



WESTERN RIVERS
CONSERVANCY

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Prime Stretch of a Major Clark Fork River Tributary Conserved and Soon Open to Public

Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest acquires 131-acre parcel on Racetrack Creek in southwest Montana through land conveyance from Western Rivers Conservancy.



The Oxbows property includes a mile of Racetrack Creek, prime habitat for fish and wildlife.

Photo Credit: Kyle Dudgeon/Western Rivers Conservancy

POWELL COUNTY, Montana (July 16)—In southwest Montana, Western Rivers Conservancy and the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest conserved the last significant private inholding on upper Racetrack Creek, a headwater tributary to Montana’s upper Clark Fork River. Last week, WRC conveyed the remote, 131-acre property called The Oxbows to the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest, conserving prime fish and wildlife habitat and improving public river access next to the only recreation site in the area, the Racetrack Campground and Picnic Area.

“Because of its top-notch fish and wildlife habitat and its recreational value, the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest wanted to acquire this inholding for years,” said Allen Law, Interior West Project Manager at Western Rivers Conservancy. “We were able to buy the property and then partner with the national forest to make that vision a reality. We’re thrilled to see this special place conserved and open for Montanans to fish, hunt and otherwise explore and enjoy.”

Racetrack Creek is a 23-mile-long stream that flows clear and cold from the Flint Creek Range to the Clark Fork River, Montana’s largest river by volume. With The Oxbows property conserved,

all of upper Racetrack Creek is now protected within the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest. The property contains a mile of the creek and is spread across a scenic, shallow canyon.

The Oxbows is located where upper Racetrack Creek changes from a high-altitude headwater stream to a slower meandering river. This transition zone makes for prime rearing habitat for westslope cutthroat trout and potential habitat for bull trout. The property is also a key part of a migration corridor for large animals like Rocky Mountain elk, moose and mule deer moving between the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem to the south and the Crown of the Continent Ecosystem to the north.

In addition to its superb fish and wildlife habitat, The Oxbows lies immediately adjacent to the [Racetrack Campground and Picnic Area](#). The area is especially popular during hunting season, and campers enjoy access to trout fishing on Racetrack Creek. Were the property to have been developed, it would have had significant impact on the campground and surrounding natural landscape.

Western Rivers Conservancy first set its sights on buying and conserving The Oxbows in 2022. The organization purchased the property in June 2023 and then worked to obtain funding through the Land and Water Conservation Fund to convey it to the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest. Now that the property is in public hands, a pristine reach of Racetrack Creek will remain permanently intact for fish, wildlife and anyone seeking to explore this rugged corner of Big Sky Country.

This project was made possible by funding from the Land and Water Conservation Fund. Pivotal support also came from the Cinnabar Foundation, Powell County and individuals throughout the West.

About Western Rivers Conservancy

Western Rivers Conservancy's motto is "Sometimes to save a river, you have to buy it." WRC purchases land along the West's finest rivers and streams to conserve habitat for fish and wildlife, protect key sources of cold water and create public access for all to enjoy. To ensure the lands it acquires are protected in perpetuity, WRC transfers them to long-term stewards including the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, state parks and Tribal nations. WRC has created sanctuaries for fish and wildlife and secured recreational access along 250 rivers and streams around the West. It has protected more than 440 river miles and over 220,000 acres of land in nine western states. Its approach to river conservation is effective, tangible and permanent. More information at westernrivers.org.