Celebrating 50 Years of Wild & Scenic Rivers

Filter Your Water Like a Forest:
Travis Merrigan, Co-Founder of GRAYL

From Forest to Faucet:
Learn how protecting northwest forests leads to clean water

Washingtonians Raise Their Voices for Roadless Forests

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Director's Message

This spring, we’re proud to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. These designations ensure that the wild and free-flowing character of our rivers are preserved for clean water, fish passage, and recreational opportunities.

Our spring newsletter highlights the importance of our wild and scenic rivers; areas that are essential to maintaining the quality of life we are lucky to have here in Washington. Over 16 million Washingtonians source drinking water from watersheds. Learn about how our rivers and forests work together in watersheds to bring us clean water, protect wildlife, and prevent environmental threats such as erosion.

Washington Wild has been working on projects to protect the Roadless Rule and designate more low elevation Wilderness on the Olympic Peninsula (Wild Olympics). Both projects aim to federally protect more of these low elevation riparian areas that are so important to healthy watersheds. We have mobilized our communities to speak up for wild and scenic rivers and have had many successes. However, there is still work to be done.

Our rivers and watersheds are currently threatened by federal and local laws to increase logging and mining. It is critical that we speak out during this time to protect these areas of our state.

Thank you for standing with Washington Wild. For a wild and green Washington.

Tom Uniack, Executive Director
In 1968, Washington Wild’s former board member and long-time river advocate Doug North was a 16-year-old student at Ingraham High School in Seattle. He had grown up through the ranks of his boy scout troop where he took backpacking trips up the Big Quilcene and Dosewallips Rivers on the Olympic Peninsula. Little did he know that a historic law would greatly affect how he spent his passion and energy through much of his adult life.

By the 1960s, decades of dam construction had blocked thousands of miles of fish habitat, degraded water quality, flooded riverside forests and farmland, and changed the ecology of hundreds of rivers. Despite their promise of power and energy, over time the negative impacts of the more than 70,000 large dams blocking 600,000 river miles became clear. These revelations changed minds, including Senator Frank Church of Idaho who moved from a pro dam position to a champion of new legislation in 1966.

Three years later, on October 2, 1968 the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act became law seeking to balance the federal government’s role in damming and channelizing certain segments of rivers with protecting the free-flowing character and associated river values for present and future generations. Today, the act protects more than 200 rivers totaling 12,734 miles as part of a national wild and scenic rivers system.

“The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act was a big boost for wild steelhead populations and those that love and depend upon them,” said Rich Simms, Founder of the Wild Steelhead Coalition. “Over the last 50 years it has been an important tool to stop new dams on wild rivers across the country and retain quality fish habitat.”

WASHINGTON’S FIRST WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS

Ten years later, Doug worked as a law clerk before starting his own legal practice. He spent his free time climbing many of Washington’s renowned peaks with his brother including The Brothers, Mt. Stuart, and Mt. Adams.

In 1978, Washington State celebrated its first Wild and Scenic River designation. Congress designated 158 miles of the...
Skagit River and its tributaries, including the Sauk, Suiattle, and Cascade rivers. The Skagit River and its tributaries provide spawning ground for as much as half of the Chinook salmon of Puget Sound, and it is the only river system in the state that has healthy breeding populations of all five of the native salmon species. Because of its salmon abundance, the region is also home to one of the largest overwintering populations of bald eagles in the U.S.

"The Skagit River is the one of the largest and most biologically important river systems in the continental United States. As the third largest drainage within the lower 48, it represents over one third of all freshwater contribution to the Puget Sound," says Steve Hinton, Restoration Director for the Skagit River System Cooperative, a natural resource agency working to recover salmon populations on behalf of the Sauk-Suiattle and Swinomish Tribes. “This river system and the ecological treasure of native fish and wildlife it sustains is the foundation of the cultural integrity and spirituality of local tribes that have called it home since time immemorial. Salmon are the very cornerstone of the food system that has sustained these communities for hundreds of generations.”

In many ways rivers connect us. They strengthen connections to nature, to each other through recreation, and to the source of the clean water we rely on for wildlife, fish, farms, businesses, and safe drinking water. Wild and scenic rivers provide an opportunity to protect our water from the snowcaps of the Cascade Mountains to the whitecaps of Puget Sound.

Over the next three decades, three additional wild and scenic rivers were designated in Washington State, including the Upper White Salmon, Lower White Salmon and Klickitat Rivers. As of 2005, Washington has nearly 200 miles of designated Wild and Scenic Rivers.

RIVER RECREATION
In the 1980’s, now in his thirties, Doug found his life-long passion for canoeing and whitewater rafting. In an effort to share his love for paddling, he wrote one of the classic guide books entitled, “Washington Whitewater.”

Wild and scenic rivers also provide world class recreational opportunities like whitewater rafting, kayaking, fishing, riverside camping, wildlife viewing, and scenic hiking. Outdoor recreation is a massive and growing industry generating $887 billion in annual consumer spending. River recreation accounts for up to one-third of this spending, including activities both on and around waterways.

"Wild rivers like the Skykomish and the Skagit have always been a big part of my life, and an important venue for our business,” said Blair Corson, owner of Outdoor Adventure Center in Index, WA. "We exist to provide trainings, environments, experiences, and resources that lead people especially youth in exploring the outdoors. Wild and scenic adventures can change the way we see the world.”

In 1984, Doug served on the Washington Wild Board of Directors and founded the Friends of Whitewater with the focus of leading a legislative campaign to designate more than 2,000 miles of new rivers as Wild and Scenic. However, as local politics and battles over the fate of the remaining old growth forest enveloped the Pacific Northwest in the late 1980’s and early 90’s, the vision of a statewide Wild and Scenic Rivers bill faded.

WASHINGTON’S RIVER RENAISSANCE

In 2008, Doug rejoined the Washington Wild Board just as the flagship Wild Sky Wilderness was signed into law. Despite the 106,000 acres of low elevation forests and salmon spawning streams that were designated, Doug noticed the absence of any Wild and Scenic River designations for the Skykomish and other rivers on the landscape.

Washington Wild mobilized local wilderness advocates and the local conservation community to insist on including Wild and Scenic River protections in future Wilderness
designation campaigns. As the next bill was introduced into Congress to add 22,000 acres to the Alpine Lakes Wilderness in 2008, it also included nearly 40 miles of Wild and Scenic River designations for the Pratt and Middle Fork Snoqualmie Rivers. In 2014, both rivers as well as a separate proposal to protect Illabot Creek (a Skagit tributary) were formally designated. With these new designations, the length of statewide Wild and Scenic Rivers increased to more than 250 miles.

In 2012, Washington Wild helped lead efforts to include 460 more miles of Wild and Scenic River designations as a part of the Wild Olympics legislation which is currently pending in Congress.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS - DEFENDING A LASTING LEGACY

While Washington is blessed with an abundance of public lands, there is more work to be done to ensure that these wild places are protected for future generations. Washington’s federal lands are under attack from leadership in Congress and the Trump Administration. In 2017, Congress introduced several bills aimed at weakening protections for (or even selling off) federal land, and the Trump Administration is activating its power to negatively impact environmental protections across the board. Our public lands are a legacy worth protecting for future generations to enjoy. North Cascades National Park, Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument, and the countless other iconic landscapes will outlive all of us, but only if we remain vigilant and continue to defend these special places. Washington Wild has defended our public lands from challenging Administrations in the past, and we are prepared to do it again.

FUTURE STEWARDS OF OUR RIVERS

As Doug looks back on a life of advocacy for the rivers he loves, he is inspired by the next generation of river advocates who are coming of age. These are young conservationists like Anne Lee, a senior at Tesla STEM High School from Sammamish, WA.

Over the past year Anne has participated in several STEM exchanges with the rural Darrington Middle School supported by Washington Wild, the Darrington Collaborative, and the Glacier Peak Institute. Students spend a day sampling water from streams near Darrington, including the Sauk Wild and Scenic River, comparing the water quality and other factors.

“Whether it’s climate change, protecting our wild rivers, or living more sustainably, my generation understands that the time for action is now,” said Anne Lee, 2017 winner of the Brower Youth Award recognizing emerging environmental youth leaders nationally. “We need to use tools like the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act to ensure that we protect our clean water and wild rivers for the generations that will follow us.”

“Whether it’s climate change, protecting our wild rivers, or living more sustainably, my generation understands that the time for action is now...”

Anne Lee, a senior at Tesla STEM High School from Sammamish, WA.
FROM FOREST TO FAUCET: How protecting our northwest forests leads to clean water

HEALTHY

EVAPORATION
Rainfall is regulated when water collects on leaves or foliage and then evaporates. This redirects moisture back into the air instead of flooding the forest floor.

INTERCEPTION
Forest leaves and treetops gently slow and guide water to the ground, preventing erosion which may be caused by direct rainfall on exposed slopes.

FILTRATION
Roots, fallen leaves, and other organic material on the forest floor slow water and help it soak into the soil which reduces run-off and filters pollution.

STABILIZATION
Understory plants, like ferns and huckleberries, and tree roots strengthen the forest floor which hold and stabilize soils against erosion and mudslides.
WHAT IS A WATERSHED?
A Watershed is an area of land in which precipitation collects and then drains into a defined area. Here in Washington, watersheds start at the snowcapped peaks of our mountain ranges, include headwater streams that flow into lakes and rivers, and ultimately drain into the Puget Sound.

WHY ARE WATERSHEDS IMPORTANT?
- Provides us with clean drinking water
- Reduces the risk of flooding
- Sustains a healthy salmon population
- Supports jobs in fishing or outdoor recreation
- Provides opportunities for activities that contribute to the quality of life we enjoy in Washington

UNHEALTHY

Waters that are clouded by soil and sediments have negative health impacts on the plants and animals, specifically salmon, that rely on clean, cold water to survive.

When water evaporation, interception and filtration are reduced, heavy or sustained rainfalls can lead to dangerous flooding and mudslides.

Human interferences like mining, logging, and other types of developments lead to polluted water, intense fires, higher risk of drought, erosion, and mudslides.
Conservation Voices

FILTER YOUR WATER LIKE A FOREST

By Travis Merrigan, Co-Founder of GRAYL

Water has always been an inspiration to me. Water has shaped our landscapes and civilizations. Rivers carve our mountains and feed our agriculture. Consider this: there’s never been lasting human settlement in all of human history that wasn’t located beside a river.

Clean water is a basic human need and should never be taken for granted. I’ve been to many places where improper sanitation and water treatment means people and communities have no access to safe, clean drinking water. Waterborne diseases cause children all over the world to face stunted growth, or endure other lifelong maladies. Furthermore, global travelers are sickened in droves due to unsafe water.

In 2012, Nancie Weston and I started Grayl to enable adventurous, self-reliant people to make their own clean water - whether on a backcountry stream or a hotel tap in Bali. Grayl makes easy-to-use, portable water purifiers that make clean, safe water in just 15 seconds with One Press.

When GRAYL began partnering with Washington Wild, it occurred to me how similar GRAYL’s purifiers are to riversheds. Grayl treats water for the human gut like riversheds treat water for entire ecosystems - including downstream cities. GRAYL guides water through a special media, removing pathogens and chemicals from water.

Riversheds provide a similar filtration service for us all on a much grander scale. An intact rivershed (one that has escaped the impacts of logging, mining and other development) is literally a natural filter. Snow or rain falls on mountain peaks or tree canopies before slowly melting. This provides a manageable flow of water which is pulled down slope by gravity through a path of soil, rocks held together by tree roots, and vegetation which removes impurities and contaminants and ensures steady water flow, even in dry months. Eventually, clean, cold water is deposited into rushing mountain streams on its way to the Pacific Ocean - supporting every living creature, from the humble mountain fern to the mighty king salmon.

The benefits of these intact forests go beyond just producing clean water. Forested slopes also reduce flooding by regulating the amount of water that accumulates by increasing evaporation of moisture from leaves and absorbing water into the ground. For salmon and other fish, native vegetation and roots literally hold the soil together when it rains, avoiding excessive sediment and higher stream temperatures that can negatively impact salmon spawning.

Washington Wild works every day to protect wild functioning forests and rivers that provide clean water to fish, wildlife, and residents downstream. Protecting the forested upper watersheds of the now federally-designated Wild Sky Wilderness from the impacts of sediment from logging on steep slopes and pollution from mining has directly benefited the drinking water supply for the city of Everett and much of south Snohomish County.

GRAYL is a member of 1% for the Planet - we donate over 1% of all revenue to environmental causes, including Washington Wild. We work with Washington Wild because our business depends upon our customers’ ability to access and recreate on public lands and their willingness to drink from our rivers. Washington Wild is a vital advocate for our public lands and our rivers. 

Travis Merrigan is the Co-Founder and Chief Operating Officer (COO) for Grayl, based in Seattle, WA.
Calling upon our coalition partners and organizational allies, Washington Wild lead the effort to create a joint comment letter signed by an impressive group of 152 partners in response to threats against the Roadless Rule (National Forest Roadless Area Conservation Rule). These partners represent diverse interests including conservation, recreation, wildlife, hunting, and fishing and include faith leaders, local businesses and elected officials from Washington State. Together we raised concerns about congressional and administrative attacks on national forest roadless areas and will continue to defend the Roadless Rule.

In 2001, Washington Wild led statewide efforts to establish the Roadless Rule, garnering support from nearly 350 of our coalition partners to secure formal protection for nearly two million acres of roadless forests in Washington State. During the draft rule comment period, over 1.6 million Americans submitted comments, including more than 80,000 comments from Washington State. Furthermore, over 95% of comments submitted were in support of protecting roadless areas.

“Roadless areas protect the headwaters and the source of clean quality water… Without clean water, my business would not be able to exist.” said Jack Lamb, CEO of Aslan Brewing (Bellingham) and member of Washington Wild’s Brewshed’ Alliance.

Washington’s nearly 2 million acres of roadless areas are a critical part of the quality of life we enjoy as residents. Roadless forests are essential to maintaining clean and safe drinking water, protecting fish and wildlife, and provide us with amazing recreation experiences.

“The areas of our national forests without roads are often some of the best habitat for fish and wildlife,” said John McGlenn, President of Washington Wildlife Federation, which represents hunters and anglers. “These refuges are critical to ensuring that we are able to pass on this legacy to future generations.”

The current Congress has already taken the first steps to dismantle this key rule. Senator Murkowski (R-AK) introduced a legislative rider as part of the 2018 Budget that would have eliminated protections for roadless areas in Alaska. However, in response to overwhelming public opposition, this harmful legislative rider was completely stripped from the funding package in March.

However, while we applaud the removal of the rider, there is still work to be done. Senator Murkowski has asked the Department of Agriculture that the state of Alaska be exempted from the Roadless Rule. We are concerned that a next step will be a nationwide repeal of roadless protections as was attempted a decade ago. In addition, there are two local mine expansion projects proposed that threaten to break this rule.

Washington Wild will continue to defend roadless areas and mobilize our communities to protect these special places. Together, we can make a difference. ▲
Wild Profiles

TERI HOWE
Washington Wild Member

Teri has been an all-star Washington Wild member since 2008. Over the past ten years she has been a regular participant at our Wild Night Out annual dinner and auction. She spent her childhood growing up between both the Los Angeles and Houston metropolitan areas until she moved to the Skagit Valley at age 10. Between tulips, wild and scenic rivers, and views of Mt. Baker, the Pacific Northwest took hold of her. When applying to colleges, she had her choice of schools around the country but ultimately chose the University of Washington, in part, because of the quality of life and natural beauty of the Evergreen State. She currently resides in Snohomish County and works as a principal project manager for a software firm located in Bellevue.

Washington Wild’s leadership role in the designation of the Wild Sky Wilderness near Stevens Pass first connected Teri with the organization. “What makes Washington Wild’s work so compelling for me is the sense of legacy that comes from permanently protecting forest, rivers, trails, and mountain peaks,” said Teri. “These hard-fought protections are not only for us, but an investment that we can pass on to our grandkids’ grandkids.”

A traveler at heart, Teri enjoys exploring new landscapes and cultures, including recent trips to Africa and Europe. “I have been blessed to have incredible opportunities like being on safari in South Africa, snorkeling the Great Barrier Reef, visiting the Seychelles, and staying overnight in a medieval castle,” she says, “but at the end of each trip, I get off the plane, take a deep breath, and immediately feel I’m home. The Pacific Northwest is a special place. As a travel, I meet many people who have Pacific Northwest on their bucket lists, wanting to experience our forests, rivers, and coasts. Supporting Washington Wild is an investment in the place I call home.”

KRISTEN PROCTOR
Washington Wild Volunteer

Growing up in the Mill Creek Area, hiking and camping in Washington has always been a part of Kristen’s life. These experiences led her to continue to be an advocate for nature and public lands as she grew up. This is one of the reasons why Kristen chose to work closely with Washington Wild as a volunteer graphic designer.

Kristen graduated from Western Washington University with a degree in art. From there she built her well-rounded design portfolio in graphic design, fashion, communications, and photo editing. She now lives in Seattle with her husband and two young children, doing graphic design work with various community businesses including the Woodland Park Zoo.

When a former Washington Wild board member put out a call for a graphic designer, Kristen jumped at the opportunity to get involved with the community. She likes that working with Washington Wild offers a meaningful way to utilize her skill set. Kristen also noted that as someone who is not necessarily outgoing, volunteering her professional skills was a great way to give back that matched her interests.

When asked about her favorite hike in Washington, Kristen didn't hesitate to say Heliotrope Ridge near Coleman Glacier on Mt. Baker. “I first hiked this spot on a class trip in 8th grade and I keep coming back,” she says, “It’s so amazing! I’d be to able to look down over a glacier.”

Kristen has been volunteering with Washington Wild for 3 years now. She started with general design work for events like Wild Night Out and one-pagers for various advocacy programs. Now, she is Washington Wild’s go-to person for bigger projects, including working with us to design our print newsletters. We are so grateful to have Kristen on our team!

Interested in volunteering?
Get in touch with us by emailing info@wawild.org and we will work together to find a project that matches your interest!
FOREST SERVICE GREENLIGHTS MINING NEAR MOUNT ST. HELENS

The Forest Service issued a final decision consenting to exploratory drilling in the Green River valley, just outside the Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument. The Green River flows through old growth forests, roadless areas, the volcanic blast zone, and the Mount St. Helens National Monument. This unique paradise provides critical habitat for salmon, drinking water to downstream communities, and a place where our families can hike and explore.

In response to this decision, Washington Wild joined a coalition of over 15 conservation and recreation groups opposing the project on a letter to Governor Jay Inslee.

TRUMP ADMINISTRATION BACKS AWAY FROM OFFSHORE OIL DRILLING PROPOSAL FOR WASHINGTON STATE

In response to an outpouring of public opposition and objection from Washington’s Congressional delegation, Secretary of Interior Ryan Zinke acknowledged the overwhelming opposition from Washington State leaders and residents to his proposal to allow offshore oil drilling!

After Senator Maria Cantwell (D-WA) raised concerns about the proposal in March, Secretary Zinke stated, “The state of Washington is deeply, passionately opposed to oil and gas drilling off their coast…Our proposal will have the interests of Washington reflected in that plan.”

Thank you to all who voiced your concern! Washington Wild supporters sent over 1,200 letters to elected officials opposing this proposal. Together, we can make a difference.

Brewshed Beer Fest

A CRAFT BEER FESTIVAL

JUNE 9TH
HALE’S ALES PALLADIUM

TICKETS: wawild.org/beerfest
MONTHLY DONOR!

Monthly donations are the best way to support Washington Wild as we move forward in our efforts to protect clean water in Washington for generations to come.

New for Spring 2018!

When you become a monthly donor, choose a Washington Wild branded item as a token of our appreciation! We have cozy beanies, Kleen Kanteen steel water bottles, and our iconic t-shirt.

Join the community at wawild.org/donate

Member benefits underwritten by Lush Cosmetics