

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

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# National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form

This form is used for documenting multiple property groups relating to one or several historic contexts. See instructions in *How to Complete the Multiple Property Documentation Form* (National Register Bulletin 16B). Complete each item by entering the requested information for additional space, use continuation sheets (Form 10-900-a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

☒ New Submission ☐ Amended Submission

## A. Name of Multiple Property Listing

Drive-in Theaters of Idaho

## B. Associated Historic Contexts

Drive-in Theaters of Idaho 1947-1967


## C. Form Prepared By

name/title Amy Derscheid, Intern  
organization Idaho State Historic Preservation Office date August 10, 1988  
street & number 210 Main Street telephone (208)334-3861  
city or town Boise state ID zip code 83706

## D. Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this documentation form meets the National Register documentation standards and sets forth requirements for the listing of related properties consistent with the National Register criteria. This submission meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60 and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Archaeology and Historic Preservation.

☐ See continuation sheet.

  
Signature of certifying official

10/28/99  
Date

Idaho State Historic Preservation Office  
State or Federal agency and bureau

I, hereby, certify that this multiple property documentation form has been approved by the National Register as a basis for evaluating related properties for listing in the National Register.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Keeper of the National Register

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## **E. Statement of Historic Contents**

Discuss each historic context listed in Section B.

X See continuation sheet

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 1

Name of Property Drive-in Movie Theaters of Idaho

### Section E

#### Drive-In Movie Theaters of Idaho 1947-1967

The years immediately following the Second World War saw a remarkable expansion in the American economy. Following the devastation of the Second World War, the United States was the only industrial nation to emerge with its production capacity intact. The post war era saw rapid economic growth which fostered disposable wealth and the creation of new communities at a rate unprecedented in national history. Automobile oriented consumer culture and enterprise created an entire landscape of new business and property types in communities nationwide.

Perhaps no property type so symbolizes this period and aspect of American history as the drive-in theater. These outdoor entertainment venues, though in existence before the War, soon came to epitomize the automobile fixated American landscape of the post-war period. In the span of a few decades the drive-in became a cultural icon and just as quickly faded from the cultural landscape. Their wild success and rapid decline are uniquely American. Foreign countries tried to produce the same effect but the drive-in was never so well-suited to an economic and social climate as that of the United States during the 1950s and 60s.<sup>1</sup> The drive-in era has come and gone in a startlingly brief period of time. The intervening years have seen the loss of all too many examples of this property type and have spawned examination by both serious academics in particular and mid-century American roadside culture in general. There is also an extensive and growing popular interest in the few remaining drive-ins. As such, these fast disappearing landmarks of the roadside have achieved historic significance within the past 50 years and are worthy of inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A.

#### A. Development and Decline of the Drive-In Theater in America

The concept of the drive-in theater was patented by Richard Hollingshead, Jr. of Camden New Jersey. He received his patent in 1933 and in July of that year the Automobile Movie Theater opened to South Jersey audiences. The screen tower and series of ramps in a fan-shaped arrangement, although a novel idea, was an easy enough concept for other entrepreneurs to understand and copy. By the advent of World War II there were 95 drive-in theaters in 27 states.<sup>2</sup>

Though the movie industry thrived during the Depression, new businesses--including the recently developed drive-in theater--were scarce. The drive-ins that did exist were fraught with technical problems, particularly poor sound quality. World War II restricted nonessential domestic construction. While new establishments did not appear, the existing drive-ins continued to flourish during war time. People attended auto theaters despite rubber and gas rationing. From 1941 to 1946 the unused technology and untapped enthusiasm for drive-ins grew to an unimaginable level.<sup>3</sup>

Success during the war clearly demonstrated that a drive-in was an almost sure profit maker for post-war

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 2

Name of Property Drive-in Movie Theaters of Idaho

business venturers. Several factors contributed to the triumph of the drive-in theater in the 1950s and 1960s: The post-war economic boom created the perfect environment for drive-in theaters. Drive-in theaters were much less expensive to build and operate than indoor or "hardtop" theaters. Continued prosperity in the 1950s ensured a high demand for entertainment. The booming economy allowed the expanding middle class to emerge as the core of a consumer driven economy. More people had more money to spend on leisure activities than ever before.<sup>4</sup>

Increasing the validity of the drive-in as a sign of the times was its connection to another icon of the mid-20th century: the automobile. Large American-made cars were perfect not just for transportation but as an extension of the household. Roomy enough for the whole family to stretch out and relax in, it was a very suitable private box seat.<sup>5</sup> Not coincidentally, the rise of the compact car--which did not achieve wide sales until the oil shortages of the 1970s--accompanied the decline of the drive-in theater.

The drive-in mainly catered to the 1950s nuclear family. The attraction of the drive-in for families included its convenience and informality. No baby-sitter was required, just a back seat. There was no reason to get dressed up if you hardly left your vehicle. Parking the car wasn't expensive or a hassle. Also, the drive-in's edge city location offered another selling point, as going back into the city held little appeal to the suburban family. Built on large plots of cheap land, the drive-in followed the trend of the post-war housing developments to locate outside traditional, pre-war city limits.<sup>6</sup>

The drive-in also attempted to provide something for everyone in the family. Cartoons for the children and full-length features for adults were offered. The amenities and events available at the drive-ins were endless for a young American family. Playgrounds, refreshments, dances, contests, giveaways and bottle-warmers were enjoyed all over the nation, night after night.<sup>7</sup>

Purposely or inadvertently, the drive-in became a favorite locale for the newest consumer, the American teenager. The prosperity and the informality of the 50s created a revolutionary dating process. Integral to the teens' culture was the automobile, and integral to their social structure was the drive-in.<sup>8</sup> Drive-ins' "passion pit" reputation grew from the privacy that the car provided for couples. However, the teenage element was a small percentage of the drive-in patronage, at least in the 1940s and 50s. Later, the crowds varied according to the type of film shown.<sup>9</sup>

The problems facing drive-in owners were many. Despite seasonal operation, the technology lag in sound production, opposition from indoor houses and difficulty obtaining quality films, the drive-in continued to draw patrons in the 1950s and 1960s. The novelty of seasonal entertainment had been seen in the movie industry before. Roofless "air domes" became popular in the early 1900s, providing an outdoor place to show moving pictures. These were often hastily erected or temporary arrangements, resulting in the absence of material evidence. In contrast, the drive-in movie theater was a visible and lasting change in the American landscape. While few drive-ins remain, their easily recognizable form still dot the terrain, representing the prosperous era in which it thrived.<sup>10</sup>

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 3

Name of Property Drive-in Movie Theaters of Idaho

The evolution of sound technology over the course of years proved a great boon to "ozoners" (as drive-ins were called). Starting out with large speakers, strategically placed throughout the lot, owners were delighted when war technology benefitted the sound quality of drive-ins. Individual speakers abolished the light and sound travel time discrepancy and reduced noise complaints from neighbors. The cost of seasonal, speaker upkeep was high, however; the advent of radio sound in 1970 both improved sound quality and eliminated maintenance costs.<sup>11</sup>

At one time the poor quality of sound was rivaled only by the poor quality of pictures available to drive-ins. Because distributors could rely on "hardtop" houses for ticket returns or owned indoor houses themselves, drive-ins were second-class buyers of good films. Owners of indoor movie houses resented the drive-ins for stealing business. As such, alliances between indoor and outdoor exhibitors were rare in the battle with distributors for affordable quality pictures. Throughout the life of the drive-in first run movies were off limits, with most nightly bills containing B and sub-run movies. However, the drive-in patron tended to go, not mainly for the picture showing, but the novelty and atmosphere of this unique form of entertainment.<sup>12</sup>

### B. Decline of the Drive-in Theater

Drive-in theaters experienced a steady decline beginning in the late 1960s which has continued virtually unabated to present day. As the suburbs continued to expand urban sprawl swallowed up many "ozoners," causing their large plots of land to become extremely valuable. The high price of movies in the 1960s forced many drive-ins to show R and X rated movies, changing the once-family atmosphere.<sup>15</sup> High insurance rates on play equipment cut down on the total experience of catering to the family patronage. Daylight savings time, implemented in 1967, also decreased the number of shows that drive-ins, the slaves of sunset, could run. The oil crisis of 1973 began a shift to smaller cars and a radical rethinking of the gas-guzzling, post-war culture in general. Perhaps the most obvious threat to drive-ins was and is the television. This threat substantially increased in the late 1970s with the availability of cable TV, VCRs, and video tape rental.<sup>16</sup>

Since their peak in 1958, the number of drive-in theaters in the nation has been in steady decline. From approximately 4,000 establishments in 1958 to under 900 in 1993, the trend has continued, meaning near extinction of this once common roadside icon.<sup>13</sup> There has been a slight revival in the popularity of the drive-in in the 1990s. This has slightly slowed the onslaught of closings and demolition. For many people across the country, particularly members of the so-called "Baby Boom" generation, part of growing up included the drive-in movie theater. That generation now wants to share their drive-in experiences with their children - evidence that the drive-in movie theater was an important, shaping and lasting phenomenon in American history.<sup>14</sup>

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 4

Name of Property Drive-in Movie Theaters of Idaho

### B. History of the Drive-In Theater in Idaho

The state of Idaho, along with much of the less populous portions of the United States, did not have any pre-World War II drive-in theaters. Idaho saw its first wave of drive-in theater development in 1947. The development and decline of the drive-in in Idaho closely follows the national trend.<sup>17</sup> Eight Idaho drive-ins were listed by the 1948 census. In just ten years that number had jumped to thirty five establishments. 1953 alone saw the opening of at least three drive-ins: the Terrace Drive-in of Caldwell, the Spud Drive-in of Driggs and the Parma Motor-Vu.

Low statewide population dictated that 1958 would be the zenith of existing auto theaters in Idaho. Most regions of the state could boast a drive-in theater. A greater concentration, however, were found in the southern half of the state--this resulting from a milder climate and longer operating season. Drive-ins in Idaho mirrored all the social and cultural trends associated with this property type across the nation. They were built at the edge of town on relatively cheap land. They catered to families seeking informal entertainment without the necessity of going "downtown". They also played a prominent social role in a generation of Idaho teens.

The decline of the drive-in in Idaho also reflects national trends. Business for local operators began to slacken in the late 1960s. The last drive-in to be built in Idaho was completed in 1967. During the difficult years of the late 1960's, drive-in owners of the Parma Motor-Vu tapped Idaho's unique population of migrant workers by showing unsubtitled Spanish films.<sup>18</sup> The number of drive-in theaters in Idaho fluxuated little until 1972 when the imminent decline began. The sharpest drop in drive-in numbers in Idaho occurred in the early eighties, leaving only fifteen in 1987. Boise lost its last two Drive-ins in the last decade. The Meridian closed in 1992 and the Fairvu shut its doors in 1995. In 1998, only eight drive-ins remain open in Idaho. Three additional remain intact, but closed<sup>19</sup>

Drive-in theaters remaining in Idaho are most often simple, vernacular versions of the elaborate establishments found at one time in California and Florida. Screen towers and projectors' buildings in other places were built in a particular architectural style, such as Art Deco or even Classical Revival.<sup>20</sup> Idaho owners, however, ordered plans for drive-in screens and buildings from theater equipment distributors or designed what they could themselves.<sup>21</sup> As such, drive-in theaters in Idaho tend to be simple or vernacular resources as individual as the entrepreneurs who built and operated them.

While drive-in theaters are a part of Idaho's recent past, their significance as historical property types is exceptional. Due to the rapid disappearance of a once common feature of the Idaho landscape, drive-in theaters possessing a high level of historic integrity should be recognized as significant resources at the statewide level.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 5

Name of Property Drive-in Movie Theaters of Idaho

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### ENDNOTES

1. Seagrave, Kerry. Drive-in Theaters. Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co., 1992. p. 104.
2. Ibid p. 1, 15, 49
3. Ibid p. 33.
4. Lewis, Peter. The Fifties. New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1978. p 27.
5. Stones, Barbara. America Goes to the Movies. Hollywood: National Association of Theater Owners, 1993. p 188.
6. Ibid p.34
7. Ibid p.41
8. Lewis p. 141
9. Seagrave p. 66
10. *The Lewiston Morning Tribune* 11 June 1912, p.1
11. Stones p. 184
12. Seagrave p. 147
13. Stones p. 194
14. Seagrave p. 161
15. Stones p. 195
16. *The Idaho Statesman* 6 Aug 1995 p 1D
17. Film Yearbook, 1948, Private Collection, Gary Hill, Boise, ID.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 6

Name of Property Drive-in Movie Theaters of Idaho

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18. Karen Cornwall, interviewed by Linda Morton-Keithley, Boise: Idaho History, July 30, 1998.
19. The Idaho Statesman 12 Mar 1992 p. 1C. and 6 Aug 1995 p. 1D.
20. Seagrave p.69



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number F Page 1

Name of Property Drive-in Movie Theaters of Idaho

### Section F

#### F. Associated Property Types

I. Name of Property Type Drive-in Movie Theaters

#### II. Description

The form of the drive-in movie theater includes an open lot with graded ramps and driveways laid out in a fan-shaped arrangement. At the center of the fan stands a screen tower. Towers are made of a variety of structural materials, such as wood, metal or concrete. The tower supports the surface on which the movie images are projected. The screen is often made of plywood with flat paint or some other surface supplied by vendors of theater products. A projection booth, centrally located on the lot, houses machines needed to display the films. This structure is often combined with a concession building. Ticket booths were usually situated at the entrance of the lot. In Idaho these buildings tended to be simple and functional. Perimeter fences seven to ten feet tall and typically made of wood or metal commonly surround the lot. A sign advertising the name of the drive-in theater and perhaps the movie billing is usually visible from a nearby roadway.

#### III. Significance

The drive-in theaters of Idaho are the sole property type associated with the Drive-In Theaters of Idaho Multiple Property Submission. They are eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic places under Criterion A as structures that have made a significant contribution to an important and national historical pattern and as rare survivors of a vanishing property type. Reflective of the post-World War II economic growth in the United States, drive-in theaters were an integral part of and reflective of the post-war economic boom and its resultant auto oriented, consumer driven cultural and social contexts.

Most properties of this type in Idaho are less than 50 years old. Nevertheless, examples with good historic integrity should be considered eligible for listing in the Register under Criteria Consideration G and National Register Bulletin 22. Section IV of Bulletin 22 specifically addresses the eligibility of short lived or fragile resources: "*Some resources acquire historical qualities before the passage of 50 years because they ... by their nature, are subject to circumstances that destroy their integrity before 50 years has elapsed.*" (National Register Bulletin 22, p.5). The inventory undertaken in 1998 clearly demonstrates that, in the case of the State of Idaho, circumstances which have been discussed in Section E of this document have rendered drive-in theaters as a class both short lived and fragile. Of 35 examples known to have been built in Idaho between 1947 and 1967 only 11 remain in any kind of intact condition. Only eight of these are operational and being maintained. Bulletin 22 goes on to state that "*Such resources are viewed by*

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Continuation SheetSection number F Page 2Name of Property Drive-in Movie Theaters of Idaho

*scholars and the public as 'old' even before they are 50 years old" (National Register Bulletin 22, p.5). It is clear through the sources cited in this document and through the efforts of the Society for Commercial Archaeology and other roadside advocacy groups that the mid-century, automobile oriented landscape has achieved this status among both scholars and the public. Finally Bulletin 22 states that "The fact that a resource is jeopardized by a specific proposed project does not, in and of itself, render that resource more historically important than if it were not threatened. But one may evaluate whether a type or category of resources--as a whole--has faced loss at such a rate that relatively young survivors can be viewed as exceptional and important" (National Register Bulletin 22, p.5). This advice has been the foundation of our approach to evaluating drive-in theaters. The evidence is clear. In the context of the State of Idaho, this important and significant property type is disappearing at an alarming rate. More than two thirds of the examples known to have existed in the state have disappeared. In addition no new examples of this property type have been created in the past 32 years. As such, remaining examples which meet the integrity and associative requirements of this document are eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.*

## IV. Registration Requirements

In order to be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places a drive-in theater should include structural elements discussed in Section F Part I, such as screen, graded land, concession/projection building, and ticket booth. The establishment may or may not be under current operation to be considered eligible, however discrepancy between historic and current functions will affect structural integrity in most cases.

In examples which are less than 50 years old a particularly rigid approach to integrity standards should be adopted when considering eligibility. Few alterations which postdate the period of significance of this property type (1947-1967) should be evident. Alterations such as screen widening in the mid-1950s is quite acceptable and a natural reaction to changes in the motion picture industry. In many cases the removal of speaker stanchions is unavoidable due to changes in sound technology and should, in and of itself, not indicate a loss of integrity.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number G Page 1

Name of Property Drive-in Movie Theaters of Idaho

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Section G.

## G. Geographical Data

The geographical data covered by this Multiple Property Documentation Form is restricted to the actual site of the drive-in movie theaters themselves. All are located within the state of Idaho. Site Specific UTM coordinates are identified within each individual nomination form.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number H Page 1

Name of Property Drive-in Movie Theaters of Idaho

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### Section H.

#### H. Summary of Identification and Evaluation Methods

Discuss the methods used in developing the multiple property listing.

Initial identification was a result of a statewide reconnaissance-level survey of drive-in theaters conducted in 1998. Telephone directories from each region of the state were consulted for current locations of operating establishments. This nomination was developed in association with a multiple property nomination for Motion Picture Theaters in Idaho. Much of the preliminary research for drive-in theaters in Idaho was based on research done for the concurrent nomination. Trade magazines from a private collection revealed individual drive-in theaters names and periodic years of existence. Photographs, newspaper clippings, advertisements, blueprints and financial papers, also in private collections, assisted in creating this nomination. The Idaho State Historical Society Library and Archives provided both primary and secondary information from newspapers and books. Oral history interviews of owners provided insight into the operation of Idaho drive-ins. There have been few books published solely on drive-in theater development. However, books devoted to the motion picture industry and to American culture of the post war era supplemented the research for the historical context. Registration requirements were developed in accordance with National Park Service standards.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number I Page 1

Name of Property Drive-in Movie Theaters of Idaho

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Section I.

I. Major Bibliographical References

Books:

Briggs, Joe Bob. Joe Bob Goes to the Drive-In. New York: Delacorte Press, 1987.

Briggs, Joe Bob. Joe Bob Goes Back to the Drive-In. New York: Delacorte Press, 1991.

Lewis, Peter. The Fifties. New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1978.

Seagrave, Kerry. Drive-in Theaters. Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co., 1992.

Stones, Barbara. America Goes to the Movies. Hollywood: National Association of Theater Owners, 1993.

Ward, Baldwin H. ed. Historic Decade 1950-1960. New York: Year,Inc., 1960.

Ward, Baldwin H. ed. The Incredible Decade 1960-1970. New York: Year,Inc., 1970.

Oral History Interview:

Karen Cornwall. interviewed by Linda Morton-Keithley. Boise: Idaho Oral History Center, June 30, 1998.

Newspapers:

*Idaho Daily Statesman* (Boise)

*Lewiston Morning Tribune* (Lewiston)

*Idaho Free Press* (Nampa)

*Post-Register* (Idaho Falls)

*Teton Valley News* (Driggs)

*Teton Valley Visitors Guide Summer 1983* (Driggs)

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 1 Page 2

Name of Property Drive-in Movie Theaters of Idaho

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*Idaho Film Yearbook, various (Boise)*

Primary location of additional documentation:

☐ State historic preservation office

☒ Other State agency

☐ Federal agency

☐ Local government

☐ University

☐ Other

Specify repository: Idaho State Historical Society Library and Archives

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

SAPO  
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# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

## 1. Name of Property

historic name SPUD DRIVE-IN THEATER

other names/site number \_\_\_\_\_

## 2. Location

street & number 231 S. State Highway 33 N/A not for publication

city or town Driggs x vicinity

state Idaho code ID county Teton code 081 zip code 83422

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination     request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets     does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant     nationally     statewide X locally. (    See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

*Susan P. Neitzel*

*10/29/99*

Signature of certifying official/Title  
SUSAN P. NEITZEL, Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property     meets     does not meet the National Register criteria. (    See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title                      Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

## 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

- entered in the National Register.  
        See continuation sheet.  
    determined eligible for the National Register.  
        See continuation sheet.  
    determined not eligible for the National Register.  
    removed from the National Register.  
    other, (explain:)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Spud Drive-In Theater  
Name of Property

Driggs, Teton, Idaho  
City, County, and State

## 5. Classification

Ownership of Property  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

☒ private  
☐ public-local  
☐ public-State  
☐ public-Federal

Category of Property  
(Check only one box)

☐ building(s)  
☒ district  
☐ site  
☐ structure  
☐ object

Number of Resources within Property  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>5</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Name of related multiple property listing  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

Drive-In Theaters in Idaho MPL

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

## 6. Function or Use

Historic Functions  
(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE: Theater

RECREATION AND CULTURE: Outdoor

Recreation

Current Functions  
(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE: Theater

RECREATION AND CULTURE: Outdoor

Recreation

## 7. Description

Architectural Classification  
(Enter categories from instructions)

No Style

Materials  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete

walls Wood

roof Asphalt

other Wood, Metal

## Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

X See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 7



Spud Drive-In Theater  
Name of Property

Driggs, Teton, Idaho  
City, County, and State

## 8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria  
(Mark "x" on one or more lines for the criteria  
qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ A Property is associated with events that have  
made a significant contribution to the broad  
patterns of our history.
- ☐ B Property is associated with the lives of persons  
significant in our past.
- ☐ C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics  
of a type, period, or method of construction, or  
represents the work of a master, or possesses  
high artistic values, or represents a  
significant and distinguishable entity whose  
components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield,  
information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations  
(Mark "x" on all that apply.)

Property is:

- ☐ A owned by a religious institution or used for  
religious purposes.
- ☐ B removed from its original location.
- ☐ C a birthplace or grave.
- ☐ D a cemetery.
- ☐ E a reconstructed building, object, or  
structure.
- ☐ F a commemorative property.
- ☒ G less than 50 years of age or achieved  
significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance  
(Enter categories from instructions)

ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION

Period of Significance

1953-1967

Significant Dates

1953, 1955

Significant Person  
(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Fence Company of Michigan, Escanaba MI (designer  
of screentower), Ballentyne Company, Omaha NE  
(concession/projection building)

## Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

☒ See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 8

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

### Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing  
(36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National  
Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey  
#
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering

Record #                     

Primary location of additional data:

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other

Name of repository:

Bob Wood, Driggs, Idaho

☒ See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 9

Spud Drive-In Theater  
Name of Property

Driggs, Teton, Idaho  
City, County, and State

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property 4.2 acres

### UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

A 1/2 4/9/1/2/6/0 4/8/3/9/1/8/0  
Zone Easting Northing

B / / / / / / / / / /  
Zone Easting Northing

C / / / / / / / / / /

D / / / / / / / / / /

### Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property.)

Tax Parcel #3612, Section II, Township 4 North

Range 45 East of the Boise Meridian, Teton County, Idaho

See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 10

### Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The above described property contains all the land historically associated with the Spud Drive-In Theater

See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 10

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Michael A. "Bert" Bedeau, Architectural Historian

organization Idaho State Historical Society

date 08/30/99

street & number 210 Main St.

telephone 208-334-3861

city or town Boise

state ID zip code 83702

## Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- Continuation Sheets
- Maps: A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A Sketch map for historic districts and/or properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

- Photographs: Representative black and white photographs of the property.
- Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

## Property Owner

name Richard Wood

street & number P.O. Box 158

telephone \_\_\_\_\_

city or town Driggs

state ID zip code 83422

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 1

Name of Property Spud Drive-In Theater

County and State Teton, Idaho

### 7. Description

The Spud Drive-In Theater is located at 231 S. State Highway 33, approximately one and one half miles south of Driggs, Teton County, Idaho. The rectangular site encompasses 4.2 acres located on the east side of the highway. The Spud Drive-In Theater is an excellent and intact example of an outdoor automobile-oriented venue for the display of motion pictures. It comprises a unified "entertainment landscape" which was constructed between 1953 and 1955. For purposes of the National Register of Historic Places, the Spud Drive-In is considered an historic district which contains two buildings, one structure, one object and one site (to wit the landscape) all of which contribute to the historic character of the property. Descriptions of these individual elements are as follows:

#### 1. Drive-in theater landscape (1953)--contributing

The designed landscape of the Spud Drive-in is typical for the post-war era. Access from the highway is gained via a circular driveway located at the rear of the screen tower. An entry ramp leads from the south side of the driveway past a solid wood fence to the ticket booth. This in turn leads to the core of the theater lot which consists of dirt concentric semi-circular dirt and gravel access drives and graded parking spaces which focus on the screen tower. The concession stand/projection booth is set in the center of the parking area. An exit ramp is located on the north side of the main lot which guides patrons past another solid wood fence to return to the front circular driveway. The Ballentyne Company of Omaha, Nebraska provided sight distance and grading specifications for lot. The Spud's lot can accommodate 150 to 170 automobiles. There is a small lawn at the foot of the screen tower which is separated from the parking area by a row of low stone posts. Metal stanchions which formerly held individual speakers are still in place in the first several rows of parking spaces. The rest were removed when the Spud Drive-in updated its sound system in 1989. An AM transmitter station was first used to broadcast the soundtrack of the film. In the early 1990s an FM transmitter was added. Lightning destroyed the AM station in 1997.

#### 2. Screen tower (built 1953, modified 1955)--contributing

The Screen tower is located in roughly the center of the west side of the site. Plans for the screen tower were obtained from the Fence Company of America, Inc. in Escenaba, Michigan in July of 1950. It was initially constructed in the summer of 1953. It sits back from the road approximately 50 feet and is approximately 35 feet high and 60 feet wide. The tower consists of an unenclosed heavy timber framework anchored by concrete pilings. The screen surface is affixed to the east side of this framework and has been replaced several times over the years. The screen tower was modified in 1955 to accommodate films made in Cinemascope. These films required a wider projection surface than

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 2

Name of Property Spud Drive-In Theater

County and State Teton, Idaho

traditional stock. An additional section was added to each end of the screen tower, resulting in the present dimensions. The rear of the screen tower features a large billboard designed to mimic an Idaho License plate which advertises the Spud.

### 3. Concession Stand/Projection Booth (1953)--contributing

The Concession Stand/Projection Booth is a low single story rectangular structure located approximately in the center of the Spud Drive-In lot. It has a very shallow gable roof and is of frame construction clad with wide board clapboard siding. It contains the concession area and kitchen to the north, restrooms in the center, and the projection booth to the south. The building has a small shed roofed el on the north elevation which contains the kitchen and storage. The east elevation features an entry door leading to the concession area, a large fixed window which allows a view from the concession area of the screen, and one large and two small openings for the projector. The rear of the building is unadorned save for a rear entry to the concession area. The south elevation is also unadorned.

### 4. Ticket Booth (1953)--contributing

The ticket booth is located to the south and east of the screen tower. It is a small rectangular structure placed in the center of the entry ramp. It has a shallow gable roof and is of frame construction clad in wide clapboard siding. There is a half-glazed door located in the front of the booth and sliding aluminum-framed windows on the other three elevations.

### 5. 1946 Ford One-Ton Truck/Gunnite Potato (1953, Potato replaced 1992)--contributing

Rather than a traditional advertising sign, the Spud has used a rather unique roadside object to draw attention to the theater. Since 1953 "Old Murphy," a 1946 one-ton Chevrolet flat-bed truck, has been parked along the highway inside the circular driveway. An oversize potato has been placed in the bed of the truck. The original "Spud" was made from wood, chicken wire and plaster-of-paris in 1953. This original object was vandalized and destroyed in 1992. Following this event, the Driggs Chamber of Commerce held a fund raising drive to replace what had come to be a local icon. They raised \$1000 to construct the present "Spud" of wood, foam insulation, and gunnite. The present frame around the truck bed was also installed at that time to prevent future vandalism.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 1

Name of Property Spud Drive-In Theater

County and State Teton, Idaho

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### 8. Significance

The Spud Drive-in Theater is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A. It meets all of the registration requirements for drive-in theaters as outlined in the *Drive-In Theaters of Idaho Multiple Property Submission*. It is an excellent example of this rare property type that continues to play a substantial role in the recreational and social life of the community of Driggs and the Teton Valley.

The Spud Drive-In Theater was opened by A.C."Ace" Wood in 1953. Wood was owner and operator of the indoor movie house in Driggs. He had contemplated building a drive-in venue since sending for plans for a screen tower in 1950. The Spud quickly became a local success and something of a local landmark in the region as the screen tower is one of the tallest structures in the region. In 1968 Wood retired and Leo and Gladys Davis took over the operation of the Spud Drive-In. It was at this time that the concession stand added the "Gladys Burger" (now called a Spud Burger) for which the Spud became locally famous.

The Spud came under the ownership of Richard Wood and his wife, Dawnelle, in 1986. Richard is the great-nephew of Ace Wood, the Spud's first proprietor. The Woods have made some technical improvements to the Spud. They switched from a carbon-arc system projection to Xenon bulb technology. The carbon-arc only allowed 20 minutes of bright light, requiring two projectors and trained personnel to coordinate the film segments. The Xenon bulb eliminated segmented film and the cost of an operator. The original projectors, dating to before World War II, were updated and remain in working order.

The Spud has clearly become a local institution and icon. According to Woods, patronage is growing slowly but steadily. He attributes this to tourist traffic from nearly Jackson, WY and to the fact that generations of Teton Valley residents have made going to the movies at the Spud a summer tradition. He admits that limited entertainment options in Driggs might also be a factor. No clearer demonstration of the central role the Spud plays in the community could be found than local reaction to an incident of vandalism in 1992. The huge potato, which had rested in the bed of a 1946 Chevy truck named "Old Murphy" parked in front of the drive-in since 1953, was destroyed by vandals. The community responded quickly. The Driggs Chamber of Commerce raffled a hot-air balloon ride to raise \$1000 to replace the Big Spud. A new gunnite potato was placed in the bed of Old Murphy and remains a local landmark today.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 2

Name of Property Spud Drive-In Theater

County and State Teton, Idaho

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The Spud Drive-In Theater has also received kudos from national experts. In the 7/6/92 issue of the San Francisco Chronicle, Joe Bob Briggs, infamous and nationally renowned drive-in movie critic and advocate, called the Spud "one of the three best drive-ins in the country". He has praised the Spud on numerous occasions and is well known for his continuing advocacy for drive-ins and drive-in movies through his syndicated column *Joe Bob Goes to the Drive-In* and as host of *Monstervision* on TBS and *Joe Bob Theater* on Cinemax.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 1

Name of Property Spud Drive-In Theater

County and State Teton, Idaho

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