

COLUMBIA LAND TRUST

Fieldbook

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Conserving and caring for the vital lands, waters, and wildlife of the Columbia River region through sound science and strong relationships.



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Thank You for Joining Us

Columbia Land Trust conserves and cares for the vital lands, waters, and wildlife of the Columbia River region through sound science and strong relationships.

Columbia Land Trust has earned accreditation from the Land Trust Alliance, which recognizes land trusts that adhere to national standards for excellence, uphold the public trust with rigorous ethical standards, and take steps to ensure that conservation efforts are permanent.



Cover photo: Ahmed Yusuf, member of the Green Jobs team, hauls brush for fire resilience work at the Summit Creek site. Photo by Paloma Ayala
Inside cover: Lady Fern (*Athyrium filix-femina*). Photo by Brian Chambers Photography
Opposite Page: A Land Trust fire resilience work team clears brush. Photo by Paloma Ayala



“...managing lands to be more resilient to wildfires may be critically important to many species, including birds.”

As you'll read in this issue, managing lands to be more resilient to wildfires may be critically important to many species, including birds. The 6,000 families who are participating in the Backyard Habitat Certification Program are making our urban landscapes more resilient for birds as well.

Survival of so many species is dependent upon things we easily overlook: the types of flowering plants available, fruits or seeds coming ripe at just the right time, insects hatching just prior to bird migration, natural areas remaining intact along migratory corridors to offer rest and replenishment.

In a world with accelerating change, our actions—yours and mine—to restore habitat that offers natural resilience is critically important. These actions aren't just theoretically important. They likely save wildlife every day, month, and year.

Thank you all for making this work possible.

Glenn Lamb, Executive Director

An Owl's Call

One night in mid-September, appreciating the absence of wildfire smoke, we had our doors and windows open. And for the first time in our decades living in inner southeast Portland, we heard a western screech owl.

Our most common neighborhood birds are crow, robin, junco, goldfinch, house finch, scrub jay, house sparrow, song sparrow, hummingbird, and flicker. In the last couple of years, we have also heard western tanager and, just twice, varied thrush.

It is always a thrill to see even our regular birds. So many of these birds travel thousands of miles in a year across diverse habitats. Their presence in our yard is a gift, and we are happy to offer them food from the many native species we planted as part of the Backyard Habitat Certification Program.

But I have paid even more attention to them since reading the article published last fall in the journal *Science*, detailing the loss of about 3 billion birds in the United States and Canada since 1970, nearly 25% of the entire population of birds. While scientists can't be sure what is causing this loss, they point to human actions as contributive causes, including the loss of habitat and the use of toxic pesticides.



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Fire Resilience in Our Forests

The Land Trust is Managing Forestland for the Realities of Climate Change and Catastrophic Wildfire

BY JAY KOSA



The vanilla scent of ponderosa pine mingles with dust in the air as a crew of Land Trust staff and interns convene in the forest near Washington's Summit Creek, a tributary of the Klickitat River. Contractors from Slawson Wood Products out of Goldendale have been on site since 6:00 a.m. and were just packing up their chainsaws by late morning to mitigate fire risk. Together, the combined crew set into the forest to pile a vast tangle of just-cut logs and branches.

Columbia Land Trust's July acquisition of 4,900 acres may have marked the culmination of more than a decade of work to establish the nearly 11,000-acre Klickitat Canyon Conservation Area, but in reality, our work is just beginning. Natural Area Manager Lindsay Cornelius has seen her portfolio of stewarded lands in the Klickitat River watershed grow by 340 percent as a result of the recent conservation success at the canyon. In a year of crises, she is taking the new challenge in stride.

"I am energized by this landscape," Cornelius says, "because there's so much to learn and discover, because it is so biologically rich, so remote, and so beautiful. And yet there are still many restoration and stewardship opportunities that feel relevant and urgent, never more so than in the wake of this summer's firestorms."

"I am energized by this landscape... there are still many restoration and stewardship opportunities that feel relevant and urgent, never more so than in the wake of this summer's firestorms."

LINDSAY CORNELIUS
NATURAL AREA MANAGER

Cornelius recognized that the forested portions of the Klickitat Canyon Conservation Area fit into a broader landscape of forestland spanning areas managed in conservation by the Yakama Nation, Mount Adams Resource Stewards, and the Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Natural Areas program. She is exploring the possibility of a collaborative forest-health project with these neighbors and DNR's Forest Health Program as a

funding partner, which could set the course toward a more climate-resilient landscape.

Much of the Klickitat River area's forests are prone to lightning strikes, fuel loads are elevated, and in many places forest composition has shifted toward Douglas-fir and away from more fire-tolerant species. In addition, a majority of the forest is young, dense, and brushy. In other words, these forests are at risk of burning hotter, longer, and more intensely than they would have historically through a natural cycle of fire and regeneration.

At the Summit Creek project site, mistletoe infestations and overstocked, fuel-laden forests shade out Oregon white oak trees and create fuel ladders into an old-growth stand of ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir on the adjacent Yakama Nation Indian Reservation. A wildfire here would almost certainly have catastrophic effects, compromising the old-growth trees.

Globally, the climate is changing, and in the Northwest, hotter, longer, drier summers along with frequent extreme weather events, including high winds, demand swift adaptation in our work on three fronts: First, we are accelerating the pace and scale at which we conserve Northwest forests, which serve as some of the most effective carbon sinks in the world. Next, we are adapting our forest management plans to further emphasize fire resilience, especially in the East Cascades, both by thinning trees and reducing fuel loads to limit the intensity of fires when they occur, and through prescribed burns that perform the historic role of natural fire in the region's ecology. Lastly, we are advocating and educating around opportunities for natural climate solutions in the region.

Back at Summit Creek, the day's work undertaken by Cornelius, Stewardship Assistant Sanoe Keliinoini, and Green Jobs interns Ahmed Yusuf and Jonathan Albarran involves piling the small trees and branches cut by the contractors for



Adapting the Plan

- › Accelerate the pace and scale at which we conserve Northwest forests.
- › Shift our forest management plans to further emphasize fire resilience.
- › Advocate and educate around opportunities for natural climate solutions in the region.

later burning. This removes fuels that could otherwise feed wildfires, smother understory vegetation, or contribute to lethal temperatures during a future prescribed fire.

Working early in the morning, father-and-son contractors Rick and Richard Slawson, and their helper Tim, thinned a dense pocket of forest, guided by flags tied by DNR foresters, Keliinoini, and Cornelius. The layout process isn't entirely linear, or entirely random. When wildfires burn, they can burn in patches, leaving seed sources and cover for wildlife. The goal when mimicking these positive effects of fire is to create not a barren landscape in the understory of the forest but a mosaic of skips, which are brushy, and gaps, which are clearings. Birds, including flammulated owls and Lewis's woodpeckers, benefit from having these breaks in the canopy to access tree cavities and food. The crews also removed conifers from around native Oregon white oak trees to give them more light.

Once the contractors complete thinning efforts across 95 acres of forest along Summit Creek this fall, the Land Trust will look to conduct subsequent phases of forest restoration in adjacent stands, which will involve similarly treating hundreds more acres in preparation for prescribed burns on the property.

"I feel this huge sense of responsibility," Keliinoini says. "There's a reconnection between us and the land, change you can literally see once the stands aren't cloaked in shadows and dead branches anymore. It's a little overwhelming how much acreage is out here, but I'm excited to be part of the project."

Throughout the day, the crew members strain their muscles lugging logs and dragging slash across the landscape. In this moment in history shrouded by unrest—as we face climate change, deep social divisions, and a pandemic—this forestry effort in the wilds of Klickitat Canyon offers an experiment in hope. Land managers ranging widely in age, experience, and background traverse common ground together, hewing a flourishing, resilient vision for the future, one tree at a time. 🌲

Photos by Paloma Ayala

a | A pile of brush grows as the team works to mitigate fire risk

b | Natural Area Manager Lindsay Cornelius, directs the work at the Summit Creek project site



c |

Green Workforce

Building Relationships
with a Focus on Equity

BY JAY KOSA

c | Ahmed Yusuf, Green Jobs team member, at the Powderdale work site. Photo provided by Ahmed Yusuf

d | Wisdom of the Elders' Wisdom Workforce Development crew install deer-friendly fencing

e | Selena Gutierrez, one of four 2020 Green Jobs team members, works on site. Photo provided by Ahmed Yusuf

Columbia Land Trust's nine-member stewardship team is tasked with caring for 30,000 acres spanning the many diverse ecosystems of the lower Columbia River region, and every year the number of acres grows.

One thing is certain: we can't do it alone. Each year, we rely on support from seasonal field staff, interns, volunteers, and contractors. Heavy civil construction firms, engineers, forestry crews, junk haulers, and watershed technicians are just a few of the contractors we now routinely hire to carry out our land management and restoration efforts. From our humble beginnings, we now embrace our role as a significant employer in the region's growing green economy.

With that power comes responsibility. Looking to our equity commitments to guide us, our stewardship team has recognized opportunities to the development of an equitable green workforce, to envision a sector whose diversity reflects that of the communities in which we work, across all levels of employment.

"We asked ourselves, 'What is the racial and cultural composition of our team (it is predominantly white), and who have career development opportunities in our field historically been designed for?'" says Emily Matson, a land steward on the stewardship team. "We want to improve the professional pathways that determine who becomes a land manager at the Land Trust and, more importantly, who goes on to have a career in restoration and land management in our region."

To meet this responsibility, the stewardship team began shifting its practices and building new partnerships to remove barriers and increase access to careers in the field.

WISDOM WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT CREW

In the realm of skill building, the Land Trust is partnering with Wisdom of the Elders, a nonprofit dedicated to Native American cultural sustainability. The nonprofit recently formed Wisdom Workforce Development, LLC (WWD), a restoration contractor that provides Native American adults with employment opportunities and skill development throughout the Portland-Vancouver area. In the past year, the Land Trust has contracted with WWD crews on stewardship projects, including vegetation mapping, brush cutting, and replacing cattle fencing with newer, wildlife-friendly fencing.

Bruce Amick, a crew leader with WWD, has enjoyed his experiences on Land Trust projects led by natural area manager Dan Friesz. "It's been really awesome. Dan has helped us gain a lot of experience in the field, whether it's fencing or tree maintenance, and it allows us to learn, try new things, adapt, adjust, and always improve." Amick points out that from a business perspective, the Land Trust contracts pay well, which allows the LLC to build a foundation, purchase new equipment, and invest in growing the company. He also appreciates Wisdom's vision for WWD. "You hear a lot about

programs for youth. But what about adults who need a second start? I certainly count myself in that category."

GREEN JOBS PROGRAM

In 2020, the Land Trust also partnered with Forest Park Conservancy (FPC) in the pilot year of its Green Jobs Training and Internship Program. FPC launched the program to provide access and career pathways into the green workforce for young people of color.

"In Portland, and across the US, the green jobs sector has historically been, and still is, extremely white and hard to break into," says Katrina Montoya, fieldwork and internship coordinator for FPC. "We are working to make space for people who have felt like a career in conservation and stewardship would not be welcoming or even an option for them."

Through the program, four Green Jobs team members, ages 18 to 25, are working with Columbia Land Trust as part of rotating placements with environmental organizations around the Portland-Vancouver area. In addition to the Land Trust and FPC, program partners include the Blueprint Foundation, Wisdom of the Elders, Ecotrust, and West Multnomah Soil & Water Conservation District.

Though the pandemic has made both field and office work more challenging logistically, the Green Jobs team members have still been able to gain hands-on experience in the field and shadow seasoned professionals, while earning a living wage and developing a professional network. They have supported planting and restoration efforts as well as vegetation management and fuels reduction, working alongside members of the Land Trust's stewardship team.

Montoya has served as the Green Jobs team's point person in navigating rotating assignments with multiple organizations, in addition to the challenges of working during a pandemic and a social reckoning with pervasive, systemic



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"We asked ourselves,
'What is the racial and
cultural composition of our
team ... and who have career
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been designed for?'"

EMILY MATSON,
LAND STEWARD



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that's probably true for most people. It's still been a positive, different kind of experience being creative, finding ways to contribute from home. I just want to be outside doing the work on the ground. Hopefully people see me as an example out there."

Yusuf supports the goal of the Green Jobs program to help diversify the field. "No matter which sector, you want the people serving a community to look like that community."

Looking ahead, the Green Jobs team is preparing for their next career steps by creating résumés and action plans, with support from Matson, Montoya, and the other program staff. We are excited to see what comes next for the 2020 cohort, and we will be here to support them in their journey.

These partnerships and programs are new, and we won't be able to fully evaluate their impact for years. In the meantime, we are grateful for the leadership and vision of our partners at FPC, Wisdom of the Elders, and many others. We are committed to challenging ourselves, making mistakes, and learning how much more work awaits as we support a vision of a Northwest that is nature-rich, culturally vibrant, and thriving. 🌱

You Can Build New Pathways

As we enter the season of giving, you can make a difference in the future of people and wildlife in the Northwest by making a gift to Columbia Land Trust.



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Use the attached
envelope or give online at
columbialandtrust.org/donate

Have you found solace outside?

Here are some places and observations from those who...
#ReflectWithNature

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Taaj Armstrong

It has been a challenging year for everyone: events that have forced our country to confront the racism of its past and present; a worsening global pandemic, which has changed our lives both personally and economically; and the devastating wildfires unleashed by our changing climate...This summer...with all of the heaviness and trauma...I found

myself emotionally depleted. I called up my dear friend...and I asked if I could tag along with her on her next hike. We went to **Pup Creek Falls**. Being outside, hearing the racing water, smelling the forest, and the sound of my feet on the forest floor gave me an instant release of all that I was carrying. ~Wild Splendor event



Kate VanNice Shafer

Some of my most memorable backpacking trips have been through forests that were burnt by wildfires. There is something inspiring and hopeful in seeing the first signs of recovery that come after the flames. I have been reflecting a lot on this trip through Three Sisters Wilderness my husband and I took back in July as we cope with our community being hit by wildfires. This year has been difficult beyond measure, but looking at this picture of a field of shooting stars thriving in a burnt forest I am reminded that one day we will look back and see that even though things will be much different than before, we have an opportunity for new growth because of what we have gone through.



Rebecca Ballweber Roberts

This is from Mill Creek Ridge – one of my favorite places in the world!

CULTIVATING TRUST

The Newly-Formed Oregon Agricultural Trust Aims to Ensure a Farming Future Across the State.

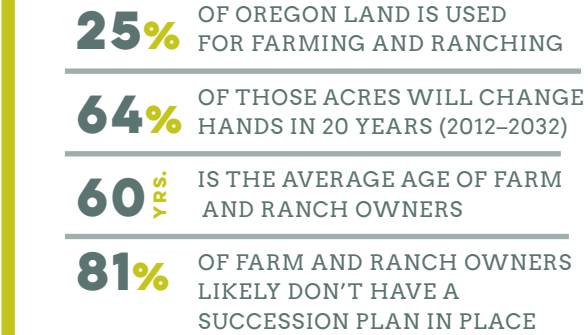
BY MACKENZIE RAWCLIFFE

Columbia Land Trust's conservation vision for the Columbia River region has always encompassed people working on and enjoying the land, including farmland. Yet a farmland conservation problem is looming as farm owners age without the guidance and resources to make succession plans. Despite the state of Oregon being a pioneer in open-space land-use planning, no organization has been ready to tackle the succession problem across the quarter of lands dedicated to agricultural use.

"Columbia Land Trust would receive inquiries from farmland owners interested in protecting their farm for continued use as viable ag land," says Alice Williamson, Ag Lands Program director (formerly a member of the Conservation team at Columbia Land Trust). "We would hand those leads off to conservation districts, but recognizing that some of them didn't have the capacity, we thought that perhaps lots of other land trusts [in the state] were coming up short in terms of resources." So in March 2018, taking a page from the entrepreneurial world, the Land Trust met with partners from academia, conservation, and agricultural interests to design a solution that could fill the gap in the conservation "market."

Columbia Land Trust has since served as an incubator for the organization that grew from those discussions, the Oregon Agricultural Trust (OAT): from that first agenda-setting meeting, through the feasibility study, connecting with funders, and as both a mentor and a fiscal sponsor over the past year. Now that OAT has a solid reputation, a strategic plan, full-time employees, and an enthusiastic board, they are ready to leave the nest, so to speak. However, at their core OAT shares the Land Trust's belief in a long-term strategy, research-based plans, and strong, cooperative relationships.

The Oregon Agricultural Trust's primary goal, according to its executive director, Nellie McAdams, is to strategically conserve as much agricultural land as possible. OAT is achieving this by connecting interested landowners to



planning resources, working alone or with partners to set up easements when appropriate, supporting state and national advocacy efforts for favorable funding and policies, and offering training on succession planning to relevant professional associations. "We are hoping to bring on more farmers and ranchers as board members by the end of the year," says McAdams. "For us, it is a matter of earning trust, and deserving it, and continuing to deserve it over time...In part, that comes down to creating results that farmers want to be a part of."

How does Williamson feel about her start-up future with Oregon Agricultural Trust? "I would say that I'm taking a lot of what I learned at Columbia Land Trust...That desire to not be scared by big ideas, I carry that with me too [as well as] some of the examples that I've seen set by staff and board members at Columbia Land Trust, to just go after something even if it seems insurmountable."

We at the Land Trust are thrilled to have Oregon Agricultural Trust as a close partner in our ongoing mission for the Northwest as a region of thriving communities; local, healthy food; and flourishing landscapes. 🌱

f | Photo provided by Oregon Agricultural Trust

SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

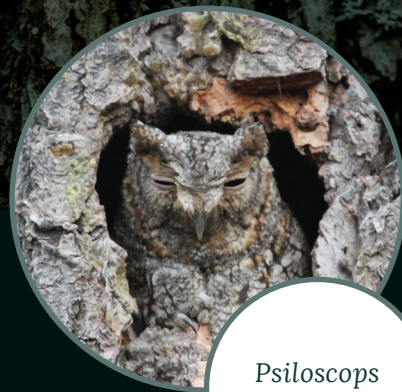
Flammulated Owl

BY KARLEY GAUTHIER-DAVIS

HABITAT

WITH A MIX OF GRAY, BROWN, RUST, AND WHITE PLUMAGE, FLAMS ARE CAMOUFLAGED WELL AGAINST TREE TRUNKS.

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Psiloscops flammeolus

IDENTIFICATION

Flammulated owls, affectionately known as flammies or flams, are fairly small, standing at about 6 inches and weighing roughly 2 ounces. Despite their small size, their wings are long, so they can achieve high speeds. With a mix of gray, brown, rust, and white plumage, flams are camouflaged well against tree trunks. These pint-sized critters have big eyes and small ear tufts that remain flat against their heads, two distinctions that are often used to differentiate them from other owls. Flammulated owls produce a variety of calls, including deep and husky hoots since they are able to slow their vocal vibrations. It is common to hear a flam before seeing one.

LIFE

Because flammulated owls are nocturnal and extremely well camouflaged, they are tough to spot and even harder to study. They even migrate during the night, and there are several theories as to when their migration begins and why some

populations fly south. These owls reside mostly in coniferous forests of the western United States and Mexico, and they prefer it where the trees are not dense but grow in thick enough pockets for them to safely hunt. Their diet mostly consists of beetles, moths, grasshoppers, crickets, and similar insects.

STATUS

Flammulated owls are not globally threatened, but their nocturnal lifestyle makes it hard to monitor their populations. Since they like a very specific habitat, they are more vulnerable to small changes in their ecosystem. Pesticides and insecticides, wildfires, and climate change all threaten the flammulated owl. Because of its small size, a flam can lay only about two or three eggs at a time. This results in a much slower reproductive rate, but they have a long lifespan. Scientists and researchers continue to study flammulated owls in order to learn more about their habitat preferences and behavior. 🦉

g | Photo by Alan Schmierer
h | Photo by Rob Lowry

Thank You for Joining us Virtually for *Wild Splendor*

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Nearly **500** supporters came together when tuning in to Columbia Land Trust's *Wild Splendor* virtual celebration on October 1st. Supporters like you raised more than **\$250,000** to conserve and care for the lands, waters, and wildlife of the Northwest. Together we celebrated nature's resilience, honored conservation milestones, and premiered our latest short film, *The Witness Tree*. Everyone who watched, gave, and otherwise contributed made the evening a resounding success!

i | Remarks were given by event emcee Taaj Armstrong and Executive Director Glenn Lamb.



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RESILIENCE IS IN OUR NATURE

This year has been challenging for everyone. A worsening global pandemic, which has changed our lives both personally and economically; events that have forced our country to confront the racism of its past and its present; and the devastating wildfires unleashed by our changing climate. These events, and others like them, provide us with opportunities to exercise our resilience and to create a world in which we all thrive.

The nature of the Northwest always gives back. Like you, it is generous even when times are difficult—especially when times are difficult. And like you, the very nature of the Northwest stands apart.

Thank you for giving fearlessly to protect
the lands, waters, and wildlife of the
Columbia River Region—conserving
the nature you love.

Photo by Paloma Ayala