

# WILD SALMON CENTER

*2020 Annual Report: Breaking Through*





## A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

### Breaking Through

Between wildfires, the pandemic, and historic economic, political, and social disruptions, 2020 was one of the most challenging years that the Wild Salmon Center has ever experienced. And yet, 2020 also proved to be a year of breakthroughs.

In early 2020, our decades-long battle with the Oregon timber industry over adequate stream protections came to a head. With high stakes—namely, the ecological health of 40,000 miles of streams and rivers flowing through billions of dollars of standing timber on private lands—WSC’s Bob Van Dyk led a coalition of conservation groups into negotiations with major state and national timber companies, mediated by Democratic Governor Kate Brown. The goal is to complete a statewide private forestland conservation agreement and have it codified by early 2022. In June 2021, I welcomed both sides for the first post-vax in-person meeting at our offices: a sight I couldn’t have imagined back in the 1990s, when Bob and I launched this fight.

Then in August, it looked certain that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers would approve a permit to construct Pebble Mine in the headwaters of Alaska’s Nushagak and Kvichak rivers—the latest development in a 15-year campaign to protect Bristol Bay led by Alaska Natives and a broad coalition of salmon champions and advocates, including WSC.

Within weeks of the expected permit approval, I met Nick Ayers, a sportsman and influential Republican. Nick agreed that Pebble was an unacceptable threat to Bristol Bay and asked if he could help.

What happened next is one for the ages. Between outspoken advocacy from Nick and other prominent Republicans, Democratic leadership, and the relentless work of the Bristol Bay Defense Fund coalition and WSC’s Alaska team, Pebble Mine became the biggest environmental issue in Washington in a matter of weeks.

At WSC, we talk about building the kind of local “immune response” infrastructure that enables watershed communities to repel threats from dangerous development. This immune response went national, and it forced the Army Corps to give Pebble the scrutiny it deserved. Ultimately, the agency denied the permit: a rare instance of the Alaska office stopping a large natural resource development project. Now, the stage is set to secure permanent protections for Bristol Bay.

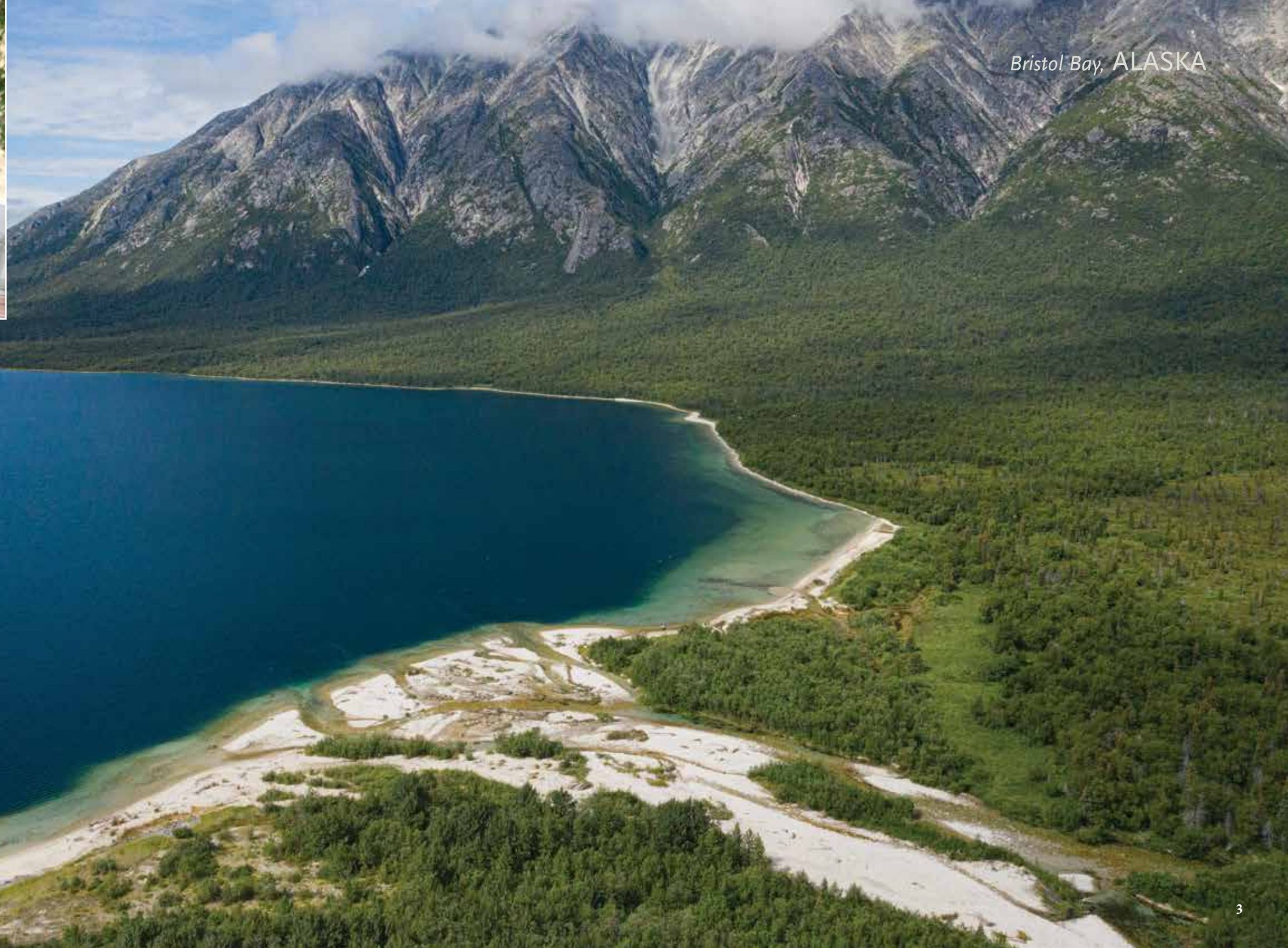
How did we make these monumental strides?

Our strength comes from clarity of mission, a focus on science, and a close network of collaborators that includes prominent Republicans, Democrats, Indigenous leaders, scientists, and allies from the US, Canada, and Russia. Indeed, the diversity of viewpoints on our board and among our supporters is one of our key assets.

That diversity is bonded by a shared belief: that we must leave our children and grandchildren a network of large, intact, thriving watersheds for wild salmon, trout, and steelhead. Because our salmon strongholds are not only critical centers of biodiversity and food security, but refuges from the stresses of modern life, and places that preserve our ancient—and irreplaceable—link to the natural world.

Thank you, friends, partners, and supporters, for working with us to protect these beautiful rivers and all the species they support, especially in this year of extraordinary challenges.

Guido Rahr  
President and Chief Executive



Bristol Bay, ALASKA



## Alaska

Political leaders join federal scientists in speaking up for Bristol Bay, and the U.S. Army Corps denies Pebble Mine a key federal permit (p. 6).

## Oregon Coast

WSC leads a conservation team into historic negotiations to protect salmon and other species on 11 million acres of private forestland (p. 8).

A 70-year plan for the Tillamook and Clatsop State Forests moves forward, with protections for priority rivers like the Nehalem, Salmonberry, and Kilchis (p. 9).

Thirty Coast Coho Partnership projects are underway on the Oregon coast, with nearly \$3 million channeled into the restoration of six coastal watersheds in the last three years (p. 14).

## British Columbia

WSC scientists and partners are mapping the DNA of hundreds of wild Pacific salmon and steelhead runs in order to ensure that harvest preserves salmonid genetic diversity (p. 10).



## Washington Coast

WSC is working with the state to include productivity, distribution, and population diversity in wild steelhead management (p. 12).

Governor Inslee intercedes to ask for serious alternatives to the proposed 24-story Chehalis Dam on one of the state's best remaining salmon and steelhead rivers (p. 13).

The Cold Water Connection campaign continues to make progress, with 11 culvert projects reconnecting 16 river miles (p. 13).

## Russian Far East

A full 70 percent of Kamchatka salmon fisheries by volume are now either certified by the Marine Stewardship Council or actively in pre-certification (p. 16).

## Science and Policy

At a time of escalating drought, our new Oregon Water Initiative puts water rights front and center (p. 18).

Why we must give spring Chinook a fighting chance on rivers like the Klamath and Snake (p. 20).

Salmon strongholds and priority lands for carbon sequestration (p. 22).



# A Dramatic Defense of Bristol Bay

Entering summer 2020, our battle to defend Bristol Bay looked bleak. Pebble Mine, which would tear a gash through the headwaters of North America’s greatest salmon stronghold, seemed headed for certain federal approval.

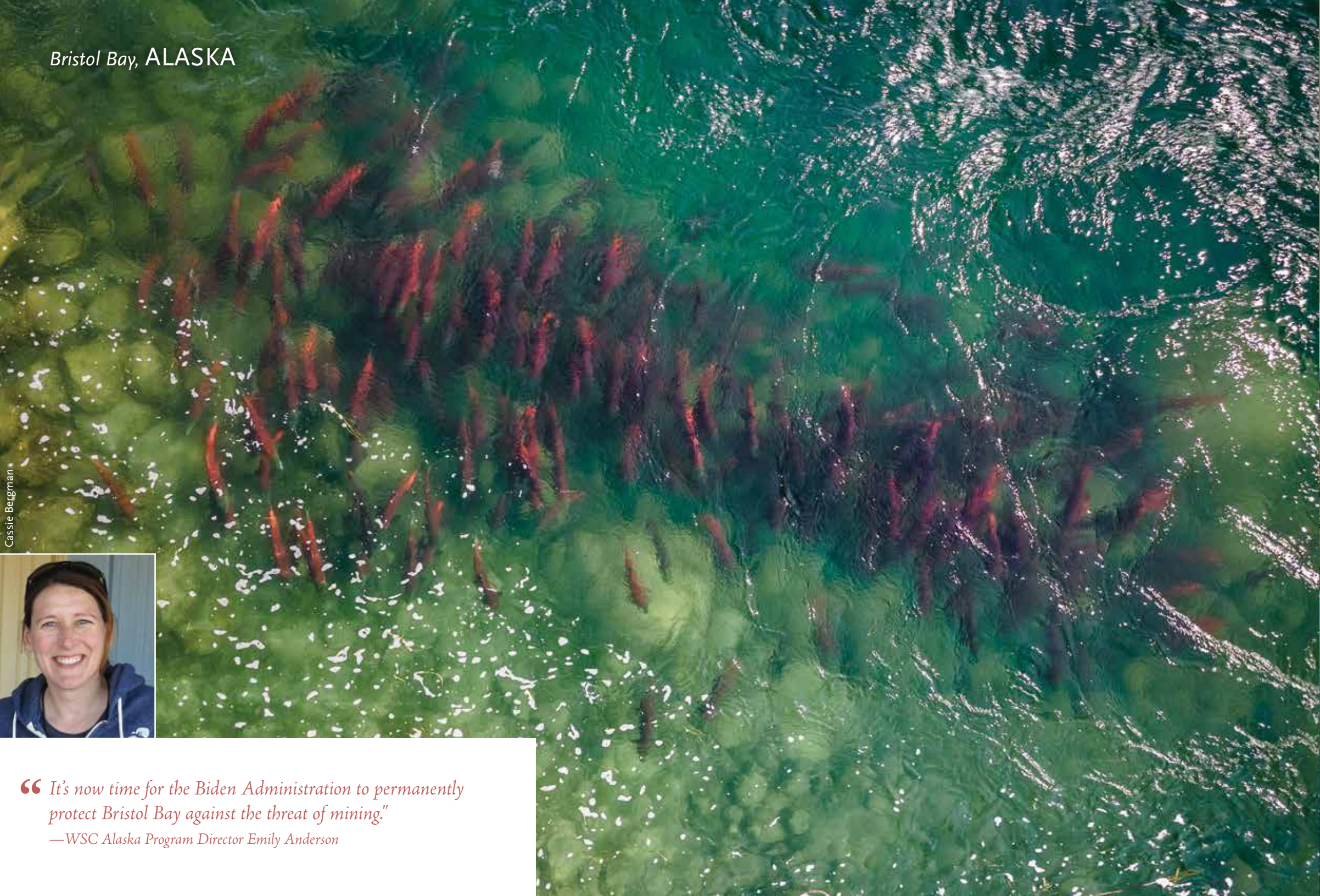
Then in late July, as a U.S. Army Corps decision neared, we joined with Native leaders and fishermen at the Bristol Bay Defense Fund on a media campaign that quickly became a national firestorm. The cold, hard facts about this proposed mine played over and over on the airwaves and in prominent social media feeds: hundreds of miles of salmon streams and thousands of acres of wetlands to be destroyed in the Nushagak and Kvichak watersheds, with billions of tons of toxic waste left there forever.

After outreach by Wild Salmon Center and partners, prominent Democrats and Republicans began calling for Bristol Bay’s protection. Then, as new evidence emerged about Pebble’s backroom dealings with Alaskan politicians, the state’s two U.S. senators turned definitively against the mine. “No Pebble Mine,” tweeted Sen. Dan Sullivan, in the midst of a fall reelection fight.

It was a stunning bipartisan rebuke of Pebble, and clear consensus for protecting Bristol Bay. Political leaders finally aligned with federal scientists, who had unanimously criticized Pebble as a threat to Bristol Bay.

**In November, the Army Corps denied Pebble its key federal Clean Water Act permit.**

With bipartisan support for protecting Bristol Bay, the Biden Administration can—without controversy—now direct the Environmental Protection Agency to stop the mine for good. This is the chance for WSC and our allies to bring the Pebble campaign to its conclusion. We need one more resounding victory.



Bristol Bay, ALASKA

Cassie Bergman



“It’s now time for the Biden Administration to permanently protect Bristol Bay against the threat of mining.”  
—WSC Alaska Program Director Emily Anderson

## Pebble: the Last Chapter

The Call to Protect Bristol Bay, released this year by Bristol Bay Tribes and local communities, asks the Environmental Protection Agency to use the Clean Water Act to veto the Pebble Mine. The Call also asks Congress to establish the Bristol Bay National Fisheries Area, which would restrict future hard rock mining in the watersheds draining into Bristol Bay. WSC is proud to stand with the Tribes and communities of Bristol Bay, and is actively working to support permanent protections for the region’s rivers in Washington, DC.



Cassie Bergman

### ECONOMICS OF BRISTOL BAY

**57%** of the world’s sockeye salmon catch

**\$990m** in economic activity in Alaska and **\$800m** in the Pacific Northwest

**\$75m** in sportfishing tourism



# Better Oregon Forestry: Getting Down to Business

The temperate rainforests of the Oregon Coast harbor some of the strongest remaining wild salmon and steelhead runs in the Lower 48. But Oregon’s strongholds, from the Rogue north to Tillamook Bay, all flow through large tracts of private forestland—11 million acres across the state. And with the weakest streamside protections on the West Coast, Oregon’s salmon runs remain vulnerable to the rising temperatures and lower stream flows that come with climate change.

**Last year, Wild Salmon Center achieved a breakthrough agreement with Oregon timber companies to negotiate new protections for salmon and aquatic species on private forestland,** as part of a new statewide Habitat Conservation Plan. Following enabling legislation passed in June 2020, WSC’s Bob Van Dyk and his conservation team prepared extensively for a return to the negotiating table this February 2021, under the leadership of Governor Kate Brown and her staff.

In addition to winning stronger protections along salmon streams and rivers, our team aims to secure forested buffers along feeder streams—those small tributaries, often originating on steep slopes, that are big contributors to drinking water and habitat quality for fish and wildlife. And science shows that adequate shading throughout Oregon’s entire stream network will help keep water temperatures viable for salmon, even with climate change.

Both negotiating parties hope to send their proposed new rules to the Oregon Legislature for approval in early 2022, hopefully then signed by Gov. Brown in her last year in office. Federal fish and wildlife agencies would then review the plan for final approval, ensuring it will help recover threatened salmon and other aquatic species.

Achieving this outcome across 11 million acres of private timberland and tens of thousands of miles of salmon and trout streams would be a once-in-a-generation leap forward for wild fish and all who love them in Oregon.



Ken Morrish



“ Combined with wild fish protections and restoration work, forestry protections would provide real durability for Oregon strongholds.” —WSC Oregon and California Policy Director Bob Van Dyk

## A 70-year Plan for the Tillamook

For 20 years, WSC has been fighting to protect salmon streams in the Tillamook Rainforest, a globally important salmon stronghold anchored by 500,000 acres of state forestland in Tillamook and Clatsop Counties, less than an hour west of downtown Portland. Success is closer than ever. On October 6, 2020, the Oregon Board of Forestry voted unanimously to move ahead with a plan to protect roughly half of the state’s forestland in stream and forest reserves for 70 years. That includes significant new conservation areas tied to stronghold rivers including the Nehalem, Kilchis, and Salmonberry. Combined with a successful private forests plan, wild fish protections, and our restoration work led by WSC, strong state forest protections will help ensure durable protections for the region’s six stronghold rivers. Stay tuned for ways to help our campaign push this plan over the finish line.





# Smarter Fisheries to Protect Wild Runs in B.C.

West of Vancouver Island, a commercial fisher catches a bright Chinook salmon. We're in British Columbia's territorial waters. But are these fish...Canadian?

Until recently, fishers operating here—or in Haida Gwaii, Alaska, or off the Washington Coast—would have little way of knowing. Marine fisheries are “mixed-stock,” with both vulnerable and healthy salmon runs intermingling during coastal migrations. A fisheries analysis from WSC Salmon Watershed Scientist Dr. Will Atlas finds that more than 70 percent of the marine Chinook salmon catch from Southeast Alaska to Oregon’s Cape Falcon is harvested in mixed-stock fisheries, with almost 40 percent caught outside their home state or province.

For instance, in recent years, an average 45 percent of the total Chinook run to Washington’s Queets River has been harvested in Alaska and B.C., and 33.5 percent of Skagit River Chinook.

“Salmon traverse multiple jurisdictions; that’s a fundamental truth,” says Dr. Atlas. “We want to understand where they’re caught, to support the larger conversation about how and when we fish.”

That’s the aim of the **B.C. wild salmon ID project, a genetic library from WSC scientists and partners that maps the DNA of hundreds of wild Pacific salmon and steelhead runs**, starting with B.C.’s Central Coast. This tool could inform a new dialog on fishery refinements to better safeguard vulnerable stocks. Addressing the harvest of vulnerable runs is key to protecting the genetic diversity and unique survival strategies of wild salmon and steelhead, both fundamental to the species’ long-term survival.

“This will be the ultimate shared resource for fishery assessment,” says Dr. Atlas. “Because smarter salmon fishing starts with good data and a seat at the table for everyone.”

## Dean River, BRITISH COLUMBIA

Jeremy Koreski



“ Marine fisheries that protect wild salmon diversity start with good data and a seat at the table for everyone.”  
—WSC Salmon Watershed Scientist Dr. Will Atlas

## Safeguarding the Babine Watershed

Can sustainable forest practices coexist with Canada's salmon strongholds? Yes, says Greg Knox, Executive Director of WSC partner SkeenaWild.

A place to start is the Babine River, a Skeena tributary that's home to famous steelhead lodges and sockeye fisheries for the Gitxsan and Lake Babine First Nations. But as Big Timber presses in from the east, poor oversight lets operators log down to water lines, while market forces push overharvest, outsourcing, and bad land stewardship.

But a 2020 SkeenaWild study offers solutions, from local timber processing and Indigenous-led land use planning to third-party environmental certifications.

“We have the tools,” Knox says. “Now we need to use them to protect these watersheds.”

**40%** of North American Chinook salmon are caught in mixed-stock fisheries outside their home state or province.

Peter Bohler





# Stepping Up for Wild Olympic Peninsula Steelhead

When it comes to salmon and steelhead management at the Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife, the byword is abundance: how many fish—in theory—can be harvested and still sustain populations.

But Washington steelheaders now face hard choices. In recent years, coastal Tribes have proactively responded to steelhead declines by voluntarily cutting their own fishing days. And in December 2020, with many runs projected to fall below escapement goals for the fifth straight season, WDFW issued emergency regulations for steelheading on all coastal rivers, including a ban on fishing from boats and bait fishing.

**Now, after dialog with Wild Salmon Center and other stakeholders, WDFW is expanding its wild fish management to include productivity, distribution, and population diversity.** This broader view of steelhead health is long overdue, says WSC Washington Director Jess Helsley.

“What we do in the next few years will make the difference for wild Olympic Peninsula steelhead,” says Helsley. “This is our last chance to get it right. To finally expand our management mindset beyond simple abundance.”

To support that dialog, WSC is bringing a wider lens to conservation science. Currently, many managers use only recent data to assess steelhead returns, and that can skew our sense of how wild runs are faring. For example, historical data analysis by WSC and partners shows that we have lost seasonal runs of Hoh winter steelhead that made the river famous. They are now likely 70 percent less abundant than they were in the mid-20th century. Modern data doesn’t readily reveal these changes, which are important clues for rebuilding population diversity and abundance.

“Change is hard and new regulations can be painful,” Helsley says. “But it would be more painful not to step up and protect this resource for future generations.”

Hoh River, WASHINGTON



John Gussman



“What we do in the next couple of years will make the difference for wild Olympic Peninsula steelhead. This is our last chance to get it right.” —WSC Washington Director Jess Helsley

## COLD WATER CONNECTIONS

11 culvert projects reconnecting 16 river miles

\$13.1m won from state and federal agencies for coastal restoration projects

8 project proposals developed with our partners

## Governor Intercedes in Chehalis Dam

For years, Washington’s Office of the Chehalis Basin has pushed one idea to address flood damage reduction: a 24-story dam in the Chehalis River. But if built, the dam would risk some of the state’s best remaining salmon and steelhead habitat, cost upward of \$1 billion, and yet do little to fix basin-wide flood damage.

This past spring, a pressure campaign—from the Quinault Indian Nation, Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation, Chehalis River Alliance, and WSC community—got results. In July, following a deluge of public comments and petitions, Gov. Inslee ordered OCB to consider alternatives. We’re already ground-truthing smarter solutions, and breaking ground on habitat restoration work through the basin’s new Aquatic Species Restoration Plan.



Alamy



# Restoring Oregon Coast Coho: the Multiplier Effect

On Cedar Creek, a tributary of Oregon’s Elk River, a beaver dam blocked a culvert. Terry Wahl spent much of last summer digging it out. Each time, the beaver came back.

Some might reach for a shotgun. But Wahl, a fourth-generation sheep rancher, prefers long-term fixes that don’t fight nature.

“What it comes to is, get the water moving and beavers can stay,” he says. So he called up Curry Watersheds Partnership, one of the organizations in the Wild Salmon Center-managed Coast Coho Partnership, which develops and implements targeted, science-based action plans that accelerate the recovery of Oregon’s two coast coho runs.

Today, a bridge crosses the free-flowing creek, now reconnected with a side channel to a deep, reed-filled pond the Wahls call their “fish hotel.” It’s not just a love of wildlife that motivates Wahl; since fencing off the fish streams on his property, he’s actually seen a four-fold increase in sheep production, which he attributes to healthier pastureland.

The Wahls’ culvert removal, which also included almost a mile of instream habitat restoration, is one of **30 Coast Coho Partnership projects currently underway on the Oregon coast. Since 2018, WSC has channeled \$2.8 million into the restoration of six coastal watersheds,** repairing instream, floodplain, and estuarine habitats while generating hundreds of seasonal and full-time jobs that boost local economies.

“Both fish and working landowners benefit from restoration work,” says WSC Coastal Program Director Mark Trenholm. “But the ultimate payoff lies in the future, as these projects accelerate the coast-wide recovery of Oregon’s wild coho runs, rebuilding our commercial, recreational, and Tribal fisheries.”



“Both fish and working landowners benefit from restoration work. But the ultimate payoff lies in the future—in rebuilding our fisheries.” —WSC Coastal Program Director Mark Trenholm

## Projects in Progress

*West Fork Evans Creek, Rogue River.* Since 2018, WSC and the Applegate Partnership and Watershed Council have worked with BLM and three private timber companies to restore a contiguous 11-mile stretch of West Fork Evans Creek, habitat known to be essential for spawning and rearing coho.

*Upper Indian Creek, Siuslaw River.* From 2019 to 2020, we worked with partners including the Siuslaw Watershed Council and U.S. Forest Service to place 670 logs along 10 miles of high-value tributaries in the Upper Indian Creek basin of the Siuslaw watershed, adding stream complexity for rearing juvenile coho.

*Tioga Creek Watershed, Coos Bay.* In 2020, we worked with the Coos Watershed Association, NOAA, and other partners to prioritize and fund a new slate of restoration projects to restore degraded mainstems below the basin’s highly productive upper tributaries. The mainstem Tioga Creek, for example, will receive project funding for a large wood installation in 2022.

**\$2.8 million:** Funds channeled by WSC into Oregon coast watershed restoration since 2018.





# Kamchatka's Sustainable Fisheries Concept: Proven

For more than 25 years, Wild Salmon Center and our partners have sought to protect the pristine wild salmon, steelhead, trout, and char rivers of Kamchatka.

When we started this work, poachers were nabbing about half of the peninsula's returning salmon. Mining interests encroached on the banks of salmon rivers like the Kikhchik and Icha. Hatcheries were gaining a foothold.

But WSC's Russian allies are pushing back. In recent years, the number of Kamchatka hatcheries has shrunk, bucking national trends. Pending federal legislation might revive headwaters-to-ocean salmon protections (*see sidebar*).

And a sustainable fisheries strategy designed and implemented by WSC in 2004—and since built upon by partners Ocean Outcomes and ForSea Solutions—is flourishing. According to a recent ForSea Solutions report, **70 percent of Kamchatka salmon fisheries by volume are now either certified by the Marine Stewardship Council with annual third-party auditing, or are actively in pre-certification.**

"Turning the ship in the Russian Far East has been a decades-long project," says WSC Western Pacific Director Mariusz Wroblewski. "We now have proof of concept that our long-term focus on Kamchatka can achieve important results for wild salmon."

Poaching is declining in Kamchatka, and the peninsula's MSC-certified fisheries are continuing to enhance transparency through rigorous chain-of-custody requirements. For fishers, the reward is access to new international markets for products from MSC-certified fisheries. It's a win-win: for local communities, and for Kamchatka's productive wild runs of Chinook, chum, sockeye, and pink salmon.

"Years ago, we engaged Kamchatka's commercial fisheries in this sustainability project," says Wroblewski. "Today we can state without doubt that market incentives in fisheries can lead to real conservation outcomes."

## Sakhalin Island, RUSSIA

**70% of Kamchatka salmon fisheries by volume are now fully MSC-certified or in pre-certification.**

Sakhalin Environment Watch



*“We now have proof of concept that our long-term focus on strongholds like Kamchatka can achieve dramatic results for wild salmon.” —WSC Western Pacific Program Director Mariusz Wroblewski*



## Sweeping Salmon Protections for Russia

In the Soviet era, salmon were a strategic resource, with fishing controlled by the state.

"There were huge forests lining Russia's salmon rivers," says WSC's Mariusz Wroblewski. "No one could mine, log, or develop near them."

But starting in the 1990s, development, mining, and timber interests began to encroach on salmon watersheds like the Tugur and Langheri. That encroachment could soon end, as the government considers sweeping legislation supported by the Russian Salmon Association, a key Wild Salmon Center partner. The legislation would create Federal Fishery Protection Zones around commercial salmon watersheds, banning development and resource extraction.

"This would offer protected status to Russian salmon fisheries," says Wroblewski. "It's the most promising sign yet of domestic momentum to safeguard wild salmon."





# Water: the Third Pillar of Our Oregon Work

When it comes to Oregon's rivers, the image often touted in tourism videos is one of endless cascades of clean, cold water. But Oregon's water resources are far less abundant than many Oregonians want to acknowledge, much less address—especially in this time of escalating drought.

“Oregon’s water rights system wasn’t built for today’s complex reality, with persistent drought, climate change, population shifts, and increasingly diverse water demands,” says Caylin Barter, WSC Water Policy Program Manager. “If Oregonians value a thriving economy, vibrant communities, and strong wild salmon runs, we must approach water like the crisis it’s become.”

With over-allocated water rights on most Oregon rivers and streams, summer is an increasingly dangerous time for salmon and steelhead in rivers like the Rogue, Umpqua, and Siuslaw. As flows on tributary streams are siphoned off for other water uses, juvenile fish can get stranded in overheated shallows, while home-migrating adults face disease, dry river beds, and other barriers.

Water rights issues impact everyone from farmers and anglers to cities and industry. Finding a better balance is the work of our new Oregon Water Initiative. We're working in the state capitol to build support for agencies to monitor and manage water supplies, identify key salmon streams that are overdrawn, and incentivize water users to restore those stream flows.

**Achieving a philosophical shift in Oregon’s approach to water rights is a third, critical pillar of our work here, alongside forestry reforms and coastal salmon habitat restoration and protection.**

“We have to be proactive about understanding, protecting, and managing this resource,” says Barter. “Because everything—our environment, our economy, our culture, our bodies—it all runs on water.”



“If Oregonians value a thriving economy, vibrant communities, and strong wild salmon runs, we must approach water like the crisis it’s become.” —WSC Water Policy Program Manager Caylin Barter

Oregon Coast COHO

### Key Strategies for Watershed Resilience

Protect cold water flows and cold water refuge areas

Restore and increase flows in tributaries

Protect off-channel, wetland, and estuary habitats

Restore incised channels and reconnect rivers and streams with their floodplains

Protect healthy vegetated stream corridors and upland forests

Restore stream corridors with greatest potential to lower water temperatures

Across the state, most rivers and streams have been over-allocated, meaning water rights exceed actual streamflow during much of the year. This can dramatically impact places like Trail Creek in the Rogue River Basin (below).

Winter Flow vs Summer Flow



## The Key in the Code: How to Save Spring Chinook

Hundreds of thousands of years ago, a tiny genetic mutation changed everything for one Pacific salmon species. GREB1L, the DNA variation that dictates early freshwater return, drives spring Chinook to hopscotch high up winter-swollen rivers to claim coldwater habitat that other salmon can't reach.

This unique genetic advantage has helped spring Chinook thrive despite ice ages and floods, predators and natural disasters. In the process, the first-returning salmon has become the beating heart of food webs that sustain orcas and grizzlies, Indigenous communities and vast inland forests.

Now, spring Chinook's genetically-directed early migrations could help the species adapt to rapid climate change. But first, we must remove the barriers blocking their success. For 150 years, humans have dammed, logged, dewatered, and overfished the West Coast's spring Chinook rivers.

The result is a species on the brink. On the Snake and Columbia Rivers, total returning wild Chinook numbers have fallen 80 percent in the last two decades. In California, spring Chinook are now extinct on the Shasta and Scott Rivers. On the Salmon River, a key Klamath tributary, just 106 spring Chinook were counted in 2020.

But there is hope. **Momentum is growing for bold actions—from tearing down Klamath and Snake dams to piloting selective fishing tools like weirs, wheels, and pound nets.** Meanwhile, WSC is providing strong scientific evidence to state and federal agencies to expand spring Chinook's endangered status and unlock full legal protections.

"If we act fast, we can give spring Chinook a fighting chance on rivers like the Klamath and Snake," says WSC Science Director Dr. Matt Sloat. "These are hardy, ancient survivors. What they need from us is time and space to flex their natural advantage."

### Spring CHINOOK

John McMillan



“Spring Chinook are hardy, ancient survivors. What they need from us is time and space to flex their natural advantage.”

—WSC Science Director Dr. Matt Sloat

### Bring Down the Dams

For too long, massive dams on the Klamath and Snake Rivers have blocked spring Chinook from critical cold water habitat.

On the Klamath, a decades-long campaign for dam removal is back on track and possible as soon as 2023. Wild Salmon Center is working with the Karuk Tribe, local organizations, and scientists to ensure that the Klamath's spring Chinook runs earn federal protections and endure to anchor recovery after the dams fall. On the Snake, WSC is working with stakeholders and Congressional leaders to shape a legislative path forward for dam removal and investments in regional economies.

**19%:** Annual decline in returning Snake River spring Chinook over the last decade.

Alamy





“Protecting important salmon watersheds should be part of a land-based climate strategy.”  
—WSC Executive Vice President Sara LaBorde

## Protecting Salmon Strongholds, Slowing Climate Change

As international efforts to reverse climate change gather new urgency, land-based strategies could play a major role. In the United States, improvements in land management could absorb up to a fifth of annual emissions—the equivalent to taking all cars and trucks off the road—according to a 2018 study led by The Nature Conservancy.

Wild Salmon Center is working to harness this tool to protect salmon stronghold ecosystems in two ways: by conserving large natural landscapes that already sequester carbon, and by restoring salmon watersheds in ways that increase their carbon-sequestering abilities.

With our colleagues at Ecotrust, we’re mapping the North Pacific and getting a clearer picture of the **strong overlap between salmon ecosystems and priority lands for carbon sequestration**. This map is organized into carbon storage categories that represent roughly five equal-sized land distributions.

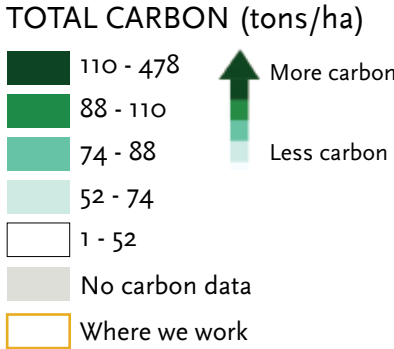
The most important lands for carbon storage—those storing more than 110 tons of carbon per hectare—are marked in deep green.

In Khabarovsk, where WSC’s Russian partners are working to create a network of protected areas for salmon and Siberian taimen, boreal forests and their underlying peatlands represent unusually high carbon storage potential. Alaska’s Bristol Bay region, home to the world’s largest run of sockeye salmon (and the threat of Pebble Mine), is a massive tract of largely undeveloped carbon-absorbing wetlands and peatlands the size of Wisconsin.

The remaining temperate rainforest rivers in coastal Alaska, British Columbia, Washington’s Olympic Peninsula, and the Oregon Coast also offer globally significant carbon storage.

Our goal is to provide policymakers, the philanthropic community, and the carbon finance sector with hard evidence of the clear climate benefits of keeping salmon strongholds intact and safe from large-scale logging, mining, and other destructive development. And that could accelerate increased protections and restoration across the North Pacific, from the Lower 48 to the Russian Far East.

Only **20%** of land has carbon stores of more than 110 tons per hectare.



Map produced by Ecotrust. Source: Noon et al. 2021. Mapping the irrecoverable carbon in Earth’s ecosystems. Under review.



# The Stronghold Fund: First of its Kind

In the North Pacific, wild salmon, steelhead, and trout face no shortage of issues. From habitat loss to warming temperatures to overharvest, the deck often seems stacked against wild fish. This stark reality means that funding for salmon conservation has never been more vital. The Stronghold Fund, created to help balance the odds, is the first grant-making fund of its kind to focus exclusively on Pacific salmon strongholds.

And we are making progress. **Since 2015, we’ve received \$14 million in commitments toward our capitalization goal of \$15 million.** In 2021, we aim to finish this first phase of fundraising and position the Fund to fully deliver on its high-leverage strategy.

The Stronghold Fund’s grants are deployed with three filters in mind: seed funding for new initiatives that can yield high returns for the North Pacific’s wild fish; surge funding for time-sensitive campaigns; and durable support for WSC partners and coalitions working day-in and day-out to safeguard our greatest remaining salmon ecosystems, like Alaska’s Bristol Bay.

For several years, the Fund has been supporting partnership efforts in the Skeena and Dean regions in British Columbia. In 2021, the Fund has a new slate of strategic grants including major support to advance a critical, forward-looking water conservation initiative in Oregon (*see p. 18*).

As we accelerate our grant-making, the Fund is occupying a central role in the conservation landscape by ensuring that WSC’s constellation of partners and initiatives have the resources needed to advocate for the protection of the North Pacific’s wild salmon and steelhead watersheds and everything that depends on them.



Dean River, BRITISH COLUMBIA

Jeremy Koreski



“The Stronghold Fund is ensuring that WSC’s partners and initiatives have the resources they need to strongly advocate for the North Pacific’s most extraordinary wild salmon and steelhead rivers.” —The Stronghold Fund Executive Director David Finkel

The Stronghold Fund has received more than **90%** of gifts and commitments toward its first capitalization goal of **\$15 million.**



Babine River, BC



Ken Morrish



Skeena River, BC

Ken Morrish



2020 Donors

Thanks to the steady support of our donors this year and in years past, we achieved major conservation breakthroughs—even amid 2020’s historic disruptions.

The Stronghold Fund

Anonymous  
John W. Childs  
John S. Dale  
The DeBruce Foundation  
James and Angela Hambrick Foundation  
Conrad N. Hilton Foundation  
The J.C. Kennedy Foundation and James C. Kennedy  
Ray J. and Stephanie Lane  
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Paulus Family Foundation  
John G. Searle Family Trust and John and Julie Dixon  
Deke and Hope Welles Fund of the Toledo Community Foundation  
Willow Springs Charitable Trust

Foundations, Corporations, Government, and NGOs

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WSC President Guido Rahr with Tugur Siberian taimen. See more in the new film short "River Tigers."

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Announcing Two New Members of the Ambassador Council

WSC is proud to announce two new additions to our Ambassador Council—Billy Blewett and Dan Michels. As pillars of the fishing and conservation communities of coastal British Columbia and Bristol Bay, Alaska, they will be invaluable to WSC’s efforts to engage wild salmon and steelhead advocates across the Pacific Rim. Please join us in welcoming them!



**Billy Blewett** and his wife Mandi have co-owned and operated the Lower Dean River Lodge on British Columbia’s central coast since 1999, and his family has been an integral part of the lodge since Billy’s father founded it in the mid-sixties. He is active in the protection of the iconic Dean River watershed—assisting scientists with salmon, steelhead, and wildlife research as a founder of Coastal Rivers Conservancy, partnering with the Nuxalk First Nation’s Supporting Emerging Aboriginal Stewards (SEAS) community youth initiative, and serving on the Dean River Advisory Committee for 20 years. Billy’s in-depth knowledge of the central coast’s wild salmon and steelhead runs comes from a life spent exploring its many marine channels and rivers.

**Dan Michels** is an owner and manager of the multi-award-winning Crystal Creek Lodge in Bristol Bay, Alaska, where he oversees operations, hosts guests, and flies one of the bush aircraft. He helped build the original Crystal Creek Lodge in 1988 and began guiding in the Bristol Bay region. Dan purchased the lodge in 1995 and has managed it since. He says, “What originally began as a summer adventure has become a life’s work”—a mindset that shines through in Dan’s passionate efforts to conserve the Bristol Bay watershed.



“While our work at Natural Systems Design is essential to restore function back to degraded watersheds, WSC’s proactive strategy to get in and protect wild salmon rivers before the damage is done—and while those systems are still intact—is a refreshing approach to conservation. Their work gives me hope.”  
—Leif Emberston, Natural Systems Design President

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Quinault River, WA





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From left: Jonathan, Morgan, Darcy, and David Saiget in Cordova, Alaska.

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WSC's Dr. Tim Elder snorkeling Evans Creek, a tributary of Oregon's Rogue River.



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The Martinellis

Talking to John and Megan Martinelli, it's immediately clear that both deeply care about their community and share a passion for all things wild. And their actions reflect these values, from Megan's work chairing the annual holiday food drive for their local food bank to the conservation easement the Martinellis placed on their family ranch on California's Pajaro River.

"We've tried to set a good example for our kids by being active in our local community and by giving back to the places we love," says John.

It was John's passion for fly fishing that brought Wild Salmon Center's work to the couple's attention. Both quickly realized that they deeply valued the cascading benefits to people and wildlife that come from protecting wild salmon. For Megan, the outsized impact salmon have as a keystone species is what most inspired her. For more than a decade, the Martinellis have been dedicated supporters of WSC's conservation work. It's thanks to the long-term commitment of people like John and Megan—and their strong belief in our mission—that we're able to achieve major conservation gains for the North Pacific's salmon strongholds.

“We are grateful for the Wild Salmon Center's important work to maintain clean and healthy rivers. As a lifelong fly fisherman, I have a deep appreciation for the natural beauty and solitude found while out on the river. Now more than ever, we need organizations like WSC.”  
—Pat Becker, Jr., President of Becker Capital Management





Scott Carlson, Coastal Rivers Conservancy

WSC's Dr. Matt Sloat conducts field research in a Eucott Bay salmon creek in the Dean Channel, British Columbia.

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“ Growing up around the mouth of the Columbia River in Oregon, salmon was an important part of my family dinners. I remember coming home from school one day to find a 4-foot salmon a family friend had caught resting in the kitchen sink. The connection my community had to these fish and their cultural significance for Indigenous communities is why it's important to me to support wild salmon conservation.”

—Susan Dean, Stronghold Guardian donor

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WSC's Dr. Will Atlas with Cecil Brown, a member of the Heiltsuk Nation, at the Koeys fish weir in British Columbia.



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## Make Strongholds Part of Your Legacy

From the temperate rainforests of coastal Oregon to the remote rivers of the Russian Far East, Wild Salmon Center is building a network of protected strongholds for wild fish that spans the entire North Pacific.

These remarkable watersheds aren't only critical for global biodiversity—they're also centers of human well-being, and beautiful places where we can take our children and grandchildren.

And their protection requires a multi-decadal commitment that lasts far beyond our lifetime.

**Making a bequest to Wild Salmon Center is a powerful way to support our conservation efforts over the long term.** It's a gift that anyone, of any means, can offer today—and make a significant difference for wild salmon and steelhead rivers for generations to come.

Help us build a legacy of free-flowing rivers, dense forests, and abundant fish across the North Pacific by including Wild Salmon Center in your will today.

**To learn more, or to tell us about your existing plans,** contact Kim Kosa at [kkosa@wildsalmoncenter.org](mailto:kkosa@wildsalmoncenter.org) or (971) 255-5562, or visit [wildsalmoncenter.org/legacy](https://wildsalmoncenter.org/legacy).



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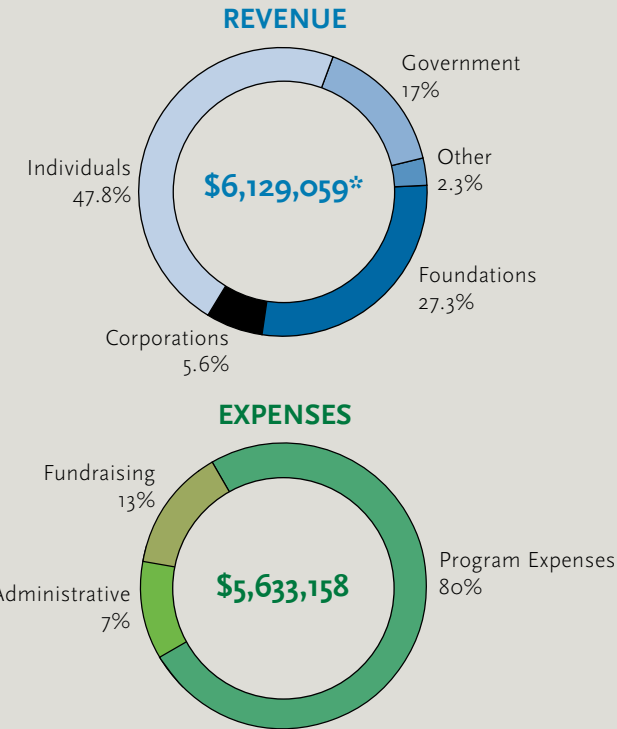
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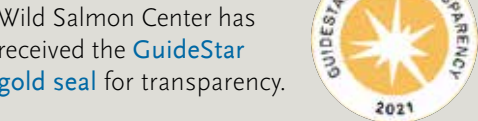
FINANCIALS: Statement of Activities  
For the fiscal year ending December 31, 2020



\*Revenue includes new funds raised during each calendar year, contributions pledged for work in future years.



Wild Salmon Center has received the highest rating for sound fiscal management from [Charity Navigator](#).



WSC is a grantee of [The Conservation Alliance](#), a group of outdoor industry companies that disburses collective annual membership dues to grassroots environmental organizations.



WSC has been approved to receive grants through the [One Percent for the Planet](#) program.





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Ken Morrish

Klamath River, CA



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Will Atlas. Ph.D., Salmon Watershed Scientist  
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Brett Brownscombe, Special Projects Director  
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## Science Fellow

Mikhail Skopets, Ph.D., Science Fellow

## New Staff



Will Atlas



Caylin Barter



Brett Brownscombe



WSC Staff



Mariusz Wroblewski



Betsy Krier

*Our Life History Project* videos follow WSC staff members on their journeys to joining the conservation movement. From Betsy Krier, who found home deep in the Olympic Peninsula, to Dr. Sam Snyder, a native Texan who's defended Bristol Bay for the last decade, to Mariusz Wroblewski, who traveled the longest road from Poland to the U.S., these stories show us the values that bind us and the places that inspire us. Watch at [wildsalmoncenter.org/life-history-project](https://wildsalmoncenter.org/life-history-project)

## Sam Snyder



Photos and film by Brian Kelley

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Front cover: leaping coho, OR; Back cover: Killer whales, BC (Alamy).

## New Board Members

*Dr. Tatiana Degai* is from Kamchatka, Russia, and her family belongs to the Itelman salmon community. She is a Postdoctoral Scholar at the University of Northern Iowa's ARTICenter. Her research concentrates on Indigenous knowledge systems and visions of sustainability, including biocultural diversity, cultural landscapes, language revitalization, and Indigenous education.

*Rick Halford* is a former Republican state Senate President from Alaska. An avid outdoorsman, he divides his time between Chugiak/Eagle River in south central Alaska and a home in Bristol Bay, where he's an active pilot and guide. He's an outspoken critic of the Pebble Mine and has testified against it before Congress and the Alaska Legislature.

*Dr. Andrea Reid* is a citizen of the Nisga'a Nation and an Assistant Professor at the University of British Columbia's Institute for Oceans and Fisheries. She leads UBC's new Centre for Indigenous Fisheries, a national and international hub for the study and protection of culturally significant fish and fisheries.

*Dr. Mary Ruckelshaus* is the director of the Natural Capital Project and a Stanford University consulting professor. She previously led the Ecosystem Science Program at NOAA's Northwest Fisheries Science Center in Seattle. Her recent work focuses on developing ecological models including estimates of the flow of ecosystem services and changes in human wellbeing under different global management regimes.

Below (from left): Peter Seligmann, Loretta Keller, Mitch Zuklie, Guido Rahr on the Deschutes.



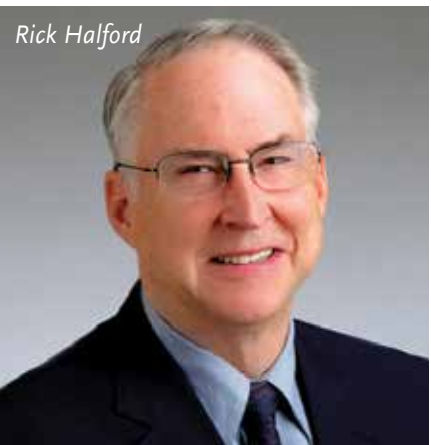
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Mary Ruckelshaus



Tatiana Degai



Rick Halford



Andrea Reid

Alex Sarna





## WILD SALMON CENTER

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