

RIVERLANDS

NEWS FROM WESTERN RIVERS CONSERVANCY

Issue 26

Fall 2012

WRC Launches Project on the Legendary Salmon River



SALMON RIVER, IDAHO

At a dramatic bend in Idaho's Salmon River, adjacent to U.S. Bureau of Land Management property and a public recreation site, lies a segment of intact riverfront grassland that has been privately held for years. Too often, the fate of privately owned properties in such stunning natural settings is development—as trophy homes, ranchettes, or hunting or fishing lodges. But this particular piece of wild Idaho will be permanently protected.

Western Rivers Conservancy has entered into a contract to purchase 1,284 acres of land adjacent to the BLM's Pine Bar Recreation Site, west of Grangeville, Idaho, where the lower Salmon River

In one of the longest anadromous journeys anywhere, salmon and steelhead migrate 900 miles from the Pacific to their headwater destination on the Salmon.

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A Passageway for Salmon and People in the Sierra Nevada

DEER CREEK, CALIFORNIA

If salmon could cheer, you'd hear their voices echo up the canyons of Deer Creek, where a nearly pristine stretch of water was permanently protected this spring.

In April, Western Rivers Conservancy conveyed 600 acres including a spectacular waterfall along Deer Creek to the Northern California Regional Land Trust. This secures the last vulnerable segment of Deer Creek between the Lassen National Forest and Ishi Wilderness, notching a major victory for imperiled Sacramento River spring Chinook.

A precious handful of tributaries hold the hope of restoring the Sacramento River's once abundant wild salmon. Deer Creek is one of them, ranking

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With its dam-free length and undeveloped stretches, Deer Creek is one of the Sierra's top streams for aquatic life.

Prized Frontage Added to National Conservation Area



WRC is building a long-term conservation strategy along the Gunnison River, within the Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area.

GUNNISON RIVER, COLORADO

No longer is gravel mining in the cards for a stretch of Colorado's lower Gunnison River. In June, Western Rivers Conservancy conveyed three miles of river frontage along this iconic desert waterway to the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Surrounded entirely by the BLM's recently created Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area (NCA), the 400-acre parcel had been proposed for gravel mining and real estate development.

Instead, the conveyance saved this outstanding natural area from degradation. The lower Gunnison provides critical habitat for four endangered warm-water fish—the Colorado River pikeminnow, razorback sucker, humpback chub and bonytail chub—and supports prized jumbo rainbow and brown trout. The property itself boasts habitat for the threatened Colorado hookless cactus, the northern leopard frog, bald eagle

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The property includes two miles of important grassland habitat sloping above the Salmon and contributing to its spectacular viewshed.

SALMON RIVER, CONTINUED

makes a sharp bend. The property wraps around the bend, forming a steep, grassy bowl that bighorn sheep, Rocky Mountain elk, mule deer and white-tailed deer use for winter range. The grasslands are thought to shelter two ESA-listed plants—Spalding's catchfly and MacFarlane's four o'clock—and to support species the BLM considers sensitive: green-band and broad-fruit mariposa lilies, peregrine and prairie falcons, mountain quail, western toad and more.

Small, high-gradient streams tumble down the bowl to reach nearly two miles of curving riverbank below, which hides rare cultural resources and almost encircles the BLM's recreation site—an area that is heavily used for boating, fishing, picnicking and camping. Most importantly, the river

here provides excellent habitat for some of the Columbia Basin's most crucial ESA-listed salmonids: sockeye, spring/summer Chinook, fall Chinook, steelhead and bull trout.

The Salmon River has only one small dam (located at its headwaters) and is fed by clear, cold streams that drain more than three million acres of roadless area in central Idaho. With its free-flowing length and wildest of wilderness settings, it is arguably the most important river in the Rockies for salmon conservation.

Completion of this project will bring into public ownership an inholding in one of the West's most dramatic settings, so that the land can forever be managed for fish and wildlife, conservation-sensitive public recreation, and recovery of imperiled salmonid species. ■



Deer Creek is a rare California waterway with healthy runs of spring Chinook and steelhead.

DEER CREEK, CONTINUED

among the top three streams for aquatic life in the Sierra Nevada. Sourced from underground springs and Mount Lassen snowmelt, its waters flow 50 dam-free miles down volcanic canyons, over waterfalls and through blue oak groves to the Central Valley. Rare, robust runs of spring Chinook and steelhead make Deer Creek one of the most productive salmon-producing streams in the Sacramento system.

A waterway of this quality deserves an uninterrupted sanctuary along its length. To secure this 1.4-mile stretch, WRC bought the property from Sierra Pacific Industries in 2009 and retained control for several years while the best long-term steward emerged. In April, funding from California’s Wildlife Conservation Board allowed WRC to convey the lands into the capable care of the Northern California Regional Land Trust, ensuring fish and wildlife habitat and continued public access for hikers, boaters, birders and anglers.

Just off Highway 32, the property provides the hiking route to beautiful lower Deer Creek Falls. Visitors indulge in the views along this mile-plus stretch of canyon and can connect to a network of Sierra foothills trails for extended backpacking and snowshoeing trips. The property is home to mountain lion, deer, the rare mountain yellow-legged frog, and an assemblage of birds, wildflowers and diverse plant species.

Deer Creek is one of the most promising projects for the survival of Sacramento spring Chinook, and conserving these riverlands is a cornerstone of that effort. ■



Reviving Oregon’s Coho Powerhouse

ALSEA RIVER/DRIFT CREEK, OREGON

Capping more than a decade of efforts, a life-sustaining nursery for threatened Oregon coho salmon has been permanently protected.

This autumn, Western Rivers Conservancy conveyed 287 acres of prime estuarine lands on Alsea River Bay to the Siuslaw National Forest. The property provides the missing link to 1,400 acres WRC protected in 2002, extending five miles up Drift Creek, through moss-draped forests and to a waterfall.

Once the largest powerhouse of coho production in the state, these habitats provide just what young salmon need to survive and grow, and in rare abundance — winding sloughs, wetlands and salty backwater areas full of eelgrass.

Still, restoration was needed to reconnect complex tidal channels that had been blocked for dairy farming. WRC negotiated with two timber companies to buy the lands, enabling a large-scale coho restoration effort by the U.S. Forest Service and partners.

Now each year when the salmon return — not just coho, but also some of the state’s healthiest runs of Chinook, steelhead and sea-run cutthroat trout — this restored habitat will be waiting for them. ■

The Alsea River was once the most productive coho salmon stream in Oregon, and its estuary is now the focus of a coho recovery effort.





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OUR MISSION

Western Rivers Conservancy acts to protect 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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GUNNISON RIVER, CONTINUED

and a variety of other desert flora and fauna. Absorbing these 400 acres into the NCA will both maintain important ecological values and expand public access to back-country trails, red rock canyons and boating and fishing sites on this famous Colorado waterway.

This project follows two earlier WRC acquisitions just downstream, within a BLM recreation management area. Yet the work is not over. WRC continues to partner with the BLM on a long-term conservation strategy for



This stretch is one of the few places where endangered Colorado Basin warm-water razorback sucker, left, still survive.

the NCA along the lower Gunnison — to ensure that the river remains a thread of life winding through the desert West. ■



Thank you for your support!

We'd like to thank the generous individuals, foundations, businesses and organizations that make our work possible. Recent gifts of \$100 and above are listed below. For a complete list, please visit www.westernrivers.org

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