



History preserved; Changed little since 1908, nearby Idler's Rest continues to offer visitors a forest retreat among the wheat

By Laura Hixon, For the Daily News

A little ways out of town, down Mountain View Road, there is a tract of land, unchanged since at least 1908, when logging stopped short of a grove of cedars and pines.

It may have been because even back then Idler's Rest was a popular recreation area.

"It is unique. Cedar groves are scarce," Jay Pengilly, secretary of the Palouse Land Trust said. Cedar is a valuable wood because the tree is slow growing and it is highly resistant to rot.

The Palouse Land Trust is a local conservation group that is now responsible for maintaining and protecting the 33 acres of preserved land. It officially acquired the easement from the Nature Conservancy in December of last year.

"This is our first land holding. It's nice to have it back in local hands," Pengilly said.

In the mid-1960s the descendants of the first landowners decided to sell the property. The Inland Empire Chapter of the Nature Conservancy mounted a campaign to raise \$7,000 to purchase and improve the land. In January 1967, the deed was officially transferred and the property fell under the protection of the Nature Conservancy. University of Idaho students built the foot bridge that spans Paradise Creek. A rail fence and bulletin board also were added as well as labels identifying different plants, erected by a professor from the College of Forestry at the UI.

Idler's Rest has historical significance as well ecological importance. In places along the creek, the sites of several cottages can be seen, as well as what may have been a tennis court. There is an old fruit orchard, whose evenly spaced fruit trees are slowly being reclaimed by the forest. As well as several shallow pits marking the labors of early gold prospectors.

A plaque is mounted on a boulder to memorialize Jim Manis, a student who died in a car accident in 1974. Friends and family established a fund that was offered to the Nature Conservancy for use at Idler's Rest and the money was used to study the area and to provide interpretive facilities at the site.

The Palouse Land Trust received grants from the Latah County Community Foundation and Tri-State. They plan to use the grants to build a new fence along the creek and to provide trail guides to educate people about the changing ecosystem and the plants that flourish there.

Land trusts are nonprofit, volunteer organizations whose members contribute time and resources to maintain and enforce easements. There are more than 1.6 million acres of conservation easement land established across the nation. The Palouse Land Trust is just one of more than 1,500 organizations responsible for conservation easements.

The Palouse Land Trust isn't just about preserving land. The organization maintains conservation easements and enforces landowners wishes for the land. A conservation easement is a legal agreement between a land trust and a landowner that limits the use of the land. Future owners are bound to the terms of the easement. The agreements are somewhat flexible and allow for some development or agricultural use while preserving some significant tract of land. A farmer could agree not to build any more structures on a property but continue to grow crops. There are also groups that meet the needs of farmers specifically.

"We encourage membership of farmers. It's probably the biggest gap in our (group)," said Gerry Wright, acting president of the Palouse Land Trust.

While there has been some vandalism, most people who frequent the area are responsible recreationists.

"A lot of people watch over the place. People feel protective of this place," Pengilly said. "They recognize its value as a protected place."