

Washington Ponders Volcanic National Park

Local News

Posted by: David Haviland

Posted on : May 17, 2012 at 8:20 am

OLYMPIA, Wash. - Friday is the 32nd anniversary of the Mount St. Helens eruption. The area is now a national monument, but people are gathering there that day to make a case for turning it into a national park.

According to the National Parks Conservation Association, the added prestige of park designation would mean more visitors, which boosts the local economy, and also more stable funding for conservation and upkeep. Sean Smith, NPCA Northwest regional director, says that's because the National Park Service is funded differently than is the Forest Service, which manages Mount St. Helens now.

"In the President's budget every year, there are specific allocations for individual parks, whereas the Forest Service has a lump sum that then gets trickled down to its individual forests and forest units." National park designation would not mean acquiring any new federal land, Smith says, just changing the way the existing acreage is managed. He notes there are some concerns about proposals for neighboring lands, including a mine and a residential development.

The rally is to begin at 10 a.m. Friday at the Johnston Ridge Visitor Center.

This weekend is also National Parks Family Day, just in time to plan those summer vacations. This year's free NPCA event will be held from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday at Rainier Community Center, 4600 38th Ave. South in Seattle, where representatives from national parks and monuments will share information about their sites.

Despite the federal budget crisis, Smith says, the park system has survived - in part, because of the advocacy of its many fans.

"We're even seeing some legislation to expand the national park system, even given these tough economic times. So, they've done pretty well, but there also are a number of assaults and challenges that they face."

One challenge this spring, he says, has been legislation in Congress to require more parks to allow hunting and recreational shooting.

The National Parks Conservation Association turns 93 this weekend.