

Washington **Wild**

SUMMER NEWSLETTER 2012



Go Wild!

The Need to Preserve Access to Our Wild Lands

Wild About Recreation

Washington Wild

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Dear Friends,

I am honored to be elected president of Washington Wild's board of directors, and want to begin by thanking Barak Gale for his splendid service as the prior president, as well as for his continued service on our Executive Committee.

For my first column, I offer a personal point of view. I knew Washington Wild's co-founder, Karen Fant, from our time spent working together in the Sierra Club's Northwest Office. This was seven years before she and Ken Gersten started the Washington Wilderness Coalition in 1979. Karen was a determined and exceptional activist who helped protect more than one million acres of wilderness through the Washington Wilderness Act of 1984. Her efforts laid the groundwork for passage of the Wild Sky Wilderness. I followed Karen's footsteps (and those of our mentor, Brock Evans), in joining Washington Wild and the board of directors.

In our summer issue, we examine how advocating for appropriate access to our Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers can foster appreciation and reverence for wild places and the work of Washington Wild. Promoting appropriate and reasonable access to our wild spaces builds Wilderness advocates, and helps support the economies of local communities.

We are pleased to highlight the need to both protect wild places and preserve access to them, as eloquently described by Thomas O'Keefe, from the Outdoor Alliance. Too often we confront the argument that securing Wilderness or Wild and Scenic River protection means locking it away from human usage and enjoyment. Not so! We dedicate this issue to encouraging you to get out and enjoy Washington's spectacular wild places. To help you plan your summer vacation, we suggest some wonderful activities right in our backyard. We highlight activities in our Wilderness campaign areas that will help you enjoy all that these special lands and waters have to offer.

As you enjoy your summer, please know that you and all of our members are vital to the success of Washington Wild. Whether you are calling your U.S. Representative, writing letters to the editor, volunteering, or, yes, serving on Washington Wild's board, please know you are making a significant contribution to preserving Washington's wild lands and waters. Please also be assured that your donations are hugely important to our organization.

Thank you for your support of our wild places, and have a great summer out in the wild.

Roger Mellem
Board President, Washington Wild





The Need to Preserve Access to Our Wild Lands

Andy Porter

Over the last couple years, a growing narrative that casts conservation groups as anti-access, has been seen on the pages of local newspapers, blogs, and message boards. Consider this lead from an article written in the Seattle PI last March: “Acts of God, and extreme greens, shouldn’t keep people from wild places.”

At issue is the long-awaited repair of the Suiattle River Road, which accesses tens of thousands of acres of National Forest Wilderness, hiking trails, and other recreation opportunities outside of the town of Darrington. Access through this road has been cut off since 2003 by storm damage, and a recent lawsuit by two local environmental organizations has threatened the funding for the road repairs.

For some user groups and recreation enthusiasts the Suiattle lawsuit was indicative of efforts by environmental groups to block road repair and restrict access to the backcountry. “It seems like at every turn, some organization is arguing to not repair a damaged main arterial that pack and saddle stock users rely on to access the backcountry for both riding and trail maintenance,” said Jeff Chapman, Public Lands Subcommittee Chair of the Backcountry Horsemen of Washington.



Suiattle River Road (photo courtesy of the USDOT)

“The opposition to repairing the Suiattle Road is the most recent effort to limit recreational access to system trailheads by hampering efforts to secure road repair funding.”

PRESERVING ACCESS

A recent look at Wilderness and Wild and Scenic River campaigns in Washington State, however, tells a different story.

The Wild Sky Wilderness, which was designated in 2008 as the first new National Forest Wilderness in Washington State in nearly 30 years, was the result of efforts to address dozens of issues raised by local stakeholders. Many of those had to do with preserving and enhancing existing access.

The Index-Galena Road, a prized access route for locals and backcountry enthusiasts, was excluded and sufficiently buffered from the Wilderness boundary to ensure continued access and future road repairs. The Barclay Lake Trail, which is popular with Boy Scout troops and large church groups, was ultimately set back 200 feet from the Wilderness boundary to ensure that large-group recreation would be able to continue on this easy day hike.



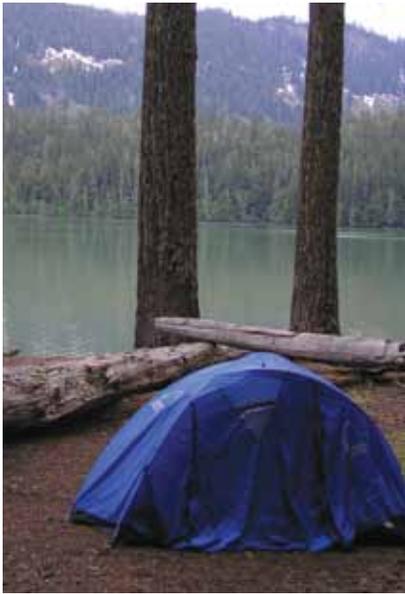
Joe Neal, Skykomish District Ranger

“Coming into the Skykomish Ranger District from western Wyoming, I remember looking at the Wild Sky map and being shocked about how the boundaries afforded so much access to multi-season recreational opportunities.” said Joe Neal, Skykomish District Ranger for the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest (which includes the Wild Sky Wilderness). “It is the most accessible Wilderness I have seen.”

During proposal development for additions to the Alpine Lakes Wilderness and river protections for the Middle Fork Snoqualmie and Pratt Rivers (currently moving through Congress), similar accommodations were made early on in the name of access. The proposed Wilderness included no roads, and made sure to draw boundaries that did not disrupt existing popular trailheads (like Granite Mountain, Denny Creek, Snow Lake, and Talapus Lake) or the roads that access them. The 13-mile Middle Fork trail, which is a prized mountain bike ride on odd-numbered days, was set back from the proposed Wilderness boundary to ensure that this “mechanized” use could continue, but was included in a Wild and Scenic River designation, which provided a compatible layer of protection for the route.

RESTORING ACCESS

In addition to not impacting existing recreational access through new wild lands designations, proactive support for



Camping at Packwood Lake

repair and maintenance of major access routes is also needed. As increasing frequency and severity of winter storms make washouts and road damage seemingly an annual occurrence, federal funding for repair and maintenance is shrinking.

In order for Washington Wild to accomplish our mission, we cannot stand against access to the wild lands we work so hard to protect. We have an

obligation and vested interest in supporting the maintenance and repair of key access routes so that future generations can hike, fish, climb, and raft the incredible forests and rivers in our own backyard.

Washington Wild was one of six conservation and recreation organizations who recently provided comments in support of repairing the Index-Galena road, a critical access route to a half dozen beloved trails and routes for hikers, climbers, equestrians, and paddlers within the Wild Sky Wilderness and the Troublesome Creek and San Juan campgrounds.

This year, the federal government reopened a public comment period for the repair of the Suiattle Road, and heard a chorus of both conservation organizations and user groups who are in support of the road repair. Washington Wild was one of 10 conservation and recreation groups that signed the letter, with other groups including: Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance, the Mountaineers, Washington Trails Associa-



Foss River (Tom O'Keefe)

tion, American Whitewater, and the Backcountry Horsemen of Washington.

"I was delighted to see the mix of conservation and recreational user groups come together in support of repairing the Suiattle Road," said Chapman. "I hope that this is the first of more such collaborations on access issues."

A BALANCED APPROACH FOR ACCESS AND RESTORATION

However, not all roads are equal. In fact, most of roads on Forest Service lands fall into two distinct categories: (1) those that provide critical access for recreation and management (like the Index-Galena and Suiattle); and (2) those that no longer provide such recreational access because of a growing maintenance backlog, but do present high aquatic risks to our watersheds.

This second category is often referred to as "legacy roads," meaning that most are left over from the heyday of logging decades ago, and have since fallen into disrepair. Such roads can have significant negative impacts on forest watersheds by blocking fish migration patterns if inappropriate culverts are used or are blocked with debris. Non-maintained or blown-out culverts can damage already dwindling salmon runs, habitats, and spawning grounds, and sediment from legacy roads can smother fish eggs. Landslides from damaged roads also degrade drinking water supplies to communities in the watershed.

Equally problematic is the fact that these roads are expensive. The current estimate of a bill to taxpayers to maintain all of the nearly 400,000 miles of roads currently residing on our national forests is more than \$8 billion. Many conservation and recreation groups are coming to the realization that we can preserve and enhance key recreation access routes while we decommission old and failing legacy roads that don't provide such access.

Hopefully, a new narrative about wilderness access is starting— one that balances our need to protect and access wild places for recreation while at the same time protecting our watersheds and reducing the burden on future taxpayers by right-sizing the federal road system.



Hikers in the Wild Sky Wilderness

Wild About Recreation

Here at Washington Wild, we talk quite a bit about the preservation and restoration of Washington's wild lands and waters. With all this talk about preservation, it may seem that setting aside lands as Wilderness and rivers as Wild and Scenic prohibits us from using the land. This is a common misconception; in fact, the following activities are all allowed in federally designated Wilderness areas:

- › Hiking and Camping
- › Hunting and Fishing
- › Photography
- › Bird watching
- › Horseback riding
- › Canoeing, Kayaking, and Rafting
- › Swimming
- › Picnicking
- › Cross-country Skiing
- › Snowshoeing
- › Rock climbing and Spelunking
- › Wildflower walks
- › Conducting ecological research
- › Leading educational trips

The following activities are allowed on a designated Wild and Scenic river and its surrounding areas, so long as they do not threaten the outstanding value of the river:

- › Fishing
- › Rafting, Kayaking, Canoeing
- › Swimming
- › Boating
- › Biking along a river
- › Photography
- › Bird watching
- › Conducting ecological research
- › Leading educational trips

Washington Wild, as a statewide leader on Wilderness issues, has worked on a variety of campaigns to set aside some of Washington State's most pristine places from development. We support these varied uses on federally designated Wilderness land and Wild and Scenic Rivers. The following are some examples of the wild lands and rivers we work to protect that provide unique recreational opportunities here in Washington.



Horseback Riding in the Pasayten Wilderness

The Pasayten Wilderness,

located in the north central Cascades, offers plenty of trails for novice and adventurous equestrians alike. In the Pasayten, there are ample opportunities for one to travel and camp with their own horse, or use one of the many guide services, which are based out of the Methow Valley towns.



Hiking and Backpacking in the Buckhorn Wilderness

The Buckhorn Wilderness

Area, located in the Olympic National Forest, offers many hiking and backpacking adventures. One great option for hiking is the Marmot Pass-Upper Big Quilcene trail, which offers towering old growth trees, a pristine river, alpine meadows, and expansive views of nearby peaks.



Paddling and Rafting on the Wild and Scenic Skagit River

The Skagit River is located

in northwest Washington and drains into Puget Sound. The Sauk, Suiattle, and Cascade Rivers are part of the Skagit River System and are classified as Scenic. These rivers offer great opportunities for the paddling and rafting enthusiast. Enjoy pristine scenery and ample wildlife viewing opportunities when paddling this majestic river system.



Fishing on the Wild and Scenic Klickitat River

The Klickitat River is located in south central

Washington and flows to the Columbia River in the Columbia River Gorge. The Wild and Scenic designated segment is the lower most 10.8 miles of the river. The river supports all types of recreational activities, especially fishing for salmon and steelhead.



Rock Climbing in the Boulder River Wilderness

The Boulder River Wilderness, located in the northwest

Cascades, offers many great areas for rock climbing. Three tall spires, known as the Three Fingers, mark the center of this Wilderness area, and are destinations for rock climbing enthusiasts. Some great climbs in Boulder River include Three O'Clock Rock, the Comb, and Green Giant Buttress.



Snowshoeing in the Wild Sky Wilderness

The Wild Sky Wilderness, located in the

central Cascades, offers many opportunities for winter time activities. Many prefer hiking here in the spring and summer months, but these same trails are transformed in the snow, and offer great opportunities for snowshoeing. A great trail for snowshoeing is the Ragged Ridge trail, which offers great views of nearby peaks.

Conservation Voices

Promoting Responsible Access to our Wild Lands

Thomas O'Keefe, American Whitewater

Something special happens when people enjoy the outdoors while hiking, skiing, climbing, mountain biking, or paddling. First, they have fun and the bonds between friends and family grow stronger. Young and old alike enjoy healthy exercise and learn greater self-reliance. Along the way, they learn the moods and character of the land and water. They notice—and care—when something is wrong. Time and time again, we are moved to conserve these special places.

Over the past five years, I have been working with organizations in the active outdoor recreation community in a coalition known as the Outdoor Alliance. Nationally, our groups include the Access Fund, American Canoe Association, American Hiking Society, American Whitewater, International Mountain Bicycling Association, and Winter Wildlands Alliance. One of our core principles has been the promotion of responsible access to public lands and opportunities to enjoy healthy outdoor activities. When people learn and enjoy the land and water, they become more interested in keeping those resources healthy.

In our own region, we can see examples of places where access to our public lands and working to protect them for future generations go hand in hand. For example, paving and upgrading the Middle Fork Snoqualmie Road, access to a new developed campground, and investment in new trails, such

as the new route up Mailbox Peak, will provide access to several quality hiking, climbing, biking, and paddling opportunities less than an hour from downtown Seattle, in the Middle Fork Snoqualmie Valley.

As a community, we have enhanced this investment with important conservation gains that include decommissioning the last few miles of the Middle Fork Snoqualmie Road, as well as our continued work to

permanently protect the Middle Fork Snoqualmie and Pratt Rivers under the Wild and Scenic River Act, and add low-elevation forest protections through Wilderness designations. Local conservation and recreation organizations, including Washington Wild and many organizations representing the active outdoor recreation community, worked hard to accomplish the dual goals of conserving this special place while enhancing responsible access.

The recently designated Wild Sky Wilderness, which permanently protected more than 100,000 acres of new wilderness when it was designated in 2008, provides another local example of the importance of integrating conservation and access goals. The heart and soul of the Wilderness proposal was to protect significant low-elevation mature and old-growth forests, salmon spawning streams, and multi-season, family-accessible recreational opportunities. The vision and promise of Wild Sky, however, cannot be realized until the Index-Galena Road can be repaired after storm damage in 2006 to provide central access to a dozen hiking trails, paddling opportunities on the North Fork Skykomish, two campgrounds, and access to the Cascade Crest.

These local examples are not unique to our region. In a series of listening sessions held across the nation, the Obama Administration received feedback on the President's 'America's Great Outdoors Initiative' (AGO). Among the recommendations of this initiative was a call to enhance recreational access and opportunities. The Administration found that "despite the many opportunities for quality outdoor recreation on public lands and waters, better integration, alignment, coordinating, and targeting of recreational resources and opportunities on public land is called for."

Success depends on effective partnerships between the federal government and individuals, organizations, communities and businesses to reconnect people to the outdoors. That reconnection depends on creating a new generation of stewards and mentors that inspire Americans to experience our Wilderness and roadless areas, our national parks, and our Wild and Scenic rivers. It also depends on ensuring that the primary access infrastructure, including roads, trails, and river access, are maintained so that people can enjoy the incredible landscapes we have all worked so hard to protect.

In Washington State, as elsewhere around the country, Wilderness, conservation, and groups representing the user community can, and are, finding common ground. Successful coalitions around the Wild Sky, Alpine Lakes Wilderness and



Thomas O'Keefe, American Whitewater

river additions, and the Wild Olympics are proof of that. So too are recent and diverse support for repairing the Suiattle Road to restore access to dozens of trailheads, the western gateway to the Glacier Peak Wilderness and a key part of the Skagit Wild and Scenic River System.

Our public lands and waters, and particularly our wildlands and wild rivers, are a defining feature of our quality of life in Washington State. To be successful with our goals of effective conservation, restoration, and stewardship of these special

wild places, we need to embrace partnership opportunities and actively challenge the notion that protection is inherently at odds with access to recreational opportunities.

Thomas O'Keefe is the Pacific Northwest Stewardship Director for American Whitewater and serves as a Policy Chief for the Outdoor Alliance, a coalition of user groups that works to ensure the conservation and stewardship of our nation's land and waters through the promotion of sustainable, human-powered recreation.

Out of the **Wild**

House Approves Protection for Illabot Creek in Skagit County

The House of Representatives approved legislation that will designate 14.3 miles of Illabot Creek, a major tributary of the Skagit River, as a Wild and Scenic River. The legislation was authored by Representative Rick Larsen (WA-2) and is sponsored by Senator Patty Murray (D-WA) in the Senate. This designation will protect vital spawning habitat for numerous threatened and endangered species, including bull trout and Chinook salmon. Washington Wild has been working to highlight the benefits of utilizing Wild and Scenic River designation as a key tool for protecting Washington's rich and mighty rivers. WW has played a leadership role in developing legislative proposals to designate additional Wild and Scenic rivers near Snoqualmie Pass and on the Olympic Peninsula.



Illabot Creek



Wild Sky

Geothermal Development Targets Wild Sky Country

Washington Wild, along with a dozen other conservation organizations, sent a letter to the Skykomish Ranger District requesting an extension of the comment period for the consent to lease subsurface lands for geothermal exploration. The Skykomish Ranger District is exploring the possibility of leasing land adjacent to the heart of the Wild Sky Wilderness for geothermal energy exploration. Washington Wild, along with other conservation organizations, is working to understand the impacts that geothermal development could have on the area, and hope to provide thorough and useful comments to the agency as the process moves forward.

Road Restoration Near Wild Sky

In April, the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest released a Finding of No Significant Impact on a plan to decommission and remove 9.9 miles of the Harlan Creek Road System. Located adjacent to the Wild Sky Wilderness, much of the Harlan Creek Road is no longer used by the Forest Service for access into the Wilderness area. In addition to decommissioning road segments that are too expensive to maintain, the decision was also focused on eliminating unauthorized off-road vehicle (ORV) trespass into the Wild Sky Wilderness, where motorized use is prohibited.



Road Closed

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