



SIGHTLINES

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Spring 2015

Newsletter of the Selkirk Conservation Alliance

FEATURES

2 -FROM THE BOARD CHAIR
-FOND FAREWELL TO MIKKI

3 -TIMBER, A-Z, CONT'D

4 -LITTER CLEAN-UP
-IDAHO'S CROWN JEWEL

5 -BEING BEAR AWARE
-GOOD NEWS FOR CARIBOU

6 -SCA CELEBASIN REPORTS
-WATER DATABASES

8 -WAKE UP CALL IN THE
WOODS

JOIN US! SPRING LITTER CLEAN UP MAY 17, 2015

SEE DETAILS, PAGE 4
FEATURED PHOTO



PHOEBES MTN (PHOTO: BRUCE CUNNINGHAM)

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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.

Timber Industry Gaining Foothold on Colville National Forest: "A to Z"

BY BARRY ROSENBURG, SCA MEMBER SUPPORTER

For the first time ever, in a historical and disconcerting move, the Forest Service has turned over the design, layout, implementation, and environmental analysis of a timber sale to a private timber corporation. The Colville National Forest (CNF) has awarded two A to Z Stewardship Project timber sales to Vaagen Brothers Lumber Company. Vaagen, a member of the Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition and the only bidder, purchased the right to conduct the North Fork and the Middle Fork Mill Creek A to Z Stewardship Projects for one million dollars. Both timber sales are located on the Three Rivers Ranger District.

When I asked a Forest Service official why the sale is named A to Z, he replied that "the name says it all." Vaagen was awarded not only the right to log, but also the right to do the Environmental Assessment, decide where and how many trees will be cut, where and how many roads will be built, decide on and carry out forest restoration work, cattle grazing needs and just about everything else associated with a timber sale.

Private companies have written Environmental Assessments (EA) for the Forest Service in the past, but the agency has never before granted private timber corporations such broad powers. Except for the administration of this timber sale and the rendering of the final decision, Vaagen and its contractors will take over that which has historically been done by the Forest Service.

This precedent-setting move has the support of the Congresswoman Cathy McMorris Rodgers and the Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition, a collaborative organization based in Colville, WA, of which Vaagen is a member. Three environmental groups—The Lands Council, the Kettle Range Conservation Group, and Conservation Northwest—are also members of this collaborative group.

The Selkirk Conservation Alliance, the Kootenai Environmental Alliance, and Friends of the Clearwater are very wary of the collaborative process and strongly oppose giving profit-driven private timber corporations such

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

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A MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD

From the Board Chair

BY STEVE BOOTH

First of all: I would like to thank our members and donors for their generous contributions, particularly during the last several months. On behalf of our staff and board, I would like to personally thank you for your support. Your donations definitely help keep us a financially viable organization.

As some of you may know, Mikki Ravenscroft, SCA's office manager since 1997, is retiring at the end of March 2015. Mikki has been tremendously valuable to our organization. She will be sorely missed by us all. We welcome Linda Check as our new office manager. Also, SCA is considering hiring an outreach person; hopefully prior to the summer season.

We have a lot on our agenda: the caribou are more threatened than ever; many Idaho politicians would like Idaho Department of Lands to administer some federal forest lands, and we are expanding our water quality monitoring of Priest Lake; just to name a few.

My involvement with the Idaho fish and game stakeholders group continues. We are at the information gathering phase but soon will be working on how the Priest Lake fisheries will be managed. Fish and Game is doing quite a lot of research regarding living things in the lake and their relationships to each other. 'Interesting stuff'!

Again, thanks for your support and please feel free to be involved with some of our issues and programs.

Steve Booth has been on SCA's board since 2002. He is a former teacher, coach, historian, and forest service firefighter. Steve is a long time resident of Priest Lake and has owned his small construction business for 28 years.



A Fond Farewell to Mikki

MIKKI RAVENSCROFT—SCA OFFICE MANAGER OF EIGHTEEN YEARS!



After 18 years of commitment and dedication, it is time for us to bid a fond farewell to Mikki, the familiar voice of SCA, as she takes the path to retirement.

Mikki has experienced a varied and interesting job and work

history starting with three years in the Army after high school; but it was in the fall of 1997 that she took her first job in office administration with SCA.

They say that once you drink the water of the Pend Oreille valley, you will always return. Mikki and her husband Bob purchased 10 acres in the area in the 1970s and built a log cabin. Events caused them to sell and explore

elsewhere for a while, including West Virginia, the east coast, and Alaska. They spent time in Germany prior to that but they found their way home and have been here since.

When asked what was the most important thing she learned while working for SCA, Mikki replied, "I learned how important it is to keep the environment healthy not only for the wildlife in it but for all of us and future generations who will enjoy co-existing with all the different wildlife and habitat we live in and be able to experience the wonder of it all."

Mikki plans to stay busy in retirement: finishing a home addition with Bob, spending more time gardening and canning, maybe a little travel, camping and playing – basically "experiencing the wonder of it all."

*Be well, do good work,
and keep in touch. ~Garrison Keillor*

TIMBER, A-Z

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

sweeping authority over timber sales on the public's national forests.

The North Fork Mill Creek's proposed timber sale, the first one to be conducted, is very large. The following sale numbers are the latest estimates that could be obtained from Cramer Fish Sciences, the company preparing the Environmental Assessment for Vaagen, and are subject to change. Currently there are two proposed action alternatives which range from logging approximately 37.3 million board feet from 4,581 acres (Alt B), to logging 16.2 million board feet from 2,503 acres (Alt C). The logging will be "designated by prescription," meaning the loggers will interpret the prescription and choose the trees to be cut. Depending on which alternative is chosen, enough logs will be generated to fill approximately 3,400 to 7,500 logging trucks.

The approximate amount of new road construction ranges from 27 miles for Alt B to 2.2 miles for Alt C. The brushing of 5.9 miles of existing unauthorized road will occur in both alternatives. Most of these roads will be closed and decommissioned at the end of the timber sale activities. Decommissioned roads can be reopened when needed.

The CNF claims that it has lost about 70% of its staff in the last 20 years and does not have the personnel necessary to meet its Forest Plan timber quotas. Much of the Forest Service budget, and consequently its staff size, is dependent on timber sales. Allowing the timber industry to take over the planning and implementation of timber sales would make up for the lack of Forest Service staff and could lead to a significant increase in cutting and associated environmental impacts.

Cramer Fish Sciences, an independent contractor, was hired by Vaagen to do the analysis and write the Environmental Assessment. The North Fork EA is expected to be released in March 2015 followed by a thirty-day review period for public comment, after which the CNF will make its final decision on the sale. It is a forgone conclusion that the Forest Service will approve the A to Z North Fork Stewardship Project/timber sale, given the time and money invested.

SCA member supporter Barry Rosenberg can be reached at barryrosenburg88@gmail.com

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



SCA bull trout t-shirt

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

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

Include the following SCA merchandise:

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SCA's Spring Litter Pick-up: May 17, 2015

BY MIKKI RAVENSCROFT,
FORMER SCA OFFICE MANAGER

Dear Members,
It is almost time again for our Spring litter pick-up. It will be the 3rd Sunday in May each year, which is **May 17** this year. (Fall pick-up will be the 3rd Sunday in September: **September 20, 2015**). Our section of highway 57 changes this year. It will now begin at mile post 15.5 and end at mile post 16.5. There is a drive-in area before the Selkirk Conservation Alliance sign which is close to mile post 16.5 and that is where we will meet.

Be sure to wear appropriate foot wear and always bring gloves. Garbage bags and safety vests are provided by SCA. Refreshments and drinks will be furnished along with great conversation when the task is finished.

Thank you again to Amy Daniels and Terry Turner who coordinated the litter pick up for 24 years and to all who have helped us over the years. Also, thank you to Bruce and Rosemary Yocum who will now be coordinating the litter pick-up for SCA.

Hope to see you May 17th or September 20th this year!



Priest Lake at dusk.

Protecting Idaho's 'Crown Jewel'

BY TIM LAYSER, SCA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR / WILDLIFE BIOLOGIST

Priest Lake is often referred to as Idaho's 'Crown Jewel' because of the clarity and purity of its waters. Additionally, the Priest Lake Chamber of Commerce refers to the Priest Lake Area and Idaho's Crown Jewel as a natural wonderland: unspoiled, uncrowned and unhurried. For each of us, the vision of Idaho's Crown Jewel likely means something different. Whether it is the clarity of the water, the diversity of plant and wildlife species, a place to get away from the busy city, the scenery, or as a lure used to attract tourism to the area, it is likely important to each of us.

Our water quality-monitoring program, which we adopted in 2008, has been designed as an extension of previous efforts by Idaho's Department of Environmental Quality to evaluate and monitor Priest Lake's water quality. Our efforts are intended to provide a solid baseline for water quality and an early detection of any potential changes that may occur in the future. Numerous residents surrounding the lake rely on clean water for their primary source of water and others simply enjoy the purity of the water for purposes such as swimming, boating and fishing.

In the past, SCA has worked tirelessly with the U.S. Forest Service to adopt and apply standards for the protection and management of the areas unique old growth timber. The Selkirk Mountains support the largest extent of Inland Temperate Rain Forest's in the lower 48 states. These forests support habitat for a wide assemblage of wildlife and plant species that are found in no other ecosystem in the lower 48 states.

SCA has in the past and continues

to work with the federal agencies to ensure that land and resource management incorporate the best and latest science into their decision making process. SCA routinely provides comments, critiques and suggestions on proposed plans and in some instances provides a heavy nudge when its needed to propel agencies in the right direction for them to fulfill their obligations in the management of our public resources.

We continue to be engaged in the struggle to manage and restore our dwindling caribou numbers in the Selkirk Ecosystem. Once caribou numbers in the Selkirks were in the hundreds, now only a small handful survive today and are on the threshold of disappearing forever in our lifetime if the course remains the same. SCA has participated in court challenges to the federal agencies charged with their management and hopeful recovery. We will continue to do so.

SCA has most recently begun work with area state parks to provide materials and information to reduce the potential for human and bear conflicts within the campgrounds within the Priest Lake area (see article, facing page). The intention continues to be to provide a safer environment for the visiting publics and to reduce the chances of a bear becoming nuisance and eventually having to be destroyed. This becomes extremely important for the Selkirk's small recovering population of grizzly bears, when the loss of even one individual has the potential to result in setback to the hopeful and eventual recovery of this population.

All of these efforts and many others are intended to retain Priest Lake and the surrounding area's standing as Idaho's Crown Jewel—beginning with now and well into the future.

SCA Executive Director 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. layser@scawild.org.

Being Bear Aware

BY TIM LAYSER, SCA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR / WILDLIFE BIOLOGIST

As spring is upon us, and as the region's bears emerge from their winter's den, it is a good time to remind ourselves about good practices which can help reduce potential conflicts between human and wildlife, especially bears.

Many conflicts that occur take place around our residences and campsites. Improperly stored food and garbage is often the key.



Minimize odors and the availability of food rewards throughout your yard, home, and community

- Put out garbage on the day of pick-up, not the night before. Store in sturdy building or place in a bear-resistant trash receptacle.
- Do not leave pet food out. Hang bird feeders out of reach of bears.
- Keep barbecues clean and grease free. Store with livestock/pet feed inside a sturdy building.
- Pick all ripe fruit from the tree and surrounding ground as soon as possible.
- Vegetable gardens and compost piles may attract bears. Do not put meat, fish or other pungent scraps in compost pile. Add lime to reduce odors and accelerate decomposition.
- An electric fence is an effective way to keep bears out of orchards, gardens, compost piles, and beehives. Follow appropriate safety precautions.

When camping in bear habitat:

- Always keep a clean camp.
- Use a designated camping area.
- Don't leave food out when not in use. Store it in bear-resistant storage unit, hard-shelled vehicle or car trunk.
- Use bear-resistant trash receptacles.
- Set up tents with space between them.
- Keep pets on a leash.
- Keep your sleeping area, tent and sleeping bag completely free of food and food odors and personal products that are scented, like toothpaste, lotion, and makeup.
- Do not sleep in the same clothes you cooked in.

Northern Idaho and northeastern Washington supports the highest populations of black bears in their respective states. In addition, the area also supports a smaller population of grizzly bears.



Once a bear accesses human food it becomes 'food conditioned' and potentially 'habituated' to humans, and then often becomes a nuisance. The bear may have to be relocated or destroyed. These "bear aware" practices, helpful in reducing conflicts between bears and humans, and also good in helping reduce conflicts between humans and other wildlife.

Contact SCA Executive Director Tim Laysar at laysar@scawild.org.

Good News for Selkirk Caribou

BY TIM LAYSER



A Selkirk Mountain caribou feeds on lichen. Photo credit: Bob Summerfield

Good news on two fronts for our Selkirk Mountain caribou. On March 23, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service re-opened the public comment period on their draft proposal to downlist the Selkirk caribou herd from endangered to threatened status.

The USWFS draft proposed to downlist caribou failed to take into consideration that Canada had, during the same time frame, reclassified the status of the same cross-border caribou herd from threatened to endangered. **The comment period is open for 30 days and ends on April 23. Instructions for viewing the proposed rule and how to submit comments online or via hardcopy can be found at www.regulations.gov.**

On the same day the Selkirk Conservation Alliance, along with a host of numerous conservation groups, won a victory in federal courts in the challenge of the USFWS decision to reduce the amount of critical habitat for caribou in the Selkirk Mountains. This will require the USFWS to reevaluate their final determination and hopefully protect enough habitat to affect the recovery of this last caribou herd in the lower 48 states.

Combining this potential reevaluation of the critical habitat designation for caribou with the potential to keep the caribou federally listed as an endangered species will be significant in protecting habitat in the United States portion of the recovery area.

SCA Celebasin: A Look at the Good Work

BY ELEANOR JONES, SCA MEMBER

It was a small but vibrant crowd that flowed into the Coolin Community Center for the annual SCA meeting last summer. How delighted we were to be greeted so warmly along with being given a welcome gift. There was no hesitation among the attendees to help themselves to the inviting buffet lunch – and when the peach pies arrived many made a second trip to the food table!

SCA Board Chair Steve Booth kicked off the meeting with a warm welcome and key introductions of present board members. Former Executive Director Mark Spengel and Office Manager Mikki Ravenscroft were given kudos for their energy and dedication to SCA.

Board member John Abelson spoke about the importance of monitoring Priest Lake's water quality which is effectively being done by SCA on a continuing basis. Interestingly, there is a plethora of lake data from 1902 when record keeping began at Outlet Bay and continues to this day (see article, right). Forty percent of the water in the Lower Lake is provided from the Upper Lake through the Thoroughfare. Fortunately, much of the water flowing into the Upper Lake is free of contamination. Mr. Abelson's *Sightlines* articles (this issue and Summer 2014) give in-depth reviews of water quality in area lakes.

Executive Director Tim Laser spoke of current and ongoing SCA projects, with additional information on the water quality project. SCA has received kudos from the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) for this work.

SCA, aided by several organizations, has helped make camping safer in our Priest Lake State Parks by working with Eagle Scouts to install bear proof food storage units. The storage lockers have been placed in Indian Creek, Lionshead and Dickensheet parks.

Aerial monitoring continues for tracing winter habitats and movement of Selkirk caribou, wolverine, bear, wolf and snowmobiles. They provide evidence of increasing yearly violations, and of herd activity. In the past few years, flights have been possible three to seven times annually.

Priest Lake Databases: A Comprehensive View of Historical Water Data

BY JOHN ABELSON, SCA BOARD MEMBER

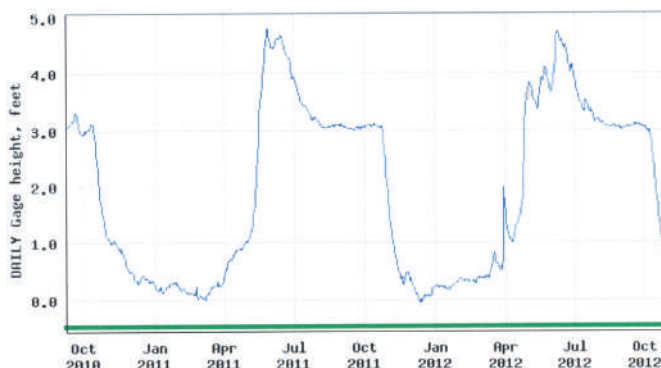
The most comprehensive scientific information about Priest Lake comes from a 1993-1995 study done by the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality by Glen Rothrock and David Mosier. This study can be accessed in its entirety from our SCA website scawild.org.

Upper Priest Lake		Metric	English	
Shoreline length	.....	12.9 km	8	miles
Surface area	.....	5.4 km ²	1,338	acres
Volume	.....	0.1 km ³	80,000	ac-ft
Maximum depth	.....	34.1 m	112	ft
Mean depth	.....	18.3 m	60	ft
Priest Lake				
Shoreline length	.....	115.9 km	72	miles
Surface area	.....	94.4 km ²	23,300	acres
Volume	.....	3.7 km ³	3,000,000	ac-ft
Maximum depth	.....	112.5 m	369	ft
Mean depth	.....	39.0 m	128	ft

Volume and depth values are based on the mid-summer pool elevation, 2,438 ft above sea level.

For many years the US Geological Survey (USGS) has kept detailed records of lake height and outward flow at Priest Lake. SCA has collected this data; it is also available on our website. It is interesting to see what can be derived from these data.

USGS gage height 2010-2012



Since 1928, the USGS has measured the gage height of the lake daily. This measurement is made at the Outlet Bay. It shows the daily gage height for the years 2010 to 2012.

The SCA caribou project is on-going. While caribou used to live across the northern section of the USA from east to west, remaining USA caribou are now found only in the Idaho Selkirk mountain range. The caribou census indicates a four-year decline: 40- 35- 27—and now 2014 with only 18 caribou spotted. [Reference *Sightlines* Summer 2014 for an expanded report on Selkirks caribou. Click the "Newsletter" tab at scawild.org for archive copies]

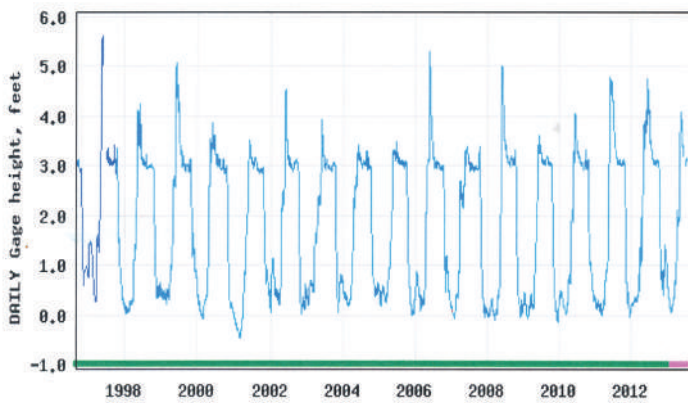
Steve Booth and Mark Kabush spoke of a new project involving a look at logging practices on the east side of Priest Lake. The land logged is to support Idaho educational needs. However, the distribution of funds allocates only 0.75% (approximately \$60,000) to Bonner County schools. The big question is if this funding from logging is justifiable given the destruction of irreplaceable forest lands.

The afternoon ended with a lively raffle of generously donated items. Thanks, SCA, for this annual event, and kudos to all the working board members and volunteers who support this vital conservation group.

The peak flow occurs during the spring run-off and during this period the lake levels are not controlled by the outlet dam. When the lake level has dropped to 3 ft. in the summer the level is kept constant until October or November when the gates are again opened allowing the lake level to fall.

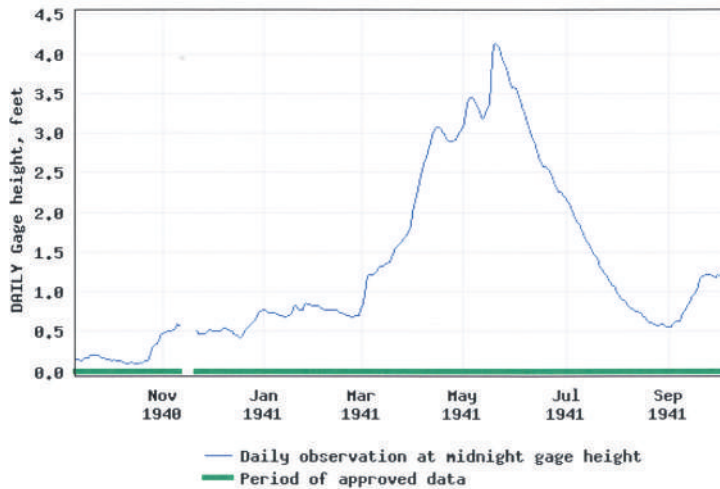
A graph of the lake levels over a longer period shows the variation in peak gage heights that occurs as a result of variable snow packs.

USGS gage height 1996-2012



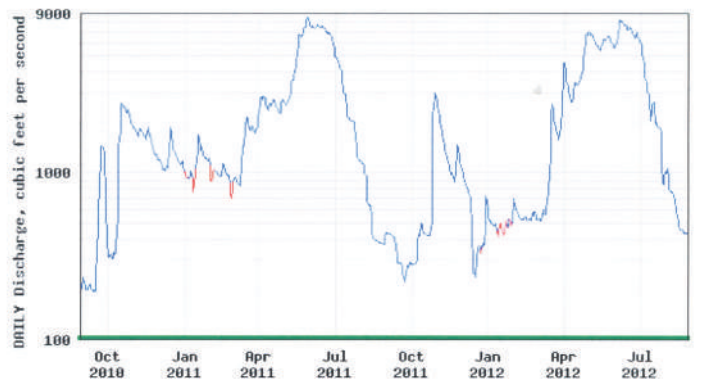
The outlet dam was built in about 1950 and it is interesting to see the difference it made by looking at earlier gage height records. Here we show gage heights for the year 1940-41.

USGS 12393000 PRIEST LAKE AT OUTLET NR COOLIN ID



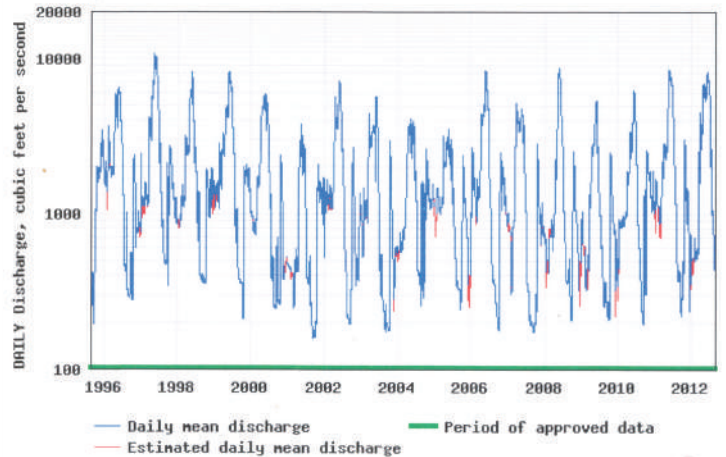
As it is now, the lake falls to low levels in the winter, rises to a peak level in the spring run-off but then by late summer is again down to a low level.

Since 1903, the USGS has measured the daily efflux flow rates at the Dickensheet Bridge five miles south of the outlet. The following graph shows measurements taken during the year 2011-2012:



From this data it can be calculated that the mean flow for 2011 was 2400 cu. ft./sec. So the total volume for 2011 was 1.68 million acre-feet. Since the total volume of the lake is 3 million acre feet it follows that the water lake turns over in about two years. Seen below is the record for the period 1996-2012. It shows how the peak out-flow is quite variable corresponding variations in the snow pack.

USGS 12395000 PRIEST RIVER NR PRIEST RIVER ID



There is a continuous record of the weather as measured by the US Weather Service at the Priest Lake Experimental Forest. Average temperature and total precipitation for the years 1980 to 2012 can be viewed at scawild.org.

The graph shows that mean temperature has been quite steady during this period but there have been large variations in total precipitation. In particular, the high level of precipitation in 1996 is reflected in the high outflow rates for that year.

These measurements do not in any way convey the beauty of Priest Lake. However, it is our conviction that in order to conserve the beauty of the lake for future generations we must take a scientific approach and that is what we have been doing.

SCA Board Member John Abelson can be reached at johnablesen@gmail.com

A Wake Up Call from a Close Call in the Woods

BY ELEANOR JONES, SCA MEMBER SUPPORTER

It started easily enough over the picnic table as my sister and I discussed our need for fresh huckleberries. The ones we'd picked earlier were running out as we baked pies for our family, sprinkled fresh berries over yoghurt and laced our flapjacks with them. Certainly no big deal for us to take a trip up into the mountains, as we have done every summer for the past 60 or so years.

The next day, berry buckets ready to loop onto our belts, we drove up the road. Within a mile of the drive, my sister realized she'd forgotten her hat. Not a big deal. Then we both realized that neither of us had worn our wristwatches. Should we turn around? No, it was early in the day and we wouldn't pick that long so we could be home for a late lunch. We had each packed an energy bar and water. We had remembered our whistles, which we use to keep in contact as we work our way through the berry patches.

We parked along the logging road and scrambled over the edge of the embankment, eyes alert to finding just the right patch to start picking. The ping of berries hitting bottom was short lived as our buckets quickly filled. Along we merrily went—across logs, under tall firs—eyes constantly searching for more berries as we reached for those nearby.

As serious pickers know, picking time is measured not by minutes but by how far up the berries sit in the bucket. While not a competition, it is fun to compare buckets with each other; at about the same time, we both announced that our buckets were nearing the top. For us, 'nearing the top' equates to 'time to start back to the car.'

We started back to the car as we always did—return from whence you have come. However, as we stood at the top of a steep ravine with a creek at the bottom we looked at each other. This was new territory. We were not retracing our steps. We looked at each other in strained disbelief. I'm not exactly sure who asked first, "Do you know where we are?" but we both knew the response: "I think we're lost." My heart was pounding, my stomach took a lurch and all I could think was, *Where in the woods are we?*

Within seconds, a very cold fact came to us: we had not told anyone where we were specifically headed. Usually, if not speaking directly to a family member or neighbor, we write down our destination on the white board beside our door. Neither of us had done that! Carelessly, I'd left my water and energy bar in the car so we were down to one bottle of water, one energy bar, two buckets of huckleberries, and not a clue which way was out. Knowing family was out of town, if they phoned with no response, they could assume our electrically lines were down from recent storms. We calculated that it could be at least two days before anyone might suspect we

were not in camp. What should we do?

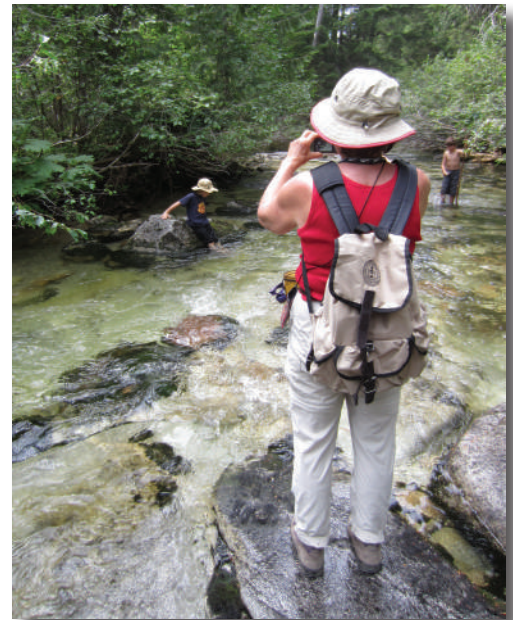
We knew we would not separate. As well, we both agreed to slow down so that another misstep, either literal or figurative, was not taken. We knew we had to keep our wits about us. After talking about sun position and a far mountain we had in view, we started along the edge of the mountain ridge.

My sister Anne spotted a blue ribbon tied in a tree. Experience told us that if there is one ribbon this deep in the woods, there will probably be another leading to a way out, but which direction would it be? Luck was with us when we spotted another tree tied blue ribbon. The blue ribbon, not the blue huckleberry, became our goal as we scanned each tree ahead. Some ribbons were on the ground, other ribbons had fallen with the tree but follow them we did for about 40 minutes. It was when we came to a dense growth of alder trees that I knew I'd previously picked above. We cut up the hill and the most blessed of all sights appeared—a logging road that we were able to follow down to our car.

That evening, as rain and thunder passed overhead and as we snuggled into our warm, dry living room, we let settle in just differently this experience might have ended. We took our 'lost in the woods' story for what it was: a warning—our warning not to become complacent about forest safety.

We have since been out picking but, believe me, we now check that we each have water, matches, several energy bars, whistles, and we've added an easy-to-pack 'earth blanket.' We will learn to use a compass and carry one with us. Are there other things we are missing? We do love huckleberries but we love our life more!

SCA member-supporter Eleanor Jones neé Hungate has spent 74 summers at Priest Lake, and a handful of winters. She began picking huckleberries as soon as she was deemed old enough to join the family crew of adults heading out for 'the hunt.' She can be reached at ejones3@gmail.com



The author, with her pack of gear for the woods, takes a break from a walk along Lions Head Creek with family.