

FALL 2010 ISSUE 83

Conservation Northwest

Q U A R T E R L Y



Wilderness
kick-off

Pathways to protecting

Northwest Grasslands



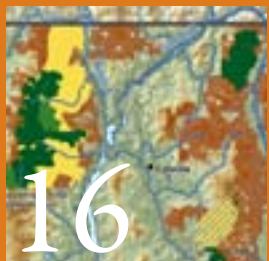
Conservation Northwest protects and connects old-growth forests and other wild areas from the Washington Coast to the BC Rockies: vital to a healthy future for us, our children, and wildlife.



Why grasslands?



Conserving a legacy of ranchlands



Initiative for north-eastern Washington



On tour with the Columbia Highlands

Center insert:
Other news, views,
and thank yous

Cover image

Burrowing owl on sagebrush, both are distinctive features of Northwest grassland ecosystems

Photo © Paul Bannick

Inset: Citizens show their support for an initiative for the Columbia Highlands of northeastern Washington, featuring new wilderness areas (including Kettle Range, San Poil, Mountain Caribou, Salmo-Priest Additions, Abercrombie Hooknose, and Quartzite) and a proposed Kettle Range National Conservation Area.

Staff

- Paul Bannick**
Development director
- Jodi Broughton**
Business and membership director
- Barbara Christensen**
Systems administrator and blog editor
- Tim Coleman**
Director, Columbia Highlands Initiative
- Seth Cool**
Conservation associate
- Mitch Friedman**
Executive director
- Crystal Gartner**
Outreach associate
- David Heflick**
Conservation associate
- Jay Kehne**
Okanogan County outreach associate
- Rachel Livingston**
Development associate

- Derrick Knowles**
Outreach coordinator
- Jasmine Minbashian**
Special projects director
- Kit McGurn**
Outreach associate
- Erin Moore**
Publications
- Pat Roberts**
Accountant
- Joe Scott**
International conservation director
- Julia Spencer**
Office manager (Bellingham) and membership associate
- Jen Watkins**
Conservation associate
- Dave Wertz**
Science and conservation director
- George Wooten**
Conservation associate

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Erin Moore, editor, erin@conservationnw.org

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Offices

Bellingham

1208 Bay Street, #201
Bellingham, WA 98225
360.671.9950
360.671.8429 (fax)

Seattle

3600 15th Ave W, #101
Seattle, WA 98119
206.675.9747
206.675.1007 (fax)

Republic

600 South Clark, #7
Republic, WA 99166
509.775.2667
509.775.3454 (fax)

Spokane

35 West Main, #220
Spokane, WA 99201
509.747.1663
509.747.1267 (fax)

VIEW FROM THE DIRECTOR

The Columbia Highlands Goes Public

Another year and another session of Congress winds down without legislation having been introduced to designate wilderness on the Colville National Forest and protect the Columbia Highlands. We decided to meet this disappointment with action, by taking to the public a wilderness proposal that is part of a bigger, balanced plan for the forests and wild lands of northeastern Washington.

The proposal we unveiled in late July, described on page 16, is unique in many ways. It is part of a balanced overall vision for the entire Colville National Forest, developed collaboratively with timber interests and other community leaders. It's integrated with private land conservation, including collaboration with prominent ranchers, to help assure safe passage for wildlife between the Cascades and Rockies. And it has substantial community support.

Our collaborative partners supported and participated in the public roll-out. The media response was rewarding, including front-page newspaper coverage in both Seattle and Spokane. I also feel good about the public response, of which we've seen favorable indications in the local communities, Spokane, and elsewhere.

There is much work to do to fulfill our vision.

We are working with the Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition to get more funds to the Colville National Forest so it can implement projects, including important forest and watershed restoration, that we've been involved in developing.

We are continuing outreach into local communities to build awareness and understanding of the proposal and to address any concerns.

We are also working to protect key ranches with conservation easements, as described in this edition of *Conservation Northwest Quarterly*, which focuses on the value and conservation of our region's grasslands, some of which are critical to facilitating wildlife connections between the Cascades and the Rockies.

Combined, this body of work is a powerful call to our state's delegation in Washington, DC, that it is time for Congressional action to designate wilderness in the Columbia Highlands. Opposition is limited to narrow and entrenched interests, while support extends throughout the community. Wilderness designation is a fundamental part of this overall package which not only sustains wildlife and ecosystems: Protecting wilderness also benefits local communities, including timber, agriculture, tourism, and recreation interests.

I see the Columbia Highlands Initiative as an opportunity for northeastern Washington, a part of our state that has struggled far from metropolitan centers, to get an economic boost it deserves and a new sense of hope. I look forward to great progress in the months ahead.



Jessie, Mitch, and Carrie Friedman.
Photo Jackie Branz

Public roll-out of the Columbia Highlands Initiative is a powerful call to our state's delegation in DC that it is time for Congressional action to designate wilderness in northeastern Washington.



Read the full press on the Columbia Highlands Initiative at conservationnw.org/columbiahighlands/latest-campaign-news

A timeless mosaic

The Northwest's Temperate Grasslands

Joe Scott International conservation director,
jscott@conservationnw.org

The "sage-brush sea" of Oregon is part of a dry, largely treeless landscape that stretches from Mexico to British Columbia. Open grasslands give wildlife places to live, food to eat, and room to roam. Photo Patrick Contor

Temperate grasslands, like their tropical grasslands/savannah sister systems, used to harbor the greatest assemblages of life the planet has ever known. From the Asian steppe to the short-grass prairies of South Dakota, the biological diversity in the world's grasslands was truly staggering. The journals of Lewis and Clark describe immense virgin prairies teeming with wildlife.

As Clark is pursuing elk on July 19, 1804, near what is now Nebraska City, he is enchanted by the landscape laid out before him: "Came Suddenly into an open and bound less Prairie, I Say bound less because I could not see the extent of the plain in any Direction...This prospect was So Sudden & entertaining that I forgot the object of my prosute..."

"The country in every direction around us was one vast plain in which innumerable herds of Buffalo were seen attended by their shepherds the wolves," wrote Meriwether Lewis later.

Now however, the only buffaloes Lewis and Clark are likely to see are the ones running around the stadium at University of Colorado. The open, wild landscape they grazed would be unrecognizable to them today. Only in a few of the world's remaining intact grasslands—mainly in African savannahs—can the wildlife of past centuries still be witnessed in such abundance.

Temperate grasslands currently represent the most altered and endangered ecosystems on earth. According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature, of the approximately 9 million sq km or 8% of the Earth's surface that grass-

lands cover in some form, only 5% of those systems are within protected areas. The rest have succumbed to agriculture and urbanization. Of the 140 million acres of tall grass prairies that once covered North America, less than 4% remains—in the Flint Hills of Kansas. In the US, less than 3% of the native prairie (both tall and short grass) remains.



Grasslands of the world, blueplanetbiomes.org

The grasslands of North America are more endangered than our old-growth forests and are home to more endangered species than any other ecosystem. In fact, you could say grasslands are the Rodney Dangerfield of conservation. No respect!

In our rush to save the big old-growth trees and the shining mountains we hurtled past the subtle but stunning expanses of prairie that remained post-manifest destiny—as 60 million bison, like numbers of elk, deer and pronghorn, tens of thousands of prairie wolves and grizzly bears and untold numbers of birds, badgers, and other supporting cast were replaced by cows, corn, soybeans, and hogs.

It would take a dustbowl and a couple of world wars before

anyone besides the US Soil Survey (later, the Natural Resources Conservation Service) would pay any attention to prairies. It was almost entirely gone before the advent of the modern conservation movement. For a wonderful, in-depth history of events surrounding the dustbowl and prairie natural history, read Tim Egan's book, *The Worst Hard Time: The Untold Story of Those Who Survived the Great American Dust Bowl*.

The short grass prairies and shrub-steppe or shrub-grasslands of the Intermountain West lasted a bit longer but also have been largely degraded and fragmented. Just ask the burrowing owls and sage grouse, whom, among dozens of other species, are at risk because of habitat destruction.

Scientists say all species of western grouse have plummeted from as many as 16 million birds in the early 1800s—when they were first described by members of the Lewis and Clark expedition—to as few as 100,000 today. The leading threat to these shrub grasslands "indicators" is habitat destruction from the usual suspects: sprawl, energy development, invasive species, livestock grazing, and increasing fire frequencies.

The native grasslands of the Columbia Plateau have been degraded so extensively that they have already lost many of the native plant communities and cannot even be restored. The great Palouse prairies, from which the famed Appaloosa horse of the Nez Perce Tribe is named, once covered an area the size of Vermont and New Hampshire in eastern Washington, northwest Idaho, and northeast Oregon—a sea of bluebunch wheatgrass, Idaho fescue, needle-and-thread, and others. Today it is virtually gone, 99% converted to wheat fields and cheatgrass.

Badgers, along with prairie dogs, skunks, marmots, and ground squirrels, create burrows in grasslands that burrowing owls and other animals use later for nesting and shelter. Photo © Paul Bannick



Two types

Broadly there are two types of grasslands in the world—tropical savannahs and temperate grasslands. Of the temperate grasslands there are five sub-types: the Pampas of Argentina, the steppes of Russia, the veldt of South Africa, the plains of New Zealand, and the prairies of North America. Although they are located on different continents they all share annual precipitation averaging less than 500 mm (20 in).

Canada's hot spot

The South Okanagan of BC is Canada's hot spot for threatened and endangered species with over 30% (57 species) of the province's listed species overall. More than 50% of the species are associated with grasslands, and more particularly with antelope-brush plant communities. Only 10% of the antelope brush/needle-and-thread grass community is left in the south Okanagan, and it is ranked as one of the four most endangered ecosystems in Canada.

Grasslands unraveling

It may look vast, green, and timeless when you drive through it, but these systems are unraveling. In our magnificent Columbia Basin, shrub-grasslands comprise the northern extent of the dry, largely treeless landscape that stretches from Mexico to British Columbia. Cataclysmic glacial floods and their sediments and the formidable Cascade Mountains have continued to shape the plant communities and animal life of this vast "sagebrush sea."

Variations in soil types and depths and precipitation create a vegetative mosaic whose boundaries ebb and flow over time in response to fire or lack thereof, grazing pressures and other disturbances, moisture, and climate change. Subtle differences in topography, slope aspect, soils, and precipitation result in dozens of "variants" or variations in the regional shrub-steppe ecosystem, many of which have unique plant communities and are often confined to relatively narrow areas.

In the Okanagan grasslands region of southern British Columbia, for example, there are 15 such "major variants" (those over 3,000 ha). Some of the hottest and driest sites are in the south Okanagan Basin, the northern extension of similar grasslands that occur as far south as Oregon. Here antelope brush/needle and thread grass and great basin sage/bluebunch wheatgrass communities are often found side by side. Together these two plant communities harbor more than 100 rare plants, 300 rare invertebrates, 29 threatened and endangered vertebrate species, and 4 species of management concern.

This area has the most diverse array of grasslands species in BC. On undisturbed sites widely-spaced bluebunch wheatgrass can be found separated by healthy biotic soil crusts of lichens, mosses, algae, and fungi. Prairie sagewort, junegrass, yarrow, phlox, bitterroot, and snow buckwheat represent the flowering plants on these sites. On cooler north and east-

Continued next page

The native strength of grasslands

Prairie plants are tough. They range from sea level up to the very edges of glaciers. Adapted to harsh conditions, they tolerate high winds, low water, extremes in temperature, and saline, acid, and alkaline soils.

Grassland species evolved with wildfire and co-evolved with herbivores. They are one of the few vegetation types that thrive on being abused. Most plants generate new growth from special growth cells called the meristem near the top of the plant where it can be easily damaged by exposure or munching. But grasses have lower, “intercellary” meristems that can take over stem growth after the tops have been eaten, burnt, or trampled.

Prairie grasses and other plants have extensive root networks that anchor soils and resist erosion. They also support soils rich in “biotic” soil crusts of lichens, algae (including photosynthesizing blue-green algae), and mosses. These cryptic communities hold in the soil, and store nutrients, carbon, and water. They provide a rich seedbed for vascular plants and habitat for invertebrates and animals.

Grasslands are carbon storehouses

It’s become increasingly clear that the value of unconverted, native grasslands is major. They are critical to storing carbon and decreasing carbon dioxide as a greenhouse gas. According to the World Resources Institute and the Temperate Grasslands Conservation Initiative:

- Grasslands store approximately 34% of the global stock of carbon in terrestrial ecosystems. Forests store 39% and agroecosystems, 17%.
- Unlike in tropical forests, where trees and aboveground vegetation are the primary source of carbon storage, in grasslands most carbon is stored belowground in the soil and roots.
- Altering those natural systems can be a significant source of carbon emissions.

Temperate grasslands, continued...

facing slopes, Idaho and rough fescue dominate and at higher, moister elevations giant wild rye is found.

The grasslands of the Okanagan are a virtual wildlife menagerie with the highest diversity of wildlife in BC including several “endemics,” those that are unique to the area. It is home to 75% of the bird species in the province including meadowlarks, nighthawks, burrowing and flammulated owls, vesper sparrows, and endangered sage thrashers. Lower elevations are critical winter range for mule and white-tailed deer, mountain goats, and bighorn sheep. Eleven species of bats can be found in the grasslands and among associated cliffs, wetlands, and rocky outcrops.

The South Okanagan of BC is Canada’s hot spot for threatened and endangered species with over 30% (57 species) of the province’s listed species overall. More than 50% of the species are associated with grasslands, and more particularly with antelope-brush plant communities. Only 10% of the antelope brush/needle-and-thread grass community is left in the south Okanagan and it is ranked as one of the four most endangered ecosystems in Canada.

Backyard conservationists

Absent the huge numbers of mega-fauna on which Native Americans based their well-being and culture, today’s grasslands are indeed a shadow of their former selves. Existing native grasslands are threatened by conversion, increasing fire frequency, invasive species, and ignorance.

But those that have escaped the plow and pavement, like those in the proposed South Okanagan Similkameen National Park of BC, are rich and complex systems, priceless for their rarity and beauty. They are critical pieces in our remaining ecological tapestry.

But we need to slow down, even stop—to notice and appreciate our grasslands, home to plants, animals, and natural communities found nowhere else. They have adapted to survive in some of most challenging conditions and are found on every continent except Antarctica. Drama and subtlety interplay in these systems in ways that aren’t so obvious but that are unique and captivating.

In our own backyard conservationists are racing against time to protect some of these places—under enormous pressure of human development because of their dry, mild weather, pure air, and quality of life.



Mule deer. Photo © Alan Bauer

It’s time to notice and appreciate our grasslands, home to plants, animals, and natural communities found nowhere else.

A land suited to birds

Birds of Washington’s Open Country

Paul Bannick Development director,
pbannick@conservationnw.org



Rough-legged hawks are winter visitors who use their keen eyesight to hunt from the most improbable perches. Photo © Paul Bannick

The western meadowlark’s call is a rich, beautiful descending warble that is synonymous with grasslands. Photo © Paul Bannick



Your eyes see farther in the open expanses between and below the ochre-colored ponderosa pines that stud the hills. The avian silhouettes that dot the horizon, atop basalt outcrop, sage-branch, grass hummock or fence-post, change by the season and the time of day, always lending music and color to landscape.

While the mix of birds changes gradually as you move down slope in the forests of the West, the changes become more dramatic as trees are replaced by sage and grass.

In the winter, visitors from the treeless landscapes of the Arctic, such as the rough-legged hawk and the northern shrike, migrate to the sparsely-treed grasslands of Washington and British Columbia, where they might replace Swainson’s hawks and loggerhead shrikes that move south.

Spring finds ancient perennial dancing grounds throbbing with elaborate ritualized displays and a cacophony of foot-stamping, hooting, and cackling, as male sharp-tailed grouse and sage grouse compete for the mating privileges.

Through the summer, the liquid call of the meadowlark initiates each day, while the hoots of great horned owls and the screeches of barn owls herald nightfall.

As the winds chill and the snows fall, the northern shrike and the rough-legged hawk return from the Arctic, sometimes along with snowy owls and other northern birds that find the treeless landscape familiar.

No matter the season, the grasslands are alive with survival and song.



Northern flickers are the woodpecker best adapted to the open landscape, as long as pine or cottonwood can be found for cavities. Their brown coloration is unusual among woodpeckers, and allows them to stay camouflaged as they forage on the ground for ants and other insects.

Photo © Paul Bannick



When trees are absent, cavity-nesting birds such as barn owls raise families in lava tubes, caves, and animal burrows in cliffs and cut-banks. Photo © Paul Bannick



Short-eared owls benefit from having a very little weight per inch of wing surface, allowing them to hover almost effortlessly while they listen for prey moving in the grass below. Photo © Paul Bannick

In the Okanagan-Similkameen

Doreen Olson, South Okanagan-Similkameen National Park Network

A Grasslands Park in the Making



Crossing the border into Canada from Washington at the towns of Oroville or Nighthawk, you enter into the South Okanagan and Similkameen valleys. The dry shrub-grasslands found here represent the northernmost tip of the Great Basin shrub-steppe community. Locals call it the “pocket desert.”

The hot, dry shrub-grassland habitat is one of Canada’s four most endangered natural areas. The province of British Columbia lists more than 250 species at risk that depend on habitats here. Nationally, more than 40 species at risk depend on these same habitats. In addition to the rare plants and animals, the entire South Okanagan ecosystem is in danger.

It’s also a natural corridor for the movement of plants and animals north and south, east and west.

Peaches and beaches

In 1994 when I moved from the Vancouver area to the Okanagan Valley (we spell it a bit different in Canada), things were a bit slower paced. The valley was mostly agricultural based, growing soft fruit. The region also had a long reputation as summer resort destination boasting of “peaches and beaches.” At that time were just starting to see the beginnings of vineyards accompanied by wine tasting rooms and farm gate wine sales. Shortly thereafter, we entered into period of economic growth.

New retirement developments and the wine industry took off with glamour and sophistication that brought with it a new and promising investment. Orchardists began removing the low-profit apple trees and replanting them with row upon row of Merlot and Gewürztraminer. Soon vineyards were established on much of the valley bottom agricultural land, changing the landscape and bringing with it high-end tourism.

As a new-comer to the Okanagan, I was surprised that not many people were concerned about the loss of this incredibly rare and interesting ecosystem. I would overhear conversations that land not suitable for grapes was just shrub wasteland with little value, best used for housing or industrial developments. Meanwhile, I was learning that some of the plants

and animals living here were found nowhere else in Canada and in some cases nowhere else in the world; and that the land was so fragile that it was easily damaged and once damaged took many years to heal.

I kept thinking about all this interesting natural history and felt I had to tell more people about it before it was lost forever. I found all too quickly that many of the critters here were not very appealing to the average person who fell victim to my enthusiasm.

After all, rattlesnakes, bats, and black widows are not exactly cute or cuddly. So I started with tiny plants with names like pink twink and blue-eyed mary, not rare, but cute. With these as my ambassadors, I could then talk about the protective biotic crusts, which took years to grow and even longer to recover once damaged. It worked! People became fascinated with the stories.

Healing the land

Childhood visits to her grandfather’s rural Ontario farm inspired Doreen Olson to love nature early in life. During a career as an airline stewardess she also raised horses, but repeated loss of riding access, the result of subdivisions and development, kept her moving west, eventually to the Okanagan. “It turned out that my property here had all kinds of endangered species. So I moved the horses to the corner of the farm and began restoring the rest.” Doreen helped found the South Okanagan-Similkameen National Park Network. She maintains, “You don’t have to be a scientist to educate others and protect the things you love.”

Love of the land in the face of change

A few years later I was involved with a several people in advancing local knowledge of the ecosystems and biodiversity of the South Okanagan-Similkameen. With a small grant and great passion, we organized the first Meadowlark Festival. This celebration of the unique natural history of the grasslands featured close to forty tours to help people understand the sense of place.

Surprisingly, the day tickets went on sale there was a line-up of fifty people waiting to buy tickets well before the doors opened. Every tour sold out in advance. With a hundred eager volunteers, we hosted more than 2,000 people from near and far who enjoyed a weekend discovering, exploring, and experiencing our natural history. Happily, Meadowlark Festival is now an established annual event, which boasts of a plentitude of tours and activities.

But sadly, these shrub-grasslands and pocket desert are quickly changing. Population growth, improper grazing, loss of important habitat to invasive weeds, housing development, rezoning, vineyards and golf courses, damage from off-road vehicles, threats of methane gas and coal fired power plants, toxic waste dumps, dams and the effects of climate change all make us fearful for the future of this rare landscape. No wonder that I am now supporting the concept of a national park here that would give the highest form of protection to this special place.

A proposed grasslands national park

In 2004, recognizing the ecological values of the South Okanagan-Similkameen, Parks Canada began a feasibility study in the south Okanagan and lower Similkameen. The draft concept is based on a combination of Parks Canada land ownership within the study area and partnerships for conservation within the larger region. The core would be land set aside as provincial protected areas through the land resource management plan, a collaborative public planning process.

As well, Parks Canada would seek to acquire adjacent government-owned and private lands on a willing seller—willing buyer basis to improve long-term conservation and visitor objectives. The park would provide for continuous land for



Conservation Northwest’s Jay Kehne of Omak talks soils on a tour during the Meadowlark Festival in the Okanagan. Photo Doreen Olson

conservation efforts across the border into Washington state. Full implementation of this park concept will take many years and require consultation and support of land owners, First Nations, and many levels of government.

Despite the ecological, cultural, and economic and community benefits, there continue to be challenges, including First Nations rights and titles and issues of grazing tenures.

A few years ago, the South Okanagan-Similkameen National Park Network, a citizens group, was formed to advance the idea of a national park for this area. People volunteer their time at information booths throughout the region and give tours of areas included in the park concept area and presentations to community leaders, schools, and politicians.

In February of 2009, members of the citizens group delivered a petition of almost 20,000 names supporting the park to the government of Canada. We are dedicated and determined that this park will be established to protect this place and the wildlife that live here. We cannot watch and let it disappear before our very eyes. Our grandchildren and their children deserve to know what we have known and enjoyed. This is our legacy to the future.

For more information, visit sosnationalpark.ca and meadowlarkfestival.ca

In the South Okanagan Similkameen, western rattlesnakes share the scene with tiger salamanders. One of the largest land-dwelling salamanders in the world (growing up to 25-cm or 10-inches in length), tiger salamanders are red-listed in BC. Photo Ole Westby



2:1 park support

People living in the South Okanagan Similkameen region support a proposed national park by a ratio of over two to one. A recent poll commissioned by the Wilderness Committee revealed that 63% of local residents were in favor of the park proposal versus 26% who were opposed. Learn more at wildernesscommittee.org

Protecting and connecting Large Ecosystems, Cascades to Rockies

Mitch Friedman Executive director,
mitch@conservationnw.org

The Similkameen River meanders through southern British Columbia and Washington state. This area provides vital connected wildlife habitat that would be protected with a national park. Photo Doreen Olson

Some people think of Conservation Northwest as a group that protects forests or wilderness or grizzly bears or the North Cascades. But these are all just parts of our true mission, which is to protect and connect the places and wildlife that keep our region's large ecosystems healthy and whole. Northwest grasslands are a vital piece in that puzzle. And they can be just as beautiful and inspiring as a giant old tree or mountain peak.

On vacation this August with my friend Jackie, we found ourselves testing wines crafted by the Osoyoos Indian Band of the Okanogan in south-central British Columbia. The Osoyoos Band are a desert people, as explained by posters on their winery walls, which frequently use the term Sonoran in describing their setting, though these deserts are more closely related to the Great Basin deserts. Indeed, the modest amount of dry grassland in southern BC—parts of the Okanogan, Thompson, and Fraser valleys—are the northern tip of an ecosystem that stretches down through the great basin deserts of

Nevada and Utah to Mexico's Sierra Madre. While we don't see saguaro or cholla in BC, the sage and occasional smaller prickly pear and big sagebrush are familiar, as are many of the grasses and biotic crusts.

The Columbia Basin of the inland US Pacific Northwest is part of that long system, in its long north-south span. The dry grasslands of BC link to those of the Columbia Basin through the narrow valleys of the Okanogan and Similkameen rivers, which have been covered with cattle ranches for over a century. If those ranches were to be converted to vineyards or

houses, or flooded by the proposed Shankers Bend dam, BC's populations of badgers, sharp-tailed grouse, sage thrashers, and many other birds, mammals, reptiles, insects, and plants would become isolated and at dire risk of extinction. Today, Canada lists more at-risk species in the grasslands of British Columbia than anywhere else in the country.

Wildlife movement

These grasslands form an important east-west ecological connection. For a lynx, wolverine, or mule deer to move between the Cascades and the Columbia Highlands (perhaps even on its way to the Rocky Mountains), these wildlife need to cross the dry grasslands of the Okanogan Valley. Biologists believe the best place for such a crossing is between Riverside and Tonasket in Washington state, a belief unfortunately affirmed by the number of deer hit by cars travelling Highway 97 at that spot.

For these reasons, Conservation Northwest and our partners, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Trust for Public Lands, and Okanogan Valley Land Council, have worked for almost five years protecting ranches in key locations in Okanogan County. We have delivered more than \$15 million from state and federal sources for purchases of easements (or fee title, if the rancher so chooses) to keep more than 10,000 acres in open space for agricultural and habitat purposes.

Conservation Northwest is doing similar work further east in the Columbia Highlands itself, where grasslands are also a critical part of the ecosystem. The Wheaton Ranch, on Vulcan Mountain just west of Curlew, is thought to be important to safe wildlife passage between the Cascades and Rockies. The property may even provide habitat for the small population



Burrowing owls have long legs that allow them to chase prey and stand tall to look for threats or food, but they still require elevated perches such as sagebrush or fence posts to be most successful.

Photo © Paul Bannick

provides quality wildlife habitat and a critical buffer to the core wild public lands of the nearby Colville National Forest. Bryan and Deb are good stewards on their property and on national forest lands where they have a permit to graze cattle. But low prices for timber and beef have put the Gothams in a tough spot, with a lot of financial incentive to sell or develop. The Gothams don't want to see more double-wides on this beautiful land, nor do they want to see the complete destruction that would come with open pit mining associated with a

Continued next page

“When the property around us starts growing houses instead of grass and trees, that hurts our ranch, other local ranchers, and the wildlife. This partnership is helping us keep the land the way it was in our grandfather's time, with a quiet backcountry that we can access by horse, and a means to keep our ranch economically viable so we can pass it on intact to our kids.” —Bryan and Deb Gotham

Springtime grasslands. Photo Erin Moore

of grizzly bears a bit farther north, in BC's Granby watershed. The ranch owner is retired and wants to sell but would much rather see the property kept intact than broken up for trophy homes overlooking the scenic Kettle River Valley. I have been working to find a buyer who firmly shares that goal.

Between a rock and a hard place

Ranchers Bryan and Deb Gotham have 2,200 acres between Republic and Sherman Pass, the high point along Highway 20 as it transects the Kettle River Range. Their land





Two male sharp-tailed grouse compete for the right to move closer to the center of the lek, where they have a better chance of passing on their genes. Photo © Paul Bannick

Protecting and connecting, continued...

gold mine. Instead they have chosen to sell their development rights to the state and their mineral rights to Conservation Northwest. If we are successful in our efforts to raise private funds for the mineral rights, and to help the Gothams work through the state's Forest Legacy Program, they will use the funds to purchase neighboring properties that are also at risk of development, thereby protecting even more land in agriculture, open space, and wildlife habitat. This will help maintain the local ranching heritage and economy while conserving the wildlife connection between the Cascades and Rockies.

I offer these examples to illustrate why Conservation Northwest works on grasslands as part of our ecological mission. There is no way we could accomplish our ecological mission, to protect and connect key lands, if we only worked on public land or only focused on forests and mountain wilderness. It is gratifying that we are accomplishing this work by collaborating with ranchers, just as our forest conservation efforts have benefited from collaboration with timber partners, such as through the Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition.

We are demonstrating how conservation of critical wildlife corridors and large landscapes can be done in partnership with rural economies, lifestyles, and communities. The heritage of these places includes the open space, wildlife, and profitable management and stewardship of the land. Prosperity comes through maintaining this balance. This is how we keep the Northwest wild.

Mitch Friedman Executive director, mitch@conservationnw.org

A good option for ranchers

Conservation Easements

To truly connect lands important for both people and wildlife between the Cascades and the Rockies, Conservation Northwest is helping ranchers protect private lands, such as the grasslands in the Okanogan and Similkameen valleys in north-central Washington. To date, we have helped raise nearly \$15 million to protect close to 10,000 acres as open space.

Lands in these beautiful valleys range from dry, sage grasslands to forested mountains between the North Cascades and the Columbia Highlands and continuing up into British Columbia. Important to wildlife movement, they are rich in wildlife from Canada lynx to snowshoe hare, and sharp-tailed grouse to bighorn sheep.

Keeping key ranches open and natural is important for conserving wildlife along the Cascades to Rockies corridor. It is also elemental to sustaining the heritage and unique lifestyle of the Okanogan and Columbia Highlands. Around the West, at an alarming rate, America is losing its working farms and ranches to global price competition and real estate development. Sustaining ranches and ranch lands keeps intact rural character, wildlife habitat, and quality local farms and food.

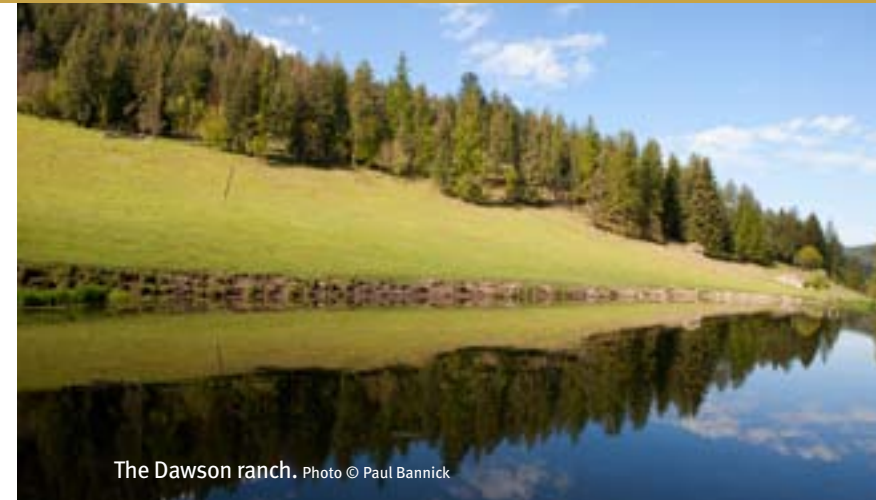
Everyone knows, it's a tough time for ranchers. In Okanogan County, ranchlands are threatened by conversion to winery vineyards as well as a real estate boom fueled by Canadians buying second homes in their nation's retirement hub.

In Ferry and Stevens counties, ranchers also face tough choices and the pressures of subdivision and development. Through a variety of pathways to easements, Conservation Northwest is helping local ranchers "keep the farm."

A way forward

John and Melva Dawson's family ranch near Colville was recently protected with a conservation easement. The ranch provides valuable habitat for wildlife, including prized, trophy white tail and mule deer.

The Inland Northwest Land Trust of Spokane, Conservation Northwest, and the Dawsons worked together to better connect lands important for people and wildlife between the Cascades and the Rockies.



The Dawson ranch. Photo © Paul Bannick



John Dawson. Photo © Paul Bannick

Conservation easements are a good option for ranchers and for wildlife, and a long-lasting commitment to open space, agriculture, and wildlife habitat. We are helping ranchers procure easements on ranch properties key to our vision of wild and working forests in the region.

A conservation easement is an agreement placed on private property that protects public benefits such as wildlife habitat and public recreation by permanently restricting development or other uses and managing the land managed according to a forest stewardship plan. While some landowners can afford to donate easements for tax breaks, others must capture some value when they voluntarily forfeit what can be substantial development rights or mineral potential of their land. In return, he or she obtains capital today to implement a forest stewardship plan for managing the land, and maintain and even expand their operations in timberland.

Our recent work has helped the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife apply state funds to purchase land and conservation easements from several Okanogan County ranchers. In the central and eastern Columbia Highlands, where fewer public dollars are available to procure easements, we are taking another tack. Two programs—Forest Legacy and Farm and Ranch Protection—are other options for ranchers wanting to keep ranch and timber lands in open space. Both require a matching share of the purchase price from non-federal sources, and today, Conservation Northwest is raising funds from private dollars towards those matches.

“Our family continues to enjoy a lifestyle of working on the land, appreciating the freedom and beauty of open country. It would have broken our hearts to see the ranch broken up and developed. We are happy and thankful for this opportunity,” says John Dawson.

Forest Legacy is a federal grant program administered by the state—in Washington's case through the Department of Natural Resources—to protect working forest lands. The program provides for both traditional forest uses and the protection of water, cultural resources, fish, and wildlife. For example, Conservation Northwest is partnering with the Gotham family to apply for Forest Legacy funding for an easement on their 2,200-acre tree farm and cattle ranch between the town of Republic and the boundary of the Colville National Forest. Conservation Northwest is matching the prospective public funds by purchasing and retiring the property's mineral rights to end the danger of an open pit gold mine near Sherman Pass.

The **Farm and Ranch Protection Program** similarly administers federal funds for purchase of easements. Through the program, Conservation Northwest and the Inland Northwest Land Trust of Spokane partnered with John and Melva Dawson and their family near Colville to gain funding for an easement to keep their ranch in operation and out of residential development. The ranch has been accepted into the program and Conservation Northwest is raising necessary matching funds with the goal of closing by the end of 2010.

Private purchase is another avenue for protection. On properties for which the rancher wants to retire and sell, Conservation Northwest helps recruit conservation buyers who will keep the land intact, providing the rancher with a better option than selling to a developer.

**Love ranchlands?
Need a ranch?**

Contact
**Conservation Northwest's
in-house realtor
Mitch Friedman**

360.319.9266

Jay Kehne Conservation associate,
jkehne@conservationnw.org

Building partnerships

What It Takes

The first time I met Bryan Gotham was over the hood of his pickup looking at maps of his 2,200 acre ranch and timberland just east of Republic, Washington, and the Colville National Forest. From the top of that hill it was evident that Bryan's and his wife Deb's property would indeed be a fit for one or several easement programs, and that it was also prime real estate that would be in high demand for development. In

and wanted to keep it all in one piece, but tough economic times were making that a harder and harder choice.

With Bryan and Deb's okay, we started the long process of building the partnerships necessary for a conservation easement application. After reviewing several programs, we chose the Forest Legacy federal grant program, administered in Washington by the Department of Natural Resources.

Conservation Northwest's part in this was to work with Bryan and Deb to put together the best application possible in what is a very competitive process for a limited pot of funds. With a dedicated contractor hired putting together all the documents and maps, and with Bryan and I sometimes working into the wee hours of the night, we eventually finished, then began seeking support for the project from county commissioners, conservation district officials, and with the local land trust organization, the Okanogan Valley Lands Council.

Conservation Northwest helped pay for a property forest management plan necessary to the program. We also committed to purchasing and retiring the mineral rights, by the end of 2011, protecting the landscape from a potential open pit gold mine. In Bryan's words, "Without Conservation Northwest I did not have enough knowledge or capital...I just couldn't have done it without teaming with Conservation Northwest."

Today, the Gotham's application is



The Gotham family ranch near Republic. Photo © Paul Bannick

one of seven easements under review in Washington State. Three will be picked to go on to a national review; if selected, funds would become available in 2012. In the meantime Bryan has spoken out about the positive benefits of working with partners to protect ranches, timberland, and open space—and the benefits of wilderness as well.

Not everyone in the local community has his open minded outlook and Bryan has taken some heat from some of the locals. "There are a lot of rumors flying around out there, with not a lot of truth in any of them," he says. "Fact is, I speak for my ranch and none others and I am trying to better my personal situation in a way that makes sense for the land and our ranch. Having some wilderness in the mix will be good for wildlife giving them more room to wander and it really won't affect my operation that much."

Bryan's attitude is similar to the Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition that promotes a balanced plan of wilderness, forest restoration, and active management on the Colville National Forest. With people like Bryan and Deb Gotham stepping up to do the same thing on private grounds, it gives new energy to the public/private partnerships that are so critical to the broader efforts to maintain wildlife habitat and open spaces while supporting local families, economies, and communities.

"Having some wilderness in the mix will be good for wildlife giving them more room to wander and it really won't affect my operation that much," says Bryan Gotham.

Theresa Ann Terbasket
Lower Similkameen Indian Band

Skunk, Rabbit Run, and Badger

A Grasslands Tale

The setting is the forbidden forest of the animal world and a desire of one animal to change his persona.

The little animals played and did everything together. There were many others in the forest besides the three best friends: Skunk, Rabbit Run, and Badger.

Skunk was unhappy and wanted to smell pretty, not just be handsome. He had an idea of what he wanted his new scent to be. "I will ask Badger about changing my scent to something sweet and aromatic," he thought.

"Mmm," said Skunk to Badger, "I should like a strong smell, something like honeysuckles."

"Yeah right, Skunk, you smelling like honeysuckles, in your dreams!" snorted Badger.

"I love the smell of honeysuckles, so sweet," moaned Skunk.

Badger, "You know there are things one cannot change and one of 'em is what you get born with!"

Skunk, "I will ask little sister, Rabbit Run, she'll help me,"

Badger, "Bah, she'll laugh at you too!"

Skunk swung his tail up and stalked away. Skunk is very sensitive about his scent and would be happy with the smell of clover.

Says Skunk to Rabbit Run, "Little sister, a minute please!" Rabbit Run stopped. "What does he want now?" She said to herself.

Skunk, "Can you tell me how I can smell like honeysuckles?"

"Ha ha ha! You, smell like honeysuckles?" Rabbit Run roared, rolling in the dirt.

Skunk hunched up and stormed away, leaving a musky smell in his wake.

Rabbit Run, "Oops, I have hurt his sensibilities... What have I done?"

Looking around, she saw Badger and thought to ask him what to do.

Badger, "Oh, you talked to his Highness, I see."



One of the best friends, badger.
Photo © Paul Bannick



A tour of the proposed grasslands park was organized by Mitch Friedman with elders of the Lower Similkameen Indian Band.
Photo Mitch Friedman

Rabbit Run, "Yes I have hurt his sensibilities to the core. What can we do!" she cried.

Badger, "Do? You are mad, there is nothing we can do!"

Rabbit Run, "Oh, we can do something, we must!"

Badger, "Yeah right: he is who he is."

Rabbit Run, "Let me think, will you help me?" she looked like she might cry.

Badger, "Okay, but there is nothing we can do, trust me!"

Rabbit Run, "Yes, we can go pick honeysuckles and soak him in it."

Badger, "Pick honeysuckles, that's work. I have better things to do!"

Rabbit Run, "Oh please, Badger, we can do this for him."

So they picked baskets of honeysuckles and sang songs to the forest creatures who all perked up to the happiness shared. Badger sneezed more than once!

Badger, "What to do with the flowers now?" he asked.

Rabbit Run, "Go find Skunk, I will be ready. When you find him, bring him back."

Skunk and Badger arrive and Rabbit Run has Skunk's flower bath ready. Will they convince him to bathe?

Skunk, "Me? Get into a bath? Not a chance!"

Rabbit Run has reached her limit and she pushes Skunk into the honeysuckle bath.

Skunk sputtering, comes up smelling as he'd wanted to all along!

Rabbit Run, "Skunk will smell pretty for awhile. Will he not?!"

All is well in the forest once again with harmony.

Elder Theresa Ann Terbasket tells stories of the grasslands.
Photo Mitch Friedman





View from White Mountain, part of a proposed new San Poil Wilderness in the Columbia Highlands. Photo © James Johnston

Tim Coleman Director of the Columbia Highlands Initiative, tcoleman@conservationnw.org

SUMMER ROLL-OUT

Advance of the Columbia Highlands Initiative

This July 2010, Conservation Northwest formally introduced our long-anticipated and hard wrought proposal for public forest lands in northeastern Washington. The Columbia Highlands Initiative builds upon years of community collaboration to forge a balanced proposal that continues the safe passage of wildlife between the Cascades and the Rockies. The proposal advances:

- 1) Recommendation to the US Congress for designation of a national conservation area, three national recreation areas, and several new wilderness areas in the Colville National Forest;
- 2) Recommendation to the US Forest Service for designation of distinct zones for forest restoration and quality, long-term forest management, as well as improvements to recreation infrastructure on the Colville National Forest;
- 3) Collaborative and privately funded work with local private property owners to keep several ranches in operation for cattle production and maintenance of essential wildlife habitat.

Wilderness Areas (215,000 acres) Wilderness designation gives the highest form of permanent protection to roadless areas that provide important wildlife habitat and primitive recreation opportunities such as hiking, skiing, snowshoeing, horseback riding, and hunting. Existing livestock grazing will be grandfathered in to continue. Proposed wilderness areas include:

Kettle Range (Profanity, Hoodoo, and Twin Sisters* Roadless Areas): This proposed wilderness in the heart of the Kettle Range north of Highway 20 has popular hiking and horseback riding trails, including a 30-mile stretch of the Kettle Crest National Recreation Trail. Its undulating ridgeline of 6-7,000 foot peaks is dominated by moderate to steep mountains of forest, including biologically unique sagebrush and wildflower meadows, with distant vistas of the Cascade and Rocky Mountains. It provides the best wildlife habitat in the Kettle Range, especially for Canada lynx. It includes places like Hoodoo Canyon, treasured for its sheer cliffs and giant pines.

San Poil (Bald Snow, Thirteenmile*, and Cougar* Roadless Areas): The southern stretch of the Kettle Range contains dramatic summits—including Sherman Peak, Snow Peak, Bald Mountain, and White Mountain—and is named after the tribe whose home this has been for millennia. Some of this area was burned in the 1988 White Mountain Fire, which has created spectacular wildflower meadows, snags for nesting birds and other wildlife, and the next generation of young, healthy forest. The area contains productive wildlife habitat for animals such as Canada lynx, pine marten, and wolverine. The fire also created prime glade-like terrain for backcountry skiers and snowboarders.

Mountain Caribou (Hall Mountain, Hungry Mountain, Grassy Top, and Harvey Creek Roadless Areas): Rugged terrain and steep trails rise to summit vistas traversed by hikers, bighorn sheep, grizzly bear, and caribou in this proposed wilderness area south of the Salmo-Priest Wilderness. Trails along winding ridgelines connect to Grassy Top Mountain, the Salmo-Priest Wilderness, and the wildlands of the Idaho Panhandle. These areas, including Hall Mountain, form an impressive backdrop for boaters and campers on Sullivan Lake. Further south, the ecologically rich Bunchgrass Meadows feature a rare bog. All together, these wild areas provide habitat for one of Washington's two confirmed wolf packs, as well as lynx, wolverine, elk, mule deer, black bear, and moose.

Salmo-Priest Additions These would add about 16,600 acres to the existing 40,000-acre Salmo-Priest Wilderness in the very northeastern corner of our state. The gently rolling, lower-elevation, mountainous terrain is cloaked in old-growth rainforest of red cedar, western hemlock, and western white pine and is home to grizzly bear, the endangered mountain caribou, wolverine, ptarmigan, bull trout, and west slope cutthroat trout.

Abercrombie-Hooknose Abercrombie and Hooknose Mountains are accessible by three hiking and equestrian

trails that sit in the middle of this roadless area. The rugged nature of Abercrombie Mountain, eastern Washington's second highest peak, has long been a favorite with hikers, horseback riders, and hunters in search of challenging trails and cross-country ridge routes. The steep, granite and quartzite cliffs of Hooknose Mountain provide habitat for mule deer, lynx, cougar, black bear, and many species of birds. Grizzly bears have also been documented in the area.

Quartzite Quartzite Mountain Roadless Area is the southernmost unlogged drainage in the Colville National Forest. Its old-growth cedar and hemlock forest and the adjacent private Betts Meadow preserve have attracted nature enthusiasts and photographers for years. With its close proximity to Spokane and 49 Degrees North Ski Area, Quartzite Mountain is a popular draw. It is home to more than twenty rare plant species, an abundance of elk, and features habitat for wolverine, Canada lynx, and pine marten.

***Delayed Wilderness Areas** (Cougar, Thirteenmile, and Twin Sisters Roadless Areas): These areas of about 33,000 combined acres would be designated by Congress as potential wilderness, thus providing the Forest Service up to ten years to address restoration needs and relocate motorized trails, at which time they will be normal and permanent wilderness.

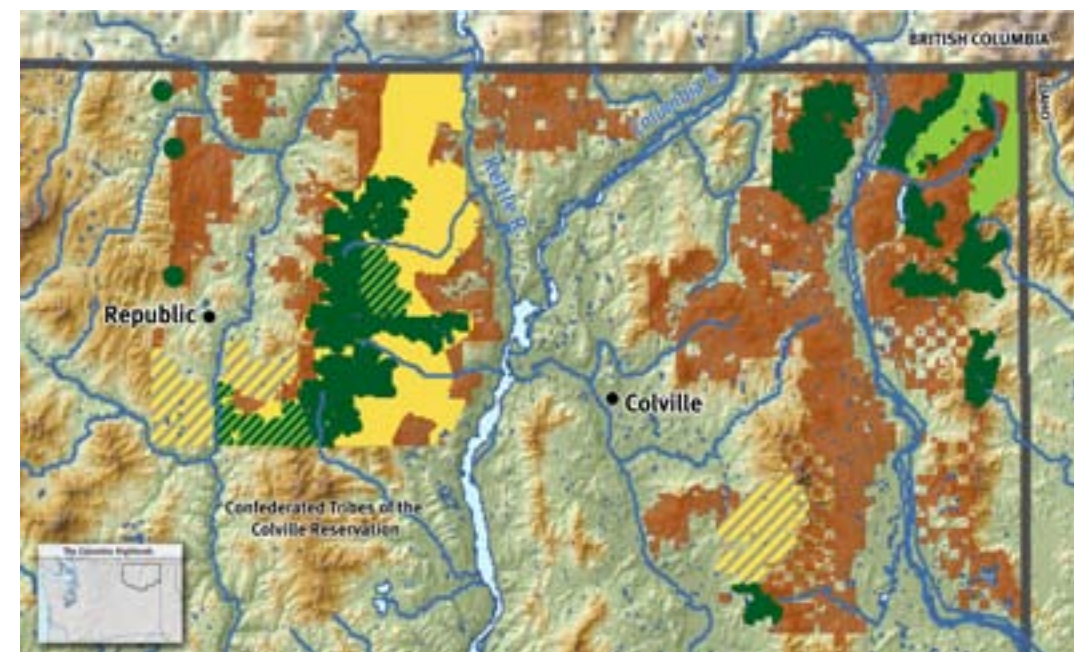
Kettle Range National Conservation Area (145,700 acres) Once established by Congress, the conservation area will provide strong protection of important habitat on the east flank of the Kettle Range. Included are four inventoried roadless areas (36,000 acres) for which the emphasis will be wildlife habitat and primitive and semi-primitive recreation, prohibiting new roads and new motorized recreation trails. Existing motorized trails will remain open. The remainder (109,700 acres) will be managed to restore old-growth forest conditions and enhanced recreational access where appropriate. Livestock grazing will be grandfathered in.

National Recreation Areas (70,500 acres) Once established by Congress, the Swan Lake, Gibraltar Mountain, and Tiger-Quartzite National Recreation Areas will be managed with an emphasis on recreation—both semi-primitive and more developed—such as hunting, fishing, horseback riding, skiing, snowshoeing, and mountain biking. Motorized access on designated routes will be allowed and could be expanded. Livestock grazing will be grandfathered in.

Forest Restoration Areas (279,000 acres) These areas are a mix of roaded and non-roaded forests that are recommended by the Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition for a restoration land allocation within the Colville National Forest's forest plan. They would be managed to restore old forest conditions, improve wildlife habitat, and boost water quality for fish. Existing livestock grazing and recreational uses will continue and could be expanded.

Active Forestry Areas (347,000 acres) These areas are recommended by the Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition for active timber management by the Forest Service using improved forestry practices. Much of this landscape already has infrastructure in place to support commercial forestry. In areas close to communities, an emphasis of forestry activities will be to reduce wildfire risk. Existing livestock grazing and recreation uses will continue and could be expanded.

Learn more at www.conservationnw.org. See how you can support a "Proposal for the Future."



THE SEARCH IS ON **Where's Ursus?**

Erin Moore Publications editor,
emoore@conservationnw.org

North Cascades grizzlies are today in the limelight. This summer and fall, US Forest Service wildlife biologist Bill Gaines began an extensive hair snag survey to document grizzly bears in Washington's North Cascades, he and his team setting out 90 hair snag stations deep in ideal grizzly bear habitat.

Biologists estimate there are 10 or fewer North Cascades grizzly bears today, likely crossing over the border with Canada. The last confirmed sighting of a grizzly in the North Cascades was in

1996. When the North Cascades National Park was established in 1968, there were four known grizzly bears in the whole park—a tenuous population in need of help. Soon thereafter, the state Fish and Game Commission protected grizzlies statewide. In 1975, the US Fish and Wildlife Service designated them as an endangered species in the lower 48.

Other grizzly bear populations, like those at Yellowstone National Park and in the Rockies of Montana, have responded positively when treated with

comprehensive recovery strategies. Yet grizzly bear recovery in the North Cascades, one of six designated recovery zones, remains at a political standstill.

"If these bears are to have a future," said Joe Scott, international conservation director for Conservation Northwest, "the United States and British Columbia governments must do their job—boost Cascades bears with a small number of young animals from areas where grizzly bears are more numerous."

Learn more at conservationnw.org

Jen Watkins Conservation associate,
jwatkins@conservationnw.org

CONNECTIVITY AND CLIMATE
Arid Lands Focus

Although most of Conservation Northwest's history has seen us focused on the forested landscapes between Washington's Coast and the BC Rockies, our recent efforts in addressing habitat connectivity have taken us to the arid zones, lands that are defined by how little rain they receive. These lands include many of the grasslands in the Northwest, including the shrub-steppe and grassland habitats of the Columbia Plateau of southeastern Washington and extensions northward up the east Cascades into British Columbia.

These open lands provide home and passage for bighorn sheep, black-tailed, mule, and white tail deer, jackrabbits, sage grouse, badgers, burrowing owls, and piute ground squirrels. Some of these wildlife are endangered, such as the BC's Okanagan's tiger salamander.

Over half of the shrub-steppe and grassland habitats in eastern Washington have been converted to agriculture. Now the remaining habitats face increasing pressure for renewable energy development. According to the Renewable Northwest Project, nearly 1400

megawatts of wind energy have come online in Washington State since 2001, and more than twice that has been approved or is in some stage of proposal or permitting.

Conservation Northwest this year is working to bring attention to the issue of arid grasslands. Through the Washington Wildlife Habitat Connectivity Working Group, we are conducting a connectivity analysis on this landscape to identify and prioritize the important pathways between remaining habitat. We're also working with the Western Governors Association's Wildlife Council on a pilot project for the arid lands of



West of the Kettle Crest.
Photo © Eric Zamora

Will work for wildlife

The Washington Wildlife Habitat Connectivity Working Group is an open science-based collaborative effort to identify key wildlife corridors and help ensure connectivity for regional wildlife. It was created to carry out the work of the association of western governors' Wildlife Corridors Initiative, and Conservation Northwest is one of the groups active in this effort. Find out more at www.waconnected.org

Washington, Idaho, and Oregon to produce an online tool that consolidates and coordinates information on important habitat and corridors for this landscape. Exciting times are ahead for these critical landscapes in Washington.

2010 WILD LINKS

A Changing Climate

Jen Watkins Conservation associate,
jwatkins@conservationnw.org

Climate change adaptation

for Northwest wildlife and ecosystems was the ambitious topic for the 2010 Wild Links conference held in Seattle on October 26 and 27. This year's gathering, with its climate and adaptation focus and other changes, was bigger and better than ever. Understanding how animals and their movements are driven by climate change and how we might help wildlife adapt are two pressing issues for our region today.

At this year's event, the Washington Wildlife Habitat Connectivity Working Group released its connectivity analysis for Washington and neighboring wildlife habitats and previewed specific next steps to give wildlife options for moving across the region. Scientists introduced new methods for analyzing anticipated regional effects of climate change. Agencies described actions being taken to address wildlife and climate adaptation, including various wildlife connectivity and climate policy mechanisms, for ex-

ample, the Fish and Wildlife Service's Landscape Conservation Cooperatives.

Non-profits and other interest groups presented their work for wildlife at the local, regional, and national levels, including Conservation Northwest's work linking wild lands and protecting natural systems.

This year's Wild Links also served as a regional workshop for the US Fish and Wildlife Service's North Pacific and Great Northern Landscape Conservation Cooperatives, voluntary initiatives that aid non-



Moose are big travelers.
Photo Dana Base

Wild Links

Hosted by Conservation Northwest, this annual conference promotes better understanding and collaboration on conservation efforts across borders and between government agencies, First Nations, and non-profit communities. Conservation Northwest created Wild Links for scientists and others to showcase current research, highlight issues, and present ongoing initiatives relevant to wildlife, wildlife habitat, and wildlife connectivity within the overlapping ecoregions of Washington state.

industrial private agriculture and forest lands. Learn about what else we're doing for wildlife at www.conservationnw.org

Jasmine Minbashian Special projects director, jasmine@conservationnw.org

PROTECTED AGAIN **Gray Wolves**

Northern Rockies' wolves

are back on the federal Endangered Species list. The August 2010 ruling by federal Judge Donald Molloy puts wolf management back into the hands of the US Fish and Wildlife Service. This decision not only affects wolves in Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming, but also wolves in the eastern third of Washington and Oregon, which are included in the Northern Rockies population.

In 2008, a breeding pair of wolves with pups was discovered in Washington for the first time in decades. They are thought to have moved into the state from coastal British Columbia. Currently, there are two confirmed wolf

packs in the state, one in the North Cascades and one in the Selkirk Mountains of northeast Washington (this pack is part of the Northern Rockies population). Recent news indicates there may be two additional packs in the state but these have not yet been confirmed.

Nevertheless, many more breeding pairs are still needed in order to ensure their long-term survival in the state. Wolf recovery in Washington has been tenuous with many wolves being either victims of poachers or car collisions. The most recent reports from the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife indicate that the North Cascades pack's breeding female is missing and they fear

she may have been killed. The recent ruling is good news for Washington's few wolves because it means that there is a greater chance for recovery in our state (which is dependent on healthy populations in Idaho) and it will ensure that adequate state plans are in place before delisting can occur in the future.

A final Washington wolf conservation and management plan is expected to be presented to the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission in 2011.

The wolves have their own page and many friends! Follow the latest news about them on **Facebook**. Search for "Washington's wolves."



The father of Kettle Range wilderness, Dick Slagle. Photo © James Johnston

WILDLIFE MONITORING

Letter Writing for the Highlands

Crystal Gartner Outreach associate, cgartner@conservationnw.org

Until a few years ago I hadn't hand-written a letter on stationery since probably 1991, the year I wrote from Germany to my mother about the Berlin Wall coming down and working in eastern Washington for a conservation organization seemed like a far-away dream. Today, the walls between local timber industry and conservationists have also crumbled and our fast-paced, technology-enhanced lives have almost made using a pen for anything more than signing one's name seem a quaint chore. Well, it's time to revive our letter-writing powers and get our wilderness-loving friends to follow suit. Here's why:

officials, one hand-written letter is more powerful than 2,000 emails? Your letters to local Congressional offices are more relevant than ever, and more effective than anything short of a personal visit, especially for this wilderness campaign and especially at this time. Those "old school" letters are critical right now, from everyone who cares about Northwest wilderness and wildlife.

It's simple—just pick a date and invite some friends or your club over to your house for drinks, popcorn, or your famous lasagna, and watch our cool new 20-minute video about Washington's Last Wilderness Frontier, which includes a Google Earth tour of the Columbia Highlands! We'll give you the video to show, along with handy sample letters that make it easy for you and your friends to write one-page missives, even if they have never written to an elected official before. It's a great excuse to unwind with friends while participating in an historic effort and a great cause!

Many of your fellow Washingtonians—hikers, students, retirees, business-owners, hunters, soccer moms, kids—have already written inspiring



There's nothing like the power of the ask. Are you a natural born, letter writing captain? Find out today, go online to conservationnw.org. Photo Erin Moore

notes to Sen. Cantwell and Rep. McMorris Rodgers telling them it's time to move forward on wilderness and working lands in the Columbia Highlands. The letters are making an impact. Please join this effort. Several people have volunteered an evening to host a casual gathering to generate much-needed letters, and I hope you will, too.



Kit McGurn (standing, far right), in September organized a party for the Columbia Highlands grassroots in Seattle at Piccora's Pizza. His reflections? "What resonated most with people were that the vision, scale, and ambition of this effort merits their support, and that Conservation Northwest is trailblazing new and creative approaches to conservation as we connect the Cascade to Rockies." Photo Erin Moore



Jasmine Minbashian Special projects director, jasmine@conservationnw.org

SEATTLE OUTREACH Welcome, Kit

We are excited to welcome Kit McGurn as Conservation Northwest's new outreach associate in our Seattle office. It's all about the new Columbia Highlands Initiative, baby. This new position represents a renewed investment in engaging our western Washington membership.

Originally from the dry climes of Pueblo, Colorado, Kit attended college at Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, majoring in economics and environmental studies.

After an 8-month solo backpack trip to South America, he took a job with the Greater Yellowstone Coalition in their Idaho field office. There he worked with a small coalition of groups to prevent the construction of a hydroelectric project on the Bear River in southeast Idaho, organized Idaho state residents to protect Idaho roadless areas, and performed policy analysis regarding the transfer of the Northern Rockies Wolf population to state management.

Most recently Kit worked as the Sierra Club's Arctic conservation organizer, engaging and activating the Sierra Club's national membership on oil and gas development issues and the effects of climate change in America's Arctic region.

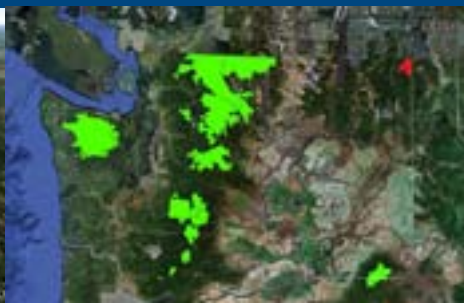
He is very excited to refocus his conservation efforts on the Pacific Northwest, a place he now considers his home. You can often find Kit sampling Seattle's burgeoning roots music scene or pouring over a map planning his next adventure in the last wild places of the American West. Reach him with any thoughts, questions, and volunteer interests, at kit@conservationnw.org, 206.675.9747 x 201.

Calling all letter captains

Interested in hosting a letter writing party in Spokane or Seattle? It's fun and easy. Call Crystal Gartner at 509.747.1663 or Kit McGurn at 206.675.9747 x 201.

Columbia Highlands Google Earth tour

Below are scenes from our new online video of the Columbia Highlands. Shown in red is the Salmo-Priest, the only protected wilderness in northeastern Washington today. It represents just 1% of all wilderness (bright green) in the state. A balanced proposal for the area, the Columbia Highlands Initiative, would change that, protecting wilderness in the Kettle Range, Abercrombie-Hooknose, Quartzite, and Salmo-Priest Additions.



In memory of John Arum

I never climbed a mountain with John Arum, but I expect he approached climbing the same way he practiced environmental law and life: intelligent, thoughtful, diligent, and thorough. I first worked with John in the mid 1990s, when he represented us as intervener for the state, helping defend against a lawsuit brought by Okanogan County and others to

force more logging on the Loomis State Forest. This was our first chance to test legal theories that challenged the degree to which logging and school funding were bound in a mandate. These were theories John had developed and published while in law school. John was a loyal supporter of Conservation Northwest, and brought to trial many environmental cases for nonprofits and tribes. He was always calm, humble, and brilliant. He died this summer in a fall on Storm King Mountain in the North Cascades that he loved. —Mitch Friedman





Katie Ross helps John Curley draw the winning raffle ticket at this year's auction. Photo Joanne Polayes

7TH ANNUAL

High Hopes for a Wild Future

Rachel Livingston Development associate, rlivingston@conservationnw.org

At our 7th annual *Hope for a Wild Future* auction this year on June 10, 2010, we celebrated in a new venue, Sodo Park, a rustic yet elegant refurbished factory just south of downtown Seattle. Herban Feast prepared a gourmet dinner and delectable appetizers, and spirits were provided by Terra Blanca, Smoking Loon and Fish Tale Ales.

There was never a dull moment with auctioneer, John Curley, who has a lively auctioneering style you'd have to see to believe. A professional with unlimited energy, Curley kept the audience on its toes with humorous antics, fairly dancing his way through the evening and not letting a corner in the room go unnoticed.

Executive director Mitch Friedman gave an inspiring talk in front of recent

photos of lynx kits in the Loomis Forest. Sally Hintz, northwest Washington director for Senator Maria Cantwell, read a letter from the Senator that praised Conservation Northwest and our supporters for our past accomplishments as well as for our current, collaborative work with the Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition. Senator Cantwell said she believes in designating new wilderness in the Colville and, "...when the time is right, I will be honored to introduce Wilderness legislation in the United States Senate."

By the end of the evening, 250 guests helped raise \$150,000 for Conservation Northwest programs. Thanks to our table captains and all the volunteers, staff, and supporters who made this night such a great success!

Julia Spencer Membership associate, julia@conservationnw.org

Thank you, table captains

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A northern shrike surveys the grasslands landscape for potential prey. Shrikes are predatory songbirds, whose calling card, an insect or small animal left on a thorn or fence-spike, are sometimes found on our open landscapes.

Photo © Paul Bannick



Conservation Northwest has great gear for you and your family! Here's a testimonial: "At our family reunion in Port Townsend this summer, we needed matching shirts for our family. Conservation Northwest's grizzly tee's were perfect for our family and the proceeds go to a great cause." Left to right are Ron and Greta Kocol, and Sarah and Jeff Debord with their one-week-old baby, Claire. Photo by Schwencke