



ALPS “Beckler 6/Tulalip” TLT Application Ranked #1 by DNR

The Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Trust Land Transfer (TLT) program has been called the best kept conservation secret in Washington state. Since its inception in the early 1990s it has preserved over 125,000 acres of valuable conservation lands. The majority of TLT lands are in biologically rich low elevation

areas where not many other places have been preserved.

Unfortunately, Hilary Franz, the Commissioner of Public Lands (term ending 2024,) and in charge at DNR, let the program die in 2020. A handful of people, three to be exact, from ALPS and the North Cascades Conservation Council, decided to do something to revive it. Others soon joined the cause, and the campaign grew and led an

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ABOVE: Beckler River in Section 6, looking NW.



Typical mature forest in Beckler 6.

Beckler 6

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effort in the Washington legislature to revive and codify the program. In early 2023, success came as a bill was passed and signed into law bringing back the sorely missed TLT program.

TLT works via a process whereby applications can be submitted to DNR for properties with high conservation value. DNR selects which properties qualify, and is often motivated to include places isolated from other DNR lands, or difficult to log or otherwise manage. Such places produce little or no revenue for the

counties and schools that receive money from DNR activities. The legislature appropriates money to square the books by allowing DNR to buy replacement lands better suited for producing revenue for those beneficiaries.

ALPS has long been concerned about a square mile of isolated DNR land in the lower Beckler valley, north of the town of Skykomish. Known as “Beckler 6,” (it is survey section 6,) it is a remarkable and beautiful area of mature, naturally regenerated, “legacy” forest. Railroad logged in the 1930’s, it has been left alone ever since and is well on its way to becoming old growth once again. The Beckler river has a wide floodplain there, with numerous clean, gravelly side channels providing excellent spawning grounds for anadromous fish.

Beckler 6 borders the Wild Sky Wilderness for a full mile on its north side. ALPS members discussed including it in a possible land exchange with the Forest Service long ago, but after a number of other large exchanges with private companies, the Forest Service was never able to do one with DNR. As an isolated, difficult to log but valuable parcel of land, it seemed an ideal candidate for TLT.

DNR itself will not hold on to areas conserved by TLT unless they are within the boundaries of one of DNR’s own Natural Resource Conservation Areas. The very isolated Beckler 6 is not within one of those areas. The TLT legislation designates other public agencies or Federally recognized Indian tribes as qualified receiving entities. When

the Tulalip tribes offered to be the receiving agency, and hold Beckler 6 for conservation purposes, all the pieces began to fall into place. ALPS is the applicant for transferring and protecting Beckler 6 under Tulalip stewardship.

Headquartered at Tulalip, west of Marysville, the Tulalip tribes (plural,) comprised mostly of Snohomish, Skykomish and Snoqualmie peoples, are the original inhabitants and caretakers of the Snohomish watershed. Beckler 6 is part of their home. Tulalip directs a very long list of environmental efforts, and has a large staff of professionals to maintain their treaty rights, and the public and other lands that support them. Tulalip already owns and manages a sizable amount of land in the Beckler watershed near Beckler 6, as well as a huckleberry harvesting area co-managed with the Forest Service on a high ridge just southeast of Beckler 6.

During 2024, DNR reviewed about 30 TLT applications. Those which were determined to meet the best interests of DNR's management trusts were sent to a committee of volunteers from the public for review and ranking. The ALPS/Tulalip Beckler 6 application was ranked as the number one priority, and tops the list of six

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TOP, RIGHT: 2022 Bolt Creek fire burned into part of Beckler 6, staying on the ground and killing very few trees.

BOTTOM, RIGHT: Old logging RR grade in Beckler 6. Inconspicuous before the ground fire, creosoted RR ties that sat there for nearly a century burned in 2022, leaving voids and making the RR line more visible, for a while at least.





ABOVE: Clear and beautiful side channel spawning gravels at Beckler 6.

proposals that DNR will send to the legislature in its upcoming 2025 request for TLT funding.

The Tulalip tribes have pledged to hold Beckler 6 in perpetuity strictly for conservation purposes, allowing nature to continue taking its course. Having lived in the Skykomish valley for more millennia than anyone, even the Tulalips themselves, can say, one fact is clear: the Tulalip tribes take a long term view of things. ALPS is pleased to play a part in protecting this important place and helping Tulalip expand the list of lands for which they are once again caretakers.

RIGHT: Looking NE from Beckler 6 to Evergreen Mtn.



Fate of Eightmile Lake now up to Forest Service



KARE FORSBERG

The years-long saga of the Eightmile Lake dam in the Alpine Lakes Wilderness passed a milestone when the Washington State Department of Ecology (DOE) released its Final Environmental Impact Statement in June 2024. DOE agreed with the Icicle Peshastin Irrigation District's preferred alternative to build a new Eightmile dam to a height that can fill the lake to an elevation of 4671 feet above sea level. Since 1990 the maximum lake level has been at elevation 4667 feet. Thus DOE's preferred alternative would allow the new dam to increase the maximum volume and surface acreage of Eightmile Lake.

Even more concerning is DOE agreeing to allow the irrigation district to place a new drain pipe in the lake at elevation 4640, which would enable lowering the lake

level more than has ever happened in the past (thereby extracting more water from the ecosystem). There is an excellent argument that the irrigation district has no water right that would allow this. But DOE has steadfastly avoided addressing that issue. Disputing water rights determinations is a difficult task when there is an entire state agency to get past. Water law is like the bottomless quicksand pit of the legal system. Cases commonly drag on for decades. It is enough to make one ruefully recall the adage often attributed to Mark Twain that in the American West, "whisky is for drinking, water is for fighting over."

The Icicle Work Group's October 2024 meeting notes recorded this update: "Eightmile Lake Dam Rebuild: resetting

conceptual design to go with preferred alternative from the EIS, FEMA funding needs to be spent by June 2025; IPID plans for 60% design to be complete by then." When IPID provided 30% drawings in January 2019, IPID said it would provide 60% drawings "soon"; that was almost six years ago.

However, the State DOE's Final EIS is not the final word on this, because the dam is surrounded by federal lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service. DOE's Final EIS acknowledges that it is not a decision document, and that future permits and approvals are required from the Forest Service, including National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review, and other Forest Service authorizations.

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Keeping Trails Non-Motorized



Swakane Canyon ebike sign.

In May 2024, ALPS was one of many organizations invited to participate in an “E-Bike Pilot Study” conducted by Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest (OWNF). The “Pilot Study” was co-managed by OWNF and TREAD, a Wenatchee-based nonprofit. Its purpose was to explore “integration” of electric motorized bicycles (e-bikes) onto non-motorized “natural surface” trails of OWNF.

Four workshop meetings and e-bike riding demos were held in May and June in Chelan, Wenatchee, Leavenworth and the Methow Valley. A report is being compiled by TREAD, with delivery to the Forest Service estimated for March 2025. It remains to be seen whether the Forest Service will take any action based on the “E-Bike Pilot Study.”

During the “Pilot Study,” ALPS and seven other organizations submitted a July 29, 2024

letter, reminding OWNF that it cannot change existing trail use designations until it completes the Travel Management process. We also opposed the suggestion to allow motorized e-bikes on “all” non-motorized trails currently open to human-powered bicycles, which would flip all of those trails from the non-motorized category into the motorized category, because it is contrary to the site-specific analysis required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the Travel Management Rule.

E-bike riders are already allowed on over a thousand miles of motorized trails in the OWNF, so e-bike riders should not be viewed as lacking opportunities for their recreation. But only a small percentage of OWNF trails outside of Wilderness are still non-motorized. ALPS believes those non-motorized trails need to be protected, and not turned into motorized. In managing

trails in the USA, there is a binary division between motorized and non-motorized trails, and this important distinction is reflected in laws and regulations of all federal land managing agencies (USFS, NPS, BLM, USFWS) as well as state agencies, and in trail construction and maintenance funding streams (NOVA, NRTP etc.). Non-motorized trails have a constituency that values the non-motorized experience. The “E-Bike Pilot Study” organizers’ suggestion that “all” remaining non-motorized trails be flipped into the motorized category (including trails in remote backcountry roadless areas adjacent to Wilderness) is very significant.

The “E-Bike Pilot Study” (and the e-bike industry “toolkit” on which it was based) promote the assertion that “Class 1” e-bikes are the same as human-powered bicycles. They are not. E-bikes are motorized, they are significantly different from ordinary bicycles and need to be managed to reflect these differences.

Our July 29, 2024 letter to OWNF was co-signed by ALPS, Conservation Northwest, Kittitas Audubon Society, North Cascades Conservation Council, North Central Washington Audubon Society, Spring Trust for Trails, Sierra Club, and Washington Wild.

ALPS and other organizations have been urging the OWNF to stop delaying, complete its Travel Management process and become compliant with the Rule. In 2005, the Travel Management Rule required each National Forest to develop a travel management plan for motorized vehicles and to complete the process in four

ebikes

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years, and most National Forests did so. OWNF is a national outlier on Travel Management. Of the 154 National Forests in the USA, OWNF is one of only three that have not completed the process by issuing its Motor Vehicle Use Map designating motorized trails and roads.

ALPS has previously invoked Travel Management in battles about gas-powered motor vehicles on trails, similar to the emerging battle about electric motors. For example, our 2015-2016 lawsuit stopped OWNF's creation of 350 miles of wheeled all-terrain vehicle routes across all OWNF Districts, on the grounds that OWNF had not yet completed Travel Management. Those and other problematic proposals for new motor vehicle routes are likely

to resurface if and when OWNF's Travel Management process re-launches.

E-bike manufacturers would of course love to see lots of new areas opened up to e-bike use in hopes of boosting sales. But there is no lack of places where people can ride e-bikes, including that thousand-plus miles of OWNF trails already open to motorized use. ALPS will be continuing to follow this issue.

Eightmile Lake

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Both DOE and the irrigation district have tried to avoid acknowledging that Eightmile Lake is within the Alpine Lakes Wilderness. This has extended even to petty things like not labeling the Wilderness on maps. But Eightmile Lake is within the Alpine Lakes Wilderness, and attempts to ignore that will not change the facts. And federal Wilderness law is not like state water law. The Wilderness Act is quite clear on what kinds of things are permitted and not permitted within Wilderness areas.

Thus, it will be up to the U.S. Forest Service to determine whether the irrigation district can get away with enlarging Eightmile Lake and draining it down to levels beyond the legal limits of its water rights. It is hard to see how they could allow that to be done to a lake that has been within the Wilderness for almost fifty years.

The irrigation district has other ideas for other lakes in the Alpine Lakes Wilderness. Various schemes are planned, all of which are designed to extract more water from the Wilderness than it has ever taken during those almost 50 years of Wilderness, or even before. Thus the Forest Service's decision on Eightmile will have

implications far beyond just one lake, and likely beyond even the Alpine Lakes Wilderness to other Wilderness areas in other places.

The irrigation district's thirst is not driven by the orchards of the Wenatchee valley, which have had plentiful water for over a century. Rather, it is the relentless growth of Leavenworth and its green lawns, along with other areas in the valley. The acreage of orchards is not growing. The irrigation district can and does sell water to

developers, something they really try to avoid talking about or even acknowledging.

A lot is riding on the Forest Service's Eightmile decision. Not just the health of the waters within the Alpine Lakes Wilderness, but whether additional water will be taken from there to fuel continued population growth and the paving over of the Wenatchee valley. ALPS, of course, will continue to be involved.



KARL FORSGAARD

Alpine Lakes Collaborative: *In A Quagmire*



KARL FORSCHARD

***Snow Lakes from Wedge Mtn.,
Enchantments Plateau in further
distance.***

Many places in the Alpine Lakes Wilderness see very heavy use. But one place stands far above the rest in extreme peril of being loved to death: the Enchantment Lakes and close by areas near Leavenworth.

There is no question that the Enchantments area is beautiful. Anyone who went there before it became a mob scene knows that it lives up to its name, or at least it used to. The numerous tarns, the smooth granite, the parklands of larch trees make it the equal

of any of the places in the Sierra Nevada that John Muir wrote so lovingly about. When the larches turn golden in October it is unforgettable.

However, this scenic wonder has been discovered in a big way. Overnight camping is by permit only, with limited spots available. But day use is not regulated in any way, and numbers have exploded almost beyond belief in recent years. One way through hiking in a day is now the done thing among the bucket list crowd, both hikers and runners. The usual route is via Colchuck lake up to the Enchantments plateau and out via Snow lakes. The constant stream of hikers from Colchuck up to Aasgard Pass often looks

like a scene from movies about WW2 Yugoslav partisan armies threading their way through the Balkan mountains to fight German invaders.

Things have gotten so bad, so utterly overrun, that anyone who appreciates Wilderness will avoid the place like the plague. And this is all within the Alpine Lakes Wilderness, where use levels are supposed to be kept at least somewhat in balance with protecting the Wilderness itself, as was the intent of the 1964 Wilderness Act. Supposedly Yogi Berra once said of a favorite restaurant: "nobody eats there any more, it's too crowded." That's

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what it's like nowadays in the Enchantments, only worse. A small number of Wilderness rangers and volunteers fight a losing battle to carry out trash and human waste as the crowds inexorably grow year after year.

In 2022 the Forest Service gave its blessing to the formation of the Alpine Lakes Collaborative wherein "diverse interests" were supposed to come together and agree on a solution. Trouble is, many of those diverse interests strongly prefer things to stay just as they are: profitable for them. Recreation has become big business in Leavenworth. Innumerable people are making money from the area's natural beauty, including the Enchantments. Every service is for sale, from guided climbs of Prusik Peak to simply holding the hands of neophytes as they experience this once-wild Nature. There are people who for a fee will carry one's pack, even offering to haul up watermelons for fat-wallet, but sweat-averse hikers. The outdoor businesses and gear retailers oppose any measure they fear might slow the growth of their bottom lines in the slightest.

Some have described ALC meetings as an endless bureaucratic talking shop, crippled by economic interests. Soul-deadening might be a better term. Minor points of a national, Forest Service mandated procedure called "framework" are debated at unbearable length. Nothing ever approaches anything close to a decision. There is only delay, more delay, then after that, yet more delay. Buzzwords abound, with laughably endless calls to "cooperate and collaborate." One would hope that large statewide non-profit trail and recreation

organizations, who claim to want to protect Wilderness values, would see the necessity of limiting the number of visitors after decades of trail and wildlife habitat degradation. But apparently they don't. The ALC has failed comprehensively. Continued failure seems guaranteed until the day it collapses.

It would not be all that difficult for the Okanogan Wenatchee National Forest to come up with a solution. As has been suggested for decades, day use permits could be assigned through an online lottery, perhaps giving more weight to those who have failed to get a permit in previous years. A certain number could be first come first served. Many places have solved day use overuse problems. One good example is at

Mount Whitney, highest peak in California's Sierra and the lower 48. There, the Inyo National Forest listened to diverse interests, but then acted on its own initiative, and did the right thing by coming up with a fair way of rationing use and online registration, which everyone now supports.

How long will it take for the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest to obey its own plans (the Alpine Lakes Wilderness management plan,) and regulations and do something similar to solve the appalling overcrowding and habitat degradation in the Enchantments? ALPS, and everyone who thinks Wilderness areas should be about more than just commerce, are waiting.



KARL FORSGAARD

Enchantment peaks from Mt. Stuart.

New report challenges wisdom of new water projects in Alpine Lakes Wilderness and adjacent to William O. Douglas Wildernss

In September, the Alpine Lakes Protection Society joined with Friends of Bumping Lake, Save Lake Kachess, Federation of Western Outdoor Clubs, Friends of Toppenish Creek, Middle Fork Outdoor Recreation Coalition (MidFORK), Wild Earth Guardians, Wilderness Watch, and the Wise Use Movement to submit a report on the Department of Ecology/ Office of Columbia River (2017-2024) to the Washington Office of Financial management. The report requested a review of the Department of Ecology's FY 25-27 Budget Requests for uneconomical and environmentally damaging new water projects in Washington State.

<https://northcascades.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Ecology-OCR-Report-2017-2024-September-9-2024.pdf>

The report focuses on how the WA Legislature's mandate for the Department of Ecology to "aggressively seek out new water supplies," is resulting in pursuing wasteful uneconomical and environmental destructive irrigation water projects in Eastern Washington at taxpayer expense, as well as seeking new water supplies within the Alpine Lakes Wilderness. It also undermines efforts to reduce water demand in the face of climate change.

The report demonstrates how irrigation water projects proposed under the Department of Ecology's "Yakima Plan", such as the Lake Kachess pumping project and new Bumping Lake Dam next to the William O. Douglas Wilderness, have higher costs than benefits

and how new irrigation water projects are added to the "Yakima Plan" without review by the Legislature or basic feasibility or environmental review.

In addition, the report documents the failures of the Department of Ecology to meet legislative deadlines for reporting, hampering the Legislature's review of Ecology's ever increasing budget requests.

The report calls on the Office of the Washington State Auditor to conduct a performance audit on the Department of Ecology's Office of Columbia River program. The same recommendation was made by a similar study of the Office of Columbia River's first ten years (2006-2016).

http://ucrsierraclub.org/pdf/OCR-Power-Report_12-3-2016%20.pdf

This year the State of Washington is facing a \$10 billion budget shortfall. You can use the Washington State Legislature's District Finder: <https://app.leg.wa.gov/DistrictFinder/>

You can then send an email message to your Washington State Representatives and Senator:

<https://app.leg.wa.gov/memberemail/>

Message: Please save taxpayers money by deleting money in the Capital Budget for the Department of Ecology's Office of Columbia River until a performance audit is prepared.



Old Forest north of Alpine Lakes Wilderness near Skykomish.

Grim Northwest Forest Plan Amendment Coming Soon

by Jim Scarborough

A federal advisory committee (FAC) tasked with providing recommendations to the U.S. Forest Service for amendment of the Northwest Forest Plan is now wrapping up its work. A draft environmental impact statement is expected from the Forest Service prior to the end of 2024 and perhaps before you receive this issue of the Alpine. This will set the stage for highly significant and worrisome changes to the Northwest Forest Plan, which in the North Cascades has served as the main protector of old growth and mature forests across all of the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest and a sizable portion of the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest for the past three decades.

Although the original Northwest Forest Plan was compelled primarily by the listing of the Northern Spotted Owl under the Endangered Species Act, the plan's revision process has not been shy about its intent to elevate rural economies to at least equal footing with the ecological integrity of our national forests. This of course translates to increased logging and greater industrial exploitation of older forest stands. Whereas the original Northwest Forest Plan prohibits logging of stands greater than 80 years old in areas zoned as Late Successional Reserve, the amended plan is expected to raise this age limit to 120 years, thus opening up many thousands of acres of fully-functioning, natural forest to the bulldozer and chainsaw.

Every aspect of this amendment process has been centered around devising ad hoc rationalizations and euphemistic terminology for increased timber extraction. The FAC, despite including a fair



800+ year old Douglas fir forest just north of Alpine Lakes Wilderness, near Skykomish.

diversity of “stakeholders” (or, in Forest Service jargon, “partners,” to distinguish them from other individuals and groups that the agency thinks should just butt out), has been remarkable for its embrace of groupthink. The FAC deploys public fear of wildfire and purportedly unhealthy forests to promote the twin mythologies of “firewising” and “restoration” for the unstated end goal of increased commercialization. The Northwest elites serving on the FAC are as convinced of the benevolence of more sawlogs being hauled off our national forests as West Virginians and Kentuckians are of more coal mines. It’s a cultural thing. A money thing.

An open question is how and whether an amended Northwest Forest Plan will stand up when tested in court, which will inevitably follow its adoption

and implementation. How does increased roading and logging in older forest stands, including designated critical habitat, square with the viability of the ever-dwindling Northern Spotted Owl population? Perhaps of even greater salience, particularly in the legal arena, how would an amended plan affect the unique habitat needs of the Marbled Murrelet? No doubt, the Forest Service, its loyal FAC, and their timber industry allies hope to overwhelm federal judges with a firehose of euphemisms and tales of frightening fire events that only they have the wisdom to keep at bay. North Cascades Conservation Council and ALPS, among the very few to still resist the growing clamor to exploit our national forests for near-term profit, will do what we can to allow the light of truth to shine through.



ALPS

Alpine Lakes Protection Society
P.O. Box 4603
Wenatchee, WA 98807

ALPS Officers & Trustees:

President: Rick McGuire
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Board Members:

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KARL FORSGAARD

*Upper Florence Lake and Grindstone Mtn. in
Alpine Lakes Wilderness.*



The newsletter of the Alpine Lakes Protection Society (ALPS). ALPS is dedicated to protection of the Alpine Lakes area in Washington's Cascades.

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Layout: Pat Hutson

To join ALPS or renew membership, send \$15 to:

Alpine Lakes Protection Society
P.O. Box 4603
Wenatchee, WA. 98807

For information, send email to:
alpinelakes.info@gmail.com