

Park Passion

THE DIFFERENCE YOU'RE MAKING IN THE NATIONAL PARKS • WINTER 2026



FRIENDS OF THE FUND,

As we step into a new year, I'm reflecting on all that your generosity made possible in 2025. Together, we've reached a record-setting year of support for Mount Rainier, North Cascades, and Olympic, allowing WNPf to award over \$2 million in funding to support park priorities.

This milestone isn't just a number. It represents more scientific research, more youth learning experiences, more resilient trails, and more long-term investment in the projects that preserve these places for future generations.

One of those long-term efforts — Restoring Paradise, part of our multi-year *Together for the Parks* campaign — has taken major steps forward thanks to your commitment.

From science-driven meadow restoration at Mount Rainier to repairs for one of the park's best-loved trails, the momentum going into 2026 is not just inspiring — it's truly powerful.

With gratitude,

Steve Dubiel
Chief Executive Officer

P.S. Thank you for helping us start this new year off strong for the parks! Read on to see how your support has already had an impact and what's to come.



Mount Rainier's iconic wildflowers may be hidden now, but we're already dreaming of the rainbow of colors these meadows will bring when summer sunlight returns. Photo: Mount Rainier captured by WNPf Board Member Teresa Hagerty. Right: Photo by Dene' Miles.

Returning a Meadow Research in Action at Mount Rainier

How Science, Collaboration, and Donor Support are Helping Fragile Ecosystems Recover

By Alex Day, Director of Marketing & Communications

Last summer marked a major milestone for Restoring Paradise — a long-term effort to care for the most visited area of Mount Rainier and address restoration needs that extend beyond the annual project list.

A cornerstone of that work is the "return-a-meadow" initiative, designed to help the park conserve its fragile subalpine meadows with the best science available.

While the park's ecological restoration crews replant damaged areas each summer, the scale of disturbance has outpaced even their dedicated efforts.

Thanks to donor support, though, the park now has a research partnership in place that is focused on finding restoration strategies that work faster and more effectively than before.



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Photo by John Chao



STAFF UPDATE: WELCOME, JESS!

We're thrilled to welcome Jess Merchant, WNPF's new Campaign Coordinator, to the team. Jess brings a rich background in nonprofit operations and systems strategy —talents that will help advance the *Together for the Parks* campaign and strengthen year-round donor communications and stewardship. Her position is made possible thanks to a grant from the National Park Foundation.

We're excited for the energy and expertise she brings as we enter a new year of growth.

An update on

Together FOR THE PARKS

To kick off the new year, we're excited to share that our donor powered Together for the Parks campaign is gaining new visibility.

Our work was recently featured in the *National Parks Traveler* in an op-ed from Steve that highlights the urgency behind Restoring Paradise. Check it out at wnpf.org/traveler or by scanning the QR code.

One of our next major funding priorities within Restoring Paradise is rehabilitation of Mount Rainier's Skyline Trail, an iconic route that sees immense use and faces increasing pressure from erosion and shifting weather patterns. Restoring this trail system is essential for visitor safety and ecosystem health — and thanks to generous supporters of the campaign, we're looking forward to putting \$525,000 toward tackling it in the years ahead.

We're grateful for the growing community rallying around this effort. This momentum toward supporting the parks belongs to you.

Andrea D. Christensen

Andrea Christensen
Philanthropy Director

P.S. Interested in learning more or getting involved?
I'd love to connect — reach out to me at andrea@wnpf.org.



Your Gifts in Action

This training lays the foundation for a swiftwater patrol and response plan, enhancing safety for both visitors and staff.



Photo by NPS.

Last summer, donor support enabled nine National Park Service responders to complete intensive swiftwater rescue training on the Skagit and Sauk Rivers.

With fast-changing river conditions and limited nearby rescue resources, this training ensures that skilled responders in North Cascades National Park are prepared when emergencies arise. It also strengthens plans for a future swiftwater patrol program, expanding readiness across the park.

This training represents an investment in visitor and ranger safety in one of the most rugged landscapes in the national park system. Learn more and see how your support made it possible at wnpf.org/swiftwater.

MEET THE WNPf BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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OUR FLAT HAT SALUTE

Our winter Flat Hat Salute goes out to **AllTrails**, who is helping fuel trail improvements on the Wonderland Trail at Mount Rainier National Park. Washington's National Park Fund was honored to be selected as a recipient of the 2025 AllTrails Stewards Fund, which provides awards to projects focused on improving, maintaining, rebuilding, and restoring our outdoor spaces. We're grateful for collaborators who believe deeply in connecting people with public lands by supporting on-the-ground impact!



RETURNING A MEADOW CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1



Allie collects data in the plots.

The reality is, Mount Rainier's subalpine meadows have endured decades of wear from off-trail travel, shifting snow patterns, and other pressures.

Enter a University of Washington research team focused on finding answers to the question of how best to protect them for the long run. Key in this effort is Allie Howell, a graduate student and Research Scientist with UW's Rare Plant Care & Conservation program, working under Dr. Jon Bakker, Denman Endowed Professor in Sustainable Resource Sciences.

In collaboration with the Northwest Climate Adaptation Science Center and Dr. Beth Fallon, a Vegetation Ecologist with the National Park Service, they're digging into the science behind meadow recovery, looking at soil health, seedbank viability, and the success of treatments like mulching, seeding, and varied planting densities. Their work is already illuminating where past restoration succeeded, where it stalled, and why.

This summer, the researchers revisited sites first restored in the 1980s, surveyed newly planted areas, and

analyzed soil samples with the help of undergraduate assistants whose involvement is also made possible by WNPf donors. Early findings suggest that some commonly used treatments may not "bear fruit" as expected — though in true scientific fashion, the team is following the evidence with patience and curiosity.

As winter settles in, the next phase begins: digging into the season's data, refining hypotheses, and planning summer 2026 fieldwork. The goal is simple and ambitious: to give Mount Rainier a restoration playbook grounded in science and tailored to the park's unique alpine environment.

This project truly "plants the seed" for healthier, more resilient meadows in the years ahead. With your support, the research isn't just documenting change — it is shaping a future where Paradise's wildflower meadows return in full, vibrant color.

This piece is drawn from a longer blog article about the project, which you can find at wnpf.org/return-a-meadow.

Ways to Support Throughout 2026

Consider making your gift a **monthly donation** for ongoing impact.

Connect with us to learn about **legacy giving** options that shape the future of Washington's national parks.

Ask your employer about **matching gifts** to double your contribution.



Climb for a Cause is a one-of-a-kind fundraiser! Photo by Kathryn Martini.

Join a Mount Rainier (Tahoma) fundraising climb.

Spots are now open for our two upcoming climbs! Reach out to Kristen (kristen@wnpf.org) for details:

- **June 3 – 5**, Guided by Alpine Ascents
- **June 7 – 10**, Guided by International Mountain Guides

SUPPORT SPOTLIGHT

Make Every Drive Feel Like You're Going to a Trailhead

Looking for a fresh way to start the new year? Drive with pride and support Mount Rainier, North Cascades, and Olympic National Parks all year long with a Washington national parks special license plate!

Each plate helps fund trail repairs, research, youth programs, and more – and featuring a real photo of the North Cascades, it's one of the easiest ways to show your love for these incredible public lands everywhere you go. Learn more at wnpf.org/plates



Klahhane Ridge in Olympic National Park, by Kristen Oliphant



Washington's National Park Fund is the official philanthropic partner of Mount Rainier, North Cascades, and Olympic National Parks

Upcoming Events

For a full list of events, visit wnpf.org/events

THURSDAY, JAN. 29

Over the Top Society Luncheon

Interested in joining us and becoming an OTT member? Visit wnpf.org/OTT

MONTH OF FEBRUARY

Black History Month

See how the parks celebrate: wnpf.org/BHM

THURSDAY, FEB. 12

Join Us for a Virtual Field Trip

This virtual trip to Mount Rainier will feature Volunteer Program Manager Kevin Bacher. Sign up: wnpf.org/field-trips

MONTH OF MARCH

Women's History Month

See how the parks celebrate: wnpf.org/WHM

MONDAY, MARCH 2

Mount Rainier National Park's 127th Birthday

The park was established on March 2, 1899. Learn more: wnpf.org/mount-rainier

FRIDAY – SATURDAY, MAY 15 – 16

Return to Paradise

Stay at Mount Rainier's iconic inn before it opens to the public. Details: wnpf.org/return

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 3

First Climb for a Cause of 2026

Interested in climbing with us? Learn more at wnpf.org/climb