

CLEAR CUT. Looking over the Lower Green Bonnet sale in Trapper Creek and Caribou Creek reveals a scarred, overcut forest.

Judge to Rule in Land Board Case

AN IDAHO DISTRICT COURT judge who heard arguments in November on SPBA's unprecedented lawsuit against the Idaho Land Board is expected to issue a ruling soon, and both sides seem eager for the decision.

At issue is whether or not SPBA has legal standing to bring its action against the Board for mismanagement

of school trust lands. A ruling in SPBA's favor could upset the Board's imperious claim that its business conduct is above review by state courts and the concerns of Idaho citizens.

At a spirited November hearing in Coeur d'Alene, the Land Board argued that SPBA has no right to bring the lawsuit.

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Huck Bay In Jeopardy Yet Again

THE LONG-RUNNING FIGHT against a major development on Priest Lake's remote Huckleberry Bay enters a new chapter Feb. 24, when an appeal by the Huckleberry Bay Co. goes before the Bonner County Board of Commissioners.

Member Alert!
February 24
hearing set

With two new commissioners voted onto the board last November, the Huckleberry Bay development is entering an uncertain political arena — and SPBA is once again issuing an urgent call to members and friends to attend the coming hearing, or submit written comments beforehand.

"This hearing may be a milestone in the fight against the mega-development at Priest Lake," said SPBA Director Chris Bessler. "Two of the three commissioners are new and may not be familiar with either the issues or the resounding majority of citizens who have opposed this development for the last 10 years."

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Pete's Bog a wealth of water worth preserving

SPBA MEMBERS AND PRIEST Lake property owners Jim and Judy Lea are recent graduates in the Master Water Watchers program administered by the University of Idaho Extension Service. The program entails 30 hours of classroom study of water pollution problems, and 35 hours of community projects related to water quality. As part of their project, the Leas have "adopted" the Hanna-

Bismark aquifer and are promoting public awareness and protection. To that end, Jim Lea submitted the following story:

WHEN PETE VAN GELDER bought a lake lot on Kalispell Bay in 1945 from the Schneider family homestead, the area from Reynold's Creek to Kalispell Creek and beyond to the Forest Service border was a swamp.

The area along the lake consisted of bogs, springs and seeps. There was so little terra firma that fill dirt had to be brought in to provide a foundation for the lake cabins. Pete, being one of the original conservationists in the area, resisted the urge to fill in the swamp and convinced his neighbors, Harry and Jo Peters, to do the same. As a result, Pete's Bog — as one wag called it — is

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Chairman's Message

After 10 Years, the Time Has Come

IT SEEMS HARD TO BELIEVE that 10 years have passed since the state of Idaho made a land trade with developers intent on creating a mega-development on Priest Lake's pristine Huckleberry Bay. But it has been that long, and the citizens of Bonner County have overwhelmingly and repeatedly spoke out against large-scale development of the bay ever since.

Time has come to put this 10-year hassle to rest. Each and every scheme by the Huckleberry Bay Company (HBC) and its predecessors for development at Huckleberry Bay has been rejected. In their last decision on the matter, the Bonner County Planning & Zoning Commission concluded with a clear and rational set of reasons to deny development at the bay. Now the out-of-state developer has appealed to the Bonner County Commissioners to overturn their own Planning & Zoning Commission.

Those reasons cited by the Planning & Zoning Commission last August for denial still stand. The lack of medical, education, police and fire services hasn't changed. The threats of degradation in the environmentally sensitive and vulnerable area haven't changed. The additional costs which taxpayers will incur in providing new services to such a remote area of the county haven't changed, and nor has the fact that those costs will not be offset by the new taxes. Traffic congestion concerns haven't gone away, nor has the question of whom will maintain the road to the development. The location and density of this large-scale development are still not justifiable under the County Comprehensive Plan. Finally, the failure of the developer to assess the cumulative impacts on the costs to the taxpayers and the environment still remain.

So what has changed? Nothing relative to the scheme to develop. What has changed is the makeup of the Bonner County Commission. Two of the three commission members are new. They are Commissioners Gene Brown (R-District 3), who replaced Jim McNall, and Wayne Newcomb (D-District



2), who replaced Dean Stevens from Priest Lake. Both campaigned and were elected on the promise to hold the line on taxes and costs of government. They also promised to listen and act on the wants and needs of their constituents. On both of these counts, the commissioners would only have to review the files in the planning and building department to discover the evidence regarding how local folks feel about the Huckleberry Bay Company's scheme to develop the area, and the attendant increased costs for the taxpayers. The public response already on file is uniquely voluminous and the sentiment unmistakable. The response from the public is: "No. Absolutely no!"

For years planning commission members have come and gone and county commissioners have come and gone. Yet the public response to the schemes of Huckleberry Bay developers remains. It has been a strong and consistent no, and for a lengthy list of good reasons.

If the new commissioners are to fulfill their campaign pledges to listen to the people they represent, they will join with carryover commissioner Susan MacLeod (who has regularly voted against this development) to end this 10-year parade of schemes and send the out-of-state developers the final message. In doing so, they would ease the certain prospect of increased taxes and costs to the environment, avoid violation of the comprehensive plan, and reflect and respect the wishes of the citizens of the county.

Bruce Brockway

Bruce Brockway
SPBA Chairman

Scholarship Fund for Priest River Senior Kicked Off

AS THE SCHOOL YEAR winds into the second semester, SPBA is kicking off its scholarship fund drive for a worthy Priest River Lamanna High School senior.

The SPBA directors will award the third annual SPBA Scholarship of \$1,000 with the goal of promoting excellence in education and supporting the Priest River community.

Shortly after the 1992 scholarship was awarded to Desiree Ann Jachetta, an SPBA member donated \$200 to the 1993

scholarship fund. That head start makes the fund just \$800 short of the scholarship total.

Contributions to add to the scholarship fund are being sought now. As found in the past, the scholarships are greatly appreciated by their beneficiaries.

Students who apply will provide scholastic records and other pertinent information, which is then reviewed by an SPBA selection committee. The committee also considers applicants' college goals, academic achievement level, col-

lege aptitude tests scores, extracurricular involvement, letters of recommendation and statement of need. The SPBA will award the \$1,000 scholarship at commencement on June 8 at the high school.

If you would like to contribute to this deserving cause, please send your donation to: SPBA, Attention: Scholarship Fund, P.O. Box 1809, Priest River, ID 83856.

Or for further information, call Executive Secretary Mary Boone at 208/448-2971.

Former ranger addresses SPBA

Collotzi: 'It Is Time to Stop This Waste'

EDITORS NOTE: On Nov. 1 Priest Lake District Ranger Al Collotzi was reassigned as Land Stewardship Coordinator for the Idaho Panhandle National Forest supervisor's office in Coeur d'Alene. Collotzi, who was district ranger since 1988, will now be working on resource projects in North Idaho's forests while commuting from his home in Priest River. Replacing Collotzi is Kent Dunstan, who took over the helm at Priest Lake on Feb. 8. He comes from the Avery Ranger District, where he was the district ranger since 1989. Before that, Dunstan served various Forest Service positions in the Southwest.

SPBA has worked with Collotzi on forest issues since his arrival here, and as he left his position as district ranger asked him to submit some comments on resource issues within the Basin. His comments follow:

About four and a half years ago, my family and I moved from Denver to the Priest River area with little knowledge of the people or the area. We found that in both cases we were not disappointed. We found a land abounding in a

rich heritage and valuable forest resources, but the greatest resource of all was the people we found living here.

This resource like others varies considerably over a wide range of conditions depending on how it is acted upon. Even so, for the most part, I have found the people in this area to be concerned about their environment, how they treat each other, and making this area a better place to live. As a district ranger and an individual living in the area, I have talked with many of these people and I believe that all of them want only what is good for the land.

However, this human resource is being wasted as we battle over what is and isn't. It is time to stop this waste and put this valuable resource to work where everyone can benefit. I believe that in this area there are those that have the capability to sit down together, work out their differences, and agree upon what the land is capable of producing whether it be wood products, recreation, wildlife, or whatever, while at the same time protecting all of the valuable resources of this area. I know it can be done; I have seen it happen in the past in other areas. Why not here? The only problem: "There are no losers."

New Furniture Business Could Fit Area's Needs

SPBA'S COMMUNITY development committee recently met with Remi Couriard, a dynamic furniture designer from New Zealand whose zest for business is matched only by his gregariousness.

Couriard, who also runs his own college, spent the day educating and tempting the group with his enthusiasm and ideas on starting a business that would utilize local materials and workers to produce high-value furniture.

The SPBA team also met with Priest River Industrial Park representatives about the concept. The Industrial Park has previously looked for established businesses that were interested in relocating and was intrigued by the idea of tailoring a new business to fit the Basin's unique resources.

DEQ's Lake Scientist Undertakes Long-awaited Priest Lake Study

THE PRIEST LAKE STUDY is now up and running under the competent direction of Glen Rothrock, a limnologist (lake scientist) from the Coeur d'Alene field office of the Division of Environmental Quality (DEQ). Rothrock's first two months on the job have been spent drafting a tentative work plan for the study and developing a budget.

The work plan outlines the components of the study and is intended to serve as a guidance document for objectives, tasks and expenditures. The first field season will be used as a "scoping" process to discover where the bulk of effort should be focused during the next two field seasons.

The Citizen's Volunteer Monitoring Program (CVMP), which has been collecting data since 1986 for trend analysis, will be integrated into this more intensive study. Rothrock intends to use the volunteers' talents and energies for tasks specific to the project rather than the general sampling that has been done in

the past.

The CVMP coordinator, Jules Gindraux (a long time SPBA director), said, "The volunteers are very enthusiastic about being able to continue our six years of commitment to the health of the lake."

The CVMP will receive some compensation for expenses but overall will likely save taxpayers thousands of dollars by their efforts. SPBA commends the dedication of the volunteers.

A large portion of the study will focus on tributaries to the lake. Rothrock would welcome those interested in volunteering to assist DEQ technicians in stream monitoring. Anyone wanting to help should contact Gordon West c/o SPBA for more information.

Successful completion of the Priest Lake Project depends upon full funding for the next three years. Members should contact Idaho legislators and Governor Cecil Andrus as soon as possible to urge them to support the project.

See the Letter Drop, page 7.

Huck Bay

Continued from page 1

"It's quite possible the Huckleberry Bay Co. lawyers could go in there and talk this new commission into approving the development despite the extensive record opposing it," Bessler said. "It's critical that the citizens who have opposed this thing for years attend and once again speak up strenuously against it."

The hearing will be held 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 24, in the Bonner County Courthouse in Sandpoint.

Although the Huckleberry Bay Co. has proposed several versions of a large-scale development at the bay — and been turned down repeatedly — the new hearing is coming about because the Bonner County Planning and Zoning Commission last August unanimously rejected the company's latest application for a Planned Unit Development. Decisions by the planning commission can be overridden by the county commissioners, and HBC President David Bell quickly appealed the decision to the county commissioners.

However, after the November elections produced two new county commissioners the company asked for a postponement of the appeal hearing.

The new commissioners are Democrat Wayne Newcomb and Republican Gene Brown. They replace Democrats Dean Stevens and Jim McNall, and join the sitting commissioner, Susan MacLeod.

Both Newcomb and Brown campaigned vigorously on the promise to listen to the citizens, and Bessler said that campaign promise is one reason citizens should attend and speak at the Feb. 24 hearing.

"Priest Lake has been a pawn for out-of-state developers for almost 10 years now, since Diamond International engineered the trade for state lands along the lake despite local public opinion that was almost 90 percent opposed. The politicians in Boise didn't give a hoot about the local people," said Bessler.

"Since then more than 80 percent of citizens commenting on the various proposals for large-scale development at the lake have been opposed. It's pretty rare to get 80 percent of the people to agree on anything, so I hope our new commis-

sioners are listening. About the only people who favor this development are the Spokane developers — and they're in it just to make a bunch of money regardless of the impacts on residents."

The plan which the company has appealed to the commissioners would create two subdivisions containing 41 residential lots within a Planned Unit Development that encompasses 220 acres. The Huckleberry Bay Subdivision would have 14 lots on 16 acres fronting the lake, while the Ridgeview Terrace Subdivision would have 27 lots on 46 acres. The remaining 157 acres would be designated open space, although much of that land would be devoted to the development's sewage treatment system.

Over the years the company has proposed various versions of a much larger development along the bay. Last March, it proposed a PUD of 100 units on 400 acres, but that proposal was denied.

However, these proposals are the tip of the iceberg in the company's overall plans for the 1,565 acres it owns by the bay. Last April Bell said he envisions developing up to a total 313 dwelling units, with as many as 40 different condominium buildings and 182 single-family lakefront and upper tier lots.

There would also be a store, marina, gas pumps, fire station and nine-hole golf course. The overall development would be more than twice as large as the lake's current largest communities of Coolin and Nordman.

SPBA has contended since the outset that siting what in effect will be a new city in such a remote location will destroy the natural character of Priest

Lake. It clearly violates the Bonner County Comprehensive Plan, which stipulates that new development must locate in areas of compatible uses.

SPBA has also contended the development is deficient for other reasons:

- Because of its remote location it would pose major new burdens on county services, including schools, police and fire protection. The cost of providing these services will be far higher than tax revenues the development will generate.

- The development poses a major threat of pollution to Priest Lake through contamination of groundwater by the development's sewage system, and from runoff.

- Although the company has improved the Eastshore Road, no one has agreed to maintain the road north of Indian Creek. If the development goes through, county residents may get saddled with that expense, too.

- The development will ruin wildlife habitat and harm wetlands areas.

SPBA has been represented by attorney Chuck Sheroke. For the upcoming hearing, the group has also hired Sandpoint attorney Paul Vogel.

Although the case could wind up in court if the commissioners override the planning commission denial, Bessler expressed hope that the commissioners will listen to their constituents.

"It's never been more important for those opposed to this development to speak up," he said. "They should attend the Feb. 24 hearing if at all possible, and also bring or send in written comments."

For addresses to send in written comments, see The Letter Drop, page 7.

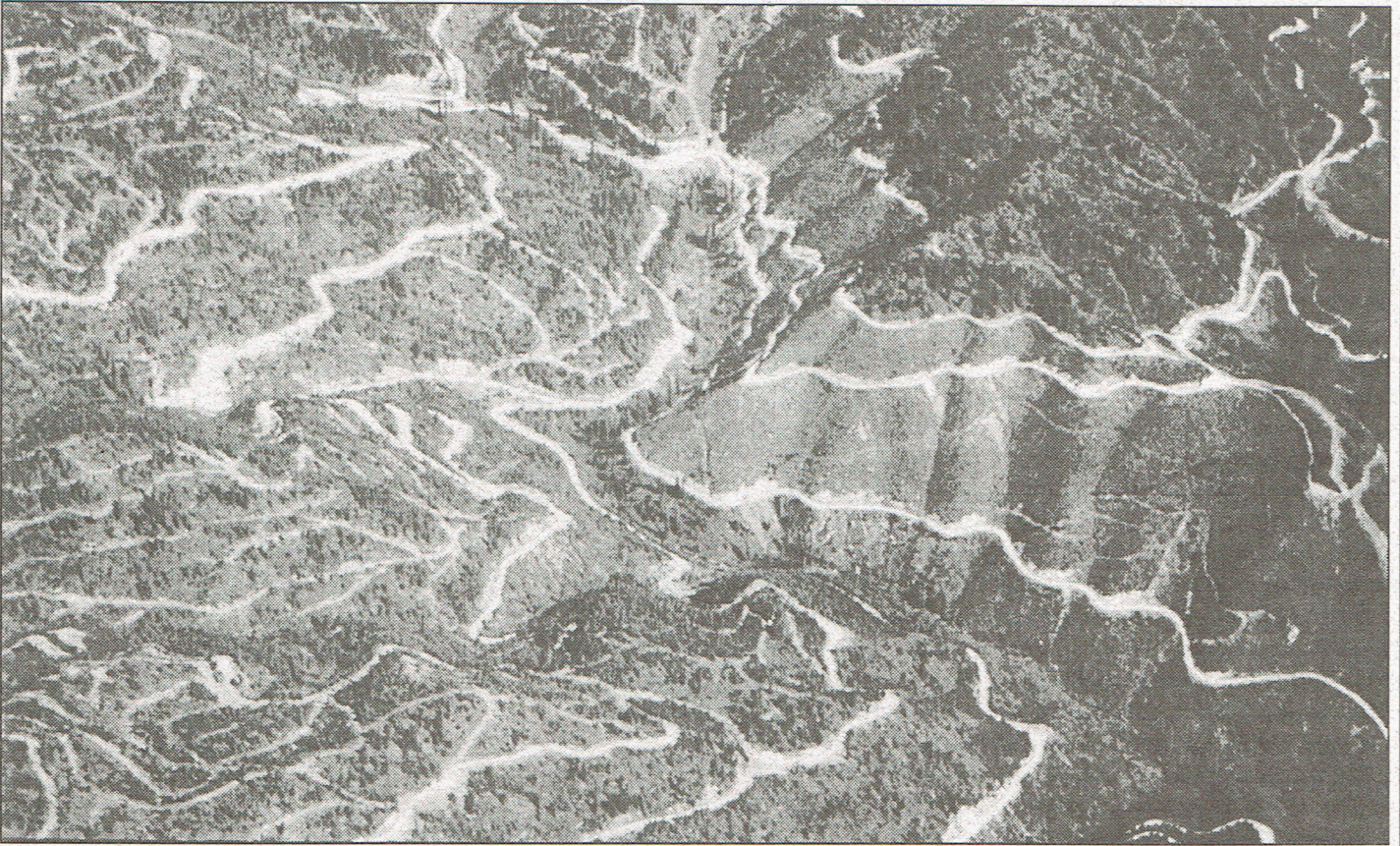
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"We must take responsibility for the impact of state forest management on the environment and public resources ... We have elevated concern for environmental protection to a footing comparable to our ... (other) responsibilities."

— Washington state Commissioner of Public Lands Brian Boyles, writing in a newsletter published by state Department of Natural Resources, April 1992.

"Any consideration other than revenue production (from Idaho state lands) is prohibited ... The public's wishes are canceled by the objectives of the endowment."

— Idaho Department of Lands Director Stanley F. Hamilton, addressing the audience at a symposium on natural resource policy held at the Spokane International Ag Trade Center, November 1991.



OUR SCHOOL CHILDREN'S FUTURE. Abusive management of Idaho state lands is by no means limited to the Trapper Creek drainage. Above is the Floodwood State Forest, where Land Board policies have destroyed the Breakfast Creek drainage. SPBA's lawsuit would set a precedent for management of all state lands.

Land Board

Continued from page 1

Among other things, the Land Board claimed Idahoans have no right to recreation on state lands, and therefore, have no right to sue for damage to recreational opportunities caused by excessive logging.

SPBA responded by citing provisions in state law plainly designating to the general public lands adjacent to Priest Lake for recreational purposes.

The Board also argued that Idaho schoolchildren have no legal interest in the lands because relevant laws referred to "common schools" and school "institutions" as interested beneficiaries of the revenue generated from grant lands.

SPBA attorneys decried this argument as an exercise in semantics, calling the Board's arguments the "bricks and mortar" theory of trust land management. The group said schoolhouses have no purpose unless to benefit the schoolchildren inside.

SPBA read the judge excerpts from transcripts of Idaho's constitutional con-

vention in 1889 where the framers of the state constitution repeatedly and emphatically discussed the importance of holding and managing the lands for Idaho's school children.

The framers' selfless, caring expressions of concern for Idaho's future generations stood in sharp contrast to the Land Board's position that the children have no lawful interest in the trust.

"The framers of Idaho constitution are turning in their graves in witness to what the Land Board is doing to the children's trust," SPBA's Dave Boswell said. "Those lands were consecrated in perpetuity for our children's sake; the Land Board has desecrated them and now argues for disenfranchising the kids. It's shameful."

SPBA also responded strenuously to the Land Board's arguments that it lacked legal standing because the injuries inflicted on the lands and the children are shared generally by all citizens and therefore, should be decided in a political arena, not the courts.

"This argument," Boswell said, "is that elected officials can authorize the

Land Board to breach its trust duties to the schoolchildren and, once having committed its breaches, the Land Board can shield itself from judicial scrutiny by asserting that the ballot box, not the courts, is the only process available for redressing the injuries.

"The Land Board wants it both ways," Boswell said. "When it wants to avoid its trust duties or liability for breaching them, it hides behind the political process and when it wants to avoid the political process, it hides behind its trust duties."

"They have successfully obfuscated the issues in the past using this approach but its duplicity has been exposed now; I think the judge is seeing right through it."

SPBA's lawsuit is drawing attention from across the nation. Inquiries from interested citizens and public interest groups have been received from many western states and as far away as Pennsylvania. All want to be kept abreast of the court's decisions — which could affect millions of acres of state grant land.

SPBA Asks for EIS in Rogers-Mosquito Sale

SPBA'S FORESTRY committee has once again appealed the Priest Lake Ranger District's decision to log approximately 7 million board feet of timber from the Rogers and Mosquito creek drainages. The group would prefer to see about half that amount of timber be cut in the sensitive area.

The "new" decision, called Alternative F, is the same as Alt. E (modified) which was appealed last year. That appeal was upheld by the Regional Supervisor and the decision was remanded back to the district ranger, according to SPBA Forestry Chairman Bill Egolf.

In the SPBA's "Request for Relief," the SPBA requested that the Forest Service do an environmental impact statement (EIS) as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) when activities are likely to cause significant impacts to any resources.

The district has only done an environmental assessment (EA) which is a much



FIRST-HAND LOOK. *Forestry Committee Chairman Bill Egolf looks at riparian zones during an on-site survey in late November in the Rogers-Mosquito sale area.*

less rigorous study used to identify potential impacts. It is the group's contention that issues of significance related to Alt. F were purposely understated in order to allow an unsupportable level of cutting.

The Lower West Branch drainage has historically been abused, suffering habitat fragmentation and hydrologic disequilibrium.

Although SPBA had indicated that the choice of Alt. C (which would log about half of the volume of Alt. F) would not be appealed, the pressure to "get the cut out" has resulted in a third appeal of the same decision.

"We expect that this appeal will follow the course of its predecessor. The group hopes that a new administration and a new district ranger will put an end to this bureaucratic game-playing and open the eyes of the Forest Service to our concerns for healthy ecosystems and sustainable forestry," Chairman Egolf said.

Corps Alternatives Target River's Water Flow

THE ARMY CORPS of Engineers presented a range of alternatives regarding modification of the water release schedule at the Outlet Dam to a gathering of about 30 people on Nov. 23. The alternatives were the result of the Priest River study by the Corps which looked at balancing needs and beneficial uses between the lake and the river.

The dam was originally built in 1948 and rebuilt in the '70s for the sole purpose of stabilizing the lake level and extending the recreational season for Priest Lake boaters.

However, an unfortunate side effect has been that in low water years such as the last three, the river is reduced to a trickle for several months, impacting river recreationists and fish. In August of last year, SPBA director Gordon West reported having to portage his canoe over gravel bars more than 20 times in a six-mile run below the Dickensheet

Campground. The Corps' task was to develop a plan to ease the river's problems without seriously harming boating on the lake.

The alternatives were all similar in that they only pertained to the months from July through October and would impound more water than at present. The gauge at Outlet Bay now reads 3.0 when the lake is at "normal summer pool." River enhancing measures would maintain the lake at 3.2 on the gauge, the maximum level possible without alteration of the dam, until the river needed more water.

The alternative recommended by Corps representatives would have this extra stored water released at a rate that would keep at least 300 cubic feet per second (cfs) of water flowing in the river during summer. The current minimum discharge is 60 cfs, a volume that is far too low for recreation and is very stressful for the river's fish. West thought that

300 cfs would be adequate for floating in a "durable" canoe.

Idaho Department of Water Resources Director Bill Graham emphasized that any change of operations will require legislative action since the 3.0 level is part of Idaho Code. Another public meeting will take place this summer for the benefit of seasonal residents, so any proposal to the legislature must wait until 1994.

In response to one resident's worry that a higher lake level would damage his property, Graham pointed out that the level frequently exceeds 4.5 feet for two months during spring runoff, and has historically topped 6.0 feet. The 3.2 level would only last a short time until it was used in the river.

Most concerns were over having less than 3.0 in the lake, as many bays are nearly too shallow for safe boating now. The extra water would be a boon for those residents.

Pete's Bog

Continued from page 1

filled with skunk cabbage and ferns in the spring and summer.

When we bought the bog in 1987, I was impressed by the beauty of this wild remnant and by the constancy of the flow from the spring on this property. Long-time residents assured me these little streams never go dry even in droughts. Our well, which is perhaps six feet deep, has never failed.

The puzzle of Pete's Bog became a little more clear when my wife and I took the Water Watchers course offered by the University of Idaho and Kootenai County Extension Service. I learned that our bog is technically a fen. The water source for a fen is derived from ground water from an aquifer. Where, then, did this aquifer originate?

As one drives north along Highway 57, a plateau is reached at Lamb Creek. This gradually sloping valley extends from Lamb Creek to Nordman and beyond. It is composed of glacial outwash from the lateral moraine of the glacier that chiseled out the Priest Lake Basin.

The valley floor consists of porous gravel and rock. Organic matter is evident only in the first foot or so of top soil. Beneath this is washed gravel that can be seen at the gravel pit just west of the Priest Lake Ranger Station. This type of material is precisely the same as that which lies beneath the Rathdrum Prairie and which constitutes the geologic substrate for the Rathdrum Aquifer, the prime source of water for both Spokane and Coeur d'Alene.

As I studied the USGS topo maps of this area, I was struck by the number of streams that terminate as they enter the valley from the surrounding mountains. Although many of these streams are intermittent, some, such as Indian Creek, flow continuously.

Conversely, the named streams such as Kalispell Creek receive ground water contributions through seeps and springs. Reynold's Creek seems to be derived entirely from the aquifer. Hager Lakes arises de novo from the aquifer and then sends its outflow right back into the ground in the course of just a few hundred feet.

Preservation of our Hanna-Bismark wetlands will not only help ensure Priest Lake water quality but will also preserve ranch lands, open vistas and prime grizzly bear spring forage range.

Since an aquifer receives, stores and then releases water from its underground reservoir, the release of water from the aquifer in summer and fall likely explains the minimal fluctuation of water flow evident in many of the West Side streams.

Hanna Flats and Bismark Meadows overlie our presumptive aquifer. A hydrologic map of the area indicates that most of this valley is either wetland or land with a very high water table. It seems likely that even more of this land would qualify as wetland were it not for the "reclamation" projects of the earliest homesteaders.

Even now standing water is evident in the open meadows except in the driest months. Aquifer recharge areas remain damp even in droughts. The cedars in the Hanna Flats Natural Area did not burn for this very reason.

Recognizing that an aquifer exists is only the first step in preserving it. We hope the Division of Environmental Quality will include the Hanna-Bismark Aquifer in the newly funded Priest Lake water quality study. We need to ensure that the aquifer water quality is not sullied by helter-skelter development, by septic tanks and even by our own Kalispell Bay sewer lagoon which sits right on top of our drinking water source.

Preservation of our Hanna-Bismark wetlands will not only help ensure Priest Lake water quality but will also preserve ranch lands, open vistas and prime grizzly bear spring forage range.

Hopefully, there will still be skunk cabbage growing in Pete's Bog a hundred — or even a thousand — years from now.

Huckleberry Bay. The Huckleberry Bay Company is attempting to turn the tables on the Bonner County Planning & Zoning Commission. The company has submitted an appeal of the last P&Z decision against HBC to the Bonner County Commission, which has two new members. The commissioners will consider the appeal on Feb. 24. Time is drawing short for the public to let new commissioners Wayne Newcomb and Gene Brown, who joined Susan MacLeod, know how they feel about the misplaced, unwanted and undesirable development proposed for the beautiful

THE LETTER DROP

bay on Priest Lake. See story page 1, and send comments to the three commissioners at: Bonner County Courthouse, 215 S. First Avenue, Sandpoint, ID 83864.

Priest Lake Water Quality Study. The study is finally underway, see page 3. Division of Environmental Quality lim-

nologist Glen Rothrock is beginning the huge task by drafting a tentative work plan for the first season of study. The successful completion of the Priest Lake study hinges upon full funding for the next three years. Members should contact Idaho legislators and Governor Cecil Andrus as soon as possible to urge them to guarantee funding. Address these key legislators at the Capitol Building, Boise, ID 83720: Sen. Tim Tucker and Reps. Jim Stoicheff and Monica Beaudoin of District 1; and Sen Mary Lou Reed of District 2. Write to the Governor at the Statehouse, Boise, ID 83720.

Lumber Quality on the Decline

POOOR QUALITY LUMBER, the result of decades of "cutting the best and leaving the rest" has left architects and builders across the country put off with wood as the choice of building materials.

Now, alternative building products are appearing and the construction trade is pleased — with the quality and the cost.

Engineered joists, like the Silent Floor system made by Boise-based Trus-Joist Corp., and polystyrene foam panels are beginning to displace lumber as a building material.

Spokane architect Jon Saylor says that the quality of dimension lumber is "bad" because little high-quality timber remains. As a result, he is using alternative building materials in his designs.

And builder Larry Haight thinks the new products are superior to today's dimension lumber products and have entered the market to stay.

"These products will become the standard — more the rule than the exception," he said.

As the high-value old growth disappeared — only about 5 percent of the old growth forests still stand nationwide — the timber industry turned to cutting immature, second- and third-growth trees. Much of the dimension lumber from this type of timber is unusable for construction because of warping, twisting and large, insecure knots.

But industry's need to feed the mills has pushed timber harvest levels beyond the land's capacity to keep pace. The rising cut led to rising demand for stumpage, pushing timber and board

prices higher while quality goes down.

"At many mills, quality counts for nothing, quantity is everything," Saylor said. He called sawmill procedures "sloppy" and is avoiding lumber in his designs now; instead, he's using a "tremendous amount" of engineered products.

Moreover, finger-jointed studs are replacing solid lumber as a framing material. They're straighter, more stable, mostly knot-free and stronger than milled lumber. And they make use of shorter pieces of wood — pieces that might formerly have been burned, chipped or discarded as mill-ends.

SPBA Director Barry Rosenberg said the advent of alternative building products is a sign the timber industry has mismanaged the country's forests.

"It's clear that industry is cutting itself out of the building market. There's virtually no high-value timber remaining and young second growth is a poor and expensive substitute. Builders are looking elsewhere now. The free market is sending a signal that America's forests have been abused," he said.

And while Rosenberg praised some alternative materials for making better use of every scrap of wood fiber, he said a troubling question lingers about how woodcutters are being treated.

"Lumberjacks get paid by the thousand board feet; that's a lumber scale left over from the turn of the century. But mills are making products from every chip in the log. I don't think it's fair that woodcutters get paid for only part of the product they deliver while mills get to profit from it all," he said.

JOIN THE SPBA

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

Our newsletter, funded entirely by member contributions, keeps you informed of natural resource issues within the Priest Basin, and offers regular updates on the efforts of SPBA to promote environmental excellence. Now is time to give to the environment which sustains us all.

Make a contribution; keep *Sightlines* coming regularly. Dues and donations are tax-deductible.

Enroll me as a member of the SPBA. Enclosed are my dues:

	Individual dues	Couples
Regular:	<input type="checkbox"/> \$25	<input type="checkbox"/> \$30
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To help more, I'm enclosing an additional contribution:

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☐ **Yes, I'm interested in volunteering for SPBA work. Call me.**

SELKIRK-PRIEST BASIN ASSOCIATION
P.O. BOX 1809
PRIEST RIVER, ID 83856

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