

METHOW VALLEY CITIZENS COUNCIL



VALLEY VOICE

SPRING / SUMMER 2023

**Ghost Bears of the
North Cascades**

**Chiliwist — The
Path Through**



METHOW VALLEY CITIZENS COUNCIL

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"A culture like ours, we fear what we don't know and we really hate what we fear. To know the bear, to know the unknown and make friend with that kind of fear—it does expand that tolerance towards all other kinds of beings."

— Doug Peacock

"It is wired in our DNA to fear animals that at one time in our distant past posed the most significant threat to us. Our genetics warn us of a danger that still exists in some places but is extremely rare compared to other factors that today account for most of human mortalities. Our genetics have yet to catch up with the realities of our current lives. Our primal fears should be focused the factors that cause us the greatest harm, like automobiles and guns!"

— Dr. Bill Gaines, p. 4

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Letter from the Executive Director

In 1976, the Methow Valley Citizens Council was born when residents met in living rooms to raise a strong community voice to protect the natural environment and rural character of the valley. Over four decades later, MVCC is still tenaciously advocating for our membership's deep care and love for the land, air, water, and communities of the Methow Valley — and pushing for effective representation in our political system. These principles remain core to our mission and our identity as an advocacy organization today. As we envision a future with an incredible rate of change at all levels — locally, regionally, and globally — we must think big, be creative, demonstrate flexibility, and nimbly adapt our organization for the changes, opportunities, and needs ahead.



To address these complex issues, we must do more than advocate for better policies, we must acknowledge the grave injustice, inequity, and disconnection from the natural world inherent in our society. If we are to advance enduring, fair, and just solutions to protect our natural environment and rural character, we must actively work to confront and change these root causes.

In the fall of 2021, the board and staff began the process of developing a long-term strategic plan by interviewing and surveying our members, colleagues, partners, and community members. The themes and messages have been consistently clear: People value our advocacy role, especially in the areas of climate, growth, water, and land use. But we must think differently about how we take on this advocacy. To this end, in February of 2023, our board and staff finalized and committed to six strategic organizational objectives over the next three years:

1. Incorporate the “rights of nature” into the decision-making process, advocating for the needs and voices of the landscapes and wildlife.
2. Build stronger tribal partnerships in and

beyond the Methow.

3. Facilitate connections and collaboration in a green, regional economy.

4. Grow MVCC membership and engage partners beyond the Methow Valley (countywide) to increase breadth and depth of our impact.

5. Advocate in a way that convenes important conversations and builds community.

6. Invest in thriving organizational health and develop robust culture and capacity which aligns with our values.

In this issue of the Valley Voice, we explore elements of many of these strategic objectives. “The Ghost Bears of the North Cascades” (p.4) speaks for the forgotten grizzly bear and the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity

to restore them to the North Cascades. “The Path Through” (p.7) dives into the historic connection between the Methow and the Okanogan. “Connecting with Time Immemorial” (p.9) examines the importance of curriculum that teaches tribal sovereignty. “Regenerative Agriculture as Climate Resiliency” (p. 11) explores agriculture as an integral part of a local green economy and an important climate solution. “From Competition to Collaboration” (p. 14) looks at how we’ve moved to a model of advocacy that convenes. And “Rethinking Fundraising”(p. 17) explores how we might raise money with a focus on the well-being of the community.

We’re simultaneously feeling energized and challenged by this road map for the future, but we believe in our hearts it’s the right way forward to navigate today’s world. We look forward to partnering with you to create this vision of a healthy future for our land, air, water, and community.

Jasmine Minbashian
Executive Director



BRINGING BACK THE GHOST BEARS OF THE NORTH CASCADES

Grizzly bears lived in the North Cascades for thousands of years until they were hunted and trapped close to local extinction by the early 1900s. There are not currently enough bears in the North Cascades to recover on their own. With a vast, wild space of nearly 10,000 square miles, the North Cascades is one of the few intact ecosystems remaining in the contiguous U.S. where we can recover grizzly bears. Photo: C. Barfoot

Grizzly bears have disappeared from the North Cascades. We have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to return them to their native habitat.

DR. BILL GAINES, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
WASHINGTON CONSERVATION SCIENCE INSTITUTE

Bill Gaines has over 30 years of experience in natural resource management and conservation, working for both private and public agencies and has published over 60 peer-reviewed articles and technical reports. Over the decades, he has spent many days and nights in search of the elusive grizzly bear in the North Cascades.

SHELLROCK PASS — FALL 2020

I sit high up on a ridge looking down at the vastness of the Eureka Creek valley. The valley stretches due west from me then makes a sharp rounded turn as it flows south. I've spent the better part of two days trying to sort out how to get into this valley, wandering around on its ridges and high basins but failing to find a safe passage into its inner depths. Still uncertain how to access the valley bottom to set up any sample sites in our search for the elusive North Cascades grizzly bear, I am beginning to think this valley may just be too remote, vast, and difficult to enter.

The valley is rimmed by black and gray rock that forms

huge faces and ridges of the high peaks. Gorgeous basins lie beneath the summits, highlighted with reds and purples from the huckleberry whose leaves have turned color with the fall season. The valley is lined with a ring of gold — alpine larch in full fall glory. Green forests along the bottom are interspersed with meadows and interrupted by the powerful forces of avalanches that form long chutes cutting through the forest. A breeze blows over me. I zip up my jacket and windshell. The cold wind tells a message of the coming of winter, of a time when bears go within. A time of introspection as I withdraw from the summer.

And then I imagine her. She is roaming through the high basins, gathering what is left of the season's fruits, knowing what the cold and shortened days are telling her. It is time to find a den. She knows she's entering the den without being pregnant... again. This valley is all she knows. Taught by her mother before she died, she knows all she needs to survive. If only she could find a mate to sustain her species. The deep snows will come soon. She will take her last bites of food, content that she has put on enough weight to make it through the winter. She will slide into her cozy den and fall asleep, thinking that perhaps next year will be different.

She will be 14 years old when she next comes out of her den in the spring. She knows that her time to have a cub is fast running out. The sad reality is that most likely she will die alone, unable to find another of her kind. And we humans will have missed an opportunity to lend a helping hand to another species, to right the wrongs of our past. Instead, the grizzly bear of the North Cascades will be but a ghost haunting the memories of those who knew and cared.

I am often asked: “Why do we need to recover grizzly bears in the North Cascades?”; “Isn’t the ecosystem functioning just fine without them?” I usually answer the question something like this: there are many reasons to try to recover grizzly bears in the North Cascades, from legal obligations brought by the Endangered Species Act, to aesthetic reasons of wanting to be able to see these amazing animals and to know they are there, to ecological reasons that describe the role they play in shaping ecosystems and how they can be used to assess ecosystem health.

I then offer to the person who asked the question that it is up to each individual to come to their own decision on why, or why not, we should return grizzly bears to the North Cascades. I offer my own reasoning: as a scientist, I see grizzly bears playing a key ecosystem

function — they maintain healthy meadows by acting as rototillers, dispersing seeds from the many plants they eat. Many of the roles bears play in ecosystems are subtle and not likely to be noticed by the casual observer, and many roles we have yet to understand. We have very few places where we have a full complement of our native carnivores to study — the North Cascades could be one of them. With its vast wild space of nearly 10,000 square miles, the North Cascades offers one of the few places in our country, in our world, that is large enough to consider recovering a full complement of these magnificent animals.



The North Cascades provides ideal habitat for grizzly bears. One hundred of the 124 plant species that bears primarily feed on grow in the North Cascades recovery area. Photo: NPS/Eric Johnston

As a grizzly bear expert, I’m often asked about bear attacks. On more than one occasion, I’ve had a person approach me after my presentation is over, clearly shaken by the idea of seeing a bear. Often they tell me that they are supportive of conservation efforts, but that they have an overwhelming fear of bears. I recall one woman in a class I was teaching visibly shaken by the pictures of bears (both grizzly and black bears) I projected on the wall. She described her fear as something that was almost “primal” and difficult to control.

It is wired in our DNA to fear animals that at one time in our distant past posed the most significant threat to us. Our genetics warn us of a danger that still exists in some places but is extremely rare



Left: The Eureka Creek Valley is one of many wild and remote places Bill Gaines has searched for signs of grizzly bears in the North Cascades. Photo: Bill Gaines

compared to other factors that today account for most of human mortalities. Our genetics have yet to catch up with the realities of our current lives. Our primal fears should be focused on the factors that cause us the greatest harm, like automobiles and guns! As I researched more about this to gain my own understanding, I thought back to some of my experiences and I realized that I too have these same primal fears but through repeated exposure to wild places and by educating myself about the realities of bear attacks, I have learned to overcome these fears, to put them in proper perspective. Instead, I lie awake at night worrying about our daughter driving home from college!

The last reason I give for returning grizzlies to the North Cascades is that we as humans are responsible for making them into ghost bears. Grizzlies were in the North Cascades for thousands of years until local settlers hunted, trapped and poisoned them to local extinction in the 1800s and early 1900s. Hudson Bay Company collected 3,188 grizzly bear pelts from nearby trading posts between 1826 and 1857! As the population of grizzlies dwindled, government trappers were hired to rid the west of the remaining wolves, bears, and carnivores in an effort to protect

livestock and enhance numbers of big game.

By the late 1960s, grizzly bears were rarely seen in the North Cascades and the Washington Department of Game estimated their numbers to be about 10. However, in 1967, Rocky Wilson, a Cascade mine operator and veteran packer, killed a large bear in Fisher Creek whose “hide measured 6 feet and 11 inches from nose to tail, and the claws were 3 ¼ inches long” according to a newspaper article about the incident. Mr. Wilson was the last known person to legally kill a grizzly bear in the North Cascades.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, considerable efforts were made by state and federal biologists to determine the number of grizzly bears that still remained in the North Cascades. Based largely on tracks and sightings, biologists estimated the number of grizzly bears in the North Cascades to be no more than 10-20 animals by the mid-1990s.

In 2014, an additional evaluation was made of the available grizzly bear reports in the North Cascades to determine if the remaining bears met the definition of a “population.” I participated on the team of biologists who conducted this review. The determination: there were not enough grizzly bears to recover on their own and without any human intervention the grizzly bear would go locally extinct in the North Cascades.

I’ve been working for much of my professional life to study the ghost bears of the North Cascades, finding occasional traces — a track here, a suspicious photo turned in by a hiker. Over time, the evidence of their existence in the North Cascades has considerably reduced. If we are to have this iconic native species in the North Cascades, they will need our help. ♦

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for grizzly bear recovery in the North Cascades will be released in July. The National Park Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will be seeking comment on their recovery proposal which will seek to slowly (3-7 bears a year for 5-10 years to build to an initial population of 25 bears) re-introduce bears into the North Cascades. More information about the proposal and how to comment can be found at: www.mvcitizens.org/grizzlyrecovery



The Path Through

Looking south towards the Chiliwist Valley. This raised east-west valley was a traditional pathway between the Okanogan and Methow valleys. Photo: Nick Littman

NICK LITTMAN, COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER

From up here on Chiliwist Butte the boundaries between two valleys, the Methow and the Okanogan, seem far less distinct. Not far south of me the two rivers — both flowing muddy and bankfull on this rainy early May day — find their outlet in the mighty Columbia. The clouds are welcome after a sweltering, sunny week that has opened the arrowleaf blooms in their yellow long-necked splendor and the lupine in their purple upright stature. Meadowlarks announce themselves from high perches — a bitterbrush stem, a burned stump, an old fencepost. From my highpoint on the Butte looking east and west at the meander of Chiliwist Creek, I can imagine the passage through this range: the steady climb from Malott onto the raised, flat valley before me, now dotted with small farms, homesteads, and homes; the steep climb up over Three Devils Mountain and, finally, the long descent down Benson Creek to the Methow just south of Twisp. This was a trail of necessity, linking the tightly-bounded Methow to the world outside. It was also a trail of connection, winding cultural treads between two places.

We live today in a world of harsh distinction. Straight rigid lines are drawn, not only around towns and

counties and states, but around people too. It is within this framework of modern social-political division that we often view the Methow and Okanogan Valleys as different and separate — one progressive, the other conservative, one cowboy, the other affluent. A quick look down shows us that the underlying roots of these places have intertwined for a long time, beginning with those who established the trails on foot: the Methow People.

The Chiliwist trail connected the villages of the Methow Tribe together. As Richard Hart writes in “Lost Homeland: The Methow Tribe and the Columbia Reservation”, the Methow lived in seasonal and permanent villages up and down the Methow River and tributaries as well as villages near where Chiliwist and Loup Loup creeks empty into the Okanogan River. Their territory extended south along the Columbia around the towns of Azwell, Pateros and Brewster as well as across the Columbia around Bridgeport. The narrow, steep topography of the lower Methow Valley made up valley travel challenging in spring due to high water and snow. The Chiliwist trail, worn by many feet and horse hooves over millennia, allowed the Methow to move to seasonal food sources in the Methow. At least 15 types of berries and seven types of roots were collected around the Methow Valley including huckleberries, serviceberries, Bitterroot, Indian Potatoes (spring beauties), and Indian Carrots (a variety of *lomatum*).

There were other trails too. The Ashnola Declaration, which affirms the protection and conservation of the Ashnola Watershed by the Lower Similkameen Indian Band in Southern British Columbia, includes a story about a traditional trade connection from the Methow through the Pasayten, past the Cathedral peaks and into the Ashnola watershed, a tributary of the Similkameen River. Lauren Terbasket, the Lower Similkameen Indian Band's parks negotiator, has talked of a time when much of the Lower Similkameen adult population was wiped out by an epidemic. The Methow found and adopted the surviving Similkameen elders and children. These two Tribes, now placed in separate countries, are more interrelated than we might think.



Lupine hug rocky slopes near the top of Chiliwist Butte. Photo: Nick Littman

As white settlers homesteaded on Methow land, they also used the Methow People's trails. Sally Portman's chronicle of the Methow Valley's history, "The Smiling Country" states that for decades, the Chiliwist was the only settler route into the valley, requiring a crossing of the Columbia by "hollowed out logs with bark still on them" and then a "two-and-a-half-day ordeal by wagon wheels." The earliest mail carrier in the Methow, U.E. Fries, used the route.

It was around this point in history, in the late 1800s and early 1900s when the Methow People were forced from their traditional lands onto the Colville Reservation east of the Okanogan River, that the connection between the two Valleys could have halted. However, the Methow People continued to return to their traditional lands into the 1940s to set up seasonal camps and gather food in their traditional homeland. A few Methow families held on to

deeded acres (the Miller family still has their land near the mouth of the Methow River). The Chiliwist was used less and less once a road up the valley from the Columbia was finished in 1910 and the Loup Loup road was improved in the 1930s. As ranching and agriculture became anchors of the Methow and Okanogan economies, there was extensive movement back and forth across the Loup.

Today, we see the Methow and Okanogan connections being re-strengthened. The Colville Confederated Tribes have made several land purchases in the Methow Valley in recent years which give the Methow People a toehold presence on their traditional lands. In 2021, the Methow Conservancy purchased the Wagner Ranch along the Chewuch River which they gifted to the Colville Tribes last year. The 328-acre riverfront property holds a strong cultural significance and will be used for traditional gatherings, youth culture camps and retreats.

MVCC's work spreads throughout the Methow, Okanogan and beyond because the issues we work on are interconnected throughout this geography. Smoke from wildfires is breathed in Mazama, Omak and Brewster alike. Enloe Dam prevents salmon from swimming up the Similkameen River into one more vital cold-water refugia in the Upper Columbia watershed. The toxic mine tailings in British Columbia that pile up behind expanding tailing dams threaten the water of the Ashnola and thus the Similkameen, the Okanogan, and the Columbia rivers. The policies of Okanogan County — how they allocate water and zone for development — affect us all.

A bioregion, or *life territory*, is an area defined by its natural systems, a region governed by abiotic and biotic commonalities—geology, climate, elevation, flora and fauna but also, culture. On Chiliwist Butte, the clouds hemmed in my distant vistas but I knew the Cascades rose up sharply to the west, the Columbia flowed wide in the south, and the Kettle River Range lay to the east. North of me, two valleys ran parallel, entwined through the centuries. This was the immense and complex geography of our bioregion, a place worth advocating for far into the future. ♦

Chiliwist has also been spelled "Chilowist" and "Chillowist" meaning a "trickle of water falling over big rock." The hike up Chiliwist Butte lies just west of Malott in the Chiliwist Wildlife Area managed by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.



CONNECTING WITH TIME IMMEMORIAL

Why MVCC Supports a Curriculum that Teaches Tribal Sovereignty and Coexistence

LEKI ALBRIGHT, JUNIOR BOARD MEMBER AND
MARY YGLESIA, OPERATIONS MANAGER

In learning about effective coexistence and stewardship of the natural world, among our greatest teachers are the local indigenous communities who have millennia of experience and a deep cultural connection to the land. Unfortunately, this opportunity for learning has been lacking from statewide

Above: Students learn about how Indigenous tribes use native plants at the Methow Valley Interpretive Center (MVIC) native plant garden. Photo: MVIC

elementary and high school education. To change this, the Washington Office of Public Instruction with collaboration from Washington tribes, created the Since Time Immemorial curriculum. In 2015, this curriculum was mandated to be delivered to students in Washington public schools. However, this mandate remains unfunded, meaning teachers are not provided the professional development and tools to be able to effectively teach this curriculum to their students.

What does a curriculum about Washington's first people have to do with MVCC and its mission to raise a strong community voice for the protection of the Methow Valley's natural environment and rural character? A key objective in MVCC's strategic plan is to "Build Stronger Tribal Partnerships in and Beyond the Methow." Working in partnership with the indigenous people of the region is at the heart of environmental and social

justice. To protect our environment we must learn from and listen to Indigenous communities who have a rich understanding of how our individual and collective actions impact the each other and the natural world.

One of the action items under this strategic objective is to evaluate how the curriculum called “Since Time Immemorial: Tribal Sovereignty in Washington State” is being taught in our local schools. This curriculum goes beyond historical information about native culture to explore concepts of tribal sovereignty and the modern-day relationships between local tribes and governments. It promotes collaboration with those local indigenous groups to change the narrative from one of taking from the environment to one of coexisting



A display of traditional foods harvested by the Methow and other Indigenous tribes at the Methow Valley Interpretive Center (MVIC). Photo: Jamie Pettito

with the environment. Students educated through this curriculum will have a greater understanding of the authentic history of their communities and be better equipped to care for the natural environment in a time when proactive youth are most needed.

The Methow Valley School District is fortunate to have dedicated teachers who, despite not being provided the support they deserve to deliver this educational content, are making efforts to bring this information to their students. One of the third-grade teachers who has been bringing her classes to the Methow Valley Interpretive Center for many years, says that her goal is to show her students, “how the environment influences the culture and how the

people lived and respected the environment.” She particularly appreciates that the Interpretive Center offers students an opportunity to see actual artifacts of the first people, visit the native garden and learn about how Indigenous people gathered traditional foods and medicines in this area.

While this rich learning opportunity is reaching the younger students, some Liberty Bell High School students are exploring the deficiencies in education around Native American tribes. For their tenth grade Civic Action Project, students Nora Bosco and Ghost Miranda shared their experiences: “We feel like past and current curriculums could be improved by adding more focus on the humanity of Native Americans and showing culture in a respectful way.” They expressed that they felt that the way they were taught was not culturally sensitive and leaned on Native American stereotypes that reinforced notions of the superiority of the colonizers.

Nora and Ghost reiterated, “Something we hope to accomplish is raising awareness about the failure of some curriculums to teach the lifestyles of Native Americans in respectful and accurate ways. We want accurate teachings about important cultures in America’s history, not only focusing on one side of the story like most classes are. From properly learning about Native American culture we hope it will spark empathy in people and teach it to young students.”

In Washington we are fortunate to have a curriculum endorsed by all 29 federally-recognized tribes ready to be delivered to our students. What remains missing, however, is the funding to support the professional development of our teachers to deliver this curriculum. Once again, a bill to fund this educational mandate failed in the 2023 legislative session. It is a great loss to our students, our communities and to the work of social and environmental justice.

The future is in our youth. They are the ones who are inheriting the challenges of a changing climate, droughts, floods, wildfires, polluted waters, and dwindling wildlife. They are the ones who will have to navigate a world where too many of us are only now waking up to the realization that the ways we’ve done things are not sustainable. What if we arm them with a deeper connection to a culture that has been here since time immemorial, a culture that worked with the natural world instead of extracting from it all that it could? Perhaps those seeds of a changing viewpoint will grow and sprout seedlings of compassion that grow into strong trees of wisdom and fairness. ♦

Regenerative Agriculture as Climate Resiliency

MADELYN HAMILTON, PUBLIC LANDS
& WILDLIFE COORDINATOR

A key objective of MVCC's strategic roadmap is transitioning to a local green economy that supports natural systems rather than degrades them. A vital part of this economy in the Methow and Okanogan is a productive local agricultural sector that helps to store carbon in our soils while growing us food. MVCC's original mission included language around protecting our agricultural character and we remain committed to that ideal today. But what exactly is regenerative agriculture and how can it help us to store carbon and become more climate resilient?

How we grow our food matters. The production, processing and distribution of food is the world's largest economic activity.

According to the "Carbon Farming Solution," food production is responsible for one third of all greenhouse gas emissions worldwide. In the face of an uncertain climate future, how we grow our food has the potential to slow current carbon emissions and build soil health and biodiversity that will ensure food security for generations to come.

Regenerative agriculture is currently trending as a hot button climate solution, but like the word "sustainable," it often has its meaning muddled and greenwashed. While there is broad agreement that regenerative practices are good for soil health and have extensive other environmental benefits, there is less consensus on their true capacity for sequestering additional carbon out of the atmosphere on a global scale. Rather than it being the solution, it is therefore important to talk about carbon farming as but one tool of many that are needed to help us reach a climate resilient future.

Bluebird Grain Farms processes grain sourced from three large Columbia Basin farms with regenerative practices at their new barn along Hwy 20 south of Winthrop. By working with other farms, they are able to have a greater impact on regional soil health and overall carbon footprint. Photo: Bluebird Grain Farms





Regenerative farming practices such as crop rotation, composting, and reduced or no-till farming creates living soil that can hold more carbon and increase the nutrient density and production of crops. Photo: Mintra

WHAT IS REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE?

In its simplest definition, regenerative agriculture speaks to closed-loop farming practices that cultivate cycles of soil replenishment rather than depletion. Regenerative agriculture helps soils and plants to store more carbon by using techniques in alignment with natural systems. The soil becomes a fertile “carbon sink” that is capable of increasing both the nutrient density and production of crops. Regenerative practices include:

- Perennial crop systems (which don’t require tilling, a practice that releases carbon into the atmosphere)
- Reduced or no-till farming of annual crops
- Cover-cropping to slow soil erosion and hold water
- Composting
- Crop rotations
- Improved grazing and pasture management for livestock

While regenerative agriculture has grown in popularity in recent years in our culture, indigenous communities the world over have been implementing these same practices as part of their land management for millennia. They are the original regenerative stewards, and a truly regenerative food system would also include economic relationships to the land and each other that mirror indigenous relationships of reciprocity, reverence, and collective care, a far cry from our current global capitalist market systems. As our community works toward cultivating a “green economy,” we would do well to follow indigenous food sovereignty leaders who are centering relationships to land and people.

Food is an indicator of both the health of a community and the health of the land, and many Methow farms are already implementing regenerative

practices into their operations. As anyone who's tasted Willowbrook Farm greens, Doubletree Farm Jersey milk or Wild Plum Farm pork can attest to, food is medicine — you can taste the difference, and that difference is a direct reflection of the care and attention farmers give to their soil. With climate uncertainty on the horizon and as widening income inequality gaps continue to shape this valley and region, the future of farming in the Methow is

unclear. It's therefore imperative that we prioritize the preservation of Okanogan County farmland and continue to find creative ways to support regenerative agricultural practices in our communities. We need these working lands to stay in agriculture that fosters biodiversity, builds soil health, holds water and produces food — all ecosystem services that will make our land and people more resilient in the decades ahead. ♦

LOCAL CASE STUDY

BLUEBIRD GRAIN FARM WINTHROP, WA

"Without live soil we can't expect to reap living food."

Before 2004, Brooke and Sam Lucy couldn't buy organic Washington wheat because nobody was growing it. They decided to take the growing upon themselves and Bluebird Grain Farm was born. With the initial vision of growing and processing their own grains, flours and dry mixes and expanding organic grain production in the Pacific Northwest, Bluebird has provided our region and our state with high quality, nutrient-dense, organically grown ancient grains and flours for the last twenty years. Soil health has been their priority since the beginning.

On their farm fields in the Methow the Lucys have incorporated the following regenerative practices to improve soil health over the years: they've cover-cropped with legumes to increase soil nitrogen, grown out buckwheat to increase soil potassium, fed liquid fish and compost to crops, and have left all crop residue (including straw) in the field to become future soil.

Over the last several years Bluebird's model has shifted from growing production grain to increasing

their capacity for processing (you've likely seen their beautiful new mill facility right off the highway a mile or so south of Winthrop!). The Lucys now farm 35 acres of seed stock on that site, one of the Methow Conservancy's original easements and one of the places Sam first farmed when he moved to the valley thirty years ago. In producing less grain in the valley proper, Bluebird now sources from three other organic farms in the Columbia Basin. These larger farms that Bluebird collaborates

with (1,500-5,000 acres each) incorporate regenerative agricultural techniques into their operations, at a much larger scale than what Bluebird was ever farming here in the Methow. This means that collectively they are able to have a far greater impact on both regional soil health and carbon footprints by working together.

Finding innovative ways to partner and collaborate both locally and regionally is a vital part of creating a new food economy, and Bluebird Grain Farm's model stands as a shining example of how working together

creates efficiencies of scale that can help make farming economically viable, all while producing more food for our communities.

Learn more about Bluebird Grain Farms at www.bluebirdgrainfarms.com



Brooke and Sam Lucy founded Bluebird Grain Farms in 2004 with the aim of growing and processing their own grains. Photo: Bluebird Grain Farms



For MVCC, collaboration plays out in many different venues from the Capitol building to the riverside.

From Competition to Collaboration

LORAH SUPER, PROGRAM DIRECTOR

*Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and
rightdoing,
there is a field. I'll meet you there.*

*When the soul lies down in the grass,
the world is too full to talk about.
Ideas, language, even the phrase 'each other'
doesn't make any sense.*

— excerpt from *A Great Wagon*, by Rumi

In the past two decades, I have witnessed a rewarding shift as nonprofits in the valley have moved from working in a competitive frame, through learning how to collaborate with one another to keep funding for our work, to a new day in which we are actively sharing resources, raising each other up and convening across sectors to solve big, complex problems. It's a heartening evolution.

Just two short decades ago, most of the environmental work I saw lived in silos. The valley already had over 80 active nonprofits, and we were friendly but there was fierce competition for limited pools of funding. We each held our cards close, and our failure to communicate about our goals and projects led to duplication and inefficiency. Grant-making foundations — and in one case I'm familiar with, the federal government — stepped in to require collaboration as a condition of funding. That got us moving in the right direction. Some nonprofits disappeared from the landscape, and others learned to thrive by coordinating on common goals with other organizations in our respective sectors. Somewhere between the lessons learned from the 2014 Carlton Complex recovery process and the long slog through the COVID-19 pandemic, we picked up a new skill: pulling people together from across the spectrum of community organizations to work on long term, big-picture goals.

Last month, I was having coffee with Sarah Jo Lightner, the Executive Director of Methow Recycles. We were meeting to plan for a spring visit from Governor

Inslee's staff. This is a meeting that probably would not have happened 20 or even 10 years ago. In the past, similar tours for policymakers have been coordinated to showcase MVCC's advocacy work, highlight problems we address, and promote our success stories. But now my thoughts skip to how I can share this opportunity — how it can be beneficial to our community.

The thing is, our work today not only thrives on convening and collaborating, it requires it. The issues we face have become exponentially more complex and multi-dimensional, requiring an array of strategies and expertise to find the best solutions. After this year's legislative session, during which MVCC's Action Fund team spent significant time coordinating with nonprofits from the valley, around the region, and across the state, the opportunity was calling me to be inclusive of areas where MVCC is not taking the lead, areas where success relies on groups coming together to collaborate and share their work.

Immediately, Sarah Jo's comments over coffee affirmed my gut feelings about why we need to keep doing this. In one short conversation, we connected environmental justice with zoning and affordable housing, and tied them both to equitable access to recycling and repair services. We discussed an important link between composting and wildlife conservation. Given enough time, we probably could have connected more dots, and filled our table with other problem-solvers from different parts of the community, generating creative solutions with our new partnerships. And that would have been a good thing for both our organizations and for our community.

Historically, MVCC has been best known for our advocacy role and willingness to take on controversial issues (e.g. an international destination ski resort, Okanogan County land and water use, rules, and enforcement). These are a key part of our brand. At the same time, the issues we face have become exponentially more complex and multi-dimensional, requiring an array of strategies and expertise. Thus, we are often called upon to act as a convener or as participant at a table convened by others. Recent very successful examples of our role as convener/leader are the Methow Headwaters campaign and the process which culminated in the Methow Climate Action Plan. The North Central Washington Forest Health Collaborative and the Methow Valley Housing

Solutions Network are groups convened by others where we've played a critical role relevant to our mission.

In the coming 3-5 years, we anticipate significant opportunities for coalition building around some of our community's most significant challenges including how to allocate and conserve water, how to manage our lands and forests in light of increasing wildfire risk and the impacts of burgeoning recreation on wildlife. As chronicled in "Lost Homeland," by Richard Hart, the culture of the Methow People was to be welcoming and collaborative. By continuing that tra-



The Methow Headwaters campaign was a recent example of a very successful collaborative campaign to prevent industrial-scale mining on 340,079 acres of land around the headwaters of the Methow River. Photo: Hannah Dewey

dition, we are honoring the spirit of that culture, and the spirit of the land to which it is connected. To be successful and have the greatest community benefit we will have to work across sectors — with nonprofits, agencies, tribal members, governments, businesses and passionate individuals.

The future we are walking into contains many uncertainties. I am convinced that we have been brought here at this time to walk toward that future together, and to succeed by confronting it with the best of what we all bring to this special place on Earth. ♦



The skies in the Methow are dark enough to see the Milky Way over Winthrop. The Milky Way is one of the first features of our night sky to be washed out by an increase in light pollution. Photo: Paul Pigott

Our Dark Skies Won't Protect Themselves

DEAN KURATH, CHAIR OF METHOW DARK SKY COALITION STEERING COMMITTEE

We are excited to welcome the Methow Dark Sky Coalition as MVCC's newest program. Methow Dark Sky Coalition's mission of preserving, enhancing and promoting dark skies in the Methow nestles seamlessly into MVCC's mission of protecting the Methow's natural environment and rural character. We look forward to spreading their important messages throughout our community.

Imagine, you're sitting next to the pulsing red embers of a dying fire. You're by yourself, looking into the recesses of the night sky. Your night-adapted eyes soon absorb far more than you can really comprehend: the wispy, wide arms of the Milky Way, the faint glow of the core of the galaxy in the Sagittarius constellation, the many pinpricks of light inside the Pleiades. The chill of spring hasn't left yet. You lean closer to the fire. An owl's hoot vibrates the air.

You hear the car a moment before its light sweeps into your eyes. You blink through the glare. The magic of the night is wiped away. Magnify this a hundred, a thousand, a million times and you realize the pervasive effects of light pollution.

The Methow Valley is fortunate to have some of the darkest skies in the country. Global surveys indicate that the brightness of the night sky is doubling every 7 years. Left unchecked, it won't be too long before residents and visitors in the Methow will no longer be able to see the Milky Way.

Light pollution affects far more than our stargazing ability. Bright lights disrupt bird migration patterns, and the feeding and mating cycles of insects, bats, fish, and salamanders. Excessive lighting at night also interrupts the predator/prey relationship, creating an imbalance in the ecosystem. In humans, nighttime exposure to blue-spectrum light suppresses melatonin and increases the risk for a number of chronic conditions. As much as half of our outdoor lighting is wasted in the U.S., costing us billions of dollars and increasing the carbon footprint of our cities and towns due to excess electricity use.

The good news is that making a few, small, affordable changes to lighting practices can limit the effects of light pollution. The Methow Dark Sky Coalition is working with the International Dark Sky Association to educate and inspire valley residents and visitors to implement smart lighting practices. We advocate using light only where and when needed at night. This can be accomplished by using timers, motion detectors and shielding outdoor lights to direct light downward where it is useful. Using the lowest wattage

necessary and using lights with a warm color correlated temperature of less than 3000 Kelvin can also reduce light pollution. Turning off the outdoor lights is always the simplest and most effective approach.

In last fall's Valley Voice, Methow elder Mark Miller talked about how he loves when the power goes out and he can go outside and see the same night sky his ancestors saw thirteen thousand years ago. By working to

implement smart lighting practices together we have the opportunity to make our skies darker for future generations to come. The dark night sky won't protect itself. ♦

For more information and to get involved in working to keep our skies dark check out the Methow Dark Sky Coalition website: www.methowdarksky.org or the International Dark Sky Association website: www.darksky.org

RETHINKING FUNDRAISING

Raising Money with the Community at the Center

NANCY MCKINNEY-MILSTEADT,
DEPUTY DIRECTOR

As a fundraiser for over 20 years, I have often thought about the competitive nature of my work and wondered how organizations could think differently about the money they raise. Too often, nonprofits who are committed to doing good work for our community have been left vying for similar donors and grants rather than focusing on how to raise and spread money to bring the greatest benefit to the community.

In 2018, a group of savvy Seattle fundraisers began conversations about fundraising and equity. Together, they “developed a movement that challenges philanthropic practices as being colonial in nature, and exclusionary in practice.” These community-centric fundraising principles have changed the way I and many nonprofit fundraisers approach their work in a more holistic and inclusionary way, changing the way many think about funding the good work that they are engaged in.

The ten principles of community-centric fundraising are:

1. Fundraising must be grounded in race, equity, and social justice.
2. Individual organizational missions are not as important as the collective community.
3. Nonprofits are generous with and mutually supportive of one another.

4. All who engage in strengthening the community are equally valued, whether volunteer, staff, donor, or board member.
5. Time is valued equally as money.
6. We treat donors as partners, and this means that we are transparent, and occasionally have difficult conversations.
7. We foster a sense of belonging, not othering.
8. We promote the understanding that everyone (donors, staff, funders, board members, volunteers) personally benefits from engaging in the work of social justice — it's not just charity and compassion.
9. We see the work of social justice as holistic and transformative, not transactional.
10. We recognize that healing and liberation requires a commitment to economic justice.

As part of our strategic plan, MVCC has committed to incorporating these principles into our fundraising strategies. We believe that how we raise money and how we spend precious funds reflects on our organization and must support the broader community. Our commitment to community-centric fundraising also connects with our role as a convener and collaborator who works with many partners to achieve goals beyond the scope of any one organization.

How will this change our fundraising in practice? We'll be submitting more collaborative grant applications, directing donors to projects or campaigns that they may be interested in, and raising what we need to fulfill our mission. We'll be working to share our funds and fundraising expertise with organizations and groups who have not been able to raise funds as effectively due to systemic racism, classism, and other structural oppressions. We'll be raising money with the aim of improving the natural environment and rural character for everyone in the Methow Valley and Okanogan County — not just those who send us a check (though please do keep sending us checks!). ♦



LEARNING TO BURN

In mid-May this year, Cascadia Prescribed Burn Association organized a “Learn and Burn” event on private land outside Leavenworth, bringing together community members, agencies and organizations to show how a prescribed burn can be implemented. The event was a success and could be a model for a Prescribed Burn Association here in the Methow. Photo: Sam Israel

Using Fire on Private Lands

SAM ISRAEL, FOREST FIELD SPECIALIST

For our dry forests east of the Cascade crest, fire has played a critical role in maintaining the health of our forests for millennia. Native species adapted to fire and indigenous communities wove it into their culture and actively used burns to keep the landscape healthy. It is time for us to learn from and embrace indigenous practices and reintroduce fire onto our landscape. While we’ve worked hard to promote prescribed fire in large public land forest restoration projects, there are many private lands in the Methow that would benefit from fire.

In support of our effort to embrace community prescribed burning on private lands, I traveled to Northern California in March to take part in an inaugural

Prescribed Burn Association Learning Exchange. Prescribed Burn Associations are a partnership between a range of stakeholders, from ranchers and landowners to heavy equipment operators and (often retired) fire management professionals who share knowledge and resources and carry out prescribed burns on private land.

Across the West, Prescribed Burn Associations have successfully burned thousands of acres and are developing the capacity to implement landscape-scale burns in the challenging terrain of the wildland-urban interface. Associations have their challenges — liability, cost, and the moderation of smoke — but by working collaboratively with the community they’ve been able to overcome many of these barriers. Here in the Methow, we are exploring innovative ways to overcome these barriers and advocate for appropriate protections for landowners, burners and their communities. ♦

If this community burning program interests you and you would like to learn more please reach out to Sam Israel at samisrael@gmail.com.

MEET & GREET

Dana Golden, Resilient Methow Program Coordinator

Resilient Methow, which grew out of the Methow Valley Climate Action Plan (MVCAP) and has been fiscally sponsored by MVCC for the last few years, officially became a program of MVCC in April. Resilient Methow works to build collaboration with partners throughout Okanogan County to advance the goals of the Methow Valley Climate Action Plan (MVCAP).



Dana has loved the Methow Valley since the age of four, when her parents built a yurt in Mazama. She feels incredibly privileged to be living in the valley full time now, working on addressing the impacts and causes of the climate crisis while soaking up the wonder of this place and community. Dana brings eight years of environmental consulting and leadership

experience to her work on implementation and facilitation of the Methow Climate Action Plan. She has a degree in Environmental Policy from Williams College, and recently completed her MBA in Sustainable Systems from Presidio

Graduate School where she learned to apply an equity and systems lens to complex problems. She's also passionate about health and movement, and teaches yoga, mindfulness, and movement classes.

Madelyn Hamilton, Public Lands and Wildlife Program Coordinator

Born and raised in Washington, Madelyn joins MVCC after a decade dedicated to place-based living and learning in both the Methow and Skagit Valleys. With a background primarily in farming and food systems, she also has experience with climate resiliency work, wildlife advocacy, and sustainable economies.

Madelyn is passionate about the intersections of land-use issues, climate change, environmental stewardship and environmental justice, and is thrilled at the opportunity to dive deep into their complexities in a place like Okanogan County. She is deeply grateful to call this region her home, and looks forward to continued relationship building as MVCC grows its wildlife and public lands program.



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How can I leave a legacy of care?

You can support MVCC's work to protect this special place far into the future by adding us to your estate or will. Talk to Nancy McKinney Milsteadt (nancy@mvcitizens.org) today about how a simple bequest can ensure the Methow Valley thrives for generations to come.

Photo: Dana Golden

