

# IRU STRATEGIC PLAN: 2016 – 2020



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Idaho has roughly 100,000 miles of rivers, more than any state except Alaska. Many of these are free-flowing rivers that inspire paddlers, anglers and families camping on sandy beaches. Yet, less than 1 percent of these river-miles are protected. This means Idaho has a lot to lose.

Idaho's rivers provide drinking water, recreation, hydroelectric power and crucial habitat for fish and other wildlife species. Idaho's rivers are the lifeblood of the state's cherished open spaces and wild country. Nobody wants to see Idaho's rivers misused and polluted, but often there's a dramatic imbalance between the desires of hydroelectric companies, agribusiness, mining corporations and other interests and the sustainability of our unpolluted rivers and native fish populations.

IRU is the only statewide river conservation organization dedicated solely to protecting Idaho's rivers. We take a comprehensive look at the many forces that impact Idaho's rivers and fish, including dams, mining and municipal water use. We work to change unsustainable water policy. We initiate local river protection campaigns and have offered grants for water conservation. We strive to place many of Idaho's untouched rivers under state protection or national Wild and Scenic designation. In short, IRU is the voice for Idaho's rivers.

As we implement this next five-year strategic plan, IRU will continue its steadfast dedication to the conservation programs our members and supports have relied upon. The strategic initiatives defined in this document will strengthen conservation priorities by driving IRU forward with improved operational efficiencies, communications and membership growth. We've asked ourselves the tough questions that address what IRU should be doing as an organization to better serve its membership, enhance conservation programs, respond to change and opportunity and create a sustainable financial future that keeps IRU strong for another quarter century of protecting the rivers you love.

Thank you for your support in protecting Idaho's rivers. We truly appreciate your partnership in fulfilling the collective mission of keeping Idaho's rivers free-flowing, clean and filled with *wild* fish. We'll look forward to crossing paths as we do this important work together.

For the rivers,  
The Crew at IRU

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We wish to thank The Bullitt Foundation for providing IRU with a generous grant that supported the work of this strategic planning process and ultimately produced this document. The Bullitt Foundation's support provided the time and space necessary to build strategy and create the pattern of goals, policies and actions that will collectively define the way IRU positions itself for the next five years. We also wish to thank all the IRU members who participated in the member survey and attended the various events and meetings to talk with staff and the Board of Directors about why they are members of IRU and what drives them to get involved and take action to protect Idaho's rivers. All your voices helped inform this process and set our priorities for the next five years. Thank you. Lastly, we'd like to acknowledge and thank the all-volunteer IRU Board of Directors. This is an incredible group of individuals, each with specific strengths and all with eyes on the future as we created, and now implement, IRU's next five-year strategic plan. Thank you all for your selfless investment in time and resources to make IRU what it is today.

## **MISSION STATEMENT**

The mission of Idaho Rivers United is to protect and restore the rivers and streams of Idaho.

## **VISION**

Our vision is an Idaho with clean, free flowing rivers that support the communities, people, fish and wildlife that depend on them.

## **CORE VALUES**

The members, supporters and employees of Idaho Rivers United share basic values that drive all organizational efforts. They are:

- The ecological integrity of Idaho's rivers and streams must be protected and restored.
- Idaho Rivers United must provide consistent and credible leadership for river conservation in Idaho that empowers the public to take action on behalf of our rivers.
- Idaho Rivers United supports a culture of open communication, teamwork and productive dialogue amongst the staff and board, and honors its role as a community organization that emphasizes the importance of its members, volunteers and allies.

We support our core values by:

- Practicing and promoting effective advocacy, including, when necessary, litigation.
- Being sensitive to human needs and the perspectives of those who don't agree with us.
- Using accurate information to educate citizens and civic leaders.
- Building coalitions with other interested parties.

## **ABOUT IDAHO RIVERS UNITED**

Idaho Rivers United (IRU) is a result-driven, campaign-oriented, conservation group formed in 1990 to help citizens defend the rivers they love. Since that time IRU has led grassroots campaigns to protect and designate federal Wild and Scenic Rivers, stop construction of nearly 20 unnecessary and destructive dams and helped found the Save Our Wild Salmon Coalition, the driving force behind the national campaign to remove four fish-killing dams on the lower Snake River.

IRU has approximately 3,500 members, 17 active volunteer directors, and a staff of four full-time and four part-time river activists. IRU supporters, members and partners become involved with IRU because of the exceptional river conservation successes that have been delivered the past 25 years to protect the rivers they love.

## **THE STRATEGIC INITIATIVES FOR THE IRU 2016 – 2020 STRATEGIC PLAN ARE:**

### **1) EXCEPTIONAL RIVER CONSERVATION WORK**

IRU advances its mission by building citizen-grounded conservation campaigns that use a mixture of direct advocacy, education, citizen involvement, collaboration and, when necessary, litigation. IRU works in five main conservation program areas that must continue to excel in delivering successful results that inspire IRU members and advance IRU's mission. (Pages 4-6)

### **2) BROADEN IRU'S INFLUENCE THROUGH STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS**

IRU's focus is the ecological integrity of Idaho's rivers, but the lens we work through is citizen involvement. We build river protection campaigns that effectively team up staff, volunteers and other partners. Campaign effectiveness relies directly on active citizen involvement. To that end, IRU will broaden its influence through strategic communication efforts that will engage and empower new, as well as traditional, audiences and decision-makers. (Pages 6-8)

### **3) ENHANCE COMMUNITY EDUCATION, ENGAGEMENT AND PARTNERSHIPS**

To enhance community engagement and partnerships IRU must continually seek key volunteers and partner stakeholders in strategic communities across Idaho. IRU will strategically engage these communities, individuals and stakeholders on timely and relevant issues and campaigns, as well as general education and membership expansion efforts. (Pages 8-9)

### **4) OPTIMIZE SYSTEMS AND OPERATIONS**

A major strength of IRU is our ability to be nimble and pivot as needed to address critical river conservation issues as they arise. IRU will strategically optimize this strength by refining our operational model, strengthening our internal systems and improving our technological capacity. (Page 9-10)

### **5) EXPLORE NEW AND PROGRESSIVE OPPORTUNITIES**

IRU will proactively explore opportunities that advance IRU's mission through new and innovative programs and initiatives. (Page 10-11)



## **EXCEPTIONAL RIVER CONSERVATION WORK**

### *The Context*

IRU supporters, members and partners become involved with IRU because of the exceptional river conservation successes that have been delivered for the past 25 years. IRU achieves its mission by building citizen-grounded conservation campaigns that use a mixture of direct advocacy, education, citizen involvement, collaboration and, when necessary, litigation.

### *The Strategic Initiative*

IRU will define its conservation work with the ability to achieve realistic and tangible results that members and the community at large will see as valuable to advancing IRU's mission of protecting and restoring the rivers of Idaho – the rivers they love. In some cases, IRU engages in difficult, long-range issues that can potentially take decades to achieve success. In such cases, IRU will keep its membership informed of the ongoing work and the necessity to continue these long, difficult fights.

IRU staff, board and volunteers will be knowledgeable and versed in IRU's conservation work through a variety of communication strategies and educational efforts in order to share and promote IRU's conservation work to the membership and general public. This effort is paramount to communicating and educating the membership and community at large.

IRU works in five main conservation program areas:

- Native Fisheries with a focus on Salmon and Steelhead Recovery
- Energy and Water Policy
- Urban River Stewardship
- River Recreation
- Wild and Scenic Rivers

These programs are the core of IRU's work and must continue to excel at delivering successful results that inspire IRU members and advance IRU's mission.

### *Implementation*

#### Native Fisheries with a Focus on *Wild* Salmon and Steelhead Recovery

*Goal: Protect and restore Idaho's native fisheries with a focus on restoring wild salmon and steelhead to self-sustaining levels while monitoring the threats to other native fish populations, such as bull trout, and taking action when appropriate to protect them.*

1. Remain a forceful regional presence in support of salmon and steelhead recovery via lower Snake River dam removal.

2. Maintain involvement in the Save Our Wild Salmon coalition by participating in board of director activities, steering committee meetings, and actions.
3. Work with IRU attorneys on Biological Opinions (BiOps) for anadromous fish (salmon and steelhead) and Programmatic Sediment Management Plan (PSMP) litigation.
4. Continue efforts to create effective coalitions that can drive change toward meaningful salmon and steelhead recovery.
5. Maintain an on-the-ground and strategic leadership voice in critical partnerships for native fisheries.

### Energy and Water Policy

*Goal: Protect Idaho's rivers from the harmful effects of dams and other water projects, promoting positive, solutions-based alternatives that advocate for state water policies that re-water streams, allow the transfer of water rights for conservation and support carbon neutral energy sources that do not damage rivers and streams.*

1. Evaluate and participate in critical hydropower relicensing cases that come before the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission.
2. Block new, unnecessary dam proposals in Idaho. As the state of Idaho continues to advocate for the construction of new surface water storage reservoirs, IRU will track and engage in these processes while educating public officials and citizens about the negative impacts and expense of such proposals.
3. Participates in the Hydropower Reform Coalition (HRC) in a leadership role and help shape national hydropower and other energy policies. The HRC provides an excellent support network of hydropower expertise, as well as financial resources for IRU's Dams and Energy program.
4. Educate citizens and advocate for policies to increase energy efficiency, and support the development of carbon-neutral energy sources that do not damage rivers and streams.
5. Promote the removal of dams and diversions that are obsolete and have outlived their usefulness.
6. Enhance water quality by working to stop, restrict or secure appropriate regulation of activities like mining, stream channel alteration, diversions and withdrawals.
7. Protect existing minimum stream flows while seeking new and meaningful minimum flows, and pursue other opportunities to re-water streams.
8. Advocate for the modernization of Idaho water laws in order to: a) allow water rights to be used for conservation purposes, b) better recognize fish, wildlife, water quality, recreation and riparian health as critical beneficial uses and c) allow for the re-examination of the highest and best uses of existing water rights.

### Urban River Stewardship

*Goal: Protect and restore Idaho's urban rivers to healthy and clean levels that encourage reduced human consumption and enhanced in-stream flows.*

1. Build diverse and broad-based support for river stewardship in Idaho's urban areas through outreach, education and strong urban-focused program work. As the state's most urban river, the Boise River will remain a priority river for IRU activities.
2. Watchdog and campaign to improve fish and wildlife habitat within urban corridors. In particular, focus water conservation and wise-use outreach campaigns in urban areas.
3. Reduce stormwater and non-point source pollution through education, government partnerships and, if necessary, litigation.

4. Promote green infrastructure and natural flood defense in strategically identified urban areas.
5. Coordinate with IRU's volunteer Conservation Associate Program as appropriate to protect and restore urban rivers in Idaho.

**River Recreation**

*Goal: Support environmentally compatible river recreation in Idaho.*

1. Work with applicable stakeholders on strategically identified and environmentally compatible river recreation access opportunities.
2. Increase outreach to boaters in order to recruit more river activists.
3. Engage with and/or lead campaigns to designate national water trails.
4. Advocate for recreational boating in Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management and State Land Board planning processes.
5. Continue IRU representation on the Idaho Wild Rivers license plate program that supports whitewater education and safety programs in Idaho.

**Wild and Scenic Rivers**

*Goal: Protect water quality, natural flows, fish habitat and other vital ecosystem services in Idaho's remaining, free-flowing rivers.*

1. Protect federal Wild and Scenic Rivers in Idaho, along with streams classified as eligible and suitable for designation, from degradation or other threats to Wild and Scenic River values.
2. Advocate for new designation of federal Wild and Scenic River miles in Idaho.
3. Work with federal agencies to update, revise and modernize Wild and Scenic River management plans throughout the state.
4. Help develop a national coalition of Wild and Scenic River stakeholders.
5. Defend and protect Idaho's State Protected Rivers. If possible given political climate shifts, work for new designations. Work with the State of Idaho to strengthen the State Protected Rivers System to include stronger in stream flow and stream bank protections, and promote new designations.



**BROADEN IRU'S INFLUENCE THROUGH STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS**

*The Context*

Idaho Rivers United focuses on the ecological integrity of Idaho's rivers through the lens of citizen involvement, protecting our wild rivers, keeping our drinking water clean, defending at-

risk fish populations, establishing in-stream flows and minimizing the impacts of dams on Idaho's rivers. IRU builds river protection campaigns that effectively team up staff and volunteers. Campaign effectiveness relies directly on active citizen involvement. To that end, IRU's communications efforts are critical to engaging volunteers, the membership and community at large.

### *The Strategic Initiative*

IRU's strategic communications plan will advance brand identity, broaden awareness of programs, assist in fundraising activities and membership growth and increase visibility for the organization across key stakeholder audiences. The strategic communications plan is intended to create and implement marketing and public relations strategies that enhance organization relationships with key audiences, including media and political stakeholders, our membership and the public at large.

### *Implementation*

#### Traditional Media

*Goal: IRU will continue to focus on traditional media outreach that stems from successful conservation work, while seeking out additional opportunities to reach new constituencies.*

1. Build and maintain relationships with key reporters, editorial writers and bloggers.
2. Track media and identify emerging opportunities.
3. Write regular editorial board updates.
4. Write and distribute op-eds in cooperation with conservation staff.
5. Write and distribute LTEs in pertinent markets.
6. Pursue opportunities with radio and television markets.

#### Website, Blog and Social Media

*Goal: Build and maintain a website and online presence that integrate evolving content needs that mirror IRU's evolving sphere of conservation work, relay IRU's history of success and engage existing and new members and funders.*

1. Create a balanced voice that appeals to and engages the broad spectrum of IRU's membership, from detailed policy oriented pieces to engaging personal stories related to Idaho's rivers.
2. Consolidate IRU's various online presences and maintain a professional, technologically modern website.
3. Integrate IRU's database, email services and social media platforms.
4. Highlight an internal Blog that becomes a hub around which other social media activities revolve.
5. Orchestrate coordinated social media efforts to reflect a fair balance of IRU's work: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and other new and relevant platforms as they arise.

#### Member Direct Communications

*Goal: Keep IRU members informed of conservation work, applicable issues, events and actions on a regular and consistent basis.*

1. Emails: strategically planned and sent to inform members of river conservation news, program updates, blog posts and other items as needed.
2. Newsletter: quarterly electronic newsletter, with website presence, that can be printed on demand for members that request printed versions.

3. As an environmental conservation organization, IRU is strategically moving communications toward non-print methods to save natural resources.



## **ENHANCE COMMUNITY EDUCATION, ENGAGEMENT AND PARTNERSHIPS**

### *The Context*

The endless threats to Idaho's rivers and fish will always exceed the capacity of IRU's Board of Directors and staff. As Idaho's only dedicated statewide river conservation organization, IRU must expand its capacity via the engagement of its most dedicated volunteers from across the state to broaden its ability to address these threats.

### *The Strategic Initiative*

To enhance community engagement and partnerships IRU must continually seek key volunteers and partner stakeholders in strategic communities across Idaho. IRU will strategically engage these communities, individuals and stakeholder organizations on timely and relevant issues and campaigns, as well as in general education and membership expansion efforts.

### *Implementation*

#### Regional Volunteer Conservation Associates

*Goal: Build a network of volunteers in local communities across Idaho that participates in IRU's Regional Conservation Associate Program, helping our volunteers protect their local rivers by providing them with sufficient organizational backing that makes their efforts as effective as possible.*

1. Create, maintain and continuously build upon a network of dedicated river conservation volunteers from across Idaho that are connected with each other and the board and staff of IRU.
2. Regional conservation associates will provide a "local voice" and connection for IRU, represent the interests of and speak on behalf of IRU, watchdog for threats in their region and network with and engage other concerned citizens from their region.
3. IRU's Conservation Advisory Committee, which consists of IRU board members, IRU staff and regional volunteer conservation associates, will provide support, leadership and guidance for the program.

#### Guide Education Program

*Goal: Build a community of informed river guides that actively educate their guests on the persistent threat of extinction for Idaho's salmon, the incredible history and current work to safeguard and expand protections to Idaho's Wild and Scenic Rivers and the impacts of climate change and other current issues related to protecting Idaho's rivers.*

1. Build and maintain resource kits containing educational materials that are accessible for guides and create an enjoyable opportunity to relay the information in presentations or informally on the river.
2. Encourage ongoing relationships between guides, IRU and river guests through follow-up contact after trips, memberships and continued communication and education.
3. Annually assess the program through feedback from guides and outfitters, IRU's guide education coordinator and others.

#### Idaho Rivers Lecture Series

*Goal: Provide an annual series of lectures that are informative and inspirational to the members of IRU.*

#### Community Partnerships

*Goal: Enhance and grow strategic partnerships in communities across Idaho that advance IRU's mission.*

1. Organizational and NGO partnerships: continuously seek and collaborate with applicable organizations on various conservation issues and educational efforts related to IRU's work.
2. Corporate partnerships: identify, develop and maintain strong and appropriate corporate partnerships.
3. Government: identify, develop and maintain strong and appropriate government partnerships.



### **OPTIMIZE SYSTEMS AND OPERATIONS**

#### *The Context*

IRU must be prepared for change in order to continue delivering successful conservation victories and educational opportunities members and the community have come to expect. This requires internal policies, procedures and documentation that serve as organizational pillars, as well as technological capabilities that serve as instruments of efficiency and success. To that end, IRU will provide improved member services through optimizing its existing systems and operations.

#### *The Strategic Initiative*

IRU will examine its daily operations, evaluate organizational structure, improve existing systems, and create new systems as needed. This strategic initiative will allow IRU to respond to a dynamic and changing world while growing our programs and financial stability.

### *Implementation*

#### Database Conversion

*Goal: Upgrade and maintain IRU's database system to create internal efficiencies and better serve IRU's membership and donors.*

1. Convert IRU's database from its current, dated system to Salesforce.
2. Integrate IRU's website with the database for operational efficiency.
3. Utilize the new database system in conjunction with sound internal policies and procedures to improve donor relations and provide timely acknowledgement and receipt of donor gifts and membership communications.

#### Upgrade Technology and Tools

*Goal: Invest in technology services and tools to meet the current needs and those outlined in this strategic plan, delivering efficient and effective services.*

#### Operations and Organizational

*Goal: Improve resource optimization and efficiency through strategic operations improvements.*

1. Assess organizational structure and address areas of need and/or change.
2. Review and strengthen IRU's human resource management practices.
3. Build internal systems and procedures that strengthen IRU's ability to respond to workplace demands and dynamic conservation issues in a more flexible and nimble manner.
4. Support the strategic plan and remain fiscally stable by continuing to build and meet annual budgets.



## **EXPLORE NEW AND PROGRESSIVE OPPORTUNITIES**

### *The Context*

The physical, political and social environments in which IRU works are dynamic, and we cannot foresee all of the emerging threats and opportunities facing Idaho's rivers. While our strategic plan is a needed and valued road map, IRU must also plan for opportunities that may not be defined within it.

### *The Strategic Initiative*

IRU will continuously explore and be open to opportunities that advance the organization's mission through new and innovative programs and initiatives.

*Implementation*

Research and Planning

*Goal: IRU staff and board will continuously remain open to and actively explore river conservation issues and programs that are not defined in this plan, but that strategically advance IRU's mission and vision.*

1. Staff will understand and employ new and emerging communication modalities that keep IRU relevant in a rapidly evolving media market.
2. Staff will research and understand the leading trends in the river conservation field and adopt and progressively lead on issues that advance IRU's mission and vision.
3. The Board of Directors and leadership will stay open to new programs and ways of advancing the mission and organization.
4. Staff and board will formally consider issues and opportunities that may not have been discerned earlier as part of IRU's annual planning procedures.