

DNR plans new trails in Middle Fork and I-90

By Rick McGuire

The Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is moving ahead with plans to develop new trails in the

Mailbox Peak / Granite Creek area of the Middle Fork Snoqualmie valley. Most of the more than 20,000 acres of DNR lands in the Middle Fork have been protected in the Mt. Si and Middle Fork

Snoqualmie Natural Resource Conservation Areas. NRCA's are the state's near-equivalent of Wilderness. If the Alpine Lakes Wilderness expansion (currently working its way through Congress) is enacted, the combination of state and federal protected lands in the Middle Fork will surpass any other lowland valley in the Cascades.

Now that the jobs of land acquisition and protection are largely finished, DNR is turning its attention to recreational development. Construction of a new trail to the top of Mailbox Peak at the entrance of the valley is currently underway. It is expected that trails to Granite Creek and Granite Lakes will be built soon. DNR is also looking at a number of other options for new trails to viewpoints and other attractions, and plans to initiate a public planning process to look at how and

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May Creek Waterfall above Chainlink Falls at Reiter Forest.

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KARL FORSGAARD

Future Management of the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest



CHARLIE RAYMOND

Tacquala Meadow and Cathedral Rock near head of the Cle Elum River.

By Charlie Raymond

In June of 2011 the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest issued a "Proposed Action for Forest Plan Revision." This Proposed Action (PA) lays out the initial Forest Service vision for changes to the existing Forest Land Management Plan. It is intended to account for new scientific information, changes in the resource base, and current social conditions. The PA text, related maps and background information can be found on the OWNF web site at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/okawen/>.

The PA is based on a multi-year effort of outreach and collaboration to identify the range of issues in the public mind including those of environmental organizations such as ALPS. (See the article by Don Parks in the *Alpine* of 2006, Issue 2.) The publication of the PA and an associated Letter of Intent begins the formal environmental review required by the standing rules for Forest Planning and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). It is followed by a period of public comment (which concluded on the 28th of

September, 2011), development of a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) with a range of Alternatives for public review and comment (expected in 2012) and a decision in a Final Environmental Impact statement (FEIS).

The present Land Management Plan for the Wenatchee portion of the OWNF was adopted in 1990, concluding the first round of Forest Planning mandated by the National Forest Management Act of 1976. Subsequently, significant protections were added through amendment by the regional

Northwest Forest Plan of 1994. It introduced Late Successional Reserves, Eastside Screens for dry forest, the Aquatic Conservation Strategy and related standards and guidelines. These positive developments were motivated by growing public awareness and a strong scientific understanding of the implications of the decimation of old growth forest and other critical habitat for a range of focal species, most prominently the endangered Northern Spotted Owl. In preparation for Forest Plan revision, roadless areas that had first been inventoried in the 1970s (RARE I and II) were inventoried again in 2005 and 2006. These inventoried roadless areas (IRAs) carry a level of protection (most strongly under the Clinton era "Roadless Rule"), and further define Potential Wilderness Areas that, by law, have to be considered for wilderness in any Forest Plan revision.

The Alpine Lakes Area is of special relevance to ALPS. The Alpine Lakes Wilderness Area, established by Congress in 1976, is its crown jewel. Fortunately, the wilderness area is not subject to administrative change in the Forest planning process. The associated Alpine Lakes Management Plan of 1981 has guided management direction of the surrounding area. In the early 1980s, it enabled acquisition of critical private lands, some of which became "instant" additions to the wilderness as directed in the enabling wilderness legislation of 1976. Subsequent acquisitions of private land with Land and Water Conservation Funding and the I-90 Land Exchange of 1999 leveraged with private funding further consolidated the Forest Service land base, especially in areas of checkerboard ownership. The Snoqualmie Pass Adaptive Management Area (1997) provided a specific implementation of the Northwest Forest Plan protections

along the I-90 Corridor. The I-90 Wilderness Study mandated by the I-90 Land Exchange recommended designation of approximately 15,000 acres of additions to the Wilderness along its southeast boundary.

ALPS and its partner environmental organizations have been engaged through all of the above-mentioned planning cycles affecting the Wenatchee portion of the OWNF. Foremost, ALPS desires that the cumulative protections developed since the last Forest Plan in 1990 be carried forward and further strengthened in the Forest Plan Revision.

Broad statements in the 2011 Proposed Action indicate encouraging and forward-looking aspirations. There is recognition of a breadth of challenges (e.g., "Major challenges facing Forest managers include population growth, urbanization, appropriate recreational use, access, climate change, drought, disease, tree mortality, fire, invasive non-native species, and protection of natural resources"), as well as limitations on what the Forest can provide (e.g. "Achieving ecological, social, and economic sustainability may be limited by the capability of the plan area as well as by agency authorities" (FPR-PA, Pg. 16). There is a stated emphasis on ecosystem functioning (e.g. "A shift in focus from commodity production to ecosystem restoration and forest health is being proposed." FPR-PA, Pg. 31) and to viable wildlife populations (e.g. "management actions are proposed to provide habitat conditions (amount, arrangement, and reduced risk factors) that contribute to the viability of focal wildlife species and the other species they represent", FPR-PA, Pg. 42).

On the other hand, these broad statements can be variously interpreted. Specifics are sparse,

and many of those presented are non-prescriptive and flexible to the extent that it is not possible to ascertain where the revised plan would actually lead management of the Forest. The corresponding broad request from ALPS is that all Alternatives in the DEIS have sufficient specificity and detail that clear future directions can be understood.

There are a host of intertwined issues mostly encircled by the list of challenges above. Here we mention a few especially important ones:

- Proposed elimination of specific reserves and targets in the Northwest Forest Plan that are not replaced with tangible alternatives with a strong, peer-reviewed, scientific foundation or clear goals.
- Lack of commitment to meaningful changes in management of winter recreation, leaving free reign for snowmobiles over most of the Forest outside of wilderness areas, and neglecting serious resource issues and recreational balance with non-motorized, quiet-seeking forest visitors.
- There is uncertain commitment to future protection of Inventoried Roadless Areas. Motorized recreation is one threat. Once occupied by this activity, the ORVers claim ownership, dominate the recreation use, and block recommendation for wilderness.

The PA does make some specific recommendations for wilderness. Approximately 44,000 acres are recommended in the Alpine Lakes Area, all of which are adjacent to the present Wilderness and would then expand it. Parcels include most of the I-90 Wilderness Study Area (about 12,000 acres in seven parcels in the upper Yakima and Cle Elum

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Future Management

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drainages); part of the Teanaway (about 15,800 contiguous acres near Eldorado, Beverly, Bean, Standup, and Stafford Creeks, as well as an extension into upper Negro Creek); 16,200 acres in the Icicle Creek drainage; and scattered small parcels on the east and northeast boundary of the Wilderness. This amounts to about one-quarter of the potential wilderness in the Inventoried Roadless Areas surrounding the present wilderness.

The FS recommendation is significant and very welcome. It is being strongly attacked by motorized interests (primarily winter snowmobilers), and will need strong support.

ALPS argues that the FS recommendations do not go far enough. They do not include key areas in the I-90 Wilderness Study (e.g. North Fork Fortune Creek and Lake Ann), the Teanaway (e.g. Esmerelda Basin, the West and Middle Forks) and Icicle



CHARLIE RAYMOND

Looking north from Jolly Mountain toward Hawkins Mountain.

Ridge. ALPS is requesting a DEIS Alternative with a larger wilderness recommendation that is better aligned with the original ALPS aspirations for wilderness in 1976, as is now being proposed by a coalition of groups including ALPS. It is more realizable now and still strongly motivated given the land acquisitions of the past 2 decades. ALPS will work hard for that.

The upcoming DEIS stage is a critical time for public involvement. If you are not already on the contact list, please consider adding your name to receive mailings or email notifications by contacting Forest Plan Revision Team Leader Margaret Hartzell at Forest Plan Revision, 1240 Second Avenue Ave. S., Okanogan, WA 98440, 509-826-3275 or r6_ewzplanrevision@fs.fed.us. ■

New trails in Middle Fork and I-90 planned

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where to develop new trails and facilities in the entire North Bend region. Extensive lands have been acquired not only in the Middle Fork, but also on Rattlesnake Ridge and most recently in the Raging River valley to its south.

This large acreage of new, easily accessible public lands presents opportunities for many new trails for different user groups. Trail planning might be thought of as easy: just pick an attractive destination, draw a line on a map and build it. But there are many more considerations. Since people drive cars to trailheads, parking facilities are a crucial factor. It's not easy to find suitable places for

parking lot construction, especially in mountainous areas. Since heavy use is guaranteed at new trails close to Interstate 90, trailhead-parking areas will need to be large. Providing access is a critical factor in deciding where to invest in building new trails.

ALPS believes that many new trails need to be built in accessible, easily reached places. Trails located at the end of long, failure-prone logging roads will be increasingly difficult to access in years to come. DNR's new trail developments in the Middle Fork and other areas around North Bend are just what is needed to encourage more people to enjoy

their public lands. ALPS is looking forward to working with DNR and other stakeholders in this exciting process.

DNR is also looking at the possibility of new trails farther north, at Reiter Forest near Gold Bar. DNR's newly developed plan for that area includes extensive areas for non-motorized recreation. One likely candidate for a new hiking trail is a series of attractive waterfalls on May Creek, located in the non-motorized section there. If you would like to work with ALPS and DNR on planning trails in the Snoqualmie/Raging or Reiter forests, please contact us at info@alps.org. ■

Small hydro threat grows

The threat of new low-power hydroelectric projects in the Alpine Lakes region continues to grow. In addition to projects proposed for Hancock and Calligan creeks (see the 2011 #1 edition of the Alpine) the Snohomish PUD is now also looking at diverting the South Fork Skykomish River at Sunset Falls. Meanwhile, a private developer is trying to divert the North Fork Snoqualmie River into a pipe, and to dewater the Black Canyon of the Snoqualmie at the northwestern foot of Mt. Si, where the river forms the boundary of the Mt. Si Natural Resource Conservation Area.

Projects have not been built in these places in the past for the very good reason that the amount

of energy they would produce is very small. Proponents like to use the “nameplate rating” of the generators that will be installed, which is the maximum amount of power that could be produced under the most favorable conditions of peak flow. But the important number here is energy, not power, with energy being power over the course of the entire year. Developers don’t mention that peak flows last only a very short part of the year, usually late May and early June. This period of high runoff is when power generation is in such surplus that Northwest electric utilities often give away power, or in some cases actually pay distant utilities to take it off their hands.

Thus these small projects produce power just when it is not needed or wanted. Because the Bonneville Power Administration is required to purchase their output, it means money for the developers but costs for everyone else as BPA is forced to dump the power at the worst possible time.

ALPS takes the position that there is no need to dam up the smaller creeks and streams of the Cascades. There is no electricity shortage, and even if there were this would not be the way to solve it. ALPS will continue to oppose the spread of these projects into undeveloped parts of the Cascades. ■

New trails needed in the Skykomish Ranger District

As part of the Wild Sky Wilderness bill enacted in 2008, Congress instructed the Forest Service to look into new recreational trails in and around the Wilderness. The legislation does not require the construction of any new trails, and sadly, provides no funds to do so, but there is no doubt that the sponsors of the Wilderness looked upon the development of new trails as desirable. The Forest Service had one public meeting in June 2011 and is soliciting comments and recommendations for a Wild Sky trail plan.

ALPS has long advocated the building of new trails, to better allow people the opportunity to enjoy their public lands, and to nurture new generations of wilderness defenders. ALPS members have extensively explored the Skykomish area away

from existing trails, gaining insight into where new trails might best be located. ALPS members were the first to suggest a trail to Beckler Peak, where the Forest Service recently opened the first new trail in the Skykomish district in more than a decade.

As discussed in this issue’s lead story (page 1) many factors need to be considered in both choosing a destination and in routing a trail. Topping the list is figuring out how people will get there. Will it be located in a place that people will be able to get to in future? New trails located at the ends of long, crumbling logging roads would be a bad investment from such a perspective. And with fuel prices likely to climb in years to come, new trails might be best located in places along or near major thoroughfares, where

they might be accessible by public transit.

Other considerations include avoidance of sensitive wildlife habitats, and insuring that new trails offer attractions such as viewpoints that can be reached by people of varying levels of ability. A new trail that climbed many thousands of feet before offering any views would be a poor investment of taxpayers’ money.

And money is the biggest problem facing advocates of new trails, getting harder and harder to come by each year. ALPS believes that interested groups can increase the odds of securing funding by working together to come up with just one or two well-thought-out recommendations. Otherwise, the Wild Sky “trail plan” could end up gathering dust instead of moving dirt, an outcome that no one wants to see. ■

Congressional redistricting could affect Alpine Lakes

Washington gets additional district



KARL FORSGAARD

Crest of Alpine Lakes looking SW from Mt. Daniel.

By Jim Chapman

It's redistricting time, when states have to readjust their congressional and legislative districts so that all have nearly the same populations found in the recently completed census. Because Washington's population has grown so much, we have gained a tenth congressional district.

Since 1983, Washington requires leaders from both houses and both major parties to appoint two voting members from each party to a redistricting commission that must finish its task by the end of the year following the census taking. These four members then appoint a non-voting chair. The current commission includes Slade Gorton and Tom Huff for the Republicans, and Dean Foster and Tim Ceis for the Democrats, as the voting members. The chair is Lura Powell.

In the past, redistricting had little direct effect on the Alpine Lakes, but this time it could. At least two districts have always encompassed

the area. Right now one district, the 4th, is on the east side of the Cascade crest and two, the 2nd and 8th, are on the west.

By September 13, each commissioner had drawn his own map and the maps are quite divergent. Even some district numbers have been moved. But there is one new commonality. All four commissioners have districts crossing the Cascade Crest. Until now, the crest had formed district boundaries from Canada almost to the Columbia River Gorge.

For the past several years, ALPS and other conservation groups have been working on expansion of the Alpine Lakes Wilderness. In 2009 bills were introduced in Congress that would add the Pratt River valley, along with other areas south of the Middle Fork Snoqualmie and north of I-90. Rep. Dave Reichert from the 8th District has been leading the effort in the House, but other representatives declined to become involved. Within National

Forest boundaries, the current 8th District boundary only goes as far north as the Middle Fork, so that is the extent of our proposed wilderness addition. ALPS has asked the commission to move the boundary to the ridge top between the Snoqualmie and Skykomish watersheds. It would have no impact on population count since nobody lives between the Middle Fork and the ridge top.

So what boundaries around the Alpine Lakes did each of the four commissioners draw? Interestingly, three of the commissioners went east and added all of Kittitas and Chelan Counties to the 8th District. Only Commissioner Gorton stayed on the west side and his proposed district is very similar to what it is now. Commissioners Gorton and Huff kept the boundary along the Middle Fork, with Huff's boundary line following the river all the way down to North Bend.

On the other hand, Commissioners Foster and Ceis have the 8th District encompassing the entire Alpine Lakes area. One representative would be responsible for all of it.

So which would be better — a single representative overseeing the Alpine Lakes, or multiple representatives overseeing their own portion? A single representative could spend more time on the Alpine Lakes, but multiple representatives might carry more clout and provide more votes. Most important than the numbers, though, are the representatives' attitudes. Ideally, they would support ALPS positions. But if they are non-supportive or neutral, things could be much more difficult.

For more details and maps, go to <http://www.redistricting.gov/commission.asp>.

Hopes rekindled for wilderness expansion

ALPS is hoping that efforts to expand the Alpine Lakes Wilderness will advance in this Congress. The plan is to add low elevation lands in the Pratt River and Middle Fork Snoqualmie valleys to the Wilderness. Legislation has again been introduced by Senator Patty Murray as S.322 (with Senator Maria Cantwell as co-sponsor), and in the House by Congressman Dave Reichert as H.R. 608 (with Congressmen Norm Dicks, Jay Inslee, Jim McDermott and Adam Smith as co-sponsors)

On November 10, the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources passed S.322 with no amendments. On October 25, a House Natural Resources Subcommittee held a hearing with no further action taken as of November 18.

This is the second year that the bill has been submitted to Congress. The bill passed the House in the last Congress but failed to make it through the Senate. Wilderness legislation is a long, difficult process, by design. It is difficult to enact but also very difficult to de-enact, making it the strongest form of protection for public lands.

ALPS will continue to do all it can to advance this landmark legislation. Look for updates in future editions of *The Alpine*. ■



KARL FORSGAARD

Daniel Middle and East peaks from West peak.

Harlan Ridge “restoration”

In a new proposal by the Forest Service, a road climbing to nearly 5000 feet at the top of Harlan Ridge would be kept open for the exclusive use of the Tulalip Tribes as part of a “Harlan Ridge Meadow Restoration Project.” The tribes have stated that they want access for their members to pick berries and perform ceremonies that their ancestors had done there for generations. Harlan Ridge is a few miles to the northeast of Skykomish.

The area in question was clearcut logged by Weyerhaeuser in the late 1970s and now borders the Wild Sky Wilderness. While ORVs have caused some minor damage on top of the ridge, the major concern is the crumbling road that climbs thousands of feet to the ridge top. The Forest Service proposes to install a gate and keep the road drivable.

ALPS believes that, in normal circumstances, this precarious and expensive road should be closed. Gates have seldom been effective obstacles to ORVs. But closing it could create hardship for the tribal elders who would have a difficult time walking the long, steep grade. Vehicular access would probably be needed for them to make the ridge top, but no one else would be allowed to drive the road.

In this time of shrinking budgets, it is hard to argue for taxpayers’ dollars being spent on keeping such a long, unstable and costly road open. Therefore ALPS believes that, if they are to have exclusive motorized use of this road, the Tulalip Tribes should be made responsible for reconstructing, maintaining and patrolling it, including all necessary engineering to stabilize it so as to insure it presents no further threat to the Beckler watershed. ■



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Tank Lake with hiker reflection.



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