

State parks exceed goal in securing business sponsors

By KIMBERLEE KRUESI, Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — The Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation has received nearly \$40,000 in corporate sponsorship since getting legislative approval to reach out to businesses to help offset the agency's depleted budget.

The amount is double the estimated \$20,000 department officials hoped to secure in the first year.

Five sponsors made either cash or in-kind donations. This included a \$7,500 cash donation and a \$20,000 in charitable giving from Airstream NW to help fund beginner outdoors education programs and state park marketing — making the luxury trailer company the top sponsor.

Meanwhile, Cabela's gave \$2,500 toward an educational program. Kendal Auto Dealerships gave \$500 and donated an estimated \$500 in truck and trailer rentals for a haunted hayride event.

"These are exactly the kinds of sponsorship deals we were expecting," said department spokeswoman Jennifer Okerlund. "These are through the appropriate public industry partnerships so we can continue to grow experience for park-goers."

The department's sponsorship proposal sailed through the Idaho Statehouse last year with a handful of lawmakers raising concerns that some sponsorships would result in renaming some of the state's 30 parks.

However, Okerlund said none of the sponsorships required a name change. While the agency hasn't completely ruled out allowing state parks to be named after a private company, so far no one has asked for a permanent name placement or requested that their company logo be placed on state park equipment.

According to the department's guidelines, the agency's board of directors 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.

State lawmakers cut the parks department budget during the economic downturn, forcing the agency to look for money elsewhere. This year, the department received \$3.5 million in state funding.

Maine, New Hampshire, California and Georgia are among the states that have implemented some kind of sponsorship plan to support their parks.

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