

Highlands NEWS

JOURNAL OF KETTLE RANGE CONSERVATION GROUP

Summer 2013



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Conservation Group
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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



Anyone who lives in rural northeast Washington, hikes the Kettle Crest National Scenic Trail in summer, hunts, fishes or spends anytime near streams knows that livestock grazing has a significant impact on the sights, sounds and smells found in your national forests.

In late July, I had the pleasure of helping the Colville National Forest do some roof repair work on the historic fire lookout on Columbia Mountain in the Kettles. It was a splendid day of bright blue skies, light breezes scented with wildflowers. As I hauled my old Campways "mega-load" backpack full of cedar shakes and a 12' combination ladder up the mountain, I passed fourteen hikers in four separate groups going down the mountain including a group of five cheerful youths clearly enjoying themselves. The Kettle Crest Trail (that I was walking on) is now part of the Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail, which is a lofty status for which few trails – most notably in this region the Pacific Crest Trail – have been granted.



There I was simultaneously overjoyed by nature and child laughter, beaming good vibrations for a better world, when BOOM! The smell of a feedlot hit me. Gone were the tall grasses and wildflowers, replaced by cow pies, smashed vegetation, gouged out sections of trail tread and mud holes where high mountain spring water had recently bubbled. As I came to discover over the ensuing miles, a cow herd had settled in for the transformation of this high alpine meadow into a feces-smearred landscape.

Are cows trashing a National Scenic Trail the best use of it? To say the least, for me this was a serious distraction from what had been a sweet walk in the woods.

A few years back, I convinced a friend of mine to hike the Kettle Crest Trail. He took his family, including his teenage daughter, along with him. He said the experience of cow crap all over the trail and having to follow a herd of cows that refused to leave the trail convinced them all NEVER to hike the Kettle Crest again. That incident has a real and lasting economic impact.

In the Kettle Crest from Sherman Pass north to Boulder Pass, there are four ranching families who run cows over the length of the Kettle Crest Trail every summer from June through September. They pay a \$1.35 per month for a cow and her calf which by July is mostly no longer nursing but eating vegetation. Consider that for \$135 a cow herd of 200 animals (100 cows + 100 calves) can utterly destroy a mountain meadow, wetland or stream in a single month – to say nothing of an entire summer – for what amounts to chump change.

Continued on Page 2

A NOTE TO YOU *(continued)*

Four years ago, I hiked with Dick Slagle to the top of White Mountain. Even in the scorching sun of July, meadows from the bottom to top were flush with wildflowers. On return less than a week later, I found those same meadows had been trampled and soiled by cattle. That, occurring on public lands at the top of a 7,000' mountain in an area that maybe has a 45 day frost-free growing season, for one ranching family.

I thought how could anybody get away with that? If you or I were to dump our latrine in a local stream or the national forest, we could be jailed and fined. But for public lands grazers, it's permissible to pollute in the highest and most pristine landscapes left in northeast Washington.

Since the mid 1990's, I and colleagues have talked to and cajoled ranchers into taking a different path. We have often repeated we do not oppose livestock grazing on public lands. Though there are many good reasons why those practices should be discontinued, that's not been a pursuit. But ranchers we talked to didn't want to change. They said the allotments belong to them. But the reality is range allotments are leases from the U.S. Forest Service who manage our national forests. It is up to the Forest Service to make the necessary changes to protect the Kettle Crest Trail and the streams that flow from there and into the Kettle River, Curlew Lake and San Poil River.

The Forest Service claims their Best Management Practices are going to fix the problems: degradation of recreation, water pollution and weed spread – even though the bulk of evidence shows those mitigation practices in place for over 30 years have been a failure.

The fact is the range allotment program in the Colville and Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest loses money. It's nothing short of a subsidy for few ranchers, while most ranchers don't get that benefit. Calves raised on allotments typically go to feedlots in the fall and then sold to the public. The public pays to raise the meat and again to buy it at market.

Public land grazing's toll on ecological health is untold, however, because it's often minimally or not at all

monitored. The Boulder Grazing Complex allotments encompass four range allotments (for two ranchers) from Boulder Pass south to Mt Leona in the Kettle Range. From 2005-2010 the Forest Service did not collect monitoring data (as required). Recent water quality tests found widespread water pollution including nitrogen, phosphorus and temperature – and of course there's noxious weed seed that cows carry into high elevation meadows.

In April, KRCG appealed the Boulder Complex Grazing allotment plan revision, citing in part inadequate measures to protect water quality and recreation infrastructure. The Colville National Forest denied that appeal, but promised to keep a watchful eye on cows to make sure they didn't impact the Kettle Crest Trail.

Some years ago the Interior Columbia River Basin Scientific Assessment conducted extensive surveys of public attitudes regarding public land management. At the top of that values list were wildlife, scenery, biodiversity, watershed health, hunting, fishing, camping, hiking, and solitude, while only about 1% of the public supported public lands grazing.

It's time for public lands range reform that in the Kettle Range should manage cows to keep them off the National Scenic Trail. It's not a large area, after all, it's only the upper slopes of the Kettle Crest. Admittedly, this is a modest request than can help the recreation economy.



ANOTHER GREAT KETTLE RANGE RENDEZVOUS by Steve Anthes, President

Every year members and friends of KRCG camp-out together in the Kettle River Range. This year was our fourteenth celebration with many children and adults of all ages enjoying the company of old friends and the chance to make new ones. One thing we all looked forward to: the chance to enjoy the places we'd like to protect as Wilderness. This year we camped at the Swan Lake group campground seven miles south of the town of Republic in the Colville National Forest.



Many folks, accompanied by kids and dogs, enjoyed the leader-led hikes to Thirteen Mile and Fir Mountain.



The hike around Swan Lake was popular and included watching and hearing the local Great Northern or Common Loons (*Gavia immer*)...one of only thirteen lakes in Washington where loons breed.

The group campsite at the edge of the lake turned into a charming tent-city with many large family shelters along with individual tents. Swimming in the refreshing (cold!) water, frisbee games, relaxing and a campfire at night made Saturday seem too short.

A great pot-luck dinner on Saturday evening was highlighted by Executive Director Tim Coleman and his wife Sue grilling burgers to order. The group picnic shelter was full of delicious, homemade side dishes, salads, dips and desserts. A keg of beer from Northern Ales in Kettle Falls was tapped along with a variety of wines. Sitting around the open fireplace talking story and listening to guest guitarist Mark Rhodes made for a delightful end of an enjoyable day.



Sunday morning was time for the traditional Bob and Jane's Omelet Bar and Steve's Flying Pancake breakfast. Eggs and ham donated and prepared by Matt Forsman rounded out the morning feast. No one went hungry and fuel was now on-board to break camp and drive home.



Official Kettle Range Conservation Group T-shirts and hats were on sale and sixteen people joined as new members of our group. A splendid time was had by all.

We plan to hold the 2014 Kettle Range Rendezvous again at Swan Lake on July 18-19-20. Hope to see you there!



GROUPS PETITION WASHINGTON STATE FOR WOLF PROTECTION by Timothy J. Coleman

On July 19, Kettle Range Conservation Group and seven other conservation groups petitioned the Washington Fish & Wildlife Commission to codify rules that protect gray wolf in the state in an effort to stop the indiscriminate killing of gray wolves. Groups asked the Commission to make the state's wolf-management guidelines legally binding.

The Commission adopted their Washington Wolf Conservation and Management Plan to recover gray wolf listed as endangered in Washington. But the Commission ignored that plan when last year control measures were used to destroy the seven wolves that comprised the Wedge Pack.

During a five-year process, Washington's wolf plan was crafted by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife with input from a 17-member stakeholder group; more than 65,000 written comments from the public; and a peer review by 43 scientists and wolf managers from outside the state. Yet despite the plan's formal adoption by the Fish and Wildlife Commission in December 2011, department officials have publicly stated they view the plan as merely advisory and have recently proposed numerous amendments to Washington's Administrative Code that significantly depart from the wolf plan's provisions.

Public meetings held in Colville and statements made by Department of Fish & Wildlife have provided a mixed messages to the public that sometimes sounded alarmist, holding the view that wolves were a threat to humans and, in general, to other wildlife.

Wolves were driven to extinction in Washington in the early 1900s by a government-sponsored eradication program on behalf of the livestock industry. They began to return from neighboring Idaho and British Columbia in the early 2000s, and their population has grown to 10 confirmed packs today. This represents solid growth, but wolves in the state are far from recovered and face ongoing threats.

The state Fish and Wildlife decision last fall to kill the entire Wedge Pack in northeastern Washington for livestock-related conflicts resulted in a firestorm of

public controversy; the department issued its wolf kill order despite conflicting opinions from experts about whether the initial livestock losses were due to wolves and despite the livestock owner's refusal to take adequate proactive steps to prevent losses.

In addition to provisions regarding conflict-prevention strategies and the specific circumstances when lethal control of wolves is allowed, the plan also sets forth requirements for ongoing monitoring of the health and sustainability of wolf populations in Washington; the publication of annual reports to keep the public updated regarding the status of wolf recovery and conservation; and meeting specific population goals before regional delisting of wolves within the state can take place. But because the plan's provisions have not been codified into law, none of them are enforceable; they can be changed by the department or commission at any time without public input.

The petition filed by the seven groups seeks to increase protections for wolves. In filing the petition, KRCG joined with the Center for Biological Diversity, Cascadia Wildlands, Western Environmental Law Center, Gifford Pinchot Task Force, The Lands Council and Wildlands Network.

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission starts the clock ticking on a 60-day statutory period within which the state must respond.



TRAILS WRAP UP

Let's challenge the proposition that person with the most stuff – wins. There is a lot of evidence that shows that spending time outdoors, recreating, is one of the most satisfying pursuits we humans engage. But unless you **MAKE TIME** to get out for a hike in your national forest, you might be skeptical of that claim. Getting out into the big wide open is as energizing as it is calming. Using our two legs to get around is good for the heart, lungs and brain – and it's a great way to meet people.

The art of being *present* is an art in and of itself, defined as being aware of self and life around you. Being present is what KRCG's summer hiking and trail maintenance program is all about. Thanks to our volunteers and especially the Board of Kettle Range Conservation, we're getting a lot done.

In addition to the annual Kettle Range Rendezvous (see article Page 3), KRCG sponsored hikes to Fir Mountain Trail and Big Lick Trail. In June, KRCG and Curlew Job Corps students put in a hard day of work restoring sections of the historic Big Lick Trail in the Kettle Crest. In May and July, volunteers helped construct and maintain the new Gibraltar Trail.



Good News! The Colville National Forest has received funding to hire a contractor to complete construction of the Big Lick Trail. Carmen Nielson said she expected the trail to be completed next summer.



Even as intrepid as some of us are lucky to be, losing a connection to this Earth is easy to do. It's hard not to get distracted by what we *should* be doing, especially in this techno-jazzed world we live in.

Get out and enjoy your public lands. Take a short walk and add to it gradually. You'll be glad you did!



Craig Romano presentation in Colville on his latest book: ***Dayhiking Eastern Washington***

- September 25
- 6:30 PM
- Community Colleges of Spokane's Colville Center
- 985 S Elm St, Colville

"To be whole. To be complete. Wildness reminds us what it means to be human, what we are connected to rather than what we are separate from."
- Terry Tempest Williams

BEETLES IN THE FOREST – WHAT DOES IT MEAN? by Timothy J. Coleman

Forest health is misunderstood and misconstrued to mean green trees. But dead trees are as much or more ecologically valuable than live trees. Dead trees feed a web of life from insects to organisms that build health and fertility.

According to a five part series on mountain pine beetle published by the Vancouver Sun Newspaper in September 2012, B.C.'s pine-beetle epidemic began in the 1990's, but it wasn't until 2001 - a full decade ago - that the province began ramping up the annual allowable cut in a failed attempt to arrest its progress.

“Winters were suddenly warmer, improving the beetles' survival rates. Summers had become hotter and drier, potentially stressing the forests. And fire suppression had created an abundance of the mature trees preferred by the tiny creatures, which are the size of a grain of rice and carry a blue-stain fungus that finishes off the trees,” according to the Sun.

The B.C. government estimates that least 17.5-million hectares were killed and of the 2.3-billion cubic metres of merchantable lodgepole pine in the province, the beetles claimed 726-million cubic metres.” According to the Sun.



In some cases, nearly entire watersheds were clearcut in a futile effort to stop beetles spread. Despite ridgeline to ridgeline clearcutting, the beetle attacked moved on, eventually reaching the southern Rockies and today the Kettle River Range.

There is an astonishing amount of research that has been conducted in the last decade (and before) dispelling the notion that logging is the cure to bark beetles or a preventative to forest wildfire.

By and large, forest insects and wildfire are climate driven. Wetter, colder weather inhibits or kills forest insects, and it gives trees the ability to ward off infestations. Spruce budworm, another insect attacking eastern Washington forests, is very much influenced by drought. Unlike bark beetles, budworm outbreaks – which cause moderate to severe defoliation – often

don't kill infested trees. The current budworm outbreak appears to be declining as it did back in the mid 90's.

On the other hand, indiscriminately extinguishing every forest fire has influenced forest composition as has livestock grazing – which reduces competition with tree seedling from other herbaceous plants – and of course timber management that planted Douglas fir with reckless abandon and was the major driver behind fire exclusion as well.

Do insect attacks lead to a greater likelihood for extreme wildfire behavior?

Yellowstone National Park is one of the most studied forests in the country. Researchers Simard, et al (2010) found that the probability of active crown fire in stands recently affected by beetles was significantly lower than in stands not affected by beetles.

In his testimony before Congress, April 11, 2013, Dr. Dominik Kulakowski, a former researcher at University of Colorado and now Assistant Professor, Clark University, attributed an uptick in the number of wildfires directly to changes in climate.

“[R]ecent climatic conditions have favored the growth of beetle populations and have at the same time stressed trees and reduced their capacity to defend themselves against attack. This perfect storm has contributed to the largest outbreaks of bark beetles in recorded history. [M]y research group recently completed a study in which we examined the influence of mountain pine beetle outbreaks and drought on severe wildfires in lodgepole pine forests in Colorado over the past century. We found that burned stands were no more likely to have been affected by outbreak prior to fires than were nearby unburned stands.”

Dominik Kulakowski also noted that a major outbreak of spruce beetle in spruce and fir forests in Colorado occurred in the 1940s. However, he and his team found “although over 300 fires occurred in that region in the decades that followed, our research found that the forests affected by beetles were no more likely to have burned than other forests,” and in fact there were no major fires in those beetle-affected forests in the years and decades that followed the outbreak despite the abundance of dead trees.

KRCG ANNUAL FUND RAISING AUCTION SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 16th

Feedback for last year's auction told us most folks would enjoy a dinner on a Saturday evening rather than *o'devours* mid-day. We heard you. You'll want to mark you calendars for November 16th.



This year we're planning not only a full course dinner, with complimentary beer and wine, but also homemade dessert. The location will be the Ferry County Fairgrounds Carousel House conference room just a few miles east of the town of Republic on Highway 20.

The many members and supporters who have attended our once a year benefit auction know it supports our Project Scholarship which every year provides financial support to academically outstanding high school graduates to help them meet the cost of going to college. Up to three \$1000 scholarships are awarded each year to students from Ferry, Stevens or Okanogan County. So far over \$40,000 has been granted to local students.

And don't forget the auction also supports KRCG's mission: to defend wilderness, protect biodiversity and restore ecosystems of the Columbia Highlands. In 2002, KRCG co-founded the Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition, joining with area business, timber, and energy industries to work together to create a balanced plan for managing our Colville National Forest.

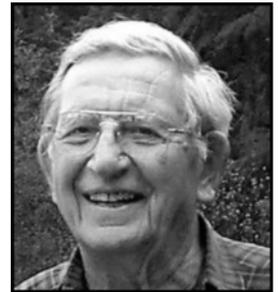
The once-a-year auction is a great way to support our programs and have FUN! Enjoy bidding on special donations from local artists, craftspeople, businesses, resorts, handcrafted beers and wine, ski packages, massages and many other wonderful items. As usual, we'll have a silent and live auction along with complimentary beer, wine and non-alcoholic beverages.

Doors open at 5:30 PM. Hope to see you there!

IN MEMORY...

Tom McKay

Awarded the Silver Star for bravery in WWII, Tom McKay was as persistent a force for democracy as ever there was. He served his community as a school teacher and mentor. Despite suffering wounds that shattered his shoulder, Tom built an expansive family home east of Curlew, Washington. In addition to teaching, he ran a sawmill, logged, raised cattle and hay. Over the years Tom and his wife Louise were recognized for their many contributions to their community, education and conservation work, and their support for protecting Kettle Range wilderness. Tom was hero in so many ways - he was a stalwart of a man.



Vicky Welch

Known for her tenacity and effervescent smile, Vicky Welch was a leader in her community in land-use planning – friends said she was “always there” at public meetings. While representing many, she was often a lone voice raising objections to speculative land development. Vicky was instrumental in the campaign to stop a mega ski resort in the upper Methow Valley and for securing public ownership of Methow River frontage. She and her husband Ed farmed organically from their Sunny Pine Farm, selling a variety of produce, raspberries and cheese made from their goats. Vicky was wise, generous, tenacious and above all, a beautiful spirit who loved Mother Earth.





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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.*

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

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