



Kinnikinnick Chapter of The Idaho Native Plant Society

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January 15, 2009

Bud Justice
Priest Lake State Park
314 Indian Creek Park Rd.
Coolin, ID 83821

bjustice@idpr.idaho.gov

Dear Mr. Justice,

Re: Dickensheet Unit Grant proposal for development of a full service campground with ATV trails

The Idaho State Parks mission is: "To improve the quality of life in Idaho through outdoor recreation and resource stewardship."

Recreation, especially motorized recreation, can negatively impact resource stewardship. Your grant request contains wording but does not appear to contain steps to protect the fragile botanic and soil components of the area (quoting with highlights):

" Developing a new RV campground will ease the problem of limited campsites, and provide recreational opportunities, such as, ORMV (off road motor vehicle) use, that accompany the RV user, by providing easy access to 100,000+ acres of public land for year round enjoyment. This project is to develop a master plan for a campground area and associated infrastructure."

The Priest Lake basin is a fragile and unique botanic area. It is the only Idaho home to several sensitive, disjunct, coastal plant species. Plants from the Rocky Mountains and Canadian Boreal ecosystems are found here, as are some found primarily further south.

We have listed some of our concerns below that may already be addressed in your management policies and be more thoroughly explored in the final proposal. If not, we would like to see them resolved and incorporated into policies in the development process of this plan:

1. Developing a new RV campground might ease the problem of limited campsites but many of the current spike campsites are not RV-use camping. RV site development may use excessive ground area without concomitant benefit. This needs careful analysis.
2. Your proposal mentions that this land is at a conjunction of trails from east and west. This area is currently heavily abused by both summer ORMV use and snow mobiles in the winter on unauthorized trails. Your property has a long shoreline on Priest River with possible sensitive sites. Any facility improvement that might encourage ORMV use must include plans for how ORMV use will be controlled to strictly limit damage to the 100,000 acre surrounding forest and plant life or resulting damage will be extensive.
3. Further development of your park area will impact the surrounding Department of Lands properties. We encourage that this planning process be conducted in coordination with the Department of Lands to protect resources.

4. Weed prevention and control during construction, adjacent to campgrounds and wherever motorized or horse travel occurs needs to be firmly addressed. The alarming spread of exotic, invasive species is the greatest threat to native plant populations in this country. Sadly, once weeds are introduced, they can only be controlled, and that is often ineffective.
5. An inventory of sensitive plant populations on grounds deemed suitable for recreation needs to be part of this process. The damage done by ORMV to soil, drainages, streams, riparian areas and plants can obliterate small ecosystems and important plant populations and create widespread disturbances to drainage systems.
6. The plan should detail the enforcement and education programs you will employ to assure that ORMV users stay on trails and respect the natural resources.
7. When is an appropriate use level established? Will excess visitors be turned away or will "spike camps" crop up once again as demand increases?
8. Additional topics for the plan: How will the park participate in efforts to control Eurasian Water Milfoil and other aquatic invasives? If watercraft can be launched from the campground, will a wash station be required to prevent introduction of aquatic invasives to Priest Lake?

We are interested in learning what Idaho State Parks considers the carrying capacity of this park, and how protection of natural resources figure into this number as well as any additional steps you currently take to protect the integrity and natural resources of this area.

Sincerely,

Molly O'Reilly
Chair, Conservation Committee
Kinnikinnick Chapter, INPS