

Olympic National Park Update

The Quarterly Newsletter of Olympic National Park

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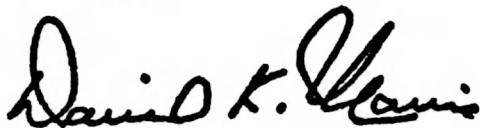
As we look towards spring and the busy season, we see some big changes in store. For the first time, as directed by Congress, the National Park Service will be collecting fees for recreation-related activities such as parking and overnight backcountry use. We've done our best to design a fee structure that will cause minimal financial impact to park visitors, while still demonstrating for Congress the feasibility of using fees to help cover the costs of maintaining a national park.

At Olympic, proceeds from the new fees will go towards completing a number of much-needed and long-overdue projects. Replacement of the Ozette information kiosk and outdated exhibits throughout the park are high priorities, as is improved campground maintenance. Park maintenance crews will build new picnic tables and fire grates for park campgrounds, and new doors will be installed in campground restrooms, making them wheelchair accessible. In the park's backcountry, fees will fund trail maintenance, privy improvement and revegetation work.

Assessment and repair of this winter's storm damage will be another important element of our spring and summer workplan. Trail crew members are already at work replacing the Sol Duc Falls bridge, and this autumn will replace the Kimta Creek bridge in the Quinault area, both of which were destroyed by winter storms. As more areas are uncovered by melting snow, we will provide further updates on trail conditions and openings.

As ever, we welcome your questions, comments and suggestions about what you read here. Barb Maynes, the park's public information specialist, can be reached at (360) 452-4501, extension 207.

Sincerely,



David K. Morris
Superintendent

Park Staff Prepares for Summer

Friday, March 29 is the opening day for most park campgrounds. As of that date, Elwha, Fairholm, Heart O'the Hills, Hoh, July Creek, Kalaloch, Mora, North Fork,

Ozette, Queets, Sol Duc and Staircase campgrounds will be open.

The remaining park campgrounds (Altaire, Deer Park, Dosewallips, Graves Creek and South Beach) will open later in the season.

Altaire and South Beach campgrounds will open May 23, in time for the Memorial Day weekend, while the opening dates for Deer Park, Dosewallips and Graves Creek are dependent on snow melt and road clearing.

High country road openings are likely to be later than usual because of this winter's heavy snowpack -- 113% of average at Hurricane Ridge. At present, the park road crew anticipates opening the Deer Park Road in early June and the Obstruction Point and Hurricane Hill Roads by mid July. Weather and snow conditions may delay these openings. No date has been set for opening the Dosewallips Road -- park crews must clear approximately 1,000 yards of debris before the road can open. The Olympic Hot Springs Road and the Graves Creek Roads are blocked by slides; both should re-open by mid to late April.

Storm Damage Closes Backcountry Areas

The Sol Duc Falls Bridge, which crosses the Sol Duc River about one mile from the trailhead has been closed after structural inspections revealed major cracks in the logs (or "stringers") that support the bridge. Inspectors theorize the cracks were caused by late December's rain-soaked snowfall. Park trail crews have begun work to replace the bridge, and are anticipating completion by early July.

For the next several weeks, the Sol Duc Trail, trailhead parking lot and the Sol Duc Road beyond the campground will be closed to allow trail crew personnel to safely transport construction materials to the bridge site. Crews hope to have all materials

in place by mid-April and will reopen the road, parking lot and trail at that time.

The Kimta Creek Bridge on the North Fork Trail near Quinault was destroyed this winter by a fallen tree. Loss of this bridge dictates closure of the North Fork trail to all use beyond Francis Creek. Plans to replace the bridge are underway and construction will begin later this summer. Two other bridges along the North Fork trail -- over Stalding and Three Prune Creeks -- will also be replaced this fall.

The North Fork Trail is part of the popular "Press Expedition route", leading from the Elwha Valley over Low Divide to the Quinault Valley. Hikers planning a cross-park hike this summer are encouraged to use alternate routes across the park. For more information, call the Wilderness Information Center at (360) 452-0300.



Big Snow Year at Hurricane Ridge

After several years of below-average snowpack, Hurricane Ridge recorded a maximum depth of 12 feet of snow, making this year's snowpack 113% of average -- a

tenfold increase over last year. Deeper snow meant more activity at the downhill ski area, as all lifts were open throughout the winter. Approximately 1,400 people participated in ranger-led snowshoe walks this year. The deep snow and good weekend weather in January and February resulted in a higher number of visitors to the Ridge this year.

New Fees Will Benefit Olympic's Visitors and Resources

As most people now know, government funding has not kept pace with national park needs in recent years, resulting in millions of dollars of backlogged projects. In response, Congress authorized the Recreation Fee Demonstration Program, directing the National Park Service, and several other agencies, to implement a 3-year test program to see if user fees can help offset budgetary shortfalls.

Under this program, new moneys collected at Olympic will be returned to the National Park Service. Eighty percent of that amount will be retained by Olympic to fund visitor use, maintenance and resource management projects. These projects include parkwide trail maintenance, repair and upgrade of park roads, maintenance of historic structures and new accessible nature trails. The remaining 20% will help fund maintenance and resource backlogs throughout the national park system.

New fees at Olympic include a \$3 charge for RV sewage dump station use, a \$1 per day parking fee at Ozette, and increased and new fees at some park campgrounds. Entrance fees went from \$5.00 to \$10.00 in January, with annual passes now \$20.00. A

program to collect fees for overnight backcountry use will be finalized and announced soon. Revenue from the backcountry fee program will go directly to support backcountry projects such as trail maintenance and revegetation.



Elwha River and Ecosystem Restoration

The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process on Elwha restoration was concluded on December 23, when the Record of Decision (ROD) was signed on the Elwha River Ecosystem Restoration Implementation EIS. The ROD endorsed the Department of the Interior's plans for dam removal, sediment management and ecosystem restoration. In its 1998 budget proposal, the Clinton Administration included \$21.8 million for the purchase of the two Elwha hydroelectric projects and another \$3.1 million for final planning and designs for dam removal and the river restoration process. The President's budget proposal is now before Congress.

Discussions Continue On Mountain Goat Management

The NPS and the Department of the Interior continue discussions with Congressman Norm Dicks' office, aimed at reaching a mutual understanding regarding non-native mountain goat management in Olympic National Park. This most recent round of talks began in December in response to concerns raised by Congressman Norm Dicks, as well as many members of the public. During this interim discussion period, the Environmental Impact Statement process remains on hold.



Over 1,500 Public Comments Received on Lake Crescent Management Plan/EIS

The 150-day public comment period for the Lake Crescent Management Plan/EIS ended March 19. Over 1,500 comment letters were received and park staff has now begun the process of reviewing and analyzing them. Substantive comments will be addressed in the final version the plan, which is targeted for release later this year.

The Lake Crescent Management Plan/EIS was released October 11, 1996. A 60-day public comment period was originally scheduled, but was extended by an additional 90 days, through March 19. Participation was lively at the two public meetings held in mid-January.

New Housing at Kalaloch to be Completed This Month

Construction is nearly complete on the new 12-person bunkhouse in the NPS housing area at Kalaloch. The bunkhouse will replace three old and dilapidated mobile homes. Budgeted at \$725,000, this construction is funded through a congressional appropriation specifically targeted for park service employee housing. The bunkhouse will be ready for use when seasonal and temporary employees report for work early this summer.

Washington Conservation Corps Helps Park

Two Washington Conservation Corps crews are supplying much-needed assistance with trail repair and construction. One crew is building a new accessible interpretive trail near the NPS Quinault River Ranger Station, while the second is repairing storm-damaged beach trails along the Kalaloch strip. The Washington Conservation Corps, part of the Americorps program, is designed to help individuals 18 - 25 years old to gain work experience while receiving credit towards college tuition. Olympic's two crews are comprised of individuals from the Forks and Quinault areas.

Campground Improvements

Park maintenance crews have completed the renovation at Fairholm campground, leaving behind new tent pads, enlarged parking pads and new picnic tables and fire grates. Comfort stations were also improved, with more energy-efficient light fixtures and

universally accessible facilities. Sol Duc campground now has new water and electrical mains, the old ones having been replaced this winter by park maintenance crews.

Cushman Land Exchange Complete

The City of Tacoma and Olympic National Park no longer dispute whether the Cushman Reservoir inundates park lands when the reservoir is at full basin, thanks to a land swap and boundary change finalized on February 28.

Resolution of the issue was made possible in 1992, when Congressman Norm Dicks successfully promoted legislation authorizing the Secretary of the Interior to negotiate a land exchange and park boundary change. Through cooperation with the Washington State Department of Natural Resources, the City of Tacoma purchased parcels of state land that were located within the park. This land was then exchanged for the park lands affected by the Cushman Reservoir.

The flooding of park land had posed a possible obstacle to licensing of the Cushman dam and hydroelectric plant by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), a requirement for continued operation. The park is grateful to the City of Tacoma, the Skokomish Tribe, the Save Our Lakes Coalition and others for their help in bringing this issue to closure.

Employees On the Move

Olympic has recently welcomed several new employees, and bid farewell to others. Mark O'Neill and Cody Cole have moved to the Mora area, as the district and subdistrict rangers, respectively. Dan Messaros, a seasonal ranger at Lake Crescent for the past two summers, has moved into a permanent position at Ozette as that area's new subdistrict ranger. Loretta Hansen, a 19-year veteran of the park has been named the new Fee Program Coordinator. Mike Danisiewicz will move to Hurricane Ridge from Kalaloch where he has been the subdistrict ranger for the past four years. Mike replaces Jane Hendrick, who is now an instructor at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center in Georgia. George Leite, who has worked at Quinault for the past few years, will move to a permanent position at Independence National Historical Park in Philadelphia.

Park Visitation

Visitation for the first two months of 1997 showed a 29% increase over January and February of last year. Some of the increase is linked to last year's 7-month closure of the Hoh Road after a major washout. Increased visitation has also been noted in other areas of the park, especially Kalaloch and Quinault. As of February 28, there had been 387,670 visits to the park. Visitation for 1996 totaled approximately 4.3 million.

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<http://www.nps.gov/olym/>

Inside This Issue:

- Spring Opening Underway
- Initial Storm Damage Assessments
- Trail Construction and Repair
- New Employees