

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 10/29/2018 7:00:00 AM

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Comments: As a long-term user of the Upper Wynoochee area I feel it's necessary to keep an eye on what the Forest Service might have in mind for that patchwork but significant remnant of the old growth forest that lies above Wynoochee Lake, and outside the National Park boundary. Seeing an opportunity recently to provide input to the USFS as it looks ahead to the next 50 years in its document:

(<https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=53124>), I provided my perspective and provide it here again for hopefully a larger local audience. Those who have been there once, who spend summer time there regularly (the area is locked up October 1 until April 1 each year), or who would like to be able to explore this area one day need to know that the FS 2270 road is the main ingress.

Keeping the 2270 road open is important to many recreational user groups, including naturalists like myself who appreciate this remarkable opportunity to be able to drive right up and into the oldest forests in the Olympic Peninsula, as the area was described to me many years ago by a USFS ranger there.

There is always a push and pull pressure to either lock up such remnant outside-of-Park boundaries or to mow them down. At this stage of the game, as far as I am concerned, if it's old growth, it should be hands off. The voices that claim the "need" to cut the last of it for the sake of "timber jobs" are more than disingenuous. If in the most productive and supposedly well-managed timber region in North America, they have to resort to that to make a few more equipment payments or whatever, then we need to call their whole enterprise an economic failure. Pitching the last of this upper elevation into their machine isn't going to fix or save or sustain anything. There, I've said it.

In the Upper Wynoochee, in my view, the way things are right now is a condition worth maintaining to a decent standard. Not everyone drives a high clearance 4x4 vehicle, and these folks deserve access as well. So let's keep 2270 open and well-graded. That's a pretty simple, straightforward, and low-cost way to go.

Too bad the USFS, Simpson, et al. got as far as they did in whacking this upper-elevation Alaska yellow cedar-mountain hemlock area, but it could have been much worse. Stories from friends that logged that area being belayed on ropes with their saws to drop the ancient timber down the dangerously steep slopes, with many of the trees shattering into what the loggers called "alligators" is not a joke, it's a wasteful travesty. Today it is what it is.

The important thing to me and many others right now is to keep the current and future other-Washington administrations from re-opening the massacre of this thousand-year-old steep forested region. What's there right now is irreplaceable.

In the last two decades in particular, we have seen greatly increased public recreational use of the upper Wynoochee and Humptulips watersheds, partly due to folks being closed out of many other formerly public-accessible areas. The additional pressure merits additional management attention under the USFS multiple-use mandate.

The discussion in the document about what they call decommissioning needs careful examination. If by "road decommissioning", USFS means the practice called obliteration, I am completely opposed to it in principle and for economic reasons, and see it as a wasteful and expensive practice from every perspective that I can think of, including the negative public relations effect for the Forest Service that it creates in the general public's eye.

I come up every year to pick huckleberries for home consumption, and bring friends who've never seen anything of the likes, including those with limited accessibility, up close and personal. The area we have come to call The Grandmother Trees has become near and dear to many hearts, and many of us will be there to defend it if need be, using modern media tools. Promise.

Managing the re-forested Douglas fir plantations through commercial and variable density pre-commercial thinning are ways to steer forest succession forward and generate some income. Mixed species stand composition should be emphasized when and where possible. But there will never be in the foreseeable future a return what was, or what remains. Simply put, we can't get to the past from here, but must go forward with care and ecological sensibility. We can manage our way to new healthy forest stand conditions, but good roads are a pre-condition for this.

The reason this area is considered the oldest Olympic Peninsula forest is connected to the fact that Wynoochee Pass is considered the wettest place in the Continental US, so forest fires have been absent, for nearly a thousand years. With climate change, this might all change in any given year or two. Having access roads gated instead of closed with "tank traps" and road kept useable can enable fire-fighting access should it one summer day be necessary. The trade-off between public access (the public being the most likely source of a forest fire) and closing the region down is, I believe, on balance to be placed in favor of public access.

In this era of "Nature Deficit Disorder" the ability of folks of all ages to get out into the woods is psychologically and thus socially important, and by that I don't mean being stacked cheek by jowl in some campground. We have Wynoochee Lake below for that and for those who bring town with them to their camping experience.

This is not an environmentalist vs. redneck issue. These are public forest lands, they have been abused in the past, but we all have a lasting right to have ready access, and in the process be witness to a managed forest renewal. The ghost of Gifford Pinchot, the father of the Forest Service, looks down on the Grandmother Trees, and many of those who care for this forgotten corner are watching, too.