

LIGHTS and SHADOWS

from the
Dishman Hills

June 2013

SENIOR PLANTS

What are the oldest living things in the Natural Area? A good guess would be some of the senior Ponderosa pines. Our dating studies in the Natural Area found that some of them go back to the late 1700's. These trees, residing in a relatively dry forest, grow slowly adding on the years without getting very large. Nope, there are some older. All of the understory plants are young as the forest floor is constantly being recycled. Far as we know, there are no ancient reptiles or hermits in our forest.

We believe the prize can be awarded to the Aspen trees around the ponds. Western Quaking Aspen (*populus tremula*) can propagate asexually by cloning off its root system and those individuals we see today may be part of a continuous plant that goes back to the end of the glacial age, up to 10,000 years ago. The "quaking" part of the name refers to the noise the leaves make as they tremble in the wind. Aspen do have two basic ways to reproduce, by seeds or by root shoots. Here is the West, where it is dry, much of the growth is by shoots. Seed dispersal for this tree is complicated by the fact Aspen stands are either male or female. Propagation by roots essentially clones the plant genetics for the new tree that grows from the sprouts rising from the root beneath. A grove of Aspen is a single plant, each tree attached to a root system. In many places in the West these sprouts are aggressively grazed by wildlife since to many they are quite tasty. In the Natural Area there are few grazers and Aspen sprouts can be found. We do not know if the Aspen grove at the ponds is either male or female.

The oldest living thing on Earth is thought to be an Aspen grove in Utah that has been estimated to be as much as 80,000 years old, and covers 106 acres!

LEAVE ALONE

We received a request last month from a commercial interest to harvest mushrooms in the Natural Area. The request was declined. The situation reminded us that many people do not know what a conservation area is all about. While the Natural Area is open for

If you know strength and patience, welcome the company of trees
- Hal Borland - American journalist and author

public access and use, it is not available to use up or to exploit. Over the years we have had to tell people "no" who wanted to remove rocks, native plants or animals, and wood. We also had to say "no" to those requesting to remove or compromise the environmental health of our Natural Area with off trail activities such as paint ball warfare, inappropriate trail activities such as pack-llama training and nude hiking groups, and an assortment of stuff such as pet burials, forest camps, and backwoods partying.

The whole point of public access to the Natural Area is to provide the opportunity to experience intact natural settings while getting some exercise. That way we conserve our natural assets for the future. On your next hike in the Hills, try to increase your skills to observe, take notes, count sightings, describe colors, and ask the basic scientific questions of how, why, and when. Doing this you will take something valuable from the Natural Area while leaving all that was there before your hike.

HOW DRY WE ARE

We are having a very dry season and it is shaping up as a very dry year. The previous year was actually a bit wetter than normal. Our Ponderosa forest is well adapted for drought during this season. Many of the plants on the forest floor sacrifice all the growth above ground level, and maintain their roots. Many plants limit above-ground activities such as propagation to the spring. There is no doubt that the wildfire season will be severe this year so everyone should be especially careful with fire. Most all our wildfires start with carelessness.

CONSERVANCY NEWS

We are a non-profit 501(c)(3) 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 month on the third Tuesday. Our next meeting will be on July 18th, 7 pm. We meet at the Moran Prairie County Library, 6004 South Regal St.. Visitors are always welcomed.

The following are our May donors that have consented to be listed: Dave Adams, Barbara Baumgarten, Elizabeth DeNiro, Mary Gentile, Inge Hendron, Cynthia Langlois, Barbara Morkill, Mark Nelson, Sharon Spear, Kimberley Taylor, Mary Water, and two anonymous donors. This is an incomplete list due to vacation break. Catch up next month. Thank you all for your support.

YES, I want to help protect our natural areas in the Spokane Region

Enclosed is my tax-deductable donation of :

\$ 15* \$ 25 \$ 50 \$ 100 Other _____

* annual dues, due by June 30

Gift is a Memorial for: _____

Name: _____ Acc. No. (see address) _____ Please don't list me as a donor

Please return this form along with your check payable to: Dishman Hills Conservancy

I would like to receive my Lights & Shadows online My email address is: _____