

AFTER THE FIRE

As of this July, the Natural Area has acquired a somewhat new ecology on the southern acres, a wildfire burn area of about 50 acres. It's not very pretty and the predominate color is black. But wildfires are a natural component of our forest and it is our responsibility to manage the situation as best we can. With the help of Spokane Conservation District, WA Dept. of Natural Resources, and various other agencies, individuals, and companies that deal with burn areas we hope to embark on a restoration of the forest that will, in time, replace what was lost. Our immediate concern is to mitigate more damage to the forest in it's vulnerable condition. This means addressing erosion, beetle infestation, and noxious weed invasion. In the "old days" we would be more inclined to allow a 100% natural regeneration of the forest, but

now active management does better to deal with the unnatural aspects that affect an urban forest. For erosion we can place hay bales in steeper areas and drainage where bare surfaces could be washed with the return of the wet season. We really are not sure how much cleanup is necessary since esthetics is not a high priority, but trails should



Hot burn area,
SE corner Natural Area

be kept clear of dead trees that fall in the wind. A trail blocked with downfall usually means a new path will form immediately by people bypassing the block. A big concern is the noxious weed problem, and to help fight them we plan to seed the burn areas with native grasses in the Fall when the rains return. This will, hopefully, fill up the ecological niche before the weeds arrive in force, stabilize the soils, and maybe provide some food for wildlife in the spring. We would also like to do some tree planting, probably in the spring of 2009. We will have to be patient to see which trees survive the fire burn, beetle attack, and the winter to come. Much of the burn zone in the Natural Area was grass fire and did not scorch the trees too badly. Larger dead tree snags are good habitat for certain animals and we should leave them standing. A stressed forest is susceptible to a variety of effects and we will be learning about them as they happen.

We are moving ahead now to secure financial support for these restoration projects and have initiated a grant request through DNR forest stewardship program, and the USDA natural disaster recovery assistance program. Planning now what materials will be needed for restoration will be important since local native grass mixes and tree saplings are in limited supply. We have been told that local plant stocks are the most hardy for the local environment.

We have also started a modest outreach program to join with our neighbors, who also suffered from the wildfire, on restoration projects. This will allow us to get to know our neighbors better, and to increase project efficiency and cost. There may be some interest at the local community colleges for students in forest management to participate in the restoration and to observe the rebuilding of the forest ecology. Behind this dark cloud there may be a silver lining or two, time will tell.

Weed—a plant whose virtues have not been discovered.
Ralph Waldo Emerson, American Poet

GIVE TRAILS A BREAK

One surprise result from the recent wildfire in the Dishman Hills was the obvious importance of trails as ready-to-go fire breaks and rapid access to for fire fighters. At the Eagle Peak trail in the southern part of the Natural Area crews burned out the grass so when the wildfire arrived it had less fuel to burn into the Natural Area. Trails could be designed in developments that are situated in or near natural spaces and through urban forest that could serve both as recreation assets and safety features for the communities that share these green spaces.

The Dream Trail Project, which we and others have been working on over the last few years, could be an excellent model for this concept. The trail would run north-south, connecting the Dishman Hills Natural Area with the new conservation lands on Tower Mountain. The lineation of the trail would be perpendicular to the prevailing winds and thus the usual wildfire path. Such a trail would not only offer recreation use and animal migration paths, but offer protection to development to the east and down the slope. A classic win-win-win situation!

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, however, will be on Wednesday, September 17th at 7pm, and at the Moran Prairie Spokane County Library, 6004 S. Regal St. Members and the public are always welcome to drop in.

The following are our July donors that have consented to be listed: Laura Ackerman, Mike Arnot, Diedre Ashmore, Barbara Bailey, Denise Beardsler, James Berry, Robin Bishop, Carolyn Boatman, Bertha Booth, Erwin Bronsch, Ann Marie Burk, Claire Carter, Nancy Cashon, John Douglas, William Eagle, Earthworks Recycling, Joe & Lisa Giegall, Charmaine Gural, Larry Hampson, Isabel Hawkins, Eris Heggem, LeRoy Hook, Clint & Kathy Kalich, Gary Keller, Hans & Katie Krauss, Rich Leon, Lee Loudis, Leo Middendorf, Ken Mondal, Barbara Morkill, Norma Rosenbeger, Mark & Kimberly Stevenson, Fred & Dorothy Radebaugh, Ann Sheridan, Jan Strobeck, and one anonymous donor. Your generous support is very much appreciated.

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