



Idaho Recreation and Tourism Initiative

December 11, 2013 Meeting Notes

In attendance: Robin Fehlau, Diane Norton, Vicky Runoe, Ann Chambers, Ken Knoch, Dan Buckley, Jake Howard, Danelle Highfill, Maureen Gresham, John May, Rick Just

Coordinator Report—Rick reported on a trip he made in September that included one day of attendance at the Idaho Recreation and Parks Association annual Conference in Coeur d’Alene and a speaking engagement in Missoula. He spoke to graduate students at the University of Montana on why Idaho’s “recreation initiative” remains viable, while so many, started by the Forest Service as a way to promote partnerships in the late 80s across the West, have dissolved.

Rick credits much of IRTI’s success to founding coordinator Jack Lavin and his successor Vicki Lawson. The structure of the organization also seems to be more sustainable in Idaho. For instance, in Montana the recreation initiative effort became a gubernatorial body. The governor would gather together state agency directors and the highest officials in the state from the federal land management agencies for a one-day meeting, once a year. They would discuss in broad terms statewide issues related to public land management. There seemed not to be much effort to move beyond that discussion, and as succeeding players came and went, everything drifted apart.

In Idaho, IRTI (originally the Idaho Recreation Initiative) was structured so that there was more participation from program managers who found the opportunity for partnerships appealing, especially for projects already on their plates. Steering group members and sub-group leads found that partnerships were not only a way to give their dollars more impact, but resulted in products that were much more useful to the public.

Asking the steering committee members to select a handful of projects each year, then go back to high level administrators to determine the extent to which an agency could contribute money and time, also seems to be a good strategy. It gives decision makers some time to consider their agency’s needs, and to evaluate the successes of past IRTI projects. When the annual budget is presented to agency heads, it contains no surprises.

Tourism—Diane reported the Department of Commerce is undergoing an ambitious self-evaluation, part of which has resulted in the elimination of a couple of positions and a reorganization. Long-time steering committee member Karen Ballard’s position was eliminated in the reorganization. A tourism manager position was created. Diane, also a long-time participant in IRTI, was named to the position.

Part of the reevaluation includes a new focus on State Purchasing requirements. The agency now has a purchasing officer to manage Requests For Proposals, contracts and purchasing. Two major decisions expected by the end of the month are the selection of an advertising agency to handle Idaho's tourism needs, and a decision on whether or not to continue Idaho's participation in Rocky Mountain International (RMI). Idaho has been in partnership with Wyoming, South Dakota and Montana for more than 20 years through RMI. The partnership is an effort to leverage limited funding to have a greater impact on international tourism.

Diane reported that return on investment and the measurement of the effectiveness of programs would be paramount, and that the agency was going through larger expenditures line-by-line to assure efficacy.

One important measure that many IRTI partners look forward to is the Longwoods International report on tourism in Idaho. Diane says that new report is scheduled for release during the Idaho Conference on Recreation in Tourism, which is scheduled for May 6, 7, and 8 in Sun Valley.

Idaho Campground Directory—Anne Chambers passed out the latest version of one of IRTI's most successful products. There were 106,000 RV Idaho guides produced. Anne also shared a dramatic graphic that shows where Internet orders for the guides came from across the US. That graphic is attached.

Watchable Wildlife—Deniz Aygen could not attend the meeting, but the WW group met the following day in Boise. Rick attended reported that:

- The Watchable Wildlife poster that has been selling for \$15 (unsigned) and \$50 (signed) will now be available for \$10 (\$25, signed). About \$1500 worth of posters were sold this past year.
- Deniz is looking for articles for Windows to Wildlife, the quarterly digital newsletter. Short articles, photos and event listings should be sent to deniz.aygen@idfg.idaho.gov.
- Do you have a watchable wildlife project idea? Deniz would like to hear about it. There may be a little funding available for interpretive signing, nature programs, etc. Send her an email.

Outfitter and Guide GIS Development—Jake Howard reports that development continues on the project, even with reduced funding. He has also been working closely with **John May**, the new Outfitters and Guides Association executive director, who attended the steering committee. John is a former hotel manager and Idaho Travel Council member, who expressed his interest in working closely with IRTI. We're happy to have the Association as a partner.

Scenic Byways—Maureen Gresham reported that the web presence and scenic byways guides are still available and in good shape. While the funding source for additional byway projects has disappeared, Maureen told us about the Community Choices grants that are now available through ITD. These grants will provide some additional funding for communities around the state, especially for projects that will create safe routes for schools. One opportunity of special interest to IRTI partners is that **wildlife crossings** are fundable through the Community Choices grants. Information is available on ITD's website, <http://itd.idaho.gov/transportation-performance/cci/>.

Be Outside Idaho—Vicky tells us that Unplug and Be Outside will be the week of April 19 in the Boise area and May 3-10 in Idaho Falls this coming year. The Blue Cross of Idaho Foundation has been the major sponsor of that effort since the beginning, and will continue to be, although they will need to cut their support in half this year to \$10,000. BOI will ask participating communities to step up and take more of a leadership role, and to work more closely with local media rather than relying on paid advertisements. Unplug will promote fewer, but larger events this coming year. BOI, through the Friends of Idaho State Parks, has applied for a \$2,000 grant from KEEN to assist with social media promotion. BOI will devote a larger share of their IRTI fund to the effort this year.

Rick Just has assumed an organizational role for BOI, sending out meeting notices, taking notes and facilitating at meetings.

State Visitor Centers—Diane reports that a new RFP will soon be going out for the operation of the centers. The plan is to have a new contract in place in March. Meanwhile, she told of a particular need at Gateway Southwest, also known as Snake River View, for **fishing information**.

OHV Committee—No one from the committee was able to attend the steering committee meeting, but Rick Just attended the OHV committee meeting on Friday and reports:

- The online trails map at www.idahotrails.gov has seen steady growth each month since its inception three years ago. Recent changes in the underlying Google Maps interface have caused some issues, but those are being worked on. More and more users are accessing the site on smart phones and other smaller devices. Configuring the site to accommodate the Google changes might give them an opportunity to make it more friendly for handheld devices. If you're unfamiliar with the site, check the YouTube how-to at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ydxLtrtcKY>.
- OHV sales steadily increased for many years, bringing with them more funding for related programs at IDPR. In the last three or four years, though, sales have flattened out. That means IDPR is having to cut back a bit on funding some projects and has eliminated one training position through attrition.
- The committee is working to determine the feasibility of co-sponsoring a three-day land manager training program along with the National Off-Highway Vehicle Conservation Council (NOHVCC). The program would spotlight on-the-ground OHV projects and focus on management implementation.
- The committee is considering applying for another IDPR grant for the Stay on Trails Campaign. The last two cycles the OHV Advisory Committee has chosen to focus on on-the-ground projects and did not fund the requests.

New and Continuing Business

Rick reported that **Friends of Idaho State Parks** has received their 501 (c)3 nonprofit status. Rick is the president of the group. Yvonne Ferrell, long-time director of the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation, is the vice president. Vicki Jo Lawson, former coordinator of IRTI is serving as the

secretary/treasurer. The group will assist IDPR through its nonprofit status and will embark on an education campaign to make the needs of the agency clear to the general public.

Rick is working on a presentation about IRTI that will be given at the annual conference of the **Society of Recreation Professionals** (www.recpro.org) in San Francisco this coming May.

After seeing a public lands information booth at the REI in Denver, Rick asked the steering committee if they would be interested in starting a discussion with REI and Cabella's regarding the possibility of working together to provide information centers in those two local stores. The steering committee gave him the go-ahead.

Agency Updates and Discussion

Ken reported that he is proposing that IRPA contribute to IRTI, probably for the Idaho Conference on Recreation and Tourism. We discussed swapping booths, i.e., having an IRTI or Tourism booth at the IRPA convention each September and having an IRPA booth at ICORT each May. This year's **IRPA conference** is September 21-23 in Twin Falls.

Ken also expressed an interest in getting information about community events and opportunities onto the Tourism websites. Rick brought up the main VisitID site and Diane explained how communities could take advantage of the existing opportunity to get their information into the database. Ken will learn more about that by signing on for his own community, then will spread the word through IRPA.

Dan reported that Craters of the Moon experienced a 7 percent increase this past season. He is working with the Twin Falls Chamber of Commerce, which is eager to develop a new visitor center on the canyon edge that will include expanded NPS information and potentially participation by other public lands agencies.

City of Rocks National Reserve celebrated its 25th year this past season. The popular site is jointly managed by NPS and IDPR.

Dan also reported on NPS activities planned for the 50th anniversary of the Wilderness Act. Craters will be offering frequent programs/hikes for the public. Wilderness Wednesdays will be a new Facebook feature.

Rick stressed that the IRTI partners could expand their social media reach by following each other on Facebook and reposting whatever might be appropriate for individual agency audiences. For instance, many of the posts from Be Outside Idaho would be appropriate for other agencies. Some discussion ensued about agencies that have chosen not to have a Facebook presence, Fish and Game and the Forest Service among them.

Danelle brought up a problem she would like the steering committee to consider. In the winter, restrooms on the highway between Horseshoe Bend and Cascade are sparse. Some restrooms that are available during the summer are closed in the winter, leading to the creation of messy situations as people... get close. This is inconvenient for travelers and polluting. There is much public land through the

canyon, most of it owned by BLM and the Forest Service, with considerable ITD right-of-way and some additional ITD property. IRTI has never taken on a facility project, and is probably not in a position to do so. However, we might be able to pull together a partnership to examine the issue and come up with a recommendation. **Does anyone have an idea about how to proceed, or even if we should proceed?**

The **next meeting** of the IRTI Steering Committee will be Wednesday, April 2, 2014 at 1:30 pm in the Summit Conference Room at the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation Headquarters, in Boise. Participation via videoconference will be available by dialing [12085772080@vtc.idaho.gov](tel:12085772080) from a videoconferencing facility.