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## Boise Police Department

June 29, 2006

Rob T. Guerette  
School of Policy and Management  
University Park, PCA 366B  
Florida International University  
11200 S.W. 8th Street  
Miami FL 33199

RE: Nomination letter

Dear Mr. Guerette:

It is my pleasure to submit the Boise Police float problem solving initiative as an entry to the Herman Goldstein Award for Excellence in Problem Oriented Policing. The report reflects an education first; regulate when necessary problem solving approach.

The Boise Police Department and its partners collaboratively worked on one of the most significant issues to face our community in years. The Boise River is considered a treasure to this community, but the popular summertime activity of floating the river had turned into a rowdy, alcohol heavy carnival atmosphere that threatened the health of the river and had driven away families. In one summer, our project decreased crime and disorder, decreased environmental threats to the river, and restored confidence within the community, bringing families and children back to the river float.

Thank you for sponsoring this distinguished award and for your consideration of our award nomination.

Sincerely,

Michael F. Masterson  
Chief of Police

MFM/tgm

cc: Mayor David H. Bieter

# Boise River Float Patrol



## Summary

Boise, Idaho, has a beautiful, winding river that runs through the heart of Boise. Boise's portion of the river is the most heavily used waterway in the state. It has a 22-mile paved greenbelt system adjacent to the river that is used by thousands of people each day. During the summer, the river is the premier recreational opportunity for visitors and residents, generating a significant economic impact to the region. The City of Boise has grown substantially in the last several years. With a population of approximately 205,000 residents, we are currently the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest city in the Northwest. Because of the growth, there is an increased demand on city and county resources, including the Boise River.

During the last several years, the behavior of floaters on the river has become less tolerable to the general public. Drunken, rowdy, obscene, and intolerable behavior was observed on the river. Because of the observed behavior during the 2004 river float season, the City recognized the need to address the problems. In addition to the Mayor's Office receiving numerous complaints about behavior during the float season, the problems were identified by our frontline workers (police officers, parks employees, greenbelt volunteers), who were hearing concerns and complaints from river users. Since the traditional law enforcement methods were ineffective, the Boise Police Department recognized problem-oriented policing would be a better solution to address the problems.

## **Problem Description**

- ***Scanning***

As a result of the concerns of citizens and the Mayor's Office, the Boise Police Department put together a task force of affected stakeholders. Along with the Boise Police Department, the task force included Neighborhood Associations, City Parks and Recreation, Ada County Parks and Recreation, Ada County Sheriff's Office, Idaho State Waterways, Boise Fire Department, Ada County Highway District, concerned citizens, and a local rafting company. At the initial meeting, there was a great deal of discussion on issues that surrounded the river. Three subcommittees were formed to address issues: education, engineering, and enforcement.

- ***Analysis***

The committees explored the problems extensively. The committees looked at the problems caused by river floaters, determining that alcohol consumption, lack of trash facilities, and lack of restroom facilities were the main contributing factors to the incivility occurring on the river. Alcohol consumption was identified as the primary factor in unruly floater behavior.

- ***Response***

Committee recommendations focused on the floaters' behavior. There was a need to overcome the attitude that existed with floaters and educate them that unruly behavior would not be tolerated. The response was a multi-faceted approach including the following:

- ***Education***

- Heavy media coverage that included press releases, multiple TV interviews, several stories in the local papers, creation of a PSA that was played on local channels
- New signage was posted at the launch sight for floaters
- Volunteers provided information and brochures to floaters at the put in point that detailed the new rules

- ***Engineering***

- Identification and implementation of rest stop areas along the float route, which were equipped with porta-potties and trash receptacles
- Recycle bins also were placed at the rest areas

- ***Enforcement***

- The police department acquired one-man catarafts to allow officers to patrol the river and interact with floaters
- The fire department deployed its rescue boat with police officers on board to patrol and educate the public on the new rules

- ***Assessment***

The results of combined efforts were a much cleaner, family-friendly, and community-supported river float that brought back the recreational fun, alleviating the drunken and uncivil actions of river floaters. There was a significant cost reduction to police the river float with cost going from \$101,100 to \$53,177, including police, fire, and parks department costs.

## **Detailed Description**

- ***Scanning***

The Boise River has been an icon of recreational enjoyment for over 50 years. The river is slow-moving, relatively safe, and meanders through a beautiful valley. The river travels through all of the major parks in downtown Boise, and ends at a take-out point in Ann Morrison Park, Boise's largest park. Over the past five years, the number of problems associated with the river float has escalated, including littering, drunken behavior, obscene conduct, urinating in public, fighting, assaults, and general uncivil conduct.

The police and parks departments were the first to see the problems. The river rafters' unruly behavior generated numerous calls for City services. Bike officers were assigned to patrol the Greenbelt that runs adjacent to the river and to take enforcement action as needed. However, enforcement action was difficult considering the behavior was occurring on the river where officers didn't have immediate access to violators. The department assigned officers to raft the river and take enforcement action as they saw necessary. This was a "no tolerance" action resulting in a great deal of citations but only when the violations were occurring on dry land. However, the next week had similar violation numbers and fewer families were floating the river. It was obvious the problem had not been successfully mitigated and alternatives needed to be explored.

Parks department employees observed the incredible amount of trash that littered the river banks and takeout point. The Mayor's Office received numerous complaints about the river float. Boise's Mayor floated the river on one of the hottest days of 2004, and through personal observations, he confirmed the complaints. He was appalled by the behavior of floaters who lessened the enjoyment of others, and was quite disappointed in the deterioration of the quality of the floating experience.

- ***Analysis***

Captain Jim Kerns, Boise Police Department was charged with directing task force efforts on behalf of the City. Along with the Boise Police Department, the stakeholders included Neighborhood Associations, City Parks and Recreation, Ada County Parks and Recreation, Ada County Sheriff's Office, Idaho State

Waterways, Boise Fire Department, Ada County Highway District, Neighborhood Associations, Neighborhood Watch leaders, Idaho Rivers United (a non-profit river conservation group), and concerned citizens. Additionally, a news release was prepared, inviting the public to serve on the committee.

Meetings generated discussions on the scope of the problem. Committee members called upon their own observations to document the behavior problems. A lack of reporting data made it difficult to go back more than one year to obtain statistics on river enforcement activities. Additionally, tracking contacts, warnings, and educational opportunities from prior years was not possible.

The task force meetings centered on the visual signs of the behavior that created the problems on the river. Alcohol consumption was identified as having a considerable impact on river rafters' behavior. The enforcement action that was taken by officers during 2004 was nearly 100% related to alcohol consumption. This enforcement included illegal consumption of alcohol by minors, fighting, urinating in public, public nudity, glass containers, and littering. During the 2004 float, the fire department reported they conducted 13 river rescues; all were alcohol related. The parks department observed nearly 85% of all trash collected along the river and at the take-out consisted of alcoholic beverage containers.

Violation enforcement was restricted, because officers on the Greenbelt had a difficult time getting to the violators on the river. As such, enforcement was difficult and dangerous. Most of the enforcement that occurred took place at the extraction point where officers had access to the violators. In 2004, there were efforts to put officers on the river during the busiest weekends. Officers floated the river on paddle rafts and were able to cite 150 violators during two weekends of directed patrol. This was an expensive deployment of manpower, because of the overtime costs to conduct this patrol. It did not have a lasting effect on the floaters' behavior.

Secondary factors contributing to misbehavior on the river centered on the lack of restrooms along the float route. Although there were numerous areas along the river that seemed to be natural rest stops, facilities were not available. People stopped along the river route, drank alcoholic beverages, were urinating in the bushes, challenging other floaters to fight, and engaged in public nudity. Additionally, the river bank riparian area was being destroyed by these large gatherings of people. It was clear there needed to be designated spots to provide rest stop facilities during the three hour float.

- ***Response***

The goal of the response plan was to create a family-friendly, safe-floating environment for Boise citizens and visitors. The most significant part of the plan was to enforce an existing law making it illegal to drink alcohol on the river. The major concern of the stakeholders and the City Council was that people needed to

be educated regarding the new enforcement standard. People had been floating the river for decades, becoming accustomed to varying protocols. Our strategy became “educate first; regulate and enforce as necessary.”

We developed a three part approach to solving this problem. Three committees each evaluated their area of responsibility and developed an action plan. The following is a synopsis of those plans:

○ *Education*

- Trash receptacles – Group consensus felt that rest stop sites should provide necessary receptacles for the trash.
- Signage –The signs needed to be recognizable, promote safety and responsibility, clearly mark the new rest stop areas, and provide the expectations for floater conduct. Rest stop area identification and recognition were crucial to making the rest stops successful. If people didn’t know where they were located, they wouldn’t use them. Signs were constructed that illustrated the river float route and clearly marked the take out rest areas. Signs were posted at the launch site and on brochures that were produced during the educational campaign. Additional signs were posted along the river route to indicate rest areas were ahead.
- PSAs – We developed public service announcements to be played on TV Stations. Ultimately, there was plentiful coverage on each news channel and in the local newspaper during the float season, so PSAs were not needed.
- VNR – We developed a video news release (VNR) to distribute to TV stations for presentation. The VNR was completed by the police department and given to the news channels. Six major network stations played this VNR throughout the float season.
- Brochures – Volunteers staffed the launch site at the county park and provided brochures to floaters. They specifically directed attention to the new float rules posted on the signs at the launch.

○ *Engineering*

- Identified river take-out points – By evaluating the river flow and natural quiet water areas, the committee determined suitable rest stop locations along the float route. The locations were accessible from the adjacent greenbelt for servicing and installation. Four spots were identified as take-out points. Each of these spots on the three hour float trip allowed for ingress and egress to the river. They were appropriately spaced to facilitate individual needs.
- Identified rest stop amenities – The need for rest stop amenities was abundantly clear. They were developed to facilitate portable toilets, as well as collection of trash. The rest stop was clearly marked and delineated. Trash cans, portable toilets, and recycling bins were set out at each stop.

○ *Enforcement:*

- The city has an open container law, which prohibits any open container of an alcoholic beverage in a public place. However, there were conflicting legal opinions on the department's authority to enforce a city ordinance on a navigable waterway. Previous legal opinions varied from no enforcement ability to being able to enforce if the floater's feet were on the ground while standing in the river. Additionally, City parks have an ordinance that prohibits the consumption of alcoholic beverages within 250 feet of the river, while in a City park. That was the only ordinance officers could enforce prior to the 2005 river float season. The lack of consistency and direction caused great confusion for both officers and floaters. It was imperative the jurisdictional issue be resolved before officers could proceed with the proposed enforcement strategy.
- The committee submitted a legal opinion request to the City Attorney, who forwarded the question to the Attorney General's office. The AG's opinion was that any jurisdiction can enforce their city ordinances in a navigable waterway as long as they were within the city limit boundaries. The task force believed prohibiting alcohol on the river would curb unruly behavior, just as it is enforced in the adjacent parks. The strategy was to educate first, regulate when necessary.
- A consortium of law enforcement agencies worked together to train officers. Boise City Police, Ada County Sheriff's Department, and Idaho Fish and Game combined to patrol the river and its banks to enforce the open container law. The officers were trained in waterway laws and regulations, safe boating operations, and cataraft operation.
  - The cataraft is a one-man raft that is maneuverable in the river. It has a rowing platform supported by two inflatable pontoons. The cataraft was chosen as the best platform for officers' ability to be on the river and to make direct contact with floaters. The police department was able to use catarafts that were owned by the sheriff's department. By sharing resources, we were able to test the effectiveness of this strategy.
- Money was needed to purchase all the related equipment for the float including catarafts, helmets, personal floatation devices, throw ropes and other safety items. The Boise Police Department was encouraged to apply for a grant from the Idaho State Parks and Waterways Fund. Generally, these funds are allocated to only counties that have a Marine Patrol program. The mission of the river float patrol was consistent with the mission of the marine patrol programs subsequently Boise applied for and was awarded a \$10,000 grant.
- For the 2005 floating season, officers made over 1900 educational contacts on the river. Most of these contacts were made while on the catarafts. Law enforcement also teamed with the fire department to

conduct three patrols on the water with their river rescue boat, a motorized zodiac for greater mobility and speed on the river. This proved to be an excellent educational tool and a team builder for law enforcement and fire department personnel.

- Boise police also deployed eight officers to the river patrol for the summer. These officers not only worked the river, but rode bikes along the Greenbelt adjacent to the Boise River. Officers were assigned to work the hours and days when the float was most active.



- ***Assessment***

Determining the effectiveness of any program is difficult. We used multiple measures to determine whether the Boise River Float Patrol Program was a success. These measures included quantitative and qualitative gleaned from databases and other sources.

One test of the effectiveness most important to us was perceptions of users floating the river. At the conclusion of the river float season, The Boise Weekly, a local newspaper with a circulation of 35,000, posted the results of an unscientific public poll. The paper measured the “Best of” in many different categories around Boise. Below is the content of the Best in Family Recreation Destination as determined by readers:

- **Best Family Recreation Destination**  
**First Place: Floating the Boise River**

When it comes to finding something for the whole family to do, there's nothing like a float down the Boise River. Now that alcohol has been

banned (much to the chagrin of even some parents), many more feel it's safer to bring the kids on down.

### **Second Place: A walk or ride down the Greenbelt**

Citizens who were directly affected by the river float also wrote in with comments like this:

Alcohol Ban: I wanted to make a comment on the recent ban on alcohol on the Boise River. My husband and I live about a block off the Boise River. We go down there frequently to let our dogs swim. The ban has been wonderful. I have seen hardly any beer cans. It was a very enjoyable weekend. I just wanted to thank whoever was responsible. Thank you.

Volunteers who have worked the parks in our Greenbelt volunteer program for years even took considerable notice:

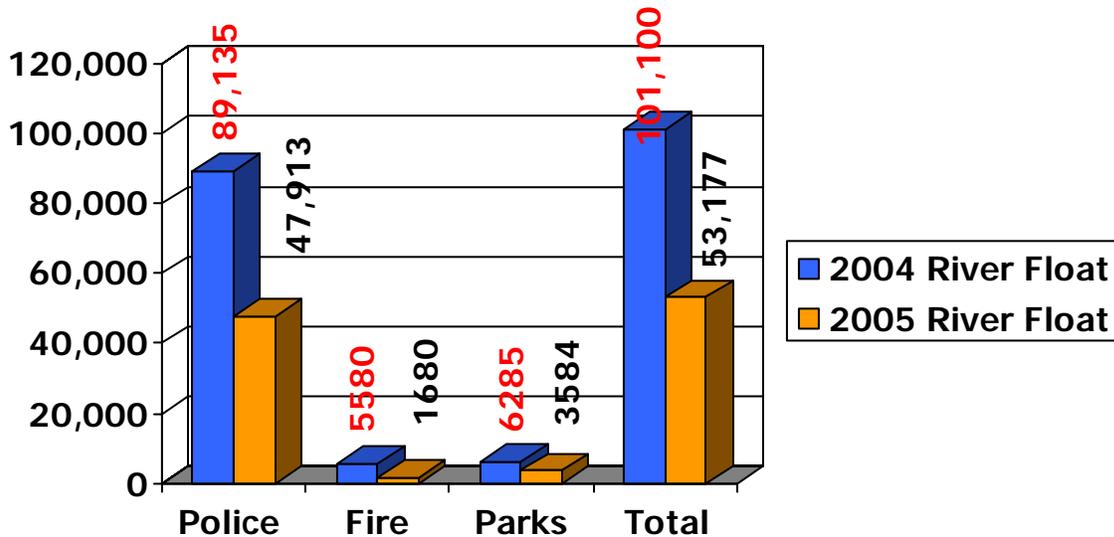
“The float was moderately attended, Friday. Saturday was heavily attended. River traffic Saturday, was as dense as any I have seen. The trend to more family use is obvious to any observer. I have noticed that virtually all younger children are now wearing life vests. Don’t know if it was the signs, or direct education that prompted that change, but it was quick. Figure three weeks for a switch to safer floating, that is nearly universal in scope. If a move to compliance gets better than that, I wouldn’t know how. (July 17, 2005)” Ray Demaree, volunteer

Even the parks department employees had positive things to say about the river float of 2005:

“We had a very successful weekend for recycling. The majority of the cans and plastic ended up at the take-out areas in Ann Morrison, approximately a 50/50 split between each, for a total of six bags. The majority of the trash ended up there also. The Quarry/Bridge and Julia Davis rest areas didn't fare as well for recycling; together a total of 3/4 of one bag. Trash collection at these same sites totaled three bags; again a small comparison to Ann Morrison. On a good note, very, very few beer cans compared to last year.” Jack Wilkerson, Boise Parks Department

Success can be measured in many different ways. As shown above, there were a considerable amount of support and appreciation for the efforts of the task force’s plan. An initial assumption was that it would cost more money to patrol the river while creating an environment conducive to a family-friendly, safe environment. The Mayor, City Council, parks department, and police department made a financial commitment to implementing this plan.

Remarkably, at the conclusion of the float season there was a significant cost savings. The graph below illustrates the savings achieved by each department through this plan:



The police department used its resources more efficiently resulting in substantial cost savings. In 2004, seven officers worked the parks/greenbelt/river enforcement for approximately 60% of their work week. The cost for these employees was \$89,135. In addition to this figure, Boise Police spent about \$3,500 in overtime dollars on two weekends of directed patrol. By comparison, by deploying eight officers who worked a total of 1841 regular hours and 63 overtime hours, the total cost of those officers was \$51,363. Additionally, the police department purchased \$6,550 worth of equipment from the Idaho Parks and Waterways Grant. The total money spent on law enforcement services for the float was only \$57,913. The \$10,000 grant reduced the total expenditure for the police department to \$47,913. By deploying police resources when and where they were needed and dedicating the resource time, we were able to substantially cut the costs of the police services, while implementing an effective problem-solving program.

Fire department costs were down due to the lack of emergency responses they made for river rescues. In 2005, there were only three cases of the fire department needing to respond to distressed floaters compared to 13 the prior year; again, all were alcohol-related. The primary cost to the fire department was putting the zodiac rescue boat on the water for the educational contacts. The zodiac was deployed on four occasions. The total cost to the fire department for personnel costs for float season 2005 was \$1,680.

The parks department noticed a substantial decrease in trash and disorder along the river route, especially at the take-out point. Parks hired a full time employee to just take care of the river float. However, the employee only spent half of his

time on the float cleanup. In 2004, it took 2.5-3 hours of continual dumping and hauling trash; in 2005, it only required .75 – 1 hour.

The cost of recycling was shared by the city public works department and the parks department. Parks staff installed anchoring devices, material, and labor to install the recycling bins at a cost of approximately \$105.

Portable toilets were rented for the rest stop areas. The cost to rent the portables was \$115 per month, which included three services weekly for a total of \$345, for three months. The total cost to parks was \$5,184 dollars. However, the \$1,600 cost of printing signs for the float was offset with part of the grant money received by the police department. This made the total cost to parks \$3,584.

Although an unintended benefit, the cost savings for each agency were significant.

The final factor to consider in the effectiveness of the river float patrol is in the behavior change and criminal activity that initially prompted the entire project. The police department did not have a clear delineation of citations and arrests for the 2004 river float. However, there were statistics that captured the entire Greenbelt crime. In 2004, 1187 citations were written by officers working the parks and Greenbelt area. In 2005, the number dropped to 1092 citations. We had anticipated making more arrests, but the introduction of warning signs at the point of entry lessen the need for enforcement. The data suggests that displacement did not occur. According to the Boise Police Bike Patrol Annual Report 2004-2005, Sgt. Phil Bevier writes:

“There are a number of factors affecting our enforcement contacts, the first being reduced number of officers and the second being the decision to enforce the open container law on the Boise River. This change in enforcement philosophy had far reaching effects on law enforcement contacts. In years past, we had high levels of enforcement contacts at the take-out in Ann Morrison Park. This was due to the level of intoxication and resulting behaviors...It’s my assessment this shift in enforcement philosophy, alone, had the biggest positive impact on quality of life issues in the park system and river corridor.”

## **Conclusion**

During the 2005 float, officers were asked to keep track of all their contacts made on the river float. During the float, officers made over 1900 contacts with the public. These contacts resulted in 502 warnings given, 27 citations written, and 11 arrests made. Officers gave warnings to 78 floaters regarding alcohol violations and wrote 16 citations for alcohol violations. This shows a significant reduction in alcohol violations that were observed on the river and at the take-out point. More

importantly, the behavior was significantly improved largely due to voluntary compliance.

The three prong approach (education, engineering and enforcement) to solving the behavior issues on the Boise River Float produced excellent results. The mission was to provide a family-friendly, safe environment to enjoy the river float. It appears that this team effort was successful during the 2005 river float.

The 2006 river float season is about to get underway. Lessons learned by this problem-solving experience lead us to develop a user perception survey. This survey will be handed out at the takeout point and should provide for continuous improvement in preserving a significant community treasure.



### **Agency and Officer Information**

The Boise Police Department has been engaged in Problem Oriented Policing since 1997. Officers have been trained in the SARA model of problem solving. Our Neighborhood Contact Officers are points of contact for geographic areas around the city. These officers serve as point people and problem evaluators for the department. Officers are encouraged to work with their Neighborhood Contact Officer to identify and resolve problems.

The SARA model of problem solving was used extensively in this project. There were several times when the problems multiplied themselves and through the SARA model we were able to keep the mission in mind and work to solve the problem that was identified.

The contact person for the Boise River Float project is:

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