

WILD SALMON CENTER

An aerial photograph of a river system winding through a lush, green forest in a mountain valley. The river flows from the upper center towards the bottom right, with several meanders and a large gravel bar in the foreground. The surrounding landscape is dominated by dense evergreen and deciduous trees, with rolling hills and mountains in the background under a cloudy sky.

Reconnecting
2023 Annual Report

Letter from the President

Late last fall, I was chasing fall Chinook salmon in the tidal section of a small river on the Oregon coast. Fishing was slow, but the sky was a cacophony of waterfowl: pintails, mallards, blue winged teal, noisy flocks of white fronted geese. I tucked my boat into some cover and sat in the grass next to the river.



Guido Rahr

From my vantage point, I could see a wide, glassy stretch of river. Eventually, I noticed the subtle wakes of ocean-bright Chinook sneaking slowly upstream—hesitant, nervous to be in such shallow water and so exposed.

In that moment, I was taken by a feeling of deep connection: to the river, to the salmon, and to the vast ocean I could hear thundering beyond. Knowing that these fish had made it home meant this whole system was somehow working.

The ocean is surely a living, breathing thing, and the rivers that tie us to it are like arteries to our lungs. In these rivers, returning salmon are essential: the red blood cells that carry nutrients

far inland. Should salmon runs stop arriving, it would mean this miraculous connection has been lost forever. At Wild Salmon Center, our mission is to make sure that never happens to the rivers of our stronghold archipelago.

For all living things, the key to protection is a strong immune system. In stronghold river systems, this means strengthening the health and effectiveness of our partner organizations on the ground, and building layers of land, water, and wild fish protection in anticipation of threats to come.

As the climate crisis worsens and development pressures increase, our science and conservation teams continue to scale Wild Salmon Center's stronghold strategy with our partners. Our relationships—built on our role as a steadfast ally and trusted broker of science and information—are the connective tissue that binds us to decision makers across the North Pacific.

In 2023, our networks kicked in powerfully, as we mobilized people to stand up for their home rivers from the wilds of Alaska to the outskirts of Portland. We reconnected wild salmon and steelhead to cold water habitats by scaling river restoration across the Pacific Northwest. We secured major investments to protect streamflow in Oregon's rivers. And we strengthened the work of our British Columbia partners to reform fisheries up and down the coast.

We are quite determined to protect the North Pacific's last, best salmon rivers as gifts of incalculable value for our children and grandchildren. What's at stake is no less than protecting the life force that binds salmon rivers with the fertile and churning Pacific Ocean—and with it, the vital work of reconnecting our children to nature.

Thank you for believing in our vision and supporting our work.

Guido Rahr
President and Chief Executive



*Our link to the natural world, and to each other,
can be found in the protection and stewardship
of our wild salmon and steelhead rivers.*

What connects us?

From the Western Pacific to Alaska, Canada, and America's West Coast, salmon connect the freshwater arteries of the North Pacific. Salmon also have the power to connect us: to each other, to wonder, and to the larger story of the Pacific Rim.

For more than 30 years, Wild Salmon Center has shown that when salmon champions come together, we achieve great things. Our 2023 Annual Report celebrates these victories and connects past with present. You're part of this story. Read on for what we'll accomplish next.

Western Pacific



**Priority salmon,
steelhead, and taimen
rivers of the North Pacific**

A satellite-style map of North America, showing the United States, Canada, and Alaska. Several regions are highlighted in red, indicating protected areas. These include parts of Alaska (including Bristol Bay), British Columbia, Washington, Oregon, and California. The text 'North America' is written in a large, white, serif font across the top of the map. Labels for 'ALASKA', 'CANADA', 'BRITISH COLUMBIA', 'WASHINGTON', 'OREGON', 'CALIFORNIA', and 'UNITED STATES' are placed near their respective geographical locations. A blue curved line is visible at the top left and bottom left of the page.

North America

ALASKA

Bristol Bay

CANADA

BRITISH
COLUMBIA

WASHINGTON

OREGON

CALIFORNIA

UNITED
STATES

In this year's report:

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Since 1992, Wild Salmon Center and our partners have secured more than seven million acres in protected areas and led wild fish conservation programs on 89 rivers.

Stopping the Next Pebble

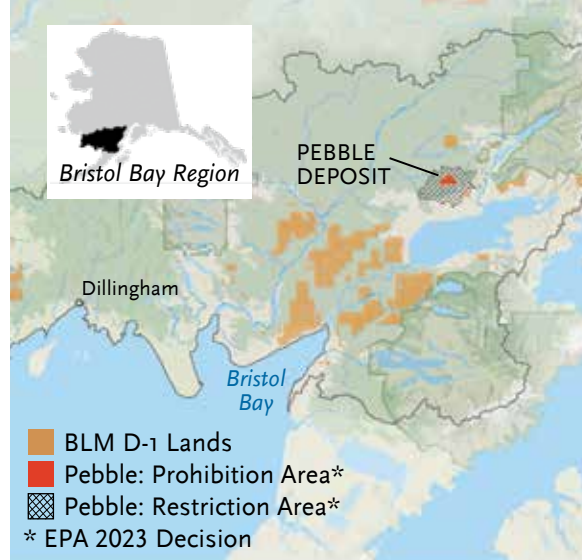
In early 2023, we won a decade-long campaign to stop the Pebble Mine project at the headwaters of Alaska's Bristol Bay: the greatest wild sockeye salmon fishery in the world. But a larger battle still looms. Within Bristol Bay's Nushagak and Kvichak watersheds alone, 23 outstanding mining claims still remain.

As the federal Clean Water Act protections that stopped Pebble face court challenges, we're working to layer protections in Bristol Bay to stop the next dangerous mine.

"We live at a time of mounting pressure from extractive industries," says Wild Salmon Center Alaska Program Director Emily Anderson. "The stakes are huge, and they include some of the last, best salmon systems on the planet."

Across Alaska, some 28 million acres of federal land currently stand at risk of being opened to mining and oil and gas development. These lands include 1.2 million acres in Bristol Bay.

That's why, in 2021, WSC and our partners launched a national campaign to urge the Bureau of Land Management to retain protections for these public "D-1" lands. We sent a powerful



With our partners, WSC is fighting to keep 28 million Alaskan public acres off limits to mining and oil and gas development. 1.2 million acres of these lands are in the Bristol Bay region, where our coalition recently stopped Pebble Mine.

message to the Biden Administration: More than 140,000 Americans spoke up for keeping these lands intact, adding to calls from more than half of Alaska Native Tribes and hundreds of businesses.

If the administration rules favorably in the coming year, Bristol Bay and its fishery will be better protected from the next big mining threat. ✨

Connected to Salmon

Mike Overcast, Tordrillo Mountain Lodge

Mike Overcast has co-owned Tordrillo Mountain Lodge, deep in the roadless West Susitna wilderness, for almost 15 years. Yet each fall, he's surprised again by the unlikely places where salmon choose to spawn.

"Coho, especially, will spread out into the littlest swamp ditches," he says.

Such biological richness is why Overcast thinks that a publicly funded, 100-mile industrial mining road through the wild West Su is a bad prospect for the region's salmon.

"A road through here is just a terrible idea," he says. "Especially one that comes with at least 150 stream crossings."

Concerned by state support for this project, Overcast connected with Wild Salmon Center's Emily Anderson and our Defend the West Su coalition. This year, that connection grew even stronger when Overcast joined WSC's Board of Directors.

The Susitna is one of the world's best salmon strongholds, Overcast says.

"That's because it remains an untouched wilderness," he explains. "A road will change it forever. We must do right by the salmon."



Mike Overcast

BRISTOL BAY

What's at Stake: The world's greatest sockeye salmon fishery.

Status: In 2023, the EPA used its authority to protect the headwaters of two Bristol Bay rivers, stopping Pebble Mine.

Next: 23 mining claims still pose a threat to this watershed. With our partners, we're pursuing Congressional legislation to win broader protections for Bristol Bay.

BLM LANDS

What's at Stake: 28 million acres of protected public land across Alaska could be opened to mining and oil and gas development.

Status: 145,000+ Americans and more than half of Alaska Native Tribes asked the BLM to keep these lands intact.

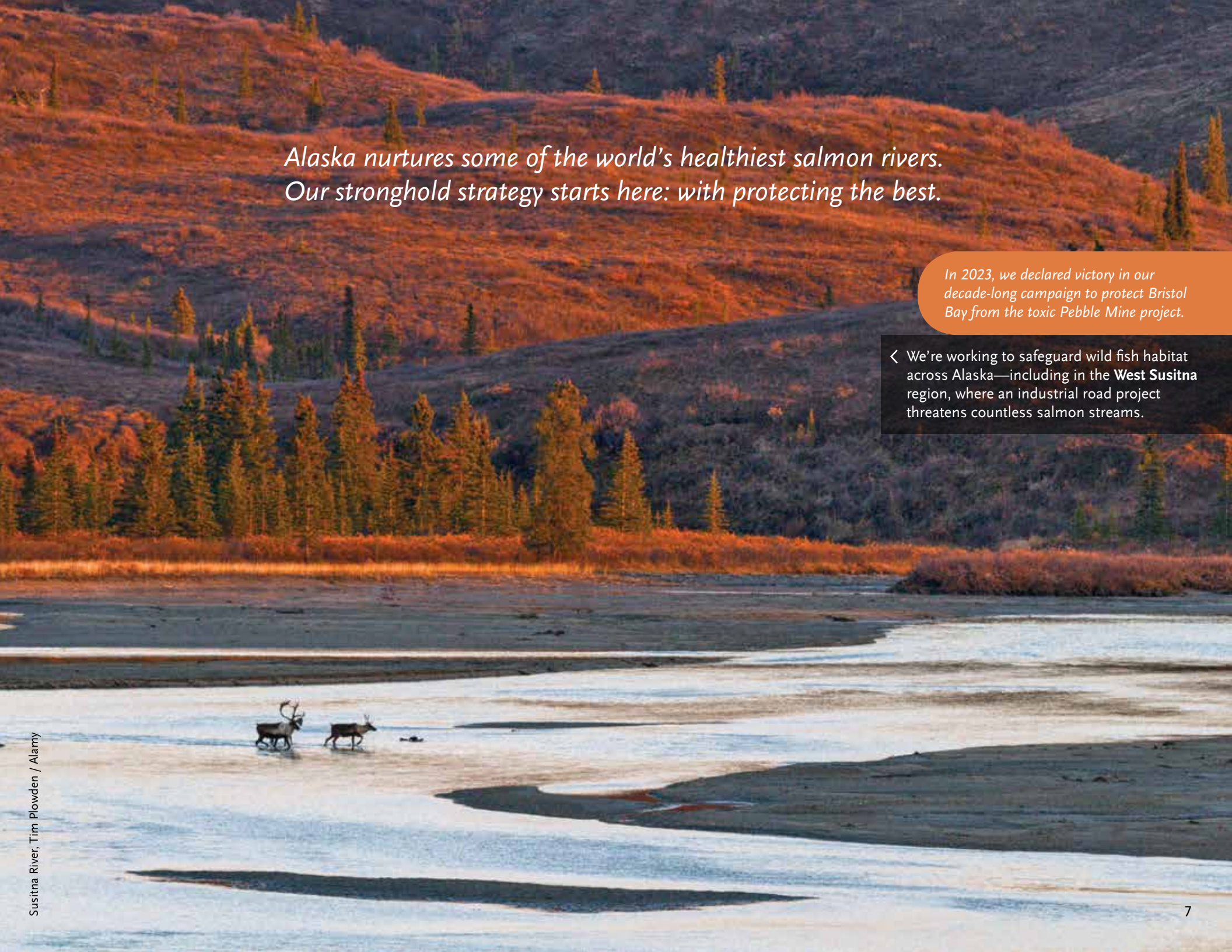
Next: A decision on whether to keep existing land protections is expected from the U.S. government by summer 2024.

WEST SUSITNA ACCESS ROAD

What's at Stake: A 100-mile industrial mining road would cut through countless salmon streams in Alaska's roadless West Susitna region.

Status: Pending federal and state permits.

Next: A federal environmental review and public comment period will open soon. It's our chance to fight back against this project.



*Alaska nurtures some of the world's healthiest salmon rivers.
Our stronghold strategy starts here: with protecting the best.*

In 2023, we declared victory in our decade-long campaign to protect Bristol Bay from the toxic Pebble Mine project.

◀ We're working to safeguard wild fish habitat across Alaska—including in the **West Susitna** region, where an industrial road project threatens countless salmon streams.

Revitalizing Coastal Rivers

Today, coho are again climbing Tioga Falls in Oregon’s Coos Basin, where a new fishway has restored passage for the first time in decades. On Washington’s Dickey River, beavers are claiming our “starter kit” dams and building homes that also shelter juvenile salmon. Nearby, on the Quillayute River, a log installation nudges flood waters away from Tribal homes and toward enhanced side channels—where baby Chinook have already been spotted.

“2023 was a pivotal year for salmon restoration,” says Wild Salmon Center Watershed Restoration Director Jess Helsley. “Agencies made historic investments in wild fish recovery.”

In the Lower 48, even strongholds need critical restoration: work that we cannot do without deep resources and expertise. Across the Pacific Northwest, we’ve spent years building a science-based restoration strategy for Oregon and Washington: one that’s identified high-priority work in key salmon watersheds, supported local partners, and restored habitat in dozens of rivers and tributaries.

Now, WSC and our partners are leveraging unprecedented federal funding to speed and scale our work. To date, the WSC-convened Coast Coho Partnership and our Cold Water Connection Campaign have secured more than \$22 million in grants, driving a new wave of coastal restoration. These projects mean healthier economies now, and more fishing opportunities on the horizon.

“Reconnecting salmon with their historic habitat takes a village,” Helsley says. “We couldn’t do this work without the Tribes, restoration partners, sportfishers, and coastal communities that know and love these rivers best.” ✦

Connected to Salmon

Mike Nelson, Clearwater Resources, Olympic Peninsula

The tiny town of Amanda Park sits on the shores of Lake Quinault, inside the Quinault Indian Nation.

It’s here that contractor Mike Nelson first cut his teeth in the logging and road-building industry. But now, he’s pivoting his family business into a new niche: the restoration economy of Washington’s Olympic Peninsula.

“I used to be able to see work six months ahead, and that was good,” Nelson says. “With stream restoration, we’re seeing prospective projects five years out.”

For Nelson’s crew—which includes Quinault Tribal members—the reliability of this work is one key benefit. With our Cold Water Connection Campaign partners, Wild Salmon Center has recruited millions to fund a steady pipeline of fish passage and road



Contractor Mike Nelson is pivoting his family business to serve the Olympic Peninsula’s growing restoration economy. “For our community,” he says, “this is about the future.”

decommissioning projects across the coast. It’s well-paying work that needs local expertise: skills built on the personal connections Nelson and his team share with the streams they now repair.

“All of us have friends who support their families by fishing and guiding,” Nelson says. “For our community, this is about the future.”



When salmon and steelhead reconnect with healthy habitat, the benefits ripple far beyond their home rivers.

◀ For decades, salmon have mostly failed to make it up Oregon's **Tioga Falls**—meaning coho and Chinook weren't reaching 14 miles of quality upstream habitat. This fall, Wild Salmon Center and our partners completed a new, nature-mimicking fishway. Within weeks, coho made the leap.

In 2023, we secured millions in grant funding to drive restoration projects across the Northwest coast.

Standing Tall for Oregon Forests

From the air, Oregon’s Tillamook and Clatsop State Forests can look like a green oasis of clear-flowing rivers and rich tidal estuaries.

Home to the Trask, Wilson, Kilchis, Miami, Nehalem, and Salmonberry Rivers, these forests nurture wild runs of fall Chinook and winter steelhead, as well as spring Chinook, coho, chum, and rainbow and sea-run cutthroat trout. We plan to sustain these wild runs through restoration work, strong state-level wild fish management strategies, and better protections for state forests.

Oregonians polled by state agencies agree: They want public lands protected for healthy fish and wildlife habitat, clean drinking water, and outdoor recreation. For years, Wild Salmon Center and our allies have worked with local communities to advance a 70-year habitat conservation plan encompassing more than 600,000 state forest acres across Western Oregon.

In 2023, we fought back relentless timber industry pressure to keep this plan on track. This past July, the Oregon Department of Forestry began proactively implementing many of its fish and wildlife protections, anticipating the plan’s final federal approval in 2025. It’s a necessary complement to the stream and steep slope protections now in effect on 10 million acres of private forestland: protections won through the WSC-led Private Forest Accord.

“Again and again, Oregonians have stood tall for conservation,” says WSC Oregon Policy Director Stacey Detwiler. “We’ve made historic progress for private forests. Now, it’s time to get a state forest plan to the finish line.” ✦



Oregon Coast photo, Paul Jeffrey



STAND
TALL
OREGON

Thousands of Oregonians have joined our **Stand Tall Oregon campaign** to stop the timber industry from derailing a habitat conservation plan for state forests. As a result, this legacy plan remains on track for federal approval in 2025. Its protections will ensure a better future for wild salmon and steelhead strongholds on Oregon’s rugged North Coast.

Connected to Salmon

“Oregonians place a higher value on fish and wildlife habitat and cold, clean water over other uses of our state’s public forestlands.”
—Stevie Parsons, fisher, advocate, and resident of Aloha, Oregon

“We believe it is our role as decision makers to ensure future generations also enjoy the benefits of healthy functioning ecosystems in which to live, work, and recreate.”
—Pamela Wev, Clatsop County Commissioner

“Sportfishing is a \$200 million a year industry on the North Coast. If we don’t recover these fisheries, there will be no future for salmon fishing communities.”
—Bob Rees, Northwest Guides and Anglers Association

“The case can be made that clean, cold water is the most valuable yield of our forestlands now, and will become more valuable as our climate warms.”
—Ted Chu, retired fish and wildlife biologist, and North Coast homeowner



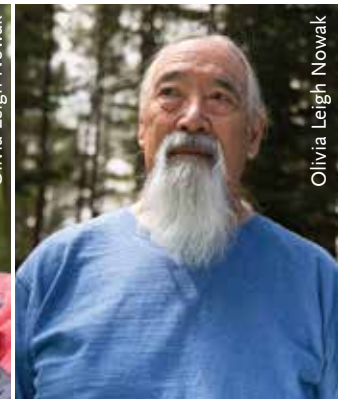
Olivia Leigh Nowak



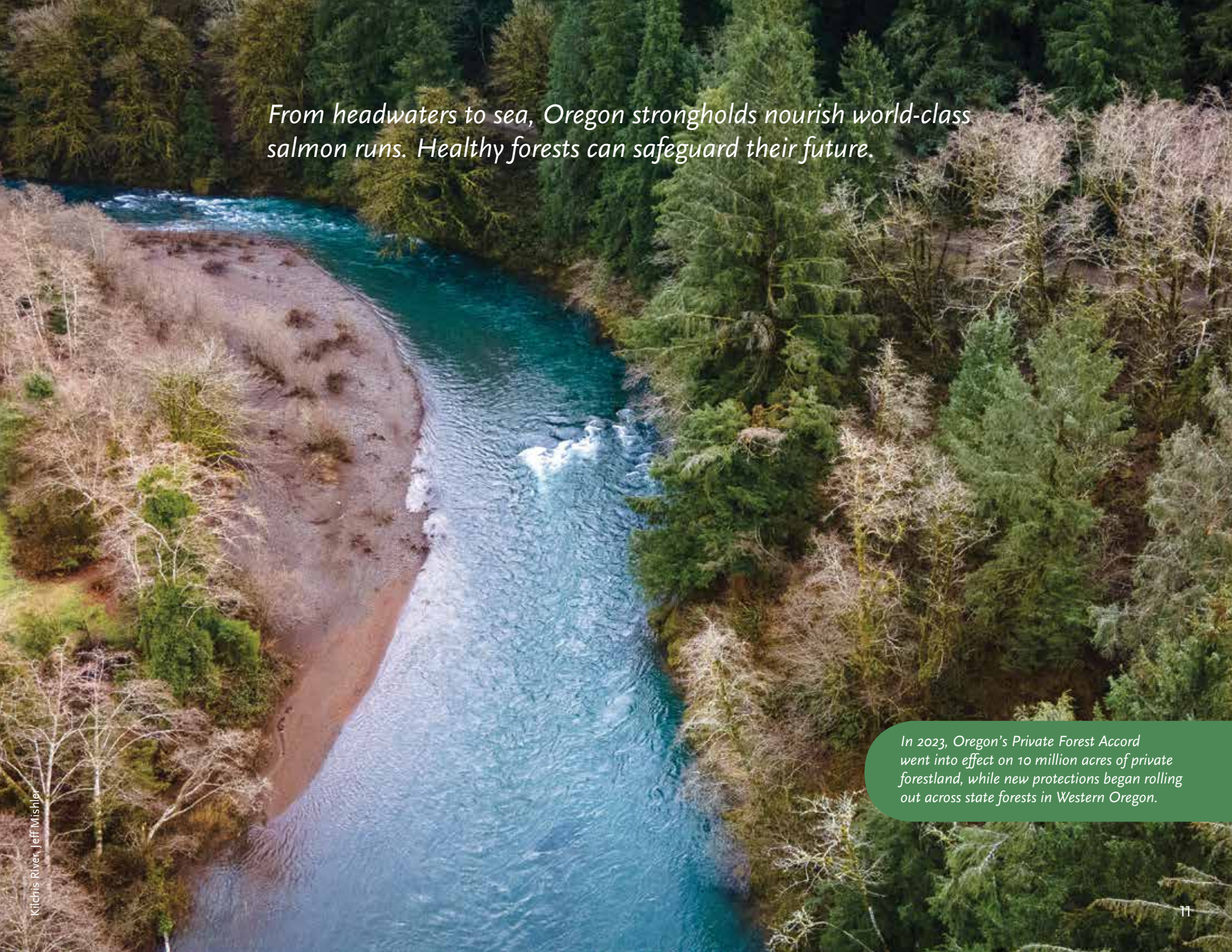
Pamela Wev



Olivia Leigh Nowak



Olivia Leigh Nowak

An aerial photograph of a river winding through a dense forest. The river is a vibrant blue-green color, contrasting with the surrounding green and brown trees. The banks are a mix of sandy soil and sparse vegetation. The overall scene is a lush, natural landscape.

From headwaters to sea, Oregon strongholds nourish world-class salmon runs. Healthy forests can safeguard their future.

In 2023, Oregon's Private Forest Accord went into effect on 10 million acres of private forestland, while new protections began rolling out across state forests in Western Oregon.

Safeguarding Oregon's Water Future

Oregon's water laws arose during Gold Rush days, when this resource felt practically limitless. But modern times have brought increased water demand, megadrought, and heat domes—along with dramatic drawdowns of Oregon's rivers and aquifers.

For salmon, this mix of outdated water policies and a hotter, drier new normal can mean dangerously low streamflows, right when wild fish need them most.

"There's a lot we can't control out there right now," says Caylin Barter, Wild Salmon Center's Water Policy Director. "But we can do a better job of protecting our home waters."

That's the value proposition of Oregon Water Partnership, a new WSC-convened coalition of seven statewide conservation groups. By investing in smarter water data and management, increasing freshwater protections, and modernizing water laws, the coalition aims to improve Oregon's long-term water outlook for fish, rivers, and the human communities they sustain.

The Oregon Legislature seems to agree. In 2023, we helped to win historic levels of drought and water security funding for the 2023–2025 biennium. Now, those allocations—topping \$174 million—are driving fish passage barrier removal, streamflow restoration, headwater protections, and river monitoring across the state.

"Every step we take now to connect our water policies with our new reality gets us closer to a world where people and fish can still thrive together," Barter says. "Like salmon, we can adapt." ✦



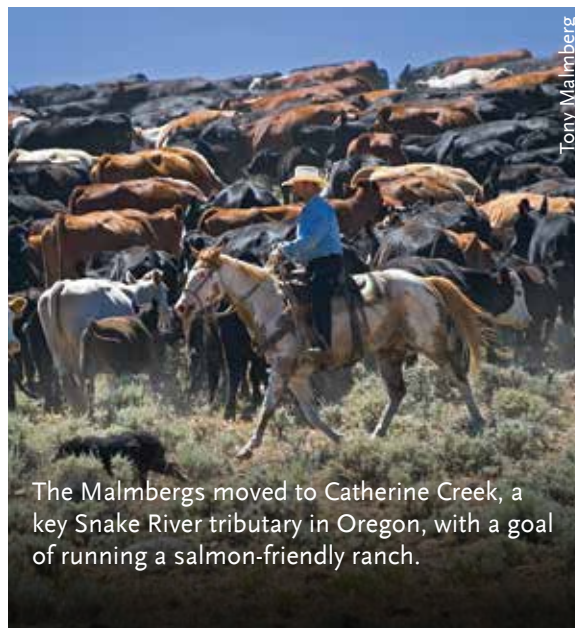
A 2023 study led by WSC connects Chinook abundance trends to time spent in relatively cold freshwater and marine habitats.

Spring Chinook, Shannon Thompson/Stock



Andrea and Tony Malmberg

Tony Malmberg



Tony Malmberg

The Malmbergs moved to Catherine Creek, a key Snake River tributary in Oregon, with a goal of running a salmon-friendly ranch.

Connected to Salmon

Tony Malmberg, rancher, Union County


Oregon rancher Tony Malmberg will tell you that his cows' alfalfa grows best in early summer, when weather is temperate and irrigation needs are minimal.

Malmberg draws his water from nearby Catherine Creek, a key nursery for threatened Snake River spring Chinook salmon and summer steelhead. And in late summer, Malmberg believes the creek needs water more than he does.

That's why he's a fan of Oregon's unique split-season instream leasing program, which pays farmers like him to leave late-summer water in rivers—instead of diverting it to irrigate one last low-yield hay crop.

"The hot season is when the water's highest value is staying instream for salmon and river function," Malmberg testified to the Oregon Legislature.

In 2023, the program that helps Malmberg keep more water in Catherine Creek was set to expire. But advocacy led by the Oregon Water Partnership convinced the Oregon Legislature to pass House Bill 3164 and make this program permanent: a win-win for farms and fish.



By connecting water policies with a changing climate, we're building solutions that help people and fish thrive together.

In 2023, we helped win \$174 million in state funding to enhance drought resilience and water security in Oregon. This unprecedented investment will drive a new generation of water-smart policies, while accelerating salmon habitat restoration across the state.

The Vanguard of Fisheries Innovation

Northwest British Columbia is home to some of the world's last large, intact wild salmon, trout, and steelhead ecosystems. Yet many of these wild runs have faced staggering declines in recent decades—some surpassing 90 percent.

Now, thanks to sustained pressure from salmon advocates, provincial and federal agencies are taking on B.C.'s wild salmon issues: moving toward bans on open net-pen salmon farming, while embracing fisheries management reforms—including lifting restrictions on Indigenous selective fishing practices like weirs and wheels.

First Nations are seizing this moment. Today, the Gitanyow, Gitksan, and Nuxalk are among the Nations guiding a wave of next-generation science and innovation toward fisheries reform.

Wild Salmon Center is a proud ally in this work, alongside local partners including SkeenaWild, the Babine River Foundation, and the Coastal Rivers Conservancy. And we're honored to count First Nations as key partners in our study of fishing methods that protect wild salmon diversity while allowing harvest of abundant runs.

The Nuxalk Stewardship Office, for example, is a close collaborator in our work to build a genetic database of B.C. wild salmon and steelhead. This tool could help inform selective fisheries programs throughout the region, including the Nuxalk Nation's pilot fish wheels on the Bella Coola River.

“For millennia, Tribes and First Nations stewarded ecosystems across the North Pacific,” says WSC Senior Watershed Scientist Dr. Will Atlas. “Now, science and Indigenous leadership are reconnecting us with the knowledge to rebuild our forests and fisheries.” ✦

Connected to Salmon

William Housty, Heiltsuk Nation

“Fish weirs are really an expression of our governance,” says William Housty, Associate Director of the Heiltsuk Integrated Resource Management Department on British Columbia's Central Coast. “They serve not only as a modern-day expression of Heiltsuk title and rights over a place, but also as an avenue for us to be a part of the latest and greatest science.”

Today, the Heiltsuk Nation is working with Wild Salmon Center and others to fuse traditional weir technology with artificial intelligence.

Called Salmon Vision, this new Indigenous-led AI tool can rapidly identify and count fish species passing through a weir. It's data that fisheries managers typically can't get until a fishing season is over. For the Heiltsuk, this tool also represents a form of reconnection with rivers that have sustained them for millennia.






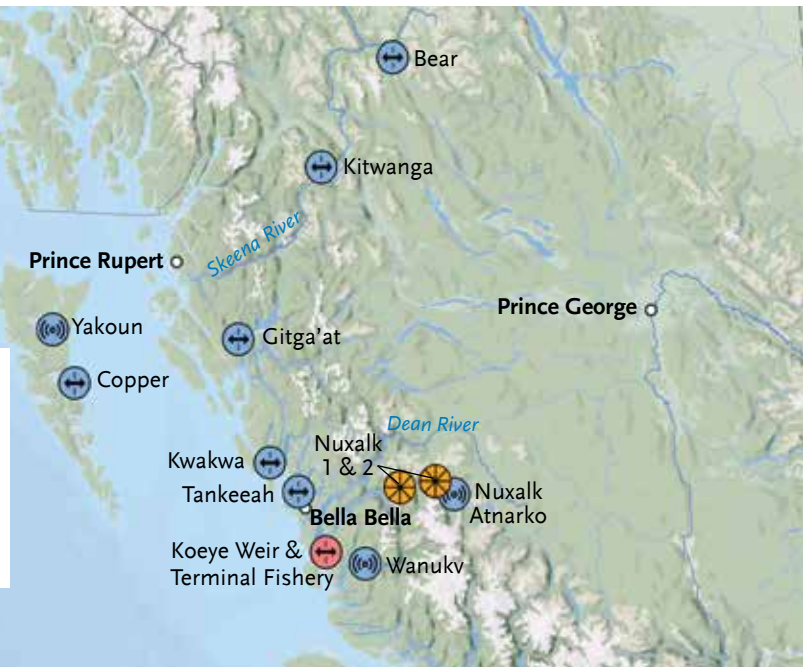
William Housty

From Bella Bella, on B.C.'s Central Coast, William Housty and the Heiltsuk Integrated Resource Management Department have been key partners in our long-running research at the Koeye River fish weir.

“We wouldn't be here right now if it wasn't for the salmon,” Housty says. “Now we can make decisions based on what's actually happening out there—not just for the betterment of a creek, but for the whole ecosystem.”

At sites across **British Columbia**, we're partnering with First Nations to enhance Indigenous-led selective fishing technologies—weirs, wheels, reef nets, and more—with cutting-edge tracking tools like sonar and our Salmon Vision software. Our research suggests that selective fishing can help rebuild salmon runs at a time when many are struggling.

PROJECT	PROJECT TYPE
■ Salmon Vision	 Sonar
■ Selective Fishery	 Weir
■ Salmon Vision & Selective Fishery	 Fish Wheel



Science and Indigenous leadership are reconnecting us with the knowledge to rebuild our forests and fisheries.

In 2023, our British Columbia partnerships grew stronger, advancing better ways to fish across the province.

◀ Piloted at Indigenous-run fish counting weirs on British Columbia's Koeye, Kitwanga, and Bear Rivers, **Salmon Vision** is a first-of-its-kind artificial intelligence technology that identifies and counts fish species in real time, with accuracy scores surpassing 90 and 80 percent for coho and sockeye salmon.

Science Is Our North Star

From the Western Pacific to the Skeena River and California's North Coast, Wild Salmon Center leads the way in Pacific salmon conservation science. Connected by the rivers we love, we draw on science to chart our way.

As our guides, the members of WSC's growing Science Team include world-class conservation geneticists, fish ecologists, watershed conservation planners, and field researchers. Our team draws further strength from partnerships with both established experts and emerging leaders in salmon conservation science.

Through science, we know that wild salmon, trout, and steelhead face existential threats. Now, we're racing to unlock the secrets of these species' genetic diversity—insights that we need to advance critical fisheries reforms, before it's too late.

In 2023, WSC scientists advanced that understanding with nine new studies in journals including *Fish & Fisheries*, *Nature Ecology & Evolution*, and *Frontiers in Marine Science*. This research informed a painful decision by Canada's Department of Fisheries & Oceans to close a mixed-stock chum salmon fishery on British Columbia's Central Coast: one that was driving smaller runs of other wild salmon toward long-term decline. Meanwhile, our genetic discoveries are shifting paradigms for spring Chinook and summer steelhead conservation from Vancouver Island to California.

Throughout our history, scientific breakthroughs and data-driven innovations have informed our work to save struggling wild fish runs and protect the healthy ones. Thanks to WSC scientists and our partners, we know more than ever about what it takes to meet that challenge. ✦



Olivia Leigh Nowak

Wild Salmon Center's Dr. Will Atlas and Nuxalk Guardian Watchman Ernie Tallio on British Columbia's Kimsquit River. With our partners, we're gathering genetic samples from hundreds of wild salmon rivers across the North Pacific.

Connected to Salmon

Dr. Tasha Thompson, Wild Salmon Center

Dr. Tasha Thompson is one of the world's foremost salmon conservation geneticists. Now, with WSC, she's literally cracking the code of salmon DNA.


For the past two years, Dr. Thompson has led a project of unprecedented scope and ambition: a whole-genome database for both Chinook salmon and steelhead. This project builds on groundbreaking work by Dr. Thompson that's helping fisheries managers genetically distinguish spring Chinook from their fall-run cousins. Now, her team's range-wide database could soon serve as a Rosetta Stone for fisheries managers: translating the rich genetic diversity that underscores wild salmonid success into bold new conservation strategies.

"Our database will serve as an atlas for genetic diversity," Dr. Thompson says. "As a brand-new tool for researchers, it will help us see how discoveries made in one river play out across the North Pacific."

WSC's Dr. Tasha Thompson leads her research team from her lab on the banks of Oregon's North Umpqua River.



From "The Lost Salmon" by Shane Anderson

An underwater photograph of several salmon swimming in clear, greenish water. The fish are shown from various angles, some in the foreground and others in the background, creating a sense of depth and movement. The lighting is soft, highlighting the scales and fins of the fish.

Science is the foundation of our work, from coastal restoration to new policies centered on salmon biodiversity.

In 2023, our Science Team advanced a groundbreaking genetic atlas for wild spring Chinook and summer steelhead.

In Russia, Salmon Advocacy Undaunted

For more than 30 years, Wild Salmon Center proudly worked with Russian scientists at the federal, regional, and local levels to improve the health of salmon rivers.

In July 2023, the Prosecutor General's Office of the Russian Federation designated WSC as an "undesirable organization" within Russian territories, effectively barring us from direct work in Russia. We are confident that this setback will be temporary. Meanwhile, nothing can diminish our decades of work alongside Russian partners to protect one of the most important centers of wild salmon abundance left on Earth.

Under the bilateral Area V agreement to advance scientific cooperation between the U.S. and Russia, we conducted leading research on taimen, trout, salmon, and steelhead in the Russian Far East. We supported Russian commercial fishing operations to improve their management of wild salmon. And we worked closely with conservation and science partners across Russia to create new parks and protected areas, and safeguard wild salmon strongholds across the region.

From afar, we're heartened that the work of our Russian partners goes on. They're conducting scientific research, reducing illegal fishing, improving commercial fisheries management, protecting stronghold rivers, and promoting sustainable angling tourism.

Russia's salmon rivers are key to WSC's stronghold strategy. We are proud of our friends and colleagues around the North Pacific, and cheer their ongoing quest for clean water, healthy fisheries, and wild places to call home. ✦

Connected to Salmon Dr. Matt Sloat, Wild Salmon Center

Our International Taimen Initiative convenes leading scientists to advance conservation strategies for taimen: the world's largest salmonids. Below, an excerpt from Dr. Sloat's essay "What the Taimen Said," published in *Fisheries*, January 2023.

"What did the taimen say to you?" asked Khandsuren Jigmen, one evening this summer at a riverside camp high in the Mongolia headwaters of the Yenisei basin. It was day three of a two-week expedition into one of the world's last, best taimen strongholds.

At breakfast each morning, Khandsuren, our camp manager, offered prayers for our success. For her and other local Mongolians, taimen are children of the river god, a link between humans and the spirit of the land and water.

And that day, the incantations had been answered. Out on the river in the afternoon, a meter-long fish had



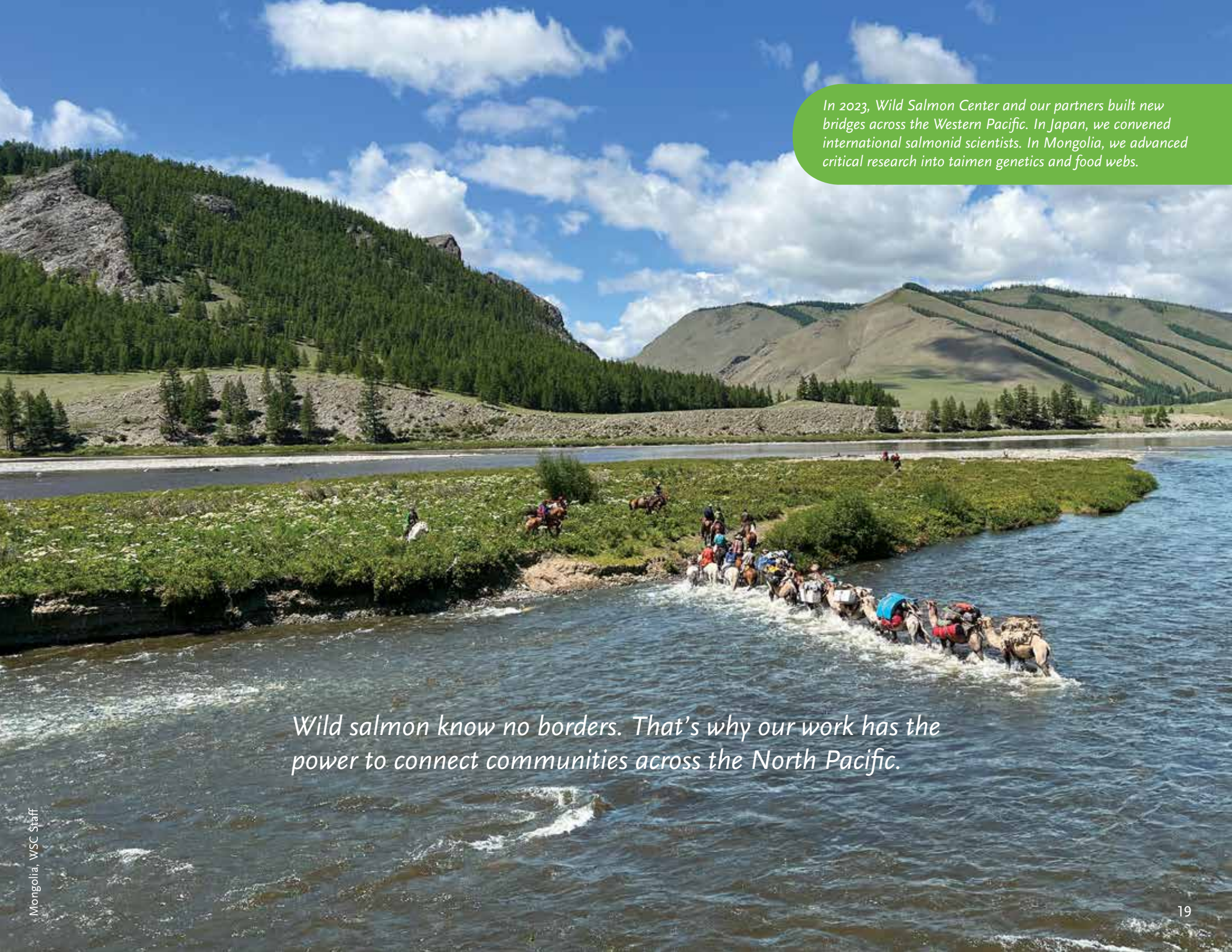
In 2023, leading taimen experts convened in Hokkaido, Japan, for the first-ever meeting of our International Taimen Initiative.

smashed a surface fly I skated slowly across a glassy run. The taimen's leap cleared the water in the process and then it hooked itself as it crashed back into the river.

After several strong runs, our team netted the fish, measured its size, and collected a quick scale and fin sample. On release, this giant made a powerful tail slap back into the current and was gone. But its fight and then its yielding to our grasp did leave a message—about something fierce, wild, and completely vulnerable.



WSC Science Director Dr. Matt Sloat and Dr. Bud Mendsaikhan of the Mongolia Academy of Sciences with a Siberian taimen.



In 2023, Wild Salmon Center and our partners built new bridges across the Western Pacific. In Japan, we convened international salmonid scientists. In Mongolia, we advanced critical research into taimen genetics and food webs.

Wild salmon know no borders. That's why our work has the power to connect communities across the North Pacific.

The Stronghold Fund

Eight years ago, Wild Salmon Center launched an impact fund for wild Pacific salmon conservation. In 2023, we supported more than eight high-priority initiatives and key partners. Below, a few highlights by geography.

BRITISH COLUMBIA

Coastal Rivers Conservancy

Support for this core WSC partner included efforts to reform a British Columbia chum salmon fishery and assist our work to build genetic databases for B.C. Central Coast wild fish stocks. (See page 16 for more on this research.)

Selective Fisheries Project

WSC's Indigenous and Selective Fisheries Initiative expanded its salmon genetics research, supported First Nations fisheries management throughout B.C., and secured additional funds for new selective fishing projects by the Heiltsuk and Nuxalk Nations. (See page 14.)

Watershed Watch Salmon Society

Ongoing research and advocacy work by Watershed Watch Salmon Society aims to end the use of open net-pen salmon farming off the B.C. coast.

Skeena Wild

This longtime core partner is expanding Indigenous-led land use planning in the Skeena watershed, fighting the Telkwa coal mine, and reforming provincial mining regulations.

Taku River Tlingit First Nation

We partnered with the Taku River Tlingit First Nation to enhance river monitoring and assess the watershed's wild sockeye, coho, and Chinook runs.

Connected to Salmon

*Sara Cannon, Centre for Indigenous Fisheries,
University of British Columbia*

In T̓silhqot'in Territory, high in the Chilcotin Plateau along the Fraser River, some hearts are literally bigger. Here, powerfully-built sockeye have evolved to make the 3,850-foot elevation climb to Chilko Lake. Their supersized hearts add another beat to the story of salmon biodiversity.

In 2022, the T̓silhqot'in First Nation invited Sara Cannon, a postdoctoral fellow with UBC's Centre for Indigenous Fisheries, to help with a scientific assessment of human impacts on salmon within the territory. This work, supported by WSC's Science team and The Stronghold Fund, can prioritize next steps to restore vital wild fish habitat in key Fraser River tributaries. The rivers of T̓silhqot'in Territory nurture five species of salmonids: runs that have been deeply affected by provincial logging, mining, and road-building.



Sara Cannon, a researcher with the University of B.C.'s Centre for Indigenous Fisheries.

Within British Columbia, many First Nations have begun similar work to catalog loss and underwrite restoration following court decisions that reaffirm Indigenous historic rights to wild salmon.

"The T̓silhqot'in are fiercely protecting their fish," says Cannon. "This analysis will help establish a legal foundation to seek redress for damages, while communicating impacts in a way that's more reflective of T̓silhqot'in understandings and priorities."

UNITED STATES

West Susitna Campaign

The WSC-led Defend the West Su coalition launched a paid media campaign to oppose a proposed 100-mile industrial access road. (See page 6.)

Stand Tall Oregon Campaign


This WSC-led coalition launched a media campaign to boost local engagement in the fight to win a legacy conservation plan for Oregon state forests. (See page 10.)

Oregon Water Initiative

With partners, we launched the WSC-convened Oregon Water Partnership. (See page 12.) ✦



A pilot fish wheel project on B.C.'s Bella Coola River, led by the Nuxalk First Nation with help from WSC, to improve monitoring and selective harvest of salmon.

An aerial photograph of a wide, shallow river with milky, turquoise water flowing through a lush green forest. The river winds from the bottom left towards the right. In the background, large, rugged mountains with patches of snow rise against a clear blue sky. The overall scene is a vibrant, natural landscape.

When opportunities arise, The Stronghold Fund is here to help our partners and campaigns seize the moment.

In 2023, The Stronghold Fund supported work to stop a salmon-threatening Alaskan road project, fight the Telkwa coal mine, protect Oregon state forests, and more.

2023 Donors

Thanks to the steady support of our donors this year and in years past, we achieved major conservation breakthroughs. Our gratitude to the foundations, companies, government agencies, and individuals that helped make this possible.

Thank you to *all of our donors*. The full honor roll of our supporters can be found at wildsalmoncenter.org/2023honor-roll.

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Mitch & Elizabeth Siegler: A Legacy of Salmon Strongholds

In many ways, it seems as if Wild Salmon Center and the Sieglers were meant to cross paths.

“I’ve fished in many places where WSC works—Alaska, Oregon, Washington, Kamchatka,” Mitch Siegler says. “And there’s a certain connection when you’ve visited those places.”

But it was a book that brought the Sieglers into WSC’s orbit. “I first heard about the organization in 2019 when I read *Stronghold*, the biography of WSC’s Guido Rahr by Tucker Malarkey,” Siegler says. “I found the story very powerful and decided to learn more.”

After digging more deeply, WSC’s model proved to be a strong fit for their philanthropic goals.

“A healthy environment and a well-functioning ecosystem are really important to us and to the future of our children,” Siegler says. “What I like about WSC is that they focus on a particular species, pursue just a few target initiatives, and have stitched together a compelling story about how salmon are a linchpin species supporting healthy rivers, forests, and natural ecosystems.”

Over the years, Mitch and Elizabeth became more involved by acting on key campaigns, spending time on the river with WSC staff, and supporting our work with high-impact gifts through their Donor Advised Fund.

“By virtue of WSC being targeted and efficient, our donations were ultimately more meaningful than if they were made to a larger, less focused nonprofit,” Siegler says. “We felt our gifts were harder-working.”

In 2021, Mitch and Elizabeth decided to take the next step, by including WSC in their estate plans to help ensure that our conservation efforts are sustained into the future.

“The need for WSC’s work will continue for some time, and like the twists and turns of a river, there will be different challenges 10 to 20 years from now,” Siegler says. “Setting the stage for continuity and permanence through our bequest helps WSC think more strategically, and in longer-term fashion, to continue to thrive and fight the battles likely to present themselves in the future.”

To learn more about creating a legacy with WSC, please visit wildsalmoncenter.org/legacy.

“A healthy environment and a well-functioning ecosystem are really important to us and to the future of our children.” —Mitch Siegler



WSC has been approved to receive grants through the **One Percent for the Planet** program.



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

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Ray Lane on the Skeena River, Nate Mantua

“Salmon carry the vital nutrients to support the entire Pacific Rim lifecycle.” —Ray Lane

WSC BOARD SPOTLIGHT: Ray Lane

When Ray Lane joined the Wild Salmon Center Board of Directors in 2018, he brought with him his experience as one of Silicon Valley’s most steadfast and successful organizational leaders, from his overhaul of Oracle in the 1990s, to his chairmanship of HP in the 2010s, to his current role as Managing Partner at GreatPoint Ventures and partner emeritus at Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers.

Through his board tenure and leadership gift to The Stronghold Fund (page 20), Lane has also been pivotal in advancing our stronghold strategy. Via The Stronghold Fund, Lane underwrote creation of our new Oregon Water Initiative (page 12), which is securing natural streamflows for wild salmon from the Rogue to the Nehalem. Now, he’s helping us build an ambitious 10-year capital campaign to empower salmon champions around the North Pacific and catalyze new support for wild salmon conservation through immersive multimedia storytelling.

As Lane says: “When I meet people unfamiliar with WSC’s mission, I say, yes, it’s about the salmon, but their importance as fish is unparalleled. They carry the vital nutrients to support the entire Pacific Rim lifecycle. Without them, the patient dies. We must get out of their way.”

* \$10,000 and above. See a full list at wildsalmoncenter.org/2023honor-roll.



Washington Coast steelhead, Dave McCoy

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



WSC has received the [GuideStar gold seal](#) for transparency.



Barbie Hull Photography

Ivan Thompson: Salmon Champion

In the early 1980s, Ivan Thompson moved to Smithers, in British Columbia’s remote Skeena watershed, to teach at a school that served many children of the Lake Babine First Nation. But he’s the one who got schooled: by the parents and grandparents of his students.

“I learned how connected these folks were to rivers, to salmon,” remembers Thompson, a board member of The Stronghold Fund, WSC’s impact fund. “I watched them fight huge mining companies. I saw the power of people when they work together.”

Over the next four decades, Thompson translated that lesson into his life’s work: connecting small salmon communities to the best science, and a bigger story.

“In the early days, there was no Wild Salmon Center to show us how the Skeena fit into a grand vision,” Thompson says.

“The stronghold strategy does that. It uplifts the sometimes lonely work of championing your local river.”

Over the course of his career, Thompson brought this bigger story to the Tides Canada Foundation, the Sage Centre, and the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation’s Wild Salmon Ecosystems Initiative.

There and in his three terms on WSC’s Board of Directors (2015–2023), Thompson saw the rise of local “immune responses”—communities mobilizing quickly to fight threats—in salmon watersheds across the North Pacific. And as Thompson moves to the board of The Stronghold Fund, he’ll continue to ensure that these communities can draw on our resources, science, and vision.

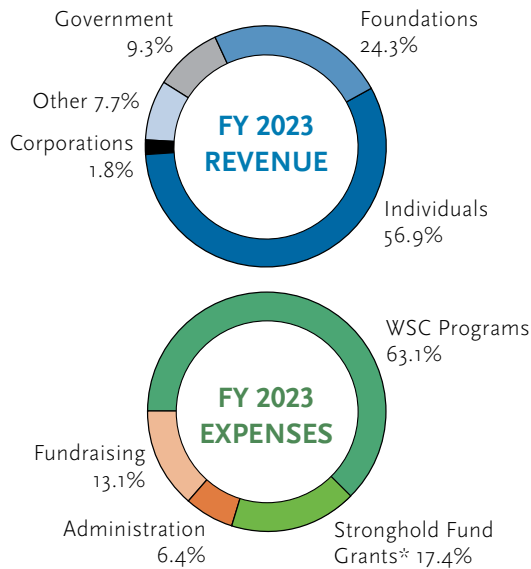
“This work starts with neighbors talking to neighbors,” Thompson says. “Once we all see ourselves in the story of salmon, we truly build our power.”

“Once we all see ourselves in the story of salmon, we truly build our power.”

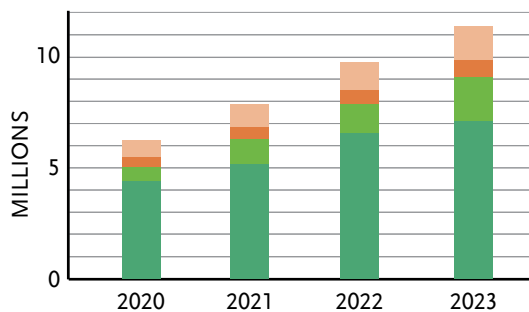
—Ivan Thompson

2023 Financials: A Season of Growth

WSC has embarked on a new ten-year initiative to ensure our most important salmon strongholds have durable protections in place to thrive far into the future. This will require major investments in our team, in our watersheds, and in our partners throughout the Pacific Rim. As a result we are planning to grow our operating budget over the next several years. Your ongoing support will be critical to our success.



WSC Operational Budget 2020-2023



* Includes subgrants to conservation partners and WSC programs.

THE GIFT of a LIFETIME

Including a gift to WSC in your will—or designating us as a beneficiary of your trust, retirement plan, or life insurance policy—are easy ways to ensure future generations know the joy of wading in cold, clean rivers, exploring old-growth forests, and observing wild fish heading upstream.

Ready to get started? Reach out to us at 971-255-5562 or visit wildsalmoncenter.org/legacy to learn more about bequests and WSC's free will-writing tool.



The People of Wild Salmon Center

Andrea Lonas

Staff

Guido Rahr, President and Chief Executive Officer

Emily Anderson, Alaska Director

William Atlas, Ph.D., Senior Salmon Watershed Scientist

Jessica Baker, Events & Donor Engagement Coordinator

Caylin Barter, Water Policy Director

Luke Brockman, Alaska Community Outreach Coordinator

Oakley Brooks, Communications Director

Michelle Cramer, Habitat Restoration Engineer

Jody Creasman, Media Design Coordinator

Cyndi Curtis, North Coast Manager

Ramona DeNies, Senior Writer

Wild Salmon Center's highly talented staff spans geographies, disciplines, and diverse life experiences. What connects our team is a deep dedication to conserving the health of wild salmon, trout, and steelhead around the Pacific Rim.

Stacey Detwiler, Oregon Policy Director
Melaney Dunne, Salmon Watershed Scientist

Tim Elder, Ph.D., Senior Habitat Restoration Manager

Erin Ellis, People & Culture Manager

David Finkel, VP of Development & Communications, Executive Director of The Stronghold Fund

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Jessica Helsley, Watershed Restoration Director

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John Kober, Senior Habitat Restoration Manager, CA

Kimberly Kosa, Development Director
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Audie Paulus, Senior Donor Relations Manager

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Tasha Thompson, Ph.D., Conservation Geneticist

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Morgan Urquia, Alaska Campaign and Outreach Manager

Mariah Williams, Staff Accountant
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Interns

Luke Brockman, Science Department, 2023-2024

Alicia Canales, GIS Project, 2023
Griffin Morse, Image Library, 2023-2024

Finn Russell, Coast Program, 2023
Olivia Somhegyi, GIS Project, 2023
Alex Ward, Coast Program, 2022

Science Fellow

Mikhail Skopets, Ph.D., Science Fellow

Above: Portland-based and visiting staff at our new 19th Street location



John Childs and Guido Rahr

Orange Photography

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WELCOME BOARD MEMBER: *Mike Overcast*

Mike Overcast is the co-owner of Alaska's Tordrillo Mountain Lodge. With 20 years of experience guiding helicopter terrain, along with his extensive experience as a snow blaster, avalanche consultant, and wilderness guide, he's regarded as an expert in anything snow-related in Alaska. Overcast has guided skiers in Valdez, Girdwood, Seward, Hatcher Pass, and in the Tordrillo and Neacola mountain ranges.

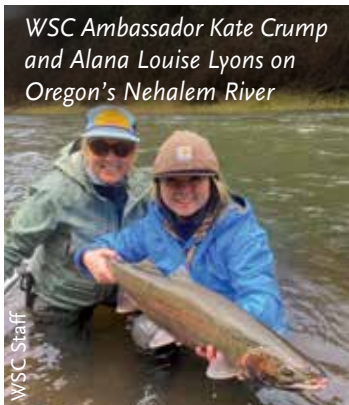
Born and raised in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, he has pioneered river corridors throughout Southcentral Alaska since 1992.



Mike Overcast

Guido Rahr

Front cover: Iliamna River, Bristol Bay, Alaska (Jason Ching). Back cover: Orca pod off the coast of Alaska (Ron Niebrugge, Alamy).



WSC Staff

WSC Ambassador Kate Crump and Alana Louise Lyons on Oregon's Nehalem River



Guido Rahr (top, center), and board members Mitch Zuklie and Ray Lane with guides and guests of Mongolia River Outfitters.

Guido Rahr

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We're migrating! To accommodate our growing team, WSC has moved:

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