



Quinault River Poses Uncertain Future for Enchanted Valley Chalet

In early January braiding along the East Fork Quinault River threatens to undercut the old chalet in scenic Enchanted Valley in Olympic National Park. The historic three-story log structure is located 13 miles from the trailhead deep within the Olympic Wilderness. Park managers are monitoring the situation, but historic structure buffs are calling for dramatic action to save the structure. Suggestions on websites range from dynamiting the river back into its older channel to helicoptering in equipment to move the building to a new location.

Both suggestions raise serious questions under the Wilderness Act.

It may be that, though well-loved, the old commercial lodge, built before Olympic National Park was established, has run its course. OPA has written the park service requesting that the agency keeps the Wilderness Act firmly in mind as it charts a future course for the chalet. The park is required to document the structure under the National Historic Management Act. It may then disassemble it or let natural processes prevail.

[Click here to view OPA's letter.](#)



Olympic Park Associates

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January 17, 2014

Superintendent Sarah Creachbaum
Olympic National Park
600 East Park Avenue
Port Angeles, WA 98362

Dear Superintendent Creachbaum,

We understand that natural river processes of the East Fork Quinault River have recently placed the Enchanted Valley Chalet in danger of being undermined by the river. As you may be aware, this situation has been inevitable since the winter floods of 2007 moved the channel closer to the south bank. At that time, trees were felled and cabled to armor the river bank and deflect the river away from the cabin.

Although this was a temporary fix at best, OPA considers these measures extraordinary and intrusive in a designated wilderness. We sincerely hope you will not repeat past errors. Rather, please allow natural processes to prevail in this instance. The Wilderness Act prohibits this type of manipulation of natural environments, particularly when they are employed to protect structures in Wilderness.

We have become aware of a call on at least one website for the park to take "emergency" action and to "fly in heavy grip hoists, steel cables, roller logs and personnel, and to hand-winch the entire chalet off its foundation, moving it south to a safe site... [and] a new foundation placed beneath it."

The writer is apparently unaware that a "safe site" does not exist on an active floodplain. Further, the use of helicopter flights for this or other heroic purposes in defense of structures raises serious questions under the Wilderness Act.

Similarly, we urge you to resist calls for bank armoring using riprap, gabion baskets, or other artificial constraints on the river's hydrology. These actions would be detrimental to aquatic habitats, natural geologic process and ecological processes the park is charged with preserving. Obviously the use of mechanical equipment to alter the river's course (or to move the structure) is prohibited by the Wilderness Act.

We trust you and your staff will continue to assess the situation and in lieu of the inevitable take appropriate mitigating action to keep non-organic materials (window glass, stove pipe) and pollutants from entering into the river. Regarding logs from the structure that may enter the river, it seems they would serve well in natural downstream log jams, providing salmon habit and floodplain nourishment following their brief hiatus stacked into walls.

As you are aware, the park's obligations under the National Historic Preservation Act are to thoroughly document this historic structure. Following that, allowing nature take its course is not only a legal option, to us seems the most prudent one.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and for your mindful adherence to the Wilderness Act. The human hand shows in 90% of the American landscape. The purpose of wilderness is to give nature's processes the freedom and some space as it was formed by earth's creator.

Sincerely,

Donna Osseward
President, OPA

cc: Congressman Derek Kilmer
Senator Patty Murray
Senator Maria Cantwell