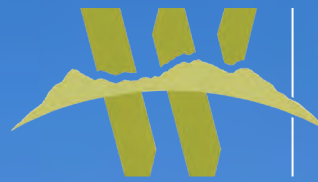


2023 ANNUAL REPORT



Western
Environmental
Law Center





DEAR FRIENDS,

The future of the western U.S. we love is threatened. The Lords of Yesterday persist in ravaging our lands, waters, wildlife, and communities. Yet there exists an ecology of kinship that strengthens the bonds between us and our region’s mosaic of living beings, beauty, wonder, and resilience.

With your support, we have made steady progress for wolves and salmon, for grizzlies and wolverine, for lynx and owls. We’ve knocked back ill-considered plans to drill and frack sacred and public lands. And we’ve set pioneering legal precedent in Montana on behalf of brave youths upholding the people’s right to a safe and secure climate.

Our ecology of kinship reminds us of the poet John O’Donohue’s words, in his poem “For One Who Holds Power”:

*When the way is flat and dull in times of gray endurance,
May your imagination continue to evoke horizons.
When thirst burns in times of drought,
May you be blessed to find the wells.
May you have the wisdom to read time clearly
And know when the seed of change will flourish.*

We rise.

Erik Schlenker-Goodrich, J.D.
Executive Director

Karin P. Sheldon, J.D.
Board President

Sristi Kamal, Ph.D.
Deputy Director

The Western Environmental Law Center is a nonprofit, public-interest organization. We use the power of the law to safeguard the public lands, wildlife, and communities of the western U.S. in the face of a changing climate.



MONTANA YOUTHS PREVAIL IN FIRST-EVER U.S. CONSTITUTIONAL CLIMATE TRIAL

This summer, we won what one expert called “the strongest decision on climate change ever issued by any court.” Shoulder-to-shoulder with 16 brave young people and our partners at Our Children’s Trust and McGarvey Law, we stood up to fossil fuel-loving Montana officials.

Our victory upheld Montanans’ constitutional right to a clean and healthful environment.

For decades, the state of Montana has ignored its citizens’ constitutionally enshrined right to a clean and healthful environment by promoting, incentivizing, and deregulating the fossil fuel industry, knowingly worsening climate change and degrading the state’s atmosphere, rivers, lakes, fish, and wildlife. The Montana government has never in its history denied a fossil fuel permit. The legislature even passed a law forbidding regulators from considering the climate impacts of fossil fuel permitting. Thanks

to the legal expertise and tireless work of WELC attorneys and our partners, these youths were the first people in the U.S. ever allowed to tell their stories to a judge in a constitutional climate trial. With the world watching, they explained how Montana’s blind devotion to fossil fuels is intensifying climate change, degrading their quality of life, and harming the environment of the state they love.

The youth plaintiffs bravely—and often emotionally—took the stand in front of a packed courtroom. They shared their experiences of evacuating to escape wildfires and flood-destroyed bridges preventing them from returning home. They told of how drought and wildfire have taken away income—through ranching losses and canceled workdays as ski instructors and camp workers.

Indigenous youth plaintiff Sariel recounted her increasing difficulty in accessing traditional plants and foods. As a member of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, her opportunities to practice cultural traditions—some only possible with snow on the ground—are diminishing as temperatures rise.

Plaintiff Mica is a distance runner. Like four other plaintiffs, he suffers from asthma. He described the psychological toll of being trapped in his own home as a result of wildfire smoke and being unable to train.

Plaintiff Badge, whose family strives to only eat meat they hunt themselves, has less food in his freezer because extreme climate conditions have made game scarcer. Each and every plaintiff testified about the mental burden of their climate-related struggles and the difficulty of watching places they love being changed, perhaps forever, by the climate crisis.

Our legal team also brought the world’s foremost climate and health experts to Helena. The court heard testimony from Dr. Steven Running, who holds a Nobel Peace Prize for his climate research and Dr. Cathy Whitlock, internationally renowned for her research on Montana’s climate. Decorated psychiatrist Dr. Lise van Susteren testified about the physical and mental effects of climate disruption, especially on young people. For the first time in U.S. history, these experts and many others laid out the scope and severity of the climate crisis in a trial setting.

Young people’s way of life and constitutional right to pursue life’s basic necessities depend on the state disclosing the true climate impacts of its decisions and making future decisions in accordance with those disclosures. And now, thanks to our victory, it must. Montana appealed this victory to the state supreme court, where we will continue to defend our clients’ constitutional rights.

Left: Some of the youth plaintiffs walking to court.
Right: WELC attorneys Barbara Chilcott and Melissa Hornhein (middle).



WELC is dedicated to ending oil and gas leasing and drilling on public lands to safeguard our climate and to protect the natural and cultural heritage of the western U.S. We are also fighting to hasten the end of coal—the dirtiest energy source on Earth.

VICTORY FOR SACRED LAND IN GREATER CHACO

We have worked for nearly a decade with our partners to tackle runaway oil and gas extraction in northern New Mexico’s Greater Chaco region, sacred to Diné (Navajo) and Pueblo peoples.

Due to our successful legal advocacy, EOG, a major oil and gas operator in the San Juan Basin, relinquished drilling leases on nearly 500,000 acres this year. The company has also agreed to begin reclamation on all lands disturbed by roads, pipelines, and well pads there. In other words, the company has ceased operations in the basin completely. Now, the sacred Sisnaateel Mesa Complex—central to Diné cosmology and akin in importance to Jerusalem, Mecca, or the Bodhi Tree in India—and many other sacred areas in Greater Chaco will be restored and protected.

This major victory builds on the impact of WELC’s 2023 Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals win, defeating 199 additional oil and gas extraction permits in Greater Chaco.

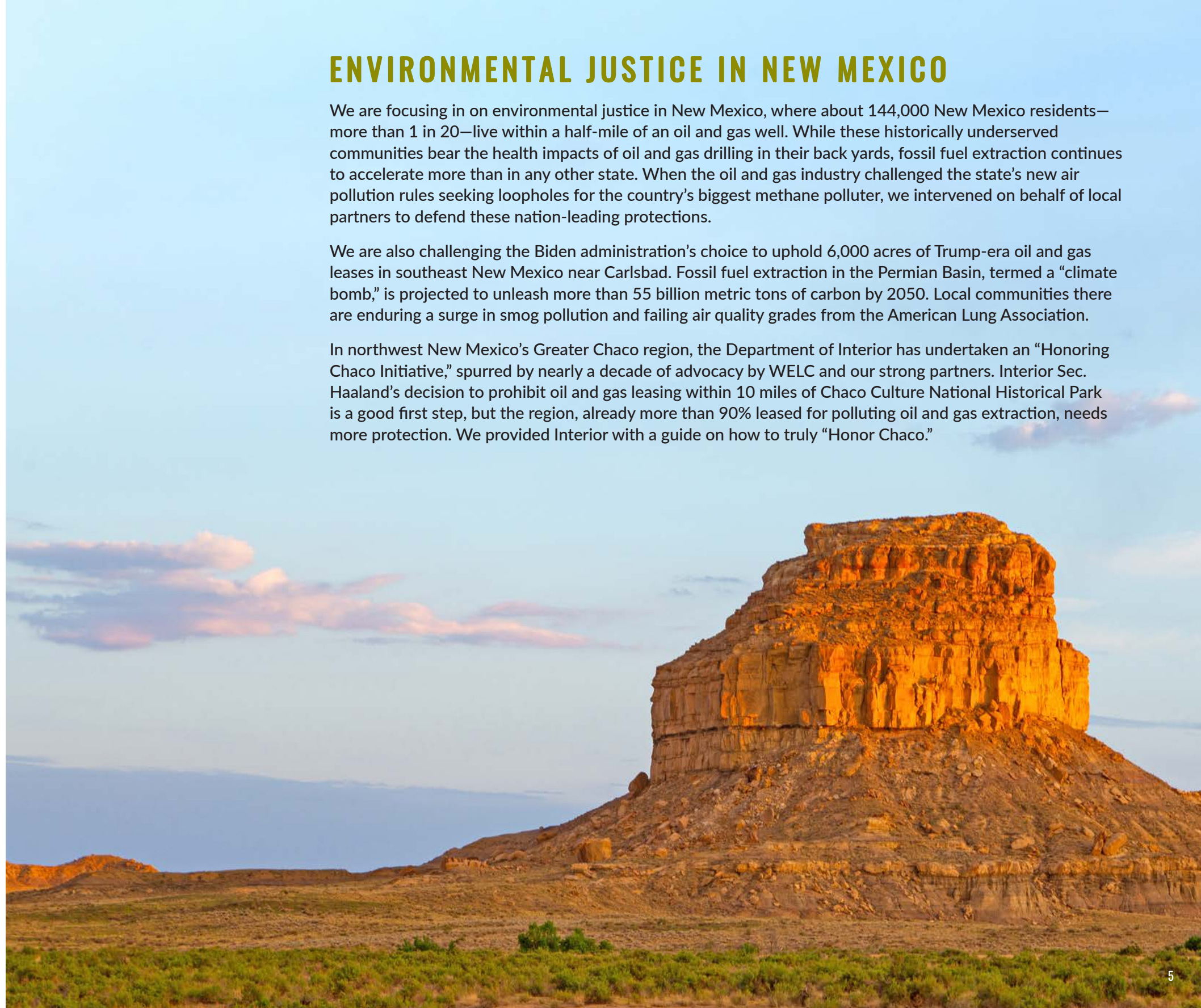
In addition, WELC and our partners’ pressure compelled the Department of Interior to withdraw federal minerals from consideration for oil and gas leasing within a 10-mile radius of Chaco Canyon.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE IN NEW MEXICO

We are focusing in on environmental justice in New Mexico, where about 144,000 New Mexico residents—more than 1 in 20—live within a half-mile of an oil and gas well. While these historically underserved communities bear the health impacts of oil and gas drilling in their back yards, fossil fuel extraction continues to accelerate more than in any other state. When the oil and gas industry challenged the state’s new air pollution rules seeking loopholes for the country’s biggest methane polluter, we intervened on behalf of local partners to defend these nation-leading protections.

We are also challenging the Biden administration’s choice to uphold 6,000 acres of Trump-era oil and gas leases in southeast New Mexico near Carlsbad. Fossil fuel extraction in the Permian Basin, termed a “climate bomb,” is projected to unleash more than 55 billion metric tons of carbon by 2050. Local communities there are enduring a surge in smog pollution and failing air quality grades from the American Lung Association.

In northwest New Mexico’s Greater Chaco region, the Department of Interior has undertaken an “Honoring Chaco Initiative,” spurred by nearly a decade of advocacy by WELC and our strong partners. Interior Sec. Haaland’s decision to prohibit oil and gas leasing within 10 miles of Chaco Culture National Historical Park is a good first step, but the region, already more than 90% leased for polluting oil and gas extraction, needs more protection. We provided Interior with a guide on how to truly “Honor Chaco.”



DEFENDING OIL AND GAS LEASING PAUSE

We represent 17 conservation groups defending the Biden administration’s authority to postpone oil and gas lease sales on public lands. After a court affirmed that authority, states and fossil fuel industry groups are suing again to try to force quarterly lease sales across the western U.S. We are working to oppose this effort to hand over public land management to the oil and gas industry. The law grants the Department of Interior and the Bureau of Land Management discretion over if and when to hold lease sales to serve the public interest, including addressing climate change impacts. We will continue to support the government’s right—and responsibility—to do so.

FIGHTING OIL AND GAS IN NEW MEXICO AND WYOMING

In the first phase of his administration, President Biden’s Department of Interior issued more oil and gas permits than Donald Trump. In a single case based on the same pioneering legal theory that resulted in an unprecedented string of more than a dozen victories against federal oil and gas industry permitting, we are challenging about 75% of President Biden’s onshore drilling permit approvals to date. These more than 4,000 oil and gas extraction permits are for New Mexico’s Permian Basin near Carlsbad and the Powder River Basin in Wyoming. The fracking approvals are deficient in many ways, including on environmental and climate justice, endangered species, and more.

KEEPING COAL IN THE GROUND IN MONTANA

We are in appeals court defending our 2021 victory against an expansion at the Rosebud coal mine, which fuels the Colstrip power plant, the 15th dirtiest power plant in the U.S. The expansion would result in 100 million tons of carbon dioxide equivalent emissions over 19 years. We are on firm ground, however, because Montana’s strip mining laws prohibit such activity if a company cannot assure water resources will be protected. The mine is currently polluting the East Fork of Armells Creek, and the coal mine expansion would extend the creek’s impairment for “tens to hundreds of years,” according to the state. We are confident our victory will be upheld.

ADVOCATING FOR RENEWABLES IN MONTANA

We are representing a regional renewable energy advocacy partner group in an electricity case before the Montana Public Service Commission. As coal power declines, Montana’s monopoly utility, NorthWestern Energy, wants to replace that power generation not with renewables, but with the planned fossil gas Yellowstone Generating Station. And NorthWestern wanted Montanans to shoulder a 25% rate hike to pay for it through a gimmick called a “reliability rider.” As a result of our and partner groups’ engagement, the “reliability rider” was abandoned by the utility. We will continue to pressure NorthWestern and the Public Service Commission to put ratepayer and climate interests first.

FIGHTING OIL AND GAS LEASING IN SIX WESTERN STATES

Building on previous victories requiring federal land managers to examine the cumulative climate effects of oil and gas leasing, we are challenging all lease sales from the first quarter of 2022, across New Mexico, Colorado, Montana, Wyoming, North Dakota, and Oklahoma. These sales represent the administration’s abandonment of its leasing “pause” in response to pressure from the fossil fuel industry. The decision to resume oil and gas leasing without ever taking a comprehensive look at climate impacts violates the Federal Land Management and Policy Act’s requirement that the Bureau of Land Management prevent “unnecessary or undue degradation” of public lands. This is a requirement the agency has never defined and has consistently ignored. Our case also challenges the agency’s failure to examine these closely related lease sales in a single National Environmental Policy Act analysis. This falsely minimizes the effects of the sales when they are really coordinated. It’s like saying since one piece of candy won’t make you unhealthy, neither will 10,000 pieces.



VICTORY FOR COHO SALMON IN CALIFORNIA'S SHASTA RIVER

We won a significant victory this summer invalidating a National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) "Safe Harbor" program on California's Shasta River that allowed a dam owner and water diverters to harm threatened coho salmon in exchange for slight changes in operations. The Shasta River was once the most important salmon-producing tributary of the Klamath River, but now fewer than 60 coho salmon are returning to the Shasta each year. Meanwhile, the recovery target for coho salmon returning annually is in the thousands. Historically, a dam owner almost completely dewatered part of the river on occasions. Under the program, NMFS rubber-stamped many of the same diversions that have deteriorated conditions in the Shasta. Now, the agency must rewrite its analysis of the program and complete a thorough environmental impact statement of how it affects wild coho.

VICTORY FOR WILDLIFE IN MONTANA'S CONTINENTAL DIVIDE

The Continental Divide region in Montana's Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest is extremely important for wildlife, including threatened grizzly bears and big game. When the U.S. Forest Service closed 144 miles of roads and trails to off-highway vehicles in roadless areas, recommended wilderness, and sensitive wildlife habitat including designated Canada lynx critical habitat, we applauded the agency. Many of the trails were created illegally in the first place, and motorized use harms and displaces wildlife of all kinds. But off-road vehicle interests sued over the change. We intervened in the case on behalf of local partners, and successfully defended the exclusion of motorized vehicles from these roads and trails in this jewel of a landscape. Today, grizzlies, lynx, elk, mule deer, and more have the freedom to live and roam in this important wildlife habitat without being harassed by ATVs and other off-highway vehicles.

We use our legal expertise to protect imperiled wildlife native to the western U.S. We defend grizzly bears, wolves, native salmon and steelhead, beavers, Canada lynx, northern spotted owls, wolverines, and more.

WIN FOR BEAVERS IN OREGON, THE BEAVER STATE

We worked tirelessly amid many challenges this year to change Oregon state law to better protect beavers. As a result of our advocacy, the Oregon legislature passed the "Beaver Believer Bill" with bipartisan support and Gov. Kotek signed it into law this summer. This new law ends beavers' "predatory animal" status and unlimited, year-round beaver killing on private lands without permits. The new law promotes non-lethal mitigation where conflicts arise. Beaver-modified wetlands, wet meadows, and ponds regulate water temperature and quality, store large amounts of carbon, provide climate refugia for fish and wildlife especially during drought, and create natural fire breaks to help contain wildfires. Now, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife can begin to manage beavers on private land as it does for other wildlife. We are thrilled to bring beaver management in the Beaver State into the 21st century.

RESTORING MEXICAN WOLVES

Our legacy of championing Mexican wolf reintroduction and recovery goes back to 1998 when WELC's legal advocacy prompted the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to make the first ever releases of captive-bred *lobos* into the wilds of Arizona and New Mexico.

At that time, Mexican wolves were extinct in the U.S. We are dedicated to seeing Mexican wolf recovery through, with several current cases to ensure Mexican wolves are set up for success.

We are fighting in court to improve the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's inadequate Mexican wolf management rule, which fails to promote recovery as required under the Endangered Species Act. The rule falls short on improving crucial genetic diversity by leaving wolves vulnerable to being killed or removed from the wild, and by preventing wolves from occupying suitable habitat north of Interstate 40. The rule also designates the approximately 240 Mexican wolves in the wild as "not essential" to the species' recovery. Yet only about 45 exist in the wild in Mexico.

We are also challenging a 2017 Mexican wolf recovery plan, demanding that wildlife managers rely on the best available science.

Moreover, we are evaluating an appeal to stop a U.S. Forest Service plan to invite conflict by allowing cattle grazing on about 300,000 acres in prime Mexican wolf habitat and wilderness areas on the Gila and Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests.

GRIZZLIES BELONG

Contrary to what some would have you believe, grizzly bears are not on every street corner or lurking behind every tree in the Northern Rockies region. They are threatened with extinction in a very real way. To aid their recovery, we are taking a strategic, multi-faceted approach across the western U.S.

We are fighting to rein in Wildlife Services' predator-killing program, currently authorized to kill or remove grizzly bears in Montana recovery zones. The government failed to consider the program's effect on connectivity and genetic interchange between grizzly populations in Montana and other locations—crucial for long-term recovery.

Also in Montana, we are challenging a large-scale livestock grazing plan in grizzly bear recovery zones that increases the risk of conflict and working to end the problem of trains in the northern part of the state killing grizzly bears. Since 1980, 64 grizzlies have died from being hit by trains on Burlington Northern Railway Company (BNSF) tracks. After trains killed three more grizzly bears this year, we sent a notice of our intent to sue. We aim to require BNSF to take steps to prevent trains on its tracks from killing threatened grizzly bears.

Additionally, we are challenging the U.S. Forest Service's policy governing the use of bait to hunt in national forests, which allows Idaho and Wyoming to permit hunters to bait black bears with human food such as donuts. These bait stations can also attract threatened grizzly bears, which have been shot in mistaken-identity killings. We will continue using the power of the law to ensure grizzly recovery is in line with what the bears need to truly recover and thrive in the wild.



PROTECTING NORTHWEST WOLVES

We strive to protect wolves in Washington and Oregon, where more than 80% of wolves do not enjoy federal protections and are at the mercy of state laws. Washington announced its intent to significantly reduce state protections for its approximately 200 wolves by downgrading their classification from “endangered” to “sensitive” under the state Endangered Species Act. We provided comments urging the Fish and Wildlife Commission to reconsider the decision. In Oregon, the state has engaged us in the five-year revision of the Oregon Wolf Plan which dictates management of its about 180 wolves. Our top priorities are poaching and climate change effects on wolves, especially as Oregon is set to become a source population for Colorado’s wolf reintroduction effort.

RESTORING OREGON STEELHEAD

We are in court to help recover threatened winter steelhead trout in the upper Willamette River basin in Oregon, now at only 5-10% of their historic population. In 2020, we won a case forcing the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to write a hatchery and genetic management plan as well as a biological opinion to study whether releasing non-native summer steelhead into the North and South Santiam Rivers impairs native winter steelhead recovery. Even though scientists agree non-native summer steelhead harm native winter steelhead by every metric analyzed, the National Marine Fisheries Service ignored this consensus. We intend to force fisheries managers to follow the science and the law to best help winter steelhead recover.

DEFENDING NORTHERN SPOTTED OWLS

We are challenging a Trump-era U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service decision to grant an astonishing 50-year permit to Sierra Pacific Industries to kill and displace threatened northern spotted owls in the course of logging in California. The iconic owl has only declined since its designation as threatened in 1990, and is functionally extinct in Canada. Precious few remain in California. Northern spotted owls require mature or old-growth forests to survive, and historic and ongoing habitat loss are primary causes of its decline. Our government issuing a permit allowing a wealthy company to kill threatened owls while destroying their habitat is outrageous. We won’t let it happen.



PROTECTING THREATENED CANADA LYNX

We are continuing our legacy of fighting for Canada lynx recovery with a pair of cases in two very different parts of the western U.S. In northeastern Washington state, we are challenging a 44,000-acre logging project in Colville National Forest’s Kettle Range that would degrade a designated “core area” to the big cat’s recovery for 40 years. Tribes in the area have begun reintroducing lynx in the region—one of the few remaining areas in the U.S. where populations of the animal still exist. We aim to keep this Canada lynx population on track by stopping this ill-sited logging project.

In southwest Colorado, we are challenging the revised land management plan for the Rio Grande National Forest because it slashes protections for the threatened Canada lynx and the endangered Uncompahgre fritillary butterfly. Canada lynx strongly depend on this habitat, which contains more than half the locations in Colorado where lynx are seen with regularity. As in our Washington case, this change opens lynx habitat to logging.

VICTORY DEFENDING CASCADE-SISKIYOU NATIONAL MONUMENT FROM LOGGING

This year, WELC and our partners won a huge victory protecting the expanded borders of Oregon and California's Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument. A logging industry lawsuit threatened this stronghold of biodiversity as well as the president's authority to protect public lands under the Antiquities Act.

National monuments are protected public lands that are too special for drilling, logging, or other extractive industry use. Among these, Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument rises to the top of the list as the only monument designated specifically to preserve biodiversity.

This special place is a biological crossroads and a true ecological wonder known for its incredible diversity of wildlife and plant species.

Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument protects a rich mosaic of forests, grasslands, shrublands, and wet meadows as well as spotted owls, a long-isolated population of redband trout, and a vast array of other wildlife.

After President Clinton designated the monument in 2000, ecologists emphasized that its borders excluded many of the areas most important to the region's ecology.

Monument supporters, ranging from local individuals and conservation groups to elected officials including two consecutive Oregon governors and both of Oregon's U.S. senators, plus Tribes, business owners, scientists, hunters, and anglers, have fought for decades to protect the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument area.

In 2017, President Obama heeded this huge public support for enlarging the monument, expanding the protective boundaries of this sensitive and special place in part to prevent it from being logged.

But a timber company sued, arguing that an obscure law, the Oregon and California Lands Act of 1937, committed some 40,000 acres of the expansion—about twice the area of Manhattan—to commercial timber production, making those lands ineligible for inclusion in the national monument.

Our legal experts disagreed, and with a coalition of partners, we intervened to defend the expansion area from destruction.

This year, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in our favor, confirming the law in question does not conflict with the expansion. Two other industry lawsuits in different jurisdictions also failed to overturn the expansion.

This represents a huge step forward toward quashing a flawed argument used for decades by timber companies in favor of logging this crown jewel of public land. This victory positions us at an advantage to fend off industry and eliminate a longstanding threat to Cascade-Siskiyou.

WELC is a strong advocate for the natural heritage of the western U.S. which is rooted in wildlands, rivers, forests, and wildlife. We take on cases and perform advocacy to defend national forests, protected lands, clean rivers, and more.

Climate-caused aridification is creating new water challenges throughout the country. WELC is focused on ensuring the communities, wildlife, and wildlands of the western U.S. have the clean, ample water supplies they need to survive and thrive.

INTERIOR HEEDS OUR GUIDANCE TO LIMIT POLLUTION, CONSERVE LANDS

We spearheaded a petition on behalf of 30 organizations to implore the Department of Interior to use the agency's longstanding authority and responsibility under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act to limit climate pollution and better conserve public lands targeted for oil and gas extraction. The law requires Interior to prevent the "permanent impairment" and "unnecessary or undue degradation" of public lands from oil and gas development. For decades, Interior has mothballed these critical provisions in favor of promoting a massive expansion of climate-damaging oil and gas production on public lands. The agency appears to have taken our recommendations to heart in new Bureau of Land Management proposed rules aiming to place conservation on equal footing with extractive uses. While the rule has some vulnerabilities, we lauded its intent and provided guidance on how to improve the proposed rule and ensure it achieves its stated goals.

VICTORY FOR CLEAN WATER NEAR MONTANA'S LARGEST COAL MINE

Early in 2023, we won a landmark case halting coal mining at Signal Peak Energy's Bull Mountains mine in Montana pending a full analysis of its effects on ranchers, vital water sources, and the environment. The Trump administration had approved a 175-million-ton mine expansion there, largely ignoring impacts to water and the environment. Our victory will require the federal Office of Surface Mining to prepare an environmental impact statement for the proposal. Signal Peak has destroyed precious water resources above the mine and has attempted to force local ranchers out of the Bull Mountains. Cave-ins from the underground mine have torn cracks and crevasses through the landscape, causing springs and wells to go dry and endangering all who use the area. Additionally, in an apparent effort to evade reclamation obligations, Signal Peak has harassed ranchers and canceled their grazing leases. Our victory brings long-sought accountability to a mine that has operated with utter disregard for the local community and the water supplies they have depended on for decades. We are continuing with local and state-based advocacy efforts to loosen Signal Peak Energy's grip on this beautiful and unique landscape and the tenacious community of ranchers and farmers who call it home.



DEFENDING ANCIENT FORESTS

We are challenging the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) N126 Late Successional Reserve Landscape Plan Project, one of the largest logging proposals for Oregon's public lands in decades. This proposed logging project near Eugene contains at least three federal Endangered Species Act-listed species: northern spotted owl, marbled murrelet, and coho salmon. The agency failed entirely to consider impacts to these species, among other errors. BLM has purposely hidden the specifics about this massive logging project from public review, promising to reveal all once the project is completed and the trees are lumber and pulp. We aim to shine a light on the agency's intentions and protect these forests and animals from logging.

FIGHTING INDUSTRIAL AG POLLUTION

We are challenging permits allowing industrial animal feeding operations in Washington to continue polluting state waters. A 2021 court ruling in a previous WELC case found the original permits violated laws by failing to control discharges of excess nutrients, bacteria, and other pollution. Despite the court ordering fixes, the revised permits still carry over illegal provisions and don't require affordable practices to curb the pollution threats to drinking water, shellfish beds, and public health, all vulnerable due to climate change. The Washington Department of Ecology continues shirking its duty to protect communities and the environment. We have appealed the permits to compel proper safeguards against industrial agriculture water pollution.

PROTECTING A SACRED YAKIMA SITE

Fifteen thousand years ago, an ice dam failed, sending 500 cubic miles of water crashing through the Columbia River. The Ka-milt-pah people—the Rock Creek Band of the Yakima Nation—took refuge in the area's highest point, Put-a-lish, or the Goodnoe Hills, near present-day Goldendale, Washington. Today, the area is a sacred site where Tribal members practice traditional hunting and gathering. Now, a developer wants to use those same hills to site the upper reservoir of what would be the Northwest's largest pump-storage hydroelectric facility. This would destroy irreplaceable Tribal cultural resources, including archeological, ceremonial, burial, petroglyph, monumental, and ancestral use sites. We are appealing the state's decision to green light this project under the Clean Water Act.

VICTORY PROTECTING FORESTS FROM A MASSIVE TRUMP-ERA LOGGING LOOPHOLE

On behalf of a strong coalition of partners, we finalized an agreement with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) reversing a Trump-era rule that vastly expanded categorical exclusions for post-fire logging without environmental review. The rule increased the maximum area excluded from review under the National Environmental Policy Act for logging dead and dying trees after fires from 250 to 3,000 acres. It also doubled the road construction permitted and allowed those roads to become permanent rather than temporary. Under the agreement, BLM will remove the expanded categorical exclusion language and revert to previous limits for size and road construction. We are pleased to have played a role in closing this egregious and dangerous logging loophole. Post-fire logging harms imperiled species and watershed recovery. The environmental impacts of such projects warrant public involvement and careful review, not categorical exclusions meant for truly minimal actions.

PROTECTING PUGET SOUND
AND WASHINGTON

The Washington Department of Ecology has conducted many studies on the serious effects of nutrient and toxic pollution on Puget Sound, revealing a variety of water quality problems affecting the Sound, its marine life, and people. These problems include plummeting dissolved oxygen, increasing hazardous algal blooms, deteriorating fish and wildlife—such as salmon and orca—plus changes to the food web with increased jellyfish and decreased forage fish. WELC is taking action to force Washington state to solve this problem, which has long plagued Puget Sound and its communities and has now become a full-blown emergency.

FIGHTING TERERRO MINE IN
NEW MEXICO

Last year, we led a successful effort in northern New Mexico to protect some of its most precious waterways from industrial development. These new Outstanding National Resource Waters designations allow traditional, existing water uses and prohibit new uses that may degrade water quality. Despite this, a mining company applied to conduct exploratory drilling for gold, copper, zinc, lead, and silver in the Upper Pecos watershed. We are representing the local watershed association to prevent this mining, which would adversely impact the entire watershed and potentially Santa Fe’s municipal water supply. Our previous victory protecting the Upper Pecos River could aid us in this effort.

STOPPING TOXIC WATER
POLLUTION IN MONTANA

We are challenging the state of Montana’s decision to renew a five-year pollution permit for an oil refinery in Laurel. This refinery is the worst facility in Montana for total toxics released into waterways, discharging into the iconic Yellowstone River. Citing the river’s high levels of naturally occurring arsenic, every five years the state rubber-stamps the refinery’s permit to pollute the Yellowstone even more. In addition, the Laurel Refinery is the third-largest greenhouse gas emitter in Montana. We hope to force the state to require stricter pollution controls and actually enforce the permit’s limits, which Laurel Refinery has a history of exceeding.

PROTECTING CLEAN WATER IN
NEW MEXICO

Unfortunately, this year the U.S. Supreme Court issued a flawed decision to slash Clean Water Act protections. As a result, now about 90% of New Mexico’s waters are vulnerable to pollution. In response, we are working with state regulators to create protections for these wetlands and streams, and we are engaged in rulemakings on the use of “produced water” from the oil and gas sector. We want to ensure any uses of this compromised water do not endanger New Mexicans’ health or the environment. We are also actively involved in efforts to lower the threshold for cancer risk for regulated toxic pollutants and create water quality standards for PFAS, the highly toxic “forever chemical.”

WE ARE TRAINING THE NEXT GENERATION OF
ENVIRONMENTAL ADVOCATES

WELC is dedicated to sustainability, and that includes cultivating students and recent graduates to join us in our mission to advance the public interest and protect the people, places, plants, and animals that make the western U.S. such an enchanting part of the country.

This year marks the 30th anniversary of WELC becoming an independent nonprofit outside the University of Oregon School of Law. We honor our Oregon roots by hosting the School of Law’s environmental law clinic, which provides the next generation of legal advocates real-world experience. In 2022 and 2023, our clinic students aided ongoing work in Montana, Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico, and Oregon.

We also employ two recent law graduates as Diehl Fellows for two-year fellowships to provide opportunities for bright young graduates to gain valuable experience. This year, we welcomed Karli Uwaine (Lewis & Clark ’23) and Michelle Hoge (University of Washington ’22).

We are lucky to work alongside these passionate advocates, and we look forward to the change we will make together.



THANK YOU

We appreciate the generosity and loyalty of our supporters. This year, more than 1,600 individuals and families made contributions to the Western Environmental Law Center. Your donations make a lasting difference for the wildlands, wildlife, and communities of the western U.S. As a public interest law firm, we do not charge clients and partners for services, but rely instead on charitable gifts to achieve our mission. You make our victories and advocacy possible—thank you.

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Oregon Community
Foundation
Anil R. Gangolli Family
Charitable Fund
An Advised Fund of Oregon
Community Foundation
Anya and Henry Bagley
Charitable Trust
Aria Foundation
Bella Vista Foundation
Blue Oak Foundation
Bright Funds
The Eugene N. and Margaret C.
Bruce Family Fund
Cabin Fund of the Santa Fe
Community Foundation
The Caldwell Stair
Charitable Fund
Carroll Petrie Foundation
CGC Financial Services LLC
Louis Chiofalo Charitable
Giving Fund
Christopher and Priscilla
Williams Fund of The
Oregon Community
Foundation
Cinnabar Foundation
The Collins Foundation
Community Foundation

Boulder County
Community Foundation of
North Central Washington
Cosman Family Foundation
Cross Charitable Foundation
Dr. Roy D. Johnson and Joyce
Johnson Fund of the Oregon
Community Foundation
Ed and Ellen McClaran Fund of
Oregon Community
Foundation
Edyne and Allen Gordon
Foundation, Inc.
Eggal Foundation
Elizabeth G. Maughan
Foundation
Energy Action Fund
Energy Foundation
Environment Foundation
Evergreen Hill Fund of The
Oregon Community
Foundation
The FaJah Fund at the Chicago
Community Foundation
Faulkner and Hagen Giving Fund
Feder-Fogelson Charitable
Donation Fund
Fidelity Charitable Gift Fund
Firedoll Foundation
Give Lively Foundation
Goldman Family Charitable Fund
Grateful Foundation
The Grateful Fund of the
Community Foundation of
Greater Des Moines
Gwladys and John Zurlo

Charitable Foundation
Harder Foundation
The Healy Foundation
Hildner Family Fund at
the Whitefish Community
Foundation
ImpactAssets
J. Charitable Fund and Greater
Horizons
The Purple Lady/Barbara J.
Meislin Fund of the Jewish
Community Federation and
Endowment Fund
JW & HM Goodman Family
Foundation
Kalispel Tribe and Northern
Quest Resort & Casino
Lazar Foundation
LuLu's Fund
Suzan Mackler Fund
Maki Foundation
McCune Charitable Foundation
Meadow Fund
The Merck Foundation
Merlin Foundation
The Musser Family Fund
National Financial Services, LLC
New-Land Foundation
NISSE Fund
The Dawn Hill Fund at The
Chicago Community
Foundation
Northwest Fund for the
Environment
Park Foundation
Peierls Foundation

Planet in Peace Foundation
Redtail Fund of Oregon
Community Foundation
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Marshall Fund
Rockefeller Family Fund
Roots to Leaves Fund
Roundhouse Foundation
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Seattle Foundation
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Gift Fund
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Wy'east Foundation
Zemek Family Charitable Fund
Anonymous

ORGANIZATIONS AND BUSINESSES

Asdzáá Consulting
Caffry and Flower,
Attorneys at Law
Equilibrium Inc.
Friends of Toppenish Creek

Ink Realty Group
Lewis & Clark College
Mountain Rose Herbs
Network for Good
Organically Grown Company

Skjersaa Group at
Duke Warner Realty
Sunrise Montessori of the
Napa Valley
Tillak

Upper Pecos Watershed
Association
The Wilderness Society

CLIENTS AND PARTNERS

Alliance for the Wild Rockies
American Rivers
American Whitewater
Amigos Bravos
Appalachian Mountain Club
Archaeology Southwest
Arizona Zoological Society
Association of Zoos and Aquariums
Audubon Society of Portland
Blue Mountains Forest Partners
California Sportfishing Protection Alliance
California Trout
CalUWild
Cascadia Wildlands
Center for Biological Diversity
Center for Civic Policy
Center for Environmental Law and Policy
Center for Food Safety
Chaco Alliance
Chama Peak Land Alliance
Citizens Caring for the Future
Citizens for a Healthy Community
Citizens for Sustainable Development
Clean Air Task Force
Clean Water Action
Climate Solutions
Coalition for Clean Affordable Energy
Coast Range Association
Columbia Gorge Audubon Society

Columbia Riverkeeper
Community Association for Restoration of the Environment
Concerned Citizens of the Yakama Reservation
Conservation Colorado
Conservation Voters New Mexico
Cottonwood Environmental Law Center
Dakota Resource Council
Defenders of Wildlife
Dennis and Bonnie White
Dinè Citizens Against Ruining Our Environment
Dunton Hot Springs, Inc.
Earthjustice
Earthworks
Enhancing Montana's Wildlife and Habitat
Environment America
Environmental Defense Fund
Environmental Protection Information Center
Food & Water Watch
Footloose Montana
Forest Issues Group
Fort Belknap Indian Community
Friends of Oak Ridge
Friends of the Bitterroot
Friends of the Clearwater
Friends of the Crazy Mountains
Friends of the Earth

Friends of the Shasta River
Friends of the Wild Swan
Friends of Toppenish Creek
George Wuerthner
Grand Canyon Trust
Grand Canyon Wildlands Council
Grand Canyon Wolf Recovery Project
HECHO: Hispanics Enjoying Camping, Hunting, and Outdoors
Helena Hunters and Anglers Association
High Country Conservation Advocates
High Sierra Hikers Association
Humane Society of the United States
Hydropower Reform Coalition
Indian People's Action
Institute for Fisheries Resources
Interfaith Power and Light
Kettle Range Conservation Group
Klamath Forest Alliance
Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center
Kootenai Environmental Alliance
Law Offices of Charles M. Tebbutt
League of Conservation Voters
Los Padres ForestWatch
Lummi Indian Nation
Moms Clean Air Force
Montana Chapter of Backcountry Hunters and Anglers
Montana Elders for a Livable Tomorrow

Montana Environmental Information Center
Naeva
Naqsragsmiut Tribal Council
National Parks Conservation Association
National Wildlife Federation
Native Ecosystems Council
Native Fish Society
Native Organizers Alliance
Natural Resources Defense Council
New Mexico Audubon Council
New Mexico Backcountry Hunters and Anglers
New Mexico Interfaith Power and Light
New Mexico Physicians for Social Responsibility
New Mexico Wilderness Alliance
Northern Blues Forest Collaborative
Northern Plains Resource Council
Northwest Energy Coalition
Northwest Environmental Advocates
Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission
Oregon Coast Alliance
Oregon Wild
Our Children's Trust
Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations
Pacific Rivers
Pasado's Safe Haven
Physicians for Social Responsibility

Powder River Basin Resource Council
Public Justice
Public Land and Water Access
Pueblo Action Alliance
Puget Soundkeeper Alliance
Rainforest Action Network
RE Sources for Sustainable Communities
Recognition
Renewable Northwest
Rico Trails Alliance
Rio Arriba Concerned Citizens
Rocky Mountain Wild
Rogue Riverkeeper
San Juan Citizens Alliance
Sheep Mountain Alliance
Sierra Club
Sierra Club - Grand Canyon Chapter
Sierra Club - Mother Lode Chapter
Sierra Club - Washington State Chapter
Sierra Forest Legacy
Sky Island Alliance
Skyline Sportsmen's Alliance
Snoqualmie Indian Tribe
Socially Responsible Agriculture Project
Soda Mountain Wilderness Council
South Yuba River Citizens League
Southern Environmental Law Center
Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance
Southwest Environmental Center

Spokane Riverkeeper/Center for Justice
Sustainable Northwest
Swan View Coalition
Swinomish Indian Tribal Community
The Conservation Angler
The Wilderness Society
Tó Nizhóní Aní
Trout Unlimited
U.S. Climate Plan
Upper Green River Alliance
Washington Conservation Action
Waterkeeper Alliance
Western Colorado Alliance
Western Organization of Resource Councils
Western Resource Advocates
Western Watersheds Project
What's Upstream
WildEarth Guardians
Wilderness Watch
Wilderness Workshop
Wildlands Network
Willamette Riverkeeper
Wyoming Outdoor Council
YUCCA: Youth United 4 Climate Crisis Action
Yurok Tribe
350 Montana
350 New Mexico
350 Santa Fe

Ranging from small grassroots to large national groups, from youth to adults, we represented, partnered, and worked with more than 165 organizations and individuals this year. It is our pleasure to Defend the West with all of you.

FINANCIAL REPORT

REVENUE

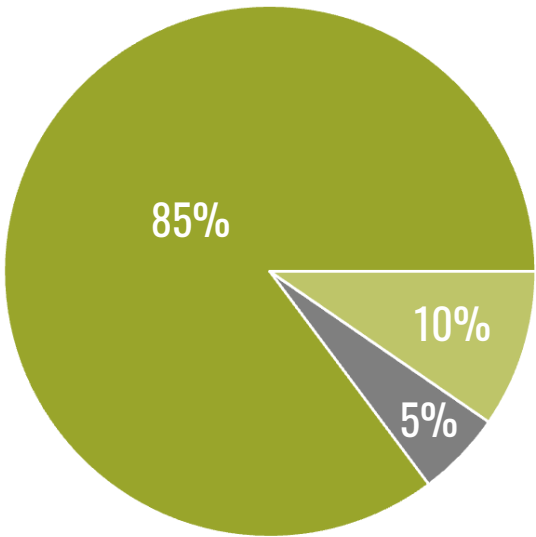
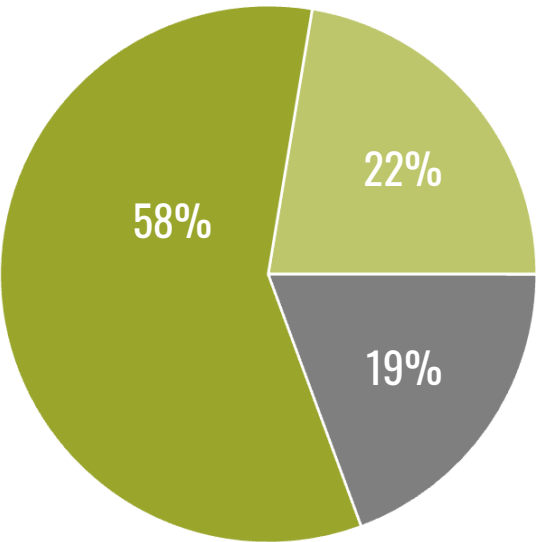
Grants	58%	\$3,449,100
Program Services	22%	\$1,324,541
Contributions	19%	\$1,146,014
Investment and Other Income	<1%	\$443

TOTAL **\$5,920,098**

EXPENSE

Program	85%	\$3,591,392
Administrative	10%	\$404,243
Fundraising	5%	\$219,527

TOTAL **\$4,215,162**



These amounts are from our audited 2022 financial statements. Net assets at 12/31/22 are \$6,375,365.

WAYS TO GIVE

We fight in court to defend the western U.S. on behalf of our clients free of charge, but we can't do it without your support. As a public interest law firm, we rely on charitable gifts from individuals, families, businesses, and foundations to achieve our mission. Your donation is tax-deductible as allowed by law. We have a variety of easy ways for you to donate and make a difference for public lands, wildlife, and communities across the western U.S.

KEYSTONE PARTNER MONTHLY GIVING PROGRAM: Automatic monthly gifts are convenient for you and provide us with reliable support year-round.

GIL F. STAENDER LEGACY CIRCLE: Name WELC in your will, trust, or other estate plans and leave a lasting legacy of Defending the West.

ASSETS: Gifts of stocks, bonds, and mutual funds.

CHARITABLE REMAINDER TRUSTS AND CHARITABLE GIFT ANNUITIES: Payments are made to beneficiaries during their lifetime and the remainder is added to our endowment fund.

We can receive donations from workplace giving, businesses, real estate, vehicle donations, tribute gifts, and more. Please contact Jenna Kloeppel, Development Director at (575) 305-3993 or jennak@westernlaw.org with questions or to learn more. We're happy to help and discuss options with you. We welcome gifts of all sizes. Thank you!

HELP DEFEND THE WEST AT [WESTERNLAW.ORG/DONATE](https://westernlaw.org/donate)



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*Not all staff and board are pictured

WELC is governed by a board of directors comprised of renowned attorneys, academics, and conservationists from across the country. Our team of staff members are based throughout the western U.S.

Photo: September 2023, Oregon Coast.





Western Environmental Law Center
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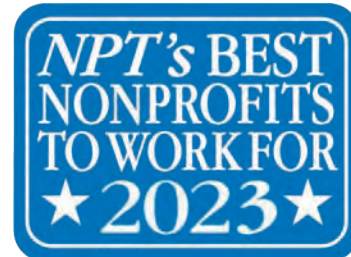
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WELC was also listed as an *Outside Magazine* Best Place to Work for the fifth year in a row. Guidestar is now known as Candid, and we again received their highest rating of Platinum.

When you donate to WELC, you can give with confidence knowing your gift will be used efficiently and effectively, and will have a true on-the-ground impact across the western U.S.

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