



North Umpqua River upstream of Winchester Dam

**W****inchester Dam:** On the North Umpqua River, we are leading a coalition of 22 local and statewide groups working to end the harm caused by Winchester Dam, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's second highest priority for fish passage improvement among all privately owned dams. This disintegrating, 17-foot-high, 130-year-old structure's only purpose is to maintain a private waterski lake for surrounding landowners, but it kills, injures or delays salmon and steelhead trying to access 160 miles of superb river habitat. Among other 2020 accomplishments, our coalition has intervened in a state proceeding to hold the owners accountable for 2018 repairs which killed numerous fish and polluted the primary drinking water source for 37,000 people, worked to ensure that Oregon officials required the owners to meet state dam safety standards for the first time in decades, and filed suit to stop harm the dam causes to protected Coho Salmon—after the dam owners rejected our coalition's offer to raise the public and private funds necessary to remove the dam at little to no direct cost to the owners.



**I****nstream Water Rights:** In 1987, WaterWatch drafted and secured passage of the Oregon Instream Water Rights Act to create legal water rights for water flowing instream. WaterWatch's advocacy over several years bore fruit in the past twelve months with Oregon establishing 80 new instream water rights on ecologically important north and mid coast rivers like the Salmonberry, Siletz, Nestucca, and Alsea. This begins to fill some important gaps in coverage across Oregon. Over the next twelve months, our work to revive this program should



produce another 160 new instream water rights in the Umpqua, Rogue and South Coast Basins to protect a variety of streamflows. Combined with existing instream water rights, these new rights provide a potent form of natural climate insurance for these streams and their fish. This is arguably the most significant streamflow and environmental water protection initiative in North America today.

**Rogue River Dam Removals:** In 2019, WaterWatch secured landowner agreements to remove three priority salmon and steelhead barriers on two tributaries in the Rogue River’s Applegate subbasin. Through 2020, thanks to local fishing groups, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, and many others, we had raised the nearly \$400,000 necessary to remove these three dams in 2021, meet landowner needs and permanently improve access to 15 miles of salmon and steelhead habitat.



Rogue River, Siskiyou National Forest



**Willamette River Basin:** WaterWatch continues to be the central conservation participant in a “once in a generation” process to allocate fairly 1.6 million acre feet of water stored in 13 Army Corps of Engineers reservoirs in the Willamette Basin. WaterWatch helped negotiate language in federal legislation requiring the Corps to implement the allocation in accordance with the biological needs of imperiled salmon and steelhead. The legislation, which was passed by the House and awaits action in the Senate, also allows the Corps to reallocate up to 10 percent of the water later if required by future biological opinions. Given this language in the bill, WaterWatch and other conservation groups suing to block the plan agreed to put their litigation on hold.



Oregon Spotted Frog

**Deschutes River Basin:** Thirteen years in the making, the final Deschutes Habitat Conservation Plan was released in November. The Plan will, over many years, begin to restore the winter streamflows in the Upper Deschutes that scientists have determined are

needed to avoid killing aquatic species in the river. Likewise, over many years, the Plan will begin to reduce damaging, scouring high summer flows that result from using the river as an irrigation ditch. However, while the plan is improved over earlier versions, it still falls short of the needs of the fish and wildlife species that the plan should protect. WaterWatch will continue to push for improvements to help restore the beloved rivers of the Deschutes River Basin.



Wild Chinook Salmon

**Clackamas River:** Since 2008, WaterWatch has served as a critical watchdog and legal backstop as the City of Lake Oswego and other municipalities have sought entitlements to withdraw almost half of the dry season flow of the Lower Clackamas River, thus further imperiling four runs of salmon and steelhead that use the Lower Clackamas. Although WaterWatch previously won these cases at the Oregon Court of Appeals, the Oregon Water Resources Department again approved the diversions without protecting the water needs of these fish. In 2020, WaterWatch completed the next round of briefing in the Oregon Court of Appeals. Oral argument will follow soon. This and other ongoing efforts will be crucial to ensuring the future viability of salmon and steelhead in the Clackamas.

**Lake Abert:** In 2020, WaterWatch continued to advocate for water solutions for Oregon’s rare, internationally significant saline lake. Lake Abert provides critical food for migratory and nesting birds, including



The American Avocet (pictured here) and other migratory birds rely on Lake Abert

eared grebes, Wilson’s Phalaropes and Snowy Plovers. WaterWatch is working to ensure the lake’s ecological importance is recognized and protected. We have been working to resolve our challenges to state water permitting decisions for Rivers End Ranch on the Chewaucan River with the goal of increasing inflow to the lake. Our goals are to encourage problem solving that will increase much needed inflow to the lake and better long-term resilience of Lake Abert.

**Place Based Planning:** WaterWatch is working with diverse stakeholders in two collaborative water planning efforts: Lower John Day and Harney/Malheur Lakes. The plans must consider both instream and out-of-stream water needs and operate within existing law. In both processes, WaterWatch is working closely on the ecological and instream issues. In the Harney, where Pleistocene era groundwater is being pumped unsustainably, we are helping to identify and evaluate a variety of tools and approaches to limit groundwater pumping to reduce impacts to residential well owners, farmers, streams, lakes, valuable plants and wetlands.



# LOOKING FORWARD



**ADAPTING TO CLIMATE CHANGE:** In 2021, to help Oregon's waters, species and people adapt to a changing climate, WaterWatch will secure new instream water rights to protect water instream, remove multiple dams to reconnect habitat and advocate for policies and agency budgets that will help cold water habitat and species—and the people who depend on them—adapt to a changing climate.

**WORKING TOWARDS WATER JUSTICE:** WaterWatch will continue to advocate for laws and policies that result in equitable water management across Oregon and to right historic wrongs visited upon people and the environment through outdated water policies. In the 2021 legislative session a major focus for WaterWatch will be to preserve agency programs that are critical to streamflow restoration and protection and to secure more responsible, and equitable water management that benefits species and people statewide. Examples include increasing the pace and scale of water use measurement, working to address the water impacts of Confined Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) and defending against any weakening of protective policies and laws. WaterWatch will also continue to advocate for water justice in places like the Malheur Lakes Basin where excessive groundwater pumping hurts people and species and on the Clackamas River, where our legal work is protecting the water needed by four imperiled runs of salmon and steelhead and the jobs and people who depend on healthy fish runs.

**SALMON, STEELHEAD, LAMPREY AND OTHER AQUATIC SPECIES:** 2021 will also be a major year for the future health of the Deschutes, Crooked, Klamath, North Umpqua and Willamette rivers and Lake Abert and the Klamath Basin National Wildlife Refuges. In all of these waters, WaterWatch will advocate for enough water for imperiled species and policies and investments that account for the needs of fish and wildlife and the people who depend on healthy waters in Oregon.

## WaterWatch of Oregon

Main Office: 213 SW Ash St. Suite 208 Portland, OR 97204

Southern Oregon Office: PO Box 261, Ashland, OR, 97520

[www.waterwatch.org](http://www.waterwatch.org) • Main Office: 503.295.4039 • S.OR Office: 541.708.0731