



Strategic Plan Fiscal Year 2022

Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation

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Idaho Park and Recreation Board

The Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation provides citizen oversight for the department. Each member represents one of six districts of the state. Current Board members are:

Doug Eastwood	District 1—Post Falls, Idaho
Randy Doman	District 2—Cottonwood, Idaho
Brian Beckley, Chair	District 3—Meridian, Idaho
Cally Roach	District 4—Fairfield, Idaho
Pete Black	District 5—Pocatello, Idaho
Louis A. Fatkin	District 6—Idaho Falls, Idaho
Susan E. Buxton, Director	Ex Officio

ENJOYING THE IDAHO OUTDOORS FOREVER

Strategic Highlights

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 for the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation and leaving our parks and recreation areas better than when we inherited them. This strategic plan proposes bold new initiatives and strategies on how to achieve them.

The Department is determined to address operating and maintenance needs of our facilities while not asking to spend money we do not have. So how will we get better results? The Department will maximize the use of existing funds by focusing on what we do best. In so doing, we know the State of Idaho will reap economic benefits. Our true success, though, is measured not in economic multipliers but instead in a lifetime of memories.

“Vision is not enough, it must be combined with venture. It is not enough to stare up the steps, we must step up the stairs.”
Václav Havel

Looking Ahead

We see the future teeming with residents and out-of-state visitors enjoying outdoor recreation opportunities in our parks, facilities, and other recreation areas. Despite the popularity of certain locations, our park and recreation areas are so well-designed and managed that the crowds do not detract from the recreation experience.

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

Brian Beckley, Chair
Idaho Park and Recreation Board

July 1, 2021

PARKS AND RECREATION

Enjoying the Idaho Outdoors Forever

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 are innovators in outdoor recreation, committed to excellent service and resource stewardship. We foster experiences that renew the human spirit and promote community vitality.

What We Do

IDPR manages thirty state parks and recreation programs throughout the state. What we do best—and better than any other provider in the state—is provide overnight stays in beautiful, natural settings, unique daytime recreation areas and experiences, and access to outdoor recreation on federal lands. We also provide inspiration and hope—hope for a better quality of life through our stewardship, education, and interpretation of our great natural resources.

IDPR administers the recreation sticker programs for boats, snowmobiles and other off-highway vehicles. Money from these sticker programs goes to develop and maintain trails, facilities, and education programs for snowmobilers, boaters and off-highway vehicle operators. IDPR administers non-motorized trail programs like *Park N' Ski* and assists in the Department of Agriculture in their *Protection Against 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.



THE STRATEGIC PLAN

The Planning Process

You can't plan your way to change. (Miller, 2006, p. 15) For this reason, it is important to IDPR that our strategic plan is a useful tool. Only with the support and input of the individuals that make decisions daily regarding the operation and administration of the Department, can the document truly become a useful tool. The final plan is sent to the Governor's office, distributed to employees, and posted on the Department website.

Using the Strategic Plan

The strategic plan is made a part of our daily work lives in several ways. Most importantly, the strategic plan communicates 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



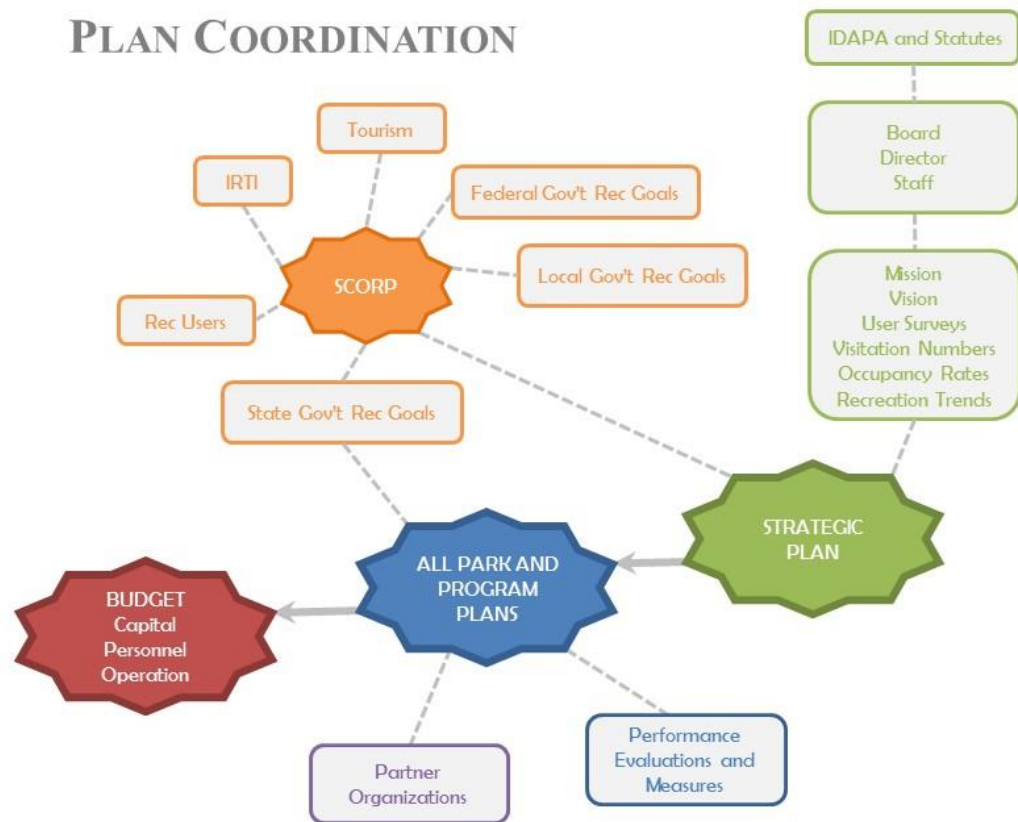
goals at all levels—the Board, the Director, and all employees. Parks and programs have annual work plans that mirror strategic plan objectives and tasks. These park and program level work plans become the basis for the individual work plans and performance evaluations.

Parks and programs also have annual reports that specifically analyze their success in meeting strategic plan objectives. That analysis is 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.

PLAN COORDINATION



Sustainable Model

The strategic plan is the result of a continuous improvement process that evaluates the organization'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 when we inherited them. Our sustainable model is focused on acknowledging what we do best as an organization and seeking to do what we do best even better.

In a recent employee and Board survey of "what we do best", nearly all the responses could be grouped in order as:

1. Setting the stage for excellent recreation activities;
2. Providing great customer service; and
3. Being proper stewards of our natural resources.

One survey answer, "Provide joy to the people around us," expressed an aspiration held by many employees. We are foremost public servants, and we want to share our love of the outdoors. This and other sentiments from the survey are expressed throughout the plan as "what we do best."

Organization

We maintain our organizing 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.



WHAT WE DO BEST: EXPERIENCE

We provide great experiences in our parks with overnight stays in beautiful, natural settings and unique daytime recreation areas and experiences. The recent pandemic taught us that the outdoors is a place of refuge, that it is important for recreators to understand more about what they experience in the outdoors, and it is equally important they know how to safely recreate. This is not just imperative to the citizens of Idaho; it is important to people throughout the nation.

Goal: Foster experiences that renew the human spirit.

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

Unique Camping Experiences.

Campers are looking for unique camping experiences—some as an entry into the camping experience—some as a new adventure—some as a more comfortable alternative to tent camping. Camping is fulfilling the younger, more diverse generation’s desire for a different type of vacation experience. (America, 2018, p. 10). Conversely, older campers are looking for more comfortable accommodations while still “camping.” Regardless of why, IDPR has an opportunity to provide more unique types of accommodations such as lodges, treehouses, safari tents, yurts, and even caves. IDPR should focus on adding inventory of luxury types of accommodations and high-end services and amenities. IDPR should also provide add-on amenities like paddleboards with the yurts at Winchester.

The location of these unique experiences should be carefully considered to find spots within underutilized parks that will still be able to draw visitors. IDPR should target promotional campaigns to the new opportunities at underutilized parks.

Task 1: By June 2025 increase the availability of unique camping experiences by refurbishing, building or contracting with concessionaires for at least two new locations at underutilized parks throughout the system. Provide a promotional campaign in association with the new opportunities.

Task 2: By April 2022, within at least three parks, develop overnight accommodation sites for cyclists. Things to consider include: no reservation required, a reduced rate, a no-turn-away policy, bike racks at trail heads and visitor centers, repair stations and supplies for purchase.



State Park Campgrounds.

Each year, more visitors are camping at Idaho State Parks. Over time 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. Idaho needs more camping spots. We will continue to add campgrounds within existing Idaho State Parks, but IDPR needs new areas as well. New parks are difficult to locate and expensive to acquire.



In order to accommodate more campers, 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 providing a reservation system for overnight camping. The partnering entity will provide the land for development, the operating capital, and personnel to manage the facilities. IDPR should only enter into partnerships where the partnering agency supports and will commit to the top five considerations in selecting a campground (America, 2018, p. 22) which are:

1. Clean and well-maintained bathhouses and restrooms.
2. “Kid friendly” setting.
3. Self-guided recreational activities.
4. Allows pets and has a pet area.
5. Free WiFi.

Task 3: By July 2024 enter into partnership agreements with at least two other entities to construct State Park Partner Campgrounds.

Satisfied customers.

IDPR prides itself in providing exceptional customer service to our visitors. It is one of the things we do best. We initiated a survey of our overnight guests in 2015 to begin monitoring customer satisfaction. We continue to send out that survey to every overnight guest that makes a reservation.

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

Given the wording of the current questions in the survey, we do not see much change in overall rating from year-to-year. We have an opportunity to evaluate the survey questions to be a more useful tool in assessing customer satisfaction.

Task 5: By January 1, 2023, consider 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 overnight customer satisfaction rating of 4.11 (with 5 being a rating of “excellent”).¹

Competitive Wages

Great customer service comes from employees that 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 that did not anticipate or study for a natural resources job. Our Jr. Ranger and recreation programs are one way of recruiting future generations of patrons and, hopefully, employees that 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 appropriation to bring IDPR salaries closer in line with other resource agencies, such as Department of Fish and Game and Department of Lands, based on hiring or average wage rate.



¹ Benchmark of 4.11 set by data collected during 2015 for average customer satisfaction rating for all parks statewide.

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

IDPR provides not only quality recreation experiences associated with overnight stays, but also recreation experiences through education, instruction, and interpretation. Our most recent programmatic success within the parks is the Jr. Ranger Program. For many park visitors—particularly young visitors—interacting with employees in an educational or interpretive program greatly enhances their experience. The success of the Jr. Ranger program is an indicator for all our interpretive efforts within the parks.



IDPR also provides excellent education opportunities within the Recreation Bureau on snowmobile avalanche and rescue, safe boating, and off-highway vehicle safety. It is one of the things IDPR does best, and IDPR is often the only group providing the instruction.

Performance Measure 2: Increase the number of participants in Jr. Ranger and Recreation Bureau programs by at least 3% each year through July 2026.²



We can improve our recreation offerings by better understanding how the citizens of Idaho want to recreate.

Task 7: By December 2023, conduct a statewide survey on outdoor recreation trends, motivation, barriers to participation, and other recreation appropriate topics. Use this information to 1) create programming and services that best align with our customers, 2) directly target our promotional efforts, and 3) identify customers we can reach with customized messages.

² The original benchmark of 244,000 participants in all programs was set in 2015. This proved problematic in that one large event—or lack thereof—made the metric meaningless. In 2021, we propose to shift the benchmark to only address the Jr. Ranger and Recreation Bureau education programs as an indicator of all programming within the Department. The Jr. Ranger program benchmark is set at 42,258 views of interpretive videos, which is based on 2020 numbers. The Recreation Bureau benchmark is set at 4,518 students which is based on education numbers for 2020: boating education 2,718 and motorized trails education 1,800 (actual number is 1,519 which was about 25% lower over our three-year average). As COVID 19 restrictions ease, these benchmarks may need to be reevaluated.

Technology improvements geared toward park and recreation customers.

Parks and recreation are 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, is helping to eliminate barriers to camping. (America, 2018, p. 14)

Through the success of several pilot programs, IDPR shifted from a distributed, pay-to-use, and unsustainable WiFi model, to a free WiFi hotspot model that is sustainable and has been well-received by customers. IDPR will continue this model 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 band width to address business, employee, and customer needs (in priority order).

Task 8: By January 2022, submit request to Governor's office to receive American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) infrastructure funds to improve available technology in the parks.

Task 9: By January 2025, and as connectivity at the parks improves, move the reservation window from one day to zero days coupled with 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.

WHAT WE DO BEST: ACCESS

We create an opportunity 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.

Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation 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 that enjoy state parks but also those that enjoy motorized and non-motorized recreation throughout Idaho.

Objective 3: Protect and improve access to valuable recreational facilities throughout the state.

Motorized and non-motorized access to recreational trails.

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% of multiple use trails over the last 30 years have been redesignated for non-motorized use only. Idaho needs more 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 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.

While IDPR will continue to advocate for keeping all existing access we recognize that some areas are a greater priority for maintenance needs—regardless of whether the traveler is walking, riding a horse, pedaling a bicycle, driving an off-highway vehicle, riding a snowmobile, or wrangling a

motorcycle. IDPR will continue to work with our partners to identify routes in jeopardy of being lost and investigate how we might join maintenance efforts to strategically address key maintenance projects.

Performance Measure 4: Maintain at least 2,000 miles of motorized use trails annually.³

Performance Measure 5: No net loss of existing summer recreational trail access to federal and state lands.⁴

Task 10: IDPR had the great fortune of obtaining Recreation Initiative funds from Governor Little for our FY 2022 budget. A portion of those funds are for improvements to the Idaho Centennial Trail. By November 2021, develop an implementation strategy on how to use the FY 2022 funds for the Idaho Centennial Trail and plans to seek and improve additional segments in future budgets.

Public access to safe and convenient boating facilities.

Task 11: Include an inventory of boat launches statewide in need of repair and upgrades as a prioritized list in the next update of the Idaho Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan.



³ Benchmark of 1,500 miles set by 2013 (2,028 miles), 2014 (2,482 miles), and 2015 (2,073 miles).

⁴ Benchmark of 8.202 U.S. Forest Service miles of motorized trails in Idaho as of May 14, 2021.

WHAT WE DO BEST: STEWARDSHIP

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

Goal: Be responsible stewards of our natural resources.



Protecting the natural environment.

Stewardship is an important tenant of any land management agency. We are entrusted with caring for property that must thrive for the generations to come. 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, fuels management, erosion control, care and maintenance of historic and cultural properties and structures, riparian restoration projects, curating historic artifacts, and preserving the culture of those that came before.

As stewards of our parks, we take steps to improve safety within our parks 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.

Our failure to care for these important resources is generally the cause for complaint and dissatisfied customers. Given population increases and the pandemic inspired popularity of outdoor recreation in Idaho, we anticipate that our number of customers will continue to increase.

Objective 5: Be exceptional stewards of the natural resources, artifacts and assets entrusted to IDPR.

To be exceptional 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 12: By January 2023, identify areas within our parks and managed sites that need resource restoration. Prioritize restoration efforts and include in the FY 2025 budget.

Task 13: By January 2022, evaluate the effectiveness of the Bear Lake State Park Advanced Reservation System and identify implementation strategies for other parks that are being “loved to death” by overuse and overcrowding.



Maintaining IDPR facilities.

More visitors mean more wear and tear on our facilities as well. Unfortunately, IDPR already has a backlog of maintenance projects. The Department is determined to address maintenance needs of our facilities through the annual capital budgeting process. The goal is to eliminate the backlog of overdue maintenance.



Performance Measure 6: Seek additional capital funding each year to eliminate the backlog of maintenance projects for above ground facilities by FY 2030. This means that the budget prepared for FY 2030 would fully address maintenance needs for that year with no outstanding required maintenance.⁵

Task 14: In preparing the capital budget each year, evaluate progress toward the goal of eliminating the maintenance backlog by FY 2030.

Task 15: By January 2024, prepare a comprehensive assessment of all below-ground facilities, required maintenance, and prioritized list of projects.

⁵ Benchmark of needed maintenance projects was set at \$20,472,000 through comprehensive evaluation of all above-ground facilities during the summer and fall of 2016.

EXTERNAL FACTORS

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

Pandemic

2020 and 2021 have shown us that, when other forms of socializing and getting away from home are curtailed, people seek the outdoors. We anticipate increased demand for the opportunities we offer for great experiences in parks or other state and federal lands—whether it is an overnight or daytime adventure or a program that inspires hope for the future.

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 recreation registration revenue.
- Drought may shorten the boating season and can impact IDPR's ability to sustain desired vegetation and control weeds.
- Natural disasters such as floods, fires, 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 very expensive and outside the spending authority in place at the time.

Legislative and Gubernatorial Support

IDPR is dependent on the support of the Idaho State Legislators and the Governor for its continued operation. Inability to approve appropriation requests or fund programs will obviously impact IDPR's ability to meet the strategic plan goals and objectives.

State and National

The state and national economy/unemployment rate impact the discretionary income of would-be park attendees and recreationalists to enjoy our facilities and programs. The relative cost of fuel for would-be customers can encourage or discourage out-of-state visitors and motorized recreationists such as motorbikes, boats, ATVs, UTVs, and RV (recreational vehicle) users. A decrease in customers or decrease in fuel sales both impact the revenue stream of IDPR.

Access to recreational trails is a very important goal of IDPR. However, most of the recreational trails are on federal properties, and IDPR has very limited direct control over such decisions. Therefore, decisions by federal and other state land management agencies to close access to 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 driven vehicles improves, it is unclear if this may have a favorable impact on federal land management policies.

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.

Implementation

In making budget requests 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.

Works Cited

America, KOA. (2018). *North American Camping Report*. KOAPressRoom.com.
 Miller, K. (2006). *We Don't Make Widgets*. Washington, D.C.: Governing Books.