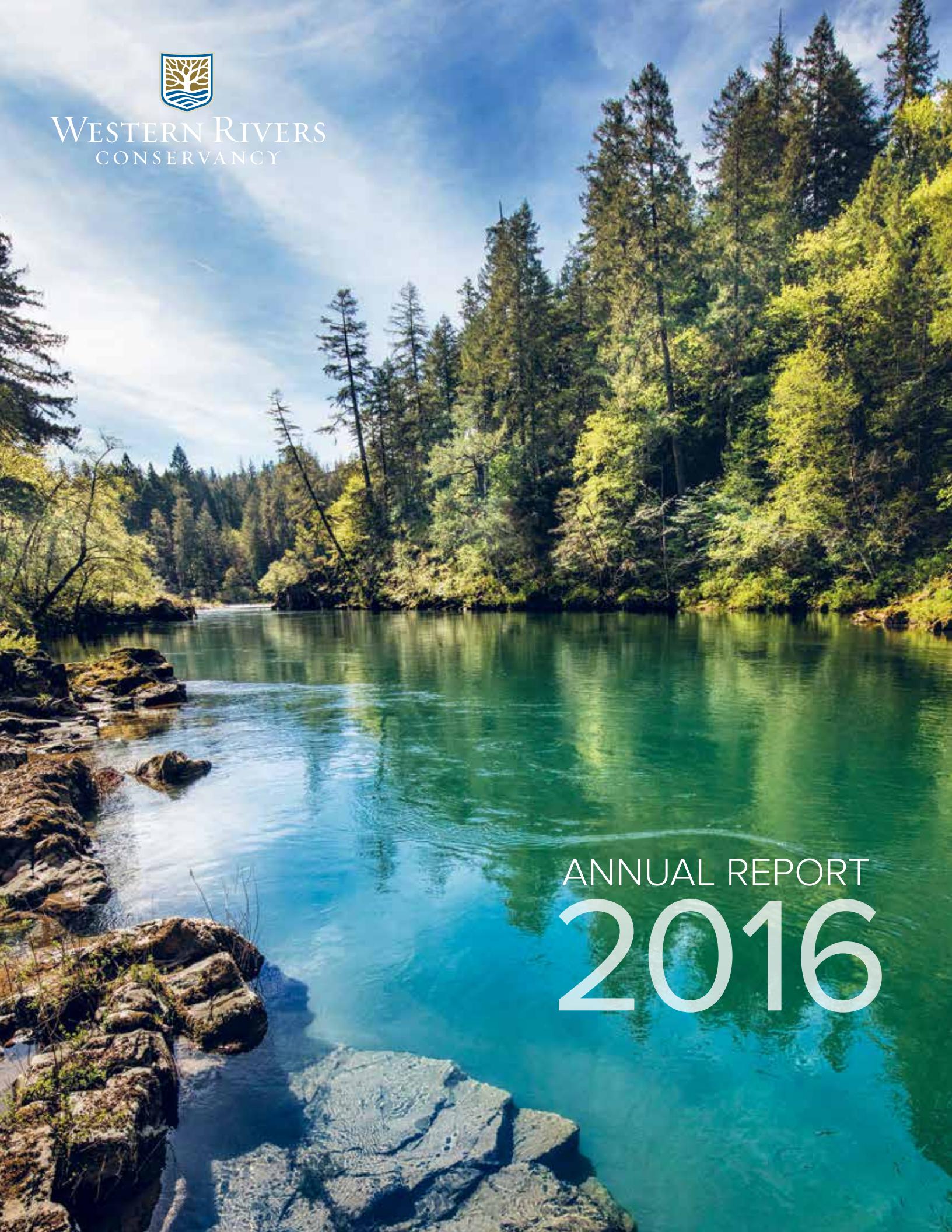




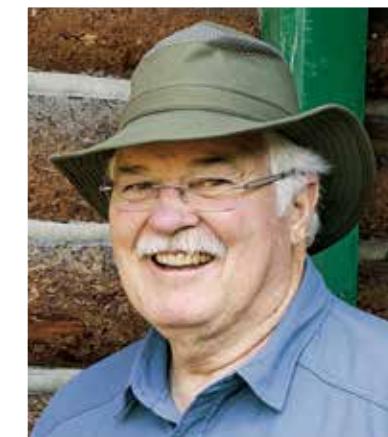
WESTERN RIVERS  
CONSERVANCY



ANNUAL REPORT  
**2016**



Sue Doroff, President



Robert Anderson, Board Chair

## Letter from the President and Chair

The wonder of rivers is that each and every one of them is unique. We all have our favorite stream and our reasons for holding it dear. You might love Arizona's Fossil Creek for its 70-degree water, its waterfalls, rock formations and its crystal-clear aquamarine pools, perfect for swimming in the heat of the Southwest sun. Or maybe your river is the North Umpqua, in southern Oregon, where the water runs cold, deep and emerald-green through dense evergreen forests, where chrome-bright steelhead leap waterfalls and black bear amble along the riverbank at sunrise.

Different as these two rivers are, they share an essence that far outshines their differences. Both are crucial to fish and wildlife and vital to the people who live (and play) in the regions through which they flow. Each is immeasurably important. And that importance is what draws Western Rivers Conservancy to both of them, and to every river we set out to conserve.

Of course, every river matters. But WRC focuses on those that matter most. Rivers like the Klamath, the Salmon, the upper Rio Grande, the John Day, the North Umpqua and the Santa Margarita are rivers that remain intact along much of their length and play a crucial role in sustaining fish and wildlife and making life better for people. Each of the rivers you will read about in this report are uniquely outstanding, which we hope comes through in the pages herein. Despite the countless challenges humans have placed upon these rivers, they are all still functioning, relatively intact ecosystems. Now, more than ever before, they need our vigilance and care if they are to stay healthy and accessible for generations to come.

There is something else we hope to demonstrate in this report: Thanks to you, we are having a profound impact on these rivers, ensuring that some of their most crucial reaches are forever conserved, and that they remain permanently open for you, for our children and for all those who wish to enjoy the beauty of a healthy, free-flowing river.

For our rivers,

Sue Doroff, President

Robert Anderson, Board Chair

# 2016 ACTIVE PROJECTS

RIVERS

**16**

TRIBUTARY STREAMS

**31**

ACRES

**94,750**

RIVER MILES

**144**

A LASTING IMPACT ON OUR RIVERS AND THE WEST

## An Immediate Impact

When Western Rivers Conservancy buys land along a river and conveys it to a long-term steward, that land is protected forever. It can no longer be subdivided for development or mined for gravel. Riparian areas are free to recover and to flourish, and trees and grasslands can mature and perform the vital ecosystem work that rivers need. When we conserve riverlands, the results are clear: Every property we protect becomes a sanctuary for fish and wildlife, from riverbed to riverbank to the habitat above. And whenever public access is compatible with conservation, we create it. We want people to have access so they can experience and enjoy our rivers.

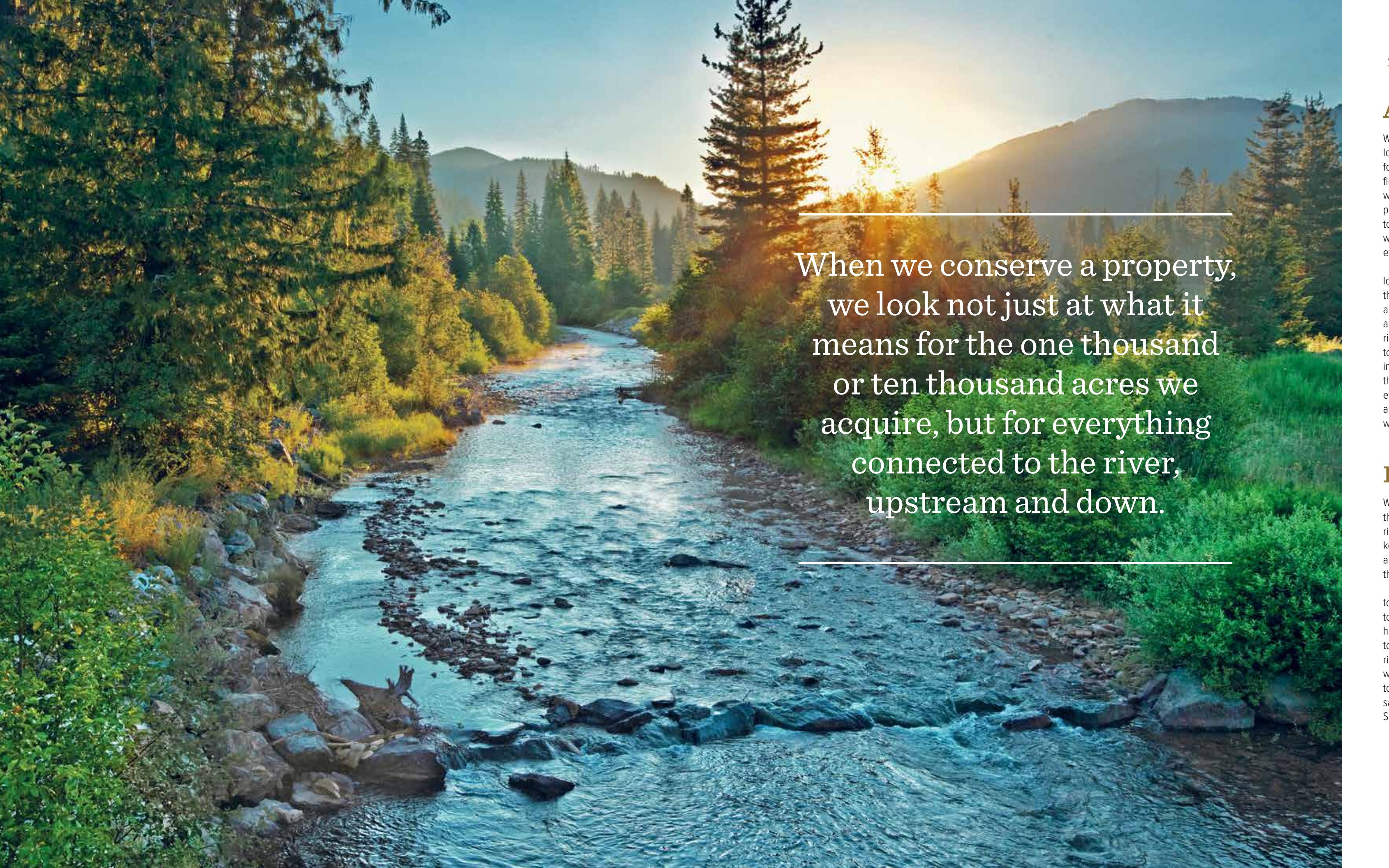
In Oregon, for example, we continued our effort to conserve 12 miles of the lower John Day River, the longest free-flowing river west of the Rockies. Along this stretch, WRC will permanently protect vital streamside and upland habitat, and four miles of a crucial cold-water tributary called Thirtymile Creek. WRC will also secure the lone public access point to a spectacular 70-mile stretch of the river canyon. In Colorado, we purchased 1,330 acres along the Conejos River to conserve prime habitat for endangered southwestern willow flycatcher, and in Washington, we worked to acquire lands that will allow us to protect one of the largest runs of chum salmon in the Puget Sound. In each of these places our efforts will improve access for people and create refuges for fish and wildlife along strategic reaches of important rivers. This focused impact epitomizes our work, though the fruit of our efforts extends far beyond the lands we acquire.

## Beyond the Acres

When we conserve a property, we look not just at what it means for the one thousand or ten thousand acres we acquire, but for everything connected to the river, upstream and down. In the act of conserving the most important reaches of key rivers, we expand wildlife corridors, strengthen connectivity between inland and coastal ecosystems, and protect and enhance sources of clean, cold water that are crucial to entire watersheds.

In Idaho's Sawtooth Valley, for example, we are conserving habitat along top-priority salmon spawning streams while dedicating water rights in-stream to ensure flows will always be there for fish. Protecting and restoring these headwater streams, where salmon are born and where they rear until their return to sea, will enhance fish populations throughout the Salmon, Snake and Columbia rivers. What's more, by improving critical spawning and rearing streams like these, we will bolster vital food sources for wildlife downstream, from raptors and bears to animals far beyond the river to the sea. Orca whales depend heavily upon salmon for survival—salmon born and reared in the tiny headwater streams of the Sawtooths and throughout the Columbia basin.

CONTINUED



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# A LASTING IMPACT on Our Rivers & the West

Nearly three decades ago, Western Rivers Conservancy set out to protect the finest remaining rivers in the West. Our idea was simple: Buy land along rivers and convey it to the best long-term steward available, delivering permanent protection and public access for all. Our efforts have paid off. Over the past 29 years we have conserved 116,731 acres along more than 60 rivers in nine states. Today, our projects include some of the most important conservation efforts in the West.

While much has changed since the early days of WRC, our goal of saving the great rivers of the West remains the same. Nowhere else in the world will you find rivers like those that flow from the Rocky Mountains and across the Colorado Plateau, that tumble from the Sierra Nevada and the high Cascades, that course through the coastal forests of Oregon and Washington or that wind across the deserts of the Southwest. Rivers define us and are crucial to the fish and wildlife that make this region so special. Without free-flowing, healthy rivers, we would have little else. As you will see in the pages of this report, WRC is making a tremendous difference for our rivers and remains committed to broadening our impact each year.

## A LASTING IMPACT ON OUR RIVERS AND THE WEST

CONTINUED

Similarly, the Blue Creek Salmon Sanctuary we are creating on California's Klamath River will help ensure the long-term survival of some of the greatest runs of salmon left in the West. Blue Creek is the cold-water lifeline to the Klamath River. By protecting it, we will create a refuge for the keystone species of the Klamath-Siskiyou ecoregion, improving the odds that this 19,000 square-mile "biodiversity hotspot" remains healthy forever.

### What Our Work Means to You

Rivers and humans are inextricably linked, and our work touches people in a myriad of ways. For recreationists, we create and safeguard access not just to rivers, but to hiking and biking trails, boating put-ins, campsites, adjacent public lands and the cherished waters that people fish, float, swim and explore. We help landowners realize aspirations of seeing family homesteads conserved for future generations. We strengthen bonds between communities and their home waters by engaging with local stakeholders throughout the conservation process. We strengthen local economies by creating parks such as Cottonwood Canyon State Park on the John Day River, where visitors support local businesses. We work closely with Native American tribes, like the Yurok or the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, communities uniquely positioned to restore, improve and forever steward river habitat to improve the odds for imperiled fish and wildlife.

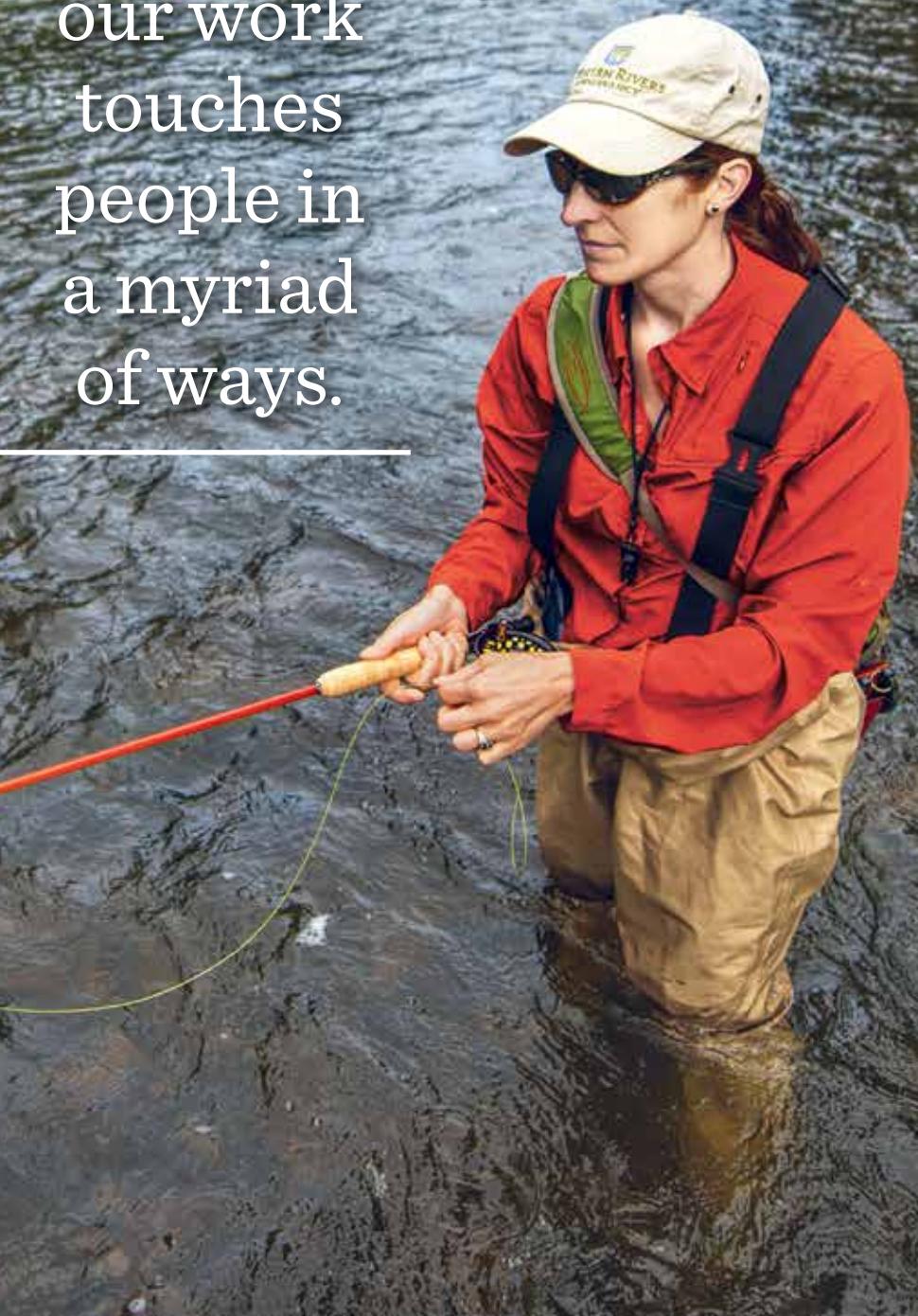
Most importantly, the return on our investment comes in the form of functioning river systems. Only when they are healthy can rivers provide clean drinking water for communities or the natural flood control that comes with an intact watershed. By conserving land along our rivers, we can ensure that the diverse and spectacular wildlife that makes the West so special is still around for our children and our children's children. By reconnecting habitat and preserving riverlands, we can help guarantee people have access not just to rivers, but to rivers that are clean and healthy, too.

### A Lasting Impact

Permanence is what makes WRC's work so important. Our approach provides the best, most enduring protections available for the rivers we work to preserve. Whether they become part of a National Conservation Area, a Wilderness Study Area, a Wild and Scenic River corridor, or a salmon sanctuary in the heart of the redwoods, the lands we conserve gain some of the most secure, long-lasting protections that riverlands can enjoy. Once protected, these lands are free to function as they always have, as pathways between mountains and sea, as sources of clean, cold water, as habitat for fish and wildlife and as a place for us all to explore whenever the river calls. ■



Rivers and humans are inextricably linked, and our work touches people in a myriad of ways.



## John Day River & Thirtymile Creek

OREGON

After its descent from the Blue Mountains of eastern Oregon, the John Day River flows through ancient fossil beds and into the heart of sagebrush country. As it meanders across the open steppe, the John Day carves one of the finest river canyons in the West, where basalt cliffs tower over the river and bighorn sheep amble along the ridgelines in the sun. Along this lower stretch, 147 miles of the river are designated Wild and Scenic, a reach that people throughout the Pacific Northwest cherish for its wilderness setting and its outstanding float trips, fishing, hunting and hiking.

Yet what really makes this river so critical to the Pacific Northwest is its importance to fish and wildlife. The John Day sustains the Columbia River basin's healthiest run of wild summer steelhead and supports Oregon's largest herd of California bighorn sheep.

**PROJECT SIZE**  
18,715 Acres

**RIVER MILES**  
Mainstem: 12  
Tributary: 4

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

**KEY FISH**  
summer steelhead, spring Chinook

On the lower John Day, Western Rivers Conservancy is working to protect dozens of miles of the mainstem and extensive reaches of the lower river's most important cold-water tributaries, streams that are crucial to fish and wildlife.

In 2016 we continued our effort to conserve the Rattray Ranch at Thirtymile Creek, which we purchased in 2014. Our work will protect 12 miles of the John Day and four miles of Thirtymile Creek, a top-priority steelhead-bearing stream and the single most important source of cold water for the lower river. Last year, we worked to position the property for conveyance to the Bureau of Land Management for permanent protection within the John

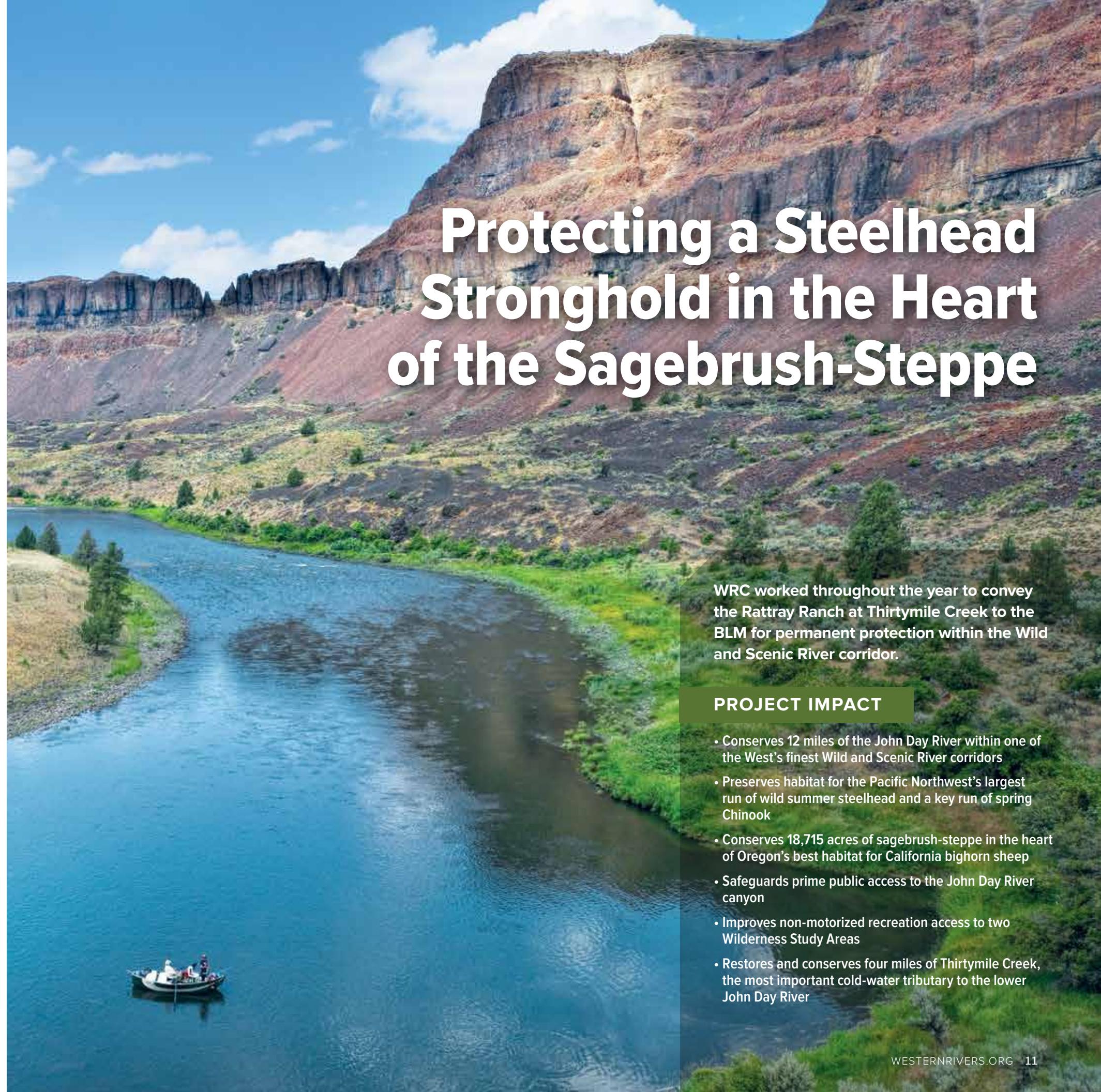
Day Wild and Scenic River corridor.

WRC's acquisition of the ranch, along with its associated grazing lease, will allow us to conserve 18,715 acres of riparian and sagebrush-steppe habitat and ensure permanent public access to the only access point along a 70-mile reach of the river canyon between Clarno Bridge and Cottonwood Canyon State Park. We will also improve access to more than 78,000 acres of public land with exceptional hiking, hunting and wildlife watching.

Our work at Thirtymile Creek follows on the heels of WRC's creation of Cottonwood Canyon State Park, downstream. At Cottonwood, we conserved 16,000 acres along 16 miles of the lower John Day and restored four miles of the mainstem and three miles of Hay Creek, another crucial cold-water tributary. Our efforts today build on that success, and deeply root our commitment to enhancing and protecting the John Day, the longest free-flowing river in the Pacific Northwest.



WRC's conservation of the Rattray Ranch at Thirtymile Creek (right) will protect 16 miles of river and tributary frontage and prime habitat for summer steelhead, bighorn sheep, elk and pronghorn (pictured).



# Protecting a Steelhead Stronghold in the Heart of the Sagebrush-Steppe

WRC worked throughout the year to convey the Rattray Ranch at Thirtymile Creek to the BLM for permanent protection within the Wild and Scenic River corridor.

## PROJECT IMPACT

- Conserves 12 miles of the John Day River within one of the West's finest Wild and Scenic River corridors
- Preserves habitat for the Pacific Northwest's largest run of wild summer steelhead and a key run of spring Chinook
- Conserves 18,715 acres of sagebrush-steppe in the heart of Oregon's best habitat for California bighorn sheep
- Safeguards prime public access to the John Day River canyon
- Improves non-motorized recreation access to two Wilderness Study Areas
- Restores and conserves four miles of Thirtymile Creek, the most important cold-water tributary to the lower John Day River

# Conserving the Rivers of Colorado's San Luis Valley

In 2016, WRC successfully purchased three Rio Grande properties totaling 18,129 acres, an effort that will create meaningful new access to the river and protect important habitat for fish and wildlife.

## PROJECT IMPACT

- Protects 16,707 acres along four miles of the Rio Grande within the Rio Grande Natural Area
- Protects 92 acres at the confluence of Texas Creek and the Rio Grande
- Preserves 1,330 acres along the Conejos River near its confluence with the Rio Grande
- Preserves crucial feeding, resting and breeding habitat for over 200 bird species, including endangered southwestern willow fly catcher
- Conserves important wet-meadow habitat, montane grassland, remnant oxbow, mixed conifer forest, cottonwood/mixed-willow and upland habitat
- Creates new access to the Rio Grande in an area with almost no public river access
- Opens new walk-in access to prime trout water just off the Silver Thread Scenic Byway

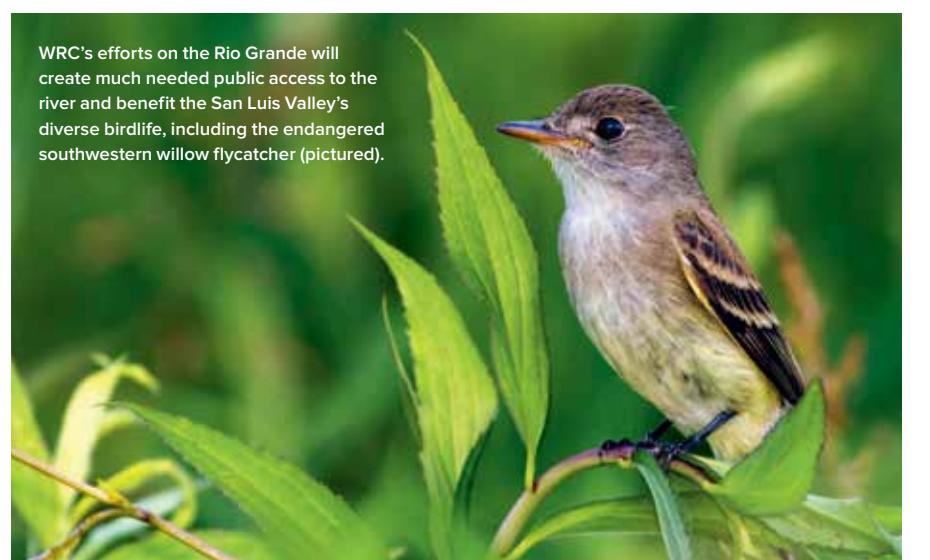
Colorado's high, broad San Luis Valley stretches over 100 miles across the eastern flanks of the Rocky Mountains, bound by the Sangre de Cristo Range to the east and the San Juan Mountains to the west. It lies on the western edge of the Central Flyway and is home to some of the most diverse birdlife in the state. The valley also has a rich cultural heritage, first inhabited by the Ute people and later by Mexican and white settlers. There are towns that predate Colorado becoming a state or even a territory, and traditional *acequia* irrigation still sustains some of the working ranches and farms that form the base of the region's agricultural economy.

Despite a wealth of public lands in parts of the San Luis Valley, extensive reaches of the upper Rio Grande are privately held and inaccessible to the public. In Costilla County, for example, nearly all land along the Rio Grande is in private hands, with little or no public access. Western Rivers Conservancy is working in partnership with the Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust, Colorado Open Lands and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to improve access to the Rio Grande and its tributaries and to conserve habitat for fish and wildlife throughout the upper river.

In 2016, WRC successfully purchased three properties—Brownie Hills, Olguin Ranch and a smaller parcel upstream, adjacent to the Weminuche Wilderness—totaling 18,129 acres. Together, they span five miles of the Rio Grande, as well as the Conejos River, Texas Creek and Spring Creek. Our conservation of the Brownie Hills property will conserve 16,707 acres of land and open new public access to four miles of the Rio Grande and thousands of acres of uplands, all within Costilla County, where public river access is almost nonexistent. Our purchase of the adjacent 1,330-acre Olguin Ranch will allow us to conserve a mile of the Conejos River, including Critical Habitat for endangered southwestern willow flycatcher, and a reach of the Rio Grande directly across from Brownie Hills.

Further upstream, near the town of Creede, we acquired a 92-acre property that we will convey to the Rio Grande National Forest to create the only legal resting spot for boaters along an otherwise private eight-mile stretch of the Rio Grande. The effort will conserve important wet meadows, montane grassland and mixed conifer forest and open new walk-in access to an area with outstanding trout fishing, just off the Silver Thread Scenic Byway.

WRC's efforts on the Rio Grande will create much needed public access to the river and benefit the San Luis Valley's diverse birdlife, including the endangered southwestern willow flycatcher (pictured).



## Klamath River & Blue Creek

### CALIFORNIA

In 2016, Western Rivers Conservancy moved one step closer to forever protecting Blue Creek, the cold-water lifeline to the Klamath River and a refuge for the fish and wildlife of the Klamath-Siskiyou ecoregion. Within this 10-million-acre expanse of wild rivers, redwoods, rugged wilderness and unmatched biodiversity, Blue Creek is a crucial source of clean, cold water. For the Klamath River, which warms with each passing summer, it is all-important, providing the cold-water haven that salmon need to survive on their long journey inland to spawn.

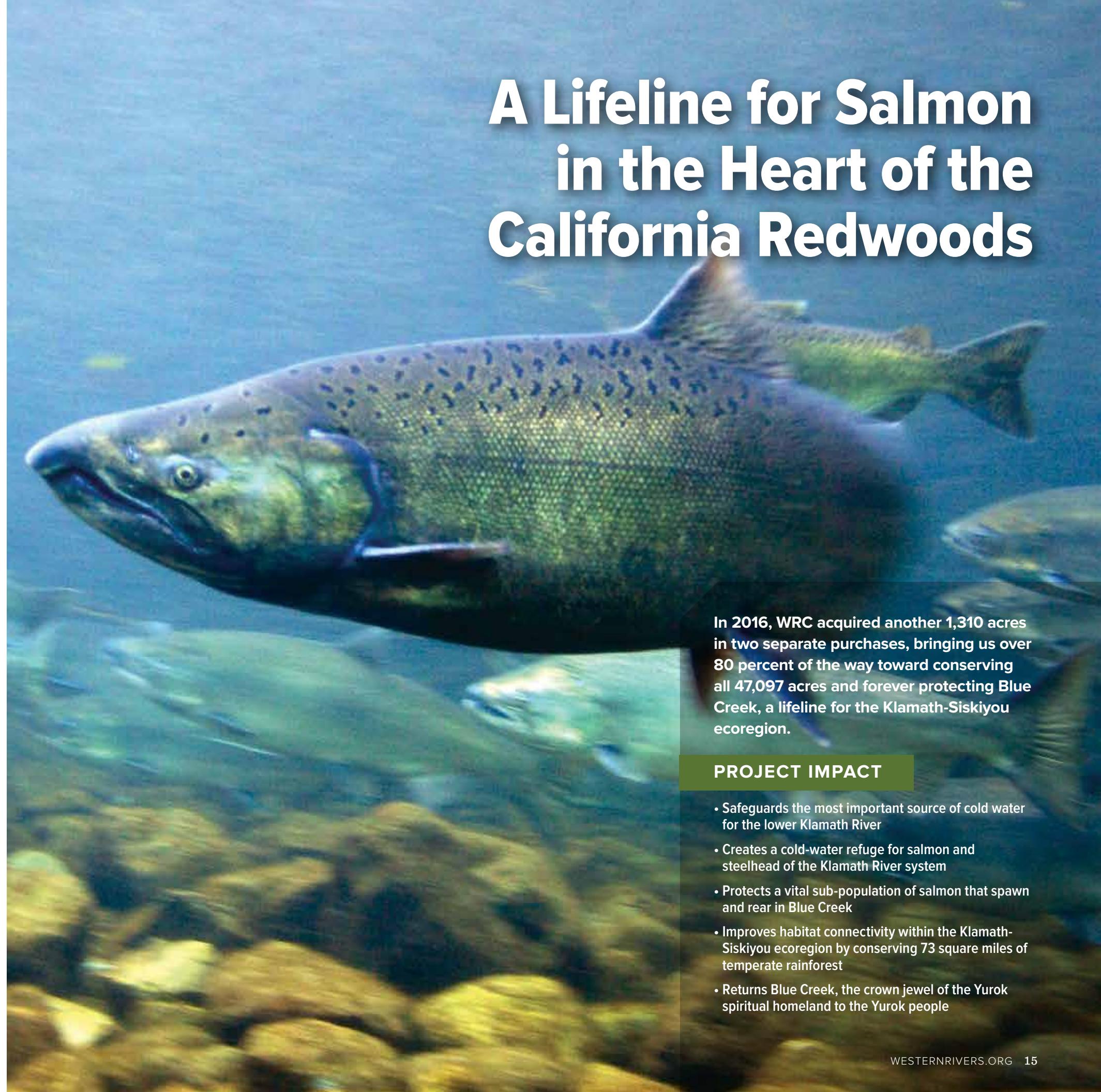
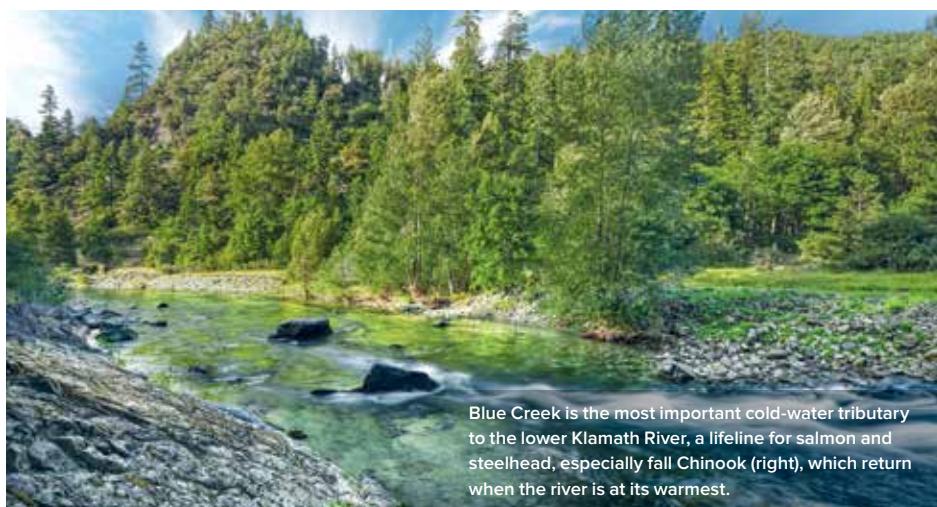
As the keystone species of the Klamath-Siskiyou, salmon are the biological linchpin for the entire region. The Klamath River's yearly runs of salmon, the third largest in the West,

carry vast amounts of nutrients inland, nourishing fish, forests and wildlife and sustaining the lives and livelihoods of people throughout coastal northern California and southern Oregon. But today, following decades of water withdrawals, timber harvest, impoundment and overfishing, the Klamath's salmon runs, and the web of life they support, are a fraction of their former size.

WRC is working to ensure that Blue Creek, the most important cold-water tributary to the lower river, forever remains a safety net for the Klamath River's salmon and steelhead. To do this, we are helping California's Yurok Tribe acquire 47,097 acres of land from Green Diamond Resource Company to create the Blue Creek Salmon Sanctuary and Yurok Tribal Community Forest.

In 2016, WRC acquired another 1,310 acres in two separate purchases, bringing us over 80 percent of the way toward conserving all 47,097 acres. The first of these purchases, 562 acres, was made possible by a major grant from The Kendeda Fund. The second, 748 acres, was funded by the State of California's Environmental Enhancement and Mitigation Program. Our other partners in the project include the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the Wyss Foundation, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, California Wildlife Conservation Board and California Coastal Conservancy.

Once our efforts are complete, Blue Creek will be protected in its entirety (the upper watershed is already protected within the Siskiyou Wilderness) and managed by the Yurok as a sanctuary for the Klamath's fish and wildlife. Nearing completion after 10 years of work, our effort at Blue Creek has become one of the most important conservation projects in the Lower 48 today. When all is said and done, the project will preserve the key to all life on the Klamath River and ensure this rare and incredibly important stream will stay clean and cold for the fish, wildlife and people that depend on it to survive and to thrive.



# A Lifeline for Salmon in the Heart of the California Redwoods

In 2016, WRC acquired another 1,310 acres in two separate purchases, bringing us over 80 percent of the way toward conserving all 47,097 acres and forever protecting Blue Creek, a lifeline for the Klamath-Siskiyou ecoregion.

## PROJECT IMPACT

- Safeguards the most important source of cold water for the lower Klamath River
- Creates a cold-water refuge for salmon and steelhead of the Klamath River system
- Protects a vital sub-population of salmon that spawn and rear in Blue Creek
- Improves habitat connectivity within the Klamath-Siskiyou ecoregion by conserving 73 square miles of temperate rainforest
- Returns Blue Creek, the crown jewel of the Yurok spiritual homeland to the Yurok people

### IDAHO

# Vital Headwaters: The Key to Survival for the Salmon River's Salmon



**WRC's successful conveyance of 620 acres to the Sawtooth National Forest permanently conserves over a mile of Pole Creek and a short reach of the mainstem Salmon itself.**

#### PROJECT IMPACT

- Permanently conserves crucial spawning and rearing habitat for salmon and steelhead in one of the Snake River basin's top-priority streams
- Improves the odds of survival for salmon and steelhead smolts within a mile-long reach of Pole Creek
- Strengthens production of Chinook salmon, a primary source of food for Pacific orca whales and other ocean predators
- Enhances a long, broadly based effort to restore anadromous fish habitat within Pole Creek
- Conserves habitat for threatened bull trout



For Chinook salmon, which complete their life histories by returning to their natal streams to spawn and die, the end of the line is also the beginning of life. While salmon need healthy habitat throughout their migration, it is this beginning-of-life habitat, where salmon spend the first stages of their lives, that is especially important. There are few places where this is more pronounced than in the headwater streams of the Salmon River, which require a migration of more than 900 miles from the sea, one of the longest anadromous journeys on earth.

The Salmon River begins its descent from the Rocky Mountains in Idaho's scenic Sawtooth Valley, where ice-cold headwater streams flow from snow-clad peaks.

Conserving these streams is crucial to maintaining some of the greatest runs of salmon anywhere. Historically, the Salmon River produced 50 percent of all salmon within the Columbia River basin, a remarkable number considering the Columbia once produced more salmon than any river on Earth.

After decades of declining salmon returns in the Snake and Salmon River basins, millions of dollars and untold energy is being invested to recover the Salmon River's namesake fish. In 2016, Western Rivers Conservancy made an important contribution to this effort by permanently protecting a mile of Pole Creek, a crucial spawning and rearing stream that is designated Critical Habitat for spring Chinook, summer steelhead and bull trout for most of its length. The Sawtooth National Forest has ranked the stream as its highest priority

for salmon recovery. We conserved a mile of the creek by conveying a 620-acre ranch to the National Forest, setting the stage for habitat restoration and ensuring this key reach of the stream is preserved forever. The project also conserved a short reach of the mainstem Salmon River.

Our work builds on extensive conservation efforts already underway along Pole Creek, where state and federal agencies, NGOs and local landowners have worked for years to improve streamflow and habitat for fish. Stream conditions are now on the upswing, and protecting Pole Creek's riparian areas is crucial to ensuring these gains are permanent. Ultimately, our efforts will help protect some of the best salmon and steelhead habitat, within one of the greatest salmon streams in the world, for good.

#### Goat Falls Ranch



Deepening our commitment to keeping salmon in the Salmon River, WRC signed an agreement to purchase the 369-acre Goat Falls Ranch. The ranch possesses senior water rights on two streams that historically contained some of the highest-density salmon spawning and rearing habitat in the Columbia River basin. Currently, portions of both streams are dewatered by withdrawals most years.

Our goal is to dedicate the ranch's water in-stream to ensure the streams flow year-round once again. This project will be Idaho's first permanent in-stream water dedication project and will prove essential to satisfying the goals set forth in the Snake River Water Rights Act of 2004.

## Fossil Creek

### ARIZONA

In Arizona, the fourth driest state in the country, perennial streams are a rarity. Where they do exist, they weave ribbons of lushness into the landscape and offer water and respite from the blazing Southwest sun. Rivers like the Gila, Salt and Verde provide crucial habitat for fish and wildlife, drinking water for people and recreation for countless Arizonans. In a place defined by the scarcity of rain, these lifelines in the desert are wholly dependent on the spring-fed tributaries that replenish them. One such tributary is Fossil Creek.

Flowing from a series of calcium-rich mineral springs at the edge of the Mogollon Rim, Fossil Creek winds 17 miles through the Sonoran Desert to the Verde River. It is one of the Verde's primary tributaries and crucial to the overall health of the Verde system. Critical

in its own right, Fossil Creek supports diverse fish and wildlife, including river otter, beaver, endangered southwestern willow flycatcher, threatened yellow-billed cuckoo, threatened Chiricahua leopard frog, 15 species of bat, nine species of native fish and a wealth of other bird species. Fossil Creek and the Verde River are the only two Wild and Scenic rivers in the entire state.

In 2016, Western Rivers Conservancy successfully conserved the last remaining unprotected reach of Fossil Creek by conveying 19 acres of riverland to the Coconino National Forest. The land will be permanently protected within the Fossil Creek Wild and Scenic River corridor and help the Coconino National Forest minimize human impact on the increasingly popular stream. In addition to its importance to fish and wildlife, Fossil Creek also happens to be incredibly beautiful, attracting people year-round from throughout central Arizona.

As a mineral stream, Fossil Creek is laden with calcium that creates polished limestone formations throughout the river. The water is always 70 degrees Fahrenheit, and waterfalls pour into crystal-clear aquamarine pools that lure swimmers from the desert heat into their refreshing depths. In the cool of the morning, hikers wander along the banks watching for birds and other wildlife.

Surprisingly, Fossil Creek was not always this idyllic. For nearly a century, the river was diverted by a hydroelectric project that left the creek lifeless. In 1999, state and federal agencies and restoration groups embarked on what would become the largest river recovery effort in the Southwest. The dam was removed and, four years later, Congress designated all 17 miles of the stream Wild and Scenic. Within this context, WRC played a small but crucial role in assuring Fossil Creek remains a lush, desert oasis and a source of clean water for the Verde River.



Fossil Creek is an oasis in the Sonoran Desert, providing prime habitat for fish and wildlife and a welcome escape from the heat for Arizonans. The Chiricahua leopard frog (pictured) is one of many imperiled species that depend on Fossil Creek.

# Last Stretch Protected on Arizona's Wild and Scenic Fossil Creek



In 2016, Western Rivers Conservancy successfully conserved the last remaining unprotected reach of Fossil Creek by conveying 19 acres of riverland to the Coconino National Forest.

### PROJECT IMPACT

- Improves the integrity of the Fossil Creek and Verde River Wild and Scenic River corridors
- Conserves habitat for nine species of native warm-water fish within a crucial Southwest river system
- Benefits endangered southwestern willow flycatcher, threatened yellow-billed cuckoo and threatened Chiricahua leopard frog
- Improves the ability of Coconino National Forest to manage public access and minimize human impact on a fragile and increasingly popular destination
- Complements the largest river recovery effort in the Southwest, which returned Fossil Creek to health after it was dewatered for a century

# Protecting the Emerald Waters of a Storied Oregon River

In 2016, Western Rivers Conservancy purchased 211 acres along a mile of the North Umpqua to conserve a crucial reach of the river.

## PROJECT IMPACT

- Forever protects one mile of outstanding salmon and steelhead habitat within one of the most important anadromous rivers in the Pacific Northwest
- Safeguards public access to the westernmost trailhead on the 79-mile North Umpqua Trail, a treasured national recreation trail visited by thousands of people every year
- Protects public access at the head of the 33-mile stretch of fly-fishing-only water, one of the most legendary reaches of fly water in the West
- Ensures the lasting protection of a significant swath of ancient forest in a region where little old-growth remains
- Permanently conserves habitat for northern spotted owl, bald eagle, Roosevelt elk, black bear and river otter

The North Umpqua is one of the few rivers left in Oregon—indeed, the Pacific Northwest—that remains cloaked in old-growth forest, where relatively healthy runs of salmon and steelhead find clean, cold water on their return migrations throughout the year. The North Umpqua's emerald-green water, which rushes across a riverbed of polished basalt bedrock, flows not from the Coast Range, like nearly every other river on the Oregon Coast, but as snowmelt from the high Cascade Mountains. This anomaly is what gives the river its viridescent water, and it is the reason it flows clear and cold year-round, while other regional streams slow to a warm trickle in the heat of summer.

For all of this, the North Umpqua stands out as one of the West's great rivers. It is a stronghold for wild salmon and steelhead, an unparalleled destination for anglers, boaters, mountain bikers and hikers, and crucial habitat for the imperiled wildlife of southern Oregon. The North Umpqua also has soul. It is a river where every pool and rock has a story, where the steelhead are famed but impossible to catch and where a community of anglers and local conservationists have worked for a century to keep the river pristine.

In 2016, Western Rivers Conservancy deepened its commitment to this community when it purchased 211 acres along a mile of the North Umpqua to conserve a crucial reach of the river. The opportunity arose in 2015, when Douglas County determined it needed to dispose of Swiftwater County Park, which spans both sides of the river at the western terminus of the 79-mile North Umpqua Trail. The trail is one of the country's few nationally-designated trails along a Wild and Scenic River and includes the hallowed 33-mile stretch of fly-fishing-only water. By saving the park from timber harvest and development, we will ensure that the Swiftwater Trailhead, and a mile of the North Umpqua Trail at the head of the fly-only water, will remain open to the public forever.

While our efforts at Swiftwater are crucial for recreation, they are even more important from a conservation perspective. Our work will protect a mile of designated Oregon Coast Coho Critical Habitat, including several high-quality gravel spawning beds. We will ensure the forests on the Swiftwater property, which might otherwise be logged, stay standing forever, providing vital shade for the river and habitat for the area's diverse wildlife.

We plan to convey the lands to the Bureau of Land Management for permanent protection within the North Umpqua Wild and Scenic River Corridor. This will ensure that Swiftwater Park, which has been cherished by generations of anglers, boaters, hikers and others, remains open to all—and healthy for the fish and wildlife that make the North Umpqua the remarkable river it is.



# Kennedy Creek

## WASHINGTON

In the first days of November, when the chum salmon return to Washington's South Puget Sound, another migration occurs at the mouth of Kennedy Creek. This one, however, arrives in yellow school buses. Tumbling out in galoshes and raincoats, visiting schoolchildren run up the half-mile-long Kennedy Creek Salmon Trail, teachers and chaperones in tow, gaping at the chum that return to the stream by the tens of thousands to spawn.

Only ten miles west of Olympia, Kennedy Creek is one of the most productive chum salmon streams in Washington, with average fall runs topping 30,000 fish. Each November, thousands of visitors, including more than 2,500 local school children, visit the interpretive sites along the trail and witness the miracle of the salmon return.

**PROJECT SIZE**  
667 Acres

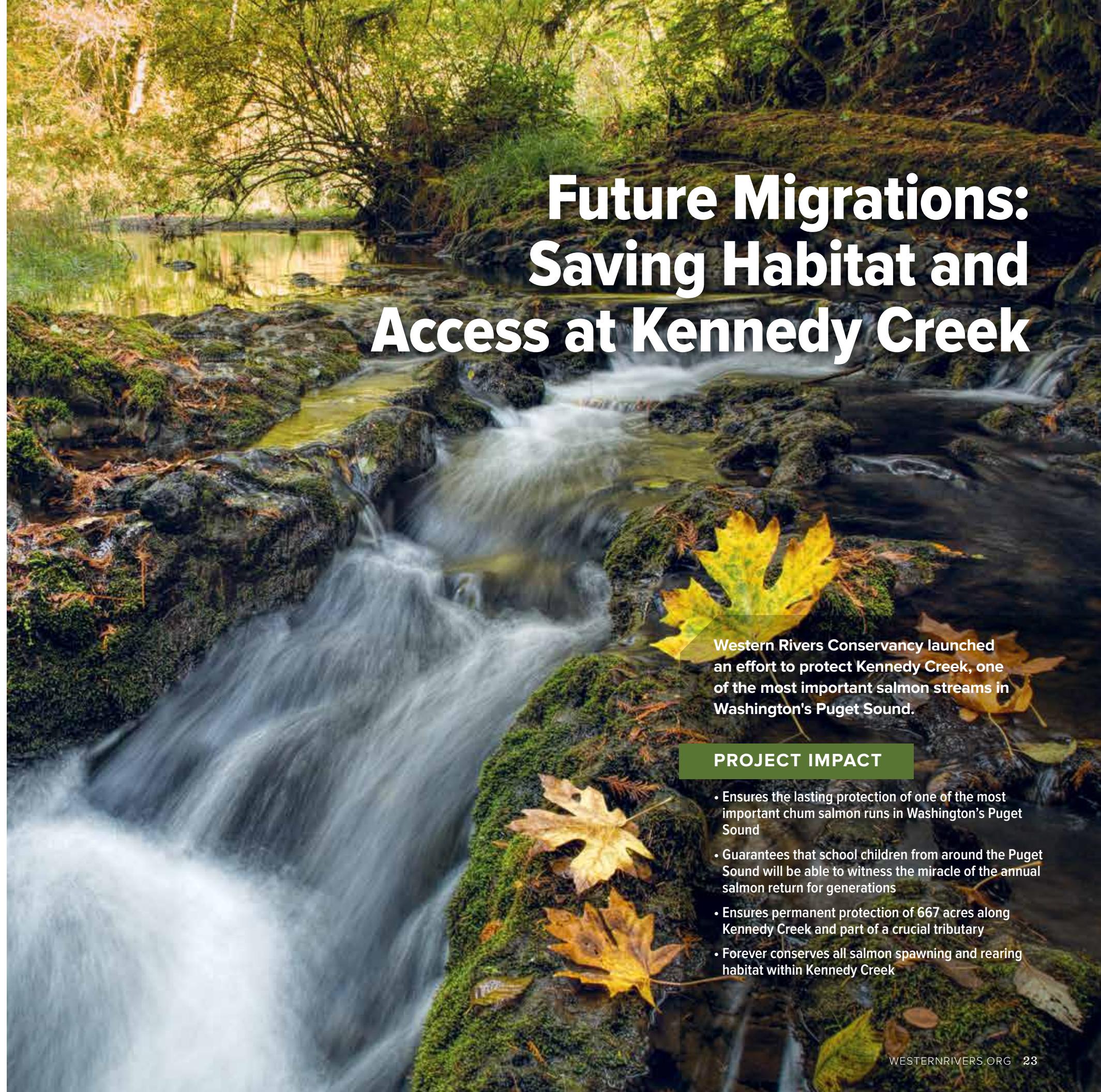
**RIVER MILES**  
Mainstem: 6  
Tributary: 0.5

**KEY ANIMALS**  
bobcat, northern river otter, bald eagle, red-tailed hawk

**KEY FISH**  
chum salmon

Our efforts to conserve Kennedy Creek are crucial. Chum salmon once returned to the small streams of the Puget Sound by the millions, nourishing its forests, fish and wildlife. By the mid-20th century, overfishing and habitat degradation had reduced chum runs in Kennedy Creek to an average of 100 fish a year. Thanks to local recovery efforts, those numbers were dramatically improved, and Kennedy Creek again enjoys salmon runs that have exceeded 70,000 fish in banner years. With each run, millions of eggs are deposited into Kennedy Creek, providing a crucial food source for other fish, including coastal and resident cutthroat trout. Salmon carcasses also provide important marine-derived nutrients to the greater Kennedy Creek ecosystem. Coho, pink salmon and winter steelhead also inhabit the stream.

With permanent stewardship by Washington Department of Natural Resources, WRC and its partners will help protect salmon habitat throughout the stream and ensure recent conservation gains are lasting. Conserving Kennedy Creek will preserve not just a great salmon run, but an entire ecosystem that depends on the health of its fish. In the process, we can guarantee that children are always able to experience this outdoor classroom, where they can learn the importance of rivers and salmon to Puget Sound and the world.

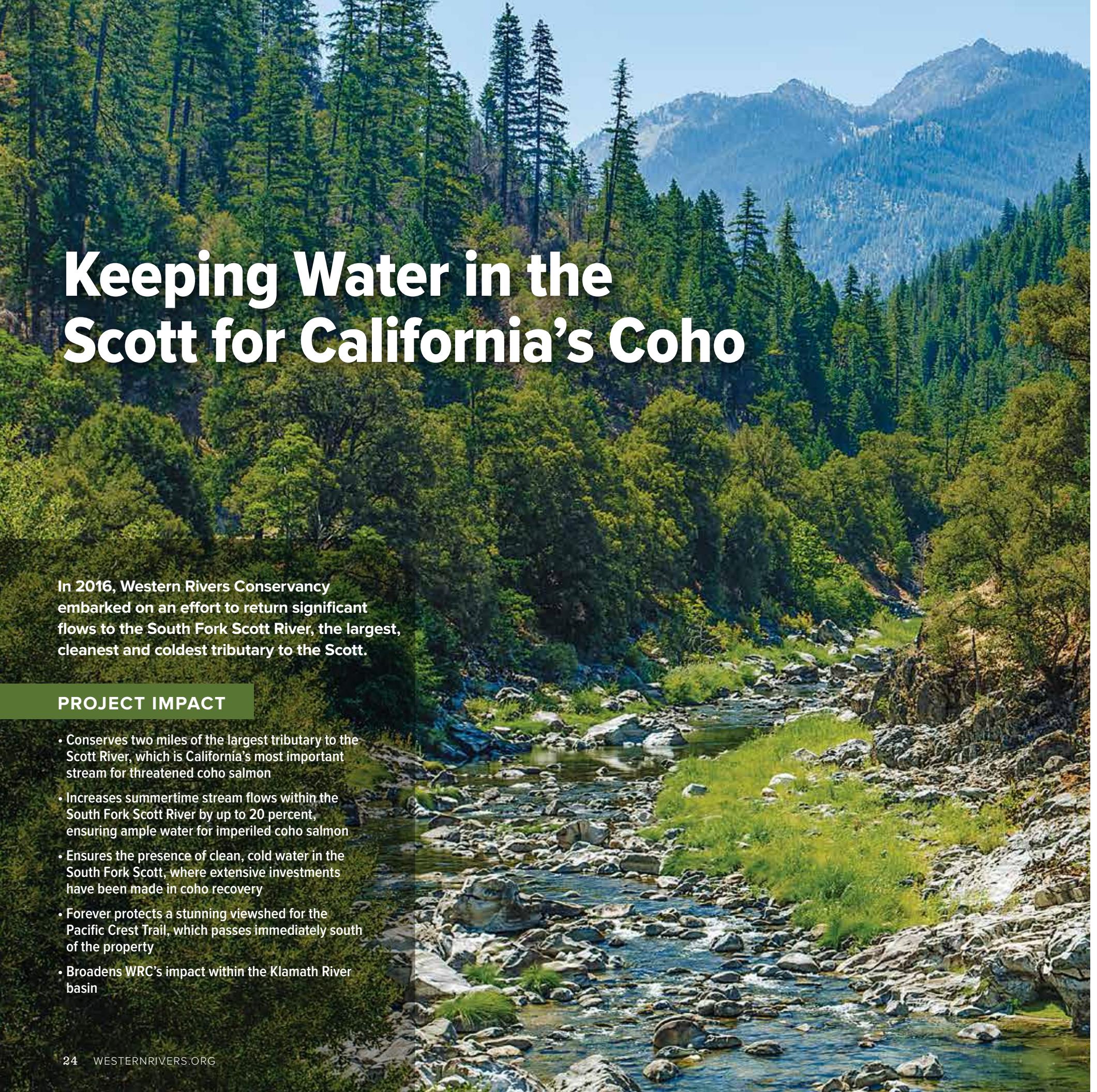


# Future Migrations: Saving Habitat and Access at Kennedy Creek

Western Rivers Conservancy launched an effort to protect Kennedy Creek, one of the most important salmon streams in Washington's Puget Sound.

## PROJECT IMPACT

- Ensures the lasting protection of one of the most important chum salmon runs in Washington's Puget Sound
- Guarantees that school children from around the Puget Sound will be able to witness the miracle of the annual salmon return for generations
- Ensures permanent protection of 667 acres along Kennedy Creek and part of a crucial tributary
- Forever conserves all salmon spawning and rearing habitat within Kennedy Creek



# Keeping Water in the Scott for California's Coho

In 2016, Western Rivers Conservancy embarked on an effort to return significant flows to the South Fork Scott River, the largest, cleanest and coldest tributary to the Scott.

## PROJECT IMPACT

- Conserves two miles of the largest tributary to the Scott River, which is California's most important stream for threatened coho salmon
- Increases summertime stream flows within the South Fork Scott River by up to 20 percent, ensuring ample water for imperiled coho salmon
- Ensures the presence of clean, cold water in the South Fork Scott, where extensive investments have been made in coho recovery
- Forever protects a stunning viewshed for the Pacific Crest Trail, which passes immediately south of the property
- Broadens WRC's impact within the Klamath River basin

## Scott River

### CALIFORNIA

In California, coho salmon are endangered throughout much of their range and only possess the slightly less vulnerable status of threatened in the northernmost reaches of the state. When it comes to their survival in California, the Scott River, a major tributary to the Klamath River, is of utmost importance. Producing over half of the state's wild coho population, the Scott River has clear water, abundant spawning beds and no mainstem dams to impede fish migration. Yet, since the days of the Gold Rush, the Scott River has been dramatically transformed, and the river and its fish face countless challenges, from water diversion and diking to deforestation and drought. Perhaps the greatest stressor on coho today is the lack of water. Frequently, there is simply too little water in the river and its tributaries for spawning, holding and rearing fish.

To build on our work within the Klamath River basin, Western Rivers Conservancy embarked on an effort to return significant flows to the South Fork Scott River, the largest, cleanest and coldest tributary to the Scott. In August 2016, we signed an agreement to purchase the Bouvier Ranch and gain control of a key water right, which will allow us to

return critically needed water to the river for the benefit of coho, Chinook salmon and steelhead. Keeping this water in the South Fork Scott will increase summertime flows by up to 20 percent, exactly when the river and its fish need those flows the most.

The project will also allow us to conserve over 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. And that step is critical. Millions of dollars have been invested in coho recovery within the Klamath Basin, and the one thing it all hinges upon is the presence of water in the river.

Our efforts at Bouvier Ranch also provide the opportunity for WRC to protect a viewshed of the Pacific Crest Trail by acquiring a property that has been a priority for the Pacific Crest Trail Association. The trail skirts the property at the northeast edge of the Trinity Alps Wilderness before crossing the South Fork Scott River, upstream of Bouvier Ranch. Our goal 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.



California's Scott River (left) produces more wild coho salmon (pictured) than any other river in the state, and its health is crucial to ensuring the species' long-term survival.



Santa Margarita | CALIFORNIA

## Protecting the Last Intact Coastal River in Southern California

**In FY 2016, Western Rivers Conservancy signed an agreement to purchase 1,384 acres along five miles of the Santa Margarita River and two miles of Sandia Creek, a crucial tributary.**



As southern California continues to develop, the Santa Margarita River is all the more vital as a lifeline for imperiled wildlife and a rare place where people can enjoy a free-flowing river.

**F**lowing just 30 miles from the Santa Ana Mountains to the Pacific Ocean, the Santa Margarita is one of the last free-flowing rivers in southern California. Despite its diminutive length, the river is a lifeline for one of the most biodiverse regions in the country, providing vital water and habitat for an area that has more rare, threatened and endangered species than any comparable land area in the Lower 48. The Santa Margarita River corridor is home to 52 mammal species, 43 reptile species and, most remarkably, 236 species of birds. A total of 33 species are threatened or endangered, including southern California steelhead. For the latter, the Santa Margarita River provides the southernmost viable habitat remaining in North America.

In FY 2016, Western Rivers Conservancy signed an agreement to purchase 1,384 acres along five miles of the Santa Margarita River and two miles of Sandia Creek, a major tributary. Our efforts will place nearly all of the remaining unprotected land along the Santa Margarita River into permanent conservation, linking the Santa Margarita Ecological Reserve upstream, to protected lands within Camp Pendleton, downstream.

The reach of the Santa Margarita that WRC is working to conserve has long been a favorite destination for hikers, equestrians, cyclists and birdwatchers from communities throughout San Diego and Riverside counties. By acquiring these lands and conveying them to a long-term steward, we can guarantee permanent access to this island of tranquility within the burgeoning metropolises of southern California.

Most importantly, we will be completing an assemblage of protected lands along a river corridor that provides one of the last remaining habitat links between the high desert, coastal Santa Ana Mountains and the sea. In a region where both water and healthy habitat are becoming increasingly scarce, this connectivity is of paramount importance to fish and wildlife, and to the people of southern California.



North Santiam | OREGON

## A Sanctuary for Fish and Wildlife in Oregon's Willamette Valley

**T**he lowland, closed-canopy forests of Oregon's Willamette Valley are largely gone, but those that still exist offer a glimpse of the biological richness that once defined the valley floor. They also offer an opportunity to preserve what remains of this important habitat and to restore some of the vital floodplains of the Willamette River and its tributaries. Most of the finest remaining stands of these forests are found not along the Willamette River itself, but along the lower reaches of tributaries like the North Santiam River, where Western Rivers Conservancy has been working for over six years.

In 2016, WRC successfully acquired and protected another 411 acres of prime riverlands by conveying them to the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde for permanent conservation. The tribe named the lands Chankáwan, meaning "place of salmon." The project followed on the heels of two previous WRC acquisitions that conserved a combined 429 acres downstream, lands the tribe named Chahalpam, or "place of the Santiam-Kalapuya people."

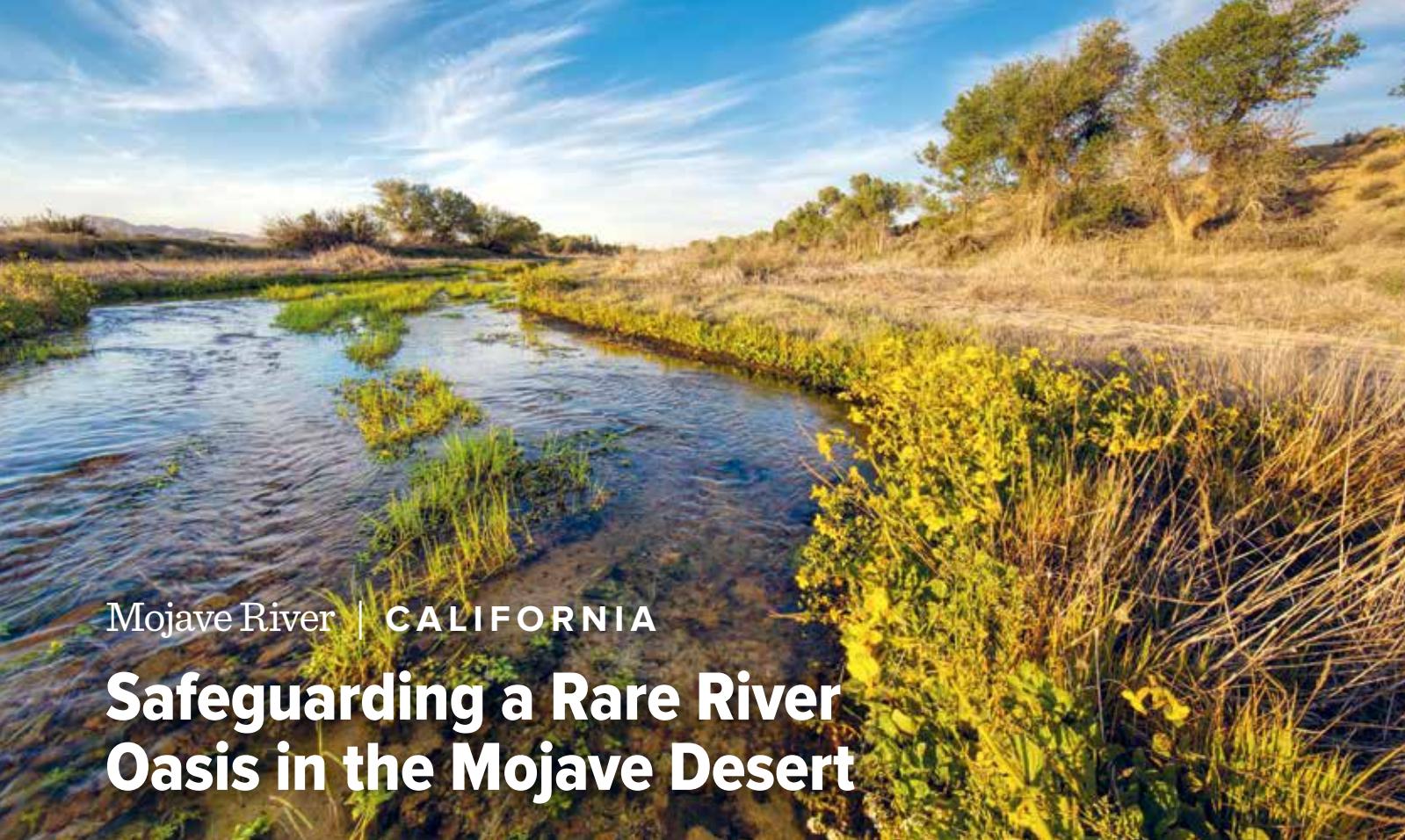
Our effort protected over four miles of river, side-channel and tributary habitat, along with seasonally flooded wetlands and stands of both closed- and open-canopy forest. In all, WRC has permanently protected nearly seven miles of riparian habitat along the lower North Santiam. Our efforts will be especially beneficial to salmon and steelhead, which the North Santiam historically produced in great numbers. The river once produced two-thirds of the Willamette River's winter steelhead and a third of its spring Chinook. Today, both species are threatened, and habitat protection and restoration is essential to their recovery.

Our efforts will conserve and enhance habitat for numerous other imperiled species as well, including pileated woodpecker, western pond turtle, red-legged frog and Oregon chub, a tiny omnivorous fish that was only recently removed from the Endangered Species List. Today, one of the valley's healthiest populations of Oregon chub is found on these properties. That habitat, along with an outstanding reach of the North Santiam, will remain free from development forever.

**In 2016, WRC successfully acquired and conserved another 411 acres of prime riverlands by conveying them to the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde for permanent conservation.**



Pileated woodpecker (pictured) are one of many species that will benefit from WRC's efforts to conserve bottomland forests, wetlands and river habitat on the North Santiam River (top).



Mojave River | CALIFORNIA

## Safeguarding a Rare River Oasis in the Mojave Desert

**WRC successfully purchased the 1,640-acre Palisades Ranch in an effort to protect four miles of the Transition Zone, a rare reach of the Mojave River that flows above ground.**



The Transition Zone is a rare 15-mile stretch of the Mojave River that flows above ground, providing water and habitat for multiple threatened or endangered species, including desert tortoise (pictured).

**S**outhern California's Mojave River is an intermittent stream born in the San Bernardino Mountains and ending at the western edge of the Mojave Desert Preserve, where three of the four North American deserts come together. For most people, the word "river" would appear a misnomer for the seemingly insignificant bed of sand that defines the Mojave River for most of its length. Yet the Mojave provides the most important stands of riparian habitat in the Mojave Desert and has sustained human inhabitants for more than 5,000 years.

The paradox of the Mojave is that it flows not just inland, ending at Soda Lake in the middle of the desert, but below ground for nearly all of its length. Along those rare reaches of the river that flow above ground, the Mojave becomes an oasis. Between the towns of Victorville and Helendale, the Mojave does exactly this, forced to the surface by the underlying bedrock and bringing life-giving water into the harsh landscape of the Mojave Desert. Along this stretch, known as the Transition Zone, the river nourishes a lush 15-mile corridor of cottonwoods and willows, rich with bird, insect and plant life. Last year, Western Rivers Conservancy purchased the Palisades Ranch to conserve five miles of this crucially important reach of the Mojave.

Protection of the Mojave, especially where it flows above ground, is key to the recovery of imperiled birds, including endangered southwestern willow flycatcher, endangered least Bell's vireo and threatened yellow-billed cuckoo. It may also prove critical to the recovery of the endangered Mojave tui chub, a small endemic fish that once lived throughout the Mojave River. Conservation of the ranch will benefit migratory birds, threatened desert tortoise and multiple California species of special concern. With support from the US Fish and Wildlife Service, California Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Wildlife Conservation Board, WRC plans to convey the lands to the Mojave River Land Trust, which will manage them as a reserve with low-impact public use.



Big Sheep Creek | WASHINGTON

## Conserving the Life Source of a Washington Wildlife Corridor

**I**n remote northeast Washington, a major wildlife corridor known as the Wedge spans tens of thousands of acres between the Kettle River to the west and the upper Columbia River to the east. Winding through the northeast portion of the Wedge is a stream called Big Sheep Creek, which flows from Canada's Monashee Mountains to the Columbia River. The stream is crystal clear and cold, with healthy populations of redband rainbow and bull trout. It is the centerpiece of a broad valley where fertile riparian areas with rich meadows and wetlands provide excellent habitat for Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep, mountain goat, Rocky Mountain elk, moose, Canada lynx, wolverine, pine martin and over half of Washington's recovering grizzly bear population.

In 2016, Western Rivers Conservancy successfully conserved 2,440 acres along five miles of Big Sheep Creek and a mile of American Fork Big Sheep Creek. We completed the project by conveying the lands, which we purchased in two phases in 2014 and 2015, to the Colville National Forest. The agency is now managing them for the sake of fish and wildlife and to ensure permanent public access to an area that has long been popular with anglers, hikers, hunters and other outdoor enthusiasts. The property is bordered on two sides by public national forest lands and includes an important stretch of the 1,200-mile Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail, which can now permanently run through the property.

In addition to protecting prime river habitat, WRC's efforts have conserved the property's fragile meadows and wetlands that are crucial to fish and wildlife yet disappearing from the western landscape. The project also improves habitat connectivity within an area where large mammals and rare carnivores must roam great distances to survive. The icing on the cake is recreation—the people of Washington will now have permanent access to these remote and scenic wildlands around Big Sheep Creek.

**In 2016, WRC conveyed 2,440 acres to the Colville National Forest, permanently protecting five miles of Big Sheep Creek and a mile of American Fork Big Sheep Creek.**



Canada lynx (top) are one of many species of rare and imperiled predators and large mammals that will benefit from WRC's conservation efforts at Big Sheep Creek.

## Sandy River | OREGON

# Another Success on Oregon's Sandy River



**O**n northwest Oregon's glacially-fed Sandy River, Western Rivers Conservancy protected another 120 acres of high-quality fish and wildlife habitat. The project was part of our ongoing work to expand a 4,500-acre conservation and recreation corridor that we created along the Sandy in partnership with Portland General Electric and the BLM. Last year's effort preserved nearly half a mile of Little Joe Creek, an important salmon- and steelhead-bearing tributary to the Sandy. Winter steelhead, coho salmon and fall and spring Chinook are all federally threatened within the Sandy River. The project also linked an existing county park with protected BLM lands and expanded the BLM's Sandy Ridge Trail System, one of the country's top mountain bike destinations.

Just upstream from Little Joe Creek, WRC committed to purchasing a 186-acre parcel along North Boulder Creek, another important fish-bearing tributary to the Sandy. The parcel lies adjacent to the Little Joe Creek tract, and our efforts will conserve a quarter-mile stretch of North Boulder Creek while adding upland acreage to the Sandy Ridge Trail System.

## Hood River | OREGON

# A Century in the Making, Punchbowl Falls Conserved At Last

**I**n Oregon, Western Rivers Conservancy realized the local, century-old hope to see a special stretch of the Hood River conserved forever. We created a 102-acre county park to protect Punchbowl Falls and the confluence of the East and West Forks of the Hood River. In doing so, we guaranteed that the confluence and the falls will remain open to the public and protected as prime fish and wildlife habitat. The pool below the falls will remain a sacred fishing site for the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, who have fished there since time immemorial.

WRC purchased the land in 2006 and 2012 and worked for a decade to secure funding to permanently protect this part of the Hood. The Collins Foundation, M. J. Murdock Charitable Trust, PacifiCorp and its foundation and generous individuals supported our efforts. In 2016, when Hood River County secured a grant from Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, our vision finally became reality. Punchbowl Falls Park is now officially open to all.



## Gunnison River | COLORADO

# Securing the Future of a National Conservation Area

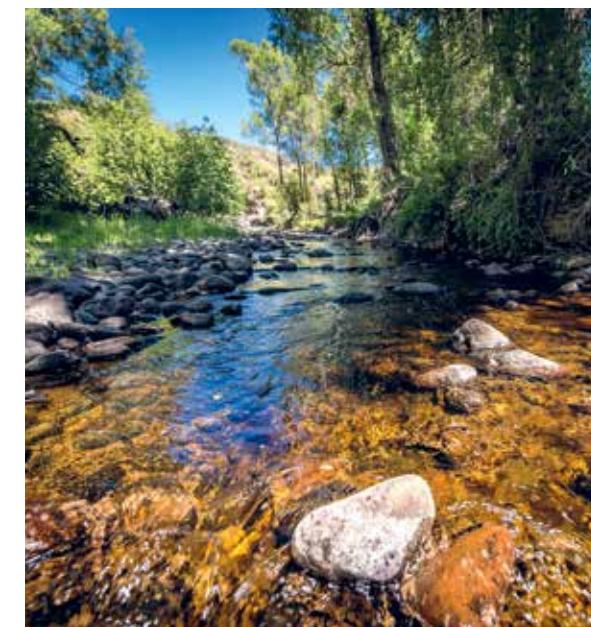
**I**n Colorado, the lower Gunnison River flows through a land of scenic canyons, sweeping vistas, and sandstone mesas that stretch endlessly across the vast Uncompahgre Plateau. Before it meets the Colorado River, the Gunnison flows through the Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area (DENCA), which protects 328 square miles of red-rock canyons, paleontological resources, archeological sites and 30 miles of the lower Gunnison. The area is home to diverse wildlife, and the river is one of the few places where all four species of the Colorado Basin's native warm-water fish still survive.

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 conserve these lands and improve the integrity of the DENCA. In 2016, we continued our effort to convey 190 acres, including a mile of Gunnison River frontage, to the BLM for protection within the conservation area. When that is complete, WRC will have conserved over nine miles of the Gunnison River in this extraordinary place.



## Little Cimarron River | COLORADO

# Returning Year-Round Flows to an Outstanding Colorado Trout Stream



**I**n 2016, 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 mainstem Cimarron, a tributary to the Gunnison River. The upper river possesses all the qualities of a first-rate wild trout stream, but its middle reaches flow only intermittently, dewatered by the irrigation ditches of the lower Cimarron Valley.

WRC has been working to permanently reconnect habitat between the lower and upper river. In 2012, we purchased a farm with senior water rights and conveyed those rights to the Colorado Water Trust in 2014. WRC and CWT are now working to create Colorado's first water-sharing agreement between agriculture and the environment. Our goal is to establish a shared season that keeps water on the farm while prioritizing flows in the Little Cimarron during the dry season. If we succeed, the Little Cimarron will flow uninterrupted all year, temperatures in the lower river will decrease, and trout will repopulate the formerly dewatered reach of the stream. The project has the potential to serve as a model for river conservation not only in Colorado, but throughout the West.



Protected habitat and improved public access—these are the outcomes of WRC's efforts on rivers around the West, including the John Day (pictured), where WRC is conserving riverland and delivering access to both the river and to tens of thousands of acres of surrounding public lands.

## Consolidated Statement of Financial Position

As of September 30, 2016

	2016	2015
<b>Assets</b>		
Cash and cash equivalents	\$3,929,543	1,156,036
Restricted deposits and reserves	818,410	965,409
Receivables: contributions, interest and other	1,340,962	1,919,616
Prepaid expenses and deposits	82,789	61,016
Investments	1,251,717	1,250,345
Notes receivable	16,761,020	16,761,020
Land holdings, equipment and other assets	36,440,340	32,647,669
<b>Total assets</b>	<b>\$60,624,781</b>	<b>54,761,111</b>
<b>Liabilities</b>		
Accounts payable, grants payable and accrued expenses	552,663	575,254
Funds held for others	1,291,000	-
Notes and interest payable	37,083,556	31,738,610
<b>Total liabilities</b>	<b>38,927,219</b>	<b>32,313,864</b>
<b>Net Assets</b>		
Unrestricted	12,689,117	13,585,993
Temporarily restricted	7,855,979	7,708,788
Permanently restricted	1,152,466	1,152,466
<b>Total net assets</b>	<b>21,697,562</b>	<b>22,447,247</b>
<b>Total liabilities and net assets</b>	<b>\$60,624,781</b>	<b>54,761,111</b>

## Consolidated Statement of Activities

For the fiscal year ending September 30, 2016

	Unrestricted	Temporarily Restricted	Permanently Restricted	Total 2016	Total 2015
<b>Revenues</b>					
Contributions and grants	\$918,206	4,234,005	-	5,152,211	17,196,233
In-kind contributions	45,703			45,703	26,659
Investment return	237,536			237,536	173,731
Gain realized on sale of land	518,400			518,400	241,600
Reimbursements, fees & other	370,161			370,161	1,097,169
<b>Total revenues</b>	<b>2,090,006</b>	<b>4,234,005</b>	-	<b>6,324,011</b>	<b>18,735,392</b>
Net assets released from restriction	4,086,814	(4,086,814)			
<b>Total revenues &amp; other support</b>	<b>6,176,820</b>	<b>147,191</b>	-	<b>6,324,011</b>	<b>18,735,392</b>
<b>Expenses</b>					
Program	6,263,529			6,263,529	3,733,957
Management and general	486,750			486,750	379,123
Fundraising	323,417			323,417	375,516
<b>Total expenses</b>	<b>7,073,696</b>		-	<b>7,073,696</b>	<b>4,488,596</b>
Change in net assets	(896,876)	147,191	-	(749,685)	14,246,796
Net assets at beginning of year	13,585,993	7,708,788	1,152,466	22,447,247	8,200,451
<b>Net assets at end of year</b>	<b>\$12,689,117</b>	<b>7,855,979</b>	<b>1,152,466</b>	<b>21,697,562</b>	<b>22,447,247</b>

This financial information is excerpted from Western Rivers Conservancy's audited financial statements. To obtain a complete copy of the audit by 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, 2015 and September 30, 2016. For a full list of supporters, visit [www.westernrivers.org](http://www.westernrivers.org).

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**Cover Image:** North Umpqua River, Oregon  
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### **CALIFORNIA OFFICE**

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### **COLORADO OFFICE**

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606 Columbia Street NW, Suite 104  
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