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Environment at Work: Parks and Waterways building receives LEED certification

Boise now has 5 buildings recognized for meeting environmental standards

Ada County received its third green-building certification, giving Boise five buildings recognized nationally for their environmentally friendly designs.

Ada County has led the growing green-building trend locally with three of the five green buildings. The county's Parks and Waterways headquarters in Barber Park received the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certification this fall.

LEED certifies environmentally friendly, or green, buildings. The program, which started in 2000, has certified 669 buildings worldwide so far, including 619 in the United States.

Green buildings cost the same or slightly more than a standard structure to build. But they are designed to be more energy efficient and usually save building owners money over the years.

The Ada County Courthouse was the first building in Idaho to earn a LEED certification, and a remodeled portion of the courthouse — the Ada County Development Services Department on the second floor — won the second LEED award for improvement to a commercial space.

The Front 5 Building at Front and 5th streets and the Banner Bank Building at 10th and Bannock streets in Downtown Boise followed. Ada County's Parks and Waterways office in Barber Park is No. 5.

"It's becoming pretty obvious around the country that Idaho is this unusual little hot-spot for LEED," said Bruce Poe, a local architect and president of the Idaho chapter of the U.S. Green Building Council. His architecture firm, Cole and Poe Architects, has offices in the Front 5 Building.

"What is really exciting is that you not only hear it within the private sector, the architecture community, but you hear it from your clients," Poe said.

It helps that Ada County has made a commitment to construct LEED buildings, Poe said.

"Our buildings are going to be around for a long time, and green buildings cost less to operate," said Selena O'Neal, energy specialist for Ada County.

The building in Barber Park was designed to maximize the use of natural light, and it has a green roof that helps heat and cool the building.

The roof is covered with recycled plastic trays full of sedum plants which help heat and cool the building by insulating the roof, deflecting sunlight and absorbing rainwater.

"It keeps it cool, it keeps it protected, and it provides additional insulation," O'Neal said.

The building was positioned in the park so all the office space faces the south, where most of the sunlight shines through the windows. Light shelves installed near the windows help direct the sunlight throughout the building. For most of the day, employees don't even have to switch on the lights.

Most of the floors inside the building are made of sealed concrete, but the few carpeted areas are covered with carpet tiles that can be removed individually and replaced if parts of the carpet get worn or stained.

The county has two more green buildings in the pipeline. The county owns a 10-acre plot of land off Pine Street, near Locust Grove Road, in Meridian where it plans to build a new weed, pest and mosquito abatement facility and an emergency medical services building.

Both buildings will be designed according to LEED standards, O'Neal said.

Contact reporter Melissa McGrath at mmcgrath@idahostatesman.com or 377-6439. Doug Cooper, the architect of the new building, gives a tour showing off the features that won the building a LEED certification. The visitors walk under a light shelf, which reflects daylight back into the building and off the white walls and ceilings. Kerry Maloney / Idaho Statesman

The carpet in the building is made of recycled plastics. Each square of carpet can be taken out and replaced if it gets stained so the rest of the carpet isn't wasted. Most of the floors in the building are just sealed concrete. "Where we didn't have to put anything on the floor, we didn't," said Pat Beale, director of Ada County Parks and Waterways. "Less is More."