

October 29 | Free Virtual Event

Join us for Wild Salmon Center's second annual live event. *Headwaters* will feature updates from salmon conservation experts across the North Pacific, along with our latest news and a sneak peek at exciting new projects.



Scan to RSVP!

A scientist's gift for salmon strongholds

For Jim MacDonald, the first encounter with wild salmon was unforgettable. "Seventeen years ago, I traveled to Alaska for the first time. Watching tens of thousands of sockeye come upriver—it knocked me over. It demonstrated the power and majesty of this ecosystem but also highlighted its fragility."



Jim MacDonald, WSC donor

As a scientist with a career in pharmaceutical toxicology, Jim has always valued the use of sound data to create good solutions. He looked for the same qualities when it came to his philanthropy, and chose to support Wild Salmon Center through his IRA.

Once donors reach age 70½, they can make gifts from their IRA directly to nonprofits, tax-free. For those **required** to make distributions at 73, this can reduce taxable income while making a meaningful difference for the causes they care about.

*"It's unbelievably simple. You just designate WSC as a recipient, and it's done. I would give anyway, but this way I can manage my financial health while making a tremendous impact."* Jim MacDonald

Through his support, Jim hopes to inspire a global effort to protect North Pacific watersheds: "A broad approach is critical, and Wild Salmon Center is helping people understand why whole ecosystems matter."

**Learn more about making a tax-wise gift for wild salmon rivers by contacting your IRA Custodian or Financial Advisor.**



On set with RUNNING WILD

Witset Canyon is central to fishing life for the Wet'suwet'en First Nation of the Skeena River, B.C. This summer, camera crews filmed traditional dipnetting, a salmon ceremony, and interviews with Wet'suwet'en leaders. See these scenes for yourself in spring 2026, when the world's first giant-screen film on salmon hits theaters.

Courtesy of Mission Partners Entertainment Group



From Juneau to D.C., we're holding the line for Bristol Bay

Cassie Bergman

Our goal has long been to establish layered protections for this priceless fishery. State and federal leaders are responding.

It's been a stunner of a summer for the world's greatest sockeye salmon fishery. In May, we saw the introduction of the Bristol Bay Forever Act: an Alaska state bill that aims to safeguard the 36,000-square-mile Bristol Bay Fisheries Reserve from the type of mining most harmful to salmon. Then, in July, the U.S. Department of Justice announced that it would defend past federal decisions to block the Pebble Mine project in court against Pebble's backer, the Canadian company Northern Dynasty Minerals.

"Bristol Bay is America's most productive salmon stronghold," says Wild Salmon Center President and CEO Guido Rahr. "State and federal leaders are following science and honoring the thousands of Alaskan fishermen and millions of Americans who treasure this place."

This united front comes as extractive industries seek to ramp up production across North America. Here's where we stand today, more than a decade into our evolving campaign to keep Bristol Bay safe. *Continued on page 2.*



Shannon Thompson

Salmon and the State of the Union

There's no doubt about it: recent political shifts in the United States are creating headwinds for wild salmon, steelhead, and trout. (Pg 3.)

IN THIS ISSUE

- Bristol Bay legislation
- Salmon and the State of the Union
- West Su campaign update
- Coho recovery in Oregon
- Oregon legislative update
- Latest salmon science and field work
- Stronghold strategy at work
- RUNNING WILD in British Columbia
- 2nd annual Headwaters event
- Remembering three Wild Salmon Center leaders

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**It's been a long fight.** In 2019, as federal agencies seemed ready to greenlight the Pebble Mine project, Wild Salmon Center and partners launched the Bristol Bay Defense Fund led by the United Tribes of Bristol Bay. By that point, we'd already been battling this toxic open pit mine for years.

"The Pebble Mine has been the top threat to Bristol Bay since it was first discovered in 2005," says Wild Salmon Center Alaska Director Emily Anderson. "But if we truly want to protect this fishery, we need to make sure it's safe not just from Pebble, but from any future project like it."

That's why layered protections—at all levels of government—are our ultimate goal for Bristol Bay. Now, even at a time of unprecedented challenges for America's wild rivers and fish (see story, opposite page), that goal is advancing on two fronts.

*"The Pebble Mine has been the top threat to Bristol Bay since it was first discovered in 2005. We need to make sure it's safe not just from Pebble, but from any future project like it."*

*Emily Anderson, Alaska Director*

**Federal defense: U.S. government will back Bristol Bay against mining lawsuit**

In recent years, thanks to tireless advocacy by the United Tribes of Bristol Bay, Wild Salmon Center, and our Bristol Bay Defense Fund coalition—backed by the support of millions of people across the globe—key federal agencies have made decisions that have blocked the advancement of the Pebble Mine project.

In 2020, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers rejected a key permit for the mine. In 2023, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency invoked Clean Water Act protections to make the headwaters of Bristol Bay's Kvichak and Nushagak Rivers off limits to hardrock mining. But Pebble backer Northern Dynasty is challenging both decisions in court, aiming to have them overturned.

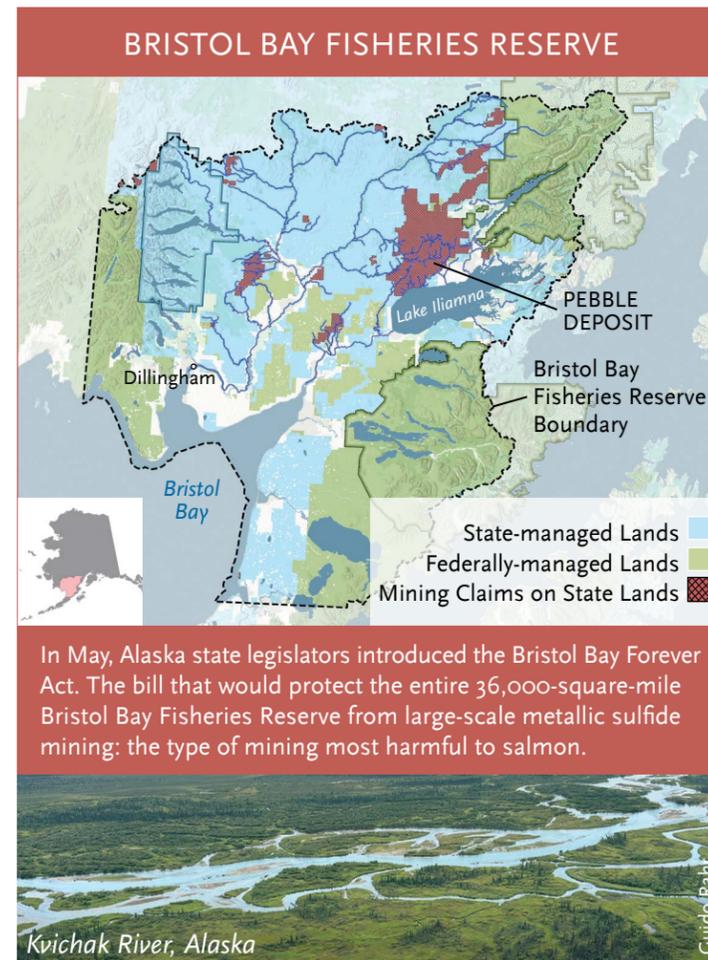
For months, it was unclear what position the Trump administration's Department of Justice would take with regard to this suit. Then, on July 17, we got great news: the agency announced that it will defend both the Army Corps and EPA decisions.

"Bristol Bay is a national treasure," Rahr says. "We're grateful that the Trump administration is defending protections for Bristol Bay and is continuing its opposition to the Pebble Mine."

**State protections: Alaska introduces the Bristol Bay Forever Act**

In the closing days of Alaska's 2025 legislative session, state lawmakers introduced an ambitious bill to protect a fishery that generates 15,000 jobs and \$2.2 billion annually in regional economic activity.

The Bristol Bay Forever Act would safeguard state lands within the 36,000-square-mile Bristol Bay Fisheries Reserve from both the Pebble Mine and mining operations in 20 additional known mineral deposits in the region. If passed in a future session, these state-level protections would mark a huge step toward our ultimate goal of layered protections for this irreplaceable fishery. (See map below.)



In May, Alaska state legislators introduced the Bristol Bay Forever Act. The bill that would protect the entire 36,000-square-mile Bristol Bay Fisheries Reserve from large-scale metallic sulfide mining: the type of mining most harmful to salmon.

"For decades Alaskans have demanded action to keep Bristol Bay safe," Anderson says. "Now Alaska's leaders are meeting the challenge head on with a state-based solution to end the threat of the Pebble Mine and mines like it."

Wild Salmon Center is working to build on the momentum of this summer's good news. We've joined the federal government's case to help defend against the lawsuit brought by Northern Dynasty Minerals. And with our coalition partners, we're raising support across Alaska for the Bristol Bay Forever Act.



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**Salmon and the State of the Union**

Wild Salmon Center's federal affairs team is closely tracking new challenges for wild fish conservation—along with a few opportunities—in the 119th U.S. Congress and second Trump administration.

In May, Senators Patty Murray (D-WA) and Steve Daines (R-MT) introduced the Floodplain Enhancement and Recovery Act. We helped to shape this commonsense legislation, which aims to streamline permitting processes—a stated goal of this Congress—for ecosystem restoration and nature-based solutions in federally-regulated floodplains.

In June, millions of acres of public lands were nearly sold off, as part of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act. These land sales were ultimately defeated, thanks in part to advocacy from key Wild Salmon Center board members and other conservation partners.

In July, the U.S. Department of Justice announced that it will defend Bristol Bay, Alaska, from a lawsuit brought by Pebble Mine backer Northern Dynasty Minerals. (See story, opposite page.)

Now, our team is seeking ways to stem further pain from unprecedented workforce and budget cuts at core partner agencies like the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the National Resources Conservation Service. These divestments hold real risk for salmon, says Wild Salmon Center President and CEO Guido Rahr—particularly for the continued recovery of Oregon Coast coho.

*"We have a real shot at delisting the first salmon species ever under the Endangered Species Act. But it's happening when federal partnerships are under threat." Guido Rahr, President and CEO*

"Right now, we have a real shot at delisting the first salmon species ever under the Endangered Species Act," Rahr says. "But it's happening at a moment when the federal partnerships that drive this work are under threat."

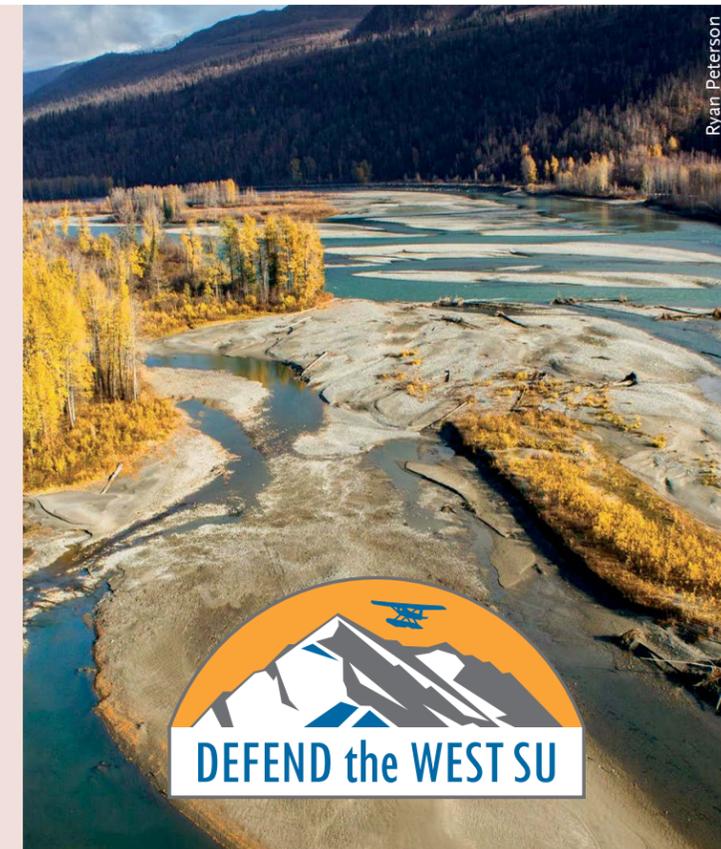
**New fronts open in fight to keep the West Su wild**

The West Susitna region is roadless for a reason. It's a salmon stronghold—home to all five species of salmon found in Alaska—and beloved by outdoor recreationalists.

That's why Alaskans have said no to past projects that put this area at risk. It's why, since 2022, they've said no to the West Susitna Industrial Access Road—a public project that would solely benefit private mining interests.

In response to intense public scrutiny, state agencies are breaking the project into parts and attempting to advance it piecemeal. For example, in 2024, the Alaska Department of Transportation proposed what it said was an unrelated 22-mile "recreation" road: one that ends exactly where the 100-mile industrial road begins.

Meanwhile, Alaska's Governor is moving to fast-track permits for the road through new federal policies. With our Defend the West Su coalition, we aim to engage in every step of this process—and give Alaskans and Americans a chance to voice their concerns.



Ryan Peterson



# At low tide, a high water mark for Oregon coho

It's 4 a.m. on the Oregon Coast. August neap tides on the Coos River are at their lowest ebb in months when excavators breach the levee.



Excavators worked through the night to breach an old levee on Oregon's tidally-influenced Coos River mainstem.

For at least 75 years, an earthen wall on the river mainstem has blocked tidewater—and fish—from reaching wetlands just beyond. Now, Ed Cope can hardly believe he's finally here, witnessing a new chapter for the Coos Basin and its wild salmon.

As the on-site project manager for the Millicoma Confluence Project—named for its location right below the merger of the South Fork Coos and Millicoma Rivers—this moment caps years of work by Cope and his colleagues at the Coos Watershed Association.

"A lot of water pumps through here in winter," Cope says. "That's why it's really important that young fish can find calm places like these wetlands to take refuge before heading out to sea."

This project was a priority of the Coos Basin Coho Partnership, comprised of Tribes, timber companies, conservation groups,

and state and federal agencies. CBCP, in turn, is part of the statewide Coast Coho Partnership, led by Wild Salmon Center.

Across coastal Oregon, diverse coalitions like this are implementing our strategic action plans to improve life for wild fish and local communities. Launched in 2017, the Coast Coho Partnership's science-based restoration work is already helping to recover coho and other salmon species in places like the Elk, Siuslaw, and Nehalem. Now, we're expanding our proven model to the Coquille and Siletz watersheds—bringing us closer to our goal of recovering coho salmon sufficiently to delist them from the Endangered Species Act.

"The Millicoma Confluence Project is a perfect example of what's going right for coho recovery," says Wild Salmon Center Oregon Senior Habitat Restoration Manager Dr. Tim Elder. "It's the story of local partners seeing opportunities and making big things happen. And it's one we're seeing more and more across the Oregon Coast."

*"The Millicoma Confluence Project is a perfect example of what's going right for coho recovery on the Oregon Coast."*

*Dr. Tim Elder, Oregon Senior Habitat Restoration Manager*



Coho smolts take refuge in calm wetlands before heading out to sea.

FROM THE FIELD: This summer, Wild Salmon Center staff and partners got outside for science, salmon restoration, and community building.



Wild Salmon Center's Betsy Krier monitors fish below a new culvert in Washington's Quillayute River Basin.



A Chinook salmon fitted with an acoustic tracking device in Washington's Hoh River.



Wild Salmon Center's Kirk Blaine surveys coho salmon in Oregon's Rogue River Basin.



Wild Salmon Center staff and partners team up to track Hoh River Chinook salmon in Washington.

## Oregon's grueling legislative session offers some wins for forests and fish



According to Wild Salmon Center Oregon Policy Director Stacey Detwiler, Oregon's 2025 legislative session was a slog to the end, as legislators ground through a record slate of bills amid unprecedented federal uncertainty. "Despite our best efforts, no major conservation legislation made it over the finish line," Detwiler admits. Among our wins and misses:

- We secured basic **funding for Private Forest Accord grant and research programs**—albeit just \$24.2 million of \$36 million needed.
- We raised concerns over a bill that undermined progress for a **state forest habitat conservation plan**—and defeated it.
- We supported innovative bills to **boost stream flow protections**, elevating key issues despite the bills' failure to advance.
- We diverted funds from hatchery programs to **wild salmon and steelhead monitoring**.

# The link between North Umpqua summer steelhead and spring Chinook everywhere



Dr. Tasha Thompson on Fish Creek, a North Umpqua tributary.

Dr. Tasha Thompson is a renowned salmon geneticist on Wild Salmon Center's science team. The impacts of her research ripple across salmon country.

In the coming months, Dr. Thompson and her colleagues will share new findings that could help shape how we protect summer steelhead on Oregon's North Umpqua River—her home river—along with other early-run salmonids across the Pacific.

**Wild Salmon Center:** *Why study the North Umpqua's summer steelhead run?*

**Dr. Tasha Thompson:** The North Umpqua is known for its summer steelhead run. It drives a robust recreational fishing economy. Historically, a strong summer steelhead run has meant that our steelheading season goes months longer than it otherwise would. But these fish have seen steep declines in the last 10 years, and answers have been hard to find.

We wanted to test a hypothesis for why summer steelhead exist in the first place: that, like spring Chinook, they need access to habitat that later runs can't get to.

*Why would exclusive habitat be so important for summer steelhead?*

It's their one big advantage over winter steelhead. It's really hard to be a summer steelhead. They stop eating once they enter freshwater, and it can be up to 10 months before they spawn. They also have to sexually develop during that time, which takes a lot of energy.

Given these challenges, summers are at a serious disadvantage when they have to compete directly with winter steelhead for spawning habitat.

*Where did your research start on the North Umpqua?*

We mapped where they showed up, where winter steelhead did, and what, if any, true flow barriers kept them separate. To do that, we analyzed GREB1L—the gene that dictates early- versus late-run timing in both summer steelhead and spring Chinook—in samples collected throughout the basin.

*And what did you find?*

In some years, other creeks might have semi-exclusive habitat. But we found that only the waterfalls on Steamboat Creek had exclusively summer-run steelhead above them. It means that Steamboat Creek is critical for North Umpqua summers. That's a lot of pressure on one creek.

*What's the takeaway for steelhead conservationists?*

One obvious takeaway is that North Umpqua summers need more opportunities to use their genetic advantage. We're now looking to see where they could recolonize habitat, with a little help from humans.

*You have more studies coming out soon that also focus on early-run salmonids. Is there a bigger picture?*

Definitely. We're now finding GREB1L is important even in rivers where spring and fall salmon runs nearly converge—like Chinook in the Dean River, which is our case study for another project.

Whether it's the North Umpqua or the Dean, knowing what genetic diversity is present means that we can help protect the built-in tools that salmon and steelhead use to adapt as climate change rapidly alters their watersheds. It means this research is more important than ever.



Mongolia River Outfitters

## FROM THE FIELD:

### Ensuring the future of Mongolia's wild salmonids

In August, Wild Salmon Center Senior Mongolia Consultant Dr. Saulyegul Avlyush and Mongolia River Outfitters hosted leading environmental policymakers on the Delgermörön River in Mongolia's Khovsgol Province. Scientific exchanges like this aim to bring wild salmonids into national conversations on fisheries management, climate change, and energy development.



## IN REMEMBRANCE



Pat Lee

**Jim Van Loan** (WSC board, 1995–2004) was a U.S. Army veteran, avid fly fisher, and a lifelong steward of Oregon's fisheries and natural resources. He served eight years on the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission, and was a founding member of the North Umpqua Foundation, and an early board member of Oregon Trout (now the Freshwater Trust). Many who knew Jim and Sharon, his wife of 68 years, knew them first as the longtime owners of the Steamboat Inn. He passed April 2 at the age of 88.

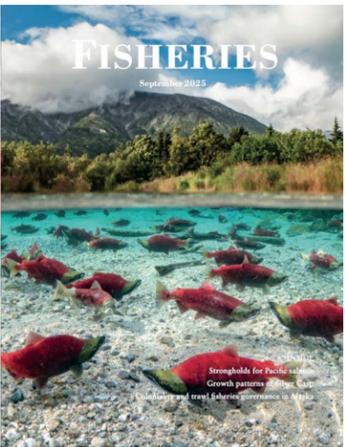
## PUBLICATIONS:

### The stronghold strategy in action

A new study in the peer-reviewed journal *Fisheries* shows how Wild Salmon Center's salmon-focused ecosystem protection strategy delivers in the global drive to protect biodiversity. Our strategy proactively protects "strongholds"—a select group of salmon, steelhead, and trout systems that collectively comprise 119 distinct watersheds.

For the past 25 years, Wild Salmon Center has deployed the stronghold strategy in rivers across the North Pacific. With our partners, we've protected 35.7 million acres of overall habitat and prioritized wild fish biodiversity in 89 rivers.

"The stronghold strategy is already sustaining local fisheries, slowing the pace of biodiversity loss, and helping to mitigate climate change," says Dr. Matthew Sloat, Wild Salmon Center Science Director and a study co-author. "It's one of the smartest investments we can make for the health and wellbeing of future generations."



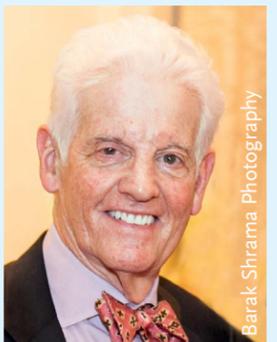
Wild Salmon Center's stronghold strategy featured in the September 2025 edition of *Fisheries*. PC: Jason Ching

**David Wimberly** (WSC board, 1999–2009) was a world traveler and a master fly fisher. He founded Frontier Capital Management in 1980, and was a member of many organizations, including the New York and Boston Societies of Security Analysts and the Flycasters of Boston. He passed July 20 at the age of 91.



Guido Rahr

**Bill Neukom** (WSC supporter), a committed fly fisher, was Microsoft's lead attorney for nearly 25 years, a managing partner of the San Francisco Giants, and the co-founder of the World Justice Project. In 1995, Neukom and his four children founded the Neukom Family Foundation. He passed July 14 at the age of 83.



Barak Shrama Photography