

Wildlife, Recreation & Our Shared Responsibility

Spring 2025

Across the country, conservation efforts are facing unprecedented challenges. At Conservation Northwest, the words we hear most often in recent communications are layoffs, reductions in force, chaos and uncertainty.

We are seeing deep staffing cuts across public lands agencies, unstable funding for conservation initiatives, and a weakening of long-standing natural resource protections. Wildlife and the rural economies that depend on sustainable land management face mounting threats. The immediate consequences are alarming, and the long-term effects could reverberate through our ecosystems for generations to come.

These challenges jeopardize our ability to protect, connect, and restore the wildlife and wild places that make Washington unique. More than 35 years of hard work in conservation is potentially at risk. Particularly relevant to our work to reduce recreation's negative impacts on wildlife and habitat, the Forest Service will struggle to maintain roads, hiking trails, visitor services, and law enforcement patrols. This will result in diminished recreation quality, increased illegal activities such as off-road vehicle use, and a decline in public land upkeep. Tribal treaty resources will be further degraded.

We refuse to stand by while these challenges weaken the legacy we've spent decades building.

The need for conservation work is greater than ever, and we are committed to confronting this crisis head-on. At Conservation Northwest, we are doubling down on our mission and investing in the strategies and partnerships that drive real conservation outcomes. We are adapting and refocusing our efforts to maximize benefits for both wild ecosystems and the human communities that depend on them.

Even as national funding and policies become unreliable, we will continue to prioritize action at the state and local levels. We are committed to delivering meaningful conservation results across Washington, ensuring that our work remains steadfast even in the face of instability. We will not let the current challenges derail the progress we've made.

To be effective, we must start with a grounded understanding of the reality we face. The news cycle moves quickly, but the stakes remain clear. We invite you to stay informed, take action when needed, and continue to stand with us as we work to protect the wild places we all cherish for future generations.



How We Connect, Protect & Restore Through Recreation

You know our mission to connect, protect and restore wildlife and wildlands. But how does outdoor recreation fit into that?

Outdoor recreation continues to grow in Washington. It's an important economic industry and way to maintain our physical and mental health. But we also must reckon with the fact that outdoor recreation can pose challenges to wildlife that call our favorite outdoor places home. Our response to this dilemma was to create the *Wildlife Recreation Coexistence Program (WREC)*—a dedicated initiative to promote and advocate for recreation policies and practices that protect wildlife and habitat while supporting sustainable recreation use.

WREC covers a huge breadth of the Conservation Northwest mission with connection and the protection of wildlife and habitat. This program is helping other programs like the Forest Field Program, grizzly bear restoration in the North Cascades, and Cascades Watersheds programs as we address on-the-ground impacts stemming from increasing human pressures in sensitive wildlife areas. WREC is unique for Conservation Northwest in that it is so cross-cutting and relevant in today's landscape.

KURT HELLMANN
WREC Program Manager

Understanding the Challenge

Washington's diverse wildlife depend on our public lands for breeding, foraging, and resting. Human outdoor activities can disturb and stress wildlife, causing an additional expenditure of valuable energy and displacement from preferred habitats and reducing their access to necessary resources.

From mountain biking to hiking, motorized vehicles to backcountry camping, Washington's public lands are visited by millions more people than ever before. The numbers are clear: between 2019 and 2022, visitation to Washington's state public lands increased by 38%. Nationally, there was a surge in visitation to national forests in 2020 to almost 170 million people. As visitation grows, so do the challenges of ensuring that our public lands remain sustainable for wildlife.



Why This Matters

The role of outdoor recreation in wildlife conservation is critical. If done or managed irresponsibly, recreation can negatively impact wildlife populations. But if managed well, it can lead to better stewardship, preserving Washington's landscapes for future generations. The goal of the WREC Program is to find a balance; promoting sustainable recreation practices and policies that ensure both wildlife and people can thrive across our treasured landscapes.

Looking Ahead

With outdoor recreation set to continue its upward trajectory, it's a critical time for responsible stewardship. The Forest Service has been hit hard; they're down in funding and staffing. Nonprofits like **Conservation Northwest will be needed to fill that gap. While other nonprofits will focus on fixing trails and picking up trash, our role will be to safeguard wildlife.**

The Wildlife Recreation Coexistence Program is essential in ensuring that Washington's landscapes remain vibrant and healthy for both wildlife and outdoor enthusiasts. By supporting the program, donors help ensure that wildlife in Washington can continue to thrive while people enjoy the outdoors in a responsible way. Together, we can protect the places we love, safeguard the wildlife that depend on them, and ensure that these landscapes remain accessible for future generations of adventurers.



Advocating for Pro-Wildlife Recreation Policy

The WREC Program works to improve outdoor recreation management to better support wildlife and habitat objectives like mitigating human-caused impacts to wildlife and protecting critical times and places for wildlife to be free of disturbances. Our work is often collaborative, informed by the latest science, and aims to support both wildlife and people's access to public lands.

WREC policy work has shaped notable state-wide recreation plans like Washington Department of Natural Resource's Outdoor Access and Responsible Recreation Strategic Plan and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's 10-year Recreation Strategy. WREC has also advocated for adaptative management approaches that acutely protect certain spaces for wildlife, like WDFW's Methow Wildlife Area's seasonal closures to protect mule deer wintering habitat.

WREC has also elevated the topic of recreation-wildlife coexistence by helping lead the state-wide Recreate Responsibly Coalition. Conservation Northwest organized a policy workgroup to learn about human impacts on habitat and wildlife and champion visitor management strategies that support both wildlife and outdoor access.

Tribal Sovereignty and Respectful Recreation

Tribal voices in Washington have expressed concern over the growth in outdoor visitation and its impact on sensitive natural resources. Tribes uphold their inherent sovereignty and retain their rights, including those protected by treaties, that safeguard their access to natural and cultural resources across public lands. Conservation Northwest's Wildlife Recreation Coexistence Program works with Tribal nations in Washington to support Tribal rights and interests amid growing visitor use across wildlife habitat. We work closely with the Snoqualmie Indian Tribe and their Ancestral Lands Movement to share its mindful recreation messaging through our Wildlife Ambassador Project. Recreating respectfully is important for both ancestral land and wildlife as we visit lands that have been stewarded by Tribes since time immemorial.



Appreciation for a Conservation Legacy

Recently we received a substantial gift left to us in the will of Cornelia Remy, a supporter of our work for more than 20 years. Cornelia was actively involved as a conservation and wildlife volunteer, working with other nonprofits on planning, building, and maintaining trail systems.

Unfortunately, we did not know Cornelia personally, but her gift allowed us to expand programs like the Wildlife Ambassador Project in 2024. The entire staff of Conservation Northwest is incredibly grateful for her belief in our work, and we hope our impact is a fitting legacy for her love of our natural spaces.

- Meghan Madden, Philanthropy Director.



Wildlife Ambassador Project

RECREATE
WITH
RESPECT

We educate recreationists where they are—in the wild—through the Wildlife Ambassador Project. This outreach arm of the Wildlife-Recreation Coexistence Program operates at popular recreation areas to share information that promotes respect for wildlife and habitat.

Our goal is to protect wildlife and support sustainable outdoor recreation by:

- Reducing disturbance and displacement of flora and fauna.
- Preventing human-wildlife conflict.
- Eliminating negligence around securing food and garbage in wildlife habitat.

Education about Recreating with Respect

Conservation Northwest staff and volunteers encourage the public to be prepared for wildlife encounters and to deepen their understanding of what it means to follow the Leave No Trace principle of ‘Respect Wildlife’. Through direct engagement at trailheads, we educate outdoor enthusiasts about securing food and trash, respecting wildlife habitats, and understanding bear safety.

Supporting Sustainable Recreation

A huge part of sustainable recreation is reducing conflict between wildlife and recreationists. In 2023,

Conservation Northwest purchased food storage signs and two bear dumpsters to help the Middle Fork Campground complete its goal of a 100% wildlife-proof infrastructure. We’re working with partners to make these resources more accessible at other recreation sites.

Middle Fork Campground Success Story

The Middle Fork Campground is a huge success of our Wildlife Ambassador Project. This popular campground struggled for years with bears that have learned to associate humans with food caused by campers not storing their trash or food. Several black bears had been translocated or euthanized in recent years, and in 2022 the campground shut down all operations to prevent more human-wildlife conflict.

After the installation of food storage lockers and bear dumpsters, combined with in-person education efforts with campers starting in 2023, there has been no euthanasia of wildlife and no closures of the campground. This is proof that equipping recreationists with the knowledge and resources about sustainable recreation benefits both wildlife AND people.

Our Impact in 2024 & Where We’re Going in 2025

Over the 2024 field season, staff and volunteers tallied nearly 14,000 total engagements at the Middle Fork Snoqualmie Trailhead and Campground, Pratt Lake Trailhead, and the Snow Lake Trailhead. Thousands of people learned about wildlife, habitat and how to recreate with respect to natural resources.

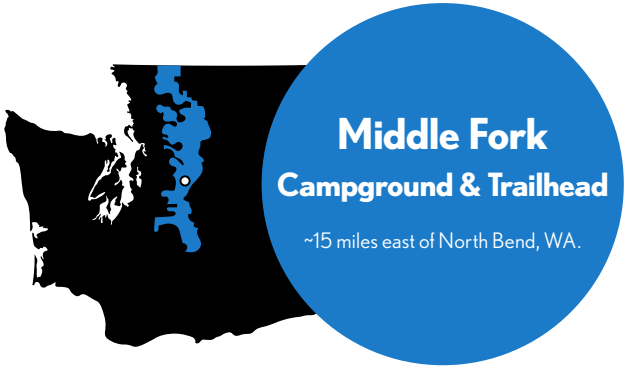
Conservation Northwest staff worked with 30 volunteers over 52 outreach days from June to September to educate the public about general wildlife awareness, best practices in bear and cougar country, and tips to reduce impacts to wildlife and habitat, including encouraging users to stay on the trail, keep pets leashed, give wildlife space, specific “dos and don’ts” during encounters with bears or cougars, and securing garbage.

Wildlife Ambassador volunteers are everyone and anyone who cares about our wildlands and wildlife and want to get involved in a tangible way. They are lifelong recreational users, wildlife advocates, wilderness lovers, or just people who care about spending their time educating others on how to create a sustainable relationship between outdoor recreation and conservation. These volunteers are critical to Conservation Northwest and the Wildlife Recreation Coexistence Program.

In 2025 the project will continue operating at various locations across the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest, hopefully with the capacity to expand our reach. This summer there will be fewer rangers and trail stewards in the forests at a time when responsible recreation practices are needed most. It will be even more critical that we have the resources to deploy staff and volunteers in our forests to protect wildlife and our ability to recreate sustainably. This program is funded by a few small grants, but the majority of funding comes from individual supporters.

If you’re interested in joining as a volunteer please reach out to Wildlife-Recreation Specialist Alycia at alycia@conservationnw.org.

Our Partners:



- 2019** USFS reports an increase in bear sitings at campsites, largely because of un-stored food.
- 2022** Middle Fork campground and 6 miles of dispersed camping close early due to food conditioned bears.
- 2023** Wildlife Ambassador pilot launches with 1 trailhead and 2,000 engagements. No campgrounds close and no bears euthanized.
- 2024** Ambassadors expand to 3 trailheads and 14,000 engagements. No campgrounds close and no bears euthanized.

The Conservation Northwest folks are working hard because they love wildlife and they want to protect it. With Conservation Northwest you have the chance to learn in depth - why wildlife, why we need to protect it, why it works, why there’s actually a lot of hope. This is really important work to do if you want to participate in something that’s really going to make a lasting impact on not only wildlife, but also humans and their enjoyment of the great outdoors.

PEGGY JACKSON
Wildlife Ambassador volunteer

Your Guide to Grizzlies in the North Cascades (and How to Talk About Them!)



The North Cascades are a wild and wonderful place, and the idea of grizzly bears returning to their historic range is sparking a lot of conversations. Whether you're a seasoned hiker, a weekend camper, or just curious about wildlife, we want to help you feel informed and empowered. We're here to answer your questions about grizzlies and give you tips for how to engage people in your community on the benefits of bears.

Q: “Why bring grizzlies coming back anyway? What’s the point?”

A: Grizzlies are a keystone species, meaning they play a vital role in the health of the ecosystem. Grizzlies are like the gardeners of the forest; they help keep everything in balance by dispersing seeds, regulating prey populations, and fertilizing the soil. Restoring a bear population helps restore the balance of the North Cascades, making it a healthier place for all wildlife, including us! Having them back would make the North Cascades one of the few places in the lower 48 states with all of its original large predators.

Q: “Aren’t grizzlies dangerous? I’m worried about hiking in the North Cascades.”

A: It’s understandable to feel apprehensive about grizzlies. But, while they are powerful animals, bears are naturally wary of humans, and we can help maintain that by being responsible while in their habitat. Black bears are already in the area, and we’ve been coexisting with them for a long time. Similar safety practices apply! Encounters with

bears are rare and are often a positive experience, it’s all about being prepared and respectful.

Q: “So what can I do to stay safe while recreating in grizzly country?”

A: It’s all about being prepared. Here are a few essential tips:

- **Make Noise:** Talk, sing, or clap while hiking in areas of low visibility to alert bears of your presence.
- **Hike in Groups:** Bears are less likely to approach a group.
- **Carry Bear Spray:** Know how to use it and keep it readily accessible.
- **Store Food Properly:** Use bear-resistant canisters and place them at least 70 paces from camp at night.
- **Stay Aware:** Watch for signs of bear activity, like tracks or scat.
- **Give Bears Space:** If you see a bear, give it plenty of room and never approach it.

Q: “How can I support grizzly bear recovery in the North Cascades?”

A: There are many ways to get involved!

- **Educate Yourself:** Keep learning about grizzly bears and the recovery efforts.
- **Share Information:** Talk to your friends and family about the importance of grizzly bears.
- **Follow Best Practices:** When recreating in the area, follow all safety guidelines.
- **Engage in Public Processes:** When there are opportunities for public comment, make your voice heard.

The return of grizzlies to the North Cascades is a chance to restore a vital part of our natural heritage. By staying informed, practicing safe recreation, and being thoughtful ambassadors, we can help ensure a future where humans and grizzlies coexist peacefully. Let’s work together to make the North Cascades a wilder, healthier place for everyone.

Sharing the Backcountry & Respecting Wildlife in Winter & Spring



Winter and spring in the backcountry are a truly magical experience—fresh powder, crisp alpine air, and snow-covered landscapes stretching as far as the eye can see. But as we venture into these spaces on skis, snowshoes, or snowmobiles, it’s crucial to remember that we are stepping into the homes of wildlife, many of whom are operating on razor-thin energy reserves just to survive the seasons. With more people enjoying snow recreation, we must take steps to minimize our impact. By making small, mindful changes, we can help protect the fragile ecosystems and the species that depend on them—not just in winter and early spring, but year-round.

Winter is a Challenge for Wildlife

Winter is a season of scarcity for all wildlife species. Food is harder to find, temperatures are extreme, and any unnecessary expenditure of energy can mean the difference between survival and starvation. When animals are startled by human activity and forced to flee, they burn precious calories they may not be able to replace. Repeated disturbances can also lead to failed reproduction, reduced survival rates, and displacement from critical habitat.

Climate change is already adding stress to these delicate ecosystems, making it more important than ever to be conscientious when exploring. Organizations like the Wintering Wildlife Conservation Initiative are working to elevate awareness around responsible recreation, and we can all do our part to reduce our impact.

As we transition into spring, many of these same principles apply. Emerging wildlife, such as deer fawns and bird nestlings, are particularly vulnerable to human disturbances. Stick to marked trails, avoid trampling fragile vegetation, and be mindful of nesting areas when recreating in forests and grasslands.

By adopting these practices, we can help ensure that wildlife and wild places continue to thrive.

How You Can Help

Stay Alert for Wildlife Signs: Tracks, scat, and other clues can indicate the presence of wildlife. If you notice fresh signs, consider altering your route to avoid disturbing animals sheltering nearby.

Give Wildlife Space: If you encounter an animal, pause and wait for it to move on. Never approach, and if needed, adjust your course to minimize stress on the animal.

Respect Seasonal Closures: Some areas close temporarily to protect wintering wildlife, such as the Methow Wildlife Area, which implements seasonal restrictions to protect mule deer habitat. Check for local closures before heading out.

Stick to Established Routes: Unpredictable human activity can be particularly disruptive. When possible, follow designated trails, ski runs, or skin tracks instead of breaking new ground.

Pack It Out: Carry out everything you bring in, including food scraps and waste. Even biodegradable items can impact wildlife behavior and habitat health.

Keep Pets Under Control: Off-leash dogs can chase or disturb wildlife, causing unnecessary stress. Keep dogs on a leash or under strict voice control.

Be Open to New Management Practices: As outdoor recreation grows, creative visitor management strategies are needed to keep landscapes healthy and accessible. Participate in public processes to advocate for sustainable recreation policies.

Learn About Local Wildlife: Understanding which species inhabit our favorite recreation areas fosters a deeper respect for these landscapes. Resources like the Cascades Wolverine Project and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife offer valuable insights into native species.

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How can YOU support wildlife & recreation?

- Tell your elected officials how critical federal Forest Service, National Park, and Fish and Wildlife agencies are!
- Spend time learning about how to recreate with respect.
- Engage in mindful recreation yourself and put these ideas into practice.
- Volunteer as a 2025 Wildlife Ambassador and help educate others.
- Volunteer to join a public lands clean-up day.
- Get your company to donate to Conservation Northwest to match your volunteer time.
- Donate! The majority of the WREC Program is funded by individual contributions.



Help Protect Wildlife This Recreation Season

If you love the thrill of seeing a moose track on a snowy trail, the quiet awe of watching an eagle soar, or the freedom of exploring Washington's wild landscapes, then you know how vital it is to protect the places and wildlife that make these experiences possible.

At Conservation Northwest, we're committed to keeping the Northwest wild—for wildlife and people alike. Through science-based advocacy and collaborative solutions, our work helps ensure that conservation and outdoor recreation can go hand in hand. From protecting critical wildlife corridors for bears to working with communities on sustainable trails and responsible access, we're finding ways to steward the wild places we cherish.

But we can't do it alone.

Your donation today helps safeguard our region's most treasured species and landscapes. It fuels projects that restore vital habitats, advocate for smart policies, and bring people together to create a future where both wildlife and outdoor adventure thrive.



Kurt Hellmann, Manager, Wildlife Recreation Coexistence Program



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Support Our Auction

Support our Annual Hope for a Wild Future Auction and Dinner from anywhere in the world!



Our silent auction is open to everyone April 18-30th. Visit conservationnw.org/auction2025 to place your bids in support of conservation.

Maximize Your Impact

The fastest growing gifts aren't cash- they're **stock, distributions from your IRA, Donor Advised Funds, crypto, and gifts from your estate.** These can all help you make larger gifts to the causes you love, while also giving you tax benefits. There are many ways to make these gifts, but our partner Freewill can provide more information or help get you started. Find out if any of these options work for you at freewill.com/conservationnorthwest.

