



WATERWATCH
Protecting Natural Flows in Oregon Rivers

Accomplishments

2023

R I V E R S N E E D W A T E R

Happy Holidays!

There is so much to be thankful for this holiday season. At WaterWatch, we are grateful to supporters like you who make it possible for WaterWatch to protect and restore Oregon's rivers, lakes, fish, wildlife, and people. This year was a landmark year for WaterWatch, and our enclosed 2023 accomplishments report showcases the impacts you have made possible. From advancing instream water rights to removing obsolete barriers to fish passage and preventing new dams from being built, your support allows us to give a voice to rivers across the state.

Your appreciation and understanding of the importance of healthy rivers and smart, equitable, climate resilient water policies to Oregon's quality of life and economy makes a huge difference. None of these successes would have been possible without you. *You* are the common thread in our victories for Oregon's waters!

Now, more than ever, we need your support to prevent our rivers from being degraded and dewatered. We all want to leave a legacy of healthy Oregon rivers for fish and wildlife — and for our children and grandchildren. Your gift goes a long way toward helping us reach that goal.

To be clear: Caring about our rivers is important, but by itself it is not enough. There are powerful, political, and moneyed interests who will dam,

drain, and divert our rivers to trickles *if* we don't continue to stand together and demand healthy rivers for Oregon.

For over 38 years, WaterWatch has stood with you to protect and restore the rivers and streams you care about most. Despite recent, often remarkable successes, serious threats remain. Climate change, outdated water laws and policies, and ill-conceived water development projects all threaten the rivers we love in Oregon.

Invest in your rivers and Oregon's waters today by making a special year-end gift to WaterWatch. In doing so, you'll leave a legacy of healthy rivers, lakes and wetlands with enough water to support fish, wildlife, people and Oregon's quality of life.

Thank you for your continued support, and happy holidays to you and yours.

For rivers,



Neil Brandt

Neil Brandt
Executive Director



DAM PROPOSAL ON DRIFT CREEK STOPPED

In a major WaterWatch win for fish and instream water rights, the Oregon Court of Appeals upheld an earlier decision by the Oregon Water Resources Commission to deny a permit request from a Marion County irrigation district to build a 400-acre reservoir with a 70-foot dam on Drift Creek, a tributary to the Pudding River near Silverton that provides habitat for winter steelhead, coho salmon and cutthroat trout. The dam and reservoir would have blocked fish passage, undermined an earlier instream water right, and drowned several family farms.



GOODBYE DAMS, HELLO SALMON AND STEELHEAD

Fish-blocking structures have clogged almost every Rogue Basin waterway since the days of the Oregon Trail, but this summer the basin got another WaterWatch-led boost for native fish and natural flows. Demolition of Lovelace Dam in the Applegate River subbasin wrapped up in July, while Takelma Creek Dam in the Illinois River subbasin came down in September. Combined, these projects opened or improved access to 29 miles of habitat for salmon and steelhead.



NEAR-RECORD FINES FOLLOW ECOLOGICAL DISASTER AT WINCHESTER DAM

Years of grassroots efforts by a WaterWatch-led coalition to end the harm caused by Winchester Dam and return unimpeded access for salmon and steelhead on the North Umpqua River paid off this year. State regulatory agencies responded to public outcry and scrutiny from elected officials with over \$27 million in fines against the Winchester Dam owners and their contractors after botched structural repairs this summer blocked fish migration, polluted the river, and sparked massive losses of Pacific lamprey.



NEW GROUNDWATER ALLOCATION RULES EXPECTED

After years of advocating for a more sustainable approach to groundwater permitting that aligns with the 1955 Oregon Groundwater Act and prevents impacts from over-pumping like the plummeting aquifer levels seen in the Harney Basin, WaterWatch is pleased the Oregon Water Resources Department has developed new science-based, sustainable groundwater allocation rules. WaterWatch continues to press for adoption of these needed reforms.



ANOTHER YEAR OF LEGISLATIVE SUCCESS IN SALEM

Despite the GOP walkout that upended much of the session, WaterWatch and our allies helped secure passage of common-sense proposals that had been stalled for years, including more rigorous enforcement of illegal water use. WaterWatch also helped pass a \$174 million drought package with provisions to boost ecosystem resiliency, and played an outsized role in stopping bills that threatened Oregon's iconic rivers, including a bill that would have prohibited the state from applying for new instream water rights past 2024.



PROGRESS TOWARD RESTORING LAKE ABERT

Lake Abert, Oregon's internationally significant saline lake, is critical to the survival of migratory birds along the Pacific Flyway. For years, WaterWatch has been working to ensure the lake gets the inflows it needs to function, and during this year's legislative session in Salem, WaterWatch worked with partners to help secure funding for a new collaborative process focused on the lake and the Chewaucan Basin. We are participating in this process and are hopeful strategies can be identified to address the ecological needs of Lake Abert.



VICTORY FOR FLOWS AND FISH IN THE CROOKED RIVER

After a decade of advocacy to restore and protect flows in the Crooked River in the Deschutes Basin, water released from Prineville Reservoir for downstream fish and wildlife will finally be protected instream. The state water right, which was approved this fall, was the final step needed to protect water released for fish under the Crooked River Collaborative Water Security and Jobs Act, which WaterWatch helped negotiate, draft, and secure. Now, nearly 80,000 acre feet of water will be protected for fish and to restore streamflows in the Crooked.



NEW LEGISLATION WILL LIMIT GROUNDWATER USE FOR LIVESTOCK

Confined Animal Feeding Operations, or CAFOs, are agricultural facilities where animals are kept and raised in confinement. Previously, CAFOs could use unlimited amounts of groundwater without a permit, but thanks to WaterWatch's advocacy Senate Bill 85, signed into law by Gov. Kotek this summer, will limit that for new CAFOs. Livestock operations will also need to submit water supply plans as part of their applications and renewals to show they have legal access to all necessary sources of water.

WaterWatch 2023 Accomplishments Across Oregon



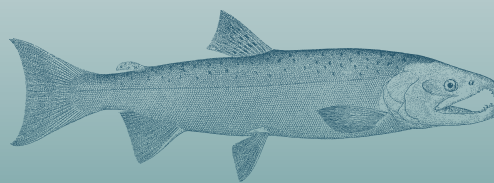
SCAN ME!
Read our full length
pieces covering
these important
accomplishments



bit.ly/WW-EOY2023



WATERWATCH
Protecting Natural Flows in Oregon Rivers



Since 1985, WaterWatch has pursued a single clear mission:
To protect and restore flows in our rivers to sustain the native fish,
wildlife, and the people who depend on healthy rivers.