



LIGHTS AND SHADOWS FROM THE DISHMAN HILLS

FEBRUARY 1993

FEBRUARY DONORS TO PROJECT

Donations to the Dishman Hills project came to \$537.55 in January. \$7.55 came from recycling and \$125.00 from memorials. Expenses were: \$151.41 for bulletin printing and postage and \$40.00 for administration.

Our thanks to the following who contributed cash, recyclables and/or services during the month and have given permission to be listed here: James C. Banta, Jon Barstad, Kathryn Bernard, James T. Bertis, Bertha B. Booth, Lyndall L. Cook, June Helen Foote, Barb Garcia, Don Griffiths, Pauline S. Hagan, Michael Hamilton, LeRoy E. Hook, Bill Marchand, Rick Nelson, Tom Rogers, Lee M. Smith, Ruth F. Stickney, S. M. Talbot, Ed Tietjen, Lawrence Thieman, Robert S. Turner and Jeanne H. Wilson.

WHAT GOOD IS A LICHEN -- OR A MOSS?

They are just little plants without real stems, leaves or even roots. They don't have flowers, fruits or seeds. We can step on them and hardly notice them. But please don't step on them. They have their place in the scheme of things. And if you look closely they are beautiful.

From the earth's point of view, they slowly make soil out of rock. And lichens capture nitrogen from the air and make it into compounds that enrich the soil, fertilizing it. To the stomachs of caribou they are life-sustaining--reindeer "moss".

Another role of lichens and mosses came to our attention recently. The latest news bulletin of the Oregon Natural Desert Association tells how they often cover the soil and prevent the invasion of weeds. Just how they do this is not explained. Do they merely preempt the space, keeping the weeds from germinating or their seedlings from getting sunlight? Or do they produce a chemical that inhibits weedy growth? But one thing is certain: heavy grazing by hoofed animals, primarily cattle, destroys this fragile protective mat, encouraging weeds. A news report has said that spotted knapweed has become a serious problem in grazing land in the Okanogan Valley. It sounds like overgrazing.

In the Dishman Hills knapweed is thriving only on disturbed soil, along paths, and in places where the native plants have been replaced by exotic ones, as at Camp Caro--but not the lawn. Whether or not the absence of lichens has allowed the invasion of bulbous bluegrass and Dalmatian toadflax, we do not know. We plan to try to find out this summer if there is any connection.

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 Lentes
Board of Directors: Omar Carroll, Michael Hamilton, Francis Potter, June Potter, and Ray Staley

Our meetings are held every third Monday at 7 P.M. at Opportunity Elementary School, South 1109 Wilbur. You are cordially invited to attend.

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

WILDLIFE SCARCE IN SNOWY HILLS

A trip into the Dishman Hills February 6 found a lot of snow -- surprise!--but not much wildlife. A Ruffed Grouse flushed, seven ravens flew over and eight Red-breasted Nuthatches showed up; this is a good number compared to previous winters and continues the high trend of 1992. Rather unexpected was a little flock of five Pine Grosbeaks, down from the mountain forests to the north.

Red squirrels seemed almost absent, for the pine cone crop, their main food, is scarce. No deer tracks appeared but some of coyotes did. Dog tracks were frequent, though dogs aren't supposed to be running loose anywhere in the county. Some hikers are using the Hills, in spite of the snow. Though a few spots were snow-free, mostly under trees and on rocks, the buttercups will have to wait.

A hike part way up Iller Creek on Tower Mountain didn't do any better. In fact, only one or two Red-breasted Nuthatches were heard. Except for a Steller's Jay, all the rest of the birds were found around the end of Holman Road: a Red-tailed Hawk soaring, a magpie and a Ring-necked Pheasant heard, and a Hairy Woodpecker and another Steller's Jay. The latter species seems to be on the increase, possibly nesting, in the Tower Mountain area.

At the last meeting of the Advisory Committee for Dishman Hills Natural Resource Conservation Area February 9 the public was invited. Most of the people were horseback riders, who spoke for approval of their activity in the Dishman Hills. Our association does not want riding on the land we own and would like to see it banned elsewhere in the Hills, for we believe it would be difficult to keep that use out of our land while allowing it on County and Department of Natural Resources land. (Some people still don't understand that our 225 acre tract is not public property.) One rider was invited to come back to the next meeting with his proposal for accomodating horses.

The next meeting is scheduled for February 23 at 2 P.M. at the County Agricultural Building, N. 222 Havana. The public is invited. We urge that more Dishman Hills Association members attend to state their views.

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