



# Lights and Shadows from the Dishman Hills, December, 1998

## THE PONDEROSA FOREST

The following article was written by Maurice Vogel, a professional forester with a lot of experience with western woods including 27 years with the US Forest Service, and 14 years teaching forestry at SCC. Since 1970 he has lived adjacent to the Dishman Hills Natural Area. Now retired, Maurice has the time to write several articles for us on the Dishman Hill's Ponderosa forest.

The Dishman Hills are on the eastern edge of the Columbia Basin, a saucer shaped land feature that covers most of Central Washington. Forest occur around the basin on the higher outer rim while the drier center is nearly treeless. The Hill's forest are typical of basin edge areas, and classified as Interior Ponderosa Pine Cover Type. This type is defined by its major tree occurrence, the Ponderosa Pine, growing with ninebark, snowberry, or fescue grasses. The Ponderosa can be a climax species (perpetuates with no other tree species mixed in), or seral (growing mixed with other species before the climax stage).

In the Hills, Ponderosa is found mostly in pure stands, with a few Douglas-fir on wetter sites. The tree has a long, deep root system, making it possible to survive in very hot and dry sites. The elevation where it grows ranges from 1,000 to 5,000 ft. It can be long lived, sometimes as old as 600 years. The older trees are fire resistant due to their thick bark. Their wind resistance is very good as is their ability to withstand extremely cold temperatures. They bear cones starting at age 7, and continue for another 350 years. Good seed years come every three to seven years.

The climate of the Dishman Hills is varied and complex. Most moisture laden storms arrive from the west in the winter. In summer high pressure brings dry weather for long periods of time. Average annual rainfall is near 12 inches per year. Most of it falls as snow or cold rain before or after the growing season. The remaining rain falls during the warm summer months.

In the Ponderosa Pine areas, wildlife habitat is a three dimensional space. The tall trees increase the habitat by adding large volumes to the length and width of the area. Birds and animals live in this space. Large trees also contain big cavities that are valuable to wildlife. The great longevity of this habitat, including fallen logs is an important factor for the health of the wildlife family.

Diseases (such as dwarf mistletoe) disfigure the tree. Insects (like the bark beetle) can gradually kill the tree over two or three years. The greatest danger to the Ponderosa Pine is uncontrolled wildfire. When this happens to forest stands where no fire has occurred for 50-75-100 years, all ground cover is reduced to ashes. This stand replacement fire starts a new cycle of life all over again. Fires of this type can be prevented by cool under-burns every 5- to 20 year cycles.

## ROAD THREAT RETURNS

County Engineers are again threatening the Dishman Hills Natural Area. Besides planning a major highway just north of the Natural Area (Sprague couplet), they now propose another highway right up against the southern edge (Southside Arterial). This latter proposal could be an ecological disaster blocking animal migration, excavating a huge scar in the hillside, and bringing development to an area that is now mostly forest. It's not that the Engineers want to damage the preserve; they just ignore it, considering it undeveloped open space where building roads is cheaper. Please send your written support for the Natural Area to Spokane Co. Public Works or your County Commissioner.

## ORGANIZATION NEWS

We are a non-profit organization dedicated to saving natural areas in the Spokane region for public enjoyment and education. Call Michael Hamilton at 747-8147 with any questions. We will have our monthly meeting in January at Opportunity Elementary School, South 1109 Wilbur, the third Tuesday of the month at 7PM. November donations were \$905, expenses were \$65 for postage.

If you want donations to go on your 1998 income tax return, remember that those to the Dishman Hills Association are fully tax deductible as a non-profit organization.

Our thanks to you who who donated and have given permission to be listed here: Jon Barstad, Helen Blackwell, David Cole, William Erler, Wilbert Fritz, Gloria Krebs, Hugh Lifcort, Hannah Lovik, Dr. Richard Hartley, Dorothy Knechtel, Helen Lininger, Barbara Lockwood, Joy Peterson, Francis/June Potter, Tom Rogers, Lois Smith, Jane Thrasher, and Jeanne Wilson.

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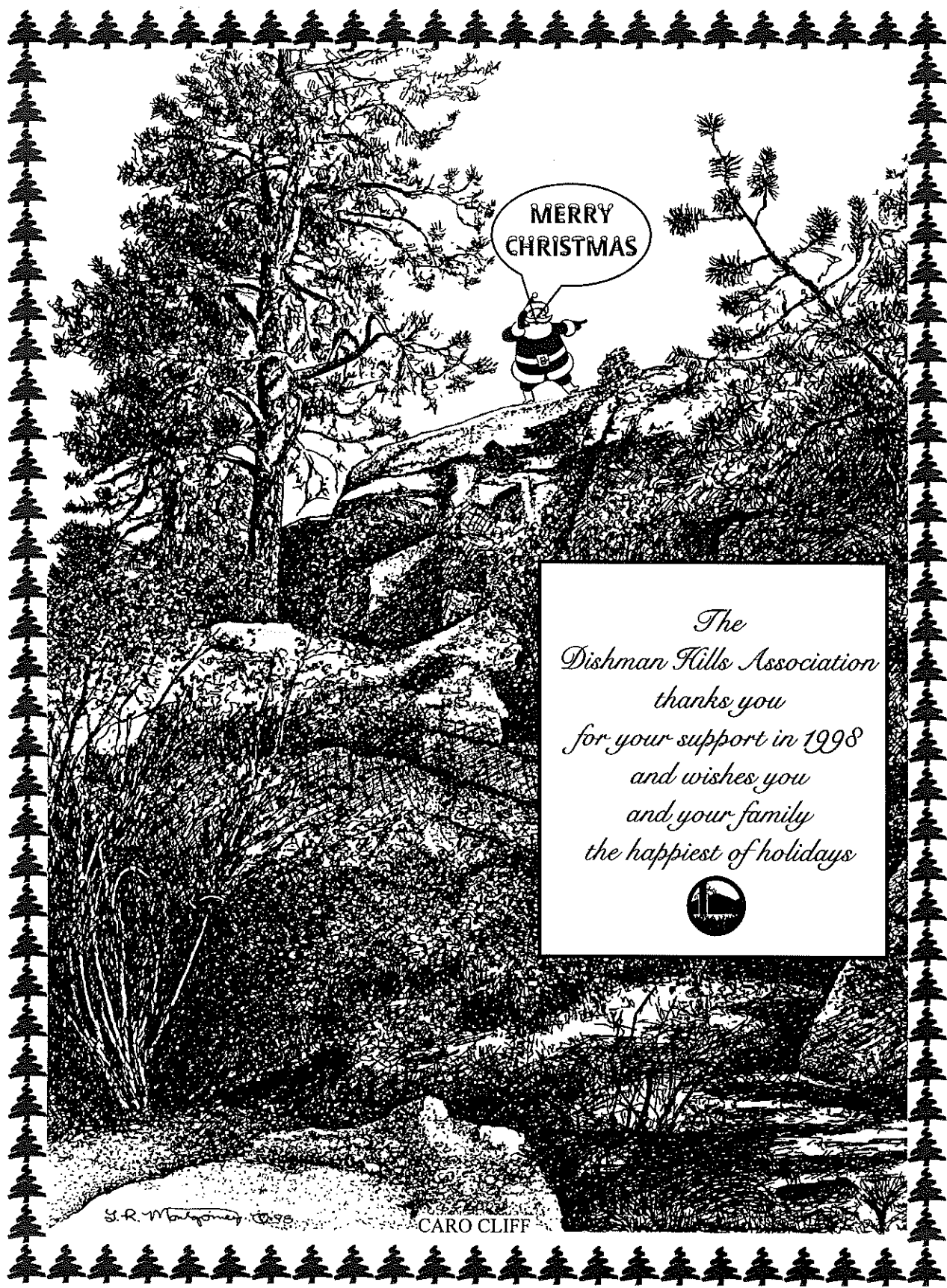
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MERRY CHRISTMAS

*The  
Dishman Hills Association  
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and wishes you  
and your family  
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