



Hells Bells - July 2026



Carrie Caselton Lowe of Grande Ronde Community Science Project and GHCC volunteers examining bumble bees caught during a survey earlier this month in the Blues.

Bumble Bee Surveys in the Blues

Thank you to the volunteers who got a very early start to the day on July 8th, joining GHCC's Stewardship Manager Ian Wilson and Carrie Caselton Lowe of [Grande Ronde Community Science Project](#) for a bumble bee survey in the Blue Mountains! The day was a sunny success, and many bumble bees were caught, surveyed, and released back into the wild to continue pollinating plants near the summit of Mt Emily. Our work is so often focused on the macro scale as we try to move the needle towards large landscape protections, and this work zooms in on one of our smallest and hardest-working allies. The data collected during these beginner-friendly surveys helps build a picture of ecosystem health with the help of the team at [Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation](#). Often it is the smallest-scale players in the landscape that help inform landscape-scale protections.

The flower species in bloom documented during the July 8th survey were primarily giant red indian paintbrush, yarrow, and yellow buckwheat. The bees in this survey favored the wild mint and the purple Rydberg's penstemon in bloom. When we collect bumble bees in the

field, we always make a note of the flowers they were visiting at the time of capture. This helps us understand how certain types of bees specialize in pollinating certain types of plants; important information to provide the experts at Xerces.

The Roadless Rule Protects Much of the Country's Clean Drinking Water

The Roadless Rule is one of the most important safeguards protecting our public lands from extractive interests. For more than 25 years, this rule has helped shield nearly 60 million acres of federal forest nationwide from logging and new road construction.

We are a few weeks into the final and most important public comment period for the Blue Mountains Forest Plan revisions. The current plan proposal assumes that the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule will be rescinded by the Trump Administration early next year, and those 700,000+ acres of our most wild and undeveloped lands will be recategorized from once-protected "roadless areas" to "general forest," a term which here means "open for business," aka timber extraction. Not only open to, but actually incentivized toward extraction, given the plan also proposes timber harvest targets that are 3-4 times current levels. These pristine lands are where that extra timber will come from.

A recent Think Out Loud piece, [University of Washington study: Roadless Rule helps protect drinking water](#), examines the protective benefit that roadless areas provide our watersheds, which are the source of much of America's drinking water. The guest on this episode is Michael Dombeck, a Professor Emeritus at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point who, as chief of the U.S. Forest Service from 1997 to 2001, helped create and implement the Roadless Rule. At the time of its creation, the rule was wildly popular with the public, garnering 90% support. At last check, the response to the current administration's efforts to repeal it showed that about 80% oppose the rollback. As Dombeck says in the interview, "It's hard to imagine a constituency that supports rolling it back."

Dombeck and his co-authors used state-of-the-art science to look at some 2,500 watersheds across the country. To zoom out: in the continental US, over 80,000 miles of river are protected by inventoried roadless areas, and more than 25 million Americans get a significant portion of their drinking water from these rivers, thanks to the natural filtration through aquifers that roadless areas allow, replenishing the water table as they go. In Oregon alone, 91% of roadless areas sit within municipal watersheds, supplying places like Walla Walla, Baker City, and Pendleton. Logging in these areas, especially on steep backcountry terrain, brings landslides and heavy sediment into streams; [American Rivers has found that logging roads are linked to erosion rates and sediment delivery up to 850% higher than in undisturbed habitat](#), and the Forest Service's own scientists have repeatedly identified road-building as the top driver of watershed damage on national forests. That sediment degrades the last remaining bull trout habitat and the headwater spawning streams that many salmon species depend on. These unroaded areas function like a

sponge, catching, storing, and releasing water, which buffers the effect of floods and eases drought.

We cannot afford to lose the intact nature and function of these landscapes protected by the Roadless Rule, and this is a key part of why the Blue Mountains Forest Plan comment period matters right now: it's your chance to say the Roadless Rule protections should hold, here and across the nation.

[Submit Your Comment](#)

Update: Lawsuit Challenging Harm to Elk on the Umatilla National Forest Moves Forward



In April, GHCC and Oregon Wild [filed a lawsuit](#) challenging the Umatilla National Forest's abrupt decision to remove protections for elk from the final decision of the Ellis Integrated Vegetation Project; a logging project slated for 110,000 acres of forest and critical elk habitat on the Umatilla National Forest. This change, which will further exacerbate the issue of elk fleeing public lands, came after 7 years of the Forest Service consistently centering improvements to elk habitat as a main project priority. We are disappointed to report that the parties were unable to reach an agreement, despite our attempts to settle in good faith. This means the litigation will proceed. We'll update you when there's more to share.

Connect With Us at an Upcoming Event



Salmon Life Cycle 'Pedalpalooza' Bike Ride | Tuesday, August 4th @ 5:30PM | Laurelhurst Park - Portland, OR

We hope you can join us in Portland **next Tuesday, August 4th**, at Laurelhurst Park for our annual Salmon Life Cycle Pedalpalooza Bike Ride!

For the third year in a row, we're teaming up with [Pacific Rivers](#) and [Save Our Wild Salmon](#) for a relaxed-pace, out-and-back ride in support of a free-flowing Snake River and Columbia Basin salmon recovery. We'll meet at Laurelhurst Park at 5:30 PM, ride

down Salmon Street to Salmon Street Springs, and then head back upstream to the park. Come dressed in blue — let's become the river! This ride is moderately easy and open to all.

 [RSVP](#)



Pacific Crest Trail Days | August 14 & 15| Cascade Locks, OR

We hope to connect with you this summer in the Columbia River Gorge at PCT Days. This is the summer hiking and outdoors festival you don't want to miss.

Greater Hells Canyon Council's staff will be there to share information and spend time with the Blue Mountains Trail community alongside some of our favorite business sponsors and many other outdoor brands and trail groups. If you are a part of the long-distance hiking community, a trails enthusiast, or just love a good party with great food, drinks, and fun people, come join us!

[Learn More Here](#)



GHCC's Annual Fall Gala and Community Dinner | October 3 | La Grande, OR

Mark your calendars for GHCC's annual fall gala in La Grande! This is a celebration and opportunity to gather with friends both new and old. This community dinner is a great way to connect with us and to learn how to get involved in the work ahead.

This year's event takes place immediately following the close of a very important public comment period for the Blue Mountains Forest Plan. Please make sure to submit your comments on the proposed plans by September 30th! The future of the Blues depends on those who stand up for them! [Submit your comment today.](#)

Save the Date!

Other news we're following...

[As Trump focuses on timber in Blue Mountains elk hunters fear habitat could diminish](#)

Federal officials have unveiled a long-awaited proposal to triple logging across three national forests in northeast Oregon and southeast Washington. Elk hunters worry the plan could shrink the habitat their sport depends on.

[Ending America's forever war on wildfire](#)

For nearly a century, U.S. fire policy has waged an all-out war on wildfire. As the current administration doubles down on full-suppression mandates amid a shrinking, understaffed firefighting workforce, critics warn the approach is becoming deadlier and less sustainable.

Another relevant Think Out Loud episode...

[Think Out Loud Oregon - Blue Mountains Logging](#)

Public comment is now open on the federal government's sweeping new draft plan covering nearly 5 million acres of Blue Mountains forest and grassland. OPB's April Ehrlich joins Think Out Loud to break down what's in the proposal.

[Oregon Lawsuit Could Upend Federal Management of Public Lands](#)

A new Oregon lawsuit challenging a BLM timber harvest argues that a 2016 land-use plan never legally took effect, since Congress now claims such plans are subject to review, potentially invalidating decades of permits and management decisions across the West. If successful, the case could unleash a wave of legal challenges affecting everything from mining and grazing to hunting and conservation on federal land.

Volunteer Opportunities

There are many ways to volunteer with GHCC and the Blue Mountains Trail. We are always thrilled to work with our members, supporters, and fellow conservation advocates.

If you are interested in volunteering with us, be it at a trail stewardship event, doing wildlife and wilderness surveys, monitoring and community science projects, or joining us on a GHCC-led outing, we've created a survey that will help us know where to direct you and which opportunities to send your way. Completing this survey should take 2 minutes or less of your time. Thank you — we look forward to spending time with you!

Volunteer with GHCC

Let's Protect the Greater Hells Canyon Region Together



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