



Payette Land Trust
309 E. Lake Street
McCall, ID 83638

Phone: 208-634-4999

Fax:

Email: info@payettelandtrust.org

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‘Hansberger’s South Fork Ranch Partners with Payette Land Trust to Conserve this Iconic Salmon River Property’



Historic Hansberger’s South Fork Ranch Photo courtesy of the family

The 100-acre South Fork Ranch is the latest property to be protected with a conservation easement from over-development by the Payette Land Trust in McCall.

The ranch is located along the South Fork Salmon River roughly 12 miles upstream from the confluence with the Salmon River and is quintessential in the region’s remarkable history. Pit home sites on the Ranch tell a story of ancient peoples. In 1880 the first settler, Threefinger Smith, filed a mining claim

hoping to strike it rich. This property has inspired dreams of big business and riches while handing out tough times and heartache. For anyone who has spent time on the South Fork of the Salmon, you know what a rough yet intriguingly beautiful country it is.

Accessible year round by plane and car in the summer, this secluded ranch is surrounded by the steep hillsides of Payette National Forest and is across the river from the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness. The property has changed hands multiple times, evolving from a onetime mining and timber claim to a homestead ranch and eventually inspiring the idea of a logging mill. Plans were made and in summer of 58' a D8 caterpillar punched a road along the steep hillsides down from Warren summit, allowing for equipment to come in and logs to go out. The mill was constructed in the in the early 60's just as the logging permits were restricted and a moratorium put in place. It became a losing venture and the vision of industry on the South Fork never came to fruition. The mill equipment was sold and hauled away, leaving only the wigwam burner as a reminder of what almost was. The land would now enter into its next chapter, narrowly avoiding major development.

The Hansberger family purchased the property in 1978, naming it the South Fork Ranch. It became a pivotal location for their guide and outfitting business, using it for the breeding and development of the Salmon River Sportsmen's pack string along with a wintering home for livestock. Over the past 40 years, multiple generations of the Hansberger family have experienced the beauty of the canyon and majesty of the river. They hold a deep understanding of the precious resource they steward. Working to return the land to its natural state, they have devoted time and money to the ecological restoration of the Mill site. The old burner has been dismantled and hauled away, removing the last vestige of industry. Now, as you float past the ranch you can hear the words of Frank Church echo off the canyon walls,

"I never knew a man who took a bedroll into an Idaho mountainside and slept there under a star-studded summer sky who felt self-important that next morning. Unless we preserve some opportunity for future generations to have the same experience, we shall have dishonored our trust."

144 years after "Threefinger" Smith, the Hansberger children have partnered with the Payette Land Trust to conserve the heritage of this iconic riverfront property through a conservation easement.

"The easement limits the number of potential structures, including houses, barns and sheds. It also defines exterior surfaces and colors on building along with height limits for remodeled or new buildings. No mining exploration or extraction as well as no alteration of natural water courses, is permitted under the easement." according to Craig Utter, executive director of the PLT, "horses and cattle can still be kept on the property, but sheep or goats are no longer allowed to avoid the possible spread of disease to big horn sheep."

The Payette Land Trust (PLT) works with families in Adams, Idaho, Valley and Washington counties to further their conservation ethics working to balance conservation and development in the region. The PLT believes in conserving the rural landscape of West Central Idaho for the benefit of our community and future generations.

Currently, the PLT owns two properties and holds ten conservation easements on private land.

To learn more about PLT and its work in the West Central Mountains of Idaho, visit

<http://www.payettelandtrust.org>