



RIVER OF THE MONTH



# Queets River

A remote gem on Washington's Olympic Peninsula, the mainstem Queets is one of the best protected rivers in the country. From the southern glaciers of Mt. Olympus, the Queets runs wild and undammed for 53 miles to the Pacific Coast. Apart from its lowest reaches in the Quinault Indian Reservation, the Queets flows entirely through Olympic National Park, including the park's most secluded rainforests, set in a majestic glacial valley.

## Why It Matters

The mainstem Queets above the Quinault Indian Reservation may be the only near-pristine major river on the U.S. West Coast, and its comparatively strong steelhead and salmon runs offer a glimpse into what a healthy river might look like. This is the wettest place in Lower 48, and the Queets delivers staggering volumes of water for a basin its size. All that water nourishes one of the Earth's most impressive temperate rainforests, where colossal conifers shelter rich biodiversity.



## Fish

With national park protection and no dams, the Queets has a pure and relatively robust assemblage of native fish, including one of the healthier wild steelhead populations in the Northwest. With key fish-producing tributaries like the Clearwater, Salmon and Sams, the basin also has relatively healthy runs of Chinook, coho and cutthroat trout, as well as bull trout, Dolly Varden, Olympic mudminnow and three species of lamprey.

## Wildlife

Lush, primordial rainforests are home to northern spotted owl, marbled murrelet, Pacific fisher, Roosevelt elk, Olympic black bear and black-tailed deer. The upper basin is home to animals like Olympic marmot and grouse, as well as diverse alpine flora. **Hundreds of bird species** are found throughout the basin, from the high meadows to the wild Pacific Coast.

# How to See It

Olympic National Park is at its most pristine along the Queets. The majority of visitors make the river a day-rip, and there is one campground for overnights. From Highway 101, you can access the lower river, including two boat launches, via Lower Queets Road. Following a 2005 landslide, the upper river—including [Queets Campground](#), a boat launch and two hiking trails—is only accessible via a FS-21 detour to [Upper Queets Road](#). Before you go, [check conditions](#) and [Park entrance fees](#)—and bring your rain gear.



## Paddle

The mainstem Queets has a [beautiful Class II run](#), while the tributary streams kick out bigger thrills. Winter rains bring Class IV-V whitewater on the [Sams River](#) and the [Clearwater](#), while [Matheny Creek](#), a favorite among advanced boaters, delivers continuous, fun drops in a gorgeous bedrock canyon. Scout carefully and expect portages—log hazards exist all year.



## Hike

Explore rainforests of mythical proportions along the three-mile [Queets Campground Loop](#), which traces the Sams and Queets rivers and passes through meadows dotted with wildflowers in May. Summer adventurers tackle the longer [Queets River Trail](#), which requires a river crossing (doable below 1,000 CFS, [check flows](#)), but rewards hikers with one of the world's largest Douglas firs, a 17-foot-wide megatree.

## Fish

A notable winter steelhead run awaits anglers who are patient enough to wait out blown river conditions. A popular float is Hartzell Creek to the Clearwater/Queets Bridge. For more solitude, head up to [Queets Campground](#) to bank fish or float the stellar stretch down to Hartzell Creek. Fall brings big Chinook and coho, and there are plenty of cutthroat in summer. [Check regulations](#); no license is required in the Park. The Salmon River (a tributary to the lower Queets) is known for its run of hatchery kings, chased primarily by gear anglers.

## Reading List

- [Queets Area Brochure](#)
- [Queets River Trail, Washington Trails Association](#)
- [Record Trees: Forest of Giants](#)

## CONSERVATION THE WRC STORY

In 1999, Western Rivers Conservancy acquired and conserved [the last unprotected stretch of the Sam's River](#) by purchasing an 89-acre property at the confluence of the Queets and Sams rivers. The Sams is a vital salmon and steelhead tributary of the Queets, and the property is critical for fish and wildlife. Over 1.5 miles of the Sams River flows through it, and meandering side channels function as nurseries for juvenile, finger-sized salmon and steelhead. WRC conveyed the parcel to the Olympic National Forest, permanently conserving this reach of the river and its side channels and completing protection of the Sams River, from source to confluence. The property, now part of the national forest, sits at the southern edge of Olympic National Park, just upstream of Queets Campground and the Queets River Trail. The project not only benefits wild runs of steelhead, coho, Chinook and cutthroat trout to this day, it permanently conserved habitat for marbled murrelet and northern spotted owl, two endangered birds that depend on healthy old-growth rainforests for survival.

[How to Help](#)