

# LIGHTS and SHADOWS

from the  
Dishman Hills

July 2008

## FIRE, FIRE IN THE HILLS

A strong wind was blowing out the west, the temperature was up and the humidity was down, a dangerous combination in these parts when combined with human carelessness. On the afternoon of July 10 a fire started about 1.5 miles west of the Natural Area as a result of a recreational bonfire that was lighted in an empty lot and left to smolder for three days before the wind turned it into a pyro nightmare. The fire front roared east driven by dry forest and a wind up to 50 miles per hour. Hundreds of firefighters combined with firefighting aircraft moved in to stop it while a number of communities were evacuated in the fire's path. The Natural Area was also in the path, and as the sun set the Washington Dept. of Natural Resources (DNR) wildfire crews joined with volunteer convicts from Airway Heights Correctional facility and moved onto the south side of the Natural Area to stop the fire using firelines and burnouts both along foot trails and hand dug fire trenches. The fire was torching a number of forest homes and running as a hot crown fire, hopscotching from treetop to treetop, but when the wind subsided and shifted to out of the north towards the end of the day the Natural Area was spared serious damage. Throughout the night, in the pitch dark forest full of fire and air full of smoke, ash, and embers fire fighters worked to stop the burn's spread into the Natural Area and by sun up it was contained.



Large snake flees the burn zone

These guys did one fantastic job of blocking the wildfire's spread into the Natural Area without the use of heavy equipment that could cause more damage than necessary. Before crews cleared out they even cleared the trails of fallen timber! The final toll of forest effected in the Natural Area is estimated to be 25 acres of seriously burn and 25 acres of grass-fire burn where most of the trees were not damaged; not bad considering this was a 1200 acre fire with many millions of dollars in damage. Our 21 acre "lemon property" however, south of the Natural Area, was directly in the path of the raging inferno and was burned clear of vegetation.

In the days following the fire the burn area was patrolled to assure that wildfire did not reawaken. It appears that crews dug up a number of roots and tree stumps that might have smoldered into another fire. A tour through the burn area two weeks later found new plants sprouting up through the ashes suggesting that in some places the intensity of the fire was not high enough to sterilize the soil. There was a sighting of turpentine beetle, a bark beetle that can infest a stress forest. We will be watching how the forest recycles and rebuilds itself over the next several years, and we are well aware that wildfire is a natural part of the Ponderosa-tree forest.

The DNR held a meeting for those who were affected by the wildfire at the end of the month and members of the Association attended the meeting. Topics included a number of choices for land

*Men have brought their powers of subduing the forces of nature to such a pitch that by using them they could now very easily exterminate one another to the last man.*

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939)

owners such as salvage tree harvest, erosion control, replanting, and cleanup. A large crowd of about 100 people appeared attentive and serious, and many were eager to cooperate with their neighbors on joint recovery projects. The Association stands ready to join with our neighbors in the work ahead of all of us to restore the beautiful natural spaces we lost. Our board has called for a special mid-summer meeting to initiate a path for forest recovery. Our deepest sympathies are offered for those who lost their homes and so much of their possessions in the Dishman Hills. If you would like to share in our resources for recovery projects please contact our corporate headquarters at 747-8147. But remember, the forest will return in time to replace the blackened landscape for nature is a wise and powerful force.



Trail/fire line near Eagle Peak

## ASSOCIATION 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 questions. Our board meets every other month on the third Tuesday. We are on our summer break and our next meeting will be on September 16th at 7pm, and at the Moran Prairie Spokane County Library, 6004 South Regal St. Members and the public are always welcome to drop in.

The following are our June donors that have consented to be listed: Brad Blegen, Nancy Cashion, Bob Damon, Carol Ellis, Chris Ericksen, William Erler, Jean Flechel, Frieda Foth, Celesta Frost, Joe & Lisa Giegel, Harry Hendron, Patty & Bill Houff, Glen Kivett, Pat & Ruth Manners, Marilyn McCall, Della Meyer, Marilyn Miller, Marlene Montgomery, Sharon Murphy, Karen Nelsen, Bill Nienhuis, Robert Ordner, Christoph Phillips, Ellen Pierce, Marion Pillsbury, Joel & Lorna Ream, Lyn Ream, Ed & Jan Reynolds, Mary Ruud, Dr. & Mrs George Schneider, Nanette Smith, John Stevenson, Mary Sweeting, Walt & Norm Trefry, Beth Tietjen, Bernadine Van Thiel, Mary Weathers, Mike & Jody Wende, Jeanne Wilson, Art Zack, Hershel Zellman, Irene Zimmer, and two anonymous donors. Thank you one and all for your support.

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