



# Lights and Shadows from the Dishman Hills, May, 2000

## BUNCH GRASSES

Some of the lesser appreciated plants of the Dishman Hills are the native grasses that are at their best in the moister months of the early summer of Eastern Washington, much of the ground beneath excellent example of native ponderosa forest environment distinct clumps, rather than your lawn. They are excellent survival skill in areas we had last year (but not this year) respond well to fire. (dead plant material) from grass seeds can germinate. We know well, here in Eastern Washington, the field burning techniques used by commercial grass seed growers (cough, cough).



their full glory in these summer. Here in the arid for- native bunch grasses cover the trees. The Hills are an grasses in conjunction with a ment. Bunch grasses grow in forming sod like the grass in drought-resistant, an impor- with hot, dry summers like year so far!). Most of the Fire burns off the "litter" the forest floor so that the

Idaho fescue and blue bunch wheatgrass are the two most common bunch grasses in Eastern Washington. Idaho fescue has fine, hair-like leaves 4-10 inches long and, usually, a bluish tinge. In fact it is sometimes called blue bunchgrass. The flowers and seeds are found in loose, drooping clusters at the end of stems. Blue bunch wheatgrass is a courser plant with wider, flatter leaves, up to 1/4 inch wide and 10-20 inches long, with a narrow, spike-like seed head.

Another bunch grass that is common here in the Hills, but less so in the rest of Eastern Washington, is rough fescue (pictured above). This beautiful grass is the largest of the bunch grasses that you will see in the Natural Area, two feet tall and up three feet in diameter! Like the Idaho fescue, this species has a loose, drooping seed-head, but its larger size and wide, darker leaves (up to 1/4 inch wide) are easy to distinguish. So lets get out there to find these wonderful plants and appreciate them. Native grass seed has been harvested from the Natural Area by the State in the past.

## COUPLET SAGA CONTINUES

The saga continues with the construction of the new Sprague Couplet on the northern side of the Natural Area. An article summing up the situation is reproduced on the reverse of this newsletter with the permission of the Spokesman Review. There was also an article called the "Buffer Brigade" in the Inlander, May 11-17. The Association is trying to assure that the County takes in account the environmental deterioration to the Natural Area caused by proximity of the new roadway. Its pretty obvious that if the Hills did not have an advocate such as the Association, County engineers would have done some serious damage as part of this and other roadway projects near the

Hills. The heart of the problem is that the County is not giving natural areas, urban forest, and green spaces enough priority as a needed component for our community. It's a complex situation that involves comprehensive plans, growth boundaries, zoning, EIS's, etc. Development is a powerful force that threatens to consume our natural spaces slowly, one acre at a time.

The County has responded favourably to some of our request to protect the local ecology where possible as part of the Couplet Project. The property just north of Camp Caro will probable be transferred to the Natural Area after reclamation of several dumps on the property. A recent communication from County Commissioner John Roskelley states disposal of County land bordering the Natural Area is on hold pending the exploration of the possibilities of saving some of the rocky terrain both south of the roadway, and in the vicinity of the Park Place development on the northwest side of the Natural Area. Way to go John Roskelley!

## 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. For the summer months we meet only for special reasons and will resume monthly meetings in the Fall.

The following are our April donors that have consented to be listed: John Barstad, Signe Currier, Walter Davis, Howard Dolphin, Victoria Freeman, Roger Fruci, Henry Hagen, Janet Hannink, Mark Huggar, Charles Gillingham, Emma Jackson, Helen Lininger, John Lorang, Marilyn Miller, Sharon Myrphy, Francis and June Potter, Jan Reynolds, Iris Scheel, Jan Strobek, Roger Tarr, Richard Taylor, Agnes Thornock, John Warner, Barney Wilson, and Jeanne Wilson; Many thanks for your generous support.

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