



# Idaho at a Glance: IDAHO RANGELANDS

Idaho is composed of rangelands (55%), forests (32%), and cultivated crops (11%).<sup>1</sup> Rangelands are ecologically diverse landscapes that have been home to people for centuries and have a legacy of multiple uses, impacting where and how people live, work, and recreate. Many of Idaho's pressing issues intersect with rangelands, including water resources, wildfires, wildlife health, invasive species, and economic development.

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## RANGELANDS

Rangeland ecosystems are influenced by complex factors, such as climate, topography, and soil stability, which directly affect plants and animals. Rangeland ecosystems are:

- **Extensive:** More than 54% of Earth's land area<sup>2</sup> and approximately 50% of the 19 western states have been classified as rangelands.<sup>3</sup>
- **Diverse habitats:** Varied ecosystems provide food, water, shelter, and space for fish, birds, wildlife, livestock, and non-domesticated animals.
- **Woodlands and savannas:** Rangelands are dominated by grasses and shrubs intermixed with flowering plants. Some trees, such as juniper and aspen, also thrive on rangelands.
- **Non-cultivated (non-agricultural) lands:** Typically, rangelands cannot sustain farming because of low precipitation, shallow soils, and rugged topography.

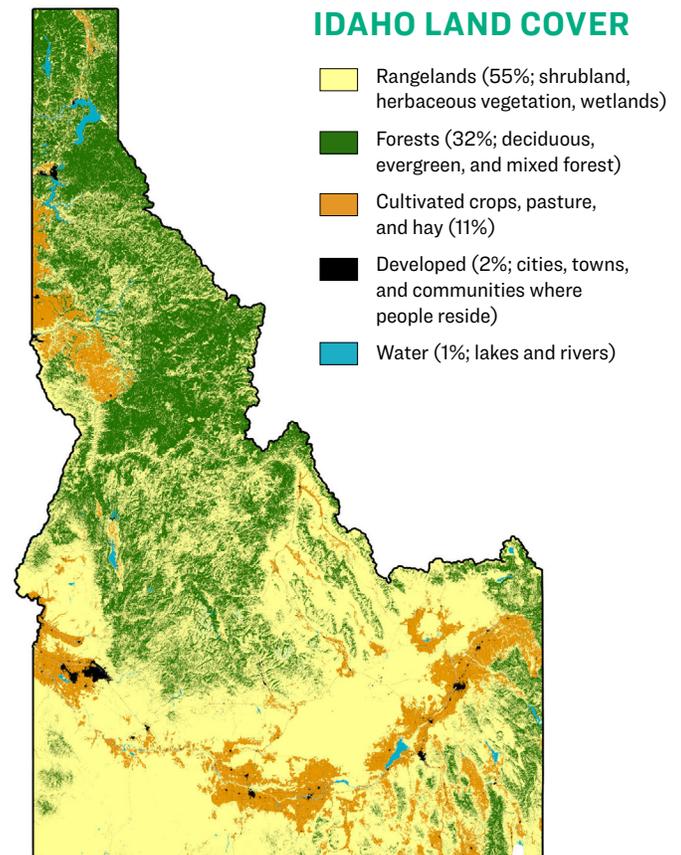
Rangelands can be a **renewable natural resource:** Each year, 30-50% of the annual growth of plants can be safely harvested without damage to soil, vegetation, and wildlife resources.<sup>4</sup>

## USES, OWNERSHIP & MANAGEMENT

Idaho rangelands are a patchwork of public, private, and tribal lands where fences do not necessarily signify ownership.

- Current range ownership has been driven by historical events and state and federal policies, including tribal treaties. For example, private lands are often adjacent to water sources due to the Homestead Act of 1862,<sup>5</sup> which encouraged settlement of the western US.
- Of the 28.7 million acres classified as rangelands in Idaho, the **US Bureau of Land Management** manages 38%, the **US Forest Service** manages 26%, and **private landowners** manage 24%. The remaining lands are managed by other federal, tribal, and state agencies.<sup>6</sup>

**Communication and collaboration among users, land managers, and policy makers support healthy rangelands, economic livelihoods, and public access.**



**Source:** National Land Cover Database (NLCD).<sup>1</sup>

- Idaho rangelands are managed for **multiple uses**, including water resources, recreation, energy development, mineral extraction, wildlife habitat, and livestock grazing, as well as cultural and historical resources.<sup>2</sup>

## RANGELAND STEWARDSHIP: CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

The continued health and sustainability of Idaho rangelands depends on stewardship of these open landscapes and understanding the interdependence of nature and multiple use.



**Drought:** Drought reduces plant growth and water availability on rangelands, negatively impacting wildlife and livestock. The reduced ground cover increases erosion, and reduced precipitation lengthens the fire season.



**Livestock grazing:** Idaho's rangelands provide forage for livestock production, an important economic driver for many Idaho communities. Grazing practices on public lands are regulated by state and federal agencies. Regulation includes monitoring to sustain healthy lands and ensure compatibility with the multiple uses of rangelands.



**Energy production:** In Idaho, energy developed from renewable energy sources (biofuels, solar, wind, water, and geothermal) has increased by 51% since 1960.<sup>9</sup> Rangelands represent a significant source of renewable energy sources, particularly solar and wind.



**Recreation:** The use of rangelands for recreation is a perennial favorite among Idahoans. Nationally, this use has grown exponentially. Over the last 30 years in the US, hiking has increased by 210%, driving off-road has increased by 142%, and fishing and hunting has increased by 30%.<sup>7</sup>



**Growth and development:** As population increases, parts of Idaho are shifting from rural to urban communities. Open spaces are diminishing as ranches are sold for development. This can lead to additional pressures on water uses, wildlife, and recreation.



**Wildfire:** Fire is a natural and important part of rangelands. However, historical fire patterns have been altered primarily by invasive annual grasses and woodland encroachment. Over the last 5 years, fires have burned more than 750,000 acres of Idaho rangelands.<sup>10</sup>



**Invasive species:** Managing for invasive species on rangelands costs Idaho millions of dollars each year.<sup>8</sup> Damage includes depleted soil and water resources, increased fuels leading to larger fires, decreased wildlife habitat, and lower quality forage for livestock.



**Wildlife habitat:** Rangelands provide critical wildlife habitat, including the essential survival elements of food, water, cover, and space for movement. Land disturbances, such as human activity, invasive species, and wildfire, threaten and change these habitats.

## BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

**Collaboratives:** Across Idaho and the west, organizations such as the Owyhee Initiative, Sage Grouse Initiative, Coordinated Weed Management Areas, and Rangeland Fire Protection Associations have developed comprehensive and effective ways to manage natural resources on rangelands. Many factors contribute to their success, including:

- Diverse groups of partners with various expertise that commit to work cooperatively.
- Community-level investment (voluntary cooperation and training) to build trust.
- Science-driven management decisions and monitoring.
- Leveraging funds, pooling resources, and providing conservation incentives to private landowners.

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