

Fieldbook

COLUMBIA LAND TRUST



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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.

Seeing the
Forest for
the Trees

PG. 4

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Cover photo: Conserved forest at Pine Creek, below Mount St. Helens.

Inside cover: Spring lupine in the East Cascades.

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.



Inspired by Our Community

Wow, are we living in a dynamic world. Daily developments in our shared social, economic, and environmental worlds are impacting all of us—in different ways and to varying degrees—and I have been feeling the need for both a sense of agency and a sense of community more keenly.

When I joined Columbia Land Trust six years ago as Grants Manager, I was tasked with conveying the breadth of our conservation work in words—and within maximum character count!—to foundation funders. Having come from the arts sector, this was a new and welcome challenge: the Land Trust accomplishes a LOT and much of what we do is complex, both logistically and scientifically. What I quickly came to appreciate is how the Land Trust works to achieve outcomes that benefit all of us. We work in collaboration and in community—lending our expertise, learning from others, and finding common ground to get real results. This organization was founded by passionate volunteers and built, over the next 35 years, by a growing community that cares about the lands and waters of the Northwest, the resilience of its natural systems, and the health of the plants, animals, and people who call it home.

I stepped into my current position as Development Director last fall and feel so honored to continue to be a part of this high-impact work. At the Land Trust, I am grateful to find both the sense of agency and community that I need right now. I am bringing my energy and resources to bear on lasting work that matters. I have largely shifted from writing about what we do to sharing it, face to face, with many of you—and it has been an absolute pleasure.

In this *Fieldbook*, you will find stories not only of thoughtful forest management and our work to support endangered species, but of amazing volunteers and Land Trust supporters like you! I hope you will peruse a donor story on page 8 featuring Darlene Chirman and Jo Ann Harris, who have each left a bequest to Columbia Land Trust in their estate planning. Theirs is a legacy of care and hope that will help the nature of the Northwest adapt and endure for many, many years beyond our present moment. We would like to invite all of our supporters to consider this kind of giving and we've provided guidance in these pages on how to get started.

In times of change and uncertainty, I am grateful for the steadfast dedication of Columbia Land Trust and inspired by our community's commitment to caring for each other and for this place we love.

- Keely McIntyre, Development Director



Volunteers work together to search for endangered squirrel nests.



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Seeing the Forest

The Science and Strategy Behind Forest Management

Imagine you are walking through a Northwest forest. Scattered sunlight breaks through the tree canopy high overhead, while a diverse and complex understory of native plants grows at ground level. There are snags and dead wood, standing and fallen, to provide habitat. You can hear bird calls, see a network of wildlife trails, and even spot a bear rub tree with

and downed wood that provide exceptional wildlife habitat, and allows the native plant understory to thrive. We've implemented this strategy at sites across our service area, and a dozen years later, the thinning is imperceptible and you just see a healthy, diverse forest."

Columbia Land Trust's service area follows the Columbia River for 230

for the Trees

clear signs of wear and tufts of fur caught on branches. This sort of older, diverse forest is what we are seeking to achieve with our land management.

Healthy forests benefit water quality, carbon sequestration, and climate and wildfire resilience. Columbia Land Trust is working to conserve forestland at a meaningful scale to strengthen these vital ecological systems for generations to come.

"It is possible to nudge nature in the right direction," said Columbia Land Trust Stewardship Director Ian Sinks. "You can change a timber plantation into a healthy forest using silviculture and modern machines. Intentionally harvesting trees on former timberland supports the local economy, increases growth of the remaining trees, releases oaks from conifer overtopping, creates room to plant diverse species, leaves behind snags

miles, encompassing multiple different forest types. There are many complexities to modern forest management and conservation that include a changing climate, logging history, the removal of fire from fire-adapted landscapes, and the broad variety of social contexts we operate in. The amount of forestland under our care grows as we conserve more land, so our team is constantly working to refine our stewardship capabilities to best achieve our goals.

The Land Trust regularly conserves former industrial timberland with the goal of restoring it and accelerating the return of older growth habitat conditions. This requires active management to maximize long-term ecosystem functionality. Two of the most common and effective forest restoration strategies are thinning and prescribed fire.

East Cascades Forests

In the arid East Cascades, our stewardship team completed a forestry assessment of Land Trust sites in Klickitat and Yakima Counties, that will inform our work as we continue to conserve land in this region. It showed that most of the forest stands are in the "young" or "mature" age class (trees that are 28-120 years old). On average oak/pine forests in the assessment have 420 trees per acre, the dry mixed conifer forests have 350 trees per acre, the pine savanna forests have 204 trees per acre, and the moist mixed conifer forests have 200 trees per acre.

Current forests stands have departed from pre-European settlement conditions, resulting in denser forests with continuous layered canopies, homogeneous structure, more shade-tolerant and fire-intolerant species, and high surface fuel loads and fuel ladders. There is little evidence that current conditions are sustainable, especially in the face of climate change, and they have set the stage for high-severity, stand-replacing wildfires. Other landscapes in similar condition have demonstrated the lasting impacts these megafires have on ecosystems, carbon storage, hydrologic regimes, native biodiversity, and terrestrial and aquatic habitats. Megafires cause large areas to become inaccessible or inhospitable to species that rely on mature forests, leading to support lower wildlife species diversity in the impacted area.

"These problems aren't unique, we are not alone in this," said Natural Area Manager Adam Lieberg, explaining that our current forest issues began with the forceful removal of Indigenous peoples (which included curtailment of Indigenous burning practices), followed by decades of industrial forest

management. "Fire exclusion and suppression have fundamentally changed dry forests in the East Cascades by increasing tree densities and fuel loads. Fortunately, there are resources available and other organizations, Tribes, and agencies we can learn from and partner with," he said.

Oak/pine and dry mixed conifer forest types are shown to have high levels of wildfire hazard potential in climate modeling by Washington Department of Natural Resources. Because of this reality, we are actively working to grow the capacity of Columbia Land Trust, and other land managers, to safely and strategically implement prescribed burns in low-elevation dry forests to help mitigate these risks.

The absence of recurring fire also allows conifers to encroach on sun-loving and fire-adapted Oregon white oak trees and eventually overtop the oaks and shade them out. Because of the many habitat and climate resilience benefits they offer, protecting oak habitats in the East Cascades is one of our top conservation priorities, and implementing prescribed fire serves our goal of supporting oak systems.

Like oak trees, large diameter ponderosa pines, with their thick bark, open crown structure, and deep roots, are also well adapted to moderate severity fire. Historic reference photos of forests in the area show high branches and forest floors with less brush and other understory ladder fuels than are often currently present; two factors which increase the risk of high severity wildfire.

"Bowman Creek Natural Area is a great example of how thoughtful stewardship can promote and maintain

How do you prioritize forest treatment plans?

In the East Cascades we prioritize forest treatment plans based on three criteria, ranking each site against this triple bottom line:

NEED: What is the current condition of the landscape and what stressors are impacting ecological integrity and forest health? Are hazardous fuels conditions present?

ACCESS: How difficult will it be to implement fuels reductions treatments here, given the topography and access for people and equipment?

IMPACT: Consider project size, ability to simultaneously make progress towards other goals, proximity to unique ecological features, and human priorities.

high quality habitat for wildlife," said Lieberg, referencing a site where the Land Trust has completed both thinning and prescribed fire restoration projects. "It is one of the last strongholds for endangered western gray squirrels, and one of our biggest concerns is high-severity, stand-replacing fire. Restoring patterns and processes through thinning and prescribed burning treatments is part of responsible and science-based forest management.."

Igniting a prescribed fire at Bowman Creek. Photo by Amanda Monthei.

Silviculture:

the science of managing the establishment, growth, composition, and health of forests and woodlands to achieve specific goals.

Coastal Forests

In the Coast ecoregion, in addition to our significant work to restore wetland ecosystems and salmonid habitat, Columbia Land Trust manages about 5,000 acres of upland forest, across a variety of age classes and forest conditions. Our priority conservation areas are concentrated around the Columbia River Estuary, the Grays River watershed, and the Willapa Hills. Our long-term forest management goals include accelerating stands toward late successional characteristics, supporting a diversity of species, structure, and habitats, and supporting the regional forestry economy by hiring local contractors and keeping land in the tax base. In coastal forests, thinning is one of the primary restoration strategies we use to work towards these goals.

“Over the last five years we have completed over 130 acres of commercial thinning and over 100 acres of pre-commercial thinning across four Land Trust properties,” said Land Trust Coast Region Stewardship Manager Austin Tomlinson. Our goal with precommercial thinning is early intervention, when trees are 15-20 years in age. This takes a forest with a high number of trees per acre (700-1000) to a low or moderate number of trees (350-450). This lets in more sunlight, reduces stress and competition amongst the remaining trees, and gives us an opportunity to leave specific species like hemlock or spruce, in what would otherwise be a monoculture of Douglas-fir dominant stands. In contrast, with commercial thinning, the forest stand is older and we actively remove specific trees and send them to the mill. This forest enhancement strategy again allows us to create diversity in tree species, age, and structure while also generating revenue that supports additional conservation and stewardship work, and local economic benefits. “We work closely with our contractors to leave snags and trees with other imperfections, since those offer additional habitat diversity,” he continued.

Over the next five years, we are hoping to accelerate and continue this type of thinning work across hundreds of additional acres within our Coast stewardship units. 🌲



How do you support habitat?

Our stewardship work generally takes a watershed-scale approach, focusing on big picture ecological function to support a diversity of plant and animal species, but sometimes out of necessity it focuses on a specific species. For example, some of our forestry management near the coast is done specifically to enhance habitat for endangered marbled murrelet (MAMU). A forest is considered occupied MAMU habitat if a contiguous area has individual trees ≥ 32 inches in diameter at the breast and contains two or more marbled murrelet nesting platforms per acre. More than 100 acres of Land Trust land in the Grays River watershed meets these criteria, as do 20 acres around East Willapa Bay. We also care for another few hundred acres of suitable habitat, where we are working to foster suitable habitat conditions.

See page 7 for more details about the endangered marbled murrelet.



[Precommercial thinning] lets in more sunlight, reduces stress and competition amongst the remaining trees, and gives us an opportunity to leave specific species like hemlock or spruce, in what would otherwise be a monoculture of Douglas-fir dominant stands.

Coast Region Stewardship Manager Austin Tomlinson manages forest thinning restoration near the Grays River. Photo by Steve Strom.

SPECIES SPOTLIGHT Marbled Murrelet

(*Brachyramphus marmoratus*)

Washington's coastal forests hold some of the last remaining intact habitat for endangered marbled murrelet (*Brachyramphus marmoratus*) in the Pacific Northwest. These unassuming seabirds, which are the size of a robin, spend most of the year foraging in shallow waters just off the Pacific Coastline. But come early April, marbled murrelets begin to leave the ocean behind and travel into the shady coastal forests in search of the perfect breeding grounds: old growth trees.

The birds require wide, mossy branches deep within the forest canopy where they can lay a single egg and raise their young safe from predators. Two centuries ago, these habitat conditions were abundant in the Pacific Northwest, but marbled murrelet populations have declined significantly due to increased deforestation, habitat fragmentation, nest predation, and marine disturbances like gillnets, oil spills, and climatic changes in ocean conditions, which affect the abundance of fish that they forage.

Throughout the coast ecoregion, our stewardship work, (as you can read on page 4) often focuses on accelerating older forest conditions through restoration, with the goal of protecting and/or improving marbled murrelet habitat.

“Marbled murrelet are extremely difficult to track and see, but their presence is a good indicator of healthy forest conditions,” said Coast Region Stewardship Manager Austin Tomlinson. “Replicating their habitat conditions is not accomplished overnight. It can take decades, if not centuries, to show results.” 🌲



The birds require wide, mossy branches deep within the forest, where they will lay a single egg each breeding season.

FAST FACTS

In 1992, marbled murrelets were federally listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. They were uplisted to endangered in Washington in 2016 and in Oregon in 2021.

They travel up to 50 miles inland to nest in mature or old-growth forests, where they lay a single egg each year in tree depressions covered in moss and lichen.

Marbled murrelets can fly up to 100 miles per hour and have the ability to dive up to 100 feet in search of prey.

Pairs establish long-term bonds and fidelity to nesting areas and nest trees. They also share egg incubation and feeding duties.

A Legacy of Conservation and Care

Permanent and Lasting Impact

One of the most powerful aspects of Columbia Land Trust’s work is that the conservation we accomplish is permanent, and our stewardship builds ecological health and resilience long into the future. Estate gifts, also known as bequests, can propel our conservation efforts forward by creating predictable revenue that allows us to capitalize on opportunities and leverage other funding sources.

Darlene Chirman and Jo Ann Harris, two generous Land Trust supporters, share their personal connection with nature, and how it inspired them to leave a legacy gift to Columbia Land Trust.

Darlene Chirman

My first career was as a nurse, but while living in American Samoa I assisted visiting scientists with a study on fruit bats, which are integral to rainforest ecology, pollinating, and dispersing fruits of forest trees. Inspired by that work, I decided to go back to school when I returned to the States, to earn my Master’s in Ecology. I worked as a restoration biologist for 20 years in the Santa Barbara, California area, often partnering with a local land trust on restoration projects. When I moved to Portland in 2011, the then Executive Director at that organization spoke highly of Columbia Land Trust’s exemplary work and recommended that I get involved.

I have been very impressed with Columbia Land Trust’s landscape-scale conservation approach, as well as their restoration of individual sites. While revising my estate plans a few years ago, I added them as a beneficiary of my IRA. For me, this utilized a tax-smart strategy to support a charity I care about. I have also been making annual Qualified Charitable Distributions (QCDs) from my IRA, which meets my Required Minimum Distribution, but with no income tax due—so I can be more generous in my donations. I am grateful to be part of this work!

“I have been impressed with Columbia Land Trust’s landscape-scale conservation approach, as well as their restoration of individual sites. While revising my estate plans, I added them as a beneficiary of my IRA.”

~ Darlene Chirman



“I was privileged to grow up in a less crowded, noisy, over-heated planet than what young people are inheriting ... if the gift of my property ... can conserve even a small piece of the world I grew up in, then I will have done some good.”

~ Jo Ann Harris

Jo Ann Harris

I had the good fortune to grow up in White Salmon, Washington, in the 1950’s. The Mt. Adams area was a playground for my family and I have wonderful memories of camping, berry picking, and other outings. Our house was on the bluff in White Salmon (back when that was far more affordable), and we had a spectacular view of Mt. Hood and the Columbia River Gorge. My mother was an avid gardener and she passed that love of gardening, and an appreciation of the natural world, on to me.

It is out of gratitude that I have chosen to bequeath my property in Hood River to Columbia Land Trust, a nonprofit that shares my values, and whose mission is to conserve and care for the vital lands, water, and wildlife of the Columbia River region.

I was privileged to grow up in a less crowded, noisy, over-heated planet than what young people are inheriting today, and if the gift of my property to Columbia Land Trust can conserve even a small piece of the world I grew up in, then I will have done some good. For this reason, I have named Columbia Land Trust as beneficiary in my recently updated will and trust. 🌿

Photo of Jo Ann by Jessica Daniels Photography



JOIN OUR HERITAGE CIRCLE

Including Columbia Land Trust in your estate plans is an impactful way to leave a legacy of your own that will benefit the nature of the Northwest for generations to come. You can allocate any amount, percentage, or the remainder of your estate or other assets to Columbia Land Trust through your will or revocable living trust.

How to Make a Bequest

1. Start by getting advice from your estate planning attorney and tax advisor.
2. Copy and paste the sample language found at: [ColumbiaLandTrust.org/Bequest](https://columbialandtrust.org/Bequest) or via the QR code below. Using our templates, work with your financial advisor or estate planning attorney to customize the gift and language.
3. If you include Columbia Land Trust in your plans, please include the below information to help with our records:
Legal Name: Columbia Land Trust
Address: 850 Officers Row, Vancouver, WA 98661
Federal Tax ID Number: 94-3140861
4. Contact us at **(360) 696-0131** or jsamwel@columbialandtrust.org to notify us of your estate gift.



Find Sample Language Here



[COLUMBIALANDTRUST.ORG/BEQUEST](https://columbialandtrust.org/Bequest)

If you own land you are interested in seeing conserved, please contact us to discuss.

The information above does not constitute legal or tax advice. Please make sure to work with your legal and tax advisors.

CONNECTING MILL CREEK RIDGE

Volunteers Improve Wildlife Passage

Two Columbia Land Trust volunteers completed a decade-long project to remove unnecessary interior fencing and improve wildlife passage at Mill Creek Ridge, a natural area outside The Dalles, Oregon, home to sweeping views of the Columbia River and Mount Hood and native wildflowers including balsamroot, lupine, and paintbrush.

Bruce Lumper and Susan Stelzer are long-time friends who live on opposite sides of Mill Creek Ridge. They met around 2010 as the Land Trust began acquiring the parcels that make up the natural area, which now covers 418 acres and stretches for 2.5 miles.

Bruce had a vision for a protected natural ridgeline and he and his wife Marolyn played a crucial role in bringing people together to conserve this land. “We were reminded again and again how conservation takes patience and relationship building,” he said.

After the land was conserved, Bruce and Susan were trained as volunteer site stewards. They have helped with many tasks, including collecting annual photo points that are used for monitoring. They chipped away at

the fence removal for years, which involved rolling up barbed wire, digging out fence posts and railroad ties, and hauling debris away. “I grew up on a ranch, so taking down fences instead of building new ones was a first for me,” commented Bruce, who found the results of naturalizing the landscape to be deeply satisfying.

“I am so grateful for Susan and Bruce’s care for this special place,” said Land Trust Natural Area Manager Kate Conley. “In addition to completing big projects like this, they serve as conservation ambassadors, and their observations and familiarity help us make well-informed management decisions.”

While working on the fence removal, Susan and Bruce would bring picnic lunches and take time to appreciate nature. Favorite sights included oak leaves turning golden in the autumn light and a mother elk and her calf walking down the ridge to reach a water source.

“Mill Creek Ridge is a gem. We’re so lucky Columbia Land Trust conserved this place,” said Susan. “It has been a pleasure to help take care of it and share it with others.” 🌿

They chipped away at the fence removal for years, which involved rolling up barbed wire, digging out fence posts and railroad ties, and hauling debris away.

Above: Mt Hood seen from Mill Creek Ridge in the spring. Below: A vintage truck used to haul out fence materials.



PEOPLE MAKE CONSERVATION POSSIBLE

Working and Learning Together on the Land

Throughout the Columbia River region, more than 100 people joined Columbia Land Trust this spring to improve habitat, support native plants and wildlife, and experience the power of conservation.

Whether removing invasive species in the Sandy River floodplain or mulching native plants at a youth camp along the Lewis River, many enthusiastic volunteers joined us to work on three different habitat restoration projects across our service area! Twenty volunteers braved chilly weather to help us survey endangered western gray squirrel nests in an East Cascades forest, 30 households adopted mason bee colonies at our annual mason bee workshop to support healthy urban ecosystems across the Portland-Vancouver metro area, and 15 people from the Northwest Association for Blind Athletes joined us for a birding tour at Cranes’ Landing



in March, to listen to the iconic call of sandhill cranes and other birds that utilize the landscape.

“I loved the birding event!” said tour participant Natalia Moloney. “I’d like to spend a long while with Cindy, [Cindy McCormack, Columbia Land Trust Sandhill Crane Monitoring Scientist and birding expert] absorbing all her knowledge about various birds and their respective calls. I learned a lot from her in the time we had together.”

We are grateful to you, our conservation community, for caring for nature and giving your time and energy to support our work. 🌿



Land Trust staff and volunteers look for and mark trees containing Western gray squirrel nests.




Visit ColumbiaLandTrust.org/Events to learn about upcoming volunteer days and other programs.

We’d like to thank our 2025 sponsors for their role in making these and other events possible!



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Conservation Updates



Steelhead Habitat in the East Cascades

We conserved 64 acres along a stretch of the East Fork Lewis River that offers prime steelhead habitat, benefits for water quality, and connected upland habitat. This project was made possible by a generous land donation from a family that has cared for this place for more than 100 years.



Trails and Nature Access Close to Home

Columbia Land Trust transferred its 43-acre Fallen Leaf Lake site to the City of Camas. The land is part of the Fallen Leaf Lake Park system, beloved for its beauty and local trails. Conserved in 1999, this site was one of the Land Trust's earliest projects. We held the land until now as part of a long-term conservation strategy to maximize funding and leverage resources for additional conservation projects as part of our partnership with the City of Camas and Clark County.



Willapa River Tributaries

A 93-acre property near the Willapa River in Washington is now permanently protected thanks to a generous donor. The land holds incredible conservation value, and is home to intact older forest with native understory, springs, and streams that run to Willapa River. We will care for it to support watershed processes and forest health, which will in turn benefit water quality and foster habitat for salmon, steelhead, and marbled murrelet.