



Gray Wolf Trail Crew - in partnership with - BCHW, Peninsula Chapter

West Elwha Trail, ONP

January 3, 2026

Report by Rebecca Wanagel



Crew members

Rebecca Wanagel
Martin Knowles
Bill Mueller
LaVonne Mueller
Bernt Ericsen
Brian Berg

Jack Bochsler
Tim Branham
Julie Metzger
Eric Nagle
Ian Davis
Jonathan Hamlin

Greg King
Lisa Turnberg
Neil Turnberg
Marti Campbell
Nisha Sharma
Rodney Lemay

Quick Stats
On-trail volunteer hours: 126
Hours including travel time: 170
Miles worked: 2.75
Trail is rated for:
stock and hikers
Pans of sweet rolls:
Two! Huge!

Thank you, Bobbie Stoneman, for the special treat and the parking!

Objectives:

1. Continue brushing both sides of the trail with power brushers, picking up from where we left off last time.
2. Start a brushing team back at the $\frac{3}{8}$ mile point to do a second pass.
3. Clean up brushing debris, rake thick layer of deciduous leaves and toss all away from the trail.
4. Trim overhead encroaching branches with pole saw, starting from the trailhead.
5. Rebench 100 yards of badly slipped, wet trail at mile 2.75 from trailhead.
6. Address drainage issues on the hill going down towards (formerly known as) Altaire Campground.
7. Mitigate a troublesome wet, mucky, slippery clay corner at about $\frac{3}{8}$ mile from trailhead.
8. Clear out drainage features as necessary.

Achieved:

1. The brushing team doing the second pass nearly made it to the stopping point from last time.
2. The front brushing team got both sides of the trail brushed for another mile.
3. The clean up crews raked and tossed and raked and tossed!
4. Pole saw team did a thorough job and made it about a mile from the trailhead.
5. Rebenching goal was met, the trail is much more walkable and pleasant through there now.
6. Slippery clay corner problem was mitigated with a short bypass.
7. Drainages in first $\frac{3}{8}$ mile were cleaned out.

Future work (next crew on Saturday, Jan 24):

1. Complete brushing on both sides all the way to Altaire (about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile left) and clear all debris.
2. Catch up the raking / tossing left over from the last crew.
3. Continue trimming back overhead branches with the pole saw.
4. Mitigate drainage issues on the hill heading down to Altaire (we couldn't get to that in this crew).

Special projects (at a later crew):

1. Do a repair on a broken puncheon on the hill heading down to Altaire.
2. Mitigate a super wet, slippery, mucky section at mile 2.75.

What is happening here?

This wet, slippery corner, $\frac{3}{8}$ mile from trailhead, has been a problem for a while. It's been dealt with before but never completely fixed. It is pure clay and the water collects here.

The team - Bill, LaVonne, Jonathan, Lisa, Neil and Marti - assessed the problem and decided the best scenario would be a short bypass. Bill and LaVonne have looked at this problem with their highly-experienced eyes many times before, so they knew what had been tried and where to go from here.

They found a source of gravel about 100 feet up trail (that's GOOD - it means you carry empty bags uphill and heavy full bags downhill). They put in a short bypass and made steps out of the clay. Crucially, they lined each step with gravel for traction.

Left picture: before, looking south

Bottom left: after, from the same viewpoint

Bottom center: after, looking north. Note the bypass. What doesn't show in the picture is the steps cut into the clay and the strategic placement of gravel on each step.

Fun Fact!

We have 4 new bags and, appropriately, they are named "dirt bags." (really fun to say).

They are incredible! They are not cheap! Stiff, lightweight, perfectly placed handles - even a dumping handle. Stays open for filling. Durable!!

They received an A++ grade from this team, who were the first to try them out.

We were able to buy these with generous donations made to the Graywolf Crew / BCHW. That just shows you how much donations go into keeping trails in great condition.



West Elwha has lots of precious views like this.





BRUSHING

One of the things that makes West Elwha such a sweet trail is that the surrounding terrain is mostly an ocean of swordferns. Quintessential Olympics and just speaks to the volume of moisture that reigns here (pun absolutely intended).

Those very same ferns do not seem to respect trail edge boundaries. We fully know that cutting back ferns is temporary, they grow back of course. But there is other brush in there as well and the combination of all makes it so this tends to be a very wet trail to hike. Once every few years we try to take it all back to give hikers and the trail some breathing space.

On the last crew we had 4 brushers doing both sides of the trail, and they got about 1.75 miles done. This time we had one team go ahead to pick up where we left off, and another team in back doing a second pass through. The last crew did a GREAT job it's just that the brush was SO THICK that sometimes you just have to brush, clean up, and hit it again.

In this picture, Martin - who was on the second-pass-through team, takes a pause for Eric to snap a picture. What I don't have a picture of is the before and after of how thickly lined the trail was and how clean it is afterward. Sorry - it's just that we were working in pouring rain so folks were having a hard time pulling their phones out in that persistent wet to snap pictures.

Trust me - it was THICK and once it's brushed and cleaned up it is such a pleasure to hike. Cleaning up behind the brushers is, as we find out every crew, a massively hard job. It's nearly impossible to keep up. We usually end up going back in to finish the raking, not from lack of effort on the team's part. No! It's just simply **That Hard** to keep up. Especially because we are also raking up the thick layer of deciduous leaves to let the trail breathe and dry out.

Brushing teams

South: Tim, Rodney, Nisha, Ian

North: Martin, Eric, Julie

Right picture: You can barely see but there is a thick layer of ferns behind me as I walk up the trail towards Bernt, who was taking a hard-earned lunch break. You can also see Tim's brusher on the side of the trail. Note the mud coating on Bernt's pants and boots and the sorry, wet, muddy state of my condition as I walk towards him. That is the segue to my next topic, rebenching.





Rebenching Tread

This is a before and after taken from the same vantage point with my pack for reference. The trail had moved downhill so badly that we had to move it back up 2 or more feet. It was slippery, off-balance, and hard to keep your footing. This is also a very wet location.



The rebenching team: Bernt, Brian and Rebecca.

It was hard work for two reasons:

1. A lot of it was very rocky.
2. Wet, wet, wet made worse by the fact that it was raining all day. Our boots, raingear and gloves were coated with mud. I actually felt like my feet were encased in concrete they were so heavy from mud.

Behind Brian you can barely see a location that is super wet and has an old makeshift turnpike that we are going to address later in the season.



A couple more after shots. Bernt doing some final raking. You can see here that this whole section is now moved up, wider, smooth and back to regular trail specs.



Pole Saw Work

Team: Jack and Greg

Tool: battery-operated pole saw (lighter than the gas ones) - shown in the picture.

Sorry, no working pictures - they were too busy cutting branches and tossing them. And it was raining - which I believe I have mentioned before. 😊



They removed all overhanging branches for one mile. We will continue this next time. They were super careful, though, not to cut out those high arching, moss-covered vine maples that make this trail feel like it belongs where it is - in the Olympics. Example shown to the left. ***When we do trail work, we work to preserve the natural feeling while still making the trail more hiker and stock friendly.***

The fence in this picture is because West Elwha trail starts out as easement across and next to private properties. It shortly reaches the ONP boundary and from there it is all forested with occasional amazing river views.



The team including Bobby (center, wearing red), who kindly hosted our post-work party in her heated shop with warm, homemade sweet rolls, hot drinks and lots of comradery. This would not have happened had we met back at the cars in the cold and damp.

This space allowed us to connect and celebrate ourselves as a crew, with lots of laughs.

Note one of Don Stoneman's old saws hanging on the wall in the back left.

Missing from the picture are crew members Julie and Marti.

**NEXT CREW IS SATURDAY, JANUARY 24.
I NEED A LARGE CREW, PLEASE JOIN US IF YOU CAN!**

Signup at www.graywolftrailcrew.org

