



VOICE of the WILD OLYMPICS

Vol. 34 No. 1

Olympic Park Advocates

Spring – Summer 2026

Planning Moves Ahead for Hurricane Ridge Lodge

By Janis Burger

When the Hurricane Ridge day lodge was lost to a fire in May 2023, people near and far mourned its loss. In the interim, the park installed two trailers providing restrooms and an information window. Now the long process to rebuild a new facility is under way.

A design contract was awarded to Anderson Hallas Architects of Golden, Colorado last September. The firm has designed facilities for other snowy, mountainous sites like Glacier National Park and Cedar Breaks National Monument. Geotechnical drilling was conducted in October to inform the design process. The project will move into the design phase and request proposals in 2027. A contract start date is planned for 2028. With its long road, heavy snowfall and short construction season, Hurricane Ridge is a challenging construction site.

U.S. Senator Patty Murray earmarked \$80 million for rebuilding in the Fiscal Year 2025 Disaster Supplemental fund. At an April 22 subcommittee hearing, Sen. Murray pressed Interior Secretary Doug Burgum on the status of the project. There is concern that the current administration will claw funds back as they have for many other funded projects nationwide.

To gather community input, Olympic National Park held a public listening session in Port Angeles in January. About 200 attendees shared ideas and concerns on sticky notes posted at various stations. The hundreds of notes combined with online public comments will inform the vision.



Photo by John Gussman

Comments ran the gamut from concerns about exterior lights impacting night sky viewing to the need for restrooms in the shoulder seasons and an easy-to-use elevator. OPA and the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) wrote a joint letter emphasizing the importance of natural history and climate education, sustainability, visitor services and more.

The architects face challenges. The former building served as a visitor center, indoor picnic/warming area, classroom, first aid/emergency services base, restaurant and gift/winter rental shop.

In a FAQ document, park officials wrote that the building would occupy the same location and that construction may start in 2028. "Before construction can begin, a series of steps must be completed, including design, compliance, and construction contract solicitation and award." It concluded that construction would likely take two to three years given the short construction window.

OPA will continue to monitor the planning process.

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Printed by Abracadabra Printing on acid- & chlorine-free FSC-certified paper, 10% recycled, 30% post-consumer waste

Bipartisan Appropriations Bill Blocks NPS Funding Cuts

Adapted from National Parks Traveler and other news sources

In January, bipartisan legislation passed both chambers of Congress that blocked drastic cuts in the National Park Service's fiscal 2026 budget and provided for hiring increases for the agency.

The funding measure was part of a three-bill package that carried funding for the Interior Department, which oversees the Park Service. The package provided \$3.72 billion for the Park Service.

The measure retains current funding levels for Park Service 2026 operations and ignores the Trump administration's call for a \$1 billion cut.

"This bipartisan budget bill rejects the Trump administration's reckless \$1 billion funding cut that would have devastated our parks," said Theresa Pierno, National Parks Conservation Association's president. "These funding levels should keep parks open and staff on the ground as the system has been nearing a breaking point after losing a quarter of its

[A]s park watchers prepared for a lean-but-not-disastrous 2026 visitor season, the Trump team struck again

permanent workforce in 2025."

But as park watchers prepared for a lean-but-not-disastrous 2026 visitor season, the Trump team struck again. In April, the Trump administration asked

Congress for \$2.14 billion for the 2027 "Operation of the National Park System." That includes the management, operation, maintenance, and general administration of all 433 National Park Service sites.

This budget proposal is yet another attempt to gut the National Park Service. It's a \$760 million budget cut, or a full 26% reduction of the entire NPS budget. Just as visitation and demands on parks grow, funding and staffing continue to shrink. Since January 2025, the Park Service has lost nearly 25% of its workforce – over 4,000 staff – due to pressured resignations, early retirements and ongoing barriers to hiring.

Americans remain united in our support for national parks. Nearly 70% of citizens polled reject the drastic cuts to park budgets the Trump administration proposes. We want parks protected, funded and fully staffed. OPA and national conservation groups are urging our representatives in Congress to restore full funding to national parks.

Forest Service "Reorganization" Announced

From Forest Service Employees for Environmental Ethics and other sources

In a troubling announcement, the Forest Service said it will move its headquarters from Washington, D.C. to Salt Lake City, Utah, and begin "a sweeping restructuring of the agency to move leadership closer to the forests and communities it serves." The Forest Service will also "begin transitioning to a state-based organizational model designed to shift authority closer to the field."

As a result, all regional offices will close, and 15 state directors will be appointed around the West. The agency calls the change "a common-sense approach to improve mission delivery." Agriculture Department Secretary Brooke Rollins emphasized "supporting our timber growers across the country... by



Photo by John Gussman

prioritizing a regional office and promoting policies that boost timber production." Rollins also said, "Deregulation is the top priority for our agency."

While Department and agency leaders are touting how the reorganization will move Forest Service offices closer to the field, the new plan takes the opposite approach with research. Under the reorganization, the Forest Service will shutter at least 56 research facilities in 31 states, including the Pacific

Northwest Research Station in Portland, Ore., a facility founded in 1925 that has 246 employees, most of them scientists. Research will be consolidated into a single facility in Colorado.

Continued on P. 10 Reorganization

Record Low Snowpack Foretells a Parched Summer

By Tom Hammond

April 1 is typically when our mountains reach maximum snow accumulation for the winter, commonly referred to as "snowpack." Snowpack across the Olympic Mountains for winter 2025-2026 was historically low, averaging a mere 26% of normal across the entire range.

For many sites in the Olympic rainshadow, such as Dungeness, Deer Park and Hurricane Ridge, snowpack is at just 9% of the historical average.



Never before in recorded history have we experienced four consecutive years of drought

A south-facing Webcam view from Hurricane Ridge in early April overlooks the Lillian and Elwha River valleys, where a subnormal snowpack is quickly melting from the Olympic Mountains. Photo courtesy of Washington's National Park Fund.

Olympic National Park ecologist Bill Baccus summed it up: "The Hurricane snow course had the third lowest snowpack value since measurements began in 1950. At the Deer Park snow course, which has been measured since 1949, we recorded the lowest value ever in the 78-year record."

Warm temperatures are the main culprit for this lack of snowpack, with precipitation falling as rain instead of snow in all but the highest elevations, often exceeding the height of all Olympic mountains save for the summit area of Mount Olympus.

Even when snow fell, warm "atmospheric river" events occurred throughout the winter, washing away what little snow there was. Most notable was the warm rain event of Dec. 11, which resulted in the Elwha River reaching major flood stage.

I visited the Elwha and Morse Creek that day, and while Morse Creek (which drains the entirety of the eastern extent of Hurricane Ridge) flowed a dark chocolate brown, turbid with mud and debris, the Elwha flowed a surreal slate-concrete color--it seemed like the last of the area glaciers were being washed away.

As of May 1, ONP's Baccus reported "snow is nearly non-existent on most south

facing slopes below 5,500 feet in many areas. Both the Deer Park and Hurricane snow courses are completely snow free. Combining snow course data with the three SNOTEL sites that retain snow into May, we get an average of 22% of normal for the Olympic Mountains... our second lowest snowpack in the last 75 years."

We are now in the fourth consecutive year of drought in the Pacific Northwest. The lack of snow in the Olympic and Cascade Mountains has resulted in the Washington State Department of Ecology declaring a drought emergency. Never before in recorded history has there been a drought declaration in April -- as noted, this is when we should be our wettest. Never before in recorded history have we experienced four consecutive years of drought.

The times they are a-changing, and not in a good way. The threat to fish, wildlife, farms, and forests, and potentially adverse effects on our very lives and livelihoods, cannot be overstated. Will this be the summer where folks living along the northern Olympic Peninsula turn on the tap to take a shower and nothing comes out but wildfire smoke?



John Bridge Selected as Sequim Citizen of the Year

OPA was pleased to learn that our president, John Bridge, was selected as Sequim's Citizen of the Year for 2026. John was recognized for his years as a fourth-grade teacher at Helen Haller Elementary, where he also coached Math Olympiad teams, refereed youth soccer, and led school chess clubs. John later served on the Sequim School Board, the Sequim Education Foundation, and the Sequim Planning Commission, along with doing volunteer work at the Dungeness River Nature Center and Volunteer Hospice of Clallam County.

In his endorsement letter, Tim McNulty wrote that John's dedication to conservation of public lands on the peninsula is exceptional.

"At OPA, John directed a reorganization of our non-profit group and moved OPA into active financial support of scientific research and restoration efforts in Olympic National Park. Under his guidance, OPA supported critical glacier studies which measured the impact of global warming and supported important field studies of Pacific marten, fisher, and

Roosevelt elk in the Olympics.

"Throughout this time, John volunteered with the annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count, maintained remote cameras for the Olympic Cougar project, and continued to lead groups of wildflower enthusiasts into the wilds of Olympic National Forest and Olympic National Park."

Congratulations, John. Your recognition is well deserved!



The Glory of Bigleaf Maples

Story and Photos By Tom Butler

Winter has its merits, but oh! how I love our green springs, when Bigleaf Maples (*Acer macrophyllum*) wake from their winter naps. I look forward to them every spring. Those lovely flowers don't smell like much but they're really important to early spring insects, and a lot of birds such as Evening Grosbeaks and Purple Finches gobble them like crazy. Eventually the blossoms produce the familiar golden brown helicopter fruits called samaras that whirl away on fall gales or when flung from the hands of laughing kids.

As I'm sure you've noticed, these trees can be majestically big, and like some politicians, often live for decades in states of partial decay, with some parts dead and rotting away while other parts live on happily. The bark of young trees starts out a delicate smooth gray, but gives way to a wrinkly roughness as it ages. All those stationary nooks and crannies give mosses and small plants a perfect place to get going.

As you go west from Sequim the moss gets more and more luxuriant until by the time you reach Lake Crescent maples look like trees trying to join the world of mammals, but not quite figuring it out yet. "Dripwater" from fog or rain, enriched by the poop of canopy-dwelling birds, insects, etc., runs down the trunks, nourishing a dense

miniature forest chock full of bizarre spiders, insects and centipedes. Out west this living upholstery can be elbow-deep. Older trees actually grow tiny roots out of their trunks into the nutrient-rich mossy "soil" to grab some of the nutrients before they run onto the ground.

The leaves have an amazing shape variety and are sometimes so big they just make you laugh. If it's dry and a little frosty in fall, they turn a welcome bright yellow before they fall. Back east their cousins put on a roadside show so bright you'll drive right into the ditch if you aren't careful.

Bigleafs are the biggest of all 125 species of maples, sometimes with limbs so immense you'd only be half surprised to see a troop of gorillas lounging around. They range from southwestern British Columbia south to northwest California, and will enjoy themselves on rich valley soils for two or three hundred years if they're lucky. Optimistic sprouts from cut or burnt stumps can grow over 12 feet in one year.

Natives used the leaves as temporary containers and the dense wood was and still is used to make cooking utensils and paddles. Some parts of the tree were used to make an infusion to treat sore throats and the Saannich rubbed the leaves on a young man's face so he wouldn't grow whiskers. You can make a decent syrup if you're willing to boil down about twice as much sap as from the eastern sugar maple. I know at least one guy who eats the flower clusters battered and fried in butter. They're not bad.

Nowadays maple wood is pretty valuable for furniture and flooring. Crazy grain types like "fiddleback," "quilted" and "birdseye" trick the eye into seeing otherworldly landscapes on glass-smooth tabletops and can be quite spendy, leading to some poaching. A lot of it is sold in smaller pieces for making musical instruments. Apparently, Carlos Santana's favorite electric guitar is made of Bigleaf Maple.



Bigleafs are the biggest of all 125 species of maples, sometimes with limbs so immense you'd only be half surprised to see a troop of gorillas lounging around



An Uncommonly Common Seabird

Book Review by Shelley Spalding

In her latest book, *The Bird with the Flaming Red Feet*, Maria Mudd Ruth combines memoir with natural history to tell a lively and heartfelt story about the charismatic pigeon guillemot.

Although a fairly common seabird in Washington's nearshore areas, pigeon guillemots spend most of their time offshore beyond the reach of binoculars and spotting scopes. Thus, a common seabird is seldom seen by birdwatchers.

Ruth weaves together science, field observation, and community

storytelling as she describes how she became part of a local group of volunteer surveyors that record and document the comings and goings of this often-overlooked bird. The survey team took on the name "Guillemoteers" because, according to Ruth, "although we brandish binoculars, not swords like the Musketeers, 'Guillemoteers' captures the spirit of camaraderie... we carry onto the beach each week."

The beauty of community science like this, using trained volunteers, is that it can collect data at little to no cost, thus helping answer questions that scientists are interested in.

The team shared not only admiration for pigeon guillemots but also curiosity about how they live their lives. For example, they realized that during all the time surveying they had never seen a pigeon guillemot actually excavate a fresh burrow for their nest. The team then assembled and tried

out numerous tools in order to see what it would take to excavate a burrow. Tools assembled but not necessarily tried out included toothpicks, chopsticks, a bamboo fork, tweezers, flat-headed and Phillips screwdrivers, a 10-inch-long dandelion weeder, a three-tined weeder, the

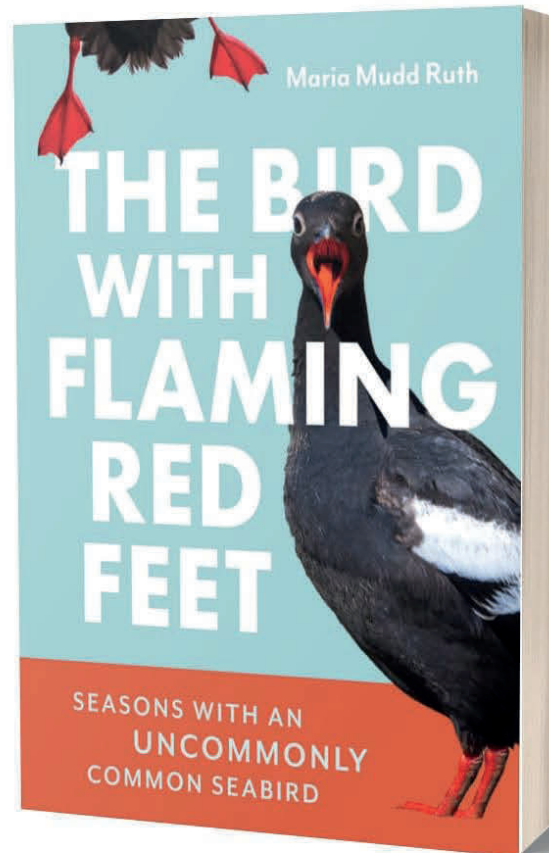
small file from a toenail clipper, and a set of acrylic glue-on fingernails. After an hour of stabbing with the dandelion weeder, they succeeded in digging a hole seven inches deep; it would take several hours to excavate the two feet that pigeon guillemots need. The most likely scenario, they realized, was that the birds enlarge existing burrows that were excavated by other birds or animals.

As well as learning about the life history, habitat needs, and the role the pigeon guillemots play in the health of the marine ecosystem, we learn how citizen scientists can bring a sense of

deep caring for the plight of a wild animal or plant and the place in which it lives. The inlet in Puget Sound where the Guillemoteers conducted their surveys became "our home, our place, and our shared responsibility."

Ruth has a sense of humor and a playfulness that are displayed in her descriptions of the guillemots' world. In the chapter titled "Sex on the Beach," she describes how, during courtship, "a male will paddle in a circle closely and rapidly around a female and dip his head under water repeatedly as if utterly obsessed with her stunning red legs and feet.... He seems head over heels."

This delightful book invites the reader to slow down, pay attention, and reconnect with the wild places and creatures just outside their door -- and experience the sheer joy of doing so!



Marymere Falls and Overlook in Olympic National Park. Photo by John Gussman

Funding "America's Best Idea" Worsens

By Rob Smith

Congressional funding for the National Park System continues to decline, including in staff positions. Meanwhile, visitation continues to grow, putting more pressure on roads and other facilities which are aging and need repairs.

A new study by a University of Washington public policy graduate student puts a fine point on these trends for Olympic and other Northwest national parks. As a research intern for National Parks Conservation Association, Alaina Medjo documented NPS funding levels over time using agency budget information.

For the last 20 years, park funding at Olympic has not kept up with inflation. This means not keeping up with regular maintenance of roads and visitor facilities — the needs amounted to more than 102% of received funding, which might allow for deferring some projects in the short term, but over time can become serious and expensive problems.

Meanwhile, visitation at Olympic, the most visited national park in the Northwest, has

gradually increased annually by 0.7% even as staffing level have decreased by almost 10%.

Even the park's own business plan back in 2002 noted that Olympic was facing a shortfall of 33% in operations funding, and things haven't improved.

Also, funding remains slow to come for rebuilding the day lodge at Hurricane Ridge. Thanks to Sen. Patty Murray's continued efforts, this \$80 million project is authorized but making sure it happens under this Administration is not a sure thing.

Continue to let Sens. Murray and Maria Cantwell, along with Rep. Emily Randall, know that Olympic and our National Park System deserve full support. As well as being a World Heritage Site and a premier wilderness park, Olympic supported 2,290 jobs in the region and was an economic boost of \$393 million, according to an NPS report done in 2024.

Writer Wallace Stegner termed our National Park System "America's best idea." It deserves our nation's best efforts.

ONP Staircase Area Opening Remains Unscheduled

The Staircase area trails and campground remain closed to visitors as the *Voice* goes to press in late May. But Park Service and Forest Service crews are working to repair facilities, trails and bridges following last summer's Bear Gulch Fire.

According to ONP Public Affairs Specialist Milly Pittman: "We still need to meet multiple safety, infrastructure, and visitor services goals within the park and Olympic National Forest before the area can be reopened."

The 20,233-acre human-caused Bear Gulch Fire was the largest wildfire on the Olympic Peninsula since 1951. It left a patchwork of burn scars that increase the risks of landslides, rockfall, and treefall in the Staircase area of the park. Road crews, hazard tree specialists and trail crews are repairing and stabilizing the Rapids Loop trail, mitigating hazard trees in the developed area, and clearing road drainage infrastructure.

The park is coordinating with Olympic National Forest to reopen the FS-24 road. Wilderness areas surrounding Staircase will remain closed until crews can repair trails, bridges, and backcountry privies. Other closures include:

- On the coast, the Mora Road, accessing Rialto Beach, will be closed from July 8 to Nov. 9 due to reconstruction from past flood damage. The road and Rialto Beach will be closed to all pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicle traffic beyond the Mora Campground. The campground will remain open.
- The Graves Creek Road in Quinalt remains closed to vehicles due to a washout at mile 4.1. No opening date has been scheduled.
- Due to a water system rehabilitation project, Hurricane Hill Road will be closed Monday-Thursday through June 30. The road will reopen every Friday-Sunday.

For updates, visit the park's Alerts and Conditions webpage: <https://www.nps.gov/olymp/planyourvisit/conditions.htm>

Forest Service Approves Canyon Timber Sale

As this issue of the *Voice* goes to press, we learned that Olympic National Forest approved its controversial "Canyon Forest Restoration Project" in the heart of the Dungeness watershed in the northern Hood Canal District.

This misnamed project will commercially thin some 2,300 acres. Nearly a thousand acres are natural fire-regenerated legacy forest from 80 to 160 years in age. Some 11 miles of new "temporary" roads are required, some "within and adjacent to potentially unstable landforms." 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 watershed deserves better.

In May, the forest supervisor gave final approval to the project in an inadequate final environmental assessment (FEA). Objections raised by OPA, other conservation organizations, and dozens of individual letter writers were largely ignored. OPA stated that a project of this scope requires a full environmental impact statement under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). 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 commercial thinning. The agency declined.

OPA will file an objection to the project and continue to challenge this irresponsible action. Check our website, olympicparkadvocates.org, for updates.

The Challenges of Long-term Monitoring in a Time of Short Attention Spans

By Janis Burger

Over 20 years ago, national park leaders began a nationwide Inventory and Monitoring Program to survey park resources and track the long-term "vital signs" of parks. With over 400 sites, National Park Service sites protect everything from alligators to caribou, to huge cacti and tiny alpine flowers.

Olympic is in the North Coast and Cascades Network, one of 32 monitoring networks nationwide. At Olympic, chosen vital signs include fish, intertidal communities, glaciers, elk, weather and climate, and landscape processes like floods, fires and landslides. It's a who's who of Olympic stars, from teeming tidepools, to forests and glaciers.

Monitoring data is essential to determine if management and restoration efforts are effective. If a vital sign's pulse is faltering, managers can work to make course corrections. After all, legislation mandates that the NPS preserve parks "unimpaired for future generations."

Even in good budget times with well-meaning stewards at the helm, long-term research can be a hard sell. It takes commitment and stable, long-term funding. Stable does not describe the last 15-16 months. Across the NPS, thousands were fired, retired or took early buyouts and a hiring freeze makes it nearly impossible to fill key vacancies.

Some vital signs, like forest health plots, haven't been sampled since 2018. In a warming climate can scientists detect impacts on Olympic's iconic forests with only intermittent sampling? Can satellite imagery fill in for eyes on the ground?

As of May, network researchers were able to hire summer field staff, but amidst so much uncertainty, they have to scale monitoring efforts in a way that doesn't stretch the remaining staff too thin.

Last September the Department of Interior abruptly cancelled contracts with several science groups that conducted vital signs research, including the Institute for Bird Populations (IBP), which monitored migratory land birds in multiple parks. There are 20 years of valuable bird data from Olympic. Democracy Forward



Field crews measuring a tree in one of the park's forest monitoring plots, 2008. NPS photo

sued, and in March 2026 a judge ordered DOI to restore the grants! It may be too late for IBP this field season, but Inventory and Monitoring staff hope to salvage the bird monitoring work.

The limited good news is that the Olympic Field Station and the rest of the "ecosystems mission area" of the U.S. Geological Survey, which was on the cutting block last year, has been funded this year, though hurdles remain. A researcher noted, "We're trying to figure out what we can do with no money." And Olympic was finally able to fill one of two vacant fish biologist positions, so hopefully some fish monitoring can resume.

By sharing field crews, testing the efficacy of remote wildlife cameras for elk monitoring, using acoustic monitoring, using detailed satellite imagery, and working with statisticians to ensure methods can still detect changing conditions, researchers are hopeful they can continue vital monitoring work. Millions come to experience the plants, animals and ecosystems of Olympic. Are they healthy or threatened? We, the owners of these public lands, must ensure that the biologists whose job it is to answer those questions can continue their work.

See <https://www.nps.gov/im/nccn/inventory-reports.htm> for some Inventory and Monitoring program results.

Reorganization *continued from p. 3*

It's an unpopular move. *High Country News* reported more than 80% of the 14,000 public comments submitted about the reorganization were negative, with many tribal representatives, conservation groups and former Forest Service staffers opposing it.

The Forest Service Employees for Environmental Ethics noted that these changes, combined with an increased emphasis on timber extraction, signal a continuation of the current administration's disdain for science-based management decisions in favor of special interests and cronyism.

The *New York Times* observed, "Mr. Trump has long denied the science and effects of climate change, and his

administration has cut funding for climate-related research across the federal government. Conservation groups say that eliminating climate-related science will result in forests that are less healthy, and less resilient to future environmental changes.

U.S. Rep. Emily Randall, who represents the Olympic Peninsula, posted: "Just in Washington State, Trump's Forest Service relocation and reorganization plans may impact as many as 200 staff members — but he's not stopping at firings and forced relocations; his administration is also cutting funding for programs that help ensure our public lands stay protected for generations to come."



Voice of the Wild Olympics

Amy Youngblood, Editor

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