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Methow Conservancy

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

Picture This

A picture is worth a thousand words. With this edition of our annual Impact Report, we're testing out that long-used adage — and we hope you'll let us know if it holds true.

When we sat down to brainstorm all the news we had to share from the past year from all the different ways we approach inspiring people to care for the land, we were, quite frankly, overwhelmed. It appeared that we would have a 20-page newsletter with 10-point font articles that somehow just wouldn't adequately capture our work, our values, and our challenges.

And, that's when someone said something along the lines of "well, you know, a picture is worth a thousand words." So we thought we would try to convey a year of conservation in photographs (with some short words and some QR codes to take you to more in-depth writing if you are interested). The result is this publication!

I've been pondering why a picture is worth a thousand words. There's something about a photograph that captures the emotion, the feel, the "vibe" of a particular moment in a way that can be hard to replicate in words. It's seeing the joy of someone pulling barbed wire, of all things, or the peaceful beauty of riverfront property protected for wildlife.

When I think about the work of the Methow Conservancy, I don't actually think about metrics — the acres protected or the number of birds who visit and enjoy Sunny M. I think about, for lack of a better term, the vibe. For me, it's the power of seeing a community rooted in caring for the



land (and each other); it's the awe that strikes when you see a baby fawn stand for the first time, making you realize that we live in an amazing Valley that is home to so many more beings than just us; and it's the optimism that is required to take on the audacious goal of protecting a place we all love forever. I hope you see that power, awe, and optimism in this edition of our annual Impact Report, and I hope you feel those vibes whenever you interact with the Methow Conservancy.

Speaking of vibes, one of our favorite events is our annual Cider Squeeze, held this year on September 28. We hope to see you there! Check our event poster on the back page for details.

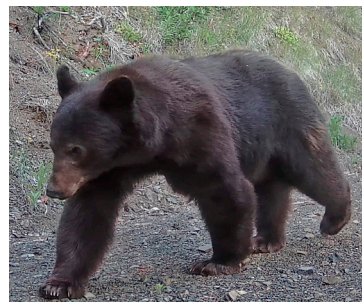
Thank you for making all these moments and impacts possible — we really are one team and we couldn't do what we do without you.

With appreciation for all the good vibes,

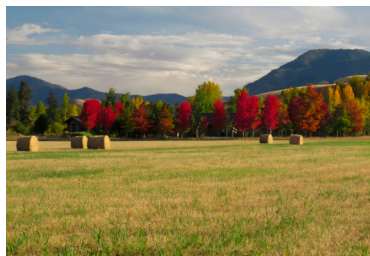
Sarah Brooks
Executive Director



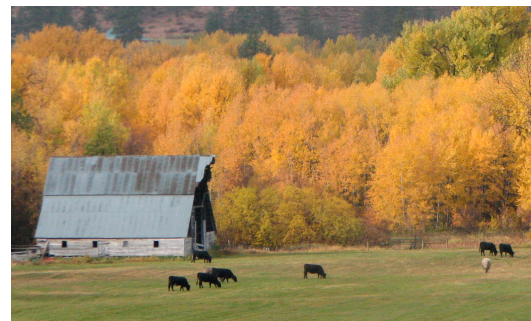
We rely on volunteers to help us take care of land we own and steward. From weeding, to planting, to cleaning, to fence removal, volunteers work with us to improve the health of many of the Methow Valley's most-loved landscapes. This volunteer planting native shrubs in a riparian area is just one of the nearly 500 volunteers who contribute to our efforts.



One of the Methow Valley's charismatic megafauna, black bears generally don't pose a threat to humans; however, habituation to humans is increasing. That's one of the reasons we seek out opportunities to protect wide swaths of wildlife habitat, to give these far-ranging animals places to roam. Bearwise.org has information to help people live more responsibly in bear country.



At the core of our work is our land protection program. Conservation easements, ownership, and other tools allow us to be strategic and creative with conservation outcomes that benefit the ecosystem as a whole, including both human and wild communities.



The agricultural landscape is important to Methow Valley residents and visitors, for economic and aesthetic reasons. Since 1996, we have worked to keep agriculture viable for local farmers and ranchers, primarily by protecting farmlands and rangeland acres with conservation easements.

Our Work

PROTECTING HEALTHY LAND AND WATER

Since 1996, we have protected nearly 12,000 acres from Lost River to Pateros through conservation easements and ownership, including 33 miles of shoreline and more than 2,400 acres of irrigated farmland, plus additional rangeland acres.



All of this provides important habitat for the Methow Valley's vast wildlife population.

CONNECTING PEOPLE TO THE LAND

We believe the more people know about and find joy in the natural wonders of the Methow Valley, the more



they will want to work with us to protect them. We inspire people of all ages to learn about the Methow Valley's varied landscapes so that they will want to make a difference on the ground.

Through educational classes, social gatherings, and a wide array of volunteer opportunities, we not only meet people interested in conservation, but we also help to reinforce a community ethic of caring for the land.

SUPPORTING LOCAL AGRICULTURE

We recognize that farming and ranching are critical components of the Methow Valley's rural character. We support local agriculture by protecting prime agricultural land, supporting the launch of a regional USDA meat processing unit, promoting local food to consumers, helping local families get access to locally-grown products and leasing farmland to local farmers. We also host an annual Farmers Forum, a one-day conference for local agriculturalists, designed to nurture ecological and economic resilience in Methow Valley agriculture.



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CONSERVATION IS ... *connection*

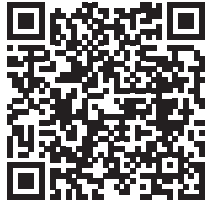


classes, field
trips, farm tours,
& First Tuesdays

Our field trips take you to places near and far in the Methow Valley, to explore birding, botany, hydrogeology, and other topics that provide greater understanding of our incredible watershed.



Conservation is connection. Without people connected to the land, our conservation work in the Methow Valley simply couldn't happen. We are always experimenting with ways to bring people together around their shared love for the land. From our long-standing First Tuesday educational series to the programs we lead in the school district, our efforts to connect people to the land have five goals: to inspire understanding; to engage people in being thoughtful stewards; to promote access to land; to cultivate the next generation of conservationists; and to create a community identity around caring for the land. We hope that all who love the Methow Valley feel inspired to learn more about it.



Our Schoolyard Science program with Methow Valley Elementary School fourth graders inspires and nurtures curiosity about the natural world. Each year culminates in a trip to Homestream Park, where Methow Elder Mark Miller talks to students about the Methow Descendants' past, present, and future role in caring for the Methow Valley, as well as about the roles of salmon and salmon habitat in Native culture.



Our summer Farm Tour series takes guests onto the soil at local farms and ranches, to learn about farming practices and products ranging from seeds to produce, meat, dairy, and grains. Attending a Farm Tour is an engaging way to meet the farmers behind the foods.

The Cybertracker classes we host with professional wildlife tracker, naturalist, and educator David Moskowitz are some of our most popular offerings.

We seek opportunities to get people out on the land. Some of our past field trips have included alpine botany studies, bird walks, hydrology and geology tours, and even Star Parties, where instead of remaining earthbound, we look skyward and learn about the cosmos.



Our stewardship efforts rely on volunteers from the community. Over the past two years we have removed close to four miles of barbed wire from places where it is not necessary. The old wire gets recycled and the t-posts get reused by community members, thanks to Methow Recycles.



Gary Kominak has been growing food in the same ground for four decades, and he has built an incredible stock of knowledge over those years by pairing old gardening techniques learned from his grandparents, with new innovations inspired by his own observations on the land.

People like Gary, with specialized, relevant knowledge, share some of what they know in our First Tuesday programs, which take place indoors, outdoors, and/or on Zoom. Our event poster on the back page provides you with a schedule of upcoming First Tuesday programs.

While it's not a First Tuesday event, our annual Cider Squeeze is a sweet celebration of community and the harvest season. It's another chance to gather, learn, and engage.



CONSERVATION IS ... *a commitment to relationships*

Founded by Phil and Cathy Davis and now owned by the Methow Valley Interpretive Center, Homestream Park is "dedicated to the rivers and fish of the Methow Valley, and to the Native people, past and present, who have called this place home for thousands of years." Homestream Park includes a trail with benches along the river, a large collection of sculptures by Indigenous artist Smoker Marchand depicting elements of traditional life, a tipi, a public gathering area with shelters, picnic tables, interpretive signs, and a magical kid's lookout topped with wooden osprey.



Homestream Park is owned by the Methow Valley Interpretive Center and stewarded by the Methow Conservancy. With the help of volunteer crews, we prepare the park for summer visitation every year, clean the signs and sculptures, and keep the native trees and shrubs in good health.

In 2018, the Methow Conservancy, thanks to a generous donation from Tina and Eliot Scull, purchased 139 acres of rolling hillsides, shrub-steppe benches, and ravines used as wildlife corridors near Winthrop. Meadowlark is now owned by the Town of Winthrop, but we continue to steward it for the Town. We created the trail system that so many residents and visitors enjoy, we host regular weeding parties and trail maintenance opportunities, and we manage the seasonal closure for mule deer foraging.



Our Farm Tours and Podcasts offer a way to get to know the growers behind the food. Our relationships with growers and producers help further our understanding of agricultural land and farming issues. Food systems are complex, but when eaters can purchase food directly from growers, the pathway from farm to table is startlingly simple. Grow, harvest, relish.

Our Methow Grown program connects growers with eaters. The Methow Grown Farm Directory helps you learn about the farms in the area, what they're producing, and where to find it. The Farms to Neighbors program supports local producers by purchasing top quality products at market rates and supports households in need by providing them with these products free of charge. We'd like everyone to have the option of enjoying the bounty of Methow Valley harvests.



The ǰwǰnǰmǰwǰnam/Hummingbird property is the homeland of the mǰtxwǰu/Methow people and offers an important place for the mǰtxwǰu/Methow Descendants to protect and preserve their culture and heritage, as well as to steward the property. It is with deep respect and appreciation that we approach our role as allies to the mǰtxwǰu/Methow Descendants. In 2024, the mǰtxwǰu/Methow Descendants held an open house and invited the community to visit the property and learn more about the mǰtxwǰu/Methow people. This tule mat lodge was constructed for the event using gathered materials, including hand-woven mats. The tule mat lodge was just one of many aspects of traditional life that the mǰtxwǰu/Methow Descendants shared with interested community members.



SINCE TIME IMMEMORIAL

13,000 years ago the last of the Missoula floods swept across Eastern Washington and down the Columbia River Gorge. Glaciologists estimate that the glaciers in the Methow Valley were up to a mile deep. The First People of the Methow Valley have stories about the great flood and its impacts. For hundreds of generations, the Methow Valley has been the home of the mǰtxwǰu/Methow People. The Moses-Columbia Reservation was formed in 1879 as part of early strategies to separate Indigenous people from their ancestral homelands. In 1884, the Moses-Columbia Reservation was dissolved and most of the mǰtxwǰu/Methow People



were forcibly removed out of the Methow Valley and relocated to the area east and south of present-day Omak, becoming one of the twelve tribes of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation. Others in this diaspora refused to enter the reservations and simply stayed or dispersed in the region. Even today, many mǰtxwǰu/Methow Descendants maintain a consistent presence in this valley. We are grateful for the mǰtxwǰu/Methow People's careful stewarding of this land, past and present; we continue to be inspired by their stewardship practices. Our relationship with the land is informed by what we learn from them.



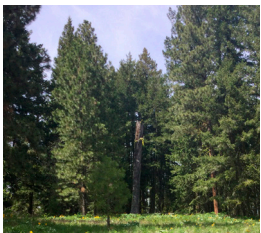
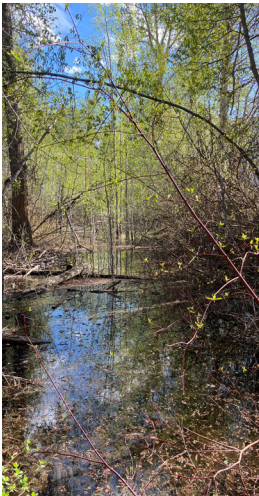
Photo by Jason Paulsen

N IS ... forever

near future. This year we're working on at least three more easements, including one in the Lower Valley, one up Twisp River, and one near Winthrop.

As a land trust we take a forever view of our work — and that means we have to think long-term, plan long-term, and maintain enough organizational and financial stability to endure. So before you turn the page, please take a moment to savor this eye-popping exposé of some of the most dazzling places in the Methow Valley.

Conservation laid bare, just for you.



CONSERVATION IS ... *collaboration*

The Town of Winthrop declared an affordable housing crisis in 2021. In 2023, we purchased the 1200-acre Sunny M Ranch with the intention of making 12–24 acres available for affordable housing in the future.



In 2024 we gifted 6 acres of land in Winthrop to the Methow Housing Trust to create an affordable neighborhood. We believe in clustering development in towns, to take pressure off sensitive wildlife habitat and agricultural lands and to take advantage of accessing town infrastructure when possible. Collaborating with others invested in addressing the Methow Valley's shortage of affordable housing allows us to create strategies for people to be able to live where they work.



Our partnership with Methow Trails makes the 10+ miles of trails on the Sunny M Ranch possible. We provide the land and access; Methow Trails takes care of trail management and maintenance.



Many of the 175 households that allow Methow Trails to put trails across their property are also landowners with conservation easements, who understand that having public access to trails is important to the community. When we collaborate with landowners to protect their property through a conservation easement, we encourage them to formalize any existing trail access.



In the winter, when the fields lie fallow, ski trails traverse the edges of farmland parcels. The farmers we work with understand the important role trails play in the Methow Valley economy and community health and wellness, and are willing to accommodate trail access outside the growing season.



Like all land in the Methow Valley, farmland is increasingly expensive, generally out of reach for younger farmers. And the number of agricultural acres in the Methow Valley is dwindling. To address this issue, in the past five years we have purchased about 500 acres of irrigated farmland, which we lease at favorable rates to three local farmers. By collaborating with local growers, we support a thriving agricultural economy and protect the scenic agricultural views that many associate with the Methow Valley landscape.

CONSERVATION IS ... community

Our Farms to Neighbors partnership with The Cove is based on two simple truths: 1) everyone should have access to high quality, locally-produced food and 2) farmers deserve to be paid full price for the fruits—and vegetables—of their labor. Many Methow Valley families and individuals struggle with access to food in general and quality local food in particular. Methow Valley growers produce a veritable alphabet of deliciousness every growing season: apples, berries, carrots, daikon, and everything else right on down to Yukon golds and zucchini. We don't have to spell it out; Farms to Neighbors makes sense for farmers and for families.



We like to think that when the community needs us, we show up. We use our trusted position in the community to help elevate other non-profit organizations by collaborating on projects, using our communication channels to share information about their programs, and providing organizational/strategic expertise, when asked. We lead and/or participate in long term recovery and resiliency efforts in the valley, including fire/flood readiness, recovery, and restoration; the Methow Housing Solutions Network; the Methow Valley Trails Collaborative; food access/equity efforts, and other collaborations that support community health and resiliency. We also have a beautiful conference room and kitchen that we allow nonprofit and community groups to meet in free of charge.



We hosted our first Seed Mob in 2014, in the wake of the devastating Carlton Complex fires. Community members volunteered to help us scatter native grass seeds in fire-scarred areas that had been disturbed in firefighting and rebuilding efforts, such as fire lines cut by bulldozers and utility pole replacement sites.



Our second Seed Mob focused on spreading native seeds in areas impacted by fire lines and powerline repairs after the Twisp River fire. In the immediate aftermath of the fires, there wasn't a lot that the average citizen could do to help. Seed Mobs harnessed the power of people hoping to contribute to restoration efforts, using them to help the land begin to recover.

Did you know that in the 15-year period from 2005-2020, private parcel acreage in agriculture in the Methow Valley decreased by 13%, undeveloped land decreased by 12%, and residential acres increased by 27%. And did you know that the biggest Methow Valley building boom in recent times (measured in building permits issued by Okanogan County) was in 2005-2006? During these two years more than 250 building permits were issued in Mazama, Winthrop, Twisp, Carlton, Methow, and Pateros.

Our State of the Methow data collection and dissemination project tracks information like this, focusing on current conditions and trends in the human population, land use, development, and land protection. The resource ensures that non-profits, municipalities, government agencies, elected officials, and community members have a consistent source of data and information to aid in making informed decisions about actions to take to support the Methow Valley.



President's Corner

Without doubt, it has been very exciting to watch the Methow Conservancy thoughtfully steward owned lands like Sunny M. But for me, one of the loveliest and most critical roles of the Conservancy is facilitating stewardship in others.



This work comes in so many forms: empowering the community to directly protect the lands they love through easements and donations; inviting 4th graders and First Tuesday attendees to see and engage with the valley's ecological community; asking willing hands to volunteer on the land; sharing the stories of local farms to connect consumers to caring producers; and providing an opportunity to acknowledge harm done by returning a stretch of river, forest, and field to Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation on behalf of the Methow Descendants, who have stewarded the land and water for millennia.

All these diverse actions give members of our community, near and far, real agency and opportunity to care for this place we love. I'm grateful for this invitation to action.

Kristen Kirkby,
Board President

"My family has taught me that we are part of the land, not separate from it. This perspective has driven my interest in environmental science. I want to understand the complexities of these changes, the science behind them, so I can contribute to finding solutions. It's through the foundation of culture and tradition collaborating with science that I will have the opportunity to contribute solutions to care for the land," wrote Darrell Nanpuya, one of two awardees of our "Care for the Land" scholarship.



Damon Alumbaugh, the other awardee, said "I have learned about caring for the land while working at Moccasin Lake Ranch in Winthrop,

where we have focused on sustainable ranching. Something that we practice to ensure that focus is carried out is rotational grazing. We push our cattle from section to section every few weeks. This prevents overgrazing in any one area, but it also prevents overgrowth from occurring in these sections. This allows the fields more rest periods, which strengthens the roots of the plants, consequently preventing soil erosion during periods of heavy rains. In addition to those benefits, the grazing areas receive lots of natural fertilizer from the cattle, making the soil much healthier. This sustainable farming keeps the land healthy for future generations of ranching."



Darrell will attend Cal Poly Humboldt, working toward a degree in Forest and Wildland Fire Science. Damon plans to attend Arizona Christian University, with intentions of becoming a game warden.

We look forward to hearing how these two scholarship award winners approach caring for the land in their future lives and careers.



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WE ARE ...

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Conservation is for
everyone—join us!

Methow Conservancy

Upcoming Events

Into the Thaw with Jon Waterman

Aug. 5

Join us virtually for a talk by Jon Waterman on his book *Into the Thaw: Witnessing Wonder Amid the Arctic Climate Crisis*.

In the Field at Beaver Food Forest Farm

Sep. 2

Come see how Julie Vanderwal is growing native plants without peat moss, coco coir, or single-use plastics at her nursery south of Twisp.

Cider Squeeze 2025

Sep. 28

This sweet event is always a special, fun-filled time to celebrate community, conservation and the harvest season.

How to Love a Forest with Ethan Tapper

Oct. 7

Come learn about healing forest ecosystems from forester, author, and conservationist Ethan Tapper.

Climbing Toward a True Self with Melissa Arnot

Dec. 2

Join us for a talk from renowned mountaineer, author, and Methow Valley local Melissa Arnot Reid. Melissa will reflect on her new memoir, and her relationship to place in the Methow Valley.

Full event details at methowconservancy.org. Contact us
at (509) 996-2870 or info@methowconservancy.org.



November
Coming Soon!