

# VOICE of the WILD OLYMPICS

Olympic Park Associates

Founded in 1948



Volume 28  
Number 3  
Fall 2020



*Proposed Duckabush Wild and Scenic River. Photo by John Gussman*

## Wild Olympics Included in Defense Appropriations Bill

By Tim McNulty

It's been a wild ride for the Wild Olympics Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers Act this year. As this issue of the *Voice* goes to press, we're hopeful that 2020 sees this critical legislation cross the finish line.

In February, thanks to years of diligent effort on the part of D-6 Rep. Derek Kilmer, the Wild Olympics passed the U.S. House with bipartisan support. The bill was included in H.R. 2546, the Protecting America's Wilderness Act, which protects wilderness, wild rivers and recreation areas in Colorado and California as well as Washington.

Then, in July, Wild Olympics,

as part of the Protecting America's Wilderness Act, was attached as an amendment to the National Defense Appropriations Act (NDAA). The NDAA passed the House and U.S. Senate, but the Senate version failed to include the wilderness amendment containing Wild Olympics.

A conference committee (appointed by the House and Senate to resolve bill differences) will convene after the election to negotiate and finalize full congressional approval and passage of the NDAA. This is "must-pass" legislation and it is the best hope for Wild Olympics since the bill

*Continued on P10, Wild*

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## OPA Meetings

**Next:** January 26 at 6:00 p.m. (conference call)  
**Upcoming:** March 23 at 6:00 p.m. (conference call)  
**Regular Meeting Schedule:** 4th Tuesday of odd-numbered months, except 3rd Tuesday in November. No meeting in July.

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### VOICE OF THE WILD

#### OLYMPICS

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Sol Duc River, photo by John Gussman

## Sol Duc River Lands Proposed for Conservation

The Sol Duc River is the longest on the Olympic Peninsula, incredibly scenic, and an extraordinary sanctuary for wild salmon. It flows 65 miles westward from the spectacular Seven Lakes Basin through Olympic National Park and Forest to its confluence with the Bogachiel River near Forks.

Western Rivers Conservancy proposes to acquire and conserve 1,023 acres along four miles of the Sol Duc River adjacent to the Park. The property is an in-holding in Olympic National Forest. The Conservancy's goal is "to safeguard the strong fish and wildlife habitats while preserving public access to this reach of the Sol Duc River and the Olympic Discovery Trail."

The Sol Duc hosts good runs of wild spring and summer Chinook, winter steelhead and pink, coho, chum and sockeye salmon. Dolly

Varden, sea-run cutthroat trout and resident trout also inhabit the river.

The Sol Duc supports some of the healthiest stocks of wild winter steelhead in the Pacific Northwest, with as many as 19,000 steelhead returning to spawn in some years. In 2012 it became the first river on the Olympic Peninsula to be designated a Wild Steelhead Gene Bank by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.

This property is also at the very transition point from nearly unbroken stands of ancient forest upstream in the Park, to industrialized forestlands downstream. It provides important critical habitat.

OPA enthusiastically supports this acquisition. For more information, please go to [www.westernrivers.org](http://www.westernrivers.org).



### Navy to Increase Training Flights Over the Olympics

## The Sound of Garbage Disposals Overhead at the Hoh?

By Rob Smith

The U.S. Navy is planning to increase training flights for their EA-18G "Growler" jets, some of the loudest aircraft in the world, over one of the quietest spots in America: Olympic National Park's Hoh Rain Forest.

The Navy's own analysis, just released in the final environmental study for their Northwest Training and Testing Range, revealed that the maximum noise levels heard on the ground are projected between 81.5 and 100.6 decibels

(dB). According to the Navy, these noise levels are roughly equivalent to a garbage disposal (80dB) and a handheld drill (100dB). The Department of Defense assesses noise impacts at more than 75dB as incompatible for most land use, says the Navy's document.

Ironically, Olympic's popular Hoh Rain Forest Visitor Center is at the edge of the military airspace, just a short hike away from the "One Square Inch of

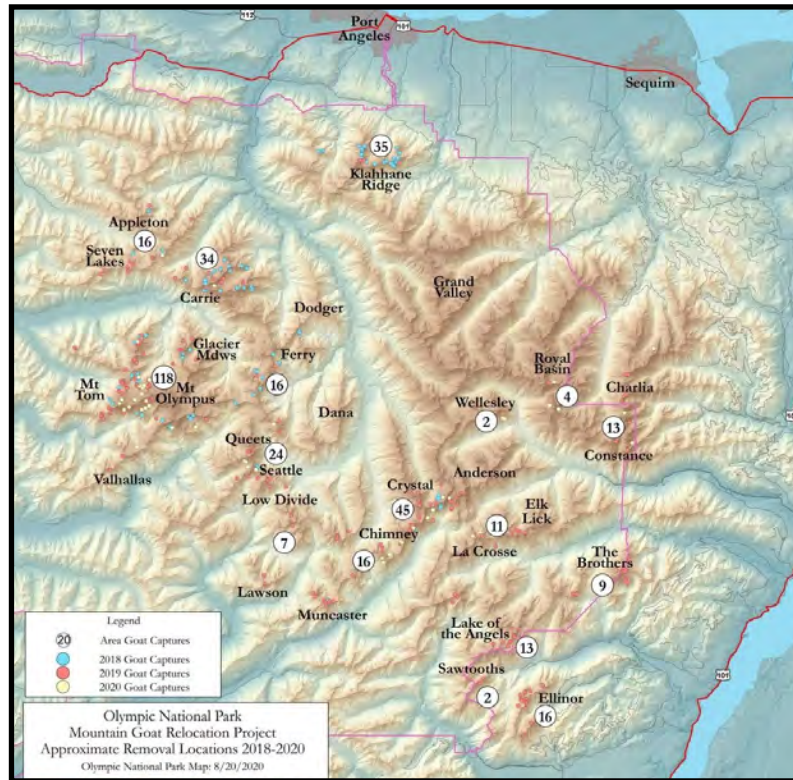
*Continued on P10, Sound*

# Park Finishes Live Goat Capture Phase

Lethal Removal a Multi-Year Project

By Tom Bihn

During the summer of 2020, the effort to remove non-native mountain goats from Olympic National Park and Olympic National Forest passed a milestone. The interagency team completed the live-capture and translocation component of the operation – capturing an additional 50 goats. A total of 325 goats have been successfully translocated to the Cascades, with an additional 56 animals either being lost as fatalities during capture and transport or transferred to zoos. The number of animals live-captured and translocated far exceeded expectations for this phase of the removal operation. However, as expected, this final push also came with relatively higher mortality rates, as well as increased helicopter time per capture, as the remaining animals were more wary and better eluded capture.



Removal locations for ONP-ONF mountain goat captures. NPS map.

According to NPS Spokeswoman Penny Wagner, the survival rate in the North Cascades for the translocated animals has been 60 percent for males and 48 percent for females.

This fall, Olympic National Park began the next and last phase of the removal project: lethal removal of goats from the Olympic Mountains. This phase of the multi-year project involved ground-based shooting by trained volunteers. From more than a thousand applicants, 18 groups of three or more were selected, six groups for each of three hunts which took place from September 9 to October 16. Volunteers were trained and assigned to remote areas of the Park for culling. Thirty-one goats were taken, bringing

the total number of goats removed from the Olympics to 412, well over half the estimated population of 725. Remaining goats will be lethally removed in aerial operations in 2021 and 2022 as needed.

Introduced to the Olympic mountains in the 1920s for sport hunting, mountain goats have spread throughout the high country, severely impacting fragile and endemic flora. OPA has long held that removal of destructive non-native goats from the Park and Forest is essential for the ecological health of this World Heritage Site and Biosphere Reserve.

## The COVID-19 Pandemic and Overcrowding in the Olympics

By John Bridge

I have always felt particularly fortunate because of all the hiking opportunities here on the Olympic Peninsula. During the pandemic this might seem like the perfect place to social distance and find solitude, but not this year.

I have never seen so many people at the trailheads. Some have speculated that the reason so many people chose to come here was because they wanted to finally get out of their houses, but did not want to fly or they couldn't drive to Canada. The

Olympic Peninsula was a short drive away. Whatever the reason, they came, and trailheads and campgrounds overflowed; many pull outs were taken over by people camping.

This came to a head in August when the Olympic National Forest closed the road leading to Lake Cushman and Staircase. The Kitsap Sun reported "thousands of vehicles parked along the narrow dirt road." Emergency vehicles had trouble getting through on multiple calls, according to Susan Garner, spokeswoman for the

Continued on P. 5, Overcrowding

# OPA Funds Efforts to Bolster Genetic Diversity of Fishers

By Annie Cubberly

Fishers are forest carnivores closely related to wolverines. They are about the size of a large brown cat with a hunched back and a long thick tail. They den in cavities in old trees, making the old-growth forest of Olympic National Park an ideal habitat. Fishers prey on squirrels, mountain beavers, snowshoe hares and other small mammals.

Although fishers are native to the Olympic Peninsula, they were trapped to extinction a century ago for their silky, luxurious fur. Some 90 fishers were reintroduced into Olympic National Park between 2008 and 2010. About half of them survived but few were reproducing. By 2016, third-generation fishers were widely distributed throughout the Peninsula. However, genetic analysis demonstrated that the same four females from the founding population showed up in all samples. This is troubling because it means a significant loss of genetic diversity over time, a condition that could endanger the long-term survival of the species in the Olympics.

Geneticists estimate that ONP will need at least eight new female fishers from a different genetic source every 10 years. Earlier this year



Fisher release in Olympic National Park. National Park Service photo

Washington's National Park Fund put out a call for \$25,000 to complete a supplemental introduction of fishers from a source population in Alberta. Olympic Park Associates was pleased to contribute a significant portion of that goal. Other partners were also generous and a supplemental reintroduction will take place this fall.

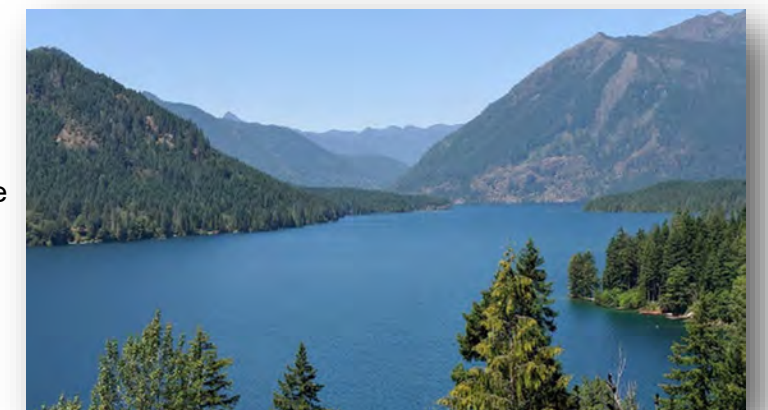
For more detailed information on fisher reintroduction, check out the YouTube video of ONP Wildlife Branch Chief Patti Happe discussing the return of fishers to the Park. <https://wnpf.org/field-trips/#RecentFC>

## Overcrowding *Continued from P.4*

Forest Service. "The extreme numbers of people recreating at Lake Cushman are creating unsafe conditions and degrading the experience for everyone," said District Ranger Yewah Lau. "No one wants to be stuck in a six-mile long traffic jam on a narrow, gravel road with no way to turn around."

The spike in visitation to public lands was a pattern seen throughout the country this summer, according to Forest Service officials. The Forest Service, seriously hampered by limited staffing, has been hard pressed to manage the overcrowding, illegal parking, excessive trash and scattered human waste.

Olympic National Park reported a 48% increase in backcountry permits for August 2020 from August 2019 and a 37% increase for people in campgrounds. This causes me to ask if there are adequate facilities for this dramatic increase in campers. More concerning, is there sufficient monitoring of where all



Lake Cushman, U.S. Forest Service photo

these people are camping? I have never seen any backcountry rangers in the National Forest and very few in the Olympic National Park in recent years. It's clear more funding and staffing are badly needed. This is a problem that is going to get worse.

# Chasing the Light

Story and  
Photos  
By Stephen  
Grace

I've returned from Mount Gladys, the most magnificent place in the Olympics. Or so I believe as I peruse my photos.

Hunkering under a boulder near Gladys Divide while waiting for a cold drizzle to dissipate—this is now a distant memory. Plus I've nearly forgotten that my jaws jackhammered so forcefully after I snorkeled in Flapjack Lakes I had to bite my sleeping bag to keep my teeth from cracking.

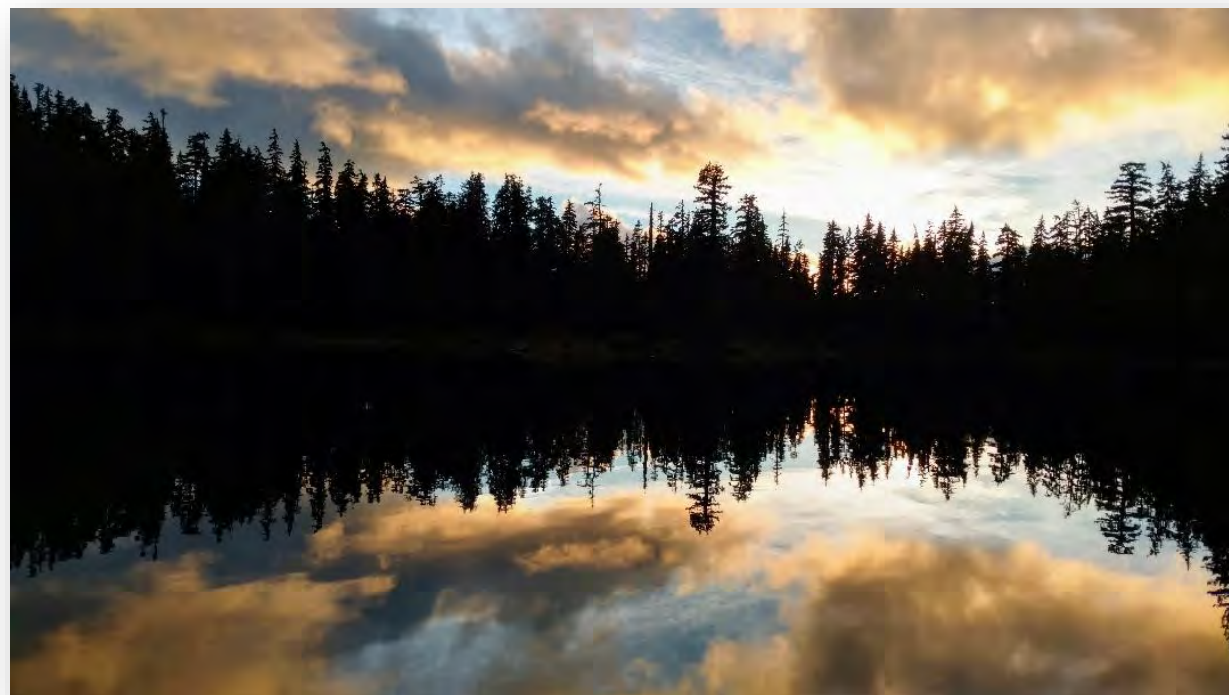
During my first trip into the Olympics just a few months ago, the mountains spoke of spring. How quickly the seasons turn. Meadows painted bright with blooms have been replaced by tawny fields. At Gladys



Flapjack Lakes and Sawtooth Ridge, ONP

Divide, clouds colored like soot curtained the view and freezing rain burned coldly on my skin. It's easy to fall in love with wild places in their prime. Who wouldn't love the mountains when their slopes are resplendent with wildflowers in July? Loving the mountains when autumn turns to winter—this takes more patience, more perseverance.

In the night the clouds did part, revealing the stars, and the next morning I saw the Sawtooths, aptly named. Their jagged summits sawed the sky as sunlight slipped between toothed peaks. Frozen grass that edged the path was brittle as glass and the rocks were sugared with frost. Ponds paneled with ice glimmered beneath the blue sky. After crunching my way up a path paved with hoarfrost I reached the top of Mount Gladys. My breath smoked in the air. From the shadows of river valleys, mountains took shape in the dawn. When the sun lifted



Flapjack Lakes, ONP



Sawtooth Ridge, ONP

over the Sawtooths, I was suffused with sudden warmth. My mood soared. I was in love. These mountains!

Visible beyond the range that forms LaCrosse Basin and the Duckabush drainage was Mt. Anderson, the hydrologic center of the Olympic Range, a sort of *axis mundi* among this universe of peaks. From Mount Anderson's slopes, major rivers radiate and run in three directions: toward Hood Canal in the east, the Strait of Juan de Fuca to the north, the Pacific Ocean to the west.

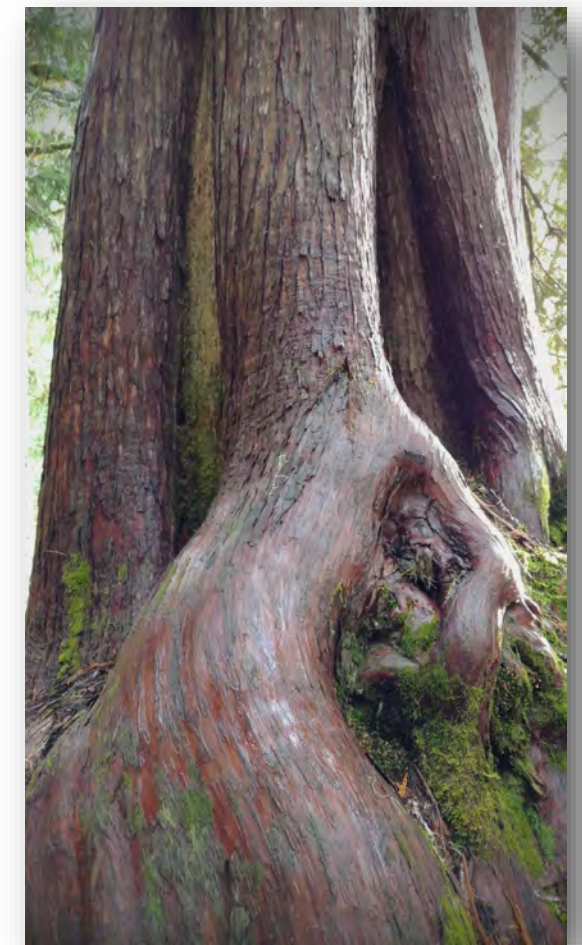
While standing atop Mount Gladys I remembered that slung across my shoulder was a pair of binoculars. By the time I looked through their glass for a detailed read of the landscape, a new round of clouds had formed. The next storm was building. Summer's steady high pressure was being upended by winter's stormy chaos. Soon the view would disappear, closed off by clouds. Daylight was dwindling. For the first time this year I ate dinner on a backpacking trip while wearing a headlamp.

When I returned from the mountains to the world below, I brought with me these memories: the roots of a western red cedar gripping the earth like a hand, a coral mushroom burning with orange light like a struck match. A varied thrush fluting its whistled song, practicing for spring.

In the weeks to come I will chase what light is left in high places, gathering memories to brighten my mood when the darkness descends.

*Stephen Grace is an author, educator and photographer based in Port Townsend, Washington. His website is [www.tidesandtrails.org](http://www.tidesandtrails.org).*

*In the weeks to come I will chase what light is left in high places, gathering memories to brighten my mood when the darkness descends.*



Western Red Cedar, ONP

## Great American Outdoors Act is Great for National Parks

By Rob Smith

Despite partisan rancor and an economy hit hard by COVID-19, Congress came together and passed the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) which was signed into law by President Trump on August 4.

The act would permanently and fully fund the Land and Water Conservation Fund at \$900 million annually to buy critical land for parks and wildlife, as well as support local parks and open space. It would also commit \$6.5 billion over the next five years to repair ailing and aging facilities in national parks including trails, roads, buildings, and water systems. Additional funding would go to other public lands.

The biggest priority at Olympic National Park is renewing water and wastewater systems that were installed several decades ago, which are not only in need of modernization but now serve many more visitors than for what they were originally designed for. ONP is the Northwest's most visited national park, now seeing more than 3 million visitors



Dry water fountain at Hoh Rain Forest Visitor Center. Photo by Rob Smith

throughout the year.

In many ways, the GAOA is what the doctor ordered for our nation right now. It creates and protects open space for us to enjoy, it rebuilds access to the outdoors, and it creates jobs from youth trail-building programs to skilled labor for construction projects.

The GAOA is a landmark conservation achievement which was fought for over many years. Every member of the Washington State Congressional delegation (except R-4 Rep. Dan Newhouse) voted for final passage.

Beyond that, special thanks should go to D-6 Rep. Derek Kilmer, who was a lead sponsor of the national park funding element of the bill and to Senator Maria Cantwell for being a tireless champion for the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

Please let them know how much we appreciate their efforts and this investment in the future.

## Wildfire Report for the Olympic Peninsula, 2020

By Tom Hammond

Given the incredibly large and devastating wildfires that burned over five million acres in California, Oregon and Washington in 2020, OPA wishes to provide a brief update on fires that burned across our Olympic Peninsula this fire season and comment on fire events across the western United States.

A dozen or so fires burned on the Peninsula this past summer. Of those, only two grew in size to be of note or require firefighting resources. Thunderstorms on August 16 sparked many of the fires, but nearly all lightning-caused fires were quickly extinguished or reduced by passing rains within a week of ignition. Only the Mount Lena fire persisted. At its apex, it

*Continued on P9, Wildfire*



East Beach Road Fire, U.S. Forest Service photo



Rialto Beach, Olympic National Park. Photo by John Gussman

### Wildfire *Continued from P.8*

burned only some 20 acres in very steep terrain. It resulted in trail closures in the area, but by any measure it did little damage to forest ecology.

The other fire of note was the East Beach Road fire above Lake Crescent, which was started by humans in mid-July and burned about 84 acres. It was actively fought due to its proximity to developed areas and forced a closure of the East Beach Road for the remainder of the fire season.

The fires on the Peninsula do offer educational opportunities. While some declare that a lack of "forest management" (read: logging) has led to the outsized fires burning throughout California, it should be noted that most of the fires in California started in chaparral and grasslands—not forests.

The fires of Oregon were of such a nature that their severity was driven by atmospheric, not forest-floor fuels. That is, intense heat for weeks before the fires, near-zero humidity, plus incredibly strong, dry east winds drove fires across the forest canopy. They were not fed by ground-level fuels.

It's also worth noting that the Oregon fires,

intense as they were, also hopscotched across the terrain, leaving many sections of forest intact and ready to re-seed/re-populate the forest, as has happened for millennia.

The same proponents of "forest management" also declare that if we had more roads crisscrossing our forests, people would be better able to access and fight fires. One need look no further than our own East Beach Road fire to see that roads provide access to people who start fires. Indeed, according to the U.S. Department of Interior and the Insurance Information Institute, 90% of all wild land fires are caused not by lightning, but by people. Fewer roads mean fewer fires.

It is evident, based on the nine days of air quality in the "Hazardous" category across the area that these fires have global, not regional impacts, as predicted by all legitimate climate models.

OPA extends our sincere sympathy and support to communities across the western United States as they seek to rebuild their lives and livelihoods.

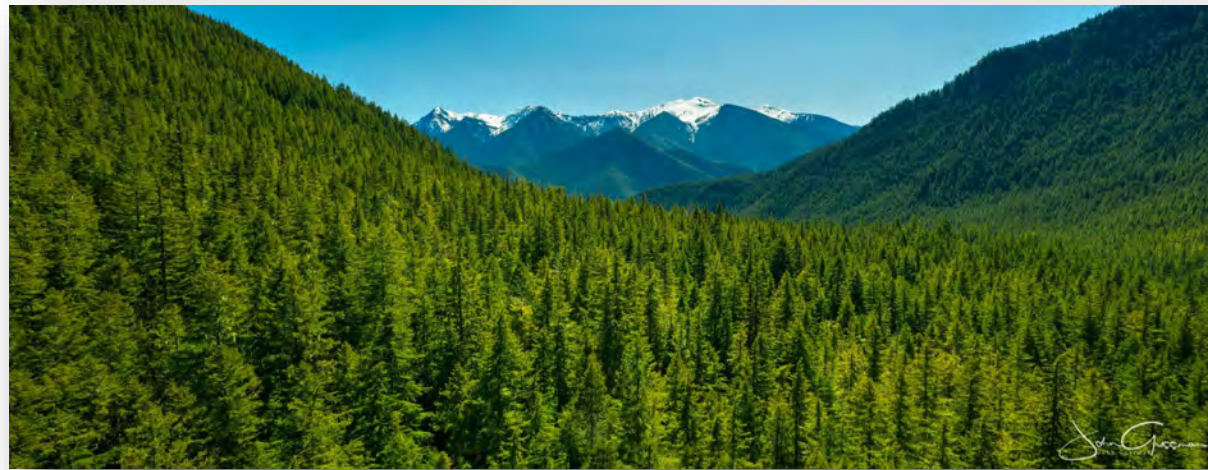
Wild

Continued from P.1

was first introduced in Congress in 2012.

Wild Olympics legislation will protect the best of the

Peninsula's remaining ancient forests and free-flowing rivers and salmon streams for future generations. It will designate more than 126,500 acres of Olympic National Forest roadless lands as Wilderness, including some of the most popular hiking areas in the eastern and southern Olympics. It will also protect 19 rivers and their major tributaries as Wild and Scenic Rivers.



Slab Camp Area Gray Wolf Ridge in distance, ONF. Photo by John Gussman

It goes without saying that Congress has a lot on its plate this fall, so remind your senators that protection of wilderness and wild healthy rivers are critical to our country's health and long-term security. Ask them to make sure the Protecting America's Wilderness Act is included in the final National Defense Appropriations Act.



Sound Continued from P.1

Silence" spot informally identified as the most naturally quiet place in America due to its moss covered landscape and dense forest. Natural sound levels here can be less than a whisper.

Senator Maria Cantwell and D-2 Rep. Rick Larsen have recently required the Navy to study its jet noise impact across the region with actual measurements rather than modeled projections. In a new study partially funded by OPA and soon to be published in the journal *Northwest Science*, researcher Lauren Kuehne has found that 88% of all aircraft noise over the west side of the Olympics comes from military flights, with their noise two to four times louder than the natural background.

More than 4,400 Growler flights take place each year over the Olympics – an average of more than 16 every weekday-- and each one may be heard multiple times as they circle around their training area over the Park. They typically fly out to the Pacific Coast from the Navy's airbase on Whidbey Island over the north side of the Park and return from multiple locations as far south as Lake Quinault, so few places even in the Park's wilderness interior are

a respite from military jet roar.

With the arrival of 36 more Growlers to enhance the existing fleet of 82 already based on Whidbey Island, expect even more noise soon.

The Navy prefers this airspace because it is close to their Whidbey Island base and it's more lightly populated than urban areas. But what may appear as a convenient blank spot on the map to the Navy is home to the most visited national park in the Northwest. Olympic National Park now sees more than 3 million visitors annually and they come year-round. Also, Olympic National Park is recognized internationally as a World Heritage Site and an International Biosphere Reserve.

The Navy could fly elsewhere and in fact has done so. They have conducted Growler jet training from Mountain Home Air Force Base in southern Idaho and there are many military airbases and airspaces around the country which could be used instead.

It's time to have the Navy join us in protecting Olympic National Park and its surroundings by moving their Growler jet training to less noise sensitive areas.

Why they're a problem and what's being done

Invasive non-native plants in the Olympics

By Dan Lieberman

They were the flowers in my mother's hair in San Francisco in the sixties, the bouquet at my sister's wedding and even the boutonniere at my wedding. They are naturally beautiful and a joy to behold.

There's only one problem: they destroy other species and even entire ecosystems. Yes, this is the bitter truth about daisies.

In Olympic and other national parks, ox-eye daisies and dozens of other invasive species, including Himalayan blackberry, reed canary grass, tansy ragwort and many, many others, are wreaking havoc on ecosystems.

According to the National Park Service, the proliferation of ox-eye daisies and other invasive plants leads to "a species-poor plant community of use to few wildlife species."

Daisies are just one species. Countless other plants and animals are disrupting the balance of all our local ecosystems.

Over the past few decades, Hurricane Ridge Interpretive Ranger Janis Burger has led informal efforts to eradicate weeds at and leading up to the Ridge. When I worked as an interpretive ranger at the Ridge with Janis in the early 2000's I remember pulling many invasive plants from the meadows and roadway. Janis recently updated me, "Canada thistle and St. Johnswort on the upper road seem to have been beaten back," but "dandelions, ox-eye daisy, some clovers, cheat grass, etc. require constant vigilance as they thrive on the disturbed shoulder and adjacent slopes."

Fortunately, Olympic National Park has recently brought on an invasive species exterminator-in-chief, Janet Coles. Janet's and her seasonal



crew's jobs are Sisyphean, as essentially all areas near roads and heavily trafficked trails are overrun with invasive plants. Janet's goal is "to maintain ecological integrity in the face of wave after wave of exotic invasive plants and animals."

Because they lack natural checks and balances in the ecosystem and they reproduce by seeds, stems and roots, invasive plants spread and cover the ground in an exponential way. As a result, species that have evolved alongside and rely on the native vegetation often cannot survive.

What can citizens do? Janet shares that park visitors can be part of the solution "by cleaning their shoes, clothes, packs, pets and vehicles before coming into a park or hiking trails."

She adds, "From a native plant perspective, locals can help by using native species at home, checking the county noxious weed board's lists, maybe volunteering with them (or the Washington Native Plant Society) and controlling non-natives on their own property."

It took a bit of a paradigm shift for me, but in recent years I have come to relish tearing up and trashing ivy, herb Robert, Scot's broom, bull thistle and, best of all, ox-eye daisies. Try it, you too may find killing weeds enjoyable, or at least tolerable. Our local ecosystems will show their thanks through increased biodiversity and true beauty.

Invasive plants from top to bottom: Ox-eye daisy. NPS Photo by Mel Harte  
Himalayan blackberry has five-petaled flowers and pointed-oval leaves. NPS photo by Will Elder  
The leaves on this tree-climbing English ivy are five-lobed. NPS Exotic Plant Management Team  
Scot's broom branches showing flowers and three-part leaves. NPS Exotic Plant Management Team



# Voice of the Wild Olympics

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