Wildlife Wins in 2023, Looking Ahead for 2024
THE NORTHERN ROCKIES PRAIRIES AND PACIFIC REGION has a clear track record for protecting Western water, wildlife and landscapes. In 2023 we gained considerable momentum, which will define the breadth and depth of our work going forward in 2024. It’s going to be a busy and exciting year!

3 Connecting Landscapes for Wildlife

4 Western Water: Protecting a Resource that Sustains Us All

6 Wildlife Conflict Resolution: A Market-Based Approach to Wildlife Conservation

7 Education for the Next Generation of Conservationists
Wildlife-Friendly Fencing
Wildlife must move to survive and 2023 was a big year for expanding our Wildlife Connectivity program. In 2023 we completed 7.5 miles of wildlife-friendly fence conversions with 37 volunteers on both private and public lands in southwest Montana. Since 2021, we’ve converted 23 miles of fencing and involved 143 volunteers in this important landscape that connects the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem to the Selway-Bitterroot. Building on this work, this year we received a new 3-year $400,000 National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant and a new 5-year $250,000 BLM grant as a part of their Restoration Landscapes initiative, that will allow our team to grow and continue this important work to conserve and restore migratory pathways for pronghorn, elk, and mule deer. Our goal is 10 miles of fencing modified or removed in 2024, and with added capacity we plan on scaling this work to other organizations. For example, in 2023, we helped the National Resource Conservation Service fund a program to convert 75 miles of fencing to wildlife friendly specifications over the next three years in the Ruby Valley.

Fencing Goes Virtual
Our push toward next-generation fencing is gaining momentum. With a new $400,000 grant from National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, virtual fencing, or “vencing,” will replace 16 miles of fencing on a 27,000-acre ranch in central Montana. This will clear the landscape for multiple species to move more freely, including pronghorn, mule deer, and elk.

Safer Travel for Wildlife and for People
Wildlife crossings are another important area of work—for the safety of animals and people. Our team is leading a group of local partners to design and develop a wildlife crossing on I-90 west of Missoula. We’ve joined forces with local wildlife professionals, landowners, and conservation organizations to submit a project proposal to the Montana Wildlife Transportation Partnership. The goal is to develop a large wildlife underpass to ensure the safe passage of a broad range of wildlife, including grizzly bears, black bears, elk, deer, and aquatic species—as well as highway travelers.
Enhancing Watershed Health: Beaver Conflict Resolution Program

Beavers are integral to healthy riparian systems. The Western Water Program’s newly adopted, partner-driven Beaver Conflict Resolution Program has grown exponentially. We’ll be adding two field technicians and a beaver conflict specialist to work with private and public landowners to build more tolerance for beavers on the landscape and thereby, to improve watershed health.

Scaling Up Low-Tech, Process-Based Restoration in Montana

The National Wildlife Federation is building our partners’ and the Bureau of Land Management’s (BLM) capacity to implement low-tech, process-based restoration, or LTPBR, at a watershed scale in Montana. Through a cooperative agreement with the BLM, and in support of its newly announced Restoration Landscapes as noted above, we are rapidly leveraging federal dollars, putting them to work in our local communities and working with partners to expand riverscape restoration.

A Bigger Tent Benefits Beavers: The Montana Beaver Working Group

Since 2019, the National Wildlife Federation has coordinated the Montana Beaver Working Group. Each year, we host a key meeting that brings together local, state, and federal agencies, non-profits, and private citizens. The goal: to collaboratively manage beaver in Montana through policy, regulations, education and outreach, and best management practices, which is reflected in the newly finalized 2023-2026 Action Plan.

“"We are rapidly leveraging federal dollars, putting them to work in our local communities and working with partners to expand riverscape restoration."
Building Better Resilience: The Healthy Headwaters Alliance

The National Wildlife Federation provides leadership and facilitation for the Healthy Headwaters Alliance, a diverse coalition of Western water innovators, including water utility executives, federal land managers, scientists, community and water justice leaders, and conservation professionals. Together we share a commitment to equitable, science-based actions to build resilience back into the critical forested headwaters of the West’s streams and rivers. In 2023, in Denver, the Healthy Headwaters Alliance convened in person for the first time in more than three years, a fantastic opportunity to engage in strategic visioning for the future of the alliance, as well as review and discuss the draft assessment resulting from the Forests & Water project (see next).

The Forests & Water Project: At the Intersection of Greater Ecological Health

In 2023, with support from the Water Foundation, the Federation’s Western Water program conducted an interactive project to assess opportunities for improving forest health to protect and enhance water for people and nature. More than 50 individuals from across the West, including many leaders from the Healthy Headwaters Alliance, provided critical expertise and input to this assessment which was released in January 2024!

Please visit the Northern Rockies, Prairies and Pacific regional homepage to discover how you can support our work!
A 100,000-Acre Win in the San Juan Mountain Range

By retiring ten high-elevation grazing allotments, we’ve worked to protect more than 100,000 acres of fragile alpine tundra habitat in the San Juan mountain range. This extraordinary wildlife win has been years in the making and is the outcome of a recent domestic sheep grazing lease retirement in partnership with the Etchart family in Colorado.

How does retiring grazing permits help wildlife? Unfortunately, domestic sheep carry a number of diseases that can, and often do, decimate entire herds of Bighorn sheep. This herd has suffered from disease related die-offs over several decades and the only solution is to create permanent separation between domestic and wild sheep. This project does just that.

Bighorn sheep were once very abundant in Colorado though today, the state’s current bighorn population is estimated to be about 10 percent of its historical size. However, retiring grazing permits can change that. This market-based approach compensates ranchers for retiring their leases, and in turn, safeguards bighorns and other sensitive species. This approach has proven to be a successful model across the west. In over 20 years, the National Wildlife Federation has resolved conflicts on more than 1.7 million acres—equal to the land in the state of Delaware. With this big win for wildlife, we have the opportunity to significantly grow our footprint in 2024 – stay tuned!
Freeing the Fry!
Thousands of migrating Chinook salmon are now making their way to the Pacific, thanks to the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife’s Fish Eggs to Fry and EcoSchools U.S. Salmon Stewards programs! Last fall, we had two busy months fostering salmon eggs in classroom aquariums before a fateful trip to local river banks. There, students released the tiny salmon fry into the water so they could start the migration toward the Pacific Ocean. With the support of our “fin-tastic” and invaluable volunteers and partners including our affiliate the Northwest Steelheaders, more than 22,000 Chinook salmon eggs were hand-delivered to 113 classroom aquariums — a record number of schools! Through this hands-on learning experience, students watched as salmon eggs transformed and developed, while learning about their habitat and the critical role that salmon have to play in our regional ecosystem and our Northwest way of life.

EcoSchools are growing and on the move — into Boise!
Hello Boise! The EcoSchool program is expanding rapidly in the Boise, ID school district with 50 schools added to the roster, this is the greatest density within the new EcoSchools US program. As we prepare for this tremendous growth in 2024, we have one big takeaway: the travel and time to deliver this introductory presentation delivered measurable impact. We are delighted to have Boise, Idaho join the family of EcoSchools US and look forward to working together!

“In Washington state alone, we have more than 12,000 Certified Wildlife Habitats and Seattle ranks first among cities of its size.”
— MARY PHILLIPS, HEAD OF GARDEN FOR WILDLIFE™/CERTIFIED WILDLIFE HABITAT®, NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION
Project WET: Water and Climate-Focused education

Interactive, objective, and science-based learning is fun and a fantastic way to engage with and educate the future stewards of our communities. Project WET is an international non-profit which seeks to advance water education to understand global challenges and inspire local solutions. Our team, as a partner of the EPA Education Award, our Regional Education Manager was awarded a grant to lead Climate, Water & Resilience workshops in towns across Montana. With seven workshops under our belt, more are planned. Stay tuned!

Delivering Impact, Building Skills, Educating Communities — and Launching Careers

Our AmeriCorps members are the drivers of some of our biggest achievements each year. Engaging young conservationists and community volunteers, the work of an AmeriCorps member ranges from delivering science-based activities in non-traditional educational settings to leading activities to help butterflies in the garden — and more. We are proud of our ongoing partnership with the AmeriCorps program, building the experience and skills of young grads, who in turn, grow community interest, knowledge, and support of the ecosystem that sustains us.

Habitat Stewards: Educating and Activating Community Volunteers

Since 2009, in Western Washington we have trained and activated over 100 volunteers annually with the support of an AmeriCorps Member based in the Seattle office. The goal of the Habitat Stewards training program is to empower people to help restore and maintain habitat for wildlife in their communities. The National Wildlife Federation’s Community Wildlife Habitat Teams work together with other local non-profits involved in habitat conservation. Our trainings bring experts from the local community to offer workshops and field experiences so that participants can discover how their local ecosystem functions and the essential role that local wildlife and plants, habitat restoration, and environmental stewardship have to play in keeping it healthy.
Gardening for Wildlife — and Vibrant Communities

Now more than ever, community engagement is needed to conserve and restore surrounding wildlife habitats and watersheds, which are under threat from stormwater runoff and the pollutants it brings through waterways. 2023 ushered in 50 years of our Garden for Wildlife, a program centered on assisting wildlife by providing food, water, cover, sustainable practices and places for raising their young. In Washington state alone, we have more than 12,000 Certified Wildlife Habitats and Seattle ranks first among cities of its size. As 2023 registered as the hottest year on record, planting these gardens is of vital importance and we’ll keep pushing ahead in 2024.

Recovering Columbia and Snake River Salmon

Salmon are central to the Northwest way of life and a healthy ecosystem. Yet in the Columbia River Basin, they are running out of time due to the four dams on the lower Snake River. However, on December 14, after more than two decades of fighting for salmon recovery in court, we’ve finally reached an important turning point. The Biden Administration, the Six Sovereigns (the Nez Perce, Warm Springs, Umatilla, and Yakama Tribes, and the states of Oregon and Washington), National Wildlife Federation and a coalition of conservation and fishing organizations agreed on a package of actions and commitments that creates a roadmap for recovery of healthy and abundant salmon throughout the Columbia and Snake River Basins. It also creates a pathway to a more resilient Northwest in the face of climate change, and provides important steps toward or progress toward upholding federal commitments made to Northwest Tribes.
With your help, our wins keep gaining momentum.

Learn how you can donate to the National Wildlife Federation, please visit: NWF.org/DonateNow

Or call 1-800-822-9919