

February 1, 2006

Blaine County Commissioners
206 1st Avenue S.
Suite 300
Hailey, ID 83333

Dear Commissioner Michael, Bowman and Wright:

The County Commissioners are to be commended for their efforts to provide a plan for growth in Blaine County consistent with community values; we appreciate this opportunity to comment on the proposed concepts.

This year The Nature Conservancy is celebrating the 30th anniversary of the creation of the Silver Creek Preserve located just a few miles down the road from here. It has taken many citizens sharing a vision of a landscape where agriculture, abundant wildlife and a world renowned spring creek could flourish together. Through dedication and determination their vision is being implemented to create the treasure that is Silver Creek. Enjoyed year-round by locals Silver Creek also attracts visitors from all 50 states in the nation and more than a dozen foreign countries, and pumps millions of dollars annually into the Blaine County economy.

This shared vision has created The Nature Conservancy's 880 acre preserve on Silver Creek and protected through voluntary conservation easements over 9,500 acres in the Silver Creek watershed donated to both The Nature Conservancy and The Wood River Land Trust. Through partnerships and voluntary, incentive-based efforts a lot has been accomplished with 22 of our neighbors to protect the rural feel, the open spaces, the wildlife habitat and the farms and ranches that define the Silver Creek watershed and the southern end of the County. Silver Creek has been recognized as a model for community-based conservation. It proves that wise, collaborative stewardship of places like Silver Creek has provided this community with economic, recreational and quality of life benefits.

Yet there is still more to do!

Its now time for the citizens of Blaine County to create and implement another vision, the vision of how our county will grow and look 20 or 30 years from now.

The Nature Conservancy strongly supports the county's efforts to plan for growth to ensure our communities remain highly desirable places to live, work and play.

We support the notion of containing growth in our communities and working together to control sprawl and leap-frog development that could undermine what the community has worked so hard to preserve over many years.

The Nature Conservancy strongly supports protecting the open spaces, agricultural lands, wetlands, riparian areas and other wildlife habitats that occur in our county and especially within the Silver Creek watershed south of Bellevue. TNC supports voluntary, incentive-based approaches that are acceptable to landowners and fiscally responsible to ensure these lands, wetlands, riparian areas and working farms and ranches remain in the future as they are today.

Thank you again for your leadership on this issue and the opportunity to provide comment.

Sincerely,

Trish Klahr
Silver Creek/Big Wood Watershed Manager
The Nature Conservancy