

New Growth

We're sowing the seeds for a brighter future, where wildlife and habitat conservation continue to thrive, and our youth are at the forefront of this vital endeavor.



November 2023

Native Seeds to Conservation Careers

For the past two years at Conservation Northwest (CNW) Keith Watson, a Sagelands Heritage Coordinator, has been mentoring students at Oroville High School through a Supervised Agriculture Experience (SAE) internship. Most internships are offered by large agricultural companies, so working with a nonprofit like CNW gives these kids a unique opportunity. Keith brings a conservation approach to the program through his work as a conservationist, biologist, and owner of a small orchard in Okanogan County. "It's about creating a scientific framework for viewing the world and hands-on problem-solving," Keith shared on the importance of this internship, "we can support their ability to better engage with their local landscape and world."

Our high school interns worked on a cycle of growing, transplanting, and harvesting native plants. This effort is a part of a greenhouse program that initially was intended to focus on growing non-native food plants, but with Keith's guidance was refocused to native species that belong on the landscape. "This program really started from the students and me growing 2,200 plants in plastic containers, and has evolved into a full cycle of rehabilitation," Keith shared. Our first interns started by joining Keith in the field and harvesting seeds from big sagebrush, a native plant that is critical to many iconic western species, and then conducting research on how to grow these seeds in their school greenhouse. Two years later, this is a complete cycle that goes from germinating plants all the way to planting them in fire restoration areas, including the Figlenski Ranch that CNW returned to the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation in 2021.



Working with these interns weaves together many aspects of conservation that are core to our work at CNW. Not only are these students gaining a lifelong appreciation for stewardship, but they are positively impacting their local landscape.

The impact of this program extends beyond our interns; students throughout the entire school engage with native plants through a greenhouse management course, spreading the importance of this work even further. The SAE internships are a part of a broader initiative to incorporate conservation into more of the state's career and technical education programs through the Sustainability and Sovereignty program. Last year's interns presented their work with CNW to a Western Washington University committee as an example of a successful program that can be replicated at other schools throughout the state.



Illustrations by
Amber Smith.

Guiding the Future Stewards of Our Wildlands



For the second year in a row, Conservation Northwest had the privilege of working with the Doris Duke Conservation Scholars Program. These Scholars are a diverse, committed and creative community of young professionals from around the country who aim to change the face, practice and future of conservation. Three natural resource students – Mikayla Agbamuche, Amber Smith, and Kareli Mora Ayon - brought their enthusiasm and diverse experiences to our 2023 field season. Because of their shared interest in plants and community outreach, they were paired with our Central Cascades Watershed Project. Conservation Northwest provided three mentors: Laurel Baum, Tanner Humphries, and Jen Syrowitz. Laurel shared on the impact being a mentor had on her, “It gives me hope to see young women having doors open to work in conservation. I want them to know they fully deserve to be here, and their voice has space here.” The cohort developed educational signage to protect meadows, restored riparian areas near waterways, and worked to connect wildlife corridors in different watersheds around the Central Cascades.

Amber, Kareli, and Mikayla engaged in a wide breadth of experiences with us ranging from wildlife camera retrievals, to dispersed human recreation surveys and garbage cleanup and invasive plant treatments and removals at I-90 wildlife crossings, as well as meeting with a variety of natural resource specialists in the field. Policy and advocacy became new interests for them, pairing well with their shared desire for just and democratic decision processes that intentionally include unheard voices. “Working with these three amazing women gave me hope and inspiration if they are the future of conservation, we are in good hands,” Tanner shared.

At Conservation Northwest, we do our best to practice this value in our work, but time spent with the next generation of diverse voices really brought this need to bear, and the ways in which we can continually do better.



Matt Danielson, Jen Syrowitz, Mikayla Agbamuche, Laurel Baum, Amber Smith, Tanner Humphries, and Kareli Mora.

Meet Our Scholars



Mikayla Agbamuche

UNIVERSITY: University of Florida
MAJOR: Natural Resource Conservation with minors in Urban Planning, Environmental Horticulture, & Dance

WHY SHE JOINED THIS PROGRAM:
I'm passionate about plants and the relationships people have with them in both the past and present. I'm also interested in cultural preservation through plant conservation and encouraging members of minority communities to reconnect with nature by promoting the inclusion of minorities in outdoor recreational settings. I wanted to be placed in a positive learning environment where I could learn about the many dimensions of conservation, and I have gotten all that and more at Conservation Northwest.



Kareli Mora Ayon

UNIVERSITY: Heritage University in Toppenish, WA
MAJOR: Environmental Science

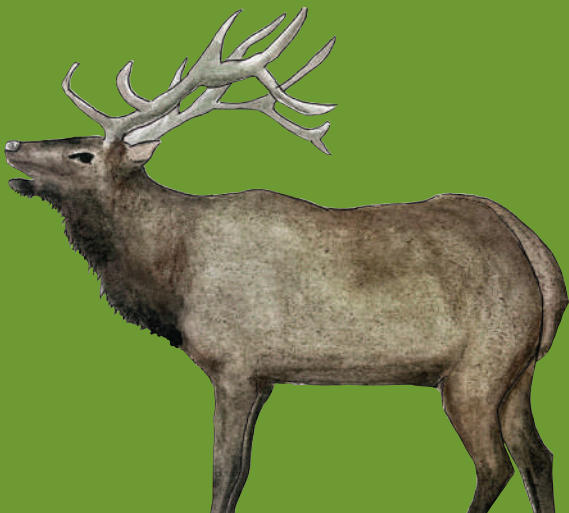
WHY SHE JOINED THIS PROGRAM:
I grew up in Stockton, California where agriculture work was a strong component of my life. The only time I was outdoors when I was younger was for work. Heat exhaustion, long hours of manual labor, and pesticides created this negative outlook on what being outside meant, however this sparked my passion for environmental justice and how it is everyone's right to enjoy the beauty of mother nature. I want my work to tie in with ecosystems and all the little and big critters that reside in them because animals are also that unrepresented community to those who believe they are superior to them. Which is not the case at all. This is why I love Conservation Northwest and the work that they do from the riparian restoration project to the carnivore project and I know it just doesn't stop there.



Amber Smith

UNIVERSITY: University of North Carolina at Charlotte
MAJOR: Environmental Science

WHY SHE JOINED THIS PROGRAM:
My main interests are in large ecological restoration projects, plant and water resources, and policy. I became interested in this field because I have a passion to encourage people of color into the outside world without the negative connotation while also ensuring environmental justice.



Getting Youth into the Wild Spaces of the Okanogan

In the Omak-Okanogan area, Matt Danielson, part of Conservation Northwest’s Forest Field team, is working to make nature more accessible. Most of the public access to land around the greater Omak-Okanogan area is limited to state wildlife areas and access is confusing to many young people. Matt has spent his entire life in Omak, allowing him to understand the importance of this work. “We don’t have the same infrastructure for accessing outdoor recreation as other areas in Washington. It’s going to start by building community and culture around using our local landscape,” he said.

This year we started working with the Foundation for Youth Resiliency and Engagement (FYRE). FYRE is a

youth center that serves over 700 young individuals annually across Okanogan County and advocates for “equitable opportunities that allow all youth to thrive.” Despite the small population size and its remoteness, the Omak-Okanogan is diverse. Of the young people served by FYRE, 67% identify as BIPOC and 35% as LGBTQ+. Many of the young people they serve are those furthest removed from justice and opportunity, including youth that are houseless or with unstable housing, young parents, and youth with substance use disorders or involved in the juvenile justice system.

FYRE and the young people it serves have expressed a need for simple, place-based information to access the outdoors. “It’s more than a guide to a local hiking spot; we’re giving them skills to engage with their own back yard. Opening pathways for them to explore these spaces creates a lifelong passion for protecting and sharing them with future generations,” Matt shared. The students knew what they needed to gain access to their local wilderness. They made direct asks for things like essentials lists and our team provided the expertise and resources to make it a reality. We’re bringing wildlife habitat and sustainable wildlife-recreation coexistence experience to this partnership by offering field trips; supporting independent outdoor exploration; hosting workshops; creating a pamphlet about hiking and camping locations; and providing recreational passes, gas cards, and tents. These products are being created with and for the students



Photos by Matt Danielson.

that will engage with them, with focus groups to get their feedback along the way.

The outdoor guide will highlight local wildlife viewing areas, present commonly viewable wildlife species and native plants within their habitats, provide scavenger hunt lists, and create space for youth to record their own wildlife and habitat observations. These wildlife areas represent some of the best opportunities in Washington for youth to see rare species like sharp-tailed grouse, white-headed woodpecker, and western gray squirrel as well as locally important species like migratory mule deer and ruffed grouse.



A volunteer handling a Pygmy rabbit to administer vaccines.
Photos by Jordan Ryckamn.



Small Rabbit, Big Impact

Chiawana High School’s Running Start students teamed up with Jordan Ryckman, from our Sagelands Heritage team, to make a tangible difference in the world of conservation. With a focus on wildlife cameras and Geographic Information Systems (GIS), these students embarked on a journey to support the preservation of endangered pygmy rabbits in the shrub steppe habitat in central Washington.

They helped sift through thousands of photos captured by six cameras stationed in pygmy rabbit enclosures to sort images and identify animals. “These students bridge the gap between what biologists can accomplish and the endless tasks that await. We have entrusted them with real conservation work, work that will have a direct impact on the landscapes we call home. This not only offers them invaluable real-life work experience but also instills a profound sense of purpose in the cause of conservation,” Jordan shared.

By working with Conservation Northwest, these students are not passive observers of conservation; they’re actively involved in deep learning, understanding enclosures, burrows, and the intricacies of their local lands and habitats. This work encourages them to look beyond the “brown blur” of sagebrush and truly connect with the wildlife big and small that thrives in their local spaces, fostering a sense of stewardship.

By getting students out of the classroom and immersing them in the field, we’re helping them to witness firsthand the natural habitat and the enclosures designed to support these endangered animals. Jordan reflected that, “it was truly remarkable to be in the field with these young minds. They displayed an innate ability to observe even the subtlest changes and clues within the habitat, as if conservation were second nature to them. Their curiosity quickly turned into a drive to learn more, to ask questions, and to lend a helping hand.” Students examined the habitat, identified tracks and clues about what was happening around them, including coyote tracks and smaller clues like animal droppings and deer tracks. Their sharp observational skills were a testament to their deep connection with the natural world.

Helping Families Recreate with Respect

This year, we kicked off our pilot Wildlife Ambassador Project in the Middle Fork of the Snoqualmie, a high traffic recreation area that frequently struggles with human-wildlife coexistence. Our collaborative effort aimed to connect people to the information they need to recreate with respect to wildlife and habitat, guiding them toward mindful recreation practices. Our approach was to connect with the community right where they were—at trailheads and campgrounds. Many families and kids

were out on the trails, eager to learn how to interact responsibly with the environment. “Engaging families and kids is absolutely crucial, especially when it comes to coexisting with bears and other wildlife. If we can foster an understanding of how to respect and appreciate these animals, we’ll all reap the rewards,” remarked Kurt Hellmann, our Senior Coordinator for Wildlife Recreation Coexistence. Kurt joined forces with Conservation Northwest staff Alycia Scheidel to craft family-



A black bear sow and cub spotted outside the Middle Fork campground. Photo by Alycia Scheidel.



Photo by Alycia Scheidel.

oriented outreach that resonated with the recreation community. Our toolkit included quizzes, coloring pages, informative pamphlets, wildlife bandanas, and we encouraged active involvement in spreading the word through our wildlife ambassador pins and stickers. This collective effort culminated in the launch of our Recreate with Respect campaign. Going forward, our goal is to continue promoting a culture of thoughtful recreation across the entire state, with a special focus on instilling these values in the younger generation.

Make Your Gift Go Further



We’ve expanded our partnership with FreeWill with the goal of making non-cash giving accessible for our entire donor base. Why “non-cash” giving? Donating assets like stock or funds directly from your IRA often comes with greater tax benefits, increasing the overall value of your contribution while making a sizable impact on our mission.

- **IRA GIVING:** If you are a donor who is 70.5 or older, you are eligible to make a tax-free donation from your IRA that helps you meet your Required Minimum Distribution.
- **STOCK GIVING:** You can avoid capital gains taxes and get an income tax deduction by donating appreciated stock directly to Conservation Northwest.
- **DONOR-ADVISED FUND (DAF) GIVING:** There’s a simple way to support Conservation Northwest from funds you have already set aside in a DAF. A DAF can help you make donations without paying capital gains tax.
- **CRYPTOCURRENCY GIVING:** Support Conservation Northwest with appreciated cryptocurrency, which also avoids capital gains taxes in addition to giving an income tax deduction. A donation of appreciated crypto can be up to 20% more valuable than a cash gift.

Visit freewill.com/smartgiving/conservationnorthwest to see information about all of these options or to start a donation.

Use Your Love for Wild Places

I, like many individuals in the Northwest, find a lot of my identity in my love for being outside. Whether that be hiking, going to a swimming hole, or enjoying our wonderful snowpack, I find myself constantly thinking and talking about the natural wonders that envelope me in Seattle. It’s impossible to have these conversations and venture into these places without acknowledging how fragile they are.

That is why I joined Conservation Northwest—to be a part of over three decades of success in protecting special places. As someone who spent their entire childhood on the rolling hills of the Palouse and now enjoys the landscapes of the Cascades and Olympics, I consider it a privilege to work towards preserving these spaces and everything that lies in between them.

Ensuring I can see these places thrive for my entire life and proudly pass them on to future generations is vital work.

I invite you to join us in the effort to preserve these spaces, not only for yourself but also for the countless generations that will follow.



Katy Wicks,
Events and Membership Coordinator



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