Conservation in a Changing Climate

How Washington Wild is Working for a Healthier Climate Future

Conservation Voices:
Community and Climate Resilience

Big Win for Salmon Habitat in Washington State Legislature

Save the Date!
WILD NIGHT OUT 2020
Thursday, October 8
5pm - 8:30pm
Axis Pioneer Square

Silent Auction | Live Auction
Local Food and Beverage | Awards

Photo Courtesy of Andy Porter
As a life-long resident of Washington State, I’m deeply concerned about our warming planet. For three generations, my family has lived in the Pacific Northwest. I grew up hiking, fishing, climbing, and skiing in Washington’s wilderness areas with my father. For most of my life, I took these wild places for granted.

Now that I’m a father, I want to do everything I can to make sure Washington’s wild places are here for my grandkids’ grandkids. The topic of climate change is resonating in political, social, and policy debates nationwide. In this edition of our newsletter, you will find an in-depth look at how Washington Wild is focusing in on climate change. Protecting our last remaining ancient forests protects sources of clean water and preserves salmon spawning streams and other critical wildlife habitat, ultimately helping to mitigate the impacts of our warming planet.

We know that many are navigating rough waters right now as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. We want you to know we are still here protecting our wild places for a more resilient climate future.

Mark Walters
Washington Wild Board President
“For Port Townsend, the almost 20,000 acres of untouched, roadless forests in the Big Quilcene watershed provide natural filters for clean and safe drinking water to our residents. Protecting our municipal watershed from threats like mining and logging provides a buffer against the impacts from climate change that are already being felt.”

Michelle Sandoval, Mayor of Port Townsend

atmosphere, exacerbating the effects of climate change.

Protecting what we have left is critically important to hold the line against a changing climate. That is why Washington Wild has led efforts statewide to defend our last remaining unlogged ancient forests like those protected by the 2001 National Forest Roadless Area Conservation Rule. The more than 60 million acres of roadless areas nationwide, including 2 million acres in Washington State, have come under attack by current and previous administrations. These forests provide ecological, recreational, and therapeutic benefits to many.

PRESEVING SOURCES OF CLEAN WATER

Everyone needs clean water. As we have already seen throughout the U.S. and the world, the quantity, quality, and availability of water are all impacted by a changing climate. More than 60 million Americans rely on safe and clean drinking water sourced in upper watersheds of national forest lands. Here in Washington, that includes residents in communities like Everett, Seattle, Port Townsend, Bellingham, and Leavenworth. The forests surrounding the sources of our water filter contaminants, retain water during flood and drought, and preserve the cold temperatures of our streams and rivers for salmon and wildlife. As founding members of the Wild Olympics Campaign, Washington Wild is working to protect more than 126,000 acres of old-growth forest in the Olympic National Forest and 464 miles of Wild and Scenic Rivers on the Olympic Peninsula. Legislation that recently passed the U.S. House of Representatives would protect the benefits provided by key watersheds around the Olympic Peninsula.

Over the past five years, the campaign has worked with residents in every single community on the Peninsula to build diverse support, listen to concerns, and get feedback to shape the proposal. More than 12,000 Peninsula residents have written letters or signed our petition, and more than 800 Peninsula and Hood Canal area-businesses, farms, faith leaders, tribes, elected officials and conservation, outdoor recreation and civic groups have endorsed Wild Olympics. Together we are fighting for healthier forests, a healthier climate, and healthier communities.

DEFENDING WILDLIFE AND FISH HABITAT

After two centuries of efforts to “settle” the west, white settlers have altered the landscapes of the western United States through logging, mining, dam building, and other development. One of the many consequences of these actions has been a significant loss of habitat for a variety of species. While efforts have been made by federal and state agencies, tribes, and conservation organizations to restore habitat, such efforts are costly and challenging. Not surprisingly, it is next to impossible to replicate natural systems. Wildlife biodiversity depends primarily on a healthy habitat. Just like humans, eagles, bears, and salmon need the right balance of temperature, fresh water, food, shelter, and travel corridors. Climate change is altering key habitat elements that are critical to wildlife’s survival and putting natural resources in jeopardy. For example, many species take their cues about when to migrate, flower, nest, or mate from seasonal changes in temperature, precipitation, and daylight. Climate change is confusing those signals and forcing some species of fish and wildlife to the brink of extinction.

Protecting our watersheds and keeping them healthy will result in increased resilience for our salmon and local ecosystems. Since 2017, Washington Wild has coordinated a growing international coalition of more than 140 conservation, recreation, and wildlife organizations, local businesses, tribes and First Nations, and elected officials who oppose mining and logging in the Canadian Headwaters of the Skagit River. Imperial Metals, the company proposing to mine in the unprotected “donut hole” of public land nestled between Manning and Skagit Provincial Parks, was responsible for the infamous Mount Polley mine disaster of 2014, which spilled more than 2.6 billion gallons of toxic sludge into the Fraser River watershed. It remains today one of the biggest environmental disasters in Canadian history. The risk of such a disaster in the Skagit, home to Puget Sound’s healthiest remaining runs of wild salmon and steelhead—vital food for the Southern Resident orca whales as well as a livelihood for tribal nations and other frontline communities—is simply unacceptable.

December, 2019, brought good news when the British Columbia Government announced that they would halt future plans to log in the Canadian headwaters of the Skagit. A decision on the mining permit has yet to be delivered, but public pressure continues.

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Scott Schuyler, Natural Resources Director for the Upper Skagit Tribe

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Glaciers on Mount Rainier are melting at six times the historic rate.

Intact forests retain water and prevent flooding, soil erosion, and drought. In one year, an acre of forest can absorb twice the CO2 produced by the average car.

Warmer temperatures and sustained drought are leading to more intense wildfires. 2.2 million acres have burned in Washington since 2015.

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Climate change is one of the most urgent environmental issues of our time and arguably all of human history. By some reports, the earth's climate has warmed by a 1 degree Celsius since the mid 20th Century, resulting in rapidly melting arctic sea ice, rising sea levels, more extreme weather events including hurricanes, heat waves, and catastrophic wildfires, as well as the endangerment and extinction of entire species.

What does this have to do with Washington Wild? Turns out, quite a bit. Many of the impacts of climate change and potential solutions are local. As a statewide conservation organization, Washington Wild leads in efforts to protect our wild lands and waters and combat and build resilience to climate change.

Climate Change Hits Home

Forests are among the largest stores of living carbon on the planet. Forests in the Pacific Northwest store more climate-disrupting carbon than almost anywhere else in the world.

Indigenous peoples are the original stewards of the lands and waters of the Pacific Northwest and have lived and continue to live here since time immemorial.

100 mature trees intercept approximately 139,000 gallons of rainfall per year.

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I’ve spent time in forests across many landscapes across the West. I grew up aware of the impacts of climate change, driving me to study environmental justice issues at the University of Washington and make it my life’s work to address many of the intersections of climate justice. My experiences have taken me from fieldwork on the Olympic Peninsula studying the Indigenous practices of burning prairies, to the Cascades looking at how fires and climate change will shape forest ecosystems in the years to come. I currently work in urban forest restoration and urban farming in the city of Seattle, doing the work that makes me feel whole.

These days, I step outside my apartment, hands sanitized and work boots tied tight. I walk down my street for 30 minutes, smiling at the familiar faces in the neighborhood and listening to my favorite bops in my headphones. I’m thinking about friends who lost all their sources of income, how to keep my phone and hands clean, thinking of what I’ll be able to do at the farm today, thinking of the Black community I am part of and the powerful ways we organize as a means of survival, and finally, of course, the looming climate crisis. I take my headphones off as I arrive, grateful for the rare Seattle sun and the old school shower them with some water, and leave them in the climate crisis, driving me to study environmental issues at the University of Washington and make it my life’s work to address many of the intersections of climate justice.

The fight against climate change doesn’t begin with the number of trees we have on this planet or the preservation of ecosystems across the globe. It begins with our relationship to our environment and how we value it, especially in terms of forests. The reciprocal relationship we have with trees sustains the balance we need to mitigate the impacts of the climate crisis. The carbon they sequester is just the beginning of why we need forests. We are experiencing a great imbalance when it comes to resource exploitation as a result of capitalization and colonialism.

Washington Wild is building broad coalitions of stakeholders to protect our last remaining old-growth forests, like those in the Cascades and Olympic Peninsula where I studied, working with Indigenous communities, faith leaders, local businesses, and more to address the impacts of climate change on our wild lands and waters.

When we learn to take care of the vulnerable communities in our society, we will have to care of the vulnerable forests and ecosystems that keep us in balance and face the climate crisis head on.

“A decade-long fight to protect salmon habitat on Washington’s rivers and streams came to a positive conclusion on March 18, as Governor Jay Inslee signed motorized suction dredge mining reform into law. The legislation (ES HB 1261) passed the State Legislature earlier in March with bipartisan support.

It provides common sense reform of the largely unregulated practice of motorized suction dredge mining. The practice involves turning over gravel in streams to look for gold and dumping the contents back into the river. The disturbance of gravel and sediment destroys spawning habitat for salmon and releases pollutants into the water column.

The new law bans motorized suction mining on the roughly 11,000 miles of streams that have been federally designated as critical salmon habitat. It allows the practice to continue on the remaining 61,000 miles of rivers statewide. Washington State joins neighboring Oregon, Idaho, and California, who have passed similar safeguards for salmon habitat.

In 2018, Washington Wild joined an established coalition including Trout Unlimited, the Sierra Club, the Snoqualmie Tribe, Fish Not Gold, and Clark Skamania Flyfishers, that has been advocating for this important safeguard in Olympia for a decade. Washington Wild recruited 142 conservation, recreation, and wildlife organizations, and local businesses to sign on to a letter to the state legislature. Washington Wild also supported the publishing of a dozen articles, editorials, and letters-to-the-editor in local news outlets during the 2020 legislative session.

Motorized suction dredge mining reform protects the significant investment made in salmon habitat restoration by federal, state, municipal governments, and tribes. It bolsters future efforts toward recovering our salmon and orca whale populations.

By Hannah Wilson

Hannah Wilson is an Outreach Specialist for Earth Corps and a 2020 Sherry award winner. Her current work is focused on Earth Corps’s partnership with Yei the People and the Black Farmers Collective based in the Central District, the historically Black neighborhood in Seattle. She is passionate about environmental restoration and the need to recenter the ways environmental organizations partner and engage with communities, especially when engaging with communities of color in a way that is equitable and just in the face of increasing climate change, gentrification, and resource exploitation.

“Trout Unlimited has led the fight for protecting salmon habitat from the impacts of suction dredge mining in the state legislature for years. We finally passed the legislation this year and Washington Wild was a big reason why. Their ability to gather diverse stakeholders from around the state and help us with a sustained effort to highlight this issue in local news made a big difference.”

Crystal Eilot, Washington Habitat Director for Trout Unlimited.
Wild Profiles

JEFF CHANDLER
Washington Wild Volunteer

Jeff Chandler is a dedicated volunteer with Washington Wild. Since 2018, he has been lending his skills in graphic design and illustration to the Brewshed® Alliance. You will have seen his work on the last two Brewshed Beer Fest event posters, where he blends natural elements like rivers, mountains, and forests with craft beers (see below right).

“I got involved with Washington Wild because I wanted to help tell the story of clean water in Washington,” Chandler said. “The Brewshed program is the perfect way for me to merge my passions for design, the environment, and local craft beer.”

Chandler grew up in the outdoors, canoeing and hiking in the wildernesses of New England. In 2017, he came to find a home in the Pacific Northwest. He is always looking for opportunities to combine his creative interests to help communicate environmental science and share the incredible interconnectedness and diversity of the natural world.

“The art has the ability to reach new audiences and inspire people,” Chandler said. “I am happy to help the organizations I partner with raise awareness about their important work.”

When not drafting nature-inspired designs, Chandler can be found working at School’s Out Washington, a state-wide organization that provides services and guidance for organizations to ensure all young people have safe places to learn and grow when not in school. ▲

Learn more about Washington Wild and our supporters at wawild.org

BALE BREAKER BREWING COMPANY

Crafting fresh-off-the-farm beers from the middle of a hop field, Bale Breaker Brewing Company is a family-owned brewery located in the Yakima Valley. Backed by four generations of hop farming experience, Bale Breaker started in 2013, and has since become the fourth largest independent craft brewery in Washington.

As they have grown over the years, so have their sustainability practices and community engagement. Bale Breaker joined Washington Wild’s Brewshed® Alliance in 2018 to help protect the wild watersheds that sustain the local craft beer industry. Recently, this partnership led Bale Breaker to support Washington Wild with a charity beer called “Brewshed IPA.” This super-sustainable brew was made with Salmon-Safe certified ingredients and brewed with barley and wheat grown and malted in the Pacific Northwest.

“The concept around this charity beer was to highlight the importance of protecting our healthy watersheds for our salmon, Southern Resident orca, and us,” said Kevin Quinn, co-owner of Bale Breaker. “To make great beer, you need to have a pure and quality water source. So much of our industry relies on this.”

Brewshed IPA featured a collaborative can design and was available in PCC markets beginning in October 2019. Bale Breaker ended up raising $2,000 for Washington Wild.

As Bale Breaker looks towards the future of the craft beer industry and the ingredients they use, sustainability is one of their key goals.

“We’re focusing on the hyper-local,” Quinn said. “At a brewery that already grows our own hops, we’ve started taking it one step further by growing our own barley, and in 2020 are releasing the second and third installments of our 100 percent Homegrown IPA Series, Sown & Grown.”

Bale Breaker’s goal is to brew beers that reflect their family’s farming history, the unique landscape of the Yakima Valley, and promote local, farm-grown products in the marketplace. ▲

Conservation Updates

SEATTLE PUBLIC MEETING FOCUSES ON RETAINING PROTECTIONS FOR ROADLESS FORESTS

In November 2019, Washington Wild and a variety of conservation and recreation organizations joined Senator Maria Cantwell (D-WA) to hold a community public meeting at the Seattle REI flagship store. The goal was to offer the public an opportunity to weigh in on old-growth protections in our national forests. A group of more than 100 community members were in attendance. More than 30 gave public testimony, voicing support for a rule that protects a third of the country’s national forests from logging and road-building. The Roadless Rule protects nearly two million acres in Washington State, including places like Liberty Bell in eastern Washington, the Olympic Peninsula’s South Quinault Ridge, and the South Cascades’ Dark Divide.

WASHINGTON WILD EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TESTIFIES IN OLYMPIA IN SUPPORT OF SKAGIT HEADWATERS

In February 2020, Washington Wild’s Executive Director testified in Olympia before the House Rural Development, Agriculture, and Natural Resources Committee in support of Senate Joint Memorial 8014. This measure requests that the British Columbia Government work with the City of Seattle and the Skagit Environmental Endowment Commission to prevent logging and mining in the unprotected areas of the Upper Skagit watershed. Since 2017, Washington Wild has coordinated a growing international coalition of more than 140 conservation, recreation, and wildlife organizations, local businesses, tribes and First Nations, and elected officials who oppose mining and logging in the Canadian Headwaters of the Skagit River.

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