

RIVERLANDS

NEWS FROM WESTERN RIVERS CONSERVANCY

Issue 28

Summer 2013

A Vision Realized on Oregon's John Day River



DAVID JENSEN

JOHN DAY RIVER, OREGON

On September 25, the John Day River will be officially home to Oregon's largest state park in a generation: Cottonwood Canyon State Park. It will protect over 16 miles of riverbank along both sides of the lower John Day and more than 16,000 acres of native shrub-steppe habitat. The park will offer a wild experience to visitors and guarantee permanent public access to outstanding fishing, hiking and hunting areas where access was previously difficult. And it will help ensure the long-term health of one of the greatest runs of native summer steelhead in the Pacific Northwest.

WRC purchased the former Murtha Ranch in 2008 because of its location, size and exceptional conservation values.

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WRC permanently conserved 16 miles along both banks of the John Day, including one of the most important cold-water tributaries on the lower river.

Conservation Milestone at Cross Mountain Canyon

YAMPA RIVER, COLORADO



DAVID DIETRICH

This summer, Western Rivers Conservancy completed a milestone project on Colorado's Yampa River, forever conserving 2.5 miles of the Yampa and opening new access to tens of thousands of acres of adjacent public wilderness. Permanent protection of these lands is a boon for native fish, and great news for outdoor enthusiasts, especially hunters and boaters.

WRC's efforts on the lower Yampa began in 2012 when we purchased a 920-acre cattle ranch at the entrance of Cross Mountain Canyon, a dramatic river gorge about 90 miles west of Steamboat Springs. Early this summer, we conveyed the ranch to the Bureau of Land Management, which will serve as the property's permanent conservation steward. The BLM will manage the property for its exceptional wildlife values as well as for the access it provides to the neighboring Cross Mountain Wilderness Study Area (WSA), also managed by the BLM.

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WRC's acquisition of Cross Mountain Canyon Ranch, visible in the distance, forever protects 2.5 miles of the Yampa River at the very entrance to Cross Mountain Canyon.



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Restoring a Watershed in the Idaho Panhandle

PRICHARD CREEK, IDAHO

Hoping to breathe new life into a recovering Idaho watershed, Western Rivers Conservancy has launched a new conservation effort on a unique stream: Prichard Creek. The project will expand habitat for bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout while creating new recreational opportunities in a stunning region of the Idaho Panhandle.

million current value). During this period, dredge and placer mining destroyed nearly every inch of fish and wildlife habitat within Prichard Creek and left a nearly unrecognizable graveled gouge in place of the stream.

Since then, Prichard Creek has slowly begun to recover. The stream runs exceptionally clear and cold, and native bull trout and westslope cutthroat thrive in the lower creek. But two miles of the stream were dug up so extensively that the creek runs entirely below the surface in summer. In some places, gravel piles line the banks.

If Prichard Creek is to sustain the wealth of fish and wildlife it once had, acquiring the property and pursuing extensive on-the-ground restoration work is imperative. To this end, WRC is now working to purchase 3,000 acres along Prichard Creek, including nearly ten miles of the stream and significant areas of upland forest. We plan to convey the lands to the BLM or US Forest Service, which will conduct major restoration work on the property.

Such an effort will rejuvenate spawning habitat and revive key riparian areas that are currently clogged with gravel. It will also improve public access in an area with outstanding recreational values, including fishing, hiking, wildlife watching and family rafting. It's a big project on a small stream, and one with potential to improve not just Prichard Creek, but the North Fork Coeur d'Alene watershed as a whole. ■



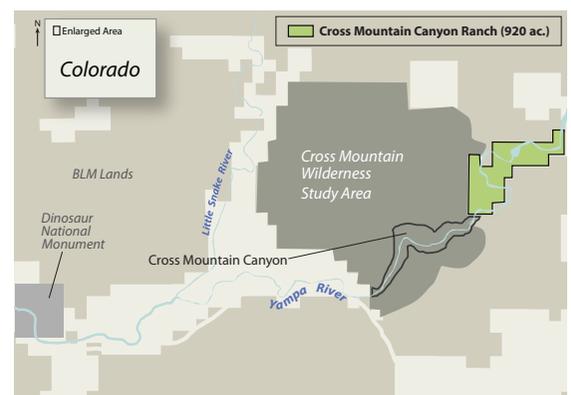
Goldenrod blooms over Eagle Creek on the property WRC is working to conserve. Eagle Creek meets Prichard Creek just above the confluence of Prichard and the North Fork Coeur d'Alene River.

At the height of the American Gold Rush, Prichard Creek was a hotbed of mining activity. It flows only 12 miles, from its headwaters near the Montana border to Eagle Creek, a tributary of the North Fork Coeur d'Alene River. It's a short stream by most standards, but from its valley floor, miners extracted over \$4 million in gold (\$180

YAMPA RIVER, CONTINUED

Cross Mountain WSA is home to one of the largest herds of Rocky Mountain elk on the continent and is legendary among big-game hunters. Until now, public access was difficult due to private property bordering the WSA. Today, any hunter with a valid tag can enter the area, as can anyone with an interest in exploring this remote reach of the Colorado Plateau. The project also improves access to Cross Mountain Canyon itself, which is famous among rafters and kayakers for its formidable stretch of Class III-V whitewater.

From a fisheries perspective, the project is equally important. The lower Yampa is home to four species of endangered warm-water fish: razorback sucker, humpback chub, bonytail chub and Colorado pikeminnow. All four of these fish are native to the Colorado Basin and migrate hundreds of miles from the White River to the Yampa to spawn. Ensuring the health of the Yampa River is critical to their long-term survival. ■





PETER MARBACH

The John Day River is cherished by many, including boaters, hikers, anglers, hunters and birders. WRC's acquisition guarantees permanent public access to a coveted stretch of the lower river.

JOHN DAY RIVER, CONTINUED

Some of the John Day's most spectacular stretches, where massive basalt cliffs tower over the river, lie within the property. The ranch is home to rare animals like California bighorn sheep, burrowing owls, ferruginous hawk and sagebrush lizards. At the north end of the park, one of the most important cold-water tributaries on the lower John Day, a stream called Hay Creek, flows into the river. Steelhead smolts and spawning redds have been identified more than seven miles up the creek.

In anticipation of the park's opening, WRC and

its partners conducted streamside restoration work on lower Hay Creek and along five miles of the main-stem John Day. Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD) also carried out restoration work on the main-stem and is currently wrapping up work on a small picnic area, a welcome station and a primitive campground.

OPRD will manage the park as a mostly roadless, wild alternative to the more developed parks in the state park system. Following a grand opening on September 25, Cottonwood Canyon State Park will be open to the public. We hope all of you have a chance to visit and experience this magnificent new park. ■

Hope for Salmon and Steelhead on the North Santiam

The North Santiam River was once a powerhouse of salmon and steelhead production for Oregon's Willamette Basin. It produced an incredible two-thirds of the Willamette River's winter steelhead and a third of its spring Chinook. These runs have declined steeply, however, and are now listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act.

This summer, Western Rivers Conservancy bolstered the hope that these runs might one day approach their former abundance. In June, we conveyed a farm on the North Santiam to the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde. The project conserves over two miles of river and side-channel habitat and forever safeguards one of the largest tracts of native riparian forest on the lower river. At the same time, the project places 338 acres of culturally important land into the hands of the Tribe, which will manage the property for the sake of native fish and wildlife. Now in Tribal hands, the property is known as "Chahalpam," meaning "place of the Santiam Kalapuya people" in Kalapuyan.



LEE H. REINTZ



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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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WRC Opens New Colorado Office

To support our growing focus on rivers and streams in the Interior West, WRC has opened a third office, this time in Denver, Colorado. Dieter Erdmann, who has over fifteen years of land and water conservation experience, heads the office as Interior West Program Director. For five years prior to joining WRC, Dieter served as Director of Conservation Operations at Colorado Open Lands (COL), where he worked for over a decade.

WRC is committed to Colorado and the Interior West, and we feel Denver is an excellent base of operations—and Dieter the perfect director—for our efforts throughout the region. In Colorado, we have projects underway along the Yampa, Gunnison and Little Cimarron rivers, and in Idaho we are working on the Salmon River and Prichard Creek, a tributary of the North Fork Coeur d'Alene River.



Dieter Erdmann, WRC's new Interior West Program Director, based in Denver.



DAVE JENSEN

Thank you for your support!

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