

Public Comments Sought for I-90 Expansion, Wildlife Bridge Proposals

The following article was adapted with permission from a release by the Wildlife Bridges Coalition



Artist's conception of wildlife bridge near Easton.

Recently, ALPS joined with over 30 conservation groups to form the I-90 Wildlife Bridges Coalition, an advocate for high wildlife standards in the I-90 Snoqualmie Pass East Project. The freeway expansion can actually improve the situation for wildlife with new structures that allow wildlife to safely travel over or under the freeway. There is a need for safe passage in the central Cascades of Washington for wildlife and motorists. The reasons for wildlife crossings on this section of I-90 are:

- The project area bisects a critical connective link in the north-south movement of wildlife in the Cascades Range.
- Conservation groups and Congress spent over \$72 million to protect 34,000 acres of habitat just north and south of the interstate to maintain wildlife corridors through The Cascades Conservation Partnership.
- Across the country, thousands of motorists are injured annually in collisions with large animals.

- In the United States, scientists estimate that over one million animals are killed on our roads each year. Within the 15-mile project area alone, in the last ten years more than 240 deer and elk were killed by motorists.
- Critical waterways and local creeks flow under Interstate 90 that provide aquatic habitat and clean water.
- On average, 27,000 vehicles a day travel over Snoqualmie Pass, many of them semi-trucks. Demand is expected to increase steadily over the coming years.

Join us in telling the Washington State Department of Transportation that high-quality wildlife crossings are a critical component to this project.

Public hearings to solicit comments on this project will be held at

the following dates and places (all are from 4 - 8 p.m.):

- June 29th in Ellensburg at the Ellensburg Inn
- June 30th in Snoqualmie at the Summit at Snoqualmie Pass
- July 7th in Seattle at South Lake Union Naval Reserve Building

Mark your calendars to attend a meeting, and visit the following webpage for directions to the meetings and other ways to take action:

www.i90wildlifebridges.org. **We need your voice—you can write a letter, send an email, and sign our petition today!** Your voice can truly make a difference in this project, and can ensure wildlife crossing structures to make the road safer for people and animals.

Contact the Wildlife Bridges office with any questions at 206.675.9747 ext 208 or info@i90wildlifebridges.org.

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Middle Fork Snoqualmie Updates

ATM Plan Released

The Snoqualmie district of the Mt. Baker Snoqualmie National Forest has released the long-awaited revised Decision Notice for the Middle Fork Snoqualmie Access and Travel Management plan (ATM). Regular readers of the Alpine will recall that efforts to get the ATM plan out have been going on for some time. Its release is the product of many hours of hard work by stakeholders (including ALPS) and also by Forest Service personnel—who deserve a big thank you for seeing this effort through!

The ATM plan will shape the future of the transportation “infrastructure” of the Middle Fork valley. The centerpiece of the ATM is the conversion of the Middle Fork road above Dingford Creek into a multi-use trail. This will turn eight miles of dusty, potholed road into a new low-elevation trail, giving access to the upper Middle Fork valley. In addition, it will close off a number of spur roads leading to the river, which have become squalid, muddy messes. The Middle Fork trail between Taylor River and Hardscrabble Creek will open to mountain bikes every other day for a three-year trial period.

ALPS and other organizations recommended that the Middle Fork road be converted to trail beyond Taylor River. Although this will not happen as part of the ATM, the plan nonetheless represents a huge step forward for the valley, which in the past has been plagued by dumping, vandalism and wild shooting.

Middle Fork Paving EA Expected

The Federal Highways Administration is hoping for an August

release of the Environmental Assessment for the Middle Fork Snoqualmie paving project. The Middle Fork road could be paved from the current end of pavement to the Taylor River area. ALPS has been monitoring this project from the beginning. ALPS board members visited the valley this spring with FHWA engineers and consultants to assess progress and view critical areas. While there is still much to worry about, it seems that the FHWA is getting the message that conservationists will accept the project only if it is done on the existing road prism as much as possible, with minimal disturbance of new ground. The number of trees cut also needs to be minimized. ALPS does not want a cleared swath all the way up the valley, and wants the Middle Fork road to remain a “road through the woods.” ALPS will be closely watching the plans as they develop.

Pratt Connector Trail Still Looming

ALPS board members met recently with Forest Service personnel from the Snoqualmie Ranger District to discuss the Pratt connector trail project. This would build a new trail on the southeast side of the lower Middle Fork Snoqualmie from the Taylor River to the Pratt River valley. ALPS opposes this trail project, and would like to see the Pratt remain as it is – close by, yet remote and difficult to access, an undisturbed refuge for wildlife. The Pratt valley is a remarkably lonely place – very close to Seattle and I-90, yet hard to get to because one must ford the Middle Fork Snoqualmie River to reach the trail. The ford is

difficult in spring, when the habitat value of the Pratt is highest for species such as bears emerging from hibernation. It is easy in the fall, when bears and other species have moved to the high country. It’s a near-perfect setup for both animals and humans.

ALPS is advocating putting wildlife needs ahead of human recreational desires in the Pratt due to its pristine lowland qualities (only 900 feet elevation at its mouth). We are urging the Forest Service to leave the Pratt as-is, and instead build new trails to middle elevation viewpoints near the Taylor River. ALPS members have made numerous field trips to investigate trail building opportunities in the Taylor Junction area. These trips have turned up a number of extraordinary places where new trails could be built without going in to a big “blank spot on the map,” as the Pratt connector would. A system of ledges on the lower and middle slopes of Garfield Mountain – the “Garfield Balconies” – have superlative views up and down the scenic Middle Fork valley. Other similar places are also found on lower Quartz Mountain, and on “Stegosaurus Butte,” a knoll which stands above the Middle Fork just south of where the Taylor River joins it. New trails built to these places would have far fewer adverse impacts on wildlife habitat, and would likely be far more popular than a trail down valley to the Pratt. The new Middle Fork campground is currently under construction near Taylor River, and trails to nearby viewpoints would provide splendid opportunities for campers and all other users to enjoy the “backyard

More updates in the next issue.

Trustees Election Ballot

The terms of four ALPS Trustees expired last year, so an election is required for the next three-year term, which will be 2004-2007. (Yes, we're late as usual.)

Trustees Mike Pierson, Mike Town and Natalie Williams are running for re-election.

Charlie Raymond of Seattle was recently appointed to fill a board vacancy in the 2003-2006 term. Charlie is an emeritus professor at the University of Washington's Department of Earth and Space Sciences. His area of study is glaciology and ice sheet dynamics. He has been an active member of ALPS for many years. Currently, he is involved in ORV and snowmobile issues, particularly on the Cle Elum Ranger District.

Trustee Dick van Haagen has chosen not to run but will remain a very active member. He has been a long-time trustee, serving first in the 1970s and 1980s. He was president in the early 1980s and returned to the board three years ago. His scientific background has proven invaluable to ALPS, the DUSEL controversy being just one example. He and his wife Nancy often travel to Eritrea where she does follow-up work on her PhD thesis, the study of social conditions in that country. They adopted an Eritrean daughter, Saba.

The Trustees will fill Van's position later and have provided a place for you to suggest someone. If you yourself are interested or would like to attend one of our meetings, please contact Don at 425-883-0646 or dlparks@jps.net.

Here are brief biographies of the candidates.

MIKE PIERSON is an attorney and a principal at the Seattle law firm of Riddell Williams PS. He is currently an ALPS trustee. He has

represented various conservation and environmental groups, and joined the ALPS board after representing it before the Forest Practices Appeals Board in ALPS' successful challenge to an attempt to build logging roads into the Scatter Creek area. He is married and has two teenage sons whom he still hopes to convince that hiking can be as great as basketball.

MIKE TOWN, Duvall, teaches high school AP Environmental Science. Has been an ALPS trustee for the last two years. His specialties include on-the-ground knowledge of the northern Alpine Lakes area. Currently he is an active member on the Wild Sky Wilderness campaign and has testified both to the House and the Senate on the Wild Sky bill. Mike lives in a solar-powered house.

NATALIE K. WILLIAMS, Seattle, is a Boeing System Engineer. She has been a trustee since 1995 and is in charge of membership. Her major interests are preserving wilderness and old growth, preserving access to the high alpine for climbing purposes, and preserving space for hiker-only trails.

Please mark the ballot below, tear out this page, fold it and tape it closed. Mail to the address on the backside of this sheet.

- MIKE PIERSON**
- MIKE TOWN**
- NATALIE K. WILLIAMS**
-

(Suggested New Trustee)



BILL BEYERS

Early summer day at Ingalls Lake.

**DON PARKS, PRESIDENT
ALPINE LAKES PROTECTION SOCIETY
P. O. BOX 27646
SEATTLE WA 98165**

Cle Elum District Plans Trail Changes

District Proposes to Swap Motor Bikes from Domerie Peak to Sasse Ridge

The Cle Elum Ranger District is proposing changes to several of its trails. Most are minor reroutings to correct damage from overuse and/or misuse.

The biggest one, however, would close one trail to motorbike use and open another. In 2002, the district temporarily closed the south end of the Domerie Peak (aka Mt. Baldy) Trail #1308 to motorbikes because of the damage the Northwest Motorcycle Association had caused in its attempts to rebuild it. (See Alpine, 2002, Issue No. 1.)

The trail was closed southward from the saddle that is just north of Thomas Mountain. The closure was to last until the district could resolve such issues as trail engineering, alternate routes and access. The latter was very important, as it turned out that the Forest Service had no easement across private land to reach the trail from the south.

These issues proved to be almost insurmountable, so on January 3, new district ranger Rodney Smoldon proposed that the entire length of Trail 1308 be closed to motorbikes, from the south end near the mouth of Lake Cle Elum to the north end near French Cabin Creek. To compensate the bikers, the district would reopen the Sasse Ridge Trail #1340 from Hex Mountain north to the trail's intersection with the road Plum Creek Timber Company built to access its timber in the headwaters of the West Fork Teanaway.

Sasse Ridge offers some spectacular views, but it is also very fragile with lots of loose rocks and narrow, steep sections of trail. It also

forms the western edge of the Teanaway Recreation Area. Many conservationists believe there are too many motorbike trails in the area already. ALPS considers this an unacceptable tradeoff and has written a letter to the district expressing our displeasure.

Other trail projects being considered are listed below:

Sasse Mountain/Corral Creek Trails: From Hex Mountain south, the Sasse Ridge (or Sasse Mountain) Trail is heavily used by motorbikes. Just south of the peak, the ground is flat and open, with the trail as wide as I-5. The Corral Creek Trail, added to the trail system in the early 1990s, takes off to the southeast from Hex Mountain. Combined with some travel on Road 4305, the two trails provide a decent loop trip. Both are steep and rutted in places. Part of the Sasse Ridge Trail and part of the Corral Creek would be rerouted to provide a lower grade.

Jolly Mountain: Lower the grade on the last half-mile of the northern approach to the summit. This would increase safety, eliminate two-foot deep ruts and make the trail easier to maintain.

Davis Peak Trail Bridge: This 40-year-old bridge and its abutments are wearing out. The proposed replacement is a steel structure.

Waptus Pass: Reroute 900 feet of trail at the pass to lower the grade. Rehabilitate the old trail. This would reduce rutting, eliminate new bypass trails and restore vegetation.

Silver Creek: This would repair damage from increased mountain bike use alongside the spectacularly beautiful meadow in the upper basin, as well as build a new trail from a ridgetop parking lot down to the trail, just north of the twin sentinel spires guarding the upper entrance to the Silver Creek valley. This new trail would replace a steep user-built trail that is eroding badly. About 2000 feet total would be involved. *ALPS suggests the district consider moving the parking lot back down hill to discourage overuse.*

Manastash Ridge: Reduce the grade on several steep sections of trail, totaling a mile, to minimize erosion that has been a big problem.

Let the district know what you think. Contact Trails Manager Tim Foss, Cle Elum Ranger Station, 803 W. Second St., Cle Elum, WA 98922 or e-mail him at tfoss@fs.fed.us.

Cumulative Effects Rules not Supported by Court

In March of 2003 ALPS and others submitted a petition to the Forest Practices Board (FPB) asking it to adopt rules for cumulative effects. The FPB denied the request, which led us to file an action in Superior Court, represented by Peter Goldman of WFLC. On June 8, Judge Wm. McPhee ruled against us. The decision, if left to stand, would allow continuing piecemeal destruction of wildlife habitat across the State. ALPS believes that Forest Practice Applications must be considered responsibly, in the context of cutting plans for an entire drainage. ALPS and the other plaintiffs are considering their options including an appeal.

What's Next in Land Acquisition Efforts?

By Jim Chapman

Thanks to \$3.4M that Congress approved last fall, the last of 21 "Option Lands" parcels left over from the 1999 I-90 Land Exchange became National Forest land on March 18. A celebration of this event was held in Cle Elum on April 7. Totalling 2,574 acres, the final parcels included Salmon la Sac Creek and Little Salmon la Sac Creek; Branch Creek along the northwest shore of Lake Cle Elum; and Section 33 across Lake Kachess from the campground.

Obtaining the option lands was the primary focus of The Cascade Conservation Partnership's five-year campaign, but it was far from the only one. The Partnership and other groups were able to raise \$76.9 million for the purchase of 37,606 acres. Over 20% of the money was raised privately while public sources provided the rest. The vast majority of these lands will become part of the National Forest system; most of the rest will be owned by the State of Washington and the remainder by the City of Tacoma.

RECAP

The federal Land and Water Conservation Fund provided \$40.7 million to buy 13,583 acres of option lands, 4,711 acres of I-90 Exchange "escrow" lands set aside when the Forest Service had to withdraw lands with marbled murrelets – 4,472 acres targeted by the Mountains to Sound Greenway Trust, 5,348 acres along the Pacific Crest Trail and 36 acres along Nason Creek near Berne – as well as to buy back 1,844 Fossil Creek acres near Mt. St. Helens that were traded away in the exchange and to buy back 717 acres traded to Weyer-

haeuser in the Huckleberry Exchange. The vast majority of these lands were acquired from Plum Creek Timber Company.

The state Fish & Wildlife Department has used \$6.9 million in federal Fish & Wildlife Service grant money to acquire 746 acres thus far near Lake Easton, with another 1,100 acres pending.

The federal Forest Legacy Program provided \$1.5 million to keep 669 acres around Lake Easton and Swamp Lake from being developed.

The Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program provided \$6.75 million to buy 597 acres at Moolock Lakes near Mt. Si.

The federal government purchased another 221 acres at Swamp Lake to mitigate impacts from the Bureau of Reclamation's repair work at Lake Keechelus Dam.

Tacoma Public Utilities provided \$350,000 to buy the land in the 302-acre northern parcel of Sawmill Creek. Private funds were used to purchase the timber, which the Cascade Land Conservancy holds as a conservation easement.

Private money was also used to buy 2,492 acres from Plum Creek in the Manastash Roadless Area, 1,341 acres from Longview Fibre near the mouth of Negro Creek and 1,044 acres from American Forest Resources along the Yakima River.

Many thanks go to the Greenway, the Trust for Public Land, and the Cascade Land Conservancy for their help in acquiring these lands.

HCP GRANTS FOR YAKIMA RIVER

The state Department of Fish & Wildlife will be acquiring the 1,100

acres near Lake Easton with Phase II and Phase III grants from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's Habitat Conservation Program.

The state Department of Natural Resources will provide a one-third local match by transferring to the Department of Fish & Wildlife 320 acres of trust land just west of Cabin Creek, plus 70 acres a mile east of Easton called Nelson Siding and 185 acres on the north side of I-90 a mile west of the Roslyn Interchange called Bull Frog. These three parcels are estimated to be worth \$4.11 million, far more than what is needed for the match. In addition, DNR will transfer 162 acres surrounding the Easton Airstrip and valued at \$1.72 million, to State Parks. This is all part of its \$67 million Trust Land Transfer Program for 2005-2007, which the state legislature just approved.

Interestingly, all the parcels except Cabin Creek were once part of the proposed Ahtanum Land Exchange, featured in the Fall 2004 issue of the Alpine. Now only two Kittitas County DNR parcels are left in the exchange – 640 acres on Easton Ridge a mile east of the West Nelson interchange and about 480 acres just east of Cole Creek and two miles south of Lake Easton.

OLD CASCADE TUNNEL

Purchase of the mile-long, 200-foot-wide property in the middle of the three-mile long tunnel at Stevens Pass is almost a done deal.

Tye Valley Tunnel Co. will donate the property and Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway will sell its mineral rights for a small fee.

The Forest Service inspected the tunnel for hazardous materials in

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

late November. Although submitting a favorable report, it did find debris in the federally-owned east end of the tunnel that was left over from Boeing – University of Washington experiments in the 1960s.

The Mountaineers Foundation should accept the deeds from both BNSF and Tye Valley Tunnel Co., combine them into one deed and turn it over to the federal government by this summer.

TIETON RIVER

As had been feared, Congress rescinded money that it had originally appropriated to buy land along the Tieton River.

After the Forest Service refused to use the money for this purpose because of mineral rights issues, we had hoped it would be reprogrammed for Alpine Lakes projects. The Nature Conservancy recently announced that it purchased another 2,000 acres, bringing its ownership there to 5,270 acres. This is half the 10,400 acres it intends to acquire and now turn over to the state Department of Fish & Wildlife through the Washington Wildlife & Recreation Program.

PROSPECTS FOR FY2006

Administration efforts to rein in domestic spending will present a big challenge to land acquisition groups this next year. But the administration is requesting some money for lands of interest to ALPS. These include:

- \$1.0 for the Pacific Crest Trail. This could apply to any PCT property in Washington, Oregon or California. ALPS will push for Stampede Pass.
- \$1.2 million for I-90 “Checkerboard Lands”. These are lands that had been dropped from the

I-90 Exchange in mid-1998. One or two parcels along Manastash Ridge are the most likely candidates.

Because they have the administration’s support, most of The Partnership’s individual partners, including ALPS, will be lobbying for them. But there are at least four other high priority areas:

- Parcels along the Wallace River, northeast of Gold Bar, which could be part of the proposed Wild Sky Wilderness Area.
- The middle parcel along Sawmill Creek.
- Lands along the Carbon River just outside Mt. Rainier National Park.
- Little Naches Forks along the Kittitas-Yakima County Line.

PARTNERSHIP SETS MONEY ASIDE

Finally, The Partnership is setting some money aside to help others complete a few key transactions. One that should have closed by the time this goes to press is for 200 acres on Jumpoff Ridge (aka West Gunn) just east of Index, which the Cascade Land Conservancy is negotiating. Because the terrain is so steep, it is costing only a bit more than \$100,000.

Other targeted transactions will be the Little Naches Forks; increase in the match for the HCP grants; and resolution of mineral, oil and gas issues, particularly in Negro Creek.

We can all be grateful for what The Cascade Conservation Partnership has accomplished these past five years, but there is still a lot of work to be done.

NOVA Funding on the Cle Elum District

A breakdown of Nonhighway and Off-Road Vehicle Activities (NOVA) funding for trail projects is listed below, as reported in a recent issue of the *North Kittitas County Tribune*. NOVA funding comes from the state gas tax and is intended to put some of this money to work when people burn gas on roads beyond the state system. Up until a couple of years ago, state law weighted expenditures very heavily toward ORV trails. The formula was later changed to make the funding somewhat more equitable, after surveying users of non-highway roads to determine how many were using them for motorized vs. non-motorized recreation.

- Planning for a new campground (Camp Kittitas) - \$13,164
- Purchasing trail maintenance equipment (ATV trails) - \$32,500
- Maintaining trails near Cle Elum (non-motorized) - \$82,000
- Providing ORV trail Crew - \$137,331
- Maintaining ORV trails - \$190,746
- Educating the public in Cle Elum District - \$152,920
- Restoring Kachess campground - \$100,000
- Maintaining campsites - \$99,446
- Planning to reroute motorized trails - \$17,880
- Moving & rebuilding North Fork Taneum Trail - \$96,300
- Maintaining Naches motorized trails - \$53,293
- Educating the public about ORV use in Naches District - \$37,050



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Balsamorhiza in bloom near Lake Cle Elum.

ART DAY



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