



The Moose Call

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

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Www.MountSpokane.org

From the President

by Cris M. Currie

It was an amazing year at Mt. Spokane as several very long term projects were completed. First, after nine years of working with five different GIS mapping volunteers, the computerized map for Mt. Spokane was finally finished. The Friends Group ultimately decided to hire the staff at the Spokane County GIS office to fix the remaining problems stemming from the original data collection. Eight specialized maps of the park were also created for inclusion in the soon to be published Mt. Spokane guidebook. Gray Dog Press in Spokane is very excited about the potential for the 30,000 word manuscript put together by the Friends Group over the last five years. We expect to have the book ready for sale by March or April.

The centennial snowshoe hut at Smith Gap had its open house on October 5 after almost six years of work. The foundation and framing were constructed in 2013, and then 18 Friends contributed over 600 hours last summer to paint, stain, insulate, build the steps, railings, and ADA ramp, finish the eaves and interior walls, install the wood stove and flooring, build the furniture, and decorate the 24' X 16' day-use hut. The hut features a 6' covered porch as well as an 8' picnic table, benches and window trim all hand-made from a fallen white pine found in the park. Hundreds of people have already visited the hut and have commented on what a wonderful

addition it is.

But by far the longest running project at Mt. Spokane is the proposed alpine ski area expansion. Various plans have been put forward for this since 1952, but the Parks Commission finally made a decision in November to allow the current expansion plan to proceed. Since 1999, the Friends Group/Advisory Committee has periodically given input to parks staff and the concessionaire regarding these plans.

The amended trail plan submitted two years ago to the Parks Commission was also finalized and approved in November. Implementation of that plan continued at a rapid pace over the summer. Three major reroutes for upper Trail 140 were completed and the second reroute for Trail 160 was cut by staff. It will be finished this summer. The third and final bridge was built on Trail 100 by Washington Trail Association members. Volunteers constructed new trailhead bulletin boards/kiosks and large, color trail maps were installed on each. The knapweed eradication program saw its 14th straight year on Ragged Ridge last summer. The number of plants found and pulled continues to decrease and is now down to about two dozen plants across the entire ridge.

Exciting projects are continuing as the Friends prepare to assist the restoration of the long neglected Heritage Area in the park, and the proposal for a new Mountain Recreation and Education Center to replace the Selkirk Lodge gets considered by the state legislature!

Alpine Area Expansion

In November, the Parks Commission decided to finish the land classification project started in 1999 when it left 800 acres in the proposed alpine ski expansion area (PASEA) unclassified pending further study. Their final decision was that 279 acres on the south end would be classified Recreation, 351 acres on the north end would be classified Resource Recreation, and 170 acres below the Chair 4 Road would be Natural Forest Area (NFA). In a separate decision, they allowed the current plan to move forward to construct 1 new chair lift and 7 new runs within the 279 acre portion. The Commission amended this decision with the provision that no conditional recreational use of the north end would be permitted except for search and rescue and backcountry skiing. In other words, traditional winter uses will continue, but no new summer trails can be built.

So why did most members of the Friends Board support this decision? Does it mean that the last remaining old growth forest in Spokane County will be clear cut for ski runs, as some have insisted? Does it mean that the proponents got everything they wanted with no need for compromise as they have been accused? The answer to both is a definite “no.” Fortunately old growth trees can be found throughout the park, and the area needing to be cut for new runs is relatively small (about 60 acres), with only 7 trees over 150 years old being found.

Quoting from our public testimony before the Commission meeting: “While a majority of the board has consistently been supportive of the expansion over the years, a few members have been critical and have actively sought alternatives. Partly in response to those criticisms, expansion proponents withdrew their much more extensive two-chair proposal and replaced it with the current bare minimum single chair and 7 run proposal. We have also discussed no-chair options as well as the option to classify the entire PASEA as NFA. At our

October meeting, our vote was 9 to 1 in favor of the current expansion proposal. While the single dissenting director did not believe that an expanded ski area was the best use of the land and that it should be classified NFA, the majority felt that the current proposal is the best compromise possible, given all of the mitigation efforts to protect the environment that will need to be followed. Directors also felt that the history of this particular decision making process needed to be at the forefront of the discussion in order to continue to assure its fairness. Instead of rejecting the expansion idea outright in 1999 based on the area’s eligibility for NFA, the Commission agreed that expansion was worthy of strong consideration as long as the proponents could successfully pass a list of expensive and time consuming financial and environmental tests. It now seems that those tests have been passed, and it is time to proceed with the next stage of the permitting process. This has been an exceptionally long and difficult decision to make, and it has caused serious divisiveness through the Spokane community. Above all, it is our hope that regardless of which way the decision goes tomorrow, that we can all pull together and make the outcome as successful as possible.”

This was truly one of the most difficult decisions the volunteer Commission has ever had to make. At the public meeting, each member detailed their own struggle behind the 5-2 vote on classification and the 7-0 vote favoring ski area expansion. Their expectation is that natural resources in the PASEA will be managed to a higher standard than in the existing ski area, and that staff will explore opportunities to increase the current 30% of park land that is classified as NFA/NAP in order to provide additional natural resource protection for the park as a whole. Staff were also directed to identify high priority neighboring properties within existing wildlife corridors for possible trade or purchase by State Parks.

Snowshoe Hut Success

Without a doubt, the snowshoe hut, built in the Washington State Parks' centennial year, is a resounding success story. About 75 people attended the open house on October 5, during which scrumptious treats were served, the hut was decked out in fresh flowers, and volunteers were able to meet and thank Bill Fix for his foundation's grant of \$15,000 for the project.



Because the structural plan was donated, Commission staff built the foundation and floor, and Solid Structures gave us a very reasonable bid for the framing, the Friends Group only had to put in another \$7,200 plus 600 hours in volunteer labor and various in-kind contributions to finish the hut. So not only is it truly a *warming* hut that is well built and pleasing to look at, it also came at a very pleasing price. This is just a great example of how a non-profit group can stretch limited resources to their maximum and produce something that will be cherished for many years to come. If you haven't seen it yet, be sure to visit as soon as you can!

New Maps

Secured to the outside front wall of the snowshoe hut is a large color map of the entire park. This is the first actual product of the computerized mapping project the Friends have been working on for over 9 years. The map is on ARC GIS software and is in multiple layers so that products can be customized for a wide variety of purposes and updated as needed. Rather than showing

topographic lines, the base map shows the shaded relief of the topography. This makes it much easier to read for those who are confused by topo lines. The map also utilizes icons for various park features and facilities. The downside to this kind of mapping is that the software is extremely complicated and expensive and professionals must be relied upon for most changes. This means that we will continue to use the digital topographic maps for some applications, but the GIS maps are a most welcome addition. Both types of map are available for free download on the Friends' website.

Guidebook in Publication

The completion of the mapping project means that the guidebook will be published very soon. With about 30,000 words, dozens of photos, elevation profiles, 7 detailed route maps, a fold out map of the entire park, and color plates of common birds and butterflies, the book will be a unique and essential guide for anyone wanting to get to know Mt. Spokane, but has been too intimidated to try. The book covers the park's natural and cultural history, the little known planning history and land classification system, mammals, birds and butterflies, the various recreational permits needed to use the park, access points, facilities, rules, and safety issues. Most importantly, the book describes 15 trail routes in detail that cover every trail in the park, except for some of the Nordic area trails. Separate sections give suggestions for the best trails for snowshoeing, biking, running, and horseback riding in addition to the facilities available for Nordic and alpine skiing and snowmobiling. Plans for future development are also described.

Trail Reroutes Nearly Completed

The master trail plan proposed by the Friends Group/Advisory Committee and approved by the Commission calls for several new trails and several reroutes for existing trails. The reroute of upper Trail 140 from the summit to the bottom of the Kit Carson meadows was

completed this last summer by volunteers from the Evergreen East Mountain Bike Alliance. Park staff used the new mini-excavator to reroute the top portion of the trail which was too steep and badly eroded. They also rerouted another section to avoid an existing wetland, as well as two lower sections to eliminate unnecessary uphill stretches. Old trail sections will be re-vegetated. As a result, the trail has become much easier to maintain and more fun for mountain biking, since it presents a nearly continuous downhill run from the summit to Bear Creek Lodge. Trail 160 from Saddle Junction to the Kit Carson summit is also being rerouted to eliminate the fall line portions which have become badly eroded. The lower section was completed 2 years ago and the upper section was cut by staff last summer. It will be finished and signed by volunteers this summer.

New Projects for 2015

At the initiation of the Friends Group, park staff have agreed to renovate and provide interpretation for the park's Heritage Area. This includes the CCC area which hosted a legendary Civilian Conservation Corps camp between 1934 and 1940, the Paradise Camp/Cook's Cabin/Grand Lodge area where downhill skiing began in the 1930s, and the Vista House on the summit of Mt. Spokane, which was built in 1933. As a first step, signs were erected around the CCC area indicating that bike and horseback riding are not permitted in the area. Then four interpretive signs were written and produced in cooperation with Commission staff. Two will be installed inside the CCC cabin and two are ready to be seasonally installed on a kiosk at the Cook's Cabin site.



The CCC cabin logs are in the process of being re-chinked. The concrete has been removed, but the necessary personnel were not available in time last fall to replace the chinking with a more historically appropriate material before winter, so the cabin got wrapped in plastic.



This summer we hope to finish the chinking, improve the interior, repair the rock walls, and re-vegetate the grounds. We will also start to restore the historic woodshed built by the CCC for Cook's Cabin.



Alex McMurry, Historic Preservation Staff in the Woodshed

Disc golf anyone?? Members of the Spokane Disc Golf Association have expressed interest in building a new 18 hole disc golf course within the first two junctions in the Nordic ski area. Please let us know if you have an opinion about this OR if you would like to get involved in any of our projects OR if you would like to serve on the Friends Board of Directors. Contact Cris Currie at criscurrie22@gmail.org.