



WESTERN RIVERS CONSERVANCY

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On the Yampa River, New Public Access and a Sanctuary for Fish and Wildlife

Maybell, Colo.—The entrance to Cross Mountain Canyon and 2.5 miles of the Yampa River immediately upstream have been permanently conserved for the benefit of fish, wildlife and people, [Western Rivers Conservancy](http://www.westernrivers.org) (WRC) announced today. The project, a joint effort by WRC and the [Bureau of Land Management](http://www.blm.gov) (BLM), also opens new access to tens of thousands of acres of surrounding public land, including the BLM's vast Cross Mountain Wilderness Study Area (WSA).

The announcement today follows WRC's successful conveyance of Cross Mountain Canyon Ranch, at the mouth of its namesake canyon, to the BLM. The ranch lies 15 miles west of the town of Maybell and spans 920 acres of pinyon-juniper woodlands, sagebrush communities, riparian areas, wetlands and former pastureland. It borders the eastern edge of the Cross Mountain WSA.



The Yampa River enters Cross Mountain Canyon (foreground), immediately downstream from the WRC conservation property.

“Protecting access to our finest riverlands and the wild areas that surround them is a key part of Western Rivers Conservancy’s mission,” said WRC President, Sue Doroff. “Our conservation work at Cross Mountain Canyon Ranch ensures this incredible area will be open to hunters, anglers, boaters, hikers and anyone else who wants to explore this unique and rugged landscape.”

The Cross Mountain WSA and its neighboring lands are fabled big-game hunting grounds, home to one of the largest herds of Rocky Mountain elk on the continent. Until now, access to the area was difficult at best because the only feasible routes into the WSA were through private property or by boat. Now, the conservation lands, as well as the access they provide, are open to all.

The project also creates a permanent sanctuary for all four species of Colorado Basin warm-water fish: Colorado pike minnow, humpback chub, bonytail chub and razorback sucker. Other animals that will benefit from the effort include Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep, pronghorn antelope, cougar, coyote, mule deer, peregrine falcon and numerous songbird species.

The least damned river in the Colorado Basin, the Yampa flows 250 miles from the Flat Tops Wilderness to the Green River, in Dinosaur National Monument. West of Maybell, where it enters the spectacular vertical-walled Cross Mountain Canyon, the river picks up force and offers some of the best class IV-V whitewater in Colorado.

“This is extraordinary country,” said Dieter Erdmann, Interior West Program Director in WRC’s Colorado office. “The wildlife values are exceptional, and the recreation opportunities—especially for hunters, anglers and boaters—are excellent. When it comes to access, the project creates an invaluable resource for the public.”

For all of these reasons, the acquisition has received positive support from local groups and conservation projects including the Yampa River System Legacy Project and Friends of the Yampa River.

Given the property’s strategic location, the BLM has sought to acquire the ranch for years. Since WRC purchased the land in 2012, it has worked closely with the BLM to make that vision a reality.

“The BLM is committed to providing expansive recreational opportunities and to managing native habitat,” said BLM Field Manager Wendy Reynolds. “Our partnership with Western Rivers Conservancy has allowed us acquire land that will greatly improve access to a unique and prized recreation area.”

The BLM, now the property’s long-term conservation steward, will install visitor facilities on the property and work to ensure the project lands remain healthy for fish and wildlife.

About Western Rivers Conservancy

Western Rivers Conservancy is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that protects outstanding river ecosystems in the western United States. WRC acquires lands along rivers to protect critical habitat and to create or improve public access for compatible use and enjoyment. By cooperating with local agencies like the BLM and by applying decades of land acquisition experience, WRC secures the health of whole ecosystems. It has protected hundreds of miles of stream frontage on great rivers like the Gunnison, the Salmon, the Snake, the Hoh, the John Day and the Madison.

Founded in 1988, WRC is the nation's only conservation program dedicated solely to the protection of riverlands. Earlier this year, WRC opened a third office, its Interior West office, in Denver, Colorado. To learn more about WRC, visit www.westernrivers.org.