



News From the Woods

Spring 2010

Supporting Northwest Biological Diversity & Communities

On the Cover: Spring brings wildflowers and butterflies back to the forests of the Cascade Range. Important pollinators, butterflies can't carry as much pollen as bees or other insects, but they move pollen over greater distances.

Making the Difficult Choice to Litigate

In the last few years we worked hard to overcome the obstructionist stigma often associated with many environmental non-profits. The Gifford Pinchot Task Force (Task Force) takes pride in working with our collaborative partners to prevent the need for appealing or litigating by resolving problems earlier in the process.

However, the Task Force has made the difficult decision to litigate the Wildcat logging project. The Task Force has not opted to litigate a timber sale in over seven years, and we are saddened that the Forest Service's decisions- including preventing a real collaborative discussion - have led us to this point. The Wildcat logging project is located in a watershed that contains habitat for threatened bull trout and coho salmon. The logging proposed in this area, including logging of slopes up to 45% (steep!), will lead to increased sediment in these streams and will disrupt the monetary and physical investment that several groups, companies, taxpayers, and the Forest Service have made to increase suitable habitat for bull trout in this watershed. In fact, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service in its biologi-



Pine Creek is shown here at its confluence with the Muddy River. Irresponsible logging could fill these streams with sediment and destroy fish habitat.

cal opinion on this project recommended that the Forest Service withdraw several units located in important watersheds to protect bull trout habitat. The Forest Service declined to accept those recommendations. Logging on steep slopes is not the only issue with the Wildcat project. The project intends to log riparian areas, which are designed to maintain or enhance wildlife and fish habitat as well as protect water quality and aquatic resources. The project also expects to build and reconstruct up to eleven miles of roads with thirteen stream crossings. Road reconstruction and building has significant impacts on fish habitat and recovery stemming from the runoff and sediment delivery from roadbeds which bury spawning grounds and damage habitats. Additionally, the GPNF has over 4,000 miles of roads to manage and a \$50+ million road maintenance backlog that already leads to severe water quality and fish and wildlife issues. Adding and reconstructing roads in this environment will be costly to the taxpayer as well as to our environment.

It is unfortunate that we have had to take this step and we hope that in the future we can work collaboratively on thinning projects so that we can design projects that will enhance and restore our ecosystems.

Spring Hike: June Lake

It's looking like a below average snow year for the south side of Mount St. Helens which means the beautiful June Lake Trail will likely be accessible by April. The June Lake Trail is a classic, a short 1.4 mile hike from the trailhead brings you old-growth forest, wildflowers, and great views of Mount St. Helens. Once at tiny June Lake, enjoy a beautiful waterfall. This hike has it all for little effort.

Directions: From Cougar, Washington, follow Forest Road 83 to the June Lake trailhead. Go after March 31st to be sure Road 83 will be open.

This year late Spring will likely bring excellent flowers and foliage to the June Lake Trail on the south side of Mount St. Helens.



Clackamas River Road Restoration

Roads are widely recognized as a risk to aquatic ecosystems on federal lands nationwide. They have numerous widespread, pervasive and, if left untreated, long-lasting biological and physical impacts on aquatic ecosystems that continue long after completion of construction. Road restoration has been specifically identified in the Northwest Forest Plan and other recent federal policies as a high priority for aquatic conservation on federal lands. Climate change will have a host of impacts on biodiversity and healthy functioning ecosystems in the Northwest. Species will be migrating to habitats northward and upward (in elevation); drinking water quality now protected by headwaters in national forest lands will be threatened by the increasing frequency and severity of floods; and access to public lands for hunting, camping and other recreational activities could be limited by the deteriorating and flood-impacted road system.

Addressing the impacts of the Forest Service's crumbling and destructive road system is one of the most important actions the Forest Service can take to help species and communities adapt to climate change.



The Mount Hood National Forest has 3,407 miles of roads in just over 1 million acres of forest. Many of these roads are deteriorating, impacting threatened fish populations and fragmenting habitat for sensitive wildlife like lynx and bears.

The Mt. Hood National Forest has taken on the challenge of addressing the road system by strategically closing unneeded roads on the Forest that have a variety of impacts including impacts to water quality, aquatic habitat, and terrestrial habitat. Closing unneeded roads also reduces maintenance costs and better enables the Forest to focus resources to needed roads. The agency currently faces a road-maintenance backlog of \$5.1 billion (U.S. Forest Service, 2008A) and is poised to see that amount grow as many of the roads on the national forests near the end of their engineered lifespans.

This backlog means Northwest residents can't reach their favorite hiking, hunting and fishing areas because there is so little money to repair even popular roads. The backlog also means increasingly severe impacts to fish and wildlife species, and as climate change throws more severe and frequent storms and floods our way, it means exponentially more money will be needed to repair roads that are guaranteed to fail in the next round of storms. Conversely, an investment in the road system now means good family wage jobs, the protection of community drinking water supplies, restoration of habitat for fish and wildlife, and a reduced future taxpayer burden.



Over the last year, our Deputy Director, Lisa Moscinski has been coordinating road restoration committee meetings, workshops, and field tours to facilitate Clackamas Stewardship Partner's engagement in the Mount Hood National Forest's road restoration planning.

Since 2006, The Task Force has been working with the Clackamas Stewardship Partners collaborative group to restore the Clackamas River Basin. Last year, with the help of the Clackamas Stewardship Partners, the Clackamas River Ranger District planned for the removal of 117 miles of road in the Upper Clackamas watershed. This year, the Task Force will continue and improve engagement in the planning process to remove over 200 miles of roads in the Collawash watershed. The Collawash is the most geologically unstable watershed on the Mount Hood National Forest and is regionally important as a core area of late seral (old growth) biodiversity.

Emily Platt travels to DC for Watershed Award

This December, Task Force executive director Emily Platt was part of delegation of members of the Washington Watershed Restoration Initiative that traveled to Washington DC to receive a Rise to the Future Award from the Forest Service. The coalition received this honor for the significant impact it has had on watershed health and specifically for its work to heighten public awareness of the need to address the Forest Service's crumbling road system and the impacts it has on water quality, sensitive fish populations, and watershed health.

Private Forest Lands

Private forest lands around the Gifford Pinchot National Forest (GPNF) are extremely important to the health of our ecosystems. The GPNF provides critical social, economic, and ecological benefits to our communities including fresh drinking water, sustainable forest products, aesthetic value and recreational opportunities, and habitat for fish and wildlife. Development of private forestlands into residential areas and tourist attractions threaten the integrity of the existing forest habitat and often causes increased pollution to water from the clear-cuts required for house sites and new roads. The increased loss of forest in these areas also creates edge effects that can severely impact habitat for sensitive wildlife like the northern spotted owl. In the last few years, development around the GPNF has become an increasing phenomenon.

In recent years several private land holders around the GPNF have sold their forestlands for private development. The High Lakes area just north-west of Mount St. Helens was sold approximately two years ago to a private developer with the intent to develop lots for private residential use. In an area just below Mount St. Helens, known as the swift development, houses and amenities like boat launches have continued to pop up on the landscape in an area known for threatened bull trout populations. In a 2007 study, "National Forest on the Edge: Development Pressure on America's National Forest and Grasslands," the Forest Service estimates that "between 2000 and 2030, a substantial increase in housing density will occur on more than 21.7 million acres of rural private lands (8 percent of all private land) located within 10 miles of national forest and grasslands across the United States." The development of these areas has led to increased sediment impacts to threatened bull trout habitat as well as new roads on the landscape. This loss of forest land is having a tremendous impact on both the land as well as the communities who enjoy the area.

The Gifford Pinchot Task Force is looking for ways to help maintain private forest lands as forests. We are exploring the idea of a community-owned forest with local community members, county commissioners, and agency experts. As we move forward with our work on private forest land work, we will continue to update you on our progress.

Thank you for Submitting Wolf Comments

The Task Force would like to thank all of our friends who submitted comments on the Washington Wolf Management Plan. For more on how wolves importance to ecosystems, see *Ask the Task Force* on the next page.

Ask the Task Force

Why are top predators like wolves important to recovering ecosystems?

Wolves are a native carnivore to the Pacific Northwest and before their extirpation wolves played a large and important role in maintaining ecosystem balance. In areas where wolves have returned, scientists report that these important "top-down" regulators are having a dramatic and much needed effect. For example, in Yellowstone researchers from Oregon State University, Bill Ripple and Bob Beschta, have shown that since the return of wolves a dramatic shift in willow growth along stream banks has occurred due to the change in ungulate behavior and population in response to wolf presence. The response of ungulates in the presence of predators dramatically decreases over-browsing of vegetation which allows for the release of willow and aspen trees long suppressed by deer and elk browsing. This new growth of willows along stream banks is good for creeks, fish and wildlife too: it stabilizes stream channels, provides cooler waters for fish, and offers new habitat for beavers. This rippling effect of wolf presence on elk, willow and aspen, and then fish and wildlife is what is known as trophic cascades or "top down" ecosystem control. If you love science as much as we do, you can follow the links on our website: www.gptaskforce.org.

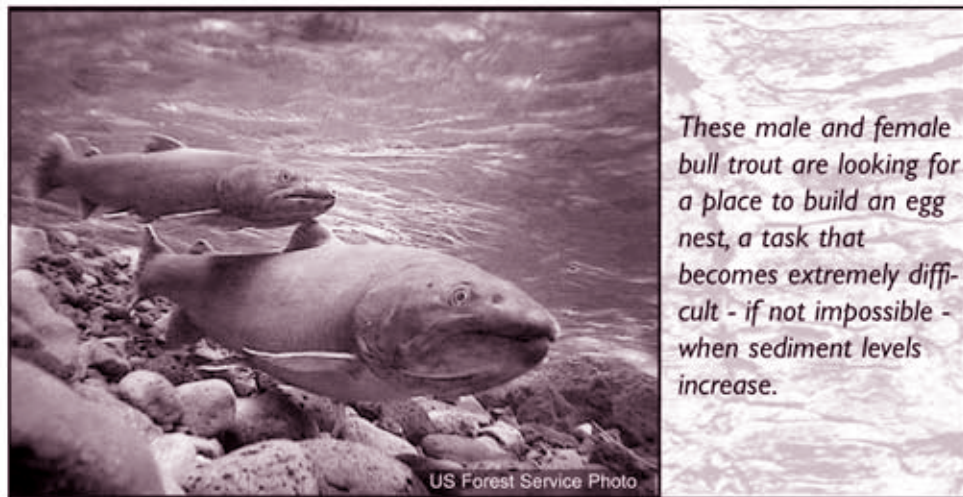


US Forest Service Photo

When they are not relaxing in the shade, you can find wolves keeping deer and elk moving through the forest, preventing overgrazing and ecosystem strain.

Critical Habitat for Threatened Bull Trout

On January 14, 2009, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service issued the Revised Designation of Critical Habitat for Bull Trout. When a species is proposed for listing as endangered or threatened under the Endangered Species Act, the Fish and Wildlife Service must consider whether there are areas of habitat that are believed essential to the species' conservation. Critical habitat is defined as "the specific areas within the geographic area occupied by the species...on which are found those physical or biological features essential to the conservation of a threatened or endangered species and which may require special management or protection." The revised designation of critical habitat for bull trout includes areas previously excluded in the flawed original Bull Trout Habitat Conservation Plan, including Pine Creek and other important tributaries.



These male and female bull trout are looking for a place to build an egg nest, a task that becomes extremely difficult - if not impossible - when sediment levels increase.

We appreciate the United States Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) review of the misguided decision in the original Bull Trout Habitat Conservation Plan process that was heavily influenced by the former Deputy Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks, Julie MacDonald. The original recommendation from the field biologists and the USFWS for the Columbia River Basin Population included Pine Creek but it was later removed from the designation prior to the final rule being listed in the Federal Register in 2004 because of MacDonald's political influence. In the final rule in 2004, the critical habitat designation indicates stream protection on the Washington side for the Columbia River Population on the Lewis River up to Lake Merwin, but not past Lake Merwin, which excluded Pine Creek, which is essential for the survival of bull trout in the Lewis River watershed.

Pine Creek begins its long journey to the Muddy River high up on the slopes of Mount St. Helens. It flows through deep lava canyons and over stunning waterfalls before rushing through dense and lush forest lands. Its deep canyons and swirling pools make it a prime location for bull trout and bull trout recovery. According to several reports by the WDFW and the Lower Lewis River Watershed Analysis bull trout are found in several streams draining into Swift reservoir and Yale Lake including Pine Creek and Rush Creek. The evidence is clear that we must protect Pine Creek in the revised Critical Habitat Designation.

The high volatility of Pine Creek bull trout habitat due to increasing development and flood occurrences is evidenced by Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife fish estimates that show in 2000 41 fish were present reaching a high in 2004 of 293 fish. However, after 2004 the numbers steadily decline to 74 fish in the 2007 survey. In 2006 a large tract of development began in the area adjacent to Pine Creek and contributed to sediment impacts which occurred during the 1996 flooding episode. All scientific records from the original recommendations as well as this new round of recommendations indicate that Pine Creek is critical habitat for the bull trout and we are happy to see that the USFWS included Pine Creek in the revised designation of critical habitat because of its importance to the area's bull trout population.

Without adequate protection, habitat for the bull trout in Pine Creek will be severely impacted and the resulting loss of bull trout in that area will significantly reduce the overall population.

What You Can Do:

We urge you to send comments to the USFWS by March 15, 2010 and thank them for including Pine Creek and other tributaries in the Lewis and Lower Columbia River Basin to protect important spawning and rearing habitat for bull trout. Comments can be submitted to:

Public Comments Processing
Attn: FWS-RI-ES-2009-0085
Division of Policy &
Directives Management
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services
4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Suite 222
Arlington, VA 22203

For more information about
Bull Trout visit :

www.fws.gov/pacific/bulltrout

Volunteers Give Task Force Technological Boost

Volunteers are vital to small nonprofit organizations like the Gifford Pinchot Task Force. In this edition of *News from the Woods*, we would like to acknowledge the amazing contribution of HeatherAnn Van Dyke. HeatherAnn, a student at Portland State pursuing a graduate certificate in Geographic Information Systems (GIS), along with two fellow students created a geodatabase for the Task Force to organize and utilize the enormous amount of data needed for planning restoration projects and conservation activities like reviewing timber sales. "Just recently we were able to use the geodatabase to easily create maps for the Wildcat Thin Timber Sale and Pepper Cat Thin Timber Sale, which allowed us to identify issues like the proximity of thinning near bull trout habitat in Pine Creek," explained Task Force Deputy Director Lisa Moscinski. HeatherAnn and her co-volunteers contributed around 120 hours of their spare time over two months assessing and prioritizing data, programming restoration tools, and converting the data into a useful format. According to Task Force Conservation Director Jessica Walz, "HeatherAnn's work on this geodatabase provided us with a functional and usable system that we much appreciate. The simplicity of the database saves us a lot of time when developing maps for reviewing projects. She devoted a lot of time and energy to this project and even spent a morning tutoring Lisa and I on the use of the system and how to work with the toolboxes she created. I am incredibly grateful for her insight and her willingness to help."



When asked what motivated her to undertake such a vast project as a volunteer, HeatherAnn said that she feels that "this type of data is vital to...seeing where we fit in the world around us." She also acknowledged that the work was fun and fit right in with her career aspirations. And there is more to come. HeatherAnn said that she's looking forward to the next steps in the project, adding in a tracking component to organize the data being collected by the Task Force's carnivore tracking program.

The Task Force thanks HeatherAnn and her fellow students for their incredible contribution to our work.

You Can Help: The Task Force lacks a quality GPS device (or the funds for one!) to use with our new geodatabase. If you have a GPS device you would be willing to donate, please contact us.



Task Force Conserving Paper This Year

Saving paper is great for the environment and the Task Force. The Task Force has chosen to only print two of our four newsletters this year. We will produce all four in an electronic version however, so if you have not been receiving emails from us, please put your email address on file by sending an email to our membership coordinator Andy at andy@gptaskforce.org. In addition, if you would like to receive all our newsletter electronically from now on, please contact Andy with your current address. Thank You!

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Youtube Videos & Facebook Updates

There are even more ways to keep up with the Task Force now. We are now posting weekly updates on our Facebook page, find us on Facebook.com by searching for Gifford Pinchot Task Force. We have also posted a few youtube videos of some of our recent work, including some sequences of very interesting



animal behavior from our predator tracking program cameras. You can find links to the videos on our website and on our Facebook page.

Membership Outreach Team

Dane Gatewood
Josh Gates
Paul Seif
Scott Skiles
Tim Rabe



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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