

INSIDE/OUTSIDE

CONSERVATION NEWS AROUND THE NORTHWEST

Goat Mountain protected

Success! On April 30, the Bureau of Land Management rejected a lease application near Mount St. Helens, protecting Goat Mountain from a proposed 217-acre copper mine. The mine would have cut through the popular recreation area, demanding new roads, diversion of large amounts of water, and potential leaching of toxins into local waterways affecting fish and local wildlife. Some 33,000 public comments were received regarding the project, including many from Conservation Northwest members. The vast majority opposed the mine, while Senators Patty Murray and Maria Cantwell also voiced their concerns.

"It's great news," said Emily Platt, executive director of the Gifford Pinchot Task Force. "It's good news for the communities that are downstream of the mine, including Kelso and Longview. It's great news for threatened fish runs in the Green River. It's great news for those who horseback ride and hike in the area because they won't have to see hundreds of mine trucks every day."



Goat Mountain. Photo: Jim Thode

It looks like the fight really is over: A spokesman for General Moly mining company stated that they will not pursue the mine application any further.

Buckhorn: Keeping a close eye

In April, the Okanogan Highlands Alliance (OHA) and other area protection proponents came to an accord with Crown Resources Corporation for an underground gold mine at Buckhorn Mountain in north-central Washington. OHA considers it a "win-win" for local communities.

The final agreement ensures extra environmental protections for the lands being mined and includes mitigation and monitoring requirements, such as maintaining the natural water levels of local creeks, third party monitoring of the mine, and wetland and stream improvement projects in the greater highlands. Crown Resources is required to monitor the water quality for fresh-water wells of

nearby residents.

The controversy over mining at Buckhorn began in the early '90s with a proposed open-pit, mercury-leach gold mine, a mine eventually

quelled by people around the state. The mine proposal then went "underground"—and dragged on. You might remember our action alert about the latest mine incarnation back in October 2003.

As the project moved forward OHA appealed the Department of Ecology's approval of the underground operations, and a trial regarding the appeal was scheduled for May. Both parties withdrew, however, once the current agreement was reached.

"OHA believes this settlement is a victory and a win-win for the local community," said Dave Kliegman, OHA's executive director. "We aren't going anywhere. We will continue to keep a close eye on this mine's operations for a very long time."



Buckhorn Mountain. Photo: Dave Kliegman

Saving shrub-steppe in the Methow Valley

The Methow Valley, one of the most beautiful valleys and important wildlife habitats in Washington, has been served by a single high-voltage transmission line for the past 60 years. But rather than simply rebuild the ailing existing line, the Okanogan County Public Utility District (PUD) wants to build a brand-new second transmission line. The proposed line would cut through mostly public lands containing Okanogan's largest intact section of shrub-steppe habitat and home to golden eagles, sharp-tailed grouse, and the state's largest mule deer herd. It would fragment healthy wildlife habitat, crossing 72 tributary streams to the Methow River, and require a 21-mile-long maintenance road system, encouraging noxious weeds and off-road vehicle traffic. The new line could also trigger extensive new development on private lands nearby.

A local rancher and orchardist whose property would be harmed, Dan Gebbers, and two Methow Citizens groups (People

for Alternatives, Conservation and Education and the Methow Valley Citizens' Council) have fought hard against the PUD's quest. Conservation Northwest's botanist George Wooten has provided critical technical advice and Peter Goldman of the Washington Forest Law Center and a long-time Conservation Northwest supporter has served as their pro-bono lawyer.

Many Methow Valley residents agree that the PUD needs to upgrade the existing "Loup Loup" transmission line, and most see no sense in the utility's insistence on constructing an entirely new line.

Predictably, the PUD's stubborn insistence on building a new line ended up in the courts. In May, the Washington State Court of Appeals affirmed a lower court's rejection of the project EIS, even though that EIS fails to consider the future cumulative environmental and economic costs of rebuilding the original transmission line. This most recent court decision was a tough blow for Mr. Gebbers and the local community but they are continuing the fight all the way to the Washington Supreme Court.



Canada lynx. Photo: John Stephen Robinson

to log in their Loomis State Forest habitat, just outside the natural resource conservation areas we protected in 1999.

Wildlife biologists were particularly troubled by a proposed sale in Branch Creek in the upper Toats Coulee watershed. The DNR planned to log nearly one square mile of the remaining lynx habitat in the north Okanogan, including forests critical for lynx feeding and movement. We urged the agency to drop the sale, and the sale was recently deferred.

Conservation Northwest and others will continue to urge DNR to consider lynx habitat when discussing timber sales in that area. We are also pushing the agency to change their lynx management plans to account for the drastically different habitat conditions these rare cats now face. Increased losses from fire mean that lynx cannot tolerate any more habitat lost to logging—period.

Lynx in limbo?

Research is still underway, but it appears as though the numbers of lynx in north-central Washington have declined in direct proportion to losses in their habitat. The lynx's situation worsened when the Department of Natural Resources began moving forward with a plan

Wild Sky passes at last

And so at last, Wild Sky in the greater Skykomish River watershed in the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest becomes our state's first new protected wilderness since 1984 when the Washington Wilderness Act was enacted. Kudos to the many people who protected Wild Sky for all of us, including the bill's champions, Rep. Rick Larsen and Sen. Patty Murray. Wild Sky is gorgeous lands, steep peaks and deep forested valleys. Included are rare lowland old growth, wetlands, and meadows.

We are thrilled for the protection of this beautiful and needed area; but let's face it, wilderness on the westside of Washington gets all the credit. On the eastside of the state, the 1984 Washington Wilderness Act rejected most of the lands that local citizens worked passionately in the '70s to protect as wilderness. The result is that today, only 3% of Washington's protected wilderness areas are situated east of the Cascades and only 1%—the Salmo Priest—in heavily forested northeastern Washington.

There's wilderness still waiting—and in much the same shape as when Lewis and Clark first visited these lands—in the little-known wild forests of the Columbia Highlands. These lands richly deserve wilderness consideration and congressional designation. While so many wilderness areas protect high, craggy peaks and the rock and ice of mountain tops, the highlands are prime low-elevation habitat, precious for salmon and trout and wildlife from butterflies to bears.

Polar bear protection?



Polar bear with cub. Photo: USFWS

The polar bear's plight was finally recognized May 14, when the US Department of the Interior announced it will list the polar bear as threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Though a step in the right direction, many conservation groups worry that little will be done to curb the climatic warming that is melting the bear's habitat.

Patently ignoring the crystal clear link, Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne said that loss of sea ice, not oil and gas development, are to blame for the bear's decline.

In his statement Kempthorne said the ESA will “not” be used to regulate greenhouse gas emissions from automobiles, power plants, or other sources or to curtail drilling in polar bear habitat.

Without measures to reduce the factors that are contributing to the polar bear’s loss of habitat, there is a question whether this listing will do much to stop the bear’s sink toward extinction.



Scott Niedermeyer, born in Cranbrook, BC, was the National Hockey League’s Most Valued Player in 2007. His support for keeping Jumbo wild gained national media attention. Photo by Patrice Halley

International Mountain Film Festival, to highlight climate change and loss of yearlong snow cover for the glacier, without which the whole mega ski resort concept fails.

Go to www.keeptowild.ca

The air belongs to us

As more people wake up to the implications of climate change, calls are growing on the US government to take action. Environmental law professor Mary C. Wood argues persuasively that the government is legally responsible for protection of the atmosphere. The atmosphere, like any other natural resource, belongs to the people as a trust that is administered by the government. And if the government is not protecting our air, lawsuits can be filed under the public trust doctrine, a legal statute that designates preserving natural resources as a primary duty of government.

Wood presented her proposal at the 2008 Public Interest Environmental Law Conference with the hopes that practicing attorneys will use this principle to pursue trust claims in court to help curb climate change.

Source: High Country News, May 12, 2008

A Jumbo mistake

For 20 years—and against the wishes of Kootenay locals—developers of the Jumbo Glacier Resort have belabored building a mega resort west of the town of Invermere in the central Canadian Purcells. With a dangerous, avalanche-path ridden access road, melting glaciers, and a declining ski industry, the business plan for this resort makes even less sense today than it did years ago.

The area is key habitat for Central Purcell grizzly bears, whose numbers have dropped by nearly 50% just since 2004 when the controversial environmental assessment for the resort was first published. Critically endangered US populations of grizzly and mountain caribou rely on healthy source populations in the Canadian Cabinet-Purcells, and unsustainable permanent development would only further fragment this already stressed ecosystem.

Conservation Northwest and Wildsight are part of Jumbo-wild—a coalition of voices calling to keep the central Purcells free of permanent real estate development. Wildsight helped produce the film “Alas, Resort,” which premiered at the 2008 Vancouver

Wacky weather in the West

Winter this year went out with a bang. What first started as a fairly dry winter has now turned into an above average snow pack. In Washington’s lowlands many areas saw sporadic snowstorms through the end of March. The ski season re-opened at the Summit of Snoqualmie for the weekend of May 18 as the snow continued to fall. Colorado has experienced even weirder weather. A storm covered the San Juan Mountains with 3 feet of snow in mid-April; a few days later a vast wind storm blew through the region melting the snow and fueling forest fires. As the climate continues to change, who knows what unexpected weather we’ll see next year.

Source: High County News, May 12, 2008

Relief for murrelets

The marbled murrelet got a break recently when the US Fish and Wildlife Service reversed itself and decided not to follow through on a proposal to considerably reduce the bird’s critical habitat. The



Murrelet nesting high in old growth. Photo: Thomas Hamer Environmental LP

surprise move leaves in place protection for more than 3 million acres of coastal old-growth forest. The earlier proposal would have slashed 94% of the threatened seabird’s critical habitat as part of the Bush Administration’s plan to increase old growth logging in

the Northwest. "This reversal, coupled with a recent court decision throwing out a timber industry attempt to delist the murrelet, should end the timber industry's profit-driven and illegal attack on the coastal forests that murrelets need to survive," said Earthjustice attorney Kristen Boyles. Earthjustice, representing several conservation groups including Conservation Northwest, led the charge to challenge the agency's proposed habitat revision and to fight the timber industry lawsuit.

Thanks to all of you who responded to the call to action we put out in 2006. This little sea bird, legacy to our old-growth forests, can rest a little easier today partly because of your help.

Volunteer thanks

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!

Tabling: Lee Alkire • Athanasios Bitsas • Charmaine Gural • Mike Moen • Taze Raney • Kristina Schoonmaker • Neil Schoonmaker

Newsletter/Poster Distribution: Kathleen Conley • Maggie Early • Jessica Haffner • Suzi Hokonson • Hilary Kingman • Norine Kruse • Jeff MacDonald • Dinah Reed • Kristina Schoonmaker

Hike Leaders: Chris Baldini • Denise Beardslee • Jessica Haffner • Chuck Huber • Wendy Huber • Jonathan Isacoff • Karen Jurasin • Jeff Lambert • Scott Miles • Bill Milliken • Dinah Reed • Judy Rose

Photography/Art: Tim Chandonnet • Ryan Harried • Jesse Kinsman • Aric Mayer

Office/Computer: Claire Browning • Doris Ferm • Michael Hinkel • Tom McNeely (computer guru) • Susan Rhodes • Katie Ward

Phone Banking/Public Hearings: Johnny Grames • Andrea Lawson • Nate Rice • Judy Soicher

Interns: Chelsea Davis • Steven Davis • Heather Diemert • Jenny Frederick • Candace Hultberg • Emily McMahon • Kathleen Powers • Nina Ramsey • Rebecca Rayner • Molly Sherlock • Holly Slattery • Steve Smith

Trail Work: Holly Weiler • Ken Mondal

Groovin' Volunteers: Cathy Craver • Jolanna Gamblewood • Dan Hall • Nick Hartrich • Joel Heil • Larry Hildes • Ian Rae • Amy Silver • Amy Strohm • Cailin Murray • Shannon Webb • Karen Weill • Jess Wight • Krissa Woiwod

Bear Head Creators: Joel Bergsbaken • Carrie Cooper • Sido De Cassis • Jeralyn Heil • Kate Voorhees

Whatcom Legacy Fundraiser: Barbara Christensen • Ali Illyn • Erika Malone • Bri Silbaugh

Remote Camera and Citizens Wildlife Monitoring: Alissa Anderson • Jeff Anderson • Chantal Argyle • Janice Ashleman • Russ Ashleman • Fatima Aviquivil • Ruth Bagge • Paul Balle • Leslie Barstow • Roger Bean • Doug Beeman • Paul Brookshire • Cat Bruson • Cindy Callahan • Richard Champlin • Kathy Chrestensen • Robert Chrestensen • Mark Christenesen • Maurreen Corlas • Steven Davis • Jenn Dean • Kim Des Rochers • Carolyn Dobbs • Trent Elwing • Laura Farwell • Brenna Forester • Kirsten Gantenbein • Steve Glenn •

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Volunteers Sarah Polster and Chelsea Davis sport bear heads at Groovin' for Grizzlies in Bellingham. Photo: Ryan Harried

Poertner • Keith Possee • Austin Pratt • Peggy Ratermann • Dan Rikard • Mike Ruiz • Kelly Ryhajlo • Paul Ryhajlo • Laura Schiltz • Kate Schultz • Scott Shaffer • Mark Smaalders • David Snair • Liz Snair • Bryan Torell • Theresa Torell • Amy Tsui • Sera Turner • Lucy Uhlig • Laura Vitale • Andy Wargo • Mike Webb • Bill Whipple • Sean Williams • Marian Wineman • Julie Wright

Want to volunteer? Get engaged! Visit our website: www.conservationnw.org, click on "Get Involved" then "Volunteer Sign-up Form" and fill out and submit the form with your interests marked. We'll follow up with you as opportunities arise.

Or contact one of these regional volunteer coordinators to discuss your interests and availability:

Bellingham: Rose Oliver, rose@conservationnw.org or 360.671.9950 x10

Seattle: Marlo Mytty, marlo@conservationnw.org or 206.675.9747 x201

Spokane: Crystal Gartner, crystal@conservationnw.org or 509.747.1663

Eastern Washington: Derrick Knowles, derrick@conservationnw.org or 509.747.1663