

“... the health of the environment is good if the salmon and steelhead are around. It is that simple.”
 — Tom McCall

Photo: Hell Roaring Lake, by Trade Carlson



Photo by Jim Grossman

“Water is the driving force of all nature.”
 — Leonardo da Vinci

Rivers are for Everyone

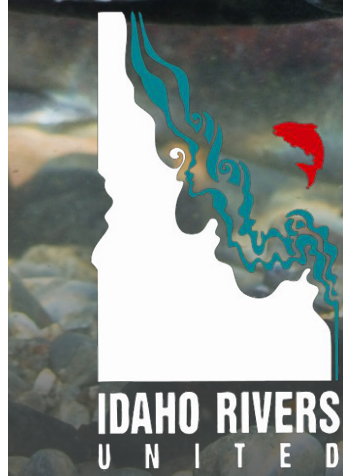
In 2021, Idaho Rivers United renewed our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion by making it central to our initiatives and programs. While we have a long history of partnering with our region’s Indigenous Tribes to confront the myriad of issues affecting our rivers, and demanding treaty rights are upheld, we recognized that we could do more.

Inequity, environmental justice, and lack of diversity in outdoor recreation have become a greater focal point for conservation and recreation advocates. Issues of inequality and representation in the outdoors and conservation community range from lack of access, lack of diversity, and environmental injustice to socio-economic barriers and affordability; IRU has recognized that these issues are particularly pronounced in Idaho.

In recognition of this issue, IRU engaged in conversations with Inclusive Idaho surrounding inclusivity and access in river recreation. Through this process, we piloted a program promoting access and equality in outdoor recreation with the goal of reducing barriers to engagement, such as cost, fear of discrimination, adaptive needs, access to gear, and ease of learning. Thanks to a partnership with Idaho River Sports and Inclusive Idaho, we were able to jointly offer a series of free, safe, and welcoming stand-up paddleboarding lessons.

As we move forward in the next year, we will expand our partnerships and programs, support opportunities for equitable access to the outdoors, and foster engagement in the outdoor and conservation community with underrepresented individuals. By bringing together people with a wide range of perspectives, backgrounds, and experiences, and encouraging a community of openness and inclusion, we can develop better solutions for river conservation and stewardship for the benefit of all.

Access to healthy rivers, the benefits they provide, and the ability to advocate for them, goes beyond protecting the environment; it goes to the heart of protecting people, each and every one of us, equally.



IDAHO RIVERS UNITED ANNUAL REPORT 2021

IDAHO RIVERS UNITED

Photo: David Sufanza©

Wild Salmon and Steelhead Recovery & Lower Snake River Restoration

Since 1991, advocating for Idaho’s wild salmon and steelhead recovery has been a top organizational priority. During that time, and especially over the last year, Idaho Rivers United worked closely with stakeholders and partner organizations, engaged the public, and urged regional decision-makers to act towards wild salmon recovery.

In February, Congressman Mike Simpson introduced his Columbia Basin Initiative (CBI), a comprehensive river restoration and economic revitalization plan for the Northwest, centered on restoring the Lower Snake River through dam breaching and placing wild salmon on the path to abundant recovery. The plan called for investments in clean energy, agricultural transportation infrastructure upgrades, and extensive river community investment.

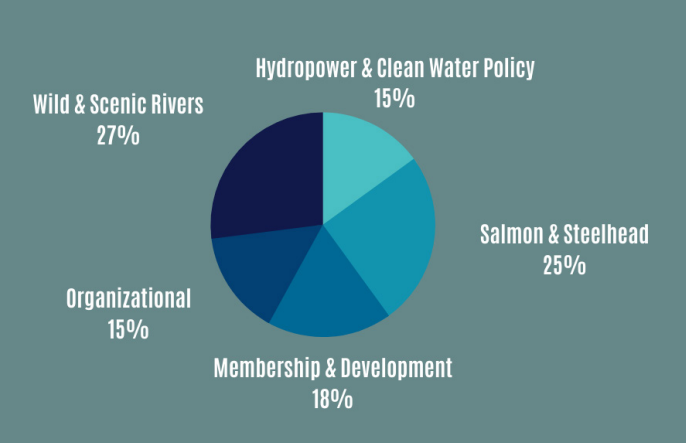
IRU has strongly supported the CBI throughout this last year. We engaged citizens in River Advocacy Trainings (River RATs) and information sessions following the plan’s release. We organized sign-on petitions, and sent letters to members of Congress across the Northwest, imploring them to collaborate on timely legislation. While legislation was not introduced, the CBI brought the salmon issue to the public’s attention, and IRU is engaging with regional Congressional offices and the Biden Administration to develop a long-term solution culminating in legislation to restore the Lower Snake River to a free-flowing, natural river.

This past summer and fall, the Columbia-Snake River system reached lethally hot temperatures exacerbating the peril of endangered salmon and steelhead, highlighting the urgent need for action. In September, the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), for the first time ever, set limits for hot water pollution stemming from the Lower Snake River dams. This was the result of years of work by IRU and partners to hold the dams’ operators accountable for jeopardizing the health of our endangered salmon and steelhead runs.

In keeping with our commitment to place equity and justice at the center of our work, we worked collaboratively with our Tribal partners to amplify their voices in calling for salmon restoration to uphold Tribal treaty rights and honor the cultural and spiritual identity of Tribes. These voices have been some of the most important levers in influencing Congressional delegates to act on salmon recovery.

IRU’s salmon recovery campaign will continue to push our elected leaders for near-term action. We will be working closely with the Biden Administration, Congressional offices, and our Tribal partners on a long-term solution for salmon recovery, building upon the groundwork laid by Congressman Simpson. We will continue to amplify the voices of Tribes and support rural river communities’ need for a revitalized salmon run. Next year will be a pivotal and exciting year as we build on our successes to secure a viable path to abundant, healthy, and harvestable wild salmon and steelhead in Idaho.

YOUR INVESTMENT AT WORK



Idaho Rivers United 2021 Member & Partner Awards

Each year, IRU’s annual awards recognize outstanding members, businesses, and partners that further IRU’s mission and work. We are honored to present this year’s award recipients:

- Member of the Year:** *Alan Hamilton*
- Business Partner of the Year:** *Idaho River Sports*
- Salmon Advocate of the Year:** *Congressman Mike Simpson & Lindsay Slater*
- Water Protection Advocate:** *Mary Faurot*
- Conservation Partner of the year:** *EcoFlight*

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“A river is more than an amenity, it is a treasure. It offers a necessity of life that must be rationed among those who have power over it.”

– Oliver Wendell Holmes

A Message from the Executive Director

The year 2021 will elicit both grief and gratitude in many, but will also serve to remind us of the power of our rivers to heal, recover, and even to unite during these seemingly disparate times. Rivers are a microcosm of that existence, because as different as two rivers can be, they share virtues that transcend their differences, impartially providing for fish, wildlife, and people that depend on them.

This year of highs and lows saw one constant, and that was your steadfast resolve to ensure that the important work we undertake was accomplished. You were at the forefront of each of our victories, and we cannot thank you enough for your dedication and loyalty. None of this would have been possible without you.

In 2021, we made the most significant strides in our 30-year battle to recover endangered salmon and steelhead. We hindered the permitting of one of the most irresponsibly sited gold mines, the Stibnite Gold Project, and required a new environmental assessment of the project. We brought social justice issues and access to the forefront of our work, and won victories that restored protections for rivers across the United States.

While 2021 saw many successes, we look forward to the coming years, reaffirming our commitment to healthy, free rivers; defending and upholding our bedrock environmental laws; and recovering wild fish populations back to Idaho. Our resolve to safeguard our most important resource has never been stronger, and with your help, we will accomplish even greater things in the name of river conservation.

For our rivers,

Nic Nelson
IRU Executive Director



Photo: Middle Fork Salmon, by Caitlin Hoepner

2021 Milestones

Salmon & Steelhead Recovery

- Congressman Mike Simpson (ID) launched Congressional action to remove the Lower Snake River Dams as part of the Columbia Basin Initiative after several years of engaging with IRU
- The EPA required Lower Snake River Dam operators to mitigate temperature pollution, a result of IRU's work over several years to hold federal agencies accountable
- River Stewards program launched in partnership with the USFS to protect spawning salmon in the Sawtooth National Recreation Area

Water Quality & Policy

- Clean Water Act provisions were restored, granting state and sovereign rights after IRU & partners worked to overturn changes completed under the previous Administration
- Hells Canyon Complex ordered to create a Total Maximum Daily Load to address methylmercury pollution and high water temperatures as IRU & partners worked to establish pollution limits for dam operations

Protecting Rivers

- Stibnite Gold Project ordered to complete supplemental Environmental Impact Statement, significantly delaying the project after IRU & partners raised concerns about project changes and missing analysis
- Gold mining project in the headwaters of the Wild & Scenic Jarbirdge and Bruneau Rivers reduced by 98%, reducing impacts to the watershed; continued safeguarding of the headwaters for impacts to endangered Bull Trout, habitat, and water quality
- IRU's comment letters on proposed management changes to the Wild & Scenic Owyhee River systems prompted senator-sponsored legislation requiring a supplemental EIS investigating how changes would impact Wild & Scenic river values

Community Engagement & Education

- Partnership program with Inclusive Idaho launched to increase diversity, access, and inclusion in outdoor recreation and conservation
- Over 178 individuals attended IRU's new Wild & Scenic Stewardship Guide Education Program, with 41 individuals graduating as certified Wild & Scenic Stewardship Guides
- Conservation & stewardship workshops hosted for several community programs, including Dare to Kayak, Alazar School, the Sage School, and the North Fork Championships

Grassroots Advocacy & Action

- 485 hours of on-the-ground volunteer restoration & conservation work
- 1,423 letters to elected leaders and policymakers
- 2,432 members of Idaho Rivers United*

For a full list of our members, supporters, & partners, visit idahorivers.org/partners

Reforming Hydropower and Clean Water Policy

Idaho Rivers United had a banner year for our work in hydropower reform and clean water policy. In addition to substantive talks around removing the four Lower Snake River Dams, we have garnered positive change and gained protections through our hydropower reform work for not only Idaho's rivers, but for rivers across the nation.

In October, we won our lawsuit against the Trump Administration's changes to the Clean Water Act and restored the States' and Tribal Nations' rights to veto harmful projects within their boundaries. This victory was key to ensuring that the public continues to have a voice in the NEPA process.

In addition to this victory, IRU helped secure another major victory that required the State of Oregon to develop a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) for methylmercury pollution throughout the Hells Canyon Complex, which is co-managed by the states of Oregon and Idaho. This was achieved through a settlement agreement that also addresses temperature issues caused by the Hells Canyon Complex, and calls for modifications to the complex of dams if the temperature thresholds are exceeded in consecutive years.

As a result of our previous success, the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) developed and adopted a TMDL for hot water pollution along the Columbia-Snake River hydro-system. The plan will require drastic alterations to the system to protect salmon and steelhead from dangerously warm river temperatures created by the eight dams. Additionally, IRU submitted comments on numerous relicensing processes, ensuring that maximum environmental protections are secured for these decades-long licenses.

In addition to our typical hydropower work, through our involvement in the Hydropower Reform Coalition, Idaho Rivers United has helped to develop an infrastructure proposal to the Biden Administration for changes in hydropower management. This proposal, included in the infrastructure bill passed in November, appropriates \$1.6 billion for dam removal and safety updates. This provides needed funding to restore many rivers to a healthy, free-flowing state, and protects people from outdated and dangerous dams.

Protecting the South Fork Salmon River from the Stibnite Gold Project

Idaho Rivers United submitted concerns to the US Forest Service in February and June of 2021, demanding that a new environmental review be conducted for the Stibnite Gold Project. Perpetua Resources' (formerly Midas Gold) proposed open-pit gold mining project, located in the headwaters of the South Fork Salmon River, would have a negative impact on vital habitat for endangered wild fish, water quality, public land access, and would destroy restoration work already completed at the site.

The substantial impacts of the mine plan and missing analysis in the original Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) made it clear that further research and analysis are needed. Moreover, Perpetua's new modified plan, which was submitted after the public comment period, proposed significant changes to the original DEIS. We recognized that further review should be required, and submitted our concerns to the US Forest Service (USFS). Many individuals also sent letters to the USFS asking for a new environmental review through IRU's Take Action webpage.

In addition to concerns from the public and conservation groups, the EPA's review found significant impacts to water quality and aquatic life, and disproportionate effects on local Tribal communities. The Nez Perce Tribe has treaty-reserved rights within the proposed project boundary, and has worked tirelessly, investing millions of dollars in restoring fish habitat throughout the watershed.

As a result, a new DEIS and public comment period will be conducted for the Stibnite Gold Project, delaying mining operations for nearly two years. The process will provide more insight into the environmental impacts of this massive, open-pit mining project and proposed changes. While Perpetua attempts to put a positive spin on this for their investors, this news from the USFS is a clear win for conservation and community organizations, and all concerned stakeholders.

A longer review process will allow for a more thorough understanding of the mine's many impacts on the watershed and wild fish. With more time, and the additional public comment opportunity, we also have a greater opportunity to educate the public of the risks of the project and encourage a just environmental review process. Looking ahead, 2022 will be a critical year for advocacy and activism to protect the South Fork Salmon River.



Photo by Steve Jansa