

Cascade Forest Conservancy 2020 Annual Report

Three months and ten days into our 35th year as an organization, the Board of Directors and I decided to ask our staff to work from home. At the time, we all hoped to come back to the office within a month. Two months seemed like a worst-case scenario. As I write this, we are still working remotely. At the beginning of 2020, none of us anticipated how different and how tough the year would be. Yet Cascade Forest Conservancy showed remarkable resilience at every level of our organization.

Our staff continued to fight to protect and restore the southern Washington Cascades. Our Board continued to provide direction and leadership. And our community of volunteers, supporters, and donors showed up, again and again, to keep Cascade Forest Conservancy strong.

Despite many challenges, we moved forward undeterred. We continued to fight to protect places like the Pumice Plain and the Green River Valley from harmful projects and mining. We expanded some ongoing restoration programs, like beaver reintroduction, and launched new ground-breaking projects like the Instream Wood Bank Network (instreamwoodbanknetwork.com). And we hosted successful online events to build community and support our work at a distance, such as our annual auction and screenings of documentaries and films like *The Dark Divide*.

Many volunteer trips were reimaged to keep volunteers and staff safe from COVID-19. Our 2020 volunteers put on masks, stood far apart, and came out to donate their time and energy to important conservation and restoration initiatives that wouldn't have been possible without their help. Others showed up in different ways. I'm very glad to report that CFC remained financially stable last year, in no small part because of the support of partner organizations and continued donations and gifts made by individuals like you. Even in a year characterized by financial uncertainty, you still gave to support conservation. Thank you!

In our 2020 Annual Report, we're bringing you three stories from our staff that encapsulate what CFC is all about. Details about our finances can be found in the online version of this report, which is available at cascadeforest.org.

Thank you for continuing to support conservation in the heart of the Cascades.

Molly Whitney
Executive Director



Making a lasting impact: one beaver at a time

Science and Restoration

A habitat-altering keystone species

Beavers alter their environment, benefiting multiple habitats within a watershed. The habitats engineered by these animals:



Create deeper and cooler pools in waterways that are important to other aquatic species, leading to increased biodiversity of plants and animals



Add complexity to waterways by creating new side channels while increasing and regulating water storage. This leads to more drought, flood, and fire-resistant watersheds



Store organic materials and nutrients while capturing fine sediments, which reduces the suspended sediment in the stream and creates and maintains fertile floodplain soils



Support the continued growth of older trees as younger trees are thinned out for forage and building materials



by Amanda Keasberry | Science & Stewardship Manager

After hours of driving like I had babies on board, I, our Director of Programs Shiloh Halsey, WSU-Vancouver graduate student Jesse Burgher, and a pair of beavers were closing in on our destination—a small tributary of the Lewis River in the Gifford Pinchot National Forest.

We knew this spot well. Previous surveys had shown us this area had everything we were looking for—slow-flowing water, a wide floodplain, ample amounts of vegetation for foraging, and muddy banks for burrowing—a beaver Shangri-La. From evidence like old chewed stumps, we could tell this site was previously home to beavers, but we saw no sign indicating any within the past few decades. We don't know what removed the previous inhabitants from this system. What we do know is that the landscape would have looked very different with beaver inhabitants. The topography surrounding the creek is flat—easy to flood. The water would have spread horizontally across the landscape, creating acres and acres of wetland and riparian habitat for the fish and wildlife that thrive in those environments. We knew this was a location where beavers could once again be effective in creating a productive environment.

It can be difficult to fully appreciate the historical impact of beavers and how the landscape has changed in their absence. The fur trade that partially propelled and financed European colonization annihilated beaver populations. Before the arrival of Europeans in the area that is now the United States, estimates indicate that beaver-created wetlands covered an area the size of Arizona and Nevada combined. Without beavers, freshwater systems became functionally simple—lacking connectivity, containing fewer spawning and rearing sites for fish and amphibians, storing less water, and suffering from stream incision. These negative impacts are still affecting many waterways today and are amplified by other factors, including riparian timber harvests, road building, and mismanagement of aquatic systems. Thankfully, some land managers have realized that reintroducing these fuzzy engineers will help restore impacted areas back to complex systems.

Beavers instinctively dam flowing water—a habit that can make them challenging neighbors for farmers or suburb-dwellers when they unexpectedly find themselves owners of waterfront property. There are simple, inexpensive ways to live with beavers. Yet, some still opt to euthanize animals perceived as pests. My current passengers had recently been a pair of such imperiled suburban “problem beavers.”

Professionals helped us trap the pair to give them a second chance in a place their dam-building would be useful.

We finally arrived at the release site. I parked and opened the hatch of my car to discover one calm and one very vigilant beaver. The male had already shown his aversion to us at the beaver housing facility, which we use to care for and observe the animals prior to the release. During his stay, he would repeatedly slap his tail and splash us as we walked by. I was eager to prove that putting up with us was worth it for what he was about to experience. Once we located an opening in the forest that could fit two humans carrying an extra-large pet kennel, we carried the ever-weary male to the release site. The female (the calm one) patiently waited to be brought out next.

Soon, both of the beavers were sitting streamside. With Shiloh as a cameraman, Jesse and I opened the doors. The male cannonballed into the stream. The female pulled a fast one and headed towards the trees. Shiloh and I chased after an attempt to redirect her. It is incredible how fast these creatures can move on land; they are better equipped to maneuver through the water, but they can book it on dry terrain as well. We were finally able to get ahead of her to point her in the right direction. She made her way back towards the water and belly-flopped in.

Populations of beavers have rebounded across the U.S., but numbers are lower than historical estimates. In the Gifford Pinchot National Forest, there is still an absence of beavers in many headwater systems. No official beaver population surveys have been performed, but out of the 125+ sites we have visited, we only identified around 15 active beaver sites. Not only will our reintroduction efforts help increase beaver populations in the forest, but we will also be learning about how beavers utilize habitats, how they move around their new environment, and the overall impact of these animals on the health of aquatic and riparian ecosystems. Jesse Burgher will be keeping tabs on this pair using radio tags while exploring a new method of monitoring populations using environmental DNA collected in water samples. Researchers are hopeful this method will provide a new way to test the effectiveness of beaver reintroductions.

At the end of what must have been a long, strange journey, the pair reunited and swam downstream. For a while, we followed the beavers along the creek banks as they checked out their new home. I don't know about Jesse and Shiloh, but I felt like I was sending my kids off to college.

A photograph of three people in a forest setting up wildlife cameras. On the left, a person in a plaid shirt and red face mask is adjusting a camera on a tree trunk. In the center, a man in a white shirt and black face mask stands with a bag. On the right, a person in a black shirt, grey cap, and blue face mask is kneeling and operating equipment. The forest floor is covered in fallen leaves and branches, with sunlight filtering through the trees.

Monitoring species with help from **Volunteer Citizen Scientists**

by Shiloh Halsey | Director of Programs

My connection with the Cascade Forest Conservancy (then the Gifford Pinchot Task Force) began in 2011 with wildlife camera survey work. Ten years later, it is interesting to look back over those years of growth and change, both with the organization as a whole and the wildlife camera work specifically.

When I first learned about the GP Task Force's research on carnivores in the national forest, I was immediately intrigued. I was already well underway with a somewhat obsessive relationship with the Gifford Pinchot National Forest, so I happily volunteered some of my sweat and free time to the fledgling project. I soon made what was apparently a strong enough pitch to take the program to another level as a paid staff member, and I quickly got moving on the first steps of a study to explore carnivore occupancy patterns in the hopes to inform future reintroduction planning for fishers and other carnivores in the west.

Fast forward to 2018... We had seen 55 fishers reintroduced into the GPNF and 26 into Mount Rainier National Park (with releases beginning in 2015). Their survival as a population looked promising, but details remained elusive and the batteries in the reintroduced fishers' radio collars were starting to die.

continued on pg. 5

continued from pg. 4

During the early months of 2018, I had been pondering ways to up our game with the wildlife survey work and exploring the possibility of embarking on a bigger effort that could answer fisher reintroduction questions while also looking deeper into certain habitat relationships, climate change and marten co-occupancy, in order to better inform our work on forest management. Then, on a warm summer day in Portland, I happened to run into an old acquaintance who now works at the carnivore research lab at Oregon State University. After catching up on current happenings of work and life, I mentioned these nascent project ideas, and we began a series of conversations that would eventually result in a whole new chapter of our wildlife survey project.

By August 2019, we were ready to kickstart this new effort. With the help of many dedicated volunteers, we set up 57 camera stations across a 380 square mile area in the center of the GPNF. These cameras remained in place for an entire year. In August of 2020, many of the same volunteers—and a handful of new citizen scientists—headed out to remote corners of the GPNF to download the photos from the year and reset the cameras for another year of data collection.

Now in 2021, we are looking forward to gathering the second year of photographic data from the cameras currently in the field. With this information, we will run a habitat model to elucidate important population information and help us better protect habitat areas in the GPNF and surrounding lands.

I relay this story to offer some background to this project as well as a heartfelt thanks to the volunteers that, quite literally, make this work possible. The value that volunteers bring to our work is immense, immeasurable, and greatly appreciated. I'm looking forward to another year of great work and shared stories from the field.

I and the entire CFC staff have great gratitude for these members of our community who choose to spend a whole day or weekend with us, sometimes getting drenched, sometimes sweating through layers of clothing, but also sometimes discovering hidden vistas and canopied animal trails that we would have never seen otherwise. We hope these moments of inspiration and the opportunity to make a difference for the species of this area outweigh the wet clothes and tired legs.



Volunteers stepped up in a big way during a challenging year.



FIRE PREP NEAR MT. ADAMS

Volunteers helped prepare old-growth ponderosa pines for prescribed burns by removing debris from the bases of trees and collecting data that will be used to better understand fire in a unique forest ecosystem.



SEED COLLECTION

After some on-the-job training from a U.S. Forest Service botanist, volunteers learned to identify 20 local native plants and spent time collecting seeds that will be used in restoration efforts to build ecosystem health and habitat resilience in the forest.



POST-FIRE PLANTING

Some areas around Mt. Adams have been impacted by unusually intense and/or short-interval recurrent fires. To help these areas recover, volunteers planted over 350 seedlings and scattered seeds from more than a dozen native plants in 2020.





MOUNT ST. HELENS NO PLACE FOR A MINE

Fighting to protect the Green River Valley

by Lucy Brookham | Policy Manager

I landed at the Goat Mountain trailhead on Lewis County's first day of snow for the year. The air was crisp, and the trail started to sparkle as those first rays of morning sun crept between the tree line. Tranquility is the first word that comes to mind every time I visit the Green River Valley. A stone's throw from the National Volcanic Monument at Mount St. Helens, this unique and remote landscape has critical habitat, endangered wildlife, a designated gene bank for wild steelhead, pristine drinking water, roadless areas, and extensive recreation opportunities. Home to some of the last old-growth stands to survive the Mount St. Helens blast, the hike up Goat Mountain ascends through these majestic forest stands to the ultimate panorama starring Mount St. Helens, Mount Rainier, Mount Adams, and the Green River below.

For 15 years, Cascade Forest Conservancy has been fighting the prospect of an open-pit mine right in the heart of the Green River Valley. Ascot Resources Ltd., a Canadian mining company, has been seeking a permit to conduct exploratory drilling for copper, gold, and molybdenum for the last decade. Drilling to locate mineral deposits and determine commercial viability is the first essential step in developing a hard-rock mine and a step CFC seeks to prevent from happening.

Over the past year, CFC has built momentum in our legal and legislative bids to stop the mine. Our lawsuit, filed in March of 2019, made its way through the District Court system, and we received a date for oral argument in September. Our arguments spanned two days of hearings across two weeks where we demonstrated the federal environmental laws that were violated when the mineral prospecting permits were issued. We had excellent representation from Earthrise Law Center and Western Mining Action Project, and the judge was receptive to our claims for relief.

In our legislative campaign—another avenue of protection we are pursuing, we ramped up efforts to pursue a mineral withdrawal for over 40,000 acres of the Green River Valley. The lands we are seeking to protect comprise the precise area targeted for the mine site, as well as the surrounding lands we determined to have significant ecological and recreational value and which could also face mining threats in the future.

Standing on the top of Goat Mountain, the solitude is deafening; you are acutely aware that maybe it's only you, the forest, and the wildlife for miles. It would certainly not be the same with a full-scale mining operation drilling into the hillside.



Spirit Lake - Save the Pumice Plain

On the foggiest day I can remember since I moved to the Pacific Northwest, I set out on the three-hour drive up to Windy Ridge. At times along the 99-road, I could barely make out the edge of the shoulder, so to reach the researchers' parking lot and see all the fog disappear straight across the Pumice Plain was quite remarkable. The Pumice Plain in the Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument was created by the 1980 blast. Now a designated Class 1 research area, this protected natural laboratory is transforming before our eyes and informing our understanding of ecosystem recovery and formation.

Now 40 years after the blast, this landscape is teeming with life. As I traversed the Plain, I waded through wetlands and streams bearing fish and frogs, scrambled through dense willow thickets, encountered deep beaver ponds, and listened to the calls of roaming elk echoing through this windswept plain. A landscape recolonized mainly by the wind since the blast cleared the Plain of all life, it is rich in biodiversity and changes rapidly from one watershed to another. It is hard to imagine a road cutting through this magnificent landscape and the damage it would do to this spectacular ecosystem and the ongoing research happening there.

In an effort to protect this irreplaceable landscape, CFC has spent the last year engaging in the federal commenting and objection process, opposing road construction across the Plain and advocating for comprehensive environmental analysis in the form of an Environmental Impact Statement. There are reasonable alternatives to road construction, and we will continue to advocate for a pathway that protects this place as well as providing access to work at Spirit Lake.

Forest Management and the Collaborative Process on the Gifford Pinchot National Forest and Surrounding State Lands

Over 35 years ago, the Gifford Pinchot Task Force formed to protect the Gifford Pinchot National Forest and advocate for change in the way the forest was managed. Decades later, advocating for sustainable forest management practices and working with forest collaboratives is still the bread and butter of our work. Over the past year, CFC employed various approaches to protect critical habitat and threatened and endangered species. We weighed in on both federal and state timber sales, ensuring old-growth stands were protected, roads degrading aquatic systems were removed, and we opposed regeneration harvest in 120-year old forest stands. We also continued our work in our two forest collaboratives: the Pinchot Partners, and the South Gifford Pinchot Collaborative, working on building consensus around how the forest is managed and advocating for forest practices that build climate resilience.





2020 Finances

Our financial position remained strong in 2020, and despite the uncertainty caused by the pandemic, we continued to operate without reductions to staffing and with minimal reductions to programs. This was thanks to the generosity of individual donors, the support of our partner organizations, and the flexibility and leadership of our staff and board.

In 2020, individual giving and funds from sponsorships and attendance at online events together totaled more than \$260,000. That is an impressive 36% of CFC’s total 2020 income and an incredible 49% of the year’s total expenses. Thank you for doing your part to ensure that CFC has the resources and capacity to fight for the Cascades for years to come.

TOTAL EXPENSES: \$538,737

PROGRAMS:	\$436,378
ADMINISTRATION:	\$78,281
FUNDRAISING:	\$24,077



TOTAL INCOME: \$730,639

RESTRICTED GRANTS:	\$248,987
INDIVIDUAL DONATIONS:	\$186,484
UNRESTRICTED GRANTS:	\$127,380
OTHER:	\$80,524
EVENTS:	\$76,534
INTEREST INCOME:	\$10,732

