



WESTERN RIVERS
CONSERVANCY

A Request for a Letter of Support from the
DESCHUTES COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
Fiscal Year 2026

LITTLE DESCHUTES RIVER, PAULINA MEADOWS

Project Facts

Funding Source:	Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)
Intended Steward:	BLM, Prineville District
Location:	Deschutes County, Oregon
Project:	Paulina Meadows
Size:	674 acres
Congressional Dist.:	OR-2 (Rep. Cliff Bentz)

For more information, please contact: **Nelson Mathews, President** | 503-241-0151 | nmathews@westernrivers.org



Conserving Confluence Lands for Recreation with Prime Habitat for Frog, Mule Deer and Elk

The Wild and Scenic Deschutes River is one of Oregon's most beloved treasures. Located in north central Oregon, the basin drains from the many glaciers along the Cascade crest east to the Ochoco Mountains. Once the headwater streams tumble out of the mountains and forests, the remainder of the river carves a course north through the high desert to meet the Columbia River just east of The Dalles.

The Little Deschutes, also a Wild and Scenic River in its upper reaches, is the southernmost of the Deschutes' principal tributaries, flowing from the Mount Thielsen Wilderness in the Deschutes National Forest. The lower 80 miles of the Little Deschutes' 105-mile course has beautiful, low-gradient meanders until it meets the mainstem Deschutes near Sunriver Resort. Here the river valley has gentle topography and depressions with forested wetlands, marshes, meandering streams and shallow lakes. These features are the result of nearby volcanic eruptions and depositions of highly permeable material which created coarse, rapidly draining soils and high groundwater tables. Paulina Creek, a tributary to the lower Little Deschutes, flows from Paulina Lake in the Newberry Crater National Volcanic Monument. The majority of the stream is inside the monument and national forest, with just a short reach from the national forest boundary to the Little Deschutes confluence that is not in federal ownership.

The 674-acre Paulina Meadows property contains the lowest **2.3 miles** of the creek as well as nearly **2 miles** of the Little Deschutes centered on their confluence. The BLM owns almost all the adjacent land except for the property immediately upstream on the creek that was recently conserved by the Deschutes Land Trust. The property has a diverse mix of forest, meadow, riparian and wetland habitats. The meadow habitats are part of the Paulina Prairie, which is a combination of wet and dry meadows. The upland areas are dominated by lodgepole pine woodlands with scattered ponderosa pines. The undergrowth includes sagebrush

Project Highlights

- Enhancing access for boating, hiking, fishing, hunting and bird watching on **2 miles** of the Little Deschutes
- Conserving a stronghold for Oregon spotted frog and migratory habitat for mule deer and Rocky Mountain elk
- Continued grazing management and preserving heritage on a part of the historic Triangle Outfit ranch
- Mitigating risk of fire with thinning on 180 acres north of Quail Run Golf Course and residential area on Pine Grove Road

and perennial bunchgrasses. The meadow areas are dominated by grasses, sedges and rushes with copses of willow. The riparian corridor consists of stands of willow, alder and cottonwood.

The property has a farmstead with a dilapidated house, plus several sheds and a set of corrals, once a part of the Triangle Outfit, an expansive and historic ranch worked by generations of the Stearns family — early pioneers in Central Oregon. The Triangle Outfit has been broken up and sold over many years, and the Paulina Meadows Property is one of the last large undeveloped blocks that remains.

Special Values

Fish: The Little Deschutes and Paulina Creek are well above the basin's natural and manmade anadromous fish passage barriers, but they provide important water quality and habitat for the system. Currently, the Little Deschutes is home to native rainbow and introduced brown trout. Bull trout, which are ESA-listed as threatened, once occurred in strong numbers in the Little Deschutes, but

decades of habitat degradation caused their extirpation from the basin. The recent conservation of the property immediately upstream on Paulina Creek includes a potential water right in-stream dedication that could rewater the property's reach, and reconnect the stream to the Little Deschutes.

Wildlife: The stretch of the Little Deschutes that runs through the property has some of the densest occurrences of Oregon spotted frog (OSF) in the entire basin. A federally threatened species, OSF populations have seen a steep decline in recent years due to predation by non-native bullfrogs, water withdrawals and habitat alterations. The Paulina Meadows property has highly productive OSF breeding and rearing habitat, which are critical habitat targets outlined in the species recovery plan. The project will preserve these breeding grounds and continue to work towards the eradication of bull frogs from the property, improving local OSF population levels. Coupled with the 30-year water management actions outlined in the Deschutes Basin Habitat Conservation Plan, this project will aid in the recovery of OSF and help to alleviate future water use restrictions in the basin.

The area around the property, especially between La Pine and Sunriver, contains the longest mule deer migration corridor in the state. The pattern of continued development and the associated roads and traffic all threaten successful mule deer migration. In addition to its role in the migration corridor, the property also offers good mule deer and Rocky Mountain elk habitat. Other notable wildlife species on the property include river otter, beaver, Townsend's big-eared bat, Lewis's woodpecker, great-horned owl, golden eagle, cinnamon teal and wood duck, among others.

Recreation: This extremely scenic property has potential to become a recreational treasure for the public. It offers recreational opportunities for a wide range of users with just under **2 miles** of the Little Deschutes River meandering through, as well as an existing network of interior gravel roads in close proximity to La Pine, Sunriver, and the Newberry National Volcanic Monument.

The Little Deschutes provides great opportunities to fish for the river's famous "redside" native rainbow trout and brown trout, as well as horseback-riding, flat-water boating, hiking, wildlife viewing and hunting. Paulina Meadows is just upstream from a public boat launch and, in time, will be open for public access to all recreational users.

Conservation Opportunity: Conservation of the Paulina Meadows property will protect nearly **2 miles** of the Little Deschutes River and over **2 miles** of Paulina Creek and will improve recreational access for rafters, fishermen, hunters, hikers and birdwatchers. It will complete conservation of the entire length of Paulina Creek and complement significant habitat restoration efforts immediately upstream. Lastly, the project will safeguard important big game habitat within the state's longest mule deer migration corridor and conserve critical habitat for Oregon spotted frog.

Local Support: This project has received letters of support from local business, non-profit organizations, and state and federal agencies, including Oregon Hunter's Association, Rocky Moun-



tain Elk Foundation, Mule Deer Foundation, Visit Central Oregon, Confluence Fly Shop, Fly and Field Outfitters, Trout Unlimited, Deschutes River Conservancy, Upper Deschutes Watershed Council, Deschutes Land Trust, Amphibian and Reptile Conservancy, Three Rivers Environmental ODFW, USFWS, BLM. The La Pine Chamber of Commerce and the Newberry Regional Partnership are currently considering writing letters of support. .

Status: WRC acquired the Paulina Meadows property in summer 2024 with a loan. We will manage and restore forest and riparian habitats during our ownership and plan to convey to the BLM with an FY26 LWCF appropriation.

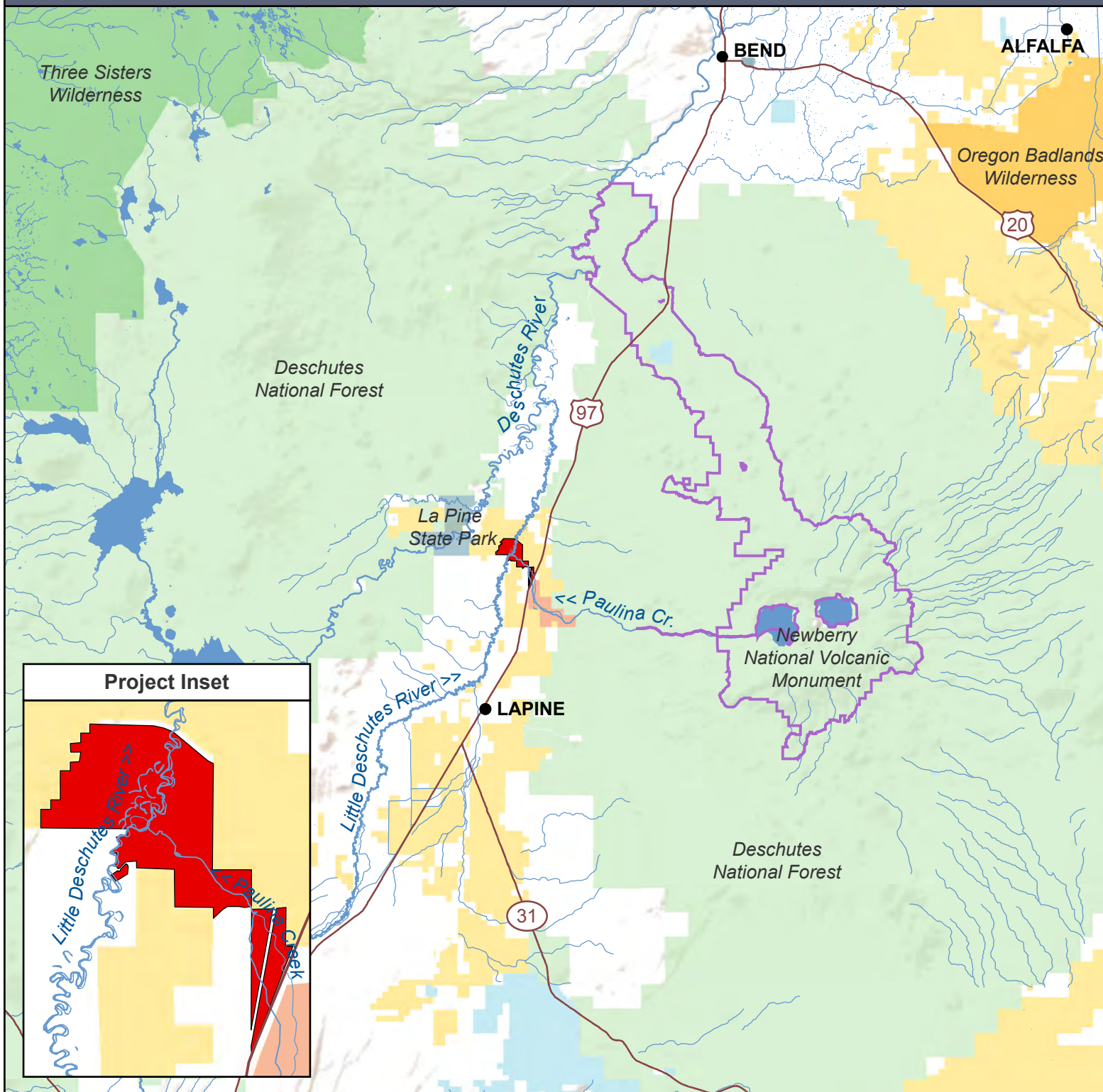
Little Deschutes River

Paulina Creek – Paulina Meadows Property

Deschutes County, Oregon



WESTERN RIVERS
CONSERVANCY



- Paulina Meadows Property (674 acres)
1.97 miles fronting Little Deschutes River
2.3 miles of historic Paulina Creek bed
- Deschutes Land Trust (1,099 acres)
- US Forest Service
- Bureau of Land Management
- Newberry National Volcanic Monument

- BLM Wilderness Area
- Oregon Parks and Recreation
Department or Oregon State Parks
- State Lands
- Major Roads



0 3.75 7.5 15 Miles