



# Gray Wolf Trail Crew - in partnership with - BCHW, Peninsula Chapter



West Elwha Trail, ONP

January 24, 2026

Report by Rebecca Wanagel

## Crew Members:

Rebecca Wanagel	Cricket Pomeroy	Julie Metzger
Martin Knowles	Kellie Creamer	James Miller
Bernt Ericson	Michelle Winey	Bill Mueller
Eric Nagle	Rick King	LaVonne Mueller
Tim Goss	Jack Bochsler	Lisa Turnberg
Rodney Lemay	Ian Davis	Neil Turnberg
Miguel Reabold		

## Quick Stats

On-trail volunteer hours: 128  
Hours including travel time: 172  
Miles worked: 3.5  
Trail rating: Hiker and stock

## Objectives:

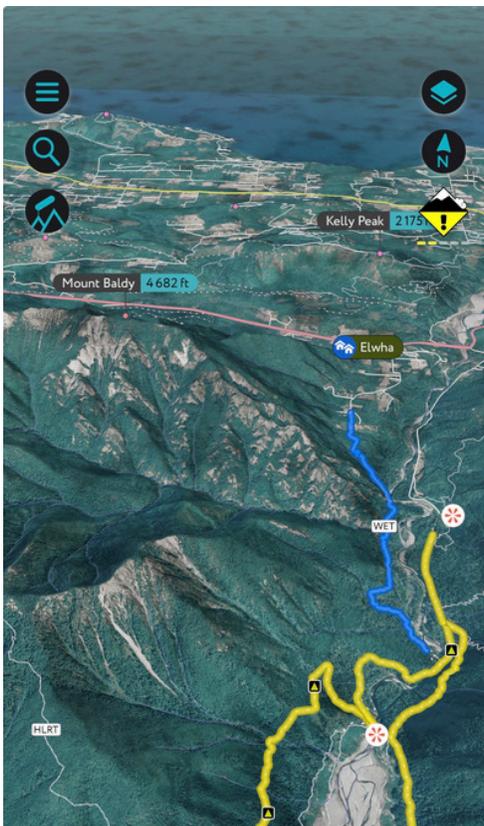
1. Finish brushing both sides of the trail.
2. Clean up brushing debris and finish raking deciduous leaves.
3. Finish trimming back overhead and encroaching branches and vine maples.
4. Final touch up on muddy corner  $\frac{3}{8}$  mile from trailhead.
5. Tread repair / rebenching as necessary.
6. Mitigate drainage issues as necessary, especially focusing on hill going down to Altair.

## Achieved:

1. All objectives achieved, including most of the crew needing to hike nearly 7 miles to accomplish it!

## Future work:

1. Build a short turnpike in a wet area about 2.5 miles from trailhead.
2. Communicate and plan with Nathan from ONP to address the deteriorating and broken puncheon on the hill going down to Altair.



This map helps give you an overview of the West Elwha Trail with its appropriate acronym, WET, highlighted blue.

It basically runs at the base of Mount Baldy on the west side of the Elwha River. Hughes Creek dumps a large volume of water into the Elwha from the south side of Baldy. The trail runs from Herrick Road south to the former Altaire Campground and hooks up with the Olympic Hot Springs road.

Since it starts on private property before entering the ONP boundary, one might think this is an odd place for a trail. However, it is the old stock route up to the Olympic Hot Springs, from back when both people and supplies were transported up there via mule and horse power. The yellow is showing the Olympic Hot Springs Road with its start at Madison Falls parking lot (star). You can see where the OHS road splits off to Whiskey Bend road, the former way to drive up to the main Elwha trailhead (no longer in use as a road because the OHS road has been closed for so long).

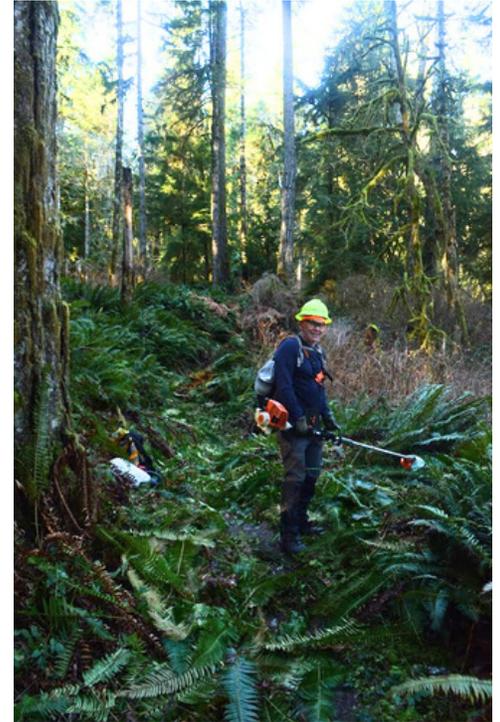
We have run several crews on WET this winter, with the goal of giving it a good, thorough tending from trailhead to Altaire. This was the final large crew we will be putting on this trail for the year. There will be smaller crews to tend two specific project areas. But for now, the trail is so much nicer to hike! Thank you to all the crew members and Bobbie Stoneman who, again, provided us with parking and a warm place to gather after the crew with hot drinks and yummy rolls. Not to mention brownies before the work began for the day.



This day our brushers were Bernt, Eric, Rodney and Tim. The progress they made was remarkable, zooming their way through the last ¾ mile of trail full of ferns, salmonberry and other vegetation on both sides of the trail.

But, wow, did they ever leave a mess behind them! ;-)

The tools we are using are called Kombi tools. They are a Stihl powerhead that can be used with different attachments. We use the attachment that can take a circular blade, which has carbide-tipped teeth. The blade is SO GOOD that we have to consciously remind ourselves to cut only smaller stuff because the power of the blade will outdo the strength of the plastic attachment on the shaft.



Next came the swampers, Cricket, Kellie, Michelle and either Bernt or Eric when they swapped out the brusher. However, being that it's nearly impossible to keep up with that brushing crew, Rick and Rebecca stepped in to help near the end to get it all cleaned up.



Michelle, left, tossing ferns as far off the trail as they would reasonably go. This is partly for aesthetics and partly so we don't create a berm of debris that blocks water from getting off the trail.

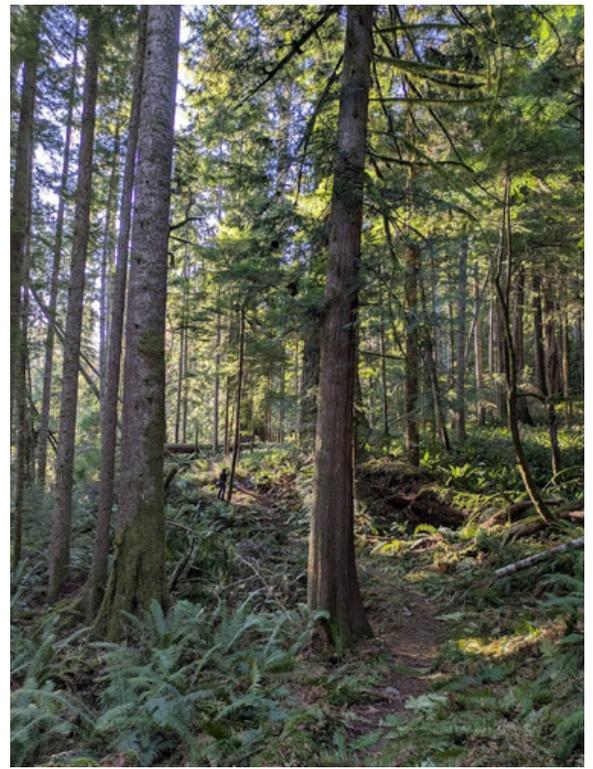
Rick, right, was primarily tasked with cutting back vine maples and encroaching branches all along the trail, but jumped in near the end to help with the massive clean up project.





Cricket, left, was part of the swamping crew and also our main photographer of the day.

Kellie, barely noticeable in this lovely picture as she rakes and rakes and rakes in the picturesque light of the forest, is Cricket's mom. It's wonderful to see families out there working on trails together.



In this same area was Martin, Rebecca and Miguel working on drainage and tread problems on the hill going down to Altaire. This hill notoriously has water running down it which is eroding the trail terribly. We addressed drainage as much as we thought appropriate, and we'll go inspect it sometime soon after we get more rains. We can always put more drainage features in but it's best to only put in what is necessary. Many times you can catch the water from escaping at the top of a run and not need drainages all the way down.



Miguel, left, was learning how to "think like a water drop" to give the water a place to flow off where it naturally would want to anyway.

Rebecca, right, was fixing tread where necessary (mostly where it needed widening or some flattening), working on drainage and teaching trail skills to the new folks on the team. Also helping with the brushing clean up.



Martin, in addition to doing some remarkable drainage which is hard to get a good picture of, also had to cut out a log with his Katanaboy saw. This came down since we were last on the trail, because we had already cleared the trail of logs about a month ago.

Martin also spent some time to clean off and cut back this rootball that nature recently added to our collection of trailside views. It was partially blocking the puncheon.



Some of the crew using the relatively new footlog across Hughes Creek. Thank you to the amazing ONP crew that put this in! So much safer.



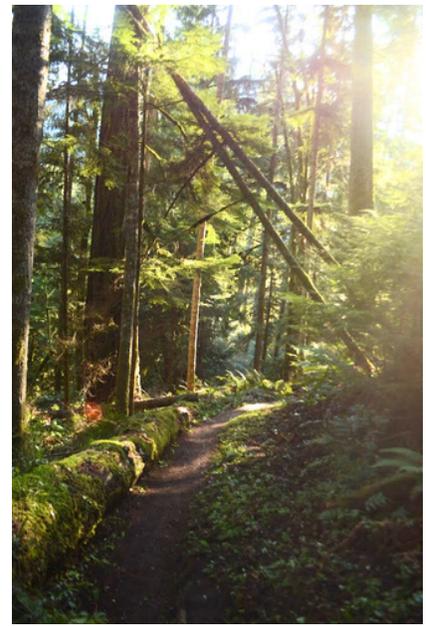
Some terrific before and after shots from tread master, Julie, all in a stream crossing area just south of Dead Horse Bridge (a little over a mile from the trailhead).

Left and middle bottom are looking north.

Middle top and right are looking south. This area had tread that was slowly getting more and more narrowed and off-balance. Julie spruced it all back up.



A before and after set, from the same viewpoint, showing the debris down on the trail and then it all nicely cleaned up.



Below: A before shot from the Jan 3 crew and the after picture from the Jan 24 crew. This is the muddy corner not too far from the trailhead that's been problematic for years. You will recall from the last summary that they made a nice hiker bypass with gravel-lined steps. Now they have improved the trail to the right where stock animals would need to go. More drainage was done along with bringing in plenty of gravel to help with the mushiness.



Jack and Ian primarily ran the pole saw, while Rick went along the trail cutting back endless numbers of vine maples, small encroaching trees and branches along the entire trail.

This trail has, for as long as I can remember, always had a lot of vine maples leaning into the trail. While we don't want to cut the picturesque, moss-covered ones, many of them are simply face-slapping obstacles. It was great to get those cleared back along with all the high branches.



The crew on this beautiful winter day, enjoying hot drinks, yummy rolls and delightful company.

Roughly left to right:  
Martin, Jack, James, Lisa, Neil, Michelle, Rebecca, Cricket,  
Kellie, Julie, Tim, LaVonne, Ian, Rick, Bill, Miguel, Eric, Bernt



As a special treat I leave you with this delightful photo (thank you, Cricket) of hair ice, found here and there on the trail that day. It was chilly and, from a google search, I found that this forms on moist rotting wood when temperatures are just below freezing and the air is humid. We see this from time to time on hikes but it never loses its charm.