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## Prime nursery grounds for Hells Canyon bighorn sheep permanently protected along the Snake River

LEWISTON, ID—A piece of the Northwest’s most important habitat for bighorn sheep was protected this week, thanks to a partnership between Western Rivers Conservancy and the Idaho Department of Fish and Game.

On Wednesday, the partners placed a conservation easement over the 2,920-acre Ten Mile Creek Ranch along the Snake River. Western Rivers Conservancy then sold the protected ranch to a private buyer who shares the partners’ conservation vision for the property.

The ranch’s steep breaks and sheer cliffs provide critical protection for bighorn sheep, allowing them to easily escape predators in the rugged terrain. Because of the ranch’s unique topography, between 50 and 80 percent of Idaho’s northern Hells Canyon herd of Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep, which currently number roughly 150 head, use this area. Importantly, the property provides secure cliff habitat along the Snake River where ewes give birth and raise their lambs.

The ranch spans four miles of the Snake River, a reach that includes important spawning redds for Chinook salmon and migration habitat for spring and fall Chinook, sockeye salmon and summer steelhead, all listed under the Endangered Species Act.



Media photos can be found at: <http://www.westernrivers.org/snakeriverimagegallery/>

“This is an extremely important stretch of the Snake River, and we feel very proud of what we were able to accomplish for bighorns and salmon through this partnership,” said Zach Spector, WRC’s project operations director. “Thanks to the state of Idaho and the ranch’s new owner, we were able to guarantee that a very special herd of bighorns will always have this place for habitat and lambing.”

The property, which Western Rivers Conservancy purchased in 2018, is located about 10 miles south of Lewiston, between Idaho’s Hells Gate State Park, to the north, and the 78,000-acre Craig Mountain Wildlife Management Area to the south.

“The Ten Mile Creek Ranch property is a great addition to enhance the existing contiguous block of lands currently managed for fish and wildlife habitat protection around Hells Canyon,” said Don Jenkins, regional wildlife habitat manager for Idaho Department of Fish and Game. “We are excited to work with the new landowner to preserve this rare pocket of Idaho for its irreplaceable bighorn habitat and important salmon-spawning areas along the Snake River.”

Once abundant in Hells Canyon, Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep have seen steady declines since the mid-1800s, largely due to disease and habitat loss.

“Recovering bighorn sheep populations depends on protecting places like Ten Mile Creek Ranch,” said Frances Cassirer, senior wildlife research biologist for the Idaho Department of Fish and Game. “In addition to providing habitat for lambs and access to the river, wild sheep need to be able to move through country where they won’t be exposed to pathogens carried by domestic sheep and goats that have decimated the species and continue to limit population restoration. This project accomplishes exactly that.”

Conservation of Ten Mile Creek Ranch was made possible with support from The Cross Charitable Foundation, Steele-Reese Foundation and the Wild Sheep Foundation.

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## ABOUT THE PROJECT PARTNERS

**Western Rivers Conservancy** acquires lands along rivers throughout the West 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, Western Rivers Conservancy secures the health of whole ecosystems. Western Rivers Conservancy has protected hundreds of miles of stream frontage on great western rivers, including the Rio Grande, Yampa, John Day, Gunnison, Salmon, Snake, North Umpqua, Klamath and Madison Rivers. To learn more, visit [www.westernrivers.org](http://www.westernrivers.org)

**Idaho Department of Fish and Game’s** mission is to protect, preserve, perpetuate and manage Idaho’s wildlife resources. IDFG works to sustain Idaho’s fish and wildlife and the habitats upon which they depend; meet the demand for hunting, fishing, trapping and other wildlife recreation; and improve public understanding of, and involvement in, managing the state’s fish and wildlife.

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