

THE WILD CASCADES

THE JOURNAL OF THE NORTH CASCADES CONSERVATION COUNCIL

SUMMER 2026



THE WILD CASCADES ■ Summer 2026

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COVER: *The Upper Enchantment Lakes are spectacular, and popular. The habituated goats are a reminder that our presence has become part of their daily lives—for better or worse.* —MARK NELSON PHOTO

The Wild Cascades

Journal of the North Cascades Conservation Council

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The Wild Cascades Editor

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

Over the last six decades 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 William 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: \$10 (Living Lightly) to \$100.

N3C acknowledges the North Cascade Range and adjacent areas as the ancestral homelands of Indigenous Peoples, First Nations, and all who have lived here for millennia and have stewarded this land since time immemorial.

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PRESIDENT'S LETTER SUMMER 2026

Keeping up with public lands threats these days—policy changes and actual events on the ground—is like drinking from a proverbial firehose. And it can be discouraging. As a colleague in Utah wrote recently, “These are the times that try conservationists’ souls.”

So far, our two greatest N3C achievements, our National Park and our Wilderness Areas, aren’t on the chopping block, despite the general erosion of protections. Unlike the protected lands in the Southwest, there haven’t been proposals to just sell them off to the highest bidder, like there might have been if there was coal, oil or gas under them, let alone uranium.

Anything outside Wilderness protection around here, though—and that’s roughly half of our National Forests—is seemingly being made available for exploitation by the timber industry under the guise of thinning. And with a blank check to make it up as they go along that they call “Condition-Based Management.”

To counter that, we must go to the point of absurdity sometimes. While traditional methods under NEPA are being debased to the point of irrelevancy, we must continue to abide by them to maintain standing for litigation if all else fails, as it seems likely to.

A recent example was a so-called “Objection Resolution Meeting.” These used to be forums where we would meet with Forest Service staff to discuss the flaws in projects and talk about ways to resolve them. We recently attended one of these meetings, for the MBSNF Forestwide Thinning project, but it was the procedural equivalent of a kangaroo court. Each of us was given just five minutes to speak and we could clearly see on the video call that none of the FS staff were even so much as taking notes.

Our objector asked the Forest Service reps point-blank if they planned to make any changes to the EA based on our objections, which he pointed out included suggested remedies. The answer was vague to say the least, just that the Service is still in the process of reviewing objections and we’ll get a response in due time, all in a sort of “word salad” that somehow wasn’t very reassuring.

We presume no changes will be made and it will be up to us to take legal action as a last resort, which is unfortunate because the whole process of NEPA public engagement was designed to reduce or eliminate the need for litigation. Despite this Orwellian situation we persist in these sorts of formalities. We do it to maintain standing to take legal action in hopes of stopping or at least improving these damaging projects that propose to turn loggers loose on any part of the National Forests in the North Cascades that isn’t explicitly protected as Wilderness. We never know if we’ll succeed at these efforts, of course, but we do know if we fold our hand early, we can’t win.

It seems clear now that the Forest Service has abandoned many of the foundational conservation commitments that have regulated federal forest management for decades. Your support for our efforts to resist this downward slide is crucial and much appreciated in these trying times!

Phil Fenner
philf@northcascades.org

N3C Actions

WILL NOT APPEAR
IN THIS ISSUE

*The Actions column is on
summer break.*

Track Forest and Park Service news with these sites

Our Forest Service colleagues gave us a great tip. Smokey Wire and the Forest Service Employees for Environmental Ethics (FSEEE) maintain websites that are very useful for tracking current developments in USFS policies and litigation.

Forest Service Employees for Environmental Ethics (FSEEE)

<https://nationalforestadvocates.org/>

Informs the public about national forest issues and needed reforms; monitors national forest management, highlighting both failures and successes, and promotes policy reforms that benefit ecosystems and communities. Helps connect reform-minded voices inside and outside government to strengthen public oversight and en-

gagement and supports public employees who face retaliation for speaking up on behalf of the public interest.

The Smokey Wire

<https://forestpolicypub.com/>

Solicits broad participation from a cross-section of interests in a respectful atmosphere of mutual learning on topics related to the Forest Service and public lands policy and to share perspectives among practitioners, the public and the academic and science communities. Administered by Sharon Friedman, Ph.D., forest geneticist, Forest Service Retiree (2012); former Chair of both the Forest Policy Committee and Forest Science and Technology Board at the Society of American Foresters.

Frontcountry and Visitor Use Plan (VUMP) for Ross Lake National Recreation Area and State Route 20

By Dave Fluharty

Work continues toward a Draft Visitor Use Management Plan (VUMP) for the Ross Lake National Recreation Area and State Route 20. For those who missed the Scoping meeting a year ago (June 17, 2025) there is now a recording available from the project website. Project documents are available through the North Cascades National Park Service Complex Planning website www.nps.gov/noca/getinvolved/planning.htm.

N3C expects the Draft VUMP to be released for public review this summer. Feedback is planned to be incorporated and the planning process completed during Fall 2026-Spring 2027. However, since the proposed review of draft concepts with partners, stakeholders, and tribes has not taken place as proposed online, we may assume that the timeline has shifted to later.



Glacier lilies and Ruby Mountain from Sourdough Mountain. —JIM SCARBOROUGH PHOTO

Give the gift of the North Cascades through our Gift Membership Program

Know someone who'd like to be part of N3C? Give them a one-year gift membership. Your designee will get a copy of *The Wilderness Alps* by Harvey Manning as well as three issues of *The Wild Cascades* as they are published

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If you have questions, contact us at GiftMember@northcascades.org. If you lack internet access, simply cut out the membership card on page 23, complete your information, write "GIFT" across the top and attach a note with the name and mailing address of the recipient.

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N3C needs you!

We have openings for:

- volunteer board members
- I.T. help
- writers
- legal and policy advisors
- lawyers

Please contact N3C board president Phil Fenner at philf@northcascades.org.

December floods and Park Service retreat cause Stehekin disaster

By Phil Fenner

For years N3C has been asserting that the National Park Service was failing to meet its historic and legal obligation to protect the Stehekin River valley as part of the North Cascades National Park Complex. We have been criticizing the Park for its steady withdrawal of Park presence from the valley, most recently with the NPS's unfortunate decision to not hire interpretive rangers in Stehekin and close the Golden West Visitor Center. The Park's withdrawal meant that when a crisis hit, there would be a vacuum of leadership to address the crisis within the context of the Park's mission to protect the valley.

Last December, that crisis hit, when an atmospheric river caused flooding throughout Washington State. In Stehekin, the results were catastrophic, if predictable: Along the head of Lake Chelan, where the Pioneer Fire the summer before had burned on a steep slope, the hillside collapsed in a landslide, obliterating the sole road from the boat landing into the valley and destroying the sewage treatment plant for the Lake Chelan Lodge. Within the valley itself, the Stehekin River blasted away sections of the Company Creek Road and sent flood waters surging around a dozen homes as it reclaimed historic channels.

Some residents' homes became islands amid rushing water for days. A private helicopter evacuated several of them and brought supplies to others. Once the flood waters receded, residents who lived beyond the washed-out section of Company Creek road could get out only by climbing a cliffside or wading. Although the Stehekin Valley is part of the North Cascades National Park Complex, the National Park Service was slow to respond to the disaster and this raised residents' ire. Residents reported that for weeks after the December flood, they heard nothing from Park officials about what could be done for flood-affected Ste-

hekin residents. The North Cascades National Park was without a superintendent in this crucial moment, and hobbled by DOGE and budget cuts.

But this was not a short-term problem: The NPS has retreated from Stehekin over the last two decades, withdrawing staff, closing the Golden West, and eliminating all visitor-facing staff in this isolated valley in 2024. With this retreat, Stehekin residents lost trust in the Park Service and belief in its authority. Not surprisingly, after the flood, with no response from the Park Service, frustration grew to a boiling point, and a number of residents understandably began to develop ideas and plans to protect their properties irrespective of the Park's legal responsibilities for oversight and protection of the valley, including the wild Stehekin River. A second high-water event in March 2026 only made matters worse.

Some residents began calling for dredging the wild Stehekin River. As hydrologist Paul Bakke soon pointed out in a carefully reasoned report, this would be ineffective at preventing flooding and counter-productive—the river would quickly redeposit gravel, while eroding elsewhere. Furthermore, the Stehekin River is federally protected along its entire length, set aside by Congress to remain unimpaired for public enjoyment. It has been designated eligible for Wild and Scenic status, and it is a beautiful gem of the national park system.

Some residents also proposed to “put the river back” and rebuild the Company Creek Road in its old location—in what is now the middle of the river. Attempting to move a wild river is an even more misguided idea than dredging. Unfortunately, Park Service officials did not quickly explain to the public why this could not or should not be attempted. Instead, they appear to have attempted to pass the buck, saying they couldn't put the river back

or rebuild in the river because they might be sued. This only increased acrimony in the valley and unfortunately played into the narrative, amplified by some in the media, that the conflict was between environmental preservationists and residents.

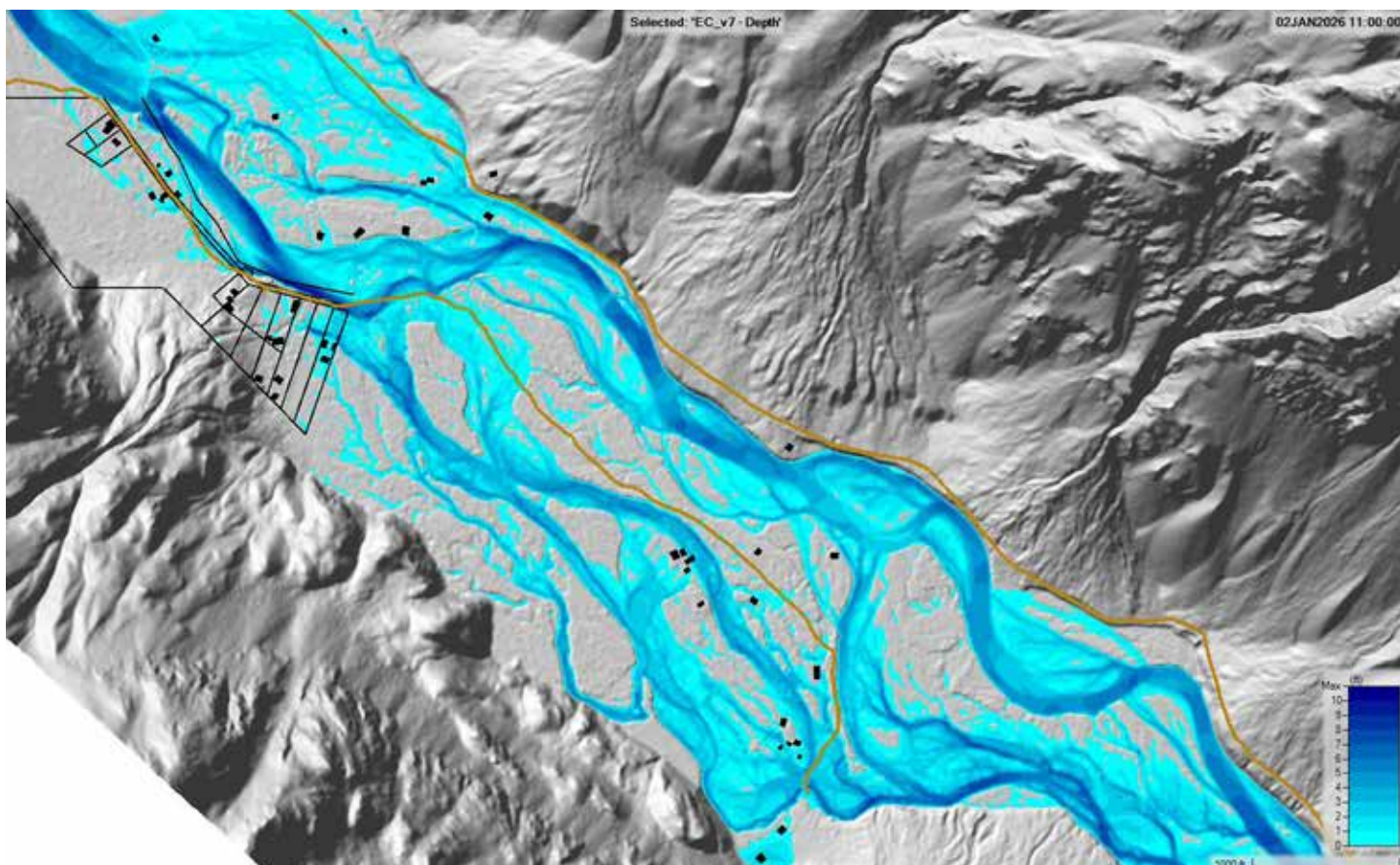
The issue caught the ears of county and federal elected officials, and a drumbeat built for the Park Service to do something.

What it did was a boondoggle that only reinforced the NPS's lack of credibility: At a cost to taxpayers of between \$3 and \$4 million, it built a section of temporary road. But then, without reconnecting that section to the stranded road beyond the wash-out, the Park simply stopped construction at the edge of one resident's property, leaving all the other homes beyond it still cut off. Because the river now abuts that one person's land on one side and cliffs bound it on the other, the only reasonable way to reconnect the pieces of the road is by crossing that private property. Rather than negotiate an easement, the Park Service threw up its hands.

Additionally, the NPS was very slow to respond to the destruction of the wastewater treatment plant at the boat landing, leaving the lodge there and nearby residences unable to accept visitors. The plant has not been restored in time for the summer visitor season, so visitor traffic to Stehekin is low this year.

With the recent events, the Stehekin River has been doing simply what a river does—shifting within its historic floodplain. But also, thanks to global warming, the Stehekin River has been changing, shifting from a spring flood regime to a fall or winter flood regime, and its floods are more sudden and much bigger. Humans who were used to the old Stehekin River staying within certain channels for decades

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Stehekin disaster

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now find their homes in its way, and they understandably are frustrated and want protection.

Stehekin is a unique place within the National Park system: It is part of the North Cascades National Park Complex, but a human community lives within that land. When the North Cascades National Park came into existence in 1968 thanks to the dogged advocacy of the N3C, Congress assigned to the Park Service responsibility for protecting the river and the valley as parkland, while also recognizing that several dozen families were private property inholders within that same area. Proper stewardship would require working with landowners to address their needs while upholding the laws and principles of the Park. That stewardship required an active and ongoing engagement in the Stehekin Valley. Instead, with the steady

withdrawal of Park presence over the past two decades, the situation became ripe for conflict when a crisis hit.

N3C firmly believes that there are solutions to today's crisis that would support Stehekin residents and provide them access to their homes while honoring the Park's legal mandate to protect the valley's ecology and scenery unimpaired and create a welcoming environment for Park visitors. However, that will require a renewed commitment to Stehekin by Park Service officials and an earnest effort by those officials to rebuild trust it has lost among both longtime residents and advocates for the Park's mission and responsibility, including N3C members.

LIDAR modeling map

Above: Hydrologic modeling of a 10-year flood along upper Company Creek Road using updated LIDAR mapping obtained from a drone. LIDAR uses a laser to collect millions of data points and produces centimeter-level elevation data that shows the exact shape of the land — slopes, depressions, and channels. This allows hydrologists the ability to model flooding of varying intensities and how floodplains function. This image was included in the National Park Service environmental analysis, which was completed before the construction of the Company Creek emergency road.

Holden evaluation continues

By Anne Basye

Holden Village and all trails leading to it remain closed as the U.S. Forest Service assesses damage from multiple slides along Forest Service Road (FSR) 8301. The FS road closure for both motorized and nonmotorized travel from the Lucerne commercial dock all the way through Holden Village to the ballfield continues until December 31, 2026.

An update on the Holden website says that the USFS, in partnership with Rio Tinto Mining Company, “have observed what they call ‘catastrophic geotechnical failures’ in at least eleven spots between Lucerne and the water treatment plant. The damage is not just to the road itself, but to both the upslope and downslope areas of 8301, which will greatly affect how the road is rebuilt.”

Assessments to determine the scope of work in reopening the road are

underway. Holden spokesperson Carl Norquist says that the Forest Service and Rio Tinto are mapping the road and identifying the most significant damage. “This includes the obvious mudslides and washouts but also utilizing technology to survey beneath the ground,” he said. “Once that is done, we’ll have a better picture of potential repair timelines.” It is hoped that some construction may start this year and be completed in 2027.

Fifteen long-term staffers are in the village maintaining its utilities but no staff from IMCO, the contractor handling post-remediation water quality testing for the Rio Tinto, are present. The water treatment facility mandated by the recent federal remediation is not operating and Rio Tinto’s website shows the Holden remediation as a “closed asset”.



Mt. Baker geothermal consent to lease project

By Dave Fluharty

The Mt. Baker Snoqualmie National Forest issued a Draft Environmental Impact Assessment (DEA) for a joint proposal from the Nooksack Tribal Council and Puget Sound Energy (Whatcom PUD) to lease about 60,000 acres for a geothermal energy exploration project on USFS lands surrounding Mt. Baker. At this first stage of the process for geothermal development the USFS claims that there are no environmental impacts due to leasing (assessed later). N3C is concerned that the opportunity is lost to exclude sensitive habitats and to place conditions in the leases to protect wildlife. Exploratory drilling requires roads and drill pads, disturbs wildlife, and pollutes. Lands identified for leasing exclude designated Wilderness and other restricted lands, but they include many acres that are in Inventoried Roadless Areas.

N3C is concerned about the lack of site-specific environmental impact assessment making it difficult to know where, within the proposed leased area, exploration will occur. Martha Hall’s article in this issue argues that there are multiple subpopulations of mountain goats on the ridges surrounding Mt. Baker. Are they included or excluded? Former USFS wildlife biologist D. Brady Green comments that nine of these sensitive ridge areas are within the area of the proposed leases.

The Statement of Need for this Proposal is in conflict with the conclusions of the Washington State Department of Natural Resources (2014) http://www.dnr.wa.gov/publications/ger_ofr2014-02_geothermal_favorability.pdf that that indicates there is NO viable, commercial geothermal development potential. Resources for the Future, which conducts independent

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Skagit Gorge and Teebone Ridge from Sourdough Mountain. —JIM SCARBOROUGH PHOTO

Skagit Hydroelectric Power Project Relicensing update

By Dave Fluharty

As reported in the Winter-Spring *TWC* the N3C Board of Directors decided not to sign on to the Settlement Agreement with Seattle City Light (SCL). This refusal to sign means that N3C is not a member of the Skagit License Implementation Committee (SLIC) and is not eligible to attend meetings. That is nothing new because N3C and other non-governmental “participants” in the Settlement negotiation process have been effectively excluded anyway. N3C continues to track the developments for the Project through the official website of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC).

Once signed by the tribes and federal and state agencies, the Settlement Agreement was submitted to the Seattle City Council, which amazingly approved the \$4.2 billion price tag without a backward glance and was submitted by SCL to FERC. Subsequently, SCL submitted an “Amended Final License Application” in May.

The next step is for FERC to perform its Environmental Assessment of the environmental impacts of the actions under the Settlement Agreement. The lack of a full environmental assessment for the Settlement Agreement was one of the reasons N3C decided not to sign. N3C’s assessment of the environmental risks and tradeoffs show some of the proposed actions under the license agreement outweigh the benefits. Furthermore, the segmented decision process proposed in the Settlement Agreement means that key actions are not defined for FERC environmental analysis as part of the issuing of the license; rather they are delayed for anywhere between five and 15 years. If these action items are not included in the license, FERC can neither approve nor deny when the initial license is granted and the parties to the Settlement Agreement do not have a FERC backed contract to enforce the terms of the license.

Trust Land Transfer: the effort to protect state lands continues

By Jim Freeburg

Despite the ongoing flood of bad news from the Trump Administration, there is sustained progress in this Washington to conserve state-owned public land. In March, the legislature again invested in the trust land transfer (TLT) program at the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), this time protecting old growth forests that are part of Jefferson County’s Lost Quimper Wilderness. This continues the success we’ve seen since N3C helped kick off the TLT revitalization effort in 2020, which can now claim credit for over \$50 million in public investment to conserve 12,000+ acres.

In the Fall 2025 issue of *TWC*, readers were the first to hear of a new nonprofit, called the Stewards of Washington State Lands (“Stewards”) that spun out of the TLT revitalization effort. The Stewards are continuing to gain steam by laying the groundwork for the 2027 legislative session. A new website will be live soon to tell the 40-year story of TLT and how it’s re-shaped landscapes across the state, especially in the Morning Star Natural Resource Conservation Area, sandwiched between the Wild Sky and Boulder River Wilderness Areas. A citizen’s advisory committee at DNR is currently prioritizing projects to be considered by the legislature in 2027 and then the public will again have the opportunity to nominate parcels for the TLT program next summer.

But you don’t need to wait to ask your elected officials to prioritize conservation. Many politicians are on the campaign trail now and need to hear from you about your vision for our state. Reach out to them and ask them to make conservation of wild places like the North Cascades a priority.

Learn more at <https://www.stewardswa.org/>

Rationale for opposition to the Midnight Restoration Project: A summary of concerns

By the Methow Forest Forum, a newly formed fellow advocate for the Methow watershed

Members of the Methow Forest Forum (MFF) participated in the public process for the Midnight project. We attended tours with Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest officials and employees, met with Forest leadership, and submitted volumes of written comments. We've pointed out legal deficiencies and violation of federal rules. We've recommended the agency review specific scientific studies that contradict the studies they cite. We've made numerous recommendations for activities that would achieve project objectives. There has been little acknowledgement of our concerns or ideas, and there is no evidence that any of our recommendations have been considered. Following is a summary of our concerns:

The project purpose is misrepresented: Columbia Insight News Service published an investigative report drawn from internal Forest Service memorandums obtained from a Freedom of Information Act request ("EXCLUSIVE: The Forest Service is using the threat of wildfires to meet timber targets.") The report detailed how agency leadership seeks to use the public fear of wildfires to drum up public support for timber extraction projects. The story details an agency objective of achieving timber production quotas. Midnight does not list satisfying timber production quotas as one of its objectives.

Inequitable public involvement process: In December 2022, the Forest Service approached the North Central Washington Forest Health Collaborative (NCWFHC) and requested their involvement in developing the Proposed Action for the Midnight Project. The two entities worked together for 19 months to develop logging and burning prescriptions before the rest of the public was notified of the existence of Midnight. The Forest Service denied requests from the North

Cascades Conservation Council (N3C) to be involved in project conception. The only opportunity the public outside the Collaborative has had to influence Midnight was to comment on a specific plan of action that was developed behind closed doors with the NCWFHC. Public comment was limited to 24 hours' notice of an "open house." No public meetings were held, and there was no notice of the existence of the projects published in the Methow Valley News. The public had only 23-30 days to comment on the Draft Environmental Assessment, which (including appendices and cited studies) includes over 800 pages of technical documents.

Non-compliance with EA prescriptions and guidelines: With the Mission Project, the Forest Service changed the logging prescriptions from what had been agreed on with the NCWFHC after the timber sales did not attract bidders. Then during logging operations, they overcut far beyond the already-expanded prescription. The same thing has occurred with the Twisp Project. Despite requests, the Forest Service has not responded to these violations with any measures to ensure future compliance with the prescriptions.

Violations of the National Environmental Policy Act: The finding that Midnight will have "No Significant Impact," and thus no Environmental Impact Statement will be prepared, is unsupported. The purpose and need outline a dramatic alteration of forest ecosystem conditions to compensate for 100-plus years of ill-advised fire suppression and high-grade logging. The whole point of the project is to affect change in the forests to a degree that cannot objectively be deemed "insignificant." The presence of critical habitat for endangered species represents a significant potential impact. The log haul plan that projects at least

20,000 log truck trips through local neighborhoods and towns represents a significant social impact. Up until now, it has been standard procedure that projects of the size and magnitude of Midnight require an Environmental Impact Statement rather than the scant analysis provided by an EA. Further, the inclusion of only a single action alternative is insufficient. It precludes consideration by the public and the deciding officer of the innumerable scenarios, and intensities of scenarios, that might potentially meet the project needs with as little environmental and social impact as is reasonably possible. An independent alternative offered to the agency by the N3C was rejected. It has always been a standard practice for the Forest Service to show how the impacts of a project are minor and thus do not require an EIS. With Midnight, there is no such discussion.

Violation of the Northwest Forest Plan: Proposed logging in Late Successional Reserves (LSR's) under the Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP) defeats the purpose of the designation—to protect endangered species that require a specific undisturbed forest habitat for survival. There are many real violations of the NWFP, for example: failure to conduct a timely survey for spotted owl nests; violation of the prohibition on logging on slopes over 40 percent, and in landslide-prone areas; no identification of dozens of ephemeral streams, which are required to be precluded from ground-disturbing activities; weakening NWFP and Okanogan-Wenatchee Forest Plan riparian buffers; no consultation with the multi-agency LRSA committee to approve or reject the project.

Ignoring the Roadless Area Policy: Midnight proposes to enter approximately 4,000 acres of the Sawtooth inventoried roadless area for sil-

vicultural treatment. Although the EA states no timber will be removed from the roadless area, alteration of the roadless character would occur. Further, what is stated on paper is often not what occurs in the woods. The EA fails to adequately describe why entry into the roadless area is important to achieving project objectives.

Implementing Designation by Prescription and Condition-Based Management: It is likely that the policy of Designation by Prescription is at least partly responsible for the overcutting that has occurred on the Mission and Twisp projects. Allowing the contractor to interpret prescriptions without formal training, and to select the trees to be cut when they are being paid with trees, is inappropriate. Trees to be removed should be marked by resource professionals. Condition-Based Management allows the Forest Service to change logging and burning prescriptions after the EA has been finalized, rendering the environmental analysis incomplete. It also allows logging to be based on dated information on forest conditions, rather than with current surveys. These provisions invite violation of the prescriptions and render the EA's analysis of impacts inadequate.

Adverse impacts to the citizenry and economy of the Methow community: Midnight will not help the Methow Valley community, it will mar the Twisp Corridor's natural scenic qualities, degrade the recreation experience, damage our outdoor recreation-based economy, and impose profuse log truck traffic through local neighborhoods. Midnight cites "economic benefits" as a positive byproduct but supplying logs from local forests to faraway sawmills will not help our economy. Nor, based on many scientific studies, will it protect local homes and communities from wildfire. The Methow Watershed should not become a resource colony serving distant corporate sawmills. The Twisp Corridor is the key location that brings visitors from outside the community to the town of Twisp, contributing to local businesses. Midnight will besiege the Twisp Corridor with log trucks and machinery; impact campgrounds

and trailheads with industrial logging operations; and leave logging scars that may last for decades.

Conclusion: It is the position of the Methow Forest Forum that the impending violation of multiple laws and rules for management of the national forests requires unconditional opposition to Midnight. Midnight is being rushed forward in defiance of law

and science and with minimal public participation, in order to meet timber production quotas with little regard for social, economic, and environmental impacts to the Methow Community.

For more information on the Methow Forest Forum, contact president Ric Bailey at icilybear@gmail.com



Thunder Creek valley with Boston Glacier at its head, Tricouni & Primus peaks in middle ground, from Sourdough Mountain. —JIM SCARBOROUGH PHOTO

Join our N3C Facebook page!

We're up to 880 followers and growing. Help us build our clout by friending us and then recommending our page to your friends concerned about preserving the North Cascades.



*880 people
like this*

An update from the Methow Forest Forum

By Paula Mackrow



Piles of freshly cut lumber observed during a June outing to the Coal Creek drainage above Twisp River. —PAULA MACKROW PHOTO

The vicious quagmire created by U.S. Forest Service policy of building roads and logging big trees under the pretext of removing fire risk to communities is ongoing in the Methow Valley as the bulldozers enter the Twisp River watershed for the commercial harvest they call “thinning”. Despite alarms raised by the public and science community,

long-term massive projects include timber sales across nearly 200,000 acres because our forests are “unhealthy”. The story the USFS sells the public mandates that chainsaws and feller bunchers can create a more “fire resilient” landscape. We are asked to believe the government’s own fantasy design can manufacture an ecosystem-wide return to “historic condi-

tions”. The plan depends on funding through removal of valuable old Douglas fir and Ponderosa pine and burning the undergrowth for 20 years.

It is a pretense, an experiment, a fantasy to imply we can cut and slash our way to resiliency. Keeping communities “safe from wildfire” cannot be proven as climate and wildfire are now beyond our control. What scientists agree on is that carbon storage in trees is imperative for reducing climate chaos.

As neighbors and landowners, we asked the USFS to design the “Restoration” projects by following the scientifically based guidelines of the Northwest Forest Plan (NFP). However, our Methow Valley Ranger District is being pressured to meet a federally mandated timber quota which benefits the timber industry while the restoration activities only come after ecosystem damage, likely without improving forest ecosystem health in the short or long term.

The Twisp River Project (TRP) is actually a large-scale logging project that includes emergency directives violating the carefully designed and scientifically based NFP guidelines. The Plan was created by a broad range of ecologists from many disciplines and broad community participation. Parties recognized the negative effects of massive timber removal in the 1970s and 80s, clearly linked to habitat and watershed degradation. At that time 2 percent of our old growth forest remained in the western US and salmon were listed as endangered species across 70 percent of Washington watersheds. Old-growth dependent birds, spotted owls and marbled murrelets, were identified as indicator species for forest health regionally. Key forest types were mapped and designated to be preserved intact to allow natural processes repair the damage of road building, soil compaction, stripping steep slopes, and loss of canopy cover. Riparian Reserves, Forest Plan Old

Growth, Late Successional Reserves and Roadless Areas set aside for the ages, need time to repair the incursions of thoughtless, profit-driven corporations promising jobs forever. They closed the local mills and ran when the damage was no longer profitable.

The corporations are back, using the same brutal technology, coming for the last groves of big trees set aside in stream-side shaded trails, salmon habitat, intact roadless areas and Late Successional Reserve trees. Those are forest qualities we cherish, quietly, patiently fulfilling their destiny to become the next generation of Old Growth habitat. The fungus, moss, fleas, ticks and squirrels all play significant roles, re-establishing qualities of Old Growth, taking centuries, not decades to establish. Watershed protection needs legacy forest soil, shade, water and carbon storage to make up a continuous cycle of death and replenishment from underground lifewebs to canopy nesting communities.

While national, regional and local USFS staff negotiate a careful path through drastic budget cuts and foolish mandates from above, the public at large, who live, work and recreate in these lands are under pressure to agree to the impacts of emergency orders that liquidate the forests in the name of “fire protection”. Working with the all-volunteer Methow Forest Forum (MFF) friends and neighbors try to keep up with the quickly changing landscape-level habitat destruction that commenced in earnest three years ago. Our current senators and representatives supported the false, hysterical narrative that if we don’t cut it now, climate change will take the forest from us forever. Such claptrap has instigated much internal pain in this community between multiple conservation organizations. With much gratitude, MFF thanks the North Cascade Conservation Council for helping initiate litigation. Litigation likely now, as always, has been the most effective way to bring a rational approach to forest multiple-use processes before irreparable harm can continue.



Harvested in 2022 as part of the Mission Restoration Project and now “recovering.”
—PAULA MACKROW PHOTO



Disturbing photos of recent activity along Coal Creek, tributary to the Twisp River. —
PAULA MACKROW PHOTO

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Methow Forest Forum

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Since mid-May 2026, we have participated in the Upper Methow Project USFS field tour and then suffered through an outlandishly opaque North Central Forest Health Collaborative (collaborative) public event. Staff not only outnumbered the citizens but clearly dismissed even the most innocent expectations of honest discussion. Questions regarding the future harvest plans and the opinions of the previous “restoration” activities in Cub Creek (‘23), Mission Restoration (‘23) Projects and current Twisp River commercial harvest (‘26) actions went unanswered. Staff made clear this project would receive no further public outreach unless through other agency activities. No public forums, no specialist presentations, no information will be forthcoming except for the Draft Environmental Assessment in process.

The Collaborative event a week later was billed as a public conversation about forest health restoration. The presentation was so one-sided, the local newspaper asked MFF for comment to present contrary information acknowledging the lack of questions regarding alternative data or opinions on the current plans and actions. In the public eye, the timber harvest/fire fiasco seems written in granite.

In late June, we walked the ongoing commercial harvest of the Coal Creek drainage above Twisp River. What broke my heart was watching all the songbirds flitting around the fresh piles of treetops. Food, shelter, home, gone without regard to ecological context except the constant drum of “but it will burn!”

So many trees were removed in an area that wasn’t dense to begin with and had partially burned in 2015. It’s interesting how much hotter these exposed areas are while walking around vs how they felt prior to treatment. I also noticed a lot of soil disturbance and steep slope operations. Nesting

spotted owls are the only specified species of concern in the project. I love them in concept and will likely never see any. The conservation of specific species serves as indicators of forest community health. However, songbird populations are declining rapidly and all five Pacific salmon species are ESA listed across Washington State.

In a warming world removing tree canopy warms the world. From the cedars of Lebanon to the American Dust Bowl of the 1930s, human driven mechanical encroachment has far

TRP plans to liquidate the forests in the name of “fire protection”

exceeded the ability of the natural order of INCOMPREHENSIBLY complex systems to maintain themselves. The environmental shifts now taking place have few counterparts in speed and geographic extent in human history. 80 to 90 percent of fires in the Pacific

Northwest are human caused, yet the collective conscience fears wildfire destruction beyond all other natural disasters here.

Another enviro friend tells me to “be nicer to the powers-that-be”. Over the decades I’ve heard that often, mostly from those supporting the status quo. I do fear that outlook is winning the mass communication prize with the public, even as they purport to support environmental laws. “It will all burn!” is the rallying cry of the UW scientists whose extensive research programs receive funding from the beneficiaries of legacy logging. Now the public pays the costs of the “repair the forest” by removing mature trees. That’s the goal!

Listen for a moment to the heartfelt emotions of the silent naturalists of the Methow Valley. These folks’ lives have endured the logging of the past that is now blamed for the “disease of trees” clogging the forest with an “over-abundance of vegetation” that cannot “survive the warming climate”.

“It cannot be over-emphasized that these projects have one central goal: to provide Douglas fir logs to

sawmills. After the dozens of conversations we’ve had with the MVRD, all other reasons given for these logging projects are academic. People who are dedicated to working with the Forest Service and supporting its overall agenda despite the destruction we’ve witnessed will never understand what we’ve been through with the agency leadership, the lies, the deception, the timber production agenda they try so desperately to hide.”

“I’ll talk to them, but have no illusion they will ever understand our frustration, nor concede to the Forest Service’s perpetual violation of laws and violation of ecologically responsible management. I’m not going to spend much time trying to convince them.”

“I just returned from viewing Coal Cr. this morning. It is horrific. They did come over closer to our house and cut out nice shady groves that actually were not too crowded. There is not a lot of fir, but mostly pines, in the 18”-21” size probably 80 years old. These are SW facing slopes and they are opening it up—guaranteed to dry out! It’s very near the Coal Cr. bike trail that does have damage in places with three feller bunchers going. We need to get these pics out that I took, to anyone that will listen.”

“USFS doesn’t want people going into these projects while they are working. Apparently there is stuff happening in the background we don’t know about and the FS has been decimated with staffing cuts.”

“If those collaborating organizations did not condone this, would there be more “power” to stop this sort of thing? USFS is pushing the limit. The community needs to know about this kind of stuff. Again, there is no restoration about this. It is logging, logging, logging. It has come back to the Valley, like it used to be, in the 70’s. Ask me and my neighbors who have been witnessing this logging show up above us. We get to make comments on an already-decided-upon plan. The Collaborative has at least four timber

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New video tells the story of the Upper Skagit

Learn more about the Upper Skagit watershed—everything that lies north of Ross Lake—in a new 13-minute video exploring this ecosystem that crosses national boundaries.

N3C contributed archival photos to the filmmakers hired by the Skagit Environmental Endowment Commission, which was established in 1984 by the High Ross Treaty between Canada and the U.S. Eight of its 16 members are appointed by the Premier of British Columbia and eight are appointed by the Mayor of Seattle. The commission administers an Endowment Fund used to

1. to conserve and protect wilderness and wildlife habitat;
2. to enhance recreational opportunities;
3. to acquire mineral or timber rights in the area of the Upper Skagit above Ross Dam; and
4. to conduct studies in the Upper Skagit Watershed to support its overall conservation and education mission.

Most of its work takes place in Canada. In 2022 the SEEC helped broker



the agreement under which the Imperial Metals Corporation surrendered all its mining and related rights within the so-called Skagit River donut hole, a 22.4-square mile gap of unprotected B.C. land that is home to the headwaters of the Skagit River. N3C is part of the 300-member Skagit Headwaters Coalition of conservation groups, U.S. and Canadian tribes, non-governmental organizations, recreation groups,

elected officials and many Skagit organizations and businesses that worked to stop Imperial Metals' permit proposal to mine for gold in this ecologically and culturally sensitive place—and SEEC endowment funds were part of the \$24 million it took to end that threat permanently.

See the video at <https://skagiteec.org/the-story-of-the-upper-skagit/>

Methow Forest Forum

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companies participating. They want the timber! Of course. And some of our local environmental groups go along with it. If a large tree is determined to be a hazard or has mistletoe, they're going to take it."

Another forest scientist wrote, "I walked to the back of one cutting unit on Thompson ridge and found a multi-acre area where almost every merchantable tree was cut. The only remaining trees looked less than 7 inches dbh (not sellable) and still on the low end in terms of quantity. Medium-sized timber was removed as evidenced by the fresh stumps. Whether or not this is in line with their pro-

posed prescription, I don't care. The intent is obvious."

"The units on the south side of Coal Creek were also alarming. I would be curious to hear more specifics on how this affects the native ecology and other insights."

Our message should be focused on the impacts of logging and its associated burning on our tourism and recreation-based economy in the Methow. There will always be wildfires regardless of how many thousands of acres of trees we cut from our forests, so let us be guided by the scientifically based Northwest Forest Plan to carefully manage our forest lands. Let's leave

the carbon in the forest as ash, root, standing trunks. Most potential wildfires won't necessarily adversely impact recreation and scenic beauty, but logging always will.



Mountain goats need more help, not more hunting

By Martha Hall

These shaggy, white mountaineers have survived for thousands of years by using habitats with steep, rugged cliffs. They have developed highly specialized physical, cultural, and social adaptations that allow them to live where other ungulates would die.

Nature's annual wardrobe change: shedding incredibly thick winter coats. Marmot Ridge, Mount Baker Wilderness. —MARK NELSON PHOTOS

No one has captured what defines the mountain goat like Douglas H. Chadwick in his classic book *A Beast the Color of Winter* (Chadwick 2002). After seven years of carefully observing everything about this species, he knows how they live and die. Their bodies and legs are custom-made for living on steep terrain, not for out-running predators. Their courtship consists of lengthy negotiations. They defend their personal space, not territories. Their simple horns are lethal weapons.

Mountain goat abundance in our Cascade Mountains declined significantly in the past because of overhunting (Rice and Gay 2010). Hunting was eventually paused and then limited to special permits. Now this species is declining again. An estimate of their statewide population in 1961 was 8,500, excluding goats in Mt. Rainier National Park and on the Yakama Reservation. The last statewide estimate in 2012 was 2,800 (WDFW 2026 GMP). More recent statewide estimates are not available because only populations used for trophy hunting are surveyed regularly. These nine or ten populations are declining. Many areas are no longer hunted because of their low numbers (WDFW Status & Trend Report 2024).

Mountain goats are declining because of the cumulative impacts of the many challenges they face in today's world. The increasing impacts

of climate change pose major threats. Heavy snowfalls mixed with warmer weather, less snowfall, spring and summer heat, droughts, and wildfires may reduce food, reproduction, and survival. Avalanches and rock falls are increasing. These have always been common causes of documented mountain goat deaths (White et al. 2011) (Michaud et al. 2022) (White et al. 2018 and 2025).

Other serious threats are related to human activities that disturb and displace mountain goats. These activities prevent goats from using the best habitats and they degrade these habitats. These impacts are increasing as more humans participate in recreational activities where mountain goats live. (Macdonald et al. 2026) (St. Louis et al. 2021). Logging and construction of roads and trails may also have negative impacts. Moving is not an option for this species. Many studies also explain why mountain goats are especially vulnerable to the negative impacts of trophy hunting (Hamel et al. 2006) (Festa-Bianchet and Cote' 2008) (Chadwick 2002).

WDFW's management harms mountain goats

The Washington Department of Fish

and Wildlife (WDFW) is responsible for protecting and perpetuating our state's fish and wildlife for the benefit of all residents. WDFW's legislative mandates clearly state that attempts to maximize hunting cannot harm wild species such as mountain goats in any time, place, manner or quantity (RCW 77.04.012).

But this state agency is failing to implement those mandates. Protecting species requires protecting their habitats. While WDFW doesn't manage the land where most goats live, it should be collecting and using the

data needed to identify and protect critical habitats for mountain goat populations. WDFW has failed to do this even for the populations it uses for trophy hunting. It has also failed to provide the necessary leadership to educate land managers and the public on how

to minimize impacts caused by climate change, human disturbance and habitat loss. The one threat that WDFW does fully control is hunting. WDFW has refused to acknowledge that its recent and more limited hunting may still be harming mountain goats.

WFWC's nine commissioners are responsible for seeing that legislative mandates are implemented. They are

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Climate change and human activity impacts harm this vulnerable population

Table for WDFW's Mt. Baker Population, Last 10 years, Counts and Hunts. Tribal hunts not included

WDFW Mt. Baker Goat Population Last 10 years	Total Count of all mt. goats	Count of only 1 st year kids and the other mt. goats	Number of hunts sold by WDFW	Goats killed in WDFW hunts not Tribal hunts
2016	375	94 281	6	3
2017	292	61 231	6	5
2018	No counts	No counts	6	4
2019	345	89 256	6	2
2020	295	62 233	6	4
2021	166	25 141	7	4
2022	167	27 140	6	2
2023	126	33 93	7	7
2024	132	35 97	7	4
2025	63	12 51	0	0

Mountain goats
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appointed by our governor and confirmed by our state senate. Commissioners hire this agency’s director, also responsible for implementing mandates. Accountability to the public is minimal. State legislators can and do adopt laws related to wildlife management.

WDFW’s hunting is harmful because of this fundamental failure. It is based on “populations” that have not been accurately defined. This is extremely important because negative impacts of hunting occur at the population level. Metapopulations may also be impacted. A mountain goat population is defined as the goats who interact with each other regularly, excluding goats who immigrate/emigrate permanently. Knowing which goats belong to what population requires data on goat movements which is challenging to collect. WDFW lacks this data even for populations that are hunted.

WDFW’s so-called populations are arbitrarily defined by using unverified guesses, geographic features, and

agency motives to maximize hunting. Its aerial surveys may and do count more than one population. For example, aerial surveyors fly all the way around Mt. Baker as they count goats in arbitrarily created survey blocks in goat habitats throughout this area. These counts are combined and the total count is the Mt. Baker Population, shown on page 17. But

these goats could not all interact with each other regularly even if they wanted to. A lot of science shows that mountain goats usually depend on relatively limited areas of winter and summer habitats. Socializing usually occurs in these habitats except for

young males who are more likely to explore new areas and/or permanently disperse. WDFW’s counts for the Mt. Baker Population include many different goat populations of varying sizes. By managing all of these populations as only one population, WDFW fails to recognize and note the existence of most of these populations. When they disappeared, maybe because of hunting, this too was not seen and noted. The smaller and more isolated populations and those closest to roads

and trails probably become extinct first. Those that are closer to another population may survive longer due to immigration.

WDFW’s new 2026 Game Management Plan failed to address this fundamental error in how populations are defined. Hunting is still based on modelling that applies to single populations, but this is often used for groups of populations. This new Plan promises to consider the many other threats that mountain goats face when providing hunting. However, this Plan’s hunting guidelines fail to include this. WDFW also lacks the necessary data on how these threats are impacting goats at the population level.

Ignoring guidelines is harmful

WDFW game management plan guidelines seem to describe how species like mountain goats will be managed and hunted. However, WDFW’s staff and commissioners do not believe they must follow guidelines. They claim that RCWs, legislative mandates and policies must be followed, but not the guidelines in their plans. When guidelines, especially ones focused on implementing science, are ignored, plans are misleading, deceptive, and harmful.

WDFW’s biases and priorities are clear when looking at which guidelines are followed and which are ignored. Trophy hunting is popular with some hunters and WDFW. These hunts are used as incentives to sell more hunting licenses and to raise money through auctions and raffles.

Because the frequency of droughts and warm spring temperatures are expected to increase with climate change, mountain goat populations in Washington will likely be increasingly challenged as the atmosphere warms.

Harris et al 2023, Survival of adult mountain goats in Washington: effect of season, translocation, snow, and precipitation.

Bumping River Population

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Counts		none		none	none		none		none		none	
Total	151		147			127		89		62		85
Kids	43		44			33		25		19		31
Hunts												
Sold	1	2	3	3	3	3	2	2	0	2	1	1
Killed	1	1	3	3	3	3	3	1	0	2	1	1



One guideline of WDFW's 2015 Game Management Plan said hunting would only be considered when a population had at least 100 goats. This guideline implemented the best available science found in Hamel et al. 2006, and Rice and Gay 2010, whose studies showed that hunting can be harmful for mountain goats, especially when populations are small. But over the last 10 years, WDFW ignored this 100-goat guideline many times in order to sell more trophy hunts. The Bumping River Goat Population, below, shows the results. Hunting also continued in other goat populations when counts were below 100, like populations on the South Shore and North Shore of Lake Chelan and those in the Blazed Ridge and Boulder River areas, also likely resulting in direct and indirect negative impacts.

This raises questions about another guideline, which says that WDFW will not prioritize income to the Department and/or recreational opportunity over wildlife conservation.

When adopting both its 2015 Plan

and its new 2026 Plan, WDFW refused to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to study and disclose the negative impacts of the hunting. Instead, a Determination of Non-Significance (DNS) was used. It said there will be no significant negative impacts. Evidence was not provided to support this claim. This DNS is especially irresponsible for mountain goats because the best science agrees that this species is not only facing many other threats but they are also easily harmed by hunting.

Mountain goat hunting based on little science and data

WDFW continues to ignore the science about the negative impacts of hunting. Studies show wild species may be more fearful of humans where and when hunting occurs, increasing the disturbance and displacement that occurs from all kinds of human activities. This is obvious in National Parks. Smaller populations are easily harmed by hunting because of their lack of genetic diversity as well as diversity

The best part of climbing at Washington Pass: pausing long enough to watch a mother and her kid go about their day. In the North Cascades, it's these quiet reminders of wildness that make every visit special.

in ages, knowledge, experiences, and personalities of the individual members. This is why small populations are more likely to become extinct even without hunting.

Aerial surveyors are unable to accurately distinguish males from females. Only two age categories can be accurately counted, first-year kids and the other goats. Many of "the other goats" are not mature and breeding adults even though WDFW may call them adults. Female goats mature late and may not breed until they are 4 or 5 years old, or older.

WDFW fails to account for the fact that when hunters mistakenly kill females, orphaned kids have a low chance of surviving. WDFW does not

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Mountain goats

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account for goats who are injured and/or killed by hunters but are not found and reported. Biologists have suggested that a loss of 30 percent or more should be added to reported harvest for crippling and poaching that includes goats who were injured or killed but not reported. (Johnson 1983). Goats killed by hunters probably would not have died anyway from natural causes (Chadwick 2002).

WDFW's goal in its 2015 and 2026 Plans is to have stable to increasing populations. Both Plans based hunting on the same modelling (Hamel et al. 2006 and Rice and Gay 2010). But WDFW ignores many of the warnings in these studies. In Hamel et al. 2006, authors recommended not hunting populations that were declining. Rice and Gay said their modelling had a $\geq 50\%$ probability for producing stable or increasing populations. Authors of both studies cautioned that their modelling may not be accurate for some populations because of differences in age and sex ratios.

The predictions in these now very old studies were based on data collected many decades ago. Today's mountain goats are facing a very different world because of the impacts of climate change, human disturbance and habitat loss. Why does WDFW assume that these models will still be accurate?

WDFW's new 2026 Plan still has the guideline that requires populations of at least 100 goats before hunting is considered. The new Plan focuses on killing three percent or less of the so-called "adult goats" in each hunted population rather than up to 4 percent. A new feature might reduce this three percent depending on how many females are killed by hunters over three years. This does not adequately address the impacts.

Translocating more goats part of 2026 Plan

Like the 2015 Plan, WDFW's 2026 Plan proposes translocating more

goats to our state. When 325 goats were moved from the Olympics to the Cascades, goat abundance didn't seem to improve. Of the 115 collared goats monitored by the Tulalip Tribe, only three survived. Only one of the 36 monitored by the Stillaguamish Tribe survived. No first-year kids were successfully reunited with their mothers. Twenty-two goats were injured or died during translocation.

Translocations are irresponsible and unethical because of WDFW's problematic management and its plan to kill up to three percent of the goats in populations we already have. WDFW lacks adequate funding to monitor and collect the necessary data on our goats. It has failed to identify and protect critical habitats. Adding more goats will not fix these problems. WDFW must focus on protecting and perpetuating the goats we already have.

Anacortes resident and retired teacher Martha Hall loves mountains and spending quality time with animals, wild or domesticated.

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Book Review

The Hour of the Land: A Personal Topography of America's National Parks by Terry Tempest Williams

Reviewed by David Fluharty

Ken Burns has famously declared the designation of National Parks to be “America’s Best Idea.” On the cusp of America’s 250th anniversary Ken Burns’ words are being contested by the current administration. The jumble of insults streaming out of the White House lays waste to the concept of the National Parks, Monuments, and Refuges as special places. We are being told that the National Parks should not present a critical perspective on the troubled history of the nation. We are seeing the resolute employees of the National Parks being let go by a rogue agency (DOGE) led by a man who believes we should be colonizing Mars rather than saving the earth. We are seeing Public Lands proposed for sale while billions of dollars are being poured into military assets sufficient to destroy the earth. Even the National Mall Reflecting pool is given national attention by a President whose whims are being gratified to “presto change-o” fix leaks and recolor the pool. The failure to follow administrative procedures resulted in an embarrassing failure that is now being blamed on vandals – Crazy!

In 2024 President Biden proposed a \$3.8 billion request for the National Park Service (NPS) budget. Mr. Trump, in 2026 proposed a \$2.1 billion budget for the NPS which would result in a reduction in staffing levels of approximately 8,130 full-time equivalent employees – roughly half of the agency employment. Bipartisan efforts in the Bush Administration to redress the NPS needs cite the figure of twelve billion dollars as the backlog of infrastructure needs in the National Parks. What would the backlog be estimated to be today?

In search of sanity after being confronted with these absurd challenges, I looked to my bookshelf for solace. I saw there a modest book that I had

*Reading The
Hour of Land
restored my
confidence that
America still
loves its parks.*

not read but remembered vaguely had been written in anticipation of the 100th Anniversary of the NPS in 2016: *The Hour of the Land* by Terry Tempest Williams.

Williams has earned her place in the panoply of American nature writers along with Henry David Thoreau, Wallace Stegner, and Edward Abbey with her award-winning books *Refuge*, *Desert Quartet*, and *Finding Beauty in a Broken World*. She brings her own intimate take and social commentary to the natural world. More importantly, in this instance, *The Hour of the Land* is “part memoir, part natural history, and part social critique... (it)... is a meditation and a manifest on why wild lands matter to the soul of America” to quote from the book jacket.

For lovers of large Western National Parks like me, Williams is at her best when writing about contemporary visits to Grand Teton National Park, Big Bend National Park, Gates of the Arctic National Park, Acadia National Park, Canyonlands National Park, Theodore Roosevelt National Park, and Glacier National Park. She weaves a personal web of sight, smell, and experience—sometimes solo, other times shared with family, friends, and strangers. We meet the people she bumps into along the way, from lone visitors to park superintendents. I found myself travel-

ling, seeing and feeling along with her even though we were seldom far from a road or a visitor center.

Williams has a way with words that appeals to me. “Any wind will tell you it is the long view that counts. Big Bend National Park is the long view—stark, lonely and soul saving. I have waited all my life to see this kind of vista.” Doesn’t it make you want to visit Big Bend?

I also tagged along with her while visiting places I had never been: Gettysburg National Military Park, Effigy Mounds, Gulf Islands National Seashore, and César E. Chávez National Monument. Places I knew the NPS had in its custody but were focused on history or culture, which I did not value as much as my favored big, get-lost-in-national parks. Through her eyes, imagination and attention to history and people, I came to regard these other places in a different light.

While I thoroughly enjoyed visiting these parts of the NPS system with Williams, my interest sometimes flagged when family genealogy became too heavy for my ability to track its relevance to the narrative. However, I sometimes found myself wanting her to write more about the difficulties facing NPS employees in managing and maintaining our parks with the surging post-Covid visitation and social media expectations.

Reading *The Hour of the Land* did restore my confidence that America still loves its parks. Fortunately, too, my faith in America’s support of parks was confirmed by Congress approving a \$3.27 billion budget allocation for the NPS in 2026. Even though this funding does not address the budget shortfall facing the NPS, there is widespread bipartisan support for National Parks—America’s Best Idea. Happy 250th Birthday, America the Beautiful!



As teens, Jim Whittaker and twin brother Lou summited Mount Olympus and climbed many other North Cascades peaks, later becoming guides on Mount Rainier, and when drafted into the Army, training soldiers in skiing, climbing, mountain maneuvers and bivouacs. Photo: THE SPRING TRUST FOR TRAILS.

Mt. Baker geothermal consent

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research into environmental, energy, and natural resource issues, reports that superhot reservoirs suitable for fracking-like extraction processes are required for cost-competitive geothermal electrical production (RfF 2026). Ominously, the Hotrock Energy Research Organization states, “Unfortunately, the areas closest to the edifice are both inaccessible and protected. Future resource exploration plans will include consideration of areas excluded from development.”

Toasting Jim Whittaker, 1929-2026: 97 years on the edge

Jim Whittaker’s life was full of firsts: first American to climb Mount Everest, first full-time paid employee of Recreational Equipment Inc (REI), where he eventually became CEO, and an early and passionate supporter of conservation. In 1968 his testimony before the U.S. Congress helped establish North Cascades National Park and the Pasayten Wilderness.

Here’s what he told the Subcommittee on National Parks and Recreation of the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs in a congressional hearing held in Seattle that April, representing REI:

My name is Jim Whittaker. I am chairman of the State Parks and Recreation Commission. I would like to give the statement of intent for the North Cascades public hearing.

I support the current Senate bill No. 1321 and the establishment of a national park of 505,000 acres and two recreation areas; totaling 684,305 acres. It is my opinion that the National Park Service can provide and maintain the best possible facility in the North Cascades. I feel this is the best compromise of many different opinions.

Thank you, Jim. You accomplished much and your legacies live on!

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Joe and Margaret Miller helped to document what would have been lost if Big Beaver Valley had been flooded by High Ross Dam, circa 1969. —PHOTO COURTESY OF TOM PERRY