



OFCO News

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The Newsletter of the Olympic Forest Coalition

Protecting and restoring Olympic forests

FOREST SERVICE AGAIN PROPOSES REBUILDING DOSEWALLIPS ROAD

by Jim Scarborough

When we first got word that the Forest Service was gearing up yet again to attempt reconstructing the Dosewallips road at the site of its huge washout, there was no need to feign surprise. In this Age of Bad Ideas, one can bet the farm that the worst of notions will resurrect themselves cyclically. For those calling the shots within the Forest Service, frustrated after watching their two previous road reconstruction attempts fall flat in response to vigorous public input and deft legal work, fighting Mother Nature on

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the Dose is apparently the top priority. They are joined in their efforts by the Park Service, which under its current superintendent has not accepted the wilderness mandate for the Olympic National Park. Certain business interests in Brinnon and Quilcene, that purport to speak for area residents, have also pushed the road proposal.

You'll recall that a football field-sized length of the Dosewallips road was completely swept away in January 2002 during a flood, about ten miles west of Highway 101. A massive wall of glacial till is all that remains of the road's original location there. Each sub-

sequent winter, the washout has grown larger. The Forest Service's first environmental assessment, which emphasized moving the river back and reinstalling the road in place, was yanked by the agency due to salmon habitat concerns. The second EA yielded a decision by Forest Supervisor Dale Hom to re-route the road above the washout, which would have destroyed

dozens of centuries-old trees. Following a formal appeal by OFCO, Olympic Park Associates, Olympic Peninsula Audubon Society, and two individuals, Mr.

Hom withdrew his decision – rather than face a ruling against him that was due from the USFS Regional Office the very next day. In the meantime, non-motorized recreationists have rediscovered the beauty of the Dosewallips' middle valley, while the wild critters or left to live in peace.

Now, however, the FS has published a Notice of Intent to re-construct the Dosewallips road through critical chinook salmon habitat. Although the agency will be completing an Environmental Impact State-

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More on the Dose: NMFS Weighs In

Environmental organizations and many concerned citizens throughout our area are not the only ones dismayed at the Olympic National Forest's (ONF) desire to rebuild the Dosewallips Road. In a surprisingly strong letter dated August 18, 2005, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), in charge of protecting anadromous fish and marine mammals, expressed dismay at the ONF's preferred alternative to replace the washed out road into the Dosewallips River channel.

Like OFCO and many others, they recommend a fully analyzed alternative that would decommission the road and "begin restoring watershed processes that support salmon recovery."

NMFS' letter further states that this river contains essential fish habitat for Chinook (a species listed under the Endangered Species Act), coho and Puget Sound pink salmon and that replacing the road into the river would have a serious impact on these species.

To see a copy of this three-page letter and an article written by Chris Dunagan of the Kitsap Sun about NMFS' position, please go to OFCO's website at: www.olympicforest.org.

-- Bonnie Phillips

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ment (EIS), which requires consideration of several alternatives, the most responsible option of converting the last five miles of road into a non-motorized trail would not be studied at all. By choosing to ignore the obvious benefits of a road-to-trail conversion above the massive washout, the FS essentially thumbs its nose at the many thoughtful citizens who have submitted comments in favor of ensuring the future integrity of the Dose.

The FS's new preferred alternative would reconstruct the road using a single-lane "low-water crossing design" of 600 feet in length that would be 8 feet lower than the existing road grade. This seasonal-access road would curve close to the unstable washout bank, so hardened as to be overtopped by the river during flood events. While not only forcibly altering the Dose's natural dynamics and harming threatened salmon stocks, the FS would seek a Northwest Forest Plan amendment to waive compliance with the Aquatic Conservation Strategy (ACS). This, despite the fact that the Bush administration has already rendered the ACS largely toothless, suggests the severity of damage the FS expects to inflict on the river.

The Dosewallips once again depends upon you! The FS has indicated it will gladly sacrifice this Northwest icon for the sole benefit of getting motor vehicles five miles farther upvalley. Only a concerned and vocal public can keep the bulldozers out of the river. Please write the FS by September 19. Suggested talking points:

* An alternative that would convert the last five miles of road above the washout into a non-motorized trail must be included in the EIS. The FS cannot simply disregard the public's prior and current demands for studying this option. Access to the upper valley via foot, bicycle, wheelchair, or stock is not only best for experiencing the beauty of the Dose, but also the most respectful towards the fragile landscape and watercourses there.

* The proposal to waive compliance with the ACS is an egregious violation of the public trust and a reckless continuation of the Bush administration's weakening of core environmental protections. It runs directly counter to time-intensive and costly salmon recovery efforts throughout the region. Any degradation of chinook salmon critical habitat is likely illegal under the Endangered Species Act. (See sidebar for the reaction of the National Marine Fisheries Service.

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river.*

* In these days of stretched public funds, the Forest Service must deliver an honest accounting of both short-range and long-term comparative expenditures to taxpayers. The poorly conceived road along the Dosewallips will continue to sustain severe damage, due in part to global warming. Is it worth the price? A comprehensive economic analysis is necessary.

* Any re-routing of the road through the old-growth forest and unstable bank above the washout, as would occur in other "non-preferred" alternatives to be studied in the EIS, is not only illogical, but would be an illegal incursion into northern spotted owl critical habitat.

You may also email your comments to olympic@fs.fed.us, but be aware that this mode of communication to the FS has not been fully reliable in the past. If you choose to email, please ask for a confirmation from the agency that they have indeed received your message. Thank you from the bottom of our Dosewallips-loving heart for your participation! As always, personalizing your comments is helpful (e.g., relating a particularly pleasant hike you may have taken on the closed road above the washout). Check out OFCO's Web site at www.olympicforest.org for future updates.

Please address your comments to:

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OFCO needs members and money to continue doing our good work. General membership is \$25 and we have a living lightly category at \$10. A higher level of donation is always welcome. All donations to OFCO are tax deductible. Make checks out to OFCO and mail to:

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LOGGING ON (ROADLESS) SNIDER RIDGE? ONF'S PACIFIC RANGER DISTRICT TALKS SCIENCE

by Bonnie Phillips

OFCO was one of several environmental organizations that attended an informal presentation in Forks hosted by the Olympic Natural Resource Center (ONRC) to consider the potential for logging on Snider Ridge, an area of about 6,000 uninventoried roadless acres. Only one road accesses this area from Hwy 101, the road leading to the Snider Ridge lookout.

The session grew out of concerns of some community members in Forks about the unhealthy aspect of this forest area. There were fears that forest fires might result, placing Forks itself at risk; some believed thinning in the Snider Ridge area might lower that risk. There was also concern for spread of insect and disease damage in areas of die-back (that is, dead trees). Residents recalled that the area had been planted in off-site stock after early 20th century fires, reasoning that these trees should be logged and replanted to native vegetation.

Verne Farrell of the Pacific Ranger District gave an excellent presentation on many aspects of Snider Ridge, including statistics showing that only about 5% of the area had major die-back and that, given the lack of soil in these rocky places, logging followed by replanting would be destined to fail. We also learned that this area, except for a small section on lower Snider Ridge, has never been logged. On a field trip the group took to the area, Verne also mentioned that the areas of dead trees were not expanding, and that insects and disease were not a problem here.

The ONRC received about \$50,000 to do an analysis of the area, with information to be provided by the Forest Service and other sources. The goal was to take a look at options, including several logging alternatives and leaving the area alone.

District Ranger Eduardo Olmedo expressed thanks to all who came together for this discussion, but also made clear that if a proposal to log came from the Forks community, the Forest Service would not necessarily accept that proposal. OFCO later explained to Olmedo that although we understand that the agency considers only Inventoried Roadless Areas (a very specific designation) as roadless, nationally and locally, OFCO and the rest of the environmental community considers all roadless areas --1,000 acres or greater -- to have great

biological significance and therefore could not support logging.

Thanks also go to Rod Fleck, Forks City Attorney and Planner, and John Calhoun, Director of the ONRC, who made presentations, set up the meeting and provided lunch and a vehicle for the field trip. Jason Cross of ONRC also added to the presentations and discussion with very valuable information. Lastly, we want to thank Katie Krueger of the Quileute tribe for giving us copies of her great photos of the field trip and well as some of the presentations and other educational material on Snider Ridge.

Jackson Sale Update: Is "Ugly Beast" Losing Steam? Stay Tuned

by Kevin Geraghty

The proposed Jackson sale, an ugly beast, threatens to set new records of destructiveness for Northwest Forest Plan-era timber sales on the Olympic National Forest. Part of the destructiveness is due simply to its unprecedented scale. The sale covers about four square miles near Hood Canal tidewater on the slopes of Mt Walker, Mt Turner, and Green hill, just north of the Dosewallips valley. It could be expected to extract in the neighborhood of 30 to 40 million board feet if it goes forward as proposed.

More than half the proposed sale area is occupied by relatively old forest of natural origin, regenerated following late 19th-century fires. Much of this 110+ - year old forest contains patches of residual old growth trees which survived the 19th-century fires. In fact, these forest stands already have sufficient old forest character to support nesting by marbled murrelets. Field monitoring over the last decade, conducted under the auspices of the Forest Service's own PNW research station, has detected murrelet occupancy here. Habitat modeling conducted as part of the same research effort has categorized these forest stands as some of the highest-quality murrelet nesting habitat

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available in the eastern Olympics, on a par with the protected wilderness stretches of the Dosewallips and Duckabush valleys.

The current proposal also calls for the construction of something like 12 miles of new road, more than half of it in lands designated as late-successional reserve.

OFCO and local activists from the Brinnon area have been complaining vociferously about the most destructive aspects of this sale, and there are signs that this heat is having some effect. It is rumored that the environmental analysis for the sale, due out in a couple of months, will contain alternatives which drop all old forest units, and which minimize road-building. But it is questionable that these will be preferred alternatives. The only certainty is that continued pressure and publicity is needed to keep nice old public forests standing and free of new roads.

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