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## IDAHO RECREATION AND TOURISM INITIATIVE: AN OVERVIEW

October 20, 2008

The Idaho Recreation and Tourism Initiative (IRTI), created in 1988, is a coalition of state and federal agencies and others dedicated to providing Idaho citizens and visitors with expanded recreation opportunities. IRTI's primary objective is to develop partnerships and cooperate with any and all interested agencies, organizations, groups, and individuals in order to improve public information and services associated with recreation and tourism opportunities in Idaho.

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, including these: a statewide campground directory, a statewide scenic byway system, a statewide wildlife viewing guide, and an annual Governor's conference on recreation and tourism. Simply, the coalition strives to make it easy for people to come outside and play. By working together, the coalition is able to more effectively provide information and services.

IRTI partners include Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Reclamation, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation, Idaho Division of Tourism, Idaho Outfitters and Guides Association, Idaho Outfitters and Guides Licensing Board, Idaho RV Campground Association, Idaho Transportation Department, National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and U.S. Forest Service. Other public and private entities participate in various IRTI projects, including Idaho Department of Lands and Idaho Division of Aeronautics.

A Steering Group composed of one representative from each partner agency governs IRTI. The Steering Group meets three to four times each year, approves statewide work projects, and approves the annual budget. The annual IRTI budget is funded by contributions from various partner agencies. An IRTI Coordinator, funded jointly by the partner agencies, provides staff support to the Steering Group. Jack Lavin filled the Coordinator role from 1988 until 2007. Vicki Lawson is the current Coordinator. The Steering Group follows these operating guidelines:

- Each IRTI Steering Group member is responsible for adhering to his/her agency's laws and fiscal regulations.
- Each IRTI Steering Group member should recognize and respect the laws and fiscal regulations of the partner agencies.
- IRTI operates on the State of Idaho fiscal year schedule – July 1 through June 30. Federal partners operate on a fiscal year that begins October 1 and ends September 30.

- The IRTI Steering Group is the decision-making authority for the IRTI. This includes determining which statewide projects are to be included as line items in the annual operating plan/budget.
- The IRTI Coordinator provides staff support to the IRTI Steering Group.
- Projects approved in the annual operating plan/budget are accomplished by project-specific working groups composed of representatives from the involved agencies.
- An agency's IRTI Steering Group member may be a different person from that agency's representative on a project-specific working group. If this is the case, it is important that the two people communicate well. Agency financial commitments can only be made by the Agency representative on the IRTI Steering Group.
- Each project, shown in the annual IRTI budget, will have one agency designated as "Banker".
- Banker responsibilities include collecting and dispersing funds obligated to the projects described in the IRTI annual operating plan/budget. It is important that Banker agencies bill the partners early in the fiscal year, since funds sometimes are not available later in the year.

The IRTI Coordinator, currently a one-quarter time position, is housed at the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation headquarters in Boise, and reports to the Department's Division Administrator of Operations. The Coordinator work priorities are set by the IRTI Steering Group. One of the Steering Group goals is to institutionalize the on-going projects so that, aside from funding, the individual, project-specific work groups run them. The Coordinator has a general knowledge and respect for the laws and regulations guiding each partner agency. The Coordinator identifies potential conflicts and works with the Steering Group or project-specific working group to resolve them. The Coordinator acts as a focal point for receiving and distributing information that facilitates the partner agencies in providing improved public service in outdoor recreation and tourism. The Coordinator represents IRTI at meetings and conferences relating to outdoor recreation and tourism.

The Coordinator is responsible for making arrangements for the periodic meetings of the Steering Group, including meeting space reservations, agenda preparation, and drafting meeting minutes. The Coordinator assembles the annual IRTI budget from data provided from the partner agencies, including getting agency directors' approval signatures. The Coordinator is available as a staff resource for agency employees and others on matters pertaining to recreation and tourism in Idaho. There are many more agency partnership projects accomplished at the local park, forest, management area, and district levels that do not involve the IRTI Steering Committee. However, the Coordinator is available, upon request from local entities, to assist with advice and counsel.