

OFCO NEWS

A Newsletter from the Olympic Forest Coalition on National and Local Forest Issues

January 2003

Note to our friends: The former Quilcene Ancient Forest Coalition is now the Olympic Forest Coalition, or OFCO. Recently, we received non-profit status from the Internal Revenue Service, which means any donations you make are tax deductible. There are so many immediate threats to our national forests we decided we had to become more active—and we hope you will feel the same way. To get involved, please visit our Web site, www.olympicforest.org, or contact Bonnie Phillips, conservation chair, at (360) 456-8793, or bonnie@olympicforest.org.

Bush to America: timber is again king

By **BONNIE PHILLIPS**

WHILE THE AMERICAN PUBLIC focuses on fears of war and the economy, the Bush administration continues steadily dismantling environmental regulations and policies that have protected our national forests for over twenty years. So many bad tidings tumble out of the daily news that you can't keep track without a scorecard.

The unprecedented attack on our public lands is setting back forest management and the public's right to have a say in this management. Each new move is horrific in itself. Together, these changes spell disaster for the entire forest ecosystem and for the democratic principles that have fostered citizen involvement.

The government is predictable. Congress, and the laws it passes, have their own set season. But when it comes to administrative changes in regulations and unpopular management decisions, you can always expect the worst to be issued just before Thanksgiving and continue on through the December holidays. The apparent hope is that concerned citizens will be so overwhelmed responding to documents at a time

when friends and family vie for their attention, that any public uproar will be muted.

On the national level

AS YOU MIGHT EXPECT, the worst news covers all 155 national forests. Although Congress has passed legislation, such as the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the agencies that fall under these acts are allowed to write their own implementing regulations, usually called rules. Because the agencies can write them, they can also change them—without the support of Congress. When rules are changed, they appear in the Federal Register, which details the proposal and gives deadlines for public comment.

NEPA—The Bush administration is currently “streamlining” the Magna Carta of U.S. environmental laws. NEPA requires that all federal actions that could affect the environment be disclosed through an environmental impact statement (EIS) or environmental assessment (EA). Both pathways require an environmental analysis, full public disclosure, and the right to challenge the decision through an administrative appeal or a lawsuit. Streamlining, to this

administration, seems to be just another quick and dirty way to push through controversial actions. Currently, there is a move to allow many damaging management activities to be “categorically excluded” from the regular environmental analysis process. Although there are indeed actions of small consequence where its use is appropriate, the categorical exclusions are being employed more and more frequently for timber sales around the country, and seems custom-made for this anti-environmental administration: if we just assume all is well, we won’t have to check to see if there is a problem.

NFMA—Under a proposed rule change, new forest plans would contain little science and would not require full NEPA documentation.

up a disgraceful non-defense. Although the case is now under review by the U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals, Under Secretary of Agriculture Mark Rey (the official in charge of the Forest Service) is not waiting for the answer and instead hopes to cut a back-room deal with those who would accept far less protection.

It seems that the administration won’t listen to 1.6 million people, but is more inclined to heed the industry officials who donated more than \$1 million to Bush’s election campaign.

Healthy Forests Initiative—During the media flurry surrounding this summer’s wildfires, Bush found a perfect opportunity to put more public logs on the timber industry’s table—without all

Bush policy changes spell disaster for the entire forest ecosystem and for the democratic principles that have fostered citizen involvement.

Citizens who comment on these plans would have to make substantive comments, including the citing of laws and policies. However, citizens would no longer be able to appeal a plan. Management activities would not have to comply with the plan and logging could again become the major use of our national forests. These changes would negatively affect these lands for generations.

Roadless area protection—In the waning days of the last administration, President Bill Clinton signed a record of decision that protected inventoried roadless areas (typically 5,000+ acres in size) from most road building. During the unprecedented public involvement process, 1.6 million comments were received; over 90 percent wanted the protection to be even stronger.

The Bush administration, however, has refused to implement the roadless area plan. Instead, after the forest products industry sued, they put

those pesky citizen activists interfering. He proposed the Healthy Forests Initiative, which would allow salvage logging and other questionable actions in the name of preventing fires, again removing many citizen rights during this “emergency”. This Initiative is expected to affect some of our Western Washington forests.

On the regional level

THE CLINTON ADMINISTRATION made a foolish mistake when announcing the Northwest Forest Plan in 1994: they claimed that 1.1 billion board feet of timber would flow yearly. Neither the plan’s scientists nor anyone in the Forest Service backed that number—it was pure political science. The plan brought an uneasy peace to the region; logging old growth forests have never been accepted by environmentalists, and the timber lobbyists never saw a tree they didn’t covet. The 1.1 billion cut levels were never close to being met, but this administration seems determined to do whatever it can to make

sure our national forests again will be logged at unsustainable rates.

Survey and Manage—In the first move to dismantle environmental protection in the Northwest Forest Plan, the Bush administration has targeted a requirement called survey and manage. This condition was added to the plan in order to protect old growth-dependent species that scientists knew little about. The Forest Service has always been behind schedule in conducting the surveys, which led to an environmental lawsuit against the plan. The settlement under the first lawsuit weakened some of the requirements. This administration wants to do better—they plan to eliminate survey and manage all together.

these bills is uncontested by the timber industry, since it rarely contains many big trees.

Although this bill covered only a small section of the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest, it was unique in that it protected an additional 13,000 acres of low elevation forest, 10,000 of which could be logged under the Northwest Forest Plan. In 2003, knowing that this administration is with them, the American Forest Resource Council, a lobbying association for the timber industry, will push for changes in the bill so that the 10,000 acres proposed for protection can instead be logged.

Gathering all the bad news in one place makes for dismal reading. For years we thought our national forests were reasonably safe. Yes, there

The only way to save our forests from new devastation is to have people rise in support.

Aquatic Conservation Strategy (ACS)—Step two in dismantling the Northwest Forest Plan is weakening the ACS, one of the linchpins of the plan. The ACS is designed to protect and restore aquatic ecosystems; however, the Forest Service's track record on implementation has often not been good, and lawsuits have been successfully filed to challenge this problem. The administration has reacted predictably—attempting to weaken the rule so that the brakes are removed from management activities that damage watersheds and aquatic habitat.

Dismantling a wilderness bill—The 106,000-acre Wild Sky Wilderness bill almost made it through the current congressional session, but both houses decided to call it quits before all the work was done.

Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., and Rep. Rick Larson, D-Wash., plan to reintroduce the bill in January. However, this time the going may not be so easy. Wilderness bills are often criticized because they contain “rock and ice”—a term used to clarify that most of the land put into

were still some bad old growth sales happening on the Gifford Pinchot National Forest; but no old growth was being logged on the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie and the Olympic National Forests, and only the occasional second growth thinning sale seemed worthy of concern. The thrust of these forests was restoration, primarily dealing with dismantling a gigantic road system (about 2,300 miles on the Olympic National Forest alone) that the agency no longer had money or reason to maintain.

Citizen activists moved on to other issues; and that made sense for almost a decade. Now, however, the only way to save our forests from new devastation is to have people rise again in support. These won't be glory years. Instead of having administration and congressional allies (there are a few left there), activists will be in the trenches, dodging bullets.

The term “environmentalist” has become a four-letter word in the minds of many, even in a progressive community like Olympia. Doesn't sound like fun, does it? Yet, the erosion of democracy and environmental protection go

hand in hand in this new battle. We must rise to this new challenge. If we don't, the losses will be deep, and they will be lasting.

In January, OFCO will send around an action alert to give you more information on response to changes in the National Forest Management Act and other critical issues.

NOTE ON LOCAL MATTERS: The Olympic Forest Coalition has developed a good relationship with the staff on the Olympic National Forest; and we plan to do our best to continue this relationship during these bad times. It is always important to support those who are doing a good job managing our public lands.

Access and travel management: dealing with roads

THE FOREST SERVICE is currently undertaking a broad and sweeping revision of its Access & Travel Management (ATM) plan, which will guide the future management of Olympic National Forest's 2,254 miles of roads. Of this hefty total, the Forest Service is proposing that 733 miles of road, or 33 percent, be permanently decommissioned (i.e., closed,

highlight certain roads not presently listed for decommissioning in the ATM draft, in hope that they will be added to the closure list as part of the final product. Priorities for these additionally recommended closures will focus on roads invading sensitive riparian areas and old growth stands, as well as those that compromise the integrity of nearby roadless areas.

The Forest Service is proposing that 733 miles of Olympic National Forest roads be permanently decommissioned.

obliterated, and restored), with another 59 miles converted to trail.

The remaining road mileage would continue to be open to vehicles, with management prescriptions ranging from an emphasis on sedan-friendly surfaces to non-maintenance.

OFCO will be offering comments to the Forest Service to help shape the end result of the ATM process. We applaud the agency for its ambitious intent to decommission these several hundred miles of road (although, at current funding levels, it may take up to four decades for all of this mileage to be fully put to bed).

Given the well-documented damage inflicted by eroding forest roads on watershed health, such actions should go far in improving the habitat of salmonid and other vulnerable wildlife populations. Nevertheless, OFCO intends also to

The Forest Service invites the public to provide written comments on the revised ATM plan by January 10, 2003. Comments should be mailed to Olympic National Forest, Attn: ATM Comments, 1835 Black Lake Blvd., Olympia, WA 98512-5623.

The agency recently completed a series of open houses around the Peninsula for those seeking more information about this process, and provided several handouts summarizing the proposal (alas, no maps, though). However, it's likely that interested folks could still obtain these handouts from the Forest Service by calling them at 360-956-2402.

Jim Scarborough, who will be coordinating OFCO's comments on the ATM plan, may be reached at: jim@olympicforest.org, or 206-780-2254.

The Shelton Sustained Yield Unit meets its maker

By **JIM SCARBOROUGH**

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT, Olympic National Forest and its advocates received some good news last summer. After more than half a century of serving as a nefarious vehicle for the destruction of forest ecosystems in the Skokomish and Wynoochee watersheds, the Shelton Cooperative Sustained Yield Unit (SCSYU) is finally pushing up daisies.

The SCSYU was contractually established in 1946 between the U.S. Forest Service and Simpson Timber, ostensibly as a collaborative

denuded, leaving only replanted, bedraggled saplings to hold onto the thin soil. Hundreds of miles of decaying logging roads continue to foul what were once world-class salmonid streams.

The dramatic policy shifts of the Forest Service in the 1990s, however, were not conducive to business-as-usual for Simpson on the unit. Frustrated in response to ever-decreasing harvest levels, Simpson filed suit against the Forest Service, basically alleging breach of contract. After extensive negotiations, the parties settled out of court last June by way of ending SCSYU once and for all, some forty-three years prior to

Entire valleys and mountains have been denuded.

effort to manage substantial acreage on Olympic National Forest's south flank and Simpson's adjacent tree farm as one unit. At the close of World War II, Simpson's own lands had been logged to bare earth, which threatened the socio-economic viability of the company's mill towns of Shelton and McCleary.

With legislation creating SCSYU, the Forest Service offered up its then-vast holdings of ancient forest exclusively to Simpson for the century to follow, thus allowing the company's private holdings to regenerate marketable trees in the long interim.

The direct result of this ill-conceived arrangement was the utter devastation of a huge swath of the public's wild lands over the ensuing five decades. Road-building was pursued at a frenzied pace into this formerly pristine corner of America, while hyperactive chainsaws systematically eliminated a veritable sea of old growth conifers.

Fast-forward to the present day, and it's not difficult to comprehend the horrific legacy of the SCSYU. Entire valleys and mountains have been

its scheduled termination.

Simpson stated later that the agreement had "outlived its usefulness." ONF supervisor Dale Hom relayed that "both federal law and management policies pertaining to public lands preclude us from emphasizing timber production in the future."

This happy result means that the public has finally regained its rightful domain, and the Forest Service may now concentrate on the multiple restoration activities (e.g., decommissioning or stabilization of harmful roads) necessary in the area. Impressive work of this sort is already being carried out in such locales as LeBar Creek in the South Fork Skokomish watershed.

With continued sensitive management, in combination with the healing elements of time, the few ancient forest stands miraculously surviving amidst the former SCSYU may one day serve as anchors for a revitalized ecosystem, stretching across the entirety of this once brutalized landscape.

Opinion

Post-election musings on Demo soul-searching

By JIM SCARBOROUGH

THE RUMMAGING AND SORTING through of Election 2002's wreckage continues in earnest. Victorious Republicans are busily attempting to discern and confirm a coherent "mandate" from the roughly two-fifths of eligible voters who actually made it to the polls. Democrats, meanwhile, are suffering from their worst case of vertigo in eight years — flailing about in search of easy excuses or convenient scapegoats that might absolve them of responsibility for the old fashioned butt-whuppin' they've recently endured.

What connection, then, might this sorry situation have with conservationists — with respect to our perpetual battles of protecting old growth and roadless areas, or ensuring that restoration policies are based on sound empirical research?

Conservationist and Democratic political alliances notwithstanding, it must be acknowledged that our ilk are often guilty of the same wishy-washiness, use of disclaimers, and purposeful blurring of the issues that arguably resulted in the utter defeat of the otherwise well meaning donkeys this fall. Centrism to the point of invisibility, if you will.

The roots of our tentativeness appear to be steeped in anxiety and paranoia—a fear the wealthy Utilitarians of the world might easily stamp us out should we become too bold.

Nonetheless, the Democrats do seem to have stumbled across one trend of post-traumatic reflection that might well entail genuine relevance to their political future: the growing consensus that the party of the unexpurgated Harry Truman has inadvertently morphed into the party of Virtual Nothingness.

The apparent result? Despite presumably maintaining a core philosophy of some sort, the Democrats opted to play it soft and quiet as a campaign strategy, with no communicable message that might have inspired a progressive (or even moderate) voter. This non-strategy hinged largely on the wishful notion that Republicans would collapse under their own rightist weigh; in reality it translated to utter non-attentiveness of the Democrats' underwhelmed base.

Our steady diet of focus groups, opinion polls, and time-tested (non-) communication tactics might well thrill the Terry McAuliffes of the world, but it's far less clear that they serve to motivate and harness the energies of the supposed majority who care greatly about the environment.

Conservationists spend a great deal of mental effort attempting to comprehend why environmental issues often occupy the lower rungs of the electorate's priorities, and it would be unrealistic to attribute this phenomenon to any one factor. Still, can we honestly assure ourselves that the chronically self-imposed sanitization and dilution of our message isn't exacerbating the problem?

The roots of our tentativeness with the general public appear to be steeped in anxiety and

paranoia, in that we fear the wealthy Utilitarians of the world might easily stamp us out should we become too bold.

But as centuries of athletic competition have repeatedly proven, the team that comes in trying not to lose (as opposed to *knowing* victory is imminent) is usually the team that loses.

By going out of our way to ensure that we offend no one, how many potential allies are we shedding, or even missing entirely? Are we really so cynical as to believe that if we clearly and honestly state our case without hesitation that we'll arouse more hostility than support? That we'll be unable to win the inevitable debate?

One wonders to what extent many veteran conservationists have numbed even their own core beliefs via years of neglect. Essentially all of us have at least once walked humbly and enthralled into a pristine forest wild land and said to ourselves: "This place is the absolute crown of creation, and I'll fight with everything I have to save it."

Taking a cue from the morose Democrats, it seems high time for conservationists to reevaluate exactly what we stand for, and forthrightly decide whether we have the guts to put our beliefs into more aggressive action.

News items

OFCO organizes its first conference save the dates: May 10-11, 2003

OFCO IS EXCITED TO ANNOUNCE that our first conference, which focuses on various protection models for national forests, will be held on Saturday and Sunday, May 10-11, 2003 on the Olympia campus of the Evergreen State College.

Our initial co-sponsors (or co-hosts) are the Evergreen Graduate Environmental Studies Program and the Olympic National Forest. In addition to this involvement by the college, Bonnie Phillips will do a winter graduate internship with OFCO to begin planning the conference.

The Bush administration's attempt to turn back the clock has conservationists looking even more closely at models for permanent protection for the most critical areas on public land. The major models that currently are being supported by various conservation groups include: legislative protection for roadless areas; wilderness bills; legislation to protect old growth forests with a focus on second growth commercial logging and ecological restoration

activities; and a bill to end commercial logging on national forests.

Instead of having an environmental conference where only conservationists and their allies would speak and attend, we decided that it was time to open the dialogue to a range of interests including federal and state agencies, local communities, timber industry and recreational representatives, academic interests, and others.

The first day of the conference will be spent on campus learning about and discussing these issues, and the second day will offer a range of field trips in order that the dialogue can continue in these contested forests. OFCO has submitted a grant proposal to the National Forest Foundation and will be looking for other funding sources to help ensure that this event is a big success.

Keep your eyes on our website, www.olympicforest.org for conference details.

Notes from the Provincial Advisory Committee Meeting

THE QUARTERLY MEETING of the Provincial Advisory Committee was held on

November 22, 2002. Some of the issues discussed in the PAC meeting are discussed elsewhere in this newsletter. The other important points were:

Money for Road Problems—Currently, all the funding for roads problems come from ERFO, the emergency funding that comes after flood events, and the modest amount coming from Title II funds, as part of the County Payments Act. Congressman Norm Dicks managed to get \$22 million inserted in the Appropriations budget (still not passed by Congress) to help with culvert problems. Given the short supply of funding, it will take up to 40 years at the current rate to fix the roads that should be decommissioned now. This does not take into account additional roads that will be damaged in floods of the future.

Cedar Thefts Continue—A significant amount of old growth cedar is being lost through major cedar thefts that continue on federal, state, tribal and private lands, mostly on the west end, and is

beyond the ability of local law enforcement agencies to handle.

Future Agenda Items Tell a Story—More important than the agenda items for November’s meeting are the issues that PAC members wanted on the agenda for February.

One member asked to hear more about expedited second growth logging opportunities that would be coming from the administration. It seems that this is part of Bush’s “healthy forest” program that would affect this forest. Another member wanted to hear about how the forest would deliver on promised timber volume.

Finally, one other member was interested in Charter Forests, an initial idea that came from a free-market think tank that proposed turning over some national forests to a small group of local interests who would manage them “for the public good.”

QUAFCO becomes OFCO

Mission and programs of our new organization

T***HE OLYMPIC FOREST COALITION***
formed to promote the protection, conservation and restoration of natural forest ecosystems and their processes on the Olympic Peninsula.

The programs of OFCO will focus on educating members of the public, officials, agencies, and other environmental, community and recreation groups on issues of importance to help achieve these goals.

In July 2002 forest activists who worked in an informal group called the Quilcene Ancient Forest Coalition came together to discuss the opportunities and threats facing the Olympic National Forest. From this discussion a new non-profit organization was formed. We took a

new name, the Olympic Forest Coalition, to reflect our interests throughout the Olympic Peninsula. In November 2002 we received our non-profit status from the Internal Revenue Service.

Our Programs

Restore the Olympic National Forest—Extensive past logging and road building have severely harmed our forests. OFCO’s programs are designed to work with agencies, community groups, local governments, and other conservation organizations to support ecological restoration on the Peninsula. In order to accomplish this, a range of interests must be included in this effort.

Protect the Wild lands on the Olympic National Forest—Currently, most of the roadless areas and old growth forests are protected under the Northwest Forest Plan. However, the Bush administration wants to gut this Plan and bring back days of much higher logging levels. This program searches for ways, working cooperatively with all interested parties, to permanently protect these precious forests.

Foster Educational Efforts to Bring People Together—There are many issues that face the Olympic National Forest today. Climate change predictions suggest major changes on our forests. Fire in our area occurs rarely, but when fires happen they can be very hot and very extensive. Restoration is a complicated matter involving ecological principles as well as funding and various political agendas.

We will provide educational opportunities in an open forum for all interested parties. In this way, we hope to begin fostering a better dialogue among various interests, all of whom care about what happens to our forests. (See story about our first conference.)

Provide Newsletters and Action Alerts—We publish quarterly newsletters and occasional action alerts to help inform our members and other interested Olympic Peninsula citizens.

Monitor Forest Service Activities—We will monitor and comment on a variety of Forest Service management proposals. We will also keep in touch with research being done on the Peninsula, and look for opportunities to arrange field trips to areas of interest.

Our Board Members

Alex Bradley, Chair
Diane Hoffman, Treasurer
Kim McDonald, At-Large
Bonnie Phillips, Secretary
Jim Scarborough, At-Large
Pete von Christierson, At-Large
Ginger White, Vice-Chair

For more information, or to give input, OFCCO board members can be reached by using their first name and then adding @olympicforest.com, for example, <mailto:alex@olympicforest.com>

Our website is: www.olympicforest.com

Thanks to all of you for past contributions. We hope you will remember us during your holiday giving. With greater threats to the Olympic National Forest looming, we will be far more active in the future, but only with your help. We also need more volunteers. There are many ways to contribute to the Olympic Forest Coalition. OFCO has not yet set a dues structure, so we continue to use our old requests:

\$10—I can only afford to cover direct communicating costs

\$20—Basic yearly donation

\$30—Donor

\$40—Supporter

\$75—Patron saint of the forest

\$ ____ Any amount to support our efforts

Please send your check to: Alex Bradley, OFCO, P.O. Box 1813, Port Townsend, WA 98368. Remember, your donations are fully tax-deductible. If you are interested in volunteering for OFCO, call Alex (360) 385-6271 in Port Townsend, or Bonnie Phillips (360) 456-8793 and we'll plug you in.

Our holiday wishes to all of you. Enjoy yourself this December, and gird yourself as a concerned citizen for the work needed in 2003 to protect of our national forests.

Olympic Forest Coalition

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