

2021 Accomplishments



WATERWATCH
Protecting Natural Flows in Oregon Rivers

Steelhead Falls Deschutes River

THANKS TO YOU, Oregon's rivers and waters are more resilient to a changing climate. Our water policies are smarter and the state has made important investments in ecologically appropriate management of the state's waters. Your support produced these amazing results for Oregon's waters, rivers, aquatic species and people in 2021.

PROGRESS ON THE MOST SIGNIFICANT ENVIRONMENTAL WATER CAMPAIGN IN NORTH AMERICA:

In 1987, WaterWatch drafted and secured passage of the Oregon Instream Water Rights Act to create legal water rights for water flowing instream. Over several years, WaterWatch's advocacy with agencies and multiple governors has revived this program from a long dormancy. As a result of our work, in 2021, Oregon applied for 22 new instream rights in the Rogue Basin, 116 new instream water rights in the Umpqua Basin and 23 new instream water rights in the South Coast Basin. Instream water rights make streams more resilient to the effects of climate change and provide a potent form of natural climate insurance for the affected streams – and their fish and aquatic species. In terms of volumes of water protected and the species and areas of watersheds impacted, this is the most significant streamflow protection initiative in North America today.

FREE FLOWING RIVERS: On the **North Umpqua River**, WaterWatch continued to lead 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. We also went to court to address the harm the dam causes to imperiled coast coho salmon.

WaterWatch and project partners successfully removed three obsolete dams on **Slate** and **Welter** creeks. Slate Creek is a high priority tributary of the Applegate River in the **Rogue Basin**. This project opens up access to over 15 miles of high quality habitat for a variety of salmon, steelhead, trout and lamprey.

Elsewhere, we defended against the proposed siting of harmful new dams in the **Willamette Basin** and in the **Upper Crooked Basin**, where private interests want to build five new dams, including one that would inundate part of the Wild and Scenic North Fork Crooked River.

Our Free Flowing Rivers Program also advocated for the protection and restoration of fish passage in many small historic fish bearing streams across Oregon.





Rafting on the Rogue River

2021 – A MILESTONE IN LEGISLATIVE FUNDING FOR WATER: WaterWatch's advocacy in the 2021 Oregon Legislature was instrumental in securing long sought investments in water – about half a billion dollars across multiple programs. The Oregon Water Resources Department gained over 30 positions, an unprecedented gain for this very small agency. Over half of these positions will be involved in managing Oregon's groundwaters. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife saw a 38% general fund increase, much of which went to the agency's Water Program and to create a new Habitat Division. This money will begin to reverse the chronic underfunding of these agencies, particularly in the science and water management functions, and are critical to improving water management and the climate resiliency of our rivers and aquifers.

development. WaterWatch advocated for the state to stop "defaulting to yes" on new requests for groundwater where the state does not know if the proposed use is sustainable.

REFORMING MUNICIPAL WATER USE: In 2021, our Water and Growth Program increased the sustainability of municipal water supplies and protected biodiversity in source waters used by Oregon's largest cities.

• **WILLAMETTE BASIN:** WaterWatch's advocacy ensured that the Army Corps of Engineers' reallocation of 1.6 million acre-feet of water stored by the Corps behind 13 dams will include an instream allocation to meet streamflow needs of Endangered Species Act-listed fish in the Willamette River and its tributaries. WaterWatch also went to court to keep municipal water withdrawals from the Willamette River from making the river too warm for imperiled fish.

• **CLACKAMAS RIVER:** WaterWatch once again went to the Oregon Court of Appeals for the Clackamas River and its salmon and steelhead runs. Despite our previous victory, the cities of Lake Oswego, Tigard, West Linn, Oregon City and continue to seek to divert an additional 100 million gallons a day from the Lower Clackamas, which would reduce streamflows below those needed for imperiled salmon and steelhead.



Harney County, female phalarope

PROTECTING COLD, CLEAN GROUNDWATER AND COLD WATER HABITAT: WaterWatch's focus on groundwater recognizes the close link between cold water habitat and groundwater in a climate changed Oregon – and the unsustainable nature of Oregon's current groundwater policies that threaten the health of many rivers, wetlands, species and other groundwater users. In 2021, WaterWatch analyzed, identified and presented to the Oregon Water Resources Department evidence of illegal groundwater use in Harney region and filed an amicus brief (an informational document with expertise or insight) in the Court of Appeals supporting denial of a new groundwater



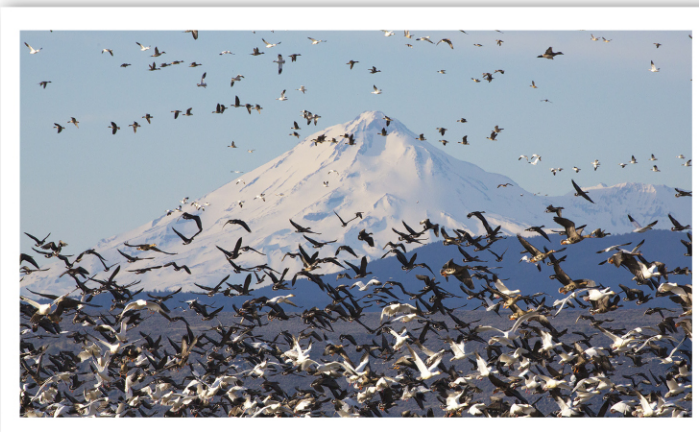
Chinook salmon during spawning



Lake Abert

PROTECTING AND RESTORING ICONIC RIVER BASINS AND AQUATIC HABITAT:

• **Klamath River Basin:** WaterWatch (represented by CRAG Law Center) fought for Klamath Basin wetlands, lakes, fish and wildlife by challenging a plan for the Klamath Basin National Wildlife Refuges that would continue to favor commercial agriculture on the refuges instead of the imperiled wetlands and birds that the refuges were intended to protect. WaterWatch also went to court (represented by Earthjustice and Karl Anuta) against attempts by irrigators to stop the Bureau of Reclamation from providing water from Upper Klamath Lake to the Klamath River to meet the streamflow needs of imperiled salmon.



Klamath Wildlife Refuge

• **Lake Abert - a key destination on the Pacific Flyway:** WaterWatch worked with allied organizations to address the decline of the stunning and internationally significant Lake Abert. It is Oregon's largest saline lake and provides critically important habitat for birds on the Pacific Flyway. WaterWatch also supported the bi-partisan Saline Lake Ecosystems in the Great Basin States Program Act and accompanying appropriations to provide much needed foundational science for these ecosystems.

• **Deschutes River Basin:** After six years of advocacy, the Bureau of Reclamation finally applied for a water right to protect streamflows below Bowman Dam when "fish water" is

released from Prineville Reservoir. When finalized, this secondary water right will protect streamflows essential for salmonid habitat in the 72-mile reach between Bowman Dam and Lake Billy Chinook. WaterWatch also served on the Deschutes Collaborative as a member of the working group and the technical, planning and groundwater committees. The Collaborative is preparing a management plan to meet the water needs of environment, cities and agriculture in the Upper Deschutes Basin.

• **Columbia River - Umatilla Basin:** WaterWatch continued to fight against new industrial scale dairies (because they use so much water) and helped prevent a new mega-dairy from locating in parched Northeastern Oregon.

PLACE-BASED PLANNING:

WaterWatch provided a strong voice for aquatic ecosystems and water management accountability in the place-based collaborative water planning processes for the Lower John Day and Harney Basins. WaterWatch continues to apply its expertise and be a voice for groundwater dependent ecosystems, river flows, fish, wildlife and better water management in these pilot processes and in shaping what comes next.

• **Lower John Day Basin:** WaterWatch ensured that instream flow needs for fish and wildlife are recognized and protected in the water resources plan developed for the Lower John Day Basin.

• **Harney/Malheur Basin:** WaterWatch helped develop solutions to the over-issuance of groundwater irrigation permits in the Harney Basin; and advocated for groundwater dependent ecosystems, the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, and water right enforcement and water management accountability. WaterWatch provided a strong voice for aquatic ecosystems in the Harney Place-Based Planning process.





Large spring on the Upper Rogue River

LOOKING FORWARD



ADAPTING TO CLIMATE CHANGE:

In 2022, 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 smarter, more equitable water policies 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. Examples include increasing the pace and scale of water use measurement, working to address the water impacts of Confined Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs), defending against any weakening of protective policies and laws and improving habitat for salmon. WaterWatch will also continue to advocate for water justice in places such as Malheur Lakes Basin, where excessive groundwater pumping hurts people and species.

SALMON, STEELHEAD, LAMPREY AND OTHER AQUATIC SPECIES:

2022 will also be a major year for the future health of the Deschutes, Crooked, Klamath, North Umpqua and Willamette rivers, and for Lake Abert and the Klamath Basin National Wildlife Refuges. In all of these basins and places, 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.

Thank you for your support and for making this work possible.

