

ANNUAL REPORT

2015



WESTERN RIVERS
CONSERVANCY



Western Rivers Conservancy protects outstanding river ecosystems throughout 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.

Letter from the President and Chair



Sue Doroff, *President*

Everywhere, and especially in the American West, rivers are life. This is as true at the landscape level as it is for the tiny mayfly laying its eggs on the surface of a cold mountain stream. For people, we all find renewal on rivers, each of us in our own way. Some of us are hikers, and some are biologists. Others are anglers or boaters. You may be a photographer or a birder who hits the river at dawn when the rest of the world (barring caffeinated anglers) is sleeping.

Whatever your reason for loving rivers, and for supporting our work, we thank you. The need for clean, healthy, free-flowing rivers is crucial, just as the need for people who cherish them and who work to preserve them is crucial. Together, we can ensure our rivers stay pristine and functioning for generations to come. With ever-increasing pressure being placed upon our streams, the need for our work, and your help getting the job done, is more important than ever.



Darcy Saiget, *Board Chair*

In 2015, Western Rivers Conservancy launched, continued or completed conservation efforts on 16 rivers in six states across the West. Each of these projects will

have a direct and lasting impact on the river systems we are working to protect and ensure that thousands of acres of riverlands are open to the public.

We hope you enjoy the pages of this report. They will take you from a cold-water stream at the Canadian border, to one of the last free-flowing rivers in southern California, and from the Pacific to the Continental Divide. Thanks to you, the depth and scale of our impact last year was greater than ever before.

For our rivers,

Sue Doroff, *President*

Darcy Saiget, *Board Chair*

The Importance of Rivers

Rivers are the great connective forces of nature. They link mountains with the sea, alpine forests with coastal estuaries, high deserts with lowland floodplains. They are the pathways of migration for fish and birds, elk and moose, bobcat, wolf and myriad other animals moving within and across the great landscapes of the West. Our anadromous streams are conduits for vast nutrients that are transferred inland from the ocean in the bodies of salmon, which spawn, die and nourish the water, soil, wildlife and forests themselves.

For humans, rivers are also about connections. They link us to nature, they fuse us to our past and they connect us to each other. They lie at the heart of our most treasured places, whether Yosemite or Yellowstone, the Grand Canyon or the Columbia Gorge. They bring us together on float trips, family camping trips and fishing trips with friends. They link our communities and embody our responsibilities to one another, both upstream and down.

Today, except in those rare cases where streams are protected by their remoteness or through the hard work of dedicated people, the health of our rivers is in decline. In a sense, they are becoming more and more disconnected—clogged by dams, disrupted by culverts or drained by diversions and ditches. At the same time, the human connection to rivers has weakened or disappeared altogether.

At Western Rivers Conservancy, we are in the business of reconnecting. By buying and conserving the confluences, tributaries and critical reaches of the West's great rivers, we can protect and improve habitat throughout entire river systems and beyond. By connecting long-term stewards to the riverlands we purchase, we ensure lasting benefits for the streams we set out to conserve. And by connecting people to rivers through improved public access, we can build constituencies for those rivers. Just as humans need rivers, rivers today need constituencies, people who know and love them and will defend them against all threats.

Connections have been at the heart of what we do since our earliest days. One of our first projects was on Washington's Hoh River, where, parcel by parcel, we purchased nearly every acre of corporate-owned land between Olympic National Park and the Pacific Ocean, ensuring this incredible salmon stream was protected in its entirety, from its headwaters to the mouth.

Today, as you will find in the pages of this report, we continue to do this. On the upper Rio Grande in Colorado, we are opening river access where there is precious little public land, and we are investing in a long-term effort to conserve its finest tributaries. On California's Klamath River, we are helping the Yurok people reconnect to their spiritual homeland by creating a salmon sanctuary and tribal community forest that the Yurok will forever steward for the benefit of fish and wildlife. On Washington's Big Sheep Creek we conserved a major swath of wetlands within one of the country's most important movement corridors for large mammals and rare carnivores. And on the John Day, in Oregon, we purchased a ranch at Thirtymile Creek to ensure access to one of the most dramatic river canyons in the West and to conserve vital habitat for steelhead, salmon, bighorn sheep, elk and other wildlife.

The most important connection we work to make at Western Rivers Conservancy is our connection to the future. Our actions today directly determine the quality of the rivers that our children, our grandchildren and their children will find ten, twenty or a hundred years from now. By investing in our rivers today, we can guarantee the health of our rivers for generations to come. The sanctuaries we create will serve as refugia for fish as our rivers get warmer. They will improve habitat connectivity for wildlife. They will help people connect and reconnect with rivers, the great outdoors and each other by safeguarding and expanding those wild places that are open to all, where you can hike, fish, boat or simply kick your feet up on the banks of a healthy, beautiful western river.



- 2015 PROJECT IMPACT AREAS
- ECOREGIONS

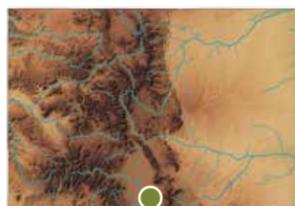


“As the lifeblood of our community, the Rio Grande is vital to the people, land and wildlife of Colorado’s San Luis Valley and beyond. WRC’s work will enable important restoration and provide public access so people can enjoy a beautiful new area for its fabulous scenery, abundant wildlife and diverse recreation.”

— RIO DE LA VISTA, *Rio Grande Natural Area Commission*

A Rare Opportunity on the Upper Rio Grande

Colorado’s San Luis Valley spans 122 miles along the eastern front of the Rocky Mountains, bound by the Sangre de Cristo Range to the east and the San Juan Mountains to the west. It is one of the Centennial State’s great natural and cultural treasures, home to a wealth of public protected lands, including the Rio Grande National Forest, Great Sand Dunes National Park, the Rio Grande Natural Area and the Alamosa, Baca and Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuges.



At the heart of the San Luis Valley is the Rio Grande, which begins its 2,000-mile descent to the Gulf of Mexico from headwaters high in the San Juans, before flowing across the valley floor and south into New Mexico. While much of the valley is high desert, the tributaries, oxbows, wetlands and riparian areas of the Rio Grande provide excellent habitat for wildlife,

including the vast birdlife for which the valley is famous. Huge flocks of waterfowl, a plethora of songbird species and over 95 percent of the Rocky Mountains’ sandhill crane population all inhabit the San Luis Valley.

Last year, Western Rivers Conservancy continued an effort we launched in 2014 to conserve the upper Rio Grande and its principal tributaries. The first project in that effort was a 16,707-acre acquisition along four miles of the Rio Grande, a property we worked to purchase throughout 2015. By acquiring these lands we will conserve a crucial reach of the Rio Grande in an area that has lost significant fish and wildlife habitat to poor management, and where precious little riverfront is accessible to the public. The project will also set the stage for acquisitions elsewhere on the river and its tributaries.

The property, known as Brownie Hills, lies within the congressionally designated Rio Grande Natural Area, located between the Alamosa National Wildlife Refuge and New Mexico’s Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River corridor. Our efforts will provide much-needed access to the river, and enable restoration activities that benefit imperiled native fish, like Rio Grande chub and Rio Grande sucker, and protect an area with Critical Habitat for the endangered southwestern willow flycatcher. We will also conserve vital winter habitat for Rocky Mountain elk, mule deer and pronghorn.



WRC’s purchase of 16,707 acres along the upper Rio Grande will conserve habitat that sustains the diverse birdlife of the San Luis Valley, including the endangered southwestern willow flycatcher (left).



RIO GRANDE COLORADO

PROJECT SIZE
16,707 acres

RIVER MILES
Mainstem: 4

ECOREGION
Southern Rockies, Southwest

KEY ANIMALS
Rocky Mountain elk, American pronghorn, sandhill crane, southwestern willow flycatcher

KEY FISH
Rio Grande cutthroat trout, Rio Grande chub, Rio Grande sucker

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

WRC worked to acquire a 16,707-acre ranch in the San Luis Valley to conserve four miles of the Rio Grande within the Rio Grande Natural Area. The project will protect prime habitat for migratory birds and excellent winter habitat for elk, antelope and other ungulates. It will also create public access in an area where almost no river access exists.



Protecting a Wild River for Steelhead, Salmon, Bighorns and Access

“Our family has been working this ranch for generations, and the John Day River is part of all of us. We’re proud to play a part in conserving this incredible stretch of the river and to leave a legacy for future generations.”

— RITA RATTRAY, Homesteader Descendant, Fourth Generation Rancher



JOHN DAY RIVER & THIRTYMILE CREEK OREGON

PROJECT SIZE
18,715 acres

RIVER MILES
Mainstem: 12; Tributary: 4

ECOREGION
Columbia Plateau

KEY ANIMALS
California bighorn sheep, pronghorn, burrowing owl, ferruginous hawk, sagebrush lizard

KEY FISH
Summer steelhead, spring Chinook

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

WRC worked to conserve 18,715 acres of sagebrush steppe habitat spanning 12 miles of the lower John Day River and four miles of the most important cold-water tributary to the lower river. Our efforts will protect prime habitat for summer steelhead, Chinook salmon and bighorn sheep while safeguarding prime public access to the river canyon and its two Wilderness Study Areas.



The 70-mile float through the lower John Day River canyon is one of the West’s great multi-day river trips. Beneath the open skies of eastern Oregon, the Wild and Scenic John Day River snakes its way across some of the last great expanses of sagebrush steppe, carving sweeping river bends into the Columbia Plateau. Bighorn sheep edge their way along basalt cliffs above the river, and the smell of sagebrush hangs in the air. For decades, however, there has been only one feasible overland access point to this entire stretch of the river: Rattray Ranch at Thirtymile Creek.

In 2014, Western Rivers Conservancy purchased the ranch, continuing our effort to improve access to a scenic river corridor that was almost entirely closed to the public, and to protect the finest habitat and key cold-water tributaries to the lower John Day. The project follows on the heels of our creation of Cottonwood Canyon State Park, which protected 16 miles of the John Day, downstream from Thirtymile Creek.

The importance of Thirtymile Creek lies in its size and location. It is the largest cold-water tributary of the lower John Day and the most important summer steelhead spawning and rearing stream on the lower river. The ranch spans the confluence of Thirtymile Creek and the John Day and includes a grazing lease that will allow us to conserve 18,715 acres in all. Our acquisition will enable restoration of the lower four miles of Thirtymile Creek, conserve 12 miles of the mainstem John Day and ensure permanent public access to the river at this highly scenic location.

The project lands lie adjacent to the Thirtymile and North Pole Ridge Wilderness Study Areas, at the heart of Oregon’s best habitat for California bighorn sheep. The area supports an estimated 650 bighorns, the largest herd in the state. The ranch is home to Rocky Mountain elk, mule deer, pronghorn antelope and mountain lion, as well as raptors, upland game birds and numerous sensitive bird species. Our work will also conserve prime habitat for the John Day’s imperiled run of chinook salmon.

We plan to convey the property to the Bureau of Land Management, which will manage the lands for the sake of fish and wildlife, for compatible upland grazing and to ensure low-impact public access to the John Day. Our vision is of a great Oregon river that is not only accessible to everyone, but able to sustain the increasingly rare fish and wildlife that inhabit this free-flowing river.

Exceptional by nearly every measure, Oregon’s John Day River flows for 284 miles from the Strawberry Mountains to the Columbia River. It is a stronghold for summer steelhead and supports exceptional wildlife including California bighorn sheep (right).



DAVE JENSEN

TOM AND PAT LEEBSON



“The Mojave is that rarest of the rare: a desert river, a flowing oasis. Its fragile riparian zone is the only refuge in a vast landscape for water-loving birds: cuckoos, chats, vireos, and flycatchers. Someday, the rare Mojave chub may even find its way back to the river, delivered from the artificial ponds where it now lives, to flowing water. This is a small river with a big future.”

— PETER MOYLE

FISHERIES BIOLOGIST, PREEMINENT EXPERT ON CALIFORNIA NATIVE FISHES

Conserving an Oasis in the Mojave Desert

In 2015, Western Rivers Conservancy launched an exciting effort to conserve a stretch of southern California’s Mojave River, one of the Golden State’s most imperiled streams. Often referred to as a “river upside down,” the Mojave flows subsurface for much of its length. Despite its unorthodox hydrology, the Mojave still manages to sustain the only significant riparian habitat in the western Mojave Desert. Its water, whether underground or on the surface, is critical to the increasingly rare plants and wildlife that rely on it. This is especially true for those rare stretches that flow above ground, where the Mojave River brings an otherwise barren landscape to life.



Between the southern California towns of Victorville and Helendale, the underlying bedrock forces the Mojave River to the surface, and year-round flows nourish a lush 15-mile corridor of cottonwoods and willows, rich with bird, insect and plant life. This oasis in the Mojave Desert, known as the Transition Zone, is where WRC is focusing its efforts.

The ranch we worked to acquire throughout FY 2015 contains the most significant stand of riparian habitat within this unique stretch of the river.

Protection of the Mojave, especially where it flows above ground, is crucial to the recovery of numerous imperiled bird species, including endangered southwestern willow flycatcher, endangered least Bell’s vireo and threatened yellow-billed cuckoo. It is also critical to the recovery of the endangered Mojave tui chub, a small endemic fish that once lived throughout the Mojave but is now only found in rare pockets. Conservation of the ranch will support populations of migratory birds, threatened desert tortoise and several California species of special concern, including Mojave River vole, southwestern pond turtle, brown-crested flycatcher, long-eared owl, summer tanager and yellow warbler.

We are now working to identify a long-term steward to manage the lands as a reserve with low-impact public use. The property has long been a top conservation priority for the US Fish & Wildlife Service, the State of California and local and national conservation organizations. WRC’s acquisition of these lands will finally make this a reality and ensure this vital reach of the Mojave River is protected forever.

WRC’s efforts on the Mojave River will protect one of the most crucial reaches of this entire stream, a rare stretch that flows above ground. This four-mile segment is an oasis for imperiled animals like the long-eared owl (left), desert tortoise and arroyo toad.



MOJAVE RIVER CALIFORNIA

PROJECT SIZE
1,640 acres

RIVER MILES
Mainstem: 4

ECOREGION
Southwest

KEY ANIMALS
Southwestern willow flycatcher, least Bell’s vireo, Mojave river vole, desert tortoise

KEY FISH
Mojave tui chub

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

WRC continued its effort to protect one of the most critical reaches of the Mojave River, a rare four-mile stretch where the Mojave flows above ground and creates an oasis in the Mojave Desert. The ranch we worked to acquire provides important habitat for numerous threatened, endangered and sensitive species.

Saving a Riparian Gem for Wildlife and Hikers

“The Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail is one of the country’s great thru-hikes, soon to rival the Pacific Crest and Appalachian Trails. WRC’s acquisition at Big Sheep Creek guarantees a wildlife corridor and protects the trail and viewscape that hikers, mountain bikers and equestrians will enjoy in perpetuity along this stretch.”

— REED WAITE, Executive Director, Pacific Northwest Trail Association



The Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail begins at Glacier National Park, high in the Rocky Mountains, and winds its way west for 1,200 miles to the Pacific Ocean. Shortly after the trail crosses into northeastern Washington, it enters one of the most important wildlife corridors in the Pacific Northwest, an area known as “the Wedge.” Viewed on a map, the Wedge is an inverted triangle, pointing down from Canada and bound by the Kettle River, the Columbia River and the Canada-United States border.



At the heart of the Wedge is a Columbia River tributary named Big Sheep Creek, a crystal-clear, cold-water stream teeming with rare redband rainbow and bull trout. It is the centerpiece of a broad, gentle valley where fertile riparian areas and rich meadows and wetlands provide excellent habitat for many charismatic and rarely seen species. Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep, mountain goat, Rocky Mountain elk, moose, Canada lynx, wolverine, pine marten and more than half of Washington’s recovering grizzly bear population all inhabit the valley.

Last year, Western Rivers Conservancy acquired the second phase of a 2,440-acre property known as the Bennett Meadows tract, a parcel that includes some of the richest wildlife habitat within the Wedge. We purchased the first phase of the property in 2014. Named for its extensive meadows and wetlands, the Bennett Meadows tract spans nearly five miles of Big Sheep Creek, one mile of American Fork Big Sheep Creek and more than two miles of the Pacific Northwest Trail.

In addition to its relevance to our National Scenic Trail system, the property is cherished by local and regional outdoor enthusiasts. Big Sheep Creek offers outstanding fishing, hunting, hiking and dispersed camping opportunities, and the property is bordered on two sides by the Colville National Forest. By acquiring these lands and conveying them to the national forest, we will ensure continuity along the Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail, which can now run through the property. Our efforts will ensure public access to the area, improve the integrity of a major wildlife corridor, and guarantee that this vital reach of Big Sheep Creek is protected in perpetuity.

Big Sheep Creek flows through one of the most important wildlife corridors in the West, providing habitat for grizzly bear, moose (right), bighorn sheep and mountain goat. Our efforts will conserve vital meadows and wetlands and key habitat for two imperiled trout species.



BIG SHEEP CREEK WASHINGTON

PROJECT SIZE
2,440 acres

RIVER MILES
Mainstem: 4.75
Tributaries: 1.5

ECOREGION
Northern Rockies

KEY ANIMALS
Moose, grizzly bear, wolverine, Canada lynx

KEY FISH
Redband rainbow trout, bull trout

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

In northeastern Washington, WRC purchased the second phase of a 2,440-acre property in an effort to protect some of the finest riparian habitat within a major wildlife corridor. The project will benefit rare redband and bull trout and ensure through-access along the new Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail.



“The Salmon River is one of the country’s most treasured and iconic rivers, and Pole Creek is one of its most essential headwater tributaries. WRC has been a vital component in the recent combined and concerted efforts to fully restore and protect Pole Creek. Thank you, WRC!”

— MARK MOULTON, Fisheries Biologist, Sawtooth National Recreation Area

Bolstering Efforts to Recover the Salmon River

Idaho’s Salmon River plays host to one of the greatest fish migrations on Earth, a journey of more than 900 miles from the Pacific Ocean inland to the Rocky Mountains. As if distance weren’t challenge enough, humans threw in eight dams on the Columbia and Snake Rivers, which salmon and steelhead must navigate before they reach the Salmon River. After their epic journey, fish bound for the upper Salmon River finally reach their natal streams in the headwaters of the Sawtooth National Recreation Area. Here, in the high Sawtooth Valley, the snowcapped Sawtooth Mountains tower over small tributary streams that provide crucial habitat for Chinook, steelhead and bull trout.

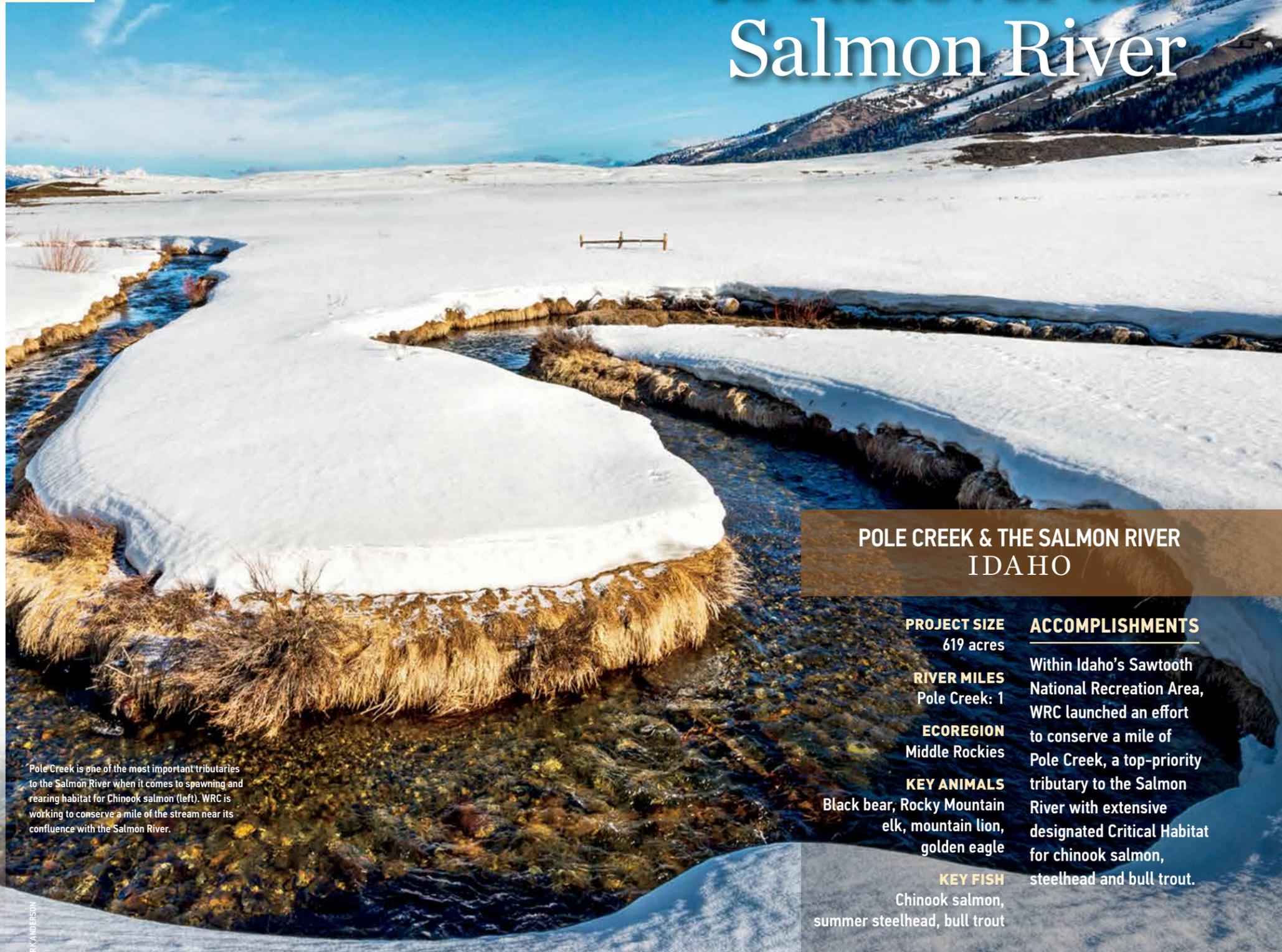
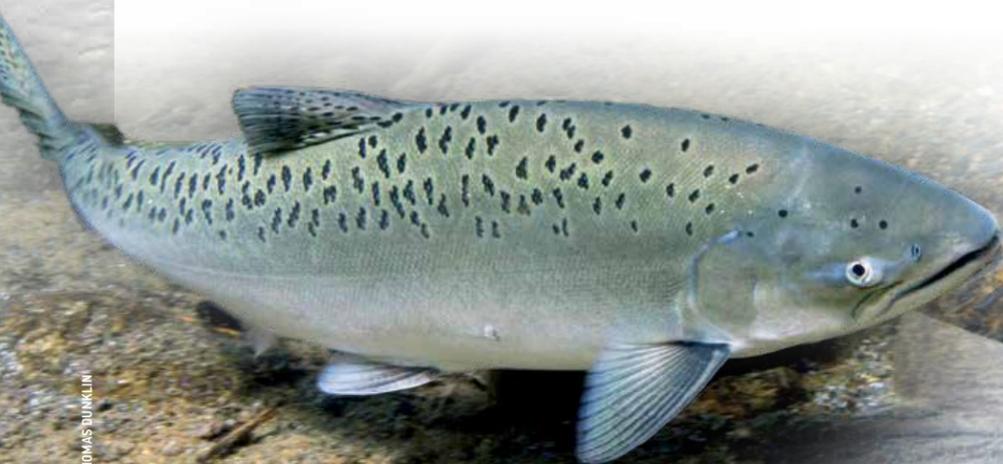


In 2015, Western Rivers Conservancy launched an effort to acquire 619 acres along one of the most important of these tributaries, a stream called Pole Creek. Located on the eastern side of the Sawtooth Valley, just below Galena Pass, Pole Creek is designated Critical Habitat for chinook, steelhead and bull trout for most of its length. Unlike tributaries on the western side of the valley, which have granite streambeds, Pole Creek is sedimentary and volcanic in origin, which means more nutrients for insects and riparian life and excellent spawning and rearing habitat for salmon and steelhead.

Given Pole Creek’s importance, the Sawtooth National Forest has ranked the stream its highest priority for habitat recovery. Pole Creek has been the focus of an extensive restoration effort by local and national nonprofits, local landowners and state and federal agencies. Millions of dollars have been invested in the stream to remove culverts, improve fish passage and increase flows in the stream during peak irrigation season.

WRC’s purchase of these lands, which include a mile of Pole Creek and a short stretch of the mainstem Salmon River itself, builds on these extensive conservation efforts. Habitat quality within the creek is on the upswing, and protecting the stream’s riparian areas will help prevent setbacks to the investments already made. By conserving the property, we can prevent future development along this key reach of the creek and eliminate grazing in the sensitive riparian areas. Ultimately, we will ensure that a mile of prime salmon and steelhead habitat in one of the West’s greatest salmon streams is protected forever.

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Pole Creek is one of the most important tributaries to the Salmon River when it comes to spawning and rearing habitat for Chinook salmon (left). WRC is working to conserve a mile of the stream near its confluence with the Salmon River.

POLE CREEK & THE SALMON RIVER IDAHO

PROJECT SIZE
619 acres

RIVER MILES
Pole Creek: 1

ECOREGION
Middle Rockies

KEY ANIMALS
Black bear, Rocky Mountain elk, mountain lion, golden eagle

KEY FISH
Chinook salmon, summer steelhead, bull trout

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Within Idaho’s Sawtooth National Recreation Area, WRC launched an effort to conserve a mile of Pole Creek, a top-priority tributary to the Salmon River with extensive designated Critical Habitat for chinook salmon, steelhead and bull trout.

THOMAS DUNKLIN

KIRK ANDERSON

A Cold-Water Sanctuary in the Heart of Redwood Country

KLAMATH RIVER AND BLUE CREEK CALIFORNIA

PROJECT SIZE
47,097 acres

RIVER MILES
Mainstem: 25; Blue Creek: 9
Tributaries: 50

ECOREGION
Klamath-Siskiyou

KEY ANIMALS
Humboldt marten, marbled murrelet, northern spotted owl, Pacific fisher, mardon skipper

KEY FISH
Coho, fall and spring Chinook, winter steelhead, Pacific lamprey, green sturgeon

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

WRC acquired another 6,479 acres along the Klamath River, bringing us within striking distance of completing a major conservation effort to forever protect Blue Creek, a cold-water lifeline for some of the largest salmon and steelhead runs in the West. The acquisition leaves just under 10,000 acres to go.

“If Blue Creek disappeared, all of this would disappear—the salmon, the steelhead, the animals, everything. People who’ve never been up here can never imagine how special this place is. Without Blue Creek, nothing would exist on the Klamath River.”

— PERGISH CARLSON, Yurok Tribal Member



Flowing from remote headwaters high in northern California’s Siskiyou Mountains and cooled by the perpetual fog of the Redwood Coast, Blue Creek is a cold-water lifeline for some of the greatest runs of salmon and steelhead in the West. The stream is crucial to the wildlife and overall health of one of the most biologically diverse regions on the planet, the Klamath-Siskiyou. For the Yurok, California’s largest Native American tribe, Blue Creek is the spiritual centerpiece of a culture that is tied to the Klamath River and its tributaries, and especially to Blue Creek, the most important inflow of cold water on the lower river.



Western Rivers Conservancy is working in partnership with the Yurok people to purchase over 47,000 acres of temperate rainforest from Green Diamond Resource Company to create the Blue Creek Salmon Sanctuary and Yurok Tribal Community Forest. One of the most important conservation initiatives in the country today, the effort will ensure the Blue Creek watershed is safeguarded in its entirety, from pristine headwaters that are already protected in the Siskiyou Wilderness, to its confluence with the Klamath River. Once the Yurok acquire the lands, they

will manage them to enhance salmon and steelhead recovery, improve old-growth forest habitat and benefit the rich wildlife of the Klamath-Siskiyou ecoregion.

To fund our efforts, we are pioneering new ground in conservation finance, bringing diverse public and private funding to the table, including New Markets Tax Credits, carbon offset sales, endangered species funding and foundation and individual support. Our partners include the Keneda Fund, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, California Wildlife Conservation Board and California Coastal Conservancy.

In FY 2015, WRC took another major step forward in this landmark effort, purchasing an additional 6,479 acres along Blue Creek and the Klamath River. With this acquisition, a total of 37,205 acres have now been acquired, leaving just under 10,000 acres to go. Once the project is complete, 73 square miles of forest will be forever conserved, the Yurok people will have regained the crown jewel of their spiritual homeland, and Blue Creek will be forever safeguarded by a community whose greatest cultural, spiritual and economic interests are healthy forests, healthy habitat and healthy returns of salmon and steelhead.

Northern spotted owl, California condor, Humboldt marten and Pacific fisher (right) are four of many imperiled species that will benefit from WRC’s conservation efforts at Blue Creek (left), which will protect over 47,000 acres of coastal temperate rainforest.





“Once you see and spend some time on the North Umpqua, it’s in your heart forever. I feel incredibly lucky to have fished this river when it was relatively unknown. WRC’s work at Swiftwater will help ensure future generations are as blessed as I’ve been since I first discovered the secrets and remarkable beauty of this great river over 70 years ago.”

— FRANK MOORE

North Umpqua River Guardian & Legendary Fly Fisherman

Saving a Key Reach of a Fabled Steelhead Stream

Few rivers capture the imagination of fly anglers like Oregon’s North Umpqua. With its runs of wild steelhead, spectacular setting, and 33 miles of fly-fishing-only water, the river looms large in the minds of anglers from around the globe. Increasingly, the river resides on the bucket lists of non-anglers, too. Traced by the North Umpqua National Recreational Trail for 79 miles, the river has become a haven for hikers, mountain bikers, backpackers and boaters as well.



While the North Umpqua makes an exceptional playground, what really sets it apart is its clean, cold water that sustains an extraordinary fishery. The North Umpqua is one of only two coastal streams in Oregon that rise in the Cascade Range rather than the Coast Range. Fed by Cascade snowmelt, the North Umpqua flows cold and clear year-round, sustaining healthy runs of spring Chinook, coho salmon and steelhead.

Thanks to efforts by anglers and other conservationists, the river is protected along much of its length by multiple designations, including the North Umpqua Wild and Scenic River. Despite its protections, parts of the North Umpqua remain at risk.

In summer 2015, Western Rivers Conservancy committed to purchase 211 acres along a mile of the North Umpqua, at the head of the North Umpqua Trail and the gateway to the fly-fishing-only section. The need arose when Douglas County concluded it had to dispose of Swiftwater County Park, which protects crucial river access, a key trailhead and a largely unbroken stand of old-growth forest along the river. Rather than see the parcel logged or developed, WRC acted to acquire and conserve the property.

The project will keep a key reach of the National Recreation Trail in public ownership and conserve large stands of ancient forest, which provide vital shade for the river and harbor diverse wildlife, including northern spotted owl, bald eagle, Roosevelt elk, black bear and river otter. The project will also protect crucial spawning habitat for anadromous fish, including nearly a mile of Critical Habitat for threatened Oregon coast coho. Our goal is to convey the lands to the BLM for inclusion and protection within the Wild and Scenic River corridor.



SHELLEY BANKS



The clean, cold, emerald-green waters of Oregon’s fabled North Umpqua River support strong runs of salmon and steelhead (left). Flanked by the 79-mile North Umpqua Trail, it is a recreationist’s paradise.

TYLER ROEMER

NORTH UMPQUA RIVER OREGON

PROJECT SIZE	ACCOMPLISHMENTS
211 acres	On Oregon’s Wild and Scenic North Umpqua River, WRC committed to purchase 211 acres at the head of the renowned North Umpqua National Recreation Trail, at the start of the fly-fishing-only water. The effort will preserve old-growth forest, prime salmon and steelhead habitat, a key trailhead and a mile of trail.
RIVER MILES Mainstem: 1	
ECOREGION Cascades & Klamath-Siskiyou	
KEY ANIMALS Roosevelt elk, black bear, northern spotted owl, river otter	
KEY FISH Coho salmon, spring Chinook, winter and summer steelhead, Pacific lamprey, green sturgeon	

A Rare Refuge for Fish, Wildlife and People in Southern California

“The Santa Margarita River is a special place, an oasis for wildlife and a refuge for people where parks are few. The Trails Council has maintained this stretch of the river for decades, and we are thrilled that it will at last be protected, both for its non-motorized, multiuse trails and the wildlife that lives there.”

— DONNA GEBHART, Chair, Fallbrook Trails Council



The Santa Margarita River is one of the last free-flowing rivers in southern California and a lifeline for one of the most biodiverse regions in the continental United States. It provides habitat and connectivity essential to survival in a region that has more rare, threatened and endangered species than any comparable land area in the Lower 48. Protected along much of its length, the Santa Margarita remains the longest intact riparian corridor in southern California and one of the last remaining habitat links between the high desert, coastal Santa Ana Mountains and Pacific Ocean. In a region where water is scarce, the Santa Margarita is a resource of immeasurable importance.



The Santa Margarita begins at the confluence of Temecula and Murrieta Creeks, flows through Temecula Canyon and crosses a broad floodplain at Camp Pendleton Marine Corps Base, finally entering the Pacific near Oceanside. The river corridor provides habitat for 52 mammal species, 43 species of reptile and, most remarkably, 236 bird species, the highest avian diversity on California’s southern coast. Of these, 33 are threatened or endangered, including arroyo toad, least Bell’s vireo, southwestern willow flycatcher and arroyo chub.

The Santa Margarita also offers the southernmost viable habitat on the continent for endangered southern steelhead.

In late 2015, Western Rivers Conservancy launched an effort to protect five miles of this crucial stream and two miles of Sandia Creek, a key tributary. The effort will connect the 4,000-acre Santa Margarita Ecological Reserve upstream and protected lands within Camp Pendleton downstream. In addition to safeguarding and improving habitat connectivity, the project will conserve 1,384 acres of riparian lands and chaparral, coastal sage scrub and live oak woodland communities, all vital to the region’s imperiled wildlife.

Within southern California’s bustling and rapidly developing metropolises, the Santa Margarita also offers people the rare opportunity to experience the joys of a free-flowing stream. The river is an exceptional birding destination and is popular among equestrians, mountain bikers and hikers. Western Rivers Conservancy is now working to secure conservation funding and identify a long-term steward that will manage the lands to enhance compatible public access while protecting one of the last free-flowing rivers in southern California.

SANTA MARGARITA RIVER CALIFORNIA

PROJECT SIZE
1,384 acres

RIVER MILES
Mainstem: 5; Tributary: 2

ECOREGION
Mediterranean California

KEY ANIMALS
Mountain lion, western pond turtle, least Bell’s vireo, southwestern willow flycatcher

KEY FISH
Southern steelhead, arroyo chub

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

WRC signed an agreement to purchase 1,384 acres along the Santa Margarita River, the southernmost steelhead stream in North America and one of the last free-flowing rivers in southern California. Our effort will conserve the last major unprotected stretch of the river and secure public access for all.

MYLES MCCUNNESS

PETER BRANNON



WRC is conserving an extensive reach of the Santa Margarita River, a lifeline in the arid landscape of southern California and a refuge for hundreds of species of birds, including the southwestern willow flycatcher, least Bell’s vireo and California least tern (left).

Completing Conservation of an Arizona Treasure

In the parched Sonoran Desert, Arizona's Fossil Creek is an oasis, a ribbon of life flowing from a series of mineral springs in the Mogollon Rim down to the Verde River. Water temperatures in the creek hover around 70 degrees Fahrenheit year-round, and the stream's high mineral content creates slick limestone formations and spectacular blue-green travertine pools. River otters, bats, frogs, beavers, a wealth of bird species and nine species of native warm-water fish all inhabit the stream. Fossil Creek is a true haven for fish and wildlife – but it wasn't always this way.



For nearly a century, Fossil Creek was diverted by a hydroelectric project that left the creek lifeless. Beginning in 1999, state and federal agencies and restoration groups embarked on what would become the largest river recovery effort in the Southwest. A hydroelectric dam was removed from the river, and Fossil Creek flowed wild and free for the first time in a hundred years. Four years later, Congress designated all 17 miles of the creek Wild and Scenic. It is now one of only two Wild and Scenic Rivers in Arizona, the other being the Verde, into which Fossil Creek flows.

In 2015, Western Rivers Conservancy purchased the only remaining unprotected riverland on Fossil Creek, a 19-acre parcel within the Wild and Scenic River corridor. We intend to convey the lands to the Coconino National Forest for permanent protection and to improve the integrity of both the Fossil Creek and Verde Wild and Scenic River corridors. The effort will conserve habitat for numerous special-status species, including endangered southwestern willow flycatcher, threatened yellow-billed cuckoo and threatened Chiricahua leopard frog. As more and more people discover and visit Fossil Creek, WRC's efforts will also help Coconino National Forest minimize impact on this sensitive desert ecosystem.

A wonder in its rarity, Fossil Creek is a refuge for fish and wildlife in the harsh Sonoran Desert and one of only two Wild and Scenic Rivers in Arizona. WRC is conserving the last unprotected stretch.

DAN SORESENEN



WRC is acquiring unprotected riverlands within Colorado's Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area to conserve habitat for bighorn sheep, elk, mountain lion (below), bald eagle, native warm-water fish and other wildlife.

RICH DORNAN

A Ribbon of Life in an Arid Land

The second largest river in Colorado, the Gunnison flows 159 miles from the confluence of the East and Taylor Rivers to the Colorado River. While the upper Gunnison is heavily dammed, the lower river flows freely for over 100 miles, sweeping past rocky bluffs, desert slopes and lush thickets of cottonwood that stand in sharp contrast to the arid landscape of the surrounding plateau.

This lower reach of the Gunnison is one of the few places where all four species of Colorado Basin warm-water fish still survive, and much of the lower river is designated Critical Habitat for these increasingly rare fish. Scenic canyons and sandstone mesas dominate the landscape, and the area is home to desert bighorn sheep, Rocky Mountain elk, mule deer, mountain lion, river otter and bald eagle.

Before the Gunnison meets the Colorado River, it flows through the Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Areas (DENCA), hemming in the western edge of the Dominguez Canyon Wilderness. The DENCA is rich in archeological sites and offers exceptional hiking, wildlife viewing and boating opportunities.

Despite the area's extraordinary natural and recreational merits, more than 16 miles of the Gunnison within the DENCA remain unprotected. Since 2008, Western Rivers Conservancy has worked to shore up these lands, improve the integrity of the DENCA, conserve habitat for fish and wildlife and enhance public access. To date, we have protected a total of nearly eight miles of the lower Gunnison and tributary streams. In 2015, we worked to convey an additional 190 acres, including another mile of prime river frontage, to the Bureau of Land Management for protection within the conservation area. All told, our efforts on the Gunnison will help ensure this extraordinary river remains healthy, intact and accessible for generations.



Continuing our effort to conserve unprotected reaches of the Gunnison River within Colorado's Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area, WRC worked to conserve 190 acres of land, including another mile of prime river frontage.



TOM AND PAT LEESON



DAVE JENSEN

Few streams in the Columbia Basin have the potential that Catherine Creek has when it comes to improving survival rates for juvenile Chinook salmon. WRC's efforts are enabling extensive habitat recovery along a crucial 2.5-mile stretch of the river. (Adult Chinook pictured below.)

Recovering a Top-Priority Salmon Stream



WRC protected 545 acres along 2.5 miles of Catherine Creek, one of the Columbia Basin's highest-priority streams for salmon and steelhead recovery. The effort enables extensive restoration of a critical reach of this Grande Ronde/Snake River tributary.

TOM AND PAT LEESON



Recovering the Columbia River Basin's prodigious salmon runs is one of the great conservation challenges of our time. In addition to being the iconic animal of the Pacific Northwest, salmon are a keystone species upon which the health of a vast ecosystem depends. They are not only vital to the longevity of a watershed spanning more than 260,000 square miles, but central to a way of life for people and communities across the region.

The approaches to salmon recovery are many. Our focus is habitat. By conserving critical spawning and rearing tributaries and improving survival rates for juvenile fish, we can improve the health of runs throughout the greater Snake River system. An example of this is our work on Catherine Creek.

Catherine Creek is a small stream in eastern Oregon that tumbles cold and clear out of the Wallowa Mountains. It is a tributary to the Grande Ronde, which flows into the Snake, the largest tributary to the Columbia River. Small as it is, Catherine Creek contains some of the highest-priority habitat for summer steelhead and spring Chinook in the Snake and Columbia River basins.

In February 2014, WRC purchased a 545-acre ranch spanning 2.5 miles of Catherine Creek, where rearing habitat has been severely degraded for decades. In 2015, we conveyed the lands to the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, which has received funding to extensively restore this stretch of creek. The project will recreate healthy original stream habitat and dramatically improve survival rates for overwintering fish.

The salmon and steelhead runs on the Snake were once one of the largest in the West, but are now the most imperiled runs in the Columbia Basin. Our acquisition on Catherine Creek will play a small but essential part in bringing those runs back to life.

A Conservation Success on the Upper Yampa River

In Colorado, Western Rivers Conservancy successfully completed a landmark project that protected some of the most productive trout water on the upper Yampa River. We conserved a 45-acre property called Hubbard's Summer Place, which spans a half-mile of the Yampa at the confluence of Sarvis Creek, three miles downstream from Stagecoach Reservoir.



WRC conveyed the property to the Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service, which will now manage it for its outstanding conservation and recreation values. The property lies just 13 miles from Steamboat Springs, on the banks of a classic tailwater fishery. Local anglers covet this stretch of the Yampa for its outstanding fishing, and Colorado Parks and Wildlife is working to recover native mountain whitefish.

The property was one of the few remaining unprotected private parcels in an area that is blanketed by public lands, including the Sarvis Creek Wilderness Area, Sarvis Creek State Wildlife Area, Routt National Forest and BLM lands. The area supports a variety of wildlife, including Rocky Mountain elk, black bear, mountain lion, Canada lynx and dusky grouse, and has stands of black cottonwood, red osier dogwood and serviceberry as well as aspen, spruce, fir and lodgepole pine.

WRC learned about the Hubbard property in 2011 while working with the BLM to conserve a ranch at the entrance of Cross Mountain Canyon, on the lower Yampa. At the request of the BLM and local conservation groups, we purchased the Hubbard lands in 2013. Thanks to an outpouring of community support, WRC was able to secure enough funding to convey the lands to the agencies in late 2015. Now, this beloved stretch of the Yampa is protected and open to all.

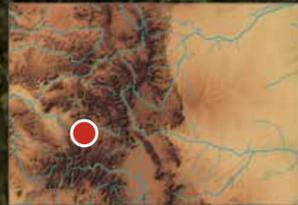
WRC successfully conserved a reach of the upper Yampa River that is cherished by anglers yet was closed to the public for decades. It is now open to everyone.



RUSS SCHNITZER

Reviving a First-Rate Colorado Trout Stream

Western Rivers Conservancy continued its effort to reestablish year-round flows in the Little Cimarron River, an outstanding Colorado trout stream that flows from the Uncompahgre Wilderness to the main-stem Cimarron, a tributary to the Gunnison River. The upper 13 miles of the Little Cimarron possess all the qualities of a first-rate wild trout stream, with cold, clean water and abundant, naturally reproducing rainbow and brook trout. Along its middle reaches, however, the river flows only intermittently, dewatered by the irrigation ditches of the lower Cimarron Valley.



Since 2012, WRC has been working to permanently reconnect habitat between the lower and upper reaches of the river. Our first step was purchasing a farm with senior water rights on McKinley Ditch, which draws heavily from the Little Cimarron. In 2014, we conveyed the water rights to Colorado Water Trust, which is now working to create Colorado's first permanent water-sharing agreement between agriculture and the environment. Our goal is to establish a shared season that keeps water on the farm, yet prioritizes flows in the Little Cimarron during the driest times of the year. If we and the Water Trust are successful, the Little Cimarron will flow uninterrupted all year long, temperatures in the lower river will decrease, and trout will repopulate the formerly dewatered reach of the stream. It is a complex project and one with potential to serve as a model for river conservation not only in Colorado, but throughout the West.



A major grant from Oregon Parks and Recreation Department will allow WRC to permanently conserve Punchbowl Falls and the confluence of the East and West Forks of the Hood River. The river is home to northern river otter (below) and numerous anadromous fish species.

A Park in the Making at Punchbowl Falls



WRC secured a major grant that set our project at Punchbowl Falls, on Oregon's Hood River, on the path to completion. We can now convey the lands to Hood River County to permanently protect the falls and the East and West Fork confluence forever.

For over a century, residents of Oregon's Hood River Valley have envisioned a park at Punchbowl Falls on the Hood River. Here, the West Fork Hood, after its descent from glacial headwaters on Mount Hood, plunges over a basalt ledge into a giant bowl, set within a natural basalt amphitheater carved into the river gorge. The scene is made all the more stunning by the East Fork Hood, which tumbles into the West Fork immediately below the falls. Throughout the year, returning salmon and steelhead can be seen holding in the pool, gaining vital energy before they hurdle the falls and continue upstream to spawn.

This spectacular site has long been popular among hikers, anglers, boaters and swimmers and is sacred to Native Americans, who have fished the pool since time immemorial. The Hood River itself is utterly unique, in that it sustains the most diverse assemblage of anadromous and native fish species in the Columbia River Basin. It is also entirely free-flowing: In 2010, the utility PacifiCorp removed Powerdale Dam on the lower Hood, returning the river to its wild status for the first time in more than 90 years.

Understanding the confluence's crucial importance to the Hood River system as a whole, Western Rivers Conservancy purchased 103 acres surrounding both the confluence and the falls. We have since been working to place the lands into public stewardship with Hood River County and protect this magnificent site for all to enjoy. Last year, we came one step closer when we secured a \$470,000 grant for the county from Oregon Parks and Recreation Department. WRC is donating the remaining \$575,000 in land value to the county to make conservation, and the park, a reality at last.



TOM AND PAT LEESON

Opposite page: During the driest months of the year, this upper reach of the Little Cimarron is disconnected from the lower river when a critical stretch gets dewatered for irrigation. WRC's efforts will ensure this prized trout stream flows uninterrupted year-round.



TYLER ROEMER

The North Santiam is one of the most important salmon and steelhead streams in the Willamette Valley and supports excellent habitat for imperiled wildlife, including pileated woodpecker, red-legged frog and western pond turtle (below).

Protecting Forests, Fish and Wetlands in the Willamette Basin



In Oregon's Willamette Valley, WRC completed a project that created a 429-acre assemblage of protected riverlands along the North Santiam River. We also committed to purchase an additional 411 acres of prime fish and wildlife habitat upstream.

Oregon's North Santiam River rises in the Cascade Range and descends quickly toward the Willamette Valley, where it slows to a broad meander and nourishes some of the finest remaining lowland riparian habitat in the state. On these lower reaches, Western Rivers Conservancy is working to shore up prime fish and wildlife habitat by purchasing properties with intact riparian areas and excellent potential for reconnecting the river with its floodplain.

In 2015, we took two major strides in this effort. We conveyed a 91-acre farm to the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, and we committed to purchase an additional 411 acres of riverland upstream. The conveyance completed a 429-acre assemblage that now protects 2.5 miles of mainstem and side-channel habitat, as well as significant swaths of closed-canopy riparian forest and rare wetlands. The Tribe named these lands "Chahalpam," meaning "Place of the Santiam Kalapuya people" and will steward them for the sake of imperiled Willamette Valley fish and wildlife. The project prevented gravel mining on the banks of the river and set the stage for one of the most significant floodplain restoration projects in the Willamette Valley. We are now working to conserve the 411-acre farm upstream, an effort that will protect another 1.5 miles of mainstem frontage and 2.75 miles of tributary habitat.

Historically, the North Santiam produced two-thirds of the Willamette River's winter steelhead and a third of its spring Chinook. All of the project lands contain excellent spawning and rearing habitat for these species, which are both protected under the Endangered Species Act. The properties possess excellent habitat for Oregon chub, which are recovering from near extinction, as well as prime habitat for imperiled species like western pond turtle, red-legged frog, pileated woodpecker and hooded merganser.



ADAM CLAUSE

Completing Conservation of an Oregon Treasure

For nearly two decades, Western Rivers Conservancy has been working to conserve unprotected reaches of Oregon's Sandy River and its tributaries, the Little Sandy, Bull Run and Salmon Rivers. The Sandy is a remarkable stream, flowing from glacial headwaters in the Mount Hood Wilderness, through deep river canyons and lush forests down to the Columbia River. Only 25 miles from Portland, the Sandy provides exceptional recreation opportunities, including hiking, boating and bird-watching and one of the best sport fisheries in the region.



In 2007 and 2008, Portland General Electric removed its dams on the Sandy and Little Sandy Rivers. With no dams on the Columbia below the Sandy, the river once again provided an unimpeded pathway for salmon and steelhead, from its headwaters all the way to the Pacific. In conjunction with the dam removals, WRC partnered with PGE to conserve over 4,000 acres of riverland and create an unprecedented conservation and recreation corridor along the middle reaches of the Sandy. WRC conveyed those lands to the Bureau of Land Management, and over 17 miles of the Sandy and Little Sandy Rivers are now protected within a BLM Area of Critical Environmental Concern.

WRC completed the core of this project by 2012, yet we continue to purchase and conserve lands along these rivers whenever they become available. Last year, we acquired 120 acres along a small salmon and steelhead spawning tributary called Little Joe Creek. In addition to protecting vital fish habitat, the effort linked an existing county park with protected BLM lands and enabled expansion of the Sandy Ridge Trail System. Managed by the BLM, the trail system opened in 2010 and has since become one of the top mountain biking trails in the country.

WRC has created a conservation and recreation corridor along 17 miles of the Sandy River, creating access for river-lovers and ensuring this gem of a glacial river remains forever healthy for fish and wildlife.





Roosevelt elk cross Washington's Hoh River. Flowing from its glacial headwaters on Mount Olympus, the Hoh is one of the West's great salmon and steelhead streams. WRC created a conservation and recreation corridor along 20 miles of the river between the Pacific and Olympic National Park.

TOM AND PAT LEESON

Consolidated Statement of Financial Position

As of September 30, 2015

	2015	2014
Assets:		
Cash and cash equivalents	\$1,156,036	1,358,824
Restricted deposits and reserves	965,409	586,410
Grants, interest and other receivables	1,919,616	450,009
Prepaid expenses and deposits	61,016	46,983
Investments	1,250,345	2,047,379
Notes receivable	16,761,020	8,351,020
Land holdings, equipment and other assets	32,647,669	15,248,043
Total assets	\$54,761,111	28,088,668
Liabilities:		
Accounts payable, grants payable and accrued expenses	575,254	203,537
Notes and interest payable	31,738,610	19,684,680
Total liabilities	32,313,864	19,888,217
Net Assets:		
Unrestricted	13,585,993	6,457,760
Temporarily restricted	7,708,788	593,725
Permanently restricted	1,152,466	1,148,966
Total net assets	22,447,247	8,200,451
Total liabilities and net assets	\$54,761,111	28,088,668

Consolidated Statement of Activities

For the fiscal year ending September 30, 2015

	Unrestricted	Temporarily Restricted	Permanently Restricted	Total 2015	Total 2014
Revenues:					
Contributions and grants	\$660,004	16,532,729	3,500	17,196,233	5,361,057
In-kind contributions	26,659			26,659	38,789
Investment return	173,731			173,731	87,439
Gain realized on sale of land	241,600			241,600	321,600
Reimbursements, fees & other	1,097,169			1,097,169	961,504
Total revenues	2,199,163	16,532,729	3,500	18,735,392	6,770,389
Net assets released from restriction	9,417,666	(9,417,666)			
Total revenues & other support	11,616,829	7,115,063	3,500	18,735,392	6,770,389
Expenses:					
Program	3,733,957			3,733,957	3,050,927
Management and general	379,123			379,123	410,751
Fundraising	375,516			375,516	348,628
Total expenses	4,488,596	-	-	4,488,596	3,810,306
Change in net assets	7,128,233	7,115,063	3,500	14,246,796	2,960,083
Net assets at beginning of year	6,457,760	593,725	1,148,966	8,200,451	5,240,368
Net assets at end of year	\$13,585,993	7,708,788	1,152,466	22,447,247	8,200,451

This financial information is excerpted from Western Rivers Conservancy's audited financial statements. To obtain a complete copy of the audit by the firm of Gary McGee & Co., please contact Western Rivers Conservancy.

Acknowledgments

Western Rivers Conservancy greatly appreciates gifts from all of our supporters. The individuals, foundations, businesses, organizations and agencies below contributed \$100 or more between October 1, 2014 and September 30, 2015. For a full list of supporters, visit www.westernrivers.org.

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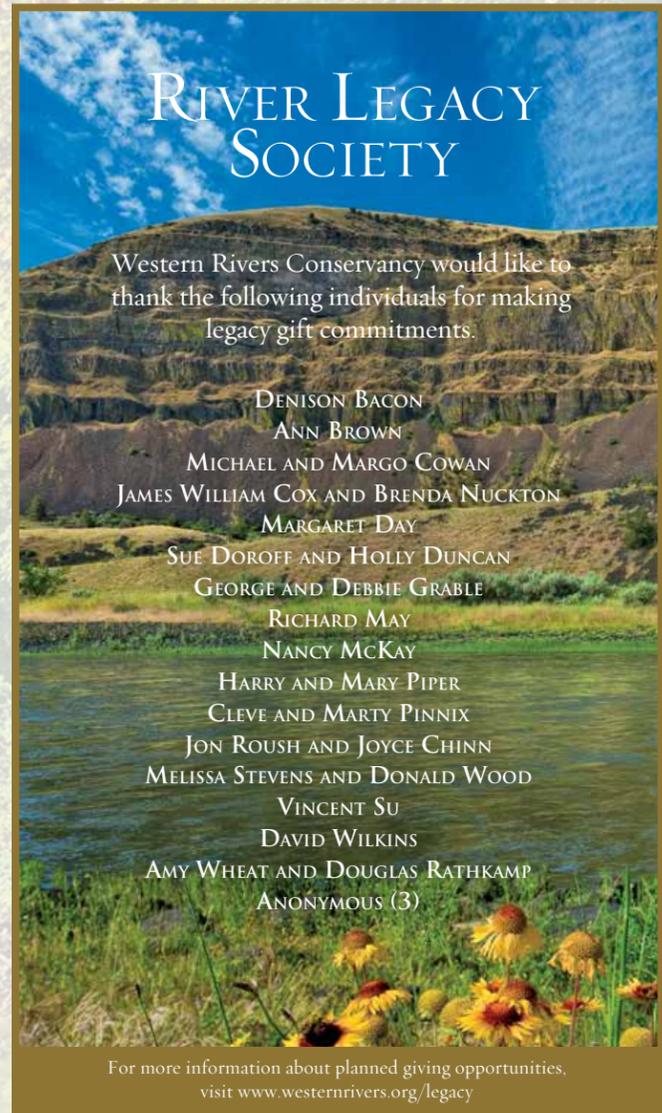
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