



## Wildlife-Recreation Coexistence Program

**Webpage:** [www.conservationnw.org/our-work/wildlands/recreation](http://www.conservationnw.org/our-work/wildlands/recreation)

### Key Staff:

- Program Lead: Kurt Hellmann, Advocacy Associate, [kurt@conservationnw.org](mailto:kurt@conservationnw.org)
- Communications Director, Outreach Associate, project-relevant Program Leads

### Program Summary:

Promote greater coexistence between wildlife and outdoor recreation by reducing impacts on sensitive species and habitats through applied science, advocacy and outreach while advancing sustainable outdoor opportunities and supporting Indigenous cultural and First Foods values.

Conservation Northwest's Wildlife-Recreation Coexistence Program (WREC) will work with partner agencies, organizations, Tribes and businesses to scientifically analyze the impacts of increased recreation on Pacific Northwest wildlife and plant species.

These resources will support the development of appropriate policy for public lands use, both internal and external. Staff will identify geographic hot spots and biggest forms of recreational impact, provide input to the development of proposals, engage in grassroots and direct advocacy, and grow awareness of recreation's impact through information sharing, educational collaborations and outreach. The WREC will also seek to support sustainable recreation opportunities, with a focus on Washington state, as well as support for Tribal/First Nations sovereign, cultural and subsistence interests.

### Program Context:

Washington state has the second largest population in the West (7.6 million people and growing), yet has the smallest overall landmass and least amount of federal public lands among Western states. The Puget Sound region is consistently one of the fastest growing areas in the country, leading to many more outdoor users each year, particularly after 2020.

**While we are happy to see more people enjoying the outdoors, we can't ignore the costs associated with overuse or under-regulation**, especially when Leave No Trace ethics or wildlife awareness are not in practice. One particular cost that has often been overlooked by recreation groups and industry is the impacts of human presence/activities to sensitive flora and fauna.

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[conservationnw.org](http://conservationnw.org)  
[facebook.com/ConservationNW](https://facebook.com/ConservationNW)  
[info@conservationnw.org](mailto:info@conservationnw.org)

#### Seattle headquarters

1829 10th Ave W, Suite B  
Seattle, WA 98119  
206.675.9747  
206.675.1007 (fax)



While more research and a technical literature review is needed, especially locally, activities including motorized vehicle use, mountain biking, backcountry skiing and more have been associated with negative impacts on wolverines, [elk](#), [grizzly bears](#), bighorn sheep, marbled murrelet, mountain [caribou](#) and other species, as well as sensitive watersheds, meadows, grasslands and other habitats.

**In many areas, impacts are not dependent on a particular use, but are the result of significant increases in the overall volume of year-round human activity.** Many of our region's wild areas and public lands are also important for First Foods, hunting, fishing and gathering, and other traditional uses by Indigenous peoples. Widespread year-round recreation can have an [outsized adverse impact](#) on these culturally important activities, as well as the experiences of other public land users invested in wildlife conservation.

By identifying areas and activities in Washington that may disturb sensitive wildlife, we hope to work with recreation groups to educate the public on their potential impacts on wild critters, as well as provide guidance on how and where to minimize harmful impacts. We'll also continue to engage on recreation-related proposals that may negatively affect wildlife and their habitat in addition to advocating for policies that promote sustainable recreation and prevent the overuse of our public lands.

### **Program Tactics:**

- **Target audience:** Frontcountry and backcountry recreationists; human powered and mechanized recreational activities in Washington and the Northwest; new and old recreationists. ALL recreationists. Initial focus will be on terrestrial, “non-consumptive” recreation.
- **Species/Habitat:** Particular focus on CNW's current program areas (especially the Cascade Mountains and central Washington's shrub-steppe) key habitat and target/keystone species, but also consider impacts of habituated wildlife on threatened/endangered/key species.
- **Tactics:** The WREC program's tactics fall into two distinct groups:
  - 1) education and outreach to engage and inform the recreation populace on sustainable and safe recreation and
  - 2) policy formation related to issues around recreation and wildlife or habitat, including regulation setting. Education and outreach will initially have more tactical focus, while policy formation will gradually ramp up over time.
- Science review, informing projects/proposals such as ski area expansions or road and motorized use development, grassstops (direct) and grassroots

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advocacy, coalition involvement similar to other CNW programs. Innovative scientific analysis to identify key geographic areas and species impacted as well as determine the threshold that recreation is no longer sustainable. Find and prioritize areas where we're willing to support and encourage increased recreation and areas where we draw a stronger line due to wildlife/Tribal values, as well as alternatives (less impactful recreational activities, closer to home).

- Public engagement, education and outreach as a tool for building awareness around recreation's impact on wildlife, supporting sustainable recreation and partner with recreation coalition groups. Produce and share streamlined education material for wildlife safety and recreation best practices. Develop consistent messaging and talking points for public branding. Facilitate programs like TrailHead Direct, to reduce barriers, address the carbon footprint associated with driving to trailheads.
- **Tools:** Educational materials and resources, collaboration and partnership building, limited on the ground outreach/events, existing coalitions and outdoor recreation learning spaces, educating on Leave No Trace's [Wildlife at Risk](#), encourage for-profit outfitters/guides/etc. to include LNT ethics & wildlife impact in curriculum *and implement*.

### **Intermediate Goals (6-12 months)**

1. **Science & Analysis:** Inventory existing science, review literature, and further educate ourselves on what local species are displaced by what activities
  - Geographic representation of impacts: identify sensitive habitats, carrying capacity, priority and urgent hotspots, potential sacrifice zones, as well as an analysis of stakeholders, where heavily used recreation intersects with known wildlife corridors (impacts), and the intersection with wildlife-vehicle collision hotspots and recreational hotspots.
  - Determine the threshold when recreation is no longer sustainable in a given area (impacts on wildlife, ecosystem, etc.)
  - Science cultivation & dissemination through flyers, pamphlets, videos, workshops
  - Work with local communities and partner groups to determine needs of wildlife, communities and recreation groups as well as impacts on their communities
  - Map out expected growth areas in recreational use, highlighting possible wildlife conflict zones

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- 2. Coalition & partnership building:** relationship building to refine shared goals, needs and strategies
  - Develop resources about recreation ethics in wildlife habitat
  - Disseminate among partners and coalitions, with community workshops and other outreach opportunities
  - Connect with Cascades Wolverine Project staff to build on partnership, relationships, and potential opportunities for collaboration
  - Determine stakeholders on multiuse landscape, evaluate potential access issues and facilitate partnerships and programs like Trailhead Direct that work to minimize inequitable access to public lands
  - Assess and inventory current/existing relationships related to outdoor rec community/industry
  
- 3. Community and public outreach & engagement:** become a local resource and voice for recreation ethics to minimize impact on wildlife
  - Determine target audience: new recreationists, certain types of recreationists?
  - Outreach to share educational materials, recreation ethics, LNT ethics, workshops
  - Work with partners to co-host webinars and workshops and share social media and other campaigns
  - Engage with outdoor recreation groups for greater incorporation of wildlife values into their education and outreach
  - Encourage alternative recreation activities with lower impact (front country, sacrifice zones, alternative forms of recreation)
  
- 4. Advocacy & Policy:** ensure new and old recreation areas respect wildlife habitat
  - Advocating for (free) permitting systems to control volume and promote accountability and look at funding options.
  - Have conversations around advocating for new funding mechanisms, such as backpack tax
  - Reviewing new recreation areas and uses – potential opportunity for advocacy, LTE, public comment, sign-on letters, etc.
  - Engage with MBSNF/private companies on proposed ski expansion areas in wolverine habitat
  - Engage with WDFW around managing state wildlife management areas

**Please contact our staff for more information, including on longer-term goals, outreach, funding and partnerships.**

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