

LIGHTS and SHADOWS

from the
Dishman Hills

February 2005

CONCEALED CAMPS

Global warming is having an unexpected effect on the Natural Area. Accompanying the warm and dry winter is an increase of unauthorized camping in the north, northeastern, and northwestern parts of our urban forest. In most cases these incidents involve indigent men and women (!) using the privacy of the woods for low-cost accommodations. They tend to use the less visited, hidden parts of the Natural Area, and are not in camp during daylight hours; problems with recreation users of the area are rare. The Dishman Hills has a long history of such activity that dates back to the 1930's

when there was a hobo village on the northeastern side next to the railroad tracks. Over the years there has been a minor, but steady rate of occurrences, with bivouac sites consisting of a couple of blankets and some trash. This latest flurry of illegal camping, however, involves shelter structures with beds and fire pits, camouflaging, and even a little landscaping. Some of the structures might have earned a boy scout merit badge. The overall impression is that these people planned to stay awhile. In the last three weeks County Parks, working with the County Sheriff and the Dishman Hills Association removed five camps on the NE side, and one camp on the N side. Last fall we removed one camp on the NW side. Convict labor teams from Airway Heights Corrections Center were used to swiftly breakup the camps and totally remove the debris.



The Spokesman Review newspaper featured the Dishman Hills camping problem in an article called "sites unseen" in their February 13th Sunday paper. This article reports on the human side of the story, discussing the social changes such as the recent ban on camping in Spokane. More homeless people are being pushed further outside the city, causing problems in the Hills not only with messy campsites and fire hazards, but isolating the homeless from their support from social service agencies. Some are camping there because they have nowhere else to go, some are hiding, and some just need a safe and free place to crash. Hopefully, they found a certain peace and beauty during their brief visit to the natural area that added some comfort to a life on the skids.

We plan to manage this problem as we have with other issues involving non appropriate uses of the Natural Area that degrade the ecology, cause public hazards, and encourage others to do the same. Our aggressive position to remove the camps as fast we can, will, hopefully, encourage these campers to move on. The Dishman Hills are a valuable public asset that is not to be wasted for the needs of a few, whether they are vagrants, developers, road builders, or high-impact use recreational enthusiasts.

If you run across a camp in your hiking adventures do not approach it or disturb anything, but please make a note of its location and report it to the County Sheriff or the Dishman Hills Association. We will take care of it as fast as we can. It is often helpful to leave a ribbon, flagging or rock pile on the trail to mark the camp site in relation to something on a map.

Nature is often hidden, sometimes overcome, seldom extinguished

Francis Bacon (1561-1626)

HORSING AROUND

The Association has been contacted by Spokane County Sheriff and asked to consider a horse patrol for the Natural Area to counter the increase of problems with camping in the more isolated parts. For the last ten years we have had to stop horseback riding as a recreational activity because of the impact it was having on the ecology. Riders were taking horses off trail and tearing up soft ground. We decided to limit recreational uses to low-impact uses. However, we are seriously considering signing off on the horse patrol concept. The Natural Area needs the personal touch and the patrol will provide volunteers on site to support our efforts to actively manage the Natural Area during these challenging times. The horse patrol would be uniformed and will provided a source of security and public information. Probably the smart course will be to try the patrol for a period of time and evaluated the effects. The Association will be meeting with the horse club members to brief them on the "ins and outs" of natural area patrol.

EVENTS

A geologic tour of the Dishman Hills is being offered through Community College Continuing Education, course # 7544, on May 14th. It cost \$27 and one must register through the college.

ORGANIZATION NEWS

We are a non-profit organization dedicated to saving nature areas in the Spokane region for public enjoyment and education. Call Michael Hamilton, 747-8147, if you have any questions. We meet every other month on the third Tuesday at Opportunity Elementary School, S. 1109 Wilbur, in the teacher's lounge, 7pm. Our next meeting will be March 15th.

The following are our January donors that have consented to be listed: Andrew Ashmore, David Cole, James Conaty, Celesta Frost, Marva Goede, Lloyd & Janet Hannink, Hobnailers, Mary Alice Jones, Janyce Keeling, Lewis Lovell, Brian Miller, William Moody, Betty Maron, Sharen Murphy, Mr. & Mrs. Orcutt, Ambrose Prestley, Victoria Sola, Dick and Lorraine Taylor, William Vogt, Larry & Mary Wright, and two anonymous donors. Welcome aboard all you renewers and new members.

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