

FOREWORD

As Idahoans, we are justifiably proud of our environmental heritage. We are, for example, one of only five states that still has its full complement of vertebrate species. We still have large expanses of open space including the largest roadless area outside of Alaska—an area with cougars, wolves, grizzly bears, and salmon. This wildness has made Idaho a destination for those who pursue wildlife. People from around the world travel here to hunt elk, cougar, bighorn sheep, and moose; to fish for salmon and steelhead; to look for our four species of chickadees or to watch sage–grouse booming on a lek.

We also live, work, and play on these lands. Idaho not only provides high quality potatoes to the world market and much of the nation’s commercial trout; we are also home to space–age industries providing micro–chips and printers to the world. Idaho’s lands, ranchlands, farmlands, streams and rivers also provide a variety of ecological services such as flood control, and air and water purification.

Idaho’s current population of 1.3 million is expected to be 2 million by 2030 and much greater by 2100. The increased demands these individuals will place on the land raise crucial questions. What will Idaho’s landscape look like on the 200th anniversary of statehood in 2090? Will we still have wild areas, ranch and farmlands, and timberlands—those open spaces where we hunt, fish, hike, bike, watch wildlife, graze livestock, and produce the food and fiber that supports our economy and quality of life?

It is obvious to even the casual observer that there are major changes occurring across Idaho’s landscape. Areas a short drive from downtown Boise, where many can remember going for an afternoon to hunt pheasant, ducks, or geese, are now housing developments; residents of Coeur d’Alene and Idaho Falls, of Sandpoint and Twin Falls, have experienced similar changes. We can expect more in the future. Idaho’s future landscape is being shaped daily by land use decisions that determine where and how we build our homes, farm, ranch, manage our working forests, and recreate. Maintaining Idaho’s recreational, economic, and ecological opportunities is challenging, but that challenge can be accomplished by working together to develop a long–term vision for Idaho’s future landscape and a conservation strategy that is flexible and adaptive, a process that will be made easier by our well known ability to balance conflicting interests. To be effective, the conservation strategy must fully engage people with diverse interests, bringing them together to participate in discussions to help shape Idaho’s conservation future. Each person will bring their vision of what landscapes, as well as recreational, ecological, and economic opportunities, they wish to bequeath to future generations. Having this conversation requires that we acknowledge the ways that today’s land use decisions impact our legacies to future generations and that we act in ways to ensure the integrity of the agreed upon legacies.

The Idaho Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy set out in this volume provides much of the information needed for such an effort. It provides the best available information on the status, distribution, and abundance of the state’s natural communities and species of greatest conservation need—information that will help land use managers make informed decisions about land use changes.

Although the list of at-risk species is lengthy, it is a clear signal of the state of Idaho's commitment to passing on our ecological heritage to future generations. The list also presents Idahoans with the opportunity to be proactive and thus prevent additional listings of species under the U.S. Endangered Species Act.

The Idaho Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy thus signals a change in our approach to wildlife management and should be viewed as the first step in a process for cooperative conservation. It is not a regulatory roadmap but a source of information for developing a conservation strategy. It is a fluid and flexible document intended to change over time. Idahoans have a history of finding ways to work together in collaborative ways to find better ways to accommodate wildlife on our working landscapes. The Idaho strategy is designed to inform those collaborative efforts and also engage the public in conservation efforts that will make future listings under the regulatory hammer of the Endangered Species Act unnecessary. Our challenge is to work together to create a shared vision of future landscapes that will gladden our spirits, support our quality of life, and meet the full range of human needs while continuing to provide for the needs of wildlife statewide.

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