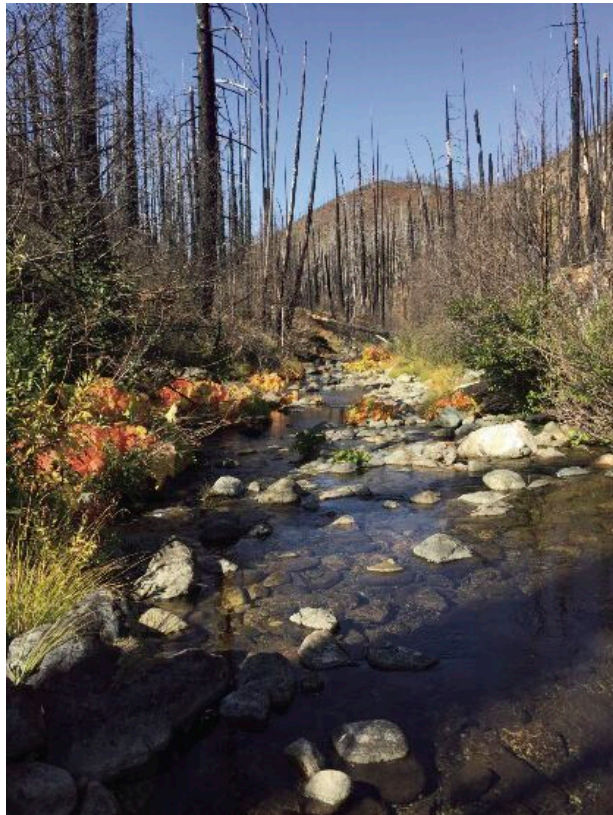

Column: Keeping the promise of wilderness

June 24, 2023



Almost 60 years ago The Wilderness Act set forward the strongest set of protections for our public lands with a vision of maintaining our wildest places for future generations. But today, across the West, there are still more than 180,000 acres of privately owned property within federally designated wilderness areas known as inholdings, ranging from a few acres to thousands of acres.

Each one represents a hole in the fabric of wilderness protection — a threat to the wild character and ecological integrity of the lands surrounding them. Each one carries the possibility of development and resource extraction in the heart of some of the grandest landscapes in the American West.

The Wilderness Land Trust has transferred a 60-acre property in the heart of southwest Oregon's Kalmiopsis Wilderness to public ownership, adding it to the designated wilderness areas.

In 2018 the Trust purchased the last remaining private inholding in the Kalmiopsis Wilderness. The property sits on the Little Chetco River, and up until the Trust's purchase of it, was an active dredge mining operation. Most recently it was run as a destination for recreational gold mining trips, complete with cabins and

dredging equipment, flown in by helicopter, to house a steady stream of visitors as they tried their hand at gold mining.

The impact of this kind of development reaches beyond property lines though, with sediment washing downstream in Coho Salmon spawning grounds, and wildlife pushed out of historic migration routes, according to a release from the Trust, which said acquiring the property was only the first step in protecting it.

The Trust then undertook restoring the property to its wilderness character, no small feat in this remote and rugged location. With the property successfully restored, we recently transferred it to public ownership, completing the wilderness area 54 years after it was first established.

In the organization's 31-year history, The Wilderness Land Trust has worked to keep the promise of wilderness by acquiring these private in holdings from willing landowners and transferring them to federal ownership to become designated wilderness. In this time we have purchased and transferred 540 properties totaling over 55,500 acres from Arizona to Alaska.

Along the way, we've completed 17 wilderness areas by removing their last remaining private in holdings. With each transfer, we come one step closer to completing the vision of the Wilderness Act. Each project we work on carries the story of a place that has inspired countless people and communities, a family that has chosen to give up what is theirs to protect its future, and a vibrant, and often breathtaking, landscape supporting rich biodiversity.

Background

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