

# Wilderness Trip Planner

North Cascades National Park  
Ross Lake National Recreation Area  
Lake Chelan National Recreation Area

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

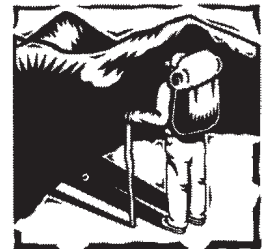


Randy Godfrey

## Getting Started

### Planning Your Route

There are countless backcountry routes and possibilities in this wild land. The diversity of climate and geography creates very different habitats on the west and east side of the crest, as well as fostering a great array of plants and animals. Cascading water is fed by over 300 glaciers and countless snowfields. Lakes are abundant. Almost 400 miles (644km) of trails, mostly in major drainages and over high passes, traverse this tremendous landscape. Your path may follow a route used for many centuries by people who have long crossed these mountains or sought food and resources here, or you may venture to an area so wild it feels as if you are the first explorer.



To help plan your trip, consider these questions: How many days in the backcountry are you planning? How many miles and how much elevation gain would you like to hike each day? What type of terrain do you most want to see? Consider the physical condition and experience level of all in your group. Check trail and snow conditions via phone or web, and review your plans with a ranger when you pick up your permit.

### When to Visit

Low elevation trails are most visited between April and October, with the driest weather from mid-June to September. Visitation to the high country (above 5,000 ft/ 1524 m) is greatest after the snows melt, generally from July through early October. The best snow mountaineering conditions are often June and July. The park is open year round, but heavy winter precipitation limits road access and increases backcountry hazards between November and March.

### How Large Is Your Group?

Group size is limited to protect wilderness values. The size limit is 12 within all trail corridors and camps, and in cross-country zones around Shuksan, Eldorado, and Forbidden peaks. The limit is six for the remainder of the backcountry. Size limits include people and stock. Due to natural terrain constraints in some places, not all camps can accommodate 12 people. Check the map on the reverse for maximum camp sizes. Groups larger than 12 are not allowed. Affiliated groups with more people must divide into separate parties of 12 or less for the duration of their stay in the backcountry, and travel and camp a

## Plan For Your Safety

### Plan for Changes in Weather

Although the North Cascades frequently enjoy a summer drought with warm, dry conditions, cool rainy weather is a possibility year-round, and higher elevations are colder. Snow is possible in any month, especially at the higher elevations and early or late season. Check the forecast before leaving home, but remember that the weather in the North Cascades can change quickly. Even in the summer, warm layers and good rain gear are a necessity, and a hat and gloves are often welcome. Dress in layers so you can regulate your body temperature by adding or removing insulation. Avoid cotton clothing—it is cold and does not insulate well when wet. Instead, bring wool, fleece or other synthetics, which perform much better in wet or cool conditions.



### Safety in the Subalpine Environment

With a few notable exceptions, most trails typically follow valley bottoms to high passes, as the terrain is usually too steep to follow high ridges. Trails over alpine passes tend to be quite steep, so plan your daily mileage estimates with this in mind. If you are looking for alpine views, remember to factor in potential snow cover in the high country as late as July or even August. Travel over steep snow requires sturdy boots, an ice axe and knowledge of how to self-arrest on steep slopes. There are no trail markers or blazes, so snow cover can make route-finding a challenge. If you are not prepared and knowledgeable about traveling over steep snow, ask a ranger for alternative ideas for your hike.

### Stream Crossings

Most major stream crossings are bridged, but not all. High water or bridge damage can also mean encountering unexpected or difficult stream crossings. Scout for the best crossing. Look for wider, shallower areas with safe downstream conditions. Cross in the morning before snow melt swells the water level. Unbuckle your pack straps, wear

## Leave No Trace

Wilderness travelers are the stewards of these last great wild places. Ultimately, it is not regulations or land designations that protect the wilderness, but rather the willingness of each of us to make good choices and travel with care. The nationwide Leave No Trace program is designed to teach the skills needed to touch the wilderness gently. Please help by learning and practicing the following principles and backcountry regulations. To learn more about Leave No Trace, visit [www.lnt.org](http://www.lnt.org), or call 1-800-332-4100.

### Plan Ahead and Prepare

Be informed about the area, including local weather, trail conditions, and regulations. Choose destinations that your group is physically in condition to handle, and know your group's limits. Visiting in small groups (four to six) gives you more flexibility and has less impact. Learn the necessary skills and know how to use your gear before you head into the wilderness, especially if you will be crossing steep snow, traveling cross-country, or mountaineering.

### Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces

**Along trail corridors:** Camp only in designated camps (marked by name posts) along trails, in the location specified on your backcountry permit. Pitch your tent on established bare sites, not the vegetation. Protect the native vegetation and reduce erosion by staying on the trail, even if it's muddy. Avoid making parallel trails, cutting switchbacks or widening trails. Some subalpine plants, such as the low-growing mountain heather, are easily damaged when stepped or camped on. Restoration is costly and often fails—it is better to protect the land in the first place.



**Traveling Cross-country:** Cross-country camping is allowed for those who are up to the challenge of off-trail travel. Seek a route over rock or snow, or spread your group out to avoid creating a trail through vegetation. Let others discover wilderness on their own—never mark a new route with blazes or cairns, or litter the backcountry with flagging tape. Select a camp that is at least a mile from established trail camps

### How to Get Your Backcountry Permit

Permits are required year round for all overnight stays in the backcountry. Permits can be obtained in person only, the day of or day before, a backcountry trip. Reservations are accepted for trips between May 27 and September 30. Visit [nps.gov/noca](http://nps.gov/noca) for more information.

Permits are not issued at trailheads or in the backcountry. Permits are available at the Wilderness Information Center in Marblemount 7 days a week during the summer to accommodate backcountry travelers. Rangers are available with firsthand knowledge of the wilderness, current trail and camp conditions and more, and are experienced at helping visitors plan trips in the North Cascades.

minimum of one mile (ideally a half day's travel) apart at all times. If you will not be passing through Marblemount, you can also obtain a permit at: Golden West Visitor Center, Stehekin; Glacier Public Service Center, Glacier; Park/Forest Information Center, Sedro-Woolley; North Cascades Visitor Center, Newhalem; Hozomeen Ranger Station (summer only, call for hours); or the USFS ranger stations in Winthrop or Chelan. If you have any questions about obtaining a permit, call the Wilderness Information Center at 360-854-7245.

### Permits Are Limited

To protect the wilderness and visitors' experiences, the number of permits issued for each area is limited. Popular areas such as around Cascade Pass, along Ross Lake, on Copper Ridge, and at Thornton and Monogram Lakes can be very busy during the height of summer, and permits can fill quickly. The busiest climbing areas are: Sulphide Glacier, Boston Basin, and Eldorado cross-country zones. To maximize your chance of obtaining a permit and finding solitude, visit these areas midweek or after Labor Day, and have a backup itinerary or climb in mind if your first-choice area is already full. Ask a ranger for less busy alternative areas to visit. There is always somewhere to go.

### Why do I need a permit?

Backcountry permits protect your wilderness experience by preventing overcrowding at camps or climbing routes, and protecting natural resources so all visitors, including future generations, can enjoy them. Permits also serve an important safety function during emergencies and wildfires, and allow managers to gather data for decision making.

secure footwear, and angle your travel across the current. Never tie yourself in while you cross. Never attempt an unsafe crossing—if in doubt, turn back or wait for help.

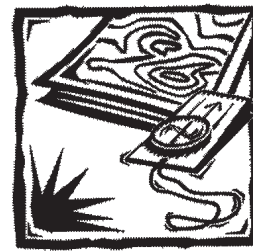


### Treat Drinking Water

*Giardia lamblia* and other water-borne contaminants are a possibility. To protect yourself, purify your drinking water by using a water filter, purifying tablets, or boiling fully.

### Cross-country Travel

Leaving the trail can be an exhilarating and very wild experience. If you have not traveled cross-country in the Cascades, however, ask an experienced ranger for advice on your intended route. Most cross-country travel is undertaken by mountaineers with climbing objectives. Some routes or lakes might look "easy" or close on the map, but thick brush and very steep terrain can quickly turn an off-trail adventure into an unintended epic, with hours required to travel even very short distances. Cross-country "shortcuts" can be very time consuming or even dangerous. Plan a realistic trip.



### Mountaineering Safety

The numerous peaks and glaciers of the North Cascades present a variety of challenges and rewards for the mountaineer: classic mixed mountaineering routes, glacier travel, technical rock climbing, and scrambling, all within a premier wilderness setting. If you are new to the sport, join a club or take a class to learn more about the challenges, risks, and rewards of this activity, including proper instruction on the equipment and skills you need to stay safe. The Wilderness Information Center has climbing rangers on hand to assist you in planning your climb.

and one-half mile from the trail. Choose a campsite away from water on a durable surface such as forest duff, snow, or rock slab. Avoid subalpine vegetation, which is easily damaged—all subalpine meadows are closed to camping. Leave your site natural, without wind-blocks, trenches, or alterations. Camp in the zone indicated on your permit.

**Other tips include:** Sandals or camp shoes are a welcome change for your feet at day's end, and cause less impact to soils and vegetation around your camp. They are useful for stream crossings as well. A collapsible water carrier reduces the number of trips and trampling to a water source and allows you to wash well away from lakes and streams.

### Dispose of Waste Properly

**Use toilets where provided.** Pit or composting toilets are located at most designated campsites. If there is no toilet, walk at least 200 feet (63 m) from camp or water, and dig a small "cat hole" about six to eight inches (15 to 20cm) deep. Look for organic soil—rocky mineral soil does not break down waste as efficiently. Pack out toilet paper. Feminine products should never be buried; they are slow to decompose and animals may dig them up. Double bag and pack them out. Urine is salty and thus very attractive to animals, especially deer. Urinate well away from your camp, on bare ground or rock, so that animals do not paw up the site.



**When traveling high in the alpine or on snow or glaciers,** there is often no organic soil in which to dig a cathole. Do not bury waste in the snow, as this pollutes the water and the route. Pack out human waste from these fragile areas using a blue bag or other human waste pack-out system. Call or stop by the Wilderness Information Center for more information.

**If you wash,** carry water at least 200 feet (61 m) from streams or lakes and avoid the use of soap (use sand or a pot scraper to scour your dishes instead). Scatter strained dishwater and disperse toothpaste on bare ground well away from camp or water sources. Check your campsite before leaving—all trash and leftovers must be packed out. Never bury or burn food or garbage, as the smell attracts animals!

### Can I Bring my Pet?

Dogs and other pets are not allowed within the national park except on a leash on the Pacific Crest Trail. Pets are allowed on leash within the Ross Lake and Lake Chelan National Recreation Areas. Service animals are allowed for those with disabilities.

### Traveling with Pack Animals

Pack animals (horses, mules, burros or llamas) are allowed on a variety of stock trails and at stock camps, as trail conditions permit. Some trails are closed to stock. Stock may also travel cross-country on the eastern side of the park around Rainbow, Boulder, and Fourmile Creeks. Note that all party size limits apply to people and stock combined. Grazing (with permit) is allowed in some parts of the recreation areas, but not in the national park—carry weed-free hay or pellet feed instead. Hikers should yield the right of way to all stock, and speak softly with the riders about how to proceed. For more information on stock use, contact the Wilderness Information Center.



### Hunting

Hunting is prohibited in North Cascades National Park and game cannot be transported through the park. Hunting is permitted in Ross Lake and Lake Chelan National Recreation Areas with a license and in accordance with Washington State Law.

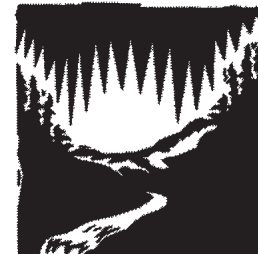
### Fishing

There are a variety of native and non-native fish in the park's lakes and streams. Although many creeks run too fast to provide good fishing, many of the lakes have ample, if small, fish. Fishing is allowed in accordance with Washington State Law and with a state fishing license. Obtain your license before arriving at the park, as they are not available at ranger stations. Many lakes are high elevation and do not allow campfires. Plan to fry your catch over a campstove, and dispose of fish entrails in deep water, fast streams, or scattered widely over an area far from any camps.



### In Case of Emergency

Leave an itinerary with someone at home, including: trip route, location of your vehicle, and when you plan to return. This information can be critical in initiating a search or rescue. If you get lost, the best thing you can do is stay put and wait. Keep yourself as comfortable as possible, and make yourself noticeable using a whistle, bright clothing, or a signal mirror. If injured, treat the injury using your first aid supplies, make the person as warm and dry as possible, and send for help. Keep in mind that a rescue effort could take hours or days, depending on the weather and terrain. Emergency locator beacons can also speed an emergency response and provide rescuers with your precise location. Know how to use and deploy your rescue device. A false alarm wastes time and endangers rescuers.



### Cell Phones?

If you bring a cell phone for emergencies, be aware that tree cover and steep mountain walls block most coverage. Some climbers at high elevations have used cell phones to successfully report an emergency, but never rely on a cell as your sole emergency evacuation plan. If calling via cell, state your name and phone number up front, in case the connection is lost. Cell calls from wilderness areas often reach dispatch centers far from your location, sometimes in Canada, and it may take hours for the logical responding agency to receive the information. Ask a ranger for the best phone number to call for emergencies in the park.

### Leave What You Find

Treat our natural and cultural heritage with respect. Leave plants, rocks and artifacts as you find them, so that others may discover and enjoy them. Avoid altering your site: Digging out rocks, moving logs, building windbreaks or trenching all disturb the natural area. Leave the land as you found it. Edible fruits and berries may be gathered for personal consumption (1 liter per day). Mushroom collecting is not allowed.



### Minimize Campfire Impacts

Camp stoves are recommended for all cooking. They are clean, light, efficient and don't scar the land or deplete natural wood sources. Fires are not allowed at some camps, including those in the subalpine, nor in any cross-country areas. Where fires are allowed, build a small, low-impact fire in an existing firepit at an established camp. Burn only small pieces of dead and downed wood that fit entirely within the firepit. Be sure the fire is dead out before leaving. Try these alternatives to an evening fire: bring a candle lantern, or bring a star chart and identify constellations.

### Respect Wildlife

Many animals are attracted by food smells, strong odors, and salt. Seeking food from humans and loss of natural wariness are harmful to wildlife. Many bears (mostly black, but grizzlies are possible) make their home in the North Cascades, and sightings are not uncommon. Deer, mountain goats, marmots and other rodents are attracted to the salt in urine and sweat, and they have chewed or ruined unattended gear, clothing, and boots. Help protect yourself, your gear, and all wildlife by following these requirements and tips:

**Store all food and scented items properly.** Bears learn quickly and return to areas where they obtain food. This can be unhealthy for the bear and problematic for you or the next visitor. To secure your food from wildlife, you will need a waterproof sack dedicated to smelly food and garbage storage, plus at least 50 feet (15m) of lightweight cord.

## For More Information

### North Cascades National Park

**Wilderness Information Center**  
Open seasonally (May – October)

7280 Ranger Station Road  
Marblemount, WA 98267  
360-854-7245

[noca\\_wilderness@nps.gov](mailto:noca_wilderness@nps.gov)

### Park/Forest Information Center

Open year-round  
810 State Route 20  
Sedro-Woolley, WA 98284  
360-854-7200

[www.nps.gov/noca](http://www.nps.gov/noca)

### Maps & Books

Trip planning materials such as maps, and trail and natural history guides are available at ranger stations or through outdoor retailers. The following map series are available for the park complex:

- Trails Illustrated map, covers the entire park, good trip planning tool. Scale 1:100,000.
- Green Trails maps, smaller scale 15 minute area maps. Scale 1:69,500.
- USGS map, finest scale 7.5 minute maps, most topographic detail, some camp and trail information outdated, best for mountaineering and cross-country travel. Scale 1:24,000.



NPS / Rosemary Seifried

## Backcountry Trip Essentials

The following items are useful or necessary for safe and comfortable backcountry travel in the North Cascades.

- Navigation tools (map and compass)
- Sun protection for skin and eyes (especially for snow travel)
- Weather protection (extra clothing layers, raingear, hat, gloves)
- Shelter from weather or insects (tent, bivvy)
- Sleeping bag and pad
- Sturdy boots
- Headlamp with extra batteries
- Lightweight campstove and adequate fuel
- Adequate low-odor food, plus extra for emergencies
- Bear canister or 50 feet (15 m) of cord + weatherproof food bag
- Water treatment (filter, treatment tablets, or fuel to boil water)
- First aid kit
- Emergency signaling device (whistle or mirror) + fire starter
- Repair kit (duct tape, pocket knife, etc.)

Depending on the type of trip you are planning, you may also need or want:

- Ice axe (essential for steep snow crossing)
- Blue bags / human waste pack out system (snow w / glacier camping)
- Trowel for human waste disposal (where no toilets are provided)
- Camp / water shoes (for camp wear or stream crossing)
- Insect protection (long-sleeve clothes, headnet, bug repellent)
- Collapsible water jug (to minimize trips to a water source)
- GPS and/or altimeter

Hang the stuff sack with food, cooking gear, garbage, and any other scented items at least 15 feet (4.6m) from the ground and 5 feet (1.5m) out from the limb and tree trunk. Since trees with large limbs are not always present, this technique can require time and ingenuity. Avoid trampling fragile vegetation in your search for a tree.

**Use an animal resistant food storage canister.** This is an excellent alternative to a food hang or for use in areas where trees are limited. The Wilderness Information Center loans out canisters free of charge, as do other ranger stations. **Canisters are required in some areas.**

**Keep a clean camp and minimize smells.** Establish a cooking area well away from your sleeping and food storage areas, and keep tents, clothing and sleeping bags clean and free of food scents. Avoid using strongly scented items, such as cosmetics, cleansers or strong-smelling foods. Seal all leftovers and garbage in plastic bags and secure with your food away from wildlife. Whenever possible, sleep at least 100 yards (91 m) away from food storage and cooking areas. Never bury or burn leftovers or trash, or throw them in the toilets—the smell will linger and attract rodents or bears.

**Leave pets at home.** They can disrupt native wildlife or get injured or lost. Many hikers wish to enjoy natural surroundings without interference from domestic animals. Pets are prohibited in the National Park—be sure you know where your trail takes you.

**Enjoy wildlife from a distance**—never approach or feed a bear or any other wild animal. Report all bear and other unusual wildlife sightings or interactions to the nearest ranger station.

### Be Considerate of Other Visitors

Respect the wilderness experience of all visitors. Keep your party size small. Be aware of noise levels and let nature's sounds prevail. Bright jackets and gear shrink the wilderness. Where possible, choose earth tones and blend into your surroundings. Wilderness is a respite from modern distractions, so consider leaving your cell phone at home.





# North Cascades

## Stephen Mather Wilderness

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National Park Service  
 U.S. Department of the Interior



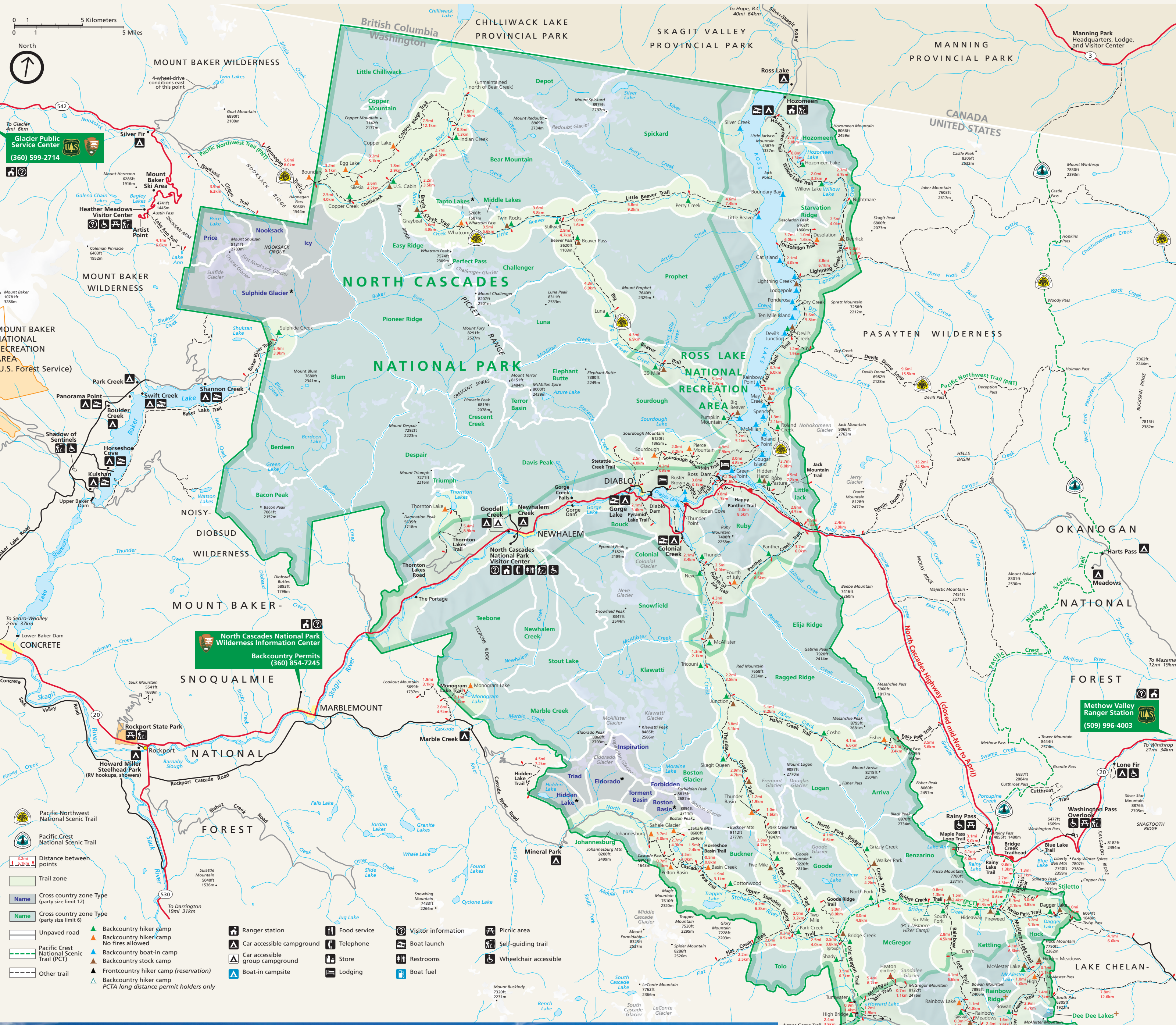
### An Enduring Legacy of Wilderness

"[I]t is hereby declared to be the policy of the Congress to secure for the American people of present and future generations the benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness." — Wilderness Act, 1964

The North Cascades National Park Service Complex includes 684,000 acres in three units: North Cascades National Park, Lake Chelan National Recreation Area, and Ross Lake National Recreation Area. Congress has designated 94% of the Complex as the Stephen Mather Wilderness.

Today, as in the past, wilderness is an important part of every American's story. People seek wilderness for many reasons: physical or mental challenge; solitude, renewal, or a respite from modern life; or as a place to find inspiration and to explore our heritage. What draws you to visit wilderness?

The Stephen Mather Wilderness is at the heart of over two million acres of some of the wildest lands remaining—a place "where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man...." Untrammelled (meaning "free of restraint," "unconfined") captures the essence of wilderness: a place where the land's natural processes prevail, and the developments of modern technological society are largely unnoticeable. Here, we are visitors, but we also come home—to our natural heritage. It is a place to experience our past and a place to find future respite. This is the enduring legacy of wilderness.



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