

# Protecting a Northwest Icon: Fly Anglers and Their Efforts to Save Wild Steelhead

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In the end . . . we will all be remembered not so much for what we built and developed but for what we protected and refused to destroy.

UNKNOWN

## Introduction

Pacific steelhead and salmon are salmonids, of the scientific family Salmonidae. They are anadromous fish, which means that they migrate up rivers from the ocean to spawn in fresh water. Pacific salmon are the scientific genus *Oncorhynchus*, which includes pink, sockeye, chum, Chinook, and coho salmon, steelhead, and rainbow trout. Steelhead trout, *Oncorhynchus mykiss*, can reach up to fifty-five pounds and forty-five inches in length, although the average size is much smaller. Unlike Pacific salmon that die after spawning, steelhead often return to the ocean and then come back to their natal stream to spawn again. In the United States and Canada, steelhead are found along the entire Pacific Coast and inland to Idaho. Worldwide, steelhead are naturally found in the Western Pacific

south through the Kamchatka peninsula. They can be divided into two basic reproductive types, stream-maturing and ocean-maturing. The stream-maturing, or summer-run, steelhead enter fresh water between May and October and require several months to mature and spawn. The ocean-maturing, or winter-run, steelhead enter fresh water between November and April and spawn shortly thereafter.

Anglers, and especially fly fishermen, have been drawn to these bright, aggressive, and fierce fighting fish since the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Accordingly, steelhead fishing has been a long, storied, and noble tradition in several Northwest states and British Columbia. Numerous books, magazines, museum exhibits, conferences, clubs, equipment, merchandise, lectures, and businesses have been devoted to steelhead and steelheading over the years, and steelhead fly fishermen are some of the most devoted and passionate anglers in the region. The anticipation and thrill of “the grab” or “the take” of a fly tied by oneself along with the potential for an epic battle on light gear in a wild and scenic river is the lure and the drug of avid steelhead fly fishermen. In this regard, one of Washington’s past directors of the Department of Fish and Wildlife was correct in saying that the steelhead is “one of the icons of the Pacific Northwest. It’s like the orca. It’s almost like a religion.”

British fly fishing traditions came to the Pacific Northwest during the first thirty years of the twentieth century via English immigrants who settled in British Columbia. Tommy Brayshaw, Bill Nation, Noel Money, and Roderick Haig-Brown brought their love of fly fishing, etiquette, and knowledge of equipment and tactics used as young men in the rivers and lakes of their home country. Brayshaw became a well-known steelhead fly fisher, tier, and rod builder in the lower mainland; Nation, a popular guide, innovative fly fisher, and tier in the Kamloops region; Money, a respected steelhead fly fisher and tier on Vancouver Island; and Haig-Brown, a book author, magistrate, and important conservationist also from Vancouver Island. At the same time in Oregon, Maurice “Mooch” Abraham was preaching a steelhead angling ethic to his fellow Multnomah Anglers Club members and Jordan “Major” Mott brought his Eastern gentlemen’s outdoor creed to share with other steelhead fly fishers on the Rogue and North Umpqua. All six anglers were important components of the early connection between steelhead fly fishing, outdoor ethics, and the movement to protect wild steelhead in the Northwest.<sup>1</sup>

Both Zane Grey and “Mooch” Abraham carried the concept of catch and release, often credited to Lee Wulff and his 1938 book *Handbook of*

*Freshwater Fishing*, to the Northwest, as early as 1919. In *Tales of Fishes*, Grey explained that he and his companions regularly released fish, “inaugurating a sportsman-like example never before done.” Later, in the same book, he warned: “Let every angler who loves to fish think what it would mean to him to find the fish were gone.” In his “Rustlers of Silver River,” a serialized novel about the destructive logging and commercial fishing on Oregon’s Rogue River published in *Country Gentlemen* in 1929, Grey lamented: “Then take the fly-fishermen. They’re too many to count . . . Are a few men to be allowed to kill the food value and the sport value of the river?” Abraham, a well-known champion fly caster and fly tier in the Portland area, took an early stand on releasing fish in the 1920s and a colleague from that era remembered that “Mooch was a nut on releasing fish unharmed.” Another fishing companion noted that “Mooch” had “an attitude toward fishing [that] was entirely on the quality side. . . .” And, by 1939, Haig-Brown was writing about “Limits & Ethics” in the *Western Angler*.<sup>2</sup> These fly fishers not only paved the way for a devoted culture of Pacific Northwest steelhead fishing but, as this chapter shows, did so with a foundational water conservation ethic as the basis for their sport and angling tradition.

### Fly Fishers Discover Northwest Steelhead

Fly fishermen began to catch steelhead on flies up and down the Pacific Coast from British Columbia to northern California in the early twentieth century. As stories of the wild steelhead’s beauty and power appeared in both regional and national literature, a bevy of steelhead aficionados perfected their craft and became the first generation of wild steelhead conservationists.

Tommy Brayshaw caught his first steelhead in 1910 and Money in 1914. Portland’s William F. Backus, owner of Backus and Morris Sporting Goods, published “Steelhead Trout on the Rogue River” in *Field and Stream* in 1916, and two years later, Zane Grey took his first steelhead in Washington’s Deer Creek, soon to be a fabled river in steelhead lore and legend. Grey described his prize as “a strikingly beautiful fish, graceful, symmetrical, powerfully built, with a great broad tail and blunt, pugnacious nose. The faint pinkish color, almost a glow, shone from a background of silver and green.” On California’s Eel River, Jim Pray and Lloyd Silvius were landing plenty of fish on flies in the teens. By the early 1920s, Noel Money was making flies for winter fishing in British Columbia, Washington’s Ken McLeod caught a Deer Creek steel-

head, and Grey was writing about fly-caught steelhead in the Rouge. Grey published "Steelhead" and "Fishing the Rouge" in 1923 in *Country Gentleman*, and the following year, McLeod wrote "The End of the Rainbow" for *Field & Stream* and one of the editors of *The Morning Oregonian*, Ben Hur Lampman, penned "A Fish of the Warrior Class." By 1926, Haig-Brown caught his first steelhead, also in the famed Deer Creek, Lampman published another editorial on "What Is a Steelhead? Identity of Steelhead Trout Discussed," Grey published a seven-part series on "Rocky Riffle on the Rogue" in *Field & Stream*, and McLeod introduced "Deer Creek—Home of the Rainbow" to a national audience in *Outdoor Life*.<sup>3</sup> As the decade came to a close, Washington's Al Knudson was catching winter runs in the North Fork Stillaguamish and selling flies, and Peter Schwab's "Wood Pussy Bucktail" and "Paint Brush" steelhead flies gained national attention because he substituted deer hair for the more traditional feathered flies.<sup>4</sup>

Steelhead fly fishing became firmly established in the Northwest during the 1930s, and knowledge of its popularity spread throughout the United States and Canada. The feats of Oregon's Harry Van Luven, Joe Wharton, Mott, and Abraham; California's Ben Andersen, Art Dardini, Pray, and Sam Wells; and Washington's McLeod and Knudson became part of the early regional lore. Mott published his exploits in *Forest and Stream* and before he released a North Umpqua steelhead asked: "Gad man—did you ever see anything so wholly beautiful? Now then—take a quick look, as the little fly in the tough part of the upper jaw has done no harm and this chap goes back to his freedom."<sup>5</sup> Zane Grey's "North Umpqua Steelheads," published in 1935 in *Sports Afield*, attracted significant attention to the region with stories of one hundred steelhead in three months and the testimony that "there is no stream in the United States that can hold a candle to the Umpqua for wet or dry fly-fishing."<sup>6</sup> Schwab's "Challenge of the Steelhead" appeared in *Sports Afield* the following year and further glorified the North Umpqua along with the Rogue and Klamath.<sup>7</sup> Also gaining attention were the "double haul" casting technique taught in Portland by "Mooch" Abraham to Marvin Hedge, a young man who won the national casting events in the "Anglers Fly Distance" event, better known as "the steelhead event"; Hedge fly lines for steelhead; steelhead rod builders Edwin Powell and Lew Stoner of R. L. Winston; and flies like Pray's Demon and Thor. In Washington, Enos Bradner, Ken McLeod, Ralph Wahl, and Walter Johnson caught winter run fish on their flies like the famous Purple Peril and Skykomish Sunrise. By the end of the decade, steelhead, steelhead flies, steelhead fly rods, steelhead fly lines,

and steelhead rivers gained stature, recognition, and national notoriety, and anglers began to take notice.<sup>8</sup>

### The Beginning of Wild Steelhead Conservation

Those early pioneers of steelhead fly fishing during the first few decades of the twentieth century were also among the earliest conservationists. By the end of World War I, both sport and commercial fishermen in the Northwest were feeling the impact of pulp mills, dams, and logging on salmon and steelhead numbers, the two species that everyone considered a public resource. Steelhead fishermen, also known as “steelheaders,” fly fishermen, and gear fishermen alike were also concerned about poachers using gillnets in rivers, the abundance of fish traps at river mouths, and lack of enforcement of fish laws by county governments. Accordingly, a small group of hardcore steelheaders in the Seattle Sportsmen’s Association broke away in 1928 to form the Steelhead Trout Club of Washington. Ken McLeod, one of the founders, organized this new group to petition the state legislature and convinced them to declare steelhead a game fish once it was in fresh water in 1929. McLeod became president in 1930 and the following year began to write the outdoor news for the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, a position he maintained until 1950. In this role, he wrote regularly about steelhead fly fishing and the protection of steelhead and their habitat. In 1931 McLeod also began publishing and editing the *Northwest Sportsman*, a monthly magazine in the “interest of outdoor recreation and the conservation of natural resources of the Northwest.” That same year, he became secretary of the Washington State Conservation Association and spearheaded Initiative 62 the following year, resulting in the formation of separate state departments of fisheries and game. In 1934, McLeod worked tirelessly to get Initiative 77 passed to outlaw fish traps, became a founding member and secretary-treasurer of the Washington State Sports Council, and served as executive secretary of the Salmon Conservation League. The following year, he helped close Deer Creek to fishing to protect wild steelhead and was the key figure in Washington’s decision to designate steelhead as a “game fish,” thereby disallowing their sale and permitting only hook-and-line fishing.

This was a clear victory for sport fishermen, signifying a triumph of recreational values over economic ones. With this designation of the steelhead as a “game fish,” the Department of Game, rather than fisheries, had jurisdiction over this resource. This resulted in divergent views



**FIGURE 4.1** Ken McLeod with a wild Deer Creek steelhead caught on a dry fly in 1931. Photograph from *The Northwest Sportsman*, August 1931. Author's collection.

of native fish species: steelhead as “sport fish” and salmon as “food fish.” Also in 1935, Zane Grey warned the people of Oregon that “unless strong measures are adopted. . . this grand river will go . . . And it will be a pity because the value of the Umpqua, with its wonderful steelhead, is inestimable.” By 1939, McLeod was joined by Enos Bradner and a few others to found the Washington Fly Fishing Club, whose early leaders were top steelhead fly fishers. And one of their most significant achievements was convincing the Washington State Department of Game to institute fly-only rules on the famed North Fork Stillaguamish, for which Deer Creek is its major tributary, in 1941.<sup>9</sup>

Similar developments were also taking place in British Columbia and Idaho. General Money became president of the Qualicum Fish and Game Association in 1939 and Haig-Brown's *Western Angler*, published that same year, featured chapters on "Winter Steelhead," "The Future," and "The People's Right to Good Fishing," along with regular reminders of sound ethical practices. Idaho's Ted Trueblood, discussed in this volume by Rick Williams, who pioneered steelhead fly fishing on the Snake and Clearwater, became fishing editor for *Field & Stream* in the early 1940s and brought steelhead conservation to his national readership. *Oregonian* editor Lampman wrote of "The Valiant Steelhead Trout" and "Ascent of the Steelhead" and published *Steelhead Trout: Dynamite Dressed in Sheer Silver* in 1945. In this book, he called steelhead "the finest fish of them all" and argued for their respect and protection. Bradner became the outdoor editor of the *Seattle Times* around this time and continued his regular column, "The Inside on the Outdoors," until 1969. In his column, Bradner offered his "Fly of the Week" and served as a spokesman for Northwest steelhead fly fishing and the protection of wild steelhead and their habitat. Haig-Brown published his literary classic *A River Never Sleeps* in 1946, which was a testimony to fly fishing, steelhead, rivers, and conservation. Soon thereafter, Brayshaw became the founding president of the Hope Rod and Gun Club and McLeod fought the building of dams on Washington's Nooksack, Skagit, and Cowlitz Rivers. He also convinced authorities to move the proposed dam on the Green River, just outside of Seattle, upstream from its original site to be above the migratory fish range.<sup>10</sup>

### Steelhead Fly Fishing and Conservation at Midcentury

Steelhead fly fishing success and advancements in the 1940s set the stage for further conservation in the 1950s. The Pray "Optic" and Silvius "Fall Favorite" were the standard fly patterns in California waters, Schwab's articles on steelhead lines, flies, and techniques appeared regularly in *Sports Afield*, and Washington fly fishers Ralph Wahl and Ralph Olson designed special flies and set records on Washington's Skagit River. Brayshaw designed his famous Coquihalla series of steelhead flies and newcomers like Jack Hemingway, Bill Schaadt, Bob Nauheim, and Jimmy Green were gaining both regional and national recognition for their stellar fishing and casting abilities. Huge steelhead entered into *Field & Stream's* big fish contest focused attention on the Skagit and Eel especially, and two-handed rods and tapered lead-core shoot-

ing heads revolutionized techniques. Fly fishermen Claude Krieder and Clark Van Fleet published their classic books *Steelhead* and *Steelhead to a Fly* in 1948 and 1951, respectively. Krieder's book featured the Eel and Van Fleet wrote reverently about the Eel, Klamath, Rogue, and North Umpqua, while discussing releasing fish, conservation-minded steelheaders, and the failure of hatcheries. He concluded with an insightful chapter, "What of Tomorrow's Fishing?"<sup>11</sup> And it was Haig-Brown in *Fisherman's Spring*, published in 1951 as well, who put steelhead in a group of "really worthwhile fish" that "are nowhere sufficiently numerous to withstand unlimited fishing" and are not "able to hold their own against the determination of anglers to kill them, and of industry to poison them or bar them out or dry up their water supply." He went on to conclude that "if one is convinced of this, as I am, some thought of limiting one's own killing is inevitable."<sup>12</sup>

Once again, steelhead fly fishers led the movement to protect steelhead and their habitat in the 1950s. Lloyd Silvius was a leader of California Fly Fishermen United, Northcoast Fly Fishermen, South Humboldt Bay Conservation Club, Fish Action Council, and Redwood Sportsman's Club, and his fly shop in Eureka sold more Cortland steelhead fly lines than any other store on the West Coast. In 1952, a thirty-four-mile stretch of the North Umpqua was designated fly fishing only, a plan pushed through by the Roseburg Rod and Gun Club. Three years later, in Everett, Washington, several steelheaders founded the Evergreen Fly Fishing Club. The club's insignia featured a Knudson "Spider," and early members included Lew Bell and Bill Nelson, who would eventually play central roles in the founding of the Federation of Fly Fishers ten years later (discussed by Rick Williams later in this volume). It was also in this decade that several key players in steelhead conservation were first introduced to steelhead fly fishing. Pete Hidy, an Easterner with strong ties to the Angler's Club of New York and the Theodore Gordon Flyfishers, arrived in Portland. Fishing guide and restaurant owner Frank Moore bought the Steamboat Inn on the North Umpqua. Angling writers Bill Bakke and Bill McMillan were directly influenced by the writing of Haig-Brown.

### Conservation Reaches New Heights in the 1960s

Once again, it was Haig-Brown who garnered national attention for the plight of wild fish. In his "Articles of Faith for Good Anglers," originally published in 1960 in *Life*, he argued for "respect for the fish, re-



spect for the fish's living space, and respect for other fishermen," and noted that "the fish is the real base of the whole business. He is not an enemy, merely an adversary and without him and his progeny there can be no sport."<sup>13</sup> The following year in Portland, just after a group of mostly gear fishermen formed the Association of Northwest Steelheaders, Pete Hidy and a few others started the Flyfishers Club of Oregon. Soon thereafter, they began publishing their pioneering fly fishing journal *The Creel: The Bulletin of the Flyfishers Club of Oregon*, and in the first issue, editor Hidy published Haig-Brown's "A Talk to Oregon Fly Fishermen." Here, Haig-Brown suggested, "Loving the sport of fishing, and especially fly fishing, and the creatures surrounding it, the environment about it, the fly fisherman inevitably must seek the preservation and perpetuation of these values for future generations."<sup>14</sup> Haig-Brown's "Ethics and Aesthetics" followed in 1963 in *Trout and Salmon*, and his "Outdoor Ethics" was published in *Trout* the next year. In the first article, with respect to fish's environment, he urged fly fishers "to protect it to the best of his ability and to fight for it if necessary," and, in the latter piece, Haig-Brown called for "sound ethical behaviour" and "sound ethical codes" at a time of "increasing population and decreasing resources."<sup>15</sup>

When Bill Nelson moved from Everett, Washington, to Eugene, Oregon, in 1964, he was instrumental in starting the McKenzie Fly Fishing Club, and during that same year, Lee Wulff and Bob Wethern, Hidy's coeditor of *The Creel*, corresponded about the idea of a national group of fly fishers starting an organization "to protect our native fisheries." This idea came to fruition in June 1965 when the McKenzie Club hosted the first Federation of Fly Fishers (FFF) conclave. Much of it was East coming West, highlighted by Wulff, Trueblood, and Ed Zern. But western steelhead fly fishers like Bradner, Wahl, and Brayshaw, among several others like Dave Carlson and Polly Rosborough, also played key roles as panelists and exhibitors. And Bradner was elected charter vice president.<sup>16</sup>

Several significant events occurred in the second half of the 1960s that became central to wild steelhead conservation. At the second FFF conclave at the Jackson Lake Lodge in Wyoming in 1966, several steelhead fly fishers who fished the North Umpqua around the Steamboat area discussed the idea of an organization "to promote fly fishing" and the "conservation of our natural resources." The Steamboaters were born and became a charter member of the FFF soon thereafter. Central to their charter was the protection of steelhead water, steelhead research, conservation, and a code of ethics for true sportsmanship.<sup>17</sup>



FIGURE 4.2 Frank Amato on Oregon's Deschutes River in August 2011. Author's collection.

The following year in Portland, Frank Amato began publishing *Northwest Salmon Trout Steelheader (STS)* magazine. Amato read Haig-Brown's books as a high school student in the 1950s and after graduating from college decided he wanted to start a fishing magazine. He looked to Haig-Brown as a man "who could teach and inspire me. He knew when to kill or release steelhead. He conveyed a caring spirit toward the fish and the full river environment." At that point, Amato remembered, "it became my goal to do the same and also to preserve that type of wilderness and that type of fish."<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, his editorials over the next several years favored and stressed "the making of the steelhead a game fish in Oregon," "the welfare of the steelhead," the need "to join conservation-minded clubs," "creation of more catch and release streams," and support for the Association of Northwest Steelheaders.<sup>19</sup>

The *Flyfisher*, the official magazine of the FFF, began in 1968, and that same year, at the urging of Frank Moore on the North Umpqua, a film called *Pass Creek and North Umpqua River Basin* was made to document the effects of clear-cut logging practices on an important steelhead spawning stream. Frank took the film to the FFF Conclave in 1968, and after the Bureau of Land Management denied their destructive impact, he flew the movie in his private plane for a showing in

Washington, DC, greatly influencing the Natural Resources Committee of Congress and eventually the passing of the Forest Practices Act in 1973.<sup>20</sup>

But all of this progress from an angler's point of view was not without controversy. Northwest Native American tribes, especially in Washington, began staging "fish ins" to express their belief that treaties gave them the right to gillnet steelhead in rivers. Regulation of this fishing was done by the state Department of Game, whose main constituency were sportsmen who believed rivers were reserved for rods and reels, not nets. After a major confrontation and case from the Puyallup River reached the US Supreme Court, the court ruled on May 27, 1968, that the state could only restrict tribal fishing for conservation purposes. The following year, Ken McLeod convinced the Washington State Legislature to name the steelhead as the state fish. The Steelhead Committee of the British Columbia Wildlife Federation met for the first time to discuss the conservation of wild steelhead, and R. P. Van Gytenbeek, a fly fisherman, became the new executive director of Trout Unlimited. The battle over steelhead raged between sportsmen and Native Americans and both parties hoped for relief when the US Attorney for Western Washington filed a suit on behalf of the tribes, *US vs. Washington*, on September 18, 1970, in US District Court in Tacoma. Each of these events would play significant roles in future wild steelhead protection measures.<sup>21</sup>

### **Steelhead Fly Fishing Becomes More Popular in the 1970s and the Admiration, Respect, and Appreciation of Wild Fish Results**

In 1970, the news of Karl Mausser's massive twenty-seven-pound, eight-ounce fly-caught wild steelhead from British Columbia's Kispiox River excited anglers worldwide and signaled the beginning of a flurry of activity, including new books, magazine articles, and specialized tackle.<sup>22</sup> Later that same year, Bill Luch, the vice president of the Association of Northwest Steelheaders, and Frank Amato published *Steelhead: Drift Fishing and Fly Fishing*. Ken McLeod's pioneering Scientific Anglers book *Steelhead on a Fly? Here's How* (1962) was joined in 1971 by Jimmy Green's Fenwick-sponsored book *Fly Casting: From the Beginning* and Trey Combs's *The Steelhead Trout*, one of the first books published by Frank Amato Publishers in Portland.<sup>23</sup> Haig-Brown's article "Fascinating Challenge" was published in *True*, and later that same year, the great Joe Brooks wrote "Steelhead or Atlantic Salmon" for *Outdoor Life*.<sup>24</sup>

Ralph Wahl also published his remarkable *Come Wade the River* in 1971 and Enos Bradner's *Fish On!* appeared at the same time. Wahl celebrated wild steelhead and rivers with his beautiful black and white photography and Bradner included two chapters on steelhead fly fishing.<sup>25</sup>

By 1975, Haig-Brown would write "Steelhead Angling Comes of Age" for the *Flyfisher*, which at the time was edited by Seattle's Steve Raymond and printed by Frank Amato.<sup>26</sup> The following year, Trey Combs published what became "the Bible" for steelhead fly fishers, *Steelhead Fly Fishing and Flies*. It featured photos from Amato, Wahl, and McMullan, among others, beautiful color photos of flies tied by the best in the Northwest, a thorough history of the sport, and valuable instruction in tactics and techniques.<sup>27</sup>

As was the case in earlier years, a heightened concern for the conservation and protection of wild steelhead went hand in hand with their popularity among fly fishermen. In 1970, at a meeting in Port Coquitlam, a group of steelhead fly and gear anglers formed the British Columbia Steelhead Society with major goals to protect rivers from aggressive logging, stop the pollution of Howe Sound, and actively participate in their federal government's new Salmon Enhancement Program.<sup>28</sup> Haig-Brown's riveting article "Along the Steelhead Rivers" was published in the *American Sportsman* later that year and concluded by suggesting that every angler "should be satisfied to limit his kill" and that wild steelhead "have more important duties than filling freezers or posing for posthumous pictures."<sup>29</sup> Frank Amato stepped-up his criticism of hatcheries in his *STS* editorials, and his Washington Field Editor, Les Johnson, published a "wake-up call" article, "Are Washington's Steelhead Facing Disaster?" in *Field & Stream*.<sup>30</sup> In Idaho, Ted Trueblood's friend Jack Hemingway, also a regular fly fisher on the North Umpqua, became Northwest field editor for *Field & Stream* in 1970 as well and began fighting a pit mine and proposed dam on the Snake River.<sup>31</sup> Finally, during Christmas week that year, a group split away from Trout Unlimited in San Francisco to form a new conservation group dedicated to "protecting and restoring wild trout and steelhead waters throughout California." They became known as CalTrout and produced a model, standard, and philosophy soon to be copied in other parts of the Northwest. Their first major accomplishments included successfully stopping the federal relicensing of a hydropower dam on the Eel River and convincing the California Fish and Game Commission to approve a statewide Wild Trout Program.<sup>32</sup>

Jack Hemingway, who caught his first steelhead on a fly in Washington's Kalama River in 1942, became a wild steelhead advocate instantly.

After a long association with Frank Moore on the North Umpqua and many fishing trips with Dan Callaghan, an original Steamboater and Salem attorney, Hemingway became very active in his home state of Idaho. He sponsored a fundraising party in Sun Valley for the Democratic candidate for governor, Cecil Andrus, and when he won the election and became governor in 1971, Andrus appointed Hemingway to the Idaho Fish and Game Commission (IFGC), a position he held until 1977. That year, Hemingway published "The North Umpqua Story" in *Field & Stream* as well as "Will We Let the Pink and Silver Warrior Die?" in *National Wildlife*. In the latter article, Hemingway predicted that "the day of their decline or even demise in the Snake River watershed of the Columbia might be closer than many of their admirers realize."<sup>33</sup> In 1972, Frank Amato published a blistering editorial in *STS* noting that "when it comes to the management of native or wild trout streams, the public agencies involved make horrible showings." He went on to conclude that "departmental officials are mediocre. They lack the courage to be leaders showing the way. Rather, they drag their feet and need to be pushed by organizations such as CalTrout, Federation of Fly Fishermen and the Steelheader's Council of Trout Unlimited, which all do more for wise fishery management than any state agency." Later that year, Amato asked Bill Bakke to be conservation editor for *STS*. Bakke was a Portland-area steelhead fly fisherman who began a regular column called "Perspectives on Fisheries Conservation."<sup>34</sup> Finally, to illustrate the "tone of the times," Haig-Brown's new foreword to *A River Never Sleeps*, republished in 1974, was very telling. He explained that "We know much more about fish and their needs, especially the anadromous trouts and salmons, and we understand their values better . . . It is time now to move into an era of constructive conservation that nourishes the natural world and all its creatures instead of destroying them."<sup>35</sup>

While *US vs. Washington* was still pending, the US Supreme Court upheld the right of Native American tribes to commercially harvest steelhead in a November 19, 1973, ruling. The following year, on February 12, US District Court Judge George C. Boldt ruled in a 254-page decision that Native Americans were entitled to half of the fish. Now the conflict broadened to include salmon and suddenly all nonnative fishermen, regardless of harvest method, were competing for half as many fish as a group. Boldt's decision undermined the basic principle of the earlier Initiative 77, that everyone should have equal access to fish, and further exacerbated the fight between steelheaders who were fishing for fun and gillnetters who believed their livelihoods were be-

ing threatened. Sportsmen's groups in Washington, namely the Washington State Sportsmen's Council and the Northwest Steelhead and Salmon Council of Trout Unlimited (NWSSC), fought the decision with lawsuits, boycotts, and "fish ins," among other tactics, into the mid-1970s. The state of Oregon sided with sportsmen and banned the sale of steelhead "incidentally" caught while fishing for salmon, which effectively decommercialized steelhead in that state. Washington tried the same tactic in 1979 and 1981, with NWSSC support, but the proposal never made it out of committee.<sup>36</sup>

Bill McMillan, who was influenced as an eighth grader by the writings of Haig-Brown in the 1950s, became an avid steelhead fly fisherman. He moved to the banks of Washington's Washougal River in 1970 and started writing about steelhead, mostly in *STS*. By 1974, he realized that wild steelhead were being replaced by hatchery steelhead and began to articulate the dangers of hatchery fish. It was at this time that McMillan, who remains a major stalwart in wild steelhead conservation today, began his active, consistent, and constant fight to save wild steelhead. He was instrumental in starting the Clark-Skamania Fly Fishers in Camas, Washington, in 1975 as a "conservation" organization. They initiated letter writing campaigns "as a primary means of conservation activism," McMillan remembered, but they soon realized they needed data. So they started to conduct spawning surveys and snorkeling expeditions to count fish. McMillan said, "We would collect and make the data talk for wild fish. We became an independent generator of wild fish science."<sup>37</sup> CalTrout continued their wild steelhead efforts at this time too, sponsoring their first national catch and release symposium in 1977 and pushing for the California Trout and Steelhead Conservation Act, which became law and state policy in 1979.<sup>38</sup> Oregon got more involved as well, when Hemingway, Callaghan, Moore, and the new owner of Steamboat Inn, Jim Van Loan, convinced the Secretary of the Interior, Cecil Andrus, to visit and fly fish the North Umpqua. This event, in 1977, gained national attention, and Andrus stopped plans for an ill-advised road on the south side of the North Umpqua.<sup>39</sup> The following year, thanks to the efforts of Bill Bakke and Fish and Wildlife Commissioner Louisa Bateman in particular, Oregon adopted a wild fish management plan.<sup>40</sup> Later that year in Portland, Frank Amato started a new fly fishing magazine, *Fly Fishing the West*. It was the first national publication devoted to fly fishing, continued the wild steelhead advocacy Amato had started in *STS*, and featured a group of steelhead fly fishing editors like Don Roberts, Marty Sherman, Dave Hughes, and Les Johnson, who were all major players in fish conservation and wild fish protection.<sup>41</sup>

## A More Formal Approach to Wild Steelhead Conservation is the Hallmark of the 1980s

Bolstered by a few notable successes to save wild steelhead in the early 1980s the Clark-Skamania Fly Fishers, with the biology of Bill McMillan and the leadership of their young president Randy Stetzer, convinced the Washington State Department of Game to proclaim the Wind River as “the first formally designated wild steelhead river in the Northwest to be managed strictly for wild steelhead with hatchery fish eliminated.”<sup>42</sup> In 1983, after editing TU’s *Trout* magazine since 1977, Tom Pero, by now a converted steelhead fly fisher, launched a newly expanded color magazine that included expanded coverage of the Northwest, especially salmon and steelhead issues, and columns by national fly fishing leaders like Leon Chandler and Michael Fong and fisheries experts such as Robert Bachman, Robert Behnke, and Ray White.<sup>43</sup> That same year, Bill Bakke, who had been working for the Oregon Wilderness Coalition to establish the Northwest Power Planning Council, met Dick May, the president of CalTrout. After interacting with him, fishing with him, and discussing conservation issues with Dave Hughes from Astoria, Oregon, Oregon Trout was formed in 1983. Bakke worked as executive director and conservation director into the 1990s. They followed CalTrout’s lead and worked very hard for wild steelhead in Oregon.<sup>44</sup>

The NWSSC, after a series of defeats over attempts to fight the Boldt decision and to decommercialize steelhead, supported a wild fish conference in 1983 where a call was made for cooperation among user groups and special protection for wild steelhead and salmon. The outcome was a decision to work with tribal biologists and fishermen in the name of conservation. This infuriated John Kelly, chairman of the Washington State Sportsmen’s Council, who accused Jerry Pavletich, executive director of the NWSSC, of “surrendering” to, and “joining hands” with, the tribes. Later that year, on the North Umpqua, it was revealed that a hydroelectric power dam was proposed near the town of Winchester. Knowing the impending danger to the river’s anadromous fish, the Steamboaters and the Umpqua Fisherman’s Association protested. Others, also fly fishermen, formed the North Umpqua Foundation to further oppose the project.<sup>45</sup>

In late 1985, the president of the FFF’s Northwest Regional Council asked Seattle steelhead fly fisherman Bob Arnold to serve as chairman of a steelhead committee. Arnold agreed and in 1986 started the Washington Steelhead Committee, composed of “a handful of steel-



**FIGURE 4.3** Frank Moore (left) and Bill Bakke (right) share a hug in Joel Lafollette’s Royal Treatment Fly Shop in West Linn, Oregon, before a fishing trip in 2010. Author’s collection.

head fly fishermen I regularly encountered on the Stilly, Skykomish, Sauk, Skagit, and Wenatchee.” Included were John Farrar, Alec Jackson, Bill McMillan, and Steve Raymond, among a few others. The group immediately got involved in the Deer Creek Restoration Fund, “hammered out a policy on wild fish,” and proposed catch and release regulations for several rivers late in the season when mostly wild steelhead were present. By the following year, the Steelhead Committee of the FFF published the first issue of their new journal, the *Osprey*. In it, the group made it very clear that they believed that “in the future virtually all rivers having anadromous fish should be managed for their wild fish populations, with increased reliance on natural reproduction and less dependence on hatcheries.”<sup>46</sup>

In 1987, the governors of Washington and Oregon each appointed steelhead fly fishermen to their respective state fish and wildlife com-



missions. Appointees included John McGlenn, a devoted conservationist who caught his first steelhead in 1963, in Washington, and Jim Van Loan, owner of the Steamboat Inn and member of both the Steamboaters and the North Umpqua Foundation, in Oregon.<sup>47</sup> In British Columbia, the outcry of steelhead fly fishermen over the netting of Skeena River-bound steelhead as part of the traditional salmon harvest eventually had an impact in 1989. This was instigated by a widely circulated “Steelhead Run Status Report,” which listed by actual numbers of wild steelhead killed, the impact of commercial fishing. As a result, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans from Ottawa, who finally understood the significant “incidental catch” of wild steelhead, instituted a “selective seine fishery” at the mouth of the Skeena.<sup>48</sup> The idea of forming a wild fish conservation group in Washington like CalTrout and Oregon Trout was discussed by several members of Bellingham’s 4th Corner Fly Fishers, and in 1989, with the leadership of their conservation of-



**FIGURE 4.4** Bill McMillan in his wet suit after doing a snorkel survey on Washington’s Icicle River. Author’s collection.

ficer Dick Van Demark, a steelhead fly fisher, a group met in Ellensburg to form Washington Trout. The entire board of directors were all fly fishermen and the first executive director, Kurt Beardslee, was also a steelheader.<sup>49</sup>

### **The Numbers of Steelhead Fly Fishers Grow and the Fight to Save Wild Fish Intensifies in the 1990s**

As the 1990s began, Idaho Rivers Unlimited was formed to help safeguard that state's imperiled wild steelhead and salmon runs, and British Columbia's Steelhead Society started their Wild Steelhead Campaign in 1991.<sup>50</sup> During the same year, two Washington steelhead fly fishermen released their classic books on steelhead. Trey Combs's giant *Steelhead Fly Fishing* was both historical and contemporary and Steve Raymond's *Steelhead Country* was provocative and inspiring. Raymond wrote about the "steelhead tradition," noting that "the complete steelheader" must show "appreciation and respect for the fish" and had an obligation to "preserve and protect" steelhead. In his epilogue, Raymond wrote of his faith in the future and "a new angling ethic, a new attitude of consideration toward fish and fishing. . . . a greater awareness and respect for rivers and the life in them. . . ."<sup>51</sup> In 1992 Oregon steelhead fly fisherman Deke Meyer published his highly successful book *Advanced Fly Fishing for Steelhead*. Meyer, like so many other steelheaders, believed "in the catch and release of all wild steelhead and the preservation of those runs." He went on to argue that "the future of all steelhead rests with its wild fish."<sup>52</sup> And also in 1992, Peter Soverel and Tom Pero, both devoted steelhead fly fishers with a long connection to wild steelhead, founded the Wild Salmon Center in Portland "to conserve wild salmon and steelhead around the Pacific Rim."<sup>53</sup>

By mid-decade, the book and magazine literature focusing on steelhead and steelhead fly fishing continued to put their demise in the public eye. Oregon State English professor Ted Leeson, driven by steelhead like Steve Raymond and others, penned his exquisite book *The Habit of Rivers: Reflections on Trout Streams and Fly Fishing* in 1994. He admitted that "Above all other fish, steelhead were to me the most intriguing natives of the Northwest. They defined its angling identity."<sup>54</sup> In 1994 Tom Pero began publishing *Wild Steelhead & Atlantic Salmon* magazine while also advertising the magazine's Wild Steelhead Library of books for sale.<sup>55</sup> That same year, Nick Amato and Amato Publications began publishing the new *Steelhead River Journal*, which featured major

issues devoted to the top steelhead rivers authored independently by many of the leading steelhead fly fishers.<sup>56</sup>

The following year, Bill Bakke's Oregon Trout was renamed the Native Fish Society and another steelhead fly fisherman who would become a major force for reform, Bill Redman, joined the FFF Steelhead Committee. He was past president of the Washington Fly Fishing Club and started steelhead fly fishing in the 1960s. His first article was published in the *Osprey* in 1995 when John Sager was the editor.<sup>57</sup> Then, in rapid succession, steelhead fly fishermen began to publish significant books that all called for wild steelhead protection, better management by state agencies, and the leadership of other fly fishermen. Examples are: Baughman, *A River Seen Right*; Arnold, *Steelhead & the Floating Line*; Thornton, *Steelhead*; and Rose, *Fly Fishing in the Olympic Peninsula*.<sup>58</sup> Two other books, McClintock and Crockett's *Watermark* and McGuane's *The Longest Silence*, also stressed the importance and value of anadromous fish and the need to protect them.<sup>59</sup> A final development, at decade's end in Washington, was the appointment of Pete Van Gytenbeek as a State Fish and Wildlife Commissioner in 1998.<sup>60</sup>

### **Steelhead Fly Fishers and the Status of Wild Steelhead as the Twenty-First Century Begins**

A newcomer to the battle to save wild steelhead emerged on the scene in early 2000, due to the closure of the popular catch and release season on Washington's Skagit and Sauk Rivers. A group of disgruntled anglers, the majority being fly fishermen, officially formed the Wild Steelhead Coalition (WSC) as a nonprofit association in 2001. Their goals and objectives were straightforward: "Dedicated to increasing the return of wild steelhead to the waters of the Pacific Northwest." Specifically, the WSC believed that "over harvest, habitat degradation, poor hatchery practices, construction of impassable barriers to migration, and misguided management strategies have all contributed to the decline, and in some cases extinction, of wild fish runs."<sup>61</sup> Later in their first year, for distribution at public hearings on steelhead fishing regulations before the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission, the WSC released their first research report, titled "Biological and Economic Benefits of Wild Steelhead Release."<sup>62</sup> At this same time, the Washington Council of Trout Unlimited presented their "Wild Steelhead Conservation Policy" statement and report. It was spearheaded by Richard Burge, a fly fisherman and retired fisheries biologist from the

WDFW, and included a series of wild steelhead run size graphs for most of Washington's major rivers compiled by another fly fisherman and retired engineer, Larry Doyle.<sup>63</sup>

British Columbia fly fishermen intensified their efforts to protect wild steelhead in 2002. The South Coast Steelhead Coalition and the North Coast Steelhead Alliance were both formed that year, and the British Columbia Conservation Foundation released their "Greater Georgia Basin Steelhead Recovery Plan."<sup>64</sup> Later that year at the University of Washington, the WSC hosted a Wild Steelhead Summit, attended by over thirty recreational fishing and conservation organizations from California, Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia. Attendees formed committees, planned position papers, and agreed to meet regularly in the future.<sup>65</sup> Through the efforts of the WSC, TU, and the FFF Steelhead Committee in particular, and with the help of WDFW commissioner Pete Van Gytenbeek, Washington's rules for wild steelhead retention went from thirty to five a year in 2002. Then, through intense lobbying, scientific data, and testimony, the February 2004 meeting of the WDFW Commission resulted in a decision to put a two-year moratorium on killing any wild steelhead, slated to go into effect from April 1, 2004, to March 31, 2006. This landmark decision was appealed and in 2004 was changed to allow one steelhead to be killed statewide in a handful of rivers.<sup>66</sup> Finally in 2005 in British Columbia, Friends of Wild Salmon was formed. Leading this group of fishermen and nonfishermen was Andrew Williams, a steelhead fly fisherman and Terrace resident. The group was formed to fight against "the dangers of floating feedlots" for Atlantic salmon, citing the risks of pollution and disease to BC's wild fish.<sup>67</sup>

By mid-decade, the WSC published their second major research report, "The Status of Wild Steelhead and Their Management in Western Washington: Strategies for Conservation and Recreation," and joined Trout Unlimited, American Rivers, the Pacific Rivers Council, the Native Fish Society, and the Sierra Club in a lawsuit against the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). Specifically, the lawsuit was brought against NMFS because they decided to "lump wild and hatchery steelhead together and downlisted Upper Columbia steelhead based on the numbers of hatchery fish, even though it also found that those hatchery fish pose a threat to the survival and recovery of the wild steelhead."<sup>68</sup> It was at this time, too, that the dwindling numbers of Pacific Northwest wild steelhead stocks gained more national attention and attracted representatives of major fishing and outdoor recreation companies to help support the cause. A new WSC trustee and fly fishing tackle

representative, Dylan Tomine, also became involved by writing “The Tragedy of Steelhead” for *Wild on The Fly* magazine and “Teetering on the Brink: Olympic Peninsula Hatcheries and Steelhead Politics” for *The Flyfish Journal* in 2007 and 2008, respectively. Some exciting fly fishing videos were also produced, with a portion of the profits donated to helping wild steelhead. One in particular, “Rivers of a Lost Coast,” was made by two young California filmmakers and avid steelhead fly fishers, Justin Coupe and Palmer Taylor. In their award-winning video, they documented the rise and tragic fall of Northern California’s phenomenal steelhead and salmon fly fishing and emphasized that the same thing could happen elsewhere if corrective measures are not taken.<sup>69</sup>

More encouraging things have happened for wild steelhead as this chapter is being written. Following the release of the video “Rivers of a Lost Coast,” the Russian River Wild Steelhead Coalition started in California, and in Oregon, the North Umpqua Wild Steelhead Coalition was formed to lobby for no harvest of wild fish and the elimination of the hatchery program.<sup>70</sup> In Seattle, Rob Masonis, the new vice president for Western conservation for TU, organized a partnership between his organization, the WSC, and Long Live the Kings to reform wild steelhead management plans, and the Pike Place Fish Market stopped selling wild steelhead because of angler protests.<sup>71</sup> Jack Berryman, WSC past president and board member, published “Wild Steelhead Need More Advocates” and WSC trustee Bob Margulis published “Yes We Can: What You Can Do to Save Wild Steelhead.”<sup>72</sup> And, even more recently, several fly fishermen, including Will Atlas of the FFF Steelhead Committee, Richard Burge of the WSC, and Bill and John McMillan, successfully convinced the WDFW to close the Snider Creek wild broodstock hatchery on the famed Sol Duc River.<sup>73</sup> Lastly, the WSC (Rich Simms) joined with the Wild Fish Conservancy (Kurt Beardslee and Bill McMillan and others), Conservation Angler (Peter Soverel), and the Federation of Fly Fishers (Will Atlas) to file suit over the proposal to stock hatchery steelhead in Washington’s historic Elwha River upon the removal of a dam that blocked it since 1911. As a result, in late February 2012, the plaintiffs were notified that no hatchery stocks would be planted if they would drop their lawsuit.<sup>74</sup>

## Wild Steelhead and the Future

Steelhead fly fishermen have “won some and lost some” in the long fight to save wild steelhead and wild anadromous fish in general. Sig-



**FIGURE 4.5** Past and current leaders of the Wild Steelhead Coalition at a Seattle fundraiser in November 2012. (Left to right: Jack Berryman, Rich Simms, Bob Margulis, and Dick Burge.) Author's collection.

nificantly, though, they have not given up. In fact, fly fishermen are deeply embroiled in two of the most frightening proposals on the current scene with huge potential to damage fish and entire watersheds. One is the Pebble Mine project in the heart of Alaska's Bristol Bay and the other is a coal bed methane project that could literally destroy British Columbia's three major river systems—the Skeena, Nass, and Stikine.

Without the conservation efforts of steelhead fly fishermen in particular, the current dismal situation for many wild steelhead stocks would have been much worse. There is still hope for these magnificent fish, however, because their future is in very good hands. And based upon this historical account, those "hands" will be holding fly rods casting to wild steelhead.<sup>75</sup>