EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Idaho has roughly 100,000 miles of rivers and streams, more than any state except Alaska. Many are free-flowing and 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 critical habitat for fish and wildlife. Idaho’s rivers are the lifeblood of the state’s cherished open spaces and wild country. No one wants to see Idaho’s rivers misused and polluted, but often a dramatic imbalance exists between the desires of hydroelectric companies, agribusinesses, mining corporations and other interests and our ability to sustain free flowing, unpolluted rivers full of native fish.

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, industrial, agricultural, and municipal water use. We work to change unsustainable water policy. We initiate local river protection campaigns and have offered grants for water conservation projects. We strive to protect many of Idaho’s best rivers under state law or under federal Wild and Scenic River designation. In short, IRU is the voice for Idaho’s rivers.

As we implement this five-year strategic plan, IRU will continue steadfast dedication to the conservation programs our members and supporters depend on. The strategic initiatives defined in this document will strengthen conservation priorities by driving IRU forward with improved operational efficiencies, enhanced communications and membership growth. We’ve asked ourselves tough questions about what IRU should be doing as an organization to better serve its members, enhance conservation programs, respond to change and opportunities, and create a stronger financial future.

Thank you for your support in protecting Idaho’s rivers. We truly appreciate your partnership in 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 to support a strategic planning process that ultimately produced this document. The Bullitt Foundation’s support provided the time and space necessary to study our priorities, build a sound strategy and articulate the goals, policies, and actions that collectively define the way IRU will position itself for the next five years.

We also wish to thank all the IRU members who participated in the member survey and who attended various events and meetings to discuss why they are members of IRU and what keeps them involved. Your voices helped inform this process and set priorities for the next five years. Lastly, we’d like to acknowledge and thank IRU’s all-volunteer Board of Directors. This is an incredible group of individuals, each with specific strengths, bright minds, and eyes on the future, as we created, and now implement IRU’s five-year strategic plan. Thank you for your selfless investment of 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, and citizens motivated to protect their rivers for future generations.

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 will 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 among staff and board, and honors its role as a community organization that emphasizes the importance of 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 results-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 dams, improve urban rivers, advance responsible river recreation, and organize and assist the Save Our wild Salmon Coalition in a regional and national campaign to restore wild salmon runs by removing four high-cost, low-value 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 members and partners remain involved with IRU because of the exceptional river conservation successes won in the past 25 years to protect the rivers they love.

“Water is the most critical resource issue of our lifetime and our children’s lifetime. The health of our waters is the principal measure of how we live on the land.”

Luna Leopold
THE STRATEGIC INITIATIVES FOR 2016 – 2020 ARE:

1) **EXCEPTIONAL RIVER CONSERVATION WORK**
   IRU advances its mission by building citizen-based conservation campaigns that use direct advocacy, education, citizen involvement, collaboration and, when necessary, litigation. IRU works in five main program areas to achieve river conservation goals, inspire IRU members, and advance IRU’s mission. (Pages 4-6)

2) **EXPAND 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 engage staff, volunteers, and other partners. To that end, IRU will use both traditional and modern communications technologies, methods, and media to engage and empower advocates, audiences, supporters, and decision-makers. (Pages 7-8)

3) **ENHANCE COMMUNITY EDUCATION, ENGAGEMENT, AND PARTNERSHIPS**
   To enhance community engagement and partnerships, IRU will continue to seek, train and develop river advocates, volunteers, and stakeholders in communities across Idaho. IRU will strategically engage these communities, individuals and stakeholders on timely and relevant issues and campaigns, general education, and membership growth. (Pages 9-10)

4) **OPTIMIZE SYSTEMS AND OPERATIONS**
   A historic strength of IRU is the organization’s ability to react nimbly and quickly to new river conservation challenges as they arise. To maintain and advance this ability, IRU will strengthen internal systems, improve technological capacity, build and maintain close communications among staff, board, volunteers, and partners. (Page 11)

5) **EXPLORE NEW AND PROGRESSIVE OPPORTUNITIES**
   IRU will proactively explore opportunities that advance IRU’s mission through new and innovative programs, methods, and initiatives. (Page 12)
EXCEPTIONAL RIVER CONSERVATION WORK

The Context
IRU supporters, members, and partners are involved with IRU because of the exceptional river conservation achievements delivered in the past 25 years. IRU accomplishes its mission by building citizen-grounded campaigns that use direct advocacy, education, citizen involvement, collaboration and, when necessary, litigation.

The Strategic Initiative
IRU will define its conservation work in terms of realistic, measurable, and tangible results that members and the community at large recognize as valuable in protecting and restoring the rivers of Idaho. In some situations, IRU will engage in especially difficult, long-range issues that might require decades to achieve success. In such cases, IRU will keep its membership informed of progress and challenges, and will periodically evaluate and reaffirm the need to continue.

IRU staff, board and volunteers will remain knowledgeable and well-versed on IRU’s conservation work through a variety of communication strategies and educational efforts, and will provide leadership to advance values, policies, and actions to protect and restore rivers. This effort is paramount to communicate and educate members, public leaders, and the community at large.

IRU works in five main conservation areas:

- Native Fisheries, with a focus on salmon and steelhead recovery
- Energy and Water Policy
- Urban River Stewardship
- Responsible River Recreation
- Wild and Scenic Rivers

These programs are the core of IRU’s work, in which we continue to deliver 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, harvestable levels, while monitoring threats to other native fish populations such as cutthroat and bull trout, and taking action when appropriate to protect them.

1. Remain a forceful presence in Idaho and the Northwest in support of removing four lower Snake River dams to fully restore Idaho’s wild salmon and steelhead populations.
2. Maintain active involvement in the Save Our wild Salmon Coalition through its board of directors, steering committee, planning sessions, and coordinated actions.

3. Work with IRU attorneys to monitor and challenge as necessary Biological Opinions (BiOps) for salmon and steelhead, the lower Snake River Programmatic Sediment Management Plan (PSMP), and other federal proposals and actions that affect Idaho salmon.

4. Continue efforts to create effective coalitions that can advance political change in favor of meaningful salmon and steelhead recovery.

5. Maintain on-the-ground and strategic leadership in critical partnerships for native fisheries.

Energy and Water Policy
Goal: Protect Idaho’s rivers from the harmful effects of dams or other water projects, promoting positive, solutions-based alternatives to re-water streams, allow the transfer of water rights for conservation, and support carbon neutral energy sources that do not damage rivers.

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, or where negative impacts outweigh benefits.

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 meaningful new minimum flows, and pursue other opportunities to re-water streams.

8. Advocate for the modernization of Idaho water law 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 conditions, and encourage reduced water 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 programs. 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 opportunities and access.
2. Increase outreach to boaters in order to recruit more river activists and encourage stewardship.
3. Engage with and/or lead campaigns to designate national water trails.
5. Continue IRU representation on the Idaho Wild Rivers license plate program to support 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 federally designated Wild and Scenic Rivers, and in other free-flowing streams.*

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.
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, work for new designations. Work with the State of Idaho to strengthen the State Protected Rivers System to include in-stream flows, better 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 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 combine the efforts of staff and volunteers. Campaign effectiveness relies directly on active citizen involvement. To that end, IRU’s communications are critical to engaging volunteers, the membership generally, and the 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 groups and 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 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 an online presence with content that reflects IRU’s conservation work, shares IRU’s history of success, and engages existing and new members, supporters, 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, e.g. on 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, issue alerts, blog posts and other items as needed.

2. Newsletter: create a quarterly electronic newsletter with website presence that can be printed on demand for members who request a hard copy.

3. As an environmental and conservation organization, IRU will move communications as possible toward non-print methods, to save natural resources.
ENHANCE COMMUNITY EDUCATION, ENGAGEMENT AND PARTNERSHIPS

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

The Strategic Initiative
To enhance community engagement and partnerships IRU will seek volunteers and partner stakeholders in strategic communities across Idaho on timely, relevant issues and campaigns, general education, and efforts to expand membership.

Implementation
Regional Volunteer Conservation Associates
Goal: Build a network of volunteers in local communities across Idaho in a Regional Conservation Associate Program, in which IRU protects local rivers by providing volunteers appropriate training and organizational support.

1. Create and maintain a network of dedicated river conservationists from across Idaho that are connected with each other, and to the IRU board and staff.
2. Regional conservation associates will provide a “local voice” and a connection for IRU, represent the interests of and speak on behalf of IRU, be watchdogs for threats in their region, and engage with other concerned citizens on local river issues.
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 to actively educate guests and clients on the persistent threat of extinction faced by Idaho salmon, their unique and incredible history, and IRU’s current work to fully restore them. Additionally, educate guests on the challenges to Idaho’s Wild and Scenic Rivers, the impacts of climate change, management of river corridors, and other current issues.

1. Build and maintain resource kits containing educational materials that are suitable and accessible to guides, and which create enjoyable tools for them to relay information formally or informally to guests and clients.
2. Encourage ongoing relationships between river guides, IRU staff, and guests through follow-up contacts after trips, with memberships, communications, and education.
3. Annually assess the program through feedback from guides and outfitters.
Idaho Rivers Lecture Series
Goal: Provide regular lectures that are informative and inspirational to members of IRU.

Community Partnerships
Goal: Build and enhance strategic partnerships in Idaho communities to advance IRU’s mission.

1. Organizational and NGO partnerships: seek and collaborate with appropriate organizations on conservation issues and educational efforts related to IRU’s work.
2. Corporate partnerships: identify, develop and maintain appropriate corporate partnerships.
3. Government: identify, develop and maintain strong and appropriate relationships with government agencies and leaders.
OPTIMIZE SYSTEMS AND OPERATIONS

The Context
IRU must be prepared for change in order to continue delivering successful conservation victories and educational accomplishments. Key enabling elements include internal policies, procedures, technological capabilities and documentation to serve as organizational pillars and instruments of efficiency and success. To that end, IRU will provide improved member services by optimizing existing systems and operations, and by improving them as opportunities arise.

The Strategic Initiative
IRU will examine and clarify daily operations, evaluate organizational structure and internal practices, improve existing technological systems, and create new coordinating strategies as needed. This will allow IRU to respond to a dynamic and changing world while improving 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 the current system to Salesforce.
2. Integrate IRU’s website with the Salesforce database for operational efficiency.
3. Utilize the new database system in conjunction with sound internal policies and procedures to improve developmental efforts, donor relations and contacts, and provide timely acknowledgement and receipt of donor gifts and member communications.

Upgrade Technology and Tools
Goal: Invest in technology services and tools to meet current needs and those outlined in this strategic plan.

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 to strengthen IRU’s ability to respond to workplace demands and dynamic conservation issues in a flexible and nimble manner.
4. Support this 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 fluid and dynamic, and it is impossible to foresee all the emerging threats and opportunities facing Idaho’s rivers. While our strategic plan is a valuable guide and roadmap, IRU must also plan for opportunities that are not specifically defined within it.

The Strategic Initiative
IRU will continuously watch for and be ready to react to opportunities that advance the organization’s mission through new issues, opportunities, innovative programs, initiatives and relationships with other entities and individuals.

Implementation
Research and Planning
Goal: IRU staff and board will remain open to any river conservation issues or 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 provide leadership in Idaho on issues that advance IRU’s mission and vision.
3. The Board of Directors, executive director and staff will remain watchful for new programs, methods and opportunities to advance IRU’s mission, and act as needed to incorporate new priorities.