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STATE BOARD APPROVES BIG SKY CONFERENCE INVITATION TO UNIVERSITY OF IDAHO FOOTBALL PROGRAM

(Boise). The Idaho State Board of Education unanimously approved an invitation from the Big Sky Conference to the University of Idaho Football program to become a conference member starting with the 2018 football season. All other University of Idaho athletic programs already compete in the Big Sky Conference.

The University of Idaho (UI) will end its current membership in the Sun Belt Conference after the 2017 football season. In February 2016, the Sun Belt Commissioner informed UI that the conference had reached a decision to become a 10-team league beginning with the 2018 football season. As part of the Sun Belt Conference decision, the membership of UI and New Mexico State University will expire following the 2017 season. The Sun Belt Conference is a Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) Conference, and the Big Sky Conference is a Football Championship Subdivision (FCS) Conference.

“The Board is pleased to accept this invitation from the Big Sky Conference. It makes sense for the University of Idaho” said Don Soltman, President of the Idaho State Board of Education. “All other UI sports are already in the Big Sky. This decision brings conference alignment and consistency to the university’s athletic program,” Soltman continued.

The Board also saw an opportunity to renew football rivalries with universities in the Northwest, including Idaho State University, the University of Montana and Eastern Washington University, among others. “This move gives the University of Idaho a chance to renew regional rivalries, and brings known and geographically relevant competition. It will be easier for students, alumni and the entire University community to attend away games, and be even more excited about Vandal football when it joins Big Sky Conference play,” said Soltman. UI currently travels to southern states, such as Texas, Louisiana, Alabama and Georgia, for Sun Belt Conference football games.

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University of Idaho – Big Sky 2

The conference move also brings more financial stability to the football program. UI estimates funding for competitive FBS play to as high as \$6 million annually, not including facility upgrades required to be considered by an FBS conference. The Annual booster funding through the Vandal Sports Fund for Vandal Athletics has not exceeded \$2 million in any year for the last 10 years. Sustaining a FCS football program with more regional travel is more financially feasible for UI.

Soltman added, “University of Idaho President Dr. Chuck Staben is to be commended for demonstrating strong leadership and foresight in making this tough but necessary decision.”

The State Board of Education is charged with the general supervision and governance of the public educational institutions and the public school system of the State of Idaho. To learn more about the Idaho State Board of Education, please visit www.boardofed.idaho.gov.

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