

Can we bring back wintertime quiet?

By Charlie Raymond

Only a few decades ago, quiet prevailed in national forests and other public lands, especially when the roads and trails were covered with snow. While in some places and at some times silence can still be found, it is becoming evermore difficult.



CHARLIE RAYMOND

Chimney Rock and Overcoat Peak

Foremost of the causes is the emergence of snowmobiles of ever-increasing power, driven by more aggressive riders at higher speeds over larger distances. Their presence and intense noise often totally overwhelm all natural sounds. The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) allows snowmobiles to go almost anywhere in uncontrolled numbers. The main exceptions are designated wilderness areas. The Alpine Lakes Wilderness Area (ALWA) is a wonderful resource where people can go to leave snowmobiles behind. But even there, the USFS lacks the resources to patrol wilderness boundaries and incursions by snowmobiles are common (e.g. <http://www.justgetout.net/Wenatchee/14129>, [\[snowboarding/trip_reports/index.php?topic=16511.0\]\(http://www.turns-all-year.com/skiing_snowboarding/trip_reports/index.php?topic=16511.0\)\).](http://www.turns-all-year.com/skiing_</p>
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The problem is broader than just protecting the Wilderness boundary. This is especially evident on the southeast side of the ALWA accessed from I-90 in the Cle Elum Ranger District (CERD), where legal parking areas and accessible terrain draw in non-motorized users. Unfortunately, their access routes to the wilderness are typically impacted either directly by speeding snowmobiles, or indirectly by their noise and exhaust. The lack of a clear winter management plan on the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest has created a *de facto* situation where the winter forest is dominated by one user group (snowmobiles) in an area that is a major recreation destination for a

multitude of non-motorized users from Puget Sound, as well as many local residents seeking quiet recreation near by.

In the last few years ALPS has stepped up discussion with the Forest Service. Some needs are: (1) to establish clear and enforceable rules about

machine characteristics and rider behavior, (2) to better balance the relative funding for grooming and facilities versus education and enforcement, and (3) to establish a "closed unless open" policy for over-snow, motorized vehicles including snowmobiles as will be established for wheeled ORVs by the new Travel Management Rule. Areas open to snowmobiles need to

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Skier near Tanks Lake, on Foss traverse.

CHARLIE RAYMOND

be designated through serious analysis in Forest Plan revision including extensive and broad public discussion rather than the *de facto* occupation by snowmobiles that is the present situation.

Just as on the landscape, numerous snowmobilers have not been quiet with the USFS. Their advocacy has been evident, strong and effective. Unfortunately, the yet more numerous non-motorized skiers, snowshoers and other seekers of quiet winter respite tend to be relatively quiet both on the landscape and in advocacy with the USFS. That balance with the USFS may be about to change.

A potentially important development for the Alpine Lakes is the recent initiation of the Wenatchee Mountains Coalition and the related Thousand Skiers Project to advocate on behalf of non-motorized winter recreation in the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest. Specific areas of interest identified by the Wenatchee Mountains Coalition include "the unroaded Wenatchee

Mountains ridge crest from near Van Epps Pass to Three Brothers [Mountain]." This band of interest runs along the southeast boundary of the Alpine Lakes Wilderness, including Ingalls Peak, Fortune Peak, Iron Peak, Earl Peak, Navaho Peak and Three Brothers. It also includes areas in the I-90 Wilderness additions study. A key goal of the coalition is to create a buffer protecting this boundary of the Alpine Lakes Wilderness in the winter months. See http://www.turns-all-year.com/skiing_snowboarding/trip_reports/index.php?topic=16511.0 and <http://www.justgetout.net/Wenatchee/18996> for a description of the coalition and its advocacy project, as well as informative exchanges between skiers and snowmobilers.

The Thousand Skiers Project has the challenging goal to generate 1000 letters to the Supervisor of the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest by 15 August 2010 advocating that the Forest Service create new and

significant non-motorized areas in the Wenatchee Mountains that bring a more representative balance between motorized and non-motorized winter recreation. Everyone concerned with quiet winter recreation can contribute to this effort. Environmental groups including ALPS will also note the importance of quality wildlife habitat for many species; for example, high areas of the Wenatchee Mountains could support return of Canadian lynx and wolverine, which require solitude and remain active all winter.

ALPS would like to see this new grass roots effort grow and succeed. To support this important effort please contact:

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Any mail, email or phone communication will help. If you use mail or email, send a copy of your message to the Forest Plan Revision Team at the same mailing address as the forest supervisor or this email address r6_ewzplanrevision@fs.fed.us

If you are a member of ALPS, consider mentioning your membership in your message.

To aid coordination of the Thousand Skiers Project consider sending a copy to wenatcheemountainscoalition@hotmail.com who will respect and protect your privacy.

One thousand is a big number, so let your interested friends know about this. ■

Alpine Lakes Wilderness Bill Clears Congressional Hurdles

by Don Parks

The Pratt, Middle Fork Snoqualmie and South Fork Snoqualmie river valleys have moved closer toward permanent protection after two key congressional hearings in October and November 2009, followed by Senate Natural Resources Sub-Committee approval in December that was then followed by its corresponding House Sub-Committee approval in February 2010. The full House then passed the bill on March 18 of this year. Here is what happened in more detail:

Senate and House versions of The Alpine Lakes Wilderness Additions and Pratt and Middle Fork Snoqualmie Rivers Protection Act were introduced as bills S. 721 and H.R. 1769 by Senator Patty Murray [D-WA] and Congressman Dave Reichert [R-WA08], respectively. The hearings went smoothly and generated no opposition. On October 29, a Senate Energy and Natural Resources Subcommittee on Public Lands and Forests heard testimony from Senator Murray and the U.S. Forest Service on the legislation. Key elements of the bill included an expansion of the existing Alpine Lakes Wilderness by 22,000 acres, the inclusion of critical low-elevation forest lands, and the designation of two rivers of great importance to the surrounding ecosystem as Wild and Scenic. No significant issues were raised except that the Forest Service, which supported the bill, asked for certain Wilderness boundary revisions.

Senator Murray stated in her testimony "I had the opportunity to visit the Alpine Lakes area this spring, and it truly is a special place. Conserving and preserving

our natural resources reflects the values I grew up with here in Washington State and I want to leave the same kind of legacy for my grandson and for future generations to enjoy. And this legislation will ensure that we protect these special places."

On November 5, 2009, the House version of the legislation was the subject of a hearing in the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Parks and Forests. The committee heard testimony from the U.S. Forest Service and from Tom O'Keefe, the Pacific Northwest Stewardship Director for American Whitewater. Congressman Reichert also spoke, saying "This legislation not only preserves the landscape for future generations, but also follows in the proud Washington State tradition of working together to protect public land in our own backyard." He added "I am optimistic that the congressional committees reviewing our bill will recognize that it clearly fits the Pacific Northwest tradition of collaborative, consensus-based, environmental stewardship."

ALPS has played a lead role since 2007 in the development of the legislative proposal by the local coalition that has worked with numerous local stakeholders, including businesses, elected officials, religious leaders, and recreation and conservation organizations.

After the House and Senate Sub-Committee hearings, Senator Murray and Congressman Reichert and Alpine Lakes Working Group representatives subsequently met with the Forest Service on November 12 to deal with Wilderness boundary definition questions raised by the Forest Service in both Sub-Committee

hearings. ALPS representatives participated in these discussions and provided inputs into the final map definition.

A revised Wilderness map was completed and agreed to on December 3 and then submitted to the USFS Washington Office for later transmittal to Congress. The resulting boundary included some additions and subtractions, with a net increase in of about 100 acres over the initial version of the map.

On December 16, the Senate Sub-Committee on Energy and Natural Resources marked up the bill and reported it out of Sub-Committee. The bill was "ordered to be reported with an amendment in the nature of a substitute favorably." (Per Thomas.gov) The change from the original bill included the substitution the new Dec. 3 Wilderness map and simplified legislative language.

After a snow delay, the House Sub-Committee adopted the Senate version of the bill and passed the legislation on a voice vote and sent the bill to the full House on Feb. 24, 2010. On March 10 the full House passed the legislation.

When the bill passes the full Senate it can be signed into law. However, that step is currently uncertain since it is possible that this legislation may have to be combined into an Omnibus bill where a number of like pieces of legislation are packaged together prior to final Congressional approval. Only time will tell.

(Many thanks to Tom Uniack of the Washington Wilderness Coalition for his assistance in preparing this article.) ■

Purchase of three Longview Timberlands parcels sought

By Jim Chapman

ALPS has asked Congress to fund the purchase of three Longview Timberlands parcels for \$3.5 million in the Skykomish River Valley on both sides of US Highway 2. The parcels are known as:

- **Grotto**, a 320-acre ridge top parcel located northwest of Skykomish. It is adjacent to the Wild Sky Wilderness and could become part of the wilderness if acquired.
- **Maloney Creek**, a 320-acre parcel located just south of Skykomish. It has been logged in the past but is rapidly returning to a natural state.
- **Lake Serene Trail**, a 200-acre “upside down L-shaped” parcel that contains the relatively new

trail to Lake Serene south of Index. This is a very popular trail to a very scenic lake nestled at the base of Mt. Index. It is the top priority for the Skykomish Ranger District.

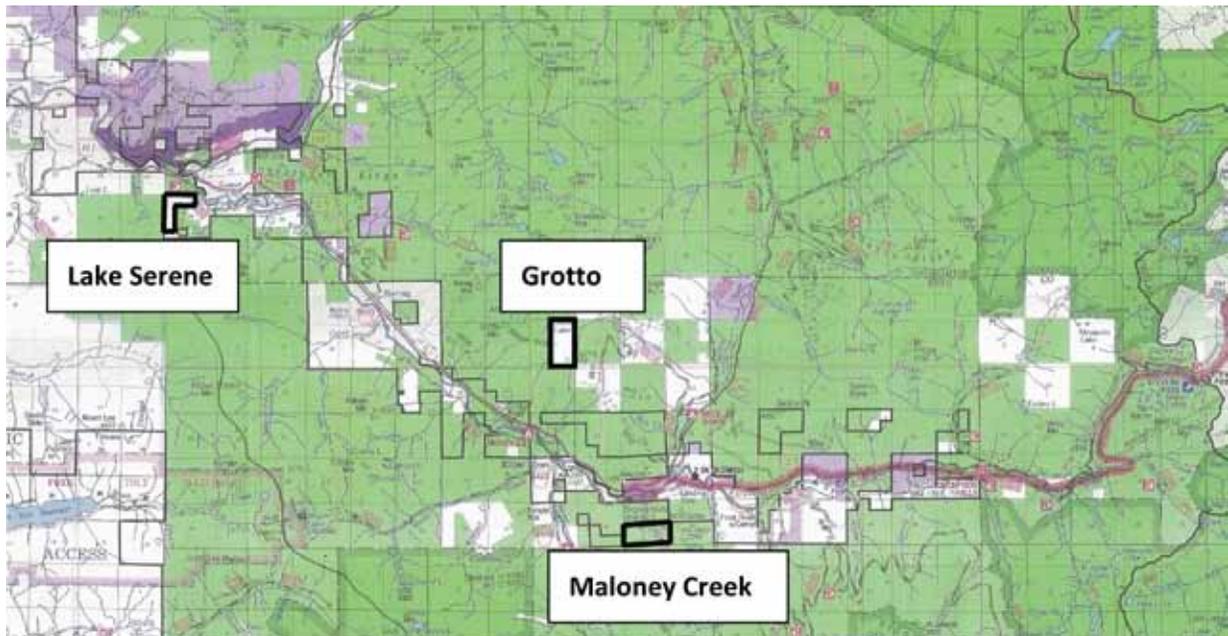
ALPS is partnering with the Cascade Land Conservancy in this request. The conservancy has identified 17 parcels in a project it calls the Skykomish River Valley. They range from Mt. Persis almost to Stevens Pass. Last year, Congress appropriated \$1.7 million for the federal government to buy the first parcel, Lower Wallace River, which is adjacent to the Wild Sky and is currently owned by the conservancy, which bought it from Longview. At least two more years will be needed to get the money to buy all the parcels.

Last year ALPS targeted four parcels – Grotto, Maloney Creek, Deception Creek and Windy Ridge. The latter two were replaced by the Lake Serene Trail parcel in this year’s request but will stay as part of the long term project.



Art Day

PCT fungi.



ALPS’s requests for FY2011 LWCF funding, shown on a portion of the USFS map for the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest (used by permission).

Off Road Vehicles in Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest

By *Charlie Raymond*

The National Forest Travel Management Rule issued in 2005 was motivated by recognition that unmanaged off-road vehicle (ORV) use is one of the largest threats to the National Forest System. The Rule requires that cross-country motor vehicle travel be banned in all National Forests and that all motorized travel be restricted to designated routes and exceptional local areas depending on vehicle type as specified on an annually updated published map. The motorized routes are to be chosen based on local conditions to protect resources and establish a sustainable motorized route system yielding an appropriate balance of motorized and non-motorized recreation opportunities.

Implementation in Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest (OWNF) has followed a number of steps mainly reaching out to encourage ORV users to enunciate what routes they would like to see on the published map. ORV groups and individuals have responded in large numbers and with considerable strength, especially those wanting to drive ATVs on Forest Service roads open to standard street vehicles, as well as have access to more trails. Unfortunately, the Forest Service outreach has not brought clear attention to the stake for non-motorized recreation. Thus, hikers, horseback riders and other non-motorized forest visitors have not yet engaged in proportion to their numerical strength to express concerns about the impacts of ORVs on non-motorized activities and on the environment. Environmental groups, including ALPS, have responded forcefully to the OWNF team with general

concerns about the process and criteria for decisions as well as numerous site-specific comments. In past issues of the *Alpine*, you will find some history of the Forest Service steps and ALPS's responses to its requests for input. ALPS advocacy for the Alpine Lakes area has focused on the largest Inventoried Roadless Area in the Alpine Lakes region, which is centered over the West and Middle Forks of the Teanaway River. There, the majority of trails have been open to motorcycles in spite of expanding ground damage and the displacement of non-motorized activities. Locations where ORVs threaten the wilderness boundary have also received ALPS attention.

The last phase of the Travel Management process is the development of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). To start NEPA, the OWNF offered a trial proposal for public comment in March of 2009. Since then, an interdisciplinary team has been evaluating the public comments and doing environmental analysis to develop a draft EIS (called a DEIS). This document will describe a range of alternatives offering different weighting of various competing considerations.

Environmentally-oriented organizations including ALPS made the case for alternatives that reduce the ORV footprint to protect resources and achieve a sustainable, balanced recreation plan that is within the long-range capability of the USFS to manage. At the other extreme, there is likely to be an alternative that is very responsive to the desires of the ORV community for an even more extensive motorized trail system than present that would further threaten the integrity of roadless areas and wilderness boundaries. We also expect an alternative that is close to the status quo with its current unmanageable problems. There will be an OWNF "preferred" alternative, but we will not speculate what that will be at this time. The interdisciplinary team now expects to complete the DEIS and make it public this coming fall of 2010. The issuance of the DEIS will start the most crucial time for public engagement to make the case for adopting a strong, environmentally sound and recreationally balanced alternative. ALPS wants to see a successful implementation of the Travel Management Plan that actually achieves its goal to significantly reduce the threat of ORVs to the National Forest. ■



Elk heading for summer pastures.



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Art Day

A pleasant day hike to Thorp Mountain Lookout.



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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