

NORTH CASCADES INITIATIVE: ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES



Photo courtesy of National Park Service

*Prepared for The Wilderness Society
by Cedar River Group
June 9, 2010*



CEDAR RIVER GROUP

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INTRODUCTION

In early 2010 The Wilderness Society asked Cedar River Group to interview a range of interested parties associated with the North Cascades Initiative (NCI) to assess the progress of the Initiative and identify strategic options for moving forward. The list of those to be interviewed was developed after conversation with the Advisory Work Group, and the TWS staff. In addition to Cedar River Group's interviews, several other interviews were conducted by TWS staff. Those interviewed included:

Environmental Allies

Lisa Bellefond, Federal Policy Coordinator, The Nature Conservancy
Bob Bugert, Executive Director, Chelan Land Trust
Joan Crooks and Rod Brown, Washington Environmental Council
Mitch Friedman, Executive Director, Conservation Northwest
Tom O'Keefe, American Whitewater
Steve Whitney, Program Manager, Bullitt Foundation

Other External Stakeholders

Sharon Dillon, Skagit County Commissioner
Doug England, Chelan County Commissioner
Carolyn Eslick, Mayor of Sultan, and Debbie Copple, Director Sky Valley Chamber
Jim Gallagher, Owner, Yakima River Fly Fishing Store, Cle Elum
Becki Heath, Supervisor, Okanogan/Wenatchee National Forest
Chip Jenkins, Superintendent, North Cascade National Park
Ron Judd, Senior Advisor to Governor Gregoire
Dale Neumann, Pacific Northwest Four Wheel Drive Association
Dave Sabold, Co-Founder, Methow Land Conservancy
Don Super, Outfitters and Trail Guides Association
Rufus Woods, Publisher, Wenatchee World

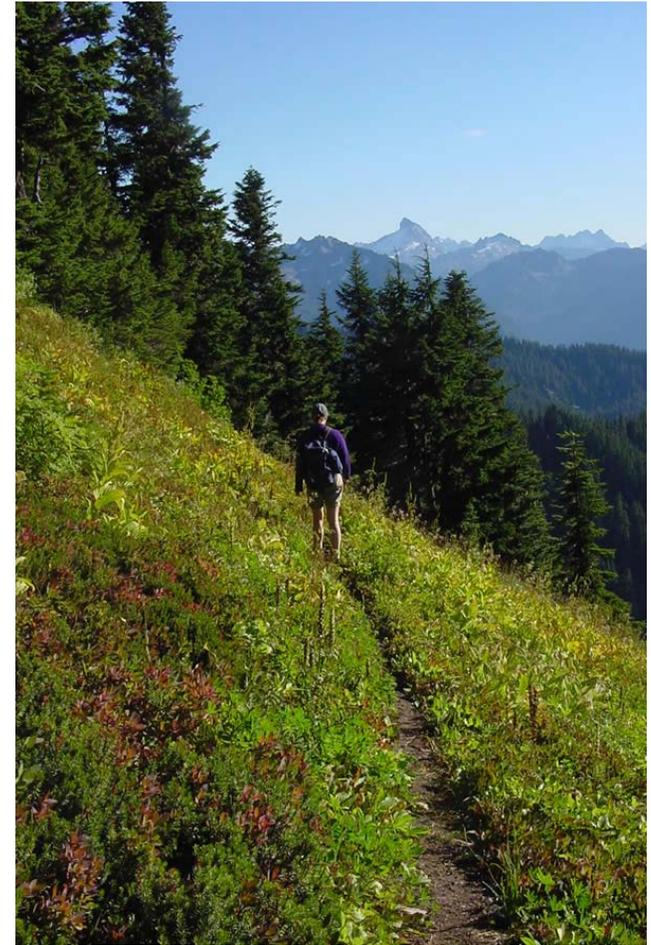


Photo courtesy of Gary Paul



Photo courtesy of Cameron McKinnon

This report is intended to provide TWS with several tools:

- Part One summarizes the answers to each of the questions used during the interviews
- Part Two presents the key findings that emerged from the interviews in a manner that reflects the major themes that were evident in the responses we received.
- Part Three provides a spectrum of “strategic options” for the Initiative’s future direction.

These materials were presented to TWS staff in April, and became the basis for staff workshops to discuss the options and identify an action plan for moving forward.

- Part Four (to be developed) will display the agendas for the workshops and a graphic summary of the results.

The Cedar River Group team wishes to thank all of those who contributed their time and their wisdom to this endeavor. We hope our efforts and theirs will be useful to all those who are working to protect and enhance the North Cascades.

PART ONE: SUMMARY OF THE INTERVIEWS

1. How would you define the geographic boundaries of the North Cascades?

- In general, those with the greatest knowledge about the NCI project define the boundaries as being from I-90 on the south to the Fraser River on the north. For this group the northern boundary does not stop at the Canadian border. Two interviewees suggested that the North Cascades extends south of I-90. The east/west borders were generally described as the foothills on either side of the Cascades, with four interviewees suggesting that the eastern boundary should stretch to the Okanogan.
- For those less familiar with the NCI project, the boundaries were described in narrower terms – the area in and immediately adjacent to the North Cascades National Park.
- ❖ *"There isn't a clear sense among the public about the boundaries."*
- ❖ *"There is not a common understanding about the boundaries, but it's not productive to define the area."*
- ❖ *"I don't think of the Teanaway or Alpine Lakes as being part of the North Cascades."*

2. What are the physical or natural features of the North Cascades that are most important to you? Why? Do you believe there are sufficient land use or management measures in place now to protect those features? If not, how would you provide that protection?

- Four related features were mentioned most often: 1) the overall ecological functions the area provides; 2) the wild, pristine and

"The most important features of the North Cascades can be summed up with two words: Snow pack. That's the key to the whole economy – recreation, agriculture, power, drinking water, you name it."



Photo courtesy of National Park Service

serene nature of the region, 3) the habitat for a variety of animals, and 4) the system of rivers, streams and lakes.

- A number of those interviewed mentioned the importance of the North Cascades as both a north/south and east/west habitat area, including animal and fish recovery efforts – specifically, wolves, grizzlies, wolverines and salmon.
- In general, those interviewed described the existing level of protection by elevation: The higher elevation areas are thought to be well protected by the public agencies that own and manage them; the middle elevation lands are seen by some as an area where restoration should occur; and the lower elevations are seen as the most endangered and least well managed. It was striking how much the emphasis has shifted in recent years from concerns about logging to other issues.
- Those most involved with work in the North Cascades region see the biggest threats to the lowland forests and river valleys. Those more removed from the North Cascades believe there are sufficient protections in place.

- ❖ *"The most important features of the North Cascades can be summed up with two words: Snow pack. That's the key to the whole economy—recreation, agriculture, power, drinking water, you name it."*
- ❖ *"Those rivers are very important to the Sound and the Columbia River."*
- ❖ *"The US Forest Service has pretty high standards. When you add in local land use and environmental review there are a lot of protections."*
- ❖ *"There are areas to the south and river valleys that should be wild but are not."*

3. What are the uses of the North Cascades that are most important to you? Why? How would you protect or enhance those uses?

- Every participant mentioned recreational use as being very important. The range of recreational activities varied: hiking, mountaineering, fishing, hunting, kayaking, rafting, wildlife watching, biking, off-road vehicles.
- The snow pack and river systems were mentioned by nearly half of the individuals as critically important for agriculture and an important source of drinking water and hydro power.
- There was no consensus about suggested protections or enhancements. Some want to preserve the status quo, while the majority of those interviewed want to see improvements in access and restoration and a stronger economy in the gateway communities. Specific suggestions included the following: continue to protect wilderness; improve visitor services and enhance the community portals (gateway communities) to the North Cascades; maintain and enhance the hiking trail system; protect the wildlife corridor function; provide more access to rivers and provide more facilities for day use, not just overnight use of rivers; keep the area off-limits to development; protect the remaining forests and orchards.



Photo courtesy of National Park Service

- ❖ *"Enhance it by leaving it alone."*
- ❖ *"How do we expect the next generation to want to protect the North Cascades if we don't give them the chance to experience the area?"*
- ❖ *"Jeeps are family oriented. Dad gets to play, he puts the kids in the back and they sleep and get out and play. We like to look for geos and crystals."*

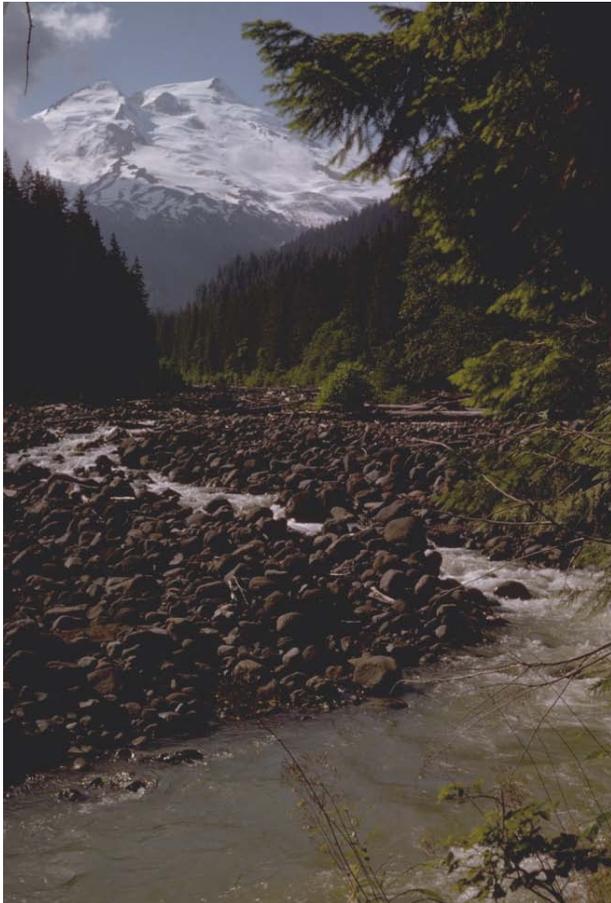


Photo courtesy of National Park Service

4. How would you characterize the current management of the North Cascades? Are there improvements you would like to see? If so, what are they?

- Most felt that management of the area is fragmented and disjointed (e.g. inconsistent maintenance of trails and roads; no definition of sustainable road network; inability to monitor ecosystem comprehensively; lack of coordination on education programs, etc.). A number of interviewees went out of their way to compliment the current managers of public lands in the region, calling them creative and well-intentioned individuals who are doing the best they can within bureaucratic constraints. Many mentioned the continuing decline in federal agency staffing levels (particularly the Forest Service) as being a significant challenge to managing the region effectively.
- There were many comments about the inability of the two federal agencies to manage and maintain the road and trail systems within the area.
- Some of those interviewed in eastern Washington believe the federal agencies have failed to live up to their promises on such issues as re-opening Stehekin Road and improving trail maintenance.
- It was also noted that State DNR lands and private lands (mostly in the lowland areas) are regulated and managed very differently than federal lands.
- Checkerboard ownership is still regarded as an important management problem by several interviewees.

- The concept of “restoration forestry” was mentioned by several interviewees as a win-win strategy in the middle-elevation parts of the landscape. The opportunity to manage the forests for long-term health was seen as creating employment opportunities while enhancing the ecology.
- ❖ *“We work well on fire issues, but not on anything else. Budget issues are a big problem.”*
- ❖ *“There is a continuing decline in staffing levels to manage the forest lands. This results in fewer opportunities to connect the public with the forests.” “County governments tend to be aggressively pro-development.”*
- ❖ *“I’m more concerned about private land protections.”*
- ❖ *“There are probably more areas that could rightfully be designated as wilderness, but we’d want to see the agencies keep their promises first before we could support it.”*

“The old guard watchdog crowd is disappearing with age. Who is going to pick up that fight? The next generation of watchdogs is needed.”

5. The region offers multiple, important functions (e.g. recreation, economic, ecosystem). Does the current management of the region provide the proper balance between those functions? If not, what functions are not valued sufficiently by current management or land use practices?

- Most feel the balance between sometimes competing functions and uses is fairly well maintained. However, one participant believes that environmental interests are given unfair preference over off road vehicle use.



Photo courtesy of Wade B. Clark Jr.

- Four participants said the balance in the lowland areas is too heavily weighted toward economic values (i.e. timber harvest and development).
- An elected official pointed to the imbalance in rural counties' budgets caused by growing populations, the loss of tax revenue from timber harvest and the cap placed on property tax revenue by voter initiatives.
- Interviewees in Chelan County pointed to recent success in collaborative planning as they way to achieve and maintain balance in resource management.
- One interviewee stated that the public land managers do not have the resources to manage the forests to achieve the highest environmental standards. He pointed to many areas where monoculture (of Grand fir) has been allowed at the expense of other species.
- Several of those interviewed feel there is too little access to the North Cascades, and too few support services in most of the gateway communities.

- ❖ *"It feels like we're trending in the right direction – toward a healthy ecosystem."*
- ❖ *"In the lowlands and transition areas there is too much economic use that is marginal, like hobby farms. Hobby farms in Kittitas County suck the river dry."*
- ❖ *"The balance is unfair. The environmentalists want all or nothing."*

6. Describe your perception of the current land ownership patterns – i.e. privately owned lands, federal lands, state lands, etc. What opportunities does that ownership pattern create? What challenges does that create?

- It is well understood that most of the land is owned and managed by the two federal agencies: the Forest Service and National Parks. Most participants also mentioned that there are large and important holdings of land owned by State DNR and private interests.
- The private ownerships create both challenges and opportunities. It was noted that the lands and ecosystem functions near the spine of the North Cascades are easier to protect because they are in federal ownership. But lowlands and river valleys to the east and west are a lot harder to protect because there is more privately owned land. However, several said that there is currently a lot of private timber land for sale. Lands in Chelan and Kittitas Counties, and along the Nooksack, Stilliguamish, and Sultan Rivers were specifically mentioned. It was also mentioned that private timber lands have historically provided recreation opportunities, but those are becoming more limited.
- It was mentioned that there is increasing pressure to deforest areas where forests and homes intersect to reduce the risk of fire damage to homes. This could have big implications for limited Forest Service budget resources and on habitat.
- On the east side there is growing concern about the loss of agricultural land to development.

❖ *"Owners of private timber lands are struggling to make money. Their land may be developed as a result."*

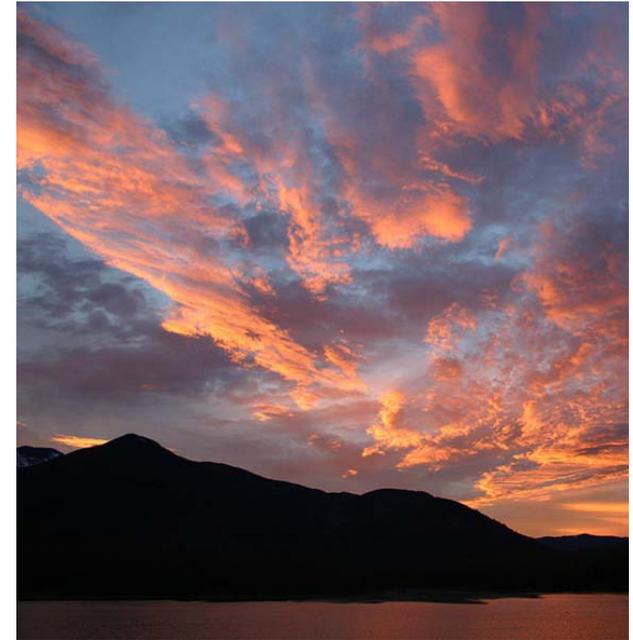


Photo courtesy of Wade B. Clark Jr.

"Generally the high elevation lands are in good hands. The further south and down-slope you go the biggest threat is sprawl

- ❖ *"A lot of stupid Seattle money came over here a few years ago looking to buy property for summer homes. They paid way more than the land was worth as orchards and now we have a problem saving the orchards."*
 - ❖ *"A lot of corporate timber land is available. But it's an opportunity that is way out of scale with available funding."*
 - ❖ *"The land trusts and DNR are key players in protecting lower elevation lands."*
- 7. Describe the state of the communities in the North Cascades...is it a good place to live and why? What could be done to improve our communities?**
- Most described the state of North Cascades communities as highly variable. Some communities were described as great places to live, particularly where local economies had embraced the shift away from natural resource extraction industries. Those communities were better able to weather ebbs and flows in economic cycles. They are also able to attract skilled professionals (e.g. doctors and entrepreneurs). The communities that had not embraced this approach were thought to be having significant challenges.
 - One participant said we have to be careful not to create a vision that the gateway communities are there just to serve city dwellers. Several others mentioned that there are insufficient services (lodging and restaurants) for recreational users and tourists.

- While most of those interviewed acknowledged recreation's contribution to local economies, few thought recreation alone would make up for the good-paying jobs in the timber industry. They saw more hope in putting people to work in activities involved in "restoration forestry"---closing roads, thinning forests, replanting riparian areas, etc., and in the skilled jobs that can be drawn to an area with a high quality of life.
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- ❖ *"This is an opportunity to help communities choose a trajectory for their communities."*
 - ❖ *"Most local economies are dying"*
 - ❖ *"We need to understand what the communities need and want."*
 - ❖ *"We need to honor their heritage."*
 - ❖ *"We have world class physicians in Wenatchee because of the unrivaled access to the mountains and the forests."*
 - ❖ *"I'd like to see more of an artisan economy like they have in the mountains of Italy"*
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- 8. In what ways can the North Cascades provide sustainable economic value for neighboring local communities that also supports the recreational and ecosystem functions of the region?**
- Most participants see environmental protection and recreation as keys to economic growth and stability for local communities. Winthrop and Leavenworth were often cited as examples of towns that have prospered as a result of embracing their proximity to wild and recreation lands. Cle Elum and North Bend were mentioned as communities that were beginning



Photo courtesy of Gary Paul



Photo courtesy of National Park Service

conversations about how to develop more sustainable economies by taking greater advantage of their proximity to recreation opportunities.

- It was also noted that management of recreation lands and rivers can provide opportunities, but there are also challenges – e.g. rivers that are open one year for fishing but closed the next.
- Chelan county communities are pursuing a number of projects that use recreational trails as part of their economic development strategies.
- A small number said that private forest and ranch lands are still large job producers, so that a focus on protecting working forests and farms is still important
- Chelan County's interest in developing a biomass project was mentioned as a possible win-win project for stakeholders.
- Restoration forestry was mentioned as a possible source of employment in many communities.
- Several of those interviewed pointed to the relatively low profile of the North Cascades as a major impediment to the health of the communities, and thought much more could be done to raise the visibility of the area.
- Some interviewees suggested that there seems to be some ambivalence in gateway communities about catering to visitors.

❖ *"You have to convince local business people of the [non-timber] value of the forest."*

- ❖ *"Almost all of the land is reserved for hiking. Hikers don't contribute to the economy."*
- ❖ *"The NCI language around this issue feels old fashioned and awkward."*
- ❖ *"Anything we can do to keep farmers and growers on the land is a plus"*
- ❖ *"The North Cascades National Park is spectacular but it lacks a single iconic feature. It doesn't have an iconic park lodge. The Park Headquarters isn't even in the park, and it's on the wrong side of the road when you are entering the park".*

9. What are the biggest threats to the North Cascade region? What solutions would you suggest to eliminate or moderate those threats?

- Climate change was mentioned most often as the biggest threat. It was suggested that it could have an impact on water supply, increase the interest in hydro projects, increase fire danger and the threat of disease and insects in trees.
- A number of those interviewed also said that private land conversions and continued development of low land forests and ranches is a large threat.
- Other threats mentioned include: fragmentation of the ecosystem (i.e. not recognizing the North Cascades – from I-go north to Canada – as one region); over-management of lands (e.g. moratorium on wells in upper Kittitas County); off- road vehicle usage; wilderness designation; the dam proposed by the Okanogan PUD for the Similakameen River; and the aging of the advocates who helped create the North Cascades Park.



Photo courtesy of Wade B. Clark Jr.

- ❖ *"The biggest threat is climate change. The glaciers there create great diversity in the river systems. The glaciers affect the biology of the rivers."*
- ❖ *"Generally the high elevation lands are in good hands. The further south and down-slope you go the biggest threat is sprawl."*
- ❖ *"The biggest threats are wildfire and bugs. Guys in Seattle want to tell us how to run the land. It's not helping the forest when it's burned to a crisp."*
- ❖ *"The old guard watchdog crowd is disappearing with age. Who is going to pick up that fight? The next generation of watchdogs is needed."*



Photo courtesy of National Park Service

10. What are the biggest opportunities to enhance the North Cascade region? What solutions would you suggest to take advantage of those opportunities?

There were a number of suggestions about opportunities to enhance the North Cascades, but there was little consensus. The following provides a summary of several suggestions.

- Get more people to enjoy the park and the surrounding land. There is a need to develop a stronger constituency to "own" the park and protect the lands. People don't know/understand the watershed.
- Restore the trail system and create better access to recreational opportunities that are compatible with preservation.
- Create places away from the wilderness areas where people can pursue recreational activities such as off-road vehicle use.

- Do a better job of describing the connections of the North Cascades to the broader region – i.e. one-third of the freshwater in Puget Sound comes from the Skagit, one-third of all Seattle’s power comes from the Skagit, etc.
 - Help local communities understand that the recreational use of the North Cascades is a valuable resource for their local economies.
 - Implement “restoration forestry” as a way to enhance the forests and create jobs.
 - Reduce the role of state and federal agencies in the management of public lands. Turn management over to private agencies whose sole interest is protection and management.
 - Wild and Scenic River designations will prevent construction of dams.
 - There are several small hydro dam opportunities.
 - It was mentioned that with the new administration there is interest in considering new forms of land designations and protected areas.
- ❖ *“There is an opportunity to describe the North Cascades as a biological region or ecosystem.”*
 - ❖ *“The North Cascades is essential to a thriving economy in the Methow.”*
 - ❖ *“The current work to protect the Skagit watershed is an important opportunity.”*
 - ❖ *“Government should stay out of the management [of lands].”*
 - ❖ *“I’m not the least bit concerned about designated road-less areas converting to other uses. How many times do we need to protect the road-less areas?”*

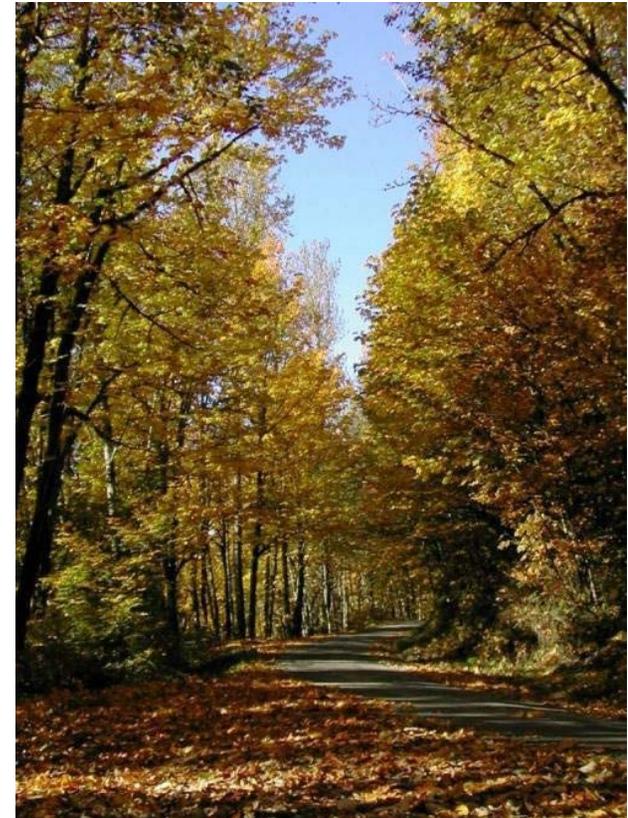


Photo courtesy of Walt Dortch, Forest Service

11. If a long term plan were to be created to protect the multiple functions the North Cascades provides, what organizations and/or individuals should be involved in that discussion? Would you or your organization be interested in participating?



Photo courtesy of Wade B. Clark Jr.

- Most people expressed interest in participating in some fashion, although views were divided about whether planning activities should be focused on a large, eco-system scale (i.e. I-go to Canada), or on a smaller more targeted scale (i.e. the Methow, the Teanaway, the Skagit Valley, etc.).
- There were numerous suggestions about who to involve in a future planning effort. Specific individuals and businesses were mentioned. Generally those interviewed felt strongly that any planning effort should involve representatives of the local communities in the area, businesses that operate in the area, land owners, and the two large federal agencies.
- Several people suggested that TWS look at other collaborative planning models that have been created in other parts of the country – Yellowstone, the Sierra Nevada Ecosystem Project (with another reference to the Sierra Nevada Business Alliance), and Astoria Oregon’s transition to an economy based on tourism and recreation.
- Those interviewed in Chelan County were enthusiastic about their recent success in bringing people together around “what’s working”, and in organizing successful community-based planning efforts that engaged diverse stakeholders. These individuals stated they would welcome TWS as a partner.

- ❖ *"It will be difficult to raise funds, develop a process and gage outcomes. I'd prefer a SWOT approach to addressing individual issues within the large landscape."*
- ❖ *"The political climate in National Park Service and the Forest Service is now good for this kind of work. The State is the weakest link."*
- ❖ *"It is critical to include local communities because they often get left out."*
- ❖ *"Make it available to everyone. Don't want one group to think they are better than the others."*
- ❖ *Emphasize "what is working" in our communities. There is a lot of good, collaborative work going on all across the area, but we don't get a chance to learn about what others are doing."*



Photo courtesy of Wade B. Clark Jr.

PART TWO: KEY FINDINGS

"The biggest threat is climate change. The glaciers there create great diversity in the river systems. The glaciers affect the biology of the rivers."

- The interviews revealed an important dichotomy in the way stakeholders perceive the North Cascades: Although most are aware of the *global* significance of the North Cascades as a large and intact ecosystem, the experiences, loyalties and concerns that motivate most stakeholders are mostly expressed in *local* terms. This paradox seems to be at the center of the choices TWS faces as it implements the North Cascades Initiative.
- The importance of North Cascades to the region (and the world) lies in the significant role of its forests in mitigating climate change, and the fact that the region provides water for a vast area. One of those interviewed summed up the importance of these resources eloquently when he said: *"I can tell you what's important about the North Cascades in two words: "Snow pack. That's what gives us the clean water to quench our thirst, power our homes and factories, irrigate our fields and orchards, and sustain our salmon runs."*
- That intuitive understanding of the importance of the "natural capital" the North Cascades area provides is shared by most of the well-informed stakeholders we interviewed, but few of them believe it is well understood by the general public. The future health of the North Cascades may well depend on increasing public appreciation for those contributions.
- The first step to accomplish that objective is to *build a stronger identity for the North Cascades region as a whole*. One challenge in achieving that objective is that there is not really much agreement among stakeholders about the geographic dimensions of the North Cascades. Everyone we interviewed agrees the heart of the North Cascades is the national park complex and the wilderness areas adjacent to it. Beyond that, there is not a clear consensus.

- Most of those interviewed described the region as extending from the Canadian border to I-90, but some say the region extends into Canada, and a few believe it extends south of I-90. Others would stop at Highway 2. There is almost no agreement on where the eastern and western edges are. Some stress the importance of the connections between the North Cascades and the Rockies, while others believe the region should be seen as an integrated whole that includes the major cities that depend on the natural capital the North Cascades provide.
- In spite of these differences in perspective, stakeholders share a desire to build a stronger identity for the North Cascades, and believe that it could help their local efforts. They identified at least three ways TWS could help to strengthen the identity of the region: 1) by helping the public understand the value of the “*eco-system services*” the region provides; 2) by providing *solid data* to help local communities make sound decisions about land use; and 3) by helping gateway communities to take full advantage of the “*green jobs*” that be could be created through their proximity to the North Cascades. (We will touch on specific actions that could be taken in the “Options” section of this report).
- Even though stakeholders differ in how they define the North Cascades, most articulated a conceptual framework of the region that was strikingly similar. It is defined by both elevation and geography:
 - ❖ The northern highlands, comprised of the national park and surrounding wilderness areas, are publicly-owned and perceived to be well-protected. All those we interviewed share a determination to preserve the quality of this heartland, and they generally expressed the view that it will be necessary to *build a*



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Photo courtesy of Wade B. Clark Jr.



Photo courtesy of Wade B. Clark Jr.

stronger constituency among the next generation to assure that goal is achieved.

- ❖ The mid-elevation forests, comprised of national forest lands, state forests, and private holdings, are seen as more complex in terms of the ownership patterns and management challenges. There is a strong desire to find the best ways to *accommodate a variety of recreational uses* in these areas. Some of those we interviewed believe that the timber wars that raged in these areas in decades past have largely abated, creating the opportunity to introduce “*restoration forestry*” as a means to correct the mistakes of the past and improve the long-term health of the forests.
- ❖ The lowlands, adjacent to highway and river corridors and population centers, are seen as the current battleground. It is in these areas that ownership patterns are most complex and the pressures of population growth most severe. Stakeholders perceive the challenges in these areas to be *accommodating growth, preserving farms and forests, and creating viable economic development strategies to ensure the health of gateway communities*.

This basic conceptual framework may be more useful than any attempt to agree on fixed borders for the area. It provides a method for grouping the major issues and ideas that emerged from the interviews to help TWS choose its future course.

The Northern Highlands

The key issues in this portion of the landscape are *identity, access, and coherent management by public agencies.*

Identity

Many of those interviewed expressed the view that the national park complex lacks a clear identity in the public mind. It has no single iconic feature (like Mount Rainier or Old Faithful), no grand lodge or gathering place. The NPS headquarters is not even located in the park, but in Sedro-Woolley, and it is on the “wrong side of the highway, where you pass it as you’re leaving the park”. The “gateway communities” near the park do not proclaim themselves as such, and some stakeholders said they were not sure that tourists who come to visit the park are entirely welcome in some of those communities.

Access

One of those interviewed said “If we expect future generations to protect the North Cascades, they have to experience it, and we need to make it easier for them to do so”. That view was shared by a majority of those we interviewed. There was general support for the idea that public land managers should “look for the least harmful ways to attract more people into the area and expand access to those opportunities”. Two specific examples are:

- Step up trail maintenance to re-open the hundreds of miles of trails that are no longer accessible because of a lack of maintenance. (Even if it requires the use of chain saws during limited periods).
- Re-open Stehekin Road as a one lane facility for electric shuttles to afford better access to the most spectacular areas of the national park.

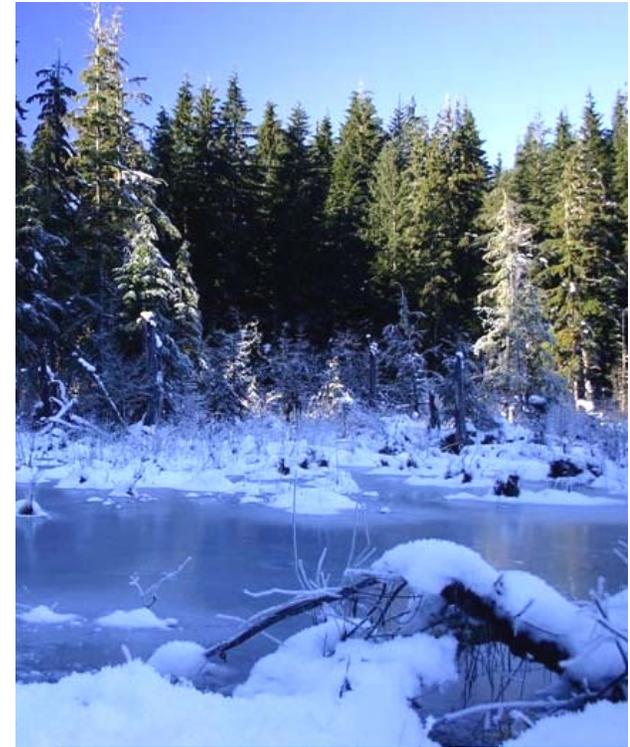


Photo courtesy of Wade B. Clark Jr.



Photo courtesy of Wade B. Clark Jr.

Coherent Management of Public Lands

Although the current managers of the national park and the two national forests were praised by many of those we interviewed, most expressed the view that there is still a long way to go to coordinate the practices and policies of the agencies in support of a unified vision. Stakeholders who are frequent users of the park cited examples of decisions that seem at odds with the goal of attracting more visitors.

The Mid-Elevation Forests

Key issues in these areas are *acquisition, restoration/stewardship, uses, and the relationship with DNR.*

Acquisition

Stakeholders pointed out that many privately owned forest parcels in these areas are for sale and at risk of conversion. The opportunities for acquisition in these areas are far out of proportion to the limited resources available. Absent a concerted effort to acquire the best of those parcels, many could be lost to development.

Restoration/Stewardship

The concept of "restoration forestry" was mentioned by several stakeholders during our interviews as a potential guiding principle for this portion of the landscape. Although the meaning of this term has yet to come fully into focus, it generally describes a philosophy of correcting past mistakes and managing the lands for the long term health of the forests. Advocates of this perspective pointed out that reductions in logging have left vast tracts of land that need to be reforested, other areas with trees of the same species and age that need to be thinned, road networks that need to be reduced in scope, streams and rivers that need care, and trail systems that are badly in need of repair. Many pointed to the reductions in staff levels in the federal agencies that make it harder to properly maintain trails and roads. If adequate funding were available to address these needs, it would provide a source of employment opportunities that could strengthen local economies and replace jobs that were lost in conventional logging. A number of stakeholders also pointed out that the agencies could make more use of volunteer labor to complement the efforts of paid staff in these activities.

Uses

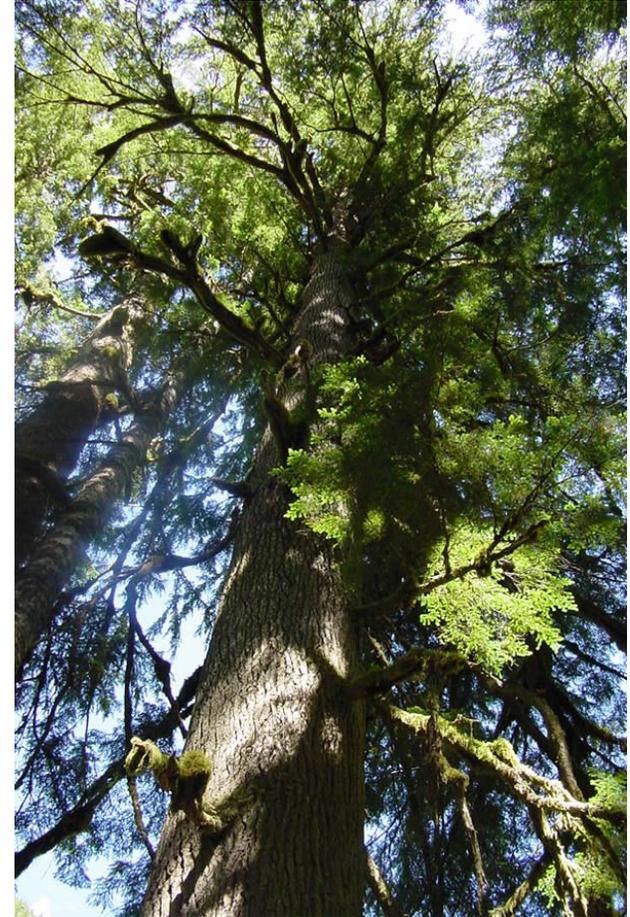


Photo courtesy of Gary Paull



Photo courtesy of Wade B. Clark Jr.

Some key stakeholders believe “the landscape is big enough to accommodate everyone’s needs” when it comes to recreational uses. For example, leaders of the Highway 2 communities (Startup, Gold Bar and Sultan) said their cities want to be seen as a gateway to recreational activities such as mountain biking, shooting, and off-road vehicle uses that would be anathema in the wilderness areas, but might reasonably be accommodated in certain areas as a trade-off for the designation of additional wilderness and/or to reduce the political pressure to allow such uses in more sensitive areas.

Relationship with DNR

Substantial portions of the mid-elevation forests that have been or potentially could be designated as wilderness are adjacent to DNR’s holdings, and changes in that agency’s practices have a significant impact on the quality of other public lands and waterways. Many stakeholders stressed the need for TWS to include DNR in its work in the North Cascades.

The Lowlands

The key issues in these areas are *population growth, farm and forest preservation, and economic vitality.*

Population growth

The gateway communities face several difficult challenges as they struggle with growth. First, their relatively close proximity to metropolitan areas places huge conversion pressures on nearby farms and forests; second, the loss of timber tax revenue and voter approved limits on property taxes have left local and county governments with little choice but to encourage real estate development as the only viable source of new revenue to sustain public services; and third, most of these communities have limited resources for the planning and design services needed to create alternative development strategies that would have less impact. Although the recession has stalled the sprawl that has been occurring in some areas within the North Cascades landscape, most stakeholders believe it is a just temporary respite.

Farm and forest preservation

Many of the stakeholders we interviewed cited the need for strategies to protect the working landscapes that have traditionally been the base of the local economy. Those working landscapes face the dual threats of development pressure and the volatility of the agricultural and forest products industries in the context of the global economy.

Economic vitality

The health of the gateway communities was seen by those interviewed as quite varied: Many gateway communities are perceived to be lacking the types of services (such as restaurants and lodging) that will attract visitors. Those that have such services, and have purposely rebuilt their economies around their adjacency to the recreational opportunities afforded by the North Cascades (such as Leavenworth and Winthrop) are



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Photo courtesy of Wade B. Clark Jr.

perceived to be relatively prosperous, while those that have not made the transition are thought to be much more fragile. "We love this place," said one of those we interviewed, "but we have to struggle to make a living so we can stay."

PART THREE: STRATEGIC OPTIONS

The Wilderness Society does not have unlimited resources and must be strategic in tackling the broad range of issues stakeholders have identified. This section of our report presents several options that could reasonably be pursued by the organization. They are intended to illustrate a spectrum of relatively discreet choices, but in our experience it is rare that an often, the options stir a dialogue among the organization's leadership and a hybrid solution emerges from that dialogue. For the sake of discussion, we have provided one option (Option F) that offers such a hybrid.

In formulating the options, we took into consideration the perceived strengths of TWS, as well as some of its vulnerabilities. The organization is perceived by stakeholders to have significant strengths:

- **Good new relationships with a nucleus of local leaders.** Most of those we interviewed had a positive impression of TWS and its intentions in launching the NCI, even if they have political views that might be perceived as at the other end of the spectrum. This suggests that the outreach TWS staff members have conducted during the recent past has been an important step in building relationships. For example, John Chelmaniak's decision to hike the Stehekin Road with Chelan County Commissioner Doug England was seen as an important signal that TWS is serious about listening to the concerns of local communities.

Peter Dykstra's past track record of successful collaboration. Peter is held in very high regard by those he worked with in Wenatchee during his tenure with the Trust for Public Land.

- **National Reach.** The organization is perceived as having success, an influential Board of Directors and a formidable presence in Washington D.C.



Photo courtesy of Gary Paull



Photos courtesy of Wade B. Clark Jr.

- **Technical expertise.** TWS is recognized by some stakeholders as having access to scientific experts, technology, and media tools that are more sophisticated than those available to local environmental organizations.
- **A clear niche within the environmental community.** The history of the organization has been to focus on the designation of wilderness areas within federal lands. That limited focus has obvious limitations in today's environment, but it has provided the advantage of clarity of purpose in a crowded field of environmental organizations in which it is sometimes difficult to sort out roles.

The organization is perceived as having the following vulnerabilities:

- **An organizational structure that is confusing to outsiders.** Although the internal structure of TWS was not a central topic in our interviews, we were never able to articulate to stakeholders how NCI fits within the organization, and exactly how decisions will be made about the future course of the initiative.
- **A lack of definition of the Initiative.** As mentioned above, most stakeholders we interviewed have good feelings about TWS and its intentions, but there is a lack of clarity about what the NCI is intended to accomplish beyond raising the visibility of the North Cascades.
- **Intermittent communications.** All stakeholders we interviewed expressed a desire to be involved as TWS moves forward. However, some stakeholders expressed the view that past communications with the staff have been intermittent rather than consistent. Those individuals generally want to be more involved than in the past, and expressed some disappointment with the level of on-going communication.

- **The perception of a limited mission.** TWS is still perceived by some stakeholders as being interested only in expanding wilderness areas and not in broader use and economic goals.

With these factors in mind, we identified several options TWS could pursue. The first option is presented in the interest of providing a complete spectrum of choices. The next two are predicated on the idea that TWS wishes to continue to work on the region as a whole, while options D, E, and F each focus on specific areas within the landscape. Option F is a hybrid for discussion.

OPTION A: FOCUS ON EXPANDING WILDERNESS AREA DESIGNATIONS WITHIN THE NORTH CASCADES

General description: In this option, TWS would use the conservation framework it has developed to identify priorities for expansions of wilderness, and work to build coalitions in those parts of the region to secure congressional approval.

Advantages: This is TWS' traditional strategy. The data is available to build the case on scientific grounds.

Disadvantages: Stakeholders who have been impressed by TWS recent efforts at collaboration could be confused by a return to what many will perceive as an adversarial approach. The politics of wilderness designations in much of the region are very difficult unless diverse coalitions can be established.

OPTION B: CONVENE A FORMAL VISIONING PROCESS FOR THE NORTH CASCADES REGION AS A WHOLE

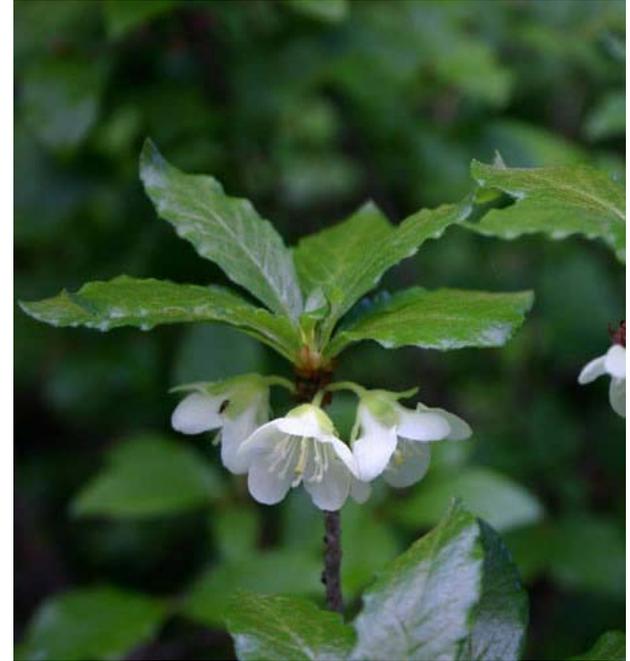


Photo courtesy of Wade B. Clark Jr.



Photo courtesy of Wade B. Clark Jr.

General description: In this option, TWS would convene key players throughout the region in an attempt to create and document a shared vision for the North Cascades.

Advantages: If the effort succeeded, the vision document could provide a unifying framework for the host of stakeholders who have influence on the local, state and federal decisions that will shape the future of the region.

Disadvantages: It is not at all clear that stakeholders share a high enough level of trust to work together on a vision that could be perceived as over-riding local interests. Nor is it clear that TWS alone would have the standing to convene such an effort. Given the significant differences that exist among the stakeholders in vocabulary, political philosophy, and priorities, the effort would require a significant commitment of time and resources. Stakeholders working on local initiatives expressed concern about being diverted from their work by a larger planning effort.

OPTION C: DEVELOP A PUBLIC INFORMATION CAMPAIGN TO HIGHLIGHT THE ECO-SYSTEM SERVICES THE NORTH CASCADES PROVIDE

General description: TWS would take the lead in an extensive media campaign to increase public understanding of the value of the North Cascades in mitigating climate change and providing clean water to the region.

Advantages: Higher levels of public understanding of these issues could generate support for the preservation of the eco-system, even among elements of the population who may never visit the area. It could also build public support for measures that would allow the national parks and forests to benefit from the carbon markets.

Disadvantages: Substantial effort would be required to translate TWS's current data on ecosystems services into language and images that could be used in a media campaign for the general public. The media campaign would not necessarily be linked to specific accomplishments on the ground.

OPTION D: INCREASE THE POPULARITY OF THE NORTH CASCADES NATIONAL PARK COMPLEX AND ADJACENT WILDERNESS AREAS

General description: In this option, TWS would work with the public land managers and representatives of gateway communities to increase access and visitation to the "northern highlands". Specific actions could include lobbying for additional federal funding for trail maintenance, brokering an agreement to reopen portions of the Stehekin Road, and other actions that would increase the numbers of people visiting the park and their determination to protect it.

Advantages: This option builds upon work TWS already has underway through its marketing committee and in the relationships the organization has established with the public land managers. It could also strengthen relationships with some of the key stakeholder groups for whom access is the key priority, and create more openness on their part for future wilderness designations.

Disadvantages: This option may require TWS to broker compromises that are not universally popular within the environmental community. It does not address issues and opportunities in the middle and lower elevation lands.

OPTION E: FOCUS ON BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS AROUND ACQUISITIONS IN THE MIDDLE ELEVATION FORESTS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF "RESTORATION FORESTRY" IN THOSE AREAS

Emphasize "what is working" in our communities. There is a lot of good, collaborative work going on all across the area, but we don't get a chance to learn about what others are doing."



Photo courtesy of Wade B. Clark Jr.

General description: In this alternative, TWS would focus on working with conservation partners to acquire key parcels at risk of conversion and develop the concept of restoration forestry as a viable method of creating “green jobs” while improving the health of the forests.

Advantages: This option would build upon TWS’ perceived strength in analyzing the value of specific parcels within the overall landscape, and expand its support for restoration activities that could strengthen the economy of gateway communities.

Disadvantages: This option would require a major fundraising effort to secure the resources to save the most important parcels from conversion. It would also require partnerships with organizations that are prepared to own and steward the lands acquired. Some of these activities could be perceived to be outside TWS’ traditional mission.

OPTION F: FOCUS ON BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS WITH GATEWAY COMMUNITIES TO CONTAIN SPRAWL, PROTECT FARMS AND FORESTS, AND STRENGTHEN THE GREEN CONNECTIONS WITH THE HIGHLANDS

General description: In this option, TWS would concentrate its resources to support local community groups who are working to protect the valleys from sprawling development and to link their communities to the wilderness through the creation of complementary local economies.

Advantages: This option focuses on the areas of the North Cascades that are perceived to be the real battlegrounds for conservation. It builds upon the new relationships that have been established with local open space preservation groups, many of whom would welcome the help. It would take advantage of TWS’ GIS capabilities and technical expertise.

Disadvantages: This option is the farthest removed from TWS' historic role. It could place the organization in the midst of contentious struggles that are taking place well outside potential wilderness areas. Some of the gateway communities are actively seeking higher intensity recreational uses—such as off-road vehicle use—that may be controversial among TWS members and supporters.

OPTION G: CONVENE A “CELEBRATION OF THE NORTH CASCADES”

This option is intended as an example of a hybrid that incorporates aspects of many of the options listed above.

General description: In this option, TWS would heed Rufus Woods' admonition to “focus on what’s working” by convening a 2-3 day event bringing together stakeholders from throughout the region to highlight their past achievements and current efforts. Unlike option A, there would be no effort to agree on the wording of a specific vision document. Instead, the event would help to set the stage for a consensus to emerge through the sharing of information among people working throughout the landscape on the range of issues described in the options above. It is entirely possible that the event could result in the identification of a number of actions on which there is consensus, and TWS and other stakeholders could pursue that consensus agenda as a step in building trust. If the gathering produces good results, it could become an annual event, and as trust is built through shared success, more difficult issues could be tackled by the participants. In this way, the unified vision TWS is seeking for the North Cascades could emerge organically over time.

Advantages: This option would help to build a regional consciousness among those working to protect the North Cascades. It carries relatively little risk for TWS, since nearly all the stakeholders we spoke with would value the opportunity to present their current projects, learn from



Photos courtesy of Wade B. Clark Jr.



Photo courtesy of Wade B. Clark Jr.

others, and potentially find new supporters for future battles. It would also provide TWS with an opportunity to present the new data on ecosystem services to a friendly audience during the plenary sessions. Panels on topics such as “Creating better access to the North Cascades”, “What do we mean by “restoration forestry” and “How can we build stronger economies in gateway communities” could begin to flesh out a common agenda that might evolve into a more formal vision document in the future as trust grows among the participants.

Disadvantages: This option would require a significant amount of planning and logistical support. The event could raise expectations, and TWS would need to be able to follow up quickly and effectively on the best opportunities that emerge.

STAFF CHARRETTE ON NORTH CASCADES INITIATIVE PROPOSED AGENDA

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS *PETER DYKSTRA*

GOALS FOR THE DAY *PETER DYKSTRA*

- ❖ Review Findings and Key Concepts
- ❖ Affirm or modify basic framework from Key Concepts document
- ❖ Identify potential actions within each area
- ❖ Explore and narrow strategic options for discussion with the Advisory Group

PRINCIPLES *PETER DYKSTRA*

- ❖ TWS will work collaboratively with partners
- ❖ TWS will identify and work on concrete projects
- ❖ TWS will seek to articulate a compelling case for preserving the North Cascades Landscape as a whole
- ❖ TWS's work in the near term will lay the groundwork for a shared vision in the long term

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND KEY CONCEPTS *TOM BYERS/JOHN HOWELL*

GROUP DISCUSSION (Facilitated by Tom and John) *ALL*

- ❖ Reactions to Findings
- ❖ Reactions to framework in Key Concepts paper
- ❖ Discussion of what is happening in each zone:
 - What are the issues?
 - Who are the partners?

PART FOUR: STEPS TOWARD THE FUTURE



Photo courtesy of Wade B. Clark Jr.



Photo courtesy of National Park Service

- What concrete actions should TWS consider?
- What role should TWS play? (Lead alone, lead in partnership, support others, etc.)
- ❖ Discussion of the interplay between the actions identified and the landscape as a whole
 - How do we maintain the momentum that has been built on marketing, etc.?
 - How do we pursue issues that are common to communities across the landscape?
 - How do we take advantage of our unique capacities? (GIS, ecosystems services analysis, etc.)
 - How can we bring potential partners together to achieve mutual goals?

IDENTIFY STRATEGIC DIRECTION(S) TO PRESENT TO THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

IDENTIFY NEXT STEPS

PETER DYKSTRA

CLOSING REMARKS

PETER DYKSTRA

TWS Staff Retreat Summary April 21, 2010

| | Issues | | | |
|--|----------|----------------|--------|---------------------|
| | Identity | Climate Change | Access | Coherent Management |
| HIGHLANDS ACTIONS | | | | |
| Plug into climate challenge program of North Cascade Institute; tie them to TWS DC staff to work on climate change legislation in DC. Use evidence gathered in North Cascade glaciers. | | X | | |
| Provide leadership in land and resource management plans (Forest Service, Park Service). | X | X | X | X |
| Work with public agencies on a more vigorous communications plan. | X | | | |
| Help achieve a solution on Stehekin Road | | | X | |
| Create recreational access coalition and action plan | | | X | |
| Create ecological baseline in National Park as way to monitor changes resulting from climate change | | X | | |
| Develop carbon trust concept to incent local stewardship | | X | | |
| Tap into Go America "Get Outdoors" program. Participate in Cascade Wild, Alpine Lakes. Identify areas needed additional protection (wilderness, wild and scenic) | | | X | |

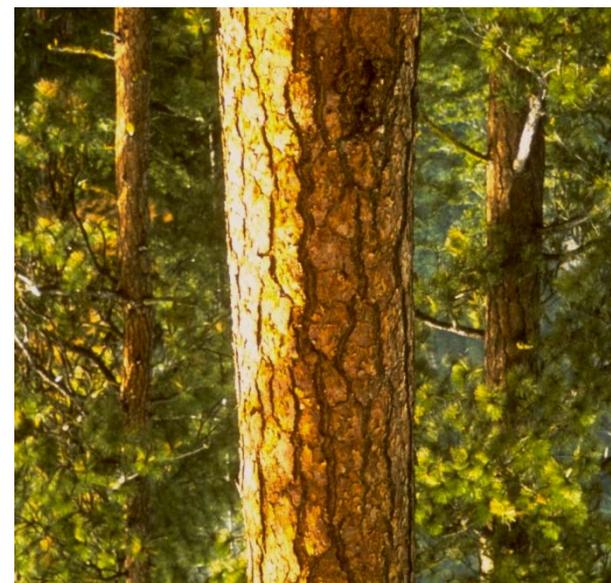


Photo courtesy of National Park Service



Photo courtesy of National Park Service

| | Issues | | | |
|--|--------------|-----------------------------|------|--------------------------|
| | Acquisitions | Restoration/ Stewardship | Uses | Relationship with DNR |
| MIDDLE ELEVATION FORESTS ACTIONS | | | | |
| Forge partnership on restoration forestry, such as portable mills, trails (lower Chewuch minimum roads analysis), post fire salvage | | X | | X |
| Lobby for LWCF funds; coordinate statewide lobbying, and coordinate identification of priority projects | X | | | |
| Implement TWS restoration toolkit | | X | | |
| Carbon Trust Concept | | X | | |
| Create recreation coalition and action plan | | | X | X |
| Create healthy headwaters coalition to help assure water supply in context of climate change and develop funding strategy – engage DNR | | X | X | X |
| Engage DNR on frontlands access and FSC standards | | | X | X |
| Play leadership role in WWRC acquisitions | X | | | |

| | Issues | | |
|--|--------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|
| | Population growth/sprawl | Farms & Forest Restoration | Economic vitality |
| LOWLANDS ACTIONS | | | |
| Roslyn Community Forest – create plan merging conservation/recreation values as a model for other communities | | | X |
| Carbon Trust/Secure rural schools | | | X |
| Restoration forestry, Recreation Coalition, Healthy Headwaters, Marketing | | | X |
| Engage in a solution to the Teanaway | X | X | X |
| Participate in county land use planning. | X | X | |
| Bring people together around meaning of eco-systems services analysis and impact on communities. | X | X | X |
| Passport to North Cascades (create a mechanism to allow folks to make voluntary contribution to NCI projects – i.e. hotels, B&B, wineries, etc.) | X | | X |
| Strengthen/identify river access points and trail access and help market | | | X |
| Coordinate with CLC on Teanaway & Route 2 initiatives | | | X |
| Engage in helping CDLT develop trail to Leavenworth | | | X |



Photo courtesy of National Park Service



Photo courtesy of Wade B. Clark Jr.

Top priorities/Immediate actions (6-8 months):

1. Create recreation coalition and action plan
 - a. Stehekin Road
 - b. Water access on west side
 - c. Roslyn Community Forest
 - d. Chelan/Douglas Trail
 - e. Youth access
 - f. Trail maintenance
2. Chewuch minimum roads analysis (reducing road network) – reduce road impact on water resources; pilot in restoration, shaping access (Methow)
3. Increase engagement in Cascades Wild & Alpine Lakes (need to flesh out TWS contribution)
4. Start work on Secure Rural Schools legislation
5. Complete and evaluate ecosystem services analysis and its potential.
6. Sustain the capacity and involvement of volunteer leadership

Priorities for 18 months:

1. Create restoration forestry in sync with economic recovery
 - a) Employ restoration toolkit to find where to put mobile mill and create jobs
2. Work with Forest Service on restoration plan
3. Ecosystem services outreach
4. Healthy Headwaters – complete concept
5. Carbon Trust
Engage in land and water resource planning (identify protection priorities)
6. Secure Rural Schools
7. Engage in the Teanaway
8. Celebration of the North Cascades in the Summer of 2011