



## **Strategic Plan**

**Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation**

**FY2025 to FY2028**

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## Idaho Park and Recreation Board

The Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation Board provides citizen oversight for the agency. Each member is appointed by the Governor and represents one of six districts of the state.

Current Board members are:

Charles “Chuck” Roady	District 1	Bonnors Ferry, Idaho
Hugh Cooke	District 2	Moscow, Idaho
Brian Beckley (Chair)	District 3	Meridian, Idaho
Mike Roach	District 4	Fairfield, Idaho
Amy Manning	District 5	Pocatello, Idaho
Vacant	District 6	Idaho Falls, Idaho
Susan E. Buxton, Director	Ex Officio	Boise, Idaho

## **PARKS AND RECREATION**

*Enjoying the Outdoors for Generations*

The mission of the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation (IDPR) is to improve the quality of life in Idaho through outdoor recreation and resource stewardship. We help create life-long memories through unique experiences that can enhance the human spirit, while we also ensure the preservation of the State's natural resources for future generations.

IDPR manages thirty state parks, trails and recreational programs throughout the state. What we do best—and better than any other provider in the state—is provide overnight stays in beautiful settings, offer unique daytime recreation areas and experiences, and deliver access to outdoor recreation on state and federal lands.

We see Idaho's recreation future as a viable-and-growing economic driver for the State (outdoor recreation contributes \$3.4 billion annually and is growing), as IDPR maintains a delicate balance between visitor access and resource protection. Residents and out-of-state visitors enjoy opportunities in our parks, facilities, trails, and other recreation areas. Despite the record popularity of certain locations, our park and recreation areas are so well-designed and managed that the crowds do not detract from the experience.

Parks are not just nice, they are necessary. We want all Idahoans and visitors to enjoy the Idaho outdoors, and we want those opportunities to be available forever. This strategic plan is about developing a sustainable model and leaving our parks and recreation areas better than when we inherited them. The plan proposes initiatives and strategies on how to achieve this.



Susan E. Buxton, Director  
Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation



Brian Beckley, Chair  
Idaho Park and Recreation Board May 13, 2024

## THE STRATEGIC PLAN

### *The Planning Process*

It is important to IDPR that our strategic plan is a useful tool. Only with the support and input of the individuals who make decisions daily regarding the operation and administration of the Department, can the document truly be valuable. The final plan is sent to the Governor's office, distributed to employees, and featured on the Department website.

### *Using the Strategic Plan*

The strategic plan becomes a part of our daily work lives in several ways and sets the trajectory of the Department. It guides employees and the Board in how we choose to focus our funds. IDPR uses the strategic plan in setting work expectations and goals at all levels—the Board, the Director, and employees.

Parks and programs have annual work plans that mirror strategic plan objectives and tasks. These park- and program-level work plans become the basis for the individual work plans and performance evaluations. Those evaluations are then used to identify how to improve for the upcoming year. This reporting mechanism reinforces the importance of the strategic plan and gives us the ability to measure our performance from year to year.

Finally, the strategic plan includes initiatives from our Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) that are tailored to IDPR. These relationships and how they coordinate are shown in the following diagram.



## Organization

We maintain our organizational structure from the previous plan to highlight our approaches to “experience,” “access,” and “stewardship,” while also folding in the concept of “what we do best.” The plan provides specific objectives and tasks regarding performance measures over a five-year period. The plan also identifies those key factors external to the Department and beyond its control that could significantly affect meeting performance measures.

## Strategic Highlights

The Department is determined to address the capital expansion, operating and maintenance needs of our facilities while not asking to spend money we do not have. The Governor and State Legislature has generously appropriated over \$165 million in recent years to address the backlog of maintenance and much needed capital expansion to add more public recreation areas. Expanded and improved facilities will create additional staffing, utility, and other operation expenses, and the Department must enhance our operational resources to ensure visitors receive the maximum benefit from our improved and expanded facilities. We know that with strategic investments, the State of Idaho will reap economic benefits. Our true success is measured not in economic multipliers but the overall value provided to visitors, to the communities where we operate, and to the State.



Climber at City of Rocks

## Agency Objectives

IDPR administers recreation sticker programs for boats, snowmobiles, and off-highway vehicles (OHVs). Money from these sticker programs goes to develop and maintain trails, facilities, and education programs for snowmobilers, boaters and OHV operators. IDPR administers non-motorized trail programs like Park N’ Ski, and we assist the Department of Agriculture in its Invasive Species Sticker program. IDPR also manages several outdoor recreation grant programs that provide facilities and services to a wide variety of recreationists and the local government organizations that serve them.

## Sustainable Model

The strategic plan is the result of a continuous improvement process that evaluates the department’s direction and identifies key strategies to meet goals. This version of the strategic plan is about developing a sustainable model for the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation and leaving our parks and recreation opportunities better than they were previously. Our sustainable model focuses on acknowledging what we do best as an organization.

## WHAT WE DO BEST

### Experiences

IDPR provides unique experiences in our parks with overnight stays in beautiful, natural settings and exceptional daytime recreation areas. The pandemic taught us that parks are not only nice, but they are absolutely necessary. It is important for recreators to understand more about what they experience in the outdoors, and that it is equally important they know how to recreate responsibly.

**Goal:** Create experiences that renew the human spirit.

**Objective 1:** Provide a greater number of, and options for, overnight camping opportunities.

Campers look for unique camping experiences—some for an entry into the camping, some for a new adventure, some for a more comfortable alternative to tent camping. Camping is fulfilling the younger, more diverse generation’s desire for a different type of vacation experience. Conversely, older campers generally look for more comfortable accommodations while still “camping” or “glamping.” Regardless of why, IDPR has a historic opportunity to provide more unique types of accommodations such as lodges, treehouses, yurts, tent and recreational vehicle (RV) sites, among many other concepts.



New campground under construction at Eagle Island State Park

With the ongoing surge in park visitation since 2020, IDPR is adding inventory with various types of accommodations and amenities based on the State’s natural landscape. The locations of these unique experiences are carefully considered to find spots within “demand” parks. IDPR is also targeting new opportunities at underutilized parks to make them more self-sufficient and evaluating locations within the State that retain public access in perpetuity.

**Task 1:** By Fall 2027, develop or add at least an additional 300 overnight accommodation sites for RVers, tent campers, cabin enthusiasts, cyclists, etc.

## State Park Campgrounds

Since 2020 camping at Idaho State Parks has been maximized at our current parks and the demand for camping opportunities has stretched the traditional camping peak season (Memorial Day to Labor Day) out to include the “shoulder seasons” of April | May and



September | October (depending on location). Idaho is becoming a world-renowned recreation destination and needs more camping opportunities but must also preserve the State’s unique landscape. We will continue to add campgrounds within existing Idaho State Parks and evaluate opportunities for new State Park areas.

Campground at Challis Hot Springs, now part of the Land of the Yankee Fork State Park

To assist with the demand to add more campgrounds, IDPR proposes to partner with other entities to provide “State Park Partner Campgrounds.” The

partnership will leverage IDPR skills in designing, building, writing grant proposals, and also provide a reservation system and management of the resources. The partnering entity will provide the land for development.

**Task 2:** By July 2025 enter into partnership agreements with at least two other entities to construct State Park Partner Campgrounds.

**Objective 2:** Provide a greater number of daytime recreation experiences.

**Task 3:** By Fall 2026, develop an additional 25 day use areas and upgrade/improve at least 150 boat slips and docks.

### *Satisfied customers*

IDPR prides itself in providing exceptional customer service to our visitors. It is one of the things we do best. We monitor customer satisfaction and continue to send out surveys to every overnight guest who makes a reservation.

**Task 4:** Annually evaluate customer satisfaction surveys and implement changes (including increased staffing and construction projects) at the state-, region-, or park-level as appropriate.

**Task 5:** By July 1, 2024, implement new customer satisfaction survey questions that elicit responses that can better guide employees on how to improve customer service.

**Performance Measure 1:** Maintain or improve our customer satisfaction rating.

### *Competitive Wages*

Great customer service comes from employees who love their job. The work of running state parks and recreation programs provides a rewarding public service job. As our park managers retire, we must recruit and retain new leaders and provide job satisfaction to a new generation of workers—some who did not anticipate or study for a natural resource job. Our Junior Ranger and Recreation programs are one way of recruiting future generations of patrons and, hopefully, employees who value the Idaho outdoors. Recruiting employees, both full-time and seasonal, also requires providing a competitive wage.

**Task 6:** In preparing the budget each year, seek additional appropriations to bring IDPR compensation closer in line with other resource agencies and with other state park system budgets.

### *Education*

IDPR provides not only quality recreation experiences associated with overnight stays, but also recreation experiences through education, instruction, and interpretation. For most park visitors—particularly young visitors—interacting with employees in an educational or interpretive program greatly enhances their experience.

IDPR also provides excellent education opportunities within the Recreation Bureau on snowmobiling, avalanche safety and rescue, safe boating, and OHV safety. It is one of the things IDPR does best, and the department is generally the only entity providing the instruction.

**Performance Measure 2:** Increase the number of participants in Junior Ranger and Recreation Bureau programs by at least three (3) percent each year through July 2026.



A ranger giving a presentation on wildlife



## Technology and Broadband Improvements

Recreating outdoors is about disconnecting from urban life and embracing the natural environment. In the past, technology was perceived as part of urban life and not appropriate within a park. We know now that technology can, and needs to be, a part of experiencing the natural environment. Access to technology while camping, along with the use of social media and streaming services, helps to eliminate barriers to camping.

Through the success of several pilot programs, IDPR shifted from a distributed, pay-to-use and unsustainable Wi-Fi model to a free Wi-Fi hotspot model that has been well-received by customers. IDPR will expand access where and when adequate internet connectivity is available. Unfortunately, because of the remote location of many parks and recreation areas, internet connectivity is not always available with sufficient bandwidth to address business, employee, and customer needs (in priority order).

**Task 7:** By January 2026, and as connectivity at the parks improves, move the reservation window to allow same day reservations and online campground check ins. This will provide traveling campers more flexibility in making reservations, minimize cash handling and be more efficient than manually registering and checking registrations.

## ACCESS

IDPR creates and manages opportunities for adventure on state and federal lands. We maintain recreation trails and facilities throughout the state, and we are always looking for ways to increase recreation infrastructure.

**Goal:** [Maintain and create new opportunities for adventure.](#)

IDPR provides access to outdoor recreation through a variety of means. The term “access” as used here includes not only a point of entry, but also the full recreational opportunity. IDPR impacts all recreationists, not only those who enjoy State Parks but also those who enjoy motorized and non-motorized recreation throughout Idaho.

**Objective 3:** Protect and improve access to valuable recreational facilities throughout the state. Having access to state and federal lands is key to many recreation opportunities in Idaho. Despite IDPR’s efforts at advocating for maintaining multiple use access to Forest Service properties, 40 percent of multiple use trails over the last three decades have been redesignated for non-motorized use only. Idaho needs more public access, not less.

Access closures can result from not only changes in plans and management strategies (e.g., “This trail is now closed.”) but also changes in local, state, and federal budgets (e.g., “We no longer have funds to maintain this trail.”) It is important to note that without maintenance, many trails simply disappear



Trail crew clearing the way

from lack of use. Although budgets for trail maintenance on federal lands continue to decline, IDPR continues to dedicate funds toward trail maintenance of motorized, non-motorized, and multiple use recreation access throughout Idaho.

**Task 8:** By Fall 2025, provide a no-net-loss of trails plan and enhance at least 500 miles of the Idaho Centennial Trail with wayfinding signage, clearing, access easements, and other improvements.

## STEWARDSHIP

We inspire hope for the future through exceptional stewardship of our facilities and natural resources.

**Goal:** Be responsible stewards of our natural resources.

Stewardship is an important trait of any land management agency. We are entrusted with caring for property that must thrive for generations. Part of our mission is to be good stewards of the outdoor recreation resources under our care. Our stewardship responsibilities include care and maintenance of campground and day use facilities, control of invasive species (plants, snails, etc.), planting trees, managing fuel loads, controlling erosion, maintain historic and cultural properties and structures, restoring riparian areas, curating historic artifacts, preserving Dark Sky areas, and preserving the culture of those that came before.

As stewards, we take steps to improve safety within our parks that include removing hazard trees, decreasing the fire fuel load, establishing forests and range lands that are more fire-resistant, and creating fire breaks to protect parks.



Eroded shoreline at Lake Cascade will be restored with a FY 2025 project.

Our failure to care for these important resources is generally the cause of complaints and dissatisfied customers. Given population increases and the popularity of outdoor recreation in Idaho, we anticipate that growing numbers of customers will seek access to our cherished public lands.

**Objective 4:** Be exceptional stewards of the natural resources, artifacts and assets entrusted to IDPR.

To be great stewards, we must recognize that our parks and recreation areas have a threshold capacity. Our natural resources cannot support an unlimited number of people at any given

time—they have limits. It is important that IDPR understand and manage to these limits.

**Task 9:** Identify areas within our parks and managed sites that need resource restoration. Prioritize restoration efforts and include them in the FY 2026 budget.

**Task 10:** By January 2027, identify at least two parks that can support Dark Sky preservation and offer enhanced stargazing opportunities.

## FACILITY MAINTENANCE

More visitors mean more wear and tear on facilities, naturally. IDPR already has an extensive backlog of maintenance and capital expansion projects. However, the State Legislature has generously appropriated over \$165 million to address the backlog of maintenance and to expand facilities. The Department is determined to address the need for new facilities, to secure new recreational opportunities, and to eliminate the maintenance backlog.

**Performance Measure 4:** Reduce the backlog of maintenance projects by FY 2030 and establish an ongoing maintenance program.

**Task 11:** In preparing the capital budget each year, evaluate progress toward the goal of eliminating the agency’s maintenance backlog.

**Task 12:** By January 2026, update the comprehensive assessment of all IDPR facilities and required maintenance.



The historic stamp mill at Bayhorse has been evaluated and forthcoming structural repairs will ensure this piece of mining lore will remain for years to come.

## EXTERNAL FACTORS

There are several factors external to the Department that may delay or prevent the implementation of this strategic plan.

### *Resource Supply Chain*

With the recent influx of funding from the Federal government from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), and the State Surplus program, there will be continued strain on the available labor and materials over the next five years, which will drive increased costs. Moreover, all agencies receiving funds will be under the same time

frames to deliver on projects.

### *Weather and Disasters*

Given that the focus of IDPR is enjoying the outdoors, the weather can greatly impact programs and facilities:

- Weather extremes (very hot and very cold) can affect park attendance.
- Wind and rainstorms can down trees and destroy facilities.
- Lightning strikes can destroy electrical systems and start fires.
- Ice build-up can damage docks and increase and/or cause shore erosion.
- Low snow levels may impact funds through recreation registration revenue.
- Natural disasters such as floods, fires, drought, and earthquakes create severe impacts on facilities, customers, and programs. In particular, fires during the peak season can have a drastic impact on our revenues.

In general, employees are accustomed to weather related impacts and can adjust accordingly. However, repair and maintenance activities can be expensive and outside the spending authority in place at the time any damage.

### *State and National*

The state and national economy/unemployment rate impacts the discretionary income of would- be park attendees and recreators to

enjoy our facilities and programs. The relative cost of fuel for would-be customers can encourage or discourage out-of-state visitors from coming to Idaho. Also, motorized recreationists such as motor bikers, boaters, OHVers, and RV users factor fuel costs into their decisions. A decrease in customers or decrease in fuel sales impact the revenue stream of IDPR.

Maintaining access to recreational trails is an important goal of IDPR. However, most of the recreational trails are on federal properties, and IDPR has limited direct control over access decisions. Therefore, decisions by federal and other state land management agencies to close recreational trails for motorized and/or non-motorized use will affect our ability to meet our goal of “no net loss”. As the technology for battery powered vehicles improves, it is unclear if this may have a favorable impact on federal land management policies.



Repairs to the roof, porch and wheelchair lift at the Mission of the Sacred Heart, Idaho’s oldest building, will ensure that groups will continue to enjoy this historical and cultural treasure.

## *Regional*

Regional impacts out of IDPR control include the rising cost of water, fuels, and other utilities. Sharp increases in utilities can impact operating budgets for the parks and recreation programs, reducing on-going preventative maintenance efforts.

## *Operational Sustainability*

Improved and expanded facilities (campgrounds, marinas, day use areas) presents an ongoing operational issue without an ongoing dedicated funding source to support our world class resources. The department is under strain to adequately staff and operate existing parks and programs. The historic investments of recent years have exclusively targeted capital repair and expansion. The Idaho State Park

Passport, enacted in 2012 at \$10, today has an inflation-adjusted buying power of \$7.41. In 2008, the ratio of staff to visitors was one (1) full-time employee per 26,198 guests. Today, that ratio is one (1) to 38,878. (For reference, the National Park Service has one full-time employee for every 15,000 visitors and is widely considered understaffed.) Park staff continue to do more with less.



Sailboats at Lake Cascade

The prospect of 300 new campsites, 25 new day use areas and 150 new and upgraded boat slips by late 2027 will only increase the workload. IDPR must acquire a new or expanded dedicated funding source for operations to keep pace with the record visitation, and, our expanded inventory of facilities.

## *Implementation*

In making budget requests, the Administration and employees will consider the priorities outlined in this plan. In making decisions on policy, operations, and administrative issues, Administration and employees will seek guidance from this plan. In making large purchases or hiring decisions, Administration and employees will consider the guidance this plan provides. Noted performance measures will be tracked and reported annually to the Division of Financial Management.

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