

Riverlands

FALL 2016 NEWS FROM WESTERN RIVERS CONSERVANCY ISSUE 37

WRC Effort on the Salmon River Gains Momentum



In Idaho's Sawtooth Valley, WRC is working to preserve prime spawning and rearing habitat for imperiled salmon and steelhead by acquiring lands along key tributary streams that flow to the Salmon River.

Salmon River

Idaho

Stream by stream, Western Rivers Conservancy is preserving some of the most important habitat in the upper Salmon River basin: land along crucial tributaries in Idaho's Sawtooth Valley. Conserving these high-elevation lifelines is part of WRC's long-term commitment to the Salmon River system, and to ensuring salmon and steelhead find healthy habitat after their epic 900-mile journey inland from the sea.

Our most recent success was on Pole Creek, which has been the focus of extensive restoration efforts by nonprofits, local landowners and state and federal agencies. Pole Creek is exceptionally rich in nutrients and insect life and harbors some of the upper Salmon River's best habitat for salmon, steelhead and bull trout. WRC contributed a critical piece of the Pole Creek puzzle by purchasing a 619-acre property along a mile

CONTINUED ON BACK

Redwoods and Rivers

Redwood trees have the unique ability to capture moisture from fog and direct it through condensation to the forest floor. This adaptation sustains not just the trees, but an entire ecosystem. In summer, redwoods can be the primary mechanism for converting moisture to groundwater, which cools streams and nourishes a healthy forest. In turn, the forest shades rivers and streams, keeping them cool for salmon and steelhead and healthy for wildlife. When those trees fall across streams, they create crucial habitat for fish, which return nutrients to the forest when they spawn and die. Amidst the redwoods of Big Sur, WRC has launched a new effort on the Little Sur River (see story inside).





On California's Big Sur coast, WRC recently launched an exciting project to conserve a mile of the Little Sur River, pictured here where it flows into the Pacific.

A River in the Redwoods of the Big Sur Coast

Little Sur River

California

Amidst the world's southernmost naturally occurring redwoods, and within earshot of the waves of the Big Sur coastline, Western Rivers Conservancy has taken crucial first steps to conserve a 1,200-acre ranch along the Little Sur River.

This month, we signed an agreement to purchase the Adler Ranch, an important property at the edge of the Los Padres National Forest, 40 miles south of Monterey. Our efforts will conserve roughly a mile of the Little Sur River, which flows from the Ventana Wilderness in the Santa Lucia Mountains, through a deep, redwood-shaded gulch and into the Pacific, near Andrew Molera State Park.

This is an exciting project on multiple fronts. The Little Sur River flows through an area that provides habitat for imperiled animals like northern spotted owl and California condor, as well as a wealth of other wildlife. The river is considered the Central Coast's most important spawning stream for threatened south-central coast steelhead, which once returned to this stretch of the California coast by the tens of thousands. Today, it is likely that fewer than 100 fish return to the Little Sur River each year, making our efforts to conserve the stream vitally important.

Conservation of the Adler Ranch will preserve some of the southernmost stands of old-growth redwoods on earth, trees that have genetically adapted to

the warm, dry climate of Big Sur. These trees could be extremely important for future efforts to assist redwood survival in a warming climate, making their conservation essential.

WRC's purchase of the ranch will link protected public lands along the coast to the main body of the Los Padres National Forest, helping to ensure permanent habitat connectivity between the ocean and the crest of the Santa Lucia Mountains. It will also allow for the creation of new trails between the ocean and the inland reaches of Los Padres National Forest, a significant enhancement for the many hikers who visit Big Sur from around the world. ■

Preserving a Lifeline for the Verde River

East Verde River

Arizona

This fall, Western Rivers Conservancy launched an effort to conserve a rare unprotected reach of Arizona's East Verde River. Flowing from headwaters in the forests of the Mogollon Rim, the East Verde courses through nearly 30 miles of backcountry within the Tonto National Forest and Mazatzal Wilderness, where it finally meets the Verde River against a backdrop of sunbaked boulders and saguaro cacti.

The Verde is one of only two Wild and Scenic Rivers in Arizona, and the East Verde is the most intact part of the basin. It is a stream of great importance, providing crucial habitat for imperiled native fish populations, clean water for communities like Payson and opportunities to hike, paddle, hunt, swim and birdwatch in an area where heat is far more prevalent than water.

This is WRC's second project in Arizona, following our recent work on Fossil Creek, which also flows into the Verde River. On the East Verde, we are working to conserve the 149-acre Doll Baby Ranch, which includes a mile of the river within the Tonto National Forest, immediately outside the eastern edge of the wilderness area. Our effort will preserve crucial habitat for a number of threatened species, including Mexican



WRC's second project in the Verde River basin, in Arizona, will conserve a mile of the East Verde River, a crucial source of clean, cold water for the mainstem Verde River.

spotted owl, narrow-headed garter snake, northern Mexican garter snake and Chiricahua leopard frog. It will also benefit struggling populations of seven native warm-water fish species that still inhabit the river.

The East Verde River is also rich in human history and important to the Yavapai Apache Nation. Along and around the river it is possible to find ruins of prehistoric settlements, and hikers commonly encounter petroglyphs, potshards and grinding stones.

WRC's effort to conserve Doll Baby Ranch is important for recreationists as well. The property controls a critical,

private road that accesses the Mazatzal Wilderness, two trailheads and extensive hiking, backpacking, equestrian, hunting and birding opportunities in an area that is treasured by Arizonans from near and far.

As at Fossil Creek, our partner in this effort is the U.S. Forest Service, which will be the long-term steward of Doll Baby Ranch. Once the lands are in public hands, a mile of the East Verde will be restored and forever managed for its fish and wildlife habitat and to guarantee permanent access for the people of Arizona to cherish and enjoy. ■



WRC has conserved over 4,500 acres of fish and wildlife habitat along the Sandy River (pictured) and its tributaries.

Sandy River Oregon

CONSERVED: Little Joe Creek

On northwest Oregon's glacially-fed Sandy River, Western Rivers Conservancy successfully protected another 120 acres of outstanding fish and wildlife habitat. Completion of the project means we have now conserved over 4,500 acres along the Sandy and its tributaries, helping ensure this cherished river stays healthy for generations to come.

Our recent effort preserved nearly half a mile of Little Joe Creek, an important salmon and steelhead-bearing tributary to the Sandy River. The Sandy's imperiled runs of winter steelhead, coho salmon and fall and spring Chinook are all listed under the Endangered Species Act. The project also linked an existing county park with protected BLM lands, and will help the BLM expand its Sandy Ridge Trail System, located away from the river. Created in 2010, Sandy Ridge has become one of the country's top mountain bike destinations.

WRC began its work on the Sandy River in 1999, when it partnered with Portland General Electric at the outset of the utility's dam removals on the Sandy and Little Sandy Rivers. With the dams coming down, WRC committed to conserving 4,500 acres of river habitat in partnership with PGE. Since then, we have created an unprecedented conservation and recreation corridor along 14 miles of the middle river. Today we continue to seek out high-quality riverlands, where acquisition will allow us to protect even more habitat for Oregon's fish and wildlife.



RUSS SCHNITZER

A Project for People on the Rio Grande

At the eastern edge of Colorado's Weminuche Wilderness, Western Rivers Conservancy is expanding its effort to preserve habitat and improve access to the upper Rio Grande. This month, we purchased a 91-acre property to that will create the only legal resting spot for boaters along an otherwise private, eight-mile stretch of river. The effort will conserve important wet meadow habitat, montane grassland and mixed conifer forest and create walk-in access to an area with excellent trout fishing, just off the Silver Thread Scenic Byway.

This is WRC's third acquisition on the upper Rio Grande. Earlier this year we purchased the Brownie Hills property and Olguin Ranch to conserve over 18,000 acres of land, four miles of the Rio Grande and a key reach of the Conejos River. The lands we acquired this month lie upstream of these properties, where Texas Creek flows into the Rio Grande.

The upper reaches of the Rio Grande offer a wealth of recreation opportunities, but in places, particularly the stretch known as "the oxbows," the Rio Grande is difficult or impossible to access due to private property. Our work at Texas Creek will place a key piece of land into public hands and ensure that boaters have a half-mile refuge where they can get out of their boats and put their feet on the banks of the Rio Grande, without trespassing.

WRC's partner in this effort is the Rio Grande National Forest, which will soon acquire the property and manage it for access and conservation. The project is part of WRC's broader conservation efforts within the San Luis Valley, where we created the San Luis Valley Conservation Fund in partnership with the LOR Foundation and our local partners Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust and Colorado Open Lands. Together, we are working to preserve river habitat and enhance livability for valley communities. Our work at Texas Creek will be funded in part by the Land and Water Conservation Fund, a bipartisan effort to safeguard natural areas and provide recreation opportunities to all Americans. ■

of the stream and conveying it to the Sawtooth National Forest for restoration and permanent protection.

Our efforts at Pole Creek will eliminate future grazing in the stream's sensitive riparian areas and prevent development along this key reach of the creek. The project also protects a short reach of the mainstem Salmon River itself.

We are now working throughout the Stanley Basin to purchase equally outstanding riverlands, properties that allow us to have an impact beyond the actual lands we conserve—just like at Pole Creek. Following on the heels of that project, we have committed to purchase Goat Falls Ranch. The ranch is home to two streams—Goat Creek and Meadow Creek—that historically contained some of the highest density Chinook salmon rearing habitat in the entire Salmon River system.

Goat and Meadow Creeks are now degraded and only harbor a fraction of the salmon and steelhead they once did. WRC's acquisition will allow for restoration of key reaches of both streams. In partnership with the Idaho Water Resources Board, we hope to dedicate the ranch's water rights in-stream, which will improve late season conditions for fish and wildlife by returning cold water to these critical Salmon River tributaries. We expect to convey the land to the U.S. Forest Service to be managed as part of

the Sawtooth National Recreation Area.

Goat Falls Ranch also has an important recreation component. The property controls access to portions of the SNRA that have historically required long hikes, including a 12-mile stretch of the Alpine Way Trail. The trail accesses several

With a mile of Pole Creek permanently conserved, and Goat and Meadow Creeks now on their way, WRC continues its effort to conserve other lands along the Salmon River.

scenic alpine lakes as well as Goat Creek Falls, Idaho's tallest waterfall.

With a mile of Pole Creek permanently conserved, and Goat and Meadow Creeks now on their way, WRC continues its effort to conserve other lands along the Salmon River. While much of our immediate work is in the scenic Sawtooth Valley, we continue to seek out opportunities throughout the entire Salmon River system. It's a long-term effort, but if the Salmon's salmon can swim 900 miles inland to spawn, we can ensure the streams at the end of their journey have the water and habitat they need to survive—and to thrive. ■



KIRK ANDERSON

WRC's efforts to conserve Goat Falls Ranch follow our recent success at Pole Creek (pictured), where we conserved more than a mile of designated Critical Habitat for threatened Chinook salmon.

PORTLAND
(503) 241-0151

SAN FRANCISCO
(415) 767-2001

DENVER
(303) 645-4953

OLYMPIA
(360) 528-2012