

Sight



Lines

NEWSLETTER OF THE SELKIRK-PRIEST BASIN ASSOCIATION

FALL/WINTER 1996

Executive Director's Message

I would like to begin my first column by saying I'm delighted to be a part of SPBA. The board hired me in late July (on a part-time basis) with instructions to help SPBA grow and continue its history of success — and we're on our way.

As we prepare for the future, it's important to remember SPBA's contributions and consider what the Basin might be like if SPBA never existed. What would the mountainsides look like? Or the shoreline of Priest Lake? How much more of our priceless old growth would have been logged?

The next question is, What might the Basin look like if SPBA ceased to exist? If you don't think it would be any different, just take a look at the article about the large area the Forest Service is proposing to log along Priest Lake.

If we're to make a difference, it's critical that we let our legislators and the media know that we're not raging radicals — we're citizens concerned with the long-term health and well-being of our environment. We care about the Basin's inhabitants and communities. So write, call and fax your officials and the media. Counter the rhetoric and misinformation — comments from concerned citizens carry weight.

It's also vital that we provide accurate information and express ourselves in a manner that recognizes and addresses legitimate concerns. We also need to build bridges with other groups. The recent SPBA-sponsored economic presentations were well attended by diverse groups and serve as examples of the types of dialogues that are needed.

We also need new members and your financial support. SPBA is the only conservation group addressing multiple issues in an area that is incredibly rich — and threatened. We monitor activities, protect resources, work to improve the local economy and the results are visible.

SPBA will soon have a presence on the Internet with a web-site designed by member Bob Ulrich, and we're also looking at organizing short workshops and tours of specific sites in the Basin for members and the public. Additional opportunities for members to be involved might include assisting with a loon survey on Priest Lake.

Ask someone you know to join SPBA and please consider making an end-of-the-year gift. Gifts are tax deductible and SPBA can accept gifts of stock.

SPBA is graced with a hard-working, dedicated board that operates a very efficient organization and your dollars go a long way.

Let's make '97 a great year for the Basin; and please call or write with your comments.

Forest Service Proposes to Log Lakeface

The Forest Service told only part of the story when it recently distributed a picture postcard about its plan to reduce forest fire danger at Priest Lake.

The photo showed a devastated area labeled "Kalispell Bay in late 1930s following forest fire." What the caption didn't say, according to Bill Egolf, forestry chairman for SPBA was that the picture was taken after the hillside had been logged and deliberately burned.

The Priest Lake Ranger District is proposing to log as much as 3.2 million board feet of wood from 7,200 acres very near Priest Lake which they claim will reduce wildfire risk. The project called Lakeface-Lamb Creek is an area between the west lake shore and Highway 57 and between Outlet and Kalispell Bays.

Use of the misleading photo description and questions raised by a fire ecologist is causing the SPBA to question whether the Forest Service was overstating the danger from fire in an effort to increase logging.

A recently completed study in the Sierra Nevada Mountains showed logging increases fire risk more than any other activity. In addition, the Selkirk-Priest Basin is wetter than forest areas where recent catastrophic fires have occurred in the West.

Leon Neuenschwander a fire ecologist at University of Idaho, who has toured the demonstration sites agrees that cutting trees along powerlines and road right-of-ways may reduce fire risk but said that the program may cause more problems than it solves.

"The stuff around Priest Lake is on its way to healing itself from past fires and logging," he said. "It won't burn very fast." If the proposed areas are logged, they'll eventually be filled with highly flammable brush and young trees. If the Forest Service doesn't have the money to perpetually maintain the area, "they create a situation worse than what they had to start with," Neuenschwander said.

Because there won't be any larger trees to induce logging companies to do the work, funding may be difficult, said Egolf. He also noted that the Panhandle National Forest Plan provides for the highest protection level for scenic values along the West Shore Road, where most of the logging is proposed. "Priest Lake is a special place. People come here for the scenery. If they start logging in the name of fire prevention, what's that going to leave?"

If you're concerned about logging along Priest Lake, contact District Ranger Kent Dunstan at

Upper Priest Cedars

There was a bit of a stir around here after SPBA received a tip that part of the cedar grove (520 acres of very old growth trees) presently owned by Riley Creek Lumber Mill was being cut. Our investigation to date reveals a less serious situation.

According to the Forest Service and Riley Creek, an independent assessor was hired to determine a market value for the trees. The assessor had to cut numerous trees that *were already down due to natural causes* to determine quality and value.

The Forest Service and Riley Creek are negotiating a swap of forest lands to save the old growth grove. We will know more next spring after SPBA can travel to the site.

New Trends in Economic Growth

Dr. Ray Rasker, a resource economist, described new trends in the Inland Northwest during SPBA-sponsored presentations in Sandpoint and Priest River this past month.

Rasker, who works for The Wilderness Society and is associated with Montana State University in Bozeman, used government data to show how extractive industries (timber, mining, etc.) contribute increasingly fewer dollars in income, while non-labor and service sectors are growing.

The definition of the service sector includes about every phase in product production (design, marketing, creation of components, management, legal issues and engineering) except the final assembling of parts.

The research clearly illustrated the correlation between economic growth and the quality of life offered by rural communities.

For more information, see Rasker's publication *A New Home on the Range*; available at the SPBA office. Rasker also offers a workbook and guidance for communities who want to

Wetland Update

The Idaho Division of Environmental Quality has approved Jim Anderson's plan to prevent erosion at his development from running into Priest Lake. June Bergquist of the division office at Coeur d'Alene said Anderson had an engineer draw up a plan that met the agency's standards. "He has been very careful," Bergquist said, "As far as I know he is implementing it. We have had no further complaints."

Last spring's heavy rains washed an unknown quantity of silt from Anderson's development above Linger Longer into the Lake. Anderson said he had been "working real hard all summer" to get the erosion controls in place.

At Kalispell Bay, the Corps of Engineers has notified Gary Rudi he violated a federal law prohibiting the filling of wetlands without a permit.

Gregg Raynor of the Corps office in Coeur d'Alene said his Agency and other state and federal agencies involved with wetlands are considering whether to accept an after-the-fact application for the fill, which covers slightly more than half an acre near the mouth of Kalispell Creek.

Typically, when a late application is accepted, the landowner is required to create other wetlands elsewhere, Raynor said. The corps could, however, require full restoration. The area provides habitat for wildlife, Raynor said.

Rudi said the wetland has been created every year on his land by a beaver dam, which in previous years has been removed by the county road department or state Fish and Game Department to prevent water from spilling onto lots nearer the lake. He said he was using logging slash from part of his land to fill the site to provide more room to move his horses away from Kalispell Creek.

Rudi said he would cooperate with the Corps to resolve the issue.

"Missing" Files

On February 24, 1993 the Bonner County Board of Commissioners approved the Huckelberry Bay Company (HBC) application to develop two sub-divisions at Huckleberry Bay on Priest Lake. Included were 14 shoreline lots and 27 secondary lots on 220 acres.

SPBA appealed the decision on grounds of improper procedure (see Sightlines 1993 through 1996). HBC filed a motion to dismiss the SPBA action. District Court Judge Gary Harman in Coeur d'Alene denied the HBC appeal for dismissal and ordered the SPBA appeal to go forward.

The judge ordered that the files in the case be returned to Bonner County. They never arrived at the clerk's office, nor has a strenuous search located the large box containing the files.

Reconstituting the file is questionable and the validity of the HBC approved application is in some legal limbo. We will keep you informed as more light is shed on the situation.

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

Individual dues Couples

Regular: ☐ \$25 ☐ \$30

Limited
income: ☐ \$15 ☐ \$20

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

☐ \$10 ☐ \$25 ☐ \$50 ☐ \$100

Here's my check for: _____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State ____ Zip _____

Phone _____

☐ **Yes**, I want to volunteer for SPBA work. Call me.

Selkirk-Priest Basin Association