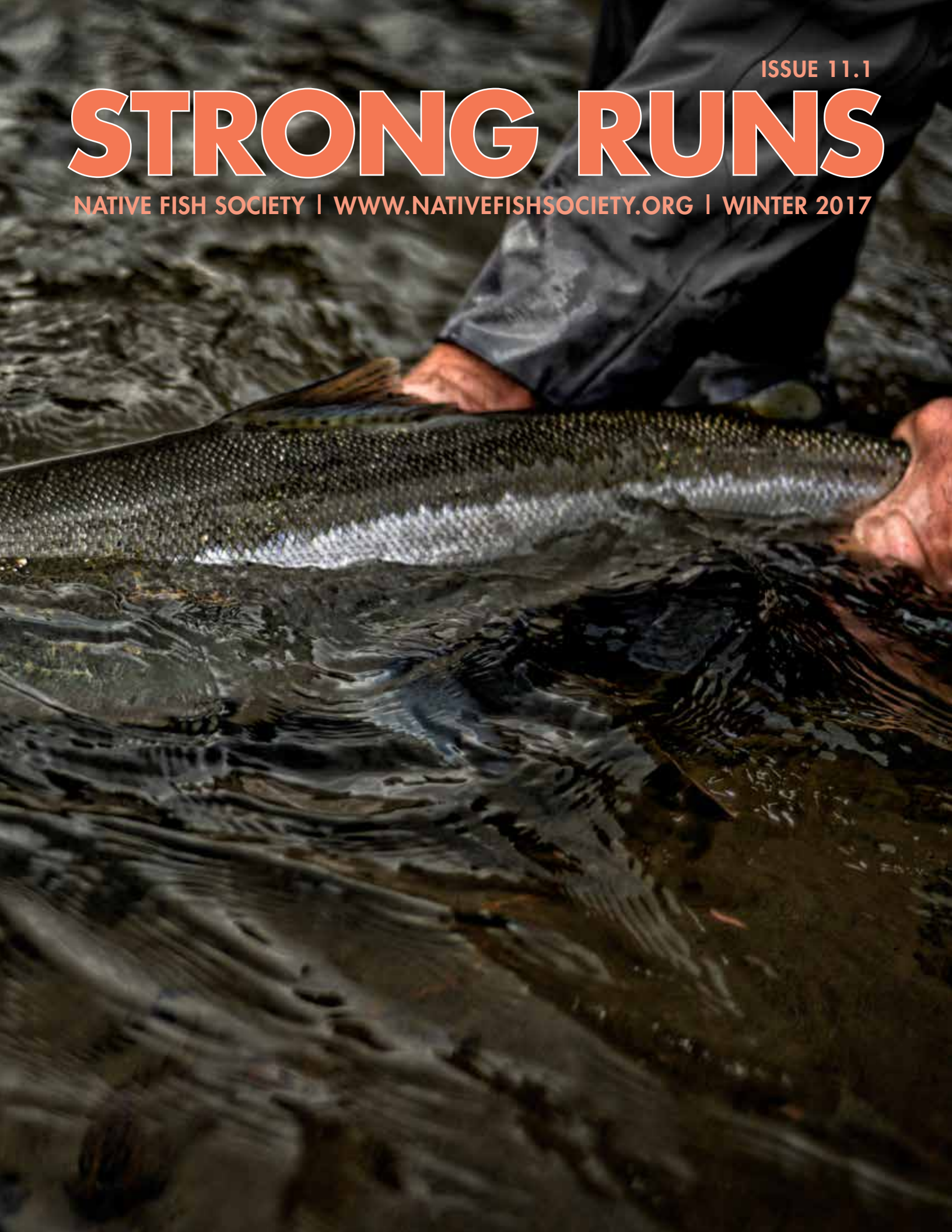


ISSUE 11.1

# STRONG RUNS

NATIVE FISH SOCIETY | [WWW.NATIVEFISHSOCIETY.ORG](http://WWW.NATIVEFISHSOCIETY.ORG) | WINTER 2017





(THIS) Protected from strip mining.  
PHOTO: Ken Morrish

## STRONG RUNS

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Native Fish Society is a tax-exempt, non-profit charitable organization.

No human being, however great and powerful, was ever as free as a fish. ~ John Ruskin

(COVER) Connect with the wild!  
 PHOTO: Marty Sheppard



# HOMEWATERS: CONNECTION TO PLACE

WORDS BY  
Mark Sherwood  
Executive Director

(ABOVE)  
A king's burial

PHOTO:  
Duncan Berry

A WILD SALMON IS A PERFECT REFLECTION OF ITS ENVIRONMENT. It is a product of water and gravel, predators and prey. It is refined by its trek to the sea, its ocean-spanning odyssey, and its miraculous return to its natal stream. And, even after it has given up the ghost, its body sustains an entire ecosystem, nourishing not just the life in the stream, but the plants and animals surrounding it.

A wild salmon is inextricable from its homewaters.

For 15 million years, salmon have maintained that fundamental connection to place, besting ice ages and earthquakes, landslides and volcanic eruptions. This connection makes salmon durable and it hones them for survival. As a community, working to protect and restore salmon, we cannot disregard a salmon's connection to place and still hope to save them.

All this is backed up by hard science. Earlier this year, Dr. Mark Christie published a landmark paper that identifies the repercussions of breaking the connection between a wild fish and its homewaters. Researchers recorded more than 700 genetic changes in steelhead

spawned from wild parents, but raised in a hatchery. After just one generation, the fish had been tamed by their surroundings. The concrete walls, regular food supply and crowded conditions eroded the animals' ability to heal, fight off disease and metabolize food. When we break the connection to place, we break wild fish.

Before we invest in or advocate for salmon recovery, we must first ask ourselves if our efforts support the salmon's natural way of life. Too often, human intervention alters and even replaces it.

Late last fall, the agency in charge of recovering salmon and steelhead, the National Marine Fisheries Service, expressed interest in protecting 23 stocks of hatchery salmon and steelhead under the Endangered Species Act. Not only does the proposal contradict the purpose of the ESA, which is to restore self-sustaining wild fish, it also ignores a fundamental truth about salmon recovery - that we must honor, not manufacture, their connection to place. To protect hatchery stocks would mean hardwiring a disconnected approach into the very system created to protect them.

# HEMOWATERS: CONNECTION TO PLACE



(ABOVE)  
Chinook in Siletz  
River, OR

PHOTO:  
Duncan Berry


(BELOW)  
River Steward  
Gathering 2016

PHOTO:  
Octave Zangs

The Native Fish Society, our River Stewards, and our members don't take this threat lightly. In 2016, nearly 500 of you sent messages to NMFS opposing their proposal and asking for a scientific review and revision of the 2005 Hatchery Listing Policy. Seventy-eight River Stewards also sent letters and together we provided a unified voice for watersheds and native fish in four states.

Our model, grassroots activism, is also defined by a connection to place. Like the fish we advocate for, we are bound to our homewaters. Through our River Stewards Program, the Native Fish Society works to foster that connection. The method is tried and true. The most important conservation victories in history started with individuals and small groups of concerned citizens, who cared about a place. Ed Abbey loved the desert canyons of southeast Utah and John Muir loved the Sierra Nevada. The Campbell River had Roderick Haig-Brown and the North Umpqua has Frank and Jeanne Moore. Their

names alone conjure images of the places they fought for. Like the native fish we work to protect, we are stronger as a community because we are organized river by river across the Northwest. Starting with this issue of Strong Runs, we hope to foster your connection to place. From unlocking the mysteries of Puget Sound's coastal cutthroat, to protecting wild steelhead diversity through new gene banks in Washington, to keeping strip miners from degrading native fish habitats in Oregon and California, this issue is full of inspiring stories of wild fish advocates transforming their passionate connection to place into durable conservation.

Only healthy, diverse and abundant wild fish have ever succeeded in providing the economic, ecological, cultural and spiritual enrichment that make these remarkable fish icons of the Northwest. In 2017, our grassroots activism will focus on reviving the icon by honoring its connection to place. 



# WILD RIVERS CAMPAIGN

## A GRASSROOTS VICTORY FOR NATIVE FISH & CLEAN WATER

WORDS BY  
Dave Lacey  
Hunter Creek River  
Steward

(ABOVE)  
Clean and steelhead  
green on the Wild  
Rivers Coast

PHOTO:  
Ken Morrish

HOW CAN YOU HELP?  
Head to  
[nativefishsociety.org/get-involved](http://nativefishsociety.org/get-involved)  
and sign our action  
alert thank you to the  
congressmen and  
senators who helped  
make these protections  
a reality!

SOUTHWEST OREGON'S WILD RIVERS COAST BOASTS the highest concentration of Wild & Scenic Rivers in the lower 48 states. After three years, our Wild Rivers Campaign just crossed the finish line with a big victory toward their protection. The Illinois, Rogue, Smith and Pistol rivers as well as Baldface, Rough and Ready and Hunter creeks just received national protections in the form of a 20-year mineral withdrawal! Native Fish Society staff and River Stewards organized the overwhelming support of local stakeholders to secure protections banning strip mining on 101,000 acres of rugged public lands until 2037.

Like much of the Oregon coast, natural resource extraction has ruled here for a long time. In 2013, a new threat emerged. A nickel mine was proposed within the Rogue River Siskiyou National Forest and Bureau of Land Management lands less than seven miles from my house on Hunter Creek.

A British corporation applied for a permit with the U.S. Forest Service to explore a sensitive area not far from Gold Beach, Oregon. With the help of NFS Southern Regional Manager Jake Crawford, we researched mining threats and the Mining Act of 1872. We concluded that the best way to stop a mine was to shut it down before it starts.

We broke our strategy into four parts. After coming up with a message we could use throughout the campaign, we set out to gauge public opinion, build support, and weigh in at key decision-making points.

Our first step was to petition the residents of the Hunter Creek and Pistol River watersheds. With the

help of two friends, I went door to door to let people know about the nickel mine threat and learn what they thought. The responses from my neighbors were encouraging. Only one resident thought a nickel mine in their watershed was a good idea. More than 120 residents signed the petition, including a former gold-mining CEO from Alaska.

Next, we engaged local politicians, held community meetings where we stated our concerns and shared the evidence. We spoke to chambers of commerce, county commissioners, reporters, and any community group that would listen. I wrote letters to newspaper editors and encouraged others to do the same.

As we learned more about mining, we realized we weren't alone. In Oregon's Illinois River Valley, Barbara Ullian, of Friends of the Kalmiopsis, had been fighting various mining threats to the Illinois for the last 20 years. The very same company that wanted to mine in my neck of the woods also wanted to exploit the headwaters of the world-famous Smith River, on the border of Oregon and California.

By the time the first public-comment period was held, our coalition had momentum. Thanks to local organizing and an action alert from NFS the Forest Service received over 600 comments opposing the drilling, the most ever for an exploratory permit.

At the same time, we engaged our congressional delegation. Together, we came up with a plan to introduce legislation that would remove public lands from the Mining Act of 1872, an action called a 'mineral withdrawal.' The legislation was titled the

# WILD RIVERS CAMPAIGN

A GRASSROOTS VICTORY FOR NATIVE FISH & CLEAN WATER



**BIG THANKS TO:**  
Senators Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley and Congressmen Peter DeFazio and Jared Huffman!  
Gold Beach City Council, Curry County Commissioners.

Campaign partners Kalmiopsis Audubon, Friends of the Kalmiopsis, Smith River Alliance, KS Wild, Earthworks, American Rivers, Trout Unlimited and American Whitewater

Our neighbors and friends in Hunter Creek and Pistol River.

Native Fish Society members and supporters!

Campaign Sponsors: Harry & Mary Piper, Warner Munro, Mark Caffee, Ken Morrish, Ken Anderson

(LEFT) Hunter Creek River Steward Dave Lacey & River Stewards and River signs at the public hearing  
PHOTOS: Conrad Gowell

Southwestern Oregon Watershed and Salmon Protection Act (SOWSPA) and, once introduced, it spurred agencies to start the withdrawal process. This prohibited the filing of new mining claims in the area for two years while the the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management considered the withdrawal.

In three years, our coalition grew from a small group of Hunter Creek locals, to a region-wide stakeholder group, powerful because we had gathered the voices of passionate and knowledgeable activists across three counties and state lines.

Fellow Hunter Creek River Steward James Smith and his business partners at Arch Rock Brewery offered more than just vocal support. They created the Wild Rivers, Wild Brews Coalition, enlisting 14 breweries in Southern Oregon to oppose the nickel mine, and hosted Representative Peter DeFazio for a thank-you event at their brewery in Gold Beach, right on lower Hunter Creek.

Chetco and Smith River Steward Sunny Bourdon helped organize in Oregon and across the border in California. Hundreds of people were informed about the nickel mine threat thanks to her gallery of photos of the threatened watersheds, which moved through four breweries on the Wild Rivers Coast, prior to the large public hearing in 2016. Behind the scenes she helped us pull off every campaign party and authored a number of letters to the editor to

(RIGHT) Hunter Creek and Pistol River – Homewaters!  
PHOTOS: Ken Morrish

speak up for her friends and neighbors who wanted to protect our wild rivers and native fish.

Though the agencies involved first proposed a five-year mineral withdrawal, we persistently asked for a 20-year withdrawal, the maximum possible. In the end we won them over by filling inboxes with more than 68,000 comments during the two public comment periods, making our voices heard at town halls and packing the meeting rooms with local, smart, passionate supporters.

We had the support of Curry County, Del Norte County (CA), the cities of Crescent City, Gold Beach and Cave Junction. We also gained support from water districts and hundreds of businesses around the region through our business alliance, the Curry Democrats, the League of Women Voters, and our congressional delegation of Merkley, DeFazio, Wyden and Huffman (CA).

This was a true grassroots endeavor from start to finish. We didn't have large funders backing us, money for t-shirts, radio time or bumper stickers. Instead we had people who, no matter their background, care deeply about their backyard: the Wild Rivers Coast. We also have rock star River Stewards in James and Sunny and the great staff at NFS. There are too many to thank, but NFS has been a true leader in this process and I thank them from the bottom of my heart for helping me to protect my backyard. 🐟



# COASTAL CUTTHROAT CURIOUS

a field update from the puget sound coastal cutthroat campaign

WORDS BY  
James Losee  
WDFW, Fisheries  
Biologist

(LEFT)  
Seining for searuns

(PHOTO)  
James Losee

(MIDDLE)  
Coastal Cutthroat

(PHOTO)  
Dave McCoy

(RIGHT)  
Jason Small, South  
Puget Sound Coord.  
on night duty

(PHOTO)  
James Losee

HOW CAN YOU HELP?  
To learn more, volunteer or donate head to [www.nativefishsociety.org/campaigns/puget-sound-coastal-cutthroat-campaign](http://www.nativefishsociety.org/campaigns/puget-sound-coastal-cutthroat-campaign)


IT'S WINTER ON PUGET SOUND. RECENT RAINS AND RISING rivers have cleared local streams of the last remaining chum, coho and Chinook salmon carcasses, and the beginning of spawning for cutthroat trout is still at least a month away. Most years, a walk along one of south Puget Sound's many small tributaries may reveal a family of beavers repairing winter damage, or a lone water ouzel gliding through the rapids. Compared to the bustle of fall, when salmon are spawning, the streams are quiet. This year, however, biologists and volunteers from Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife, Native Fish Society and The Coastal Cutthroat Coalition will be taking a closer look.

The question is modest: how many sea-run cutthroat trout spawn in Skookum Creek? But the implications for managers throughout the range of this subspecies are huge. For more than a decade, River Stewards and WDFW volunteers, led by Bill Young, have been counting redds in Skookum Creek to improve our understanding of spawn-timing, as well as teaching others to identify redds in their area. The hope is that data like these will allow managers to truly identify poor and good returns; "poor" and "good" having been used loosely to describe cutthroat returns in the past. In order to do that, we need to know how the number of redds relates to the number of spawners. More specifically, we need to know how many fish it takes to make a redd.

With an estimate of fish per redd, biologists, fish managers and volunteers could estimate abundance of sea-run cutthroat by simply counting redds. Keeping a count of 14- to 20-inch fish as they enter the spawning grounds and establishing the number of redds they

leave behind is difficult business. With initial money awarded to NFS from the Patagonia World Trout Initiative and the Sol Duc Foundation, as well as further fundraising momentum from the Coastal Cutthroat Coalition and well-planned study design by Gabe Madel, we have been tagging adult cutthroat in Puget Sound marine waters with small electronic tags called Passive Integrated Transponders, or PIT tags. Using antennas installed throughout the spawning grounds, we can detect the presence of tagged fish, allowing for an accurate count of cutthroat trout by size, time, gender and age as they enter the creek. By comparing fish counts to redd counts, we can achieve the holy grail of cutthroat research: the number of fish per redd.

While I write, there are approximately 250 tagged sea-run cutthroat trout swimming in south Puget Sound marine waters, waiting to enter freshwater to spawn. Unlike the noisy, short-lived spawning behavior of salmon, anadromous cutthroat are discrete spawners, making them difficult to track. Under a fallen log, or at the bottom of a shaded pool, cutthroat trout can go undetected once they enter the stream. It can take as long as six months to finish spawning and the only sign that they've been there is a small patch of disturbed gravel.

Over the coming months NFS, WDFW and the Coastal Cutthroat Coalition, not to mention the anglers, conservation groups and businesses who have pitched-in, will be watching for results from this research as these native trout move onto the spawning grounds and finally provide fish managers with an effective tool to estimate abundance of anadromous coastal cutthroat trout. 



# PROTECT THE MAGIC: MOVING FORWARD ON THE DESCHUTES RIVER

WORDS BY  
Mark Sherwood  
Executive Director

(ABOVE)  
River level, near  
South Junction

PHOTO:  
Conrad Gowell

(RIGHT)  
Iridescent summer  
steelhead

PHOTO:  
Marty Sheppard

HOW CAN YOU  
HELP?  
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or donate to this  
campaign check out  
[nativefishsociety.org/get-involved](http://nativefishsociety.org/get-involved)

The anthropologist Loran Eiseley once wrote, “If there is magic on this planet, it is contained in water.” And there are few places where that magic is more evident than Oregon’s Deschutes River. The lower Deschutes is a flowing, 100-mile-long oasis cut through canyons and sagebrush. It supports blanket hatches of caddis and salmonflies, wild, desert-dwelling redband trout, and iridescent summer steelhead. In spring and fall, Chinook salmon return that are so powerful they turn over large cobbles while excavating their massive redds. The genetics of those fall Chinook have never been diluted by hatchery stock and, recently, the run approached 20,000 wild fish – one of the largest wild chinook runs in the entire Columbia River basin. To experience the living lower Deschutes is, in a word, magic.

The Native Fish Society and our River Stewards have been advocating for the Deschutes River and its wild, native fish for decades. In 2016, we redoubled our efforts, intent on holding Portland General Electric (PGE) to the promises it made in exchange for the 2005-relicensing of the Pelton Round Butte Complex: improved water quality and healthier populations of native fish. The long-term stewardship of the Deschutes River and its native fish is among our highest purposes as an organization. Below you’ll find comments on the ups and downs on the Deschutes in 2016, as well as notes from our plan moving forward.

## Wild Fish Don’t Ride in Trucks

Based on both personal experience and the best available science, we are opposed to non-volitional fish passage, like PGE’s trap-and-haul program. When fish are driven around a dam in the back of a repurposed septic truck, they are no longer self-sustaining; a fundamental component of recovery according to the Endangered Species Act.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> To learn more about fish passage that supports wild fish

## Lucky Misses the Mark

PGE agreed to mark 100 percent of young salmon and steelhead that pass through the fish-collection station at the selective water withdrawal tower on Lake Billy Chinook. This is a significant improvement in the reintroduction plan. With a clipped maxillary, anadromous fish that originated above the dam will be easily distinguished, preventing delayed passage upstream and the spread of non-native diseases.

In 2016, a record 535 sockeye returned to the trap at the base of Pelton Dam. They had not been marked during their outmigration in 2014 and biologists couldn’t determine whether they were returning salmon from above the dams, or strays from another Columbia River tributary. After holding the fish for nearly a month with no progress toward determining their origin, the decision was made to send the majority of them upstream.

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recovery check out “Wild Fish Don’t Ride in Trucks” by Jake Crawford in our Strong Runs Winter 2016.





Genetic analysis later determined that 94 percent of those sockeye did, in fact, originate above the dams, but good luck can run out quickly. A clipped maxillary is a simple solution that will take luck out of the process.

### **How Warm & How Dirty?**

After six years of seemingly warmer and dirtier water in the lower Deschutes,<sup>2</sup> we're optimistic that the Fish Committee<sup>3</sup> will have the data needed to assess and improve water quality in 2017. PGE is finishing its Macroinvertebrate & Periphyton and Deschutes River Water Quality studies. The Deschutes River Alliance (DRA) is publishing their own water quality data gathered last year from Lake Billy Chinook, its tributaries, and the lower Deschutes.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, a Clean Water Act lawsuit brought by the DRA has increased pressure to provide a more thorough analysis. It has been an agonizing wait for more information, but we will not recommend specific changes without data.

The data and modeling developed for PGE's Deschutes River Water Quality Study, which should be available in early 2018, will help members of the Fish Committee understand what effect cold water reserves in Lake Billy Chinook could have on the lower Deschutes. After lethal water temperatures resulted in massive fish kills in the Columbia River in 2015, we urged the Fish Committee to consider emergency releases of cold water to provide a refuge for salmon and steelhead. A protocol for emergency cold-water releases could be in effect as early as the summer of 2018.

To keep our members informed, NFS River Stewards are compiling all of the recent reports on fish health and water quality as soon as they are available. On our website, the watershed page for the lower Deschutes will become a clearinghouse for this information.

### **Never Ending Reintroduction**

Since 2007, 8.4 million hatchery chinook and steelhead fry have been released into Lake Billy Chinook's tributaries with the intent of jumpstarting the reintroduction effort. Worse, the Fish Committee can't say when they plan to stop. It seems there is no consensus on how many steelhead and chinook must return to the upper river before the committee considers the population

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<sup>2</sup> See "Deschutes in Decline" by Michael Moody in Strong Runs Summer 2014 and "Crisis on the Lower Deschutes" by Greg McMillan and Bill Bakke in Strong Runs Summer 2015.

self-sustaining and hatchery programs can be shut down. Left unchecked, the committee's open-ended timeline is poised to create a negative feedback loop that could ultimately undermine the end goal of the reintroduction: locally adapted, self-sustaining runs. In 2017, NFS will work with members of the Fish Committee to establish clear objectives and hard timelines.

Equally concerning is the potential expansion of hatchery programs on the Deschutes. A few members of the Fish Committee have expressed interest in introducing hatchery sockeye to aid the reintroduction effort. This is not only unnecessary, it would be counterproductive. Because they evolved to rear in lakes, Deschutes-river sockeye may be the fish best-suited for reintroduction above the dams. The base of the record return of sockeye in 2016, for example, was a naturally spawning population from the Metolius River.

Hatchery steelhead smolts are also a threat to wild rainbow trout above the dam. A joint study, conducted in 2015 by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Forest Service, concluded that, "Round Butte hatchery rainbow trout and steelhead have predominantly displaced natural origin rainbow trout from Whychus Creek in the past two generations." Native Fish Society asked PGE to stop planting hatchery steelhead fry until they could ensure native fish were protected. While PGE and ODFW refused to stop hatchery steelhead plants altogether, they have significantly reduced the number destined for the Crooked in 2017. Acknowledging the potential of this problem, PGE and ODFW are conducting a study on rainbow trout in Whychus, Ochoco and McKay creeks. Results will be available in 2017.

### **Proceed With Caution**

Thank you to our members and Rivers Stewards for your unwavering support. In hard times, we draw inspiration from the spirited words of former Oregon Governor Tom McCall: "Let's proceed with great caution. Let's be on the side of native fish and the river, and the solitude of those tremendous canyons.....and the sound of rushing water." We look forward to working with everyone who cares about the Deschutes to ensure the magic of the river is passed on to future generations.



<sup>3</sup> The 'Fish Committee' is composed of agency, tribal and NGO signatories, including NFS, to the licensing agreement for Pelton Round Butte Hydropower complex. The Fish Committee advises the hydropower operators on the studies and operations that impact fish health and reintroduction.



# SUPPORT THE SPRINGER REVIVAL

## RECOVERING A ROGUE RIVER ICON: WILD SPRING CHINOOK SALMON

WORDS BY  
Jake Crawford,  
Southern Regional  
Manager

(LEFT)  
Springer revival

PHOTO:  
Justin Bailie

(RIGHT)  
Upward trajectory  
Rainie Falls,  
Rogue River

PHOTO:  
Tim Palmer

GRAPHIC:  
Data from ODFW  
Rogue Spring  
Chinook Annual  
Reports

**S**outhern Oregon's Rogue River is home to one of the most famous Chinook salmon populations in the Pacific Northwest. Of these wild Chinook, the "Springers" are the crown jewel. It is their unique life history that sets these fish apart from neighboring populations, which are comprised of later returning, fall-run Chinook salmon. Between late winter and early summer, chrome-bright Springers blast through the Rogue's estuary, riding freshets upstream to the cool, deep pools of the upper river. They will hold in those pools, sometimes up to 5 months, until they are ready to spawn.

The history of commercial fishing for salmon on the Rogue dates back to the 1860s, when R.D. Hume operated a cannery near the river's mouth near the city of Gold Beach. More recently, the Rogue's legendary springers have pioneered a wave of aluminum drift boat manufacturers. Alumaweld, Willie Boats, Fish Rite, and Pavati have all built businesses around targeting these prized fish in the upper river. A 2009 economic report estimated that the Rogue's sport and commercial fishing brought in more than \$17 million annually, with the largest share going to Chinook salmon.<sup>1</sup>

For all they bring to communities, the Rogue's wild, native fish have been hampered by more than a century of commercial and recreational harvest, habitat degradation from agriculture and mining, hatchery programs, and the loss of access to historic habitat because of dam construction. But thanks to a commitment from Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife to protect the unique life history of this iconic species, we are seeing, in real time, how grassroots advocacy and science-based management can bring back a wild salmon population.

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<sup>1</sup>"The Economic Value of Rogue River Salmon." Commissioned by Save the Wild Rogue Campaign with funding support from Giles & Elise Mead Foundation. Prepared by ECONorthwest. 1/30/2009.

# ROGUE WILD SPRING CHINOOK

## Post-Conservation Plan



### A Dam Briefing

Constructed for flood control and fisheries enhancement in 1977, William Jess Dam was built without fish passage and cut off spring Chinook from 20 miles, roughly one-third, of their critical spawning habitat. The 1980s and 1990s marked two decades of decline in wild spring Chinook abundance on the Rogue. In the early 1990s, the wild population plummeted. Where an average of 28,000 wild fish had returned before William Jess, the average run in the 1990s was just 7,600 Chinook.

### Taking Action


Responding to the declining population, in 2004 ODFW convened a public advisory committee to develop a conservation plan to preserve and recover the struggling wild fish. Native Fish Society's Rogue River Steward, Peter Tronquet, served on the committee, alongside representatives from the Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, NOAA Fisheries, and sport-fishing guides. After 25 meetings over two years, the committee had a plan to save the Rogue River spring Chinook.

Oregon's Fish and Wildlife Commission adopted the plan in 2007. Following the advisory committee's recommendations,

the commission modified sport-fishing regulations, giving preferential treatment to early-run Chinook with the hope of achieving a 10-year average return of 15,000 wild adult fish. In spite of drought, El Nino, and three of the hottest years on record, the average return since the adoption of the plan is 8,905 wild fish and climbing. In 2015, an estimated 15,300 adult fish returned, surpassing the target return for the first time.

### Looking Forward

A lot of noise has been made about poor returns of hatchery fish, but the real story on the Rogue is the upward trajectory of our wild spring Chinook population. A wild, native fish population is restoring itself, and Rogue managers, ODFW biologists, members of the advisory committee, and Rogue River Steward Peter Tronquet deserve our gratitude for protecting the diversity of this iconic wild fish.

A 10-year status review of the Rogue Spring Chinook Conservation Plan is coming up in 2017 and Native Fish Society will continue to work with ODFW and our local partners on the Rogue. We can't afford to revert to dead-end strategies like increased hatchery production, hatch boxes, and trap-and-haul programs. Instead, let's stay focused on science-based solutions. 

SALMON  
SPAWNING  
SURVEY

# Vigilance

## Rails, Trails and Zombie Trains On the Salmonberry River

WORDS BY  
Ian Fergusson,  
Salmonberry River  
Steward

(ABOVE)  
Steelhead  
spawning surveys

PHOTO:  
Conrad Gowell

HOW CAN YOU  
HELP?

Every April and  
May you can  
help with the  
annual steelhead  
spawning  
surveys. To learn  
more contact  
Ian at [www.  
nativefishsociety.  
org/watersheds/  
salmonberry-river](http://www.nativefishsociety.org/watersheds/salmonberry-river)


IN 1993 A SMALL GROUP OF VOLUNTEERS UNDER ODFW's direction began a five-year project to collect winter steelhead spawning and summer temperature data. Twenty-three years later, we're still at it; collecting data, and watching. We've documented a cyclical but stable population of winter steelhead, and rising temperatures. We've mapped the extent of steelhead spawning habitat, and we've documented widespread use by coho in a system once dismissed as marginal coho habitat. We saw spawning distribution change after the December 2007 flood, and we've continued to watch as the system begins to recover.

Largely intact habitat and remoteness contribute to the Salmonberry's healthy and diverse fish populations. Both are threatened. Increased logging and road construction on state and private timberland continue to threaten habitat. Unexpectedly, the 2007 flood started a chain of events that may forever change the Salmonberry's character. The flood destroyed the Port of Tillamook Bay railroad that runs beside the river for most of its length.

Rather than repair it, the Port decided to stop rail operations entirely. Although the rail bed continues to erode into the river, the threat of a disastrous diesel spill is gone, and herbicide spraying along the track has ceased. But, as in any good horror movie, the dead monster has come back to life, this time with a sidekick.

The Oregon Coast Scenic Railroad leased the remaining track from POTB and decided to rebuild in the lower five miles of the Salmonberry. Fortunately, one Native Fish Society member's vigilance resulted in a cease and desist order from the Corp of Engineers and a court case that is still unresolved.

As for the monster's sidekick, there is a multi-agency effort to create a "rail with trail" from the Willamette Valley, through the Coast Range, down the Salmonberry, and all the way to Tillamook. The original plan called for a wide, hard-surface trail suitable for road bikes, pedestrians, and equestrians all the way through.

Wild fish advocates succeeded in getting the plan changed so that the Salmonberry portion will be a narrow dirt "adventure trail". But the cat is out of the bag. On any nice weekend, there are hordes of hikers scrambling along a trail that hasn't been built yet. It's hard to predict the full impact of increased use on the Salmonberry's wild fish. Steelhead are easily flushed off their redds; crowds of hikers in April and May will have an effect similar to crowds of anglers in March. We routinely find people fishing in summer who don't know the river is closed to trout angling year-round and it's safe to assume that poaching will increase as more people wander into the area. The need for a long-term stewardship presence will not end. There are too many threats to this unique resource. 



# Wild Yet?

## Legit Wild Steelhead Gene Banks Long Overdue for Puget Sound

WORDS BY  
Jason Small,  
South Puget  
Sound District  
Coordinator &  
Mark Sherwood,  
Executive Director

NATIVE FISH ADVOCATES AROUND PUGET SOUND celebrated last August, when the Nisqually and Elwha rivers were set aside exclusively for wild steelhead. Part of Washington's Statewide Steelhead Management Plan, they were the 6th and 7th wild steelhead gene banks, and the first two designated in Puget Sound by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW).

But WDFW's decision to delay the Skagit's designation "pending further review" hints at what wild fish are up against. Unlike the Nisqually, the Marblemount Hatchery steelhead program has anglers divided over the Skagit. The bulk of opposition comes from anglers and local communities, like the Concrete City Council, which passed a resolution opposing the Skagit's designation.


(ABOVE)  
The free flowing  
Elwha – wild  
steelhead gene  
bank in name  
only?

As WDFW prepares to name a third, we shouldn't get too comfortable. There was little opposition to the designation of the Nisqually, which has not received hatchery steelhead plants since 1982. After years of low returns, more than 2,000 wild winter steelhead spawned last spring, indicating the health of wild steelhead in this watershed is beginning to show signs of recovery.

Generally, these communities want two things: fishing and fishery dollars. We believe they can have both, while still giving wild steelhead a legitimate shot at recovery in the Skagit. British Columbia's catch-and-release wild steelhead fishery on the Bulkley River provides the local economy with millions of dollars annually and local First Nations with a subsistence fishery. A huge demand exists for catch and release wild steelhead fisheries -- all you have to do is spend a few days in Smithers, B.C. during September to see how many people are willing to travel and spend money to catch and release a wild fish. The same can be true for the Skagit.

PHOTO:  
Conrad Gowell

In the free-flowing Elwha, the significance of the designation is complicated by the ongoing operation of the Lower Elwha-Kallam's hatchery steelhead program. While the program isn't intended to operate indefinitely, an end date has yet to be established. As it stands, the Elwha's designation appears purely aspirational -- an aspiration we support, but we're still waiting on true protections for the Elwha's wild steelhead.

Now is the time for a decisive move toward the recovery of self-sustaining populations in Puget Sound. The success of the Skagit as a wild steelhead gene bank hinges on coalition building within the very communities that oppose it. This may sound like an impossible task, but it's the very the reason our River Steward Program exists: to empower and inspire local grassroots advocates to champion science-based solutions, like wild steelhead gene banks, for their Northwest homewaters and wild, native fish. 

HOW CAN YOU  
HELP?

To learn more,  
volunteer, and/  
or donate to  
this campaign  
check out  
nativefishsociety.  
org/get-involved

The best candidate for a gene bank in north Puget Sound is the Skagit River. The Skagit sustains what is both the largest and the healthiest run of wild steelhead in Puget Sound. Its designation may be the best opportunity to recover wild steelhead in western Washington.

# THE SANDY CASE AND ITS RIPPLE EFFECT

WORDS BY Doug DeRoy North Coast Coordinator & Mark Sherwood, Executive Director

In 2010, Native Fish Society began a grassroots campaign, Save Sandy Salmon, spearheaded by River Steward Spencer Miles. This led to a lawsuit two years later, Native Fish Society v. National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), challenging hatchery practices that threatened the recovery of the Sandy River's wild salmon.

In 2014, the U.S. District Court in Oregon concluded that the Sandy River Hatchery programs violated both the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). This precedent-setting decision has already had a significant positive ripple effect for wild fish throughout the Pacific Northwest. The Sandy case has been cited in four other U.S. District Court rulings, 23 trial or appellate court documents, and 20 law review articles.

The U.S. District Court in Washington cited the Sandy case in its opinion in the Wild Fish Conservancy's (WFC's) Elwha Hatchery case, to support its conclusion that NMFS violated NEPA when it approved a steelhead hatchery program that would have resulted in a returning steelhead population that was 90% hatchery fish.

Second, the Sandy case was cited in WFC's successful motion to determine scope of review in its case against NMFS for failing to prepare and implement a recovery plan for threatened Puget Sound steelhead.

Third, Mackenzie Flyfishers cited the Sandy case in its summary judgment brief in its Mackenzie River Hatchery case, including Judge Haggerty's finding in the Sandy case that "it is undisputed that hatchery fish can pose a host of risks to wild fish."

Finally, Judge Haggerty's decision in the Sandy case likely spurred settlement in WFC's case challenging WDFW's planting of "Chambers Creek" hatchery steelhead in the Puget Sound, in which WDFW agreed to cease planting Chambers Creek hatchery steelhead in all Puget Sound rivers but one pending NMFS approval for each hatchery program. The settlement also established a 12-year moratorium of such hatchery plants in the Skagit River system, the Puget Sound's largest tributary and most important wild steelhead river.



## DIRECT EFFECTS

### SANDY RIVER

**8 RIVERS**  
POSITIVELY AFFECTED  
(HATCHERY RELEASES ELIMINATED OR REDUCED)

## RIPPLE EFFECTS

### CHAMBERS CREEK HATCHERY

**45%** REDUCTION IN HATCHERY RELEASES  
(468,000 LESS HATCHERY FISH/YR)

REDUCED COHO HATCHERY RELEASES  
BY  
**300,000 FISH/YR**

REDUCED SPRING CHINOOK HATCHERY RELEASES  
BY  
**168,000 FISH/YR**

STATE COMMITTED TO  
**LESS THAN 10% STRAY RATE**  
FOR HATCHERY STOCKS

**46%**

REDUCTION IN CHAMBERS CREEK HATCHERY WINTER STEELHEAD RELEASES IN PUGET SOUND (500,000 LESS HATCHERY FISH/YR)

**ENDED**

CHAMBERS CREEK HATCHERY WINTER STEELHEAD RELEASES IN:

ELWHA RIVER (150,000 FISH/YR)  
SKAGIT RIVER (230,000 FISH/YR)

**REDUCED**

CHAMBERS CREEK HATCHERY WINTER STEELHEAD RELEASES IN

**5 RIVERS:**

GREEN/DUWAMISH, SNOHOMISH STILLAGUAMISH, SKYKOMISH, SNOQUALMIE

**12 YEAR**

MORATORIUM ON CHAMBERS CREEK WINTER STEELHEAD RELEASES IN THE SKAGIT RIVER

**968,000**


**FEWER HATCHERY FISH**  
RELEASED PER YEAR IN OREGON AND WASHINGTON

# NEW SOUTH FORK SMITH RIVER HERITAGE TROUT WATERS

WORDS BY Jake Crawford, Southern  
Regional Manager + Sunny Bourdon,  
Smith & Chetco River Steward

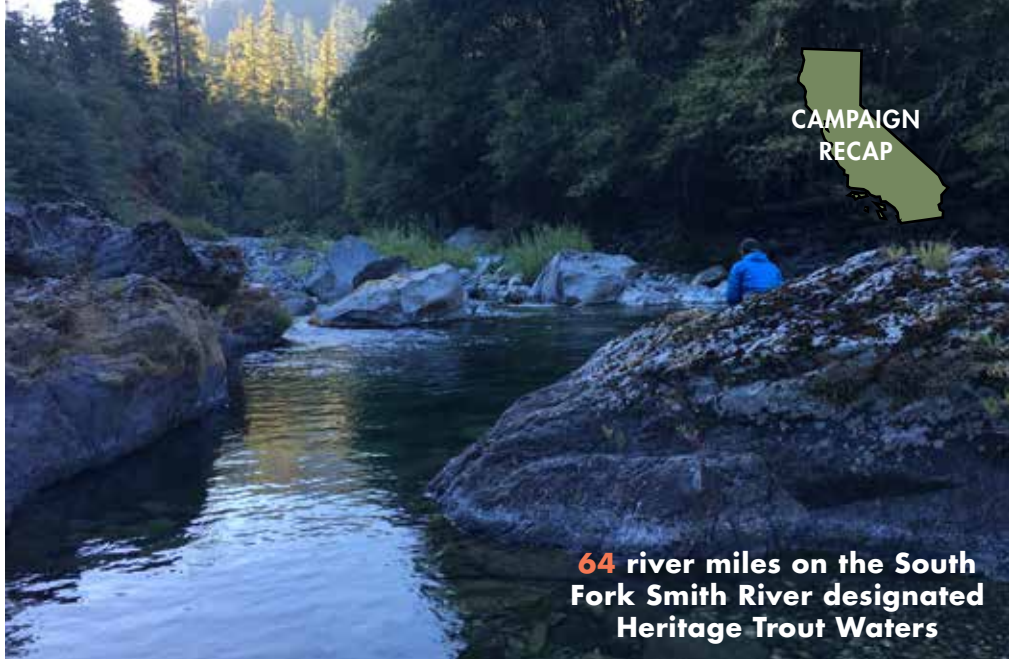
THANK YOU TO ALL OUR MEMBERS AND supporters who sent comments to the California Fish and Wildlife Commission in October. With your encouragement, and help from our local River Steward and partners at the Smith River Alliance, CDFW designated 64 miles of the upper South Fork Smith River and its tributaries as Heritage Trout Waters! Your comments convinced the commission to recognize the importance of the South Fork Smith's native rainbow and coastal cutthroat trout populations and covered that stretch of river with better protection from future development.

The Heritage Trout Waters Program was started in the 1970s to increase the public's understanding of and appreciation for the state's unique fish populations. For more than 40 years, the program has rallied support for the collaborative efforts necessary to maintain a river's beauty and protect its trout for future generations. A Heritage Trout Waters designation is reserved for the state's most prized, self-sustaining fisheries. With the addition of the South Fork Smith, the first on California's North Coast, there are now 12 across the state, each of them testaments to remarkable wild populations.

The Smith River is already a prized watershed. Multiple reaches have been protected under the National Wild & Scenic Rivers system since 1981 and 1990, but the Heritage Trout Waters designation is a special distinction for its magnificent native coastal cutthroat and rainbow trout. 

(RIGHT)  
New Heritage Trout Waters on the South  
Fork Smith River!

(PHOTOS)  
Mark Sherwood



**64** river miles on the South  
Fork Smith River designated  
Heritage Trout Waters



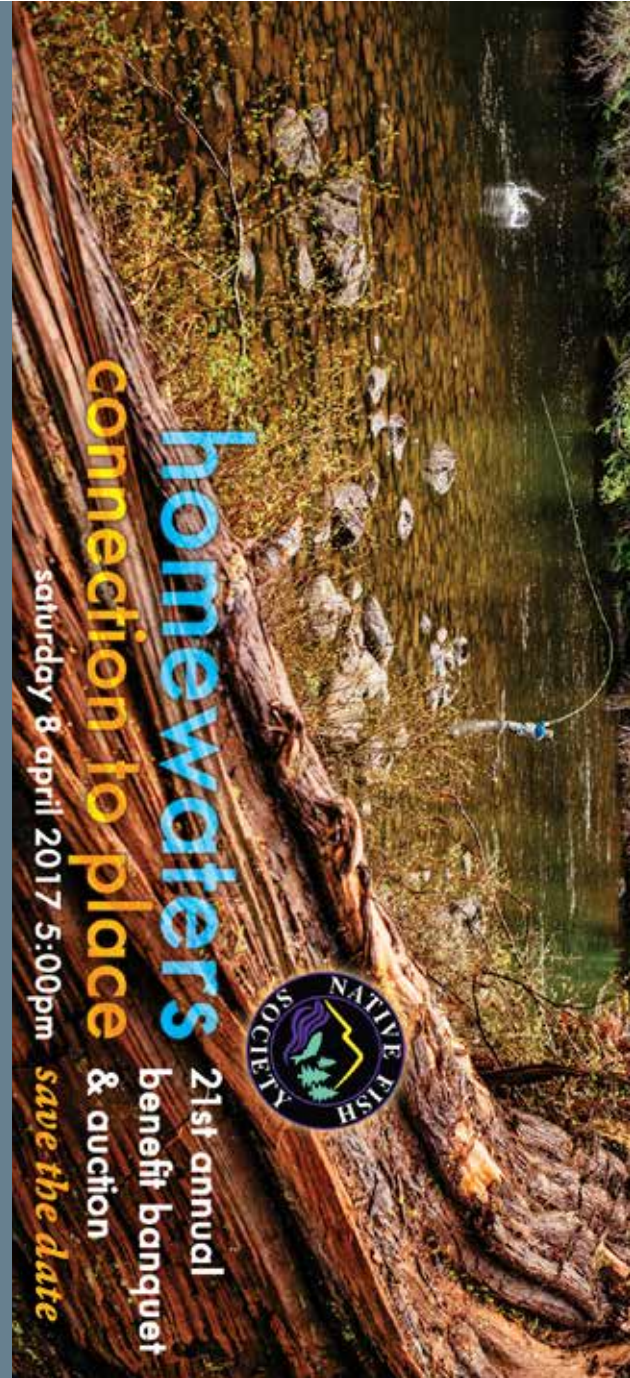


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& auction  
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**DISTRICT**

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**Chris Johnson**, North Puget Sound

**Jason Small**, South Puget Sound

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**Rachel Andras**, Bear Creek Tributaries

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**Scott Baumer**, 15 Mile

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**Pat Dunham**, John Day

**Scotty Evans**, Salmon

**Ian Ferguson**, Salmonberry

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**Michael Mathis**, Snake River & Lower Hell's Canyon

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**Crystal McMahon**, Sycan

**Matt McQueen**, Klickitat

**Ed McGill**, Skagit

**Chris Menaui**, Green/Duwamish

**Spencer Miles**, Nestucca, Tillamook Bay Rivers

**Bart Mills**, Johnson Creek

**Ed Miranda**, Wood, Williamson, 7 Mile

**Marshal Moser**, Williamson

**Daniel Peirce**, Hood

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**Dustin Revel**, Lower Eel

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**Mark Schmidt**, Molalla

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