

Winter23

Washington Trails

A Publication of Washington Trails Association • wta.org

Looking to the future

Celebrating **10 years** of Outdoor Leadership Training —
Empowering the next generation of adventurers and explorers



- + Winter hikes: Favorite urban destinations
- Cozy feet: How to find your ideal hiking sock
- New trails: Breaking ground in the Teanaway



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Washington Trails

A Publication of Washington Trails Association

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Planting a Seed

Fall is a season of transition. The days get shorter, the weather cools and, at least for me, there is a welcome shift away from the packed calendar of summer to a more reflective and planning-oriented time of year.

This year has been a bigger transition than usual for my wife and me as we recently welcomed the birth of our second daughter, Avery Sol. I took most of the past 2 months off for parental leave. In that time I was reminded again and again how important time outdoors is, not just for my own health and mental well-being, but for that of my entire family.

Spending time outside with my daughters was what made the last 2 months not just bearable but also fun. Whenever baby Avy would get fussy, a walk in the neighborhood or a nearby park would quiet her down and give her some rest and me some energy. When my older daughter, Sasha Luz, got antsy we'd take her outside to explore and she would invariably come home in a better mood.

Beyond the immediate benefits like this, at WTA we believe that getting youth outside can plant the seeds for a lifelong love and appreciation of the outdoors. The next generation of trail champions are the kids and young people out on trail today.

This year, WTA is celebrating 10 years of our Outdoor Leadership Training (OLT) program. This program seeks to lower barriers to getting outdoors for youth and community groups who might not otherwise have access to the outdoors. The program starts by training outdoor leaders in how to safely get groups outdoors, then connects them to our free gear lending libraries (one in Seattle, one in Puyallup) where they can get boots, jackets, camping gear, even snowshoes to make outdoor experiences a reality.

Over the past 10 years, our OLT program has supported 832 outdoor events, with a total of 18,399 participants, most of whom are youth from predominantly BIPOC or low-income communities. Each of these participants is a young person who got a chance to connect with and benefit from nature and who will hopefully carry that love of the outdoors with them in the future.

One thing I love most about trails and the outdoors is how intergenerational they are. Spend time on a popular trail like Naches Peak Loop or Rattlesnake Ledge and you'll see people of all stages of life. Trails bring us together and give us an opportunity to get to know and learn from each other. And together we can build a more sustainable future for trails.

Jaime Loucky | Chief executive officer | jaimel@wta.org



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18,000 outdoor experiences

Ten years ago, WTA stepped in to fill the gaps outdoor educators and community leaders told us about. It's been a game changer for breaking down barriers to the outdoors.

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Whether we're working on advocacy, outfitting communities for amazing experiences or literally hauling rocks, we're so grateful and inspired by your support.

16 The source for change

Beyond delivering joy and society-wide health benefits, time on trail is core to connecting people to the passionate protection of places we love.

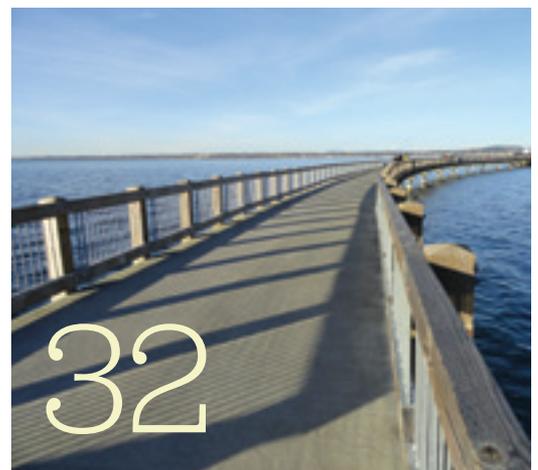
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John Mackenzie puts decades of construction and carpentry experience to work for WTA on trail projects, restoring tools and in our gear libraries.



On the cover

Students from Rainier Prep, a public charter school for fifth to eighth graders, regularly go on trips supported by WTA's Outdoor Leadership Training program and gear library. Photo by Zyanya Alvarez.



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Explore our urban trails

When higher elevations get covered in snow, Craig Romano thinks it's a great time to check out your local urban green spaces.

Photos by Britt Lé and Craig Romano

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From hats to soups, seven hot tips to keep you warm on cold hikes.

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Gear, travel, hot drinks

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Find inspiration for your next hike.

POWERED BY YOU

Washington Trails Association is a nonprofit supported by a community of hikers like you. By mobilizing hikers to be explorers, stewards and champions for trails and public lands, together, we will ensure that there are trails for everyone, forever.

WTA was founded by Louise B. Marshall (1915–2005). Ira Spring (1918–2003) was its primary supporter. Greg Ball (1944–2004) founded the volunteer trail maintenance program. Their spirit continues today through contributions from thousands of WTA members and volunteers.

Winter 2023 | Volume 58, Issue 4

Washington Trails (ISSN 1534-6366) is published four times per year by Washington Trails Association, 705 2nd Avenue, Suite 300, Seattle, WA 98104. Annual membership, which includes a subscription to Washington Trails magazine, is \$20. Single copy price is \$4.50. Periodicals postage paid at Seattle, WA, and at additional mailing locations.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Washington Trails Association, 705 2nd Ave., Suite 300, Seattle, WA 98104.



Proud to be a Part of This

One of the things I love about putting together this magazine is when I get to interview my coworkers. Of course, I'm already familiar with their work, but it's a treat to sit down and ask them all the questions. I love to hear about their dreams, their challenges, their big plans for the future.

For this issue of the magazine, I spent a lot of time talking to Krista Dooley, who helped start our Outdoor Leadership Training (OLT) program — 10 years ago. When I started at WTA, the program was a few years old. I've had the joy of watching it grow.

I feel lucky to have spent a lot of time outdoors while growing up and I have a daughter who also loves to get outside. I think everyone should have that chance. I loved hearing Krista talk about how and why we started the program, and how carefully we created something that would help as many kids as possible get outdoors. It was clear that she was excited about the next 10 years as she was the first 10 years. And I enjoyed talking with my other coworkers, who are newer to the OLT program, but no less excited for the future.

I've been immensely proud of the work WTA is doing. Throughout 2023, and in our past issues this year, we've had the chance to celebrate 30 years of conducting crucial trail maintenance, 20 years of hikers raising funds for trails through Hike-a-Thon, and now 10 years of helping more people get outdoors through our OLT program.

I'm excited also to share the rest of the stories in this magazine.

Craig Romano has excellent suggestions for urban hiking around the state in the cold, dark season. My coworker on our advocacy team talks about the intense value of connecting to place, and how those connections can encourage people to care for those places. And if you're one of those hikers who enjoys the dorky glee of a fresh new pair of socks, we have advice on finding the pair that will be best for you and your hiking plans.

As we come to the end of the year, I also want to say thanks for being here with us. Thanks for helping to make a better community for hikers all across the state.

Happy hiking!

Jessi Loerch | Washington Trails editor | jessi@wta.org

The Power of Winter Hikes With Friends

By Linnea Johnson

I remember the first hike I took with friends after going into lockdown. It was January 2021. For nearly a year, I had spent free time with my roommate in our small apartment in the Seattle area, and most of my time outdoors had entailed looping the same neighborhood blocks alone. Recovering from a breakup, nervous about a new job and far away from my family in colder but sunnier Ohio, I spent a lot of time numbing the loneliness and stress with screens.

But as soon as I approached my friends at the trailhead, my spirits lifted. Even while masked and distanced, the once-commonplace ritual of “catching up” felt transformative. The mental exercise of exchanging stories and the joy of laughter — combined with crisp lakeside air, physical movement and the excitement of encountering wildlife — were like sunshine cutting through my mental fog. And I didn’t just feel better during those couple of hours in the park; I felt more clear-headed and energetic in the following week than I had in months.

In the years since, I, like many, have happily returned to in-person hangouts. Yet in winter, it’s easy to return to my quarantine ways; the chilly air and drizzle strengthen the gravitational pull of the couch, and I spend a lot of time snuggled up in front of the TV with my partner and cat. That cozy time is an important part of this quiet season. But the darkest days of winter are also when we need time with friends and time outdoors the most.

According to research by Georgetown University clinical professor of psychiatry Dr. Norman Rosenthal, at least one in 20 people in the United States experiences seasonal affective disorder (SAD), and plenty more experience milder “winter blues.” Those affected may feel sluggish, depressed or disinterested in activities they normally enjoy.

“If you feel any identification with a hibernating bear, you might well have SAD,” Rosenthal told NPR’s Life Kit.

Hitting the trail with friends checks many of the boxes researchers have found to help treat and prevent SAD and other mental health challenges:



Getting outside with pals is one of the best things you can do for your winter well-being.

Light: Light cues the brain to feel awake — and not getting enough of it is at the heart of SAD. Happy lamps are fantastic, but natural light is still key! So, get outdoors during daylight hours if possible, even if the sky is overcast.

Movement: Like light, movement tells you that it’s time to be alert, which, in turn, helps your brain know when it’s time to sleep at night. Moving on trail can help boost your energy, reduce tension and kick the blues.

Social connection: Spending time with a variety of people is closely tied to happiness and a sense of belonging. As social beings, we’re evolved for connection, so being with friends releases “happy chemicals.”

Stress reduction: Being outdoors helps turn down the “fight, flight or freeze” response that triggers anxiety, in part because natural sights like trees, lakes and animals are easy for our brains to process.

We’re wired to share the experience of being human with others and with the natural world — every season of the year. So schedule a hike with a friend! You never know how much it could mean to your future well-being — and theirs.

Hike Planning Made Easy

Brainstorming where to hike with friends? With WTA’s Trailblazer app, you can share any hike via text, social media or messaging app with the touch of a button. And thanks to our volunteer developers’ work earlier this year, you can now share trip reports too!



— **Linda Roe**, @muledeer in WTA trip reports

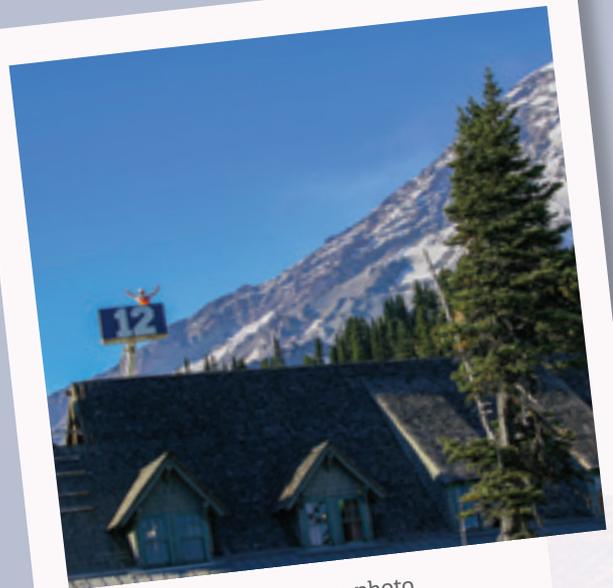
Share a story

Show us your fave sports gear on trail

📷 Memorable moments from WTA's community

- ◀ **This was a special hike for my husband Tom and I**, as we were in Winthrop celebrating our 50th wedding anniversary! Everything was golden for our golden anniversary, larches on the hills, turning aspen leaves, more golden foliage and for this Cougar romance, we celebrated with some Cougar Gold cheese and crackers for lunch! This is a long drive for a short easy hike, but the drive itself is beautiful. Most people hike to Tiffany Mountain, but we were not interested in long and up, but romantic and relaxing.

I worked with the construction team during the renovation of ▶ the Paradise Inn and construction of the Jackson Visitor Center at Mount Rainier years ago. A small group of us lived at Paradise during the week rather than make the long commute back home. This provided an amazing opportunity to hike, trail run and recreate at Paradise after work. PJ O'Brien (in the photo), Walt Schwartz and I took advantage of opportunities to run the Skyline Trail, Comet Falls, down to Longmire for dinner or even hike up to Camp Muir to spend the night, before making the early morning descent back to Paradise before work. We loved the majestic setting and we also love the Seahawks. That is what makes the photo great — it combines both!



— **Mark Stoesser**, @stoesser_photo



— **James Alexander**, @dude_exploring

- ◀ **The photo was taken in August this year on top of Tatoosh Peak** with Mount Rainier in the background. I was leading a WTA backcountry response team in the Tatoosh Wilderness and I was so stoked that the volunteers had the motivation to summit the peak after an exhausting day of trail work. Volunteer Cory Adamski and I celebrated with "planting" a tree pose. And, as you can see, I'm rocking my son's alma mater, University of Texas – San Antonio, T-shirt.



TRAIL SMARTS

Seven Hot Tips for Cold Days

By Loren Drummond

If you hike or play outside in winter, you know the key to a good time is staying warm. It seems so simple, but is also one of those skills you can spend a lifetime dialing in. Keeping toasty on a sunny day snowshoeing around the Methow is a different prospect than staying warm on a rainy river ramble in the Olympics.

To stay warm, think about how to **preserve heat, generate heat or add heat**. With those three goals in mind, you can mix and match a menu of approaches that fit the day, your budget and who you're trying to keep warm.

Layer up: A science and an art, layering perfectly to preserve heat takes trial and error, but the basics remain the same. Wear a thin wicking wool or synthetic base layer (including and especially socks) to pull moisture away from your body. A cozy, insulating mid-layer like a fleece or sweater will keep you warm. On the outside, a waterproof layer keeps you dry. The trick? Don't overheat and get sweat-soaked.

Pack gloves, hats and bonus layers. In winter, always pack gloves and a warm hat. It doesn't hurt to have extras to replace layers in case something goes sideways (like an

accidental river dunk or downpour).

Move! The best way to keep warm on a winter hike is to move. You can dunk your feet in a snow-fed river, and they'll still warm up if you're wearing wool socks and you work hard enough. Go fast, go steep or, if that's not your style, just keep going. If you need to move slower (if, say, you're with your hiking buddy who moves at a, ahem, meditative pace) do some lunges along the way. Stopped for a snack break and cooling down? Jumping jacks or the boot dance (wta.org/bootdance) will stoke your fire and remind you that yes, silliness does belong on trail.

Insulate your bum. Pack a small foam pad to keep the ground from leaching heat from your body when you stop. Or sit on your pack.

Fuel with food. One of the most overlooked ways to generate heat on your hike is food. Go for calorie-rich and fat-full foods. You can add heat by packing hot food in an insulated thermos. Or, bring a stove and make hot food on the trail.

Hot drinks. From savory broth to steaming teas, spiced cider to hot coffee or cocoa, there is nothing more satisfying than sipping liquid heat and feeling it warm you up from the inside.

Use technology. Hand warmers like HotHands stashed in your pack are a light, fast way to add heat on cold days. There are also disposable and battery-powered reusable options. If your fingers go numb, tuck a warmer inside your gloves. If your hands are always cold, gear companies are coming out with swanky gloves with built-in rechargeable heating packs. You can DIY the effect if you bring a stove along and pour hot water into a Nalgene or other (very) well-sealed hot water bottle.

Photo by Matthew Johnson

Highlights

A quick look at what WTA is accomplishing on trails around the state



◀ Fire Recovery

For years, WTA has focused our Lost Trails Found campaign on keeping remote trails from disappearing. Wildfires, and the downed trees that follow, are one of the big challenges for those trails. In a new collaboration with the U.S. Forest Service, WTA signed an agreement with the Naches Ranger District to put our Lost Trails Found crews to work opening up 50 miles of trails by the end of 2024. From June to mid-October, our crews worked in the Schneider Springs burn zone. They spent more than 3,000 hours clearing hundreds of logs, restoring tread and maintaining roughly 25 miles of trails across the William O. Douglas Wilderness and adjacent areas in the Naches Ranger District. They worked on well-known trails like Mount Aix as well as some lesser-known area trails and rugged loops that included the Burnt Mountain Trail, Ironstone Mountain Trail, Nile Ridge Trail, Rattlesnake Creek Trail and Soda Springs Trail.

Role Models ▶

This summer, 7 years of serendipity brought Kathryn Conley and Anna Pree together for a history-making moment for WTA's youth program. For the first time, a youth volunteer vacation was led by two staff members who both got their start as teen volunteers with WTA! Both Kathryn and Anna began their WTA journey near Mount Rainier, and then went above and beyond as youth ambassadors. After high school, both worked on WTA's inaugural Lost Trails Found crew for two seasons before pivoting to youth volunteer vacation leadership in 2023. Throughout the past 7 years, Kathryn and Anna have contributed so much to WTA's mission and the hiking community, as both volunteers and staff, and it's been awesome to have them as positive role models for teen volunteers just getting their start.



Big Plans for the Mountain Loop Highway

After 5 years of work, WTA has completed a vision for the south side of the Mountain Loop Highway, touching on key access roads, wheelchair access and maintenance for inaccessible trails. WTA worked with more than 10 groups to create recommendations that will inform decisions made by the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest. The work included a visitor use survey and incorporated tribal feedback. Read the trails vision at wta.org/mlhvision.

Transit to Trails Needs You

The Transit to Trails Act could expand outdoor access, fight climate change and improve trailhead parking — with your help. This federal act would fund transportation projects that connect more communities to trailheads. Take 30 seconds to sign WTA's petition at wta.org/transit and help bring nature within reach for anyone who cannot walk or drive to experience the outdoors.

NOTEWORTHY

WTA trail work volunteers are happy to provide well-loved trails with the TLC they need to stay in good shape.

Trails Rebooted

From Favorites to Forgotten — Revamping Trails Statewide

WTA's campaigns are ensuring that no matter what type of hike you prefer, there's a selection of trails for you to explore in Washington.

Lost Trails Found saves backcountry routes at risk of disappearing from lack of maintenance, wildfires or winter storms.

Trails Rebooted improves existing trails, advocates for the creation of new ones and educates hikers about their responsibilities on trail.

The Trail Next Door ensures people have access to nature close to home by maintaining local trails or advocating for the creation of new ones in areas without access to trails.

We make this happen thanks to volunteer trail work and close partnerships with agencies. We did a lot in 2023, and here are some highlights we're especially proud of.



Lost Trails Found



The Trail Next Door

801 📍📍📍

Miles of trail that WTA worked on

85 📍📍📍

Land managers that WTA worked with

75 📍📍📍

Number of trip reporters who picked up litter on trail

\$4.3 M 📍📍📍

Value of donated labor this year

1,251 📍📍

People that ambassadors spoke to on trail

114,554 📍📍📍

Number of hours of volunteer time in 2023

52,000 📍

New users found hikes using our Trailblazer app

46 📍

Number of NYT crossword puzzles completed by the Lost Trails Found crew

4,969 📍📍

Logs cleared from trails

53 📍📍📍

Average number of hours donated per youth volunteer in 2023

New Trails for the Teanaway

We're excited to start trail work in the Teanaway Community Forest — thanks to years of collaboration and careful planning. **By Melani Baker**

After a decade of strong collaboration, WTA and our partners are excited to announce that we've broken ground on new trails in the Teanaway Community Forest. Late in 2022, the West Fork Trails Plan for the forest passed the state's environmental review, the last step needed before we could get to work on the ground. We started putting that plan to work with a youth volunteer vacation in July and day work parties in October.

The first stage of work focuses on a series of loop trails north of the West Fork Teanaway River, which offer scenic viewpoints and unique landmarks. The early work will also link up the West Fork trails with the nearby communities of Cle Elum, Roslyn and Ronald.

The forest's location, in the backyard of these communities and a 90-minute drive from the Seattle area, will support the growing number of Washingtonians looking to get outside. At the same time, the forest will boost local economies and protect vital wildlife habitat.

The Teanaway Community Forest, created in 2013, is the state's first community forest. It took government agencies, nonprofits, tribes and agricultural groups years of planning and public involvement to develop management and recreation plans so the forest can provide for water sources, salmon habitat, recreation, grazing and forestry. WTA led the way on the West Fork Trails Coalition, which includes the Back Country Horsemen of Washington, Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance and Mountains to Sound Greenway, to plan for trails in the West Fork Teanaway River drainage of the Teanaway Community Forest.

"We wouldn't have been able to move forward with or complete the West Fork Trails Plan without our partnership with WTA," said Stephanie Margheim, southeast region recreation and public use manager for Washington State Department of Natural Resources. "WTA brings years of expertise to projects like this that we do not have in-house, and we are incredibly thankful to have WTA by



Youth volunteers work on a trail in the West Fork area of the Teanaway Community Forest over the summer. The volunteer vacation was our first work party in the forest after the trails plan was finalized last year.

our side. We are excited the plan crossed the finish line so we can get working on implementation."

The West Fork area was chosen for the most trails because of the rich opportunities for recreation like camping, hiking, sightseeing, mountain biking, hunting, horseback riding, fishing, wildlife viewing, plant gathering, cross-country skiing and snowmobiling. The plan calls for bringing existing trails in the area up to Department of Natural Resources standards. It also calls for removing trails that negatively impact the watershed, rerouting trails away from private property and building new trails to maximize access and safety. The goal is to provide opportunities for people with different experience levels to use the trails for a variety of activities.

The Teanaway Community Forest is truly a collaboration. WTA wants to thank everyone, from partner organizations to individual volunteers, who have been part of its creation — and to everyone who will be part of the forest's next phase.

We'd love your help building trails in the Teanaway. Look for work parties in spring 2024 and get involved at wta.org/volunteer.

Photo by Andy James

Drive Good™



A True Partner for Trails and WTA

By Brynna Counts-Morgan

When WTA was approached by Western Washington Honda Dealers about partnering to support trails, we were excited. WTA is always on the lookout for corporate partners with shared values around celebrating community and time spent outdoors. Even with how happy we were to embark on our work together, we had no idea how meaningful and successful this partnership would feel one year in. Here's the incredible impact that Western Washington Honda Dealers has had on WTA in 2023:

Helping hikers discover WTA

One of Western Washington Honda Dealers' partnership goals is to help more people discover WTA's resources that help people get outside. So they began donating WTA memberships to anyone who purchases or leases a new Honda from one of their 18 dealerships. To date, WTA has gained nearly 800 new members from this effort.

WTA has also been featured in local Honda television ads,

which has led to an increase in the number of people using our Hiking Guide and online tools. We've also partnered with Western Washington Honda Dealers on news segments with Fox 13's "Passport to the Northwest" that feature WTA's trail work, Hiking Guide and Hike-a-Thon. One of WTA's biggest values is helping people get outside safely, so this boost in awareness for our resources is a huge win.

Powering trail work

Western Washington Honda Dealers has also supported WTA in the area they know best: vehicles. They've generously provided WTA with a Honda Passport TrailSport to support our Outdoor Leadership Training program and other outreach events. They also provided us with two Honda Ridgeline trucks to haul tools to trails and take on bumpy backcountry roads. These three Hondas have helped WTA complete countless hours of trail work and outreach events, and we couldn't be more grateful.

Several local Honda dealership employees have even joined WTA on Tiger Mountain to help build a new trail in this well-loved recreation area. By working together, staff from WTA and Western Washington Honda Dealers were able to create new tread and remove logs from the path of the new trail.

Thank you, Western Washington Honda Dealers, for letting WTA Drive Good™ with you.

Photo by Erika Haugen-Goodman

Here for You on Trails

By Nicole Masih-Théberge

There's nothing quite like face-to-face connections to share important information. That's why, over the summer, WTA expanded several partnerships to put ambassadors at trailheads. Washington has long been a hub for hiking and outdoor recreation, but since the pandemic, even more people are spending time outside, which means we have new opportunities to educate people about how to recreate safely and responsibly. By having ambassadors at popular trailheads, we have a chance to connect directly with hikers, answer questions and help them hike safely and responsibly.

Central and Northern Washington

In partnership with the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife, 16 volunteers talked to hikers and other folks at six sites over the summer. WTA seasonal staff members Madison Anderson and Sydney Beckett supported and worked alongside these volunteers to welcome people, answer questions and provide educational materials about recreating responsibly.

"I am so amazed at how people are willing to travel around the state to volunteer and protect the places they love," Madison said. "Most of our volunteers woke up bright and early to drive hours to volunteer sites."



Owen Daryani, trailhead ambassador program coordinator for Glacier Peak Institute, took a group photo for these happy hikers at Lake 22.

Where we worked

This summer, WTA ambassadors and our partners connected with folks at nine locations.

- **6 trailheads** in Central and Northern Washington
- **2 trailheads** on the Mountain Loop Highway
- **2 trailheads** in the Columbia River Gorge

Ambassadors met folks of all kinds: hikers, boaters, hunters, birders, bikers and horseback riders, showing that Washingtonians love to get outdoors in many different ways.

Mountain Loop Highway

Nowhere was it more clear how many people are getting outside than at Lake 22, where ambassadors worked with Glacier Peak Institute and counted about 1,000 hikers each weekend. It was clear that people were looking not only to experience nature, but also to connect with others. It was common to see large hiking groups. While the most common questions had to do with parking and permitting, volunteers

had a variety of conversations about the trail, how to get involved with WTA and trail work and how to be a responsible hiker.

"People were truly appreciative and surprised to see organizations out there that are just there to help and have nothing to sell," said Linda Martindell, a WTA ambassador who spent 5 days talking to hikers at Lake 22.

The Gorge

In the Columbia River Gorge, WTA ambassadors were joined by Trailkeepers of Oregon volunteers to conduct trailhead outreach at Beacon Rock State Park and Cape Horn trailheads. In just 2 days, they talked with 132 hikers. These efforts were made possible through support from the Gorge Stewardship Network, and we are excited to continue working in this area in the future.

Trailhead outreach has looked a little different at each site and region, but the response has been positive. People appreciate WTA and our partners' efforts to provide information and resources, and — if nothing else — a smiling face.

Interested in joining this effort? Learn more at wta.org/ambassador. The deadline to apply for 2024 is Dec. 8.

Photo by Linda Martindell



We ♥ Our Members

WTA's members are at the core of everything we do. Our 26,000 members stun us with their generosity year after year, powering our work and making a difference for trails. Our staff is constantly talking about the incredible ways that members show up to support Washington's hiking community. Here are four WTA staffers on why we love our members.



I'm lucky that I get to work so closely with our amazing member community in my role. When we're raising money for our programs and requesting needed support, it's incredible to see how hikers step up and show up for each other and for trails. We really have the best community.

— **Brynna Counts-Morgan**, individual and corporate giving senior manager

We're so grateful for your dedication to trails. To continue your support and renew your membership, visit wta.org/donate.



I appreciate our members a lot. Without them, our trail teams wouldn't have the resources to accomplish their work. Through their financial support, they have helped the Southwest region complete numerous construction projects this year, including building retaining walls on the Hamilton Mountain Trail and installing staircases at Cape Disappointment.

— **James Alexander**, trail crew leader in the Southwest region



I have so much gratitude for WTA members. Over the last 10 years, you have helped grow the Outdoor Leadership Training program to support over 18,000 outdoor experiences for youth and adults. It's been incredible to hear about the transformative experiences shared in nature. Thanks to WTA members' support, I look forward to the impact over the next 10 years.

— **Krista Dooley**, community partnerships and leadership development director



WTA members help my colleagues and I better advocate for trails and public lands. WTA members join advocacy events, such as Hiker Rally Day, and speak to their elected officials as constituents who care deeply about trails. I'm continually impressed by members' passion and thankful for their insights and support.

— **Michael DeCramer**, policy and planning manager



Why Hiking Is Good for People and the Outdoors

By Michael DeCramer

Katelynn Carlson hikes north along the Pacific Crest Trail in Goat Rocks Wilderness.



The Pacific Crest Trail hugs the east side of Hogback Mountain in the northern Goat Rocks Wilderness. The trail sits above a high-elevation meadow littered with boulders before switching directions at a windy saddle above Shoe Lake. Deep valleys radiate from rocky ridgelines in all directions. Ice hangs on nearby Old Snowy Mountain.

At this viewpoint, my friends and I pause. We slather peanut butter on tortillas and stare at Mount Rainier. PCT thru-hikers hustle past our perch. Some pause, and their eyes move slowly as they take in the views. I chat with these ambitious travelers. They tell me anecdotes from their journeys with toothy grins.

It is a summer weekend at the end of July. My spouse and I are taking our friend, Katelynn, on her first backpacking trip. When the trail climbs steeply, Katelynn charges ahead. She keeps shouting, “This is great!” We stop at a nearby lake and plunge into the water. I sit on a warm rock and think about all the things trails have given me and how their winding paths have directed my life.

Hiking, for me, is a reliable source of joy. I like taking labored breaths as I ascend steep grades. Bounding past fragrant ponderosa pines calms me. On trails, I know where I am going. Whether I am hiking with friends and family or am spending time alone, my legs will propel me only so fast. I move through landscapes. I relax into the pace of my gait. On backpacking trips, I can look at the miles on the map and count the hours ahead of me. As I walk, I know that I have chosen the particular aches in my knees and hips. I accept the familiar fatigue. Unconfined by walls, I have new thoughts. When I hike, I am frequently surprised by beauty. I feel different. Moving along a trail, I feel connected to the world around me. I feel grateful.

In recent years, researchers have found that spending at least 120 minutes per week in nature for the purpose of recreating is positively associated with good health. When individuals have more than 2 hours a week of direct exposure to green space including parks, forests and beaches, they consistently report higher levels of health

and well-being than people who do not spend time recreating outside. This does not surprise me. I feel better when I hike, but the magnitude of the impact is striking. According to research published in 2019, the size of the reported health benefit associated with getting sufficient time in nature is similar to the difference between meeting or not meeting recommended physical-activity guidelines. The positive benefits of time spent outdoors can come from many short trips in a week or one long outdoor experience, such as going for a hike on a weekend. What seems to matter is being outside and experiencing the natural world.

Trails are a critical conduit for my time outside. They allow me and many others to go to the same beautiful mountain lake without trampling vegetation. By giving people the ability to travel on a durable surface and be in nature, trails make important contributions to the mental and physical health of Washington state residents. A 2019 report published by our state government looked at impacts of trails in our state and found that “physical activity associated with trail use results in more than \$390 million in health savings annually.”

Hiking helps boost balance and stability. It helps individuals maintain mobility and healthy lifestyles. Studies have also found that hiking can lower stress and anxiety. And while it’s hard to separate correlation and causation, research suggests there is benefit to simply being outside, not only that people who are in good health are more likely to go outside.

WTA exists because people care about trails and public lands. Hiking connects people to nature. As a community, we work together to protect those places where we recreate. Psychologists call forming a bond with an environment or setting “place attachment.” Scholars tell us that having an attachment to the natural world increases pro-environmental behaviors and civic engagement. I see examples of this constantly.

Last year, WTA trail crews gave more



Michael DeCramer, Kate DeCramer and Katelynn Carlson pictured near Shoe Lake in the Goat Rocks Wilderness

We can better advocate for policies that address the threats to outdoor places because there is a broad base of people who have deep personal connections to the outdoors.

than 158,000 hours of their time to improving the trails we all share. This speaks to a shared passion for assuring that Washington trails are designed, located and maintained to support the conservation of the natural, cultural and scenic resources of the surrounding areas.

In my work, I communicate with the more than 66,000 people who participate in WTA’s Trail Action Network. These hikers give input to public lands managers and elected officials about the importance of trails and public lands. They sign petitions, attend meetings with legislators and write comment letters. These advocates speak with passion about the places they love, like the mountains where I took my friend for her first backpacking trip.

For decades, WTA has labored to increase protections for special

places and assure the conservation of publicly owned lands. We advocate for the environment in collaboration with other recreation groups based on our shared connections to mountains, rivers, shorelines, forests and grasslands. There are many challenges facing the environment, including climate change and the associated loss of biodiversity.

We can better advocate for policies that address these threats because there is a broad base of people who have deep personal connections to the outdoors. Hiking brings me joy. It also strengthens my conviction that I need to demand that the government acts to preserve the places we all love so that we may continue to enjoy them.

To learn more about the research mentioned in this story, go to wta.org/benefitsofhiking.

Photos by Kate DeCramer



For the next generation

By Rachel Wendling and Jessi Loerch

Participants have fun on a Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest collaborative outing with Outdoor Asian and Latino Outdoors at Gold Creek Pond.

W

TA is celebrating a major milestone in our **Outdoor Leadership Training program**. For a decade, we have been helping community leaders get outside with youth and families. By offering training, gear and resources, we have helped make more than 18,000 outdoor experiences possible.

More than a decade ago, staff at WTA kept hearing similar stories from people in our community.

They wanted to get outdoors with groups of youth and families — but they needed more resources to

make it happen. We saw that problem and went looking for a solution. Now, we're excited to celebrate 10 years of that solution — our Outdoor Leadership Training (OLT) program.

Since 2013, the OLT program has trained 475 educators and other people who work with youth to get outside safely with kids and families. The graduates of our workshops engage youth and families with the outdoors and inspire the next generation of hikers, outdoor leaders and public land stewards.

While participating in an OLT-supported trip, many youth have an opportunity to experience something completely new. For some, that might be strapping on a pair of snowshoes or lighting their first camp stove. For others, it might be as simple as walking a trail. Those experiences can stick with them for a lifetime; they're also a whole lot of work to create.

“OLT totally supports our vision of trails for everyone,” said Krista Dooley, who was key to starting the program and who now leads our community partnerships and leadership development team.

We're excited about how far the program has come — from training five leaders in 2013 to 75 leaders in 2023 — and how the impacts of OLT spread far beyond just the people we have trained.

“**Thank you for getting me the gear so I felt prepared for my trip.**

— 5th grade student



Rainier Prep students practice setting up a tent before a camping trip.

Starting something new

Community leaders, teachers and youth group leaders all have a lot on their plate. And, while we all know the positive impact outdoor experiences can have on youth, sometimes leaders need a little help to make them happen.

“I think it would be a great experience to take my students hiking, but I don't know where to start.”

“The young people we work with just don't have the appropriate gear to enjoy the outdoors.”

“Our youth group would love to volunteer with WTA, but we don't have transportation to get to the trailhead.”

Back in 2013, those were just a few of the comments we had been hearing from community organizations and schools interested in leading outdoor youth trips. While we wanted to help in any way we could, we also realized that we lacked the resources to do so.

The conversations got us thinking: Was there a way we could get those resources? Could we create a program that would break down the major barriers that prevent community leaders from getting youth outdoors?

Krista made it her mission to make that hope a reality. Over the course of many months, Krista made calls across the country, searching near and far for organizations attempting to do similar work. She held dozens of meetings and focus groups with local educators, youth-serving organizations and government groups to dig even deeper into the specifics of their programs.

In her research, Krista stumbled upon the work of Kyle Macdonald, founder and former executive director at Bay Area Wilderness Training, based out of Oakland, California. At the time, Kyle was hoping to shift his focus toward creating a new network of youth programs — a network that fell right in line



with the hopes and dreams of WTA's emerging OLT program. The network, known as the Outdoors Empowered Network, is a collective of programs nationwide that aim to connect all youth to the outdoors by breaking down barriers to access.

It's safe to say our interest was piqued — and we readily signed on as one of the first members of the burgeoning network, which gave us a wealth of resources for setting up our own program. (And, over the years, our program has served as a model for other programs.)

We now had the network and resources to help kids get outside. The next order of business was to find ways to address the major barriers to leading outdoor experiences for youth, which Krista's research identified as a lack in four major areas: training, gear, funding and support.

Meeting those needs was paramount in the creation of our OLT program, guiding our work in four interconnected areas: workshops on a variety of trip-leading topics, access to free gear-lending libraries, funding assistance to cover associated trip costs, and ongoing community support to foster connections and crowdsource solutions to common problems.

Training

Many teachers and youth leaders that Krista talked to were excited by the idea of getting kids outdoors, but they said they needed training to feel confident planning and leading safe and fun trips. In our workshops, we wanted to focus on building these skills and include plenty of hands-on experience in the field. We also decided on a training model that focused on training the leaders of youth outdoor excursions rather than taking youth out ourselves.

With this model in mind, we built out a curriculum focused on adult leaders and featuring four distinct workshop topics: hiking, camping, backpacking and snowshoeing. Our workshops are offered all year long and are held at various public lands throughout Western Washington.

“One of the biggest challenges at first was helping people understand that we were helping them lead trips, we were not doing the guiding,” Krista said. “Instead, we had to explain ‘We are empowering

Our train-the-trainer model focuses on empowering leaders in their own communities. These leaders know the unique needs of their students and can build on the personal relationships and sense of belonging that are created during outdoor outings. This model also allows us to leverage the multiplier effect. It has allowed us to support thousands more youth experiences in the outdoors than we ever could alone.



This program has helped change the conversations about barriers to access the outdoors in the region.

— David Dunphy, executive director of Y.E.T.I.

you as leaders to do this for your programs.’ A few immediately got it and a few needed time to build up their confidence. The train-the-trainer idea was a new concept to a lot of folks.”

Gear

The next step in a successful outdoor outing is getting access to gear that makes participants feel comfortable and safe — and hopefully itching for more adventure. The upfront cost of acquiring enough gear for a day outside is a massive hurdle for many youth-serving organizations. Plus, for groups that take only a handful of trips a year, it often doesn't make sense to store 20+ sleeping bags.

Free gear-lending libraries were the answer. With the help of Outdoor Empowered Network, we secured enough gear to open our first gear lending library in Seattle in 2013. What started as a small collection of backpacks, jackets and boots has grown to include everything from snowshoes to complete backpacking kits.

In 2021, we opened a second gear lending library in Puyallup, in partnership with Pierce County Parks, to support more groups in the South Puget Sound region.

Gaining access to the libraries is simple. After completing one OLT workshop and gear orientation with WTA, leaders can check out any gear they need for their youth participants. Rain, shine or snow, our gear is available all year long.

Krista says that the gear library is critical to OLT's success. Early on in the program, partners didn't quite realize how much we could offer them.

“Concerns about gear kept coming up, until they really understood the basis of the program and the intent,” she said. “I had to explain, ‘We listened to your needs and here is the opportunity to take the gear for whatever you need.’”

MJ Sampang, WTA's community partnerships and leadership development coordinator, works in WTA's Pierce County gear library. She says that having access to the gear library



The positive impact of this trip was deeply felt by all. Youth reported that they had found newfound strength in themselves, connected deeply with others in new and unexpected ways, and felt more closely connected with nature.

— **Rae Parks**, former Young Women Empowered staff



provides peace of mind for our community partners. It also gives them more freedom to try new outdoor activities, like snowshoeing, since the gear library is already equipped with all the needed gear.

“Community partners have told me that it is reassuring to tell guardians and families that there is a gear library that can supply additional gear their youth needs,” MJ said. “Having access to the gear library also provides reassurance for youth by allowing



El Centro de la Raza (top), **The Bronze Chapter** (left) and **Wild Grief** (above) are a few of the groups that WTA's Outdoor Leadership Training programs supports.

Photos by Lily Poppen, Freya Fenwood Photography, Megan Carlisle

them to focus on the program events and having fun with each other rather than worrying about the gear that they don't have.”

Funding

Even with access to gear, there are other barriers to outdoor outings that leaders need to figure out before they can go. Transportation, campsite fees, food and permits are just a few of the most common ones. To help minimize the funding barrier, OLT workshop participants who serve priority communities (those where 40 percent or more of youth are low-income and communities of color) are eligible to apply for funding assistance that can be used on any costs for their trip.

Support

A number of youth-serving organizations are in Washington state, and there's an incredible wealth of knowledge and experience among them. We heard from many youth leaders that forming connections with leaders in similar positions was a deeply valuable resource for their work. Through our centralized workshops, we provide a space for networking and idea-sharing between leaders across the region. And we keep supporting partners and building connections even after the workshops.

“Our workshops are a space where everyone learns and grows together, even me,” said Erin McQuin, OLT manager. “Often, there are great discussions where one leader may pose a question to the group and another leader is able to answer authentically because they have had a similar experience. By the end of our workshops, I feel a strong sense of connection between everyone in the group.”

Our OLT partners also support each other. Last year, GirlTrek's



Gear is a barrier for so many people and for a variety of reasons. Our ability to support as many people as possible is because of our partnership with WTA. Without the ongoing partnership, we wouldn't be able to impact the thousands of people that have accessed our programming over the years.

— Chevon Powell, founder of Golden Bricks Events

transportation for a trip fell through at the last minute. Y.E.T.I. had vans available that weren't being used. Erin was able to connect the two groups and Y.E.T.I. was able to provide transportation. The trip likely would have been canceled otherwise.

Sometimes our trainings are geared toward leaders of specific communities and to meet specific needs. In 2021, we piloted a wilderness first aid course for leaders who identify as black, indigenous and people of color (BIPOC). It created a unique learning environment as well as a natural networking space. Since then, we have collaborated with Braided Seeds to co-host BIPOC wilderness first-aid courses on an annual basis.

18,000 outdoor experiences (and counting)

Now, 10 years in, OLT has the same goals, but the program has grown dramatically.

On any given weekend, we may have up to 11 groups checking out gear. From snowshoeing at Gold Creek Pond and backpacking along the Olympic coast, to giving local STEM lessons and cleaning up debris at Ruby Beach, our workshop graduates are out exploring Washington's wild places and making lasting memories with their youth

OLT by the numbers

109 outings that Y-WE has led — the most of any of our partners

224 organizations and communities supported

390 pairs of boots in our gear libraries

475 leaders trained

834 outings supported

1,008 nights that kids have spent under the stars, with OLT support

1,584 quarters used to wash sleeping bags each season

18,399 supported youth and adult outdoor experiences

\$49,582 in funding assistance provided for workshops and outings

\$2,927,080 estimated cost savings for partners not needing to purchase gear



Interim WILD, one of WTA's regular Outdoor Leadership Training partners, on a snowshoeing trip at Snoqualmie Pass.

“**All of the students wanted to go snowshoeing again after the trip. They had so much fun, especially during a snowball fight between teachers and students. The most positive impact was the relationships formed between teachers and students outside the classroom.**”

— **Talia Hirsch**, former executive director of Y.E.T.I.

groups. When the shelves are empty, we know we're succeeding.

With the help of our members and supporters, our OLT program has been able to grow bolder and brighter year after year. We cannot give enough thanks to the educators and community leaders who are doing the work to make the experiences happen. We're so proud of the work being done across the state to connect youth with the outdoors, and we're happy to be a support system for these experiences.

The OLT program was founded on listening to and learning from educators' and community leaders' needs. We

are continually thinking about how we can innovate to increase our support and reduce barriers to getting kids outside. We're developing relationships with new partners and expanding our workshop locations across the state.

“I think OLT has been a game changer for who has access to the outdoors and for breaking down those barriers that keep people away,” Krista said. “It helps to change the representation of who is a leader in the outdoors. As I look ahead, I would love to hear about youth that have gone on OLT-supported trips who are now leading

trips. I'd love to see youth growing up and seeing themselves as the leader and leading trips and inspiring the next generation.” ■

Get involved

You can learn more about our Outdoor Leadership Training program, including upcoming workshops for 2024, at wta.org/olt.

If you want to help more communities experience the joy of the outdoors, celebrate OLT's 10th anniversary by renewing or upgrading your WTA membership at wta.org/donate.

Photo by Britt Lé

The Support She Needed

How Outdoor Leadership Training helped one teacher finally get outside with her students

Sara Ullmer, a former high school science teacher at Highline High School in Burien, attended one of WTA's first OLT workshops. She found the program to be just what she needed. It helped her build her confidence in safety considerations and group management, which helped her take her students on outdoor trips.

"I had been trying to lead trips with my students and realized how important providing gear was to making the outdoors accessible," Sara said. "I had already looked to WTA for hike ideas and trail conditions. So when I discovered the OLT program, it was magical. I remember thinking what a game changer the program was. I could invite any and all kids on a trip and give them the gear they needed to have fun and stay safe and dry. It was incredible."

Between 2015 and 2019, Sara led 24 outdoor trips with students. The trips ranged from water quality testing on a hike through a watershed to camping, backpacking, snowshoeing, rock climbing and more.

"The OLT program was a massive support for my school and Youth Experiential Training Institute trips," she said. "I



Sara Ullmer's trips with Highline High School and Y.E.T.I included the Olympic coast and North Cascades.

borrowed tents, raincoats and pants, hiking boots, snowshoes and everything in between. I even borrowed a fully stocked camp kitchen to make cooking easier with large groups. The OLT community was also a wealth of knowledge about what places worked well for outings and other considerations. The OLT team was so helpful and kind, supporting me as I figured out what it meant to lead all sorts of trips."

The OLT community Sara referred to is the instructors and the other attendees of the workshops she attended. Often by the end of the hands-on trainings, participants have learned from each other and shared their experiences. Some also share contact information to stay connected as they go on to lead outdoor trips.

"It was useful to have a group of educators and trip leaders who were passionate about taking students on trips and hearing about their ideas and considerations," Sara said. "I could



incorporate some of the logistics planning and coordinating to make it a little easier.”

There are many challenges leaders face when planning outdoor trips. Without the OLT program, Sara said, “I would have been much more isolated in my experience. It would have been difficult or impossible to take students on certain trips, such as backpacking, without the extra gear. It made every trip memorable in a positive way, not in the ‘I’m so cold’ sort of way. Most of the students I worked with would have struggled to find the equipment necessary to have an enjoyable experience.”

Sara still reflects on the transformative experiences and positive memories shared with her students on the outdoor trips.

“I have so many fond memories of the trips,” she said. “The sheer joy that students showed playing in the snow might be unparalleled. I remember taking a group of English language learners who had recently immigrated to the U.S. snowshoeing,



One of my favorite things I’ve done in my career so far is lead outdoor trips with students and I absolutely could not have done it without WTA.

and snow was so fascinating and peculiar to them. They tossed that snow up over and over again and were laughing; it was pure joy at its finest.”

The impact of making connections to nature and spending time together outdoors goes well beyond the experience in the moment.

“I still hear from students who went into outdoor or environmental careers because of the trips we took,” Sara said. “A lot of the impact was also hard to measure, but you could feel it on the car ride home from a trip. The feeling of belonging to a group, confidence in trying a new skill, excitement from being outdoors all weekend. It was almost tangible, the positive feelings as students said goodbye to each other. The trips helped foster some unlikely friendships between students who wouldn’t normally know each other at school and now had a friendly face in the halls.”

The outdoor experiences didn’t just have a positive impact on students; they made a lasting impact on Sara as well.

“One of my favorite things I’ve done in my career so far is lead outdoor trips with students, and I absolutely could not have done it without WTA,” she said. “I am forever grateful.”



Volunteers with Latino Outdoors work to replant meadows at Mount Rainier.



Celebrating 10 years of Latino Outdoors

By Luis Villa

Diversity is good for the outdoor community and for the natural world we care about.

For a decade, Latino Outdoors has been part of a movement. In that time, the community of people who not only love and care for the outdoors, but also feel included in this community has blossomed into something more nuanced,

more rich and more robust than what it once was.

As diversity and inclusivity in the outdoor community have steadily increased, they have added to broader social and environmental justice efforts. As a continuing contributor to these efforts, Latino Outdoors celebrated our 10th anniversary by eagerly looking towards the trail ahead and proudly looking back at the ground we have already covered.

Latino Outdoors (LO) began as a one-person blog in 2013 and has flourished into a movement powered by a deeply committed network of volunteer outdoor enthusiasts and leaders. The LO network has served communities around the country through more than 1,000 outings for over 20,000 participants so far.

Latino Outdoors volunteers based in Seattle, for example, have collaborated multiple times with National Park Service staff at Mount Rainier to introduce community members to this iconic national park. During one of the more recent collaborations, participants built bonds between themselves and with the park through hiking, camping and stewardship. Seeing themselves reflected in the Latina

Photo courtesy Sully Moreno

park rangers with whom they worked to help revegetate a meadow made the experience that much more memorable.

From day hikes to dancing outside, biking to belaying, camping to caring for cempasúchil, mountaineering to mushroom foraging, the volunteers who lead LO outings have been connecting people to place and to each other for a decade through creativity, a sense of cultural pride and a passion for service.

To hear me or just about anyone else at LO tell it, you'd think we were convinced that spending time outdoors is a panacea for the challenges confronting us, individually and collectively. And although we are not oblivious to the tensions in our society, we believe we have a lot to gain from a community of outdoor enthusiasts that grows to become more representative of the diversity of people who actually comprise it.

We are all part of an increasingly interconnected global society, largely an outcome of the world's dominant power and economic structures, which focus on profit and market share. But we can't grow into new markets, and then not expect a response from or impact on the people and communities we're selling to and extracting from.

When, for example, the outdoor industry uses its power to reach new audiences, that broader customer base will bring new ideas for experiencing the outdoors and for shaping the corresponding narrative. Similarly, those looking to grow the conservation community must understand that in doing so, the very definition of "conservation" will be put to the test, resulting in more nuance. The changes that follow can be uncomfortable.

There have been uncomfortable stretches during the first 10 years of Latino Outdoors. Those growing pains include being challenged to better represent the diversity within the Latino community itself. Actually, we do our best to refrain from referring to Latine communities in the singular in order to underscore the fact that they are far from monolithic.

LO started off as California-centric and with a particular Latino demographic.



We have a lot to gain from a community of outdoor enthusiasts that grows to become more representative of the actual diversity of people who love and care for the outdoors.

Time, along with constructive feedback from the communities we serve, helped change that. We still have more to do, but when looking at the LO comunidad today, we see more geographic, ethnic, racial, generational, political, professional and recreational diversity. This variety of thought, perspectives and lived experiences has compelled us to take pause, slow down, and, at times, look for an alternate route. We embrace the detours with the learning opportunities they offer.

Latino Outdoors relies on a framework for guiding our volunteers in crafting outdoor experiences. The framework's four key words are people, place, process and policy. We encourage LO outings leaders to create experiences for people to connect to each other and to the place they are exploring. We also underscore the process of enjoying the outdoors safely and the policies that lead to protection for the places we enjoy.

This open-ended guidance has led to mindfulness and watercoloring walks by volunteers like Victoria in California, summit hikes for Hispanic engineers by Nohemi in Colorado, birding beyond the city with Ariel and Juan in Illinois, outings in solidarity and community with groups like Black Women Who by Rosa Bianca, Azalia and Liz in Texas, and bike rides sweetened with Brazilian brigadeiros by Stephanie in Massachusetts. In creating outdoor experiences like these, LO volunteers are empowered to apply their own passion, perspective and personal touch.

The movement toward diversity in the outdoors is made up of many other affinity groups, including Black Women Who, Brown Girls Climb, Disabled Hikers, Hunters of Color, Outdoor Afro, Outdoor Asian, The Venture Out Project and Un Mar de Colores, to name just a few. And it is precisely this rich and

robust diversity that makes the outdoor community stronger and more resilient. It's not unlike an ecosystem that thrives thanks to rich biological diversity.

Syren Nagakyrie, who founded Disabled Hikers, expresses the same idea when sharing the story of how they were inspired to start their organization.

"As a child, I spent hours outside, sitting under a tree or gazing at the moon. I noticed how different the plants and animals were from each other. This awareness helped me feel less isolated. I sensed that even though I was different from the other kids, I had a place in the world."

Latino Outdoors has a place within a movement that celebrates diversity in the outdoor community. That movement is nested within society's broader diversity, equity, inclusion and justice movement — DEI. Taking what I've learned on my own life's trail from nature, people, experiences, and time, it's dawned on me that that little acronym is actually a formula for societal and environmental success. It goes something like this: diversity + equity + inclusion = justice = peace + sustainability = a thriving world, and in that equation, diversity is the linchpin.

Luis Villa is the executive director of Latino Outdoors, which is celebrating its 10th birthday this year. As part of the celebration, LO self-published a children's book. The book follows Pepe Plantasemillas, a vibrant and colorful bird, on a journey to plant a magical seed of cultura y comunidad in different places while meeting new faces. Luis last crossed paths with Washington Trails Magazine readers in the fall of 2020, when he shared his thoughts and experience on how the conservation and social justice movements intersect.

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Thank you, volunteers! We appreciate you!

You, our community, are the secret to our success. A community that is committed, innovative and fun. You take care of each other, Washington's hikers and our trails. 30 years of trail work is about much more than tread and drainages — it's friendships and stewardship of our lands. Every step in this journey has people coming together around the idea that people protect the places they love. Thanks to the foundation you have helped build, we are laying a path towards trails for everyone, forever.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jaime".

Jaime Loucky
Chief executive officer





John works in the Pierce County gear library, surrounded by racks and storage he built.

Building Solutions by Hand

By Anna Roth

For 18 years, John Mackenzie has been using his carpentry skills to support WTA behind the scenes.

It's fairly common to look forward to retirement as a time to step away from the work that filled your days for decades. Not for John Mackenzie. A carpenter and construction project manager by trade, John retired around 2007, and almost immediately began building things with WTA on trail. Around 2018, he shifted to volunteering to support WTA staffers who make our programs possible.

He started by building storage in our North Bend packing facility, making it possible for WTA to host volunteer vacations. He's built ingenious storage solutions in our gear libraries, making it easier for groups to rent gear and. And he helps with tool maintenance, so volunteers have sharp tools.

'Carpentry, cool!'

John discovered WTA from a post by volunteer crew leader Bob Adler on

NWHikers, an online hiking forum.

"I saw (Bob's) post about restoring Kelly Butte Lookout shortly after I retired, and I thought, 'Carpentry, cool! Lookouts, cool!' I think I spent every other weekend there the rest of the summer."

Once they finished that project, Bob convinced John to give trail maintenance a try. So when WTA started working in the Skykomish District, so did John. He was a regular at those work parties led by former crew leader Zack McBride. The following spring he joined a volunteer vacation with Lisa Black, a longtime crew leader, former board member and dedicated, charismatic volunteer.

Bob, Zack and Lisa had set the stage, offering camaraderie and fun projects, and John was hooked. He did years of "dirt work," with a strong preference for construction projects.

“My head works in inches and feet and eighths and quarters and solutions to problems,” he said. “It’s what I did when I was a project manager for 30 years.”

John’s entire career was in construction. He was a carpenter for 10 of those years, where he had access to “just about every tool you can think of.” Later he worked on contracts for large commercial projects, but once you learn carpentry, you don’t forget those skills. And lucky for us, John loves carpentry and believes in sharing knowledge.

“How can I know how to do that and not want to share?” he said. “I enjoy it. It’s not work to me. Carpentry isn’t work.”

Which is probably why he spends so much time building stuff for WTA. When he was on-trail, there was always a construction project available, and when Jen Gradisher – now our trails director, then a crew leader – had a project, they’d call on John for assistance. Each time Jen or Zack told him about a puncheon or a bridge project, he’d put together a materials list and provide instructions on how to build the structure.

Having those instructions and neatly sorted materials simplified construction hugely. It was crucial to WTA in offering a good volunteer experience on our work parties.

Simple, neat, fun

Simplifying and streamlining the volunteer experience is something John believes is central to getting people to feel part of WTA’s community. It’s also how he shifted his focus to projects that support WTA’s programs, starting with tool sharpening.

John is serious about this. In 2015, he attended a weeklong crosscut saw maintenance class at the Ninemile Remount Depot and Historic Ranger Station outside of Missoula, Montana. For 40 hours, they practiced crosscut sharpening, a manual task that takes precision and focus in a world of increasingly automated practices. They also had a 4-day class on ax maintenance.

John was fascinated by the whole compound. “Their focus at the station is in teaching many of the lost skills they don’t want to lose forever.”

When he returned, he brought that expertise to WTA’s tools, which he maintains year-round in his at-home shop.

“Good folks come out on trail,” he said. “Even if they’re not skilled when they get on a project, it’ll come in time. You just have to ensure they come back. You keep really nice-looking, well-kept tools in volunteers’ hands, and at the end of the day they’ll get more done and they’ll come back.”

Erin McMillan, the WTA staffer who oversees volunteer vacation prep and the tool cache in North Bend, reflects on John’s commitment to maintaining and storing those sharp tools.

“I’d estimate he paints and sharpens almost 300 tools in a year,” Erin said. “Sharpening crosscut saws is a tedious and challenging process. It’s a difficult skill. ... It’s amazing to have a skilled sharpener in our community.”



John helps WTA staff and volunteers by keeping our tools in great shape and creating ways to store them efficiently.

Thinking in inches and feet

Spending all that time in the tool cache and the facility in North Bend, John noticed some improvements needed to be made. When WTA first took up residence in North Bend, it was a drafty, open garage with a rat problem. John saw a solution and built floor-to-ceiling shelves to create a more sanitary and pleasant workspace to prep all of the supplies for our volunteer vacations. Every year, he does a little more to improve it.

“If we say we need more storage, he’ll start planning the shelves before I finish my sentence, and have them built by the end of the week,” Erin said.

He’s made an equal impact on the gear libraries where the gear for our Outdoor Leadership Training (OLT) program is stored. MJ Sampang, who works out of the Pierce County location, says John has been an integral part of the OLT library organization.

“When John noticed that this location was small and mighty, he added wheels to the table to make the space fun and dynamic,” she said. “John also built all the dowels and shelves that hold snowshoes, trekking poles and 125 colorful backpacks.”

The gear libraries help various community groups take their members outside by making gear available to group leaders after a training session. They’re key to helping introduce young people to the outdoors who wouldn’t otherwise be able to get outside, and John believes OLT is the key to the future of WTA.

WTA’s 30th anniversary of trail work is this year. While we have been celebrating that anniversary all year, we wouldn’t be able to do the work and programming we do as an organization without commitments from people like John. We’re lucky to have his generous spirit and the time he dedicates to our mission.

It’s a great opportunity,” John said. “The kids that take to it are gonna want more. It’s a natural transition from using gear from the lending library, to spending a few day trips volunteering on trail, to becoming orange hats (assistant crew leaders) and loving WTA”

We agree! Thanks to John and volunteers like him who help make all our programs possible.



Urban Trails Become Winter Wonderlands

Suggestions for finding hikes near you, even in the dark, wet winter months

By Craig Romano

Mercer Slough (above) and Discovery Park (right) are just two of the many urban trails that you can explore in the winter.

Photos by Craig Romano



As hikers and runners, we need to get outside year round.

Luckily we have plenty of options to make that easy, even in the chilly, damp season — namely our region’s hundreds of urban trails.

They’re nearby and easily accessible and they’re often quiet in the winter, offering opportunities for solitude and quiet contemplation. In the western, more temperate regions of Washington, Oregon and Southwest British Columbia, urban trails are usually snow-free all winter long. And in Eastern Washington, where snow is more common in-town, you can cross-country ski or snowshoe right in the city. Best of all, these trails are close to coffee shops, brewpubs and cafes, so you can enjoy a cozy après hike experience.

In case you think urban parks are inferior to parks and forests found further afield, let me introduce you to some real gems. These places feature big trees, big views and wild environments, sometimes just a few miles from home.

Old growth

Missing the big trees of the Cascades and Olympics? You can find majestic old growth right in our urban centers. Explore **Seattle’s Seward Park**, **Millersylvania State Park** just south of Olympia or **Burnaby Central Park** in British Columbia to hike among towering ancient trees.

Tacoma features one of my favorite urban parks in the country: **Point Defiance**. Explore over 15 miles of trails including some

weaving through impressive old-growth groves and along dramatic bluff tops, where you can enjoy fantastic views of the Tacoma Narrows Bridge.

Mountains

If it’s mountains you need, our urban areas have those too, though they’re a little smaller than the Cascades. Plus, they offer great conditioning grounds for keeping in shape and training for next summer. Between Bellingham and Mount Vernon lie the **Chuckanut Mountains** and **Blanchard Hill**, complete with a large network of trails, old-growth forests, lakes, and stunning views of Mount Baker, British Columbia’s Golden Ears and the San Juan Islands.

Right in Mount Vernon is 522-acre **Little Mountain Park** with 10-plus miles of well-built trails weaving through forest groves and viewpoints of the Skagit Flats, Olympic Mountains and Mount Baker. Near Bellevue and Issaquah are the **Issaquah Alps**, four thickly forested, rolling hills up to 3,000 feet in elevation. The trail system that spans these urban peaks is extensive, exceeding 100 miles. Explore old town sites, a showy waterfall, plus former mines and logging railroad lines. Dotted all over the mountains are viewpoints of the Seattle skyline, Lake Washington, Mount Rainier, the Cascade foothills and so much more.

To the south, **Capitol State Forest** just outside Olympia features 80 miles of non-motorized trails. It’s a great alternative to the more popular Issaquah Alps and you can still find

waterfalls, mature forest and views that include Mount Rainier, Mount St. Helens and the South Sound.

Shorelines and wetlands

Want to be near the water? Seattle's 500-plus-acre **Discovery Park** is an urban gem with an undeveloped coastline, 12 miles of trails, historic structures and lighthouse, and breathtaking views of the Olympic Peninsula across the Sound.

Take to 7 miles of trails in Bellevue's **Mercer Slough** to explore Lake Washington's largest and mostly undeveloped wetland.

Bellingham's **South Bay Trail** travels on a trestle crossing Bellingham Bay. Sunsets are magnificent on this trail, and you'll get views of Lummi Island. Olympia's **Capitol Lake** boasts impressive views of the state capitol building on a hill above it.

Vancouver Lake Park in southwest Washington has a series of trails through lakeside oak forests and along the Columbia River. And Richmond, British Columbia's extensive **West Dyke Trail** runs along the Strait of Georgia, granting views out to Vancouver Island and North Shore summits.

Just minutes from downtown Portland you can hike **Sauvie Island**, the largest island in Oregon and explore its Columbia River shoreline or wetlands teeming with birds.

Rivers

If you want rivers, consider the **Apple Capitol Trail** in Wenatchee for a 10-mile loop on the Columbia — great for families on bikes! In Vancouver, Washington, connect beautiful and historic revitalized downtown Vancouver with Fort Vancouver National Historic Park on the 5-mile **Columbia River Renaissance Trail**, which follows the Pacific Northwest's grandest river. The **Tapteal Greenway** in the Tri-Cities or the **Yakima Greenway Trail** in Yakima both let you explore the Yakima River. The 23-mile **Sacajawea Heritage Trail** runs along the Columbia River, tying together the Tri-Cities. And the **Spokane River Centennial Trail** offers an extended trip from mature pine forests through the heart of Washington's second-largest city all the way to Idaho.



Tapteal Greenway and Sacajawea Heritage Trail



Chehalis Western Trail

Photos by Craig Romano

Long-distance trails

If you need an all-day hike or perhaps some ultra-running training, choose from a handful of in-town rail trails. Visit all of Washington's **interurban rail trails** — **Bellingham, Snohomish, Shoreline, South King County and Milton** in Pierce County.

Bellingham's is the most scenic, traveling along the base of the Chuckanut Mountains. South King County's is the longest at 15 miles and with connections to the 19.6-mile **Green River Trail** which meanders along remnant farmland and historic areas from Kent to Seattle. **Snohomish County's Centennial Trail** traverses the county's suburban and rural areas. At 31 miles long, it's perfect for 50K and 100K training.

And Spokane's 40-mile **Centennial Trail** (mentioned above) can connect to the North Idaho Centennial Trail for 23 more miles all the way to Lake Coeur d'Alene for a whopping 63-mile one-way trip.

Rural rail trails

One of my favorite rail trails is King County's **Snoqualmie Valley Trail**, which travels 28 miles in two sections from Duvall to North Bend through a rural stretch of the county. Skagit County's **Cascade Trail** is another favorite. This 23-mile-long trail travels along a gorgeous stretch of the Skagit River. In Thurston County, the **Chehalis Western Trail** connects to the **Yelm-Tenino Trail** providing 35 miles of trail through the county's urban areas and to bay shores, lake shores, prairies, pastures and forests.

Play in your local park

In Portland, you'll find plenty of places to hike and run. **Forest Park** has an astounding 5,200 acres, making it one of the largest urban parks in the country. More than 80 miles of trails traverse its rolling hills, thick forests and deep ravines. Enjoy some excellent views of the city and Mount St. Helens and Mount Hood from here, too.

In the other Vancouver, British Columbia's **Stanley Park** is consistently rated one of the finest urban parks in the world, and I concur. The iconic park contains more than 1,000 forested acres on a peninsula minutes from downtown. Explore 25 miles of spectacular trails including one of the longest seawall trails in the world. The city's **Pacific Spirit Regional Park** is more than twice the size, with almost 50 miles of trails and a wild, undeveloped coastline. You can spend a lot of winter days just exploring these two parks alone.

Smaller cities have urban gems, too! Longview's **Lake Sacajawea Park** was influenced by the early 20th century City Beautiful movement and is a gorgeous park with 4 miles of trails through beautifully landscaped grounds complete with stately eastern hardwoods.

So embrace the wet months and discover new trails.

You won't run out of new places to hike. I have written eight books on our urban trails, covering Vancouver, Olympia, Tacoma, Seattle, the Eastside (of Lake Washington), the Kitsap Peninsula, Everett and Bellingham. And next year I add Vancouver, British Columbia, to the lineup. See you out there — or afterward at a café or brewpub.



DOUBLE YOUR IMPACT FOR TRAILS WITH MATCHING GIFTS

Workplace matches make it easy for you to double contributions you already make to WTA. Many companies, like Microsoft, Boeing, Salesforce and many more, offer generous matching gifts programs so you can double your impact on trails. Check with your human resources department to see if your donations to WTA are eligible.

Photo by Alison Mehravari



Cool Days, Hot Drinks

The right warm beverage can transform a winter hike into something magical. Here are ideas for what to put in your thermos, or to heat up on trail, for your next trip.

By Jessi Loerch

The Thermos Hot Toddy

The hot toddy is perhaps the perfect winter drink. It's got a bit of zest to it, a bit of bite to it, and a throat-soothing flavor that's enjoyable on brisk mornings.

Ingredients

- Hot water
- Shot of whiskey
- Honey to taste
- Lemon to taste
- One lemon round
- Cinnamon stick (optional)

How to

Combine all ingredients, except the lemon round and cinnamon stick, and pour into a thermos. Add the lemon round and cinnamon stick when you're ready to drink.

Hot cocoa hacks

Any instant hot cocoa can be elevated with a few fun extras. A few ideas:

- Mini marshmallows
- Candy cane or peppermint stick
- Altoids (any of the flavors)
- Butterscotch chips
- Peppermint patties
- Nutella
- Irish cream
- Coffee liqueur

Simple yet effective

You definitely do not need a recipe to enjoy a hot drink on trail. Here are some simple options that are easy to pack and carry and can be ready as fast as you can heat up water.

- Tea bags
- Instant coffee (such as Via)
- Powdered spiced cider
- Tang
- Hot cocoa
- Instant miso soup
- Bouillon cubes

Easily packable add-in ideas

- Honey sticks
- Sugar cubes
- Dry milk powder
- Powdered coconut milk (creamy and sweet)



Mulled wine or cider

I like to make this at lunch on my winter hikes. I enjoy the time to relax and visit with friends, and the wine smells incredible while it mulls. Don't be surprised if fellow hikers wander over to ask what you're making.

Ingredients

- Red wine or apple cider
- Mulling spices
- Whiskey or rum (optional)
- Orange slice (optional)

How to

You can make your wine in advance (at the trailhead or at home) or on the trail. Add your desired amount of wine and mulling spices to a pot and heat it over your stove gently. Don't let it boil. Once it is warm and smells amazing, take it off the heat. Pour into a thermos if you're working in advance. If you like, you can add a shot of whiskey or rum and/or an orange slice right before you drink.

Note: You can use any mulling spices you like. For more mulled flavor, add more spice or let it mull for longer. I like to use the pre-portioned tea bags of mulling spice when I hike — I use 6-8 bags for a full bottle of wine. Mulling spices in re-usable muslin bags work well too. If you have a hard time finding mulling spices, look in the bulk section of your local food co-op or grocery store or make your own.

Alcohol-free: You can do the same process with apple cider, which is usually easy to find and delicious in the fall. Just replace the wine with apple cider and omit the whiskey or rum.

Happy Feet, Happy Hiker

The right hiking socks can make a huge difference to your day on trail. (And your time chilling in camp.) Here's how to pick the right ones for you.

By **Sandra Saathoff**





I have a sock obsession. I admit it. Plop me in a store and you'll soon find me caressing the soft fuzzy socks, squeezing the cushioning and reminding myself that I have dozens of socks in my drawer and I don't need any more. So when the opportunity came to write about hiking socks, I jumped at it — and offered to try out several pairs to determine what really works best in different scenarios.

On trail, socks are important — they aren't just pieces of fabric. They act as a crucial barrier between your feet and your shoes or boots, protecting against blisters, hot spots and abrasions. Hiking socks provide cushioning and support, wick away moisture and regulate temperature, ensuring your feet stay dry and comfortable throughout your hiking adventures. And as many types of feet there are — that's how many types of socks there are: short, medium, tall, different fabrics, different features. So let's look at some of them.

Height

Hiking socks come in a variety of heights ranging from ankle and quarter crew to three-quarter crew and full length. Why does this matter? Socks should be taller than the shoes or boots you're wearing, so the footwear isn't rubbing on your skin. If you wear boots, that may mean choosing a three-quarter or full-length sock. If you're using trail runners, you could get away with a quarter crew or even a shorty running sock. Depending on the season, socks also provide protection against mosquitoes and black flies and can be treated with insect repellent. If you're backpacking in summer, you may choose a taller sock just to keep the bugs from eating your legs. Similarly, socks can provide sun protection, and tall socks can be paired with shorts to protect more skin.

Cushioning

Light, medium or heavy weight — depending on your preference, you can find socks in all varieties. Again, the choice is personal. Do you value a thicker cushion because your feet feel better when hiking through rocky terrain — or warmer when snowshoeing? Do you prefer a thinner sock because your trail runners have plenty of cushion and you value a quicker drying sock while you're doing water crossings in the backcountry?

Support

This is another feature with a lot of variability. A sock design may come with reinforced arches and ankle support or none at all. Tall compression socks provide incredible support for legs and feet, boosting blood flow, reducing leg fatigue and cramping, aiding muscle recovery and alleviating leg swelling. They can translate to a more enjoyable hiking experience for some. Spend some time looking at the options and decide what might work best for you based upon your own circumstances.

Architecture

While most socks are designed with the toes all in one area, there are also socks with individual ports for each toe. These toe socks may be helpful for people who get blisters on or between their toes when wearing average socks. The toe fabric rubs against other fabric instead of toes rubbing against toes. There are also sock liners, very thin socks that go on first and are followed by your normal hiking sock. Liners provide an extra layer of fabric intended to mitigate blisters.

Fabric

Merino wool, cotton, polyester or nylon. Merino wool offers excellent moisture wicking, odor control and temperature regulation. Synthetic blends like polyester and nylon provide durability, breathability and quick-drying

capabilities. Cotton tends to absorb moisture, lose its insulating properties and can take a while to dry, so it's not ideal on its own but is sometimes blended with synthetics for comfort.

Choosing the right pair

First, determine what type of hiking you're going to be doing — and in what season(s). You may need multiple pairs that can be swapped out during the year, depending on the conditions and your footwear. Thicker, warmer socks are ideal for cold weather, while lighter, moisture-wicking options are better suited to warm climates and summertime. During a short day hike, your feet may have different needs than on a multiday backpacking trip where you're doing 12+ miles a day.

Once you've determined the type of sock you're looking for, ensure a proper fit by choosing socks that match your shoe size and have a snug yet comfortable feel. Avoid socks that bunch up or have excess material, as they can cause blisters or discomfort.

Quality and durability are important considerations as well. Investing in a high-quality hiking sock may mean spending a little more upfront, but these socks are built to withstand the rigors of the trail over time. Some brands even come with a lifetime guarantee.

Finally, personal preference does come into play. Everyone's feet are unique, so it's essential to try on different brands and styles to find the ones that suit you best. Pay attention to features that matter most to you, such as cushioning, moisture wicking or reinforced toes and heels.

Investing in high-quality hiking socks is an important step toward ensuring a comfortable and enjoyable hiking experience. Socks protect your feet, provide cushioning and keep moisture at bay, reducing the risk of blisters.

By prioritizing the well-being of your feet, you can embark on your treks with confidence, knowing your feet will remain happy on trail. You may even find a new favorite sock — I did!

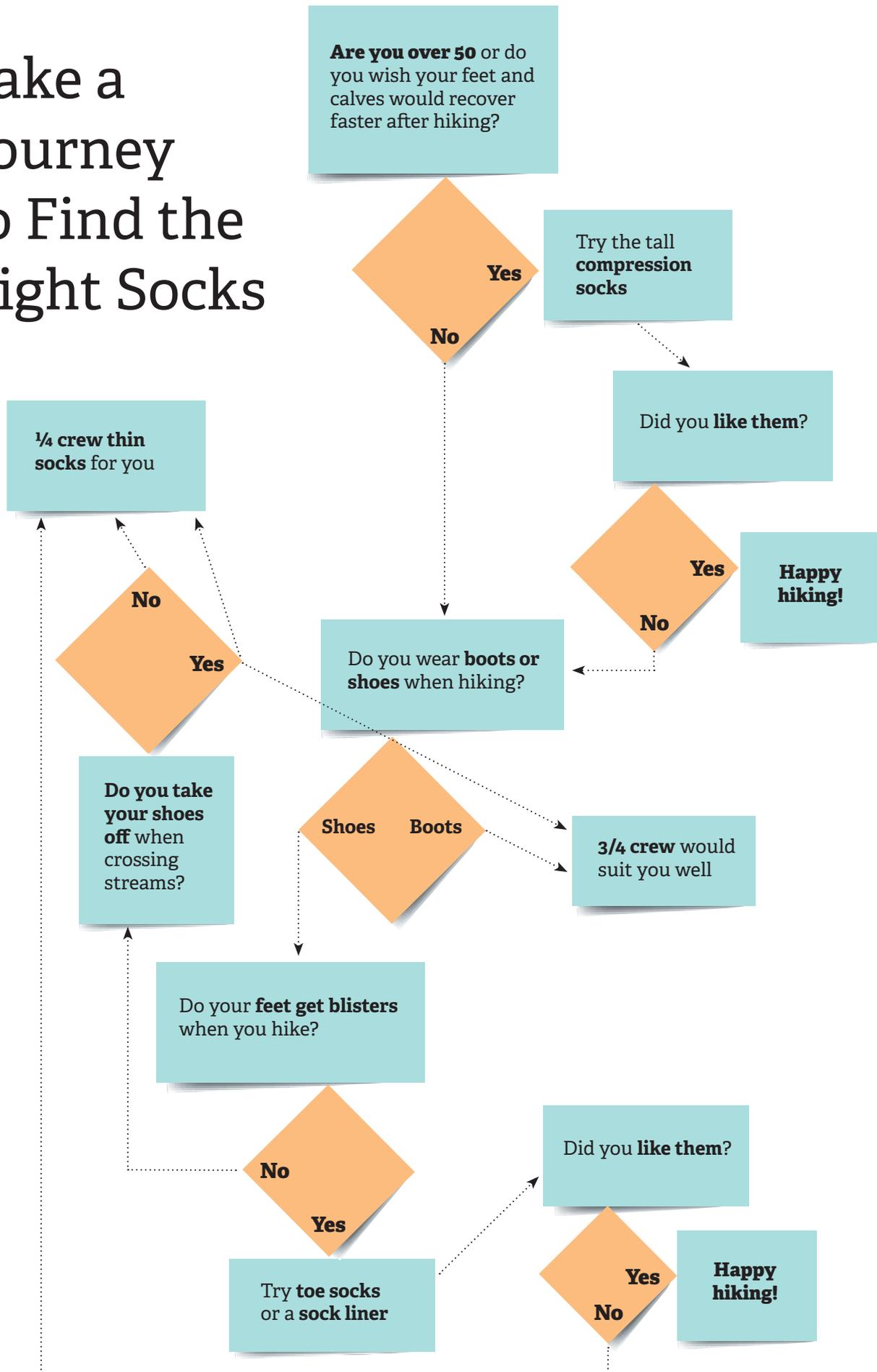
Socks, socks, socks

Part of my sock research included testing a few options I hadn't tried before. I learned a lot — and maybe so can you! Note: I tested these in the summer — so while some may have been hot for then, they could be ideal for winter hikes.

Brand	Style	Fabric	Features	Best Use	Notes
Bombas	Light-weight	Cotton, polyester, nylon, elastone blend	Seamless toe, stay-up tech, honeycomb arch support, cushioned	Spring/ Fall/ Winter	Very comfortable, but I overheated in summer hiking
Bombas	Hex Tec Performance	Cotton, polyester, nylon, elastone blend	Honeycomb arch support, seamless toe, airflow venting, full cushion	Spring/ fall/ winter	Again comfortable, but even with the airflow venting, overheated in summer
Farm to Feet	Sport, ¼ crew	Merino wool	Moisture management, ultrafine 19.5 micron yarn	Spring/ summer/ fall	Very comfortable, foot temperature stayed regulated all day, fast-drying
Farm to Feet	Trail, ¾ crew	Merino wool	Light targeted cushion	Spring/ summer/ fall	Nice cushioning, very comfortable, not too hot even in 85 degree weather
Smartwool	Light-weight, ¼ crew	Merino wool	Targeted cushion on heel and ankle, odor resistant	Spring/ summer/ fall	Very comfortable, foot temperature stayed regulated all day, fast-drying
PRO Compression	Full length compression	Polyester, nylon, spandex blend	Provides support for foot and calf, increases blood flow efficiency	Spring/ summer/ fall	Comfortable, fast-drying, legs recovered faster after workout
Darn Tough	Micro crew mid-weight	Merino wool, nylon, Lycra blend	Breathable cushioning and low-profile, slouch-free 1x1 ribbing	Spring/ fall/ winter	Comfortable, durable sock for cooler seasons

In the end, given my own needs, although I loved all the socks I tried in their own sweet spots, I took the PRO Compression socks on 12 days of backpacking trips and they performed well, although they were a challenge at stream crossings. Being compression socks, they are a tight fit and tough to get on wet feet. On a warm day, I put my water shoes over them and walked through, but on cooler days that wouldn't be the best option. However, that issue was manageable and the support and recovery far outweighed the annoyance factor. As for the other socks in my trial, I'll definitely wear them for day hikes throughout the year. I was impressed with the number of quality hiking socks available and know there were tons more I didn't try. If you're looking for new socks, use the flow chart at the right to help you narrow in on what you need.

Take a Journey to Find the Right Socks



Making New Memories

Quality Time Together

The end of the year is always a great time to reflect and to surround yourself with those you care about. Pack up your warm layers, backpack and loved ones, then head out on one of these trails that are fun for young and old, new and experienced. Say goodbye to 2023 and hello to 2024 by taking on new adventures with your friends and family, and create new memories you can look back on when yet another year is upon us.





Old Kettle Falls Trail

Lake Roosevelt National Recreation Area

This path wanders through the old Kettle Falls townsite, with an interesting history, and makes a good choice for a late fall or winter walk.

By Lindsay Leffelman

In the early 1900s, Kettle Falls was a town of 300 people on the shores of the Columbia River. Today, Kettle Falls is a town of 1,600 people near the shores of Lake Roosevelt. So why did the town move? The construction of the Grand Coulee Dam 100 miles downstream was the reason.

In all, 11 towns would be inundated by rising waters as the reservoir filled behind the dam. Many of the Kettle Falls residents and businesses moved to higher ground, to the present-day site of Kettle Falls. Buildings and other objects were removed before the reservoir filled, but a few remnants of the old townsite remain near the lakeshore and can be seen from the Old Kettle Falls Trail.

From the trailhead, walk south and pass the boat launch access road. You'll soon cross a bridge over a marshy wetland area. Keep your eyes peeled for birds. Before long, the trail veers left to the road to the Locust Grove Group Camp. Continuing across the road, you'll soon come to signs of the town that once was. Old homesteads, pastures and orchards give a glimpse of what life in Kettle Falls used to be like.

After just over a mile, a junction is reached. Stay to the right, traveling along a forested bluff until the trail ends at 1.3 miles. Enjoy the view of the lake and imagine what the landscape looked like before the dam was built. When you are ready, return the way you came.

Pro tip: Sandy's Drive In along Hwy 395 in Kettle Falls makes a great stop for a pre-hike breakfast or a post-hike lunch.

Distance: 2.6 miles roundtrip ♦ **Elevation gain:** None
Highest point: 1,300 feet ♦ **Map:** USGS Kettle Falls
Permit: None ♦ **Dogs:** Leashed

Info: wta.org/go-hiking/hikes/old-kettle-falls-trail

Trailhead: From Kettle Falls, travel west on SR 20/US 395 for 2.2 miles. Turn left onto Boise Road, continuing for 1.6 miles. Here the road forks; stay to the right and come to the Kettle Falls Campground. Park near the ranger station for the trailhead.

NEARBY HIKES

Mission Point Trail: This short interpretive trail is rich in history, offering a downloadable audio tour to enhance the experience. Along the loop, you will pass by St. Paul's Mission, Kettle Falls site overlook, a Hudson's Bay Co. outpost, and a small graveyard. (0.5 mile, minimal elevation gain)

Sherman Point Loop: Located in the Sherman Creek Wildlife Area, this trail is a great place to spot a variety of deer and fowl species. A few interpretive signs provide more information on the area. (3 miles roundtrip, 200 feet of elevation gain)

Photo by Holly Weiler



**Wheelchair
Friendly**

Centennial Trail section

Eastern Washington — Spokane

With a total trail length of nearly 40 miles, Spokane's Centennial Trail offers varied recreational experiences from the Nine Mile Recreation Area through downtown Spokane and all the way to the Idaho state line. This small section of the route, Wilbur trailhead to Trail 211, passes through Riverside State Park and showcases regional history.

By Holly Weiler

Visitors to the Spokane River Centennial State Park Trail have over 17 trailheads to choose from and nearly 40 miles of available trail. The Wilbur trailhead access point stands out due to its beauty in a forested section of Riverside State Park, as well as its history, as it invites visitors to linger at interpretive signage installed at the site of a former Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp.

The Centennial Trail is a paved non-motorized trail that runs parallel to the Spokane River, and hikers can enjoy peekaboo views of the water along this section of trail. The main draw for Wilbur Trailhead, however, is the natural forest on both sides of the trail.

At the quarter-mile mark, the Centennial Trail passes the site of Camp Seven Mile, a CCC camp in the 1930s. The only structure remaining is the chimney of the former recreation hall, but nearby interpretive signage explains the history of the CCC and shows historic photographs of what the site looked like from its creation in 1933 until its closure in 1940.

The Wilbur trailhead offers ample parking, including an ADA parking spot and has an ADA-accessible concrete-walled vault toilet. The trail is barrier-free along its entire length, and as a long, continuous trail, could be extended to a much longer hike. A good turn around spot for a 3-mile roundtrip hike is at the intersection with Trail 211 within Riverside State Park. At this location, the view opens up at a portion of the state park that was burned in a large wildfire in 1994, showing how the forest is recovering as new pines begin to fill in the old burn zone.

Seasonal tip: Eastern Washington sometimes gets a lot of snow, even at lower elevations. When conditions allow, this trail is groomed for Nordic skiing. Snowshoers should stay to the far right of the groomed trail when there is deep snow, and hikers may want to use traction devices if it's snowy.

Distance: 3 miles roundtrip

Elevation gain: 140 feet

Highest point: 2,200 feet

Map: Washington State Parks's Spokane River Centennial State Park Trail (generally at the trailhead, also available online) ♦ **Permit:** Discover Pass ♦ **Dogs:** Leashed

Info: wta.org/go-hiking/hikes/spokane-river-centennial-state-park-wilbur-trailhead

Trailhead: From the intersection of Francis Ave and N Assembly Street, travel northwest on Highway 291/West 9 Mile Road. After 2.1 miles, turn west on Seven Mile Road. Continue 0.8 mile, crossing the bridge over the Spokane River, then take an immediate left onto Riverside Park Road. The road dead-ends at the Wilbur Trailhead.

NEARBY HIKES

Centennial Trail, Carlson Trailhead:

Try the Carlson trailhead near the trail's start for a similar experience in Riverside State Park. This trailhead is near the Riverside State Park office, making it an excellent starting place for those who need to pick up a Discover Pass or speak to parks staff.

Centennial Trail, Mission Park

Trailhead: For a more urban trail experience, try the Mission Park trailhead east of downtown Spokane. This portion of the trail follows the river briefly, then passes along the edge of Gonzaga University's campus and continues into downtown Spokane and Riverfront Park.

Photo by Holly Weiler



Dockton Forest & Maury Island Natural Area

Vashon Island

A four-season, family-friendly, forest-to-beach-and-back hike on reclaimed lands and shoreline with sweeping views of western Puget Sound and Mount Rainier.

By *Kim Huntress Inskeep*

From either gravel parking lot, head up into the cool forest. There are miles of trails to meander, all of which may be shared with horseback riders and three of which are shared with mountain bikes. Signage isn't always clear, so if you'd like to steer clear of mountain bikes, stick to trails that hug the north or south boundaries of the forest. Make your way over soft-surface or well-manicured gravel paths among mostly conifers, ferns and shrubs. Aim for the wide gravel service road where Dockton Forest transitions to Maury Island Natural Area. Don't skip the sunscreen here as you leave the protection of the forest.

For the best views and beach access, make your way northeast to the Bluffs trailhead (porta potty here) via the Gravel Pit Trail or an unnamed service road. From the Bluffs trailhead, it's an easy hike of less than $\frac{3}{4}$ mile down to the beach, through madrone forest, abundant wildflowers in season and expansive views of Mount Rainier across the Sound. From the beach, you may spot chinook salmon, orca, otters, seals and a number of seabirds.

Return to the Bluffs trailhead and retrace your steps back through the forest, or explore a different combination of trails back to your starting point.

Bathrooms and water are at Dockton Park Marina. Observe signage and stick to open trails. Parcels of Dockton are protected — barring any use — and a few parts of Maury Island Natural Area awaiting further rehabilitation are restricted.

Pro tip: Reserve some time on your return trip for a stop in central Vashon for excellent dining options, including indoor and outdoor dining at local butcher The Ruby Brink (vegan options available) or the mouth-watering Iyad's Syrian Grill, a food cart typically located just across from Ober Park and its playground.

Distance: about 6 miles roundtrip — 13 total miles of trails
Elevation gain: 350 feet ♦ **Highest point:** 400 feet
Map: aqua.kingcounty.gov/gis/web/VMC/recreation/BCT_Dockton_brochure.pdf ♦ **Permit:** None
Dogs: Leashed

Info: wta.org/go-hiking/hikes/dockton-forest
wta.org/go-hiking/hikes/maury-island-natural-area

Trailhead driving directions: Take the Fauntleroy or Tahlequah Ferry to Vashon. Drive Vashon Highway to SW Quartermaster Drive. Bear right onto Dockton Rd SW. At 3.5 miles, find a gravel parking lot to the left, across from the Dockton Park Marina. Or, continue past the marina, turning left onto 99th Ave SW, then left onto SW 264th Street. Continue briefly on SW 264th to find a large gravel parking area on the left.

TRAILHEAD TRANSIT DIRECTIONS

Monday through Friday: Take the King County Water Taxi to Vashon, then King County Metro Route 119. Ask for the Dockton Park stop. To return, flag down the 119 at the gravel parking lot just west of the crosswalk. Or end your hike at SW 264th parking area described above, walking a few hundred feet to the 119 bus stop at 99th Ave SW. Limited schedule; plan ahead.

Weekends: Bring a bike on the ferry, then take King County Metro Route 118 to Quartermaster Dr. From there, bike to Dockton Park. Or take route 118 to Vashon Center, where seasonal e-bike rentals are available at Vashon Adventures. Pro tip: Both the 118 and 119 make flag stops anywhere along their routes.

Take care crossing Dockton Rd SW between the marina and the trailhead.

NEARBY HIKES

Maury Island Marine Park: This park is just around the corner for those seeking more madrone, more views, more shoreline and — often — more — marine mammals. Especially wonderful for walking the dog. (3.5 miles roundtrip, 400 feet of elevation gain)

Island Center Forest: Walkable from central Vashon via 188th Street, the forest offers 10 miles of multi-use trails through 440 acres of forest, meadows and wetlands. (10 miles of trails, elevation gain varies)



Ebey's Trail System

Whidbey Island

Embrace the pastoral as you hike over rolling pasture and prairie and past working farmland on this journey between smaller local parks.

By PJ Heusted

The Walking Ebey's Trail System includes 8.5 miles of trail connecting three smaller parks on Whidbey Island: the Admiralty Inlet Natural Preserve, Rhododendron Park and Prairie Wayside. The trail passes alongside wide-open pasture and provides panoramic views of the fields and farms and, if it's a clear day, views of the Olympic Mountains to the west and Mount Baker in the northeast.

Choose your own adventure by starting your hike at any of the three parks and using the trail to hike between them with the option to extend your trip through the forested trails of Rhododendron Park or past the bluffs and endangered prairie ecosystem at Admiralty Inlet.

As you hike past walls of snowberry and several native rose species, you'll follow a wide grassy trail dotted with posts bearing the Whidbey Camano Land Trust logo that guides you through a series of sharp turns around private property borders. The trail is unique in that it follows a thin strip of conservation property between privately owned farmland, giving hikers the experience of both the natural and agricultural beauty of the area. While you are unlikely to see much of the wildlife typically spotted on trails, be respectful of livestock that you may pass and do not feed or attempt to pet the animals.

Pro tip: The waterfront town of Coupeville is located just a few miles north of the trail system and features a variety of local boutiques, cafés and historic sites.

Distance: 8.5 miles of trail ♦ **Elevation gain:** varies
Highest point: 200 feet ♦ **Permit:** none ♦ **Dogs:** Leashed
Map: wclt.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/WalkingEbey_TrailMapwText-002.pdf

Info: wta.org/go-hiking/hikes/walking-ebey-trail-system

TRAILHEAD

To reach the Admiralty Inlet Natural Area Preserve: From Coupeville, follow N Main St/S Engle Rd for 2.9 miles to Admiralty Inlet Natural Area Preserve. The gravel parking lot will be on your left.

To reach the Prairie Wayside parking lot: From Coupeville, drive south on N Main St/S Engle Rd for 2.1 miles. The parking area will be on your right.

To reach Rhododendron Park: From Coupeville, head south on N Main St for 0.5 miles. Turn left onto Hwy 20 W and continue for 3 miles. Turn right onto W Patmore Rd and drive for 0.5 miles before turning right at the Rhododendron Park ball fields.

NEARBY HIKES

Kettles Trail System: If you still want the sense of choosing your own adventure, then consider exploring the Kettles Trail System, which features 35 miles of trails just west of Coupeville. The trail system features ocean bluffs and views across the sound or the option to stick to the woods and walk alongside hearty coastal cedars — just be sure to bring a map before you head out exploring! (35 miles of trails, 200 feet of elevation gain)

Greenbank Farm: If you're looking for more views of the fields or a view into a working farm, then try out this trail. Greenbank Farm provides a braided network of trails through several different landscapes making it ideal for hikers and trail runners looking for a sampler of what Whidbey Island has to offer. (7 miles of trails, 275 feet of elevation gain)

Photo by PJ Heusted



West Rocky Prairie Wildlife Area

Olympia area

Hike through a riparian area on a gently rolling double-track before arriving at an expansive prairie with big skies, swooping birds and native vegetation.

By Jessica Kelley

This is a relatively easy lollipop loop through a wildlife area just outside of Olympia. Begin your hike on an old roadbed lined with aspen trees and wild blackberries. Enjoy the shade, you'll be out on the open prairie soon enough. At 0.8 mile, you'll emerge from the woods and reach your first junction — keep going straight and cross a small ditch that spans the trail and can be filled with relatively deep water during the rainy season. Plan to get your feet wet in the spring and winter! By late summer, this will likely be dry.

At almost exactly 1 mile, you'll come upon a three-way junction that marks the start of the loop. Pause here to read an informational sign about the West Rocky Prairie Wildlife Area before continuing straight through the junction. The trail flattens out noticeably as you make your way around the prairie. (If you visit in May, there's a good chance you'll find abundant wildflowers.) At approximately 2.2 miles, you'll hike through an area recently part of a prescribed burn, which the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife uses to maintain the native grassland habitat. At 2.4 and 2.5 miles you'll encounter two additional junctions — stay left at these junctions to keep on the main loop. At 3 miles, you'll reach the end of the loop. Turn right here to retrace your steps back to your car.

Seasonal tip: This trail is a great option when higher-elevation routes are snowed in. If you're planning a trip to the coast, this is also an excellent leg-stretcher on your way to Westport or Ocean Shores.

Distance: 4.3 miles, roundtrip

Elevation gain: 142 feet ♦

Highest point: 265 feet ♦ **Permit:** Discover Pass

Dogs: Yes, must be leashed between April 1 and July 31

Info: wta.org/go-hiking/hikes/west-rocky-prairie-wildlife-area

Trailhead: From Olympia, take I-5 south. Get off at exit 99 for WA-121 S/93rd Ave SW. Turn left onto WA-121 S/93rd Ave SW. Stay on WA-121 for just under 7 miles before turning left again onto 43rd Ave SE/Arrowhead Ln SE. Go 1.9 miles and turn left onto Powder Plant Rd SE, which is the trailhead parking lot. This can be easy to miss, so be sure to slow down as you're approaching the turn-off! The trailhead has room for five to six cars. There are no bathrooms or facilities.

NEARBY HIKES

Millersylvania State Park: Head here for camping, boating and more than 8 miles of hiking trails through huge old-growth cedar and fir. Its easy accessibility to I-5 and excellent opportunity for a pleasant walk in the woods make this an attractive place to hike, especially in winter. (6 miles, 105 feet elevation gain)

Scatter Creek: This area sports a wealth of opportunities for outdoors people of all varieties, including bird-watchers, hunters, horseback riders, historians and botanists. By combining rare prairie wetlands, a large forested area and an old historic building, all in 960 acres, Scatter Creek has attractions for everyone. (4.75 miles, no gain)

Photo by Jessica Kelley



**Trails Less
Traveled**
with **Craig
Romano**

Yacolt Burn State Forest – Hidden Falls

Southwest Washington

By Craig Romano

With the construction of the Appaloosa Trail, Hidden Falls is a little less hidden! This new trail accesses the 24-mile-long Tarbell Trail just north of the falls, allowing for a more direct hike to this pretty cataract in the shadows of Silver Star Mountain. From the campground, hike northeast on the Tarbell Trail and cross Rock Creek on a big bridge. Then immediately veer right onto the Appaloosa Trail, which was opened in 2021 by the Washington Department of Natural Resources with help from WTA, Back Country Horsemen of Washington and the Washington Conservation Corps.

The multi-use, non-motorized trail utilizes old logging roads and new tread, traveling through forest stands of various ages. The way follows along both Coyote Creek and Rock Creek on the way. After emerging in a recent cut, the trail climbs more steadily. Enjoy views to Sturgeon Rock cresting above a forested ridgeline, and then enter a stand of mature timber. It's important to note that this entire area is an actively managed forest, so timber may be harvested in the future. For now, enjoy hiking through it.

At 3.6 miles, come to a junction with the Tarbell Trail. Turn right and descend into a cool lush ravine to a bridge spanning the South Fork Coyote Creek, just below Hidden Falls. Now savor the sight! Tucked in the ravine and framed by towering trees, 90-foot Hidden Falls are revealed!

Seasonal tip: The falls are at their best in winter and spring.

Distance: 7.8 miles
Elevation gain: 1,400 feet
Highest point: 2,300 feet
Map: dnr.wa.gov/geo/yacolt.pdf
Permit: Discover Pass
Dogs: Leashed, and keep in control near horses

Trailhead: From Battle Ground, drive north on Highway 503 for 5.6 miles and turn right onto Rock Creek Road, which eventually becomes Lucia Falls Road. Continue east for 8.5 miles and turn right (just past Moulton Falls) onto Sunset Falls Road. Then continue 2 miles and turn right onto NE 312th Ave, which eventually becomes NE Dole Valley Road. After 4.9 miles, turn left into the Rock Creek Campground and proceed to trailhead.

Craig Romano is a guidebook author, craigromano.com

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At WTA, we envision a future where everyone who seeks nature's splendor can quickly find themselves outdoors.

A future where trails are so abundant and high quality that anyone can use them safely and enjoyably. A future where our shared wild spaces are cherished and protected by all. Here are three unique ways to invest in this vision of trails for the future.

Stock: Donating appreciated stock is simple and avoids capital gains tax. You also gain a charitable gift tax deduction and can support trails with a larger gift than you thought possible. WTA has an account ready to receive your stock gift.

Qualified Charitable Distribution: If you are 70½ or older, you can transfer your required minimum IRA distribution as a Qualified Charitable Distribution to WTA instead of taking a disbursement and paying taxes on these funds.

Bequest: Leave a legacy gift as you plan for your future and for the next generation of hikers across the state. A bequest made from your will benefits trails beyond your lifetime, and any amount is appreciated.

Our team is here to make your plans count.
Contact us at wta.org/legacy or chandelman@wta.org.

Photo by Yunyan Wang



AWE AND GRATITUDE

The end of the year is a great time to rest and reflect.

From warm days on trail to cold evenings watching the stars, there is so much to be grateful for. But more than anything, **thank you** for helping create a future where there are trails for everyone, forever.

PHOTO BY ISAAC DAY







Local parks, Local reports

Winter trip reports help the hiking community!

wta.org/filetripreports

Photo by Sue Niezgoda

