Toward Returning Wolves to ONP:
Elk Monitoring in the Hoh Watershed

By Mary Peck

In August 2023, Olympic National Park biologists will deploy a grid of 35 game cameras in the Hoh River drainage and use a new method of data analysis to estimate populations of elk and deer; detect other key species such as bear, cougar, and coyote; and determine if wolf colonization is occurring. The last elk survey done by the park was in 2015.

Elk are considered a key indicator of the overall health of the park and, along with deer, play an essential role in the park’s ecosystems, from low-elevation forests to subalpine meadows. One aspect of this monitoring will be information on the spread of treponeme-associated hoof disease (TAHD), an ulcerative hoof disease that is emerging as a concern to elk health and affecting some animals within the park. Currently, there is no vaccine to prevent the disease, nor are there any proven options for treating it in the field. Preliminary results from studies by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife suggest that elk with TAHD enter winter months in poorer condition, have lower survival rates, and have reduced pregnancy rates.

The spread of TAHD to the Olympic Peninsula is a stark reminder of the many costs of the absence of wolves in the park. Wolf predation would strengthen the Roosevelt elk population in the Olympics and likely redistribute elk browsing patterns, benefiting riparian forest development and aquatic habitats. Wolves would also have a tempering effect on burgeoning coyote populations in Olympic National Park, which have posed a grave threat to the park’s endemic marmots.

OPA has donated $10,000 to the Washington National Park Fund toward this effort.
OPA Urges Action on Park’s Climate Plan

Commercial Air Tours to Remain Over Olympic

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Masthead photo by Pat O’Hara

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The Olympic Marten Project

By Dylan Hub!

The Pacific Marten (Martes caurina) historically occupied habitats ranging from the coastline to high elevation forests on the Olympic Peninsula. However, through over-harvest, incidental take, and habitat loss, the marten has suffered an extreme range contraction. By the 1960s, martens had become extremely rare with only nine verifiable sightings on the Peninsula between 1968 and 2016. This lack of sightings was not due to a lack of survey effort. From 2001 to 2017, extensive camera trap surveys were conducted across the Olympic National Park (ONP) and Olympic National Forest (ONF) as part of forest carnivore inventories, monitoring the population of newly reintroduced Pacific fishers (Pekania pennanti), and to specifically search for martens. Over the span of nearly two decades, these surveys deployed hundreds of cameras, collectively watching baited sites for tens of thousands of camera-trap nights, and only produced four marten detections. In 2017, a pilot study was initiated through the partnership of ONP, ONF, Woodland Park Zoo (WPZ), and U.S. Geological Survey to test the efficacy of using over-winter lure dispensers to survey for martens. These scent dispensers, developed by WPZ, Idaho Fish & Game, and Microsoft Research, are programmed to release a small amount of liquid scent lure, a mixture of pure skunk essence, beaver castor, fish oil and anise oil, every other day for an entire year. This is crucial as it allows surveys to be conducted through the winter when martens are much more likely to be detected. Prior surveys paired a camera with a bait, such as a chicken carcass, which required researchers to revisit survey sites regularly to replenish baits and lure. High elevation areas, with extensive snowpack and limited access were therefore not surveyed in the winters due to increased safety hazards. Overall, data collected in 2018 and 2019 showed that over-winter surveys using scent dispensers were effective.


Continued on P10.
Record Drought, Low Flows Force Fishing Closure on Olympic Rivers

By Tom Hammond

Now that the rains, snows, and winds of autumn have returned, it might be easy, or even preferable to forget the record-breaking drought experienced across the Pacific Northwest from early July (July 2 to be exact) to late October. Consistently warm temperatures combined with very little precipitation resulted in rivers running dry and forests aflame across the region—even in the normally wet western portion of the Evergreen State. Seattle-Tacoma International Airport (SeaTac) saw only 0.48 inches of rain from July to September versus an average 3.16 inches, making it the driest stretch that has been on record, and that doesn’t even include the first few weeks of October, which saw the highest ever temperature for October 16, 88 degrees Fahrenheit. SeaTac is a good benchmark for the region since records have been kept there for 130 years. Other locations, including critical ecosystems at Mount Rainier National Park and the Olympic Peninsula, also experienced a very distressed and distressing situation. As reported by the National Weather Service: “…the high at Paradise on Mt. Rainier 72° tying the record high for today” was only the second time in over 100 years of records that Paradise had a high of 70°+ on October 12.

In October, Olympic National Park fisheries biologist Sam Brenkman reported, “…the rainforest is parched! Quinault is at 110-year low flow for date, Hoh at 62-year low (period of record) and flowing at 184 cfs [cubic feet per second] (mean for date is 1,740 cfs), and upper North Fork Skokomish at 33 cfs, a 98-year low for date. The Sol Duc is unrecognizable with low flows although we do have around 600 adult summer coho counted to date in park.”

The extreme drought and record low flows caused Olympic National Park to issue an emergency recreational fishing closure on coastal river systems in early October. Rivers opened after fall rains brought river levels up, but extreme weather conditions this summer and fall foreshadow future stresses to aquatic systems as global warming tightens its grip.

The City of Port Angeles was forced to declare a Stage III water alert due to low flow in the Elwha River.

All this calls to mind the importance of glaciers to our alpine mountains. Remember the impact of our disappearing glaciers—just when rivers most need a supply of cold, clean water to sustain even minimal flows in September (and apparently now October), dozens of glaciers that used to sustain the Elwha and other major drainages on the Olympic Peninsula are diminished—or they no longer exist.

Welcome to New Olympic Superintendent Sula Jacobs

OPA welcomes Sula Jacobs as the new superintendent of Olympic National Park. Sula came to the park in August. “I’ve spent a lot of my time – both during and outside of working hours – getting to know this special place and the people who care for it,” she said. Immediately prior to Olympic, Sula served as superintendent at Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area. She’s also been a national park manager at Biscayne, Yosemite, and Cumberland Gap.

“Olympic National Park is a powerful place, a place which can spark our imaginations, fuel our curiosity, and help us understand the lessons of the natural world,” she noted.

Sula graduated from Washington and Lee University with a degree in economics and East Asian studies, received a master’s degree in public policy from University of California Berkeley and has a graduate certificate in wilderness management from the University of Montana. She enjoys paddleboarding, hiking and baking.

OPA looks forward to a long and productive working relationship with Superintendent Jacobs.

OPA Urges Action on Park’s Climate Plan

By Janis Burger

This summer, Olympic Park Advocates joined with the National Parks Conservation Association and Olympic Climate Action to send a letter to the park urging action and offering assistance to make progress on the park’s 2009 Climate Action Plan. In the late 2000s National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) developed a process for parks all over the country to become Climate Friendly Parks. Over 140 parks, including Olympic, completed the steps: carbon emission inventories, public workshops, and developing greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction plans. Olympic’s goal was to decrease the park’s carbon emissions 30% below a 2006 baseline by 2016. The 2011 National Park Service Green Parks Plan (now many years ago by the concession lodges. OPA’s letter noted that the Biden administration’s Zero Emission Vehicle program for federal agencies could help rectify that, especially since transportation is the biggest source of the park’s greenhouse gas emissions.

Our letter suggested other areas of potential emissions reductions, like ensuring this summer’s shuttle to Hurricane Ridge continues. (Earlier this year OPA made a financial contribution to develop a plan for permanent shuttles to Hurricane Ridge.) And rather than plowing the Hurricane Hill and Obstruction Point Roads in April at near peak snowpack and when snow may still fall, waiting until May or June and letting the sun do much of the work, emissions-free, as
Voice of the Wild Olympics

Unlikely Beast

By Tom Butler

Beady eyes, yellow teeth, fat and smelly with thin, patchy hair. That’s either the opening to a singles ad I could write about myself, or some of the redeeming qualities of one of our most interesting local rodents. The only surviving members of their ancient genus, you could look at them as unfortunate beasts left behind by the juggernaut of evolution or the lucky guys that stumbled upon a good genetic plan early on and just stuck with it. They have primitive teeth, a wide, flat skull and host the world’s largest species of flea (up to 3/8” long!). I was about to call them slow-witted, but they’ve been around for about thirty million years and will very likely still be here after the last human has run out of a burrow that might be five feet underground. Aside from reproductive obligations, mountain beavers apparently prefer their own company. Despite being antisocial, mountain beaver populations can be pretty packed in good habitat, and if you ever travel off -trail in the lowlands around here, you just have to train yourself to laugh when you trip and fall, or you’ll soon run out of expletives. There’s always a ton of brush, sticks and ropey blackberry of course, but the ground is also very often a crazy, ankle-busting mess of shallow, interwoven tunnels, exposed roots, and trips on piles of dirt. Aging clearcuts and damp ravines are ideal, so you can imagine that might be why the reintroduced fishes have done so well here on our peninsula. Beavers work hard and are very important tillers of soil, disseminators of seed and spore. If they survive the weasels, bobcats, coyotes, and owls, they’ll spend 5-10 years plowing just a half-acre or so, eating juicy roots, greens, ferns and whatever sapling tops present themselves. These dietary habits make them unpopular with foresters and gardeners alike, but of course they were here first, and a little trimmed greenery is warm evidence that they’re still here, going about their old business.

The Olympic Peninsula: Showcase for Climate Change

By Donna Ossesaw

Carbon dioxide (CO₂) has been building in our atmosphere because of our carbon releasing activities since the industrial revolution. CO₂ in the air chemically reacts with the ocean’s water, turning an increasing percentage of sea water and carbonic acid (H₂CO₃). This is ocean acidification. Each of us can help reverse it.

Reducing carbon dioxide emissions cannot wait. Twenty percent of the world’s population gets one fifth of its total calories from seafood. The sooner reversal starts, the easier it will be to make the earth more livable for ourselves, our children, and grandchildren. 

We can make a difference by voting and we can respond to calls for public comment. We can reduce climate change by giving or:

- Giving gifts that reduce climate change – Give a gift labeled “For YOU and YOUR FUTURE”.
- A bike for young or old that will enhance the recipient’s and the planet’s good health.
- Solar powered motion sensing night lights.
- A pass for public transportation.
- A membership to a group that promotes people-powered activities.
- Winter weather-proofing supplies and help with lawn mowing services using an electric mower or help with garden planting and weeding.
- Supporting legislation and practices that would protect the sea butterfly’s habitat.
- Supporting legislation to save old-growth forests like those in the park. Untouched, they are the best forests for sequestering carbon.
- Supporting, with comments, on OPA efforts to stop improper use of National Park lands and the Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary that increases carbon emissions.
- Supporting, with comments, efforts by government agencies to decrease their carbon footprint.
- Supporting, with comments, when government agencies propose projects that would harm the environment.
- Supporting increased housing density in urban growth areas.
- Supporting integrated transportation systems and integrate housing with transportation systems.
- Participating in car pooling.

The sea butterfly and our children need your help.
Olympic Forest
Announces Major
Timber Sale in
Dungeness Watershed

By Tim McNulty
This past summer, Olympic National Forest announced plans for a major timber action in the northern portion of the Hood Canal Ranger District. The "Canyon Forest Restoration Project," proposes to commercially thin some 2,300 acres of forest in the Dungeness watershed. The scoping document describes the purpose and need for the project: "for increased structural diversity and development of late-successional forest characteristics. A resulting benefit of thinning forests is the generation of wood products and employment of local work crews or contractors for hand felling or other restoration work."

This is a massive action for a recovering forest like the Olympic. The areas targeted for thinning are classified as Late Succession and Adaptive Management areas under the Northwest Forest Plan. Close to half the areas being considered (922 acres) are made up of naturally regenerated stands that seeded in after a fire or natural disturbance. As noted in the Spring-Summer 2022 VIOCE of the Wild Olympics, protecting these forests is the best and cheapest way to combat climate change.

When President Biden signed an executive order meant to protect old-growth forests on all federal lands last April, the first task was to determine where those forests occur. OPA asked the Forest Service to consider thinning only previously logged second-growth stands and monitor treatments for desired habitat results before committing nearly 1,000 acres of older, naturally regenerated forest to restoration thinning.

The Forest Service will release an environmental assessment (EA) this winter or spring. OPA will continue to monitor this project and work with other organizations to reduce its scale. Check our website, olympicparkadvocates.com, for updates. For details on the proposal, view the Forest Service’s project webpage at https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=62260.

Many areas are older legacy forests, important carbon sinks that help curb the acceleration of global warming. They do not need "improving."

First Nationwide Inventory of Older Forests Released

By Shelley Spalding
Mature and old-growth forests are receiving increased attention nationally and internationally as natural climate solutions. This includes recognition from policy makers and conservation non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

As noted in the Spring-Summer 2022 VOICE of the Wild Olympics, protecting those forests is the best and cheapest way to combat climate change.

When President Biden signed an executive order meant to protect old-growth forests on all federal lands last April, the first task was to determine where those forests occur.

While some of those forests had been identified during previous land use designations such as the Northwest Forest Plan, it became obvious that there was need for comprehensive information on the location of all mature and old growth forests on all lands. In September 2022, an international team of scientists released the first ever coast-to-coast, map-based assessment of mature and old-growth forests (i.e., collectively referred to as older forests) in the continental United States, in a new peer-reviewed study published by Frontiers in Forests and Global Change. Using processed satellite images to identify three structural measures relevant to forest maturity — canopy height, canopy cover, and above ground living biomass (amount of live vegetation) — scientists found that older forests make up approximately 167 million acres, or 36%, of all forests in the contiguous 48 states. While 35% of these forests are on federal lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and National Park Service, the rest exist on lands owned by non-federal entities. While older forests in National Parks are fully protected from logging, only 24% of national forests and BLM lands — which
Commercial Air Tours to Remain Over Olympic

By Rob Smith

Low-level commercial air tours will be allowed to continue over the heart of Olympic National Park, despite the National Park Service receiving more than 4,000 comments, almost all of which opposed. A limit of 64 tour flights, which stay between 2,000 and 3,000 feet above ground level, will be allowed annually, similar to current levels.

The approved tour route is from Port Angeles, entering the park up the Sol Duc valley to circle Mount Olympus and then departing south of Hurricane Ridge and across Obstruction Point trailhead to return. That brings noisy air tours across some of the most visited backcountry sites and popular overlooks in the park, almost all of which is within the Daniel J. Evans Wilderness.

It’s an opportunity missed by the NPS to significantly reduce or eliminate this unneeded intrusion into Olympic’s world-class natural experience. The NPS could have done more. For instance, a similar review at Glacier National Park produced a plan to phase out low-level air tours by 2029.

To encourage the park to protect the natural sounds and quiet at Olympic, whether from commercial tour flights or Navy training jets, contact Superintendent Sula Jacobs at olymp.superintendent@nps.gov.

Judge Rejects Navy Review of Growler Jet Expansion

By Rob Smith

The Navy did not do sufficient impact or alternative analysis when they increased EA-18G “Growler” jet training at or near their Whidbey Island airbase, according to a federal court. The judge affirmed the findings made a few months ago by a judge magistrate.

Washington Attorney General Bob Ferguson and Citizens for E'Bay’s Reserve each brought suit against the Navy following the completion of an environmental impact statement for their greatly expanding use of the local airspace for jet training as they build up Growler numbers there.

The judge agreed with a couple of key challenges: that the noise impact on people has not been considered enough, especially on children in nearby communities, and that reasonable alternatives to reduce noise by training elsewhere should have been more seriously considered.

On the negative side, the judge did not find a distinction between real time noise monitoring and the Navy’s preferred method of modelling the noise footprint without actually using instruments to measure it. National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) and OPA raised this concern over the Olympics not because modelling is inherently bad, but because the results depend on inherent assumptions that make all the difference between capturing reality or not seeing what’s really happening.

As an aside, the Navy’s models generalize and average noise impacts over a landscape which varies greatly in elevation, and the Navy also averages their noise impacts for long periods of time, so any single dramatic noise spike is largely lost over an average day. It’s the underestimating the assumptions in the models which make all the difference between capturing reality or not seeing what’s really happening.

NPCA is taking a close look at whether some of the weaknesses of the Navy’s Whidbey Island analysis are similar to the more recently completed Northwest Training and Testing environmental impact statement which the Navy did for expanded Growler training over the West side of the Olympics, including over the Hoh Rain Forest at Olympic National Park.
Olympic Park Advocates

The value of an organization endeavoring to promote the protection and integrity of a World Heritage Site and its Wilderness is infinite.

Visit us at olympicparkadvocates.org

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