

A person wearing a yellow jacket and a hat stands on a large, moss-covered rock in the foreground, looking out over a river. The river is surrounded by a dense forest with trees showing autumn foliage in shades of green, yellow, and orange. The water in the river is a deep, clear blue-green color. The scene is captured from a slightly elevated perspective, looking down at the person and across the river towards the forested banks.

WILD SALMON CENTER
2015 Annual Report



Guido Rahr with son Henrik fishing on the Oregon Coast.

Letter from the President

Each spring, just after the long winter rains have ended and before the onset of summer, I pack my boat, flyrods and boxes of bright green flies and head to the Oregon Coast to fish for spring Chinook salmon. The spring salmon arrive early, five months before they spawn. They are fat, loaded with energy for the swim upriver to cool headwater pools, and they are very hard to land on light tackle.

But for the last two springs I have noticed an alarming trend while chasing springers. The rivers are warming early, and agricultural runoff is causing algae blooms that turn normally clear estuaries into pea soup. As I write this, on June 6th, the water temperature in the Tillamook Bay

has reached 68 degrees. By July it could be in the 70s and prove lethal to the spring Chinook and summer steelhead that are gathering to make their upstream migration.

Is this the new normal? Scientists aren't sure. The persistent high pressure ridge that blocked the Pacific Northwest's normal diet of lifesaving clouds and rains in 2015 and the vast, warm and stagnant "blob" of ocean water that appeared offshore starting in 2014 were a combination nobody had seen before. But climatologists and fisheries experts do predict hotter, drier summers, warmer, wetter winters, and an ocean environment increasingly hostile to salmon and steelhead smolts arriving in the spring of each year.

What then can we do to ensure the survival of wild salmon and steelhead and all the species they support?

How do we protect those beautiful places that sustain us, thrill us, and define us in the face of change?

We must "anchor" salmonid biodiversity in each region by protecting river systems that have cool water and reliable instream flow, high habitat quantity and complexity to withstand weather shocks to watersheds, and a rich diversity of salmon, trout, and steelhead populations that can adapt to a changing environment.

We're focusing our work on those three fronts – cool water, habitat complexity, and fish diversity. In Washington, we've started a new campaign to reconnect coastal rivers to cold, spring-fed tributaries and in Oregon, we doubled the width of forested stream buffers on 2,500 miles of coastal rivers to better shade streams in summer. On Russia's Kol River, we have spent a decade and a half working for permanent, whole-river protection for one of the Pacific's most biologically productive wild salmon streams. (See page 22 for good news on the Kol). And on the Oregon Coast, we've worked with Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife to prioritize the protection of wild fish stocks on 25 coastal river basins and sub basins.

Just like any investor builds a diverse portfolio that can survive boom and bust business cycles, we are building a portfolio of salmon strongholds – from Russia to California – that will be resilient enough to survive environmental challenges over the next 20 years.

The world is changing, but we're adapting to it. If we're strategic, we can save the salmon rivers we want to give to our children. Thank you for helping us.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Guido'.

Guido Rahr
President and Chief Executive



Bristol Bay, Alaska by Guido Rahr



We must protect wild fish diversity, cold water, and river complexity in order to adapt to climate change.

Western Pacific



Connecting rivers, salmon &

YEAR AT A GLANCE 2015 Highlights



Russian experts bring LNG experience to BC's Skeena estuary (pg 8)



Kamchatka's Kol River, a portrait of complexity, protected long-term (pg 22)



Education and Exchanges, connecting people and ideas (pg 10)

North America



people across the Pacific Rim.



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Water for salmon and restoring the Tillamook estuary (pg 18)

Protecting a River's Nursery

From high mountain lakes set in dry boreal forest to back channels in floodplains of the storm-streaked coastal temperate rainforest, the Skeena River's multitude of salmon spawning grounds spans a huge range of landscapes and stretches the imagination. But this is the diversity inherent in an intact, 350-mile long river that cuts through the 9,000 foot-tall British Columbia Coast Mountains and drains the now famous tributaries – the Bulkley, Babine, Sustut, Morice, and Kispiox – across an area the size of Switzerland.

Those diverse streams and spawning grounds support one of the most productive salmon rivers in Canada, with 300 genetically distinct populations from five Pacific salmon species and steelhead, including some of the largest Chinook and steelhead ever recorded. It's a robust system, with clear hedges against climate change-induced floods and temperature extremes.

But this unusually complex and productive river has an Achilles' heel.

Many of its juvenile salmon and steelhead converge on a single thousand-acre sandbar each spring, at the point where the Skeena emerges from conifer-lined fjords and washes out to sea. Most stay for two weeks to two months before heading to the open ocean.

Juvenile salmon and steelhead depend on Flora Bank.

That makes Flora Bank a vulnerable bottleneck. A threat to this sandbar is a threat to the whole Skeena salmon ecosystem. Clearly, Flora Bank is a bad location for industrial development. But a conglomerate of Asian state oil companies led by Malaysia's Petronas wants to build an \$11.4 billion liquefied natural gas cooling and export terminal next to and over Flora Bank. A Golden Gate-sized bridge would loom over the bar to carry processed gas from neighboring Lelu Island out to waiting ships. Hydrological studies suggest that the bridge towers and the heavy dredging, drilling, and blasting during the entire terminal's construction could permanently alter the countervailing forces of tides, wind, and river current that have held Flora Bank intact for eight thousand years, since the last Ice Age.

Our British Columbia-based partner, SkeenaWild, has been methodically campaigning to stop development around Flora Bank.

And as Canada's Trudeau administration has moved toward a final decision on the Lelu Island gas terminal over the last year, **Wild Salmon Center has tapped our global network of salmon advocates in support of SkeenaWild.** We teamed with international fisheries scientists to issue a public critique of the federal environmental assessment, which wrongly concluded the terminal would have minimal impacts to salmon. We organized a visiting delegation of Russian scientists and activists in northern BC, to discuss their experience with liquefied natural gas on Sakhalin Island (see next page). We have helped activists raise climate concerns about the energy intensive, methane-leaking gas project, which flies in the face of Trudeau's signature on the Paris climate agreement. We have communicated the global importance of the Skeena through international media outlets. And we have provided much needed financial support.

As SkeenaWild turns its energy in the coming year toward earning permanent protection for Flora Bank and Lelu Island, Wild Salmon Center will continue to leverage our experience in creating protected areas around the world. This campaign is about ensuring one of the Pacific's great salmon and steelhead strongholds will remain intact as a dynamic century unfolds.



Ken Morrish

Skeena River, British Columbia





The Skeena's streams and spawning grounds support one of the most productive salmon rivers in Canada, with 300 genetically distinct populations from six Pacific salmonid species.

Above: Upper Kalum River in the Skeena watershed. Below: Juvenile salmonid in Flora Banks eelgrass.



Russian Experts Bring LNG Experience to BC

As British Columbians weighed in on a proposal to build a liquefied natural gas (LNG) facility at Lelu Island this winter, WSC offered local communities a unique perspective: Russian scientists and activists who had witnessed the construction and operation of a similar facility, at Aniva Bay on Sakhalin Island.

At the invitation of British Columbian First Nations and community groups, WSC arranged a four-person delegation from Sakhalin, including Dmitry Lisitsyn, a longtime Wild Salmon Center collaborator and Goldman Prize winner. The group spent a week in the Skeena River region, visiting Lelu Island and talking with local activists and fellow scientists.

“We have a chance to help the people of the Skeena watershed protect one of the most famous and rich wild salmon sanctuaries in the world. With the dramatic decline of our wild salmon, I really hope this will not be replicated in the Skeena estuary.”

- Dmitry Lisitsyn, Sakhalin Environment Watch

The Russians' visit was timely: it coincided with the release and comment period for a questionable draft report on the Lelu Island project from Canada's environmental assessment agency. That report dismissed and understated the impacts the LNG project could have on salmon in the Skeena estuary.

Three veteran Russian scientists on the trip detailed specific threats LNG projects pose to salmon, from construction effects on fragile habitat to noise and light hazards to juvenile salmon.

Dr. Alexander Vedenev, Head of the Ocean Noise Laboratory, Shirshov Institute of Oceanology, Russian Academy of Sciences told press, “Salmon will be negatively affected at both the construction and operation stages.”

The delegation also submitted formal comments to the Canadian government.



Skeena Media



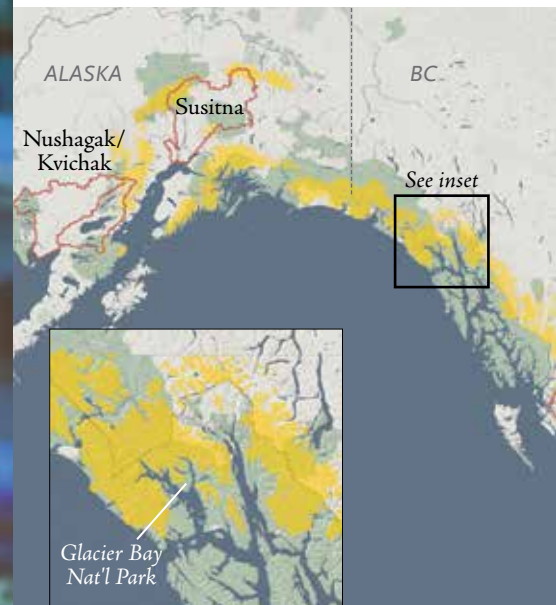
“Salmon will be negatively affected at both the construction and operation stages.”

- Dr. Alexander Vedenev, Head of the Ocean Noise Laboratory, Shirshov Institute of Oceanology, Russian Academy of Sciences

Skeena Media

SE Alaska and Coastal BC

■ Remaining glaciers
(Source: GLIMS Glacier Database)





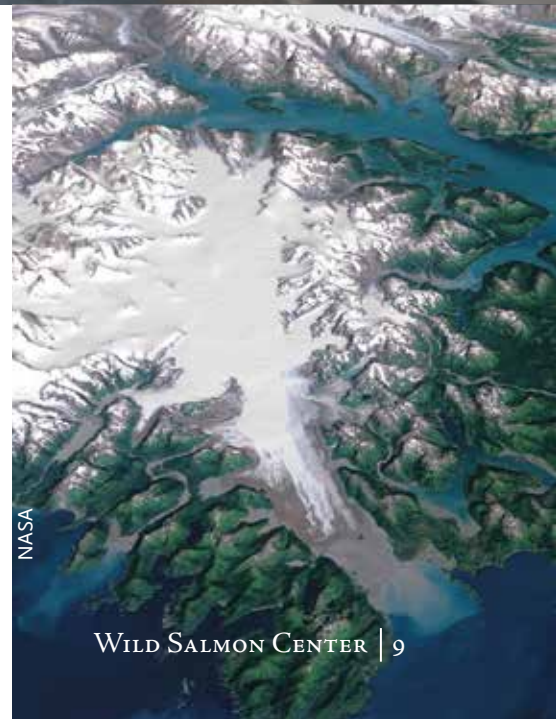
Russian Delegation (from left to right): Mariusz Wroblewski (WSC), Dr. Alexander Vedenev, Dmitry Lisitsyn (SEW), Greg Knox (SkeenaWild), Viktor Afanasiev, Dr. Aleksandr Shubin, Leila Loder (WSC). Below: Glacier Bay, Alaska.

What happens when glaciers disappear?

Glaciers can be a mixed blessing for salmon. Meltwater delivers reliably cold summertime flows, but too much glacial influence can render rivers frigid, silt-laden, and unproductive. Glaciers are melting at an increasing rate world-wide, and a recent study in *Nature Geosciences* projects a 70% reduction in the mountain glaciers of western Canada by 2100.

As glaciers retreat, will salmon expand and flourish in newly exposed habitat, or will they lose the cold, abundant summer streamflows?

A new collaboration between Wild Salmon Center and Simon Fraser University will examine a world with fewer glaciers. With a focus on coastal British Columbia and southeast Alaska, our partnership will identify areas in which glacial retreat will help or hurt salmon production. This work will help shape policy decisions for a landscape in transition – for instance, assessing the environmental impact of a mine proposed now for a watershed that will lose its headwater glaciers in a few decades.



NASA

Connecting to Salmon in a Wired World

Our educational exchanges between the Russian Far East and North America aim to stop the cycle of salmon decline that has followed development around the world. By sharing experiences and knowledge across political boundaries, we can accelerate the adoption of the best conservation strategies. Since our founding, Wild Salmon Center has supported and led more than 50 exchanges of scientists, conservationists, and educators around the North Pacific.

WSC's annual Russia-Alaska exchange, now in its 16th year, is all about sharing new educational approaches to the salmon story – especially techniques to hook kids on salmon. Six Russian Far East educators came to Alaska this year from the Koppi River in Khabarovsk, the Kol in Kamchatka, and Boomerang, an environmental education club on Sakhalin Island that has been a long-time collaborator.

The Russians learned about how government agencies in Alaska help the non-profit sector with education – through programs like StreamWatch, the Forest Service's volunteer monitoring on two world class sockeye rivers, the Kenai and Russian, and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game's Salmon in the Classroom curriculum, which allows students to incubate eggs into the fry stage.

During one of the most popular days of the trip, the group marveled at a sockeye spawning bonanza from the wooden Williwaw Creek Viewing Platform in the Chugach National Forest south of Anchorage. They later stopped at the Portage Valley visitor center to watch live underwater video feeds from nearby salmon creeks.

All of which raised questions about the way we balance hands-on outdoor experiences, classroom time, and digital interactive tools.

WSC has supported more than 50 exchanges for scientists, educators, and conservationists from Russia and the United States.

Sakhalin's Boomerang club takes a gonzo approach to environmental education by sending kids and their parents hiking, canyoning, kayaking, sailing, skiing, and, in the spawning season, snorkeling in rivers and bays to witness migrations. Last year, 4,500 kids joined their trips throughout Sakhalin Island, impressive by any standard. And after the exchange to Alaska in August, the club is restructuring its trips to add history, geography, and local culture units.

They have also created a popular online salmon game for younger kids in which they rack up points for identifying salmon and fish behaviors. And they have recently commissioned new illustrations of the salmon lifecycle, with WSC support. Since the exchange, Boomerang is also developing a plan to recreate one of the salmon species displays they saw in Alaska and take it on a traveling tour of school playgrounds.

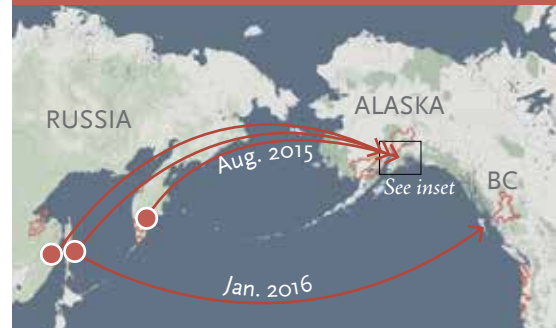
“Curiosity, education and mutual compassion, understanding of nature, knowledge of animals, vivid experiences with parents and family traditions – all of these really generate a passion for conservation and protecting wild places,” said Valentina Mezentzeva, chairwoman of Boomerang.

Around the Pacific, we're recognizing that it takes a full range of techniques to connect kids to salmon and build a new generation of stewards. But there's nothing better than being in the river.



Boomerang

Pacific Rim Exchanges





Our annual Russia-Alaska exchange is all about swapping techniques and ideas that connect people to salmon.

Above: Kids from Boomerang outdoor club snorkeling off Sakhalin Island. Below: Sakhalin teacher using new salmon models.

A well-rounded salmon curriculum

Many salmon programs teach students about the ecological importance of salmon, but few deal equally with salmon’s role in the social and economic life of communities. Our new education program piloting in Cordova, Alaska aims to change that, with comprehensive units on each of the three spheres of life affected by salmon. It’s a joint project with the Prince William Sound Science Center and Copper River Watershed Project in Cordova.

This spring, Cordova fifth graders engaged in two months of experiential lessons on the importance of salmon to their community. This fall, they will interview local residents about the role of salmon in their lives. And the students will eventually handle and smoke salmon, and learn how to market it to potential buyers – real world skills for future entrepreneurs. Once our curriculum is fully vetted, we will offer it to communities throughout Alaska.



Hydropower That Respects Salmon

By Emily Anderson, Alaska Sr Program Manager

Alaska's wilderness is unparalleled in North America: just 1% of the state is permanently altered by human activity. The state's tens of thousands of undeveloped rivers, lakes, and streams make for the best salmon habitat anywhere. And these waterways' consistent supply of cold, clean water supports some of the biggest salmon runs on the planet.

As we think proactively about protecting salmon in the face of climate change and development, Alaska's pristine, complex watersheds – places like the

Nushagak and Kvichak in Bristol Bay – are Wild Salmon Center's top priorities. Complex rivers like these that are unrestricted by development have the ability to absorb extreme flood events and buffer against temperature spikes.

But the sheer wildness that forms great salmon habitat and resilient rivers also makes it a rough place for humans to live. Particularly, Alaska is a tough place to get reliable, affordable electricity. With little infrastructure, villages and towns off the road system depend on polluting generators guzzling diesel at \$10 per gallon. To promote strong communities, local leaders seek to improve standards of living through cleaner, cheaper power sources. Hydroelectricity is one option on the table – it taps a locally abundant, clean resource.


There is a path in Alaska to reliable clean energy and resilient salmon streams.

We think there is a way for communities throughout Alaska to have clean, affordable energy that doesn't threaten salmon habitat. Our first choice would be wind, geothermal, and other non-hydro sources of clean power. But because of Alaska's resources, hydropower will likely be part of the future energy mix.

Our experience fighting the Susitna Dam (see next page) has led us to pivot toward a more proactive, comprehensive approach when looking to the hydropower projects of the future. **Our goal is to avoid the same mistakes as the Lower 48: we can't build a system of large dams at the expense of salmon.**

This year, my Alaskan colleagues and I are engaging fishing groups, local communities, and political leaders across the state to discuss the future of Alaskan energy development and how fish-friendly hydropower fits in. It's clear that hydropower projects should make salmon protection a high priority, locating them primarily in lakes and other waterways without salmon (where some example projects in Alaska already exist). If they are built on salmon streams, hydroelectric projects should not degrade water quality, impede fish passage to important spawning, rearing or migratory habitat, nor significantly alter the flow of salmon streams.

There is a path for Alaska to ensure reliable energy and resilient wild salmon rivers, for the changing century to come. And we're helping to shape that path.



Hydropower projects should make salmon protection a high priority, avoiding salmon streams wherever possible.

Salmon in a Flood-Prone World



By *Matt Sloat, Director of Science*

Climate change giveth and climate change taketh away. In the southern regions where Wild Salmon Center works, climate models predict a decrease in rainfall and stream flows. In southeast Alaska, however, there's more rain in the forecast. A warmer and wetter future brings its own set of challenges for salmon – including an increased risk of flooding.

How will salmon fare in a more flood-prone world? With colleagues from the US Forest Service, we are identifying the risks and options for adapting to a

future climate that produces larger floods in key salmon watersheds. One impact of larger floods is their effect on incubating salmon eggs. Salmon spawn in streams in the fall and eggs develop through the winter, so increased winter flooding could potentially scour eggs from the streambed and impact the next generation of fish.

Salmon spawn in areas with intact floodplains, protecting their eggs from the scouring effects of flood events.

Interestingly, our research indicates that the risk of flood impacts to salmon reproduction in southeast Alaska is probably much lower than was previously thought. That is due to the relatively pristine condition of the area's rivers and floodplains. Open, undeveloped low lying areas alongside rivers minimize future impacts by acting as a pressure release valve for large floods. Most salmon prefer to spawn in stretches of river with intact floodplains which help protect salmon eggs from flood events.

One clear message emerging from our work is that floodplains are critical for increasing the resilience of salmon. Our work has identified parts of the landscape that, if protected, will continue to buffer salmon populations from flood disturbance. There's a Pacific-Rim wide message here: intact rivers and floodplains are key strategies for sustaining salmon in the future.



Ryan Peterson



Michael Wilhelm

Susitna River, Alaska





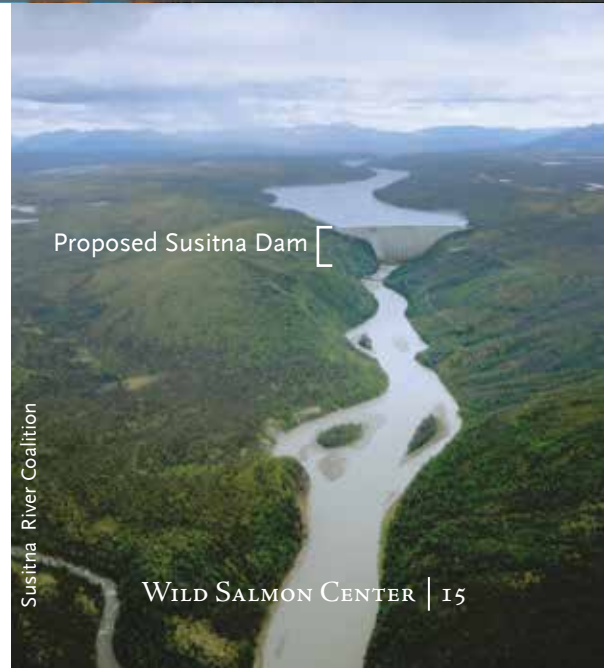
Intact floodplains are tremendously important for minimizing future impacts to salmon populations.

Above: Meandering floodplain of the Susitna River. Below: Rendering of the proposed Susitna Dam.

Alaskans ready to move beyond Susitna

As the conversation shifts to salmon-friendly energy development in Alaska, WSC and our allies in Alaska are still working to shut down one decidedly unfriendly project for fish: the proposed Susitna-Watana Dam. The dam is designed without fish passage, which would jeopardize Alaska's fourth largest Chinook run. The dam would also flood 40,000 acres of prime hunting and recreation wilderness near Denali National Park.

Our partners at the Susitna River Coalition sent a letter this spring to Gov. Bill Walker asking him to issue a final stop work order for the dam. The letter included more than 14,000 signatures from Alaskans who oppose the dam. Collected through the efforts of local volunteers over the last three years, these signatures represent about 20% of the voting bloc that brought Walker into office. As the Annual Report went to press this year, the Alaska coalition was awaiting a response from Gov. Walker.



Proposed Susitna Dam [

Susitna River Coalition

Cooling Down Washington's Coastal Salmon Rivers



By *Devona Ensmenger, Washington Sr Program Manager*

We have always had a soft spot for the Washington Coast's storied salmon streams. Prized by anglers, beloved by staff, Olympic-fed streams like the Hoh, Queets, and Quillayute were later confirmed by intense habitat mapping to be some of the best remaining wild salmon habitat in the state. In the final analysis, fully half of Washington's strongest remaining wild salmon streams are on the coast.

Over the last decade, Wild Salmon Center's work to improve habitat on the Washington Coast has yielded significant success. Our founding of the Hoh River Trust, with Western Rivers Conservancy, enabled the eventual protection of 7,000 acres along the Hoh, one of the best steelhead rivers in the Lower 48. We helped create and continue to support the Washington Coast Sustainable Salmon Partnership, an entity now 44 members strong that secured \$11 million in new watershed restoration funding last year.

It turns out that Washington's coastal rivers will be the state's best hope for salmon in a warming world. University of Washington climate modeling shows that in Washington State, these rivers will have the best chance of sustaining cool flows by 2070.

The next phase of conservation on the coast: connecting fish to coldwater reaches.

But salmon populations will continue to survive and thrive here only if we can open up access to the most important cold water tributaries in coastal rivers.

And that's driving the next phase of coastal salmon conservation. We need to make sure all the great habitat we have worked to protect is interconnected. The Hoh is a great example: while the mainstem is well protected, fish have limited access to 42% of the river's fish-bearing streams because of culverts, failing roads, and piles of cedar waste from historic timber operations. Disconnected areas include many spring-fed cold water channels where young salmon and steelhead can lay low in sweltering summers, like the one we saw in 2015.

A recent federal court decision on a tribal lawsuit is accelerating the fish barrier removal process: Washington must spend \$2.4 billion over fifteen years to take out 1,000 barriers connected to state roads and bridges.

Wild Salmon Center is working with local salmon recovery groups to identify the highest priority rivers and fish passage problems within them. We are also providing guidance to the state to **ensure major public investments in barrier removal focus on whole river reconnection and areas where we expect fish to thrive in the future – such as on the Washington Coast.** Investing in labor intensive barrier removals in struggling coastal counties will also provide much needed job creation and economic stimulus.

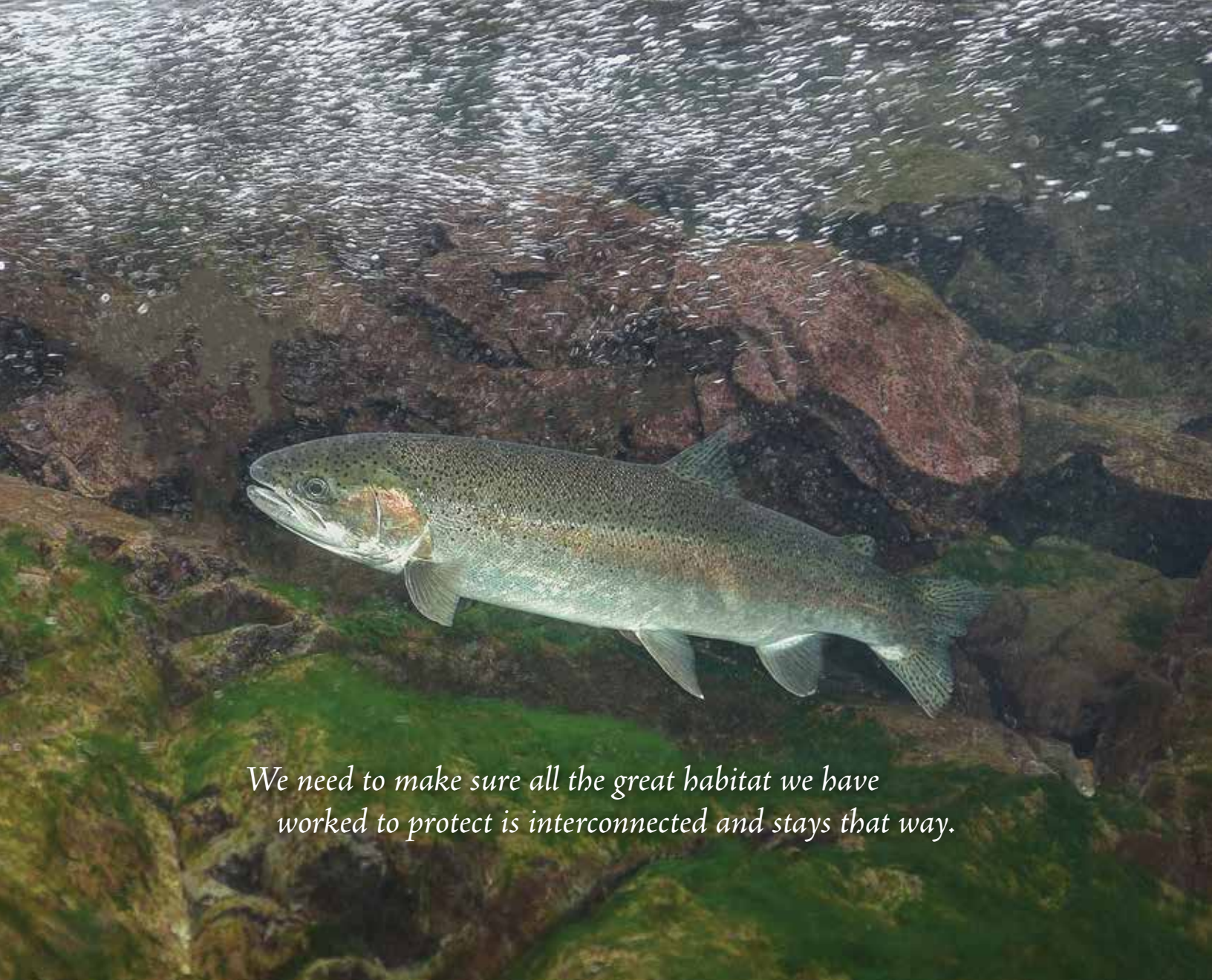
In the next five years, our goal is to see 150 miles of priority coastal rivers open up. This is a crucial step toward ensuring fish have access to cold water in Washington's best climate refuge.



John McMillan

Washington Coast





We need to make sure all the great habitat we have worked to protect is interconnected and stays that way.

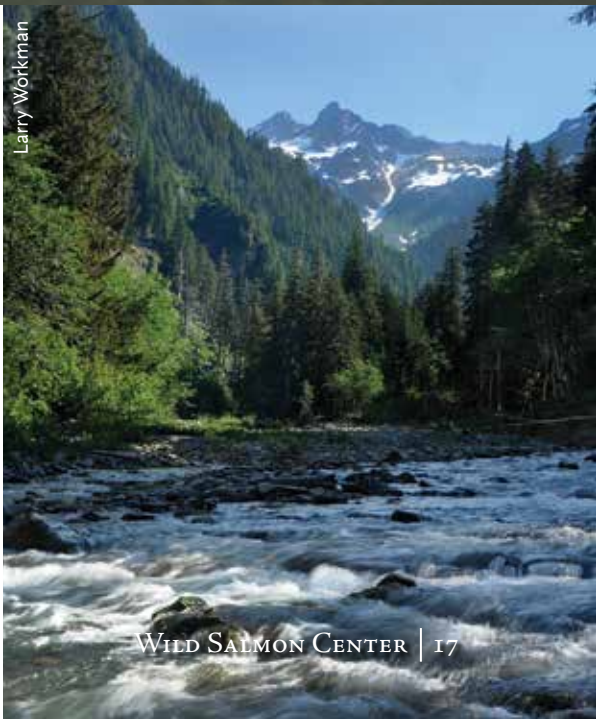
Above: Steelhead from Washington's Olympic Peninsula. Below: Upper Quinault River.

Washington puts down payment on Coast

After eight years of hard work by Wild Salmon Center, The Nature Conservancy and our other key Washington partners to steer investments to the coast, state legislators responded last summer by earmarking more than \$11 million in watershed restoration funding for coastal rivers. The investment will leverage \$5.5 million in additional funding, marking a major turning point in proactively protecting some of Washington's best wild salmon rivers.

The 23 funded projects, part of the Washington Coast Restoration Initiative, range from fish-blocking culvert replacements to riverside forest restoration. They stretch from the Willapa Bay in the south to the Makah Reservation in the north. Several coastal projects kicked off in 2015, including forest restoration along the upper Quinault River, an identified wild steelhead stronghold. The entire package is expected to create 240 jobs in technical fields as well as badly needed blue collar sectors such as construction.

Larry Workman



Restoring Oregon's Leadership on Clean Water, for Salmon



By Bob Van Dyk, Oregon and California Policy Director

Despite Oregon's vaunted green reputation, the state has earned some black marks lately on water management. Thousands of miles of rivers and streams in Oregon are listed as polluted by the Environmental Protection Agency. And after Oregon's failure to improve forest practices on coastal streams, Oregon became the first state to lose federal grant funding – \$1.4 million to be exact – for coastal zone water improvement projects.

In the harsh light of the hot, dry summer of 2015, we saw just how important it is for Oregon to take proactive steps to keep streams clean and cool. The summer was riddled with fishing closures on many of Oregon's rivers, and massive salmon die-offs on the Columbia.

Oregon needs a coordinated water initiative, and Wild Salmon Center is helping to lead the way. Our main thrust: keep Oregon Coast rivers cool, protect and restore salmon habitat, and help Oregon Coast coho be the first salmon species removed from the Endangered Species List.

We focus on the Oregon Coast because it has one of the best collections of wild salmon habitat in the Lower 48. It's also well positioned to ride out a shifting climate. Coastal rivers are generally rainfed and aquifer-fed, and won't be affected by the decline of winter snowpack. Many coastal headwaters are protected in public lands. Few dams block fish passage. The coast has relatively limited impacts from existing hatcheries and a commitment from the state to contain hatchery fish for the benefit of more resilient and adaptable wild populations.

The challenge remains keeping coastal waters clean, flowing, and cold.

Amid last summer's unfavorable water conditions, **WSC helped lead a coalition of fishing and conservation groups that pushed to expand forested buffers along streams on private land in Western Oregon.** We raised public awareness about strong scientific evidence showing that wider forest buffers would keep streams cool. In November, the Board of Forestry voted to effectively double the buffer width on over 2,500 miles of coastal salmon streams from 30 to 60 feet.

It's the most significant change in Oregon forest laws in two decades.

Over 2,500 miles of Oregon coastal streams will benefit from wider buffers WSC advocated for.

There's far more to be done. We need to accelerate the rate we restore watersheds. We need to repair or retire old logging roads and improve forest laws on landslide prone slopes, to keep sediments from washing into salmon streams.

Wild Salmon Center's Mark Trenholm (shown right) is building action plans with local landowners and watershed groups on the coast, to push the state forward on water quality.

We all agree that it's time to stake out a new legacy for Oregon.



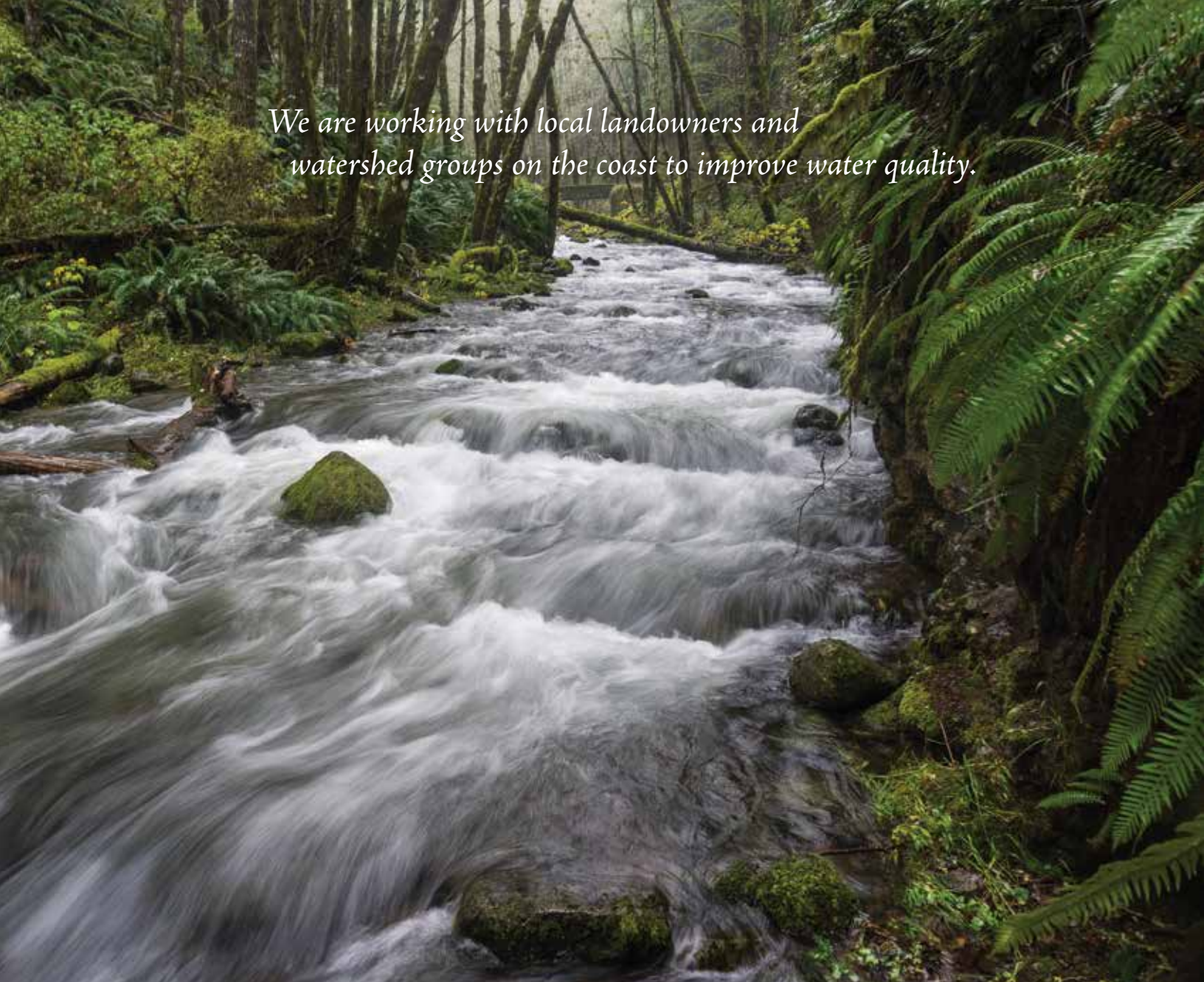
Rick Stare

Oregon Coast

— Highlighted areas represent sections of rivers benefitting from wider buffers



We are working with local landowners and watershed groups on the coast to improve water quality.

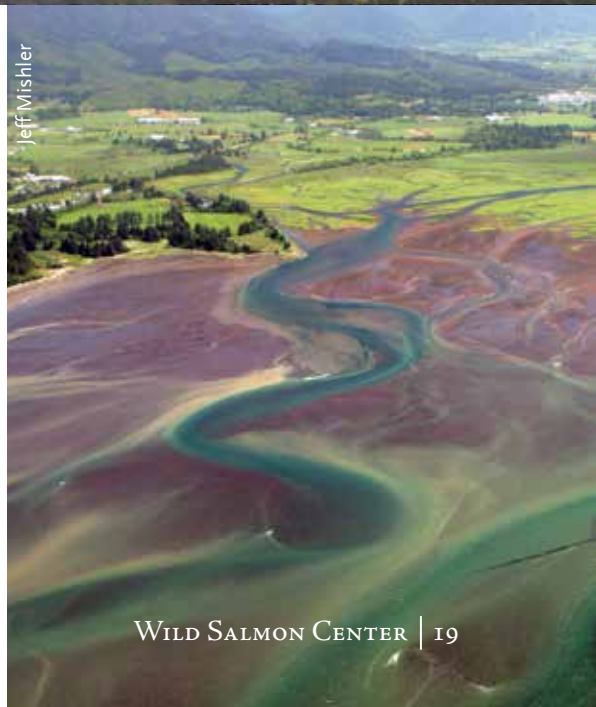


Above: Idiot Creek, Wilson River, Tillamook Forest. Below: Tillamook floodplain.

Grand Opening: Tillamook floodplain

Tillamook County is now implementing one of the largest tidal wetlands projects on the West Coast. The floodplain where the Trask, Wilson, and Tillamook rivers converge on Tillamook Bay once supported a complex maze of tidal channels, sloughs, and wetlands, where juvenile salmonids could grow before entering the ocean. But over a thousand acres have been diked off from the river for a century. Now, thanks to 15 years of hard work by local, state, and federal partners, dikes will be breached this summer to reopen 520 acres of wetlands to outmigrating salmon.

Wild Salmon Center assisted Tillamook County in securing options to buy three land parcels, and in helping to secure \$2.7 million in federal funding to acquire the land. The restored fish habitat ensures continued economic benefits from visiting fishermen, who spend \$13 million in Tillamook County each year. Expanded floodplains will also relieve chronic, costly flooding along Highway 101 – all proving that salmon conservation can be good for fish and communities.



Jeff Wishler

Investing in California's Strongholds

By Bob Van Dyk, Oregon and California Policy Director

In northeastern California, Mill Creek tumbles clear and cold from 8,000-foot-high Lassen Peak and down to the mainstem of the Sacramento River. The creek's headwaters provide some of the highest-elevation spawning areas for Chinook in North America. And Mill Creek has one of the last strong populations of wild spring Chinook in California, with up to 20,000 returning fish in a good year.

Mill Creek's exceptional spring run is one reason it was selected as part of the Sacramento River salmon stronghold. The designation came from an extensive scientific process. Wild Salmon Center worked alongside state and federal partners, Trout Unlimited, CalTrout, The Nature Conservancy, and local experts to identify those California wild salmon rivers and tributaries with the highest levels of species diversity and abundance, and the least influence of hatcheries.

Along with Mill, Deer, Antelope, and Butte creeks in the middle Sacramento, identified salmon strongholds include the Smith; Salmon/Mid Klamath; Mattole; South Fork Eel; Big Sur; and Santa Clara river systems. These rivers are the future hubs for sustaining salmon in California, and partners such as CalTrout are committed to protecting these strongholds.

California needs a strategy to drive funding into strongholds.

Unfortunately, many of these rivers face imposing threats due to the multi-year drought. In Mill Creek, for example, just 300 spawning adults returned last year.

Of all the areas Wild Salmon Center works, California is seeing the harshest effects of climate change. A persistent drought over the last four years has delivered the worst snowpack in at least 500 years. The lack of precipitation has exacerbated a system of water use rights that leaves rivers oversubscribed: as El Niño rain and snow offered new relief this winter, water users scrambled to lay claim to the replenished supplies. Fish, and the policies meant to protect them, have been repeatedly marginalized in political statements and proposed legislation at the state and federal level.

The challenge is clear: in a drier and more competitive water environment in California, we need to be more strategic about how we restore and protect access to cold water in the state's best salmon streams.

Fortunately, California took a big step to address their water challenges by earmarking \$1.5 billion for ecosystem management under California's 2014 water bond. Hundreds of millions of dollars are available for salmon protection in the years ahead, so WSC will be working to drive those investments to the strongholds.

To make that happen, we're developing an "investment portfolio" that will promote projects that are critical to conserve and restore the state's best salmon runs. One focus will be getting fish access to clean, cold water.

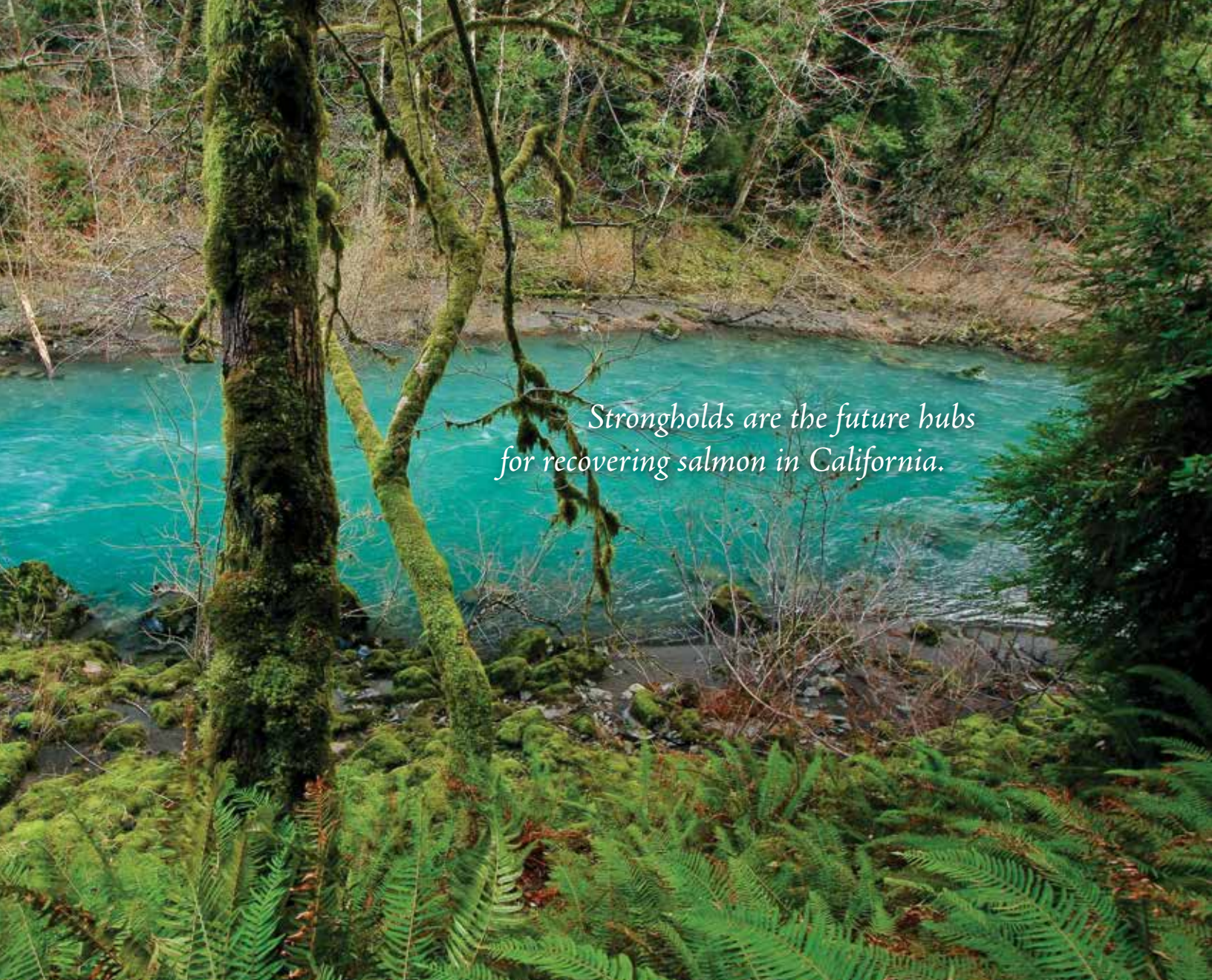
The need could not be more urgent. Salmon returns are expected to remain low in the next few years, due to three poor water years in 2013-15. Salmon experts are genuinely concerned that salmon runs like Mill Creek's wild spring Chinook might blink out altogether. And the future of salmon in the Sacramento depends in part on protecting remaining reservoirs of locally adapted genetic diversity found in wild fish.



Ken Morrish



North Coast, California



Strongholds are the future hubs for recovering salmon in California.

Above: Smith River. Below: Fall Chinook from a tributary of the Smith.

How much heat can fish take?

For steelhead in Southern California, one degree can make a lot of difference. On the Santa Clara River, in Ventura County, we found that one degree Celsius increase in water temperature – from 30 C (about 86 degrees Fahrenheit) to 31 degrees C (88°F) – marks the difference between life and death. This critical threshold was remarkably consistent across several summers and at over 50 different sites that we surveyed with the National Marine Fisheries Service.

As global climate trends raise summer stream temperatures, new management techniques will be required to keep juvenile fish cool and give them a greater chance of survival. Our research in the Santa Clara River suggests that reducing stream diversions and lowering river temperatures slightly may have a large impact on steelhead. In hotter climates like Southern California, we need to better understand how to balance water use and keep stream temperatures from rising above make-or-break thresholds for these iconic fish.

Thomas Dunklin



A Portrait of Complexity



By *Mariusz Wroblewski, Western Pacific Program Director*

What do we mean when we talk about a resilient river system that can withstand an uncertain future?

We mean the Kol River.

The Kol flows from the Central Mountains in west-central Kamchatka 75 miles west to the Sea of Okhotsk. Along the way, it unbraids and forms new connected channels with more frequency than almost any other salmon river in the Pacific (see map). The

river's vast, undeveloped floodplains – reaching almost four miles across – nurture a shifting mosaic of at least five different land and forest types, from young willows to mature alders to grasslands.

This leads to an explosion of life. The Kol hosts native stocks of Chinook, coho, sockeye, chum, pink and Asian masu salmon (all six Pacific salmon species found in Asia), as well as steelhead, rainbow trout, Dolly Varden char, and white-spotted char. The fish rear in the network of channels and backwaters during floods, feasting on blooms of invertebrate scuds and insects. Returning salmon runs have totaled more than 7 million fish in recent years, feeding large predators such as Kamchatka brown bears and Steller's sea eagles.

Our partners at Ocean Outcomes and local fishing company Vityaz-Avto are also working to sustainably harvest some of this abundance, by working with the Marine Stewardship Council to develop a responsible harvest plan for Kol salmon.

We've been working to protect the Kol since 2002, when we first set up a permanent biostation there as part of our ongoing research in Kamchatka. In 2006, we helped set aside the world's first whole watershed refuge for salmon—544,000 acres from headwaters to sea. The experimental refuge, which also included the neighboring Kekhta River, was to last 10 years.

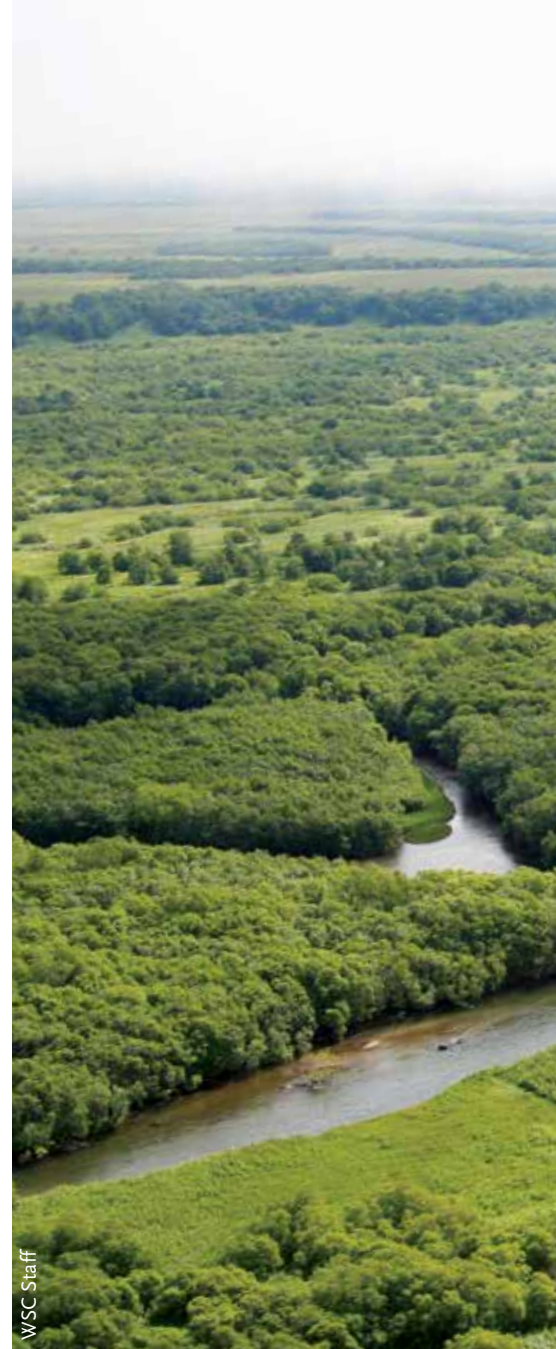
In recent years, we've doubled down on the Kol and worked with our local partners toward permanent status for the refuge. A stronghold like the Kol has durability, if we can keep it intact.

This year, I'm happy to say, the Kamchatka regional administration converted the Kol River Salmon Refuge into a **permanent reserve, as part of the Volcanoes of Kamchatka UNESCO World Heritage site**. And the governor recently signed a decree reiterating his long-term support for the refuge.

Whole river system protection inspires our work across the Russian Far East.

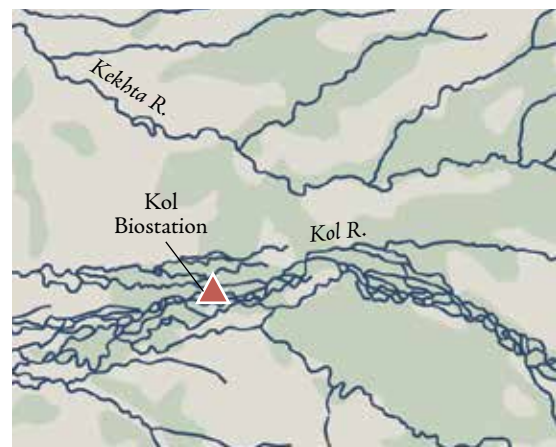
With Russian partners, we are shifting to protection efforts on the steelhead-rich Uktholok and Kvachina rivers in northern Kamchatka (see sidebar). And we are working with Alexander Kulikov and the Khabarovsk Wildlife Foundation to expand regional protections in Khabarovsk from existing refuges in Khabarovsk's Tugur River and Shantar Islands, to the Nimelen.

Together, all these strongholds will ensure that the wild salmon story continues, in Russia and beyond.



WSC Staff

Kol & Kekhta Rivers





*A stronghold like the Kol has durability,
if we can keep it intact.*

Above: Kol Biostation, Kamchatka. Below: Taking samples from summer steelhead on the Kvachina River.

The steeliness of steelhead

How many ways are there to be a steelhead? Summer-runs, fall-runs, winter-runs, half-pounders are just a few life history varieties – those unique development and migration patterns that vary across populations. Steelhead spread more broadly across the Pacific Rim than any other salmon. The secret to their success could be the flexibility in their approach to life. Steelhead may spend as few as one or as many as seven years in rivers before migrating to the ocean. Or they may not go at all, completing their lives solely within freshwater as a rainbow trout.

Wild Salmon Center is working with partners in Kamchatka and across the Pacific Rim to study how healthy rivers generate diverse steelhead populations. This work builds on our earlier studies on Kamchatka steelhead begun in 2002; it will help us understand how to better conserve the features of watersheds that create diverse life histories.



WSC Staff

Partners

Over the past year, we have continued to share resources and personnel with the following organizations, in order to further our common conservation goals.

United States

Alaska Center for the Environment
 Alaska Department of Fish and Game
 American Rivers
 Association of Northwest Steelheaders

Chase Community Council
 Chugach National Forest
 Copper River Watershed Project
 Ecotrust
 Elk River Land Trust
 The Freshwater Trust
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 Long Live the Kings
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 National Fish & Wildlife Foundation
 National Marine Fisheries Service
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 The Nature Conservancy
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 North Olympic Land Trust
 Northwest Guides & Anglers Association
 Northwest Sportfishing Industry Association
 Nunamta Aulukestai
 Ocean Outcomes
 Oregon Conservation Network
 Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
 Oregon Department of Forestry
 Oregon Environmental Council
 Oregon League of Conservation Voters
 Oregon State University
 Oregon Stream Protection Coalition



WSC Staff

WSC's **Bob Van Dyk** and **Oakley Brooks** touring the Tillamook.

Bristol Bay Heritage Land Trust
 Bristol Bay Native Association
 Bristol Bay Regional Seafood Development Association
 Bristol Bay United
 California Department of Fish and Wildlife
 California Trout



Barbie Hull

WSC's **Devona Ensmenger** with **Miles Batchelder** and **Key McMurry** of the Washington Coast Sustainable Salmon Partnership.

Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board	Quinault Indian Nation Salmon State
PNW Forest Service Resource Center	Sierra Club
Pacific Rivers Council	Siuslaw Watershed Council
Pew Charitable Trusts	Smith River Alliance
Prince William Sound Science Center	Susitna River Coalition
Quileute Tribe	Talkeetna Community Council
	TerrainWorks

Kerry Hermann and WSC's **Emily Anderson** and **Amee Pacheco** at SalmonFest on Alaska's Kenai Peninsula.



WSC Staff

First Nations Declare Lelu Off-Limits

In January, Wild Salmon Center joined partners SkeenaWild for the two-day Salmon Nation Summit in the lower Skeena River port of Prince Rupert, BC. More than 300 hereditary and elected First Nations leaders, scientists, politicians, commercial and sport fishermen, and BC residents came together to speak out in defense of wild salmon. First Nations leaders ended the summit with the **Lelu Island Declaration** (left), proclaiming under traditional indigenous law that Lelu Island and critical sections of the Skeena estuary are off limits to development and are protected as a refuge for wild salmon and marine resources. See our feature on the Skeena River for more campaign details (pg 6-9).

Pictured: **Donnie Wesley**, Lax Kw'alaams Hereditary Chief, and select First Nations leaders at the signing of the Lelu Island Declaration.



Skeena Media



Barbie Hull

Greg Knox from SkeenaWild.



Elena Kuznechikina

The **First Salmon Celebration** hosted by the Koppi Council.

- Tillamook County, Oregon
- Tillamook Estuaries Partnership
- Tongass National Forest
- Trout Unlimited
- UC Davis
- United Tribes of Bristol Bay
- University of Alaska, Fairbanks
- University of Washington Olympic Natural Resource Center
- Upper Nehalem Watershed Council

- USDA Forest Service
- US Environmental Protection Agency
- US Fish and Wildlife Service
- USFS Pacific Northwest Research Station
- Washington Coast Sustainable Salmon Foundation
- Washington Coast Sustainable Salmon Partnership
- Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
- Washington Forest Law Center
- Wild Rivers Coast Alliance
- Wild Rivers Land Trust

Canada

- Fisheries and Oceans Canada
- Harrison Stronghold Partnership
- Pacific Salmon Foundation
- Simon Fraser University
- SkeenaWild Conservation Trust

Russia

- Aniva Watershed Council
- Boomerang NGO, Sakhalin
- Elizovo Watershed Council
- Kamchatka Regional Administration
- Kamchatka State Technical University
- KamchatNIRO
- Khabarovsk Division TINRO
- Khabarovsk Regional Administration
- Khabarovsk Wildlife Foundation
- Koppi Watershed Council
- Kronotsky State Nature Reserve
- Moscow State University, Ichthyology Department
- Nogliki Watershed Council
- Russian Academy of Sciences Institute of General Genetics and Institute of Problems of Evolutionary Ecology



Evgeny Dort-Goliz

The annual **Kamchatka Salmon Festival** featured presenters from youth groups, indigenous performers, as well as speakers such as festival organizer **Sergei Vakharin** from Saving Salmon Together (below).

- Russian American Pacific Partnership (RAPP)
- Russian Fly Fishing Magazine "Nakhlyst"
- Russian Salmon Fund
- Sakhalin Environment Watch
- Sakhalin Regional Administration
- Sakhalin Regional Fisheries Association
- Sakhalinrybvod
- SakhNIRO
- "Saving Salmon Together" Regional NGO, Kamchatka
- Smirnykh Fisherman's Association
- Smirnykh Watershed Council
- Uglegorsk Watershed Council
- Ust-Bolsheretsk Watershed Council
- Vulkany Kamchatki Nature Park
- Wild Salmon Territory



Evgeny Dort-Goliz

International

- IUCN, Species Survival Commission
- Marine Stewardship Council
- North Pacific Anadromous Fish Commission
- Pacific Salmon Commission
- Sustainable Fisheries Partnership
- World Wildlife Fund for Nature

Japan

- Sarufutsu Itou Conservation Council
- Sarufutsu Itou no Kai

Volunteers Stop Poachers in Their Tracks

Poaching continues to be a problem in the Russian Far East but there's good news: local watershed councils have reported a significant reduction in violations from years past. WSC provides logistical, technical, and expert support to a total of six local watershed groups, including help with anti-poaching campaigns. Our partners collaborated with local law enforcement to carry out **200 anti-poaching raids** last year. The Aniva council on Sakhalin Island conducted dozens of anti-poaching raids in the Aniva district, including on Aniva Bay (right). Two fishing companies in the bay were found in violation for netting fish too close to a river mouth.

Pictured: Anti-poaching group leader and Aniva watershed council member **Maksim Ageev**.



Maksim Ageev

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David K. (Deke) Welles, Jr.

*See page 33 to learn more about The Stronghold Fund

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The Conservation Alliance



Wild Steelhead, Wild Rivers: Guests gathered at Seattle's Arctic Club for a celebration and fundraiser for our work to protect wild steelhead strongholds in Washington and British Columbia (Photos by Barbie Hull).

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Guido Rahr and **Senator Maria Cantwell** recognizing **Harriet Bullitt** (center) for her contributions to wild salmon conservation.



Stewart Parker (center) and guests of Wild Steelhead, Wild Rivers.

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Guido Rahr with Siberian taimen on the Tugur River in Russia.

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John Driggers (Harder Foundation) and WSC's Ameer Pacheco on a float trip down Washington's Hoh River.

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Create a Legacy of Healthy Rivers

To protect our favorite places – the Pacific’s most extraordinary salmon and steelhead watersheds – it’s vital to ensure that the resources are there to preserve hard-fought conservation achievements over time.

As you make your estate plans, we ask you to consider the beautiful rivers and landscapes that mean the most to you: the Skeena, Bristol Bay, Kamchatka, the Olympic Peninsula, Oregon’s North Coast, California’s Smith River. With your help, Wild Salmon Center will continue to conserve these iconic strongholds and their wild fish populations for future generations.

Through the Stronghold Society you can:

- ♦ Name Wild Salmon Center in your will;
- ♦ Name WSC as a beneficiary of your life insurance policy or retirement plan;
- ♦ Make a gift of appreciated securities, land, or other assets;
- ♦ Create a charitable gift annuity; or
- ♦ Make a tax-free rollover gift directly from your IRA.



Make a lasting investment in the Pacific Rim’s most spectacular river systems.

Ken Morrish

To learn more about legacy gifts at WSC, talk to your financial planner or contact David Finkel at 971-255-5568 or dfinkel@wildsalmoncenter.org.

Already made a bequest? Please let us know at the contact above.

Thank you. A legacy gift through The Stronghold Society is an investment in the Pacific’s best wild salmon and steelhead rivers. Learn more at wildsalmoncenter.org.

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MEET THE BOARD:

Nikita Mishin

Hometown: Moscow

Occupation: Vice Chairman of the Board of Directors of Global Ports, the leading container terminal operator in Russia

WSC Board: Since 2015

How did you get to know the Wild Salmon Center?

I heard about the Wild Salmon Center for the first time about 20 years ago when I went fly fishing with Pete Soverel on the Tigil/Sedanka in Kamchatka. It was a great experience: the wilderness, being so far away from the city. And you feel this vibrancy in chasing fish. After that, I started fly-fishing regularly and all over the world.

There was a long gap and then four years ago, I fished with Guido Rahr on the Tugur River.

Is your membership on the WSC Board about leaving a legacy to your kids?

Very much so. I have three children. Everyone should think about what we will pass on to our children and grandchildren, and make sure they can enjoy what we enjoyed. That's why we're trying to protect salmon habitat in the Pacific.

What gives you hope for the future?

More and more of my compatriots are taking care of wildlife. And generally speaking, the attitude of government officials in Russia is changing in favor of protection of the environment. I'd say it's much better than 20 years ago.

I think another thing that gives me hope is education of kids, which is building a culture of proper use of our environment in Russia. And certain programs for kids, which the WSC supports in Sakhalin, are helpful in that sense (see our work with Boomerang on pg 10).

What do we still need to work on, what needs to change?

The vast majority of environmental problems are caused by economics. We need to find a way to improve livelihoods without seriously damaging the environment. It's easy to say, difficult to do.

But we should at least try to find a way.



Guido Rahr

Tugur River, Khabarovsk



Guido Rahr



MEET THE BOARD:

John Childs

Hometown: Vero Beach, Florida

Occupation: Chairman and Partner,
J.W. Childs Associates

WSC Board: Since 2014

What drew you to Wild Salmon Center?

I like fishing for salmon and I want to make sure they are around forever.

My nephew Starling Childs knew Guido and he said, "You need to meet him."

What's your favorite river?

For salmon, it's the rivers in Alaska around the Bristol Bay area – the Nushagak, Togiak, Kvichak, Naknek, and the Egegik. As for favorites, I'm equally divided between silvers and sockeye.

Outside Bristol Bay, it's Yantarni Creek, which runs into the Pacific. It's a runoff from the Alaska Range – not a massive river but it has a fantastic silver salmon run.

How do you see the future in Alaska – how do we keep it protected?

I'm counting on Guido and (Alaska Sr Program Manager) Emily Anderson to keep it all protected. I'm trying to do what I can to help out.

One of the biggest threats is the Pebble Mine. Certainly, it's one of the things Guido and I collaborated on early. The mine project is sort of smoldering there, now. I think as long as the price of gold and copper stays low, we don't have as much to worry about.

Undoubtedly, there will be other natural resource projects in Alaska. We have to contain them so that they don't threaten salmon runs – it's a continuing issue.

Is there a sense of hope for you, in terms of fish and rivers and wild places?

I think the Wild Salmon Center has done a phenomenal job in mobilizing interest in protecting salmon habit across the entire Pacific. It's one thing to do it in Alaska. What's impressive about WSC is they have been able to do it in a place like Russia, which is not an easy place to work.

Where are you headed to next?

I'm looking forward to going up to Alaska this summer for the sockeye runs. When you're flying over the Kvichak River, you can see this ribbon of fish going for miles along the shoreline. It's a very impressive show.

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Bristol Bay, Alaska

Ben Knight



Wild Salmon Center has been approved to receive grants through the 1% for the Planet program.

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FUNDER SPOTLIGHT: Conservation Alliance

The Conservation Alliance is a coalition of outdoor industry companies that contribute their collective annual membership dues to nonprofits working to protect wild places. Founded in 1989 by REI, Patagonia, The North Face, and Kelty, The Conservation Alliance now boasts more than 190 member companies and contributes over \$1.6 million annually to conservation organizations throughout North America.

Wild Salmon Center has been a grateful recipient of Conservation Alliance grants since 2010, when they began supporting our efforts to achieve more balanced logging practices in Oregon’s Tillamook and Clatsop State Forests. More recently The Conservation Alliance has funded WSC’s campaign to safeguard fish, wildlife, and outdoor recreation and tourism in Alaska’s Susitna River basin by preventing the development of a massive hydroelectric dam project (see page 15 to learn more).

“Wild Salmon Center made good use of our funding to protect important areas within the Tillamook and Clatsop State Forests, and we hope to see similar good results on the Susitna River,” says Josie Norris, Program Manager of The Conservation Alliance. “The proposed Susitna Dam would have an enormous impact on the river and the surrounding landscape. We are committed to preserving wildlife habitat and recreation opportunities for future generations, and we are proud to support WSC’s effort to halt this dam.”

The Conservation Alliance’s commitment extends far beyond financial support. The group’s expansive membership



Matt Fox
 Conservation Alliance staff members Josie Norris, Serena Bishop Gordon, and John Sterling.

amplifies the reach of grantees when member companies help promote events, donate outdoor gear, or inform customers about opportunities to take action in defense of the wild places they’re working to protect. This year WSC will host a series of screenings for a short film highlighting the threat of the proposed Susitna Dam in an effort to build opposition to the project in the Lower 48 – thanks in large part to the support of The Conservation Alliance and its member companies.

“Like many things in Alaska, the Susitna River is big and wild,” says Norris. “We hope WSC’s efforts will keep it that way.” Learn more at conservationalliance.com.

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Alexander Abramov and WSC's Mariusz Wroblewski on the Tugur River.



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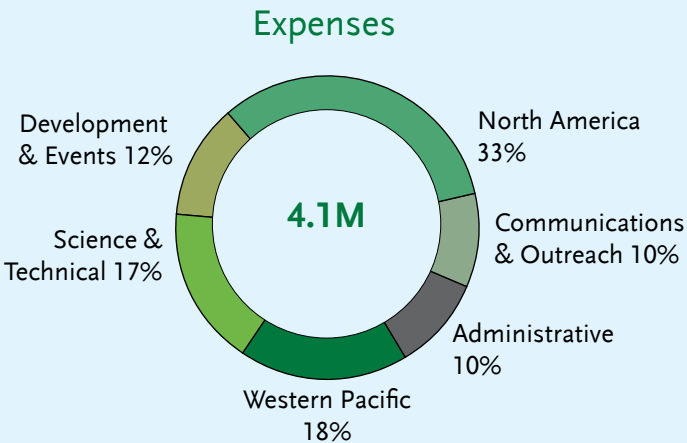
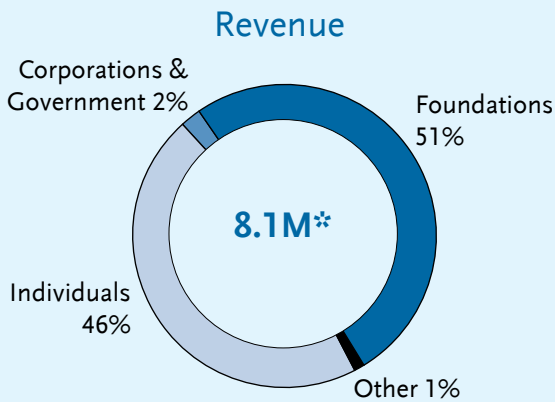
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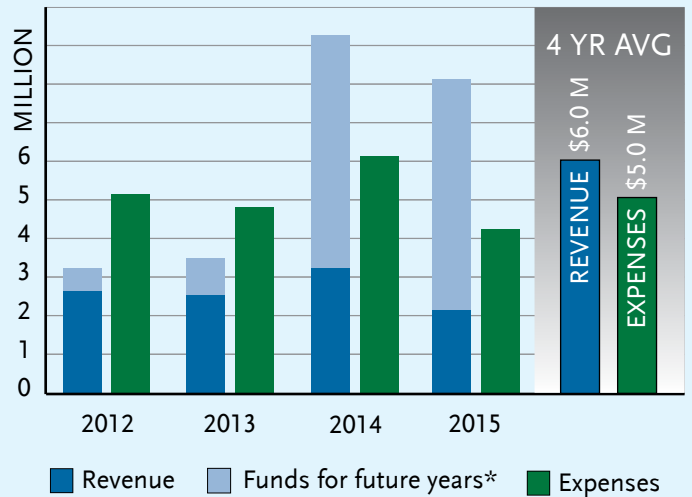
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Statement of Activities

For the fiscal year ending December 31, 2015



Revenue & Expenses 2012-2015



* Funds pledged during the fiscal year to be spent over future years. This includes revenue for **The Stronghold Fund**, a new, first-of-its-kind funding vehicle created by WSC to provide reliable financing to conserve the North Pacific's salmon and steelhead strongholds over the next 15-20 years. **To find out more**, please contact us at 971-255-5568 or dfinkel@wildsalmoncenter.org.





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Guido Rahr with outgoing Board Member **Leah Hair**.

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Guido Rahr

WSC staff flying over Bristol Bay, Alaska. From left to right: David Finkel, Emily Anderson, Sara LaBorde, Oakley Brooks and Mark Trenholm.

Front cover: Umpqua River, Oregon by Ken Morrish. Back cover: Kamchatka bear by Igor Shpilenok.



The mission of Wild Salmon Center is to promote the conservation and sustainable use of wild salmon ecosystems across the Pacific Rim.

