

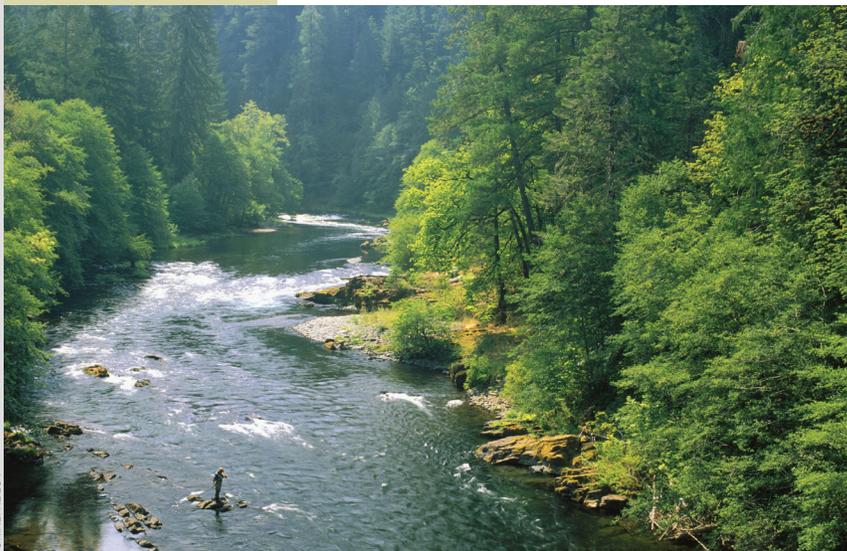
RIVERLANDS

NEWS FROM WESTERN RIVERS CONSERVANCY

Issue 33

Summer 2015

Effort Begins to Save a Stretch of a Legendary Oregon Stream



LOREN IRVING

WRC is working to protect a mile of the North Umpqua River at the head of the North Umpqua National Recreation Trail.

NORTH UMPQUA RIVER, OREGON

The North Umpqua River is one of Oregon's great recreational treasures and one of the finest rivers in the Pacific Northwest. Flanked by the North Umpqua National Recreational Trail for most of its length, the river is accessible by foot or mountain bike for 79 miles, making it a haven for anglers, mountain bikers, hikers, backpackers and boaters. But what really sets the North Umpqua apart is its clean, cold water and its extraordinary fishery.

The North Umpqua is a legendary steelhead stream, steeped in fly fishing lore and revered by anglers from around the world. Thirty-three miles of the river are designated fly-fishing-only, and a long tradition of local conservation has helped ensure this remarkable

stream stays healthy for fish. Today, the North Umpqua is one of the few designated Salmon Strongholds in Oregon, with healthy runs of spring Chinook, coho salmon and summer steelhead. *Continued on page 3*



KRISTIA SCHLIER

Southern California's Mojave River is one of the state's most fragile streams. WRC is working to protect a rare stretch of the river that flows above ground, where it forms an oasis in the heart of the Mojave Desert.

WRC Commits to Purchase Vital Reach of California's Mojave River

MOJAVE RIVER, CALIFORNIA

Western Rivers Conservancy has a rare opportunity to conserve an important stretch of California's Mojave River, one of the Golden State's most imperiled streams. Often referred to as a "river upside down," the Mojave flows subsurface for much of its length. The river sustains the only significant riparian habitat in the western Mojave Desert, and its water, whether underground or on the surface, is crucial to the rare fish and wildlife that rely on it.

At the same time, human communities rely on the Mojave, and explosive growth around Los Angeles and Las Vegas is putting intense pressure on the stream. The Mojave Basin's groundwater has been in overdraft for decades, and excessive water withdrawals, combined with rapid urbanization, are threatening the fragile Mojave River ecosystem more than ever.

WRC is focusing its effort on a stretch of river known as the Transition Zone, located between the cities of Apple Valley and Helendale. Along this reach of the river, the Mojave creates a lush oasis in the desert, nourishing a 15-mile-long

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WRC Buys Last Unprotected Reach of Fossil Creek

FOSSIL CREEK, ARIZONA

Arizona's Fossil Creek is one of only two Wild and Scenic Rivers in the state. WRC's efforts will improve the integrity of the scenic river corridor and conserve vital fish and wildlife habitat.

It's official: Western Rivers Conservancy purchased the last piece of unprotected land along Arizona's Fossil Creek, a tributary to the Verde River and one of only two Wild and Scenic Rivers in the state. Fossil Creek rises from a series of mineral springs, and its high mineral content creates slick limestone formations and spectacular blue-green travertine pools throughout much of its length. In the heart of the Sonoran Desert, Fossil

Creek is an oasis, providing important habitat for native fish, beavers, otters, leopard frogs, bats and an extraordinary array of bird species. The creek is home to nine native fish species. It plays a vital role within the greater ecosystem of the Verde River, Arizona's other Wild and Scenic River and a crucial stronghold for native fish species.

Fossil Creek was dewatered by a hydroelectric project for nearly a century, resulting in degraded riparian and stream habitat throughout much of the basin. Beginning in 1999, state and federal agencies and restoration groups embarked on what would become the largest river recovery effort in the Southwest. Then, in 2005, the diversion dam was removed, and Fossil Creek became a wild, free-flowing river once again. Four years later, Congress designated all 17 miles of the stream Wild and Scenic.

WRC intends to convey the property to the Coconino National Forest for protection within the Wild and Scenic River corridor and to improve the integrity of both the Fossil Creek and Verde River Wild and Scenic corridors. And as more and more people discover and visit Fossil Creek, WRC's efforts will help Coconino National Forest ensure public access while minimizing impact on this sensitive desert ecosystem. ■



MOJAVE RIVER, CONTINUED

riparian corridor of cottonwood and black willow trees. Here, we are working to purchase a 1,640-acre parcel called the Palisades Ranch.

WRC's acquisition of the ranch will protect four miles of the Mojave River and 700 acres of riparian lands in an area that is threatened with dense residential development. The project is key to the recovery of imperiled species like the southwestern willow flycatcher, least Bell's vireo and Mojave tui chub (all endangered), as well as the threatened western yellow-billed cuckoo.

Conservation of the property will benefit migratory birds and several California species of special concern, including the Mojave River vole, southwestern pond turtle, brown-crested flycatcher, long-eared owl, summer tanager, vermilion flycatcher, yellow warbler and the Mohave shoulderband snail. Upland habitat on the property also supports several listed species, including desert tortoise, Mohave



ground squirrel and burrowing owl.

Like the desert through which it flows, the Mojave River is often defined more by the lack of water than the presence of it. Conserving those precious stretches of river, where water flows above ground, is a top priority for WRC—one that will benefit Southern California's desert wildlife and those increasingly rare animals that call the Mojave home. WRC's efforts will help ensure this river oasis stays with us forever. ■

Right: Long-eared owls are one of the many species that will benefit from WRC's conservation work on the Mojave River.

Expanded Effort to Protect a Salmon Stronghold

NORTH SANTIAM RIVER, OREGON

The Willamette River and its vast floodplain were once a lacework of side channels, wetlands and wet prairies, with extensive bottomland forests that provided rich habitat for fish and wildlife. But today, after more than a century of development, Willamette Valley wetlands and native deciduous forests exist only in pockets, primarily along Willamette tributaries like Oregon's North Santiam River.

Earlier this year, Western Rivers Conservancy completed Chahalpam, a project that conserved 429 acres of forest and over 2.5 miles of the North Santiam and key side-channels that provide vital habitat for salmon, steelhead and other wildlife. Our partner in this effort was the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde. We are now working with the Tribe to conserve another 411 acres of outstanding riverland habitat, upstream from Chahalpam. As with Chahalpam, funding for this project will be provided by the Bonneville Power Administration and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife through



TYLER ROEMER

the Willamette Wildlife Mitigation Program.

This project is our third acquisition on the North Santiam and will protect nearly three miles of main-stem and side-channel frontage, as well as seasonally flooded wetlands and crucial swaths of both closed-

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WRC is working to conserve an additional three miles of the North Santiam River, one of the most important salmon and steelhead streams in the Willamette Basin.

NORTH UMPQUA RIVER, CONTINUED

Thanks to efforts by anglers and other conservationists, the North Umpqua River is protected along much of its length by a number of designations, including the North Umpqua Wild and Scenic River corridor, the Rogue-Umpqua National Scenic Byway, the North Umpqua Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA), the North Umpqua Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC), the Oregon State Scenic Waterway and the North Umpqua National Recreation Trail. Yet, despite this multitude of designations, parts of the North Umpqua remain at risk.

This summer, Western Rivers Conservancy committed to purchase 211 acres of forest and a mile of North Umpqua riverfront at the head of the North Umpqua Trail and the gateway to the fly-fishing-only section. The need arose when Douglas County, Oregon, concluded it had to sell Swiftwater County Park, a beautiful park with prime access to the river, an important trailhead and a largely unbroken stand of old-growth forest. Rather than let the parcel be logged or developed, WRC acted to acquire and conserve the property. Our goal is to convey the lands to the BLM for inclusion and protection within the

Wild and Scenic River corridor.

WRC's acquisition, our first on the North Umpqua, will prevent timber harvest and development within the SRMA and ACEC, and keep a key reach of the National Recreation Trail in public ownership. The project will conserve large stands of old-growth Douglas fir, as well as sugar pine, incense cedar, western red cedar, white fir and western hemlock. In addition to the important role the forest plays in keeping water temperatures low, it harbors diverse wildlife species, including northern spotted owl, bald eagle, Roosevelt elk, black bear, river otter and many others. The project will also protect high-quality gravel beds within the property that provide crucial spawning habitat for anadromous fish, including nearly a mile of designated Critical Habitat for Oregon coast coho, a threatened species. ■



LESLIE KEMMER

The North Umpqua Trail is ranked among the top mountain bike trails in the country. WRC's efforts will ensure a key trailhead, at the western end of the trail, stays in public hands.



WESTERN RIVERS CONSERVANCY

OUR MISSION

Western Rivers Conservancy protects outstanding river ecosystems in the western United States. We acquire land to conserve critical habitat, provide public access for compatible use and enjoyment, and cooperate with other agencies and organizations to secure the health of whole ecosystems.

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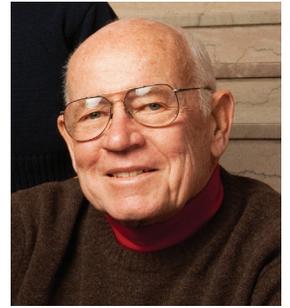
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WRC Says Goodbye to a Great Friend

This summer, Western Rivers Conservancy lost one of its dearest friends when Norb Wellman, a WRC founding Board member, passed away. Born and raised in Oregon, Norb grew up fishing the rivers that define our experience as Oregonians—streams like the Siletz, the Umpqua and the John Day, which teemed with trout, salmon and steelhead. When WRC was formed in 2001, Norb was a charter Director. He led WRC as Chair as it grew into a focused, effective, permanent force for river conservation. This was Norb's way of giving something back to the rivers and streams that had given him so much.

Under Norb's guidance, WRC undertook and completed projects along great rivers like the Sandy, Hoh, Siuslaw, Willamette, Goose Creek, Elk and John Day, conserving tens of thousands of acres of riverlands and miles of riparian habitat. Norb died on August 8. He will be remembered for all he did for our streams, and to further our connections with wild rivers, wild fish and wild places. ■



NORTH SANTIAM, CONTINUED

Continued from page 3

and open-canopy forest. Native tree species like grand fir, western hemlock, Pacific yew, western red cedar, Oregon white oak and red alder will all be protected.

Once our work is complete, another outstanding stretch of this key Willamette River tributary will be forever conserved. When combined with our recent projects downstream, WRC and its partners will have protected over five miles of the North Santiam River, as well as vital side-channel frontage, wetland habitat and hundreds of acres of native forest. ■



Red-legged frog (pictured), western pond turtle, Oregon chub, pileated woodpecker and other species will benefit from WRC's conservation efforts on the North Santiam River.

Thank You for Joining Us!

We'd like to thank everyone who made recent first-time gifts to WRC. For a complete list of supporters, please visit www.westernrivers.org.

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