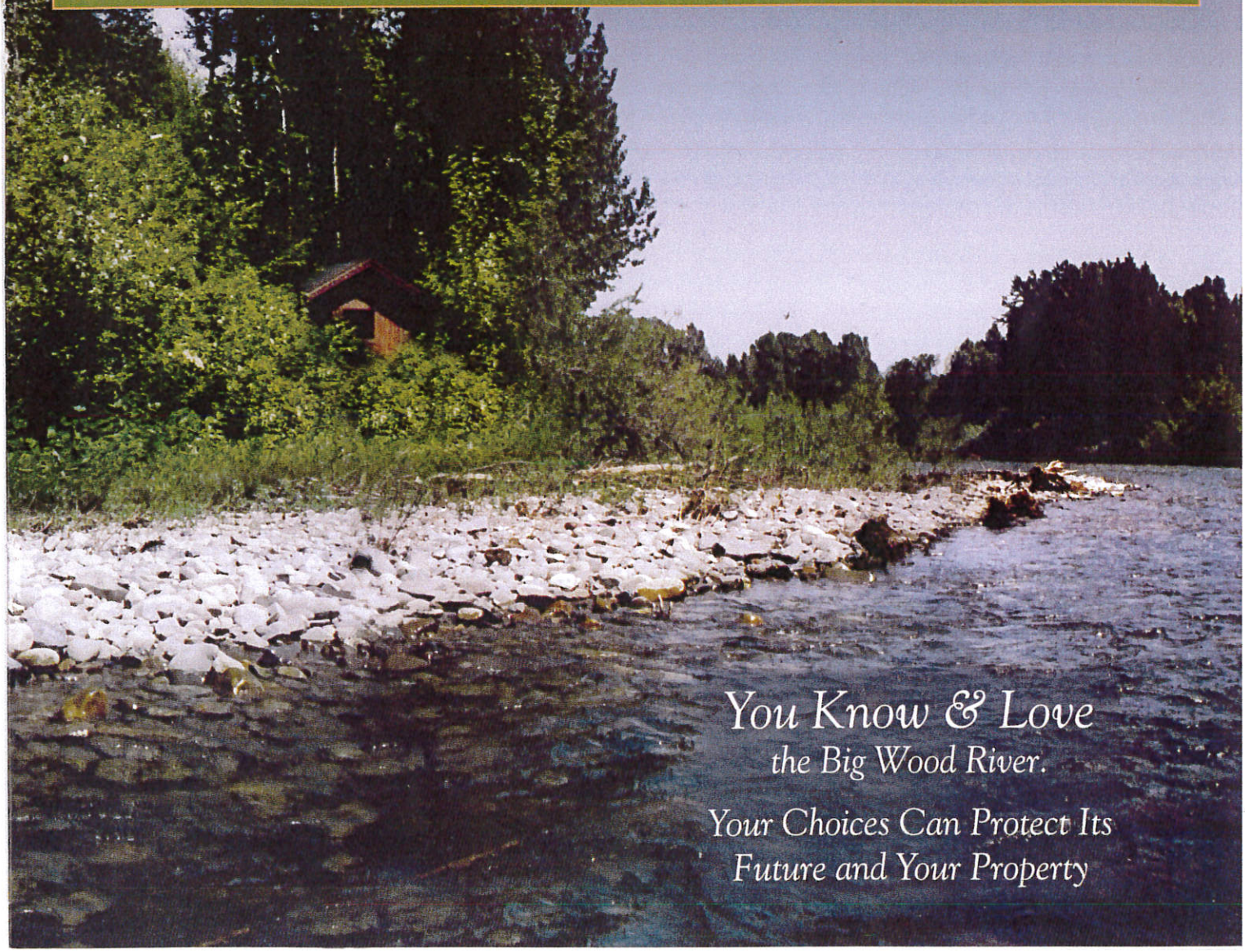
Get to Know Your Closest Neighbor

A GUIDE FOR FLOODPLAIN HOMEOWNERS



The Big Wood River

The Big Wood River's floodplain is home to unique and important plants and wildlife. You have likely seen elk, moose, fox, and a variety of birds along the river; you may even fish from your own backyard. As a floodplain homeowner, you experience the beauty and unique qualities of the area first-hand.

The natural processes that make the river such a desirable neighbor—the sound of rushing water, the wildlife it attracts, and the lush plant life it nurtures—may also lead to flooding and bank erosion that can damage private property in the floodplain. Your actions can protect your property while preserving important aspects of the river's natural functions. One of the best ways to protect your home and the river is to use native landscaping.

This brochure provides information about the importance of the floodplain's function in our valley and describes how the use of native landscaping can protect your property and the floodplain

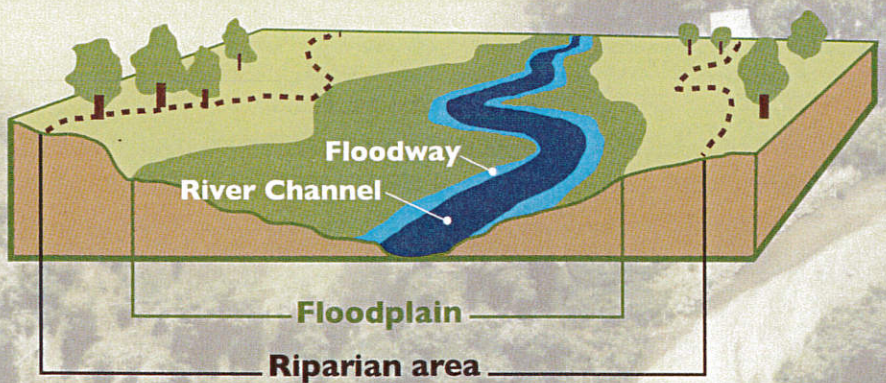
Understanding the Floodplain

A floodplain is the flat land along a stream or river. Floodplains are often filled by water during spring runoff or other high water events.

A floodway is the channel through which the majority of a flood's waters move.

The riparian area is a transitional area between land and water ecosystems, such as the area adjacent to a river. Riparian areas, though small in size, provide a large percentage of the wildlife habitat for birds, moose, deer, fox, and other species throughout the year.

The Natural River has many components that contribute to its health.



Resources for Floodplain Living:

- Conservation Seeding & Restoration, Inc.
- Blaine Soil Conservation District
- Sawtooth Botanical Gardens
- Hailey Nursery
- Webb, employee owned

For more information or a complete list of recommended plants to use in the floodplain, contact Wood River Land Trust at 788-3947 or go to www.woodriverlandtrust.org.

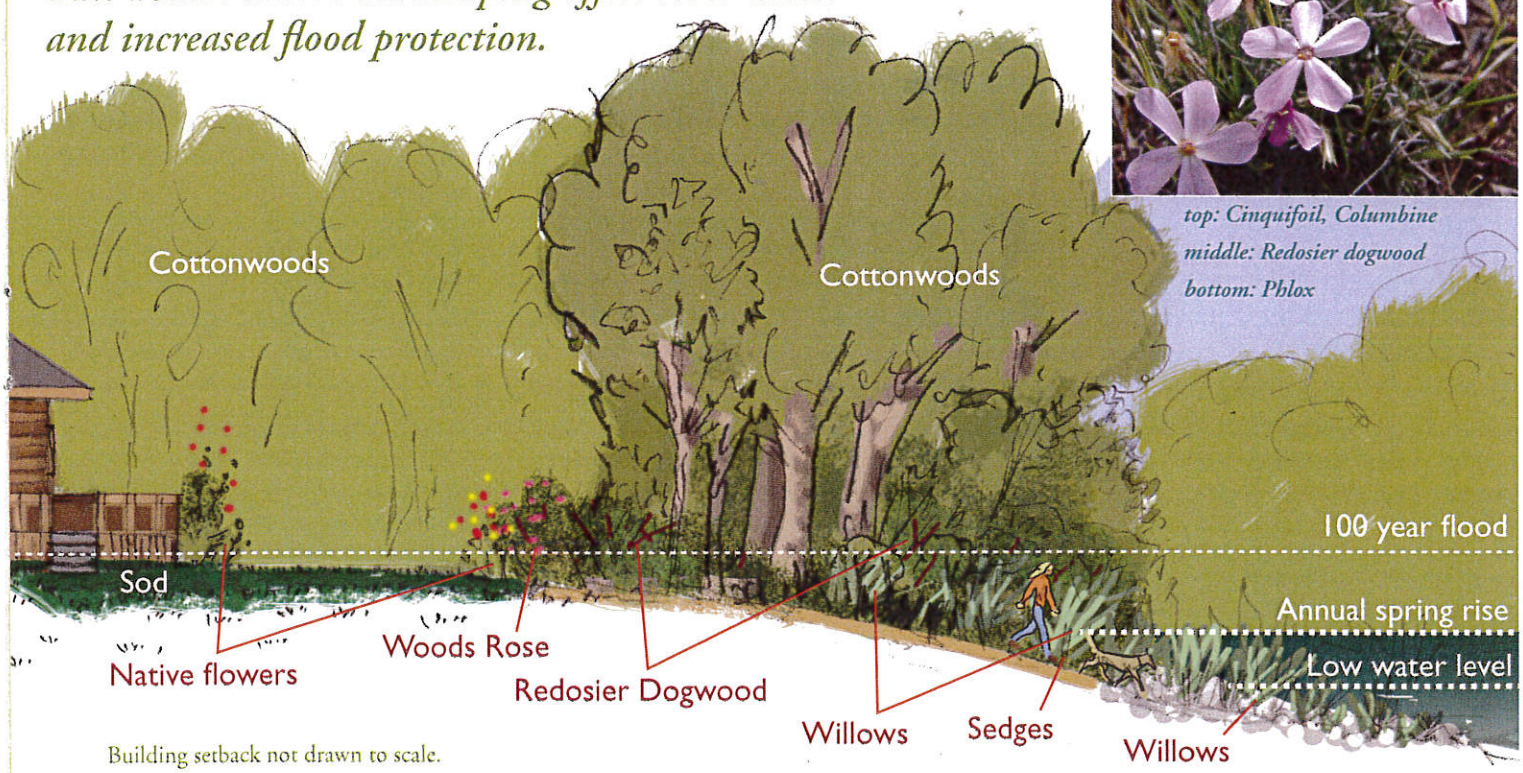
Remember to contact your local government to learn the specific riparian setback requirements and other regulations that apply to your property before adding or restoring decks, yards, structures, landscaping, or building a new home.

Color & Texture

Photo: Robert H. Mohlenbrock

top: Cinquifoil, Columbine
middle: Redosier dogwood
bottom: Phlox

This home's native landscaping offers river access and increased flood protection.



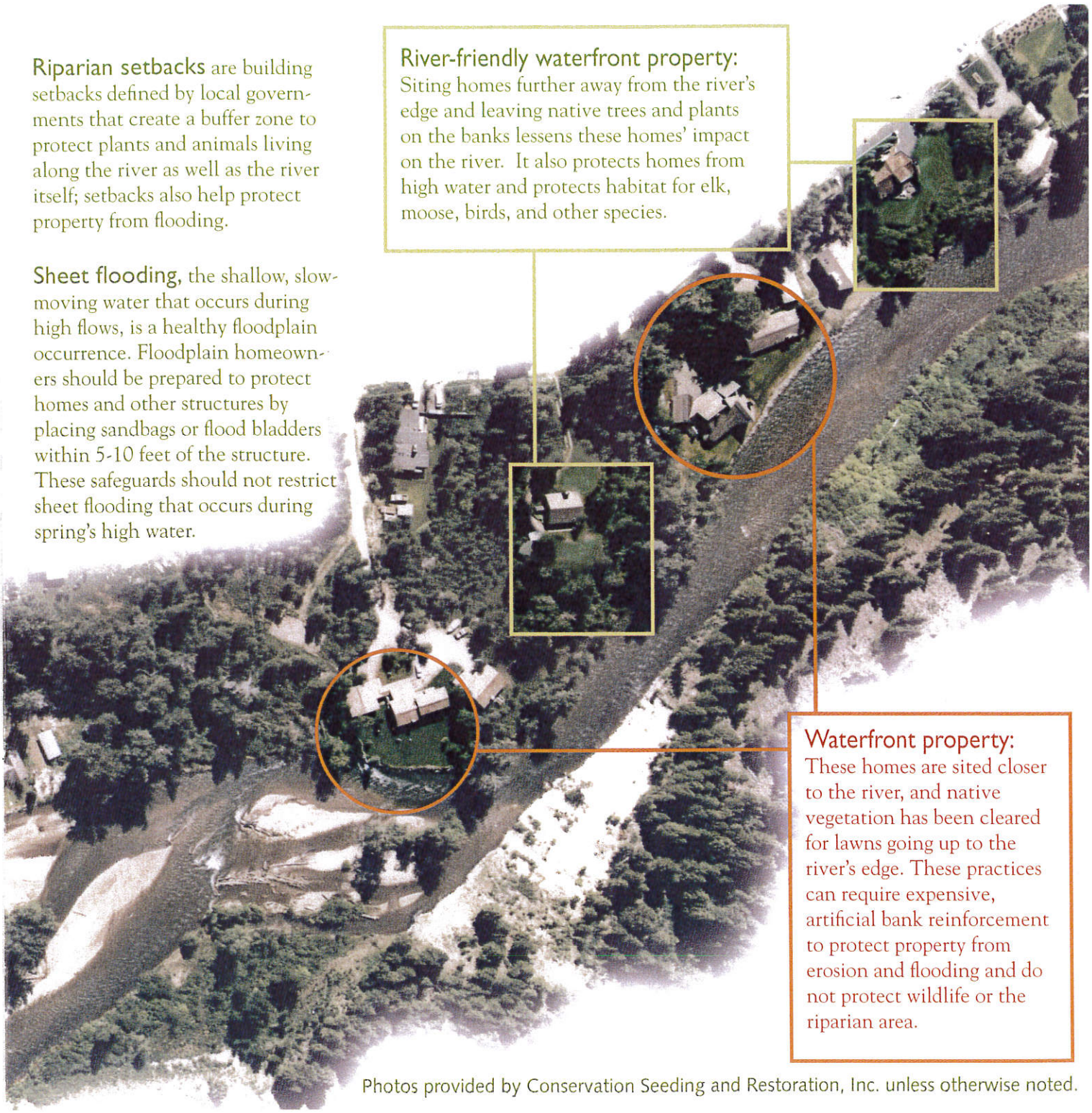
Building setback not drawn to scale.

Rivers are dynamic, ever-changing systems that benefit the land & its inhabitants

Western rivers, including the Big Wood, have been impacted by development. Above Magic Reservoir, however, the Big Wood River is free-flowing with many sections that are healthy and undisturbed. We can act now to ensure it remains a gem in the west and provides our community with clean water, abundant recreation, healthy wildlife, and a refreshing respite from our dry mountain clime.

Riparian setbacks are building setbacks defined by local governments that create a buffer zone to protect plants and animals living along the river as well as the river itself; setbacks also help protect property from flooding.

Sheet flooding, the shallow, slow-moving water that occurs during high flows, is a healthy floodplain occurrence. Floodplain homeowners should be prepared to protect homes and other structures by placing sandbags or flood bladders within 5-10 feet of the structure. These safeguards should not restrict sheet flooding that occurs during spring's high water.



River-friendly waterfront property:
Siting homes further away from the river's edge and leaving native trees and plants on the banks lessens these homes' impact on the river. It also protects homes from high water and protects habitat for elk, moose, birds, and other species.

Waterfront property:
These homes are sited closer to the river, and native vegetation has been cleared for lawns going up to the river's edge. These practices can require expensive, artificial bank reinforcement to protect property from erosion and flooding and do not protect wildlife or the riparian area.

Photos provided by Conservation Seeding and Restoration, Inc. unless otherwise noted.

Benefits to Birds and Insects:

In addition to being beautiful and low-maintenance, native landscaping also attracts insects, birds, and wildlife. Owls, dragonflys, and butterflys are all part of a healthy plant/river relationship.

Photo: Jerry W. Britton

Native Landscaping

Native landscaping is beautiful and attracts an array of birds, insects, and wildlife. Once established, native plants use less water and require less maintenance than non-native plants. They also help protect against flood risks by slowing high flows and stabilizing river banks. Native landscaping is important both inside and outside the floodplain.

While some steps towards native landscaping in the floodplain take planning, others can be implemented easily and with little expense. Native plants preserve the land's health, beautify your property, and are hardy and easy to maintain.

Three Examples of How to Use Native Vegetation:

1. ***Bank stabilizers for use along the river and in the 20 feet beyond the river's high water mark*:** Coyote willow, River birch, Bog birch, Redosier dogwood, Chokecherry, Streambank wheatgrass

2. ***For use in the 20-40 feet beyond the stream bank*:** Booth willow, Geyers willow, Aspen, Alder-leafed buckthorn, Gooseberries, Currants, Elderberry, Serviceberry, Snowberry, Lewis' mockorange

3. ***For use as ground cover*:** Meadow foxtail, Idaho fescue, Bluebunch wheatgrass, Rocky Mountain iris, Asters, Bluebells, Western valerian, Sticky geranium, Creeping potentilla, Yellow monkey flower, Columbine

** Contact riparian experts or environmental consultants to determine the best site-specific plantings for your property.*

What You Can Do

Simple landscaping steps you can undertake now:

- ❑ Preserve native vegetation along the stream bank and throughout your floodplain property
- ❑ Incorporate a few native plants into this year's plantings
- ❑ Keep our water clean by using organic fertilizers and pesticides
- ❑ Pass this information along to a neighbor or friend

Landscaping steps that require planning:

- ❑ Use native plants to replace non-native plants little by little over time
- ❑ Exceed setback requirements to avoid the need for rip-rap and to give wildlife room to roam
- ❑ Fence off the riparian area and stream bank during construction to protect them from soil erosion and compaction caused by large machinery
- ❑ Use water-permeable asphalt or other pervious materials for driveways and patios to encourage recharge of the aquifer
- ❑ Use large, in-stream wood instead of riprap to stabilize the riverbank
- ❑ Limit paths to the river and construct them with hand tools to reduce soil compaction

The floodplain plays a critical role in clean water, wildlife habitat, and a healthy river system. The floodplain:

- ❀ Keeps our water clean and acts like a sponge to store water in the aquifer; our communities use water from the aquifer for drinking water
- ❀ Allows the river to move naturally and keeps our cottonwood forest healthy
- ❀ Provides habitat and food for birds, moose, elk, fox, and other wildlife

Native plants within the floodplain, in addition to being beautiful, protect this sensitive area and provide a home for fish and wildlife. Native trees, shrubs, and other plants:

- ❀ Filter our water to remove impurities
- ❀ Attract birds, insects, and wildlife
- ❀ Help protect the banks from erosion during high flows
- ❀ Shade the river and keep it cool in summer when trout are vulnerable to high temperatures

Don't forget about native trees when creating your landscaping plan!

Cottonwood trees are another component of healthy floodplains. Cottonwoods eventually fall into the river and create log jams and pools where fish can rest, feed, and hide, and they slow the erosive action of high flows. Log jams in the river and native vegetation along the banks work together to protect stream banks from flood damage and assist with groundwater recharge.

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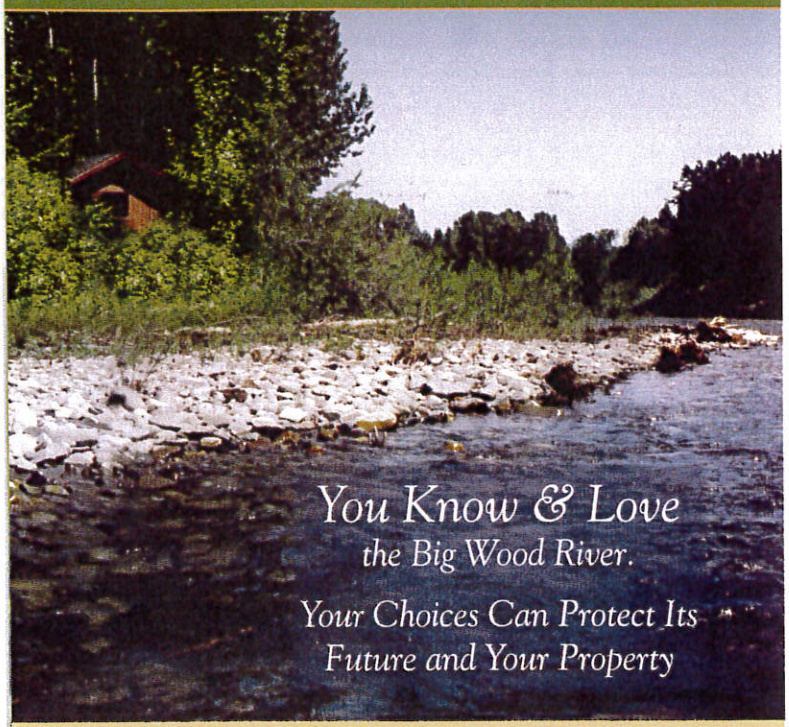

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WOOD RIVER LAND TRUST

Protecting and restoring our natural lands and healthy waters since 1994.