

Current

Ada County Parks & Waterways



*Trails Issue
Spring 2014*

Current

Current *adjective* \kúrrənt\
: happening or existing now; most recent; of the immediate present; in progress

Current *noun*

: the swiftest part of a stream; a steady, smooth onward movement

IN THIS ISSUE

- 3 DIRECTOR'S CUT
- 4 SPRINGTIME IN THE FOOTHILLS!
- 5 RIDGE TO RIVERS
- 6 THE GAME TRAIL
- 8 EDUCATION & EVENT CENTER
- 10 FOR THE BIRDS
- 12 OREGON TRAIL
- 14 FOOT TRAFFIC ONLY
- 15 TO LEASH OR NOT TO LEASH:
THAT IS THE QUESTION



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DIRECTOR'S CUT

For some reason (bragging rights anyone?) I still have a June 2001 issue of Mountain Bike magazine in which Boise was awarded the #1 ranking in the cover story “Best U.S. City for Mountain Bikers.” I also managed to save a June 2003 Bike magazine issue that honored Boise with the #1 ranking in their similar cover story titled “5 Best Places to Live and Ride.” The message to cyclists in general and mountain bikers in particular: Live here and you can have it all. This still rings true over a decade later.



Boise (and really Ada County as a whole) still beats the national average in just about every “livability” category — household income, climate, commute time, unemployment rate, home prices — but also has a massive amount of publicly accessible land laced with single-track trails close to home in the Boise Foothills. For those of us who are mountain bikers these articles, published independently by nationally distributed magazines, served as a true confirmation of what we already knew. Then almost as soon as the high-fiving began came the realization that, “Uh oh, the secret’s out now.”

Despite the constant barrage of population growth and increasing number of trail users, the fact that public access to the foothills is actually *increasing* along with a corresponding increase in trail mileage for *all* users is very encouraging. Add supply to meet the demand, right? It’s not quite so simple. Managing and sustaining the existing trails while adding new pieces relies upon the commitment, dedication, vision, and stewardship of a relatively small group of stakeholders and citizens. Ridge to Rivers is the backbone of these efforts. Although most folks already know the name, Ada County encourages all trail users to become more involved in learning about the history and future of our trails and this unique partnership. Hopefully the next couple pages provide a good starting point.

In addition to sharing some great Spring season options from the Ridge to Rivers network, this issue of Current also highlights a few lesser known trails for all types of users including the pedestrian only Wood Duck River Trail in Barber Park (cover photo). Although I now use our trails much less as a mountain biker and more as a family hiker, I’m always excited to explore new terrain and feel fortunate to have such a wide variety of multi-use trail options within reach. With more users than



ever out there it’s increasingly important not to take our public access for granted and to always practice responsible use while being respectful to others. With that in mind we’ve also sprinkled in several tips on etiquette in this issue of Current as well as a bit about dog poop.

Lastly, we would like to thank our agency partners and friends for their generous story contributions, photos and insights. We learned a lot from them and hope you will too. Welcome to our Spring 2014 Trails Issue!

-Scott Koberg, Director



Spring is a beautiful time to be in the Foothills. Green grass and wildflowers abound, temperatures are mild and the days are long. Some of the best places to view wildflowers include along the Wild Phlox Trail #112 in Seaman Gulch, Central Ridge Trail #22 in Military Reserve, Doe Ridge #82 in the Polecat Reserve, Watchman Trail #3 in Rocky Canyon and Chickadee Ridge #36A in the Lower Halls Gulch Reserve.

The months of April and May are some of the busiest on the Ridge to Rivers trail system as everyone shakes off their winter blues and enjoys springtime in the Foothills. Late afternoons are busiest so you may wish to avoid that time of day if you are seeking a quieter experience. Good bets for less crowded trails include the Polecat Reserve area, and trails in Rocky Canyon as well as those further east in the Boise River Wildlife Management Area. **Please practice good trail etiquette and share the trails respectfully with others who are also out to enjoy them.**



Trail conditions can vary greatly during the Spring when warm dry days might be followed by heavy spring showers. Please pay attention to the weather and trail conditions and plan your outings accordingly. **Do not use trails when they are muddy.** Instead, seek sandier routes and turn around if you are leaving tracks in the trail. If you find yourself walking in the vegetation to the side of the trail due to muddy conditions you should turn around and head back the way you came as trampling trailside vegetation leads to trail widening and the loss of our singletrack trail experience.

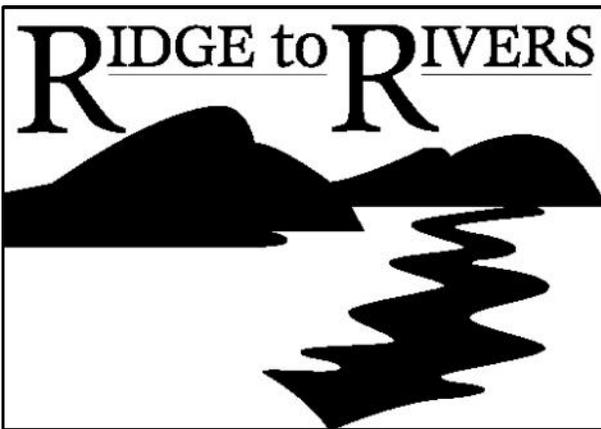
A great resource highlighting which trails to use and which to avoid on muddy days is located at: www.ridgetorivers.org/etiquette/muddy-trails.

Also, a good rule of thumb is to check the trail conditions *prior* to heading out using the Ridge to Rivers website at: www.ridgetorivers.org

Or you can visit our facebook page at:
www.facebook.com/boisefoothillstrailconditions.

Both are updated daily during winter months and regularly throughout the rest of the year.

Enjoy the trails!



Since David was willing to take a little time from his post as Trail Program Manager to share some Spring time trail tips, we thought our readers (that means you trail users!) might also benefit from learning a bit more about the **Ridge to Rivers partnership.**



With roots dating back to the late 80s and initiated under the visionary leadership of the Boise Front Coalition in the early 90s, the Ridge to Rivers trail system and partnership was **created to keep the Boise Foothills open to public recreation while also protecting natural resources, open space, wildlife habitat, and private property rights.** These same values continue to drive the partnership as it exists today and, by any measure, Ridge to Rivers is widely recognized as a huge community asset with a track record of success dating back almost 25 years.

Through a Memorandum of Understanding the public agencies that currently participate as partners in the coordinated management effort known as Ridge to Rivers include: the City of Boise (Lead Coordinating Partner), Bureau of Land Management, Ada County, U.S. Forest Service, and Idaho Department of Fish & Game. Input from private property owners, user groups, local organizations, and the general public also continues to play an important role in the partnership process along with the annual commitment of citizen volunteers.

Providing a **quality, sustainable, and seamless experience for various user groups on 150 miles of trail** across 85,000 acres while also demonstrating responsible natural resource management in the Boise Foothills is challenging. We do our best to serve the **400,000 visitors** that enjoy our multi-use trails each year and Ridge to Rivers appreciates the continued positive support from our community.

The Game Trail

Story contributed by:

Steven Dempsey, IDFG Senior Wildlife Technician

For centuries mule deer migrated from their summer range in the Sawtooth Mountains to their winter range in the Boise River Valley. Over time, increasing residential development and human activity along the river began to push these big game species out of their preferred wintering habitat and into the foothills. Beginning in the 1940s as development started to expand outside city limits near the river and into the foothills, biologists voiced concerns over the loss of critical mule deer winter range and the potential loss of the herds themselves.

In response to these concerns, the Idaho Department of Fish & Game (IDFG) purchased prime mule deer winter range at the base of Lucky Peak Mountain in 1943. This land acquisition was the first of many that created the **Boise River Wildlife Management Area (BRWMA)**. Now totaling 37,000 acres, the BRWMA includes several segments of property located east of Boise in portions of Ada, Boise, and Elmore counties. The Boise Front Segment (the largest in the management area) includes much of the Ada County foothills area between Rocky Canyon Road and Lucky Peak Reservoir.

Today, **over 7,000 mule deer and 1,500 elk spend the winter on the BRWMA**, most of them on the Boise Front Segment. These animals migrate annually from higher elevations to escape the harsh winter weather and to find enough forage to help them survive the colder months. Since the BRWMA is the only local range capable of providing the large amount of forage these animals require daily, space and resources in the management area are at a premium. The combination of limited food supply and freezing temperatures make conserving energy crucial to the survival of the population.

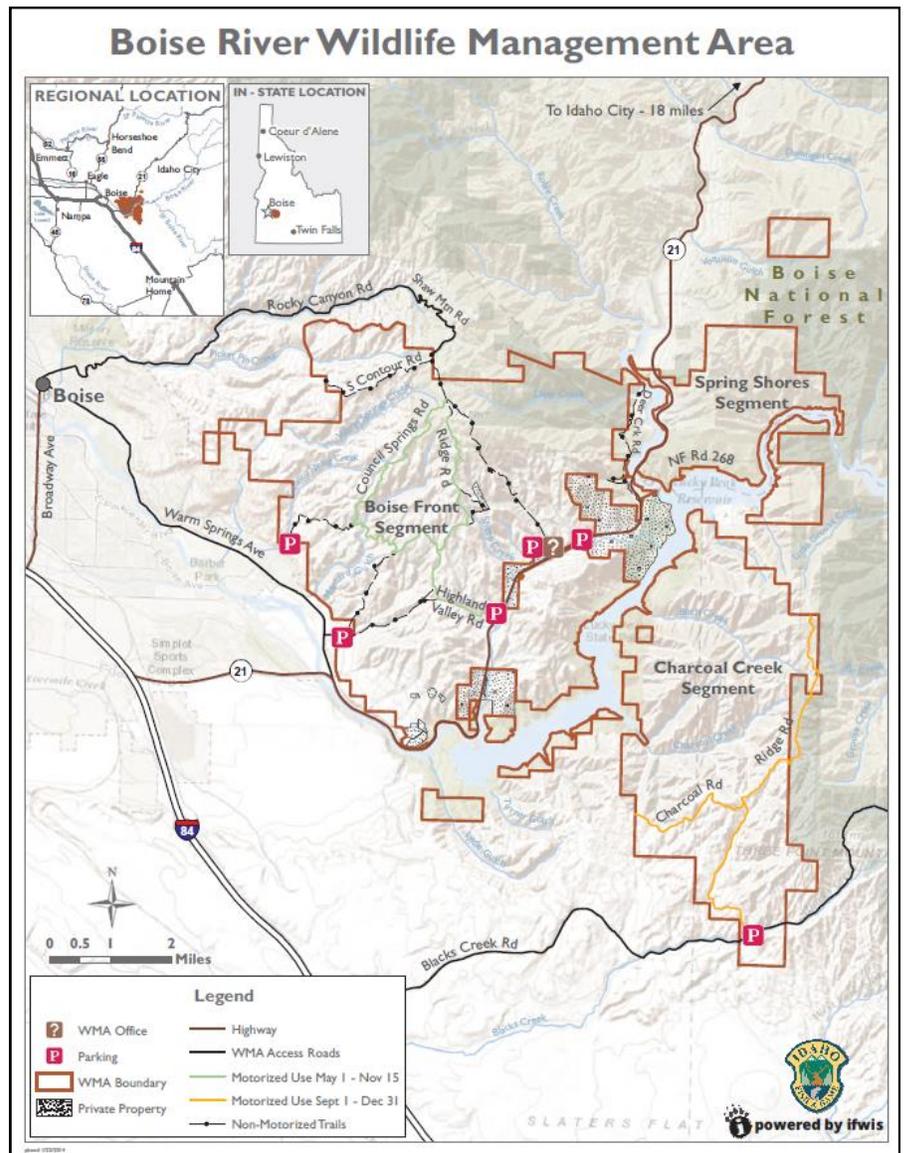


The main mission of the BRWMA is to sustain high-quality winter habitat for mule deer and elk and to preserve year-round habitat for a diversity of other wildlife species. Due to the variety of

recreational opportunities (including hunting and trapping), Ridge to Rivers trails access, and close proximity to Boise, the BRWMA receives a high number of visitors throughout the year. Therefore, it's critical that visitors utilizing the management area (especially during the winter months) help protect these animals.

Here are just a few simple tips on how you can make a difference for wildlife:

- **Keep dogs on a leash at all times**, as required by IDFG regulations within the Boise River Wildlife Management Area, to prevent dogs from chasing after wildlife. Off leash dogs can cause mule deer to expend valuable energy moving out of an area, decreasing it's ability to survive the winter or possibly even separate does from their fawns.
- **View wildlife from a distance.** Mule deer enter the winter having just completed the breeding season. Consequently, many of the does you may see on the BRWMA in the winter months are in the early stages of pregnancy. Using binoculars to watch big game from a distance minimizes disturbance to does while also allowing you to observe them resting and foraging — typical winter behaviors in their natural habitat.
- **Stay on designated trails/roads.** Going off trail may seem like fun, but it causes damage to plants that are essential to the survival of mule deer during the winter. The protection of shrubs such as sagebrush and bitterbrush, both plants used as forage, is of the highest priority on the BRWMA.



By following these simple steps, you can help protect these animals for future generations to come. Thank you for caring about wildlife!

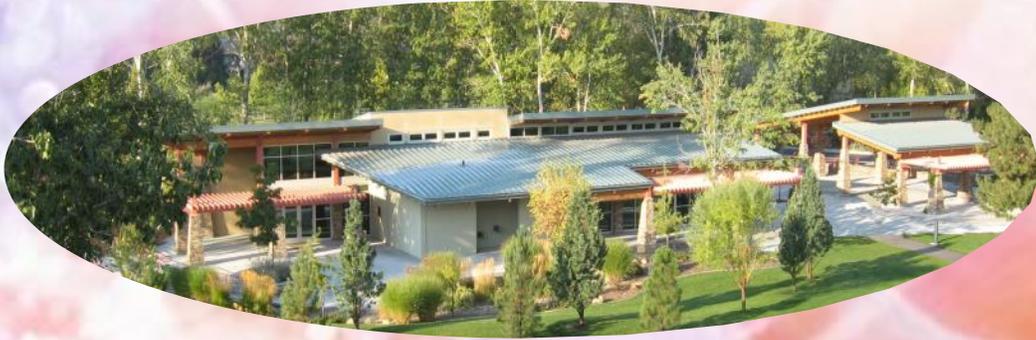
For more information please visit: <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/public/wildlife/wma>



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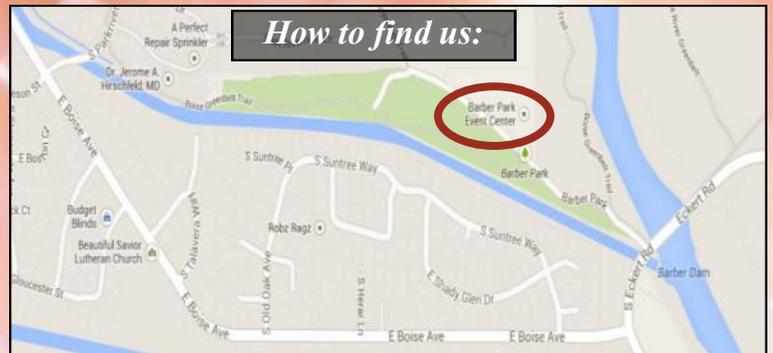


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- ♥ CD-DVD-VHS player



Visit us on Facebook



Located in beautiful Barber Park with plenty of parking and only 5 miles from downtown Boise!



The **Idaho Birding Trail (IBT)** is a network of sites and side-trips that provides the best viewing opportunities to see birds in Idaho. With 175 sites and about 2,000 miles of trail separated into four distinct regions the IBT **represents a collection of bird watching hotspots, diverse habitats, and a glimpse of Idaho's rich natural heritage.** In recognition of the educational and recreational opportunities it offers to the public, the House of Representatives passed a resolution in 2006 declaring the IBT as the official state birding trail of Idaho.

Here in Ada County we're fortunate to have a few official sites within the Southwest Region of the Idaho Birding Trail for folks to explore and enjoy. Our most accessible site is SW20 — a **scenic 20 mile stretch of the Boise River that includes Ada County's own Barber Park**, as well as several other parks along the Boise River Greenbelt.

The mature riparian forest, proximity to the river, diversity of habitat and variety of recreational trails in Barber Park create an ideal setting to observe several of the 44 target species within the Boise River IBT site. An active rookery near the western park boundary increases the odds of spotting Great Blue Herons wading near the shoreline or nesting in the trees, while sightings of majestic Bald Eagles and **Ospreys** soaring overhead or snatching fish from the river are not uncommon.



The more commonly seen (or heard) species in Barber Park and along the river throughout the spring and summer include waterfowl (Canada Goose, Mallard, Wood Duck, Hooded and Common Mergansers), waterbirds (Pied-billed Grebe, Double-crested Cormorant, American Coot), shorebirds (Killdeer, Spotted Sandpiper), songbirds (Song Sparrow, Western Tanager, Black-capped Chickadee), woodpeckers (Downy Woodpecker, **Northern Flicker**), and raptors (American Kestrel, Western Screech-Owl, Merlin). From many riverside trails California Quail coveys can be heard skittering into the brush seeking food and cover or, conversely, exploding noisily in flight causing heart palpitations in unsuspecting trail users.

Created through the Idaho Fish & Game's **Wildlife Diversity Program**, the goals of the Idaho Birding Trail include **promoting wildlife viewing, photography, education, and increasing public awareness regarding the state's important wildlife resources**. The intent of the Wildlife Diversity Program is to instill an appreciation for all wildlife in an effort to promote conservation of our wildlife species and to sustain the habitats upon which they depend for survival. The IBT also has the potential to boost local economies through a previously untapped tourism industry.

When visiting Barber Park or other Idaho Birding Trail sites please remember to practice proper birding etiquette including:

- Minimize stress on birds by keeping your distance while viewing, photographing, or filming
- Stay back from nests, nesting colonies, and display areas
- Stay on designated roads and trails and follow posted rules/laws
- Respect the law and the rights of others
- Respect private property
- Practice common courtesy to other birders and non-birders
- Keep groups to a small size (4-8 people)



Learn more at: <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/ifwis/ibt/>





Oregon Trail

For those seeking an educational multi-use trail experience that's off the map but close to home, Ada County's new and improved Oregon Trailhead and recreation access area is the perfect option. Often overlooked by trail users since it isn't featured on the popular Ridge to Rivers map, this **unique wagon inspired trailhead** includes several educational kiosk

panels portraying the local history of the Oregon Trail. Providing an interesting historical perspective, actual wagon ruts from the 1800s are still visible on portions of the trail beyond the kiosk.

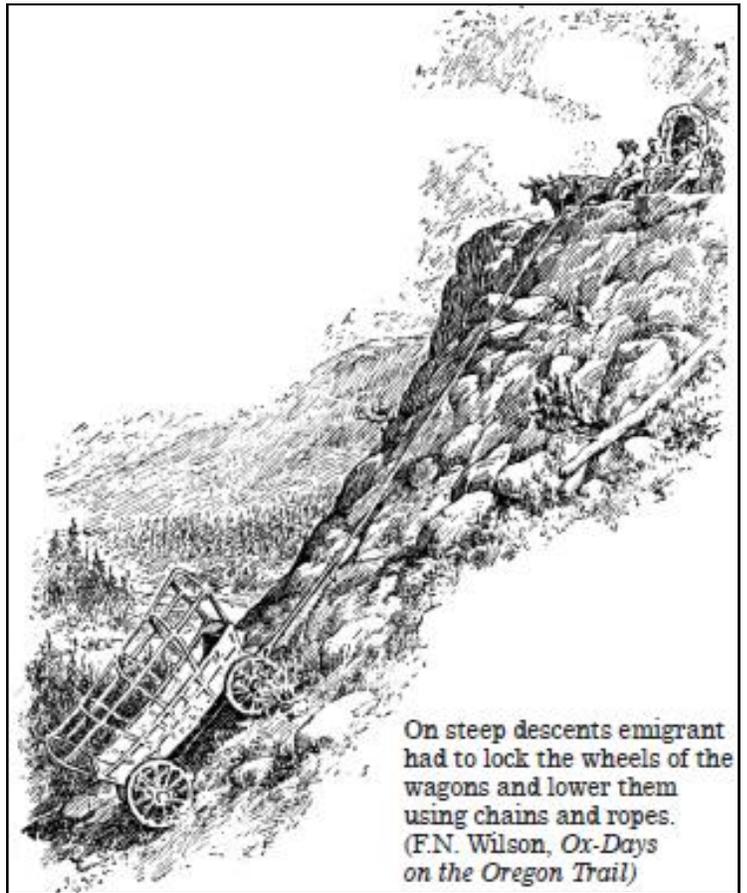
Starting from the huge parking area at the wagon, visitors have a variety of trail options for exploring **miles of scenic and sometimes rugged terrain** on foot, bike, or horse. Most trails offer stellar views of the Black Cliffs, Hammer Flat, and the foothills across Lucky Peak Canyon as well as some great bird's eye views of the Boise River and Barber Valley. If you've never been there you'll be surprised by the **massive and picturesque panorama** this location offers. With keen eyes you might also see a variety of wildlife from this vantage point including mule deer, elk, coyotes, foxes, hawks, falcons, and rabbits in addition to the human "wildlife" across the canyon — rock climbers and hang gliders.

Completion of the Oregon Trail Recreation Area was the result of a collaborative effort involving Ada County, Idaho State Parks & Recreation, Idaho State Historic Preservation Office, Simplot Corporation, Idaho Transportation Department, and U.S. Bureau of Reclamation to preserve open space, trails, and cultural heritage. Now, with the recent acquisition of a separate 14 acre parcel sandwiched between two Bureau of Land Management (BLM) parcels southeast of the trailhead near Columbia Road, Ada County is initiating additional partnerships with the BLM and the City of Boise to define the future vision of a larger trail system.



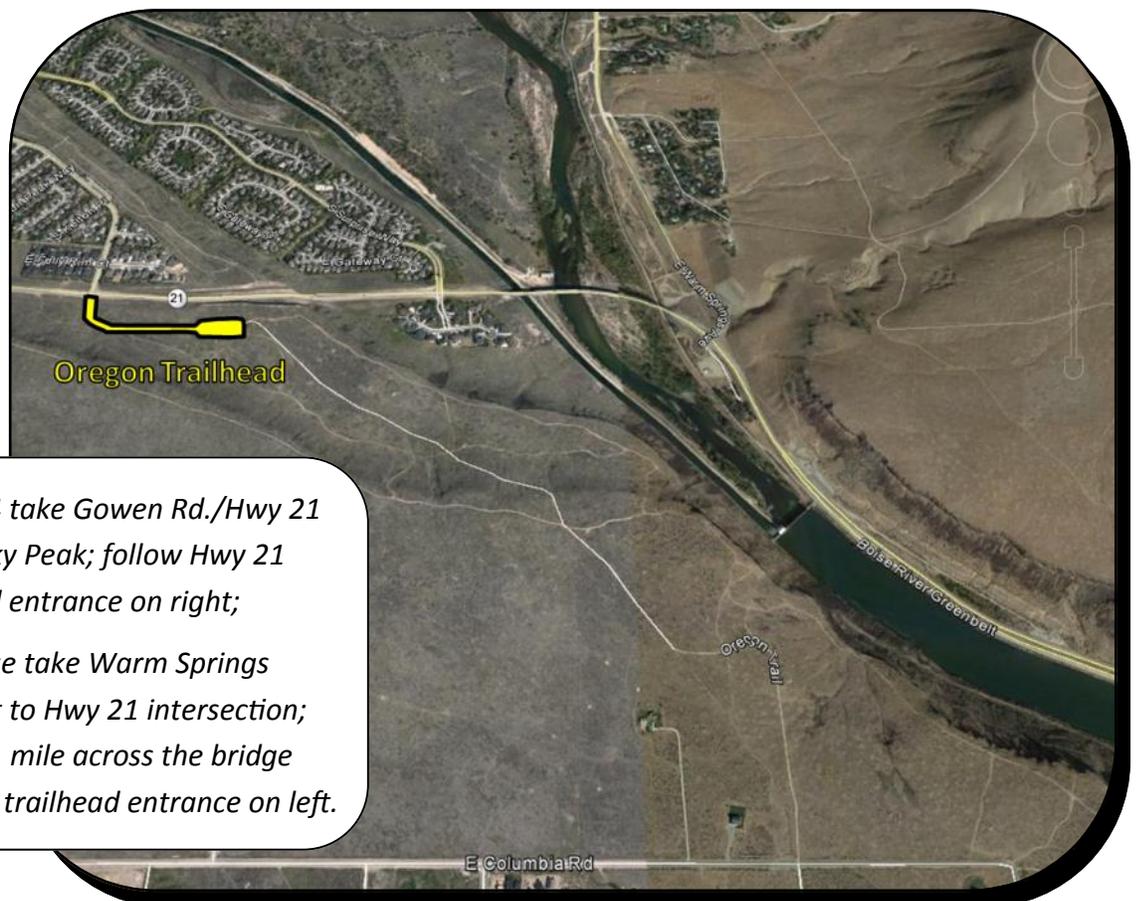
Although the official ribbon cutting ceremony occurred back in 2010, the Ada County trailhead is still a new addition to a lot of folks and well worth adding to your list of trail options any time of year. When visiting please keep in mind that much of the land near the trailhead is private property that has been made available for public use by community minded landowners so **please stay on trails, pick up and pack out trash, follow all posted rules, and be a good neighbor.**

“Below, thousands of feet below, were seen the water of this beautiful river winding this tranquil course & gleaming like a thread of silver in the rays of the setting sun. The stream seemed as calm and gentle, as if it was through a meadow, instead of rugged canyons. After reaching the plain, the course of the stream is marked by a line of green timber, which gave rise to its name among early trappers ‘Boisse’ or ‘Wooded River’ — This green strip of vegetation winding its way through the desert sage plain, gave a more cheerful prospect to the view and after gazing once more on the vast map spread out before me I rapidly descended the hill — to find a camp for the tired train; but never can the recollection of the grandeur of that scene be blotted from memory — the sunset from the Big Hill of the Boisse will always be a greene spot in the past.”



On steep descents emigrant had to lock the wheels of the wagons and lower them using chains and ropes. (F.N. Wilson, *Ox-Days on the Oregon Trail*)

- Winfield Scott Ebey; August 20, 1854



Directions: From I-84 take Gowen Rd./Hwy 21 exit east toward Lucky Peak; follow Hwy 21 2.5 miles to trailhead entrance on right;
 From downtown Boise take Warm Springs Blvd. all the way east to Hwy 21 intersection; turn right and head 1 mile across the bridge and up the hill to the trailhead entrance on left.

Foot Traffic Only

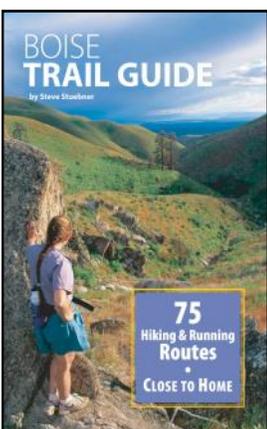
If you're looking for a relaxing trail escape without the company of wheeled and hooved users, look no further than the Boise River Greenbelt. Granted, most of the Greenbelt is open to cyclists and various rollers but the **Wood Duck River Trail in Ada County's Barber Park is one of the few segments of official Greenbelt that is unpaved and designated as pedestrian only.**

Starting in Barber Park, the trail connects downriver to the Bethine Church River Trail (near Park Center Bridge) to create the perfect family outing for Spring or early Summer events like Easter, Earth Day, Mother's Day, Memorial Day, and Father's Day. Typically the Boise River float season begins in mid-June so the scenery and vibe on river frontage trails changes around that time as well. If you're up for a **low-key experience along the river** now is the time to go. It's also a great



option for anglers looking to get off the beaten path to test their spinner casting skills during higher flows on the river. The Idaho Department of Fish & Game regularly stocks the Boise River during the Spring and Fall with 9"-11" rainbow trout in addition to steelhead stocking on occasion. For the full Boise River stocking schedule please visit: <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/public/fish/?getPage=230>

Still not convinced this trail is a gem? Just ask local outdoor expert and guidebook author Steve Stuebner. We did, and he let us use a part of his trail description from the Boise Trail Guide:



Difficulty: *Easy*

Tread: *Dirt greenbelt path*

General notes: *The Boise River walking trail is one of the sweetest sections of the Boise River Greenbelt. It's quiet, no bikes or other pavement-oriented users are allowed, and the trail is located directly adjacent to the river, allowing for great wildlife watching the whole way. Take your time and enjoy it. There are benches in places where you can ponder life and soak in the beauty.*

The Hike: *This is a beautiful hike at any time of year. Bring a fishing pole if you like. It's also a great hike for kids in the backpack, and an awesome birding walk. Bring the binoculars. --SS*

Boise Trail Guide at: <http://stevestuebner.com/>

To leash, or not to leash: that is the question

For some, hitting the trails wouldn't be complete without the company of their best 4-legged friend. After all, if your furry companion sat by your side through the cabin fever phases of winter the least you can do when the weather warms up is reward your buddy with a romp through the foothills, right?



It's a given here in Ada County — visit any local trail any time of year and you're almost sure to encounter dogs and dog owners. Some interactions are good, and some are not so good. Dogs may be predictable to their owners and generally friendly to strangers but other trail users shouldn't be forced to guess if approached by off-leash dogs. Although many trail areas in the foothills are designated as "Controlled Off-Leash", there are also several clearly signed on-leash trails and parks that are designated as such for various reasons. **When in doubt always keep your dog on-leash.** Dog owners, just like all other trail users, should adhere to all-posted rules/laws for the safety and enjoyment of others (including vulnerable wildlife) and practice respectful trail etiquette. Please visit: <http://www.ridgetorivers.org/etiquette/dogs-trails/> for more information.



Table Rock Trail —each flag marks a poop



If you've visited the Old Penitentiary Trailhead (or others) recently you've seen first hand another reason owners should keep their dogs nearby. Poop. Lots of poop. **Remember to always carry a grocery bag or mutt mitt to pick up your pet's waste** and deposit it into trash cans — NO ONE WILL DO THIS FOR YOU. The positive side: according to the Boise City "Annual Poop Count" we're making progress!

"Controlled Off-Leash": In certain areas dogs can run off leash if they are not disturbing wildlife (including ground nesting birds) or causing safety concerns for other trail users. Dog owners must still carry a leash and waste bag with them and their dogs should not be further than 30 feet away at any time. Controlling your pet means keeping it from interfering with other trail users or digging and causing erosion on hillsides or stream banks. Common sense and respect for others will go a long way in keeping this option available to dogs and dog owners.

Happy Spring... now let's get out there and enjoy our parks, open spaces and trails!



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