

HighlandsNEWS

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Mission

Our mission is to defend wilderness, protect biodiversity, and restore ecosystems of the Columbia River Basin.

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A NOTE TO YOU - Timothy J. Coleman, Executive Director

December 28th was the 51st anniversary of the signing of the Endangered Species Act. Since its passage in 1973, more than 1,600 species in the U.S. have been protected. The ESA has helped restore populations of iconic species including humpback whales, gray wolf and our national symbol bald eagle.



Year 2024 marked Kettle Rangers 48th anniversary of rural, grassroots activism. Our mission to defend wilderness, protect biodiversity and restore ecosystems continues on a solid footing of science, advocacy and experience.

In April KRCG was fortunate to hire Elizabeth Carr as lead staff working to protect wild carnivores, fish and ecosystems. Liz and I are proud to represent Kettle Range Conservation Group membership doing our part as a continuum of defenders of Wild Nature, sentient wild creatures and ancient wisdom of biological nations that long existed even before us humans arrived.

Our knowledge of the land plus decades of applied experience in law & policy has achieved significant legal and frontline administrative successes furthering our mission to promote evolutionary ecologic ecosystem integrity across north central and northeastern Washington. This sub-region of the upper Columbia River is small yet of critical importance to the survival of grassland, forest and aquatic ecosystems. Landscape analysis shows this area is critical to the migrational pathway from coastal, Cascade and Rocky Mountain ecosystems for sensitive, threatened and endangered species.

Kettle Rangers have a rock-solid history as team players supporting grassroots activism nationally and regionally in the greater Rocky and Cascade Mountain bioregion. And like so many other grassroots causes, we have more failures than successes. Though we have tried and failed to achieve congressional wilderness protection for deserving wildlands in the Colville and Okanogan National Forest, it's not for lack of trying. We have no intention of giving up – we are tenacious and committed to Wild Nature that is Life.

Remembering President Jimmy Carter

James Earl (Jimmy) Carter was our United States' 39th president. President Carter was an inspiration to me just out of the military, as a forward thinker promoting world peace and a transition to clean energy. Carter's solar energy tax credits provided an incentive to purchase my first photovoltaic panels (\$7/watt) as a start to a fully solar-powered home, today.



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A NOTE TO YOU *(continued)*

Just as important was Carter's success in achieving what is one of the most important land preservation achievements in the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) of 1980. ANILCA created protection of varying degree for 157 million acres of Alaska:

To provide for the designation and conservation of certain public lands in the State

of Alaska, including the designation of units of the National Park, National Wildlife Refuge, National Forest, National Wild and Scenic Rivers, and

National Wilderness Preservation Systems, and for other purposes.

(Public Law 96-487, 94 Stat. 2371).

Last Word

It's my absolute devotion to wilderness, fish, wildlife and healthy ecosystems that makes life worth living. But then, as author/activist Edward Abbey did say: be a reluctant activist, get out and play. All work and no play is not good for one's health nor longevity as an activist. Get active for sure, but never stop rejuvenating your youthful spirit exploring Nature. This Winter Solstice reminds us that light follows darkness, the spring is just three months away. The dark times shall pass.

Cheers & Best wishes!

Tim

Work Assignments - 2024 Year in Review

Defending Wilderness & Restoring Ecosystems

A new wave of 1970-2000-style of clearcut logging has since 2019 been brought back from the grave thanks to the smokescreen of "collaboration." What we know from the past nine years is collaboration served the timber industry first and foremost. Promises of equitability – including restoration of old growth forest and designation of new / long overdue Wilderness – in reality, was a ruse. Congresswoman Cathy McMorris Rodgers who once said it's "music to my ears" when a delegation from Northeast Washington Forest Coalition visited her office in Washington, D.C. regarding agreement between

timber industry and forest activists to support such equitability. McMorris Rodgers never delivered. Nor did Senator Cantwell. Millions of board feet of Public Lands including old growth forest logged-off in order to "protect" what little remained from wildfire – has been a colossal travesty. Collaboration is a joke, congressional action a non-starter and the revised Colville Forest Plan a sieve through which our public forests flow to timber mills who decide what to cut. It's classic Orwellian doublespeak.

Thus, Kettle Rangers workload has increased significantly. KRCG has 48 years of experience fighting bad forestry - these are some of the most significant issues we have worked on in 2024:

Successful legal challenge

KRCG's successful legal challenge to the Sanpoil Timber sale continues to provide a critical backstop to logging old growth trees, benefitting multitude species from northern goshawk, pileated woodpecker, great gray owl and so many other benefits of old, wild forests

Bulldog Timber Sale: Beginning in 2020, Kettle Rangers attended Forest Service meetings, did field monitoring, submitted comments and filed two administrative Objections to the Bulldog environmental assessment (EA). This project would impact three Kettle Range roadless areas including logging 5,980 acres, 8,106 acres of thinning and 13,944 acres of surface fuels treatments. The impacts to naturalness as viewed from Copper Butte/ Kettle Crest, fish & wildlife habitat of this project would be enormous.



Forest Service documents alleged this mixed conifer forest stand is actually "dry" ponderosa pine.

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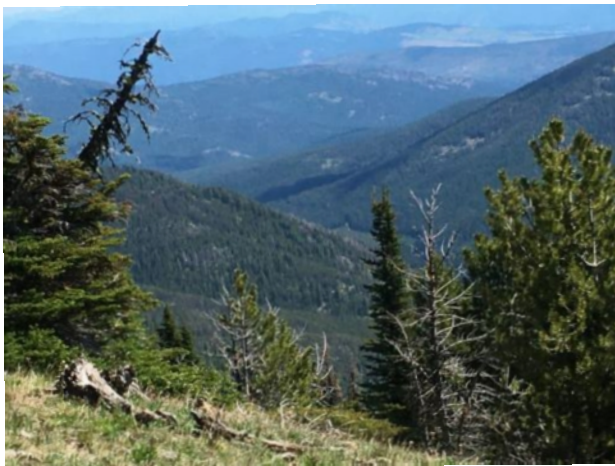
Work Assignments - 2024 Year in Review - Continued

In March 2023, Kettle Ranges were fortunate to get Western Environmental Law Center (WELC) to represent us for this case. WELC filed a formal Complaint in May 2023, alleging the project would cut big trees and degrade threatened Canada lynx. October 3, 2023 a Stay to project implementation was granted. Soon after the Forest Service issued a Supplemental EA (SEA) with proposed actions similar to its initial EA. KRCG has negotiated in good faith to resolve this case before it goes to a hearing. At this time it appears there is likely a settlement that includes increased protection of threatened lynx, protects big trees, fish & wildlife and scenic integrity.

Tonata Trout Timber Sale

Yet another massive timber sale that if enacted as proposed will result in degradation of fish, wildlife and recreation opportunities. This project environmental assessment (EA) and draft Decision authorizes logging on 24,703 acres including 5,993 acres of regeneration (clearcut) logging and old forest structure removal, and 1,176 acres of a combination of both. Kettle Ranger's are actively seeking a peaceful resolution that protects & restores old growth forest, lynx habitat and the Bodie Mountain Roadless Area.

Buckhorn Timber Sale: As if Tonata Trout project was not environmentally degrading enough, another project in its development phase is another massive logging project in the same watershed as Tonata Trout, proposing 31,242 acres of "intensive timber and range management." Submitted scoping comments.



Midnight Forest Restoration Project

KRCG submitted scoping and draft environmental assessment (EA comments regarding the Midnight Project, in the Twisp River watershed. This project encompasses an affected area of 53,009 acres of prescribed fire and commercial logging on 28,237 acres. EA impacts include logging trees up to 25" dbh, damaging stands of mature and old-growth (MOG trees, eliminating snags, spreading invasive species, degrading riparian areas, compromising unique habitats, severing vital wildlife corridors, and potentially displacing, disturbing or killing sensitive, threatened, and endangered species, including Canada lynx.

Protecting Biodiversity via Wildlife Management Reform by Dept. of Fish & Wildlife

Staff testified to the Washington Fish & Wildlife Commission (FWC) at its monthly meetings supporting various improvements in state wildlife management:

- Successfully opposed gray wolf downlisting from endangered to sensitive;
- Successfully opposed a spring black bear hunt that has led to deaths of female bears with cubs;
- Successful in getting FWC to adopt a rule that counts all sources of cougar mortality – previously county and state kills were not counted -- and limiting mortality to 13% in a cougar management unit (PMU). An exception to the rule KRCG opposed allows up to 20% annual mortality in a PMU if the 13% limit is reached by September 1st that is a perverse incentive to kill more cougars, earlier. WA Dept. of Fish & Wildlife biologists say 16% annual mortality is the upper limit to maintain stable cougar populations.
- Supported ending beaver, badger and marten trapping
- Successfully supported DNR rulemaking prohibiting the use of commercial net pen aquaculture for raising salmon and other "fin fish" in Puget Sound.

What Lies Ahead in 2025

Federal climate change, political chicanery and human arrogance are existential threats to clean air, water and Public Land management are likely to get much worse with the incoming Trump Administration. Threats to fire federal workers will reduce effectiveness of environmental oversight and lands management agencies, but of course, that's the point! Trump's first term resulted in several significant environmental defeats including decreased safeguards for endangered species, increased climate impacts from logging, coal, oil and other dirty fossil fuel leases while derailing transition forward to a clean energy economy. Although the Biden Administration has taken many corrective actions, many more are needed.



National Old Growth policy gets the axe. On June 21, 2024, the Forest Service published the notice of availability of the draft environmental impact statement (DEIS). During the 90-day comment period the agency hosted virtual information sessions and regional field meetings across the country. Over 300,000 comments were received and analyzed. A forthcoming Federal Register notice the Forest Service has decided to withdraw from this process and will not be publishing a final environmental impact statement. This will of course lead to more fighting, etc.

Washington Department of Natural Resources state lands management will see a shift towards more progressive, ecosystem-based strategies with the election of Dave Upthegrove as Washington Lands Commissioner, replacing outgoing Hillary Franz.

Commissioner-elect Upthegrove stated intention to protect what remains of Washington's old growth forest is a welcomed change from the outgoing administration.

Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife (WDFW) is a state agency needing significant reform. WDFW is not meeting its mission "to preserve, protect and perpetuate fish, wildlife and ecosystems." It has yet to follow Governor Inslee's directive for rulemaking regarding "endangered" gray wolf, but rather recommended to the Fish & Wildlife Commission (FWC) to support downlisting gray wolf to "sensitive."

Fortunately, by a razor thin 5-4 vote, the FWC voted to support its motion opposing downlisting gray wolf, that was shockingly close considering state recovery goals in the 2011 Wolf Conservation and Management Plan had not been met. The obvious biases of WDFW were in full theatric view when Commissioner Kelly Susewind called for a roll-call vote after this motion passed as if to challenge its approval. A blatant and frankly stunning turn of events. *Read more about gray wolf, pages 5-8.*

WDFW actions are supervised by the FWC. Only recently the FWC delegated rulemaking authority to the department's Director Kelly Susewind, in direct contravention of state law. The FWC is responsible for "establishing policies to preserve, protect, and perpetuate wildlife, fish and wildlife and fish habitat" for all of Washington. RCW 77.04.055.

The struggle to reform WDFW to follow its mission "preserve, protect and perpetuate fish, wildlife and ecosystems" supported by the 90-plus percentage of Washingtonians that do not hunt or fish. WDFW policy is biased, favoring hutable & trappable wildlife and fish hatcheries ahead of other species regardless of extinction risk to wild salmon, trout, aquatic ecosystem health, mountain goat and gray wolf.



Why Protect Wolves?

By Liz Carr, Program Director

Wolves are a crucial part of a healthy ecosystem. Wolves are a keystone species, meaning they play a disproportionately influential role in maintaining biodiversity in their ecosystems. If a keystone species is removed, the ecosystem would drastically change, and in some cases, collapse.



Wolves positively impact the balance of biodiversity and keep ecosystems resilient and balanced. Biodiversity is all the diverse kinds of life you'll find in one area—the variety of animals, plants, fungi, and even microorganisms like bacteria. Each of these species and organisms work together in ecosystems, like an intricate labyrinth, to maintain balance and support life. Biodiversity supports everything in nature -which we need to survive - food, clean water, medicine, and shelter. Scientists often speak of three levels of biodiversity: species, genetic, and ecosystem diversity. These levels are important and interact with each other, so changes at one level can cause changes at other levels.



Wolves bring an explosion of life and biodiversity as they return to their natural place as apex predators. Scientists called this beneficial effect the “trophic cascade” because wolves initiate a more natural ecosystem balance. The effects of wolves on ecosystems and biodiversity ripple through the entire ecosystem. The term “trophic” refers to the different levels of a food chain, with plants being one trophic level, insects the next, all the way up the ladder to

herbivores and then predators. However, the “cascade” forces us to look at the traditional food chain from a different perspective. Wolves, as top predators, have a cascading beneficial effect on all the trophic levels that are below them.

Wolves can alter predator-prey relationships, which can impact the entire ecosystem. Wolves can increase the proportion of healthy animals in ungulate herds, improve the genetic structure of breeding populations, reduce the prevalence of infectious and genetic diseases in prey species.



Wolves redistribute nutrients through their prey carcasses, which provide food for other wildlife species. Wolves can help restore riparian habitats damaged by over-grazing. Wolves may help buffer the effects of climate change by making carrion available to other species during mild winters. Wolves are apex predators, which can cause ecological effects that ripple through an ecosystem.

Wolves are our first defense in stopping the spread of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) in Washington. There are two confirmed CWD cases in the Spokane area. CWD is a fatal neurological illness that is a transmissible disease that affects cervids, which include deer, elk, moose, and caribou.

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Why Protect Wolves? - Continued

Wolves tend to target slower, more vulnerable individuals, such as sick and diseased animals. Wolf predation may help limit CWD and reduce the number of infections.

Wolves can also reduce the number of deer-vehicle collisions by changing deer population and behavior. A study published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences found that areas with wolves experienced a roughly 24% decrease in deer-vehicle collisions.

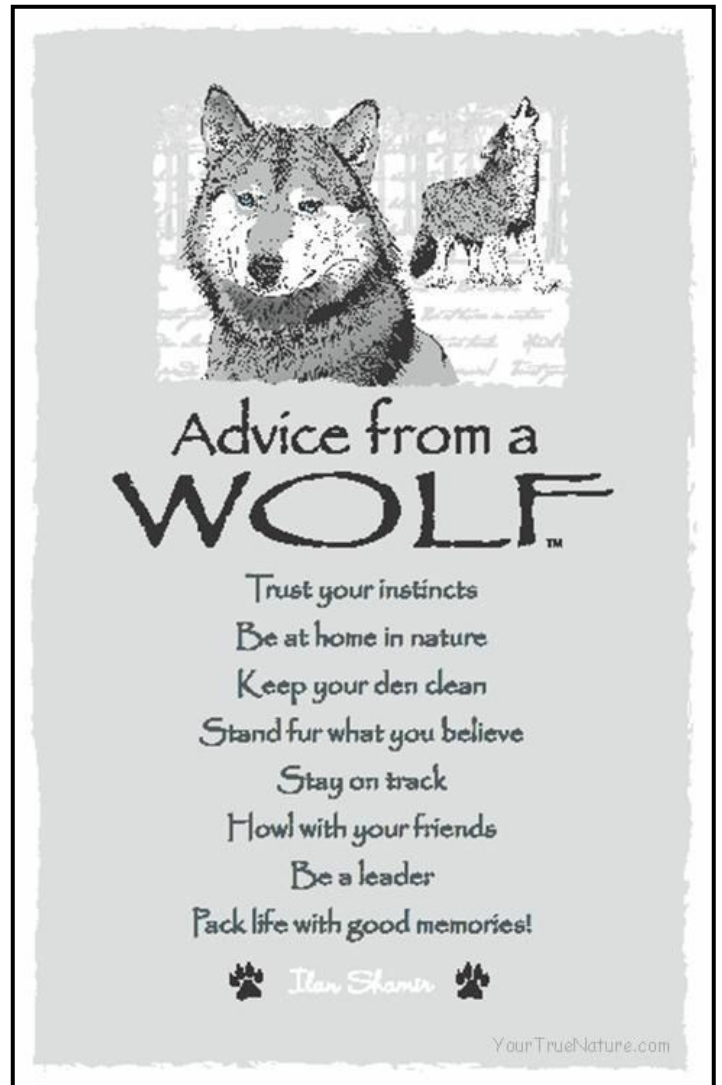
With only 5% of our nation's wilderness left, people are recognizing the importance of complete ecosystems in keeping all of us healthy. But as humans increase pressure on habitat, on the planet, by using and consuming more resources than ever before, we risk upsetting the balance of ecosystems and losing biodiversity.

[World Wildlife Fund's 2024 Living Planet Report](https://www.worldwildlife.org/publications/world-wildlife-fund-2024-living-planet-report) found an average 73% decline in global populations of mammals, fish, birds, reptiles, and amphibians since 1970. The report warns that, as the Earth approaches dangerous tipping points posing grave threats to humanity, a huge collective effort will be required over the next five years to tackle the dual climate and nature crises. Alarming.

<https://tinyurl.com/webe6by8>



Let's respect and protect wolves, not kill them. We live in a place where we might see or hear wolves, cougars, bears, lynx, moose, elk, deer, and other wildlife beings who give us so much. Let's give them a voice by sending letters and/or attending WDFW Commission Meetings to safeguard them. The Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission encourages public participation by providing opportunities to comment in person, online, or by submitting written comments electronically. Here is a link to the 2025 [Commission Meetings Schedule](https://wdfw.wa.gov/about/commission/meetings/2025). Contact us if you want to be involved and we can email you the current alerts. <https://wdfw.wa.gov/about/commission/meetings/2025>



Gray Wolf Update

WDFW Commission Votes to retain the Endangered Status of Gray Wolves

On July 19, 2024 the WDFW Commission [voted against](#) the staff recommendation to [reclassify](#) gray wolves as a protected sensitive species in Washington. Today gray wolves remain [listed](#) as state endangered in Washington. This vote does not impact the federal classification of gray wolves, which remain federally listed as endangered in the western two-thirds of Washington and federally de-listed in the eastern third. <https://tinyurl.com/yzp8f9y5>

The vote followed a last-minute plea by Governor Jay Inslee, urging Commissioners to give the wolf population a chance to recover by keeping current protections in place due to the number of breeding pairs in the three management zones not meeting the criteria set in the 2011 Wolf Conservation and Management Plan.

In 2011, Washington developed a Wolf Conservation and Management Plan, a nearly 300-page document that was subjected to peer review and analyzed through an

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The Plan sets standards before wolves can be delisted or downlisted, and Washington's wolf population has not met these benchmarks. Ultimately, the Commission decided by a 5-4 margin to reject the agency's request to downlist wolves from "endangered" to "sensitive," a proposal that WDFW management had advanced even though wolves have not met the standards for downlisting set by the state wolf plan.



Three recovery regions are delineated for the state: (Zone 1) Eastern Washington, (Zone 2) Northern Cascades, and (Zone 3) Southern Cascades and Northwest Coast. To reclassify (downlist) from state endangered to state threatened status you need 6 successful breeding pairs present for 3 consecutive years, with 2 successful breeding pairs in each of the three recovery regions.



In 2023 WDFW reported 260 wolves statewide which includes tribal data. Zone 1: Eastern WA with 33 packs (20 breeding pairs); Zone 2: North Cascades with 9 packs (5 breeding pairs) and Zone 3: Southern Cascades & Northwest Coast with 1 wolf (0 breeding pairs). Although WDFW reported the formation of a pack of two wolves in that zone at the end of 2022, the female wolf in that pack has since disappeared, leaving only one wolf in the Southern Cascades & Northwest recovery zone.

Concerns were reported about the 2023 wolf numbers reported by the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation (CTCR). A significant increase in numbers compared to statewide trends and a lack of details about their wolf monitoring methods, the number of surveys conducted, locations, and criteria used to count wolves, raised questions about the reliability of the reported number. CTCR removed wolves from its endangered species list in 2019 and at that point stopped investing the same kind of money in wolf counts. For that reason, the tribal numbers were not included in WDFW's 2019 and 2020 annual reports. However, WDFW began including the tribal numbers again in 2021, without explanation. In the past CTCR has worked with WDFW to standardize counting methodology, this year the tribal numbers were conveyed verbally over a conference call, without any transparency as to methodology. WDFW did not independently verify the numbers.

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Gray Wolf Update - Continued

Wolf/Livestock Conflicts and Depredations

WDFW reports wolf livestock depredation as “confirmed” and “probable” kills and injured as “confirmed injured.” **WDFW investigators documented only 10 “confirmed” kills of cattle (primarily calves) and 2 miniature donkeys in Washington State. Probable kills were 3 cattle and 1 alpaca.** Confirmed injuries were 8 (7 cattle, 1 miniature donkey). Studies have shown wolves prefer wild prey even when domesticated animals are available. **Further, wolf predation on domestic animals is exceptionally rare.** WDFW Report: <https://tinyurl.com/47vffjxd>



Another troubling trend for wolves is that there has been a surge in wolf mortality. Over the past three years, humans have killed 93 wolves in Washington, including 55 wolves killed in tribal hunts, 15 by poachers, 10 in lethal control actions by the Department, and 4 in purported “caught in the act” incidents. This equates to an average of 31 wolves killed each year since 2021, nearly triple the 12 wolves a year killed during the prior 9 years.



Kettle Range Rendezvous

Twenty-two years and counting

The 2024 Kettle Range Rendezvous camp & hike was held at the Jungle Hill Campground and it was a good time for all. It was so nice to see familiar faces, share food & drink, stories and listen to the wonderful voice and guitar of Mark Rhodes.



The hikes were great and wildflowers were a bouquet of color and texture – truly inspirational as always for this once a year annual event. Thanks to all of you who participated, co-led hikes, donated awesome potluck food and most importantly – made time to enjoy the beauty of Kettle River Range wilderness.

This annual celebration is suitable for all ages. Join in the fun for the first time or the twenty-third time next July, 2025! Watch for the announcement next spring.



Project Scholarship

KRCG instituted the Project Scholarship grants program for college-bound high school graduates in 1996, granting over \$80,000 to northeast Washington students. Students who achieved this award were clearly exemplary in their academic excellence, critical thinking and community involvement. **Unfortunately, 2024 marked the final year of this grants program.** It’s been rewarding helping rural students with the high cost of college & inspiring some grantees to achieve Masters and PhD. Thanks to all for participating in this project and donors for your generous contributions!



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48 Years Protecting Northeast Washington Forests



Help support community collaboration work. Your annual membership supports Project Scholarship and our work to protect special places while promoting healthy forests in the Colville National Forest. *All contact information is strictly confidential and is never shared or published.*

Kettle Range Conservation Group is a 501(c)3 non-profit, community charity founded by a concerned group of citizens in Republic, WA in 1976. Your membership dues are tax deductible to the fullest extent of the law.

Please use the secure PayPal form on our website or fill out this form, include your check and mail to:

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