

Chapter 4

Hulls Angels: Planning a Mountain Town and Saving Boise's Foothills, 1965-2001

The morning that Anne Hausrath opened up the *Idaho Statesman* in April 1989 to peruse the daily news over a cup of coffee would alter the course of her life as well as the history of Boise. While not a departure from her usual routine, this day was different. “Divine intervention,” Hausrath exclaims, when she tries to explain why her eye caught something small in a section she did not normally read. Buried in the legal notices were Orida Investment’s detailed plans for a housing development in Hulls Gulch, a watershed teeming with wildlife just a mile north of central downtown and only a few blocks from Hausrath’s 7th Street home in the middle-class North End. To Anne’s horror, the notice explained the company’s proposal to, “Run a large drag line, remove all vegetation, dewater the area to a depth of 5 feet.”¹ During her walk in the Gulch later that week with neighbor Judy Ouderkirk, Hausrath came across a large sign announcing the imminent arrival of more than 300 houses there.²

As lovers of this wild gem in an urban setting, Hausrath and Ouderkirk instinctively knew that they could not let this happen. They made an immediate decision to fight the development, jumping into a controversy already a decade old and emblematic of continued efforts to create a better city and a distinct urban identity. “For me, it was enough to know that it would be the ruination of the Gulch,” remembers Ouderkirk.³ Hausrath offered to go to Boise’s Planning Department that day to find out more, and what she found provoked thousands of average citizens to halt the

¹ Anne Hausrath, interview by Jennifer Stevens, April 12, 2006, Boise, Idaho. Notes in personal files of author.

² Judy Ouderkirk, interview by Jennifer Stevens, November 7, 2007, Boise, Idaho. Notes in personal files of author.

development and save Hulls Gulch, a citizen effort unmatched in Boise history. Their chapter in the story of Hulls Gulch and the women's establishment of the non-profit Wetlands Coalition came to dominate the papers and local government agendas for the next four years. Their epic battle to stop Orida's development in the Gulch showcased women's critical role in shaping Boise's identity as an outdoor Mecca with ample open space near the city center and a high quality of life.

But the fight to save Hull's Gulch, while heroic, was only a small part of women's longer-running efforts to establish better urban planning in the valley. The women who battled to create better metropolitan policies in Boise and save this special place came along later than the women in Portland and Los Angeles, building on their successes. Like those women, their views were shaped by the disastrous urban policies that governed the cities of their births and resulted in dirty, unattractive areas. But some of them were also shaped by the activism of the 1960s, and were more aware of and willing to embrace the impact that their activism would have on the status of women in Boise. Visions for a vibrant downtown and a halt to sprawl began in the late 1960s, a time when women who were active advocates of urban planning created a tangible vision for Boise, one that policy makers hung their hats on for decades to come. While their actions were not terribly radical, some of them consciously engaged in feminist causes alongside their urban environmentalism, and some did challenge the existing order of a male-dominated, business-oriented, individualistic western outpost. While most of them claim to have *not* been feminists, the work they did changed the status of women in Boise and ushered in an era in which women seized a greater role for women in public life in

³ Ibid.

the small intermountain city. Their stories fit the role of the cautious feminist told throughout this dissertation, yet point to a national shift toward more conscious change.

Hulls Gulch and the Boise Foothills

Hulls Gulch is situated almost in the center of the Boise Front, which lies north and east of the City of Boise and drains into the Boise River. The Front comprises about 80,000 acres of land. The land at higher elevations is primarily in public ownership, while the land at lower elevations lies in a patchwork pattern of privately owned land. The Boise Front, called the Foothills by locals, is defined by large basins in the east, silicated sandstone and granite outcrops in the central hills, gulches and streams scattered throughout that contain significant riparian values, and some wide valley floors that support agricultural uses. Some extraordinary geologic features exist along the Boise Front, as well as fodder and water for both domesticated livestock and wild animals such as elk and mule deer. Southwest Idaho's desert climate keeps the Foothills brown throughout much of the year, with the exception of winter, when periodic snowfalls turn the hills white, and spring, when the winter's precipitation melts and temporarily tints the brown hills a mossy shade of green.

The foothills, and even Hull's Gulch, which is home to more than 50 species of birds, are not spectacularly beautiful. As one local journalist put it after a walk there, "I'd be lying if I said my visit to Hull's Gulch was a life-changing experience, or that Hulls Gulch was the most beautiful place I'd ever seen." The wildness of the Gulch makes it unique. The journalist continued: "It is unusual this late in the millennium, however, to have such a place so close to the center of a city. Those kinds of places used

to be common in Boise, but not anymore.”⁴ The Gulch’s proximity to Boise’s center and the diversity of wildlife there made many people believe it was worth saving.

Today, a look up from the valley floor at the vast open space in the hills might lead a visitor to believe that early Boise planners were aggressive in their protection of this resource. In contrast to other small cities, Boise’s foothills remain relatively unmarred. But in spite of this unusual view from Idaho’s capitol city, Boise’s foothills have not always been protected. Early settlers, taken with the fertile lands that flanked the Boise River, settled not in the granite and sagebrush hills but on the bottomlands located between them and the river, creating the original town site there. These Euro-American settlers came to Boise in the mid-nineteenth century, following the discovery of placer gold in the mountain streams of Idaho City in 1862. The Hawkins toll road connected Boise to Idaho City, crossing the foothills at Aldape Summit, a 5,000-foot peak named for the shepherding family who owned much of the foothills land in the area.⁵ When the mines gave out, sheep and cattle grazing became a critical part of the area’s economic puzzle, in spite of the serious damage the animals caused to the land.⁶ The hills surrounding the city were distant from a majority of the residents, who viewed the hills primarily as an economic resource.

To determine potential land use in the newly settled area, the federal government sent surveyors to Boise just after settlement in 1867. The first, Peter Bell, surveyed the lands northeast of what is now the Highlands subdivision in the central foothills and

⁴ Tim Woodward, Idaho Statesman, circa 1990, in personal files of Judy Ouder Kirk.

⁵ E.L. Jones, Jr., *Lode Mining in the Quartzburg and Grimes Pass Porphyry Belt, Boise Basin, Idaho*, U.S. Geological Survey Bulletin 640-E, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1916), 84.

⁶ *18th Biennial Report of the State Land Department of the State of Idaho, 1925-1926*; *30th Biennial Report of the State Land Department of the State of Idaho, 1948-1950*; *21st Biennial Report of the State Land Department of the State of Idaho, 1930-1932*; *27th Biennial Report of the State Land Department of the*

observed the grazing value of the land and the large granite formations, concluding that the land was valuable only for grazing.⁷ Mining was soon another potential use.

Edmund Taylor Perkins surveyed the foothills 25 years after Peter Bell in 1892, and noted that the land was:

all mountainous - without brush and has but little usefulness save for grazing - except on Five Mile Creek where the bottom is being taken up in small ranches by teamsters. There are strong indications of mineral bearing quartz, and many prospects are located, but no work is being done.⁸

Perkins also noted the presence of scattered mining claims near present day Table Rock – a granite outcrop that towers over east Boise – but that no work was being done.⁹ By 1906, that had changed, and surveyors noted the presence of a miner's cabin, a company ranch house, a stamp mill, and a boarding house, suggesting that mining had become more prevalent in the area in addition to the grazing that had been ongoing there for decades.¹⁰

State of Idaho, 1943-1944, all in Box 2, "State Land Dept. Reports, 1911-1926," Idaho Parks and Recreation Papers, AR 63, Idaho State Historical Society.

⁷ Peter W. Bell, "Field Notes of the Survey of the Exterior Boundaries of Township 1, 2, 3, 4, & 5 N. of Ranges 1, 2, 3, 4, East of Boise Meridian," under contract Dated June 26, 1867, Township 4 North, Range 3 East, Cadastral Survey Volume R11, pages 94-95. U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Boise, Idaho; Peter W. Bell, "Field Notes of the Survey of the Exterior Boundaries of Township 1, 2, 3, 4, & 5 N. of Ranges 1, 2, 3, 4, East of Boise Meridian," under contract Dated June 26, 1867, Township 4 North, Range 3 East, Cadastral Survey Volume R11, page 138, U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Boise, Idaho; Peter W. Bell, "Exterior Line Survey of Township 3 North, Range 3 East," under contract dated June 26, 1867, U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Boise, Idaho.

⁸ Edmund Taylor Perkins, Jr., "Field Notes of the Subdivision Lines of Township No. 4 North, Range No. 3 East of Boise Meridian," under contract dated April 21, 1892, Volume R102, page 7, U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Boise, Idaho.

⁹ "Field Notes of the Subdivision Lines of Township No. 3 North, Range No. 3 East of Boise Meridian," under contract dated April 21, 1892, Volume R102, page 4, U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Boise, Idaho.

¹⁰ Gordon C. Smith, "Field Notes of the Survey of Subdivisions, retracements, and resurveys, Fracl. Tp. 4 N. R. 3 E. of the Boise Meridian, Idaho," under contract dated May 2, 1908, U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Boise, Idaho; Albert Smith, Jr., "Field Notes of the Survey of the Part of Subdivisions, Retracement and Resurvey of Part of East Boundary, and Retracement and Resurvey of Suidivisional Lines of T. 3 N., R. 3 E. of the Principal Base and Boise Meridian," under contract dated April 11, 1913, Volume R292, U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Boise, Idaho.

Despite the addition of mining, grazing continued to be of critical importance in the Boise foothills as well as in Ada County as a whole. Between 1926 and 1944, the number of Ada County acres (not strictly in the foothills) being leased for grazing had increased 100%, from approximately 25,000 to more than 50,000 acres.¹¹ By 1950, the State Land Board reported that the number of acres – 2, 230,000 – under grazing leases was larger that year than ever before in the state’s history.¹² Grazing increased in intensity in this period in Boise’s foothills, as well, and for most of Boise’s early history, the residents considered the city’s lower hills solely as an economic resource, not a place of natural beauty or value.

But, as American views of the natural environment underwent major shifts in the latter half of the 20th century, so, too, did perceptions of the Boise Front. In the same decade that the 1962 publication of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*¹³ and the 1969 Santa Barbara oil spill triggered national policy efforts to increase protection of the natural environment, Boiseans began to fully appreciate the unique and rich ecosystem that existed right in their backyards. What business people described in 1966-67 as “barren

¹¹ *Eighteenth Biennial Report of the State Land Department of the State of Idaho, 1925-1926*, copy in Records of the Idaho Parks and Recreation, AR 63, Box 2, “State Land Dept. Reports, 1911-1926,” ISHS; *Thirtieth Biennial Report of the State Land Department of the State of Idaho, 1948-1950*, copy in Records of the Idaho Parks and Recreation, AR 63, Box 2, “State Land Dept. Reports, 1927-1950,” ISHS; *21st Biennial Report of the State Land Department of the State of Idaho, 1930-1932*, copy in Records of the Idaho Parks and Recreation, AR 63, Box 2, “State Land Dept. Reports, 1927-1950,” ISHS; *27th Biennial Report of the State Land Department of the State of Idaho, 1943-1944*, Records of the Idaho Parks and Recreation, AR 63, Box 2, “State Land Dept. Reports, 1927-1950,” ISHS.

¹² *30th Biennial Report of the State Land Department of the State of Idaho, 1948-1950*, copy in Records of the Idaho Parks and Recreation, AR 63, “State Land Dept. Reports, 1927-1950,” Box 2, ISHS.

¹³ Carson, *Silent Spring*.

hills”¹⁴ and “naked, inhospitable brown hills that have about them an air of menace,”¹⁵ a local journalist described as “beautiful”¹⁶ just one year later. And, as residents began to view the brown hills as one of the Gem State’s gems, many of them wanted to live and play there. Hausrath and Ouderkirk and the women who came before them were part of a new generation of Boiseans who viewed the high-desert Boise foothills with awe and wonder, and who were determined to preserve them as part of the western urban landscape.

Hausrath, originally from the East Coast, moved to Boise with her husband 12 years before the Hulls Gulch battle, choosing Boise as home after reading Jane Jacobs’ *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* in 1977.¹⁷ Anne and Alan chose Boise for its open spaces, parks, and compactness, ideals embraced by Jacobs and sought by the Hausraths. Alan was a math professor at Boise State University, and Anne, with a bachelor’s degree from Brown University and two masters degrees from the University of Pittsburgh, devoted herself to her children and volunteer activism, calling Alan “my patron” in recognition of his paid work that allowed her to pursue her real interests.¹⁸ The two of them loved listening to the songbirds and watching the seasons pass peacefully in the Gulch. They had enjoyed walking the Gulch for more than a decade when Anne saw the notice that day in the paper. The Gulch had also served as fertile ground for a new friendship to blossom with fellow morning walker Judy Ouderkirk, a

¹⁴ “Boise Valley Co-op Handles Milk of 1400 Members,” *Northwest Dairy News*, November, 1966, Scrapbook 3, Idaho Department of Commerce Papers, AR 29, Idaho State Historical Society (hereafter ISHS), Boise, Idaho.

¹⁵ Ralph Prouty, “Boise,” *National Motorist*, September 10, 1967, p. 5, Scrapbook 3, Idaho Department of Commerce Papers, AR 29, ISHS.

¹⁶ David Zarkin, “Council’s Study Shows Public Favors Formation of Aesthetic Panel on Building,” *Idaho Daily Statesman*, August 25, 1968, p. C9.

¹⁷ Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*.

¹⁸ Anne Hausrath, interview by Jennifer Stevens, August 5, 2008, recording in personal files of author.

native of the Boise area who had returned after many years away in the east, south, and Midwest. None of them ever imagined that Boise's growth would encroach on this open space that lay just outside their backdoors, or that a developer would try to cram more than 300 housing units onto the fragile ecosystem.

1946-1970: Early Foothills Development and the Growing Demand For Planning

Building in the foothills began slowly in the years immediately after World War II but picked up around 1960, just as developers in Los Angeles and other American cities flirted with building in similarly fragile environments.¹⁹ Although the central foothills were actually quite close to the city center – just a mile from the State Capitol - they lay primarily outside of the official city limits and within the planning jurisdiction of Ada County. By the 1960s, the ubiquity of automobiles made the hills more accessible, and the increasing number of developers proposing to subdivide and build on the land forced the County to contend with the unique challenges the foothills posed.

One of the consequences of continued 1960s Cold War hostilities was the nation's retreat inward. Residents began to vacate the central city neighborhoods like Boise's North End, where front porches faced gridded streets and sidewalks and where the neighborhood layout encouraged interaction with one's neighbors. Families who wanted to isolate themselves from the frightening new world purchased new hillside homes that they entered through street-facing garages in neighborhoods where they rarely had to encounter their neighbors. Aldape and Rogers Heights subdivisions were started in 1946 in the central foothills, with Lancaster Terrace, Boise Heights, and the first plats for The Highlands developments following in the 1950s. Early developers built many of these homes on hillsides with grading greater than 50%, using cut and fill methods that scarred

the landscape and were visible from across the valley floor. Such techniques, which involved slicing many feet off the hilltops and filling in the land's depressions in order to create flat building lots, exacerbated the effects of years of grazing, further eroding hillsides that could no longer absorb the rare but heavy rains that fell in the summer months. The man-made alterations to the city's physical setting were unsettling to residents who were tuned into the earliest phases of the postwar urban environmental movement. Natural disasters added to their discomfort. They hesitantly began to demand a more deliberate, planned approach to the city's development rather than a reactionary one.

In August 1959, a fire raging in the hills northeast of Boise underscored the challenges of the foothills. The human-caused fire burned 9,000 acres and was followed the same month by the first of three episodes of torrential rain, deluging the bare foothills until water raced down their sides and into the densely populated northeast section of the city. Meteorologists estimated that the first storm to hit that month was a 50-100 year rainfall event. .3 inches of rain fell in five minutes at one location in the hills, and more than 500 homes in Boise were soon inundated by ten inches of mud in their basements and yards. Shortly thereafter, two more storms hit Boise, sending soil and debris down Cottonwood Creek, Maynard Gulch, and Warm Springs Gulch and flooding the city two more times in one month during "The Big Mud Bath of 1959." The *Idaho Statesman* published photos of North and East End residents shoveling mud out of their homes across the front page of their paper.²⁰

¹⁹ Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside*.

²⁰ "Fire," *Idaho Statesman*, August 28, 1996, p. 8A; Sylvia Wood, "On-the-sight Lesson in Ecology for Club Women," *Idaho Statesman*, October 11, 1970, p. 9C; *Idaho Statesman*, August 21, 1959.

In its continued quest to control nature in order to accommodate humans, however, the federal government, via the U.S. Forest Service, the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and the U.S. Soil Conservation Service, engineered a new solution to the flooding problem within two months of the 1959 events. The agencies hoped that digging contours into the hillsides would help absorb additional rains and prevent future flooding. By mid-October, the agencies had cut the first contour trench in the Hulls Gulch-Picket Pin part of the aptly named Boise Front Watershed Restoration Project.

According to a documentary film created by the Bureau of Land Management, the 1959 floods had been “the result of the carelessness of man.” Decades of sheep grazing had denuded the hills of everything but non-native, fire-susceptible cheatgrass. Those working on the inter-agency rehabilitation project seeded the new trenches with native plants such as bitterbrush and wheatgrass, which provided more natural resistance to fire. Government workers also planted Ponderosa Pine seedlings, as well as alfalfa, clover, and winter rye, all perennials with extensive root systems. In addition to being more fire resistant, officials hoped that these plants would provide stability for the soil system and prevent water from running over the land surface in times of heavy rain. The film, designed to educate the community about the fragile hills and to build support for the government’s work there, insisted that the imminent element of danger made the mud bath and the prevention of further such tragedies a community issue.²¹

As in the case of Los Angeles, the 1959 fire and subsequent floods were critical events in the evolution of Boiseans’ thought on the foothills, inspiring policy makers to consider new development policies that greatly altered how the community developed.

²¹ *When the Pot Boiled Over*, a documentary film by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, c. 1975, copy located at the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Snake River office, Boise, Idaho.

The documentary film, coupled with the events themselves and yet another damaging flood on Cottonwood Creek in 1965, caused local policy makers to recognize that specific foothills planning was needed. The initial result was a vague 1959 Ada County ordinance²² followed by additional county planning in the early 1960s. It was the unincorporated parts of the *county* – not the city of Boise – within which the Treasure Valley’s proposed foothills developments had doubled in just one year.²³ Ada County Commissioners – all three of them men – were responsible for planning and regulations, and passed the county’s initial Comprehensive Plan in 1964, including the Boise Front as one of its nine distinct planning areas.²⁴ Additions to the plan, passed in 1968, were intended to “guide the physical development of the county through correlating both public and private projects and coordinating their execution in all subject matters utilized in developing and servicing land.”²⁵ According to Kay Hummel, a resident of one such development and a woman active in guiding appropriate developments into the 1980s, such a plan was desperately needed. The county had built too many early subdivisions that relied only on septic tanks, had poor water supply, narrow streets, and poor

²² Between 1958-1960, at least four subdivisions (or additions to existing subdivisions) were proposed on foothills land outside of Boise city limits: Lancaster Terrace, Claremont Heights, Boise Heights, and Warm Springs Mesa. Other development proposals had also increased dramatically. To deal with the growth, the Ada County Commissioners held a public hearing on August 20, 1959 to discuss a proposed planning ordinance that would deal with the “orderly development” of Ada County. The ordinance, which laid out subdivision process and design standards, including a requirement that areas with a topographical slope greater than 10% needed to conform with additional (unnamed) requirements, received no testimony and no protests. Thus, County Commissioners passed the new law on September 28, 1959. AR 202, Ada County Commissioners Minutes, Book 27, from February 20, 1958 to December 14, 1960, ISHS.

²³ Hearing Minutes, February 20, 1958 - June 6, 1960, Book 27, Ada County Commissioners Minutes, AR 202, ISHS.

²⁴ Ada County Zoning Commission, *Part One: Objectives, Principles & Standards of the Comprehensive Plan, Ada County* (1964), 34.

²⁵ Ada County Planning & Zoning Commission, *Comprehensive Plan, Ada County, Idaho* (April 1968) 2.

infrastructure (no sidewalks, etc.). Sewer service was not provided to the homes in Boise Heights in the central foothills, for instance, until the 1980s.²⁶

In addition to these service issues, the biggest problem encountered by the early developments was, well, slippery slopes. To prevent additional mudslides caused by flooding, the 1968 County Comprehensive Plan encouraged residential areas to be developed “primarily in the plateau and gentle slope areas rather than in the river valleys and poor drainage or high water table areas.”²⁷ The plan recognized that foothills lots had become “prime residential view areas,” but that the “development of hillside areas at flat land residential densities and standards creates problems of unstable cuts and fills due to excessive grading, erosion, street design, storm water drainage, sewerage disposal, water supply, access for fire equipment, protection of privacy, and disposition of unstable land.” To avoid such problems, the plan urged that the hills not be “over” developed, which was just vague enough for elected officials to allow the land abuse to continue.²⁸ As in Los Angeles, the growth lobby’s grip on local government was relentless in these early years.

The 1959 floods increased the valley residents’ general awareness of the foothills’ need for special consideration. While Ada County officials recognized a need to create stricter requirements regarding the lots upon which developers were permitted to build, others, at the city level, acknowledged that decades of grazing had wrought its own

²⁶ Kay Hummel, interview by Jennifer Stevens, November 21, 2007. Notes in personal files of author.

²⁷ Ada County Planning & Zoning Commission, *Comprehensive Plan, Ada County, Idaho*, April, 1968, 29, Boise Public Library, Regional Northwest Room (hereafter BPLRNW).

²⁸ *Ibid*, 31-32. Interestingly, historic grazing patterns in the foothills were already beginning to conflict with the housing developments. In almost all of these new neighborhoods, residents petitioned for the county to create “herd districts,” which would prohibit horses, mules, cattle, swine, sheep and goats from roaming freely in their neighborhoods. In approving the herd district in the Table Rock region, the commissioners noted that creation of the district would “be beneficial to the further development of the

damage and needed to be curtailed. Some federal agencies working in the Valley believed that simply damming the creeks would provide an adequate solution to the danger of floods. But certainly by the mid-1960s, policy makers in the Capitol City were aware that they would need to tame the Boise Front watershed if residential development was to continue in the foothills, regardless of the solution. On November 30, 1965 Boise City Planning and Zoning Commission annexed 11 “widely scattered” areas into the city (including land in The Highlands and Boise Heights, both central foothills developments), contingent upon finding a solution to the flooding problem caused by centrally located Crane Creek.²⁹

It is not surprising that as yet, no one proposed disallowing foothills settlement. Instead, federal agencies proposed dams as the most basic of solutions to the flooding, reflective of the mid-century nationwide turn toward the Army Corps of Engineers for flood control and so-called civil defense. Following the 1959 events, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers completed a report called Tributaries of Boise River, in which it recommended a dam across Cottonwood Creek, the most frequently overflowing waterway in the foothills. In November 1965, following *that* summer’s flooding, the head of an ad hoc committee studying foothills’ flooding potential (who also served as the director of Ada County-Boise Civil Defense) told a group of public officials and private landholders at Boise City Hall that efforts to complete Cottonwood Dam early and build additional dams on Crane Creek and Stuart Gulch should continue in spite of the approximately \$1 million cost per dam. The committee also recommended that the city close the sheep trail, reduce grazing to allow for optimum growth and survival of

area." (March 28, 1962) Hearing Minutes, January 30, February 21, and March 28, 1962, Book 28, Ada County Commissioners Minutes, AR 202, ISHS.

vegetation, use sediment basins, gully plugs and tree planting in all “active” gullies, designate the BLM as the Boise Front’s primary fire protection agency, and establish a drainage district.³⁰ The city’s public works director agreed with the committee’s recommendations.³¹ The Army Corps of Engineers finalized its plans for the dam by the fall of 1969, and the dams were authorized soon afterward.

In spite of the dams’ authorizations, the severity of the 1959 events had begun to fade into distant memory by the time the lawmakers passed the legislation ten years later. Time’s passage, together with the growing national momentum against the damming of more rivers,³² caused the plans for damming these foothills creeks to fall out of favor. In 1974, the Corps deactivated authorizations for construction of Cottonwood and Stuart Gulch dams.³³ Although the dams were never built, the controversy surrounding them demonstrated the growing awareness of the complex foothills environment. The debates pointed to a tenuous relationship between the city and its natural surroundings. Were the foothills and their watersheds *part* of the city, or were they *apart* from the city, simply an obstacle to comfortable living? The policy discussions that resulted from the 1959 floods also foreshadowed the citywide debates that would develop over the ensuing 30 years, as Boise and the unincorporated land that surrounded the city faced great population growth and development pressure.

Women Dream of Regionalism: 1970-1975

²⁹ J. Schifferdecker, “Zone Panel Would Add 11 Parcels,” *Idaho Daily Statesman*, 1 December 1965.

³⁰ “Committee Chairman Tells Group Boise Front Flood Potential Grows,” *Idaho Daily Statesman*, 16 November 1965.

³¹ “Crane Creek Sand Deposits Cause Committee to Recommend Correction of Flood Problem in North Boise,” *Idaho Daily Statesman*, 15 December 1965, p. 10A.

³² Roderick Nash, “Decisions for Permanence,” in *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 200-237.

³³ Ada Council of Government’s Citizens’ Advisory Committee, *Concept Plan Volume 1* (September 1974) 103.

While there had been a general neglect of the foothills by 1970, the cumulative effect of dense foothills development over the previous decade had in fact evoked a change in Boiseans' perception of the hills by the early 1970s. In part, the change was caused by Boise Cascade's late 1960s hiring drive that brought newcomers to the valley from all over the country. They were offering good jobs, and the men who took them brought their college-educated wives to Boise with them. With few professional opportunities available to the women and little besides family to occupy their time, they joined groups like the American Association of University Women and the League of Women Voters, which saw a rise in membership at the end of the decade.³⁴ The League's new members, motivated by the overbuilding in the hills, a withering downtown that was suffering at the hands of urban renewal, and sprawl in the valley, took up urban planning as a study item, launching them into a heated policy debate that would last decades.

Most everyone – from average citizens to federal agencies to city and county officials – was on board with the idea that foothills regulations needed, at the very least, to be discussed. In part, such regulations were meant to reduce the impact of natural disasters on downstream neighborhoods, but they also reflected the changing belief about cities and their adjoining open space. Boise had, during the previous decade, annexed many county-approved hillside developments over which the city had had no planning jurisdiction, such as the several-hundred home Highlands development. Population growth, together with the annexations, took Boise's population from 34,481 in the 1960

³⁴ Sue Reents and Joy Buersmeyer, interview by Jennifer Stevens, August 20, 2008. Transcript in personal files of author.

census to 75,000 by 1970 and 102,000 by 1980.³⁵ The valley was growing at rapid clip, causing county, city, and state officials, together with citizens at large, to voice concern that without some guidance, foothills development would run amok. A vision of Boise was needed. Would downtown Boise remain the geographic center of population, and if so, where would the people settle? And, would recreation in Boise's foothills become a defining characteristic of the quality of life that the Treasure Valley had to offer?

Many women in Boise, realizing that the city needed guidance on its growth, revitalized the 25-year old local League of Women's Voters chapter. Like Oregon's League women, Boise's members had moved to town from other places following college and often, marriage. Joy Buersmeyer, born in 1932, moved to Boise from Chicago in 1965 via a circuitous route that included a brief and unpleasant stint in the Bay Area, where they found the traffic and large population overwhelming. She moved with her husband, Clarence, and five children, following college in Connecticut and a career as a medical technologist. Sue Reents, born in 1946, moved to Boise in 1969 from Eugene, Oregon immediately after her four years at the University of Oregon and her marriage to Henry Reents. Both joined the League right away. Sue had her first child in 1970, and opted not to teach, but to maintain her political activism instead, continuing interests from her college years as a civil rights activist, years that had seen the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. and civil rights leader Robert Kennedy.³⁶

The League was a good place for these two to land. In 1964, before these women joined, the group had begun involvement in city issues, urging the city and county to pass

³⁵ U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, *Flood Plain Information, Boise, Idaho and Vicinity, Boise River and Northside Tributaries*, October, 1967, 10, BPLRNW; U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, 122nd Edition (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2002), 36.

³⁶ Reents and Buersmeyer, interview, August 20, 2008.

zoning laws that “will keep pace with community development.”³⁷ Buersmeyer, who had spent time in Chicago as well as San Francisco, had strong ideas about city growth. She knew that a strong downtown was critical to a city’s success, and soon became the local League president, guiding the chapter’s involvement in the issue of a strong city. In some ways, Boise’s small size, compared even with Portland, allowed these women great access to decision makers regarding local issues such as city planning and land use. But simultaneously, the strength of the male-dominated political structure made the women’s job even harder, and required them to confront explicit sexism to be effective.

In 1971, as the planning issues heated up, the Boise League put on a one-day conference entitled, “As We Grow,” at which many local elected and appointed officials joined with other prominent Boiseans in panels such as “Concepts of Urban Planning for Boise City and Ada County.”³⁸ Reents served as the League’s Local Government Chairman at the time of the conference, and moderated a panel that included Ada County zoning commissioners and past Boise City zoning commissioners. The Boise program also included Pacific Northwest regional policy experts, such as the executive director of the Lane (Oregon) Council of Governments (LCOG), an organization that had been working toward regional planning in the wake of the recent Oregon legislation. A summary of the day noted that the “symposium clearly pointed up the need for greater co-ordination in urban planning between Boise and Ada County, and there was general agreement that many benefits would result from more citizen education and

³⁷ Jane S. Garbacz to John Dentley, September 26, 1972, fd. 26 Local Govt. Correspondence + testimonies 1972-1975, Box 8, MS 386, League of Women Voters – Boise, ISHS.

³⁸ “As We Grow” conference program, Box 10, Fd 2 “As We Grow” Conference April 1971, MS 386, League of Women Voters – Boise, ISHS.

participation.”³⁹ However, the panelists also concluded that the people of Boise did not perceive of themselves as living in an urban area. Planning, therefore, was putting the cart before the horse. Community goals and a framework would need to be set in order to move on to consideration of things like urban boundaries. The perception that Boise was still a small time fort town had led to the lack of planning, and panelists worried that, “planning in the Boise area is a reaction, rather than an implementing directional force.” Another set of them felt frustration over the general sense that coordinated planning was a “political impossibility.”⁴⁰ The debate on this April day in a small Idaho town pointed yet again to women’s uniqueness in perceiving that the problems of environmental and hillside degradation were inextricably joined with those of urban solutions. They, like the women in Portland, saw coordinated regional planning as a solution to the destruction of the foothills and the demise of a city. And Boise, like Portland, was not so unwieldy a town in terms of population and sheer geographical size as to dismiss the idea out of hand.

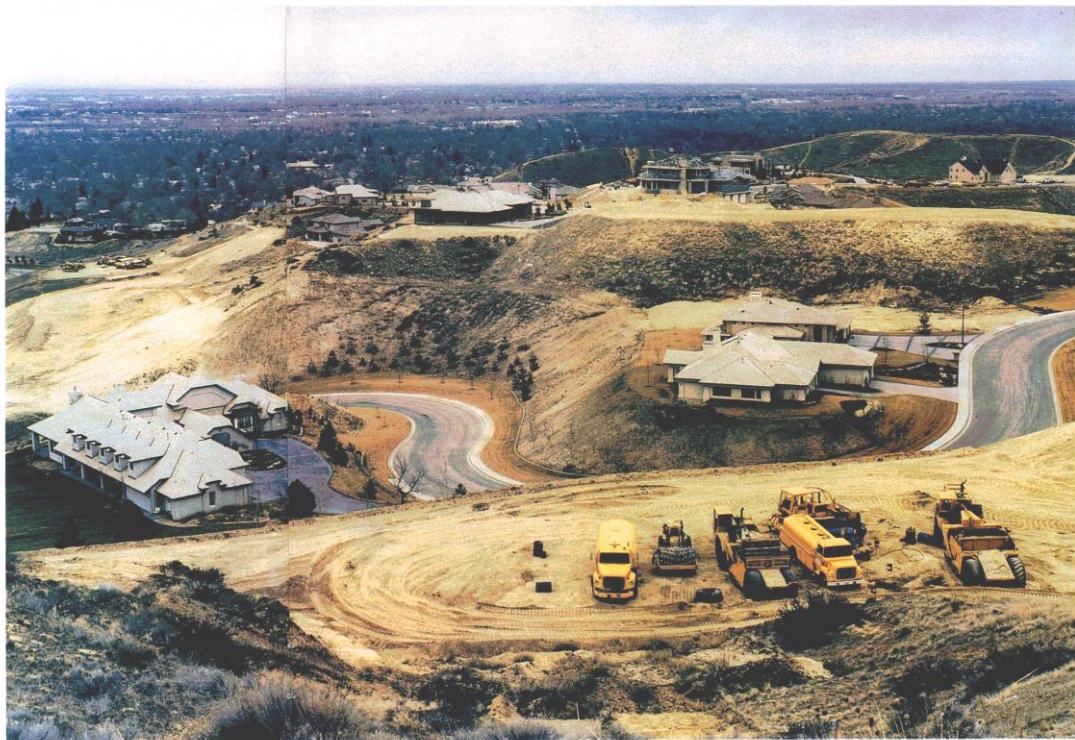
The League women were at the front of this trend toward urban planning in Boise, and particularly a new era in foothills planning, since the two went hand in hand in this small intermountain city. A new group calling itself the Ada Development Council had joined forces with the Ada Soil Conservation District to create a technical guide for hillside development in 1970, and representatives from both were at the League’s 1971 “As We Grow” conference. The document provided uniform standards and specifications for building on hillsides. The early subdivisions had so grossly erred in

³⁹ “As We Grow...One Day for the Future,” Box 10, Fd 2 “As We Grow” Conference April 1971, MS 386, League of Women Voters – Boise, ISHS.

⁴⁰ “As We Grow...One Day for the Future,” Box 10, Fd 2 “As We Grow” Conference April 1971, MS 386, League of Women Voters – Boise, ISHS.

their liberal cuts and fills that scars could be seen from across the city. (See figure 4.2, a photo of a more recent development with excessive cuts.) These new standards were expected to reduce or eliminate similar problems and provide developers with a set of guidelines to follow.⁴¹ Developers were not required to use the standards, which were only advisory, but at least they were available.

⁴¹ Ada Soil Conservation District, *Sediment and Erosion Control Guide, Boise Front Urban Area, Part II – Standards and Specifications, Ada County, Idaho*.



With view lots selling for as much as \$100,000, developers have been carving the Boise foothills into a series of terraces, leading to protests from downslope residents.

Figure 4.2

Soon after the League's seminar and with the League's enthusiastic support, local governments formed the Ada Council of Governments (ACOG) as a regional advisory body to look at foothills (and other urban) development from a regional perspective. The Council of Government (COG) movement had begun in 1954 in Detroit, Michigan, where an effort to confront problems on an area-wide basis resulted in the creation of a Supervisors' Inter-County Committee.⁴² In the Treasure Valley, the COG model seemed a good fit for the growth issue, as the valley desperately needed coordination between Ada County and Boise City governments. The creation of ACOG provided a feeling of

hope and enthusiasm for urban planning and its potential for creating a great metropolitan area in the Valley. While ACOG had no law-making powers, many considered it a panacea for local transportation and planning problems, since all local entities voluntarily chose to participate. Many hoped that a regional perspective could help the county work jointly with the cities to anticipate and conquer problems associated with runaway development. The League was a great supporter of coordinated government in the ensuing years, even advocating a city-county consolidation ballot measure in 1972.⁴³

As ACOG ramped up, developers continued to propose more housing on county land that abutted existing Boise neighborhoods, and concern from average residents of established Boise neighborhoods also solidified. A new group calling itself the Citizens Alliance expressed deep concern about managing the growth and pledged in 1971 to help control and direct it. Kenneth Pursley, a resident of Boise's East End, one of the city's original "streetcar suburbs," served as the organization's president, and his wife Marcia was equally involved.⁴⁴ Marcia, also one of seven co-founders of the non-profit Idaho Conservation League, was, at the time, serving as that organization's first executive director. She spent much of her time in the early 1970s lobbying the Idaho Legislature to pass a state law requiring local comprehensive planning, similar to what Oregon had recently done.⁴⁵ Simultaneously, they and other East End residents fought developers over the Foothills East subdivision, a proposed development in the hills nestled up

⁴² American Planning Association, <http://www.planning.org/pathways/regional.htm>, accessed on January 15, 2008.

⁴³ Jane S. Garbacz to Editor, *Idaho Statesman*, October 23, 1972, fd. 26 Local Govt. Correspondence + testimonies 1972-1975, Box 8, MS 386, League of Women Voters –Boise, ISHS.

⁴⁴ Ken Robison, "New Group to Explore Urban Environment," *Idaho Statesman*, May 19, 1971, 15.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*; Kay Hummel, interview by Jennifer Stevens, November 9, 2007. Notes in the personal files of author.

against the East End. The developer had proposed to route traffic from the new homes down the hill through the East End neighborhood, similar in home style and demographics to the North End, creating a collector street out of a narrow residential one and resulting, residents claimed, in dangerous traffic loads.⁴⁶ East Enders thus embarked on a neighborhood plan – which Boise City Council passed – to discourage further foothills development in their area.

In an effort to stall further development and allow time for proactive coordinated planning, Marcia Pursley, ACOG, the League of Women Voters and others asked Boise City Council in September 1971 to deny yet another proposed development east of Aldape Heights (adjacent to the proposed Foothills East) and pass a temporary moratorium on foothills development.⁴⁷ Like Los Angeles' Santa Monica Mountains, 90% of Boise's lower foothills were privately owned, and Pursley hoped to ward off a "bunch of little battles" against individual developers by asking the City to create a Foothills Plan and include citizen involvement in its creation. Like the women in Portland and Los Angeles, the ideals of citizen involvement, democracy, and a balanced group of non-experts was critical to these women's idea for a "good city." Plus, the Citizens' Alliance was already in place to help, Pursley argued.⁴⁸ In the absence of a foothills plan, the proposed moratorium would be in effect only until geological and soil studies, commissioned by ACOG, were complete. But they had a hunch that such studies would tell them what they instinctually already knew. Testifying in front of city council on a development in the East End, Gay Davis from the League read sections of a report

⁴⁶ Mindy Cameron, "Residents Hit Plan for Warm Springs," *Idaho Statesman*, 6 May 1971, p. C-1.

⁴⁷ Mindy Cameron, "Council Weighs Query on Uses of Foothills," *Idaho Statesman*, September 8, 1971, C7-8.

on foothills development in Palo Alto, California, and then argued that: “the fragile terrain and ecological values in the foothills is of prime importance to the future of our community.” Davis encouraged the City of Boise to defer zoning the foothills until scientists had completed a more intensive study and analysis.⁴⁹ Both Davis and Pursley viewed the foothills as critical to Boise’s identity as a growing community, essential to the quality of life the town could offer.

Boise City Council rapidly extinguished the enthusiasm and excitement generated by the birth of ACOG and talk of regionalism. In September 1971, they rejected the proposed moratorium, instead accepting the city attorney’s report that such a plan was unnecessary to safeguard the Boise Front from improper construction activity.⁵⁰ The regulations contained in the Uniform Building Code provided adequate protection already, the legal department argued. When Pursley pointedly asked Mayor Jay Amyx (who had attended the League’s April conference) whether ACOG’s report and recommendation in favor of the moratorium had held any weight, the mayor answered that ACOG’s opinion was “just given to the council for information and was nothing taking official action.”⁵¹ At that pivotal moment, the City of Boise quashed any hope that ACOG would provide an effective path to regionalism.

With the Council’s denial of a moratorium forcing their hand, the Citizens Alliance, in which Sue Reents was also active, sprung into action on its own. The

⁴⁸ Mindy Cameron, “ACOG Director Suggests Delay on Boise Foothill Development,” *Idaho Statesman*, September 14, 1971, 15.

⁴⁹ Testimony of Gay Davis, President of League of Women Voters, December 14, 1971 Re: Annexation and Zoning of the Danmor Property, Box 10, “Fd 26 Planning + Zoning 1964-1978,” MS 386, League of Women Voters –Boise, ISHS.

⁵⁰ Mindy Cameron, “Council Weighs Query on Uses of Foothills,” *Idaho Statesman*, September 8, 1971, C7-8.

⁵¹ Mindy Cameron, “Council Told Code Protects Foothills from Bad Building,” *Idaho Statesman*, 13 October 1971, p. C3-4.

group's Foothills Committee sponsored a presentation to approximately 100 interested citizens in one of the first efforts to involve average citizens in a campaign to limit and control foothills development. The group invited experts to present information on geology, aesthetics, and planned developments. The local newspaper covered the event, quoting the panel's moderator as saying, "the time has come when land abuses of the past have got to be controlled." One ACOG planner pleaded that the foothills are the one distinctive feature that creates "a sense of place" or a "memorable vision" for Boise, and the League.⁵² Boise's struggle for a comprehensive urban vision had crept into other policy issues, as well. In addition to concerns over the foothills, Boise simultaneously struggled with management of the Boise River, which ran directly through the city's center. Wildlife biologist Hugh Harper remembers that the river was a cesspool in the 1960s, with five meatpacking plants dumping their waste there: "We were wading through pools of fat globules up to our knees. Sometimes the river ran red with blood."⁵³ Two decades of contentious but steadfast struggles over the river's management has today resulted in one of the cleanest urban rivers in the nation with a well-maintained greenbelt that runs for more than twenty miles along its banks, an issue for which the League was a strong advocate as part of its vision for a green city. Despite its recent growth, Boise was a city that still had the luxury of being relatively undiscovered, and what planners did then would determine the city's reputation 30 years hence. Newly energized citizen activists, many of them newly arrived women, who had always identified Boise and Idaho with big open spaces were focused on creating that identity for

⁵² Mindy Cameron, "Scientists, Planners, Developers Enlighten Boiseans on Stakes of Foothill Growth," *Idaho Statesman*, November 17, 1971, 1D.

⁵³ Glenn Oakley, "Closing in on Open Spaces," *Focus*, Vol. XVI, No. 2, Winter 1991, p. 20, in personal files of Judy Ouderkirk.

the city as a whole. Potential development was threatening the spaces they valued, and that threat brought citizens to the table.

ACOG continued to operate and offer innovative solutions to the growth problem, in spite of its increasingly impotent status. The organization's staff prepared a draft Hillside Development Ordinance that it planned to circulate for adoption by local jurisdictions within the County. ACOG also appointed a group of citizens and public officials that came to be known as the Foothills Committee, in the hopes that any weaknesses or objections to the ordinance could be anticipated and fixed before approaching the various jurisdictions with their recommended laws. The Committee included members from both the pro- and anti-development communities. ACOG charged the Committee with reconciling various objections and criticisms to the proposed ordinance, and producing a final set of hillside development regulations that ACOG could recommend.⁵⁴ The Committee held weekly meetings for three months during the summer of 1972. ACOG staff hoped that the Committee would come away with proposed regulations that would be applied to any development proposal where the slope exceeded 10%, or where adverse conditions were present due to instability, erosion, or sedimentation. Proposed regulations included standards for roadways and driveways, a requirement for slope stabilization and re-vegetation plans that included analysis of the environmental impact of development, and a construction schedule that minimized soil disturbance during the wet season. The language in the proposed ordinance reflected the ongoing national evolution in perception of and concern for the natural environment.

The League of Women Voters continued to weigh in on the issue of foothills

development and its sister issue, comprehensive planning, during this period of ACOG's efforts, expressing concerns that echoed those of the Portland women: efficiency, democracy, and a compact city. In addition to their concern over democracy, the women involved were worried about the quality of life in Boise, fretting over "the growing public awareness that Boise's urban development may soon take on the form of a 'sluburb.'"⁵⁵ They were also concerned with environmental ramifications of foothills building. The League bombarded Ada County and Boise City commissions with letters and testimony during the early 1970s. Their letters reflected a growing appreciation for the wildlife and intact natural environment that still existed in the foothills. Betty Maguire, for one, agreed with ACOG on the concept of providing buffer zones between developed areas and undeveloped natural habitats for "reasons of mental and physical health for both man and other animals." Another member stated: "we...support the philosophy of open spaces and urban boundaries as they pertain to community identity. If it is easy to see in the mind, a place...becomes real and interest is generated."⁵⁶ The protection of the foothills was an important part of their hopes for the city's development. They desired adequate advance planning as a way to prevent overbuilding and poor building, and they remained staunch supporters of ACOG as the agency for coordinated planning. In a letter to the Ada County Commissioners in January 1973, the League's president wrote:

⁵⁴ Russell J. Carter, Foothills Committee Chairman, to Regional Planning Commission, Ada Council of Governments, September 15, 1972, in the *Regulations for Hillside Development, The Report of the Foothills Committee, August 30, 1972.*

⁵⁵ Jane S. Garbacz to John Dentley, September 26, 1972, fd. 26 Local Govt. Correspondence + testimonies 1972-1975, Box 8, MS 386, League of Women Voters, Boise, ISHS.

⁵⁶ Betty Maguire testimony to Ada County Planning and Zoning Commission, December 7, 1972; see also Marilyn Robertson to Boise Planning and Zoning Commission re: Long Range Urban Boundaries, November 21, 1972, both in "Fd 26 Local Govt. Correspondence + testimonies 1972-1975," Box 8, MS 386 League of Women Voters – Boise, ISHS.

Compatible city and county planning and zoning are essential. Let us not retreat from coordination to fragmentation and overlapping of authorities. These confuse citizens and make comprehensive planning more difficult...In 1973, we should be in an era of cooperation and coordination of local governmental agencies.⁵⁷

The plethora of such letters between the League and local governments yet again demonstrated women's concern during this era with efficient planning, organizational fairness, and democratic citizen participation, in addition to their dreams for Boise to retain a high quality of life replete with large open spaces.

Despite three months of weekly meetings, ACOG's Foothills Committee could not unanimously subscribe to the values inherent in the proposed Foothills Ordinance in a town that vigorously subscribed to an individual's property rights. Insistence by one set of representatives on the preservation and promotion of "natural morphological features" such as ridge tops, rock outcroppings, streambeds, and vistas; and respect for "the view of the hills as well as the view from the hills," failed to gain consensus. (Emphasis in original.)⁵⁸ Thus, what would become a common impasse over the next thirty years began here in the Foothills Committee. The Foothills Committee split in 1973 when developers withdrew from the process, "protest[ing] the idea of regulation as a subversive effort to end any growth of development in the foothills at all."⁵⁹ With Ada County and its cities experiencing tremendous growth and its correlating prosperity, the pro-development contingent fought against any hindrance to this growth. Like Los Angeles, Boise had a very strong growth lobby and its citizens a strong inclination toward

⁵⁷ Marilyn Robertson to Ada County Commissioners, January 19, 1973, "Fd 26 Local Govt.

Correspondence + testimonies 1972-1975," Box 8, MS 386 League of Women Voters – Boise, ISHS.

⁵⁸ Russell J. Carter, Foothills Committee Chairman, to Regional Planning Commission, Ada Council of Governments, September 15, 1972, *Regulations for Hillside Development, The Report of the Foothills Committee, August 30, 1972*, BPLRNW.

⁵⁹ Hearing Minutes, February 12, 1990, Boise City Planning & Zoning Commission, Records of the Mayoral Office, "Foothills Ord. Changes/Info," Foothills Plan, Location I-03-01, Box 8436, Boise City Record Center (hereafter BCRC), Boise, Idaho.

individual property rights. The city had always embraced pro-business values. But preservation of open space on the city's perimeter would prove to be the issue that women used to challenge the lobby's hold on local government.

The split in the Foothills Committee caused great turmoil for ACOG and for the Treasure Valley. The majority of the organization's staff resigned in the split's wake, creating another crisis of legitimacy and uncertainty. The League's new president Nancy Mandle pleaded with ACOG board members to continue fighting to "become the effective planning tool [ACOG] has the potential to be."⁶⁰ But within a year, the new ACOG staffers, too, were dismayed. A stunning nine-page memo to ACOG board members and to the "Citizens of Ada County" signed by all 17 ACOG staffers⁶¹ brought to light developers' disproportionate and long-lasting influence on local planning policy in the Treasure Valley. The memo highlighted significant historical events over the previous 2 ½ years that involved named individuals. The memo focused attention on the bankrolling of Ada County elections by developers who were then appointed to the County's Planning and Zoning Commission, these same developers "attacking urban containment schemes through scare tactics and through maligning the intentions of its proponents...employing members from ACOG staff while attacking the ACOG organization; and heavily influencing policies of the Commission even where [there are] strong business conflicts." The relationships between the various players were painstakingly detailed so that no person was left unscathed. Of the three Ada County Commissioners, one was a developer, DeWayne Bills, and the other two, as portrayed in the memo, were greatly influenced by Bills. One of the two non-developer

⁶⁰ Nancy Mandl to ACOG Board Member, July 22, 1973, "Fd 26 Local Govt. Correspondence + testimonies 1972-1975," Box 8, MS 386, League of Women Voters – Boise, ISHS.

commissioners who was clearly prejudiced toward Bills' developments, just happened to also be the brother of Boise's sitting mayor.⁶² ACOG staff's recommendations for change included the passage of ordinances preventing conflicts of interest, increasing the openness of government, and encouraging greater public involvement.⁶³ But by the close of 1974, in spite of these additional staff efforts to halt undue developer influence, ACOG was nothing more than an advisory agency without teeth, and any hope for it creating real regional change in the Treasure Valley had been lost.⁶⁴

Despite the overwhelming failure of ACOG, state action and some last ditch efforts by ACOG the following year brought some hope to citizens like Marcia Pursley, the League, and others involved in the effort to save the foothills and control Treasure Valley growth. After three years of effort, the legislature passed the Local Land Use Planning Act in 1975, mandating comprehensive planning by cities and counties, and creating a new method by which they worked together to plan land use. The Area of Impact Agreement negotiated with Ada County as a result of that law gave Boise City some control over 14,000 acres of land it might annex in the future, including the increasingly valued Hulls Gulch.⁶⁵ In addition to these new "areas of impact," Boise created a new Metro Plan Steering Committee charged with creating a new comprehensive plan for the city under the auspices of the Planning Act. The Committee

⁶¹ With the exception of executive director Al Marsden, who the staffers protected in their memo.

⁶² The relationship of the Ada County Commission to the mayor of Boise is conjecture on the author's part. However, with a last name such as "Amyx" in a city the size of Boise, with first names Jim and Jay, it is hard to imagine that the two men were not related.

⁶³ Memorandum, ACOG Staff to ACOG Board and Citizens of Ada County, July 30, 1974, "Fd 19 Ada Council of Governments 1970-1975, Box 8, MS 386, LWV – Boise, ISHS.

⁶⁴ Citizen's Advisory Committee, *Concept Plan, Goals and Objectives for Regional Long Range Planning*, September, 1974, 81-83, Box 4, Boise City Records, AR 300, ISHS; Woodward, Tim, "It's Time to Revive 'Radical' Plans for Roads," *Idaho Statesman*, July 2, 2007.

⁶⁵ Boise City Community Planning and Development Department, *Foothills Plan Background Report*, Boise State University Special Collections (hereafter BSU); *Boise City Foothills Policy Plan, an Amendment to the Boise City Comprehensive Plan, Boise, Idaho – March 1997*.

convened in February 1976 and worked on policies that it hoped would re-create downtown as the demographic center of the city: increase the population in the southeast and northeast areas of the city, and "permit" foothills development. Finally, ACOG had made a last-ditch effort to guide foothills development through the commissioning of a report called simply: "The Foothills, Background for the Issues." The report, which dealt with many foothills issues, including soil, geology, and water, served as the basis for an Emergency Foothills Ordinance that Ada County Commissioners passed in 1977. The emergency law was very controversial, aimed at halting further development until Boise City's Metroplan was adopted and county regulations underwent revision. Commenting on the shifting tides, developer Richard B. Smith, who was himself in the midst of planning for the contentious "Highlands Mall" at the base of the Highlands Subdivision, stated that the law amounted to a rezoning of the foothills "to a less intensive and thus less monetarily [sic] productive use."⁶⁶ As the courts considered Smith's case, Boise City, through the Metro Plan Steering Committee, led the way toward its own controversial policies on the foothills, and it finally looked as though Treasure Valley leaders were forming a vision to manage growth.⁶⁷

Additionally, the same year that the Legislature passed the Local Land Use Planning Act, Boise residents elected a new slate of three pro-planning, pro-ACOG members to City Council, of whom two were women. The *Idaho Statesman* endorsed Joy Buersmeyer, past-president of the local and state League of Women Voters and director of the Idaho Mental Health Association.⁶⁸ Buersmeyer opted to run when she

⁶⁶ "Smith Sues County," *The North End News*, May 1978, p. 4. MSS PERIODICALS, Box 54, Boise State University (hereafter BSU) Special Collections.

⁶⁷ Rick Ripley, "Boise Metro Plan Will Bring Change," *Idaho Statesman*, September 8, 1977.

⁶⁸ *Idaho Statesman*, 4-A, November 2, 1975.

heard Mayor Dick Eardley's off-the-record comment that he would not appoint "another god damn woman" to fill a vacated spot on the council the previous year.⁶⁹ Although Buersmeyer proclaims not to have been a feminist, the mayor's comment irked her enough to throw her hat into the ring. While anger may have provoked her candidacy, it was her strong beliefs about supporting downtown retail and opposing sprawl that spoke to Boise residents, who gave her more votes than any of the other 15 candidates, all of whom were male with the exception of the two women that won, and a conservative woman, Darlene Crawford, who lost.⁷⁰ Together with the other victorious woman, Corki Onweiler, and incumbent Marge Ewing, women now made up 50% of a six-person Boise City Council. The papers were replete with surprised stories about the myriad women elected in November 1975. Headlines read: "Ada, Canyon Elections Display Women's Clout;" "No Chauvinism in Boise;" "Voters Elect Women, Snub Bonds;" "Two Women, Incumbent Elected to Boise Council."⁷¹ Not only were regional planning and environmental protection making advances, but women in Boise were making inroads to the male-dominated political sphere, as well.

Thus, while ACOG itself had failed, the organization and its supporters had nonetheless created an awareness of the regional nature of these issues and the importance of the various local governments in creating and implementing a consistent vision across the valley. The women's conception of the environmental problems' relation to the urban ones represented an important shift for this conservative town and required a re-thinking about the growth ethos that ruled the city. Those who hoped to save the foothills from development and to see Boise grow effectively and smartly

⁶⁹ Reents and Buersmeyer, interview, August 20, 2008.

⁷⁰ *Idaho Statesman*, November 6, 1975.

continued to fight an uphill battle, but were slowly gaining influence among both elected officials and perhaps more importantly, in the court of public opinion.

Hulls Gulch I, The Rise of Neighborhood Activism: 1975-1984

Planning efforts and the continued rise of citizen activism marked the mid-to-late 1970s in the Treasure Valley. The era saw the rise of citizen-driven neighborhood associations, further advances by women in Boise's male-dominated political climate, and the beginning of some important regulations for the Valley's growth. As Boise began putting measures in place to curb urban sprawl and limit damage to the foothills, Hulls Gulch became the emblematic battle that pointed to all the problems Boise faced. The passage of the Local Land Use Planning Act mandated what before had only been voluntary. In response to the momentum of citizen activism, a changing perception and increased appreciation of the natural environment, and women on city council, developers began to cede some ground.

Boise's Metro Plan Steering Committee began meeting in 1976. Around the same time, private landowners submitted two controversial proposals to develop Hulls Gulch for housing. In spite of the fact that the Hulls Gulch land had not yet been annexed to the City, the proposals came to dominate the Steering Committee meetings, and the threat of development in this wildlife-rich watershed drove many of the policies that Boise ultimately implemented. This important year served as the genesis for what became a 25-year battle to save Hulls Gulch and the land that surrounded it. From 1976 until 2002, this segment of land was the most consistently controversial site among myriad foothills battles. It was also the site of terrific citizen involvement by women activists, who were particularly concerned about the development of the land and who discovered that

⁷¹ *Idaho Statesman*, November 7, November 6, November 5, respectively.

decision makers valued their opinions on issues of neighborhood and environmental protection. Their continued vision of a good city – in the vein of Jane Jacobs – influenced their efforts in the Gulch.

The two developers of Hulls Gulch submitted their plans to Ada County – which still held jurisdiction over the land – just one month after the city’s Steering Committee began meeting regularly. Together, the requests amounted to 2400 housing units on 1200 acres. An agreement had been reached between Boise and Ada County that the county would request an opinion on proposed developments that lay within a mile of city boundaries. Thus, while the applications were pending at the county, Boise’s Metro Plan Steering Committee held a controversial hearing on the development in December 1976, which resulted in a recommendation to limit Gulch development to 650 total new dwellings in the entire area – a reduction of nearly 1800 units.⁷² The county’s elected commissioners concurred with the City’s opinion that the development would impact Boiseans most, and agreed to Boise’s request for annexation prior to the development’s approval so that it would be subject to the regulations of Boise’s new Metropolitan Plan.⁷³

Residents of Boise’s North End neighborhood, which abuts Hulls Gulch, did not trust that the City would want or be able to stem the tide of foothills development. They were concerned about increased traffic and the loss of open space in such close proximity to their neighborhood. Additionally, the city engineer had been studying the sewer capacity problem in the North End since 1973, and had concluded that even with

⁷² Minutes, Metro Steering Committee, December 15, 1976, Boise City Planning and Development Service Department Records, Planning Division, CUP99-0063/CUP99-0065 Appeal-Somerset Ridge II, Section VII, Boise City Hall, Boise, Idaho (hereafter Appeal-Somerset Ridge II files); Ripley, “Boise Metro Plan.”

modification, the existing sewer lines could only accommodate an additional 400 units in the region, which included Hulls Gulch.⁷⁴ Like the League of Women Voters in Portland, who fought against the proliferation of special service districts, discussing service issues was one method by which North End citizens attacked these new Hulls Gulch proposals. The concerns of these North End residents – consisting mostly of middle-class white families – sparked the formation of the North End Neighborhood Association (NENA) in the summer of 1976. The group later became fairly powerful at city hall, with its aim to protect the City’s oldest neighborhood.

Al Marsden, former executive director for ACOG and now planner for both Hulls Gulch developers - Claremont Realty and G.W. Services - saw the writing on the wall even before the Ada County Commissioners ruled on annexation. The Boise Metropolitan Steering Committee had already established policies for foothills development that conflicted with the original proposal for Claremont’s Thunderhills

⁷³ Memorandum, Staff to Planning and Zoning Commission, March 15, 1977, File A-4-77, in records of the Boise City Planning and Development Service Department, Planning Division, CUP99-0063/CUP99-0065 Appeal-Somerset Ridge II file, Boise City Hall, Boise, Idaho.

⁷⁴ Boise City Planning and Zoning Commission, Public Hearing, 15 March 1977, in records of the Boise City Planning and Development Service Department, Planning Division, CUP99-0063/CUP99-0065 Appeal-Somerset Ridge II file, Boise City Hall, Boise, Idaho. NENA tried everything it could to halt the developments in Hulls Gulch, including forming opposition to the North Boise Sewer Project, which proposed to clean and grout North End sewers and reline the Resseguie trunk line. Such a project would alleviate North End sewer problems and provide capacity to serve an additional 300-400 homes in the Hulls Gulch area. The City of Boise claimed that environmental reviews were not necessary in the area but NENA disputed that claim, arguing that Housing and Urban Development (which funded the project) regulations required that “water and sewage facilities projects which will serve undeveloped areas of 100 acres or more” require an environmental impact statement. NENA sent a letter to the mayor explaining its position, and received a reply that had, according to the association’s interpretation, no relevance to the issue. Another letter was sent after the City announced its intention to apply for release of the funds, and an additional letter was sent to HUD. (“Association Challenges City Hall,” *The North End News*, December 1976, p. 1, MSS PERIODICALS, Box 54, BSU Special Collections). The sewer fight was indicative of NENA’s efforts to forestall any development whatsoever in the foothills. An entire set of records is available at Boise State University’s Special Collections documenting this fight with the City that was directly related to foothills development. See the records of The North End Neighborhood Association, MSS 99, Tom Trusky Papers, Series III, Resseguie Sewer Project 1977; Series V, The NE Neighborhood Association, Box 2, entire, BSU Special Collections.

Village.⁷⁵ Thus, Marsden submitted a new application on January 24, 1977 to Boise's Planning and Zoning Commission, where he brought the development total down to 650 units (a decrease of about 750 units) on only 325 acres of land in Hulls Gulch: 125 acres of G.W. Service's land (now Boise Water Corporation and later ORIDA Investment Corporation) and 200 acres of Claremont land. The Commission held a hearing on the application on March 15, 1977, at which neighborhood representatives fought for even stricter limits, based – at least officially – on existing sewer capacity.⁷⁶

The hearing that night represented a typical clash between potentially affected citizens and developers. Twelve of the thirty-one citizens who testified at that hearing were women, most of them associated with the neighborhood organization. The women's concern over the development's impact on traffic through their neighborhood and the addition of children to already overcrowded neighborhood schools were not environmental in the strictest sense, but more neighborhood-oriented. All opposed the concept of building in Hulls Gulch.⁷⁷ Despite their opposition and that of others, the developer succeeded in convincing the City's Planning and Zoning Commission to recommend to City Council the approval of 650 units for annexation to the city. Joan Carley, the lone woman on the commission and herself a local developer, made the

⁷⁵ In addition to the density recommendations, the policy stated: "Development in the foothills should be limited by its impact on the stable, built communities of adjacent neighborhoods." Memorandum from Staff to Planning and Zoning Commission, 15 March 1977, File A-4-77, Subject: Annexation request of Boise Water Corporation, page 5, in records of the Boise City Planning and Development Service Department, Planning Division, CUP99-0063/CUP99-0065 Appeal-Somerset Ridge II file, Boise City Hall, Boise, Idaho.

⁷⁶ "Thunderhills Comes Back Again," *The North End News*, January 1977, 1, Box 54, MSS PERIODICALS, BSU.

⁷⁷ Hearing Minutes, March 15, 1977, Boise City Planning & Zoning Commission, indexed item 36, Kay Hummel's personal collection for Boise Heights Neighborhood Association, Boise, Idaho.

motion for approval of a new zoning designation, R-1H, that would allow a density of one unit per two acres.⁷⁸ The approval followed the city staff's recommendations:

It appears the intent of the policies is to limit development in Hulls Gulch for the immediate future and provide a pragmatic response to pending applications, while at the same time indicate potential for future development after judging the impacts from the initial 650 units. [Emphasis in original.]⁷⁹

The obscurity of these intentions and the express possibility of even further development down the road had the effect of fueling the fire instead of providing a long-term settlement, and neither the developer nor the neighborhood residents felt satisfied with regard to the future of Hulls Gulch.

Indignantly asking, “Who...ever guaranteed land speculators a profit?,”⁸⁰ but realizing the power of the development community, members of NENA began working on a settlement with the Hulls Gulch property owners so that the neighborhood residents could attain a measure of comfort about future development there. After weeks of negotiation, Claremont Realty and the North End Neighborhood Association signed what they called the Negotiated Settlement on April 9, 1977. One of its key provisions limited development to the existing sewer line capacity in the North End and downstream lines, which at the time was zero. Both sides were aware that the city's plan to rehabilitate the sewer would increase its capacity by an additional 400 units in the Hulls Gulch area. But service for the additional 250 proposed units – not to mention the early foothills homes that were still on septic tanks – remained a problem that no party adequately addressed.

⁷⁸ Boise City Planning & Zoning Commission Public Hearing, 15 March 1977, regarding A-3-77 and A-4-77, in records of the Boise City Planning and Development Service Department, Planning Division, CUP99-0063/CUP99-0065 Appeal-Somerset Ridge II file, Boise City Hall, Boise, Idaho.

⁷⁹ Memorandum from Staff to Planning and Zoning Commission, 15 March 1977, File A-4-77, Subject: Annexation request of Boise Water Corporation, in Boise City Planning and Development Service Department, Planning Division, CUP99-0063/CUP99-0065 Appeal-Somerset Ridge II file, Boise City Hall, Boise, Idaho.

The Negotiated Settlement also required Claremont to build the development under planned-unit development procedures. Such procedures required an application that took “into consideration the physical limits of the site, including floodways, slopes, geology, soils, hydrology, and other potential hazards.” Some of the most important promises came in the second section of the agreement, in which Claremont agreed to fully cooperate with the City and other public agencies to establish a system to monitor the development’s impact. Additionally, the parties agreed that, “the remaining land will not be subject to development until the impacts of the first development have been assessed in accordance with the [Metro Plan] Halls Gulch policies.”⁸¹ This last point was an important one for the residents of the North End. They trusted that the City of Boise and the developers themselves would be able to objectively evaluate the developments and therefore make rational decisions later, based on facts. The staff report submitted for the Planning and Zoning hearing had supported the idea of later assessment, as well.⁸²

City Council, which received the recommendation for the development’s approval from Planning and Zoning, approved the developer’s annexation request *with the Negotiated Settlement’s conditions* by a 4-2 vote. Joy Buersmeyer – serving her first term on City Council – cast one of the two opposing votes, arguing that it was unfair to give the entire allowable building approvals to just two of the eligible landowners in the area. Her vote was no doubt influenced by fellow League member Patricia Chase’s testimony, which embodied the women’s desire for a compact city with open space on its perimeter, stated on behalf of the League that there were more appropriate places to build

⁸⁰ “Thundermont or Clarehills,” *The North End News*, February 1977, 1, Box 54, MSS PERIODICALS, BSU.

⁸¹ “Test of Negotiated Agreement,” *The North End News*, April 1977, 2, Box 54, MSS PERIODICALS, BSU.

within the City than in Hulls Gulch.⁸³ Nonetheless, the agreement and its approval by City Council did not *guarantee* the developers the full 650 units, nor were “they given carte blanche to develop the annexed area any way they see fit.” The developers were to submit a Planned Unit Development/Conditional Use Permit application to the City for approval, to which the neighborhoods would provide close scrutiny. Residents of the downstream North End sought open space, clustered homes, and recreational amenities in the development, and hoped that traffic impacts would not harm their neighborhood.⁸⁴

After City Council’s decision, the neighborhood newspaper noted that over the course of the controversy, “NENA has established itself as a body to be reckoned with.”⁸⁵ So had the other affected neighborhood residents. The neighborhood associations – NENA, East End, and Boise Heights – had all become a force in policy making, and had also provided an opportunity for many women to become involved in and impact the fight to save Hulls Gulch. Neighborhood women joined together with the Boise chapter of League of Women Voters in battling these developments and engaged in debates about growth, urbanization, planning, and the natural environment.⁸⁶ City Council’s passage of the Metro Plan in October 1978⁸⁷ ensured that the neighborhoods and the women associated with them would continue to have a cause. With the adoption of the new comprehensive plan, “Foothills development was placed in a neutral position - not

⁸² Memorandum, Staff to Planning and Zoning Commission, March 15, 1977, File A-4-77, Appeal-Somerset Ridge II files, Boise City Hall, Boise, Idaho.

⁸³ Patricia A. Chase of League of Women Voters to Boise City Planning and Zoning Commission, March 15, 1977; indexed items 31, Kay Hummel’s personal collection for Boise Heights Neighborhood Association, Boise, Idaho.

⁸⁴ “Negotiated Settlement Clarified,” *The North End News*, April 1977, 1, MSS PERIODICALS, Box 54, BSU Special Collections.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Patricia A. Chase of League of Women Voters to Boise City Planning and Zoning Commission, March 15, 1977; Sue Hayden to Boise City Planning and Zoning Commission, March 14, 1977; indexed items 31, 28, Kay Hummel’s personal collection for Boise Heights Neighborhood Association, Boise, Idaho

⁸⁷ Boise City Ordinance 4298 (October 16, 1978).

encouraged, but not a low priority either."⁸⁸ Residents may have obtained a compromise with the developers this time, but the plan's vagueness with regard to development in the foothills meant a lack of clarity about whether they could win the larger war.

In 1979, as the flowers began to bloom in Hulls Gulch and the songbirds returned from their winter migrations, Boise's Planning and Zoning Commission finally heard Claremont Realty's proposed concept plan for the development known today as Somerset Ridge. It included grand plans for 369 residential units located on 200 acres. Areas of "hillside reserves" on the area's steepest slopes set off the clustered home sites shown on the plats. The neighboring Boise Heights residents registered their opposition to the plan with a petition that bore hundreds of signatures and focused on the traffic patterns and the danger to children playing on their narrow roads. They also objected to new houses being built adjacent to theirs that would potentially have sewer service when they still relied on undependable septic tanks.⁸⁹

Over the next few years, neighbors and developers continued to spar, though with less hostility. Marsden requested approval for one departure after another from the Somerset Ridge Foothills Concept Plan that Council approved in 1979. The developer's original plan had called for clustering numerous homes together in relatively flat portions of the annexed land, leaving more sensitive areas as open space between the clusters. The Metro Plan policies encouraged developments such as these.⁹⁰ Kay Hummel, a Boise native who was born to civic-minded parents and who had an abiding love of wilderness, returned to her hometown in the 1980s, resided in Boise Heights, and

⁸⁸ Boise City Community Planning and Development Department, *Foothills Plan Background Report*, iv.

⁸⁹ Boise Heights residents to Boise City Planning & Zoning Department, April 2, 1979, indexed item 91, in Kay Hummel's personal collection for Boise Heights Neighborhood Association, Boise, Idaho.

followed the controversy closely.⁹¹ She became active in the fight to control foothills development and characterized City Council's approval of Somerset Ridge this way: "Representations regarding zero lot line patio homes, town homes and apartments factored into the approval of higher density [than the total annexed acreage would have allowed under existing policies] since such units require less land and less cutting and filling of foothills topography, while supplying more dwelling units."⁹² But what seemed like monthly visits to city hall from Marsden to change one thing or another from the original overall concept plan wore the City down, and the cluster concept faded.⁹³ Soon, the local paper and local officials were lamenting the "piecemeal" nature of recent foothills development.

Hulls Gulch II, Continuing the Tradition and Winning the Fight: 1984-1993

The evolution of a distinct debate over urban planning marked the 1970s in Boise. But the debate proceeded in stops and starts. When the Valley experienced growth and good economic times, which inevitably threatened the fragile hills, the citizens were heavily engaged in growth control and creating a vision for the city. But in slow times, dialogue and enthusiasm waned. Additionally, for average citizen activists, the bureaucratic system at city hall made it hard to keep track of all the changes in development plans. Leaders also found it hard to maintain people's motivation for long periods of time. Such was the case in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when Valley growth slowed. The signing of the Negotiated Settlement as well as Boise's passage of the Metro Plan indicated to

⁹⁰ "P&Z Hears Claremont Request," *The North End News*, May 1979, 1; "Council Rejects Claremont Appeal," *The North End News*, June 1979, 1, both in Box 54, MSS PERIODICALS, BSU.

⁹¹ Kay Hummell, interview, November 9, 2007.

⁹² Boise Heights Neighborhood Association (Kay Hummel) to Boise City Planning & Zoning Commission, September 29, 1999, Appeal-Somerset Ridge II files, section VIIc, Boise City Hall, Boise, Idaho.

⁹³ Shannon Lafferty, "Somerset Ridge Earns P&Z Nod Despite Debate," *Idaho Statesman*, June 20, 2000.

many people that the battle had been won and the city government was monitoring growth appropriately.

New activists and new controversies helped continue in the 1980s what had begun in the 1970s. About the time that the Negotiated Settlement was signed, Anne Hausrath moved to Boise. Pregnant with her first child upon when she arrived, her time was occupied with the usual new family demands and not immediately with neighborhood activism. But her own liberal education at Brown University and her deep yearning for peace soon pulled her toward a cause. In 1981, Hausrath began the Peace Quilt project, bringing together 24 women and one child to make quilts for “ordinary citizens in the Soviet Union,” all in a grass roots effort to prevent nuclear war. According to Anne, “the Quilt project really changed the way I looked at the world.” It was during the Quilt project that she learned what Margaret Mead once said: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.” From that time on, Anne was an activist.⁹⁴

Judy Ouderkirk, too, had returned to Boise in 1980 after years away. While gone, she had cultivated an unassuming personality of activism. “Every place I’ve lived, I’ve been near open space,” she said. Her early years on a farm in Boise were the obvious roots of her passion to maintain open space, but even her apartments in urban Cincinnati and Philadelphia were next to an open field and woods, where she took her young children out to walk “all the time.” And, during her time in Atlanta from 1974-1980, she fought developers who wanted to put apartment buildings in a wide swath of open woodland next to her neighborhood of single-family homes. Her return to Boise, coupled

⁹⁴ Anne Hausrath, interview, April 12, 2006.

with her 1983 move to a house across the street from Anne and Alan Hausrath, were destiny in the making.⁹⁵

Although neither woman was active in the radical feminist movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s, both had strong ideas about women's equality, and neither shied away from asserting it. Hausrath, who graduated from Brown in 1971, was, in her own words, "totally oblivious" to the activism going on around her, and notes that feminism in Boise was a "dirty word." Her own mother, who had supported the family since her father's unexpected death in 1960, had raised Anne to assume that women were equal. She observed her mother's 17 years of service on the Forest Grove, Oregon Planning Commission, and never really gave it a second thought. In fact, in an era when women Anne's age were shunning marriage as passé and hopelessly traditional, she married her husband of 25 years the summer after college and never looked back. Hausrath claims to have only come into feminism in the late 1980s, just before the Hull's Gulch fight began. Her host on a 1988 trip to Quebec was dumbfounded when Anne declared that she was "not a feminist." Upon being barraged by rapid-fire, provocative questions from her female host, Anne soon changed her mind about her feminist status. Ouderkirk also was not a feminist in the radical sense. She completed college in 1964 but married soon afterwards and followed her husband around the country for the next twelve years. Nonetheless, she divorced him in 1976 and says she was "always a little bit of a rebel," with some strong ideas about women's equality. Ouderkirk also describes her mother as independent. Both women operated from a strong base of equality.⁹⁶

Despite both women's avowed lack of involvement in the formal woman's

⁹⁵ Judy Ouderkirk, interview, November 7, 2007.

⁹⁶ Judy Ouderkirk and Anne Hausrath, August 5, 2008. Notes in author's files.

movement, their closely held beliefs about women's equal status strongly impacted their activism. Yet their gendered domesticity was a strategy they utilized to win adherents, suggesting the same cautious feminism from two decades before in both Portland and Los Angeles. Although they both assumed equality in their fight for Hull's Gulch, Ouderkirk possessed a fierce independent pride that went along with single motherhood. As they gathered on Ouderkirk's living room floor to plan their policy attacks, Judy's children were always present. Their presence, together with her lack of paid work at the time, conveyed the idea that Ouderkirk was nothing for anyone to be afraid of – she was, after all, just a mom. Hausrath, too, had the same non-threatening status. In both cases, the women's very domestic life outside of their activism helped them to advance their cause.

Although the North and East End neighborhoods continued to monitor events in the foothills and established policies of their own through neighborhood plans adopted by City Council in the early 1980s,⁹⁷ citizen action faltered until 1988 when citizens formed the Boise Front Coalition. Two things brought the Coalition together. First, the city was poised to revise its 1982 Hillside ordinance, and citizens were anxious over rumors that had been circulating about the city's plans.⁹⁸ Second, a foothills confrontation between rancher Charlie Gibson and dirt bike riders in April 1987 created awareness of a new problem in the foothills: too many people engaged in myriad activities that often resulted in trespassing on private land and over-use, a growing national problem that historian

⁹⁷ "Resident Recommendations for the East End Neighborhood, Still Active After All These Years, April 1981;" "Draft: North End Neighborhood Plan, March 1981," ISHS Vertical File, "Boise, Idaho - Planning & Zoning."

⁹⁸ Memorandum, Bob Kresge, P.E. to Planning and Zoning Commission, February 2, 1990, "Foothills Ord. Changes/Info," Location I-03-01, Box 8436, Foothills Plan, Records of the Boise Mayoral Office, Boise City Record Center, Boise, Idaho; Memorandum from Bob Kresge, Civil Engineer Public Works Department to Reviewers of Proposed Hillside Ordinance Amendments RE: Revisions to Hillside and Foothill Area Developments Ordinance, PWE 062, 7/7/88, "Foothills Ord. Changes/Info," Location I-03-01, Box 8436, Foothills Plan, records of the Boise Mayoral Office, BCRC, Boise, Idaho.

Roderick Nash called “loving wilderness to death.”⁹⁹ By the late 1980s, Boise’s urban wilderness – the foothills – were blighted by off-road tire tracks, stripped by overgrazing and even used by some as a dumping ground. Someone needed to mediate the mounting problems between landowners and recreational users.¹⁰⁰ With the environmental movement in full swing, public support had ramped up enough to pursue more adequate protection for the foothills.

While the ordinance revision efforts were ongoing at City Hall, citizens in the North and East Ends faced more urgent events. Since the Hulls Gulch agreement of 1977, North Enders had witnessed the construction of dozens of single-family homes that had been approved in “piecemeal” fashion by a less vigilant council following the 1970s negotiations.¹⁰¹ The appearance was a far cry from the clustered village and mixed density concepts that earlier city council members had approved. Moreover, the commitment made by the developer and the City (by virtue of accepting the 1977 Negotiated Settlement) to monitor conditions following that first development had been quickly forgotten. Despite the city’s requirement that Orida Investments Group file annual progress reports with the city regarding dwellings constructed, traffic load increases, and flow of sewage from the development into Boise facilities, no reports appear to have been filed.¹⁰² Thus, when subsequent phases of development came before the City, there was no data upon which to justify denials.

This kind of complacency marked development in the hills surrounding Hull’s Gulch when, in April 1989 on a walk in Hulls Gulch, Anne Hausrath and Judy Ouder Kirk

⁹⁹ Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*.

¹⁰⁰ Craig Quintana, “Foothills Clash Spurs Change,” *Idaho Statesman*, May 16, 2001.

¹⁰¹ Kay Hummel, interview, November 9, 2007.

saw the sign announcing Orida Investment Corporation's plans for the next phase of its subdivision in Hulls Gulch. The 303-unit development would be built on land that contained wetlands, trees and numerous hiking and biking trails. On the back of a manila envelope, Hausrath jotted an urgent note to Ouderkirk after her visit to City Hall later that day: "Judy - This looks serious! Please pass it around!" Inside the envelope was the staff report on the applicant's request, which was highlighted in pink: "variance to the Floodplain Ordinance to *allow physical relocation of the floodway and floodplain of Hulls Gulch.*" [Emphasis added.] The initial plan included 25 houses in the floodplain. Ouderkirk covered the page with angry scribbled notes: "Is such change and destruction for 25 families reasonable?" "No 'open space' left for North End resident use?"¹⁰³ The proposal's potential for serious controversy was not lost on city staff. "The development involves significant physical alteration of the lower Hulls Gulch," wrote the city engineer. "Considering the history of past development proposals in this area," he continued, "this development/drainage project may become controversial."¹⁰⁴ The engineer had no idea how right he was.

Orida – successor to the prior landowner – proposed major changes to the natural landscape of Hulls Gulch. Cuts into the hillside would have a 2:1 slope and be up to 53 feet in height, and much of the development was proposed for the area lying in the existing Federal Emergency Management Agency's 100-year floodplain. In order to mitigate potential flooding and avoid compliance with the City's floodplain ordinance,

¹⁰² Susan M. Stacy, Boise Director of Planning & Community Development to Wayne Booe c/o Orida Investment Corp., October 17, 1984, in folder "Letters/Wetlands," in silver box 2, personal collection of Judy Ouderkirk.

¹⁰³ Floodplain Review Staff Report, File Number: FPR-1-89, in personal files of Judy Ouderkirk, file "1989."

the developer proposed construction of an artificial channel for Hulls Gulch runoff to flow away from the development. As Boise urban planning had evolved, individual awareness of fragile lands also had grown. The applicant's proposal to "dewater" the wetlands greatly angered many citizens and Boise City staff acknowledged that the plan lacked compliance with stated goals in Boise's Metro Plan as well as the city's Floodplain Ordinance. The Metro Plan included policy statements such as "The gulch floodways shall be used for open space," and an open space goal that read: "Opportunities for recreation, exercise, relocation and contact with nature will be provided for urban residents through the use of land as open space." [Emphasis in original.] The Floodplain Ordinance was even more specific: "The floodway boundary line may not be relocated through physical alteration to the lands in the floodplain."¹⁰⁵ The city engineer put it bluntly in a letter to Boise's mayor: "This project will significantly alter the physical environment."¹⁰⁶ The citizens knew it, too, and reacted in kind.

The initial hearing on the application was to take place on April 26, 1989. By April 11, Hausrath and Ouderkirk had begun a massive publicity blitz and organizational campaign.¹⁰⁷ In a small town not particularly famous for anyone but French fry billionaire magnate J.R. Simplot, the people leading their contact list were "somebodies"

¹⁰⁴ Bob Kresge, Civil Engineer to Mayor Kempthorne and Council Members, 1 March 1989, in records of the Boise City Planning and Development Service Department, Planning Division, Hulls Grove Subdivision BCS-55-88 1989, Subdivision Records, Boise City Hall, Boise, Idaho.

¹⁰⁵ Floodplain Review Staff Report, File Number: FPR-1-89, p. 7-8, in personal files of Judy Ouderkirk, file "1989."

¹⁰⁶ Bob Kresge, Civil Engineer to Mayor Kempthorne and Council Members, 1 March 1989, in records of the Boise City Planning and Development Service Department, Planning Division, Hulls Grove Subdivision BCS-55-88 1989, Subdivision Records, Boise City Hall, Boise, Idaho.

¹⁰⁷ April 11, 1989 Information regarding File Number FPR-1-89, folder marked "Agendas" in personal files of Judy Ouderkirk, silver box.

in Boise. Walt Minnick was the President and CEO of timber company Trus Joist.¹⁰⁸ Minnick's wife, A.K. Lienhart, was anchorwoman for the local ABC affiliate. Morley Nelson was a well-known birder who had founded the Snake River Birds of Prey Natural Area, while Kathy Troutner was a large landowner in the Boise area and Jeff Fereday (Kay Hummel's husband) a local environmental lawyer. There were also people on the list who were neighborhood activists and who would go on to become important policy makers, including Hausrath herself and North End Neighborhood Association President Elaine Clegg, both of whom later became elected councilwomen for the city.

A month later the Hull's Gulch activists had a name for their group – the Wetlands Coalition – and had attracted 13 attendees for its May 31, 1989 meeting. Within the span of these first eight weeks, they made contact with various governmental agencies and other non-profit groups to determine the potential avenues for opposition to the proposed residential development and re-channeling of the Gulch. Anne and Judy contacted the local chapter of the Audubon Society to help document the startling variety of bird life in Hulls Gulch, and the women's supporters worked to come up with a legal definition of "wetland" and embarked on a letter writing campaign to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers opposing the granting of a permit to drain the area. Additionally, the women managed to land a meeting with Wayne Booe, the president of Boise Water Corporation, the applicant's parent company, in June, and another with Boise Mayor Dick Kempthorne in August.¹⁰⁹

These women took on the role of citizen experts. Rather than relying on their domestic expertise to explain their advocacy for the Gulch, they went to the agencies and

¹⁰⁸ Minnick also ran in 2008 for the second district Congressional seat in Idaho and won.

scientists they knew would hold sway for the local policy makers. They engaged in the men's world of experts. And, they formed a new organization to forge community in their neighborhood and throughout the city. They utilized their domestic organizational skills to create a strategy in the world of public policy without relying on their domesticity for justification.

Different yet related motivations caused these two women to act. Hausrath had very specific ideas about Boise and about cities generally. She had left the Portland, Oregon area after high school, and spent almost a decade on the East Coast for her education. She was happy to have re-established "a home base in the West" when she moved to Boise. In the interim, Jane Jacob's *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* had greatly influenced her ideas about city issues. She felt that open space near the city's center would help reduce reliance on cars and help stop sprawl. Hull's Gulch in particular served as a natural playground for her family, which included two daughters and a son. At a very basic level, she was also concerned with the human alteration of natural landscapes. A different kind of motivation moved Ouderkirk. She craved a sense of community and expected people to do the right thing for the simple reason that it was *the right thing*. For her, the Gulch was a place where people convened with nature, and its presence at the outskirts of the North End helped establish that neighborhood as a unique place. There was no need for homes there, she mused, and it remained a black and white issue for her about what was right for the hills as well as for the adjacent neighborhood.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ The Wetlands [sic] Coalition, Minutes of the May 31, 1989 Meeting; Wetland Coalition, August 10, 1989 Agenda both in folder marked "Agendas" in personal files of Judy Ouderkirk, silver box.

¹¹⁰ Judy Ouderkirk and Anne Hausrath, interview, August 5, 2008.

The two women formed a lasting friendship and tight community of their own from their work in the Gulch. According to Ouderkirk, Anne “was the idea person.”¹¹¹ Conversely, Hausrath claims she could not have “done Hulls” without Judy.¹¹² As evidence of that, Hausrath hatched the plan for the nonprofit Wetlands Coalition, and Ouderkirk collected the first \$500 for the organization in September 1989, following the Wetlands Coalition’s proposal to Mr. Booe offering to purchase the lands in question.¹¹³ Despite Booe’s initial decline of the offer,¹¹⁴ negotiations continued. The two women worked together, utilizing each other’s strengths and compensating for each other’s weaknesses. Ouderkirk was the list maker, the file keeper, the organizer. Hausrath found out what needed to be done and did it, and she got other people to follow along. She self-deprecatingly claims not to be a self-starter, however, and says that all of her best efforts in life have been with a partner.¹¹⁵ Hull’s Gulch was no exception. And in both of their cases, they instinctually felt that developing Hull’s Gulch *just wasn’t right* because of the hold that developers had on the city. They fervently believed that this development was not in the best interest of the citizens of Boise.

This grass-roots effort was stunning in its initial and ultimate success despite myriad bumps along the road. Thanks to Hausrath and Ouderkirk’s efforts, the developer revoked his application for the 25 Gulch homes that formed Hulls Grove Phase II on April 25, 1989. However, that was only the beginning of the renewed fight. Orida

¹¹¹ Judy Ouderkirk, interview, November 7, 2007.

¹¹² Anne Hausrath, interview, April 12, 2006.

¹¹³ Paper dated November 11, 1993, including copy of check dated September 9, 1989 from Harold Eastman in the amount of \$500 made out to the Wetlands Coalition, personal collection of Judy Ouderkirk; Anne Stites Hausrath to Wayne Booe, July 14, 1989, folder marked “Letters/Wetlands,” silver box 2, in personal files of Judy Ouderkirk.

¹¹⁴ Wayne L. Booe to Ann [sic] Hausrath, August 10, 1989, in folder “Letters/Wetlands,” in silver box 2, personal collection of Judy Ouderkirk.

¹¹⁵ Judy Ouderkirk and Anne Hausrath, interview, August 5, 2008.

continued with its plans for approximately 200 homes immediately outside the wetlands area, and City Council approved the first phase of the development in July 1990, justifying it by pointing to Orida's offer to give the city control over 190 additional Orida-owned acres outside the City limits. However, Council put a condition on the approval, saying that no further development would be approved until a concept plan had been submitted and approved for the entire 300-acre property.¹¹⁶ Despite the condition, Council continued to approve phases without the larger conceptual plan in place. North Enders, disappointed with their elected representatives, had to rely on Booe in their desperation for a solution that would preserve their backyard playground. Mindful of the 1977 Negotiated Settlement, residents of this established neighborhood hoped for another compromise. But Booe wanted \$1 million for the land. The number was daunting.

By this time, Hausrath had come up with a vision for Hulls Gulch that won a great deal of citizen support, despite numerous official setbacks. In her mind, a nature preserve, integrated with the existing city park to the area's immediate west, would create a holistic unit with easy public access. Anne and Judy envisioned a center for educating children on the natural environment, school field trips to the area, and a respite from the bustle of city life. In describing her plan in a plea for support to Mayor Dirk Kempthorne, she characterized Boise as a "pioneer in preserving urban parks and the Greenbelt," and argued that the city "has an opportunity to lead the west in the establishment of foothills open space."¹¹⁷ Boise had, in fact, done some creative planning with the Boise River, passing an ordinance protecting it from development within 200

¹¹⁶ Gary Richardson to Hon. Dirk Kempthorne, Mayor, December 19, 1990, in folder "Letters/Wetlands," in silver box 2, personal collection of Judy Ouderkirk.

¹¹⁷ The Wetlands Coalition to Mayor Dirk Kempthorne, July 1989, in folder "Letters/Wetlands," in silver box 2, personal collection of Judy Ouderkirk.

feet of the 6500 cubic feet per second water line, and pouring money into the construction of the Greenbelt, a unique feature that would eventually provide citizens with more than 30 miles of riverside pathways along which to bike, run, skate and play. During the town's history, leaders also had accepted gifts of land from benefactors who saw the need for great parks in the city center, creating the 89-acre Julia Davis park in 1907 and the 145-acre Ann Morrison park in 1957. But in spite of these bright spots, Boise's City Council seemed determined to hurt the women's efforts by granting the developer one approval after another.

The city's dismissal of their concerns was disheartening. But the women maintained their optimism and were praised for their upbeat behavior. Idaho's governor Cecil Andrus,¹¹⁸ renowned for his efforts on behalf of the environment, wrote to Ouderkirk in July 1990:

I know things haven't been going your way in Hulls Gulch, but don't ever feel your efforts are in vain. It's true that 'the best disinfectant is sunshine,' and your group has focused a great deal of light on the whole matter of development along the Boise Front. Because of your efforts, citizen awareness has been heightened enormously, developers will have to give more consideration to the environment before moving into a natural area, and Boise will be further encouraged to undertake enlightened growth planning.¹¹⁹

The citizens of the Wetlands Coalition felt sidelined to say the least. They were excluded from "unofficial" meetings between Boise Planning and Zoning Commission members, city staff, and the developer's representatives, and remained concerned that developers had undue influence over what was supposed to be a public process. Like the women in

¹¹⁸ Governor Andrus served as United States Secretary of the Interior under President Jimmy Carter from 1977-1981.

¹¹⁹ Cecil Andrus to Judith Ouderkirk, July 30, 1990, in folder "Letters/Wetlands," in silver box 2, personal collection of Judy Ouderkirk.

Los Angeles and Portland, the desire to open that process became an important footnote to these citizens' primary cause to save Hulls Gulch.¹²⁰

Despite the setbacks, Hausrath and Ouderkirk were not deterred. Keeping Margaret Mead's wisdom in mind, they and hundreds of concerned Boise residents, many from the North End and many of them women, became active in the Wetlands Coalition, meeting weekly on Judy's 7th Street living room rug to plan the sale of bumper stickers, t-shirts, and baked goods, put together fund-raising concerts and dances, plan letter-writing campaigns and design yard signs. Anne's summer 1990 departure for a year in Africa with Alan was difficult for Judy, but the Coalition had so many volunteers by then that she was hardly alone. Judy was an organizational mastermind. She kept on top of every permit date, every deadline requirement, and every single contact that would be useful to the cause. She devoted every spare minute she had to the effort to save Hulls Gulch. She reflects today that her daughter, who was in high school at the time, probably does not remember the era fondly. In fact, a volunteer for the Coalition, who knew the toll such activism took, wrote a letter to Judy's daughter Kirsten, thanking her for her patience on behalf of

all the little owls, chipmunks, frogs, [and] wild flowers...your taking messages, answering at least a million phone calls, greeting people at the door in your nightie, looking for a chair to sit on in the dining room every Wednesday night, is really contributing to the cause. What your mom is doing is very important to improve the quality of life for the city of Boise. She is standing up for her beliefs.¹²¹

While Judy was not motivated specifically by the desire to leave a legacy for children, she nonetheless set an example of activism for her own, extending the domesticity of her

¹²⁰ Anne Stites Hausrath to Lee Dillion, Chairman of the Planning & Zoning Commission, April 12, 1990; Gary Richardson to G. Anne Barker, Chairman of the Planning and Zoning Commission, November 8, 1989, in folder "Letters/Wetlands," in silver box 2, personal collection of Judy Ouderkirk.

home to the world outside her door. Divorced, raising two children on her own and forming a citizen organization, she was anything but domestically contained.

By November 1, 1993, the coalition had raised more than \$1.2 million, including federal money from the Land and Water Conservation fund.¹²² Close to half of the citizen contributions came in amounts of less than \$100.¹²³ In spite of his position as president of the development company, Booe had done everything he could to help Hausrath and Ouderkirk. He accepted \$300,000 of the total amount raised by the Coalition to purchase 55 acres in the Gulch; the rest was donated to the Audubon Society and the Boise Parks Department when the U.S. Senate passed a bill that appropriated \$625,000 to purchase additional lands in Hulls Gulch. Additionally, the City of Boise signed a land exchange agreement with Orida that preserved yet another 100 acres there.¹²⁴ Purchase of the land and the saving of Hulls Gulch in 1993 was the first of what would be a decade of bittersweet victories for the foothills' citizen activists, for while Orida developments all but ceased, Hulls Gulch's other landowner, Claremont Realty, remained hot on North Enders' heels with continued development plans for their adjacent property.

Today, both women say that preservation of Hull's Gulch was the most significant thing they ever did. Hausrath says that the fight even eclipses her eight years on city council. It is hard to overstate the significance of the battle to the long-term identity of the City of Boise. The citizen-directed, grass roots nature of it showed city leaders the importance of open space to the residents of this growing town, and helped

¹²¹ Pam Leverett to Kirsten Ouderkirk, April 12, 1990, in folder "Letters/Wetlands," in silver box 2, personal collection of Judy Ouderkirk.

¹²² Paper dated November 11, 1993, including copy of check dated September 9, 1989 from Harold Eastman in the amount of \$500 made out to the Wetlands Coalition, personal collection of Judy Ouderkirk.

created the political will to create a long-term policy for the city's fragile hillside lands. The Hulls Gulch fight made foothills growth control a permanent fixture on the Boise policy scene and forced leaders to deeply contemplate how their city would grow.

The next five years were dominated by the city's efforts to create a foothills policy plan, a process that was marked by intense disagreements between developers and citizen activists, and which followed on the heels of this women-led preservation movement. Not everyone was happy with the plan. Some thought it too lenient, and others, too restrictive. But an important aspect of the adoption of the *Foothills Policy Plan* was the degree of cooperation established between the City and Ada County for regulatory review in the Foothills Area of Impact. For the first time since the failed attempts to cooperatively plan in the late 1960s, the two entities used the same set of policies for planning development in the foothills. The County agreed to adopt the plan for the Area of Impact and at the same time limit the kind of zone changes possible in this area. The plan was intended not just to serve the city but also to guide Ada County, whose leaders saw it "as a vital part of their own planning process and an instrumental guide to development in both jurisdictions."¹²⁵

Conclusion

Earlier activists such as Sue Reents and Joy Buersmeyer focused on broader planning issues and were motivated by their desire to see Boise become a great city in its own right, learning from the mistakes of its western neighbors. Buersmeyer and Reents were trendsetters, adopting strong environmental and urban viewpoints that, by Boise

¹²³ Emily Simnitt, "Monument Honors Hulls Gulch Volunteers," *Idaho Statesman*, July 2, 2002.

¹²⁴ *Idaho Statesman*, October 1, 1992; *Idaho Statesman*, November 2, 1993.

¹²⁵ *Boise City Foothills Policy Plan, an Amendment to the Boise City Comprehensive Plan*, Boise, Idaho – March 1997.

standards, were radical. Even more fundamental was their lack of domestic justification. Like the women in Los Angeles and Portland, these women strategically used domesticity to advance their cause without relying on it for justification. Their acceptable relationship with nature and cities, coupled with Boise's accessible size, gave the women a voice.

Judy and Anne had different motivations for their work. Anne's concern about the future left to her children was evident in her written pleas. She often talked about increasing urban density and the need to "consider seriously the legacy we leave our grandchildren and great-grandchildren." She envisioned a Hulls Gulch that provided an opportunity "to see that children then have a place to catch tadpoles, watch hawks, and enjoy a rich, varied open space habitat."¹²⁶ Judy was driven instead by what was "right" in her mind. Her love and passion for open space certainly played a key role, but more than anything, she did not like the idea of average citizens being sidelined by an undemocratic process. But by 1989, environmental values were a given for Hausrath and Ouderkirk. If anything, it is interesting that Anne brought the children back into the debate when it had been absent from such battles for so long. In Boise, developers' continued influence on the process necessitated a return to this historically successful language.

Their general lack of avowed feminism should not detract from these activists' bearing on the status of women in Boise. Each of them had a disproportionate impact on the perception of women in this conservative mountain town. Buersmeyer refused to be called by her husband's name (i.e. Mrs. Clarence Buersmeyer), became president of the

¹²⁶ The Wetlands Coalition to Mayor Dirk Kempthorne, July 1989, in folder "Letters/Wetlands," in silver box 2, personal collection of Judy Ouderkirk.

local and then the state League of Women Voters, and helped to break the barrier for women in 1975 when she was elected to the Boise City Council, bucking the trend of patent sexism in Boise politics. Sue Reents followed in her footsteps 14 years later when she ran for and won a seat at the state house. In another three years, Hausrath ran for city council in 1992 against a field of 11 men. She compensated for her diminutive stature by borrowing a red suit that she wore to every public event. Her campaign platform came as no surprise to those who had fought for the Gulch with her: open space, a transparent public process, neighborhoods first. She won, garnering almost as many votes as the rest of the candidates combined.¹²⁷

The building of Claremont Realty's Somerset Ridge and the legal failures of the North End Neighborhood Association to halt that development brought Boise to the dawn of a new age. The 1994 failure of a \$20 million bond to acquire parkland and open space did not stop supporters from continuing to push ahead.¹²⁸ As an alternative, Boise Mayor Brent Coles recommended at an April 1996 City Council foothills workshop that the City hold a levy election to buy foothills land. "Given the amount of testimony that we have received supporting preservation of the foothills locations," Coles said, "I think there is a high likelihood that if it's not too expensive, that people would support it."¹²⁹ Coles was right. When the levy was put to the voters in May 2001, a remarkable 36% of voters turned out, with 59% of those supporting it.¹³⁰ Not surprisingly to those familiar with the history of foothills development, "Passionate

¹²⁷ Charles Etlinger, "Hausrath Seized Environment as Way to Pedal Into Council," *Idaho Statesman*, date unknown.

¹²⁸ Kim Eckart, "Boise City Council Opts for 15-Year Parks Bond," *Idaho Statesman*, January 5, 1994; David Woolsey and Kim Eckart, "Boiseans Reject Parks Bond Plan; 52.1% Vote 'No'," *Idaho Statesman*, February 2, 1994

¹²⁹ Frank E. Lockwood, "Coles Suggests Tax to Protect Foothills," *Idaho Statesman*, April 24, 1996, 1A.

turnout in the North and East Ends was central to the levy's success."¹³¹ The women who had been active in the various stages of the battle to save Halls Gulch were by now in positions of power. Hausrath remained on City Council until 2000, and Elaine Clegg, who had been the co-president of NENA in the 1990s and fought for Halls Gulch, also ran for City Council in 2003 and won. Judy Ouderkirk received the "Citizen of the Year" award in 1993, and Diane Ronayne, who covered Halls Gulch over the years for the local newspaper, was appointed to Boise's Planning and Zoning Commission.¹³² Today, Boise City Council has two progressive women on board and is not overrun by developers, and its Planning Commission is chaired by a woman, as well as having an equal proportion of women to men. The city that had become renowned for its proximity to quality outdoor recreation and high quality of life received the endorsement of a majority of the population to do what was truly needed to preserve large areas of foothills land property, while the women activists found and maintained a critical voice in local environmental and planning policy.

¹³⁰ Dan Popkey, "Supporters, Not Foes, Turned out en masse for Election," *Idaho Statesman*, May 24, 2001, 7.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² Martin S. Johncox, "Neighborhood Groups Gain Influence," *Idaho Statesman*, date unknown.