



The Moose Call

*Newsletter of the Friends of
Mt. Spokane State Park*

January 2011

President's Message

by Cris M. Currie

This was quite the exciting year for the combined Friends of Mt. Spokane State Park and Advisory Committee with the culmination of over 15 years of work creating a long term master plan for the Park. After two disappointing Parks Commission meetings in 2009 where the draft Master Facilities and Development Plan was expected to be approved, but instead was withdrawn from the agenda, and after yet another Commission meeting in June of 2010 where a similar expectation was dashed, the plan was finally presented and approved at the August Commission meeting in Spokane. Deb Wallace took the reigns as the Planning Manager for the Parks Commission in late June, learned the issues very quickly, and managed to pull together numerous loose elements into a format that worked for all parties involved. She then moved immediately into implementation mode for final conceptual approval for most of the Park improvement projects proposed by the Advisory Committee. Each individual project still needs to go through a permitting process, but the overall conceptual approval was a huge step forward that now makes it possible to fund raise and lay out a realistic time line for work to be done.

One project, the rerouting of Trail 115 between Smith Gap and the Mt. Kit Carson meadow, is already nearly complete.

Park staff rented a mini-excavator in late summer to cut a tread after a DNR crew cut the trees. Volunteers then went in with hand tools to smooth out the surface and set the proper out sloping for the trail. This work will be finished next summer, but the trail has already gotten rave reviews by hikers, equestrians, cyclists and snowshoers.

Deb also pulled together a statewide committee to iron out the details for improving the downhill mountain biking in the Park. Committee members plan to survey the local mountain biking community and then recommend a draft plan for public comment. Assuring the safety of other Park visitors and regular ongoing maintenance will be central goals of the plan.

The Friends Group received a very generous bequest from the estate of Allison Cowles this year, which will be used to start an endowment fund. Allison was deeply involved in a wide variety of local causes and a passionate supporter of the Friends Group and Mt. Spokane 2000. As an avid alpine skier, her name will live on at Mt. Spokane with a new run named after her: Allison's Way. According to those who knew her, when Allison spoke, people listened, and decisions typically went her way. She died in April of pancreatic cancer and will be greatly missed!

To brighten our financial picture even more, we eliminated the message phone and found a volunteer to host our web site at no charge, making more money available for implementation projects!



The “Mini” at work.

Logging at Mt. Spokane

The Inland Empire Paper Company (IEPCO) owns thousands of acres of forest land immediately adjacent to Mt. Spokane State Park, and its logging practices have long been a concern to Park visitors. Recently, the company made a concerted effort to better explain its approach to sustainable forestry in the form of public tours of future harvest areas. This is a report from one tour I had with Paul Buckland, Forest Resource Manager at IEPCO.

We drove north from the Snowblaze Condos to look first at the long clear cut ridge that suddenly became so visible from the alpine and nordic ski areas a few years ago. Apparently this was as much of a surprise to IEPCO as it was to the hundreds of people who called the company and the ski area to complain. Originally it was a commercial thinning operation, which takes only the subdominant, sick, and dying trees and leaves the healthiest and largest dominant species for a later harvest after new seeded trees have taken hold. The ridge would have looked just like the commercial thinning on the next ridge to the northeast were it not for a 100 year wind storm that knocked out 90% of the standing timber just 3 months post harvest. Normally it takes 2-3 years for “leave trees” to build up their wind

tolerance, and these trees, unpredictably, just didn’t have enough time. The slope was planted with a more sustainable mix of western larch, white pine, and Engelmann Spruce, but it now faces a new threat. Some snowmobilers adopted it as a play area last season, and the company fears that a significant percentage of the new trees will be topped, substantially slowing their growth and ruining their commercial value. To prevent this situation on this and other IEPCO plantations, the company decided that for the 2010-11 winter season, no snowmobiling will be permitted on company land. If sufficient funding for on-trail law enforcement materializes, the company will consider reopening its property for next season.

Just downhill from this area, lie two planned harvests that are also in full view of the ski slopes. Root rot, a native fungus in the soil, is starting to take a heavy toll on the dominant Douglas Fir and Grand Fir in both areas. Because in earlier times, only the White Pine and larch were logged, there is an overabundance of Douglas Fir and Grand Fir. Both species have continued to have an advantage over others as a result of the practice of extinguishing all forest fires. Normally these trees would burn up in a fire, exposing the ground to sunlight and allowing shade intolerant species, such as pine, larch and spruce to get a start. But since Douglas Fir and Grand Fir can tolerate shade as seedlings, they are the only ones that tend to survive in a perpetually shade covered environment. Nature’s response to this unfair advantage is to unleash a fungus or an insect to clear out some of these trees, but as with fire, it’s next to impossible to make a profit in this scenario. So, IEPCO is trying to find a way to stop the spread of root rot, harvest as many trees as possible without creating an erosion prone eyesore, and promote the growth of a more sustainable and healthy forest at the same

time.

The plan is for a “variable retention harvest” which will leave individual trees, clumps (3-12 trees), patches (over 2 acres), and an irregular border. Leave trees will include large healthy specimens, under-represented trees, and snags. This type of harvest is not widely used in the industry because it is much more difficult and expensive to manage than more traditional methods, but IEPCO is committed to doing what it can to promote species diversity, which it sees as the key to sustainability. Unforeseen events may of course produce other results, but IEPCO wants park visitors to know that they are listening and that they are making a sincere effort to soften the aesthetic impact of their logging operations. —CC



Volunteers smoothing the tread

Snowshoe Hut

As part of the recently finalized Master Facilities Plan for Mt. Spokane State Park, a day use facility for snowshoers and backcountry skiers was approved. Currently the Friends Group is seeking a grant and individual donations for its construction. The current plan calls for a 16' X 24' wood hut with an 8' porch, metal roof, and wood stove. It is expected to be off the ground, insulated, and cozy warm, unlike the NOVA Hut! Earlier plans suggested a 24' yurt, but after reconsideration, staff decided the wood hut would be more durable in the deep forest

environment. The location is still planned to be within the existing picnic area near Burping Brook at the intersection of Trail 110 and the Kit Carson Loop Road. While it is only a 10 minute walk from the hairpin parking area, it is right in the heart of one of the most majestic cedar-hemlock forests in the region. For those who want a longer trail to the hut, the location is about 1.75 miles up from the Park entrance via Trail 110, and about 2 miles down from the snowmobile parking lot via Trail 100.

Snowmobiling at Mt. Spokane

Another piece of the Master Facilities Plan is a new trail for snowmobiling so that the Linder Ridge Road can be used for nordic skiing. This 0.75 mile Trail 260 would connect the snowmobile parking lot with the logging road running southeast of the Condos. The route was determined jointly by representatives from the Inland Paper Company, the Winter Knights Snowmobile Club, the Spokane Nordic Ski Education Foundation, and the Parks Commission. From the Condo Road, riders can access the bridge and other groomed trails as they have done before via the Linder Ridge Road. While the concept was approved and grant money has been secured, the permitting and construction process is on hold, pending resolution of the on-trail law enforcement issue. Inland Paper permits snowmobiling only on designated logging roads, and keeping riders off its plantation areas has been a major challenge. The company has now prohibited snowmobiling on its lands until a long term enforcement solution can be created. Thus the new trail will only be necessary if an effective enforcement plan is established and the ban is lifted. Meanwhile, for the current season, the Linder Ridge Road is being groomed for nordic skiing.



How You Can Help!

If you would like to volunteer for a trail crew or to help with the hut project, contact Holly Weiler by e-mail at hmweiler@yahoo.com.

If you would like to contribute money for the snowshoe hut or just join the Friends (\$25 suggested donation), please make your check to:

The Friends of Mt. Spokane State Park
and send it to:

Friends of Mt. Spokane State Park
621 W. Mallon, Suite 607
Spokane, WA 99201

All contributions are tax deductible.
Thank you!!

Please send us your e-mail address so we can mail your newsletter electronically. We are a very small organization with an equally small budget, so every dollar we can save on operating costs will benefit the Park. You can send your e-mail address to: criscurrie@igc.org. Thank you!

Website News

Check out the Friends Group website at www.mountspokane.org. We have new trail maps for both winter and summer activities that can be easily downloaded for free. We also have the final version of the master trail plan, past newsletters, the story of the fire lookout, an authoritative bird list, and lots of great photos.



Supporting the tread

Many Thanks to our Volunteers

Board members include: Mark Augenstine, Chris Bachman, Anita Boyden, Mike Brixey, Ken Carmichael, Mike Close, Cris Currie, Robin DeRuwe, Ray Downard, Rob Lindsay, George Momany, Lew Persons, Barbee Scheibner, Shelley Tschida, and Holly Weiler.

Other volunteers include: Paul Buckland, Sam Deal, Stephanie Hughes, Bea Lacoff. Brad McQuarrie, Aaron Spurway, Ben Wadden and Cindy Whaley.