

The mission of the Olympic Forest Coalition is promoting the protection, conservation and restoration of natural forest ecosystems and their processes on the Olympic Peninsula, including fish and wildlife habitat, and surrounding ecosystems.



Olympic Forest Coalition

Winter 2015

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President's Column

Connie Gallant

2014 was a very interesting year for OFCO and our projects. First, it marked the 12th anniversary of OFCO's "official" beginnings—that is, when the IRS granted our nonprofit status. Prior to that, however, the parent of our fledgling organization was QUAFCO, the Quilcene Ancient Forest Coalition, founded by Alex Bradley and Bob Crowley in 1989, and soon joined by other dedicated souls.

This was also the year of many environmental catastrophes, such as the Oso landslide. The Department of Natural Resources is still trying to spin that story.



We thank all our members and donors for their financial support. If you have not yet contributed, we hope you will become inspired to do so. We gratefully acknowledge 2014 donors in our website blog.

You can donate to OFCO online on our website www.olympicforest.org. Or, if you prefer, you can mail a check to PO Box 461, Quilcene, WA 98376.

Dose: We watched helplessly as the recent and unprecedented storms washed out many roads, including portions of the already-compromised Dosewallips Road. Erosion is taking its toll. Neither the Forest Service nor the Olympic National Park has the funds to repair the road on its existing path—and the original idea of cutting down an old-growth grove higher up on the very steep slope in order to build a bypass road is definitely a "no-go" with us and many other groups. Other alternatives have not born fruit.



During this past December's storms, Dosewallips Road, mile 3, washed out again. At the time photo was taken, portions of the road were still sliding into the river. photo by Sallie Harrison



The Dosewallips was not alone in flooding. Recent storms have raised the flood levels of rivers across the Olympic Peninsula to all-time highs. Shown here is the Big Quilcene River during our most recent storm in February. photo by Jill Silver

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In the meantime, scores of hikers traveling alone, or with families in tow, descend on the Dose for the beautiful trek into the national park. We get comments from families about how delightful it is for them to leave behind concerns for their children's safety amidst vehicle traffic. And, as Mother Nature always shows us, it does not take long for her to recover the beauty that mankind has so easily obscured.

Electromagnetic Warfare Training: We now face another potential intrusion into the peacefulness of the Peninsula's public lands. Last year the U.S. Navy and the Forest Service put forth an Environmental Assessment requesting a permit to use our public lands to place mobile emitters in 15 different spots throughout the Olympic National Forest. Navy jets ("Growlers") then fly over in groups of three in an attempt to pick up the signals from the emitters and learn to disable them in training exercises that simulate finding and destroying an enemy.

This action by both agencies has actually started a "firestorm" among the public—primarily because the Environmental Assessment (EA) process was not announced properly and the public did not have much time to submit comments. The majority of the residents on the Olympic Peninsula are opposed to such activities happening on our public lands and loud jets flying over a world heritage site, our Olympic National Park. (The Forest Service received more than 4,000 comments with 99.9% opposed.) Gone would be the peace and solitude for which these places are treasured—along with our local economy, in which nature tourism is becoming an evermore critical element. Congressman Derek Kilmer, who campaigned heavily on the economic opportunities for small businesses on the Olympic Peninsula, has engaged with the Navy and succeeded in having the EA deadline comment extended.

OFCO and many other local and state environmental organizations have submitted comments opposing this proposal. In addition to the many objections, we are concerned with the impact

Hikes Around Dosewallips

(Road washout adds 5.5 miles to trail mileages below.)

Terrace Loop: Easy 1.2 mile loop through forested terraces above the Dosewallips River. Elevation gain, 200 feet.

Lake Constance: This very steep climbing route is difficult and is not recommended for children.

Constance Pass: 7.5 miles, with 3,368 feet elevation gain one way to the pass. This is a strenuous climb into Olympic high country.

West Fork: 10.5 miles to Anderson Pass, 2,864 foot elevation

Main Fork: 14.9 miles to Hayden Pass, 4,250 foot elevation

Dosewallips: Walk the fairly level 1.4 miles to a bridge at Dose Forks.

such activities would have on the already rapidly declining Marbled Murrelet population and the Northern Spotted Owl. Many organizations are preparing for litigation. Stay tuned.

Collaborative: The Olympic Peninsula Collaborative effort between environmental organizations and the timber industry continues. Toby Thaler and Jill Silver, OFCO board members, have been assigned to work with the collaborative to find ways to generate more stewardship projects and increase timber harvest through additional ecological habitat restoration thinning projects under the Northwest Forest Plan. That harvest increment, of course, would need to be accomplished without causing ecological damage to our forests/streams. We are engaged in a couple of pilot projects for this coming year. We will publish the results of those projects when they are completed.

Looking Ahead: Our ongoing projects, and new ones, are lining up for 2015. And we hope to engage with our membership on a wider spectrum of concerns for the future of the forests. Thank you for your continued support and belief in our efforts!

Marbled Murrelet News

by Marcy Golde and Paul Kampmeier

OFCO's work to save Marbled Murrelets on the Peninsula is paying off in a lot of interesting ways.

In mid-June the Jefferson County Superior Court heard a request by OFCO, Seattle Audubon Society and Sierra Club for a Preliminary Injunction to stop the harvest of two timber sales on state-managed land in the Goodman Creek drainage on the west side of the Peninsula. We were very ably represented by Wyatt Golding of the Washington Forest Law Center (WFLC) and, although we lost the case, we believe the Dept. of Natural Resources (DNR) increased the no-cut buffers around the sales, and has refrained from proposing other sales in murrelet areas because of our efforts. The two sales were not yet old forest or murrelet habitat, but were wedged between and next to several occupied sites. Their harvest will increase fragmentation and the risk of nest predation because they will open up areas near occupied sites to ravens and other corvids, which prey on murrelet eggs and young.

Preserving large blocks of contiguous forest is central to the Marbled Murrelet conservation recommendations presented to DNR by a blue-ribbon panel of state, federal, and private scientists. In 2008 those scientists recommended the establishment of a series of larger habitat blocks, called Marbled Murrelet Management Areas (MMMA) that would meet the bird's needs for large blocks of habitat in various eco-zones with interior forest to help protect them from predators. The two Goodman Creek sales were in the area the scientists proposed for designation as the Goodman Creek MMMA in the Spruce Zone of the Olympic Experimental State Forest, where almost no murrelet habitat remains because of past logging.

In response to the court loss, WFLC drafted a letter to the state attorney general refuting the argument made in defense of the case, that conservation groups cannot appeal State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) determinations for state timber sales. Such appeals have been fixed law and practice since 1979. The letter to the attorney general, which was

co-signed by 13 environmental lawyers in Washington state, asked the attorney general to clarify existing SEPA law as applied to the Washington Board of Natural Resources' decision to sell timber from state-managed lands.

Finally, the group of environmental organizations working on murrelet protection received two generous foundation grants this past spring to hire a part-time staff person, Kevin Schmelzlen, to publicize and organize for murrelet protection.

You will be hearing more from Kevin in the near future as he works to educate people on the needs of the murrelet and what DNR needs to do to protect and restore this great bird that nests in big old trees, but lives on the ocean. There is still much work to be done—DNR only now is gearing up to develop the long-term Marbled Murrelet conservation strategy required by its Habitat Conservation Plan—so expect to see OFCO and its partners continue to advocate for murrelet protection.

Climate Change

by Peggy Bruton

We can no longer afford to compartmentalize our thinking on forest issues. It's not just the impacts of roads, clearcuts and nearby development that will determine what manner of forests we leave for the next generation. The snowballing reality of global climate change makes our forests both more important, and more vulnerable. Many of us are deeply involved in the fight to keep our entire region from becoming a hub of fossil fuel traffic—trains, planes and automobiles (well, tanker trucks)—with real and proximate risks of spills and accidents that could devastate coastal areas and watersheds.

And environmental activists are determined not to allow traffic that would facilitate further development of the dirtiest fuels, from the Bakken fields of North Dakota and the tar sands of Alberta. So we encourage all our members to speak up against proposed expanded and new crude oil facilities at every opportunity, and let the Governor and legislators know how you feel. Thanks!

A Steady Drumbeat of Landslides

by Josey Paul

On a late Saturday morning last March, the bluff that loomed 650 feet above a small community near Oso collapsed. As it fell, the slide turned liquid and quickly accelerated.

Horrified witnesses looked up to see 268 million cubic feet of mud, rock, trees and debris racing toward them at 60 miles per hour. For a minute or so, the slide roared like a freight train from Dante's hell. Trees snapped. Houses exploded. Mud buried everything in its path. And 43 people died, making the catastrophic debris flow at Oso the deadliest landslide in U.S. history.

The exact causes of that slide are not fully understood. The bluff is geologically unstable and has been sliding from time to time for 6,000 years. But logging is also implicated. According to the Geotechnical Extreme Events Reconnaissance (GEER) study published in July, the area around Oso has suffered previous landslides correlated with logging, and research has long implicated logging as a causal factor in both shallow- and deep-seated landslides, often delayed by years or decades.

The Oso slide shocked most Washingtonians, but for those of us who live in remote homesteads on the Olympic Peninsula, landslides are no surprise. Oso may be the worst single landslide in U.S. history, but out here in the heavily logged boonies, the steady drumbeat of landslides is a part of life.

On the East Twin River, where I live, there have been hundreds of landslides over the decades, both shallow and deep seated. The vast majority are caused by logging or logging roads. Only four percent of the slides investigated in the Twin Rivers area were caused by natural forces, according to a U.S. Forest Service watershed analysis in 2002.

None of these slides are as big as the Oso slide, but some come close, and they all do extensive damage. And cumulatively, they are devastating to the environment. In 1985, following logging on the west bluff just above my property, a two-acre slice

of the hillside lost its grip and slid into the river. The slide tore out trees, buried a half dozen crude shelters used intermittently by homeless people and dammed the river.

A few years later further logging on the bluff, a half-mile downstream, triggered a cluster of large slides over the next 15 years. Each of the slides either buried my access road—sometimes under 10 to 20 feet of debris—or completely tore it out. Three of the landslides reached the river.

In the late '90s, the state Department of Natural Resources (DNR) set up a sale on Sadie Creek, a tributary just upstream from my cabin. It was an area of highly unstable slopes where many slides have fallen in the past. But forestry officials approved the logging sale anyway. And, as predicted by at least one geologist's report, a huge section of the Sadie Creek bluff fell into the stream in 2002, ruining stream habitat and salmon restoration work. The slide left a 90-foot vertical head scarp.

Hardly anyone pays attention to these slides because they are so common and because they fall in remote locations. On Deep Creek, a heavily logged watershed five miles to the west, virtually every stream segment has been "severely affected by mass wastings" and subsequent debris flows caused primarily by logging (McHenry, 1995). The Deep Creek watershed has the misfortune of being almost entirely owned by commercial logging interests. Of 134 large mass wastings, the study found that 69 percent were caused by logging or logging roads. Just five percent were caused by natural forces. The causes for the rest could not be determined because they predated aerial photographs.

In November 1990, a huge storm drenched the area, setting off numerous mass wastings on heavily logged slopes in the area. Deep Creek suffered the worst in a series of dam-break events. The Deep Creek blow-out began high on the flanks of Mt. Muller, when three cubic yards of sidecast, improperly discarded during construction of a logging spur road, turned mobile and dammed a

tributary. Water backed up until the dam broke, sending a larger surge of water and debris downstream. A series of dam-break failures followed, each magnifying the power of the debris flow, until finally a massive wall of water and debris undercut a down-valley slope and caused a deep-seated landslide.

In places, the debris flow scoured the stream channel down 10 vertical feet to bare rock. Large logs, including old-growth Douglas-fir logs, were thrown like children's toys far out of the stream's active channel. In all, the landslide tore out two miles of the stream and sent a massive plume of mud far out into the Strait of Juan de Fuca. The slide also left Oso-scale sediment deposits, some 60 feet deep (Shaw, 1995).

The debris flow ruined salmon habitat and widened the stream channel, making the stream shallower and more susceptible to overheating in the summer and overcooling in the winter. Critical off-channel habitat, which coho salmon need to survive winter storms, was lost. Spawning gravel was lost. Pools were lost. Large woody debris was mashed into massive log jams. The largest jam was roughly the size of a football field buried under 10 feet of logs. The jam blocked salmon from accessing the upper watershed for two years.

Similar slide-initiated debris flows have damaged Boundary Creek, a tributary to the Lyre River, and the East Fork of the East Twin River. Other slides caused extensive damage too. Around 1990 I watched the remnants of a landslide caused by a failed logging road rush past my cabin. The river looked like a fast-moving chocolate shake. The sediment severely damaged salmon runs. Those runs have never recovered. When I moved out here in the '80s, I could walk up the stream in the summer and send schools of coho fry fleeing before me. Now, after that debris flow, I see only individual salmon juveniles. Crayfish are almost gone. Lampreys are almost gone. Nothing is the same.

And this damage is not short term. The debris and sediment take decades to clear out. Deep Creek,

once a narrow, cool and deep stream, is now much wider, shallower and warmer. As recently as the '70s, Deep Creek still retained a run of Chinook. No longer. The stream is too damaged for Chinook to survive and other salmonids cling to life as best they can in degraded habitat. A watershed analysis for a local watershed group by Tetra Tech, a consulting firm, found that steelhead in Deep Creek now need a summer flow of 250 cubic feet per second (CFS) for optimal rearing habitat. Deep Creek's actual summer flows drop to 3 CFS or less. Those small flows nurtured salmon easily when the stream was narrow, cool and deep. They harm salmon now that the stream is wide, shallow and warm.

These mass wastings have gone on for more than 100 years, and it's not hard to find evidence of old disasters. In my hikes of the area, I have found old, semicircular landslide scars big and deep enough to bury CenturyLink Field, the Seahawks stadium. Within these scars, there are no old-growth stumps from the first logging out here in the late 1800s. But outside these scars, you can still find stumps of the old forest giants that used to grow here, including some on the wetland flats on Sadie Creek that are 12 to 17 feet in diameter.

The bluffs here are unstable, like those at Oso, and when the old-growth trees were cut down, the bluffs also came down too, usually after big rains. And rivers ran wild over the land.

In the early '80s, loggers clearcut a couple hundred acres on the east side of the lower river. They took every tree, all the way to the river banks. In successive years, the river chewed through banks no longer protected by those trees. A large meander in the river moved more than 300 feet laterally through the landscape, spewing roughly five acre-feet of fine sediment into the spawning grounds of chum, coho and steelhead. Chum like to mass spawn in the lower watersheds, where the current slows and fine sediment from logging drops out, smothering salmon eggs buried in the gravel. That logging sale marked the sharp decline of chum on the river.

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Landslide Drumbeat.....continued from page 5

And still the beat goes on. In 2008 an ill-fated decommissioning of the FS 3040 road slumped into a tiny tributary of the West Twin River. In a series of dam breaks, it reached the FS 30 road far below. The debris plugged the FS 30 road culvert. Water built up until the road could no longer hold, and a massive, destructive debris flow was set loose.



West Twin River debris flow 2008 photo by Josey Paul

The debris flow turned a wide swath of forest into a field of gravel and sand. Hillsides were denuded. The stream looked like it had been run through a blender. And the catastrophic damage lasted for most of a mile. The long-term damage is still being felt and will be for decades to come.

On a tour of the Pysht River in the early 2000s, we stopped on a hillside that was completely logged. The ground was hard and duff free. Any rain would run off quickly into the river. Newly planted fir trees baked in the sun. And far upstream, we could see where a 2- to 3-acre slab of the bluff—trees and all—had fallen into the Pysht River. Rapid runoff from the numerous clearcuts dramatically had increased the flow and erosive power of the river, undercutting a bank and triggering the large landslide.

So much logging sediment has been flushed down the Pysht River that the once-vast meadows of eelgrass in the nearshore estuary have been converted to mudflats. Gone are the zillions of

herring that used to lay eggs on that eelgrass in a vast explosion of life. And almost no salmon can survive in the lower six miles of the river.

So, yes, Oso was bad. Very bad. But it is not an isolated event. Because it happened in a populated area and caused a large death toll, it received extensive publicity. Unfortunately the vast majority of landslides get no publicity, even though their cumulative damage is staggering.

Early reporting on the Oso slide gave logging a free pass, and DNR angrily rejected later reporting that uncovered evidence of illegal logging and a long history of irresponsible logging practices on or near the Oso slide that were ignored or condoned by DNR.

We still don't know the primary cause or causes of the Oso slide, and the GEER report worries that we never will. But we do know that forestry regulations do not prevent landslides—they promote landslides.

Rayonier Breaks Promise

Photos taken by a landowner depict Rayonier timberlands on the south side of Mount Walker, north of Point Whitney, on Hood Canal. An OFCO friend writes, "I don't think I have seen more trees fall off the bank in a single winter; there are probably four different areas of trees coming off the bank on our beach alone. The Potato Patch got washed out again as a result of the logging activities above.





"Same old story: The logging road culvert plugged and the road washed out down the mountain into the Potato Patch. I had written Rayonier in 2012 warning them that their logging plans might cause this to happen. I got a call back from one of their people [saying] they were going to remove the culverts along the road once the logging activities were finished up to mitigate that possibility; somehow that didn't happen."

DNR Withdraws Proposed Timber Sale Adjacent to Devil's Lake NRCA

by Fayette Krause

On September 29, 2014, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) officially withdrew its proposed timber sale of more than 250 acres adjacent to Devil's Lake Natural Resources Conservation Area (NRCA) in Jefferson County. Shortly thereafter, the agency announced plans to nominate the previously proposed sale as an addition to the Devil's Lake NRCA.

Northwest Watershed Institute (NWI) and OFCO both submitted letters questioning the planned sale. We stated that at the very least DNR is required to produce an Environmental Impact Statement so the public could further assess the agency's due diligence on protecting the existing NRCA.

Questions surrounding the sale centered on the fact that the proposed sale area hosts a rare plant community: Douglas-fir/western hemlock/Pacific rhododendron/evergreen huckleberry, to be precise. This community type is a Priority 1 element for protection in the state of Washington Natural Heritage Plan, the highest and rarest rank in the plan. The community, found only below 1,500 feet, and generally below 1,000 feet, is a Puget Sound endemic and does not extend to British Columbia.

While OFCO was gratified that DNR stated its intent to nominate the proposed 250(plus)-acre tract as an NRCA addition, using the Trust Land Transfer (TLT) mechanism available to the agency, we later learned that the agency has put the transfer on hold until it can evaluate a second occurrence of the plant community on DNR land.

OFCO urges that DNR consider both sites favorably for TLT, especially since these occurrences represent a regional endemic of high ecological value. We note also that at Devil's Lake NRCA other elements, including the protected lake itself, add to the ecological importance of the plant community type. DNR must take this biological diversity into account in evaluating the site for expanded protection.

OFCO looks forward to working with the agency to bring protection to both of these rare community occurrences on state land.

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