



COWICHE CANYON COLUMNS

Summer 2009

"The mission of CCC is to promote a healthy future for our community by conserving our heritage of open space, scenic vistas, and riparian corridors from Yakima to the Cascade foothills with connected recreational trails and natural landscapes."

New Kiosk at Snow Mountain Ranch

Benton Murray, Scout Troop 151, elected to design and build a new kiosk at Snow Mountain Ranch in order to complete the requirements of his Eagle Scout Project. This kiosk is a welcome addition as the CCC continues to develop trails and provide education opportunities at SMR. Thank you, Benton.

Through fundraisers and donations from various businesses, including Home Depot, Morton Supply, Dunollie Enterprises, Benton was able to acquire materials and organize the help of other scouts and family members. Home Depot became involved after evaluating Benton's community based project and elected to send a "Home Depot Work Team" to help with one day of on-site construction.

Benton wrote the following in his report on the project:

"The first big day of work on the project my troop came and helped even though it was cold and snowing. That day we were able to remove the old sign and set posts for the new one. As work progressed on the project I was amazed to learn that there was a significant need for such a sign. I was surprised to see all the people that use the trail and also those who wanted to learn more about the CCC. People wanting to know what the Conservancy does and other information like how to get in contact with the Conservancy. With this sign, hikers' questions can be answered by way of posted information and the Conservancy will have the means to show people all about their organization." Thanks very much, Benton!



Boy Scout Benton Murray and his father, Shawn, put final touches on the new kiosk

Great Wildflowers

This was a good year for wildflowers in the Yakima Valley, including the Cowiche Canyon Preserve and Snow Mtn Ranch. In mid-February the first little desert parsleys were blooming as well as some buttercups at Snow Mtn Ranch. By mid-March the yellow bells, grass widows, sagebrush violets, & other early flowers were coming on strong. The long cool, wet spell that we experienced prolonged some blooms, delayed others, and in some cases made for an unusually lush blooming.



Carey's Balsamroot

There were good displays of phlox, desert parsleys, desert buckwheat, and, at Snow Mtn Ranch, big-headed clover. But perhaps most spectacular of all was the balsamroot. I don't think that I have ever seen it as lush and profuse as it was throughout the steppe this spring.

-David Hagen

Thanks to Volunteers

Several groups of volunteers came out in April and May to work on digging scotch thistle. Ace Hardware provided a 20% discount on shovels, hoes and gloves and the rest was covered by a grant from the Washington Native Plants Society (WNPS). The remainder of the WNPS grant was used for herbicides and a new backpack sprayer for focused spraying of weeds.

A big thanks goes to the following volunteers for their help this spring: Mike Hiler, Jim Hertel, John Alymer, Ken Tolonen, Tucker Andis, Gavin and Vicki Wang Miller, Alison Nolz, Jerry Kobes, Betty Meilander, Kirk, David Dillahunt, Tim Franks, Becky Lang, Russell Maier, Sara Cate, and Katrina Strathman.



Message from the Executive Director

By Cecilia Vogt

As a long-time fan and member of Cowiche Canyon Conservancy and former board member, it is my honor to now serve in a staff capacity, working in partnership with Barb Smith Gilbert, now our development director. We are excited to work as a team (part time) with the board to build a solid future for CCC with the goal of having a full-time staff to take care of our community treasure.

There is so much happening! Stewardship (weed control, signs, fencing and so on) of 2000 acres, habitat restoration at the Snow Mountain Ranch and Cowiche Canyon properties, educational experiences, volunteer projects, grant writing, outreach to our partners and the public—it's a full time job for several people. Fortunately, we have very active, hard-working board members who have devoted countless hours. Barb and I are here to lighten their load as CCC continues to grow and continue our important work.

For nearly 25 years, CCC has been an important contributor to the quality of life of our Valley and the value of this project grows as more people use the area for recreation and solitude. We'll be planning a big celebration of our 25 years' success story soon. People ask me every day, "How can I help?" My answer: join or renew your membership, tell your friends and encourage them to join and volunteer. With that, our next 25 years will be even more successful!

Family Hikes in the Canyon

The first guided family hike at Cowiche Canyon of the Yakima Greenway Kiddin' Around program will be held on Saturday, June 20. The hike will start at the Wiekel parking lot at 9 am. The Cowiche Canyon hikes will be only for kids accompanied by a parent or adult. This is a summer-long activity program to promote outdoor activity for kids. Participants will earn points toward prizes. Learn more about this program at yakimagreenway.org, or call the Greenway Office at 453-8280.



Erwina Peterson, with friends, enjoying the wildflower display

Yakima Outdoors

An Outdoor Summit was held in Tieton on April 25, 2009 to discuss outdoor activities in the Yakima area. Participants from several organizations, including CCC, attended and discussed common themes, including the need to develop and nurture a conservation ethic, as well as an appreciation for outdoor activities in younger people.

There was a concern expressed about the balance between the promotion of outdoor activities and outdoor tourism and encouraging conscientious use.

For more information, go to www.yakimaoutdoors.net

Discovering Snow Mountain Ranch

On May 3rd, board member David Hagen invited members of the Wesley United Methodist Church to get involved with Cowiche Canyon Conservancy after a presentation of nature photography highlighting Snow Mountain Ranch and Cowiche Canyon across the seasons.

Following the presentation, about 50 members of Wesley from age 3 to 75 years were wowed by world-class rocks, flowers, lizards, great horned owls and gopher snakes on a nature walk at Snow Mountain Ranch.

The walk was divided into six groups, with two leaders for each group. Each group was given trail maps and several of David Hagen's photos of wild flowers, trees, rock formations, lizards and wildflowers. The groups reconvened a couple of hours later to share discoveries and impressions. Everyone had a great time. They saw lizards, snakes, tons of wildflowers, and owls. One child exclaimed that it was the best day that they had ever had.

Thanks to Gilbert Orchards for donating the delicious apples for this event.

-Sara Cate



Reflections on a CCC Internship

Nancy Pinnell was the first ecological intern for Cowiche Canyon Conservancy. Nancy, who grew up in Yakima, recently graduated from Middlebury College in Vermont with a joint major in Environmental Studies and Biology. Working with CCC former Executive Director John Aylmer in 2007, Nancy spent the summer on several varied projects such as species restoration and invasive species removal, creating trails at Snow Mountain Ranch, monitoring the Cowiche Canyon and Uplands trail, and painting the trail sign at the Weikel entrance. Her predominant interest was working on the restoration plan produced by Tom McCoy for Snow Mountain Ranch. Nancy recently took some time to reflect about the importance of her CCC internship:

“My internship gave me a wonderful opportunity to work outside and truly get to know our area through first hand interaction. The largest benefit was that I became comfortable with the area and started to learn many of the plant species, what they looked like, and their life cycles. By working outside all summer I have been able to observe changes and learn first



Nancy Pinnell working on the trail at SMR

hand the transition our environment goes through in a season. I have always felt attached to what I thought was our desert climate. Now I have an appreciation for just how much life there is living on our hills. Although they may look brown, I now understand they are full of countless species of plants and animals. I have learned that we, in fact, do not live in a desert, but rather a shrub steppe environment. This internship has fed right into my love for our surroundings here in the valley. I love the look of our brown hills and now when people at school ask why they are all dead I can explain just how full of life they are. I feel that the hills that are such a predominant part of our valley give life here a certain feeling. I feel very lucky to have gotten such an intimate look at what those hills actually are.” Thanks, Nancy!

Audubon Birdathon

Four Audubon members found a total of 67 bird species at Snow Mountain Ranch and Cowiche Canyon on May 16 as part of the annual birdathon held by Yakima Valley Audubon. This was one of several teams that covered all of Yakima County to see how many bird species could be identified in one day. The SMR total was less than last year, when the entire Audubon group spent all day at Snow Mountain Ranch.

There were still many interesting birds seen and this information is a valuable part of knowing what birds can be seen and where. We hope to have a birding guide posted on the Snow Mountain Kiosk very soon. Some of the notable and colorful birds were the Lewis' Woodpecker, Lazuli Bunting, Western Tanager and Cedar Waxwing. A special treat was seeing the two young, fuzzy Great-horned owls hopping around on the basalt columns. The wary parent owl was watching us from the cottonwood tree just opposite the cliff.

A complete list of bird species seen will be posted on the CCC website.

-Bob Wahl

Restoration work begins at SMR

Restoration has officially begun at Snow Mountain Ranch SMR on 22 acres along the west field, south of Cowiche Creek. Restoration contractor Rex Schenck applied the first herbicide spray on May 1st. This is part of Partners for Fish and Wildlife Grant which we received for 2009.

Rare Butterfly at Cowiche Canyon

Dr. David James, Associate Professor of Entomology at Washington State University has informed us that Cowiche Canyon is home to one of Washington's rarest butterfly species. The Lucia Azure Butterfly (*Celastrina lucia*) is a small bright butterfly, with barely an inch wingspan, but quite noticeable when common. According to Dr. James, the Lucia Azure Butterfly is usually uncommon and has been found in only a few locations on the eastside of the Cascades. It occurs in small numbers near Rimrock Lake and in Bear Canyon, on Highway 12. However, the Lucia Azure is common in Cowiche Canyon during April and May in most years and is the only locality for it in the Yakima Valley. The population at Cowiche Canyon can be quite large in some years with many of the small blue butterflies seen flying around red osier dogwood, the larval host.

It is the only known locality in WA that the species can be found reliably and in good numbers. Consequently, Cowiche Canyon is very important to the conservation of this species and should be a consideration in conservation and restoration efforts in the Canyon.





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*The word Cowiche, sometimes spelled Cowychee, is said to mean
"footbridge between the valley and the mountains"*

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Newsletter going online

This might be the last newsletter you receive in the 'regular' mail, if you choose. The newsletter will soon be available to read on our website, cowichecanyon.org. An online newsletter will save paper and mailing costs. It will also be in color.

If you prefer to have the newsletter emailed directly to you, please send your request for an online version to: info@cowichecanyon.org.

Donation Requests:

For the first time ever, CCC is seeking donations for general support. Our responsibilities have grown tremendously in the past few years. We welcome any assistance you can offer, from \$10-\$10,000.

Specific donation request: we are seeking a digital projector for presentations.