

Methow Valley Citizens' Council

AS 2013 DRAWS TO A CLOSE, the Methow Valley Citizens' Council Board of Directors would like to offer our deepest gratitude for your past support, to ask for your continued support, and to bring you up to date on some of the pressing issues we face as a community.

For nearly four decades, the Citizens' Council has stood as the primary advocate for responsible stewardship of our precious lands and waters and worked to preserve the rural, agricultural character of the Methow Valley. From our original focus on mobilizing opposition to a large-scale downhill ski resort, we have evolved a wealth of expertise on land use, air and water quality, and wildlife issues.

Increasingly, we are the "go to" organization to educate and mobilize citizens valley-wide around a growing number of issues, ranging from basic land-use policy to environmentally damaging (and sometimes illegal) development proposals, to all-terrain vehicle use that may conflict with protection of sensitive habitat. We have also strongly articulated support for a diversified economy with low impact on the environment—one that provides opportunities for a range of careers and lifestyles, all while protecting our rural character.

MVCC's laser-like focus on land-use rules has helped create many of the special protections that apply in the Methow Valley. We are proud of our record of success in influencing critically important decisions, the results of which we witness each day.

Today, MVCC is strong and growing ever stronger. As you will see from the attached newsletter, the Citizens' Council is engaged in an array of issues that directly affect the

well-being of all of us, the human and non-human inhabitants of the Methow Valley. Whether it's the regulatory framework that governs land use or individual projects and activities that affect air and water quality, we provide decision makers with constructive analysis and hold them accountable. And we let you know how you can get involved.

We promise that, with your continued support, we will work hard to keep you informed and engaged. YOU have a huge contribution to make, since ultimately it is our collective voice that matters most.

HONORING OUR FOUNDER, VICKY

VICKY WELCH'S passing in June of this year marked an opportunity to rejoice in her life and to honor her memory. Vicky's persistence over 40 years in demanding the best possible land use protections is evident throughout the Methow Valley. Let us all remember her by renewing our own commitment to her passionate legacy of safeguarding the Methow's precious lands and waters.



In this season of giving thanks, please take this moment to reflect on the difference the Methow Valley Citizens' Council has made in your life—and in the life of this incredibly special place on earth.

Please give as generously as you

possibly can by sending your contribution and membership form to:

Methow Valley Citizens' Council
P.O. Box 774, Twisp, WA 98856

Contributions in honor of Vicky Welch may be made to this same address.

Rest assured, we will stretch the value of your tax-deductible contribution to the max!

The Methow Valley Citizens' Council Board of Directors

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VALLEY VOICE



The Newsletter of the Methow Valley Citizens' Council

SINCE 1976

www.mvcitizens.org

FALL 2013

Helping the Methow Valley Citizens' Council grow

2013 HAS BEEN AN EXCITING YEAR FOR MVCC.

New board members have brought significant expertise and energy to our ranks and membership has expanded apace. Additions to our board this year include Kari Bown, a skilled organic farmer and teacher; Phil Millam, who spent years with the Environmental Protection Agency on air and water quality and Superfund issues; and Melanie Rowland, an environmental attorney and specialist in endangered-species issues.

They join Maggie Coon (a retired public affairs professional), John Crandall (a fish biologist), Peter Morgan (a retired health care executive and now Methow Valley Inn co-owner), Isabelle Spohn (a former teacher with a specialty in environmental education), and George Wooten (an expert botanist) to make up a highly enthusiastic and hardworking group.

The ever-increasing importance of a strong voice for environmental advocacy in the Methow Valley requires that

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MVCC challenges the legality of Okanogan County ATV ordinances

ON AUGUST 14, MVCC filed a lawsuit in Okanogan County Superior Court, challenging two county ordinances that opened hundreds of miles of county roads—including most county roads in the Methow Valley—to off-road vehicles (ORVs) and all-terrain vehicles (ATVs).

The two county ordinances were approved by the county commissioners at the end of July, just before and after a change in the state law governing ATV use. MVCC contends that each ordinance violated different aspects of state law.

In their first action, the commissioners opened roads across the county, many with speed limits up to 50 mph, just before the new state law went into effect. The new law allows counties and cities to open more roads to ATVs if they choose to—but only roads with a speed limit of 35 mph or lower. MVCC believes the county intended to circumvent the new law's speed-limit restriction, and charges that the county needed to meet other requirements before allowing ATVs on these roads.

A few days later—once the new law went into effect—the commissioners opened all county

roads with a speed limit of 35 mph or lower, and declared that all roads they had already opened to ATVs remained open. MVCC maintains this was an illegal attempt to “grandfather” in the roads that don't comply with the new law.

In the lawsuit, MVCC contends that the ordinances violate both the State Environmental Policy Act and the state's new ORV/ATV law. MVCC also claims that the commissioners made no effort to determine whether the roads they opened are safe for a mix of ATVs and other traffic.

The lawsuit also claims that the commissioners' actions will allow ATV operators to use county roads to reach sensitive public lands that are closed to ATV use. MVCC believes this access will encourage an increase in illegal ATV activity on these lands and pose a threat to the environment and to public safety.

MVCC submitted comments and testified at hearings in opposition to both ordinances, as did several MVCC members and other valley residents. MVCC has partnered with Conservation Northwest and has hired David Mann of Gendler & Mann in Seattle to handle the lawsuit. ■

MVCC fights to keep environmental review for construction projects

RECENT CHANGES to Washington state legislation permitted counties and towns to exempt larger construction projects from environmental review under the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA). SEPA review allows citizens to comment on and appeal the possible environmental impacts of a project at the very beginning of the permitting process.

Following these state changes, Okanogan County proposed to raise the size of projects exempt from review across the county to the new maximum sizes allowed by state law. If these changes are allowed by our county commissioners, agricultural buildings of approximately one acre—with 40 parking spaces—would be exempt from what has been a mandatory SEPA review since the mid-90s in Methow Valley School District 350. Residential and commercial structures could also be larger without being submitted for review.

In response to a request by the county planning commission, over 60 Methow Valley citizens weighed in, objecting unanimously to these changes in the Methow Valley School District (the area from Gold Creek to Mazama that has special planning and zoning protections). Citing this overwhelming response, the planning commission recommended that county commissioners retain the existing minimum exemption standards for construction projects in the school district.

While this is a very positive result for the Methow Valley School District, the county is ignoring the stipulation that raising exempt sizes for projects anywhere in the county (including the lower Methow Valley) must have been completed by December 31, 2012. If it wasn't done by the deadline, an analysis of other laws providing environmental protections is required.



The scale of buildings in the Methow Valley will most likely be kept in check after input by Methow Valley residents persuaded the planning commissioners to require larger projects, parking lots, and excavation sites to be reviewed for their environmental impact.

Despite the planning commission's favorable recommendation for School District 350, the ultimate decision on this proposal lies with our three county commissioners. A final commissioners' hearing will be scheduled in the future—stay tuned for an opportunity to lend your support. ■

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Helping MVCC grow

we continue to build our effectiveness as an organization. This means further developing our volunteer base, improving outreach and communications, strengthening

partnerships and enhancing our financial base. Toward this end, we are poised to hire a staffer who will focus on volunteer engagement and communications. Look for an announcement on this in the near future.



MVCC continues to increase networking with individuals and organizations in the Methow that share our concerns. Within the past couple of years, we have also significantly increased our collaboration with statewide organizations that are willing to share resources and

expertise in land use and environmental issues for the sake of a sustainable future in Okanogan County.

Since our inception, MVCC has maintained a major focus on Okanogan County land use. In the coming months, we anticipate an accelerated need for such engagement. We will keep you informed of opportunities to lend your voice as we work together to shape the future of this place.

This newsletter includes a brief review of the major issues MVCC is currently focusing on. For additional details, see our website at www.mvccitizens.org. We welcome your ideas on topics of importance relating to our mission or organization. You may send them to mvcc@mvccitizens.org. ■

Will county's comp plan protect agriculture and the environment?

SINCE 2007, county residents and planners have struggled to revise the Okanogan County comprehensive plan of 1964 and to agree on a direction for the county's growth. A comprehensive plan guides the future actions of a community. It presents a vision and long-range goals, and provides guidance on land-use decisions.



MVCC keeps close tabs on the county to press for policies that protect farmland and the environment.

In addition to updating the comp plan, the county must issue an environmental impact statement (EIS) on the plan to inform decision makers and citizens about how changes proposed in the plan are expected to affect the environment.

Many people in the Methow understand that the comp plan is not just an abstract document that sits on the shelf, but know its policies and guidelines have very real implications—literally on the ground—for the quality of life and the environment. In 2011, more than 400 people attended a hearing on the plan at Liberty Bell High School. They testified that they wanted protections in the plan for open space, agriculture, wildlife, the environment, and the rural nature of the Methow. But during the long updating process on the plan, others in the county have been pushing to reduce environmental safeguards and emphasize property rights.

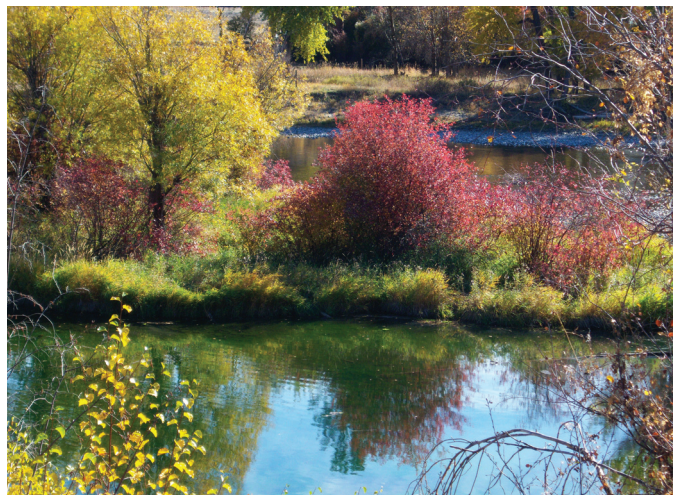
The county is now close to finalizing the plan and

releasing the final EIS. MVCC was concerned that the previous version of the EIS did not adequately analyze the environmental impacts of the plan. The EIS failed to address the impact of population growth on a clean and adequate water supply and did not adequately compare various alternatives for development. This analysis is required by law. MVCC is prepared to challenge the EIS if the final version does not include the necessary elements.

While the recent draft includes a special planning area for the Methow Valley and the area around Mazama, we are waiting to see whether the final revision to the plan clearly and adequately protects these areas. MVCC has also continued to press the county to provide for a future subarea that covers the Lower Methow Valley (south of Gold Creek).

Critical Areas Ordinance critical for water, wildlife, wetlands

THE CRITICAL AREAS ORDINANCE regulates development in wetlands, areas that affect aquifers used for potable water, fish and wildlife



The Critical Areas Ordinance should include the latest scientific research as the basis for protection of wetlands and fish and wildlife habitat.

habitat, frequently flooded areas, and geologically hazardous areas. Under state law, the county must use the best available science to protect these critical areas. MVCC submitted

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Endangered listing for wolf is itself endangered

MVCC INTENDS to submit a comment opposing the proposal by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to remove the gray wolf from the list of species protected under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). While wolf populations in the eastern part of Washington have already been delisted, those in the western third of the state—including the Methow Valley's Lookout Pack, the first gray wolves to be seen in Washington in more than 70 years—are still listed as endangered. MVCC, along with many other conservation groups and scientists, believes it is premature to remove all gray wolves in Washington from the endangered list.

Washington has its own wolf recovery plan, but the target numbers and distribution of wolves set out in the plan have not been reached. While the wolf would remain protected under state law, state law is not as strong as the federal protections. In fact, the state recently allowed people to kill gray wolves without a permit if the wolves are threatening livestock or pets. Wolves in the Methow and western Washington are still protected from such killing by the ESA, but that protection would be lost if the animals are delisted.

For more information or to comment on the proposal, go to www.fws.gov/home/wolfrecovery. The comment deadline is December 17, 2013. ■

ONE OF THE MANY CREATURES THAT DEPEND ON THE METHOW'S HEALTHY ECOSYSTEM TO THRIVE



LIBBY SCHREINER

An eight-spotted skimmer dragonfly—a key member of the food chain—needs healthy lakes and streams to reproduce. Dragonflies eat mosquitoes, wasps, ants, flies, and other insects we generally don't like... and birds, frogs, and lizards love to eat them.

MVCC WORKS WITH NEIGHBORS TO PROTECT ZONING PRECEDENTS

The Okanogan County Board of Adjustment voted unanimously to deny a variance request from the owners of Pipestone Canyon Ranch on Beaver Creek. The applicants sought a variance from the zoning code to develop an events center there.

During the hearing on the variance request, it became clear that the owners were also seeking the opportunity to create a planned development on the 29.3-acre site, which would have included subdividing the property into smaller lots. Without the variance, this would not have been allowed because the Pipestone Canyon Ranch parcel was too small.

MVCC members and neighboring landowners submitted written and oral testimony against the variance. MVCC believes the current zoning and requirements for planned developments have served the Methow Valley well and that deviating from these requirements—especially the minimum lot sizes—would have set a bad precedent. ■

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Critical Areas Ordinance

lengthy comments on earlier drafts of the CAO, in both 2009 and 2010.

MVCC still has major concerns about the current draft of the CAO:

- It does not use the best available science. Scientific research justifies stronger environmental protections than those in the CAO. We are especially concerned that little has been done to protect critical aquifer-recharge areas. Studies conducted in the Methow and Okanogan watersheds that document the limitations of aquifers and forecast water shortages—particularly in the Lower Methow valley—aren't even mentioned.
- The maps that will be used to determine whether a critical areas exists on a particular parcel are inadequate, imprecise and difficult to read.
- The ordinance allows the county "administrator" to interpret critical-area regulations liberally when reviewing development proposals. This could nullify important critical-area protections.

The county commissioners will hold a public hearing before approving the CAO, but most likely not until after they have finished the comp plan. ■

ARE YOU A CONCERNED CITIZEN?

Then MVCC is your organization! For almost 40 years MVCC has worked to protect the rural character and biological integrity of the Methow watershed. With your support we will continue to do so. Let's bequeath to our children a valley every bit as vibrant and beautiful as the one we are privileged to live in now.

☐ **Yes, I'd like to become a member.** I support MVCC's goals and actions in promoting and protecting the rural and environmental character of the Methow.

☐ \$10/limited income ☐ \$35/regular membership ☐ \$50 ☐ \$100 ☐ \$250 ☐ \$500 ☐ \$1,000

NAME

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CITY, STATE, ZIP

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Volunteers are welcome! Please help by:

☐ Attending meetings ☐ Writing letters ☐ Taking leadership on an issue important to you ☐ Fundraising ☐ Networking/phone-tree help

MEMBERSHIP DUES ARE TAX-DEDUCTIBLE ■ Please send to MVCC, P.O. Box 774, Twisp, WA 98856

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