



Olympic Forest Coalition

Winter 2007–08

The mission of the Olympic Forest Coalition is to protect and restore forest and aquatic ecosystems on the public lands of the Olympic Peninsula.

Housing Market Crashes—Good or Bad News for Our Forests?

by Bonnie Phillips

The housing market crash is now old news; the more interesting question for OFCO is what this will do to logging on our national and state forests. Already there are timber sales that are not getting bids. An article in this newsletter discusses how the OFCO collaborative project on the Dungeness brought in only \$11,000 where the earlier prediction was for \$60,000. If this sale were offered today, it would likely have no bidders.

On the Olympic Experimental State Forest, timber sales attract few bids. This affects trust beneficiaries on state land and could start to look like recession in some timber communities. Beyond that, the threat of recession looms throughout the nation.

OFCO has concerns for local timber-dependent communities like Forks. Although we would like to see less logging, we also recognize that the industry's characteristic boom and bust cycle is very hard on communities. But the markets are out of

our control. The blame often heaped on environmentalists for job losses in the timber industry is typically greatly exaggerated; this time, any such claim would make no sense at all.

A great deal of new information on the housing market crash is coming to the forefront. See our

*(Continued on next page, **Crash**)*

Inside. . .

Bonnie Phillips: Watershed Restoration: The Politics & Players, *page 2*

Jim Scarborough: Watershed Restoration on the Ground in ONF, *page 3*

Bonnie Phillips: Hills and Valleys on the Dungeness, *page 4*

Tim McNulty: The Dose Road: Get Ready to See Bad Options, *page 5*

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Conservationists Work for Watershed Restoration With Congress, Feds and State

by Bonnie Phillips

(Progress of the Washington Watershed Restoration Initiative, or WWRI, in the Olympic National Forest is described in Jim Scarborough's article on page 3. Executive Director Bonnie Phillips serves as OFCO's coordinator with the group, a coalition of 12 conservation and recreation organizations and the state Departments of Ecology and Fish and Wildlife. Her report on the political situation follows. Ed.)

Our congressman, Norm Dicks, Chair of the House Interior Appropriations Committee, has been a great champion for funding an effort to deal with the enormous and failing road systems in national forests. Failing, and unneeded roads lead to mudslides, downstream flooding, water quality problems and destruction of salmon habitat.

Senator Maria Cantwell has been the leader in the Senate and our coalition has been working with her to get support from senators from other states, but especially Diane Feinstein of California, who is Dicks' counterpart in the Senate.

Among the barriers to funding the restoration effort this year is the veto threat from the Bush White House that hangs over many of the spending bills for fiscal year 2008, which began September 1. (The federal agencies depending on funding are now operating on a "continuing resolution," meaning they go on spending at 2007 levels).

We are also working with the Forest Service through the Regional Office in Portland and will soon be meeting with Regional Forester Linda Goodman to discuss priorities. As Jim's account makes clear, ONF managers are doing good work.

Our communications committee is at work to get stories in Washington state and California papers. Once these articles are published, we'll put them on our web site at www.olympicforest.org. This site already contains a lot of information on the WWRI; if you are interested in more detail, check it out!

(Crash, continued from p. 1)

website, www.olympicforest.org for a very useful recent article from the Seattle P-I.

I've been thinking hard about what the market tumble means to OFCO's work. We want a lower timber sale volume and at the same time we want more environmentally sensitive sales to go forward.

From a purely environmental perspective, less logging is good. But that doesn't tell the full story. OFCO as well as environmentalists across the country have been working on, and sometimes supporting, less environmentally destructive timber sales. Simplistically, this means sales that thin younger forests (under 50 years of age) and have no new roads. When prices were high, these sales got decent bids. And often the receipts went into decommissioning roads.

Collaborative groups throughout the national forest system have worked with the Forest Service to design decent timber sales, with receipts going to fix road problems and restore watersheds. But the market collapse may be a death knell for such efforts. Since agencies see a need to sell timber even in this bear market, they're likely to push for more extensive and "easy to log" sales. Thus, a very positive but fragile trend could soon collapse. This collaborative work is incredibly time consuming; unless the "good" sales succeed, what's the point?

This is one of many thorny questions occupying OFCO's board as we consider how best to deploy our limited time and resources. Please give us your ideas.

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Watershed Restoration Projects Are Bearing Fruit on Olympic National Forest *by Jim Scarborough*

Life-sustaining rivers and creeks meandering through the grandest forests of North America are what make the Olympic Peninsula special. OFCO has been committed since its inception to ensuring that these unmatched attributes remain in perpetuity. Where watersheds are intact, we vociferously defend them from poor management decisions. Where watersheds are degraded, we work with other interested parties to facilitate their restoration. To these ends, OFCO has been directly involved in opposing atrocities like the proposed Dosewallips road rebuild as well as leading ambitious and positive efforts such as the Washington Watershed Restoration Initiative (see article by Bonnie Phillips, page 2.)

In previous newsletter issues, we've described how the U.S. Forest Service often seems like a two-headed creature. On the one hand (or head), the Bush administration and certain economic interests push the agency hard to cut public timber rapidly and emphasize motorized recreation over the well-being of the lands and waters. On the other, forward-thinking scientists and talented professionals within the agency are working overtime to repair past damage stemming from excessive road-building and logging—often with creative strategies to obtain needed funding, despite a federal government that's opted to devote the lion's share of taxpayer dollars to overseas war.

OFCO believes strongly that watershed restoration is the future of Olympic National Forest. Although we rightly criticize and challenge Forest Service decisions that would harm our resources, we know it's important to highlight the good things happening on the ground. What follows, then, is an update of current restoration activities in the Forest, mostly involving road decommissioning projects (such as closure of old logging roads and returning those sites to more natural aquatic and soil conditions). While not exhaustive, this listing does convey that, beneath the media radar, wounded portions of the Forest are

gradually being stitched back together, stream by stream.

- **Brown Creek road:** In the South Fork Skokomish watershed, 4.7 miles of road are being put to bed for the benefit of threatened bull trout.

- **Wynoochee River road spurs:** Two projects, one to the south near Anderson Creek, and another to the north at the confluence of the West Branch, would prevent illegal off-road vehicle use on sensitive river bars.

- **Sams River system:** Quietly as a mouse, the Forest Service, in collaboration with the Quinault Tribe, has removed nearly the entire road system from the Sams River drainage (a major tributary of the Queets River), effectively rewilding this remote valley adjacent to Olympic National Park. If OFCO had medals of honor to bestow, we'd hand them out with utmost gratitude for this extended project.

- **North Fork Calawah/Sol Duc:** As part of the mitigation activities associated with the Clavicle timber sale, 2.1 miles of road will be decommissioned along the Calawah/Sol Duc divide.

- **Goodman Creek:** In a major tributary of the salmon-rich Sol Duc River, 4 miles of road will be removed for both aquatic health and to discourage off-road knuckleheads.

- **Slab Camp road:** Derived from a stewardship collaboration project facilitated by OFCO, this project will—once and for all—take out the grotesque extension of Forest Service Road 2875 south of Slab Camp, a major intrusion along the peripheries of the Buckhorn Wilderness and Quilcene Roadless Area. In the process, blockages will be erected to fight the virus of illegal off-road vehicles in the area, which have repeatedly trashed Canyon Creek and a mid-elevation wetland nearby. Certain other road

(Continued on p. 4, On the Ground)

(On the Ground, continued from p. 3)

spurs in the Dungeness watershed will also be decommissioned.

- **Little Quilcene spur road:** In the Olympic rainshadow, just east of Mount Townsend, 1.4 mile of road is being removed.
- **Mount Crag/Tunnel Creek:** On the slope west of Mount Crag, above Tunnel Creek, 5 miles of road will be decommissioned to benefit threatened summer chum salmon.
- **Tunnel Creek road:** The Forest Service had originally planned to convert the final 2 miles of the main Tunnel Creek road to trail and remove constraints to the North Fork of the creek, but guidebook author Seabury Blair, Jr. mounted a letter-writing campaign in opposition to the project. Regrettably, District Ranger Dean Yoshina gave in to Mr. Blair's misguided wishes, allowing only an unneeded culvert over the South Fork to be pulled, along with some stabilization of the remainder of the road. Although purportedly a hiker, Mr. Blair apparently values vehicle access and modern conveniences more than the integrity of the wild country around him. OFCO fails to see the logic, and the City of Port Townsend's municipal water managers are similarly mystified.

Other admirable restoration efforts are taking place on Hvas Creek in the South Fork Calawah watershed, O'Brien Creek in the Humptulips watershed, and Pine Creek in the South Fork Skokomish watershed, among others. When contacting the Forest Service, please encourage them to keep up this good work.



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Dungeness Collaborative Forest Stewardship Effort Nears Completion

In 2006, OFCO took the leadership role in forming and facilitating a diverse group of interests on a sub-watershed to the Dungeness called Slab Creek.

Members of the group found a thinning unit that would not require new roads. Working with Olympic National Forest staff, the group made decisions on where to log and participated in the design of the sale. Derek Churchill, Silviculturist with Conservation Northwest, deserves applause for his work on the design.

The group also decided what roads to decommission should sufficient funding from the proceeds of the sale allow this.

Forest Stewardship timber sales are different than normal timber sales. In the first place, receipts remain at home to do restoration work like road decommissioning. They also require a number of parties to get together to make recommendations to the Forest Service. This was an agreeable project for OFCO because the thinning unit contained no roads, no ground logging and more variety than usual. We'd like to see more sales look like this one and we hope more such opportunities will arise.

Our one disappointment was how little money this sale generated—approximately \$11,000 instead of the estimated \$50–60,000. This meant less road decommissioning and repair. The market for timber goes through many boom and bust cycles. Right now the housing downturn and threat of recession appear to be suppressing receipts. Boom times will no doubt return, however, and OFCO is glad we participated.

OFCO members who participated include John Woolley, Connie and JD Gallant, Kevin Geraghty, Linda Winter and Bonnie Phillips. Key Forest Service staff included Susan Piper, Dean Yoshina, Bruce Huntley, Scott Hagerty, Kurt Aluzas, and Dick Carlson.

— Bonnie Phillips

Happy Holidays from OFCO!

Dosewallips Road Study Delayed Until New Year; (Hint: Sensible Option Not Included)

by *Tim McNulty*

(reprinted from *Voice of the Wild Olympics*, Fall 2007)

As late autumn rains swell the Dosewallips River, the elk hunker down, and salmon and steelhead continue their upriver migrations. But the multi-agency report on the fate of the Dosewallips Road has once more experienced delay. Apparently, there is no easy way to present three bad choices for road management while refusing to consider the only one that makes sense: convert the road beyond the washout to a trail.

The Forest Service, National Park Service, and federal highway administrators have already announced that the draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) on repairing the Dosewallips Road will not look at the option of trail conversion. The rock and hard-place options the agencies have left are reconstructing the road through critical spawning habitat in the river or building a bypass road up an excessively steep side hill and through a spectacular grove of ancient forest (which has come to be known as the Polly Dyer Grove).

Both options would access two primitive campgrounds (that are well-used now by hikers and bicyclists), and two trailheads. Neither option makes much sense. But both reflect a Bush administration obsession with motorized access coupled with an

utter disregard for the environment, wildland protections, or federally listed species. Threatened chinook salmon, steelhead, northern spotted owls and marbled murrelets all come into play in this decision.

Unfortunately, what won't come into play in the DEIS is a sustainable solution for the Dosewallips Valley, one that would involve a new trailhead, parking area, and planning for a downvalley campground. A similar solution for the Carbon River Valley at Mount Rainier received strong support from park users and local communities.

The Dosewallips Road DEIS is now expected in January. Olympic Park Associates, OFCO, and other organizations are committed to a sensible and sustainable solution for this stunning wild river valley.

Dose Road: *Stand By For Action*

Upon release of the Dosewallips DEIS, OFCO will be alerting each of our members with updated info on what's at stake and how to officially register your much-needed comments for the record. It's crucial that we do everything in our power to prevent degradation of the Dosewallips River and irresponsible road construction through the Polly Dyer Grove. There is a better way—by converting the upper road to a trail.



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