

# IDL leases Payette Lakes lands to county

BY DREW DODSON

THE STAR-NEWS

Public access to over 1,200 acres of state endowment land fronting Payette Lake could be preserved until 2025 under a lease signed last week by Valley County and the Idaho Department of Lands.

The lease applies to about 1,037 acres along the southern portion of Warren Wagon Road near McCall, as well as 165 acres along Eastside Drive south of Lucks Point.

The purpose of the lease is to protect water quality in Payette Lake and maintain public access to the lands for camping, hiking,

See **IDL**, Page A8

foraging, snowmobiling and other recreational activities.

However, it does not prevent the lands department from selling or exchanging the lands subject to the lease, leasing the land for other uses like mining, or revoking the lease in favor of a more profitable lease application.

"Currently, there is no other plan for this leased area," said Sharla Arledge, an IDL spokesperson.

The lease takes effect today and expires Dec. 31, 2024. The state will earn about \$11,667 from the lease in 2023 and \$20,000 from the lease in 2024.

The Eastside Drive parcel is an access point to Payette National Forest land and the Crestline Trail through mountains east of Payette Lake.

The land along Warren Wagon Road contains snow-

mobile trails and is the most visible endowment land from the shores of Payette Lake, including Legacy Park in McCall.

"This is a win-win for IDL, Valley County and all who enjoy these beautiful lands," said Jeff Mousseau of United Payette, a local advocacy group that funded the lease.

The short-term leases are aimed at giving United Payette time to raise money for conservation easements that would permanently restrict future development on the endowment lands.

So far, a permanent conservation easement on endowment land has never been authorized by the State Board of Land Commissioners, Arledge said.

In addition to preserving public access, the lease allows the county to do trail maintenance and im-

provement projects with permission from the lands department.

The county may apply to renew the lease next April, but could be forced to compete for the lease at auction if the lands department receives other applications for use of the lands.

"This is such a positive for our community," Valley County Commissioner Sherry Maupin said. "We need to just continue onward and forward with this."

The lease is held by Valley County, but was funded by United Payette, which has raised more than \$100,000 to pay for short-term recreation leases with the lands department.

The lease covers about 20% of the 5,197 acres of Payette Lake endowment land on which United Payette hopes to secure short-term leases under a plan adopted last fall.

The next endowment land parcels the coalition and the county will target for short-term recreation leases have not yet been determined.

Most of the endowment land the coalition hopes to conserve is contained in nearly 3,500 acres surrounding the north end of Payette

(Continued from Front Page)

the state's management plan for Payette Lake endowment lands, which was adopted in 2021.

However, the coalition's plan encourages selling about 160 acres, or 58% less than the 377 acres that could be sold off within 20 years under the state's management plan.

In September, the lands department sold 2.5 acres of endowment land on Cougar Island in Payette Lake.

The auction marked the first recommended by the management plan, though it was authorized by the State Land Board years before the 2021 management plan was drafted.

A 3.2-acre parcel on Payette Drive near Warren Wagon Road and 20 acres of commercial land along Deinhard Lane near Spring Mountain Boulevard could be the next state land parcels slated for auction under the plan.

However, there is no current timeline for any future auctions, which will be influenced by market conditions, Arledge said.

The lands department operates under a mandate in the Idaho constitution to maximize long-term earnings from state endowment