Meet WTA’s Leadership and Inclusion Crew

Profiles of recovery on trail

Try something new and keep moving
Backcountry season is almost here!

**Trails all over Washington need your help.** Each year we offer multi-day adventures with fun and friendly people to accomplish much-needed trail work in beautiful locations across the state. We’re returning to a closer-to-normal trip schedule in 2021, which means more backcountry response teams and a return to volunteer vacations! We’d love for you to join a crew.

**Plan your trip now**

- **Registration is now open** for March – June trips.
- **Registration for July – October trips opens on April 23**

Find out about youth volunteer vacations at [wta.org/youthvolunteervacations](http://wta.org/youthvolunteervacations)

Sign up at [wta.org/volunteer](http://wta.org/volunteer)

Photo by Jessi Loerch
It’s been a year since the world was turned upside down by coronavirus. The pandemic has left no aspect of life untouched and we’ve all struggled to find ways forward in the face of uncertainty.

But, while most everything felt upside down, there was one thing that did not — the time I spent outside in nature. Neighborhood walks, day hikes and backpacking trips were a chance for me to feel some sense of normal again.

I know I’m not alone. We’ve heard from many of you that trails were a saving grace in 2020, a place to restore mind and body. Our collective experience over the last year has affirmed what we already knew — trails are essential to our well-being.

Of course, our collective experience has also shown us that Washington’s trail system is insufficient for today and unsustainable for the future. There are too many crowded parking lots and viewpoints; too many trails with deteriorating tread and washed-out bridges; too many communities without easy access to nature.

But, it is the combined power of both aspects of our collective experience that gives me hope going forward. Over the last year, we saw an outpouring of support and a redoubling of commitment for WTA’s work. Today I’m proud to say our membership stands more than 25,000 strong, and ten times as many other trail enthusiasts also rely on WTA to get outside and give back.

More than ever before, the WTA community is united around a shared belief that trails change lives. And our community is aware of the challenges trails face, and committed to investing in their future. A future where everyone who seeks nature’s solace can quickly find themselves outside; where abundant and high-quality trails are treasured and protected by all.

The existing gap between vision and reality means we have our work cut out for us. But I believe anything is possible if we put our community’s full weight behind it. In the coming year, let’s use the last year as motivation to work together with urgency and intention to create trails for everyone forever.
Growing Together

WTA’s BIPOC Leadership and Inclusion Crew has found that, while racism definitely extends to trails, there’s power and comfort in being together.

Features

16 Vital funding
The Great American Outdoors Act was one of the biggest conservation wins in a generation. Here’s how it will help trails.

24 Caring for their minds
A military veteran helps researchers study how hiking could help PTSD recovery.

28 Explore the science
From outdoor preschools to the power of nature in a pandemic, WTA goes behind the scenes with a UW team to discover what cutting-edge research might tell us about nature and health.

30 Hiking heals
Three hikers share how trails have profoundly and positively impacted their mental, emotional and physical well-being.

40 Move more
Nicole Tsong’s new book encourages more than outdoor movement — it makes the case for trying something new.

34 Seeking solace
Craig Romano on how time in nature has been the key for quieting anxiety and finding comfort in times of turmoil.
Greetings from our chief executive officer and Washington Trails editor

Quiet time on trail can help you weather the long, dark days

WTA's volunteer crew leaders really stepped up during the challenges of 2020

A piece of gear that could save your life

Explore the beauty of our state as the seasons change

How are bear canisters tested?

The story behind our favorite photos

More Fun than Chores

During a pandemic, my family moved to a new home. For the record, moving when you can’t ask your friends to carry heavy things in exchange for pizza makes the process harder. We’re still tripping over boxes. But in our new place, there is a trail across the street. It’s a joy I’m grateful for everyday. I can walk out my door and, in a few minutes, be watching ducks in a pond and hearing waves crash on the nearby beach. And I wave at my neighbors, who I wouldn’t get a chance to see otherwise.

So, many days— when I should have been unpacking — I went for a stroll. Sometimes I went alone or just with my dog, but I often brought my family. And trails have been so good for all us — physically and mentally. (Dog included.)

I probably don’t have to tell you that trails are good for you. Since you’re reading this magazine, I suspect you understand that, even if you haven’t thought about it deeply. In this magazine, we explore how trails are good for our hearts, bodies and minds.

While trails can be good for everyone, not everyone experiences them in the same way. A member of our new Leadership and Inclusion Crew talks about the racism he and the rest of his crew has encountered. But he also explains how finding community on trail has been such a powerful experience (Page 18).

We also share stories of hikers who have found healing, both mentally and physically, by spending time moving their bodies on trails (Page 24 and Page 30). We also talk to researchers, to get an idea of what science is telling us about how, and why, nature is good for us (Page 28).

I hope you enjoy learning, in more detail, why your time on trail is so good for you. Since you’re reading this magazine, I suspect you understand that, even if you haven’t thought about it deeply. In this magazine, we explore how trails are good for our hearts, bodies and minds.

Happy hiking,

Jessi Loerch | Washington Trails editor | jessi@wta.org
Some folks revel in Pacific Northwest winter. They love the bite of cold, the feeling of snow (or slush) underfoot. They love the low, grey clouds unloading frosty fat drops on their heads. They love the dark and the winter stars; some might even tilt their heads back and wish the long, clear nights would never give up to dawn.

But even those of us who relish this season can get mired in it, despairing that going outside will never be fun or easy again. In these doldrums of winter, one of the cures for finding joy is, counterintuitively, hiking alone.

By now, we’re all experts at being alone. COVID-19 has forced us into new, lonelier ways of existing in the world. We’re weary and we miss each other. And yet … hiking alone is different. Whether you take a daily pilgrimage into a neighborhood green space or visit a trail climbing up nearby bluffs, going alone can feel like getting away with something. Like mischief tangled up with the amplified attention that comes from sustained meditation or prayer. It’s a unique kind of joy, a sly winter flower only found alone on trail. It blooms under the pale sun that barely scrapes off the horizon.

The experience is not unlike reading a great book for the first time, when nothing exists but you and the story pulling you along. The worries of the world fade, your attention heightens and you notice everything. Every detail along the trail gets magnified by the unlikeliness of someone else seeing it just then. Pre-dawn risers will recognize the feeling, as will night owls. To be awake, to move through a landscape when the very land itself is resting, will shake something pure and vital loose in you.

Whether it’s exploring the riot of colorful details of lichen and sparkling rocks hidden in the scrublands around Crab Creek, or cataloging the dozens of different mosses and ferns along the trails in the waterlogged Skagit Valley, winter has treasures to share with the hardy souls who seek them.

The difficulty itself adds fuel to the fire that will carry you through to spring. There’s reward in expending the effort it takes to pile on layer after layer of wool and fleece while your family or housemates watch, aghast, as you leave the house to go on a foul-weather stroll.

There is no need for risk-taking to find this small solo joy in the doldrums. It’s better to stay well within your comfort zone and discover that the comfort zone is more interesting than you remembered. A 3-mile hike hauling extra winter safety layers and food feels vastly more rewarding than those same miles in August, when the days last forever. Your neighborhood park takes on a winter mood, wilder and less tended than its summer self.

And when you strike out alone, seeking joy in the darkest days of winter, sometimes you’ll even see someone else on trail, and you’ll nod or maybe even chat, and share a tendril of quiet kinship that’ll pull you on to spring.
Share a story
Tell us about your new experiences on trail.

Memorable moments from WTA’s Instagram community

I was lucky enough to watch these dramatic lenticular clouds slowly evolve and emerge on a sunny (but cold!) afternoon at Mount Rainier. I was snowshoeing to collect samples of Alaskan yellow cedar as a volunteer for the Adventure Scientists (@adventurescientists), a group that collects samples to help researchers map the health of these threatened trees, and create a genetic map to protect them from illegal poaching. In these challenging times, appreciating our beautiful world has been a salve, and volunteering to help understand and protect it has felt like a positive contribution when so many things are beyond our control.

— Janice King, author “Eastside Seattle Walks”
@eastsideSeattleWalks

This recycled metal salmon sculpture is installed outside the historic Alexander House along the Rainier Trail in Issaquah. This was a newly discovered artwork for me, found as I began a greater exploration of Eastside community trails in 2020. For me, walking is the best way to develop a strong sense of connection to a natural place and a human community. Through the book and social media, Eastside Seattle Walks helps others connect with treasures of nature, history and public art that can be found on interesting and easy walks in communities throughout East King County.

— Jerome Graber, @crewjjg

When I took this photo, I had just completed a day of volunteering for the Chelan Douglas Land Trust, gathering sagebrush seeds up Badger Mountain Road east of Wenatchee. They are drying and using the seeds to reseed an area that was severely burned last summer. Since I’m using the trails around Wenatchee so much, I wanted to give back and help maintain the trails I was using. I also felt that was a good place to meet like minded people in my new home town; I moved to Wenatchee from Maui last August. I’m an ultra runner so I have been using the WTA website to scout out new training areas.

— Marie DeJournette, @adventureye1

When I took this photo, I had just completed a day of volunteering for the Chelan Douglas Land Trust, gathering sagebrush seeds up Badger Mountain Road east of Wenatchee. They are drying and using the seeds to reseed an area that was severely burned last summer. Since I’m using the trails around Wenatchee so much, I wanted to give back and help maintain the trails I was using. I also felt that was a good place to meet like minded people in my new home town; I moved to Wenatchee from Maui last August. I’m an ultra runner so I have been using the WTA website to scout out new training areas.
When planning for a hike or backpacking trip, you likely have an idea of how long you’d like to be out. Maybe you want to squeeze in a morning hike before the afternoon rain rolls in, or maybe you just need to make it to your campsite by sundown. Either way, it’s going to be easier to plan if you know how long it takes you to hike from point A to point B — also known as your hiking pace.

Your hiking pace will help you estimate how many miles you can expect to cover in your desired time frame and it is key to efficient planning and staying safe. Once you know your pace, you can determine how far you can hike in the time you have. Then, you can use the mileage filter in our Hiking Guide to find hikes that fit your schedule. After you’ve found your ideal trail, your pace can also help you figure out what time you need to be at the trailhead, when your turnaround time should be, and what time you anticipate getting back home — great information to share with your emergency contact!

Plus, knowing your pace can be helpful when searching for a hiking buddy. While it’s not necessary that you and your hiking partners share the exact same pace, knowing where everyone is at can aid in group planning and shine a light on how you might need to adjust your pace.

**Start the clock**

To find your hiking pace, your best bet is to simply head out for a hike. We recommend pacing yourself in two different scenarios: on a relatively flat, well-maintained trail and on a trail with a bit of elevation gain. Fill up your pack with your usual gear, and make sure to bring a smartphone or watch with GPS capabilities. When you reach the trailhead, start a timer, turn on your GPS and head out at whatever pace feels comfortable. After an hour, stop hiking and take note of your mileage — that’s your baseline miles per hour. (Hiking paces vary dramatically, but you can expect to be somewhere between 0.5 miles per hour for a leisurely stroll and 3 miles per hour for a fast-paced hike. If you find yourself well outside that range, it’s worth checking again.)

These baselines are an important tool, but your pace will change depending on the trail and the conditions you encounter. Things like heavy packs, snow cover and poor trail conditions are bound to slow you down. To account for this in your planning, make sure to read through hike descriptions and recent trip reports to figure out what you can expect. If it sounds like you’re going to hit obstacles, lower your expected pace a notch.

It’s also important to keep in mind what type of hiker you are. Do you power through long uphill stretches or do you prefer to take breaks along the way? Try to account for rest when pacing out your hike. For example, reserve 10 minutes of every hour as rest time and subtract that from your mileage. You might also find that your pace decreases throughout the day as you get tired. If you’re headed out for an all-day hike, know that your last few miles may be done at a slower pace than your first few.

With all of these considerations in mind, you’ll have more information to help you plan your next safe and fun hike.
Building A Trail Next Door

This winter, WTA has begun exploring trail layout options with King County for their newly acquired park in unincorporated North Highline. We have plans to start work there this spring with our Leadership & Inclusion Crew and hope to plan a series of youth and family work parties for local community members this summer.

Time to Plan for Backpacking

If you're planning a trip to an area that requires a permit, now's the time to start thinking ahead. Enchantments permits open in mid-February and permits for Rainier and North Cascades National Park open in March. Olympic National Park has rolling reservations. wta.org/backcountrypermits.

Snow Work

WTA crews have been getting to work on trail in Mount Spokane State Park, even with plenty of snow on the ground. Volunteers have been taking care of obstacles that could interfere with optimal snowshoe and winter hiking experiences for the ever-increasing number of Spokane area residents who are bursting to get outside. With the snow, crews are working about 3-feet to 5-feet off of the ground, which allows them to reach higher up to clear branches that they couldn't dream of reaching in the summer. Crews have also cleared logs blocking trails, hacked away about 2 feet of ice and snow on the footbridges to make creek crossings safer, and removed branches knocked over by the weight of the snow in order to help folks stay on track.

Honored for Collaboration

WTA’s Advocacy Director Andrea Imler was recently awarded the Jim Ellis Spirit Award for her work in developing the Recreate Responsibly Coalition (RRC) in response to the pandemic. Jim Ellis Spirit Awards are named for Mountains to Sound Greenway Trust founder and Seattle civic leader Jim Ellis. The award honors individuals who embody the values of collaboration, inclusion, trustworthiness, positivity, and pragmatism. Andrea was a recipient of the award for her work on the Recreate Responsibly Coalition. She co-founded the coalition in May alongside Taldi Harrison, government and community affairs manager at REI, as a way to bring together government agencies and organizations and discuss safe recreation and the state of recreation as lands were rapidly opening and closing.
Volunteers Step Up to Help WTA, Each Other

By Emily Snyder

A work party is more than trail work. It’s more than safety talks and candy breaks. It’s shoulder-to-shoulder conversations and mountain views. It’s pride in the work done. It’s the trailhead wrap-up with folks chatting long past the time it takes to load the tools into the truck. Our trail crews value the folks they work with, many of whom have become friends. Over the years, WTA volunteers have built more than trails; they’ve built a community.

When the COVID-19 pandemic changed all of our lives, volunteers started asking, “Will there still be trail work?”

This summer, with new safety protocols in place and limited crew sizes, WTA struggled to provide enough opportunities for everyone who wanted to participate in trail work. But WTA volunteers like a challenge and this was no exception. A few enthusiastic assistant crew leaders (ACLs) saw the growing need for people who could run work parties and applied to be volunteer crew. Karen Bean was one of these folks.

“With the small crews and the full waitlists, I knew WTA had the physical resources — tools — but didn’t have the people (to lead work parties). I decided to take my love of leading as an ACL to the next level,” Karen said. “One of the best things that happened when I started running crews was meeting all of the new people signing up for work parties. Like me, they were looking for community and a way to give back. For all of the volunteers, new and old, the work parties were a place to feel almost normal and be outside in our happy place.”

In addition to WTA’s regular seasonal staff this year, 27 volunteers led work parties, while abiding by COVID protocols. They provided leadership for 2,200 volunteers to engage in additional work parties. And these opportunities were not just for adults, but youth as well. After seeing how the virus was disrupting school and athletic/club opportunities and isolating local youth from their friends, Micki Kedzierski stepped up to volunteer as a crew leader for youth and family work parties.

“Youth and parents have told me of their appreciation for being outdoors together, seeing other people and gaining needed volunteer hours for school requirements,” Micki said. “On trail, they are learning about the ongoing need to preserve our parks and recreation areas and they’re learning trail work skills. It makes their day when hikers come by and express gratitude for the work they did. Several youths and families have mentioned to me that they see this work as a community effort. I think these youth crews are helping people see that we can get through challenging times by working together in any way we can. I’m truly grateful for the opportunity to blue hat with youth and families.”

Thanks to our amazing volunteer crew leaders, we were able to complete more than 26,000 volunteer hours under their leadership. Patrick Sullivan, volunteer crew leader for Puget Sound, noticed the impact that getting outside with others was having on volunteers.

“The thing that will stick with me most this year is the gratitude and good cheer of the participants to be outside having fun and doing something constructive that doesn’t involve a Zoom meeting,” Patrick said. “For me personally, it will be providing folks with the opportunity to participate in the trails program by being a crew leader. I’ve led many more days than what I set out to. And I would do it again in a heartbeat. As a bonus, leading crews has helped keep me sane in these challenging times.”

Over 4,300 volunteer hours have been donated by crew leaders themselves this year, and that’s not counting the scouting and prep hours that folks often forget to document! WTA is blessed to have an amazing volunteer base that values community as much as they value trails. Our hats are off to our volunteer crew leaders and the value they’ve added to the trails program during this challenging year!
Binny Marwaha is a WTA member and an avid hiker and backpacker. She left an especially touching note on a recent donation. “Thank you from the bottom of my heart for all the work you do to maintain trails, educate about outdoors and everything else. Trails made it possible to get through the pandemic without losing sanity,” she wrote.

After reading that, we caught up with her to learn a bit about why she chooses to support WTA as a member. Here is a snippet of our conversation with her.

How has hiking and time outdoors been important to you in 2020?
The magic of nature was fully understood in 2020, the year of the pandemic. It was not important to get out and hike; it was necessary. Connection with nature has been my solace in these trying times.

How has WTA helped you get outdoors?
It was my lucky day when I stumbled upon wta.org. It became my only resource for trails in the area. I found hikes using the wonderful Hike Finder tool. Trip reports were extremely helpful for planning. I am grateful to hikers for sharing their experiences.

Meeting a WTA trail crew while hiking filled me with an appreciation for all the work WTA does to protect the hikes. WTA will always be my trusted partner in exploring Washington’s outdoors. I am impressed by WTA’s advocacy for the outdoors.

Can you share a specific outdoor experience that was particularly meaningful to you in 2020?
Backpacking Gem Lake. Backpacking with my teen son was one of the best experiences of 2020. We enjoyed each other’s company without distractions, shared laughs at his silly jokes and contemplated life in general. And backpacking Hidden Lake Lookout. It was an uplifting experience to sleep under a star-studded sky and wake up to a beautiful sunrise. I backpacked with my amazing hiking buddy. We found each other in early summer and hiked together each week. Trip reports on wta.org helped us navigate the rough access road to the trailhead. Thanks again, WTA!
Backpacking can be intimidating if you haven’t done it before. But it’s also an amazing way to get out into the backcountry, to challenge yourself and even to find a new way of being. Sometimes, though, a smaller step toward that challenge can be helpful. Three folks who have used WTA’s volunteer vacations as that first step toward new adventures share their stories, including how those trips shaped other parts of their lives.

**Why did you choose to do your backpacking trip as a WTA volunteer vacation?**

**Yen Flannigan:** I was raised in the city, and because of the war (in Vietnam), we were not allowed to venture too much into the wilderness. Because I wasn’t raised camping, I hadn’t thought about doing those things. I thought people of my age only car camped, but I heard that there were older people backpacking, and people of all ages signing up for WTA. I thought, “Why shouldn’t I try this?” I was turning 60, so I decided that was the time to do it. I had been on a day work party with WTA and I’d never been pressured to do anything beyond my abilities. Fun and safety come first, and that works for me. Because it was WTA, I felt I would get enough support for my first experience. I was not wrong.

**Carmen Parisi:** I hiked with my daughter to help her get in shape for an Outward Bound trip when she was a teenager, so that’s how I got into day hiking. I hiked with her, and I thought, “My god, it’s really beautiful here.” Backpacking was something I wanted to do, but I had no concept of what it entailed. A friend told me about WTA. There were day trips available, but I wanted it to be a bigger adventure.

**Holli Dexheimer:** I had taken an outdoor course, but then signed up for a day trip with WTA. I discovered that I enjoyed trail work far more than I enjoyed the outdoor course. WTA trips made me feel strong and capable. When you can move boulders with a rock bar and it’s just you doing it, it’s really powerful.

---

**Learning and Growing With WTA**

We caught up with volunteers from years past to see how the skills they gained have helped them with new adventures. *By Barbara Budd*
Carmen Parisi Y en Flannigan (fourth from left) found that a trip with WTA gave her the support she needed to try new adventures.

I always wanted to go camping or backpacking, but never knew anyone who knew what they were doing or wanted to go with me. I saw volunteer vacations, and I love trail work. The first was a car camp, so I didn’t have to carry anything a long way. Or food. Or the stove. Lighting the stove was a big hang-up for me. What I liked about volunteer vacations was that all I had to worry about was bringing my clothes and making sure I could set up my tent. That was it. From that trip, I realized that it wasn’t as scary as I thought it would be.

The next volunteer vacation was my first backpacking trip, so that was a little intimidating. I decided I was comfortable enough being in a tent, so the next hurdle was carrying things. I practiced packing my backpack before I went. But I still didn’t have to worry about food. Or that stove.

What was the impact of these trips on you? Did it change your feelings about yourself and your abilities?

Yen: I got support from my leader, and that was important in my first backpacking experience. I gained a lot of self-confidence in my physical ability. I am short, and couldn’t carry as much as others. It helped me see I could do things. That was a big thing for me. It also increased my confidence that I could learn new stuff, like setting up camp by myself and even helping others in the group — not feeling helpless, which is great. There were many times while we hiked in to the camp that I wanted to turn around. Now, when I talk to other people who say, “I haven’t done it before. I can’t do it.” I can say, “Look at me. I can do it. So can you.”

Carmen: It was a life-changing experience for me. I’d never done physical labor before and didn’t realize how strong I could be. Learning to wield an ax and shovel, move rocks. Learning to poop and pee in the woods. Getting cold and figuring out how to get warm. Now, I take the Ten Essentials seriously. I have an appreciation for being prepared for an emergency or spending the night in the woods. I’d be ready for that.

I learned that you can embrace life and do what you want and go for it. Just because something seems hard doesn’t mean it can’t be fun. I’ve become more outdoorsy and athletic. I’ve gone snowshoeing, which I’d never done before. I completed a triathlon in 2018. And I became what I call an adult-onset swimmer. I took swimming lessons, and I learned about a swim that happens every year across Lake Washington. I’ve done it five times now. So I’ve done some really hard things since then. There’ve been tears, but on the other side, I can say I’ve done it and I have a smile on my face. I would not have done those things without WTA.

Holli: It wasn’t as if we hiked very far, but we hardly saw anyone, so it felt like we were way out in the middle of nowhere. It wasn’t as scary as I’d made it up in my head. I got braver on future trips. Well, maybe not braver. I think I got more confident. It gave me the confidence to be willing to take the next step and learn how to use the stove, to go on regular backpacking trips and not be supported. It reinforced that there’s nothing better than waking up on a really crisp, cold morning, being able to unzip the tent and see the amazing view. It’s great to be self-sufficient, to be able to take care of yourself and not be afraid. And I helped another person on the trip, which made me realize I was more capable and skilled and knowledgeable than I thought I was.

I love taking people on hiking trails. Among my friends, I’m now the one who is experienced. I’m the one who’s prepared and carries the Ten Essentials. I love saying, “See that log, I put that log there. See that rock wall, I built that.”

Note: Holli has since become an assistant crew leader with WTA and loves supporting other folks who come out for the first time.
This year, as a COVID precaution, the state legislative session is online. But while that might be different than in years past, hikers can still help WTA make a real difference for trails.

While many things about the future are uncertain, we know for sure that trails and hikers’ voices are needed now more than ever. Since COVID began, we’ve seen more people than ever getting out on trail to enjoy time in the great outdoors and step away from the hustle and bustle of daily life.

This year lawmakers are determining budgets for our state agencies for the next two years — our state’s biennium budget cycle. Lawmakers will determine in this session how much agencies receive for their operations, maintenance and new development. That means the funding for the trails, parks and public lands that we leaned on so heavily last year is at stake.

WTA’s legislative priorities
WTA is calling on lawmakers to invest in trails — ensuring that state agencies have the resources they need to keep trails safe and strong, the funds to hire staff for education and upkeep and the ability to create new outdoor recreation options.

Here’s a look at WTA’s priorities for the 2021 legislative session:

**Department of Natural Resources:** DNR trust lands and natural areas provide substantial outdoor recreation opportunities. WTA supports DNR’s request for:
- **Sustainable recreation:** $8.5 million (capital) — For developing and renovating trails and campgrounds, and to increase public access on state recreation lands.
- **Natural Areas Facilities Access and Preservation:** $5.05 million (capital) — For improving facilities such as trails and day-use sites in natural areas across the state.
- **Teanaway/Klickitat Community Forest:** $2.4 million (capital) — For implementing management projects to improve trails and recreational access, and enhance watershed health and wildlife habitat.

**Washington State Parks:** Our state parks provide hundreds of miles of hiking trails. WTA supports State Parks’ requests for:
- **$219 million (operating)** — For park operations and programs, and to reduce gaps in service to meet increasing visitation at parks across the state.
- **$122.4 million (capital)** — For facilities investments to reduce the maintenance backlog.

**Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program:** WWRP is a critical funding source for hiking trails and walking paths in Washington state. WTA supports the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board’s request for $140 million.

**No Child Left Inside:** This program, administered by the Recreation and Conservation Office and State Parks, provides grants to Washington state outdoor education and recreation programs for youth. WTA supports State Parks’ request for ongoing funding for No Child Left Inside, as well as its request for an additional one-time funding of $500,000 to help with unmet demand for the program.

WTA is working hard to support public lands — such as state parks like Columbia Hills — and trails in the Legislature. We hope you’ll speak up, too!

---

**Big Legislative Goals for Trails**

By Andrea Imler
HIKER RALLY

March 10 – 11, 2021
All-online event

• **What:** A chance to speak up for trails
• **When:** March 10 – 11, a few hours total
• **Where:** Online
• **Who:** You!
• **Why:** You can make your voice heard by speaking to your legislators, and explaining why they should support trails and public lands.
• **How:** We provide all the training you need. We’ll coach you on our legislative priorities, connect you with other hikers in your legislative district and set up your legislator meetings. You’ll only need to dedicate a bit of time each day. And, at the end, join us for an online happy hour to celebrate.

Learn more at [wta.org/hikerrallyday](http://wta.org/hikerrallyday)
Last year, the outdoors community celebrated a massive land conservation win, the largest such win in a generation. When the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) passed, it was the culmination of years of work by advocates across the country — including Washington Trails Association and many of our partners right here in Washington state.

Last summer, as the legislation worked its way through Congress, we asked for your help. And you stepped up. You contacted your lawmakers and urged them to support this vital funding for our public lands. On more than any other item last year, you all showed that Washington hikers are a powerful force.

The GAOA has two main areas that will make a big difference for hikers here and across the nation. First is funding to take care of a massive backlog of maintenance on federal lands.

Up to $1.9 billion dollars will go to federal lands each year, for up to five years. That means that trails, campgrounds, roads and many other facilities will finally get desperately needed resources for repairs and general upkeep. Second is permanent funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund of $900 million annually. The LWCF helps pay for land acquisition and recreation investments.

“We are thrilled to see this overdue investment in Washington recreation system and even more excited that so many of the proposed projects fit so nicely with our longterm vision of Trails for Everyone, Forever,” said Andrea Imler, WTA's advocacy director. “We hope that, by working with agencies and our partner organizations, this funding will provide a jumpstart for some comprehensive planning and conversations about how to improve our state’s outdoor recreation infrastructure for the long haul.”

Finally, funding

Getting funding for the backlog on deferred maintenance on federal public lands has been WTA's biggest advocacy priority for a decade. Now that the funding is finally there, thanks to the actions of so many of our partners and advocates, we're looking forward to what that will actually mean on the ground. The money will be split between five different federal land management agencies: the National Parks Service (70%), the Forest Service (15%), the Bureau of Land Management (5%), the Fish and Wildlife Service (5%) and the Bureau of
Indian Education (5%). With full funding of deferred maintenance, those splits would mean that annually, an agency like the Forest Service could receive up to $285 million in funding.

Here’s a few ways that funding will begin to make a difference.

**The Mountain Loop Highway:** This road, which stretches from Granite Falls to Darrington, offers excellent opportunities for outdoor recreation. Because of this, and its proximity to a growing population, the Mountain Loop is a key area for WTA’s Trails Rebooted campaign. We’ve been working there for years doing trail maintenance, and last year, we developed and hosted a survey to understand how people use the lands accessed from the highway. Part of the funding from the GAOA will go toward improving the hiking experience on the loop and funding projects like replacing the bridge that provides access to the Big Four Ice Caves. Investments like these will ensure the trail system will be there for years to come.

**Milk Creek bridge:** More than a decade ago, major storms wiped out the Milk Creek bridge over the Suiattle River, outside of Darrington. When that bridge was lost, so was a key gateway to the Pacific Crest Trail. This bridge has been a poster child for WTA’s Lost Trails Found campaign and we have been exploring how to secure funding to replace the bridge for years. The GAOA could finally make the work possible. The bridge is on the list of projects for fiscal year 2022. And while building such a bridge won’t be fast, it’s exciting to see the progress. Once that bridge is in place, and trails have been restored to link up to the PCT, many miles of exploration will open up for hikers and equestrians. And having easier stock access to the PCT will help with annual maintenance work by WTA and partners.

**Snoquera:** Snoquera, an area northeast of Mount Rainier and just outside of the national park, is within an hour’s drive of nearly 5 million people. WTA has also identified this area as key to our Trails Rebooted efforts. Snoquera can provide much-needed recreational opportunities while dispersing some users from the national park. The Great American Outdoor Act could provide funding to the area to continue planning and work to create more trails and other ways for people to get outside.

For many years, the U.S. Forest Service has been extremely strained financially. They’ve had very little capacity to deal with maintenance issues or plan for the future. The GAOA will start to change that and WTA will continue to work closely with the Forest Service to help them plan for the future. And WTA is also helping bring other trail users — such as mountain bikers and equestrians — together to make the planning process more efficient and powerful. We’re excited to work together to make the future brighter for everyone who loves the outdoors.

---

**Land and Water Conservation Fund**

The LWCF has been used for years to acquire land. Now, with permanent funding, that process will continue, but just with more certainty. We’re pleased that the GAOA means that the LWCF will continue to support the conservation and acquisition of public lands for years to come.

---

[THANK YOU TO OUR CORPORATE PARTNERS]

**RAINIER | $25,000+**

**OLYMPIC | $10,000-$24,999**

**ALPINE | $2,500-$9,999**

**MATCHING GIFT CORPORATIONS | $5,000+**

Apple • Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation • Boeing • Google • Microsoft

Find out if your company matches charitable gifts. Your donation could go twice as far! To learn more about supporting WTA’s work, call us at 206-508-6846.
Safety, fun and work — in that order. It’s the Washington Trails Association mantra, and every volunteer and staffer comes to learn it. But for those of us on the Leadership and Inclusion Crew — all people of color — a volatile interaction showed us just how differently we can experience these vital pillars.

As a part of WTA’s Trails for Everyone campaign, our six-person Leadership and Inclusion Crew is delightedly helping to launch this new, paid program that focuses on leadership development for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and people of color) and LGBTQ+ folks. We come from communities historically underrepresented in the outdoor industry. For most of us, this is the first opportunity we’ve ever had to develop our technical skills, network with outdoor professionals or learn about environmental stewardship as a career. Or, more forlornly put, we’ve never been able to chat up park rangers or forest service employees at the proverbial cookout, but damn would we have liked to!

Back in October, in the spirit of developing our technical skills, Jay Tarife, WTA trail crew leader, led us through building box stairs on the Snow Lake Trail. Dozens of hikers thanked us on their way up and down the trail. It felt great to accomplish hard work while sharing some laughs together — even while hauling countless loads of heavy rock and gravel. We had just finished up our work day and wanted to celebrate by grabbing some gas station tamales and a drink (outside and socially distanced, of course!) in Snoqualmie Pass.

Leave it to racism to ruin the vibe. “You see this?” asked a hostile White stranger while waving around a dirty, discarded face mask he had found in the parking lot before walking up to us. “This is a Black Lives Matter Death Mask!”

No one at our table wore their political leanings on their sleeves. Nonetheless, this bitter, melanin-challenged outsider felt the need to circle us like a vulture while exclaiming his conservative viewpoints. He made sure to flash his military I.D. and boast about his familiarity with firearms.

“I think you all will be real surprised with the upcoming election,” he said forebodingly. The stranger babbled on about his disgust with liberals and the Black Lives Matter movement. He also felt the need to defend himself by adding that he “actually liked black people” and had even visited Africa once ... Cool.

Shortly after, but not soon enough, an employee kicked the man off the premises for not wearing a mask.
Zach Toliver (left) found that the Leadership and Inclusion Crew has made it easy to be himself while learning new skills.
The stranger probably went on with his day, never again thinking of the encounter. Or worse, maybe he felt proud about “telling off” a table of Black and Brown people. It was our camp that was left taxed by the burden of his threats.

The uncomfortable accosting prompted us to talk about safety in ways an all-White crew wouldn’t have to consider.

We were in the middle of a tumultuous election season, and Election Day was only a few weeks away. NPR ran stories about possibly violent outbreaks. According to a report by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, over the past year, hate crimes rose to their highest level in over a decade. Right here in Washington, Republican state Rep. Robert Sutherland of Granite Falls has told his constituents to “prepare for war.” As I was writing this, news came from Olympia that a right-wing extremist shot an activist in Olympia. And then later, as I edited this story, I saw unprecedented images of our nation’s Capitol under attack by Trump supporters spewing racist slurs at Black officers while carrying Confederate flags. The violent insurrection left several people dead.

After our vexatious experience, our crew began thinking about strategies in case things ever went over the edge. Crew leaders Venice Wong and Britt Lê reminded everyone to fill our gas tanks in case we had to make a speedy exit and to keep an eye out for anyone following us or snooping around camp. We discussed how to de-escalate situations that could potentially turn violent.

As fellow WTA staffers wrote in their article “Trails for Everyone,” in the last issue of this magazine, “Unfortunately, outdoor spaces are not safe or accessible for everyone, nor is our state’s hiking community always as welcoming or inclusive as it should be.”

We knew this from the very beginning of the Inclusion Crew. On our first day, we all met in the Tiger Mountain region to discuss the program. A woman parked at the High Point Way Trailhead felt the need to question the validity of our program. Did race play a factor? Sometimes it’s hard to tell what is true from what is felt. But her overzealous “MAGA” bumper stickers and condescending comments about our group size gave us a clue. After all, race is always a potential variable in every situation of our lives.

Run-ins like these only further validate the urgent need to diversify the outdoor industry.

COMMUNAL LEARNING

Shoving a foot into conservation seemed impossible a few short months ago — despite having a love for the outdoors and a desire to get involved. We’re driven to do well by WTA and leave a lasting legacy for this program. What we build here impacts future Leadership and Inclusion participants who, like us, may see this program as their rare chance to finally chase a dream. Representation matters! We don’t take this opportunity lightly.

Throughout this program — thanks to the magnificent coordination efforts of our program manager, Clarissa Allen — we’ve had the privilege to work alongside some incredible outdoor industry professionals who kindly set time aside from their own busy schedules to teach us a thing or two about trail work.

We’ve practiced cross-cut techniques, run chainsaws and used hydraulic demolition hammers. We’ve created new tread, decommissioned social trails, installed culverts and dug sumps. We’ve learned how to rehab trails down to the smallest details and minimize our impact while building a quality, sustainable hiking trail. I can’t fathom any other scenario where someone like me could have learned all these skills.

No matter what we’re learning or how much rain is dumped on us, the days always end filled with sincere enjoyment. Our conversations with experts go beyond the work, often into what everyday life is like in their respective fields. And we’re constantly
1. Leonardo Velazquez (he/him)
Leonardo joined the crew because it was an opportunity to work in the outdoors and experience a new environment. His favorite thing to do on trail is to build stairs. When he is not on trail, he enjoys taking amazing naps under trees.

2. Zach Toliver (he/him)
Zach was so thankful for landing a spot on this crew after realizing that working as a content writer was the exact opposite route in life he was supposed to take. His favorite thing to do on trail is to clear debris from drains that are holding back tons of water. When not on trail, Zach is probably reading about the complex social life of fish.

3. Beatriz Rojas Vazquez (she/ella/they)
Beatriz joined the crew because she wanted to be a part of systematically disrupting the status quo, find community and connect with nature. Her favorite things to do on trail are decommission, demolish and rebuild structures. When she’s not on trail, she enjoys long walks on the beach, talking to Orca whales about how to dismantle the patriarchy ... you know, normal stuff.

4. Kailee Go (she/her)
Kailee joined the crew because she loves all things nature and her connection to the earth. Having found work in the outdoors for her is a blessing and she hopes that other people of color can find fulfillment in their work as well. Her favorite things to do on trail is new trail construction. When she is not on trail, she enjoys spending quality time with friends, reading/writing poetry, and dancing her heart out.

5. Britt Lê (she/her)
Britt jumped at the opportunity to co-lead the crew because she’s happiest when she’s spending time outside with others. Britt likes a lot of things about trail work, but loves those moments at the end of a project when the crew can look back and feel pride in all that they’ve accomplished. In her spare time, Britt can be found biking around town, falling in love with fictional characters, yelling at her sewing machine and eating candy for dinner.

6. Venice Wong (they/them)
Venice joined the crew because it was an opportunity to build community while sharing their knowledge about trail work. Their favorite thing to do on trail is building structures, but making crush (small rocks) is a close second. When they are not on trail, Venice enjoys making friends with neighborhood cats and living out the existential diasporic life cooking and baking food that speaks of home, if there is such a thing.
on the hunt for hot gossip from our instructors. There’s a love story between two Mount Rainier National Park rangers that could rival “The Notebook.” We really love hearing this stuff.

Our crew meets every challenge with raving eagerness to accomplish the task at hand. We encourage one another. It feels like, together, we can accomplish herculean feats. I used to think mornings weren’t for me. Now, I realize that I needed something worth waking up for.

Sometimes, our enthusiasm actually gets the best of us. On one particular day, Venice noticed our rushed, bad body positioning while hauling spall (golf ball-sized rocks) in Discovery Park. Thankfully, they stopped us with an important message.

“I know as people of color we feel like we always have to go hard and prove ourselves in White spaces, but we don’t have to do that here,” they said. “Do good work but take care of yourself.”

**HAPPILY IN THE MUD TOGETHER**

During our first week together at Mount Rainier National Park, our crew was almost immediately comfortable expressing our mental and emotional states. Our experiences with racism were a common topic.

I asked Bea why she thought this was and, in between her unceasing regurgitation of Cobra Kai ethos, she sagaciously noted, “It’s easier to share lived experiences because I don’t have to explain certain things or worry about being exploited or tokenized.”

For most of us, our workforce experiences before this position were in White-dominated spaces. This is the first time, at least for me, that we don’t have to make an exhausting effort to teach coworkers about racism. (Or to simply convince them that racism exists!) Our companions in this space already get it, and we can breathe a sigh of relief. To our amusement, our race-related dialogs have turned the faces of some well-meaning White folks. These conversations hold awkward nuance for them. For us, they’re therapeutic.

“It’s not like some ‘Hunger Games’ where I have to volunteer as tribute to explain racism or sexism to the privileged,” Bea told me.

Of course, we may be a BIPOC crew, but by no means are we a monolith. Our ancestors span multiple continents. We have different pronouns and diverse backgrounds. We all came to this squad for different reasons. But as I like to say, “real recognizes real,” and this crew looks truly familiar.

I think by the end of this program, we’ll all be able to lead a WTA work party with confidence. Beyond that, our futures remain unfixed. Hopefully, every member of this crew goes off to actively diversify the outdoors and dismantle the White-washed histories of these recreational spaces. (Thank you, Bea, for enlightening me on John Muir’s infamous racism.) When employees — such as at visitor centers, or as various guides — are the first contact some have with nature, an increase in BIPOC staff would certainly help shed “outsider” anxieties many people of color feel. Our presence would truly put forth the unobjectionable fact that trails are for everyone.

The Leadership and Inclusion Crew pilot program — initially slated to run from October to December — has been extended to April. To no surprise, the whole squad jumped at the opportunity to stay a part of this project. No distraught racist waving a dirty face mask can ever take away the passion and raw fun we have in this Leadership and Inclusion Crew.
OUTDOOR WORKSHOPS FOR EDUCATORS

Join our Outdoor Leadership Training program for a new hybrid approach to workshops with both online and in-person hiking, camping and snowshoeing events. We’ll teach you how to lead and plan a trip, and then we’ll give you the tools you need to make it happen. We’re here to support your dreams of connecting youth and families to Washington’s outdoors. All workshops will follow state and CDC-recommended safety guidelines. Events are in small-group settings and face coverings are required.

- Hands-on training
- High-quality gear to borrow
- Funding assistance for trips
- Community support

SNOWSHOEING
March 13 – Mount Rainier National Park (Longmire)

HIKING
April 17 – Point Defiance (Tacoma)
May 15 – Tradition Plateau (Issaquah)
October 2 – Tradition Plateau (Issaquah)

CAMPING SKILLS
June 12 – Dash Point State Park (Federal Way)
August 21 – Lake Sammamish State Park (Issaquah)

Learn more and sign up at wta.org/olt
Miles of Medicine
When war leads to trauma, trails may lead the way out

By Charlie Wakenshaw

Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge was one of the locations where veterans hiked as part of a study to help understand the benefits of nature on their mental health.
Joshua Brandon was inspired to climb Mount Rainier when he could see it from where he was stationed at JBLM. He trained for the climb with fellow members of his brigade.

In 2008, Joshua Brandon was stationed at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, the military base near Tacoma, between his second and third tours of duty in Iraq. He could see Mount Rainier every day and he started hatching plans to climb to the summit.

“Getting out here was my first real touch of being exposed to wilderness,” he said. “You’re surrounded by mountains. Rainier is staring at you every day and I’m like, it’s there, we gotta go climb it.”

Joshua commanded the 32nd Stryker Brigade at the time and got his platoon leaders involved with his plan. They formed a climbing team and got to work.

Joshua grew up in Cleveland and says his experience with the outdoors prior to being stationed in Washington was limited to the Cleveland Metroparks. So when he set his sights on Rainier in 2008, he knew it wouldn’t be easy.

Joshua calls their first summit attempt an absolute disaster. It was late in the season, a storm was brewing and one person on the team got hit in the head with a rock on Disappointment Cleaver, forcing them to retreat. Even with this mishap, Joshua says they got back down to Camp Muir and looked at each other and just started laughing. They agreed, it was one of the coolest things they’d ever done. For Joshua, it was even more than that — it was medicine.

Before his Rainier challenge, Joshua had been serving in Iraq during an especially trying period of the war. One of the first nudges to seek help for his mental health came when he returned to base after a mission. A colleague he respected came up to him and said, “After combat we clean our weapons, but we never clean our minds. Make sure you take care of yourself.”

When he returned home from that deployment, Joshua’s family noticed a Paving the way to hiking treatments for PTSD

For something like post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), there is no one magic cure — a combination of treatments often proves most effective. In addition to two main types of treatment, psychotherapy and pharmaceuticals, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs also grants funding to a variety of organizations that run adaptive sports programs.

While some of these programs include nature therapy and hiking, these activities are not widespread. But that could be changing — two key actions in 2020 show that policies are shifting to help improve access to the outdoors for the veteran community. The federal Accelerating Veterans Recovery Act, which was signed into law on December 5, establishes a task force to increase access to public land for medical treatment and recreational therapy for veterans. Also, on the eve of Veterans Day, Secretary of the Interior David Bernhardt announced that veterans and Gold Star families will have free access to National Parks from here on out.
difference in him. He noticed it too. He started to see typical symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) — heavy drinking and self-medicating. Joshua sought help from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and was formally diagnosed with PTSD, then prescribed medication and limited therapy. The treatments worked okay, but it wasn’t until Joshua moved to Washington and started spending all his time outdoors training for Rainier (which the team ultimately summited) that he noticed a big improvement in how he was feeling, and even the quality of his therapy.

“My progression in therapy was often a lot more significant when I was constantly engaged in the outdoors,” he said.

Joshua began to wonder if he could use this experience to help other veterans.

A new way to treat PTSD

After leaving the military in 2012, after 10 years of service in the Army, Joshua started working to help get other veterans outside. He knew personally that the outdoors helped improve his PTSD symptoms, and he wanted to see this treatment become more mainstream. In order to do that, data and research were needed to back up his claims. He met Dr. Howard Frumkin, Dean of the UW’s School of Public Health at the time, and they started talking about formally testing the hypothesis.

Their study began in 2018 as a partnership between the University of Washington (UW) and the Seattle Epidemiologic Research and Information Center at the VA and was funded in large part by REI. Joshua advised on the project. The two pilot phases of the study each included six hikes over 12 weeks. The first phase consisted of one group of 12 veterans that went on hikes in natural settings, led by Joshua. The second phase included two groups of 13 hikers led by staff from Outdoors for All, one that hiked in natural settings and another that hiked in urban settings.

Dr. Frumkin initiated the study then, during phase 1, brought in Professor Gregory Bratman, who studies the effects of nature on well-being at UW, and Professor Alyson Littman, who is based at the VA and also a Research Professor in the Department of Epidemiology at the UW.

Alyson says prior research on the effects of hiking on veterans diagnosed with PTSD does not meet the rigorous
Researchers are trying to understand how spending time in nature, such as at May Valley (left) and Little Mashel Falls (above), can be helpful for mental health and PTSD.

They can reestablish community,” he said. “They can benefit from the effects of being out in small groups in nature, and it complements traditional mental-health care.”

For now, Joshua is happy to be back in Washington and able to hike the state’s trails again, after 18 months away working on the East coast.

“I’m going back and hitting all of my old favorite spots,” he said. “Being gone for a year and a half felt like being gone for 10 years, so it’s like seeing these places again for the first time. It’s absolutely cool.”

Looking to the future
After two successful pilots, Alyson says the next step is trying to get funding to do a bigger study. She, Gregory and others on the team are in the process of submitting grant proposals to the VA and the National Institute of Health for a national study. This scaled-up study would also add a third group of veterans who would not participate in any physical activity, establishing a control group.

Joshua has a vision of a brighter future for veterans diagnosed with PTSD.

“Instead of just getting sent to a therapist and given some medicine, or worse yet just given some drugs and kicked off to fend for themselves, they get a backpack and a pair of hiking boots and they get put into these groups so

scientific standards for randomized controlled trials that are necessary to draw conclusions. This study would change that.

“Even though I can personally say that I enjoy my time in nature on trails, I think it’s important that we try to be rigorous and understand why that might be,” she said.

According to Alyson, the study will specifically look at whether or not there are greater benefits in terms of PTSD symptoms, functioning and quality of life in people who hike in nature versus an urban environment, with the hope that the latter environment still provides benefits. The study also aims to start narrowing in on the sources of other benefits of group hiking for those suffering from PTSD, including physical activity and belonging to a community.

“One of the many challenges for our veterans with PTSD who are coming home from these conflicts right now is isolation, extreme loneliness and withdrawal,” Gregory said. “These interventions were intentionally designed to address that by bringing people together as a group.”

But why was hiking chosen, when there are so many other outdoor group activities to choose from?

“You don’t need a lot to get started, you don’t need a lot of specialized equipment and you don’t need to go that far either,” Alyson said.

“Hiking can be replicated everywhere,” Joshua said. “It’s something that most veterans either can do right off the bat or with minimal accessibility accommodations.”

Even in the first phase of the study, Joshua noticed promising results — results that were in line with what he himself had experienced.

“I noticed, in general, an increase in mood and self-efficacy within the group,” Joshua said. “(The participants) were just feeling better and they felt that they had a little bit of community.” Joshua also noticed that the hikes facilitated a social atmosphere. “(The hikers) started to look at the group as not just this hiking group they were in, but as this important social group,” he said.
Time spent in nature is good for you. Whether you’ve known that consciously or not, it’s likely that the physical and mental benefits have played a role in why you get outside and hike. But there are plenty of questions about how much time or what type of nature gives people the greatest benefits. Thankfully, there is Nature and Health, an entire group of professors and students at the University of Washington dedicated to exploring these connections. WTA has been attending events and meetings with Nature and Health for several years, even presenting with GirlTrek and the U.S. Forest Service to other member organizations about our joint research. We talked with Josh Lawler, Nature and Health director and Denman Professor of Sustainable Resource Sciences, one of the group’s key organizers, to find out more about the group’s work and findings.

How did this group at the University of Washington come to be?

Nature and Health is a group of researchers, practitioners, and policy makers—all interested in the positive health effects of time spent in nature. We work together to build our understanding of the linkages between nature contact and health and use it to develop better programs, policies and practices to improve health and conserve nature for all people.

We began when a small group of UW researchers and members of the broader community got together to talk about how time spent in nature could positively affect health and what the implications of those effects are for urban planning, outdoor programs, school design, and myriad other plans, programs, and policies. We continued to meet at a local brew pub, meeting every few months to share research findings, program
plans, and policy ideas informally over dinner. Our convenings continued to grow into what is today a community of over 360 people.

What have you learned that you think could help people in their day-to-day life?
There is strong evidence that nature contact can positively affect mental and physical health as well as general well-being. For example, studies have found nature experiences to reduce stress, anxiety, ADHD symptoms, obesity, aggression, blood pressure, depression, and mortality as well as to improve birth outcomes, sleep, immune function, eyesight, and life satisfaction. Even relatively little time spent in nature—just 120 minutes per week—has been found to have positive health effects. We are also learning how these benefits are distributed. Both access to nature and the benefits of that access are not equitably distributed due to historical and ongoing systemic racism that has resulted in segregation practices such as redlining.

We’ll stress that although there is a growing body of evidence for all of these things, there are still many things we need to know to better understand how to best take advantage of the health benefits of time spent in nature. For example, we need a better understanding of the mechanisms through which nature experiences affect changes in the mind and the body as well as what aspects of nature have the largest effects and how those effects may vary across people.

What have you learned that you think could help guide public policy?
Our group is specifically learning about how outdoor preschools affect mental and physical health, about how outdoor programs can be used as treatment for veterans with PTSD, and about how greening schoolyards can affect the health in a community. All of these studies have implications for policies surrounding education, health care, and urban planning. The more general findings in the field have implications for an even wider array of policies that include recreation programs, health insurance plans, school curricula, park design, and therapy practices.

What has your research found about the roles trails play in health?
Perhaps most simply—and this doesn’t come from our research—trails help facilitate interactions with nature. They are particularly important for generating many of the physical health benefits from time spent in nature. Trails also play an important role in what Peter Kahn, professor of Psychology at UW and Nature and Health researcher, calls interaction patterns—specific ways that people interact with the natural environment. Spencer Wood, Nature and Health and eSciences researcher at UW, and team have found that trail use has been steadily increasing for decades, regionwide. More recently, trail use increased by about 75%, from 2015-2019 at sites in the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest. The rise was even greater in 2020, although the exact numbers aren’t in yet.

What have you been learning since the pandemic began?
More and more people are seeking connection with nature. A recent study that looked at Google searches found that the number of searches for “go for a walk” skyrocketed starting in March of 2020. Nature is likely to prove to be particularly important for mental health over the course of the pandemic. Nature exposure has the potential to be helpful for overstressed health care workers as well. The University of Washington is working to put plants in breakrooms for healthcare workers and other hospitals have healing gardens and other green spaces for patients and staff. The pandemic has also emphasized the racial and economic inequities in access to nature.
Hiking and healing

Personal stories on the power of trails to boost mental and physical health

By Anna Roth

In the early days of the pandemic, Washingtonians were relieved to have hiking and outdoor recreation declared an essential activity “for everyone’s physical and mental health.”

There is plenty of research to back that up, and WTA has been instrumental in making some of that research happen. In 2019, thanks to efforts from WTA and our hiking advocates, a study — Economic and Health Benefits of Walking, Hiking, and Bicycling on Recreational Trails in Washington State — was funded. Later, WTA worked with the Office of Recreation and Conservation (RCO) to publicize the study and the findings, which were impressive.

Collectively, Washingtonians spent 292 million days on trail in 2016. Statewide, people who spent time on trail contributed to $390 million in annual health savings. Adults who spend more time outside report lower rates of depression, and time in nature is particularly good for children’s physical and mental health. This is critical. Washington reports higher levels of adults suffering from depression or mental illness and more children with major depressive episodes each year than the national average.

The benefits — both mental and physical — of time in nature go on. But the overarching takeaway is that access to green spaces and fresh air is essential. And in 2020, that was more evident than ever.

While the health benefits from trails is a common theme, everyone’s connection to trails is unique. To better understand those connections, we recently asked hikers to tell us why they need trails. Your answers covered a lot of ground (pun intended). From providing a path to recovery to a completely new way of moving through the world, here are a few insights from some of your fellow hikers.
Six years ago, Marie was living in New York, doing weekly mixed martial arts (MMA) sessions with her coach Sal. One day he stopped her during a workout and looked closely at her arm. “He’d noticed I wasn’t sweating,” she said. “At first he said we needed to rethink my workout, but I still wasn’t sweating, so he finally told me I needed to go see a doctor.”

The doctor diagnosed Marie with hypohidrosis — inability to sweat. Because the body cools itself with sweat, people with hypohidrosis can get muscle cramps or pass out if they exert themselves.

“There’s no cure,” Marie said. “The solution was to tell me to stop doing physical activity. But my job was stressful and I needed the outlet MMA gave me. I loved it. It was fun. I didn’t want to have to give it up.”

Soon, Marie’s work sent her to Dallas, where she had to stay inside for 8 months out of the year to avoid overheating. Even so, 4 years after her diagnosis, her doctor told her she couldn’t stay in Texas.

“I had to live somewhere cooler, where I could be outside,” Marie said. “I couldn’t do most physical activities, except swimming or hiking, and I didn’t know how to hike. You have this mentality living in New York that the hustle and bustle is what it’s all about. I knew nothing about hiking and being outdoors.”

In search of a cooler climate, Marie headed to Washington so she could spend more time outside. When she arrived, she saw photos from a coworker’s hikes and was stunned by the natural beauty.

“I wanted to go to those places,” Marie said. “And (my coworker told me), ‘If you want to learn how to hike, look at WTA.’”

So she did. She read trip reports and browsed the Hiking Guide. She got a tip to check out The Mountaineers’ classes to meet people who like being outside, and folks were only too happy to give Marie advice.

“This was amazing. In NYC, no one helps you, people just rush by,” Marie said. “Sometimes I ask people here why they’re so outgoing and they usually say something like, ‘Because I have a passion for being outside and I want other people to enjoy it too.’”

Marie is building her own knowledge base to share, since she has to do a lot of research to select a hike. When you can overheat in even mild conditions, you have to know exactly how physically demanding a hike is going to be. The data in the Hiking Guide and trip reports were crucial for her research.

“I get up at 4 a.m. because I have to be sure I’m done at 11,” Marie said. “When we’re out there, people think I’m checking my phone for a text, but actually I’m monitoring the weather.”

All that research pays off. Marie says the time she gets to spend outside is essential for her, physically and mentally. Hiking provides a much-needed mental break and the physical outlet she needs to de-stress.

“I go out there and forget about work,” she said. “I think sometimes my condition has helped me realize there is more to life than work. The trails here are an incredible experience. This place is beautiful.”
RICHARD WALLIS
RECOVERY AND DISCOVERY

Originally from Chicago, Richard made Washington his home 36 years ago. For most of that time, he worked for the YMCA at the national level, consulting for the nonprofit. After retiring, he took a break but returned to the working world in 2013 to serve as the CEO of the Spokane YMCA. That’s when he started hiking.

“I’ve always enjoyed the outdoors — I started my career as a YMCA camp counselor,” Richard said. “And all through my professional career I was exposed to health and fitness programming. So I knew it was important.”

Richard wanted to spend more time outside, but he didn’t know where to go.

“I started using wta.org to find places to go,” he said. “I had no idea we had so many trails around Spokane, within 30 to 45 minutes of my house.”

Those trails became essential to Richard’s physical health in a new way after a motorcycle accident in 2015. He was on Highway 20 when he lost control while trying to avoid a pile of gravel on the roadway. He ran off the road and hit a tree.

“I was in the hospital for the next two and a half months,” he said. “I broke three vertebrae, 10 ribs. My ankle, my shoulder. Dislocated my hip. Broke my wrist. When I got out, it was all I could do to walk 150 feet.”

Richard saw a physical therapist for 4 years after the accident, and she recommended hiking or biking to supplement the therapy. The hip injury left Richard with nerve damage in his right leg, so he feels like there’s extra weight in his right foot. Hiking on uneven surfaces helps him stay sharp.

“She told me the more I get out and move, challenge myself, the better,” he said.

Richard’s recovery plan included getting back on trail, so this was welcome advice. He started with short walks, working up to a couple of miles, then longer.

“My sweet spot is 6 to 8 miles,” he said. “After 8 miles, my right leg gets tired. But I get a lot out of being outside. I find it so energizing and peaceful. It has been so helpful to regain my strength and balance. And it’s nice to have quiet time alone.”

Richard also enjoys hiking with company. His extended family is in Spokane, and he loves that hiking offers an inexpensive way to connect while enjoying a healthy activity. He gets on trail with family frequently. He loves to see his grandkids interested in hiking, and believes time on trail is teaching them other values as well.

“I think they’re going to respect the environment and have an appreciation for it,” he said. “When I see them go hiking, I feel really good about that.”

BONNIE RICO
TAPPING INTO INNER STRENGTH

Bonnie builds her confidence and physical fitness through hiking, but challenging herself outside has also guided her through addiction and times of uncertainty. Beginning in the late 90s, she started taking annual trips to national forests, where she spent time with other folks who taught her the basics of backpacking and Leave No Trace.

In 2008, Bonnie saw an opportunity to experience the outdoors in a new way when she got into a study abroad program that involved trekking through the Himalayas in India.

“I was pretty out of shape but I wanted to go on this trip so badly,” she said. “When I was accepted into the program, we did a get-to-know-you hike. I remember I wore Doc Martens and really ripped my feet up. I bought my first pair of boots after that.”

Better boots helped her hiking experience, as well as a cane Bonnie bought from a local merchant to help her move through the mountains.

“I was never would have made it without that cane,” she said. “But as difficult as it was, I did it. I was in love with hiking.”

A year later, Bonnie was in addiction recovery and discovered a 12-step program that met on Tiger Mountain. She joined them on a hike up West Tiger 3, a popular training trail.

“I remember standing at the top, dripping with sweat and looking around at the group thinking, ‘These are the healthiest sick people I have ever met in my life,’” she said. “I went back to that meeting a lot.”

Attending those meetings helped Bonnie through recovery physically and mentally. She made friends who were in a glacier
climbing group, and the idea interested her. Again she found herself unsure she could do something, but yearning to try. She started training, gaining skills and losing weight she’d hoped to shed as part of her recovery process.

“Over the course of 6 months, these people taught me amazing skills,” she said. “I learned the physical part of climbing, and the skills you need to do it, but also how to deal with my fear. And I got more and more conditioned.”

As she built her physical strength and endurance, she learned more skills. She’d struggled with imposter syndrome for years, but the more she learned, the more confident she became.

She started climbing bigger mountains. Mount St. Helens and Eldorado — “Boy, was that hard!” — and in 2019 she made it to the top of Mount Rainier. She remembers the day vividly, particularly the moments before reaching the summit.

“It felt like I was watching myself on a GoPro — I was looking down at my feet and watching myself put one foot in front of the other, seeing my breath and my feet moving and my ice pick,” Bonnie said. “And I was saying to myself, ‘I am a mountaineer.’ It was an absolutely incredible moment.”

So much of Bonnie’s physical and mental well-being comes from being outside. So the limitations the pandemic put on hikers were a challenge.

“When trails closed, I was distraught. Hiking is my self-care,” she said. “For me, there’s no replacement for getting out in nature. When I found out they’d reopened Point Defiance, I headed straight there.”

She came up with a game: Try to stay at the park as long as possible and avoid seeing other people.

“I packed my bag like I was going on a big hike and spent all day there,” she said. “If I saw someone coming, I would duck down another trail. That was the only thing that kept me relatively sane. That and my job.”

When more trails reopened, Bonnie was right back out there. She’s continuing to train for her next hike or climb, whatever that may be. And she has some advice to share, whether you’re navigating addiction, a pandemic or climbing a mountain.

“Someone told me one time — ‘You can do anything that your brain tells you you can do.’ I think there is truth to that. I start going up some crazy steep hill and if I tell myself, ‘You can do this,’ every step of the way, I make it to the top,” she said.

Those are some good words to remember when the going gets tough.

For some hikers, overcoming challenges on the trail can go hand-in-hand with overcoming challenges in life.
Stunned, anxious, and in a near daze I headed to Mount Rainier’s Paradise Valley. It was a warm, bright-blue day — the type we live for in the Pacific Northwest. I headed up familiar trails before turning off on one I had yet to explore.

Only one day before, on September 11, 2001, I had watched the news as New York’s World Trade Center towers come crashing down. The world as we knew it abruptly ended. This horrific event replayed in my mind’s eye and I desperately needed to hit the pause button.

That day, when I reached the end of the trail, it was just me. And, for the first and only time in my life, the skies were completely devoid of aircraft and contrails. Mount Rainier beneath an eerily quiet and empty sky put my mind at ease.

Upon hearing of the horrific terrorist attacks — then having the disturbing images of death and carnage seared into my mind — I went through an array of emotions: rage, fear, loss and anxiety. Lots of anxiety. I no longer felt secure. But my surroundings quelled my emotional turmoil. I sat still in the high valley and stared out. The roaring of tumbling water intensified. A hawk’s high-pitched warning pierced the air. A distant marmot’s shrill whistle echoed off the ridges. I
Healing through nature

COVID-19 and the current political and social unrest have been tough on many of us, leaving in its wake, depression, despair, and anxiety. While I encourage you to maintain strong, healthy relationships with loving family members and friends; and seek professional help from mental health workers as positive ways to cope with these challenges — consider the trail too as a way to heal. Here are a few tips to help you on your way.

• It’s not necessary to travel far to national parks and wilderness areas. Many of our local parks and trails offer plenty of room for a quiet reprieve.

• Consider returning to a familiar and loved trail or destination — one that instills warm memories and solace.

• A new destination can also help heal, with its promise of anticipation and a sense of discovery.

• Slow down and take time to notice and appreciate the little and intricate details all around. Become enthralled studying patterns on tree bark, petals on a flower, dew on moss, a flitting lizard, a curious squirrel — the list of all the life and beauty around is endless.

• Become one with the surroundings. Sit by a creek and close your eyes. Let nature’s music amplify and soothe your soul.

• Document your emotions, feelings and observations in a journal. Writing can be cathartic.

cocked my head downward and gazed at the glacial till beneath me. I took notice of small plants tenaciously surviving in this harsh environment. I breathed deep and let my mind wander. Like my enduring surroundings, my life will go on. It’ll be different, but it’ll go on. No matter what happens out there: war, social unrest, economic distress, a rancorous political divide, pain, suffering and loss — these natural cathedrals will be here to assuage my soul and bring comfort to my anxious mind. Here in nature, everything is right. And in times of turmoil, I need that assurance, stability and validation.

The natural world has always been my safe harbor. Trails leading to sparkling lakes, primeval forests, mountaintops, desert canyons, hidden beaches, remote valleys and alpine meadows — these have continuously kept me from wandering down darker paths when the world has come crashing down or life has dealt me a bad hand. And now, during this unprecedented time of the coronavirus pandemic, and political and social upheaval, the backcountry has been my panacea. And it is about more than a pretty place. The fresh air reminds me to breathe, the path reminds me to put one foot in front of the other. I can focus more on my inner thoughts and feelings in tranquil surroundings. Taking to the trail forces me to see the beauty of the world and allows me to face the outside world with more clarity, confidence and hope. Life is full of suffering, hardship and loss. But the trail is the place I can take a reprieve from the pain, a place I can reflect, assess and seek redemption. The backcountry is where I have gone to grieve after losing loved ones and beloved pets, a place I have headed after heartbreaks, disappointments and failures. The trail has assuaged me during periods of extreme stress, uncertainty and reckoning. It has allowed me to accept who I am, what has come my way, what has passed and what will be.

Never has the power to heal on the trail and in the backcountry been so revealing to me as it was 30 years ago during one of →
my darkest times. A failed marriage was followed by a long bout of depression, insecurity and anxiety that manifested in claustrophobic attacks. The backcountry, hiking and running saved me. There were many turning points along the way — and the path was rife with setbacks and regressions — but the overall route was one of recovery. A particular episode stands out among the many little triumphs and revelations. It was my first solo backpacking trip. During a bout of extreme loneliness, I headed to Olympic National Park’s High Divide and Seven Lakes Basin. Being self-reliant on the trail builds self-confidence. Being surrounded by bountiful natural beauty and wildlife instills a constant sense of wonderment and awe. And hiking and camping in one of the most breathtaking landscapes in the world after emerging from one of the darkest periods of my life intensified the entire experience. The whole trip was surreal. I listened to the haunting sounds of bugling elk. A curious young coyote pranced through my campsite. I watched more than a half-dozen black bears comb blueberry and huckleberry patches. I sat in utter astonishment on a peak watching below as a black bear sow and cub splashed in a shimmering tarn against a backdrop of glistening snow and ice. A nearby marmot broke the stillness of the evening with its piercing whistles. Afterward, in astonishment, I watched the sky turn fire red as the day faded into night. I never felt so alive — and so secure, adequate and at peace. It was a physically and emotionally challenging trip. The mileage, elevation gain and rough terrain distracted me from my emotional pain. And finishing the hike instilled in me a touch of confidence. It was being alone in the wilderness in the dark of night that daunted me. I would have to fight my mental demons on my own — and not give in to doubt and fear. I would console myself throughout the evening by repeating that I was safe and all was well. And I would awake assured I could be alone and not lonely. Being alone surrounded by so much life and beauty brought me clarity. Being alone heightened my experience. I emerged from this trip renewed and assured that despite all of life’s bumps behind me and the ones remaining in front of me, I wanted to keep moving forward. There was so much out there I wanted to see, feel, and experience. I was going to be okay. Nature’s rejuvenating powers are prodigious.

Craig Romano is a guidebook author, craigromano.com.
Know what you’re walking into.

Trail: Little River Trail
Location: Olympics
Type of trip: Day hike
Trail condition: Good
Description: So green!

Snow? Slush? Slippery stream crossing? Conditions change fast. File a trip report to keep each other safe and in the know.

wta.org/tripreports

Photo by Roger Mosley
One Piece of Gear You’ll Hope to Never Need

If things go sideways in the backcountry, an emergency beacon could save your life.

By Jessi Loerch
When you head out on trail, it’s always good to be prepared.

Have the Ten Essentials, know how to use them and always tell someone you trust where you are going and when you’ll be back. But life is unpredictable and, despite your best preparation, you may get into trouble. If you do, having a device that can call for rescue may save your life, or the life of someone else.

At WTA, we send our crew leaders out with emergency beacons, although we hope to never have to use them. An emergency beacon is just one part of the puzzle for staying safe when adventuring outdoors. We send all of our crew leaders out with first-aid training, as well as the essentials to stay safe in a variety of conditions.

With that in mind, you might consider adding a beacon to your gear. But what kind should you get? There are two main types of devices that will allow you to call for help with that in mind, you might consider adding a beacon to your gear. But what kind should you get? There are two main types of devices that will allow you to call for help when out of cell phone range. Which you decide on will depend upon your needs.

---

Personal locator beacons: emergency use only

- **Emergency use only devices have — you guessed it — one purpose.** They allow you to send a signal requesting help. You press a button that sends a signal with your location, and that information is routed to potential rescuers. There’s no two-way communication.

- **They do not require a subscription.**

- **They use a global satellite network and can pinpoint your location extremely accurately.** However, just because the beacon can contact a satellite doesn’t mean you will definitely be rescued. Other factors, like where you are in the world, play into that.

- **If you call for rescue in the United States, your information will be routed to a search and rescue near your location.**

- **Some models have bright lights, which can help rescuers pinpoint your location.**

- **They have batteries that will last for years if not activated.** Batteries have to be replaced by a dealer after a set period of time or if the device is used.

- **Examples of emergency only devices include the ACR ResQLink and the Ocean Signal rescueME PLB1.**

---

Satellite messengers: for emergencies and communication

- **These devices have more than one purpose.** In addition to signaling for help, they allow you to send, and sometimes receive, messages. In some cases, you can also use a satellite messenger to communicate directly with possible rescuers, to give them additional information beyond your location.

- **They require a subscription.** Plans vary in price and may require an activation fee.

- **Some include GPS and navigation features.** Some will also provide information such as weather forecasts.

- **Some have an option for tracking and can send your location to your contacts.**

- **Include rechargeable batteries.** (For long trips, you might need a battery backup.)

- **Use private satellite networks — if you’re traveling outside the U.S., you should check to see where the device you are considering can be used. In the U.S., calls are routed to a central center, which will coordinate with search and rescue near you.**

- **Some messengers pair with a cellphone via Bluetooth, making various features easier to use.**

- **Examples of satellite messengers include the Garmin inReach Mini, Garmin inReach Explorer, SPOT Gen 4 and Bivystick Blue.**

---

Tips

**Whatever device you have, be sure to register it.** That will provide potential rescuers with the information they need about you, such as medical conditions, as well as your emergency contacts’ information.

**Before you leave, prepare your emergency contacts with the information they will need.** Ideally, the person who is an emergency contact on your device will also have the relevant information about your trip: where you were going, who you were with, etc.

**Remember that rescues take time.** If you know you need rescue, don’t wait to call for help. If, for instance, you are lost, don’t wait until you are out of food and water to send a signal. While of course beacons are only for emergency use, they only work if you use them. Calling sooner gives rescuers more time to reach you and get you the help you need.

**If you need to use your device, try to get a clear view of the sky.** It will be harder to get a signal if your view of the sky is blocked by cliffs or heavy foliage. If possible, move to a more open area.

**If you use the device for someone else not in your party, stay with that person.** If you move with your device, you could confuse rescuers.

**If you have a satellite messenger, consider your present messages.** In case you have to use your device to call for help, you could use those messages to easily give your contacts back home some information. Potential messages:

- **Pressing SOS for myself. More info to come when possible.**

- **Pressing SOS for someone in my party. I am fine.**

- **Pressing SOS for someone not in my party. I am fine.**
Nicole Tsong spent 6 years of her life trying new ways to move her body. Week after week, she was a perpetual newbie as she wrote the Fit for Life column for the Seattle Times. She climbed trees, she took dance classes, she jumped on trampolines. And she learned that when she moves more and in more ways, she feels better.

Nicole has a new book, “24 Ways to Move More,” which takes what she’s learned and helps encourage her readers to try something new. We talked with her about her new book as well as some of her tips on how to give your body the movement it craves.

The value in trying something new
Children try new things all the time, whether that’s movement or learning other new skills. As adults, however, we often don’t think of trying new things as one of our skill sets. Nicole says she sees that adults often stick with what they know, or are good at, but that can quickly leave them stuck in an unenjoyable exercise box that they don’t enjoy.

“There’s a very limited way of thinking about exercise,” she said. “This thought that you have to exercise to lose weight and be skinny. But that’s not very motivating for me.”

Nicole says that, if you can break out of that way of thinking and try something different just for fun, you can find joy in moving for movement’s sake. You just need to begin by accepting that you won’t be good at something at first. But you don’t need to be good to have fun. And, the more you try new movements, the more your body will be able to handle even more new things.

Nicole says that, especially given the pandemic of the last year, being willing to try new things is a valuable life skill.

What to keep, what to let go
Nicole encourages folks to give new activities at least three or four tries. It can be hard, sometimes, to decide if you don’t like a new activity because it’s hard or simply because it’s not for you. After a few attempts at a new activity, your muscles will begin to remember the movement and it will become easier — and it may become more fun. That said, of course some activities just aren’t going to be for you.

“If it’s not fun, don’t do it,” Nicole said.

Advice for trying new activities during a pandemic
As the pandemic has required folks to avoid groups, many opportunities have gone online. That includes classes that can help folks learn new ways to move. Yoga, dance classes, tai chi, it can all be found online. And while some may miss the in-person contact, it also means that if you’re nervous about trying
a new skill, you can do it in the comfort of your own home. Nicole also encourages activities like playing tennis, trying out simple body-weight movements or, of course, taking a hike.

Nicole also says that she has heard from folks who have worked at home during the pandemic, that they’re missing their transit time, which was a chance to create a bit of mental space between work and home. She recommends taking time to move before and after work, which offers a chance to transition from home to work life. She also emphasizes that it doesn’t need to be much. Start small.

Tips for folks with limited mobility
If walking is accessible to you, Nicole suggests simply starting there. And remember, it doesn’t have to be much. Walk to the corner and back, or whatever distance feels accessible to you. She also suggests checking out options such a chair yoga, which can allow you to move your body in new ways, while still being gentle.

Advice specifically for hikers
“Hiking requires a lot of endurance,” Nicole said. “Anything that offers mobility and strength is good. That’s true of anyone, but especially of hikers. They tax their body a lot and could really use some stretching.”

She encourages trying exercises such as yoga that will encourage stretching and mobility. Strength exercises will also help build stability for trails, especially for those who are only getting out to hike occasionally.

When you just don’t wanna
If you’re just not finding the motivation to get moving, Nicole suggests taking a single step. Maybe that’s putting on your walking shoes. Or maybe you simply pull your yoga mat out of the closet. You don’t have to do the whole process, but making a start helps.

“Don’t think about the whole progression,” she said. “Just get yourself somewhere along that progression.”
Beautiful Skies
How to avoid “blowing out” your photos
By Erika Haugen-Goodman

If you’re like the majority of hikers, you end up taking a good amount of photos in the middle of the day, when the sun is high in the sky. After all, that’s usually when we’re out on trail seeing all that neat stuff. One thing you may have noticed doing that is that taking pictures in the middle of the day is tough, particularly when you’re balancing a darker subject like a forest with a brighter sky. The sky tends to be “blown out,” or in other words, too bright to make out any detail or color other than blinding white. But fear not, there are tips you can use to fight that blown-out sky and take more balanced photos.

Expose for the sky, avoid facing the sun
When framing your shot, be aware of where the sun is. Typically, you want your back to the brightest light source so you’re not shooting directly into it and therefore overexposing the photo, particularly when the sun is brighter midday. At the golden hour (early in the morning or late evening) it’s easier to take photos facing toward the sun since the light is less severe.

In addition to avoiding facing into the light, try to expose your photo for the sky. In short, make sure that when you adjust your exposure settings in your camera the sky is nicely illuminated and as close to how it appears naturally to your eyes. Typically, this will mean other parts of your scene may be a little darker, but it’s better to have aspects of the photo slightly too dark than too bright (I’ll explain a bit more about this below).

Use a filter
If you’re using a camera that allows you to attach filters to the lens, try using a polarizing filter to bring the brightness of the sky down. Circular polarized filters come in a variety of sizes and styles, but they all function in essentially the same way: depending on how you rotate it on your lens, it will darken roughly half of the scene. This is a perfect way to capture a scene closer to how your eye sees it rather than having one section of the photo get too bright or too dark.

Shoot RAW if possible
For those of you inclined to do a bit of post-processing and editing, shooting in RAW format will give you more control over the photograph, allowing you to manipulate the highlights and shadows with a bit more freedom. In most photos, pulling shadows back to normal is easier than lessening blown-out skies, which is why exposing for the sky when you take the photo is a safer bet.

You can also edit JPEG files and other formats, but you might notice that the adjustments don’t do as much as with RAW files. This is due to how image data is stored in the file itself. Typically, RAW formats are only available on DSLRs and mirrorless cameras, so check to see if your camera is capable of taking advantage of that first. You’ll also need to make sure you have editing software that can open and edit those types of files. All that said, if you have the time to edit and ability to use it, RAW files will let you correct overexposed skies or dark shadows when trying to capture a midday scene.
Trails for everyone, forever

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.

Help us secure this vision for the future. Join the Legacy Circle by including WTA in your estate or will – it’s never too soon to start planning your legacy.

To learn more about your giving options, contact Whitney Allen at 206-577-3404 or wallen@wta.org.

Learn more at wta.org/legacy

Photo by Kyle Lewis
Rested and Recharged

A Renewed Sense of Wonder

Spring is a season full of transitions — mountains begin to thaw and landscapes begin to bloom. Whether you need an escape, a challenge or one last frolic in the snow, spring is a beautiful and dynamic time to go outside.
Schriebers Meadow
Snowshoe
North Cascades – Mount Baker
On the flanks of Mount Baker’s south side, Schriebers Meadow makes for a delightful snowshoe excursion, either for a day trip or an overnight experience.
By Lindsay Leffelman

Schriebers Meadow is a popular hiking destination in the summer and fall, but it becomes a winter wonderland in the snowy months. With magnificent Mount Baker towering above the rolling snowfields of the alpine meadows, there is plenty of room to roam and take in the scenery. However, be prepared to share the trail with both snowmobilers and cross-country skiers. Practice good trail etiquette by staying to the outside edge of the trail — out of the ski tracks and listening for approaching snowmobiles so you can stay safely out of the way.

From the sno-park, make your way up snow-covered Forest Road 13. For 5 miles, climb gently under a canopy of trees as the wide roadway makes its way along a hillside above Sulphur Creek. Eventually, the road ends at the summer trailhead for the Mount Baker National Recreation Area.

From the expansive summer parking area, the trail narrows as it crosses Sulphur Creek and reaches the edge of Schriebers Meadow. From here, explore to your heart’s content, finding a space away from the crowds to enjoy lunch or set up camp.

If you have enough energy left and are confident in your navigation and snow travel skills, consider pushing onward toward Survey Point, which offers views of not only Mount Baker, but also Park and Black buttes and Schriebers Meadow below. This point lies northwest of Schriebers Meadow and should only be attempted if you have the experience and skills to select a safe route and know how to read avalanche terrain and conditions. Otherwise continue to enjoy the meadow before heading back.

**Distance:** 11 miles roundtrip  
**Elevation gain:** 1,200 feet  
**Peak elevation:** 5,200 feet  
**Map:** Green Trails: 45, Hamilton  
**Permit:** Sno-park permit  
**Dogs:** No  
**Info:** wta.org/go-hiking/hikes/schriebers-meadow-snowshoe  
**Trailhead:** From Sedro-Woolley, drive east on State Route 20 for 14 miles. Turn north on Baker Lake Road (Forest Road 11). Continue for 12.5 miles, then turn left on FR 12. Continue for 3.5 miles to the sno-park located at the junction with FR 13. Note: Depending on snow levels, you may be able to continue driving up the road past the sno-park. There are two other parking areas along FR 13.

**NEARBY HIKES**

**Anderson Creek:** From the Anderson Creek/Watson Sno-Park, explore up to 14 miles of groomed shared-use trails. Climb above Baker Lake for exquisite views on a clear day. (14 miles of trails; 3,000 feet elevation gain)

**Baker Lake:** This trail along the east side of Baker Lake generally sees little snow, making it a great option if you want to get outside without the need for snowshoes. After crossing Baker River on a sturdy suspension bridge, follow the lake’s eastern shore for as far as you wish. Noisy Creek Campground makes for a good turn-around point. (9 miles one way, 500 feet elevation gain)
Sun Mountain Snowshoe Loop

North Cascades, Methow Valley

This well-marked snowshoe route near Sun Mountain Lodge offers outstanding views, a variety of terrain and more solitude than you might expect.  

By Jessica Kelley

This loop is part of the Methow Trails network, a partnership between public and private landowners to create a vast trail network that is open to the public. A Methow Trails pass, which you can purchase online for $5, is required to use these trails.

To begin, after you park, look across the road for a sign (it may be partially hidden by a snowplow berm) that says, “Access to Moose and Click-A-Pic.” The same sign also says that snowshoes are required — bare boots aren’t allowed on these snowshoe trails.

The access trail leads to the bottom of a hill where you take a sharp left, following a sign that says, “To Moose Trail.” The next junction is just 50 feet ahead, signed and marked by a gate. Go through the gate and take a left onto the Moose trail.

The Moose trail begins with a steep descent, then cruises along through open terrain and small stands of trees. The trail is marked by wooden sticks painted orange at the top, as well as bright flagging. After 0.7 mile, you’ll reach another marked junction. Take a right onto the Black Bear trail and enter the forest, winding through the woods via gentle ups and downs. This trail shortly leaves the woods to cross an open plateau with amazing views up valley towards Mazama and beyond. Pause a moment to read the sign that names all the peaks in the distance before continuing on your way through another gate that is marked with orange flagging.

At approximately 1.5 miles from the lodge, you’ll start climbing gradually but consistently. At 1.75 miles, you’ll reach another signed junction, where you should take a right to continue climbing on the Black Bear trail.

The Black Bear trail eventually turns into Click-A-Pic, although the transition is not currently marked. Regardless, you’ll know you’re going the right direction because soon enough you’ll see the lodge looming ahead of you. Snap a few final photos of the gorgeous views from the aptly named Click-A-Pic trail before completing the loop and retracing your steps up the access trail and back to your car.

Tip: To get the best views, and to increase the likelihood that the trail is packed down and easy to follow, consider going on a sunny day.
Potter’s Trail

Green River Natural Area, Puget Sound Area

Tucked into beautiful farmland east of Auburn, this trail winds down through lush forest to the edge of the most dynamic stretch of the Green River in King County.

By Charlie Wakenshaw

Start out from the parking area on the edge of expansive farmland. For the first section of the hike you'll be descending along a wide access road. Take in the towering big leaf maples fringed in licorice ferns and the road curving into the distance through a tunnel of green.

After a quarter mile, turn right onto the Hop Craze Trail, marked clearly by a wooden sign. Trek along this single-track trail that ends after half a mile at a point farther down the same access road you started on.

Continue downhill on the road for a short while until you come to a clearing. With benches, a picnic table and a porta-potty, this is a good place for a break. Next, turn right onto Potter’s Trail. As you leave the access road behind, the forest will begin to take over.

Cruise along this moderate grade, taking note of the occasional wooden step on the side of the trail. These aid horseback riders in mounting and dismounting. Remember to yield to horses by stepping off on the downhill side of the trail.

Stay left at the one fork, and soon you'll come to a couple of steep switchbacks that end at an expansive clearing stretching out to the edge of the river. Stay on the trail, going past this field, to the final stretch out to the water’s edge. Depending on the season, this part may be underwater, preventing you from getting a clear view of the river but offering a glimpse into the yearly cycle of a forest along a river’s edge.

Tip: When the river is high it may flood the very last part of this trail, showing off the powerful dynamics of a riparian ecosystem.
Vancouver Lake to Frenchman’s Bar Trail

Vancouver Area

Vancouver Lake sprawls across fertile Columbia River floodplain just to the west of the bustling city of Vancouver, WA. Frenchman’s Bar straddles a narrow strip of land between the Columbia River and the large shallow lake. A near-level paved 2.5-mile trail connects these two landmarks. Hike, run or walk it and savor breathtaking riverine and volcano views.

Several inviting short trails traverse the manicured grounds and oak and cottonwood forests of Vancouver Lake Regional Park. But for a longer walk or run, take to the paved path that heads south from the park. It makes a couple of road crossings and skirts the bird-rich Shillapoo Wildlife Area before paralleling a slough teeming with waterfowl.

The trail passes through the Blurock Landing Trailhead (no fee to park here), then bends right to traverse agricultural fields protected by the Columbia Land Trust. From autumn to spring these fields host thousands of migratory geese and hundreds of migratory Sandhill cranes. Be sure to scan the nearby cottonwoods for perched bald eagles, too. And look for ospreys and their nests.

The bird watching along this trail is exceptional, but be sure to look upward and outward, too. On a clear day the view across the fields and wetlands of Shillapoo to Mount St. Helens is breathtaking. Mount Rainier and Mount Hood can be seen too, and the only thing more impressive than seeing these three snowcapped volcanoes lined up is seeing flocks of geese and cranes eclipsing the sky in front of them.

At 2.5 miles the trail reaches a parking area in Frenchman’s Bar Regional Park. But don’t stop here. Continue following the paved path for another half mile past picnic shelters, lawns, and interpretive signs to a sandy beach on the river. Admire huge vessels anchored in and plying the wide river. Catch good views too across the river to Oregon’s Sauvie Island, the largest island in the Columbia River.
Do you love hiking overgrown, hard-to-follow trails? How about exploring areas that haven't seen a trip report in years? If that sounds like what you're into, WTA has a challenge for you.

Trip reports help hikers decide where to go next and help our trail maintenance crews decide where to work. But not all WTA's hikes have current trip reports. We love it when intrepid hikers take the plunge onto a trail without a recent report and share their findings in a trip report when they return.

Are you one of the confident, responsible hikers we can count on to do some on-the-ground sleuthing?

Scouting Challenge
Help fellow hikers, and WTA, stay up to date on trail conditions

Weldon Wagon Road
This lesser-known trail near the Columbia River Gorge extends out along a ridge lined with weathered oak trees and vibrant wildflowers during the spring and summer. Traverse these grassy meadows and take in views of the White Salmon River valley below. The last trip report for this trail is from May, so we could use some up-to-date information on trail conditions. When you get back from your hike you can file a trip report at wta.org/go-hiking/hikes/weldon-wagon-road.

Last Time: Coyote Wall — Labyrinth Loop
Trip reporter Steve Turner hiked here at the end of November and wrote a trip report full of helpful information.

"Be prepared to share the trails with bicyclists and dogs. My experience with the above has been very positive! Everyone was considerate of others. Coyote Wall area is by far the most popular. The trail's conditions are very good," he wrote.

Photos like this one showing the trail surface help WTA’s volunteer trail crews determine which areas need maintenance.

Do you love hiking overgrown, hard-to-follow trails? How about exploring areas that haven't seen a trip report in years? If that sounds like what you’re into, WTA has a challenge for you.

Trip reports help hikers decide where to go next and help our trail maintenance crews decide where to work. But not all WTA’s hikes have current trip reports. We love it when intrepid hikers take the plunge onto a trail without a recent report and share their findings in a trip report when they return.

Are you one of the confident, responsible hikers we can count on to do some on-the-ground sleuthing?
If you’ve ever hauled a bear canister along on a backpacking trip, you know they’re sturdy. And, if you’ve ever tried to open one while tired or in the dark, you know they can be tricky to get into. But how do the manufacturers of approved bear canisters actually know that a bear can’t get into them?

The answer is straightforward. The canisters are tested by real bears. Grizzly bears, in fact, who live at the Grizzly & Wolf Discovery Center in Montana. (While hikers in Washington aren’t likely to encounter a grizzly, black bears are common. And if a grizzly can’t get into a container, it is also safe from the smaller black bears.)

For testing, the bear canister, cooler or other item is filled with tempting food (fish, berries, honey, that sort of thing) and then left with the captive grizzlies. If, after an hour of trying, the bears weren’t able to get into the container or get food, the container passes. It’s then certified by the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee (IGBC) as bear resistant. (If the bears open the container, they enjoy a snack. And presumably come back next time even more keen to do their jobs well.)

The IGBC, which is made up of federal and state agencies, was created in 1983 with the goal of keeping grizzly bears in their habitat. With that goal in mind, in 1989 the IGBC created consistent methods to test bear-resistant products to reduce human-bear conflicts. For about 15 years, that has included the bears at the Grizzly & Wolf Discovery Center.

And why is it important that a bear doesn’t get your food? (Beyond the fact that you’d then go hungry?) Well, a bear that gets human food is more likely to become dangerous to people, which gives it a higher chance of being killed or placed in captivity. In fact, the testing bears ended up in captivity because they became a problem by foraging for human food.

So, protect your lunch and protect a bear. And go watch a video of bears trying to break into bear cans — be sure to watch for their “CPR” move. You’ll know it when you see it. wta.org/beartesting.

Yes, this bear is cute. No, you do not want them to eat your food. So make sure your bear canister is certified bear-resistant.
BEAUTY NEARBY

Matthew James Ahola took this photo on the Soundview Trail, near Chambers Bay Golf Course in University Place. He loves that the area offers a lot of open space near the water for families to gather and exercise. And he appreciates the opportunities for great photos.

“I like the warm sunset, and then the geometry of the railroad tracks and bridge railings. Their converging and leading lines draw us in and out over the land, sky and water,” he said.

“I work from home and sit at a computer desk Monday through Friday. It is important to get back to nature and hike our Washington trails as often as I can. I love to exercise and get my body moving again.”
Trails are essential to our community’s mental and physical health. By supporting WTA, you help us be there for trails and hikers when it matters most. We are so grateful that you’re working with us to build trails for everyone, forever.

Thank you

Photo by Erynn Allen