

Old Growth Research Underway at Rainier NP

By Stanley E. Schlegel and Cat Hawkins

Since 1983, Mount Rainier National Park has been participating in the Old Growth Forest Wildlife Habitat Research and Development Program – a five-year program initiated in 1981 to plan, coordinate, and provide leadership for research in old growth forest ecosystems. Goals of the program, administered by the U.S. Forest Service, are:

1. to identify animal and plant species that depend on or find optimum habitat in old growth forests;
2. to describe, classify, and inventory old growth forest ecosystems;
3. to determine biological requirements and ecological relationships of species found in old growth stands; and
4. to evaluate old growth management alternatives and their economic impacts.

The study involves the U.S.F.S., Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, conservation groups, and university scientists in Washington, Oregon, and California.

Within the 15 study plots selected at Mount Rainier, research teams are studying birds, small mammals, bats, reptiles, and amphibians. Although small mammal studies have been conducted at Mount Rainier periodically, it has been some time since the park's

birds were studied in depth, and the reptiles and amphibians probably never have been thoroughly researched. The current studies will update old inventories, furnish valuable baseline data, and provide interpreters with recent information for their interpretive programs.

The park also will receive representative specimens of all small mammals, reptiles, and amphibians collected . . . valuable additions to the park's long-neglected natural history collections. Interim progress reports have been filed; specimens and specific information about the park's animals will come later.

Apart from what Mount Rainier NP will receive from the work, and perhaps even more important, is the park's contribution to knowledge of old growth forests. Here are extensive old growth stands, protected from past utilization and subject only to nature's hand. These stands are fully protected from future cutting. They now serve as a baseline from which better understanding of the functioning of old growth can be gained. In the future they will provide a standard against which to measure success in the management of other old growth forest areas and their attendant plants and animals.

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