

Nomination of Outstanding Resource Waters: Steamboat Creek

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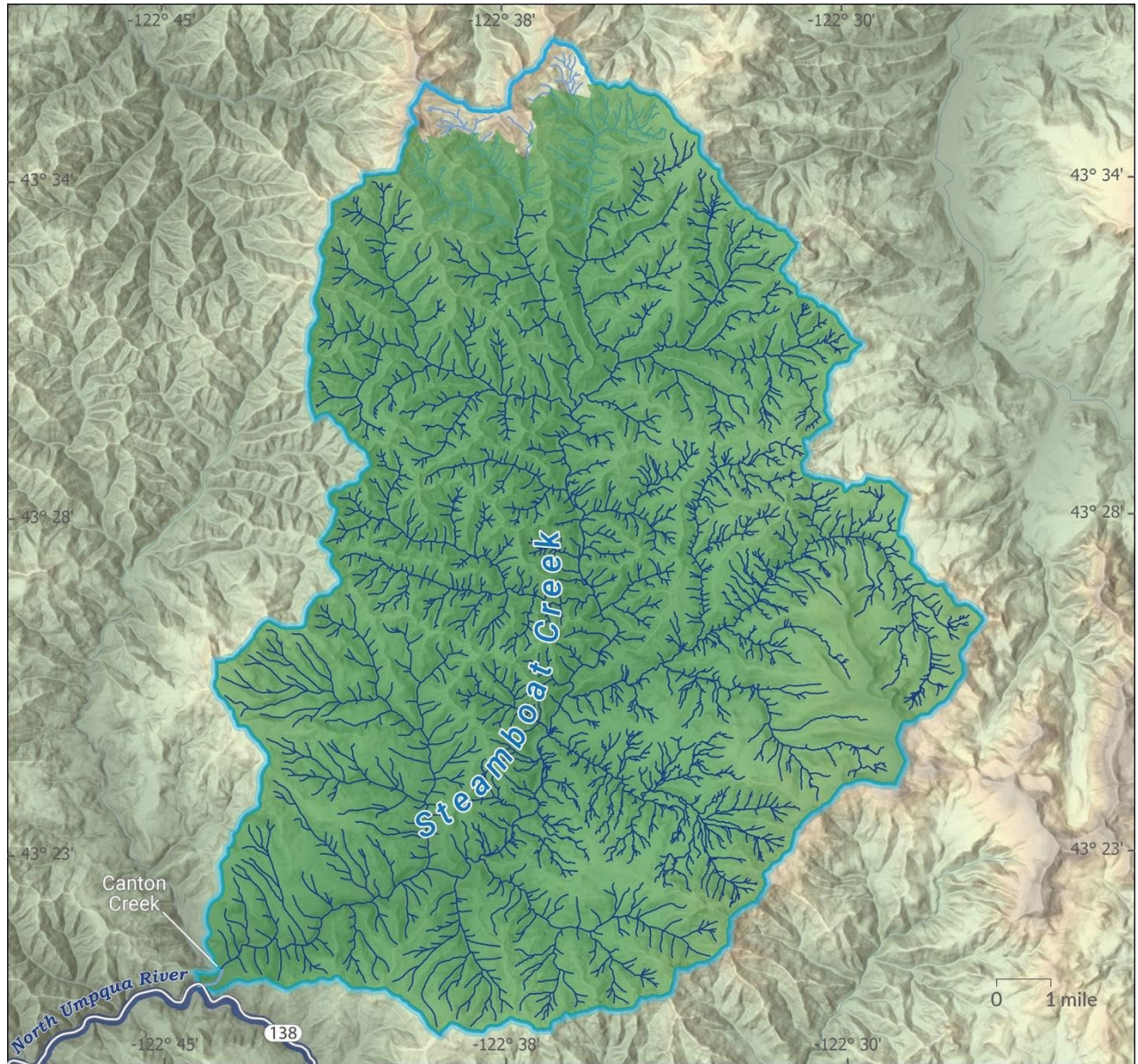
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B. Description of Nominated Waterbodies and Steamboat Creek Watershed

1. Nominated Waterbodies

This nomination proposes for designation as Outstanding Resource Waters Steamboat Creek above its confluence with Canton Creek and its named and unnamed tributaries located within the 99,653-acre Frank and Jeanne Moore Wild Steelhead Special Management Area. The waters proposed for designation exclude the entire length of Annie Creek, Knott Creek and Hobart Creek, and Horse Heaven Creek above its confluence with Windy Creek. The proposed designation includes 732.72 river miles.



Steamboat Creek

Proposed Outstanding Resource Water (ORW) Nomination

 Candidate ORWs

 Steamboat Creek Watershed

 Frank and Jeanne Moore Wild Steelhead Special Management Area

SOURCE: USGS; US Census; Natural Earth.

2. Watershed

Steamboat Creek and its tributaries lie within the 104,521-acre Steamboat Creek watershed. The watershed is within the Western Cascade mountains in Southwest Oregon, on the southern slopes of the Calapooya Divide, which separates the Willamette River and Umpqua River drainages. The topography of the watershed is variable and characterized by rolling hills and mountains. Elevations range from 1,200 feet to 5,990 feet at the peak of Bohemia Mountain. The watershed is primarily forested, dominated by transitional moist forests with Hemlock and dry forests with Doug fir.¹ Late successional forests comprise 58 percent to 72 percent of the middle and upper watershed.² The watershed spans both Douglas and Lane Counties and is situated 40 miles northeast of Roseburg and about 100 miles south of Eugene. The nearest community is Glide.

Ninety-nine percent of the watershed is located in the Umpqua National Forest, which was first set aside as public land in 1893 and established as a national forest in 1907.³ Ninety-five percent of the watershed is located in the Frank and Jeanne Moore Wild Steelhead Special Management Area, which the U.S. Forest Service is statutorily required to manage to conserve and enhance the watershed's natural character and ecosystem, drinking water, cultural, recreational, and fisheries values.⁴ The waters proposed for designation lie entirely within the Umpqua National Forest and the Frank and Jeanne Moore Wild Steelhead Special Management Area.

Rising from its headwaters on Bohemia Mountain, Steamboat Creek flows south and then southwest for 24 river miles before joining the federally designated Wild and Scenic North Umpqua River at river mile 53, which then continues another 165 miles to the Pacific Ocean. The drainage is predominantly fed by runoff from winter rain events and is characterized by shallow, rocky soils that do not hold water well. This geology results in frequent extreme high-flow events—the highest in the Umpqua National Forest—that have created deep pools with extremely cold bottom water and distribute coarse gravel in the area's numerous riffles and glides.⁵

A smaller portion of the drainage—higher elevation headwaters and Big Bend Creek—are fed by glacial deposits that store rain and snow and provide consistent cold water throughout the year.⁶ Runoff from these areas is an important source of cold water for the watershed, particularly in the summer months.⁷ One assessment found that Big Bend Creek, which joins Steamboat Creek at river mile 11, provides 35 percent of Steamboat Creek's baseflow in the summer⁸ and lowered temperature in Steamboat Creek up to 6°C;⁹ a 2003 survey showed Big Bend Creek lowering

¹ Steamboat Creek Watershed, Oregon Explorer, <https://oregonexplorer.info/content/steamboat-creek-watershed?topic=56&topic=98>.

² Upper and Lower Steamboat Creek Watershed Analysis 1.1, USDA Forest Service Umpqua National Forest Timber Planning Team, 4 (April 2007).

³ History of the Umpqua National Forest, USDA Forest Service, <https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/umpqua/learning/history-culture/?cid=fseprd1008933>.

⁴ 16 U.S.C. § 539s.

⁵ Wild and Scenic River Suitability Study for Steamboat Creek, Draft Legislative Environmental Impact Statement, Umpqua National Forest, Ch. III, 4 (1992) (Suitability Study).

⁶ Wild and Scenic River Eligibility Determination for Steamboat Creek, Umpqua Ranger District, National Forest, 11 (1991) (Eligibility Determination).

⁷ Charles Dewberry, Steamboat Creek Snorkel Survey, Pacific Rivers (2019) (Steamboat Creek Snorkel Survey), https://www.pacificrivers.org/uploads/1/1/9/9/119981094/2019_steamboat_creek_survey_report.pdf.

⁸ Steven A. Holaday, Summertime water temperature trends in Steamboat Creek Basin, Umpqua National Forest, M.S. Thesis, Oregon State University, Corvallis, OR, 27 (1992).

⁹ Suitability Study, Ch. III, 19.

temperatures in Steamboat Creek by 3.9°C.¹⁰

The watershed's distinctive geology and hydrology create unique habitat conditions—deep pools, cold water that persists through the summer, high-quality spawning gravel, and low-gradient streams—which provide critical habitat for its resident and nonresident fish. The watershed supports more than 50 miles of anadromous fish streams, 40 miles of streams with resident fish species, and 160 miles of perennial streams.¹¹

C. Outstanding Water Quality Values and Characteristics to be Protected by Outstanding Resource Waters Designation

Outstanding Resource Waters (ORW) designation will protect the high water quality and outstanding ecological, cultural, and recreational values of Steamboat Creek and its tributaries. Designation as an ORW prohibits new or expanded discharges and activities that would degrade water quality, providing unique regulatory protections that safeguard the state's outstanding waters. While existing management designations reduce risks to water quality by restricting land uses and development, they do not provide the same targeted and forward-looking protection of water quality as ORW designation.

As described further in the next section, the outstanding water quality values and characteristics of Steamboat Creek and its tributaries that would be protected by designation are:

- High water quality, including cold water temperatures in tributaries and Steamboat Creek's deep pools and clarity, that supports outstanding habitat for the North Umpqua's anadromous fish and particularly its coastal summer steelhead.
- Ecological value as outstanding and strategically important habitat for salmonid species, providing spawning and rearing habitat and cold water refugia for over half of the North Umpqua summer steelhead.
- Cultural value tied to the area's fisheries and natural resources, which are culturally significant to Indigenous peoples and are important for Tribal economies and as subsistence for Tribal members.
- Recreational value as the most important tributary supporting the world-renowned and economically significant North Umpqua's fly fishery and as one of the best opportunities to view summer steelhead.

D. Qualifications for Outstanding Resource Waters Designation

Steamboat Creek and its tributaries have outstanding ecological, cultural, and recreational values, and provide important habitat for several anadromous fish populations, particularly the North Umpqua River's iconic coastal summer steelhead population. Based on the following characteristics, these waters are outstanding state resources and qualified to be designated as ORWs:

- The water quality of Steamboat Creek and its tributaries is critical to supporting its outstanding ecological, cultural, and recreational values.

¹⁰ Watershed Sciences, LLC, Aerial Surveys in the Umpqua River Basin, Thermal Infrared and Color Videography, Report for Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, 32 (May 2, 2003), <https://www.oregon.gov/deq/FilterDocs/tmdlTIRump2003.pdf>.

¹¹ Suitability Study, Ch. III, 18.

- Steamboat Creek and its tributaries have outstanding ecological value and are uniquely important as a stronghold for anadromous fish.
- The watershed is within the ancestral lands of Northwest Tribes and the fisheries and natural resources it supports are culturally significant to Indigenous peoples and are important for Tribal economies and as subsistence for Tribal members.
- Steamboat Creek and its tributaries support outstanding water-related recreational and learning opportunities, including one of the best opportunities to view summer steelhead.
- Numerous administrative, state, and federal management frameworks and designations recognize the outstanding natural and resource values of Steamboat Creek and its tributaries. The watershed is congressionally designated as the Frank and Jeanne Moore Wild Steelhead Special Management Area, which directs U.S. Forest Service to manage the watershed to conserve and enhance its natural unique values, including as a thermal refuge for wild salmonids. Steamboat Creek is a critical tributary to the federal North Umpqua Wild and Scenic River.

1. Water Quality

The outstanding water quality characteristics of Steamboat Creek and its tributaries, including clarity and temperature, are the foundation of their outstanding ecological, cultural, and recreational values. The quality of these waters has been studied since the 1950s.¹² A stream gauge has measured streamflow on Steamboat Creek since 1956 and gauges have measured flow on Cedar, Steelhead, and Big Bend Creeks since 1969.¹³ Water quality measurements for temperature began as early as the 1950s and has regularly occurred in the basin since 1969. Turbidity sampling has occurred since 1971, with sporadic monitoring data related to chemical composition.¹⁴ There are no point sources of pollution in the watershed, no anthropogenic sources of nutrients, and no flow withdrawals.

Lower Steamboat Creek and the watershed's tributaries have high invertebrate densities, a key indicator of high water quality.¹⁵

Steamboat Creek and its tributaries are designated for all beneficial uses except for commercial navigation and transportation.¹⁶ Fish use designations include for salmon and steelhead spawning use from January 1 through June 15 and as core cold water habitat.

Effects from historical timber harvests in the basin, particularly between the 1950s and 1980s, continue to impact the water quality in Steamboat Creek.¹⁷ These harvests preceded regulations to protect streams and resulted in the removal of trees within riparian areas—leaving streams unshaded—and the degradation of stream channels from the addition of logging debris and log transport.¹⁸ The removal of riparian buffers and modification of channel habitat increased water

¹² Ibid., 6.

¹³ Ibid., 5.

¹⁴ North Umpqua River Management Plan, Wild and Scenic River Management Plan, USDA Forest Service, U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Oregon State Parks & Recreation Department, Ch. II, 11 (July 1992), https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fseprd493804.pdf (showing years of water monitoring and fish surveys) (North Umpqua Management Plan).

¹⁵ Suitability Study, Ch. II, 15.

¹⁶ OAR 34-041-0320.

¹⁷ See e.g., Steven A. Holaday.

¹⁸ Jeffery Dambacher, Distribution abundance, and emigration of juvenile steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*), and analysis of stream habitat in Steamboat Creek basin, Oregon, M.S. Thesis, Oregon State University, 2 (2019).

temperature and sedimentation in Steamboat Creek and several tributaries.¹⁹

Beginning in 1985, the U.S. Forest Service began restoration efforts to improve stream conditions.²⁰ These restoration efforts continue today and are now paired with administrative and statutory protections that restrict logging in the watershed to conserve and enhance the area's habitat values and water quality. These efforts have improved water quality; by the early 1990s, tributaries had generally experienced significant cooling in response to increased riparian shading.²¹ However, temperatures continue to be elevated in the watershed. Steamboat Creek, East Fork Steamboat Creek, Little Rock Creek and Big Bend Creek are listed as Category 5 for year-round impairments for cold water criteria for spawning and rearing habitats.²²

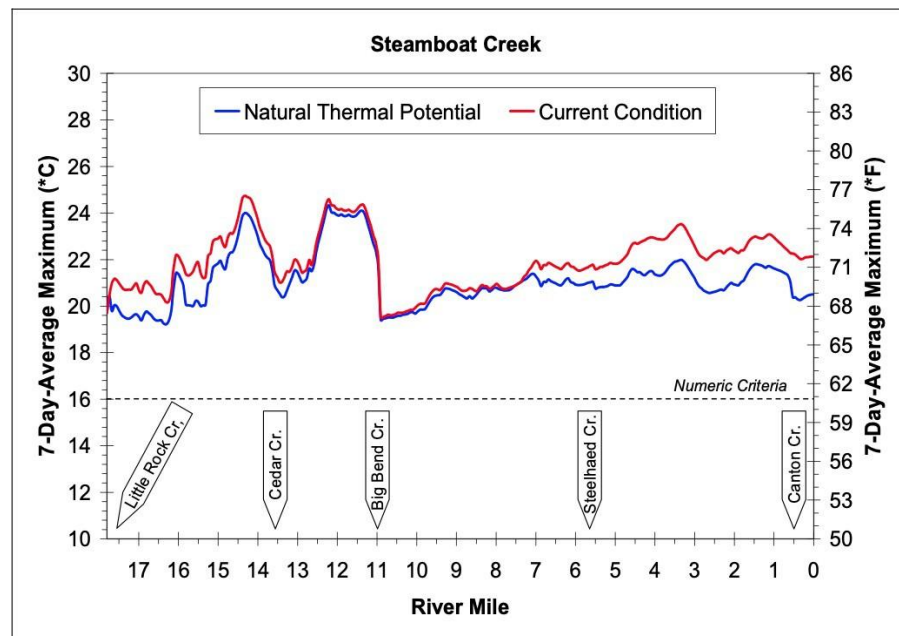


Figure 3.28 Steamboat Creek temperature simulation results.

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Warmer stream temperatures have also resulted in water quality impairments for Dissolved Oxygen (DO) and pH.²⁴ The 2006 Umpqua Basin TMDL attributed exceedances solely to warmer stream temperatures.²⁵ There are no anthropogenic sources of biochemical dissolved oxygen or nutrients in the watershed—the U.S. Forest Service has prohibited the use of natural fertilizer since at least the mid-1990s. The TMDL anticipates that continuing stream restoration will add assimilative capacity and lower pH and DO levels.²⁶

¹⁹ Steven A. Holaday, 44-56.

²⁰ Jeffery Dambacher, 2.

²¹ Steven A. Holaday, 44-56.

²² 2018/2020 Integrated Report, Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, <https://www.oregon.gov/deq/wq/Pages/epaApprovedIR.aspx>.

²³ Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, Umpqua Basin TMDL, Ch. 3 Stream Temperature, 67 (Oct. 2006), <https://www.oregon.gov/deq/FilterDocs/umpchpt3temp.pdf>.

²⁴ 2018/2020 Integrated Report, Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, <https://www.oregon.gov/deq/wq/Pages/epaApprovedIR.aspx>.

²⁵ Umpqua Basin TMDL, Ch. 4 Algae/Aquatic Weeds, Dissolved Oxygen and pH, Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, 43, <https://www.oregon.gov/deq/FilterDocs/umpchpt4nut.pdf>.

²⁶ Ibid.

Steamboat Creek and two tributaries were previously listed as impaired for sediment; however, they were delisted in 2004 following data provided by the U.S. Forest Service.²⁷ Existing high sediment in Steamboat Creek is attributed to naturally high stream flows and the watershed's shallow soils. The type of sediment in the watershed generally does not produce high turbidity but instead settles, contributing to high value spawning and rearing habitat.²⁸

While early land uses continue to impact the watershed's streams, these waters remain critically and uniquely important as aquatic habitat. In particular, tributaries remain important thermal refuges and spawning and rearing habitat for anadromous species.²⁹ A 2003 thermal study found that of eight tributaries studied, six had significantly cooler water than Steamboat Creek.³⁰ A 2019 snorkel survey of cutthroat trout and steelhead found 92 percent of recorded individuals in tributaries, with the largest number in Little Rock Creek followed by Cedar Creek, Horse Heaven Creek, and City Creek.³¹

Streamflow in Steamboat Creek and Steelhead Creek was first protected in 1979.³² In 1991 the Oregon Water Resource Department issued three instream water rights securing additional flows for the entire length of Steamboat Creek to support anadromous fish "migration, spawning, egg incubation, and juvenile rearing."³³ More recently, the Department approved an instream water right for Cedar Creek, and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife has two pending applications for instream water rights in Steelhead Creek and Big Bend Creek.³⁴

2. Ecological Significance and Critical Habitat

Located in the Doug Fir and Hemlock forests of the Western Cascades, the Steamboat Creek watershed's outstanding ecological values center on the unique water quality of Steamboat Creek and its tributaries. The outstanding ecological values of these waters and their surrounding forests include important habitat for a variety of plants, wildlife, and aquatic species. The area's fisheries are culturally significant and provide unique recreational and learning opportunities.

a. Plants and Wildlife

The Steamboat Creek watershed provides habitat for a variety of plants and wildlife, including threatened and sensitive populations. The watershed includes habitat for the North Umpqua *Kalmiopsis*, a rare perennial plant endemic to Oregon, found only in steep rocky outcroppings in the Umpqua basin.³⁵ The watershed's late-successional habitat includes 18,194 acres of critical habitat for the threatened northern spotted owl and 2,003 acres of primary habitat for four

²⁷ Oregon 2012 Integrated Report Database and 303(d) List.

²⁸ Middle North Umpqua Watershed Analysis, Human Uses and Land Management, USDA Forest Service, North Umpqua Ranger District, Ch. 6, 19 (Jan. 2001), https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb5389661.pdf.

²⁹ Suitability Study, Ch. III, 7.

³⁰ Thermal Infrared and Color Videography, Report for Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, 32.

³¹ Steamboat Creek Snorkel Survey.

³² Minimum instream flows were first protected as Minimum Perennial Streamflows and converted to certificated instream water rights in 1984, though they retained the original 1979 priority date. See Certificates 59961, 59962, and 59963.

³³ Certificates 73062, Certificate 73063, and Certificate 73064.

³⁴ Certificate 89016; Application IS-89015; Application IS-89016.

³⁵ Lower Steamboat LSR Plantation Thinning Project, Final Environmental Assessment, Umpqua National Forest, North Umpqua Ranger District, 103 (Feb. 2014), <https://usfs-public.app.box.com/v/PinyonPublic/file/932817648544>.

peregrine nests.³⁶ In addition, northern bald eagles use the watershed for foraging related to the watershed's anadromous fish populations.³⁷ Sensitive species—which show evidence of reduced population viability—found in the watershed include the White-Headed Woodpecker, Lewis Woodpecker, the Townsend's Big-Eared Bat, and the Foothill Yellow-Legged Frog.³⁸

b. *Fisheries*

The Steamboat Creek watershed is uniquely important as critical habitat for aquatic species. The watershed has more than 50 miles of anadromous fish streams, 40 miles of streams with resident fish species, and 160 miles of perennial streams.³⁹ Resident fish include redbside shiner, suckers, Umpqua long-nose dace, sculpins, speckled dace, and lamprey.⁴⁰

The watershed is particularly important as habitat for salmonid species, providing outstanding spawning and rearing habitat and cold water refugia. Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife has identified the Steamboat Creek watershed as having the highest ecosystem value for salmonid species,⁴¹ and the North American Salmon Stronghold Partnership—a public-private partnership that works to identify and protect healthy salmon ecosystems in North America—recognizes the watershed as a “Wild Salmon Stronghold.”⁴²

Species of wild salmon supported by the watershed include spring chinook, coastal coho, sea-run cutthroat trout, and winter and summer steelhead. Oregon classifies cutthroat trout and winter steelhead as “strong guarded” based on strong population viability but needing a cautious management approach.⁴³ Coastal spring chinook and summer steelhead populations are classified as “sensitive vulnerable,” which indicate species with currently viable populations but that have naturally limited range or have a small number of distinct populations.⁴⁴ State assessments of coastal coho have determined there are viable populations, but that population numbers fall below desired abundance.⁴⁵ Spring Chinook, steelhead, and coho all have declining population numbers; the State notes it has limited actual abundance data for cutthroat trout. For all species, habitat and water temperature are listed among the primary limiting factors for populations.⁴⁶

(i) Summer Steelhead

Among these anadromous fish, Steamboat Creek and its tributaries are uniquely significant as habitat for coastal summer steelhead. The U.S. Forest Service has recognized the watershed's

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 77.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 71.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 58-9.

³⁹ Suitability Study, Ch. III, 18.

⁴⁰ Jeffery Dambacher, 3-4.

⁴¹ Coastal Multi-Species Conservation and Management Plan, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, 93 (June 6, 2014), https://www.dfw.state.or.us/fish/CRP/docs/coastal_multispecies/CMP_main_final.pdf.

⁴² Pacific Rivers and Wild Salmon Center Testimony in Support of the Frank Moore Wild Steelhead Sanctuary Act of 2015 (Senate Bill 1448), Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests and Mining (Oct. 8, 2015), <https://www.wildsalmoncenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/FMWSSfinaltestimony-ENR-10-8-15.pdf>; North American Salmon Stronghold Partnership, Charter (Dec. 8, 2009), https://wildsalmoncenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/10-NASSP_Charter_12-8-09.pdf.

⁴³ Coastal Multi-Species Conservation and Management Plan, 29-30.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Oregon Coast Coho Conservation Plan for the State of Oregon, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (March 16, 2007), https://www.dfw.state.or.us/fish/crp/docs/coastal_coho/final/coho_plan.pdf.

⁴⁶ Coastal Multi-Species Conservation and Management Plan, 35.

value as habitat for coastal summer steelhead as “outstandingly remarkable.”⁴⁷

Summer and winter steelhead are distinguished by their lifecycle. The North Umpqua summer steelhead return to their natal freshwater streams between late spring and late fall when they are still immature.⁴⁸ They then hold in freshwater streams as they fully mature and spawn between January and May. Juvenile summer steelhead live in freshwater for two to three years before migrating to the ocean between January and July. Because summer steelhead remain in freshwater streams for longer periods, including through warmer summer months when stream temperatures frequently exceed their natural requirements, they are uniquely dependent on habitats that provide cold water refuges. As with other anadromous fish they also require habitat with migratory corridors, adequate stream flow for migration, and clean gravel and a complex environment for spawning and rearing months.⁴⁹

Oregon has 29 populations of wild summer steelhead, managed as seven unique groups of populations that share a common geographic range, genetics, life history, and ecological characteristics—termed Species Management Units.⁵⁰ Oregon coastal summer steelhead are managed as one SMU and include only two populations—the North Umpqua basin population and the Siletz basin population.⁵¹ The North Umpqua’s summer steelhead population has generally been declining and experienced a significant drop in 2021.⁵² Oregon lists coastal summer steelhead as a sensitive species.⁵³

Table 1. Naturally produced spawner escapement estimates for North Umpqua summer steelhead. Population estimates are since approval of the *Coastal Multi-Species Conservation and Management Plan (CMP)*. Naturally produced spawner escapement estimates are summer period counts at Winchester Dam (May 1 – November 30), adjusted to account for fishery-related mortality above Winchester Dam. The CMP Desired Abundance Target and Critical Abundance Threshold are 4,200 and 1,200, respectively (see CMP, Table AIII:2).

Run Year	Naturally Produced Escapement
2014	2,182
2015	1,598
2016	3,652
2017	2,472
2018	1,820
2019	1,924
2020	1,452
2021 ^P	449

^P2021 Estimate is provisional and subject to change.

⁴⁷ Suitability Study, Ch. III, 12.

⁴⁸ 2022 Assessment of Naturally Produced Summer Steelhead in the Umpqua River Basin, Science Bulletin 2022-1, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, 7 (2022) (2022 Summer Steelhead Assessment), https://www.dfw.state.or.us/fish/CRP/docs/north_umpqua_summer_steelhead/2022_NU_StS_Assessment_FINAL.pdf

⁴⁹ Oregon Conservation Strategy, Summer Steelhead/Coastal Rainbow Trout, Coastal SMU, <https://www.oregonconservationstrategy.org/strategy-species/steelhead-rainbow-redband-trout/summer-steelhead-coastal-rainbow-trout-coastal-smu/>.

⁵⁰ 2005 Native Fish Status Report: Special Management Unit Summaries, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, 2, 6, <https://www.dfw.state.or.us/fish/ONFSR/docs/final/A-Vol%20I%20Introduction.pdf>.

⁵¹ 2005 Native Fish Status Report: Summer Steelhead SMUs, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, <https://www.dfw.state.or.us/fish/ONFSR/docs/final/07-summer-steelhead/ss-summary.pdf>.

⁵² 2022 Assessment of Naturally Produced Summer Steelhead in the Umpqua River Basin, 11.

⁵³ OAR 635-100-0040.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

Fish counts of summer steelhead holding in the Big Bend Pool, a primary thermal refuge in the Steamboat Creek watershed, have also shown declines—falling from over 500 fish in the 1990s⁵⁵ to now several hundred fish annually.⁵⁶

Habitat conditions, particularly water quality, are identified as limiting freshwater factors to summer steelhead abundance.⁵⁷ Oregon’s Conservation Strategy identifies maintaining and restoring aquatic habitat as a key conservation action.⁵⁸ To date, summer steelhead have lost 33 percent of their total historical habitat in the western United States.⁵⁹ Maintaining existing strongholds—such as Steamboat Creek—is critically important to safeguarding and growing existing populations.

(ii) Unique Role of Steamboat Creek Watershed for Coastal Summer Steelhead

Steamboat Creek and its tributaries provide critically important habitat for coastal summer steelhead. The Steamboat Creek watershed serves as habitat for more than half of the North Umpqua River summer steelhead population. As the Oregon State Game Commission described, “summer steelhead of the Umpqua system are peculiar in that practically the entire run enters the Steamboat Creek drainage to spawn.”⁶⁰ The U.S. Forest Service recognizes that Steamboat Creek watershed’s high-quality summer steelhead habitat is “of regional, national and international significance.”⁶¹

⁵⁵ Karl Konecny, Bring them Back Better, Steamboaters, <https://steamboaters.org/newsletter/bring-them-back-better/>.

⁵⁶ See Fishwatch Monthly Reports, <https://northumpqua.org/fishwatch-august-2022-monthly-report/>.

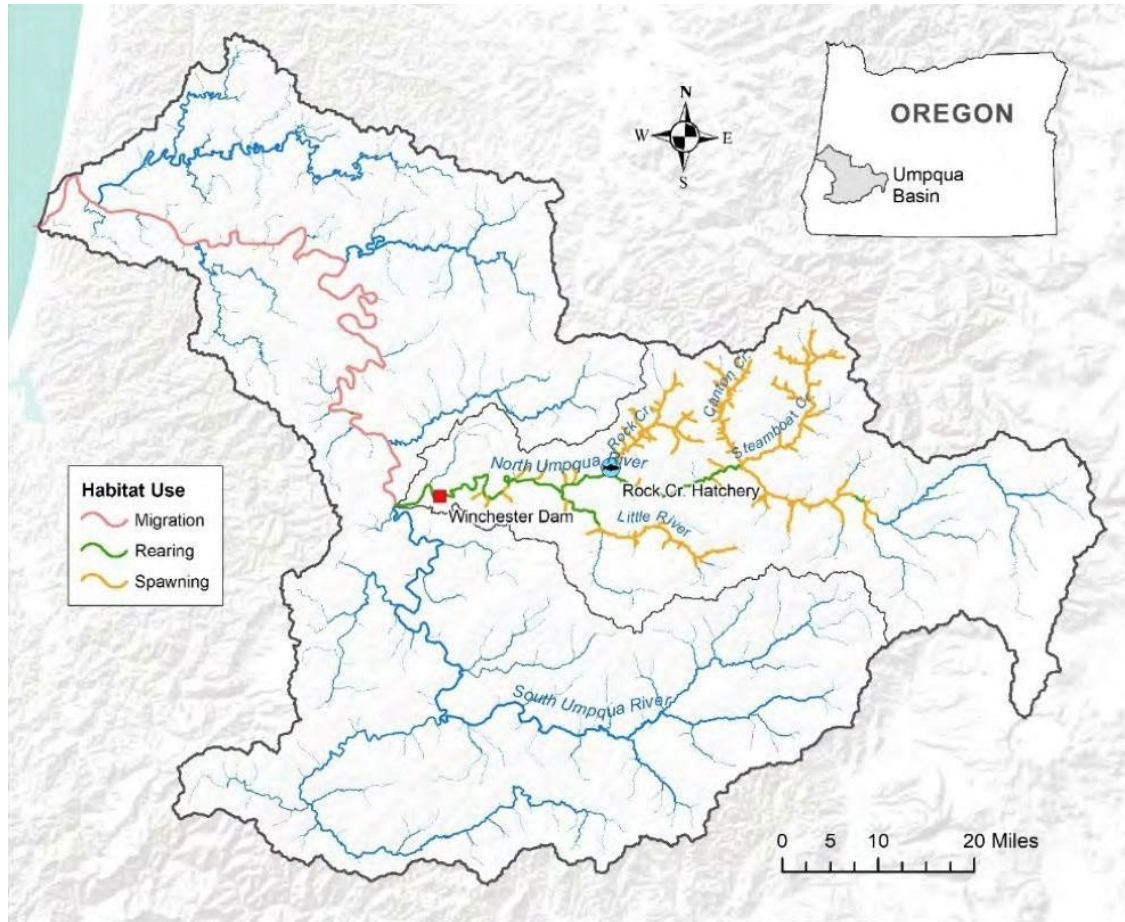
⁵⁷ Coastal Multi-Species Conservation and Management Plan, 35.

⁵⁸ Oregon Conservation Strategy, Summer Steelhead/Coastal Rainbow Trout, Coastal SMU

⁵⁹ Kurt Fesenmyer, Range-wide Assessment of Strategic Management Opportunities for Wild Winter and Summer Steelhead *Oncorhynchus mykiss* in the Western Contiguous United States, Trout Unlimited, 11 (Nov. 2014), https://www.tu.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Steelhead_assessment_v1_0_Nov_2014.pdf.

⁶⁰ 2022 Assessment of Naturally Produced Summer Steelhead in the Umpqua River Basin, 35.

⁶¹ Suitability Determination, Ch. II, 1.



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The watershed provides a unique combination of spawning and rearing habitat and cold water refuges. Steamboat Creek watershed has a high percentage of secondary channel areas that support strong spawning and rearing habitat.⁶³ It also has the deepest pools per kilometer in the North Umpqua watershed, which provide both thermal refuges and exceptional spawning habitat.⁶⁴ Water temperatures stratify in these pools, with temperatures at the bottom of the pool remaining two to three degrees cooler than at the surface.⁶⁵ The fish hold in these pools over the warm summer and fall months until they move deeper into the watershed to spawn.

Big Bend Creek has exceptionally cold water—spring-fed from glacial snowmelt—which persists throughout the summer. The Big Bend pool serves as a critical thermal refuge for the steelhead that spawn in the watershed. This single pool provides habitat for up to 30 percent of the fish that return to Steamboat Creek, which is 10 percent to 12 percent of the total run that return to the North Umpqua River.⁶⁶

Steamboat Creek’s habitat and particularly its cold water refuges are anticipated to become even more critical as climate change disruptions—reduced snowpack, lower streamflow in the

⁶² ODFW habitat use designations for summer steelhead in the Umpqua River Basin. See e.g., 2022 Assessment of Naturally Produced Summer Steelhead in the Umpqua River Basin, 8.

⁶³ 2022 Assessment of Naturally Produced Summer Steelhead in the Umpqua River Basin, 61.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Suitability Study, Ch. III, 25.

⁶⁶ Pacific Rivers and Wild Salmon Center Testimony in Support of the Frank Moore Wild Steelhead Sanctuary Act of 2015 (Senate Bill 1448).

summer, warmer ambient air temperatures—result in increased stream temperatures. A recent Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife assessment found the watershed’s cold water and high streamflow permanence would be resilient to climate change effects and continue to serve as refuge for juvenile salmon.⁶⁷

Steamboat Creek’s habitat is also uniquely insulated from hatchery fish. Hatchery fish, which can spawn with wild fish, are shown to weaken the fitness of wild fish populations, making them a key threat to wild North Umpqua summer steelhead.⁶⁸ While hatchery fish are released in the North Umpqua River, they are generally not found in Steamboat Creek.⁶⁹ Early surveys of summer steelhead below Steamboat Falls identified only wild fish despite hatchery fish accounting for almost half the total population in the North Umpqua.⁷⁰ More recent surveys have continued to find near zero numbers of hatchery fish in the watershed, with a high number of 0.3 percent of hatchery fish noted between 1998 and 2021.⁷¹ The absence of hatchery fish amplifies Steamboat Creek’s importance as critical habitat—providing a rare refuge for wild fish stocks.



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Steamboat Creek’s outstanding water quality and habitat conditions are critically important to maintaining this unique summer steelhead population. Designation as an ORW is an important tool for ensuring that the water quality is maintained to protect this critical habitat. As the U.S. Forest Service recognized, “maintaining [Steamboat Creek’s] high quality water, stable flows, and stream habitat are the foundation for protecting this unique fishery.”⁷³

⁶⁷ 2022 Assessment of Naturally Produced Summer Steelhead in the Umpqua River Basin, 81.

⁶⁸ Ibid; 2005 Oregon Native Fish Status Report, Volume II Assessments Methods & Population Results, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, 322 (2005), <https://www.dfw.state.or.us/fish/onfsr/docs/final/07-summer-steelhead/ss-summary.pdf>.

⁶⁹ 2022 Assessment of Naturally Produced Summer Steelhead in the Umpqua River Basin, 3, 35.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 35.

⁷¹ Ibid., 35.

⁷² Steelhead in Steamboat Creek by Kenn Morrish.

⁷³ Suitability Study, Ch. II, 1.

c. Ecological Importance to the North Umpqua River Ecosystem

The North Umpqua River basin is one of the most important ecological areas in Oregon and the Pacific Northwest. The area supports one of the last salmon and steelhead strongholds on the West Coast. As the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife noted, “the Umpqua River is arguably one of the most important fisheries in the state.”⁷⁴ It also provides habitat for several endemic and rare species including black bears, river otters, bald eagles, and northern spotted owls.

Thirty-four miles of the North Umpqua is designated a national Wild and Scenic River for its spectacular riverine qualities including clean water, fisheries, cultural sites, and scenic beauty. This stretch of river is distinguished as one of Oregon’s most scenic rivers and renowned for its world-class salmon and steelhead fishing.⁷⁵ The North Umpqua summer steelhead fishery is identified as one of its outstandingly remarkable values and “one of the most outstanding on the West Coast.”⁷⁶ As the U.S. Forest Service noted, “as people come from literally all over the world to fish for North Umpqua River summer steelhead, this fishery is culturally and economically significant for the state of Oregon and is culturally important at the national level.”⁷⁷

Steamboat Creek and its tributaries are critically important to sustaining the ecological health of the North Umpqua River basin. These waters provide critical streamflow and cold water for the North Umpqua River and provide strategically important habitat that support the North Umpqua River’s fisheries. As the North Umpqua River Management Plan notes, “the North Umpqua is the sum of its tributaries.”⁷⁸

3. Cultural Importance

Steamboat Creek watershed is an important cultural resource for Tribes and Indigenous peoples. The watershed is within the ancestral territories of Northwest Tribes and the fisheries and natural resources it supports are culturally significant to Indigenous peoples and are important for Tribal economies and as subsistence for Tribal members. The watershed is a documented Native American travel route from the North Umpqua River to the Calapooya Mountains.⁷⁹ Federal cultural resource surveys identified 18 cultural sites in the Steamboat Creek and Canton Creek drainage, including four sites that were found eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. These sites suggest early occupancy, more than 10,000 years ago, in the drainage centered on the area’s fishing pools. An assessment of Steamboat Creek’s outstanding resource values as part of its Wild and Scenic Eligibility Determination found these sites to be “outstandingly remarkable,” having “the potential to expand our knowledge of the nature of human occupation in relationship to the environment,” particularly around the importance of anadromous fish runs to Indigenous communities.⁸⁰

⁷⁴ 2022 Assessment of Naturally Produced Summer Steelhead in the Umpqua River Basin, 5.

⁷⁵ North Umpqua Wild and Scenic River, Travel Oregon, <https://traveloregon.com/things-to-do/destinations/rivers-streams/north-umpqua-wild-and-scenic-river/>.

⁷⁶ North Umpqua Management Plan, Ch. II, 11 (July 1992).

⁷⁷ Middle North Umpqua Watershed Analysis, Human Uses and Land Management, USDA Forest Service, North Umpqua Ranger District, Ch. 5, 95 (Jan. 2001), https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb5335998.pdf.

⁷⁸ North Umpqua Management Plan, Ch. II, 15.

⁷⁹ Eligibility Determination, 4.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

4. Recreational and Educational Opportunities

The waters of Steamboat Creek and its tributaries support numerous unique recreational opportunities, serving as an important economic driver for local communities. The watershed supports fishing, hiking, camping, mountain biking, swimming, hunting, and wildlife viewing.

The watershed's one developed road, Steamboat Creek Road, parallels Steamboat Creek providing recreational access and offering travelers scenic vistas of the river and surrounding landscape. The area has two developed campsites. Steamboat Falls campground—with ten developed campsites—is situated on the banks of Steamboat Creek near its namesake Steamboat Falls.⁸¹ Canton Creek campground has five campsites located on Steamboat Creek just downstream of its confluence with Canton Creek.⁸² The historic Steamboat Inn is located just downstream of the confluence of the North Umpqua River and Steamboat Creek, and welcomes visitors from all over the world drawn by the area's unique fisheries.⁸³

Steamboat Falls, a 25-foot block style waterfall located five miles up Steamboat Creek, draws people to swim in its calm pool and cliff jump from the surrounding rock slabs. Steamboat Creek also has several stretches that provide paddling opportunities, including whitewater for rafting and kayaking.⁸⁴ The Black Gorge area—beginning at river mile five—provides a sense of isolation with steep walled canyons and class four to six whitewater in the winter.⁸⁵ The area also supports several mountain biking opportunities and connects to the famous North Umpqua Trail, a 69-mile single-track trail in the North Umpqua watershed.

Steamboat Creek's most unique recreational opportunities relate to the fisheries it supports. The watershed provides numerous one-of-a-kind opportunities to view migrating, spawning, and juvenile anadromous fish. In early summer, Steamboat Falls provides a unique opportunity to watch migrating steelhead leaping over the falls.

Big Bend Pool—one of the watershed's primary thermal refuges for summer steelhead⁸⁶—provides one of the best opportunities in the world to view wild steelhead and learn about the steelhead's life cycle, its role in the ecology of the basin, and the importance of thermal refuges to its survival. The pool receives more than 1,300 annual visitors, drawn by its unique density of fish—upwards of 600 steelhead historically found refuge in the pool's cold water—and easy accessibility from Steamboat Road.⁸⁷

The pool, and the area's other thermal refuges, also provides outstanding opportunities to learn about the summer steelhead's life cycle and habitat needs and to increase public awareness of these important fisheries. Since 1992, the North Umpqua Fish Watch, a partnership with the U.S. Forest Service, state agencies and nonprofit partners, monitors the Big Bend Pool to protect holding fish

⁸¹ Steamboat Creek Falls Campground, USDA Forest Service, Umpqua National Forest <https://www.fs.usda.gov/recarea/umpqua/recarea/?recid=63746>.

⁸² Canton Creek Campground, USDA Forest Service, Umpqua National Forest <https://www.fs.usda.gov/recarea/umpqua/recreation/camping-cabins/recarea/?recid=63678&actid=29>.

⁸³ Steamboat Inn, <https://www.thesteamboatinn.com>.

⁸⁴ Oregon Whitewater, Steamboat Creek, Riverfacts.com, <http://www.riverfacts.com/rivers/12729.html>.

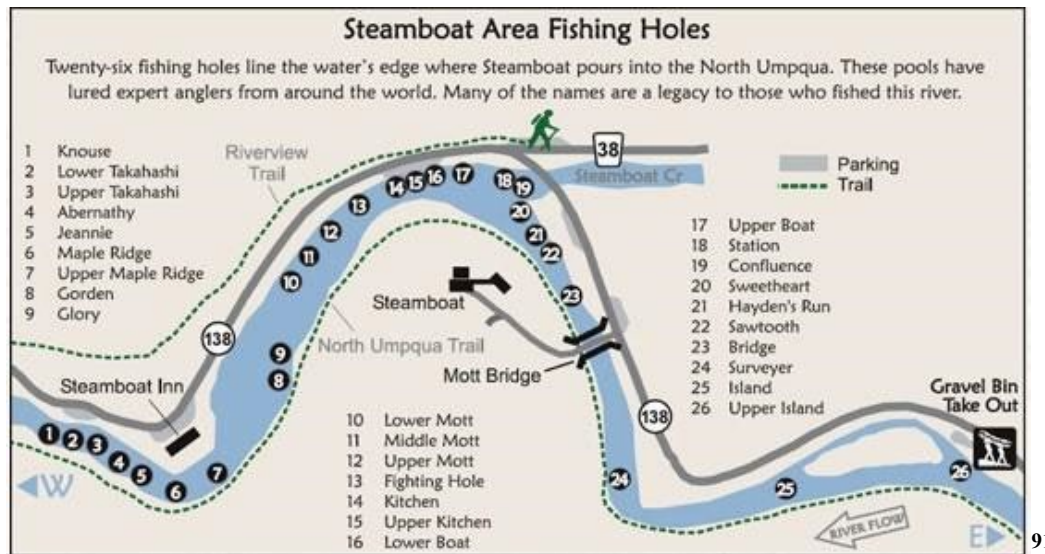
⁸⁵ Eligibility Determination, 8.

⁸⁶ Kelly S. Miller FishWatch Caretaker Lee Spencer Protects Migrating Steelhead, USDA Forest Service, Umpqua National Forest (2012), https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb5402242.pdf.

⁸⁷ Pacific Rivers and Wild Salmon Center Testimony in Support of the Frank Moore Wild Steelhead Sanctuary Act of 2015 (Senate Bill 1448).

from poaching.⁸⁸ A volunteer, Lee Spencer, has watched the pool from May through November for over 15 years, keeping the fish safe and sharing learning and insights about the fish with the public.⁸⁹ In 2017, Lee Spencer authored *A Temporary Refuge, 14 Seasons with Summer Steelhead*, that describes daily observations about the lifecycle of the North Umpqua Summer Steelhead.

While fishing has been prohibited on Steamboat Creek since 1936 to protect the anadromous fish that rely on its cold clean water as a summer refuge and for spawning and rearing, the watershed’s habitat is critical for supporting the world-renowned North Umpqua River fly fishery. As one river enthusiast described, Steamboat Creek is without question the most important tributary to the North Umpqua River. The stretch of the North Umpqua River at the mouth of the Steamboat Creek with 26 fishing holes—called the “camp water”—is one of the most celebrated wild steelhead fishing areas in the country and has been described as the “most revered stretch of steelhead water in the United States.”⁹⁰



5. Existing Designations and Protections

The watershed has received several special designations that recognize the watershed’s ecological significance and manage it to protect its resource values. These management designations include state and federal restrictions on fishing and resource development in the watershed. The watershed is administratively designated as a Late Successional Forest—areas with important old growth habitat—and a Tier 1 Key Watershed—areas that provide critical habitat for anadromous species and clean water. Federal designation as the Frank and Jeanne Moore Wild Steelhead Special Management Area permanently protects the watershed to conserve and enhance its natural values, including as refugia habitat for anadromous fish. The U.S. Forest Service has identified Steamboat Creek as eligible for designation as a Wild and Scenic River and Steamboat Creek is a key tributary to the North Umpqua Wild and Scenic River. These designations qualify Steamboat Creek and its tributaries for special consideration as ORWs.

⁸⁸ The North Umpqua Foundation, Programs, <https://northumpqua.org/programs/>.

⁸⁹ USDA Forest Service, FishWatch Caretaker Lee Spencer Protects Migrating Steelhead, [stelprdb5402242.pdf](https://www.fs.fed.us/steampool/pdfs/stelprdb5402242.pdf).

⁹⁰ The Camp Water, Steamboaters, <https://steamboaters.org/the-camp-water/>.

⁹¹ Steamboaters, Steamboat Area Fishing Holes, <https://steamboaters.org/wright-creek/>.

In 1936 the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife recognized the importance of Steamboat Creek watershed as summer steelhead habitat and closed the watershed to all angling.⁹² In 1959 the U.S. Forest Service imposed mining restrictions along Steamboat Creek to protect its water quality and in 1976 expanded mining restrictions to tributaries.⁹³

In 1984 Congress prohibited the construction of any dam or water resource project that would have a “direct or adverse effect” on the outstanding values of Steamboat Creek and directed the U.S. Forest Service to manage “Steamboat Creek and its immediate environment to conserve, protect, and enhance the anadromous fish habitat and population.”⁹⁴

In 1988 Congress directed the study of Steamboat Creek for designation as a Wild and Scenic River.⁹⁵ The U.S. Forest Service found Steamboat Creek eligible for designation as a Wild and Scenic River based on its outstandingly remarkable fisheries value and the prehistory of the area.⁹⁶ The majority of public comments received in response to the study process affirmed Steamboat Creek’s unique resource values.⁹⁷ However, in determining the most suitable management framework to protect these values, the U.S. Forest Service ultimately recommended against designation as a Wild and Scenic River in favor of alternatives that would focus on watershed management.⁹⁸ Federal legislation continues to be introduced to extend the designation of the North Umpqua Wild and Scenic River to include Steamboat Creek and several of its tributaries.⁹⁹

In 1994, as part of the Northwest Forest Plan, the U.S. Forest Service classified the entire watershed as a Tier 1 Key Watershed and Late Successional Reserve.¹⁰⁰ Tier 1 Key Watersheds have high quality water that provide drinking water or serve as strongholds for native salmonids.¹⁰¹ Steamboat Creek meets both criteria—serving as a water source for downstream communities and salmon habitat. Tier 1 watersheds are managed to protect water quality and habitat values, and watershed analysis is required to ensure land uses are consistent with these values.

Late Successional Reserves are designated to protect and enhance late successional and old-growth forest ecosystems as habitat for late-successional and old-growth species.¹⁰² Silviculture activities within these reserves are restricted to those that support late-successional forest conditions. Apart from pre-commercial thinning and harvests for wildlife habitat restoration, there have been no timber sales in the Steamboat Creek watershed since the mid-1990s.¹⁰³ Non-silviculture activities—such as roadbuilding—are also limited to those that have a neutral or beneficial impact on late-successional habitats.¹⁰⁴ The U.S. Forest Service has identified the area as a number one priority area for restoration.¹⁰⁵

⁹² 2022 Assessment of Naturally Produced Summer Steelhead in the Umpqua River Basin, 35.

⁹³ Steamboat Creek Watershed, Oregon Explorer.

⁹⁴ 16 U.S.C. § 1278.

⁹⁵ 16 U.S.C § 1271 5(a), 7(b), 8(b), 9(b) (1988).

⁹⁶ Eligibility Determination.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Suitability Study, Ch. I, 4.

⁹⁹ River Democracy Act of 2021, S. 192 (Introduced 02/03/2021).

¹⁰⁰ Lower Steamboat Watershed Analysis, USDA Forest Service, North Umpqua Ranger District, 5 (Sept. 1999).

¹⁰¹ Kirsten Gallo, Steven H. Lanigan, Peter Eldred, Sean N. Gordon, Chris Moyer, Northwest Forest Plan—The First 10 years (1994-2003): Preliminary Assessment of the Condition of Watersheds, USDA Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Research Station, 18(2005), https://www.fs.usda.gov/pnw/pubs/pnw_gtr720.pdf.

¹⁰² Ibid., 18.

¹⁰³ Lower Steamboat LSR Plantation Thinning Project, 27.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 28.

¹⁰⁵ Watershed Restoration Business Plan, USDA Forest Service, Umpqua National Forest, 11 (Aug. 21, 2000),

In 2019 Congress designated almost 100,000 acres of the Steamboat Creek watershed as the Frank and Jeanne Moore Wild Steelhead Special Management Area.¹⁰⁶ This designation recognizes Steamboat Creek’s importance as critical habitat for steelhead and directs the U.S. Forest Service to manage the watershed to protect and enhance Steamboat Creek’s outstanding water quality, which acts as habitat for salmonid species and as thermal refuge for summer steelhead, and to conserve and enhance the watershed’s “botanical, recreational, ecological, fish and wildlife, scenic, drinking water, and cultural values.”¹⁰⁷ The law prohibits the disposal of land within the area or the use of lands within the area for mineral or geothermal development. This most recent designation permanently protects this outstanding and nationally significant resource.

E. Landowners and Land Managers

The waters proposed for ORW designation and most of the land within the watershed is managed by the U.S. Forest Service as part of the Frank and Jeanne Moore Wild Steelhead Special Management Area.

The Nominators identified 18 unpatented mining claims, held by 12 owners, upstream of the waters proposed for designation.¹⁰⁸ ORW designation prohibits upstream discharges that would degrade the water quality of the ORW.¹⁰⁹ If these mining claims were developed following ORW designation, they would be required to manage discharges to avoid impacts to the ORW.

Land uses in the Canton Creek watershed—the lower most tributary to Steamboat Creek—are not expected to be impacted by the proposed designation. Canton Creek joins Steamboat Creek downstream of the stream segments proposed for designation and, therefore, discharges associated with land uses in the Canton Creek watershed should not impact water quality in the designated reaches.

The Nominators identified the following Tribes that may have an interest in the watershed: The Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians, The Coquille Indian Tribe, The Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw, The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, and The Confederated Tribes of Siletz.

F. Impact of Designation

The proposed designation is anticipated to be consistent with and support current management and uses of the Steamboat Creek watershed. The majority of the watershed is within the Frank and Jeanne Moore Wild Steelhead Special Management Area, which directs management of the area to (i) conserve and enhance the “natural character, scientific use, and the botanical, recreational, ecological, fish and wildlife, scenic, drinking water, and cultural values of the Special Management Area,” (ii) maintain and enhance the area’s “wild salmonid habitat,” (iii) maintain or enhance “the watershed as a thermal refuge for wild salmonids,” and (iv) preserve “opportunities for recreation, including primitive recreation.”¹¹⁰

https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb5430058.pdf.

¹⁰⁶ 16 U.S.C § 539s.

¹⁰⁷ 16 U.S.C § 539s(3)(B)(i).

¹⁰⁸ A list of mining claimants are included in Appendix B.

¹⁰⁹ See e.g., OAR 340-041-0345(7)(b).

¹¹⁰ 16 USC § 539s.

Consistent with the area’s management directive, the primary activities in the watershed are anticipated to be restoration activities to improve and protect ecosystem function. ORW administrative rules allow discharges from restoration activities that provide long-term water quality improvements.¹¹¹ Therefore, the proposed designation is not anticipated to impede management activities in the watershed. In addition, ORW designation is expected to support the management objectives for the watershed by providing targeted protections against discharges that would result in long-term degradation of water quality.

Wildfire suppression—including both wildfire response and proactive actions to enhance fire resiliency—is an ongoing management need in the watershed. ORW designation should not restrict these activities. Existing ORW administrative rules expressly permit discharges from fire-fighting activities and fire resilience activities should be permitted as restoration activities that provide long-term benefits to water quality.¹¹²

There is no commercial logging permitted in the watershed and the area is withdrawn from new mining claims and mineral leasing. Therefore, the designation is not expected to directly impact these uses. There are unpatented mining claims upstream of the waterbodies proposed for designation and ORW designation may restrict discharges from these activities if they would lower water quality in the designated reaches. These mining claims have not been developed.

Discharges from land uses in the watershed below the waters proposed for designation would not impact water quality of the designated waters and therefore should not be impacted by the proposed designation.

Outdoor recreation is an important use of the watershed. ORW designation is expected to support and not impede these uses. The waters proposed for designation are a primary driver of many of the recreational uses of the watershed. ORW designation, which would protect the quality of the designated waters, would support the area’s recreational uses. Designation is not expected to impede management of recreational facilities. Existing ORW administrative rules allow for construction stormwater permits for projects that would have short-term water quality impacts.¹¹³

The proposed ORW designation is expected to have positive impacts on the local economy. Outdoor recreation is a significant contributor to the economies of Douglas County and Lane County. A study commissioned by the State to assess and quantify the economic benefits of outdoor recreation calculated spending in 2019 on outdoor recreation in Douglas County at \$375 million, supporting 3,800 full and part-time jobs and \$125 million in wages and other compensation.¹¹⁴ In Lane County, spending on outdoor recreation was calculated at \$429 million, supporting 12,700 full and part-time jobs and \$429 million in wages and other compensation.

With respect to recreational fishing, the 2019 study calculated statewide spending at \$396 million.¹¹⁵ A 2008 study commissioned by ODFW estimated economic contributions for freshwater fishing to Lane and Douglas Counties at \$3.2 million and \$7.4 million, respectively.¹¹⁶

¹¹¹ OAR 340-041-004(8)(c).

¹¹² OAR 340-0410-0345(7)(c).

¹¹³ See e.g., OAR 340-041-0345(7)(b).

¹¹⁴ Mojica, J., Cousins, K., Madsen, T., *Economic Analysis of Outdoor Recreation in Oregon*, Earth Economics (Jan. 7, 2021) (*Economic Analysis of Outdoor Recreation in Oregon*), <https://industry.traveloregon.com/resources/research/oregon-outdoor-recreation-economic-impact-study/>.

¹¹⁵ *Economic Analysis of Outdoor Recreation in Oregon*, Appendix E.

¹¹⁶ Dean Ryan Associates, *Fishing, Hunting, Wildlife Viewing, and Shellfishing in Oregon*, prepared for Oregon

G. Outreach Efforts

In developing this nomination, Nominators conducted outreach to the following parties:

- The Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians, The Coquille Indian Tribe, The Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw, The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, and The Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians.
- The Umpqua National Forest.
- The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.
- Local businesses, including fishing, mountain bike, and river adventure guides, and hotels that serve recreational users of the watershed.
- Local conservation organizations: The Steamboaters, The North Umpqua Foundation, Native Fish Society, Umpqua Watersheds, and The Conservation Angler.

Letters of support are included in Appendix A

Appendix A: Letters of Support



COW CREEK BAND OF UMPQUA TRIBE OF INDIANS
GOVERNMENT OFFICES
2371 NE STEPHENS STREET, SUITE 100
ROSEBURG, OR 97470-1399
Phone: 541-672-9405
Fax: 541-673-0432

April 4, 2024

Kathleen George, Chair
Oregon Environmental Quality Commission
700 NE Multnomah St, Suite 600
Portland, Oregon 97232

Leah Feldon, Director
Oregon Department of Environmental Quality
Oregon Environmental Quality Commission
700 NE Multnomah St, Suite 600
Portland, Oregon 97232

Dear Chair George and Director Feldon:

The Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians writes this letter in support of the petition to designate the Steamboat Creek above its confluence with Canton Creek and its named and unnamed tributaries located within the 99,653-acre Frank and Jeanne Moore Wild Steelhead Special Management Area as an Outstanding Resource Water under OAR 340-041-0004(8). The benefits of Steamboat creek extend beyond its watershed boundaries, and its designation as an Outstanding Resource Water will help to protect and enhance aquatic ecosystems and rural economies throughout the North Umpqua River system.

The Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians (the tribe) is a sovereign nation located in southwest Oregon. The North Umpqua River Basin is part of our ancestral homelands. The cold, clean, clear water Steamboat Creek provides for the North Umpqua River is imperative for the survival of resident and anadromous fish that live there including spring chinook, coastal coho, sea-run cutthroat trout, winter and summer steelhead and Pacific lamprey. These species are culturally significant first food sources for our people. We are river people and take stewardship of our homelands very seriously. The tribe has robust Natural Resources and Forestry Departments that work on a myriad of issues including instream habitat restoration and water quality monitoring as well as forest resiliency to ensure a healthy ecosystem for seven generations into the future.

The tribe is supportive of collaborative solutions to the threats facing Steamboat Creek Watershed and its tributaries. We look beyond the riverbanks to the forest as well. We have seen devastating wildfires destroy large swaths of our homeland in the last five years and want to ensure that the Steamboat Creek Watershed is protected into the future. The tribe is supportive of active management aimed at improving the health and resiliency of the forest surrounding Steamboat Creek. This type of forest management will benefit not only the forest and the terrestrial wildlife that depend on the forest but will protect the

watershed from catastrophic wildfire that could burn through the riparian area, as we have seen in other recent fires including the Archie Creek Fire and the Milepost 97 Fire that burned through tribal reservation lands to the south. The Tribe is practicing cultural burning to protect our lands and would like to see cultural burning reintroduced to the Steamboat Watershed as well. We cannot afford for a catastrophic wildfire to burn through Steamboat Creek, which provides some of the best over summering habitat for adult summer steelhead within the Umpqua Basin and is a vital source of cold water for all native aquatic species.

We fully support the Pew Charitable Trusts, American Rivers, Trout Unlimited and Pacific Rivers petition to designate Steamboat Creek as an Outstanding Resource Water. The benefits to the North Umpqua River alone merits its designation. Designation is necessary considering the far-reaching recreational, economic, and species benefits the waters of Steamboat Creek provide to the North Umpqua River system. We also urge the management and reintroduction of cultural burning to the watershed to protect terrestrial and aquatic habitats. Designating Steamboat Creek as an Outstanding Resource Water will aid in preventing future degradation and will ensure that these crucial clean, cold-water sources are protected for generations to come.

We implore the Oregon Environmental Quality Commission to consider this petition and designate Steamboat Creek as an Outstanding Resources Water.

Sincerely,



Carla Keene
Tribal Board Chairman
Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians



The Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde Community of Oregon

Umpqua Molalla Rogue River Kalapuya Chasta

Phone (503) 879-2301

Fax (503) 879-5964

1-800-422-0232

9615 Grand Ronde Road

Grand Ronde, OR 97347

April 12, 2024

Rick George, Pacific Rivers

Via Email georgerick738@gmail.com

Re: Letter of Support for the Nomination of Outstanding Resource Waters: Steamboat Creek

To Whom It May Concern:

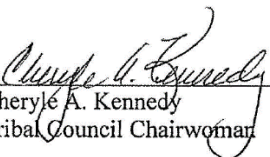
On behalf of the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde Community of Oregon, I write to you today to express our support for the nomination of Steamboat Cr. in the North Umpqua as Outstanding Resources Waters with the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality.

The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde is a federally recognized Tribe comprised of more than 30 Tribes and bands from western Oregon, northern California, and southwest Washington. These include Tribal bands from the Kalapuya, Molalla, Chasta, Umpqua, Rogue River, Chinook and Tillamook. In the 1850's these Tribes and bands signed Treaties with the United States and were forcibly removed to the Grand Ronde Reservation. As original inhabitants of the Lower Columbia River, Willamette Basin, Upper Umpqua and Rogue Basins, we continue to utilize these areas and actively maintain our connections.

Steamboat Creek and its tributaries have extraordinary ecological, cultural, and recreational values, and provide important habitat for several anadromous fish populations, particularly the North Umpqua River's iconic coastal summer steelhead population. As noted it is of significant cultural importance and supports numerous unique recreational opportunities; including hiking, mountain biking, swimming, hunting, and both scenic and wildlife viewing. For these reasons among many others we believe that it meets the criteria to be designated as Outstanding Resources Waters with the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality.

We are pleased to support this nomination and designation and I thank you in advance for your consideration. Please feel free to reach out to our Natural Resources Department Manager, Colby Drake with any questions. He can be reached by phone at (503) 879-2384 or by email at Colby.drake@grandronde.org.

Hayu masi (Many thanks),


Cheryl A. Kennedy
Tribal Council Chairwoman

Treaties

*Rogue River 1853 & 1854 ~ Umpqua-Cow Creek 1853 ~ Chasta 1854 ~ Umpqua & Kalapuya 1854
Willamette Valley 1855 ~ Molalla 1855*

April 9, 2024

Kathleen George, Chair
Oregon Environmental Quality Commission
700 NE Multnomah St. Suite 600
Portland, Oregon 97232

Leah Feldon, Director
Oregon Department of Environmental Quality
Oregon Environmental Quality Commission
700 NE Multnomah St. Suite 600
Portland, Oregon 97232

Dear Chair George and Director Feldon:

The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde write this letter in support of the petition to designate Steamboat Creek above its confluence with Canton Creek and its named and unnamed tributaries located within the 99.653-acre Frank and Jeanne Moore Wild Steelhead Special Management Area as an Outstanding Resource Water under OAR 340-041-0004(8). The benefits of Steamboat Creek extend beyond its watershed boundaries, and its designation as an Outstanding Resource Water will help to protect and enhance aquatic ecosystems and rural economies throughout the North Umpqua River system.

The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde (the Tribe) is a sovereign nation located in northwest Oregon. The North Umpqua River Basin is part of our ancestral homelands. The cold, clean, clear water Steamboat Creek provides for the North Umpqua River is imperative for the survival of resident and anadromous fish that live there including spring chinook, coastal Coho, sea-run cutthroat trout, winter and summer steelhead and Pacific lamprey. These species are culturally significant first food sources for our people. We are salmon people and take stewardship of our homelands very seriously. The Tribe has robust Natural Resources and Forestry Departments that work on a myriad of issues including instream habitat restoration and water quality monitoring as well as forest resiliency to ensure a healthy ecosystem for seven generations into the future.

The tribe is supportive of active management aimed at improving the health and resiliency of the forest surrounding Steamboat Creek. This type of forest management will benefit not only the forest and the terrestrial wildlife that depend on the forest but will protect the watershed from catastrophic wildfire that could bum through the riparian area, as we have seen in other recent fires including the Archie Creek. The Tribe is practicing cultural burning to protect our lands and would like to see cultural burning reintroduced to the Steamboat Watershed as well. We cannot afford another catastrophic wildfire to bum through Steamboat Creek, which provides some of the best over summering habitat for adult summer steelhead within the Umpqua Basin and is a vital source of cold water for all native aquatic species.

We fully support and believe in designating Steamboat Creek as an Outstanding Resource Water which will aid in preventing future degradation and will ensure that these crucial clean, cold-water sources are protected for generations to come.

We implore the Oregon Environmental Quality Commission to consider this petition and designate Steamboat Creek as an Outstanding Resources Water.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'CWD', written in a cursive style.

Colby Drake
Natural Resources Department Manager
Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde



Oregon

Tina Kotek, Governor

Department of Fish and Wildlife
Habitat Division
4034 Fairview Industrial Dr SE
Salem, OR 97302
Phone: 503-947-6000
Fax: 503-947-6330
www.dfw.state.or.us

March 26, 2024

Dean Finnerty
Trout Unlimited
1777 N. Kent Street (Suite 100)
4100 Arlington, VA 22209
Dean.Finnerty@tu.org

Re: Steamboat Creek Outstanding Resource Water Nomination

Dear Mr. Finnerty,

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) supports the proposal to designate Steamboat Creek in the Umpqua basin as an Outstanding Resource Water under Oregon's antidegradation regulations under the Clean Water Act. ODFW's mission is to *"to protect and enhance Oregon's fish and wildlife and their habitats for use and enjoyment by present and future generations."* Water quality is an important component of habitat for fish and wildlife and ODFW supports efforts to protect and maintain high-quality waters in Oregon's waterways.

The Steamboat Creek watershed is primarily managed by the U.S. Forest Service, but Canton Creek, a major tributary has checkerboard ownership with private industrial landowners and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM and USFS). Nearly the entire Steamboat Creek watershed is designated as a late successional reserve and a key watershed by the 1994 Northwest Forest Plan¹. The transitional moist and dry forest zones around the creek are home to several endemic and rare species¹. In 1959, the U.S. Forest Service and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife successfully put into place both mining and fishing restrictions, and in 1976 mineral withdrawal was extended to portions of 15 tributaries to Steamboat Creek to protect these watersheds from the possible negative effects of mineral development².

Steamboat Creek is a groundwater fed stream, and the Steamboat Creek watershed provides over fifty river and stream miles of high-quality habitat for summer and winter steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*), Coho salmon (*Oncorhynchus kisutch*), Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*), migratory and resident cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarkia*), rainbow trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) and other native species. Oregon coastal summer steelhead, which includes the North Umpqua population, are listed as a sensitive species under Oregon's Sensitive Species Rule (OAR 635-100-0040). This sensitive species listing is largely due to the vulnerability associated with the summer-run life history strategy and the existence of only two isolated populations in the North Umpqua and Siletz River basins. Summer steelhead enter freshwater during the late spring and summer, holding over in resting pools before spawning in

¹ <https://oregonexplorer.info/content/steamboat-creek-watershed?topic=56&ptopic=98>

² <https://wildsalmoncenter.org/campaigns/frank-moore-wild-steelhead-sanctuary/>

To protect and enhance Oregon's fish and wildlife and their habitats for use and enjoyment by present and future generations.



Oregon

Tina Kotek, Governor

Department of Fish and Wildlife
Habitat Division
4034 Fairview Industrial Dr SE
Salem, OR 97302
Phone: 503-947-6000
Fax: 503-947-6330
www.dfw.state.or.us

the fall to early winter. Cold, clean water is required to support these fish through the warm season. Steamboat Creek's deep, cool, pools provide this crucial habitat for North Umpqua summer steelhead. The importance of the Steamboat Creek sub-basin to the productivity of this population was recognized over 80 years ago, when Steamboat Creek and its tributaries were closed to all angling to protect summer steelhead³. In 2019, the watershed was federally designated as the Frank and Jeanne Moore Wild Sanctuary and a "Special Management Unit" which directed the Forest Service to manage the watershed as a thermal refuge for steelhead⁴.

ODFW is deeply committed to furthering actions to ensure resilient habitat conditions in the face of climate change, including sufficient water quantity and quality conditions, for Oregon's fish and wildlife. ODFW supports the proposal to designate Steamboat Creek and its tributaries as Outstanding Resource Waters. This designation would help to ensure the long-term health of fishery resources in the Umpqua basin by protecting the water quality and ecological characteristics of the Steamboat Creek watershed.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Anthony
Water Quality and Mitigation Specialist
Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife

³ OSGC (Oregon State Game Commission). 1936. Official Synopsis of Oregon Fishing Laws, Effective April 5, 1936. Oregon State Game Commission, Portland, Oregon.

⁴ <https://www.pacificrivers.org/wild-steelhead-sanctuary-act.html>

To protect and enhance Oregon's fish and wildlife and their habitats for use and enjoyment by present and future generations.



Oregon Department of Environmental Quality
Attention: Aron Borok
700 NE Multnomah Avenue
Portland, OR 97232

March 27, 2024

Subject: Steamboat Creek Outstanding Resource Waters Designation Rulemaking 2024
Comments.

Dear Mr. Borok,

Please accept the following comments on behalf of the North Umpqua Coalition supporting Trout Unlimited, Pacific Rivers, PEW Charitable Trust, and American Rivers proposal to designate Steamboat Creek as an Outstanding Resource Watershed (ORW). The North Umpqua Coalition is a group of conservation organizations working together to help protect and restore the North Umpqua Watershed. The coalition is comprised of the following organizations -- The Steamboaters, The North Umpqua Foundation, Native Fish Society, The Conservation Angler, Umpqua Watersheds, and Pacific Rivers.

We call on the Environmental Quality Commission (EQC) to adopt the proposed ORW rules that would designate Steamboat Creek as an Oregon ORW. We also would like to commend the staff of the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) for their hard and thorough work in reviewing the ORW petition and documenting the facts.

Steamboat Creek is one of the largest tributaries to the North Umpqua River, with a watershed area of about 100,000 acres.

Within the watershed, there are about 60 miles of spawning and rearing habitat for summer steelhead; about 25 miles in the mainstem and an additional 35 miles in about 15 major tributaries. Summer steelhead are recognized by Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife as a state sensitive species, which means there are small or declining populations, are at-risk, and/or are of management concern. Steamboat Creek also supports small populations of winter steelhead, coho and spring chinook salmon.

While many adults over-summer in the mainstem North Umpqua, up to 35% over-summer in Steamboat Creek. The importance of Steamboat Creek to the healthy summer steelhead populations has long been recognized. Steamboat Creek and tributaries have been closed to angling and mining since the 1930's, it is truly a summer steelhead stronghold.

The Steamboat Creek watershed, which is managed almost exclusively by the Umpqua National Forest, has been the focus of extensive watershed and habitat restoration since the late 1980's; including improving fish passage, restoring riparian vegetation and function, decommissioning roads, protection from poaching, and placement of large wood in stream channels to improve habitat diversity.

There are numerous deep pools that hold over-summering steelhead in Steamboat Creek, but there is one of utmost importance. Most years, this one pool holds 300-500 of these fish, sometimes more. In 2012, the count was about 800. This pool is known as Upper Bend pool. In addition to being a large, deep pool, it has a very cold tributary, Big Bend Creek, that enters Steamboat Creek immediately upstream from the pool. This provides a critical thermal refuge during the summer months.

In addition to providing refuge for over-summering adults, Steamboat and its larger tributaries provide spawning areas and rearing habitat for juveniles, which emerge in the spring and reside for up to 3 years (usually 2 years) in these streams before heading to the ocean,

In 2019 the U. S. Congress designated the watershed as the Frank and Jeanne Moore Wild Steelhead Management Area (F&JMWSSMA). Congressional designation as a Special Management Area provides additional assurance that this management would continue into the future. An ORW designation would provide additional protection for this very special watershed.

Under the Oregon Administrative Rules, the state may classify “high quality waters” as “Outstanding Resource Waters of Oregon.” OAR 340-041-0004(8). On designated rivers, “existing water quality and water quality values must be maintained and protected. . . .” *Id.* Steamboat Creek is characterized by exceedingly high quality water, and provides tremendous habitat value and refugia for native fish and wildlife. This ORW designation would provide additional protections for water quality in the North Umpqua Sub-basin.

The Steamboat Creek watershed obviously qualifies to be designated as an ORW. This is an excellent opportunity to implement the Oregon ORW rule as intended. As quoted on DEQ’s website, “DEQ’s mission is to be a leader in restoring, maintaining and enhancing the quality of Oregon’s air, land and water.” The best way to restore water quality is to protect it in the first place. Therefore, we respectfully request that the EQC designate Steamboat Creek and all of its tributaries and associated wetlands in Oregon (HUC 17100301) as an ORW.

Our organizations overwhelming support the proposed designation of Steamboat Creek as an Outstanding Resource Watershed. Please let us know if you have any further question and how we can help move this destination along.

Sincerely,

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Appendix B: Mining Claims

Steamboat Mining Claims Ownership

List format:

Landowner name (# of claims)

Tributary impacted/location of

claim Tax address

Stewart, Bruce D (4)

Annie Creek, Saint Peter Creek, Horse Heaven Creek, Hobart Creek
PO BOX 1183 COTTAGE GROVE OREGON 97424-0050

Briedwell, David (1)

Annie Creek and Knot Creek
61950 JANALEE PL BEND OREGON 97702

Brewster, Anne K (1)

Horse Heaven Creek
94 SETTRINGTON RD LONDON SW6 3BA

Alpine Forest, INC. (2)

Unnamed tributary of Horse Heaven Creek and near Hobart Creek
494 STATE ST STE 300 SALEM OREGON 97301

Porter, Ernest L (1)

Horse Heaven Creek
4176 CRANSTON ST SE SALEM OREGON 97317

Kathryn A Bartels Revocable Trust (2)

Knott Creek and Annie Creek
47470 VIA FLORENCE LA QUINTA CALIFORNIA 92253

DONALD R JANISCH REVOCABLE LIVING TRUST (2)

Horse Heaven Creek and unnamed tributary of Horse Heaven Creek

1448 YOLANDA AVE SPRINGFIELD OREGON

97477 HELENA RESOURCES INC (1)

Horse Heaven Creek

1948 MONROE ALY EUGENE OREGON 97405

Barton, Harold E (1)

Horse Heaven Creek

28500 SUTHERLIN LN EUGENE OREGON 97405

Christian Ventures LLC (1)

Unnamed tributary of Horse Heaven Creek

3112 INDUSTRIAL AVE SPRINGFIELD OREGON 97478

CF BROWN ENTERPRISES INC (1)

Near unnamed tributary of City Creek

100 BOOMER HILL RD MYRTLE CREEK OREGON 97457

Musik Mine LLC (1)

City Creek

PO BOX 11053 EUGENE OREGON 97440