



## Lights and Shadows from the Dishman Hills, March, 1999

### LIFE OF A PONDEROSA

Last year we had an article by Maurice Vogel, forester, on the Ponderosa pine forest. The following is a story by Maurice studying a slice of an ancient ponderosa tree found freshly cut last summer on the Dishman Ridge, two miles south of the Natural Area where a logging operation was moving through old growth. The tree's story, a study of the growth ring structures, unfolds like a novel.

Back in 1849 the valley and hills were covered with dense forest, but, more often than now, fires sparked by thunder storms during the long, hot, dry summers ran their course without any human intervention. The ridges suffered more since the high ground is lightning's first choice, and fires burn up slopes with a vengeance. A fire had left a blackened scare on the west facing slope the year before, but this year the area was dotted with green saplings of Ponderosa pine, thousands of them, thriving in the fertile ashes. The Ponderosa, without a doubt, is the tree happiest with the local climate. It's tap root digs deep to find the needed water during dry times, and the thick bark insulates against the fast moving grass fires driven by strong seasonal winds.

With plenty of sun and water the young tree grew rapidly. The Civil War passed by, and the West was being settled. But by 1870 growth started to slow down. Neighbouring trees, which all started after the fire, were crowding into a dense thicket, competing for space and nutrients. For five decades an increasingly crowded forest put the brakes on growth. Around WW I, a ground fire burning up the slope scared the 70 year old tree but did little to hurt the pine, or for that matter, failed to thin the thicket. Growths continued painfully slow until something with even more impact hit the forest during the prosperity of the 1920's, logging.

Around 1927, the forest around our pine was drastically thinned. The old Ponderosa, while already 80 years old, was only 9.5 inches in diameter, a size that failed to catch the eye of the lumberjack. In one year the pine was "turned loose" to grow at a faster rate than it had seen since it was just a tiny sapling. All the sun and water a tree could want and all the new, younger trees had to take second seat to the old pine. The years flew by and the tree's growth matched the weather, cold or hot, and wet or dry. Threatening fires did not return for the carpet of forest was being divided by a growing city, and natural fires were not tolerated. The Great Depression, WW II, and the post war period of growth and prosperity unfolded beneath the great pine.

In 1998 the tree meant it's match. Almost three feet in diameter, and 150 years old meant little to the tide of city expansion. No doubt the tree was mainly considered as cash flow to help balance equity debt incurred from land purchase prior to subdivision and land sale. But the cycle of birth and death of the forest continues, and after our fair city meets it's final chapter, the big Ponderosa pines will once again cover the hills, overlooking a green carpet of forest.

### BENEFIT CONCERT IN APRIL

There will be a benefit concert by Walkin' Jim Stoltz for the Dishman Hills Association on Friday, April 16th, 7:30pm, at the Spokane Falls Community College Music building. Jim obtained his nickname by hiking more that 23,000 miles, soaking up the beauty of nature, writing songs, and troubadouring from sea to shining sea. He has performed on Public radio and television. The multimedia show Forever Wild, will share images and songs of the western wildlands from Mexico to Canada. Tickets are at REI on Monroe, all G&B outlets and at the door for \$10. **Please plan to attend and support the event and the Association.**

### 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. We will have our April meeting at Opportunity Elementary School, South 1109 Wilbur, the third Tuesday of the month at 7 PM.

We heartily thank the following loyal supporters who contributed a total of \$1134.17 during February and have permitted us to list them here: Louise Beyer, Robin Bishop, Helen Blackwell, Robert Burroughs M.D., Phyllis Burwell, Reta Cencich, James Conaty, Myrtle Erickson, Pauline Hagan, Hobnailers Hiking Club, Inland Empire Gardeners, Janyce Keeling, Randy Knight, Jean Koch, Natalie Lindgren, Helen Lininger, John Lorang, Janice Mahoney, Leo Middendorf, Margaret Millsap, Bill Nienhuis, Marion Phillips, Connie Porter, Tom Rogers, Norma Rosenberger, Marjorie Rozell, Jan Strobeck, Janice Thorson, Edwin Weilep, Jody Wende, and Jeanne Wilson.

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