



Summer 2009

News from the Woods

Supporting Northwest Biological Diversity & Communities

How Predators are Linked to Healthy Rivers and Forests

By Jessica Walz

What do Zion, Yellowstone, Yosemite, Olympic and Jasper have in common? Yes, they are all national parks in the United States and Canada, but they also have something else in common—the ecologies of these parks have all been analyzed by Oregon State University scientists

Bill Ripple and Bob Beschta in a study on trophic cascades. The term trophic cascades originated in 1966 from experiments showing that predators have significant effects on ecosystems that

range from impacts on plants and butterflies to birds and mammals (Ripple and Beschta; Linking Wolves and Plants: Aldo Leopold on Trophic Cascades, Bioscience, Vol 55 No 7, July 2005). In recent studies of these various national parks Ripple and Beschta have been analyzing the loss of predator species and the effects this loss has on ecosystem health and in so doing are “thinking like a mountain.”



Wolves and other predator species play a vital role in ecosystem function and health.

Beschta and Ripple are following in the footsteps of Aldo Leopold whose own thinking during the 1930s evolved from “anti-predator” to advocacy for the need to maintain wolves and other large carnivores in forest and range ecosystems because without them deer and elk explosions

would damage plant communities (Ripple and Beschta, 2005). In his famous essay *Thinking Like a Mountain*, Leopold described how he first began to question his anti-predator views after watching a wolf die: “I thought that because fewer wolves

meant more deer, that no wolves would mean hunter’s paradise. But after seeing that green fire die, I sensed that neither the wolf nor the mountain agreed with such a view” (Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, 1949).

In a 2005 study, Ripple and Beschta compiled historical data to compare timing of wolf extirpations with deer and elk explosions to evaluate predator impacts on ecosystem function and diversity.

What they found was stunning and corroborated Leopold’s informal theory that predators are important regulators of ecosystem integrity and health. Ripple and Beschta’s Yellowstone studies demonstrated that “the removal of keystone predators effectively eliminated any wolf driven trophic cascades that had historically influenced elk numbers and foraging patterns, which, in turn, maintained a healthy distribution and structure of deciduous woody plant communities.” (Ripple and Beschta 2005).



Scientists have documented the importance of predator populations to healthy and diverse ecosystems.

In other words, when wolves were reintroduced to Yellowstone, aspen and cottonwoods flourished because of less grazing by elk,

which enabled the return of beavers and restored shady fish habitat. In Zion, research showed that areas with cougars had far more diversity of butterflies, wildflowers, fish, and mammals than did areas in Zion where cougars had been excluded.

Ripple and Beschta have documented the importance of predator populations to healthy and diverse ecosystems at a time when methods of creating and sustaining ecosystem resilience and diversity are more important than ever because of climate change. These cutting edge scientists have encouraged many to reconsider Aldo Leopold’s early works and begin thinking like a mountain.



Rosalie Guard
Member since 2009
Portland, OR

Focus on a Task Force Member

“...an event like the Lords of Nature film premiere was an opportunity to attend an intellectual program and discussion that allowed me to reconnect with the academic part of my personality and to also connect with a new group of people motivated by the same cause.”

Hemlock Dam Removal Begins

We are excited to report that Hemlock Dam removal is finally underway! Prep work has already begun at the Hemlock Dam site on Trout Creek about two miles upstream from its confluence with the Wind River. The outbuildings have been removed, and materials have been stocked at the site – the most impressive stash being hundreds of trees with roots wads that will be used to create the new channel and fish



Hemlock Dam removal is finally underway - Trout Creek and the entire Wind River watershed will be free-flowing from the headwaters to the Columbia this fall.

habitat after the dam is removed. Work at the site and removal of the dam will take place throughout July and August, and Trout Creek and the entire Wind River watershed will be free-flowing from the headwaters to the Columbia this fall!

The Task Force will be leading visits to the area while work is in progress, so let us know if you'd like to join us. Email or call Emily at emily@gptaskforce.org or 503-221-2102 x 100.

Help the Task Force Restore the Central Cascades

The best way to support the Task Force's work is to become a Forest Guardian by donating \$15 or more per month. The ongoing support of our monthly donors is truly the lifeblood of our organization. We appreciate any gift you can afford to give - we just ask that you give as generously as possible.

Please send in the inserted remit envelop with your credit card info or a check made out the Gifford Pinchot Task Force. You can also donate online by visiting www.gptaskforce.org.

Thank you for your support!



Joyce Foster
Member since 2004
Los Angeles, CA

Focus on a Task Force Member

“The Gifford Pinchot Task Force has done a wonderful job preserving, protecting, and promoting the area for people to respect and enjoy. With the monetary pressures our country and our states are facing, we need someone to preserve our natural resources and to prevent them from becoming a commodity.”

Make the Switch to Electronic-Only Communication

The Task Force would like to encourage you to make a change in the way you receive communication from us. In order to conserve resources, both natural and financial, we would like to use email communication as much as possible. This would include anything you would usually receive from us via U.S. mail, from our *News from the Woods* quarterly newsletter to program updates and renewal letters.

In order to make this change, just email our Membership Coordinator at: membership@gptaskforce.org. Make sure to include your name

and address so we can effectively locate you in our database and make the change. Thanks for your continued support of the Gifford Pinchot Task Force.



Cascade Carnivore Project Produces Results

After 15 months of persistence the Cascade Carnivore Project photographed this wolverine in southern Washington on the northwest side of Mount Adams in the Gifford Pinchot National Forest. The Gifford Pinchot Task Force helped supply the cameras for this research effort and are excited to share with you the first photograph of a wolverine in the Gifford Pinchot National Forest.



Wolverines are rare and elusive creatures in the continental United States. They are solitary creatures that require very large home ranges. Since the 19th century wolverine populations have been steadily declining due to trapping, range reduction and habitat fragmentation. Research conducted by biologists at the U.S. Forest Service Pacific Northwest Research Station indicates that there is a dispersed population of approximately 20 wolverine that live at high elevations in the northern Washington Cascades.

Restoring Predator Species to the Northwest

The Gifford Pinchot Task Force was honored to host the Portland screening of *Lords of Nature* on June 4th. Over 320 friends joined us for this educational and inspiring movie about the return of predator species like wolves and cougars to our region. Bob Beschta of Oregon State University was also on hand for the evening answering questions about his work on trophic cascades. To host a home screening or for more information about *Lords of Nature* or the work we are doing to restore rare predator species to the Central Cascades, please contact jessica@gptaskforce.org.

Predator Tracking Program

Our carnivore tracking volunteers are sending in some exciting photographs of tracks they found this winter on the Gifford Pinchot National



Forest. The tracks in this photo show black bear prints and were photographed in the southern region of the Gifford Pinchot National Forest. Black bears are found throughout Washington and are essentially creatures of the coniferous forests. Bears are

often seen during late summer months in high elevation huckleberry fields on Mount Adams. They can roam up to 100 miles and tend to feed mainly on plant material. The tracking program works in concert with the remote wildlife camera program.

If you are interested in joining our volunteer carnivore tracking program or are interested in learning more, please visit www.gptaskforce.org/get-involved or email jessica@gptaskforce.org.

Mount St. Helens Timber Sale

By Lisa Moscinski

The Gifford Pinchot National Forest is proposing a large 2,800 acre timber sale on the Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument called Wildcat Thin Timber Sale. The Gifford Pinchot Task Force has supported thinning projects in the past when the

negative impacts (e.g., road building) are minimized and there is a clear benefit to terrestrial wildlife from thinning dense plantations.

The Wildcat Thin is far from meeting this standard and would have extremely detrimental impacts on a variety of species and resources. We have submitted detailed comments requesting the Forest Service amend their proposal and we need your help to convince them to make the right decision.

The Task Force's foremost concern with the Wildcat timber sale is the plan to build and reconstruct over ten miles of roads with thirteen stream

crossings, which cause erosion, sedimentation and increased peak flows to nearby streams. The timber sale is planned in a Tier 1 Key Watershed meaning activities are supposed to contribute directly to conservation of at-risk salmon, bull trout, and resident fish species—road building with



Bull trout and other species will be negatively affected by road building proposed in the Wildcat Thin.

stream crossings is clearly not an aligned activity.

Moreover, the Forest Service already has over 4,000 miles of roads to manage on the GPNF, and if you've

been out there lately, you've personally seen what a \$50 million road maintenance backlog looks like. The Forest Service should be focusing thinning projects in areas that are easily accessible and where benefits to habitat and species could be created, not in areas where negative impacts to both fish and wildlife are certain.

The proposed timber sale is also planned in an area with sensitive soils and very high to moderate potential for landslides. The project proposes to amend management

requirements to allow logging on steep slopes and in areas that have high risk of landslides, which could result in destruction of fish habitat in nearby streams, and the loss of soil over large areas that could take hundreds to thousands of years to recover. Soil is one of the least renewable forest resources and takes thousands of years to develop.

Terrestrial species will also be impacted by the proposed project. The Wildcat Thin proposes to log in areas where there are likely to be spotted owls. Spotted owl populations are in rapid decline, and these threatened species should be protected, not further harassed. Sites likely to support spotted owls should be removed from the project. The Task Force has learned the value of working with the Forest Service and other partners early on while projects are being planned so solutions can be developed and diversely-supported, good projects can be created. In this case the Forest Service did not allow collaborative involvement in the project design and therefore we are faced with a project that does far more harm than good. We need your help now to persuade the Forest Service to prioritize restoration and ecosystem health in the Wildcat timber sale.

What You Can Do:

Please call the Mount St. Helens Monument Manager Tom Mulder at 360.449.7810 or email tmulder@fs.fed.us to share with him any of the following concerns:

- Road Construction- Roads have a particularly negative impact on ecosystems when they are built across streams, which harms threatened fish and water quality. The Forest Service should be focused on removing old, unneeded roads, not building more.
- Northern Spotted Owls- Areas that are likely to support spotted owls should be dropped from the project.
- Steep Slopes - Logging should not be allowed on steep slopes and areas that are prone to landslides. Active logging is known to trigger landslides and cause sediment delivery to nearby streams negatively impacting fish habitat.

Your input is needed now before the project is finalized!

Ask the Task Force

The Gifford Pinchot Task Force is pleased to introduce a new feature in *News from the Woods*. Beginning with our Fall 2009 issue, we will publish our new question and answer forum, “Ask the Task Force”. Our Deputy Director, Lisa Moscinski, or a guest writer, will respond to questions submitted by our membership about such topics as the work of the Task Force, current environmental news, the Gifford Pinchot National Forest or the Central Cascades, and any other important issues that are related to the Task Force’s mission.



Task Force Deputy Director, Lisa Moscinski is looking forward to fielding your questions.

It’s easy to submit a question. Just send us an email to askthetaskforce@gptaskforce.org. Try to be as specific as possible, and include your name and contact information. We look forward to hearing from you.

Your Input is Needed

Task Force members are the backbone of the organization, and it is your support that has made our successes possible over the last ten years. Whether with a donation, phone call, postcard, or letter to express your views or by pitching in here at the office or out in the woods, you contribute generously whenever called upon.

Beginning this year, the Task Force will assemble a group of members who can assist us with something we value very highly – our communication with you. Throughout the year we send letters, newsletters, and emails to

keep you informed and involved. We want to make sure that the types of issues we cover and the ways we do that meet your needs and expectations.

We are seeking 6 to 10 volunteers who could review materials, complete surveys, and occasionally meet here at our office to discuss how we can refine our membership communication. Most of the feedback can be accomplished by email and will require minimal time.

If you would like to join this group, please email Derek Meinhard at derek@gptaskforce.org.



The Gifford Pinchot Task Force supports the biological diversity and communities of the Northwest through conservation and restoration of forests, rivers, fish, and wildlife.

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The Task Force would like to thank Kara Sitz-Narciso for her stellar volunteer work. We would also like to Thatch Moyle for his GIS assistance. (Their volunteer work has been invaluable to us.)

