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Columbia Land Trust Conserves an Ecological Gem in Klickitat Canyon

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VANCOUVER, WA—Columbia Land Trust today announced the conservation of 2,400 acres of river canyon and mixed-conifer forest along the Klickitat River in Klickitat County, Washington. The acquisition safeguards a unique diversity of wildlife and protects three miles of the state's longest undammed river.

The Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) purchased the land from the Hancock Timber Resource Group with funding from Columbia Land Trust and the federal Forest Legacy Program through the Land and Water Conservation Fund. The Land Trust is partnering with DNR to manage the property under a jointly written land management plan that includes forestry and low-impact recreation.

"We have partnered with Columbia Land Trust over the past decade and have great respect for the organization, its people, and its work," said Brent Keefer, president of the Hancock Timber Resource Group. "We are very pleased to complete this transaction with the Land Trust and see this land in Klickitat Canyon conserved in perpetuity."

Adjacent to DNR's existing 2,335-acre Klickitat Canyon Natural Resources Conservation Area, this newly acquired property will be managed as a community forest, meaning that the property will be managed according to a plan developed in consultation with a local advisory committee. The community forest designation allows multiple uses, including managing the land for forestry to the benefit of contractors, mills, and communities throughout the Klickitat region.

"This is one of the most awe-inspiring landscapes in the Northwest—where the Cascades transition to oak-and-pine woodlands with Mount Adams punctuating the horizon," said Columbia Land Trust Executive Director Glenn Lamb. "We're thrilled to conserve this canyon both as a wildlife haven and as a community resource."

Designated a National Wild and Scenic River, the Klickitat flows roughly 95 miles from the Goat Rocks Wilderness Area through the Yakama Nation Indian Reservation, then through a mosaic of private forests and ranchlands before its confluence with the Columbia River.

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The watershed supports a stunning variety of wildlife, including 15 federal and 21 state-listed species and species of concern. Endangered salmon and steelhead continue primordial migrations while mule deer, bear, mountain goats, golden eagles, and numerous rare plants inhabit the rugged terrain. The conserved project area will help maintain habitat connectivity along the East Cascades migration corridor and support species resiliency in the face of a changing climate.

Columbia Land Trust initially identified the project area as a prime conservation priority in 2012 and partnered with The Conservation Fund to secure funding for the acquisition.

“The national loss and parcelization of our working forests is a threat to our environment, communities, and economy. Thanks to this partnership, the future is bright for the Klickitat Canyon and everyone it benefits—from kayakers to loggers,” said Evan Smith, Senior Vice President at The Conservation Fund. “We appreciate the leadership of U. S. Senators Patty Murray and Maria Cantwell, and U.S. Representative Jaime Herrera Beutler for this conservation project.”

The Land Trust devised its conservation approach through collaboration and dialogue with local, state, and tribal stakeholders.

“[The Klickitat River] provides an essential artery that supports our culture and way of life,” said Phil Rigdon, Superintendent of Yakama Nation Natural Resources. “We support and depend on partners and owners like Columbia Land Trust that strive for good stewardship and understand the importance of enhancing and protecting these significant aquatic and ecological places. Because a watershed like the Klickitat is the last of its kind.”

The Forest Legacy Program (FLP), a program of the U.S. Forest Service funded through the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), provided \$3.9 million dollars in funding for the Klickitat Canyon conservation project while Columbia Land Trust contributed \$96,000 to the closing of the transaction and Washington DNR contributed a critical match through the State Trust Land Transfer Program. The FLP supports state efforts to protect environmentally sensitive forest lands. LWCF is a bipartisan, federal program that uses a percentage of proceeds from offshore oil and gas royalties, not taxpayer dollars. LWCF is annually funded by the U.S. Congress, including Washington’s U.S. delegation representing Klickitat County: U.S. Senator Patty Murray, U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell and U.S. Representative Jaime Herrera Beutler.

“We are fortunate to live in a state with abundant natural resources and unique outdoor spaces, and I’m thrilled to see this conservation project come together,” Senator Murray said. “It is a testament to the value of the Forest Legacy Program, which works to support working timberlands and jobs in rural communities while supporting healthy habitats for fish and wildlife, as well as recreational opportunities.”

The Klickitat Canyon conservation area builds on Columbia Land Trust’s commitment to the broader Klickitat River watershed. The Land Trust conserved 3,300 acres across 11 properties in the watershed prior to this project.

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About Columbia Land Trust

Founded in 1990, [Columbia Land Trust](#) conserves and cares for the vital lands, waters and wildlife of the Columbia River region. The nonprofit has more than 3,000 members and has conserved more than 30,000 acres of land in 14 counties around the Columbia River, from the John Day River near The Dalles, Oregon, to the Pacific Ocean. The Land Trust uses a positive, collaborative approach to protect and restore crucial wildlife habitat, working forests and farms, and urban spaces.

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