

University of Idaho

Rock Creek Ranch June 2016

What is Rock Creek Ranch?

Rock Creek Ranch is nearly 10,400 acres of privately-owned land adjacent to an additional 11,000 acres of publically-owned land in the Wood River Valley in southeast Idaho. The Rinker family bought the ranch in the 1980s and continued the long-time practice of grazing the land. In 2013 the family began looking for ways to preserve the land. The Natural Resource Conservation Service purchased the development rights in 2014 and shortly thereafter the ranch was purchased by the Wood River Land Trust and The Nature Conservancy at a below-market sales price. Shortly after, the University of Idaho was invited as a partner to expand the research and outreach opportunities of this property.

Why was this collaboration formed?

Management, research and outreach possibilities for this land are plentiful and broad. The Wood River Land Trust (WRLT) and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) have aligning missions to conserve land, water and wildlife habitat. The University of Idaho (UI) is Idaho's research university, tasked with providing relevant research to the state. Viable management of our state's natural resources is a value all three entities share.

What is the goal of the collaboration?

The collaboration allows for a live demonstration of how conservation and sustainable ranching can work together to provide healthy landscapes for generations to come. Active and relevant data on best management practices obtained through research on this property can be directly applied across the state and the region.

What will happen on the property?

The property will be responsibly grazed while, simultaneously, active research projects will focus on hydrology, wildlife habitat, healthy grasslands and the impact of grazing on wildlife and the ecosystem. Stream restoration projects will also begin within the first year of this collaboration.

Why is there grazing on the property?

Grazing is a sustainable practice that can positively affect the landscape. Through careful management and monitoring, best practices for grazing can allow for protection of wildlife habitat and improve water quality and the results shared through educational outreach.

Will the property be open to the public?

Yes. WRLT and TNC will ensure that the property will serve the community with access for hiking, mountain biking, wildlife viewing, cross-country skiing, hunting, snow shoeing and snowmobiling. Trails for these traditionally limited or undesignated activities are now mapped and some may be subject to seasonal closures due to wildlife and habitat protection or other needs. Camping is prohibited and motor vehicles, including snowmobiles, are limited to designated roads. Maps are available through the City of Hailey and on the WRLT website.

How does this help Idaho?

Like 50% of Idaho, Rock Creek Ranch is rangeland. What we learn at Rock Creek will provide valuable insight into how to conserve rangelands, improve economic return, enhance wildlife habitat and sustainably meet the needs of a variety of land users.

Conserving our resources, better understanding best practices of land management and providing research data to benefit landowners across the state benefits the entire state – economically and socially.

Who will decide what research is done?

UI, WRLT and TNC have formalized their partnership through a Memorandum of Understanding, which outlines how they will collaborate on choosing what research is done along with other management decisions. Additionally, an advisory committee of key stakeholders has been engaged to provide research and management suggestions. Through additional collaboration with state and local entities, grant dollars are already in place to jumpstart research and restoration activities, as they are identified by the advisory committee.

Will there be research and education facilities built on the Ranch?

With no facilities on the ranch now, we will initially be developing some temporary facilities such as tents, yurts for staff and researchers to use, and storage sheds for equipment. Decisions about additional, more permanent facilities will be addressed as part of the long-term plan.

Will the Wood River Land Trust and The Nature Conservancy own the property for a long time?

The focus is on establishing a strong collaborative to meet the goals outlined above. We expect it to take 3 to 5 years to see the full benefits of the collaboration. For now, WRLT and TNC will continue to own the property and will work with the University and others to determine long-term ownership.

Why is Rock Creek such a good place for research?

There are numerous reasons Rock Creek is an ideal location for research. Combined, the private lands and associated public land grazing allotments include almost the entire watershed allowing researchers to control most of the uses that will affect research results. The natural habitats on the ranch are in good condition. There is limited development of roads and buildings. Having both private and public lands is similar to most ranch operations in Idaho. The ranch has sage grouse, pygmy rabbits, elk and other wildlife species of broad interest. The ranch is centrally located in southern Idaho and easily accessible to researchers and partners.

What kind of education will happen at the ranch? Will UI offer college classes there?

UI, as a statewide educational institution, has research centers and study sites across the state. Rock Creek will benefit undergraduates studying rangeland management, as well as graduate students who will have access to this research site. The UI Rangeland Center, a research and outreach partnership of the UI's College of Natural Resources and College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, will also lead community, landowner and industry tours, educational seminars and more on the land.

What is Blaine County's role?

An application has been made to Blaine County's Land, Water and Wildlife Program for funding to help conduct restoration activities at Rock Creek Ranch.

What is the Idaho Department of Fish and Game's role?

Idaho Fish and Game conducts long-term monitoring of the area's wildlife and water quality, which will help determine best management practices for both short- and long-term use of the property. Idaho Fish and Game also has a representative on the Rock Creek advisory committee.

Where can I get more information?

Wood River Land Trust website: <http://woodriverlandtrust.org/projects/>

The Nature Conservancy website:

<http://www.nature.org/ourinitiatives/regions/northamerica/unitedstates/idaho/placesweprotect/id-rock-creek-ranch-profile.xml>

What is the Wood River Land Trust?

The Land Trust is a local non-profit organization that protects and restores water, wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities in the Wood River Valley and surrounding areas.

What is The Nature Conservancy?

The Nature Conservancy is the leading conservation organization working around the world to protect ecologically important lands and waters for nature and people.

What is the University of Idaho?

The University of Idaho is one of only 72 land-grant research universities in the United States. From its residential campus in Moscow, UI serves the state of Idaho through educational centers in Coeur d'Alene, Boise, Idaho Falls and Twin Falls, and Extension offices in 42 counties. Home to more than 11,000 students statewide, UI is a leader in student-centered learning and excels at interdisciplinary research, service to businesses and communities, and in advancing diversity, citizenship and global outreach.