



Online at nature.org/alaska

Watch a series of videos about the Conservancy's wild salmon projects in Alaska:

- Bristol Bay
- Restoring Streams
- Protecting Fisheries

Read "The Source: A Fight Is Brewing over the Last Great Salmon Headwaters" in Nature Conservancy magazine at nature.org/salmon.

Donor Profile



Sarah and Steve Wright

When Sarah and Steve Wright and their daughter, Chelsea, moved to Alaska 13 years ago, they were already longtime members of the Conservancy. It's only natural: as kayakers and backpackers, they joined the Conservancy because it protects the natural landscapes they love.

In Alaska, where the family's adventures lead them to destinations near and far, they have continued their support. Sarah's own wildlife photography pursuits have made a family tradition of trips to remote pockets of Alaska's Interior and Katmai National Park.

Steve's work – as a clastic depositional stratigrapher, to be exact – regularly takes him to far-off locales. Each year at a Brooks Range field camp, he leads young geologists along wild river canyons, where the naked core of the mountain range reveals the geologic story that forms the basis of his lessons.

In recent years, Steve began investing even more in his personal conservation ethic when he encouraged his company, Chevron North America, to include the Conservancy in its charitable giving. Steve has now served as the company's donor representative with the Conservancy for ten years.

"There was nothing in my job description that said, 'Steve, go do this.' It just fit with my personal values," Steve says.

Chevron supports Conservancy projects elsewhere, too. For one, the company has supported the Conservancy's efforts to protect coral reefs in Indonesia, where Chevron operates oil-and-gas and geothermal energy facilities.

"There really is a great philosophical alliance between Chevron and the Conservancy," Steve says. "In my view, it's a great win-win for our organizations."

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alaska news



Southwest Salmon Ecosystem Science

Two of the great salmon rivers feeding Bristol Bay begin at shared headwaters where tracts of rolling tundra seem tucked into place like pieces in a jigsaw puzzle. These remote waters meander as they draw from a web of tributaries until they form legendary salmon rivers: the Nushagak, Mulchatna and Kvichak.

Each summer, all five species of wild Pacific salmon – chrome bright cohos, Chinook, sockeye, pinks and chums – swim up these rivers to spawn in cold, crystalline waters. And in spring, millions of salmon smolts descend these rivers en masse to return to the sea in one perilous leg of the salmon life cycle.

A Field Crew's Discoveries

To confirm these headwaters nurture living salmon—and protect habitat — Conservancy field crews are trying to ensure these remote yet vital habitats are protected by documenting the presence of young salmon. Last year, crews surveyed nearly 30 tributary streams and studies have continued this summer.

One crew member, Daniel Chythlook, who trekked high in the Nushagak tundra last summer carrying a pack bristling

with instrumentation, says the field work went something like this: A battery-powered wand – standard equipment for a biologist who's surveying for fish – poked in the water delivered a shock just strong enough to briefly stun a young salmon. This was Chythlook's cue: he had four seconds to swoop in with a fine-meshed net. (Once recorded with a photo, all captured fish returned to the water.)

The method worked, and their findings are worth noting. Over the course of several days, the crew discovered healthy numbers of salmon nearly everywhere they looked.

"We were successful in finding rearing coho and Chinook salmon in 20 streams," Chythlook said.



Young coho salmon

Ensuring Protection for Crucial Habitat

These salmon inventories are a necessary step in the ongoing effort to protect Alaska's salmon spawning and rearing habitat. By nominating these 28 miles of headwaters streams to the state's Anadromous Waters Catalog – the authoritative list of waters deserving protection under Alaska state law – the Conservancy is helping to ensure these remote habitats receive the protection they deserve under Alaska state law.

"Nominating these streams for inclusion in the state's anadromous waters catalog protects salmon habitat," says Randy Hagenstein, director of The Nature Conservancy in Alaska. "Now that we've confirmed salmon depend on the rearing habitat of these headwater streams, we can help ensure they receive the most stringent protection available under Alaska state law."

History of Conservation Success

As home to the world's largest remaining runs of wild sockeye salmon, Bristol Bay is among the globally significant natural resources considered a conservation priority for The Nature Conservancy. In the late 1990s, partnerships formed with local organizations – Curyung Tribe of Dillingham, the Bristol Bay Native Association, and the Nushagak-Mulchatna Watershed Council – led to the 2007 publication of "The Nushagak River Watershed Traditional Use Area Conservation Plan."

More recently, the Conservancy's salmon conservation efforts have focused on the increasing threat posed by the potential for large-scale gold and copper mining in the region.

By establishing accurate environmental baselines in these Nushagak and Kvichak river headwaters, the Conservancy is emphasizing the need for clear protections for salmon habitat.

"Good science raises the bar whenever development is proposed," Hagenstein says. "The Conservancy's investment in Bristol Bay intends to set the highest possible standard in order to protect vital salmon habitat – a globally significant natural resource."

Learn more: visit nature.org/alaska

Southwest Partnership

When Tim Troll talks to a roomful of people about his work for the Conservancy in Alaska's Bristol Bay, he likes to flash a pair of landscape images on the wall. First, a picture from space.

"From a satellite, the Bristol Bay watershed looks great," says Troll, who directs the Conservancy's Southwest Alaska program. "You can see it's an intact ecosystem, where wild salmon swim free and wildlife travel far and wide."

The next is a map. It's the same landscape of rivers and lakes, but the property lines are drawn out.

"Now, this healthy watershed looks fragmented. All of these state, Native and federal landowners have management ideas of their own. As history shows us, the legal fragmentation of the land leads to fragmented natural areas – unless people work together."

Working toward a simple plan to protect salmon habitat in such a vast region has challenged conservation efforts since the 1970s.

"In the landscape we've inherited from federal ANCSA and ANILCA legislation, doing good conservation work requires that everyone on the map gather at the same table," he says.

To help bring people together, the Conservancy and The Conservation Fund helped form the Southwest Alaska Salmon Habitat Partnership.

In Southwest Alaska, the partnership's new recognition opens the door to new conservation work. The Southwest Salmon Habitat Partnership is leading efforts to research and file for instream flow reservations on the Stuyahok and Mulchatna rivers and Kaskanak Creek. This continues the work that began in 2000 with the habitat partnership's predecessor, the Southwest Alaska Conservation Coalition, which raised \$30 million to preserve 79,000 acres in the region.

"The salmon habitat partnership has become the forum, in the absence of any other, in which all landowners in Southwest Alaska can work together to achieve real protection for salmon habitat," Troll says. "With this infusion of support, we're able to imagine a future in Bristol Bay that emphasizes cooperative land management in the way former governor and Bristol Bay resident Jay Hammond envisioned."

Learn more: visit nature.org/alaska

In May the U.S. Department of the Interior honored the Southwest Alaska Salmon Habitat Partnership with its Partners in Conservation Award.



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Ways of Giving

Where there's a will there's a way

When you leave something to your loved ones and the natural places you love, you are giving a lasting investment that goes far beyond any specific dollar amount. This is why The Nature Conservancy works with people like you to prepare bequests that provide for the people and places you hold dear.

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