

## **IRTI Steering Committee Meeting**

August 26, 2021, 9 AM to 12 PM MST/ Boise, ID

Present: Rick Just, Cecilia Arritola, Everardo Santillan, Wade Vegias, Chelsea Chambers, Mindy Peper, Susan Kain, **Susan Saad**, Shannon Bassista, **Deniz Aygen**, **Andy Brunelle**, Ian Malapei, **Todd Wernex**

### **Welcome/Introductions**

Peper welcomes everyone and everyone introduces self to group.

### **Housekeeping Items**

Peper shares information about the binders. Peper shares information about the ICORT conference.

Heather Dermot with Idaho (sitting in with Skylar Jett) interested in signing MOU on behalf of her organization.

Susan Kain USFWS- Deer Flat NWR is sitting in for Ally Turner and will probably be the primary person to attend. States that their organization is also interested in signing the MOU.

### **Review Minutes from April 2021**

IRTI reviews April 2021 minutes and accepts and approves minutes as is.

### **MOU**

The current MOU was signed about 5 years ago and expires September 26, 2021. Brunelle is working on the extension. Because of a lot of work going on with other projects and understaffing of many agencies and organizations, it is decided to do a 1-year extension of this MOU. Then, over the next couple months, Brunelle and Peper will work on an MOU for the subsequent 5-year period. Peper sent Brunelle an email with current agency leads for the MOU. In earlier discussions nothing has come up in changing the MOU, but during this next 12 months we can revisit that. Peper will add discussion of the new 5-year MOU to future agendas including bringing in new parties who want to be on the next MOU. Arritola mentions that her agency director just announced his retirement and so she will keep us up to date on whoever the new director will be. Chambers asks if there is a problem electronically signing the MOU. Peper and Brunelle will work together on how to route the MOU extension for signatures.

Bassista suggests it may speed up the process if we send out individual signature pages for each agency lead.

In the meantime, IRTI committee members will let their agency leads know that the extension is on its way to help with efficiency and speed of the process.

### **Budget Update and Decision**

Peper and Chambers touches on the budget and the need to update it. Malapei mentions have not invoiced for Free Fishing for the last two years and this project may need to be removed from the IRTI budget.

Aygen mentions that she could use more money for the Watchable Wild program, specifically regarding the leaflet series she is working on.

Bassista mentions that she had some money left over on the Be Outdoor project, so she needs to work to make sure that money is obligated before the deadline.

Brunelle talks about the IRTI history project. He worked with the former IRTI coordinator on this, and it turned into an annual report. It is felt like this project is done and can be closed out and removed from the budget.

Regarding the state visitor centers, Just says historically that the visitor centers were staffed but now they are run by volunteers. They also hold a lot of the RV Campground directories. It seems to be the consensus of the group to keep this project on the budget.

Malapei mentions that it would be great to follow up with Matt Borrud at IDC in regard to the Recreate.gov site. Recreate Responsibly project has several state and federal partners. It may be a good idea for each IRTI partner to consider putting money toward the project which includes running ads across state agency social media platforms as well as each Thursday creating an organic post shared by the agencies. Bassista will speak with Jennifer Jones at BLM to see if there is a price point for the projects.

### **Project Updates**

Aygen states she is working on a new wildlife viewing leaflet series, similar to pocket guides. The first one is focused on big game and will be free and available soon. The more she can print the more they can give out and the lower the cost per leaflet. She plans to have them at state parks, visitor centers, etc. Would like money to help cover that project- cost of printing primarily. She feels they may be very popular. The next leaflet will be on bats and then after that, songbirds. Chambers asks when she might need funding on the project. Aygen says her goal is early October. She will send the group the draft via email. She is basing the series off the

Yukon Wildlife leaflet series, which have been very popular. You can view them here: <https://yukon.ca/en/wildlife-viewing#learn-about-yukon-wildlife>.

Chambers explains the Be Outdoor project grants. Beoutsideidaho.gov is where you apply. October 1<sup>st</sup> is the deadline. Bassista mentions she would like to talk to Chambers more about the grant for a project they are trying to put together. Chambers also says she will see if they can extend the deadline and then Peper will promote at the ICORT and will have paper applications.

Bassista mentions that there may be a trail summit to discuss non-motorized trails. Peper will invite Todd Helmer to the October and January event to speak on the summit.

Bassista states BLM applied all the funding except the piece for the CG directory. BLM is still remote working in their offices- have to stay at 25% capacity. They are facing staff shortages and vacancies, which is creating challenges. Having a hard time filling seasonal positions. Hoping to get more Great America Outdoor monies next year to apply to projects but even if they do, they are so short-staffed that they run into the problem of spending that money. Bassista mentions that her agency has several district recreation guides in Spanish that shows development and undeveloped campgrounds, rules, tips, etc. She asks the group if they have ideas of where to distribute them. Cecilia says PODER Idaho (non-profit advocacy group), or the Idaho Hispanic Cultural Center may be a good avenue for that. Malapei says that they are doing projects with Recreational Boating and Fishing Association and Idaho Hispanic Chamber of Commerce for a free fishing event September 25<sup>th</sup> at Rotary Pond in Caldwell, ID and that may be a good avenue for those brochures. He mentions he is interested in doing more outreach to the Hispanic population. If you have items to give Malapei for the Hispanic Free Fishing Day, please follow up with him after the meeting.

Brunelle states that he discovered that the effect of COVID on recreation use in Idaho has had an overall increase of 69% based on reservation sales. There were more reservations and for longer periods of time. Caribou-Targhee and the Idaho Panhandle forests saw the biggest increase, probably due to the proximity to large metro areas. Nationally seeing an increase in 2021 and will probably see the same for Idaho. The numbers in SW Idaho went up. Also, a smaller increase in the Sawtooth's, a little less but that is because they are already very popular. Arritola asks if it is due to people getting out more or due to the growth Idaho is seeing. Brunelle suspects it is mostly to more people getting out because so many other things were closed. The question is, will things snap back to pre-COVID behavior or will this set a future trend of people getting out into the outdoors. Of course, these numbers don't reflect the public land where you do not have to make reservations.

Wade reports that it has been extraordinary to see the numbers of increase in people getting out. At Craters of the Moon, 2019 and 2020 numbers were similar to one another until April or May and then in June, July, August, there was a vast increase with September being surprisingly the busiest month. They like most agencies are very understaffed and the front-line staff is

feeling the impact. Unfortunately, there has also been an increase in behaviors that are not necessarily appreciative of public lands.

Wade reports that there is a 25-year agreement with IDPR to build, design, and staff the visitors center at Thousand Springs. Soft opening in October and a grand opening in April. Will be HQ for Hagerman Fossil beds and the Thousand Springs recreation area.

Malapei reports that IDFG is wrapping up fishing season. They have seen an increase in numbers but also in unsavory behaviors. Unfortunately, the impact of increase in numbers means also the need to revisit some of the soft ethics needed to care for public lands.

They are monitoring fire situation closely—may have some closures. In 2020, resident fishing numbers were up 13% but were down a bit for 2021. This year IDFG limiting number of non-resident hunters by unit and/or zone. Tags sold out quickly.

The new Boise headquarters is just about finished, and they plan to be in there by November. Also have a new Nampa regional office.

Arritola updates the group that last year they received the most requests for scenic byway information than they have seen in the last 9 years. Also had a campaign that highlighted different features about various byways.

The feds are getting ready to release funds to help states fund byway needs. She has been working with the various organizations and councils to see what their needs are. This may include replacing all scenic byway signs and then later look at funding additional tourism signs. Malapei asks if the “Don’t Litter” sign campaign is still going and viable. Arritola will investigate that and get back to the group. Perhaps there may be a good social campaign idea there. Wernex mentions the road painting don’t litter project back in the 80s and 90s and wonders if that is something that can be brought back. Arritola will look into that as well.

Susan introduces herself. She will be taking Ally Turner’s place. She is with USFWS, Deer Flat Refuge. They are really focusing on laying the foundation for connecting underserved communities as well as collaborate with non-traditional organizations to see where there are intersections between the organizations. They are also seeing an increase in visitors due to COVID and state growth. Visitor’s center is still not open. Planning an Urban Wildlife Conservation Day with the Ecological Society on October 9<sup>th</sup> in various parks in our greater metro area.

Chambers reports many projects going on right now. IDPR is working with the NPS regarding the visitor’s center at Thousand Springs. They are very excited about the grand opening in April. Chambers asks if NPS is part of the RRI campaign. Wade will connect Chelsea to the right person for this. IDPR also working on the loaner fishing rods program and it is up and running. The Explore Idaho backpack and Junior Ranger program is also up and going. This is a joint venture with Friends of Idaho State Parks. This is the second year, and it is very popular. This is a loaner program, and each park has at least five backpacks, geared to kids 6-12. Trail sticker sales has

slowed a little bit so could use some push from partners to promote it again. They will be at the parks this year. This program allows for donations in exchange for the sticker and the money supports the non-motorized trails.

Just reports that IFSP has been helping with the backpack program, as Chambers reported. Also helping with Winchester Lake Community Movie Night (help pay for movie royalties). Also helping with fossil program in Ponderosa. Writers in Harriman program has recently become their own 501c3 program and will separate from IFSP. Just is the director of that program. Lastly, IFSP is helping with a celebration of life event for Yvonne Ferrell which will be held at Eagle State Park early September.

Wernex reports that they too have had an uptick in use of endowment lands. They don't necessarily encourage recreation because the lands are set aside to help with endowment funds, although it is okay as long as it doesn't affect their bottom line. Most of the work with non-motorized and motorized trails has been mitigation. They are looking at ways to change their signage to make it something that can be read easily and quickly. They have also been revamping the recreation webpage for Idaho endowment lands and they hope to have it done by late winter/early spring. Lastly, they have been working on the Idaho Centennial Trail and looking at adding new trail up toward Priest Lake.

Santillian said they had an increase from 2019 to 2020 but a reduced use in 2021 on dispersed use. The Payette River parking passes are going virtual. Great American Outdoor Act monies going toward campground areas around Sagehen and Kirkham. Winter travel map will soon be updated which hasn't been done since 2012. It will include QR codes. They are working on message about harvesting Christmas Trees a little earlier this year. Ongoing work continues with updating several cabins that will be added to the rental systems. Trying to get more agreements with Idaho Conservation Corp (ICC) for more seasonal interns. Brunelle adds that on the GAOA, Idaho received about 16 million and about 3.5 million of that will go to trails and trail bridges, which includes a back log of maintenance. Those funds were just released this Spring so haven't been rolled out yet but will be this coming spring.

Director Susan Buxton (IDPR) was made permanent director in April. She states that she can understand the HR struggles that all the agencies are having- understaffed, long-process to get things done, etc. She states that her agency has asked for more money to work on the Centennial Trails, a request which turned out to be popular with the legislature and was approved. Buxton touches on the non-motorize trail stickers and how it has raised money. She states the governor is looking at the Outdoor Recreation program as well.

## **OREC Update**

Chelsea shares OREC update. The draft executive order to establish the Idaho Outdoor Recreation Collaborative is under consideration with Gov. Little's Office. As proposed, the

advisory group would include reps from state and federal resource agencies and three others from the outdoor industry — i.e., Idaho Business for the Outdoors, etc. The IDPR director would chair the group, which would make recommendations to the governor. No timeframe for action as of now.

## **Fall Planning**

IRTI will plan to meet in person in October, virtually in January and February.

## **New Business**

BLM shared with IRTI a potential funding opportunity via email. It is a grant to open up more acreage and trails. Chambers covered the email with the group and will forward it to new group members.

Malapei sates that he put out an RFI for a mobile mapping app with IDFG to include all the trails, land management units, and much more at no cost to IDFG but for a free trial app for users. One of the main emphases would be to hep with not trespassing on private property.

## **Adjourn**

### **ACTION ITEMS for IRTI:**

- **Peper- update binders with names, nameplates, roster, MOU, budget; invite guests for October and January;**
- **Peper/Chambers-Update budget draft and send to IRTI for feedback and then finalize;**
- **Peper/Brunelle- work on MOU extension**
- **Bassista- speak with BLM colleague regarding extra funding/labor for RRI project**
- **Aygen- send draft of wildlife series leaflet to IRTI**
- **Chambers- see if due date of Be Outdoors grant can be extended**
- **IRTI Members- let agency leads know MOU extension is headed their way in the near future**
- **Aritolla- look into Don't Litter sign campaign and road marking campaign to update IRTI in October**
- **Chambers- send Trail Sticker information out to IRTI to push on their social media platforms**