

...the Elwha has little in common with the Columbia and it is a disservice to both to combine them."

### 'A cautious approach'

The Elwha River dams, built early in the century by Olympic Power Co., have been controversial from the start. The lower Elwha Dam has no provision for fish passage, a violation of Washington state

...million to pay for water quality improvements here in the nearby city of Port Angeles, Wash.

When last year's federal budget negotiations allocated \$700 million to the Land and Water Conservation Fund, more than twice the normal amount, the senator relaxed his position — but only on one dam, the lower Elwha, which can be removed at a cost of only \$86 million. This, Gorton said at the

### YOU CAN CALL ...

- Sen. Slade Gorton at 202/224-3441;
- Shawn Cantrell of Friends of the Earth at 206/633-1661.

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## HOTLINE

### IDAHO

### Motorheads lose one

Environmental groups have put the squeeze on off-road vehicle enthusiasts in eastern Idaho's Targhee National Forest. On Jan. 15, the Forest Service abandoned its policy of allowing snowmobiles, motorbikes or cars access to every part of the forest, on or off road.

The decision is a part of the agency's Targhee Travel Plan, which includes closing 689 miles of roads and trails to preserve grizzly bear and elk habitat and control soil erosion. The plan still leaves over 2,000 miles of roads and 773 miles of trails open to motor vehicles.

The Travel Plan's objective, forest supervisor Jerry Reese says, is to balance the interests of conservation and vehicle users, but closing roads and trails is always controversial. Debate over the plan during last fall's administrative review brought in 1,200 public appeals, 80 percent of which came from angry ORV enthusiasts. "We don't need any more mass closures of roads," says Jim Gerber, spokesman for the Citizens for a User-Friendly Forest.

Still, the agency wants to close 400 more miles of road and 250 miles of trails, according to Reese.



**TRANSPORTATION, IDAHO STYLE:** Snowshoeing and cross-country skiing are still allowed on the Targhee (Idaho Division of Tourism photo)

But the agency won't make a decision on further closures until the end of the year.

"This is the beginning of a really ugly battle over winter use in Yellowstone and surrounding national forests," says Marv Hoyt of the Greater Yellowstone Coalition. He says the coalition is not flatly opposed to off-road vehicles on public lands. "We just want some balance. But they want it all." — *Jason Lenderman*

### NEW MEXICO

### Feds ready to get WIPPed

Twenty-three years after the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) near Carlsbad, N.M., was first proposed, the controversial \$2.5 billion underground storage facility is scheduled to open this spring.

The Department of Energy formally approved the project on Jan. 23, and the Environmental Protection Agency is expected to certify it in May. Department of Energy officials say they'll open the site after they get EPA approval. The pilot plant is designed to accept barrels of plutonium residues, contaminated clothing and equipment used in nuclear weapons production, now housed at sites

throughout the country. Site administrators plan to store about 2 percent of the nation's nuclear weapons waste at the plant.

But some believe WIPP faces another roadblock. Many of the barrels contain "mixed wastes" — chemical as well as radioactive waste — and the state of New Mexico is responsible for permitting the disposal of chemical waste, says Nathan Wade from the New Mexico Environment Department. To satisfy state requirements, he says, WIPP administrators will have to get a permit or go through a "characterization" process to prove the barrels contain only radioactive waste.

But DOE says it will go ahead with or without a permit. Kent Walter, a WIPP site manager, says the DOE has a characterization process already in place. He also says the state has been slow and uncommunicative. "We just don't know how long we'd have to wait," says Walter. "Technically speaking, they might never issue us a permit."

New Mexico Attorney General Tom Udall, a vocal opponent of the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant, has said that he may sue the DOE over its failure to obtain a state permit and over several safety concerns, including the possible collapse of underground storage caverns and the risks posed by oil and gas drilling near the site. Environmental groups appear ready to join his effort. "It's an unnecessary and dangerous project," says Don Hancock of the Albuquerque-based Southwest Research and Information Center. "We're willing to go back and sue them again." — *Michelle Nijhuis*