



# VOICE of the WILD OLYMPICS

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Olympic Park Advocates

Spring - Summer 2025

## America's **best** idea at risk from one of the **worst**

By Rob Smith

National parks are "America's best idea," said author and historian Wallace Stegner, but now they are threatened to the core by the Trump Administration's actions to recklessly reduce the federal workforce. For an already understaffed National Park Service, these moves have become critical to the future of park protection and visitor services.

There have been two rounds of memos to all federal workers encouraging them to quit in exchange for early retirement. If they don't act within immediate deadlines, they may be subject to being laid off through an expected "reduction in force" (RIF). As of this writing, a major RIF is expected to further disrupt and reduce programs which protect air quality, wildlife and adaption to climate change across the system.

The recently released budget proposal from the Trump Administration for next fiscal year calls for a \$1 billion cut to the National Park Service – the equivalent of closing down 350 of the 433 national park units across the country.

Meanwhile, there is a hiring freeze so vacant positions at all levels, from park managers on down, cannot be filled although they are fully funded.

Then there was the firing on Valentine's Day of any employee on "probationary" status, meaning they were less than one year in a new position. That included experienced rangers, scientists, and managers who were recently promoted or finally gained permanent employee status. Two courts reversed this, but not before hundreds of park



East Fork Quinault Valley, Olympic National Park. Photo by John Gussman

workers were told to leave. While some workers have returned, the Administration has appealed this decision.

The NPS and Interior Department have been gagged on information requests, so finding out what's happening is difficult. We've heard that several people have been lost at Olympic National Park. Both fish scientists are gone, a snowplow operator was fired, and ranger staff is down, which could mean access to the park's visitor centers, campgrounds or other services could become limited.

Olympic National Park is the most visited national park in the Northwest, but has seen a 24 percent staff decrease in the last decade even before these latest actions.

Congress can fix this. Legislation is being drafted to protect the National Park Service, America's favorite government agency, from staff cuts. Funding levels could be saved through the Congressional appropriations process. Now is the time to let our senators and representatives hear that the national parks need support and champions.

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Your Legislators

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**Senate:** [senate.gov](http://senate.gov), **US House of Representatives:** [house.gov](http://house.gov)

**Sen. Maria Cantwell (D)**  
DC 202-224-3441  
Seattle 206-220-6400  
[cantwell.senate.gov](http://cantwell.senate.gov)

**Sen. Patty Murray (D)**  
DC 202-224-2621  
Seattle 206-553-5545  
[murray.senate.gov](http://murray.senate.gov)

**1 Suzan DelBene (D)**  
202-225-6311  
Kirkland 425-485-0085  
[delbene.house.gov](http://delbene.house.gov)

**6 Emily Randall (D)**  
202-225-5916  
Bremerton 360-373-9725  
[randall.house.gov](http://randall.house.gov)

**2 Rick Larsen (D)**  
202-225-2605  
Everett 425-252-3188  
Bellingham 360-733-4500  
[larsen.house.gov](http://larsen.house.gov)

**7 Pramila Jayapal (D)**  
202-225-3106  
Seattle 206-674-0040  
[jayapal.house.gov](http://jayapal.house.gov)

**3 Marie Gluesenamp Perez (D)**  
202-225-3536  
Vancouver 360-695-6292  
[gluesenkampperez.house.gov](http://gluesenkampperez.house.gov)

**8 Kim Schrier (D)**  
202-225-7761  
Issaquah 425-657-1001  
Wenatchee 509-850-5340  
[schrier.house.gov](http://schrier.house.gov)

**4 Dan Newhouse (R)**  
202-225-5816  
Yakima 509-452-3243  
Richland 509-713-7374  
Grand Coulee 509 433-7760  
[newhouse.house.gov](http://newhouse.house.gov)

**9 Adam Smith (D)**  
202-225-8901  
Kent 425-793-5180  
[adamsmith.house.gov](http://adamsmith.house.gov)

**5 Michael Baumgartner (R)**  
202-225-2006  
Colville 509-684-3481  
Spokane 509-353-2374  
[baumgartner.house.gov](http://baumgartner.house.gov)

**10 Marilyn Strickland (D)**  
202-225-9740  
Lacey 360-459-8514  
Lakewood 360-459-8514  
[strickland.house.gov](http://strickland.house.gov)

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[olympicparkadvocates.org](http://olympicparkadvocates.org)

VOICE OF THE WILD OLYMPICS

Masthead photo by Pat O’Hara

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Hall of Mosses, Hoh Rain Forest, ONP. Photo by John Gussman

Ferguson Steps Up with Funds to Reopen Hoh River Road

In March, Washington State’s Governor Bob Ferguson announced that he has come up with the funds needed to reopen the Hoh River Road. He directed that \$623,000 in the state’s Strategic Reserves Account be made available to retore access to the popular Hoh rain forest in Olympic National Park. Jefferson County made it a priority. Repairs began in April, and the road opened in early May.

The Hoh River Road washed out outside the park boundary in a December storm, and federal emergency funds needed to fix it had not been granted.

State emergency funds were used along with with \$27,000 of privately raised matching funds.

“The Hoh Rain Forest is one of the crown

jewels of Olympic National Park and Washington’s coastal communities,” Ferguson said. “It is also a critical driver of tourism on the Olympic Peninsula. We cannot allow access to remain closed during the peak visitor season.”

Some 176,566 vehicles used the road to access the rain forest in 2024, bringing nearly 460,000 visitors according to the National Park Service.

OPA president John Bridge attended the Seattle news conference announcing the funding along with fellow conservationists and local officials. The Governor thanked OPA for its support.

*Thank you,* Governor Ferguson, for stepping in when the federal government clearly dropped the ball.

## OPA Endorses EMF Forest Lands for Conservation Uses

OPA is pleased to endorse forest investment and management company EMF's application to the Washington DNR's Forest Legacy Program for a conservation easement for its 68,000-acre Olympic Rainforest holding. The lands are located on the peninsula's coastal lowlands in western Clallam and Jefferson counties; some adjoin Olympic National Park. Portland-based EMF purchased the property from Rayonier Inc., which has been managing it for intensive, short-rotation clearcutting for the past 80 years.

These lowlands forests are home to significant fish and wildlife including ESA-listed species and state species of concern. The property is a crucial habitat between upland salmon spawning streams and the ocean, said Guido Rahr, Wild Salmon Center president.

The Center will work with EFM to build greater resilience for wild salmon and steelhead. EMF has pledged to manage for salmon and wildlife habitat as well as for sustainable forest production under guidelines developed by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). FSC certification is the most environmentally rigorous in the forest industry. Very few commercial forest landowners on the peninsula adhere to its standards, certainly not Rayonier which has sold off much of its ecologically significant forest lands for residential development.

Additionally, and most importantly, these lowland forests offer invaluable opportunities for long-term carbon sequestration, watershed restoration and protection. They are critically important to the health and viability of the Olympic ecosystem. The conservation easement would also have widespread recreational benefits to the public by allowing non-predator hunting, hiking, biking (including portions of the Olympic Discovery Trail), and tribal uses.

Peninsula. But possibilities they have discussed so far include:

- Two camping loops in the park's center, with the west side mostly undeveloped.
- Two camping loops, an education center, amphitheater, climbing walls, and multi-use open lawn area.
- Three camping loops providing between 40 and 75 sites, a 20-person group camping loop, a day-use area and other facilities that might include a botanical garden, amphitheater, amphibian pond, artist space, and other features.

The author and other passionate supporters of a less-is-more future for the Miller Peninsula State Park continue to oppose such intense development.

Dr. Schanfald describes their perspective as preserving the park as it now exists. "We believe that the 3,000-acre area of unique soils, plants, and tree clusters found nowhere else belongs to the wildlife dependent on the habitat, so the human footprint should be light," she said.

She said she likes the support that David Allen, a local naturalist and horticulturist gave her when he said: "We are running out of beautiful places to kill."

To view planning efforts at Miller Peninsula State Park property to date, visit [parks.wa.gov/1187/Miller-Peninsula-Planning](https://parks.wa.gov/1187/Miller-Peninsula-Planning).

## Parknapping Doesn't Pay

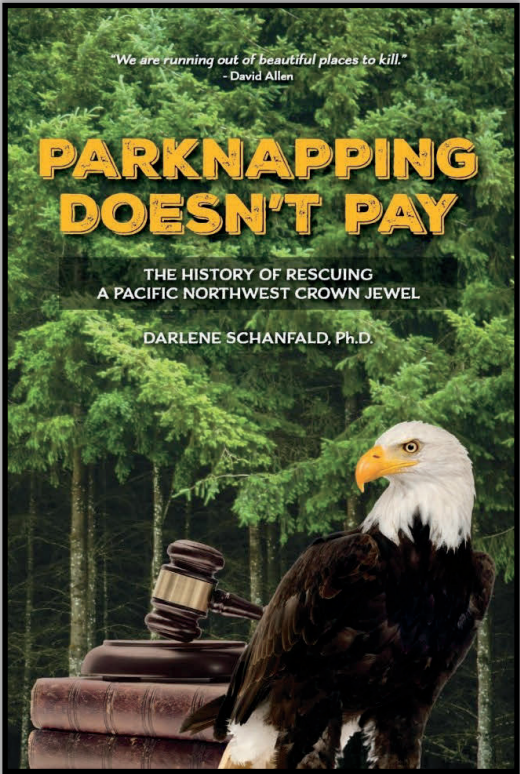
Book Review by Robbie Mantoath

*Parknapping Doesn't Pay* (Gatekeeper Press, 2024) may seem a lighthearted book title, but author Darlene Schanfald is completely serious as she lays out evidence for the scheme she helped uncover to take away land that had been set aside for a public park.

A longtime environmental activist with a Ph.D. in social-clinical psychology, Dr. Schanfald kept records as meticulously as a top-notch lawyer might do for a longtime client. The story unfolds with the appeal of a well-researched mystery.

Revealing that she and other volunteers eventually documented enough deals between Washington State government officials and entrepreneurs from the global Mitsubishi Corporation to fight off a world-class destination resort for wealthy Japanese and Americans won't spoil the reading adventure. An added benefit is the inspiration she provides for other environmental activists.

In the face of state budget problems, Washington State Parks commissioners haven't proceeded with a \$600,000 study of alternatives for a proposed heavily developed state park on the Miller



# Another Unlikely Beast

By Tom Butler

Opossums aren't complete pushovers, but if faced with a truly formidable opponent, like your Labrador, they sometimes have a curious habit of "playing dead" or "playin' 'possum." It's a masterful act, but apparently not really under their mindful control. It's more like fainting, and they don't come to for a while. It's hard to imagine playing dead being a good evolutionary decision when faced with a predator, but they also produce some convincingly hideous crab-bait-smelling drool from both ends, so maybe that's the trick.

About the size of a housecat, opossums resemble colossal rats, complete with pointy snout, naked pink ears, patchy fur and scaly tail. But they're not rodents; not even close. In fact, they share less DNA with rats than you do. Males, at about 3-12 pounds are larger than the 2-6 pound females. They're up to three feet long, with that ratty tail accounting for about half of that.

Well, there's someone out there for everyone, and opossum mating season lasts from about January to July. Since they don't have a placenta for protection, the babies get kicked out by the mother's immune system pretty early. The very tiny young (maybe the size of a pencil eraser) are born after only 12-13 days of gestation and spend their first 50-60 days affixed to a nipple in the mother's pouch. Later, the young sometimes endearingly ride around on their mother's back, but by about 100 days, she's sick of them and the maternal bond

Opossums resemble colossal rats. But they're not rodents; not even close. In fact, they share less DNA with rats than you do.



introduce them to the West, and now a population extends up along the coast into British Columbia, showing up on our north peninsula in 2021. Northern 'possums often lose parts of ears and tails to frost, so maybe their range expansion is nearing its limit.

Kind of like humans, opossums eat just about anything, including birds, eggs, small mammals, snails, snakes, insects, earthworms, carrion, fruit, and garbage. If you feed your dog or cat outdoors in opossum country, your house is on their shopping route. They are often hit by cars while foraging for roadkill. When I worked for the railroad, we'd sometimes see them at night, walking calmly down the rail, hand over hand, or later after the train went by, half a 'possum on each side.

Despite having a pretty small braincase, they are generally smarter than dogs in trials, apparently approaching pigs in intelligence. Though it pains me to say it, I just can't help but admire them.

evaporates. Adult opossums prefer their own company and rarely live more than about 18 solitary months. The oldest known opossum was only three years old. Overall, they seem sort of ill-equipped, but marsupials have been around since before the dinosaurs died out and there are still over 300 different species, mostly in South America and in and around Australia.

The somewhat revolting Virginia opossum is the only marsupial native to North America and was originally found from Central America into what is now the central and southern United States. They do pretty well around suburbia and hobby farms and can now be found as far north as Maine. Somebody thought it would be a good idea to

# Elwha Nearshore Recovery, Winter Update

By Dr. Anne Shaffer, Coastal Watershed Institute.  
Reprinted from RewildingEarth.com

In November the rains finally arrived. They raised river flows and allowed salmon to return. This year there was an abundance of chum carcasses that were washed out and deposited along the beach. Chum, historically the second most abundant salmon in the Elwha and the backbone of the Elwha ecosystem, were all but wiped out by the dams. Chum spawn during some of the roughest months of the year and aren't a sought-after fish for recreational and commercial fishing (but ARE seasonally very important to southern resident killer whales). We are thrilled to see they are arriving to the Elwha despite continued challenges. *This* is a sign of true, hard-won ecosystem recovery.

We were lucky to capture the 2024 Beaver Moon along the Elwha nearshore. The last full moon of the season is called the 'Beaver moon' — it heralds the time of year when beaver start settling in for winter. It's a fleeting and stunningly beautiful time of year.

This year the coastal beaver were largely gone from the Elwha west side channel. Key signs of their absence? The tell 'tail' (pun intended) beaver slides were grown

over, the lodge was covered with vegetation, and willow were thick and growing along both sides of the entire west/Place levee. There were no fresh chew signs along the west side channel. Our work has revealed that deterrents of low water levels and high recreational use of the area contribute to this seasonal absence. We hope the coastal beaver are thriving in other areas of the restoring watershed that are more hospitable to them. And with winter flows activating the lower river, there is a good chance they will be back to the Place levee/Elwha west side channel site. Remember, the Elwha nearshore is a

recovering ecosystem—NOT a park. Keep a keen eye on those dogs ON LEASH.

We began our holiday season with the publication of our work restoring the east Elwha delta. The work reveals

importance to, foremost, conserve and protect intact coastal ecosystems.

Thank you to all our collaborators for their continued goodwill, hard work, and partnership. Keep going.



Mouth of the Elwha River, November, 2024. Photo by Anne Shaffer and Coastal Watershed Institute. Used with permission. All rights reserved

that, when present, armoring deters nearshore ecosystem recovery even in the face of large-scale dam removals. When armoring is removed, ecosystems respond quickly, and that, when done properly, ecosystem processes are restored not only on the shoreline where the work occurs but also up to six kilometers away. It also is the latest testament to the connectivity of our nearshore world, and the



Unprotected old-growth forest, Olympic National Forest. OPA photo

## Northwest Forest Plan Goes Under the Axe

By Tim McNulty

For three decades the 1994 Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP) has protected and restored the diverse ecosystems of Northwest national forests. Launched in the aftermath of the spotted owl crisis, it is a sound, science-based attempt to preserve the Northwest's remaining old-growth forests and recover federally listed threatened and endangered species such as the northern spotted owl, marbled murrelet, and numerous stocks of wild Pacific salmon.

The plan established Late Successional Reserves (LSR) to protect old-growth and mature forests, Adaptive Management Areas (AMA) where various forms of thinning sought to hasten establishment of old-growth conditions. Aquatic Reserves were established to protect habitats for salmon and other aquatic species, as well as safeguard clean water and promote watershed health.

Most importantly, the plan drastically reduced the unsustainable logging of Northwest national forests. The annual cut on Olympic National Forest was slashed from over 300 million board feet to less than 30 million.

In the decades that followed, climate change and increased wildfires have prompted the forest service to reevaluate the plan. The agency developed amendments to address these and other concerns which primarily affect forests east of the Cascades. Unfortunately, the temptation to ramp up logging on west-side forest was apparently too much to resist. "Economic opportunities for rural communities" is now a driving factor in NWFP amendments.

Logging and control burning will be greatly increased in east-side forests. On west-side forests like the Olympic, trees over 80 years old were off limits

to logging under the existing plan. No more. Trees up to 120 years old would be available for logging, primarily for "restoration forestry." This flies in the face of scientific research, climate science, and common sense.

"[The Northwest Forest Plan] has stood the test of time as a global model for biodiversity conservation," Dominick DellaSala, chief scientist at Wild Heritage, Earth Island Institute, told the *Seattle Times*. "The plan is a threat, not a help, to old growth." Additionally, a recent executive order from President Trump further threatens national forests by demanding the "immediate expansion of American timber production" on federal lands.

In our letter to the forest service OPA stated, "The DEIS reflects an emphasis on commodity outputs over science-based ecological recovery. By increased logging of large trees and road building in Late Successional Reserves, the preferred alternative would compound climate-driven degradation of spotted owl forests."

"The proposed alternatives would more than double logging on national forests ostensibly to meet a variety of questionable goals while reducing the functional network of Late Successional Reserves needed to anchor recovery."

"This would open LSRs to significantly more logging at a time when forests like Olympic are in an early stage of ecological recovery, and when threatened northern spotted owl and marbled murrelet populations on the ONF and throughout the planning region continue to decline."

A few on the OPA board were around for the 1994 NWFP planning process. We will continue to closely monitor the amendment process and keep members informed. To read OPA's comment letter to the Forest Service, go to [olympicparkadvocates.org](https://olympicparkadvocates.org) > Current Issues > Northwest Forest Plan.

# Chehalis Tribe Purchases Critical Conservation Lands

Slow but steady progress is being made reestablishing connectivity to the Olympic Peninsula from the Cascades and Puget Sound lowlands. A major barrier to wildlife passage is the heavily developed I-5 corridor. Increasing urban sprawl, agriculture, industrial forestry, and commercial development are all taking a toll. I-5 effectively blocks migration to the peninsula for many sensitive wildlife species. Cougars and wolves in particular are loath to cross multilane interstates.

According to the international conservation organization Panthera, cougar populations are exhibiting less genetic diversity on the Olympic Peninsula. In recent months Conservation Northwest (CNW) assisted the Chehalis Tribe in purchasing ecologically critical lands that may serve as a potential site for a wildlife crossing over I-5.

The land is immediately adjacent to the interstate north of Grand Mound, where a feasibility study, also funded by CNW, identified the opportunity for constructing an overpass to allow wildlife safe passage between the Cascades and the Chehalis Valley and Olympic Mountains.

That study will guide the work that the Washington Department of Transportation, Fish & Wildlife, CNW, and area tribes will do in the coming years to protect that critical wildlife connection. For more information, visit <https://conservationnw.org/our-work/habitat/cascades-to-olympics-2/>.

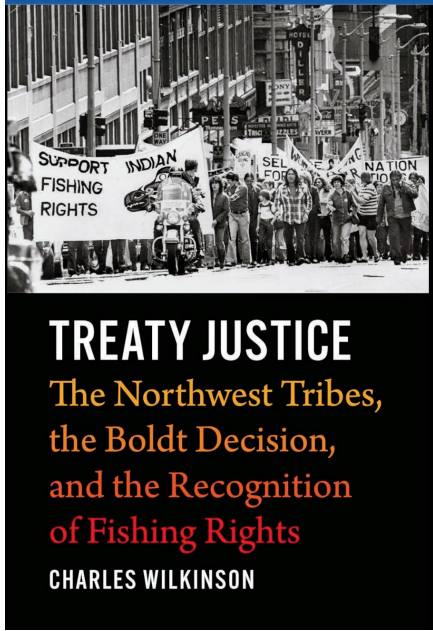
## Treaty Justice: The Northwest Tribes, the Boldt Decision, and the Recognition of Fishing Rights, by Charles Wilkinson

Book Review by Julia Guarino

I first met Charles Wilkinson in 2011, on a beautiful August day in Boulder, Colorado. I had transferred from Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. to the University of Colorado for my second year of law school, hoping that being back in the Rocky Mountains would remind me why I had chosen to pursue the study of law in the first place. I thought I might want to practice environmental law or federal Indian law, and I found the inspiration I sought in Charles' classroom.

Charles was a passionate lecturer, and at 70 he was spry, and prone to pacing the front of his classroom and shouting with excitement. He grounded his teaching and his understanding of the law in the people and the places of the West. They came alive in his lectures, and he always brought us back to them in our discussions of statutes and case law. When I had the pleasure of diving into reading the many books he published on public lands and federal Indian law (14 in total), I found that passion there, too.

Charles passed away on June 6, 2023, at the age of 82, having just finished his final manuscript for *Treaty Justice: The Northwest Tribes, the Boldt Decision, and the Recognition of Fishing Rights*. The book describes the people and places surrounding Judge George Boldt's 1974 decision in *U.S. v. Washington*, the historic fishing rights case that affirmed that the treaties the United States signed with Washington's coastal tribes included a right to fish, which Judge Boldt concluded meant a right to a full 50 percent of each annual harvest. The decision, based



on Judge Boldt's sense of equity and the solemn promises contained in the treaties, turned the fishing industry in Washington upside down.

Like his previous books, *Treaty Justice* is grounded in the people and places so deeply affected by *U.S. v. Washington*. From treaty times to the present, Charles describes the important players with care and the landscape with deep respect. The book offers a message of hope that the dedication of those committed to the protection of wild creatures and ancient cultural traditions have the power to make lasting change.

As for me, I felt lucky to read this final book in Charles' voice, which continues to bolster my confidence that I have chosen the right career path to walk. I am honored to have known Charles, and to try to continue his legacy of advocating for our precious natural resources and for the people who have always called these places home.

*Julia Guarino is Senior Associate Tribal Attorney for the Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe and was a former law student of Dr. Charles Wilkinson.*

# Park Science Amid Chaos

By Janis Burger

Imagine you're a steward of a park with world-renowned natural and cultural resources. Suddenly you can't buy supplies; all your partnerships and contracts are in question or on hold; your purchasing card limit is frozen at a \$1, and you can't travel, even to research sites that are part of your job. And by the way, you can't hire all that staff you were about to bring on for your busy field season. The government is firing your newer staff, and you can't fill essential vacant positions.

Now stop imagining. Though things change weekly, this has been the reality for staff at Olympic National Park. Under the Organic Act establishing the National Park Service, those who manage parks are required to "conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations."

Despite how dire events have been, the NPS is a high-profile and popular federal agency. It appears to be faring marginally better than the U.S. Forest Service or National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. But directives to not close public-facing park facilities belie a hollowed-out workforce struggling to do their jobs in morale-busting conditions.

How might the drastic cuts, shifting directives and gutted staffs affect the mandate to preserve unimpaired? Besides the more visible day-to-day challenges of keeping roads open, visitors safe, facilities staffed, and toilet paper in the restrooms, there's also the important behind-the-scenes work of



Dave Parks (Coastal Watershed Institute) surveys the shoreline on the North Olympic Peninsula. Photo by John Gussman.

protecting and monitoring the park's iconic resources from elk to endemic marmots, glaciers, and more.

Park staff study and manage park resources, but with the hiring limitations/freezes and various buyout/early retirement incentives, some departments are greatly shrunken. Travel and purchasing restrictions add more challenges. Long backups in Human Resources have made timely hiring of seasonal staff an issue when some field seasons should have started in April or May.

Olympic staff are also part of the National Park Service's North Coast and Cascades Inventory and Monitoring Network, one of 32 networks nationwide. Its role is long-term tracking of the "vital signs" of the park, including fish, intertidal communities, water quality, weather and climate, and landscape processes like floods and landslides. The data help inform park managers and the public, and also provide a valuable baseline for comparison to more altered ecosystems. But long-term monitoring takes reliable funding and staff. And now the Olympic Field Station and the rest of the biological research branch of the U.S. Geological Service, are on the chopping block. Its scientists have done key research on marine nutrients in salmon carcasses, non-native mountain goats, fishers, bats, elk/forest interactions and much more at Olympic.

So much research depends on partnerships with tribes, NGOs, volunteers, universities and other government agencies. While the volunteer-powered Olympic Marmot Project is continuing this summer, other research may not happen.

During my 38-year career at Olympic National Park, I worked with hundreds of dedicated, passionate colleagues who conducted field work in one of the rainiest places in the U.S., carrying heavy sampling equipment across rugged terrain and camping out for days at a time. It's heartbreaking to see morale diving as they are treated as less than the dedicated public servants they are, working to protect our national heritage for all of us.

*Directives to not close public-facing park facilities belie a hollowed-out workforce struggling to do their jobs in morale-busting conditions.*

# Still Navy Growlers!

By Donna Osseward

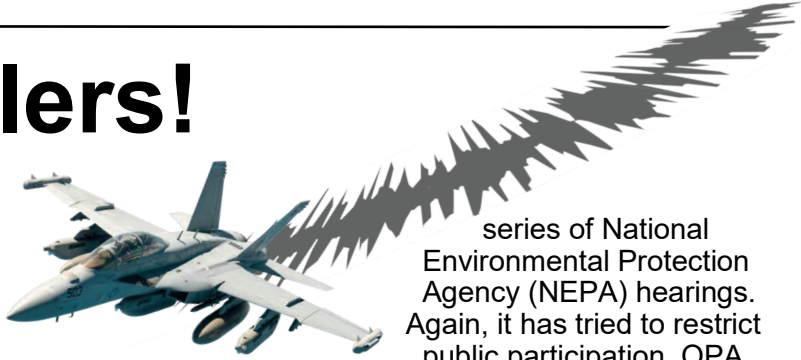
Olympic Park Advocates’ argument with the Navy about Growler jet training over Olympic National Park began in 2014. OPA supports a well-trained Navy, but we disagree about where that training should occur. In eleven years, OPA has opposed training in the air space over a wilderness national park.

This Navy has been training at Naval Air Station Whidbey Island for 40 years. In 2014 Navy Growlers flew out of Mountain Home Air Force Base in Idaho. That base is located in a less populated area than the Naval Air Station Whidbey Island Complex. The Whidbey training has Growler jets taking off and flying to the Olympic Peninsula over the San Juan Islands, the Olympics, and small towns surrounding the park.

The shaking of homes and schools -- and turning what were once the quietest spaces on earth into very noisy places -- have taken a toll. People in Forks complain of deck boards rattling. Port Townsend residents are shaken as Growlers head to the Peninsula. Quiet parks have great value for American’s health. Olympic has over 3 million visitors a year.

When the Navy moved its training, the State of Washington and Sound Defense Alliance on Whidbey Island sued, arguing that Growler noise would create unhealthy problems for the area. The judge agreed that the Navy should provide more information about noise and its effects on learning and wildlife, as well as the newly proposed Naval Air Facility El Centro or (now) NAS Lemoore. Both bases are in California. But he did not halt the training flights out of Whidbey.

In March, the Navy responded by starting a new



series of National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA) hearings. Again, it has tried to restrict public participation. OPA has taken issue with the Navy’s response of: 1) Yes, the noise is not good for learning but the level is insignificant; 2) Our national defense desperately needs this training; and 3) It cannot be done anywhere else.

The State of Washington and Sound Defense Alliance continue their opposition. This training *can* be done elsewhere because it already has for nearly 30 years. In the past several months, the Navy has had two Growler accidents. The first unfortunately killed two pilots crashing south of Mt. Rainier. The second crashed in San Diego Bay. Thankfully, the pilots were not killed. Neither of the crash areas are within the stated training area for the Growlers from Whidbey.

The Navy’s updated NEPA draft proclaims the current importance of the training by saying it had just been successful in attacking Houthi raiders in the Yemen and Red Sea area. OPA cannot see the significance of incidents in Yemen and the requirement that the training can only take place at Whidbey.

OPA asks for your help as the NEPA process continues. Emails will be needed to help convince the Navy to take its training to a more suitable base. We also ask you to provide us with your up-to-date email address so we can ask for your timely help as the process proceeds.

## Bird Flu Infected Cougars Found on Olympic Peninsula

By Shelley Spalding

Mountain lions are tawny, elegant, muscular animals, and they are the most wide-ranging cat species in the world. They are found as far north as Canada and as far south as Chile. They can be found in forests, deserts, jungles, or swamps. They are known by many names, including puma, cougar, and catamount (they are listed in dictionaries under more names than any other animal in the world). They are solitary animals and can live as long as thirteen years in the wild, although few lions live a full lifespan.

Cougars are the most exclusive of meat-eaters and are apex predators. Their keen senses, especially sight, allow them to be effective nocturnal hunters. Early colonists viewed the mountain lion as both a threat to their livestock and as a competitor for abundant game, resulting in cougars being hunted, trapped and shot on sight. Their current range in North America has been reduced to areas in western states, the Canadian provinces, of British Columbia and Alberta, and a small population in Florida.

Last fall, on the northern edge of the Olympic Peninsula, a skinny, weak cougar was seen walking slowly through a field. “I watched it twice go up to the electric cow fence and get shocked and barely respond,” an individual who witnessed the animal’s movements said in a statement. “It walked up and rested several times and did not react to my voice.” The individual called Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) and the cougar was euthanized. Shortly after that event, another infected cougar was found dead in Clallam County. The animals were tested for a number of diseases and were found to have contracted the H5N1 strain of bird flu.

The virus likely reached the cougars through their diet, which may have included infected birds or other prey such as raccoons. This raises the likelihood that the virus may be more widespread than previously thought and will likely be around for the foreseeable future. Ideally regular monitoring and sampling will be done to better understand the virus and its spread.

# Assessing the Health of Olympic Elk

By John Bridge and NPS North Coast & Cascades Network

The health of elk herds is an important indicator of — and contributor to — the overall health of Olympic National Park (ONP) and the Olympic ecosystem. “They’re big ecosystem drivers,” said ONP wildlife biologist Miranda Terwilliger. “They’re prey to a lot of predators; they drive a lot of vegetation changes therefore they have cascading impacts on smaller mammals.”

From 1984 through 2010, National Park Service and US Geological Survey biologists partnered to conduct helicopter surveys of winter elk ranges on the Hoh, South Fork Hoh, and Queets floodplains. While logistical hurdles and issues with survey design eventually halted those flights, data pointed to declines in elk herds in all three watersheds over the 27-year window.

ONP is now experimenting with a new way to monitor the park’s iconic elk herds: game cameras. Starting in 2019, wildlife crews deployed 30 cameras in remote locations in the Quinault and later the Hoh drainages on the west side of the park. OPA financially supported this shift to camera monitoring in 2022 (see “Elk Monitoring in the Hoh Watershed” in the Fall 2022 Voice). Wildlife managers seek to track the size and characteristics of elk herds over time, watching for changes that might be red flags for the status and health of Olympic’s iconic Roosevelt elk.

Although elk are protected from hunting inside park boundaries, the emergence of wildlife diseases like treponeme-associated hoof disease and chronic wasting disease in Washington has biologists on alert. Treponeme-associated hoof disease (TAHD) is an ulcerative hoof disease that is affecting some animals within the park.

Because cameras are stationary while elk move through the park, this approach will yield different

*“They’re big ecosystem drivers. They’re prey to a lot of predators; they drive a lot of vegetation changes, therefore they have cascading impacts on smaller mammals.”  
- ONP wildlife biologist Miranda Terwilliger*



Olympic wildlife technician Em Wymore removes and stows an SD card filled with images before packing the camera out of the field. NPS photo by Hazel Galloway

information than aerial surveys did. “We probably wouldn’t get a total count,” said Miranda Terwilliger, “but we could get occupancy — are elk using this area, or are they not? The question is, can we also get things like cow-calf ratio and sex ratio? And if we can get occupancy, can we tell if the population is increasing or declining?”

Of course, elk don’t stop at the entrance gate. Some herds move in and out of the park seasonally, meaning NPS scientists need data to collaborate with outside agencies to maintain sustainable elk populations.

And clearly, elk are changing how they use habitat based on climate change, which may have much more significant implications for ONP in the future.

Long-term monitoring of elk is one of the ways that ONP staff are ensuring that this treasured park continues to be healthy in the future.



# Voice of the Wild Olympics

Amy Youngblood, Editor

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Olympic Park Advocates  
PO Box 27560  
Seattle, WA 98165-2560

*As this issue goes to press,  
U.S. Senator Patty Murray and  
Representative Emily Randall  
have reintroduced the  
**Wild Olympics Wilderness and  
Wild and Scenic Rivers Act**  
in Congress.  
Thank you,  
Senator and Congresswoman,  
for your vision and dedication.*

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