



Donation of “Boise Cascade Lake” in Boise leads to creation of Veterans Memorial Park

This is the fourth in a series of 12 articles about the 50-year history of the Idaho Foundation for Parks and Lands.

By Steve Stuebner

Throughout its 50-year history, the Idaho Foundation for Parks & Lands has played a crucial role as the state’s first land trust to receive the donation of valuable properties that could later become public parks. Out of more than 50 properties that were donated to the Foundation, more than half have been gifted or transferred to cities, counties, recreation districts and states for development into public parks.

Earlier in our 50th anniversary story series, we mentioned the critical role that the Foundation played in assisting the state in receiving the donation of the 15,000-acre Railroad Ranch in Eastern Idaho, which



Top: Patriot Walk in Veterans Memorial Park depicts engraved bricks honoring veterans. Above, fall colors shine above a fishing dock designed to provide waterfront access for people with disabilities at Veterans Pond (courtesy Pintrist).

would become one of the state’s flagship parks to this day, owned and managed by the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation.

The non-profit Foundation was quickly formed in 1972 with support from then-Gov. Cecil Andrus and former Gov. Robert Smylie to accept the donation of the Railroad Ranch and later convey the property to IDPR for development as a public park.

Closely following the Harriman matter, Foundation officials began work on accepting a donation of 38 acres of land from Boise Cascade Corporation on the west side of Boise for what was known as “Boise Cascade Lake” and surrounding area.

Boise Cascade officials had begun talking to Idaho Parks and Recreation officials about donating or selling the property to the state for park development as early

as 1972.

In April of that year, Gordon C. Randall, Vice President-Administration of Boise Cascade, wrote a letter to then-IDPR Director Steve Bly.

“Boise Cascade would be interested in receiving an offer from the Department of Parks and Recreation along the following line: It is the desire of Boise Cascade ... to encourage the development of the State Park, including the present old Veterans Home property and the properties immediately southwest thereof, by providing a means whereby the property owned by



IDAHO PARK FOUNDATION RECEIVES MAJOR LAND GIFT

L-R: Jerrie Castro and Hope Kading of the Idaho Park Foundation hold a press conference with Boise Cascade President John Fery about BCC's donation of Boise Cascade Lake and 38 acres in 1975.

Boise Cascade is available for park purposes. “Boise Cascade views the proposed plan of a Veterans State Riverside Park, extending substantially from the Bob Rice Property northwesterly along the river to the Veterans property, as a material benefit to Boise City.” While this was a great offer with huge public benefits, upon further reflection, Foundation and IDPR officials suggested that it would be even more advantageous for Boise Cascade Corp. to donate the property to the Foundation as a first step. Then, by virtue of the Foundation donating the same property to IDPR, the state could apply for grant funding from the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) for park development.

And that's exactly what happened.



Idaho Soldiers Home (Courtesy University of Washington Special Collection). The home opened in the 1890s in the present-day location of Veterans Memorial Park. It was closed in 1966 and demolished in the early 1970s.

On Jan. 6, 1975, Foundation Board President Hope Kading and Boise Cascade President John Fery held a news conference, announcing the initial 38-acre gift of land.

“In commemoration of the National Bicentennial

Celebration, Boise Cascade Corporation has made a gift of land to the Idaho Park Foundation,” Kading said. “The property is a treasure of beauty that will be enjoyed by the people of Idaho for many generations to come.”

She said the land gift would be held in trust for the creation of Veterans Memorial State Park as a salute to Boise veterans who had served in our armed services dating back to the Civil War as well as World War I, World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War.

The park would be managed in a way that it would be accessible to people with disabilities – a specially designed fishing access dock was planned and built on Veterans Pond, and multiple paved paths were built on the Old Soldier's Home property by Veterans Memorial Parkway, State Street and 36th Street.

“People of all different shapes and sizes and physical abilities would be able to access outdoor recreation in Veterans Park,” said former Foundation Executive Director Sharon Hubler. “We had a planning committee for park development. Improved access for the disabled community was a big thing in the mid-70s.”

The Boise Cascade Lake area, now known as Veterans Pond, would be managed as a natural area. More about the park development in a moment. But first, let's learn a bit about the history of this interesting property in Boise.

Idaho Soldiers Home

Veterans Memorial Park might be described as “sacred ground” to the families of our veterans who died at war. But the site also served as the location for the Idaho Soldier's Home, a large three-story building built

in 1894-1895. The project was funded by the Idaho Legislature for \$25,000 at the time. The building was built on State land. Spacious lawns and grounds surrounded the building.

Many states were building what were referred to as “Old Soldier’s Homes” at the time to house aging Civil War veterans. Later, the homes expanded their mission to include veterans of all wars.

According to author Jim Witherell in his book, “History Along the Greenbelt,” there were about 120 residents living in the Soldiers Home after World War I and 132 veterans living there in 1951.

By the 1960s, residency was declining. The state decided to close the Idaho Soldiers Home and build a new facility on the grounds of the current Veterans Administration Hospital. The grand old building was closed to veterans in 1966 and demolished in 1975.

In the meantime, a major dust-up occurred between Boise veterans and city, county and state highway authorities over a proposed new bridge and road to connect Chinden Boulevard to State Street. In 1959, the Boise Metropolitan Transport Study proposed routing the new road through the Idaho Soldiers Home campus, taking out more than 30 stately trees and carving off two acres of land, Witherell wrote.

Veterans and conservationists fought the road project repeatedly at the local, state and federal level. In 1971, the Idaho Legislature passed a law, designating the Idaho Soldiers Home property as an historic site and state park. The local government appealed the state’s ruling in court and won. But by then, it didn’t matter.

Highway authorities redesigned the Veterans Memorial Parkway route and bridge project to avoid carving into the Veterans Memorial Park property as we enjoy it today.

Yates Park line.



Boise Railroad streetcar line delivered Boiseans to the Idaho Soldiers Home and Yates Park. (courtesy Idaho State Historical Society; “History Along the Greenbelt” by Jim Witherell)

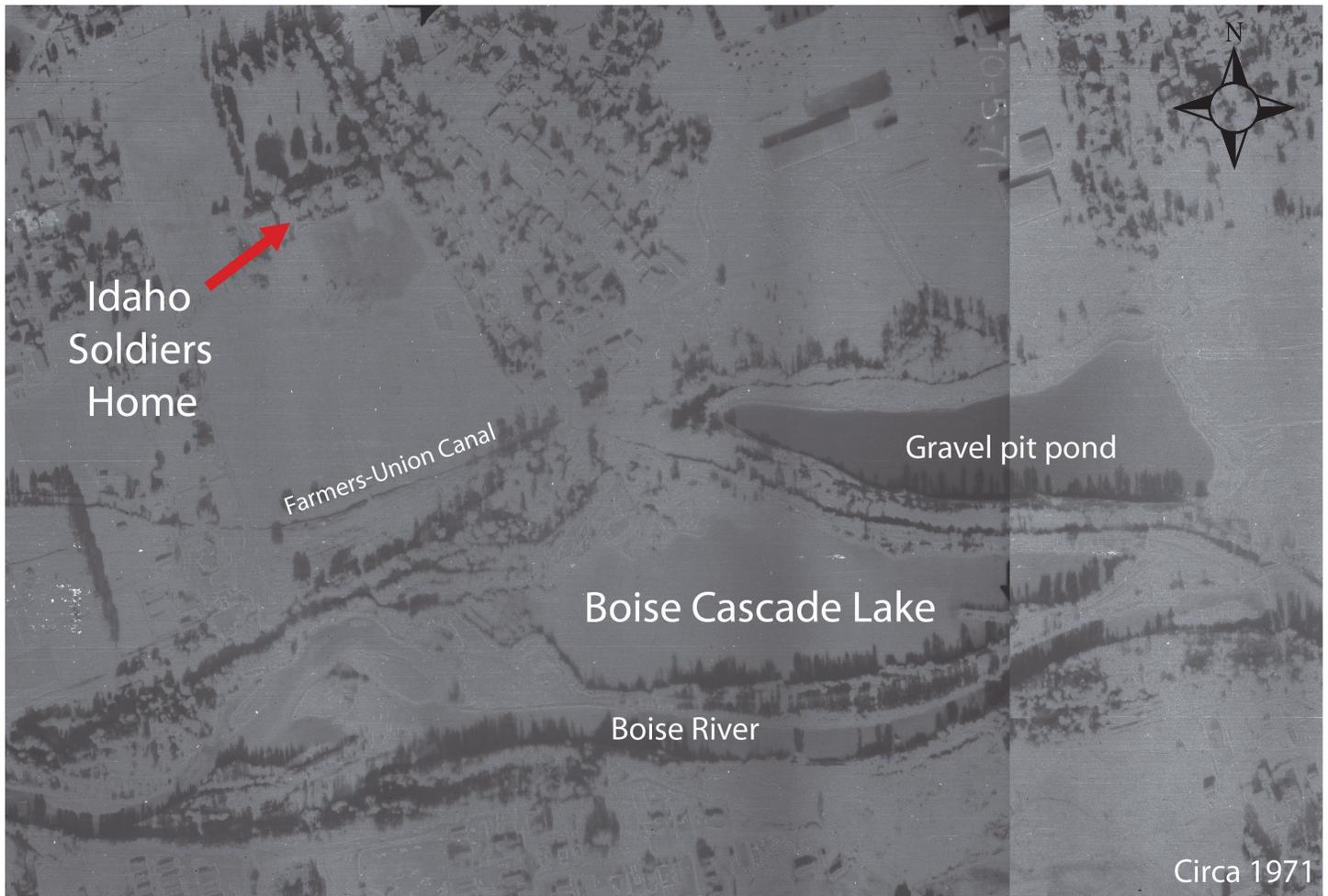
Yates Park

Author Jim Witherell brings another delightful kernel of Boise history to light with a narrative on Yates Park, officially known as “Boise Railroad Company Park.” Yates Park was developed in the early 1900s at the western end of Boise’s streetcar line, adjacent to the Idaho Soldiers Home.

The Boise Railroad, the streetcar company, created the park to compete with another streetcar line that provided service to the more popular Pierce Park. It purchased 35 acres from a man named John Yates on the southwest corner of the Idaho Soldiers Home property in 1906. The streetcar dropped people off at the park near the present-day location of Stilson Lane and the parking lot for Veterans Pond and the Greenbelt near the Farmer’s Union Canal.

According to Witherell, people paid 5 cents to travel from downtown Boise to Yates Park on the streetcar and 10 cents on the Boise & Interurban line. Boise had a population of about 9,000 people at the time.

Apparently, Boise Railroad did not charge an entrance fee, Witherell writes. The park had a few amenities like



Aerial photograph of the Idaho Soldier's Home property and Boise Cascade Lake, taken from film at the Idaho State Historical Society Archives, shows the scene prior to the time when the Foundation received the land gift from Boise Cascade Corporation. (Courtesy Idaho State Historical Society Archives: 20130120 Frame 292, 293)



Infrared aerial pic of Veterans Memorial Park in 1993. (Courtesy Inside Idaho)

park benches, a speaker's podium and a network of walking paths. The park also had a rowing pond. Boats were provided for visitors at no charge.

The rowing pond sounds similar to present day

Veterans Pond in Witherell's description. The pond "was lauded by the company as a natural lagoon in the river. But less than a mile upriver were Boise's two main slaughterhouses, Fischer's and Boise Butcher Company, and the local rendering works – glue factory in common speech," he wrote.

"It was the practice of the time to dump offal and byproducts directly into the river. In low water, the summer months, the park's natural lagoon became a natural collector, turning the pond unsavory."

Thus, Yates Park was never popular, he wrote. The park continued to exist until 1917, when it was abandoned in Boise Railroad Co.'s bankruptcy foreclosure.

"Thereafter, it remained the end of the streetcar line but was a park in name only," Witherell said.

The park was completely abandoned by 1926 and sold to Earl Stilson, who developed a slaughterhouse and feedlot on the property. "This plant survived under different owners," he wrote, until the property

was acquired by Boise Cascade Corporation.

Boise Cascade Lake

In the early days of Boise Cascade Corp., the company had a ready-mix concrete business and it also manufactured pre-stress concrete beams. BCC acquired Chaussee-Swan to secure a supply of aggregate rock.

The location of the gravel business was out on West State Street near the present-day location of Veterans Pond. By excavating gravel near the Boise River, due to the high water table, the gravel pits filled with water. One of the ponds became known as Boise Cascade Lake. When BCC got out of the ready-mix business, the land became surplus, BCC officials said.

And that's when they chose to approach the Foundation and IDPR about the gift of land for a riverside park.

The Foundation followed through on its commitment to convey the gift of land to IDPR. In doing so, IDPR leveraged the land gift to apply for LWCF funds for park development. It received about \$620,000 from LWCF to work on initial park development needs such as design and engineering, interpretive day-use facilities, site improvements, foot bridges, water and sewer system, electrical system, comfort station, maintenance/storage building, parking, program area, landscaping, trails/walkways, and signs.

Prior to gifting the parkland to IDPR, the Foundation had a land appraisal done. The value of the property was determined to be \$65,000 in 1975 dollars.

Veterans Memorial State Park was opened with great fanfare on July 4, 1976 – perfect timing to coincide with the American Bicentennial Celebration. It was chosen as one of three Bicentennial State Parks at the time.

The second development “phase” of the park occurred in 1979, including design and engineering, site improvements, trails, irrigation system, vault toilet docks, bridge improvements, play area, park furniture, and land acquisition. Total cost: \$109,376.



Veterans Pond is a popular place for swimmers, anglers, sun-bathers, kayakers, SUP paddlers and more.

Later, in the 1980s, the Boise River Greenbelt was extended west from Ann Morrison Park to a strip of land along the river by the old Bob Rice Ford property between the river and Quinn's Pond, and it continued west through Veterans Pond and Veterans Memorial Park. A concrete underpass was integrated into the Veterans Memorial Parkway Bridge to connect the Greenbelt to Willow Lane Park and the extensive ballfields in that area.

In 1997, Boise Parks & Recreation took over management of Veterans Park through a long-term lease agreement with IDPR.

During the late 1970s and 1980s, the Foundation was very active in receiving donations of land and then gifting those lands back to appropriate entities to development the lands into parks, whether it be a city, county or state park.

In 1980, for example, the Foundation gifted a 2.16-acre park to the Jerome Recreation District. The property was originally gifted to the Foundation by Candlelight Investments. Through the 1980s, the Foundation also received and conveyed park properties to the City of Lewiston (Ruth Rowell Wildlife Park), City of McCall (Payette Lake frontage property), City of Boise (Silver Sage Girl Scout headquarters), City of American Falls (Warrick Family property), Twin Falls County (Rock Creek property) and City of Coeur d'Alene (Centennial Park parcel on Fernan Hill).

Key donation from Orida Investments

In 1980, the Foundation received a gift of 23.7 acres from Orida Investments in an area on the west end of Warm Springs Golf Course. Warm Springs is currently operated by Boise Parks and Recreation. It was originally developed by JD Evans, Larry Barnes and Murray Burns.

The gift deed from Orida Investments stipulated that the purpose of the property donation was for constructing, installing, maintaining, repairing, replacing and operating water wells, water well pumps, surface and subsurface water transmission lines and building structures and for the purpose of ingress and egress from the said water wells, water well pumps, etc.

The idea, once again, was for the Foundation to receive the gift of property and leverage that for additional LWCF funds that could be used for park development. And then donate the property to a local government entity for long-term management.

But it took the City of Boise until 1992 to agree to accept the property from the Foundation.

It appears that the Orida Investment property did not have any benefits for extending the Greenbelt from Municipal Park through Warm Springs Golf Course, but mainly, it was thought the city and Warm Springs Golf Course would benefit from having access to the water wells and facilities.

Sharon Hubler, former Foundation Executive Director, recalls that it was uncomfortable for the Foundation to hold the property for 12 years. There were a number of title and tax assessment issues that had to be worked out, unexpectedly.

“That was cumbersome,” she said.

However, it turned out that the 24-acre property donated by the Foundation to the City of Boise known as “Warm Springs Park” would be part of a future land trade between the city and Boise Water Corporation via leveraging the property donation to obtain LWCF funds. The land trade would allow Boise Water to develop a water-treatment plant in its present-day location, west of Warm Springs G.C., and it allowed the city of Boise to acquire 97.35 acres of land proposed for a subdivision in Hulls Gulch, according to LWCF documents dated June 2, 1994.

The properties were valued at \$534,000 each.

Longtime Boise resident Gary Richardson, who was



Numerous memorials are located in Veterans Memorial Park.

actively engaged with Boiseans Ann Hausrath and Judy Ouder Kirk in trying to preserve land in Hulls Gulch



from housing development, remembers going to Washington D.C. to lobby former Congressman Richard Stallings for LWCF funds for the land trade to work. Stallings got behind it.

“Boise water wanted a treatment plant by the river, and they didn’t necessary want to play the role of a developer in Hulls Gulch,” Richardson recalls. “And we wanted to protect wildlife habitat and open space in Hulls Gulch for the public to enjoy. So this was one of the first deals that led to the much larger Hulls Gulch preservation movement.

“We thought that we could cut a deal where everybody got something out of it, and it worked!”

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