



The Moose Call

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

April 2009

President's Message

by Cris M. Currie

Last year was largely one of waiting for and responding to Parks Commission staff responses to our draft comprehensive trail plan. Only three official meetings were held during the year, and these were largely devoted to discussions of mountain biking management and the proposed 5000' 'Round the Mountain Trail. While no specific conclusions were reached, progress was definitely made.

The main accomplishment for the year was the completion of the GIS trail map. Volunteer Joni Sasich and Emily Lucas of State Parks, worked really hard providing the technical expertise needed to finish the project. So, State Parks now has a multi-layered, accurate trail and facilities

map in Arc Explorer software with an integrated Excel spreadsheet detailing numerous features of each trail. We are still looking for someone who can "operate" this map locally, and we are unsure how to best make it available to the public. In appreciation, State Parks awarded the Friends Group/Advisory Committee the Volunteer Group of 2008 Award. It will be presented at the Commission meeting in Spokane on October 1.

As a cost saving measure, we have started to send out this newsletter via e-mail whenever possible. We will continue to print and mail to those without e-mail, but we would much prefer to keep our Friends informed electronically. So if you are still getting the print version and you can send us an e-mail address, please do so. Send it to criscurrie@igc.org. Thanks!

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Forest Health Project Starts

Mount Spokane State Park has initiated a forest health project encompassing 4250 acres in the southwest part of the Park. It is the third such project, behind Riverside and Lake Wenatchee, that the Parks Commission has undertaken. Public meetings to explain the project were held August 12 and September 30, and Friends Group members were in attendance to learn and comment.

Because the SW portion is relatively dry and has experienced the most fire suppression, there has been a problematic overgrowth of Grand Fir (a fast growing species that tends to crowd and shade out the Larch, pines, Hemlock, and Douglas Firs). Grand Firs also have a relatively thin bark that provides little protection in a fire. Since it has tended to become the dominant species in many areas, forest diversity has diminished, while the density of small trees (ladder fuels) has greatly increased. Even though the science of forest fire prediction is still in its infancy, the risk of a crown fire in the SW part of the Park seems high enough to justify a very conservative approach to treatment. The goal of the project is to reduce the risk of catastrophic fire and encourage the redevelopment of a fire-adapted forest, while also encouraging a diverse habitat that is safe and aesthetically pleasing to visitors.

The Parks Commission hired Pacific Biodiversity Institute to survey the Park and to propose treatment plans for 45 plots. The results were published in 2007 as the Forest Health Assessment and Plan. According to this "big picture" plan, most of the plots need no treatment, but those that do, fall under ten general types. It is now up to Northwest Management, Inc., a Deer Park forestry firm, to refine the plan plot by plot and tree by tree and manage the actual implementation. The ten treatment types consist of various forms of thinning (to reduce ladder fuels and increase diversity),

and burning (to remove saplings and piled dead material).

Work was actually started on Unit 19 last fall. This area is between the summit road and the main park road just southwest of the snowmobile parking lot. It is mostly Grand Fir and Lodgepole Pine, and in general, only the Grand Fir was cut. The debris was scattered on the forest floor with the expectation that it will rot and contribute to soil health if less than 36" from the ground.

Phase One of the project calls for 150 acres to be treated. The next two areas on the list are Unit 6, south of the main road and below the snowmobile parking lot, and Unit 9, a half mile below the hairpin curve of the main road on the east side. Unit 6 is mostly Douglas Fir with an under story of Grand Fir, which will be thinned out. Unit 9 is mostly Larch, White Pine, and Grand Fir. Here, there will be too much debris to scatter, so it will need to be piled and burned by hand.

The next two units in Phase One are #20 and #1. Unit 20 is just west of Unit 19 along Trail 100. It has Douglas Fir, Grand Fir and some Larch. There are lots of dead standing trees as well as trees over 7" that are in decline. The trees here are too big to thin by hand so debris will be piled mechanically to burn. Those that are commercially valuable will be hauled out for revenue to help pay for the project. Grass will then be planted over the disturbed soil to prevent weeds. Unit 1 is south of 19 and south of the main road. This is an area that is slated for the most aggressive treatment. Once Phase One is finished, the whole project will be re-evaluated.

How fast the project proceeds will depend upon funding. It is not expected that proceeds from logs will be enough. Prison work crews are being used to minimize costs, but Commission budgets are under severe strain once again.

Biking to Spirit Lake

The community of Spirit Lake, Idaho has recently formed a Parks Commission to help boost tourism in the area. It's plan is to improve a mountain biking trail from Mt. Spokane to Spirit Lake along with a pedestrian/bike path from downtown to the lake, a rental center for bikes, kayaks and canoes, and a performing arts center. The plan also calls for a shuttle bus so that riders only need to ride downhill from the Park. Volunteer Spirit Lake Parks Commission members Mark Kroetch and Terry Dvore presented their ideas at the March Friends Group meeting and the response was favorable. They also received a supportive response from the Inland Empire Paper Company (IEP), which owns most of the land that the routes cover. Their ideas fit well with the State Park's interests in expanding connections with adjacent landowners as well as IEP's interests in opening their lands for compatible recreation.

Complaint Process Initiated

Although nobody enjoys dealing with complaints, the reality is that visitors to the Park go there for many different reasons, and sometimes those reasons interfere with why other people go there. To help ensure that all visitors are safe, that their time in the Park is enjoyable, and that the natural and cultural resources are protected, Park staff utilize a Limits of Acceptable Change management model. The model specifies a certain number of incidents of various types that can be tolerated before additional management options must be instituted. For example, "no greater than 5 cycling vs. pedestrian conflict incidents per running mile trail segment per year reported to Park staff are acceptable." Or, "no greater than 5 incidents per month of snowmobiles crossing out of any individual play area or groomed or un-groomed trail are

acceptable."

Obviously the two rangers on duty at any given time cannot possibly know what is going on throughout the Park, so to help make the system work, Park staff have requested that visitors report all user conflicts with 1) the phone number, address and name of the person reporting, the type of conflict, and the best call back time, 2) the date and time of the conflict, and 3) any facts, including conversations and descriptions, concerning those involved. These reports can be submitted by letter to the Park office at: 26107 N. Mt. Spokane Park Dr, Mead, WA 99021 or by e-mail: mount.spokane@parks.wa.gov. The information visitors provide may be used to modify law enforcement patrols, change or create policy, improve signs, and plan for future uses.

Office Nearly Washes Away



Quick work by Park staff last May 18 prevented a flood in the headquarters building, but didn't prevent about 1000' of state highway from washing away. Water was flowing around a blocked culvert under the sand shed at an estimated 38,000 gpm. The road was rebuilt quickly, but a larger culvert will need to be placed under the road this summer when the first mile of Park road will also be rebuilt. The Park road is expected to be closed again all summer.

Master Plan Update

Staff's recommendation for a Master Facilities and Development Plan for Mt. Spokane State Park is now expected to go before the Parks Commission for approval at its Spokane Meeting on October 1. The proposal will likely not include an alpine ski area expansion plan since the required environmental studies have yet to be done. An expansion plan could be added later, however.

Final details concerning the Friends Group/Advisory Committee's trail plan proposal will be worked out at the upcoming May and June meetings. Since the Proposed Alpine Ski Expansion Area (PASEA) land is still managed as a Natural Forest Area and has yet to be classified as Recreation, our proposal for a 5000' 'Round the Mountain trail will likely not be approved. Proposed downhill mountain biking trails in the area have also been withdrawn for the same reason. With the exception of a few technical modifications, it appears that the remainder of our proposed plan will go forward as written.

The reroute of the trail between Smith Gap and Mt. Kit Carson is currently the top priority trail project to be completed this summer.

Website Maps

Don't forget, you can download all of the winter trail maps, the complete draft trail plan with all of its maps, and lots of other great stuff at the Friends of Mt. Spokane website: www.mountspokane.org.

Donors and Volunteers

Many thanks go to our 2008 donors: Anonymous, Deidre and Cameron Allen, Allison Cowles, Daniel Farber, Dale Gill, Bruce and Debra Howard, Stephanie Hughes, Rich Landers, and Pat Richardson. Board members include: Mark Augenstine, Anita Boyden, Marilyn Brennan, Mike Brixey, Ken Carmichael, Cris Currie, Robin DeRuwe, Rob Lindsay, George Momany, Lew Persons, Barbee Scheibner, Aaron Spurway, Shelley Tschida, and Holly Weiler. Other volunteers include: Brad McQuarrie, Sam Deal, Tom Frost, Joni Sasich, and Sicco Rood.

Joining the Friends of Mt. Spokane State Park

Individual Membership: \$25 or 5 hours of volunteer service per year.

Family Membership: \$40 or 10 hours of volunteer service per year

Corporate Membership: \$100 per year or more! All contributions are tax deductible.

Date: _____

Name: _____ I would like to volunteer: ____ hrs

Address: _____ I have enclosed: \$ _____

City: _____ State: ____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Mail to: The Friends of Mt. Spokane State Park

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Thank you!