safe as possible, please observe the following rules:

- Slide only in the designated Small Children Snow Play area. Sliding is not allowed anywhere else in the Hurricane Ridge area or on the Hurricane Ridge Road.
- For your safety, be sure the path is clear before starting your slide. Collisions can result in injuries. Watch for cross-country skiers and snowshoers crossing below or near the road. You may get lucky and hear a seal rescue call.
- Descend one tube at a time and do not put more than one person on a tube.

Backcountry skier nears the west end of the often difficult “steepest” and icy trail traverse route to Hurricane Hill (rising in background).
Exploring Olympic in Winter

Olympic National Park Visitor Center in Port Angeles for maps, tide tables and trail condition reports. For you and your pet’s safety, pets are not allowed on trails in the park. If you plan to camp overnight in the park’s wilderness, you can experience the solitude of winter.

It can get very wet here. Snow and rain can swell streams overnight, making crossings treacherous and washing out trail sections. Camp well above flood plains. Bridges or boardwalks are very slippery when wet or icy. On the coast, storms push tides higher, creating huge waves that easily move beach logs or trap hikers on rocks. Winter storms and winds often leave behind many downed trees that may block the trail. Be prepared, always carry the 10 essentials, even for short hikes. They are: extra clothing, extra food and water, map, compass, flashlight, knife, sunglasses, matches, fire starter/candle, first aid kit.

But don’t let winter chase you inside! There are always some options for winter and spring exploration. Stop at the Olympic National Park Visitor Center in Port Angeles for maps, tide tables and trail condition reports. For you and your pet’s safety, pets are not allowed on trails in the park. If you plan to camp overnight in the park’s wilderness, you can experience the solitude of winter.

Low-Elevation Hiking

Elwha Valley: Geyser Valley Loop, West Elwha, West Lake Mills, Griff Creek, Cascade Rock trails and lower parts of the Elwha River trail.
Lake Crescent: Marymere Falls and Spruce Railroad trails.
Oxette: Cape Alava or Sand Point trails; to make a 9.3-mile loop, hike the beach between these two trails.
Mora and La Push: James Pond, Second Beach, Third Beach and Rialto Beach.
Kalaloch: Short trails to beaches, beach hikes and the forest nature trail.
Hoh: Hall of Mosses and Spruce Nature trails, or lower Hoh River trail.
Quinault: Nature trails on both sides of the lake, Irey Lake and Cascading Terraces trails, lower stretches of the North Fork and Graves Creek trails.

High Country Trips

A trip into mountains blanketed with snow offers a unique wilderness experience. Snow camping requires a lot of preparation and many safety precautions, but it is a glimpse into a season that few truly experience. Weather can change quickly. Places like Hurricane Ridge and Blizzard Pass earn their names, and whiteout conditions can occur anytime. Be prepared!

Hurricane Ridge offers the easiest access to winter high country. But remember the Hurricane Road is closed Monday through Thursday in winter. For safety, please observe the following rules:

• Overnight campers must get a permit at the WIC, as well as register and check with a ranger at Hurricane Ridge for camping locations.
• Plan trips for Friday or Saturday night, since the Hurricane Ridge Road is closed Monday through Thursday. If a storm forces a road closure at other times, you may need to install tire chains and have a shovel in case of a snowy descent. Use caution as plow operators may not see you! If you are locked in uphill from the gate, call (360) 565-3000 ext. 0 (before 5:30 p.m.) or (360) 417-2459 after hours, from the pay phone at Heart O’ the Hills.
• Because of the risk of sudden storms, winter overnight parking is not allowed at Hurricane Ridge. You must park 3.3 miles below the ridge at Third Peak. Check with rangers at Hurricane to see if a shuttle is available.
• Winter camps must be located away from the Hurricane Ridge parking lot and out of sight of ski/snowshoe trails. Check with a ranger for suggested locations.
• Use a camp stove. Campfires are prohibited.
• Share the trails—avoid walking or snowshoeing in ski tracks.
• In emergencies, dial 911 from the Hurricane Ridge Visitor Center foyer.
• Check avalanche conditions and carry beacons (see page 7).

Restoring the Elwha

Set to begin in 2011, the largest dam removal in U.S. history will free the Elwha River and allow the return of all five species of Pacific salmon to over 70 miles of pristine river and stream habitat within Olympic National Park. The salmon’s return will restore the entire ecosystem and the lifeblood of the Lower Elwha Klallam people, who have lived along the Elwha River for countless generations and are primary partners of the National Park Service in this landmark project. With less than two years left until dam removal begins, the park, tribe and many others are working to be ready.

• A park greenhouse was completed last fall and will produce hundreds of thousands of native plants for restoring over 700 acres of land that will re-emerge after the reservoirs are drained.
• Two water treatment plants to protect the area’s water supply during and after dam removal will be finished in early 2010.
• Construction of a fish hatchery for the Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe to produce salmon and steelhead to help restore the river's fish populations will begin early in the year.

When dam removal is complete, the river will once again be freed to link and enrich plant, animal and human communities from mountains to sea. For more information, check www.nps.gov/olym/ or ask for the park’s Freeing the Elwha brochure.