



Strategic Plan

Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation

FY2024 to FY2027

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Idaho Park and Recreation Board

The Idaho Park and Recreation Board provides citizen oversight for the department. Each member is appointed by the Governor and represents one of six districts of the state.

Current Board members are:

Charles “Chuck” Roady	District 1	Bonn timers Ferry, Idaho
Hugh Cooke	District 2	Moscow, Idaho
Brian Beckley (Chair)	District 3	Meridian, Idaho
Mike Roach	District 4	Fairfield, Idaho
Amy Manning	District 5	Pocatello, Idaho
Louis A. Fatkin	District 6	Idaho Falls, Idaho
Susan E. Buxton, Director	Ex Officio	Boise, Idaho

PARKS AND RECREATION

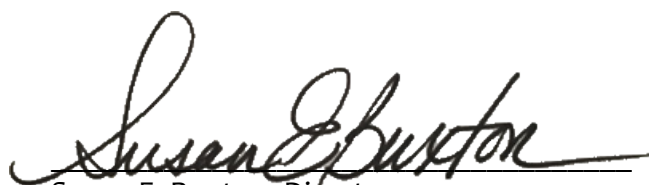
Enjoying the Outdoors for Generations

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 the architects of memories that foster experiences, renew the human spirit and assure the State's natural resources are preserved for future generations.

IDPR manages 30 state parks, trails and attractions throughout every region of Idaho and the registration programs for boats, snowmobiles and other off-highway vehicles (OHVs). 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 state and federal lands.

We see Idaho's recreation future as a viable economic driver for the State providing a delicate balance between visitor access and natural resource protection. Residents and out-of-state visitors enjoy 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.

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 and leaving our parks and recreation areas better than when we first encountered them. The plan proposes initiatives and strategies on how to achieve this.



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



Brian Beckley, Chair
Idaho Park and Recreation Board June 15, 2023

THE STRATEGIC PLAN

The Planning Process

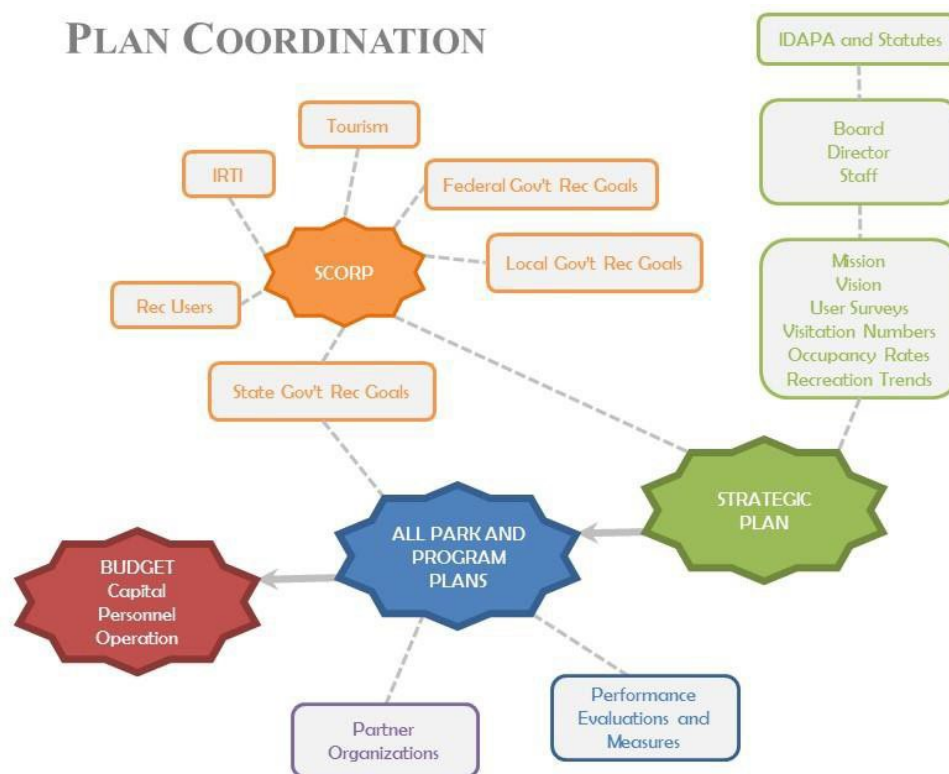
It is important to IDPR that our strategic plan is a useful tool. Only with the support and input of the individuals who make decisions daily regarding the operation and administration of the Department, can the document truly become valuable. The final plan is sent to the Governor's office, distributed to employees, and posted on the Department website.

Using the Strategic Plan

The strategic plan becomes a part of our daily work lives in several ways and sets 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. Those evaluations are 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.



Organization

We maintain our organizational 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.

Strategic Highlights

The Department is determined to address the 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 is measured not in economic multipliers but instead in a lifetime of memories.

Agency Objectives

IDPR administers 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 the Department of Agriculture in its 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.

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 they were previously. Our sustainable model focuses on acknowledging what we do best as an organization.

WHAT WE DO BEST

Experiences

IDPR provides unique experiences in our parks with overnight stays in beautiful, natural settings and exceptional daytime recreation areas. 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 that 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: Create experiences that renew the human spirit.

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

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. 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, yurts, tent and RV sites.



New campsites at the under-construction Billingsley Creek Campground at Thousand Springs State Park

With the recent pandemic and surge in park usage, IDPR should focus on adding inventory with various types of accommodations and amenities based on the area’s natural landscape. The location of these unique experiences should be carefully considered to find spots within “demand” parks. Also, IDPR should target new opportunities at underutilized parks to make them more “self-sufficient.”

Task 1: By Fall 2026, develop an additional 250 overnight accommodation sites for RVers, Tent campers, cabin enthusiasts, cyclists, etc.

State Park Campgrounds

Each year, more visitors are camping at Idaho State Parks and the pandemic has accelerated visitation. The 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 (depending on location). It is obvious, but Idaho is a recreation destination and needs more camping spots. We will continue to add campgrounds within existing Idaho State Parks and evaluate opportunities for new State Park areas.

To assist with the demand to add more campgrounds, 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, providing a reservation system and management of the resources. The partnering entity will provide the land for development.

Task 2: By July 2024 enter into partnership agreements with at least two other entities to construct State Park Partner Campgrounds.

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

Task 3: By Fall 2026, develop an additional 25 day use areas and upgrade/improve at least 150 boat slips and docks.

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 and continue to send out that survey to every overnight guest that makes a reservation.

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

Task 5: By July 1, 2024, implement 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 customer satisfaction rating.

Competitive Wages

Great customer service comes from employees who 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 Junior Ranger and recreation programs are one way of recruiting future generations of patrons and, hopefully, employees who 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 appropriations to bring IDPR compensation closer in line with other resource agencies and other state parks systems.

Education

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 Junior 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 Junior Ranger program is an indicator of all our interpretive efforts within the parks.



Ranger leading youth group at Castle Rocks State Park

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 the department is often the only group providing the instruction.

Performance Measure 2: Increase the number of participants in Junior Ranger and Recreation Bureau programs by at least three (3) percent each year through July 2026.

Technology and Broadband Improvements

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 and streaming services is helping to eliminate barriers to camping.

Through the success of several pilot programs, IDPR shifted from a distributed, pay-to-use, and unsustainable Wi-Fi model, to a free Wi-Fi 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 bandwidth to address business, employee, and customer needs (in priority order).

Task 7: By January 2024, submit a request to the Governor’s office to connect and improve broadband at our highest use parks and where emergency services are some distance away from the parks.

Task 8: By January 2026, and as connectivity at the parks improves, move the reservation window with the ability of same day reservations and online campground check ins. This will provide traveling campers with more flexibility in making reservations, minimize cash handling and be more efficient than manually registering and checking registrations.

ACCESS

IDPR creates and manages opportunities 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.



IDPR Ranger working trail

Goal: Maintain and create new opportunities for adventure.

IDPR 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 who enjoy state parks but also those who enjoy motorized and non-motorized recreation throughout Idaho.

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

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 U.S. Forest Service properties, 40 percent 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.



IDPR trail ranger with bike and saw

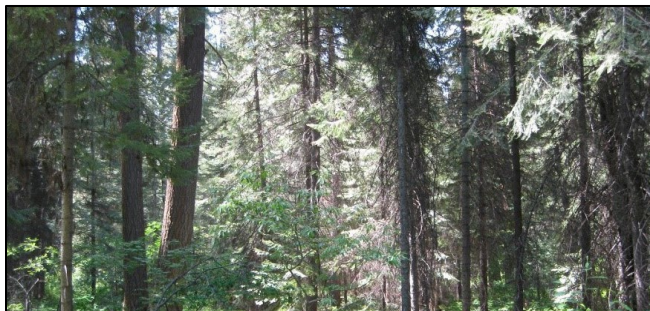
Task 9: By Fall 2025, provide a no-net-loss of trails plan and enhance at least 500 miles of the Idaho Centennial Trail with wayfinding signage, clearing, etc.

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.

Stewardship is an important trait of any land management agency. We are entrusted with caring for property that must thrive for generations. 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, fuel 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.



Before-and-after pictures of the Meadow Marsh forest health project at Ponderosa State Park. Giving the Ponderosa pines more space returns the forest to a natural state and reduces the fire risk.

As stewards, 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 of complaints 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 4: 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 10: By January 2024, identify areas within our parks and managed sites that need resource restoration. Prioritize restoration efforts and include them in the FY 2026 budget.

FACILITY MAINTENANCE

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

Performance Measure 4: Reduce the backlog of maintenance projects by Fiscal Year 2030 and establish an ongoing maintenance program.

Task 11: In preparing the capital budget each year, evaluate progress toward the goal of eliminating the agency's maintenance backlog.

Task 12: By January 2026, update a comprehensive assessment of all IDPR facilities, required maintenance, and facilities' condition.



Crumbling boat ramp in need of repair at Henrys Lake

EXTERNAL FACTORS

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

Resource Supply Chain

With the recent influx of cash from the Federal government for the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), there likely will be significant strain on labor and materials over the next four years. All agencies that received these funds will be under the same time frames to deliver on projects.

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 through recreation registration revenue.
- Natural disasters such as floods, fires, drought 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 expensive and outside the spending authority in place at the time.

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 an important goal of IDPR. However, most of the recreational trails are on federal properties, and IDPR has limited direct control over access decisions. Therefore, decisions by federal and other state land management agencies to close 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, the 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.

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