

Officials seek to limit corporate naming in Idaho parks

By KIMBERLEE KRUESI, Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — Idaho officials aren't ruling out that new state parks could be named after private companies that give large donations or sponsorships, but a recently proposed set of rules would severely limit business' ability to acquire naming rights.

Earlier this year, Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter signed legislation permitting the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation to pursue sponsorships with corporations to help offset years of budget cuts by the state. Now department officials are finalizing sponsorship rules, which will need approval from the department board and Idaho Legislature.

"The key is that we consider each person or entity to make sure we feel they are consistent with our mission," said Anna Canning, the agency's management services administrator.

The agency-backed legislation easily passed in the Idaho Statehouse, but not without some lawmakers raising concerns that the names of state's 30 parks would be renamed to the highest bidder.

Under the new rules, the board would not be allowed to consider naming a new state park simply based on the amount of a donation. Instead, the rules state the naming should be based on location, topography, natural resources and other historically known characteristics.

Furthermore, lawmakers will make the final call on all state park names, Canning said. While the parks and recreation board approves the recommendation, naming approval lies in the hands of the Idaho Legislature.

Additional rules include forbidding sponsorships from any political organizations, tobacco companies and any businesses selling pornography. The department will also prohibit any speech that could be construed as political or religious.

Maine, New Hampshire, California and Georgia are some of the states that have implemented some kind of sponsorships with businesses to support their state parks.

The parks department received \$3.5 million in state funds this year. In fiscal year 2008 —before the economic downturn— the agency received nearly \$18 million in state general funds. The department largely relies on fees and sales, along with grants and registration fees collected on boats, snowmobiles, motorbikes and RVs.