

Trails Ravaged

October rains and December winds wreak havoc on the state's trails, bridges, and forest roads. And it's still only January...



Demolished footbridge over Blum Creek, on the Baker Lake Trail in the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest. An unusually warm October rainstorm led to massive flooding and extensive trail damage throughout the Cascades and Olympics. Windstorms in December also took a toll on Cascade foothill trails.

BY ANDREW ENGELSON

Apocalyptic. Biblical. The Perfect Storm.

No matter what term you find to describe the rainstorms that hit the Pacific Northwest in late October, everyone agrees they were severe. Beginning on the weekend of October 17 and continuing for about a week, record 24-hour rainfalls combined with warm temperatures to devastate trails, footlogs, forest roads and

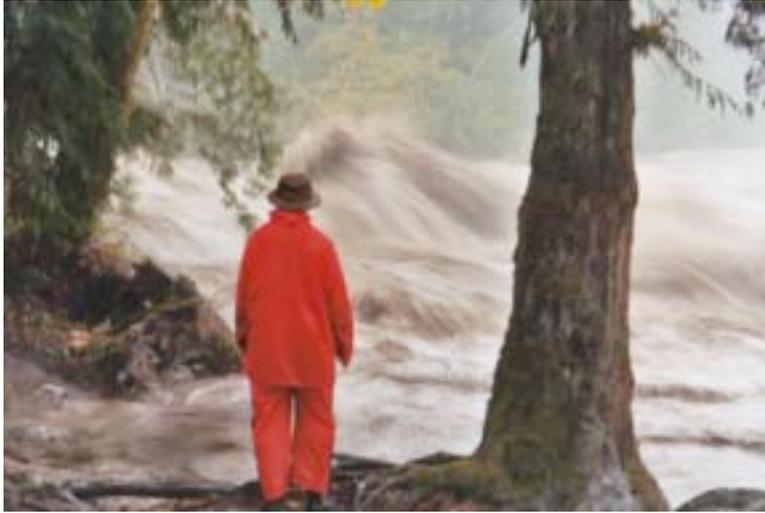
bridges throughout the Cascades and Olympics.

“Some folks are saying it’s a 500-year storm,” said Gary Paull, Trails and Wilderness Coordinator for the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest. “Considering we had three 100-year storms in the 1990s, I think that’s quite possible.”

Paull said he couldn’t remember a late fall storm as warm as this one. Media reports indicated that six inches of rain fell on Darrington in a 24-hour

period.

And as if that wasn’t enough, a powerful windstorm on December 4 wreaked its own brand of destruction on the foothill trails just east of the Puget Sound region. Trails on Tiger Mountain, Squak Mountain, and Rattlesnake Ledge were all hit hard with hundreds of blowdowns. WTA and the Issaquah Alps Trail Club worked together to triage and get as much of the blowdowns cleared as quickly as possible. As this issue went



Floodwaters rage in the Sauk River. At the flood's peak, flows topped 100,000 cubic feet per minute. Usual flow is around 3,250 cfm.

What You Can Do to Help

Sign up for a trail maintenance crew.

As reports continue to come in, WTA is adding additional trail maintenance trips to cope with storm damage.

File a trip report.

Log on to www.wta.org and describe current trail conditions. Both WTA and the various land managers use WTA's trip reports to assess trail damage. Be specific: where are footlogs out? How big approximately are the blown-down trees? How many are there?

Become a member. Donate.

If you're not already a member of WTA, there's no better time than now. Fixing and maintaining trails takes thousands of hours of volunteer time, but it also takes thousands of dollars. Additional donations beyond your membership help keep additional miles repaired.

Contact your elected representatives.

Washington Trails Association is currently working with other environmental and recreation groups to decide what supplemental funding may be needed in the spring. Your legislators need to know the seriousness of the problem, and the need for quick action. It only takes a few minutes to pen a quick letter or email.

to press closures were still in effect at Adventure Trail, Section Line Trail, Poo Poo Point Trail, Kees Big Tree Trail, and Swamp Trail.

The October storm and floods hammered the Cascades. Particularly hard hit was the Darrington Ranger District on the Mount Baker-

Snoqualmie National Forest. According to Gary Paull, "a lot of bridges are gone, many of which we replaced in the last ten to fifteen years."

Among the victims: Kennedy Hot Springs near Glacier Peak is now completely buried under mud and rocks. The Pacific Crest Trail sus-

tained heavy damage, with major stretches of trail missing at the Suiattle River, Sitkum Creek, and Mill Creek. No footbridges survive on the PCT from Red Pass to Miners Creek. The Skyline bridge, a major crossing over the Suiattle River on the PCT, is completely lost. Next season, through-hikers may have to divert to the east side of Glacier Peak.

The Whitechuck and Suiattle River Roads, which lead to many popular trailheads, sustained heavy damage, as did the Mountain Loop Highway, which is closed from Barlow Pass to Bedal Campground. In the North Cascades, the Cascade River Road and Upper Stehekin Valley sustained considerable damage. The North Cascades Highway had its earliest seasonal closure ever because of numerous slides, including one just east of the town of Diablo.

In the Olympics, the Hoh River, Queets, Sol Duc, and various Quinault Lake Roads all sustained damage. The Hoh and Quinault have been repaired, and as this issue went to press, the Queets and Sol Duc Roads are still closed. The Graves Creek Road out of Quinault was also closed because of flood damage.

At Mount Rainier National Park, Sunshine Point Campground was closed because of flooding, while all the footbridges on the Wonderland Trail between Cougar Rock and Narada Falls were washed out. Damage was also sustained in the Carbon River, Comet Falls, and Carter Falls areas.

In the high country, the extent of the damage won't be known until the spring melt-out. Judging by the early reports, it's bound to be a busy year for trail repair.

The Forest Service has conservatively estimated damage to trails and roads might top \$10 million across the state. The Forest Service, National Park Service, and Washington State Department of Natural Resources are all making presentations to the

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TRAIL NEWS

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to pursue emergency road and trail repair funding. Forest officials recently briefed the state's congressional delegation on the extent of the damage. Once FEMA has made its funding decisions in early 2004, WTA will consider whether or not to ask the Congressional delegation to pursue additional funds in the spring.

"In a single day, last week's storm set us back years, said WTA Executive Director Elizabeth Lunney. "It's like working for years to pay off your mortgage, only to see your home destroyed the day before your last payment."

One of the most impressive facts in a recent PowerPoint presentation given by Gary Paull concerned the Sauk River. The river, which in fall normally runs at 3,250 cubic feet per second, peaked at over 100,000 cfs on the night of October 22.

"I've heard mention that some of these floods may be the result be what geologists call a 'jokulhlaup,'" said Paull. Pronounced "yokolowp," that's a geological term for a glacial outburst flood. The word has its origins in Iceland, and describes conditions when a substantial quantity of glacial meltwater is suddenly released.

Jokulhlaup. Deluge. Torrential downpour. Call it what you want, October's floods and December's winds will have a profound impact on trails throughout the state next season. As always, call ahead to ranger district stations or check trip reports on www.wta.org before you head out. And if you've never been out on a trail crew, 2004 might be a very good year to start. ♦

Top Right: bridge washed out on the Lost River Trail, Olympic National Park. The price tag for road and trail damage in the state could easily top \$10 million.

Bottom Right: An enormous slump on a stretch of Whitechuck Trail 643, Darrington Ranger District, Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest. Closures on the Pacific Crest Trail could divert hikers around the east flank of Glacier Peak next season.



OLYMPIC NATIONAL PARK



MOUNT BAKER-SNOQUALMIE NATIONAL FOREST



Forest Service roads were also hard hit. This bridge on Whitechuck River Road #23 was demolished during an unusually warm October rainstorm. The road, which has been shut down indefinitely, leads to such popular areas as Kennedy Hot Springs (which is now buried beneath rock and mud).

NOVA Committee Recommends Funding Changes to Legislature

By Jonathan Guzzo

After months of intense discussion and negotiation, the NOVA Advisory Committee has reached consensus! If enacted into legislation, these changes could dramatically increase the amount of money available to non-motorized recreation in Washington.

Since September, a group of representatives from the hiking, mountain-biking, ORV, and equestrian communities has been meeting with legislators and Park and Forest managers to discuss changes to Washington's NonHighway and OffRoad Vehicle Activity (NOVA) program. After

eight meetings, the committee has arrived at a set of recommendations for the legislature to enact in its upcoming session, which begins this month. The two most important recommendations, as far as hikers are concerned, are as follows:

Expansion of Education and Enforcement grants to non-motorized activities

Currently, Education and Enforcement activities—including Leave No Trace education and enforcement of trail regulations—such as permitted uses and resource protection—can only be used for motorized activities. One of the agreements reached by the

Committee is that E&E dollars should be spent on such things as Wilderness rangers and occasional police patrols of trailhead parking lots. Many high-country lakes and meadows are polluted and scarred by inappropriate camping; more NOVA funds for backcountry rangers in non-motorized areas could make a significant difference in these heavily impacted areas.

Reallocation of NOVA Grant Funds

As the NOVA Fuel Use Study reflected, 50 percent of revenues

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to the program come from folks who are driving forest roads to go hunting, fishing, camping, wildlife viewing, berry picking, or to participate in other activities that are non-motorized and not necessarily associated with a particular trail. 30 percent of the funds come from people who are hiking, mountain-biking, or using stock, such as horses or goats. 20 percent comes from motorized trail users, like dirt-bikers or ATV users.

After long negotiation, the Committee came up with the following recommendations: 30 percent of the NOVA grants will go to non-motorized recreation, 30 percent to motorized recreation, 30 percent to "general" or non-trail based recreation, and 10 percent will be competitive across all three categories. Evaluation criteria will be developed that will favor projects benefiting the largest number of people. Taken together, these changes make NOVA much more fair, providing benefits to the people who pay into the program. Next, Washington Trails Association and the other members of this citizen advisory committee will take these agreements to the state legislature, where we'll work with House and Senate members to have these recommendations adopted into law. Be ready to call or email your legislator and register your support for making NOVA a more fair and stable program! For more information, contact Jonathan Guzzo at (206) 625-1367 or jonathan@wta.org.

Congressional Funding for Trails Still Falls Short

FY04 Interior Appropriations

Before adjourning for its winter recess, Congress completed the Fiscal Year 2004 Interior budget, which funds parks, trails, forests, and other public lands. While overall many agency budgets went up, the numbers aren't quite as rosy for the Northwest as they might initially appear. Because of administrative changes within the Forest Service, local Forests in Washington are facing substantial shortfalls in their recreation budgets. The Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest must bridge an \$800,000 gap in its budget if it is to continue projects and staffing at its current capacity.

Meanwhile, although National Park Service (NPS) annual operations increased by \$55 million nationwide, that total is not enough for most parks to cover mandatory cost-of-living increases for staff and will hinder the Park Service's ability to protect natural and cultural resources and provide adequate visitor services.

Land and Water Conservation Fund

The FY 2004 Interior budget provides an estimated \$1.1 billion for conservation programs, significantly less than the \$1.56 billion envisioned by the Conservation Trust Fund three years ago. Neither the Bush Administration nor Congress are coming close to adequately funding LWCF, a critical source of land acquisition funding for parks and trails. In FY 04, LWCF received \$272 million (\$177

million for federal LWCF and \$95 million for stateside LWCF), a disappointing \$142 million decrease from last year.

Given the small amount of funding available this year, Washington was very fortunate to still secure money for several important projects, including \$5 million for acquisition of lands near Cle Elum, which was due in large part to the efforts of Senator Patty Murray and the Cascades Conservation Partnership.

National Recreation Trails Program

TEA-21, a transportation bill which includes the National Recreation Trails Program (NRTP), was set to expire last September. Congress passed a five-month extension this fall after failing to agree on a proposal from the White House that would have offered slight increases to NRTP and other transportation enhancements. The House has now introduced its own proposal, TEA-LU, which would increase NRTP funding significantly to \$700 million over six years, up from \$300 million over six years in the recently expired TEA-21. However, TEA-LU would require a gas-tax increase, which faces stiff opposition in Congress. ♦

Thanks to American Hiking Society for some of the information provided in this report.

For a list of Congressional Representatives and their addresses, email, and phone numbers, visit www.wta.org and click on Advocacy subheading "Contact List."