Dear candidate,

Idaho is a place of wild beauty, vibrant landscapes and plentiful resources. Time and again, the citizens of this state have demonstrated their dedication to our unique environment. In March 2017, over 3,000 passionate Idahoans gathered from across the state to participate in what became one of the largest rallies in support of public lands in the west. This spring, Governor Brad Little declared May 2, 2019 to be “Public Lands Day” in Idaho before a crowd of hundreds of public lands advocates. Every day, Idahoans throughout the state head outdoors to connect with the natural world in a myriad of ways. We backpack, ski and raft. We hunt, fish and forage. And we raise our children to be filled with appreciation for wide open spaces; in short, to be Idahoans. It is all of our jobs to preserve and protect our lands, forests, rivers and wildlife so that future generations of Idahoans will have the same freedom to experience and enjoy our state’s natural treasures.

Conservation Voters for Idaho fights to protect this heritage. We are a statewide bipartisan organization that works to create the political environment to protect the natural environment. We accomplish this in a variety of ways: we provide independent information to voters, advocate for sound environmental policies, hold elected officials accountable for their votes and elect candidates to public office who will protect Idaho’s clean air and water, open space, wildlife and healthy communities. Our goal is to make conservation and democracy top issues with candidates and voters in the upcoming election.

This briefing is designed to provide you and your staff with basic background on Conservation Voters for Idaho’s goals and ideals.

Thank you for taking the time to learn about some of Idaho’s most pressing conservation priorities.

Courtney E. Washburn
Conservation Voters for Idaho

2019 Issue Briefing Overview

Open Space & Public Lands

- Ensure public lands remain in public hands for future generations and invest in our natural resources
- Use the best available science to support wildlife management decisions
- Advocate for additional public land protections through collaborative approaches and input from stakeholders
- Ensure equitable access to open space

Clean Energy

- Commit to 100% clean, Idaho-sourced energy such as solar, wind and geothermal, and help support the jobs those industries provide
- Support the electrification of the transportation system
- Promote energy efficiency across all sectors

Transportation

- Develop a balanced transportation system
- Ensure access to alternative transportation routes, pathways and infrastructure
- Promote funding opportunities that support local options for solving transportation challenges

Healthy Communities

- Improve the quality of our air and water for health, recreation and wildlife
- Keep toxic chemicals out of our food, water, land and air
- Reduce waste

Voting Rights

- Encourage civic engagement by making voting easy and accessible to all
- Educate Idahoans on the importance of voting and how to exercise their right
- Ensure elections are fair and transparent
- Safeguard the right of Idahoans to put forth a ballot initiative
- Promote an accurate and equitable census count

OPEN SPACE & PUBLIC LANDS

Background

Idahoans have always had a deep connection to the land. From the first miners and trappers and the past and present timber workers, farmers and ranchers, to the outdoor recreationists
and thousands of visitors who come here to enjoy Idaho's diverse landscapes; our lives, jobs and local economies are intrinsically tied to the land.

63% of Idaho is public land. From sagebrush deserts and canyons to forested mountains and high alpine lakes, Idaho’s public lands are part of our natural heritage and belong to all Idahoans, including those yet to come. Colorado College’s 2019 Western States Survey found that Idahoans are overwhelmingly in favor of protecting public lands and the environment. 68% of survey respondents viewed themselves as conservationists, 74% as outdoor recreationists and three-fourths said that the ability to live near public lands was a significant reason they live in Idaho.

Governor Brad Little summarized Idahoan’s love of public lands at the 2019 Public Lands Day, “We have to stop exporting our children, and there’s no better bait to keep Idahoans in Idaho than the opportunities that exist in our great outdoors.”

Keep public lands in public hands for future generations and invest in our natural resources.

Keeping public lands in public hands is the only way to ensure that our nation’s last intact landscapes remain protected and accessible to all. A small but vocal minority has long advocated for federal public lands to be sold off, whether transferred to state ownership or sold off to the highest bidder. Study after study has shown that the state of Idaho cannot shoulder the enormous cost of maintaining 34 million acres of land, much of it prone to costly wildfires. Unable to foot the bill and unbound by federal multiple-use mandates, the state could sell the land to private interests, as it has done with 41% of its land since becoming a state.

While the idea of federal land disposal remains unpopular in Idaho, we need to stay vigilant and defend against incremental attempts to whittle away public lands. In 2019, hundreds of public lands supporters flooded the statehouse to speak out against efforts to erode federal management of public lands. Idahoans must stand united in defense of our birthright. To do so is to celebrate our heritage and ensure that our tradition of public lands will endure for generations to come.

Public lands are a boon to our state and local economies. Visitors from around the country and the world visit our public lands for their scenic landscapes and abundant wildlife. This, in turn, supports the many livelihoods of outfitters, small business owners and rural communities, and has led many manufacturers of outdoor products to call Idaho home. Idahoans hunt, forage and cut wood on public lands while the timber and cattle industries rely on the ability to lease land from the public. Our state’s agricultural and urban centers count on fresh, clean water flowing down from the mountains of our National Forests.

As with all economic drivers, our public lands must be invested in so they can continue to provide these benefits for generations to come. In 2018, outdoor recreation contributed $7.8 billion dollars in consumer spending to Idaho, on par with the value of agricultural production for the entire state. In the Colorado College’s Western States survey, 92% of Idahoans said they believe the outdoor recreation economy is important for the future of our state. We must invest in the resiliency of our outdoor recreation economy at all levels of local, state and federal government.
Use best available science to support wildlife management decisions.

Idaho is one of the last states where you can still find virtually all native fish and wildlife species, but many face the possibility of declining numbers or extinction. Policies based on sound science, rather than politics, have the best chance at protecting our wildlife.

Idaho boasts a diverse range of ecosystems that support many rare species. Not only do those ecosystems add to the unique splendor of Idaho, but they are of huge importance to outdoor recreationists, sportsmen and tourists.

The Western States survey found that the majority of Idahoans are concerned about a loss of wildlife habitat. As pressures from climate change and population growth mount, it is more important than ever to prioritize protecting and restoring intact wildlife habitats and migration corridors.

Advocate for additional public land protection through collaborative approaches and input from stakeholders

Across Idaho, there are nearly a dozen locally-driven collaborative groups formed to advocate for active management and restoration on Idaho’s National Forest lands. These groups typically include representatives from industries, conservation groups, community members, local elected officials and other interests. Despite their differing viewpoints, participants are united in their call to make our forests more resilient to severe wildfires and other disturbances. They also acknowledge forest restoration as an important tool to improve water quality, fish and wildlife habitats, ecosystem health, community safety, recreation and jobs.

Idaho’s home-grown collaborative model helped set the stage for programs like the Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) and Shared Stewardship. The goal of GNA is to increase forest and watershed restoration activities on federal forests, while Shared Stewardship brings together federal, state and local partners, alongside private landowners, to treat landscapes as a cohesive unit. These efforts can help improve forest and ecosystem health, reduce fuels and wildfire threats to communities and watersheds and protect wildlife habitat. They also create more jobs and economic benefits, such as providing more fiber to forest product markets.

Ensure equitable access to open spaces

Public open spaces belong to every one of us, while also depending on every one of us for their protection. Our public lands are only as strong as our individual connection to them, which depend on open and equitable access.
A complicated legacy of land ownership has left a checkerboard of parcels across the state, sometimes making access difficult, if not impossible. A 2019 study by the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership found that nearly 200,000 acres of Idaho public land is inaccessible, “land-locked” by surrounding private parcels. In some cases, private parcels are sold to out-of-state interests who challenge easements or disregard generations-old handshake agreements. Remedies such as allowing “corner-crossing” through checkerboard parcels or creating other civil remedies to citizens locked out of public land need to be prioritized in order to maintain Idahoan’s right to public land use.

In other areas, social factors are at play, and there is work to be done to ensure that every Idahoan feels at home in the outdoors, and that public land management decisions include all voices. Hunting groups are recruiting underrepresented members, urban neighborhoods are prioritizing open space and greenways and underrepresented voices are being included in land management discussions. This work should be deepened and supported wherever it is encountered and spearheaded where it has yet to begin.

CLEAN ENERGY

Background

As a state, we have to transition to 100% clean energy by or before 2050 - not only in the electricity sector, but in transportation, heating and cooling - in order to protect our communities, environment and economy from the impacts of climate change. Fortunately, momentum is moving in that direction. This spring, Idaho Power, our state’s largest utility, committed to 100% clean electricity by 2045. Avista followed, securing pledges from two out of three investor-owned utilities in Idaho. Shortly after, the City of Boise committed to 100% community-wide clean electricity by 2035.

Currently, Idaho imports nearly three-quarters of the energy we consume due to regulatory barriers and lack of political will for clean, in-state sources. As clean energy costs fall and public approval increases, the greatest block to widespread implementation of clean energy is no longer technological or economic, but institutional and political. Making the transition to clean and local energy will allow us to keep more money in Idaho to invest in our communities and bring family-wage jobs that allow our children to stay here and build a future of their own.

Commit to 100% clean, Idaho-sourced energy such as solar, wind and geothermal, and support the jobs those industries are bringing

Idaho is flush with clean, renewable energy resource potential. Idaho is ranked 13th in the U.S. for wind potential, 12th for solar potential, has the 4th largest hydroelectricity share in the nation and is one of 8 states with operating geothermal power capacity. If fully developed,
geothermal resources could provide enough energy to cover over 40% of Idaho’s total consumption with reliable baseload power. The cost and technology needed to utilize these energy sources are now competitive with traditional energy production methods and are forecasted to continue decreasing in price. As the demand for renewable energy increases, Idaho has the opportunity to lead in the development and production of these resources. Clean energy jobs are stable, offer higher wages than the national average and build an economy that can support the next generation of Idaho workers. Investing in Idaho-grown clean energy means investing in our communities.

**Support the electrification of the transportation system**

The transportation sector is Idaho’s largest source of energy consumption, with the vast majority being imported from out of state. Unfortunately, it’s also the leading cause of air polluting emissions in our state and across the nation. In response, major U.S. automakers are committed to increasing the number of electric vehicles, and an increasing variety of zero-emission vehicles are being released every day. Thankfully, in Idaho, state-level investments are already being made. Governor Little recognized the importance of electric vehicles for Idaho’s future when he proclaimed February 14, 2019 as Electric Vehicles Day. By decreasing our reliance on fossil fueled-powered vehicles, reducing personal vehicle miles traveled per person and opening the market for electric vehicles fueled by local renewable energy, we can improve air and water quality, the health of our communities and the strength of our state’s economy.

**Promote energy efficiency across all sectors**

The cleanest, cheapest energy is the energy you never use. Effective energy efficiency measures reduce the burden on baseline energy generation, save rate-payer dollars and have the largest impact for the least cost. In fact, energy efficiency investments can pay for themselves by increasing the value of buildings and lowering operational costs. Additionally, energy efficiency programs have shown to save more than 100 dollars on average for low-income households. We need to ensure state and local governments and other agencies are promoting and practicing energy efficiency through proactive policy, effective building construction and the implementation of energy plans that include measurable and attainable metrics. The less energy we consume, the more energy freedom and security we will enjoy.
TRANSPORTATION

Background

Whether you are driving, walking, biking or taking public transit, transportation not only plays a key role in our daily lives but is also vital to Idaho’s economy. Furthermore, transportation directly affects the water we drink and the air we breathe. Unfortunately, Idaho’s transportation systems are chronically underfunded, experiencing significant deterioration, and are mainly designed for only one mode of travel - cars. Our metro area transit systems underperform in comparison with regional peers in terms of operating expense per capita, service provision and productivity.

These issues are compounded by Idaho’s rapid population growth. Idaho has placed in the top ten for population growth since 2010 and remains one of the fastest growing states in the nation. Idahoans know it’s an issue, as transportation ranked seventh on important issues facing Idaho today on a 2017 statewide poll. Solutions to alleviate traffic and protect our air quality need to be innovative.

Develop a balanced transportation system

Travel is necessary for our day-to-day life. Policies that reduce emissions and vehicle miles traveled, as well as expand public transit, walking and biking options provide countless benefits. A well-developed, multi-modal transportation network can enhance job accessibility, save time and money for commuters, reduce accident rates, give consumers and visitors access to Idaho’s businesses and recreational opportunities and improve the overall quality-of-life that attracts companies and employees.

Ensure access to alternative transportation routes, pathways and infrastructure

Idaho’s most vulnerable communities rely on public transportation, biking or walking for their daily lives. When these services are inadequate or unsafe, it hinders access to employment, education and recreational opportunities. Many who choose to walk or bike, including children, are faced with significant safety hazards, such as limited bike lanes,
crumbling sidewalks and poor lighting. A lack of safe bike routes is routinely cited as the primary obstacle for using cycling as a transportation option. We all have a responsibility to ensure safe travel for all Idahoans, especially children.

Investing in off-street pathways that connect to public transit options would create a comprehensive, multi-modal transportation system that could link communities across municipalities and spur unique opportunities for economic development. Some Idaho communities have already begun to explore pathways along canals and laterals as a viable option. Idaho is laced with irrigation canals and their allotted right-of-ways - these right-of-way paths could provide an ideal foundation to create an interconnected pedestrian and cycling-friendly infrastructure that is safe for all users. A robust network of off-street paths would reduce traffic, reduce air pollution and improve our health and quality of life.

Promote funding opportunities to support local options for solving transportation challenges

Statewide, Idaho’s transportation infrastructure tends to be ranked among the lowest when compared to other states in the region. The state government’s lack of dedicated transportation funding makes it difficult for communities to meet current and future transportation needs. Instead, the state relies on federal funding sources. Innovative financing arrangements, such as leases and public-private partnerships, have also been used to fund the procurement of materials and other activities but data shows that states with more diversified revenue sources, such as local option sales tax and less dependence on federal funding, tend to have better transportation infrastructure. Local option taxes give citizens the opportunity to shape what public amenities are available such as roads, community centers and public transportation.

HEALTHY FAMILIES

Background

Idaho’s fresh air, clean water and healthy ecosystems are at risk due to pollutants and toxic chemicals. Managing pollutants is critical to maintaining the health of our communities and involves improving our air and water quality, keeping our toxic chemicals away from Idaho families and reducing waste.

Improve the quality of our air and water for health, recreation and wildlife

We need clean water upstream to have healthy communities downstream. Clean water is vital to our individual well-being, our economies and our environment. Clean water supports healthy ecosystems that provide wildlife habitat for hunting and places to fish, paddle, surf and swim. Our economy depends on clean water for manufacturing, farming, tourism, recreation, energy production and other sectors. Policies that address agricultural runoff, urban and storm runoff, abandoned mine drainage, failing onsite disposal systems
and pollution caused by changes to natural stream channels can go a long way in keeping Idaho's 2,000 lakes, 93,000 miles of streams and rivers, reservoirs and aquifers clean.

Air quality is of equal importance. Numerous scientific studies have linked exposure to fine particles with serious health problems, including premature death in people with heart and lung disease and doctor and emergency room visits by those with respiratory ailments and cardiovascular disease. Idaho has battled air quality issues for years. Vehicles account for 63% of all emissions of concern and, in the summer, increasingly intense wildfire seasons, spurred by a changing climate, decrease air quality in Idaho even further. In 2015, Idaho was ranked second to last in the nation for air quality. However, Idaho’s air quality has seen improvements in recent years, proving that diligence and smart policies can make all the difference. We must continue to work towards keeping our air clean for the health of our communities.

Keep toxic chemicals out of our food, water, land, and air

Every day we are unknowingly exposed to toxic chemicals. These dangerous substances are in the air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat and the products we use. Scientific evidence has linked chemical exposure to increasing numbers of health problems, including asthma, certain types of cancer, infertility, learning disabilities, neurological diseases and more. It’s often our most vulnerable and valuable populations - children, pregnant women, senior citizens and first responders - that are most impacted by these dangerous substances. The damages to public health from chemicals found in processed foods and food packaging, consumer products treated with flame retardants and pesticide treated parks and green spaces are increasingly being proven. It’s imperative that we start conversations about these risks and put policies in place that limit public contact with harmful toxins.

Reduce waste

Conserving landfill space is typically touted as the main consideration for reducing waste. However, the benefits extend beyond landfill conservation and range from conserving resources and protecting air and water from pollution to saving money and energy. Elevating reuse and recycling in a community can attract new industries and bring jobs through innovation. Recycling, reusing and reducing consumption not only reduces waste but also reduces the frequency of mining and manufacturing that can be a source of pollution and emissions. These actions cultivate a safer future for our communities and environment. Local government, businesses and individuals all have the power to make reductions in waste through responsible production, consumption, reuse and recovery of products, packaging and materials. Reducing waste reduces harmful discharges to our land, water and air.

VOTING RIGHTS

Background

Efforts to protect our natural resources hinge upon the ability of Idahoans to vote their values through a fair and transparent election process. Conservation issues such as air and water quality, energy and public health are shaped and impacted by our society, politics and
A strong and resilient democracy where every Idahoan has the opportunity to participate is critical to the future of our land, air and water.

**Encourage civic engagement by making voting easy and accessible to all**

Voting in Idaho is relatively uncomplicated compared to many other states. Idahoans enjoy same-day voter registration, no-excuse early voting, access to absentee voting and online voter registration. Additionally, Idaho is one of the 19 states that have restored voting rights to felons after their sentence has been completed. We are working to make voting as easy as possible and ensure it’s a quick and streamlined process, without unnecessary obstacles keeping citizens from exercising their right to vote. Access to voting information and to the polls should be readily available to all Idahoans and education efforts should be prioritized towards disenfranchised communities.

**Educate Idahoans on the importance of voting and how to exercise their right**

According to the Secretary of State Elections Office, only 59% of Idaho’s total voting age population voted in 2016. Additionally, the U.S. Census Bureau reports that 43% of 18-24 year olds voted, while 70% of Idahoans 70 years or older voted, illustrating that voting rates increase with age. Additionally, voting rates correlate with both race and socioeconomic status. White voters are 11% more likely to vote than marginalized communities and, as with age, voting rate increases with level of education. This presents an opportunity to increase engagement in populations who have not traditionally participated in voting. Prioritizing education and outreach that focuses on empowering these communities to act on their right to vote will ensure every Idahoan has the knowledge and power to make their voice heard.

**Ensure elections are fair and transparent**

In 1994, Idahoans confirmed their commitment to transparency when they voted to create the Independent Redistricting Commission. An Independent Redistricting Commission allows for legislative districts to be drawn and approved without political interference. In February, legislation was introduced seeking to amend the Idaho State Constitution and turn Idaho’s fair and balanced independent commission into a partisan one. This would open the door for one party to manipulate voting boundaries for their own benefit, also known as gerrymandering. It is essential that voters choose their representatives - not the other way around. Efforts to undo this fair system are a direct affront to the democratic process and should be stopped at every turn.
Safeguard the right of Idahoans to put forth a ballot initiative

In March 2019, a bill was introduced to dismantle our state constitutional right to participate in the ballot initiative process. If passed, the bill would have nearly doubled the number of required signatures to get a public initiative on the ballot, nearly double the number of counties in which signatures are needed and drastically cut down the length of time Idahoans would have to collect signatures. The cumulative result would be the most restrictive ballot initiative process in the United States. The bill narrowly passed through the legislature and was vetoed by Governor Brad Little. The right to bring forth a public vote on issues through a citizen-led ballot initiative is guaranteed through the Idaho State Constitution and efforts to undermine this process threatens the voting rights of Idahoans everywhere.

Promote an accurate and equitable census count

Securing equitable representation in Idaho is essential for a healthy democracy. The upcoming 2020 census is an important opportunity to ensure all communities are accurately represented since people of color, youth and low-income individuals have all been disproportionately undercounted in previous censuses. Making sure all communities are accurately counted is crucial in creating political boundaries that accurately represent the people within them.

The results of the census will inform the reapportionment process, which will ultimately determine the political landscape in Idaho for the next ten years. Census data is also used to allocate more than $675 billion in federal investments across states, counties and cities. For Idaho, that means that each person counted would generate $1,473 per year. The importance of this process and the need to make sure it is conducted as accurately as possible means census efforts in Idaho need to be properly funded and supported by the state.