

HighlandsNEWS

JOURNAL OF KETTLE RANGE CONSERVATION GROUP



Kettle Range Conservation Group
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Since 1976
www.KettleRange.org

Mission

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

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HIGHLANDS NEWS – Fall/Winter 2023-24

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

I spend most of my work days – nearly every day – working to protect forests, wildlife and grassland ecosystems. This requires a lot of research and reading agency documents, science journals, working with other grassroots activists, writing comment letters, testifying to government agencies, monitoring forests slated for logging and fighting the inhumane slaughter of forest carnivores.

Historically, Kettle Rangers have always expressed a tenacious dedication to wild nature - that is who we are. We dedicated twenty years of our lives toward problem-solving, working collaboratively across a broad political spectrum that unfortunately ended very badly. Instead of wilderness and restoration of old growth forests – we got a flood of mechanized and motorized allowances in the few remaining wildlands and we got lots of stumps where beautiful ponderosa pine, Douglas fir and western red cedar once stood.

Our toolbox includes a deep knowledge of regional forest & grassland landscapes. We apply best available science to protect fish, wildlife and plants and creative application of policy & environmental law. We are very fortunate to have help from an amazing and dedicated league of environmental attorneys. These, combined with tenacity and a devotion to wild things enables us to keep going even against what sometimes seem like insurmountable odds. We may lose but we won't give up!

Who could have guessed that with all we know about forest ecosystems, wrong-headed wildfire management and a century of logging, that we'd be back to fight to protect what little remains of mature and old growth forests? It's a crazy time, much worse to be a forest activist now than it was in the 80's, 90's or 00's. Back then, forest activists worked as a team. Nowadays, we fight over political expediency.

A massive expansion of logging in our National Forests is at an epidemic phase. It's happening coast to coast, from the White Mountain to the Daniel Boone to the Colville. And politicians are busy trying to *help!*

No doubt you heard and read about wildfire, bugs and disease killing the forests, and the Rx to fix it is logging. On one point there is agreement: exclusion of fire is driving the problem. And where'd that come from? U.S. Forest Service.

Forest Watch network in northeast Washington of the past no longer exists nor do conservation groups living & working here on forest issues fighting the mammoth timber sales that today are being done in the name of forest "restoration." Colville National Forest timber sales today dwarf those of the 1970-2000 era, during what was called the Timber Wars. Though there are few of us, we are very determined.

We are pleased to have achieved success in our first timber sale litigation in two decades. It took three years, a lot of time and a healthy dose of mojo to stop 8,400 acres of commercial logging in the Sanpoil Timber Sale. There are four more large timber sales on the doorstep: 1) Chewelah A to Z in upper Chewelah Creek watershed will log 40,000 acres east of Chewelah, enough to fill 25,000 log trucks, 2) Bulldog in the S. Fork Boulder Creek watershed, 3) Dollar Mountain in the S. Fork Sherman Creek and Barnaby Creek watersheds, and 4) Tonata-Trout in the Trout Creek, Tonata Creek, Henry Creek and Toroda Creek watersheds. All of these projects encompass large geographic areas, lengthy 10-20 year contracts and massive volumes of logged trees.



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WDFW considers opening Black Bear Spring Hunt

Washington's cougars and bears are in trouble. Last year, Washington hunters and enforcement officers killed 289 cougars, making it the seventh year in a row that cougar mortality has exceeded sustainable levels. The same year, Washington hunters killed an all-time high of 2,211 bears, roughly 50% more than just four years ago.

These unsustainable levels of mortality come after the Fish & Wildlife Commission voted in 2019 and 2020 to discard science in order to satisfy the demands of a small group of hunters – by no means a majority of hunters -- by raising cougar hunting limits, increasing the "bag limit" for bears, and lengthening the bear hunting season.

Department of Fish & Wildlife (WDFW) admits it does not have the means of detecting whether state bear and cougar populations are already crashing—and that it likely would not be able to detect such a crash until it is too late. Every year these unsustainable hunting levels continue the risk of a population crash, increases.

In October, Kettle Range Conservation Group signed on to a [citizen rulemaking petition](#) asking the Commission to change bear and cougar rules to prevent those populations from crashing. The Commission will vote on our petition on Friday, December 15.

The Commission has changed dramatically since 2020, and several commissioners have already expressed concern over these issues. But we know carnivore hunters will be turning out in force to oppose any changes and it is essential that the Commission also hear from Washingtonians who care about our cougars and bears.

Please sign up **today** to give very brief testimony on Zoom between 8:30 and 10 a.m. on Friday, December 15. We expect the speaking slots to go soon, and it is a race against special interest groups dominated by bear and cougar hunters to determine who will be allowed to talk. To ensure that you get a chance to speak, it is important to sign up **as soon as possible**.

Next Steps

1. Click [this link](#) to register to testify. You will need to fill out basic information, including your name, email, and county/state. **For Question 7, please enter Agenda Item 2.**
2. The public comment session will begin at 8:30 a.m. and last until 10 a.m. on Friday, December 15. Please log on at 8:30 a.m. via [this Zoom link](#).



Climate Change in the Anthropocene

Scientists have dubbed this period in time as the Anthropocene: an epoch of unnatural human-caused climate disruption and apocryphal decline in wild species and native ecosystems. Temporal scale analogies of forest ecosystems unnatural deconstruction is constrained much like the fossil fuel industry, discounting the value of stored carbon – whether in mature & old forest ecosystems or fossil fuels deep in the ground. Timber industry lobbyists use smoke & mirrors distraction claiming carbon sequestration is key to combating CO2 excesses, the carbon footprint of logging/milling/transportation and life cycle.

Money buys science just like it buys politicians. The Forest Service often cites Derek Churchill and Paull Hessberg science to justify its new and massive logging projects. Not that it actually follows the science – but scientists won't call them out for it because that's political! Rep. Cathy McMorris-Rodgers champions "The Active Forest Management Act" that would mandate logging over half of every national forest. Perhaps next she'll champion "The Active Climate Change Act" to support more fossil fuel extraction for her donors in the oil industry?

If this sounds all too familiar – it is! I recall 1970s TV and print ads by Weyerhaeuser promoting cutting old

growth forests because they were "decadent, disease and insect infested." So clear-fell them did the corporate timber industry, state and federal forest managers. Did that solve anything? Apparently not – same problem all over and add to that list - wildfire!

It's the old shampoo advertisement – *lather, rinse and repeat.*

Today, a dystopian malaise of misinformation seems to pervade every aspect of life – follow the money. Like the past, the Public is informed that our Public forests are sick and diseased, outside of Historic Range of Variability (HRV) based on a postage-stamp size piece of history – old stumps and a rather broad interpretation of the 1930-era photos taken less than a hundred years ago – is considered scientific because a scientist says so?

The diagnosis: the forest is sick; *the cure:* logging – has been with us for many decades. You'd think cutting down the old decadent forest, replanting with younger trees would have fixed the problem, right? Not so fast! It turns out there are "too many trees" and "the wrong mix" necessitating a continuous "treatment" every 20-30 years! How can HRV calculated on a minuscule timeframe possibly represent historic ecosystems accurately – measured at a timescale less than a hundred years?



History of Kettle Range Conservation Group – past to present

To add clarity to a return to forest activism at KRCG not seen since 2002 it is helpful to understand some of the history behind the organization, especially in a more recent context. Recognize that KRCG has always worked toward solutions to challenges be they logging or destruction of wilderness. Here's a brief overview:

- ✓ KRCG formed in 1976 to seek congressional designation of Wilderness in the Kettle River Range Mountains. Despite what at that time was considered by wilderness campaign leaders to be one of the best organized grassroots groups in Washington -- not one acre in the Kettles was protected in 1984 Washington Wilderness Act.
- ✓ Kettle Rangers filed a couple lawsuits in the late 1970s-early 1980s most notably challenging the Helen Sale in the Thirteenmile Inventoried Roadless Area. We won that lawsuit and thanks to it – the old growth forest remains as does a big chunk of Thirteenmile IRA.
- ✓ Clearcut logging of the late 80's and 90's reignited KRCG's litigation strategy – by its new name Forest Watch. We also mapped the entire Kettle River Range mature and old growth forest in a project sponsored by National Audubon.
- ✓ In mid-2002, at the behest of a local sawmill owner, KRCG agreed to invest in forest collaboration in a partnership of Forest Service, timber industry, recreation and conservation leaders. Thus, was

formed the Northeast Washington Forest Coalition (NEWFC). The Forest Service (FS) helped create NEWFC and in fact had a Memorandum of Understanding with NEWFC.

- ✓ NEWFC was founded on a premise of shared benefit – it was initially called the Thirds Agreement – later the Blueprint. The agreement was a dedicated third of the Colville NF with Active Management where timber volume was the driver, a third would be mature/old forest restoration, thin from below small trees where timber would be a “byproduct of restoration” (not the driver), and a third would be wilderness where no logging was allowed.
- ✓ NEWFC helped make the Colville National Forest a “model” (a marketing term often cited) of cooperation across the Nation. During the housing/economic crash of 2008, NEWFC not only helped make the CNF a shining star it also helped northeast Washington timber industry stay afloat while mills were closing all across the western U.S.
- ✓ Despite agreements – promises of mutual give-and-take regarding protection of wilderness, restoration of old growth forest and what the timber industry wanted most: “active forest management” – the outcome was an all too familiar short-change ruse that in 2019 resulted in accelerated old-style logging in the Colville and Okanogan National Forest, forest restoration was in reality “timber sale program restoration,” lots of ugly clearcuts and of course cutting mature and old trees. In a sense, the Forest Service turned its back on collaboration, returning to the bad old days.

Please accept Kettle Rangers apology for believing in and helping market collaboration based on a false premise it would achieve wilderness protection, better forestry and long-term solutions! It failed!



Return of Forest Watch

Let's back up to the sea change that has changed everything and demoted collaboration to a spectator sport for tree farm industry hucksters, corporate lobbyists and wing-a-doodle politicians.

Beginning in 2003, KRCG members and board participated in Land Management Plan (LMP) revision of the Colville NF 1988 LMP. Meeting upon meeting, including a 10-month long near weekly meetings hosted by the Forest Service -- entitled the "Forest Summit" -- Northeast Washington Forest Coalition fully vetted a proposal during the Summit attended by more than 80 participants from Ferry, Stevens and Pend Oreille counties.

NEWFC Board had been assured by Colville supervisor Rick Brazell that what came out of the Summit process "would be the new Forest Plan alternative," NEWFC's proposal was widely supported by Summit participants, later became Alternative B in the LMP revision process and one of several action alternatives. The Forest Service flatly rejected NEWFC's alternative in favor of Alternative P that quadrupled the timber cut, relying on weak standards for everything from protecting aquatic ecosystems to restoration of historic old growth forests. The LMP recommended a paltry 56,000 acres of wilderness management out of more than 240,000 suitable wildland acres.

Broken promises and outright lies brought us to where we are today: a return to Forest Watch, fighting unprecedented enormously huge timber sales. It's a sad turn for the worse especially in the face of climate change.

One only has to read comments letter from American Forest Resources Council to see where timber sale project purpose and need is coming from. Never forget that timber industry, Forest Service, Department of Natural Resources, Evergreen Foundation, etc., etc. have been waging a campaign for over a decade to increase logging of our Public Lands. The message is always the same: the forest is sick, riddled by bugs & disease and a wildfire risk to



rural communities. The answer: cut it down! Replace old trees with Christmas trees -- don't ya know a multi-ton carbon storehouse that is an old tree, even a dead one, can quickly be replaced by a sapling. Not!

There is an increasing need to retain forest carbon stored in mature and old growth forests. Putting it on the back of a log truck is wrongheaded and shortsighted. There is no way stored forest carbon in hundred-plus year-old trees can be replaced by a seedling -- to say nothing of the energy needed to cut and transport logs and soil carbon loss due to eviscerating upper levels of soil exposed to sun, wind and freezing temperatures. This is even happening at mountain pass level!

The first Big Surprise came from the Sherman Pass and Trout Lake timber sales. In both cases, KRCG had participated in project planning for nearly two years. Noteworthy agreements from this process: 1) retention of big / trees, 2) protecting scenic vistas from Sherman Pass and Kettle Crest, and 3) no clearcuts larger than 5 acres and most being 3 acres or less. It was a pack of lies!

These days, anyone traveling over Sherman Pass or recreating on the Kettle Crest trail can clearly see large clearcuts 20-60 acres in size from these timber sales. Observation & monitoring not only found huge clearcuts, it also showed lots of big ponderosa pine, Douglas fir, red cedar, spruce and larch were cut.

A BIG WIN – Sanpoil Timber Sale

KRCG filed its first lawsuit of a federal timber sale in over 20 years challenging the Sanpoil Timber Sale. It was the next in line for a butch-cut like Sherman Pass and Trout Lake projects before it. Though KRCG pleaded to the Forest Service to follow forest prescriptions it had used in the Walker Project – areas that can be viewed east of Hall Creek Road and south of SR 20 -- the FS flatly refused.

Filed in May 2021, there were three primary challenges to Sanpoil Project brought by KRCG:

- 1) Sanpoil Project violated the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) for its failure to analyze cumulate environmental impacts of logging 10,000 acres of forest, including impacts to threatened Canada lynx, bats, northern goshawk and other species;
- 2) The size and scale of the project was so large that it required a more detailed analysis provided by an environmental impact statement that would include a range of action alternatives – not just one;
- 3) The 2019 Colville LMP purported to protect & restore historic old growth trees, but the Forest Service replaced what had been a “bright line” in the Eastside Screens with an exception-riddled “Large Tree Management” that allowed large diameter old trees could be cut for any of six exceptions.

Kettle Rangers and our attorneys worked long and hard hours from June 2021 until March 2022 to peacefully reach settlement of Sanpoil Project lawsuit with the Colville National Forest.

CNF played hardball, balked at every settlement proposal we offered until late March 2022 when KRCG and CNF reached an Agreement in Principle to resolve Sanpoil litigation. FS delayed submitting its formal proposal until late May 2022 – but when it did it included entirely new provisions that KRCG had not and could not agree to, including: 1) being forever prevented from challenging any future timber sale, and 2) not challenging the new LMP, that was the basis for our claim.

In effect, the Forest Service inserted unacceptable ‘poison pills’ in their formal agreement making it impossible for Kettle Rangers to agree – though we certainly tried to get the CNF to follow its Agreement in Principle. In July 2022, the Forest Service notified the Federal District Court that we had reached an “impasse.” Our “agreement” was dead and we were forced to pursue litigation.

And so began a long and challenging legal process that required multiple legal document writing and filing, conferences with our attorneys, the Department of Justice and presiding judge that led up to a formal hearing in February 2023.

Fast forward to June 21, 2023: Federal District Judge Bastian ruled in KRCGs favor regarding all of these claims, vacating LMP standards for Large Tree Management, remanding the environmental assessment and mandating an environmental impact statement be prepared.

In response to this ruling and a similar challenge in Oregon regarding Region 6 USFS replacing the “Eastside Screens 21 inch Rule,” the CNF sent out a public notice that it was to follow the Eastside Screens 21” Rule going forward.



A New Era of Logging

One example of the enormity of this New Era of Logging, is the Chewelah A to Z Project estimated to produce 125 million board feet of trees being logged off. This is four to ten times more logging than Colville National Forest projects over the history of the forest. This project is start to finish, bought and paid for by the sawmill that will mark, cut and haul the trees it cuts, interpreting forest conditions and general guidelines approved by the Forest Service from within the cab of a large cutting machine operating at breakneck speed.

The agency claims this is to restore Historic Range of Variability (HRV) – that it estimates from 1930's era photo interpretation, tree & plant species, estimates of future climate, ecology and of course social interests. What is driving the bus – is the timber sale.

This makes no ecological sense. How can cutting down a forest help elk, woodpeckers, and amphibians? There's hardly any old growth trees left. Plantation forestry cannot possibly replace 100+ year old forests -- any more than a Christmas tree farm would.

Project Scholarship Awards Announced

Since 1996, KRCG Project Scholarship project has gifted over \$78,000 in college scholarships to students in Okanogan, Ferry and Stevens counties in NE Washington. For 2024, scholarship applications will be accepted until May 1, 2024.

Applications are available at www.kettlerange.org.

This year's winners for a one-year \$1,000 scholarship were awarded to Macey Singer, Curlew HS; and to Abigail P. Steinshouer, Tonasket HS.



Help support our rural conservation work. Your membership supports our work to protect forests, wildlife, clean water, and wilderness in the Colville and Okanogan 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.

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Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife PSR

WDFW has a mandate to manage the state's wildlife for the benefit of the public. However, it takes a decidedly narrow interpretation, focusing a majority of its resources to promote huntable species – or at least to consider them huntable. For example, carnivores like bear and cougar – not exactly what most people would think of interest to a hunter.

In its Periodic Status Review of gray wolf, WDFW seems bent on downlisting endangered wolves to a point where hunting is permitted and is currently exploring listing of “sensitive” that could permit hunting.

KRCG opposes downlisting wolves from endangered to sensitive. State gray wolf recovery goals have not been met in the Southern Cascade and Northwest Coast recovery zones. The estimated 216 wolf population is small and nowhere near what it was in Montana nor Idaho before delisting there. It is premature to downlist at this time and in contravention of the Wolf Conservation and Management Plan.

WDFW's bizarre rationale for downlisting is there would be less poaching!

Human-Caused Wolf Mortality



Poaching will not be reduced by downlisting wolves to sensitive – if anything it will make it less likely WDFW will be informed about human-caused wolf mortality. Understand that poaching takes place because *some people* believe the government put wolves here to start with, or that wolves are just a socialist

construct, or, their sense of independence frees poachers of legal constraint.

Of the top three sources of mortality indicated in WDFW annual reports from 2012-2022 are: 1) agency lethal removal actions, 2) legal harvest by members of the Colville or Spokane Tribes, and 3) other human-caused mortalities such as poisoning, alleged caught in the act, poaching and vehicle strikes.

WDFW established the Wolf Advisory Group (WAG) to advise it regarding policy, specifically lethal take protocols, etc. Problems arise on two fronts 1) WDFW carefully screens members of the WAG that is biased toward ranching and hunting interests and conservation interests, two of whom are former state and federal wildlife agency staff. The WAG does not fairly represent the interests of *all* Washingtonians. The WAG has been unable to address chronic lethal removal of wolves – the vast majority of which are attributed to one ranching operation. The WAG in turn advises the FWC opposing wolf rulemaking.

WDFW has failed to take meaningful action to establish clear guidelines strictly limiting the use of lethal force to kill wolves for occasionally attacking defenseless livestock, mostly in dense mountain forests on public land.

There are only 216 wolves in the state, yet the Department of Fish and Wildlife is promoting downlisting gray wolves to “sensitive” thus stripping wolves of their designation as a state endangered species. Even though a record 9 Washington wolves were illegally killed last year, the Department wants to lower penalties for illegal killing by downlisting wolves to sensitive.

Fish & Wildlife Commission rejects rulemaking petition

On September 4, 2020 Governor Inslee weighed in sending a letter directing WDFW to engage in rulemaking on wolf management. Two years later the Commission has voted to take “no action” on the rulemaking, without ever engaging in a substantive discussion of the concerns raised by Governor Inslee.

In July 2023, Kettle Rangers in coalition with other conservation organizations jointly filed a second rulemaking petition this time asking the Washington Fish & Wildlife Commission to put stringent limits on when the state can use taxpayer money to kill our endangered wolves. The Commission has thus far voted down such proposals -- leadership refused to allow the Commission to give our proposal meaningful consideration—forcing a vote after only 40 minutes of discussion, after preventing Commissioners from hearing from leading scientific experts about the best methods for preventing livestock-wolf conflict, without giving Petitioners the chance to speak in support of the petition, and following an hour-long management presentation opposing the petition that was riddled with false and misleading statements.

In this fog of confusion, the Commission voted 6-3 to reject the petition. The bottom line is rulemaking would establish a set of legal requirements to reduce wolf and livestock mortality. State wolf population growth is flattening. Wolf mortality is skyrocketing. Immigration rates are likely plummeting as wolf populations are decimated across southern B.C.. And yet WDFW is continuing to use taxpayer funds to shoot state-endangered wolves.

