



# COLUMBIA BASIN WATER TRANSACTIONS PROGRAM

2020 ANNUAL REPORT

A PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP  
WITH BONNEVILLE POWER ADMINISTRATION  
AND NORTHWEST POWER AND CONSERVATION COUNCIL





Salmon in the Columbia River



The **Columbia Basin Water Transactions Program** (CBWTP) was developed in 2002 to address chronically diminished stream flows in tributaries of the Columbia River.

The native fish species of the Columbia River Basin rely on the healthy flow of rivers and streams for their survival, resilience and persistence. But stretches of many streams and rivers in the Basin run low — and sometimes dry — in summer and early fall because of legal water withdrawals. Inadequate stream flows, often the result of competing out-of-stream water uses like crop irrigation, are a key factor limiting the productivity of Pacific salmon, steelhead trout, and a host of resident fish species.

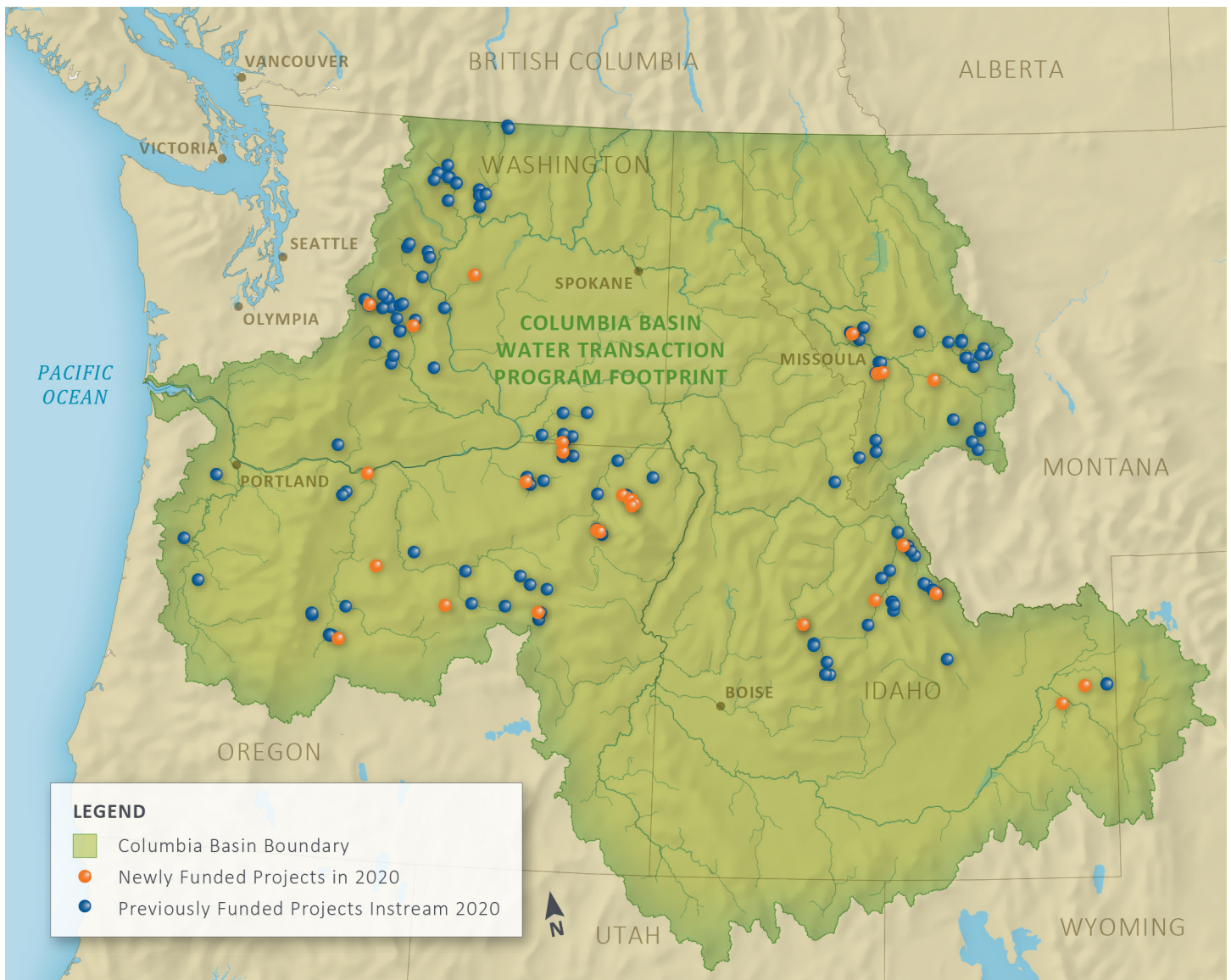
To enhance stream flow, the Columbia Basin Water Transactions Program (CBWTP) works through locally based entities to acquire water rights voluntarily from willing landowners. Using temporary and permanent water rights acquisitions and other incentive-based approaches, the CBWTP supports grantees in Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and Montana to assist landowners who wish to restore flows to key fish habitat. Voluntary, market-based water transactions provide an effective and fair way to balance out-of-stream water uses with the need to maintain stream flow for imperiled fish.

From 2002 to 2020, the CBWTP has completed over 643 water right transactions, which have restored more than 2.15 million acre-feet of water to key tributary streams in the Columbia Basin.

Funding for this program is provided by the Bonneville Power Administration in cooperation with the Northwest Power and Conservation Council and with support from Altria.







## THE COLUMBIA BASIN

# Conserving fresh water for people *and* fish

The Pacific Northwest is abundant with streams feeding the region's major rivers, which ultimately join to create the great Columbia River.

Waterways arc across the Columbia Basin's 250,000 square miles, from the west slope of the Rocky Mountains to the eastern slopes of the Cascades, through wilderness, forests and mountain valleys to arid agricultural landscapes predominately found in Idaho, Montana, Oregon and Washington. Most of the Columbia's tributaries are typically fed by mountain snowpack, now on a diminishing trajectory.

Legal water rights dating to the 19th century provide that landowners may divert the waters of these streams for agricultural production. A long list of commodities are supported by irrigation, from cattle to carrot seed, alfalfa to

apples. However, water demand from farms and fish often exceeds what nature can supply during the growing season, especially in dry years.

Under these conditions, flows are greatly diminished in sections of many streams. Water temperatures increase, compromising habitats and aquatic life. Some tributaries run dry. As a result, salmon, trout and other fish may be unable to complete their lifecycles, impacting tribes and other fishing interests that count on fish for their cultures and economies.

In 2002, the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) established a partnership with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, in cooperation with the Northwest Power and Conservation Council, to launch the Columbia Basin Water Transactions Program.





Wallowa River, OR | Credit: Trout Unlimited - Washington Water Project





Bull trout | Credit: Trout Unlimited - Montana Water project

## 2020 HIGHLIGHTS

# Securing water for fish despite a year of challenges



468

Stream miles of habitat benefited by **new** streamflows

Representing the largest water transaction program in the Pacific Northwest, CBWTP enhances streamflows in flow-limited streams throughout the Columbia Basin. CBWTP works through locally based entities to acquire water rights voluntarily from willing landowners. Using temporary and permanent water rights acquisitions and other incentive-based approaches, the increased flows benefit native fish species.

This competitive grant program provides support for transaction development, implementation and monitoring to ensure maximum benefit and compliance of transactions throughout their life cycle. Local on-the-ground organizations, including nonprofits, state agencies, municipalities, and tribes, work to develop water transactions across the basin and work collaboratively to achieve this common goal. Restoring instream flows requires taking small, incremental steps toward a longer-term vision. It's in these small steps that critical relationships are established, and trust is built. CBWTP strives towards permanent instream flow and works to build off of previous iterations and efforts.



36,890

Acre-feet of **new** protected water instream

In 2020, CBWTP grantees continued to develop meaningful instream flow transactions and work with landowners, despite the difficulties presented by COVID-19. In Montana, Trout Unlimited finalized a major transaction on Harvey Creek that will protect 640 acre-feet of water for the next 20 years, in addition to making notable strides in building broader foundations for future streamflow restoration in the Bitterroot River basin and Rock Creek watershed. In the state of Oregon, the Deschutes River Conservancy continued to showcase the effectiveness of their long-term strategy and collaboration in Whychus Creek. Washington State saw transaction negotiations and development from Washington Water Trust in new flow-limited areas such as Ickle Creek and the Klickitat.

These activities, in addition to many more accomplishments, all help to secure water and meet the needs of fish and people in the Columbia Basin.

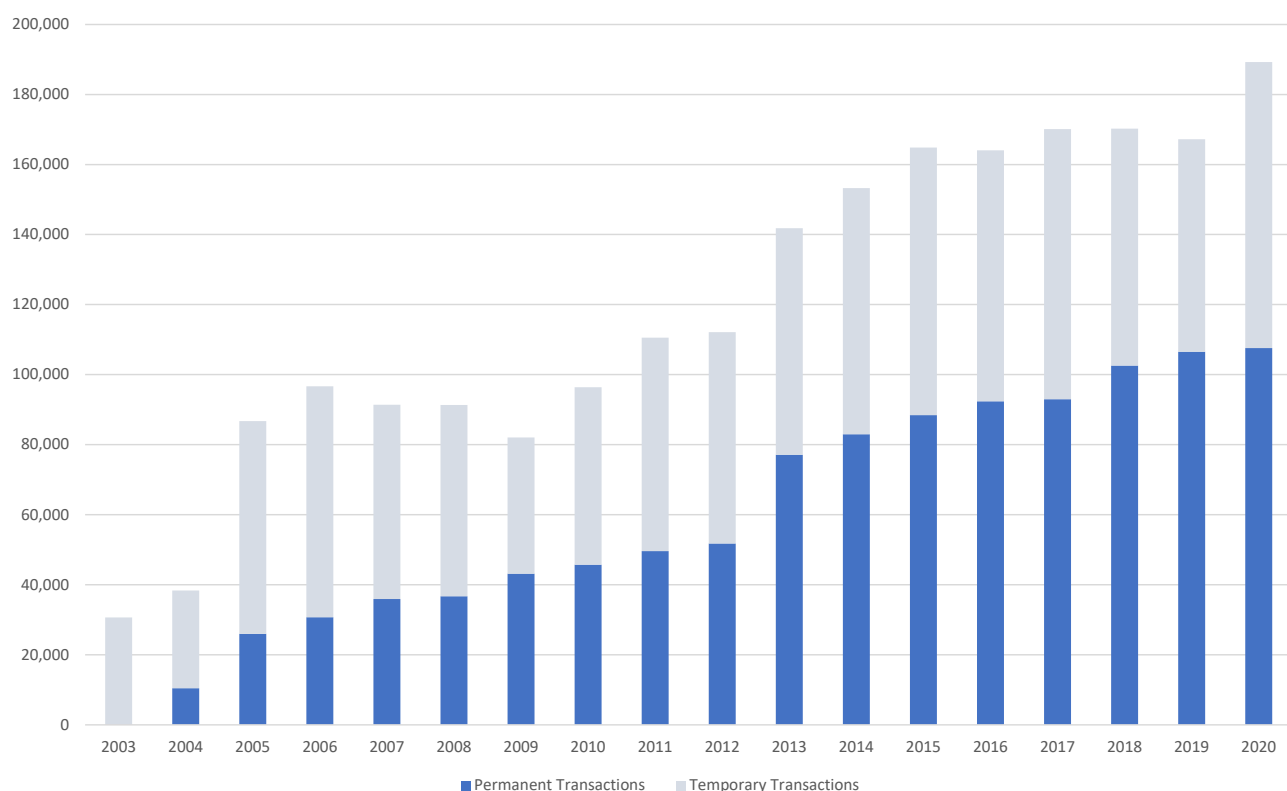


## 2020 INVESTMENTS THROUGH THE CBWTP

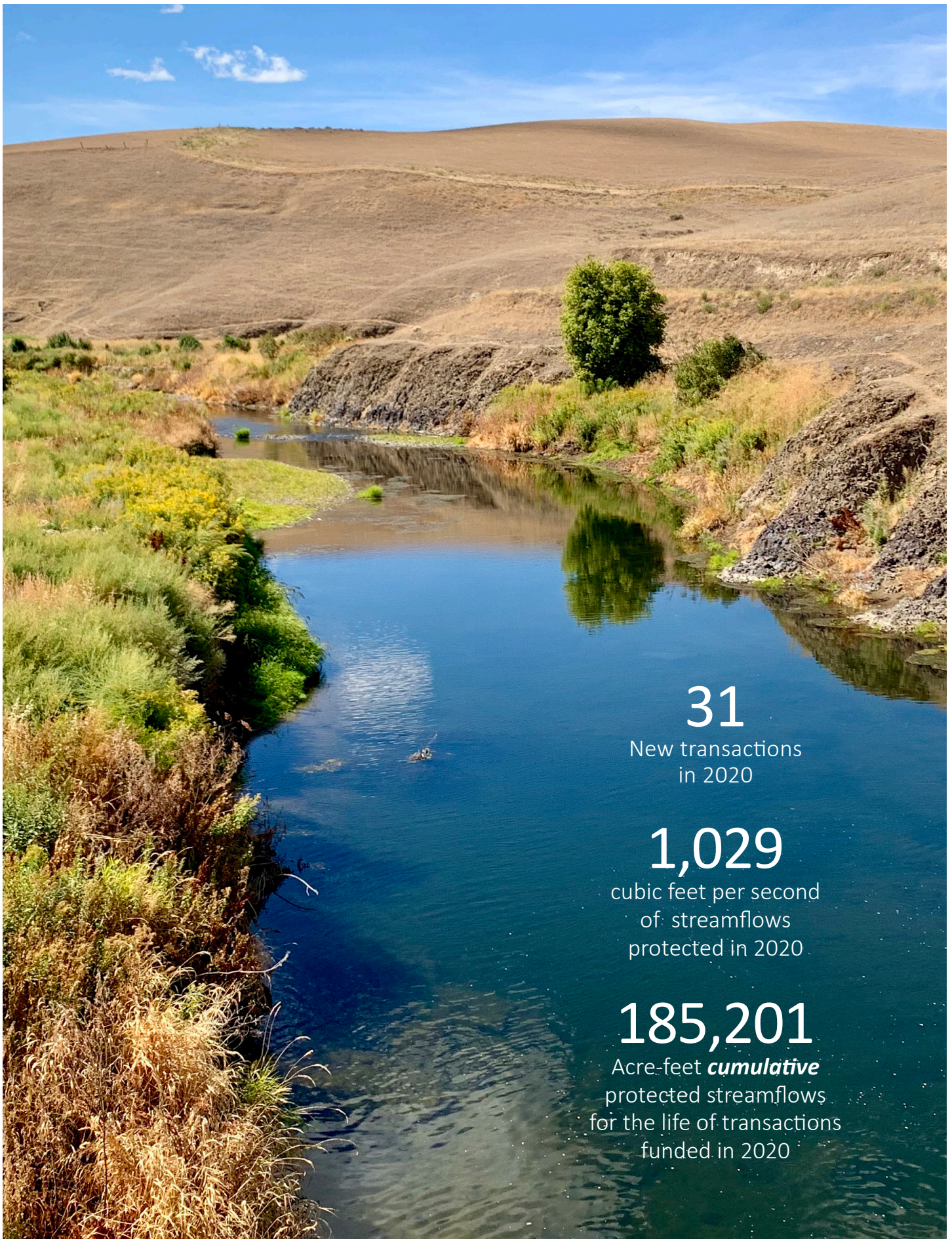
CLARK FORK COALITION .....	\$179,775
DESCHUTES RIVER CONSERVANCY .....	\$224,998
IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES .....	\$179,323
MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND CONSERVATION .....	\$43,287
NATIONAL FISH AND WILDLIFE FOUNDATION .....	\$534,616
OREGON WATER RESOURCES DEPARTMENT .....	\$80,000
THE FRESHWATER TRUST .....	\$225,437
TROUT UNLIMITED - WASHINGTON WATER PROJECT.....	\$264,299
TROUT UNLIMITED - MONTANA WATER PROJECT.....	\$112,893
WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF ECOLOGY.....	\$69,305
WASHINGTON WATER TRUST .....	\$275,683
WATER TRANSACTIONS .....	\$1,058,309
<b>TOTAL .....</b>	<b>\$3,247,925</b>

## PROJECTED FRESHWATER FLOW

Protected Flow in Acre Feet (2003-2020)







31

New transactions  
in 2020

1,029

cubic feet per second  
of streamflows  
protected in 2020

185,201

Acre-feet **cumulative**  
protected streamflows  
for the life of transactions  
funded in 2020





Westslope cutthroat trout | Credit: Trout Unlimited - Montana Water Project

## IDAHO

### Identifying, Assessing, Prioritizing and Implementing Water Transactions in the Upper Salmon and Teton River Basins (ID)

Idaho Department of Water Resources

Total payment:.....\$232,242

Work in a voluntary manner with water users in the Upper Salmon River Basin and the Teton River Basin to improve tributary flows for the benefit of Chinook salmon, steelhead, and native trout populations. Project will identify, assess, prioritize, and implement new water transactions, as well as monitor existing water transactions for compliance and biological/ecological effectiveness.

## MONTANA

### Water Transaction Development in the Clark Fork Basin (MT)

Clark Fork Coalition

Total payment:.....\$251,760

Identify, implement, and monitor water transactions in the Clark Fork basin of Montana. Project will improve streamflows and aquatic habitat conditions for native trout.

### Support for Water Transfers to Instream Flows FY20 (MT)

Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation

Total payment:.....\$43,287

Assist organizations developing water transactions with review and coordination of project proposals. Project will efficiently process instream flow water right change applications to legally protect water from transactions for instream purposes.

### Restoring, Reconnecting, and Protecting Instream Flow in the Upper Clark Fork Basin (MT)

Trout Unlimited – Montana Water Project

Total payment:.....\$234,893

Work with water users in the Upper Salmon River Basin and the Teton River Basin to improve tributary flows for the benefit of Chinook salmon, steelhead and native trout populations. Project will identify, assess, prioritize and implement new water transactions.

## OREGON

### Deschutes Basin Streamflow Restoration (OR)

Deschutes River Conservancy

Total payment:.....\$249,828

Restore streamflow in Oregon's Deschutes Basin through water transactions. Project will improve habitat and water quality for native fish, including salmon and federally listed steelhead trout.

### Assisting Oregon Qualified Local Entities in Water Transactions (OR)

Oregon Water Resources Department

Total payment:.....\$80,000

Provide assistance on water transactions for proposed streamflow restoration projects, including instream transfers, instream leases, and allocations of conserved water. Project will ensure the conditions specified in final orders are monitored and, when necessary, enforced through regulation to protect all instream flows.



### **Innovate Transactions to Restore Flow (OR)**

The Freshwater Trust

Total payment:.....\$954,106  
Develop and implement voluntary, cooperative, market-based instream flow transactions in Oregon to address both flow and temperature issues impacting listed salmonids species in critically de-watered streams. Project will result in the development of prioritized flow transactions designed to maximize ecological impact for native fish, as well as the continued implementation of over 100 existing projects located primarily in the John Day, Wallowa, Hood, and Upper Grande Ronde basins.

### **Umatilla and Walla Walla Basin Water Transactions Development (OR, WA)**

Trout Unlimited – Washington Water Project

Total payment:.....\$399,148  
Implement water transactions and prioritize reaches in the Umatilla and Walla Walla Basins. Project will include working closely with the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation to analyze collected data and ensure benefits for instream flow.

## **WASHINGTON**

### **Columbia Cascade Water Transaction Development and Implementation (WA)**

Trout Unlimited – Washington Water Project

Total payment:.....\$236,198  
Identify, prioritize and develop projects with willing water right holders in the Methow, Entiat, Yakima and Wenatchee sub-basins of Washington to complete significant instream flow enhancements to priority streams and tributaries. Project will improve tributary in-stream habitat to benefit listed salmon and other native fish species.

### **Okanogan Basin Water Transactions Development in Partnership with the Colville Tribe (WA)**

Trout Unlimited – Washington Water Project

Total payment:.....\$79,801  
Identify, prioritize and develop water transactions in the Methow and Okanogan sub-basins of Washington working in collaboration with the Colville Tribe. Project will increase habitat and in-stream flow in priority Colville tributaries and will build capacity for working with agricultural landowners on conservation projects that will benefit Pacific salmon, steelhead and their habitat.

### **Development and Monitoring of Washington State's Water Right Acquisitions Program (WA)**

Washington Department of Ecology

Total payment:.....\$69,305  
Assist in the selection, assessment, and coordination of water right acquisitions in Washington State that will improve stream flows to benefit ESA listed species. Project will monitor and manage acquired water rights to ensure project completion and long term flow improvement goals.



Morgan Creek, ID | Credit: Idaho Department of Water Resources

### **Stream Flow Restoration to Benefit Salmon, Steelhead and Trout in the Columbia Basin (WA)**

Washington Water Trust

Total payment:.....\$150,837  
Restore fish critical streams in the Columbia River Basin by implementing instream flow acquisitions to benefit ESA-listed Chinook salmon and steelhead in the Yakima, Methow, Wenatchee, White Salmon and Klickitat watersheds.

### **Stream Flow Restoration to Benefit Salmon, Steelhead and Trout in the Columbia Basin-Okanogan (WA)**

Washington Water Trust

Total payment:.....\$23,368  
Increase access for ESA-listed steelhead to cool water in the late summer as well as ensure passage of steelhead into high quality tributary habitats during the late spring spawning season. Project strategy will focus on restoring flows to Salmon Creek and Loup Loup Creek, two tributaries that are critical to the Upper Columbia steelhead. Project includes close coordination with the Colville Tribes.

### **Stream Flow Restoration to Benefit Salmon, Steelhead and Trout in the Walla Walla Basin (WA)**

Washington Water Trust

Total payment:.....\$136,147  
Secure flow in priority stream reaches during critical seasons for ESA-listed salmonids. Project will place special emphasis on the Touchet River, Mill Creek, and flow-limited portions of the Walla Walla River, where low summer flows and related high temperatures have impacted ESA-threatened bull trout and summer steelhead, as well as recently-reintroduced spring Chinook. Project includes close collaboration with the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation.



### Bonneville POWER ADMINISTRATION



### Northwest Power and Conservation Council

In partnership with the **Bonneville Power Administration** and the **Northwest Power and Conservation Council**, NFWF has supported an innovative, grassroots, incentive-based program to improve stream flows for at-risk fish throughout Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Montana. The Columbia Basin Water Transactions Program, founded in 2002, is the first regional effort of its kind in the United States to enhance flows in tributaries through cooperative partnerships between flow restoration practitioners and farmers and ranchers. The program supports a combination of practices to restore instream flows to key Columbia Basin tributaries that support important anadromous and resident fish populations. NFWF is working to better align flow improvement investments with other priority habitat restoration efforts supported by private and public entities in the region.



### Altria

**Altria** and NFWF began working together to restore some of the nation's most iconic bodies of water in 2009. The partnership began as an effort to address the impact of Altria's supply chain on local water quality in Kentucky, Tennessee, and Pennsylvania and has since blossomed into a model of focused collaboration at the intersection of corporate responsibility and conservation need. Working now to restore the Chesapeake Bay, Columbia River basin and aquatic ecosystems within the Cumberland Plateau and piedmont regions of the southeastern United States, the partnership has leveraged more than \$15 million in Altria funding into more than \$145 million in total conservation impact in addition to water conservation outcomes measured in billions of gallons annually.

The **National Fish and Wildlife Foundation** is dedicated to sustaining, restoring and enhancing the nation's fish, wildlife, plants and habitats for current and future generations.

NFWF will advance its mission through innovative public and private partnerships, and by investing financial resources and intellectual capital into science-based programs designed to address conservation priorities and achieve measurable outcomes.

In 36 years, NFWF has awarded more than 19,700 projects to more than 5,000 organizations in the United States and abroad.

In fiscal year 2020, the Foundation invested more than \$398.5 million to support more than 950 conservation projects across the nation. This investment leveraged more than \$303.1 million in matching support from grantees to generate a total conservation impact of more than \$701.6 million. This strong performance in fiscal year 2020 pushed the Foundation's cumulative conservation impact since its founding to \$6.8 billion.

## PROGRAM CONTACTS

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