



Conservation Northwest Blazes New Trail with Virtual Gala

Conservation Northwest has successfully protected wildlife and wildlands for over 30 years through the power of community collaboration and landscape-scale habitat restoration.

Large blocks of forest and wildland are the cornerstones of ecological resilience. They provide core habitat essential for the long-term survival and recovery of imperiled wildlife. Our wild public lands also offer cherished places to hike, camp, climb, ski, fish, hunt, watch wildlife, and simply enjoy the Northwest's rich natural heritage.

We promote sustainable forestry, responsible outdoor recreation, and the protection and recovery of key species of wildlife. In collaboration with numerous diverse partners and stakeholders, we are working to support thriving local communities and future generations of conservationists.

Challenge

Raising over \$400,000 annually, our Hope for a Wild Future Auction & Dinner is our biggest event of the year and critical for sustaining our conservation programs. But everything changed this year with COVID-19. In early March, recognizing the seriousness of the situation, our team decided to cancel the in-person event to keep everyone safe.

By this time, we had already procured over 60 auction packages, secured our sponsors, and had \$30K in ticket sales. So it was an easy decision to host the event online.



HIGHLIGHTS

Revenue from the online event was comparable to past in-person events.

Holding the fundraiser online opened the event to all of Conservation Northwest's supporters.

Switching to an online auction was easy and seamless with Greater Giving's [Online Bidding](#) platform.

Converting tickets to 100% tax deductible donations was a simple process with Greater Giving.

We contacted our ticket holders and made refunds available. If they chose not to request a refund, we would happily convert their ticket to a 100% tax deductible donation. In the end, we only received one request for a refund. Converting the tickets to donations was easy. We just set the value of the tickets to zero within the Greater Giving software, making them fully deductible.

Moving the event online took a lot of team adaptability. We had not used Greater Giving's online bidding before, although it was something we'd wanted to try. Given the current environment, we felt it was now necessary.

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Conservation Northwest

Solution

Switching our auction to Greater Giving online was easy and seamless. All we had to do was click a few checkboxes within the software to move our packages to the online bidding platform. Greater Giving's tech support was great! We were never on hold and they answered every question we had. We held the online auction over eight days, keeping it open to give people plenty of opportunity to participate.

We also hosted a livestream event on Zoom, complete with virtual paddle raises and live auction packages. We recruited an audio-visual consultant to help us with the technical aspects of the event. However, with everyone required to shelter in place by the date of the event, we ended up running the livestream remotely with multiple hosts. The program included our executive director, board president and our longtime auctioneer, David Silverman.

Normally only 250 people can attend our in-person event. But with an online event, that limit disappears. In mid-March we sent out an email to all our supporters through the Greater Giving platform, saying, “If you haven't been able to come in the past, here's your chance.” We shared our event on Facebook, Instagram and through our newsletter, using all three channels to keep people up to date. We set up a new ticket and registration page so that attendees could continue to register through Greater Giving.

\$370k \$370K was raised in total, surpassing the \$350K goal.

\$140k A virtual paddle raise raised over #140K, with an additional \$100K in matching donations.

When we informed our sponsors that we were moving the event online, we assured them we'd be giving them exposure as tiles on the online bidding platform and during our livestream. By opening the event to ALL our supporters, their audience would be even bigger. Our sponsors gladly stuck with us through this challenge.

We kept the livestream event short, just under an hour, to accommodate the attention span of online audiences. We had four live auction items, three of which we doubled because the bidding was so strong. The event also included a virtual paddle raise, which raised over \$140K. We secured an additional \$100K in matching donations, a key to the event's success. Our online silent auction had about 60 items and raised \$34K, comparable to the amount we earn from our silent auction during typical years.

Results

We had more than 140 viewers during the livestream and more than 200 people participating in the online auction. Our fundraising goal for this year was \$350K. We actually surpassed that goal with \$370K. In addition, we saved about \$40K in expenses. Altogether this gave us a net income similar to what we'd normally make for the in-person event.

All in all, we feel very grateful for the support of our donors and sponsors. And we feel very proud we were able to migrate our live event to a virtual format.



Tips from Conservation Northwest

- Use Greater Giving's texting feature more often.
- Allow more time and communicate more often about the event, how to engage, and what our mission is.
- Find more ways to showcase our wonderful sponsors in the virtual environment.
- Stay adaptable!