

Meet the 2024 Class of Wenatchee Naturalists



<https://youtu.be/VrUuuuEBxX0>
Take a peek at Class Assistant, Elisa Lopez's, week-by-week overview.

Photos and text by Susan Ballinger, program lead





We used Nature Journaling as an observation tool to enhance learning

We traveled together on four field trips in the Wenatchee Watershed





Thanks to guest scientist field trip leaders:
Geologist, Brent Cunderla
Fisheries Biologist, Jen Herdmann
Columbia Breaks Fire Interp. Center, Dave Spies
Botanist & Artist, Olivia Schilling
And many other guest speakers in class.





At our final class,
we enjoyed a
potluck and each
person shared
their final project



View Elisa Lopez's short video that
Features highlights of our class, week-by-week

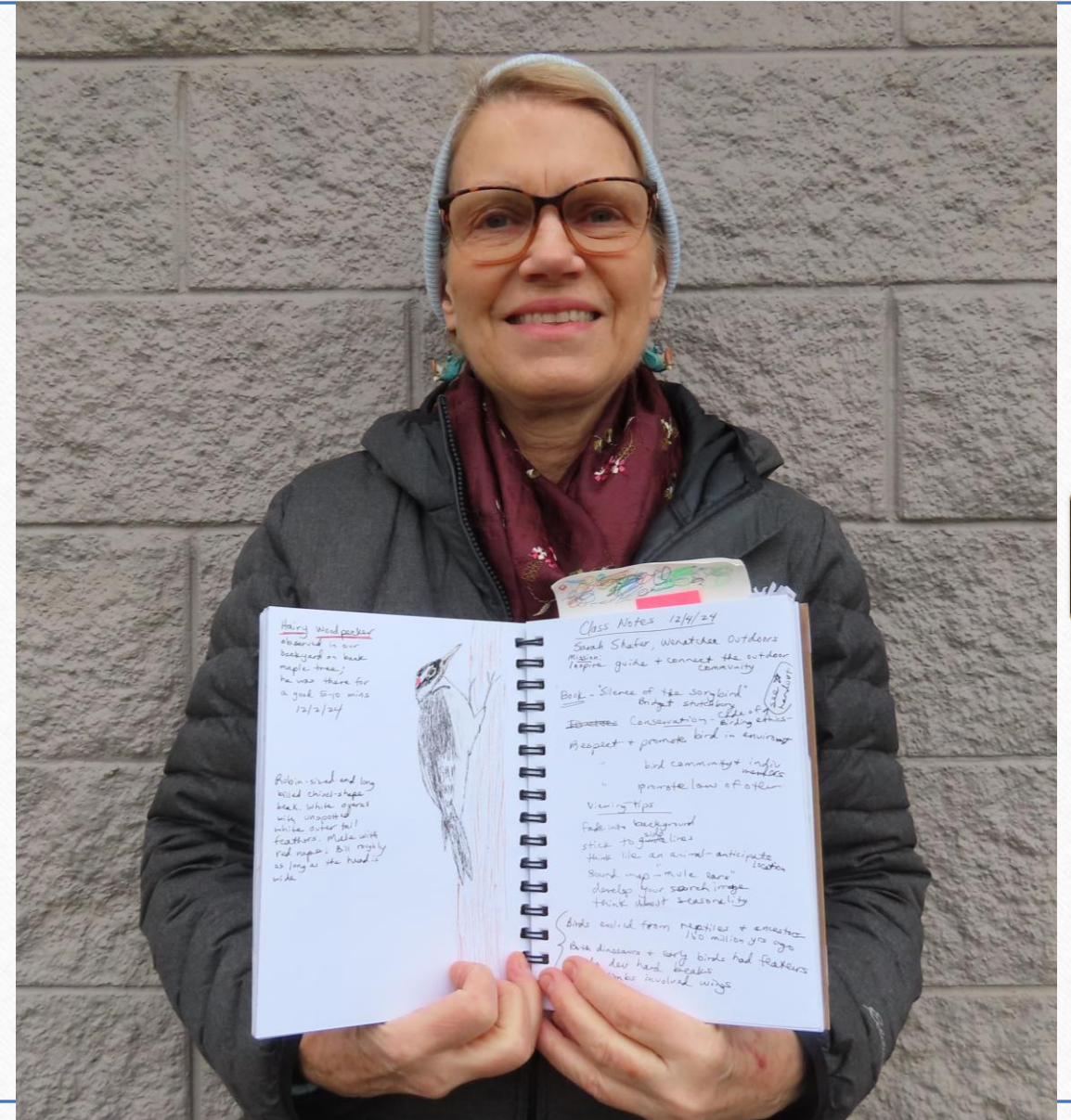
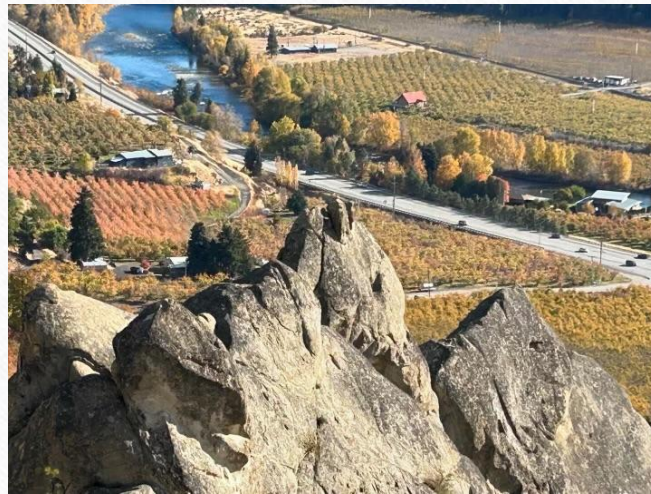
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Beth Beck

Beth read aloud a personal essay she wrote and illustrated with photos. Her piece described a variety of discoveries she made during her weekly visits to her field journaling site at [Peshastin Pinnacles State Park](https://www.wenatcheenaturalist.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Beths-Peshastin-Pinnacles-Journal.pdf)

Enjoy her piece here:
<https://www.wenatcheenaturalist.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Beths-Peshastin-Pinnacles-Journal.pdf>



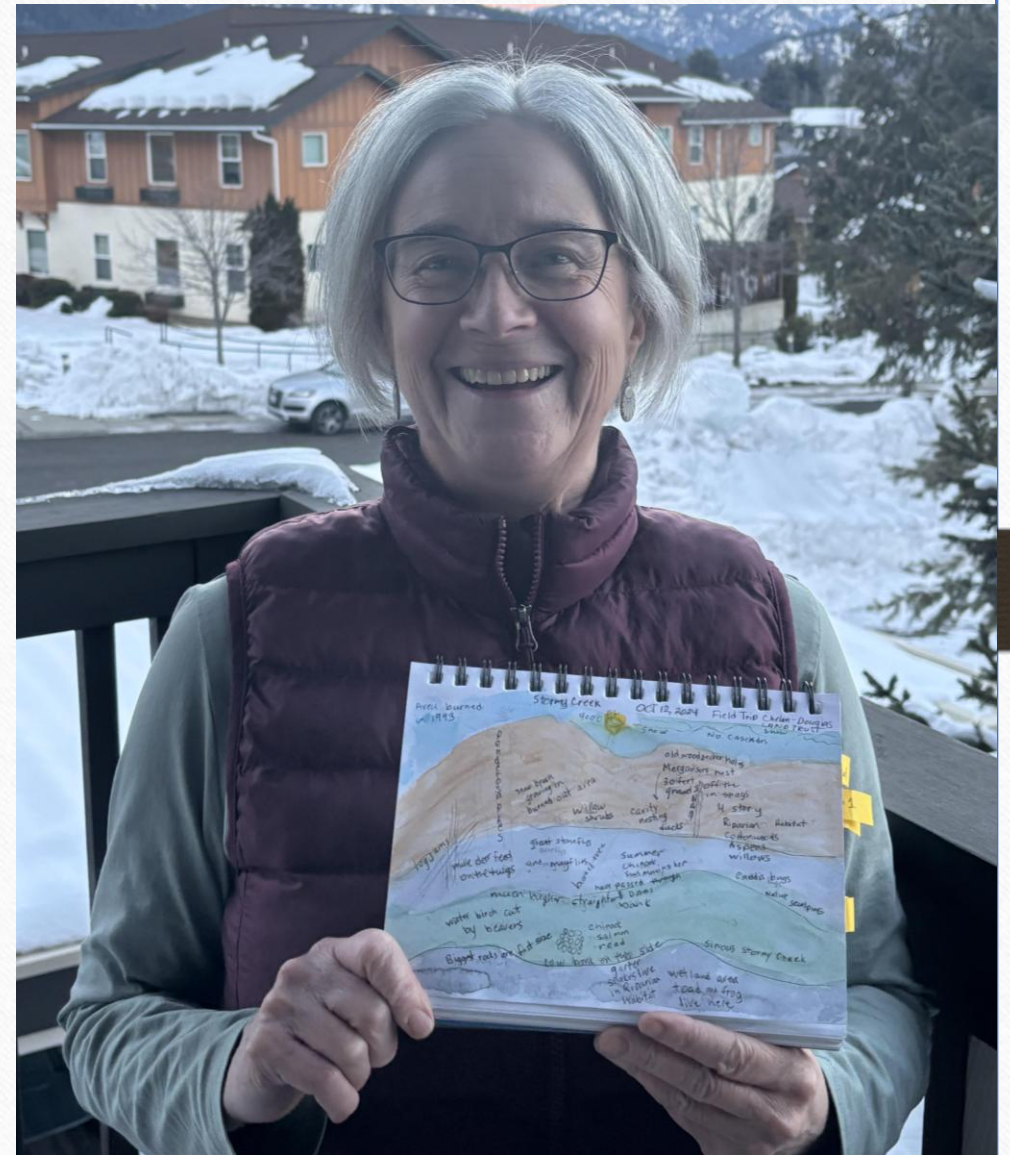
Connie Cogburn

My end of class project was reflecting on Observations!

Connie found that after every week's class she would go to her field study area and would notice (observe) new plants and animals that had always been there, but that had gone unnoticed beforehand.

The information that we were exposed to in class increased her observational skills by many levels and in so many different ways.

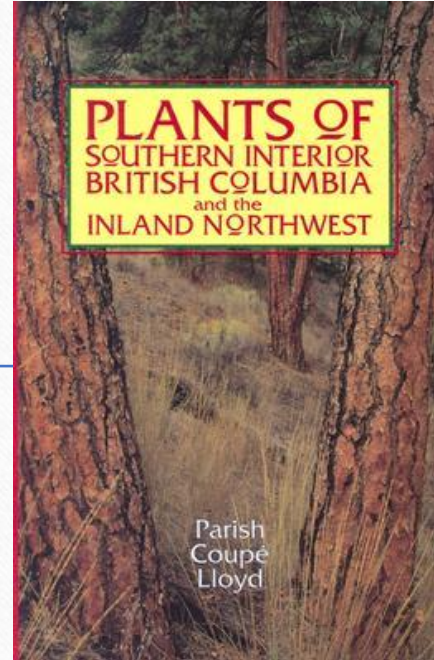
The more I learned, the more I noticed and then I did more research and more reading about the subject matter!



Dania Sanchez Contreras

Dania researched how Indigenous People used common plants of our area for food, medicines, personal care, and tools, and gave warning for a few poisonous plants.

<https://www.wenatcheenaturalist.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Dania-Class-Project.pdf>



My fun facts
during my readings!

By: Dania Contreras

Fun facts from "Plants of Southern Interior British Columbia and the Inland Northwest"
book by Parish Coupe Lloyd.

Dana Cook

Dana invites Wenatchee Naturalist to be part of a continuing community:

I'm thrilled to continue the conversation about the "big ideas" we explored in class! Let's dive deeper into the wonders of the natural world together and give back in ways that inspire us.

Here are some exciting ways you can get involved:

- *Naturalist Book Club: Choose a title from Susan's library and join us for discussions that spark curiosity and expand our understanding of nature.
- *Naturalist Hikes: Bring your journal and join us as we search for treasures like the Bitterroot or the elusive Steer's Head while chronicling our adventures.
- *Volunteer Opportunities: Team up with the non-profits we met in class and make a difference in conservation and community.
- *Educational Programs: Attend events that deepen your knowledge and connection to the natural world.
- *Or pursue any other activity that speaks to your inner naturalist!

Remember, this is a *low-commitment, high-reward* journey—join in whenever and however works for you! Dana: zoejuju@hotmail.com



Judy Derpack

Judy created a narrative to share nature's four seasons at Enchantment Park and Blackbird Island in Leavenworth, WA. She highlighted the ways that Wenatchi/p'isquosa people used this area as part of home. Read her story here.

<https://www.wenatcheenaturalist.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Judy-Derpack-Wen-Nat-project.pdf>

Judy ends the essay with her favorite quote, from Marcel Proust, *"The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking out new landscapes, but in having new eyes!"*



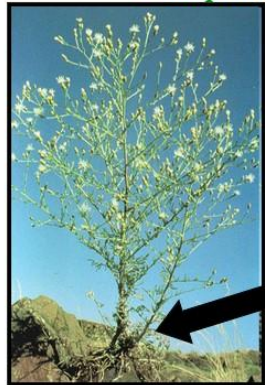
Chris Monsey

***Be a Weed Warrior & TAKE TEN (minutes)
stop DIFUSE KNAPWEED in its tracks!***

Wear gloves

Pull or dig out the plant, including the long tap root

When pulling prior to flowering, you can leave plant on ground



It is easiest to pull up once the stem has elongated



Hold here and pull!



Diffuse knapweed is a non-native noxious weed. It competes with native plants for limited water and nutrients.

A single plant can produce up to 18,000 wind dispersed seeds. Pulling plants prior to blooming prevents seed formation.

Chris invites us all to join him to rid our watershed of the Noxious weed, [diffuse knapweed](#). Before flowering, it is easy to hand-pull. Chris works to keep his favorite forest campsite free of this pesky weed.

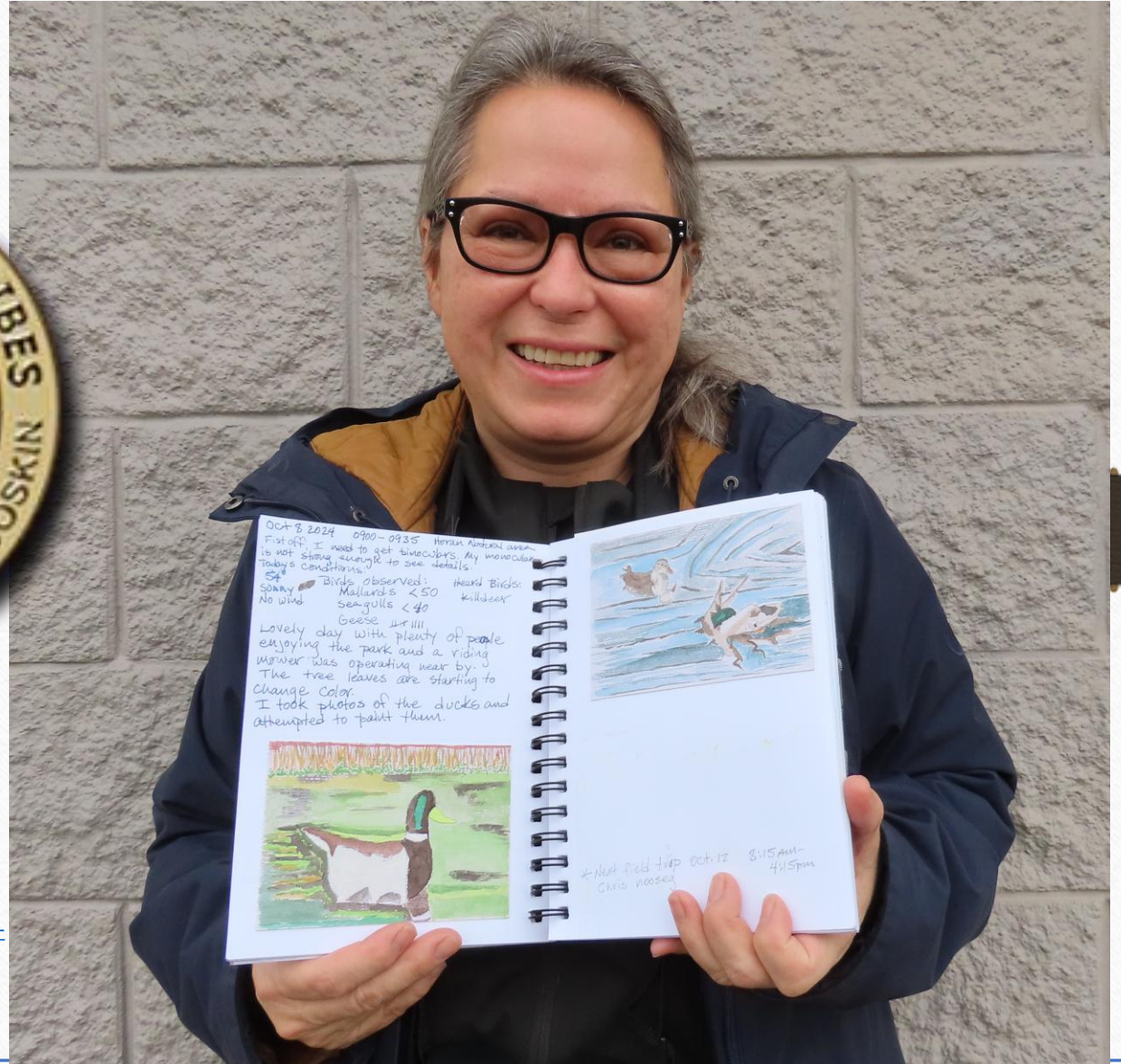


Karen Grudier



Karen began learning her native Klamath language in September, as our class also began. Listen to Karen sharing names of our region's plants and animals.

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/91tv5i1g0wu3ic9mmd6z4/Karen-Grudier-Klamath-animals-and-plants-Wednesday-at-10-41-AM.m4a?rlkey=eb34ltbbr4l7q26qnpuvz9ryw&e=2&st=500xzu3o&dl=0>



Brooke Hagopian



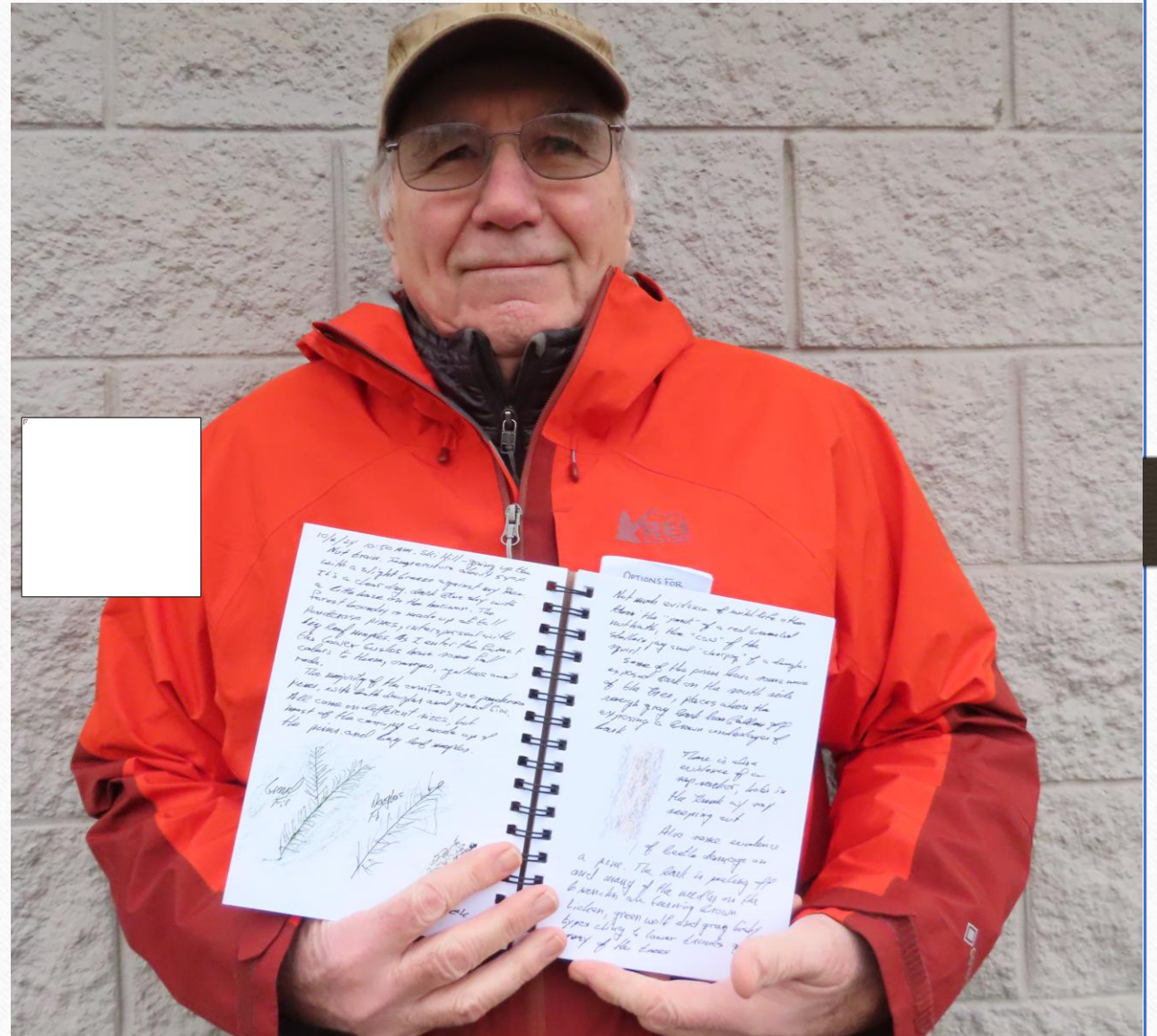
Brook creatively developed hands-on naturalist-themed lessons for her high school biology students. Her students wrote in field journals, ask questions of invited guest scientists, and explored in plants and animal specimens in labs, and went on field trips.

<https://www.wenatcheenaturalist.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Wenatchee-Naturalist-Brooke-Hagopian.pdf>

Jeremy Howell



Jeremy shared three samples of lichen found at his site, Leavenworth Ski Hill. There are more but would have been difficult to carry a boulder with other samples. Taking this class has changed my experience from being an observer to having an engaged, if not intimate relationship with the natural world.



Cindy Kahn



Indian Hemp Photos: [Burke Herbarium Plants of WA Image Library](#)

Cindy's project was to learn how Indigenous Peoples used plants found growing at her study site, the Horan Natural Area. A friend introduced her to the species used for fibers to make baskets, especially Indian hemp. She learned of other plants at her site that can be used for fiber include Willow, Cattail, Milkweed, and Sedge. She had known that the fibers of Indian hemp made a strong cord, but recently got to see locally made baskets made with these plants.



Leslie Kutz

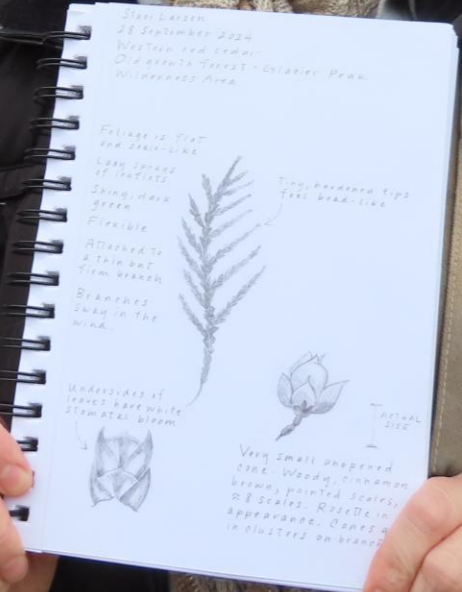
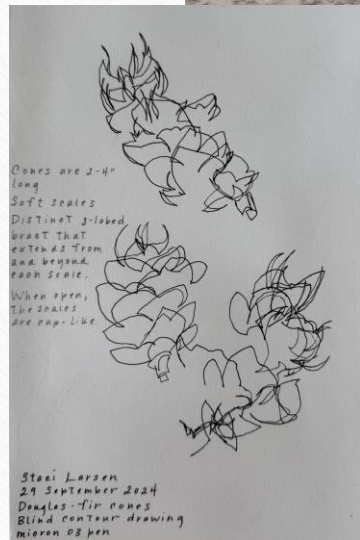
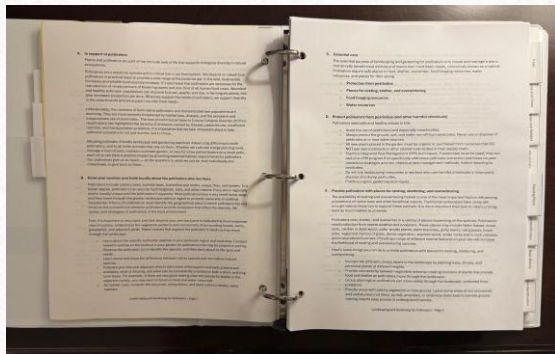
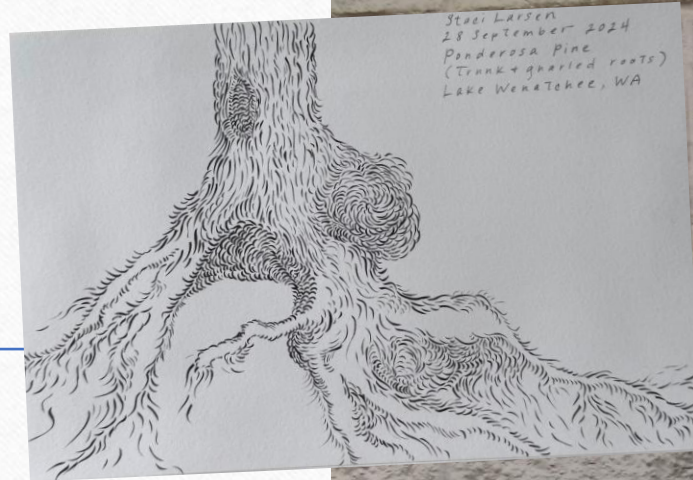
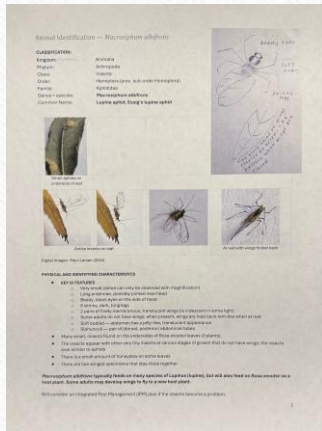


Leslie prepared a photo essay about the natural and cultural history of the natural wet meadow, Camas Meadows. She highlighted two rare plants found here- Wenatchee Larkspur and Wenatchee Checkermallow. Read it here:

<https://www.wenatcheenaturalist.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Camas-Short-History-L-Kutz.pdf>



Staci Larsen



Staci shared her extensive native plant and insect research tied to the development of her home's extensive gardens. As an artist, she focused on native plants in her journal.

Andrew Mills

You can't love something and not care for it, and its future. Read Andrew's essay here: <https://www.wenatcheenaturalist.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Climateguide-Andrews-Mills-2024.pdf>

Andrew opens with this introduction:

I have created a 12-page guide about things to do to stop the plunge toward a climate disaster. We face the possibility of a mass extinction of species. We definitely face the spiraling of costs to humanity as the climate warms, and environmental damage occurs.

The guide offers hope and ideas. It is about what each of us might do. It is written in a connected "waterfall" style that you can pick up at any point -- a bit like following a stream down a long canyon, but is accessible at points along the way.

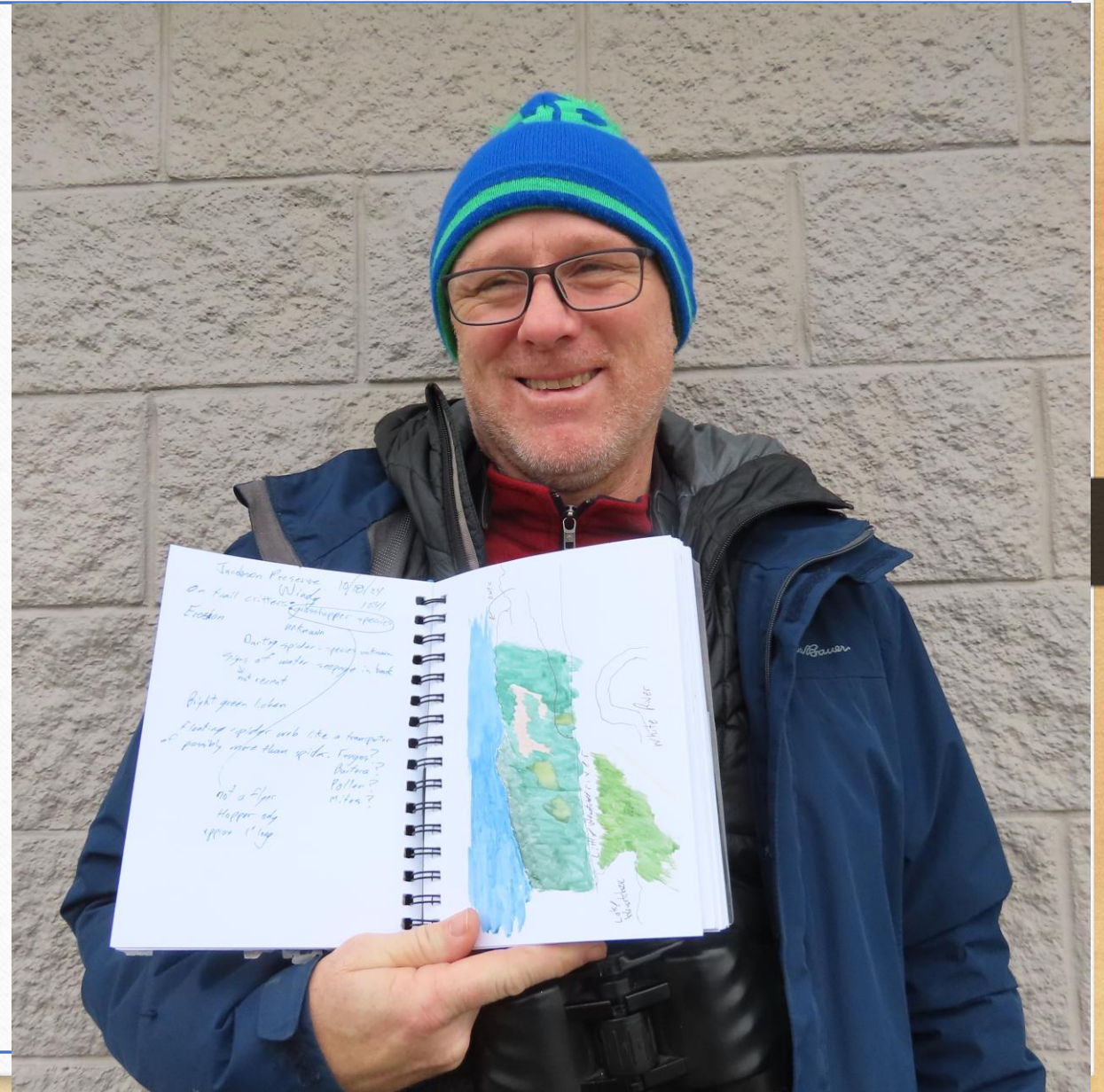


Chris Frank

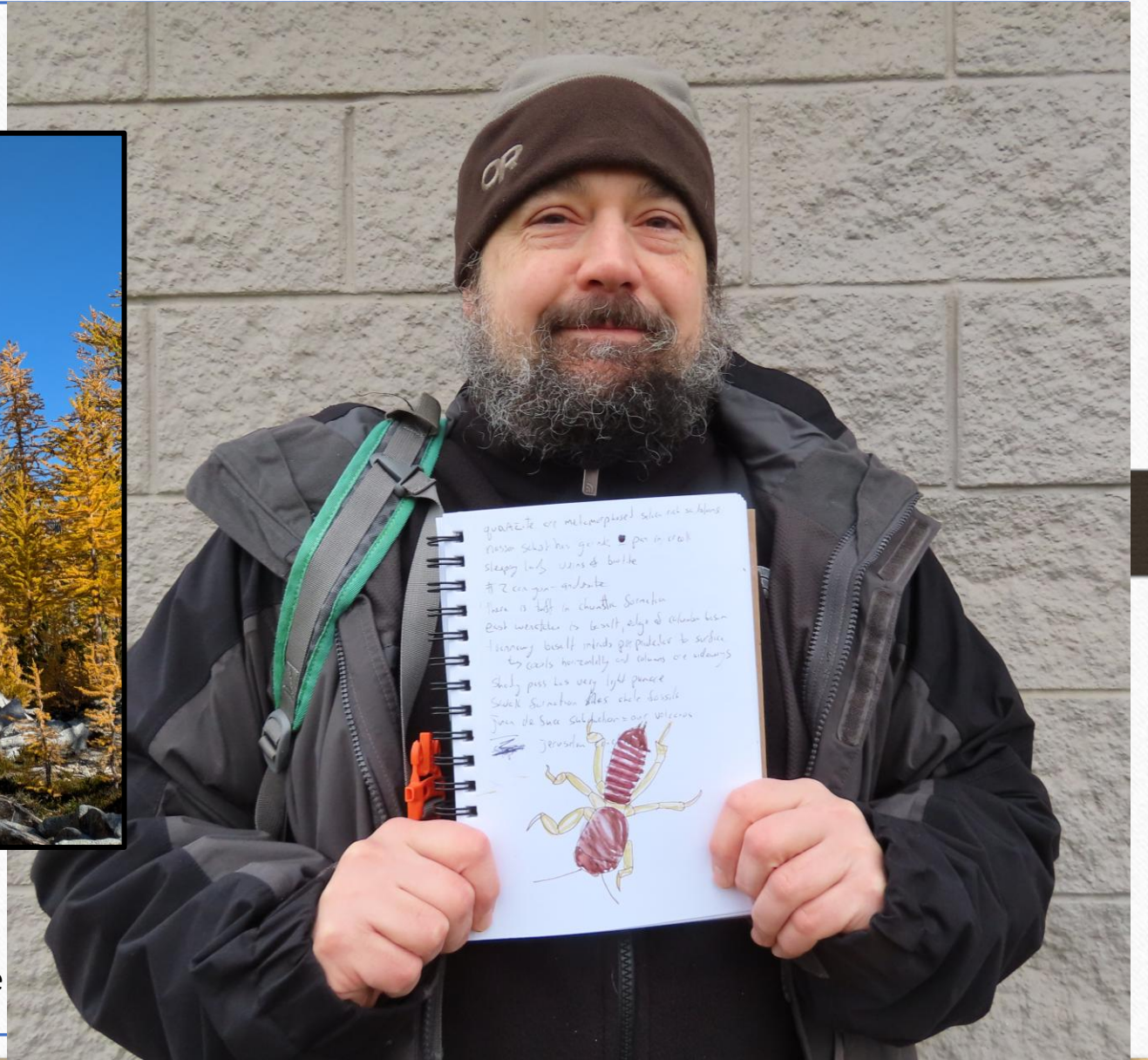


[Brown-headed cowbird. Photo: https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Brown-headed_Cowbird/photo-gallery/306621721](https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Brown-headed_Cowbird/photo-gallery/306621721)

Chris introduced the life history of the brown-headed cowbird, and the brood parasite strategy to have other birds incubate and rear their young. See Chris' presentation here: <https://www.wenatcheenaturalist.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Brown-Headed-Cowbird.pdf>



Nate Moore



Nate's project was to apply his naturalist skills to identify and study subalpine larch (*Larix lyallii*) – a native timberline species. His study was during a fall hike to the Enchantments, in the Alpine Lakes Wilderness near Leavenworth.

Jack Mynatt



[Draba verna Photo:](#)
Burke Herbarium
Image Collection

Jack suggests a good motto for the program, or at least something to put on a T-shirt:

SLOW DOWN LOOK DOWN

He quips, "I am of course thinking of Aldo Leopold's remarks about [Draba verna](#):

"He who walks by with his nose in the air shall miss it. He who looks for it with his knees in the mud shall find it in abundance."

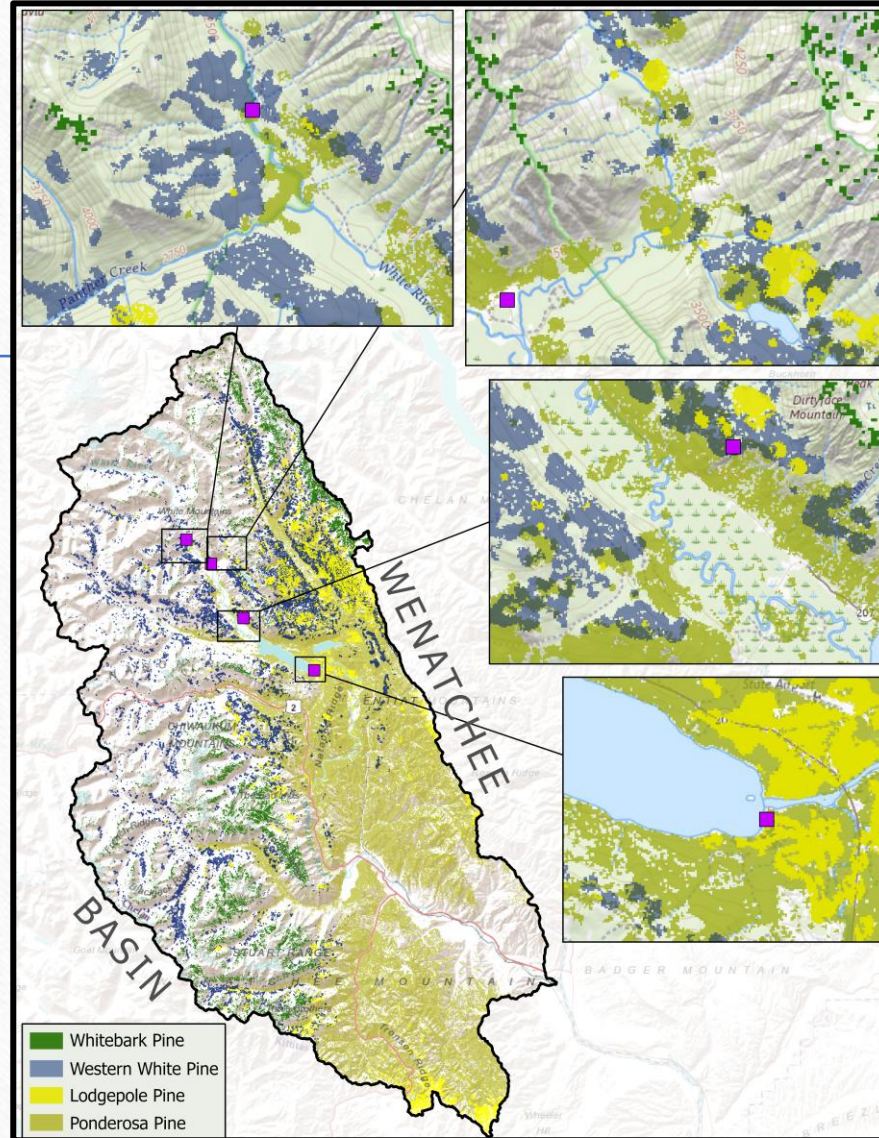


Leah Nagel

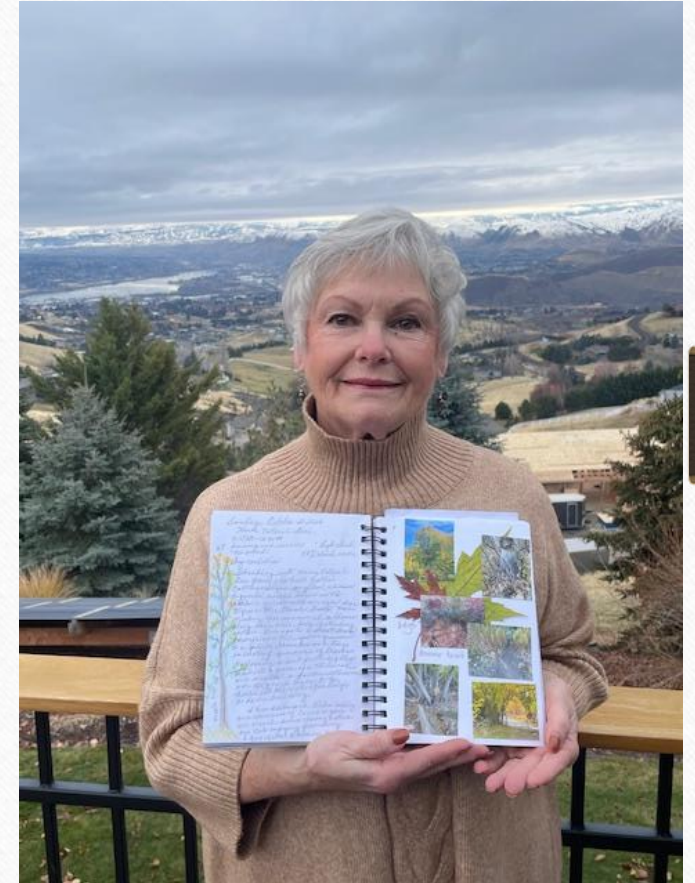
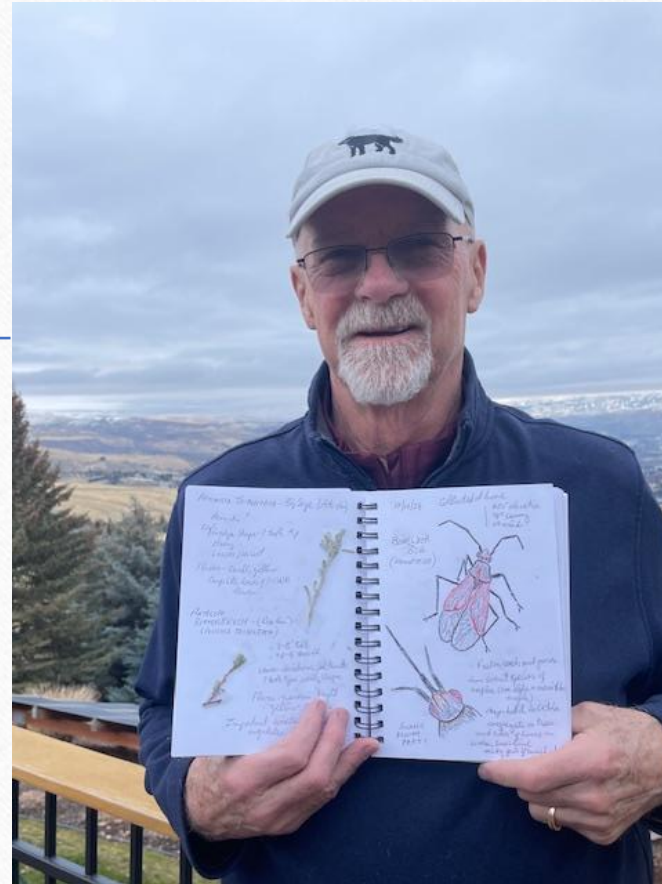
Leah's day job is as a GIS specialist, where she designs maps to tell stories. She used a tree species dataset to create a digital map of the Wenatchee Watershed, showing the range of 4 species of native pines. Each enlarged box shows our field trip stops.

Explore her map here:

https://www.wenatchee-naturalist.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/03_Pines_map-Leahtiny.png



Bob and Pat Ogburn



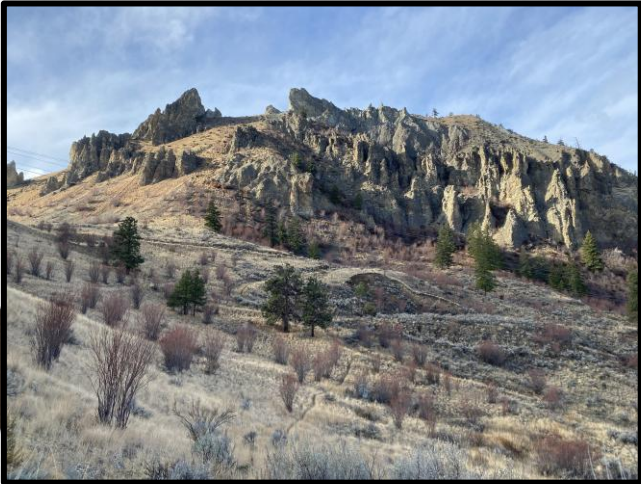
Bob and Pat found, collected, and identified branches of all the native conifer trees near their Lake Wenatchee cabin. They created a wreath using all of the samples to use greens to decorate for the winter holidays

Suzanne Reilly

Suzanne and her husband and classmate, Tod, made weekly visits to their field site, making sure to use watercolor paints to add color to their field sketches. Their site was the Leavenworth National Fish Hatchery and they observed wildlife along the Icicle River riparian corridor.



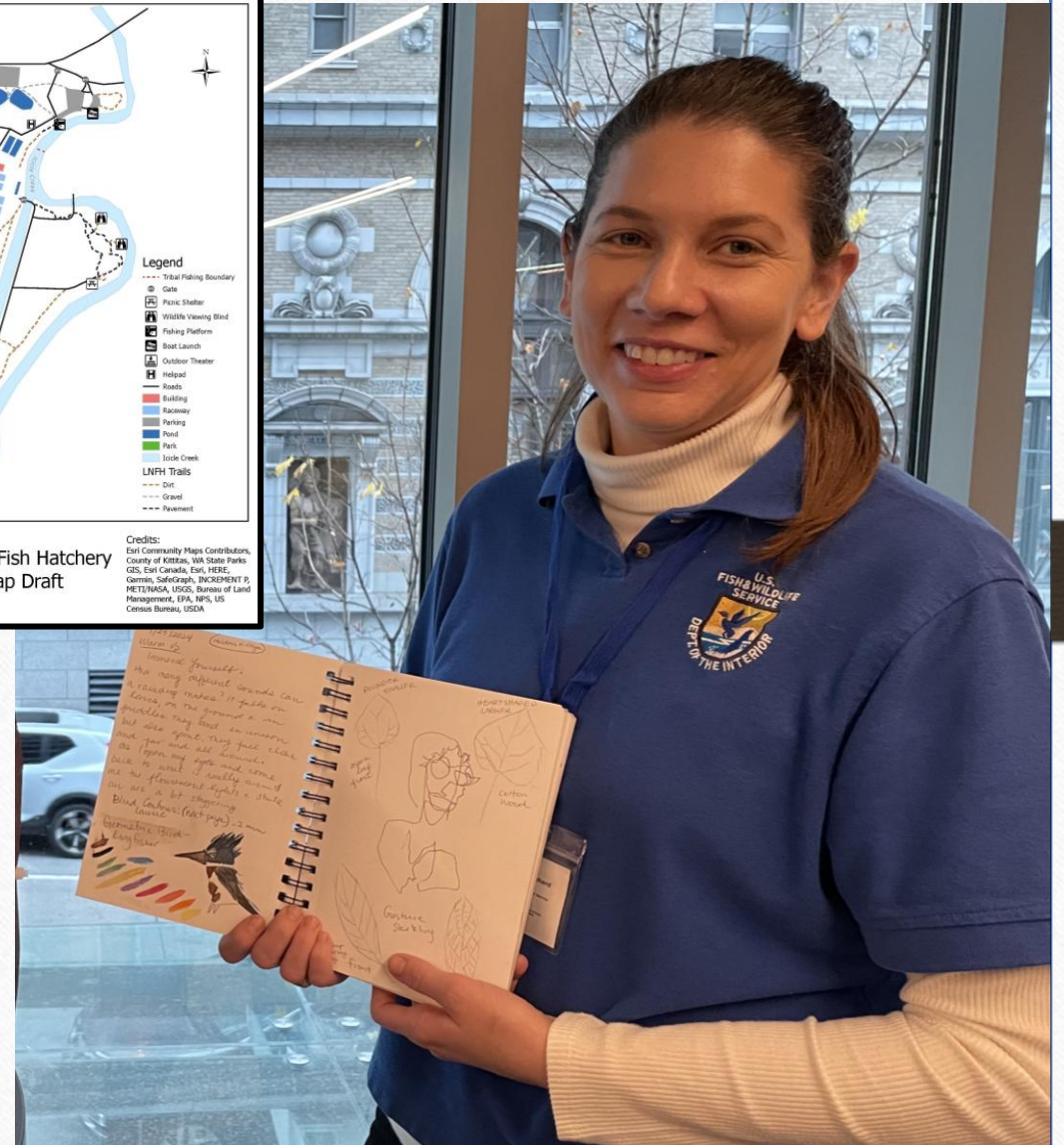
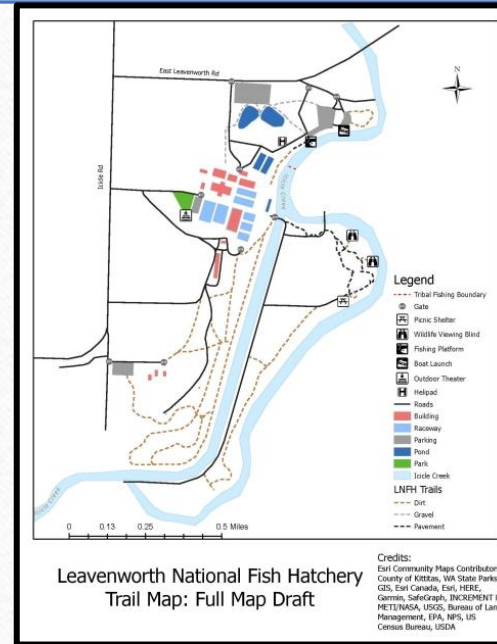
Laurie Riegert



Laurie read-aloud her essay titled, Naturalist Class and Puppy. Together, they explored the Saddle Rock area near her home. She concludes, *Izzy and I are still beginners but together we inspire each other to learn about our hillside in ways that bring us closer to nature and feel like we are a part of the shrub steppe landscape.* Read her story here:

<https://www.wenatcheenaturalist.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Naturalist-Class-and-Puppy.pdf>

Nicole Shepherd



Nicole and Sophie were classmates and are work-mates. Together, they created a four-season guide to exploring nature at the Leavenworth National Fish Hatchery. At work, they welcome the public to come learn about the salmon's life cycle, and Icicle River habitats that support a complex web of life.

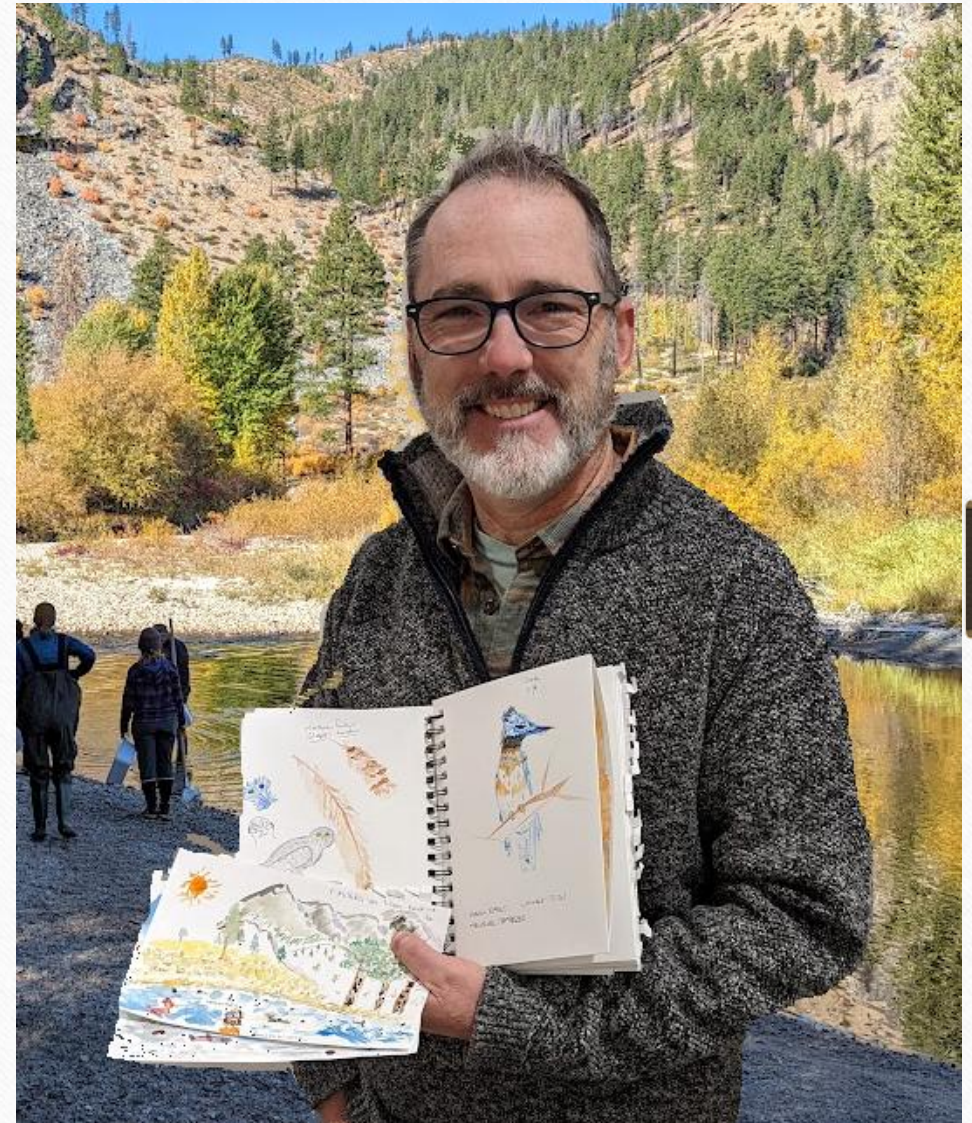
Watch their video here: <https://youtu.be/NAP8wGplkLo>

Tod Treat

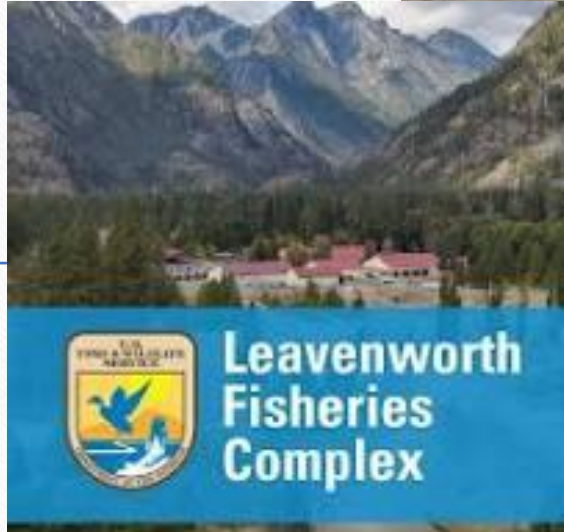
Near the end of our class, Tod and his family traveled to his childhood hometown in the Midwest. Tod applied his new naturalist eyes to see the habitat elements of the place he knew well from childhood, but had never before seen from the perspective of the natural world.

View his photo collection here:

<https://photos.google.com/share/AF1QipNB1bFkbRyen6CNrssDbf-9h8Wg1XJZcNVG-sb384Fg9YkyaqbDH1NpVVGanO8SA?key=bTN6OV8xNUdjV0xmdU1uQy05Vkt5ejNPOHVMcTIR>



Sophia Troeh



Sophie and Nicole were classmates and are work-mates. Together, they created a four-season guide to exploring nature at the Leavenworth National Fish Hatchery. At work, they welcome the public to come learn about the salmon's life cycle, and Icicle River habitats that support a complex web of life.

Watch their video here: <https://youtu.be/NAP8wGplkLo>



Catherine Waterston



Catherine was inspired to make two stained-glass neo-tropical migrant songbirds: The [western tanager](#) and the [western meadowlark](#). When she revisits her field journaling site this spring, there is good chance one of the birds will welcome her with a song, in admiration of her artistry using colored glass and a naturalist's eye.



Visit the [Wenatchee Naturalist website](#) for materials to support your life-long learning journey.

See how other past students have [volunteered to support conservation](#) upon class completion.



I thank each member of the fall 2024 class for being part of our learning community. Elisa Lopez's support as class assistant was terrific.— Susan Ballinger



<https://youtu.be/VrUuuuEBxX0> Take a peek at Elisa Lopez's week-by-week overview of our class!