

METHOW VALLEY CITIZENS COUNCIL



# VALLEY VOICE

FALL / WINTER 2023

**Why Forests Here  
Need Active  
Restoration**

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**Our Public Lands:  
Right or Responsibility?**

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# METHOW VALLEY CITIZENS COUNCIL

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*“And so I worry about a scenario where we would just say, ‘We’ll let nature do its work.’ We’re not letting nature do its work, and, in fact, we’re part of nature and people have been part of nature for millennia. I think it’s really important to remember that there’s no such thing as hands off in this valley.”*

— Susan Prichard, p. 5

*“What does it mean to love this place? Do we love it because it gives us colorful wildflowers and glowing mountains to photograph and peak-bag, an experience to ‘mine’, or do we love it more deeply for the beautiful, complex system that it is, for all the life that it sustains, which is at once both resilient and fragile? Do we love it enough to take responsibility for its well-being and therefore take responsibility for both our individual and collective behaviors impacting that well-being?”*

— Madelyn Hamilton, p. 9

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# Letter from the Executive Director: My Journey from Zero-Cut to Active Restoration

How I came to see the  
blue-green alliance that  
will benefit our forests  
and our communities

BY JASMINE MINBASHIAN

*His* steely blue eyes pierced through you like they were darting out lasers of truth with every word he spoke. His voice had a preacher-like quality with a steady cadence, strong and unwavering. He was well known for posing with photos on stumps with a bumper sticker that read “Stumps Don’t Lie.”

It was 1997, I was 26, and I was full of ideals and righteousness. I had accepted my first adult, career-track job working for a small environmental nonprofit, focused on protecting forests. I was at the Environmental Law Conference in Eugene, Oregon listening intently to an impassioned forest activist tell us that all commercial logging needed to stop on public lands.

At the time, I was all for it. After all, the Forest Service had an abysmal track record: throughout the 1980s and early 90s, with the full-throated support of Congress, they had clear-cut old growth in the Pacific Northwest like it was an unlimited resource. When I learned this was still happening, even after all the protests and forest activism, even after the Northwest Forest Plan has been enacted to help protect these precious forests, I felt compelled to be a part of the movement to stop it. I doubled down on protecting forests at all costs. I fought hard.

It was quite a few years after that first conference that I first began to glimpse another side. Who were



Jasmine circa 2000 as campaign coordinator of the Northwest Old-Growth Campaign. Rather than focusing on zero-cut, this campaign advocated for stopping the logging of mature and old growth while continuing to thin some of the younger second growth trees. These logs could help support a local restoration economy.

the people living in these rural timber-dependent communities? How did they feel about logging old trees and wild places? If they’re so connected to these lands, then they surely must care about the forests and wildlife? A group of my fellow forest activists were asking the same questions. Yes, we needed to stop egregious violations and protect endangered habitat. But in that fight, the affected people shouldn’t be left faceless, nameless, and vilified. So, we went off script and set out to find the answers. We started



Jasmine on a field tour in Oregon discussing the formation of a restoration economy. Starting in the late 1990s, collaborative groups began to be formed that brought environmental groups, Forest Service agency staff, the logging industry, and other stakeholders to the same table. The North Central Washington Forest Health Collaborative has been one such group that has been integral in planning the large-scale restoration projects being implemented and proposed in the Methow Valley Ranger District.

organizing conversations in mill towns like Randle and Morton. Together, we dreamed of a future “Blue-Green Alliance” where rural communities work together with environmentalists to restore our forests. What if we could not just protect old forests but create an economy around healing past scars from industrial forestry and restore biodiversity and natural forests across the landscape?

From this dream, came many field tours and from those field tours, came the formation of one of the first forest collaborative groups in Washington State called the Pinchot Partnership (based in SW Washington).

Today there are forest collaboratives on many of the national forests in the Pacific Northwest, including the North Central Washington Forest Health Collaborative for the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest. Methow Valley Citizens Council formally joined the Forest Health Collaborative in 2019 and has been thoroughly engaged in the projects committee. Our experience on the Collaborative has been far from a “Kumbaya” coming together. It is challenging, messy, complicated, and sometimes deeply painful. But the conversations have still led us down a better path than what would have been without it. Though some

of the projects have been far from ideal, they have seen significant improvement as a direct result of collaborative engagement with the Forest Service.

Looking back, although the sermon of stopping all logging on public lands felt good for that moment in time, it was not the long-term solution because it ignored some key realities. Research by scientists has overwhelmingly shown that today there is a critical need for active restoration (read Susan Prichard’s excellent interview on p. 5 for the reasons why!) that includes careful thinning, road decommissioning, and re-introducing prescribed fire across the landscape where it has been historically suppressed. At the same time, a healthy rural community needs a rural workforce to sustain it. This means jobs working in the woods, not just service jobs. Touting recreation as the alternative is not enough because, ultimately, we need jobs that are tied to the health of the land (we also must take a hard look at our collective responsibility in caretaking this land—read more in “Right or Responsibility?” on p. 9)

It’s past time that we dig in and build the restoration economy that was first envisioned when the Northwest Forest Plan was adopted as a solution to the timber wars in 1994 (learn about one business a restoration economy could support in our “Hawk’s Call” on p. 18).

There is a time and place for taking a hard stand, but in the long run the power of coming together and digging in to create a shared vision for managing public lands is more powerful than any other thing we can do to restore and protect our forests and our communities. Through this process, it is vital to acknowledge that these lands are the ancestral homeland of the original Indigenous people of this place who know more about the health and well-being of these places than any other culture alive today. We must learn to listen to this deep and powerful cultural knowledge that continues to rise and make it a starting point for developing future projects and policies (“Indigenous Rising” on p. 12 discusses the necessity of bridging cultural divides and working with Indigenous partners). As we plan and implement numerous forest projects in the coming years, I’m confident that if we’re willing to sit with each other, alongside people we don’t always agree with, we can move towards a blue-green alliance that will help rural communities like ours thrive. ♦

# The Science is Very Clear— Our Dry Forests Used to Look Different and Need Restoration

An interview with  
forest ecologist  
Susan Prichard, PhD

*Susan Prichard often imagines what the forests surrounding the Methow used to look like — three- to four-hundred-year-old stately stands of ponderosa*

*pine bisected by sprawling copses of aspen and plenty of wide open shrub steppe. When she pictures these forests, she doesn't see them without people. Local indigenous people have “lived with fire and used fire in these forests” for over 10,000 years. Prichard, an accomplished forest ecologist with a specialty in wildfire ecology at the University of Washington, has lived in the Methow for two decades and has spent countless days in the field studying the impacts of fire on this landscape. Examining the history of surrounding forests has shown her how profoundly local forests have been transformed by our management actions*



Robert L. Cooper 09/03/1934  
National Archives- Seattle, WA

Historic Photo Comparison 1934 ~ 2021  
East Fork Buttermilk Creek drainage and Newby Ridge

John F. Marshall 09/23/2021  
Copyright 2021 John F. Marshall

Frequent fire has been a part of east Cascade forests for millennia. John Marshall has replicated historical photos by Robert Cooper and shown how our forests used to look different. With more frequent fire every 5-25 years, trees had wider spacing between them and there were far more openings as seen in this comparison of Newby Ridge and the East Fork of Buttermilk Creek in 1934 and 2021.

*since the early 1900s. Excluding and suppressing all fire and logging the large, old trees has turned much of our forest into young, densely-packed stands of Douglas-fir that are primed for burning in the vast, high-severity, destructive wildfires we've seen over the last 20 years. So how do we fix it?*

*In 2021, Prichard helped head a team of over 40 scientists who analyzed and summarized over 1000 articles on forest management in dry forests into three comprehensive scientific papers. The science was very consistent and clear and included many of the management actions proposed in recent restoration projects on the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest: returning prescribed fire at low and moderate severities, thinning forests before introducing fire to return them to a density that prepares them for drought, climate change and wildland fire, and keeping what is left of the old bones of the forest—especially the old ponderosa pine—on the landscape. We sat down with Prichard to discuss how the local forests have changed and a vision of how restoration could help achieve a healthy equilibrium for our future forests.*

### **IF WE STEPPED INTO A METHOW FOREST 150 YEARS AGO, HOW WOULD IT LOOK DIFFERENT?**

I really think about that a lot because I did my PhD on paleoecology—old ecology in sediment records — and I had the privilege of working in North Cascades National Park in my study. It was tedious because every centimeter represented ten years and I sorted through all those samples and time traveled every ten years through 11,000 years of history.

There's a great book called *Indians, Fire and the Land* by Robert Boyd and his very first page is about the Methow Valley, about this anthropologist Jay Miller who comes back to the Methow, with Methow people from the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation — he's bringing back elders after 50 years of being forced away from the Methow. He drives up the Valley and he notices one woman is crying in the backseat and assumes she's crying recalling memories and he asks her, "Why are you crying?" And she says, "When my people were here, we tended this valley with fire every year and now it is a jungle." That wasn't 150 years ago. That was in 1979, recalling back to the early 1900s. But I think that we can use some of the oral history from the Methow people to know that this valley was tended by fire. I don't think about fire ecology without people in it when I think about this valley.

Imagining this valley in the past, I look to those old ponderosa pines—many of them are not terribly old, maybe 200 to 300 years—but many of them have fire scars and they are surrounded by open ground. You can see that the old bones of the forest were maybe twelve to fifteen very large trees per acre. Which is not that many. Sometimes twenty to forty. So we're talking about much lower densities than today. And I envision a lot of this valley, not everywhere, but a lot of this valley looked more like savannah with beautiful, often old, but not always old, ponderosa pine. Still some thickets of Douglas-fir for sure. And a lot more willow, a lot more aspen.

### **HOW HAVE BOTH FIRE SUPPRESSION AND PAST LOGGING PRACTICES CONTRIBUTED TO WHAT WE SEE AROUND US TODAY?**

Have you seen the coffee table book "Bound for the Methow"? They have some pictures of Mazama pine clearing choking the Methow river. Loggers high-graded the big, beautiful ponderosa pine from Lost River all the way down through Mazama and then floated those logs down to sawmills. Logging not just on our valley floor, but also in the foothills took out a lot of the big, beautiful Douglas-fir too. There was definitely old growth Douglas-fir here too, not just pine. All these trees, including western larch in Loup Loup were selectively logged all the way through the 1960s. And so the trees that we see remaining, the old bones of the forest, didn't get to remain everywhere. In their absence, especially without the fires happening every 5 to 25 years, Douglas-fir was able to crowd ponderosa pine regeneration out a lot of the time. The Forest Service often uses stand structural classes in their definitions and we are very rich, even with all the fires we've had, with what they call "young forest, multi-story."

### **WHAT'S THE RISK OF LEAVING OUR FORESTS ALONE? WHAT HAPPENS IF WE DON'T ACTIVELY MANAGE OUR FORESTS?**

Yeah, it's such a good question. Starting out with the beginning of the question—I get it! I hear a lot of people say, "Federal agencies and state agencies have over logged forests in the past. Let's just give these forests a rest, right?" I can totally appreciate that philosophy. The risk is, that [no management] really never was the case around here—people lived with fire and used fire in these forests. It's a nice idea, but it denies what was literally 10,000 years of Indigenous stewardship on our landscape.

I also don't think we can live with fire sustainably with that model [of doing nothing]. One of the things that we tried to say in our paper as clearly as possible is that the act of "doing nothing" while putting out all wildfires is doing a lot. It's a very active management decision to be protecting our homes from wildfires, both here in the valley floor and out in the backcountry. If we really lived by the model of "let's allow fires to come back," that would be a bitter pill for a long time just because fires after a long absence of fire are hard to live through.

Pragmatically, with the tools that we now have, we can't necessarily only use fire. I wish we could, but if we brought in the benign fire that used to be under a lot of cultural burning, a lot of the small, medium and larger Douglas-fir trees would not get thinned out by low-intensity fires and there would be too many trees for the droughts that we're going to live through.

And so I worry about a scenario where we would just say, "We'll let nature do its work." We're not letting nature do its work, and in fact, we're part of nature and people have been part of nature for millennia. I think it's really important to remember that there's no such thing as hands off in this valley.

### IN YOUR MIND WHAT DOES A GOOD FIRE LEAVE THE FOREST LOOKING LIKE?

There's a quote by Snohomish People that says "it's not good, it's not bad, it's just real." And I really wish we could kind of have that perspective about fire because fire's like wind. Sometimes fire is the light wind that is refreshing and then some fires are like a hurricane and cause a lot of damage, especially to people. I don't love characterizing good versus bad fire. But we often talk about intentional fire as burning in conditions that end up having a light

touch on the land. A low severity fire would burn some trees, but not many, a moderate severity fire might be good as a thinning agent and leave more of a heterogeneous forest. A high severity fire is sometimes great, but the problem is we're getting way too much high severity fire right now (a recent Story Map produced by Gina Cova shows the extent of high severity fire in North Central Washington. See the QR code on pg. 8). High severity fire, especially the large patches of 100% tree mortality, mean that trees are forced to regenerate by seed, conifers at least, and they have to get their seed source there. Ponderosa pine is having a very, very hard time doing that because it's a resister. Because of its thick bark and tendency to shed lower branches, ponderosa pine trees are built to survive all but the hottest fires and then episodically regenerate and persist as an uneven aged forest. With these high severity patches that we're getting too much of, it's getting harder for ponderosa pine to come back and, as ecologists, we're worried about the rapid changes of these ecosystems and the loss of our old growth ponderosa pine.

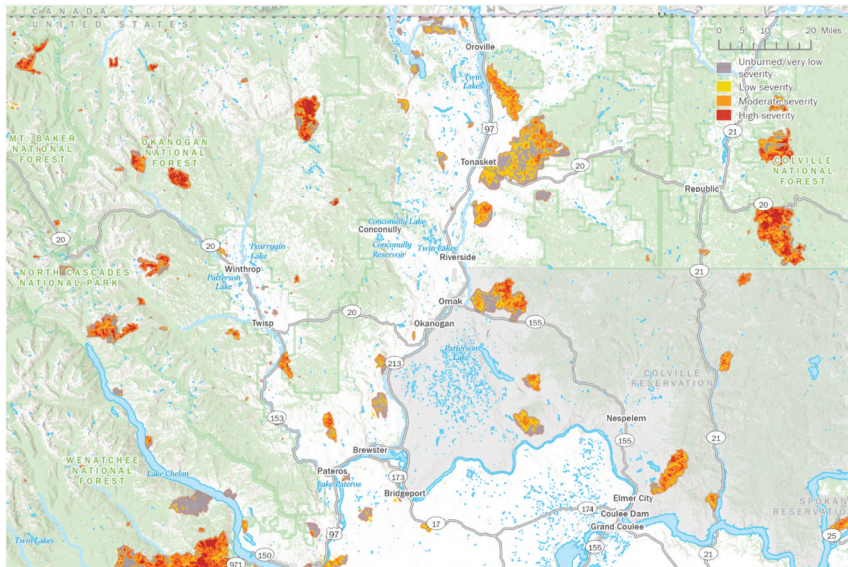


Active forest restoration that includes thinning and prescribed burning prepares a forest for the inevitable wildland fires that will come through. In this series of photos of the Sinlahekin Wildlife Refuge managed by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife you can see a multi-layered, dense, dry mixed conifer forest after 100 years of fire exclusion (top left), the same forest after a variable density thinning treatment in 2011 (top right) The forest after pile and broadcast burning (bottom left) and a post-wildfire photo after the 2015 Lime Belt fire (bottom right). Notice how well this forest withstood the wildfire! Photos: John Marshall.

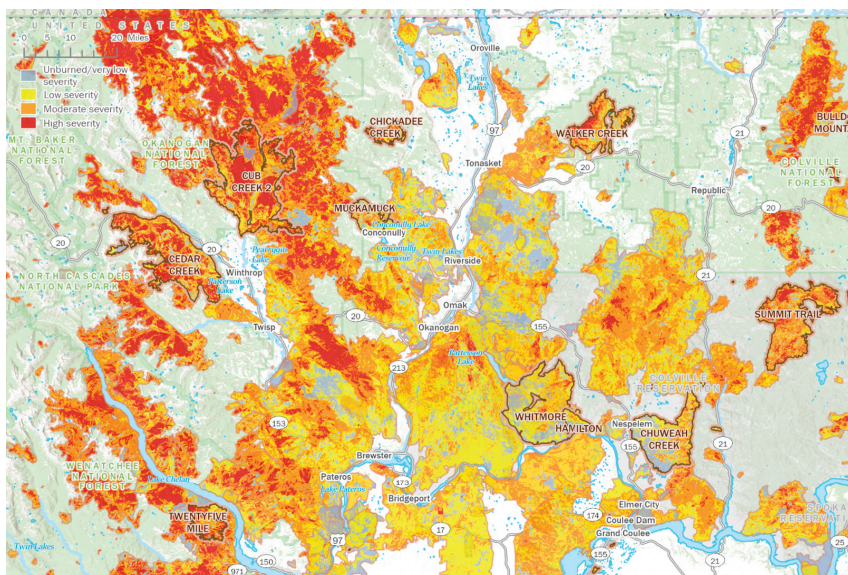
**IF YOU WERE ABLE TO MAKE DECISIONS ON HOW OUR FORESTS ARE RESTORED, WHAT WOULD YOUR PRIORITIES BE OVER THE NEXT TEN YEARS? WHAT IS THE SCALE WE NEED TO WORK AT WITH FOREST RESTORATION?**

If I had magic wand and especially if smoke was not such a huge problem for all of us, I would literally want to treat about forty to fifty percent of the landscape in the next ten years. Because at that scale, with more burning, fires become more limiting and smaller when they happen. So we're talking about a lot of treatment, especially with fire. That would be the number one choice. I would also really encourage us as a community to look at where we still have the old trees and think about how vulnerable they are and prioritize those areas first, which seems a little counter intuitive, but I'd actually go there first to see if we can make those trees durable to warmer summers, drought and fire. And then I would also get in there with our lovely aspen and where there needed to be a little more thinning of conifers so that the aspen could have the light that it needs, would open up aspen. Where we have young fire-maintained aspen stands, they are a beautiful fire break and they're great bird habitat. If we could get some of our tributaries to have more aspen and cottonwood, everyone would benefit.

And, I'd bring back beavers. The beaver-fire connection is just a fascinating one. ♦



**Fires in North Central Washington 1984–2000**



**Fires in the same region from 2001–2021**

Many huge wildfires have swept through North Central Washington since 2000. While the total area burned is similar to historical fire regimes in which forests would burn every 5 to 20 years, what is concerning is the amount of high-severity fire (red) in recent fires. Historically, low- and moderate-severity fires helped maintain resilient forests. Looking into the future, forests may have difficulty regenerating after these high severity burns due to a lack of seed source, especially with the drier, warmer conditions that climate change will bring. These maps are part of an interactive story map, “Wildfires in North Central Washington” created by Gina Cova, Saba Saberi, and Susan Prichard, UW School of Environmental and Forest Sciences. Check out the full, eye-opening story map here:





# RIGHT OR RESPONSIBILITY?



A reflection on our obligations to wildlife while recreating on public lands

BY MADELYN HAMILTON, PUBLIC LANDS AND WILDLIFE PROGRAM COORDINATOR

*Wildlife* thrive when given a little space. We saw this on full display during the initial COVID shutdown when public lands and parks were closed for a short time. Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) staff in the Methow saw extraordinary changes

Much of the 35,200 acres in the Methow Wildlife Area were purchased for the protection of mule deer winter range. The Methow's migratory mule deer population has been declining in recent years due to loss of habitat from wildfire, development, and an increase in recreation. The proposed winter closures by WDFW are one small step we can take to help mule deer during their most vulnerable time. Photo: JJ Poole, Getty Images

within a couple weeks of the closures: a mountain goat appeared at Lewis Butte after not being seen there for many years; black bears took up residence in a riparian area near the usually heavily trafficked Rizeor Lake. Without regular human disturbance, wildlife moved back in.

We are fortunate in the Methow to be surrounded by an abundance of easily accessible public lands. With landscapes spanning valley bottom shrub steppe and riparian areas to forested mountainsides and alpine meadows, many of us are drawn to this place



For thousands of years grizzly bears roamed the North Cascades before they were hunted, trapped and poisoned to local extinction. Can we embrace the responsibility of bringing them back to this place, even if it means adjusting some of our recreation habits? Photo: Jillian Cooper, Getty Images

because we love to recreate here, whether by hiking, biking, hunting, skiing, snowmobiling or camping. But as human pressures continue to mount through further development, population increase, and the effects of climate change, biologists and land managers are starting to see the effects of our recreation on non-human inhabitants of the land. In the face of these increasingly negative impacts, what obligation do we have to wildlife? Is it our right to recreate freely on public lands, or do we have a responsibility to place certain limits on ourselves in response to those increasing impacts?

Recently, WDFW has decided to close portions of the Methow Wildlife Area (MWA) from December 15th to March 31st to protect mule deer winter range. A public meeting to answer questions about the closure when it was first proposed in September brought out broad support as well as select criticisms: some felt that recreation restrictions on these lands were unnecessary, not rooted in scientific data, and posed an undue burden on specific groups; some saw it as

unfair to limit such seemingly benign use on our public lands. Many in the Methow may not realize that these Methow WLA lands were purchased, parcel by parcel over the last 70 years, specifically for the protection of mule deer winter range as land managers were beginning to see the negative impacts of human development in the Methow, home to Washington's largest migratory herd of mule deer. Prior to the development of the Wildlife Areas, these lands sustained the Methow people for millennia — providing an abundance of local plant and animal foods. The native culture holds many universal stories which encourage stewardship and respect for all living creatures on this landscape, recognizing that the fate of these animals is ultimately tied to our own fate as a human population. Recreating on these lands in recent decades has been an additional benefit for our community, but as recreation and development have exponentially increased in the valley (especially over the last 5 years through COVID and the Zoom-town boom), we are now seeing that collectively, residents and visitors are putting pressures on mule deer that threaten their health going into the future.

The health of a deer population is often measured by its doe to fawn ratio. In 2022, that number for mule deer in the Methow was at a 16-year low (WDFW). While deer may not be the most sensational of Methow wildlife, they play a key role in the functioning of the ecosystem and are a revered first food of the Methow

people and Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation. What land managers are now seeing is a kind of “death by a thousand cuts” for this species: between several decades worth of extreme wildfires burning historical winter range, increased human development (from 2005 to 2020, 1,000 houses were built in the Methow Valley (Grialou, Methow Population and Land Project)), more humans recreating on the land (many with dogs), and more illegal trails being built on public lands dividing wildlife corridors and pathways, mule deer and other species are frequently being disturbed.

Many of the conversations around these management changes advocating for wildlife are more broadly an invitation to examine our relationship (and aversion) to human limits. We are having to reckon with the consequences of a culture that more or less tells us we should be able to do whatever we want to do whenever we want to do it. In this way, the objections to WDFW’s temporary winter closures carries similar threads to the objections to North Cascades grizzly bear recovery: some recreationists don’t want to deal with the added burden of sharing the landscape with grizzlies because it would necessitate changing certain behaviors. Recreating alongside grizzly bears requires more awareness on the land, which some view as an inconvenience. But do grizzlies not also have the right to be here? When we look at the volume of reasons why grizzlies should be returned to the North Cascades, where they made their living for thousands of years before settlers hunted them to virtual extirpation, are we willing to put aside notions of convenience and personal benefit to share space with this endangered keystone species that benefits the entire ecosystem?

At its best, recreating in the natural world can be a profoundly meaningful act that connects us to a deeper sense of self. Whether in solitude or with loved ones, we recreate to ground, to have fun, to feel connection, to stay healthy and to get beyond ourselves; it’s an incredibly important part of all our lives. At its worst, however, recreation without knowledge and appreciation of a place (i.e. respect for the other lifeforms that call it home) becomes just another facet of an extractive system solely serving human purposes, one that feeds on selling products and experiences to the individual. Still fundamentally based on taking something from this landscape, recreation can blur into a modern version of the extractive logging and mining economies of last century. The conversation around recreation’s impact on wildlife currently taking place in the Methow is a timely opportunity to examine

our relationship to how and why we recreate here, and what our responsibilities to the more-than-human world are as we do so.

It also begs the question, what does it mean to love this place? Do we love it because it gives us colorful wildflowers and glowing mountains to photograph and peak-bag, an experience to ‘mine’, or do we love it more deeply for the beautiful, complex system that it is, for all the life that it sustains, which is at once both resilient and fragile? Do we love it enough to take responsibility for its well-being and therefore take responsibility for both our individual and collective behaviors impacting that well-being? Can we cultivate an ethic of shared responsibility for the health of the system and place limits on ourselves in service to that greater vision of sustained health?

I believe we can. After three years of closing portions of Big Valley for Sandhill Crane summer nesting, this endangered species is now hatching and fledging young successfully here. With a bit of human restraint coupled with best practices, our beloved wildlife can not only coexist alongside us, but thrive and flourish. ♦

*To learn more specifics about the impacts of recreation on different Washington wildlife read Conservation Northwest’s excellent report conducted in partnership with Home Range Wildlife Research:*



Although a few skiers might seem to have a negligible impact on mule deer, wildlife research has shown that deer will avoid areas that humans regularly use. Even if we don’t see the deer, we may be having a cumulative impact on them at a time when they are going into energy deficit. Proposed winter closures will still keep nearly 12,000 acres of WDFW land open for winter recreation. Photo: Dana Golden

# INDIGENOUS RISING!

BY LORAH SUPER, PROGRAMS DIRECTOR

**MAY 24, FIRST SALMON CEREMONY,  
ICICLE RIVER, LEAVENWORTH  
NATIONAL FISH HATCHERY**

*We* arrive early, around 5:30 am. People trickle in, gathering in small, groggy groups. Fishermen perch on wooden scaffolding by the river, hoping to catch the first salmon. As shadows move out and the sun gains traction, a circle forms around Wenatchi Salmon Chief Darnell Sam. Sam shares stories from the knowledge that was passed down to him about the origins of salmon: how Coyote taught humans to care for salmon so they would return year after year, providing the “first foods” that have sustained generations. Songs and prayers go out as people around the circle share stories. Speakers express their heartfelt joy for the opportunity to come together again and call the salmon home, now that the right to fish these traditional waters has finally been restored. We are reminded repeatedly that this ceremony, and the feast that follows, will grow every year, throughout the Columbia Basin. Like the salmon, indigenous cultures are returning from an era of adversity, bringing sustenance for their people.

MVCC’s work to protect our special corner of the world continually reminds us how interconnected the ecological and social systems across our bioregion really are. We’ve grown accustomed to working in collaboration with an array of “stakeholders” throughout Okanogan County, North Central Washington and the greater Upper Columbia ecosystems, whose interests align with our mission of protecting natural systems and rural character. But the people whose traditional homelands cover this broad region, whose creation stories place their very existence in the hands of the animals, waters and landforms we aspire to protect, are not stakeholders— they are our hosts.

The indigenous relationship to the land we (descendants of settler colonialism) occupy long predates our existence here. Indigenous culture is informed by a unique set of laws and protocols grounded in oral history many thousands of years old. Their time-tested methods of caring for and restoring the



July 2023: Janessa Lambert (left) describes the significance of indigenous dances as Jayleen Michell demonstrates in her regalia to the drumming of High Water Group at the Indigenous Engagement Institute training in Cawston, BC. Working in partnership with Indigenous cultures requires movement towards reconciliation. Photo: Lorah Super

land are increasingly of interest to scientists and agencies. Indigenous governments have a legal right to consult as sovereign entities with local, state and national governments. The Biden administration’s 2022 Memorandum on Uniform Standards for Tribal Consultation is making the practice of true government-to-government interaction more consistent and meaningful. With the impacts of climate change and resource depletion caused by prior management choices upon us, now is the time for building bridges across cultures to co-manage our landscapes.

**JULY 27, SIMILKAMEEN WILD,  
CAWSTON, BRITISH COLUMBIA**

We’re standing on a stony beach of the Similkameen River, just a hair north of the US border, a few hours after sunrise. High clouds moderate the intensity of

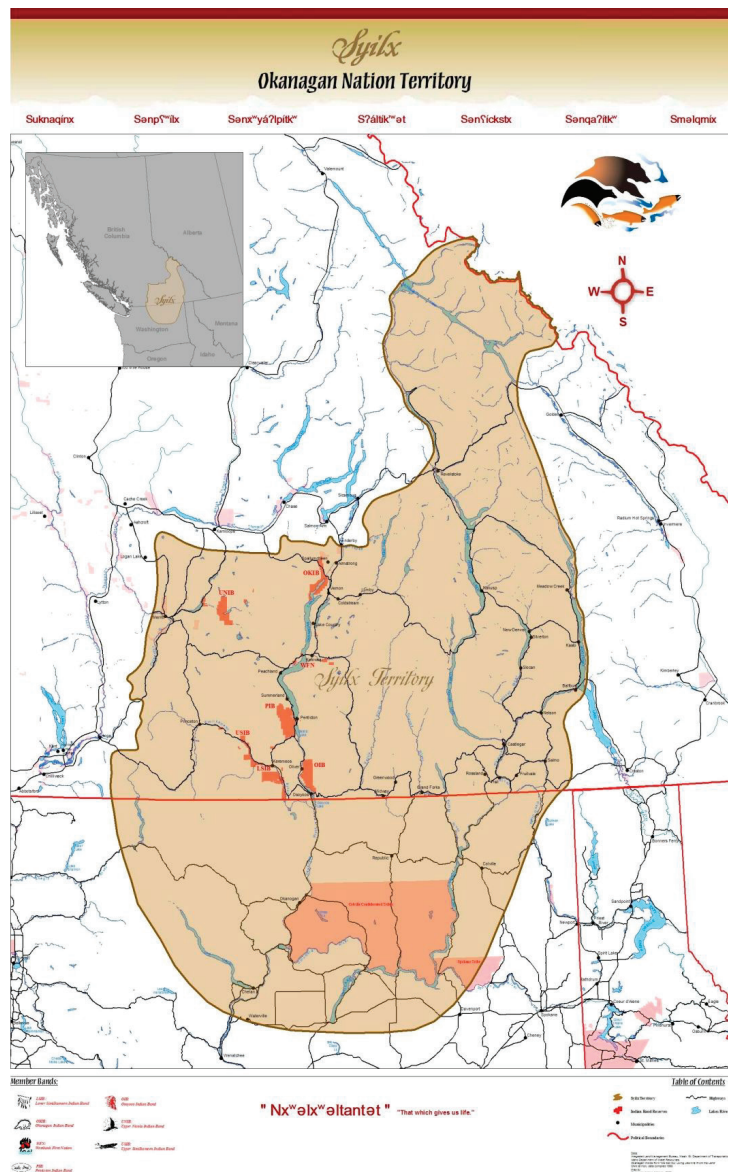
the summer sun on our circle as we are prepared for the day by Rob Edwards, an elder from the Lower Similkameen Indian Band (LSIB). Rob says a prayer in his (Sməłqmix) language. I pick up very few words with my limited Salish, but I can tell he is thanking the Creator at the start and the finish, and gesturing to us as well, perhaps praying that we get something out of this experience that will make us better people who can help restore balance in the relationship between humans and the earth.

We are a mixed group of US and Canadian citizens, agency and government employees, and conservation staffers participating in an immersive 3-day training held by the Indigenous Engagement Institute (IEI), on LSIB traditional territory. This intensive training, taught by a cadre of Indigenous instructors who are deeply involved in bridging the cultural divide, focuses on strategies that can allow us — with our Western-aligned laws and customs — to work together in an ethical framework with indigenous leaders, laws and customs, to solve the biggest environmental problems facing our world today.

Much of the work ahead, that we need to take on in partnership with our indigenous hosts, comes down to learning a new kind of framework for sharing information between western and indigenous cultures, one that allows cultural differences to come in respect and safety. Achieving this level of dialogue requires genuine movement toward reconciliation. Gwen Bridge, our lead instructor at IEI, asks this question to start people thinking: “What is in conflict between world views that needs to be reconciled?”

One answer is in the past: the land we cherish today was stolen (or obtained by dishonest means, if you prefer). In the place we now hold dear, cultural genocide was attempted with the intentional destruction of first foods and the kidnapping and indoctrination of indigenous children through residential schools, whose horrific legacy is still coming to light. It's difficult and uncomfortable to hold that awareness! But we can only come together and find reconciliation in the present by acknowledging the damage and trauma that lives on today, and by resolving to find healing. We must also commit to a new path that defines a future vision that can be embraced by both western and indigenous cultures.

This is the last day of our brief but intense time together at IEI. Our preparation for the day concludes with a Smudge ceremony shared by one of our instructors, James Rattling Leaf, a member of the



Traditional Syilx territory includes the land we now occupy in the Methow and Okanogan valleys of North Central Washington. Many of the 12 tribes of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, including the Methow People, lived on this land. Indigenous governments, as sovereign nations, have a legal right to consult with local, state and national governments. As we move into turbulent times, now is the time to begin bridging across cultures to co-manage our landscapes. Map: Okanagan Nation Alliance

Rosebud Sioux Tribe and consultant specializing in Cultural Intelligence. As the smoldering sage bundle is brought before each of us, we take turns cupping our hands, pausing to wash smoke over wherever it's needed to clear away stagnant energy, and taking in with gratitude the grace offered by these teachings. ♦

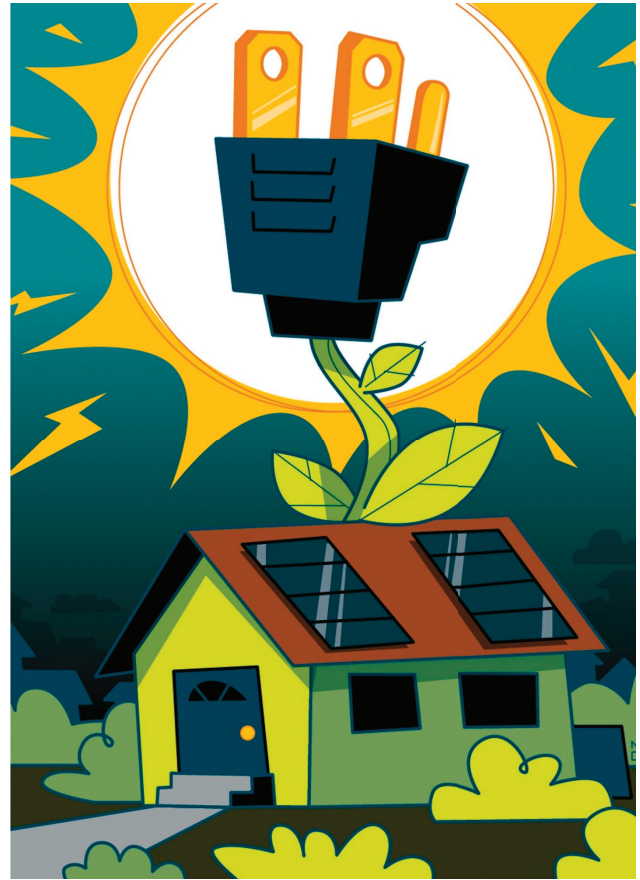
# Out with Big Oil, in with Clean, Local Electricity!

BY DANA GOLDEN, RESILIENT METHOW PROGRAM COORDINATOR

As we step up to the climate crisis and embrace local solutions, we quickly confront a core challenge: we currently need fossil fuels in our buildings and vehicles. How can we give ourselves better alternatives, so we don't rely so much on the fossil fuels that are fanning the flames of climate disruption? How do we simultaneously ensure that our sources of electricity don't harm healthy salmon runs and the ancient cultures whose livelihood depends on them?

Conservation is always the first, best strategy—our ace in the hole as consumers. We have enormous potential to make our buildings more efficient and use more sustainable transportation modes. Using less is better for the environment and the economy than even the cleanest renewable energy sources. But for the energy we do need in our homes and vehicles, renewable electricity offers an efficient, cleaner, more local alternative to fossil fuels. Electrification—using electric power to displace oil and other fossil fuels—stands as a pivotal solution to reduce emissions that drive climate change, enhance our well-being, and take back our money and power from fossil fuel giants that have obstructed climate solutions. Buying energy from local, publicly-controlled electric utilities gives us a lot more say over our energy future than buying from big oil companies or OPEC. We have more work to do to ensure that our electricity is truly green: that we are not generating electricity at the cost of wildlife habitat and healthy salmon runs. But options for generating clean green electricity exist — locally generated solar and wind — while providing long overdue fish passage for many of the upper Columbia dams.

In May of this year, Resilient Methow hosted a



Graphic: Martin Gee

community forum on home electrification, featuring speakers from the Washington Department of Commerce, Rewiring America (a national nonprofit dedicated to electrification solutions), the General Manager of our local electric co-op, and a contractor from Cascade Mechanical skilled in heat pump installations. This forum served as an invaluable resource, providing insights into incentives and resources for home electrification, practical guidance on getting started, and discussions on the infrastructure and systemic changes required to support electrification on a community level.

Shifting away from fossil fuels is something we can accomplish collectively in our shared public spaces and individually within our homes. Numerous community-level projects and developments are underway to facilitate the transition to electrification:

- Twisp Valley Grange secured funding from the Department of Commerce to retrofit the building with high-efficiency heat pumps, implement a

**ELECTRICITY** continued on page 15

# CLEAN BURN

MVCC's woodstove exchange program replaces old, smoky stoves with new efficient ones.

BY ANNA MOUNSEY, CLEAN AIR METHOW COORDINATOR

As temperatures continue falling and the leaves shed their green coats for vibrant oranges, yellows, and reds, we all prepare for another cold, snowy winter. Oil is mixed and poured into chainsaws, splitters are fired up, and stacks of wood accumulate under porches and pole barns. Already, woodstoves are sending out their first wisps of smoke as snow dusts the mountain tops.

**BURN** continued on page 16

## **ELECTRICITY** from page 14

load management system to reduce peak demand, and enhance insulation. The Grange will serve as a community refuge during extreme heatwaves and unhealthy air conditions caused by wildfires.

- A group of community volunteers orchestrated a partnership with utilities and local governments, securing two grants from the Department of Transportation designated to "electrify the Cascade Loop." These grants will make it easier to travel in and out of the valley with electric vehicles. One grant will finance high-speed electric vehicle (EV) charging stations in Pateros, Twisp, and Newhalem, while the other will upgrade five existing stations along Route 2 from Wenatchee to Everett, with one in Mt. Vernon to complete the Loop.
- The Methow Valley School District received a grant from the Department of Ecology to conduct a feasibility study on electrifying the school district's bus fleet and enhancing student learning through their career technical education program, which will train students in career opportunities related to electric vehicles.

On the individual level, Rewiring America recommends planning ahead. Most households have around eight significant machines, including cars, heating systems, stoves, hot water heaters, and more. Planning for a switch to electric options when replacing any of these appliances can make the transition smoother.

Beyond the substantial reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, adopting electric appliances at home offers other benefits. Monthly utility bills for an all-electric home are generally lower for most families. Moreover, in most parts of the U.S., it is already less expensive to construct new homes that are entirely electric. Electric appliances also contribute to better indoor air quality and pose lower risks of asthma, fire, or carbon monoxide poisoning. Indoor fossil fuel combustion turns out to be very unhealthy, and now we have cost-effective electric alternatives. ♦

*For further information and resources on home electrification, be sure to explore Resilient Methow's Home Electrification Guide or visit Rewiring America's website here:*





An old pellet stove and the new stove it was replaced with. Replacing one old woodstove with a new EPA-certified woodstove can be the equivalent to taking five diesel trucks off the road!

## **BURN** from page 15

In Okanogan County, wood stoves are often the tried-and-true source for home heating during the winter months. And for good reason: fuel is cheap and plentiful, and the ambiance of bone-dry wood crackling in the stove cannot be beaten. However, wood smoke remains as one of the main sources of air pollution in Washington during the winter months. Statistics show that wood stoves, fireplaces, and other wood-burning devices put out hundreds of times more air pollution than other sources of heat, such as natural gas or electricity. When the air quality is poor enough, the Department of Ecology can issue an air quality burn ban, usually based on protecting people's health. Ecology calls burn bans only in counties with no local clean air agency, which includes Okanogan County. Burn bans do not apply to homes with no other source of heat.

Since 2019, the Methow Valley Citizens Council has been coordinating the Woodstove Exchange Program, funded by the Washington Department of Ecology. The intent is not only to protect our airshed in Okanogan County, but to simultaneously protect

public health by reducing winter wood smoke. Since the beginning of this program, over 40 old and inefficient wood stoves have been replaced by either a new EPA-certified wood stove or a pellet stove. For most participants who meet the income guidelines, this replacement is completely free of charge. One participant could not “[thank] MVCC...enough for lifting the financial burden of putting in a much more efficient and environmentally friendly stove” recalling that the new stove “[works] so much better with less!”

This program strives to create solutions for Okanogan County residents where care for our environment, and the protection of our public health meet. In September, the Department of Ecology informed MVCC that there will be another round of funding to do more stove replacements for 2023-2025. We are pleased to be continuing this work alongside both North Valley Lumber and the Department of Ecology's Air Program teams to carry on another successful round of stove replacements. ♦

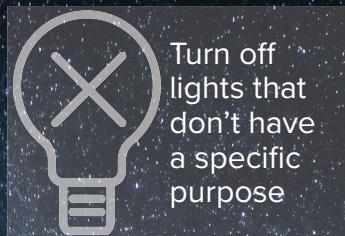
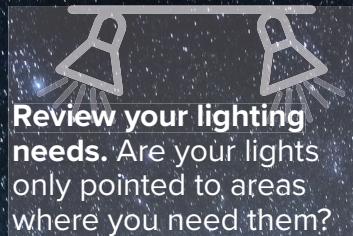
*Please reach out to Air Program Coordinator, Anna Mounsey if you are interested in the program.  
Annam@mvcitizens.org*



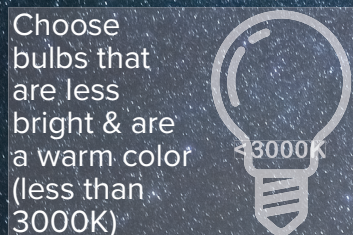
# OKANOGAN COUNTY HAS SOME OF THE DARKEST SKIES IN THE COUNTRY

**Even** in a dark place, light pollution can have detrimental impacts on wildlife, health, and energy costs. Fortunately, light pollution is the easiest form of pollution to fix! There are a few simple no cost or low cost steps that we all can take in our homes to reduce our collective light pollution and keep our local skies dark:

## NO COST:



## LOW COST:



Enjoy the night skies! Learn more at [www.methowdarksky.org](http://www.methowdarksky.org)  
You can self-assess your current lighting here:



Photo: Jack McLeod

## HAWK'S CALL

# Aaron Boley, Three Rivers Arbor Care

## The role of forest restoration on private land



Aaron Boley (right) with crew, Gabby (center) and Will (left) working on a thinning project on private land. Besides work on private land, Three Rivers Arbor Care also does work for Methow Beaver Project and Cascade Fisheries to create beaver and fish habitat by strategically felling trees. Photo: Nick Littman

*Much of the forest restoration MVCC focuses on consists of large scale projects on public land: tens of thousands of acres of thinning and burning that the Methow Valley Ranger District will be implementing over the next few decades. However, there's another vital component of forest work that occurs on a near daily basis in the Methow: restoration on private land. For the last ten years, Aaron Boley's choice of where—and where not to—use his saw, has helped to shape the forest*

*structure and wildlife corridors of the private land within the wildland-urban interface. Aaron grew up far up Lost River on the edge of wild public land and trying to keep the Methow "as wild a place as he can" is very important to him. Much of his work aims to restore health to forests that were extensively cut in the past and then poorly managed for decades. As the Methow works to keep its rural character, small businesses like Aaron's are an integral part of creating a resilient restoration economy while maintaining forest health. We caught up with Aaron recently after a long day of thinning:*

### WHY DO YOU THINK FOREST RESTORATION ON PRIVATE LAND IS PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT?

The Forest Service and DNR have plans for management. But private projects are the ones that need direction and are often looking for a lot of direction which I can provide. It's an interesting balance keeping a landscape fire resistant while keeping a healthy ecosystem.

### WHEN YOU ASSESS A PROPERTY AND ARE GIVING ADVICE HOW DO YOU WEIGH HAVING A HEALTHY FOREST AND WILDFIRE RESISTANCE?

I usually start around the home being focused on the safety of the landowner and the home and the ingress and egress and then moving out from there start to focus more on a healthy ecosystem and fire safety as well. I like helping people have fire safe homes and be Firewise, but what really matters to me is forests and habitat preservation. It is something we have more control over versus fire. If you have a hot fire rip through, the best-Firewised home in the Methow will likely burn. But providing healthy habitat for all types of critters is beneficial for so much—it keeps migration corridors for birds and bears. To wipe out and destroy a property for the sake of fire safety takes away habitat for countless creatures. That said, I totally respect the Firewise approach. Because we haven't had fire coming through, the thinning of trees is important as well as the thinning of shrubs but you also want to leave a lot of it for habitat. A lot of it is personal preference. It's a pretty sensitive dance with many variables.

## HOW HAVE YOUR THOUGHTS ABOUT FOREST HEALTH, OR WHAT FOREST RESTORATION MEANS, SHIFTED SINCE ENGAGING IN THIS WORK?

Mostly in how localized it is, in the Methow how location specific it is and how small that location can be. In a matter of 100 feet a project can change. Projects are ever-changing and so specific to the location of the project.

## WHAT IS UNHEALTHY ABOUT THE FORESTS THAT YOU SEE HERE?

That it hasn't been maintained much post logging. Most forests here have been thinned or clearcut. Mazama's a good example. Most of the trees on the valley floor are 6-12 inches and 70 years old and that's a very small tree for being that old. Following reseeded, the trees came in thick and eventually the land was divided up and became private and wasn't cared for. After reseeded, trees need to be thinned to let enough light in for an understory to develop. Without that you get poor habitat with none of the chokecherry and serviceberry for wildlife to feed on. Forests are young and small here. And diseases easily spread through trees when they are overstocked and there's not much air movement.

## WHAT ARE YOUR FAVORITE FORESTS AROUND HERE?

Some of my favorite forests are up the Chewuch in the Sweetgrass area. I love the riparian zone. I really

like the pine forests up Bear Creek and Cougar Lake area. It's hard to find one untouched though. The reason we can get to them is they were once logged and there's logging roads to them.

Even areas that haven't been logged have been impacted because of our fire suppression. It's really hard to find a landscape that's been untouched by human actions in the Methow.

## HOW DO YOU SEE YOUR WORK IN FORESTRY BEING PART OF A WORKING LANDSCAPE?

What I hope to see is to find a way to use all the material generated from thinning a forest. Creating those types of opportunities and having them become more commonplace could generate work for generations because there is endless forestry work on public and private lands.

## IF FORESTRY IS GOING TO BE A PART OF A RESTORATION ECONOMY WHAT IS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE YOU SEE?

It requires a lot of people. The current practice is hiring a large crew from out of the Methow and out of state. In the Methow to have a large, local crew it all comes back to housing and paying people enough that they can afford to live here. I'm able to pay them enough, but finding housing is really, really hard. ♦

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*Can you imagine these trees  
growing to be  
hundreds of years old?*

*Photo: Dana Golden*

The old growth forests on the east slope of the North Cascades take hundreds of years to develop. Logging, fire suppression and large wildfires have stripped these forests of many of their large, old sentinels. To bring them back will take restoration, including frequent prescribed burning, some thinning, and a whole lot of time. MVCC will continue protecting, stewarding and advocating for our forests far into the future. You can support this work into the next generation by adding us to your estate or will. Talk to Jasmine Minbashian today about how a simple bequest can ensure the Methow Valley thrives for generations to come.