Southeastern Idaho News

BANNOCK, BEAR LAKE, BINGHAM, CARIBOU, FRANKLIN, ONEIDA & POWER COUNTIES

ECONOMIC TRENDS

The Pocatello Metropolitan Statistical Area's civilian labor force continued to grow in May, but there was a dramatic drop in the number of unemployed. The seasonally adjusted unemployment rate of 2.4 percent was a half point lower than April's rate. All the southeastern counties posted declines from April in their jobless rates and numbers of unemployed. The May rate is the lowest for southeastern Idaho in this decade. Many parts of the nation are experiencing declines in construction work, and it appears to have leveled off in southeastern Idaho as well. But contractors are still busy, and there does not appear to be an excess of workers in the industry. This equilibrium is the most advantageous for both the construction workers and the construction employers. The large year-to-year increase in professional and business services is due primarily to an increase in workers at area call centers. One of the larger call centers was believed to have laid off several workers as a contract was completed, but it appears other call centers were the benefactors and hired many of those who were laid off. Oddly, the largest monthly employment increase came in government, which at the same time posted the largest year-to-year decrease in total workers. The increase from April was due primarily to the onset of road construction and fire fighting along with summer recreational activities such as fishing and boating. The year-to-year decrease appears to reflect a consolidation of some summer functions by various agencies.

Southeastern Idaho Table 1: Pocatello MSA Labor Force & Employment
Bannock and Power counties

	May 2007*	Apr 2007	May 2006	% Change From Last Month	% Change From Last Year
INDIVIDUALS BY PLACE OF RESIDENCE					
Seasonally Adjusted					
Civilian Labor Force	44,510	44,900	44,400	-0.9	0.2
Unemployment	1,060	1,300	1,570	-18.5	-32.5
% of Labor Force Unemployed	2.4	2.9	3.5		
Total Employment	43,450	43,600	42,830	-0.3	1.4
Unadjusted					
Civilian Labor Force	44,620	45,680	44,560	-2.3	0.1
Unemployment	820	1,360	1,350	-39.7	-39.3
% of Labor Force Unemployed	1.8	3.0	3.0		
Total Employment	43,800	44,320	43,210	-1.2	1.4
JOBS BY PLACE OF WORK					
Nonfarm Payroll Jobs - NAICS**	40,210	3,980	39,320	910.3	2.3
Goods-Producing Industries	5,840	5,760	5,690	1.4	2.6
Natural Resources & Mining	30	30	20	0.0	50.0
Construction	2,010	1,920	2,010	4.7	0.0
Manufacturing	3,800	3,810	3,650	-0.3	4.1
Food Manufacturing	1,250	1,300	1,120	-3.8	11.6
Fabricated Metal Product Manufacturing	180	180	160	0.0	12.5
Machinery Manufacturing	270	270	240	0.0	12.5
Other Manufacturing	2,100	2,060	2,140	1.9	-1.9
Service-Providing Industries	34,360	34,220	33,630	0.4	2.2
Trade, Transportation & Utilities	7,490	7,450	7,480	0.5	0.1
Wholesale Trade	1,320	1,340	1,350	-1.5	-2.2
Retail Trade	4,800	4,740	4,680	1.3	2.6
Utilities	50	50	50	0.0	0.0
Transportation & Warehousing	1,310	1,320	1,400	-0.8	-6.4
Information	700	700	690	0.0	1.4
Financial Activities	2,240	2,220	2,100	0.9	6.7
Professional & Business Services	5,860	5,840	5,360	0.3	9.3
Educational & Health Services	3,410	3,400	3,200	0.3	6.6
Leisure & Hospitality	3,390	3,370	3,560	0.6	-4.8
Other Services	1,170	1,170	1,200	0.0	-2.5
Government Education	5,810	6,010	5,580	-3.3	4.1
Government Administration	4,300	4,060	4,460	5.9	-3.6

*Preliminary Estimate

**Full- or part-time jobs of people who worked for or received wages in the pay period including the 12th of the month

Southeastern Idaho Table 2: County Unemployment Rates

County/Area	May 2006	May 2007
Bannock	3.4%	2.3%
Bear Lake	3.2%	2.0%
Bingham	4.2%	2.5%
Caribou	3.9%	2.7%
Franklin	2.9%	1.8%
Oneida	2.5%	1.6%
Power	4.5%	2.7%
State of Idaho	3.5%	2.3%

MAINTAINING A WORK FORCE

As the economy of southeastern Idaho continues to improve, many business people and economic development professionals are concerned about maintaining a work force to accommodate further expansion. A large part of successful work force development is educating and training people who want to live in the area. The primary source of those individuals is area schools and training centers.

Each spring thousands of southeastern Idaho students and their families celebrate high school graduation, an accomplishment that brings with it the prospect of increased earning capabilities as well as the personal satisfaction that comes with reaching one of life's milestones. If recent graduates are similar to those in the past, many went through high school wondering why they were taking the classes they were taking and are wondering what they are going do to now. Recent surveys indicate 56 percent of the graduates plan to attend a four-year college and about 47 percent will actually complete at least a semester at college this fall. Of those who do not plan continue their education, the vast majority plan to enter the work force. Some will enlist in the military, go on a church mission or perform public service through the Peace Corps or similar organization.

Only a small percentage of those planning to continue their education have a career goal. Many will find themselves taking classes aimlessly to fulfill the requirements to graduate with a degree or certificate, which will qualify them for a job that may or may not be what they actually want to do for the rest of their lives. Others may find that they have taken classes or training in fields which offer few opportunities for employment or opportunities in parts of the country where they want to live.

To assist in developing Idaho's future work force so it meets the needs of the state's evolving economy, Idaho Labor has published the Idaho Occupational Projections through 2014. The analysis identifies "Hot Jobs" for each region of Idaho as well as for the entire state. Future job prospects can be sorted by pay rates, educational requirements and the number of projected openings. All ages and grades of students and their families can benefit by taking time to review these projections and evaluate how they can help meet future work force needs as they pursue their educational goals. Copies of the report can be sent to you by regional economists, or you can access the report on the Web at lmi.idaho.gov.

AREA INTERESTS

- Because many of the region's reservoirs began the year near capacity, most people anticipated a good water supply for this year's growing season. But the outlook has become less certain, and some have expressed serious concern. Despite record setting rainfall the first week of June, the precipitation for the water year, which began in October, is less than half the 30-year average, and that could force those in charge of water allocation to reduce supplies earlier than normal.
- The low snow pack also affects the cost of electricity by reducing the stream flows through the hydroelectric generators in the state. That forces utilities to use more expensive coal- and gas-fired generation to meet demand. Area residents have been notified of expected rate increases from Idaho Power Co. as a result. In addition, a recent 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals decision eliminated a credit from the Bonneville Power Administration that will result in higher electrical bills for those getting power from other utilities like Rocky Mountain Power. It seems little can be done to avert the rate increases this year, but with a little more water next year residents might expect rates to drop.
- Last summer, several people in southeastern Idaho experienced severe illness from West Nile Virus, and nearly every county reported horses that had died from the disease. This year, all the counties are proposing mosquito abatement districts to attack the carrier. So far, districts have been formed in Bear Lake and Bingham counties. Bingham had 143 cases reported last year.
- The Pocatello community benefits economically from hosting the Idaho High School Rodeo Finals each June, and this year was no exception. Families from all around the state converged on the city for a week of activities. Many of the participants from southeastern Idaho earned the right to attend the National High School Rodeo Finals in Springfield, Ill, later this month.
- A review of property assessments by the State Tax Commission for Power, Bannock and Franklin counties found assessed values of some properties have not been keeping up with rising market values. State law requires assessed values to be within 95 to 110 percent of market value. Each county is doing what is necessary to bring assessments in line, and property owners have been given notice of expected property tax increases.
- Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter announced funding to support full-time economic development specialists for the rural areas of the state including three in southeastern Idaho. Receiving the support will be the Great Rift Business Development Organization, which includes American Falls, Rockland and Aberdeen; the Bingham Economic Development Corp., which includes all of Bingham County; and the 4 County Alliance of Southeastern Idaho, which includes Caribou, Oneida, Franklin and Bear Lake counties.

BANNOCK COUNTY

- Hoku Materials recently indicated it may need a larger facility than originally planned. A contract with a subsidiary of Solar-Fabric could be worth $185 million over seven years. If the contract comes through, Hoku would need to add an additional 1,000 metric tons of capacity to its polysilicon plant.
- Pocatello's Iron Triangle, the former home of many badly used Volkswagen automobiles and popular night club Jim Dandy's, is being turned into a 26,000-square-foot business complex called the Triangle. The Pocatello Development Authority began negotiations for 16 parcels of land in 2003 and has recently accepted construction bids.
- Pita Pit opened for business in the new Pocatello Square shopping area. The business that offers pitas, smoothies and breakfasts is owned by brothers Steve and John Lindsay and employs 15.
- Bannock County Sheriff Lorin Nielsen accepted an offer from the U.S. Marshall's Office to house federal prisoners in transition situations. Specifics have not been released, but the contract is for approximately $200,000.
- JC Penny is spending more than $1 million to remodel its store in the Pine Ridge Mall. The project is good news for Pocatello area shoppers and mall owner General Growth Properties following recent store closures in the mall. Recent perceptions that Pine Ridge shopper traffic is down have been wrong. Shopper traffic last year hit 3.2 million compared to a usual average of 3 million shoppers.
- Dining options were expanded with the opening of Chili's in the new Rail Crossing shopping center. Business has been brisk, and patrons seem pleased to have a new restaurant available.
- Pocatello Mayor Roger Chase announced the Federal Highway Administration has approved the long awaited south end connector. The next phase for the city will involve final design work and right-of-way acquisition. Construction is anticipated to begin in the fall of 2009 or spring of 2010.

BEAR LAKE COUNTY

- Bear Lake Memorial Hospital has expanded its services for mental health. Richard Bergman was hired to provide psychosocial rehabilitation services for the area. That is a Medicaid service, offering intervention therapy both at home and in the community for anyone aged 3 and older.
- Bear Lake School District voters approved a $500,000 levy to maintain current operations at nearly the same level as last year. But even with the approval, it appears at least one teaching position will be eliminated.
- The Bear Lake Valley Chamber of Commerce welcomed two old businesses that now have new owners. Bear Lake Car Care was purchased by former employees Bob Biggs and Jim Griglack. They handle all types of car repairs and sell 12 major brands of tires. Stuart and Kathy Marshall are the new owners of Montpelier Creek KOA. The Marshalls have been busy making improvements and will provide a family friendly atmosphere for travelers as well as local residents.
- Ground was broken on June 11 for eight new homes being built under the Mutual Self-Help Housing Program. This program emphasizes teamwork and community by bringing pre-qualified participants who work together to construct homes for themselves. Participants in the program work 30-35 hours per week supervised by qualified staff from the Southeastern Idaho Community Action Agency. The projects are funded by a coalition of agencies that includes USDA Rural Development, Community Frameworks and Idaho Housing and Rural Community Action. Actual construction will begin in August.

BINGHAM COUNTY

- Bingham Memorial Hospital has been expanding, and it is showing in the growth of revenue and business activities. Admissions hit 190 in April compared to 93 admissions in April 2006. The number of surgeries more than doubled from 33 in April 2006 to 74 this April. Bingham County commissioners and the hospital governing board are also evaluating future revenue needs and the best legal structure for operating the hospital before the need for bonding arises.
- The Idaho Potato Expo is being renamed and activities expanded to attract more visitors. The new name will be Idaho Potato Museum, and it will offer tours explaining the history of the potato industry, discussing crop production and offering nutritional information. The museum is being touted to operators of commercial motor coach tours traveling to Yellowstone National Park.
- Business is booming in Blackfoot. New businesses are being built while others are expanding and relocating to better serve their customers. The new building west of downtown will house the State Liquor Store, Advance Check and Loan and a convenience store. Gold's Gym is scheduled to open in August in the old Spudnik building to the south.

CARIBOU COUNTY

- The recent announcement that URS is buying Washington Group International for a reported $2.6 billion may be good news for some workers in Caribou County. The purchase price amounts to $80 per share and was a 14 percent premium on the stock's market price the day of the announcement. Washington Group International is headquartered in Boise but does a substantial amount of mining-related work in Caribou County, and employees have had the opportunity to purchase stock as part of their benefit package. The combined company will be called URS Corp. and will be the fourth largest publicly traded engineering and construction company in the United States.
- Caribou Memorial Hospital is innovating and updating. The hospital recently installed a state-of-the-art heart monitoring system that has telemedicine capabilities allowing patient information to be monitored by cardiologists and other specialist anywhere in the world.
- Working with the Public Hospital Cooperative, the hospital also acquired technology that allows patients to use telemedicine for inpatient psychology. The primary physician is Dr. Bill Hazel, who is a board certified psychiatrist working full time in Pocatello. Hazel has had extensive telemedicine experience.
- Rising power prices and a declining number of workers at major businesses were the major economic concerns expressed to Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter by local citizens during the governor's Capital for a Day event in Soda Springs. Otter responded to a large variety of questions on other topics as well and complimented the community's work force on its outstanding record of workplace safety.
- The Grace School Board has unanimously adopted a four-day school week. In addition to some monetary savings, trustees expect a shortened week will reduce absenteeism and time out of class for extracurricular activities.

ONEIDA COUNTY

- County Building Inspector Don Hubbard reports that building activity is brisk. In addition to several remodel and outbuilding projects, there are six new homes under construction. Four are being built under the Southeastern Idaho Community Action Agency's Self-Help Program and the other two are in Stone. Several more are expected to be started in the Malad Valley.
- The Malad Economic Development Foundation asked for less financial support from the county because former Director Kathy Ray is now director of economic development for all four southeastern Idaho counties. The foundation also listed expansion of the Malad Industrial Park is its top short-term goal. Others include recruiting another doctor for the area, supporting the annual Welsh Festival, retaining the U.S. Forest Service office and developing a Certified Local Government Preservation Program.
- Pocatello Urban Transit will now be providing transportation across state lines for residents of Oneida County into Snowville, Utah, and back. Senior citizens going to the Curlew Valley Community Center are expected to be the primary users.

POWER COUNTY

- Southeast Idaho Energy LLC announced plans for a $2 billion agricultural product and energy facility called the Power County Advanced Energy Center. It will produce fertilizer and ultra-low sulfur diesel fuel. The company hopes to begin construction next year with Phase 1 starting up in 2011 or 2012. An average of 700 workers will be needed for construction. Once fully operational, the company will employ 150 at an average annual salary of $50,000.
- American Falls received a $67,000 grant from the Idaho Department of Transportation to repair and upgrade sidewalks in several areas of the city.

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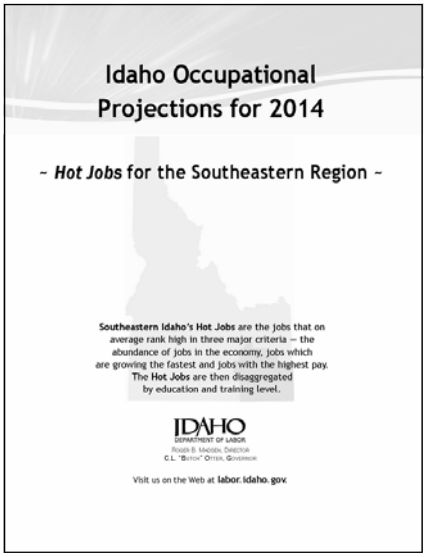
Southeastern Idaho's Hot Jobs are the jobs that on average rank high in three major criteria — the abundance of jobs in the economy, jobs that are growing the fastest and jobs with the highest pay.



This publication, available at **lmi.idaho.gov**, lists the disaggregated **Hot Jobs** by education and training level.

From the Web site, choose Area LMI from the top menu. Then choose the region of interest from the statewide map.