

# Your Lands, Your Wildlife

## Your Lands, Your Wildlife, Your Story Contest

### GRAND PRIZE

Submitted by Ian Havlick – Boulder, Colorado

Icy, gin clear water ripples around my bare legs as I try to stumble nimbly over the slippery rocks and into the current for my first cast. The delicate scent of sage lingers so strongly in the air I can almost taste it. A slight breeze quietly brushes the willows that line the banks of the Upper Copper River in the Salmon-Challis National Forest. A typical July day in the central Idaho mountains, no different than any other summer day that has crept by the umber colored hills and high-mountain peaks that guard this paradise. Aside from a primitive dirt road etched near the banks of this creek, and the occasional 'mooooooo' bellowed by happily grazing cattle enjoying the warm temperatures, this landscape has changed very little over the eons.



What makes this day different is my younger brother is here to share it. Before venturing out here alone a year ago, I had never seen such a pristine, remote expanse of high desert wilderness like this before. So as my little truck rumbles over the last rise in the rough road for the first glimpse into the basin, I know he is thinking the same thing. He is in awe. He doesn't say much, but he is excited. We drive slowly, scouting which section to begin fishing.

"We have this place to ourselves?" he exclaims in disbelief and excitement.

We park, gear up and we're off. It's always a race between us to get ready as fast as possible and to get on the river for first pick of the best pool that undoubtedly holds the biggest, baddest trout our imaginations have concocted. We separate, and then it's just me. The River. The Sky. The Clouds. The savvy rainbows, cutthroat, grayling and whitefish that are lucky enough to call this crisp stream home. I tie on a fly, throw in a few false casts, and then let it drop on the wavelets and rest. Waiting for a strike, nibble, a splash. A brookie here, a Cutthroat there, all small but all memorable.

The hours drift by as unimpeded and indomitable as the stream we fish. The clouds rumble in the distance, but we fish without pause, delaying the inevitable.

I hear a hoot: "Fish on!"

I hurriedly reel in my line and hustle downstream. His line is taut, his lightweight rod straining. My brother is beyond giddy with the excitement and nervousness only a large trout can deliver. After a few more minutes of desperate struggle, the trout surrenders to a gentle hand and a picture. Not long after he darts back down to the depths, the clouds begin to sprinkle, and the sun is masked. The dust is beaten down, our hunger invades, and we head home. As we wind our way back on the ribbon of dirt, I think to myself that maybe, just maybe, today we caught the biggest, baddest trout in the stream. But perhaps, it doesn't matter after all.