

2015 Accomplishments

Protecting and Restoring Streamflows and Rivers



Fielder and Wimer Dam Removals

In 2015, WaterWatch and project partners removed Fielder and Wimer dams from Evans Creek in the Rogue Basin. These two obsolete dams ranked fourth and eighth on the state of Oregon’s top fish passage barrier priorities list. Their removal reconnects up to 70 miles of high quality habitat in Evans Creek and continues to build on our highly successful “Free the Rogue” campaign, which has helped achieve the removal or notching of Savage Rapids, Gold Hill, Gold Ray and Elk Creek dams to benefit Rogue Basin salmon and steelhead.



Hope for the Klamath National Wildlife Refuges

In the spring of 2015, WaterWatch and allies won a court ruling ordering the federal government to complete long overdue “comprehensive conservation plans” for managing the Klamath Basin National Wildlife Refuges in 2016. These plans, mandated by law, require the government to ensure that commercial activities on refuge lands do not harm wildlife. While the vast majority of refuges in the United States have completed such plans, five Klamath refuges have tellingly lagged behind. Many conservationists believe that the completion and implementation of these plans — following the letter of the law — is the best hope for saving these long-abused refuges.



Sustaining the Columbia River

WaterWatch advocated with conservation, faith, and tribal interests to modernize the Columbia River Treaty with Canada. Our goal: streamflows and water quality to support thriving fish, wildlife, and river-dependent communities in the Columbia Basin. WaterWatch also successfully defended Oregon programs to protect streamflows for migratory fish in the Columbia Basin.



Malheur Basin Groundwater Reform

WaterWatch called out unsustainable groundwater development in the Malheur Lakes Basin, spurring the state to begin working towards a more sustainable level of groundwater use in one of Oregon’s most spectacular basins. This change of course on groundwater will help protect streams, other water users and the wetlands and surface waters of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge.

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Progress in the Deschutes Basin

In 2015, WaterWatch served notice that it will take action against activities that harm the fish and wildlife in the Upper Deschutes River, which is currently managed more like an irrigation ditch than a river, causing significant harm to the local ecosystem and to Central Oregon's economy. WaterWatch also worked all year with state and federal agencies to protect streamflows and restore the 72-mile reach of the Crooked River below Bowman Dam for steelhead and redband trout.



Scenic Waterway Act River Designations

WaterWatch helped shepherd through to the governor's desk the first new designations of rivers under Oregon's Scenic Waterway Act in thirty years. Molalla River and Chetco River segments are now ready to be designated for new protections. These results follow WaterWatch's leadership in reviving the Scenic Waterway Act program after three decades of agency inactivity.



The Water and Growth Program

On the Chetco, Kilchis, McKenzie, Row, and Willamette Rivers, WaterWatch's Water and Growth Program implemented a vision to protect the streamflows needed by imperiled fish and to boost water conservation planning. WaterWatch negotiated with the state and cities to leave more water in ecologically sensitive rivers and won appellate cases enforcing a fish protection standard. This program is critical to many rivers like the Kilchis, where a city has proposed to dry up the entire river in the summer; and the Chetco, where the city's own studies show that full development of a water right could kill off a prized run of fall chinook salmon.



Protecting Critical Water and Wildlife Management

WaterWatch helped preserve budget funds for many local fish biologists for the Department of Fish and Wildlife as well as key agency functions that helps determine and meet the water needs of fish and wildlife in permitting decisions.



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Saving Clackamas River Salmon and Steelhead

Going to bat for some of metro-Portland's favorite backyard salmon and steelhead runs, WaterWatch defeated a proposal by certain municipal water developers to take almost half of the summertime flow of the lower Clackamas River at the expense of imperiled fish. WaterWatch sent the state of Oregon and water developers back to the drawing board to find a way to leave enough water in the river to sustain its iconic fish.

2015 Marks WaterWatch's 30th Anniversary

WaterWatch was the first organization in the West to focus solely on the protection and restoration of streamflows. Since 1985, **WaterWatch has worked to protect and restore streamflows in Oregon's rivers for fish, wildlife, and the people who depend on healthy rivers.** Given the impacts of climate change, drought, new development pressures on our waters, and the loss of cold water habitat for imperiled species, our mission is now more important than ever.

WaterWatch remains the only conservation group monitoring all decisions of the Oregon Water Resources Department. Our watchdogging work protects the public interest in water and increases accountability, legal compliance, public involvement, and the transparency of the state's decisions about water. For thirty years WaterWatch has played a unique and essential role for Oregon's rivers.

The staff and Board of Directors of WaterWatch thank you for your continuing investment in our shared passion for protecting Oregon's waters.

