

# Conservation easements in Idaho



Rancher Dennis Moedl turned down potentially lucrative offers to buy his land and instead placed an easement on it.

## Meadow Vue Ranch, Island Park

### PUBLIC BENEFITS

- Protects wildlife habitat on Henry's Lake
- Protects open space and scenic views
- Preserves ranchland and area economy
- Prevents subdivision

### LANDOWNER BENEFITS

- Maintains ranching tradition
- Keeps ranch intact
- Revenue helps with ranch operations
- Defrays estate taxes so land can pass on to heirs and stay in the family

Dennis Moedl says it was hard to say no to the millions, referring to the offers of up to \$2.5 million that he got over the years to buy his 400-acre Meadow Vue Ranch on the southwest edge of Henry's Lake. It's a spectacular landscape and attractive to many who would subdivide it and build second homes here.

But that's precisely what this rancher did – say no to the big money that might have made his life a lot easier. Instead, Moedl sold a conservation easement on 380 acres to The Nature Conservancy. Funds from the Land and Water Conservation Fund are being used to purchase the development rights, giving Moedl the

capital to deal with the ranch's mortgage debt and to provide financial security for three generations of Moedls. Already to make ends meet, the Moedl family opens up their ranch each summer to city kids who come to the Meadow Vue to experience cowboy living. Under the easement, Moedl continues to run 800 head of Black Angus cattle and keeps 90 horses, just as he has for most of his 66 years.

“I never want to look out there and see a **hundred houses on that meadow**. If it gets built down there, it'll take away the scenic value of the whole valley.”

– Dennis Moedl

### IDAHO AT A GLANCE

25,798	acres under easement with local and regional land trusts
25,370	acres under easement with The Nature Conservancy
28,800	acres of farmland lost to development between 1992 and 1997
37	percent increase in urban lands converted from natural resource lands, 1982-1997

### ABOUT CONSERVATION EASEMENTS

Conservation easements are one of the most powerful, effective tools available for the conservation of private lands. Their use has successfully protected millions of acres of wildlife habitat and open space, and hundreds of miles of rivers, all while keeping property in private hands and generating significant public benefits.

Often, some of the most ecologically significant lands and waters in the country are those found in rural and agricultural landscapes. Easements have been instrumental in preserving these landscapes, from family farms to working ranches and timberlands. Between 1992 and 1997, more than 11 million acres of rural land in the United States were converted to developed use – an area five times the size of Yellowstone National Park. As people struggle to keep family farms and ranches together in the face of steep taxes and unpredictable markets, conservation easements are often the tool of choice.

In Idaho, conservation easements have been used to protect water resources, open space, wildlife habitat, and iconic Idaho landscapes such as the Boise Foothills, Silver Creek Valley, and Henry's Lake.

#### Public benefits of conservation easements

- Protect water quality
- Conserve wildlife habitat
- Preserve open space
- Preserve farmland, ranchland, timberland
- Maintain character of rural communities
- Buffer public lands
- Maintain landscapes for tourism
- Require less in public services, generate more in local revenues



John and Elizabeth Stevenson have donated six easements on their ranch near Picabo. © TNC



Easements are being used to fulfill the City of Boise's plans for the Foothills. © TNC

## Hillside Ranch, Silver Creek Valley

### PUBLIC BENEFITS

- Protects habitat for moose, sandhill cranes, sage grouse, waterfowl
- Protects water quality for a world-class trout fishery
- Preserves open space
- Maintains agricultural traditions and economy

### LANDOWNER BENEFITS

- Land remains intact beyond their lifetimes
- Tax credits
- Conservancy helps manage land along creeks
- Protects ecological values important to the Stevensons

Wary of the march of development south from Sun Valley and Ketchum, John Stevenson was one of the first Silver Creek Valley residents to place a conservation easement on his 4,000-acre Hillside Ranch. He and his wife, Elizabeth, didn't savor the thought of their ranch being developed after their lifetimes, and they wanted to protect the wetlands and creeks that weave among the fields of barley and cattle pastures. Over the years, the Stevensons have donated a

total of six easements on their land covering 1,360 acres. More than 20 neighbors have joined them, putting conservation easements on more than 10,000 acres of private land in the valley.

"Some neighbors **were pretty suspicious** [of easements] at first, but things have changed. I've seen even a few of the **old-time ranchers come around**. This [the Silver Creek Valley] is where we're going to make our stand. **It's got to be protected.**"

- John Stevenson

## Dengler Property, Boise Foothills

### PUBLIC BENEFITS

- Allows public access for recreation
- Protects wildlife habitat
- Part of voter-endorsed effort to conserve the Boise Foothills
- Less expensive conservation tool than land acquisition

### LANDOWNER BENEFITS

- Tax credits
- Reserved right to build two houses

A few years ago, the City of Boise was concerned about potential development in a part of the Boise Foothills that is heavily used by hikers and bikers and close to important winter range for the state's largest herd of mule deer. To protect the parcel, the City worked with the Conservation Fund, which bought 80 acres in April 2004 from Linda Dengler, a

private landowner in the Foothills. On another 70 acres, Dengler donated a conservation easement to the Conservation Fund. Both the purchased land and the easement were later transferred to the City as part of its Foothills conservation plans, supported by a \$10 million property tax fund approved by Boise residents. Dengler reserved two five-acre house lots for her private use. The city plans to extend a recreational trail system into the property. In all, nearly 3,200 acres of Foothills land has been secured by the City of Boise, with plans for another 6,000 acres.