

FROM RANCH TO FISH

Two creeks that pass through Goat Falls Ranch once provided critical habitat for fish near the headwaters of the Salmon River in the mountains of Central Idaho. Soon, they will again.

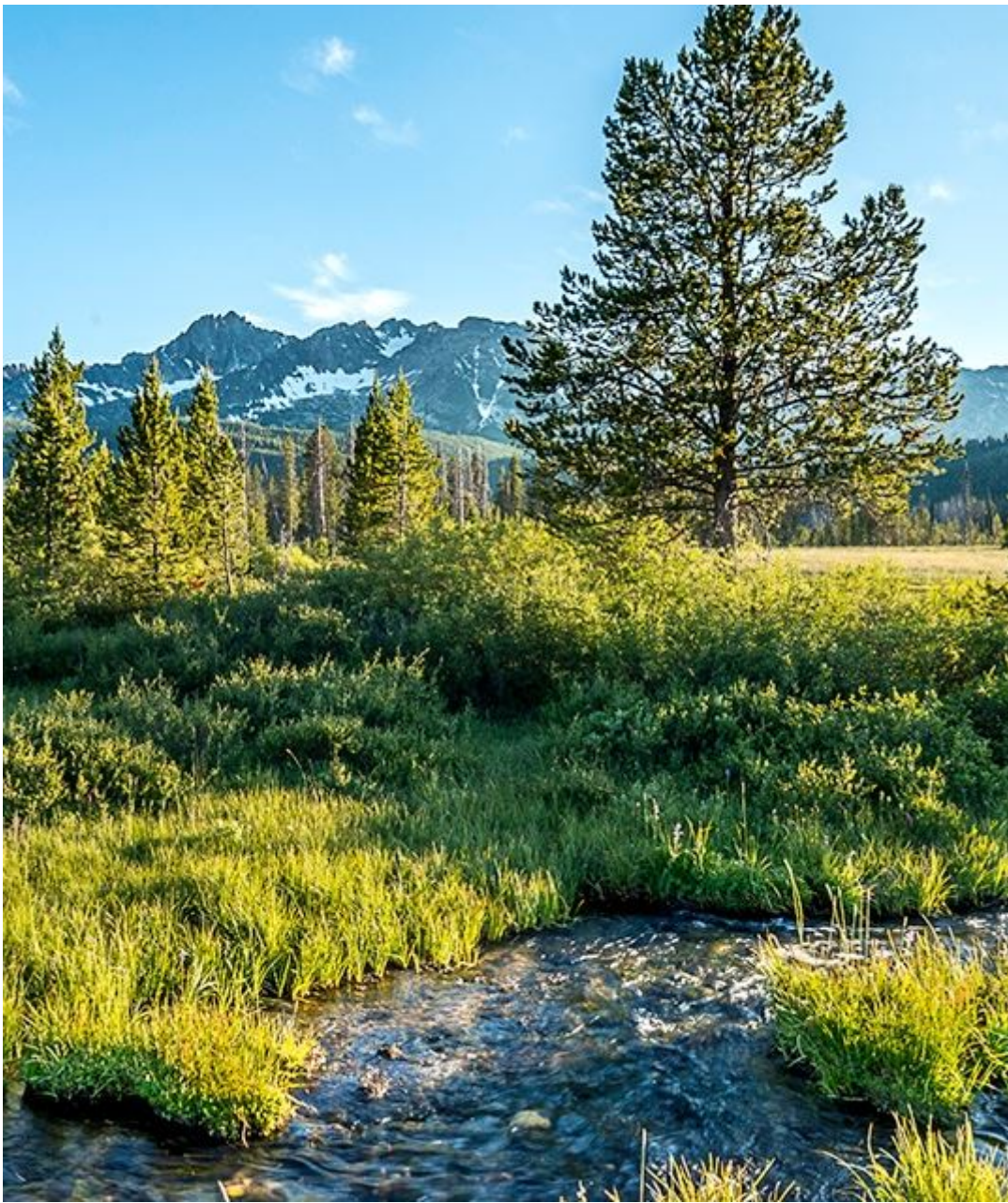
A 369-acre ranch in the mountains of central Idaho that provides prime spawning and rearing habitat for steelhead, Chinook salmon, and bull trout is being purchased using electricity ratepayer money to help mitigate the impacts of hydropower dams downriver in the Snake and Columbia rivers. The [Western Rivers Conservancy \(http://www.westernrivers.org/projectatlas/goat-and-meadow-creeks/\)](http://www.westernrivers.org/projectatlas/goat-and-meadow-creeks/) is buying Goat Falls Ranch and will convey the property to become part of the Sawtooth National Recreation Area. The Bonneville Power Administration is contributing \$983,583 to buy the ranch's water rights through the [Columbia Basin Water Transactions Program \(http://www.cbwtp.org/jsp/cbwtp/index.jsp\)](http://www.cbwtp.org/jsp/cbwtp/index.jsp) of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. The land was purchased in a separate transaction that did not include Bonneville funding.



[\(/media/7491297/goat-falls-ranch-sign.jpg\)](/media/7491297/goat-falls-ranch-sign.jpg)

Photo: Western Rivers Conservancy.

The ranch includes two creeks, Goat and Meadow, that are tributaries of the Salmon River. According to the Conservancy, Goat and Meadow creeks have been designated critical habitat for Steelhead, Chinook Salmon, and Bull Trout.



Goat Falls Ranch. Photo: Western Rivers Conservancy.

The purchase was evaluated against criteria developed through the Water Transactions Program and reviewed by the Council's Independent Scientific Review Panel. The Water Transaction Program's Technical Advisory Committee recommended the purchase.

The purchase is complex: the Conservancy is buying the ranch and water rights and then conveying the land to the National Recreation Area and the water rights to the Idaho Water Resources Board. Currently, water is diverted for irrigation at three points. At least one diversion, currently a barrier to fish passage, will be retired.

According to the Conservancy, Goat and Meadow creeks once contained some of the best Chinook salmon rearing habitat in the Salmon River system. Because of degraded habitat and low flows, the creeks today support only a fraction of the salmon and steelhead they once did. During the late summer and fall, critical times for

spawning, portions of both creeks are reduced to a trickle or run dry altogether. The Conservancy's goal is to dedicate water during summer months to support fish and wildlife and, as a result, help improve streamflows year-round.

The Goat Falls Ranch project will be the first permanent, in-stream water dedication project in Idaho and will prove essential to satisfying goals in the Snake River Water Rights Act of 2004, according to the Conservancy. The acquisition also will allow for restoration of key reaches of both streams, which will improve water quality and quantity not only for Chinook and steelhead, but for Snake River Sockeye, which is an endangered species, and also Bull Trout, Westslope Cutthroat Trout, Rainbow Trout, and Mountain Whitefish.