

DIVERSITY OF RURAL PLACES—IDAHO

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Idaho County, Idaho (population 14,000), is a very large rural area containing 5.5 million acres (8,600 square miles). Of these, 4.5 million (84.8 percent) are public lands. All or parts of six national forests and the Idaho half of the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area are located in the county. Idaho County also contains more than 400 miles of free-flowing rivers: the Salmon, Clearwater, Lochsa, Selway and Snake. There are approximately three million acres of wilderness within the county: Gospel Hump, Frank Church, Selway-Bitterroot and Hells Canyon.

Settlement within the county started in the 1800s with discovery of gold in 1860. By the late 1800s and early 1900s through the Homestead Act, the majority of private property was settled, along with the Nez Perce Indian Reservation after the Indian Allotment Act of 1893.

There are ten small communities, the largest being the county seat Grangeville with 3,500 population.

Small communities were established at about eight-mile intervals due to method of travel and religious and ethnic background. These communities continue to exist today, but mostly as bedroom communities, now due to improved roads and travel, the result of the consolidation of schools. Roads needed to be improved and snow removed to accommodate school buses. However, schools in some remote communities remain.

The economy of the county is sustained by timber, agriculture and recreation. Timber and lumber products are facing the greatest threat at the present time. Forest plans that are driven by the Fish and Wildlife Agencies, Endangered Species Act (ESA), National Marine Fisheries Service, and special interest groups have greatly reduced the amount of timber available for harvest. The ESA has the greatest impact on Forest Service activity. At present, timber harvest within the county is almost nonexistent. The county's share of national forest timber receipts obtained through the 25 percent fund amounts to approximately \$4 million a year. In Idaho, 70 percent of that money goes for road maintenance and 30 percent for schools. Timber sales have fallen 80 percent because of federal regulation which will place a tremendous burden on property taxes.

The loss of timber and mill jobs means loss of jobs and businesses

in our communities. Unemployed people are unable to own homes or pay taxes needed to sustain our infrastructure.

Agriculture remains stable at the present time. Soils, rainfall and climate within the county are very conducive to cereal grain production. However, regulations regarding herbicides, pesticides and fertilizers are becoming concerns for farmers. Water quality issues for the ESA, if allowed to continue at the present rate, will have a tremendous impact on agricultural uses also.

Cattle and sheep ranching are also important economic contributors. The sheep industry is disappearing because of high costs of public land policies and no effective predator control. Most of these operations have been replaced with cattle. A larger percentage of the cattle operations depend on public grazing permits. Federal regulations regarding riparian areas, stream fencing and proposed increased grazing fees will affect these ranches and, in some cases, eliminate them completely. This, in turn, will affect the assessed value of these properties because the value of deeded land is dependent on lease permits. Consequently, this will affect the county tax base.

Tourism and recreation are becoming important to the economy. Numerous outfitting businesses have started up to accommodate area fishing, hunting and recreation. However, even though it is most welcome, this industry will in no way offset the loss of timber-related activity. Studies by McKetta and Associates on the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest show that recreation would have to increase twenty-eight times to equal timber losses and that does not account for the seasonality of recreation employment (Robison and Freitag).

In short, federal rules and regulations affect all phases of county economic activity and local government, especially in public-land-dependent counties.

Possible Solutions

Federal and State Level

- Federal agencies must take into account the social and economic impacts on local communities and local government.
- The Endangered Species Act must be amended to consider human aspects as well as animals and plants, and all actions must be economically viable.
- Laws need to be made by Congress, not by agencies through the rule-making process.
- Higher Payment In Lieu of Taxes (PILT) payments must be provided to compensate for lost revenue from changed land use rules.

- Local governments must be allowed to have a say in their own destiny. Government needs to be of the people, by the people and for the people which means local participation in decisions affecting the local area.

Local Level

- Diversify our economies.
- Find new ways to make value-added products.
- Take advantage of the information super highway.
- Attract super highway dependent businesses.
- Work with recreation businesses to attract tourism dollars.
- Collaborate with state and federal agencies to make sure local government has a voice in decisions affecting local economies.
- Encourage collaboration between timber and recreation, which are tied directly to public lands, and federal agencies.
- Collaborate with academic institutions so they become cognizant of communities' and local government problems.

References

Robison, M. Henry, and Jon Freitag. *Socio-Economic Implications of a Below-Cost Timber Program on the Wallawa-Whitman National Forest*. Moscow, ID: McKetta and Associates, Feb. 1994.