

# 2011 Annual Report

CHANGE • COMMUNITIES • CHILDREN • CLIMATE • CONSERVATION • CHALLENGE



EMILY PETROVSKI



AMY BROWN



JASON RUVELSON



PATRICK KENNEDY



The mission of North Cascades Institute is to conserve and restore Northwest environments through education. Thanks to the support of donors, partners and participants, we are making important progress. Inside are highlights of recent accomplishments, challenges and new strategies for the future.

# Welcome



As I reflect upon 2011, I am reminded of the Institute's capacity to energize people around the value and importance of public lands for education, recreation and renewal. I am also reminded that our success is largely due to the generous support of people like you – our donors, participants, volunteers and partners.

In the following pages you will read about how the Institute explores contemporary environmental issues from the perspective of Northwest scientists,

researchers, artists, writers and naturalists. You will learn more about our approach to engaging with the natural world that, for many of you, will resonate with your experience as Institute supporters, members, class participants, and relatives and friends of young people who have taken steps along the Institute's Path for Youth. These experiences have inspired hundreds of you to support the Institute financially and we use those contributions to nurture the next generation of environmental stewards.

With the new Path for Youth educational structure, young people and their mentors are catching on to the value of place-based informal science education. Our North Cascades Wild and Cascades Climate Challenge programs received more applications than ever, the number of inquiries about Mountain School has prompted us to explore a winter curriculum option and we hosted our largest cohort of M.Ed. candidates in 2011.

We give much of the credit for this demand to accessibility. Yes, the Institute has earned a reputation for offering students and teachers a rigorous curriculum delivered with a healthy dose of fun and reflection, but – significantly – the Institute offers these experiences tuition-free or at a fraction of the cost. This would not be possible without the generous support of committed donors and our innovative partnerships with North Cascades National Park, Western Washington University and Seattle City Light, among others.

Finally, I invite you to read more about our experiences living, learning and teaching in the North Cascades through the Institute's Chattermarks and Mountain School blogs and by connecting with us through Facebook. These interactive digital formats, along with our improved website, are great ways to stay connected to current and upcoming programming.

Thank you for your ongoing support. It's an honor to be part of such a generous community.

Jeff Giesen  
Education Director

## Up close and personal: An interview with Saul Weisberg

By John D'Onofrio

It's not uncommon to find passions running deep among leaders of non-profits. But Saul Weisberg, founder and executive director of North Cascades Institute, is in a league of his own. His passion led him to start the Institute in 1986 and he's been fully committed to the mission of environmental education ever since. And that passion has been contagious. Over the years, the Institute has inspired countless children and adults and has emerged as one of the planet's most successful environmental education organizations. Saul's responsibilities have changed as the Institute has grown, but, as he says, he still gets to watch the moon rise over the hills and to follow his heart.

## INTERVIEW

**John D'Onofrio:** When did you start the North Cascades Institute?

**Saul Weisberg:** A good friend – Tom Fleischner, now a professor at Prescott College – and I started the Institute in 1986. We'd tossed the idea around with a group of friends for three or four years, and it all came together with support from North Cascades National Park and John Miles, who was Dean at Huxley College at Western Washington University. We loved this place – the mountains and rivers and human communities of the North Cascades. We were deeply involved in conservation issues and we thought that education was a key missing ingredient in "How do we protect and restore wild lands?" And just as important, "How do we help people experience and celebrate this special part of the world?"

**JD:** The mission of the Institute is "to conserve and restore Northwest environments through education." Can you elaborate?

**SW:** We are a conservation organization whose only tool is education. We believe that if people have powerful experiences in the natural world, and learn about that world at the same time,



they begin to care, and then they get engaged in taking care of that place. It works.

**JD:** The Institute operates the Environmental Learning Center on Diablo Lake. What do you do there?

**SW:** The Learning Center is our field station in the heart of millions of acres of protected public lands – national park and national forest, state parks and forests and provincial parks north of the border. It's the heart of the Institute. While we offer field-based programs throughout the region, more and more of our programs use the Learning Center as a base camp, or a jumping off point for further explorations. Programs at the Learning Center include Mountain School – which reaches every elementary aged child in Bellingham – as well as summer programs for high school youth and a wide range of family and adult programs. We also have a M.Ed. graduate program partnership with Huxley College at Western Washington University, citizen science, conferences and retreats, Skagit Tours... the list goes on. It's obvious we're having fun.

**JD:** Tell me more about Mountain School.

**SW:** Mountain School, a residential school program in North Cascades National Park, serves every public elementary school in Bellingham. That's an honor for us, and a big responsibility. In the spring and fall we offer 3- to 5-day sessions for up to two classes at a time and currently around 2,000 kids a year! The curriculum varies from elementary to middle and high school, but it focuses on the forests, rivers, mountains and human communities of our big backyard.

The kids inspire me every day. They come from so many different backgrounds – economic, ethnic, and social – I find it amazing how much they want to be outside, getting their feet wet and their hands dirty. Kids love to learn and they especially love to learn outside.

**JD:** What impact do you think that NCI has had?

**SW:** I used to joke that we were working to “save the world.” I'm not joking anymore. I know that we have a deep impact on people's lives. I've met students who were in Mountain School 20 years ago who are now teachers, parents, business owners, and they still value their experiences with the Institute. I know we've changed lives.

**JD:** How is the Institute funded?

**SW:** One of the reasons for our success has been our diverse funding sources. In our current \$3 million budget, 40% comes from earned income; 26% is from individual donations, corporate contributions and in-kind support; 24% comes from grants and the remaining 10% from an endowment.

We're proud of our efficiency with our supporters' money. For every dollar we raise, 88 cents goes directly to support programs, and only 12 cents goes to administration, overhead and fundraising. This is one of the reasons we've been consistently recognized by Charity Navigator for sound fiscal management and commitment to accountability and transparency. As independent arbiters, they have ranked us in the top 1% (see pg 8) of U.S. nonprofits.

**JD:** To what do you attribute North Cascades Institute's success?

**SW:** Relationships. Good relationships with many, many people who believe in what we do, and go out of their way to help make things work. This part of the Pacific Northwest where we live is a pretty special place. People recognize that and want to help.

**JD:** What does the future hold for NCI?

**SW:** It's never been such a challenging environment for nonprofits, and at the same time there have never been so many opportunities. For the Institute, it's a time where we have to really pay attention to what's going on in the world around us and constantly think about where we can have the greatest positive impact. At the same time, we're constantly being asked to grow, to scale up, to reach even more people. It's hard to do both well. We try.

# Our Mission

## CONSERVATION THROUGH EDUCATION

North Cascades Institute seeks to inspire a closer relationship with nature through direct experiences in the natural world. Our mission is to conserve and restore Northwest environments through education. For 25 years we have helped connect people, nature and community through science, art, literature and the hands-on study of natural and cultural history. Our goal is to help people of all ages experience and enjoy the mountains, rivers, forests, wildlife and people of the Pacific Northwest so all will care for and protect this special place.

### We Believe:

- Powerful, place-based learning experiences inspire environmental and community stewardship.
- Hands-on learning about the environment should begin in childhood and continue throughout life.
- Intimate, informed contact with the natural world helps people lead healthy, well-balanced lives.

North Cascades Institute is committed to innovation and excellence in environmental learning and leadership within the nonprofit community. We believe that sustainable communities are built on healthy environments, vibrant economies and social equity.

### Toward that end, these core values drive our programs:

- We teach at the convergence of natural and cultural history, science, humanities and the arts.
- We value the importance of public lands for education, recreation and renewal.
- We strive to inspire and support broad participation in informed civic engagement.
- We are committed to quality education, effective community engagement, sound business practices and a clear sense of purpose.

## KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS 2011

# Youth Programs

### 1. Mountain School

Established in 1990 with North Cascades National Park, Mountain School has become a national model for teaching young people about the natural world through hands-on learning experiences in the wilderness setting of the North Cascades. Students come to the North Cascades Environmental Learning Center with their classmates, teachers and chaperones to learn about the geology, forest ecology and natural and cultural history of the mountains.

During 2011, 1,868 young people and 433 adults attended Mountain School from 13 Washington school districts including Anacortes, Bellevue, Bellingham, Clover Park, Darrington, Ferndale, Friday Harbor, La Conner, Meridian, Mount Vernon, Seattle, Sedro-Woolley and Shoreline school districts. Private school groups came from Bellevue, Bellingham, Deming, Lynnwood, Mount Vernon and Seattle. Of the schools providing data, 30% of Mountain School students were minorities and 83% qualified for free and reduced lunch. Public schools pay less than half of the \$300 per student cost. The remaining tuition is financed by Institute fundraising.

### 2. North Cascades Wild

This tuition-free wilderness conservation program for underserved youth takes place in the backcountry of North Cascades National Park and Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest. During the course of 12 life-changing days, high school students from Washington canoe camp, backpack, and complete service projects while developing leadership skills, and studying wilderness and the natural and cultural history of the region. The program includes spring and fall community service and outdoor recreation field trips.

In 2011, 51 high school students participated in six 12-day trips on Ross and Baker lakes while completing service projects, learning Leave No Trace and outdoor camping and leadership skills, and fostering personal development. Most of these kids were from urban neighborhoods and had never sat by the warmth of a campfire, slept under a starry night sky or floated on deep waters in a canoe. During the past six years, more than 12 languages have been spoken within the groups and many of the teens are new citizens who had never visited a national park.

### 3. Cascades Climate Challenge

This tuition-free climate science and leadership program gathers high school youth from communities in Oregon and Washington for three inspiring weeks in the North Cascades. With the largest number of glaciers in the contiguous United States, the North Cascades is a particularly effective “classroom” for learning about climate change firsthand. Students focus on the science behind climate change and how they can effectively communicate ways to mitigate the effects of a changing global climate on human communities. Upon returning to their homes, they teach others about climate change and lead service projects based on what they’ve learned.

In 2011, Cascades Climate Challenge brought 36 student leaders from communities across Washington and Oregon – Anacortes, Astoria, Eatonville, Knappa, Mount Vernon, Olympia, Sandy, Sedro-Woolley, Sequim, Shoreline, Vancouver and Yakima – to North Cascades National Park and Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest to study climate change firsthand. Roughly 30% of the students self-identified as Hispanic, 8% as Asian and 3% as African American.

### 4. Stewardship

North Cascades Institute’s revitalized North Cascades Stewards program focused on connecting people to our public lands through meaningful service projects in three areas of focus: native plant restoration, trail work and scientific research. In 2011, this program completed essential restoration work while providing enriching educational opportunities throughout the Skagit Valley and North Cascades. Projects included National Trails Day, a Newhalem Campground workday, Lyman Slough invasive plant removal and a Baker Lake kayak trip to restore remote lakeside campsites.

### 5. Community and Neighborhood Programs

Since 2007, North Cascades Institute has engaged youth from two of Skagit Valley’s most diverse neighborhoods and the International District in Seattle in a variety of outdoor activities through all-day field trips. Since its inception, more than 300 youth have learned about bears, mountain goats, bald eagles, marine biology and migratory birds through visits to local public lands.

### 6. Youth Leadership Conference

North Cascades Institute hosted the second annual North Cascades Youth Leadership Conference at the Learning Center November 11-13. Sixty diverse youth participated from Oregon, Washington and California, many of whom were first-generation immigrants from places such as Cameroon, Somalia, Mexico, Ethiopia and the Philippines. Youth participated in skill-building breakout sessions and an Opportunity Fair that allowed students to network and learn about volunteer, internship and job opportunities. The conference was a motivating and inspiring weekend where students developed their leadership skills and created goals for continuing their engagement with the outdoors while becoming responsible citizens.



Connecting the next generation to nature with the help of our partners!



1

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Mountain School 2011 Partners: North Cascades National Park, Seattle City Light and Skagit Environmental Endowment Commission



4

PATRICK KENNEDY

Stewardship 2011 Partners: North Cascades National Park and Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest



2

INSTITUTE ARCHIVES

North Cascades Wild 2011 Partners: North Cascades National Park and Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest with support from Ross Lake Resort and the Student Conservation Association



5

INSTITUTE ARCHIVES

Community and Neighborhood 2011 Partners: Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest, North Cascades National Park and the Mount Vernon Police Department



3

JASON RUVELSON

Cascades Climate Challenge 2011 Partners: The Paul G. Allen Family Foundation, North Cascades National Park, Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest and the National Park Foundation



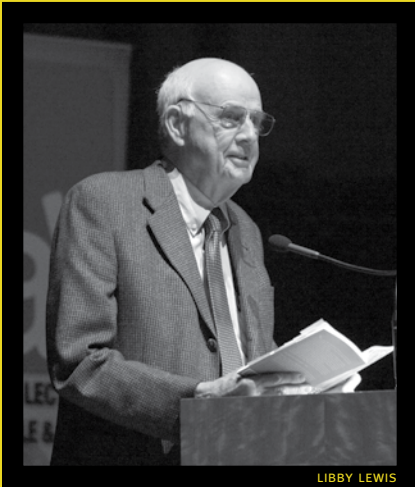
6

ELIZABETH PENHOLLOW

Youth Leadership Conference 2011 Partners: Alderleaf Wilderness College, AmeriCorps, Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest, Mount Rainier National Park, North Cascades National Park Complex, Northwest Youth Corps, Olympic National Park, Oregon Zoo, Padilla Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, Seattle Parks and Recreation, Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group, Student Conservation Association, Western Washington University and Wilderness Awareness School



# 2011 Highlights



LIBBY LEWIS

In partnership with Seattle Arts & Lectures, North Cascades Institute co-sponsored a springtime poetry reading and discussion with Wendell Berry at Benaroya Hall in Seattle.



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North Cascades Institute celebrated our 25th Anniversary with an Open House at the Learning Center. Several hundred friends, families and supporters gathered on the shores of Diablo Lake for a barbecue picnic lunch, naturalist-led hikes and canoe trips, Learning Center sustainability tours and more.



JESS NEWLEY

North Cascades Institute, at the behest of our partner Seattle City Light, helped to lead the famous 85 year old Skagit Tours. Institute naturalists taught the natural and cultural history of the Upper Skagit Valley aboard the *Alice Ross* on Diablo Lake and from our new shuttle buses offering guided expeditions of the North Cascades.

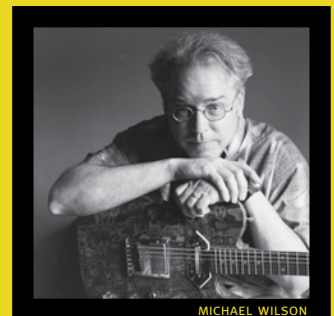


CHRISTIAN MARTIN

In May, North Cascades Institute produced events with journalist Richard “Last Child in the Woods” Louv to explore the ideas in his new book *The Nature Principle*. Louv spoke at Town Hall in Seattle and Sehome High School in Bellingham, where he also visited Birchwood Elementary School to see the students' vegetable garden and talk with them about why they love being outdoors.

The Institute produced an 11-minute multimedia video honoring its 25th anniversary. It features interviews with founders and long-time instructors, as well as a soundtrack with music donated by guitarist Bill Frisell (at right) and mandolinist Jonathan Reischman.

It can be viewed at [www.ncascades.org/multimedia](http://www.ncascades.org/multimedia)



MICHAEL WILSON



Thanks to a generous donation from Columbia Sportswear, students were comfortable learning outside no matter the weather. Columbia donated 30 raincoats to our youth programs, and will donate more gear in 2012 and 2013. Many of the students who participate in our programs are underserved and do not have the basic gear necessary for spending time outdoors.

**"North Cascades Institute and North Cascades National Park have worked together for the past 25 years to help people conserve and enjoy this special place," said Superintendent Jenkins. "This partnership is critical to the long- term well-being of the North Cascades and we look forward to it continuing to grow in the next 25 years."**



Park Service Director Jon Jarvis and North Cascades Superintendent Chip Jenkins visited the Learning Center to present Saul Weisberg, the Institute's executive director, with a Certificate for Outstanding Partnership Achievement.

## Looking Ahead



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### FIVE YEAR GOALS AND STRATEGIES

In November 2011, Institute board of directors embarked on a strategic planning process for our next five years of operations. Martin Mehalchin of Lenati Corp. led the board and leadership staff through a several month process to arrive at our 2012-2016 strategic plan. This new plan reinforces core Institute values while focusing on several exciting new initiatives.

#### 2012-2016 Goals:

1. Increase impact of Institute programs by reaching a larger and broader audience. Inspire participants to make changes in their lives that positively affect their environment and communities. Expand the reach of Institute programs to engage more people of all ages and backgrounds.
2. Engage more young people in Institute programs that emphasize leadership and adventure. Mentor youth and help them find opportunities for further personal, professional and academic growth.
3. Develop measurable health and wellness goals for selected Institute programs. Increase participants' awareness of the health and wellness benefits and strengthen outdoor recreation and fitness components of Institute programs.
4. Strengthen the Institute's regional impact and visibility while growing its national reputation and influence. Share the Institute's programs and practices with other organizations within the region and around the country.
5. Build a robust, sustainable volunteer program to broaden the Institute's visibility and support and improve the delivery and cost-effectiveness of programs.
6. Assure the Institute's ability to achieve its mission, maintain existing programs, and undertake essential new programs by increasing fundraising goals and establishing an endowment.



# Thanks to our partners, donors and leadership



## COLLABORATING PARTNERS

Aero Skagit Emergency Services  
Alderleaf Wilderness College  
Americorps  
Blue Heron Farm  
Environmental Education Association of Washington  
Groundwire Consulting  
Jones Creek Farm  
Lenati  
Mount Rainier National Park  
Mount Vernon Police Department  
National Park Foundation  
Northwest Youth Corps  
Olympic National Park  
Oregon Zoo, Zoo Animal Presenters Program  
Opportunity Council  
Osprey Hills Farm  
Padilla Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve  
Public school districts throughout Washington  
Remote Medical International  
Ross Lake Resort  
Seattle Arts & Lectures  
Seattle Parks and Recreation  
Skagit County Emergency Medical Services  
Skagit County Parks and Recreation  
Skagit County Youth and Family Services  
Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group  
Skagit Valley College  
Skagit Watershed Council  
Student Conservation Association  
Village Books  
Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife  
Washington Department of Transportation  
Washington State Parks Department  
Whatcom County Sheriff  
Wilderness Awareness School

## RECENT AWARDS



For the past eight years, North Cascades Institute has received a four-star rating for sound fiscal management from Charity Navigator, America's largest independent evaluator of charities. Only one percent of American charities are rated as highly. Charity Navigator highlights the work of efficient nonprofits and provides donors with essential information needed to give them greater confidence in the choices they make. To learn more about its ratings, visit [www.charitynavigator.org](http://www.charitynavigator.org)

## RECENT AWARDS continued...

- 2011 – Charity Navigator – 8th consecutive Four-Star rating for exemplary fiscal management and commitment to accountability and transparency (top 1% of NGOs)
- 2011 – U.S. Forest Service – Urban Communities in Conservation Award
- 2009 - Lead Silver Certification for the Environmental Learning Center
- 2008 – North American Association for Environmental Education – Outstanding Service Provider
- 2006 – Environmental Education Association of Washington – Organizational Excellence Award
- 2006 - Forest Stewardship Council - Best Use of FSC Certified Wood for Environmental Learning Center
- 2006 – Charity Navigator – Best U.S. Environmental Protection and Conservation Organization

## ADVISORY BOARD

Thomas Lowe Fleischner, PhD  
Prescott College, Arizona

Art Kruckeberg, PhD  
Professor Emeritus, botany, University of Washington

Estella Leopold, PhD  
Professor Emeritus, botany, University of Washington

Richard Louv  
Author of *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*

Chip Jenkins, Superintendent  
North Cascades National Park

Rob Iwamoto, Forest Supervisor  
Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest

Michael Napier, Vice President  
Morgan Stanley Smith Barney LLC

Robert Michael Pyle, PhD  
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John Reynolds, Director  
Pacific Northwest Region, National Park Service (retired)

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### Executive Director

Saul Weisberg



## \$250,000 and above

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North Cascades Environmental Learning Center Fund, The Seattle Foundation

## \$100,000 to \$249,999

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The Margaret A. Cargill Foundation  
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## \$50,000 to \$99,999

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## \$5,000 to \$9,999

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## Gifts in Honor or Memory of the following Individuals:

Karen Lins Bakke  
Beverly and C. L. Bakke

Robert Carson Burgess  
The Johannessen Family

Joe and Mary Byron  
Betsy and Jim Walker

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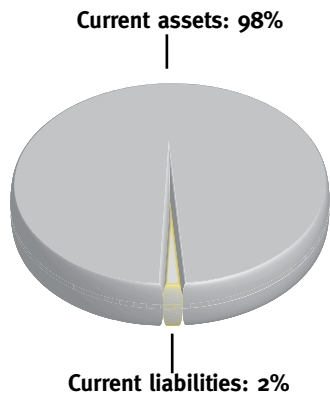
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We make every effort to include all donors in this publication. If we have made an error please accept our apologies and notify our office of the discrepancy. Thanks for your support!

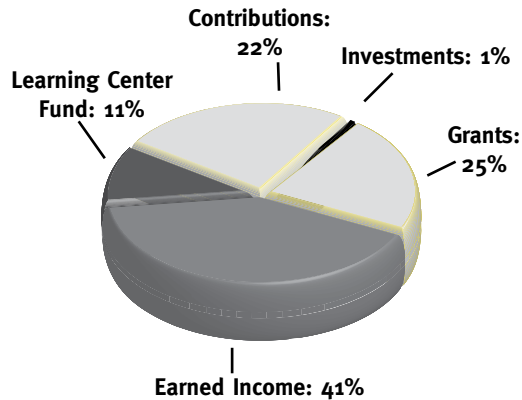


# 2011 Financials

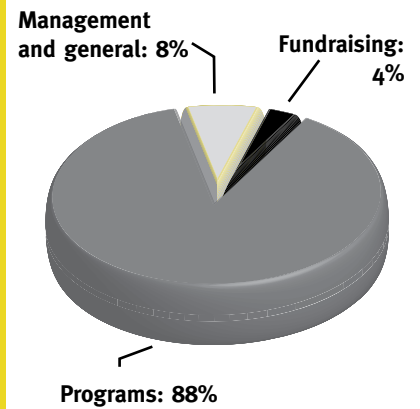
## Current Ratio



## Support and Revenue



## Expenses



### STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION as of DECEMBER 31, 2011

#### ASSETS

Cash and cash equivalents	\$ 307,471
Operating reserve	1,674,180
Receivables, net	106,845
Prepays and other	107,270
Investments	2,384,711
Property and equipment, net	256,809
	<b>\$ 4,837,286</b>

#### LIABILITIES

Accounts payable	\$ 38,039
Accrued expenses	53,967
Deferred revenue and other	20,606
	<b>112,612</b>

#### NET ASSETS

Unrestricted	
<i>Undesignated</i>	546,461
<i>Board designated reserves</i>	3,600,000
<i>Board designated endowment</i>	90,000
Temporarily restricted	298,213
Permanently restricted endowment	190,000
	<b>4,724,674</b>

**TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS** **\$ 4,837,286**

### STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2011

#### SUPPORT AND REVENUE

Tuition and fees	\$ 364,319
Contracts	648,343
Special events	17,149
Bookstores (retail/outreach), gross profit	118,053
Learning Center Fund	300,000
Government Grants	297,171
Foundation Grants	413,566
Contributions	240,555
In-kind contributions	364,286
Investment income	30,319
	<b>2,793,761</b>

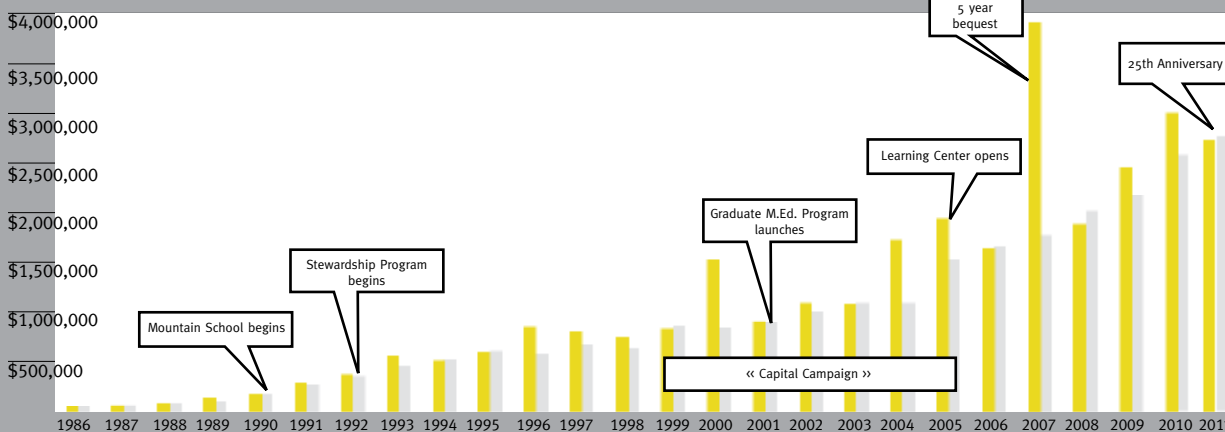
#### EXPENSES

Programs	2,476,591
Management and general	219,598
Fundraising	118,718
	<b>2,814,907</b>

**CHANGE IN NET ASSETS** **\$ (21,146)**

### REVENUE AND EXPENSE HISTORY

■ Revenue □ Expense



The condensed financial statements presented above reflect North Cascades Institute's complete set of financial statements for the year ended December 31, 2011, which have been audited by Jones & Associates LLC, CPAs, and on which they have rendered an unqualified opinion dated May 5th, 2012. The organization's audited financial statements and the independent auditors report can be found at [www.ncascades.org](http://www.ncascades.org)

JASON RUVELSON, CONTROLLER

# Thank You



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## The Headwaters Club

Your support helps conserve and restore Northwest environments through education. To ensure future generations benefit from our education programs, please consider joining the Headwaters Club by naming North Cascades Institute as a beneficiary in your will.

Donors choose to join the Headwaters Club for two key reasons:

- **They deeply believe in our educational mission.** If we just continue to try to fix things, but don't educate people about essential systems and causes, what will ever change?
- **They trust the Institute's fiscal management, leadership and vision.** The Institute is audited annually and, in 2011, received its eighth consecutive four-star rating from Charity Navigator — only 1% of American charities are rated as highly. We have appropriate reserve funds, a viable strategic plan and a clear vision for our future.

BY USING PAPER MADE WITH 100% POST CONSUMER WASTE, THE FOLLOWING RESOURCES HAVE BEEN SAVED:

-  649 LBS OF WOOD, WHICH IS EQUIVALENT TO 2 TREES THAT SUPPLY ENOUGH OXYGEN FOR 1 PERSON ANNUALLY.
-  948 GALLONS OF WATER, WHICH IS ENOUGH WATER FOR 55 EIGHT-MINUTE SHOWERS.
-  656,000 BTUS OF ENERGY, WHICH IS ENOUGH ENERGY TO POWER THE AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD FOR 3 DAYS.
-  58 LBS OF SOLID WASTE, WHICH WOULD FILL 13 GARBAGE CANS.
-  197 LBS OF EMISSIONS, WHICH IS THE AMOUNT OF CARBON CONSUMED BY 2 TREE SEEDLINGS GROWN FOR 10 YEARS.