



**Western
Environmental
Law Center**

2024 ANNUAL REPORT



Together, we ensured wolverines got the Endangered Species Act protections they deserve, kept 40 billion tons of coal in the ground, and more.



DEAR FRIENDS,

We take this moment to extend our immense gratitude to all who support our mission and work at the Western Environmental Law Center. Over the past year, we have made steady progress to protect our public lands, from New Mexico to Montana to Oregon, safeguard imperiled wildlife who call the region home, and end our country's reckless dependence on fossil fuels to reckon with the climate crisis.

As we look ahead to build on the success we've achieved with your support, we know that the future is hotly contested.

Excessive, ill-considered development, a warming climate, and extreme ideologies that put our country's democracy at risk all present grave threats. We will counter these threats in the coming year with strategic fierceness. But know also that we will resolutely place one foot in front of the other to reach our vision: A thriving western U.S., abundant with protected and interconnected ecosystems, powered by renewable energy, and cared for by communities brought together in an ecology of kinship.

Walk with us.

Erik Schlenker-Goodrich, J.D.
Executive Director

Karin P. Sheldon, J.D.
Board President

Sristi Kamal, Ph.D.
Deputy Director

ECOLOGY OF KINSHIP

We are honing our legal conservation and environmental justice strategy in an exciting new framework we're calling Western Horizons. This framework will further our vision of a thriving West, abundant with protected and interconnected ecosystems, powered by renewable energy, and cared for by communities brought together in an ecology of kinship. That idea is rooted in our goal to restore and reconcile our relationships with each other and the world around us—not as a set of resources to exploit for human benefit, but as a system to nurture and grow so all elements thrive. This means caring for the land, water, air, flora, fauna, and communities—especially where environmental injustice exists—to bolster ecological and community resilience as we face some of humanity's greatest challenges.



WILDLIFE

We use our legal expertise to protect imperiled wildlife native to the West.

We defend wolverines, grizzly bears, wolves, salmon, steelhead, beavers, Canada lynx, northern spotted owls, and more.

VICTORY: WOLVERINES NOW PROTECTED UNDER THE ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT

WELC and our partners began sounding the alarm way back in 2005 about the need for federal action to help wolverine populations in the lower 48 states survive and recover. With each passing year, climate change more severely threatens the frosty habitat these animals need to survive. Science shows climate change may eliminate nearly two-thirds of the habitat needed by wolverines in the lower 48 states within 75 years.

Despite well-documented habitat loss from climate change, as well as trapping pressures on an already small population, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service repeatedly denied Endangered Species Act protections for about 300 wolverines that remain in the lower 48 states over the last 20 years. Each time the Service offered another negative decision, WELC attorneys, armed with wolverine-like tenacity, the best available science, and unrivaled legal expertise, took the Service to court—and won.

Our greatest victory came late last year when the Service finally agreed to settle our case and begin to fulfill its responsibility under the Endangered Species Act to help wolverines recover by listing *gulo gulo* as threatened with extinction in the lower 48 states.

Resulting from our multiple prior wins in federal courts, the Service prepared a mostly strong road map to finally step up and aid in wolverine recovery, granting specific protections for the species.

The agency will work to prepare a recovery plan for wolverines, identify protected critical habitat, and explore possible reintroduction to the species' historic habitat in Colorado. Wolverine and wolves coexisting in the wilds of Colorado could soon be a reality, with wolves reintroduced to the state about the same time as this win.

This marks a breakthrough for conservation efforts after years of political intervention by states such

as Idaho, Wyoming, and Montana that improperly outweighed the findings of wildlife biologists.

That said, more work to conserve wolverines in the lower 48 states still must be done. We are concerned about the agency allowing some trapping in wolverine habitat and we will stay involved in public processes to ensure trapping does not undermine recovery. If necessary, we will also litigate any decision to allow trapping in the few places still occupied by the species. Montana has also sent a notice of its intent to challenge the listing decision. We'll intervene to defend it, if need be.

Wolverines—a crucial species for many ecosystems in the West—deserve the fullest protections possible. Given their small population and climate change shrinking the snowy habitat they rely on to survive, time is of the essence.



DEFENDING WOLVES ACROSS THE WESTERN U.S.



Wolves belong, and we're doing everything we can to return gray and Mexican wolves to their rightful places in ecosystems and landscapes across the western U.S.

ADVOCATING FOR FEDERAL PROTECTION OF WESTERN WOLVES

For decades, gray wolf conservation in the northern Rocky Mountains has been difficult if not impossible, in part thanks to a legislative endangered species exemption for them in Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming. Recently, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service worsened this problem by creating a much larger West-wide management group and denying these wolves needed protections.

The agency claims there is no risk of extinction for wolves in the West either now or in the foreseeable future, but wolves in California and the Cascade Range of Oregon and Washington are far below minimum viable population thresholds. Utah, Nevada, and Arizona all have historic gray wolf range, but, no wolves at all today.

A wealth of scientific evidence supports enacting protections for western wolves, and we are bringing that into the courtroom in a lawsuit against the Service for its failure to aid in western wolf recovery.

VICTORY DEFENDING COLORADO WOLF REINTRODUCTION

We are proud to have played a role last winter defending gray wolf reintroduction in Colorado from a last-minute legal attack by the Gunnison County Stockgrowers' Association and Colorado Cattlemen's Association. After the state of Colorado bent over backward to accommodate agricultural groups in how reintroduction would be accomplished, the livestock groups sued to block the first release of wolves.

WELC intervened in the case, striking a decisive chord with the judge by demonstrating that in other states with hundreds or even thousands of wolves, predation affects mere fractions of a percent of total livestock populations.

The judge ruled in our favor, and the wolf releases went forward as planned. We look forward to seeing wolves retake their place in Colorado's landscapes and ecosystems.

SECURING AN EFFECTIVE MEXICAN WOLF MANAGEMENT PLAN

We are challenging the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's inadequate Mexican wolf management rule for falling short of recovery required under the Endangered Species Act.

The rule fails to promote 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 says the 200 Mexican wolves in the wild are "not essential" to recovery. They are the definition of essential because without them, there is no population to recover.

Additionally, we are in court 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.

SAFEGUARDING LYNX

Our legacy of fighting for Canada lynx recovery continues in northeastern Washington state, where we are challenging a 44,000-acre logging project in the Colville National Forest’s Kettle Range that would degrade a designated “core area” for lynx recovery over a period of 40 years. The U.S. Forest Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service say the large logging project in core lynx habitat is unlikely to adversely affect the big cat. With our lawsuit, we’re seeking to require the agencies to prove it by preparing in-depth analyses instead of just cutting the trees down and hoping for the best.

PROTECTING BEAVERS

Vast volumes of scientific literature inform us beavers can play critical ecosystem roles, but our policies treat them as a pest rather than a climate change ally. We have made progress at the Oregon legislature in promoting this keystone species, and as another legislative session approaches, we are seeking funding for beaver coexistence measures and to protect their habitats for water security. Coexistence and beaver-based restoration is also our priority at the federal level, and we are working with partners to urge our policymakers in Congress to fund beaver coexistence and habitat restoration as part of natural climate solutions.

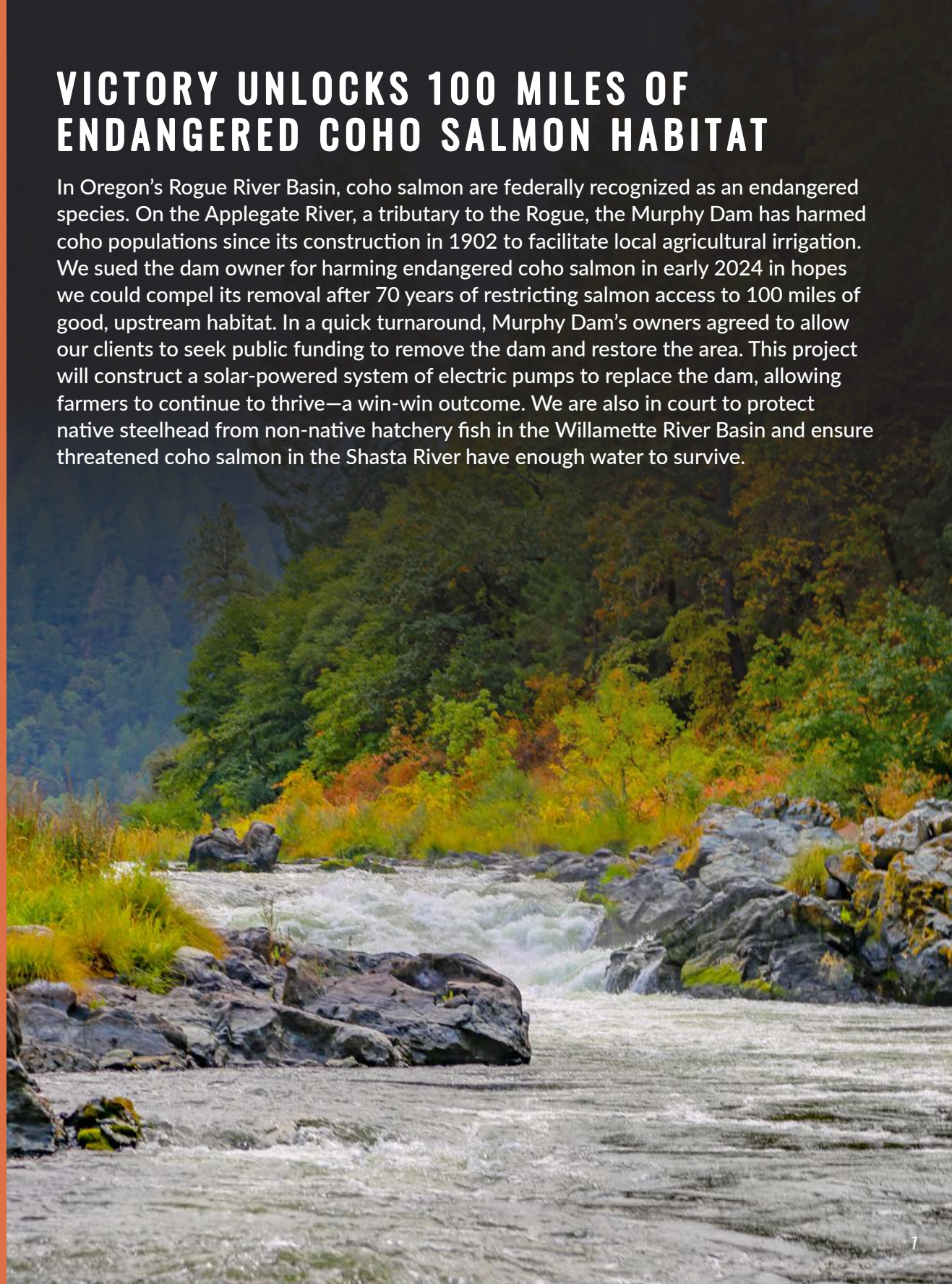
SONORAN DESERT TORTOISE PROTECTIONS

We are preparing to take legal action against the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service over its decision to deny the Sonoran desert tortoise endangered species protections. The population and habitat models the Service used to inform its decision were faulty and the agency failed to consider climate change impacts, habitat loss from development, off-road vehicle use, and livestock grazing. The decision was also flawed from the start because it relied on a speculative and overly optimistic population estimate. We’re all about positive thinking, but the precautionary principle surpasses all when it comes to preventing extinction.



VICTORY UNLOCKS 100 MILES OF ENDANGERED COHO SALMON HABITAT

In Oregon’s Rogue River Basin, coho salmon are federally recognized as an endangered species. On the Applegate River, a tributary to the Rogue, the Murphy Dam has harmed coho populations since its construction in 1902 to facilitate local agricultural irrigation. We sued the dam owner for harming endangered coho salmon in early 2024 in hopes we could compel its removal after 70 years of restricting salmon access to 100 miles of good, upstream habitat. In a quick turnaround, Murphy Dam’s owners agreed to allow our clients to seek public funding to remove the dam and restore the area. This project will construct a solar-powered system of electric pumps to replace the dam, allowing farmers to continue to thrive—a win-win outcome. We are also in court to protect native steelhead from non-native hatchery fish in the Willamette River Basin and ensure threatened coho salmon in the Shasta River have enough water to survive.



LEADING GRIZZLY BEAR RECOVERY THROUGHOUT THE WEST

For 10 years, WELC has worked strategically to restore grizzly bears in the West. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has repeatedly attempted to remove endangered species protection for grizzly bears in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, claiming the bears have sufficiently recovered, despite scientific studies to the contrary. We anticipate another delisting effort from the agency in 2025 for the Greater Yellowstone and Northern Continental Divide populations, which we will challenge.

Those bears are crucial to helping the other segmented grizzly populations across the West recover. When top predators are reduced in or removed entirely from an environment, cascading effects can throw the natural order into disarray. The grizzly bear is one of these linchpins of our region.

But delisting is not the only threat to grizzly bear recovery in the West. Federal decisionmaking about when and where to allow trapping, livestock grazing, roadbuilding for logging projects, lethal bear removal, and private train operations all have impeded grizzly bear recovery. We are taking legal action to protect recovering grizzly bear populations from each of these threats.

Just north of Yellowstone National Park, the U.S. Forest Service authorized expanded livestock grazing in designated grizzly recovery zones and within important habitat linkages for bears in the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness. The agency increased both the area and the season for grazing, placing the bears at higher risk of being killed to resolve cattle conflicts. We are challenging this decision that hinders threatened grizzly bear recovery in this critical region.

In the Northern Continental Divide and Cabinet-Yaak grizzly bear recovery zones in Montana and Idaho, trains operated by Burlington Northern Railway Company (BNSF) and others have killed 63 threatened grizzly bears between 2008 and 2023. BNSF has yet to obtain an approved habitat conservation plan to minimize conflicts—and prevent grizzly bear deaths. We are taking the company to court, seeking to force it to adopt the most protective practices possible to protect grizzly bears from being killed by its trains.

Also in Montana, we are challenging notorious U.S. Department of Agriculture wildlife-killing program Wildlife Services for failing to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act when killing or removing grizzly bears. Management killing and

removal is the leading cause of grizzly bear mortality, yet the program does not analyze how its killing affects the broader grizzly bear population as it moves toward establishing natural connectivity between recovery zones.

Our approach to grizzly advocacy first maintains the iconic bears' endangered species protections scientists agree are necessary for their recovery. We restored those protections in 2020. This critical lever underpins our strategy for site-specific advocacy. Our two-tiered method has led to real recovery gains, and we are committed to defending grizzly bears throughout the West as outside forces continue to present new challenges in this fight.

Our strategic approach to grizzly bear advocacy comprehensively defends major protections while rooting out localized threats to recovery.

CLIMATE

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 our region.

We are committed to hastening the end of coal—the dirtiest energy source on Earth.

VICTORY KEEPS 48 BILLION TONS OF COAL IN THE GROUND

WELC and our partners have successfully fought Powder River Basin coal mining in a string of major court victories dating back to 2016 to protect public health, clean water, and the climate. The region, which stretches more than 13 million acres across Montana and Wyoming, is ground zero in the U.S. for the dirtiest fuel source on Earth, producing more than 43% of all coal nationally, and over 85% of all federal coal.

Powder River Basin coal is the largest single source of carbon dioxide pollution in the nation, and the remaining coal-fired power plants in the U.S. increasingly rely on this coal because it is the largest domestic source of coal that helps plants meet air quality standards. The U.S. Geological Survey calls it the most important coal basin in the country.

Most recently, we won a case in 2022 invalidating two resource management plans—for a second time—that failed to address the public health consequences

of allowing massive amounts of coal production from public lands and minerals in the region over 20 years. Our legal advocacy resulted in a court order for the Bureau of Land Management to rewrite its resource management plans.

In redoing the plans, the Biden administration in May announced it will end coal leasing in the Powder River Basin, keeping 48 billion tons of dirty coal—the “high-use” estimate of coal available for mining—in the ground and uncombusted.

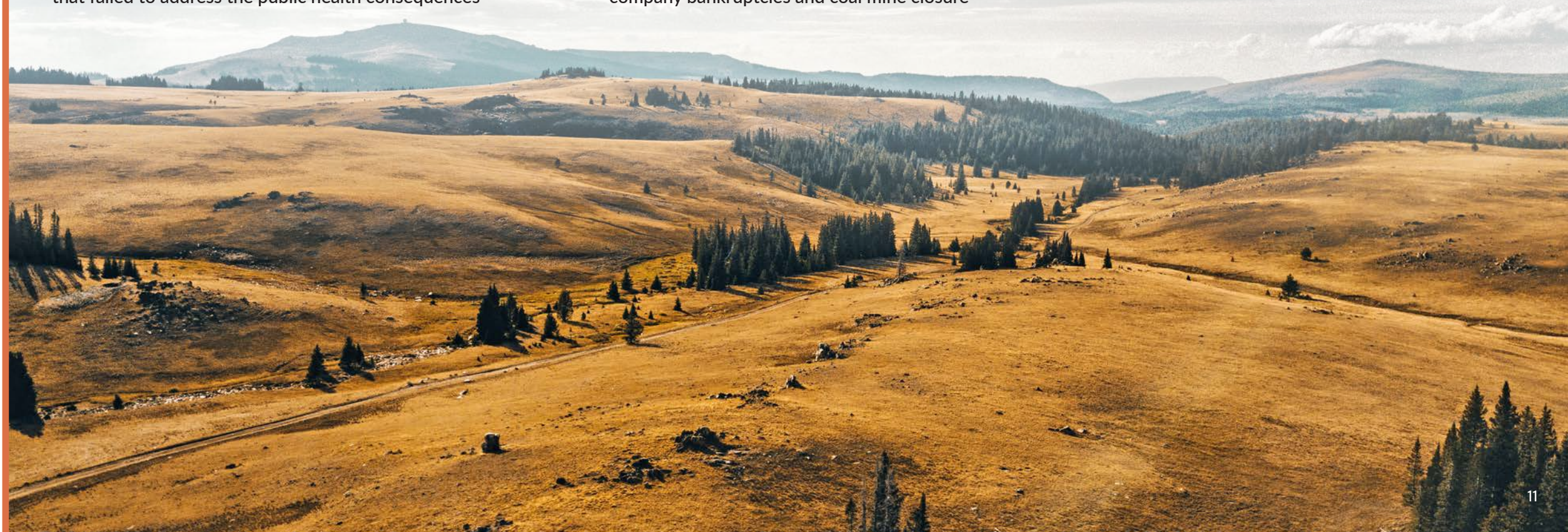
When burned, every ton of coal creates 4,172 pounds of carbon dioxide, meaning this victory kept more than 100 billion tons of carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere. To put that into context, in 2022, global fossil fuel combustion emitted a total of 40 billion tons of carbon dioxide. Coal mining has declined steadily since peak regional production in 2008. The no-new-leasing decision follows numerous company bankruptcies and coal mine closure

announcements, and currently only a handful of coal lease applications are pending in the region—all of which have been delayed for years at the request of coal companies.

In addition to this astounding success, we are also turning the screws on Signal Peak Energy, which operates the largest underground coal mine in the nation: Montana’s Bull Mountains coal mine.

In years past, our successful legal advocacy has on two occasions blocked enormous expansions at the mine when the federal government cut corners on its environmental analyses.

With the current injunction on federal coal in place for the time being, Signal Peak has turned its attention to expanding operations on state-permitted lands. We are gearing up to fight a proposed 12.7-million-ton expansion of the mine recently permitted by the state of Montana.



VICTORY MODERNIZING BEDROCK ENVIRONMENTAL LAW FOR ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AND A JUST TRANSITION

The Trump administration severely damaged rules governing the implementation of perhaps the nation's most crucial environmental and community protection law—the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The Biden administration committed to repairing this damage, and WELC joined a coalition of 90 groups to provide guidance for not only fixing the new problems, but also modernizing NEPA implementation to advance environmental justice and promote climate-smart policies. Rules finalized this year will accelerate the buildout of wind, solar, battery storage, and electrical transmission. They will also help environmental justice communities play a meaningful role in righting past wrongs and contribute their insight to shape climate action. These rules are the definition of public interest policy and will provide a brighter future for all. We are proud to have helped steer these important updates in the right direction.

VICTORY DEFEATING OIL & GAS GIVEAWAY IN NEW MEXICO

In New Mexico's most recent legislative session, the oil and gas industry secretly introduced a tax loophole that would have effectively forced taxpayers to pay low-producing, high-polluting oil well operators' costs to comply with air pollution rules, including those to protect communities from venting fracked gas directly to the atmosphere, and flaring—burning it off unused. We successfully lobbied the governor to veto this unnecessary and unsound tax giveaway. This veto helped dispel the myth that low-producing wells are run by struggling small businesses, when more than half of these wells belong to major oil and gas companies in New Mexico.

FIGHTING OIL AND GAS DEVELOPMENT IN COLORADO

Due to our successful litigation, the Bureau of Land Management is reworking its 20-year resource management plan in Colorado's Western Slope, covering 1.64 million acres including the San Juan Mountains and North Fork Valley. The plan will determine whether and where to allow oil and gas development, how to minimize fracking harm to Gunnison sage grouse and big game, and shape management of lands with wilderness traits. Yet the plan omits 560,000 acres of federal mineral estate underlying Forest Service lands, which the Bureau erroneously claims it has no authority over. We are demanding the Bureau prevent undue degradation of the full 2.2-million-acre planning area.

DEFENDING FEDERAL OIL AND GAS FISCAL REFORMS

This year, the Biden administration finalized the first comprehensive update to oil and gas regulations in nearly 40 years. While these rules could have—and should have—done more to address climate harms, they provide much-needed fiscal reforms. Bonding adjustments will help address the growing, nationwide epidemic of leaving millions of abandoned oil and gas wells un-plugged and emitting methane and other pollutants into the atmosphere. Cost estimates to plug the backlog of abandoned wells range up to \$19 billion on federal lands. Preferring to have taxpayers pay their business expenses, the fossil fuel industry sued over the changes, and we took legal action to defend these fiscal reforms.

FIGHTING AN \$8 BILLION OIL AND GAS CLEANUP GAP

The oil and gas industry has systematically exploited inadequate bonding requirements for decades in New Mexico. Bonding requires oil and gas companies to set aside money for cleaning up and plugging out-of-use wells. Taxpayers often pay to clean up and plug abandoned oil and gas wells, and the State Land Office estimates the cost of this work is over \$8 billion—and growing. We petitioned the state Oil Conservation Commission to modernize oil and gas bonding, cleanup, and well transfer requirements to address this costly and dangerous pollution problem. An overwhelming 90% of New Mexicans support requiring industry, and not taxpayers, to bear these costs.



DEFENDING YOUTHS' CLIMATE RIGHTS IN MONTANA

This summer, we had the honor of defending before the Montana Supreme Court our historic *Held v. Montana* victory from 2023 guaranteeing our youth plaintiffs' rights to a "clean and healthful environment," including a livable climate. The state of Montana, which has for decades promoted climate-harming fossil fuel development while stifling renewable energy, appealed our victory. In state court, we proved our youth clients have suffered financial loss, health challenges, and anxiety as a result, with powerful testimony from the youths themselves as well as global climate experts. We are hopeful the Montana Supreme Court will uphold our victory, reaffirming Montanans' constitutional rights.

PROTECTING COAL COUNTRY FROM RUSHED REVIEWS

In 2023, a WELC victory halted a proposed 175-million-ton expansion at the Bull Mountains coal mine in Montana because the federal government failed to adequately analyze and disclose the mine's climate impacts. The mine operators sued the government in an effort to force a rushed redo of its environmental review. We asked the court to dismiss the lawsuit because the new, sensible deadline established in the 2023 Fiscal Responsibility Act would not pass for another seven months. In the first ruling on these new National Environmental Policy Act provisions, the court dismissed the case, establishing good precedent. We are relieved the court rejected this coal company's unreasonable demands in one of the first decisions analyzing these amendments.

VICTORY PROTECTING WATER FROM MONTANA COAL MINE

WELC and our partners notched a major victory for clean water in Montana when we defeated a permit that would have allowed the Rosebud Coal Mine near Colstrip to pollute the east fork of Armells Creek, already deemed "impaired," for decades to centuries. The Montana Department of Environmental Quality and Board of Environmental Review failed to consider the mine's impact on water quality and wrongly refused to consider evidence from conservation groups. This is not the first time these state regulators have acted on behalf of polluting industries, and it will not be the last. WELC will continue to hold these bad state actors accountable to the law.

STANDING UP FOR RATEPAYERS AND THE CLIMATE

In Montana, monopoly utility NorthWestern Energy is seeking a substantial increase in electric rates for residential and small business customers to pay for its imprudent investments in fossil fuels. The company built a \$320 million gas power plant and acquired majority ownership in the coal-fired Colstrip Power Plant. The company used misleading accounting to estimate an 8.3% rate increase, but that number is closer to 26%. NorthWestern Energy is unabashedly doubling down on expensive fossil fuels to the detriment of Montana ratepayers and the climate. We have intervened to oppose these rate increases and shine a light on NorthWestern's shady accounting methods, which consistently overvalue fossil-fuel powered resources and undervalue renewables.

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 West such an enchanting part of the country.

This year marks the 31st 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 2023 and 2024, our clinic students aided ongoing work in Montana, Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico, and Oregon. We also have a summer legal internship program open to law students from any school. Our interns are supervised by a local WELC staff attorney and work in all aspects of case development and litigation including legal research, litigation strategy, client relationships, and document drafting.

We currently 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 marks the second for Michelle Hoge (University of Washington '22) and Karli Uwaine (Lewis & Clark '23).

WILDLANDS

WELC is a strong advocate for the natural heritage of the West, rooted in wildlands, rivers, forests, and wildlife.

We take on cases and perform advocacy to safeguard national forests, protected lands, clean rivers, and more.

VICTORY PROTECTING SONORAN DESERT NATIONAL MONUMENT FROM SHOOTING

For more than a decade, we have fought a Bureau of Land Management policy allowing recreational target shooting in Arizona's Sonoran Desert National Monument. The monument is one of the most biologically diverse areas of the North American desert, home to large saguaro cactus forests and three wilderness mountain ranges that provide excellent habitat for a wide range of wildlife species including big horn sheep, endangered Sonoran pronghorn, and desert tortoises. Perhaps most precious, the monument also contains significant archaeological and historical Native American sites.

WELC staff have personally documented shooting damage in the park, as well as extensive litter and debris shooters have left behind.

In 2011, the Bureau itself studied what effects allowing recreational shooting would have on the park, determining that the activity was inappropriate anywhere within its borders.

Under intense pressure from the NRA, the agency instead issued a decision allowing shooting in 100% of the monument.

We sued and won, securing a court order forcing the Bureau to reevaluate its policy.

The agency later issued a decision allowing shooting in 90% of Sonoran Desert National Monument, thinking it would satisfy people who, like us, were concerned with public safety and damage to irreplaceable resources.

We challenged that decision as well, securing an agreement under which the agency would consider protecting designated wilderness and lands with wilderness characteristics, the Indigenous Kumatke Trail and a buffer, and other special places within the monument. Under the agreement, the Bureau would also revise its shooting policy.

Thanks to the persistent efforts of our legal experts, in 2024, the Bureau closed 99% of the Sonoran Desert National Monument to shooting, ending the barrage of bullets on some 480,496 acres.

After two rounds of successful litigation, this marks a huge victory not only for the Sonoran Desert National Monument and the public, but also the local Arizona officials who spent years carefully documenting and analyzing the impacts of target shooting on these ecologically sensitive areas abundant with Indigenous cultural sites.

There are plenty of places in Arizona to recreationally target shoot without harming important resources and visitor safety.

The Bureau finally made the right call, and we will ensure this decision survives any legal challenges.



DEFENDING LANDMARK PUBLIC LANDS RULE ELEVATING CONSERVATION

WELC’s legal experts have pressured the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) for decades to fulfill its duty to prevent “unnecessary or undue degradation” to public lands from extractive uses. This summer, the agency showed it heard the conservation community by issuing new rules for the first time recognizing conservation as a “multiple use” for consideration alongside fracking, logging, mining, and other categories. Because the BLM oversees 245 million acres of public lands, this change represents an important shift in the federal mindset and may prove a valuable new tool to protect special places and resources across the West. Unfortunately, certain states and industries have brought three lawsuits against the rule. WELC and our partners have filed in all three cases to intervene in defense of this common-sense modernization to protect public lands, which must serve as a cornerstone of ecological and community resilience as we take on the worsening effects of climate change.



PROTECTING THE YELLOWSTONE RIVER

We are fighting for cleaner water in the iconic Yellowstone River—the longest free-flowing river in the contiguous U.S. The Montana Department of Environmental Quality has historically rubber-stamped permits for the Laurel Oil Refinery to discharge arsenic and other pollutants into the Yellowstone River upstream from Montana’s largest population center in Billings. The refinery has dodged enforceable arsenic discharge limits for nearly a decade. The lack of enforcement by the agency when the refinery violates its already weak permit undermines its duty to protect water quality from harmful pollution. Studies have shown the Yellowstone River is at major risk, and addressing this pollution is crucial.

CHALLENGING LOGGING IN OWL HABITAT

We know habitat loss is a primary cause of the northern spotted owl’s extremely high extinction risk, but the Trump U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service still approved a 50-year permit for the wealthy Sierra Pacific Industries to destroy its mature and old-growth forest habitat. Even as the spotted owl population continues to decline, the Service signed off on the company’s wish list, trading tried-and-true conservation practices for new, untested, and weak conservation measures, signing death warrants for over 100 northern spotted owls and relinquishing the agency’s authority to require any more meaningful guardrails for another 50 years. We are challenging this unconscionable permit in federal court.

CHALLENGING MATURE FOREST LOGGING

We are challenging the Bureau of Land Management’s (BLM) N126 Late Successional Reserve Landscape Plan Project near Eugene, one of the largest logging proposals for Oregon’s public lands in decades. At least three threatened species live within the logging area, including northern spotted owl, marbled murrelet, and coho salmon. BLM ignored any ill effects this proposed logging might impose on these creatures despite Endangered Species Act requirements to do so. The agency purposely suppressed public review of the massive logging project, promising to reveal everything once the project is completed and these large trees are just a memory. Transparency and endangered species concerns aside, logging mature forest is highly objectionable.

FIGHTING CLEARCUTTING NEAR YELLOWSTONE

With our partners, we are taking legal action against a proposed 15-year, 40,000-acre logging project adjacent to Yellowstone National Park. The South Plateau Landscape Area Treatment Project would clearcut more than 5,500 acres and log another 6,600 acres of mature forests, hindering threatened grizzly bear recovery. Alarmingly, the project would also build more than 56 miles of roads, fragmenting habitat wildlife depend on for connectivity. This area is already considered a population sink for bears, where mortality is too high and habitat security too low. A win here would require the U.S. Forest Service to take a hard look at the environmental consequences of the project and—we hope—change course.

FIGHTING FOR CLEAN WATER IN NEW MEXICO

When the U.S. Supreme Court drastically rolled back the Clean Water Act in 2023, over 90% of New Mexico's rivers, streams, and wetlands lost their essential protections with the stroke of a pen. The decision arguably harmed New Mexico the most of all states because where others have a state-level backstop, New Mexico relied wholly on federal water quality protections. The situation is so dire American Rivers named *all* of New Mexico's rivers as the most endangered rivers nationwide in its annual list. The good news is our experts are working tirelessly to create a replacement for these lost water protections, and the state legislature has provided funding for this effort. We are also fully engaged in a state Water Quality Control Commission decisionmaking process about whether to allow the oil and gas industry to sell toxic fracking wastewater for reuse in the state. We aim to ban the discharge of this waste to surface and groundwater throughout New Mexico.

Climate-caused aridification is creating new water challenges throughout the West. WELC is focused on ensuring the communities, wildlife, and wildlands of the west have clean, ample water supplies.

REFORMING INDUSTRIAL AG POLLUTION RULES

In Washington state, the Department of Ecology has for decades operated a woefully inadequate permitting program allowing industrial agriculture operations to discharge pollution that has created a water quality emergency in Puget Sound and harmed inland waterways. We won a case forcing the department to rewrite its permits, but the agency's attempt did little to protect Washington's waters. In a rare about-face, the department later admitted its proposed changes must be strengthened. Now, we find ourselves in a favorable negotiating position for a positive settlement that could begin to undo many decades of damage from lax water regulations for factory farms in the state.

VICTORY PRESERVING CLEAN WATER ACT RIGHTS

This year, we ventured outside the West to take on a special Clean Water Act case with broad-reaching implications. The state of Maine denied certification for last-minute changes to a permit application for the Shawmut Hydroelectric Project on the Kennebec River that operators did not prove would comply with state water quality laws and may have harmed threatened Atlantic salmon. States' and Tribes' authority to reject projects that do not comply with their laws is extremely important for conservation, and we intervened to ensure the courts did not erode the two-party certification process. Happily, the court made the right call, preserving an important facet of the Clean Water Act.

FIGHTING CYANIDE POLLUTION IN PUGET SOUND

In response to legal action from WELC and our partners, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is finally addressing cyanide pollution in Washington state that has harmed orcas, salmon, steelhead, and bull trout. Since 1993, the EPA has repeatedly approved water quality standards for cyanide pollution set by Washington state's Department of Ecology without analyzing how those lax standards harm endangered and threatened species. Because of the EPA's failure, the state has relied on outdated and inadequate cyanide standards when issuing permits to facilities asking to discharge cyanide. Now, EPA will update those standards to better protect imperiled orcas, salmon, and trout.

PROTECTING CLEAN WATER NEAR LOS ALAMOS

Ten years ago, we notified the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) of extremely high urban stormwater pollution from PCBs, copper, zinc, nickel, and gross alpha radiation in Los Alamos County, some at levels more than 10,000 times public safety limits. In 2017, we took legal action against the agency for doing nothing. The EPA has finally issued a decision that this pollution violates water quality standards and these discharges require a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permit under the Clean Water Act. We are pleased EPA has taken this important step to protect the communities that depend on clean water from the Pajarito Plateau for drinking, recreation, and ceremonial purposes.

PARTNERS AND CLIENTS

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
Bull Mountains Land Alliance
California Sportfishing Protection Alliance
California Trout
CalUWild
Carbon Tracker
Cascadia Wildlands
Center for Asset Retirement
Accountability
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
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
Diné 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
Families for a Livable Climate
Footloose Montana
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
Gallatin Valley Sunrise
Gallatin Wildlife Association
George Wuerthner
Grand Canyon Trust
Grand Canyon Wildlands Council
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
Interfaith Power and Light
Kettle Range Conservation Group
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
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Responsibility
New Mexico Wilderness Alliance
Northern Plains Resource Council
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Physicians for Social Responsibility
Powder River Basin Resource Council
Public Justice
Public Land and Water Access

Pueblo Action Alliance
Puget Soundkeeper Alliance
RE Sources for Sustainable Communities
Renewable Northwest
Rico Trails Alliance
Rio Arriba Concerned Citizens
Rocky Mountain Wild
San Juan Citizens Alliance
Sheep Mountain Alliance
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Sierra Club - Grand Canyon Chapter
Sierra Club - Mother Lode Chapter
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Sky Island Alliance
Skyline Sportsmen's Alliance
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The Wilderness Society
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Tó Nizhóní Ání
U.S. Climate Plan
Upper Green River Alliance
Upper Missouri Breaks Audubon Society
Washington Conservation Action
Waterkeeper Alliance
WaterWatch of Oregon
Western Colorado Congress
Western Organization of Resource
Councils
Western Resource Advocates
Western Watersheds Project
What's Upstream
WildEarth Guardians
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Wildlands Network
Willamette Riverkeeper
Wyoming Outdoor Council
Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society
Yurok Tribe
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350 New Mexico
350 Santa Fe

We represented, partnered with, and worked alongside more than 155 clients and partners this year. Our clients and partners include community-led groups, small nonprofit organizations, large national groups, Tribes, youths, adults, and more. We are proud to Defend the West with all of you.

THANK YOU

As a public interest law firm, we do not charge clients and partners for services, but rely instead on charitable gifts from people like you. Your donations make a lasting difference for the wildlands, wildlife, and communities of the West—thank you.

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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!

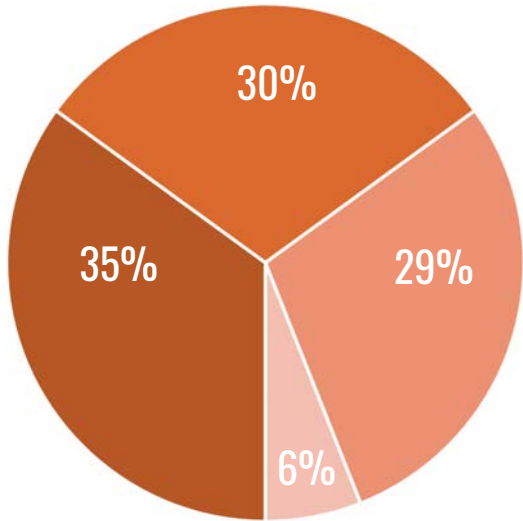
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FINANCIAL REPORT

REVENUES

Grants	35%	\$1,367,500
Program Services	30%	\$1,194,743
Contributions	29%	\$1,121,728
Investment and Other Income	6%	\$228,001

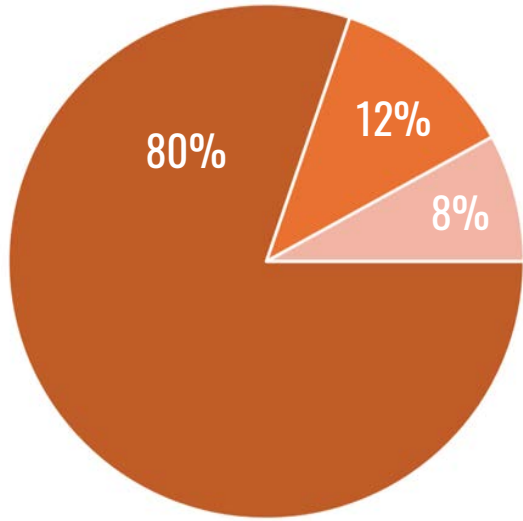
TOTAL \$3,911,972



EXPENSES

Program	80%	\$3,670,554
Management/General	12%	\$536,306
Fundraising	8%	\$367,204

TOTAL \$4,574,064



These amounts are from our audited 2023 financial statements. Net assets at 12/31/23 are \$5,713,273.

WELC is governed by a board of directors comprised of renowned attorneys, academics, and conservationists from across the country. Our team of staff live and work throughout the West.

Photo: September 2024, Oregon Coast.



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