

Ponderosa State Park

Introduction: Ponderosa State Park could easily be described as Idaho's premier natural park. Its 1,462 acres provide the visitor with a diversity of natural landscapes to view, explore, and appreciate. It also contains some of Idaho's greatest scenery, including a vista point that is one of the most often photographed spots in Idaho. Its location, just a few hours north of the Boise metropolitan area have made it the second most popular park in the Idaho State Park System. The campground is also quite popular with a lot of out of state visitors who make the park a destination location. Ponderosa is also a year around park that offers the winter visitor with recreational features. Ponderosa is a "park for all seasons."

Getting There: To the Peninsula unit, from McCall on northbound Hwy. 55, turn right on Railroad Ave. and follow it until it merges with Lenora St. At the intersection of Lenora St. and Davis Ave., turn right on Davis Ave. Continue to follow Davis Ave. which will lead you straight to the entrance station for the park. To the North Beach unit, continue northbound on Hwy. 55 through the town of McCall until you reach the Warren Wagon Rd. Turn right on the Warren Wagon Rd. and continue on it for about 7 miles. The first part of the North Beach unit will be on your right at the parking lot and small boat ramp where the Upper Payette River enters Payette Lake. Continuing north on the Warren Wagon Rd. for about 1 mile will bring you to the East Side Rd. Turn right on the East Side Rd. and almost immediately on your right will be the turn-off to the Northwest Passage Campground area. Continuing south on the East Side Rd. for about 1 mile will bring you to a right turn into a parking lot for access to the Upper Payette River. Continuing south on the East Side Rd. for about 1/4 mile will bring you to a right turn into a lot that provides parking for access to the North Beach proper.

Major Features:

The Lake: Payette Lake is a 5,337 acre crystal clear lake. The lake is named for Francois Payette, who was a French-Canadian mountain man who first arrived in the area in 1812 and was the manager at Ft. Boise from 1835 to 1844 with 22 miles of shoreline. Only about 7.5 miles (34 %) of this shoreline is contained in Ponderosa State Park. A significant topographic feature is the basaltic peninsula which juts northward into the lake and divides it into the west arm and east arm. Much of this peninsula is included in Ponderosa State Park. The lake is fairly pristine but it is now very different from what it once was. Before all the downstream dams were built, the lake once had a healthy migrating population of sockeye salmon, chinook salmon and steelhead trout. Much of the shoreline today is occupied by condominiums, hotels, and vacation homes. Some have said that Payette Lake is Idaho's equivalent of "Lake Tahoe."

The River: The North Beach unit of Ponderosa State Park includes the beautiful Upper Payette river and its surroundings. The river meanders for about 2.4 miles through the park. There are deep forests, open meadows, and lush wetlands found along the river. The scenery and solitude found here are superb.

The Park: The park consists of two unconnected units: Peninsula and North Beach. Most of the park is wildlands where only about 20% has been developed into recreational facilities.

The Peninsula Unit is the main portion of the park. It is also the most visited. It can be divided into the following use areas: Lakeview day use area; RV Campground; Peninsula Campground; Boat Launch area; and the old day use area.

The Lakeview day use area is immediately to the left of the park entrance. After coming through the entrance station, an immediate left turn will bring you into a large parking lot. The Lakeview day use has a beautiful sandy beach that is a designated swimming beach. There is an improved restroom, a group picnic shelter, a volleyball court, and 9 individual picnic tables. This area also has the park visitor center and office. The visitor center has gifts and souvenirs available for sale. The visitor center patio may also be reserved for group use. There are also 5 deluxe cabins for rent here.

The RV Campground is directly across the main park road from the Lakeview area. This is a full service campground (with water, electric, and sewer hook-ups) with 50 campsites. There is an improved restroom with showers and 2 group shelters. This area is ideal for group camping use.

The Peninsula Campground area includes the original campground. The campground has three loops: Aspen, Blackberry, and Chokecherry. It has 113 campsites many of which have water and electric hook-ups. The campground has three improved restrooms with showers available. There is also a dump station. Volleyball courts are nearby. This area also has the old park office/visitor center (now known as the activity center) that has three picnic tables available. At the end of the Aspen Loop there is a small camper cabin available for rent. At the end of the Blackberry Loop there are courtesy docks on the lake where boats can be landed near the campground. Adjacent to the docks is a small designated swimming beach. There is one picnic table and some benches located here.

The boat launch area includes a deep water ramp. The ramp has two courtesy docks. There is a parking lot for trailers and towing vehicles. There are two vault toilets provided here.

The old day use area has 8 picnic tables available for individual day use and one group shelter. There is a designated swimming beach here with benches. A vault toilet is also provided here. This area marks the end of the paved park road. A gravel road proceeds from here and ends at the park's famous Osprey Point vista. However, RVs and trailers must turn around here at the day use area as the narrow gravel road is not suitable for their use. Of special note is that there is a beautiful stand of old growth aspen trees located just across the road from the day use area.

The North Beach unit can be divided into the boat launch area, the Northwest Passage Campground, and the North Beach day use area.

The boat launch area is at the start of a 2.4 mile canoe trail on the Upper Payette River. There is a small boat launch area here suitable for smaller boats. There is a small parking lot that has very limited space and vehicles with trailers should exercise caution here. There is a concession located here that rents canoes, kayaks, and stand-up paddle boards for use on the canoe trail. There is a vault toilet provided here. Visitors should note that there is no access to North Beach from this area. Even though there is not an entrance station here, visitors are still required to pay the \$5.00 per vehicle per day fee for using this area. A self-serve pay station is provided for this purpose.

The Northwest Passage Campground has 22 campsites. These are "first come/first serve" campsites and reservations cannot be made for them. There is a vault toilet available but there are no improved restrooms here or showers. Further, there are no hook-up sites. But each site

has a parking spur, table, fire ring, etc. Small watercraft (canoes and kayaks) can be hand launched into the Upper Payette River at a sandy beach area near the campground. The Northwest Passage Campground also has a fishing pond. The pond has a parking lot with an accessible trail to a small fishing dock. There are four picnic tables available here, two of which are under a shelter. If you are staying in the campground a fee is required. Further, there is a \$5.00 per vehicle per day fee for use of any of the parking lots in the North Beach Unit. A self-service pay station is located near the campground entrance for this purpose.

The ½ mile long North Beach is the most popular area in the North Beach unit. It is a beautiful sandy beach with a shallow gradient into the lake. It can become very crowded on a hot summer day. There is a vault toilet located near the beach. Visitors must park in the parking lot provided off of the East Side Rd. A \$5.00 per vehicle per day fee is required for use of this lot. A self-service pay station is available for this purpose. A trail leads from the parking lot to the beach and a portion of this route is over a long board walk over a marsh. When this parking lot is full, another lot (for overflow) is located about 1/4 mile north adjacent to the Upper Payette River. The two lots are connected by trail. As a special note, visitors must not attempt to park along the side of the East Side Rd. where it comes near to North Beach. Some attempt to do this to try to avoid the \$5.00 fee. However, the narrow East Side Rd. is not suitable for this purpose and parking there constitutes a traffic obstruction.

Geology: During the Mesozoic Era (62 million years ago) a mass of molten magma forced its way towards the Earth's surface. As it cooled it formed a huge granite mass measuring 200 miles north to south and 100 miles east to west. It is referred to by geologists as the Idaho Batholith. Much of the region in and around Ponderosa State Park are mountains that were built up through this process.

During the Miocene Era (about 17 million years ago) a lava intrusion occurred in the area. This material was thrust up against the west side of the batholith and became the basaltic mass now known as West Mountain and Red Ridge. Some lava also squeezed through cracks and fissures of the batholith. The finger like peninsula of Ponderosa State Park is an example of this basaltic formation that sits on top of a granite base. This basaltic formation can be viewed at Osprey Point where it is very hard to miss.

The valley of the North Fork of the Payette River above Payette Lake was formed by a large glacier about 15,000 years ago (in the Pleistocene Epoch). It was a period of long, wet, and cold winters with brief summers. The glacier grew and crept slowly down the valley and in the process it scouring the granite and basaltic rock formations and pushed these materials along. It created the U-shaped valleys that we see today. As climate conditions warmed, the glacier began to retreat. The rock and sediment that were deposited formed a terminal moraine where the glacier has reached its farthest downstream location. This location is where the town of McCall exists today. The weight of the glacier and its gouging effect served to create a large impression that was exposed upon its retreat. As this depression filled with meltwater, it formed Payette Lake.

Ecosystems and Plant Communities:

The Lake: Payette Lake once supported large populations of sockeye salmon, chinook salmon and steelhead trout. The runs were blocked by an irrigation diversion dam around 1908 on the

Payette River near Montour, Idaho. Mackinaw or lake trout were introduced in the lake in 1955. The Lake is ideal spawning habitat for lake trout and they naturally reproduce. Attempts have also been made to plant westside cutthroat trout. The lake also has Largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, crappie, walleye, catfish, rainbow trout, mountain whitefish, kokanee, and brown trout.

Ponds/Wetlands: There are numerous small ponds and wetlands located in the park. Lily Marsh is located in the Peninsula unit. It still has a pond component, but at one time it used to be a lake but has now filled in. It is designated as a natural area. Another significant wetland in the Peninsula Unit is Meadow Marsh. At Meadow Marsh there are still areas of ponds and the land remains wet and moist but it presents more like a typical of a meadow environment. There is an interpretive trail available here. North Beach unit has numerous marsh and wetland areas. One of which can be easily viewed from the boardwalk that leads to the North Beach day use area. Typically found in the ponds and wetlands are cattails, horsetail, yellow pond lily, sedges, and rushes

The River: The Upper Payette River in the North Beach unit is a slow moving cold water environment. The Mountain Whitefish and Kokanee spawn in the Upper Payette. Riparian plant life here include black cottonwoods and willows.

The Land: The montane sagebrush steppe ecosystem is present in the park but in patchy segments. One of the primary locations of this in on the flat plain area to the east and north of the Peninsula Campground. The classic species present are sagebrush, bitterbrush, and rabbit brush. By far the most dominant ecosystem present in the park is the ponderosa pine forest. The plants found in this forest are: ponderosa pine, Engelmann spruce, white pine, lodgepole pine, aspen, western larch (tamarack), mountain ash, alder, honeysuckle, buffalo berry, thimble berry, huckleberry, yarrow, douglas fir, grand fir, sub-alpine fir, Oregon grape,, lupine, golden banner, and rocky mountain maple.

Ponderosa pine (*pinus ponderosa*) is the keynote species and the park's namesake. Known as blackjack pine, bull pine, western yellow pine and yellow pine, it is the most widely distributed pine in North America. Most of the ponderosa pines in the park are 100 feet tall, but some are as tall as 150 feet. The ponderosa pines stop growing when they get to be about 200 years old and then start growing outward. If the trees survive lumbering, fires and insect attacks, they may get to be as old as 600 years. The oldest trees in the park may be over 500 years old. They were merely seedlings when Columbus arrived in the continent in 1492. Records indicate that in 1920 about 7 million board feet of ponderosa pine was present in the area of he park. By 1986, there were only 3.7 million board feet. Many of the remaining trees in the park are over 400 years old and little natural regeneration is occurring.

Ponderosa pine grows most prolifically at elevations ranging from 4,000 to 8,000 feet on benches and plateaus with southern and western aspects. At an elevation of 5,050 with southern and western exposures, the park is perfect for ponderosa pines. To cope with dry conditions, the trees have huge root systems and are spaced widely apart presenting what is known as a "park like" aspect. As the trees reach maturity at 80 to 100 years of age, the bark forms thick, scaly plates and the color changes from dark brown to gray to yellowish. The fragments of bark resemble the pieces of a jigsaw busy. When smelling the bark, there is a slight vanilla scent

detected. The ponderosa pine cones take two years to mature and are used as food by many animals and birds. Chipmunks are great farmers to ponderosa pine seedlings as they tend to plant new trees in caches of cones and seeds that they bury.

Wildlife:

Mammals: The mammals present in the park include: mule deer, whitetail deer, moose, red squirrel (chickaree), Columbia ground squirrels, beaver, otter, elk, mountain lion, black bear, red fox, muskrat, bobcats, fisher, coyotes, skunk, chipmunk, and raccoon. When camping in Ponderosa State Park's campgrounds the first thing you hear in the morning and the last thing you hear at night are the chatters of the American red or chickaree squirrel. This squirrel is the keynote species in the park and it is directly related to its abundant food source, namely ponderosa pine seeds.

The American red squirrel (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*). It is one of three species of tree squirrels known as the pine squirrels. American red squirrels are also referred to as pine squirrels, North American red squirrels, boomers, and chickarees. They are medium-sized (200–250 g) diurnal mammals that defend a year-round exclusive territory. The diet of these tree squirrels is specialized on the seeds of conifer cones. As such, they are widely distributed across North America wherever conifers are common, except on the Pacific coast, where they are replaced by Douglas squirrels. The conifer trees in the park that are most utilized by these squirrels are the ponderosa pines.

Their chattering is easily distinguished. Their noisy sputterings and scoldings can be heard throughout the forest. They have three different chatters that carry different meaning. A “cirr-rr-rr” that starts with a high pitched peep is a warning to other squirrels that there is a dangerous animal nearby. A “buzz” call is used in courtship chases. An extended chatter asserts territory near their food cache.

American red squirrels are widely distributed across the North American continent. Their range includes most of Canada, the southern part of Alaska, coastal British Columbia, and the Rocky Mountains and boreal forests east to the Atlantic coast. American red squirrels are abundant and not of conservation concern throughout much of their range.

The American red squirrel's diet is primarily pine seeds. but they have also been observed eating mushrooms, willow leaves, and animal material such as bird eggs. In late summer and fall they begin their gathering of pine cones. They will climb high into the branches of the tall ponderosa pines and begin nipping off green cones. They go after the green cones so they can harvest the seeds before other animals can get to them. If you are in the park campground when this is happening, you will soon here the thumping sounds of the cones hitting the ground. Since these are being dropped hundreds of feet they can also surprise the visitor when they hit tents, awnings, and RV roofs. The squirrel will continue dropping cones for a few minutes and then will come down from the tree to gather their cones and drag them to a nearby cache. Later the squirrel will take the cones to their favorite feeding place where they will peel the scales off the cones to expose the seeds. Some seeds will be immediately eaten and others stored in a cache. The fallen scales from consumed pine seed cones can collect in piles called middens. American red squirrel territories may contain one or several middens. They clip and gather mushrooms and other fungi and place them amongst the branches of trees to dry them in the sun. With their aggressive food gathering and storing habits, there is no need to hibernate.

Females can breed for the first time at one year of age, but some females delay breeding until two years of age or older. Most females produce one litter per year, but in some years reproduction is skipped, while in other years some females breed twice. Litter sizes typically range from one to five, but most litters contain three or four offspring.

Nests are most commonly constructed of grass in the branches of trees. American red squirrels rarely nest below ground. Each individual squirrel has several nests within its territory, and females with young move them between nests. Juvenile squirrels must acquire a territory and midden prior to their first winter to survive. They can acquire a territory by competing for a vacant territory, creating a new territory or by receiving all or part of a territory from their mothers.

Birds: The birds present in the park include: woodpeckers, great blue heron, osprey, bald eagle, great gray owl, sandhill crane, Canada geese, ducks, grouse, mallards, mergansers, wood ducks, ring necked ducks, snipes, loons, belted kingfisher, pileated woodpecker, grebes, Swainson's hawk, great horned owl and songbirds.

Fish: The fish present in the park include: kokanee, rainbow trout, lake trout, cutthroat trout, brook trout, kamloops trout, brown trout, largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, mountain whitefish, crappie, walleye, and catfish.

Cultural History: The Native Americans that occupied the lands in and around Payette Land were the Sheepeater (Tukudika) Band of the Northern Shoshone tribe. Long and Round valleys were popular hunting and council grounds, and the tribe frequented the area to hunt and to dig and dry camas roots. Many traces of their camps can still be found in the area today. In 1879, during their flight across Long Valley, some of the Sheepeater band ambushed and murdered four white men. The band's eventual defeat and transfer to a reservation marked the end of Native American life in Valley County.

History: The early history of Valley County centers around long and round valleys and begins with the 1860s gold rush. Packer John Welch, a contractor who hauled supplies from Umatilla Landing on the Columbia River to miners in Idaho City, blazed a trail through the wilderness and entered long valley at Payette Lake. He established a way station near what later became the Town of Cascade. During the 1870s prospectors and miners followed in his footsteps. Soldiers involved in the Bannock and Sheepeater Indian Wars of 1878 and 1879 camped along Payette Lake brought back reports of beautiful scenery, blue water, and great fishing. By 1889, the recreation values of the lake were fully recognized and some businessmen began to cater to the fledgling tourist trade. In 1892, visitors from Boise were regularly venturing to Payette Lake for summer vacations.

As gold sources dwindled, a few miners began to take up squatters rights in the area. During the 1890s over 30 families moved to the valley and in 1888, the first post office in Valley County opened at Alpha. By 1890, as many as 750 people may have been living in Valley County. During the 1890s a Finnish community began to built east of Lake Fork, and by the 1930s the community had grown to 400. Long valley pioneer Tom McCall and his family arrived at the southern shore of Payette Lake and acquired "squatter's rights" to the first cabin site in 1891. In July of 1899, Tom McCall received a patent for 167 acres under the Homestead

Act for land in section 9 of Township 18 North, Range 3 East. Today this location is downtown McCall. In 1896 the Warren Dredge Co., opened a sawmill on Payette Lake. The towns roots are in timber, mining, and cattle ranching. Lumber would be produced in mills on Payette Lake for 80 years. The most important historical events was the coming of the railroad in 1914. The Union Pacific pushed its tracks from Emmett to McCall. This made commercial logging in the area profitable.

In about 1914, Aneas Wyatt had the the steamboat *Lyda* built and it began service on Payette Lake by transporting mining supplies from McCall to the north end of the lake for the mining districts to the north. Wyatt also constructed a hotel and operated the resort and a 30-foot sailing yacht “for the use of parties who may visit the lake on a pleasure bent.” The *Lyda* could also take up to 125 passengers on lake cruises. On calm summer evenings the *Lyda* would tow the dancing barge while patrons danced on its deck. During this period, 1914 to 1916, the town of McCall was known as Lakeport.

The construction of state highway 55 opened up the region to recreating masses. In the 1920s the state land board began leasing vacation homesites along the lake. To halt further erosion of the lake outlet in 1944, the Payette Water Users Association installed a dam just below the Lardo Bridge which raised the level of the lake a few feet. In 1939, the movie “Northwest Passage” was film in portions of the park. Several sets such as a fort, an Indian village, and the St. Francis village was built on land in the North Beach Unit.

Park History:

In May 1900, the *Idaho Statesman* described this location as “one of the most beautiful spots in Idaho.” On January 12, 1905, *Long Valley Advocate* Publisher John R. Wallis wrote an editorial; that said the land around Payette Lake should be a state park. The *Idaho Statesman*

Packer John’s Cabin

From 1862 to 1864, John Welch earned a living transporting supplies to gold miners from Umatilla on the Columbia River over a trail to Idaho City. During late winter 1862, Packer John reached Little Salmon Meadows only to find the trail completely blocked with snow. Unable to continue the trek, Packer John and his fellow packers constructed an eighteen by twenty-four foot cabin in the Goose Creek Valley just south of present day New Meadows where they spent the winter. As winter thawed and the men were able to resume their journey, Packer John’s Cabin became a local landmark symbolizing the connection of northern Idaho with the rest of Idaho Territory. Originally known as the Cottonwood House, the small cabin was selected as the site for the first Idaho Republican Convention in 1863 and as the Democratic Convention site in 1864. During these conventions, the territorial boundaries of Idaho were voted upon and mapped. Some of the delegates from Northern Idaho were absent and a new territorial convention assembled at Packer John's cabin, August 27, 1864. Although once a hotbed of political activity, Packer John’s Cabin fell into disrepair after the gold rush ended in 1864. As the cabin began to fall apart, pictures recorded its decay with the site becoming a popular picnic ground at the turn of the 20th century. Realizing the historic value of the cabin, the Idaho Legislature appropriated \$500 to the State Historical Society in 1909 to preserve the structure. John Hailey was responsible for much of the restoration, paying others to move the cabin, replace decaying boards with fresh logs, and install a new roof and floor. During its reconstruction, the cabin emerged with a new design much different than Packer John’s original structure, but the site nevertheless became a popular state attraction. Upon its restoration, the park was originally maintained privately in Salmon Meadows as a summer resort. However, this system soon failed, and Idaho legislators set aside the cabin as a state park on March 6, 1951. The site was still a state park in 1989 when a guide books to the state parks was published. But since then, the cabin has lost its state title but remains a county park under the management of Idaho’s Adams County. The scenic and historic sixteen-acre park and campground surrounding the cabin is open during the summer, and a state historic marker identifies the area.

newspaper in Boise repeated this idea in an editorial of their own on February 2, 1905. On March 9, 1905, John Wallis explained to his readers that the land around the lake was endowment lands and Idaho would have to purchase the lands from the schools trust. On September 27, 1906, the legislature passed a resolution to make the land around Payette Lake a state park.

The idea to rent out shoreline “cottage lots” also came about in 1906. The *Idaho Statesman* expressed the hope that cottage lot rental fees might be used to maintain a park. However, a resolution was introduced in the senate in March 1907 directing the State Land Board “not to sell or otherwise dispose of any part of “the lands” within two miles of the Payette Lakes.” The resolution was unsuccessful as on May 25, 1908, plans were announced to plat the first one hundred cottage lots. At first, the Land Board proposed to build an access road to the lots along the beach so that lands on the lake side of the road would be public access places. The initial cottage dwellers protested and the decision was made to build the access road at the rear of the cottage lots. So the original intent of making the entire shoreline surrounding Payette Lake into “public park” lands failed. Over the years, cottage lot owners would eventually encumber the beaches with docks, boat ramps, fences, boat houses and other buildings to the point where this “state land” had all the appearances of private property and the public thenceforth was banned from such shoreline. This was perhaps the State of Idaho’s greatest blunder in outdoor recreation management.

On March 13, 1909, the State Legislature passed an act authorizing the State Board of Land Commissioners to withdraw from sale and set aside 23 lots (approximately 115 acres) of land in Townships 18 and 19 north, range 3 east for park purposes. These lands were located on the peninsula in the area that would become Ponderosa State Park. The withdrawal was to be effective for 20 years. The lots set aside included only a portion of the lots of land that make up the peninsula property today. Further, the act did not appropriate funds for the purchase of the lands from the Endowment Trust. However, it was a good start to begin blocking up lands for a state park.

When the Land Board advertized a sale of timber along the lake shore on December 17, 1918, Boise’s Columbian Club organized a significant protest with petitions to the legislature. The club president stated that “we must recognize the importance of preserving our scenic area for park use.” The Columbian Club pushed a resolution through the legislature in the summer of 1918 that would forbid any timber harvesting adjacent to Payette Lake. This resolution aided the preservation of the old growth ponderosa pines on the peninsula. But the Land board choose to do a “select” timber sale by marking trees that could be cut without detracting from scenic values.

In December 1919, Frank G. Miller (dean of the School of Forestry at the University of Idaho) completed a report to the Land Board that the area had everything necessary to be the “greatest playground” in the Northwest. His report recommended that no timber sales should be made except for insect damaged or diseased trees. This report prevented extensive logging on the peninsula. But the Land Board claimed that it had no funds to manage a park and instead made a proposal to turn the lands over to the federal government, if it would create and maintain a national park. The legislature passed a law on February 25, 1925, declaring as a matter of public policy, “preservation of said lake in its present condition as a health resort and recreation place.”

In 1933, the Civilian Conservation Corps built the road to the tip of the peninsula. Then

The first rudimentary campgrounds were designed and constructed in the late 1930s and early 1940s. While the lands in and around the park were still endowment lands, the University of Idaho established its forestry summer camp in 1940 on lands right next to the area that was being used for “park purposes.”

On behalf of the State of Idaho, a *Master Plan and Development Outline for Payette Lake State Park* was prepared by National Park Service in March 1941. By 1953, the State of Idaho Lands Department had created a parks section and included the peninsula as park lands. In 1957, Ponderosa State Park was designated and was to include all lands in Valley County adjacent to Payette Lake. The Department of lands completed a *Payette Lake Recreation Plan* in 1958. Then the Idaho National Guard constructs 2 ½ miles of road on the peninsula.

In 1960, the first contemporary facilities were developed at Ponderosa State Park and the park came under the jurisdiction of the newly created Department of Parks and Recreation in 1965. From 1967 to 1969, many of the present park facilities were constructed. This included installation of the sewer system, water system, three camping loops, a boat ramp, and re-routing of the entrance road. Finally on March 15, 1973, the 828 acre Peninsula unit and the 490 acre North Beach unit properties were officially purchased from the Idaho Department of Lands for \$3.2 million.

The 1990s saw several other additions to the park. On November 19, 1991, The some lands formerly leased to be a part of the Silver Sage Girl Scout Council Camp Pittenger were conveyed to IDPR to add to the park. Then a *Ponderosa State Park General Management Plan* was approved on June 23, 1994. The plan called for (among other things):

- Acquisition of addition lands to the north of the North Beach unit.
- Developing a new “Indian Village” campground in the North Beach unit.
- Acquisition of Camp Pittenger.
- Acquisition of the Nazarene Church camp.
- Acquisition of the University of Idaho lease.
- Acquisition of private cabin leases next to the University of Idaho site.
- Acquisition and re-development of the Lakeview Village RV park property.

The plan garnered a great deal of interest and a number of the recommendations would be implemented. First, the former Nazarene Church camp lands and the Lakeview Village RV park lands were acquired in 1998. Second, the recommended Northwest Passage (Indian Village) campground was completed in the North Beach Unit in 2004. Then in April of 2006, Governor Kempthorne held a ceremony at Eagle Island State Park in announcing his “Experience Idaho” initiative which he described as a once-in-generation investment in some of the state’s most special places. As part of this initiative, Ponderosa State Park would be authorized 1.5 million for day-use and related facilities. Governor Kempthorne had big plans for Ponderosa State Park and said, “...the park must shift emphasis from its traditional role of regional destination campground, to its emerging role as an integral recreation area in one of Idaho’s premier four-season resort communities.” Part of the proposed developments would be a regional administrative learning and retreat center with 30 guest rooms, small conference rooms, rustic cabins and RV sites to be constructed at the old Lakeview Village site. There was further a proposal to redevelop the former Nazarene Church camp into a rustic cabin camp by making improvements to the existing chapel and some of the salvageable cabins. New cabins would be

built to replace those that were beyond repair. It was to be called Kokanee Cove. The Lakeview Village area was redeveloped, but the learning and retreat center were dropped from the proposal. The project finished with a new RV campground, a new entrance station, a new visitor center and the 5 deluxe cabins. These new facilities were finished in 2008. The redeveloped of Kokanee Cove was dropped in its entirety and the old church camp continues to exist in a state of arrested decay.

Recreation Activities:

Exploring: The park has a great deal of diverse scenery and environments to explore. There are forests, ponds, the lake and the river to view from various points throughout the park. A drive to the Osprey Point is a “must do.” However don’t attempt this with an RV or when towing a trailer as it is a narrow and steep road. The road leads to a vista point that is 300 feet higher in elevation than the main part of the park. There is an outstanding view of Payette Lake from there and it is one of the most photographed places in Idaho. Also, a trip to Ponderosa State Park is really not complete unless you explore the North Beach unit. There you can view the meandering Upper Payette River as it follows through lush forests, meadows, and wetlands.

Camping: Ponderosa State Park is indeed one of the most popular destination camping places in the region. There are 184 campsites in three different campgrounds available for this use. The RV campground offers improved restrooms with showers and full hook-up sites, The Peninsula Campground offers improved restrooms with showers and many sites with water and electric hook-ups. There is also a small camping cabin available. Then for those desiring an upgraded experience, 5 deluxe cabins are available for rent. Further, the RV campground is equipped with two group shelters for a group camping experience. All of these facilities are available for reservations except the 22 campsites at the Northwest Passage campground which are “first come, first serve.”

Picnicking: The park has four developed day use areas with 20 picnic tables available for

Please Remember

- There is a \$5.00 per vehicle per day fee required for access to the park even in the North Beach unit where there are no entrance stations.
- There is an additional fee of \$5.00 per person per day for winter access.
- Open fires are not allowed on the beaches.
- There are no lifeguards on duty at any of the designated swimming beaches.
- Personal floatation devices are required for any watercraft on the lake or river.
- All watercraft must display a current invasive species decal.
- Dogs must be on a leash at all times, are not permitted in the buildings and are not allowed on the swimming beaches.
- Motor vehicles are to stay on established roadways unless directed otherwise.
- Visitor to the beach portion of the North Beach unit must use the parking lot provided for that purpose and must not park along the East Shore Rd. Near the beach.

individual family use. Park visitors are also invited to set up on the lawns and beaches of the park should all the tables be occupied. The day use area at the North Beach does not have tables, but visitors set up for the day on the sandy beach. Two group shelters are also available at Lakeview and the old day use area.

Fishing: Fishing can be done along any parts of the parks shoreline on Payette Lake. Fishing can also be done along the Upper Payette River in the North Beach unit. A fishing pond is also provided adjacent to the Northwest Passage campground area. The pond is stocked with rainbow trout by the Department of Fish and Game. Typical fish caught at the park include: rainbow trout, lake trout, brook trout, brown trout, and mountain whitefish.

Boating: The park provides two boat ramps. The boat ramp in the Peninsula unit is a deep water ramp and should be used for launching power boats and sail boats. A parking lot is provided there for boat trailers and their towing vehicles. The small boat ramp at the west side of the North Beach unit is not recommended for power boats. Rather it is best used for hand launching of non-motorized craft such as canoes and kayaks. Popular activities on Payette Lake include water skiing, sailing and personal watercraft. Some courtesy docks are provided near the Peninsula Campground for the boat users who are also staying in the campground. Some use power boats for accessing the North Beach from the lake. Use of canoes, kayaks, and stand-up paddle boards is also popular, especially on the Upper Payette River.

Swimming: The park has four designated swimming beaches. The beaches at the Peninsula unit have buoys marking them. Swimming is also popular at North Beach but swimings must compete for space with the power boats.

Trails: Ponderosa State Park is a trail users paradise. There are almost 9 miles of trails available for non-motorized use. Some are designated for only hiking and some for both hiking and bicycling. Visitors should obtain trail maps at the visitor centers. One attractive trail is the paved trail that wraps around Peninsula Campground and fronts the lake all the way to the boat ramp.

Winter Sports: In the winter, several of the trails are groomed for nordic skiing and snowshoeing. However, visitors participating in these uses must pay an additional \$5.00 per person per day for this use. A concessionaire operates the Blue Moon Yurt during the winter months. Visitors meet at the activity center and they either ski or snowshoe on a trail lined by tiki torches that leads to the yurt in a secluded part of the ponderosa pine forest. A gourmet meal is served at the rustic yurt.

Visitor Center:

Visitors will want to see the beautiful visitor center at the Lakeview Day Use area. Staff at the visitor center can let you know what interpretive programs are being conducted in the park. They can also provide advice for wildlife and wildflower viewing. They are well stocked with trail and campground maps as well as brochures for nearby attractions. They also have a selection of nature books, park souvenirs and clothing items available. They even have a stock of ice cream

and ice for campers. Further, the visitor center patio can be reserved for group use.

Resource Management Issues: The environmental quality at Ponderosa State Park is very good, but it is not without its problems. It is known to have the following invasive/noxious weeds: toad flax, Canada thistle, and spotted knapweed. Further, the forest in the park is subject to periodic spruce budworm and pine bark beetle infestations. Mountain pine beetles and Douglas fir beetles are also known to be present in the park.

Park staff has been working for decades in trying to correct several land tenure problems in the park. Decades of management by the Idaho Department of Lands has resulted in a number of inholdings in the park. Several of these have been acquired like a portion of Camp Pittenger and the old Nazarene Church camp and an adjacent cottage lease. However, the largest inholding left is the Department of Lands property being leased for the McCall Outdoor Science School. There are also a few private cottage leases on a piece of Department of Lands property next to the McCall Outdoor Science School. This large inholding tends to be an obstruction with the park boundaries that separates the Lakeview portion of the park from the Peninsula Campground area. This prevents a necessary re-alignment of the main park road and obstructs the park's ability to more directly connect the trails at Lakeview with those at the Peninsula Campground. Further there is an unsightly tall chainlink fence situated on the northern boundary of this inholding which is an eyesore and gives the visitor the feeling that they are "trespassing" even though both sides of the fence are public property.

Ponderosa State Park is beginning to experience the symptoms of overcrowding. The campgrounds are totally full every summer from mid-June to the 3rd week of August. While the new RV campground was added in 2008, it quickly became popular and fills up at the same rate as the older Peninsula Campground. Then on July 4, 2015, the entire park, both camping facilities and day use facilities was entirely filled with no places left to park. Staff had to close the park and turn people away. This does not bode well for those Idaho citizens who possessed their annual state park passport. In 2013, the park had to impose a 750 person limit on the North Beach. Then on July 4 weekend in 2015, there was a riot like disturbance at the beach. There were problems with drinking, disorderly conduct, and parking along the East Side Rd. in order to avoid payment of the entry fee.

Suggestions for the Future: Ponderosa State Park is probably one of the more complete state parks in the Idaho State Park System. But as complete as it is there is still some unfinished business. The following are suggested improvements to the park.

- Attempts should be made to acquire the following inholdings: (1) the McCall Outdoor Science School; (2) private cottages adjacent to the McCall Outdoor Science School; and (3) Camp Pittenger. It makes much more sense for Ponderosa State Park to be the "landloads" to the McCall Outdoor Science School rather than the Department of Lands. The IDPR has environmental education and interpretation among its agency responsibilities and the transfer of these lands would not change the operation of the outdoor school. The private cottage leases adjacent to the outdoor school should also be acquired and either re-purpose them as state park rentals or assign their use to the outdoor school. Camp Pittenger is a more complicated problem, because assistance might need to

be render to the Girl Scout Council in finding another location. But the Camp Pittenger location would give Ponderosa State Park an excellent opportunity to develop additional recreational facilities on the east side of the Peninsula. A boat ramp, day use area, and a set of standard campsites would relieve some of the overcrowding problem in the rest of the park. It is realized that this suggestion would require the purchase of these endowment lands from the school trust.

- After acquisition of the above inholdings, the main park road should be realigned by following a more direct and curved route from the entrance station to the activity center. A paved bicycle trail should be developed alongside this realignment.
- The old Nazarene Church camp was acquired by the park in 1998. The IDPR actually paid for a concept plan in 2006 for the redevelopment of this site into a rustic cabin camp for group use called Kokanee Cove. Yet today, almost 10 years later it still sits idle. That is ten years of rentals that could have recouped the initial costs of the project. The 2006 plan needs to be taken out, dusted off, and implemented.
- The narrow gravel road to Osprey Point should be widened and paved. Along the road several new day use areas should be developed adjacent to the lake where possible. A paved bicycle trail should be developed alongside the improved road. This road would undoubtedly become the most popular scenic drive in the McCall area.
- The old visitor center (now known as the activity center) used to have a number of interpretive displays. These interpretive displays have been removed from the activity center, but they did not later show up in the new visitor center at the Lakeview site. Interpretive displays should be installed in the new visitor center.