

# VOICE of the WILD OLYMPICS

Olympic Park Associates

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## Olympic Park Associates' Conservation Vision for a Wild Olympics



Story by Tim McNulty

Photo by Dave Sheffler. South Fork, Hoh River, candidate Wild & Scenic River.

The twenty-first century has brought new conservation challenges to the Olympic ecosystem. The long-term ecological integrity of Olympic National Park, Olympic National Forest, and the peninsula's watersheds, fish, and wildlife is not insured. Global warming's impacts are being felt throughout the Olympics, from dwindling snowpacks and unraveling rivers to stressed coastal communities. Olympic National Park now hosts eight wildlife species on the federal endangered species list, including five stocks of wild salmon. An additional 22 species are classified "species of concern."

The future effects of climate change, unsustainable resource use, and an increasing population on the Olympics' forest, fish, and wildlife communities are unknown. But scientists and conservationists agree that the best conservation strategy is to protect those parts of the ecosystem that are healthy and functioning, and restore critical pieces that have been lost.

Protecting natural watershed processes is key, and numerous salmon and watershed restoration projects have made important strides in this direction. The Elwha River restoration, set to begin next year, will set a new world benchmark in salmon restoration. Government and private collaborations have begun the important work of removing destructive logging roads on national forest and industry lands with the goal of restoring salmon habitat.

Building on these and other protective measures, Olympic Park Associates promotes a conservation vision for the 21st century that would:

- Add four key salmon and low-elevation wildlife habitat areas to Olympic National Park,
- Protect additional Olympic National Forest roadless lands as designated Wilderness, and
- Designate a number of Wild and Scenic Rivers in Olympic National Forest and Olympic National Park.

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# OPA's Conservation Vision for Wild Olympics

*Continued from P. 1.*

This is an ambitious agenda for the future of Olympic National Park and Olympic National Forest, but the future health of the lands we love depends upon bold and visionary action today.

## Park Additions

The biggest challenge facing Olympic National Park is preserving its wealth of wild salmon stocks. Intensive logging of sensitive watersheds outside park boundaries, residential and recreational development of lowland rivers, and over-fishing at sea have landed five Olympic salmon and steel-head stocks on the endangered species list. Another challenge is protecting key, low-elevation calving and wintering areas for the park's majestic Roosevelt elk.

The park's 2008 general management plan recommended three areas of willing-seller park additions. An earlier resource protection alternative in the draft plan recommended five larger areas. OPA is recommending four areas for potential future park expansion, all with adequate upper watershed protections to insure critical fisheries and wildlife habitats remain in tact. They are: the Lyre River area north of Lake Crescent; the Ozette Lake addition; the South Fork Hoh River; and the north slope of the Queets corridor. These areas go beyond the park's recommendations but are closer to areas identified by scientists as crucial for the long-term protection of park resources.

The willing-seller restriction means that none of these areas will be added to the park until landowners agree to sell them. Inclusion of these lands as willing-seller park additions would not restrict current use of these lands by landowners (U.S. Forest Service, Washington Department of Natural Resources, private timber companies and individual land owners), and would place them under no obligation to sell. But should parcels within these areas be offered for sale, it would give the Park Service the opportunity to buy them should funds be available, an option it does not now have. This is the best bet for securing long-term protections for future parklands into the twenty-first century.

## Wilderness

The 1984 Washington Wilderness Act protected many of the outstanding wild areas of Olympic National Forest. But key, lower elevation roadless wildlands containing magnificent ancient forests, wildlife habitats, and prime recreation lands remain unprotected. Inventoried and non-inventoried roadless areas as well as critical areas reclaimed from past logging abuses are recommended for wilderness designation as part of this proposal. These include: the lower Dungeness and Gray Wolf rivers; the northern slopes of Mount Townsend and Dirty Face Ridge; rugged Jupiter Ridge between the Dosewallips and Duckabush rivers; scenic Lena Lake; the deep forest valley of the South Fork Skokomish River; and the splendid old-growth stands of Moonlight Dome and South Quinault Ridge. Additional areas, where

former logging roads have been decommissioned and restoration is underway, will help knit together fragmented watersheds, insure clean water, and guarantee year-round, non-motorized recreational opportunities.

## Wild and Scenic Rivers

The Olympic Peninsula is a land of rivers. They offer fountains of clean snowmelt water and productive habitats for wild salmon and other wildlife. Our rivers also provide opportunities for recreation, inspiration, education, and solitude. But none of the peninsula's rivers have received federal Wild and Scenic River protection. Wild and Scenic designation will insure the free-flowing character of our rivers — no dams or water development are allowed on Wild and Scenic rivers. Designation of rivers will protect water quality and insure that ecological and recreational values are preserved. Designation also requires managing agencies and landowners to work together to protect the rivers' outstanding values.

Among the 14 rivers recommended for Wild and Scenic protection are: the Elwha, Gray Wolf-Dungeness, Big Quilcene, Dosewallips, Duckabush, Hamma Hamma, South Fork Skokomish, Humptulips, Quinault, Queets, Hoh and South Fork Hoh, Bogachiel, and Sol Duc. Protection is proposed for river reaches flowing primarily through federal and some state lands.

## Wild Olympics Campaign

Taken together, these proposals represent a positive, visionary approach to public lands protection for the 21st century. Our goal is to protect what we have and restore what has been lost for the wellbeing and enjoyment of future generations.

For the past two years, OPA has been working with a coalition of conservation organizations who are also committed to securing long-term protection for Olympic Wildlands. Details of areas proposed for various protections are still being determined. But our goal of "protecting the wild forests and rivers we love for clean water and salmon we need" unites us all.

The great ecologist Aldo Leopold advised us that the first rule of intelligent tinkering is to save all the cogs and wheels. We're most fortunate that here on the Olympic Peninsula that, by the hard work of generations before us, so much of this diverse and dynamic ecosystem has been preserved. Now is the time to make sure that that gift is passed on intact to generations still to come.



You can help in this effort by writing your U.S. and senators supporting these areas for permanent protection.

See addresses and emails on Page 2.