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The Chukar Run: The season's social event

By Jim Huckabay Contributing Columnist
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As you are no doubt aware, we are two weeks away from the Kittitas County Field and Stream Club's annual Chukar Run banquet — the social event of the season. It happens Saturday, April 9, at the fairgrounds. Doors open at 4 p.m., dinner at 6 p.m. with fun and laughter until 9:30 p.m. or so. This is the 30th of these annual parties, celebrating 97 years of fun, games, camaraderie and looking after the outdoor future of Paradise.

Thanks to the Cle Elum Branch of Wells Fargo Bank, you can bid on, and own, the celebratory memento of Super Bowl 48. The Cle Elum team earned top recognition in the four-state Wells Fargo system, and was awarded the autographed Russell Wilson jersey to pass along to a charity of their choice. Because of its long history of work on behalf of access, habitat and outdoor families, the Cle Elum Wells Fargo team chose the Kittitas County Field and Stream Club. This year's auction and raffles feature donations from more than a hundred local businesses and individuals. Russell Wilson's jersey will be the centerpiece of the auction.

Funds raised at the Chukar Run help the Field and Stream Club carry forward its unique work on behalf of our outdoor activities and quality of life. The club may be the most active in the state in terms of looking after short- and long-term fishing, hunting and outdoor activities. Indeed, very few residents of Paradise have not been touched by the work of the Field and Stream Club.

From the day it was formalized in 1919, Kittitas County Field and Stream Club members have been committed to “working today for tomorrow's wildlife” and all that such a promise requires. For a fascinating look back at the club and our community check out the “Club History” link at www.kittitasfieldandstream.org.

The outdoor future of Paradise depends on an educated and committed population. The club sponsors and carries out youth fishing activities, with gear, coaching and encouragement. It regularly works to get kids to outdoor camps, and misses no opportunity to help kids connect with the outdoors. Each year, life members select a graduating high school student who shows promise of a career in wildlife or habitat management for a \$1,500 scholarship.

Through nearly all of a century, Kittitas County Field and Stream has stood the sportsman's ground. From the development of the L.T. Murray to creation of the Naneum State Forest, the club and its members have been involved. Access to public ground — our ground — has fallen under greater threat over the last couple years than at any time in the past century. The club is not passively accepting these threats; it is in deep into the struggle for access, and for the public's right to have a voice in decisions about it.

Members see this as work done on behalf of our kids and grandkids and their outdoor heritage.

The Field and Stream Club pioneered hunter education classes more than 50 years ago. That training in safe hunting and firearm handling is a big deal. More than 4,000 youngsters have graduated from club-sponsored classes. It saves lives.

Every winter, the club provides free bird seed at Ranch and Home and Shaw's Furniture to help you get your feathered buddies through tough spots.

Chukars? We have (and may) periodically release chukar partridge into prime habitat all over the valley (thus, our "Chukar Run"). Some will be hunted, but hunting is the least of their problems when you mix in hawks, coyotes, foxes, skunks, food supply and some pretty iffy weather. The shrewdest, fastest and strongest of them will be making more chukars next spring. Releasing chukars is the keeping of promises made long, long ago; they run in honor of Bob McBride, Ike Hamblin, Ray Wheeler, Loel Knudson, Martin Pedersen, and the hundreds of club volunteers before them.

Looking to the future, the club has created a Washington Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights, and spearheaded efforts to get it through the Washington State Legislature. See where that is now at www.wakidsoutdoors.org.

All of this work is supported by a huge number of volunteer hours, dues of 25 bucks a year (up from 50 cents in 1919), Rodeo weekend hilltop parking, a couple raffles and the Chukar Run — the primary fundraiser.

This year's raffle is for a Ruger SR Model 1911 stainless steel semiautomatic pistol in .45 auto caliber. Tickets are \$20 and only 100 will be sold. Food will be by Cascade Mountain Grilling — often called "the finest banquet food in the state." Dick Culver will handle the auction. Jim Huckabay and Deborah Essman will keep games moving and everything on time. It is, after all, the social event of the season.

Banquet tickets — only \$30 — are only available in advance. Get them from Arnold's Ranch & Home, Sure Shot Guns and Pawn, the Grizzly Safe Company, Shaw's Furniture, or online at www.kittitasfieldandstream.org. Board members have tickets also. Even if you can't attend and play, stop by the businesses above and thank them for their strong support of our forever outdoor lives here in Paradise.

See you two weeks from tomorrow. It's for now and for tomorrow. It's for wildlife and open land — and the ability of your children's children to enjoy them.

Jim Huckabay is the interim chair of the Department of Law and Justice at Central. His "WILD WINDS and Other Tales of Growing Up in the Outdoor West," is available online and at bookstores. Contact Jim and join in discussions at www.insidetheoutdoors.com.

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