



Nelle Tobias, Janet Jarvis and Boise Cascade donate lasting gifts of open space, park lands in the greater McCall area



51.5 acres of natural open space property on Lake Fork Creek, south of McCall, was donated by the late Nelle Tobias to the Idaho Foundation for Parks and Lands in 1982. (photo by Steve Stuebner)

This is the sixth in a series of 12 articles about the 50-year history of the Idaho Foundation for Parks and Lands.

By Steve Stuebner

The late Nelle Tobias, a long-time environmental activist in McCall, played an important role in advocating for the creation of the 2.3-million-acre Frank Church River

of No Return Wilderness, driving down to Boise to attend weekly strategy meetings with conservation legends like Ted Trueblood, Ernie Day, Bruce Bowler, Jerry Jayne, Ken Robison and Dennis Baird. This group of committed people from all corners of Idaho comprised the core of the River of No Return Wilderness Council.

Tobias also was a charter member of the Idaho Conservation League, formed in 1973.

“She might have been the most committed person I knew about the value of wilderness to protect the wildflowers, the watershed and the water quality. She felt that down to



*Nelle Tobias in front of the Roseberry research center.
(Courtesy Frank Eld)*

the soles of her feet,” says Jeff Fereday, the second executive director of ICL who worked closely with Tobias for many years.

“She cared about everything – the birds, the insects, the soil, the watershed,” adds Kay Hummel, a lifelong conservationist in her own right who is married to Fereday. They both treasured a long friendship with Tobias.

Fereday points out that Tobias was a quiet person who advocated for wilderness through attending strategy meetings, penning a razor-sharp guest opinion piece or writing a check to ICL. She kept a low profile. But when she spoke, people listened, and her words had impact.

Tobias would have been 74 when the Frank Church Wilderness was protected by Congress in 1980. She’d been a tireless advocate for the largest national forest wilderness in the lower 48, and the dream of the whole River of No Return Wilderness Council and ICL had come true!

Two years later, Tobias made a lasting gift of 51.5 acres of land adjacent to Lake Fork Creek, south of McCall, to the Idaho Foundation for Parks and Lands. She wanted the beautiful property to be protected as open space forever, and she put her trust in the Foundation to carry out her

wishes. The property was appraised at \$110,000 at the time.

In this month’s article on the Foundation, we’re focusing on three land gifts in the greater McCall area, including the Tobias property on Lake Fork Creek, the donation of prime waterfront property by the old McCall sawmill by Boise Cascade Corp., and the 47.6-acre Mud Creek Preserve on Heinrich Lane, south of McCall, donated by Janet Jarvis, an architect in Sun Valley.

Thirty years later, McCall locals still appreciate that the open space property is being maintained as a natural area in perpetuity to maintain the rural, pastoral character of the setting along Elo Road on the east side of Long Valley. Tobias placed a conservation easement on the property to ensure that no development occurred.

“Nelle was truly a visionary when it came to conservation over the long term,” says David Simmonds, longtime McCall resident and chair of the Big Payette Water Quality Council. “Her mission - she really was on a self-actuated mission - was to leave the awesome world around her a better place than she found it.

“I think she was troubled by our failure to live and plan sustainably, whether that was public forest lands, rivers, lakes or communities. She fought for conservation in the public sphere, but more than just advocacy, she put her own material resources on the line in a selfless way. Conserving a piece of Lake Fork Creek was one thing she



Kay Hummel and Jeff Fereday

could do, so she just did it. She lived her values. Nelle has always been an inspiration to those who knew her, myself included,” Simmonds says.

Tobias was a native Idahoan and a genuine pioneer in many ways. She was born in 1906 and grew up on her family’s homestead in the Peaceful Valley, near the Snake River.

Later, her family moved to Nampa, where Tobias rode horseback to school, graduating from Nampa High School in 1924.

She attended the College of Idaho, Oregon State University and Cornell University, finally graduating from C of I with a degree in landscape architecture. She worked for the National Park Service in San Francisco before moving to McCall in 1938.

Tobias visited McCall for the first time in 1911, traveling to the then-remote mountain outpost via horse and buggy with her parents. She would have been 5 years old at the time. Her parents had the foresight to buy property in McCall very early on, in 1911. They purchased some waterfront property on Payette Lake near the location of the McCall fish hatchery.

Tobias would later develop that property into clean, affordable cabins for tourists to stay in while they visited McCall. They were called the “Edgewater Cabins.”

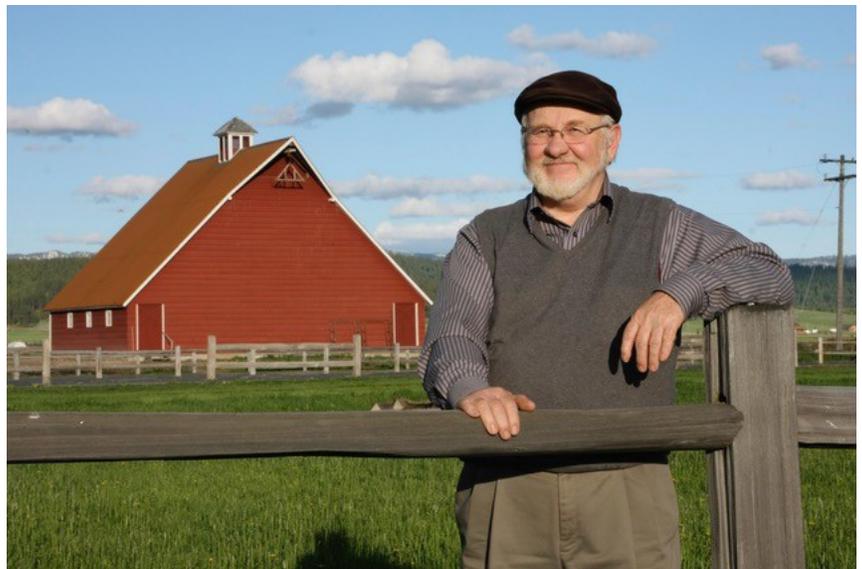
Tobias also was very active in assisting the Long Valley Preservation Society with restoring and preserving the historic town of Roseberry.

“From very early on, she was one of our most stalwart supporters,” says Frank Eld, founder and board member of the Long Valley Preservation Society.

In the early 1900s, Roseberry was becoming a bustling little town. “By the spring of 1905, the town of Roseberry was growing, complete with a hotel, two black smith



Nelle Tobias donated the property used for the annual Summer Music Festival in Roseberry to the Long Valley Preservation Society years ago. This was yet another little-known gesture of her generosity. (Courtesy Frank Eld)



Frank Eld at Roseberry (courtesy Frank Eld)

shops, two stores, a restaurant, butcher shop, logging mill and a creamery destined to be the largest in Long Valley,” according to the Long Valley Preservation Society web site.

Ten years later, “the Pacific, Idaho and Northern Railroad line traveled through Long Valley two miles west of the town of Roseberry. Homes and businesses were moved to intersect the rail line at this new location, creating the new town of Donnelly,” the web site reports. “Roseberry became a semi-ghost town with a few sturdy structures and the remnant population.”

Later on, efforts by the Long Valley Preservation Society, beginning in 1973, have restored Roseberry with the Valley County Museum, the Tobias Research Center, a general



McCall sawmill and teepee burner on the shores of Payette Lake. The sawmill closed in 1977. The gift of 1.8 acres of prime waterfront land from Boise Cascade Corp. to the Foundation included 560 feet of shoreline. Courtesy McCall Life.com)

store and several historic Finnish buildings that were physically moved to the location. A finely crafted red barn was one of the structures moved to the Roseberry town site; that property has served as the location and stage backdrop for the popular Summer Music Festival at Roseberry, held each year in July.

Eld notes that Nelle Tobias purchased the land where the red barn sits today and donated it to the Long Valley Preservation Society. Tobias did not want to call attention to the gift of land at the time, but more than 15 years after her death in 2005, it's appropriate to let people know about it, Eld said.

"She did not want to call attention to herself at all; she wanted no accolades," he said. "This is the first time that it's been made public. She deserves the credit."

Brown Park - McCall waterfront property

In 1978, Boise Cascade Corporation donated 1.8 acres of prime waterfront land on Payette Lake to the Idaho Foundation for Parks and Lands for the development of



Newly refurbished Brown Park features a new playground for children, walking paths, new lawn, waterfront access and more. (photo by Steve Stuebner)

a city park. The property had been part of the McCall sawmill operation, formerly owned and operated by Brown Tie and Lumber for many years. Boise Cascade had purchased the sawmill in 1964 and shut down operations in 1977.

The waterfront land donation was the third property that Boise Cascade had gifted to the Foundation in the 1970s in the organization's formative years. In

previous articles in the 50th anniversary series, we have noted the donations of 411 acres in the Barber Pool area in 1978 and 38 acres in the Veterans Memorial State Park area in 1975. Both donations led to substantial conservation and park enhancements.

The gift of land on Payette Lake provided 560 feet of shoreline property, which would become developed as Mill Park, just to the north of Mile-High Marina. A land appraisal pegged the value of the property at \$560,000 in 1978 dollars. The name was later changed to Brown Park, to honor the late Carl Brown who built the original sawmill in 1914 with business partner Theodore Hoff, and Carl's son, Warren, who expanded the sawmill and railroad tie



Teepee burner replica and whistle in Brown Park.



The original plaque thanking Boise Cascade for the Brown Park gift of land to the Foundation in 1978 is preserved on site.

business over time.

“I always gave a lot of credit to the Brown family,” said Sharon Hubler, former executive director of the Idaho Foundation for Parks and Lands. “They did a lot for their local community. But of course the actual donation came from Boise Cascade, which also has been very generous to us over the years.”

The Gift Deed for the Mill Park property was signed on Dec. 20, 1978.

The City of McCall developed the land into a small community park, with a playground, lawn and a dock for swimming and fishing access.

Over time, the City of McCall leveraged the donation of Brown Park with federal Land and Water Conservation Funds (LWCF) to secure more waterfront property for what would become 3.2-acre Legacy Park, the main beachfront area in downtown McCall. The LWCF package also called for a walking/biking trail would tie together Brown Park and Legacy Park, a volleyball court and horseshoe pits.

The McCall Redevelopment Agency used property tax funding to develop the beachfront and spacious lawns and amphitheater-type setting to complete Legacy Park in 2007-2008.

In the last two years, the City of McCall invested close to \$3 million in refurbishing Browns Park with remaining funds left over from the McCall Redevelopment Agency and a large grant from the Land and Water Conservation Fund and Local Option Tax dollars to replace the playground. The McCall Parks & Recreation Department and the construction contractor, Falvey’s Inc, put the finishing touches on those improvements in June as the 2022 summer recreation season kicked into gear.

“The property was in bad shape – it had reached its life expectancy,” says Kurt Wolf, Director of the McCall Parks

& Recreation Department. “I had a design drawn up to improve the park, and we hired a consultant team to engineer and put the construction documents together. With the vision of the original Master Plan done by the McCall Redevelopment Agency and internal design work we were able to quickly put together a plan to improve the park while the MRA funds were available.”

New features at Browns Park include better grading and contouring, fresh sod for the park lawn, native granite rocks being placed along the shoreline of Payette Lake to prevent erosion, dock access, public art (Mill Whistle), a new playground and a walking path that leads over to the Mile-High Marina and Legacy Park.

A nice touch in Brown Park is the original steam-whistle from the mill placed in an artful display on top of a replica of the old teepee burner from the old McCall sawmill. The whistle signified the shift change at the sawmill. The whistle will be used for special events, including for a ribbon-cutting and Grand Opening ceremony for the refurbished Brown Park on July 1.

“This is a tourism and resort community,” Wolf notes. “We value and cherish this waterfront property near the center of downtown McCall for the community and tourists to enjoy.”

Jarvis open space property

Janet Jarvis grew up on her family’s ranch on Heinrich Lane, about four miles south of McCall, in the early 1960s. She attended the first three years of elementary school in a one-room school house. She remembers having an idyllic childhood where she had a lot of open space to run around a play.

“There were no boundaries,” Jarvis says. “I remember spending a lot of time riding horses and playing with my sisters on the ranch.”

Her grandfather, Oscar Jarvis and grandmother, Maria Lehti Jarvis, homesteaded the ranch in 1917. They hailed from Finland, like many of the Long Valley settlers back in the day. They arrived by covered wagon. Oscar Jarvis raised dairy and beef cattle on the ranch. They family's white house and white barn were built in 1924 and still exist today. Upon Oscar's early death, Maria raised four children on the ranch.

Janet Jarvis remembers learning to ski from alpine skiing legend Corey Engen at the Little Ski Hill. She also skied regularly at Brundage Mountain.

"I remember we had snow days when we couldn't get to school, but we always managed to get to Brundage Mountain," she says with a chuckle.

Her lifelong interest in skiing inspired Jarvis to move to Ketchum/Sun Valley 45 years ago. "I do a lot of cross-country skiing here in the Wood River Valley, but downhill skiing always has been my favorite and still is," she says.

Jarvis is a highly respected architect through her business, the Jarvis Group Architects in Ketchum. She designs homes, ranch buildings and barns with a special focus on opportunities for open space conservation in many locations across America. Growing up on her family's ranch gives her a unique perspective.

"It's a niche that I really enjoy," she says. "I love working on ranch projects the most where we have opportunities to blend the design of homes and ranch buildings into a conservation and open space plan for the surrounding property."

When Jarvis and her three sisters inherited the family ranch on Heinrich Lane, they divided up 160 acres into three parcels. Jarvis thought it would be best to donate her portion of the property, 51.5 acres, to the Idaho Foundation for Parks and Lands in 2011. She also placed a conservation easement on the property to ensure that it would remain open space forever.

She called it the Mud Creek Preserve and dedicated the property to her parents, Larry Raino Jarvis and Thelma McKie Jarvis. There is a sign along Heinrich Lane, several miles west of Idaho State Highway 55, indicating the dedication to her grandparents, with a message saying, "Tervetuloa."

The word means "Welcome" in Finnish. The open space property behind the sign provides a grand view of the



Top, the Jarvis 51.5-acre Mud Creek Preserve open space property on Heinrich Lane, south of McCall. Above, Janet Jarvis, an architect in Ketchum. (courtesy Dev Khalsa/Sun Valley magazine)

verdant pasture lands in Long Valley with wildflowers growing amid the tall green grasslands and West Mountain looming off in the distance. (According to the family's wishes, there is no public access to the property).

A wildflower named for Nelle Tobias

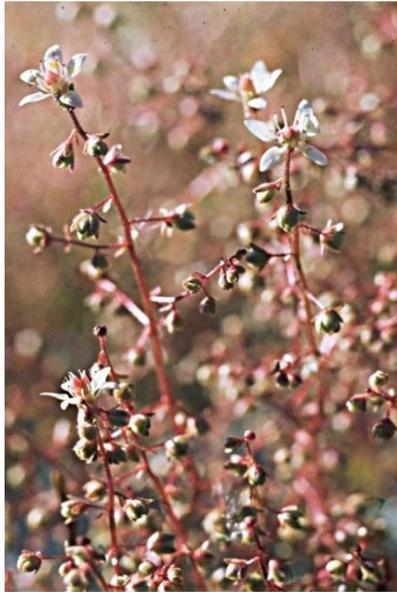
An avid hiker and backpacker, Tobias used to take many hikes into the backcountry surrounding the McCall area. One of her favorite areas was Lava Butte Lake, northwest of McCall, and another was known as "The Pinnacles" overlooking the headwaters of Big Creek and Monumental Creek.

About 40 years ago, a wildflower was named after her. It's called "Tobias Saxifrage" or the scientific name, *Saxifraga bryophora* var. *tobiasae*. The plant lives on high mountain

slopes in the 8,000-foot range that divide French Creek, Fisher Creek and Hazard Creek, north of McCall.

Tobias showed a sample of the wildflower to her friend, Pat Packard, a C of I botany professor, now retired, who found it to be unique. Packard published this discovery in the scientific literature in 1981, officially naming it in honor of Nelle Tobias. It is a rare species endemic to the Salmon River Mountains in Central Idaho.

“It’s a cute little plant,” says Bob Moseley, a retired botanist from Boise who conducted the first conservation surveys for the species in 1989.



Tobias Saxifrage or *Saxifraga bryophora* var. *tobiasae* was named in Nelle Tobias’s honor. (photo courtesy Idaho Department of Fish and Game)

“It is a unique element of Idaho’s biodiversity and wonderful that it’s named after Nelle as a tribute to her conservation legacy in the state.”

Patty Hovdey, a 5th generation McCall resident, former Olympic alpine skier and co-owner of Hometown Sports, met Tobias through her grandmother, Pearl Boydston. Both of them were gardeners.

Hovdey remembers going backpacking with Tobias on Big Creek to go see Native American

pictographs on rock walls. They hiked for several days to reach a pictograph site. Tobias brought some clear plastic with her and some markers to trace the ancient rock art so she could make a weaving of them later.

“I helped her trace the pictographs,” Hovdey says. “That was kind of a challenge because both of us are really short.”

She remembers waking up in the middle of the night, sleeping under the stars under a full moon next to Tobias. “She was sitting up, talking to the owls,” Hovdey says. “And they were answering her. It went on for a quite a while. That was a really special moment.”

Fereday and Hummel remember seeing Tobias’s weavings hanging in her home, depicting Native American pictographs and petroglyphs. In her later years, she was working on a master’s degree about the Native American rock inscriptions.

“She captured the images and turned them into curtains in her house, that was really original and cool to see,” Fereday said.



David Simmonds (courtesy AngieSmithphotography.com)

He and Kay liked to visit Tobias frequently when visiting McCall. Back in the day, when their two boys were at a young age, they wanted them to meet Tobias and learn from her wisdom. “She was a friend, of course, but more than that, she was kind of an oracle, an icon, a touchstone for us,” Fereday said. “It was just really cool to be at her house and property, and we wanted our boys to experience that.”

Tobias lived to be almost to 99 years old. She died just 11 days short of her birthday in 2005. Upon her death, she gave away all of her money to a variety of nonprofit organizations, including ICL, the Long Valley Preservation Society, and the Fund for Idaho.

There is still one piece of unfinished business. McCall locals would like to name a mountain peak after her, Simmonds says.

“A few friends who knew her are pursuing a geographic place name in her memory and honor,” he says. “There’s an unnamed peak, the highest point at the head of French Creek, east of Fisher Creek Saddle, and just southwest of Black Tip mountain, that seems appropriate. The name “Tobias Point” is available and would be a fitting tribute. No one who gave so much toward conservation of the world around us should be forgotten, especially not Nelle Tobias.”

Steve Stuebner and his partner Wendy Wilson received the Nelle Tobias Award for Environmental Integrity from the Fund for Idaho in 2014.



Patty Boydston Hovdey (courtesy Olympia.com)

Idaho Foundation for Parks and Lands

5657 Warm Springs Ave.

Boise, Idaho 83716

Phone: (208) 344-7141

Email: jan@idaholands.org