



The HOH FOREVER

Story by TEN & TWO STAFF

Photos by KEITH LAZELLE, DEC HOGAN, ADAM TAVENDER
and WALTER HODGES



WELL BEYOND MANY YEARS AND AGES AGO, T'ist'ilal was a giant—a thunderbird that lived in an ice cave at the base of the Blue Glacier on Mount Olympus at the very headwaters of the Hoh River on Washington's Olympic Peninsula. When this bird blinked, lightning flashed from its eyes. His wings were larger than two Hoh or Quillayute war canoes and the flapping of its wings created thunder that rolled down the valley of the Hoh River as it etched its own 60-mile path to the then-unnamed Pacific Ocean. Thunderbird could carry a whale in its talons, and great battles waged between them in the ocean, on Mount Olympus and in the prairies along the Hoh and Quillayute river systems.

For countless years, Thunderbird protected the rivers and the people. Then we took over and the record's not been so good. Theodore Roosevelt created Olympic National Park in 1909, and in so doing protected the area inside the park that includes the Olympic Mountains, a temperate rain forest area, and a section along the ocean beach at the mouths of the Hoh and Quillayute rivers. Along the remaining 30 miles of the Hoh, in between the park boundary and the ocean, the river was managed for timber production rather than to protect its incredible natural values. Now in 2010, it appears a major corner has been turned: The Hoh River has another chance to secure its place as the best salmon river in the continental United States and this accomplishment will last forever.





Decaying chum salmon on the banks of the Hoh.

In this day and age, we all need a good story to give us a little faith, and the story of how the Hoh was saved for everyone, not just a few people, is a model for how opportunity, faith, compromise and the sheer force of will to do something good can change everything and change it for forever and a day. In December of 2010, the Western Rivers Conservancy and the Hoh River Trust finished a deal that secured 7,000 acres along the Hoh between the National Park boundary and the ocean. This is 7,000 acres that will be left alone and will be open to the public for generations. There will be no private fishing camps or “no trespassing” signs. The wealthy can’t buy access and shut it off to the world. The Hoh will be returned to its original owners: Mother Nature and, secondly, all of us.

For years, the Hoh has been one of world’s great steelhead and salmon rivers. Its flow contains glaciated water from the Olympics and its temperate

rain forests of huge Sitka spruce and western hemlock—layered with alder, maple, western red cedar, and Douglas fir—have been protected from ocean storms and watered endlessly by what sometimes seems to be continuous rain which can total 140 inches each year. Standing in a river fly fishing can feel as if you’re being consumed by a soft, fleshy, wet oyster. It’s one of the wettest places on earth, and one of the great places to hit a wild steelhead or salmon on a fly.

In the upper river, closer to the park boundary, the gravel bar drifts are expansive and spey casting is an ideal way to cover the water. Chinook are there in the fall and spring. The steelhead winter run begins in November and runs through March. If you go in the winter, figure you’re gonna be miserable. It’s the dictionary definition of steelhead weather, meaning pouring rain and 39 degrees is no surprise. It can be the kind

Photo: Adam Tavender



Releasing a mint-bright wild steelhead fresh from the Pacific.



Photos right page: Walter Hodges

The rainforest that surrounds the Hoh River gets 150 inches of rain a year.

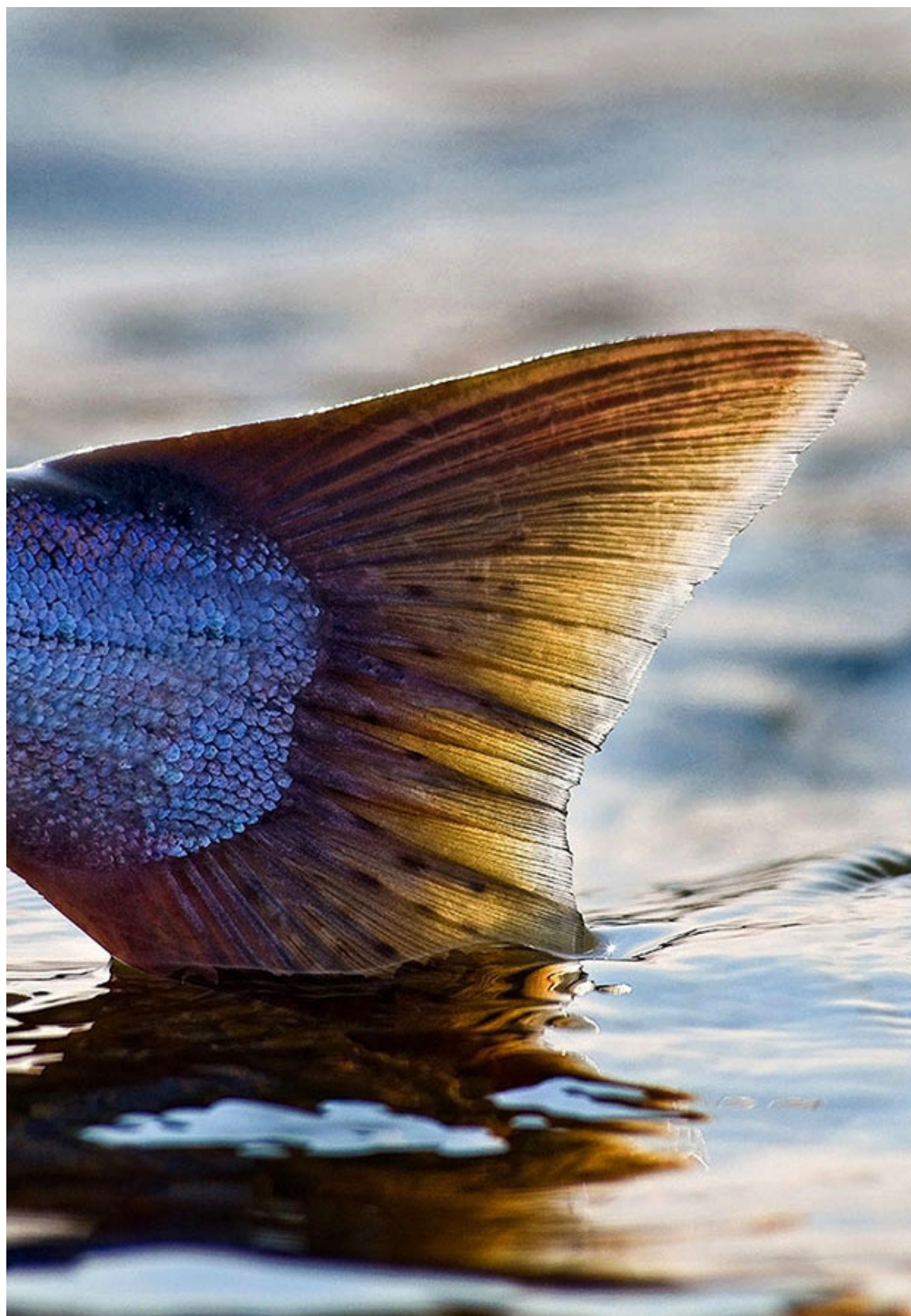


Photo: Dec Hogan

A strong fall chinook is released back into the wild waters of the Hoh.

of weather people take out home loans to avoid, and it can kill you if you're not dressed for it. But if you are, at any moment, a steelhead can pull the fly rod right out of your hands. The runs of these magnificent fish have, in fact, been seriously depleted over the years. The resource needs our help and there are, of course, no guarantees; but in the lower 48, it does not get any better than the Hoh, and the reality remains that you can catch the steelhead or salmon you've always dreamt about. They're still there. The process of simply standing and casting in a river of this magnitude is beyond measure. It's magical. It's the real deal. It's why we fly fish.

The fulcrum for the protection of this national treasure centered around two points: The Western Rivers Conservancy and Rep. Norm Dicks from Washington's 6th Congressional District, which includes the Hoh River. The Wild Salmon Center was involved from the beginning doing habitat monitoring on the Hoh, partnering with Western Rivers Conservancy, and adding an influx of money at the start. Along with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Washington Department of Natural Resources, they formed the leading edge in protecting the river. The project belongs to the Western Rivers Conservancy, but it took a lot of effort from a lot of people to pull it off.

The way it happened was reasonably complicated and, in the end, necessitated a huge cooperative effort between government, public and private interests to secure the money and the land. It began in 2000 with the Western Rivers

Conservancy buying land bordering the Hoh using Section 6 dollars from the Endangered Species Act. Norm Dicks helped in securing what ultimately became \$11 million in federal funds over a 10-year period.

It was determined that a private land trust was the preferred trustee over the lands, as opposed to a governmental agency such as the U.S. Forest Service. The Hoh River Trust was formed in 2004 by the Western Rivers Conservancy and The Wild Salmon Center. Phil Davis and Mike Hagen currently lead the Trust and it is their goal to run the trust as a community-based organization, with members from the community on the board making decisions for the good of the community, not the good of the government. The Trust has simple ownership over 7,000 acres and it's debt-free. They don't owe a dime. The mission of the Trust is to restore and preserve the lands for the benefit of fish, wildlife and people. Industry and business are not included in that mission; it will stay that way forever.

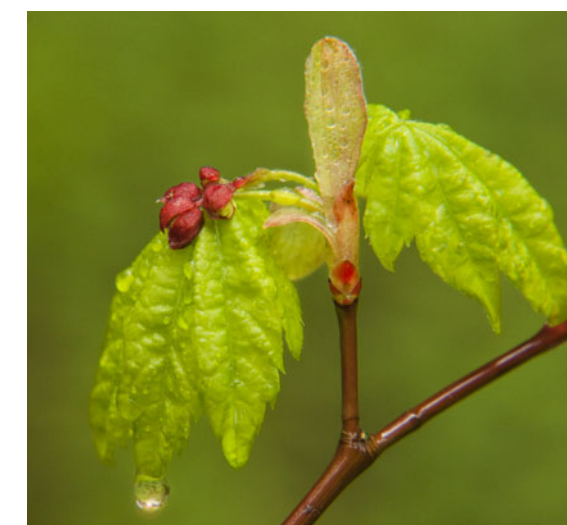


Photo: Walter Hodges

New growth on a rain forest maple tree.



Hoh River, WA. Photo by Josh Kling


When we buy a river, it belongs to everyone.

We protect the best rivers in the West by buying land along them. This helps ensure that anglers, their children and their grandchildren will always have the opportunity to fish.

Since 1990, we've conserved hundreds of river miles along such streams as the Hoh, Madison, John Day, Skagit and Smith. Discover where we're working, and how you can help, at www.westernrivers.org



WESTERN RIVERS
CONSERVANCY

A long-exposure photograph of a river flowing through a dense forest of evergreen trees. The water is calm and reflects the surrounding greenery. In the foreground, there is a large pile of driftwood on the right bank. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and natural.

*“When we leave it alone,
this river will return to what
it was in the beginning.
Can you *imagine?*
Incredible.”*

The take-out near Minnie Peterson Campground on the Hoh.



photo by Igor Shpilenok

The Wild Salmon Center is proud to be a co-founder of the Hoh River Trust.

As we continue work with our partners to safeguard the Hoh and other key river basins in the Olympic Peninsula, we're taking important steps to protect other extraordinary salmon and steelhead strongholds by bringing people together to conserve their watersheds and by passing the "Pacific Salmon Stronghold Conservation Act" in Congress.

To get involved, and to learn more about our efforts to protect the healthiest wild salmon rivers in North America and the Western Pacific, visit us at wildsalmoncenter.org.



They had a huge job selling the whole deal to private interests in the area, including descendants of pioneer families still living on the Hoh. Big protective government is not appreciated in this part of the world, especially when tax dollars are doing the protecting that the locals feel they don't need, and it fell on the Hoh River Trust with help from Norm Dicks to show private groups and individuals that it was in their best interest to support the process. In the end, these families can continue to live on the banks of the Hoh as long as they want. No one will ever tell them otherwise. It's a perfect compromise in a very imperfect world. The community was initially against the project, but because of the way it was handled on the management side, they now appear as a partner in the conservation process.

Now that the land has been secured, the goal of the Hoh River Trust is restoration and rehabilitation. Director of Land Management Mike Hagen will do the heavy lifting on this part of the process. Phil Davis thinks the process will take about 10 years to thin out the monoculture forests, plant new trees, fix the culverts, get rid of the invasive species, and take care of the roads. It's still a daunting task because there's been a lot of neglect over the years, but the goal is within reach. Potential money still appears to be there because, once again, there are state and federal funds for these kinds of projects, and the Hoh is becoming a model of how to get it done the right way. Ten years of work, and then all that's left is to simply let nature do what nature does. The rest of us get to enjoy it.



Photo: Walter Hodges

Phil Davis (left) and Mike Hagen are charged with running the Hoh River Trust.

These guys somehow figured out a formula we can all learn from. Respect a point of view that's different than your own. Find a point where you agree, and then leverage that point of mutual agreement into a force that moves forward. Then get the hell out of the way and let it happen. This is the process by which they succeeded in the face of daunting obstacles and multiple agendas. Look around. There's not much of this going on anywhere these days.

In 2008, the Trust published a book dedicated to the Hoh, its history and its future. It's called *Fast Moving Water*. With photographs from Keith Lazelle and stories from various people, including poets, scientists, researchers, fishing guides, local friends, and family, it's a celebration of the history and the success of the Hoh River. It's a celebration of life.

In a recent conversation, Sue Doroff of the Western Rivers Conservancy could not be more upbeat about the future. "The permanent nature of the accomplishment is what's most satisfying. To string together a conservation and recreation corridor along the most biodiverse river in the lower 48 is amazing. It isn't just a piece of the landscape, it's a total riverscape project and it's forever. From the glaciers in the park to the estuary at the ocean, it is one big conservation recreation success story, and with the help of a lot of friends and the local community, we made it happen. It's there for all of us to enjoy."

As the Congressman from the Sixth Congressional District, Norm Dicks is a passionate supporter of a success story he helped create. "The satisfaction I get

is in the partnership that created this success story," he said. "Someday my boys and their children will get to experience this river, and it will be even better than what I was able to experience. We can look back on this and know that our team of Western Rivers Conservancy, Washington State DNR and the Hoh River Trust pulled together and made this happen. That's a legacy I can be proud of and build on as we look forward to new challenges in protecting Washington State fish habitat."

Over coffee the other day, Phil Davis commented on the immense success of what was started 10 years ago.

"Can you believe what we've got going on here? When we leave it alone, this river will return to what it was in the beginning," he said. "If I could, I'd love to jump ahead 200 years. Just for a moment, I'd love to see what will happen to what we started here. Can you imagine? It will all be exactly like it was. Incredible."

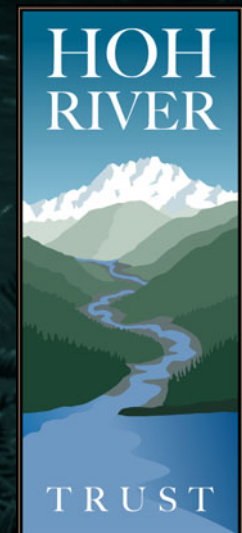
In 1959, in his book *The Immense Journey*, anthropologist and poet Loren Eiseley pondered the relationship between earth, man and nature, and said, "If there is magic on this planet, it is contained in water." The Hoh River is a magical and storied place. If you've got a chance, go take a look at a national success story. Bring your family and explore the National Park as well as the length and breadth of the Hoh River. Then try your luck with steelhead or salmon on the fly. Magic is afoot on the Hoh, and high in the Olympic mountains, in the cave at the base of the Blue Glacier, the Thunderbird rests easy.

*If there is **magic** on this planet,
it is contained in water.*

—LOREN EISELEY

The Hoh River,
with its mystical qualities,
flows unrestrained from its glacial
headwaters through lush old-growth
rain forest into the Pacific Ocean
along Washington's north coast.

*The Hoh River Trust
is restoring and preserving
important lands along this treasured
river for the benefit of the fish,
wildlife, and human communities
that call it home.*



www.hohrivertrust.org