What You Can Do

• Thin and remove vegetation around your home, leaving trees over 12 inches in diameter

• Dispose of slash by chipping or burning; burn only small piles of woody debris (see “Burning Piles”)

• Stack firewood away from your home

• Keep your roof swept clean of pine needles

• Water a 30-foot (or more) protective radius around your buildings

• Build roads at least 20 feet wide with less than 8 percent grade, and with room for a fire truck to turn around

• Keep your driveway clear of dry plants and anything that could get in the way of fire crews

• Install hoses that can carry at least 50 pounds of water pressure

• Use fire-resistant (nonwood) roofing and siding

• Screen your chimney or stovepipe, and install spark arresters in woodstoves

BURNING PILES

It is legal to burn piles of wood during low-risk seasons. (Check first to see if a burn ban is in effect.) Piles must be smaller than 10 feet in diameter, and you will need water, raking tools and a weather check before you start. See the resources section, pp. 30-31, for more information.
Out in the Open

While a shrub-steppe landscape (a complex mix of drought-adapted shrubs, grasses and flowering plants) may initially appear uninteresting, it is biologically rich and provides habitat for a wide variety of wildlife. In spring, the shrub-steppe is covered with yellow balsamroot, purple lupine and many other vibrant wildflowers.

Although this landscape is remarkably hardy, a shrub-steppe hillside is extremely sensitive to soil disturbance. Native shrubs and bunch grasses grow slowly and stabilize seemingly weightless soil that, when exposed, is commonly referred to as “moon dust.” Without the deep, anchoring roots of shrubs and grasses, moon-dust soil may quickly erode or blow away. Eroded, low-nutrient soil tends to support only invasive plants, which decrease species diversity and reduce water absorption in the soil.

What You Can Do
To minimize the amount of disturbed ground, replant any disturbed soil as soon as possible with drought-tolerant natives and remove invasive plants before they gain the upper hand.

Before the start of any construction, mark soils and plants you want protected to reduce “jobsite spread.” Save any displaced topsoil in separate piles so you can reuse it, restoring the valuable nutrients. This also reduces the chance of importing soil that is contaminated with nonnative seeds.

Replanting appropriate drought-tolerant species can help ensure that replanted areas persist and native plants can compete with weeds over time.
Ridgelines

Where you place your home has significant impact on the scenic beauty of the Methow Valley. *Malcolm Wells*

For many people, ridgelines look like the ideal place to build in order to admire the view. Unfortunately, ridgeline houses permanently mar the scenic beauty that many treasure in the Methow Valley.

While there is currently no ordinance in place to limit ridgeline building, there is strong community resistance to ridgeline homes.

Before you build out in the open, spend time on your property in the heat of summer, in the icy cold of winter and on windy days. Get a feel for the extremes you may experience living on an exposed site.

**What You Can Do**

- Site your home so that the roofline is below the skyline when viewed from the valley floor
- Choose a roof and siding color that blends into the natural landscape (brown, tan, dark green, grey)
- Contour your driveway around the slope (not zig-zagging across the hillside) and quickly reseed disturbed soil with native grasses
- Landscape around your home using native species as camouflage for your home
Wildlife

The Methow Valley is one of the few remaining places in the lower 48 states where people share space with most of the historical wildlife. To many residents and visitors this is one of the most enjoyable aspects of being in the valley. Here is a short list of wildlife that you may encounter. Understanding their habitat and behavior can go a long way toward helping you learn to live with them.

**Bears and Cougars**
Black bears are common in the Methow Valley and range over large areas. Research indicates that the territory of a male black bear often exceeds 100 square miles; a bear can cover 40 miles in two days over mountainous terrain as it exploits seasonally abundant natural forage. In general, bears peacefully coexist with people in this valley, and they are seen on occasion. However, once a bear finds human food, it may become a “nuisance bear.” Unfortunately, the old saying that “a fed bear is a dead bear” often applies in this circumstance.

Cougars are also common and widespread in the valley. They are usually most active at dawn and dusk but because of their secretive nature they are rarely seen. Deer are the primary prey for these large cats, and any behavior that concentrates or attracts deer is also likely to attract cougars. Unattended pets and small livestock can also attract cougars.

**Deer**
The Methow watershed supports the largest mule deer herd in the state, and deer are a common site in pastures and on hillsides throughout the valley. Whitetail deer are also common in the brushier habitat in the valley bottom and along major watercourses. Deer seem to appear when you least expect them: On average, about one deer per day is hit by a car in the valley.

**Rattlesnakes**
The Methow Valley is prime northern Pacific rattlesnake habitat. These unique predators winter in communal dens that are usually on south-facing rocky slopes below 4,000 feet. Snakes usually move up to a mile from their winter dens and hunt for small mammals in optimal temperatures of 80° to 85°F. Rattlesnakes are not aggressive, and they would rather escape than bite you.

**Bats**
Thirteen species of bats live in the Methow Valley, and many have learned that human structures (barns, bridges, cracks and holes in homes, overhanging porches) provide suitable habitat. They are present in the valley year-round, but are obvious only in warmer months.

**Unwanted Guests**
Yellowjackets, leaf-footed bugs, mice, packrats, chipmunks and woodpeckers will gladly move into your home. It is almost inevitable that you will create some unintended wildlife habitat.
**What You Can Do**

As the valley’s population grows, the greatest threat to wildlife is loss of habitat through development and human disturbance. But there are things you can do to promote a more peaceful coexistence with wildlife.

- Leave as much of your land in a natural state as possible. Protect wildlife habitat by leaving snags, rock dens, wetlands, native vegetation and some woody debris for animal food and cover.
- Learn to recognize sensitive species and look for ways to protect the conditions that they require to survive.
- Attract birds to your garden by planting native fruit-bearing shrubs such as elderberry, chokecherry and wild roses.
- Food stored outdoors – including garbage, fruit, pet food, compost and bird seed – attracts and “rewards” bears and other creatures. If you must store food outside, place it in a sealed bin.
- Cultivate a healthy sense of awareness when hiking or mountain biking; don’t let small children run too far ahead or trail behind.
- Drive carefully, especially at night (45 mph), to reduce your chances of maiming or killing deer.
- Fence off your vegetables, ornamental gardens and fruit trees to keep deer out of your garden.
- Do not feed animals. Feeding deer or other creatures may introduce harmful foods into their digestive tract, draw them too close to domestic pets or train them to look for easy meals.
- Screen off attic access points and leave old buildings, snags, mines and caves as undisturbed bat habitat.
- Use chemicals carefully. Fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides are toxic to some animals if improperly applied.
- Use lights at night only as needed. Some animals, like flying squirrels, require darkness for survival and are vulnerable in lit areas.
- Use owl decoys, hawk silhouettes or Mylar streamers to keep birds from hitting large windows.
- Screen, seal and caulk all vents, windows and doors. Box in your eaves to remove nesting platforms.

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**PETS**

The Methow Valley may seem like paradise for a pet, but pets can wreak havoc for native wildlife. A dog or cat may never catch anything, but a well-fed pet forces wildlife to spend precious energy during the chase. Also, unvaccinated pets can spread a host of diseases to wild animals.

Washington State law holds dog owners liable for any wildlife harassment, and under the law a dog can be destroyed on the spot by a game warden, sheriff or livestock owner. If an owner receives a written complaint from the sheriff or game warden about their dog, the owner will be held liable and may be found guilty of a misdemeanor. The best protection for you, for wildlife and for your dog is to train it to stay close – or to use a leash – whenever you’re outside.

Cats take a significant toll on small mammals, bats and birds. Cats often fall victim to coyotes, cougars and other predators. You can protect both wildlife and your cat by keeping the cat indoors.
Agriculture: A Living History

Today approximately 55,000 acres of private land in the Methow watershed are used for some type of farming, rangeland or fruit production. As of 2000, agricultural businesses on these lands employed about 14 percent of valley residents. Although in the past decade tourism and services have outpaced agricultural employment, farmland still provides important services to the valley. These services include maintaining open space, providing food, providing wildlife habitat and keeping part of the valley’s history alive.

If you own agricultural land, or if you neighbor it, you may want to learn about fence maintenance agreements, grazing leases, water rights, wildlife-friendly fences and access road agreements. If you own fruit trees, you should control insect pests and diseases to reduce risks to your neighbors’ trees and especially to nearby commercial orchards.

Before you build on farmland, consider the viability of a farm operation around your home. Any trees or structures in the middle of fields make farming more difficult. Consider placing your home at the edge of the best soils and not on top of them. If your land has been farmed before, consider making it available to a farmer who can carry on the agricultural heritage of the valley, help control weeds and contribute to our local economy. See the resources section, pp. 30-31, for more information.

A barn on a farmland conservation easement.

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**TOP FOUR METHOW VALLEY EMPLOYERS BY INDUSTRY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education and Health Services</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreation and Tourism Services</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail Trade</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Methow Valley Census Data*
Freshly cut agricultural fields in the Methow Valley. Dennis O’Callaghan
Developing Private Land

The fragile and beautiful character of the Methow Valley has been a subject of debate and careful planning for decades. Many volunteers have donated countless hours to developing sensible land- and water-use plans for the valley, along with the Okanogan County Planning Department and the Washington Department of Ecology.

Okanogan County regulates private land development through the Okanogan County Zoning Code. From north of Carlton, the minimum lot size allowed in most of the valley is five acres on the valley floor and 20 acres in the uplands.

As increasing numbers of people move to the valley on a full- or part-time basis, land-use planning will continue to be a hot topic, and rules and ordinances are likely to continue to evolve. The stalwart participation of community members from all walks of life will help to guarantee that the future of the Methow Valley remains locally directed, designed and implemented.

**NIGHT VS. LIGHT**

Step outside on a new moon night and you’ll see more stars than most people in the United States. While one bright outdoor light may seem insignificant, it takes only a small number of lights to wash out pure darkness. By shading outdoor lights and keeping them close to the ground, you can help reduce light pollution and protect the valley’s night skies.

A yellow-bellied marmot. Joyce Bergen