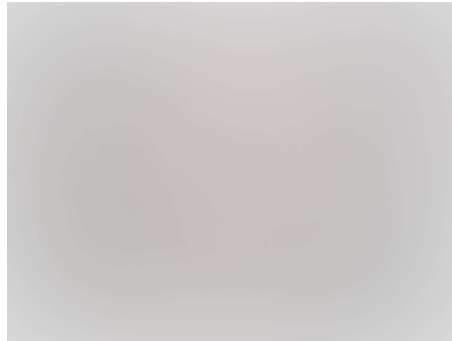


## Inside the Outdoors: Standing ground on public access

Jim Huckabay Contributing columnist

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### **Jim Huckabay**

Jim Huckabay is retired from the department of geography at Central and is the author of "WILD WINDS and Other Tales of Growing Up in the Outdoor West." Contact Jim and join in the discussion of this and other columns at [www.insidetheoutdoors.com](http://www.insidetheoutdoors.com).

The Chukar Run, Kittitas County Field and Stream Club's annual celebration and fundraising banquet, happens a week from Saturday. If you have any interest whatsoever in accessing your (public) ground in the county, be there.

The Kittitas County Field and Stream Club is the oldest outdoor-oriented club in the state. Since 1919, the outdoor lives and traditions of most families in the county have been touched by one club activity or another. Through almost 100 years, thousands of outdoor-minded men and women have actively supported the clubs motto: "Working today for tomorrow's wildlife."

Supporting that motto has taken dozens of forms, and has evolved into work to protect the public's ability to enjoy wildlife and nature on its own land. It is ever more important.

The club sends hundreds of kids to camp, and supports outdoor training in camping, fishing and hunting.

Life members of the club offer a college scholarship (\$1,500) to high school graduates in the county who are studying an outdoor-related field.

The club has been the biggest supporter (financial and otherwise) of the Kittitas County Big Game Management Roundtable. The Roundtable found solutions to ongoing game damage problems in the valley — solutions which continue improving relationships with agriculture producers.

Kittitas Field and Stream has long sponsored the Eyes in the Woods program — to better look after lands and critters. Trained volunteers have had an impact on curbing illegal and unethical activities.

Annually, club members pick up tons of yahoo trash on Durr Road.

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 — and it saves lives. More than 4,000 youngsters have graduated from club-sponsored classes.

From L.T. Murray development to creation of the Naneum Ridge State Forest, the club and its members have been deep in virtually every public land discussion and decision. That involvement is more critical than ever, and club officers, directors and members are swarming the plate.

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 Field and Stream Club is not putting up with it.

## **Modern closures**

In the 1980s, the club worked with state agencies, businesses, and the outdoor community on an agreement to close roughly half the roads on public ground throughout Paradise. Part of that agreement was that no additional closures would occur in the future. Fast forward to 2013: Proposed and actual closures are popping up all over ground we own — at the hands of those hired to manage our land.

A “temporary” winter closure has become a de facto semi-permanent (and planned permanent) closure — even though promised regular “public involvement” meetings never happened. Two widely used roads in the Quilomene — Stray and Takison — were proposed for closure. Field and Stream Club officers thought they were negotiating to keep them open during the first few months of this year. In April, a member of the club noticed from his airplane that the roads had been closed with large boulders and a bulldozer. As it turns out, the recently released road management area map for the Whiskey Dick/Quilomene — which was updated in January — showed the roads closed. Now, I hear murmuring about how those closed roads are hindering fighting the big Colockum Tarps wildfire on this critical winter habitat.

Those issues are just the beginning. Homeys often spoke of playing Whack-A-Mole with sudden and unexpected road and access closures on their public land. It reached the point that club officers, directors and members began mobilizing the community.

The community responded. In days, more than 550 homeys signed a petition opposing the closures. The Ellensburg City Council, chamber of commerce and county commissioners prepared and sent letters. Our legislative delegation worked to

garner support statewide and successfully moved a budget proviso with closure controls through the governor's signature. It's a start.

Field and Stream has stood the outdoor user's ground in Paradise for nearly 100 years. It still stands that ground. Today, the issue is access — continuing access to your ground.

The struggle for access, and the public's right to have a voice in decisions about it, will continue. And so will the Kittitas County Field and Stream Club's work. This is really for our kids and grandkids and their outdoor heritage.

### **The banquet**

If you spend time on your land around the valley, this is your struggle, too. The club needs your help and support.

The banquet and auction celebration is a week from Saturday. You will never make a better investment than the \$25 each to get you and your cohort into a terrific meal and an important evening. Get tickets from board members, Arnold's Ranch & Home, Sure Shot Guns and Archery, Old Mill Country Store, Shaw's Furniture and Appliance or get them online at [www.kittitasfieldandstream.org](http://www.kittitasfieldandstream.org). Come to the banquet.

It's for now and for tomorrow — for wildlife, for open land and for your ability to access them.

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