Business: Monday, September 15, 1997

**Making It Work**
**Forest Comes Clean Under Steward's Care -- Volunteer Takes On Litterbugs, Scours Garbage From The Mid-Fork Snoqualmie River Valley**

**Katherine Long**
*Seattle Times Eastside Bureau*

Barreling along Southeast Middle Fork Road in his old pickup, one hand holding a coffee mug and the other on the steering wheel, Wade Holden points out trash like a Seattle native might point out city landmarks to an out-of-town visitor.

"Look at this," he yells, swinging the **forest**-green truck over to the side of the road with a jerk. The offending piece of litter is a plastic juice container, the kind that holds $2 worth of exotic fruit nectar.

"They set their juice things down and just ride away," he shouts, disgusted.

"Hoodlums and punks," he adds.

Holden has become the self-appointed guardian of the lovely but often-vandalized and littered Mid-Fork Snoqualmie River Valley, which begins a few miles outside North Bend and is owned by the state Department of Natural Resources and U.S. **Forest** Service. For years, the valley has been a kind of no man's land for underage drinking, target shooting and garbage dumping.

Given its reputation, the Mid-Fork probably needed somebody like Holden.

The transplanted Texan is a volunteer with an attitude. Short and barrel-chested, the 38-year-old fence builder swears with gusto at those who would trash his beloved valley. He doesn't just talk - he shouts.

In a year's time, his fledgling nonprofit group, Friends of the Trail, has hauled 64 tons of garbage, 17 car bodies and 25 large appliances from the Mid-Fork valley.

"It's hard to fathom how bad it used to be," said Holden, who this month was honored with a special King County award for his outstanding stewardship role. "It's getting better. I'm real proud of that."

Hauling away garbage is "absolutely critical" to breaking the cycle of dumping, vandalism and lawlessness that has defined the Mid-Fork, said Mark Boyar, president of the Mid-Fork Outdoor Recreation Coalition. "One thing about garbage, it's like blood to sharks. The more there is up there, the more it attracts," Boyar said.

He thinks the Mid-Fork's reputation is starting to turn, and it's in no small part due to Holden. "Wade's like a tornado up there. He's really providing an incredible service."

Added Metropolitan King County Councilman Larry Phillips: "He's already a legend in King County, and he's only been doing this for a year and a half. He's helping to turn a whole system around."

There's a lot more to Holden's work than just picking up garbage. He has created a complex network of helpers: juvenile and adult offenders sentenced by the courts to do community service, hiking-club volunteers and Boy Scouts. He gets support from the Mountains to Sound Greenway, The Mountaineers, and federal, state and county land managers. This week, a year after Holden put in a request for assistance, the Army Reserve is sending a helicopter to airlift three junked cars out of the river.

Earlier this year, Friends of the Trail received a $30,632 King County Water Quality Block Grant, which pays Holden to work on the Mid-Fork two days a week - at half the money he makes building fences. He estimates that he's spent $7,000 of his own in dump fees, phone calls and gas for the truck.

He hounds law-enforcement officials for help, rides the **Forest** Service for not doing enough, and confronts partying teenagers, machine-gun-toting target shooters and homeless squatters who move to a new campsite in the woods every two weeks and leave a pile of garbage in their wake.

"I'm real proud of the network we've set up to get rid of this crap," Holden shouts. "It's not like you pick up a beer can and throw it away. You've gotta find somebody to take it."

And that only happens after you've found somebody to help pick it up. "Fortunately, I can put big labor crews together for nothing," Wade says.

Only occasionally is Holden able to catch someone in the act. Recently, he caught up with two teenage litterers who inadvertently discarded a video receipt with a name and phone number. "I called them back and said, `If you don't come back here and **clean** up with me, I'm going to call the cops.' And they did," Holden says, and laughs.

Holden steers his truck over to a culvert that empties water into the Snoqualmie River. Earlier this year, he found a truckload of garbage bags full of waste from a portable toilet.

"Right by the pipe," Holden says in amazement. "I've always had a thing about water quality."

There's more: a child's swimming pool. Old TV parts. Computer terminals and monitors, blasted to smithereens by target shooters.

"One of the biggest problems - and they're cutting their own throats - is the gun shooters," shouts Holden, a gun owner himself who has nothing against responsible target practice. "They shoot this stuff like TVs and computers, and leave stuff all over the place."

After he cleans up, Holden leaves a polite note tacked to a nearby tree that belies his passion for the cause. "Please don't litter," it says, and gives the Friends of the Trail address.

Holden swerves his truck down a spur road, drives past a camp of squatters and maneuvers down a rocky trail. He brakes hard to a stop and gets out, seeming to find this spot by intuition. In a small ravine, hidden from the road, are three appliances and a shopping cart.

"This ain't nothing," Holden yells cheerfully. "I've seen piles of stuff like this."

Holden decided to collect garbage during an epiphany of sorts while he was camping with his wife, Tania, and their two llamas near Goldmeyer Hot Springs.

"There was garbage waist-deep all around the campsite," he said. "We decided right then and there that somebody had to come back here and take care of all this crap, because it ain't gonna do nothing but get worse."

He's pressed llamas Munch and Marmaduke into garbage-hauling service in delicate areas where cars can't go. Tania applies for grants and does the computer work for Friends of the Trail.

The organization has cleaned areas throughout King County. Holden would like to form a statewide stewardship program to reduce vandalism and littering modeled after SOLV, Stop Oregon Littering and Vandalism.

Holden negotiates his truck down another narrow road that ends in a clearing. The scraps of a campfire are here, along with hundreds of spent, red and blue, plastic shotgun shells, broken bottles, and fragments of plastic, metal and wire. Holden picks up something that might once have been a pillow, stuffing spilling from its sides.

Just down the hill, he points out another ravine where he found a 55-gallon drum of oil sitting in a stream. "The hazardous-waste people had to take that away," he roars.

A few miles later, he parks his truck at a popular campsite on the edge of the river. Walking down the illegally cut road, he spies a black plastic bag stashed under the hollow of a tree stump. "Look under that stump," he shouts, stalking over to the offending bag. "Perfect example! Don't need it!"

He makes his way to the river and pauses at the picture-perfect view, Garfield Mountain looming over the Mid-Fork, which sparkles and dances across smooth stones on its way to Snoqualmie Falls.

"I love the Middle Fork. It's great up here," Holden says, pausing to reflect on his chosen home. "This is specifically where we wanted to be. I got my first taste of the mountains when I lived in Colorado for nine months. Here, you don't gotta contend with deep snow or cold days. You can't beat the Northwest."

Then, at his feet, he spies one of those plastic tabs used to close bread bags.

"Sometimes," he says, bending down to pick it up, "I feel like it's me against the world back here."

Give us your ideas: If you know of a person or project making a difference - from fighting crime to cleaning the environment to helping kids - call the Making It Work voice-mail line, 464-3338, or write describing your nominee: c/o Lily Eng, The Seattle Times, P.O. Box 70, Seattle, WA 98111. Include a phone number for more information.

Katherine Long's phone message number is 206-515-5631. Her e-mail address is: klon-new@seatimes.com

----------------- Volunteers sought -----------------

Friends of the Trail can be reached at 425-831-5486. The group is always looking for volunteers.