

RIVERLANDS

NEWS FROM WESTERN RIVERS CONSERVANCY

Issue 27

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Protecting the Gateway to Yampa River Canyon Country

YAMPA RIVER, COLORADO

Hailed for being the least dammed river in the Colorado Basin, the Yampa River flows 250 miles from its Rocky Mountain headwaters to its confluence with the Green River in Dinosaur National Monument. Along the way, it nourishes one of the finest riparian corridors in the West. Its waters are home to four imperiled desert fish, its rapids are prized by boaters, and the river is flanked by some of the most fabled hunting grounds in the country.

The most famous stretch of the Yampa is its descent through Cross Mountain Canyon, where the river has carved a dramatic gorge deep into the desert plateau. Here, sandstone walls tower more than a thousand feet above the whitewater

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WRC's purchase of Gumdrop Ranch conserves 2.5 miles of the Yampa River at the entrance to Cross Mountain Canyon and opens access to 88,000 acres of public land.

Historic Conservation & Recreation Corridor Nears Completion

SANDY RIVER, OREGON

This winter, Western Rivers Conservancy (WRC) is nearing completion of its landmark conservation project on Oregon's remarkable Sandy River. The project, a joint effort by WRC, Portland General Electric (PGE) and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), forever safeguards 17 miles of stream for fish, wildlife and public enjoyment. Upon conveyance of 607 more acres to their long-term stewards, the original vision of creating a conservation and recreation corridor along the middle reach of the Sandy will be nearly complete.

WRC's work on the Sandy River began in 1999, when it partnered with Portland General Electric and a coalition of partners to bring down two dams on the Sandy River system and restore the main-stem Sandy and its key tributaries to health. Removal of the dams was an historic accomplishment and reestablished

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On Oregon's Sandy River, WRC and its partners have created a 17-mile refuge for wild salmon and steelhead and an outdoor treasure for Portlanders.



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WRC Forges New Conservation Path in Colorado

LITTLE CIMARRON, COLORADO

Launching a groundbreaking project that may serve as a model for future river conservation in Colorado, Western Rivers Conservancy (WRC) recently purchased a key property above the Centennial State's Little Cimarron River. A jewel of a stream, the Little Cimarron's upper 13 miles

Valley, a six-mile stretch of the Little Cimarron runs intermittently, at best, in all but the wettest of years.

When a strategically located farm in the Pleasant Valley went into foreclosure, WRC, working together with Colorado Water Trust (CWT), recognized a unique opportunity to put water *back* in the Little Cimarron. The property, although set back from the river, possesses senior water rights on a key irrigation ditch. We are now working in partnership with CWT and Colorado Open Lands (COL) to conserve the land and dedicate the farm's water as exclusively "in-stream". Simultaneously, we will pursue creative approaches to allow continued agricultural operations. Once successful, the project will effectively re-water the river when the river needs it most.

Once the Little Cimarron flows year-round, fish will be free to migrate between the upper and lower reaches of the river. Continuous flow will also contribute to the long-term health of the famed Gunnison River, which the Little Cimarron meets just upstream from the spectacular Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park.

We are thrilled to be working with CWT and COL on this unique project. Its completion will benefit not just fish, but area wildlife, local residents and anyone who ventures out to explore the "Little Cim"—a river that may one day earn the title of Gold Medal Trout Stream. ■



CHASE JANVUS

Restoring year-round flows to Colorado's Little Cimarron River will improve habitat for rainbow trout and other native fish.

meet the standards of a Colorado Gold Medal trout stream. Its crystalline waters tumble fresh from the Uncompahgre Wilderness, and ample insect life nourishes healthy populations of brook and rainbow trout.

Still, the Little Cimarron has never garnered the Gold Medal title. One reason is interrupted flow. As the river winds through Colorado's Pleasant

SANDY RIVER, CONTINUED

some of the system's best spawning and rearing habitat for threatened salmon and steelhead.

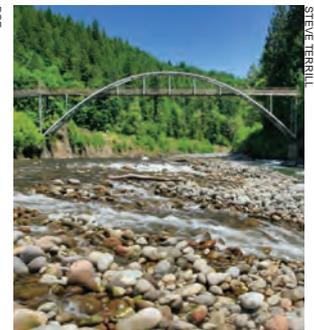
Over the course of the project, PGE conveyed nearly 1,300 acres of land, transforming our shared vision into a reality. Additionally, WRC acquired over 1,200 acres of lands and conveyed them to the BLM and other local agencies to be permanently protected. The combined acreage creates a sanctuary for fish and a vast, densely forested riverland playground for the public – all within 25 miles of the Pacific Northwest's third largest city.

By working in partnership with PGE, the BLM and others, Western Rivers Conservancy helped pioneer a project that will benefit not just native fish and wildlife, but generations of Oregonians who enjoy and revive themselves on the Sandy River. Most importantly, the Sandy's 56-mile journey, from its glacial headwaters on Mount Hood to the Columbia River, is wilder, freer—and better protected—than ever. ■

For over a century the 47-foot-high Marmot Dam blocked the Sandy River's natural flow. WRC and a coalition of partners worked with Portland General Electric to remove the dam and make the Sandy a free-flowing river once again.



Marmot Dam before removal.



Marmot Dam site after removal.

STEVE TERRELL

Wenatchee River Stronghold Protected

NASON CREEK, WASHINGTON

This fall, Western Rivers Conservancy (WRC) protected a major source of clear water for Washington’s Wenatchee River: Nason Creek. The stream has been the focus of several restoration efforts to improve the health of the greater Wenatchee system, and WRC’s involvement comes at a critical moment.

In September 2012, WRC conveyed 648 acres of land to be part of the surrounding Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest. This will conserve a vulnerable mountainside flanking the Alpine Lakes Wilderness, where four tributaries pour from pristine lakes into Nason Creek.

With logging now permanently removed from the equation, the National Forest will decommission 17 bridges and stream crossings – some of them failing – along with a network of logging roads on the land. This will prevent debris and sediment from being washed downstream, which could easily degrade fish runs and threaten large-scale restoration projects currently underway downstream. WRC has coordinated with the restoration partners—including the U.S. Forest Service, Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife, area Tribes and Chelan



LEE H. RENZI

County—to protect the vulnerable mountainside so their efforts are not compromised by sedimentation.

The property protected by WRC also preserves a beautiful view from Highway 2 and offers the opportunity for new trail routes into the adjacent Alpine Lakes Wilderness. Hikers, backpackers, anglers and skiers will enjoy improved access to this sublime outdoor playground. ■

WRC’s recent acquisition of 648 acres above Nason Creek helps guarantee the future health of this cold-water Wenatchee River tributary.

YAMPA RIVER, CONTINUED

below. At the entrance to the canyon, Western Rivers Conservancy (WRC) has purchased a strategically located, 920-acre property called Gumdrop Ranch. When completed, the acquisition will permanently protect 2.5 miles of the Yampa River at the very entrance to the gorge and provide unprecedented public access to 88,000 acres of surrounding public land.

This year, WRC hopes to convey the ranch to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), which will serve as the property’s long-term conservation steward. For the BLM, which manages the adjacent Cross Mountain Wilderness Study Area, this is an historic acquisition. Until now, access to the area, which is home to one of the largest elk herds in the Lower 48, has been strictly through private lands or by boat. WRC’s purchase of Gumdrop Ranch at Cross Mountain Canyon will give everyone equal access to the wilderness and open up prized hunting grounds that have been effectively off limits to the public until now.

WRC’s purchase also creates a 2.5-mile river sanctuary for four endangered desert fish: Colorado pikeminnow (which can reach six feet long), humpback chub, bonytail chub and razorback sucker. Even in its driest years, the Yampa provides one-third of the habitat left on earth for these ancient fish. ■



Gumdrop Ranch and the surrounding public lands provide key habitat for one of the largest elk herds in the continental United States.



WESTERN RIVERS CONSERVANCY

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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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Board of Directors Welcomes Two New Members

Ken Grossman

Founder, Sierra Nevada Brewing Co.

Ken Grossman has been a mainstay for WRC since his first election to the Board in 2003. As founder and owner of Sierra Nevada Brewing Co. in Chico, California, Ken understands the challenges of growing a business, whether for-profit or non-profit. After a year off to oversee expansion of his own business, Ken has returned to WRC's Board for a new term. Ken is also a Board Member of Sacramento River Partners.



Robert Blais

Managing Director, Citi Private Bank

Bob Blais has worked with WRC for many years as the founding Chair of the Hoh River Trust, the non-profit steward of lands that WRC purchased along the Hoh River, on Washington's Olympic Peninsula. Bob is a Managing Director of Citi Private Bank in Seattle, advising wealthy clients on investments, estate planning and philanthropy. An avid fly angler in his free time, Bob is committed to conserving our American heritage of natural rivers.



DOUGLAS HUTCHINSON

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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