

Unrealized Potential in “North-East” Idaho

Did that get your attention? We hope so.

We came together at the invitation of the Yellowstone Business Partnership (YBP). A recent report commissioned by YBP, *Turning on the Off-Season: Opportunities for Progress in the Yellowstone-Teton Region*, found that the economies of many of the counties around Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks fluctuate with visitation to the parks. That report also found evidence that the region has six distinct sub-regions.

Community leaders and interested individuals from our sub-region (composed of Bonneville, Clark, Fremont, Jefferson, and Madison) were invited by YBP to consider the social, economic and natural assets of our sub-region and how we might better address the challenges and opportunities that result from our seasonal economy. The seasonality sub-regional team was charged with prioritizing issues for the sub-region and creating a research project. YBP gave us \$10,000 to hire researchers to help us conduct our evaluation.

We asked Boise State University's Public Policy Center (BSU PPC) to:

- Create an inventory of assets and amenities in our sub-region
- Analyze the planning documents from cities and counties throughout the sub-region
- Investigate relationships and interfaces (such as technical systems, maps, etc.) among the various governmental entities
- Compare and assess ongoing marketing efforts for our assets and amenities
- Develop preliminary recommendations for how we could better accomplish a “seamless visitor experience” for people coming to our sub-region.

Why did we focus on those specific considerations? We wondered about the capacity and potential of the cities and towns within this sub-region to work together, and whether the collective planning capacity within the region complimented the sub-region's efforts to market our assets and amenities. We recognized that tourists may see Idaho Falls as a gateway to the Greater Yellowstone region, but wondered whether we recognize that potential ourselves. We further recognized that even those of us living within this sub-region may not fully comprehend everything that we have to offer.

We recommend you consider a few points as you review our report:

- The researchers requested documents during the summer of 2008. In some cases, new documents have been completed since that request was made. For example, Madison County and the City of Rexburg have since completed a new comprehensive land use plan. BSU PPC's findings provide a snapshot for what was available at a specific point in time.
- When we reviewed the inventory of assets and amenities, some of our team noticed that a few things were missing or incorrect. This occurred because the BSU PPC researchers prepared their inventory using a “secret shopper” approach. They called and asked for information. They got what they got, and whatever is missing points out some opportunities for better or more consistent marketing.
- While there may be some merit in grouping the five counties (Bonneville, Clark, Fremont, Jefferson, and Madison) into a sub-region when thinking about the entire Greater Yellowstone region, our researchers found that little binds the five counties as an integrated region. Does that matter? We will let you decide, but we think we could clearly do a better

job of uniting and integrating our efforts, expanding our connections, and defining ourselves as a specific (and special) place worthy of attention.

We hope that, after you review BSU PPC's report, you will join our call to action. The report indicates a number of opportunities for us to do a better job. If you are interested, let us know. YBP intends to continue this effort and we are eager for your help as we define next steps.

Thanks for your interest!

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