

## **Idaho Recreation and Tourism Initiative (IRTI) Objectives and History**

The Idaho Recreation and Tourism Initiative (IRTI) 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. Simply, the coalition strives to make it easy for people to come outside and play. By working together, the coalition is able to provide information and services in a more effective manner.

The IRTI was created in 1988 as a spin-off from the U.S. Forest Service National Recreation Strategy. The strategy complemented both the White House Task Force Report on Outdoor Recreation and the State of Idaho's efforts to enhance travel promotion and outdoor recreation. The 1987 Idaho Leisure Travel and Recreation Study, sponsored by the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation, Idaho Department of Commerce, and the University of Idaho, was aimed at improving tourism marketing and outdoor recreation opportunities. The 1988 White House Task Force Report called for improved cooperation among local, federal, and private organizations. Initial IRTI partners were Idaho Department of Commerce, Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation, and the U.S. Forest Service. These agencies soon were joined by the Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Reclamation, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Idaho Transportation Department, and National Park Service. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service joined in 2005. Other partners include/have included the Idaho RV Campground Association, Idaho Association of Outfitters and Guides, Idaho Power Company, University of Idaho, Audubon Society, and Idaho Outfitters and Guides Licensing Board.

Early leaders in developing IRTI included Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation Director Yvonne Ferrell, National Forest Supervisors Ron Stoleson and Bill Morden, Idaho Department of Commerce's Tourism Development Director Carl Wilgus, Bureau of Land Management's George Weiskircher, and Bureau of Reclamation's Jim Budolfson.

A Steering Group composed of representatives of the partners governs IRTI. There is a coordinator position that provides staff support to the Steering Group. The group meets 3-4 times each year and operates on the State fiscal year starting July 1. Jack Lavin filled the Coordinator role from 1988 until October 2007. Vicki Lawson is the current Coordinator.

Some of the more noteworthy accomplishments of IRTI include:

- initiated the on-going annual Idaho Conference on Recreation and Tourism;
- created the State Scenic Byway System;
- facilitated the State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation and Tourism Plan in becoming a multi-agency product;
- produced two editions of the Idaho Wildlife Viewing Guide Book;
- published an ongoing annual Campground Directory listing all private, state, and federal facilities in Idaho; and
- improved the spirit of cooperation and partnership among all recreation and tourism interests within Idaho.