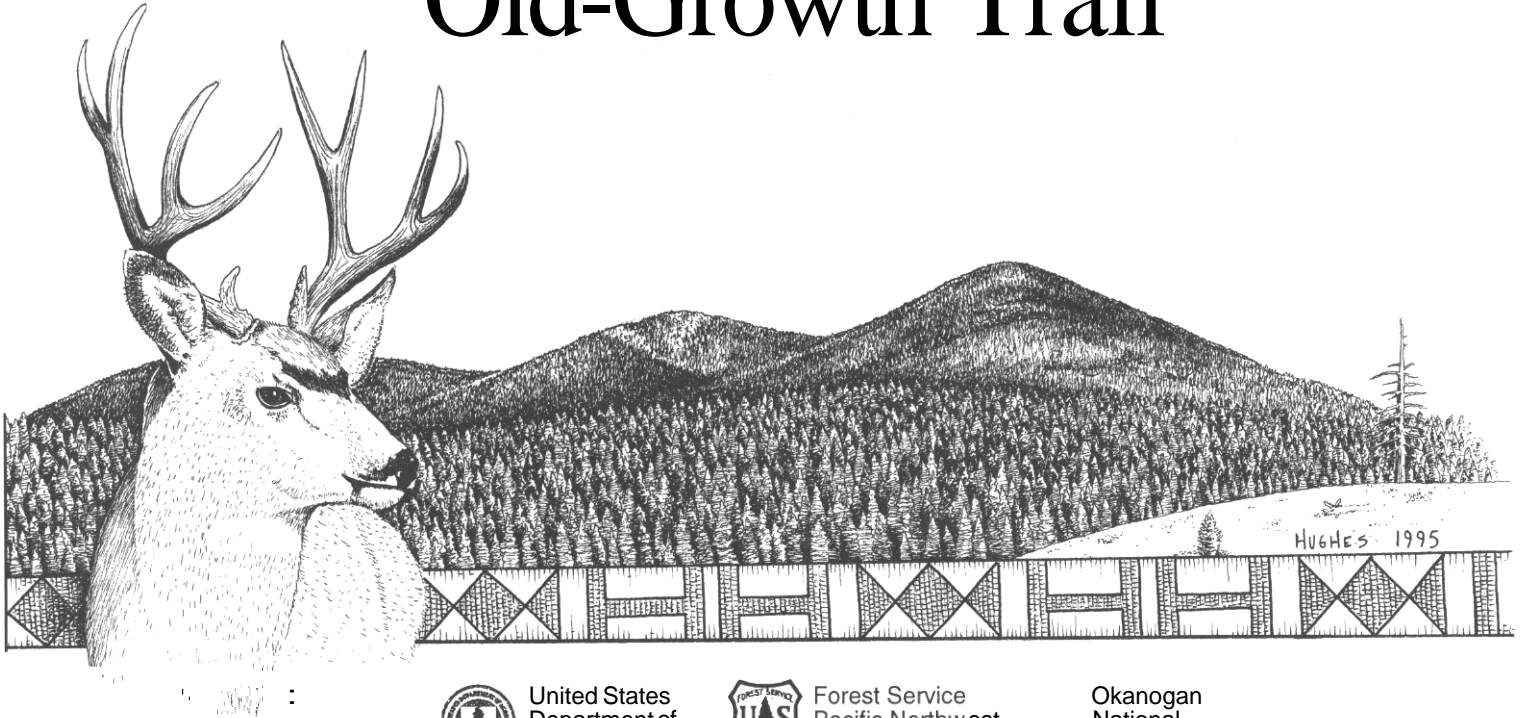




# Virginia Lilly Old-Growth Trail



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture



Forest Service  
Pacific Northwest  
Region

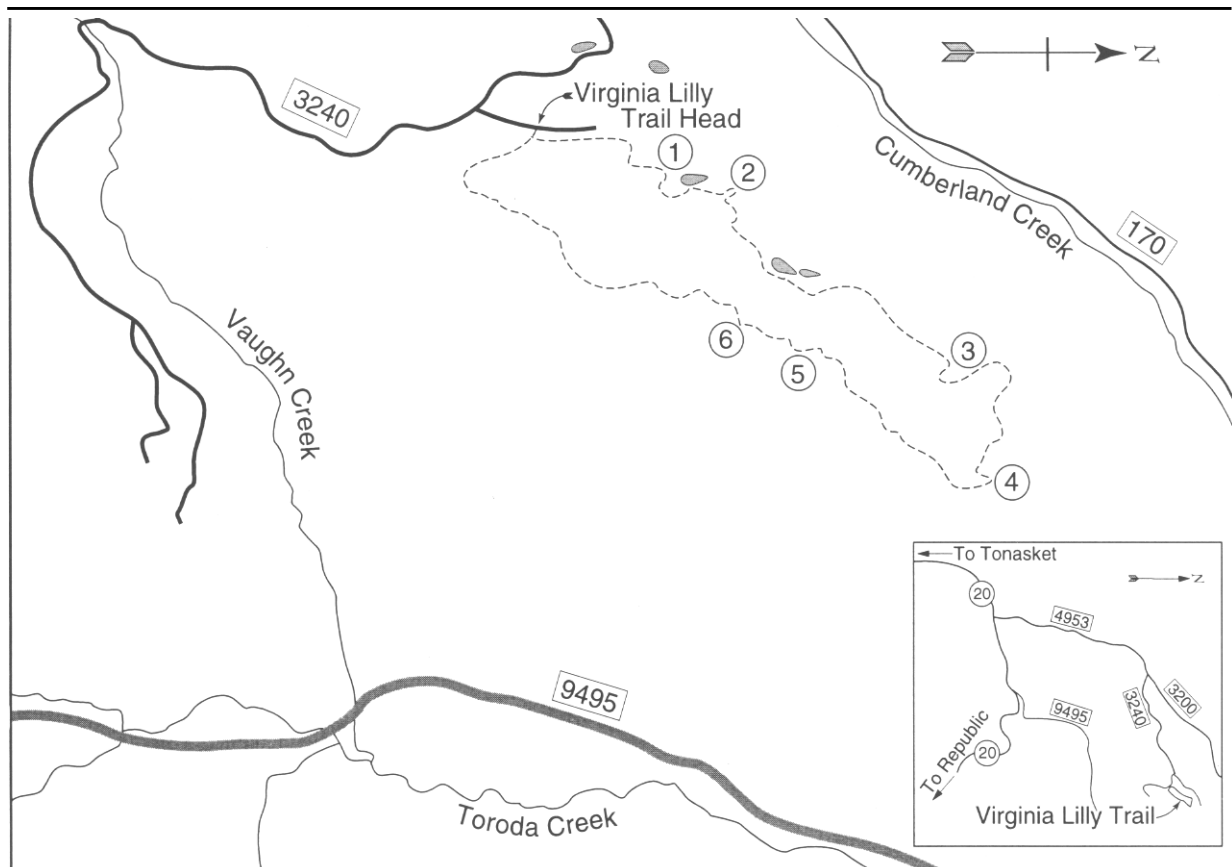
Okanogan  
National  
Forest

Welcome  
to the  
Virginia Lilly Old-Growth Trail.

***Virginia Lilly, an Okanogan Highlands resident, championed recognition of this area's beauty. For Virginia, the discovery of landscape and the discovery of self were inseparably linked. We dedicate this trail to her memory.***

The drawings in this booklet display some of the diversity of features you will see as you walk. The map below will help guide you. The numbers on the map indicate where the drawings were made, but you will see the patterns they represent many times as you go along.

This trail is moderately difficult and there is no drinking water. Please carry ample water for a two to four hour hike if you intend to walk the entire loop.



*“This living, flowing land is all there is, forever...”*

*Gary Snyder*



Old Growth shapes itself over time. In the Okanogan Highlands, in the rain shadow of the Cascades, climate induces fires, and landscape influences where and how they burn. The surviving trees space themselves and grow large as they grow old, structuring the forest. Plants and wildlife sift into this structure, developing a community that functions amid a diversity of life. As the trees die, they continue to serve, first as standing snags, then as logs on the forest floor. The space they occupied opens, sunlight reaches the ground, and new germination begins. Other groves progress toward old growth in their turn, the ever constant change creating stability for the whole forest.

①

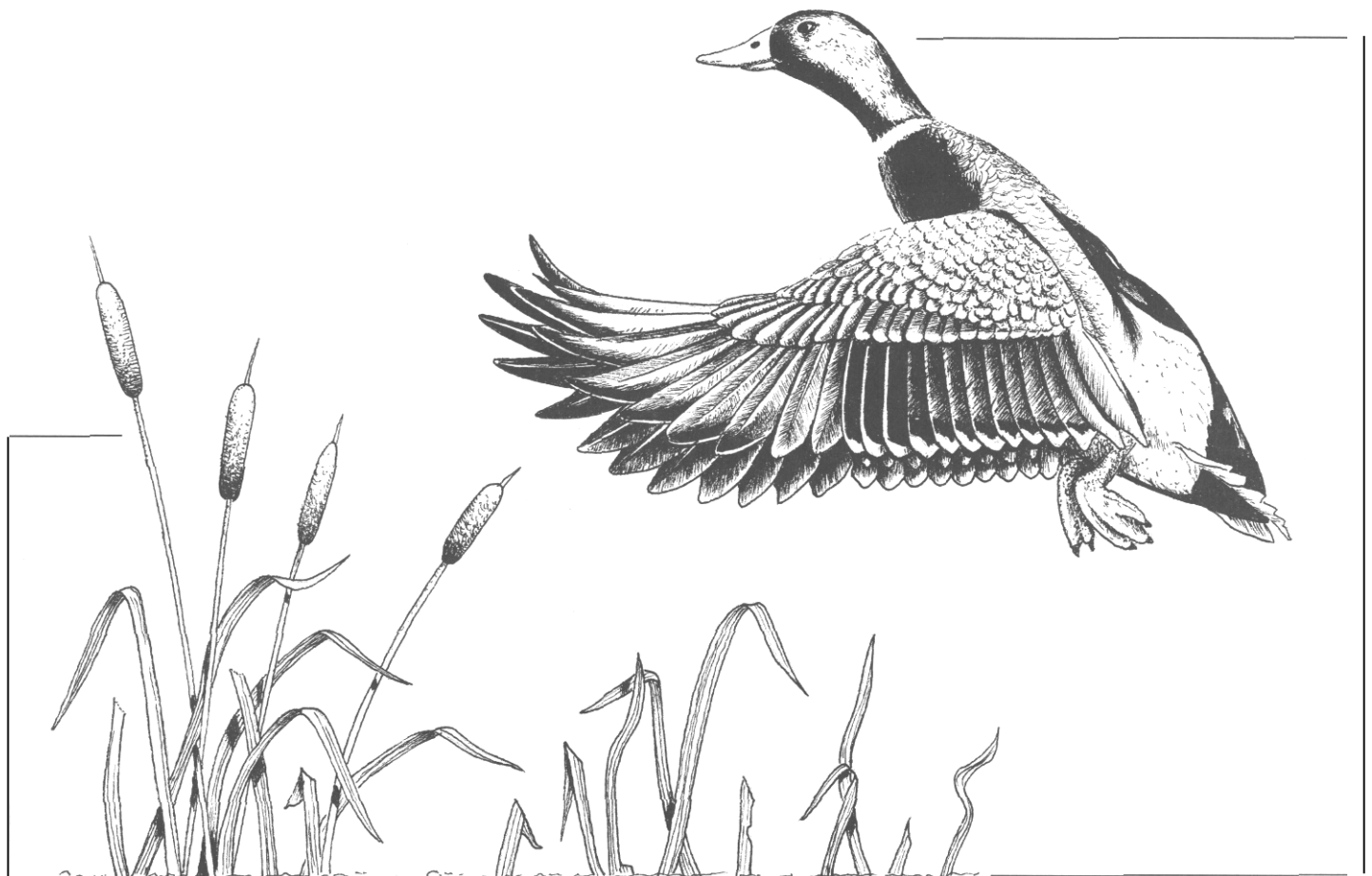


*“Only the  
mountain has lived long enough  
to listen objectively  
to the howl of the wolf;”*

*Aldo Leopold*

The beauty of the present moment is sculpted and nourished by the past. These upland ponds where mallards now feed were created by glaciers carving the landscape over 15,000 years ago. The surrounding forests are nourished by soils with a thick volcanic ash layer left behind by eruptions of Mt. Mazama in Oregon over 6,900 years ago. In nearby Republic, spectacular Eocene Age fossil beds, 150 million years old, display how forest communities change over time. The warm, moist conditions of the Eocene favored a diverse mix of broad leafed trees intermingled with the ancestors of our contemporary temperate forests. Metasequoia, sequoia, ginkgo, dogwood, elm, and maple, grew together with birch, alder, pine, and many other species. Included in this group is the oldest known ancestor of the rose family, from which apples, plums, and the Highlands woods rose are thought to derive.

2



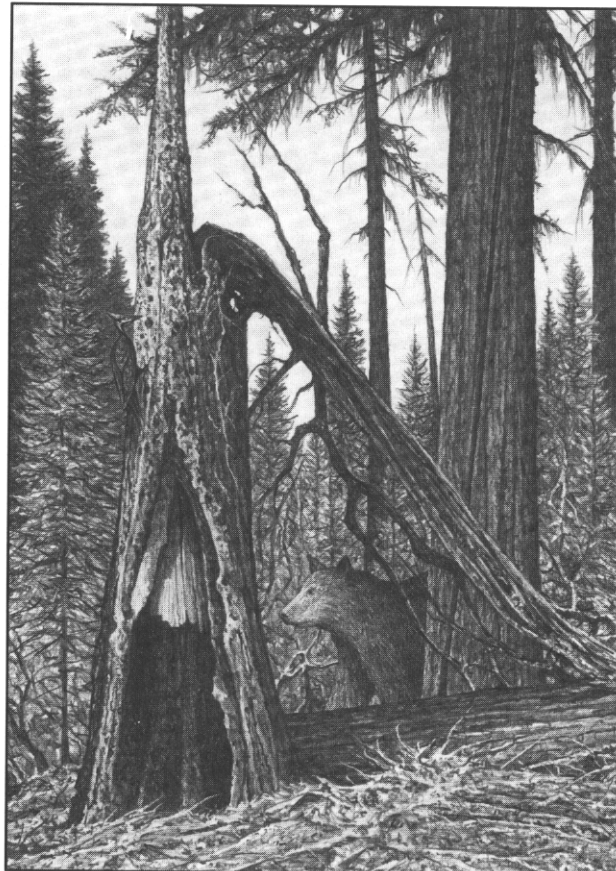
*“All ethics so far evolved rest upon a single premise: that the individual’s a member of a community of interdependent parts. Our instincts prompt us to compete for our place in the community, but our ethics prompt us also to cooperate ---”*

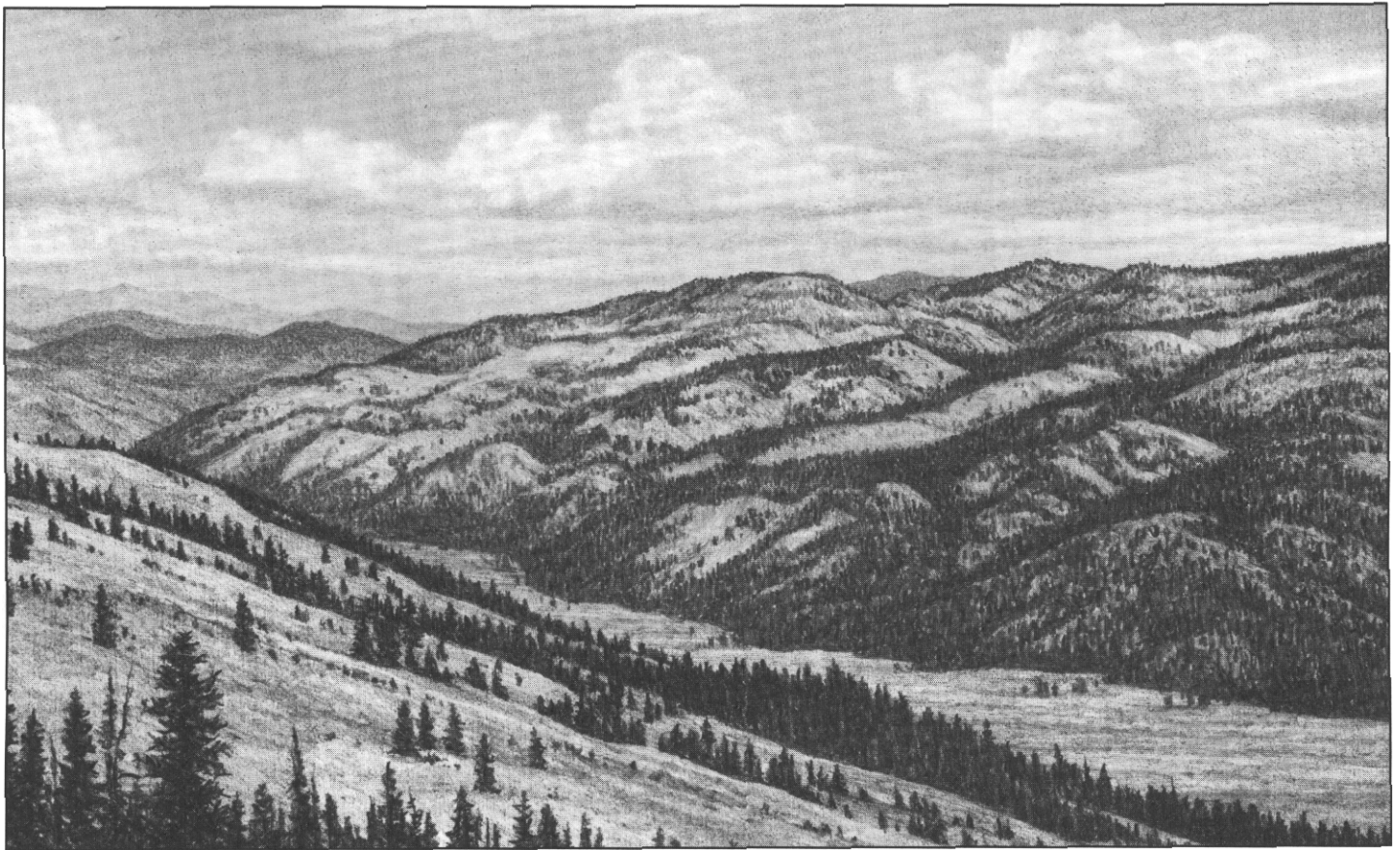
*Aldo Leopold*



**C**ommunities have properties that are greater than the sum of their parts. It is the interactions of single threads; people, animals, plants, fungi, bacteria, soils, fire, and water, over time, that compose the fabric of life.

3





*“For time changes the nature of the whole,  
and all things must pass from one condition to another,  
and nothing remains  
like itself:”*

*Lucretius*

4

Landscape forms and exposures, the slowest elements in the forest to change, influence the behaviors of natural fires. Fires visit dry, southern slopes frequently, sweeping up grass and pine needles, taking small seedlings, but leaving established, healthy trees to grow. Ponderosa pine stands here, its thick bark protecting it from fires that kill competing undergrowth. The moist, northern slopes resist burning and grow dense forests, but a lightning strike in a dry year can feed on accumulated debris. The large fire that may result will kill most of the trees. Left behind will be patches of land charred to the ground, groups of standing dead trees, trees that will soon die, and islands of survivors. Sometimes considered catastrophic, these fires occur every 200-300 years, and contribute to a changing mosaic that provides a diversity of wildlife habitats.

*“Shall I not have intelligence with the earth? Am I not partly leaves and vegetable mold myself?”*

*Henry David Thoreau*



**T**

Life depends on death in the forest. The tree that dies leaves its structure. Animals use it, feeding on it, feeding on each other, hollowing out nests, exposing its heartwood. Lichens and fungi grow and soften it. Sun, rain, wind, and sometimes fire work in tandem with the living elements until all that the tree assembled is dispersed to the soil, available again to nourish life.

5



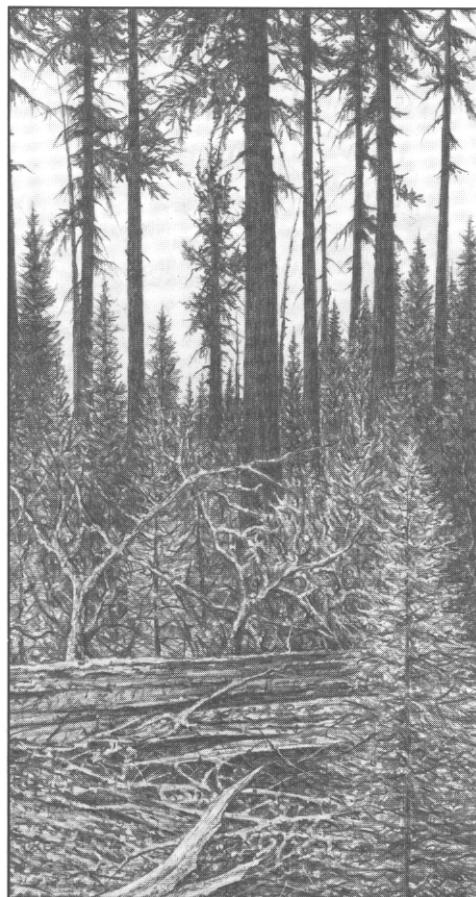
*“We cannot command nature except by obeying her.”*

*Francis Bacon*

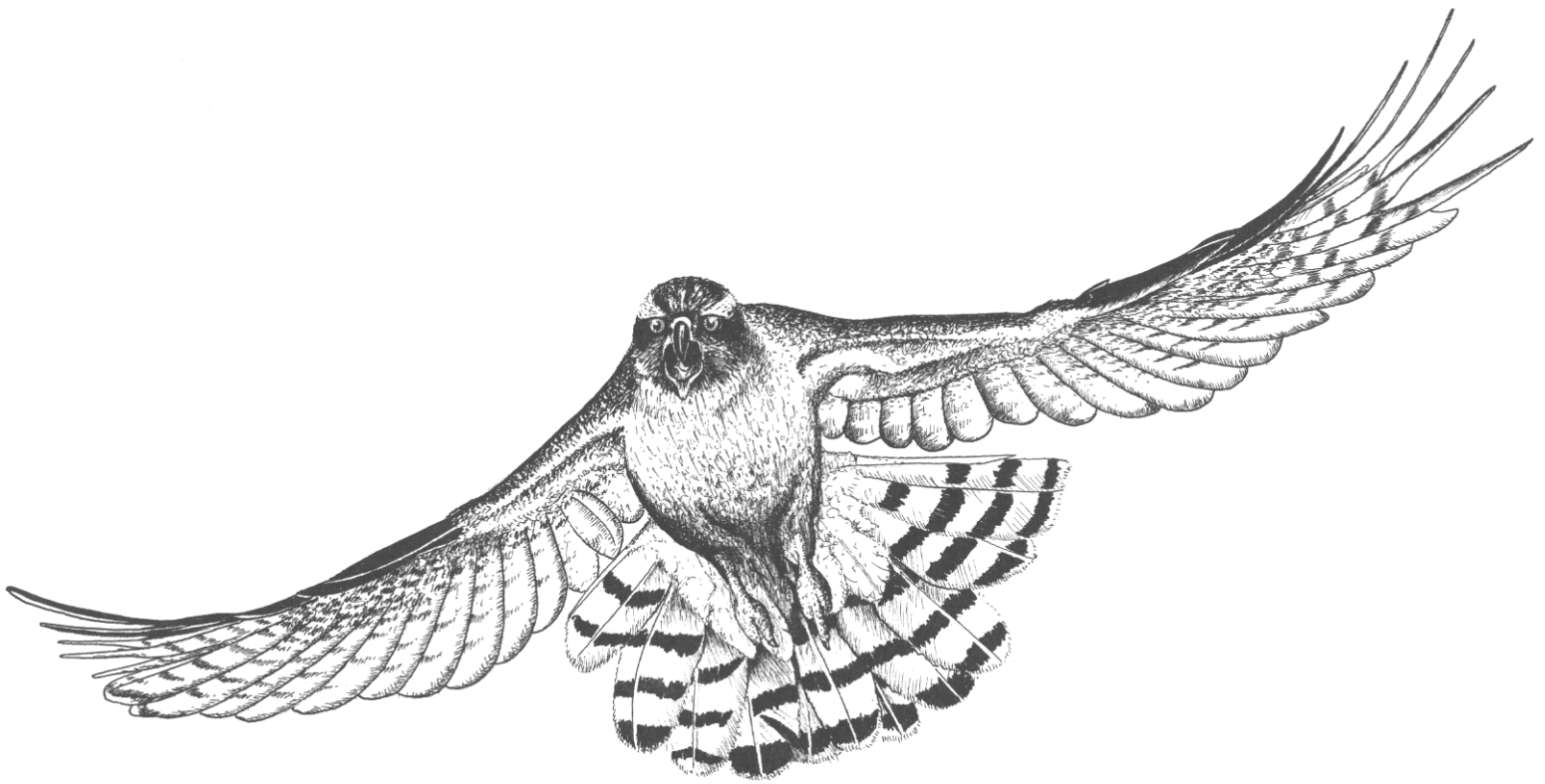


**W**estern larch also depends on fire, though it grows in areas of greater moisture than ponderosa pine. Once, an intense fire came through here, exposing the bare mineral soil where larch seeds will germinate. Fire scars show that for a time, smaller fires removed competition and helped space the trees. Now, we have interrupted the natural fire cycle, and the larch is crowded by Douglas fir trees that would not have survived burning as seedlings. Should lightning strike here, the younger fir could kindle a fire that would reach the canopy of the larch, and the change in this community would be dramatic.

6

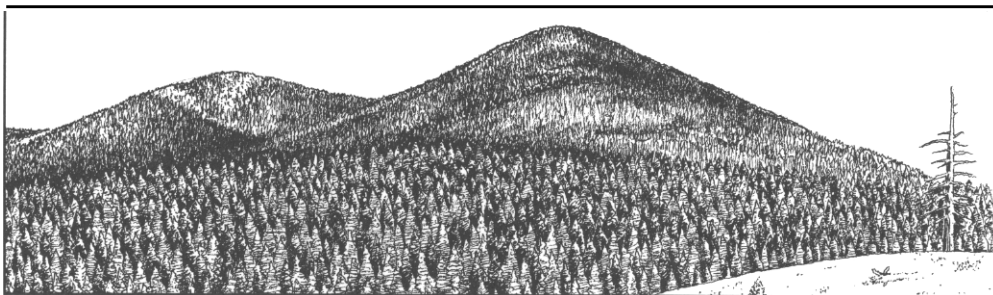






***“Balance is the gift of diversity;  
without unpredictable change diversity is not maintained.  
Without diversity,  
a forest does not exist.”***

*Herb Hammond*

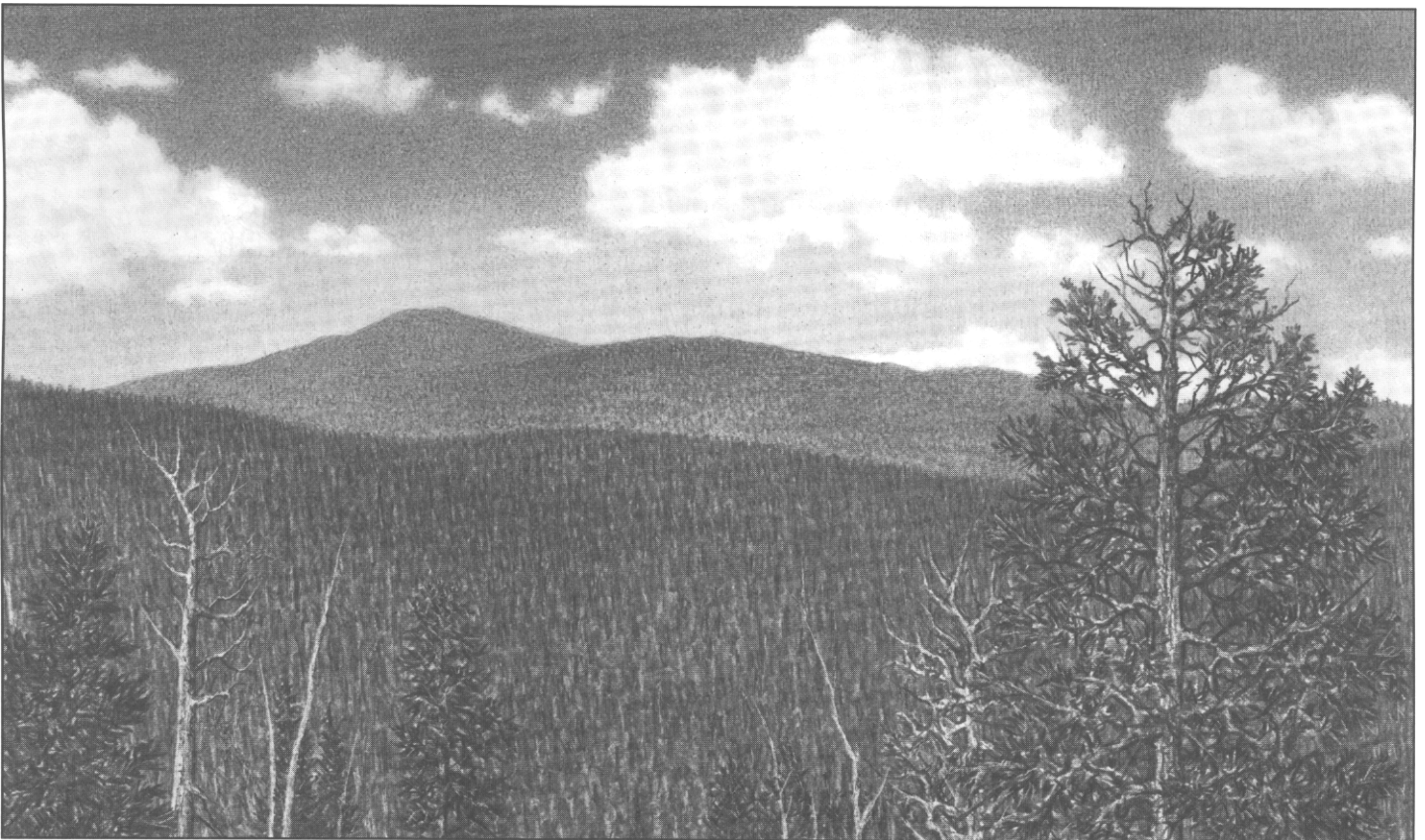


More than just the spice of life, diversity is an essential ingredient for the stability of ecological systems. Complex beyond understanding and valuable beyond measure, diversity contributes to the perpetuation and demise of life within the forest in a constant procession of change. Each facet adds to the integrity of the community, and offers resilience and protection to the whole.

*I'm any old tree ...*

Look at me. My family are gone. I am old and alone.  
I built my house on the sand. My limbs are tired,  
want to rest on the ground. How can a life extend?  
Today, left here, I stand bowed like this  
and remember: Little birds, crows, years  
when the sun studied this land for lives like mine  
to admire. Look at me---if my part of the world  
ever hears that wind again that came, my shuddering  
roots will die. And you---around this place  
miles of wilderness flow out soft and alive.  
They flow for us all. They give and return in the wind.  
And the little birds trill. I'll endure. And you? And you?

*William Stafford*



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North Central Audubon Society

The Family of William Stafford

The Seattle Mountaineers

The Curlew Job Corps

Friends of Virginia Lilly

Drawings by Carl Smith and Brad Hughes

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