

Voice of the Wild Olympics (November 1996)

Park Service Punts on Jet Ski Ban for Lake Crescent

Olympic National Park has taken a serious stumble over the biggest management issue it faces on Lake Crescent: whether noisy, high powered jet skis shall continue to wreak havoc upon the peace and tranquillity of this scenic lake and shoreline. The answer, unfortunately, seems to be "Yes".

In their *Draft Lake Crescent Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement* released in October, which will guide management for the next 15 to 20 years, the Park Service opted not to ban these noisy beasts. Instead, the plan offers a range of zoning options for their controlled use on the lake (north, northeast, west, or everywhere). For the thousands of visitors who come to the lake each year to bask in its quiet and its scenic natural beauty, this is like asking where in your house you would permit chainsaws to operate. (Kitchen? Upstairs bedroom? Den?)

The answer should be obvious to everyone. The fast, noisy, and often reckless use of these high-speed watercraft is antithetical to what most of us value in a national park experience. Jet skis may be appropriate in some recreational areas, but they should have no more place in a national park than quarter- midget race cars or dirt bikes. And the Park Service should make that clear.

Jet skis (or "personal watercraft" as they are innocuously called) are expensive one passenger "boats" that can operate at speeds in excess of 50 mph and at noise levels ranging from 75 to 90 decibels (a level that can grind the enamel from your teeth). Their use on Lake Crescent has grown over the past few summers from an occasional annoyance to a nearly continuous disruption. In Wisconsin, where they amount to one percent of all watercraft, they are involved in 25 percent of all boating accidents; in Michigan nearly half.

Conflict with boaters, fishers, and other water users is on the increase at Lake Crescent, and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife is concerned over the impacts jet skis may be imposing on fish and water birds around the state. Harlequin ducks, buffleheads, canvasbacks, mergansers, and bald eagles are known to use Lake Crescent, and the lake harbors three endangered species of fish. Glacier National Park in Montana has placed a temporary ban on jet skis throughout the park pending its final management plan. Closer to home, Dungeness Spit National Wildlife Refuge has also seen fit to ban jet skis. Olympic National Park's failure to adequately protect the quality of visitors' experience at Lake Crescent is a major flaw in an otherwise sound management plan.

Alternative A: The Park's Preferred Alternative for Lake Crescent

The Park Service's preferred alternative (Alternative A) has much to offer park visitors and goes a long way toward protecting the matchless resources of Lake Crescent. The plan proposes to:

- upgrade the Spruce Railroad trail to accommodate bicycles and extend it to the western park boundary as a safe alternative to Highway 101. establish a 100-yard "No wake" zone for motorboats along the shoreline; 300 yards around developed areas.
- increase opportunities to interpret the natural and human history of the lake and lakeshore.
- relocate the Fairholm Store away from Highway 101.
- reconfigure the Fairholm Campground to separate RV sites from tent sites, and pull campsites back from the lakeshore.
- redesign and reconstruct the Log Cabin Resort to conform with historic standards (remove A-frames and replace RV hookups with cabins).
- discontinue overflow overnight camping at La Poel picnic area.
- improve the North Shore picnic area.

In some instances the Park Service had the right intent, but didn't follow through with management actions that adequately address the issues: the proposed 50 mph speed limit for motorized boats on the lake is excessive; a 35 mph speed limit would reduce noise and safety hazards yet still prove adequate for water skiing. Along with a speed limit, there should be a noise decibel limit placed on all motorized craft.

OPA also *opposes* the following recommendations in the Park Service's preferred alternative:

- A 10 percent expansion of Lake Crescent Lodge *We fear this expansion may include a scaled-down version of a conference center proposed earlier for this historic resort. We feel such a use is inappropriate for a national park. A location for environmental education-related conferences is currently served by nearby Olympic Park Institute*
- A new bike-in campground located on the Spruce Railroad Trail. *This historic trail traverses the only undeveloped stretch of shoreline on the lake. Tent sites for bicyclists could easily be added to the Fairholm Campground.*
- Unregulated shoreline access by motorized boats. *Boat access to shores should be regulated to protect sensitive, damaged, or recovering areas.*

Letters and Testimony Needed

Olympic National Park *almost* got it right with its Lake Crescent plan. With strong involvement and support from the conservation community, we can help shape a plan that will protect the splendid resources of Lake Crescent *and* insure the quality of visitors' experiences there well into the next century.

Please write in support of the Park Service's preferred alternative (Alternative A)...

...but with these important additions:

- Prohibit jet skis from all parts of Lake Crescent. *The draft plan proposes several options for zoning jet skis on different parts of the lake.*
- Establish a maximum speed limit of 35 mph for motor boats and set a maximum decibel level for engine noise. *The draft plan proposes an excessive 50 mph speed limit, and fails to address the issue of excessive noise.*
- Limit the expansion of commercial operations around the lake, including a proposed conference center at historic Lake Crescent Lodge. *The draft plan calls for expansion of Lake Crescent Lodge.*

The deadline for written comments is **February 3, 1997**. Address your letters to: Superintendent David Morris, Olympic National Park, 600 East Park Avenue, Port Angeles, WA 98362. The Park Service will be holding public meetings where you can voice your comments on Jan. 15, 7-9 p.m. at the Federal Building in Seattle and on Jan. 16, 7-9 p.m. at the Senior Center in Port Angeles.

The Latest on the Elwha River and Its Destructive Dams

The Elwha River Ecosystem and Fisheries Restoration Act of 1992 directed the Federal government to purchase and remove the two hydroelectric installations on the Elwha River. Once the dams had been acquired, the Federal government was directed to fully restore the Elwha River, the ecosystem of the river's basin, and the wild native salmon species and other anadromous fish.

The Gorton Amendment

Senator Slade Gorton (R-WA) put forth an amendment (see text, below) to turn over the dams and any restoration of the river, its ecosystem, and its fabled salmon runs, to the State of Washington, once the full \$29,500,000.00 had been appropriated by Congress to purchase the dams from James River, Inc., their owners.

To date, \$4,000,000 per year (an amount sought by Gorton) has been appropriated or, so far, only \$8,000,000. Thus, it would be another 5 or 6 years before the full purchase price for the dams was in place. (An appropriation of \$270,000 was also made for immediate in-river work to attempt to avert the near extinction of one salmon species.)

Conservation Community Opposed Gorton Amendment

Olympic Park Associates, Seattle Audubon Society, Sierra Club, Friends of the Earth, and Trout Unlimited (the five original intervenors before FERC to seek denial of licensing), the Lower Elwha S'Klallam Tribe, and the later intervenors do not believe the State of Washington will have the resources to meet all the requirements for restoration. The current estimated costs of removing the dams and restoring the ecosystem is in the neighborhood of \$100,000,000, including the \$29,500,000 to purchase the dams.

Further, it is also our opinion that removal of the dams and ecosystem restoration is a responsibility of the Federal government. The Elwha River watershed is the largest pristine watershed on the Olympic Peninsula, and it is primarily within Olympic National Park; the Glines Canyon Dam is in the Park; and the Elwha Dam, five miles from the river's mouth, prevents wild salmon and other anadromous fish from reaching their ideal, historic spawning areas within the Park.

The dams' electric energy currently goes to the Daishowa mill in Port Angeles, covering about one third of the power requirements. Replacement power would be provided by the Bonneville Power Administration.

Some of the repealed sections of the 1992 Act affect other issues, including interests of the lower S'Klallam Elwha Tribe.

Efforts to Remove the Gorton Amendment

In spite of major efforts to drop Gorton's amendment, it passed as part of the Fiscal Year 1997 Omnibus Spending Bill. A great deal of work was done in the House of Representatives, the Senate, and The White House to remove the Gorton language. Senator Patty Murray (D-WA) and her staff did their utmost to have the Gorton language eliminated in the Senate; Congressman Rick White (RWA) and his staff went all out to have the Gorton amendment deleted by the House, initially with some success. The Council on Environmental Quality move the amendment. But, with some modifications to the amendment, Senator Gorton had his way.

The Elwha Battle Is Not Over The conservation community will continue to work on behalf of a completely restored Elwha River, its environs, and its fishery. Each of you can let your Congressional representatives and Washington State officials know that the Elwha belongs to everyone in the nation. It is a national treasure, badly tarnished during the past eighty years, but a treasure that can have its lost heritage restored -- for itself, for its wild fish, for Olympic National Park, and for future generations of people to understand and appreciate.

Text of the Gorton Amendment:

Public Law 102-495 is amended by adding the following new section:

"Sec. 10. Washington State Removal Option.

"(a) Upon appropriation of \$29,500,000 or the Federal government to acquire the projects in the State of Washington pursuant to this Act, the State of Washington may upon the submission to Congress of a binding agreement to remove the projects within a reasonable period of time, purchase the projects from the Federal government for \$2. Such a binding agreement shall provide for the full restoration of the Elwha River ecosystem and native anadromous fisheries, for protection of the existing quality and availability of water from the Elwha River for municipal and industrial uses from possible adverse impacts of dam removal, and for fulfillment by the State of each of the other obligations of the Secretary of the Interior

under this Act."

"(b) Upon receipt of the payment pursuant to subsection (a), the Federal government shall relinquish ownership and title of the projects to the State of Washington.

"(c) Upon the purchase of the projects by the State of Washington, Section (a), (c), and (d), and Sections 4, 7, and 9 of this Act are hereby repealed, and the remaining sections renumbered accordingly.

Dungeness National Wildlife Refuge Releases Public Use Plan

by Tim McNulty

The Dungeness National Wildlife Refuge is about to release an environmental assessment which addresses the pressing issue of recreational use of Dungeness Spit. In less than a decade, visitation to the spit has increased from 66,000 to 113,000 people per year. During that time, wildlife use of the refuge including black Brant geese and other waterfowl, as well as harbor seal use, has declined. The refuge provides migratory and nesting habitat for over 250 species of birds, including threatened and endangered species such as peregrine falcons, marbled murrelets, snowy plovers and bald eagles.

To limit impacts on wildlife from increasing recreational use, refuge managers closed the tip of Dungeness Spit and its subsidiary, Graveyard Spit, to human use in 1993. This action somewhat reduced human disturbance to wildlife, but recreational use elsewhere in the refuge continues to impact water birds, shorebirds, and black Brant continue to decline.

The current plan provides for wildlife-dependent recreational and educational uses of the refuge while ensuring that such uses do not negatively affect wildlife. Parts of the refuge would be closed to human use during critical wintering and migration seasons. Recreational beach uses such as horseback riding and jogging will be limited to a small area at the base of the spit, away from important bird habitat. And jet skiing and wind surfing will be banned from the refuge.

OPA supports the Fish and Wildlife Services' effort to protect wildlife use on Dungeness Spit while allowing for appropriate, wildlife oriented recreational activities, but one part of the proposed plan seriously weakens this effort. Refuge managers propose to allow a 100- yard boat landing zone near the Dungeness Lighthouse at the end of the spit -- an area that is otherwise closed year round to public use. This is one of the highest use areas for marbled murrelets (a federal threatened species) on the inside waters of the spit. The nearshore area is also utilized by harlequin ducks (a state sensitive species), and receives high use by nearly all bird species frequenting the refuge. Allowing this boat landing zone, a concession to the U.S. Lighthouse Society which has taken over maintenance of the Dungeness Lighthouse, could displace such nesting shorebirds as snowy plovers (a state endangered species) and black oystercatchers.

OPA finds this use of refuge lands contrary to the stated mission and goals of the refuge system, namely, to "preserve...lands and waters for the conservation and management of fish, wildlife, and plant resources." and to provide visitors with "enjoyable recreational experiences *oriented toward wildlife, to the extent these activities are compatible with the purposes for which the refuge was established*" (emphasis added).

There has been intense pressure by local officials in Clallam County to open the refuge to unlimited recreational use, even at the expense of wildlife.

The final version of Management for Public Use for Dungeness National Wildlife Refuge is expected in Dec. 96 or Jan. 97. A **30-day comment period** will follow. To obtain a copy, write: Robert Edens, Refuge Manager, WA Coast Refuges Office, 33 South Barr Rd, Port Angeles, WA 98362. Anyone interested in the future of this spectacular wildlife refuge should write to express their support of the management plan -- **as well as their concerns.**

Jefferson County PUD Finally Gives Up on Dosewallips Dam

The final death knell for the proposed Dosewallips dam sounded on October 14. That's when Jefferson County PUD No. 1 wrote the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) withdrawing its license application for the Elkhorn Hydroelectric Project on the Dosewallips River. Conservationists breathed a long sigh of relief.

Nearly a decade ago, OPA and six other environmental groups filed an intervention in the FERC proceedings for this project requesting that FERC deny the license on both environmental and legal grounds. The proposed dam threatened to impact "at-risk" salmon runs and a declining elk population on the Dosewallips River, and Jefferson County PUD No. 1 had no legal authority to produce or sell hydroelectric energy.

Earlier this year, FERC granted Jefferson County an eleventh-hour extension to attempt to gain voter approval for this ill-conceived project, but there was little chance that the proposed dam would ever pass voter scrutiny. It met with a resounding two-to-one defeat when it was brought before Jefferson County voters in 1984, and it makes even less economic sense now than then.

Jefferson County PUD's final withdrawal of its application was long overdue. Nonetheless, PUD manager James Parker maintained in his letter to FERC that the Elkhorn project "provides little impact on the environment" and that "the project will some day prove to be feasible." The PUD's enduring attachment to this project underscores the need for National Wild and Scenic River status for the Dosewallips River -- and a dozen other free-flowing rivers on the Olympic Peninsula. Including these rivers in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System is the *only* way to permanently protect them from environmentally destructive projects like the Elkhorn dam.

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