



2024

ACCOMPLISHMENTS



WATERWATCH
Protecting Natural Flows in Oregon Rivers

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



Happy Holidays!

As we reflect on the past year at WaterWatch, we have much to be proud of and much to be thankful for. We are especially grateful for supporters like you who continue to make it possible to

protect and restore Oregon's rivers, streams, lakes, and aquifers for the fish, wildlife, and people that depend upon them.

What follows is a summary of WaterWatch's 2024 accomplishments. A direct result of your generous support, these successes represent the culmination of major campaigns and updates on our efforts. We know our community of members, supporters, volunteers, and conservationists have been alongside us every step of the way. All of you make this work possible!

As we face new and unprecedented challenges to Oregon's rivers and waters in 2025, we need your support more than ever to prevent our rivers from becoming dewatered and degraded. We all want to leave a sustainable legacy of healthy Oregon rivers with strong populations of fish and wildlife for our children and grandchildren. Your support is critical in helping us reach that goal.

For 39 years, WaterWatch has provided a voice for our state's iconic rivers and streams, and we've secured major conservation wins over the course of our four decades. But despite these victories, serious threats to Oregon's waters remain. Extractive water developments, outdated water laws and policies, and barriers to fish passage all threaten the rivers we love.

Throughout 2025 we will celebrate WaterWatch's 40th year of advocacy, and plan for our next 40 years of river conservation. By making a choice to invest in a special, year-end gift for the future of Oregon's waters today, you help ensure healthy rivers, lakes, and wetlands will remain for generations to come.

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

For rivers,

Neil Brandt

**Executive Director
WaterWatch of Oregon**



2024 Accomplishments

BY THE NUMBERS

River miles of restored access for migratory fish

Our commitment to Free the Rogue and other Oregon rivers saw considerable access restored to upstream habitat for salmon, steelhead, and other native fish in 2024.

**137
MILES**



River basins worked in this year

WaterWatch staff worked in all 19 administrative river basins across Oregon, from the Powder to the South Coast basins.

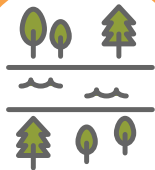
**19
BASINS**



Reaching four decades of conservation advocacy

Our first four decades came to a head with this year's successes, including adoption of updated groundwater allocation rules and further efforts to Free the Rogue.

**40
YEARS**



Support for Willamette instream water rights

WaterWatch supported progress made by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife with the agency's 269 instream applications this year in the basins of the Willamette River.

**269
RIGHTS**



YEAR 40

In 2025, WaterWatch will enter our 40th year. We look forward to the next 40 years of meaningful conservation wins for Oregon's rivers.

GROUNDWATER REFORM

In a major victory for long-term water sustainability, Oregon adopted amended rules in September for the issuance of new groundwater permits. These rules will better protect hydraulically connected waterways to groundwater throughout the state, ensure future groundwater right allocations are guided by a science-based process focused on long-term water sustainability and reliability, and end the “default to yes” approach the Oregon Water Resources Department had previously used when issuing new groundwater rights. The rules also establish standards for data needed to determine whether groundwater levels are reasonably stable, and (with narrow exception) require the denial of permit applications if data isn’t available. WaterWatch has long advocated for reform in this area and was a member of the Rules Advisory Committee. A big win for Oregon!

FREEING THE ROGUE

*Williams-Whalen Dam
Pomeroy Dam*

With the removal of Williams-Whalen Dam this June, WaterWatch achieved our third fish barrier removal in just nine years on Evans Creek, an important salmon and steelhead spawning tributary of the Rogue River near Grants Pass. Demolition of the derelict five-foot tall, 150-foot wide concrete former diversion dam improved access to 37 miles of upstream spawning and rearing habitat for native fish. Thanks to your support for WaterWatch, Evans Creek is now entirely free-flowing at the former Williams-Whalen Dam site for the first time in 128 years.

In August, WaterWatch concluded the removal of Pomeroy Dam on the Illinois River, the highest priority fish passage barrier in the Rogue Basin and among the highest priority barriers in Oregon. Removal of this outdated 10-foot tall, 160-foot wide irrigation diversion dam that lacked a fish ladder restored unimpeded access to over 100 miles of habitat for native migratory fish. The project also improved streamflows and the landowner’s irrigation system by moving the water diversion two miles downstream to two new screened and metered pumps.

Thanks to your support WaterWatch is delivering on our promise to work faster than ever to improve fish passage to high elevation cold water habitat, and bolster native Rogue fish populations against the growing impacts of climate change.

WaterWatch and our allies successfully intervened in a state water quality enforcement proceeding in August to ensure accountability for those responsible for the environmentally catastrophic repairs in 2023 at Winchester Dam on the North Umpqua River. WaterWatch testified before the Oregon Senate Interim Committee on Natural Resources and Wildfire in September to demand accountability for dam owner Winchester Water Control District for violations of state fish and wildlife, water quality, water use, and dam safety requirements. We also reiterated our standing offer to work cooperatively with dam owners to accomplish removal and site restoration at little to no direct cost to them. WaterWatch continues to lead a coalition of local and statewide conservation, fishing, and whitewater advocates to bring the rule of law to this derelict dam and support its removal.

FREEING THE NORTH UMPQUA

Winchester Dam

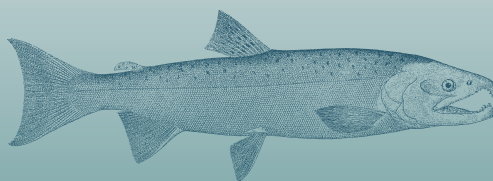
WILLAMETTE RIVER BASIN INSTREAM WATER RIGHTS

One of WaterWatch of Oregon’s earliest accomplishments was the drafting and passage of the Instream Water Rights Act of 1987. The first of its kind in the West, this trailblazing law established a means for three state agencies to apply for water rights to protect water instream for fish and wildlife, water quality, and recreation. Since 1987, WaterWatch has tirelessly advocated for the establishment of new instream rights, which now number over 1,700. In 2024, Oregon saw progress with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife applying for 269 new instream water rights in Willamette River Basin. When approved, these rights will help safeguard flows in beloved rivers such as the McKenzie, Tualatin, Molalla, Santiam and many more.

In 2024, WaterWatch staff worked hard in collaborative water planning processes around the state to provide a voice at the table for instream flows, fish, wildlife, ecological viability, and accountable water management. Our 2024 efforts focused on the Lower John Day, Deschutes, Harney, and Lake Abert/Chewaucan River basins, where we are striving to provide a brighter future for Oregon’s rivers, wetlands, lakes, and all that rely upon them.

COLLABORATIVES

WaterWatch 2024 Accomplishments Across Oregon



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.

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



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