



# News Release

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**February 28, 2018**

## **New Hope for the Klamath River and its Salmon**

*After a 10-year effort the Yurok Tribe, Western Rivers Conservancy, Opportunity Fund, and U.S. Bancorp Community Development Corporation, a division of U.S. Bank, successfully create a salmon sanctuary to protect the cold-water lifeline of the Klamath River*

KLAMATH, CA – The Yurok Tribe and Western Rivers Conservancy have succeeded in creating a major salmon sanctuary within the Yurok Reservation to protect Blue Creek, the most important source of cold water for the lower Klamath River and a lifeline for some of the largest runs of salmon and steelhead remaining on the West Coast.

The project is part of the Yurok Tribe's and WRC's larger effort to return over 47,000 acres of ancestral lands to the tribe by purchasing them from Green Diamond Resource Company, which owned all the land along Blue Creek between the Siskiyou Wilderness Area and the Klamath River. The land was controlled by the tribe until the late-1800s, when it was appropriated by the federal government. As a result, the tribe lost all but a small percentage of its reservation lands, including Blue Creek, the Yurok spiritual centerpiece since time immemorial.

“For the Yurok Tribe, Blue Creek is equally a salmon stronghold, a sacred place and an integral component of our cultural identity. Today, we are celebrating the completion of a vital piece of our long-term plan to restore the Klamath River from its headwaters to the Pacific, but tomorrow we will begin work on the next phase of this project because our people and our salmon depend on it. The salmon are a big part of who we are as Yurok people,” said Thomas P. O’Rourke Sr, the Chairman of the Yurok Tribe. “We would like to express our sincere appreciation to Western Rivers Conservancy for assisting us in the reacquisition of our ancestral homeland.”

The project is unprecedented and will create a salmon sanctuary unmatched by any in the United States. By conserving the lower 25 miles of Blue Creek and converting what was formerly a vast, industrial tree farm into a biologically robust forest preserve, it will provide new hope to salmon and to one of the most important river fisheries in the West.

“This is a historic and joyous moment,” said WRC President, Sue Doroff. “The Yurok Tribe has at last been reunited with its ancestral lands, and Western Rivers Conservancy has finally ensured that Blue Creek, the lifeline of the Klamath River, will always be a source of cold, clean water and a refuge for the fish and wildlife that depend on it.”

Now that the sanctuary exists, the tribe will be reunited with Blue Creek and can steward the forests for the sake of fish and wildlife and to keep Blue Creek clean and cold. Under a management plan approved by the State of California, the Yurok Tribe will manage the lands to heal decades of aggressive timber harvest, restore the richness of the forest and create tribal jobs in sustainable forestry and restoration.

Conservation of Blue Creek comes at a critical moment. Last year, the fall Chinook return was at a historic low. With plans in place to remove four dams on the upper Klamath River, extensive salmon habitat will be reopened in the upper basin. But if salmon are to reach the upper river, they must have the cold-water refuge that Blue Creek provides.

In 2008, WRC helped the Yurok Tribe acquire 22,237 acres of land in the first phase of the project. WRC then worked for a decade to raise the tens of millions of dollars needed to acquire the remaining 24,860 acres. The tribe also secured over \$10 million to acquire the lands, including settlement money from the federal government. Last year, WRC purchased the last of the project lands from Green Diamond and has been working to transfer them in phases to the tribe.

On Thursday, WRC moved the first major holdings along Blue Creek into Yurok ownership, finally making the salmon sanctuary a reality.

Yurok acquisition of these lands was made possible through the federal New Markets Tax Credits program, which was designed to spur revitalization in low-income communities through private investment. Through the program, Opportunity Fund; U.S. Bancorp Community Development Corporation (a division of U.S. Bank); and the Yurok Tribe invested \$16.25 million in this phase of the project.

“Helping to return these ancestral lands to the Yurok Tribe, including the beautiful Blue Creek, will create or retain over 500 jobs for Yurok Tribe members,” said Luz Urrutia, Opportunity Fund’s Chief Executive Officer. “Opportunity Fund seeks to advance the economic well-being of working people. The chance to do so on a project that also benefits our natural environment is a triple bottom-line win: the social, economic, and environment returns make this effort one of our biggest New Markets investments to date.”

WRC is a pioneer in both conservation and New Markets Tax Credits and, working in partnership with Opportunity Fund and U.S. Bancorp, helped the Yurok secure more than \$40 million in all for this project. New Markets Tax Credits were critical to the project’s success, allowing the partners to bring needed private capital to the table in the face of waning federal funding for land conservation.

“We are delighted to be a trusted partner to help the Yurok Tribe reclaim its ancestral lands so that it can continue to nurture the Klamath River and the wildlife that depend on it,” said Maria Bustria-Glickman, vice president of U.S. Bancorp Community Development Corporation, a division of U.S. Bank.

In the coming decade, the Yurok and WRC will manage the lands together until WRC is able to transfer the remaining land to the Yurok for permanent stewardship.

The Klamath was once the third largest producer of salmon on the West Coast. Its salmon are the keystone species of the Klamath-Siskiyou ecoregion, one of the most biologically diverse places on Earth. They are central to both Yurok and regional economies and are the backbone of Yurok culture.

## **ABOUT THE PROJECT PARTNERS**

**The Yurok Tribe** is the largest federally recognized Indian tribe in California and has a reservation that straddles the Lower Klamath River, extending for one mile on each side of the river, from its entry into the Pacific Ocean to approximately 45 miles upriver to the confluence with the Trinity River. The Tribe's major initiatives include: natural resources management, fisheries protection, watershed restoration, dam removal, condor reintroduction, cultural revitalization, language preservation and land acquisition. To learn more, visit [www.yuroktribe.org](http://www.yuroktribe.org).

**Western Rivers Conservancy** acquires lands along rivers to conserve critical habitat and to create or improve public access for compatible use and enjoyment. By cooperating with local agencies and organizations and by applying decades of land acquisition experience, WRC secures the health of whole ecosystems. WRC has protected hundreds of miles of stream frontage on great rivers like the John Day, Hoh, Gunnison, Salmon, Yampa, Snake and Madison. To learn more, please visit [www.westernrivers.org](http://www.westernrivers.org).

**Opportunity Fund** advances the economic well-being of working people, driving economic mobility and building stronger communities. Our strategy combines loans for small business owners and investments in community infrastructure, so that hard work and perseverance mean a shot at getting ahead, not just struggling to get by. Through our New Markets Tax Credit program, Opportunity Fund leverages federal tax credits to invest in high-impact community projects. Since 2004, Opportunity Fund has provided financing for 23 projects throughout the Western United States, which have leveraged \$270.2 million in capital for nonprofit facilities and Native American projects. Ranging from health clinics and youth centers to homeless shelters and nonprofit centers, these investments have supported more than 5,800 jobs and provide services for more than 390,000 low-income people each year. Visit [www.opportunityfund.org](http://www.opportunityfund.org) to learn more.

**U.S. Bancorp Community Development Corporation** Minneapolis-based U.S. Bancorp (NYSE: USB), with \$462 billion in assets as of Dec. 31, 2017, is the parent company of U.S. Bank National Association, the fifth largest commercial bank in the United States. The company operates 3,067 banking offices in 25 states and 4,771 ATMs and provides a comprehensive line of banking, investment, mortgage, trust and payment services products to consumers, businesses and institutions. Visit U.S. Bancorp on the web at [www.usbank.com](http://www.usbank.com).

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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