

Losing Our Soul, Speeding Up Around a Blind Curve

By Jill Bohr Jacob

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Tuesday PM

"For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?"
Mark 8:36

What do we profit if we gain development but lose the land?

I had a friend tell me the other night she was thinking about leaving Ketchikan. She said Jill, everything I love here, the things I moved here for, are going.

This was the same day that I read the state awarded a \$25.7 million contract to Kiewit Pacific of Anchorage to build the Gravina Island Highway, a 3.2 mile gravel road starting near the intersection of the Lewis Reef Road/Airport Access Road and ending near the west channel, construction on the highway could start by mid-summer. In the summer of 2003 we witnessed dead fry in tidal pools on Gravina. The US Global Change Research Program cites large-scale kills of unspawned salmon following warmer summer weather and extended rainless intervals increasing the number and duration of low stream flow episodes; the conditions that block the return of spawning salmon. Alaska Fish and Game has noted the die-offs are exacerbated by clear cutting and road building. I didn't want this \$8 million per mile road on Gravina, did you?

Also, the same day, our newspaper ran this story: the state is seeking public comment regarding its proposed Whipple Creek Timber Sale. The sale of 27.6 acres would yield an estimated 500,000 board feet of timber from 300-to-400 year old western hemlocks, Sitka spruces and red cedars on state land about a mile east of Pond Reef. The proposed sale has characteristics of an old-growth forest, within a mature Coastal Region. The Division of Forestry said the Whipple Creek sale probably wouldn't provide a lot of timber for local mills. But bless their hearts, even though these 400 year old trees will be exported, the contractors doing the cutting are doing us a favor since they're already cutting right next to this parcel. Bless their hearts. Guess the State isn't worried about the massive die-off of Yellow Cedar due to declining snow pack freezing the cedars shallow root systems or that gale-force windstorms in southern coastal forests have doubled in number since 1950. In other words, blow down big-time. I don't want anything cut, much less exported, near the Whipple Creek watershed, do you?

Our beloved Coast Guard Beach and South Point Higgins Beach are owned by the Alaska Mental Health Trust and slated for development while just nine percent of shoreline accessible by the road system on Revilla Island is under public management and available for public use. These beaches and other AMHT lands, Surprise Beach, and Mountain Point Beach, boat launch and harbor are 1/3 of the nine percent of available Ketchikan recreation land. Who here in the community wants these beaches developed?

I thought it was very funny last week when I heard Alaskan politicians debating hot air. Get it? Politicians debating hot air. They were debating methane gas, CO2, what

and how much is being released from the northern tundra and how to contain it. They were not debating WHO is releasing the most hot air on our congressional floors, and definitely not debating how climate change is affecting us here in the Tongass.

The amount of development in and around Ketchikan at this incredible time is like speeding up while driving around a blind curve, something teenagers are apt to try. Although after 15 years of accompanying teenagers with their learner s permits, I m convinced teenagers would make smarter decisions than these.

So this is the state of the Shire now. Do we, will we, can we have a voice in any or all of these land grabs, or shall we all go RV camping in the Wal-Mart parking lot? We could set up wading pools.....

Oh, and by the way, to round out a bad year for beaches and trees, right now the Forest Service is working on the Tongass Land Management Plan and their final decision is due out late this summer, comments received until April 12.

What do we profit if we gain development but lose the land? And who is profiting? Are you?

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