

GET INTIMATE WITH THE SHRUB-STEPPE 2026

| FRIDAY MAY 8TH | TIME | LOCATION | SPECIAL DETAILS/NOTES FROM TRIP LEADERS | DESCRIPTION |
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| SHRUB-STEPPE, Petrification, Ice Age - Lorena Medina-Dirksen | 9:30AM-12:00PM | GINKGO PETRIFIED FOREST - Trees of Stone Interpretive Trail | The hike will be about 3 miles. During the hike there are no places to sit or any shade area other than the trailhead. Elevation gain is about 459 feet. Most of the trail surface is gravel and dirt. Discover Pass required for parking. | Shrub-Steppe, Petrification & the Ice Age Discover the geologic forces that shaped our region while exploring petrified wood and Ice Age history at Ginkgo Petrified Forest. |
| WILDFLOWERS OF THE UPPER COUNTY - DICK AMBROSE | 10:00AM-12:00PM | COOKE CANYON (private land, location to be shared upon registration) | "When we pick out anything by itself you find it hitched to everything else in the universe." John Muir Naturalist and outdoor enthusiast Dick Ambrose will lead a guided walk in Cooke Canyon. He will lead discussions: On the connections between plants animals and the environment. Plant communities in Shrub Steppe. Plant adaptations to the environment including how plants and animals will adapt to climate change - Indian uses of plants. Dress according to weather. Be prepared for wind with an outer layer. Long pants, sturdy shoes or hiking boots are recommended. Hiking poles, water and sunblock are suggested. The hike is three miles round trip with 600 feet elevation gain. There is some rocky and uneven ground. It is fairly steep in places. It is tick season in the shrub steppe, so take precautions. There is restroom at trailhead and one available part way up to the ridge. No pets. | Wildflowers of the Upper County Explore spring blooms on private land in Cooke Canyon with expert guidance on native shrub-steppe wildflowers and plant communities. |
| Shinrin (Forest) Yoku (Bath) Experience Certified Forest Therapy Guide, Dawn Ambrose | 12:30PM-2:30PM | COOKE CANYON (private land, location to be shared upon registration) | What to Expect: Join us in Cooke Canyon for a Shinrin (forest) Yoku (bath) experience led by Certified Forest Therapy Guide, Dawn Ambrose of Woodland Findings. Participants are invited to sit and disconnect from technology while simply noticing the natural world we live with by engaging our major senses. No hiking involved! Benefits include: reduced stress, anxiety and heart rate, a boosted immune system, improved sleep, mood, concentration and more. Participants should be able to walk a short distance steadily on uneven ground. Feel free to bring hiking poles if you require some extra balance. Dress appropriately for being outdoors No pets please | Shinrin-Yoku (Forest Bathing) Experience Slow down and reconnect through a guided forest therapy walk designed to deepen your sensory awareness and connection to place. |
| Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration and Resiliency Initiative - Janet Gorrell | 12:00pm-12:30pm | IQOE | Indoor location. Downtown parking is limited to 3 hours. Stairs and elevator to 2nd floor presentation rooms. | Spanning over 10 million acres, the shrubsteppe landscape is vital for a variety of wildlife and plant species, including some endemic to the region such as Columbia Basin pygmy rabbits. It is a critical area for habitat protection and conservation for species of greatest conservation need amid increasing threats from invasive species, wildfires, land use conversion, and other impacts. The Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration and Resiliency Initiative (WSRRI) seeks to address wildlife habitat protection and restoration challenges while also supporting working lands and communities in the face of wildland fire. Wildland fire preparedness, response, and recovery are important components of this effort. |
| Bird-Friendly Ranching in Washington's Columbia Plateau -SETH HULETT, AUDUBON | 12:30PM-1:30PM | IQOE | Indoor location. Downtown parking is limited to 3 hours. Stairs and elevator to 2nd floor presentation rooms. | Learn how the Audubon Conservation Ranching program partners with ranchers to support shrub-steppe bird recovery through science-based grazing management. |
| KITTITAS COUNTY STEWARDSHIP FUND & LOCAL CONSERVATION PROJECTS - NICKY PASI | 1:30PM-2:30PM | IQOE | Indoor location. Downtown parking is limited to 3 hours. Stairs and elevator to 2nd floor presentation rooms. | Kittitas County Stewardship Fund & Local Conservation Projects Learn how local funding supports on-the-ground conservation efforts throughout Kittitas County. |
| MID-COLUMBIA FISHERIES PROJECT UPDATES - BECCA WASSELL | 2:30PM-3:30PM | IQOE | Indoor location. Downtown parking is limited to 3 hours. Stairs and elevator to 2nd floor presentation rooms. | Mid-Columbia Fisheries Project Updates Get the latest on regional fish habitat restoration, river health, and fisheries enhancement efforts. |
| HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT: THE SHRUB-STEPPE STORY - JORDAN RYCKMAN | 3:30PM-4:30PM | IQOE | Indoor location. Downtown parking is limited to 3 hours. Stairs and elevator to 2nd floor presentation rooms. | Hidden in Plain Sight: The Shrub-Steppe Story: Connection, Loss, and the Next Generation This talk explores the shrub-steppe as one of the most overlooked—and most endangered—ecosystems in the American West, and makes the case that its greatest threat is not just habitat loss, but lack of understanding. |
| SOCIAL HOUR, LAMPREY, FOOD, FUN - DAVEY LUMLEY, YAKAMA NATION PACIFIC LAMPREY PROJECT | 6PM-9PM | IRONHORSE TAP ROOM W/SWIFT FIRED PIZZA & WHEELY GOOD BOOKS | Join us at Iron Horse Brewery! Amazing beers and ciders (NA available as well), children welcome. Swiftfired Pizza available for food. | Social Hour, Lamprey, Food & Fun Enjoy food, community, and a special presentation on Pacific lamprey from the Yakama Nation. |
| TWILIGHT OWL & SNAKE WALK - DEB ESSMAN AND DR. DAN BECK | 6:00PM-9:00PM | YCIC | An easy walk, suitable for all ages, maximum 2 miles on flat gravel trail. Gravel trail is accessible, but may not work for all wheeled-chairs. Discover Pass required. | Twilight Owl & Snake Walk An evening exploration to search for owls and snakes while learning about their roles in the shrub-steppe ecosystem. |
| BATS! - BATS NORTHWEST - KATIE REMINE | 7:00PM-10:00PM | YCIC | An easy walk, suitable for all ages, maximum 2 miles on flat gravel trail. Gravel trail is accessible, but may not work for all wheeled-chairs. Discover Pass required. Participants should bring a headlamp or other flashlight. Discover Pass required. Vault toilet in parking lot. Please bring your own camp chair if you would like to sit during our Bat Activity Trends observations (which can be done as a walking observation or as a stationary observation). | Bats! Discover the fascinating world of bats during this evening program focused on bat ecology and conservation. Bats are common across the Pacific northwest, but their nocturnal habits mean that people don't often notice them. Taking time to learn how to observe them can change that! Why are bats important? Where do they live? How can I observe bats flying in the evening sky? Learn the answers to these questions and how to collect data for the regional Bat Activity Trends community science effort to help us better understand when and where bats are active across the Pacific northwest! |
| SATURDAY MAY 9TH | TIME | LOCATION | SPECIAL DETAILS/NOTES FROM TRIP LEADERS | DESCRIPTION |
| PASSERINES AND RAPTORS OF THE YAKIMA RIVER CANYON—DEB ESSMAN | 6:00AM-10:00AM | UMTANUM CREEK RECREATION AREA | America the Beautiful or BLM Day Pass needed for parking. Meet at the entrance to the footbridge over the Yakima River. Some steep short slopes on rough rocks but once past that, trail is gentle and soft dirt. No places to sit; mild elevation gain; less than 1 mile walking. | Passerines & Raptors of the Yakima River Canyon Early morning birding focused on songbirds and birds of prey in one of Washington's richest canyon habitats. |
| SHRUB-STEPPE OBLIGATES: BIRDS & HABITATS— SCOTT DOWNES | 8:00AM-11:00AM | WDFW PUBLIC LANDS OFF VANTAGE HIGHWAY GREEN GATE | Discover pass needed. Parking at two WDFW wildlife area access sites. Binoculars, hiking shoes and long pants (ticks are possible). Walking up to a mile. No benches. Walking both on the road and through the shrubsteppe. Roughly flat terrain, minimal elevation gain. | Shrub-Steppe Obligate Birds & Habitats Learn to identify birds uniquely adapted to shrub-steppe environments and the habitats they depend on. |
| YAKIMA CANYON GEOLOGY— DR. KARL LILLQUIST | 9:00AM-10:30AM | UMTANUM CREEK RECREATION AREA | America the Beautiful or BLM Day Pass needed for parking. Meet at the entrance to the footbridge over the Yakima River. Some steep short slopes on rough rocks but once past that, trail is gentle and soft dirt. No places to sit; mild elevation gain; less than 1 mile walking. | Yakima Canyon Geology Uncover the dramatic geologic story of the canyon, from lava flows to tectonic forces. |
| SNAKE SNEAKING—DR. DAN BECK | 9:00AM-10:30AM | UMTANUM CREEK RECREATION AREA | America the Beautiful or BLM Day Pass needed for parking. Meet at the entrance to the footbridge over the Yakima River. Some steep short slopes on rough rocks but once past that, trail is gentle and soft dirt. No places to sit; mild elevation gain; less than 1 mile walking. | Snake Sneaking Search for native snake species while learning about identification, behavior, and conservation. |
| AM-1:00PM YAKIMA CANYON INTERPRETIVE CENTER HANDS-ON SCIENCE BOOTHS—COME SEE US! KEEN, YCIC, CWU Biology Reptiles, Lamprey with the Yakama Nation, Conservation Northwest, Wild Ones Columbia Basin Seedling Chapter, Mid-Columbia Fisheries Enhancement Group, Kittitas Audubon, Bats Northwest, Washington Butterfly Association, CWU Wildcat Farm, Mountains to Sound Greenway, Puget Sound Energy/Wild Horse Wind Facility, CWU Department of Anthropology, Kittitas County Conservation District, WA Department of Fish & Wildlife, US Fish and Wildlife Service - Leavenworth Fisheries Complex, Benton Conservation District, Reach Museum, Washington State Department of Agriculture, NW Gamehawkers, and more! | | | | |
| YAKIMA RIVER CANYON FLOAT TRIP | 10:30AM-12PM | UMTANUM CREEK RECREATION AREA | America the Beautiful or BLM Day Pass needed for parking. Meet at the entrance to the footbridge over the Yakima River. Some steep short slopes on rough rocks but once past that, trail is gentle and soft dirt. No places to sit; mild elevation gain; less than 1 mile walking. | Yakima River Canyon Float Trip Experience the canyon from the water on a guided float highlighting river ecology and wildlife. |
| CULTURAL IMPORTANCE OF THE YAKIMA RIVER CANYON - DR. STEVEN HACKENBERGER | 10:30AM-12:00PM | YCIC | An easy walk, suitable for all ages, maximum 2 miles on flat gravel trail. Gravel trail is accessible, but may not work for all wheeled-chairs. Discover Pass required. | Cultural Importance of the Yakima River Canyon Explore the deep cultural history and significance of the canyon landscape. |
| CAMINATA FAMILIAR PARA ENCONTRAR SERPIENTES —DR. DAN BECK EN ESPAÑOL | 10:30AM-12PM | UMTANUM CREEK RECREATION AREA | America the Beautiful or BLM Day Pass needed for parking. Meet at the entrance to the footbridge over the Yakima River. Some steep short slopes on rough rocks but once past that, trail is gentle and soft dirt. No places to sit; mild elevation gain; less than 1 mile walking. | Caminata Familiar para Encontrar Serpientes (En Español) A family-friendly Spanish-language snake walk exploring native reptiles and their habitats. |
| WILDFLOWER HIKE AT SELAH CLIFFS NATURAL AREA PRESERVE—KEVIN LIESKE & ABBI LUITEN | 10:30AM-12:00PM | SELAH CLIFFS | Discover Pass needed for parking. A 2.5 mile walk with 100ft elevation gain. Bring binoculars, water, and closed toed shoes. | Wildflower Hike at Selah Cliffs Natural Area Preserve Enjoy a guided walk through spectacular spring wildflower displays and unique canyon scenery. |
| NATURE JOURNALING - SOPHIA TROEH | 11:00AM-12:00PM | YCIC | An easy walk, suitable for all ages, maximum 2 miles on flat gravel trail. Gravel trail is accessible, but may not work for all wheeled-chairs. Discover Pass required. | Nature Journaling Learn simple techniques to observe, sketch, and record your nature experiences. |
| SHRUB-STEPPE HABITAT RESTORATION & UPDATE ON YAKIMA CANYON INTERPRETIVE CENTER—JILL SCHEFFER | 12:00PM-1:00PM | YCIC | An easy walk, suitable for all ages, maximum 2 miles on flat gravel trail. Gravel trail is accessible, but may not work for all wheeled-chairs. Discover Pass required. | Shrub-Steppe Habitat Restoration & YCIC Update Hear about ongoing habitat restoration efforts and progress on the Yakima Canyon Interpretive Center. |
| BASALT CACTUS EXPLORATIONS - RON BOCKELMAN | 1:00PM-3:00PM | WILDHORSE WIND AND SOLAR FACILITY | | Basalt Cactus Explorations Explore cactus species growing among basalt formations and learn about their adaptations. |
| YAKIMA RIVER CANYON FLOAT TRIP | 1:30PM-3:00PM | UMTANUM CREEK RECREATION AREA | Rills Float Adventure Company will handle your payments and trip arrangements. Look for emails from them. | Yakima River Canyon Float Trip Experience the canyon from the water on a guided float highlighting river ecology and wildlife. |
| PLANETARIUM SHOWS— DR. BRUCE PALMQUIST | 2:00PM-5:00PM (45-MINUTE SHOWS ON THE HOUR) | CWU'S LYDIG PLANETARIUM | Located on Central Washington University Campus, park in any of the many parking lots and walk onto campus following the map. No parking pass required on weekends. | Planetarium Shows Immersive star talks and astronomy programs at CWU's Lydig Planetarium (45-minute shows on the hour). |
| HANDS-ON ADULT LAMPREY RELEASES & TALKS —W/YAKAMA NATION | 11-11:45am 12-12:45pm 1-1:45pm 2-2:45pm | THRALL ROAD PUBLIC ACCESS AREA | Discover Pass parking pass needed. No walking. Releases are in the boat launch area right next to the parking lot. | Hands-On Adult Lamprey Releases & Talks Witness live lamprey releases and learn about their ecological and cultural importance. |
| WETLAND TRAIL NATURE INTERPRETATION PLANNING - STUDIO UNDERSTORY | 3:30PM-4:30PM | IQOE | Indoor location. Downtown parking is limited to 3 hours. Stairs and elevator to 2nd floor presentation rooms. | Wetland Trail Nature Interpretation Planning A collaborative session exploring ideas for interpreting wetland trails and landscapes. |
| FALCONRY & CONSERVATION— Northwest Gamehawkers - TOBY CANTWELL | 4:30PM-5:15PM | IQOE | Indoor location. Downtown parking is limited to 3 hours. Stairs and elevator to 2nd floor presentation rooms. | Falconry & Conservation Meet trained raptors up close while learning about falconry traditions and bird conservation. |
| YAKIMA CANYON INTERPRETIVE CENTER PROJECT UPDATE - JILL SCHEFFER | 5:30PM-6:15PM | IQOE | Indoor location. Downtown parking is limited to 3 hours. Stairs and elevator to 2nd floor presentation rooms. | Yakima Canyon Interpretive Center Project Update An inside look at the vision and development of the future interpretive center. |
| KEYNOTE SPEAKER & DINNER - DR. DANIEL BECK "HOW DO WE 'GET INTIMATE' WITH NATURE?" | 6:30PM-8:00PM | IQOE | Indoor location. Stairs and elevator to 2nd floor presentation rooms. | Keynote Speaker & Dinner – "How Do We Get Intimate with Nature?" An evening keynote exploring how we build meaningful relationships with the natural world. |
| VISIT SUNCADIA'S NELSON FARM FOR "SPRINGFEST"! Saturday, May 9th, 11:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. Celebrate the arrival of spring at Nelson Farm with family-friendly activities, live entertainment, and outdoor fun. Guests can enjoy live music, local vendors, and hands-on activities that highlight the beauty of the season and our community's connection to nature. | | | | |
| SUNDAY MAY 10TH | TIME | LOCATION | SPECIAL DETAILS/NOTES FROM TRIP LEADERS | DESCRIPTION |

CENTRAL WASHINGTON CONSERVATION SUMMIT

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| PASSERINES AND RAPTORS OF THE YAKIMA RIVER CANYON—DEB ESSMAN | 7:00AM-10:00AM | UMTANUM CREEK RECREATION AREA | America the Beautiful or BLM Day Pass needed for parking. Meet at the entrance to the footbridge over the Yakima River. Some steep short slopes on rough rocks but once past that, trail is gentle and soft dirt. No places to sit; mild elevation gain; less than 1 mile walking. | Passerines & Raptors of the Yakima River Canyon A second opportunity for early morning birding in prime canyon habitat. | | | | | |
| BIRDING BY EAR— WALTER SZELIGA | 6:00AM-9:30AM | YCIC | An easy walk, suitable for all ages, maximum 2 miles on flat gravel trail. Gravel trail is accessible, but may not work for all wheeled-chairs. Discover Pass required. | Birding by Ear Improve your birding skills by learning to identify species through their songs and calls. | | | | | |
| TRACKING SKILLS - KEVIN O'MALLEY | 9:30AM-12:30PM | ROCKY COULEE | My group will need Discover Pass, dress for the weather wind breaker jacket, no more than two miles round trip (likely less), not many places to sit (on rocks or ground) this will mostly be off trail. These tracking events are slow going and easy terrain. I can regularly accommodate most levels. The only x-factor at the Rocky Coulee site is if when scouting we find some big horned sheep or elk tracks or sign. | Tracking Skills Learn to read tracks and signs to better understand wildlife movement and behavior. | | | | | |
| TAKE YOUR MOTHER FOR A NATURE WALK— JILL SCHEFFER | 10:30AM-11:30 AM | YCIC | An easy walk, suitable for all ages, maximum 2 miles on flat gravel trail. Gravel trail is accessible, but may not work for all wheeled-chairs. Discover Pass required. | Take Your Mother for a Nature Walk A relaxed, family-friendly walk celebrating Mother's Day in nature. | | | | | |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Wildflower & Wind Power Walks</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Wild Horse Wind Facility</p> <p>Morning Session: 10:00-11:00am Wind Turbine Tour, 11:00-1:00pm Wildflower Walk</p> <p>Afternoon Session: 2:00-3:00pm Wind Turbine Tour, 3:00-5:00pm Wildflower Walk</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Register by emailing wildhorse@pse.com</p> | | | Turn through the Wild Horse archway, and proceed 3 miles (10 minutes) up the hill to the visitor center. https://maps.app.goo.gl/oAEJVVvF3QfCrg9 If you are joining the Wildflower Walk, we will then caravan down a gravel road for 3 miles to the hike location (location is pending bloom location/timing). Special gear to bring along? Sturdy closed toed shoes (boots preferred), walking poles, cameras, backpack with snacks, water, etc. We will be traveling over rough basalt in places. Distance of walking, any places to sit? Wildflower and Wind Power Walks are around .75-1 mile round trip. Open shrub steppe, no places to sit. Challenge of walking/trailoff trail/elevation gain etc: Wildflower and Wind Power Walks are off trail over uneven terrain with loose basalt in places, with up to 130 ft of elevation gain, depending on the location. We typically do a flatter loop for this event, but it will depend on weather and bloom timing. Any other special details: Liability forms are required. Arrive 5-10 minutes before your scheduled events to sign a form at the front desk of the visitor center. Coffee, tea, and ice water are provided. Please bring a water bottle to refill. Dress for cool and windy weather. Bring sun protection, as there is no shade. You will be driving your own car over a few miles of gravel road to reach the hike location from the visitor center. We will be sending out an email with similar information to participants a few days before the event. | Wildflower & Wind Power Walks – Wild Horse Wind Facility Combine renewable energy education with guided wildflower walks and turbine tours. | | | | | |