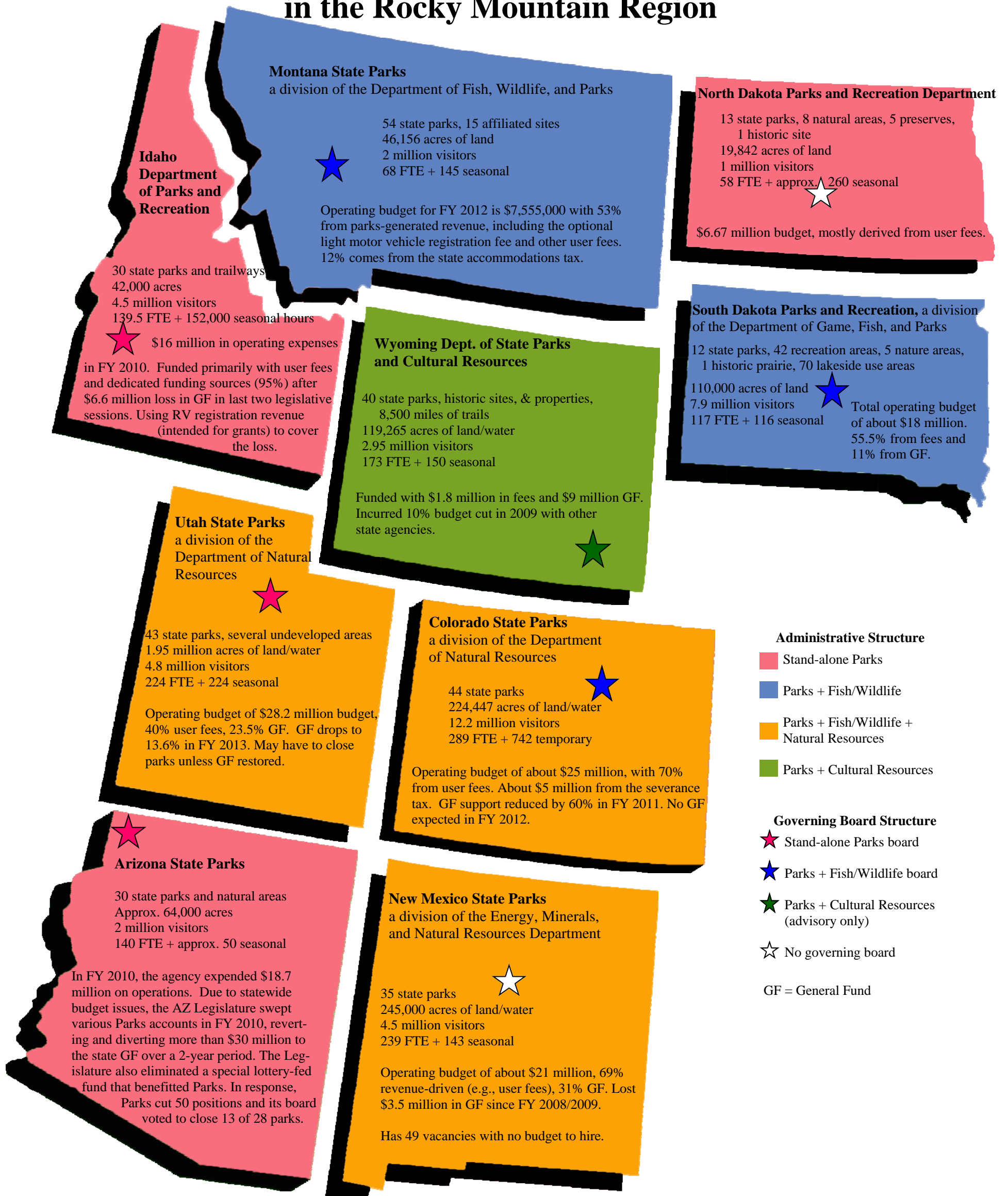


Administration of State Parks in the Rocky Mountain Region



Of Structural Interest...

Colorado's previously separate State Parks and Wildlife Divisions in the Department of Natural Resources are merging under a 2011 legislative order. Ken Brink, a co-chair of the transition team, says they're finding some operational items that can be combined and some that can't.

Wyoming State Parks were previously housed in the Department of Commerce until that agency was disbanded in 1999 and the Department of State Parks and Cultural Resources was established. The Department's Director, Milward Simpson, says there are great synergies and sharing of resources between the state parks and cultural resources divisions. He says a shared belief that they are the "stewards of Wyoming's identity" ties all of the programs together.

New Mexico once considered putting state parks with Tourism but Director Tommy Mutz says there was a feeling that state parks needed to be with his agency — the Energy, Minerals, and Natural Resources Department (EMNRD) — where there's more of a "natural resources culture". For instance, the various divisions all do similar work with NEPA and SHPO compliance. He says state parks can dip into the oil and energy conservation divisions for help as needed. In a unique structural combination, New Mexico's Department of Fish and Game is administratively-attached to EMNRD, but operates under its own director with total autonomy. Mutz feels that fish and game and state parks should be combined because there's hunting and fishing in state parks.

North Dakota State Parks operated under the Historical Commission until 1965. South Dakota's Historical Society is part of the South Dakota Department of Tourism.

SHPO — Arizona and Wyoming are the only states to house their State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) with state parks. The other seven states house SHPO in their Historical Societies (or their equivalent — the Utah Department of Community and Culture Department and the New Mexico Department of Cultural Affairs).

Historical and "heritage" sites are being operated primarily by State Parks and Historical Societies (or their equivalent).

State Parks' Strategies

In the 2012 legislative session, Idaho Parks and Recreation will ask for the optional purchase of a \$10 Parks Passport with vehicle registration to stabilize revenue.

Idaho just completed business and marketing plans for each state park and incorporated related action items into its budget plans.

Wyoming State Parks and Cultural Resources recently developed a 10-year strategic plan that will be updated every 2 years and incorporated into budgeting. It includes recommendations from Wyoming's Tourism Industry Master Plan to develop a "ranching" park, mobile apps for real time travel/recreation information, Wi-Fi in all parks, and creation of a marketing/product development council.

Efforts to develop a strategic plan for North Dakota Parks and Recreation have stalled but staff hope to reinvigorate the process in the next year.

The ND legislature first appropriated money for parks promotion (\$9,000) in 2010. Parks partners with ND Tourism, but Tourism focuses mostly on out-of-state visitors while Parks focuses on in-state.

Every state park has a friends group contributing time and money; some are more active than others.

South Dakota State Parks is downsizing from 6 to 4 regions to save money and is managing some Bureau of Reclamation reservoir shore land to increase recreation opportunities and its revenue base.

SD State Parks does master planning upon acquisition, but hasn't completed management plans for specific parks in a long time.

Utah State Parks works closely and pools money and in-kind services with local governments for promotions. Counties apply for tourism grants that state parks are ineligible for due to the funding source (accommodations tax).

The Colorado DNR just merged its state parks and wildlife divisions for efficiency, savings, and enhanced service. They will operate under a combined governing board. A transition team is developing proposals for the mission and size of the combined division.

In response to state park closures resulting from legislative budget cuts, Arizona State Parks teamed up with public and private partners to create innovative operating agreements to keep all but five state parks open in FY 2010.

AZ State Parks has a research and marketing section and partners with the AZ Office of Tourism and the AZ Council for Enhancing Recreation and Tourism to update its maps.

AZ State Parks utilizes the service of 800 volunteers.

New Mexico State Parks is initiating a strategic operations and sustainability (SOS) program, looking for efficiency measures (e.g., unmanned fee booths to save on staff and fuel, solar panels, and closing its downtown Santa Fe office).

NM State Parks has no governing board, but in Fall 2011 created a citizen advisory board. The agency is also looking at forming friends groups to help with fundraising.

NM State Parks is required by law to update management plans for each park every 5 years, but is falling behind on this time-intensive process.

Working with Tourism...

State Parks in Idaho and Utah can't join their states' tourism agency marketing campaigns because the state parks don't collect the accommodations tax used to fund the campaigns. In Utah, some counties that receive accommodations tax revenue give the money to state parks to help fund FTE. Idaho State Parks and Recreation Communication Manager Jennifer Blazek says her agency remains in close touch with the Idaho Tourism Department about ideas and the two partner on cooperative media tours.

Wyoming State Parks says it works closely with the state Tourism Department, but that the Tourism Department is more procedurally nimble and has less "red tape". Wyoming recently completed its Tourism Industry Master Plan — a 10-year view on ways to increase travel expenditures in the state by 6% annually and the number of related jobs by 3% annually. The plan makes several recommendations related to state parks (see Wyoming strategies above) and can be viewed at www.projectfrontdoor.com.

Colorado State Parks works with its state tourism office, but both agencies' budgets have been cut. They're focusing on inexpensive strategies like improving web presence and increasing use of social media.

New Mexico State Parks says it has a "small" tie with its state tourism office, which holds about \$50,000 for state park and historical monument promotions. State Parks has its own marketing section — down from 4 to 2 people — that produces e-cards, radio and tv ads, and brochures. State Parks is in the process of hiring a contractor to help it get into social media and monitor its website.