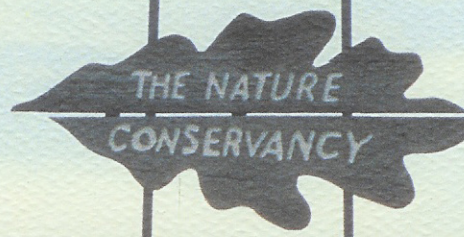




30 years  
**silver creek**  
preserve



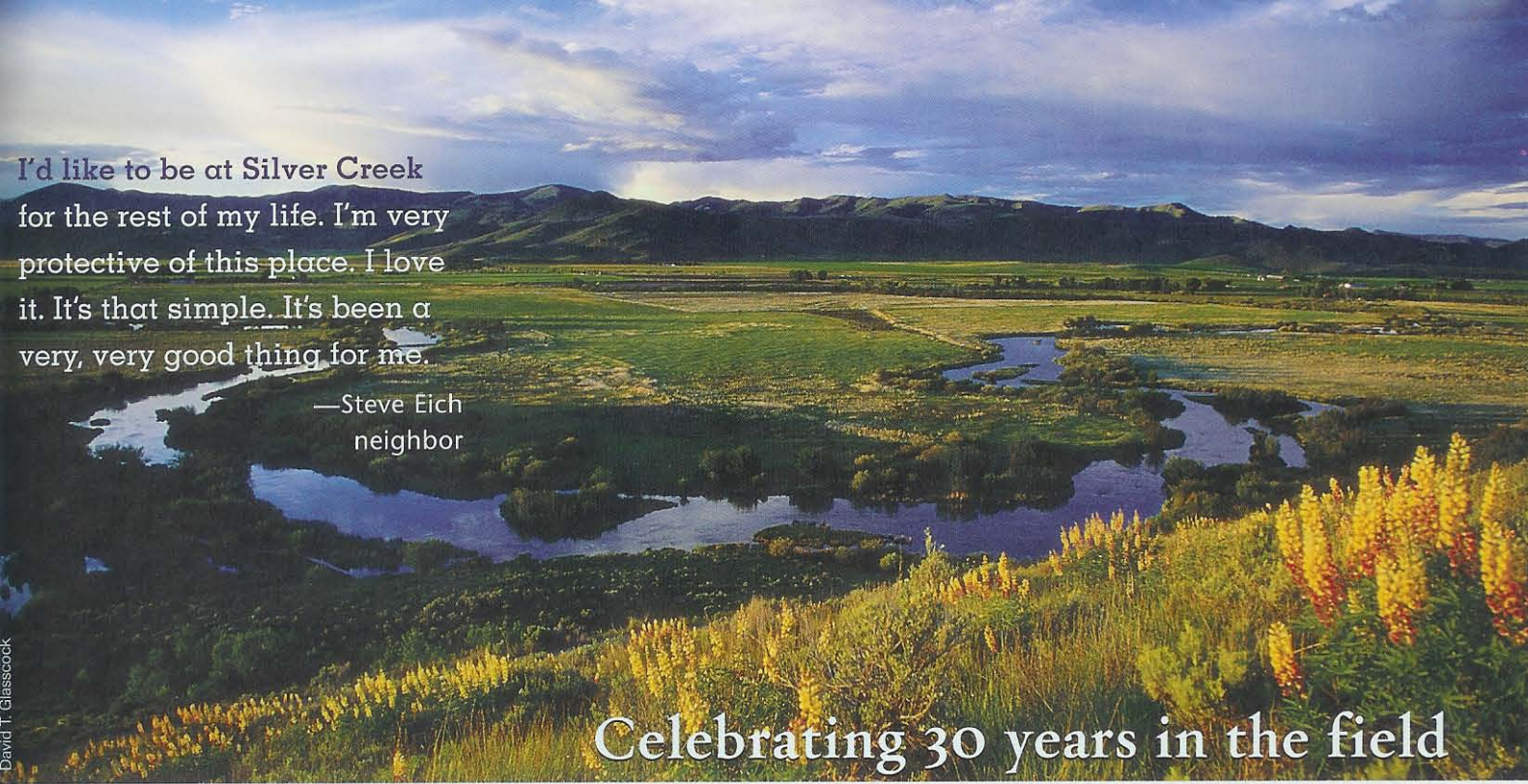
SILVER CREEK

PRESERVE

**Places have a way of claiming people.**

When they claim very diverse kinds of people, then those people must eventually learn to live with each other; they must learn to inhabit their place together, which they can only do through the development of certain practices which both rely upon and nurture the old-fashioned civic virtues of trust, honesty, justice, toleration, cooperation, hope, and remembrance.

—Dan Kemmis  
*Community and the  
Politics of Place*



I'd like to be at Silver Creek  
for the rest of my life. I'm very  
protective of this place. I love  
it. It's that simple. It's been a  
very, very good thing for me.

—Steve Eich  
neighbor

## Celebrating 30 years in the field

Dear Friends,

**In the summer of 2006, The Nature Conservancy celebrates the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its Silver Creek Preserve.**

Silver Creek is one of those special places that has inspired people around the world with its beautiful vistas, abundant wildlife and legendarily elusive trout. This project launched much of the Conservancy's work in Idaho, and it has become a model for community-based conservation.

None of this could have happened without the involvement of countless people who have put many hours into making this preserve a special place. The early visionaries, the landowners, partners, staff, interns, volunteers, members, anglers and visitors have all played a role in the conservation success story that is Silver Creek.

From the initial purchase 30 years ago of 479 acres then called the Sun Valley Ranch, the preserve has since grown to include more than 850 acres. But that is only one part of the Silver Creek story. Twenty-two landowners have donated nearly 10,000 acres of conservation easements along the creek, protecting nearly the entire main stem from development.

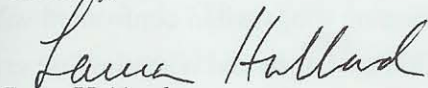
It all started with a few inspired individuals. Jack Hemingway, who fished here when visiting his father Ernest during the summer, became enthralled with the creek from the first time he fished it—even though it was an episode filled with frustration and incredibly wary fish (I know many of us can relate). When he later was commissioner for Idaho Department of Fish and Game, the property—then called the Sun Valley Ranch—came up for sale. The state couldn't buy the property, so Hemingway sought The Nature Conservancy. Conservancy staff member Spencer Beebe, Sun Valley Ranch owner Bill Janss, Hemingway and many donors and supporters worked to establish the preserve.

Later, Guy Bonnavier, at first a volunteer and then the first staff member of the Conservancy in Idaho, built the project into a model for community-based conservation. Over the years, many people have played a role in making the preserve what it is today. It would be impossible to list them all. But during our celebration, we will be telling their stories, recognizing their hard work for conservation and celebrating their connection to the land.

This publication shares a few of their thoughts on what Silver Creek means to them, through story, photo and illustration. These anecdotes and reflections showcase the powerful hold that Silver Creek still has on so many people.

And it shows what we can accomplish for conservation, by acting together, respecting the community and working hard for the legacy we leave future generations.

Sincerely,



Laura Hubbard

State Director

Over the years, many  
people have played a role  
in making the preserve  
what it is today.

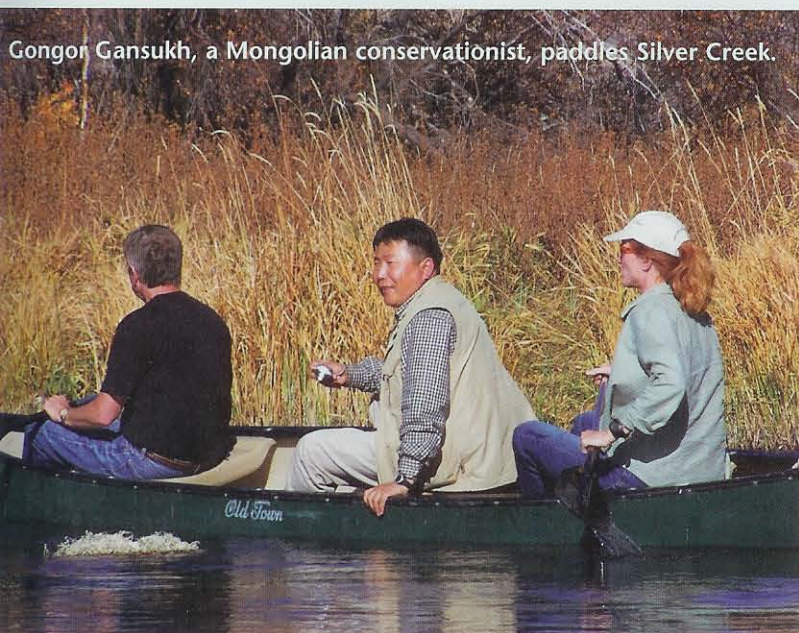
**The Silver Creek basin** is where God would go if she didn't already live there.

—Peter Gray  
landowner

# The Language of Silver Creek

essay by Matt Miller | watercolors by Dayna Smith

We walked along the creek, the sun already set and the cool fall air rapidly replacing the day's warmth. On the fields spread before us, hundreds of Canada geese began honking, their calls echoing off the hillsides as they moved to the wetland areas for the night. As if in response, a pack of coyotes let loose with a series of spirited howls, for a few seconds overshadowing the geese.



Gongor Gansukh, a Mongolian conservationist, paddles Silver Creek.

In front of us, a large splash—a beaver? a trophy trout?—sent ripples through the creek. All around were the sounds of waterfowl: the low feeding murmurs of mallards, the guttural squawks of coots, the high-pitched whistling of widgeon.

I was at Silver Creek with a guest from afar: Gongor Gansukh, a Mongolian conservationist, who was participating in a conservation exchange program with The Nature Conservancy.

Gansukh spoke the English language beautifully, and he was fond of singing songs when confronted with incredible scenery. That's what he did when he first saw Silver Creek several days earlier, after which he

**Silver Creek is more than just a fishery. It is a showcase for nature.**

—Spencer Beebe  
The Nature Conservancy



Harold Maulde

promptly cupped a handful of water and poured it over his head, to give himself a better sense of the creek.

But at this moment, there was no song, no reflection, from Gansukh. He simply patted me on the back, and sighed deeply. No words were needed. I knew exactly what he was feeling, because I've felt it myself, as have countless others who live here, work here and visit here. The magic of Silver Creek is why the community has invested so heavily in preserving its beauty and wildlife. It's why thousands of visitors come here each year—from across the country and around the world.

The next morning, as we were leaving Silver Creek, Gansukh remarked, "The people here should be so proud of what they have protected." It is something that he repeated many times during the remainder of his visit. It bears repeating again.

**A priceless legacy** was left for all of us by the foresight and dedication of Bill Janss, Jack Hemingway, Guy Bonnivier and innumerable others, who, with The Nature Conservancy, created the Silver Creek Preserve. Although there are always challenges, it was a job well done.

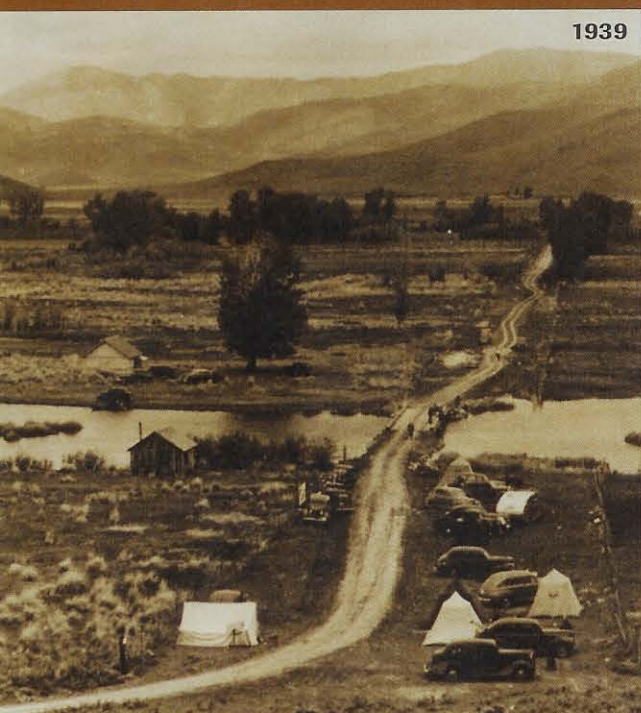
—Scott Schnebly  
fishing guide and outfitter

Not only is Silver Creek one of the most spectacular and unique natural places in the world—but also unique are the thousands of different people who came together to make it a reality.

—Guy Bonnavier  
first Silver Creek manager



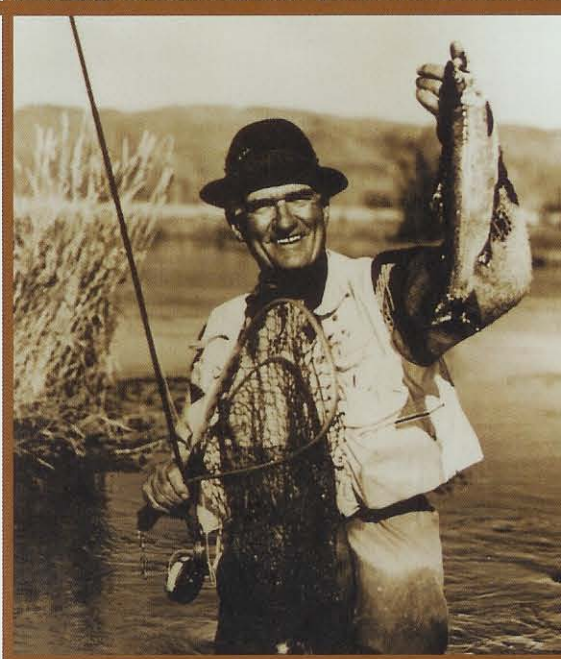
Gansukh recognized the hard work, the dedication and the love of the land that inspired so many people to make the Silver Creek Preserve and the surrounding valley what it is today. At a time when so much environmental news seems so dreary, and when Aldo Leopold's statement that having an ecological conscience means "living alone in a world of wounds" rings so true, places like Silver Creek give us hope. The story of the preserve shows that people working together can protect a special place for wildlife, for farmers and ranchers, for future generations.



1939



2006



In the early 1900's, Silver Creek's trout were already the stuff of legend in magazines like *Field and Stream*. That reputation only grew as the Sun Valley Resort began offering complimentary stays to celebrities like Ernest Hemingway and Gary Cooper, part of a successful marketing effort for the resort. The preserve property, then known as Sun Valley Ranch and owned by Union Pacific Railroad, offered resort guests excellent hunting and fishing on Silver Creek.

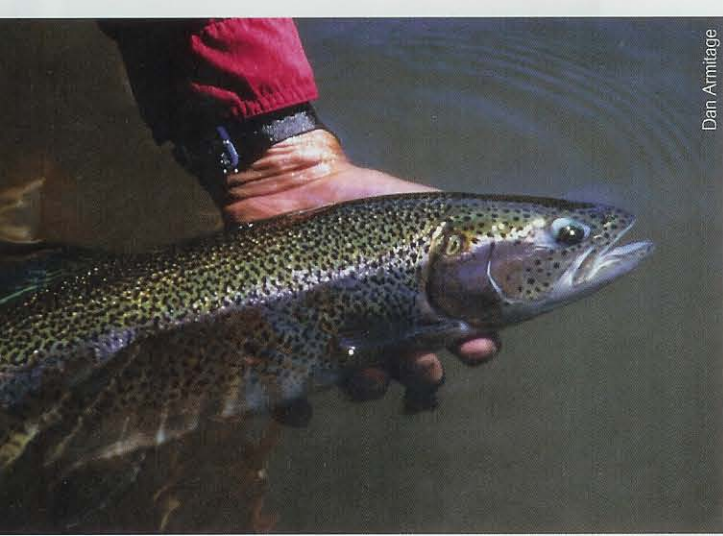
Hemingway, in particular, became associated with the valley, and with Silver Creek. Contrary to popular belief, as an adult Hemingway was not much of a fly fisherman, preferring instead to catch trophy fish in the ocean. He enjoyed Silver Creek for its duck

**Photos: Page 4.** Counterclockwise from top Many celebrities enjoyed visiting Silver Creek beginning in the 1930's, including Ernest Hemingway (center of photo), who enjoyed hunting ducks and upland birds in the valley. Silver Creek Preserve from Kilpatrick Bridge in 1930 and today. **Page 5.** Clockwise from top Stocker Creek Ranch provides a look at life along Silver Creek in the 1960's. A hunting party consisting of (left to right) ranch owner Win Gray, actor Gary Cooper, Rudy Etchen and Bud Purdy prepare to go afield. Cowboys prepare to ship cattle from Bud Purdy's stockyards. A retreat along a Silver Creek tributary provided a nice place for relaxation and, of course, fishing. Fishing writers like Joe Brooks (pictured with trout) wrote about the creek frequently in publications like *Field and Stream*, making the area a dream destination for many anglers. *The Boise Statesman* announces the purchase of Silver Creek Preserve; Bill Janss, Franklin Jones and Spencer Beebe exchange the check.



Bill Janss, Franklin Jones (Idaho Nature Conservancy Chairman in 1975) and Spencer Beebe (Northwest Nature Conservancy Director in 1975) exchange a \$15,000.00 option check which marks the Conservancy's initial commitment to Silver Creek in 1975.

## Conservationists Hope to Buy Wildlife Habitat Near Sun Valley



Dan Armitage



William H. Mullins

**When two distinct communities or landscapes meet,** you find not only those species which depend on each, but a whole array of species which depend on both. Thus the increase in species at an "edge" is not simply additive, but geometric. This "edge effect" at Silver Creek is enhanced because the two landscapes that meet—arid land and water—are so different. Thus, the abundance and diversity of species found at Silver Creek is stunning. The effect of cold clear rich spring water rising from the Idaho desert is extraordinary in the pure biological sense. The aesthetic and romantic sense of water in the desert is no less remarkable.

—Spencer Beebe and Jack Hemingway (1976)

hunting, and photos of him resting on Kilpatrick Bridge and nearby areas became common features in *Life* and other popular magazines.

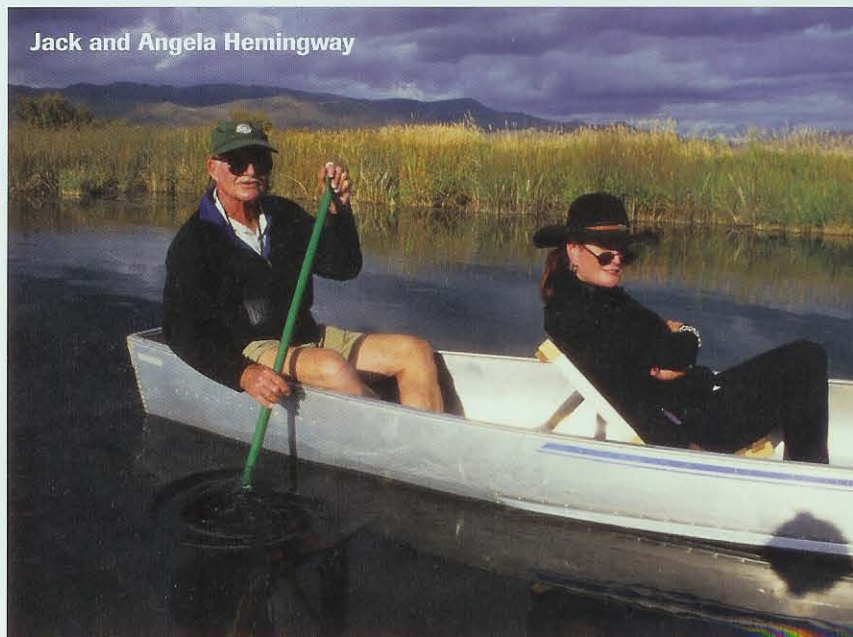
But his son, Jack, became a fanatic fly fisher at an early age. When Ernest brought his son to the resort in the 1930's, Jack had already read about the selective trout of Silver Creek. He wanted to experience the stream for himself.

Like many first-time anglers on Silver Creek, that episode was characterized by many casts, many fly changes, skittish fish and little success. Also, like many anglers, he was captivated by the experience and returned year after year.

Jack Hemingway believed the valley was paradise; he eventually settled in Idaho and become a commissioner of the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG). In 1975, with Hemingway as chairman of the commission, the Sun Valley Ranch came up for sale. Hemingway, the ranking official in the department, was unable to free up the necessary \$500,000 of state money.

**What I love the most** is the absolute diversity—the combination of so many ecosystems—sagebrush, marsh and riparian—that make such great bird habitat. I love the beauty of watching it change from season to season.

—Poo Wright-Pulliam, artist and birder

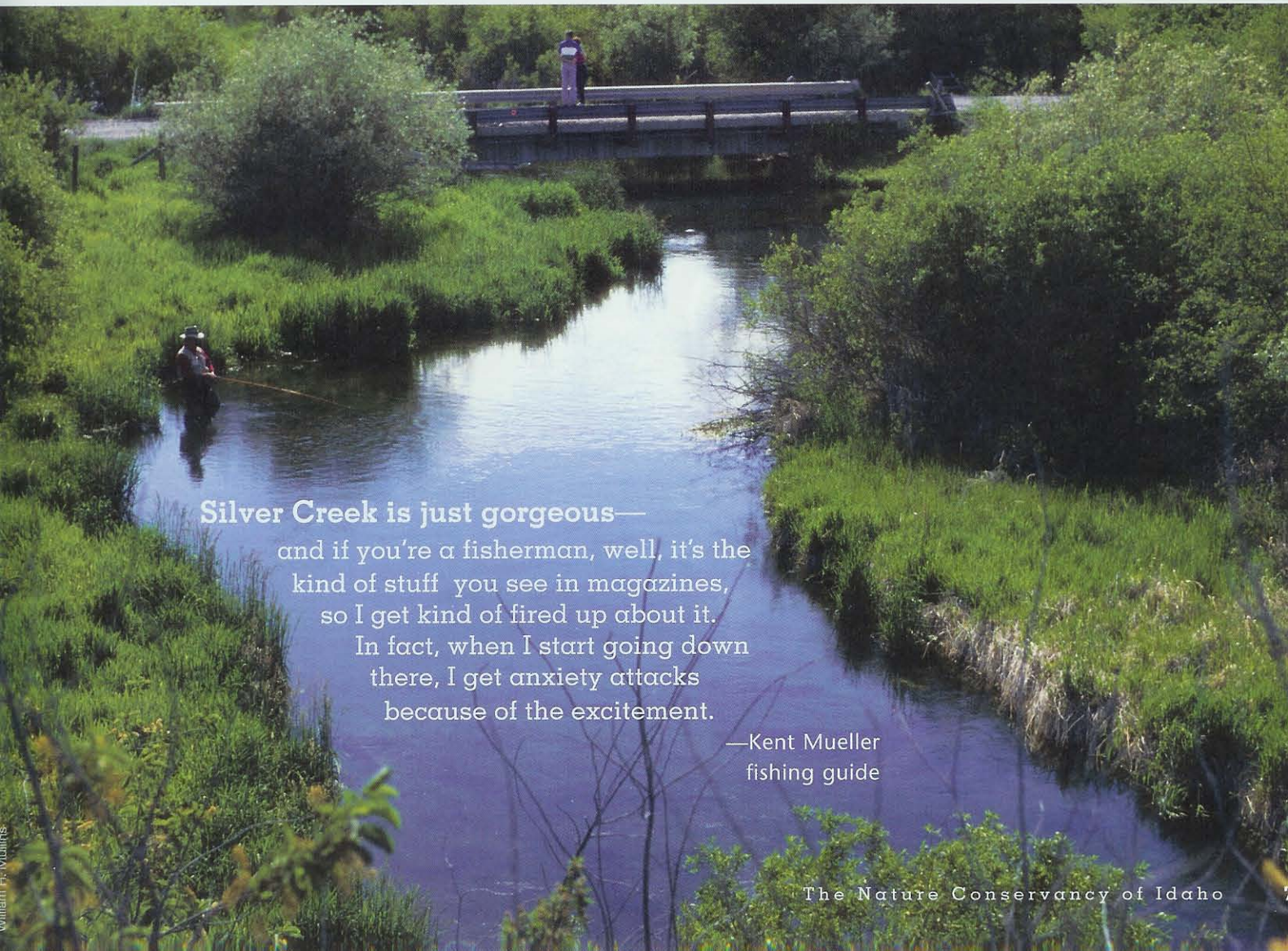


Jack and Angela Hemingway

He did not want the ranch to go for sale to the highest bidder, so he called an acquaintance in San Francisco named Huey Johnson, who worked for The Nature Conservancy. Johnson sent a Conservancy colleague in Portland, Spencer Beebe, to take a look at Silver Creek.

And so began The Nature Conservancy's work in Southcentral Idaho. In December 1975, the organization took an option on the 479-acre property from Bill Janss, then owner of the Sun Valley Resort, with the idea that it would be then transferred to IDFG. Due to uncertainties in governmental funding, the Conservancy later made the decision not to transfer the property. With many generous donations, including a \$100,000 contribution by Boise Cascade, the Conservancy purchased the preserve.

Although the Conservancy had worked in helping to protect Craters of the Moon National Monument and other projects in Idaho, this was its first acquisition in the state. From these beginnings, the Silver Creek project has become a model for community-based conservation and remains a destination for visitors around the world.

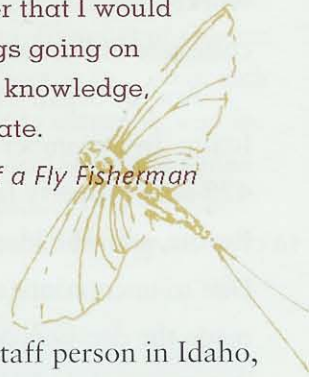


**Silver Creek is just gorgeous—**  
and if you're a fisherman, well, it's the  
kind of stuff you see in magazines,  
so I get kind of fired up about it.  
In fact, when I start going down  
there, I get anxiety attacks  
because of the excitement.

—Kent Mueller  
fishing guide

**When we left, after two hours of frustration,** I was thoroughly humbled and Stu kindly assured me that it was that way quite a lot of the time, and that there were times when the fish seemed to be easier and would take more freely... I returned to Silver Creek alone several times but only improved my success very modestly... I suspected there was something going on that I simply didn't understand, and it wasn't until many years later that I would gain a real understanding of the great variety of things going on under my very eyes, that, at that moment, I hadn't the knowledge, capacity or understanding to recognize and differentiate.

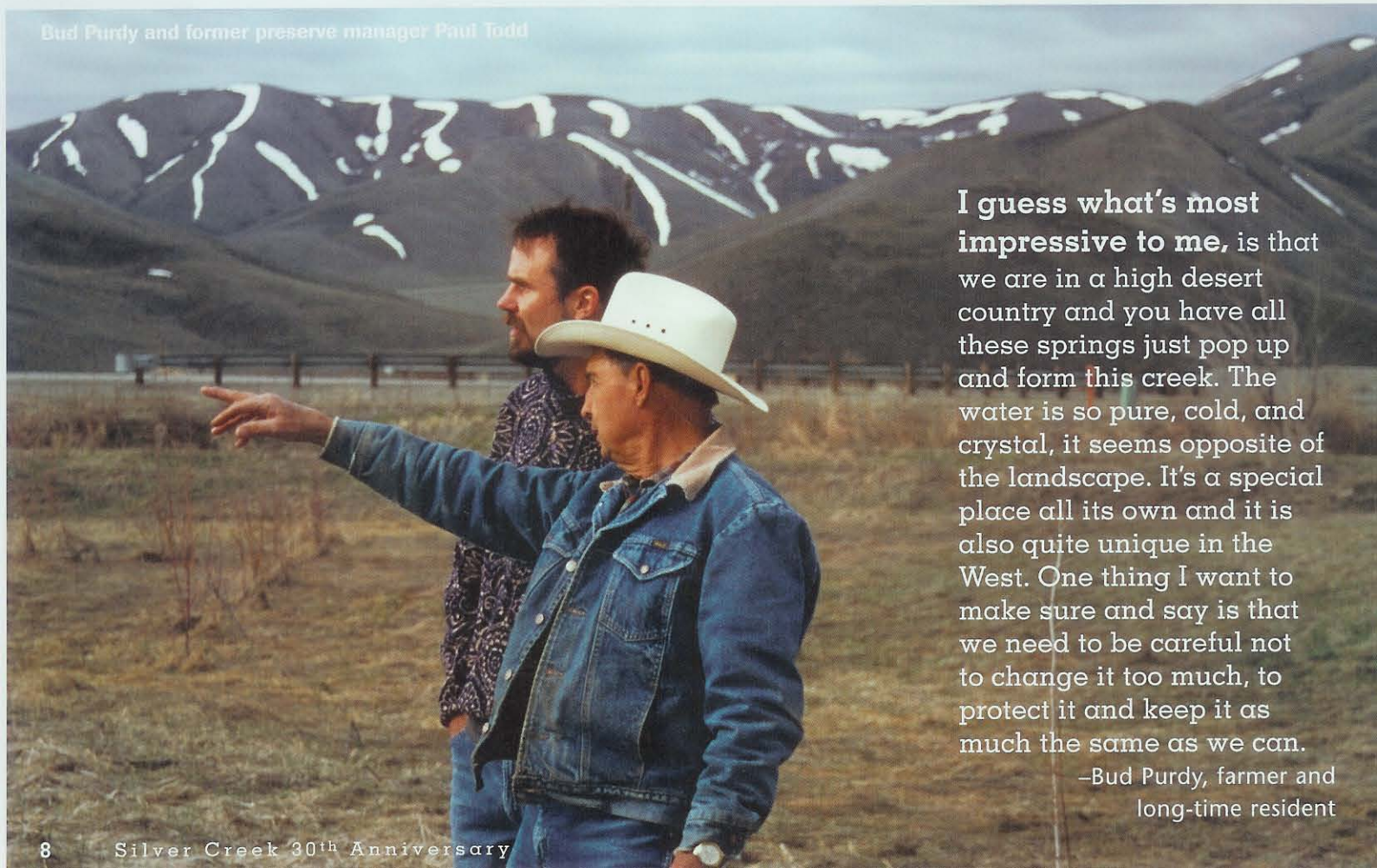
—Jack Hemingway, *Misadventures of a Fly Fisherman*



In 1979, The Nature Conservancy hired its first staff person in Idaho, Guy Bonnavier. Bonnavier had come to the area to take a carpentry job in Hailey, and he began volunteering at the preserve in his free time. He built fence, and began building the visitor's center. He lived in an old sheep wagon on the preserve, and got to know his neighbors.

At the time, the preserve was attracting controversy from local residents concerned about traditional uses like duck hunting. The Conservancy, recognizing that Bonnavier would listen to the community, hired him as preserve manager. He remained with the Conservancy for more than 20 years, and his philosophy of working with the community made Silver Creek a conservation success story.

Bud Purdy and former preserve manager Paul Todd



**I guess what's most impressive to me,** is that we are in a high desert country and you have all these springs just pop up and form this creek. The water is so pure, cold, and crystal, it seems opposite of the landscape. It's a special place all its own and it is also quite unique in the West. One thing I want to make sure and say is that we need to be careful not to change it too much, to protect it and keep it as much the same as we can.

—Bud Purdy, farmer and long-time resident

**From here to beyond Picabo** is pretty much unchanged and it's going to stay that way, pretty much thanks to the community. What do I want to see in the future? I want to see this in the future.

—John Fell Stevenson  
landowner

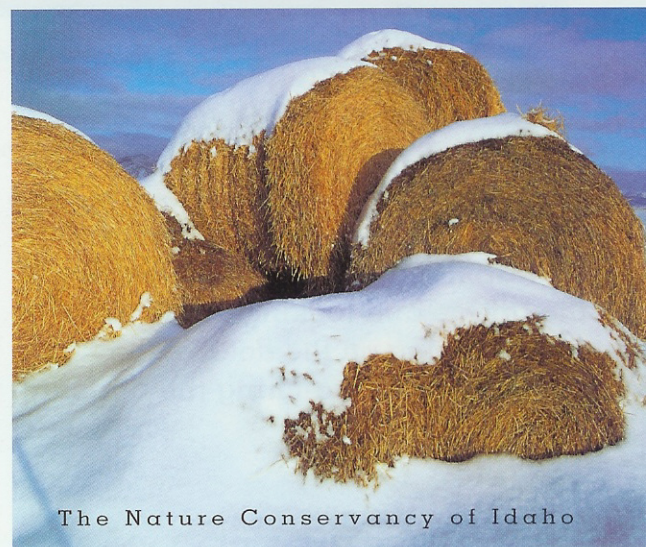
**Once I saw** this piece of creek and this piece of land, I couldn't stop thinking about it. I am just trying to protect this amazing place as best I can, do my small part, and I hope it will be the place I spend my final years.

—John French  
Silver Creek landowner

Today, the preserve has expanded to nearly 850 acres. But even more important, it launched a landowner conservation effort that has protected much of the main stem of the creek from development. When Bonnivier began working at the preserve, Stocker Creek—one of Silver Creek's main tributaries—was muddy and without fish. The Conservancy began working with landowners to fence cattle away from the stream. Within a year, rainbow trout had returned.

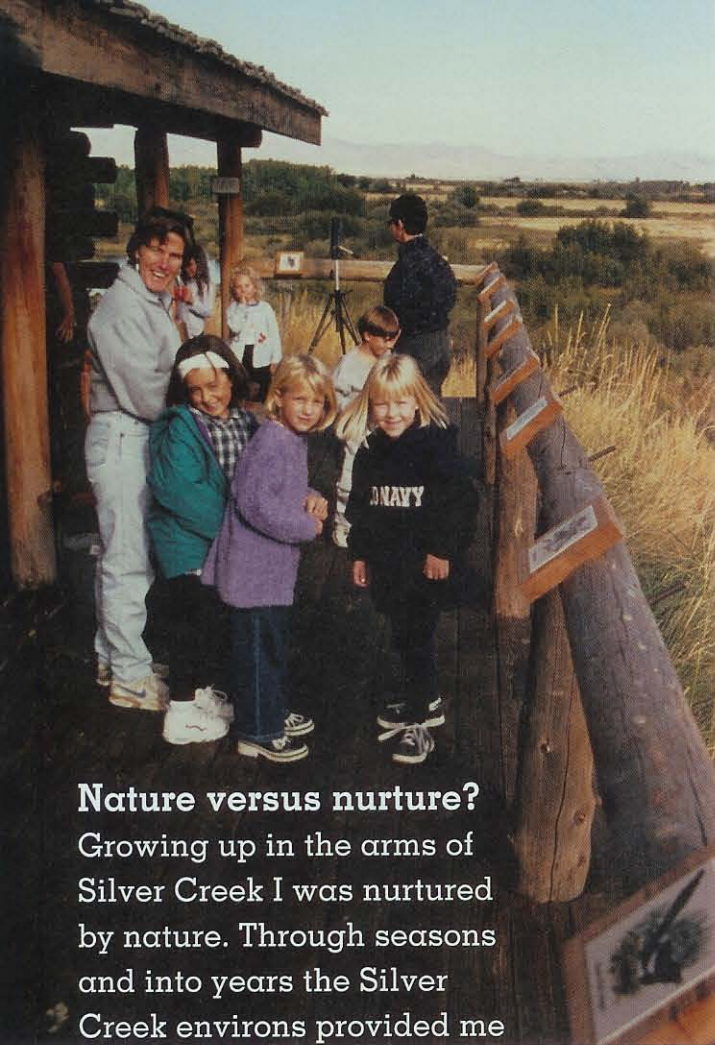
Landowners began working with staff to donate conservation easements. After landowner John Stevenson donated an easement in 1983, the Conservancy received another easement donation about once a year. That pattern has created a great conservation legacy for the valley, with 22 landowners to date donating easements that protect nearly 10,000 acres of land along the stream.

The Nature Conservancy's presence in Idaho has expanded well beyond the Silver Creek Valley. The Conservancy is one of the largest conservation groups in the state, with more than 5000 members and 30 staff. More than 300,000 acres of Idaho's most special places have been protected through acquisition,



The Nature Conservancy of Idaho

Dan Armitage



**Nature versus nurture?**

Growing up in the arms of Silver Creek I was nurtured by nature. Through seasons and into years the Silver Creek environs provided me unparalleled lessons, and for this I am forever grateful. It will always be my home.

—Brett Stevenson  
next generation landowner



William H. Mullins

I wanted to do some kind of volunteering and I wanted to do something I was passionate about... I love the drive down there, I love being down there, I love talking to the people, I love walking the trails. I love being on the bridge and looking at the fish and I love being on the deck of the visitor center and watching the birds.

—Joan Sheets  
volunteer

conservation easements, cooperative agreements and partnerships.

But Silver Creek remains a priority for The Nature Conservancy. A team of staff, interns, volunteers and visitors continue to work hard to ensure to restore habitat, maintain visitor facilities, work with anglers and guides and involve the community in projects. This hard work and effort is why Jack Hemingway, in a 2000 interview, said that the creek was better now than it was when he first fished it in the 1930's.

That's not to suggest there aren't threats to this watershed. New Zealand mud snails, a non-native species, were recently found on the preserve. These invasive snails have achieved densities of 250,000 per square meter in other areas, and are easily carried to new areas by anglers. The Conservancy still does not know what the impact could be from these invaders. Terrestrial, non-native weeds are also found in sagebrush habitat, and can out-compete the native vegetation.

An even more pressing challenge is development to the north of the preserve, which if unmanaged could threaten water quantity and quality in the creek. Planning and wise

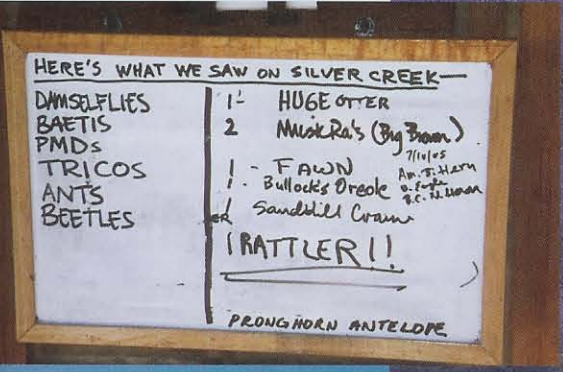


policy will be necessary to ensure that development of the Wood River Valley does not damage the thirty-year investment of countless conservationists in Silver Creek.

But conservationists have met similar challenges before. History has shown that by working together, people who share a love of this beautiful landscape can achieve great things.

The rising trout, migrating waterfowl, grazing mule deer, the night sounds, the working farms and ranches, the scenic vistas, the profuse hatches, the frustrating but addicting fishing—all are part of the legacy created by many people who have given so many hours to this magical place.

It is reason to be proud, and hopeful for a future that continues to inspire people who live here, and people who live on the other side of the globe.



**November sunrise from the deck of the visitor center** after the hunters have checked in, July sunset from the S-turns trying for big trout until a strike would be invisible, tracking on snowshoes in February, canoeing from Stocker to Kilpatrick in August, planting willows on the banks of Stocker Creek. For me Silver Creek Preserve is the wonder of nature in all seasons. Our world at its best.

—Art Dahl  
volunteer



To me—it is the landscape and the creek itself that we all have in common. It's the landscape that connects us. Even though there are people who are here for two weeks of the year, or people who are here for generations, what we have in common is that everybody cares about the place and that we all impacted it, and maybe it impacted all of us.

—Jenny Emery Davidson  
writer

David T. Glasscock



Silver Creek Preserve is truly an amazing place. It has been a favorite of mine for years. My most enjoyable times there are spent floating through the "S" turns on a warm summer evening. PMD's and Caddis on the water, fish up, red-wing blackbirds singing their song, very few people and unbelievable sunsets.

—John Hardin  
angler

David T. Glasscock



David T. Glasscock

There are a million amazing little things about Silver Creek like the incredible energy, and the light. I feel like I see more clearly here.

—Dayna Smith  
Silver Creek Preserve manager

**The best is sitting on the banks all by myself**  
early in the morning and watching the sun come up.  
Then watching the water boiling and the fish go crazy  
for the tricos—there's nothing like it.

—John McGlaughlin  
angler



**Spring creeks are rare. And Silver Creek in Idaho is top on the list.**

Everything about it is unique. With its world class dry fly fishing, diverse wildlife and close proximity to the Sun Valley ski resort, Silver Creek would seem to be heaven on Earth, and it is. As a fly fisherman, I find that Silver Creek is the post-graduate school of fly fishing for trout and offers incredible opportunities for learning the finer points of the sport. For over 25 years, I have seen many changes on Silver Creek, but without question the best thing to happen to this world-class stream was the purchase of the Sun Valley Ranch by The Nature Conservancy in the mid 1970's. The Nature Conservancy has preserved the very best part of Silver Creek for future generations and done so with the best interests of the creek and public in mind. It is a great feeling to see a free-rising rainbow trout sip my tiny fly and know that a large portion of the best part of Silver Creek will always be available to myself and others to enjoy.

—Greg Loomis  
fishing guide

**Silver Creek is simply amazing—the sheer beauty of it is unparalleled. The thing that most strikes me is the life that literally jumps out of the arid valley ground...** For me, too, it is an honor to have had a hand in safeguarding such an incredible place so early in my career—it is a reward each time I go back. People from all walks of life—fishermen, birders, canoers, everyone—can enjoy this place today more or less the way it was thirty years ago. I feel very lucky to have been a part of making it happen.

—Henry Little  
The Nature Conservancy



**The Silver Creek area strikes me on many levels.** On a personal level, it is extraordinary to live in a place so rich in wildlife, so beautiful, and so rural while at the same time only 27 miles from downtown Ketchum. On an ecological level, I never cease to be wide-eyed at the clarity of the water, the diversity of wildlife, and the breathtaking serenity of this place early in the morning and late in the evening. On a community level, I am honored to be part of the farming and ranching community of Blaine County and the conservation community all at the same time. It is very rewarding to be part of a farming and ranching community that so appreciates conservation.

—Larry Schoen, farmer and landowner