



Western
Environmental
Law Center

2025 ANNUAL REPORT



This year, we won a major victory for western wolves, one of the most important keystone species in the region. Read more inside about the wins and impact you make possible.

EMERGENT HORIZONS

At WELC, we work every day toward 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.

We are experiencing a collision of political, social, economic, and ecological crises such that we find ourselves, as Dougald Hine writes, “at work in the ruins.” This is a provocative and sobering realization. But it provides a clarity essential to apply our collective experience, skill, and capacity toward diagnosing the root causes of these crises and crafting enduring strategies in service of our mission. We are clear-eyed about the challenges, but choose to see opportunities in this upheaval to diagnose and remedy the root causes of these crises through high-impact strategies that sustain a just transition, ensure the West’s iconic landscapes are protected, and mandate that federal agencies serve the public interest. Because of your enduring support, we are confident that we will emerge from this storm stronger, fiercer, and more capable than ever.

DEAR FRIENDS,



If there’s one lesson we’ve learned from the past year, it’s this: We are not alone.

We stand together with you and the wild world against the despotism and exploitation that rages around us. It is this solidarity that powers our shared purpose and strength to fight ever harder in the ruins of our country’s democracy for the lands, waters, wildlife, and communities of the West that we love.

With your support, we’ve done that over the course of the past year. We’ve compelled federal agencies to fulfill their responsibilities to safeguard imperiled wolves and grizzly bears. We’ve worked in coalitions to pass legislation protecting Oregon and New Mexico’s watersheds. And we’ve stood tall, time and time again, against the ravages of fossil fuel extraction on public lands and communities.

As we’ve fought in these ruins, we’ve done so with an eye to emergent horizons—a time and place where we can reimagine and revitalize bedrock environmental laws to bring to life our vision of a thriving, resilient West. The path to these horizons may seem impossible right now, but we are reminded of Rumi’s teaching: “As you start to walk on the way, the way appears.”

We urge you, as you review our progress, to look toward these horizons and walk toward them with us. Together, we will prevail.

Erik Schlenker-Goodrich, J.D.
Executive Director

Karin P. Sheldon, J.D.
Board President

Sristi Kamal, Ph.D.
Deputy Director



WILDLIFE

We use our legal expertise to protect imperiled, native Western wildlife.

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

WOLVES BELONG: HUGE VICTORY FOR WESTERN WOLVES

Like so many of our supporters and friends, we love wolves. WELC staff were fortunate to encounter seven gray wolves in the Lamar Valley of Yellowstone National Park just this year. Thirty years after the first wolves were reintroduced to the park, we sat in the original enclosures used to habituate wolves to their new home before their release and contemplated how close they came to completely disappearing from the western landscapes we hold so dear. That very same day, our attorneys were in court fighting—successfully as we found out when the court later ruled—for western wolves.

What would these hills and mountains be without wolves' dark silhouettes hugging a tree line, or absent their endlessly fascinating liaisons with the burly bison they share the land with today? These places would be far less wondrous—and decidedly less wild.

We need “teeth in the landscape,” as author Doug Chadwick wrote. Those teeth—belonging to wolves and other carnivores—keep ecosystems in balance,

even as humanity upsets the scales ever more each day. That's why we work hard day in and day out to hold federal wildlife managers accountable to their duty to conserve and restore wolves and other native wildlife across the West.

When the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service declined to provide Endangered Species Act protections for western wolves, we took action. Armed with the power of the law, we challenged that decision, alongside 10 conservation partners. We knew the agency had failed, and in August the courts agreed with our legal reasoning—an enormous victory for wolves over bad science and hostile management.

The court ordered the Service to reanalyze threats to western wolves in accordance with the requirements of the Endangered Species Act. The court specifically noted the agency failed to consider key scientific factors essential to western wolf conservation and recovery, including the species' lost historic range, Colorado's role as a significant portion of

the wolves' range, poaching of wolves across the West, threats to wolves on the West Coast, impacts to their connectivity, and the effects of aggressive state agency-led killings in the Northern Rockies region. After the oral argument mentioned above, the court ruled that the Service failed to apply the best available science and relied on false promises from hostile states as well as inadequate state and federal regulatory conservation mechanisms.

The science is clear: Wolves have yet to recover across the West. Allowing a few states to undertake aggressive wolf-killing regimes is thus inconsistent with the law. We certainly do not have faith in the current administration to adhere to science—it has not done so to date. But we do have faith in our tenacity to hold them accountable to the law. As the Service reevaluates its decision regarding Endangered Species Act protections and prepares a new approach, we stand ready to defend western wolves from the most dangerous predators of all—again if need be.



VICTORY FOR BEAVERS AND RIVERS IN OREGON

Oregon’s 2025 legislative session united Beaver Believers and water advocates toward a common goal: restoring over 106,000 miles of struggling rivers and streams. The Beaver State has the most miles of impaired waterways nationwide due to sedimentation, high water temperatures, and low dissolved oxygen. Expensive solutions for analysis and remediation have proven impossible to implement at the scale demanded. Fortunately, decades of scientific evidence show the effectiveness of beaver dam complexes in addressing these challenges. Championed by WELC, HB 3932 proposed the affordable, low-tech strategy of supporting natural recovery solutions by closing beaver hunting and trapping in impaired waterways on public lands. The main idea? Give beavers space and time to use their ecosystem engineering talents in places that need it most. In partnership with the Oregon Wildlife Coalition, partner groups, and scientific experts, HB 3932 is now state law—an innovative, encouraging win for Oregon beavers, waterways, and communities.



CHECK OUT OUR NEW PODCAST AND STORE



Looking for a fun way to learn more about how we protect wildlife, wildlands, and communities? What about hearing from the people we partner with to make a difference across the West?

The Stories of Kinship podcast shares key updates as we work toward our vision, connecting our efforts across subject matter, state lines, and community voices. Along the way, we share ideas to inspire hope and meaningful action in these chaotic times. Hosted by WELC’s Suze Wehr, each episode features guests in the world of environmental advocacy, from our own staff attorneys to friends and partners across this field.

If you liked reading about beavers here, learn more by listening to our episode featuring WELC Deputy Director Sristi Kamal and Ben Goldfarb, author of *Eager: The Surprising, Secret Life of Beavers and Why They Matter*. You can also subscribe to this podcast to be notified as new episodes are available.



Use this QR code or search “Stories of Kinship” on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, or Substack to listen and subscribe today!



You can also share your Beaver Believer status with everyone by wearing a Build a Better World shirt from WELC’s new web store! All the designs come courtesy of our resident artist, Suze Wehr. Check out our Western Horizons store on Bonfire to make a purchase that helps us defend the West!

www.bonfire.com/store/western-horizons



PROTECTING GRIZZLY BEARS ACROSS THE WEST: SIGNIFICANT WINS AND ONGOING ADVOCACY



Grizzly bears play key roles in the landscapes that define the West. WELC’s strategic legal advocacy aims to help ensure grizzlies’ strong recovery.

VICTORY SAFEGUARDING GRIZZLY BEARS IN GREATER YELLOWSTONE

Our legal advocacy restored protections for Greater Yellowstone grizzly bears in 2018. This important victory allows us to sustain efforts to conserve and recover this western icon even as it faces its highest mortality year yet in 2025. Climate change has diminished the bears’ food and water supplies that, in turn, have increased human-bear conflicts. A federal plan to extend the livestock grazing season and range adjacent to Yellowstone National Park in the Absaroka Mountains’ Paradise Valley only exacerbated these challenges, compelling us to action. Through hard work and savvy lawyering, we challenged this plan in federal court and won, keeping livestock out of key grizzly recovery zones, reducing the potential for conflict.

VICTORY PROTECTING GRIZZLY BEARS FROM TRAIN COLLISIONS

Grizzly bears in the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem recovery zone in Montana have faced a formidable foe in their recovery journey: train strikes.

On 206 miles of tracks, trains have caused the deaths of 75 bears between 1975 and 2023.

We challenged BNSF Railway Company for its failure to address this problem. This year, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service approved a plan that will reduce avoidable grizzly strikes with the company quickly removing grain spills, repairing leaking cars, managing vegetation, and protecting tracks from livestock. BNSF will also fund three new grizzly technicians to reduce human-grizzly conflicts in the area.

VICTORY DEFENDING GRIZZLIES FROM WILDLIFE SERVICES IN MONTANA

Wildlife “management” killing and removal is the leading cause of grizzly bear mortality in the U.S. In Montana, federal wildlife-killing program Wildlife Services is notorious for its aggressive use of lethal removal of grizzly bears and other wildlife. Late last year, we won a case against Wildlife Services for failing to take a hard look at the consequences of its aggressive grizzly bear killing regime. One harmful impact is the impediment of grizzly connectivity between recovery zones, which scientists agree is key to the bears’ recovery. Thanks to our victory, Wildlife Services must thoroughly analyze the science, which casts doubt on the effectiveness of lethal grizzly removal, and provides breathing room for long-range conservation and recovery action.

GRIZZLY BEARS RETAIN ENDANGERED SPECIES PROTECTIONS IN WESTERN STATES

Early in 2025, the Biden administration denied petitions from Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming to eliminate Endangered Species Act protections for grizzlies. Scientific research clearly shows grizzlies have not yet recovered. We provided expert comments on why threatened grizzlies still need protections, which emphasized that when they were briefly and unlawfully removed, Wyoming and Idaho hastily organized trophy hunts near Yellowstone.

Thankfully, those hunts never took place due to a WELC court victory, but the states’ eagerness to enact brutal “management” programs shows these hostile jurisdictions cannot manage grizzly bears for recovery, and federal agencies must retain authority.

VICTORY PROTECTING LYNX FROM LOGGING IN WASHINGTON STATE

Early this year, our legal advocacy resulted in vital improvements to a federal logging plan in important lynx habitat in the Kettle River Mountains of northeast Washington. Our legal agreement with the U.S. Forest Service protects this habitat in the Colville National Forest and modifies the project to protect lynx habitat and other key ecological values in the area. The federal government is required to protect and recover imperiled species such as the Canada lynx, and to “look before it leaps” when authorizing actions that may impede their recovery. When the Service proposed this logging, the agency failed to meet either requirement. Our legal agreement not only benefits threatened lynx, in part by reestablishing protective lynx analysis unit boundaries—it also protects vital national forest parcels and maintains 40% or more forest canopy in riparian areas critical for lynx forage, travel, seclusion, and breeding habitat.



VICTORY PROTECTING OREGON STEELHEAD TROUT

Native winter steelhead trout in Oregon’s upper Willamette River basin are threatened with extinction. Yet the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers allows its hatcheries to produce and release non-native summer steelhead into the North and South Santiam Rivers in April for anglers who want to fish in warmer weather. Summer steelhead can compete with, prey upon, and interbreed with winter steelhead, contributing to its decline. We challenged the non-native hatchery steelhead program because of its harmful effects on threatened winter steelhead recovery, and early this year, we won our case, with a remedy forthcoming.

TAKING ACTION FOR NATIVE SALMON AND STEELHEAD

We are challenging Tacoma’s electric utility over two hydroelectric dams it operates on the Cowlitz River that fail to provide adequate threatened salmon and steelhead passage in the lower Columbia River Basin in Washington state. Feasible methods to improve downstream fish passage survival are readily available and used with success at other facilities, yet this utility has failed to comply with Endangered Species Act requirements for over 20 years. The Cowlitz Tribe has spent millions of dollars restoring fish habitat above these deadly dams, but these upstream investments are undermined by the utility’s failure to ensure that salmon have safe downstream passage.

VICTORY COMPELLING FIRST-EVER LYNX RECOVERY PLAN

In recent years, WELC has prevailed in two court cases to compel the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to design a recovery plan for threatened Canada lynx. The Service finalized such a plan and proposed new critical habitat designations for Canada lynx, including first-ever habitat protections in the southern Rocky Mountains. We have had to push the Service for every inch of progress on Canada lynx recovery, and we are hopeful the agency is beginning a new chapter of good-faith efforts for this ecologically significant, snow-dependent wild cat. Should the Trump administration try to claw back these protections, we won’t hesitate to challenge it in court.

FIGHTING FOR IMPERILED NORTHERN SPOTTED OWLS

WELC has fought for northern spotted owl recovery since our founding. Today, we are battling a timber industry lawsuit that threatens to open nearly 3.5 million acres—a full third—of designated northern spotted owl critical habitat in Washington, Oregon, and northern California. This is a choice by the logging industry to drive the iconic spotted owl to extinction for private profit. Simultaneously, we are fighting two federal plans that would allow large logging corporations to harm the owl and its habitat by allowing Sierra Pacific Industries to “take” 115 threatened northern spotted owls and preclude future guardrails for a shocking 50-year timeline.

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 also fighting to hasten the decline of coal—the dirtiest energy source on earth.

VICTORY FOR YOUTHS AT MONTANA SUPREME COURT

Montana is one of only a handful of states that recognizes a constitutional right to a clean and healthy environment, including a stable climate. For decades, the state of Montana has promoted, incentivized, and deregulated the fossil fuel industry, knowingly worsening climate change.

Beginning in 2020, we represented 16 young people in a challenge to the state of Montana's fossil fuel permitting practices that threaten the state's atmosphere, forests, rivers, lakes, fish, and wildlife. Elected officials' climate denial and fealty to the fossil fuel industry have harmed these young people's way of life and constitutional rights to pursue liberty and happiness through the enjoyment of a clean and healthful environment. We took on this case to hold Montana's government accountable and defend these youths' constitutional rights.

Alongside our partners at Our Children's Trust and McGarvey Law, in 2023, we brought our clients'

powerful stories and climate science into the courtroom in the first ever U.S. climate trial in history.

The youth plaintiffs ranged in age from 2-18 when we first filed the lawsuit. They represent unique landscapes and geographies from across the state of Montana and its Tribal lands. During this landmark trial, the youth plaintiffs bravely testified about how climate change has harmed their health, livelihoods, cultural practices, psychological well-being, and the state they call home. World-renowned climate experts testified that Montana's promotion of fossil fuels and suppression of renewable energy development have aggravated drought, fueled megafires, and depleted natural resources.

We were ecstatic when the court ruled in the youth plaintiffs' favor in 2023, recognizing that the right to a clean and healthful environment is meaningless without a livable climate. One expert called this "the strongest decision on climate change ever issued

by any court." Ever defiant, the state appealed our landmark decision to the Montana Supreme Court.

We are proud to report that the highest court in Montana has affirmed our victory, upholding the youth plaintiffs' rights to a clean and healthful environment, including a livable climate. This win is a decisive rejection of the state of Montana's recalcitrant promotion of climate-harming fossil fuel development while stifling renewable energy.

We prevailed for a simple reason: We proved these youth clients have suffered financial loss, health challenges, and mental duress that the Montana Constitution obliged the state to avoid and minimize. Further, we proved those harms will only worsen if the state continues to pursue its reckless fossil-first energy policy. Now, we have set our sights on using the power of the law to defend every Montanan's right to a livable climate.





TAKING ON BIG OIL AND THE ABANDONED WELL CRISIS IN NEW MEXICO

Across the West, oil and gas corporations have created an expensive, toxic abandoned well problem. Everyone knows that if you make a mess, you clean it up. Instead of taking responsibility, these corporations too often declare bankruptcy and stick taxpayers with the bill. In New Mexico, the second-largest oil and gas producing state, this problem is acute. The state estimates it will cost up to \$1.6 billion to plug known and soon-to-be abandoned wells, and the price tag is growing. WELC is spearheading the solution: modernizing oil and gas bonding rules. The current system allows corporations to post as little as \$250,000 for hundreds or thousands of wells, when cleanup averages \$163,000 per well when paid for by the state. Our proposal would create a framework to prevent abandoned wells and to ensure oil and gas corporations bear the true cost of cleaning up after themselves—keeping New Mexicans safer.

FIGHTING COAL IN MONTANA AND BEYOND

We are setting the stage for strong coal advocacy in Montana. We defended the Biden administration closure of the Powder River Basin to new coal leasing in industry litigation. We filed comments opposing the Trump administration’s plans to reopen the basin to coal leasing in preparation to litigate. We have filed numerous comments against expanding coal leasing in Montana, Wyoming, and North Dakota, positioning us for future challenges. Finally, we are developing new legal strategies to fight the administration’s “national energy emergency” that farcically requires increasing fossil fuel exports while suppressing renewable energy development.

PROTECTING THE YELLOWSTONE RIVER

We are challenging the Montana Department of Environmental Quality over relying on an inadequate environmental analysis to approve a methane power plant on the banks of the Yellowstone River. The agency failed to fully consider and disclose the Yellowstone County Generating Station’s emissions and climate-related harm despite being ordered to by the Montana Supreme Court. We are asking the court to order the Department of Environmental Quality to complete an analysis that complies with the Montana Environmental Policy Act, the Montana Constitution, and the Montana Supreme Court’s order. It is crucial that we hold this rogue agency accountable to the law.

VICTORY PROTECTING NEW MEXICO CLEAN AIR RULE

When the state of New Mexico enacted a new oil and gas industry rule to keep communities safer from ozone and emissions that create ozone, the Independent Petroleum Association of New Mexico sued. It objected to the rule’s “proximity proposal,” which requires increased leak detection and repair for wells within 1,000 feet of homes, schools, and businesses. The provision reduces industry’s emissions of volatile organic compounds and nitrogen oxides that harm human health. We successfully defended the rule before the New Mexico Court of Appeals, protecting frontline communities from yet another oil and gas industry public health threat.

CHALLENGING CARLSBAD OIL AND GAS LEASE SALES

We are in court challenging the final oil and gas lease sale of the Trump 1.0 administration, covering nearly 6,000 acres near Carlsbad, New Mexico. The Bureau of Land Management used a 1988 resource management plan and environmental impact statement to justify the 32 leases, not accounting for modern fracking and horizontal drilling methods. These new techniques introduce vastly different environmental impacts than those known in 1988. The agency also failed to thoroughly analyze the effects this new drilling would have on local air quality in these frontline communities. We completed briefing in the case and are preparing for oral arguments or a decision from the court.

WATER

Climate-caused aridification is creating new water challenges throughout the West.

WELC is focused on ensuring western communities, wildlife, and wildlands have the clean, ample water supplies they need to survive and thrive.

AGUA ES VIDA: VICTORIES AND CHALLENGES FOR CLEAN WATER IN NEW MEXICO

In arid New Mexico, protecting clean water is essential to communities, agriculture, industry, and the wild. We were crushed when the U.S. Supreme Court gutted the Clean Water Act, removing protections for up to 95% of New Mexico's waters with the stroke of a pen. But the power of the law—state law—is strong.

We took action, and with a coalition of partners and legislative champions, we worked around the clock to pass a law that restored the Clean Water Act protections slashed in the misguided Supreme Court decision. New Mexico's restored water protections will be immune from federal attacks, and we're working with the state to create the strongest program possible.

In the meantime, we participated in a state rulemaking to ban the discharge of treated fracking

waste—greenwashed as “produced water”—to New Mexico's rivers, streams, groundwater, and land. In 2021, Big Oil created 60 billion gallons of this toxic waste, containing radium, benzene, PFAS, mercury, and unknown toxic fracking chemicals.

Over the 18-month rulemaking, we presented thousands of pages of scientific evidence and expert testimony proving that the technology to treat this fracking waste to safe levels and at scale does not exist. Even an industry witness agreed that the technology “isn't there yet,” and the Water Quality Control Commission voted unanimously to ban the discharge of treated fracking waste in New Mexico.

Before the ink was dry on the rule, Big Oil came back to the commission with an extremely permissive, industry-written proposal to reverse the discharge ban. Alarming, Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham and

Environment Department Sec. James Kenney pulled strings to rig the commission's vote in favor of the industry's proposal.

In another unprecedented capitulation to Big Oil, Sec. Kenney forbade his Environment Department—which proposed and argued persuasively in favor of the discharge ban—from participating in Big Oil's rulemaking. This has never occurred in the 58-year history of the commission for a rule the Environment Department would administer.

We filed a motion to disqualify the commissioners the governor directed to vote yes on Big Oil's treated fracking waste discharge proposal as well as their votes to advance this disastrous rule. We will fight this with everything we've got, because contaminating New Mexico's water with fracking waste—even “treated”—is unthinkable reckless.



VICTORY AGAINST FACTORY FARM POLLUTION IN WASHINGTON STATE

Industrial dairies that confine hundreds or thousands of cows in cramped lots create enormous amounts of manure. This waste contains phosphorus and nitrogen, which can cause serious water quality problems. The Washington Department of Ecology must ensure such facilities control these nutrients before they run off into nearby surface waters or leach into groundwater. Yet, Ecology has consistently failed to do so, endangering Washington's waters, including Puget Sound and communities' drinking water. In 2021, we won our case against the department's weak pollution discharge permits. Unfortunately, Ecology responded by writing new permits that were still too permissive, leaving communities at risk. We challenged those permits, winning our case this year and forcing Ecology back to the drawing board. Our victory will require new permits that include public review of each factory farm's pollution control plan, site-specific studies to protect nearby waters, groundwater monitoring for every facility, and improved manure storage systems.

DEFENDING WATER QUANTITY IN MONTANA

In 2016, WELC won a case before the Montana Supreme Court ordering the state to close its "exempt well loophole," which developers had exploited to drill thousands of unregulated water wells. After our victory, the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation actually *increased* the number of exempt wells it approved annually. This exploitation contributes to water shortages for agricultural users and municipalities. It also affects river flows, exacerbating high water temperatures, harmful algal blooms, and fishing restrictions. We are challenging the state over its failure to protect water rights and resources to close the exempt well loophole once and for all.

VICTORY FOR CLEAN WATER IN LOS ALAMOS

Over a decade ago, we notified the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency of extremely high urban stormwater pollution from PCBs, copper, zinc, nickel, and gross alpha radiation in Los Alamos County, New Mexico, some at levels more than 10,000 times public safety limits. In 2017, we took legal action against the agency for doing nothing. Thanks to our advocacy, EPA will require the county to obtain a Clean Water Act permit to control this pollution. This will protect the communities that depend on clean drinking water from the Pajarito Plateau, and we are hopeful New Mexico's new surface water permitting program will also improve water quality here.

FIGHTING WATER POLLUTION IN PUGET SOUND

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 surrounding communities. These problems include plummeting dissolved oxygen, increasing hazardous algal blooms, deteriorating fish and wildlife—such as salmon and orcas—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 too big for the state to ignore.

PROTECTING A SACRED YAKAMA SITE

Fifteen thousand years ago, an ice dam on the Clark Fork River in present-day Montana failed, flooding much of eastern Washington and parts of Oregon. The Ka-milt-pah people—the Rock Creek Band of the Yakama Nation—took refuge in Put-a-lish, or the Goodnoe Hills, near present-day Goldendale, Washington. The area is a sacred site where Tribal members continue to practice traditional hunting and gathering. Now, a developer wants to build the largest pump-storage hydroelectric facility in the Northwest there, destroying irreplaceable Tribal cultural resources. We are working alongside the Confederated Bands of the Yakama Nation in an appeal of the state's decision to authorize this project on these sacred lands.

WILDLANDS

WELC is a dedicated advocate for the West's natural heritage, rooted in healthy wildlands, rivers, forests, and wildlife.

We take on cases, perform advocacy, and collaborate with coalitions to protect national forests, public and other special lands, clean rivers, and more.

VICTORY AGAINST HUGE, MISGUIDED OREGON LOGGING PROJECT

This spring, we won an important victory against a controversial public lands logging plan. The “N126” project threatened a wide expanse of mature forest stretching west of Eugene into the steep slopes of the Oregon Coast Range, an area providing vital habitat for at least three threatened wildlife species: northern spotted owl, marbled murrelet, and Oregon Coast coho salmon. The project was one of the largest such logging proposals in decades, targeting 22,000 acres of public land, including cherished old-growth groves.

This Bureau of Land Management project recklessly authorized massive logging primarily in late-successional reserves—areas intended to serve as sanctuary habitat for federally protected species including the threatened northern spotted owl. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has already determined, in response to our 2020 legal challenge, that “spotty” warrants uplisting to endangered status, making the

protection of these forests all the more imperative. Additionally, the project authorized commercial logging on more than 2,000 acres of riparian reserves, which are meant to protect the life-giving streams that maintain water quality for fish, wildlife, and people alike.

In its haste to approve the project, the agency dismissed dozens of critical environmental issues from consideration, glossed over significant impacts to protected fish and wildlife, and failed entirely to consider the cumulative impacts from other overlapping and adjacent federal logging projects.

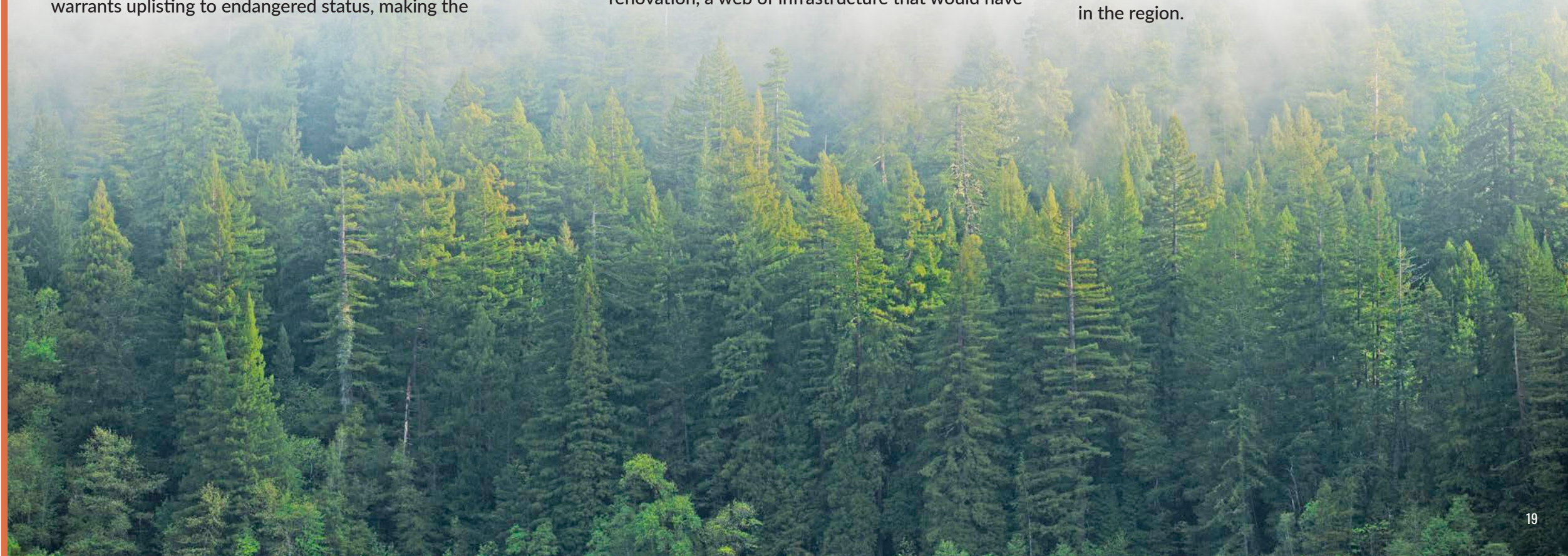
BLM's decision-making lacked public transparency as to the full scope of its plan, but the details it did disclose elicited outrage—in particular its plan for extensive roadbuilding. The project greenlit a staggering 350–510 miles of road construction and renovation, a web of infrastructure that would have

scarred the landscape and funneled sediment into salmon-bearing streams.

The court ruled that the heavy logging and extensive road building and renovation involved significant and largely unanalyzed impacts in violation of the National Environmental Policy Act.

Following the court's decision, we reached a legal agreement with the BLM that achieved significant, lasting protections for the area. The agency agreed to correct the legal violations in the project's environmental assessment and will not authorize any additional timber sales under the flawed analysis. While a few already-contracted timber sales were unavoidable, we secured excellent safeguards for the remaining forest.

The settlement secures both legal accountability and lasting forest protections—a big win for public lands in the region.



Four federal bedrock environmental protections are under attack, and we are using the full power of the law to defend and preserve them

ROADLESS RULE

The Roadless Rule is an extremely popular, science-based provision limiting commercial logging and associated road construction on some of the wildest and most undisturbed public lands in the country. One of the best American ideas of this century, the Roadless Rule protects 58.5 million acres of intact national forest lands. Yet now the Trump administration intends to rescind the Roadless Rule to allow the private logging, mining, and fossil fuel industries to profit at great generational cost to the American people and the natural world. We have vowed to fight for the Roadless Rule—and for the wild places it protects and preserves.

PUBLIC LANDS RULE

WELC led a coalition of groups that successfully petitioned the Bureau of Land Management to create its 2024 Public Lands Rule. The landmark rule recognizes that conservation in public lands management is equal to extractive uses such as fossil fuel production and mining. This rule improves the balance of the agency's multiple-use mission across 245 million acres of public lands. The Trump administration plans to eliminate the rule in a dramatic escalation of its assault on public lands, prioritizing corporate profit over the public interest. We will defend the rule, which at last operationalizes the BLM's longstanding conservation authority and responsibility under the law.

ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT

Our work to protect threatened and endangered western wildlife depends on the Endangered Species Act. Protecting imperiled animals' habitat has always been the law's central principle. The Trump administration is now proposing to redefine "harm" under the Endangered Species Act to exclude the litany of indirect harms resulting from habitat modification. The Trump administration's new proposal removes all doubt: Our federal government is affirmatively pro-extinction. Our wild landscapes need biodiversity to support life, and biodiversity hinges on shielding habitat from being destroyed. We will oppose this war on wildlife with the ferocity of the wolverine and our decades of legal experience.

NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT

The Trump administration and some members of Congress are hellbent on eviscerating the country's environmental "Magna Carta," the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). New procedures severely limit NEPA's application and the public's right to participate in decisions affecting their communities. Worse still, Congress is considering several bills to further limit NEPA, including a blatant effort at wholesale deregulation under a pretense of "permit reform." The SPEED Act would silence communities, limit environmental reviews, exclude science, and impose excessive barriers to judicial review—all for private profit. This bill has a dangerous level of support because the issue has been misleadingly framed. We are using our expertise to defend NEPA for all people.

TRAINING THE NEXT GENERATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL ADVOCATES

The University of Oregon School of Law's Environmental and Natural Resources Law Center is the birthplace of the first environmental law clinic in the U.S. Now stewarded by the Western Environmental Law Center, the clinic provides the next generation of legal advocates with real-world experience. Through the clinic, law students assist WELC attorneys with case development and strategy, conduct legal research, engage in settlement discussions, and hone their writing skills by drafting pleadings and memoranda. Students fully engage in all phases of litigation and legal advocacy, under the supervision and mentorship of WELC attorneys. This practical experience confers valuable training that prepares students for their legal careers.

Clinic students' professional-level efforts culminate in capstone projects—work product useful to WELC's clients in legal proceedings long after a semester ends. Combined with students' access to professional mentorship, the real-world experience they gain through the clinic is critically important for both the future of law and the places, communities, and species that need advocates in a changing world. As they work with students in the clinic, WELC attorneys hope to inspire a passion for justice beyond the classroom.



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
Badlands Conservation Alliance
Bird Alliance of Oregon
Bitterrooters for Planning
Bridger Bowl Ski Area
California Trout
Californians for Western Wilderness
Cascadia Wildlands
Center for Biological Diversity
Center for Civic Policy
Center for Environmental Law and Policy
Center for Food Safety
Central Oregon LandWatch
Chaco Alliance
Chama Peak Land Alliance
Chris Daughters
Citizens for a Healthy Community
Citizens for Clean Energy
Citizens for Sustainable Development
Clark Fork Coalition
Clean Air Task Force
Clean Water Action
Climate Smart Missoula
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 Northwest
Conservation Voters New Mexico
Dakota Resource Council
Defenders of Wildlife
Desert Tortoise Council
Diné Citizens Against Ruining Our Environment
Dunton Hot Springs, Inc.
Earthjustice
Earthworks

Environment America
Environmental Defense Fund
Environmental Protection Information Center
Families for a Livable Climate
Food and Water Watch
Footloose Montana
Fort Belknap Indian Community
Friends of the Bitterroot
Friends of the Clearwater
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
Grand Canyon Wolf Recovery Project
HECHO: Hispanics Enjoying Camping, Hunting, and Outdoors
Helena Hunters and Anglers Association
High Country Conservation Advocates
Humane Society of the United States
Humane Voters of Oregon
Hydropower Reform Coalition
Idaho Conservation League
Indian People's Action
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 Elders for a Livable Tomorrow
Montana Environmental Information Center
Naeva
Naqragmiut Tribal Council
National Parks Conservation Association
National Wildlife Federation
Native Ecosystems Council
Native Fish Society

Natural Resources Defense Council
New Mexico Audubon Council
New Mexico Backcountry Hunters and Anglers
New Mexico Interfaith Power and Light
New Mexico Wilderness Alliance
Northern Plains Resource Council
Northwest Energy Coalition
Northwest Environmental Advocates
Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission
Oregon Wild
Our Children's Trust
Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations
Park County Environmental Council
Pasado's Safe Haven
Physicians for Social Responsibility, New Mexico Chapter
Picuris Pueblo
Powder River Basin Resource Council
Prairie Hills Audubon Society
PSE Healthy Energy
Public Justice
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
San Luis Obispo Coastkeeper
San Luis Valley Ecosystem Council
Sheep Mountain Alliance
Sierra Club
Sierra Club - Grand Canyon Chapter
Sierra Club - Rio Grande Chapter
Sierra Club - Washington State Chapter
Sky Island Alliance
Snoqualmie Indian Tribe
Socially Responsible Agriculture Project
Soda Mountain Wilderness Council
Southern Environmental Law Center
Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance
Southwest Environmental Center
Spokane Riverkeeper
Swan View Coalition
Swinomish Indian Tribal Community

The Conservation Angler
The Lands Council
The Wilderness Society
Tó Nizhóní Ání
Trap Free Montana
Trout Unlimited
Tuscon Herpetological Society
U.S. Climate Plan
Upper Green River Alliance
Upper Pecos Watershed Association
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Willamette Riverkeeper
Wyoming Outdoor Council
Wyoming Wilderness Association
Yurok Tribe
350 Montana
350 New Mexico
350 Santa Fe

We represented and worked alongside more than 165 partners and clients this year. Our partners and clients include community-groups, small nonprofit organizations, large national groups, Tribes, youths, adults, and more. We are honored to defend the West with each and every one of you.

List based on active cases between 9/1/24-9/1/25.

THANK YOU

We are a public interest law firm and do not charge partners and clients for our services. It is people like you making charitable gifts that makes it possible for us to defend the West’s wildlife, wildlands, and communities.

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Cid’s Food Market	Organically Grown Company	Tillak	

More than 1,800 individuals and families made contributions to the Western Environmental Law Center this year. You all make our victories and advocacy possible—thank you!

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Recognition names are from donations received between 9/1/24-9/1/25.

WAYS TO GIVE

We have a variety of ways for you to donate and make a difference for public lands, wildlife, and communities across the West. We welcome gifts of all sizes and are happy to help or discuss options with you. These are some examples:

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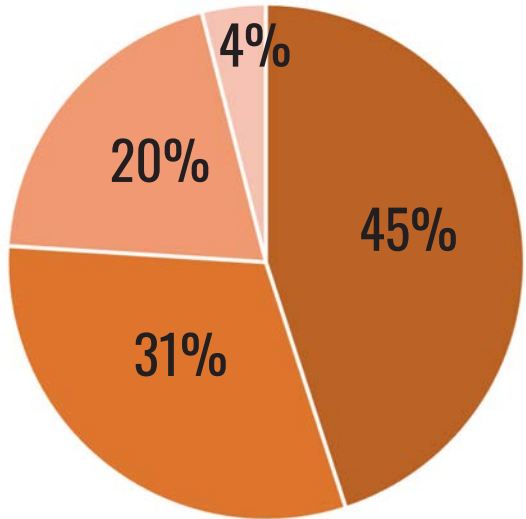
HELP DEFEND THE WEST AT WESTERNLAW.ORG/DONATE

FINANCIAL REPORT

REVENUE

Grants	45%	\$2,444,100
Contributions	31%	\$1,664,359
Program Services	20%	\$1,086,707
Investment & Other Income	4%	\$230,516

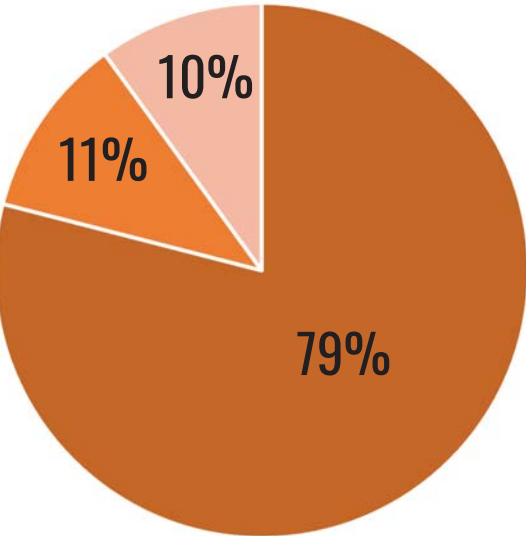
TOTAL \$5,425,682



EXPENSE

Program	79%	\$3,722,340
Management & General	11%	\$529,298
Fundraising	10%	\$451,386

TOTAL \$4,703,024



These amounts are from our audited 2024 financial statements. Net assets at 12/31/24 are \$6,435,931.



WELC is governed by a board of directors comprised of renowned attorneys, academics, and conservationists from across the country. From the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Ocean, our team of staff lives and works throughout the West.

Photo on left: September 2025, Oregon Coast. Not all board and staff are pictured.

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Our awards and recognition demonstrate our organization's financial responsibility, transparency, and ability to achieve results. You can trust there are real people behind this organization. All the content in this report was written by our staff; there was no use of AI-generated writing.



Year after year, Charity Navigator awards WELC four stars—their highest rating. We also continue to be certified as Platinum Level by Candid, which is their highest rating. Both these groups evaluate nonprofit transparency and impact on a national scale. The Western Environmental Law Center is also proud to be accredited as a charity by the Better Business Bureau.



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