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June 23, 2009

## Our View: Spend taxes on trails, too

- Idaho Statesman

It may have ended the 2009 legislative session - but the last-minute transportation funding "deal" didn't deal with much of anything.

All it did was shift some money around and create new problems. Just ask Idaho recreationists, who are starting to fight for \$4.7 million a year to maintain trails and boat docks and groom snowmobile routes.

They have a valid point. Fairness and foresight dictate putting this money into the great outdoors.

Recreationists rightfully feel like they've been had. They say lawmakers have violated a long-standing agreement to put 3 percent of gas tax dollars - their share of fuel purchases - into recreation projects.

The \$4.7 million won't do much to fix roads. According to estimates, Idaho has a \$240 million-a-year shortfall in state and local road and bridge maintenance. But \$4.7 million accounts for about half of the money spent on trails, snowmobile trail grooming and boating facilities.

When Sandra Mitchell of the Idaho Recreation Council predicts Idaho recreation would be gutted, it's easy to see her point. For the record, Mitchell is no fan of big government; she started her career as an aide to former Sen. Steve Symms, a hero among Idaho conservatives.

Well-maintained trails and boat docks aren't merely a convenience for Idaho weekend warriors. They are a marketable commodity for rural communities making the transition from timber or mining jobs. Idaho's road-repair campaign is driven first by safety issues, but also by economics - and providing more reliable and convenient roads for commuters and shippers. It doesn't accomplish much to make this economic investment at the expense of the recreation sector.

Then again, what does make sense about this year's end-of-session transportation deal? Desperate to give Gov. Butch Otter some \$55 million for roads - but equally desperate to avoid a gas tax increase - lawmakers played a shell game. They decided to get \$21.1 million by cutting off the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation and the Idaho State Police from the gas tax.

That's no solution, of course. Starting next week, an eight-member legislative task force will try to find ways to replace the \$21.1 million. Let's hope for an end to the creative accounting, and some actual problem-solving.

"Our View" is the editorial position of the Idaho Statesman. It is an unsigned opinion expressing the consensus of the Statesman's editorial board.