

The Cress Creek Nature Trail

takes you on a journey through sagebrush-grass communities, over juniper covered slopes, and along a lush perennial creek. You will see sweeping views of the Snake River Plain, mountain ranges, and volcanic geology. This photographic view faces east toward the Grand Tetons in the distance.

The trail is one mile in length.

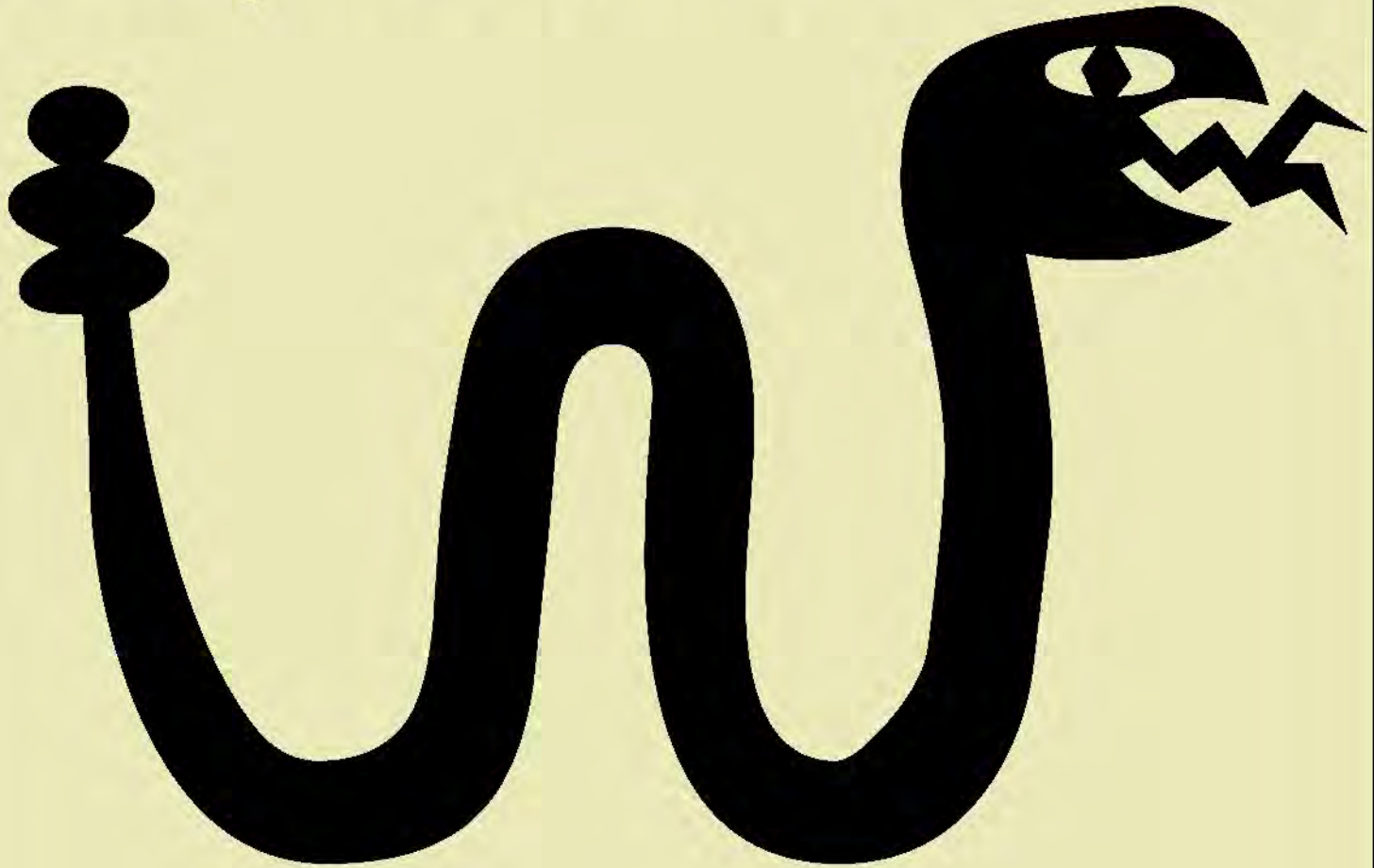
The first portion of wheelchair-accessible to the creek with two sets of switchbacks. The trail is an easy grade to the second set of switchbacks; after that it is a moderate grade to the creek. The loop trail is gravel and is moderately difficult.



Wear a good pair of walking shoes and bring water, binoculars, and a field guide to enjoy the opportunities along the trail. As you hike the trail, notice the changing environments. Interpretive signs are scattered along the trail to help identify and understand the changes.



Stay On the Trail



Snakes Live Here

I am Cress Creek...



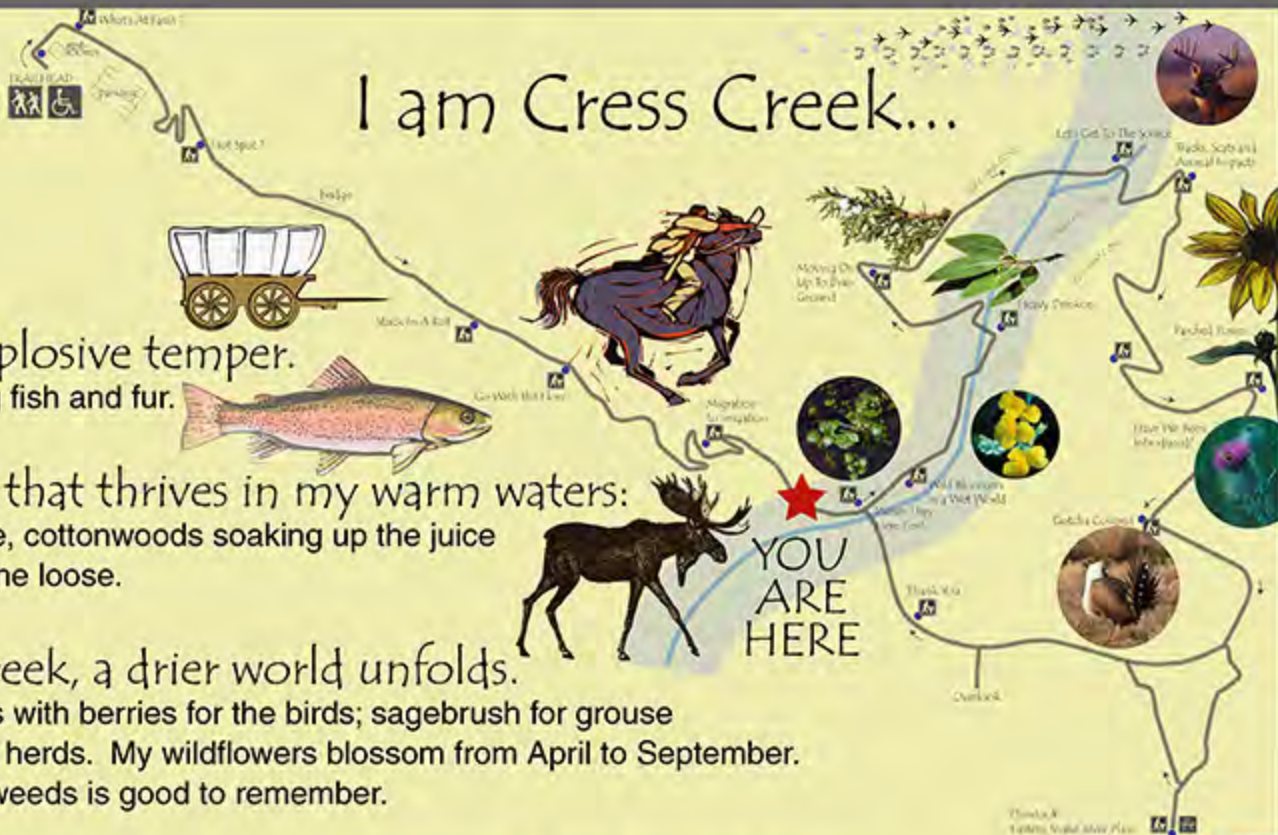
You have heard
of my faults & explosive temper.
Met my people gathering fish and fur.

Beyond is the life that thrives in my warm waters:
watercress for the moose, cottonwoods soaking up the juice
and monkey flowers on the loose.

Away from my creek, a drier world unfolds.
My hillsides host junipers with berries for the birds; sagebrush for grouse
and bitterbrush for game herds. My wildflowers blossom from April to September.
Knowing them from the weeds is good to remember.

Come up on an October morn and to see where land is born.
Volcanos sleep from their active days. Mountains loom a distance away.
The river below is ribbons of blue while cottonwoods ignite with an orange hue.

But if it is solace you seek, come to me. I am Cress Creek!



Water they here for?

As you approach the creek, do you notice a change in the scenery around you? What makes this location appear different from the area you just came from? Do you see more plants? Do you hear more sounds? Do the leaves look or feel different? Does the air temperature change as you come near the water?

Until now you have been hiking through a *xeric* (zer-ik), or dry environment. The availability of more water at the creek creates a *mesic* (mez-ik), or wet environment and allows different plants and animals to survive. Watercress and cattails are two of the many plants that live in the creek. Watercress is a food source for wildlife.

Cress Creek is named for the Watercress plant.



Heavy Drinkers

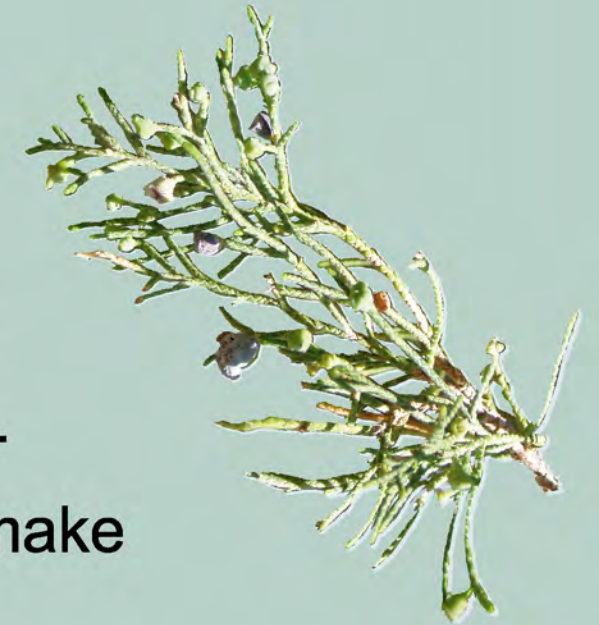
Have you noticed there are more trees along the creek than on the surrounding hillside?

The trees growing beside the creek consume more water.

The Rocky Mountain Juniper

relies on large quantities of water to grow.

The foliage or greenery of the Rocky Mountain Juniper is fine and lacy. Its berries are purple-white. Try rubbing a juniper berry. Can you make it turn light blue?



The Narrow-leaved Cottonwood

is the most common tree on the creek banks and drinks over 100 gallons of water every summer day.



100 gallons each day



Parched Posies

Like the wet environment you passed through earlier, many wildflowers grow in the DRY environment as well.



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Cress Creek
you are here

Do you recognize the rivers, volcanoes, distant mountains and other landmarks on the landscape in front of you?

WHICH DIRECTION IS NORTH?



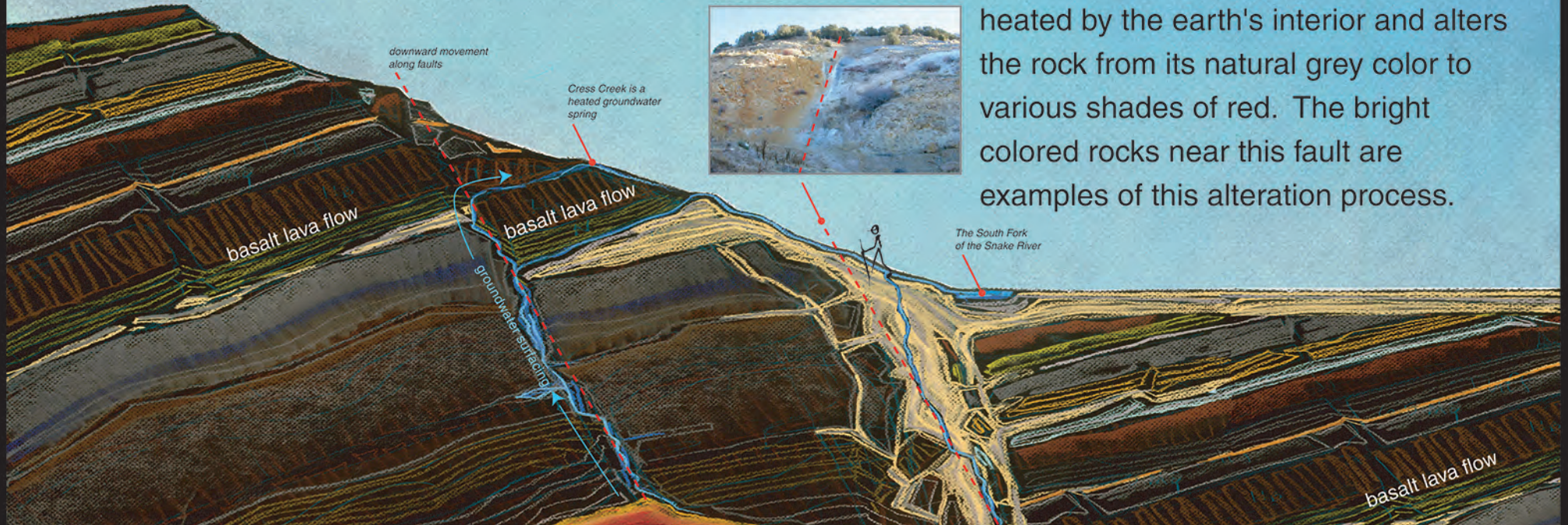
What's At Fault?

Imagine the earth moving under your feet.

The earth near Cress Creek has moved many times in the past several million years. These movements, or earthquakes, occurred along faults, which are fractures in the earth's crust. The ground shakes when two pieces of the earth move past each other along one of these faults. For example, the ground beneath your feet was once level with the Snake River, before movement uplifted this ridge and dropped the valley floor.

There are four faults near Cress Creek,

including the one you see above you. Faults provide avenues for water to flow to the surface. The water is heated by the earth's interior and alters the rock from its natural grey color to various shades of red. The bright colored rocks near this fault are examples of this alteration process.





Go With the Flow

Do you see any different environments?

Below is the South Fork of the Snake River which supports the largest cottonwood forest in the West. Cottonwoods thrive in a constantly changing environment. Floods tear down river banks and carry soil down the river, creating gravel bars where cottonwood seeds can grow. Where the river channel is today may be where a new cottonwood forest springs to life in decades to come.

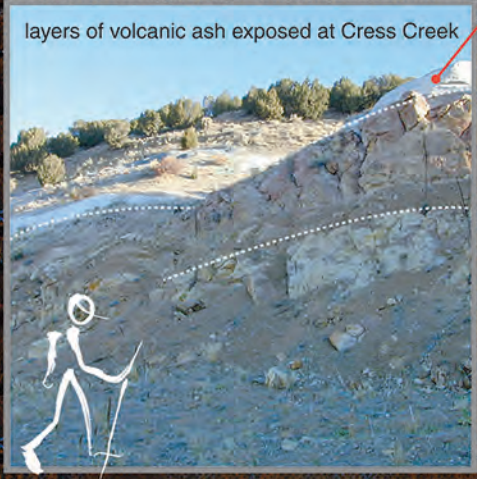
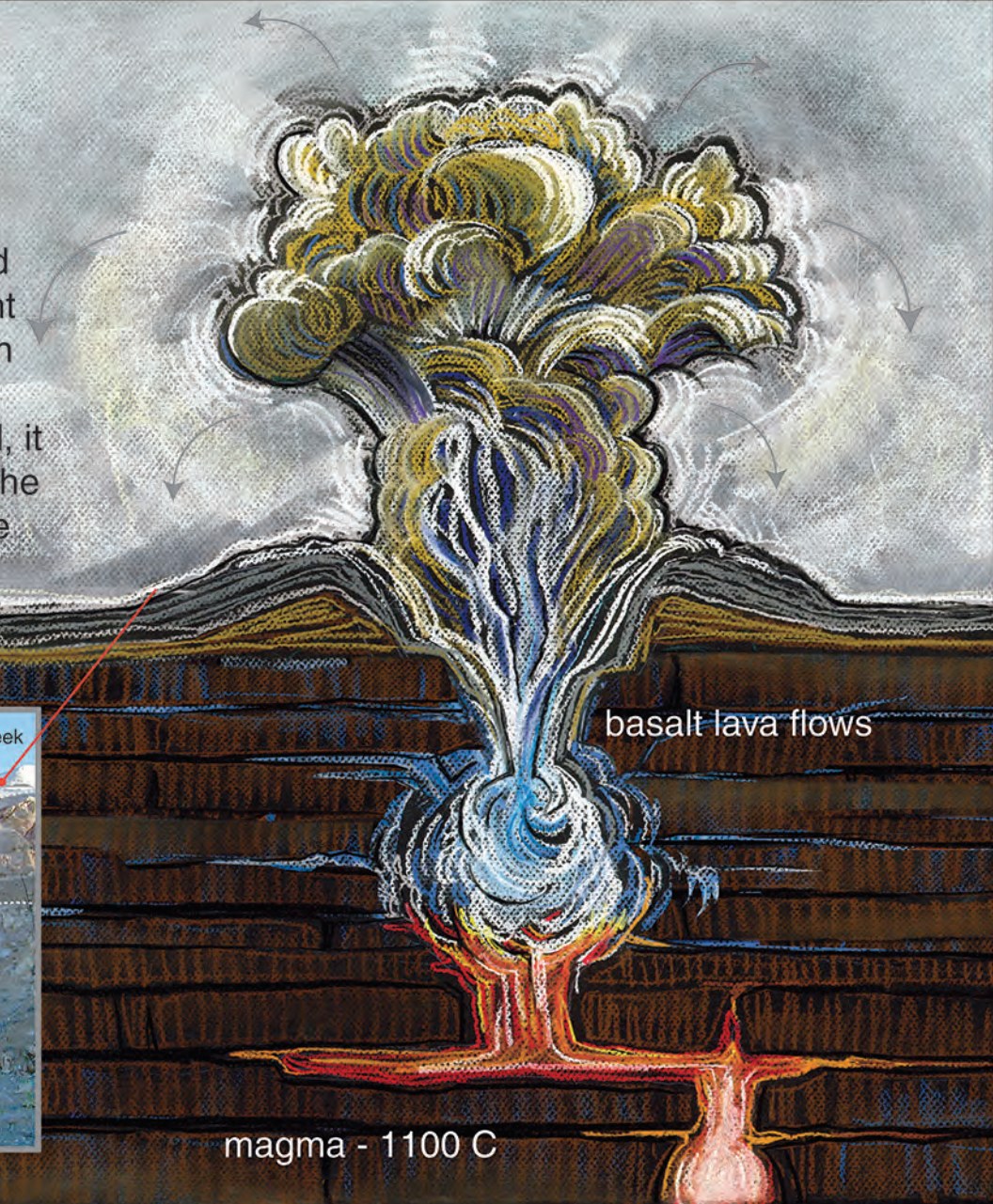
Keep your eyes on the cottonwood trees.

You may spot a bald eagle. Bald eagles need cottonwood trees for nest sites and as a place to perch when hunting fish in the river. Continue looking out over the landscape for other birds such as hawks, vultures, or osprey riding the air currents.



Hot Spot!

The Grey "Cap" that you see on the hill before you was deposited after a sudden and violent volcanic eruption 3 million years ago. The ash was still so hot when it landed, it welded together to form the grey stone you see above you.



The volcanic eruption that left behind this grey cap was one of over 100 volcanic eruptions that occurred across Southern Idaho in the past 16 million years. That series of eruptions left a footprint across southern Idaho - the Snake River Plain. The same source of volcanic activity (the "hot spot") now lies beneath Yellowstone National Park in western Wyoming. This volcanic activity creates the geysers and hot springs that make Yellowstone famous.

Keep Cress Creek Natural

Pack It In...Pack It Out.

Please stay on maintained trails to help stop erosion.

Clean up after your pets and keep them leashed.

Take pictures only, leave only footprints.

Motorized vehicles, firearms, camping, and fires are not permitted.

Watch Out!



Stinging Nettle

If you touch stinging nettle, your skin will feel a sharp stinging. The stinging doesn't last long.

Poison Ivy

Do Not Touch! Poison Ivy irritates your skin and causes an itching rash. If you come into contact with this plant, wash with soap and water as soon as possible.

Prairie Rattlesnake

These creatures are not naturally aggressive, but you should avoid bothering or startling one. Watch where you step and stay on the trail.



Migration to Irrigation

People have used this area for thousands of years...Use has changed from migration to irrigation. The Shoshone and Bannock tribes migrated through this area to hunt, fish, and gather wild plants for food. By the early 1800's, trappers moved through the area in search of beaver pelts. Charles Higgins, a white settler on the South Fork of the Snake, built the Anderson Canal. It was the first of several irrigation canals to provide a reliable source of water for agriculture.

Look around...below you are many irrigated fields. Up the hillside is an irrigation pipe that pumps water from the river to the field on the bench above.



Gotcha Covered

You now have returned to an area with more native plants. The native shrubs around you provide important food and shelter for wildlife.

Sagebrush



(*Artemisia tridentata*)

Bitterbrush



(*Purshia tridentata*)

Big game animals, such as mule deer, elk, and moose all browse on Bitterbrush in the winter when it is available. This shrub provides twigs, leaves, seeds, and bark important to many rodents such as deer mice, chipmunks, and pocket gophers. Rodents help the bitterbrush by scattering seeds to start new plants. Insects, both flies and bees, help pollinate the bitterbrush flowers so new seeds are produced.

Sagebrush provides both food and protective cover for animals such as pheasant, rabbit, and sage grouse.

A sage grouse's diet in winter is primarily made up of sagebrush.



Tracks, Scats, and Animal Impacts

Wildlife relies on both dry and wet environments to survive. Evidence is left behind even if you don't see wildlife along the trail.

Look for:

1. tracks (footprints)
2. scat (droppings)
3. nipped branches (food)
4. flattened vegetation (sleeping area)
5. antlers, hair or fur shed by animals



Stuck In A Rut

If you had been here a hundred years ago

you could have flagged down a stagecoach and been bounced along to Heise Hot Springs Resort in a deeply-rutted stagecoach road. Mail and passengers traveled this road until 1937, when the present road following the river was constructed. The road was built by Richard Heise to bring customers to the newly discovered hot springs.

People continue to change this area.

In 1975, you could have been one of the first to hike the original Cress Creek Nature Trail.

The trail was constructed by a local Youth Conservation Corps. Notice the remnants of the stagecoach road and the original trail from here.

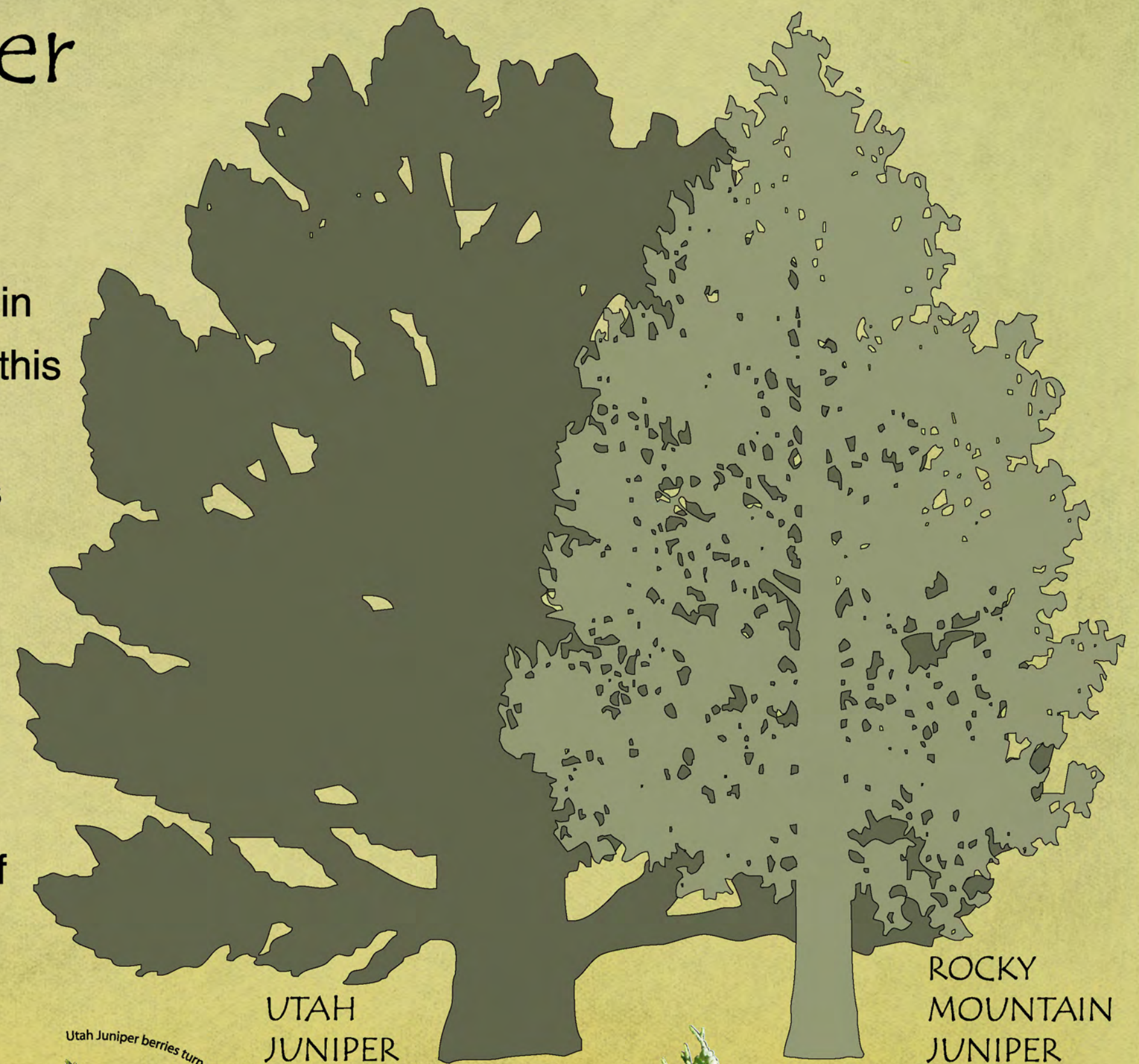


Moving on Up to Drier Ground

Do these trees look different than the Rocky Mountain Junipers you just passed? The junipers growing on this dry hillside are *Utah Junipers*. They are more common in dry areas than Rocky Mountain Junipers because they require less water.

The foliage of the *Utah Juniper* is thicker and denser than the Rocky Mountain Juniper. Its berries are a bit larger, and they turn reddish brown when you scrape the waxy coating off them.

Do you remember the color the Rocky Mountain Juniper berries turned when you rubbed them?



UTAH
JUNIPER

ROCKY
MOUNTAIN
JUNIPER



Excuse Me, Have We Been Introduced?

Many of the wildflowers and grasses you see at Cress Creek belong here. They are *native* plants.

However, some of the plants you see here were introduced from other places like Europe and Asia. They are *non-native* plants.

Non-native plants are quick to invade an area and change the environment leaving it damaged for animals and humans alike.

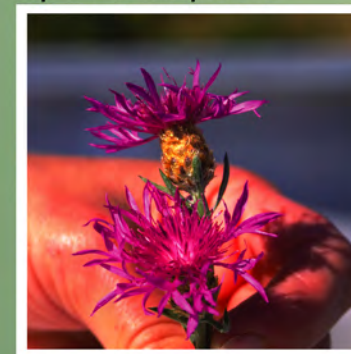
Bull Thistle, for example, chokes out the native plants most wildlife uses for food and shelter, and offers little benefit in return.

Wild Licorice



(*Glycyrrhiza lepidota*)
Photo: Dr. Thomas Richtmeyer

Spotted Knapweed



(*Centuarea maculosa*)

Cheatgrass



(*Bromus tectorum*)



Wild Bloomers in a Wet World

Many wild flowers grow in the wet environment along the creek. Use the field notebook below to learn what these flowers look like and some of their special features. Then look for them as you continue along the trail.





Let's Get to the Source

Touch the water with your fingers.

This creek is lukewarm allowing watercress to grow year round. Where do you think the warm water comes from?

Upstream from here a spring feeds this creek. The spring's warm water comes out of the ground from a fault, a crack in the earth along which movement has taken place. The water in the fault circulates deep within the earth and is warmed by its natural heat before rising to the surface.



~ THANK YOU ~

We hope you have enjoyed your time on the Cress Creek Nature Trail.

Thank you for carrying out your trash, remaining on the designated trail, leaving things for others to enjoy, and picking up after your pets.

Remember the diverse environments you have hiked. Reflect on:

- 🌀 textures and colors in the ribbon of cottonwoods,
- 🌀 hardy plants and animals that survive here,
- 🌀 influences of humans on the landscape,
- 🌀 influences Cress Creek has made on the natural environment and its neighboring residents.

Each of these environments contribute to the success of wildlife and people living near Cress Creek.

