**Great Old Broads for Wilderness**

**Polly Dyer Seattle Chapter**

Minutes of the Meeting on March 2, 2023, 7 p.m. via Zoom

Penelope called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m.

Members present were Wendy Roedell, Penelope Peterson, Genia Moncada, Barbara Muirhead, Kathy Johnson, Shelley Spalding, Karen Lee, Sally Richardson, Esther MacIlroy, Cathy Gorrell, Barb Phalen, Susan Bocek, Kate Bradley, Susan Kostick, Pam Hawes, Jody Louise, Natalie Taylor, Marilyn Evans, and Kris Ernest.

**Guest “Speaker” for the Evening**

Jody Louise’s friend, Dr. Kris Ernest, joined our Broads for the beginning of the meeting. Kris is a professor in the Department of Biological Sciences at Central Washington University. She studies population and community ecology with a particular interest in ecological connectivity. Currently, she is investigating ecological connectivity by studying pika populations in the central Washington Cascades across Interstate 90.

Rather than give a formal presentation, Kris responded to questions and engaged in a discussion with us.

* Dr. Ernest explained that she is very interested in how animals and plants interact, and so got involved when the crossings over and under I-90 began to be built.
* Kris and her team does a lot of monitoring of wildlife that use both the low- and high-level crossings. They take tissue samples to see if the animals on each side of the highway are genetically different and to explore how and if that changes over time.
* Pine squirrels is one species that Kris studies. Tracking pine squirrels is challenging. One student put a media collar on one.
* Shrews is another species that Kris studies. Kris and her team discovered the Olympic Shrew, a species that they didn’t think they would find east of the Cascades. It’s possible that the shrews may have found ways to get across the highway to stay genetically connected across the highway before the crossings were built.
* Before the wilderness corridor project began, culverts for water existed under I-90, but they were not functional for wildlife. Now the wilderness corridors are being designed for fish and insects and other wildlife to cross I-90.
* The I-90 project has turned out to be a model for the world. For example, people used to think that to get elk to cross the road you had to have an overcrossing because elk would never go under. But some of the I-90 under crossings have turned out to be high and wide enough for elk to use.
* Climate change is affecting pikas. Pikas have declined in some of the lower-level areas where it gets too hot for them. The Cascades are more protective than other mountain ranges. Hoary Marmots are also declining.
* Scientists use both still and video cameras for tracking which animals are using the crossings. One moose has crossed through an undercrossing. No wolves have been seen yet. Bear, mountain lions, bobcats, deer, and elk have crossed.
* One unique thing about the I-90 project is that they are putting in a lot of habitat structures, including logs, rocks, and earth as well as plantings. This gives smaller animals places to hide. In other locations similar crossing structures only have plain earth.
* While they were building the structures, the builders observed deer hanging out by the structure, as if they were all ready to run across as soon as the building was done.
* Constructing over- and underpasses for animals is expensive. However, it’s also expensive when an animal is hit by a car – a crew must be sent out the clean it up, the car is damaged, and there may be injuries. If the highway is closed by multiple crashes due to a herd of elk, millions of dollars are lost when commercial trucks are held up. Thus, wilderness corridors pay for themselves in just a few years’ time.
* More over- and underpasses are planned for other parts of I-90. A new overpass is planned soon near Easton.
* Kris’s research questions include the following: Are there species that aren’t really affected by the highway, so the crossings don’t make a difference? Is there something that can be done to help pikas find the crossings, such as putting special rock piles closer to the corridor’s fence?
* Kris has placed tiny microchips in deer mice, and she found that the mice were incorporating the crossing areas into their own habitat, making their homes in there, including reproducing. One mouse traveled from the forest through the undercrossing to the other side and back again within 3 weeks. Kris and her team also live-trap the mice and read the chips to identify them, and then trap them again on the other side of Interstate 90. For bait they use peanut butter mixed with oats and some molasses. Deer mice like it enough that they will come back and allow themselves to be retrapped.
* Crossing structures are off limits to the public. Human contact would make it more likely for the animals to avoid the structures.
* Contact Kris if you are interested in helping to go through the camera footage to count the animals.

**Business Meeting**

**Advocacy**

1. Advocacy for old-growth forests and urban forestry: Genia is working with Shelley, Raelene Gold, Kate Bradley, and Barb Phalen.
   * The focus of this advocacy group will be forests and rivers, both federal and state, to protect the old growth forests and ecosystems, especially as related to wildfires, and to get forests recognized as important for climate change.
   * A letter about protecting old-growth forests was sent last month to legislative representatives. Now we need to form delegations to meet with our representatives and their staff.
   * Barb Phalen says that what representatives listen to most is a story about your own experience with a forest or a river, how you felt, and why the forest is particularly important to you.
   * Email Genia of you are willing to work with her to visit representatives. Lisa Pool from Broads’ National Office will conduct a training on how to have a successful meeting with representative.
   * Legacy forests in our state our at risk of being logged. We might attend a future DNR board meeting to find out which forests are being discussed.
   * Genia introduced a new advocacy issue: “The Chehalis River Basin: Local Action Non-Dam Alternative.” The Chehalis River is the second largest river in Washington. To reduce flood damage, there is a proposal to build a dam in this river, which is a major salmon habitat. See these websites for non-dam alternatives and information: <https://www.chehalisbasinland.com/emerging-options/> and https://www.chehalisriveralliance.org/.
2. Lower Snake River Dams subcommittee report (Penelope, Susan K, and Merrilee)
   * Last month we decided to investigate whether the Public Utility Districts (PUDs) are using public money to purchase ads against removing the dams. Penelope, Susan, and Merrilee have each put in a request to their local PUDs asking for advertising expense information. Merilee got a report, but the report showed no expenses for ads about the dams. Susan and Penelope are still waiting for their report.
   * Penelope watched a two-hour presentation by James Waddell to the Clallam County PUD. Waddell is a civil engineer who is retired from the Army Corps of Engineers. Waddell presented extensive numerical data and statistics showing how inefficient the Lower Snake River Dams are. He also demonstrated that buying power from the Lower Snake River Dams is significantly more expensive than power that can be purchased from other Tier 1 sources.
3. Update on Alpine Lakes issues (Barb M. and Janna)
   * Barb attended the Alpine Lake Collaborative project meeting. The Collaborative is trying to get the forest service to deal with the increased number of visitors to the Lakes area. The group is trying to come up with a plan to give to the Forest Service to deal with issues such as toilet problems and general education on how to behave in the outdoors. Nothing will happen until 2026. Twenty-five groups participated in the Zoom call. Barb Phalen said she would be interesting in joining.
4. Update on Icicle Creek (Janna)
   * Janna was out of town, so no report was given.

**Education**

1. For our next book club on March 30 at 7 p.m., we decided to read *Of Men and Mountains* by William O. Douglas, a liberal Supreme Court Justice, a contemporary of Polly Dyer, and an early figure in the environmental movement.
2. Please check out the daily posts from Penelope on our Facebook page, “Polly Dyer Seattle Great Old Broads for Wilderness,” for educational articles that Penelope posts.
3. Let Penelope know if you have suggestions for speakers for our next meeting.

**Stewardship**

Save the date–Earth Day–April 22nd for a stewardship activity being planned by Genia and Barb.

* + Genia is looking at Green Seattle Partnership, Duwamish Alive, and the Arboretum as possible sites.
  + Stay tuned for more information as Earth Day nears.

**Fun**

We discussed plans for our campout this summer at Camano Island State Park on July 17 and 18th.  Each person indicated whether she planned to attend, and if so, what kind of accommodation she wanted--cabin, RV, or tent site.  Sixteen of our Broads attending this meeting said they would attend the campout. Others not in attendance have already contacted Penelope. It looks like we’ll have a fantastic turnout for our July campout.

* + Cabins have microwaves and refrigerators.
  + Genia wants us to come up with a catchy name for the campout.
  + Send $114 for a cabin or $33 for tent or car camping to Penelope (Penelope Peterson, 3514 E Conover Ct, Seattle, WA 98122).

***Our next Meeting will take place via Zoom at 7 pm April 20th***

Penelope adjourned the meeting at 9:00 p.m.

*Respectfully submitted, Wendy Roedell*