CASCADE FOREST
CONSERVANCY

2023 ANNUAL REPORT

OUR MISSION:

THE CASCADE FOREST CONSERVANCY **PROTECTS AND SUSTAINS** THE FORESTS, STREAMS, WILDLIFE, AND COMMUNITIES IN **THE HEART OF THE CASCADES** THROUGH CONSERVATION, EDUCATION, AND ADVOCACY.

OUR STAFF:

Molly Whitney	Executive Director
Shiloh Halsey	Director of Programs
Ashley Short	Policy Manager
Amanda Keasberry	Science and Stewardship Manager
Suzanne Whitney	Grants and Restoration Manager
Bryn Gray Harding	Communications Manager
Mona Lindsey	Accountant
Alexandria Schmidt	2023 Summer Intern
Katie Aiello	Volunteer and Outreach Coordinator since May ‘24
Debra Goldberg	Stewardship Coordinator through Dec. ‘23
Sean Roome	Campaign Coordinator through Dec. ‘23

BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

Nathan Reynolds	Board Chair
Susan Jane Brown	Board Vice Chair
Don Lloyd	Treasurer
Mark Soutter	Secretary
John Miller	Director
Allen Poole	Director
Bob Robison	Director
Heather Gordon	Director as of Feb. ‘24
Jennifer Gilden	Director as of Feb. ‘24
Threrse Burcsu	Director through Feb. ‘24

A NOTE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

CFC is the only non-profit organization focused entirely on protecting and restoring ecosystems in the southern Washington Cascades. As our Vision Statement says,

“We are working to see that our region is one where native life—flora, fauna, microbes, and the entire biota—thrive in healthy biodiverse forests and aquatic ecosystems.

We strive for a region made resilient to the effects of climate change–one that is sustainably managed and supports the economies of flourishing rural communities through recreation, tourism, and competent caring use, so that it may continue to inspire and nourish for centuries to come.”

Working towards and achieving a comprehensive vision like ours requires a wide variety of approaches, programs, and initiatives. On any given day of 2023, you may have found our staff meeting with elected officials, negotiating the details of an upcoming timber sale, collecting data in the field for a new scientific study, planning events and film festivals, or even trapping beavers and relocating them to carefully selected corners of the forest.

Once again we achieved far more in a year than we can fit into the pages of this report. Instead of attempting to cover the entire breadth of our programs, we will highlight a few projects that serve as powerful examples of how we work and what we were able to accomplish in 2023.

We’ll discuss how we built non-traditional partnerships that are transforming aquatic systems. We’ll show you how our staff and volunteers worked together to protect mature and old-growth forests from proposed timber harvest, how we secured historic new protections for one of Washington’s most pristine (and most threatened) rivers, and how a community of volunteers worked alongside our staff to radically improve and transform profoundly degraded but critically important salmon habitat.

CFC reached a new level of success last year. I’m so proud of what our team, partners, and supporters accomplished. We couldn’t have done it without you - we appreciate each person who donated, volunteered, and took action to help us protect and defend the heart of the Cascades.

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Molly Whitney
Cascade Forest Conservancy
Executive Director

NEW COHORTS OF **SALMON ARE SURVIVING** THANKS TO VOLUNTEERS' WORK AT STUMP CREEK

Our volunteers are the backbone of our on-the-ground science and restoration projects. Thanks to their dedication and hard work, we are already seeing dramatic improvements to project sites throughout the Cascades in southern Washington, including a positive transformation of a stretch of Stump Creek flowing through private timber lands, where volunteers spent three weekends transforming a badly degraded waterway into a place that is now giving generations of salmon a better chance than they have had since the 1980 eruption of Mount St. Helens.

Stump Creek flows from the foothills on the western slopes of Mount St. Helens through the national forest and privately owned timber land before joining the South Fork Toutle River. Every year, salmon make the 100-mile (and notably un-dammed) journey from the Pacific Ocean to Stump Creek to spawn. Because salmon in our region are facing increasing pressure from climate change and habitat degradation, un-dammed spawning habitats like the South Fork Toutle and its tributaries are more important than ever. However, what we found when we initially surveyed the project site on private timber land was disheartening.

Fish that make it to Stump Creek in the winter find a flowing stream with many channels ideal for spawning. Initially, newly hatched fry have plenty of water to swim and forage. But by late summer, the creek begins to dry up, leaving juvenile salmon stranded in small pools. During visits to Stump Creek, we found many dried-out stream reaches containing piles of desiccated salmon fry. For this reason and its degraded state, Stump Creek has been a high priority for CFC and project partner, Lower Columbia Fish Enhancement Group.

Working together, we designed a project to create habitat complexity and help the steam to retain water throughout the year by transforming the site using low-tech process-based restoration techniques. With the plans in place, 45 volunteers contributed 365 hours of work over three weekends to build 32 structures along a 1500-foot reach of steam.

We began to see results almost immediately. When we returned to the site after the first heavy rains in November, we found every structure we had built had remained in place and was working as intended! The structures volunteers built were creating new channels and directing the flow of water in the way we had designed, capturing and holding sediment, and creating new, deep pools. Our beaver dam analogs were also in place and working as intended, creating a series of cascading pools and spreading water outside the existing channel. Most exciting of all, we saw six adult coho salmon using these new habitat features!

A follow-up survey the following summer provided further evidence that the work of CFC's volunteers is making a difference for salmon. We counted six juvenile coho in an un-restored section of Stump Creek, and more than 380 individuals in the areas where work had been done!

254 individuals volunteered 2,032 hours to conservation and restoration projects in 2023

Invasive plants removed from stream-side and old-growth habitats: **250 gal.**

Trees and shrubs planted to support habitat recovery projects: **1,950**

Amphibians recorded during stream surveys: **31**

Want to learn about becoming a Science and Restoration Volunteer?

www.CascadeForest.org/volunteer

Stump Creek: Before and after low-tech, process-based restoration

1. Prior to the efforts of CFC staff and volunteers, stretches of Stump Creek were found to be badly degraded, lacking in habitat complexity, and regularly dry by late summer. Desiccated bodies of juvenile coho salmon were found throughout the dried out streambed.

2. We returned to Stump Creek after heavy November rains and found that the structures built by staff and volunteers were working as intended and had remained in place. We even saw large adult coho salmon swimming in the newly constructed pools and channels!

3. While conducting a survey the following year, we counted more than 380 juvenile coho salmon in the sections of Stump Creek that volunteers had worked to restore, compared to only six in an unimproved section of the waterway—a dramatic illustration of how much impact volunteer-powered restoration can have for local wildlife!

Learn more about low-tech, process-based restoration in Chapter 3 of CFC's **Conservation Guidebook**.

www.CascadeForest.org/guidebook

Continued monitoring: Although this project was designed with aquatic species in mind, improvements to the creek may positively impact a wide variety of species. We carried out surveys for amphibians to better understand other types of habitat improvements, and we also left a series of motion-triggered wildlife cameras around Stump Creek to observe and record the presence of wildlife in the project area. So far, our cameras have recorded images of bears, coyotes, bobcats, deer, elk, bald eagles, and a number of other native species.

OUR COALITION ACHIEVED **HISTORIC NEW PROTECTIONS** FOR THE GREEN RIVER

Thanks to years of advocacy, organizing, cooperation, and collaboration, the upper reaches of the Green River are more protected today than they have been at any point in Washington State's history.

That's because on December 18th, 2023, upper portions of the Green River, along with Soap Lake and sections of the Cascade River and the Napeequa River, became Washington's first Outstanding Resource Waters, a status that grants these waterways strong protections from any new pollution under the Clean Water Act.

The Green River, which flows from the foothills of Mount St. Helens into the North Fork Toutle River, Cowlitz River, and finally into the Columbia River, is a place we've been working to protect for a long time. It's a pristine waterway that's a genebank for wild steelhead and a place loved by hikers, cyclists, backcountry hunters, anglers, horseback riders, and foragers. But, for the past several decades, this place has been continually threatened due to repeated attempts by mining corporations to prospect for gold, copper, and other mineral resources in the area.

The Green River's new status as an Outstanding Resource Water means that any new developments or activities permitted in the area cannot negatively impact water quality. While this doesn't explicitly prohibit mining in the area, it does mean that any future attempts to secure mining or prospecting permits will be more expensive to apply for and less likely to be granted.

This designation is a huge win for forests, fish, and wildlife in the area, and also for all of us who enjoy the unique beauty and solitude that can be found here. Achieving this victory was not a quick or easy task. Our coalition spent a year researching this issue and building support before nominating the three rivers through Washington's Department of Ecology. Once Ecology agreed to consider our recommendations, our campaign kicked into overdrive! We built a strong network of support among business and non-profit partners, spoke with elected officials, and held public events where we helped concerned Washingtonians take action to speak up in favor of strong protections for the nominated rivers. We also received written support from the Cowlitz Indian Tribe. In the end, even objections from mining interests, timber companies, and a handful of county leaders weren't enough to overcome the strength of the research behind our proposal or the strong levels of public support expressed for the creation of the first Outstanding Resource Water designations in the state.

The years of work that finally resulted in new river protections last December shows that our persistence and collaborative approach to advocacy makes a lasting difference for rivers and wildlife in our region!

Mount St. Helens NO PLACE FOR A MINE:

The Green River's new designation as an Outstanding Resource Water doesn't explicitly mining activities. The best way to protect the Green River Valley and nearby Mount St. Helens from a dangerous open-pit mine is to successfully advocate for a mineral withdrawal. Learn more and sign our petition to tell Congress and the Administration that Mount St. Helens is NO PLACE FOR A MINE by visiting: **www.GreenRiverValleyAlliance.org**

watercolor by Lindsey Fox

WE ADVOCATED FOR **CLIMATE CHANGE RESILIENT** FORESTS

Members of the South Gifford Pinchot Forest Collaborative during a field trip

We ensure that treasures like old-growth western redcedar at Lost Creek are protected

Through 2023, Cascade Forest Conservancy remained closely involved in conversations about plans for timber sales in our region, most notably, the Little White Salmon Forest Resiliency and Fire Risk Mitigation Project. This is being planned across a vast area of the southern half of the Gifford Pinchot National Forest.

The Little White Salmon Planning Area is named after the Little White Salmon River, a 19-mile-long tributary of the Columbia River. This river flows from its headwaters in the Monte Cristo Range through the entire planning area. This part of the forest sits in a transitional zone between the wetter forests typically found west of the Cascade crest and the drier forests found to the east. That means the forest stands where harvests are being considered are on the frontlines of debates and research into which forest management strategies are most beneficial for climate change adaptation. How these forests fare in the coming years and decades will depend on what we're doing now.

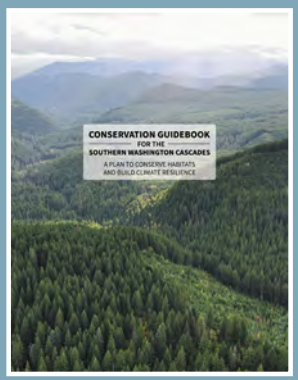
In some areas, forest managers hope to mitigate threats from wildfire or increased drought and disease by reducing the density of trees. While we have offered support for targeted thinning (and prescribed burning) in forest stands such as the mixed-conifer forests of the Upper White timber sale, this current planning area presents more complications, and the value of active management is much less understood. We are working with our partners to find areas where experimental approaches are less likely to cause undue harm, such as younger stands lacking mature forest complexity, and we are identifying areas that we feel are best left protected to continue on their natural trajectory, such as older stands that are already exhibiting early old-growth traits.

Cascade Forest Conservancy is a founding member of the South Gifford Pinchot Forest Collaborative–an organization that facilitates conversations among the Forest Service, Tribes, counties, timber companies, local businesses, individuals, and conservation organizations to discuss the details of upcoming actions in the Mount Adams District of the Gifford Pinchot National Forest.

Since the beginning of the project, Cascade Forest Conservancy has been engaging with the Collaborative and the Forest Service, asking critical questions and examining the models, science, and assumptions being used to make decisions. After submitting official comments for the first round of planning, we continued our direct engagement with the Forest Service and the Collaborative.

We also ventured into the Little White Salmon watershed to examine the forest areas proposed for treatment. We took trips with the Collaborative, one-on-one with the Forest Service, and with volunteers to gather data on some of the mature forest stands proposed for treatment. We have coordinated and/or taken part in these trips to ensure actions by the Forest Service will help these transitional forests become more resilient to climate change while minimizing the harms associated with active management. We have already seen the plan improve as a result of our work and new federal guidance, and we are hopeful that the environmental assessment and final plans will incorporate even more of our direct feedback.

Plans for climate resilience



In 2024, after a long period of research and deliberation, we developed a series of science-based and achievable strategies to preserve and support wildlife and human communities living in the southern Washington Cascades as the climate changes.

Our research and recommendations were compiled in our freely available **Conservation Guidebook for the Southern Washington Cascades: A Plan to Conserve Habitat and Build Climate Resilience** (published 2024).

Read CFC's **Conservation Guidebook**
www.CascadeForest.org/guidebook

THE INSTREAM WOOD BANK **BUILT UNLIKELY PARTNERSHIPS AND AMPLIFIED THE IMPACT OF RESTORATION WORK** ACROSS OUR REGION

Conversation and cooperation among groups and organizations (including and especially between those who don't always see eye-to-eye on issues impacting our wildlife, ecosystems, and communities) are critical steps for lasting conservation.

Through the Instream Wood Bank, Cascade Forest Conservancy continued to work as conveners and collaborators, amplifying the impact of restoration work across our region by building unlikely partnerships, strengthening existing relationships, and bringing different parties together to create situations that are a win for all involved.

The Instream Wood Bank addresses several challenges facing aquatic ecosystems. A combination of factors, including streamside logging, has left many waterways without the fallen logs and woody debris that many species, including salmon and trout, depend on. The presence of instream wood helps store water in river systems longer into the dry season, and it creates deep, cool pools that are vital to temperature-sensitive fish. Instream restoration, in many cases, seeks to increase the amount of wood in our streams. However, restoration professionals often encounter significant obstacles in sourcing wood for their projects.

The Wood Bank sources and stores non-sellable wood and employs local contractors to haul materials to storage locations or aquatic restoration project sites throughout the region. In 2023, we moved 1,650 logs and helped restoration partners, including the Yakama Nation, Underwood Conservation District, and Lower Columbia Fish Enhancement Group. We helped partners save a total of $155,944 over market value.

The wood we provided to partners in 2023 was primarily sourced from Weyerhaeuser and a variety of small landowners. Instead of processing un-sellable logs into pulp or sawdust, Weyerhaeuser offered them to the Wood Bank. Partnerships with timber companies and local landowners allowed us to expand the scale of aquatic restoration throughout southwest Washington and nullified the dilemma faced by restoration professionals who had been forced to weigh the costs of felling living trees to source materials necessary for aquatic habitat restoration efforts.

The growing success of the Instream Wood Bank, in addition to other initiatives like our work in local forest collaboratives, demonstrates that working together to find common ground among people and organizations with divergent interests, incentives, and perspectives can lead to outcomes that benefit all involved, including the wildlife and communities in our region.

A win-win for fish, conservationists, communities, and timber companies

1. We locate and secure non-merchantable wood for aquatic restoration projects throughout our region. Securing and repurposing logs with little commercial value—like those downed by storms, removed for development, or waiting to become firewood, paper pulp, or sawdust—reduces the costs and climate impacts of instream restoration projects.

2. Local contractors are hired to haul logs. When possible, we deliver logs directly from their source locations to project sites. We also developed a network of 'wood banks' where logs that are not immediately transported to the project site are stored until needed.

3. Logs are supplied to agencies, Tribes, restoration professionals, and conservation organizations at a cost significantly below market value—which supports the Wood Bank and helps our partners do more with their project budgets than would be possible otherwise.

Learn more about the Instream Wood Bank Network

www.InstreamWoodBankNetwork.com

Where the Instream Wood Bank is making a difference

Helping salmon across the state: Since getting its start in 2020, the Instream Wood Bank has supported partners' projects across the region, including: (1) the Cowlitz Indian Tribe's project at Wildboy Creek, (2) Lower Columbia Fish Enhancement Groups' work on the South Fork Toutle River, and (3)s Friends of the East Fork Lewis's work on the East Fork Lewis River, and others.

OUR 2023 FINANCES WERE **STRONG AND SUSTAINABLE**

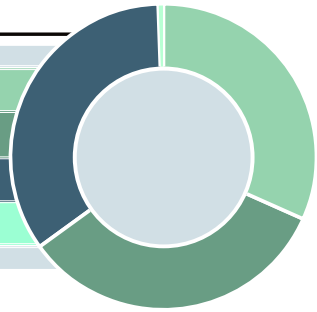
Cascade Forest Conservancy continued to grow while remaining financially sustainable.

While our expenses were stable, giving from individual donors continued to increase over the year before.

As a non-profit organization, we depend on the generosity of granting organizations, supporting businesses, and thousands of individuals across the Pacific Northwest to continue protecting and restoring habitats across the southern Washington Cascades.

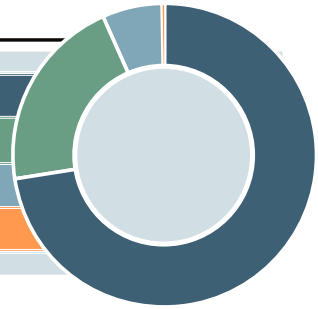
TOTAL INCOME: $827,570

INDIVIDUAL GIVING:	$262,829
GRANTS UNRESTRICTED:	$276,000
GRANTS RESTRICTED:	$285,724
OTHER:	$3,017



TOTAL EXPENSE: $792,583

PROGRAMS:	$577,340
ADMINISTRATIVE:	$164,080
FUNDRAISING AND EVENTS:	$50,760
LOBBYING:	$1,630



Cascade Forest Conservancy makes a difference for forests, streams, and wildlife because of people like you.

Thanks to the generosity of people like you, Cascade Forest Conservancy has preserved thousands of acres of mature and old-growth forests, safeguarded and restored hundreds of miles of waterways, and protected and enhanced biodiversity throughout the southern Washington Cascades.

Today, climate change is threatening life in our region like never before. But together we can protect carbon-sequestering mature and old-growth trees, restore degraded habitats, and enhance the wildness and connectivity of our region—making the heart of the Cascades resilient to the impacts of our changing world so that it can sustain and inspire us for generations to come.

Join us by becoming a sustaining monthly donor or giving a one-time gift today by using the remit envelope in this report or by visiting us online at **www.cascadeforest.org/donate**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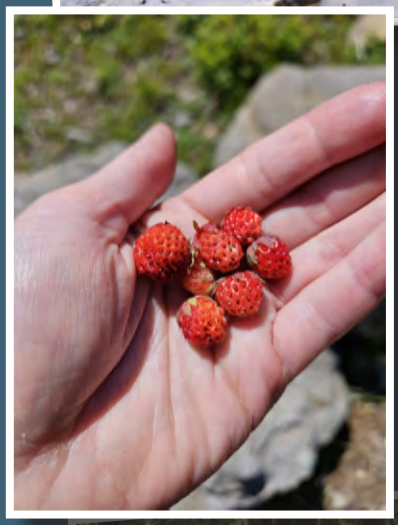

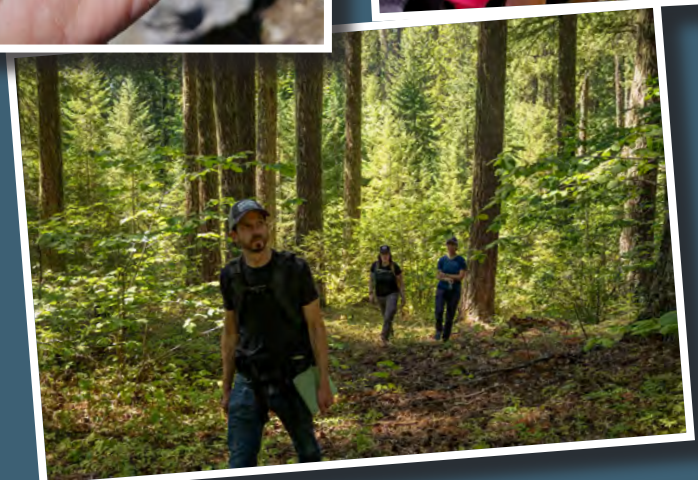

WE WORK ON **NATIVE LAND**

Land within the area we work, now referred to as the southern Washington Cascades, is the home of diverse and unique Indigenous communities. There are, and were, numerous Tribes and Bands with ties to the area, some of which include the Mishalpam, Táytnapam, Sƛpúlmx (Lower Cowlitz); Cathlamet, Multnomah, Cascades, Chinook, Nisqually, Puyallup, Squaxin Island and Steilacoom, Wasco, Wishram, Xwáłxwaypam (Klikitat), Wayám, Skínpah, Q'miłpah, and Yakama.

Many of these groups were displaced and consolidated, and few received federal recognition. Some descendants of these groups are today citizens of federally recognized Tribes, including the Cowlitz Indian Tribe, Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, Nisqually Indian Community, and the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation.

Indigenous traditions of land and resource management fostered iconic landscapes and rich species abundance.

Recognizing these stewards and their deep ecological knowledge—while acknowledging the historic and continuing injustices committed against them—is an important part of ensuring our work is conducted in an equitable manner.

As we join in the work of stewarding this land, we appreciate the history, resilience, and persistence of Indigenous communities and the important role they continue to play in our region.

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WWW.CASCADEFOREST.ORG