



Conservation Northwest FY2023-27 Strategic Plan

Mission: We protect, connect and restore wildlands and wildlife from the Washington Coast to the British Columbia Rockies.

About Us: “Keeping the Northwest wild” since 1989, we protect old-growth forests and other wildlands, connect large landscapes and vital habitats, and restore native wildlife. Our M.O. is simple: connect the big landscapes, restore iconic wildlife and protect our natural heritage for future generations. From the Washington Coast to the British Columbia Rockies, we’re your voice for conserving wildlands and wildlife.

We recognize that for long-term progress, conservation must go hand-in-hand with healthy, prosperous and equitable communities. We’re restoring wildlands and wildlife by working with diverse stakeholders. Through dialogue, we find common ground and collaborative solutions for challenging issues including habitat corridors, wilderness conservation, forest restoration and endangered species recovery across our region.

Problem Statement: The Pacific Northwest features some of the last remaining large wild landscapes left in the United States and provides refuge for a diversity of wildlife and ecosystems. But the future of these ecosystems is in question. Washington is the smallest Western state, has the least amount of federal public land, the second densest human population, and the third highest growth rate. Ecosystems and communities are also enduring the stress of a changing climate to which they must both adapt and resist. Protecting and connecting sufficient wildland to sustain wildlife and recovering iconic species against these trends is our existential challenge and focus.

We see the North Cascades Ecosystem as an ecological hub to be linked with other large areas (e.g., South Cascades, Kettle Range, Selkirks and Rocky Mountains, Willapa Hills and Olympic Peninsula, British Columbia Coast Range), creating a landscape scale habitat network that offers the best chance for our region to remain biologically diverse and ecologically resilient.

But that is not enough, as Americans and our democracy are suffering from racial inequality and political polarization. Challenging these ills is the responsibility of every person and organization; even more so for Conservation Northwest—with our far-flung objectives and staff giving us a stake and a presence across cultural divides. We cultivate common ground to sustain vital ground.

We bring to this epic challenge a solid base. Our work is grounded in scientific knowledge, pragmatic idealism, and mature relationships among diverse stakeholders, including many Tribes and First Nations. We have a history of and reputation for bringing these to bear in strategic and often catalytic ways, giving us oversized impact. As an evolution of this collaborative work, we are exploring the idea of conservation through reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, as well as other forms of environmental justice and greater utilization of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK).

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Conservation Programs: Conservation Northwest thinks big, acts strategically, aligns with science, mobilizes grassroots support, and works collaboratively. Our work ensures that core habitat on federal and other public lands and strategically-located private lands across our geography is sufficiently **protected** and inter-**connected** into a regional network that can be self-sustaining.

We **restore** populations of native wildlife within this network.

Our programs center on oversight of public lands, conservation practices on certain private lands, and protection/recovery of threatened species, with components of both climate impact/relevance and racial equity and justice in as many programs as possible.

A note about our British Columbia presence: CNW has had a presence and role across southern B.C. since 1991. This history gives us a brand and investment that are of great value, largely concentrated through the persons of Joe Scott, Jay Kehne and Mitch Friedman, with the latter two confined to the South Okanagan-Similkameen region and Joe throughout, particularly the Coast Range, Kettles/Monashees and Inland Temperate Rainforest. Establishing a successor to Joe is essential to the legacy of our Coast to Cascades work and its potential in Kettles and Kootenay.

Protect Large Blocks of Wildland

Large blocks of forest, shrub-steppe, and wildland provide core habitat that is essential for long-term survival and recovery of imperiled wildlife. To safeguard ecological function of core areas we have an ongoing focus on:

- a) Maintaining the Northwest Forest Plan's regional scope, and ecosystem management framework, and evolve it to address climate and connectivity factors;
- b) Doing our part to generate favorable federal policy and defeat attacks on public land and bedrock conservation law and policy;
- c) Seeking permanent protection for crown jewels like the South Okanagan-Similkameen grasslands and Kettle Crest, contributing to 30x30 aspirations;
- d) Promote landscape restoration actions, that improve ecological function and restore resilience to sustain fish and wildlife habitat; obtain policy and cultural norms limiting access of ATV's, bikes and other vehicles from wild habitat; and
- e) Accommodate recreational access where possible while providing habitat security for wildlife and other ecological outcomes and treaty-protected cultural practices of tribes.

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(modestly grow) Forest Field Program: We promote naturally functioning and ecologically managed forests by:

- 1) Advancing restoration of forest and watershed resilience and habitat connectivity while protecting old forests and other critical habitats,
- 2) Partnering with agencies and communities for scientifically credible, socially supported, and fiscally feasible projects,
- 3) Leveraging field examples into policy through lobbying, media exposure, court rulings, and public support and involvement.

Objectives during the period of this plan include:

- Expand landscape restoration practices from the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest across the Colville and Mount Baker-Snoqualmie, integrating forest and aquatic restoration practices and elevating Tribal and First Nation's priorities;
- Increase use of managed and prescribed fire as a restoration tool;
- Reduce road system size and density to improve habitat connectivity and watershed function; and
- Concentrate planning and restorative action in areas identified as climate refugia for at-risk plants and animals.

(seek to close out) Northeast Washington Heritage campaign: Until we attain success, we perpetually seek opportunity to permanently protect wildlands of the Kettle Crest as a vital core area bridging the Cascades to the Rockies. This work builds on our past Columbia Highlands Initiative and efforts around the 15-year Colville Forest Land Management Plan. An optimistic outlook is congressional interest and perhaps bill introduction in 2022 with potential passage in '23 or '24. Our focus entails a broad "prosperity" frame:

- Pursuit of common ground with tribes, including helping meet their interests in greater acknowledgement of their presence and cultural heritage protection;
- Reaching an accord with mountain bike and other recreation interests on land designations including a Kettle Range protected area and wilderness for Bald-Snow, Abercrombie-Hooknose and other Roadless Areas;
- Sustain support of timber partners through common ground restoration work with the Northeast Washington Forest Coalition;
- Build informed relationships with county commissioners to pursue mutual objectives for conservation and economic prosperity in northeast Washington; and
- Sustain pressure and awareness-building on Senator Cantwell and Congresswoman McMorris-Rodgers.

(sustain, potentially close out key aspects) State Forest Lands: We engage in landscape-scale conservation actions involving state land to secure core habitat areas for at-risk wildlife, like marbled murrelet or Canada lynx, and to influence old growth management and forest health policy. Another principal objective - to clarify the Constitutional obligations of DNR to manage their lands for the benefit "*all the people*"—may be ruled on by the State Supreme Court (CNW vs. DNR) before the period of this plan.

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Other objectives include:

- Following a successful court ruling, work with close allies to both defend as legislative backlash and to define in legislation what DNR management for “all the people” would entail.
- Direct funding from the WA Climate Commitment Act and potentially corporate entities interested in climate mitigation to secure an additional 40,000 acres of murrelet habitat.
- Influence discussions on rural livelihoods connected to DNR management to secure additional murrelet habitat and reduce backlash.
- Influence DNR management for improved combined biodiversity/carbon sequestration outcomes.
- Monitor and influence implementation of forest health legislation and DNR’s 20 year Forest Health plan to ensure ecologically appropriate landscape scale restoration is occurring on DNR lands.

(evaluate/initiate as other programs conclude) First Foods Collaboration: We aim to work with Indigenous communities, private landowners, and partner agencies and organizations to protect first plants and animals with cultural and ecological importance and their habitats. As the strategic model for this program is unclear and untested, we aspire to its fruition while keeping an open mind.

- Hire initial staff in 2022 or 2023 who will collaborate with one eastside tribe to develop concepts and methods focused on one to three species in key areas within reservation(s);
- Build familiarity with the concept of first foods and their connection to ecological and cultural values, starting within tribes and moving to non-indigenous people.
- Develop and propagate tribal support letters for First Foods protection and restoration by 2025;
- Expand by 2027 to 3-5 different geographies and multiple species/habitats potentially on both sides of the Cascade Mountains and/or British Columbia; and

Eventually, focus on non-reservation lands to test moral, sovereign, political, and legal rights beyond established levels.

(initiated, build) Wildlife-Recreation Coexistence: Promote greater coexistence between wildlife and outdoor recreation by reducing impacts on sensitive species and habitats through watchdogging, science-based policy, advocacy, and outreach while advancing sustainable outdoor opportunities and supporting Indigenous cultural and First Foods values.

The Wildlife Recreation Coexistence Program (WREC) will work with partner agencies, organizations, tribes and businesses to scientifically analyze the impacts of increased recreation on Pacific Northwest wildlife and plant species. This concept faces massive challenges of scale but is increasingly timely and essential for safeguarding security habitat and is a wide open role, making our effort critical. We see opportunities to protect critical

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habitats, support tribal treaty rights and work collaboratively to support sustainable recreation, education/outreach and appropriate outdoor access, including:

- Engage with outdoor recreation groups for greater incorporation of wildlife values into their education and outreach
- Encourage alternative recreation activities with lower impact (front country, sacrifice zones, alternative forms of recreation)
- Advocating for (free) permitting systems to control volume and promote accountability and look at funding options.
- Increase awareness of wildlife presence, cultural uses and First Foods in recreation areas and human impacts on wildlife
- Advocate for increased recreational focus in front country areas
- Create resources that catalytically influence and educate recreation and outdoors groups and businesses about awareness of their impact on wildlife and ways to protect wildlife habitat
- Make how we talk about and educate about human impact on habitat and wildlife a mainstream conversation among outdoors and recreation groups
- Develop interactive map of landscape protection tiers (reflecting tribal cultural and subsistence rights and needs), sensitive species, which species live in which area, and precautions to keep in mind – a Story Map. Ex. times of year for elk calving.
- Aim for no-net increase of recreation in critical habitat or connectivity linkages. E.g., Gold Creek Pond restoration, critical ungulate winter range, sage grouse lek sites.

Connect Those Large Blocks of Wildland

Protect habitat linkages that keep the large core areas of the Cascades, Olympics, Willapa Hills, B.C. Coast Range, Kettle Range and Selkirks/Rocky Mountains connected as a functional wildlands network, and sustain the Connected Backbone of shrub-steppe habitat linking the arid Columbia Basin to British Columbia's South Okanagan-Similkameen grasslands.

Provide regional leadership on both sides of the border for protecting connections by:

- a) Nurturing relationships among land, wildlife, and transportation agencies and ally nonprofits that foster joint science and policy through the Washington Wildlife Habitat Connectivity Working Group, Wildlinks Conference, and Cascadia Partner Forum; and
- b) Advancing corridor and wildlife crossings policy and funding at federal, state/province and possibly local levels.

(mostly close out by FY24) Working for Wildlife Initiative: We're entering the final year of a decade long relationship with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, guided by this business plan to maintain and restore habitat connectivity between the Cascades and Kettle

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Range for Canada lynx, Columbian sharp-tailed grouse, and mule deer. We face the prospect of meeting many of our original ambitious objectives, including protecting through easements and acquisitions more than 16,000 acres of private land; decommissioning about 45 miles of roads on USFS and tribal land; removing over 25 miles of relict barb wire fences; installing 30 miles of wildlife friendly fences on the Colville Reservation; translocating over 80 sharp-tailed grouse; developing conservation plans with multiple private landowners; reintroducing lynx into the Kettle Range (budgeted elsewhere), and marking 20 miles of fences top wire to protect sage grouse and sharp-tailed grouse. Remaining objectives include:

- Provide 11 miles of safe passage for wildlife under Highway 97 by following through on legislative and state administrative lobbying for construction of underpasses.

(grow) Central Cascades Watershed Restoration: To follow our connectivity successes across forest land and I-90, we intend comprehensive restoration of upper watershed public lands. We will work with the Forest Service and partners to design and fund landscape scale restoration of the White and Green River watersheds, Upper Swauk, Manastash-Taneum, Teanaway, and Little Naches, including thinning thousands of plantation acres, removing hundreds of road miles, relocating infrastructure from floodplains, reducing invasive species, and accommodating recreational access that aligns with resource protection. Leverage proximity to metropolitan areas for communication and branding, DEI and underrepresented communities, creative finance, and Headwaters-to-Puget Sound water quality awareness.

- Establish Snoquera as a model landscape by completing most restoration actions;
- Secure restoration blueprint in Upper Green River;
- Demonstrate progress in Little Naches with integrated landscape restoration plan and pilot restoration actions,
- Prioritize species-specific climate refugia areas during planning and implementation;
- Leverage Snoquera success into healthy headwaters restoration funding package by 2025; and
- Secure project funding through grants, private dollars, and forest resiliency bonds. Engage downstream partners. Support Tribal priority efforts.

(grow) Cascades to Olympics: Habitat connections to the Olympics are an urgent need given development trends and the distances between core wildlife populations. An opportunity presents to dovetail off Chehalis watershed improvements and new connectivity modeling in the region presents means for wolves, elk, cougar, beavers, and other wildlife to cross I-5 and Highway 12. There may be opportunities to promote old forest habitat in the corridor. Modeling on which to base this work is encouraging, and early conservation steps have stand-alone value. We will add objectives as information improves.

- Conduct early vegetation restoration and clean up under Satsop and Newaukum bridges as catalysts for turning these into full wildlife crossing structures.
- Throughout the plan period, work to secure funding and land use policies to protect high priority corridors and fund wildlife crossing structure identified in our blueprint.
- Continue to influence the Chehalis Aquatic Species Restoration Strategy

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- Advocate for funds from the newly passed Washington Climate Commitment Act for projects in the blueprint
- Work with Weyerhaeuser and DNR to secure land on both sides of the southern linkage.
- Work with local planning commissions in Thurston and Lewis Counties to prevent development in key crossing locations.

(create state policy then shift this into program) Wildlife Crossings: It's essential to enable wildlife to cross highways along key corridors at locations like Highway 2 near Stevens Pass, Highway 12 near Randle, Highway 97 near Blewett Pass, and I-90 near Vantage. We aim to establish a state funding source within the transportation budget and political will within WSDOT to prioritize this issue.

- Continue to coordinate with partners and work on transportation budgets at the state and federal levels. Build on awareness created by Safe Passage 97.
- Secure commitment from WSDOT leadership for a set of crossing priorities or criteria.
- Leverage our relationship with National Wildlife Foundation to influence federal funding and legislation for wildlife crossings and corridors within our region.
- Continue to support, celebrate and amplify ongoing wildlife crossing work on I-90 in the Snoqualmie Pass corridor and on Highway 97.

(modestly grow) Sagelands Heritage Program: The Columbia Plateau occupies nearly a third of Washington, but under half of it remains shrub-steppe. The Sagelands Heritage Program maintains, restores and connects shrub-steppe landscapes from BC's Okanagan Valley to the Horse Heaven Hills of southcentral Washington for the good of both wildlife and people. Priority species include sage grouse, bighorn sheep, badgers, sharp-tailed grouse, mule deer, pygmy rabbits, ferruginous hawks, and short-eared owls. Our focus is the *Connected Backbone* and four critical linkages within it: Dyer Hill, Sagebrush Flats to Big Bend, Colockum to Yakima Training Center, and Wenas to Yakama Reservation. We will coordinate with landowners, Tribes, First Nations, public agencies, local land trusts, Pheasants Forever and the Arid Lands Initiative to catalyze localized efforts, protect linkages.

- Support First Nations and conservation partners in negotiations to gain establishment of the South Okanogan Similkameen National Park Reserve by 2026;
- Feature aboriginal First Foods and traditional ecological knowledge, engage underserved tribal and Hispanic youth;
- Support land trusts and the Yakima Basin Integrated Plan lands committee to fund conservation easements and acquisitions throughout the *Connected Backbone*;
- Establish a multi-partnership *Bullseye Fund* for conserving critical habitat by 2024
- Achieve Farm Bill Conservation Reserve Program modifications to protect endangered species by 2023.

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- Restore fire-damaged habitat and reduce mega fires through engagement with the Shrub-Steppe Proviso Collaborative Working Group;
- Install Zeedyk and Beaver Dam Analog structures to increase climate resilience in shrub steppe riparian through 2027; and
- Close roads and remove fences on WDFW lands to protect critical habitat and permeability for wildlife through 2027, and broadly support wildlife recovery actions.

(ramp down to a sustainable level by 24) Coast to Cascades Grizzly Bear Initiative: We view the landscape connections between the Cascades and B.C. Coast Ranges as best pursued through grizzly bear conservation, including enhanced core and linkage habitat security (particularly through motorized access controls), human/bear conflict prevention, and in some cases bear population augmentation through transplants. Our efforts prior to FY 2023, include examples of each of these tactics, have been put in place via plans adopted by First Nations for habitat security through road closures and other habitat related actions and set recovery objectives and outcomes. Along with direct bear recovery efforts including translocations, these tactics have contributed to robust increases in the Squamish/Lillooet and South Chilcotin grizzly bear populations and enjoy support among First Nations and local communities.

Our upcoming objectives will be guided by research (bear hazard assessments and connectivity analyses) completed prior to this period and focused primarily on the Stein population. Of BC's five threatened southern populations (including the North Cascades), the Stein is the lynchpin to achieving a sustainable metapopulation. CNW's direct and staffed role will end by FY2024, so the below anticipated outcomes will be primarily accomplished through local partners with whom we will have a formal arrangement and to whom we will provide funds. We are seeking the right person to, over time, take over Joe's unique coordination role.

- By 2024, secure safe passage and seasonal habitat use (through education and attractant management) in the Pemberton Meadows and the three Portage Road communities;
- By 2025, have motorized management plans in place for the entire Stein/Nahatlatch unit;
- By 2025, see that title or conservation easements are secured (in coordination with Nature Conservancy Canada and First Nation partners) to priority private lands in the Haylmore, Blackwater and Pemberton Meadows areas; and
- Document by 2027 survival and reproductive success of translocated adult females and improved cub survival.

(initiate in FY 24, as C2C winds down) Kettles Connect: Continuing our objective of wildlife connectivity between the Cascades and the Rockies, we aim to employ methodology developed by leading scientists to protect key core and linkage habitat for grizzly bears and other wildlife on the BC side of the Kettles/Monashee Range. Partners will include Okanagan Nation Alliance (ONA) and interested individual Bands, potentially Secwépemc Nation

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(Shuswap) and interested local wildlife focused groups. Some success of this new program is vital to assuring our larger investments in the Cascades to Rockies corridor, making it a priority. While our objective is for Joe to initiate this program, we are seeking the right person to, over time, take over Joe's unique BC coordination role. Objectives include:

- Prior to the planning period, initiate discussions with principal science advisors and potential (primary) partners (e.g., First Nations staff) to gauge interest, plan habitat and policy analyses (geographic scope, methodologies, initial staffing/funding, etc.), and learn of any overlapping initiatives;
- In FY 2023, contract hire a local lead, develop a presentation, clarify collaborative NGO partners, and initiate formal presentations to interested First Nations for feedback, endorsement, and potential partnerships;
- In FY 2024, initiate presentations to government for feedback and to learn planning processes; and
- In FY 2024, determine final campaign framework and associated needs and strategies.

Restore Wildlife

To the protected/connected landscape we facilitate the return of top carnivores in self-sustaining numbers with greater social tolerance. Our Community Wildlife Monitoring Project engages people tracking wildlife in key areas like the I-90 corridor and documenting presence of fisher, gray wolf, grizzly bear, lynx, wolverine, and other species.

(extend for a limited time) Wolf Recovery (policy and field): Since 2006, we have pursued the goal of Washington being where wolf recovery is done right, focusing on both state policy and field modelling of ways to reduce conflict with livestock. Sustained relationships with key stakeholders is vital until other partners take the lead, while continuing our policy advocacy.

- Carefully wind down by 2027 our modeling of field conflict avoidance work by leaving durable institutional structures to carry on the work.
- Continue to secure funding for wolf co-existence work through legislative advocacy.
- Maintain policy presence on the state's Wolf Advisory Group and in front of the Fish and Wildlife Commission to strongly influence the post de-listing management plan, which should be finished within this plan period.
- Advance science-based proposal to keep pack structures intact
- Build on relationships and social learning to minimize polarization with hunting and ranching communities so as to enable a plan that maintains wolves in Washington with low levels of lethal management and as high a level of social acceptance as possible.

(grow) Community Wildlife Monitoring Project: We engage people tracking wildlife in key areas like the I90 corridor, Kettle Range and North Cascades, documenting the presence of wolverines, wolves, grizzly bears, lynx, fishers and other species. Now in its 15th year, our

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Community Wildlife Monitoring Project is one of the largest citizen-science efforts in North America, working to extend and enhance the scientific research capacity of our organization and our colleagues. The Project functions as a partnership among our staff and state, federal, tribal and independent biologists to improve knowledge about wildlife presence and distribution that is vital to informing recovery planning and policy. It also helps guide our conservation programs and priorities, and those of state and federal agencies.

- Continue to train and deploy volunteers to maintain camera stations to document Cascades wolf recovery, wolverine range expansion, wildlife use of new I-90 crossing structures, and other objectives.
- Also expand the program with a partnership involving the Colville Tribe and the youth of its reservation, in coordination with the Sagelands Heritage Program.

(extend for a limited time) North Cascades Grizzly Bear Restoration: Restoration of a viable grizzly bear population in the North Cascades has been a priority since our founding. Grizzly bears play a vital role for the health of the environment and other wildlife species, figure prominently in regional Native American and First Nation cultures and contribute to the richness of our natural heritage in the Pacific Northwest. In 2014, the National Park Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service began a new multi-year Environmental Impact Statement planning process for restoring a healthy North Cascades grizzly bear population. Despite a strong process and supportive public engagement, the Trump Administration suspended the effort in 2020. We are encouraging the Biden Administration to resurrect it.

- Continue contributing to steering an informal coalition of groups and businesses, the Friends of the North Cascades Grizzly Bear (www.northcascadesgrizzly.org).
- Cause the Department of the Interior to resume by FY 2023 a responsible, science-based grizzly bear restoration to backcountry areas in the North Cascades.
- Engage for implementation of the EIS outcome for at least the initial year following the Record of Decision, including targeted outreach in effected communities to maintain public support, advance coexistence and bear awareness in this landscape.
- Possibly raise private capital to contribute to translocations.

(follow-through) Restore lynx to the Kettle Range: Reestablish a lynx population in the Kettles through the partnership we catalyzed with the Colville Tribe and Okanagan Nation Alliance while also causing reduced BC trapping pressure.

- Translocate 5-10 lynx/year through FY26 and contribute to monitoring and communications.

(evaluate) Beaver Restoration: Our goal is to ensure that beavers are restored to their full ecological function in landscapes where those functions are needed throughout Washington State. The program would have policy, coordination, and landowner outreach functions. This concept aligns well with many of our programs, relationships, and values, but it's not clear that there's a need for us. Our exploration will be open-minded.

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- Complete due diligence by 2023 to assess a viable, value-adding role and clear objectives for Conservation Northwest within the state’s field of beaver advocates; and
- The absence of all these elements or the welcome of peers would be a kill switch.

(sustain) Wildlife Recovery: As core habitat on public lands is increasingly protected and connected as a functional regional wildlands network, we aim to restore the region’s rich biological heritage through recovery actions for mountain caribou, fisher, wolverine, Canada lynx, northern spotted owl, sage grouse, or other imperiled umbrella, keystone, culturally important, or focal species. This catch-all program has nominal budget for low-level engagement mountain caribou, fisher, etc. that were or may late have dedicated programs.

