

*WASHINGTON NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY – NORTHEAST CHAPTER*  
*STUDY WEEKEND*  
MAY 19-21, 2017

**BOTANICAL HIGHLIGHTS:** Cheney and Spokane are situated at the intersection of several distinct plant communities. To the east and north are the western-most extent of the Rocky Mountains, with open ponderosa pine savannah extending from the eastern edges of the Columbia Plateau up the flanks of the surrounding highlands. At higher elevation ponderosa pine gives way to a mix of Douglas fir, grand fir, western red cedar, western hemlock, lodgepole and white pine, and subalpine fir. The semi-arid Columbia Plateau extends to the south and west of Cheney and Spokane. Much of plateau in this area was scoured by a series of massive glacial outwash floods roughly 15,000 years ago, leaving behind exposed basalt bedrock, permanent and seasonal wetlands, and lakes nestled among the multitude of channels carved between basalt cliffs. These channeled scablands support spectacular displays of spring wildflowers adapted to the challenges of life on thin to nearly non-existent soil, exposed to cold winters and extended summer drought. Interspersed across portions of these scablands are mima mounds of looser soil and gravel that rise two or three feet above the bedrock and support their own distinct flora. Further to the south, it is still possible to find a few remnants of the Palouse Prairie with its deep fertile loess soil.

**OPPORTUNITIES TO EXPLORE:** The Cheney/Spokane area offers a variety of protected areas that provide opportunities to observe the interaction of geology, botany and wildlife biology. A few of the highlights include

- *Dishman Hills Natural Area* – 2500 acres of protected land surrounded by the city of Spokane and Spokane Valley. This area consists of north – south trending ravines formed by ancient fault lines through which granite bedrock oozed up to 1.5 billion years ago. The Dishman Hills Conservancy includes three parcels that are managed by the Department of Natural Resources and Spokane County, and collectively extend from the middle of Spokane Valley to Iler Creek, and include shaded forests reminiscent of the west slopes of the Cascades and trails that lead to ridgeline views of the Selkirk Mountains to the north and the Palouse Prairie to the south.
- *Fishtrap/Miller Ranch* – over 7000 acre Recreational Area managed by the Bureau of Land Management. This area offers some of the best opportunities to observe mima mounds, wetlands and basalt outcrops that characterize the channeled scablands. There are several trails of varying length that offer overlooks of Fishtrap and Hog Lake, and a surprising diversity of wildflowers in a mosaic of shrub-steppe, ponderosa pine savannah, wetlands, riparian zones, and mima mounds with a varied history of wildfire and grazing superimposed on the landscape.
- *Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge* – 18,000 acres of ponderosa pine woodlands, aspen stands, and over 100 seasonal and permanent wetlands. Since the early 1990's the mission of the refuge has expanded from a focus on providing habitat for migratory waterfowl to integrated management of both wetlands and uplands for migratory and resident waterfowl, songbirds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians. Located just a few minutes from the EWU campus, TNWR offers a variety of opportunities to explore diverse habitats either on foot or along a 6 mile motor loop trail.
- *Steptoe Butte and Kamiak Butte* - together include nearly 500 acres with several miles of trails offering views of the surround Palouse hills. Each butte rises about 1000 ft above its surroundings, and together boast over 200 plant species. These two state parks offer

some of the best opportunities to explore a couple of the few remaining remnants of the once widespread and lush Palouse Prairie flora.

- *Riverside State Park* – 14,000 acres of ponderosa woodland and grasslands bordering the Spokane River along the west edge of the city of Spokane. Located just minutes from downtown Spokane, and about a half hour from the EWU Campus, this park is a great site for those who appreciate a mixture of natural and human history. There are over 50 miles of hiking trails that provide views of the Spokane River as it has carved its way through the basalt bedrock, leaving behind dramatic formations like the Bowl and Pitcher, and provide opportunities to seek out over a hundred species of flowering plants in upland and riparian zones. The park also gives history buffs a chance to visit locales including the 250 year old Native American pictographs found at Painted Rocks, and interpretive displays commemorating the first permanent white settlement in what is now the state of Washington.