



NEWSLETTER: August
2022

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FOSTERING AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE, GEOLOGY, AND NATURAL HISTORY OF THE METHOW VALLEY AND BEYOND!

Healing Waters

Greetings Methow Valley and Beyond!

I can't believe that it is August already! The heat that we've experience lately has both sapped my energy and enlivened me by forcing escapes to cool waters. Without the heat, I would not have come to understand, yet again, the healing and rejuvenating effects of water. As a medicine, water has restored me to balance by transforming a withered being into an enlivened creature. Sitting by the banks of the amazing *nmetxwít^w*, Methow River, I wonder about all the water and where it comes from. And where is it going? What stories does it have to tell?

Every drop has a life of its own, a story colored by its meetings and we can no more see the drops in the river than we can see the river which shifts from season to season, year to year so that we scarcely know it.

~ Robin Wall Kimmerer

With gratitude to all the waters, flowing and still, and all the stories and lives that meet here in this place.

Keep meeting, keep connecting!

David LaFever, Executive Director

Mountain Goats - Creatures of the High Mountains

By Bruce Morrison, Board President

High on some ledge above you on any alpine trail in the North Cascades there is likely a mountain goat watching. The color of winter, this iconic creature of the high mountains is unmatched at surviving where most other animals would freeze, fall or starve. Special adaptations, including toes with hard shells and spongy foot pads that keep them from slipping, allow them to climb free solo on cliffs too hazardous for even agile predators, and to do so within hours of their birth. Goat kids will face blizzards, storm winds and avalanches a few months after birth. Deadly, sharp, curving horns help with defense against any predator that comes too close. They nibble on lichen and drink snow to make it through the winter when most plants are deep under drifts. Working the margins of survival, they claim terrain with more views than amenities.

Mountain goats were far more plentiful before they were hunted to near extinction by early miners and settlers. Rifles could reach where bows and spears could not. There are stories of an even larger race of

goats that were the first to go. Goat hunting on the alpine crags was literally the high point in the seasonal harvest cycle of the Indigenous Methow People for thousands of years. They coveted the rich meat, soft wool and valuable horns of mountain goats.

Elaine Timentwa Emerson tells how her father – who was not a Methow, was honored to go on a s̓x̓wə́łiʔ (mountain goat) hunt here. Their leader, an elder with a crippled leg who wore moccasins, led them onto thin ledges high above the upper Methow Valley. Dizzy and thirsty, he finally got a shot. The goat fell, bouncing off ledges, all the way to the rockslide far below. They climbed carefully down to find it remarkably intact. When the elder joined them, he led them in singing the Mountain Goat Song. While they carried the heavy animal back to camp, one person ran ahead. The tribe's members lined up beside the trail to welcome the revered animal with its song.

You can see a rare mountain goat skull in our wildlife display at the Methow Valley Interpretive Center. It was found in a remote basin above timberline at the head of Twisp River where an avalanche likely caught it, partially crushing the skull. Each skull, footprint, basket, arrowhead and display has a story to tell, a song to sing. Come give them a listen!

Curious about the earth deep beneath your feet?



Come check out the geology display at the Interpretive Center! We have samples of rocks and minerals found in this area, for you to touch and feel, and geology maps to see where these rocks and minerals are found. We even have geology maps for purchase for you to take home!



Photo by Nate Bacon

Connection to Land and Water is Sacred

By David LaFever, Executive Director

Last month, we were honored to host several members of the Lower Similkameen Indian Band (smelqmix), a First Nation in Canada who came down to share with us their recent declaration of an Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area in the Ashnola River watershed. Starting high in the Pasayten Wilderness, the Ashnola River flows north into the Similkameen River, a tributary of the Okanogan River. Co-sponsors of the event included two Indigenous-led nonprofits, Aboriginal Outfitters and the Indigenous Roots & Reparation Foundation and two Methow Valley nonprofits, the Methow Conservancy and the Methow Valley Citizens' Council.



Photo by Tiffany Ban

The Ashnola Declaration is one of the most inspiring documents I have read in a very long time. In it, the smelqmix upholds their inherent jurisdiction to protect and manage their territories according to smelqmix / syilx law - for the water, the land, all beings, the ancestors and future generations. Their sacred connection to land and water is outlined with clarity and precision through sharing of their language and story systems as are the inherent rights to self-determination as outlined in Canadian law.

Prior to Rob Edward and Lauren Terbasket talking about the Ashnola Declaration, a small group of us traveled up the Chewuch River to the road's end. This is where the Methow and Similkameen People traveled back and forth. As we stood there in the hot sun looking up the drainages and steep mountainsides, we wondered how the People did it. Did they travel up the drainages or along the ridges? How different did this place look back then? Wiping sweat from our foreheads, we could only imagine.

Where does the name nʔaysnúlaʔxʷ ("Ashnola") come from? And what is the deep connection between the Methow and Similkameen People? When asked, Lauren Terbasket said that her people think it is probably a corruption of the name of the legendary savior of their people, ʕačxwúlaxʷ, who came down the river, out of the mountains from the Methow. Their people had been decimated by disease, leaving only the very young and very old. There were plenty of animals, yet they were starving with winter coming soon. ʕačxwúlaxʷ was a skilled and generous hunter, bringing them hunted and gathered foods. He stayed with them all winter, supplying them with food and saving the tribe. They still revere him and feel a deep kinship with the indigenous Methow People, with whom they are twined in lives, memories and cultures.

Please stop by the Interpretive Center and pick up a free copy of the Ashnola Declaration.

Join us for "Last Sunday" talks in September and October

Vanishing Ice with Dr. Bob Carson,
September 18th at 5:00pm.

Mycorrhizae, Forest Ecology, and
Mushrooms with Helen Lau (US Forest
Service), October 8th at 5:00pm. Optional
field trip beforehand (time to be
announced).

Obsessed with Obsidian - MVIC to Conduct Exciting Research Involving Obsidian, in the Methow Valley

By Rich Davis, Archaeology Advisor to the Methow Field Institute, Methow Valley Interpretive Center, Lead on the Methow Artifact Research Project



Obsidian - It's an amazing, imported stone with a mysterious and intriguing history in the Methow Valley.

Glassy black in appearance and valued worldwide by toolmakers due to its ability to allow the creation of super-sharp edges, obsidian has been a valued stone throughout human history. Volcanic in origin and requiring specific conditions to form, obsidian in its finest form was traded across long distances both in the Americas and worldwide. In the Methow Valley, obsidian does not occur naturally and, in fact, tool grade obsidian in Washington is extremely rare. Thus, when we find tools or flakes of this material locally, we wonder where it came from.

Scientists, mineralogists, and archaeologists are fortunate in that obsidian sourcing is both possible and accurate. Obsidian has inherent characteristics that make each source identifiable by non-destructive methods (non-destructive energy dispersive x-ray fluorescence, for example). This type of analysis is

used to determine the trace and selected minor element composition of geological obsidian samples and archaeological artifacts made from obsidian. This ability to determine accurately the area of origin of each piece of obsidian allows us to determine how it moves from location to location throughout time. In addition, some artifacts of obsidian can be "hydration dated" making it possible to determine when the tool was made.

Projectile points (arrowheads, spear points and the like) generally have stylistic attributes which can be used to place a particular form within a "general" chronologic period, meaning we can usually identify the era in which the style was made. Coupling that ability with obsidian hydration dating can tell researchers approximately when the obsidian tool might have been traded through the area of its location.

All this information leads us to the obsidian artifacts found from the Columbia through the Methow Valley, up Twisp River, over Cascade Pass and down the Skagit to the coast. Testing requested by the Methow Valley Interpretive Center-sponsored Methow Artifact Research Project has proved that the obsidian for the artifacts found along this trade route was obtained from Central Oregon's Glass Buttes area or from locations nearby. Covering 500 miles in distance, Native Americans traveling by foot (pre-horse) carried the valuable mineral to be traded or to bring back to their artisans for use in creating valuable weapons, knives, scrapers and sometimes objects of art. Even the tiny flakes removed from tool creation (called debitage) were utilized, as their razor-sharp edges were important for scraping, cutting, carving, as micro-blades, for surgery and anything that required an extremely sharp cutting edge.

This exciting bit of research and its continuing results give us a window into our Valley's importance to Native Methow People throughout time. There are stories here, yet to be discovered, that have implications for this place. For thousands of years, people passed through this Valley by some means of communicated word, indicating there was a pathway to access Northern Puget Sound through the mountains up the Twisp River.

There is much more to be learned, but the process is slow, as artifacts are relatively few. By recording what we have learned, combined with scattered information from other historians and researchers, we can recapture the fascinating history of this Methow Valley and its more than 10,000 years of inhabitation.

Currently we have two artifacts being sourced at Northwest Obsidian Research Laboratory. One, a projectile point recently found near Bear Creek is shown here. It has a style that is unusual, if not rare for the North Central Columbia Plateau, our area of study. Not only will we be able to have its source determined, but it is also possible to have the use of obsidian hydration dating applied to the artifact. If successful, this information could be used to determine the date this artifact was created.

If this information becomes available, this unusual style of projectile point would then be placed chronologically in time and possibly identified as to style. This is a very exciting possibility for us.

We urge any persons who have found artifacts in the Methow Valley to let us study, photograph and return them to you. If any obsidian is found from in Methow Valley, please allow us to record its location and possibly test it as part of our research.

Seed to Syilx

By Morgan Moomaw, Okanogan descendant and teacher of language and traditional foods

I was born and raised in the hills of my ancestors on the banks of Omak Creek, fortunate enough to know the given names of these places and how deeply they have nourished my roots. Those of us who choose the plant path know how windy, dank, and dark the way is. The roots have a way of tangling all beings together like the sweet mycelial network that keeps us and the forest thriving. This notion has carried me into this work. We are told as *Syilx* people that we are one. Every object has life, has spirit; a purpose that is not ours to sway but to observe and take part in as a synergistic dance. How silly to think that we can actually "save the earth". *Tumxulaxw* (the land) does not need saving, but our relationship to *tumxwulaxw* and to one another does.

The plants have led me to the Methow Valley, not too far from where I grew up; a place I have long visited to replenish my baskets. Baskets of food, medicine, laughter, mountains, and water. It's no wonder our elders called this valley a *kwinkwant* (food basket). The reciprocity of our ancestors rings throughout the community that exists in their place. I have dedicated many years to food, from working fields to shipping produce, managing markets and kitchens, but this was never as fulfilling as the work I am now immersed in. They heard my heart longing and answered. This is a profound lesson that I try to teach students, but it can only be experienced. When we call out to these plants, they will answer in slow and nuanced ways of the heart.



Now I am leading a project called *Seed to Syilx* with the support of Rob Crandall and the Methow Valley Interpretive Center, funded by the Native American Agriculture Fund. I met Rob last year while going on a plant walk with my family, quickly realizing that he had a native plant nursery. I stated that I would do anything, *anything* to intern or work for Methow Natives. This quickly led into Rob and I working

together on a project he had previously started with Paschal Sherman Indian School, to plant a traditional food garden. We successfully planted a half an acre with over 150 different native species in a space that was once alfalfa, operated by St. Mary's Mission - the residential school that enacted horror and trauma on our people. Horror and trauma that we will be healing and grieving for many generations. This garden is a space where we can now honor our language, plants, culture, food and stories; a testimony to the resiliency of our elders who held onto what knowledge they could so that we may flourish. Elders regularly visit and share with us the ways of our ancestors from basket weaving to twining *spicn* (dogbane). The connections to the past are spun through our fingertips and the students find moments of peace and empowerment. This garden has transcended and led us into so many new paths of traditional food sovereignty. Food is medicine. We have always known this, and we are looking to food to heal and prosper.

Syilx is the name of all Okanogan people. Seed and water are the life that have carried us through unimagined trials. The resiliency and humble ways of my ancestors, the families who uphold these traditions, and the people who support this relationship to land are the only reason that projects like this can exist. *Seed to Syilx* is in the process of starting a native seed and medicine collective, securing traditional food sovereignty through a youth led native plant nursery, re-storying our lands through language, building a network of tribal and non-tribal community members, gathering our foods, re-planting traditional gathering sites, creating access to education and indigenizing our spaces once again. This work is often hard to put into words because it is untangling the web of ancestral trauma that has affected our valleys in ways that are irreparable. There is certain knowledge of plants, places and people that will never be told again. This project is focused on preserving this knowledge and opening doors for the youth to be in a space that I am currently writing from.

My wish is that these students will walk out of school empowered to follow this path that the plants are so eager to lead. That they will hear their ancestors in the creeks, rivers, trees, and all living things, in the *tmxwulaxw*.

LimLimt (thank you).



Methow Valley Interpretive Center

Open Fridays Noon – 4 pm

Saturdays 10 – 4 pm

and

Sundays Noon – 4 pm

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