



Fostering awareness and understanding of Indigenous People, geology, and natural history of the Methow Valley and beyond!



Newsletter May/June 2023

www.methowvalleyinterpretivecenter.com

Hello Friends!

I recently attended a First Roots Ceremony on the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation and was struck by something important: just how ordinary it all was, and felt. People came together around a long set of tables, chatting and passing food around, enjoying each other's company, rekindling old relationships and forming new ones. Joking, laughing, talking seriously. It was beautiful in its ordinary humanness and- and this is an important "and", it was utterly different than other such celebrations that I have attended in my own family. The food were (yes plural) honored for who they were and the gifts they offered, each coming out in the right order and way. Prayers of gratitude were given in nselxcin, the native language of many local tribes including the Methow People, and then we honored each First Food: Water, Salmon, Venison, Roots and Berries. Wild beings gratefully accepted from the wild heart of Earth, still beating loudly. We engaged in that ordinary and ancient ritual of eating with each other. Good old eating, but perhaps this time with a changed heart; one that felt the drum beat of connection we all have with each other and with the lands and waters we call home.

Wishing you deep connection with this place!

David LaFever, *Executive Director*

Looney Creek Has Gone Loony

By Isobel Kameros, Board Member

I look forward to the beautiful and gentle rebirth of Spring in the upper Methow Valley each year. Early signs for me are the yellow glacier lilies peeking their heads up through the snow, and the water melting off Sandy Butte via Looney Creek into the Early Winters ditch. This year, Looney Creek raged down Sandy Butte in multiple channels, damming the ditch with silt from runoff in multiple places. It flooded both the Davelaar neighborhood and Highway 20.

Just two summers ago, the Methow Valley experienced both the Cedar Creek Fire off of Highway 20, and the Cub Creek Fire up the Chewuch River. The Looney Creek watershed was impacted by the Cedar Creek Fire, which caused downed trees, loss of vegetative cover and erosion, leaving behind a bare and exposed mountainside. Post-fire Looney Creek carries rocks, downed trees, and soil on its way down Sandy Butte in the Spring. Multiple log jams and incised channels have been, and are still being created.

In my neighborhood, talk of Looney Creek and the flooding from Spring melt-off has been a hot topic lately. Ulrich Lane resident Rick Jones summarized the situation as follows: "Along with our good weather we are experiencing snow-melt and Looney Creek is acting, well, loony! Flooding is occurring in the Davelaar neighborhood, and the water has made its way across Early Winters ditch (covering it with silt) to Highway 20. It is flowing east down the side of the highway, threatening the lane entrances as it erodes the road."

Ulrich Lane neighbor Fred Higgins, did an investigation and provided the following: "When flow volumes increase as it did last week with high ambient air temperatures, increasing snow-melt on Sandy Butte, and with the addition of supplemental rainfall, the side channels are filled and water flows east as well as west. When stream flow volumes decrease with cooler temperatures and no supplemental rain, the water levels drop below the channels

directed to the east and the flow through the Davelaar neighborhood to the highway drainage ditch is cut off. There is currently no water flowing to the east across the bulk of the Davelaar community toward Hwy 20. In effect, these findings explain why Ulrich Lane experienced an abrupt onset of flooding as well as an abrupt cessation."

And just like that, the switch turns off and the flood waters are gone for now. Rainfall and Spring snow-melt on recently burned areas is a recipe for erosion, plugged ditches and flooding. Will there be new fires this year? And what will next Spring bring? We can only speculate, but nature will do what nature does. Water flows where it can, sculpting the land as it flows along, creating both beauty and devastation.



Looney Creek

Become a MVIC Supporter!

Your support is our lifeblood. Share our journey as we deepen connections to this place and its people.

Scan the QR code to be taken directly to our secure online donation form, or visit: www.methowvalleyinterpretivecenter.com and click the Donate button, or give by check. Make checks payable to MFI/MVIC (Methow Field Institute is the umbrella 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization for MVIC). Send your check to:
PO Box 771, Twisp, WA 98856.



Interested in being a business sponsor of MVIC? Let us know, or get more information by writing to us at mvinterpretivecenter@gmail.com

If you're already a supporter, we appreciate your generosity!

Origins of the Methow Valley Interpretive Center:

Two Hearts Beating as One

By George Wooten, Board Vice
President and David LaFever, Executive
Director

The foundational stories of any organization can be mythologized, but are also all too often forgotten. To understand where the Methow Valley Interpretive Center (MVIC) comes from we have to begin long before there was such a thing, going back to the 1990s and listening for the beating hearts of the Methow Field Institute and the Two Rivers Reconciliation. One heart beating for love of the natural environment and conservation; the other heart beating for care of Indigenous People and an acknowledgement of the past. Both the Interpretive Center itself and our many programs beat with these same hearts together, with care and love for this place.

Currently, the MVIC operates under the 501(c)3 nonprofit name Methow Field Institute (MFI) as

a way of honoring that part of our history. Founded by Dr. Mary Poss, a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine and eminent geneticist, the MFI responded to the needs for a science-based organization to engage with National Forests as they shifted away from extractive values (such as timber) toward habitat conservation. This was driven by the decline of spotted owls, Canada lynx, grizzly bears, wolverines, whitebark pine, and other species. One of our earliest MFI programs was in the summer of 1994, when Mary Poss and Bill Layman organized Artists in the Forest, a 2-day event at Black Pine Lake, where scientists and artists collaborated to learn from one another and create art inspired by nature. Later, copies of the artwork became a traveling exhibit throughout the State of Washington.

During that event, Mary organized a hike into the still smoldering Thunder Mountain fire. The 8,000 acre Thunder Mountain Fire burned in the high elevation rolling mountains of the Okanogan Range east of the Chewuch River. This area is an outstanding example of boreal (northern) forests. They are dominated by stands of fire-dependent lodgepole pine and open meadows, with pockets of old growth



Thunder Fire stream survey workshop led by Charlie Dewberry (in the stream) and MFI founder, Mary Poss (bandana)

spruce within a matrix of wetlands, and dominated by Tiffany Mountain. The Thunder Mountain Fire heavily influenced MFI's direction because the Okanogan Range, which was and still is a stronghold of Canada lynx in the western U.S. was targeted for large-scale logging at that time.

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After parts of the Thunder Mountain Fire were salvage logged, MFI received a Murdock grant for a five-year vegetation monitoring comparison between logged and unlogged forests. During the monitoring period, many workshops were held, and in winter, Mary led tracking surveys into the fire perimeter and nearby Pasayten Wilderness. On one trip, a grizzly bear and cub were spotted; one of the last documented sightings in Washington. Between 1994 and 2002, our research involved approximately 100 volunteers and paid consultants.

Fast forward to 2010, 16 years after the Thunder Mountain Fire. A group of people with interests as varied as the Methow Valley itself, banded together to put together a center that

would lie at the heart of the valley, located in Twisp, to address the need to educate ourselves and others about the valley we live in.

In the early 2000s, Glenn and Carolyn Schmekel, sought out and worked with several Indigenous Methow People as well as other Colville Tribal members to re-connect the original inhabitants of the Methow Valley with the current residents of the Valley. This story is told in a documentary DVD called "Two Rivers" which has been shown on PBS affiliates over the past few years and is available for streaming at the MVIC website, www.methowvalleyinterpretivecenter.com. For seven years, the "Heart of the Methow Traditional Powwow" was held in the Twisp Park, and a team of tribal members together with non-tribal folks hosted 300+ people for feasting and dancing on an August weekend.

One Methow elder, Spencer Martin, spoke with great sorrow about how the young people of their band have no idea where their families come from or how they used to live. He said "They don't know who they are." That loss of family and tribal identity has left a hole, and this elder felt that young people could be helped by regaining that sense of connection to a past that is rich. As newer residents of this lovely valley, the Schmekels looked for ways to give the descendants of the Methow Tribe a place where they could bring their children and say "here is our story, here is where we lived." There was also a need to safeguard their history in a permanent place and share it with the more recent arrivals in the Methow Valley.

The idea of creating an interpretive center as a solution came in response to a casual visit to Ocean Shores, WA, where Glenn and Carolyn visited a local interpretive center. It was a feast to be had in a very small area. The center featured geological history, rocks, shells, bird life, plant life, native history, a fascinating history of shipwrecks, the life cycle of the razor clam and how to dig them, and much more. The better part of an hour was spent with the exhibits curator, Gene Woodwick, who explained how the center began and how it was organized and funded.

Here was the perfect prototype for what could happen in the Methow Valley. Our small valley had so much to offer, but no central place that educates and inspires about the natural beauty all around. The Schmekels returned with a bigger vision – to tell a full spectrum story from how the valley was created, to what plants and animals are native to the area, to weather, water and a place to share the stories of the Indigenous Methow People and how they traditionally lived.

Months later, the idea for a Methow Valley Interpretive Center was presented to the Twisp Public Development Authority Board. Another presenter, Jim Brennan, was also in attendance. He was proposing a Native American cultural section for the PDA

(TwispWorks) campus. A happy coincidence! The PDA accepted MVIC as a partner and the Okanogan County Historical Society brought MVIC under their 501c3. The Methow Valley Interpretive Center became a reality.

Today's Methow Valley Interpretive Center brings together the heart and history of the Methow Field Institute and the Two Rivers Reconciliation, to foster understanding and awareness of the Methow People, and the geology and natural history of this place. The one heart that now beats is the love that we all feel for this place that we call home!

Upcoming MVIC Events

Sunday, May 28, 4pm-6pm: Walk in the Native Plant Garden and Salmon Ponds with Board Vice President George Wooten. Based on his research with the North Cascades Grizzly Bear Ecosystem habitat evaluation, George will attempt to answer the question: What did east Cascades grizzlies eat? Meet in the Native Plant Garden at TwispWorks.

Sunday, June 11, 5pm: Lynx Vilden presents "Return—A Journey Back to Living Wild", the title of her new book.

Saturday, June 24: Pateros Salmon Bake. Come check out the MVIC table and Indigenous crafts, and support Methow descendants.

Sunday, July 9 5pm-6:30pm: "What the River Says", a writing workshop with author and poet Subhaga Crystal Bacon.

October (exact date TBD): Ralph Dawes presentation on the melting of the Okanogan river glacier.

Stay current with our upcoming events by following us on Facebook and Instagram (@methowvalleyinterpretivecenter) or by signing up for our electronic newsletter. To subscribe to our newsletter, go to www.methowvalleyinterpretivecenter.com and click "Subscribe to MVIC newsletters and updates here!" on the right side of the page.

Telling the Winter's Tale

By Bruce Morrison, Board President

After a long winter here in the Methow Valley, a large group gathered at the Winthrop Barn on an April evening to honor p'squosa/wenatchi elder, Randy Lewis; to hear stories that only he can tell, and to watch a film that weaves one of Randy's many stories with geologic places and events along the Columbia River. Randy is no mere mortal but one of those rare elders who sat at the feet of his own elders and listened. He listened to stories, teachings, and the meaning behind the words being spoken in the native language of his people, nxaʔamxčín . He now passes these words along, keeping them alive through his own words, which are at once deeply potent and infused with humor.



p'squosa/wenatchi elder, Randy Lewis in front of the crowd

The Winter's Tale is a film that takes its name from a time-honored practice when, in the deep of winter, a tribal elder would gather the young people around and begin to tell a story - a story about the land, about the powers of the animals roaming through it and about the relationship of the people to it all. These stories would unfold over not just hours, but over a period of days, delivered with a sense of poetry, a cadence that captivated the young listeners and imprinted on them deeply, connecting them to the land and to

their own heritage in ways that would remain with them their entire lives. Ultimately, these stories would be told again in the deep of winter to the generations not yet born.

These stories still exist today and the purpose of this story-to-film project is to capture them in a form that can captivate the modern young mind. Through native storyteller Randy Lewis, it is possible still to connect our youth to the lands, to imbue them with a sense of awe, wonder and respect. This project seeks to endow students with the skills to become modern storytellers and to deliver those stories through the channels of today – in classrooms, through TVs and YouTube – all while preserving these stories forever.

In this story from a time long, long ago, twins are born named Red Star and Blue Star, who are quickly hidden away by Salmon People in order to be safe and to learn what they need to know. Through a series of visits from various teachers, the twins learn to use their power which will be needed in order to defeat the river dragon, Spexman. Randy said that during his childhood the twins were their superheroes. Can they defeat Spexman and make the world safe for all the other beings, including humans? We will leave the thrilling conclusion for now but the story is written in the geology of the Columbia River from downriver from Ribbon Cliffs past Moses Coulee.



Spexman

Geology, superheroes, myths and more come together in both the film *The Winter's Tale* and the book "Red Star and Blue Star Defeat Spexman."

As our Valley fills with more and more folks who carry their own stories from different places, cultures and times, those told by a Native elder might go unheard and be lost. And these stories might be all the more important because they come from this very place. We waited three years to show this film, and hear the ancient story of the Hero Twins' defeat of the spexman. As the barn filled with our friends, neighbors, and new faces, Randy sat like a rock in the riverbed, greeting the guests that streamed past him, speaking in his clear, strong voice, using his graceful hands to frame the words, bringing the light of these wenatchi stories into clear view. Randy gave us the gift of deeper ground in his resonance with the earth, the Big River and his ancestors. Driving home after *The Winter's Tale* I felt held by the familiar hills and bends in the river, sensing the lost stories embedded in our landscape.

Thank you for joining us that night if you were able to attend and lamlam't to Randy for teaching us yet again this deep way of being human. If you want to learn more about this story, please pick up a copy of Randy's book "Red Star and Blue Star Defeat Spexman" which is available in our bookstore and by request.

Leave a Legacy!

We hope that the work that the Methow Valley Interpretive Center does touches your life in many positive ways.

We recently set up a fund so that we are able to receive endowment donations. If you believe in the work that we do and are interested in setting up a planned gift to the Interpretive Center, we would be happy to answer any questions you may have, or help you get started. Please contact David LaFever at mvinterpretivecenter@gmail.com.

Time of the Balsamroot Seeds - míktuʔtan ("Time of Sunflower seeds")

By David LaFever, Executive Director



Arrowleaf balsamroot

As hot days arrive for the first time this year, blossoms spring to beauty and the river floods low-lying and recently restored areas. The beauty of mountain sides, painted in arrowleaf balsamroots have stopped me in my tracks many times recently and they are very much on my mind. With proper pollination, sunflower seeds will soon be offered by these generous plants which are an important part of the Methow People's seasonal food cycle. Sunflower seeds, also called míktuʔ are gathered, dried and then pounded during míktuʔtan (time of the sunflower seeds) to save as a winter food (often mixed with other foods to make a porridge). Methow Elder Elaine Emerson says that this is where the name for the Methow People comes from - mətʰwə , and that this food is a special thing that is offered to elders during the important storytelling months of winter.

This is a taprooted perennial plant whose branching, barky root may extend over six feet underground. The plant's native range extends from British Columbia and Alberta in the north, southwards as far as northern Arizona and the Mojave Desert of California, and as far east as the Black Hills of South Dakota. It grows in many types of habitat from mountain forests to grassland to desert scrub.

The many different parts of this plant have their own names and ethnobotanical uses as both food and medicine. Roots, shoots, leaves, and seeds all have their uses. Deer, elk, bighorn sheep and many other species graze and browse this plant. While pollination happens by many means including wind and insects, pollination is mainly driven by native bees. Arrowleaf balsamroot offers so much to our world - beauty, food, nectar, medicine, and the power of telling time. We name businesses and events after this plant and use her image as a potent symbol. All these uses, all these gifts and I wonder what can we offer in return, in gratitude and in reciprocity?



Flourishing during mǫktuʔtan

Come and visit us!

The Methow Valley Interpretive Center is now open for Summer hours:

Fridays: 4th Fridays of the month 1pm-7pm (May-Sep),

other Fridays 1pm-4pm (Jun 30-Sep 1)

Saturdays 10am-4pm

Sundays 12pm-4pm

Admission is always free, but donations are much appreciated!

210 5th Ave, Twisp, Washington

Mailing address: PO Box 771, Twisp WA 98856 Ph: (509) 997-0620 Email:

mvinterpretivecenter@gmail.com