

IDAHO RECREATION & TOURISM INITIATIVE



(Horstman Peak, Sawtooth National Recreation Area; photo by Steve Botti)

2011

Annual Accomplishment Report

The Idaho Recreation and Tourism Initiative (IRTI), created in 1988, is a coalition of state and federal agencies and not-for-profit organizations dedicated to providing Idaho citizens and visitors with expanded recreation opportunities. IRTI's primary objective is to develop partnerships and cooperate with all interested agencies, organizations, and individuals in order to improve public information and services associated with recreation and tourism in Idaho.

Idaho Recreation & Tourism Initiative

ANNUAL ACCOMPLISHMENT REPORT

Idaho has a multitude of land management agencies and recreation providers whose roles can be confusing to the public. Recreationists and tourists don't care who manages a campsite – they just want to camp. They are not especially interested in which agency manages a wildlife area – they just want to see wildlife. To accommodate needs such as these, IRTI has facilitated a number of efforts over the years, including these: a statewide campground directory, a statewide scenic byways system, a statewide wildlife viewing guide, an annual statewide conference on recreation and tourism, and statewide information and messages on a variety of recreation topics, including trails, regardless of which agency manages the trail. Simply, IRTI strives to make it easy for people to go outside and play. By working together, the coalition is able to more effectively provide information and services.

Who Is IRTI?

In 2011, four new partners signed the MOU which formalizes the IRTI relationship. These **new partners** are indicated below in bold font.

- Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
- Bureau of Reclamation (BOR)
- Idaho Department of Commerce (IDC)
- Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG)
- Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation (IDPR)
- Idaho Outfitters and Guides Association (IOGA)
- Idaho Outfitters and Guides Licensing Board (IOGLB)
- **Idaho Recreation and Parks Association (IRPA)**
- Idaho RV Campgrounds Association (IRVCA)
- **Idaho State Department of Agriculture (ISDA)**
- Idaho Transportation Department (ITD)
- **National Park Service (NPS)**
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)
- U.S. Forest Service (USFS)
- **University of Idaho (U of I)**
- Other public and private entities participate in various IRTI projects.



How Does IRTI Work?

A Steering Committee composed of one representative from each partner agency governs IRTI. The Steering Committee meets three to four times per year to explore opportunities to work together on projects that reflect overlapping agency and organizational objectives. The Steering Committee approves statewide work projects, charters working groups to implement the projects, and approves an annual budget. The annual IRTI budget is funded by contributions from various partner agencies. An IRTI Coordinator, currently Vicki Jo Lawson, provides staff support to the Steering Committee and is funded jointly by the partner agencies.

Where Can I Find More Information About IRTI?

www.parksandrecreation.idaho.gov/aboutus/irti.aspx

www.commerce.idaho.gov/travel/irti.aspx

How Does IRTI Benefit Idaho?

The following summaries briefly explain each of IRTI's 2011 projects, identify the project leader, and describe the project accomplishments and benefits to Idaho. In 2011, the partners jointly contributed and leveraged \$797,900 to accomplish these projects.

Be Outside, Idaho!

Be Outside, Idaho! (BOI) is an ever-widening network of partners working collaboratively to develop ways to connect children with nature in Idaho.

This project exemplifies how IRTI works. In 2007, many partners represented by the IRTI Steering Group discussed that their agencies had some kind of "kids and nature" initiative. However, none of the partners felt that they were effectively responding to the mandate. So, the Steering Group chartered an interagency working group to determine how to move forward. The group hosted a couple of community sessions, reaching outside the agencies to the broader community--to education, medical, scouting, environmental, and arts groups. The collaborative efforts of the working group and the community groups resulted in the current BOI organization which currently includes over 150 partners—federal, state, and municipal agencies, and private organizations and businesses. Its mission is to **connect children with nature in Idaho, from backyards to mountaintops**. BOI includes a website (www.beoutsideidaho.org) that serves as a clearinghouse for all kids and nature activities throughout the state.



The project leads, Kendra Witt-Doyle, Executive Director for Blue Cross of Idaho Foundation for Health, and Vicky Runnoe, Conservation Education Supervisor for IDFG, serve as co-chairs of the BOI Steering Committee.

2011 Accomplishments

- Events
 - **Unplug and Be Outside** The BOI partners hosted a week-long community event on April 25-30 in the Treasure Valley that encouraged families to reduce their screen time and get outside. Partners offered free activities for children and families that introduced them to community resources that provide outdoor and physically-active opportunities.
 - 24 different activities were offered during the week-long event.
 - An average of 64 children attended each event (range was from 17 to 200), with a total of 1,252 children attending events throughout the week.
 - 97% of the children who completed passport cards reported that they reduced their screen time.
 - Media sponsors included the [Idaho Statesman](#) and *94.9 The River*. Also, news spots were provided on television stations KTVB and KTRV.
- Media and Promotion
 - **News series** During April, May, and June, news stations ran nine different BOI series: Connecting to the Outside Through Mentoring, Unplug and Be Outside, Teen Mentor, Wild Campers, Geocache, Mentoring Moms, Peregrine Falcons on the Web, Wildlife CSI for Kids, Conservation Officers Create a Camp, and Wild Poetry.

- **Boise Parks and Recreation Activity Guide** The Activity Guide included information about BOI and highlighted outdoor-oriented recreational opportunities.
 - **Treasure Valley Family Magazine (TVFM)** BOI had three advertisements in TVFM, and TVFM wrote and featured an article about Nature Deficit Disorder and the need to get children outdoors.
 - **Idaho Statesman** The *Idaho Statesman* featured several articles in its Outdoor Idaho and Scene sections about BOI and the need to get children outdoors.
 - **Website** The BOI website currently is being redesigned to meet the evolving needs of the initiative's growing audiences—teachers, parents, healthcare providers, and children.
- **Attended events**
 - **Idaho Parks and Recreation Association Annual Conference** BOI presented information about the BOI partnership and about the Unplug and Be Outside event at the conference.
 - **Awards**
 - **Idaho Press Club Award** BOI was awarded second place for the its media campaign.
 - **Other activities**
 - **Environmental Literacy Plan (ELP)** BOI participated in the development of Idaho's first ELP. The ELP's advisory committee was made up of 19 members from state and federal agencies, non-profit organizations, and tribes. The ELP acts to support and align environmental education programs within existing state education standards, across all grades and subject areas.
 - **Partner Toolkit** A toolkit for partners was developed and provides information regarding BOI and use of its logo and materials.
 - **Fiscal Sponsor** To allow BOI more funding options, the Idaho Community Foundation has agreed to be a fiscal sponsor. This will permit fund-raising opportunities in the future.



(Robin's eggs; photo by Steve Botti)

Free Fishing Day

Free Fishing Day has been an annual event in Idaho for over twenty years, focusing public attention on fishing activities, resources, and ethics through sponsored events across the state. Many events focus on teaching children how to fish and providing them the opportunity. State license requirements are waived on this day. Vicky Runnoe, Conservation Education Supervisor for IDFG, is the project lead.

2011 Accomplishments

Idaho's Free Fishing Day was held on June 11 this year. The IDFG, along with other public and private partners, hosted fishing clinics at ponds and hatcheries around the state. While high water hampered events in some regions, others were able to offer a variety of fishing opportunities. Participants learned about rigging a fishing pole, baiting a hook, casting, identifying fish, and, at some locations, even cleaning and cooking their catch. The Free Fishing Day clinics in several regions hosted one of the five "Take Me Fishing" trailers that the IDFG has outfitted with fishing gear. These trailers travel to local fishing ponds, providing families and children with the chance to borrow fishing equipment and get fishing tips from the trailer staff. Trailer schedules were handed out so participants at Free Fishing Day events could learn about additional opportunities to go fishing in their community.

Free Fishing Day is so institutionalized now that it is an anticipated kick-off-to summer in Idaho! In 2012, Free Fishing Day will be held on June 9.



(Fishing at Island Park; photo by Peg Owens)

Idaho Campground Directory

Idaho's popular campground directory, *RV Idaho*, is an annually-updated guide containing almost all public campgrounds, private RV parks, and dump stations in Idaho. It is unique in the nation in that it is not a membership directory, but is a consumer-friendly, informative guide that includes detailed information on both public and private campgrounds. It is the third-most-requested travel publication in Idaho, with only the State Travel Guide and Idaho map receiving more requests, and it reaches more Idaho campers and those traveling to Idaho than any other publication. Anne Chambers, Executive Director of the Idaho RV Campgrounds Association (IRVCA) is the project lead.



RVing continues to be the fastest growing segment of the traveling public and the Idaho Division of Tourism has identified RVers/campers as high priority visitors. RVers have extremely desirable demographics and spending patterns with considerable discretionary income which they choose to spend on their RV lifestyle. Despite the economy, RVers continue to travel in record numbers. A conservative estimate of RVer annual spending in Idaho is in excess of \$200 million. IRVCA's goal is to create a sustainable RV tourism marketing program designed to increase overall RV tourism revenues throughout the state by promoting Idaho as a great RV destination, marketing Idaho's RV parks and campgrounds to the 30 million RVers on the road today, and bringing new campers to Idaho's RV parks and campgrounds. All 600 private RV parks and public campgrounds in Idaho share in the benefits of IRVCA's targeted RV tourism development programs.

2011 Accomplishments

- More than 90,000 copies of the 2011 edition of RV IDAHO were shipped and distributed free-of-charge to RVers/campers, both in-state and out-of-state, at hundreds of tourist information centers, regional tourism destinations, Chambers of Commerce, private RV parks, public campgrounds, gas stations, RV-related businesses, and recreation and sports shows.
- More than 16,000 copies were direct-mailed to campers who requested Idaho camping information via phone or the internet.
- For campers and RVers who researched their travel options online, the campground database information was included on IRVCA's website, www.rvidaho.org, as well as on Idaho's travel and tourism website, www.visitidaho.org.
- With the help of many of the IRTI partners, IRVCA updated the campground database information and published 105,000 copies of the 2012 edition of RV IDAHO in early October. This will be distributed to RVers and campers throughout the coming year.

Off-Highway Vehicle Travel Management

The Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Travel Management project is overseen by the Idaho Interagency OHV Coordinating Committee (IICC), composed of state and federal resource management agencies responsible for some aspect of OHV recreation or access. The IICC seeks to foster consistent OHV management, quality OHV opportunities, public safety, user responsibility, and protection of natural, social, and economic resources across all management jurisdictions in Idaho. One of the primary projects of the IICC is the Idaho OHV public outreach campaign, *Stay on Trails* (www.stayontrails.com). This project was developed because the agencies charged with managing OHV travel believed that their individual public outreach efforts were not being effective. This statewide campaign encourages riders to ride safely and responsibly and to reduce their impact on the land and other trail users. This campaign began in 2005. Project leads are Jon Heggen, Enforcement Chief for IDFG (IICC), and Andy Brunelle, Capitol City Coordinator for the National Forests of Idaho (OHV public outreach campaign).

2011 Accomplishments

Outreach to OHV users centers around two campaign periods, one in the spring, as people turn their attention to trail riding, and the other in the fall, prior to and during hunting season. The agencies work with a professional advertising firm to identify media strategies and tactics, select types of communication, and develop messages. In 2011, radio, television, newspaper, internet, and point-of-sale printed materials were used. Additional efforts were made to update the *Stay on Trails* website and blog.



SPRING

- Spring radio efforts included metro markets to reach the majority of Idaho's population, including the Spokane market to reach Idaho's panhandle counties. A combination of paid and recorded public service announcements (PSAs), and "live read" was used from mid-April through mid-June.
- Television PSAs coincided with the radio campaign, including purchases in Idaho TV markets and Spokane to reach northern Idaho counties, supplemented by north Idaho cable systems.
- Internet ads were placed using the Google Content Network. *Stay on Trails* ads appeared on relevant outdoor searches. This lasted from February 12 to July 31.
- A *Stay on Trails* poster was distributed by partnering state agencies for use throughout Idaho.
- The Forest Service purchased a half-page *Stay on Trails* ad in the Idaho Fish and Game hunting regulations.

FALL

- During the fall (Sept. 26 – October 30), a radio PSA campaign was repeated, supplemented with “live read”. This campaign overlaid a longer radio presence, the length of the football season, on Learfield Sports broadcasts of the Boise State Broncos and University of Idaho Vandals football games.
- In September, print messages were placed in the Hunting and Fall Outdoor sections of seven newspapers in Idaho, plus the Idaho edition of the *Spokesman-Review*, with a repeat ad in the *Idaho Statesman*.
- Posters were shipped to hunting and fishing license vendor partners promoting *Stay on Trails* as part of a point-of-sale message.
- Additional printings of Payette National Forest and Sawtooth National Forest motor vehicle use maps were made for use during the fall hunting season.

This table summarizes the seasonal campaigns and their effects:

Type of Media	Spring	Fall
Radio	4/21 – 6/19 1,012 PSAs 500 “live reads” Reached 35% of men, ages 25-54, an average of 11 times	9/26 – 10/30 1,243 PSAs 500 “live reads” Reached 30% of men, ages 25-54, an average of 12 times
		8/29 – 12/31 Football: BSU and U of I 113 PSAs
Television	4/18 – 6/19 604 PSAs Reached 35% of men, ages 25-54, an average of 4 times	
Internet	2/12 – 7/31 2,528,355 impressions 4,764 clicks to ads leading to www.stayontrails.org	
Newspaper		September 40-column inch color ads in hunting/outdoor sections in eight newspapers, total of nine ads. Estimated cumulative circulation: 230,000.
Printing and Point-of-Sale Materials	Half-page ad in Idaho Fish and Game Hunting Regulations	Posters shipped to vendor partners promoting “Stay on Trails”
	Poster distributed by partnering state agencies for use throughout Idaho	Additional printing of Motor Vehicle Use Maps: Sawtooth NF (1,000), Payette NF (1,000) for distribution through IDFG offices

Outfitters and Guides GIS Mapping



The Outfitters and Guides Geospatial Information System (GIS) Mapping project has produced digital maps of outfitter and guide-permitted and -licensed areas throughout the state. This information was previously available only in “pieces” from multiple agencies. This collaborative mapping project has made it easier for all agencies to understand exactly which areas are permitted and licensed, and who holds the permits and licenses for which activities. While this information is useful to many of the land-managing agencies, it also has a very useful application for recreationists looking for outfitter and guide services. This information is now available online at www.fishandgame.idaho.gov/ifwis/ioglb and at IDFG’s Hunt Planner site, and includes a variety of search capabilities. Soon, it will be fully integrated on Idaho’s travel and tourism website. Project leads are Bart Butterfield of IDFG and Jake Howard, Executive Director of IOGLB.

2011 Accomplishments

A total of 1,224 active license areas have been mapped; forty active license areas remain unmapped. Most of those are on private land, for which the exact boundaries have not been made available. In spite of challenging employment policies for temporary employees at IDFG, work continues on mapping all active license areas and on improving the usability of the web site.

- **Faster performance** The entire IDFG web mapping site was re-coded this past year with new GIS technologies and the new IOGLB database structure. The website was optimized and re-cached for faster performance. IDFG built a new web service that allows integration of the IOGLB outfitter areas with the IDFG licensing tag sales system.
- **More user-friendly** IDFG developed an application to make the IOGLB database and GIS into a more user-friendly format for users who request data exports. These exportable datasets were made available on the IFWIS website and on Insideldaho, Idaho’s spatial data warehouse.
- **New web host** IDFG worked with the IOGLB programmer consultant to update the IOGLB database. All database tables used in the mapping project and website are now housed at the Idaho Department of Administration and managed by IOGLB. IDFG hosts and manages the GIS layers, website, and web mapping applications.
- **Additional applications** IOGLB is working to develop an on-line use reporting system for outfitters and guides tied to outfitter license renewals, outfitter big game tag allocation, and guide licensing.

Recreation Information Fulfillment and Recreation/Tourism Databases and Websites

During most of 2011, the Recreation Information Fulfillment project included 1-800 call center operations contracted by the Division of Tourism to provide recreation-tourism related information. Ongoing services include reader service, online inquiry processing, customer online inquiry reports, and support of live chat customer service at Idaho's primary travel and tourism website, www.visitidaho.org, which serves as a portal for www.beousideidaho.org, www.idahobyways.gov, etc. The Recreation/Tourism Databases and Websites project includes the websites and the database that supports them, www.update.idaho.com. Work on these sites/databases also is contracted by the Division of Tourism to ensure that the state's primary site continues to be exciting, accurate, and useful as a one-stop information source for visitors and recreationists. The IRTI has helped eliminate **duplication of efforts** across agencies and has leveraged Idaho Division of Tourism marketing dollars. Karen Ballard, Administrator for Idaho Division of Tourism, is the project lead..

2011 Accomplishments

The total number of tourism inquiries received between July 1, 2010 and June 30, 2011 was 1,222,934, up from last year's 1,122,311. Tourism inquiries are measured in two ways: those that are received by the fulfillment contractor (previously All West) and those that are made by a unique visitor to any of the tourism websites.

The table below compares the number of tourism inquiries received from each source during fiscal years 2007/08, 2008/09, 2009/10 and 2010/11.

Inquiry Source	Inquiry Period July 1 – June 30	Number of Inquiries	% Change from Previous Year
All West (Toll-free Calls, Mail)	2007/2008	105,483	
All West (Toll –free Calls, Mail)	2008/2009	79,447	- 24%
All West (Toll –free Calls, Mail)	2009/2010	149,215	+ 87.8%
All West (Toll-free calls, Mail)	2010/2011	123,665	- 17%
Web Unique Visitors (All Sites)	2007/2008	788,397	
Web Unique Visitors (All Sites)	2008/2009	1,042,864	+ 32.3%
Web Unique Visitors (All Sites)	2009/2010	1,084,028	+ 3.9 %
Web Unique Visitors (All Sites)	2010/2011	1,099,269	+ 1.3 %

The database system created in 2003 by Drake Cooper (www.UpdatedIdaho.com) continues to be the online interface for Idaho's tourism industry to post and edit information about lodging properties, events, attractions, vacation packages, and contact information. The database delivers data to these sites:

- visitidaho.org
- idahogolftrail.com
- idahowinter.org
- lewisandclarkidaho.com
- touridaho.org
- idahowhitewatertrail.com
- idahoparks.org
- rvidaho.org
- swita.org
- twinfallschamber.com
- visitsouthidaho.com
- stayontrails.com
- beoutsideidaho.org
- and the official Idaho Travel Guide.

Improvements made to the database this year result in more usability for tourists and recreationists. Now, there is integrated interactive Google mapping technology in two locations. The first is within Search Results and Category pages. Search Results, where results can be seen by location on the Google map at the top, with the list view below it. One can zoom into a specific location to find results that best match needs. One may also click the orange icon next to any result in the list to be shown exactly where the listing is, without leaving the page. The second location is on each Attraction, Lodging and Event detail page, where one can find other nearby attractions, lodging, and events on the map. Also, one can narrow a search by choosing only to view types of listings that are of interest by using checkboxes. As a bonus, additional "Services" data from Google is available so that one can locate ATMs, restaurants, shopping, car rentals, and more nearby. These improvements make visitidaho.org a comprehensive trip-planning resource.

All West Communications closed their Boise office November 30 and returned to their home base in Salt Lake City. Since 2005, All West Communications provided 24-hour inbound customer service, web inquiries, and lead generation for Visit Idaho. The basis for All West's closure was a decline in call volume, coupled with consumers utilizing the web and smart phones. Upon their closure, All West transferred 500,000 leads to Idaho Tourism. Beginning November 29, Idaho Tourism launched a pilot "Call Center" and routed Visit Idaho toll-free calls to Idaho Tourism's office. In-bound calls will be greeted with a live, friendly, guest services agent, Monday – Friday, 8 am – 5pm. The pilot program will continue for four months and will be followed by an evaluation of effectiveness.

Scenic Byways

Years ago, Idaho had a confusing mixture of scenic routes—some were National Forest Scenic Byways, some were State Scenic Routes; there were no consistent standards for such routes, and there was little publicity about them. Since becoming an IRTI project, the Idaho Scenic Byway Advisory Committee (SBAC) has been established with multi-agency and private sector members. While the Idaho Byway program is managed by ITD, the SBAC advises ITD on Byway designation and recommends state priorities for use of Federal Highway Administration Scenic Byway grant funds. The SBAC effectively leverages between \$200,000 and \$1 million each year in Byway enhancement funds for Idaho. Idaho now has a system of thirty scenic, historic and cultural byways in Idaho's Byway program, spanning 2,916 miles of the state highway system, with several "Back Country Byways" traversing some of Idaho's more challenging and interesting back roads. The project lead is John Krause, Mobility Program Manager for ITD; the chairman of the SBAC is Reid Rogers, President of the Greater Yellowstone Geographic Center, Inc.

2011 Accomplishments

- **Scenic Byways help ITD achieve goals** This year, ITD released its revised Long Range Transportation Plan document which identified its primary guiding principles as *increasing mobility, improving safety, and encouraging economic opportunities*. Coincident with this, ITD commissioned a Technical Report titled "Growing the Idaho Economy: Moving into the Future" that identified Idaho's Byway system as one of the state's key assets, and identified tourism as having one of the highest potentials for increasing the economic well-being of Idaho's communities. Consequently, ITD has recognized the opportunities presented by the state byway system in meeting its overarching goals – specifically in improving the economic well-being of the state.
- **Idaho's Byways website and brochures.** Idaho's award-winning website (www.idahobyways.gov) continues to provide information to Idaho's visitors on features of the Byways and the communities through which they pass. The program also continues to provide an informative brochure that is sent out individually to potential Idaho visitors, and, in case-quantities, to travel associations and information centers across the U.S. and world-wide. In 2011, 50,000 copies of the brochure were printed and distributed.
- **Scenic Byway Advisory Committee (SBAC) initiative** The SBAC has an initiative underway to re-engineer, repurpose, and revitalize the role of the SBAC, relative to the evolution of Idaho's Byway program.
- **Federal funding for Idaho Byways** During 2011 there were two Federal Highway Administration National Scenic Byway Program (NSBP) grant cycles completed through the work of the SBAC, with a third cycle beginning in November.
 - In 2010, eight grant funding applications totaling \$1.9 million were submitted in response to that year's solicitation for NSBP funding. Awards were not announced for

these until mid-2011, and consisted of \$213,000 of federal aid for the following four projects:

- Payette River National Scenic Byway interpretive signage
 - Thousand Springs Scenic Byway wildlife viewing area
 - Stanley Visitor Center landscaping (at the confluence of three Scenic Byways)
 - Salmon River Scenic Byway path to Sacajawea Center
- Shortly after the 2010 awards were announced, the 2011 Scenic Byway funding process was begun. A total of six applications were submitted totaling \$1.2 Million; in August, awards totaling \$332,000 were made to the following four projects:
 - Thousand Springs Scenic Byway: interpretive and directional signage
 - International Selkirk Loop: development and construction of a new Sandpoint Byways Interpretive Center
 - Sawtooth, Salmon River, and Ponderosa Pine Scenic Byways interpretive signage
 - Payette River Scenic Byway corridor management plan update
- **Outdoor Idaho Public TV program about Idaho's Byways.** Idaho Public TV was engaged to begin production of an episode of its award-winning *Outdoor Idaho* program that will spotlight nearly all of Idaho's Scenic Byways. The segment is scheduled for airing in March 2013, with additional viewing of the segment and additional footage for years to come. This is being funded with a federal NSBP grant and contributions from IRTI partner organizations and Idaho Public TV.



State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation and Tourism Plan

Each state is required to develop a State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation and Tourism Plan (SCORTP) every five years in order to be eligible for Land and Water Conservation Fund Act (LWCF) funding. Please note that the tourism element is not required, but Idaho has chosen to include it. While a new approach to meeting this requirement is being explored at the national level, the requirement remains. Rick Just, Comprehensive Planning Chief for IDPR, is the project lead.



2011 Accomplishments

The interagency SCORTP Steering Committee met twice during the year and conducted additional business electronically. It is anticipated that the 2012-2016 Idaho SCORTP will be ready for submission to the National Park Service in spring 2012. Accomplishments during 2012 include these things:

- The SCORTP Steering Committee received permission from the National Park Service to use regional data from the National Survey on Recreation and the Environment as a surrogate for Idaho in the state needs assessment. There were not enough responses to the survey from Idaho alone to meet reliability needs, but expanding to the region provided a sufficient number of responses.
- A statewide survey of Idahoans was conducted to determine the top outdoor recreation issues and opportunities in Idaho. The 488 valid responses provided a very comfortable confidence level of 95%, at plus or minus 5%.
- A new Open Project Selection Process and criteria for LWCF grants were developed with help from the Land and Water Conservation Fund Grant Committee and the Idaho Recreation and Parks Association.

Visitor Centers

The Idaho Visitor Centers project includes support of visitor centers located along highways near Idaho's state boundaries. Three visitor centers—Huetter, Cherry Creek, and Snake River View—are funded in part by ITD (bricks and mortar maintenance) and by ID Division of Tourism (operations). Tourism does not have personnel for staffing, but can provide some funding for volunteer staffing. Currently, the Centers are operated by volunteers recruited by local Chambers of Commerce. Karen Ballard, Administrator for Idaho Division of Tourism, is the project lead.

2011 Accomplishments

- Visitor Center locations are promoted via the *Visit Idaho* Travel Guide, online resource partners, directional highway signage, and Idaho highway map.
 - Snake River View Visitor Center; open May-September, 10 am -6 pm; 32,622 visitors.
 - Cherry Creek Visitor Center; open Memorial Day-Labor Day; 10 am-6 pm; 6,840 visitors. Wi-Fi was added this summer, and provided valuable assistance to visitors, allowing them to make travel arrangements on-line.
 - Huetter Visitor Center; open Tuesday-Saturday, 9 am -5 pm; 9,871 visitors (down 8% over last year).

Watchable Wildlife

The Watchable Wildlife (WW) Committee is an interagency team that works to promote wildlife viewing opportunities and an appreciation of wildlife across land management jurisdictions across all of Idaho. The WW Committee's goal is to enhance Idahoans' and visitors' respect and understanding of wildlife, its conservation, and outdoor recreation resources through viewing opportunities and community engagement. The WW Committee works with IDFG's Wildlife Diversity Program to sustain Idaho's fish and wildlife and the habitats upon which they depend, with an emphasis on threatened, endangered, and at-risk species. Projects focus on promoting appreciation for wildlife and their habitats, wildlife-based tourism, and responsible wildlife observation ethics. In addition to the IRTI partners, the WW Committee includes representatives from Golden Eagle Audubon, Idaho Fish and Game Foundation, and Idaho Power. In past years, the WW Committee produced and published the [Idaho Wildlife Viewing Guide](#) and [Idaho Birding Trail Guidebook](#). Revenue from sales of these books and funding from interagency partners support the WW Committee's work. Deniz Aygen, Watchable Wildlife Program Coordinator for IDFG, is the project lead and WW Committee Chair.

2011 Accomplishments

- *Windows to Wildlife* Newsletter
About 3,000 copies of the newsletter are distributed quarterly. They are sent to Idaho Wildlife license plate holders (about 740, up 21% from last year), all IDFG employees, WW Committee members, Idaho Power employees, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service employees in Idaho. This year's issues included these topics: gardening for wildlife, tracking wolverines, "Bird by Bird" program in schools, bird-a-thon team fundraising, new bighorn viewing station, as well ways to support Idaho's nongame wildlife. Wildlife-related events are included in every issue. Donations received from the newsletter in FY11 were \$260.00 (down 37%). These are tax deductible donations.
- Events
The Watchable Wildlife Committee hosted an informational booth at the following events:
 - Salmon and Steelhead Days - Boise
 - Bald Eagle Days – Boise; information and Idaho wildlife coloring station
 - International Migratory Bird Day – Boise; 250 binoculars made
 - In-service Training School (ISTS) - Boise



At the Watchable Wildlife booth during International Migratory Bird Day, kids created binoculars using recycled toilet paper rolls; photos by Deniz Aygen.

▪ Projects

• **Be Outside, Idaho! - Statewide**

WW has been an integral part of the *Be Outside* initiative, focused on getting kids outside. WW helped pay for promotional decals and a banner, and donated hours of time to the project (for Salmon and Steelhead Days, Bird By Bird, Bald Eagle Days, International Migratory Bird Day, and web posting).



• **“Bird by Bird” - Treasure Valley**

WW committee members and *Be Outside, Idaho!* partners, IDFG, BLM, USFWS, Golden Eagle Audubon, and Wild Birds Unlimited, began a pilot bird watching and feeding program during the 2009-2010 school year in local elementary and high schools.

- Equipment, books, optics, and seed are provided for the entire school year.
- Classrooms record bird observation data.
- Each student submits one “Bird by Bird” project at the end of the year.
- Teachers submit a summary report, student projects, observations, and data sheets.
- WW provides funding for bird feeders and equipment, and contributes time.



During the 2010-2011 school year, nine classrooms participated in the program. During the 2011-2012 school year, twelve schools will participate, as well as a senior assisted-living facility. WW is working on a new website for the “Bird by Bird” program.

“I never did like birds, but till I saw how cool it is to watch them, I started to love learning about birds all the time. I read books about birds at school now. It was fun to learn about birds. Thanks for giving us the things to learn about them.”

- 4th grader at Grace Jordan Elementary School whose classroom participated in “Bird by Bird.”

• **Wildlife viewing camera at the MK Nature Center – Boise**

WW funded a new wildlife viewing camera that has been set up in the Alpine Lake (waterfall) area of the MK Nature Center stream. Although this pond is tiny, it displays the traits of a full-blown ecosystem, complete with food webs, production, predation, decomposition, etc. The camera helps visitors (to the Nature Center and online) see it all!



(Photos by Deniz Aygen)

- **International Migratory Bird Day – Boise**

WW staffed a booth at the event on May 14 at the MK Nature Center. Kids were able to construct their own set of “binoculars” using toilet paper rolls, yarn, and beads. Over 200 pairs of binoculars were made. WW purchased posters for the event that were handed out to participants.

- **Highway 21/Oregon Trail Interpretive Display – near Boise**

WW created two interpretive displays for the Oregon Trail Interpretive Site located just off of Highway 21 near Boise. The signs help promote the importance of the local habitat Hammer Flats and Boise River Wildlife Management Area and the wildlife that occurs in these areas throughout the year.



- **Kirkwood Ranch bighorn sheep interpretive display – Hells Canyon NRA**

The Kirkwood Historic Ranch is the “must stop” place for Hells Canyon tourists. The ranch is the upriver destination for hundreds of jet boat tours each year. Over 8,000 people arrive on jet boats or rafts and sign the museum guest book each year. These “nature tourists” are keenly interested in wild land and wildlife. Thus, the need for an educational display on bighorn sheep that will:

- Provide information on the historic, biological, cultural, and commercial benefits of Hells Canyon bighorn sheep.
- Expand public knowledge of these iconic, native animals.
- Increase public understanding and support for bighorn sheep recovery.
- Provide bighorn sheep education as identified in IDFG’s 2010 Bighorn Sheep Plan.
- Provide an additional attraction for Hells Canyon tourism.

Priorities for 2012

- Emphasize programs, events, and publicity for wildlife viewing opportunities.
- Promote the Idaho Birding Trail (signage).
- Secure funding for future projects like the Nature Backpack Program.
- Work collaboratively on other statewide projects involving wildlife viewing opportunities.
- Promote the Idaho Birding Trail guidebook and website and find new vendors.



2012 Idaho Conference on Recreation and Tourism

May 8-10, 2012

Coeur d'Alene Resort, Coeur d'Alene, Idaho

For more information about the Idaho Recreation and Tourism Initiative, visit

www.parksandrecreation.idaho.gov/aboutus/irti.aspx www.commerce.idaho.gov/travel/irti.aspx

or contact IRTI Coordinator, Vicki Jo Lawson, at vicki.lawson@idpr.idaho.gov