

Riverlands

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Returning Water to the Scott for Imperiled Coho Salmon



NATE WILSON

California's Scott River produces more wild coho salmon than any river in the state. WRC is working to improve conditions for fish and wildlife by acquiring a ranch along two miles of the South Fork Scott, the largest tributary to the Scott.

Scott River

California

Building on our work in California's Klamath River basin, Western Rivers Conservancy has embarked on an effort to improve stream flows within the South Fork Scott, the largest, cleanest and coldest tributary to the Scott River. The Scott flows to the Klamath and is the state's single most important stream for native coho salmon, which are threatened or endangered throughout California and Oregon.

The Scott River produces more native coho

than any stream in California, yet their numbers are so low, many fear coho could become extinct within the river barring meaningful, ongoing recovery work. To that effect, state and federal agencies and organizations have invested heavily in improving habitat within the South Fork and mainstem Scott rivers. This work has been crucial for the Scott and its fish, but its long-term success hinges upon one key ingredient: water.

When Rivers Need it Most

By acquiring riverland properties with associated water rights, WRC can have an even greater impact on river systems, especially when rivers are strained by summer heat, water withdrawals and low flows. On California's South Fork Scott (this page), for example, we are acquiring a ranch with senior water rights and hope to return enough water to the river to increase late summer flows by up to 20 percent. Similarly, we are working in Idaho's Sawtooth Valley to dedicate water in-stream on a high-priority salmon stream and tributary to the Salmon River (see sidebar, back page). In Colorado, we are working to reestablish perennial flows on a dewatered stretch of the Little Cimarron, and in Oregon, we recently dedicated water in-stream on Catherine Creek, a top-priority salmon stream.



KIRK ANDERSON

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DAVE JENSEN

Blue Creek is a critically important source of cold water for the Klamath River, and its health is key to salmon survival and the overall wellbeing of the Klamath-Siskiyou ecoregion.

One Giant Step Closer to Success at Blue Creek

Klamath River/Blue Creek

California

In northern California, Western Rivers Conservancy has purchased the final 8,582 acres in our effort to forever protect Blue Creek, the lifeline of the Klamath River. This extraordinary step puts us within striking distance of completing the Blue Creek Salmon Sanctuary and Yurok Tribal Community Forest, a 73 square-mile preserve in the heart of redwood country. WRC is now working to convey the land to the Yurok people for permanent stewardship.

The centerpiece of this historic effort is Blue Creek, the most important cold-water tributary to the lower Klamath. Nearly all salmon and steelhead that return to the Klamath hold at Blue Creek, lowering their body temperature enough to survive the journey inland to spawn.

The Klamath is getting progressively warmer, and the refuge that Blue Creek provides is crucial, especially for summer and fall-run fish that return when the river can be lethally warm.

The Klamath River is the third largest salmon stream on the West Coast. Without Blue Creek and its cold water, the Klamath's salmon would likely perish. Given the stream's importance, WRC has been working in partnership with the Yurok people and Green Diamond Resource Company, the former owner of the lower Blue Creek watershed, to conserve 47,000 acres of temperate rainforest by returning it to the Yurok, who will manage the lands for the sake of fish and wildlife. In addition to being a biological linchpin for the

entire Klamath-Siskiyou ecoregion, Blue Creek is the crown jewel of the Yurok spiritual homeland, and the Tribe shares WRC's conservation vision for Blue Creek and the Klamath River. The Tribe's management of the Salmon Sanctuary and Community Forest will also provide much needed jobs for tribal members.

Once WRC conveys the land to the Yurok, Blue Creek will be conserved in its entirety. From its forested headwaters, which are already protected within the Siskiyou Wilderness, to its confluence with the Klamath River, Blue Creek will be a sanctuary for the fish and wildlife that define this remote and wild stretch of the western United States. ■

Rare Opportunity on the South Fork Salmon

South Fork Salmon River

Idaho

Western Rivers Conservancy has a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to permanently conserve one of the few remaining parcels of private land along Idaho's spectacular South Fork Salmon River. In doing so, we will create unprecedented new access to more than 100,000 acres of public lands that surround the ranch we are working to acquire, and which are otherwise nearly impossible to reach.

The South Fork Salmon is an 86-mile tributary to the Salmon River and is every bit as beautiful as the better-known Main and Middle Fork Salmon rivers. Yet it is exceedingly more remote, accessible by only a handful of steep, rugged dirt roads that descend thousands of feet into the river canyon. One of these roads accesses the 234-acre South Fork Wilderness Ranch, which WRC is working to protect. Our goal is to partner with the Payette National Forest, the Payette Land Trust and a private conservation buyer to improve public access and maximize protection of the ranch's extraordinary fish and wildlife habitat.

The South Fork Salmon River courses through deep, forested granite canyons and is surrounded on all sides by the Payette National Forest and Frank Church/ River of No Return Wilderness. This is



WRC is working to conserve some of the last unprotected riverlands on the South Fork Salmon. The river is a stronghold for cold-water fish, prized by boaters and nearly unmatched for its scenery and remoteness.

one of the most remote backcountry areas in the Lower 48, home to Rocky Mountain elk, Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep, mule deer, whitetail deer, mountain lion, black bear, gray wolf and more than 200 species of birds. The second largest tributary to the Salmon River, the South Fork is one of the few rivers in the Columbia River basin that still has reasonably intact assemblages of native fish, including bull trout, spring Chinook, summer steelhead (all threatened) and westslope cutthroat trout.

The South Fork Salmon is also one of the country's premier whitewater wilderness rivers, with nearly nonstop Class IV/IV+ rapids that at times dwarf

even those of the hallowed Middle Fork. However, access is limited and paddlers must commit to a 36 mile float if they're to run the South Fork at all. WRC's efforts will create new access, allowing boaters to float a shorter stretch of water immediately above the South Fork's confluence with the mainstem Salmon.

For both its conservation values and its merits as a backcountry destination for recreationists, WRC has committed to protecting this rare riverland property. When we succeed, Idaho will be that much richer in outdoor opportunities, and the South Fork Salmon will be one step closer to being protected along its entire length. ■

North Umpqua River Oregon

CONSERVED: North Umpqua's Swiftwater Park

Two years ago, the future was uncertain for Douglas County's Swiftwater Park on Oregon's North Umpqua River. The 211-acre park controls the western end of the 79-mile North Umpqua National Recreation Trail, at the beginning of some of the most coveted fly fishing water in the West. It also harbors stands of ancient forest, prime habitat for salmon and steelhead and over a mile of river frontage. When the county was forced to sell the park, Western Rivers Conservancy stepped in to buy it, ensuring this reach of the North Umpqua remains protected, rather than harvested or developed, and open to the public forever.

The Umpqua and Rogue are the only two coastal rivers in Oregon with headwaters in the Cascade Range. All other coastal rivers rise in the lower-elevation Coast Range. Fed by snowmelt, the North Umpqua flows clean and cold year-round, its chilly emerald waters a contrast to the nearby rivers that warm dramatically in summer. This anomaly is what makes the North Umpqua so crucial to cold-water fish, including Chinook and coho salmon, sea-run cutthroat and summer and winter steelhead.

WRC completed the project this month when we conveyed the lands to the Bureau of Land Management for inclusion and protection within the North Umpqua Wild and Scenic River Corridor. This was WRC's first effort on the North Umpqua, and we are now working to conserve additional reaches of this vitally important West Coast river. ■



WRC successfully conserved 211 acres along the North Umpqua River and ensured a mile of the North Umpqua Trail will stay public forever.

NORTHWEST RAFTING COMPANY

TYLER ROEMER



New Effort for Salmon in Idaho's Scenic Sawtooth Valley

In Idaho's scenic Sawtooth Valley, Western Rivers Conservancy has successfully purchased the 364-acre Goat Falls Ranch, which controls crucial water rights on Goat and Meadow Creeks, two key tributary streams of the Salmon River. Historically, these streams contained some of the highest-density Chinook salmon rearing habitat in the Salmon River system. Due to habitat degradation and low in-stream flows, the creeks now harbor only a fraction of the salmon and steelhead they once did. During the critical seasons of late summer and fall, when stream flows are already low and rearing juvenile Chinook are most susceptible, portions of both creeks are reduced to only a trickle, or dewatered entirely.

WRC hopes to change this by working in partnership with the Idaho Water Resource Board to deliver more water in-stream. This will improve late season conditions for fish and wildlife by returning cold water to these critical Salmon River tributaries. In addition to improving in-stream flows, our purchase of the ranch will enable restoration of key reaches of both Goat and Meadow creeks.

Goat Falls Ranch also has an important recreation component. A key trailhead into the Sawtooth National Recreation Area lies off of the ranch road and accesses the popular Alpine Way Trail, which leads to several scenic alpine lakes and Goat Creek Falls, Idaho's tallest waterfall. We expect to convey the ranch to the U.S. Forest Service to be managed for conservation within the SNRA.

WRC's work at Goat Falls Ranch follows on the heels of our successful protection of a mile of Pole Creek, another critical Sawtooth Valley tributary to the Salmon River. Pole Creek is one of the top-priority streams for recovery in the Salmon River system. Thanks to our efforts there, restoration of a mile of the stream is now underway. ■

The Scott is vital to coho because of its clear water, abundant spawning beds and lack of mainstem dams to impede fish migration. But the Scott and its fish—which include Chinook and steelhead—face a myriad of challenges, from water diversion and diking to deforestation and drought. The latter, which has been ongoing in California until just this year, has taken a tremendous toll on salmon. Frequently, there is simply too little water in the river and its tributaries to sustain healthy populations of spawning, holding and rearing fish. Our goal is to change that.

Thanks to a loan from the Packard Foundation, WRC has purchased a property called the Bouvier Ranch and gained control of a critical water right on the South Fork Scott River. Control of that right will allow us to keep more water in-stream during summer to benefit coho, Chinook salmon and steelhead. Adjusting the irrigation schedule may increase summer-time flows in the South Fork by up to 20 percent, exactly when the river and its fish need those flows the most.

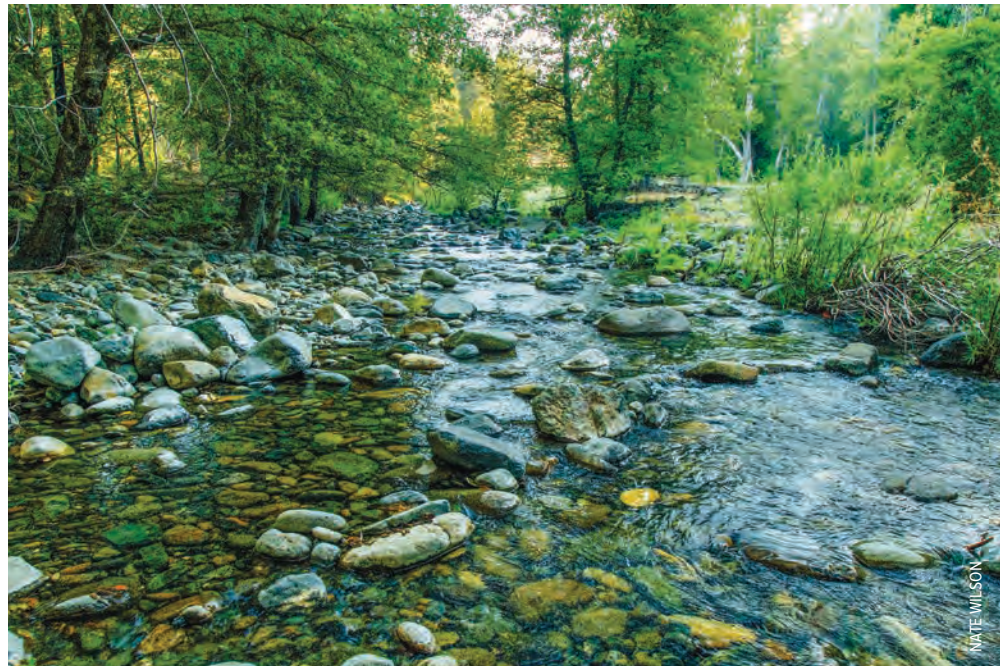
WRC's purchase of the Bouvier Ranch will also allow us to conserve two miles of designated Critical Habitat for southern Oregon/northern California coast coho. Combined with our rare opportunity to return water to the South Fork Scott, this will be a major step in the right direction

for the Scott River and its fish. We are now working with local organizations to identify the best long-term steward to manage the lands as working lands, with conservation and public access the top priority.

Our efforts at the Bouvier Ranch also provide the opportunity for WRC to protect a viewshed on the Pacific Crest

The Scott River produces more native coho than any stream in California, yet their numbers are so low, many fear coho could become extinct within the river barring meaningful, ongoing recovery work.

Trail by acquiring a nearby property that has been a top priority for the Pacific Crest Trail Association for years. The PCT skirts this property at the northeast edge of the Trinity Alps Wilderness before crossing the South Fork Scott River, upstream of the Bouvier Ranch. Our hope is to protect the views that make the PCT so scenic while ensuring the river that hikers encounter is healthy both for people and the salmon that return each year to spawn. ■



By conserving the Bouvier Ranch on the South Fork Scott River, WRC will preserve two miles of designated Critical Habitat for threatened southern Oregon/northern California coast coho salmon.

PORTLAND
(503) 241-0151

SAN FRANCISCO
(415) 767-2001

DENVER
(303) 645-4953

OLYMPIA
(360) 528-2012