



LIGHTS AND SHADOWS FROM THE DISHMAN HILLS

AUGUST 1992

Conditions in the Hills are very dry. A spark could set off a real conflagration. Yet, barring that, the plants and animals will survive quite well, as they obviously have many times in the past. Trees protect an area from the heat of the sun and the drying effect of hot winds. (Clearcutting of our forests does not seem to be an ecologically sound means of management.)

About the only flowers in the Hills are goldenrod. Bird life is quiet and inconspicuous, normal for this time of year. An interesting exception is the large number of red-breasted nuthatches. Insects themselves seem less plentiful, particularly butterflies. The tremendous population of pine white butterflies, so conspicuous for the last three years, seems to have collapsed. I have seen only one in the Hills! This brings up the question which I mentioned last year: Is there a connection between red-breasted nuthatch numbers and that of the pine whites? At least one study of predator-prey relationships showed that an increase in predator numbers lagged behind an increase in prey. Is this happening here?

Ponds in the Hills are completely without water, no surprise. A continuation of dry years is, more than ever, reducing them to temporary ponds. Yet most of them are grown over with plants, the soil beneath still moist.--TR

We have bought signs to erect at entrances to our land telling people what the rules are. We want only foot traffic and of course no disturbance of plant and animal life and rocks and soil. Also no fires, camping or picnicing. An Eagle Scout candidate has volunteered to bring a crew of Scouts in to place the signs and also to pull toadflax. This is expected to take place in September. It will be a great help!

The Department of Natural Resources, which owns 70 acres in the Hills, and Spokane County Parks and Recreation Department, owner of some 220 acres, have not yet come to a decision whether to allow mountain bikes and horses. Motorized vehicles are banned in the entire natural area. The Department of Natural Resources has a prospect for a person to hire as a ranger to patrol and help to protect the entire natural area. We all need to help do this also.

Donations during July came to a good \$482.89. Expenses totaled \$319.36. \$162.40 was for the down payment on the natural area signs, bulletin expenses was \$114.36, administrative expense, \$40.00 and miscellaneous, \$2.60.
(cont. column 2)

We are a nonprofit organization dedicated to saving some of the natural areas of the Spokane area for people to enjoy and learn from.

President: Lawrence Thieman, Vice President: Tom Rogers, Secretary: Helen Lininger, Treasurer: David Lenten

Our monthly meetings starting in September will be at Opportunity Elementary School, South 1109 Wilbur, the third Monday at 7 p.m. You are cordially invited to attend.

Please send donations to our box number, shown at top of this bulletin.

Although extremely dry conditions invite fires, yet, lacking lightning storms, human activities are the only threat of fire: dropped cigarette butts, illegal (and legal) burning and campfires, sparks from trains, motorcycles and other vehicles, downed power lines. The Dishman Hills escaped last October's "fire storm", primarily because no power lines traversed them. (Some years ago a power company wanted to put a line across the Hills at Sixteenth Avenue but changed its plans when we protested.)

Although we certainly were appalled by the fire storm, we note that the effect on the land and its plants and animals was not so severe as one might expect. In some places conifers were killed but in others they survived very well because of the older trees' thick bark. Shrubs, particularly willows, are vigorously sprouting from the roots. Grasses and flowers survived very well, since the fire did not kill their roots. Even most of the alders and birches along Iller Creek survived, the fire apparently moving fast enough so that the heat was bearable.

As for animal life, the effect on it seems minimal. Small birds along lower Iller Creek were rather scarce but no more so than they have been for several years. Deer tracks and coyote signs are frequent on the old logging road along the creek. Interestingly, song sparrows and California quail appear to be moving up into the burned areas along the creek in response to the temporary decrease in underbrush. The quail may have been attracted to the wheat dropped on the area last fall and which in some places grew and matured grain. Overall the natural vegetation in the burned area seems to have done well the job of preventing erosion.

The principal casualties of the fires were homes. One must question the wisdom of our county government's policy of permitting building in such fire-susceptible areas. The desire of people to escape from the noisy, crowded urban areas with their dirty air is understandable, yet it may carry a heavy price, adding to urban sprawl, more driving, with its resultant air pollution, noise and more road construction.

(cont. from column 1)

Our thanks to you who donated money, recyclables and/or services during the month and have given permission to be listed here: Jon Barstad, Inga M. Boyd, Joan G. Chesbrough, Joseph Collins, John Gardner, Vickie Hager, Eris A. Heggew, Ruth A. Herrington, Shiran K. Lee, Rich Nelson, Edith Rasmussen, Tom Rogers, Florence Thayer, Lawrence Thieman, Ed Tietjen, Doreen Vance and Jeanne H. Wilson.

Please use this form when sending contributions
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