



WESTERN RIVERS
CONSERVANCY

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Crucial Stretch of Birch Creek Conserved in Land Conveyance to Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation

Western Rivers Conservancy conveyed the 100-acre Birch Creek Ranch to the Umatilla Tribes with funding provided by BPA.



The ranch includes over a mile of Birch Creek, an important tributary to the Umatilla River.

Photo Credit: Kyle Dudgeon/Western Rivers Conservancy

UMATILLA COUNTY, Oregon (October 15, 2025) On September 26, [Western Rivers Conservancy](#) (WRC), the [Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation](#) (CTUIR), and [Bonneville Power Administration](#) (BPA) completed a 100-acre land transfer of Birch Creek Ranch to the CTUIR.

This transfer lays the groundwork for restoration of critical salmon and steelhead habitat in the Umatilla River Basin and reconnects the Tribes with ancestral homelands.

Located southwest of Pendleton, the ranch includes over a mile of Birch Creek, a vital tributary to the Umatilla River and the largest producer of Endangered Species Act-listed Middle Columbia River summer steelhead in the Umatilla Basin. The project also supports the Umatilla Basin's Chinook, coho salmon and rainbow trout populations.

“Conserving Birch Creek Ranch will breathe new life into a formerly thriving steelhead and salmon stream,” **said Jessica Inwood, Washington State Project Manager with WRC.** “We’re grateful for our ongoing partnership with the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation to support and enable some of the most significant fisheries recovery projects in the Columbia Basin.”

The Umatilla River was once one of the mid-Columbia’s major producers of salmon and steelhead, but decades of water withdrawals and other habitat impacts devastated the river’s fish runs. The CTUIR has led the charge to restore these runs for years.

At Birch Creek Ranch, which the Tribes will call Kwáلكwal, the CTUIR will now be able to expand stream and floodplain restoration efforts. The CTUIR intends to undertake extensive stream restoration work on more than a mile of wandering floodplain, including the removal of a longstanding earthen barrier that has impeded upstream fish migration for decades. The CTUIR also plans to dedicate the ranch’s significant surface and groundwater rights back to instream flows, which will nourish the creek and floodplain below.

“We thank Western Rivers Conservancy and Bonneville Power Administration for their help on this project and look forward to restoring this property for the benefit of the fish and wildlife of the Umatilla Basin” said Anton Chiono, CTUIR Habitat Conservation Project Leader.

With its meadows, uplands, and rimrock formations, the ranch also provides habitat for diverse wildlife species, including Rocky Mountain elk, mule deer, pronghorn, mountain lion, golden eagle, wild turkey, osprey, and Canada goose. Additionally, the property includes a spring complex and a section of Stewart Creek, which joins Birch Creek downstream of the property.

This work builds upon WRC and CTUIR’s partnership, which is anchored by a shared vision of conserving rivers and habitat within the CTUIR’s homeland. In a separate recent acquisition effort, completed in January, WRC worked with CTUIR, Blue Mountain Land Trust, and BPA on a conservation easement over the 943-acre [UmaBirch Floodplain property](#) at the confluence of Birch Creek and the Umatilla River, downstream from Kwáلكwal. This set the stage for one of the largest floodplain restoration efforts in the Umatilla Basin, which continues today.

Taken together, these collaborative projects will bolster basin-wide fisheries recovery and improve the odds that salmon and steelhead will thrive again in the Umatilla system.

About Western Rivers Conservancy

Western Rivers Conservancy’s motto is “Sometimes to save a river, you have to buy it.” WRC purchases land along the West’s finest rivers and streams to conserve habitat for fish and wildlife, protect key sources of cold water and create public access for all to enjoy. For more than 35 years, WRC has taken the lead in marrying conservation and Tribal land back outcomes, [working with Tribal Nations around the West](#) to permanently protect rivers and the lands that sustain them. WRC has created sanctuaries for fish and wildlife and secured recreational access along 260 rivers and streams around the West. Its approach to river

conservation is effective, tangible and permanent. More information can be found at westernrivers.org.

About CTUIR

The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation is comprised of the Cayuse, Walla Walla and Umatilla Tribes, and formed under the Treaty of 1855 at the Walla Walla Valley, 12 Stat. 945. In 1949, the Tribes adopted a constitutional form of government to protect, preserve and enhance the reserved treaty rights guaranteed under federal law. To learn more, visit ctuir.org