Conservancy Completes Protection of Goose Creek

Project ensures future health of California’s finest salmon stream, the Smith River

(Crescent City, California) – In one of the most significant recent accomplishments for California rivers, the Smith River’s largest tributary, Goose Creek, is now forever protected.

The Portland, Ore.-based Western Rivers Conservancy announced today that it has completed a project to buy and conserve the watershed of Goose Creek in the remote mountains of California’s North Coast. The Conservancy has conveyed all of the land – an expansive area covering 9,483 acres – to be part of the Smith River National Recreation Area, ensuring a supply of cold, clean water for the Smith River’s celebrated runs of wild salmon and steelhead, and providing improved recreational access to this scenic area.

The Smith is California’s premier stronghold for threatened salmon and steelhead, said Phil Wallin, Western Rivers Conservancy’s President. “To bring back the state’s salmon runs, the first priority is to protect the healthiest streams like the Smith, and the best way to do that is to protect the headwaters and major tributaries. By protecting Goose Creek, we help ensure that the Smith River will run clear and cold forever, just as steelhead require.”

The Conservancy purchased the Goose Creek land in several phases from Green Diamond Resource Company, starting in 2001. The Smith River Alliance and California Trout worked to rally statewide support for this project.

Thanks to the efforts of California Senators Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer and Representative Mike Thompson, the Goose Creek project received $3.1 million from the Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund over the past several years, allowing the U.S. Forest Service to buy the land and incorporate it into the National Recreation Area. In a highly competitive funding process, Goose Creek stood out as a nationally significant acquisition. The U.S. Forest Service purchased the last portion of land – 4,386 acres – with funding through the Federal Lands Transaction Facilitation Act, or FLTFA.

“The Smith River is a Wild & Scenic River and is an important resource for California,” said Senator Feinstein. “Goose Creek is a major tributary of the Smith and provides a significant refuge for several fish species, such as endangered wild salmon and steelhead. The Goose Creek acquisition not only preserves the area’s rich coniferous forest, but ensures that this habitat is protected. I am pleased to be a part of this preservation effort.”
Recognizing that recreation and tourism are a big part of the north coast economy, the Del Norte County Board of Supervisors supported the acquisition. Western Rivers Conservancy is donating 17 acres in the Goose Creek watershed for use by the County as public open space.

Though many of California’s salmon streams have been dammed and dewatered, the Smith River on California’s redwood coast stands as a remnant of what salmon streams have looked like for thousands of years. “The populations of wild cutthroat trout, steelhead, Chinook and coho salmon that thrive in the Smith are significant both regionally and nationally as more and more rivers buckle to the pressures of population growth and development,” said Grant Werschkull, Director of the Smith River Alliance. “Conserving Goose Creek is critically important for the health of the Smith River.”

“Protection of these Goose Creek lands is a first step for Californians to protect the last free-flowing river that remains in our state and a vital stronghold for endangered salmon and declining steelhead populations,” said Brian Stranko, CEO of California Trout.

As the property is transferred to the Smith River National Recreation Area (NRA) and comes under public ownership, there will be increased access and recreation opportunities. “We expect to be able to provide improved access for fishing, hunting, backcountry camping, kayaking,” said Mary Kay Vandiver, District Ranger for the Smith River NRA.

The lands Western Rivers Conservancy acquired from Green Diamond were some of the last private holdings in the Smith River watershed. With the completion of this project, all 9,483 acres are now part of the Smith River NRA, a scenic playground and protected botanical area that includes over 300 miles of the Smith River in the heart of one of the largest National Wild and Scenic Rivers systems in the nation.

“The Smith River NRA was established for protection of wild and scenic rivers, unique recreation opportunities, and ecological diversity while also providing for sustained productivity of natural resources,” Vandiver said. “Goose Creek should showcase some of the extraordinary recreation opportunities of the NRA. This will require close coordination with the community, and we are excited about this type of work and the partnerships that can be developed.”

The Goose Creek project is supported with grants from the Richard and Rhoda Goldman Fund, the Compton Foundation, Heller Charitable and Educational Fund, Norcross Wildlife Foundation, Page Foundation, Resources Legacy Fund Foundation, Weeden Foundation and Wildlife Forever.

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GRAPHICS: For photos of Goose Creek and the Smith River, contact Western Rivers Conservancy, 503-241-0151 or jandrews@westernrivers.org

About Western Rivers Conservancy
Western Rivers Conservancy (WRC) acts to protect outstanding river ecosystems in the western United States. We acquire land to conserve critical habitat, provide access for compatible public use and enjoyment and cooperate with other agencies and organizations to secure the health of whole ecosystems. www.westernrivers.org

For More Information
Smith River Alliance: www.smithriveralliance.org
California Trout: http://www.caltrout.org
About the Smith River NRA: http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/sixrivers/about/smith-river/