

VOICE of the WILD OLYMPICS

Olympic Park Associates

Founded in 1948



Vol. 21, Number 1

SPECIAL WILDERNESS ISSUE



Upper Royal Basin, Olympic Wilderness. Photo by Mary Morgan.

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Olympic National Park's Wilderness Stewardship Plan: *You can help influence this important plan.* **Comments are due by March 23, 2013**

A new plan will guide future decision-making for 95% of Olympic National Park. Right now, the Park is seeking comment on the kinds of issues and concerns the plan should address. And planners want to know your vision for the future of the Olympic Wilderness.

Next summer or fall Olympic National Park will release a range of preliminary alternatives outlining different futures for the Olympic Wilderness. The alternatives will range from maximizing recreational use to prioritizing protection for the Olympic ecosystem and

Continued on P. 3, Wilderness Plan

OPA Meetings:

Next: 27 March, 6:00 p.m.

Place: Kingston Community Center

Please join us. OPA members are always welcome at Board meetings.

The regular OPA Board meetings are in the Kingston Community Center on the 4th Wednesday of odd-numbered months, except the 3rd Weds in November to avoid Thanksgiving, and no meeting in July.

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OPA's Web Page

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Olympic National Park's Wilderness Stewardship Plan:

Help influence this important plan -- Deadline is March 23, 2013!

Continued from P. 1.

preserving wilderness character. A draft environmental impact statement is due in spring of next year; the final plan and EIS will be shortly after that.

This special wilderness issue of the Voice will familiarize you with the major issues facing the Olympic Wilderness, and help you help the Park Service create the best plan possible.

Background

Overall, the Park Service has done a good job of protecting the Olympic Wilderness. But as the popularity of the park's wilderness increases, so does demand on its irreplaceable wilderness resources. Natural and ecological health, clean water, solitude, natural quiet, an "untrammled" or un-manipulated natural environment, and other aspects of wilderness character are at risk.

Park managers will try to protect these resources while accommodating increasing demands for access, safety, comfort and unfettered enjoyment of wilderness. Possible tradeoffs may include increased administrative helicopter use, unrestricted use of mechanized tools, communications installations, reconstruction of historic structures, increased trail developments to facilitate stock use, expanding minimum group sizes... the list goes on. All these pose a threat to wilderness character and would degrade the experience of wilderness visitors.

The Wilderness Act

OPA believes strongly in the 1964 Wilderness Act definition of wilderness: "an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain." The way to preserve that untrammled sense of wilderness is by diligently protecting the area's wilderness character.

What follows is a short list of points you can make in your letter. Also, OPA addressed a number of issues and discussions in our scoping letter to Olympic National Park.

Thank you!



OPA's Scoping Letter:

- Read **excerpts** in this issue.
- Read the **full text** at:
<http://www.olympicparkassociates.org/>

Two ways to submit your comments to the Park:

- **Online** at:
<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/OLYMWildNews1>
- **In writing** to:
Sarah Creachbaum, Superintendent
ATTN: Wilderness Stewardship Plan
Olympic National Park
600 E. Park Avenue
Port Angeles, WA 98362

You can also:

- **Follow the planning process** on ONP's wilderness planning website: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/olymwild>
- **Attend a public scoping meeting:** <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/meetingNotices.cfm?projectID=29224>
- **Visit OPA's website** for further information and alerts:
<http://www.olympicparkassociates.org/>

Points you can make in your letter:

- Olympic is one of our nation's premiere wilderness parks. Every effort should be made to protect and preserve its wilderness character.
- Support the Park's stated purpose of the plan, "to guide the preservation, management, and use of the park's wilderness areas as defined by the Wilderness Act of 1964," and its goal, "to restore, protect, and enhance overall wilderness character of the Olympic Wilderness."
- In light of human-caused global warming and increasing demands on wilderness, request that Park managers protect and restore Olympics natural ecosystems as an inherent part of its wilderness. That means restoring extirpated species (like wolves), and eliminating non-native species (like introduced mountain goats).
- Support the current permit system for wilderness backpackers; campfire restrictions in high country; food storage requirements; and group size limits. All wilderness fees should be used for wilderness stewardship.
- Request that the plan regulate stock use in wilderness to protect natural resources and trail infrastructure, and keep commercial services at current levels.
- Cultural resources, like Wedding Rocks and archeological sites should be protected in wilderness, but reconstruction of historic shelters, sheds, barns, and cabins is prohibited by the Wilderness Act.

Excerpts from OPA's Wilderness Plan Scoping Letter to Olympic National Park



Importance of the plan

OPA believes that management of the Olympic Wilderness sets a precedent throughout the National Park Service, the agency that manages the most designated wilderness acreage in the nation.

Purpose of the Plan

We concur wholeheartedly with the stated purpose of the plan, "to guide the preservation, management, and use of the park's wilderness areas as defined by the Wilderness Act of 1964." And we support its goal, "to restore, protect, and enhance overall wilderness character of the Olympic Wilderness." The plan's focus on wilderness character is commendable, as that is the central quality of wilderness as defined by the Wilderness Act.

OPA's vision for the Olympic Wilderness is: the Olympic Wilderness will preserve and protect a fully restored wilderness ecosystem with its original components, species and habitat functions intact. Human use will be managed to insure enjoyment of the wilderness while protecting the healthy functioning of ecosystems into the future.

Ecosystem Protection

The Wilderness Act states that in wilderness "earth and its community of life... is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions." In light of human-caused global warming and other threats, it is important that Park managers do all they can to protect and restore the wilderness's irreplaceable natural ecosystems. That means restoring extirpated species, such as the Park's top predator, the wolf; recovering threatened species; and eliminating non-native species, such as introduced mountain goats. The plan should address these issues.

Marbled murrelet



Wilderness Character

The interagency study "Keeping it Wild" presents four qualities of wilderness character from the Wilderness Act: "Untrammeled," "Natural," "Undeveloped," and "Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation." These set clear directives for meeting the purpose and goal of the plan.

However, the Park's wilderness planning newsletter introduces a fifth quality, "Other Features of Value," not in the Wilderness Act, which purports to have precedence over the previous four. This quality "is used to capture elements of a park's wilderness area, such as Olympic's cultural resources, that aren't included in the four qualities and is unique to an individual wilderness."

OPA supports the preservation of what are widely valued as cultural resources: Native American archeological sites, artifacts, petroglyphs, shell middens and other resources that reflect the early presence of humans in Olympic. However, we have a real concern that the Park's definition of cultural resources includes any human constructions dating a minimum of 50 years. OPA maintains that this view will confuse the issue and undercut the preservation of wilderness character as directed by the Wilderness Act.

Currently, the Park is preserving some 40 structures in wilderness. These include ranger stations, sheds, shelters, homesteads, barns, hunting cabins, a chalet, and other buildings. The Park has invested significant manpower and funds in recent years, and employed the use of helicopter transport and power tools to repair and reconstruct these structures. We interpret "Other Features of Value" as a further attempt to continue to preserve, repair and reconstruct these structures in wilderness.

We find this contrary to both to the 1964 Wilderness Act and the U.S. District Court decision *OPA v. Mainella*, 2005. In that decision, Judge Burgess found Park managers guilty of "a clear error of judgment" in their interpreta-

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OPA's Wilderness Plan Scoping Letter -- Excerpts

Continued from P. 4

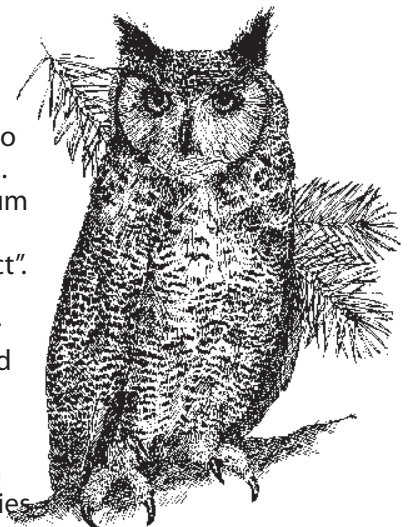
tion of historic preservation in wilderness. Wilderness designation by Congress places "a new value" on the land, in Judge Burgess' words, that is, a clear mandate to preserve wilderness character.

At a minimum, this planning process should examine each of the classified structures currently being preserved in wilderness to evaluate which ones may be "unique" to the Olympic Wilderness and can be considered features that enhance the area's wilderness character. For all but a precious few, that is an extremely high bar to reach.

Wilderness Issues and Opportunities

We would like to comment briefly on the issues listed in the Park newsletter as well as some of our own. We hope all will be addressed in the plan.

- Day and overnight use. Overnight use is currently well regulated in the park. Day use in a few heavily used areas may also need to be addressed at some point to preserve wilderness character.
- Wilderness permitting. We support the current permitting system and the opportunity for wilderness education that it affords. The plan should encourage adequate staffing to insure both education and enforcement.
- Traditional use. Any traditional uses should fall under the dictates of the Wilderness Act.
- Use of campfires. With the Olympics' unpredictable weather patterns, campfires should continue to be allowed in lower valleys, in existing fire rings only. Alpine and subalpine areas should continue to be closed to fires.
- Proper food storage. Hanging of food should continue to be allowed where conditions for safe food hanging exist. Canisters should be required in areas where hanging food is impossible. No food lockers should be placed in wilderness.
- Group size. Maximum group size should be kept to 12 backpackers, fewer in sensitive areas where group camps do not exist. Minimum stock size should be keyed to capacity of stock camps.
- Camping and campsites. Currently, camping is well managed by the Wilderness office. Numbers of campers should be regulated in high-use sites like Shi Shi Beach. Development of new campsites in wilderness should be discouraged.
- Human waste management. OPA supports "blue bag" or "wag bag" disposal of waste on Blue Glacier and other sensitive alpine areas. Vault and solar privies are suitable for high elevation areas. Pit privies are adequate in lower areas.
- Stock use. Stock use has been inconsistently managed at Olympic, and high-elevation trails and natural resources have suffered. Specific areas should be defined where stock use is appropriate and compatible with hiker use, trail conditions, and natural resources. Stock camps should be in low-elevation valleys apart from backpacker camping areas.
- Research activities. Research by Park staff and independent researchers should comply with wilderness use regulations and minimum requirement standards as specified in the Wilderness Act: "no use of motor vehicles, motorized equipment or motorboats, no landing of aircraft, no other form of mechanical transport... except as necessary to meet minimum requirements for the administration of the area for the purpose of this Act". Where use of aircraft is absolutely essential, flights should be timed for minimum disturbance to wildlife and wilderness users.
- Wildlife management in wilderness. Restoring and protecting ecosystem processes, restoring extirpated species



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OPA's Wilderness Plan Scoping Letter -- Excerpts

Continued from P. 5

and removing non-native species should be an objective of this plan. Functioning ecosystems are an essential component of wilderness character in Olympic.

- Cultural Resource Management in Wilderness. Cultural resources should be protected where they enhance wilderness character (Wedding Rocks). Where they degrade wilderness character, they should be removed.
- Maintenance of trails, bridges, or other existing or necessary infrastructure. The Park does an excellent job maintaining Olympic's trail system. The plan should endorse continued maintenance of the trail system while seeking opportunities

to reduce the footprint of human influence. Administrative buildings that are found to be necessary to insure wilderness management, such as Elkhorn and Olympus guard stations should be preserved. Unnecessary structures should be removed.

- Commercial services in wilderness. We support continued commercial services in wilderness at current levels. Outfitters should not receive special treatment regarding reservations, group size, or access.

Other issues and opportunities that should be addressed in the plan:

- Mechanized tool use. A strong case can be made for use of chainsaws to effectively and safely clear the often heavy amount and large size of blowdown timber on park trails. The plan is an excellent opportunity to have that discussion.
- Mechanized transport. We recognize that some uses, such as emergency rescues, placement of bridge stringers, and some wildlife research and management require helicopter use. We request the plan outlines those rare needs and sets standards and seasons of operation.
- Native materials. Native materials should be favored over glue-laminate and chemically treated lumber in bridge reconstruction. Even when steel stringers are used, wilderness bridges should be finished in natural wood.
- Wilderness fees. OPA supports reasonable wilderness fees. Revenues should be used for wilderness stewardship.

As population pressures increase and the world's climate continues to warm, it is imperative that we go the extra mile to protect and preserve the integrity of Olympic's wilderness.

For the full text of OPA's letter, visit www.olympicparkassociates.com



Queets spruce. Photo by Bob Kaune.

Wilderness

by Donna Osseward, OPA President

Wilderness, as it is, as the Earth's creator made it, is valuable to us all. We instinctively enjoy its beauty. We are drawn into its splendor. The areas of our earth remaining as wilderness are incredible in their many gifts.

These lands make our earth livable. Native vegetation pulls pollution from the air and water; soils and plant roots filter the water. Trees and vegetation also serve to sequester carbon by using it -- trading the carbon dioxide in the air for oxygen. The undisturbed earth protects the carbon reserves lying below. All this reduces Earth's probability of becoming like Venus, a planet so warm, with its heavy carbon dioxide filled air, that lead melts at Venus's normal daytime temperature. Global warming on Earth is already creating ocean acidification that if it continues will have devastating effects on shellfish and other sea creatures.

Earth's wilderness mountains, valleys, and forests retain the winter snow to slowly release water into summer for fish, wildlife, agriculture, and to fill a summertime tall, clear, cool glass in the city.

Wilderness holds nature's storehouse of genes that may someday provide new cures for disease; new and healthier plants for agriculture; and inspiration, as our wisdom grows, to create new products. We learn from wilderness. The burrs of burdock inspired the inventor of Velcro. Many of our pharmaceuticals are derived from nature. The Yew tree was considered a weed tree until we discovered, in its bark, a cure for some forms of cancer. Aspirin came from the willow tree. A compound found in Eastern red cedar fights MRSA, an antibiotic resistant infection. The list goes on and on: there are far too many examples to name here.

Wilderness provides wildlife habitat that offers a home for the furry to the slimy. These places, if large enough, allow wild plants and animals to maintain the interacting web of life. In the Pacific Northwest, we looked to wilderness's ancient forests to discover that the Douglas fir and the fungi at its roots are mutually dependent for their survival.

All of this is done without many of us ever stepping a boot into a wilderness area. Wilderness functions best when we don't spend



Middle Fork Dungeness. Photo by Tim McNulty

money to "take care of it." It is unsurpassed when left alone.

Even with all these values, wilderness can be a place where we can go and enjoy appropriate recreation -- appropriate in that our activities don't damage its ability to provide its other gifts. As we can see, earth's wilderness is a valuable, integrated, multiple-use resource.

Different wilderness areas hold different species and genes because they exist in different places. This truth has been found by our search around the world for prospective medicines in nature. One place cannot replace another. What is destroyed is lost. Mitigation, therefore, cannot provide an excuse for destroying a wilderness area.

Wilderness needs to be cherished untrammelled. That is how it best provides for us. Lacking wilderness with roads, weeding it according to our current standards of usefulness, destroys we know not what. It is like burning a library without looking at its books -- some, perhaps, written in a language we have not yet learned to read. Some may be filled with wonders and inspiration that we would never know.

Wilderness is fragile but essential to sustain our lives into the future - especially our children's future.



VOICE of the WILD OLYMPICS

Sally W. Soest, Editor

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