

METHOW CONSERVANCY NEWS

For Wildlife ♦ For Farming ♦ For Community ♦ Forever



*Winter 2015 -16
Newsletter*

December 2015

*Inspiring people to care for
the land of the Methow
Valley since 1996*

This Issue Features:

From the Director

*Behind the Scenes of a
Conservation Easement*

*The Corvids Connection:
The Birds Who Think
Like Humans*

Your Impact!

*Spawning The Last
Salmon*

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Awards*

and so much more!

Sowing Hope



On a cold, foggy, damp morning in November, more than 60 volunteers formed a Seed Mob, spreading native bluebunch wheatgrass seed in areas disturbed by the Okanogan County Electric Co-op's necessary re-routing of the Twisp River powerline after the summer's fires.

There are moments you realize you are part of something bigger than just yourself. Moments when you actually feel what the word community means.

In the midst of all the distressing and depressing news from around the world, moments like this year's Seed Mob stand out as markers to remind us that people can do a lot of good.

The Seed Mob concept is simple -- spread native seed right before the snow flies into areas that were disturbed by human activity during the fire with the hope of fending off weeds. The logistics of a Seed Mob and the feelings it evokes, however are anything but simple.

More than 60 volunteers gathered at a cold, damp, incredibly foggy Winthrop Park at 9 a.m. on a November Saturday morning eager to do something to help a landscape they love.

During this summer's Twisp River fire, extensive damage occurred to the Okanogan County Electric

Co-op's powerline servicing that community. Much of the line had to be re-built and a portion of it was even re-routed.

Such necessary fixes were done with incredible speed and with as much care as possible. In some

Methow seeds -- seeds literally cultivated from grasses naturally growing here in the Methow Valley. The fact that we have access to such specific seed stock is unusual and definitely ups the possibility for the re-seeding to work.



Rob Crandall of Methow Natives looks on as volunteer teams learn their assignments for the Seed Mob. Rob taught all how to effectively seed and shared the unique story of native seed used.

remote areas, the Co-Op went in on horseback to minimize disturbance.

Nonetheless the effort did impact the ground and the potential for a resurgence of weeds in these humanly disturbed areas left the Co-Op seeking a partner to fend off the noxious villains.

After the success of our 2014 Seed Mob, we knew that Methow Conservancy members and volunteers were up to the challenge again.

Thanks to the foresight of donors, we were able to secure native

Armed with metal rakes, a few seed spreaders, backpacks, more than 150 pounds of seed, and a whole lot of determination, the volunteers split into four teams to tackle the remote areas along the powerlines.

What we discovered that day grew to be so much more than expertise at the right density of seed to spread per acre.

We spent humble moments quietly walking amidst blackened ground, feeling the weight of this summer's fire and the human loss it caused.

We found opportunities for joy,

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Page 1: Jason Paulsen (small inset photo), Stephen Matera

Page 2: Kevin Kogut, Bruce Morrison

Page 3: Steve Bondi, Mary Kiesau

Page 4 & 5: Julie Grialou (upper left), Jason Paulsen (upper right), all the rest by Mary Kiesau

Page 6: Stephen Matera

Page 7: from the collection of Phil Davis, Heide Andersen

Page 8: Classroom in Bloom, Mary Kiesau

From the Director: by Jason Paulsen

Partnerships in Action

Like any of us who have lived through the experience of two back-to-back summers of historic wildfire, I'm often asked to reflect on how I feel it has impacted our community and our work here at the Methow Conservancy.

I struggle in answering that question. I mourn for the tragic loss of life and I can only imagine the turmoil that goes with losing everything you own and the challenge of seeing the land you have come to call home altered so dramatically. And yet, in other ways, I can see how these events have strengthened our community and our organization. In fact, I think our collective response to the fires will ultimately be seen as an essential ingredient in the evolution of the Methow Valley 15+ years from now.

I see a new level of communication, coordination and partnership that has emerged in our community since the day the words "Carlton Complex" became part of our vocabulary.

While it is regrettable that it took a disaster the size of the 2014 Carlton Complex Fire to catalyze this new reality, I have never felt more confident about this community's determination to look toward the future together and to take an active role in shaping the future of our community through a spirit of cooperation.

From partnerships aimed at inspiring emergency planning and Firewise preparedness at the neighborhood level -- to efforts to bring greater resiliency to our small business community -- to a commitment to ensure available and affordable housing in our community, diverse partners are coming together to shape the future of the Methow Valley in new and exciting ways.

The common denominator of two years of fire reaching from one side of Okanogan County to the other has provided additional opportunities to forge new relationships of trust across Loup Loup Pass as well. This is especially true for us here at the Methow Conservancy where we have opened new relationships with key players including the Okanogan Conservation District and our state and federal land managers.

Additionally, we've been invited to sit at the table to provide guidance to County Planning Staff as they work to update the zoning and subdivisions codes. Two Methow Conservancy staff members sit with a small group of representatives from across the County to inform the



process with the 30+ years of good land use work that has occurred here in the Methow Valley.

2015 has been filled with important work, all connected by this theme of working in new ways with partners old and new and to ensure that the conservation values we stand for are represented in the future we are creating.

I feel fortunate that this organization has the capacity to be engaged in so many of these conversations as a constructive participant.

That capacity is made possible by each of you, our members, and the more than 100 business partners who join as our partners as we work to inspire people for this unique and special place.

May the holiday season and coming winter provide you with opportunities to enjoy what you make possible here in the Methow Valley, as well as opportunities to get involved in shaping the future through many of the exciting initiatives we have underway.

Happy Winter,

Jason Paulsen
Executive Director

Honoring our Conservation Partners -- You!



We hope you will stop by our office the next time you are in downtown Winthrop and take a look at the final installation of our donor recognition art from the *Imagine the Methow Campaign*.

The beautiful cedar wood carving was created by Methow Valley artisan Bruce Morrison and it is now accompanied by a cedar "donor register" that inside contains a printed book listing all of the more than 1500 donors to the campaign. The trail register was crafted by local woodworker Rick Swanson (pictured at left with his work) and features cedar from a homestead in the Methow Valley.

As Bruce Morrison notes in his artist's statement: "This carving honors the vision, boldness, and generosity of the Methow Conservancy's work and their donor support. May it connect us with those in the future who behold, inhabit, and protect this landscape."

The *Imagine the Methow Campaign* raised more than \$20 million for conservation from more than 1,500 donors and to-date has created 51 new conservation easements in the Methow Valley.

"We're proud to honor our donors and their vision for the future of the Methow Valley with such a creative and lasting memorial," says Associate Director Sarah Brooks. "We hope everyone will come by, open up the register, and find their name."



Behind the Scenes

by Jeanne White, Land Project Manager

Among the best examples of partnerships in action are our conservation easements that bring together a landowner's vision for their land and our commitment to forever. You have helped create 108 conservation easements from the Columbia River to Mazama, protecting more than 8,400 acres of wildlife habitat, farmland, and scenic views. Conservation easements are complex legal transactions and so we asked Land Projects Manager Jeanne White to share a bit of her behind-the-scenes perspective on how this land protection partnership comes together.



Just one of the 108 properties you have protected in the Methow Valley with a conservation easement.

Having joined the Conservancy staff in 2009, I have enjoyed the remarkable push to protect land with conservation easements, a wave of work funded by you through the *Imagine the Methow Capital Campaign*. Though we announce our successful easements in postcards and electronic newsletters, I still find that there is a bit of mystery surrounding what a conservation easement is.

When I am asked at a dinner party "what do you do for the Conservancy?" My response, "I work with John Sunderland to negotiate and protect properties with conservation easements," just doesn't seem to invite follow-up questions.

At a basic (boring?) level, a conservation easement is a permanent legal agreement that runs with the land. This means that it goes on, in perpetuity, remaining in place upon the transfer of the property. It restricts where development can go on the property, how much development can occur and what activities are consistent with the

protection of the property's conservation values. This is important work to get right, so our due diligence and legal process takes time, often up to eighteen months or longer.

In spite of how legalistic this all sounds, there is nothing dry about the inspiration of our landowners and the special places they call home.

At the outset of the conservation easement process we have the pleasure of meeting with a landowner on their property to learn their objectives and to take stock of the conservation values that will guide our easement drafting process. With everything from 500 year old cedar groves up Lost River, to riverfront property throughout our vast watershed, to multi-generational apple orchards or alfalfa farms, these properties are home to

endangered or threatened species, prime and unique soils, floodplain bestowing room for our rivers to move, or signature scenic views that we experience daily in our adventures.

Of primary importance is to negotiate the terms of the conservation easement with the landowner, which depending upon the landowner's needs and the character of the property, can be smooth sailing or quite extensive.

Once we have fundamental agreement, we continue our due diligence with surveyors to ensure property lines are understood, appraisers to establish a value for a purchased easement, the title company to ensure no existing uses could jeopardize the conservation

objectives, the county or Department of Ecology to resolve any land use or water rights issues and finally, the Methow Conservancy Board, which reviews our work for its consistency with our mission, ensuring every dollar is well-spent.

The culmination of this work is a real estate closing, transactional and mundane, though the resulting conservation easement is anything but.

The protection of these properties is rooted in love for this place and the desire to pass down what we enjoy to future generations, a place that sustains us both physically and spiritually.

What an amazing job I have, even if it doesn't make great cocktail conversation!

The Corvid Connection

by Mary Kiesau, Educational Programs Director

Have you had a corvid connection? Perhaps a crow that you feed regularly or a raven that follows you on morning jaunts? Have you watched flocks of magpies and wondered why they have such long tails? Maybe you've fed a gray jay at the Washington Pass overlook from the palm of your hand?

Corvids - the group of birds that includes ravens, crows, jays, magpies, Clark's nutcrackers, and more - is the focus of the Methow Conservancy's 12th annual "Conservation Course."

Like a lot of us, I find ravens and their feathered brethren fascinating. Years ago, I read Bernd Heinrich's book, *Mind of a Raven*, and was hooked. Then, in 2012, I read University of Washington professor John Marzluff's book, *Gifts of the Crow*, and invited him to speak in Winthrop. Many of you probably remember that fantastic program where we learned how incredibly smart and adaptable crows are.

Part of the reason many of us find ravens, jays and other corvids so fascinating is their complex social structure and behaviors (which often reminds us of humans), and their intelligence that rivals, and

sometimes exceeds, that of many primates.

Birds in the corvid family are mischievous, playful, social, and smart. They mate for life and associate with relatives and neighbors for years. They are also highly adaptable and have distinct calls and other modes of communication.

Corvids tend to be large birds that we can see easily and, for better or worse, get to know them in many settings, from urban areas to farms to following us on backpacking trips. They are aware of us and stay away from or learn to recognize and approach us depending on whether we are friend or foe. There is also a rich history of stories and mythology surrounding corvids.

"The Corvid Connection" Conservation Course will meet on Monday nights at the Twisp River



Learn more about Corvids - including the gray jays - in our conservation course this January/February.

Pub, from Jan. 25 - Feb 29 plus a field-trip on March 5th. (The week of President's Day, class will meet on Tuesday.) Tuition is \$170/person. Need-based scholarships available. See all the details, including individual class instructors, at www.methowconservancy.org/conservation_course_2016.html.

You are the Methow Conservancy: Thank you for the impact you make possible!

We're dedicating this centerfold to some postcard moments from the last year that we think capture all the big and small (but all important) ways you help inspire people to care for the land of the Methow Valley. Be sure to let us know what you hope to see in next issue's postcards by emailing us at info@methowconservancy.org, calling us at 509-996-2870, or stopping by our office at 315 Riverside in downtown Winthrop.



Impact: You've protected more than 8,400 acres of incredible wildlife habitat, agricultural ground, and scenic views in the Methow valley, including this amazing spot in the upper valley, our 108th conservation easement. Easements ensure that the land stays in private hands and on the local tax rolls, while permanently protecting the conservation values of the property.



Impact: You ensure that the views enjoyed from the Methow valley's incredible ski trail system are protected. 20 families along the ski trail system have voluntarily placed conservation easements on their land, protecting more than 1,443 acres near the trails!



Impact: You inspire the next generation with our monthly School Yard Science program for 4th graders at Methow valley Elementary School. Students get a chance to join us outside on their campus and experience conservation first-hand.



Impact: Once again, you made sure we could offer free site visits to property owners with burned land. You also gave us the capacity to have our staff serve as a source of insight and information to state and federal leaders about what our county needs post-fire.

Thank You!



Impact: You make sure that visitors and residents alike can get out onto the land and learn about the Methow valley. This spring and summer Mary Kiesau offered free birding and wildflower walks almost once a week!



Impact: You help us engage in partnership projects with groups like Trout Unlimited that bring significant opportunities to improve irrigation efficiencies and keep more water in the rivers. This partnership was recently highlighted in a video produced by the Thriving Communities Initiative at the Whidbey Island Institute as a model for community-based projects conserving water.

Sowing Hope (con't.)

seeing the delicate fern-like shoots of a yarrow plant emerging from the soil. We marveled at nature's resilience.

We shared stories with each other of our experiences of the fire. Some awaited word from afar, others lived extremely close, and others still bore the scars of 2014's fires. We connected.

We learned from each other. Methow Conservancy staff biologists and naturalists shared what they were seeing and Rob Crandall from Methow Natives and Dave Gottula from

the Electric Co-Op offered their perspectives. We understand that renewal will take time.

We saw first-hand seeds hitting the ground, lightly covered in soil and collectively expressed our thanks to a Valley we all love and placed our hopes for their germination next spring. We saw the hope and optimism expressed in each seed.

As Rob reminded us, it is hard to predict what percentage of our seeds will successfully emerge. So much depends on the winter's snow cover, the spring's melt and precipitation. But, without a

doubt, had we done nothing, the native plants would struggle against noxious weeds. And, had we done nothing, we would have missed the human opportunity to connect to the land and each other.

If you missed the Seed Mob, don't worry. We may organize future Mobs to re-visit areas where our initial seeding might need a boost. This reflection was written by Sarah Brooks, Associate Director, who helped plan the logistics of the Seed Mob along with Julie Grialou, the Methow Conservancy's Conservation Biologist.

Seeds of Optimism - A Photo Essay

Professional photographer Stephen Matera joined us for this year's Seed Mob. Steve has a cabin in Mazama and after the fires this summer called us to say he wanted to volunteer his expertise to help document renewal. Below are some of the moments he captured from the Seed Mob, using his camera to show all the emotions from the event. We are so grateful -- thank you, Steve!



Spawning The Last Salmon

This spring, we will help sponsor The Merc Playhouse's original production of The Last Salmon, a chamber musical based on the book by local author Phil Davis. The indie-pop and hip-hop production--think live-versions of Frozen or Finding Nemo--adapted by Ki Gottberg and with music by award-winning composer Casey James, tells the story of the life cycle of the wild salmon. As The Merc writes, "The miracle of [the salmon's] return to the river years later holds both truth and hope for our future as we learn to understand the issues of environmental justice and sustainability from a salmon's viewpoint." We asked author Phil Davis to answer a few questions about the production before opening night this February.

What inspired you to write this story?

Years ago there was a story of ONE returning fish in a Snake River sockeye run. That was just a shocking and depressing image to me. The last of something--under our "watch." Then, about 20 years ago, at our Chewuch house, my young son Charlie and I were watching from our deck a large chinook, struggling in a soft, shallow current as his life was nearing its end. We were talking about how cool and amazing the salmon life cycle is, when we saw some splashes near the salmon, which happened to be a couple of kids throwing rocks at it. Without any prompting, Charlie ran down to the river, yelling at the kids to stop. He then waded out to the salmon and gently nudged it into a deeper section of the river where it turned and drifted downstream. A story is born.

What's it like to have your book turned into a musical?

I can honestly say when I wrote the story that a musical rendition would not have been my first choice. But what do I know. Ki's vision of adapting the

story around music and storytelling was really the perfect way to bring the story to an all-ages audience in a really fun and entertaining way.

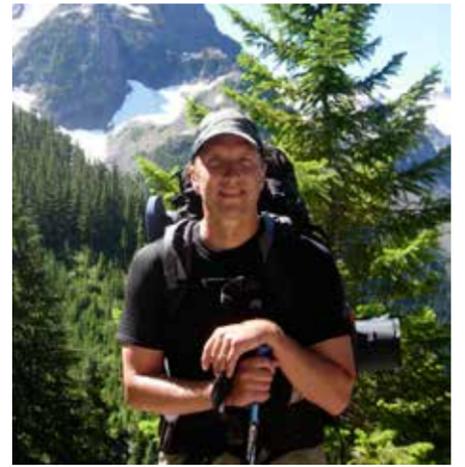
What was it like to see the sneak preview on stage in October?

The preview at The Merc was truly special for me and [my wife] Cathy. How fun to see the story come to life through these super talented performers. I kept thinking, "Am I enjoying this just because it's my story?" No way! It was really good!

What's your wildest dream for this project?

That everyone who sees it LOVES it, and that it can maybe contribute positively to our ongoing conversation about how we 'take' from our planet in such a way that we are never confronted with the 'last' of anything. But really, wildest dream? Dreamworks and Pixar in a bidding war for the movie rights.

At the time this article goes to press, The Merc is still seeking the last financing for this project. If you are interested in supporting this production, e-mail Sarah at sarah@methowconservancy.org for more information.



Local author Phil Davis will see his book *The Last Salmon* turned into a kid-friendly musical at The Merc this winter!

From Trepidation to Awe

by Heide Andersen, Stewardship Director

As soon as the snow melts, Heide Andersen, Julie Grialou, and Mary Kiesau pack their conservation easement monitoring kits and set out to cover the more than 8,400 acres of land we have protected with conservation easements. The eight month process helps us ensure that all of the conservation values we intend to protect in our easements are still being protected. Plus the visits offer wonderful opportunities to meet with landowners and share in our wonder at the land. Below, Stewardship Director Heide Andersen offers some personal reflections from this past year's monitoring efforts.

I have to admit that I entered the 2015 monitoring season with trepidation.

Most years, our stewardship staff face a mixed feeling of being daunted, yet eagerly anticipating, the visits to our 108 conservation easements. While it usually takes from April through November to tromp around, thoroughly documenting and photographing each easement, it is during this time that each of us gets to reacquaint ourselves with our favorite view on each property, see if the eagles have nested again or the beavers have returned, while also hearing news from our landowners on which creatures they have observed, their latest home project, or about the activities of their family members.

This spring was different. Our community had experienced the Carlton Complex and Rising Eagle fires the summer before. Ten percent of our easements had burned, from being singed on the outer edges to being thoroughly and completely altered by the firestorms and flooding of last year. We were fortunate to have a welcome blanket of early snow last winter that covered up the black and ashen scars. It was easy to temporarily forget. But with the spring thaw came the trepidation. What would the mummified landscape reveal with the melting away of its bandages?

My first monitoring visit of the year is always one of my favorite experiences. I join the ranch manager on horseback to view corners of a property that are rarely seen but offer dramatic perspectives of our valley. We crept around the back of the property, discussing the new addition of Wagyu cattle to the usually homogeneous Black Angus herd and checking in with a recently contracted weed warrior attempting battle with the hoary cress.



Visiting one of our conservation easement properties this year, Heide Andersen takes in the view of spring after the fires.

Annual Awards Announced

This year we celebrated the “partnership” theme in our annual conservation awards, which were presented at our Holiday Party in the Winthrop Barn on December 1st.



Classroom in Bloom earned the Ken White Award this year for their awesome school yard garden and ecology programs.

Conservancy Associate Director Sarah Brooks noted that Ken White helped people find their own way to a connection with the land and that is what we see happening every day at *Classroom in Bloom*.

Jason Paulsen then presented our Susie Stephens award to Kirsten Cook of the Okanogan Conservation District. Susie Stephens served as the Methow Conservancy's Development Director years ago and left an indelible mark on the community and organization with her energy and passion for helping others. Kirsten shares that energy and has been instrumental in mobilizing Firewise efforts county wide and countless other recovery outreach programs post-fire. Her award reads: “For tirelessly helping Okanogan County recover from two summers of fires, for inspiring neighbors to be prepared for future fires, and for being an amazing example of optimism and empathy when your community has needed you most.”

The final award of the evening was our “You Inspire Us” award for those who are excellent examples of what it means to inspire people to care for the land and community. Carlene Anders of Pateros was present to receive this year's award for her unfailing commitment to the long-term recovery process post-fire in Okanogan County. As Jason noted, “The most important take-away if you don't yet know this year's recipient is that there simply isn't enough time in this evening for me to describe all the ways she deserves this award.” From organizing hundreds of volunteers in the re-build effort to spending hours making the case for post-fire support to the county, Carlene has emerged as the leader of long-term recovery in the county.



Jason Paulsen honors the incredible and tireless work of Carlene Anders in the post-fire long-term recovery effort county-wide.

If you have ideas for worthy recipients next year, please let us know. A full list of past recipients can be found on our website at <http://www.methowconservancy.org/awards.html>.

Jason Paulsen honors the incredible and tireless work of Carlene Anders in the post-fire long-term recovery effort county-wide.

Events Calendar

See www.methowconservancy.org/events.html for more details and new calendar additions. “First Tuesday” programs are free and open to everyone. To register for any class, contact us at 509-996-2870.

Jan. 12: “First Tuesday” (on the 2nd Tuesday): Civita di Bagnoregio: A Special Italian Village with Lessons for the Methow 7:00–8:30pm at the Twisp River Pub.

Jan 25 - March 5: The Corvid Connection, winter Conservation Course, Mondays, 6:00-8:00 p.m. plus a field-trip March 5. The week of President's Day class will meet on Tuesday (Feb 16). \$170. Scholarships available.

Jan 30: Winter Wildlife Tracking, 8:30am–12:30pm, \$45. Explore the winter landscape of the Methow Valley with professional wildlife tracker and educator, Dave Moskowitz. Learn how to identify and interpret wildlife tracks and signs so that you can connect with the hidden lives of the creatures that share this land with us! Registration is necessary and space is limited to 12 people.

Jan 31: Winter Wildlife Tracking, 8:30am–12:30pm, \$45. Same as above - choose one.

Feb 2: “First Tuesday” program: Reclaimers with Ana Maria Spagna, 7:00-8:30pm, location to be announced.

March 1: “First Tuesday” program: Mountain Caribou with David Moskowitz, 7:00-8:30pm, location to be announced.

April 2-3: Wildlife Track & Sign Certification Class, \$200. Spend two full days in the field with professional wildlife tracker, naturalist and educator, David Moskowitz. Registration is necessary and space is limited to 12 people.

April 5: “First Tuesday” program: Ecologically Aware Firewise: Backyards and Beyond, 7:00-8:30pm, location to be announced.

May 3: “First Tuesday” program: The Triumph of Seeds with Thor Hanson, 7:00-8:30pm, location to be announced.

June 7: “First Tuesday” program: The Methow's Native Plants with Rob Crandall, 7:00-8:30pm, in the Native Plant Demonstration Garden at the Methow Valley Interpretive Center at TwispWorks.

And stay tuned for our popular spring and summer bird and plant “walk and talks!” These casual, 2-hour field classes will start in late March or early April.

Want to stay up-to-date on the Methow Conservancy?

Make sure you receive our monthly E-News!

We only print a newsletter twice a year - but each month we send out the latest and greatest on conservation in the Methow via E-News. To sign up, e-mail us at info@methowconservancy.org

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You may also donate with a credit card. Use our secure on-line donation system.

Go to www.methowconservancy.org and click the “Make a Donation” button.

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Thank You!

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