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3. **PARKS: Progress seen at Mount Rainier but flooding restoration could take years** (11/08/2007)

Arthur O'Donnell, *Land Letter* editor

One year after heavy rains caused an unprecedented six-month closure of Mount Rainier National Park in Washington state, park officials are crediting a massive volunteer effort for saving money and expediting repairs.

Still, Mount Rainier spokeswoman Alison Bullock said it could be years before restoration of all damaged roads and trails can be completed.

Over the course of a 36-hour period, Nov. 6-7, 2006, Mount Rainier was hit with 18 inches of rainfall that resulted in landslides and collapsed roadways, changes in river courses, washed-out campgrounds and other severe damage. At first, NPS estimated the damages at \$36 million, but with the concerted volunteer effort and use of park personnel, that price tag has dropped to about \$24 million to \$27 million, Bullock said. "Our own staff was able to do things rather than contract out for labor," she said.

As many as 1,700 volunteers, from such organizations as the Student Conservation Association, National Parks Conservation Association and the Northwest Storm Recovery Coalition, contributed more than 84,000 hours to the effort – almost doubling the 43,000 hours of volunteer work during the previous year. Bullock put a value on the volunteers' time and effort at \$1.6 million (*Land Letter*, April 26).



Volunteers at Mount Rainier put in record numbers of hours this year, saving time and money for projects such as restoring the Wonderland Trail. Photo courtesy of the National Park Service.

"Our first priority was restoring public access," Bullock said.

"Every major road in the park was impacted by washouts and landslides." Highway 123, the main highway through the park, washed out in four places but was reopened to traffic even as repairs continued.

Hard hit was Nisqually Road that leads up to Paradise and eroded in several places, leaving parts of the roadway unsupported above a steep drop-off. Crews rebuilt the road embankments as a first priority, managing to reopen the highway before last Christmas. That greatly helped with the ongoing construction at the Paradise Inn and new visitors center at Paradise. The inn will reopen in April, and the visitors center is set for dedication next autumn.

The overflowing Nisqually River also took out long stretches of levees and undermined the Emergency Operations Center at Longmire while knocking out power and sewer facilities.

A new flood wall was built in October, allowing staff to return to their offices. Another wall will be built next spring on the side of the river that hosts a campground and community building.

About half of the Sunshine Point campground washed away and major utility infrastructure was damaged. More than 10,000-tons of rock were relocated to reconstruct the road at Sunshine Point.

Park officials still need to decide whether to rebuilt the site as a smaller campground or turn it into a day-use area.

A major ecological change occurred when Kautz Creek changed course, moving some 200 yards away from its former channel. The flood also undermined a park road, damaged underground power lines, and severely eroded the site of the search and rescue helicopter base. Park crews installed several new culverts to accommodate the new creek channel but

damage remains at the helipad, and it may need to be relocated.

Work to restore the many trails of damaged trails is ongoing, but it could take years before they are brought to pre-storm status, Bullock said. With early snowfall, most of the trail work is now suspended until next June.

In all, about 12 miles of trail was severely damaged, NPS reported. Two suspension bridges, 31 foot logs, and 20 other bridges were damaged or destroyed in the floods. Among the biggest projects have been restoring the 93-miles Wonderland Trail, which was reopened in August.