

RIVERLANDS

News from Western Rivers Conservancy

Issue 19

Spring 2010



Gunnison River, CO

Conserving Great Rivers of the Colorado Plateau

GUNNISON RIVER

Western Rivers Conservancy is expanding its geographic focus to the Colorado Plateau, a region of rock-carving rivers that spans the Four Corners states.

The Colorado River and its tributaries – the White, Green, San Juan, Gunnison and many others – have sculpted one of the most famous and colorful landscapes in the world. Though many of these rivers are dammed and diverted, they are the lifeblood of the region's ecosystems and people, providing world-class recreation opportunities and supporting rare plants and animals that live in this semi-arid and desert geographic province.

Western Rivers Conservancy's first priority is the Gunnison,

Continued, page 3



The Bear River delta hosts a diverse array of birds each year.

More Critical Bird Habitat Protected

BEAR RIVER MIGRATORY BIRD REFUGE, UTAH

Western Rivers Conservancy has purchased a second parcel to protect habitat within the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge, a vast wetland complex on the edge of the Great Salt Lake.

This past fall, Congress recognized the importance of the Refuge by appropriating \$1.3 million from the Land and Water Conservation Fund for the project. This has allowed the 424 acres that Western Rivers Conservancy (WRC) has acquired to become part of the Refuge, which is managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. WRC is working to protect the remainder of this 696-acre property, as well as additional nearby wetland properties totaling thousands of acres.

The Bear River is the primary source of fresh water feeding into the Great Salt Lake. At their junction, an expansive delta offers ideal habitat for birds: open water, upland nesting areas and sheltered marshes.

By adding lands to the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge, we are enhancing habitat and feeding areas for millions of birds that utilize this freshwater oasis each year. The feathered visitors that congregate at the Refuge during migration will ultimately spread out over the hemisphere. Upwards of 50,000 people visit the Refuge annually to view the stunning numbers and diversity of birds, including tundra swans, black-necked stilts, white pelicans, and marbled godwits. ■



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A Prime Restoration Opportunity

GETTING TO WORK ON THE JOHN DAY RIVER

As a land acquisition specialist, Western Rivers Conservancy permanently protects riverlands and conveys them to long-term conservation stewards. The lower John Day River is a great example. In 2008 we bought an 8,114-acre family-operated ranch, along with its 8,000-acre Bureau of Land Management grazing lease. We conveyed the first portion to the Oregon Parks & Recreation Department (OPRD) in fall 2009. When the entire property is conveyed to OPRD by 2013, it will become Cottonwood Canyon State Park, the largest state park in Oregon.

When we took title to the land, we saw that restoration could not wait. We went right to work developing a comprehensive restoration plan and addressing the top priority: noxious weeds. We treated 200 acres of invasive species along the main-stem river and Hay Creek, which is a locally-rare coldwater tributary that is designated Critical Habitat for mid-Columbia summer steelhead.

This spring, the lower three miles of Hay Creek will be extensively planted to create a healthy native plant community and shade the creek. We've fenced off Hay Creek's fragile riparian area from cattle, thereby ensuring that the hard work will realize its full potential. We are also planting native grasses on former farm fields along the main-stem John Day to prevent weeds from reestablishing. All of these efforts set the stage for the new state park with thriving fish and wildlife habitat and breathtaking recreation opportunities.

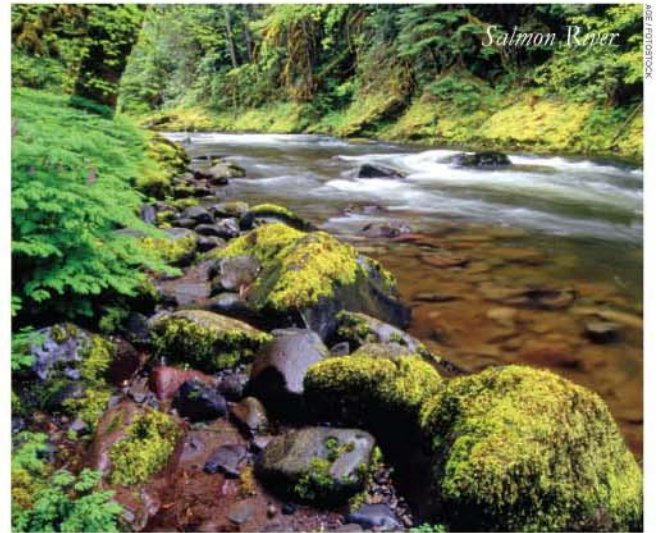
Restoration is made possible through our partnerships with the Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife, the Gilliam County Soil & Water Conservation District, the Gilliam County Weedmaster, the Oregon Youth Conservation Corps and Condon High School. ■



Youth crews help with weed removal and clean-up.



Restoration sets the stage for a new state park with thriving fish and wildlife habitat.



The Sandy's Finest Tributary

WILD AND SCENIC SALMON RIVER, OREGON

With its dams now removed, the Sandy River is completely free-flowing, an ecological and recreational treasure just outside Portland. Since 1999, Western Rivers Conservancy has protected more than 3,000 acres along the middle reach of the Sandy and tributaries, assembling a natural resource and recreation area that will be managed by the Bureau of Land Management. Land acquisition, together with the dam removals, gives us an unparalleled opportunity to restore and protect a premier salmon and steelhead stream.

The wildest tributary to the Sandy is the Salmon River. With excellent habitat, wilderness stretches, few roads and no dams, the Salmon is the largest fish-producer in the entire Sandy basin. In December 2009, Western Rivers Conservancy purchased another 70 acres in the Wild and Scenic Corridor of the Salmon River. A \$2.1 million appropriation from the Land and Water Conservation Fund in FY10 has allowed WRC to convey this tract, along with 39 acres we purchased in 2008, to the Bureau of Land Management.

Now, we are focusing on the remaining 275 acres of this property, including several miles on both sides of Boulder Creek, which feeds into the Salmon River. Fisheries biologists designated Boulder Creek as Primary Anchor Habitat for winter steelhead and Secondary Anchor Habitat for coho salmon. The property also includes frontage along the Salmon River designated as Primary Anchor Habitat for winter steelhead, coho and spring Chinook. This acquisition will also help connect wildlife migration corridors out of the Salmon-Huckleberry Wilderness, benefiting species like black-tailed deer, elk, black bear and cougar. ■

Trail Will Trace Montana Railway, With Access to Sixteen Mile Creek

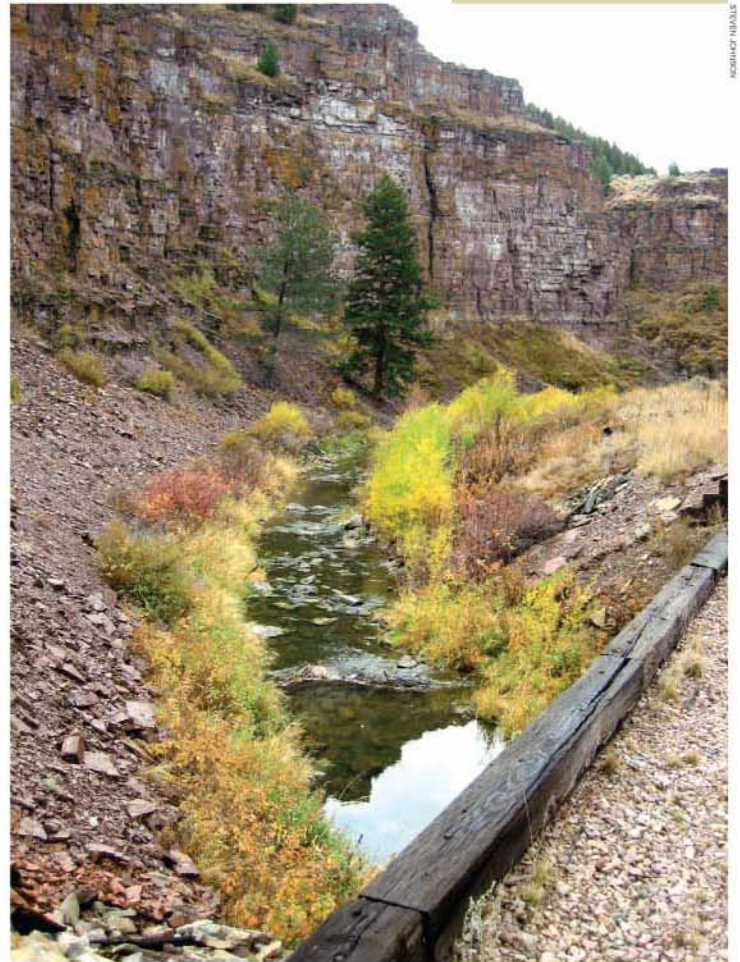
PREMIER TROUT WATERS

An historic railway soon will be a gateway to the fabled trout waters of Sixteen Mile Creek in Montana, thanks to an effort initiated by the community and now made possible by Western Rivers Conservancy.

WRC will protect five miles of abandoned rail bed due west of Ringling, Montana, along the former "Milwaukee Road." The project will create a new recreational trail with unprecedented access to Sixteen Mile Creek as well as a section of state land that can only be reached via the rail bed. The land will be managed by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

Known for its abundant brown and rainbow trout, Sixteen Mile Creek is so named because it enters the Missouri River 16 miles from its source at Three Forks, that source being a principal goal of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. Flowing from the Crazy Mountains, Sixteen Mile Creek winds through an historic area treasured by Montanans. The now-defunct Milwaukee Road traces the creek through a scenic canyon, over trestles and through tunnels to the old railway junction of Lombard.

This project, which was awarded a grant of \$250,000 from the Montana Fish & Wildlife Conservation Trust, will establish new river access points and opportunities to explore and enjoy the legendary "Sixteen Country," made famous by Ivan Doig's book *This House of Sky*. ■



Sixteen Mile Creek is known for its abundant rainbow and brown trout.

Gunnison River, Continued

Colorado's second largest river. We have committed to purchase 131 acres along the lower stretch of the Gunnison for inclusion into the Bangs Canyon Special Management Recreation Area (SMRA).

This lower stretch of the river, which sweeps past rocky bluffs, desert slopes, and riparian thickets of cottonwood, is one of few places where the four species of Colorado Basin warm-water fish still survive: Colorado pikeminnow, humpback chub, bonytail chub and razorback sucker. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has designated this reach of the Gunnison as critical habitat for these species.

Conserving this land and several other nearby properties will also enhance recreational access adjacent to the BLM's Bangs Canyon SMRA, which provides backcountry recreation trails a few miles from Grand Junction, CO.

In the next several years, our goal is to acquire additional properties to protect critical habitat along the Gunnison River and other outstanding rivers of the Colorado Plateau. ■



Western Rivers Conservancy will purchase several inholdings along the lower Gunnison River.



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OUR MISSION

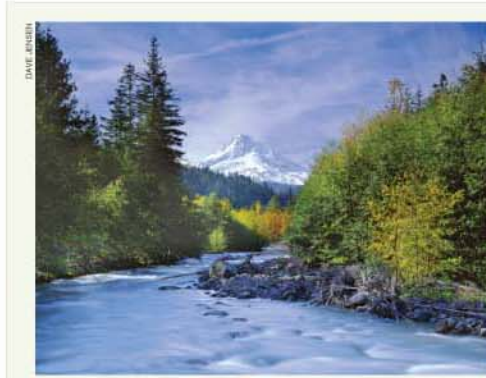
Western Rivers Conservancy acts to protect outstanding river ecosystems in the western United States. We acquire land to conserve critical habitat, provide public access for compatible use and enjoyment, and cooperate with other agencies and organizations to secure the health of whole ecosystems.

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To save a river, you first have to think in terms of 'forever.'

We dedicate legacy gifts to our River Protection Fund, where they will be utilized time and again for decades to come.

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THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

We'd like to thank the generous individuals, foundations, agencies, businesses and organizations that make our work possible. Recent gifts \$100 and above are listed below. Please visit westernrivers.org for a full list.

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Everett White

Everett White Joins WRC Team

We are excited to announce that Everett White has joined our talented land-buying team. Everett is coming on as Project Manager, working primarily in eastern Washington and northern Idaho.

Everett retired from 39 years with the U.S. Forest Service, where he was responsible for land acquisitions on three National Forests in Washington. During that time, he played an instrumental role working with WRC staff within the Mount Baker Snoqualmie National Forest, including our efforts to conserve the Skagit, Sauk and Stillaguamish Rivers, as well as Icicle and Silver Creeks. Everett holds a degree in Agriculture from North Carolina State University. ■