

**GO NATIVE**

One of the most important task of the Dishman Hills Association is to understand and protect the ecology and the native plant populations of our forest. This task was addressed by members of the Spokane Native Plant Society this month as they continued to survey the plant communities on our new land parcel acquired from Washington State two years ago. A good start in saving natural systems is to know what you have to begin with. Subsequent changes to the ecology thus can be documented, allowing for, hopefully, solutions to problems as they arise.

The affects on the native plant communities by the many changes of modern times may not be immediately obvious. Take spring wildflowers for instance. Once again the forest floor in the Hills is carpeted with buttercups, grass widows, glacier lilies, and arrow leaf balsamroot Our spring wildflowers looked good this year as we received ample rain during the last two months, making up for a dry winter. The diversity, however, of these flower populations is under a lot of pressure.

Across the nation the numbers of many native wildflowers are being significantly decreased. The spring, ephemeral wildflowers are getting hit the hardest, and we are not sure why. Many of our spring wildflowers, like the grass widow, take advantage of the extra moisture of the season to grow, reproduce, and live for the rest of the year underground. Some of the ephemeral plants take advantage of the extra sunlight they receive in the early spring before local deciduous plants leaf out. These plants have life spans of tens to hundreds of years like the trees around them. Certain species can go several years without flowering. The spring wildflower is one of the indicators of native ecology health which is being effected by habitat reduction and fragmentation, invasive and noxious weeds, pollution, and climate change.

Recent studies are showing that diverse native plant populations often to not come back strong on disturbed lands that have lost their native species and are then left to revert back to natural space. Regrown natural space seems to be a shadow of its former self. These spaces do not display the biodiversity of the original ecosystem and many of the spring wildflower species do not reappear. Also the delicate balance between the plants and the animals that depend on them once disturbed is hard to reestablish. Even the protection of animal species like the deer, without protecting their natural predators, can result in over grazing of native plants such as the spring wildflower. Maybe the mountain lion sighting in the Dishman Hills last year is a good thing!

A research scientist, Dr, Tom Rooney, working on the problem of losing our nation's spring wildflower communities has documented an almost 20% decline in native plant richness over the last 50 years. Referring to the reduction of spring wildflowers across the nation he states that "our forest are becoming less interesting. It's similar to going to an art museum, and each time you go, there are a few pieces of art missing." The Dishman Hills native plant populations seem to be holding their own, but we hope what is happening in many other places is not the future for our natural spaces. Only time will tell.

*It's humbling to think that all animals, including human beings, are parasites of the plant world*

Isaac Asimov

**BACK WOODS NEWS**

The forest covering the Dishman Hills has more than a diverse ecology. There is also a diversity of use and activities. More and more people with more and more activities are contending with less public space every year for those activities. We have to manage these activities by allowing only those that do not significantly impact the natural settings and are appropriate for a public natural area. We feel that no one has the right to "use up" this valuable resource for the community.

The latest "problem" activity is the burial of pets in the more remote sections. Some of the grave sites are rather elaborate memorials (picture). We have no choice but to remove these sites, as we have with geocaches, letter boxes, and transient camps. These special interest activities really have no place in public natural space and they encourage people to do off-trail hiking which we feel has too much environmental impact. So please refrain from burying your love ones in the natural area, this is what back yards are for.



**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 7pm. Our next meeting will be at Camp Caro on the north side of the Dishman Natural Area off Sargent Road. June 21st. At this meeting we will be approving a updated set of Association bylaws and articles.

The following are our April donors that have consented to be listed: Andrew Ashmore, Joao Bras-Jorge, John Cobb, Linde Hackett, Monte Holden, Gloria Krebs, Bart & Lindell Haggin, Barbara Morkill, Joy Peterson, Sally Reynolds, Diane Rogers, Mike & Jody Wende, Jeanne Wilson, and one anonymous donor. Thanks for your support.

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