



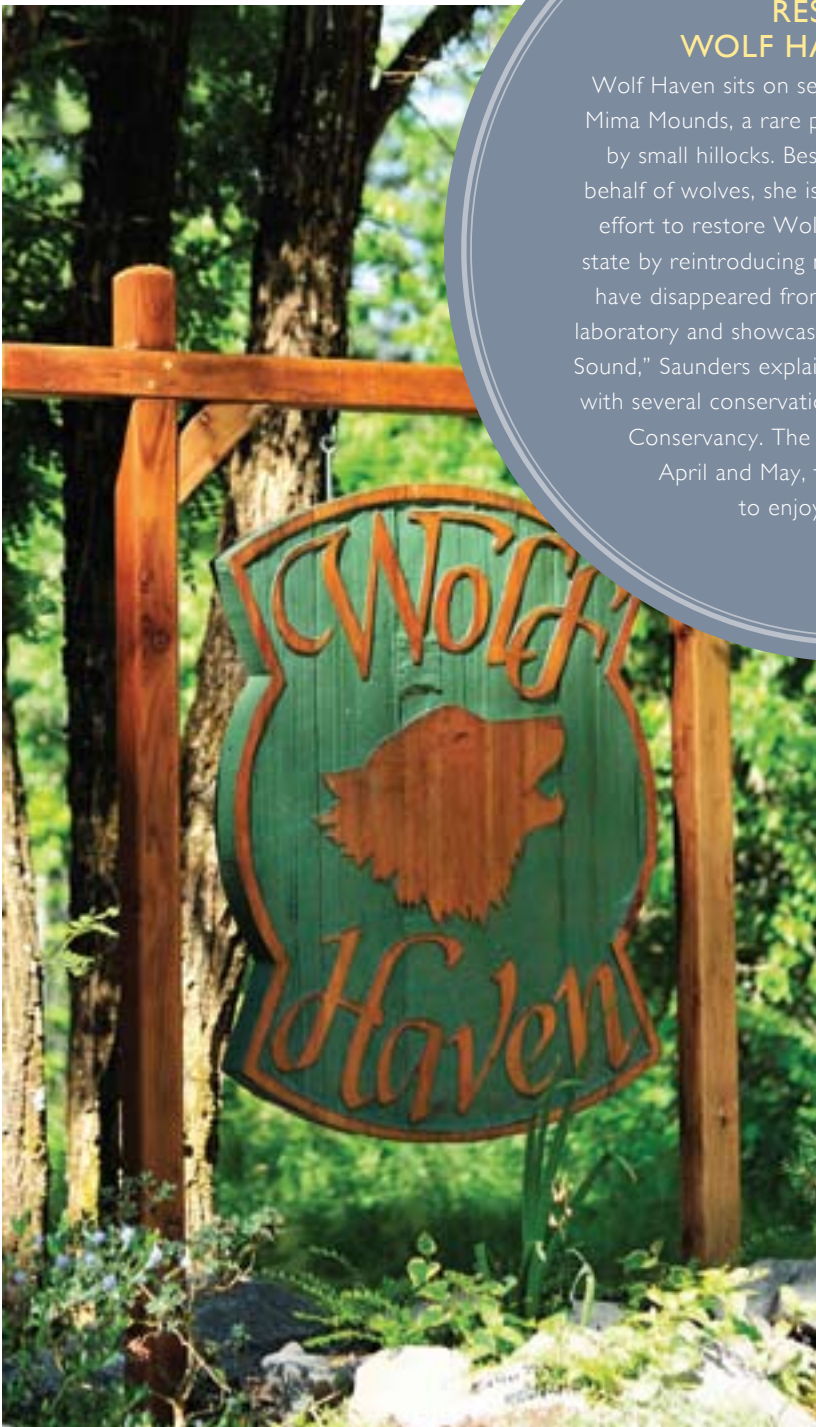
# LEADER OF THE PACK

*inside tenino's wolf haven*

The day Linda Saunders first encountered a pack of wolves in the wild, she was hooked. The animals were as curious about her — and as wary — as she was about them. They paced and postured as they studied her, coming within 100 feet. Then off they went. >>

BY ALLEN COX | PHOTOS BY SCOTT RAMSEY





### RESTORING WOLF HAVEN'S PRAIRIE

Wolf Haven sits on several acres of land dotted with Mima Mounds, a rare prairie phenomena distinguished by small hillocks. Besides Linda Saunders' work on behalf of wolves, she is the conservationist leading the effort to restore Wolf Haven's prairie to its original state by reintroducing native plants that over the years have disappeared from the area. "Our land is both a laboratory and showcase for prairie restoration in South Sound," Saunders explains. She is coordinating the effort with several conservation groups, including The Nature Conservancy. The prairie is alive with color in April and May, the best time for visitors to enjoy it in full bloom.



<< As a wildlife biologist for the U.S. Forest Service specializing in raptors in Alaska, she had encountered dozens of animals up close, including grizzlies, but never wolves. The feeling was nothing short of exhilarating. She wanted more and vowed that one day she would work with and for wolves. Today, as director of conservation at Wolf Haven International in Tenino, she's living her dream.

"When I was growing up, I was fascinated with Jane Goodall," Saunders recalls. "There was a woman who was fortunate enough to live among wildlife, observe them, and understand them through both science and a heart

connection. She was a huge inspiration to me."

Like Goodall, Saunders is a scientist and approaches her work with that same "heart connection." She genuinely cares about wolves; when she speaks, you can detect it in her voice, in the passion behind her words and actions.

"The year 2008, and no doubt 2009, will go down in history as the most amazing years for the wolf," Saunders says as she reflects on what she has seen since she came on board at Wolf Haven in 2007. In many states, wolves bounced from being listed as endangered to de-listed to listed again, all the while the centerpiece of legal battles between government, the hunting and ranching lobbyists and conservation groups. Wolf Haven and organizations like it play a key role in helping the remaining endangered population survive.

### SAFETY BY KNOWLEDGE

According to Saunders, the key to wolf survival is education. She and others at Wolf Haven are involved in teaching the public about these complex and social animals and the >>



Linda Saunders

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<< important role wolves and other predators play in maintaining a vital balance in the food web.

"There is a deep, visceral hatred of predatory animals that is prevalent out there," Saunders said. She works hard to illuminate the facts and diffuse controversy with science in hopes of changing perceptions that would otherwise mean doom for the wolf species. Besides her work at Wolf Haven and the classes and workshops she conducts at various colleges around the South Sound, Saunders is an active participant in the North Cascades Conservation Council's Wildlife Working Group.

In Washington, the North Cascades is the wolf's habitat. By the 1930s, trapping and hunting had decimated the state's once-thriving wolf population. Then, in the 1990s, after 60 years of no sightings, an occasional wolf pack was spotted in the North Cascades, but sightings were rare. In 2008, a wolf

pack was seen in Methow Valley, evidence these animals are still managing to survive in the North Cascades, a red-letter day for Saunders and her colleagues at Wolf Haven.

"I feel very positive about the future of wolf conservation," she said. "Especially in Washington and the northern Rocky Mountain states."

Wolf Haven International is a participant in the Species Survival Program, designed to ensure the survival of endangered species. Through this highly controlled and monitored program, the organization breeds and releases wolves into the wild. Once the animals are released in designated areas (none in Washington so far), conservationists hope for the best. Conflict between man and wolf still exists, and, in states where wolves are legally protected, sometimes a wolf is brutally gunned down, a painful reminder for Saunders of how much work remains. >>

**WHEN YOU GO**

Wolf Haven is a family venue that's open for guided tours year-round, except February. Admission is \$8 for adults, \$7 for seniors, and \$6 for children under 12. Children under 3 visit free. Group tours, special events and educational programs are also available. Hours vary by season; for information on days and hours, visit [wolfhaven.org](http://wolfhaven.org) or call 800.448.9653.

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**LIFE AT WOLF HAVEN**

At Wolf Haven International, there are two separate and distinct wolf populations: those on public display and those sequestered from public view.

Wolves are pack animals, and those on display live in male-female pairs, sort of mini-packs, with one alpha (usually the female) and one subordinate wolf. These ambassador wolves are used to humans and have found their way to the facility through various means, a common scenario being that some well-meaning person mistakenly thought a wolf would make an exotic pet, but, when challenged for alpha status

over a T-bone steak on the grill, quickly learned that wolves are not dogs.

The sequestered wolves are those that were rescued from some perilous circumstance in the wild and transferred to Wolf Haven. These wolves have not been socialized with humans, and many are used for breeding and repopulating the wolf population in the wild. For these animals, exposure to man at the facility is kept to a minimum, ensuring that they remain wary of humans if they are ever released. Their survival depends on it. 📍

*Allen Cox is a freelance writer who lives in Tacoma. He's the author of Falcon Guides' "Best Easy Day Hikes: Seattle" and "Best Easy Day Hikes: Tacoma."*



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