

Sisters cycling business expands to Blue River

Sisters' Blazin Saddles cycling shop is expanding over the mountains to the hamlet of Rainbow on the McKenzie River.

"We're going into a kind of partnership with Horse Creek Lodge (in McKenzie Bridge)," said Blazin Saddles owner Casey Meudt.

The lodge has been running bicycle and rafting tours and rentals, and Blazin Saddles will step into that arena.

"We're going to come in and have a bunch of bike rentals there," Meudt said.

The partnership will allow the lodge to move its tour operations out of the main lodge and into Blazin Saddles' 2,000-square-foot facility. Blazin Saddles will offer bike repair and maintenance services to riders in the area.

Meudt noted that his friend (and Sisters High School graduate) Connor Burke will run the Rainbow shop.

"He's an awesome bike mechanic," Meudt said.

Blazin Saddles will host a grand opening barbecue at their new location on Saturday, July 25.

For more information contact Blazin Saddles at 541-719-1213 or visit www.blazinsaddleshub.com.

Options considered to restore grizzly bear population

By Amy Nile
The Daily Herald

EVERETT, Wash. (AP) — People all over the world have weighed in on an effort to help ensure grizzly bears don't become extinct in the North Cascades.

Now, the National Park Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are working with other agencies to come up with several options for bringing the bears back to this part of their natural territory. That includes many of Snohomish County's prominent peaks, such as Mount Index and Whitehorse Mountain.

The federal and state agencies earlier this month released a report that analyzes almost 2,900 public comments received from all over the country and abroad about the recovery in the North Cascades. About 500 people attended meetings about the effort earlier this year, held in six cities across Washington.

"There are strong feelings about grizzly bears," said Ann Froschauer, a spokeswoman for the Washington office of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The agencies received more than 1,400 comments in support of bringing back the bears while 285 people opposed recovery. Commenters from as far away as Europe and Australia offered their thoughts about how the grizzlies might affect human safety, wildlife, land use, visitors, wilderness areas and a number of other topics.

A Snohomish resident submitted an online comment to the agencies in support of grizzly restoration in the

North Cascades.

"Not only are they a signature species in this area, but more importantly, it is likely that they preceded humans here, and thus have a special right to sufficient habitat in this important ecosystem," the commenter wrote Feb. 25.

A Marysville resident, however, expressed concerns about the plan, calling the idea of restoring grizzly bears to recreation areas people frequent, such as Mount Pilchuck, "horrifying."

"I don't have the (polite) words to say how stupid the idea of bringing back predators like grizzlies would be," the commenter wrote Feb. 26. "Do you seriously not care about people being mauled or killed?"

The information gleaned from people's comments will help the agencies identify issues to consider as they develop options, such as moving grizzly bears captured elsewhere into the North Cascades to reproduce, exploring other ways of returning the animals to the area, or to take no action whatsoever.

Based on the comments, the agencies also added new issues to consider to their list, such as how climate change might affect the bears.

"That's one of the great things about this process," Froschauer said. "There are some things the public can help us identify that we may not have been considering."

The agencies plan to include ideas from the public in the development of the proposal, which is expected to be finished by next summer.

Once the scientists and experts come up with their

plan, people will have another chance to weigh in.

"At that time, we'll really want to engage folks," Froschauer said. "We haven't made a decision yet. We're just taking all the information."

Though U.S. grizzly bear populations have been dwindling for decades, money has recently become available to study the environmental effects of returning the animals to the North Cascades, Froschauer said. The National Park Service is providing most of the \$550,000 for that work, which is expected to take about three years.

The grizzly bear restoration effort comes 40 years after the animals were listed in 1975 under the Endangered Species Act as threatened in the lower 48 states.

By 1980, Washington listed the grizzly bear as an endangered species. The state boasts about 9,800 square miles of potential habitat for the animal in the North Cascades ecosystem, which is one of six areas outlined in the federal grizzly bear recovery plan.

Canada also is taking measures to save grizzlies. About 3,800 square miles of the North Cascades ecosystem is in British Columbia.

The number of grizzlies has continued to shrink since settlers killed thousands in the North Cascades from the mid-1800s to the early 1900s.

Now, there might be a small number of grizzly bears living in the North Cascades. It is estimated that fewer than 20 live south of the Canadian border. In British Columbia, there are likely less than 30.

Snohomish County boasts the most recent biologist-confirmed grizzly bear sighting in the U.S. portion of the North Cascades. It was spotted in 1996 south of Glacier Peak.

Returning the grizzlies would help restore the natural ecosystem of the North Cascades. It is a rare opportunity to bring back all of the native animals to an area, Chris Servheen, the coordinator for grizzly bear recovery for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, told *The Herald* in February.

The Montana-based biologist said the recovery is expected to have little effect on the environment, other animals and people.

Without putting the grizzly bear recovery plan in place, Servheen said, there's little chance the animals would repopulate on their own. As the recovery plan is studied, scientists will identify specific targets to hit that would result in the grizzly bear being removed from the list of threatened species. There would need to be at least 300 grizzly bears in the North Cascades for that to happen.

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