

IMPACT

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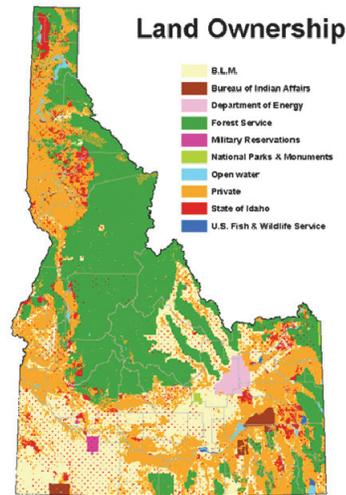
Economic development from federal lands: The Clearwater Basin Collaborative

The Situation

Sixty-four percent of Idaho is owned by the federal government, a higher percentage than any other state except Nevada. The federal government owns 53% of Clearwater County, and over half of its timberlands. Over 80% of the timberlands in Idaho are federally owned, and during the 1960s and 70s federal timber harvests exceeded half of all timber harvested in the state. Today federal timber harvest is less than 10% of the state total.

Given its importance, any prudently designed land-based economic development strategy for Idaho, including Clearwater County, cannot ignore federal land management. While Clearwater County has been the highest timber producing county in the state over most of the last several decades (producing almost 1/3 of all the timber in the state in 1979), timber harvest has declined dramatically in the county since 1979; from a harvest that year of over 500 mmbf (million board feet), to less than 200 mmbf in 2006. Federal harvest in the county declined by 66% between 1979 and 1990, and has declined another 84% since 1990, with less than 20 mmbf harvested over the entire Clearwater National Forest in 2010 (the forest averaged over 120 mmbf/year during the 1980s into the early 1990s). The number of relatively high paying forest products jobs and additional economic stimulus is highly correlated with the amount of timber harvest.

While the presence of these federal lands contributes significantly to the recreation and tourism economy, this sector has not made up for the high paying jobs and large economic multipliers of the forest products industry locally. In addition, recreation and tourism was also going on, and not obviated by, timber production from these same lands in the past.



Idaho Land Ownership Federal lands make up 64% of Idaho.

In addition to the economic considerations, the lack of management on federal forests in contributing to a dramatic increase in forest insect and disease mortality and a greater incidence of severe wildfire, while at the same time leading to uncharacteristic species composition and stand structures to the detriment of wildlife, biodiversity, and forest health.

In response to these issues, Idaho's Senator Crapo convened the Clearwater Basin Collaborative to attempt to bring all the various interests affecting federal forest policy in the basin together to reach agreement on solutions that would end the gridlock of federal land management and move forward with initiatives that would bring jobs and ecological restoration to the Clearwater Basin.

Our Response

With a major interest in retaining and expanding the forest products industry in the county in tandem

with sound land stewardship, the Clearwater County Board of Commissioners asked Extension if it would attend CBC meetings to learn the process, provide input, and ultimately participate as a full member of the Clearwater Basin Collaborative to work toward improving rural economies. In the spring of 2013 the commissioners made a formal recommendation to the CBC Steering Committee that the Extension Educator in Clearwater County be appointed to the collaborative. This appointment was confirmed by a unanimous vote of the CBC Steering Committee and full Working Group in July of 2013.

Extension involvement with the CBC over the past year has included advising county commissioners on the CBC; meeting with Senator Crapo, along with other CBC members, and presenting the economic needs for forest policy change in the basin; providing forest policy information to the group, including work by Jay O'Laughlin of the University of Idaho College of Natural Resources Forest Policy group who gave a presentation to the Rural Economies Committee of the CBC on November 1st; and drafting a whitepaper for the Rural Economies Committee on a proposal for new legislation to provide greater predictability to the forest products industry.

Program Outcomes

County commissioners, and other CBC members, have expressed their strong appreciation for Extension involvement in the CBC, and the white paper drafted for the Rural Economies Committee was well received and is being used as a template for a legislative initiative. Extension has been appointed by the co-chairs of the CBC to serve on the Forest Health, Forest Policy, Landscape Assessment, and Rural Economies Committees of the collaborative, and Extension was elected to serve as a co-chair of the Forest Health Committee. The Rural Economies Committee has developed a new proposal to address predictable timber supply concerns from federal lands in the basin that has been assisted in its development by major Extension input.

The Future

While the traditional Extension clientele has been the individual private landowner, when considering rural economic development and natural resource stewardship in Idaho, one cannot ignore the 64% of the state (or the 80% of its forests) owned by the federal government. Extension's participation in the CBC is a novel way for Extension to share its expertise and be a conduit to university-wide resources by being a co-leader in this important, and nationally recognized, innovation to better manage our federal lands for the benefit of Idaho's rural communities.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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