

# Harriman facelift will add to 'booming' local economy

By Dani Grigg

IDAHO BUSINESS REVIEW

Idaho Parks and Recreation's Dave Ricks has been to Harriman State Park a dozen times and has never failed to see a moose.

Along with the park's legendary fly fishing, what more reason do people need to head on over to the eastern side of Idaho and take in the wild majesty that is Harriman?

The state is making that trip easier with \$3 million in renovations.

"Harriman State Park is one of our larger acreage parks. It has a lot of natural beauty to it; it has two wonderful lakes in it and an abundance of wildlife,"

said Ricks, who is the division administrator for management services. "The unfortunate part is there's not a lot of lodging opportunities, and what was there was in need of repair."

So crews from Idaho Falls' SE/Z Construction began work this summer to take some historic buildings back to the new look they had 75 years ago, incorporating more lodging and dining opportunities along the way. They'll restore the Middle Dude, the Harriman Cottage and the Bunkhouse and remodel the South Dude Barn. They're improving the road and nearby signage so passersby can't miss the entrance. And the parks system is installing Wi-Fi throughout



PHOTO COURTESY STEVE TROUT

Renovations at Harriman State Park will restore the park to its original quality while adding a modern touch with a universal Wi-Fi network.

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the park. Construction will stop for the winter and finish up in June 2009.

Funding for the project comes from former Gov. Dirk Kempthorne's Experience Idaho project, which allocated \$30 million in 2006 for major improvements on six state parks and the creation of an additional park. Ricks said improvements like these serve the state and local economies.

"The goal is to bring people into the area," he said. "When people come to an area they can't help but assist the economic viability of the locale that they visit. Anytime you've got something to offer folks that entices them to an area, that helps the economy. And if Idaho has anything to offer, we've got some wonderful natural resources in our state parks."

The closest city to Harriman is Island Park, and Chamber of Commerce president Connie Funkhouser said business is already booming in the area, and the improvements at Harriman are just a bonus.

"The economy has not affected us one little bit," said Funkhouser, who owns Island Park Lodge. "Our business is booming. ... It's crowded, we are packed, and it will continue to remain so. It's great."

Funkhouser credits the increasing motivation to vacation closer to home for the area's enduring vitality. She said people are changing out the RVs for compact cars or motorcycles and coming to the area she calls "paradise" or "God's country" in droves.

And the renovations at Harriman should contribute to the tourism-based area's continued prosperity.

"The restoration project will give longevity to the historic structures, so hopefully they'll have another 100 years before they have to do it again," said Steve Trout of Trout Architects, which designed and planned the project. "It gives the park more opportunity to engage the public; they're building overnight accommodations and expensive dining facilities. That's their business."

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