

# Riverlands

SUMMER 2019 NEWS FROM WESTERN RIVERS CONSERVANCY ISSUE 43



## A Conservation Success in the Sonoran Desert



This spring, Western Rivers Conservancy successfully protected Doll Baby Ranch, including a mile of the East Verde River and a crucial recreational access point into Arizona's vast Mazatzal Wilderness.

### East Verde River

#### Arizona

It's official! Western Rivers Conservancy has permanently protected a mile of the East Verde River and a recreational gateway to some of Arizona's most beloved wild trails, streams and outdoor recreation areas.

In March, WRC successfully transferred the 149-acre Doll Baby Ranch to the adjacent Tonto National Forest, forever securing a key access point to more than 250 square miles of public lands, including a vast expanse of the eastern Mazatzal Wilderness.

The ranch, which we bought in 2017, traces a mile of the East Verde River. A haven for fish and wildlife on the edge of the Sonoran Desert, the East Verde

is the least-disturbed arm of the Verde River. In arid Arizona, these two streams, along with a handful of other crucial rivers like the Salt and Gila, shoulder the region's fragile desert biodiversity.

Recognizing the need to protect these rare freshwater lifelines, Congress established the Tonto National Forest in 1905. Today, it remains one of the country's largest national forests, home to the Mazatzal Wilderness, the Verde Wild and Scenic River Corridor and the Arizona National Scenic Trail. The setting is as stunning as it is varied, from saguaro cactus forests along the low-elevation banks of the Verde River, to the pine-studded heights of the Mogollon

CONTINUED ON BACK

## This Issue:

### East Verde River, AZ

*WRC successfully conserves a mile of the East Verde, plus crucial access to the Mazatzal Wilderness*

### Fall River, CA

*A new effort to conserve a reach of one of North America's most important spring-fed rivers*

### Rio Grande, CO

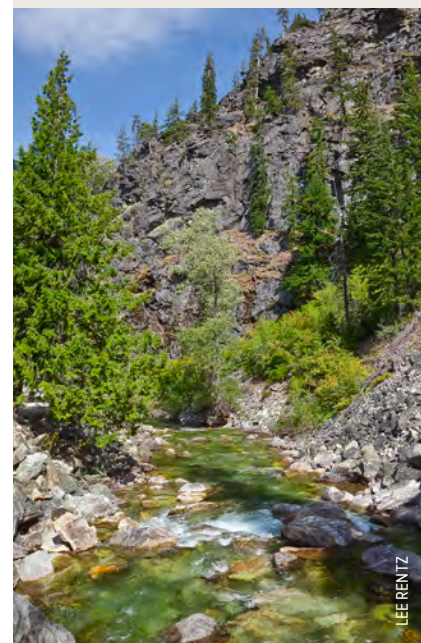
*Funding brings the creation of a new city park closer to completion in the San Luis Valley*

### Kahler and Nason Creeks, WA

*WRC launches another project in the Wenatchee River basin*

### John Day River, OR

*Improving management and adding lands to Oregon's Cottonwood Canyon State Park*





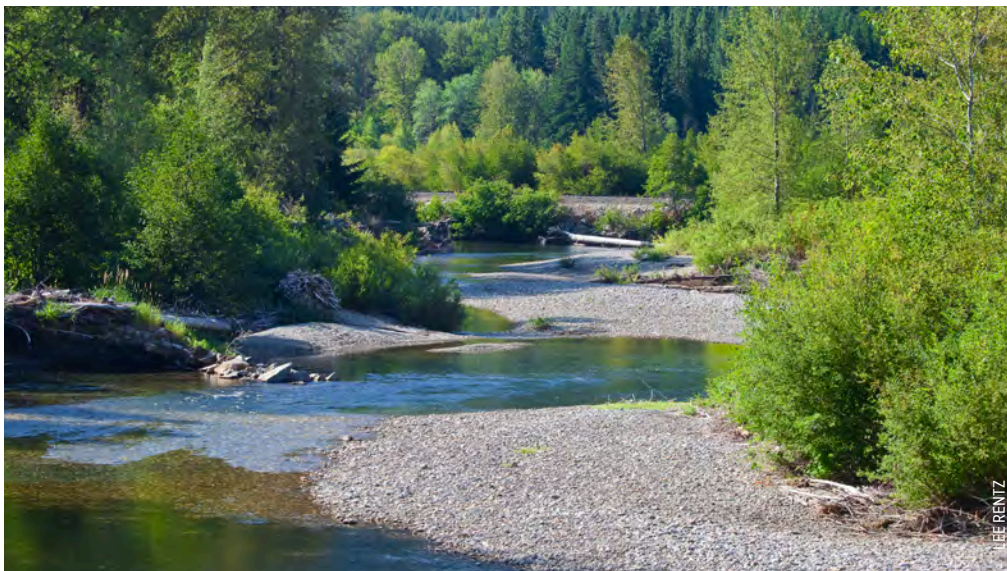
# One Step Closer to a New Community Park on the Rio Grande

In Colorado's San Luis Valley, we are forging ahead with an exciting project to create a riverfront park in the city of Alamosa that will unite community, conservation and wellness on the banks of the Rio Grande. This winter, the project received a critical funding boost from Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO), which ranked it as its number-one Open Space Project in 2018.

The Rio Grande runs through Alamosa, but the river can be difficult to access. Several years ago, the city set its sights on improving residents' health and wellness by making the river easier to get to and enjoy. WRC is now making that vision a reality. We bought two properties from local landowners who share this goal, and ultimately will transfer the lands to the city.

The result will be Alamosa Riparian Park, a beautiful tract of public open space along more than a mile of the Rio Grande, where tall cottonwoods will shade trails for pedestrians, cyclists, birders, runners and others to enjoy year-round. The park will connect to a network of trails and natural spaces in and around Alamosa and complement the area's assemblage of protected habitat for wildlife.

GOCO's support is a reflection of the tremendous importance of this project, and it sets it on the path to completion by fall of this year. GOCO is a voter approved trust fund that invests up to half of Colorado Lottery proceeds into improving the state's trails, parks, wildlife, open spaces and rivers. The LOR Foundation, a longstanding WRC partner that works to strengthen communities through conservation, has been a major supporter of the project, as have the city, county and numerous local foundations, businesses. ■



Near Washington's Lake Wenatchee, WRC is protecting key stretches of Nason Creek (above) and all of Kahler Creek, two streams that feed the Wenatchee River and provide crucial habitat for salmon, steelhead and bull trout.

## Expanding a Stronghold for Imperiled Fish in Washington

### Kahler and Nason Creeks

#### Washington

In north-central Washington, Western Rivers Conservancy is launching its third conservation effort on Nason Creek, a pristine, cold-water haven for salmon, steelhead, bull trout and other fish in the Wenatchee River system.

WRC will purchase 73 acres along Nason Creek and Kahler Creek, an important fish-bearing tributary to Nason Creek and a vital source of cold water. The property lies next to the conifer-blanketed Nason Ridge property that WRC bought in 2018 and which we are now working to permanently conserve. Fitting these pieces together, we will protect nearly all of Kahler Creek, which begins in the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest, flows down Nason Ridge and finally through our current acquisition, where it meets Nason Creek.

Rich in fish habitat, Kahler Creek is a prime spawning and rearing stream for Chinook, sockeye salmon and steelhead that migrate up the Wenatchee River and Nason Creek from the Columbia River and the Pacific. The streams are both home to wild cutthroat trout and mountain whitefish as well. Diverse birds and wildlife are found on the Kahler Creek tract, including federally listed northern spotted owl, elk,

mountain goat and pine marten.

By protecting Kahler Creek, WRC will notch another victory for the Wenatchee River system as a whole, especially Nason Creek. Flowing pristine from the Cascade Crest, Nason Creek remains one of the top priorities in Washington for bull trout and salmon recovery—so important that statewide partners have invested \$11 million to recover the species in the basin. To guarantee these investments pay off, Nason Creek's most vulnerable and productive reaches must be conserved. The Kahler Creek property is zoned for 15 home sites, and WRC's acquisition will instead guarantee it remains intact and healthy forever.

Once we buy the property, we plan to convey it to the Chelan-Douglas Land Trust, complementing other lands along Nason Creek that the trust is actively managing for fisheries and wildlife.

This is WRC's third project on Nason Creek. In addition to the 3,714-acre Nason Ridge property, WRC protected 648 acres in 2012, several miles upstream. Piece by piece, we are filling critical gaps in the conservation landscape, bolstering the broader efforts to recover fish habitat within the Wenatchee River basin. ■



# New Effort on California's Renowned Fall River

## Fall River

### California

Spring-fed streams are the rarest of rivers. Born from underground springs rather than runoff, they flow steadily year-round, with crystal-clear water that stays consistently cold. Classic "spring creeks" have gradual descents, and they meander slowly through the landscape with postcard-perfect laziness. They're rich in nutrients, insects and bird life and provide some of the most fertile trout habitat in the West.

On Northern California's storied Fall River, one of the largest spring creeks in the country, Western Rivers Conservancy has kicked off an effort to preserve some of the best fish and bird habitat in the state. We also hope to create some of the only public access to the Fall River, which is as well-known for its exclusivity as it is for its blue-ribbon trout fishery.

WRC has set out to conserve the 1,158-acre Island Ranch, which is nestled between the Fall River and its two largest tributaries, the Tule and Little Tule rivers. The property adjoins Ahjumawi Lava Springs State Park and the protected McArthur Swamp, and it sits at the heart of the Audubon Society's designated Fall River Valley Important Bird Area. The valley, which is located on the Pacific Flyway, supports a colorful diversity of breeding ducks, shorebirds, raptors and sandhill cranes. Thousands of over-



On California's fabled Fall River, two anglers fish a stretch of premier trout water in front of the property that Western Rivers Conservancy is working to protect.

wintering ducks and geese stage here during the spring migration, drawing bird enthusiasts from far and wide.

If we're successful, conserving Island Ranch will protect four miles of the Fall River and three miles of the Tule and Little Tule Rivers. The project would set the stage for much-needed habitat restoration, including rejuvenating the ranch's wetlands, improving levees to protect water quality and further enhancing the property's waterfowl habitat. While the area is best known for its exceptional bird diversity and rainbow trout, the property and surrounding area also support species like deer, bear, mink and badger.

An indispensable source of cold water in California, the Fall River supplies

the Sacramento system with a million acre-feet of reliably cold flows each year. Venerated by anglers, the river supports California's largest Blue Ribbon, spring creek trout fishery and was one of the original 16 streams designated as Wild Trout Waters by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

WRC is currently working with the local community and the Fall River Resource Conservation District to explore ways we might conserve this outstanding property and, if at all possible, create new public access to the Fall River. If we are successful, our efforts will benefit the entire Fall River system, its wild fish, its stunning array of bird life and anyone who has the opportunity visit this one-of-a-kind spring-fed stream. ■



A snowy Mount Shasta towers over the Fall River, a nationally renowned trout stream and one of the most important cold-water river systems in the West.



Rim, which tops out at nearly 8,000 feet. More than five million people visit the Tonto each year.

One of the primary access points into this spectacular area is the Doll Baby Trailhead, which can only be reached through Doll Baby Ranch. Had WRC not purchased the ranch, this access would almost certainly have been closed for good. Instead, it is now in public hands and permanently open to all.

If there's someone (or something) to thank for this outcome, it's the East Verde River. This is what moved WRC to buy the ranch in the first place. In doing so, we conserved a mile-long stretch of this critical desert stream. The Verde system is home to at least 10 native warm-water fish species, many of which are endangered. Both the Verde and East Verde are lifelines for the diverse wildlife of the Sonoran Desert, including Rocky Mountain elk, mule deer, whitetail deer, bobcat, coyote, mountain lion, black bear,

Mexican spotted owl and Chiricahua leopard frog, along with numerous species of reptiles, amphibians and birds.

***In arid Arizona, these two streams, along with a handful of other crucial rivers like the Salt and Gila, shoulder the region's fragile desert biodiversity.***

Conservation of Doll Baby Ranch is a victory for fish and wildlife and for the many people who visit this rugged and beautiful corner of the Desert Southwest to hike, hunt, ride horses, explore trails and dip their toes in a wild and scenic river. ■

## SUCCESS! WRC Expands Park on John Day

Western Rivers Conservancy just added 117 acres to Oregon's Cottonwood Canyon State Park. In March we transferred the former Kirkpatrick Homestead to the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, significantly improving the state park's ability to manage a remote boater access site roughly 10 miles downstream of the park's main entrance.

Set in eastern Oregon's sagebrush country, Cottonwood Canyon is one of Oregon's largest and wildest state parks. The heart of the park is the dramatic John Day River and its stunning basalt canyon. Over 16 miles of the river are now protected within the park and open to the public. The John Day is home to a critical wild steelhead run and Oregon's largest herd of bighorn sheep, along with elk, pronghorn and a variety of gamebirds and songbirds. The river is also home to a crucial run of Chinook salmon. Throughout the year, hikers, anglers, hunters, boaters and birders revel in the remote setting of the park, which lies adjacent to vast BLM Wilderness Study Areas that make the park so wild.

WRC created Cottonwood Canyon State Park in partnership with OPRD in 2013, and we have long sought to add this adjacent property to improve management at the downstream end. Now that we have, the stage is set for OPRD to enhance a crucial boating access site that anglers, hunters and paddlers rely on for trips down the Wild and Scenic John Day River. ■



A key access point into the 252,500-acre Mazatzal Wilderness is through Doll Baby Ranch, which WRC forever protected when it transferred the property to the Tonto National Forest this spring.

**PORTLAND**  
(503) 241-0151

**SAN FRANCISCO**  
(415) 767-2001

**DENVER**  
(303) 645-4953

**OLYMPIA**  
(360) 528-2012