



# VOICE of the WILD OLYMPICS

Vol. 33 No. 2

Olympic Park Advocates

Fall – Winter 2025

## Lawsuit Challenges Failure to Protect Olympic Marmots



An Olympic marmot reaches for a succulent bistort in ONP. Photo by John Gussman

*“We have to move quickly away from dirty fossil fuels if this species [is] ... to have any chance at survival. Reintroducing wolves to the park would also help.”*

— Aaron Kunkler,  
endangered species media  
specialist at the Center for  
Biological Diversity

In October, the Center for Biological Diversity sued the Trump administration for failing to decide whether to protect Olympic marmots, a rare species endemic to the Olympic Mountains. The marmots are threatened by climate change and predation by coyotes.

Olympic marmots are a unique species of large ground-squirrels that occur almost entirely within Olympic National Park. The Center for Biological Diversity petitioned to protect them under the Endangered Species Act in May 2024.

“The park’s alpine meadows would be empty without their iconic guardians, the Olympic marmots,” said John Bridge, president of Olympic Park Advocates.

Olympic marmots require alpine and subalpine meadow ecosystems, which are rapidly changing because of warming temperatures, loss of snow, increased and prolonged wildfire seasons and tree lines moving uphill into their meadows. They have the smallest range and population of any marmot species in the United States. Just 2,000 to 4,000 of the marmots are thought to be alive today.

“These fluffy marmots need action now to save them from extinction,” said Aaron Kunkler, endangered species media specialist at the Center for Biological Diversity. “We have to move quickly away from dirty fossil fuels if this species

and so many other animals are to have any chance at survival. Reintroducing wolves to the park would also help.”

The loss of wolves, compounded by the loss of snow, has led to more marmots being eaten by coyotes, because coyotes can now easily access marmots at high elevations. Federally sponsored eradication campaigns wiped out wolves from the park by the early 20th century, allowing coyotes to expand their range. Before the eradication of wolves, coyotes were rare west of the Cascades.

Despite the threats they face, Olympic marmots are not harmed by tourism and are frequently seen sprawling out or foraging in popular hiking areas like Hurricane Ridge. The Washington State Legislature declared them the state endemic mammal in 2009.

The lawsuit stems from the federal government’s failure to make an initial determination on the Center’s petition to protect the Olympic marmot under the Endangered Species Act. This is the first step in a long process to protect the marmots.

If the Fish and Wildlife Service decides to protect Olympic marmots, the Endangered Species Act would allow the agency to craft strong safeguards and a recovery plan to ensure that the marmots survive into the future.

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**VOICE OF THE WILD OLYMPICS**

Masthead photo by Pat O'Hara

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**ONP Experiences Severe Staffing Cuts**

By Janis Burger

With a government shutdown that dragged on for weeks, and the Trump administration threatening large Reductions in Force (RIFs) for federal employees, what has been a very tough year for public land employees has only gotten worse.

At the annual Olympic Park Advocates meeting in September, Deputy Superintendent Kevin Killian reported that the summer season went better than it could have. The Department of Interior eventually allowed seasonal employees to be hired, though many started much later than normal. He added that Olympic National Park was down 15 permanent positions from about 145. Many key positions are vacant, but thus far Olympic hasn't fared as badly as the 24 percent service-wide loss reported earlier this summer by the National Parks Conservation Association.

Unfortunately, the federal hiring freeze initiated by President Trump in January has been extended indefinitely. Approval for filling vacant positions exempt from the freeze (law enforcement, dispatch and some maintenance positions) must be sought far up the agency hierarchy and is slow in coming. As of late October, Olympic has only been able to fill two law enforcement ranger positions since January 20.

There are still critical vacancies in freeze-exempt jobs in



Visitors from Arizona peer into closed ONP visitor center during the shutdown. Photo by Janis Burger

the facilities branch, including water treatment and equipment operators. Throughout the park, from researchers to visitor center staff, there are additional vacancies subject to the freeze. Asking for exceptions to hire important staff is an onerous and lengthy process, yet the Trump administration expects parks to not cut services.

OPA is particularly concerned that the amazing salmon

sanctuary that is Olympic National Park lost both its fish biologists to retirement/buyout this summer. Killian said the park is working to fill at least one position, possibly through recruiting someone willing to transfer from another park. Many functions like human resources, contracting, IT, and public information have moved from being National Park Service jobs to being under the Department of the Interior. Some fear those moves would enable the administration to cut support positions critical to park functions, while claiming they aren't cutting NPS staff.

Morale is low, purchasing supplies tortuous, planning and implementing projects difficult to impossible, and the shutdown interfered with hiring winter seasonal staff. The future is not rosy. So, if you go for a hike in nature to restore your sanity, be sure to give park staff a break and leave no trace.

**Senator Murray Continues to Advocate for Wild Olympics Legislation**

In August, U.S. Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA), vice chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee, stepped forward to block an attempt on the Senate floor by Senator Mike Lee (R-UT) to pass a package of public lands bills without consulting Democrats on the committee. Specifically, Senator Lee's bill excluded the Wild Olympics Wilderness & Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

Senator Murray, who introduced the bill in the Senate, is a longtime champion of Wild Olympics. Representative Emily Randall (D-6-WA) introduced the bill in the House.

The Wild Olympics Wilderness & Wild and Scenic Rivers Act would permanently protect more than 126,500 acres of Olympic National Forest as wilderness and 19 rivers and their major tributaries — a total of 464 river miles — as Wild and Scenic Rivers, the first ever on the Olympic Peninsula.

We at OPA express our sincere thanks to Senator Murray for continuing to fight for permanent protection of forests and rivers on the Olympic Peninsula through the Wild Olympics legislation.

Credit: [murray.senate.gov](http://murray.senate.gov)



# National Forest Roadless Areas Under Assault

By Tim McNulty

Of the numerous assaults the Trump administration has launched on our public lands, the repeal of the Roadless Area Conservation Rule on national forests is among the worst.

The immensely popular, groundbreaking rule was the result of an exhaustive two-year public process that included 600 public meetings nationwide and drew a record 1.6 million public comments (95 percent of which supported the rule). It was put in place during the Clinton administration in 2001.

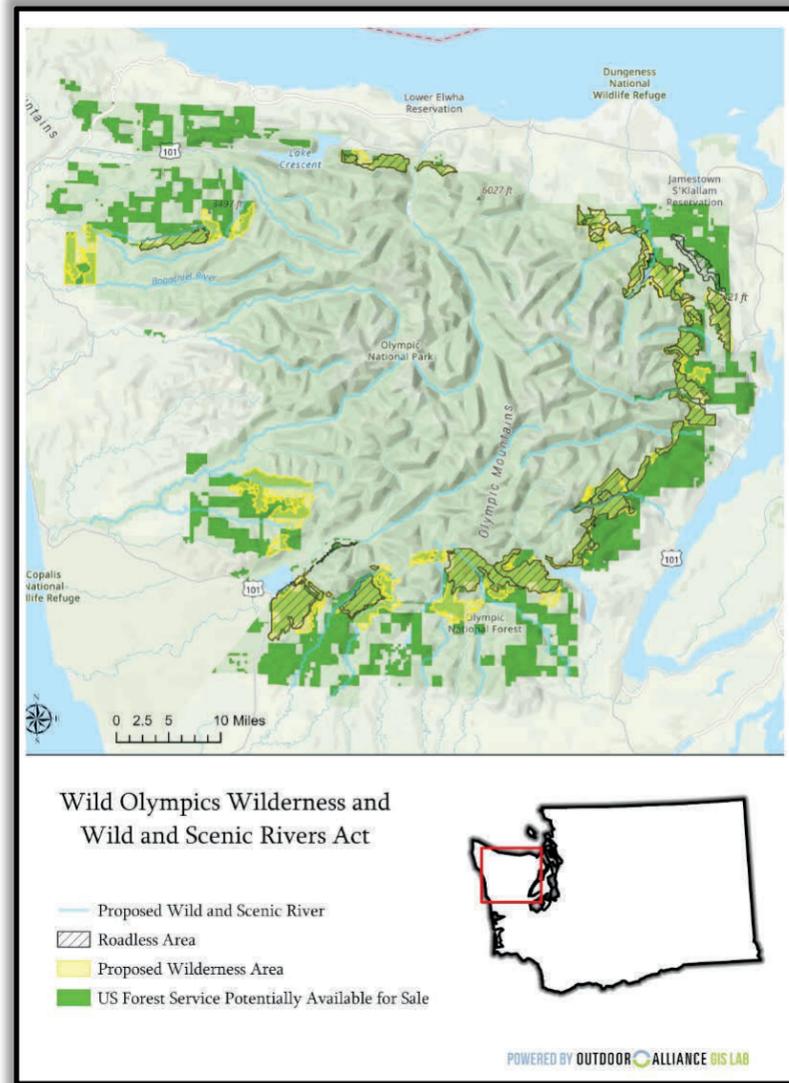
The rule blocks roadbuilding for industrial logging, oil and gas drilling, and mining on 45 million acres of wild and undeveloped forestland and protects about a third of our national forest system. These lands provide clean air, water, carbon storage, and critical fish and wildlife protections for a range of species including those federally listed as threatened and endangered.

Roadless lands also provide invaluable opportunities for millions of Americans to enjoy our natural heritage through hiking, camping, fishing, hunting, paddling, climbing and backcountry skiing. It's estimated that 44,000 miles of trails access roadless areas. A coalition of eight states including Washington oppose rescinding the rule as do 221,000 comments and 400,000 signatures on petitions.

In Olympic National Forest, spectacular roadless areas such as Rugged Ridge, Lower Graywolf, Middle Dungeness, Jupiter Ridge, Lena Lake, South Fork Skokomish, and South Quinault Ridge are at risk. Fifteen backcountry trails traverse these popular areas. All could be opened to road building and logging.

Virtually all these areas are included in the Wild Olympics Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, reintroduced this year in Congress by Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA) and Rep. Emily Randall (D 6-WA). These two officials continue to champion the Wild Olympics bill. Meanwhile, Sen. Maria Cantwell (D-WA) and Rep. Andrea Salinas (D-OR) have introduced the Roadless Area Conservation Act of 2025 (HR 3930). Their bill would codify the rule into law to prevent future rollbacks.

In September, OPA joined with 160 conservation, recreation and wildlife organizations, elected officials and local businesses that serve or represent Washington citizens in a letter to Agriculture



Wild Olympics map showing ONF Roadless Areas

Secretary Brooke Rollins to oppose the repeal of the roadless rule. In our letter, we pointed out:

*"The existing roadless rule is a balanced policy which includes common sense for temporary or other actions relating to road building for wildfire response, public health and safety, cleaning up toxic waste, existing mineral leases, federal highway projects, ecosystem restoration and habitat protection."*

Roadless areas contain less than a quarter of one percent of the nation's timber and an even smaller fraction of oil and gas reserves. But the Trump administration wants to throw them open to its pals in polluting extractive industries for private profit at the public's expense. OPA will continue working to protect these treasured lands.

# Discreet Neighbor

By Tom Butler

The Pacific jumping mouse (*Zapus trinotatus*) is a pretty common riparian resident around here all the way up to the alpine, but most people don't even know they exist.

In a family of their own, they're only distantly related to other mice. Shy and jumpy, they won't invade your sock drawer or excavate the dashboard of your car the way deer mice will. And they are nocturnal as well, so if you see one at all, it's usually only as a tawny flash across a late evening trail.

If you're lucky enough to surprise one in the open, jumping mice take off in a zigzag of great bounding leaps of four to six feet or more and then freeze abruptly. It's good strategy, as the blackish back stripe, tawny sides and white underbelly countershading makes them oddly invisible, in the way juncos seemingly vanish in leaf litter. The stylishly furred three-inch body is attached to a mostly hairless five or six-inch tail, giving them the look of a very small, vaguely fashionable rat. The tail is an essential counterweight though, as jumping mice who've lost their tails tumble hopelessly in leaps.

They walk awkwardly on all fours while foraging through dense understory, but seem to prefer a gait of short hops if they have the room. The long toes of their big hind feet leave an intermittent trail of spidery tracks in the right substrate but they're so light it's a hard trail to follow.

Like most mice, jumping mice will eat just about anything, including carrion. Gorging on the surfeit of seeds, berries, and insects of late summer and early fall, they'll increase weight by half, becoming portly and vulnerable. Sometime before winter, the grassy above-ground summer nest is abandoned for a leaf and grass-lined den deep enough to escape the frost line.

They're the only small mammal around here that hibernates deeply, some higher elevation populations for as long as nine months or more. Maybe because they're only awake during the months of plenty,

*If one of those quick blips across the trail is the color of a slightly burned tater tot, add jumping mouse to your wildlife list.*



jumping mice tolerate each other pretty well and aren't very territorial. But they hibernate alone, which is really weird, because at only an ounce or so, and with those long legs and even longer tail, the surface-to-volume ratio is huge. The heat just blasts off. Marmots hibernate deeply, but in a friendly pile. Squirrels and chipmunks will sleep for long winter stretches, but get up periodically to poop and refuel.

Jumping mice add their weight mostly as brown fat, which can be metabolized directly into heat without muscle action. Even at just a few heartbeats a minute and a body temperature near freezing, that process still uses a lot of water though. So the pituitary gland limits urine production, but of course that has toxicity problems of its own.

Jumping mice at least a year-old mate soon after waking up. Gestation of a few weeks results in three or more precocial young who achieve independence in only six weeks or so, immediately entering the race to put on enough fat to make it through winter. I'd say keep an eye out for them, but unless the cat drags one in, the attention may be in vain. If one of those quick blips across the trail is the color of a slightly burned tater tot, add jumping mouse to your wildlife list.

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Forest in Unit G32 of the Canyon Restoration Project, located in an Adaptive Management Area under the Northwest Forest Plan and scheduled for mechanized logging. Photo by Ryan Talbott, WildEarth Guardians.

By Tim McNulty

After a three-year hiatus, and a green light from President Trump to ramp up logging on federal lands, Olympic National Forest is pushing ahead with a major timber sale in the Hood Canal Ranger District. The "Canyon Forest Restoration Project" proposes to commercially thin more than 2,000 acres in the Dungeness watershed. The action requires construction of 11 miles of "temporary" roads including several stream crossings. Forest service officials are justifying this "restoration project" in a limited and inadequate environmental assessment (EA) rather than a full environmental impact statement (EIS) as required by the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA). The abbreviated period for public comment ended November 13.

This is a massive, unprecedented action for the recovering Olympic forest. Areas targeted for thinning are classified as Late Successional Reserves and Adaptive Management Areas

under the 1994 Northwest Forest Plan. Nearly half the areas (922 acres) are made up of naturally regenerated stands that seeded in after a fire. These older forests (80 to 160 years old) generally exhibit a greater diversity of species, age, and habitat structure. They contain down logs, dead snags, and increasingly larger trees as stands naturally develop. Progressing at their own pace toward more structurally diverse, late successional, and eventually old-growth conditions, these legacy forests are also important carbon sinks that help curb the acceleration of global warming.

They do not need "improving" by building roads and cutting trees.

The 11.4 miles of new roads required to access these stands can deposit sediments into salmon streams and tributaries, provide vectors for non-native and invasive species and open stands to avian predators, all of which degrade fish and wildlife habitat, including habitat for federally listed and sensitive species. We know

# Olympic Forest Pushes Ahead with Major Timber Sale in Dungeness Watershed



A legacy forest in Unit F193 of the Canyon Restoration Project. This area is scheduled for mechanized logging to improve habitat. Photo by Ryan Talbott, WildEarth Guardians.

from bitter experience even "temporary" roads, once cut, invite illicit quad and dirt bike incursions and illegal tree cutting, which remains rampant in this district of the forest.

Several federally listed threatened or endangered species occur in or near these forests, including northern spotted owls and marbled murrelets. Four threatened fish species use the Dungeness River and its tributaries: Puget Sound Chinook salmon, Puget Sound steelhead, Hood Canal summer chum salmon, and bull trout. The Dungeness River is classified as a Tier 1 Key watershed in the NW Forest Plan.

In our 2022 scoping letter, OPA stated that a project of this scope requires a full environmental impact statement under NEPA. Further we asked the Forest Service to consider thinning only previously logged and planted second-growth stands and monitor treatments for desired habitat results before committing nearly 1,000 additional acres of older, naturally

regenerated forest to restoration thinning. With staffing cuts and all-out slashing of agency budgets, follow-up studies and monitoring are unlikely.

Our concerns were dismissed out-of-hand. Not a problem, the EA assures us, such "short-term" habitat degradations are "expected to benefit habitat in the long term." With the Trump administration behind it, the agency is plunging ahead.

Deadline for comments on the preliminary EA has passed, but this will be an ongoing, ten-year project. In the meantime, the Forest Service needs to hear from you.

You can view the project at: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/r06/olympic/projects/62260>

To read OPA's letter to the Forest Service, go to: [olympicparkadvocates.org/attacks-on-public-lands/](https://olympicparkadvocates.org/attacks-on-public-lands/)

# My Chat with the Secretary

By Janis Burger

When I heard that Secretary of the Interior Doug Burgum would be visiting Hurricane Ridge in May, it coincided with a hike I was planning with a friend. When we arrived at midday there was no entourage, but several protesters had gathered and offered us some extra cardboard signs. With my borrowed “Not 4 Sale” sign, we joined other protesters in the designated First Amendment area at the east end of the parking lot.

When the convoy of black SUVs and ranger vehicles arrived, we seven yelled and held up our signs as they passed — fleeting — but better than nothing. My friend and I returned the signs and headed to my car for our hiking gear. And surprise,

below my car, near the former building location, the secretary was talking with park management, reportedly about funding for rebuilding the visitor center that had been destroyed by fire in May 2023.

After finishing, the group walked up to the parking lot, and a small group of visitors and protestors gathered round as interagency fire staff hurried to brief Burgum on the challenges of fire management. When it appeared the entourage was leaving, I decided to speak up.

“Climate change is making fire risk worse,” I chimed in. Burgum turned to listen, saying thank you for caring. No one shut me up, so I went on, noting that the administration was claiming fraud and abuse to justify cuts, but in my years of working there, I’d only seen the staff shrink and visitation increase.

“We can’t keep doing more with less forever, it’s not sustainable,” I added.

He listened politely and asked how many years I’d worked there.

“Thirty-eight,” I replied.

He thanked me for my service, then asked Superintendent Jacobs how seasonal hiring was going. She started to say all were hired except resource management, but I had to contradict her as I knew seasonal interpretive staff hadn’t started yet. I said that with the administration rescinding job offers months before, once there was finally approval to hire seasonal employees, Human Resource backlogs kept delaying start dates. I added that in years past, there’d be staff up there in May, not an empty contact station.

Finally, I said “The Organic Act requires national parks be preserved unimpaired for future generations, but that can’t be done without researchers.” I added that even the seasonal biologist who worked to keep bears, deer and people safely apart, hadn’t started yet.

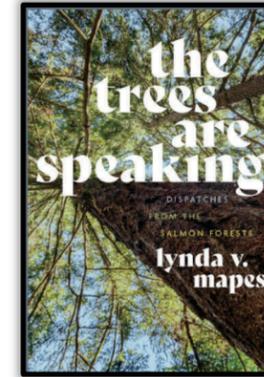
I thanked him for listening and my friend and I turned to go. I was nauseated with nerves and worried I’d been a fool. A young lady in the entourage quietly thanked me as we walked away. Maybe it wasn’t so foolish! But what a contrast to receptions with staff that some previous Secretaries of the Interior who visited Olympic held. But their policies weren’t an existential threat to public lands and their protectors.

*“I decided to speak up.  
“Climate change is making fire risk worse,”  
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Burgum turned to listen,  
saying thank you  
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No one shut me up,  
so I went on.”*

# The Trees Are Speaking

Dispatches from the Salmon Forests

By Lynda V. Mapes  
University of Washington Press



*The Trees are Speaking* is an eloquent call to rethink our relationship with forests. Ancient and carbon-rich, old-growth forests play an irreplaceable role in the environment. Their complex ecosystems clean the air, purify the water, cool the planet, and teem with life. In a time of climate catastrophe, old-growth and other natural forests face existential threats caused by humans—and their survival is crucial to ours.

In a bicoastal journey, Lynda Mapes connects the present and future of Pacific Northwest forests to the hard-logged forests of the northeastern United States. She introduces Jerry Franklin, who led scientists in recognizing and studying the distinctiveness of ancient forests. She journeys to Vancouver Island, where Indigenous activists and scientists strive to preserve the health of Nuu-chah-nulth traditional homelands amid continued clearcutting. On the East Coast, she explores lands that have been logged for generations, leaving industrial carnage along formerly life-filled waterways. Mapes interviews Penobscot elders and scientists whose new practices are restoring the fish runs, as well as loggers using new technologies to harvest more sustainably.

With vibrant storytelling supported by science and traditional ecological knowledge, Mapes invites readers to understand the world where trees are kin, not commodities. For conservationists, *The Trees Are Speaking* is essential reading.

# Randall Introduces Act to Protect Diversity Initiatives in National Parks

Last August, Congresswoman Emily Randall (WA D-6) pushed back on Trump's attempt to whitewash history in our national parks. She introduced the Expanding Quality and Universal Access to Lands and Parks (EQUAL Parks) Act. This law would codify President Obama's 2017 memorandum "Promoting Diversity and Inclusion in Our National Parks, National Forests, and Other Public Lands and Waters."

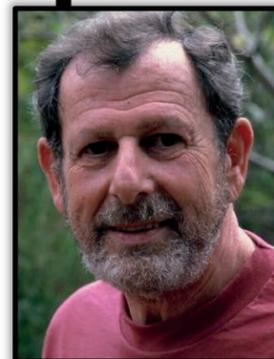
The bill comes in direct response to a Trump Executive Order, which revoked Obama's diversity initiative (The Obama initiative was later reissued by President Biden).

"Our public lands belong to all Americans, regardless of race, gender, socioeconomic status, or background," said Randall.

The EQUAL Parks Act will provide legal permanence to diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives within public lands agencies, enhance operational excellence through diverse workforce recruitment and retention, and reaffirm the federal government's dedication to inclusive practices.

"We cannot allow important historical narratives to be whitewashed or forgotten," said Randall. "By codifying these diversity initiatives into law, we're protecting them from future administrative changes as seen by this Administration. This is about ensuring that the full story of America continues to be told and preserved for future generations."

# A Farewell to Olympic Conservation Giant, Bob Lynette



By Jon Owen

On Sept 30, the Olympic Peninsula lost a legend in the Washington conservation community: lifelong activist and advocate for the environment and all things Wild, our friend and colleague Bob Lynette, who died of cancer at age 88.

As a Sequim resident, Bob started the North Olympic Group of the Sierra Club, was one of the co-founders of the Wild Olympics Campaign and a lifelong supporter of OPA. He was a humble giant with a brilliant political mind, and he was central to helping get the Wild Olympics campaign off the ground. We mourn his loss, and we will miss him.

Photo courtesy The Seattle Times

## The Bear Gulch Fire Claims the North Fork Skokomish Valley

By John Bridge

The largest fire in Olympic National Park's 87-year history was first reported on July 6, 2025, near the Mount Rose trailhead in Olympic National Forest. The fire's origin is still under investigation, but it is being called a human-caused fire. The timing, so close to the Fourth of July, suggests fireworks could have started it, but it also could have been a campfire left unattended.

As of November 12, it had burned 20,233 acres and was 100% contained.

Based on reports from August, there were some 400 total personnel, including firefighters and support crews, deployed to fight the fire. They deserve our heartfelt thanks. There was no damage to buildings at the Staircase Ranger Station and campground as they were enclosed in fire protective structure wrap. The campground was protected as well.

We don't know how severely the fire affected the park's old-growth forests or wildlife, but it was a stand-replacing fire, that occur in dense, west-side forests. Such fires are high-intensity burns that typically kill all or most trees in a forest stand. It spread quickly and eventually engulfed most of the upper North Fork Skokomish valley, reaching into subalpine areas including headwater areas of the Duckabush River southeast of White Mountain. The popular Flapjack, Black and White, and Mildred lakes were spared, but valley bottoms and mountain slopes burned from Lake Cushman to the Skokomish headwaters. The Shady Lane, Staircase Rapids, Mt. Rose, Wagonwheel Lake, Flapjack Lakes, and Six Stream trails were affected, as were most of the North Fork Skokomish trail from Staircase to Two Bear camp in the upper valley.

Closures around Staircase Campground and Lake Cushman persist to ensure public safety. Forest Service Road 24 leading into the Staircase Campground remains

closed and may not open for some time because of remaining wildfire activity and significant gravity hazards -- such as rockfall, treefall, and landslides -- which are widespread in the burned areas and are exacerbated by rain. Although this area normally receives 90 inches of rain annually, 2025 was a very dry year.

As summer temperatures continue to rise and budgets for staff to supervise visitors continue to fall, I continue to be concerned for what future fire seasons may bring.



Sword fern fronds sprout from charred rhizomes in the aftermath of Bear Gulch Fire. U.S. Forest Service photo

## Botanical Research Monitors Climate Change

By Emily Hanson  
Reprinted with permission from Peninsula Daily News

In late July and early August, Western Washington University Professor Eric DeChaine, ten WWU students, and scientists from the Missouri Botanical Garden, set up Global Observation Research Initiative in Alpine Environments (GLORIA) sites.

"It's a system of monitoring alpine plant responses to climate change in real time," DeChaine said. "It was started years ago in Austria. Since then, they have a whole protocol that anybody doing this has to use so all the studies can be compared to one another."

The team hiked into the mountains to two remote areas where they set up grids to study the existing plants. "An interesting thing about the GLORIA protocol is the sites have to be accessible and repeatable," DeChaine said. "No super steep slopes, they've got to be more well rounded, which isn't great for the Olympics. Our sites are in the northeast portion of Olympic National Park and Olympic National Forest. One is out in the Obstruction Point area and the other is in the Baldy area.

"Each day we hike out to one of those peaks and survey that peak by setting up a grid of 3-meters-by-3-meters in each direction and then identify and count all the plants that were in that grid," DeChaine said. "We would also survey the entire summit and record all the species that were on the summit and take different measurements as well. We put in temperature monitors so we can monitor any changes."

The plan is to go back to the sites every five years and survey them again using the same methodology to see if there are any changes. "There could be just plants coming in from lower elevations that are native to the Olympic Mountains," DeChaine said. "There could be plants coming in that are non-



The Global Observation Research Initiative in Alpine Environments (GLORIA) team conducting field work in the Olympics. Photo by Eric DeChaine/Western Washington University

native that then might be really bad for the area up there. It could also be that we find stability and that there actually isn't much change at all.

"The expectation for the lower plants is that as warming occurs, the suitable environment for plants will move northward or up slope and they would encroach upon the alpine habitat, the plants that are already there, which would respond by moving further upslope," DeChaine said. "The plants at the top may experience extinction because they have nowhere else to go."

The Missouri Botanical Garden approached DeChaine about doing the GLORIA experiment in the Olympic Mountains, DeChaine said. Robbie Hart, a scientist at the garden, said he's always known the Olympic Mountains were special.

"I was born and raised in Port Angeles and think of it as my home mountain range," Hart said. "It's especially dear to me and I've wanted for a long time to see if we could establish a site there."

Due to the unique plants found in the Olympic Mountains, the range is known by scientists around the world, Hart said. Scientists he's spoken to have been happy to hear the GLORIA experiment is happening in the Olympics.

For more information about the GLORIA experiment, go to [www.gloria.ac.at/home](http://www.gloria.ac.at/home).



# Voice of the Wild Olympics

Amy Youngblood, Editor

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