

RIVERLANDS

NEWS FROM WESTERN RIVERS CONSERVANCY

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WRC Boosts Efforts to Recover Idaho's Salmon River

SALMON RIVER, IDAHO



The Salmon River, Idaho's landmark stream, is home to salmon, steelhead, bull trout and some of the West's most spectacular scenery.

In March, Western Rivers Conservancy purchased 619 acres on one of these streams, a key Salmon River tributary called Pole Creek. Unlike tributaries on the western side of the Sawtooth Valley, which have

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Blue Creek Salmon Sanctuary One Step Closer to Completion

BLUE CREEK & THE KLAMATH RIVER, CALIFORNIA



The Klamath River is the most recoverable of all the great salmon streams on the Pacific Coast of the contiguous United States. WRC is conserving the lifeline to the lower river, a cold-water tributary called Blue Creek.

Thanks to a generous show of support during our 2015 crowdfunding campaign and a \$1 million grant from the Kendeda Fund, Western Rivers Conservancy is one step closer to saving Blue Creek! These contributions allowed us to purchase another 562 acres of coastal temperate rainforest in the heart of the California redwoods. This is exciting headway in our effort to bring the final 10,000 acres of land into the 47,000-acre Blue Creek Salmon Sanctuary and Yurok Tribal Community Forest.

Our partners on the ground at Blue Creek are the Yurok people, who have deep cultural, spiritual and economic ties to Blue Creek and the Klamath River. Once our efforts are complete and WRC has conveyed the lands to the Tribe, the Yurok will regain the spiritual center of their ancestral homeland, Blue Creek. The Yurok will then manage the entire lower Blue Creek watershed and the adjacent community forest to enhance recovery of salmon, steelhead and the imperiled wildlife of the Klamath-Siskiyou ecoregion.

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WESTERN RIVERS
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ED KNIGHT

DAVE JENSEN

Effort Now Underway to Protect Upper Rio Grande

UPPER RIO GRANDE, COLORADO

This month, Western Rivers Conservancy purchased a 16,707-acre property on Colorado's Rio Grande, clearing the first major hurdle in our effort to conserve the upper reaches of this great river. Acquisition of Brownie Hills, as the property is known, will protect four miles of the Rio Grande, improve access in an area with precious little public

that has sustained working ranches and farms for centuries. In the San Luis Valley, the wet meadows, river oxbows and riparian corridors of the Rio Grande floodplain provide crucial habitat for over 200 bird species, including 95 percent of the Rockies' sandhill cranes. The valley's *acequias* (community-operated water ditches), predate Colorado's statehood, and maintaining their legacy is integral to conservation efforts in the San Luis Valley.

In addition to purchasing Brownie Hills, we have committed to acquiring three other properties: one shares the riverfront with Brownie Hills and includes a reach of the Rio Conejos; another lies at the confluence of Texas Creek, upstream from Brownie Hills; and a third is on the Rio de los Piños. All three tributaries provide vital fish and wildlife habitat and crucial water for the Rio Grande.

To complement and strengthen our upper Rio Grande project, WRC has partnered with Colorado Open Lands and Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust and received a major grant from the LOR Foundation to establish the San Luis Valley Conservation Fund. The Fund, which WRC now manages, includes \$2 million for a re-granting program that will support local conservation efforts and allow all three organizations to amplify their land and water conservation efforts in the San Luis Valley. ■



WRC has successfully purchased its first property on the upper Rio Grande, an effort that will conserve more than four miles of this iconic river.

riverland and set the stage for our broader conservation efforts within the San Luis Valley.

WRC began working on the upper Rio Grande in 2014, our sights set on conserving outstanding habitat for migratory and resident birds and a river

BLUE CREEK, CONTINUED

The Klamath-Siskiyou is one of the most biologically diverse regions on Earth, home to an astonishing array of plant and animal life. The area is drained by rivers like the Rogue, Illinois, Smith, Chetco and the third largest salmon stream on the West Coast, the Klamath River. Of all of these rivers, and of all the major Pacific salmon rivers in the Lower 48, the Klamath remains the most recoverable. The key to ensuring its long-term survival is Blue Creek, the most important source of cold water for the lower Klamath River.

WRC has been working with the Yurok to protect Blue Creek for over eight years, and we are now 80 percent of the way there. In the coming month, we expect to purchase another 748 acres within the Blue Creek watershed, an exciting follow-up to the 562 acres we purchased in December. Yet there is still much work to be done. To acquire the remaining



Blue Creek tumbles cold and clean from the Siskiyou Wilderness to the Klamath River. It provides a crucial cold-water refuge for salmon and steelhead migrating inland from the Pacific to spawn.

lands we must raise over \$14 million, and every ounce of support helps. Once we are finished, and these lands are conserved, the lifeline to the Klamath will be protected forever. ■

Conserving an Oasis in the Mojave Desert

MOJAVE RIVER, CALIFORNIA

In southern California, Western Rivers Conservancy has purchased 1,640 acres along one of the Golden State's most imperiled streams, the Mojave River. In a region stressed by ongoing drought and where residential development continues to chisel away at sensitive desert habitat, the Mojave River is a lifeline. It provides the only significant corridor of riparian habitat in the western Mojave Desert.

The Mojave is unlike most rivers in that it flows underground for much of its length. Even when it flows subsurface, however, the river nourishes important habitat for imperiled southern California animals. But the rare stretches of the Mojave that flow above ground create the most fertile and important habitat of all.

Between the towns of Victorville and Helendale, the underlying geology forces the Mojave River to the surface, and year-round flows nourish a lush 15-mile corridor of cottonwoods and willows, rich in bird, insect and other life. This veritable oasis, known as the Transition Zone, is where WRC is



HANK HALSEY

focusing its efforts. The ranch we acquired contains the most significant stand of riparian habitat within this unique stretch of the Mojave.

Protection of the Mojave, especially where it flows above ground, is crucial to the recovery of numerous

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The threatened yellow-billed cuckoo is one of many federally listed species that will benefit from WRC's purchase of 1,640 acres along the Mojave River.

More Habitat Heading Toward Protection on the North Santiam

In western Oregon, another prime reach of Willamette Valley fish and wildlife habitat is on its way to being forever protected. We recently purchased our third property on Oregon's lower North Santiam River, an effort that will conserve over 2.5 miles of outstanding river and side-channel habitat along this key Willamette River tributary.

WRC's purchase of 411 acres comes on the heels of two previous acquisitions that conserved 429 acres and over 2.5 miles of river, side-channel and wetland habitat on the North Santiam. Our partner in all three of these efforts is the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, who now steward the riverlands that WRC conveyed to the Tribe in 2013 and 2014. Once we convey the third property to the Tribe, 840 acres and more than five miles of river and side-channel habitat will be forever protected for the sake of fish and wildlife.

The North Santiam has always been a powerhouse of salmon and steelhead production in the Willamette Valley. It once produced two-thirds of the Willamette's winter steelhead run and a third of its spring Chinook. Today, both species are

listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act, and habitat protection and restoration is vital to their recovery.

The importance of these projects to salmon and steelhead is only part of the story. As with our earlier efforts, this acquisition will protect seasonally flooded wetlands and magnificent swaths of both closed- and open-canopy forest. Stands such as the ones found on these properties are increasingly rare in the Willamette Valley and provide important habitat for

numerous at-risk and listed wildlife species, including pileated woodpecker, hooded merganser, western pond turtle and red-legged frog.



STEVE TERRELL



WESTERN RIVERS CONSERVANCY

OUR MISSION

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

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SALMON RIVER, CONTINUED

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granite streambeds, Pole Creek is sedimentary and volcanic in origin, which means more nutrients for insects and riparian life. This unique geology is what makes the stream especially important, and Pole Creek has extensive Critical Habitat for Chinook, steelhead and bull trout. The Sawtooth National Forest has ranked Pole Creek its highest priority for recovery due to both this richness of habitat and its potential for restoration.

WRC's acquisition of these lands will protect more than a mile of Pole Creek and a short reach of the main-stem Salmon itself. Our acquisition builds on extensive conservation efforts already underway along Pole Creek, where state and federal agencies, NGOs and local landowners have worked to improve fish passage and increase flows during peak irrigation season.

With habitat quality in the creek on the upswing, protecting the stream's sensitive riparian areas is crucial and will help prevent setbacks to



TOM & PAUL LEESON

Idaho's Pole Creek is a key tributary to the upper Salmon River and contains designated Critical Habitat for Chinook salmon (pictured) along most of its length.

the conservation investments already made. By conserving this unique property, we can prevent future development along this vital reach of the creek and eliminate grazing in the riparian areas. Ultimately, we will ensure that a mile of prime salmon and steelhead habitat, in a key tributary of one of the greatest salmon streams in the world, is protected for good. ■

MOJAVE RIVER, CONTINUED

Continued from page 3

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. Conservation of these lands will benefit migratory and resident birds and several California species of special concern, including the Mojave River vole, southwestern pond turtle, brown-crested flycatcher, long-eared owl, summer tanager and yellow warbler.

Now that we have acquired the ranch, we are working to convey it to the Helendale Community Services District so the lands can be managed as a reserve with low-impact public use. The property has long been a target for conservation by the US Fish & Wildlife Service, the State of California and local and national conservation organizations. By acquiring these lands and conveying them to the Helendale CSD, we can finally make protection of this unique reach of the Mojave River a reality. ■



KRISTIA SCHUBERT

WRC is working to conserve four miles of the Mojave River along one of the rare stretches with perennial surface flows.

Thank You!

We are grateful to the individuals, foundations, businesses and organizations that make our work possible. For a complete list of our contributors, please visit our Supporters page at www.westernrivers.org.