



Foundation acquires Gregerson, Triplett properties adding open space to Barber Pool Conservation Area



Late evening sun casts a golden glow on Barber Pool Conservation Area and the foothills above. (photo courtesy IFPL)

This is the 10th in a series of 12 articles about the 50th anniversary of the Idaho Foundation for Parks and Lands.

By Steve Stuebner

On a sunny fall day along the Boise River, the Barber Pool Conservation Area teems with wildlife. Canada geese fly in formation overhead, honking loudly as they fly upstream toward Diversion Dam. Great blue herons stand in the shallows, hunting for fish. A red-tailed hawk sounds off flying at tree-top level over the large overstory of cottonwood trees adjacent to the river, looking for its next meal.

In the 750-acre Barber Pool Conservation Area, nature

and more than 300 species of wildlife are thriving in this open space area where the Boise River flows through an expansive, mostly natural riparian area and open space for 2.5 miles in the east side of Boise. The conservation area was designated as a Boise City Heritage Site, and it's been selected as one of 12 unique ecosystems in the state of Idaho.

In our 12-part history series for the Idaho Foundation for Parks and Lands 50-year anniversary, we covered the rich history of the Barber Pool area in the March issue. The location of Barber Pool had a major nexus with the pioneer, railroad, logging and early settlement history of Barber and Boise.



Natural open space in the Barber Pool Conservation Area contrasts sharply with housing developments above it. (IFPL photo)

In this article, we'll learn more about recent efforts to expand the size and scope of the Barber Pool Conservation Area and highlight plans for how the Foundation and its partners will manage this valuable resource today and in the future.

Foundation Board President Brian McDevitt notes that it's a challenging mission to preserve and enhance the Barber Pool Conservation Area in the midst of rapid growth in the City of Boise and the Harris Ranch master-planned community in East Boise. The City of Boise has grown by more than 25,000 people in the last 10 years. Approximately 5,300 people now live in the Harris Ranch area, a large increase over the last decade.

In addition, with tens of thousands of new residents living in Boise, more people want to float non-traditional sections of the Boise River upstream of the county-owned Barber Park. On hot summer days, about 10,000 people float the Boise River on a typical afternoon, launching at Barber Park. Now some people float through the Barber Pool Conservation Area in kayaks, rafts or Stand Up Paddle Boards (SUPs) to avoid the crowds in the Barber Park-to-Ann Morrison Park section of the river.

"We're now seeing 20-30 people per day floating through the Barber Pool area, and that's likely to increase over time," McDevitt says. "The Foundation understands that the river is public property. We're not telling where they can and can't go. But we want to preserve the Barber Pool Conservation

Area mainly as a wild and natural place for wildlife.

"We also are working on future plans to improve the habitat in the Barber Pool area in the future."

The Foundation has a Master Plan in place. It also has cooperative management agreements with Ada County, the Idaho Bird Observatory, the City of Boise, and the Idaho Shakespeare Festival, all adjoining landowners who support and are in sync with the Foundation's vision for the future.

Foundation works to expand Barber Pool Conservation Area

In our March story, we detailed the history of the original donation of 411 acres of Barber Pool property on both sides of the Boise River by Boise Cascade Corporation in 1978. The Foundation bought the 20-acre Pullman Brick Company property to add to its holdings. The Foundation conveyed 34 acres of Barber Pool property to Ada County so it could extend the Boise River Greenbelt out to Lucky Peak. Ada County acquired Barber Dam and its hydro plant operations via property tax forfeiture.

In the early 1990s, the Foundation sold 18 acres of land to the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation for the construction of its state headquarters building.

Several years later, the Foundation sold 2.56 acres of Barber Pool land to the Idaho Shakespeare Festival and ISF raised \$4 million to build its outdoor theater.

"I think we all could see that the Barber Pool property

would become a long-term asset for the people of Boise,” says Foundation Board member Larry Leasure. “We didn’t know exactly how when we received the land gift from Boise Cascade. But looking back at it today, the value of that gift is quite phenomenal. Look at all of these wonderful things that have occurred since we received the property. And the value increases every day.”



Oliver Gregerson, above, works on his sand and gravel operation in the Barber Pool area. He was a demolitions expert in the U.S. Army, serving in northern France in WW II. (photos courtesy Gina Gregerson)

Foundation and ISF acquire 12 acres of land

In recent years, the Foundation has made major strides to acquire two key properties that increase the size of Barber Pool Conservation Area to about 750 acres on both sides of the Boise River. The first acquisition was 12 acres of land immediately to the north of Barber Dam that had served as the sewage ponds for Golden Dawn Estates, a mobile home community for seniors.

The acquisition was difficult, McDevitt recalls, because the 12-acre property was slated for development with 43 homes planned. The Foundation had to pay developer Jim Conger \$400,000 to cancel a development contract for the land. It also worked out a phased \$1.6 million purchase agreement with the property owners, David and Ann Triplett.

It was a difficult negotiation, McDevitt recalls, but the Foundation was glad to clear that hurdle.

In a press release in May 2019, Foundation Board Member Judy Peavey-Derr said, “We are very excited to make this announcement today that we’ve been successful in raising sufficient funds to not only acquire the property but also develop it into a beautiful natural open space parkland for the community.”

Adds McDevitt, “In the end, the Foundation and the Idaho Shakespeare Festival raised funds to buy the property, and we went to the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality to have them help remove the ponds.”

The 12-acre parcel has been gifted to the Shakespeare Festival, which has committed to restoring the property with natural landscaping and habitat in the future as part of the Barber Pool Conservation Area Master Plan.

Foundation acquires the Gregerson property

Just as Foundation officials took a short breather from the \$2 million capital campaign, the 35-acre Gregerson property in the center of Barber Pool bottom lands became available for sale. The property was appraised at \$1.6 million

at the time.

Because of its strategic location, the Foundation was instantly interested in acquiring the Gregerson property, but that would require another fund-raising campaign. Foundation board members went right to work.

The Foundation, with the help of the Shakespeare Festival, received pledges for matching funds and raised \$850,000 in two years. The Foundation also received \$750,000 from the Shakespeare Festival for the sale of 10 acres around the amphitheater.

Backstory on Gregerson Family

The late Oliver Gregerson was a colorful fellow who collected a wide assortment of exotic birds and animals in the 50 years he lived on the property. A native of Iowa, Gregerson was a demolitions expert in the U.S. Army, serving in northern France during World War II with the 324th Infantry Regiment. He was injured in battle and received two Bronze stars and a purple heart after receiving an honorable discharge.

“My dad was very mechanically inclined. He was proficient as a welder and fabricator, and he could make or fix just about anything,” says his eldest daughter, Gina, 57, who still lives on the Gregerson property.

During the war, Oliver Gregerson received a number of inoculations and vaccinations that had negative long-term health effects, Gina says. “He was not expected to live past the age of 40,” she says. “So he planned his life accordingly to pack in as much fun, work and adventure as he could in the time he had.”

As things turned out, Gregerson lived to the age of 81. He died in October 2006.

Oliver Gregerson initially moved to Idaho after World War II, following his father, Ole’s lead, and moved to Garden City, Gina said. In 1956, Gregerson bought 35 acres of land



Gina Gregerson feeds the ducks and geese. (Courtesy Gina Gregerson)

in the Barber Pool from Boise Cascade Corp. and started a sand and gravel operation, Gina recalls. However, the sand wasn't pure enough to sell to government agencies, she said. So he turned to other pursuits.

Gregerson married Martha Jean Chrestesen of Weiser in 1964. She worked as a ticket agent for United Airlines at the Boise Airport. The couple had one daughter, Gina. With the travel privileges that came with her job, Ollie and Martha Jean could fly half-price to anywhere they wished. They took two trips per year to places like Scandinavia, Europe, Australia, Japan, South America and Africa.

Gina remembers a childhood full of fun and adventure. "We had a huge mountain of sand on the property, and I had a enormous rope swing. I had the most awesome childhood

with my dad and all of the birds and animals."

Unfortunately, her mother died when she was 7 years old. But Gina and her father were very close. He took Gina everywhere. She remembers going to countless auctions and junk yards,



Gina with her mother, Martha Jean.

where Ollie would buy all kinds of things that he might want to fix up, sell or use for whatever. He developed many mining claims around Silver City, Idaho City and Atlanta. He loved going to the mountains in search of precious metals.

"He knew a lot about geology," Gina says. "He knew how to find gold. He loved being in the mountains."

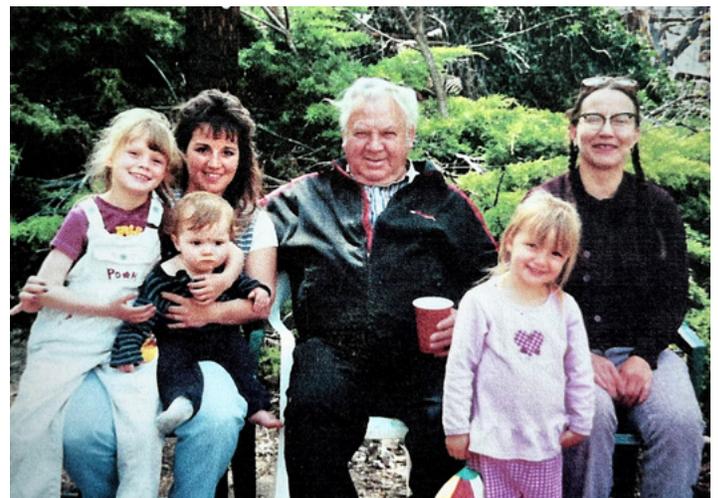
Her father took her to all kinds of cultural and seasonal events in Boise and all over Idaho. The birds and animals came from all kinds of sources, she says. "We had hundreds and hundreds of birds and animals, anything he could find" - ducks, geese, pheasants, Guinea fowl, peacocks, llamas, emus, mouflon sheep, mountain lions and more.

The header over the gated entrance to the property said, "Gregerson's Wildlife Park." Other signs said, "No Trespassing." The Gregersons were very private people who did not want the public to disturb the animals or their river-bottom land.

"I spent much of my life taking care of the animals and keeping up the irrigation lines," she says. "We are Scandinavians; we have a strong work ethic."

Gina went to Roosevelt Elementary, East Junior High and Boise High School. She didn't particularly like going to school. She figures her teachers must have wondered sometimes about what was going on in her home life.

"I'd come to high school all covered with scratch marks



Ollie Gregerson with his two daughters, Melissa, left, and Gina, right, and three grandchildren, Kylee, Alex and Ashley. Photo taken in 1996. (Courtesy Gina Gregerson)



Gregerson stored all kinds of things on his property over the years. Now the Foundation is cleaning it up to restore the land.

from head to toe from raising baby cougars,” she says with a smile.

While Gina treasures all the amazing birds and animals she got to interact with, she’s glad to see the Gregerson property being turned over to the Idaho Foundation for Parks and Lands to preserve the vast river bottom habitat for native wildlife.

“What matters is the land,” she says. “I lived in a magical kingdom in that cottonwood forest ecosystem my whole life. I’ve seen the most magical things out there. I owe it all to the land.”

Most of the non-native birds and wildlife that lived on the Gregerson property are gone today, except for a few mouflon sheep and one emu named “Leon.” Gina is in tune with all of the native insects, birds and wildlife that live in the Barber Pool area, and she celebrates the changes of the seasons.

“When I see the local vultures returning, circling around in the sky, I run out, wave, jump up and down, and welcome them back home,” she says. “And then I cry when they leave in the fall.”

“Sometimes I go out at 3 a.m. in the middle of the night just to listen to the coyotes, geese, owls and the beavers in the river,” she says. “Right at that moment, it’s like the most magical place on the planet.”

Volunteers clean up Gregerson property

Beginning in January 2021, Foundation Board member and Treasurer Stephani Hilding took the bull by the horns to head up a long-term effort to clean up the Gregerson property. Over many years, Gregerson compiled a wide assortment of things that he stored on the property. He rarely threw anything away.

“We’ve been going through and picking up things piece by piece,” Hilding says. “Once you unbury one layer, you find another layer. Literally, you name it, it’s out there – everything and anything.”

Over the last 1.5 years, Hilding has partnered with a



Foundation Board Member Stephani Hilding has been leading volunteer cleanup projects on the Gregerson property.

number of volunteer groups, including Bill “Action” Jackson and the Idaho Youth Education Recycling Partnership (iYerp), to remove items from the property. In the partnership with Action Jackson, iYerp provides large dumpsters in which valuable metals and recyclable items can be placed, and they haul it off to Pacific Recycling.

“Once we got started, the volunteer program just kept growing and growing,” she says.

So far, Hilding has recruited 195 volunteers who donated 870 hours of work to remove 1,140 tires and 20 cars/trucks. They also have filled 40 large metal recycling containers, 12 large construction trash containers and 10 large construction containers with building materials.

Key contributors to the cleanup activities include:

- Micron
- Jitasa Group
- Clearwater Analytics
- Warner Construction
- Riverstone International School
- 100 Men for Good



Natural riparian vegetation and mature cottonwood trees border the Boise River adjacent to the Gregerson property.

About \$47,000 has been raised so far to assist with the cleanup, Hilding says.

“Now we have plenty of volunteers, but we could really use some professionals with heavy equipment to haul away some larger items we need to remove,” she says. For more information about volunteering for the cleanup, go to the Foundation web site: idaholands.org.

Barber Pool Master Plan charts course for the future

The Foundation recently completed a detailed Master Plan for the Barber Pool Conservation Area in March of this year. It was a collaborative effort that laid out a shared, cohesive vision for the future. A group of 30 partners who had a direct interest and ownership stake in the Conservation Area were involved in every step of the planning process. An additional 30-person group of “Friends” provided key insights and subject matter expertise while participating in planning workshops.

Foundation Board members Brandy Wilson and Stephani Hilding, both of whom live near the Barber Pool Conservation Area, co-managed the Master Planning process for the Foundation with support from staff and the collaborative partners. The primary partners are the City of Boise, Ada County, Idaho Bird Observatory, and the Foundation.

“Basically, the Master Plan was a chance for everyone to sit down and discuss how the entire area should be managed, ecologically and for human use, where the foothills meet

the river. What emerged was a shared vision and goals for the area. This is useful to all partners in securing budget and funding for management of each parcel within the overall Conservation Area,” Wilson says.

The vision statement says: “Create an ecologically functional, sustainable and community-supported Barber Pool Conservation Area that will maximize protection for native plants and wildlife by inviting people to act as stewards for generations to come.”

The Master Plan has three goals:

1. Protect and enhance wildlife and fish habitat
2. Manage human use to minimize disturbance
3. Provide public outreach and education.

Protection of wildlife - particularly bald eagles, resident and migratory birds and mule deer - is an overarching theme for managing the Barber Pool Conservation Area in the future.

The Master Plan notes that the collaborative group made an intentional decision to reduce human disturbance in the Barber Pool area as much as possible. Why?

- The Boise River corridor is a critical winter range area for mule deer and elk migrating from the Sawtooth Mountains to lower elevations. In the foothills and mountains above Barber Pool, the Idaho Department of Fish and Game owns 36,000 acres of land to maintain a large winter game range for deer and elk.
- The area is important for resident and migratory birds.

The Barber Pool Conservation Area Master Plan calls for most of the area to be closed to public use to give birds and wildlife a place to thrive in a natural, open space environment next to the urban zone of Boise.



Bald eagles roost in the Barber Pool area in the winter-time, and a few bald eagle nesting territories have been established in the corridor. IDFG recommends a 330-foot buffer around nest sites for non-motorized recreation activities during the entire breeding season, which extends from January through August.

“We simply can’t turn this into another Barber Park to Ann Morrison stretch, like what we float today,” Wilson says. “This part of the river needs to be treated with respect and quiet from the people who use it. It’s a different place.”

- There is high potential in the Conservation Area for restoration work – side channels in the river and restoring native habitat underneath the cottonwood forest.
- Dogs, people and wildlife don’t mix.

At the Diane Moore Nature Center, managed by the Intermountain Bird Observatory (IBO) at Boise State University, restoration of a side channel on the Boise River, immediately downstream from the Idaho Highway 21 flying bridge, already has begun. They’ve planted 4,000 native plants in the riparian area so far. The side channel will benefit trout spawning and brood-rearing habitat, expansion of wetlands, cottonwood regeneration, and the production of macroinvertebrates, natural food for fish.

IBO and the Foundation have placed a number of public education signs along the Boise River Greenbelt as it passes by the Barber Pool Conservation Area to set the tone for how they would like the public to interact with nature in the area.

The Master Plan details a number of management actions that each ownership group can take to enhance the natural habitat in the Barber Pool Conservation. It will take more

than a decade for these measures to be implemented, depending on budget and priorities, officials said.

A big part of the strategy is to prohibit public use in a large part of the Barber Pool area owned and managed by the Foundation, and focus recreation along the Boise River Greenbelt and IBO existing pathways. Public education and signage will emphasize the value of preserving wildlife and wildlife habitat in the core of Barber Pool Conservation Area and explain why it’s important for humans to respect the goals and vision for the area.

“We had some questions about whether the public will support protecting an area they can’t use or have access to,” Wilson says.

“But based on the number of volunteers helping out with the Gregerson property cleanup and IBO projects, we feel confident that the public will understand our objectives to protect Barber Pool Conservation Area for nature and wildlife. This is really the only place along the Boise River in the urban zone where we are restricting public use for nature and wildlife to this extent. Our education outreach will be important today and in the future to ensure we have good compliance.”

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