



SIGHTLINES

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Winter 2010-2011

Newsletter of the Selkirk Conservation Alliance

FEATURES

- 2 -FROM THE DIRECTOR
-WE REMEMBER...
- 4 -GRIZZLIES AT PRIEST LAKE
-STATUS OF WOLVES
- 5 -AERIAL MONITORING
-FAVORITE PLACES
- 6 -'NO WAKE' OUTCOME
-WATER QUALITY PROGRAM
- 7 -SHOETREE LIVES!...
-RECYCLING PLASTIC
- 8 -HIKES FOR SENIORS
PROGRAM; -WOOD RATS

THE SCA NEEDS YOU!

SUPPORT THE SCA AS A
MEMBER, VOLUNTEER,
ACTIVIST, ADVOCATE... OR
ALL OF THE ABOVE

FEATURED PHOTO

OLD CABIN ON RUSSELL PEAK
(PHOTO BY BYRNE WITTIG)



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SightLines is the newsletter of the
Selkirk Conservation Alliance
(SCA), a non-profit corporation
providing environmental
oversight and public information
for the Inland Northwest.

Selkirk Timber Sale: SCA Intervention Puts Sale "On Hold"

Good news for now regarding the Lakeview/Reeder Timber Sale recently described in the Summer 2010 SightLines. The proposed Forest Service timber sale is in the area of Bismark Meadows and the community of Nordman.

The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for Lakeview Reeder was finalized in 2009 and the decision to proceed was published earlier this year. This decision was split into two parts. The first part outlined road obliteration work; the second part outlined vegetation manipulations that would be implemented to ostensibly reduce fire risks.

The decision for the vegetation manipulations specified that a total of 3,559 acres would be treated. This included 1,029 acres of commercial thinning, 1,163 acres of shelter woodcutting and 1,200 acres of ecosystem burning. The proposed treatments were split into two different timber sales, which were to be sold and implemented separately.

Once the specifics of the timber sale were made available, SCA decided to conduct a

field review of the proposed harvest areas to look at how these activities were to be implemented on-the-ground.

To our surprise, we found several discrepancies between what was planned (as stated within the EIS) and what actually was going to be carried out on the ground. Most of the discrepancies we found were in areas that were specified within the EIS to reduce potential negative impacts to grizzly bears and the overall recovery effort for this species.

It was obvious that some of the planned features of this timber sale had fallen through the cracks when the sale was laid out. SCA drafted a letter to the Forest Service bringing this to their attention in hopes that the agency would correct these discrepancies.

As we went to press, our office received a letter from the Forest Supervisor acknowledging the legitimacy of most of our findings and informing us that our concerns will be addressed. The Lakeview-Reeder timber sale is currently on hold.

Selkirk Conservation Alliance
P.O. Box 1809
Priest River, ID 83856

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A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

On September 16th, at a public meeting in Coolin, the Bonner County Waterways Advisory Board voted against supporting SCA's petition to make Upper Priest Lake a "no wake" zone. With over 80 people in attendance, only 3 individuals spoke out in favor of the initiative while the vast majority were strongly opposed. In fact, some comments supporting the proposal were greeted with howls, jeers and demands that the speaker "shut up and sit down." (Ostensibly, the change in venue from customary Sandpoint to Coolin was made in order to give Advisory Board members "enhanced access to local opinion.")

Our understanding was public comments submitted to the Board via email, telephone, or letter were fairly evenly split between supporters and those opposed but local sentiment, at least based on the comments of those in attendance at the meeting, was clearly against the idea of a speed limit on the upper lake. It was also clear that misinformation heavily influenced the crowd with numerous speakers voicing the opinion that proponents of the measure were attempting to "lock out" powerboats and eliminate access for the elderly and disabled.

In reality, SCA's proposal was simply to slow motorized watercraft to a "no wake" speed thus making the Upper Lake safer and more amenable to canoes, kayaks and those interested in viewing wildlife and enjoying the serenity of Upper Priest Lake. It was SCA's contention that lower speeds were also more compatible with the surrounding area's "wild

and scenic" designation. Since speeding boats have unlimited access to the entire lower lake, (as well as Lake Coeur d'Alene and Lake Pend Oreille and every other large lake in the Inland Northwest) it seemed reasonable that those desiring a more contemplative experience should have at least one place where they might escape the noise, stench, and danger of high speed water craft.

Opponents of the no wake proposal argued at the meeting that canoes and kayaks were completely free to use the upper lake along with speeding power boats. This reasoning of course is not dissimilar to a room full of smokers pointing out that non-smokers are welcome to not smoke in a smoke-filled room. But just as smokers aren't harmed by non-smokers, power boaters are seldom detrimentally affected by canoes and kayaks. Their relative impacts are not commensurate. The bottom line is, people in canoes and kayaks are far more vulnerable to the influences of high speed motorized water craft than the reverse.

SCA remains dedicated to the no wake proposal. A speed limit on the Thoroughfare and Upper Lake does not deny access to anyone.

Just as motorists are not locked out of Priest River because the speed limit decreases as one approaches the city limits.

Mark Sprengel
Executive Director, SCA
sprengel@scawild.org

HIRABAYASHI,

CONTINUED FROM RIGHT

dogs, and rode her horses. Joanne's legacy lies in her work in promoting education and a love for books in addition to her love for the environment.

She is survived by her children, Lane and Jan; their respective spouses, Marilyn and Steve; her nephew and niece, Brian and Lori; her dogs, Maia and Sashki; her horses, Folly and Red; and, the countless friends whose lives she touched. They all bear a pro-

found love and gratitude for this exceptional woman.

In lieu of flowers, family requests memorials in her name be made to Selkirk Conservation Alliance (SCA; P.O. Box 1809; Priest River, ID; 83856).

Services will be held 1:00 pm on December 4, 2010, at the Frank Chapin Memorial Senior Center (339 Jackson Avenue, Priest River). A potluck Celebration of Life will follow.

For more in-depth articles, photographs and links, go to our website
www.scawild.org

We Remember...

JOANNE V. HIRABAYASHI (1928-2010)

As SightLines went to press the SCA Board and staff were saddened to learn of the passing of our board chair Joanne Hirabayashi.

A committed environmentalist, Joanne Hirabayashi (née Vanderburg) worked tirelessly over the last twenty years to promote and ensure the health and quality of her adopted community of the Bear Paw, within the greater Selkirk ecosystem. Joanne served for many years as Chair of the Selkirk Conservation Alliance.



Joanne was born to Rose and Clarence Leo Vanderburg on July 1928, in Seattle, Washington, where she and older brother David, spent their youth. Later, she attended and went on to earn both a baccalaureate and master's degree in Anthropology at the University of Washington. Based on her studies there, she published an article on Chilkat and Salish weaving that has been cited by noted anthropologists.

Joanne earned a second Master's degree in Library Science from the University of California at Berkley and returned to work as a junior high school librarian. Joanne dedicated herself to inspiring children with her love for reading. At the peak of her career as a librarian, Joanne became the Library Administrator in the Novato School District, and during that period, served on the review committee of the prestigious Newberry Children's Book Award.

Upon retiring, Joanne pursued her dedication to the environment and animals and moved from woodsy Mill Valley to an even woodsier 160 acres in the Bear Paw just outside Priest River, Idaho. There, in her custom-built home, she enjoyed her well-earned retirement. She loved reading and music. She gardened, walked through the woods with the

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Join the SCA

Support the Selkirk Conservation Alliance with Your Membership!

Our newsletter, funded entirely by member contributions, keeps you informed of natural resources issues within the Inland Northwest, and offers regular updates on the efforts of the SCA to promote environmental excellence. Now is the time to give to the environment that sustains us all.

Make a contribution and keep SightLines coming regularly.
Dues and donations are tax-deductible.

- ☐ Enroll or Renew Me as a member of the SCA.
Enclosed are my dues.

	Individual	Family
Regular	<input type="checkbox"/> \$30	<input type="checkbox"/> \$35
Limited Income (living lightly)	<input type="checkbox"/> \$15	<input type="checkbox"/> \$20

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

☐ \$10 ☐ \$25 ☐ \$50 ☐ \$100 ☐ \$500 ☐ other _____

Include the following SCA merchandise:

☐ SCA mug #_____ \$15 each + \$5 shipping/handling
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To pay by credit card, please include type, number, expiration date and three digit security code on back.
Call the SCA Office with any questions. 208-448-1110

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Grizzly Bear Habitat Analysis on Priest Lake State Forest

BY TIM LAYSER,
SCA WILDLIFE BIOLOGIST

SCA's analysis of habitat conditions for grizzly bear on lands managed by Idaho Department of Lands (IDL) within the Priest Lake Basin has been completed. Of the approximately 182,000 acres of IDL lands in Priest Lake, approximately 97,000 acres falls within the grizzly bear recovery area.

Our analysis shows that only 37 percent of the IDL Bear Management Unit contains grizzly bear core habitat. Research conducted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Idaho Department of Fish and Game within this ecosystem has shown that the average amount of core habitat contained within a grizzly bears home range is between 55 and 60 percent. Grizzly bear core habitat is defined as those areas which are outside the influence of open roads, gated roads, motorized use trails and trails which receive high levels of human use.

The analysis also looked at several management scenarios within the IDL bear management unit, with one of the management scenarios representing what road management actions might be needed to achieve a level of core habitat, which would allow IDL lands to provide a positive contribution to grizzly bear recovery. It is expected that recovery of the Selkirk Mountains grizzly bear population will be difficult if not unlikely unless there is some level of participation into recovery efforts on lands managed by IDL.

The analysis also considered other indices of grizzly bear habitat management such as open road density and total road density. Our analysis mirrored the level of analysis commonly conducted by the U.S. Forest Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service when analyzing grizzly bear habitat conditions within similar bear management units within the designated recovery zones.

Contact Tim Layser at layser@scawild.org

Status of Wolves in North Idaho

BY TIM LAYSER, SCA WILDLIFE BIOLOGIST

Wolves and wolf management is an issue which tends to polarize the public and local communities. Some individuals dislike the idea of hunting wolves and others want to kill wolves on sight.



Gray wolf
(photo by Gary Kramer)

The impact that wolves have on big game populations is controversial and often misunderstood. Elk population estimates in the states of Montana, Idaho and Wyoming show that elk populations have increased and hunter harvest has also increased within some management units that have seen wolf numbers also increase. Although elk numbers have dropped in other management units where wolves are present, wolves are not likely the sole reason. Other reasons for decreasing elk numbers in some management units includes decreasing habitat quality and predation by other species.

In 1974, the gray wolf was listed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) as an endangered species within the lower 48 states. In January 14, 2009, the USFWS delisted wolves within the lower 48 states, except in Wyoming. At that time wolf management became the responsibility of the states. Wyoming was not included in the federal delisting because of that state's inability to produce a credible wolf management plan. The states of Montana and Idaho produced such plans and they were approved by the USFWS. Both the states of Montana and Idaho had their first wolf hunting season in 2009. The gray wolf remains as a state-listed endangered species in the state of Washington and is protected.

In 2009, a coalition of wildlife advocate groups sued the federal government over its decision to delist the wolf. Plaintiffs argued that the government's decision would set a precedent allowing them to arbitrarily choose which animals should be protected and where. The U.S. District Judge said in his ruling that the entire Rocky Mountain wolf population, including the animals in Wyoming, must either be listed as an endangered species or removed from the list. Protections for the same population can't be different for each state.

Essentially then, the concern over wolves isn't so much the viability of the population in the northern Rocky Mountains or even within the state of Idaho, as it is keeping the endangered species act intact and not making its implementation arbitrary.

Tim Layser worked for the U.S. Forest Service for more than 30 years and was the Priest Lake Ranger District wildlife biologist for the past 20 years.

SCA NEEDS YOUR HELP

Dear SCA member,

As you can see from the articles in this edition of SightLines, Selkirk Conservation Alliance is working on several important and innovative projects. Protecting Priest Lake's fabled water quality, old growth forests, and unique and imperiled wildlife requires a lot of hard work and dedication from SCA volunteers, staff, and board. Ultimately however, our efforts would not be possible without the support of you...our members.

Please consider making a special holiday donation to SCA.

Also, gift memberships to friends, neighbors, and family members make great stocking-stuffers. Bring in a new member and receive a free Caribou Mug.

(SCA is a registered non-profit organization. Your donations are tax deductible.)

Payment can be made by credit/debit card or EFT from your checking account on line at scawild.org/join, call our office at 208-448-1110 or fill in card information below and we will do the rest. All information you give will be confidential.

Please bill by () Visa () MasterCard
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Thanks!

SCA Board & Staff

Winter Aerial Monitoring Program



TIM LAYSER, SCA WILDLIFE BIOLOGIST

After the success of last year's aerial monitoring program, SCA hopes to continue with a similar level of monitoring this upcoming winter. Last season we accomplished seven separate flights and were able to document the only caribou wintering within the United States-side of the caribou recovery area. We also documented 38 snowmobile-use violations within areas designated as closed to snowmobiles for the protec-



tion of mountain caribou. This information was shared with

the Forest Service and the Idaho Department of Lands in anticipation that corrective actions would be implemented to reduce future violations. Research conducted within the last decade has shown that caribou are displaced from areas where snowmobiling occurs and that caribou show a long-term avoidance of such areas.

In addition to documenting caribou activity and snowmobile violations during our past winter flights, we documented evidence of wolverine use, several wolf activity areas and possible snowmobile damage to rare and unique habitat at Hughes Meadows. We are currently working on a schedule for this winter's aerial monitoring program.

Tim Layser worked for the U.S. Forest Service for more than 30 years and was the Priest Lake Ranger District wildlife biologist for the past 20 years.

Green Fire: Stories From the Wild A Book Review

BY TIM LAYSER, SCA WILDLIFE BIOLOGIST

Sightlines does not usually provide a review of recently published books, but this time I felt that an exception was necessary. Earle Layser, the author of *Green Fire: Stories from the Wild*, is a former Forest Service employee who has worked at various locations throughout the west including Alaska. In *Green Fire*, Layser has put together a collection of thirteen original stories about wildlife and wildlands, centering on the Rocky Mountains.

The author worked within the Selkirk Mountains in the late 1960s and 1970s and had a hand in shaping future management for

some of our cherished species such as the caribou and grizzly bear. I was often reminded of this when many years later I found myself working with these species here in the Selkirk Mountains.

Earle Layser, a distant cousin of mine, kindly sent me an advance copy of his book. When the book arrived, I turned immediately to the chapter on our caribou and began to read. With all my experience working with these species, I must admit that the book taught me facts about caribou and their history in the Selkirks of which I was previously unaware.

I found the book to be a pleasing

Favorite Places: *Russell Peak*

SUBMITTED BY BRUCE CUNNINGHAM,
SCA MEMBER/SUPPORTER



One of my favorite places in the Selkirks is Russell Peak.

The trail leading to the peak takes you through a beautiful forest of spruce, cedar and fir. Within a half mile of the peak, the trail breaks out of the forest onto a hillside covered with large boulders. In July, you can find the Beargrass, Mountain Pestemon and Indian Paint Brush in full bloom.

**Old cabin on
Russell Peak
(photo by Bruce
Cunningham)**

On top of the peak sits a log cabin and the footings for a lookout tower. The log cabin was built in the 1930s and abandoned in 1967. The last 43 years have taken a picturesque toll on the cabin.

Russell Peak is a great place to spend an afternoon. The scenic cabin and the 360 degree view is beautiful. The Selkirk crest stretches from the southwest to the northwest and to the southeast are the Cabinet Mountains.

Submit your Favorite Place in the Selkirk area along with a one- or two-paragraph description and a photograph or two to sca@scawild.org with subject line: "Favorite Places"

blend of science and myth interwoven around the author's own personal experiences in wildlands of the Rocky Mountains. As many of the noted reviewers claim, this is a book for people who love wildlife and wild places.

Tim Layser worked for the U.S. Forest Service for more than 30 years. Contact Tim at layser@scawild.org

Thank You, 2010 Auction Donors

Thank you to the businesses and individuals who donated items for our August 2010 fundraising auction. We apologize if any names are left out. Some items did not list the name of the donor.

25th Avenue Massage Center
Ardy's Bakery & Café
Burro Inn & Café
Cat Tales
Club Energy
Diamonds in the Ruff
Egger's Meats
Emery Tax & Accounting
Foxwood House
Ganesh Himal Trading
Garland Theater
General Store
Gordy's Sichuan Café
Grub & More
Handyman 4 U
Hospitality Associates, Inc.
Interplayer's Professional Theater
Into the Garden, Up at the Lake
Ivano's Ristorante & Café
Lake Pend O'reille Cruises
Micheal'e Café
Misty Mountain
Mountain Harvest Health Foods
My Sister's Cottage
Noni! A Wine Bar
Northwoods Performing Arts
Now & Then Antique Shop
Ohme Gardens
One World Architecture
Panida Theater
Pend Oreille Players
Perfection Tire
Pounder's Jewelry
POVN
Ranch Club Golf Course
Roxy Theater
Safeway
Selkirk Ace Hardware
SG Arts Jewelry
Six River's Market Coop
South Shore Café
Spiffy Lube
Spokane Indians Baseball Club
The Bake Shoppe
The Country Market
The Festival at Sandpoint
The Kitchen Shoppe
The Shanty Boutique
Tipke Manufacturing
Two Cooks with Love Catering
Union St. Perk
Vino! A Wine Shop
Vitalife Centre
Westside Pizza
Wintersport Ski Shop
Jerry Boggs, Steve Booth, Mike Connors,
Amy Daniels, Bob Harwood, Mark Kabush,
Tim & Anna Layser, Karin Overbeck, Mary
Smith, Bill Sagvold, Sharon Sorby, Bobbie
Ulrich and Bruce Yocum

Upper Priest Lake No-Wake Proposal: An Outcome Report

BY ROBERT HARWOOD

The Bonner County Water Board Advisory Committee met on September 16 in Coolin, near the south end of Priest Lake. The committee took up SCA's proposal that motorized water craft on Upper Priest Lake, a State and county designated natural scenic area, be required to operate at no-wake speed.

Advisory committee members commented that this meeting had the highest public attendance of any meeting they remembered—with more than 80 persons present. We certainly had stirred up a hornet's nest! Those opposed to no-wake had clearly alerted their supporters to attend. The result was that the opposition prevailed and the Advisory Committee voted against SCA's no-wake proposal.

A partial positive outcome of audience comments may be that rapid towing of wake boards, inflated tubes, etc. may be added to present regulations against water skiing. Several opponents of no-wake also agreed that rowdy, partying, noisy audio boom boxes, and senseless running in circles by boats and jet skis should be discouraged.

The SCA Board is considering steps to inform the public about appropriate behavior in order that all may enjoy more tranquility in this unique natural zone. The small lake is becoming increasingly popular with canoe-ers and kayakers and that will likely help to reduce motorized mayhem.

Contact Bob at plfishrub@q.com

Priest Lake Water Quality Monitoring Program

BY MARK SPRENGEL, SCA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

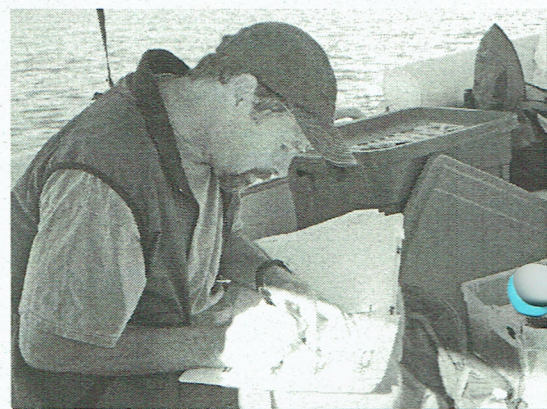
On November 2nd, SCA completed its final Priest Lake water quality monitoring outing for the 2010 season.

Six months of collecting water samples for laboratory analysis from precise predetermined locations will yield valuable data that should prove instrumental in identifying both the existing condition as well as incremental changes in the lake's fabled water quality.

SCA's Priest Lake monitoring program is a collaborative project between SCA and the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) with partial funding support from the Equinox Foundation. Success for this year's program

is in large part due to SCA volunteer Bruce Yocum who generously donated both his time and boat (and good company) to the effort.

**Collecting and recording
water samples (photo by
Bruce Yocum)**



Shoetree Lives... Sort Of!

BY TIM LAYSER,
SCA WILDLIFE BIOLOGIST

On July 15th, the Shoetree, one of the iconic landmarks in the Priest Lake Basin caught fire and was destroyed. It was speculated in the media to have been the result of mischief. The fire was difficult to extinguish because of melting rubber and plastic from all the shoes attached and hanging on the tree. In the wake of the fire, the local Forest Service district warned the public not to develop another Shoetree.



The "new" Shoetree, iconic local landmark, post-fire.

Shoetree has long been known by many local residents and visitors to the Priest Lake area as a somewhat corny but beloved landmark. The Shoetree was located north of the Nordman area where Tillicum Creek flows into White Creek. The site is also a popular dispersed camping site. The tree was a large old growth cedar measuring more than 40 inches in diameter.

The behemoth supported hundreds of shoes and boots that were either nailed to its trunk or left hanging in its lower branches. Footwear included old logging boots, running shoes, sandals and even some baby shoes. Many of the shoes had notes written inside.

It is not clearly known how this landmark started, but apparently it had its origins somewhere in the 1940s. This tree was one of those corny stops that I often would make when I was showing off the Priest Lake area to visitors, guests, or coworkers.

In early September, while showing off the Priest Lake area to some of my visiting relatives, we stopped by to see what was left of the Shoetree. I was expecting to find nothing but a burned dead tree. The tree was indeed burned and more than likely dead, but to my surprise, folks had started to once again attach and nail shoes to the tree in defiance of Forest Service's admonitions. In any event, Shoetree is back, sort of.

Contact Tim at layser@scawild.org

Recycling Plastic

BY MARY SMITH

Here are some facts on the recycling of plastics, taken from research listed in *wiseGEEK*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, and *Metropolis Magazine*.

- Around 18 billion water bottles are thrown away each year, and only around 20% are recycled.
- The decomposition process doesn't begin for about 700 years.
- Recycling of materials uses far less energy than creating new.
- Between seven to eight percent of the earth's fossil fuels are used to produce plastic.

When plastics are recycled...

- Each type of plastic is flattened and baled for shipping.
- Each bale could contain 6,500 to 7,200 soda bottles.
- Bales of plastic are sold to reclaimers. At the reclaimers, machines shred the plastic into tiny flakes, then they wash, rinse and dry it. The flakes are melted and put through an extruder, which squishes the plastic into strands that are chopped into pellets.
- Manufacturers buy the pellets.
- One makes a high-quality polyester fiber from plastic bottles. The fiber is used to make fabrics for clothing, home furnishings, blanket throws and carpet. Other products, such as cellular phones and plastic signs are made from these pellets.
- From milk jugs are made building materials for making patio decks, park benches and railroad ties. The material is denser than wood, virtually maintenance-free, long lasting stain resistant, graffiti-proof, waterproof, UV-resistant, and impervious to insects. Even automobile bridges are being made from recycled plastic.
- Wooden lumber used for bridges, marine pilings and park benches typically is treated with arsenic and creosote to prevent decay. The toxic stuff leaches out into the surroundings, and then the wood rots away. As it ages, wood also releases carbon dioxide into the environment.
- Using 'lumber' made from recycled plastic doesn't pollute, and it keeps significant amounts of materials out of the landfills.

Celebasin Success: SCA's Summer Celebration

The summer Celebasin Celebration—SCA's annual fundraiser meeting—at the new Granite Creek Marina lodge had a solid turnout of members who were treated to an informative presentation of on rare Selkirk species by Tim Laiser, SCA's wildlife biologist. Many questions ensued from the engaged audience. Our annual auction netted welcome funds of support for SCA's ongoing programs with many laughs along the way, thanks to our lively auctioneer and audience.

SCA gives special thanks to the Dean Stevens family for the use of the new lodge. Matt Stevens, Dean's son, graciously donated his time and organizational expertise. Thanks to all who contributed a potluck dish to share. See you again next summer!

~ Mark Kabush, SCA Board Member

SCA "Hikes for Seniors" Program

BY MARY SMITH

Did you know that the SCA hosts "hikes for seniors and those who like a more leisurely pace." We take our time on these trails. Look at things. Pick and eat huckleberries along the way. (Yes!!)

"What is that flower?"; "See how that tree bows over at the top? That's a hemlock."; "This is a yew. See how it's different from the hemlock?"; "The moss is so thick on this rock, you could sleep on it."; "What a beautiful view! This is heaven—I could stay here forever."

And pictures, pictures, pictures! (Thank goodness for digital cameras.)

By far, the best trail we took this year in late May and early June is Mineral Point. You can count on the trail being lined with wildflowers. I counted sixteen varieties in bloom, and some more about to pop. The views of Pend Oreille Lake are spectacular.

Navigation, Lakeshore, Upper Priest River, and especially Mineral Point and Granite/Roosevelt/Huff Lake are on

the list to do again, as are shorter ones like Pioneer Park and Lower Wolf. We hiked the Rock Slide on Lion Creek, a trail I had wanted to hike for a couple of years. It was beautiful, and one of our party even said of it, "You have outdone yourself."

We tried two other new-to-us trails, Snow Creek Falls and Roman Nose Lakes. The trail to Snow Creek Falls is only a half mile and the falls are gorgeous. Along the trail, syringa was blooming. And the perfume! The lake at

Roman Nose was breathtakingly full—alpine, with boardwalks to protect the vegetation. The mountain across

the lake still had banks of snow, and the lake was a mirror for the mountain.

I have some other new hikes planned for next year (including gold-panning) that I hope will

become favorites. We had an enthusiastic group eager to go on more great hikes. Join us if you like to walk in the woods.

Mary Smith is a member/supporter of the SCA. To connect with Hikes for Seniors, contact Mary at 208-448-2282 or marypr@conceptcable.com



Wood Rats aka Pack Rats

BY ROBERT HARWOOD

Every fall, starting in late August or early September, the droppings of pack rats start appearing on my entry mats. Then I find vegetation, such as my clematis, snap dragons and tomato plants cut and neatly laid on the deck. This pack rat behavior is possibly to dry "hay" to serve as winter sustenance. Snap or live traps baited with peanut butter or nuts effectively control them. Usually one or two climb on my deck but this year I had four invaders. Wood rats enter sheds or accessible buildings. They are called pack rats because they like to remove shiny objects such as aluminum foil or cutlery.

There are seven species of such rats in North America. Ours is the bushy tail wood rat, *Neotoma cinerea*, a rather handsome rodent specifically characterized by its long, bushy, squirrel-like tail. They gather sticks, bones and various plants to make a rough nest in rock crevices, under logs or old tree stumps. Dry basalt rock cliffs are favored loca-

tions in the Northwest. On these, white deposits accumulated from their territorial urine deposits are easily mistaken for bird droppings.

Wood rats are mostly harmless and interesting, but indirectly they can be associated with human disease. When long established, their nests can be infested with soft ticks of the family Argasidae. The ticks we see are hard ticks, the Ixodidae. Soft ticks have very different habits, leaving rodent dens at night to seek out warm blooded animals. They stealthily and quickly feed on blood and return to their nest. A person is seldom aware they have been bitten.

Soft ticks may transmit a spirochete bacterium, *Borrelia recurrentis*, the pathogen causing relapsing fever that is characterized by spiking fever followed by normal temperature and then recurring (relapsing) for up to ten episodes. Human cases are usually single, but clusters can occur; notably eleven boy

scouts and accompanying adults who slept in rodent infested cabins near Spokane, Washington, in 1963; also 62 cases in 1973 among visitors to rustic cabins on the north rim of the Grand Canyon, Arizona.

Wood rats are part of the web of life. They are mostly nocturnally active and can serve as food for predators such as owls, martens and coyotes. It is your decision as to whether they should be enjoyed, tolerated or removed. They are highly territorial and if relocated to unfamiliar places they may not survive. In new locations their established brethren will drive them away where predators may easily find them.

As an entomologist, Bob Harwood's interests are scientific but his passion is fishing. He is former professor and chair of the Entomology Department at WSU. His early school years were spent at Woodstock School in India. Contact Bob at plfishrub@q.com