The Crag Cairn

Summer 2010

The Crag Cairn is an interim supplement to the bi-annual View from the Summit that updates our supporters about recent achievements of Crag staff and volunteers. Since the Spring 2010 publication of the View from the Summit, we have continued to work hard on conservation and social justice issues impacting the Pacific Northwest.

LIVABLE COMMUNITIES
Crag provides services to local communities with an eye towards increasing their strength and political power and establishing a progressive base. As part of this program, we are tackling injustice and working to protect the health and vibrancy of communities throughout the Pacific Northwest.

Crag Works to Protect Arctic from Offshore Drilling

On May 6, Crag argued a case before the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals challenging MMS’s flawed public disclosures on impacts to bowhead whales and marine mammals. We also recently filed an appeal of the Clean Air Act permits issued to Shell by the Environmental Protection Agency. EPA failed to consider the possibility of an oil spill and the resulting air emissions when a fleet of response vessels would attempt to burn thousands of barrels of crude oil. In the upcoming months, we have even more work to do as Shell, ConocoPhilips and other oil companies rush to open the Arctic to offshore drilling.

We need your help to finish the job! Without Crag’s assistance, local communities would be unable to stand up to the oil industry’s fleet of lawyers and the federal government to demand accountability and safeguards for the environment. Please help us protect the Arctic, and we will turn your generous donation into real, on-the-ground change. With your help, we can prevent the catastrophe in the Gulf of Mexico from repeating itself in the Arctic Ocean.

On April 20, BP’s Deepwater Horizon drilling platform caught fire and sank two days later. Since that time, more than 200,000 gallons of crude oil have been spewing into the Gulf of Mexico each day. The oil slick is now threatening the livelihoods of thousands Americans and a broad diversity of wildlife species including whales, sea turtles, birds and fish.

The ongoing drama in the Gulf has ignited the national debate about offshore drilling and blown to bits the fallacy that drilling is safe for the environment. As BP and other oil companies work overtime to limit the damage to their reputations, the country’s attention has turned increasingly towards the Arctic Ocean where the Obama Administration has decided to allow even more offshore drilling. We here at Crag have been working on Arctic drilling issues since 2007 and now find ourselves in the middle of this national debate.

Crag represents local Inupiat Eskimo communities in the Arctic who are concerned about Shell Oil’s plans to drill in an area dominated by shifting pack ice, severe weather, limited infrastructure and the rapidly increasing impacts of climate change. As the incident in the Gulf demonstrates, cleaning up oil is a difficult, dirty and uncertain process. Imagine a spill in the Arctic, where response crews would be forced to try and clean up oil 60 miles off the north coast of Alaska in frigid temperatures among floating icebergs. The Arctic, like the Gulf, supports an incredibly diverse ocean ecosystem. It also provides the backbone for a unique and irreplaceable indigenous subsistence culture and economy for the Inupiat Eskimos. Crag’s clients are concerned about the impacts to bowhead and beluga whales, polar bears, seals, birds and fish, all of which provide for the subsistence traditions that have sustained their communities for thousands of years.

In 2007, Crag successfully obtained an injunction prohibiting Shell from drilling because the Minerals Management Service failed to disclose to the public threats to bowhead whales and the subsistence practices of the Inupiat Eskimos. Shell is back again with a new proposal, and President Obama’s Administration has been fast-tracking the approvals so drilling can start as soon as July 1 of this year.

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SALMON, WATER AND WETLANDS
Crag works to protect waterways, wetlands and clean drinking water through legal action and community organizing.

Board of Forestry Plan: Too Much, Too Fast, Too Risky
On Earth Day, the Oregon Board of Forestry voted five to two to reduce the amount of older forest on state lands and increase the amount of clear cutting on 600,000 acres of the Tillamook and Clatsop State Forests. As a result of this change, at least 50,000 acres of previously protected stands between the Portland metro area and the coast are now open to clear cutting. The amount of forest that is allowed to be clear cut has increased from 15% to 25%.

These changes significantly weaken the protection of your state forests, putting older forests, wild salmon and clean water at risk. Board Member Peter Hayes dissented from the change, calling the action “too much, too fast, and too risky.”

Thousands of Oregonians opposed the changes and expressed concern about increased levels of clear cutting.

The Board never obtained an independent scientific review of the plan. An internal review by the Oregon Department of Forestry noted that under the new plan some watersheds would be at a “high risk” of changing watershed function due to extensive clear cutting, with potentially negative effects on salmon. The Crag Law Center is working with our clients and experts to assess the new changes and determine if legal action is warranted.

PUBLIC LANDS
Crag works to ensure accountable management of your public lands and to protect them from unsustainable development and destructive overuse.

Ensuring Public Oversight for the Tongass Nat’l Forest
Crag has been busy this year keeping an eye on the Forest Service’s decision to allow logging of old-growth in the Tongass National Forest. The agency’s approval of the “Logjam” logging project is a tale with all the mystery and intrigue of a spy novel. The project allows road building and logging of over 3,400 acres of old growth forest on Prince of Wales Island. During the approval process, the agency insulated their decision from public scrutiny, leaving the public in the dark about the real impacts of Logjam on the environment.

In order to protect this temperate rainforest from the chopping block, Crag filed a lawsuit on behalf of the Tongass Conservation Society, Greenpeace, and Cascadia Wildlands. Alexander Archipelago wolves, Sitka black-tailed deer, and a number of different species of salmon rely on these old-growth stands for habitat. The area slated for logging and road construction also supports commercial fishermen, local subsistence hunters and recreationalists, whose interests were neglected by the Forest Service. When the logging company began operations months ahead of schedule, staff attorney Tanya Sanerib made an emergency trip to Alaska for a hearing in an effort to halt operations. Stay tuned to learn how the mystery unfolds.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Join Crag on Saturday, July 24 for our 5th annual Filbert Farm Benefit Party. Aaron Matusick and Sandy Riedman will once again host an afternoon and evening of good food, drink and music! We’d love to have you there! Come out to support Crag at 5909 SE Oetkin Road in Portland between 3 p.m. and 9 p.m.

On Thursday, August 26 and Friday August 27, Crag and Hood River Valley Resident’s Committee will host our 3rd annual presentation of SYRCL’s Wild and Scenic Environmental Film Festival. Both nights will be held at the Springhouse Cellar Winery near the train station in Hood River. Doors open at 7:30 and films start at 8:00. Tickets are available in advance from Crag or at Waucoma Books in Hood River.

For more information on these events, visit our website at www.crag.org/support-us/crag-events or call us at 503-525-2724. We look forward to seeing you soon!

Donate to Crag! To renew your support or become a donor, please visit our website at www.crag.org and click on “Support Us” or use the enclosed remit envelope. You can make a one-time gift or join the growing ranks of people who give monthly or quarterly!

Free DVD: Decades - Born in Fire. For a copy of this locally produced documentary that seeks to uncover the truth behind the Biscuit Fire controversy, please contact Ralph Bloemers 503.525.2727

Crag is a client-focused law center that supports community efforts to protect and sustain the Pacific Northwest’s natural legacy.