

GRAY WOLF / BCHW-PENINSULA TRAIL CREW NOTES

5/10/2025

Location: Smokey Bottom, ONP

Crew members:

Rebecca Wanagel
Martin Knowles
Randy Kraxberger
Greg King
Paul Kamps
Jack Bochsler
Barbara Maxwell
Jonathan Hamlin
Eric Nagle
Jeff Olson
Andy Steffens

Total volunteer hours: 70

Report written by Rebecca.

Objectives achieved on this 2-mile trail:

1. Cleared the trail of downed trees.
2. Hand brushed and raked first half of the trail (there are a lot of maples and the thick layer of deciduous trees isn't good for trail sustainability because they hold moisture so much).
3. Improved access to the first creek crossing.
4. Removed a rotten, slippery, broken puncheon. Packed out fasteners. Improved drainage in that area to get it to be less muddy.

Future work (scheduled for 5/17):

1. Clear 3 more trees – overhead ones. One has a rootball that will come down when we cut it, but we are confident we'll be able to get that off the trail.
2. Brush and rake the second half of the trail.
3. Rebench tread throughout farthest half-mile of the trail.

Smokey Bottom is the "new" name for this trail that used to be called West Lake Mills, when there was a lake. Since the dam was removed and the lake drained, this was renamed. It is now also a loop trail; you can go out Smokey Bottom trail to Boulder Creek and then loop back via the trail on the former lakebed. That area has been extensively revegetated and the lupine display in May is jaw dropping. We were lucky to have caught it at the start of the bloom, and when we go back in on May 17 they will hopefully be in full bloom.

Since the Olympic Hotsprings road is long-closed, to get to this trailhead requires about 4 miles of walking or 3.5 miles of biking and ½ mile of walking (pushing the bike over the rough, rooty bypass). The bike is a fast option and makes working on this trail much more doable, especially if access to the ONP truck is available on the other side of the bypass for tool transport. For this trip we had the truck to carry the tools, plus an ONP staff member was available to drop us off and pick us up. We were efficient getting to and from the job site.

In the following picture story I do not have pictures of the brushing crew, sorry. They were Barbara, Eric and Texas. But they were an equally important part of the crew as the overhanging brush causes a lot of problems with trails. The brush was thick enough that I probably should have brought in power brushers, but they figured out fast, efficient ways to make a huge difference with hand saws and loppers.



It was super fun using bikes to get to the trailhead, especially since the ONP truck on the other side of the bypass was available and driven by Kaye Thomas, ONP staff.
That made the bike ride extra fun because the tools were in the truck.



Jack had mentioned that he wanted more experience with sawing large trees. Be careful what you ask for ... (bwaha ha haaaa).



This fir was rotten. That's why it fell.



A major problem with this tree is that it was an old doug fir with deeply furrowed bark. The rootball above the tree had tossed lots of gravelly debris into the crevices of the bark.
If you don't clear that bark, you're looking at a dull chain the second you put your saw to the tree.



We interrupted their progress when we cruised through.



As always, this picture shows how well the GWTC adheres to best safety practices. You'll notice the wedge pouch and first aid kit attached to Paul's belt. Easy access to both.

What you can hardly see is that Paul also has a little tiny tape measure attached to his wedge pouch. That is because when we saw in the ONP, we have to keep track of the diameter and number of cuts for each tree we clear. I usually use my hand span but I like Paul's idea better.



Paul and Jack got it done. This project kept them outta trouble for most of the day. 😊



Their second and final project was a tree I had estimated at 28" but turned out to be 32".



Andy Steffens was brand new to our crew. Martin did a great job mentoring him and Jeff Olson in the art of tread work.



They were making the access to this creek crossing much more doable. Compare the image of me crawling up out of the creek (with the saw in my hand) to the other side with the tread restored.



While Jack and Paul were stuck on one tree, Randy, Greg and I moved along the rest of the trail clearing whatever trees were in the way.





Near the far end of the trail there was a puncheon that used to be old and rotten and was now old, rotten and broken. It was slippery, unstable and had become a hazard. We decided that a wet crossing was better than that. Martin, Jeff and Andy dismantled what was left of the puncheon, packed out the fasteners and threw the wood back to the forest.



Then they worked the area to get rid of the old stringers and open up the drainage. It turns out that, ironically, the puncheon itself was causing most of the backup of mud and water. We are hopeful that with the clearing of the drainage and the removal of the blocking stringers that this area will clean itself out. It will still be wet, but hopefully not mucky. This was a mucky job and I am very appreciative of the crew who tackled it!

We'll take another look at this when we go back on the 17th.



A 25" log had fallen across the road sometime after we scouted this trail. Kaye was able to just barely squeeze under it with the truck on the way to the trailhead. But we decided to cut that out to make it easier on the final return trip. You notice a slab at the cut I had just finished. That is because I didn't give it quite enough of an underbuck, so when the log to the left dropped and the log to the right raised up a bit, it split. That's called a "slab" or a "barberchair". It caused zero problems here, I simply cut it when it was time to roll this out, but it is something we work to avoid because it can cause problems in certain situations.



Look who was hanging out by the trail! Eric got to see this beauty before s(he) ambled off for some peace and quiet.



Some of the crew heading back via the lakebed of the former Lake Mills.



The lupines were starting to bloom and we are very excited to go back for another crew on the 17th when they will likely be in full bloom!