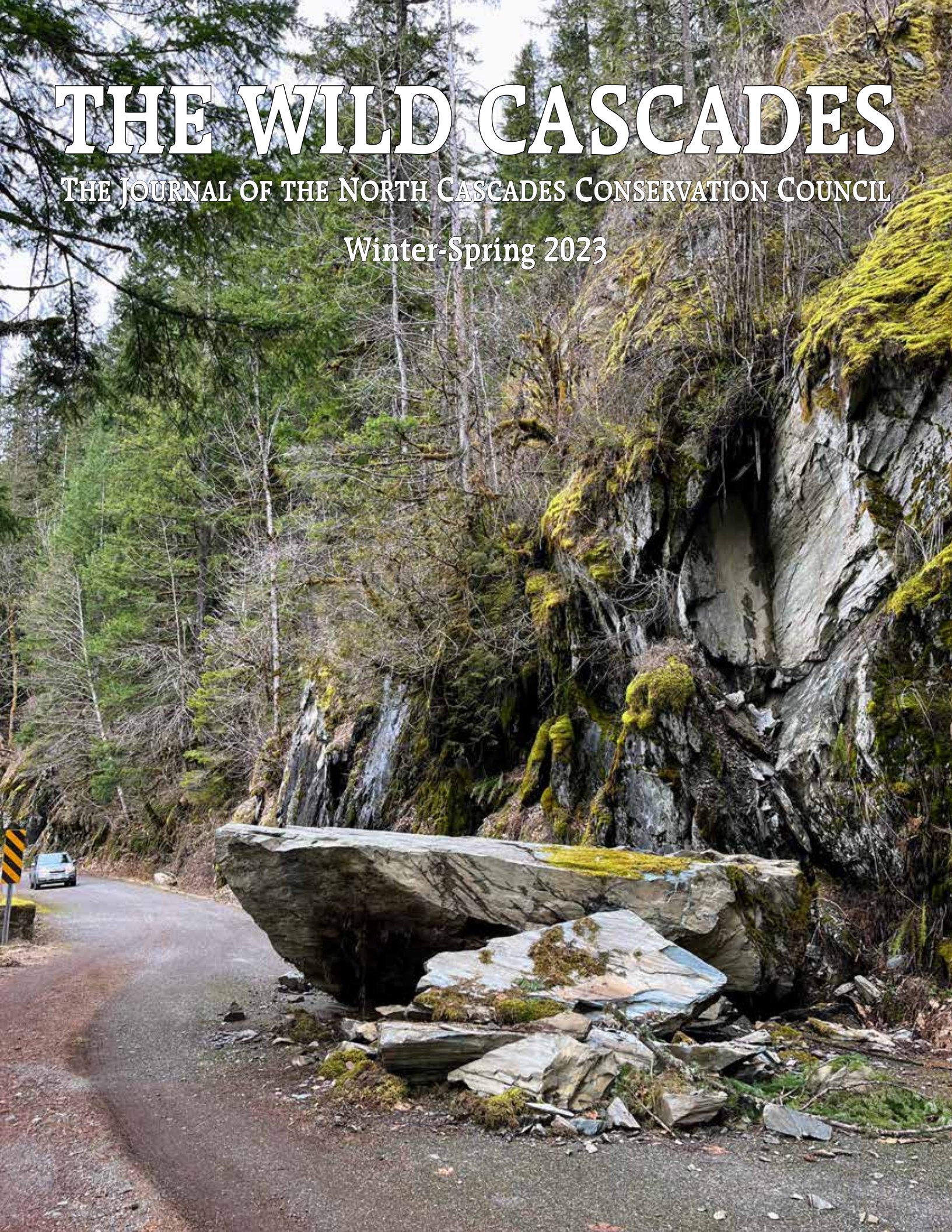


THE WILD CASCADES

THE JOURNAL OF THE NORTH CASCADES CONSERVATION COUNCIL

Winter-Spring 2023



THE WILD CASCADES ■ Winter-Spring 2023

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COVER: Huge slab of rock blocks Cascade River road, see article on page 19 —PHIL FENNER
PHOTO

The Wild Cascades

Journal of the North Cascades Conservation Council

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THE NORTH CASCADES CONSERVATION COUNCIL was formed in 1957 "To protect and preserve the North Cascades' scenic, scientific, recreational, educational, wildlife, and wilderness values." Continuing this mission, N3C keeps government officials, environmental organizations, and the general public informed about issues affecting the Greater North Cascades Ecosystem. Action is pursued through administrative, legal, and public participation channels to protect the lands, waters, plants and wildlife.

Over the last six decades N3C has led or participated in campaigns to create the North Cascades National Park Complex, Glacier Peak Wilderness, and other units of the National Wilderness System from the W.O. Douglas Wilderness north to the Alpine Lakes Wilderness, the Henry M. Jackson Wilderness, the Chelan-Sawtooth Wilderness, the Wild Sky Wilderness and others. Among its most dramatic victories has been working with British Columbia allies to block the raising of Ross Dam, which would have drowned Big Beaver Valley.

N3C is supported by member dues and private donations. These contributions support the full range of the Council's activities, including publication of *The Wild Cascades*. As a 501(c)(3) organization, all contributions are fully tax deductible to the extent allowed by law. Membership dues for one year are: \$10 (Living Lightly) to \$100.

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Founded in 1957
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THE PRESIDENT'S REPORT WINTER-SPRING 2023

Wilderness—what's that? Our members are among the few who understand what Wilderness (with capital W) is, and what it means. This year I want to encourage you to start spreading the word, especially when you're out there enjoying it and of course when you get back to civilization. Because we must do something to curb the misbehavior out there, both within and outside designated Wilderness Areas.

In my wildest dreams I envision outdoor gear retailers requiring their customers to take "responsible recreation" courses for anyone buying their backpacking gear, including the basics of how public lands designations work, what they mean, etc. And devoting a significant share of the profits they make selling that gear to protecting the areas they send folks into. But until then, it seems we need to do it ourselves.

I've met folks out in the backcountry with brand new ultralight gear who ask what the difference is between a National Park and a National Forest—that question comes up most often when they complain to me about how many different permits they need. I encountered one extreme example of that last summer in the North Cascades, tried to explain the basics, and maybe some of it sunk in. If it wasn't for the different permits and the fear of getting busted without the right one, I sometimes wonder if today's novices would care at all. Perhaps the permit systems that N3C opposed so vocally in the 80s have turned out to be a blessing in disguise, if they force folks to at least try to figure out lands designations.

But Wilderness seems to just be "where the wild things are" to most of the greenhorns, who are blissfully unaware of what it really means. Maybe we should carry quick-reference cards with us to hand out: Wilderness Means Untrammelled! So, 1) Nothing mechanized, 2) Nothing motorized, 3) Nature is in charge, 4) Man is a guest who does not remain. And point out that Wilderness is an "overlay" that can protect both National Forests and National Parks from roads and machines.

Then, hopefully, when the Federal Agencies say they intend to fly helicopters into Wilderness for anything other than search and rescue or fire, more will understand why they should be very skeptical of that.

So, spread the word! Tell everybody you hike with and meet on the trails and back home what Wilderness means. And when someone really "gets it," give them a gift membership to N3C—there's more about our new gift membership program on page 12 of this issue. Now that's a win-win situation!

Phil Fenner

philf@northcascades.org



N3C Actions

NOVEMBER 2022
to MARCH 2023

Advocacy carried out by dedicated N3C volunteers in the last four months to protect and preserve the North Cascades lands, waters, plants and wildlife. Also noted are several issues being monitored that may require action when fully evaluated and understood.



DEFENDING WILD AREAS AGAINST DAMAGING INDUSTRIAL USES

Why it matters: resource extraction — mining, logging, hydropower — is the most harmful use of public land. N3C strives to save what remains wild, mitigate what's been lost, and restore what's been damaged.

- Wrote to Seattle City Light requesting cost numbers for recoating the transmission towers, so we begin negotiations for a replacement aesthetic mitigation.
- Attended SCL tour of Skagit project. City Light demonstrated how they could partially re-water the Gorge Reach.
- Submitted written comments on SCL's hydro Lighting Plan, supporting National Park Service requests to shield lighting from surrounding area.
- Submitted testimony to State Legislature opposing Yakima Plan, saying it should refrain from funding water projects that do not pencil out or that contribute to additional methane generation.



ESTABLISHING, EXPANDING AND PROTECTING WILDERNESS AREAS

Why it matters: federal land designation as Wilderness and Park is the gold standard of ecosystem protection, precluding most damaging industrial and commercial exploitation.

- Commented on NOCA EA on modifications for Graybeal & Bridge Creek campgrounds. N3C is opposed to the use of helicopters and chainsaws in Wilderness, as they are prohibited under the Wilderness Act.
- Urged N3C members, in an Action Alert, to request that NOCA campsite work be done without helicopters and chainsaws.
- Sent letter to Darrington Ranger re status of Monte Cristo track and requesting the gate lock be changed. She will change lock but the track will not be decommissioned. See page 9.
- Attended webinar on new National Conservation Legacy Center National Wilderness Stewardship Alliance. Showed plans for the Missoula, MT museum, due to open in 2025.

Want to take actions that protect the North Cascades?

Join the N3C board.

Contact Phil Fenner for details at
philf@northcascades.org



PROTECTING ANCIENT FORESTS AND PROMOTING RESPONSIBLE FOREST MANAGEMENT

Why it matters: like real estate, they're just not making ancient forest anymore. We seek to restore watersheds and fisheries damaged from decades of heavy logging and road building and protect significant forests from degradation.

- ✓ Sent Action Alert opposing Mount Baker Snoqualmie National Forest plan to cut 2+ ac of old growth so Mt. Baker Ski Area can expand its parking lot. See page 9.
- ✓ Filed Twisp lawsuit against the U.S. Forest Service. In its formal Answer, USFS denies almost all our allegations, or says they are too vague. Reiterated our position in our reply to Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest Superintendent Kristin Bail. See page 13.
- ✓ Met Senator Cantwell staffer Ric Evans re Twisp to lobby for the USFS to open its input process beyond just Collaborative members.
- ✓ Hosted meeting of concerned Methow citizens in Twisp to explain our concerns.
- ✓ Filed N. Fk Stillaguamish draft EA comments opposing large-scale commercial thinning.
- ✓ Attended S. Fk. Stilly appeal oral arguments at the US 9th Circuit Court of Appeals hearing on our appeal of its 2021 ruling against our 2018 EA objection.
- ✓ Signed OregonWild letter thanking USFS for the recent withdrawal of the Flat Country logging project, and calling on the FS and Bureau of



PROMOTING ENVIRONMENTALLY SOUND RECREATION IN WILD AREAS

Why it matters: balancing access with economics and Wilderness preservation, we evaluate motorized use and places where it needs to be limited to reduce land impacts and recurring road repair costs.

- ✓ Requested meeting with NPS Regional Land Office to tell new staff about what was wrong with the last land exchange in Stehekin so it won't happen again.
 - ✓ Attended Alpine Lakes Collaborative meetings. N3C has joined this Washington Trails Association-led group, which seeks to limit recreational impacts in the Alpine Lakes Wilderness.
 - ✓ Objected to "brushhogging" on the Stehekin road. Poorly executed trimming severely damaged vegetation and left an ugly mess along the roadside.
-
- Land Management to implement Pr. Biden's executive order to conserve mature and old-growth forests by promulgating a strong and enduring forest carbon rule.
- ✓ Composed and signed-on joint letter by Washington Wild urging Gov. In-slee to support funding for ten trust land transfers totaling more than 7,000 acres in 10 counties.
 - ✓ Attended webinars on thinning problems and Dominick Della Salla of Wild Heritage presentation to League of Women Voters.



PROTECTING WILDLIFE AND WILDLIFE HABITAT

Why it matters: From microscopic fungi to top predators, the wilderness ecosystem's living members are interdependent, so keeping viable populations of each species is essential to preserve the ecosystem for future generations.

- ✓ Submitted comments on grizzly reintroduction to the National Park Service and FWS. N3C favors return of grizzlies, with concerns about source populations, helicopters, and other current plan elements.
- ✓ Met with Wilderness Watch leadership, which opposes grizzly bear reintroduction, to share thoughts on new scoping comments and methods that would minimize helicopters and other manipulations but achieve the goal of restoring the complete ecosystem, which we support.
- ✓ Attended NPCA Grizzly Bear restoration calls and reiterated our concerns about helicopters and source populations.
- ✓ Signed on to NPCA grizzly EIS letter thanking NPS and NFWS for restarting grizzly EIS.

- ✓ Attended Center for Responsible Forestry (CRF) webinar on legacy forests via WWU. Learned how CRF is trying to stop logging of legacy forests on State lands.
- ✓ Attended Climate Forests Coalition strategy call, and announced our MBSNF Carbon-Watershed Reserve position statement. See page 15.

Welcome two new N3C board members

Ric Bailey

New N3C board member Ric Bailey was executive director of the Hells Canyon Preservation Council for 25 years, working on ecosystem defense and establishment of a national preserve encompassing Hells Canyon and the Wallowa Mountains.

He worked as a river guide and outfitter in Grand Canyon and the Salmon River in Idaho, and has a history of blue collar work in his youth, including wildland fire-fighting. He was also a timber faller and long-haul truck driver.

His accolades include the Oregon Times Magazine Environmental Activist of the Year in 1993, the William O. Douglas Award for Courage from Oregon Wild in 1985, and Conservationist of the Year from Alliance for the Wild Rockies in 1990.

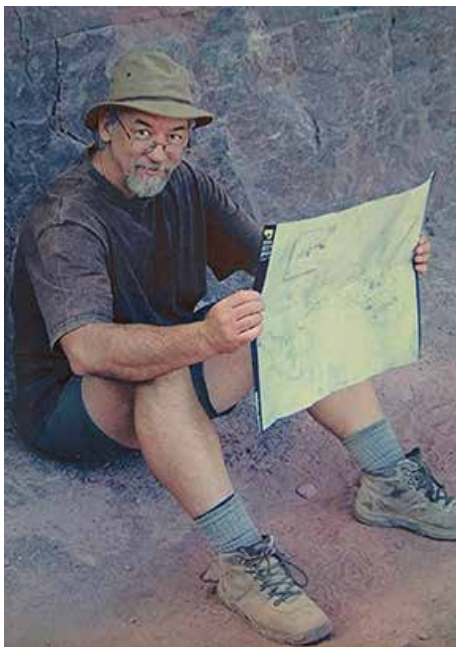
He retired to Winthrop, Washington in 2014, and presently coordinates N3C's



efforts to challenge massive logging projects in the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest. His memoir, *Lone Druid: Chronicles of a Reluctant Wilderness Activist* will be published this year.

Ken Wilcox

New N3C board member Ken Wilcox is a former N3C board member and long-time advocate for our parks, trails and wild lands in Washington state. He was active in



the campaign that led to the 1984 Washington State Wilderness Act, co-chairing the Bellingham group behind the effort to establish the Mount Baker and Noisy-Diob-sud Wilderness Areas. He was also a leader in the campaign to protect the Chuckanut Mountains, and has volunteered for a variety of similar causes, including the Skagit Environmental Endowment Commission and The Mountaineers Foundation, among others. He was also a co-founder of the Bellingham Branch of The Mountaineers.

As a consultant, he spent many years assisting communities throughout western Washington with the planning and design of their trail systems and bikeways. Ken was the editor and publisher of N3C's epic conservation history, *Wilderness Alps*. He is author of three hiking guides to north-west Washington and a walking guide to Washington, D.C., where he retired in 2018 as a senior outdoor recreation planner for a federal energy agency. Ken remains an avid hiker, cyclist, boater and traveler, and looks forward to getting back to work with N3C to help keep the North Cascades intact as one of the most spectacular wilderness areas in America.

North Fork Stillaguamish logging update

N3C recently submitted three pages of formal comments to the U.S. Forest Service in response to the latter's draft environmental assessment (EA) for the North Fork Stillaguamish Landscape Analysis. This benign-sounding federal project would in fact industrialize much of the Finney Block of the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest between Darrington and Concrete for decades to come. Just shy of 20,000 acres and trees as large as 26 inches in diameter would be subject to widespread commercial thinning or clearcuts of up to two acres, despite much of the area being managed since the 1990s as a Late Successional Reserve.

We're particularly distressed with the origins of this project, which was hatched behind closed doors between the Forest Service and an elite consortium known as the Darrington Collaborative. The Collaborative largely consists of private timber interests, local politicians, and some of the most well-known staffed enviro groups operating in our region (who've arguably been co-opted through the receipt of federal grants). Planning on the North Fork Stillaguamish was underway for close to two years before any other members of the interested public—including regional tribes—were even so much as informed about it.

N3C is also exploring whether the Forest Service's planned expansion of the Finney Block's road system for accessing and hauling cut timber would violate the Northwest Forest Plan's prohibition on increases in open road density within Key Watersheds, of which the North Fork Stillaguamish basin is part. Although the Forest Service claims in parts of its draft EA that this increase would be "temporary," another section concedes that these added roads could be reopened at some point in the future, yet there appears to be no wiggle room in the Forest Plan for even a short-term net increase of open roads here. N3C's and others' comments for this project can be found at <https://cara.fs2c.usda.gov/Public/ReadingRoom?Project=61659>

'Wildcat' mine near unpermitted Snohomish quarry operating; county, Tribe awaiting response

by Jose Vila

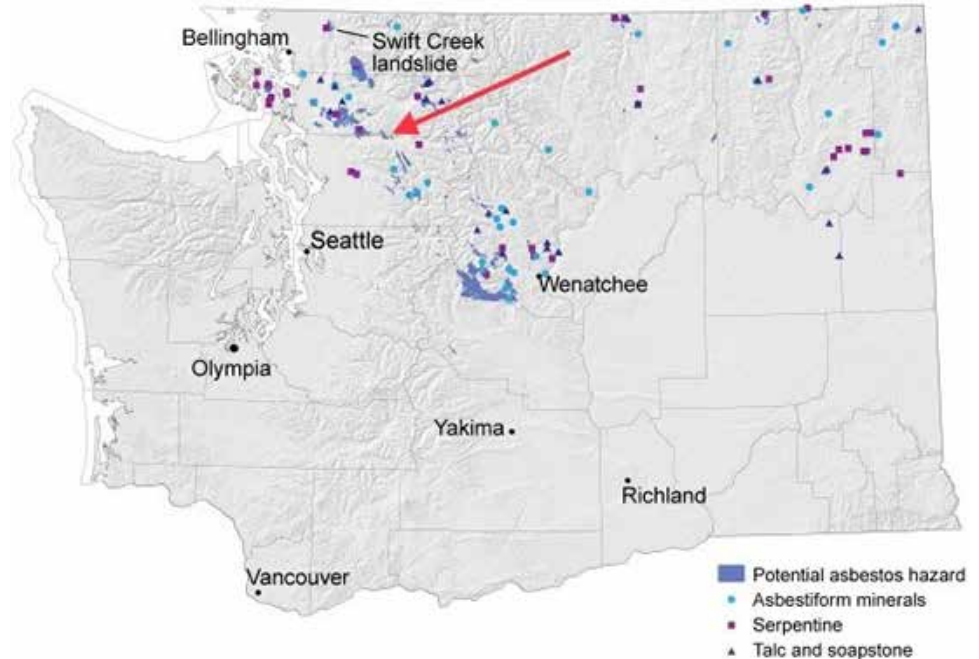
If you have taken a drive in the last few months on highway 530 along the Stillaguamish River, or on I-5 between Arlington and Bellingham, you may have noticed a lot of oversize load trucks with a huge rock, or a couple of rocks, heading from Mt. Higgins above Swede Heaven and the Stillaguamish River downriver to Bellingham Bay. From there these "jettystone" will be loaded onto barges and towed to the Oregon coast. You may also have looked across the Stillaguamish River towards Mt. Higgins and noticed the high-elevation mine site which has been rapidly expanding as the jettystone blasting and extraction operation progresses.

When Snohomish County Council member Megan Dunn received a number of calls last summer from individuals expressing concerns and asking questions about this new operation, Snohomish County Planning and Development Services (PDS) responded on October 13, "I have (been) trying to locate any information possible on this quarry. It appears to be nonconforming but I can't locate a code interpretation decision or the paperwork that was submitted."



Illicit jettystone from wildcat mine rolling down Highway 530. JOSE VILA PHOTO

On November 4, 2022, the Stillaguamish Tribe sent a letter to PDS director Mike McCrary expressing concerns that "Snohomish County may have inadvertently allowed activity without a permit for which a permit may be required under Snohomish county laws...". The Stillaguamish Tribe also stated, "These parcels are within the Tribe's traditional territories



Location of wildcat mine and asbestos hazard areas (WA State Dept. of Natural Resources).

and have proximity to sacred traditional cultural properties and archeological sites. Because permits were never issued, the Tribe has not been consulted on the activities nor its effects on Tribal cultural resources."

On February 28, 2023, the Sauk-Suiattle Indian Tribe contacted the Department of Ecology expressing concerns that "No tribal consultation or Cultural Resource Review occurred with Sauk-Suiattle Indian Tribes—the area is dangerously close to a human remains burial site of the tribe. The Tribe is looking for information and protective actions ASAP that the Tribe may take in cooperation with ECY to avoid any disturbances of the burial site."

Regarding any argument in favor of preexisting nonconforming uses, the Stillaguamish Tribe points out that Snohomish County Code states "These nonconforming uses may be expanded but only with an approved administrative conditional use permit. However, if the land area devoted to the nonconforming use would be increased by more than 100 percent... or if the expanded use would result in a significant increase in the intensity of the

use, the nonconforming use could not be expanded without a full permit process."

The Tribe also points out a DNR-mapped finding of the area's geologic formation and the potential for asbestos in the material being mined. "In addition, the DNR Hazardous Minerals Map indicates that naturally occurring hazardous materials are less than a mile from the quarry location...the Tribe is not aware if a SEPA has ever been done on any of the mining activities themselves, nor what steps have been taken to ensure that hazardous materials from the area do not negatively affect public health."

At present it appears that PDS is still trying to complete a code interpretation as it issues repeated time extensions and waits for the mine owner to respond to the county's request for information about its history of use. Meanwhile the mine continues full operation as it expands significantly in size at its new increased intensity.

DNR and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers have also been made aware of these concerns and have been asked to respond. They say they are looking at it.

Skagit Project relicensing drags on, may not deliver Final License Agreement on time

By David Fluharty

N3C is now in the third year of the official relicensing process for Seattle City Light's (SCL) Skagit River Project (the fourth year counting the voluntary pre-license set of meetings). The process creeps along driven by the deadlines set by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. Due to the slow pace it will likely be impossible to meet the deadline coming up soon for delivery of the Final License Agreement. This will delay the completion of the process and issuance of a new license to operate the Skagit Dams. No, the lights won't go off for SCL's customers. SCL will most likely be allowed to continue to operate the facilities in continuance of the current license.

What takes so long? There are many hurdles. First, there are over 50 parties signed into the license proceedings as "License Participants". This includes at least three major tribes in the Skagit River watershed and others in Canada; all relevant state and federal agencies; Skagit County and local diking/ flood control districts; as well as citizen groups, like N3C, with specific concerns, interests and expertise. Second, the list of major issues to be resolved remains much the same as 30 years ago but each has become more complex in terms of scientific understanding, legal requirements and assessment of impacts and trade-offs. Third, tribes and federal and state agencies with specific statutory requirements to be met have not completed their deliberations. Results of tribal consultations over Treaty Rights and state and federal agencies with "conditioning authority" can complicate negotiations—especially when requirements have changed since the last time around. Fourth, operational issues, like trying to set dates for meetings of multiple parties, completion of multi-year scientific field studies determined to provide essential information, etc. make for an intricate process. Fifth, climate change, listing of orca species as endangered whose favored prey is also endangered further add to the complexity of issue resolution.

Where are we now? In December 2022, SCL was required by the FERC schedule



Gorge Dam's penstock tunnel de-waters the Skagit River for 2 miles. — PHIL FENNER PHOTO

to submit its Draft License Agreement (DLA). Ideally, this Draft document would be based on substantial agreement with the license participants. Because of the delays and difficulty of reaching agreement among all license participants, SCL submitted its own version of the DLA (by my count almost 2,000 pages of text and appendices). This caused a lot of consternation among the license participants because only a few components of the DLA reflected agreements, leaving SCL to determine the content of the Draft for better or for worse.

Fortunately, the FERC Process allows license participants to comment on the DLA if they have concerns. Because this comment process is public, the extensive comments from tribes and agencies allow a glimpse into the positions being solidified by those with Treaty Rights and conditioning authority that have not otherwise been publicly available. However,

providing examples of disagreements is not permitted by N3C because, in this type of negotiation, disputes are confidential because license participants reserve the right to change positions. I can report, unfortunately, that on many of the key license elements the DLA and the tribal and agency comments show significant differences. Even FERC's comment on the DLA indicates that it finds, "the description and analysis of the proposed action lacks sufficient detail for the Commission staff to conduct its environmental analysis." (FERC letter to SCL 3-1-2023). FERC notes that of the estimated 23 Protection, Mitigation and Enhancement (PM&E) Measures, nearly all are place-holders and there is not enough information about them for FERC to comment.

Where Does N3C Stand? N3C, from the start, has adopted the position that it will support mitigation measures for the Skagit River Project that restore the integrity of the North Cascades ecosystem consistent with our mission statement, "To protect and preserve the North Cascades' scenic, scientific, recreational, educational, wildlife and wilderness values." N3C has been particularly vigilant to ensure that the Environmental Learning Center and wildlife lands purchased under the previous license continue as mitigation elements in the new license.

What's Next? according to FERC's iron-clad schedule, the Final License Agreement is to be submitted in late April. Even with some very hard work and many hours of meetings, it seems unlikely that SCL and the license participants can resolve the differences on what PM&E measures need to be in place and to develop implementation plans. It is likely that an extension of time to complete studies and negotiate agreements will be requested by SCL and supported by other license participants. Exactly what form that takes place is unknown. It is highly unlikely that FERC will not grant an extension of time to complete the SLP process because FERC would certainly be challenged on the adequacy of its review if it granted a new license.

Monte Cristo CERCLA route saga continues

By Ed Henderson

In 2009 the Secretary of Agriculture granted an exception to the Roadless Rule, paragraph 294.12(b)(2) permitting construction of a route through an Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA) to allow heavy construction equipment access to the abandoned mining sites in the vicinity of Monte Cristo village. The mining waste was collected into a Repository and covered with soil in 2015 and the heavy equipment left the site in 2016. For four years the ground water around the Repository was monitored for leakage, none has been detected. A fifth-year monitoring is required but has not been accomplished because of travel restrictions imposed by the COVID 19 pandemic.

The current condition of the route is unknown, but it was impassable to motor vehicles two years ago due to downed trees. The U.S. Forest Service (FS) may access the site this year by helicopter to monitor the ground water and check on the growth of the vegetation on the soil cover of the Repository. The FS has stated that their responsibility for the public safety of the mining waste Repository is in

perpetuity and as such the CERCLA route must remain in place.

Greta Smith, the Darrington District Ranger (DRD) has restated the FS position as spelled out in her “Dear Interested Citizen” letter of June 3rd, 2021, with a recent email to N3C that the route will not be decommissioned and will be kept in case remedial action is required at the mining waste Repository. No public motor vehicle use will be allowed but the route remains open for hiking, bicycling or horseback riding for the public. The lock will be changed at the gate at the intersection of the CERCLA route with the Mountain Loop Highway. DRD contemplates leaving the route in place to facilitate motor vehicle access for various emergency services, such as fire, search & rescue, and law enforcement.

N3C notes and objects to the access creep if DRD attempts to add motor vehicle access for emergency services to justify maintaining continued drivability of the CERCLA route. Motor vehicle access to the Monte Cristo area via the CERCLA Route in response to emergencies is neither legal,

practical nor workable in a timely fashion. The exception to the Roadless Rule was granted for the sole and exclusive purpose of the CERCLA mining clean-up. Attempts to justify other uses, however laudatory, are the camel’s nose under the tent flap and will lead to other requests for illegal motor vehicle access. N3C will vigorously oppose any endeavor to allow motor vehicle access other than that authorized for the CERCLA cleanup.

For the foreseeable future it appears that the CERCLA route will remain in place but will be unmaintained and impassable for motor vehicles. N3C will continue to closely monitor this issue and act with the goal of permanently closing and rendering the CERCLA route impassable and undrivable to motor vehicles and restoring the integrity of the IRA. This is important not only to the Monte Cristo wild backcountry site and the Henry Jackson Wilderness but to the integrity of 59,000,000 acres of Inventoried Roadless Areas in the National Forests nationwide.



Action Alert

Forest Service, Mt. Baker Ski Area to destroy old growth to enlarge parking lot

At the profit-minded urging of the Mt. Baker Ski Area, the U.S. Forest Service plans to enlarge the White Salmon parking lot by 4.9 acres to cram in more vehicles. Not only will this expand the gravel wasteland already visible from cruise altitude, but up to half of this new acreage is currently centuries-old forest—crowned by John Muir’s favorite conifer, mountain hemlock. Infuriatingly, both the ski operator and the Forest Service are intent upon literally paving paradise to put up (more of) a parking lot.

By keeping this project just below five acres, the Forest Service can avoid an environmental assessment and instead try to do its dirty work under the public radar. We can’t let that happen. Please email Ted Neff, Mt. Baker District Ranger

at louis.neff@usda.gov and the Mt. Baker Ski Area at snow@mtbaker.us and tell them both in no uncertain terms to stay away from old growth mountain hemlocks and other ancient trees with their White Salmon parking lot plans.

Please also post comments to the Mt. Baker Ski Area’s and the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest’s social media feeds, particularly Facebook. And if you’re feeling some added steam, tell Ranger Neff in your email that it’s past time for the Forest Service to get serious and start meaningfully planning for ever-increasing recreation in a way that actually safeguards our National Forest, instead of subjecting it to death by a thousand cuts.

Thank you!

New panel will review landmark forest plan

The U.S. Forest Service is forming a new advisory committee for national forests managed under the Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP). The 20-member board will recommend changes to the 1994 plan, which dictates management of 19 national forests in Washington, Oregon, and northern California.

The advisory committee will consist of 20 members approved by the Secretary of Agriculture. Membership will include:

- Up to 9 members with relevant scientific expertise
- Up to 7 members representing organizations that share a collective interest in the health and sustainability of the [affected] National Forest System lands
- Up to 4 members representing state, county, and Tribal governments.

According to the Forest Service, “the Committee will provide input on modernizing landscape management to promote sustainability, climate change adaptation, and wildfire resilience while addressing

the increased demands on Northwest Forest Plan lands.” The committee will “assist the U.S. Forest Service transition to greater proactive wildfire risk reduction and related vegetation management,” indicating more intensive “forest treatments” that will include mechanical thinning and prescribed fire.

The committee will also be tasked with advising “how to protect and promote conservation of mature, old-growth forest while ensuring national forests are resilient to high-severity wildfire, insects, disease.” Organizations like The Wilderness Society and The Pew Charitable Trusts have applauded the move as an important step toward fulfilling President Joe Biden’s Earth Day 2022 executive order, a primary goal of which is restoring and conserving the nation’s forests, including mature and old-growth forests.”

Whether such optimism is merited remains to be seen, given the committee’s role in ramping up logging under the guise of “proactive wildfire risk reduction.” The Forest Service’s reputation for having “never met a tree it didn’t want to

cut” is underscored by the Forest Service web page devoted to NWFP modernization. Even though local timber-based economies had been in decline for decades prior to creation of the NWFP, the webpage states, “The goal to maintain a viable timber industry to sustain rural communities and economies was not fully realized.” Biden’s Earth Day executive order also hedges on protecting mature and old-growth forests by including an emphasis on “strengthening local economies.”

The federal government created the NWFP in response to pressure to stop clear-cutting old-growth forests, which culminated in the northern spotted owl court ruling and a “threatened” listing under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). FSEEE Executive Director Andy Stahl spearheaded the northern spotted owl campaign, and the ESA listing significantly curtailed old-growth logging in the region.

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“The Politics of Beauty” screens at UW

John de Graaf’s new film “Stewart Udall and the Politics of Beauty” celebrates the life and legacy of the former Interior Secretary and environmental and social justice advocate. You can see this first and only film to follow the trajectory of Udall’s life from childhood through his years as Secretary of the Interior and climate activist and public official at the University of Washington on April 7, with Film Director John de Graaf attending. For more info or to purchase tickets visit <https://stewartudallfilm.org/>



Trust land transfer revitalization continues in the legislature

Due to N3C's leadership, public support is growing for trust land transfer, one of Washington's greatest and least-known conservation programs. After years of declining funding, the legislature is poised to revitalize the trust land transfer (TLT) program at the state Department of Natural Resources with a bill that formalizes the program while also funding multiple projects to put state trust land into permanent conservation status.

Final details of both the policy bill and funding levels are being worked out as we go to press, but N3C is again showing its leadership in the conservation community with this issue. We hope that TLT will be used to protect low- and mid-elevation forests in the North Cascades ecosystem as these are the largest unprotected tracts of land in the North Cascades. The Morning Star Natural Resource Conservation Area is one example but others exist around the Cascade River and beyond.

Icicle, Yakima updates

As of February 2023, the Icicle Work Group has continued to serially postpone release of its Draft Environmental Impact Statement for its proposed Eight-mile Lake dam reconstruction project in the Alpine Lakes Wilderness. Further south, the Yakima Workgroup back-burnered (i.e. postponed) its proposed Bumping Lake dam construction project several years ago; it remains one of the worst components of the Yakima Plan.



This cinnamon bear on the North Fork of Bridge Creek is doing its best impression of a grizzly. Does it know that N3C continues to support the reintroduction of grizzlies? —JIM SCARBOROUGH PHOTO

In Memoriam: The Wilderness Act in Washington State

By Jim Scarborough

The Wilderness Act, age 58, died quietly in our great state of Washington on January 3rd, at the conclusion of the 117th United States Congress. Colloquially known as Big Wild among admirers since first bursting upon the national scene in the heady days of 1964, the Wilderness Act had fallen into ill health in recent years. Big Wild drew its final breath in Washington with the U.S. Senate's unconscionable failure to pass the Wild Olympics bill over the holiday season.

In its prime, Big Wild's benevolent impact upon the diverse and often heartbreakingly beautiful landscapes of Washington is hard to overstate. From its celebrated birth through a successful 2014 bill adding the Pratt River valley to the Alpine Lakes Wilderness, Big Wild against great odds secured the highest level of land protection across 11 percent of our state's surface. Just shy of 4.5 million deserving acres, from the Twin Sisters range in the far northwest to Crooked Creek in the far southeast, still gracefully greet each sunrise and sunset as they have for millennia.

The achievements of Big Wild and its allies are the stuff of legend. There were of course the major victories, such as the Olympic Wilderness (later renamed, regrettably, for a politician), the Pasayten Wilderness, and Glacier Peak Wilderness, among others; all of them vast enough to absorb intrepid visitors for days, if not weeks, in limitless adventure and discovery. Then there are the smaller gems, no less recommended, including the primeval forests of both the Boulder River Wilderness in the North Cascades and the Salmo-Priest Wilderness in the grizzly-dotted Selkirks.

Big Wild had more to give, perhaps up to another two million acres worth. Yet we Washingtonians, collectively, had little or nothing left to give Big Wild. Gone apparently are the days when we viewed wild nature as possessing intrinsic worth—when self-willed land was seen as not just ecologically superior, but reflecting the work of a divine hand. Perhaps we should have seen this coming. Staffed enviro groups, most notoriously The Wilderness Society, now express great enthusiasm over “restoration logging” on our National Forests while barely suppressing yawns in response to newly proposed protections of the same.

Such apathy must surely start at the top, which brings us back to the demise of the Wild Olympics bill. Senator Patty Murray and her fellow Democrats in the U.S. Senate knew full well that Republicans, poised to regain control over the House of Representatives for the current 118th Congress, would soon block any path toward passing Wild Olympics. Negligently, more than ten years after this unpresuming bill

was introduced, it had plainly become a non-priority for Democrats, despite a high likelihood that the party won't regain unified control of the federal government for a generation. Some bills, it must be said, aren't necessarily intended by their sponsors to become law, but exist solely for political signaling.

Worse, the Democrats' decade-long failure to pass Wild Olympics was met with nary a hint of discontent from the bill's ostensible supporters in the “conservation community.” No public criticism was heard. No disappointment even. Little but silence. These organizations could be petrified of offending Senator Murray, or they foresee greater revenue from an endless campaign than with finished legislation. Irrespective of origin, this cultivated indifference bears more than a passing resemblance to the recent explosion of people in the backcountry who, while fully invested in self-actualizing and brand-building, are decidedly not in a mindset of aspiring to save such places.

Big Wild is preceded in death by its sibling, National Park Expansion, which was unable to survive twin injuries from comparable public apathy (aggravated by outright hostility among certain private actors) in response to earlier proposals to expand both North Cascades and Olympic national parks. Big Wild's legacy in Washington will of course live on. But as with Johann Sebastian Bach or the Beatles, no new music will be forthcoming. Our political leaders, staffed enviro groups, and most importantly the myopic donor class upon which both suckle have communicated as much, with characteristic Northwest obliqueness.

And so we are left to search for or invent other means of protection, because wild nature remains as irreplaceable and vulnerable as ever. N3C, which through Polly Dyer pioneered the concept of untrammeled landscapes for the 1964 Wilderness Act, has some ideas....

See page 15 for our Carbon Watershed Reserve statement—our newest salvo in the struggle to save wild nature.

Gift Membership Program

Give the gift of the North Cascades through our Gift Membership Program

Know someone who'd like to be part of N3C? Give them a one-year gift membership—and at a discount. Your friend will get a copy of *The Wild Cascades* immediately, as well as the next two issues.

Go to our website at www.northcascades.org and click on the new “Gift handover” icon on the home page. Enter the gift recipient's name and mailing address, then, enter your info under Credit Card Info. We suggest a \$20 donation for a gift membership. Thanks, and give a friend the North Cascades now!

If you have questions, contact us at GiftMember@northcascades.org. If you lack internet access, simply cut out the membership card on page 19, complete your information, write “GIFT” across the top and attach a note with the name and mailing address of the gift recipient.

N3C files suit against proposed Twisp Restoration Project

In November, N3C filed suit in federal district court against the proposed Twisp Restoration Project (TRP), a logging and burning operation affecting 24,000 acres in the Twisp River watershed of the Methow Ranger District on the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest.

“This litigation is a last resort to pursue equitable public process and objective analysis of wildfire science,” said N3C board member Ric Bailey, a resident of Winthrop. N3C participated in the public involvement process in good faith, submit-

ting comments, meeting with Forest Service officials, and filing an administrative objection. “Our concerns were brushed off, and no explanations were given to justify the unbalanced public process,” said N3C President Phil Fenner.

The lawsuit alleges Forest Service violation of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Administrative Procedures Act (APA), and the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA). There are five primary legal issues:

1. Segmentation of the TRP from the upcoming “Midnight Restoration Project,” which was originally a part of the TRP. The Environmental Analysis (EA) fails to consider the cumulative ecological and social impacts of the TRP and Midnight.
2. Inclusion of only one alternative in the EA and refusal to consider a citizen’s alternative offered by N3C.
3. Failure to prepare a full Environmental Impact Statement, and issuing an unjustified “Finding of No Significant Impact.”
4. Failure of the Forest Service to pre-determine which trees will

be cut, relying instead on “Conditions-Based Management,” which allows logging contractors to remove trees at will under vague guidelines.

5. Violation of FACA based on the Forest Service’s refusal to provide project information to all publics, instead giving privileged access to information and influence to the North Central Washington Forest Health Collaborative, a collection of timber companies, county government and other select public interests.

“The Forest Service claims that logging can emulate wildfire and prevent unnaturally large fires, while new studies are showing this is not the case,” Bailey added.

Logging on the first timber sale scheduled as part of the TRP is not expected to begin until spring. If necessary, N3C will seek an injunction barring logging until the case is heard.



Twisp logging, allegedly a firebreak for the Cedar Creek Fire. —RIC BAILEY PHOTOS

The Twisp logging fiasco: Forest Service doubles down on insider relationship

By Ric Bailey

On February 4, 2023, N3C met with Senator Cantwell's staffer Rick Evans to discuss our concerns with the preferential treatment being given to the North Central Washington Forest Health Collaborative (NCWFHC) in the development of two massive Forest Service logging projects planned in the Twisp River Watershed.

The two projects are the Twisp Restoration Project, which N3C has challenged in federal court, and the Midnight Restoration Project, set for its maiden revealing in April. The Forest Service had initially presented the 77,000-acre logging plan as "Twisp Restoration" but later segmented it into two separate projects, Twisp and Midnight.

On February 13, N3C wrote a third letter to Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest Supervisor Kristin Bail to object to the public involvement process for the Midnight Project, and sent a copy to Senator Cantwell with a request for a follow-up meeting.

Previously, Supervisor Bail had told N3C that "any individual or organization is welcome to submit comments, suggestions, and proposals to the Forest Service during project development."

In our latest letter to Bail, we countered that the Forest Service has not publicly announced the existence of the upcoming Midnight Project. Thus, the only publics that can submit comments, suggestions, or proposals are the 22 members of the Collaborative, which is the only entity that's been informed of its existence, and those who discovered (by happenstance) that the project exists.

Supervisor Bail also stated that "Attending NCWFHC's open public meetings is one way [for the public] to engage." Strangely, Bail had earlier agreed with us that it is the Forest Service's responsibility to ensure full and equitable public involvement, not the Collaborative's.

We responded that Collaborative co-chair Mike Anderson has informed N3C that he will no longer communicate with us due to our lawsuit challenging the Twisp Restoration Project. Moreover, recent discussions of the Collaborative regarding Midnight have been limited to Steering Committee members via closed executive session. In addition, on Septem-

ber 15, 2022, N3C wrote to the NGO members of the Collaborative asking for their help in pursuing equitable public process, but never received a response.

It is apparent that opportunities for engagement with the Collaborative have been foreclosed by the Collaborative with the approval of its five forest conservation NGOs: The Wilderness Society, Trout Unlimited, Conservation Northwest, Methow Valley Citizens Council, and The Nature Conservancy.

We reminded Supervisor Bail that the Forest Service made an exclusive approach to the Collaborative soliciting its involvement in the planning of Midnight. At the Collaborative's November 3, 2021 meeting, during which Methow Valley District Ranger Chris Furr gave a presentation, Collaborative co-chair Mike Anderson of The Wilderness Society stated:

"...When the Forest Service came to us and asked if we wanted to take on a collaborative Midnight Restoration Project... some within the Collaborative did move forward with the development of a pre-NEPA landscape analysis and prescription, which was prepared by Sean Jeronimo with Resilient Forestry under contract with The Wilderness Society...that initial contract is now done, and so we're talking about the next steps...to develop...a purpose and need statement and a proposed action based upon the landscape prescription..."

We asked Supervisor Bail how she rationalizes implementation of the closed public process with NCWFHC with the requirements of NEPA. We argued that since a proposed action becomes an alternative, and nearly always constitutes the basis for the eventual preferred alternative, it is part of the NEPA process and thus requires full and open public involvement. Otherwise, the proposed action represents a defacto, preemptive decision reached with exclusively selected publics behind closed doors that cannot be significantly altered by those who've been allowed into the process at the 11th hour.

Nearly three months after the Collaborative was informed of the existence of Midnight, the Forest Service on January 26, 2022 gave a public presentation to announce that the TRP had been reduced

by 53,000 acres. But the agency made no mention of Midnight, which would log the 53,000 acres removed from the TRP. Not only had the Service already informed the Collaborative of the existence of Midnight, it also had received the Collaborative's recommendations for a silvicultural prescription for the project.

After the changes to the TRP were finally publicly announced, the Forest Service declined requests from N3C and other publics to open a comment period so everyone could provide input on the changes to the TRP as the Collaborative had.

It seems clear the Forest Service has made a calculated decision to work exclusively with the Collaborative on Midnight, and not with any other publics.

Supervisor Bail noted in her latest missive that "because the Forest Service has been directed by Congress to increase the pace and scale of forest restoration to protect communities and wildlife habitat, we need to get this right." Toward making it right, N3C has proposed that the Service begin the process of developing a proposed action for Midnight from scratch.

The Forest Service continues to merily march forward with a closed public process it cannot even rationally defend, to enable a Twisp logging agenda despite the objections of N3C and many Methow Valley citizens.

The NCWFHC has become a "Yes Forum" that provides political and judicial cover for the Forest Service while many of its members receive generous federal grants annually for involvement in the Collaborative. (More on that issue in the next edition of *The Wild Cascades*.)

It is N3C's position that the process for public involvement should evolve from the principles of equal opportunity that all publics should expect from the federal agency that holds in its hands the fate of the critical and cherished Twisp River Watershed.

NCCC calls for end to logging and mining on MBSNF, new direction for America the Beautiful Initiative

The North Cascades Conservation Council (NCCC), a venerable advocacy group for the Greater North Cascades Ecosystem since 1957, has adopted a new position statement that forcefully calls for the permanent cessation of commercial logging and mining across the 1.7 million acre Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest (MBSNF) in Washington state.

“It’s past time to recognize and prioritize our region’s four biggest needs from the MBSNF,” said NCCC President Phil Fenner, “those being sequestration of carbon dioxide, clean and abundant water, habitat for vulnerable fish and wildlife species, and compatible recreation.”

NCCC’s vision of a Carbon-Watershed Reserve for the MBSNF, stretching from Mount Rainier to the Canadian border, is motivated in part by the U.S. Forest Service’s increasing efforts to industrialize this irreplaceable landscape. This odious trend has been sold as “restoration forestry” by the agency, though is known to NCCC as just commercial logging by another name.

“Look past the Forest Service’s soothing disinformation,” said Dave Fluharty, NCCC board member, “and you’ll see the same old bulldozed logging roads, trashed stream basins, increased risk of fire, and logging truck after logging truck hauling the public’s trees to the mill.”

NCCC has also grown concerned with creeping “groupthink” among several mainstream environmental organizations in Washington state. These well-known groups have not merely endorsed the Forest Service’s propaganda for increased logging, but in some cases are directing their own funds toward these projects while receiving federal grants themselves.

Parting company with the mutual backslapping between the Forest Service and former champions of wild nature, NCCC’s vision would redirect federal timber subsidies toward reducing the network of old logging roads which continues to impair rivers running to the Salish Sea. The end goal is a sustainable system of roads and roads-to-trails for basic public access.

“It’s make or break time,” added NCCC’s Fenner. “Our communities are suffering and even dying from repeated heat dome events, a dwindling water supply, and an unprecedented extinction crisis. The Forest Service and its enablers want to party like it’s 1980, but we have to chart a new path on the MBSNF if we hope to keep our Northwest intact for the long run.”

Carbon watershed reserve

In order to fulfill fundamental human needs and priorities from this public forest—clean and abundant water, sequestration of atmospheric CO₂, conservation of sensitive fish and wildlife habitat, and compatible recreation—both short- and long-range management emphases must change immediately. All commercial logging and mining activities on the MBSNF must be discontinued in perpetuity. Moreover, aggressive decommissioning of the antiquated road system beyond those trunk roads needed for basic access must be pursued for watershed restoration and unhindered wildlife migration.

The MBSNF must be designated and managed as a Carbon-Watershed Reserve—a model of enlightened and genuinely sustainable interaction between diverse human communities and the natural world. These goals should be pursued administratively at the earliest opportunity, as well as statutorily to ensure their permanence and enforceability.



Lake basin above the Cascade River valley. —JIM SCARBOROUGH PHOTO

Collaboratives are a failed experiment

By Andy Stahl, Executive Director
Forest Service Employees for Environmental Ethics

Reprinted with permission of the author

“If you don’t have a seat at the table, you’re probably on the menu.”
— Elizabeth Warren

It is no coincidence that the rise of collaborative groups described in Christopher Ketcham’s essay* followed the demise of the Forest Service’s logging-at-all-costs era. With visions of warring parties sitting around a fuels treatment singing Forest Service “Kumbaya” verses, the agency blandished potential collaborators with grant monies and the promise of access to its decision-making backroom, which only its traditional customers (ranchers, loggers, miners) had enjoyed previously.

Collaborative groups grew like invasive weeds. The Forest Service deftly side-

stepped the Federal Advisory Committee Act, which mandates openness and representative participation, by outsourcing the formal convening of collaboratives to its trusted confederates, especially the National Forest Foundation, which incentivized participation by passing along federal dollars to environmental groups willing to take the bait.

To the Forest Service, collaboratives, as they came to be known, could be useful rubber stamps for the agency’s agenda. Participants were heavily weighted to local interests, particularly the same traditional customers who have always dictated the agency’s agenda. The conservation collaborators were chosen for their willingness to set aside litigation and politicking in

favor of discussion and compromise. Collaboratives have never represented the national interest, nor were they intended to.

Participants overwhelmingly live in neighboring communities, and less diverse assemblages would be difficult to imagine.

Although the era of collaboratives is declining (hyperpartisanship is not fertile ground for consensus-building exercises), I expect it will continue on life-support for so long as the National Forest Foundation and the Forest Service find collaboratives to be useful cheerleaders.

To date, however, few collaboratives have become self-supporting nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in their own right. Many exist only in name, a website, a few diehard participants, and a flotilla of government agencies and bureaucrats who circle around the carcass wondering if there’s anything “there.”

Along with the gradual demise of interest-based collaboratives, the Forest Service’s reliance on one-on-one partner-



The dry slash left behind from this clearcut in the Mission project has vastly increased fire danger. —RIC BAILEY PHOTO



The justification for this clearcut on the Mission project was “aspen release.” —RIC BAILEY PHOTO

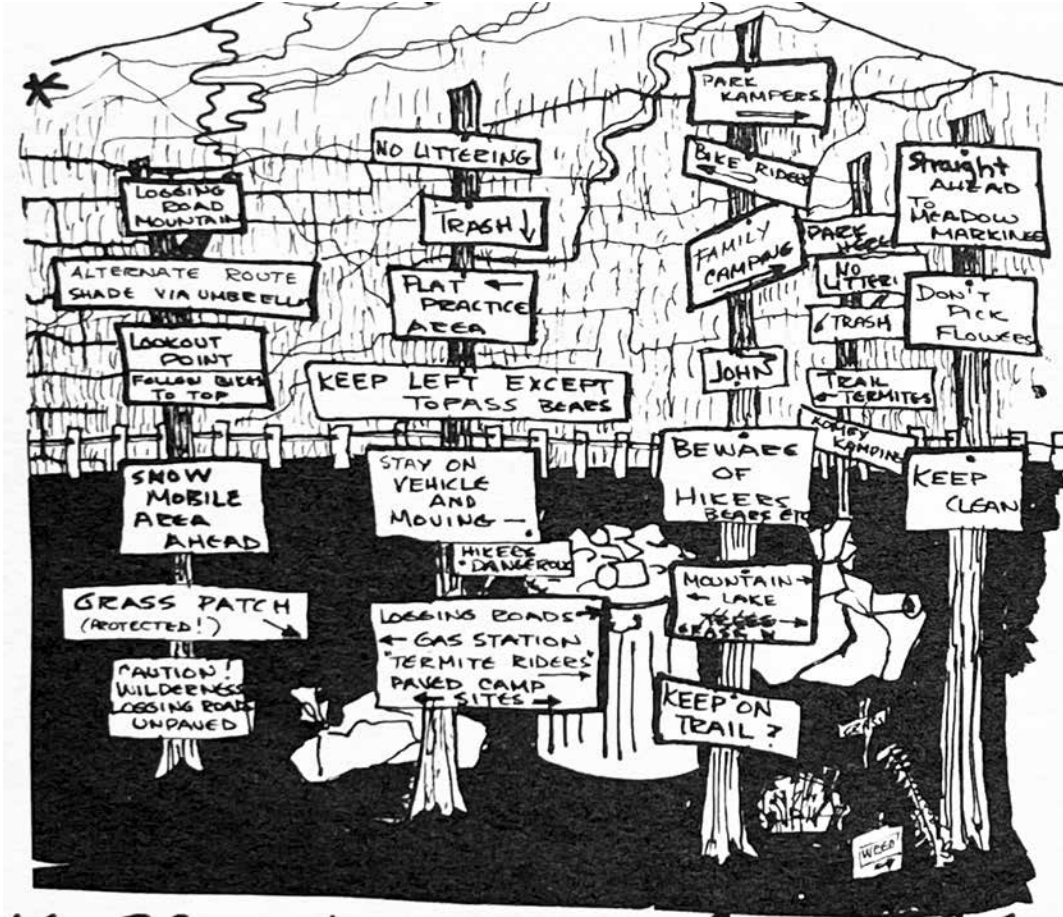
ships with NGOs grows steadily. Southern Appalachian Wilderness Stewards and Siskiyou Mountain Club maintain national forest trails and teach wilderness skills to young people. These partnerships serve well-defined needs that the Forest Service’s preoccupation with fighting fires has short-changed. Collaboratives are a failed experiment; the future is partnerships.

*<https://nationalforestadvocates.org/excerpted-from-this-land-by-christopher-ketcham/>

“It is difficult to get a man to understand something when his salary depends upon his not understanding it.”

—Upton Sinclair

Recreational supply and demand



Cartoon from The Wild Cascades, 1972.

In 2000 as user fees and permits were being implemented in our National Forests, N3C founder Patrick Goldsworthy wrote a chronology of the protection of the North Cascades that he was personally involved in. With it, he tried to show that demand for wilderness recreation was increasing continuously, and so the amount of protected wilderness, the “supply” side, needed to be increased to meet that demand.

If the supply didn't increase while demand continued to rise, it would eventually lead to over-concentration of recreation and all the inevitable impacts. Rather than charging fees for permits and imposing quotas to try to throttle the demand, he argued, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) should instead increase the supply of protected wild places for recreational demand by designating more Wilderness Areas.

Add 23 years to the milestones below, and feel free to extend it into a future of extreme overuse that even Patrick would

never have imagined. And, sadly, we have a North Cascades with few new Wilderness additions in that time.

The demand for roadless recreational experience in Washington's North Cascades has increased steadily over the past 50 years.

Patrick Goldsworthy

50 years ago (in 1950) I first hiked to Cascades Pass and saw nobody. USFS Primitive Areas existed with no guaranteed permanence. There was very little DEMAND.

40 years ago (in 1960) The USFS changed Primitive Areas to Wilderness Areas, still with no guarantee of permanence. The DEMAND was starting to grow.

36 years ago (in 1964) Congress passed The Wilderness Act to make Wilder-

ness protection permanent, to meet a fast-growing DEMAND.

32 years ago (in 1968) Congress created North Cascades National Park and Ross Lake and Lake Chelan NRAs.

16 years ago (in 1984) Congress created 25 new Wilderness Areas to meet a high DEMAND.

12 years ago (in 1988) Congress created Wilderness in 3 National Parks and 2 National Recreational Areas to meet a high DEMAND.

NOW (in 2000) the USFS is attempting to regulate the high DEMAND with permits and trail fees.

NEXT, USFS should keep Roadless Areas roadless to meet the high DEMAND, and they should become Wilderness Areas or Congressionally designated Roadless Areas. USFS should fully protect roadless areas, inventoried and uninventoried, from logging, ORVs, grazing, and mining.

Overcrowding taking a toll on Washington's backcountry

By Kurt Lauer

Having such beauty as three National Parks and millions of acres of designated wilderness so close to the Seattle area has made our region an outdoor enthusiast paradise. Though being so close to a major metropolitan area also means that many trails and popular hiking areas can be overflowing with hundreds of visitors on an average summer day. On a personal level, the visitor experience loses a certain amount of quality when you are sharing the trails with hundreds of other hikers, including many who don't share the same wilderness etiquette as yourself. But a much bigger issue than the number of daily hikers is the environmental degradation that occurs by such a high number of visitors. The increased numbers of visitors have an impact on trails, leads to the proliferation of campsites and far too many hikers engaging in improper sanitation practices.

While our National Parks can be overrun at certain times with filled parking lots, traffic backups, and cars lining the sides of roads, the backcountry areas tend to be managed better through a system of permits, designated campsites and installed backcountry toilets. The permit system has made getting to some areas pretty difficult without advanced planning, and staying in a designated national park backcountry campsite doesn't have the same wilderness feel and spontaneity as backpacking in our National Forest Wilderness Areas. The ability to not be stuck to a predetermined route or the need to secure a permit has brought more and more day hikers and backpackers to our National Forest wilderness areas.

As a result, many popular areas have seen record numbers of visitors. While it is great to see so many people taking advantage of the outdoors, certain popular backcountry areas are experiencing envi-



Backpackers at High Bridge waiting for the shuttle.

ronmental degradation. This has become very evident along the Pacific Crest Trail corridors in the Alpine Lakes and Glacier Peaks wildernesses. Hiking the entire PCT has gone from a handful of long-distance thru-hikers a day during the last weeks of August. Hiking from Red to White Pass last August, I passed a group of thru hikers every ten to fifteen minutes. The Washington Alpine Club Cabin at Snoqualmie Pass, which opens itself up to thru hikers, had to close at times, as it was seeing fifty-plus hikers a night rather than the five to ten it saw a few years ago during the busy August season. The sheer numbers of people have put a burden on the wilderness resources. Popular camping spots such as White Pass or Spectacle Lake are seeing increased user-created camp sites and walking trails.

These impacts are also very evident in the Mount Baker Wilderness, where accessible day hikes such as Lake Ann and Yellow Aster Butte see hundreds of hikers on a daily basis. An issue popular hiking areas are facing is sanitation. As more people hike, there are more people who are uneducated in regard to proper disposal of human waste. In addition to abundant views of beautiful vistas and lakes, it is becoming more and more common to encounter improperly disposed toilet paper and human waste. Unfortunately, even the outhouses at trailheads are often not properly maintained and sometimes too disgusting to use.

Addressing the problems associated with overuse is difficult. Limiting numbers of users is controversial and managing permit

systems can be difficult. Currently the only non-National Park Service Unit to have a permit system is for the Enchantments in the Alpine Lakes Wilderness, which requires permits for overnight use. Though this has helped to moderate the number of overnight users, any visitor is still aware of the incredible number of day hikers in the region. Also, the 21-mile Enchantment Loop has really taken off, especially with trail runners, as a one-day adventure. This has resulted in day use sanitation and overcrowding issues similar to those you see in other popular day hiking areas.

A proposed solution to the sanitation problem has been to increase the number of outdoor toilet facilities in the backcountry, but maintaining them is difficult and installing them often conflicts with what is allowed in a designated wilderness. There

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Overcrowding

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is also the blue bag solution of carrying out one's waste, but they entail a fair amount of education to overcome hiker reluctance to use this type of system.

N3C has not yet developed a position on this difficult and controversial issue, but it is one which members have experienced and most have some type of opinion. What do you think is the best way forward to address the problems associated with overuse? Share your feedback at wildcascades@northcascades.org. Feel free to tell us in a sentence or two what you would like to see done in regard to the issue, or if you have the time please elaborate as much as possible on any possible solutions to help us work with the Forest Service on an issue that will most likely only worsen in coming years. In the meantime, there are numerous places where one can still hike to have solitude and pristine campsites, but we hesitate to list them so these less crowded places can stay this way.

Boulder, trees block Cascade River road

As shown in the cover photo, the Cascade River road is almost completely blocked only 6 miles from Marblemount by an immense slab of rock that peeled off the face of the roadcut in early November, just a few feet before the National Forest boundary sign.

A County road crew worker near the scene said the County had called in a geologist who said he thought a jackhammer would break it up so it could be hauled away, as it is too big to even try to pick up in one piece. So they brought in a compressor and jack hammer, which didn't even make a dent!

Next thing will be to blast it, but the County doesn't have a blasting crew anymore. They have to put this one out to bid and hire a contractor, which the worker thought would take at least another month. And of course blasting might trigger more rockfall.

If the blasting is successful, then the County and Forest Service will be able to get beyond it with crews and trucks to start clearing the hundreds of trees across the road. A pedestrian can carefully get around the big rock and keep going, through many narrow cuts in down logs made by DIY chainsaw operators, to just beyond Marble Creek when the sheer number of logs across the road stopped even the chainsaw boys!

But the County can't start clearing because they can't get their trucks around The Big Rock. And nobody knows what damage may lie beyond the blowdown. The big question will be what happened over the winter up at Eldorado Creek, where the road has washed out many times before. So Cascade Pass may remain unreachable longer than usual this season, giving the meadows some more time to recover.



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Happy Creek in the upper Skagit watershed cheerfully persisted in flowing despite last winter's deep freeze. —PHIL FENNER PHOTO