SIGHTLINES

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Newsletter of the Selkirk Conservation Alliance

FEATURES

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ANNUAL BENEFIT & BASH

AUGUST 16, 2014

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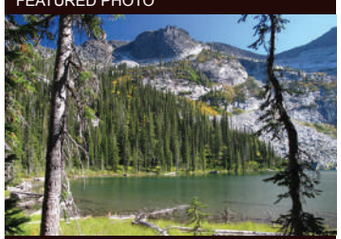


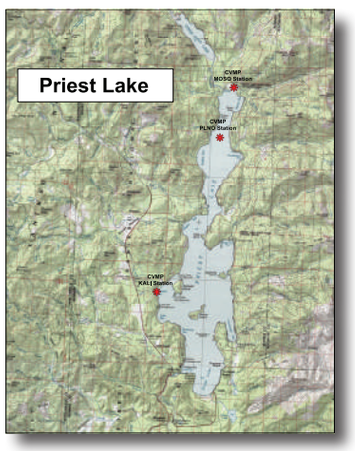
KENT LAKE (PHOTO BY BRUCE CUNNINGHAM)

www.scawild.org
phone: 208-448-1110
sca@scawild.org

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

Water Quality in Priest Lake: A Closer Look, Comparisons to Area Lakes

BY JOHN ABELSON, SCA BOARD MEMBER



A decrease in water quality is the clearest indication of ecological problems in a lake basin. For this reason, perhaps the most valuable health monitor of the Priest Lake basin is in the measuring of its water quality.

For 24 years—with a 13 year gap between 1995 and 2008—the Selkirk Conservation Alliance (SCA), in collaboration with the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (IDEQ), has taken water quality measurements of Priest Lake. SCA samples at three sites monthly from March to October: Priest Lake North, Mosquito Bay and Kalispell Bay.

SCA tests for visibility using the Secchi disk, which is a simple and highly valuable measurement done by observing the depth at which a polished disk becomes invisible. SCA staff determines temperature and dissolved oxygen levels at one (1) meter depth intervals to the end of the cord or to the lake bottom. Collected samples are chilled and sent immediately to IDEQ in Coeur d'Alene for determination of chlorophyll A (a measure of biomass in the lake) and total phosphorous.

Of these measurements, the most important indicators of lake quality are the Secchi Disk visibility, Chlorophyll A and Phosphorous. A widely-used index, the Carlson Trophic Index, incorporates these variables and is a measure of the total biomass in the lake.

Lakes generally fall into one of the following categories: Oligotrophic, mestrophic, eutrophic or hypereutrophic.

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P.O. Box 1809
Priest River, ID 83856

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Swordfern Wordsmithing, Ink.
sarahjstoner@hotmail.com

Petroglyph Printing
509-447-2590

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A MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD

From the Board Chair

BY STEVE BOOTH

SCA has gone through some changes in the last year with the retirement of Mark Sprengel. Tim Layser has taken the Executive Directors position as well as being our wildlife biologist. He is doing a fine job and Mikki, our secretary, is our "rock."

SCA continues to support the caribou recovery program which has been under attack in recent years.

We have gotten more heavily involved in water quality monitoring on Priest Lake. We have more sites on the lake to check and, with some new equipment that SCA purchased, we can now retrieve data from the deepest areas in the lake. Our organization has received some very positive compliments from DEQ.

There is a 'push' to put some federal forest land under state management. This is a bill proposed by Raul Labrador. Many of us feel that IDL has been logging their lands too heavily and we would not like to see the Forest Service lands look anything like IDL forest land. We will be taking pictures to help document IDL's practices and possibly publish them. All Americans should know what is at stake here and actually see what could happen to our federal forest land if Labrador's bill should actually pass. Do any of our members have any good pictures?

Our membership numbers are good and our board active. If any of our members belong to a group that uses the lake, appreciates what Priest Lake has, and agrees with what SCA is doing to preserve what we have—please talk to the group and help recruit new members for SCA. There really is strength in numbers.

Hope to see you at Celebasin on August 16th at Coolin.

SCA's Next Litter Pick-up: Sept. 21, 2014

BY MIKKI RAVENSCROFT, SCA OFFICE MANAGER

Spring litter pick-up was May 18th this year and as always a great success with lots of help. Thank you to everyone who helped.

We hope to see you and others again for the fall pick-up which is scheduled for the third Sunday in September--September 21, 2014.

Special thanks to Amy Daniels who has coordinated this event since 1990. Amy informed me last week that the fall pick-up will be her last one. If you want to enjoy Amy's forever smile, refreshments and treats one last time at litter pick-up, join us in September and say "till we meet again" not goodbye to a very special woman who has dedicated two days a year for 24 years to SCA's litter pick-up. We hope to see Amy at functions throughout the year, as she is a valued member of SCA.

If you are interested in taking on this task beginning in March 2015 please contact the SCA office for information. Thank you.

Amy Daniels at an SCA litter pick-up. Amy coordinated SCA's spring and fall pick-ups for 24 years. Thank you, Amy!

WATER QUALITY

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Oligotrophic lakes have low amounts of organic matter, the result of low nutrient content, nitrogen and phosphorous. They are clear and fully-oxygenated and thus support fish species like trout that require cold, well-oxygenated water.

Mesotrophic lakes have an intermediate level of productivity. They are often clear with beds of submerged aquatic plants.

Eutrophic lakes have high biological productivity due to excessive nutrients. They have aquatic plants and often large blooms of algae. With excessive algae blooms, the bottoms of eutrophic lakes become anoxic and result in fish kills.

Hypereutrophic lakes are even worse than eutrophic lakes. They have a visibility depth of less than three feet and have large levels of biomass.

Priest Lake is considered as an oligotrophic lake. In summer time, Priest Lake is stratified with three layers: the upper warm-water layer (the epilimnion), the middle temperature flux layer (thermocline), and the lower cold-water layer (hypolimnion).

Seasonal temperature changes in these three layers have been measured in Priest Lake. Graphs of seasonal temperature data averaged over all years for which data is available can be requested from the SCA office.

Data for the Priest Lake North Station of the Carlson Trophic State Index values and trends (1987 - 2013) are also available by request from the SCA office.

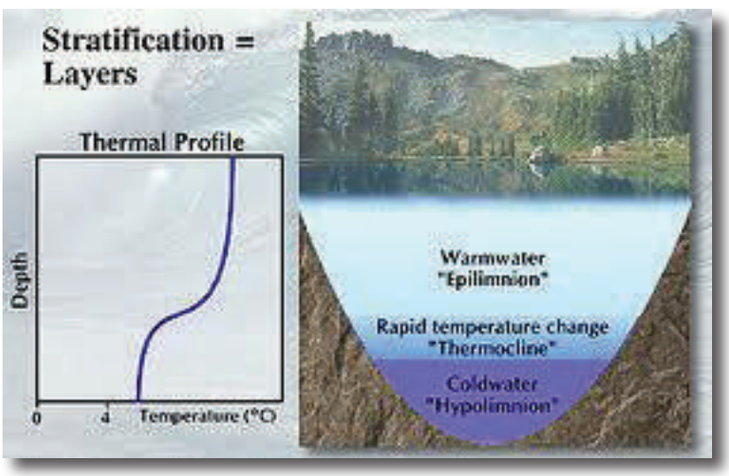
Results at the two other stations are identical. Clearly, Priest Lake is an oligotrophic lake and has not detectably changed in 24 years.

It is interesting to compare the Priest Lake results to water quality monitoring measurements in Coeur d' Alene Lake and Pend Oreille Lake.

Coeur d' Alene Lake quality has been monitored by the Coeur d' Alene Lake Monitoring Program—at first carried out by a collaboration of the US Geological Survey and the Coeur d' Alene Indian Tribe and now most recently by a collaboration of the Tribe and the IDEQ.

A graph with the historical record of Chlorophyll A levels for the C1 station close to the city of Coeur d' Alene--and for C4 which is in the middle of the lake near Rockford Bay within the boundary of the Coeur d' Alene Indian Reservation, an area that is much less populated--are available by request from the SCA office.

The results for these sites are very similar. Although the average Chla levels are somewhat higher in Coeur d' Alene than in Priest Lake (avg. = 1.5 mg/m3 at Priest Lake North), Coeur d' Alene can be classified as an oligotrophic lake.



The Tri-State Water Quality Council has monitored both the quality of the Pend Oreille Lake but also issues of nutrient loading from incoming rivers

It is difficult to compare the data for Pend Oreille Lake to Priest Lake and Coeur d' Alene lake but there is an extensive record of Secchi Disc measurements for Pend Oreille Lake:

The first of these measurements was done in 1953 and it can be seen that the lake was as clear in 2002 as it was 50 years earlier. Clearly, Lake Pend Oreille is also an oligotrophic lake.

For each of these three lakes and especially for Coeur d' Alene and Pend Oreille there has been a large increase in nutrient loading in the last 50 years coming from a variety of sources. Nonetheless these lakes continue to be oligotrophic. This can be explained in part by the fact that in winter, the thermocline that forms in summer and resists mixing disappears. In winter the lakes are well mixed. These are very large and deep lakes and thus are buffered from environmental insults.

Even though Coeur d' Alene, Pend Oreille and Priest Lake are oligotrophic both Coeur d' Alene and Pend Oreille Lakes suffer from heavy metal concentration.

From 1880 to 1980 Bunker Hill Mine in the "Silver Valley" dumped tons of heavy metal contamination into the Coeur d' Alene River. The river bed has ~6 million tons of mine tailings rich in

WATER, CONTINUED PAGE 4

In Memoriam: Elizabeth "Liz" Sedler

BY BARRY ROSENBERG, SCA SUPPORTER

The forests, grizzly bears, streams, fish and the city of Sandpoint lost one of their most tenacious and dedicated defenders, when Elizabeth "Liz" Sedler passed away on February 6, 2014 at her home in Samuels, Idaho. She was 71. Her frequent, strong laughter, her occasional persnickety and outspoken ways, and her unjustified sense of modesty will be missed. She was a unique and gifted individual. I felt fortunate to be counted as one of her friends.

In 1988 I got a call from a friend of hers asking if I would meet with Liz Sedler. Liz wanted to get involved in protecting the environment but did not know where to begin. I said I would be happy to meet and work with her.

We spent a lot of time together hiking proposed and ongoing Forest Service timber sales, meeting with regulatory and administrative agencies and conservationists, going to meetings, digging through Forest Service files, writing administrative appeals and when necessary, contributing to the filing of lawsuits against proposed and illegal Forest Service timber sales.

She spent many years as a volunteer for the Alliance for the Wild Rockies. Liz was a board member of AWR and also served as its president. She was also on the board of the Inland Empire Public Lands Council during the 1990's, and served on the board of the Idaho Sporting Congress. Liz also did contract work for several environmental groups, including Selkirk Conservation Alliance.

She volunteered with members of the Spokane Audubon Society doing old growth surveys, which made the Idaho Panhandle National Forests revise its inaccurate inventories. She participated in Idaho's Basin Advisory Group (BAG) for the North Fork Coeur d'Alene River.

Liz became one of the most effective environmental activists of the Northern Rockies and an expert in the regulations pertaining to fish, water quality and especially, the grizzly bear. She held regulatory and administrative agencies feet to the fire making sure they were fulfilling their mission to protect the bear. She also wrote legal arguments for appeals and litigation for the maintenance and enlargement of habitat necessary to insure its viability. It is acknowledged that Liz was one of the individuals most responsible for protecting grizzly bear habitat and populations in the Northern Rockies.

Being an extremely private person, Liz rarely talked about herself but I managed to gather a little information about her life. She was a graduate student who taught Italian at the University of California at Berkeley before she moved to Big Sur where she met and married Shamus Sedler. They had two sons, Moses and Jesse.

From Big Sur they moved to Lopez Island and then to Yaak, Montana in 1967 where they established a homestead.

After an amicable divorce, Liz spent many years in Sandpoint, Idaho where she worked, amongst other things, as a very popular bartender at the Donkey Jaw and the Garden Restaurant. Also, in the basement of her Sandpoint home, she sawed and sold old growth spruce wood for the construction of musical instruments.

Liz spent many years leading the opposition to the Idaho Department of Transportation's proposal to bypass downtown Sandpoint and continue Hwy 95 along Sand Creek. Liz headed up the North Idaho Community Action Network, the group that filed lawsuits against the bypass all the way to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. The Court affirmed the District Court's ruling against their lawsuit and the bypass was constructed.

Always a hard worker in all her undertakings, she worked relentlessly on environmental issues from the day I met her until her recent illness left her unable to continue her work.

She spent the last 15 years on her property in Samuels, Idaho where she raised a beautiful and abundant garden, made hay for her two beloved horses and enjoyed the peace that comes with living close to the land.

WATER, CONT'D FROM PAGE 3

cadmium, lead, zinc, antimony, copper and mercury.

Much more sediment has been deposited into the bottom of the lake. Therefore the shores of the lake are also contaminated. No one knows how to clean up this contamination although to a certain extent microbial action will provide some decontamination.

However large size does not always protect a lake. It has been obvious since the 1960s that Lake Erie is eutrophic. There are large algal blooms in the middle of the lake and the shorelines are covered with algae. At times Lake Erie became anoxic and there were fish die-offs. Lake Biwa, the largest lake in Japan has also become eutrophic.

However dire the possibilities the data suggests that if a tipping point exists the three large lakes in northern Idaho are not close to it. These lakes are oligotrophic and the data, where it is available, suggests that they have not changed significantly in 50 years. They certainly will not change significantly on a monthly scale nor even a five-year scale. The environmental insults inflicted on Coeur d' Alene Lake--with a metropolitan area of greater than 50,000 people on its shore--have not changed its quality significantly from Priest Lake where the inputs to the lake are all from wilderness. We need to consider this data in future policy decisions.

SCA Board Member John Abelson can be reached through the SCA office.

Farm Bill

BY TIM LAYSER, SCA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR / WILDLIFE BIOLOGIST

Earlier this year, President Obama signed the Agriculture Reform, Food and Jobs Act, also know as the Farm Bill. The Farm Bill isn't new, but is updated and reauthorized every five years to serve as the government's main policy tool for Agriculture Food Safety and Nutritional Programs.

This 900 plus page bill is vast and daunting while some of the provisions are helpful to support the growth of organic agriculture programs, it fails to fully protect clean water and our National Forests.

With the Forest Service being housed under the Department of Agriculture, the Farm Bill includes provisions that significantly affect forest policy.

A provision could vastly accelerate logging on some of our National Forests by allowing state governors to nominate 'treatment areas" of up to 3,000 acres that "allow logging and other management activities with reduced public participation and scrutiny". The selection and "treatment" (logging) of these areas are also exempt from he protections of the National Environment Policy Act (NEPA). This means no consideration of public input, no environmental analysis and no citizen right to appeal a decision, regardless of its impacts on wildlife or water quality.

In collaboration with the Idaho Department of Lands, Idaho governor Butch Otter has already nominated 1.7 million acres of National Forest Land in Idaho for the program.

In addition to the stripping of NEPA protection, a last minute rider to the Farm Bill significantly weakened the Clean Water Act by exempting certain silvicultural activities from permitting under the Act's National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES).

The Forest Service estimates that well over 50% of the American public lives in communities that rely on public and private forest lands for their drinking water supplies. Numerous studies have identified forest roads as the principal source of accelerated erosion in forests and sediment loading of waterways throughout the western United States. With so much of the nations drinking water impacted by sediment pollution from logging roads, the Clean Water Act provides an important regulatory backstop. This measure enacted in the Farm Bill ensures runoff of pesticides and other chemicals from these logging sites will be viewed by the EPA as non-point sources and may not be regulated under the Clean Water Act as industrial pollution.

Action Alert:

Tell Governor Otter not to move Idaho forward with "treatments" without public process or environmental analysis in areas that will negatively impact our forest ecosystems.

Office of the Governor-PO Box 83720, Boise, ID 83720

governor@gov.state.id.us

(208) 334-2100

This bill allows the timber industry to continue to pollute our water with sediment and protects the industry, instead of our drinking water and the water quality of our treasured and valuable waterways.

Pleas take action today: Tell Governor Otter that you do not want Idaho to move forward with "treatments" without public process or environmental analysis in areas that will negatively impact our forest ecosystems.

Reprinted in part from: Perspectives, Kootenai Environmental Alliance

Habitat Improvement for Grizzly Bears Completed

BY TIM LAYSER

Priest River Eagle Scout candidate Ross De Ment completed the installation of bear-proof food storage lockers within Priest Lake State Parks in May of this year. Ross took on the project as one of the tasks required of him to be an Eagle Scout candidate. Ross coordinated the project within his scout troop and led the troop in the installation. One locker was installed in Dickensheet Campground, three in Indian Creek Campground and four in Lionshead Campground. In 2012, SCA worked with an Eagle Scout from Spokane to install the first food storage lockers in Indian Creek and Lionshead Campgrounds. Between both efforts, SCA has been able to install 16 bear-proof food storage lockers within the State Parks.

The lockers were purchased and installed for campers to safely store food items. Bears cannot access human foods in the parks with use of the lockers. They are specially designed out of heavy gage steel with a special locking mechanism that bears are unable to open.

Priest Lake State Parks has had a history of bears roaming throughout the campgrounds searching for easy food from campsites. In recent past, as many as twenty bears have been trapped and removed from the campgrounds each year. Bears become easily conditioned to human foods and in many instances must be destroyed as a result.

SCA received grants from The Equinox Foundation, Yellowstone to Yukon Initiative and the Defenders of Wildlife for the purchase of the bear-proof food storage lockers. Priest Lake State parks personnel provided logistical support and the Kalispell Tribe provided funding for installation hardware. The Boy Scouts of America provided workforce and leadership for installation. SCA also provided funding, project leadership and coordination.

This project makes camping in Priest Lake State Parks safer for humans and bears alike.

Selkirk Caribou Update

BY TIM LAYSER, SCA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR / WILDLIFE BIOLOGIST

A lot has happened regarding caribou since our last newsletter.

Winter aerial monitoring efforts, again this past winter, have found no caribou ventured into the United States portion of the caribou recovery area. This is the second year that no caribou have been found in the U.S. during the winter season. There have been years past when caribou did not venture into the United States portion of the recovery area and did make a showing in following years—hopefully this will happen next year.

SCA was able to conduct three winter aerial monitoring flights this past winter. Snowmobile use was documented on all three monitoring flights. To be clear, this is snowmobile activity happening within the existing court-ordered snowmobile closures. Aerial monitoring this winter showed that the extent of snowmobile use within caribou habitat nearly equals snowmobile use levels prior to the court-ordered and designated snowmobile closures.

These closures were put into place to protect caribou from displacement by snowmobilers as well as put in place to deter long-term avoidance by caribou of areas important to the herd as a result of repeated snowmobile use. It would seem that the U.S. Forest Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have put little effort into enforcing the legal closure designated to protect caribou and their habitat.

The official winter census for caribou is equally discouraging. This 2013-14 winter the census effort only documented 18 caribou within our Selkirk Mountains. This count is down from last year's numbers of 27 caribou; 35 animals the winter prior to that; and 44 caribou counted the winter before that, in 2010-11. The exact cause for the population decline is not known but it is likely that predation played a contributing role. Hopefully, population numbers will begin to rebound or we will likely see the last of wild caribou in the lower 48 states. Caribou once numbered in the thousands in the United States area south of Canada.

A member of the precious Selkirk Caribou herd. The latest winter's census counts only 18 caribou within our Selkirk mountains.

In May of 2012, the anti-environmental law firm Pacific Legal Foundation, along with the Bonner County and the Idaho State Snowmobile Association, filed a petition to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service seeking to remove federal protections on caribou and caribou habitat. The Fish and Wildlife Service did recently, in response to this petition, down-list caribou from "endangered" to "threatened" status. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service down-list action was based on the premise that the overall protected area encompassed a larger area in Canada.

Interestingly enough, Canada *upgraded* their caribou federal listing from "threatened" to "endangered"—following the timing of the U.S.'s down-list of the same species. Maybe the two countries don't talk much anymore when it comes to caribou. This decision by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is open for public comment at this point.

SCA joined the Advocates for the West, Defenders for Wildlife, Conservation Northwest, and Idaho Conservation League in asking the courts for a summary judgment or a remand to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services final determination of critical habitat determination for caribou.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service issued its final determination for critical habitat in November 2012 when it determined that 30,010 acres met requirements for critical habitat. Almost all 30,010 acres were within the existing Salmo-Priest Wilderness, where no additional management would need to be implemented. Prior to this final determination for critical habitat, in November 2011, the draft rule by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for critical habitat included 375,562 acres. But somehow between the draft and final determination the amount of critical habitat designated for caribou would be reduced by nearly 90 percent.

It is hard to accept the fact that caribou may forever disappear from our Selkirk Mountains. And hopefully they may not.

Having worked with the issue of caribou population recovery for the past several decades, I did—and still do believe that it can be accomplished, but only if we as a society and culture have the resolve to do it. It just becomes increasingly difficult when the responsible agencies (federal and state) have become apparently inattentive to the task.

Contact Tim at layser@scawild.org