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Historic Wagner Ranch on Washington's Chewuch River one step closer to being permanently protected

WINTHROP, Washington—In the scenic Methow Valley, Western Rivers Conservancy has taken a critical step forward in the effort to permanently protect an outstanding 1.6-mile stretch of the Chewuch River, the primary tributary to the Methow River.

Last week, the organization sold the historic 328-acre Wagner Ranch to the Methow Conservancy, helping to ensure the property's open space and river frontage will be protected, and setting the stage for long-term salmon and steelhead restoration. When the property was put up for sale in 2018, Western Rivers Conservancy was able to act quickly to purchase it, with the goal of conserving a premier stretch of the Chewuch River.

“We are grateful that the Methow Conservancy stepped up to conserve Wagner Ranch,” said Nelson Mathews, Western Rivers Conservancy's vice president. “We set out to protect property three years ago for the sake of the Methow's fish and wildlife and to guarantee that this rare, beautiful swath of open space—and the benefits it provides to the entire valley—remain for generations to come. The Methow Conservancy is working to bring this vision to life.”

The Methow Conservancy is continuing its efforts to raise the funds needed to protect the ranch permanently.

The Chewuch River is a major source of cold water for the Methow and provides crucial habitat for imperiled Chinook salmon, steelhead and bull trout. The Wagner Ranch spans an important stretch of the Chewuch, where more than a dozen different salmon habitat restoration opportunities have been identified. It also abuts the 14,800-acre Methow Unit of Washington's Methow Wildlife Area, providing important habitat-connectivity for wildlife.

Conservation of the property will also help preserve the unique natural and historic character of the valley, which draws tens of thousands of tourists every year who come to hike, bike, cross-country ski, hunt, fish, climb and paddle. These visitors are important drivers of local economies throughout the year.

The ranch is one of the largest contiguous tracts of privately owned riverfront left in the Methow Valley, and it is woven into the cultural fabric of the area. It was formerly owned by the family who developed the Old West town of Winthrop, six miles to the south, and later by the family who created the famed Sun Mountain Lodge.

“When the Wagner Ranch was put up for sale, we knew we had to do whatever we could to protect it, and that meant buying it and then finding a long-term solution. This is a great step in that direction,” said Mathews.

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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. WRC has protected hundreds of miles of stream frontage on great western rivers, including the Hoh, Skagit, Snake, Salmon, North Umpqua, John Day, Rio Grande, Klamath and Madison Rivers. To learn more, visit www.westernrivers.org

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