



# Riverlands



## Hope for Klamath Salmon: Blue Creek Protected at Last



THOMAS DUNKLIN

Following a ten-year effort, Western Rivers Conservancy and the Yurok Tribe successfully created a salmon sanctuary at Blue Creek, ensuring the cold-water lifeline of California's Klamath River is forever protected.

### Blue Creek & the Klamath River

#### California

This winter marked a historic moment for Blue Creek and the Klamath River. At long last, Western Rivers Conservancy succeeded in creating the Blue Creek Salmon Sanctuary, at the heart of Northern California's rugged redwood coast. This success is a turning point for the Yurok Tribe, for California and for salmon, the keystone fish that define and sustain this remote, wild region of the Pacific Northwest.

In February, WRC transferred 9,140 acres of land to the Yurok Tribe, the first major

landholding on Blue Creek to ever be returned to the tribe. In the process, we achieved what we set out to do a decade ago: forever protect Blue Creek as a sanctuary for fish and wildlife.

Tumbling out of the fog-shrouded Siskiyou Wilderness, Blue Creek is the most important source of cold water for the lower Klamath River and a lifeline for what were once the third largest runs of salmon on the West Coast.

For the Yurok Tribe, Blue Creek is the cornerstone of spiritual life, the tribe's nicknamed "stairway to heaven" that provides

### This Issue:

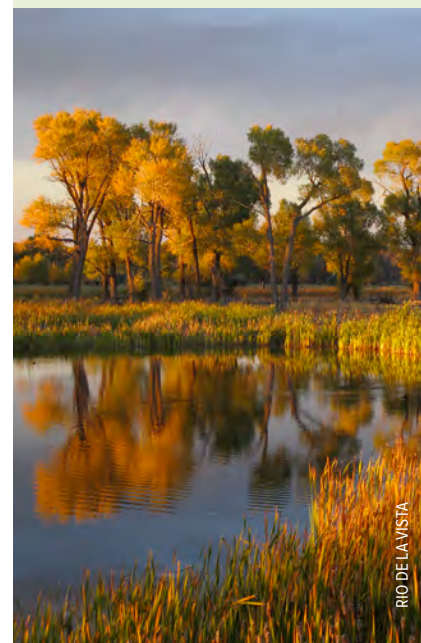
**Blue Creek & the Klamath, CA**  
*We did it! WRC completes historic effort to create a salmon sanctuary and forever protect Blue Creek.*

**Rio Grande, Brownie Hills, CO**  
*WRC connects people to the Rio Grande and preserves 17,000 acres of fish and wildlife habitat.*

**Rio Grande, Alamosa, CO**  
*New project will anchor Alamosa's trail system to the river.*

**Goat & Meadow Creeks, ID**  
*WRC's success on two Sawtooth streams is first of its kind in Idaho.*

**Nason Creek, WA**  
*WRC launches effort to protect recreation and habitat above Nason Creek and Lake Wenatchee.*



RIO DE LA VISTA

## WRC Launches Next Effort on Rio Grande

In Colorado's San Luis Valley, the city of Alamosa has been searching for a way to improve livability for its residents by connecting the community to the Rio Grande, which flows through the city's backyard but can be difficult to access. Western Rivers Conservancy found a perfect way to do it, while simultaneously protecting a mile of the river for fish and wildlife.

Last year, we committed to purchase 204 acres of scenic riverfront from two landowners who share the community's vision of a public park astride the Rio Grande. The land, with its bucolic views up and down the river, is now slated to become Alamosa Riparian Park and promises to be nothing short of a community treasure once our efforts are complete.

Although Alamosa is surrounded by the beauty of the San Luis Valley, residents have surprisingly little public access to the river through town. The City recently surveyed residents about open space, and the response was clear: residents are looking to the Rio Grande to boost community health and wellness, and they long for new trails and recreation opportunities along the river.

Recognizing this need, WRC began conversations with the Chefas family about selling part of its holdings for inclusion within Alamosa's park system. In January, we purchased 185 acres from the family, along with an adjacent 19-acre parcel, and will transfer these to the city, which plans to add them to its park system in 2019. These new public lands will anchor a network of bike and pedestrian trails that will be integrated into city's trail system.

Our work in Alamosa is part of WRC's broader effort in the San Luis Valley, where we are conserving increasingly rare, intact habitat along the upper Rio Grande and its tributaries, while providing much-needed public access to a great western river.



WRC completed a landmark effort on the upper Rio Grande, creating the San Luis Hills State Wildlife Area and opening some of the only river access in Costilla County, in the heart of Colorado's San Luis Valley.

## A New Refuge for Fish, Wildlife and People in the San Luis Valley

### Upper Rio Grande

Colorado

We are excited to announce that Colorado's San Luis Valley has a new state wildlife area, thanks to WRC's purchase of 17,019 acres along the upper Rio Grande. This month, we transferred those lands to Costilla County, reconnecting a community to a river that has been off-limits to the public here for generations. In the process, we conserved thousands of acres of outstanding natural habitat, a major boon to the fish, birds and other wildlife of southern Colorado.

With the property now under county ownership, the lands will be managed by Colorado Parks and Wildlife as the new San Luis Hills State Wildlife Area and forever protected through a conservation easement held by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The wide-open, rolling hills and shrublands of the property are a special place and were one of the last large, intact tracts of private land within the Rio Grande Natural Area. The river and surrounding uplands are crucial for imperiled animals like the endangered southwestern willow flycatcher and for mule deer, pronghorn and Rocky Mountain elk.

For the local community, this is an exciting accomplishment. In Costilla County, 99 percent of all land is private.

Until now, public river access was virtually nonexistent. With the completion of this project, more than 4.5 miles of the Rio Grande and thousands of acres of spectacular uplands are now protected and open to the public.

This is one of several WRC projects in the San Luis Valley, including the 1,168-acre Olguin Ranch, directly across the river from the new state wildlife area. Through these acquisitions, WRC is reconnecting communities to the valley's rivers and conserving habitat for the area's fish and wildlife. Our partners in this effort are the LOR Foundation, Colorado Open Lands and The Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust. Together, and with funding from the LOR Foundation, we created the San Luis Valley Conservation Fund to conserve land and bolster local conservation efforts throughout the valley.

Creation of the San Luis Hills State Wildlife Area was made possible through a loan from the LOR Foundation and funding from Great Outdoors Colorado, the Gates Family Foundation and USFWS. Through this broad collaboration with funders and our on-the-ground partners, we are having an impact that will improve people's lives—and the health of the upper Rio Grande—for generations. ■



# WRC Returns Water to Vital Sawtooth Streams

## Goat & Meadow Creeks

Idaho

Early this spring, Western Rivers Conservancy celebrated a major success in Idaho's Sawtooth Valley when we conserved the 369-acre Goat Falls Ranch and transferred the ranch's water rights to the state to keep them permanently in-stream. The effort will improve flows in two critical headwater tributaries of the Salmon River and add 369 acres to the spectacular Sawtooth National Recreation Area. This marks the first time the Idaho Water Resources Board has acquired water rights for the purpose of dedicating them permanently in-stream, an approach we hope serves as a model for balancing agricultural needs with native species recovery.

Goat and Meadow Creeks, the streams that flow through the ranch, are both crucial, ice-cold creeks that tumble from the Sawtooth Mountains and provide salmon and steelhead with reliable, cold water—the homecoming they need after their epic, 900-mile journey from the Pacific Ocean.

***WRC is focusing on these headwater streams because they are a key to sustaining the Salmon River's native fish in the face of rising water temperatures, earlier spring runoff and low flows.***

WRC is focusing on these headwater streams because they are a key to sustaining the Salmon River's native fish in the face of rising water temperatures, low flows and earlier spring runoff. Goat and Meadow Creeks once contained some of the highest densities of rearing salmon in the Columbia Basin, but water withdraws and grazing have undermined their health. Despite this, the streams are still among the best nurseries for salmon and steelhead on the upper Salmon River.

In 2017, WRC purchased the ranch, along with its 12.08 CFS of water rights,

providing the rare opportunity to protect habitat and enhance stream-flows for fish. While WRC owned the ranch, we spearheaded creative solutions with adjoining landowners to meet local water needs while placing significant flows back in-stream.

As part of the Sawtooth National Recreation Area, the ranch will be protected from development and allowed to recover from grazing. Additionally, the Forest Service and other partners will implement priority habitat restoration and monitoring projects for the benefit of fish and wildlife. The ranch also hosts important winter range for elk and habitat for 18 sensitive species, including gray wolf, sage grouse, bald eagle, peregrine falcon and Columbia spotted frog.

With cold water, restored habitat and improved flows, Goat Falls Ranch has a far greater chance at again becoming a haven for salmon, steelhead and wildlife, with benefits extending across the vast Snake and Columbia basins. ■

WRC successfully returned substantial water rights to Goat and Meadow Creeks, two critical salmon and steelhead rearing streams in the Sawtooth National Recreation Area.

# WRC Poised to Conserve Cherished Mountainside and Prime Habitat

In a rare opportunity in north-central Washington, WRC is tackling the needs of conservation, community and local industry by working to acquire a property to benefit all three.

Lake Wenatchee is an alpine jewel in the North Cascades and the source of the Wenatchee River, a crucially important stream for imperiled salmon, steelhead, bull trout and other cold-water fish. Immediately downstream of the lake, a stream called Nason Creek flows into the Wenatchee, injecting the river with life-giving cold water and providing habitat for multiple species of imperiled fish.

Homeowners on the eastern shore of the Lake Wenatchee have a stunning view of the mountains rising above the water, including Nason Ridge, a 3,714-acre forested property owned by Weyerhaeuser, a Washington-based timber company. People from the community and throughout Washington cross-country ski, hike and mountain bike on the Nason Ridge property

and in the adjacent state park. Most importantly, the property's forest is crucial to the health of Nason Creek (two miles of it flow through the property) and the Wenatchee River.

Given this property's importance to fish, wildlife and people alike, WRC, Weyerhaeuser and the community of Lake Wenatchee all wish to see the lands protected. WRC is bringing these interests together to preserve this critically important landscape. Should a private buyer acquire the property, it is highly likely it would be parceled up, developed and closed to the public. After all, it is one of the largest developable properties between Leavenworth and Stevens Pass, a popular second-home and vacation destination within a two-hour drive of Seattle.

WRC's goal is to purchase the property from Weyerhaeuser and, together with the Chelan-Douglas Land Trust, raise the private-sector contributions needed to transfer the lands to a long-term steward. Our vision is to ensure



WRC is working to protect important habitat for fish and wildlife while safeguarding popular recreational access to a scenic mountainside above Lake Wenatchee.

permanent public access and forever protect the property for the benefit of fish and wildlife.

In addition to fish, the property supports diverse wildlife. It provides foraging habitat for endangered northern spotted owl and is located within designated recovery areas for both grizzly bear and gray wolf.

The project builds on WRC's 2013 effort upstream, where we conserved a vulnerable mountainside above Nason Creek, at the very edge of the Alpine Lakes Wilderness. ■

## Blue Creek & the Klamath River CONTINUED FROM COVER

a sacred route into the high country of the Siskiyou Mountains. Yet the tribe lost control of the lands along Blue Creek over a century ago and has been separated from the river for generations.

In an effort to preserve Blue Creek, WRC formed a partnership with the tribe and Green Diamond Resource Company, which owned the lands for decades. Our goal was to preserve Blue Creek by helping the Yurok Tribe acquire over 47,000 acres and create the Blue Creek Salmon Sanctuary and Yurok Tribal Community Forest.

We completed the first phase of the project in 2011 and, in 2017, purchased the last of the project lands from Green Diamond. In February, we moved the first major holdings along Blue Creek itself into Yurok ownership, finally making the salmon sanctuary a reality.

The project is unprecedented and establishes a salmon sanctuary unmatched by any in the United States. To make it happen, WRC raised a total of \$60 million, primarily through private sources, and created a 32,307-acre sustainable community forest that will help ensure the permanent protection of the 14,790-acre salmon sanctuary, a preserve in the heart of the California redwoods.

By conserving Blue Creek and converting what was formerly an industrial tree farm into a biologically robust forest preserve, it will provide new hope to salmon and to one of the most important rivers in the West. Together with the State



WRC's efforts on Blue Creek and the Klamath River bring renewed hope for the future of the Klamath's salmon runs, which were once the third largest on the West Coast but today face immense challenges.

of California, the Yurok Tribe developed a management plan designed to heal decades of timber harvest, restore the richness of the forest and create tribal jobs in sustainable forestry and restoration—all part of a larger effort to revive the Klamath's salmon runs.

With the salmon sanctuary established, WRC and the Yurok Tribe are helping ensure that Blue Creek, the lifeline of the Klamath River, will always be healthy—and a clean, cold refuge for the fish and wildlife that depend on it. For Yurok, WRC and our supporters alike, it is an achievement we can always look to with tremendous pride. ■