



Critical fish and wildlife habitat protected in Oregon's Middle Fork John Day River

The Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon are now the custodians of 1,200 additional acres of critical habitat along the Middle Fork John Day River, thanks to a recent land transaction with The Nature Conservancy.

Ownership of the property, called the Dunstan Homestead Preserve, transferred to the Tribes in April. The land's critical fish and wildlife habitat will remain under perpetual protection and stewardship as a result of important partnerships between The Nature Conservancy, the Tribes and the Bonneville Power Administration.

The Dunstan Homestead Preserve is in the upper reaches of the Middle Fork John Day River at the heart of Chinook salmon spawning and rearing territory. The river's wide valley bottoms, gentle gradient and multiple side channels support one of the state's healthiest populations of wild spring Chinook salmon.

The property, consisting of nearly 3.5 miles of river frontage, contains riparian and upland habitats of ponderosa pine, mixed conifer forests, savannah and open meadows. This diverse property provides important habitat for many of the area's native aquatic and forest species.

The Nature Conservancy purchased the Dunstan Preserve in 1990 from the Dunstan family, who had owned the land since 1899. For years, The Nature Conservancy has worked collaboratively with neighbors, local partners and the Tribes to restore habitat and advance research, monitoring and land management on the property and surrounding lands.

"The Nature Conservancy is grateful and honored to have collaborated with the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs and BPA for over 20 years for river conservation along the Middle Fork John Day," says Jim Desmond, Oregon Director for The Nature Conservancy. "This collaborative partnership is a great example of how working together can accomplish great things and is a success for the fish, wildlife and people that call this area home."

With the addition of the Dunstan Preserve to the Tribes' existing properties, also purchased in partnership with BPA, nearly 3,000 acres of important fish and wildlife habitat are now permanently protected along the Middle Fork John Day. Lands that were once ceded to the federal government are now once again under Tribal ownership and management.



“We are excited about what has been accomplished with the Tribes, The Nature Conservancy and other partners to further protect and restore important habitat in this ecologically diverse region,” said Scott Armentrout, BPA executive vice president for Environment, Fish and Wildlife. “This is another example of how strategically invested ratepayer funds can help Bonneville fulfill its mitigation responsibilities and leave a lasting impact on the region.”

The Tribes’ commitment to ecological land management and restoration continues in the basin. Protecting and restoring habitat for spring Chinook salmon and other native fish and wildlife that rely on clean, cool water is an integral part of the Tribes’ mission. The Tribes have spent nearly a decade restoring a dredge-mined section of the river on their Oxbow Conservation Area, just upstream of Dunstan. In addition, they are restoring degraded habitat on the Forrest property, also about 10 miles upstream of Dunstan.

Robert “Bobby” Brunoe, general manager of the Tribes’ Branch of Natural Resources, says the Middle Fork John Day River is an important place. “Our Oxbow and Forrest properties already represent half of the river’s Chinook salmon spawning habitat. The Dunstan adds another 10%,” Brunoe says. “The Nature Conservancy and Tribes have been steady partners for years, and their generosity with the Dunstan transaction has been great for the Tribes and salmon.”

As for the Dunstan property itself, visitors will see little change in management as it changes hands from The Nature Conservancy to the Tribes. The focus will remain on preserving the rich habitats while allowing regulated public access, including limited hunting.

“That’s why the transfer was such a natural fit,” said Brunoe.

Representatives of the Tribes, The Nature Conservancy and BPA will celebrate the permanent protection of the Dunstan Homestead Preserve at an on-site event later this spring.

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