

The Fight to Save Cove/Mallard

Jack Squat and the Giant Pink Bunnies in Central Idaho

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1996

Deep in the wilds of central Idaho is a wild bunch of pissed-off people. No, not militias! We're people resisting the destruction of one of the last untouched forested areas in this country.

Welcome to Jack Squat, summer 1996, the year activists reclaimed a logging road in the contentious Cove/Mallard timber sale area. Visitors gawked when they approached the Jack Creek logging road in July.

They were met by a wall of metal glistening in the sun: eleven 20-foot-long culvert pipes stacked smack in the middle of the road. In front of this formidable wall was a slash pile proudly proclaiming, "Wild Rockies Free State." Beyond the culverts, a concrete lock-down structure, two tripods, a bipod, and an encampment stretched across the road. Beyond that...well, that's for later! For 40 days and nights we guarded this road, preventing road builders from finishing bulldozing through pristine streams and critical wolf and salmon habitat.

Flash! As we go to press: A federal judge has halted all logging and road construction in the Cove/Mallard area until June 1997 following a September 12 agreement between a sporting group which brought suit, the Forest Service and the lumber company. Direct action works!

Cove/Mallard, a 76,000 acre roadless area near the Salmon River, is a critical wildlife corridor between three federally designated wilderness areas. It is a place where one can still hear the howl of a wolf, see rare critters such as pine martens, and drink straight out of creeks without getting sick.

Take a short hike into Cove/Mallard and you'll realize what it's like to stand on a hill and see no roads, buildings, or telephone wires. You won't hear cars or the hum of electricity. Instead, you'll see vast contiguous swaths of trees untouched by clearcuts. You'll see old growth firs and pines and acres of tall, spindly lodgepole.

You'll hear the rush of creeks, the wind blowing through the trees, and maybe a pileated woodpecker or two.

The US Forest Service has plans to end this serenity. In 1990, with a stroke of a pen, the Forest Supervisor of the Nez Perce National Forest signed the fate of this amazing place by designating 200 cutting units and 145 miles of roads in the area. The timber sales violate existing environmental laws and regulations. Soon after the logging and road building started, pristine creeks began filling with sediment, which is death for endangered salmon.

This summer was our fifth year of direct, active resistance to this madness. Hippies, anarchists, biologists, ex-bureaucrats, and mainstream enviros have shivered on tripods and in holes in the road, been arrested, beaten, and thrown in jail. Our perseverance has paid off. This summer was the first time we blockaded the road for so long. This also held off the road-builders while we waited for a temporary injunction hearing date in September.

A combination of events made the Jack Squat action successful. The annual Earth First! Round River Rendezvous site (RRR) in July was held only three miles from the Jack road gate. Rendezvous participants slipped back and forth continuously between the big party and the big action.

Bunnies Bop and Log Cabins Appear

One late June night, a handful of sleep-deprived activists erected two tripods, a bipod, and a concrete “dragon.” A couple of days later, the EF! Rendezvous kicked off in grand style. In a feat rivaling the best (or worst) the Forest Service or Army Corps of Engineers could dish up, a culvert structure was added to the Jack Timber Sale road blockade. Official government culverts were tipped on end, creating a twenty-foot high welcome wall resembling the pipes of a giant circus organ.

Amid this backdrop, Big Pink Bunnies began their work at night. These mammals who love to rehabilitate noxious roads are most prevalent around Earth First!-type gatherings. Night after night, while RRR revelers were snug in their bedrolls, serious road restoration (can you say, “ripping!?”) and mysterious rune-writing took place on the Jack Creek road. Tank traps and ditches were dug, a 25 foot section of road was ripped out, and two log cabins appeared on the road. There were even rumors of rousing music accompanying the busy denizens of the night.

The road contractors were supposed to finish work by July 12, but gave it up rather than deal with us. They started a week earlier than planned, probably to make up for time lost during the Rendezvous ‘week. However, a week after the Rendezvous was over, the Freddie’s (Forest Service officers), still weren’t willing to bust activists on the road or post a closure notice of it.

However, all good things come to an end. On August 7, 40 cops, including Freddie law enforcement officers, county sheriffs, Fish and Game, and Department of Corrections cops, swarmed into the Jack Squat. Some of them were wielding AR-15 submachine guns, all to protect themselves from a dozen or so Earthies!!

If it wasn’t so disgusting, it would be hilarious. One cop pulled out a leg from a tripod causing the guy sitting 30 feet above to fall with the tripod on top of him. Soon, a huge excavator ripped apart the log cabins, filled in the road, and angered the Big Pink Bunnies still lurking in the woods.

The good news is that a deal made between the Idaho Sporting Congress, the Freddie’s, and the timber company, means that no logging or road-building will be permitted until next June. Meanwhile, a lawsuit to stop logging in Cove/Mallard will be heard soon.

But, even if we win at Cove/Mallard, there’s plenty of other ugly shit happening all through Idaho! So, plan on being here next summer!

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