

# Idaho Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy

## What is a conservation strategy?

Congress asked each state to develop a strategy for wildlife, known technically as a Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy (CWCS). These proactive strategies examine the health of wildlife and prescribe actions to conserve wildlife and vital habitat before they become more rare and more costly to protect.

## Idaho snapshot

**Landscape:** Idaho is a Rocky Mountain state known for its scenic beauty, diverse landscape, and abundant natural resources. Fertile soil, rich mineral deposits, thick forests, vast rangelands, and numerous rivers and streams have supported agriculture, mining, and forestry since the Idaho Territory was established in 1863. Habitats vary from dense forests in the north to high desert sagebrush steppe in the south. Idaho has the largest block of designated wilderness with the longest undammed river in the conterminous U. S. flowing through it.



Pygmy Rabbit/IDFG

**Management Issues:** Idaho is 64 percent publicly owned, and as such is managed primarily by two agencies: the USDA Forest Service and the USDI Bureau of Land Management. Because of this, Idaho presents a different scenario for conservation than states that are predominantly privately-owned.

**Highlighted fish and wildlife:** Idaho is home to an assemblage of wildlife as diverse as the landscape it occupies: wide-ranging carnivores such as gray wolf and

grizzly bear, sagebrush obligates such as pygmy rabbit and greater sage-grouse, and anadromous fishes such as chinook and sockeye salmon exemplify Idaho's wildlife diversity.

## Idaho's planning approach

The planning team for the Idaho Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy consisted of a coordinator and a core team of individuals from the Idaho Department of Fish and Game. We involved multiple staff levels within the Department and the Director took an active role in the Strategy

Leadership Committee, as well as met with stakeholders and gave presentations on the Strategy.

We chose an ecologically-based landscape approach to planning that allowed us to organize the Strategy by geographic regions—referred to as “ecological sections” or simply “sections”—expected to have similar species, habitats, and conservation needs. We combined this section-level approach with a fine-scale approach of identifying species-level issues and conservation needs for 229 species. The use of ecological sections as a means of planning appealed to us

*“The Wildlife Conservation Strategy is a source of valuable information about the diversity of wildlife in Idaho. It will help guide those with the responsibility and the interest in conserving Idaho’s wildlife to take appropriate actions before federal protection becomes warranted.”*

- Steven M. Huffaker, Director,  
Idaho Department of Fish &  
Game

because of its wide acceptance within the ecological community and its close association to The Nature Conservancy's ecoregional plans and Partners in Flight regional plans. In addition, this approach facilitates coordination with adjacent states, e.g., Oregon and Washington, who organized their strategies similarly.



Peregrine Nestling/IDFG

The aim of Idaho's Strategy is to provide a common framework that will enable conservation partners to jointly implement a long-term approach for the benefit of "species of greatest conservation need."

To this end, this strategy promotes proactive conservation to ensure cost-effective solutions instead of

reactive measures enacted in the face of imminent losses.

## Primary challenges to conserving wildlife in Idaho

Idaho faces many challenges to ensuring that healthy wildlife populations remain for future generations. As the state's population grows, development and transportation systems also increase. Idaho's working farms, ranches, and private forests have long provided homes for fish and wildlife. But its burgeoning population is converting many of these areas into residential developments. Subdivisions and second homes are pushing deeper and deeper into core areas used by wildlife. As a result, transportation systems have to be improved and coupled with development, fragment habitats used by wide-ranging species. State and local governments need to have a strategy

Wildlife	Total number of species	Species in need of conservation *	Threatened/endangered listed species
Lampreys	1	1	0
Ray-finned fishes	85	26	6
Amphibians	15	6	0
Reptiles	23	5	0
Turtles	1	0	0
Birds	383	54	1
Mammals	111	33	5
Bivalves	26	3	0
Gastropods	149	49	5
Branchiopods	2	0	0
Crustaceans	4	1	0
Arachnids	3	3	0
Amphibians	388	48	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1191</b>	<b>229</b>	<b>17</b>

\* Each state is using its own criteria for this category. In Idaho, to define the overall focus and scope of species included in the Strategy, we considered the following: (1) full array of wildlife species, (2) species of greatest conservation need, (3) species with low and declining populations, (4) species indicative of the diversity and health of Idaho's wildlife, and (5) species whose needs are not being met through other funding sources or for which we lack basic information on their distribution and abundance.

### Wildlife Highlights

for ensuring that wildlife can continue to thrive as Idaho's landscapes change.

With each passing year, it becomes more obvious that noxious weeds and other invasive species are an enormous threat to a wide range of fish and wildlife. Noxious weeds have already degraded several million acres of Idaho's forests and grasslands. Aquatic invaders, such as Eurasian water milfoil and New Zealand mud snail, are spreading in our waterways. Even more damaging invasives have been found in nearby states. The magnitude of the invasive species threat is still not fully understood by the public, but that is changing. The response of the public and natural resources managers to this threat must improve if strong and diverse wildlife populations are to survive in this state.

## Working together for Idaho's wildlife

The Idaho Department of Fish and Game used a variety of methods to facilitate public input and involvement in developing its Strategy. Immediately prior to developing the Strategy, Fish and Game conducted focus groups, a statewide public opinion survey, and workshops to gather information about public attitudes, opinions, and preferences regarding the management of fish and wildlife including nongame and at-risk species.

Early in the process of developing the Strategy, Fish and Game established a Leadership Committee that represented agencies and entities that would likely use or implement the Strategy. This committee comprised representatives of the USDA Forest Service, Idaho Legislature, Idaho Association of Counties, Intermountain Forest Association, USDI Fish and Wildlife Service, Governor's Office of Species Conservation, USDI Bureau

of Land Management, Office of Governor Dirk Kempthorne, The Nature Conservancy, private ranching community, Idaho Conservation League, University of Idaho, Idaho Council on Industry and the Environment, Idaho State Department of Agriculture, and Idaho Department of Lands.



Riparian Planting/IDFG

In addition, we contracted with the Environmental Science and Public Policy Research Institute at Boise State University to conduct public involvement and outreach activities specifically for the Strategy. An Idaho-specific brochure was developed for distribution through Idaho Fish and Game regional offices and at outreach meetings. Presentations were made to 23 groups—primarily those involved with natural resources issues—and at several less formal meetings with a limited number of stakeholders across the state. Resource Advisory Committees (RACs) of the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management were targeted because of the broad nature of interests represented by members. The purpose of the presentations was to inform stakeholders about the development of the Strategy, to gather input, and to encourage participation in implementing the Strategy.

***“We believe the Wildlife Strategy is a proactive approach to conserving and enhancing all fish and wildlife in Idaho. For too long we have reacted too late in preserving species in decline. We need to ensure Idaho's tremendous variety of species remain abundant for all Idahoans to enjoy.”***

***- James L. Caswell,  
Administrator, Governor's  
Office of Species Conservation***

Key Habitats	Wildlife (examples)	Issue (examples)	Action (examples)
<b>Dry Conifer Forest</b>  <b>Ownership: Mix of private/public</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• White-headed Woodpecker</li> <li>• Pygmy Nuthatch</li> <li>• Northern Idaho Ground Squirrel</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduced fire frequency has altered the vegetative structure and composition resulting in increased risk of stand-replacing fires.</li> <li>• Highways and roads can fragment forest habitats and result in direct mortality.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restore and maintain historic fire intervals through the use of prescribed fire, timber harvest, and thinning.</li> <li>• Identify and manage linkage zones to provide connectivity between habitats for wide-ranging species.</li> </ul>
<b>Southern Xeric Shrubland and Steppe</b>  <b>Ownership: Mix of private/public</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Columbia Spotted Frog</li> <li>• Greater Sage-Grouse</li> <li>• Pygmy Rabbit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invasive plant species replace native species and reduce the value of habitat for wildlife.</li> <li>• Conversion and degradation has resulted in landscape-scale loss and fragmentation of this habitat.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use appropriate methods to control invasive plant species and restore native species.</li> <li>• Identify and conserve large remaining areas of intact shrub-steppe in good ecological condition.</li> </ul>
<b>Riparian Woodland</b>  <b>Ownership: Mix of private/public</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yellow-billed Cuckoo</li> <li>• Mountain Quail</li> <li>• Idaho Giant Salamander</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overgrazing or grazing at the wrong time of the year can reduce the value of the habitat for wildlife.</li> <li>• Alteration of stream flows can affect streamside wetlands and vegetation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adjust season and level of use as needed with appropriate grazing schedules and best management practices to promote desired habitat conditions and restoration efforts.</li> <li>• Develop flow regimes that balance the needs of man's use of water and natural processes that maintain riparian habitats. Obtain minimum stream flows where necessary and feasible to maintain riparian habitats.</li> </ul>

### Recommended actions to conserve Idaho's wildlife

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