



# Okanogon Valley Land Council Newsletter

Volume 1 Number 1

January 2005

## INSIDE

- Columbian Sharp-Tailed Grouse (p. 2)
- Mark Your Calendar (p.2)
- Frequently Asked Questions (p.3)
- A Watershed (p. 3)
- Harvest Dinner (p. 4)
- Volunteer Opportunities (p.4)

*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](mailto:info@ovlandcouncil.org), or write to us at Okanogon Valley Land Council PO Box 293, Tonasket, WA 98855.

### Newsletter Credit:

Articles: Christine Olson, Fernne Rosenblatt  
Layout: BIT 250 Desktop Publishing class at WVC Omak

## **Dart Family Vision Preserves Wide Open**

Richard and Barbara Dart's property in the Okanogon Highlands near Molson can be described as uninterrupted grassland scattered with fir trees. The sweeping landscape gives the impression that the land is relatively untouched, yet evidence of change is present. The Darts very willingly share their story and the history of the land and its changes. Early photos show mostly grassland with very few trees. Miners reported a large fire in the late 1800's. Burns have been prevented since the early 1900's, so trees have populated the land in greater numbers. The Wallace family first

homesteaded the land in the early 1900s, followed by the Grants, Sherlings, and Suttons. These early owners grew grains and root crops. Richard's father, R. D. Dart, bought the land in the early '30s, and since then it has been passed down to Richard's brother, John Dart, and then to Richard. The Dart family has used the land primarily for livestock grazing.

The land presently is home to a variety of plants and wildlife. Red-osier dogwood, snowberry, and willow can be found, while the predominant tree is fir. Elk, black bear, white tail and mule deer,

*Continued on page 2*

*The Dart property as it appears today.*



## Columbian Sharp-Tailed Grouse

The 1806 journals of Lewis and Clark noted the presence of Columbian sharp-tailed grouse. Since that time the numbers of sharp-tailed grouse have been dwindling. These birds require grasslands, trees and water for their nesting and feeding—shrub-steppe habitat (sagebrush/bunchgrass) for much of the year and riparian areas in the winter months. The Columbian sharp-tailed grouse remain in the area throughout the year, eating forbs, plants, seeds, native tree buds, and insects. Springtime heralds the gathering of the male grouse at leks. Displaying and mating occur near leks from early March through May. During this period it is critical that these areas are not disturbed. Many factors have contributed to the decline of Columbian sharp-tailed grouse including habitat modification due to loss of riparian trees and brush, certain grazing practices, and fire suppression. Additionally predators such as coyotes, house cats, certain hawks and owls take a toll. Due to declining populations, hunting of Columbian sharp-tailed grouse in Washington State has been closed since the early 1980's.

Okanogan County is home to this rare subspecies of grouse. The largest subpopulation in this area is on the Colville Indian Reservation, but there are isolated subpopulations in other areas of Okanogan County as well. Protecting and enhancing habitat in those areas known to have subpopulations of the sharp-tailed grouse might be one of the most important factors that contribute to the survival and well-being of this species. Columbian sharp-tailed grouse are known to use the Dart property (see previous article) which is one of the reasons why it's important to keep this piece intact. Mike Schroeder, grouse biologist, and Jeff Heinlen, field biologist



Mike Schroeder photo

The Columbian sharp-tailed grouse prefers sagebrush/bunchgrass habitat for much of the year.

for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) have been identifying and studying the sharp-tailed grouse in Okanogan County. Their work has been essential in WDFW's efforts to increase their populations in the county.

Information on the Columbian sharp-tailed grouse was from these sources:

- Hays, D.W., M.J. Tirhi, and D.W. Stinson. 1998. *Washington state status report for the sharp-tailed grouse*. Wash. Dept. Fish and Wildl., Olympia. 57pp.
- Schroeder, M.A., and M. Tirhi. 2003. Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's *Priority Habitat and Species Management Recommendations*, Vol. IV: Birds, Olympia.
- Zeigler, D.L. 1979. *Distribution and status of the Columbian sharp-tailed grouse in eastern Washington*. Fed. Aid Wildl. Restor. Proj. W-70-R-18. Wash. Dept. Game, Olympia.

---

### ...Dart Family Vision

cougar, beaver, and sharp-tailed grouse have been spotted on the property. Water is present in a small lake and in other small ponds during wet years. Birds abound seasonally, especially around the wetlands.

The Darts grew concerned when large pieces of land around them were sold, broken into small parcels and re-sold. The Darts looked for a different option for their land. They wanted to protect the land from poorly planned development and approached the Okanogan Valley Land Council. OVLC sought and secured funds to purchase 177 acres which included the lake and wetlands, and work began on a conservation easement and a baseline inventory of flora and wildlife. The Darts would like to see this special place continue as wide open space, uninterrupted and undeveloped. In their minds it is an ideal location for recreational pursuits such as fishing, hunting, bird watching, and picnic outings. The Okanogan Valley Land Council has inherited a bit of history and a special trust; what remains now is to ensure its future and to protect the conservation values it holds.

## Mark Your Calendars

### January 29: Winter Wildlife

Join OVLC on a winter snowshoe/ski trip in the Sinlahekin. Kelly Cooper will lead us in looking for tracks and signs of wildlife activity in the heart of winter.

### June 4: Birds and Wildflowers

Celebrate the spring and early summer seasons in Okanogan's high country! Gordon Kent and Patti Baumgardner will lead us in identification and observation of birds and wildflowers of the area.

Watch for coming announcements about event details at [www.ovlandcouncil.org](http://www.ovlandcouncil.org) or call (509) 486-2765.

## Frequently Asked Questions of OVLC

### What is the Okanogan Valley Land Council (OVLC) and what does it do?

The short answer is that OVLC is a community-based land trust dedicated to maintaining the unique qualities of the Okanogan River watershed and environs.

### How long has OVLC been around?

Founded in December 2002, OVLC evolved out of the North Okanogan Sportsmen's Council when concern about undisciplined fragmentation of open lands and destruction of agriculture and the rural lifestyle of the Okanogan Valley encouraged some members to pursue broadening the purpose of the group. The new land trust continued the focus of enhancing wildlife and fish habitat and added additional commitments: to promote economically viable agriculture and forestry and to encourage maintenance of private lands as natural areas.

### What are the tools OVLC uses to meet their goals?

One of the tools the OVLC uses in carrying out its mission is the conservation easement, permitting landowners to permanently place a restriction on their property which ensures it will not be divided into smaller parcels. Other restrictions representing conservation values, such as maintaining land in productive agriculture, may also be guaranteed. The conservation easement does not change the ability of landowners to use and enjoy the land nor limit their ability to bequeath or sell their land, yet landowners have the assurance that conservation values important to them and their families will be monitored and protected by the OVLC. In addition, landowners may be eligible for a deduction in income and estate taxes. While the OVLC as a non-profit organization has the ability to apply for

grants to purchase easements, most received by OVLC are donated. Easements protecting conservation values benefit not only landowners but the general public as well.

### What other tools are used to reach people?

OVLC also reaches out to the community through education and service. OVLC speaks with community groups and individuals about opportunities available through a locally based land trust. OVLC participates in local and regional conferences focusing on land stewardship. In an effort to engage youth in conservation activities the OVLC has sponsored workshops at Oroville's 6th grade outdoor education camp for the past two years. Other services to the community have included funding for winter bird feed and aeration of Sidley Lake for fish survival during the winter months. As the OVLC enters its third year its commitment to public service continues, working with others to protect natural areas, valuable agricultural and forested lands, and important wildlife habitat.

### What do you love about the Okanogan?

- Meandering rivers and abundant lakes?
- Fresh air with the smell of pine?
- The rural nature of the area with that hint of wild around the corner?

### How can you support OVLC and its Mission?

Share your ideas energy and resources with us. Become a member, become a volunteer. Join the OVLC team!

**See page four for specific volunteer opportunities.**



Lady Slipper

## Okanogan River Watershed



Terry Mills photo



Trillium



Forests

*A vital artery supplying all of our natural resources.*



Wetlands

## OVLC Membership Attends Harvest Celebration

*OVLC members enjoy visiting with each other after the Harvest Dinner at Fernne and Roger Rosenblatt's home.*

The Okanogan Valley Land Council hosted its first appreciation dinner in October, acknowledging the generous contributions of so many over the first two years of the organization. Celebrating not only the gifts of supporters but of the land, foods featured were from the Okanogan Valley, including squash, garlic, and wine.

The people and organizations that have supported the land council have done so through the sharing of ideas, time, and financial resources. We are grateful to each of these for their faith and encouragement and wish to publicly acknowledge their contribution.



*Rick Gillespie photo*

### Volunteer Opportunities

*Do you have some experience in the following areas that you might be willing to share with OVLC? Contact Christine Olson at 509-486-2765 to volunteer.*

- Non-profit financial expertise
- Grant writing
- Scientific knowledge (geology, plants, wildlife) for public education and survey/baseline work
- Computer skills for web work and other projects
- Writing skills for eNewsletter and other publications
- Legal expertise

*Don't see your area of interest? Let us know how you might help!*