



Lights and Shadows from the Dishman Hills, August, 1999

ECOLOGIST REPORT

The Ecological Society of America (ESA) meeting this month included a workshop on preserving a healthy natural ecology in an urban setting. The presentation pointed out that the main stresses on the Dishman Hills Natural Area are quite typical of urban forest: a tightening boundary, deterioration of air and water quality, invasive species, and rapid climatic changes. The goal of stewardship of urban forest should be to preserve both native and rare species and their habitat, and maintain a scenic landscape while providing outdoor recreation and nature education. One of the biggest challenges is the control of noxious and invasive species that tend to occur in areas of native plant richness.

The rapid ecological assessment of the Natural Area confirmed that areas of native plant richness were under attack from exotic weeds (we have 19 species of them). Habitats of good, moist growing conditions are where a battle is going on between native and exotic species. Another point to come out was the special combination of native grasses and the ponderosa pine forest. It was stated that we need an active management and monitoring program to protect the native plant habitat in order to save the DH ecology as it was before settlement.

Another important topic of the workshop was the importance of including ecological principles in land management. A panel that represented the government, academic, and development sectors of the community discussed the role of ecology preservation. It was stated that Spokane needs a clear overall, regional picture of the special ecologies that we need to preserve, and that government planners should assure that development incorporates these special natural settings rather than destroy them. Indeed, Spokane has been guilty of "patchwork" efforts to save natural habitat rather than having a overall preservation plan. We don't seem to have a county and city government that incorporates ecological planning into its decisions.

FIRE HISTORY STUDY

The Washington State University and DNR have just completed a fire history report of the Ponderosa forest in the Natural Area, as part of their study of the role of natural fire and the possible need for controlled burns. The Natural Area no longer experiences natural fires since the forest in the Valley are fragmented and fires are extinguished as fast as possible to avoid property damage. We are considering controlled burning as a replacement for the missing natural fires.

Four trees were sampled in a 20 acre plot. Sections of the trees were polished and growth rings were analysed for fire scares and dates., and with this information the fire history for the last 217 years was described.

The oldest sample dates back to 1783, and the earliest fire scar date is 1797. Medium interval between fires is 13.5 years, with 15 burns occurring in 1797, 1806, 1815, 1822, 1839, 1851, 1859, 1862, 1889, 1895, 1918, 1926, 1940, 1952, and 1966. Most of the fire scars are found in late-season wood growth which is consistent for the dry forest of the region. The number multiple scars on sample trees indicates that most of the fire were low intensity, underbrush fires

ORGANIZATION NEWS

We are a non-profit organization dedicated to saving natural areas in the Spokane region for public enjoyment and education. Call Michael Hamilton at 747-8147 with any questions. Another reminder that we will have our summer meetings only on call.

Donations during July were very good, totally \$2226, partly due to a whopper of \$1200! We need not become complacent, however, for we must have over \$2000 in August to make up for the low donation amount in June, for our quarterly payment on the Tower Mountain land we are buying.

Expenses for July were \$83.16 for bulletin mailing. Our thanks to you many people who supported us so well in July and have given permission to be listed here: Marjorie Benander, Eunice Birk, Florence Boutwell, Rita Cencich, Sharron Collins, Robert W. Damon, The Johnston-Fix Foundation, Don Griffiths, Eris Heggem, Dorothy M. Knechtel, John C. Lorang, John J. Madden, Donna McMackin, Linda Martin, Marilyn A. Miller, Mrs. Roy R. Mills, Natural Resources Dept., SCC memorial for Maurice Vogel, Aroa A. Ohme, Dinaz Rogers, Tom Rogers, Barbara A. & Stacy M. Sigler, Fred Spicker, Mrs. Wm. E. Vogt, June A. Warner, Jeanne H. Wilson, two who requested anonymity plus recyclable donations. A number of the donations were memorials for Maurice Vogel. **Again, many thanks!**

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