



The Greening of Idaho – Embracing Sustainability

by Brian Libby

For all the attention the Pacific Northwest has received in recent years for sustainable design and construction, little of it has been focused on Idaho. To date, this has been no oversight, for the state currently has not a single [LEED™](#)-certified project within its borders. But Idaho is catching on to the benefits of high-performance buildings, as seen the formation of some key organizations devoted to promoting sustainability.

First, planning is underway for inauguration of its first chapter of the US Green Building Council ([USGBC](#)). Bruce Poe, a principal with Cole Associates in Boise who was the first LEED-accredited architect in the state (and was recently elected to a two-year term on the USGBC's national steering committee) is the driving force behind these efforts.

"Everybody sees that this is kind of like the big train coming down the tracks," Poe says, "and they're jumping on board. A lot of different potential clients out there are requiring some kind of LEED certification. The federal government already is, the state is starting to look at it, and a couple counties [Ada and Canyon] are at least recommending that it be followed. Plus, a lot of different private organizations are now interested."

Establishment of a USGBC chapter requires a series of steps, the first of which Poe and his colleagues are currently at: an "Organizational Group" of interested people and organizations that put together the bylaws and articles of incorporation for a nonprofit. Next, Poe expects by November the granting of provisional status, in time for the USGBC national conference in Portland. Full chapter status would then presumably follow after recruitment of at least 18 organizational members—namely sponsors.

A significant boon to the chapter-to-be has come from the State's Department of Environmental Quality, which will donate approximately \$200,000 to \$300,000 in funds targeted for nonprofits for use in educational programs. "That puts our efforts here in Idaho way ahead," Poe says. "I've talked to the USGBC about this, and they've said that only two or three other chapters have been able to pull that off."

Another step in sustainability for Idaho is the launching this summer of the Integrated Design Lab, a partnership between the Northwest Energy Efficiency Alliance, the Idaho Power Company and the Idaho Department of Water Resources Energy Division. Located in Boise, the IDL will assist architects and engineers with designing sustainable high-performance buildings through a comprehensive approach.

"We're a little bit different than some of the other BetterBricks labs because some of the other labs focus more on lighting or daylighting," explains Kevin Van Den Wymelenberg, formerly with the University of Washington and Daylighting Lab in Seattle and now head of the IDL. "We try to use daylighting as a wedge into the

design process, and then really focus on the other disciplines, like electric lighting and HVAC."

The Integrated Design Lab is already at work with two Idaho school districts, Nampa and Meridian—the latter of which is the fastest growing school district in the Pacific Northwest—to improve their design prototype for new schools. Van Den Wymelenberg says the guidelines from the Collaborative for High Performance Schools, a standard for building sustainable schools begun in California and now also adopted in Washington State, and are serving as an unofficial guide for Idaho educators and administrators looking to improve the performance of design and construction in Idaho.

A few other potentially LEED-rated projects are in the works. Poe's firm, Cole Associates, is currently working on the Ada County Courthouse in Boise, which was recently accepted into the pilot program for the LEED "Existing Building" program. Cole Associates is also at work on the Foothills Environmental Learning Center, which could achieve a LEED Platinum rating. "I was approached by a local developer who for twenty years has wanted to do a project that is sustainable and essentially off the grid," Poe says. "I don't know if we can pull (a Platinum rating) off, but we're just starting the process."

Many other local projects are increasingly using the LEED checklist as a template for design even if the formal application process is not followed. Boise firm McKibben + Cooper, for example, has just completed two Head Start preschools with impressive sustainable features. "I think in the near future, there will be several LEED certified projects appearing in Idaho," says principal Doug Cooper, who co-founded the Idaho Urban Research and Design Center at the University of Idaho's School of Architecture with co-principal Sherry McKibben. "Idaho is nowhere near Washington and Oregon in terms of LEED and high-performance buildings, but we're just getting started. We've had some success getting the cities, counties and state interested, but much further behind them is the typical private owner or developer. There's a lot steeper hill to climb."

Still, look for high-performance buildings in Idaho to soon begin taking root like a field of potatoes.

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