

FALL 2018



VALLEY VOICE

Newsletter of the
Methow Valley
Citizens Council

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Raising a strong community voice for protection of the Methow Valley's natural environment and rural character since 1976

Land

MVCC's early work on land use planning set the stage for the Methow Valley's low density development and considerable open space. Today, MVCC engages our members, volunteers, and the community at large in land use planning - from Okanogan County's regulatory framework to state and federal policies affecting our public lands.

Air

Too many of us take clean air for granted until it is gone. In addition to summer wildfires, the Methow frequently tops the charts of worst air quality in the state during the winter months. To tackle these issues, MVCC facilitates the volunteer-led Methow Valley Clean Air Project.

Water

The Methow watershed produces cold, clean water that supports all life in the valley. MVCC is committed to protecting our waterways from pollution and over-development. We are raising our voice to ensure there is enough clean, cold, clear water for all fish, animals and people throughout the year.

Saving our Best for What's to Come

by Lorah Super, Program Director

Addressing Climate Impacts through Water and Land Use Advocacy

How should our community respond to predictions that include a future with less water and more wildlife? By planning ahead, of course!

MVCC is preparing so the things we love most about the valley – small farms, open landscapes, healthy wildlife populations, friendly self-reliant communities – are protected from unchecked growth and resilient to the changes ahead. We are working at the landscape scale and advocating for plans that address climate impacts and make efficient use of limited resources.

Mark Wolf-Armstrong



Small farms are part of our community's future vision.

Enough Water for All

In the case of water, climate scientists predict a future of reduced snowpack in the North Cascades. The impact on the valley will be significant because well-timed snowmelt is the primary source for cool water in our creeks and rivers that helps fish survive the hot summer months. Residential, agricultural and industrial development can compound the effects of climate change by further reducing the amount of water available in streams. Development also affects water quality by impacting sediment, nutrients and temperature.

The "Methow Rule" (see sidebar) has historically acted as a check on growth in the valley by limiting the availability of water for commercial and group uses (e.g. subdivisions) in the Methow Basin, requiring these applicants to secure water rights prior to development. In Closed Basins, building is further constrained by a requirement to prove that wells draw only ground water not hydraulically connected to closed lakes and streams.

Recently, effective lobbying by developers has created pressure to expand interpretation of the Methow Rule. For example, Okanogan County has attempted to grant subdivisions the same priority in water allocation as "single domestic" wells and has approved permits in recent years. The Department of Ecology is also reviewing their approach to Closed Basins and making determinations that will warrant scientific review.

MVCC is concerned that expanding the rules will allow for unchecked growth, out of scale with existing and future water supplies and the vision of our community. We have contested some permits and we're watching carefully for other attempts to bypass the Methow Rule.

Growing with Wildfire on our Minds

Planning for climate change includes acknowledging predictions for bigger, hotter and more unpredictable wildfires on the landscape. Responsible land use planning must give thought to public safety – for example, requiring that all new developments include roads suitable for emergency equipment and evacuation routes, homes and landscaping designed to be fire-resistant, and adequate water available for fire suppression.

Promoting growth patterns that avoid placing development in dangerous places is also a critical component of responsible planning. The Current Comprehensive Plan and Zone Code encourage dispersed growth patterns in areas without adequate infrastructure to protect public or first responder safety in fire-prone landscapes.

Alex Farrell



In 1976, the **Methow Instream Flow Rule** ("Methow Rule") was adopted by the State Legislature. The Rule established base flows for rivers and streams and set aside reserves in seven reaches of the Methow Basin, with priority to supply new single domestic wells. These reserves have served all new growth in the valley, outside of towns, since 1976. The Rule also created "Closed Basins," streams and lakes closed to further water appropriation. Closed streams include Black Canyon, Swaram, French, Gold, McFarland, Cow, Texas, Benson, Alder, Beaver, Bear, Thompson and Wolf.

A Community Vision

MVCC members are pushing for action to address climate impacts and making sure decision-makers hear us by building strong coalitions. We are:

- Asking the county and state to limit development until we have a clear sense of future water needs.
- Advocating for updates to the Comprehensive Plan, Zoning, and Subdivision Ordinance that account for water availability and wildfire readiness.
- Participating actively in the Watershed Council "Water 2066" process to determine best steps to achieve a community vision for prioritizing future water allocation.
- Holding accountable the public utilities to make smart choices and investments in clean, green energy in the face of a changing climate.
- Organizing community conversations around our changing climate and engaging in solutions.





Our community will continue to say loudly and clearly that the Methow Valley is too special to mine!

Methow Headwaters

At a Confluence by Maggie Coon

The Methow Headwaters campaign has made major strides in 2018 and we're not done yet! In cooperation with coalition partners, the Citizens Council has played a very active role in moving the ball toward the goal of securing special protection (called a "mineral withdrawal") on 340,000 acres of U.S. Forest Service land on Flagg Mountain - less than one mile from Mazama. This designation would bring a halt to further exploration, drilling, and new mine activity in the area where a Canadian company is eyeing development of an industrial scale open pit copper mine. The decision falls on the shoulders of the Secretary of the Interior, in coordination with the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

Following a public hearing in mid-November, the campaign will pull out all the stops for an affirmative decision by the Secretary of Interior by the end of this year. Our community will continue to say loudly and clearly that the Methow Valley is too special to mine!

In 2018, major campaign milestones included:

- A visit to the Methow Valley by the Department of Interior's Assistant Secretary of Lands and Minerals: We were pleased this high ranking public official took the time to learn about our proposal on the ground.
- Release by the U.S. Forest Service of the Environmental Assessment on the proposed designation: This key document included a positive recommendation for a twenty-year "withdrawal."
- Commitment by the Bureau of Land Management to hold a public meeting here in the Methow: By the time you receive this, we expect supporters will have turned out in record numbers to protect the treasured Methow Headwaters.
- Campaign success at solidifying overwhelming bipartisan support: Our county commissioners, all three state representatives, Congressman Dan Newhouse, Governor Inslee and Senators Cantwell and Murray are all firmly on board!



Maggie receives the Joan Thomas award from former Governor Evans and WWRC Executive Director Christine Mahler

Celebrating an extraordinary citizen: Maggie Coon

This fall, former Governor Dan Evans presented MVCC Board Chair Maggie Coon with Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition's Joan Thomas Award. Thomas was an instrumental force behind the passage of the Shoreline Management Act, the Water Resource Act and the State Environmental Policy Act. Thomas, like Maggie, was a passionate advocate for the environment. In that spirit, WWRC recognized Maggie as "one of the foremost advocates for preservation of the Methow Valley." We couldn't agree more!

Who runs the world? Volunteers!

by Raechel Youngberg, Communications Specialist

Volunteers are the life blood of the Methow Valley Citizens Council. MVCC was a volunteer-led organization for almost 38 years and today we would not be able to do the work we do without our strong volunteer base.

This past year MVCC had over 80 volunteers assist us with events such as our office move, bi annual Adopt-a-Highway, and our Rise & Bike for the Climate event! In addition to these volunteers we had a plethora of folks working behind the scenes writing comment letters, reviewing the County's legal ads and attending County Commissioner Meetings.

The Methow Valley Citizens Council and the Methow Valley would not be as successful as we are today without the hard work of our countless volunteers. We thank each and every one of you for all the work you do to raise a strong community voice for the protection of the Methow Valley's natural environment and rural character.

Below: A strong turnout from the next generation at the Twisp 4th of July parade brought us joy.



Breathe Globally, Act Locally

MVCC's work to protect the Methow's airshed is both local and global in scale. The Clean Air Project began in 2014 in response to concerns about poor winter air quality when inversions trap smoke from woodstoves and outdoor burning close to the valley floor, creating unhealthy air to breathe. In the several years since, wildfires have increased in size and duration, as have prescribed fires. The number of bad air days have increased. Black carbon, a component of particulate matter and smoke is being recognized as a significant contributor to climate change, second only to CO₂.

Our major sources of smoke in the Methow - home heating, outdoor burning, and forest fires - resemble rural areas around the world and sometimes have traveled from very far away. With the Clean Air Project, we're making major strides in building support and awareness in the valley about the importance of air quality, and for reducing our air pollution.

By Dr. Elizabeth Walker, MV Clean Air Project

This summer, we launched the Clean Air Ambassadors network. We placed a collection of 22 low-cost "Purple Air" air quality sensors with businesses, schools, individuals, and towns throughout the Methow, from Lost River Airport outside Mazama to Prairie Flats near the town of Methow.

This project has tremendous value in identifying the areas valley residents can improve air quality by following best practices: clean home heating, using alternatives to outdoor burning, and responsibly conducted prescribed burning. These efforts mean real impact as we reduce black carbon released locally into the atmosphere and build awareness for the critical connections between local air pollution and global climate change.



Liz Walker, walking her talk.