

On the Path

In Memory of Rosalind Yanishevsky

By Keith Hammer

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When I see or hear a pileated woodpecker, I think of Rosalind Yanishevsky. When I see a big fallen tree rotting on the forest floor among its still standing brethren, I think of Rosalind Yanishevsky and have knowledge of the magical cycle of life that is unique to old growth forests. When I heard from a mutual friend that Rosalind lost her battle with cancer on June 6, it was accompanied by his observation that none did more to conserve old growth forests in America's Pacific Northwest than Rosalind.

Folks in the Flathead were fortunate that Rosalind made her home in a small off-the-grid cabin north of Polebridge, yet made frequent forays into Kalispell in the early 1980s to help shape the then-budding Flathead Forest Plan. And when the final Plan did not include adequate protections for what little old growth was left, after decades of logging that targeted the biggest and best trees, Rosalind co-founded the nonprofit Resources, Ltd. and filed a well-researched appeal of the Plan.

The Chief of the Forest Service found merit in the appeal. He agreed it wasn't adequate to assume that narrow strips of big trees left only along streams, while mountainsides were clear-cut, was enough to insure the whole array of wildlife species dependent on old growth would continue as viable populations. He ordered the old growth portion of the Forest Plan redone and it later took the form of Flathead Forest Plan Amendment 21.

Rosalind had already received a doctorate degree in microbiology, and was pursuing her passion in wildlife biology, teaching classes for Glacier National Park, and working with other nonprofit groups to see that sound science was applied to forest management. She took a position with Audubon that included detailed mapping of the remaining old growth forests in the Northwest, and I'll always remember the giant drawers of map overlays she left on file in Kalispell when she moved to Boulder to write for the Colorado Division of Wildlife and then back home to Massachusetts to care for her ailing mother.

Indeed, those maps have been used to protect many remaining stands of old growth forest, including the north slopes in Doris Creek west of Hungry Horse Reservoir that were slated for clear-cutting in the 1980s. Swan View Coalition used Rosalind's maps in a lawsuit that stayed the cutting of what Rosalind believed to be the largest remaining patch of non-wilderness old growth on the Flathead. And that large grove of old growth indeed also survived the wildfires of 2003 that burned all around it, due precisely to the fact that it remained old growth, providing shade and retaining moisture for the undergrowth during an exceptional year of drought.

Rosalind always had a special glint in her eye that revealed her love for life and her sense of humor, but she was also fearless when confronted by those who would lay waste to life out of ignorance or greed. I remember a hot summer field trip up the North Fork where Rosalind held a discussion of how the shade provided by old growth forests was essential to many a wildlife and plant species – a discussion she held in an

old clear-cut within a stones throw of some un-logged old growth. Rosalind kept talking while the sweat rolled off the brow of the Forest Service official until he finally cried “uncle” and asked to move the conversation into the shade. Rosalind had made her point!

Rosalind gave selflessly of herself and to her work. She was among those who firmly believe giving voice and protection to the fish, wildlife and plants than cannot speak for themselves is not just a rare calling, but a necessary and broad obligation that makes all who take up the charge better people for it.

Rosalind was modest and soft spoken until a firmer voice was called for. Indeed, she put the title “Dr.” before her name only on the most official of documents and, while she was a dear friend she was also shy of the camera, for I find myself without a photo of her to include with this article.

She spent the last twelve years teaching and studying wildlife biology and I am told she now rests in a hand-dug grave in the woods of northwest Massachusetts. But she will be remembered forever here in the Flathead and the Pacific Northwest, for her spirit lives on in every grove of old growth forest she worked so hard to protect.

Keith Hammer grew up hiking, skiing, camping, hunting, and fishing in the Swan Mountains. He has worked a number of jobs, from Forest Service trail worker to logger to backcountry guide, and currently works as an environmental consultant and head of the nonprofit Swan View Coalition. His column appears regularly in this paper and is archived at www.swanrange.org. Keith can be reached at 406-755-1379 or keith@swanview.org.



Signs of pileated woodpecker using a dead tree on the Flathead National Forest. Keith Hammer Photo.