

HighlandsNEWS

JOURNAL OF KETTLE RANGE CONSERVATION GROUP



Kettle Range Conservation Group
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Fall 2015

The Mission

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

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SAVE THE DATE

Kettle Range Conservation Group DINNER BANQUET & AUCTION



November 21, Doors open at 5 PM
Carousel Building, Republic Fairgrounds

Live & Silent Auction

Admission \$15 advance, \$20 at the door

Home cooking and entertainment

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From the President

To all our members and friends who have suffered any loss during this fire season we wish you well and if we can help in any way please let us know.

I know it may be difficult to see the positive aspects that a fire can have, but none the less we must move forward and work together to hopefully mitigate some of the larger fires near urban areas while keeping fire as a natural process in our forest. Fire policy, thinning and forest management are all difficult and complicated issues for parts of our forests. On the other hand large tracts of the forest should be left alone and let nature take its course – we can't do better than that.

Daniel Price

Kettle Range Conservation Group Board President

Forest Fire and Birds

A few days after the reopening of Boulder/ Deer Creek pass in the Kettle Crest standing by the side of the road I was struck by one thing: life. There were Ravens, Junco's, Mt. Chickadees, a lone Red breasted nuthatch along with a squirrel and a chipmunk. Why did I find this interesting? Many people believe that in a severely burned, stand replacing fire there is nothing but destruction and no life. Things could not be further from the truth. Burned forest still sustain life. In fact many bird species rely on the effects of fire for their survival while other birds numbers increase greatly in severely burned forests.

What may be one of the more iconic fire birds for our area is the black backed woodpecker. This woodpecker moves into burned forests in search of beetles and other bugs that are attracted by fire. Even the black and gray coloring of the black backed woodpecker is designed to be camouflage in burnt forest. Black backed and other cavity nest builders create habitat and homes for many other birds, including mountain bluebirds, nuthatches and owls. Although black backed woodpeckers are one of the first to move in, many other woodpeckers will follow, taking advantage of the increase in insect activity. Hairy and Lewis woodpeckers along with Flickers all increase greatly in numbers in burned forest.

Many other birds that may surprise you that are found in great frequency in burned forests include Ravens, Robins, Western Tanagers,



Black Backed Woodpecker by David Allen Sibley

For more information pick up a copy of "*The Sibley Field Guide to Birds of Western North America*" by David Allen Sibley

Mountain Chickadees, Swainson's Thrush and many others (a more complete list can be found in "Fire Birds" by Sneed B. Collard, 2015 Mountain View Press).

From my own experience it is very obvious how important fire is to many birds. After the Slide Creek fire on and near the Little Pend Oreille NWR, Refuge biologist, Mike Munts, was able to identify all species of woodpecker and nuthatches that live in the State (with the possible exception of the few acorn woodpeckers that may still be found on the west side).

If we leave nature to take it's course we will be helping many species to survive and thrive not just the birds. The birds and other critters will help spread seeds, many shrubs, and grasses will start to regrow almost immediately and the cycle of life will continue. If we over manage the forests after the fires the one thing that we can guarantee is that many species of birds will suffer and continue to live on the brink of survival.

I have just touched the surface about the ecological importance of fires for some bird species. Fires also help many other species including elk and deer. With more open space and plenty to eat elk, deer and other ungulates should thrive. That is just one more of hundreds of benefits fires can have.

Spend some time watching the forest recover. It's a fascinating process that only nature understands. We can just enjoy and be amazed by the beautiful process. One thing that I promise is that there will be great bird watching opportunities in the years to come.

A note to you by Tim Coleman, Executive Director

It feels like half of this past summer was a time warp of wildfire and smoke. Experiencing it firsthand was something quite surreal and at times, frightening. For the better part of two weeks in August, much of the Okanogan-Kettle Highlands was smothered in smoke so thick that at times it cut visibility to a hundred yards and so stanching daytime temperatures they were held below 70F – in the middle of the day - despite region-wide temperatures in the mid 90's.

Smoke and Mirrors

Republican Senator Brian Dangel used the unfortunate wildfire situation to editorialize against wilderness as a place where, he alleged, modern wildfire fighting tools could not be used. Of course that is patently false. Section 4(d)(1) of The Wilderness Act simply states "...such measures may be taken as maybe necessary in the control of fire, insects and diseases..." Wilderness wildfire, such as Wolverine and Farewell Fire, was fought with bulldozers, helicopters and other tools.

There is an intense behind the scenes lobbying campaign now underway badgering the Colville National Forest not to manage any of the Kettle Crest as wilderness in the Forest Service's upcoming Long Range Management Plan. Ferry County Commissioner Mike Blankenship has been distributing a slick-looking economic study that claims wilderness areas hurt rural economies.

The study is a 2011 report, "The Economic Costs of Wilderness," released by California-based Pacific Research Institute—a libertarian think tank that is a major recipient of Exxon funding and has been associated with the Cato Institute and the Heritage Foundation. The study claims that Wilderness designation harms household income, total payroll, and tax receipts. Several studies have debunked these claims, but unlike the Pacific Research Institute study, economic studies that have shown a positive correlation between wilderness and other protected federal lands have passed peer review -- the standard that validates science research. (http://headwaterseconomics.org/wphw/wp-content/uploads/Annotated_Bib_Value_Public_Lands.pdf)

Weather is the Key Factor

The historical record time and again points to weather as a key causal factor in wildfire ignition and behavior. Dry, hot and windy conditions combined this past summer to create catastrophic wildfire conditions that were likely intensified by climate change. Rain and snow extinguish wildfires and cooler temperatures significantly

reduce fire intensity, just as they have done to this year's record wildfires.

The reality is forest, grasslands and fuels reduction treatments, easy access to roads, even huge industrial forest clearcuts weren't enough to stop wildfires from spreading massively across eastern Washington. The Tunk Mt., Carpenter Road and North Star fires burned through heavily managed and roaded landscapes, escaping fire fighter containment efforts until the weather at last, changed. And it's not just forest that burn. Last year's 256,000 acre Carlton Complex Fire was 75% non-forest land.

As bad as wildfires have been this summer, there is reason for optimism. This past spring forest and grassland blackened in the Carlton Complex sprouted green growth. Forests of the eastern Cascade and Rocky Mountains mostly produce lightweight seed that winds will gather into a "seed rain" next summer – and even this winter, reseeding a new forest. Minerals and nutrients released by fire will spur lush new growth from plant roots. It's Nature's way of renewing fire-adapted forest ecosystems and restoring balance to forest and grassland ecosystems where natural fire has been suppressed for over a century.



The Stickpin Fire (2015) in the Kettle Crest burned Colville National Forest roadless area, thinned forest and forest plantations, Washington State Lands and industrial forestlands with equal intensity. Even clearcuts like those pictured above - and where most vegetation had been killed with herbicides - were also burned.

My Interest in Wolves – by Story Warren

I saw my first wild wolf in Yellowstone National Park when I was six years old. All that I knew about wolves then was what I learned from Little Red Riding Hood and the Big Bad Wolf; however, when I saw that black wolf trotting across the valley, I was struck by how similar he was to my canine best friend back at home. Seeing characteristics that were so familiar in something so wild was fascinating to me.

My interest in wolves has only grown over the years. I am sixteen now, and I have studied wolves virtually nonstop since that first sighting. I track and observe wolves in the wild, and I research them – their ecology, their behavior, and their potential conflicts with people and livestock (including meeting with several ranchers who have successfully implemented nonlethal deterrents to protect both cattle and sheep in the heart of wolf country).

The more that I learned about wolves, the more I was surprised at the discrepancy between wolves' reputation and the facts. I find that most of my peers – and in fact, almost everyone in the general public of any age – believe that wolves kill people, and are afraid of wolves. People won't want to protect something that they fear. Kids are raised on stories like Little Red Riding Hood and Three Little Pigs, so all they know about wolves is "what big teeth they have."

This led me to start an Instagram page called *Kids4Wolves* almost three years ago. I hoped to involve kids my age in learning the truth about wolves and to wipe out some of the myths that "dog" wolf recovery. In addition, I wanted to let kids know how they could get involved in the process of wolf recovery, both in their regions as well as nationally.

Almost immediately after starting the page, I noticed how heated the online conversations between "pro-wolf" and "anti-wolf" folks could become; I was expecting this, because I knew how deep-rooted the issue of wolves is for so many people. But I was shocked when I saw how petty, personal, and even violent the comments can be. Death threats are not uncommon, nor are sexually threatening messages. In all of these hostile exchanges, not one produced any sort of understanding or empathy for the other person's perspective. If anything, the name-calling and vulgarity tends to close people's minds and make them lash out more.

I decided to try a different approach. If a hunter, rancher, or any "anti-wolf" person comments on my page – whether it's a blatant death threat, or a civil comment in favor of wolf hunting – I always try to respond civilly, and ask them why they think that about wolves; and while sometimes it takes a while for the conversation to become civil in many if not most cases we are able to have a respectful, productive conversation. I try to address every concern, such as perceived decimation of game herds or uncontrolled livestock depredations. Often I learn new things just by hearing about someone's personal experience hunting or ranching around wolves. I hope that the folks on the other side of the conversation occasionally learn something about my point of view as well. Through these interactions I have learned to keep an open mind and be willing to understand the other person's perspective.



Kids4Wolves now has over 13,500 followers and has expanded to a blog and Facebook page. *Kids4Wolves* from around the country have sent countless letters and comments on various wolf issues around the continent. I continue to post facts, photos, videos, updates, and scientific articles on the page; but I also try to fairly represent the problems that wolves can cause for the people who share the landscape with them.

Conservation Groups Challenge Wolf Kill Authority

Kettle Range Conservation Group joined seven other conservation groups file a Motion for Summary Judgement to the U.S. District Court challenging the U.S. Department of Agriculture/ APHIS Wildlife Services' lack of environmental analysis required by law to kill wolves in Washington State. Groups are represented by Western Environmental Law Center. Oral arguments are scheduled for December.

Fortunately because the National Environmental Policy (NEPA) gives the public a voice in federal management decisions, conservation groups were able to challenge Wildlife Services self-administered authority to kill gray wolves, a Washington state endangered species. Wildlife Services failed to address the ecological effects of killing wolves in Washington, including impacts on wolf populations in neighboring states and on non-target animals — from federally protected species such as grizzly bears, Canada lynx and other sensitive species.

Wildlife Services used to call itself “Animal Damage Control” which more accurately described its mission then and now. Wildlife Services is responsible for killing approximately 1.5 million wildlife per year from prairie dogs to grizzle bears and thousands more non-target animals, endangered species and even people’s pets that get caught in traps or ingest poisons intended for target species.

Long criticized as a rogue entity, Wildlife Services was recently the subject of a prize-winning newspaper exposé of its shadowy operations, as well as a documentary containing firsthand descriptions by former program personnel of illegal and cruel practices perpetrated on wildlife and domestic animals. (1) Conservation groups petitioned the USDA in December demanding reform of Wildlife Services’ entire operations. Since then there have been congressional calls for an investigation into the program’s questionable operations and there is a pending USDA Inspector General investigation into the agency.

Wildlife Services acted in an advisory capacity in the 2012 killing of the Wedge pack in Stevens County by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. In that instance, the department killed seven wolves after depredations of livestock on public lands, despite the

rancher’s failure to take sufficient action to protect his cattle

Wolves were driven to extinction in Washington in the early 1900s by a government-sponsored eradication program on behalf of the livestock industry.(2) They began to return to Washington from neighboring Idaho and British Columbia in the early 2000s, and their population has grown to the current 10 confirmed packs and two probable packs. While this represents solid growth, wolves in the state are far from recovered and face ongoing threats.

Groups filing this suit are KRCG, Cascadia Wildlands, the Center for Biological Diversity, Western Environmental Law Center, Project Coyote, Predator Defense, WildEarth Guardians and The Lands Council.

Citations:

1. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qSV8pRLkdKI&list=UUD8GP2q9p2-DBpDbny2y_qQ&feature=c4-overview
2. Scientists estimate that when Europeans arrived on the North American continent, as many as 2 million wolves roamed the landscape. As settlers moved west, the livestock industry refused to coexist with wolves, and the animals were all but eliminated in the lower 48.



Trail Maintenance Report Card

Trail work is both difficult and rewarding – and it's great to help maintain trails on our public lands and enjoy the great outdoors!

After some careful thought, it's been determined that July is a bit too hot to do trail maintenance. In the future trail work projects will be organized primarily in the cooler months May/June/September. Please let us know if you are willing to help.



Dan Price and Tim Youngbluth repair a tough section of the Ten Mile Trail / Pacific NW Trail. KRCG Photo

A group of volunteers rebuilt a half-mile of the Ten Mile Trail during a grueling hot day in early July and during the Kettle Range Rendezvous. Trail crew volunteers Jerry Graser, Daniel Price, Tim Younbluth and Tim & Sue Coleman removed downed trees, blocked



Dan, Jerry Tim, Sue after a hard day of trail work

user-built trail, removed rocks and re-contoured trail tread & outslope. This section of Ten Mile Trail has been proposed as part of the Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail.

We ALWAYS need more volunteers to help with these projects – please email tcoleman@kettlerange.org or call 509 775 2667 to sign up.

13th Annual Kettle Rendezvous

Ask anybody who attended the Annual Kettle Rendezvous this past July and you'll hear what a fun time it was! This was the second year the Rendezvous was held at Swan Lake. Three days of hiking, trail work, outrageous camping, swimming, good food and drink was had by all. This year the stars were out and nothing less than dazzling! Oh, and not to mention the loons haunting song and their fledglings? So wonderful it was. Next time around – don't miss it.



Groups Challenge Washington Cougar Kill Increase

Kettle Range Conservation Group joined with seven other wildlife advocate groups to petition the Washington Dept. of Fish & Wildlife and Gov. Jay Inslee to intervene to halt the state Fish and Wildlife Commission plan to increase the permitted number of cougars that can be killed in areas where the cats home ranges overlap wolf packs.

Bob McCoy, a Washington volunteer with the Mountain Lion Foundation, explains cougars stake out wide-ranging territories and killing more of them creates conflict among the remaining males, and leaves

cougar kittens without mothers. "It's increasing the hunting to a point that it will end up with a younger population of cats," McCoy said. "They're the ones that are usually looking for territories and likely to be causing problems."

Washington state spent about \$5 million researching cougar and found a hunting quota of 12 to 16 percent satisfies hunters without doing permanent damage to the cougar population.

The Fish and Wildlife Commission has raised the quota to 17 to 21 percent, primarily in northeastern Washington.

The Commission's decision, that in some cases will double allowable cougar kills, makes absolute no sense, because wolves and cougars will keep each other in check, their habitat is based on prey availability and nature achieves a balance between the two species.

Check out our Kettle Range Conservation Group Facebook page for more information and to get involved.



www.mountainlion.org

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Project Scholarship Grantees

This year's Project Scholarship awarded \$1,000 college scholarships to Sierra McQuay, Jennifer Palmier and Hanna Heizer. All are Republic High School graduates. Scholarship grantees were selected based upon their grades, community volunteerism and writing skills.

Project Scholarship is a non-profit charitable fund of the Kettle Range Conservation Group that has granted \$50,500 in college scholarships to northeast Washington students. Scholarship applications are open to all graduating seniors in Ferry, Stevens, and Okanogan County and available for download online at www.KettleRange.org. Deadline for 2016 submittals is May 1, 2016. Financial contributions to Project Scholarship are welcome and may be tax-deductible.



Scholarship grantee Hanna Heizer at Washington State University

In Gratitude

Best Wishes & Heartfelt Appreciation to
our Supporters

Kettle Range Conservation Group is a voice of rural grassroots for conserving and preserving ecosystem health, wild forests, wildlife and clean water in the upper Columbia River. We rely on our members and volunteers to carry out our mission, produce & organize the Wild & Scenic Film Festival, Project Scholarship, Kettle Range Rendezvous, trail work & hikes and our fall auction. Thank you!

We humbly appreciate our generous financial contributors especially our major gift donors
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