

RIVERLANDS

NEWS FROM WESTERN RIVERS CONSERVANCY

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Expanding our Efforts on Oregon's Wild John Day River



DAVE JENSEN

JOHN DAY RIVER, OREGON

Snaking across eastern Oregon, the John Day River winds through a land of basalt canyons and sweeping river bends, where bighorn sheep outnumber cars and the scent of sagebrush fills the air. In spring and summer, boaters put in at sites like Service Creek, Twickenham and Clarno and spend multiple days floating the river, bass fishing and soaking up the spectacular scenery. Each fall, hunters and anglers return to the river just as surely as the wild steelhead do with the coming of higher water.

The John Day is a river that is cherished like few others. Its steelhead run is one of the healthiest in the Pacific Northwest and its Chinook continue to hang on, despite declining populations throughout the Columbia

Basin. But the river is at risk. Warming water temperatures, degraded spawning and rearing habitat, reduced stream shading and seasonal water withdraws all threaten the John Day's native fish.

This summer, in an effort to conserve more of the John Day's finest fish and wildlife habitat, and to conserve the largest steelhead spawning and rearing tributary on the lower river, WRC committed to purchase the Rattray Ranch. The ranch spans four miles of Thirtymile Creek, a perennial stream

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WRC is working to conserve Thirtymile Creek, the most important steelhead spawning tributary on the lower John Day River and a cherished access point for anglers and hunters.

Conserving a Western Icon: A New Initiative on the Mighty Rio Grande

RIO GRANDE, COLORADO

Few rivers occupy a place in the country's collective imagination like the Rio Grande. One of the West's most iconic rivers, the "Brave River of the North" flows for nearly 2,000 miles, from its headwaters in southwestern Colorado's San Juan Mountains to the Gulf of Mexico. Although much of the lower river has been diverted or impounded by dams, extensive reaches of the upper river remain critical to imperiled fish and wildlife and offer outstanding recreation opportunities. In these upper reaches, Western Rivers Conservancy has secured a rare opportunity to protect an expansive reach of riverland for the benefit of fish, wildlife and people.

Near the Rio Grande's headwaters, in Colorado's high San Luis Valley, WRC has committed to purchase 17,808 acres of land controlling more than four miles of riverfront. The effort will conserve a crucial reach of the Rio Grande in an

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ANDY COOK



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The Rio Grande flows through Colorado's San Luis Valley, where WRC is acquiring 17,808 acres in an effort to conserve four miles of riverland and improve public access to this iconic stream.

Viewshed Forever Protected on the Salmon River

SALMON RIVER, IDAHO

On a scenic bend in Idaho's legendary Salmon River, Western Rivers Conservancy has successfully protected a dramatic viewshed and ensured the widely-loved Pine Bar Recreation Site remains forever accessible. The project, our first on the Salmon River, began in 2012 when we acquired 1,284 acres on a spectacular bend above the river. We purchased the land with the goal of conserving both the viewshed and the high-gradient creeks that tumble down the mountainside to nourish the river. The streams that flow through the property

directly influence habitat quality for five threatened or endangered fish species, including sockeye, Chinook, steelhead and migratory bull trout.

This summer, we conveyed this strategically located property to the BLM, which will now steward the lands for the sake of the Salmon River's fish and wildlife and to ensure access to Pine Bar remains unfettered and compatible with conservation.

Our efforts at Pine Bar are integral to our larger vision to ensure the Salmon River and its unique riverland habitat stay healthy and accessible to all. The Salmon River is the longest, wildest and cleanest major river in the Rockies, flowing 425 miles from its headwaters in the Sawtooth Mountains to its confluence with the Snake River in Hells Canyon. Its salmon and steelhead, which migrate farther than any anadromous fish in the West, navigate over 900 miles on their epic journey from the Pacific Ocean.

The project conserves prime winter range for Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep, Rocky Mountain elk, mule deer and white-tailed deer and habitat for black bear and mountain lion. The steep grasslands are believed to shelter two ESA-listed plants—Spalding's catchfly and MacFarlane's four o'clock—and to support sensitive species like peregrine and prairie falcon, mountain quail and western toad. ■

This summer, WRC completed conservation of an extensive and spectacular viewshed above the Salmon River and ensured continued access to the BLM's Pine Bar Recreation Site.



DAVE JENSEN

JOHN DAY RIVER, CONTINUED

that nourishes the John Day with a steady flow of cold water and once provided some of the best habitat for summer steelhead in the lower river. In terms of Columbia Basin steelhead recovery, this is an tremendous opportunity.

From a recreation perspective, WRC's purchase of the ranch is equally important. For countless anglers, hunters and boaters, Rattray Ranch is the only access point along a 70-mile stretch of the river. By purchasing the ranch and conveying it to the BLM, we can ensure this special area remains open to all.

The ranchlands are also critical to the region's unique wildlife. The property lies adjacent to the Thirtymile Wilderness Study Area and supports some 650 bighorn sheep, the largest herd in Oregon. Rocky Mountain elk, mule deer, pronghorn antelope, mountain lion, raptors, upland game birds and numerous sensitive bird species all inhabit the area.

Restoration of Thirtymile Creek will improve habitat and survival rates for juvenile summer steelhead, which become the largest smolts in the John Day River.



WWW.RICHARDROST.COM



DAVE JENSEN

WRC plans to acquire the ranch in December 2014 and convey it to the BLM once funds are available. While we own the ranch, we will continue to manage it as private property, with conservation a top priority. Once in BLM hands, the property can then be carefully managed for the sake of its incredibly unique fish and wildlife and to ensure ongoing, compatible public access to one of Oregon's most beloved rivers. ■

Completing Conservation of an Arizona Treasure

FOSSIL CREEK, ARIZONA

Flowing from a series of mineral springs in central Arizona, Fossil Creek is known for its travertine pools and stunning aquamarine water. In an arid landscape it is a lush oasis, providing habitat for rare native fish, beavers, otters, leopard frogs, bats and an extraordinary array of bird species.

Sadly, this gem of a stream was dewatered for over a century. But restoration efforts by Arizona Fish and Game, U.S. Forest Service and others brought the creek back to life. The dam was removed, and today Fossil Creek is considered the most successful river recovery project in the Southwest. It is now one of only two Wild and Scenic Rivers in all of Arizona.

This summer, WRC committed to purchase the last unprotected parcel of land within the Fossil Creek Wild and Scenic River corridor. Although at 20 acres the property is relatively small, the impact of buying the land will be significant. The effort will benefit the creek's rich fish and wildlife, protect outstanding scenic areas and archeological resources, and improve efforts by the Cococino National Forest to manage an increasing number of visitors.

What makes the effort truly worthwhile is the diversity of wildlife the creek supports. In all, more than 80 special-status species inhabit the area. Fifteen bat species occur in the river corridor, as do numerous bird species, including black hawks, peregrine falcons,



G. REID HEILMAN

bald eagles, Bell's vireos, Lucy's warblers and verdins. Following a decade of recovery work, the stream again supports nine native fish species, including spikedace, loach minnow, Gila topminnow, speckled dace and Sonora sucker. Along with the stream's unique mineral formations, the presence of these fish gives the creek national significance.

Fossil Creek also contains evidence of thousands of years of human habitation, including pit house villages, pueblo sites, rock art sites and more. Today, as more and more people rediscover and visit Fossil Creek, WRC's efforts will help Cococino National Forest ensure public enjoyment while minimizing impact on this fragile desert river ecosystem. ■

In Arizona, WRC is acquiring the last piece of privately owned land within the Fossil Creek Wild and Scenic River corridor and plans to convey it to the Cococino National Forest for permanent protection.

RIO GRANDE, CONTINUED

area that has lost significant fish and wildlife habitat to development, and where precious little riverfront is accessible to the public.

The project lies within the congressionally designated Rio Grande Natural Area, located between the Alamosa National Wildlife Refuge and New Mexico's Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River corridor. Our acquisition of these lands will allow for restoration of stream habitat, which will benefit imperiled native fish like the Rio Grande chub and Rio Grande sucker.

The San Luis Valley sits at the western edge of the Central Flyway and provides crucial habitat for an array of migratory bird species, including ducks, cranes, geese and an estimated 95% of the Rocky Mountain's sandhill crane population. The area also provides habitat for a plethora of songbird species, and the reach WRC will purchase has been designated critical habitat for the endangered southwestern willow flycatcher.

It is rare for a San Luis Valley property of this size to come up for sale along the Rio Grande. Given the opportunity, we are moving quickly to acquire these lands. Once the project is complete, an extensive and important reach of this great river will be conserved and open to the public forever. ■



RICK FROEHL

WRC's efforts on the Rio Grande will conserve habitat for endangered southwestern willow flycatcher.



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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Board of Directors Welcomes Two New Members

Tim Wood

Retired, Director of Oregon Parks and Recreation Department



Tim Wood has been a friend and supporter of Western Rivers Conservancy for nearly 20 years. He has a great love for rivers and brings to WRC's Board a deep understanding of the community values that natural streams provide. During his tenure as Director of Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, Tim championed our efforts to create Cottonwood Canyon State Park, which forever protected 16 miles of Oregon's John Day River and enabled extensive restoration along one of its key cold-water tributaries.

Bill Brown

*Retired, President
Green Diamond Resource Company*



Bill Brown is a longtime supporter of river conservation and for two decades has been a friend of WRC. Bill served as President of Green Diamond Resource Company and brings an invaluable natural resource business perspective to WRC. Under his leadership, Green Diamond's California operations were certified by the Forest Stewardship Council, and Bill has extensive knowledge of working with conservation organizations to devise creative ways of protecting sensitive natural areas in forested landscapes.



STEVE TERRILL

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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