



The Moose Call

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

April 2008

President's Message

by Cris M. Currie

The primary accomplishment for the combined Mt. Spokane State Park Friends Group and Advisory Committee was the completion of the group's proposed comprehensive trail plan for the Park. Consensus was reached in October after three and a half years of steady work, and the proposal was submitted to Parks Commission staff the next week. Consisting of 22 pages of text, 16 maps, a spreadsheet detailing 133 trails and roads, plus a 6 page attachment, the proposal is intended to be the centerpiece of a 20 year Master Facilities and Development Plan for the Park. Three of the major goals of the plan are 1) to minimize conflict between high speed downhill mountain bike riders and

those traveling at slower speeds on foot, horseback, or bicycle, 2) to expand the nordic ski trail system without reducing the mileage available for snowmobiling, and 3) to provide a variety of marked snowshoe trails that will not interfere with groomed nordic skiing. At the end of year, staff met to discuss the documents and responded to each proposed change. Proposed changes were either approved, recommended for approval pending individual project applications, deferred approval pending completion of a State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) review and the remainder of the Master Facilities Plan, or deferred approval pending further State Park policy review. The SEPA environmental review is scheduled to begin during the summer of 2008. The independent consultant who will conduct the review will be hired and start work in April.

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Proposed New Summer Trails

The proposed trail plan seeks to address the increasing demand for high quality outdoor recreation in the Spokane area while balancing the need to protect the natural resources on which that demand is built. It is of course impossible to expand recreational facilities without infringing on the environment to some extent, but our hope is that significant improvements to the trail system can be made such that erosion is reduced, trails are easier to maintain, use is somewhat more spread out, and conflict between user groups is reduced.

One key idea is to increase the number of options for summer travel between the Park entrance and the summit of Mt. Spokane. Currently, two main choices exist: 1) Trail 115 starting from Bear Creek Lodge to the saddle between Mt. Kit Carson and Beauty Mountain (Saddle Junction) and then proceeding up Trail 135 to the summit, and 2) Trail 110 to Saddle Junction and up the same Trail 135. With the advent of high speed downhill mountain biking, these two routes have seen substantially increased use. Accidents and complaints have also increased involving those descending at higher speeds than those ascending. Our proposal seeks to address this problem first by adding an additional route to the summit that would serve as the primary route for non-mechanized travel. From the Park entrance, the route would follow existing Trail 110 and connect to Trail 100 just above the Kit Carson Loop Road. It would follow Trail 100 east and then junction with a rerouted Trail 101 that would head due north to Bald Knob south of the summit road. Once at the campground, the route would follow a new Trail 191 up across the bald area to the summit.

The second piece in the puzzle is to reroute Trail 115 (renumbered as Trail 140) from Smith Gap to its junction with the Mt. Kit Carson Summit Trail 170. Currently

this trail follows the fall line and is badly eroded. The reroute has already been flagged by volunteers **Mike Brixey**, **Anita** and **Liz Boyden**, and **Cris Currie** working with Steve Christensen. When finished, it will meet the proposed new standard of a 10% maximum average grade. Gentler trails are much easier to maintain, easier to hike and ride, and (according to the International Mountain Biking Association) are more fun to descend on a bike because an even speed can be maintained without riding the brakes. When technical features are added to the tread such as rocks, holes, and drop-offs, the trail can be made more challenging at even slower speeds. Slower downhill speeds mean increased safety and fewer conflicts with those traveling uphill. While downhill riding would not be prohibited on Trail 110 (where sightlines will be improved), it would be strongly encouraged on Trail 140. With the addition of more technical features, Trail 140 should become the preferred route for advanced downhill riders, while Trails 110, 101, and 191 should become the preferred route for non-mechanized travel.

Other Proposed New Trails

Proposed Trail 141 will link the bottom of Trails 110 and 115 so that the need to travel on the highway to complete a loop with the Lower Kit Carson Loop Road will be eliminated. Proposed Trail 180 will follow the ridge top just north of the Day Road between the west Park entrance and the Kit Carson Loop Road. This trail will close a loop with the Day Road in a part of the Park which currently sees little use. Proposed Trail 190 will completely encircle the summit of Mt. Spokane at approximately 5000', and include the existing Trail 130 between Bald Knob and the CCC cabin. This trail will be significantly higher than the existing Chair 4 Road and will offer better views and much less elevation gain and loss.

Winter Improvements

The proposed trail plan also seeks to improve facilities for nordic skiers and snowshoers while maintaining existing services for snowmobilers. An agreement was reached with the alpine ski concessionaire to permit access to the summit for snowshoers and backcountry skiers on a straight line between the campground and the KXLY summit towers. This route is south of the groomed and patrolled ski area and east of the snowmobile summit corridor. With the construction of rerouted Trails 140 and 101, and new Trail 141, loop options for snowshoers will be greatly enhanced. There is also discussion of building a winter day use/summer overnight rental hut in the vicinity of the Lower Kit Carson Loop Road that could serve as a snowshoeing center.

Part of the nordic ski trail expansion proposal was already implemented this winter season. Volunteers representing the local nordic club, the snowmobile club, and the Friends Group met several times with the Park Manager, the snowmobile groomer operator, and the chief forester of the Inland Empire Paper Company (IEP) to devise a plan to expand the nordic ski trail system by shifting snowmobile grooming to alternative roads within the IEP system and using roads that had previously been groomed for snowmobiling for nordic skiing. Discussions were not easy, but consensus was reached in July and almost immediately, IEP went to work constructing two new short connecting trails and brushing out an abandoned road for the snowmobiles, while nordic club volunteers helped brush out old roads for skiing. The nordic club then committed to raising \$16,000 over the next year to reimburse IEP for their costs. As a result, six miles of exciting new nordic trails opened this season with no net loss in mileage for snowmobiling. Phase 2 of the proposal involves building a mile of new

road on Park land downhill of the existing Linder Ridge Road so that the road can be groomed for nordic skiing. The new snowmobile trail would connect to existing IEP roads and the existing groomed trail system, including the shared bridge across Brickel Creek. Snowmobilers and skiers will need to continue to share this bridge, since building a separate bridge would be prohibitively expensive.

This has been the first expansion of the nordic trail system since 1996 when the Quartz Loop trail was added, and the largest single expansion since the trail system started in 1982. Obviously, nordic skiers are excited, especially since it now seems possible to think about hosting world class events at Mt. Spokane. As of February 22, about \$14,000.00 has been raised! Checks can be made payable to SNSEF and mailed to PO Box 501, Spokane, WA 99210. Mugs, maps and wine glasses are available as premiums.

Other Elements of the Master Plan

Because the Friends Group/Advisory Committee took the initiative four years ago to begin creating a master trail plan, Park Commission staff are now committed to completing a 20 year Master Facilities and Development Plan for Mt. Spokane within 2-3 years. In addition to the trail plan portion, the master plan will also include plans for improvements for alpine skiing, additional parking and utilities capacity, and additional facilities for overnight accommodations.

While the Friends have not made any specific proposals at this time, the master plan might also include additional facilities at one or more of the other Park entrances, a new location for the shop and Park office, and a rebuilt Park lodge and/or other overnight accommodations. The Friends spent considerable time discussing the proposed expansion of the alpine ski area,

but were ultimately unable to reach consensus as to a recommendation. Further information can be found at www.parks.wa.gov/plans/mtspokane and the public is strongly encouraged to comment. Also look for new maps and the complete trail plan proposal at the Friends Group website: www.mountspokane.org.

Limits of Acceptable Change

While education through signs, brochures, maps, newsletters, and the media goes a long way toward environmental protection and the management of conflict, a certain amount of enforcement will always be required. As an aid to enforcement, the proposed trail plan includes a Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) matrix that attempts to quantify when management changes need to be made. For example, no greater than two cycling vs. pedestrian accidents (or five conflicts) per running mile of trail segment per year reported to Park staff are acceptable. Or, no greater than five incidents per month of snowmobiles crossing out of any individual play area or groomed or ungroomed trail (or 3 incidents

of crossing into the alpine ski area) are acceptable. If these, or other specified limits are exceeded, a management action is required to reduce the incident rate. Since rangers can't be expected to see everything, the proposal calls upon Park staff to design an easy but effective system for collecting visitor complaints and observations.

Thank You Donors and Volunteers

Special thanks to 2007 donors: Jeff Lambert, Dale Gill, Jim & Sheila Harless, Jessie Norris & Barry Chapman, and Bruce & Debra Howard. Board members include: Mark Augenstine, Anita Boyden, Marilyn Brennan, Mike Brixey, Ken Carmichael, Cris Currie, Robin DeRuwe, Dean Kiefer, Rob Lindsay, George Momany, Lew Persons, Barbee Scheibner, Aaron Spurway, Shelley Tschida, and Holly Weiler. Other volunteers include: Brad McQuarrie, Sam & Karen Deal, Craig Bierly, Karen Covelli, Paul Buckland, Bruce Garber, Tom Frost, Ed Falconer, Joni Sasich, Sicco Rood, and Liz Boyden. Special thanks to Park Manager Steve Christensen for being so involved and supportive of the Friends.

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.

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Thank you!

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