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## Keep the park open: What Thousand Springs means to the Magic Valley

By Shawn Barigar | Posted: Sunday, January 10, 2010 1:00 am

The Twin Falls Area Chamber of Commerce and its 883 diverse business members throughout south-central Idaho are concerned with the discussion of closing Thousand Springs State Park. While we understand the need to contain expenses in the operation of government, we believe this is a case of tripping over dollars to save pennies.

According to a report prepared by Jan Roeser, regional economist with the Idaho Department of Labor, the annual losses to the area include the following direct and indirect effects:

Jobs — direct: \$367,000

Events — direct: \$267,873

Actual area earnings: \$634,873

Regional travel — indirect\*: \$6.5 million

Park visitors — direct\*\*: \$4.6 million estimated impact

\*Based on Idaho Department of Transportation 2008 average daily traffic counts.

\*\*Based on Idaho Parks visitor counts, 2009, with expenditures of \$50 daily.

From our understanding, the closure of Thousand Springs State Park would eliminate approximately \$150,000 in expenses from the department's budget. But the economic impact to Main Street businesses in our communities who are working to make a living to support our economy could be more than 78 times this amount.

Thousand Springs State Park — and all of the state park properties in Idaho — exist to serve us as citizens and to offer a piece of the dramatic beauty of our state to travelers. These visitors and we ourselves spend money to use these facilities and to purchase goods and services to enhance our experience not only in the parks but throughout our travels in the region. These include fuel for our cars to get to the parks, convenience store and grocery items, hotel rooms, restaurants, retail shops and other attractions throughout south-central Idaho and the rest of the state.

The success of economic recovery is going to depend on the individual success of our Idaho Main Street businesses and their employees. State government should be supporting these businesses by keeping Thousand Springs State Park open to draw visitors to these communities and to let the natural economic cycles flourish.

On a personal note, as a fifth-generation native of the Buhl area, I cherish the times I spent as a youngster exploring the natural wonders at Niagara Springs, hiking out to see the eagles fly at Box Canyon, or picnicking with my family at Malad Gorge. Today, I share those experiences with my own sons and wife as we enjoy canoeing around Ritter Island, experiencing the wonderful events hosted in the park units, or trying our luck at fishing. The closure of the park would take away these opportunities for our next generation of Idahoans and visitors to our community.

Again, on behalf of the member businesses of the Twin Falls Area Chamber of Commerce, we encourage seeking other solutions to cost savings in the department and to refrain from measures that take away access to our state's natural beauty and developed parks. We are happy to continue the work with a coalition of citizens, local, state and federal agencies to come up with a plan to mitigate the budget shortfall and prevent this closure.

Shawn Barigar of Twin Falls is the chief executive officer of the Twin Falls Area Chamber of Commerce.