



COLUMBIA BASIN WATER TRANSACTIONS PROGRAM

2025 ANNUAL REPORT

2002-013-01 - WATER ENTITY - CBWTP REPORT COVERS WORK
PERFORMED UNDER BPA CONTRACT # 95719 REPORT WAS
COMPLETED UNDER BPA CONTRACT # 97636

2008-104-00 - UPPER COLUMBIA LAND & WATER ACQUISITION
REPORT COVERS WORK PERFORMED UNDER BPA CONTRACT #
95564 REPORT WAS COMPLETED UNDER BPA CONTRACT # 97669

2008-206-00 - INSTREAM FLOW RESTORATION REPORT COVERS
WORK PERFORMED UNDER BPA CONTRACT # 73982 REL 230
REPORT WAS COMPLETED UNDER BPA CONTRACT # 97542

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Columbia
River Gorge

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



Bitterroot 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 and drought. Inadequate stream flows are a key factor limiting the productivity of Pacific salmon, steelhead trout, and a host of resident fish species.

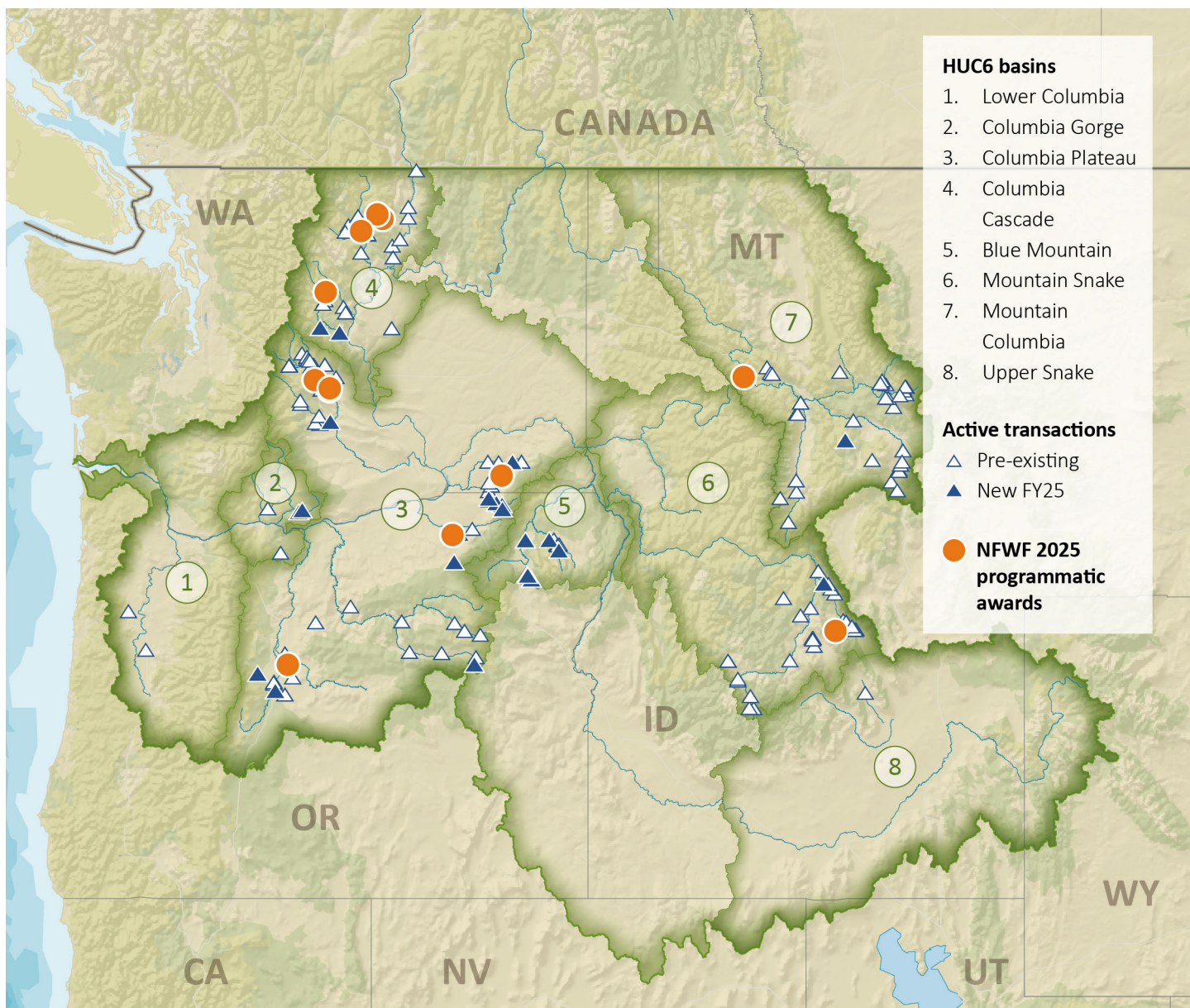
To enhance stream flow, CBWTP works through locally based entities to acquire water rights voluntarily from willing landowners. Using temporary and permanent water rights acquisitions and other incentive-based approaches, CBWTP supports grantees in Idaho, Montana, Oregon and Washington to assist landowners 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 2025, CBWTP has supported **747 water right transactions, which have restored approximately 3.15 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 via coordination with Columbia Basin Fish Accord partners: the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation and the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation.



**Northwest Power and
Conservation Council**



THE COLUMBIA BASIN

Conserving fresh water for people and fish

The Columbia Basin covers 258,000 square miles, making it one of the largest river basins in the United States. The Basin includes public and private lands, multiple mountain ranges, arid valleys, forests and agricultural lands. The mainstem of the Columbia River winds its way through Washington State and forms a significant portion of the border with Oregon before meeting the Pacific Ocean near Astoria, Oregon. This region contains abundant rivers and streams that deliver water to the Columbia River and its tributaries to provide critical fish and wildlife habitat, renewable energy, drinking water, irrigation for agricultural production, highly productive commercial fisheries and scenery that supports world-class tourism and recreation.

The Columbia Basin is home to several federally protected threatened and endangered fish species that depend on the freshwater system to migrate and fulfill their life cycle. However, many of these streams are dewatered due to numerous factors, including over-appropriation and drought. Water scarcity can have catastrophic impacts for fish and cripple local agricultural economies. Balancing ecosystem health with the resource needs of local communities is critical to long-term resilience of fish, wildlife and people throughout the Columbia Basin. Additionally, healthy fish populations serve as a food source for people who rely on subsistence fishing and are part of the cultural identity and spiritual well-being of Native Nations of the Columbia River Basin. Balancing river health with resource needs is critical to community health throughout the Columbia Basin.

The Stitt family surveys the area that's been improved by their collaboration with NFWF grantees





Chinook salmon



Before photo of the Cascade Orchard Irrigation Company transaction, which includes the large diversion structure that served as the largest passage barrier on Icicle Creek. After photo showed restored flows and removed diversion.

2025 HIGHLIGHTS

Partnering for lasting impact on rivers

CBWTP has grown steadily over the years and has become the largest water transactions program in the country. The program utilizes a competitive grant process to provide support for transaction development, implementation, and monitoring to ensure maximum benefit and compliance of transactions throughout their life cycle. The program supports a network of Qualified Local Entities (QLEs) that includes nonprofits, state agencies, municipalities, and Tribes who work to build trust and relationships with water users to develop win-win water solutions. Restoring instream flows requires taking small, incremental steps toward a longterm vision and landscape-scale impact. CBWTP strives towards permanent instream flow and works to steadily expand the quantity of protected water in key fish streams throughout the basin, year after year.

In 2025, CBWTP grantees continued to develop instream flow transactions and work with landowners to revitalize rivers across the basin. BPA supported a total of 22 new transactions in 2025 that added 18,886 acre-feet of protected water instream. Some transaction highlights include the completion of the Cascade Orchard Irrigation Company irrigation efficiency project, a major success on Icicle Creek in Wenatchee, Washington and testament to the sustained efforts of CBWTP partners Washington Water Trust and Chelan County Natural Resources Department, in coordination with the Icicle Working Group over almost two decades. The permanent transaction includes a portion of the most senior water right on Icicle Creek for up to 1,394 acre-feet and 4.14 cubic-feet-per-second a year and will significantly benefit flows for ESA-listed steelhead and bull trout in this high-priority stream. In addition to the \$1.6 million supported through CBWTP approved flow restoration funding, over \$9 million was raised by grantees and members of

the Icicle Working Group to complete the project, which included the removal of the largest passage barrier on Icicle Creek that had been in place for over 80 years.

On the Lemhi River in Idaho, a high-priority target for restoration to benefit ESA-listed Chinook, steelhead, and bull trout, the Idaho Department of Water Resources (IDWR) successfully completed a permanent transaction that will protect up to 103 acre-feet and 0.52 cubic-feet-per-second a year. As early as 2019, reports indicated that this concerted effort by IDWR contributed to a 22 percent increase in wetted stream area, a 19 percent increase in pool habitat, increased juvenile Chinook salmon productivity, presence of rearing Chinook salmon juveniles in reconnected reaches, spawning steelhead in reconnected reaches, and re-establishment of the fluvial bull trout life history in the Lemhi watershed (Haskell et al. 2019; PSMFC 2018; ISEMP 2016). This successful permanent transaction on the Lemhi continues to grow Idaho's portfolio of permanently protected water on the Lemhi to 17.35 cfs on a stretch that historically was bone dry.

“ Since 2004, the Idaho Water Resource Board has been working with senior irrigators on the lower Lemhi River to secure instream flow that plays a critical role assisting basin partners reach ESA recovery goals. The additional water permanently secured by this transaction moves the Board closer to their conservation goals and reduces the number of annual leases local staff must secure to meet flow targets. ”

— Program Manager, IDWR

22

New transactions
in 2025

91

Cubic feet per second
(CFS) of newly protected
flow in 2025

18,886

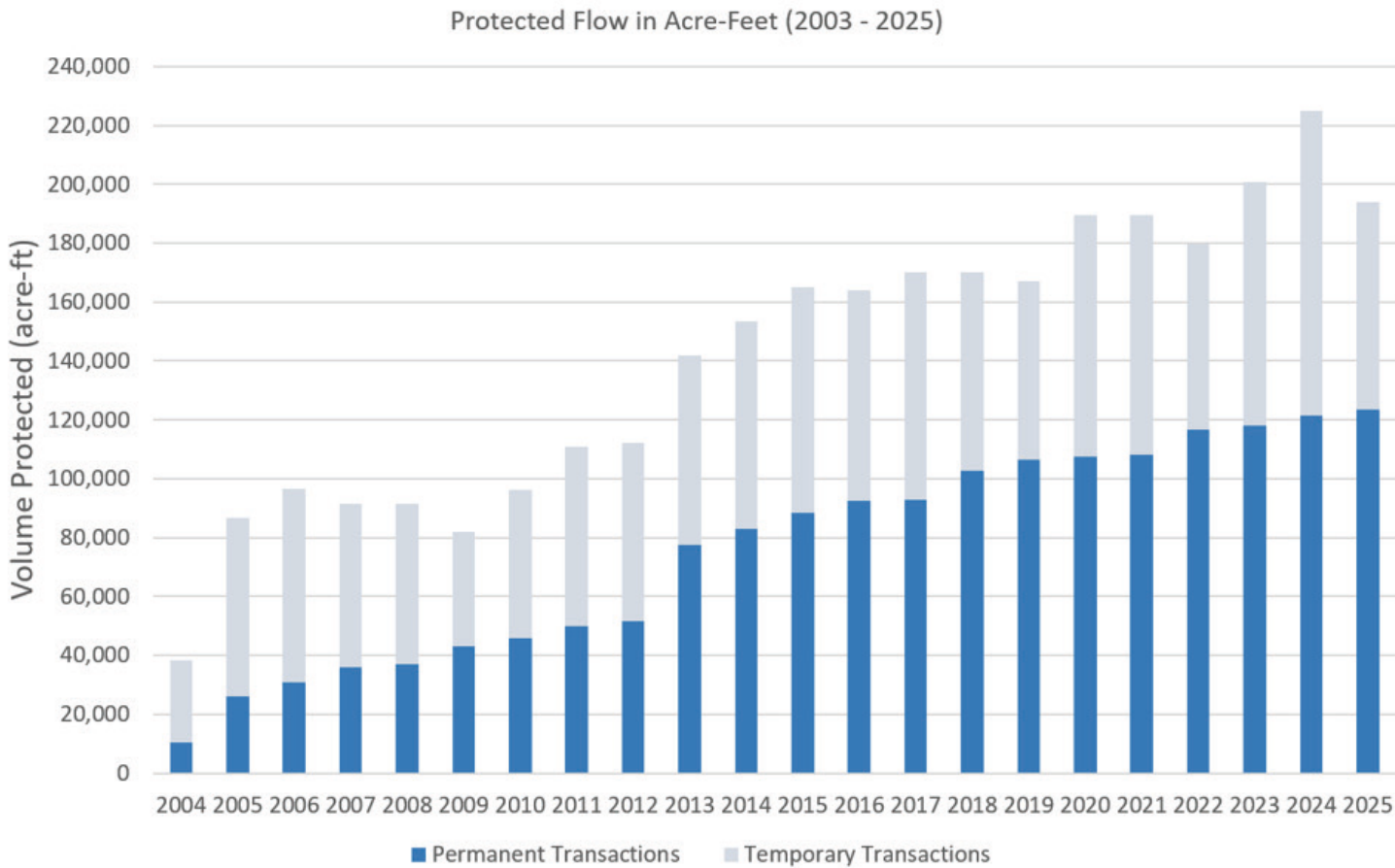
Newly protected
acre-feet in 2025

305,561

Acre-feet cumulatively protected
for the full life of newly funded
transactions in 2025

2025 INVESTMENTS THROUGH THE CBWTP¹

CHELAN COUNTY NATURAL RESOURCE DEPARTMENT	\$46,446
CLARK FORK COALITION	\$221,593
DESCHUTES RIVER CONSERVANCY	\$254,955
IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES	\$311,998
METHOW SALMON RECOVERY FOUNDATION	\$37,324
NEZ PERCE TRIBE	\$16,902
OREGON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE	\$9,209
TROUT UNLIMITED – EASTERN WASHINGTON WATER PROJECT	\$328,075
TROUT UNLIMITED – MONTANA WATER PROJECT	\$147,700
TROUT UNLIMITED – OREGON	\$399,026
WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE	\$103,948
WASHINGTON WATER TRUST	\$465,386
WATER TRANSACTIONS	\$1,913,427
TOTAL	\$4,255,989



¹Investments include programmatic (staff time, travel, etc) expenses and cumulative water transaction investments for the program.



Columbia River in Oregon

IDAHO

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

Grantee: Idaho Department of Water Resources

Total Payment:.....\$242,821

Identify, assess, prioritize, and implement new water transactions in the Upper Salmon and Teton River basins across Idaho. Project will improve tributary flows for the benefit of Snake River Spring/Summer-run Chinook salmon, Snake River steelhead, and native trout populations.

Increase Flow Restoration Efforts in the Nez Perce Tribal Geographies (ID, OR)

Grantee: Nez Perce Tribe

Total Payment:.....\$16,430

Increase flow restoration efforts in the Nez Perce Tribal geographies in Idaho and Oregon. Project will increase Tribal capacity to coordinate with other groups developing water transactions within the broad geography of ceded lands, and also enable the Tribe to propose transactions uniquely linked to Tribal relationships, Tribal treaty rights, and Tribal sovereignty.

MONTANA

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

Grantee: Clark Fork Coalition

Total Payment:.....\$232,379

Develop, implement and monitor water transactions in the Clark Fork River Basin of Montana. The project will improve streamflows and aquatic habitat conditions for native trout and white fish by reconnecting key tributaries to their mainstems and restoring chronically dewatered stream reaches.

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

Grantee: Trout Unlimited

Total Payment:.....\$154,200

Develop water right leases and transactions that work to

augment streamflow and critical habitat for native trout species, including bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout, throughout the Clark Fork River Basin, Blackfoot River and Bitterroot River subbasins in Montana. Project will reconnect key tributaries to their mainstems and restore chronically dewatered stream reaches.

OREGON

Real-time Instream Flow Assessment of Water Transactions (OR)

Grantee: Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife

Total Payment:.....\$9,208

Continue to develop a real-time instream flow tracking system to ensure that CBWTP transactions are monitored and enforced through an automated program across Oregon. Project will increase instream flows by ensuring stakeholders are immediately aware when legally protected senior instream flows are not being met and regulation or management adjustments are necessary.

Elevating Instream Flow Enhancement in high priority streams in Northeast Oregon

Grantee: Trout Unlimited

Total Payment:.....\$1,047,270

Utilize a variety of transaction tools including leases, transfers, conserved water, forbearance and minimum flow agreements to bolster flows in high priority streams throughout northeast Oregon for the benefit of ESA-listed Snake River spring/summer Chinook salmon, steelhead and other native aquatic species.

Deschutes Basin Streamflow Restoration (OR)

Grantee: Deschutes River Conservancy

Total Payment:.....\$323,519

Restore stream flow in Oregon's Deschutes Basin through voluntary water transactions with willing landowners and irrigation districts. Project will improve habitat and water quality for native fish, including salmon and federally listed steelhead trout.



Chinook salmon

Columbia River Biological Opinion and other published recovery planning and NPCC subbasin planning documents.

Restoring Streamflow in Wenatchee, Yakima and Entiat (WA)

Grantee: Trout Unlimited

Total Payment:.....\$561,753

Increase streamflow priority tributaries and improve fish survival and recruitment in mainstem habitats by working with agricultural landowners on projects that benefit Pacific salmon and steelhead, and their habitats. Project will identify, prioritize, develop and execute streamflow projects in central and north central Washington—Wenatchee, Entiat and Yakima Subbasins—working in collaboration with water right holders, irrigators and agency partners.

Provide Streamflow Monitoring and Water Transaction Support (WA)

Grantee: Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

Total Payment:.....\$103,554

Provide stream monitoring and technical assistance to all Washington state QLEs on prioritization, identification and development of water right transactions to directly support the program. Project will provide review on monitoring plans to ensure that stream flow and, where appropriate, biological monitoring are incorporated to understand and maximize conservation impact.

Stream Flow Restoration to Benefit Salmon, Steelhead and Trout in the Columbia Basin - Umatilla (OR, WA)

Grantee: Washington Water Trust

Total Payment:.....\$228,731

Restore fish-critical streams in the Columbia River Basin by implementing instream flow acquisitions in Washington and Oregon. Project will continue its partnership with the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation to benefit ESA-threatened summer steelhead and bull trout, as well as reintroduced spring Chinook.

WASHINGTON

Methow Basin Instream Flow Improvement (WA)

Grantee: Methow Salmon Recovery Foundation

Total Payment:.....\$37,323

Identify, prioritize and develop water transactions in the Methow Basin, a critical tributary of the Columbia River, which is located in northwest Washington. Project will improve instream flows for ESA-listed salmonids in collaboration with irrigation efficiency improvement efforts.

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

Grantee: Washington Water Trust

Total Payment:.....\$189,958

Restore streamflow in the upper Columbia Basin, including work in the Wenatchee, Okanogan, and Methow Watersheds to benefit ESA-listed steelhead, spring Chinook and bull trout. Project work will proceed in partnership with the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, Fish and Wildlife Department and other local partners, and prioritize projects according to recommended actions in the 2020

Elevating Instream Flow Restoration in the Methow and Okanogan Basins (WA)

Grantee: Trout Unlimited

Total Payment:.....\$91,321

Identify, prioritize, develop, and execute water transactions in the Methow and Okanogan subbasins of Washington working in collaboration with the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation. This project will increase streamflow in priority tributaries, improving fish survival, fish passage, and recruitment while also fostering partnership with agricultural landowners and irrigators on projects that benefit Pacific salmon, steelhead, and their habitats.

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

Grantee: Washington Water Trust

Total Payment:.....\$704,409

Restore fish-critical streams in the Columbia River Basin by implementing instream flow acquisitions in the Yakima, Klickitat, White Salmon River and Spokane basins in Washington state. This project will benefit ESA-listed Chinook salmon and steelhead by developing water transactions to meet flow targets in priority areas.

Wenatchee Subbasin Instream Flow Improvement (WA)

Grantee: Chelan County Natural Resource Department

Total Payment:.....\$45,951

Develop and implement water transactions in the Wenatchee subbasin in Chelan County, Washington. Project will improve instream flows and restore habitat for native salmon and steelhead populations.

ABOUT NFWF

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) works with partners to foster sustainable and impactful conservation solutions so that people and nature thrive together.

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 42 years, NFWF has awarded more than 23,900 projects to over 7,200 organizations in the states and U.S. territories.

In fiscal year 2025, the Foundation invested more than \$642.7 million to support more than 816 conservation projects across the nation. This investment leveraged more than \$327.2 million in matching support from grantees to generate a total conservation impact of more than \$970 million. This strong performance in fiscal year 2025 pushed the Foundation's cumulative conservation impact since its founding to \$12 billion.

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Amy Cassel of Idaho Department of Water Resources crosses a log bridge over 4th of July Creek near Salmon, Idaho



Columbia
River

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