

## Susan Ballinger

The confluence of the pristine Napeequa River is a place I have visited annually for over 20 years, specifically to see the wildlife supported at its confluence with the White River. I am a biologist, naturalist educator, and lover of wilderness. I bring adult student to this confluence location, specifically to be enveloped by a highly functioning ecosystem, where they witness the inter-connectedness of life, landscape, and land. At about 2000 ft, this location is the boundary between conifer tree species more common on the westside of the Cascades, compared to eastside Cascade forests, including Pacific Silver fir, Western red cedar, Engelmann spruce, Western hemlock and western yew. The confluence is the farthest north reach of its shallow gravel filled reach where Sockeye salmon spawn in addition to Chinook salmon spawning beds. Resident American Dippers, Common Mergansers, and Bald Eagles are reliably seen from the bridge at the mouth. For many years, American Dippers nest directly under this bridge in a moss-lined nest. I have watched dozens of young western toads departing this confluence, headed for upland forests for adult habitat. The cold clear, clean water is critical for the salmon spawning gravels. Sections of land near the confluence are held in conservation easement by Chelan-Douglas Land Trust (CDLT), to be protected for perpetuity. Much of the 6-miles of White River, south of the confluence, is protected by USFS, WDFW, and CDLT-held conservation easements and fee-owned land. This protection resulted from a decade of coordinated efforts to protect the cold clear waters, and the only remaining non-hatchery run of sockeye salmon in the upper Columbia River. From Buck Pass, I have hiked out along a high ridge to look down on the small icefield lake that waterfalls down, forming the Napeequa headwaters. This habitat supports wildlife, water quality, and offers a wilderness experience of awe to visitors. This river is unique on the eastside of the Cascades for being mostly federally owned, roadless land. It will continue to provide critical climate migration corridors for plants and animals in the warming decades to come. It's rugged beauty that requires a lot of human effort to explore, will serve to inspire human visitor, as it provides key habitat, with it's topographically diversity and intact hydrology. For these reasons, I urge designation as a Outstanding Resource Waters for Washington State.