

Wild Sky Passage Celebrated



HARRY ROMBERG

Aerial view of Lake Isabel.



KEVIN GERAGHTY

Topping out on Ragged Ridge above the town of Index, looking toward Gunn Peak on left and Mt. Baring in center.

On May 30th 2008, Senator Patty Murray, Congressman Rick Larsen, members of their staffs, and Undersecretary of Agriculture in charge of the Forest Service Mark Rey joined nearly a hundred conservationists and local residents on the banks of the North Fork Skykomish river at Index Washington to celebrate the recent enactment of the Wild Sky Wilderness.

As low clouds broke up and sunlight illuminated the snowmelt filled North Fork with forested slopes and peaks of the new Wilderness behind, Murray, Larsen and others reflected on the long, often rough trail that finally led to Wilderness designation for 106,577 acres of the Skykomish watershed north of Highway 2. When the Wild Sky campaign began in 2000, no one foresaw just how long and rough that trail was to be. A roadblock appeared in the form

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of House Resources Committee chair Richard Pombo, Republican of California, who held up the bill for years because it included areas which had once been logged and contained some old roads. After California voters sent Pombo back to his ranch in 2006, the bill passed the House but then stalled in the Senate because Senator Tom Coburn, Republican of Oklahoma, decided it would “cost too much money,” based on a wildly inflated cost estimate from the Republican Congressional Budget Office.

To their everlasting credit, Murray and Larsen held firm and never gave up. It’s possible that they might have gotten the bill past Pombo had they removed 16,000 acres of critical lowlands and salmon streams. Had they done so, no one could have blamed them. Indeed, even some in the conservation community urged them to do so. But, displaying a level of commitment, and perseverance all too rare in politics, they kept the faith, and kept the biologically valuable lowlands in the bill.

Their tenacity, and Murray’s determined efforts to thwart Coburn, have resulted in a new Wilderness area not quite like any other. As an “on the ground” group, ALPS was involved from the beginning in determining boundaries for the new Wilderness, pushing for the inclusion of lowland forests and salmon streams. Unlike most existing Wilderness areas which protect mostly high country, fully 30 percent of the Wild Sky Wilderness is below 3000 feet.

Thanks to some unusual geography, salmon and steelhead can ascend and spawn in the North Fork Skykomish to within five miles of the Cascade crest. One or both banks of the North Fork



MARK LAWLER

Sunset Lake, in the center of the new Wild Sky Wilderness, with old growth forests in the valley of Trout Creek below.

are within the new Wilderness in many places. Along with tributary streams, it adds up to about 25 miles of salmon spawning streams in Wild Sky, something almost totally lacking in previously designated Wilderness areas in the Cascades.

Wild Sky also protects a lot of forest, something near 80,000 acres. There are about 60,000 acres of higher elevation old growth forests (above 3000 feet.) The Wilderness also includes about 14,000 acres of rare low elevation old growth below 3000 feet, and, a particular point of pride for ALPS, 6000 acres of low elevation naturally regenerated second growth forests. These forests grow on the lowest, most productive sites, which is why they were the first to be logged long ago. Never replanted, they have grown back on their own and now have many trees 3 feet in diameter and over 150 feet tall. They line the banks of most of the salmon streams. Left alone,

they will be old growth within the span of a human lifetime, and are the heart of the Wild Sky Wilderness.

ALPS is frankly delighted that Wild Sky is now a reality, and wants to express its profound thanks to Patty Murray and Rick Larsen and their staffs, including, but not limited to, Jeff Bjornstad, John Engber, Karen Waters, Doug Clapp, Jamie Shimek, Jill McKinnie, Louis Lauter and Jasper MacSllarrow. Thanks to their unremitting efforts, and the efforts of many in the conservation community, Washington’s 24 year Wilderness drought is well and truly over. ■

DNR Initiates “Reiter Foothills” Planning for ORV “Park”

The Washington state Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has begun a planning process for the “Reiter Foothills” area, comprising 10,000 acres of state lands north of Index and Gold Bar.

The Reiter Foothills have been completely and totally overrun by ORVs. For years, these machines have been carving out new routes everywhere in the area, and it is impossible to go anywhere there without seeing the tremendous damage being done. DNR has done nothing to prevent hundreds of miles of motorcycle, quad and jeep routes from being carved through Foothills forests. These machines have transformed much of the area into something looking like a World War I battlefield, with muddy, eroding quagmires everywhere.

It appears that DNR wants to turn the area into an officially designated ORV “park.” They have set up a “Recreation Advisory Committee” comprised almost entirely of motorized recreation advocates. ALPS believes that the Reiter area, sandwiched as it is between the newly-designated Wild Sky Wilderness, Wallace Falls State Park, and Forks of the Sky State Park, is the wrong place for such a facility. The area is located directly above the “braided channel” reach of the Skykomish River, the most productive spawning area for anadromous fish in the entire Snohomish watershed. Streams from the Reiter area are delivering ORV-generated sediment directly into these spawning grounds.

ALPS believes it would cost tens of millions of dollars to put an ORV “park” there, although

there could never be any “right” way to accommodate such an inherently destructive form of “recreation.” Doing it “right” would require control of runoff and sedimentation, closure of user-made routes, construction of unbreachable barriers to keep ORVs confined within the area, and continuous and effective enforcement of all rules. DNR has no money for any of this, and apparently believes it can simply designate the area as an ORV sacrifice zone and walk away from it.

ALPS and other conservation groups are determined to prevent this from happening, and want DNR to stop the ongoing destruction at Reiter. No private timberland owners put up with ORVs and the damage they do. ALPS believes that by allowing uncontrolled ORV use at Reiter, DNR is failing in its most basic responsibility of protecting public trust assets. DNR may also be in violation of the Endangered Species Act by allowing uncontrolled runoff from Reiter to pour into Chinook salmon spawning grounds in the braided channel reach of the Skykomish. ALPS will continue to follow all developments closely, and will take appropriate steps as necessary. ■

The Great Outdoors is Calling

TrailsFest serves up a jam-packed day of outdoor adventure

Event details:

TrailsFest 2008
Saturday, July 19, 9 am – 4 pm
Rattlesnake Lake, North Bend
www.trailsfest.org

The great outdoors of Washington is calling! Come to **TrailsFest**, Saturday July 19, 9am - 4pm at Rattlesnake Lake in North Bend.

This outdoor extravaganza features clinics on everything from wilderness first aid to hiking with kids to backcountry cooking. Take a guided hike, tie a fly on, or climb a rock wall. Try out a new s'mores recipe, or hang out with packgoats. Visit dozens of exhibitors, including gear companies and outdoor groups. It's all at TrailsFest!

Been wanting to explore the North Cascades? Attend a clinic with Craig Romano, author of *Day Hiking – North Cascades* published by Mountaineers Books. Learn how to whip up a tasty backcountry meal in no time from the author of *Freezer Bag Cooking*. Want to be a responsible hiker with your dog? Check out the clinic on hiking with dogs and trail etiquette. Wanting to try backpacking? Go to Hilleberg the Tentmaker's clinic on smart packing and learn how to take less, still be comfortable and safe, and have lots more fun!

TrailsFest is presented every summer by Washington Trails Association. Sponsors for **TrailsFest 2008** include Hilleberg the Tentmaker, KPLU, Green Trails Maps, REI, CLIF Nectar, Outdoor Research, Gregory, Chaco, Teko, Helly Hansen, Erin Baker's Wholesome Baked Goods, Freezer Bag Cooking, and Marmot Mountain Works.

TrailsFest is your passport to the great outdoors this summer, and admission is free!

To get to TrailsFest, take I-90 to exit 32, then turn right on 436th Ave SE. Follow this road 2.7 miles to Rattlesnake Lake.

For more information on TrailsFest: (206) 625-1367 / www.trailsfest.org.

ALPS and ALF Confusion

A recent incident has made your ALPS board realize that even our own members still confuse the Alpine Lakes Protection Society (ALPS) with the Alpine Lakes Foundation (ALF). The confusion is understandable. We have similar names & goals and even share board members, but there are definite pocket-book differences.

While both organizations seek to protect the Alpine Lakes, ALF does it through funding educational projects such as the Alpine Lakes map. ALPS does it primarily through advocacy. Most importantly, ALF is a 501(c)3 organization, which means your contributions to it are tax-deductible. ALPS intentionally is not; being a 501(c)3 would limit our ability to lobby. Therefore you cannot deduct any contribution to ALPS.

There is an even bigger pocket book issue. Many companies, such as Boeing, will match charitable gifts their employees and retirees

make. Sometimes the company will place additional restrictions. For example, Boeing restricts its matching gifts to organizations that are primarily education or cultural in nature. But foremost, the gifts have to be to tax-deductible charities.

This issue was made clear by the afore-mentioned incident, which is too complicated to describe in detail. An ALPS member, who is a Boeing employee, made a contribution to ALPS and asked Boeing to match it. ALPS was not on Boeing's list of qualified recipients, so Boeing asked ALPS to provide the information needed for it to determine whether or not ALPS qualifies.

It does not, so the intended match was lost. The member later admitted that he realized after-the-fact that ALPS would not qualify. Since then, ALF has submitted its own information to Boeing to make sure it qualifies.

Tax-deductibility was the reason the Alpine Lakes Foundation was founded back in 1994. After receiving some sizeable gifts, ALPS decided that there should be a tax-deductible organization to receive them and spend the money on educational projects like the map. The ALF board members are current and past board members of ALPS but the two organizations do keep a respectable distance apart.

Any organization with an appropriate request can apply for funds from ALF. If ALF approves, the two parties sign a Fiscal Operations Agreement whose form was established when ALPS requested money for creating and printing the current Alpine Lakes map.

So the bottom line is, please keep paying your membership dues to ALPS. But if you want to make a special tax-deductible contribution, and possibly get your company to match, send that to ALF. And please be sure you remember the difference. ■

Sultan Relicensing Process Continues

ALPS has weighed in with the relicensing of Snohomish PUD's "Jackson" hydroelectric project on the Sultan River. ALPS, along with Pilchuck Audubon Society and North Cascade Conservation Council, believes that the PUD could provide far better mitigation for the project than it currently does. Much of the "mitigation" land for the project is timberland managed on 60-year rotations, essentially indistinguishable from any other industrial timberland. The PUD touts "deer forage" as one of the benefits from these lands — something that is widely available throughout the heavily

logged landscape of the Sultan watershed.

ALPS and the other groups believe the PUD should cease logging and manage its lands for older forests, which are scarce and valuable, instead of managing for early-successional species, which are abundant. ALPS and the other groups sent a letter to the Federal Energy regulatory Commission (FERC), the licensing authority, detailing our concerns. As expected, the PUD responded that it was doing a fine job, and saw no need to change anything. However, FERC asked the Washington

Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) to weigh in. In a very encouraging move, WDFW told FERC that the PUD needed to look at updating its 20-year-old habitat plan, recognizing that much has changed in two decades, including widespread logging of surrounding lands in the Sultan watershed. The WDFW also stated that late-successional species are now considered much more valuable and endangered than early-successional ones.

ALPS will continue its efforts to insure that the PUD provide real mitigation for the project instead of clearcuts. ■

Trustees Election Ballot

It's time for our annual ALPS Trustees election and we need you to vote.

Trustees Art Day and Thom Peters are running for re-election to 2008-2011 terms. Newly appointed trustee Karl Forsgaard is running for the first time.

There is room for one more trustee. The ALPS Board has 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@verizon.net.

Here are brief biographies of the candidates.

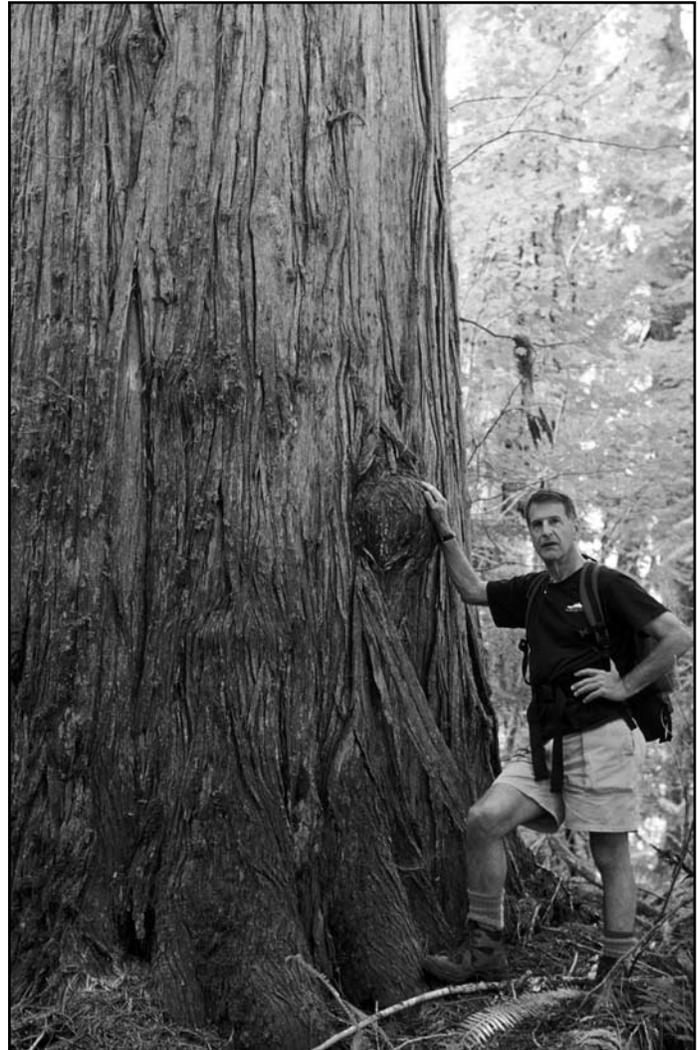
ART DAY, Seattle, has been a Trustee since 1990 and has edited the *Alpine* newsletter since 1999. Interests include hikes both high and low, all types of natural history, and the human history of the local area. He works as a physicist at Boeing.

THOM PETERS, Snohomish, has been member since 1987 and a Trustee since 1990. His main interest is recreational impacts on the physical and social settings in Wilderness. He is a board member of North Cascades Conservation Council as well as chairperson for the North Cascades chapter of Wilderness Watch. Thom is an Associate Broker in Real Estate.

KARL FORSGAARD, Mercer Island, has been doing volunteer work with ALPS since 1991, and was appointed a Trustee in January 2008. Also a board member of North Cascades Conservation Council and Mountains to Sound Greenway Trust, he works as a Staff Attorney at Washington Forest Law Center.

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

- Art Day
- Thom Peters
- Karl Forsgaard
- _____
(Suggested New Trustee)



HARRY ROMBERG

ALPS president Don Parks making friends in Hubbard Grove.

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

EIS Needed for Stevens Pass Expansion

Stevens Pass Ski Area has submitted proposals to dramatically expand its operations. Since all of its facilities are on national forest lands, the Forest Service must approve a Special Use Permit and project plans. Last year, the agency approved a 40- year extension of that permit, which essentially is an exclusive lease for those 2,400 acres of public land. Inexplicably, the Forest Service made that long-term commitment of public land without an environmental impact statement (EIS). An EIS requires an examination of alternatives, consideration of cumulative effects, identification of mitigation, and has a major role for public involvement. Now, Stevens Pass wants to start constructing more facilities, and the Sierra Club has raised the issue of complying with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). NEPA requires an EIS on federal decisions that have a significant effect on the environment- this is not optional. The other ski areas in the Cascades have used this process, and we question why Stevens Pass is avoiding this legal requirement. In fact, we question whether the Forest Service was in compliance with NEPA when it approved the permit for 40 years.

The Sierra Club, along with other conservation groups, will look at the proposals and evaluate them carefully, and has already discussed the proposal on several occasions with ski area staff. At Snoqualmie Pass, the Club and other organizations were able to reach an agreement on a substantial upgrade to ski facilities there, while deferring projects in one area until substantive studies on wildlife habitat and connectivity are conducted. That

agreement was forged within the EIS process. That same approach can be used at Stevens Pass.

Expansion into Unroaded Lands & Mature Forests

The proposed expansion would add 279 acres to the permit area, and delete 137 acres down Hwy. 2 by Tunnel Creek for a net increase of 140 acres. The draft Master Development Plan (MDP) proposes to build three new lifts and create 350 acres of new runs, add snowmaking, clear four acres of new parking lots, and increase capacity by 17 percent, to 8,710. This will impact hundreds of acres of unroaded lands, late-successional forest, wetlands, and meadows, as well as areas used by snowshoers and cross country skiers. New lifts and runs would be punched into the unroaded basin of forests and meadows around Grace Lakes and east of the Pacific Crest Trail along Big Chief Mtn. Stevens Pass says that not all those facilities will likely be built in the next seven years, but NEPA requires an analysis of the cumulative effects of all reasonably foreseeable projects. If any of these facilities are approved, the Forest Service should require substantial mitigation for the loss and fragmentation of habitat, especially unroaded lands and late-successional forest. At this point, mitigation discussions have not addressed those impacts.

Segmenting Decision Contrary to NEPA

A major controversy is over “segmenting” the decision, which is contrary to NEPA. This is when a plan is broken up into smaller parts, so that the agency can claim that each decision is not significant, and thus does not require an EIS. The ski area has

proposed to start implementing their new plan (which has not been approved) with “phase 1”, a major new construction of mountain bike trails next year. Five miles are proposed, including substantial grading, clearing of trees, bridging creeks and wetlands, and constructing large wooden ramps and banked tracks. The scale of this project could easily be determined to have significant impacts and require an EIS. While Stevens Pass says it may write an EIS on the rest of the MDP, the company’s claim that the bike development is somehow not connected to the proposed grading, clearing and construction for new winter facilities is part of our disagreement over compliance with NEPA.

Under the Bush Administration, we have seen the Forest Service and other agencies attempt to avoid their obligations under NEPA, and we will continue to be vigilant that the agency must obey the law. We have seen repeatedly that agencies make better decisions with broader support when it is done with an EIS. We will work with Stevens Pass towards that goal.

A scoping notice on the “phase 1” mountain biking facility is expected in early June. Get on the mailing list to provide comments.

For more information:

John Meriwether at Stevens Pass, jmeriwether@stevenspass.com

Sean Wetterberg, Mt Baker Snoqualmie National Forest, swetterberg@fs.fed.us



alps

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President: Don Parks
Vice President: John Villa
Membership: Natalie Williams
Treasurer: Frank Swart
Secretary: James Chapman

2005-2008

Art Day
Thom Peters
Karl Forsgaard

2006-2009

Bill Beyers
James Chapman
Kevin Geraghty
Charlie Raymond

2007-2010

Natalie Williams
Mike Pierson
Karyl Winn



MARK LAWLER

View from West Cady ridge toward the Monte Cristo peaks.



The newsletter of the Alpine Lakes Protection Society (ALPS). ALPS is dedicated to protection of the Alpine Lakes area in Washington's Cascades.

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