

# Easton Ridge Development Threatening Silver Creek

By Hal Lindstrom

The high level of real estate development in Kittitas County tests ALPS's capacity to live up to its name Alpine Lakes Protection Society. Within Kittitas County, the Alpine Lakes Management Act created 60,000 acres of Wilderness. It also designated 250,000 acres as a surrounding Management Unit, wherein lie the development pressures. A combination of economic and political forces is in the driver's seat of a vehicle that too often conflicts with environmentally acceptable practices. The challenge: What is the best course of action commensurate with ALPS's resources?

An example, the first one that ALPS has engaged, is a proposal to convert a former timber producing section of land (S1 T20 R13E) to a high density housing development (160 units initially). It is located very near Easton, Wash., and lies close by the south trailhead to the Silver Creek Basin. ALPS worked hard for the protection of Silver Creek through land exchanges and purchases, trips to Washington D.C. to testify for Land & Water



*Easton Ridge, just east of Silver Creek basin, is now a development target.*

Wildlife (DFW) also weighed in with concerns and suggested an MDNS (Mitigated Determination of Non Significance) be issued for the project. After some study and site visits by the County and representatives of the DFW an MDNS was issued by Kittitas County.

ALPS opposed the MDNS on January 11, 2006 in a hearing before

the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC). ALPS was represented by attorney and ALPS trustee Mike Pierson. An unexpected event was a challenge to ALPS's standing in the case. That challenge was properly rejected by the BOCC.

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Conservation Funding, and hosting Congressional trips to the basin. From what's known about plans for development, it appears certain there would be significant impacts in the basin. Increased recreational use due to close proximity of the new residences is only one of many. Issues outside the basin include threats to elk migration and wintering over, the consequences of excessive road building (more than 9 miles in the square-mile section), and impairment of connectivity for spotted owls and other species.

Kittitas County initially issued a DNS (Determination of Non Significance) that was challenged by a number of entities including ALPS and residents of Easton. The Washington State Department of Fish &

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# Iron Goat Interpretive Site

## *New Gateway to Iron Goat Trail*

*By Jim Chapman*

Those who cross Stevens Pass late this summer will see some major construction just north of the highway at Scenic when the Washington State Department of Transportation puts in a new rest area.

But this won't be just any ordinary rest area. Called the Iron Goat Interpretive Site, it will feature a 1950's Great Northern Railway caboose open to visitors. There will be several kiosks describing the Stevens Pass area and its history.

This will also be the third and final trailhead for the Iron Goat Trail, the only one that is right along U.S. Highway 2. The others – Martin Creek, opened in 1993, and Wellington, opened in 2000 – are at least a three-mile drive off the highway.

Built almost entirely by members of Volunteers for Outdoor Washington (VOW), the nine-mile-long Iron Goat Trail follows practically all the Great Northern Railroad's original Scenic-to-Wellington route that was abandoned in 1929 with the opening of the current eight-mile tunnel beneath the pass. Coming east from Everett, the tracks reversed direction at Scenic and headed back west to gain elevation. Just past Martin Creek, they entered a long horseshoe tunnel and came back out heading east. Curving around Windy Point just above Scenic, they went on to Wellington located at the entrance to the three-mile-long Old Cascade Tunnel. The horseshoe tunnel area is the only place where the Iron Goat Trail doesn't go. The stretch of trail from Scenic to Martin Creek

is called the "lower grade"; from Martin Creek to Windy Point, it's the "upper grade". Only the upper grade is not wheelchair accessible.

Applying a limestone surface to a mile-long stretch from Scenic this summer will complete the Iron Goat Trail. It will be linked to the interpretive site by a 500-foot long trail that VOW members will grub out and WASHDOT will surface with asphalt. Volunteers will then build one more trail to climb almost 800 feet from this "connector" trail to Windy Point and the upper grade. That will be started late this summer with completion in expected late 2007.

The Iron Goat Interpretive Site and this last segment of the Iron Goat Trail will be dedicated October 14 this year. Put it on your calendar. ■

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## Forest Service Considers Outsourcing Two-thirds of Its Workforce

The U.S. Forest Service is studying how to contract out more than two-thirds of its total workforce by 2009, according to agency planning documents released today by Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER). Coming on the heels of Bush administration plans to sell off 300,000 acres of Forest Service land (including 7500 acres in Washington National Forests), the agency is also now looking to potentially privatize large portions of its environmental, law enforcement, fire-fighting and research operations.

Under the possible agency plans, 21,350 full-time jobs will soon be under review for possible replacement by private sector firms. The Forest Service has a total of 31,625 full-time jobs, according to Office of Personnel Management.

Some of the outsourcing ideas being studied include:

- Eliminating 500 fire-fighting jobs in the aviation program, including smoke-jumpers, to be studied for outplacement by private contractors.
- In FY 2007, the government may

put out for bid approximately half of the agency's law enforcement agents and rangers (600 positions), the jobs of all of its geologists (500 jobs) plus 1,100 biologists who prepare environmental studies on the impacts of timber sales, oil and gas leasing and other actions on national forest lands.

- In FY 2008, the agency's entire network of scientists and other researchers (2,000 slots) and 3,000 foresters and range conservation staff positions will

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# ALPS Reinstates Its FPAR Activity

The process whereby the State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) evaluates land usage/management is called FPAR, for Forest Practice Application Review. When a landowner submits an application, it is the DNR that evaluates it. The applications and responses are available for public viewing. ALPS appointed trustee Natalie Williams to be the FPAR focal a few months back, and she has been actively reviewing the FPARs that affect land adjacent to the Wilderness. For the last several months, we've submitted questions on a few of these as to slope stability, application completeness, and previous decisions made on the same area.

One of the FPARs in review concerns the Foss River parcel owned

by Longview Fibre Company (FPAR#2808201). The front-page checklist "confesses" the area has unstable slopes of a highly erodible nature, and is a bald eagle habitat. The location information tells us it's Section 31, Township 26, and in the NW corner. The plan is to take 99% of the trees from 50 acres. The steepest slope is 200%, or about 63 degrees. The application states that they intend to replant with western hemlock and Douglas fir, and also that 2680 feet of road will be built. A map is always attached to the application. We asked DNR to consider the wisdom of building a road below a 200% slope that was about to be clearcut. They agreed with our concerns, and mitigation measures will be mandated.

Another FPAR (#2411226) we evaluated for steep slopes was called Lynch Fin on the Tolt. This was a 98-acre clearcut (98% volume) on a 90% slope. For this particular FPAR, we were concerned about the steep slope near water. In a very clear response, the DNR sent a geologist and a forester to evaluate the site, and found the slope erodible. The land owner (FTGA Timberland LLC) agreed to remove that slope from the proposed cutting. The final agreements are available for our review on the DNR website.

If you have an interest in being an FPAR reviewer, please contact Natalie Williams at natalie.k.williams@boeing.com or daytime phone, 253-773-6705. ■

## Forest Service Considers Outsourcing

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be reviewed for outsourcing potential.

In 2003, an outsourcing plan of similar scope, designed to meet Bush administration outsourcing quotas prior to the 2004 election, was halted by Congressional action. In its latest proposed budget, the Bush administration is cutting back Forest Service operating funds without providing any new funds to pay for this broad undertaking. In 2003, the Forest Service spent an estimated \$360 million on studies but produced no identifiable savings.

ALPS will continue to watch these developments. ■

## Help and Information Needed for ALPS Map Revision



ALPS published the third edition of the map of the Alpine Lakes Wilderness in 2003. We have sold almost all of this printing, and are now ready to begin production of the fourth edition of this popular map. The map provides ALPS with revenue that is used to defray costs of the various land-use conflicts and issues that continue to be important in the Alpine Lakes region.

We invite your input on revisions to the map. Do you know something we don't about a converted road, a new trail, or a misnamed peak?

Please send comments and suggestions by June 1 to Bill Beyers, at 7159 Beach Drive SW, Seattle, WA 98136. Or send an e-mail to [beyers@u.washington.edu](mailto:beyers@u.washington.edu). Thank you so much for your input!

# A New Turn for USFS Off-Road Vehicle Policy

*By Charlie Raymond*

The core of the Alpine Lakes Area within the Wilderness is closed to all motorized vehicles. This a quiet and wonderful place for backcountry recreation, enjoyed by thousands every year. The surrounding area is also an important resource integral to the Alpine Lakes, but managing the balance between non-motorized and motorized recreation confronts the Forest Service with a number of difficult and often contentious issues. In some places, an ever-increasing number of off-road vehicles (ORVs) has presented clear problems for both the landscape and for peaceful recreation, whether non-motorized or motorized.

A similar situation has arisen in many other locations in western National Forests. The prevailing policy has allowed driving ORVs anywhere except where explicitly excluded, as in wilderness areas, or where posted as closed. That policy did not give local Forest Service managers much leverage in dealing with local on-the-ground situations.

Realizing the need for a change, the USFS released a draft national policy in July of 2004. At a "summit" of government agency and public stakeholders aimed at reviewing the proposed policy, US Forest Service Chief Bosworth had this to say: "... We believe that OHVs [ORVs] are a legitimate use in the right place, and that includes many places on national forest land. But the days are over when folks could just drive wherever they pleased. These days, there are just too many users having too

much impact. That's why we need a new rule governing OHV [ORV] use. The new rule will lay the foundation for a sustainable system of routes and areas for motorized use, and everyone will have a fair say in determining where those routes and areas will be located. ..."

The resulting new "Travel Management" rule was announced on 2 November, 2005. Complete text and background information are available at <http://www.fs.fed.us/recreation/programs/ohv/>. The central feature is that forest lands will be closed to ORVs except on explicitly designated open routes and possibly limited areas. That is a welcome turn away from the old default ORV policy.

Implementation of the Travel Management Rule renews the discussion with changed constraints about what routes and areas should be open to different kinds of vehicles. Decisions are supposed to be made locally in ranger districts based on input from stakeholders and on-the-ground conditions. Although the intent of the new for ORV travel is to reduce resource impacts and conflict with other recreational uses, the outcome in any area such as the surroundings of the Alpine Lakes could be otherwise. The Forest Service will certainly hear from the very well organized ORV constituency. There is need for a strong input from non-motorized forest users as well.

One of the ranger districts in the Alpine Lakes where ORV use is especially intense is the Cle Elum Ranger District (Wenatchee National Forest). There, an initial step toward implementing the new rule

will be to inventory all ORV trails including those "renegade routes" that have been established without Forest Service permission (or knowledge). The inventory process should get started this spring, with a two-year timeline for completion. The next step will be to decide which routes, if any, may be added to the trail system already open to ORVs. Such decision making may start fairly quickly within the next year. We are told that it will follow National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) practices, which would allow public input and broad consideration of ORV impacts.

A similar approach will probably take place in other ranger districts. Very possibly, some renegade routes could be added to the routes designated as open to ORVs, if they are found to be compatible with ground conditions and to provide links in the system. It should also be the case that some of the problematic trails that are now officially open to ORVs could be eliminated from the ORV route system.

The Alpine Lakes Protection Society is now forming a standing ORV committee aimed to provide constructive input to the USFS as it considers ORV route designations. In particular ALPS would like to develop its own assessment of the present trail system, identify problems associated with ORV use both on and off trails and provide compelling recommendations based on sound data.

The ALPS trustees and the ORV committee could use help from ALPS members or anybody else who frequents the Alpine Lakes Area with eyes and ears open. We

## Policy

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would like general ideas about locations surrounding the Alpine Lakes Wilderness Area that are not suitable for ORV use and also options that may provide appropriate opportunities for ORV routes (keeping in mind Chief Bosworth's words that "off-highway vehicles are a legitimate use in the right place"). Particular concerns are resource impacts (e.g., compacted ground, erosion, sediment transfer to streams, damaged stream banks, vegetation damage, and wildlife disturbance) and conflicts between motorized and non-motorized recreation (all of the above plus noise, dust, trail encounters, and more).

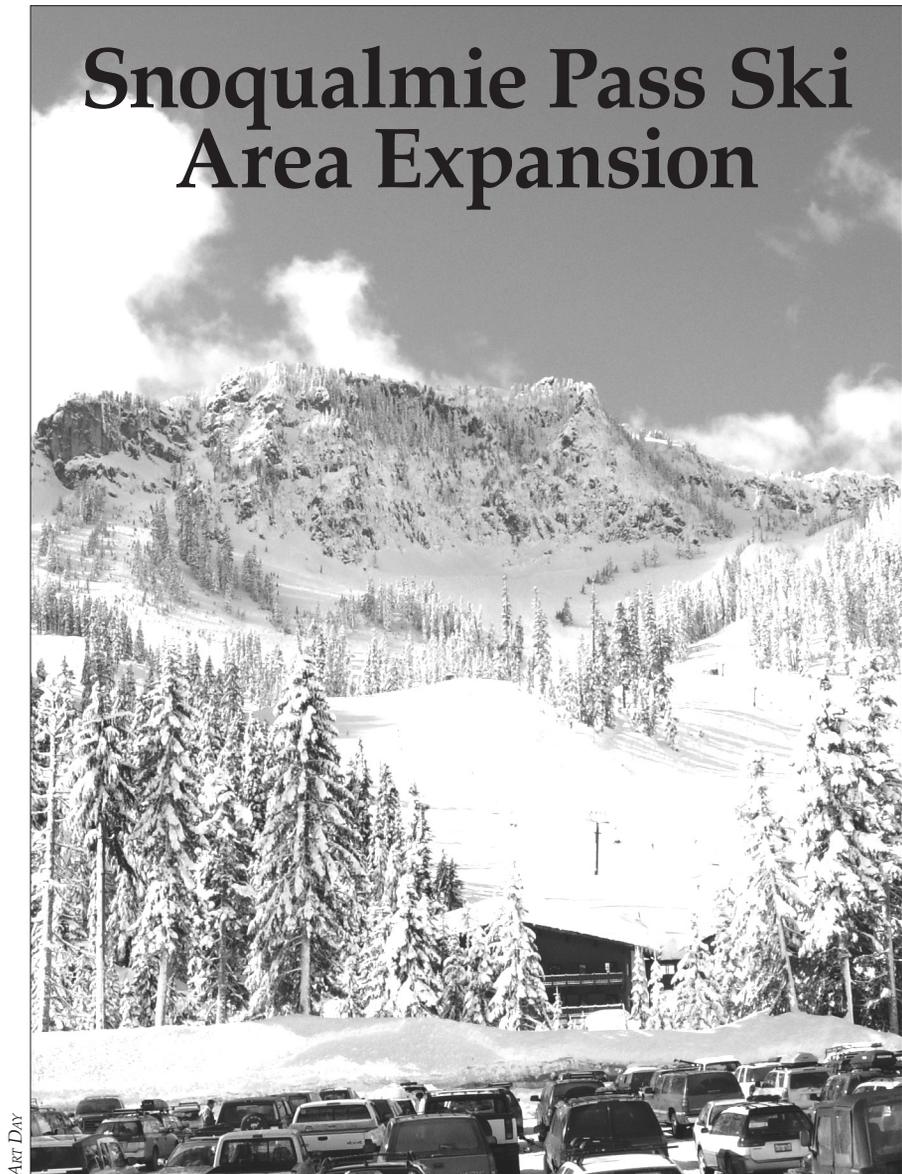
We would also like to establish a database of specific locations where there is resource damage or major recreation conflicts. If you know about such places and can provide the location (identified by trail name or number, mile locations on such trails, GPS coordinates or other) and a clear description of the problem (dates and photos would be welcome), let the ORV Committee know by email at natalie.k.williams@boeing.com, after which such input will be archived and organized. It would also be helpful to express such comments directly to the appropriate USFS district ranger. Snow will be on the ground into spring and USFS decision making could start soon after summer. So time is short for this work.

The bottom line is that we want to help the USFS make some positive changes in the management of ORVs in the Alpine Lakes Area.

Unfortunately, the Travel Management Rule does not include snowmobiles, which over the last few decades have come to dominate the winter recreation scene over wide areas. A change in direction is certainly needed for winter motor vehicles as well. We hope to have some news about this for a future *Alpine*. ■

ALPINE

# Snoqualmie Pass Ski Area Expansion



*The top of Denny Mountain could soon be tamed with lifts, a gondola and food service.*

*By Don Parks*

The ski area developers at Snoqualmie Pass are proposing a significant expansion that would increase the carrying capacity of the complex by nearly 40%. This expansion would include changes to most of the approximately 25 existing chairlifts and ski runs but would also construct four new chair lifts and runs. This expansion would come at the cost of cutting old-growth forests, degrading a critical wildlife corridor, and putting development in roadless areas. While ALPS supports downhill

skiing in existing locations, we have criticized the proposed expansion that calls for constructing new runs and ski lifts in previously undeveloped areas of Snoqualmie Pass. We are also concerned that the construction of some of these new lift facilities are planned in a roadless area that is contiguous to the Alpine Lakes Wilderness. These changes are all part of a proposed new permit for ski resort operation on national forest lands at Snoqualmie Pass.

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## Snoqualmie Pass Ski Area Expansion

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Skiing has been a fixture of the Pass for decades. Through time, this type of development has resulted in forests being cut, wetlands filled, creeks culverted and wildlife corridors blocked or severely constricted. To obtain a new operating permit, such facilities ought to be required to meet current environmental standards, meaning that real protection is given to wildlife habitat, wildlands and water quality. While most of the of the ski area's expansion proposal is not controversial, the cutting of old growth forests in a key wildlife corridor and the impacts on roadless lands near the Wilderness boundary are high prices to pay for this project.

The Snoqualmie Pass area provides important habitat for more than 150 vertebrate species of wildlife, including spotted owl, goshawk, pileated woodpecker, golden eagle, peregrine falcon, mountain goat, marten, wolverine, cougar, bobcat, and other species. ALPS expects this habitat to be protected in any ski area expansion.

One of the most controversial parts of the ski area expansion is the proposed cutting of about 45 acres of mature forest near Hyak Creek west of the old Hyak Ski Area. The proposal would construct two new chair lifts and a road, and cut new downhill runs through an important patch of forest. This development would eliminate crucial habitat in an area that is already substantially impacted so that resulting fragmentation would further reduce the effectiveness of this tenuous wildlife corridor.

ALPS questions the necessity of carving new, steeper snowboard trails to connect Summit East

(Hyak) with the Summit Central resort area. Not only do skiers have existing crossover runs, but poor snow conditions in recent years have seriously limited operations at Summit East, and the situation may worsen with global warming—making these crossover runs unnecessary.

Another extremely controversial impact is the proposed expansion at Alpental into roadless lands contiguous to the Alpine Lakes Wilderness. The proposed action would push two ski lifts and runs into the roadless area near Source Lake. In addition, a gondola and restaurant high on the slopes of Denny Mountain are proposed that would be immediately adjacent to the Alpine Lakes Wilderness. This gondola and restaurant would operate year-round in a fragile, high elevation area. The construction of yet another new restaurant on a mountain top seems like a risky idea when past restaurants in the Snoqualmie Pass area have not been able to survive. The juxtaposition of the words "mountain top" and "risk" also make us wonder, what sort of mess would we have if this restaurant were to be damaged by an earthquake?

The DEIS analysis shows that a significant expansion of ski area carrying capacity can be achieved without the construction of the four new ski lifts, restaurant, and gondola noted above. ALPS sent its written comments to the Forest Service before the February 20 closing date for public input and will be watching future developments closely. ■

## Easton Ridge

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Unfortunately, at the end of a nearly 4-hour hearing, the BOCC voted two to one to uphold issuance of the MDNS, thus rejecting ALPS's appeal. The dissenting vote came from Alan Crankovitch, who represents upper Kittitas County, where development is now spreading like Scotch broom. Commissioners Bowen and Huston voted to approve the MDNS and cited the mitigation measures as being sufficient for the road building and logging that precede development. ALPS strongly believes that the developer's plans should be complete and in the open at the start so that the potential impacts can be more clearly viewed and reckoned with, thus insuring a more environmentally responsible project.

That's where we are today. What lies immediately ahead includes a meeting between representatives of ALPS and the developer, Easton Ridge Land Company, to discuss mitigation measures. Circumstances have changed greatly since passage of the Alpine Lakes legislation in 1976. The political environment today is far less friendly and supportive, the competition for land is leagues greater, and timber land is now more valuable for housing development. In addition the U.S. Forest Service, the manager of federal land in the Alpine Lakes, is suffering significantly from the current Administration's "starve the beast" philosophy. In the midst of all that is new and different and usually not better, ALPS has its work cut out to chart a course through rough seas. ■

# BARE MOUNTAIN



JIM CHAPMAN

*Remote,  
Strenuous  
and  
Beautiful*

*President Don Parks on a walkabout.*

*Don Parks and Jim Chapman*

Tucked away in the northwest corner of the Alpine Lakes Wilderness Area, the Bare Mountain Trail stands out on national forest maps simply because of its remoteness. Only two other trails, Sunday Lake and Anderson Lake, are even within miles. It's also a 3,520-foot climb whose difficulty is matched by the drive to the trailhead. There seemed to be great potential for fine views, but we didn't know anybody who'd ever been there.

Intrigued with the question, "What's up there?" and thinking about "the bear went over the mountain" we decided to find out last summer. From North Bend, we drove some 21 miles over the ruts and chuckholes of the North Fork Snoqualmie Road, then another 2 miles up Lennox Creek. The road used to go another three miles up Lennox Creek, but now stops just beyond the trailhead, blocked by a

badly deteriorating bridge.

Following an abandoned mining/logging road, the first mile crosses a beautiful waterslide and pool in Bear Creek and later switches back to a small campsite with a bridge across the creek. This is the wilderness boundary. (No, this is not a typo. It is Bare Mountain and Bear Creek.)

From there, we found the Bear Creek valley to be quite open and about an eighth of a mile wide, but with steep glaciated walls rising up across from us. In about another mile, we hit the first of 46 switchbacks climbing up the mountain to our left. The mountainside was covered with waist-high bracken fern but somebody had weed-whacked it down to almost ground level for about three feet on either side of the trail. Some people may not like this being done in a wilderness, but it sure made easier walking and opened up the views. The ferns will

be back this coming summer.

We finally reached a saddle at about 5,000 feet and, What a View! A thousand feet below us were the two Paradise Lakes and Bench Lake, all of which flow into the North Fork Snoqualmie. The surrounding ridgeline, from south of Bear Creek to north of the Paradise Lakes, was as high as we were, if not higher. Across Lennox Creek, shear cliffs on the side of Goat Mountain rivaled those of Yosemite.

But the summit of Bare Mountain was another 350 feet higher. So up we went, to take in an even more panoramic view. Now we could see Mt. Rainier, Glacier Peak and the Olympics. Only the flat ground gave testament to the mountaintop having once been home to a fire lookout. Combining this with a clear sky and great company made for a glorious and memorable day. ■



# alps

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ART DAY

*Snowshoeing toward Source Lake.*



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