



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 a year of finishing up some old projects and planning for some new ones. Volunteers finished the Cook's Cabin woodshed restoration project by mounting a replacement door with some period hinges, cleaning up the inside, and making a log bench for the outside. Bjorn Rossow's log benches were also installed at their approved locations by staff and volunteers. We've been talking about adding benches to park trails for over 20 years, and it finally happened! The comment page on the Friends Group website was upgraded to make tracking and responding to comments submitted by park visitors much more efficient. Olympia parks staff installed a new ice age floods display on the south summit of Mt. Spokane late this summer just before a September snow storm forced its early removal and winter storage. The eight lakes view tubes were refinished, but the lake labels on the tubes were less than satisfactory, so the Friends Group had new adhesive labels printed. They will be applied in the spring.

Volunteers continued to assist in implementing the 2010 trail plan. The Friends Group and WTA laid out a reroute of Trail 131 over the summer to eliminate a steep eroding section and create a new pathway to access Bald Knob. The upper section was designed so that snowshoers would avoid the B-29 ski run and have a more gradual ascent up to the knob. In the late fall, the route was cleared and marked

for snowshoeing, and a tread will be built this summer. WTA also built a bridge on upper Trail 110. The Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance started clearing the path for upper Trail 290 and did additional work on lower 290. Eventually this will be a summit-to-park-entrance mountain bike trail. Proposed Trail 182, on the ridge north of the Day Road, was approved for construction and will be started this summer. A new connection between Trail 130 and the Kit Carson Loop Road just below the CCC Cabin was also approved for construction.

Additional interpretive projects were initiated. The Friends Group worked with the Spokane Tribe to write some interpretive material that explains the significance of Mt. Spokane to the tribe. Other materials explaining the history of the Vista House and its fire lookout and of the Cook's Cabin woodshed were also drafted. The production and exact location of these interpretive exhibits are yet to be decided, but work will continue this summer. The biggest project in the works is the Mountain Recreation and Education Center (MREC). Friends Group members participated in the needs assessment and preliminary design of this facility throughout the year, including proposing some alternative ideas.

At the annual meeting, Phil Kramer (education), Mike Henneberry (at-large), and Brian Samuelson (active summer recreation) were welcomed as new board members after Gerry Fitzgerald and David Goode resigned.

MREC History

In 2014, a Spokane Nordic committee began some long range planning to address overcrowding during the winter at the Selkirk Lodge, enhancing use of the lodge during the summer, expanding the parking area, improving the Nordic learning area, improving access for adaptive skiers and beginners, expanding ski patrol space, providing an area for on-site rentals, bringing some trails up to national racing standards, and adding a biathlon range.

In 2016, Parks received a two year \$182,000 grant, and a planning and design team for the Mountain Recreation and Education Center (MREC) was initiated. The initial proposal included a 4000 sq. ft. two story lodge at the south end of the existing parking lot with an expected cost of about \$1 million, to be split 50/50 between the state and volunteers. It also included a new parking lot for 200 cars, an expanded learning area, a small biathlon range, and a 9m wide 5K race course.

Later in 2016, the Vermont consulting firm of Morton Trails was brought in. In order to minimize the earth moving, they thought a new 15,000 sq. ft. lodge should be located at Junction 1 with expanded parking for 300 cars along the Linder Ridge Road and a 30 station biathlon range located on Brian's Hill. Numerous objections were raised to this plan by the Friends Group, and Parks eventually rejected it.

In 2018, Brian Patnode became the new Parks planner in charge of the project, and he began holding stakeholder meetings in Spokane to do a needs assessment. Attendees included Friends Group members and others. The last of four meetings was held in November, 2019 as the final schematic drawings created by the contracted architect and engineers were presented, and cost figures were finally revealed. This layout included a 3 story, 20,000 sq. ft. lodge at the south end of the parking lot that included an elevator, open space for 400 people, a large rental shop area and ski patrol area, a classroom, larger restrooms with changing areas, a food prep area and a race officials room on the 3rd floor.

In addition, a new parking lot below and to the west of the current lodge parking was proposed to include summer facilities for horse camping. In order for the grades between the parking lots and the lodge to not exceed 5%, the existing parking lot would need to be lowered by 4-5 feet with the dirt to be used to raise the level of the lower lot. A level driveway would front the lodge for pick-up and drop-off. This plan would affect approximately 12 acres of land. The total cost is estimated at \$24,455,000, not including the likely need for new water and septic systems, the cost of the EIS, or the hiring of professional fund raising services.

Numerous unresolved issues have arisen with this proposal. Maintaining such a large, complex facility, even if construction funds could be raised, would likely require a concessionaire, since current park staffing would be completely inadequate. This would undoubtedly raise the cost of Nordic skiing substantially and might need to include additional fees for summer trail use as well. While several ideas for summer use of the facility have been proposed, none is likely to produce significant revenue. The proposal also represents a major shift in how the park is utilized, by catering more to people of higher incomes and higher expectations for comfort and convenience. This shift is likely to disappoint many park users. Probably the biggest unknown is how the \$25M would be raised.

The Friends Group board has concluded that this proposal is not viable and that other options need to be pursued. One idea is to break the project into smaller pieces that could be handled as separate projects. Adding on to the Selkirk Lodge was actually considered many years ago, but was rejected due to terrain issues and the presumed lower overall cost of new construction. With the skyrocketing costs of permitting, building standards, labor and materials, however, that rationale may no longer hold. So consideration is now being given to adding a 30' X 40' extension to both the west and the

east ends of the existing lodge that would enlarge the event space, create better ADA access, and allow for a rental shop, a larger ski patrol office, expanded restrooms, and much needed storage. A separate pull through garage for the smaller grooming equipment and firewood storage could be built behind the lodge, and a separate timing shack could be built next to the trail system and expanded learning area. A new parking lot and horse camp could still be built according to the current plan except that the extensive earth moving would be unnecessary. A new trail would also need to connect the lower parking lot with the Valley View trail.

Park use is definitely growing and future planning is important. The MREC decision is a big deal that requires careful consideration of a wide variety of issues. Your thoughts are valued and can be submitted to Cris Currie at criscurrie22@gmail.com and Brian Patnode at Brian.patnode@parks.wa.gov.

Trail Improvements

The Washington Trails Association constructed its fourth and final log bridge in the park last summer on upper Trail 110. This completes a multi-year project to improve trails for snowshoeing.



Trail 110 bridge and WTA crew

Two log benches constructed by Bjorn Rossow as his Eagle Scout project were installed. One is along Trail 121 and the other is up dead-end Trail 103. Both have been

placed to allow for relaxed contemplation of the forest and nearby streams.



Trail 103 log bench

A third log bench was constructed by Friends Group volunteers for the front of the Cook's Cabin woodshed as part of its restoration.

Of E-bikes and Fat Bikes

There has been substantial confusion over whether electric bicycles and fat tire snow bikes are permitted on park trails. Vehicle restrictions have previously been determined by whether the vehicle is motorized or nonmotorized, but the new e-bikes cross over those categories. WAC 352.20.005 defines *motorized* as being self-propelled. Classes 1 and 3 e-bikes are pedal assist and they are not entirely self-propelled so, according to the state attorney general, they must still be considered nonmotorized. Therefore, Class 1 and 3 e-bikes are tentatively being permitted on multi-use trails in all Washington state parks. However, Class 2 e-bikes can be propelled with or without using the pedals, so they are defined as self-propelled and therefore prohibited on the trails. Currently there is no real market for the faster Class 3s so they are not actually being produced.

RCW 46.61.710 and RCW 46.04.169 are the statutes that lay out the definitions and prohibit e-bikes on all state trails except where authorized by an agency. This situation presents quite a challenge for enforcement and local education efforts, and it was apparently not the intention of the legislation. In response, the Parks Commission is

monitoring the issue to determine whether a change to the law is necessary.

Two stakeholder meetings were organized by Parks staff during the year to discuss the use of fat bikes during the winter at Mt. Spokane. Several Friends Group members were involved. After some successful grooming trials at Riverside State Park, advocates for on-snow bicycling have expressed interest in expanding opportunities at Mt. Spokane either by creating new fat bike trails or by using existing snowshoe, snowmobile, and Nordic ski trails. The decision centers around the compatibility of fat biking with other designated winter sports and the desirability of opening up additional pathways through the forest.

By regulation, nonmotorized cycles can't be ridden on trails (or off trail) unless specifically permitted by the Commission. Also, according to the Mt. Spokane trail plan, Mt. Spokane is "designated as a destination and preferred use site for Nordic skiing." Trail policies define groomed cross country ski trails as trails for using "cross country ski equipment only," and no "wheeled vehicles" are permitted on "trails groomed for snowmobile use."

After some spirited discussions regarding potential conflicts on specific trails, numerous trails were rejected, and park staff reduced the list to seven possible routes. Participants were asked to rank these according to safety, overall user experience, amenability to grooming, and use by those of varying skill levels. The options included the Kit Carson Loop Road, Hay Ridge loop trails, the summit road, upper Trail 100, upper Trail 120, Valley View to Larch to Silver to NOVA Hut, and some combination of Nordic trails to Tripps Knob. After reviewing the results of the poll and the need to revise existing regulations, staff decided to defer creating a pilot fat bike program at Mt. Spokane until next year.

New Ice Age Flood Exhibit

A new ice age flood exhibit was installed by Parks Commission staff on the south summit of

Mt. Spokane last summer, along with refinished view tubes for the area's lakes. The exhibit helps visitors imagine what the ancient floods might have looked like as they gushed through northern Idaho and the Spokane valley, and it points travelers toward Riverside State Park for the next display. Staff have removed the exhibit for winter storage, but will place it back this summer. The view tubes will also receive new lake labels, courtesy of the Friends Group, so that visitors will also be able to easily identify all eight lakes visible from the south summit.



South summit flood display

For volunteer opportunities, be sure to check the Washington Trails Assoc. website at www.wta.org/volunteer and go to the Eastern Washington region for work parties at Mt. Spokane. You can also check at www.mountspokanetrails.wordpress.com. For more information, visit www.mountspokane.org

NOTE: The park now opens at 7AM in the winter and the Selkirk Lodge will close at 7PM except on Mondays and Tuesdays when it will close about 5:30PM.

Pick up your copy of *Mount Spokane State Park: A User's Guide* and *Spokane's History of Skiing: 1913-2018* at the park office, Fitness Fanatics, the alpine area rental shop, or Aunties Bookstore. All proceeds benefit the Friends Group. So far we have sold about 800 guidebooks and 400 history books!