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In Sawtooth Valley, a mile of a top-priority habitat for salmon, steelhead and bull trout officially conserved on Pole Creek

Stanley, ID – Western Rivers Conservancy and the Sawtooth National Forest have successfully conserved 619 acres of land along Pole Creek, one of the Sawtooth Valley’s highest priority salmon spawning streams and a key tributary to the Salmon River.

The project protected over a mile of Pole Creek, which is designated Critical Habitat for Chinook salmon, summer steelhead and bull trout along most of its length. It also conserved a short reach of the mainstem Salmon River, near the confluence with Pole Creek.

WRC purchased the property earlier this year, and conveyed the lands to the Sawtooth National Forest Service for stream and riparian restoration and permanent protection within the Sawtooth National Recreation Area.

“The Salmon River is one of Idaho’s greatest natural treasures,” said Dieter Erdmann, Interior West Program Director for WRC. “And conservation of its important headwater spawning tributaries like Pole Creek will ensure that the Salmon River’s fish, which migrate further than nearly any other anadromous fish in the world, stay with us forever.”

Pole Creek is located on the eastern side of the Sawtooth Valley, just below Galena Summit. Unlike streams on the western side of the valley, Pole Creek originates from sedimentary geology in the White Cloud range. It therefore carries a relatively high nutrient load that sustains abundant insect life and excellent riparian habitat. The result is outstanding spawning and rearing habitat for salmon, steelhead and bull trout in the headwaters of one of the finest rivers in the West.

Knowing the importance of the stream, WRC set out to conserve this reach and bolster conservation efforts that have been underway on Pole Creek for years.

Pole Creek has been the focus of extensive restoration work 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 during peak irrigation season, all with the intention of returning this exceptional stream to optimum health.

“Public acquisition of this property contributes a crucial piece of the conservation puzzle on Pole Creek,” said Sawtooth National Recreation Area Ranger, Kirk Flannigan. “We can now extend the restoration work that has been done elsewhere on the stream and help ensure Pole Creek stays healthy for the remarkable fish it sustains.”

The U.S. Forest Service has committed to restoring this stretch of the creek and will manage it for the sake of the Salmon River’s fish and wildlife, especially the recovery of imperiled salmon, steelhead and bull trout. The project will also minimize future grazing in the stream’s sensitive riparian areas and prevent development along this key reach of the creek.

Idaho Rivers United, an Idaho-based nonprofit that works to conserve rivers throughout Idaho, was pivotal in attracting WRC to Pole Creek in the first place.

“We know how critical Pole Creek is to the Salmon River and its runs of salmon and steelhead,” said Kevin Lewis, IRU’s Executive Director. “We are glad that Western Rivers Conservancy could step in when this property became available and make it possible to restore another key mile of this exceptional stream.”

WRC has long been drawn to the Salmon River, which flows through the largest wilderness areas in the Lower 48. The Salmon plays host to one of the greatest fish migrations on earth, a journey of more than 900 miles from the Pacific to the Rocky Mountains. It is also one of the great river destinations of the West, with unparalleled boating, fishing, hiking, hunting and wildlife watching.

“Pole Creek is an excellent example of how combining conservation land acquisition with restoration can have a holistic impact on a river,” said Erdmann. “In this case, our work is going to make a difference not just in the Sawtooth Valley, but for the Salmon and Snake River basins as a whole. We’re proud to have contributed to the effort to save this important stream.”

About Western Rivers Conservancy

Western Rivers Conservancy is a nonprofit organization that protects outstanding river ecosystems in the western United States. WRC acquires lands along rivers to protect critical habitat and to create or improve public access for compatible use and enjoyment. By applying decades of experience in land acquisition, WRC is able to effectively secure the health of whole ecosystems. It has protected hundreds of miles of stream frontage on great rivers like the Yampa, Gunnison, Salmon, Hoh, Snake, Madison, Klamath and John Day. Founded in 1988, WRC is the nation’s only conservation program dedicated solely to the acquisition of riverlands. To learn more about WRC, visit www.westernrivers.org.

About the Sawtooth National Recreation Area

The Sawtooth National Recreation Area (Sawtooth NRA) consists of 756,000 acres of scenic mountain country. The Sawtooth NRA has over 700 miles of trails, 40 peaks rising over 10,000 feet and 300 plus high mountain lakes that add to the spectacular scenery and vistas. Recreational pursuits include outdoor activities of camping, hiking, backpacking, fishing, boating and canoeing, rafting, observing nature, photography and bicycling. The Sawtooth NRA is managed by the US Forest Service as part of the Sawtooth National Forest. To learn more, visit <http://www.fs.usda.gov/sawtooth>

About Idaho Rivers United

Idaho Rivers United is a conservation organization representing all who love the freedom, adventure and solitude of Idaho's rivers. IRU's mission is to protect and restore the rivers of Idaho. Since its founding in 1990, IRU has become a powerful force for safeguarding Idaho's imperiled wild steelhead and salmon, protecting and enhancing stream flows and riparian areas, and defending and promoting the wild and scenic qualities of wild rivers. IRU's supporters are river lovers who work together to keep Idaho's rivers healthy and flourishing for generations to come. To learn more, visit <http://www.idahorivers.org>.