WATERWATCH
Protecting Natural Flows in Oregon Rivers

INSTREAM

Summer 2024 Newsletter

SUMMER 2024

WATERWATCH
Protecting Natural Flows in Oregon Rivers

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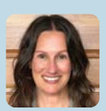
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WaterWatch's mission is to protect and restore streamflows in Oregon's rivers for fish, wildlife, and the people who depend on healthy rivers.


Lunar eclipse over Three Sisters
Photo by Steven Kratka
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WaterWatch of Oregon publishes *Instream* three times annually.
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Front Cover Photo:
Northern Lights over the Columbia River Gorge
Photo by Gretchen Rinkus

NEW TO WATERWATCH

Welcome to WaterWatch
JESSE ROBBINS, Development Officer

After an exhaustive hiring process, WaterWatch is happy to announce the hiring of Jesse Robbins, who recently began work in our newly-created development officer position. A graduate of Bates College in Maine, Jesse received a B.A. in economics with studies that culminated in a thesis on the economic benefits of the removal of the Edwards Dam from the Kennebec River. After college and a stint with L.L. Bean, adventure and parts unknown beckoned and Jesse ventured to New Zealand for an extended fishing holiday.

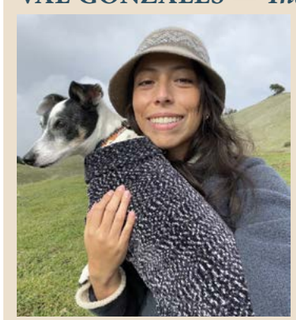
Returning to the States, Jesse worked as a fly fishing guide at the 4UR Ranch in Creede, Colorado, before accepting a job at Far Bank Enterprises — the umbrella company for the fly fishing brands Sage, Redington, RIO Products, and Fly Water Travel — on Bainbridge Island near Seattle. In total, Jesse spent 11 years at Far Bank in product development, marketing, travel, and sales.

Jesse also works as a freelance writer, and his essays, yarns, and journalism have appeared in The Flyfish Journal, The Drake, TROUT, Swing the Fly, Atlantic Salmon Journal, Modern Huntsman, and other publications.

Jesse continues to serve as president of the Redsides Chapter of Trout Unlimited in Springfield, has sat on steering committees, and consulted with the nonprofits Guiding for the Future and Science on the Fly. An avid reader and occasional organizer of the Writers on the Fly event series, Jesse is also an ordained Dudeist priest. He and his partner Stacey live near the confluence of the McKenzie and Willamette rivers with their cache of boats, books, guitars, and fly rods.

You can reach out to Jesse at:
(503)295-4039, ext.111 or jesse@waterwatch.org

VAL GONZALES — *Thank you!*



WaterWatch of Oregon offers our thanks to former board member Val Gonzales, who recently stepped away to return to her native California to continue her work with the U.S. Forest Service.

A 2020 graduate of Portland State University, Val serves on the agency's national recreation fees program implementing policy and determining how and where collected fees are best spent. Despite her California roots, it was in Oregon where Val first took up surfing as a student, and later worked in a Portland-area surf shop in between outings to Short Sand Beach and Indian Beach in Tillamook and Clatsop counties along the Oregon Coast.

While it was through surfing Val became acquainted with WaterWatch's mission to preserve and restore rivers and streamflows, it was her appreciation of the capability, winning record, and ability of WaterWatch's legal team to make real differences in environmental policy that won her over as a supporter. We know Val is going to miss her Oregon summers, but we wish her the best in her return to the Golden State.

STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Neil Brandt
Executive Director

Welcome to the summer issue of *Instream*. Speaking on behalf of our board and staff, I hope you and your families are enjoying the warm weather and summer season.

As you will note on the following page, Oregon has recently seen new directors come aboard at three of the state's natural resource agencies with missions related to water, including Ivan Gall at the Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD), Debbie Colbert at the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), and Sara O'Brien at the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB).

One common theme raised throughout the appointment processes was the need for change in how the state manages our water resources, with questions largely focused on the role of the new director of the Oregon Water Resources Department.

At WaterWatch, we agree change is needed. After more than a century of mismanagement that has resulted in dry rivers and declining aquifers — now being exacerbated by climate change — the time for a change in direction at OWRD is now.

By law, all water from all sources belongs to the public in Oregon, but our waters are administered under a largely outdated system of laws and policies that emphasize consumptive water use rather than sustainable water management. As in other western states, Oregon's laws allocate water on a "first come, first served" basis, meaning the earliest water rights take precedence over all other uses — the first user gets as much as their right allows, the next person gets what is left, and so on until there is often nothing left to distribute.

This scheme has typically failed to recognize uses of water by native people, and until the recent past failed to make any consideration for flows needed by fish and wildlife. While there has been some progress over the years to update Oregon's archaic water laws and practices to better protect instream values, it remains entirely legal to dry up a stream in Oregon — a common occurrence — particularly in the summer and fall months, and in dry years.

The Oregon Water Resources Department's dual mission is to "directly address Oregon's water supply needs" and "restore and protect streamflows and watersheds in order to ensure the long-term sustainability of Oregon's ecosystems, economy, and quality of life." We believe it is past time for the agency to live up to its mission.

A century of mismanagement has led to over-allocated streams and declining aquifers across the state. This has left Oregon's fish and wildlife, cultures, and river-related economies high and dry in many parts of the state. With climate change making long-standing problems even worse, Oregon simply cannot continue with the status quo. It is time for Oregon to step up and modernize our approach to sustainable water management.

While change is hard, Oregon's water future depends upon it. We are already seeing some level of change at the agency, and we applaud the OWRD for this. A good example of this change is the proposed groundwater allocation rules that we are optimistic will be adopted this fall. These new rules, detailed on pages 12 and 13, will ensure better protection of streamflows and cold water inputs to Oregon rivers and streams from the impacts of over-pumping hydraulically connected groundwater. These are science-based rules that will move the state away from issuing unsustainable groundwater rights — and they are exactly the type of change Oregon needs.

WaterWatch calls on Oregon, and the OWRD in particular, to continue moving forward with these changes for a more equitable water future. A few key areas we urge focus on include:

- **STREAMFLOW PROTECTION AND RESTORATION:** The importance of protecting and restoring streamflows is found in statute, rule, and Oregon's Integrated Water Resources Strategy. It is also one prong of the OWRD's dual mission. OWRD should work with its sister agencies to ensure efficient pathways to new instream water rights, scenic waterways, and outstanding resource water designations, and build up the tools and programs needed to successfully restore streamflows in waterways across Oregon.
- **MEASUREMENT AND REPORTING OF SURFACE AND GROUNDWATER USE:** Water measurement and reporting is the cornerstone of responsible water management, yet less than 20 percent of water users measure how much they take from Oregon's rivers, streams, and aquifers. Oregon needs this data to better manage water use on the ground and plan for the future.
- **ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW OF TRANSFERS:** Oregon is overdue to modernize our water transfer system to ensure aquatic ecosystems are not harmed when old water rights are moved to new uses or places. Transfers provide one of the biggest loopholes in Oregon's water laws in protecting the environment, and both rivers and fish are suffering because of it.
- **ENFORCEMENT AGAINST ILLEGAL USE:** Oregon's rivers and streams are largely overallocated, and aquifers are declining in many parts of the state. It is more important than ever for the state to regulate and enforce laws against illegal use of water — including wasteful use of water — to ensure protection for water right holders and the environment.
- **INVESTMENT IN DATA:** Oregon must continue to invest in collecting, analyzing, and distributing sound water data, including funding groundwater studies, stream gauges, and observation wells. Good data is the foundation of good decisions.

As the agency moves forward to enact change and modernize Oregon's water management policies, we urge the OWRD and its new director to focus on robust water management, including the protection and restoration of instream needs. Protecting and restoring our rivers, streams, wetlands, and lakes is written into OWRD's mission, and strong instream protections are vital for the fish, wildlife, and people that rely on healthy rivers to survive.

For rivers,

Neil Brandt

Executive Director

NEW AGENCY LEADERS OFFER OPPORTUNITIES FOR OREGON'S WATERS

This May, in a rare moment in history, Oregon saw the appointment of three new directors to state natural resource agencies with missions related to water. The Oregon Senate confirmed Governor Kotek's appointment of Ivan Gall to lead the Oregon Department of Water Resources (OWRD) and Sara O'Brien to head the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB), while Oregon's Fish and Wildlife Commission selected Debbie Colbert to serve as the new director of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW). All three bring a wealth of knowledge specific to water to their new leadership roles.

Mr. Gall has worked for the OWRD for nearly 30 years and is part of the current leadership team working to bring the historically captured agency into the 21st century to better manage Oregon's waters. Mr. Gall has the technical skills, policy know-how, and deep understanding of the many levers of government needed to bring both cultural and policy change to the agency and deliver a more equitable and sustainable water future.

Ms. O'Brien joins OWEB after decades of work in water, most recently as the executive director of the Willamette Partnership. Her background in conservation puts her in a strong position to continue moving forward on OWEB's mission of protecting and restoring healthy watersheds and natural habitats that support thriving communities and strong economies.

Ms. Colbert advanced to the director's position at ODFW after serving as the agency's deputy director of fish and wildlife, where she led initiatives related to protection and restoration of instream flows. Ms. Colbert also headed policy and legislative work at OWRD, is well versed in the many water challenges facing Oregon, and has a rich understanding of the importance of restoring and protecting streamflows needed for our state's iconic fish and wildlife.

OWRD, OWEB, and ODFW are each charged with the protection and restoration of streamflows and/or aquatic habitats as part of their agency missions, and Oregon's Integrated Water Resources Strategy calls for an integrated approach between agencies to both understand and meet instream and out-of-stream needs, including water quantity, water quality, and ecosystems.

The convergence of these three appointments, each with extensive experience in water resource protection, offers a unique opportunity for interagency coordination to realize our state's longstanding goal of ensuring adequate water for fish and wildlife, cultures, communities, and local economies. ■

Flip to the back cover for tickets!

BOYER FAMILY FOUNDATION SPOTLIGHT

In the four decades since WaterWatch's founding in 1985, we've developed close relationships with many of our supporters, and WaterWatch has been endlessly fortunate to have forged a lasting relationship with the Bend-based Boyer Family Foundation, helmed by Jeff and Tracy Boyer.

After years of consistent, generous giving by the Boyer Family Foundation, WaterWatch received what can only be described as a transformative gift from Jeff and Tracy in 2023, marking the largest gift WaterWatch has ever received as the foundation moves to scale down its giving. With that in mind, we would like to express our thanks to the Boyers and share a bit of their story, commitment to Oregon's environment, and concern for Oregon's water future.

Before Jeff and Tracy met as students at the University of Oregon, Jeff was steeped in an appreciation of water and the outdoors growing up on the island of Oahu, where his father served as a professor of environmental studies at the University of Hawaii. Jeff's father also had a tight connection to the mainland — specifically the northern reaches of California's Redwoods, where he built a summer cabin along the Smith River in 1953.

Spending summers in this idyllic setting, Jeff began to make his own explorations around the Pacific Northwest, and eventually came to serve as an aide at California's Jedediah Smith State Park during the summer while earning his undergraduate, and later, urban and regional planning graduate degree at the University of Oregon. Jeff eventually went on to serve with a regional planning agency in Boise, and as the planning director of Crescent City.

Growing up in San Francisco, Tracy credits a life-changing week hiking and camping in Yosemite National Park as her first real outdoor adventure. Immersed in the natural environment of the wild Sierras, losing track of the days as one amazing vista and natural feature was followed by another, the experience centered Tracy's conservation worldview.

Struck by the integral role rivers and water play in healthy ecosystems, Tracy familiarized herself with the rivers of Oregon upon arriving in Eugene, and after meeting Jeff the two began to travel the state exploring Oregon's outdoors. From rafting the Owyhee to skiing Mt. Bachelor to enjoying float trips down the lower Deschutes, Jeff and Tracy developed a commitment not only to each other, but to the preservation and survival of Oregon's waters and the outdoors.

The two especially got to know Central Oregon, and when Jeff's father established a llama ranch in Sisters following his retirement, they had a family base to further explore and enjoy the region's outdoors.

"Oregon remains one of the most beautiful, healthy places I know of. That's why we live here. It's why we will always fight to protect our forests, rivers, and places of such life-affirming natural beauty."

According to Tracy, "We would drive along the McKenzie River, stop to hike along the Metolius River, and spend days camping and kayaking on the Deschutes. How can you not fall in love with Oregon rivers? Each one is so unique, and in my opinion, are some of the most beautiful in the world."

As a California native, Tracy had experienced water rationing during particularly dry summer months, and saw the devastating impacts of overdevelopment that destroyed habitat and deprived fish and wildlife of the cold, clean water they need to survive. For the couple, ensuring steady flows for rivers and streams was a must for preserving the healthy Oregon environments they treasured. According to Tracy, "It became clear to us how water is the lifeblood of every part of our world."

Throughout their travels, Jeff and Tracy are often reminded how fortunate they are to make Oregon home, but also see how far our state has to go to be truly environmentally sound. While desert cities like Las Vegas and Mediterranean climates like Marin County have local governments that help homeowners remove lawns in favor of drought-tolerant landscaping, Bend's turf removal rebate program became so popular that funds allocated for it quickly ran out. While the eagerness among Central Oregon residents to embrace water conservation is good news, Jeff noted that Bend and other high desert communities must pursue more robust funding for such programs if they hope to successfully conserve water.

From their years on Oregon's rivers, Jeff and Tracy have also seen the changes from climate change and derelict dams, from a substantial decrease in fish in the North Umpqua, to increased algae formations in the Deschutes, to coming across hundreds of dead king salmon on visits to the Rogue and Klamath rivers.

Even in the free-flowing Smith River, one of the crown jewels of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System, Jeff and Tracy have noticed decreased flows during summer months lasting well into the fall, and following last summer's Smith River Complex wildfire, massive volumes of debris and fallen Redwoods clogging the river for weeks.

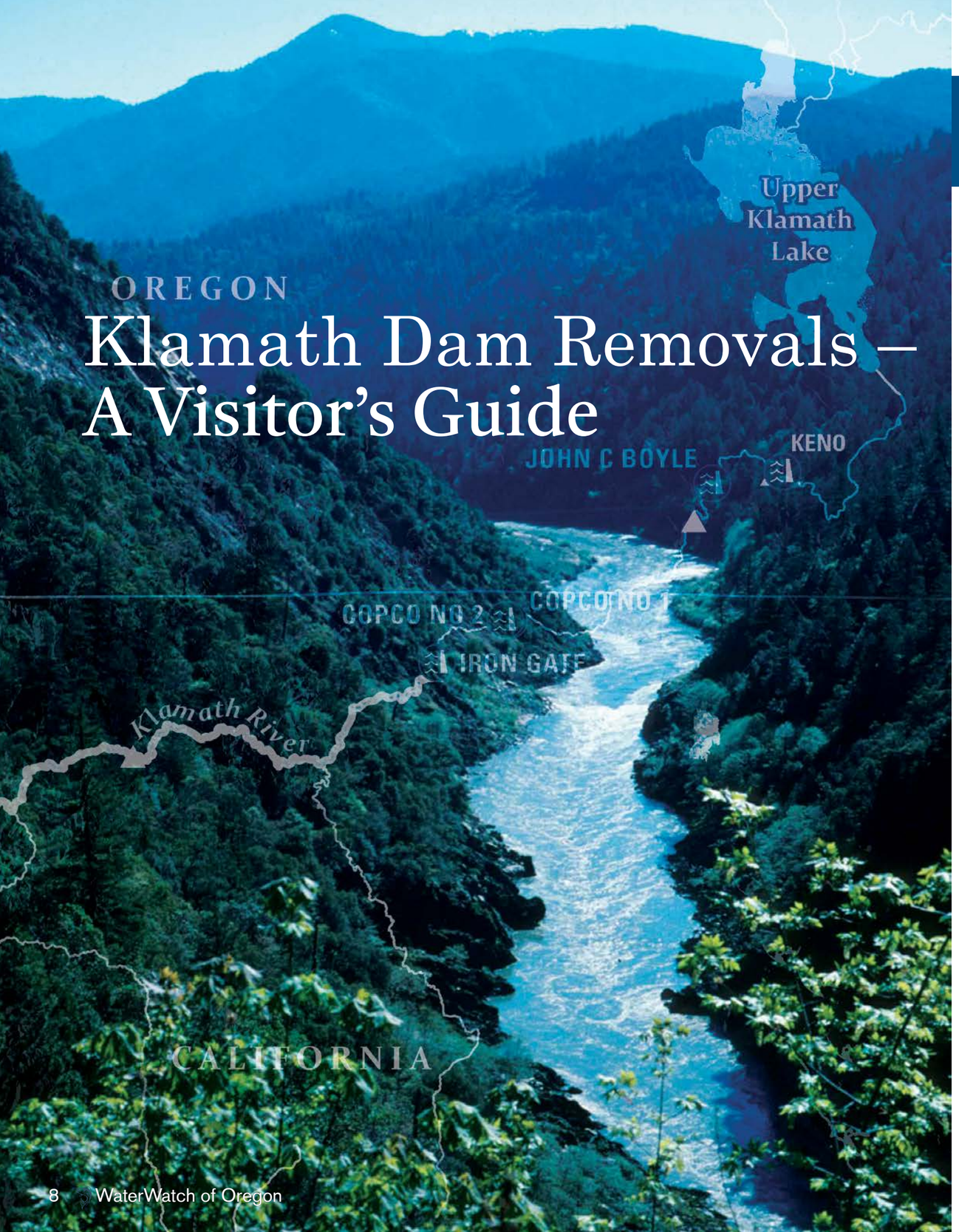
These debris flows have reduced foliage and tree cover along the length of river canyon, potentially affecting the temperature of spawning grounds for salmon and other native fish.

The couple's international travel has also given them a better perspective on deploying environmental solutions, as Jeff noted his positive impressions of Australia's national water department and Slovenia's fisheries system. Jeff was particularly impressed with the lengths Slovenia goes to protect their fisheries, with prospective licensees required to complete courses on various fish license stamps and Eastern European fish habitat.

But even with their travel to Alaska, Canada, Chile, Argentina, and other parts of the word, Jeff and Tracy agree Oregon has the best selection of wild and scenic rivers in the world — especially from their home base in Bend. "Where else can you be on the Metolius in 45 minutes, or the lower Deschutes in 45 minutes, or hike Steens Mountain and fish and camp?" asked Jeff. "We have an amazing concentration of world class rivers and outdoor spaces near us, and we're committed to protecting them and supporting those who do. That's why it made sense for us to make our commitment to WaterWatch."

While Jeff noted he'd like to see more dams that have served their purpose come down so impeded rivers can return to a free-flowing state, he and Tracy agree adapting to the impacts of our warming climate remains the biggest challenge facing Oregonians, our rivers, and our environment. "As we witness the destruction of life and property with the ongoing impacts of climate change," said Tracy, "it's clear WaterWatch has its work cut out for it in the decades to come."

For Jeff, rivers help him "stay sane in an often insane world." For Tracy, the rivers and water continue to center her environmental worldview. "As much as I love traveling," she said, "Oregon remains one of the most beautiful, healthy places I know of. That's why we live here. It's why we will always fight to protect our forests, rivers, and places of such life-affirming natural beauty." ■



Klamath Dam Removals – A Visitor's Guide

THE REMOVAL OF FOUR HYDROELECTRIC DAMS ON THE KLAMATH RIVER NEAR THE OREGON-CALIFORNIA STATE LINE IS WELL UNDERWAY.

The smallest of the four dams, Copco 2, was removed last summer. The other three far larger dams were breached this January in preparation for the major structural removal now taking place. The Klamath River mainstem is finally free-flowing from Keno Dam — near the southeast Oregon Cascades community of the same name — to the Pacific Ocean near Redwood National Park. Most importantly, the 350 miles of high elevation aquatic habitat these former dams closed to salmon, steelhead, and other native migratory fish since 1918 are on the cusp of being reopened to both upstream and downstream fish migration.

Klamath dam removal has generated a great deal of public and media interest, as well as a fair number of questions for our Southern Oregon staffer about how to best view a river undergoing the largest dam removal in the nation's history. What follows are recommendations for non-locals wishing to visit the reemerging Klamath River in the coming months.

Please keep in mind cellphone coverage and services are scarce in this relatively remote and rugged area. In addition, the roads nearest the former dams are rough and getting rougher with the continuous coming and going of work crews, heavy equipment, and dump trucks. Some nearby roads and campgrounds may be closed due to the construction. Please travel with companions in a well-maintained vehicle with a spare tire or flat kit, obey all posted signage, and keep an eye out for heavy equipment. We recommend bringing ample water and binoculars, but strongly recommend against attempting to walk on or otherwise enter any areas covered with exposed former reservoir sediments, as these areas may be unstable and/or undergoing restoration.

Visitors to the Klamath River at the former dam complex in this time of profound transformation are sure to experience beautiful, fascinating, and inspiring views of a river and surrounding valley reemerging. As of this spring, the river had cut down through the old reservoir sediments to underlying cobble and bedrock channels. Riffles, rapids, and sweeping bends have emerged in the river, as have grasses, wildflowers, and other vegetation on the river banks. There are standing clusters of formerly submerged riverside trees visible. In places, stone walls and the abutments of an old river bridge are visible.

The easiest route via the smoothest pavement to a former dam site is Route 66/Green Springs Highway, which departs from I-5 at Ashland or Route 97 in Klamath Falls. It would be a good idea to fuel or charge up in either of these towns before heading toward the Klamath River. This road will take you to directly to the J.C. Boyle Dam area. In fact, it crosses the former J.C. Boyle reservoir — now the free-flowing Klamath River.

The dirt and gravel Topsy Grade Road leaves Route 66 on the east side of the river crossing and runs even closer to the old dam. However, this road may be closed due to construction. Topsy Grade could theoretically take you all the way to the community of Copco Lake and the area of the former Copco 1 Dam and reservoir, but this way to Copco 1 is definitely *not* recommended for travel in either direction.

A safer way to the former Copco 1 and Iron Gate dams is to depart I-5 at Hornbrook just south of the California-Oregon line and take Copco Road toward the Iron Gate Dam site. This heavily potholed but paved road then climbs past this most downstream of the dam sites and continues alongside the former Iron Gate reservoir toward Fall Creek, after which it narrows to single-lane gravel and dirt. The adventurous and well-equipped can continue from here on a single dirt lane past the nearby but not visible Copco 1 Dam site and into view of the former Copco 1 reservoir.

The dirt road returns to pavement near the community of Copco Lake. Visitors may cross the Klamath River at the only bridge in town, then return to the town of Hornbrook and I-5 by turning right onto the paved Ager Beswick Road. This road passes close to the Klamath River for a short distance, before proceeding away and out of view of the former dam complex. Turn right onto Ager Road, then left onto Copco Road a few miles downstream of Iron Gate.

Klamath dam removals present a major opportunity to restore important but dwindling fish runs vital to the region, Native American tribes, and coastal communities. WaterWatch is grateful this long-sought goal for many in the Klamath is within sight. However, dam removal alone cannot restore the Klamath and end the region's woes. Restoration will require other essential steps, like providing adequate streamflows and lake levels to support abundant salmon and other native fish, improving fish passage at Keno Dam and other dams upstream of the soon-to-be former hydro complex or removing these structures altogether, protecting and restoring depleted groundwater reserves, and reclaiming converted wetlands to recover aquatic habitat and natural water storage while improving water quality.

Thanks to your support, WaterWatch will continue to advocate in public, in the legislature, and in the courts for these essential steps toward the Klamath's sustainable future.

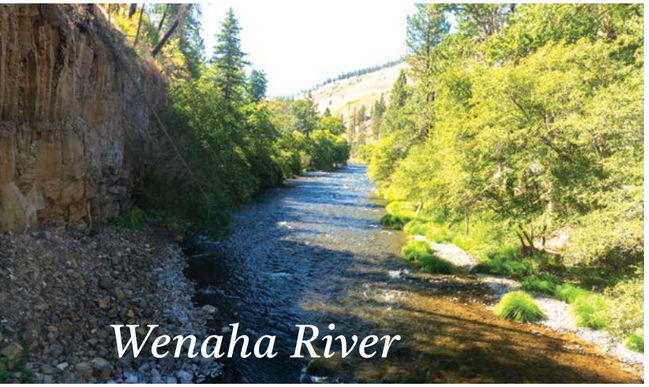
As many readers know, and as part of our larger, long-standing Klamath Basin campaign, WaterWatch began advocating for the removal of the four lower Klamath dams over two decades ago. For a brief history of our advocacy, see our article "Federal Regulator Says Four Lower Klamath Dams May Come Down" in the spring 2023 issue of *Instream,* or at WaterWatch.org. ■

Earlier this year we shared six springtime hiking and cycling options around the state along some of Oregon's most spectacular rivers, as selected by WaterWatch senior fundraiser, advisor, and former executive director John DeVoe. The article quickly became one of our most popular posts at WaterWatch.org, so with the long days and warm weather of summer in mind, we invite you to lace up your boots for the six summertime river hikes presented here.

SUMMERTIME HIKES

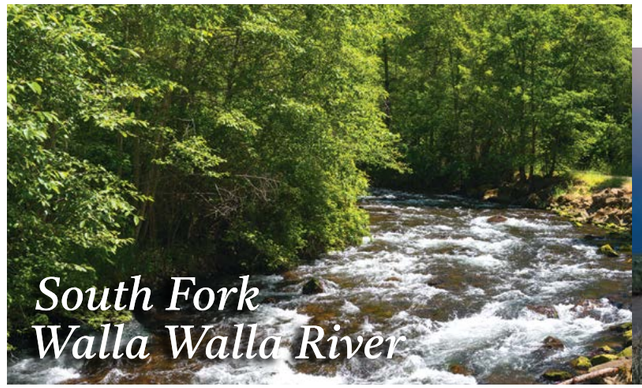
Conditions are always subject to change, so be sure to check current conditions before you leave home, observe Leave No Trace wilderness ethics on the trail, and bring water, food, a flashlight, socks, and layered clothes when heading off on an adventure. As hot as the weather can get in Oregon during the summer, the water remains very cold. You can be swept off your feet by less than six inches of moving water, so always hike smart and hike safe.

As with our spring hikes list, an expanded edition of this article complete with links to more information is available at WaterWatch.org



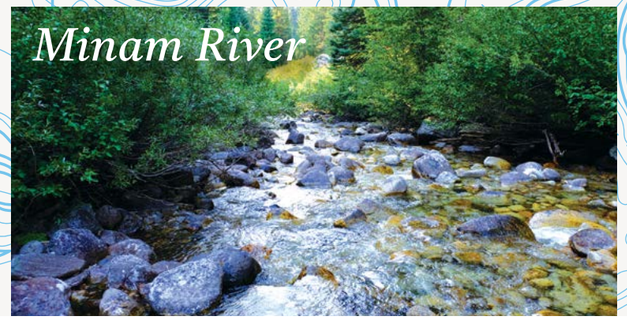
Wenaha River

Tim Palmer's Field Guide to Oregon Rivers calls the Wenaha "one of the Northwest's wildest streams ... with no roads, dams, development or diversions." He should know. A few years ago, Tim and a couple of friends hiked up the Wenaha from the lower end of the river near Troy and packrafted back down to the mouth at the Grande Ronde River in an adventure filmed for an Oregon Field Guide segment. The headwaters of the Wenaha flow out of the Wenaha-Tucannon Wilderness along the Oregon-Washington border through a canyon for about 35 miles, and Trail 3016 in the Umatilla National Forest follows the Wenaha along the southern portion of the Wilderness from a trailhead just outside Troy. Fishing is said to be good, with stunning scenery throughout. The river is a refuge for bull trout, and there are plenty of bears and other wildlife.



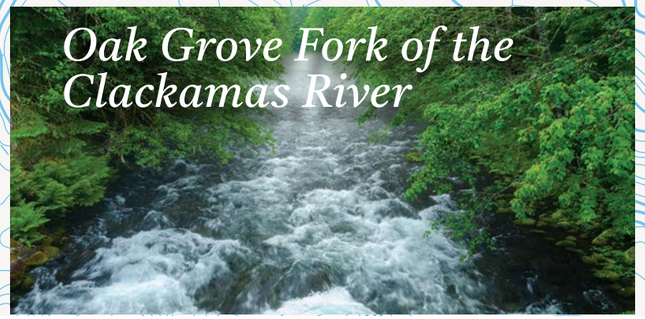
South Fork Walla Walla River

Another somewhat notorious bear and rattlesnake hangout, the South Fork of the Walla Walla joins the North Fork to create the mainstem Walla Walla River about five miles east of Milton Freewater. Recently reopened after several years of repairs following a 2020 flood, Trail 3225 begins at a trailhead on BLM land about three-quarters of a mile past Harris County Park, and meets the boundary of the Umatilla National Forest about three miles in on its route between Harris Park and Deduct Springs. About 20 miles of this trail above Harris Cabin to Deduct Campground is designated for hikers only. While the upper portion of the canyon can be accessed via Forest Road 65 at the Deduct Trailhead, that involves a somewhat long, steep, downhill hike. Best to go up from the bottom, but be aware of flood damage and debris the first few miles. The South Fork has good fishing and supports bull trout in its upper reaches.



Minam River

Located just outside the town of Minam in Wallowa County on Oregon Highway 82, the Minam River Trail 1673 was initially a logging road along its lower eight miles, and you can follow the river for 39 miles to its headwaters at Minam Lake along this trail. Fishing is fun along the river's length, and it gets even better later in the season. For a special treat, consider hiking into the Minam River Lodge (minam-lodge.com) to be pampered by great food, hot tubs, and other amenities for a relaxing and unique getaway. Or, to sample two great northeastern Oregon rivers, backpack up the Lostine River from the Two Pan trailhead to the Lakes Basin, then cross the divide into the Minam watershed and hike down the Minam River itself. There are dozens of spectacular trails in this portion of the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest and plenty of loop options, but consult an Eagle Cap Wilderness map for greater detail of the Minam River.



Oak Grove Fork of the Clackamas River

Close to Portland, the Oak Grove Fork of the Clackamas has benefitted from WaterWatch's work in a legal settlement that involved the Portland General Electric (PGE) Clackamas River hydroelectric project, which compelled the utility to rewater the Oak Grove Fork below Timothy Lake. While there is no trail along the Oak Grove Fork, the partially paved and mostly gravel Forest Road 57 does follow the river from the Ripplebrook area southeast of Estacada all the way to Timothy Lake near Highway 26 in the Mt. Hood National Forest. From there you can hike down to the river at several points. Fishing is fun for smaller trout and the occasional whopper that migrated out of Harriet Lake into the river. Consult your Mt. Hood National Forest map for details on camping and other Forest Service roads in the area that access some of the small lakes high above the Clackamas River.

Summer Lake Wildlife Area

If you're a birder, don't leave your binoculars at home for this hike. Summer Lake is one of five major wetland areas in the Great Basin, with over 250 species of birds found during the year, including some 25 species of shorebirds, large populations of lesser snow geese, and nesting populations of white faced ibis. Located in central Lake County along Oregon Highway 31 about 100 miles southeast of Bend and 75 miles northwest of Lakeview, breeding waterfowl and shorebirds are commonly found here during the summer, though the spring months tend to welcome a more diverse array of brightly plumaged ducks, geese, swans, migrant shorebirds, and other waterbirds and songbirds that pass through along their route on the Pacific Flyway. Summer Lake is also one of the key areas in the state where WaterWatch has worked to preserve and restore groundwater by preventing excessive pumping from drying up the source of the springs that feed the wetlands at Summer Lake.

Salmon River

Straddling the geologic regions of the Columbia Basin and Cascade Range, the Old Salmon River Trail 742A is another close-to-Portland hike that may seem like an obvious option to veteran Mt. Hood hikers, but is no less spectacular as one of the best river and old-growth forest hikes in the Pacific Northwest. Accessible year round, the Salmon River is also the rare example of a low-elevation river and forest ecosystem that survived the saw for decades before its preservation in 1984 as part of the Salmon-Huckleberry Wilderness. With the destruction of Opal Creek and much of the Santiam River environs by wildfire in 2020, the preciousness and proximity of this natural gem to Portland and Salem is even more apparent. Visit in the summer to escape Willamette Valley heat, visit in winter for supreme riverside solace, or visit in the autumn while salmon pump their way upstream over waterfalls along miles of exploding fall colors.

WATER BRIEFS

Troubled Integrated Water Resources Strategy Update Paused

As reported in the spring edition of *Instream*, the Integrated Water Resources Strategy (IWRS) serves as Oregon's overall blueprint for understanding and meeting its instream and out-of-stream water needs. The legislation that directed the state to develop the strategy was passed in 2009, and the first iteration of the IWRS was released in 2012 after a lengthy and transparent public process.

While the governing law calls for periodic updates, the 2012 version was widely understood to be the scaffolding to guide state water work for the next 50 years. The 2017 IWRS, by design, retained the original goals, objectives, and guiding principles from the 2012 version, and focused on refreshing information, filling important gaps, and shoring up or adding newly-recommended actions.

Fast forward to the 2024 update: Oregonians were told there would be minimal changes, with the focus being on bolstering equity and addressing climate change. Yet the 2024 draft version of the IWRS released for public comment was anything but — and instead offered a wholescale reworking of our state water plan.

At that point we called on you to make your voices heard and ask the state to move away from fixing something that was not broken, and instead focus on filling gaps, increasing agency coordination, and hastening implementation. The result? Governor Kotek has paused the update and directed agencies to focus more on interagency integration, prioritization, and benchmarking. We'll keep you abreast of any updates, but thank you — and well done — for speaking up for our IWRS and a sustainable water future. ■

Please visit WaterWatch.com to sign up for WaterWatch of Oregon's River Action alerts.

Oregon Poised to Adopt More Sustainable Groundwater Allocation Rules

A huge thank you to everyone who submitted comments and spoke at public hearings this spring to support the proposed groundwater rules! Your comments truly make a difference for Oregon.

After a thorough two-year process, the Oregon Water Resources Department proposed amended groundwater allocation rules that, once adopted by the Oregon Water Resources Commission, will put Oregon on a significantly more sustainable path for issuing new groundwater permits. The public comment period closed June 14th and, after considering and addressing public comment, the rules are scheduled to go the Commission for adoption in September.

The proposed rules, based on the best available science and data, align with Oregon's 1955 Groundwater Act to create a more sustainable water future. Helping rein in the agency's past practice of unsustainable over-issuance of new groundwater pumping rights, the proposed rules better protect hydraulically connected surface water — and the instream flows and fish that rely upon those cold, clean inputs of groundwater. Just as important, the proposed rules end the practice known as "default to yes," and would require the denial of a permit application when data is not available to determine whether groundwater levels are reasonably stable.

The process is not quite over yet — the true test will come in September when we see the final rules package and when the Commission makes a decision to adopt the rules. But WaterWatch — which has worked to reform how the state decides to issue new groundwater permits for more than a decade and served on the Rules Advisory Committee — is excited to be on the cusp of this major improvement for Oregon's waters and is cautiously optimistic the state will soon secure a much brighter water future for Oregonians and the waters, fish, and wildlife we cherish. ■

Big Win for Walker Creek as Water Permit Extension is Denied

WaterWatch landed a major legal victory earlier this year that finally terminated a water permit on Walker Creek, a tributary of the upper Nestucca River designated as a State Scenic Waterway and federal Wild and Scenic River. With its headwaters in the Coast Range in northwest Yamhill County, Walker Creek flows into the Nestucca in a high-elevation wetland meadow, and is an important source of clean, cold, free-flowing water that supports wild runs of coho salmon, chinook salmon, and winter and summer steelhead.

The City of McMinnville initially held a 1958 permit to build a 74-foot high dam that would span 550 feet across Walker Creek and impound 4,500 acre-feet of water, and over the years successfully requested several extensions from the Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD) to extend the time on the permit. In 2012, when OWRD proposed to grant McMinnville a new extension through 2050 to build the dam and reservoir, WaterWatch stepped in.

Citing potential impacts to the creek's streamflows that would affect native fish, wildlife, and recreational uses resulting from a dam, as well as its status as a State Scenic Waterway, WaterWatch filed a protest that urged a denial on the permit extension proposal.

Acting on WaterWatch's protest in 2023, OWRD issued an order proposing to deny the City of McMinnville's permit extension request. In response, McMinnville withdrew its extension application and agreed to voluntarily cancel the permit. In February, OWRD issued an order that accomplished both actions, thereby avoiding litigation and preserving Walker Creek's wild, free-flowing status. ■

Action to Stop Winchester Dam's Water Cheats

The old saying is true: justice delayed is justice denied. Thanks to your support, WaterWatch will attempt to intervene in a proceeding before a Marion County Circuit Court this summer to prevent a "justice denied" outcome for the invaluable natural resources of the North Umpqua River, and to help ensure appropriate enforcement against the state-documented water cheats who own the infamous, fish-killing Winchester Dam.

WaterWatch moved to take action following a baffling backslide by the state this spring, after state officials initially pursued long-overdue enforcement against water storage violations at the aged dam, maintained solely to provide a private water ski lake for some 110 landowners around the reservoir.

Public records show state officials were aware for years the dam likely stored more water than law allows. But it wasn't until early 2023, after written complaints and public urging by WaterWatch and our allies, that the state notified the dam owners that they were storing some 29.7 million gallons more water in the reservoir behind Winchester Dam than allowed under their filed water right claim, and requested the dam owners come into compliance through one of two available options.

Instead of complying, the dam owners sued the state last summer in a bid to carve out a special exemption for themselves from state water law. The state initially mounted a robust defense, and soon won a court ruling dismissing the case. But, as is customary, the court allowed the dam owners to replead, if they chose to do so. Despite this success, on April 25th the state agreed to stay the entire proceeding until July 22nd.

Another delay of routine enforcement against ongoing violations at this outlaw dam is unacceptable. If you agree, let Oregon Governor Tina Kotek know by calling her office at (503) 378-4582.

With your ongoing support, WaterWatch continues to lead a coalition of local and statewide fishing, conservation, and whitewater groups working to remove Winchester Dam on the North Umpqua River. As in this case, we are also working to ensure this notorious dam complies with all laws, rules, and regulations protecting salmon, steelhead, state waters, and water quality until it is torn down. ■

CREATE YOUR LEGACY FOR OREGON'S RIVERS AND WATERWAYS BECOME A RIVER DEFENDER TODAY.

As our climate continues to warm and becomes more unpredictable, the stability and health of our rivers and water has become one of our long-standing concerns.

You can help secure a healthy, climate resilient and equitable water future for our Oregon rivers and creeks, native fish populations, wildlife, and communities by pledging to become a WaterWatch River Defender today.

Our River Defender program is for advocates like you who love our rivers and waterways and are committed to supporting WaterWatch through their estate planning.

Legacy giving isn't just for those with high net value. Anyone who loves fishing, rafting, paddle boarding, hiking and camping along our landmark rivers can take part and provide meaningful support for the future of WaterWatch.

Join a community of visionaries committed to healthy rivers and climate resilient waters. Become a River Defender with WaterWatch now.

Give the gift of healthy, climate resilient waters for fish, wildlife, and future generations of Oregonians by including WaterWatch in your will or estate planning. You can also direct estate gifts to WaterWatch's endowment fund, which invests in WaterWatch's future.

To learn more about planned giving and the different options available, contact **WaterWatch senior fundraiser and advisor John DeVoe at john@waterwatch.org, or at (503) 295-4039 ext.103**

WaterWatch in the COMMUNITY

Annual Auction Tickets On Sale Now

Tickets for our 22nd Annual Celebration of Oregon Rivers are on sale now! Join us **Saturday, Oct. 5th**, at the World Forestry Center in Portland for an evening of hors d'oeuvres, drinks, dinner, and bidding as we celebrate another year of victories for Oregon's rivers with a fully-catered menu from Elephants Delicatessen, craft beer from Hopworks Brewery, and wine from Sokol Blosser. Don't be late — silent auction bidding begins promptly at 5 p.m. Take advantage of our early bird ticket special through **Sept. 5th**, with a discount for students and active duty military.
Visit WaterWatch.org for more.

WaterWatch Returns to Oakshire Brewing for Oakshire Inspires

WaterWatch members and supporters joined staff and board on **July 9th** for an Oakshire Inspires event at Oakshire Brewing's Portland Beer Hall location in the Cully-Concordia neighborhood, part of Oakshire's ongoing series of partnerships spotlighting local nonprofits as the brewery offered support with a portion of beer and food sales. We appreciated all the great feedback, conversation, and opportunity to talk about our mission and work, as well as the connection between cold, clean water and great tasting Oregon craft beer.

To stay in the loop on future events: Visit our website events calendar at WaterWatch.org

Please Support WaterWatch and invest in the health of Oregon's rivers, lakes, aquifers and wetlands!

Ways to support!

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Portland, OR 97204

ONLINE
Make a one-time or recurring monthly donation at waterwatch.org/donate

BECOME A MONTHLY MEMBER
Giving monthly is a simple way to provide us with consistent and reliable support throughout the year.

Sign up to become a monthly sustaining member at waterwatch.org/donate or via phone at (503) 295-4039 ext. 0

OTHER WAYS TO GIVE

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Donating appreciated securities such as stocks, bonds or mutual funds is an effective tax-friendly way to support WaterWatch

Estate Planning
You can help secure a legacy of healthy rivers in Oregon by including WaterWatch in your estate plans. We can help you find a plan that meets your needs and benefits Oregon's rivers long into the future.

Workplace Giving
Many employers make it easy to support by offering matching payroll contribution programs. Ask your employer if your workplace is able to help you support WaterWatch

Donate your Vehicle
WaterWatch accepts vehicle donations with Charity Connections, a non-profit vehicle donations program.

WaterWatch is proud to participate in the following programs:

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Scan here or visit **bit.ly/WW22ndgathering** for tickets, to explore the auction catalog, and all other event information.

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