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# Methow Conservancy

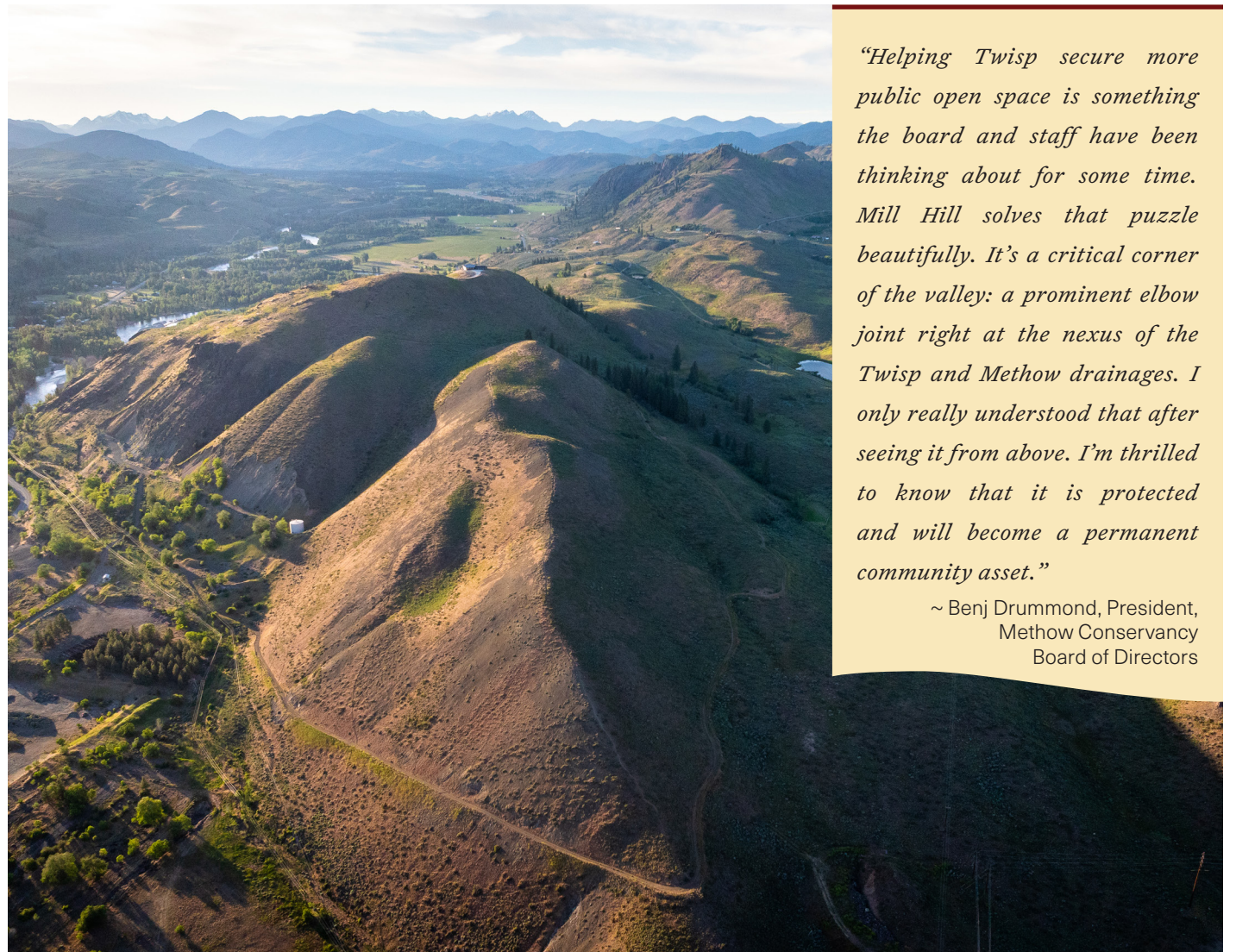
*Inspiring people to care for the land of the Methow Valley since 1996*

## Mill Hill

*Last year, right in the midst of the frantic push for fundraising for the Campaign for Sunny M Ranch, we received a tip that the land known as Mill Hill in Twisp might soon be for sale. We've recognized the need to secure property to provide free public access to walking trails in Twisp ever since we realized how popular the Meadowlark Natural Area has been in Winthrop. And, we knew there was no better property for that public access than Mill Hill, since so many Twisp residents already enjoyed walking on its trails.*

So what does a community-based land trust already moving 100 miles an hour do? Of course, we rolled up our sleeves and said, "we have to figure this out." We negotiated with the landowner and found two donors who love Twisp who wanted to see free public access happen. With their support and the nimble quick action of our board and staff, by September—just two months after closing on the Sunny M Ranch—we officially purchased the 144 acres of shrub-steppe hillside known as Mill Hill.

We plan to be temporary "bridge" owners until we can achieve the long-term vision of having the land owned as an open space park by the Town of Twisp. This winter and spring we have been working with the Town of Twisp to support their application for an RCO Recreation Grant from the State of Washington that, if successful, will



*"Helping Twisp secure more public open space is something the board and staff have been thinking about for some time. Mill Hill solves that puzzle beautifully. It's a critical corner of the valley: a prominent elbow joint right at the nexus of the Twisp and Methow drainages. I only really understood that after seeing it from above. I'm thrilled to know that it is protected and will become a permanent community asset."*

~ Benj Drummond, President,  
Methow Conservancy  
Board of Directors

The walking trails on Mill Hill have long been enjoyed by Twisp residents and others. BY BENJ DRUMMOND

facilitate the transfer of the property to the town as an open space park.

Previously owned by Redtail Development LLC, Mill Hill is the visible hillside to the east of Twisp overlooking the town. Although no formal trails have ever been built on the property, several social trails have been well-established over many years, circumnavigating the lower hillside and winding up to several viewpoints. For many years Twisp residents and visitors have been using these trails for walking and running, as well as snowshoeing in the winter.

The trails are an integral piece of recreation near the Town of Twisp.

Because the sale of Mill Hill could have resulted in private development that would have jeopardized public access, we are thrilled to have the opportunity to step in and secure long-term trail access near town. We learned how to do this with the Meadowlark Natural Area in Winthrop, which we initially bought and then eventually transferred to the Town of Winthrop as a park.

As we go through the

process of working with Twisp, we are making very few changes to Mill Hill. Aside from some minor trailwork improvements that will remedy a particularly steep section of trail, we are letting the land be as it has been for so long: simply enjoyed by the community for recreation, wildlife habitat, and open space.



SCAN THE QR CODE WITH THE CAMERA ON YOUR PHONE TO VISIT [METHOWCONSERVANCY.ORG/DISCOVER/MILL-HILL-PUBLIC-ACCESS-TO-TRAILS-IN-TWISP](https://methowconservancy.org/discover/mill-hill-public-access-to-trails-in-twisp)

### THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER



"What's your favorite corner of the Methow Valley?" It was supposed to be an uncomplicated

icebreaker question for our board recruitment committee to ask prospective board candidates. But the responses we heard back were as diverse as the applicants, sometimes obvious and sometimes completely surprising. In many ways, it felt just like the work of the Methow

Conservancy, often conspicuous, at other times a bit subtle or even unexpected. That heterogeneity has become part of this organization's DNA. It reflects the dynamic nature of conservation in our valley (and across the west), and keeps the work fresh and interesting for the staff and board.

Ultimately, in recognition of our growing workload, our recruitment committee added a cohort of five new board members this spring and I'm excited about the infusion of energy and expertise they're already contributing to our monthly meetings. The Conservancy's board has always been a varied group — in geography, profession and disposition — and now it's even more so. And those corners? Some shared common favorites, others couldn't pick just one, and a few coyly offered only the vaguest of landmarks. Enjoy the summer and may you find a new-to-you corner of this beautiful valley to explore!

~Benj Drummond, Board President

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FARMS TO NEIGHBORS

Our Farms to Neighbors program 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.

Each year we raise \$10K from community members who care about supporting local food systems and use the funds to purchase high-quality,



locally-grown produce at market prices from local farmers and ranchers. The Cove Food Bank distributes the food to their clients.

Farms to Neighbors was intended to be a pandemic support program but it was so successful that we have maintained it. We have served 75 families with about 8,000 pounds of food each of the past four years. With your support, we can do the same in 2024. Scan the QR code with your phone or visit [methowgrown.org/farms2neighbors](http://methowgrown.org/farms2neighbors)



*Some years we make a big splash. With the purchases of the 1200-acre Sunny M Ranch and the 144-acre Mill Hill property, we were in the headlines quite often last year. 2024 is, so far, a lot less splashy than 2023. But it's no less productive in terms of community-based conservation projects. Even while we are working on complex projects that have big visibility, we are still tending to our core: completing conservation easements, offering free education programs to youth and to the wider public, providing agricultural support, engaging in land justice and food equity programs, and doing dozens of other things that answer community needs. Read on to learn more! (And visit our website at [www.methowconservancy.org](http://www.methowconservancy.org) or use the camera on your phone to scan the QR codes in this Impact Report for even more detailed information.)*



Uncaging plants once they've grown large is part of our restoration work.

LAND CONSERVATION

*We protect healthy land and vital soils in the Methow Valley through conservation easements, fee acquisitions, and other conservation tools.*

- The last year was a big one for land conservation. In addition to working with YOU to purchase the Sunny M Ranch and Mill Hill (which you can read more about in this newsletter), we also protected 82 acres of farmland near Mazama with a conservation easement. The Woodward Farmland Conservation Easement consists of prime irrigated farmland with senior water rights and serves as a migration corridor for mule deer, foraging habitat for several raptor species, and possesses natural, scenic, open space, agricultural, and wildlife habitat values.
- As you read this, chances are our Conservation Easement Manager Liana Cabiles is out in the field monitoring the 121 conservation easements we hold, working with landowners to care for their land, and ensuring that the provisions of the easements are being upheld. Our Membership Coordinator, Mary Morgan, plays a critical role in keeping conservation easement

- records in order and in compliance with accreditation requirements.
- Between conservation easements and land we own, you have helped us to protect 12,000 acres of land in the Methow Valley, including 33 miles of shoreline and 2,500 acres of irrigated farmland.
- We also regularly engage in restoration projects to improve land health and wildlife habitat. The recent Hancock Springs Riparian Restoration Project near Mazama is one such example. After almost 20 years of restoration work, the first two phases of this project are coming to an end. As part of the final steps, a Methow Conservancy crew of volunteers worked this spring with Cascade Fisheries and Methow Natives to remove exclusion fencing that protects young plants from deer and other browsers until the plants are bigger. The project involved rebuilding the Hancock Springs channel and placing logs in the channel to create complexity, cover, and a diversity of habitat to support native fish. We're thrilled to note that steelhead have already been found spawning in a riffle created by the project!

AGRICULTURE SUPPORT

*We recognize that farming and ranching are critical components of the Methow Valley's rural character and local economy.*

with eaters, promote local farmers, and provide a grower directory and other resources for consumers who value eating locally grown food.

- In February we hosted our first-ever Agricultural Forum. “The Future of Farming in the Methow Valley” featured keynote speaker Senator Jon Tester of Montana (the US Senate’s only working farmer!) and focused on building a resilient agricultural future for the valley. More than 75 local agriculturalists joined us to learn from WSU extension faculty about adapting to a changing climate. We’re planning another agricultural event for next winter!
- Our summer Farm Tours series is in full swing again, helping people connect with local farmers and learn how they produce the tasty foods we get to eat.
- We’re constantly updating our Methow Grown website ([methowgrown.org](http://methowgrown.org)) and we regularly update our beautiful print guide to local farms. The website and guide connect growers
- It’s exciting to see a new pivot up and running on the 82-acre Woodward Farm field that we own in Mazama across from Wesola Polana. Through a public request for proposals, we awarded the current lease to BCS Livestock—so keep your eyes out for some sheep on the field potentially later in the summer.
- We are currently working on several additional conservation easements on agricultural lands. To date, we have protected almost 2,500 acres of irrigated farmland in the Methow Valley, through 45 conservation easements and three fee-owned lands (Sunny M Ranch, Woodward Farmland, and Mazama Corner). Many of our conservation easements allow grazing.



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Tamworth pigs at Wild Plum Farm. PHOTO BY RACHELLE WEYMULLER





Learning about compost at the B2G Compost tour.

PUBLIC EDUCATION & OUTREACH

We offer free monthly naturalist talks, focused on human/ natural/ geologic topics of interest, farm tours, public information sessions, and community gatherings.

More than 2000 people attended our First Tuesday programs, Farm Tours, field sessions, and tracking courses last year. Organized by our Education Programs Coordinator Bridger Layton, a sampling of recent programs includes Lynx & Wildfire, Bats of WA State, Astronomy & Star Party, Methow Valley Fire Lookouts, North Pacific Right Whales; and tours of Bluebird Grain Farms, McFarland Creek Lamb Ranch, and Seven Stars Farm. Check out archive recordings of some of these presentations on our Events page.

Winter and Spring Office Open Houses and were so pleased to show so many of you our great workspace.

Stalwart crews of energetic volunteers show up for our work parties, helping to improve public access areas and conservation properties around the valley like Mill Hill, Meadowlark Natural Area, Sunny M Ranch, Homestream Park, Mazama Park, and others.

Our Good Neighbor Handbook offers useful tips to Methow Valley newcomers who want to learn about, explore, and help us cherish and care for this special place. Stop by our office and pick up your free copy or find it on our website.

Hundreds of guests joined us in September for our annual Cider Squeeze harvest celebration at the Sabolds’ house. We also experimented with some



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When we work with private landowners to place conservation easements on parcels that include trail access, we encourage them to make trail access permanent with Methow Trails. Dozens of families with conservation easements on their land allow public access on the Methow Trails system.

Fatbiking on the Barnsley Lake Trail on the Sunny M Ranch.

PUBLIC ACCESS

We believe that public access to natural areas is essential to Methow Valley residents’ and visitors’ experience of this beautiful place.

- In 2018 we purchased 139 acres on a scenic, undeveloped hillside near Winthrop and created 2.5 miles of walking trails with free public access: the Meadowlark Natural Area (see text box below for more details).
- In 2019, thanks to a donation from longtime Mazama residents Nancy and Dick Gode, we purchased a small parcel along the river in the

heart of Mazama to create a pocket park. Progress was delayed due to COVID but this winter we created a design for the park, which will include a walking trail, benches and view spots, and access to the river. We intend to begin implementing the park plan later this year.

In 2023, we purchased 144 acres of shrub-steppe hillside overlooking Twisp to protect longstanding free public use of the trails: Mill Hill (see cover story for more details).

In 2023, thanks to widespread support from 1500+ donors, we protected more than 10 miles of ski, snowshoe, fatbike, and mountain bike trails on the Sunny M Ranch (see pages 4 and 5 for more details).



Meadowlark contains healthy shrub-steppe habitat and offers critical mule deer winter range.

Meadowlark Natural Area

With the help of hardy volunteers and so much community enthusiasm, we continue our efforts to be good long-term stewards of the Meadowlark Natural Area in Winthrop. We appreciate community respect for the March winter closure; we noticed that a lot of mule deer were enjoying the chance to eat early spring green-up undisturbed on the hill. We’re also grateful for our volunteer crews, who just a few weeks ago spent several solid hours pulling weeds and tidying up the trail. It’s a great example of a community caring for the land.

We hear from so many folks that Meadowlark is a true gem. From the parking area, there are 2.5 miles of trails that cross the hillside and offer outstanding landscape views. It is a spectacular place to go during the wildflower season, with each week introducing a

new combination of species. With its location and aspect, the Meadowlark trails are some of the first to hike in the spring and the last available in late fall or early winter. Our vision was always to provide free access to a great place to walk in town and it’s been so fulfilling to see that come to be.

Meadowlark contains healthy diverse shrub-steppe habitat, as well as pockets of wetter areas that support trees with a diverse shrub understory. The Natural Area provides critical mule deer winter range, and important habitat for songbirds, small mammals and raptors.

We are forever grateful to Tina and Eliot Scull, long-time enthusiasts for conservation and public access, who gave us a generous donation that allowed us to purchase the property.

The property, originally homesteaded by the Heckendorn Family, included a

total of 146 acres. 139 of those acres have been protected and named the Meadowlark Natural Area. We owned those acres long enough to build the sustainable trail system (great for hiking, running, but not for cycling or motorized access) and to establish the Natural Area. In 2021, we then turned the ownership over to the Town of Winthrop, which received funding for an open space park from the WA State Wildlife and Recreation Program. We have an agreement with the town that we will care for the Natural Area, and we work to manage it both for wildlife habitat and public recreation free of charge.

We retained ownership of an additional seven acres of the original Heckendorn property (on the flat section near the current parking area, just south of the Sullivan Cemetery). The area has been identified in the Town of Winthrop Comprehensive Plan as a future

expansion area. Learn more at [methowconservancy.org/discover/meadowlark](https://methowconservancy.org/discover/meadowlark)





# Imagine *the* Methow

# Sunny M Ranch

*Wow! It's hard to believe that a year has passed since we—through a tremendous show of community support—purchased the Sunny M Ranch to protect wildlife habitat, farmland, and trail access, and to preserve possibilities for affordable housing.*

As we spend more time on the ground, we are all getting to know the property a little better. We are reminded daily of how important the 1200 acres of the Sunny M Ranch are to the Methow Valley, and how glad we are that the community rallied to keep the land in local ownership. Thank you. We continue to rely on our trusted partners—like Methow Trails, the Methow Housing Trust, and the family that farms the agricultural fields—to help us care for the land and thoughtfully consider its future.

## GENERAL UPDATES

### Management Plan

Our work on the Sunny M Ranch is guided by our Management Plan. The document is intended to help our Board and Staff be responsible, long-term stewards of the property. We will review and update the Management Plan at least annually. We will also monitor all of the land at least annually, to assess conditions and note any new or changing issues on the land. You can read an Executive Summary of our Management Plan at [methowconservancy.org/sunnym](http://methowconservancy.org/sunnym).

### Stewardship & Maintenance Fund

Aiding us in managing and stewarding the land is our Sunny M Stewardship & Maintenance Fund, which we hold in both an endowment-like account at the Community Foundation of North Central Washington and in a more liquid account at Wheatland Bank. When we began the Campaign for Sunny M Ranch, we recognized the need for a short and long-term fund to help support the ongoing maintenance and long-term restoration work we will want to do. Two families who owned the Sunny M Ranch in the past recognized the

importance of caring for the land and historic buildings through restoration, maintenance, weed mitigation, forest management, and other efforts; they helped us establish a robust Stewardship & Maintenance Fund. Helga Haub, who, with her husband Erivan, purchased and cared for the property from the late 1980s through 2022, seeded the fund with \$500K. The Lucky Seven Foundation, started by Frances and Manson Backus, who owned the Sunny M Ranch in the 1940s, matched \$250K in new donations to the Campaign for Sunny M Ranch through a challenge grant. These gifts combined with donations to the Campaign for Sunny M Ranch mean we have a robust Sunny M specific Stewardship Fund, which we will manage into the future.

### Other Family Ties

We continue to hear from people who have connections to the Sunny M Ranch, including Avery Shulenbarger and Father Dick Case. In 1889, in the wake of the Homestead Act, Clint Shulenbarger came west from Ohio and filed a claim on the Sunny M Ranch. He later started a dairy with the Methow Valley's first Jersey cows, providing hundreds of pounds of butter each month to the Slate Creek Mine and to the Methow Trading Company. Clint's great great grandson, Avery, visited us last winter and we skied out to the ranch, where he learned more about the Sunny M history and we learned some more about his family history. Before Jesuit Father Richard (Dick) Case heard God's call at age 19, he longed to be a rancher. At the tender age of 12, after two weeks as a guest at the Sunny M Ranch, Dick was invited to be a helper. The following year he parlayed that experience into a summer job as a junior wrangler at the Sunny M Ranch, where he lived in



Black bear on the Sunny M Ranch.

the bunkroom, bucked hay, and helped lead guests on trail rides.

### Cleaning

When we bought Sunny M, we knew it was largely in great shape. Still, it's an old ranch that has served a number of purposes over the years, and some signs of those former uses linger. Where appropriate, we are cleaning up old debris piles, coiling up derelict fencing, and even dismantling a rickety shed that collapsed under the weight of a 2023 winter storm. Many hardy volunteer crews have helped us with these projects, and some of our volunteers have become experts at coiling barbed wire—an art form in itself! Want to (work) party with us? Learn more about volunteer opportunities on the Events page of our website.

## WILDLIFE HABITAT

### Wildlife

Last fall our Conservation Project Manager Daniel Senner placed game cams out on the Sunny M Ranch and since then they have been snapping



Tiger salamander near Barnsley Lake. PHOTO BY KAT WERLE

away, reinforcing what we know to be true: this land is home to hundreds of critters, including birds, mammals, and amphibians. Our cameras got shots of cougar, coyotes, snowshoe hare, black bear, wild turkeys, bald eagles, mink, beaver, and a whole lot of mule deer. We love these glimpses of wildlife in their protected habitat, in dusky shadows, the wee morning hours, and in broad daylight.

### Fencing

One of the legacies of our agricultural past and present on the Sunny M Ranch is a patchwork of barbed wire fencing in and around the property. As part of our ongoing fencing inventory, we have been working with volunteer crews to remove unneeded fencing, as it is a hazard to wildlife. When fencing is necessary—such as a means of keeping domesticated animals out of ecologically sensitive areas or cultivated fields—we are working with a fencing professional to replace standard barbed wire with wildlife-friendlier options, which are still effective at keeping cattle or horses in (or out), but which give wildlife access to breeding and birthing grounds, seasonal habitat, and water sources. Along boundaries of neighboring properties with limited livestock use, we're using a fence design with a higher bottom strand, which allows for easy wildlife passage. We're also installing extra gates in our fencing, to be left open in the winter when there are no livestock to exclude from a particular area. That way the wildlife can just walk through the open gates and not have to wriggle



Stormy morning looking across the Sunny M Ranch toward Mt Gardner.

*"All over the world we see the destruction of total landscapes, particularly forests and wetlands. Daily, animal species are being declared extinct. Many irreversible things are done today without concern for the future of our planet. I believe strongly that we should not delegate the responsibility for an intact environment only to the government. Every one of us should be involved."*

~ Helga Haub, preface to  
*The Smiling Country: A History of the Methow Valley*  
by Sally Portman, 2001





SCAN WITH THE CAMERA ON YOUR PHONE TO  
VISIT [METHOWCONSERVANCY.ORG/SUNNYM](https://methowconservancy.org/sunnym)

public info sessions about affordable housing on Sunny M. The info sessions allowed community members to engage with the project, learn more, and provide input. We believe in collaboration and want to create a permanently affordable neighborhood that the Methow Valley community can embrace.

Our next update will be on Monday, July 1, from 5:30–7 pm at the Winthrop Barn. We hope you’ll join us for this “Ranch Report,” where we’ll fill you in about our current activities on the property and answer your questions.

**Our Focus**

Creating an affordable neighborhood doesn’t begin with an architectural sketch. Long before neighborhoods can be designed, the property needs to have clear pathways for domestic water, septic, power, and other infrastructure needs. Conservation Director Jeanne White, Land Project Manager Sarah Birkeland, Aspect Consulting and our outside water counsel are currently working through different scenarios for bringing water to the project, so we can decide which avenue to pursue.

Sunny M wetlands.  
PHOTO BY BENJ DRUMMOND

when you start to see equipment and scaffolding around the farm buildings. During the pressure washing and painting, the buildings will go through color variations, but rest assured, the final color will be a nice rich barn red!

**AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

**Public Info Sessions**

Contributing to the affordable housing solution has been a part of the Sunny M project right from the very beginning. We have a critical housing shortage in the Methow Valley, especially for housing that is affordable for people who work in the valley. Our expertise is not in building affordable neighborhoods, but we can best leverage our expertise and resources by making a small parcel of the Sunny M Ranch land available for housing and then partnering with the Methow Housing Trust—a nonprofit community land trust—and, potentially, other partners they may identify, to develop the neighborhood.

Housing sub-committees from the Methow Conservancy and the Methow Housing Trust have met several times to discuss some big-picture topics about how the Sunny M property can become part of the affordable housing solution. We’re working with consultants from Navigate LLC, which specializes in helping communities like ours address housing challenges. Last fall, we launched a series of



The Sunny M barn is scheduled to be repainted this summer.



Our volunteers have become experts at removing and coiling unneeded barbed wire.

**Sunny M Ranch Report**

Monday, July 1st  
5:30-7pm at the Winthrop Barn

Join us at our next public info session about the Sunny M Ranch. As we near our one-year anniversary of caring for Sunny M Ranch on behalf of the community, we want to thank you for your support and give you an update on current activities on the land.

Scan QR code for more information.



under or jump over the livestock-exclusion fencing.

When you’re out on the Sunny M trails, you may see gates open that you are used to seeing closed, and vice versa. The rule of rural areas is to leave gates as you find them. Thanks!

**Habitat Management**

Senior Ecologist Julie Grialou conducted baseline vegetation and habitat surveys and is developing a forest management plan with a consulting forester, as well as working on a plan for weed mitigation. In late summer, we had the Okanogan Conservation District do an assessment of the dryland fields and the Barnsley-Bitterbrush area on the Sunny M as part of our process of writing our management plan and learning more about how we can best care for the Sunny M property.

We were recently bitten by the bug to tackle knapweed on the Sunny M! Our Conservation Project Manager Daniel Senner released knapweed root weevils onto the pesky perennial Barnaby/knapweed. This targeted approach to weed control involves hand-releasing cups of weevils onto individual plants, where the little guys attack. The larvae mine the roots and destroy the plants’ stored energy reserves. We hope to report positive results from this biological control agent effort. Please don’t pull any knapweed on the Sunny M! (Bet you never thought you’d hear us say that...) The weevils need all the available forage to spread across the property.

**TRAILS**

**Trail Access**

Our Land Project Manager Sarah Birkeland and Conservation Director Jeanne White worked closely with Methow Trails last winter to develop a Memorandum of Understanding with Methow Trails regarding the ski, snowshoe, and bike trails on the property. The next step will be permanently protecting trail access through a deeded easement.

**Trail Use**

People often ask us, “Now that the Methow Conservancy owns the Sunny M Ranch land, can I just go walking/riding/skiing anywhere on the property?” Our answer is that public access is only permitted on official trails, and only during the season(s) that they are open. Please promote responsible public access by sticking to official trails. Trail maps for summer and winter use can be found at [methowtrails.org/apps-and-maps](https://methowtrails.org/apps-and-maps). Thank you for helping us manage trail use responsibly.

**AGRICULTURE**

**Farming**

The irrigated farm fields along Wolf Creek Road, Twin Lakes Road, and Patterson Lake are leased to the Hover family, who has farmed those fields for many years. The Sunny M red ranch house is leased to a local family, while the remainder of the outbuildings, including the barn, are part of the agricultural lease.

As anyone with ditch shares knows, getting irrigation water up and running for the growing season involves some pressurizing, testing, and fixing lines, valves, and other parts that broke over the winter. With Washington State in a declared drought, we are looking toward water efficiencies this summer. We will share with you what we learn about water efficiencies on large farm fields. We will also continue to share information from the WA Department of Ecology about what non-commercial users can do to be water smart, both in and out of drought conditions.

**Ranch Buildings**

Built in the 1950s, the iconic Sunny M b arn has been home to hundreds of animals, storage for thousands of hay bales, and shelter for dozens of pieces of farm equipment. Now that barn, as well as the surrounding outbuildings, need to be repainted. We’re delighted that Twisp River Painting is undertaking the project this summer. Don’t be surprised



YOUTH PROGRAMS

We believe it is essential for the next generation to embrace the spirit of conservation. Our youth programs help connect kids and teens to the land, in hopes of inspiring them to care for it.



Johnnie and Jennifer Duguay help teach Schoolyard Science each month.



Snowshoeing and tracking with Schoolyard Science.

We partner with the Methow Valley School District to offer “Schoolyard Science”: an outdoor-based science curriculum that helps students learn to be inquisitive explorers of the natural world. During Schoolyard Science, students are scientists. Perhaps they are a biologist managing a population of Methow Valley mule deer; maybe they are an ecologist taking careful notes in



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Schoolyard Science winter discovery. PHOTO BY JONATHAN STRATMAN



Methow Elder Mark Miller and Homestream Park founder Phil Davis introduce Schoolyard Science students to the park.

their field journal as they canvas the schoolyard; maybe they are a track and sign specialist exploring on snowshoes looking for clear animal prints in the snow. Every lesson is unique, offering a new point of connection to the natural world and deepening their understanding of the place they call home. Although the Schoolyard Science lessons are all science-based, the approach is interdisciplinary. As a result, students learn that environmental and biological sciences involve writing, math, human and natural history, and other core topics.

Sixty fourth graders just completed 9 months of lessons that integrate into the school’s International Baccalaureate framework. They capped their school year with a field trip to Homestream Park, which is owned by the Methow Valley Interpretive Center, to learn about salmon and about the Native People, past and present, of the Methow Valley. We also distributed a free Discover Pass to each student/family, so they can experience state public lands regardless of family financial situation.

Youth volunteers from the National Honor Society and Kiwanis Key Club help us set up for and manage

events, assist with office tasks and data entry, and complete field projects. Through their engagement in our work, they are learning a conservation ethic that guides them in caring for the land in the place they have grown up.

We awarded two “Care for the Land” scholarships for graduating high school seniors: Kyler Mitchell of Liberty Bell High School and Roy Miller of Omak High School and a member of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation.



TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE SCHOLARSHIP, SCAN QR CODE WITH THE CAMERA ON YOUR PHONE OR VISIT METHOWCONSERVANCY.ORG/ABOUT-US/NEWS-FROM-THE-FIELD



Kyler Mitchell, top, and Roy Miller, above, were each awarded “Care for the Land” scholarships

We believe that housing security is an essential component of a diverse, thriving community and a resilient, sustainable economy. As a land trust, we recognize that we need to find ways to provide land for wildlife, for farming, for trails, and for community.

- We are a founding member of and a regular participant in the Methow Housing Solutions Network, which raises awareness in the community about potential housing solutions and the possibility for purposeful, structural change.
- In 2007 we commissioned a community needs assessment that resulted in the recommendation for forming a community land trust. The Methow Housing Trust was founded in 2017 in response to this need.
- After the wildfires of 2014–2015, we helped form the Long Term Recovery Organization that supported the research that led to the creation of the Methow Housing Trust. Four current and former Methow Conservancy employees were involved in that effort. We continue to participate in LTRO meetings.

- We have always encouraged clustering development near towns, while protecting larger open spaces in the outer reaches of the Methow Valley.
- When we purchased 139 acres of shrub-steppe hillside above Winthrop and created the

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Meadowlark Natural Area, we also purchased seven additional contiguous acres and reserved them for potential opportunities for planned growth, as identified in the Town of Winthrop Comprehensive Plan as a future expansion area.

When we purchased the Sunny M

Ranch in 2023, we took tangible steps toward making a small parcel of land near Winthrop available for housing that is affordable for those who live in the Methow Valley. We are engaged in determining the best route for securing domestic water, sewer, and other entitlements for the eventual neighborhood.



When development occurs we encourage clustering near towns and preserving open spaces farther from towns.





The gate at x̣ẉnáṃx̣ẉnam (Hummingbird). PHOTO BY CRYSTAL MILLER

LAND JUSTICE

*We are committed to building and sustaining relationships with the original and ongoing stewards of this land.*

—In 2021-2022, supported by fundraising from you — the Methow Valley community — we purchased and then facilitated the return of 320+ acres of ancestral land on the Chewuch River to the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation in honor of the mətx̣ẉu/Methow People, who are using the “x̣ẉnáṃx̣ẉnam/ Hummingbird” property to preserve and share their ancestral knowledge, skills, and traditions.

—The Fish and Wildlife Department of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation is in the planning stages for a series of restoration projects that will help maintain and protect fish and wildlife populations and habitat on the property and in the Chewuch river.

—We are honored to have been asked by the mətx̣ẉu/Methow Families to remain involved in their cultural activities and programs on the property. Through grant funding and private philanthropy, the mətx̣ẉu/Methow Families are able to host classes and workshops, school field trips, ceremonies, festivals, and native plant gathering. Students from Paschal Sherman Indian

School and Liberty Bell Junior High have visited the property to learn about the mətx̣ẉu/Methow People, past and present, and their traditional ways life.

—In addition to hosting monthly meetings of the mətx̣ẉu/Methow Families, representatives from the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, and the Methow Valley Interpretive Center, we continue to seek ways to be effective, trusted allies to the mətx̣ẉu/Methow Families and to the Tribes, while respecting their sovereignty.



Cooking salmon in a traditional style. PHOTO BY JOHN SIROIS

From the Director

*I was on the track team in high school and college. If you’ve ever been to a track meet, then you know that there is a LOT going on at the same time. At any moment you might have runners sprinting down the homestretch or pacing themselves in a distance race, people jumping over hurdles or vaulting over bars, and others throwing heavy objects or javelins. A track team requires a whole range of people with different skills, interests, and expertise — but it’s always scored as one team. I love that.*



*While watching the Liberty Bell High School track team compete in the district championships a few weeks ago, I realized that the Methow Conservancy is a lot like a good track team. We have some of the most committed and hard-working “athletes” for conservation on our staff. I literally cannot say enough good things about the team I get to work with every day. From people trained in wildlife biology, to law, to environmental science, to even English and economics, we are able to cover a whole lot of different “events” at the same time. We each bring different expertise, but like a track team, we share a sense of dedication to our craft and a respect for our mission.*

*Our Board, like a good coaching staff, is supportive, forward-thinking, and not afraid to encourage us to be bold or to be more cautious, depending on the situation. We recently expanded our Board, in recognition of the many different programs and projects we have going on. Wow. We are one lucky team to have so many thoughtful, diverse perspectives helping to guide the mission. (You can read more about our current Board Members at [methowconservancy.org/about-us/staff-board](http://methowconservancy.org/about-us/staff-board)).*

*No track team thrives with just athletes and coaches. Behind it all are the friends, family, and fans who set the team up for success. Your support is simply THE reason we are able to do our events well — you keep us fueled and funded, you volunteer with us, you share your feedback and observations to help us improve, and you let us know that our mission is worth it even when the hurdles seem a little taller than usual. You show up for us every day and we are grateful.*

*With appreciation for you being on our team,*

*Sarah Brooks*

Sarah Brooks  
Executive Director

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 mətx̣ẉu/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 mətx̣ẉu/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 mətx̣ẉu/Methow Tribal families maintain a consistent presence in this valley. We are grateful for the mətx̣ẉu/Methow People’s careful stewarding of this land and hope to learn from their example.



Photo by Jason Paulsen



FROM THE TREASURER'S CORNER:  
5 THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT OUR FINANCES

1. Thanks to the generous support of donors like you, the meticulous records of our retired and new Bookkeepers Joy Schwab and Joanne Uehara, and the detailed oversight of our Finance Committee, we ended the 2023-24 fiscal year on March 31st right on track. We reached our fundraising goal for the year and balanced our operating budget of approximately \$1M.
2. Your support makes a HUGE difference for us! Annual fundraising from people who care about the land of the Methow Valley comprises approximately 70% of our operating budget.
3. Since 1996, we have completed conservation projects worth more than \$57M. That \$1M annual operating budget leverages (and cares for) a LOT of conservation.
4. This past year, you also helped us complete the \$9M Campaign for Sunny M Ranch AND additional funding to purchase Mill Hill. These



Methow  
Conservancy  
Treasurer  
Jessica Kelley

capital projects are in addition to our annual operating fund. Thank you!

5. In 2023, we were deeply honored to be among the nonprofit organizations that Dave Chantler chose to support in a bequest via his will. While we all miss Dave and his amazing knowledge of birds and skiing, it is wonderful to know that his legacy lives on through his estate's support of the Campaign for Sunny M Ranch. People who include the Methow Conservancy in their wills or other estate plans are recognized as members of our Aspen Stand. We hope you let us know if you decide to include the Methow Conservancy in your estate plans so we can appropriately recognize and thank you. We consider being included in an estate as one of the highest honors and signs of trust.

If you have any questions about our finances or if you want more detail, just let us know ([info@methowconservancy.org](mailto:info@methowconservancy.org))!

Let's Stay In Touch!

If you don't get our electronic ENews and Backyard Bulletin, you're missing out! Each month you'll learn more about conservation highlights, events and current projects. We'd love to have you join our list of subscribers.

Methow  
Conservancy



For more information, and to check out our  
monthly electronic publications, visit  
[methowconservancy.org](http://methowconservancy.org)  
or email [info@methowconservancy.org](mailto:info@methowconservancy.org) to subscribe  
to ENews and the Backyard Bulletin.

Methow  
Conservancy  
First Tuesday Events  
Summer/Fall 2024

Farm Tour: Willow Brook Farm

July 2

Get a window into this efficient mixed vegetable operation growing certified organic produce, and producing sought-after sauerkrauts and sauces.

The Aurora Borealis with Shane Larson

Aug. 6

Learn about the Aurora's scintillating curtains of light, what causes them, and their connection to cosmic weather from astrophysicist Shane Larson.

Farm Tour: Twisp River Seed

Sep. 3

Come see what it takes to grow and harvest plants for seed and learn the steps along the way that ensure a high-quality, regionally adapted product.

Columbia River Resilience with Dave Moskowitz

Oct. 1

Take a visual journey with photos from Dave's new book, Big River, alongside stories gathered from the riverkeepers of the Pacific Northwest.

Fence Ecology in the West with Wenjing Xu

Nov. 5

Learn about the ecology of fences and their relationship to animal migration in this talk titled: Hindered Hooves and the Wires That Bind Them.

Full event details at [methowconservancy.org](http://methowconservancy.org). Contact us at (509) 996-2870 or [info@methowconservancy.org](mailto:info@methowconservancy.org).



WHO WE ARE

WE ARE ...

Board Members

Benj Drummond (*President*), Kristen Kirkby (*Vice President*), David Clement (*Secretary*), Jessi Kelley (*Treasurer*), Ashley Ahearn, Teri Beatty, Craig Boesel, Jenny Brown, Kathy Busse, Mike Devany, Bryan Jaffe, Mary Johnston, David Schooler, Tiffany Surface, Kevin van Bueren

Staff Members

Sarah Brooks (*Executive Director*), Jeanne White (*Conservation Director*), Ashley Lodato (*Associate Director*), Julie Grialou (*Senior Ecologist*), Sarah Birkeland (*Land Project Manager*), Daniel Senner (*Conservation Project Manager*), Bridger Layton (*Education Programs Coordinator*), Liana Cabiles (*Conservation Easement Manager*), Mary Morgan (*Membership Coordinator*), Joanne Uehara (*Bookkeeper*)

Advisory Council

Martha Kongsgaard & Peter Goldman (*co-chairs*), Roxie Miller & Carl Miller (1939-2020), Caryl Campbell & John Adams, Char & Ed Alkire, David Bonn, Carolyn & Duncan Bronson, Carolyn Griffin-Bugert & Bob Bugert, Sonya & Tom Campion, Laurel Canan, Heidi de Laubenfels & Harris Clarke, Maud & Marc Daudon, Cathy & Phil Davis, Kristin Devin, Steve Dixon, Tom Doran, Jane Gilbertsen, Richard Hart, Ray Johnston, Ron Judd, Mary Drobka & Tom Lenchek, Jennifer Lewis, Cynthia Macklin, Sue & Mike Megaard, Theresa Miller, Raleigh Bowden & Peter Morgan, Sam & Alison Naney, Amy Snover & Chip Nevins, Marilyn & Denny O'Callaghan, Jason Paulsen, Dina & Paul Pigott, Gaye & Jim Pigott, Bill Pope & Teresa Castner, Peggy Porter, Heather & Ric Redman, Gordy Reynaud & Adrian Chavey, Kathy Podmayer, Dave & Marilyn Sabold, Jeff Clapsaddle & John Schoettler, Tina & Eliot Scull, Frauke Rynd & Mac Shelton, Patty & Stu Spencer, Keith & Deb Stennes, Stephanie & Jamie Stewart, John Sunderland, Kristen Webb, Fred Wert, Maggie Coon & Mark Wolf-Armstrong

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