



Okanogon Valley Land Council Newsletter

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The mission of the Okanogon Valley Land Council (OVLC) is to enhance wildlife, fish, agricultural, and forestry values in the Okanogon Valley by:

- *accepting and overseeing conservation easements received from private landowners*
- *creating public educational opportunities for people interested in land conservation issues and projects*
- *assisting private landowners who wish to preserve family lands for future generations*

Call us at 509-486-2765, 877-486-2765 toll-free, e-mail us at info@ovlandcouncil.org, or write to us at Okanogon Valley Land Council PO Box 293, Tonasket, WA 98855.

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Hot Off the Press: New Stewardship Handbook Available for the Okanogon

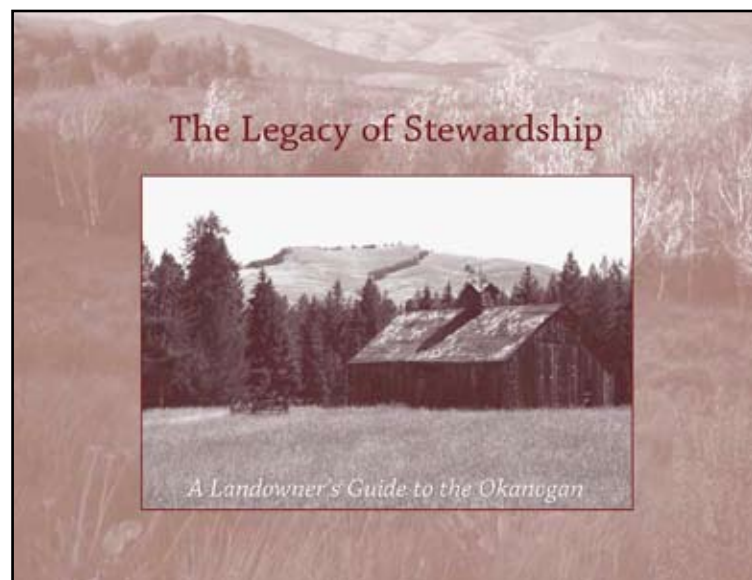
After a year of work the Okanogon Valley Land Council (OVLC) is pleased to announce the publication of The Legacy of Stewardship: A Landowner's Guide to the Okanogon.

The handbook is designed to provide information about a variety of topics that are important to landowners, especially if they're new to the area or have not previously lived in a rural setting. While emphasizing each landowner's role in keeping the Okanogon healthy, productive and beautiful, the handbook provides prospective landowners with questions they might think about when they are

purchasing land and worksheets to guide their decisions regarding land. The handbook gives an overview of some key best practices and lists resources for more information about living and working on the land. Interspersed throughout are also landowners' personal stories and various conservation tips.

The handbook showcases the unique qualities of the Okanogon which bring and keep people in the area. Background research focused on local sources. Input, direction, and review were sought from the agricultural, conservation, and business communities. OVLC sees the

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New Tax Incentives: Great News for Farm, Ranch, and Other Land Protection Efforts

Family farmers, ranchers, and other moderate-income landowners may now obtain a significant tax benefit for making the charitable donation of a conservation easement. On August 3, 2006 the Congress approved a tremendous expansion of the federal conservation tax incentive for conservation easement donations. On August 17, the President signed it into law. The new law:

- Raises the deduction a landowner can take for donating a conservation easement from 30% of their income in any year to 50%;
- Allows qualifying farmers and ranchers to deduct up to 100% of their income; and
- Extends the carry-forward period for a donor to take tax deductions for a voluntary conservation agreement from 5 to 15 years.



An example of the difference the new change makes might clarify the benefits. Under the previous rules, a landowner earning \$50,000 a year who donated a \$1 million conservation easement could take \$15,000 for the year of the donation and for an additional 5 years—a total of \$90,000 in tax deductions. The new rules allow the landowner to deduct \$25,000 for the year of the donation and then for an additional 15 years. That's \$400,000 in deductions. If the landowner qualified as a farmer or rancher, he would take a maximum of \$800,000 in deductions for a million dollar gift.

It is important to note that this new law only applies to easements donated in 2006 and 2007. The Land Trust Alliance, a national representative of land trusts across the United States, is working with other conservation organizations and interested groups to make these tax incentives permanent.

One of the primary roles of the Okanogan Valley Land Council is to work with private land owners who wish to place a conservation easement on their property. OVLC has the ability to accept conservation easements. Please contact our office if you're interested in pursuing this opportunity.

New tax incentives may benefit working lands

...Land Stewardship Handbook

handbook not only as a resource for landowners but as a potential starting point for larger discussions about the future of this area. The rural character of the Okanogan combined with its natural beauty and landscapes are key attractions. As the area grows and prospers, we all need to work together to identify ways to continue to steward the land while increasing economic vitality.

The handbook was regionally funded by the Charlotte Martin Foundation, the Community Foundation of North Central Washington, the Okanogan Conservation District, and the Pacific Northwest Region of The Wil-

derness Society. It was locally produced by Mary Koch, writer; Marcy Stamper, graphics design; and InPrint Printing.

The handbook is available free to the public. Please call, write or email us for a copy: Okanogan Valley Land Council, PO Box 293, Tonasket, WA 98855; (509) 486-2765; info@ovlandcouncil.org. Distribution is being organized through businesses, city and county government offices and other public offices. Please contact us for a location near you.

Special Places in the Okanogan: The Sinlahekin

This is the first in a series of articles that will showcase the many interesting and beautiful landscapes in the Okanogan.

Glen Cook remembers the first time he rode horseback with his father to the top of Aeneas Mountain and looked down into the Sinlahekin Valley. He thought that if ever there was a paradise, he was looking at it now. Glen later moved to the Sinlahekin with his parents and siblings in the 1920's and has fond memories.

In the twenties small homesteads and ranches could be found throughout the area, with gardens and dairy cows to help supplement family meals. Glen's early work included milking cows, working in hunting camps, and helping out at the Bracket H Dude Ranch. Glen remembers winters with quite a bit more snow than recent years, when folks in that area had to rely on pack horses and sleighs to get around. The horse was the main form of transport, and Glen rode his horse 13 miles to Loomis where he caught a school bus and rode another 17 miles to high school. Wildlife abounded; mule deer and rattlesnakes were a common sight, and once Glen saw a grizzly bear. Fishing and hunting were common pursuits.

The Sinlahekin has been a special place for many

through the years. Long before permanent settlement, this area was known to indigenous peoples. Nestled in the eastern foothills of the North Cascades, the Sinlahekin Valley is actually a glaciated coulee extending from the south, near Fish Lake, to the north, along Sinlahekin Creek which eventually empties into Palmer Lake. The rugged mountains rise high to the east and west while the valley floor is dotted with wetlands. Plant communities are highly diverse, and the area has always supported a wide variety of wildlife.

Wildlife was the impetus behind purchase of private land in the Sinlahekin in 1939. The Washington Department of Game, predecessor to the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), created the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area for the primary purpose of enhancing winter range for mule deer. Today the wildlife area, containing nearly 14,000 acres, covers much of the Sinlahekin Valley and surrounding hillsides and is managed for a diversity of wildlife species. Over 215 species of birds, 60 species of mammals, about 20 species of reptiles and amphibians, over 25 species of fish, and over 85 species of butterflies are confirmed or suspected of being present on the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area during some part of their life cycle.



*Spikeman Ranger Station--Early 1900's
Unknown photographer
Original at Okanogan County Historical Society*



*Site of old Spikeman Ranger Station in today's Sinlahekin Wildlife Area
Photo: Dale Swedberg*

...Sinlahekin

The Sinlahekin Wildlife Area is open to the public for all to enjoy; big game hunting, upland game bird and forest grouse hunting, fishing, bird watching, wildlife watching, hiking, horseback riding, trapping, viewing wildflowers and butterflies, and camping are the majority of the wildlife oriented recreational pursuits enjoyed by many people. With help from the Okanogan Chapter of the Backcountry Horsemen and funding from the Interagency Commission for Outdoor Recreation over 7 miles of hiking and horseback riding trail is being developed from Conner Lake to beyond Blue Lake. Also, a self-guided tour is being developed highlighting the early settlement and natural history of the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area. It is still an area that for many is a paradise, protected for future generations to enjoy.

For more information on the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area, visit their website at www.wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_area/sinlahekin.



Moose spotted in the Sinlahekin is one of 60 known mammal species
Photo: Dale Swedberg

A Sinlahekin Settler

Benedict Gubser, a very early settler known also to Glen Cook, lived near Fish Lake and kept a record of his activities in the late 1800's, many of them revealing observations about the wildlife or historic environment in the Sinlahekin.

May 21 and 22, 1889: In the afternoon I came, or Fight came with me, up the Coulee to the Simlaheaken canyon, up which we went half a mile and camped to fish. We caught quite a number of fish. We fished untill afternoon. All told we caught about eighty or hundred.

May 12, 1890: About a thousand cranes passed north to day in sight of here. Many have been passing over in that direction lately.

August 24, 1890: I saw a large Bear's track a mile up the Sinlaheaken canyon as I came down the trail—I think the bear was one that gave Depew a terrible scare a few days before when it stood up before him in the brush along the creek.

May 27, 1894: Before I went to bed last night I noticed a constant flashing of lightning in the east and sometime

in the night I was awakened by thunder and lightnings. I arose and watched it at intervals for an hour or so. Rain fell in torrents and the thundering gradually moved westward. The heaviest appeared to me to be down about Blue lake, or in that vicinity. Thundered and rained after ward again before morning. It raised the spring brook higher than it has been this spring and is still running to night at a good high stage. I suppose that thunder storm ranged over the watershed of the North Salmon and the Simlaheaken and as it was the most remarkable warm rain storm it seems I have ever seen, it must have melted much snow where there was any and caused the flood in the Salmon. Have not heard from the Simlaheaken quarter yet. Not a soul having come from that direction to day.

August 21, 1894: Redman went onto the mountain hunting to day. He got four or five grouse. The weather is decidedly hot and smoky. Getting more so every day.

The complete diaries of Benedict Gubser, transcribed and outlined by Jennifer James-Wilson and Bruce A. Wilson, can be viewed at the Okanogan County Historical Society.

Connected to the Land

This is the third article featuring OVLC board members sharing their history with the land and their motivation for dedicating time to the work of the land trust.

Lee Root

I have lived in the Okanogan, primarily in the Oroville area, for close to 33 years. I am one of the founding board members from the original sportsmen's group that started the Okanogan Valley Land Council. I have a passion for outdoor recreation and have recreated in almost every corner of the Okanogan. I raise, train, test, and hunt with my dogs. I really appreciate the vast amount of public land that we do have in this county and have been lucky to be able to recreate on public land as well as a few pieces of private ground. As an outdoorsman, I am keenly aware of the changes that a developed piece of land can make on wildlife. As a member of the OVLC board, I keep wildlife foremost in my mind when dealing with our projects.

I am the 6th Grade Outdoor Education Director for Oroville Elementary School, and I and the other sixth grade teachers take our students to Lost Lake in the Okanogan National Forest for a week each year in May. Part of the directive of the camp is to bring students to the outdoors for an appreciation of the intricacies of the ecology of our area, the recreation afforded by our area, and the wildlife, the forests, the lakes and rivers of our area.

I am enthralled with shrub-steppe pieces of ground. My first reaction to the sage and grassland of the Okanogan were not favorable...it all looked so brown and desolate. I no longer have that opinion and am saddened each time I see a bulldozer clearing sage lands.

I have been a small orchard owner and have watched the demise of orchards, the transformation of orchard land into developed land, and the struggle that family farmers have gone through to try and keep a viable occupation going. I have a son who is working on a large cattle ranch, so I'm also aware of the challenges of trying to make ends meet in that industry. I appreciate the forests and the farms that have for so long been large holdings. I understand the economics of the land being someone's retirement and the lure of big money for the land that took



economy for the people who live here year round, but I would like future economies, such as tourism, take into account and perhaps showcase our wildlife and landscapes.

Lee Root is a 6th grade teacher at Oroville Elementary School. He currently lives in Omak.

Walter Henze

My wife Sarah Kaiser and I began visiting the Okanogan 35 years ago. We were drawn here by the beauty of the landscape, the four seasons, and the friendliness of the residents. We liked this area so well we decided to make it our home in 1976, and we've been living here ever since. We bought an old homestead, built a house, raised two children, and pursued our careers providing local health care. As I retire this spring and could move just about anywhere, it is telling that our plans are to stay right here and enjoy our home in the Okanogan even more fully.

We feel deeply connected to the land and its people, most particularly to our farm in the highlands near Havillah. Our love of our home place is deep and specific and

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...Connected

comforting. Living out of town has been a struggle at times with kids and work, but the invigorating beauty of the land and the vistas has made the extra effort well worthwhile. I have studied this place carefully. I have been keeping a rainfall/snowfall record for almost 30 years, and now measuring water feels like measuring the kids and marking their growth on the wall. We have been planting and thinning trees for almost 30 years, long enough to see that individual actions of land stewardship really have an impact on the health of the natural resources

I would like to see the Okanogan thriving again with an agricultural economy that returns a good living to those who work the land. This means in part preserving the family farms and ranches undivided, something that the OVLC strives to do. And it means making more types of agriculture profitable, a more difficult goal that we and others are working toward.

I became involved with the OVLC because of a desire to help preserve the wide open spaces that so attracted us to this area in the first place. This past year Sarah and I were able to help move that vision forward by placing a conservation easement on our 160 acres.



The process of crafting the easement brought our entire family to a discussion about the land and its future, and resulted in a family commitment that seemed in many ways like renewing our marriage vows. The future of this land and of the Okanogan will always be an essential part of our lives.

Walter Henze is a family physician at the North Valley Family Medicine Clinic in Tonasket. He was one of the founding members of the Okanogan Valley Land Council.

Upcoming Event !

2nd Annual Awards Night: Okanogan Oral History Project

You are invited to celebrate the work of middle school students in the Okanogan Valley at the Okanogan Oral History Project Awards Ceremony on Friday, March 23rd, 2007. The oral history theme for this year is historical agricultural practices in the Okanogan Valley. Students have interviewed long-time community elders and have written essays about their findings. Top essays will be shared during the awards night. Please join us at 7:00 p.m. at the Omak City Hall, 2 North Ash Street, to honor students' work. Call (509) 486-2765 for more information.