

Highlighting River Guardians

“Let’s Do This!”

Shane Fleming

South Fork River Guardian

“I love the mutant stonefly hatch that happens in August,” Shane Fleming says, narrowing a thousand South Fork pleasures to a favorite. “The moon is out,” he explains. “You can barely see. You’re skating this bug, trying to mimic how they crawl out of their husks on gravel bars and get into the river. You get a lot of big browns. Sometimes you hear the take better than you can see it.”

Born in Swan Valley to a father who worked on the Palisades Dam, Fleming started casting for trout when he was a young boy. “Kind of a born conservationist,” he says of himself. And you quickly learn he means taking care of the South Fork for everyone who loves, uses, and needs it. “I see it as a very valuable resource for the outdoorsman as well as for the valley itself, which relies for jobs on the condition of the river.”

Fleming says his decision to support the South Fork Initiative as a *South Fork Guardian* is rooted in what has been accomplished on the Henry’s Fork over the past four decades. Water managers and users have been willing to adjust flows and implement water conservation measures to benefit wild trout when reliable science has demonstrated that their own interests will not be compromised. Fleming believes the South Fork has a golden opportunity to accumulate the same kinds of long-term data to motivate constructive changes on the South Fork so like the Henry’s Fork, it will be healthier for trout and wildlife and future generations.

He points enthusiastically to restoration work pumping life into the South Fork. Landowners have welcomed elementary and high school students, member of Future Farmers of America, and a wide array of non-profit groups and government agencies. These groups have worked together to restore tens of miles of tributary streams.

“The South Fork Initiative is putting stream sections back into conditions that settlers found,” Fleming says, “helping landowners conserve precious water and revitalizing nurseries for native cutthroats. We’re getting flows up, temperatures down, narrowing and deepening creeks and putting the old serpentine structure back in.”

Fleming believes that “collaboration plus results equals buy-in.” Every year when he and his wife host their barn party to benefit a local charity, he’s awed by the depth of generosity in the valley. It makes him optimistic about the South Fork’s future.

“Despite some decisions over the years that haven’t been positive for trout, the South Fork remains a world-class fishery. With your help as a South Fork Guardian, we can sustain and improve this river for generations to come. Let’s do this!”



Shane Fleming and Ron Miller

The Power of Relationships

Ron Miller

South Fork River Guardian

“I grew up in a small, rural community about the size of Victor,” Ron Miller begins, and within a minute you understand that his roots shaped him for life.

“All my friends were from farm families, or their parents ran the small stores,” he explains. “I worked for farmers to get money to go to the movies. My dad fixed things. If you needed something fixed, he’d get it done. I learned from my parents the relationships that make a town work. I try to maintain those kinds of relationships.”

A retired physician in his mid-70s, Miller lives in Swan Valley. He believes relationships grounded in respect and trust are essential to maintaining and improving the health of the South Fork, a branch of the Upper Snake River vital to farmers and ranchers, small communities and anglers, and water and electricity users far downstream. It haunts Miller that the river he grew up on in a small Nebraska farm town is no longer the fish-bearing water of his childhood. “I believe strongly, thinking of my grandkids, about the value of what we have here.”

“My approach is, I know people and they know me, and people know what I believe in, so they reach out and ask me about our efforts on the South Fork. Shane is much better at reaching out to groups of people and presenting things. I’m more of a wait for people to ask me what is going on. That’s the way I do it.”

Ask Miller, “What is the South Fork Initiative?” and he will tell you:

“We want to help as a great resource for the community. We want to build our relationships with the people who manage water—ranchers, farmers, and the hydropower industry. We’re working diligently to accumulate science, the long-term data that can help them conserve the water they need, and at the same time help conserve and improve the South Fork’s health and the aquatic bug life that sustain this river’s diverse trout populations and fishing experiences.”

“What we love about the Henry’s Fork Foundation is their incredible effort to do exactly this. They’ve worked hard to gather solid and reliable science and share it respectfully and constructively. Ag and Power have embraced the information to make better decisions that meet their own interests while also helping wild trout.”

“This is what we’re replicating and it’s setting the stage to make the South Fork healthier and more resilient. Shane and I are delighted you are reading this. We ask you to consider joining us. We need more *South Fork Guardians*. Together, we can improve the fishing experiences that thrill and renew us and ensure this great river endures for our grandchildren.”