

INSIDE/OUTSIDE

CONSERVATION NEWS AROUND THE NORTHWEST



Mountain caribou gain habitat protection.
Photo: BC government

A caribou nod to Darwin

In honor of Charles Darwin's 200th birthday February 12th, it seems an appropriate time to share an article about

the genetic history of the endangered mountain caribou. According to a study in the journal *Molecular Ecology*, the mountain caribou of the Inland Temperate Rainforest are a unique blending of two separate genetic subspecies: migratory tundra caribou and the more sedentary woodland caribou.

Study coauthor Byron Weckworth (University of Calgary) used DNA analysis and tracked migratory patterns to understand the evolution of the unique subspecies. "Mountain caribou are an important part of the genetic diversity of the entire species and maintaining that diversity will be critical as caribou face the impacts of continued human development and climate change into the future," he said.

Conservation Northwest and our Canadian partners in the Mountain Caribou Project are thrilled to announce the long-awaited legislation of the landmark Mountain Caribou Recovery Plan. The plan protects 95 percent of "high suitability habitat," including new forest protections totaling more than one million acres. High suitability habitat is the landscape used most extensively by caribou seasonally.

"America's Backcountry" video a breath of fresh air

A new Backcountry Hunters and Anglers video makes a convincing argument to protect our public lands for future generations. "Lonely lands" are what Theodore Roosevelt called the big, open country where people can find solitude in nature away from the hubbub of modern civilization. "Will today's kids have the kind of hunting and fishing we grew up with?" the video soberly asks.

With off-road vehicles (ORVs) becoming increasingly pervasive in wildlands, many like those in the Backcountry Hunters and Anglers are working to protect our national heritage of hunting, fishing, and hiking in solitude.

"We need big wild country, completely separate from the noise, pollution, and disturbance that comes with vehicles. Places to feel alive and free," said Backcountry Hunters and Fishers member Tom Reed. Backcountry Hunters in the video recommend that ORVs still have places to ride, but that regulations be more restrictive and current restrictions better enforced.

To view this video, go to www.backcountryhunters.org and follow the link to "America's Backcountry."



Will today's kids have the kind of hunting and fishing we grew up with? Photo: Paul Anderson

The Owl and the Woodpecker

With breathtaking photography and a spirited demeanor, Paul Bannick explores owls and woodpeckers in a presentation based on his new book, *The Owl and the Woodpecker: Encounters with North America's Most Iconic Birds*. Intertwining extensive knowledge of natural history with photography of birds in action, he draws intriguing connections between owls and woodpeckers, with a focus on western habitats.



Flammulated owls are indicator species for old-growth mixed ponderosa pine/Douglas fir forests. Photo: Paul Bannick

Conservation Northwest is hosting ten presentations by Bannick around Washington, from Bellingham to Spokane. Each is followed by a book signing with the author, who also serves as development director

with Conservation Northwest. *The Owl and The Woodpecker* was recently nominated for the Washington State Book Award and was featured in the March 1st edition of *PNW* magazine.

Go to www.conservationnw.org and our web calendar to find out when Bannick is coming to your town.



Fisher released in 2009. Photo: Dave Moskowitz

More fishers released

In late February, the last two fishers for the 2009 season were released into forests on the Olympic Peninsula. Nearly 50 fishers have been released to date as part of the ongoing reintroduction of this largely nocturnal, native forest mammal, half of the 100 animals planned for release. Fishers are an important part of the web of life in our old-growth forests. Many thanks are due to the Doris Duke Foundation and the Wildlife Conservation Society, who both contributed financial support for the ongoing successful endeavor.

Wolves on the worldwide web, WesternWolves.org

In February the Western Wolf Coalition, comprised of 17 conservation and wildlife organizations including Conservation Northwest, launched westernwolves.org, a website dedicated to providing science-based information and resources on wolves in the Northern Rockies to people living in the West.

Visitors to the site can learn about the natural history, biology, and pack structure of wolves. The site also provides data compiled about depredation rates on livestock, assesses the impacts of wolves on hunting in the region, and discusses methods available to livestock producers to reduce conflict with wolves.

“Scientists are learning that wolves play an important role in maintaining healthy landscapes,” said Jasmine Minbashian of Conservation Northwest. “Understanding this role is critical to residents in states like Washington who are just beginning to see the return of wolves.”

Wolves missed in ecosystem

A new study conducted by biologists at Oregon State University reports that the eradication of wolves from the Olympic National Park seems to have damaged its ecosystem. The study presents evidence that a “trophic cascade” has occurred, in which the loss of a top predator sets off a chain reaction of negative ecological effects. In Olympic National Park, the loss of wolves in the early 1900s has caused an unchecked elk population. These burgeoning elk forage in riparian zones—areas where wolves traditionally hunted—to the detriment of tree saplings and other plants, which in effect causes intense erosion and damages habitats.

Many of the signs of this ecosystem damage are subtle, according to the Oregon State University biologists. For example, areas filled with ferns may appear natural, but these areas should be more jungle-like with cottonwoods, hemlocks, and shrubs.



Wolf pups in the Methow. Photo: Conservation Northwest monitoring camera

Biologists also see the beneficial effect of wolves on their ecosystem as being applicable on a larger scale. It is likely that all top predators have a similar role that is crucial to ecosystem health.

Obama’s magic wand

The Obama Administration is giving wildlife and wildlands supporters good reason to celebrate. On his first day of office, President Obama froze all of the Bush Administration’s midnight rule changes, including an attempt to remove gray wolves from the Endangered Species Act. Scientists and environmentalists have criticized many of these rules as not being based on sound science.

Since then, the Obama Administration has made a number of executive orders to enact long sought-after environmental changes all over the map. In Utah, Secretary of Interior Ken Salazar nixed 77 contentious oil and gas leases. In California and 11 other states, Obama ordered the EPA to readdress their request to increase greenhouse gas emissions standards to beyond the national standard. Obama also instructed the Transportation

Department to increase fleet emissions and fuel averages to meet new, higher standards.

Perhaps the biggest sigh of relief is in response to an executive action that freezes one of the Bush administration's most notorious moves. On March 3rd, President Obama signed a presidential memorandum that restores the scientific process to endangered species decisions, reaffirming the intent of the Endangered Species Act to protect our endangered wildlife.

Dear British Columbia

That the Environmental Law Centre of the University of Victoria recently sent a letter to BC's auditor general, John Doyle, insisting that he identify critical habitat for endangered species. The letter cites the 2007 report, "The Last Place on Earth," published by the David Suzuki Foundation. The report authors call for a BC law to protect species from habitat loss and global warming. "There is no strong, stand-alone endangered species legislation in British Columbia," says the Suzuki report. "Current protections are piecemeal, weak and ineffective, leaving the province rich in species but poor in protection."

North Cascades ghost bears

A book about the North Cascades grizzly bear was just released to hot reviews. *Grizzly Wars: The Public Fight Over the Great Bear* dives deep into the history, politics, and outlook for the



Are North Cascades grizzlies here to stay, or will we let them just fade away? Photo: Chris Weston, www.chrisweston.uk.com

North Cascades grizzly bear. Whereas most books about grizzlies focus on the Rockies, author David Knibb explores the North Cascades—the only designated recovery area for grizzly bears outside of the Rocky Mountains.

Knibb refers to grizzly bears of the North Cascades as "ghost bears" because of their rarity and elusiveness. Just 10 to 20 are thought to remain. *Grizzly Wars* is a great resource to learn more about the imperiled North Cascades grizzly bear.

Critters captured on film

Hot off the press comes exciting first-year results from wildlife monitoring in the Cascades by the Cascades Citizen Wildlife Monitoring Project. The new report features thousands of images captured by dozens of cameras this past spring and summer by citizen volunteers throughout Washington's Central and North Cascades. Conservation Northwest remote cameras not only documented the first resident wild wolf pack in Washington since the 1930s, but also a rarely seen lynx in the Pasayten Wilderness and a Cascades red fox in the Teanaway.



Pine marten, smaller cousin to the fisher and wolverine. Photo: Cascades Citizen Wildlife Monitoring Project

Commenting on the wide diversity of animal images, project coordinator Marlo Mytty said, "Until you get these images back, you don't realize or think about all the wildlife that's out there that you're not seeing."

New study advances forestry

In "Spatial patterns of overstory trees in late-successional conifer forests," Derek Churchill, former staffer with Conservation Northwest, and coauthor Andrew J. Larson thoughtfully analyze contemporary thinning practices used in forest restoration. Traditional thinning, with the goal of promoting larger trees with greater resistance to bugs and disease, typically targets trees for thinning using fairly rigid, minimum spacing guidelines. This kind of thinning often involves removing entire groups of trees such as Douglas fir and Pacific silver fir.

Churchill and Larson point to the value of "variable density thinning" to more effectively restore the conditions of late-successional—mature and old-growth—forests. The new approach allows foresters to carefully tune timber cuts to individual stands and habitats. Leaving behind clusters of trees, for example, helps simulate the patchy nature of natural forests. Variable density thinning can also provide better watershed protection and woody habitat for wildlife. Look for the article's publication in the *Canadian Journal of Forest Research* sometime this year.

Keeping it wild—thank you!

A supportive membership and passionate volunteers and interns—people just like you—dramatically magnify the power of our work to keep the Northwest wild. Thanks, one and all!

Newsletter and poster distribution: Brock Baker • Laurie Fleming

Lewis & Clark High School interns: Jackson Owens • Kate Czechowski • Hilary Koenigs

Bellingham outreach: Rianne BeCraft • Eric Burr • Shannon Druckrey • Alyssa Fritz • Andrea Lawson • Ryan Lazzeri • Julia Leach • Anna Spears • Shawn Widing

Office/computer: Steve Anthes • Steve Daehlin • Valerie Wade • Tracy Wendt • Tom White • Anna Brown • Doris Ferm • Michael Hinkel • Emily Jeffreys • Dan More • Renee Redekop • Susan Rhodes • Vinney Sharp

Seattle volunteers: Bob Klein • Pete Bush • Dennis Thireault

Phone banking and public hearings: Johnny Grames • Andrea Lawson • Nate Rice • Judy Soicher

Interns: Lauren Huemann • Stephanie Kong • Whitney Fliss • Jessiann Loomis • Andrew Smeltz • Maureen Tinney • Grant Wilson

Remote camera and wildlife monitoring: Julia Meneely • Joe Talbert, Larry O'Neil • Kari Hiser • Rachel Hulsher • Doug Beeman • Patrick McGowan • Amy Tsui • Kirsten Gantenbein • Trent Elwing • Ray Robertson



Conservation Northwest supporters on a wildlife tracking trip on Columbia Mountain. Photo: Crystal Gartner

And thanks to the several hundred people who have taken action and written letters on Conservation Northwest initiatives to keep the Northwest wild. You make a difference.

Free Moonlight Dome hike

Outdoor writer Craig Romano, author of “Columbia Highlands: Exploring Washington’s Last Frontier,” is leading a hike in the enchanting Moonlight Dome of the Olympic Peninsula. He will be joined by James Johnston of the Forest Service Employees for Environmental Ethics, who photographed most of the images for the book, *Columbia Highlands: Exploring Wash-*

ington’s Last Frontier. The old-growth forests and mighty ridges of the Moonlight Dome are under consideration for wilderness protection.

Romano and Johnston will discuss ecology, hiking, and wilderness areas during this enlightening expedition with a bargain price—free!

March 29, 2009 @ 9am

Rendezvous at Starbucks, 1213 E. Wishkah Street in Aberdeen

Bring lunch and rain gear. RSVP to james@fsee.org, 541.484.2692



Marten tracks in the Cascades. Photo: Cascades Citizen Wildlife Monitoring Project



Citizen volunteers who monitor our remote cameras are also always on the move! Photo: Conservation Northwest

On the move in Seattle

Conservation Northwest recently moved our Seattle office from funky Fremont to the nearby Interbay neighborhood.

In these hard financial times, the move saves us money. But it also provides for a more functional space, with separate offices for staff—a real first!—and comes with a larger conference room and ample visitor parking.

We’ve had a Seattle office presence since 1999 when we launched the Loomis Forest Fund. Our Fremont pad provided a home to collaborative efforts such as The Cascades Conservation Partnership and the Ancient Forest Roadshow. It was also birthplace to the Cascades Citizen Wildlife Monitoring Project.

Our Seattle office has also been the site of some memorable parties, a tradition we’d like to continue. **Join us for an office warming party on Tuesday, March 24th!**

Please check our website, www.conservationnw.org/ calendar, for details.