

# Greens want bigger national park: Let people into it!

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A truck tows a camper across Diablo Lake on state Route 20, which offers a lovely scenic view. There are more than half-million acres, filled with rugged, remote peaks and towering old-growth forests in North Cascades National Park.

Photo: Seattlepi.com, Joshua Trujillo / seattlepi.com

Dubbing themselves the "American Alps Legacy Project," a bevy of conservation groups want to put about a quarter-million acres of additional federal land into our state's North Cascades National Park.

Nobody doubts the land is of "park caliber." Pull off the North Cascades Highway and look up Ross Lake at Hozomeen Mountain. Watch 8,900-foot Black Peak come into view from the road, or hike to Maple Pass for broader vistas. Or walk the Baker River rainforest on a misty-moisty shoulder season day.

But Congress ought to deliver an either/or ultimatum to the more rigid advocates of a larger park: Let people into it.

Old-line green groups must drop resistance to reopening roads that access trailheads and campgrounds in the North Cascades and Olympic National Parks. They must stop lawsuits blocking rebuild of the Suiattle River Road in Snohomish County, the major access to wonderful trails into the Glacier Peak Wilderness Area.

The coalition behind the "American Alps Legacy Project" includes practical people like former Republican Gov. Dan Evans, climber-lawyer Jim Wickwire (first American atop K-2), and Peter Jackson, writer son of the U.S. Senator who wrote the 1968 North Cascades Act.

But its lead sponsor is the North Cascades Conservation Council. The N3C was plaintiff in a federal suit, earlier this year, that forced the Federal Highway Administration to abandon a plan to rebuild the Suiattle Road.

It seems that some absolutist activists have lived by a motto: Keep everybody out but us.

Now that it's time to add 237,702 acres to the park, however, they're singing a different tune. "The North Cascades National Park is currently one of the least visited national parks in the 'lower 48' states," the American Alps Legacy Project said last week.

How come?

One reason: The N3C, Sierra Club, National Parks Conservation Association and other groups have tenaciously fought -- and helped block -- reconstruction of one of just two roads that lead into the park.

The dirt road up the Stehekin River valley washed out in the great fall storm of 2003. The washout occurred near aptly named Carwash Falls. A rebuilt road could use the path of an old wagon road just east of the washout. Rep. Doc Hastings, R-Wash., has introduced a bill to do just that.

We're not talking about Interstate 5. The Stehekin Road was used mainly for a National Park Service shuttle bus that dropped hikers off at trailheads, and took non-backpackers to such wonderful lowland places as the Bridge Creek Campground.

When Congress was considering North Cascades legislation in the 1960s, the Sierra Club produced a film entitled "The Wilderness Alps of Stehekin." It showed club director David Brower and his family on a horseback trip up to Park Creek Pass, a 6,100-foot-high defile flanked by three 9,000-foot peaks.

Hiking buddies and I once watched, at Park Creek Pass, as a mother bear and three cubs frolicked in the meadows. It's one of the most beautiful places on earth. A stiff eight-mile hike when the Stehekin Road was open, it's now 14 miles each way: Who has time to follow in the Browsers' footsteps?

Park legislation has to pass through the House Resources Committee. Doc Hastings is the chairman: The Doc's last League of Conservation Voters scorecard rating -- a gooseegg. A chunk of the proposed park addition -- Rainy Pass-to-Washington Pass on the North Cascades Highway -- is in Hastings' district.

Hence, park advocates need to ask a question they learned as kids on Saturday morning television: What's up, Doc?

The sun will rise over the Olympics before Hastings ever agrees to park status for popular hunting areas (e.g. Canyon Creek) north of the North Cascades Highway. He's going to insist that the Stehekin Road be rebuilt. Driven by outrage in Snohomish County, Rep. Rick Larsen, D-Wash., is going to have his back up -- as he should -- over putting back the Suiattle Road.

The American Alps Legacy Project proposes some visitor enhancements. But new visitor centers would be located in Marblemount and Winthrop, outside the park. A silky promise reads: "Family-friendly front country recreation along S.R. 20 will be developed in a way that is compatible with conservation in the park."

Does that mean a de-emphasis -- or abandonment -- of roads and trails leading to glorious high places? Sweeping views from the Hidden Lake Lookout hold a lot more appeal than the proposed "Goodell Creek Landslide Trail."

Sen. Maria Cantwell, D-Wash., who hikes and climbs in her (little) spare time, is working the issue. She'll need the patience of Job and the wisdom of Solomon to pull off what would be wonderful for the state -- an enlarged North Cascades National Park that a cross-section of citizens can enjoy.

Read more: <http://www.seattlepi.com/local/connelly/article/Greens-want-bigger-national-park-Fine-let-2197242.php#ixzz1ZrSjRiA2>