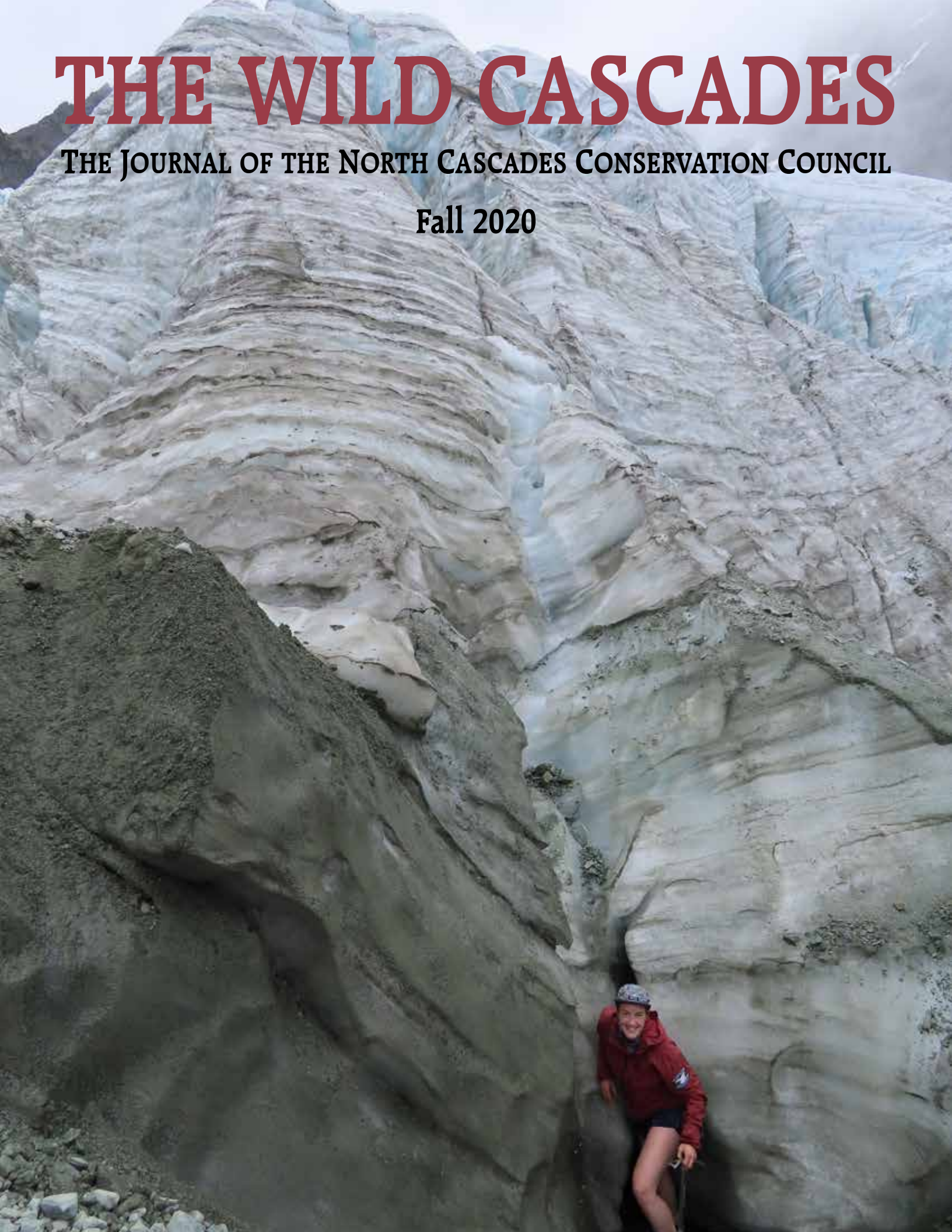


# THE WILD CASCADES

THE JOURNAL OF THE NORTH CASCADES CONSERVATION COUNCIL

Fall 2020



## THE WILD CASCADES ■ Fall 2020

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COVER: Researcher Mariama Dryak explores the terminus of the Lower Curtis Glacier. It's not every day you see someone (in shorts!) crawling out from under a glacier. —TOM HAMMOND PHOTO

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### The Wild Cascades

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#### *Journal of the North Cascades Conservation Council*

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#### THE NORTH CASCADES

CONSERVATION COUNCIL was formed in 1957 "To protect and preserve the North Cascades' scenic, scientific, recreational, educational, and wilderness values." Continuing this mission, N3C keeps government officials, environmental organizations, and the general public informed about issues affecting the Greater North Cascades Ecosystem. Action is pursued through administrative, legal, and public participation channels to protect the lands, waters, plants and wildlife.

Over the past half century N3C has led or participated in campaigns to create the North Cascades National Park Complex, Glacier Peak Wilderness, and other units of the National Wilderness System from the W.O. Douglas Wilderness north to the Alpine Lakes Wilderness, the Henry M. Jackson Wilderness, the Chelan-Sawtooth Wilderness, the Wild Sky Wilderness and others. Among its most dramatic victories has been working with British Columbia allies to block the raising of Ross Dam, which would have drowned Big Beaver Valley.

N3C is supported by member dues and private donations. These contributions support the full range of the Council's activities, including publication of *The Wild Cascades*. As a 501(c)(3) organization, all contributions are fully tax deductible to the extent allowed by law. Membership dues for one year are: Living Lightly/Student \$10; Individual \$30; Family \$50; Sustaining \$100.

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Founded in 1957  
SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

## THE PRESIDENT'S REPORT

FALL 2020

2020 is getting a reputation as the worst year anyone can remember. Those of us who grew up in the 60s and 70s lived through a sort of Golden Age, despite what seemed the turmoil of those times. We'd conquered disease and set aside enough of the natural world that the next generations would have it better than we did. Or... maybe not. The idea of controlling nature and saving it at the same time has just about reached its limits. With no "planet B" in the offing, this one-and-only home of ours now seems to lash back at us and our many misbegotten efforts to subdue it to our purposes.

I don't need to list the depredations that have befallen us as a species this year. But I do want to reassure our members that we have not lost sight of our mission. We may be playing a defensive game now, but we're defending the exceptional and unique natural heritage the founders of N3C worked so hard to preserve for us. It's not always a linear process, and progress can sometimes seem transitory. There continue to be disturbing trends bigger than anything our founders faced, like climate change with all its impacts on our glacier-clad mountains, which we're continuing to monitor and report on to raise public awareness, as you'll read on page 12.

I was personally lucky enough to be able to take some time away from other obligations to seek my own solace in our North Cascades in September, and the timing couldn't have been more dramatic: I left for the mountains just as the huge smoke cloud invaded the skies and turned a fine summer into a grey morass. Canceling my other plans, I opted to just find a stream of cool, clear water coming off the slopes of Eldorado Peak, where I found the fresher air that hovered just above the water surface. The rain returned to clear the skies and the air we breathe, a welcome relief despite the wetness. That was the right time for me to hike into the deepest, most isolated ancient forest I could find. Then the skies cleared and I could get a dose of the high country with its sea of peaks and bright autumn colors. Those scenes will stay with me through the shorter days and longer nights ahead. Helping the Park Service restore the damage to Sahale Arm had special importance to me (see page 10). The impacts of the Monte Cristo mine remediation also drew me on a ground-truthing mission attended by the local media (see page 11).

Looking ahead, we as a nation face a crucial choice next month. We have great power to set new priorities and values when we emerge from the current political morass.

Phil Fenner

[pbilf@northcascades.org](mailto:pbilf@northcascades.org)



# N3C Actions

JULY to OCTOBER  
2020

*Advocacy carried out by  
dedicated N3C volunteers  
in the last three months  
to protect and preserve  
the North Cascades lands,  
waters, plants, and wildlife.*



## DEFENDING WILD AREAS AGAINST DAMAGING INDUSTRIAL USES

**Why it matters:** resource extraction — mining, logging, hydropower — is the most harmful use of public land. N3C strives to save what remains wild, mitigate what's been lost, and restore what's been damaged.

- ☒ Continued public participation in the Seattle City Light (SCL) Skagit Hydroelectric Power Relicensing. As the relicensing process moves to the next phase with the Federal Energy Resource Committee (FERC) N3C board members are participating on the Steering Committee and Resource Workgroups meetings.
- ☒ Continued consulting with Skagit River Alliance to prevent any resumption of mining at the former quarry site near Marblemount. (See page 22.)



## ESTABLISHING, EXPANDING AND PROTECTING WILDERNESS AREAS

**Why it matters:** federal land designation as Wilderness and Park is the gold standard of ecosystem protection, precluding most damaging industrial and commercial exploitation.

- ☒ Submitted letter to the National Park Service (NPS) and the North Cascades National Park (NOCA) objecting to the proposed McGregor Meadows land exchange in the Stehekin Valley. N3C objected based on adverse environmental impacts on public lands in the Stehekin River Valley of Lake Chelan National Recreation Area (LACH), lack of transparency of the public process in developing and proposing this exchange, and NPS failure to provide sufficient detailed information to allow for knowledgeable public comment. (See page 20.)
- ☒ Signed joint letter to the Bureau of Land Management regarding a geothermal Lease Sale in the Mount Baker area. The letter restated the conditions agreed to in the 2015 final EA and Consent to Lease agreement for potential geothermal development in the Mount Baker Snoqualmie National Forest (MBSNF).
- ☒ Participated in a “plant carry” work party at Cascade Pass where the NPS is attempting to stabilize the rebuilt trail at Sahale Arm. The native plants are being used to re-vegetate the meadow around a recently constructed retaining wall. (See page 10.)



## PROMOTING ENVIRONMENTALLY SOUND RECREATION IN WILD AREAS

**Why it matters:** balancing access with economics and Wilderness preservation, we evaluate motorized use and places where it needs to be limited to reduce land impacts and recurring road repair costs.

- ✓ Submitted comments to the NPS on a revised EA for relocation of a trail and campground in the Thunder Creek Valley, off Ross Lake in the south unit of NOCA. We noted the NOCA had addressed many of the comments in our critique of the project scoping and asked the NPS to minimize use of helicopters rather than use as extensively as proposed since Thunder Creek was recently added to the Stephen Mather Wilderness. (See page 8.)
- ✓ Submitted scoping comments to the NPS for a traffic study for the Nisqually to Paradise Road in Mount Rainier National Park. The road is heavily travelled, and parking is inadequate. N3C expressed its concern that Wilderness values be protected. (See page 17.)
- ✓ Signed joint letter with 18 other conservation organizations supporting the Skykomish Ranger District of the MBSNF trail relocation plans for the Blanca Lake and Heybrook Ridge trails. The improved trails will provide improved recreational access while protecting the surrounding Wilderness.
- ✓ Signed joint letter to the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Funding Board supporting water access on the North Fork of the Nooksack River in Whatcom County.
- ✓ Signed joint letter to Washington State Recreation and Conservation Funding Board supporting Washington State Parks' acquisition of Mt. Washington Trail property, an inholding in the Olallie State Park in the Mountains to Sound Greenway National Heritage Area. This is an important opportunity



## PROTECTING ANCIENT FORESTS, WILDLIFE AND WILDLIFE HABITAT

**Why it matters:** like real estate, they're just not making ancient forest anymore. We seek to restore watersheds and fisheries damaged from decades of heavy logging and road building and protect significant forests from degradation. From microscopic fungi to top predators, the wilderness ecosystem's living members are interdependent, so keeping viable populations of each species is essential to preserve the ecosystem for future generations.

- ✓ Signed joint letter with 30 conservation organization to the Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) supporting the Trust Land Transfer (TLT) specifically endorsing the Cascade River Project transferring 1,200 acres with a willing recipient, Seattle City Light in the Skagit River Basin.
- ✓ Signed joint letter to the Region 6 Forester commenting on Deferred Maintenance Priorities, which now can and should be addressed since passage of the Great American Outdoor Act makes funds available.
- ✓ Submitted scoping comments to the Mt. Baker Ranger District of MBSNF on the proposed North Fork of the Nooksack Vegetation Management Project. We raised a number of concerns. The project encompasses a large area containing old growth, Late Successional Reserves (LSR), and Riparian Reserves. Total mileage of new and reopened roads is not identified. A project this large requires an EIS and more detailed information before the public can evaluate and make intelligent comments. (See page 18.)
- ✓ Signed joint letter to the Secretary of Agriculture opposing proposed exemption of the Tongass National Forest from the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule. The largest U.S. national forest is an important carbon sink. Turning over enforcement of the Roadless Rule to the not-so-tender mercies of the State of Alaska and the timber industry will set a precedent and effectively end roadless protection in the Tongass and throughout the U.S.
- ✓ Signed joint letter from 100+ conservation and environmental organizations calling on the nation's large oil companies not to pursue fossil fuel development in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. The letter cites the threat to the Alaska native communities and the environmental damage to the wildlife that depend upon the refuge.
- ✓ Continued following the Monte Cristo CERCLA track in Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA), which will remain open through 2021 to allow access for monitoring of ground water leakage. We will ensure that MBS permanently closes the track when monitoring is complete. (See page 11.)
- ✓ Continued supporting SnoKing Watershed Council's (SKWC) appeal of Snohomish County Permit to "rebuild" the Index-Galena Road in North Fork of Skykomish River. The old roadbed is now the new river bed in this salmon bearing stream. The appeal was heard on October 16 in Olympia. The judge denied the appeal and construction may proceed in 2021.



to protect a popular climbing and hiking destination and provide management for sustainable outdoor recreation, scenic values and wildlife habitat.

# Mountains on their minds: Early women climbers, conservationists and chroniclers in the Pacific Northwest

By Joan Burton

*Joan Burton, a member of N3C since 2008, an avid climber, and a member of the WTA and the Mountaineers, shared these glimpses from her manuscript, "Early Women Climbers with Mountains on their Minds: Climbers, Conservationists and Chroniclers in the Pacific Northwest", which portrays more than 70 historic women mountaineers. By the way, she and Betty Manning were part of the June 1958 Ladies' Cascade Expedition to traverse Cascade Pass and Boston Basin and attempt the 8,800-foot-summit of Eldorado. The seven women backpacked up ridges and meadows to reach Inspiration Glacier before their final assault on the peak.*

Northwest mountain adventurers have not always been men—some were women. They climbed glacier-clad mountains in long dresses and skirts, finding their way without maps or directions. Later they wore bloomers and rejoiced in the greater mobility. The only implement they used was the alpenstock.



*These are Seattle hikers around 1915 exploring their surroundings.*

They helped set aside and protect wilderness areas and ancient forests, saving them from logging and development.

They discovered mountains in remote areas and then went ahead and climbed them to achieve first ascents.

They wrote the first hiking guidebooks for Northwest trails, enabling hikers to find trailheads and to know what to expect on the trails.

They volunteered with mountain rescue groups to help bring out injured hikers, skiers and climbers to medical help and safety.

They served as fire lookouts during World War II when men were away in service.

They helped convince governmental agencies to set aside land in national parks, national recreation areas, and a national monument.

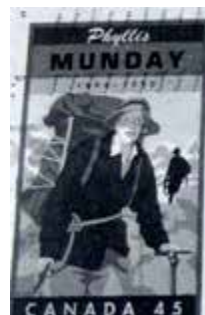
These women are mountain heroes—regional VIPs—whom we should know about, honor and celebrate.



*Fay Fuller was the first woman to climb Mount Rainier in 1890, when she was only 20 years old.*



*Catherine Montgomery envisioned a Pacific Crest Trail and proposed the concept, based on her love of hiking and what she had read about the Appalachian Trail.*



Phyllis Munday with her husband Don, were the first non-natives to see Mount Waddington, highest peak in the British Columbia Coast range – they spotted it from a boat. She was the first woman to climb Mount Robson, and then she went on to

explore and climb hundreds of peaks in those remote mountains. Canada made a postage stamp for her.

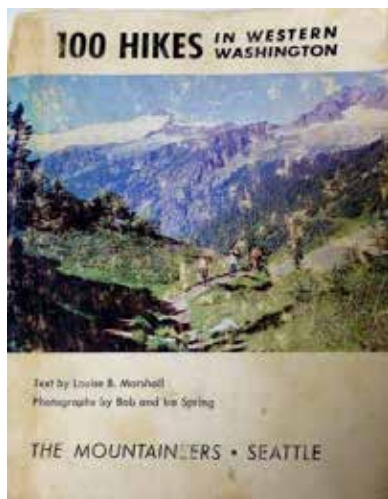
Polly Dyer fought to stop logging inside Olympic National Park, hiked the wilderness Pacific beach to stop the building of a road along the shoreline, then helped to establish the North Cascades National Park and Recreation area.

Margaret Miller, with her husband Joe, studied alpine plants in the Cascade Pass area of the North Cascades. She took home their seeds, propagated them and



Polly Dyer and Margaret Miller. —TOM HAMMOND PHOTO

then brought back the new plants to re-vegetate the alpine meadows. To help prevent the raising of Ross Dam, they studied all the plant species endemic to the area that would be harmed. The dam was not raised.



Louise Marshall wrote the first hiking guide to Cascade and Olympic mountain trails, and then went on to found the Washington Trails Association.



Joan Firey, with her husband Joe, climbed and made many first ascents in the Picket Range and British Columbia Coast Range, continued climbing in the Andes and Himalayas, and was a co-leader of the first women's Annapurna expedition.

Pam Olmsted Bobroff spent summers in North Cascades fire lookouts with her mother and grandmother as part of a three-generation fire lookout team during World War II, when she was only 13 years old.



Virginia Olmsted, Pamela Olmsted and Lurline Simpson, another fire lookout and friend.

Bree Loewen served as a volunteer mountain rescue leader for more than 10 years, helping to bring out hundreds of wounded climbers, hikers, and skiers to safety and medical help.



Susan Saul worked to set aside and establish the Mount St. Helens volcano as a National Monument. She brought environmentalists together with government representatives to achieve consensus and a world-famous monument where scientists could study the return of life, hikers would explore volcanic changes, and families could enjoy the beauty of the area.



39 Summit Ridge

Northwest women who loved mountains have helped to shape their exploration and preservation at every step. They should be remembered for their courage, love of adventure and willingness to explore the beautiful wilderness around them.

# NPS ignores Wilderness in Thunder Creek planning

By Dave Fluharty

You may have wondered what happens when you or N3C responds to requests for public comments.

The Thunder Creek Trail Reroute and Camp Construction in the Mather Wilderness this summer provides a disappointing case study. The cause for federal action to repair the trail and replace the McAllister Campground is pretty clear. The rambunctious Thunder Creek eroded the existing trail and caused the bridge to fail. The NPS requested public comment on the repair actions in 1) a Scoping Process and 2) in response to an Environmental Assessment (EA) that identifies the environmental impacts of alternative ways the NPS could remedy the management concerns.

For the most part N3C agrees with the interventions proposed to deal with management concerns. However, two major issues about NOCA's choice of management actions are extremely troubling because they are inside designated Wilderness. The first is the decision to use a helicopter to salvage the McAllister Bridge metal I-beam stringers from their resting place in Thunder Creek and second is the choice to employ motorized equipment (e.g., chainsaws) for trail clearing and campground construction. The Wilderness Act of 1964 expressly limits the use of helicopters to emergency use and forbids the use of other motorized equipment except in extraordinary circumstances within statutory Wilderness.

In the Scoping Process, N3C pointed out that the map being used to illustrate the project location did not show that the project site was in Wilderness (designated in 2012). More importantly, N3C advocated that the NPS leave the metal stringers for the failed McAllister Bridge in Thunder Creek. This would obviate the need to use a helicopter in Wilderness. N3C argued that removal was not necessary because the metal stringers were inert, were not causing problems with the hydrology of Thunder Creek and were virtually hidden from view. Based on the relatively minor need identified in the EA to cut trees for the trail reroute and campsite construc-

tion, N3C advocated that the NPS use only hand tools.

In N3C review and comment on the Environmental Assessment, N3C repeated its proposed alternatives for dealing with the remains of the bridge to avoid helicopter use and for use of only hand tools.

When the NPS issued its Record of Decision it was a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). N3C found only cursory response to its primary concerns. Leaving

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*If decisions were made before the public comment period, what benefit is public comment?*

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the I-beam stringers in place was dismissed, "Removal of the washed-out bridge I-beams will trade short-term adverse effects of helicopter noise with a long-term benefit of removing large sights (sic) of modern human development from wilderness." N3C observers report that the I-beams are hidden from view by terrain. With respect to use of hand versus power tools there is a lot of discussion but the question of whether the power tools are necessary is not addressed. Instead, N3C and others are led through a long and formal "Minimum Requirement Analysis" which basically with respect to minimum tools focuses on the choice of tools that make the work easiest and efficient and ignores their negative impact on Wilderness. Here is how the NPS describes the use of chainsaws and power tools. "...it would be intermittent over the approximately **sixty-four days of construction**... Chainsaws are usually only powered on for a few minutes at a time to make cuts for puncheon bridge parts (this is a 10 ft. long bridge!) and campsite components, cut down trees, and clear downed trees." NPS estimates a total of 25 trees dead or alive of 12-24 inches in diameter. It also lists 20 trees 12-18 inches in diameter being cut to reroute the trail. "...On days when chainsaws would be used their use is unlikely to exceed a few hours." N3C argues that the use of chainsaws could be avoided entirely given the limited number and size of the trees to be "removed" and that this would respect the Wilderness.

N3C asks why the reasonable actions that we proposed through public comment to avoid impacts on Wilderness were not accepted. Saving the high cost of heli-



copter rental and avoiding helicopter use would seemingly be in the public interest. Similarly, using hand tools to reroute the trail and to construct the camps would be consistent with the obligations to protect Wilderness. We can only speculate. Were these decisions made before the public comment period? Possibly, but in that case what benefit is the public comment period in avoiding environmental impacts?

Despite N3C disappointment with the NPS decisions, one can learn a lot from review of Environmental Assessments. For example N3C learned that if the McAllister Bridge had not washed out and isolated the campground, the NPS was contemplating cutting all of the very large trees in the vicinity of the campground because it is a "developed" site. How does Wilderness camping become the same as a car camping area just miles away? Doesn't Wilderness inherently contain hazard and risk as part of its core intent?

This is not just complaining over sour grapes by N3C. N3C's concern is over the NPS respect for Wilderness. Over the next few years N3C and the NPS will engage in revision of the Wilderness Management Plan for the Park and National Recreation Areas. What do recent NPS management actions for Thunder Creek, Sahale Arm and other areas portend for management measures in a future Wilderness Management Plan? How would "hazard trees be eliminated in Wilderness camp sites"? All this is fair warning: Engage early, engage often, engage knowledgeably and engage vociferously...at risk is 95% of the area in NOCA designated as Wilderness.

## Olympic mountain goats arrive in the Cascades

The August *Skagit Valley Herald* reported that 50 mountain goats were successfully relocated from the Olympic Mountains to the North Cascades the last week of July and first week of August, bringing the total relocated to 325 over three years by August 13, 2020.

"Dozens more will make similar journeys by truck, ferry and helicopter through September 21 as part of an effort to reduce the impact of the animals in the Olympic Mountains and encourage population growth in the North Cascades, where they are native," said reporter Kimberly Cauvel in the August 13 issue.

Cauvel reported that 11 were moved from Klahhane Ridge on the Olympic Peninsula to the North Cascades south of Darrington. Six were lifted by helicopter to Stillaguamish Peak. The other five were driven as close to the peak as possible after rain and clouds created visibility challenges for the helicopter pilot. Others were released north of Washington Pass.

The goats survived sedation, capture, vet checks and transport by ferry and

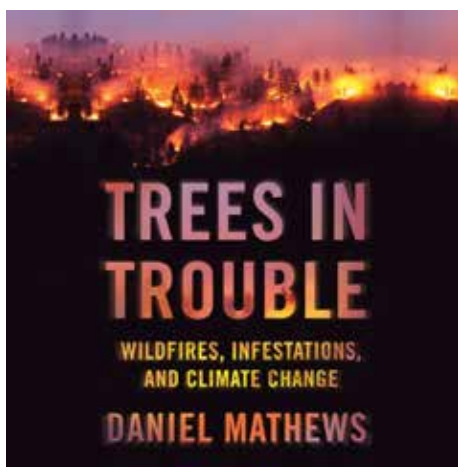
helicopter to their new homes in the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie and Okanogan-Wenatchee national forests. Some died during capture or transit, were euthanized or taken to zoos. Mountain goats remaining in the Olympics are being targeted during a specialized hunt now underway.

The project was developed in partnership between the National Park Service, USDA, Forest Service and state Department of Fish & Wildlife, with support from area tribes including the Upper Skagit.

Fish & Wildlife estimates the relocated goats have a 52% chance of surviving beyond their first year. That means a maximum of 170 of the goats moved since 2018 are likely to live long enough to reproduce and help grow the population.

As many as possible have been collared so that their whereabouts can be monitored. Fish & Wildlife plans an annual helicopter survey, in partnership with the Upper Skagit tribe.

Watch a video of goats being released at Cedar River here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CzPGV2ROjLI>



Daniel Mathews, author of one of our favorite references, *Natural History of the Pacific Northwest Mountains*, recently released this new book about the burning and infested dry, inland pine forests of the west. It only touches briefly on the wet, west-slope forests, but as most of the smoke we suffered with in western Washington this September came from dry, inland forests, it's of interest in a very immediate way on the west side, too. The details, research and encounters that form the basis of the book are an education in themselves. His conclusions aren't terribly encouraging, but overall it's clear that the only way to restoring fire resilience is through more fire.

## Attention N3C members

Please inform us of mailing address changes! It's much easier to update our records and make sure you get your copy of *TWC*, than to wait for the P.O. to return it to us. Thanks!

We're now offering an electronic delivery option for *TWC*. Just let us know and we'll send it as soon as it's ready, usually a couple of weeks before the paper copies arrive, and not sending paper will save some trees and some postage.

For either of these, email us at [nccinfo@northcascades.org](mailto:nccinfo@northcascades.org) and we'll take care of it.



Dear NCCC,

We enjoyed reading the "*Wild Cascades*" newsletter in digital form. We thought to let you know that the down-loadable digital form is great. There is no need to send us any more printed versions in the future.

My wife and I (living in California) have been several times in the North Cascades in our younger years and still hope we can make it one more time. We are in the eighties. Our daughter had a wonderful backpack trip in the North Cascades just a year ago and really loved it.

Best regards,  
Jurgen and Madeline Strasser  
Lafayette, CA

## Automatic recurring donations!

Just go to the donation portal on our website (click "Donate Now" on our home page), check the box for "Make this a recurring monthly donation" and set the number of donations/months!

# Sahale harm reduction

By Phil Fenner



*NPS plant propagation crew assisted by N3C members delivers plants from the Miller greenhouse to the damage site. —PHIL FENNER PHOTO*

You may have heard of “harm reduction” as a humane alternative to the so-called War on Drugs. The concept is to help reduce the damage done by the addiction. I have some close friends involved in that movement and it’s both heartbreaking and inspiring. We actually face similar situations sometimes in protecting the North Cascades, especially when it comes to the impacts of overuse and agency efforts to

“improve” Wilderness for the hordes of recreationalists. This means first keeping a close eye on the situation, and then following up to assure the responsible party does all it can to ameliorate (if not reverse) the damage. And helping them in that process.

Sahale Arm is a case in point. As reported in previous issues, a series of poor decisions was made by the Park Service (albeit

with “the best of intentions”) to intervene in the most overused portion of the North Cascades National Park, on Cascade Pass and Sahale Arm. From diagnosis to planning, to actual intervention to side effects, if this were a medical treatment it would qualify as malpractice. Helicopters were used in Wilderness where they are prohibited, without any public notice and during peak season more than once to build new trail to try to make the steep Sahale Arm route “safer” for hikers.

The coup de grace was a switchback extension in the steepest meadow, just above Cascade Pass. The original trail was quite steep, but fairly stable. With thin vegetative cover on polished bedrock that steep, making lateral cuts is asking for trouble, and two such cuts were made into an area without much cover, a clear sign it was not stable. The resulting slide buried both halves of the new switchback and could literally be seen from space on Google Earth satellite. It looked really ugly in person and was spreading rapidly. The site remains muddy even now in late summer, so clearly there was an underlying seep that NPS didn’t notice until it was far too late.

When we met with Park Service staff they tried to play down the situation, deny it was their fault, and then said they had already planned to stabilize and repair it by building wooden retaining walls, another major intervention requiring, you guessed it ... helicopters. A fix to the fix!

We offered to help in the final stages of this rehab project by carrying plant starts up from the trailhead for revegetation, to make at least one more helicopter run unnecessary. Besides, revegetating the Cascade Pass area has been one of N3C’s long-term projects. The NPS greenhouse in Marblemount is named after two of our founders, Joe and Margaret Miller, who pioneered the whole process.

The actual “plant carry” in late September couldn’t have been planned on a better day, considering the smoke and storms last month. Four N3C volunteers helped the NPS plant propagation crew. The crew that operates the greenhouse and works on the replanting sites are real heroes of this harm reduction work. They’ve made some changes to their protocols since the last time I participated in a plant carry: the

plants are carried up bare-root rather than in pots, and the NPS crew did the actual planting the following day (they're the experts at that process, which is crucial to success). They're also working on ways to keep the plants from dying of thirst during the typical late-summer dry spells in the high meadows, using water tanks "hidden in plain sight" up on top of Sahale Arm.

N3C applauds the efforts of the NPS re-veg crew, and we thank them for their tour of the NPS greenhouse and good company on the hike to the damage site.

We will continue to monitor the situation, as we still have concerns about what can be done to halt the continuing erosion above the upper switchback (both new walls are between the two switchbacks). And we'll continue to emphasize to NPS that doing a hydrological survey before cutting into fragile high-angle meadows is an important preventive step. Of course, if helicopters weren't part of the project and they had to do it by hand, they might have been a bit more cautious, too.



*Two timber/rock crib retaining walls now permanently mar the formerly pristine meadows on the slope of Sahale Arm. —PHIL FENNER PHOTO*

## Monte Cristo CERCLA route status

By Ed Henderson

The COVID-19 pandemic has upset the best laid plans of mice and men and the Forest Service. Because of travel restrictions imposed by the pandemic, the Forest Service was unable to conduct the scheduled fifth and last year of ground water monitoring at the mining waste repository this year. The CERCLA clean-up (e.g., the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act, aka the Superfund) requires five, not necessarily consecutive, years of monitoring. So hopefully the monitoring can be completed next year in 2021. In any case the route must remain passable for motor vehicle for another year.

N3C has written, new Darrington District Ranger Greta Smith asking what plans the district is making to manage these changed circumstances. Will property in holders be allowed motor vehicle access to the CERCLA route in 2021 or will the route be closed to all motor vehicles as anticipated by Greta Smith's Letter of May 28? N3C is strongly in favor of closing the route to all motor vehicle access except that required for monitoring, then rendering the route impassable to motor vehicles once the monitoring is complete. We have restated this position to the Forest Service.

On Friday, October 2, a party of N3C members accompanied by a reporter and photographer from the Everett Herald took a ground-truthing hike on the CERCLA route into the Monte Cristo townsite. We observed the condition of the route and the maintenance that had been required to keep the route open for motor vehicle travel. Such work being paid for by CERCLA funds! On the hike out, the group followed the old Snohomish County mine-to-market road across the washed-out twin bridges over the Sauk River and the mud slide, where a quarter-mile of the old road collapsed into the river.

N3C will continue to closely monitor this issue and act with the goal of permanently closing and rendering the CERCLA route impassable and undrivable to motor vehicles and restoring the integrity of the Inventoried Roadless Area. We feel that this is important not only to the Monte Cristo wild backcountry site and the Henry Jackson Wilderness but to the integrity of 59 million acres of Inventoried Roadless Areas in the National Forest nationwide.

# GLACIER MONITORING IS ESSENTIAL WORK

By Tom Hammond



*Team members on a snowbridge. While threatening, we probe all such features for safety—situational awareness is maintained at all times.*

—TOM HAMMOND PHOTO

2020 marks the 37th year of the North Cascade Glacier Climate Project (NCGCP), and my 17th consecutive year as a team member. As of mid-October, the team is still in the field, now on the Easton Glacier.

I had the honor and pleasure of joining the 2020 version of the Project on the Lower Curtis Glacier from August 2-4. I am very thankful and very fortunate to have close and meaningful relationships with Mauri Pelto and Jill Pelto—trust and

love are the operative words here, and in this year of profound personal change, political division, social action and health/virus-induced isolation, reconnecting with (and hugging) them means more to me than words can describe.

The Lower Curtis Glacier resides on the SW flank of Mount Shuksan, the flagship of the North Cascades and certainly one of the loves of my life. Shuksan is the most glaciated non-volcanic peak in the lower 48 states. Shuksan means “Thunder” in

Nooksack/aboriginal/Salish tribal language due to the roaring avalanches that (used to) pour off the (formerly) calving glaciers.

Team leader Mauri Pelto has directed the project since its founding in 1984, spending more than 700 nights camped out adjacent to these glaciers. He is the U.S. representative to the World Glacier Monitoring Service, author of the AGU blog “From a Glacier’s Perspective”, and associate editor for three science journals. His primary job is Dean of Academic Affairs at Nichols College in Dudley, MA where he has been a professor since 1989.

Artist and scientist Jill Pelto, in her 12th field season, incorporates scientific research and data into paintings and prints to communicate environmental changes. Cal (Claire) Waichler is an environmental science major at Colby College in Maine and is from Winthrop, WA. Mariama Dryak of Minnesota recently completed her M.S. at the University of Maine and was on the 2018 team. Claire Giordano of Issaquah is an environmental artist and author. I’m a writer and photographer from Port Angeles, focusing on conservation for North Cascades Conservation Council and Olympic Park Associates.

As with every mountain trip, weather is the first thing to be aware of when headed to the alpine zone and blue ice. In this case, the day we were to be measuring the Lower Curtis Glacier was supposed to be the first rainy day in quite some time—apparently bad timing, but one doesn’t know unless one goes.

## Sunday August 2

After a five and a half hour trip from the Olympic Peninsula to the North Cascades, it was great to lay eyes on Mauri and Jill. Hugs all around were so very welcome. The road was snow covered above Heather Meadows, so that’s where the hiking began. By the way, the road end was a zoo with people, pets and general activity. Most wore masks, but many European and Russian tourists did not.

Because the team had come from the Columbia Glacier, we got a late start hiking and barely made it in to base camp by sunset. After a hasty dinner we crawled in our tents for much needed rest/sleep. I had the temerity to not deploy the rain fly on my tent, and sure enough, it started raining shortly after midnight. I did the “deploy the fly wearing skivvies and boots in the dark” dance, and no sooner had I got back in the tent than it stopped raining.

## Monday August 3

Monday dawned cloudy and cool, but by no means was it unpleasant. Indeed, the conditions were perfect—cloud cover kept the hot sun off of us while the cloud deck was high enough that the entire glacier was visible and free of clouds, which can interfere with some of the measurements using laser range finder and general situational awareness. Heck, even the summit towers of mighty Shuksan were playing hide-n-seek through the shifting mists—like giants hiding, huge ghostly shapes would occasionally emerge around us only to disappear if one looked for them too closely. The cool, wet spring (notably May and June) has resulted in no berries where normally we’d encounter them, but also no snow on the approach save for one avalanche gully below Fisher Chimneys. The lack of berries was more than made up for by wildflowers! Wildflowers covered all meadow-like slopes in a lovely carpet of kaleidoscopic colors—mainly purple and gold (Lupine and Arnica) but also such favorites as Tiger Lily, Columbine, Partridge Foot, three flavors of heather and a host of others.

The glacier has pulled away from the lateral moraine on the west side a bit more (or it is just accumulating more loose stuff), which made for a bit of rough travel up, over and around the bouldery, unstable terrain (extremely painful for me—my right foot/ankle stopped working a couple times over the course of the trip). It is unreal how one can approach the terminus now. Only a few short years ago hiking to the terminus was out of the question due to ice fall, raging outlet stream (read: river headwaters) and steep terrain. Now one can almost crampon/ice climb directly up the snout of the glacier, it is in such repose.

We explored for ice caves and ways to get under the glacier, but unlike the last couple of years, there was no easy, obvious path to the underside. From the terminus we made our way up on to the glacier for proper mass-balance measurements, crevasse depth measurements and longitudinal profile. The glacier is really thinning. Undulations of the underlying bedrock are now clearly being reflected on the surface of the glacier, and the glacier surface has really flattened: not too much in the way of seracs or threatening crevasses; each year the glacier becomes more “benign” for travel and evaluation.

For the first time in at least 37 years (and probably more like 3,700 years/ before the little ice age) we were able to climb down to the terminus from the main

body of the glacier, and indeed, had lunch on newly exposed rock on the EAST side of the glacier. Whoa...

After lunch we finished measurements and as if on cue, the clouds began to break, Kulshan became visible and temps warmed nicely to allow for shorts and teeshirts. The artists on the team undertook some art-related work while Mauri and I visited on the little ice age moraine, discussing the future of Nichols College with pandemic, Mauri’s retirement plans, my life plans and small stuff like that.

## Tuesday, August 4

The hike out was particularly difficult for me. I was in considerable pain thanks to two biopsies on my back being rubbed to bloody raw by my backpack, and of course my right foot, left knee and general lack of backpacking/mountaineering conditioning. Within sight of the parking lot, my right foot once again just gave out. I nearly took a header into steep, sharp rocks right in front of Mauri and Jill. I promised to be in better shape next season. I fully plan to make at least 20 consecutive years!

**The Team:** What a great group of young women: intelligent, curious, willing to listen and also to contribute. Fantastic artistic skills (Jill made the cover of TIME magazine!) and solid scientific sense made for informed and engaged conversations over the three days. It was nice to be reminded that I have/had knowledge and experience to share with each team member, as they have perspectives that teach me how to be more aware. Best of all each team member demonstrated Leave No Trace ethics without any prompting.

**Wildlife:** Spooked one grouse out of hiding along the forested ribs of Shuksan Arm—a fairly regular occurrence and nice to see. We also saw six mountain goats, including two kids (newborn this past spring). They were in the usual impossibly steep terrain of upper Shuksan Creek. Oh, and we saw an eagle up high, and another raptor (perhaps the same eagle) down close to Lake Ann. As in recent years, marmot were not in evidence, though I think we heard one whistle while at camp. As well, we saw a few pika and heard a few more, but not nearly as many as we used to see. Sadly, no other wildlife. I remember regularly seeing ptarmigan, but haven’t seen any in years...

**Flora:** As mentioned, no berries but nice wildflowers. I would add that Mauri has asked me to do follow up imaging of the Rainbow Glacier at the end of the



*It is not often one sees  
wildflowers above a glacier.  
—TOM HAMMOND PHOTO*



*Team photo with Upper Curtis Glacier and the summit towers of Shuksan. It is easy to see why I call this amazing mountain the flagship of the North Cascades—a true Flying Sail of Life. —TOM HAMMOND PHOTO*

hydrologic year (end of Sept./beginning of Oct). I imagine with the recent rains, there may be great berries on that approach.

**Glacier:** The Upper Curtis Glacier is thinning noticeably on the west. What used to be icefalls/seracs are now in total repose. Indeed, we heard only one icefall/avalanche in three days. Preliminary data indicated a break-even year for mass balance on all glaciers, but the excessive heat of late August and early September enhanced snow melt, resulting in what is estimated as of this report to be minus .5 meter mass balance.

**Water:** I've always said it is all about the water. Shuksan is sparkling with frozen water and roaring with running/tumbling water. A true provider of life. Drawing drinking water from these glaciers is a real treat—no filtering, boiling or chemicals needed—one just needs to keep an eye out for suitable trickles and super-glacial streams, which were hard to come by this year. Jill discovered a small trickle coming

off the very end of the glacier, perfectly situated for filling water bottles, so our first watering of the day came easily. The trick is not to fill up every vessel, or we'd be carrying that extra weight all day long. At the end of the day I found myself wandering crevasse fields near the western margin/center to find another trickle. Finally, I came across a perfect little stream—water dancing off the edge of a crevasse with just enough air time to separate out the inevitable sand and stones that flow with/in the water, and also fit the water bottle under. That watering saw me all the way home to Port Angeles.

### **Why conduct the field season during this pandemic?**

In a normal field season, eight glaciers would be measured. For the first time in the 37 years, Mauri is omitting three glaciers, all located on Mount Daniel. So why measure the five covered in this season? As Mauri noted: "We're Essential Workers. Our work here is essential because the

Columbia and Rainbow Glaciers are part of the World Glacier Monitoring Service—they are reference glaciers informing a much larger community of climate researchers. The others (Lower Curtis, Sholes and Easton, which may be in the WGMS directory now) are so close that we included them since we're already on-site."

I am so very thankful for the opportunity, desire and ability to do this stuff. Moreover, I'm very fortunate and humbled by opportunities such as the NCGCP offer. In the year 2020, we are clear-sighted in the threats we face, from politicization of science and shared reality to climate change. How fitting that I went to a snow-covered glacier, a frozen world of hard blue ice, and discovered the warmth and connection of loving people that mean the world to me.

For more information, please see the official project webpage at: <https://glaciers.nichols.edu/>



*Looking off the terminus down to the braided streams that mark the birth of Shuksan Creek, headwaters of the Baker River. The team was able to get to this location for the first time in project history due to recession of the glacier. —TOM HAMMOND PHOTO*

# Corvid's eye

As viewed from Everson, Sumas Mountain's west-facing escarpment, separate from British Columbia's own Sumas Mountain about ten miles to the north, is an impressive 3000-foot leap from the Whatcom lowlands. It vaguely suggests some extraterrestrial mass towed in by incomprehensible cosmic entities and plunked onto a formerly less interesting piece of earth in a Roger Dean illustration. With streams draining to both the Fraser and Nooksack rivers (one of which flaunts a troubling habit of producing naturally occurring asbestos), peculiar plant communities, pocket lakes, and the mystery of the history of its Paradise Valley, Sumas Mountain is no ordinary place. For most of the recreating public, though, it is terra incognita.

As one might expect from a North Cascades foothill rising so far to the west, Paradise Valley is paradise lost, as is most of the rest of Sumas Mountain. Loggers arrived here well before a glimmer of the settler mindset finally began pondering the merits of conserving a portion of the forest. A majority of the acreage is in fact state-owned public land, but this has provided little if any constraint toward the tyranny of the chainsaw. The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has long viewed Sumas Mountain as a timber bank to fulfill the agency's obligations to its beneficiaries, and little else. And so over the last century, logging roads have been punched into nearly every stream basin and across nearly every ridgeline.

Yet "nearly" is the operative term here. The far northwest corner of the mountain is sufficiently steep to have repelled DNR and its extractionist habits thus far. This section includes the headwaters of Swift Creek (of asbestos infamy), north to the precipitous headwall of Collins Creek. It ain't much in the context of Sumas Mountain as a whole, to be sure, and in recent years DNR's logging shows have chewed even farther into this vestige of naturalness. Still, there's something to write home about here, including a deciduous "climax" forest of birch, maple, and aspen with its lush and diverse understory of forbs that's unlike anything in the heart of the North Cascades. Just above, rocky balds yield a bevy of native wildflowers that draw many a local botanist in season.

Optimistically, there's been a bit of a breakthrough of late in DNR's management policies for this attractive slope.

According to Chris Hankey, Baker District Manager of DNR's Northwest Region, a newly created wildlife habitat area of roughly three square miles will be superimposed over it from here on. Roads within this designation will be targeted for removal and logging will either be eliminated or limited to "low impact thinning operations specially designed to create better habitat" (to which the corvid will politely resist the urge to editorialize). It's not a trust land transfer, and correspondingly there's no legislative blessing to establish a Natural Area Preserve or Natural Resources Conservation Area (NRCA), though it's something. We'll take it, and push for more than just administrative protection in the years to come.

Of important note, this remnant wedge of natural goodness isn't limited to state land. Adjoining to the east, the Nooksack Valley School District's Lost Lake parcel adds another 207 acres of mostly intact forest to the mix. As described by N3C alum Ken Wilcox in his invaluable *Hiking Whatcom County* guidebook, Aron Molinder donated this land in 1918 to local schoolkids for study of the area's natural history. Molinder's epitaph of "Know more, believe less" arguably has more relevance in the waning days of 2020 than when he died in 1948 following a full life. There's old growth forest to be found near where state land and school district land meet, populated by lofty Douglas-fir and equally imposing Sitka spruce. Lost Lake itself is a tucked away gem, feeling at times like a faraway feature in the Canadian bush.

In a more sane and sober world, the story of protecting what little remains of Sumas Mountain in its pre-European settlement form might now be approaching some semblance of a conclusion, but there's no obvious escape from this increasingly ugly era we inhabit. In this case, the threat is no longer logging per se, but originates from roads blasted through long ago for that purpose; now providing ready access to every AR-15-toting, trash-strewing motorhead whose emotional maturity



stopped cold after reaching that special level of sadism ordinarily reserved for disaffected 14-year-old boys. This Mad Max atmosphere appears to be abetted by DNR, which has done a poor job of blocking or at least discouraging motorized abuse on old routes officially "abandoned" on paper, but still easily negotiable by a yahoo on a quad.

Alternately, blame may be ascribed to lack of funding and resources, as opposed to negligence. Says District Manager Hankey: "Sumas Mountain has a number of ongoing challenges that cost the DNR a lot of time and money. We have some pretty awful garbage dumping and vandalism that occurs as well as the continued presence of motorized trail use. Our law enforcement office does make patrols in the area, but we have only one who makes patrols in Whatcom, Skagit, Snohomish and Island Counties and is run ragged trying to catch people and ticket them. While ORV vehicles are allowed on the open logging roads, it is difficult to keep them from reopening abandoned roads or making trails. We deal with illegal ORV usage and user built trails by trying to get money from Olympia to block trails with crews that we hire. But as soon as we abandon trails, they get reopened within a few weeks. It is frustrating for everyone."

The end result is there are few places on Sumas Mountain that a determined motorhead can't reach. The new wildlife habitat area on state land has the benefit of being so steep in certain spots that roads and trails were never constructed, and so suffers from comparatively less damage. The more gentle terrain of the school district's Lost Lake parcel, however, has been much less fortunate. A quad track accessing this parcel from DNR's

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# N3C comments on scoping for the Nisqually to Paradise Road Corridor Plan

The Nisqually to Paradise road corridor provides access to Mount Rainier National Park (MORA), offering visitors the opportunity to reach the most glaciated peak in the continental United States through a pristine forest from sea level to treeline. Its popularity during the summer and on holidays invites congestion and concomitant impacts on park resources.

In response to this situation the National Park Service has begun a planning process to protect visitors and their experience by, among other issues, establishing the framework to plan for and manage the flow of visitors in the at key destinations along this roadway corridor, particularly during peak visitation months.

Scoping comments submitted by N3C for the plan process highlight these concerns:

**Traffic.** Assess the effect of other traffic approaching Paradise from the East in the planning process, e.g., around-the-mountain drivers coming clockwise from the west and day users coming from eastern Washington. While the greatest congestion may be from summer and holiday park visitors entering at Gateway and plugging the entrance and corridor on their way to and

from Paradise parking lot, it is not possible to discount the other traffic. Ignoring the combined impact would produce just half a plan. Include winter-time access issues as well.

**Visitor Experience.** Maintain the experience of the park visitor who does not leave her/his vehicle so that there is a distinct impression that being in a national park is different than on the highway approaching the park boundary.

- Do not consider alternatives like road widening and straightening to improve flow through.
- Consider alternatives that limit the number of vehicles and type of vehicles permitted to enter at any given time, including reservations, public or private shuttle services for overflow periods.
- Focus on the visitor safely experiencing the Park and not on making the park corridor safe for higher speeds and larger vehicles.
- Maintain the giant trees next to the road as an example of protecting a unique resource and visitor experience. These big trees are as culturally significant as other transportation assets like roads, trails and bridges. Removal of these big

trees as 'hazard trees' would devalue the visitor experience of the corridor.

Following the Scoping process there are other opportunities to participate in this planning process. The next step is for the NPS to prepare a draft Environmental Assessment for Public comment and then to invite public comment on a Final Environmental Assessment.

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## What is scoping?

*The purpose of scoping is to determine the scope of an EIS to ensure that issues are identified early and properly studied. The result of scoping is to ensure that the draft EIS produced for public review is thorough and balanced. Scoping should identify concerns of both the agency and the affected public and should clearly define environmental issues and alternatives to be examined in the EIS. If there are important environmental or social impacts that the public wants considered, the place to raise these issues is at scoping.* Mt. Rainier Summer Newsletter 2020

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## Corvid's eye

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 16

road network to the south plows straight through what was once a lovely, semi-linear mountain swamp of bog myrtle, then proceeds up and over a ridge along a muddy track to Lost Lake's smaller, nameless sister pond where bald eagles reside. The surroundings there are now largely denuded by wheels. To the east, motorcycles have recently carved deep tracks up from adjacent DNR roads for a confused route of multiple overlapping figure-eights in primary forest.

One can sympathize with DNR for lacking the tools necessary to remedy this situation, but it was the agency itself that created the conditions for such barbarism to occur. And there can be little near-term optimism on Sumas Mountain or other state lands when considering the current mood in Olympia. Commissioner of Public Lands Hilary Franz, a talented politician and careerist, clearly has her eye on bigger

fruit. She has ambitiously adopted our state's playbook for Democratic pols, by way of donning a hardhat and endearing herself to conservative leaders and extractionists, peeling off just enough rural votes while reasoning that urban and suburban voters will have nowhere else to go. Franz has loudly voiced the dogma that wildfire can be tamed if we log enough of those pesky trees. And on her watch, the most offensive DNR clearcuts witnessed in our state this century have defiled the slopes above Highway 2 at Gold Bar, including one abomination that has fully wrecked the viewshed toward Wallace Falls.

When the corvid suggested to Mr. Hankey that a trust land transfer and dedicated non-motorized trail system be pursued, thus attracting a critical mass of respectful recreationists to help reduce the atmosphere of lawlessness on this part of Sumas Mountain (not to mention providing a relief valve for Whatcom's overwhelmed hiking trails), no response was forthcoming.

This may again be due in part to the outlook of Commissioner Franz, whose interest in trust land transfers is by most accounts nil, despite major conservation achievements on state lands by way of this mechanism previously, such as the Morning Star and Mount Si NRCAs. When Nooksack Valley School District Superintendent Mark Johnson later attempted to follow up with Mr. Hankey, there was again no response. Or, at least not one that the corvid was privy to.

Insofar as the previously delineated "Delphic Mountains" to the southeast (bound by the north and middle forks of the Nooksack River) will serve as a barometer for humanity's respectful-or-not future interactions with our region's lands and waters, coming times on Sumas Mountain will lend similar clarification. What's unambiguous is that our worsening societal illness is as rampant in the North Cascades foothills as it is in the burgs below. And DNR is not equipped to deal with it.

# Forest Service thumbing its nose at locals in Nooksack logging row



*Slopes proposed for clearcutting above Canyon Creek. —JIM SCARBOROUGH PHOTO*

Members and friends of N3C are by now mostly familiar with the U.S. Forest Service's contemptible proposal to log over 3,600 acres of the upper North Fork Nooksack watershed in the shadow of our own Mount Baker. Of this total, over half would be subject to old-school clearcutting, predominately on unstable slopes above Canyon Creek previously designated as riparian reserves. The rest would be commercially thinned, with all its attendant road construction, degraded streams, compacted soils, and spread of invasive weeds.

This noxious plan upends three decades of relative peace and harmonious relations between the Forest Service and Pacific Northwesterners. Likely outcomes if this logging is allowed to go through include massive landslides, downstream wreckage of expensive fish habitat restoration projects, impairment of the forest's carbon capture potential, increased fire risk associated with newly carved log haul road corridors, increased poaching and dumping, recreational closures, and of course direct impacts to some of the finest mountain scenery in America.

Called the "North Fork Nooksack Vegetation Management Project," this proposal is of a piece with Trump administration actions on federal public lands all across the country. Whether it's minerals, fossil fuels,

forage, or lumber, this administration has posted For Sale signs on lands which are the absolute and indisputable birthright of all Americans—for the purpose of generating a quick buck come hell or high water. Yet what the federal agencies so intent on selling off these irreplaceable resources have yet to grasp is that their actions are subject to citizens' consent.

The initial scoping phase of this proposal, wherein the Forest Service is legally required to solicit public input prior to publishing an environmental assessment, has come to an ignominious close. It's obvious that the agency poked a hornet's nest and was surprised with the result. Over a thousand comments were submitted, the overwhelming majority of which are vociferously opposed to trashing what is essentially our backyard forest. To date, however, the Forest Service has not given an inch, opting instead to post pro-logging propaganda on the proposal's web page. Clearly, the agency is obediently carrying out orders from D.C. to get the cut out.

On an institutional level, the Forest Service still thinks it's 1980, as does the administration overseeing it. The concerned public has long known that the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest (MBSNF), and for that matter all of our national forests, serve centrally to meet our needs for clean and abundant water,

carbon sequestration in a warming world, wildlife habitat for vulnerable species, and compatible recreation. Yet despite all that we have experienced and learned, despite ecological collapse all around us, the Forest Service still sees our national forests mostly as unrealized two-by-fours.

Naturally, this fight has only just begun. The public (owners of the MBSNF's lands and waters) will have another opportunity to comment with publication of the Forest Service's draft environmental assessment, which could come as early as this fall. N3C and our partners will be ready with a response, along with critical talking points for the many interested folks to emphasize. Among these, and already voiced in great numbers during the scoping period, is the imperative that the Forest Service first complete a full environmental impact statement.

But why wait until then? There's nothing in the meantime to prevent letting the Forest Service know how one feels about the distinct possibility of industrial-strength logging in the Mount Baker area.

Contact District Ranger Erin Uloth at:  
**360-854-2601**

Send an email to:  
[SM.FS.mbs\\_pao@usda.gov](mailto:SM.FS.mbs_pao@usda.gov)

Or perhaps go so far as to don a mask and pay a visit to MBSNF offices in Glacier (10091 Mt. Baker Hwy), Sedro-Woolley (810 State Route 20), Everett (2930 Wetmore Ave., Suite 3A), or inside the Seattle REI store. Say it like you mean it, and beware the inevitable agency gaslighting.



*Clearcut. —BRETT BAUNTON PHOTO*

# Restore Gold Creek Valley or maintain Gold Creek Pond?

In our last edition of the *Wild Cascades* we ran a piece by Bob Mecklenburg, from the group Friends of Gold Creek Pond. This piece advocated for the protection of Gold Creek Pond, a favorite recreational site along I-90. We accompanied the piece with a short statement by our N3C Board discussing the tradeoffs between landscape restoration and preserving existing recreational values.

We also asked readers to share their views with us. After the article ran, we

were contacted by a couple of interested individuals who felt that restoration of the valley was the best environmental action to take, and that this position was more aligned with the mission of N3C. We reached out to these parties to get their perspective on the issue and invited them to share their views. Below, you'll find a piece from one of them.

As stated in *TWC* Summer 2020, N3C is evaluating our position on this proposal, and we look forward to the NEPA process

that should begin in 2021. Our hope is that the NEPA review is done in a manner that addresses the balance between restoration and recreational values, and will give us further insight into the best path forward on this difficult decision.

We thank Bob Mecklenburg and Jim Evans for sharing their perspectives. If you'd like to add yours, send your comments to [nccinfo@northcascades.org](mailto:nccinfo@northcascades.org)

## *Restoration at Gold Creek Valley: Hope for the future*

By Jim Evans



*Gold Creek. —KURT LAUER PHOTO*

The U.S. Forest Service and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife are working in cooperation with the Yakama Nation to determine science-based strategies for restoring Gold Creek Valley near Snoqualmie Pass in the central Cascades. The goal is to save one of the last populations of threatened bull trout in the Yakima Basin, but success of the project would benefit the whole valley, improving ecological functions and productivity and helping to build a more resilient ecosystem better equipped to meet the challenges of climate change.

Historic land uses, including intensive logging and gravel mining in the creekbed and floodplain, have left Gold Creek in a highly degraded state, with an unnaturally widened channel that goes dry every summer. This 'dewatering' strands bull trout and other fish in isolated, rapidly drying

pools. Because of its impacts to water quality and ecosystem productivity, dewatering also diminishes the creek's habitat value for many other species, from stream insects to bear and elk – indeed to all animals that require healthy floodplain habitat to sustain them. Dewatering may have occurred naturally in the past, but scien-

tists say it has become more frequent and extensive due to the land uses cited above. Restoring the hydrology of Gold Creek, to the extent possible, is key to enabling the critical functions of the valley's aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems to recover.

Gold Creek Pond, the largest of the former gravel mines in the valley, plays a role, perhaps a major one, in the altered groundwater flow that robs the creek of its late-summer water supply. Studies are under way to help determine what set of actions has the best chance of success at restoring the valley's hydrology. Final strategies have not yet been determined but entail a number of possible actions, including restoring the wetlands that historically occupied the Gold Creek Pond site.

Our ecosystems are in crisis and our fish and wildlife populations are threatened as never before. While global warming is a worsening long-term threat, growing

human population, accelerated extraction of natural resources, and full-on habitat loss already deeply threaten our ecosystems and the wildlife they support. Science-based ecological restoration is our best hope of cushioning these blows to our natural systems. It's particularly important in Gold Creek Valley, a vital wildlife corridor connecting the North and South Cascades where our state has invested millions of dollars in providing wildlife passages under I-90 to maintain this age-old link.

Nothing about restoration precludes recreation or ADA access, and the Forest Service has made clear that any restoration actions will maintain recreational amenities similar to those that attract visitors today. Much more than static scenery, it is the vibrancy of healthy ecosystems that draws us to wild places. Far from lessening our experiences, ecological restoration conveys a message of hope, a shining signal that we can learn from our mistakes and begin to repair the unintended consequences of past actions, that we will not stand passively by while wildlife populations decline and ecosystems and the services and pleasures they provide continue to be diminished. Restoration builds new resilience into our public lands, so that wildlife can thrive and Americans from every walk of life can experience the wonder of wild places, not just today, but far into the future.

*Jim Evans, M.S., has worked as a conservation biologist and restoration ecologist for more than 25 years and is a frequent visitor to Gold Creek Valley.*

# Park proposes rotten land deal in Stehekin to give away public land

By Dave Fluharty and Carolyn McConnell



With the 1968 creation of the North Cascades National Park Complex, the Park Service was charged with preserving these lands “unimpaired” for future generations. Unfortunately, earlier this year, N3C discovered that the Park Service has been quietly planning to betray that charge by trading away public land in Stehekin.

The Park Service initially tried to ram this deal through on the QT, without full disclosure to the public, but eventually N3C was able to sleuth out the details: The Park Service is proposing to trade away 17 acres of prime, buildable land adjacent to the Stehekin Valley Ranch, in exchange for 10 acres of flood-prone land about two miles downriver from the Ranch.

Documents the Park eventually reluctantly released reveal that extensive development would be explicitly permitted on the formerly public land. On these facts alone, it’s a head-scratcher: How can this exchange be in the public interest? Even on a narrowly monetary basis, how can 10 acres of flood land be anywhere comparable? Why do this deal?

Unfortunately, the more information N3C has been able to get the worse this exchange smells. The 10 acres the Park would acquire is visibly subject to regular flooding—it is riddled with water-carved channels and covered in patches of sand and gravel—and Park studies bear this out. N3C has also discovered that, just

*Stehekin River flooding Company Creek road, not far from McGregor Meadows (the ten acres). —JONATHAN ROSENBLUM PHOTO*

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this summer, Chelan County updated its zoning regulations to make it harder to develop in flood-prone areas, and, for places like Stehekin that lack current FEMA flood maps, it incorporated federal studies—like the ones the Park has done in Stehekin that show the 10 acres in the flood plain—into its definitions of what counts as flood-prone. This lowers the real value of the property and decreases the likelihood that

it can be developed. It is difficult to see why, in this context, there is urgency for the Park to acquire the land, or at any rate why it should pay much to get it, let alone how it could be possible that these 10 acres could be worth more than 17 acres outside of the flood plain.

The Park claims it is putting stringent limits on development of the 17 acres, but easement documents (which it also didn't initially release) in fact would explicitly permit the development of 4 new homes, 2 "auxiliary" buildings, and 2 "ranching/agricultural" buildings by the new owners on the formerly public land. This looks less like limitation than invitation. In any case, these highly permissive "limits" have zero value without enforcement, yet none of the

documents released by the Park include any discussion of the costs of enforcement. The Park would have to devote resources to monitoring compliance and, if the limits were disregarded, it would have to spend considerable resources going to court to stop the breach (and by that time the damage to the land would likely be done). That further increases the apparent discrepancy of value between the land the public will be giving up and what it will be getting. But the Park has not released appraisals or any information showing how it came up with its valuations of the exchange parcels.

The process for this proposal has also been odd. In fact, it was completely lacking in transparency. The Park initially revealed its plans on June 2, 2020, only in an email to selected residents and an announcement in the Wenatchee World. It failed to alert N3C or other representatives of the broader public or even to publicize the deal on its own website. And the announcement was cryptic, lacking even enough information to identify the parcels at issue. This limited publicity suggested that the NPS regarded the issue as purely local, but the North Cascades National Park Complex was set aside by Congress to be protected unimpaired for all Americans. When N3C and others protested this anti-democratic lack of process and members of Congress contacted the Park, the Park reluctantly released a bit more information, including the easement documents, more description of the parcels, and a claim that it could do the deal in spite of NEPA, through a "categorical exclusion." It also granted only a couple more weeks for comment.

The "categorical exclusion" document claimed that the Park didn't have to do a full Environmental Impact Statement because the deal wouldn't lead to "significant changes in the use of the land." But this is clearly untrue, given that the easement documents invited the addition of numerous new homes and buildings. The document also claimed inaccurately that the land to be given away had been identified as available for exchange in the 2012 Land Protection Plan. But in fact 7 of the 17 acres proposed to be alienated (e.g.,

removed from NPS ownership) are not listed in that plan.

The Park has made other dubious claims in defense of this deal. The June 2 announcement stated that the trade will "eliminate the risk of incompati-

ble development" in the acquired parcel. Yet it creates a likelihood of incompatible development on the alienated land. Meanwhile, under current Chelan County regulations, it is not clear there is much risk of development of the 10 acres to be acquired.

N3C has always taken the position that public land should stay public, in perpetuity, and that land trades in Stehekin are a terrible idea. They invite corruption and are unlikely to advance the public interest. Studies have found net loss of public land across the country from land trades. This land trade appears to be a case in point. N3C supports acquisition of the 10 acres, to prevent development of it, but the Park should do this by purchase, for a modest sum reflecting its limited monetary value because of flooding.

The Stehekin Valley is spectacularly beautiful and geologically and ecologically unique, which is precisely why it was set aside by Congress and entrusted to the Park Service to preserve unimpaired for the nation. It is also small, its floor merely about a mile wide. Therefore every one of its acres is precious and development anywhere within it has a significant effect on the ecosystem and the visitor's experience.

Although the intent of Congress was to preserve the wild Stehekin Valley unimpaired, while allowing the *existing* small community to persist, since the 1968 creation of the Park, the amount of private development has increased dramatically; as the LPP notes, the number of private structures had almost tripled at the time of its writing, from 125 in 1968 to 330 in 2011. Numerous additional private houses have been built since 2011. The Park Service has failed to take any steps to limit development of this precious, gorgeous valley, and indeed has positively facilitated it with several land trades already. The new owners of the traded-away land promptly built on the land, while the public acquired land whose developability was highly questionable. The Valley's wildness and the visitor's experience are threatened by continuing development. The Park is falling down on the job.

During the limited comment period granted by the Park, N3C submitted comments protesting this rotten deal. However, we expect that the Park may ignore the public interest and try to do the deal anyway, so we have hired a lawyer and will file suit if the Park moves ahead on this. We have also made a request, under the Freedom of Information Act, for information about how this deal came about. More than two months after we submitted our request, the Park Service has provided no responsive documents. Stay tuned.

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### *Studies have found net loss of public land across the country from land trades.*

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*Stehekin River flooding Company Creek road by the Webb/Walker cabin. —JONATHAN ROSENBLUM PHOTO*

# Support Wild Wallace land reconveyance to save forest near state park, Gold Bar

By Kathy Johnson

A local citizens' group called Sky Valley Futures has requested that the Snohomish County Council reconvey approximately 5,300 acres of public State Forest Board Land near Gold Bar back to the County to create a new public park. Their letter was also signed by 18 local businesses, Gold Bar elected officials, the Snohomish County League of Women Voters, eight different nonprofit organizations, and over 2,900 individuals.

This land is primarily mature second-growth forest, up to 100 years old, with pockets of old growth. It connects Wallace Falls State Park to the Wild Sky Wilderness Area and the WA Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Morning Star Natural Resources Area (NRCA), providing wildlife corridors and habitat between these protected forests, as well as near-future old growth forest habitat.

WA DNR plans heavy logging (primarily clearcutting) on public land around Wallace Falls State Park and Gold Bar in the near future. Two timber sales (including the Middle May sale, formerly known as the Singletary sale) adjacent to Wallace Falls State Park are planned for 2020, and several more in the area—up to 1,000 acres—by 2025.

In a reconveyance, a majority of the Snohomish County Council simply votes to have the land reconveyed back to the County to use as a public park. (RCW 79.22.300) There is no cost for the land, only for the administrative cost of the transfer. Contrary to the misinformation in the August 16th *Everett Herald* article provided by DNR representative Angus Brodie (who certainly ought to know better), no land exchange would be required.

This "Forest Board" land was deeded to the County through foreclosure in the early 1900s and turned over to the State to manage. Some revenue from timber sales on this public land goes to the counties, disbursed according to property tax for the parcel. This includes funds to schools for infrastructure (not for teacher salaries or equipment).

The loss of this small percentage of school construction funding and local tax district revenue can be recovered by other means that do not require the demolition of our children's forest legacy. Possibilities include increased local sales tax revenue from enhanced tourism, parking fees, and carbon tax credits.

The citizen's group has reached out to the Tulalip Tribes, who were quoted in

the *Everett Herald* article as opposing the reconveyance, as well as the Sauk-Suiattle Tribe. We hope that the necessary government-to-government negotiations between the County and all tribes in the area will be initiated soon.

Sky Valley Future is looking for support for this proposal, especially from Snohomish County residents, as well as other users of Wallace State Park and the surrounding area. Please write to the five members of the Snohomish County Council and urge them to support the reconveyance of this vital wildlife habitat to protect it from logging. Please also contact State Commissioner of Public Land Hillary Franz and request that the Board of Natural Resources put a hold on timber sales in this area in order to allow Snohomish County Council to evaluate this proposal.

We encourage all our members and readers to visit the Sky Valley Future website at [skyvalleyfuture.org](http://skyvalleyfuture.org). This website will give you all the details on this proposal and information on the planned timber sales. The website will also help guide you on how you can support this project.

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## It's not over till it's over at the Marblemount quarry

By Jose Vila of Skagit River Alliance

When N3C president Phil Fenner asked me for an update on the Marblemount Quarry for this issue of *The Wild Cascades* I saw it as a good opportunity to catch up with the Washington Department of Natural Resources and Skagit County Planning and Development, both of which have been a bit difficult to reach in these strange times. I didn't get an immediate response so I also did an internet search on "Big Bear Mine" and "Marblemount". Because there had been no activity between fall 2019 when Kiewit pulled out and my last conversation with DNR and Skagit County at the end of July, I didn't expect to find anything.

But I was wrong. Cunningham Trust has submitted a SEPA Application for a

Reclamation Permit to DNR for a very large (1.2 million tons) long-term (20 years) heavy equipment mining operation. They contend that this operation would fall within the bounds of the existing county permit from 1976 which it clearly does not. Back then the permit was for a very small gravel crushing operation and the nearest residence was a mile away. The area has changed significantly since then, with residents now living immediately adjacent to the Cunningham property and directly below the thousand-foot high, highly fractured rock face. This large mining operation would take place on top of an unconfined aquifer from which all the neighbors draw their drinking water. This large operation would also involve a large

volume of heavy truckloads heading out of the area and likely out of the county, but the documents are extremely lacking in specific detail, impact study, or mitigation of impacts.

Just as before, we trust and rely on our county and state representatives to run a fair process and to carefully review this application for all potential impacts to keep our lives and lands safe. And fortunately we have a caring and committed community that will always look after the greater interest, and friends like the N3C who have been doing right for a long time and know how to keep after it.

## In memoriam, Frank Fickeisen

Long-time N3C member Frank Fickeisen passed away in March. His obituary noted that he was an engineer who worked on the Boeing 707, 747, and 767 planes, and a dedicated skier and climber who often headed into the Cascades to back country ski. He became an active voice in the Mountaineers, the Olympic Park Association, the North Cascades Conservation Council, and was president of the Federation of Western Outdoor Clubs. He worked for several years with the American Friends Service Committee to support the rights of Native Peoples to use ancestral lands.

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I met Frank Fickeisen in 1966 on a rainy day climb of Mount Index. I will never forget his sunny disposition in appall-

ing weather. Since then we occasionally worked together on various Conservation projects in this area. He was supportive of NCCC initiatives as a member. He was a leader of other environmental and climbing organizations such as the Federation of Western Outdoor Clubs and The Mountaineers. I was especially impressed when he risked his livelihood as a Boeing engineer by opposing the notorious Supersonic Transport project that was eventually abandoned by the Federal Government. We will certainly miss Frank.

—Marc Bardsley

Frank was the president of the Federation of Western Outdoor Clubs the year (1967) when I left my Seattle Law Practice to become the Northwest Representative of the Sierra Club and FWOC, which literally meant all the territory from

Redwoods to the North Pole, Alaska, in those innocent days.

Frank was always so supportive of everything we did/I wanted to do in those days... e.g., file the first legal action to halt dams in Hells Canyon (he should go down in conservation history as one of its original saviors); lobby the final versions of the North Cascades Park and Glacier Peak Wilderness through Congress; fight for an Oregon Volcanic Cascades National Park; stop the proposed logging of French Pete Valley... Frank was there 100 per cent for them, every one. One of our Northwest's very best conservation leaders, all the time. Frank was just the kind of guy who would always stand tall and do the right thing—and he was just the kind of calm and mature presence inexperienced me needed in those intense times! I miss you, comrade Frank!

—Brock Evans



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