

## Last Stand Coming for Huckleberry Bay

### October hearing may be last chance to halt mega-development

**A** SOILS scientist hired by Don Barbieri's Huckleberry Bay Co. has turned in a site characterization report for Barbieri's proposed development — setting the stage for what may be the climax in Barbieri's attempt to launch a giant development at Priest Lake.

The site characterization report, compiled by Pierre Bordenave and Allen

Isaacson of Intermountain Resources, claims the high-density development which Barbieri proposes "is within the carrying capacity of the land."

SPBA directors say they aren't surprised that the consulting firm hired by Barbieri has concluded that Huckleberry Bay is suited to the development he proposes.

But with a hearing before the Bonner County Planning and Zoning Commission expected in early October, SPBA is

taking vigorous action to provide an independent analysis of the report's findings.

Furthermore — and underscoring the importance of the coming hearing by the planning commission — SPBA is interviewing attorneys to represent the association. The decision to retain

legal counsel reflects SPBA's committed opposition to large-scale development at Huckleberry Bay — and the far-reaching consequences such development would

*Continued on page 4*

### MEMBER ALERT!

See Page 4 To Learn How You Can Help



PHOTO: D. BOSWELL/SPBA

**ALL IN THE NAME OF SCIENCE:** Director Gordon West is at the oars as he leads an SPBA-sponsored trip down the Priest River for government officials. The trip was a prelude to a riverflow study now underway; see story, page 10.

## Timber Group Manipulates Study Team

**P**OLITICAL jockeying has already clouded the newly created Priest Lake Management Plan team formed to oversee a three-year process to study the lake's water quality and write a management plan for the lake.

Although 11 volunteers and one alternate were named June 17 to sit on the

PLMP team, a protest by the Intermountain Forest Industries Association caused the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare Board to add a paid IFIA consultant to a 12th seat on the team.

The Idaho Legislature mandated during this year's session that the Board cre-

*Continued on page 5*

### It's Time For A

## CeleBasin!

**W**ANT to have a good time and further the causes of the Selkirk-Priest Basin Association?

Then mark down Sunday, September 8, on your calendar.

That's the day the SPBA hosts the second annual CeleBasin — our yearly Celebration of the Basin — at Elkins Resort on Priest Lake, beginning at noon. And everyone, including SPBA members, friends and the public at large, is

*Continued on page 8*

### INSIDE

#### Across the Millenia

SPBA mounts search for reported 3,300-year-old tree, and the searching ain't easy. See page 6.

#### 3 Annual Meeting

SPBA members one and all invited September 7.

#### 9 Bear Dogs Back

After multi-year absence, IFG allows bear dogs to return.



# *Tampering With the Process*

**A** CURIOUS drama was played out recently over the Priest Basin. It came complete with political machinations and behind-the-scenes power struggles.

We wish it were a drama played out on a stage, peopled with the usual villains and heroes who battle it out to a happy conclusion. Unfortunately, this one was a drama in real life.

At the heart of this drama was the Priest Lake Management Plan team, the group of volunteers selected by the Idaho Board of Health and Welfare in June and charged with creating a plan for the lake that will maintain the lake's excellent water quality while allowing for existing economic activities.

The team has a high-minded and important job, and the process by which team members were chosen was fair and impartial. The story on page 1 gives more details about the team, but those selected by the Board had nominated themselves following a barrage of publicity issued by the Board. And all the team members were volunteers.

Before the team had a chance to meet, however, the political maneuvering began. The Coeur d'Alene-based Intermountain Forest Industries Association quickly petitioned the Board to change the makeup of the team. IFIA Executive Vice President Joe Hinson aired the group's displeasure with not having been especially notified and invited to apply for a seat on the team — even though the Board announced at the outset that this was a "self-nomination" process.

Further, Hinson complained that the team selection failed to represent specific economic interests at Priest Lake, although the Board had already decided not to attempt to compose the team according to economic interest groups.

Thus the IFIA made a demand. The timber group told the Health and Welfare Board they wanted the PLMP team enlarged to include a seat for a handpicked IFIA representative who will sit on the team as a paid consultant.

And IFIA decided to use muscle to get its way. With the Priest Lake study and management plan yet to be funded by the Legislature, IFIA issued a not-so-subtle threat to use its lobbying power to block funding. In a June 21 letter to the director of Health and Welfare's Division of Environmental Quality, Hinson wrote "It will be very difficult for people in my position to actively lobby for the necessary funds if our constituencies are unhappy with such fundamental, early decisions as the makeup of the planning team."

That's pretty strong stuff, and ultimately the Health and Welfare Board bowed to the IFIA demands. At their August 13 meeting the Board voted to add IFIA's paid consultant to the team. He is Gerald Stern, a former district ranger for the Forest Service's Sandpoint and Bonners Ferry districts.

There is something very wrong-minded going on here.



How is it that after a state agency conducts a selection process and announces it to the public a separate private interest can come forward to demand they be given a new and extraordinary position on the team? The IFIA representative never submitted an application, as others on the team did, and the fact he is to be paid by the IFIA to sit on the otherwise all-volunteer team makes it questionable he'll be free to exercise his own judgement.

In their effort to further control the team an attempt was made to deprive member Dean Stevens of his vote, claiming an elected official should not be allowed voting privileges. Stevens is a Bonner County Commissioner.

Good grief! Is this stacking of the committee a fair and impartial way to launch the PLMP process? Just what is the fear that prompts such extraordinary interference with a legally constituted team? Is it the fear that the team makeup does not give one segment or another a clear advantage?

And what of the Priest Lake team members, each one an unpaid volunteer who has willingly offered his or her time? Well, they have been told nothing of these attempts to slack their ranks; in fact, thanks to the political machinations, team members have not yet been called to their first meeting and are still unclear about what their duties and objectives are to be.

Perhaps most distressing is the assumption on the part of the IFIA that they can come forth after a legitimate selection process has been conducted and play by a new set of rules — very different rules from those the rest of us must and do play by. This is hardly the stuff of fair play, and it's unfortunate these tactics paid off for the IFIA.

Now, however, the PLMP team is fully constituted. They face the tremendously important task of overseeing a process aimed at preserving Priest Lake's water quality. Their charge is unique. Whereas northern Idaho's other great lakes — Coeur d'Alene and Pend Oreille — are already suffering marked water degradation, Priest Lake is by comparison pristine. The PLMP team has the rare opportunity to oversee a plan to prevent a major lake from going the way of so many waterways defiled throughout the U.S.

It's a tremendous opportunity — and an exciting opportunity. The last act of the big drama of Priest Lake hasn't been written. Let the PLMP team get their important work underway, and let's eliminate the politics.

*H. Bruce Brockway*



## Annual Member Drive Invites More to SPBA

### New Director Tabbed

**T**HE annual Selkirk-Priest Basin Association membership drive is under way, as the group seeks to draw more citizens to the cause of environmental excellence in the Basin.

The membership drive is a yearly summer event for SPBA. Membership in the group now stands at 689 persons, but this issue of *Sightlines* is being mailed to more than 2,000 additional persons as an invitation to join.

"We hope these prospective members will take us up on the invitation," said SPBA Chairman Bruce Brockway. "As SPBA continues to grow in size we are able to advocate more effectively for environmental issues in the Basin.

"The Priest Basin and Priest Lake are incredible resources," he added. "As far as we're concerned, they're national park caliber, and we want to maintain this level of excellence. Insofar as SPBA's strength comes from the citizens who support us, we need all the help we can get to meet that goal."

To those non members who have received *Sightlines*, here's a heartfelt invitation to join SPBA and help promote and protect the Priest Basin. And to our standing members, once again we say thanks for your support.

Meanwhile, in other other Association happenings, SPBA has a new member of its Board of Directors. Ted Runberg, 59, was appointed to the Board at its Aug. 1 meeting.

Runberg said simply "I believe in the cause" as his reason for making the commitment to SPBA. He's particularly interested in pursuing water quality and land usage issues.

Now a counselor in Bonner County elementary schools, Runberg has a long history in the Basin, having formerly ranched in Snow Valley. He's also long been camping and boating in the Basin.

Runberg is also part owner of Krause Nursery in Spokane and occasionally contracts landscaping work. He has four children. •

## Annual Membership Meeting Coming September 7 in Coolin

**T**HE Selkirk-Priest Basin Association is holding its annual membership meeting Saturday, September 7, at the Coolin Civic Center.

The meeting begins at 2 p.m.

All SPBA members are urged to attend, Chairman Bruce Brockway said. The annual meeting comes one day before the SPBA's Second Annual CeleBasin, Brockway noted, so members have a double reason for spending the weekend at Priest Lake. (See story on page 1 of this issue for more on the CeleBasin.)

The membership meeting includes election of directors,

introductions to SPBA staff and volunteers, and a rundown of issues currently facing the Priest Basin.

That will conclude the annual meeting, but following a dinner recess, the group will reconvene at 7 p.m. for a slide and video show illustrating issues affecting the Priest Basin. Included will be videos on Priest Lake water quality, the Save Our Streams program and old-growth forest issues.

There will also be a slide show by Executive Director Chris Bessler on the historic old Continental Mine north of Upper Priest Lake. •

## Help in Adopt-a-Highway, And Make Some Discoveries

**S**PBA members made an exciting discovery last June 9 — actually, they made two of them.

There in the tall grass members found a bouquet of Mountain Lady Slippers, a rare flower growing in abundant good health.

And minutes later other SPBA members discovered a bird's nest hidden in tall grass. Infant birds instinctively opened beaks wide for an anticipated feeding as the human audience peered into the nest.

Were these SPBA members out on a nature walk along a magnificent forest trail?

Not exactly. They were among the 23 volunteers who participated in an SPBA-sponsored littler cleanup along Highway



57 as part of the Idaho Adopt-A-Highway program.

And as these SPBA litter collectors discovered, the rich natural bounty of the Priest Basin includes even the lowly highway meridians. Trash isn't the only thing to be found during the litter pickup; there are often other discoveries to make when one has his or her eyes open.

As part of its participation in Adopt-A-

Highway, SPBA is organizing another litter pickup for mid September. The litter crew will clean two miles of highway, the stretch between mileposts 18.5 and 20.5., and more helpers are needed!

If you can volunteer time to help in the clean-up call Bruce Brockway at 448-1813 or Chris Bessler at 263-3573. •



# Huckleberry

Continued from page 1  
have.

"We're seriously questioning several portions of the site characterization report," said SPBA Chairman Bruce Brockway. "But SPBA's opposition to the development on Huckleberry Bay goes much deeper than this report. We have contended from the outset that locating such a huge development in what is currently an undeveloped and nearly pristine site will destroy the natural character of Priest Lake.

"And this issue transcends even the future of Priest Lake," Brockway added. "The Bonner County Comprehensive Plan specifically states that new developments must locate in areas of compatible uses. If the Huckleberry Bay development goes through, it ignores the comprehensive plan and sets a precedent for developers throughout Bonner County."

The new report is the latest round in a three-year attempt by Barbieri to create a major resort on the 1,500 acres of Huckleberry Bay land he controls. His plans have taken various forms; the latest plan calls for 100 dwelling units to be erected at the bay, split into 60 cluster units on the water, 13 common beach single-family lots and 27 upper terrace view lots, plus a store, public boat docks and gas pumps and a fire station.

Last February the plan was aired at a special hearing before the planning commission. Following extensive testimony from SPBA, the commission ordered Barbieri's company to perform the site characterization report, including a "hydrogeologic survey" of the development site to identify site-specific soil types and analyze groundwater flows under the proposed development's sewage treatment area.

Actually, the company had promised to perform such a survey more than two years previously and never fulfilled that obligation.

With the report now completed SPBA is taking a hard look at its contents.

The report claims that the planned development for the sewage treatment area, the beachfront cluster homes and the terrace lots can be

## Massive Dredge-and-Fill Project Proposed on Priest

**A** PRIEST LAKE landowner has applied to the Idaho Department of Lands for permission to carry out a dredge-and-fill project on 40 acres of designated wetlands adjacent to the Thoroughfare.

The July 17 application by Orville Bailey of Nordman calls for excavating a 60-foot-wide canal more than a half mile long, dredging 8.7 acres and filling 31.1 acres at the mouth of the Thoroughfare along the lake's Mosquito Bay. The application states the purpose is commercial development of recreation residences.

The massive scale of the dredge-and-fill proposal mirrors canal developments popular in Florida to increase waterfront. The reaction from SPBA directors, adjacent landowners and various public officials was incredulity that such a project would be proposed on Priest Lake.

"This would entirely eliminate 40 acres of designated wetlands at the very time state and federal governments are trying to achieve a 'no net

loss' goal for wetlands," noted Director Gordon West. "It's hard to believe he's serious.

"Among other things, wetlands are critical fish and wildlife habitat, create a natural filtering system that enhances water quality, provide bank stabilization and flood control and have a lot of other important roles to play in the ecosystem. To dredge and fill 40 acres of prime wetlands out of existence cannot be permitted."

In an Aug. 21 letter to the IDOL, Bonner County Commission Chairman Jim McNall also recommended the permit be denied. "We're incredulous, quite frankly," said Commissioner Susan MacLeod. "It's just too overwhelming. It seems like he wants to build land to subdivide."

The IDOL comment period closed Aug. 26. The Army Corps of Engineers must also approve the project and that agency will also accept comment. SPBA is urging members to write to oppose the project. See The Letterdrop for details. •

carried out without harming surface or groundwater quality in Huckleberry Bay.

County Planner Sandy Cobb said she and county engineers are reviewing the report. Then, she said, "we will prepare a supplemental staff report, which will be done about a week before the October hearing." The six members of the planning commission will review the report and the staff report prior to the hearing.

SPBA directors have asked an environmental engineer to review the report,

particularly the soil technical descriptions and laboratory results from which the report draws its conclusions.

"The Barbieri proposal will create an instant city at Huckleberry Bay," said Brockway. "The loss of the natural character of Priest Lake is irreplaceable. We must do our part to control ourselves and our greed. We must see ourselves as what we are, part of an interdependent environment — the most intelligent part, though we don't often act that way.

"We must act that way, out of respect for something wonderful that is not ours and which we are only beginning to understand. Priest Lake is too important to us and to future generations. Do not let this development proposal at Huckleberry Bay take place."

SPBA members are urged to take action. See box at left. •

### MEMBERS, YOUR HELP IS NEEDED!

HERE'S how SPBA members can help:

- **Speak up!** If you have an interest in maintaining the natural quality of Priest Lake, write the Bonner County Planning and Zoning Commissioners at 127 S. First Avenue, Sandpoint, ID 83864. Plan to attend the hearing in October to testify.

- **Support the Huckleberry Bay Legal Fund.** SPBA is retaining legal counsel to represent the group at the October hearings on this matter. Donations to finance the effort are desperately needed, and we're establishing a dedicated fund for the struggle. We need your financial support! The decisive moment has arrived. •



# Study Team

*Continued from page 1*

ate such a team to evaluate the condition of the lake's water quality and draw up a plan to prevent degradation of water quality. That action came after a turbulent legislative process in which a nomination of Priest Lake for Outstanding Resource Water designation — the highest level of water quality protection Idaho affords — failed to make it through the state bureaucracy.

Although SPBA supported the ORW designation, the association welcomed the lake study and management plan as an opportunity to establish critical baseline data on the lake's water quality.

The legislation which creates the PLMP says the goal is to protect Priest Lake water quality while allowing existing economic activities to continue within the rubric of best management practices. Although specific duties of the team have not been spelled out, it is to provide oversight of the study and planning process and is charged with conducting public hearings.

In June the Health and Welfare Board published a series of public notices soliciting applications from individuals interested in sitting on the PLMP team. According to Dr. Fred Marienau, a member of the Health and Welfare Board, "This was a self-selection process and we were inundated with applicants."

On June 17 the Board announced the 11 members and alternate. Gordon West, an SPBA director, was named to one

seat. Chairman is Donald Stratton of the Outlet Bay Resort. Other members are R.G. Wright, Frank Nichol, Shirley McDonald, Dean Stevens, David Hunt, Ray Greene, Al Collotzi, Austin Raine and Larry Townsend; Don Pettit was named alternate.

However, once the team had been selected, the IFIA apparently decided it wanted a member on the team.

Intermountain Forest Industry Association Executive Vice President Joe Hinson protested the team failed to reflect the "fair representation" mandate of the Legislature and that "not all interest groups were consulted." Hinson said the sawmill operators should have a member on the team.

To that end, the IFIA petitioned the Board of Health and Welfare to enlarge the team to include a seat for Gerald Stern of Sagle, as a paid consultant for IFIA. Stern is a former Forest Service district ranger for the Sandpoint Ranger District; he is the only paid member of the team, since all the others are volunteers.

When asked about the matter, the team's appointed chairman, Donald Stratton, said it was a "sensitive issue" and refused comment.

According to Willa Barsness, chairwoman of the Health and Welfare Board, the board had sought a "good balance" on the team and based its composition "to make sure it was a local committee with as broad a representation as possible and whose members would stay involved and would seek to preserve the economic

base of the area in the long run." Barsness further stated that she became aware of "rumblings of dissatisfaction" from some members of the Priest Lake Chamber of Commerce and that a "non-official" letter was circulated to that effect.

SPBA responded to the petition by IFIA with a letter to the Board voicing "strenuous objection to the effort of the IFIA ... to upset the objectivity of the PLMP process." Executive Director Chris Bessler wrote that six members of the team work directly or indirectly within the timber industry and "it is the opinion of the SPBA that all interests, including timber, are fairly represented on the team." Bessler appealed to the Board to "use a firm hand to keep this process free from lobbying and politics."

However, the Board in their August 13 meeting decided to add the IFIA representative to the team. Dr. Marienau, as a Bonner County resident a key in the formation of the team, said the Board's decision came after a "very emotional and traumatic" discussion.

Bessler said afterwards the Board's decision was unfortunate "not because we don't like Mr. Stern or because it's us-versus-them, but because we want the study and plan to be above political manipulation.

"However," he added, "we've got a team now, and I have to believe that every member does want to maintain the superb water quality of the lake."

Although unsettled by the early political machinations, team members also expressed optimism and stressed the importance of the work ahead. Dean Stevens, who is a Bonner County Commissioner, said he "feels good to be appointed and has no agenda except water quality."

Member David Hunt cautioned that Priest Lake water quality should not be allowed to deteriorate because of "haphazard" management, such as has hurt Lake Coeur d'Alene and Pend Oreille. The management team is an opportunity to prevent "unintended consequences and to enhance public awareness to prevent such consequences," he said.

And finally, team member and Priest Lake Ranger Al Collotzi urged the team to keep an "open mind and seek to generate the best data possible — but it's imperative we get moving." •

## VERBATIM

***"[Our goal] is to build compatible housing—compatible with the lifestyle and character that Priest Lake is used to—and nothing else."***

—Don Barbieri speaking to Bonner County officials at a public hearing regarding aspects of the development proposal at Huckleberry Bay (September 16, 1989).

***"It just really suggests that we better not at face value accept what Don Barbieri said."***

—Spokane County Commissioner Steve Hasson commenting on an aborted development proposal submitted by Goodale and Barbieri Co. to the Spokane Transit Authority (January 21, 1991).



# A Quest for an Ancient

## Could Priest Basin tree be among Earth's oldest living organisms?

**S**PBA Director David Boswell shakes his head in frustration, and the perspiration flies.

"I'm starting to feel like Indiana Jones in search of the Holy Grail," he says. "There a surprise or an obstacle every minute."

For the past eight months Boswell has been in search of treasure. The trail has led him from Katmandu, Nepal, to the top of Tillicum Peak in the Priest Basin's Shedroof Divide. He's hike miles and hacked his way through devil's club and doghair brush, over rotting elk carcasses, through rivers, up sheer cliffs and into the heart of unroaded wilderness.

And on this sweaty July day, the object of Boswell's quest eludes him once more. "We still haven't found it — but when we do it'll be a real treasure," he declares.

What's the treasure?

No, it's not a chest of gold. It's a tree.

Not just any tree, mind you; a tree maybe older than the Holy Grail itself, a tree that may be among the oldest living things on Earth, a tree draped in intrigue and surrounded by adventure. And it's apparently lost.

This "treasure" is a western red cedar that is thought to be more than 3,000 years old. Yes, that's *three thousand years*. This tree may have been a sprout sometime around the reign of Ramses II, great pharaoh of ancient Egypt.

For all its exotic twists and turns, even Indiana Jones would be jealous of this quest.

What's Boswell have to go on? Not much.

The story began last winter. When SPBA directors were reviewing old-growth inventory maps at the Priest Lake Ranger Station in January, they were handed a report on cedar groves in the Priest Basin. The report had apparently been filed away for the past 10 years.

The report provided information on the location of the district's remnant

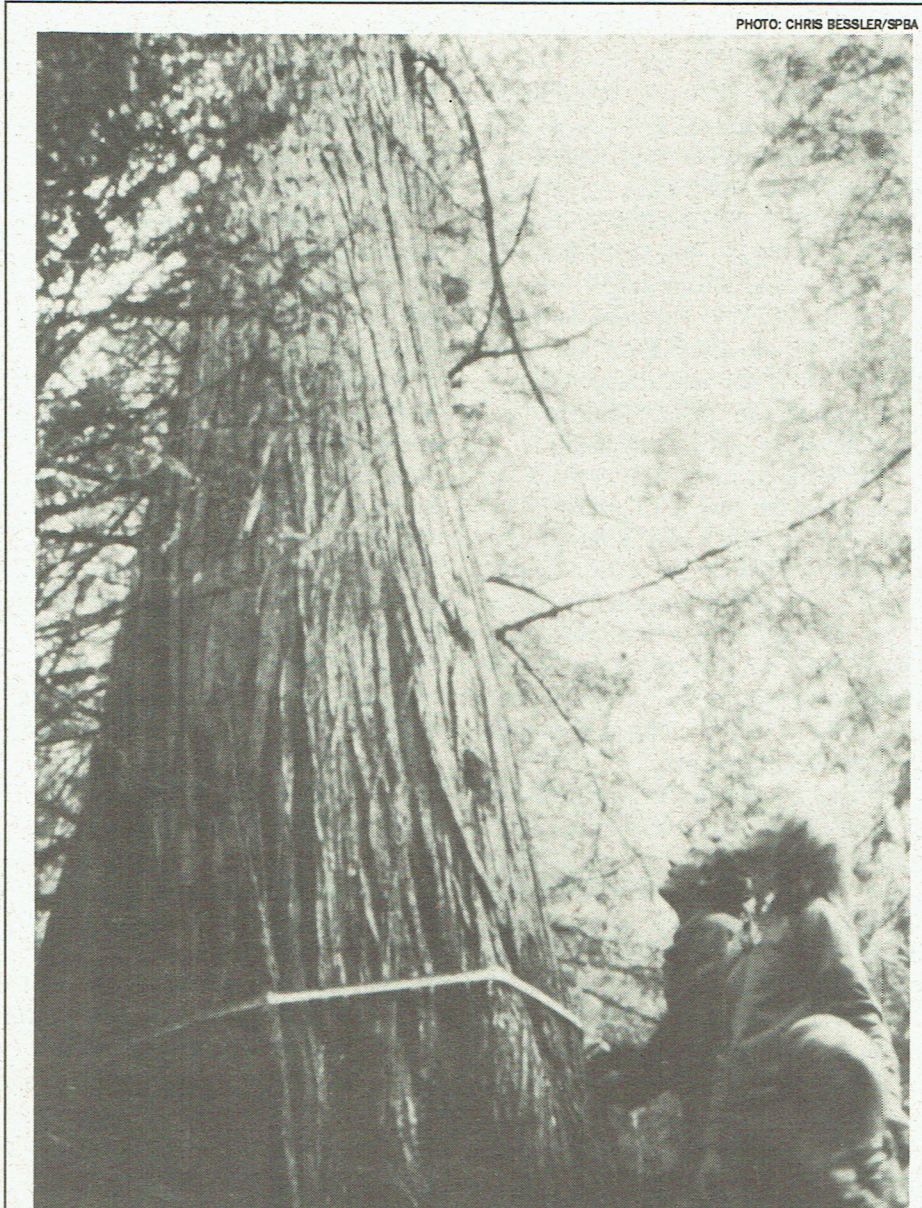


PHOTO: CHRIS BESSLER/SPBA

**JUST A STRIPLING.** Dave Boswell and Sandy Bessler measure a cedar in their quest for the Basin's ancient western red cedar. The intriguing search goes on.

ancient cedars, most of them 500-1,200 years old. Ages of a millennium-plus are impressive indeed.

But buried deep within the report was something even more exciting: a cryptic reference to a tree estimated to be as old as 3,305 years old.

Unfortunately, no district staff member has seen the cedar. And the author of the report, Dr. Tracy Parker, has since been assigned by the U.S. State Department to help the Nepalese manage forests of the high Himalayas. She could be contacted only by mail.

So in February Boswell wrote to

Parker in Nepal. "I've got it in mind now that my letter was carried for days up those slopes inside a pack on the back of a yak," Boswell says. "It took almost four months to get a reply."

And when Dr. Parker answered, she could not recall precisely where Tree No. 16, as the ancient cedar is annotated, was located. But she did know the exact dimensions: 27.94 feet in circumference. That has become SPBA's top clue in the attempt to locate the mighty cedar.

Next, Boswell called Parker's doctoral sponsor, ancient cedar authority and plant biologist, Dr. Fred Johnson, profes-



# Cedar

sor emeritus at the University of Idaho.

Dr. Johnson didn't know where the tree was. He referred Boswell to Art Zack at the USFS Coeur d'Alene office.

Zack said he'd been into the area but failed to find the tree. He could only provide a general description of the area.

So armed with that frail trail of clues, Boswell, with SPBA Executive Director Chris Bessler, in July mounted an attempt to locate the old behemoth. Although the pair made it as far as the drainage which houses the old-growth grove that contains the tree, they ran out of time before they ran out of trees to examine. "Have you ever tried to find a single tree in a forest?" quipped Bessler.

Boswell and Bessler plan a second trip in to the grove this summer, this time equipped with better maps and aerial photos of the drainage.

Should they succeed in finding the tree, finding a specialist to confirm its vast age may prove even more elusive.

The process by which scientists date trees is called dendrochronology, which is a method for estimating a tree's age when much of its heartwood may have rotted away. It's an imprecise science.

Dr. Parker wrote that she stands by her age estimate and that there may be trees even older in the same area, but she acknowledged that growth rates can vary. She said she would not be surprised if another analysis of the tree lowered its age to as few as 1,500 years — still mighty old, as lifeforms on Earth go.

Johnson and Zack are frankly skeptical of the original estimate of the tree's age. Johnson described his level of confidence in the tree being 3,000 years old as "very low." Zack agreed.

Intrigued by the possibility, however, the search by the SPBA members goes on. "Even if the tree is younger than 3,300 years, that will not diminish its value," said Boswell.

"At half that age it's still a priceless treasure, and we've had the fun of chasing it down. Who knows, maybe we'll find a tree even older.

"The important thing is that it exists in the Priest Basin — just another thread in the rich mosaic of incredibly rare plants and animals we are so fortunate to have in our back yard." •

## In the Wind ...

A compilation of the curious, the humorous, the noteworthy and other tidbits of interest.

### Hello and Goodbye

SPBA extends a warm welcome to the Priest Lake Ranger District's newest resource analyst, Wildlife Biologist Charla Sterne. Charla has worked on the district in past seasons and was permanently assigned last month. She has a biology degree from Colorado State University and a masters in public administration from the University of Idaho; she hails from Texas and Montana. Her work will emphasize wildlife resource policymaking through the National Environmental Policy Act.

Also, best wishes to former Acting District Ranger Jim Upchurch, who is leaving for a new assignment on the Durango National Forest in the Four Corners area. Jim served as acting ranger during the formative years of SPBA and is, perhaps, the local federal official who dealt most with our group's initial concerns about forest and watershed management on the west side of Priest Lake. Happy trails, Jim!

### Waterborne Moose

SPBA members have reported an unusual number of moose swimming Priest Lake this spring and summer. In June, an adult bull was spotted by Director Dave Boswell on his way toward Granite Creek from Bear Creek. And, in late July, member Brian Miller spotted a sub-adult bull with one missing antler swimming the entire breadth of the lake from Horton Creek to Luby Bay — nearly five miles! Another moose was reported in the lake by Jim and Terri Brown in July. It was swimming toward Linger Longer, but turned back toward Kalispell Island when

excited residents congregated on the shore to take pictures. All three moose were heading east, away from areas on Idaho state lands where new timber sales are active or planned within the Priest Lake watershed.

### Carcajou sighted

A wolverine, or carcajou, as the Indians called them, has been sighted this summer within the Upper Priest Roadless Area. It's the first time in about five years a reliable observation has been made of this solitary and elusive creature, says district Wildlife Biologist Tim Layser. The largest member so the weasel family, wolverines are one of the most intelligent, fearsome animals on Earth. Old trappers described them as "grizzly bears in miniature," and reports exist of them driving grizzlies off carcasses, robbing remote cabins, springing traps before eating bait, fouling caches with their strong musk, and killing 1,200-pound bull elk — though they weigh only about 35 pounds.

### Going, going ...

Here's a new perspective on the argument over how much old-growth should be saved, by no less an authority than National Geographic. The magazine says while the old-growth controversy continues the old trees keep falling in the Northwest at a rate of 170 acres a day. The Forest Service now estimates 2.3 million acres of old growth remain in Oregon and Washington, with about a third of that number protected in national and state parks and wildernesses. •



# Priest Lake Waste Site Cleaned Up

**R**EMOVAL of toxic materials buried at the Priest Lake Ranger Station more than 10 years ago has been completed, according to EPA and Forest Service officials.

A preliminary report received in April by the Forest Service from the Environmental Protection Agency contractor which conducted the clean-up indicated the hazardous chemical Silvisar — which contains arsenic — plastic storage containers and application equipment have been removed from the site. The materials filled two 55-gallon drums. In addition, potentially contaminated soil was removed. All materials were sent to a service in southern Idaho for disposal.

On-site inspection of the soil did not reveal discoloration of the soil — a tell-tale sign of Silvisar contamination.

Discovery of the waste site came two years ago following an inquiry by the SPBA, after reports from Forest Service workers that they had buried the Silvisar at the district "boneyard" sometime around 1980.

Silvisar was used by the district to thin second-growth forests. The chemical thinning program was discontinued after high levels of the compound were found in blood samples from workers.

The Forest Service subsequently buried left-over Silvisar and equipment at the ranger station, even though the active agents in Silvisar are listed by the EPA as hazardous substances.

According to Jim Spalding of the Forest Service's Coeur d'Alene office, lab tests of soil samples were taken last November. Those tests found "inconclusive" evidence of contamination, Spalding said, and the amount of Silvisar present was below standards set by the EPA.

He there is "no evidence of any contamination of nearby Kalispell Creek or the USFS Priest Lake station ground water," which supplies drinking water.

The final report from the contractor — which was originally due June 1, 1991 — has not been received by the Forest Service or EPA, but is expected soon. •

PHOTO: D. BOSWELL/SPBA



**ECO-TIME BOMB.** Members of the Priest Lake Local Working Committee stared down this mammoth cut-and-fill slope in the Trapper Creek drainage last summer, and wondered when it will fail and what the impact will be on the drainage's rare west-slope cutthroat trout. Fish and Game officials call these kinds of road construction techniques "time bombs." When the tiny culvert at the bottom gets plugged, water backs up behind the fill, eventually undercutting it. The fill breaks and tons of mud and debris rush into the stream, killing fish and ruining habitat. SPBA participated in the working committee last year to try to reform practices in Trapper Creek, but the eight-month process failed to establish meaningful protections.

## CeleBasin

*Continued from page 1*

heartily invited to attend.

What's a CeleBasin? Those who attended the first one last year can attest that it's a fun-filled day at the lake that's part party and part fundraiser for SPBA. This year's CeleBasin will feature live music by Aquila Rose — the hottest band in North Idaho — fabulous door prizes and raffles, a huge silent auction of fantastic merchandise, supervised games for children and information about issues facing the Priest Basin.

"CeleBasin is kind of our version of an Earth Day for the Priest Basin," explained Executive Director Chris Bessler, "with a good dose of a Sotheby's auction, plus little bit of Woodstock mixed in for fun."

Tickets to the CeleBasin are only \$4 advance, or \$5 at the door, and the ticket price include a chance for a terrific door prize: Two free nights in Elkins' lakeside cabin, plus \$100 spending cash to cover the cost of meals. Value of the package is more than \$300!

Got a hankering to go after one of Priest Lake's lunker mackinaw? Then get in on the bonus raffle for a guided

fishing trip for four with Rich Lindsey of Summit Adventures. The value of this trip is \$280; raffle tickets are only \$1.

Two new additions this year are supervised games for kids, and informational displays covering topics at the heart of the SPBA's work. Of course, there will be excellent food and drinks available on a no-host basis from Elkins.

Here's a partial list of what's up for sale in our annual silent auction:

A one-hour flight for up to three persons over the Priest Basin with pilot Earl Chapin; Ski gloves from Bishop's Marina; Full-day raft trip on the Priest River with Four Seasons Outfitting; Dinner for two at Hill's Resort; Shopping certificate at IGA; Lunch for two at Indian Creek Store & Restaurant; First edition of "The Klockmann Diary," from Kookoo Publishing; Car battery from Les Schwab Tire Center; Antique from Mercer's Memories; Dinner for two at Millie's; Dinner for two at Outlet Bay Resort; Lunch for two at Priest Lake Marina; Nine holes of golf at the Ranch Club Golf Course; Brunch for two at the River Pigs Inn; Brunch for two at the Riverview Restaurant; Full day of skiing for two at Schweitzer Mountain Resort; Sundae for six at the Sugar Plum; Lunch for two at the Willow Tree Drive-In; Exquisite handmade canoe paddle by craftsman Jim Hathorn; A chimney cleaning by Jake's Chimney Sweeps; Meals at Grizzly Drive-In; Two tickets to the Spokane Civic Theater; Fine merchandise from Albeni Drug Store, Coast-to-Coast; Entree Gallery, Hands Emporium, Selkirk Supply, Albeni Falls Building Supply and Mimi's Hallmark; and more! •



# Houndpacks Return to the Basin

*Residents and other forest users urged to report abuses*

**D**AWN September 15 is the date. Four-wheel-drive pickups will roll up dirt roads throughout Priest Basin drainages — Soldier Creek, Hunt Creek, East River, Lamb Creek and the Upper West Branch, to name a few.

A "strike dog" will be perched on the hood, sniffing the breezes for the faintest whiff of bear.

The CB radios will cackle inside, relaying positions, planning strategy.

In the truck beds, the bear hounds, locked in tiny kennels, will be whining and crying in unison. Each has a radio collar around its neck; it's in contact with a receiver inside the pickup.

When the strike dog catches scent, the pickups will surround the drainage and the hounds will be released. It will only be a matter of minutes before the first bear is treed. The hunters will go in for the kill, receivers and rifles in hand.

Then on to the next scent.

This is the high-tech sport of hunting black bears with trained, radio-collared hounds. It represents, perhaps, the pinnacle of man's efforts to kill wild creatures with device and efficiency. The bears, hunted primarily for their skins, have virtually no chance.

And for the first time in nearly 10 years, Idaho Fish and Game has reopened the Priest Lake area for fall

hound hunters. SPBA's best efforts notwithstanding, it seems no IFG official can say exactly why hounds have been allowed to return. Political deal-making at a statewide level seems likely.

Concern for the federally protected grizzly bear prompted state officials to close the Priest Lake area to fall season

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**There is no sound basis for this hunt; from a biological perspective, it's foolhardy.**

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hounds in 1983. The sport has long been controversial for other reasons.

Curiously, the status of the Selkirk grizzly has not changed in that time; Old Ephraim is still on the brink of extinction in the Selkirks. And ironically, the grizzly's continuing decline is attributed largely to bear poachers.

SPBA has reacted strongly to IDFG's decision and are taking steps to inform residents of the return of the hound men.

"We're not pleased with hunt at all," said Director Bill Egolf.

"Bear hunters' dogs frequently invade private property and confrontations with

the dogs' owners are not uncommon. We've gotten reports of hound hunters threatening property owners with physical injury and property damage.

"In addition, there's a huge potential for abuse here. One hound hunter with a controlled hunt permit may allow others, who purchase only bear tags, to use his dogs. Dozens of bears can be shot illegally this way, and IDFG has no way of telling which were shot with dogs and which were not.

"And we can add to all that the obvious threats to the Selkirk grizzly bear. One more grizzly mortality in this ecosystem is one too many; if a female is killed, the Selkirk grizzly population may be irreversibly impacted. Hound hunting lends itself nicely to poaching and we have no confidence that these people will exercise restraint if a grizzly was cornered by dogs," Egolf said.

"There is no sound basis for this hunt; it's socially unacceptable and, from a biological perspective, it's foolhardy."

Egolf said SPBA will be distributing posters in September advising area residents to be aware of the potential for confrontations and to contact officials if abuses are suspected. Phone numbers will be listed on the posters.

He also urged readers to write IDFG with concerns; see The Letter Drop. •

## Poachers Continue to Kill Selkirk Grizzlies

**Y**ET another Selkirk Mountains grizzly bear killer has been sentenced in federal court, this time for possession of a threatened or endangered species. The statute of limitations protected the hunter from a serious penalty, however.

Michael W. Droptny of Naples was fined \$4,000 by U.S. District Court in Coeur d'Alene in June for illegally possessing seven grizzly claws. He was also ordered to perform 150 hours of community service work, and will lose hunting and fishing privileges for three years while he is on supervised probation.

According to a report in the Spokesman-Review, Droptny killed the bear in 1980 in an undisclosed location in the Selkirks. The man claimed he shot the animal in self-defense.

Law officers learned through an informant that Droptny

had the claws at his home and obtained a search warrant for them in January. By then, it was too late to file charges for the crime of killing a grizzly, which is a threatened species. A Fish and Wildlife Service agent noted it was past the statute of limitations and "if he had not possessed the parts we would not have had a case."

In an unrelated case, a 26-year-old British Columbia man was fined a mere \$500 for killing a grizzly that was part of an Idaho Fish and Game study of the endangered Selkirk grizzly population. Troy McPhee of Trail, British Columbia, reportedly shot the bear just one mile north of the Idaho-British Columbia border.

Grizzly bear hunting is still permitted in British Columbia, but officials decided to stay charges of killing a grizzly bear out of season. McPhee pleaded guilty to failure to report killing a grizzly. •



# Priest Streamflow Study Under Way

*Early monitoring shows temperatures too high to support trout*

**T**ESTING being performed by Selkirk-Priest Basin Association volunteers as part of a streamflow study of the lower Priest River shows that summertime temperatures in the river are frequently soaring over the 70-degree mark.

That's bad news for the river's trout fishery and complicates an Idaho Department of Water Resources goal of re-establishing trout in the Priest's badly decimated fishery.

The streamflow study has come about following last spring's passage by the Idaho Legislature of a bill authorizing the study as a result of recommendations by a citizen advisory group that worked on the Priest River Basin component of the Comprehensive State Water Plan. SPBA Chairman Bruce Brockway sat on the advisory group.

The objective of the study is to develop a release schedule for the Priest Lake outlet structure that reflects the best combination of economic, recreational and environmental benefits relative to power production, lake levels and river flows.

Two major concerns of the advisory group were reduced boating opportunities on the river during late summer due to low flows, and the lack of a viable coldwater — that is, trout — fishery, presumably due to warm water temperatures.

While the boating issue is a straightforward matter of availability of water,



PHOTO: D. BOSWELL/SPBA

**RANGER, AND OARSMAN TOO.** Priest Lake District Ranger Al Collotzi joined a group of more than 20 public officials on an SPBA-organized raft trip down the length of the lower Priest River in June. The trip was aimed at familiarizing decision makers with the riverine ecosystem the current study aims to enhance.

the fishery issue is a more complex mixture of habitat, water temperatures and water volume. A team of specialists from the Idaho Department of Fish and Game has contracted to do an instream flow incremental methodology study, which should assess the requirements for re-establishing the trout fishery.

Cindy Robertson, an IDFG biologist from Boise, is leading the team, and Bill Horton is providing expertise in conducting the IFIM study. The SPBA is assisting by coordinating nine volunteers who are monitoring water temperatures along the river, from the outlet dam at Priest Lake to the town of Priest River.

At some time this summer, according

to Lance Nelson, a regional IDFG fisheries biologist, the study team will try an experimental release of water from Priest Lake to see if additional flows will reduce the water temperature to an acceptable level for salmonids. The lake level will not be noticeably affected, according to Nelson, lowering only one to two inches.

Nelson also plans to do a temperature profile in Outlet Bay near the river's beginning, in order to chart the depth of the colder water.

Data collection for the IFIM study began in late July, so as this issue of *Sightlines* went to press the findings were inconclusive.

However, the temperatures which SPBA volunteers are recording are well above those which trout can tolerate. The highest temperature yet recorded is 74 degrees; trout undergo stress when temperatures reach 66 degrees, and water temperatures of 75 degrees or more can be lethal.

The cause of the high temperatures and management actions which can bring water temperatures down are matters the study will ultimately assess.

Robertson intends to complete the study and assessment by late September and give her complete report to the IDWR at that time.

Watch further issues of *Sightlines* for the SPBA's analysis of the report. •

## VERBATIM

*"My job in the coming weeks will be to convince people in Washington, D.C. that it's OK to cut down trees."*

—Senator Larry Craig (R-Idaho), December 1990.

*"The time is long past when we can expect to convince the public through expensive public relations programs that what we are doing is correct."*

—Canadian Forester J. H. Cayford, writing in the journal of the Canadian Institute of Forestry, February 1991.



## THE LETTER DROP

# Ghost of the Selkirks

## White-tailed ptarmigan are a wildlife riddle

**L**ES Gissel still remembers the crisp, autumn day almost 30 years ago.

He was having coffee with Ed Crockett at the Pastime Cafe in Sandpoint. Crockett had been hunting grouse in the headwaters of Fox Creek, on the westslope of Bald Mountain. He was telling Gissel about his kills. Two of the birds he shot had strange white plumage.

At the time, Gissel was an IDFG Conservation Officer. He'd heard a lot of unusual hunting stories — off the tall tale variety. But this story, he thought, seemed genuine.

He asked Crockett if the birds' parts were still recoverable. They were, so Gissel went to see.

Both birds' wings were almost pure white, he recalls; he'd never seen anything like them on any local species. Gissel sent them to the University of Idaho for analysis.

Neither the wings nor the analysis ever came back — lost, apparently.

Too bad.

Because that chance meeting 30 years ago in the Pastime Cafe and the obscure events that followed may be the nearest anyone will ever come to solving the wildlife riddle of the Selkirk Mountains: Do white-tailed ptarmigan inhabit the area?

Some say yes, others scoff at the notion. But while the reported sightings are infrequent, they are persistent.

Longtime IDFG Conservation Officer, Paul Flinn, referred to ptarmigan sightings in his landmark study *The Caribou of Idaho*, authored in 1956. Flinn reported at least three different sightings, going back to the 1920s.

That kind of hearsay account occurs once or twice every year, according to veteran Sandpoint birder Earl Chapin. Chapin has never seen a ptarmigan in the Selkirks but he's a believer.

"Ptarmigan are rare," he said, "but they're not accidentals. The Selkirk population may be extremely small but I really think they're here."

He and Gissel both point out that white-tailed ptarmigan exist all around the Selkirks, in Montana and Canada.

Gissel says he's had credible reports of ptarmigan sightings in the Blue Creek

drainage east of Clark Fork and in the Cabinets.

And Idaho's prestigious Natural Heritage Program, which records credible sightings of rare and sensitive species in the state, reports a ptarmigan was seen in the Lookout Pass area only a few years ago.

Paul Hanna, the current IDFG Regional biologist, is, however, one of the doubters.

"They're a figment of someone's imagination," he said flatly.

"We've checked 12,000 hunters every year for the last 25 years and there have been 2,000-3,000 grouse—ruffed, spruce and blue grouse—taken every year. I've never seen a ptarmigan; they just don't show up. I don't believe they're here."

The birds' own habits may explain the difficulty finding them.

Ptarmigan in summer are mottled with the same hues and colors of the background environment in which they live and they have a habit of sitting stock still and silent in the presence of approaching danger.

In winter, they turn completely white, except for their eyes and beak, and will burrow under the snow for days. In any season, however, they will be found only high up near the talus slopes at treeline. Few observers make the trip that high in summer; virtually nobody makes it in winter.

And even if someone did, finding a ptarmigan can be like chasing a phantom. Glacier Park naturalist Lloyd Parratt looked for nesting ptarmigan there for 10 years before he found one in 1955.

Do they really exist?

No one can say.

But, then, no one has gone looking for ptarmigan in the Selkirks either.

SPBA directors and staff thought a *Sightlines* article might arouse more interest in this little feathered phantom—the wildlife riddle of the Priest Basin.

Any members or readers who think they have seen or heard ptarmigan are urged to notify either SPBA, IDFG or the Forest Service.

And any readers who make the trip to the high country should sharpen their senses—if ptarmigan do exist locally, whoever finds them first will have carved out a small slice of backcountry immortality. •

**Lake Dredge and Fill.** A Priest Lake landowner, Orville Bailey, has proposed a dredge and fill project that would entirely eliminate 40 acres of designated wetlands near the mouth of the Thoroughfare. In fact, the plan is so grandiose that even some public officials say they are incredulous. Nonetheless, your letter is important. The official Idaho Department of Lands comment period has ended, but write to demand that if this application is not rejected that a full public review and hearing process be instituted. Address your letter to Mr. W.R. Pitman, Manager, Idaho Lake Protection Act, Idaho Department of Lands, P.O. Box 670, Coeur d'Alene, ID 83814. The Army Corps of Engineers will also accept comment, but their hearing period has not been established. To learn the dates and where letters should be sent, call the Corps at 765-7237.

**Bear Dogs.** After 10 years, the Idaho Department of Fish and Game decided to permit the hunting of bears with dogs in the Priest Basin. Aside from the social and ethical questions of hunting animals down with dogs, hunting with dogs in grizzly bear habitat will certainly lead to more grizzly killings. This abrogates the grizzly's threatened status and leads the great bears one step closer to extinction here. Write the Idaho Department of Fish and Game to voice your opposition to this practice. Send it to their state office at 600 South Walnut, Boise, ID 83707.

**Huckleberry Bay.** If you didn't see the member alert on page 4, please go back and have a look. It's D-Day for Huckleberry Bay again, and your input is needed!



# JOIN THE SPBA

*Support the Selkirk-Priest Basin Association by becoming a member!*

**O**ur newsletter, published quarterly and funded entirely by membership contributions, keeps you informed of natural resource issues within the Priest River Basin area, and offers updates on the efforts SPBA has undertaken to promote environmental excellence. The environment belongs to us all and we belong to it. The environment gives to us all; now is the time to give something back.

**M**ake a contribution; keep *Sightlines* coming regularly, and keep abreast of the conservation and environmental issues that concern you. Dues and contributions are tax deductible.

## Enroll me

as a member of the Selkirk-Priest Basin Association. Enclosed are my annual membership dues as checked below:

	Individual Dues	Joint Dues
Regular	<input type="checkbox"/> \$25.00	<input type="checkbox"/> \$30.00
Limited Income	<input type="checkbox"/> \$15.00	<input type="checkbox"/> \$20.00

To help more, I'm enclosing and additional contribution:

☐ \$10    ☐ \$25    ☐ \$50    ☐ \$100    ☐ \$500    ☐ Other

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Winter Address \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

Winter Home Phone (    ) \_\_\_\_\_ Winter Work Phone (    ) \_\_\_\_\_

Summer Address \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

Summer Home Phone (    ) \_\_\_\_\_ Winter Work Phone (    ) \_\_\_\_\_

**I am available to participate actively in the following (please circle all that apply):**

- A. Telephoning    B. Mailings/envelope stuffing    C. Clerical Assistance    D. Field Work    E. Water Monitoring  
F. Legal Assistance    G. Research    H. Writing    I. Photography    J. Lecturing    K. Graphics    L. Fundraising  
M. Adopted Mile Litter Pickup    Z. Other \_\_\_\_\_

**I am most interested in or concerned about (please circle all that apply):**

- A. Fisheries    B. Wildlife & Habitat Protection    C. Recreation Potential    D. Water Quality    E. Scenic Quality    F. Road Construction & Management  
G. Economic Impacts    H. Timber Harvest Levels    I. Deficit Timber Sales    J. New Resort Developments  
K. Timber Harvest Methods    L. Old Growth Forests    Z. Other \_\_\_\_\_

MAIL TO: SELKIRK-PRIEST BASIN ASSOCIATION, P.O. BOX 181, COOLIN, ID 83821

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