

2024-25

# Sunny M Management Plan: Executive Summary



Methow  
Conservancy

## Introduction

This Management Plan is intended to help guide the Methow Conservancy in being responsible, long-term stewards of the Sunny M Ranch. We will review it at least annually. We will annually monitor the land to note any new or changing issues.

## Background

For hundreds of generations, the Methow Valley has been the home of the *mətxʷu*/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 *mətxʷu*/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 refused to enter the reservations and simply stayed or dispersed in the region. Even today, many *mətxʷu*/Methow Tribal families maintain a consistent presence in this valley. We are grateful for the *mətxʷu*/Methow People's careful stewarding of this land and hope to learn from their example.

### Imagine the Methow: the Campaign for Sunny M Ranch

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Helga and Erivan Haub purchased Sun Mountain Lodge and related properties, totaling roughly 2500 acres. They renovated the lodge and earned a prestigious AAA Four Diamond designation. For 35 years the Haub Family welcomed multiple uses of the 2500 acres they owned in the Methow Valley around Sun Mountain Lodge, Patterson Mountain, Wolf Creek Road, and the Barnsley-Bitterbrush area. The Methow Valley community relied on Helga and Erivan's vision and goodwill to steward the land, protect wildlife habitat, support local agriculture, and ensure recreational trail use that is so essential to the local economy.

In spring 2022, the Haub Family sold the Sun Mountain Lodge property including the cabins at Patterson Lake and about 1300 acres of their holdings to GEM Partners in Seattle. We have been exploring conservation outcomes with the Haub Family for years and saw the opportunity to purchase the remaining 1200 acres to secure the future of the land for the community: for wildlife, for trails, for agriculture, for the rural economy, and for future generations.

On December 28, 2022, we launched Imagine the Methow: The Campaign for Sunny M Ranch. 170 days and 1500 donors later, on June 15, 2023, we purchased the remaining 1200 acres to hold the land long-term on behalf of the community, both human and wild.

### Sunny M Stewardship & Maintenance Fund

Two families who owned the Sunny M Ranch recognized the importance of caring for the land and historic buildings through restoration, maintenance, weed mitigation, forest management, and other efforts. The Haub Family and the Backus Family (via the Lucky Seven Foundation) made it possible for us to care for the property and infrastructure by helping us seed a robust Stewardship & Maintenance Fund. Many hundreds of donors added to this Fund through the campaign.

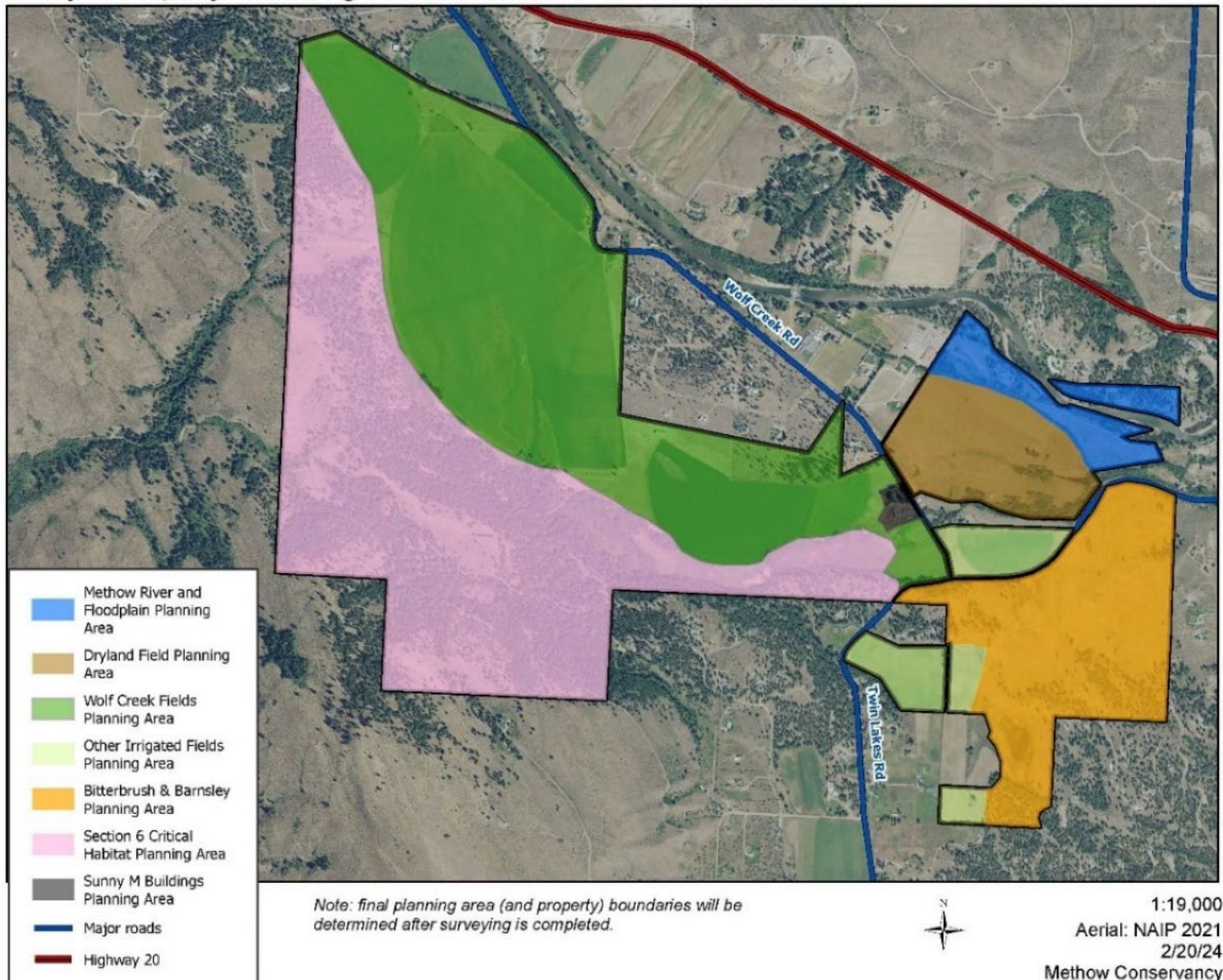


## Identification of Sunny M's Nine Planning Areas

Recognizing that the 1200 acres of Sunny M are diverse and representative of wide-ranging community assets, we have identified nine specific planning areas for this Management Plan.

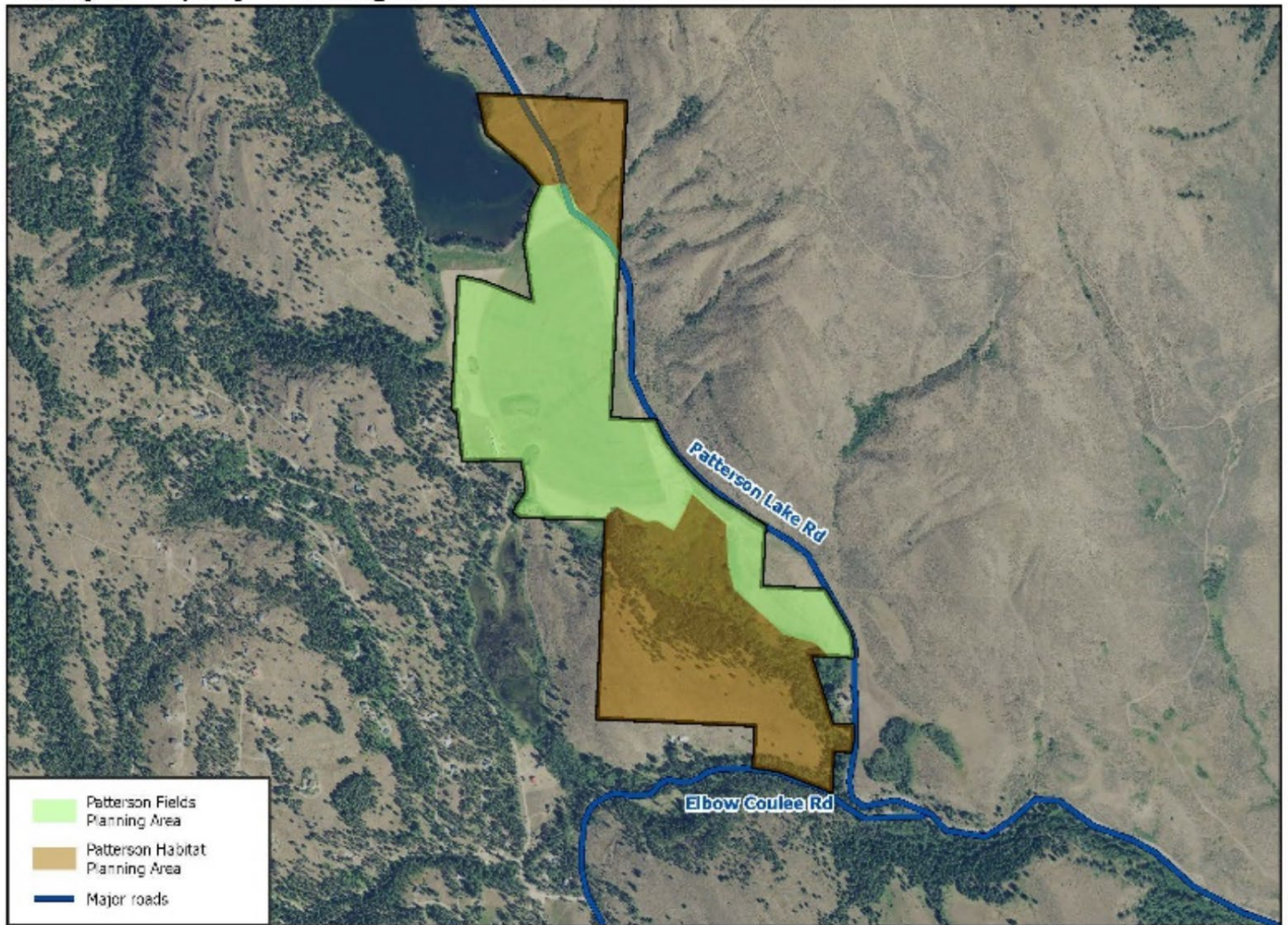
Maps of each area follow.

### Sunny M Property - Planning Area Boundaries for Northern Area





## Sunny M Property - Planning Area Boundaries for Southern Area



1:14,000  
Aerial: NAIP 2021  
12/18/23  
Methow Conservancy

### Vision and Values for Each Planning Area:

We acknowledge that managing a property as diverse and beloved as Sunny M requires a unique capacity for balancing different interests and needs. Our overall goals are to:

- Preserve key wildlife habitat and corridors.
- Protect and preserve the core farmland, ensuring it is available for local agriculture into the future.
- Work with Methow Trails to formalize access to the trail system, permanently.
- Make 1-2% of the land near town available for an affordable housing neighborhood in the future.

We also acknowledge that we will only be able to balance all the interests and needs of Sunny M by working in collaboration with key partners and the community. Below is a list of currently identified key partners:



- Methow Trails and other local recreational groups
- Wolf Creek Irrigation District
- Adjoining neighbors
- Farmers we have leases with
- State and Federal agencies
- Methow Housing Trust
- Methow Families
- The whole community!

### **Planning Area #1: Wolf Creek Fields**

#### Primary Conservation and Community Values

- Agriculture
- Recreation
- Open Space and Scenic Views
- Wildlife movement/habitat

#### Intentions/ Vision

- Primarily managed for agriculture
- Ensure adequate water for agriculture
- Maintain winter trail access
- Maintain wildlife passage



### **Planning Area #2: Patterson Fields**

#### Primary Conservation and Community Values

- Open Space and Scenic Views
- Agriculture
- Wildlife Habitat

#### Intentions/ Vision

- As long as we can find a suitable farmer, it will be managed for agriculture.



### **Planning Area #3: Other Irrigated Fields**

#### Primary Conservation and Community Values

- Agriculture
- Recreation

#### Intentions/ Vision

- Continues to be farmed, as is feasible
- Make trail access permanent



#### **Planning Area #4: Dryland Field**

##### Primary Conservation and Community Values

- Opportunity Area
- Recreation
- Open Space and Scenic
- Wildlife Habitat

##### Intentions/ Vision

- Potential site for affordable housing neighborhood
- Protect wetlands and open water habitats
- Make trail access permanent
- Weed management and habitat enhancement
- Potential site for future agricultural activities



#### **Planning Area #5: Patterson Habitat**

##### **Planning Area**

##### Primary Conservation and Community Values

- Wildlife Habitat

##### Intentions/ Vision

- In general, leave it alone for wildlife habitat, apart from some possible forest management to improve forest health, resilience, and habitat.



#### **Planning Area #6: Section 6 Critical Habitat Planning Area**

##### Primary Conservation and Community Values

- Wildlife habitat and connectivity
- Recreation
- Scenic viewshed

##### Intentions/ Vision

- Funded by USFWS Section 6 funds and needs to be managed in accordance with the grant
- Improve forest resilience and wildlife habitat
- Shrub-steppe enhancement/restoration (weed control)
- Maintain existing public access along the existing managed trails (Winthrop Trail, Power's Plunge, Wolf Creek end of farm field)
- Concentrate human use on managed trails (reduce user trails and help people understand wildlife areas and the importance of leaving them alone)
- Maintain current infrastructure (two-track access for irrigation and Wolf Creek irrigation ditch access)





### Planning Area #7: Methow River and Floodplain

#### Primary Conservation and Community Values

- Fish and Wildlife Habitat
- Floodplain Function

#### Intentions/ Vision

- Protect riverbanks and riparian function; manage human access to river
- Potential for fish/river restoration project
- Maintain existing trail access in this area.
- Good place for educational outreach



### Planning Area #8: Barnsley and Bitterbrush Habitat and Recreation Area (shrub-steppe and wetland)

#### Primary Conservation and Community Values

- Recreation
- Open Space
- Wildlife Habitat

#### Intentions/ Vision

- Make winter trail permanent, explore expansion of summer access
- Weed management and native plant restoration
- Protect wetlands and enhance habitat
- Good place for educational outreach
- Potential for ecologically viable grazing



### Planning Area #9: Sunny M House and Buildings

#### Primary Conservation and Community Values

- Historic
- Opportunity Area

#### Intentions/ Vision

- Preserve historic values (especially of the Barn); keep up on maintenance
- Meaningfully engage with the community on future uses.
- Understand how this area interacts with larger wetland complex nearby and consider restoration, if feasible.



## Community Engagement on Sunny M

### Engagement/Communication with the Community

- **Website:** We will keep the Sunny M pages of our website updated with information about what's happening at Sunny M and will include any Sunny M related events.
- **Press Releases:** Staff will regularly send press releases to the Methow Valley News and other media outlets as appropriate when there is meaningful news to share from the property.
- **Community Input Opportunities:** As the organization considers major management issues (like the affordable housing neighborhood or trail uses, etc.), we are committed to offering clear outlets for community input. This can include hosting focus groups or community discussions/conversations, surveys, and/or other methods of gaining community input.
- **Intake of Comments/Feedback/Requests:** We will monitor the Sunny M email account ([sunnym@methowconservancy.org](mailto:sunnym@methowconservancy.org)) and respond in a timely manner.
- **Signage:** During the first winter of our ownership we had signage on the trail, thanking people for their support and letting the public know how to stay up to date on what's happening on the property. We maintain signs on the backs of four Methow Trails kiosks on the Sunny M Ranch with additional information.
- **Stewardship:** We regularly offer opportunities for the public to help us care for the Sunny M Ranch. Work parties, citizen science opportunities, and other chances to engage with land stewardship are posted on our website.

### CONTACT INFO

- **Sunny M webpages:** <https://methowconservancy.org/sunnym>
- **General questions about Sunny M:** email [sunnym@methowconservancy.org](mailto:sunnym@methowconservancy.org)
- **Research proposals:** We recognize that land on Sunny M may be relevant for local research projects. If you have a proposal for a research project on Sunny M, please email us at [sunnym@methowconservancy.org](mailto:sunnym@methowconservancy.org).

**Other requested uses of Sunny M** (beyond private recreation on sanctioned trails): Submit request at [tinyurl.com/sunnymproposal](https://tinyurl.com/sunnymproposal)

