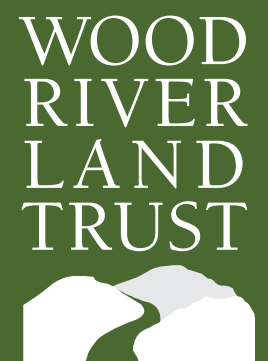




COMMUNITY PLANNING:
**Habitat
Conservation**

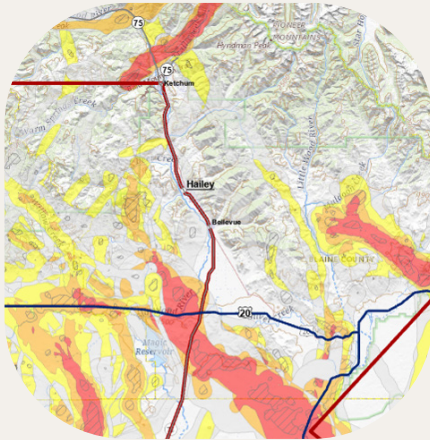


Baseline Characteristics:

HABITAT CONSERVATION

Idaho as a State, is ranked as the 14th largest in the Country by land area and 3rd highest in its percentage of federally protected land.^{1,2} Nearly two thirds of the State of Idaho is public lands— approximately 62% is federally owned and managed.³ Another four percent is made up of State endowment trust lands.⁴ Out of all the states, Idaho ranks

38th in the nation for its total population of nearly 2 million.⁵ This equation makes Idaho the 6th least densely populated state in the nation, Idaho is home to approximately 22.3 people per square mile.⁶



Big Game Migration³¹

Between 2010-2015, Idaho's population gradually increased. Between 2016-2019 the state's rate of population growth doubled on average.⁷ Then, in concert with the start of the COVID

pandemic, the State's average rate of population growth reached unprecedented highs.⁸ Population trends— as well as patterns of development⁹—have compromised open space, increased loss of agricultural lands and espoused a sense of unwanted change in rural communities in Idaho.¹⁰ Blaine County is no exception, residents surveyed by the Wood River Land Trust pointed to habitat conservation—including protections for open space, wildlife and watersheds—as a community priority, in need of attention.¹¹

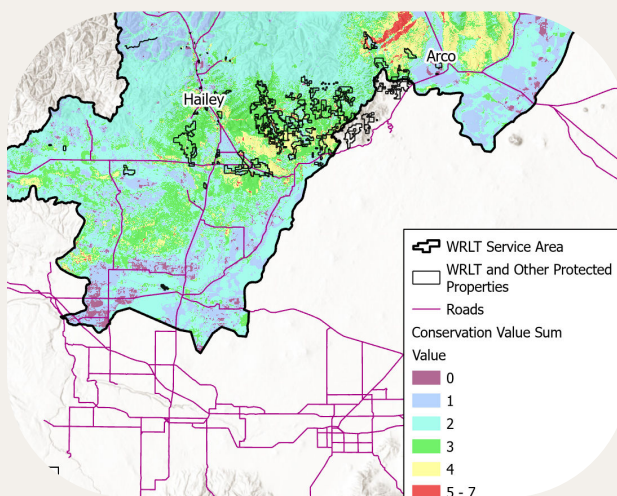
"When/If Idaho communities once again face rapid rates of population growth, pressures on Idaho's valuable agricultural land and natural resources will increase,"

write Stephanie Witt and Carole Nemnich, authors of a 2011 Boise State University Public Policy Center study on land use practices in the state. "Effective land use planning will play a critical role in shaping the design of our built environments."¹²

The physical geography of Blaine County funnels development into the valley floor, along the Big Wood River corridor. More than 80% of the county is public land, spanning the mountainous terrain to the north, east, and west; as well as the lava fields to the south. Nearly all of the County's publicly-accessible land is federally or state-owned, managed by the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, Idaho Department of Lands, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, the Bureau of Reclamation and National Park Service.¹³ Even more is protected by non-profit conservation efforts and zoning for agriculture, hillside protection and recreation.¹⁴

What is at risk? Development in the floodplain impacts riparian habitats, the side canyons are subject to sprawling development and prime farmland is forced to compete with a valuable housing market. Buildable areas overlap with the scarce sage grouse habitat in the sagebrush steppe,¹⁵ which by now have lost half of their historic range.¹⁶ Big game migration routes encompass the valley, crossing State Highway 75 north of Ketchum and U.S. Highway 20 near Stanton's Crossing, Timmerman Junction, and Fish Creek.¹⁷ Between Hailey and Ketchum, resident deer and elk populations meander across SH75 to access the river and forage in their winter range.¹⁸ Subdivisions overlap with the Big Wood River's floodplain up and down its length,¹⁹ as well as prime farmland in the Bellevue triangle and Little Wood River drainage and subarea.²⁰

Blaine County's community and built environment are invariably connected to the conditions of the surrounding sagebrush steppe, forests and waterways. Natural hazards, posed by wildfires, avalanches, and floods don't heed jurisdictional boundaries. While a variety of local entities respond to natural disasters, coordinated and proactive



WRLT Conservation Priorities by Value Sum³²

Local Species of Concern

Of the endangered, threatened and sensitive species listed by Idaho's Department of Fish and Game as the "Species of Greatest Conservation & Information Need,"³⁰ Blaine County is home to:

Steelhead	Cuckoo
Sockeye Salmon	Wolverine
Chinook Salmon	Snake River Physis
Pacific Lamprey	Bliss Rapids Snail
Greater Sage Grouse	Blind Cave Leiodid
Western Yellow-billed	Beetle

planning across the community and region can further mitigate risks. Coalitions of conservation, restoration and outdoor recreation groups engage federal and state agencies to steward open spaces. Managing development in the Wildland-Urban Interface becomes especially critical as climate change pushes us into new fire regimes and unpredictable flooding events.²¹

Unlike many other states that take active roles in managing and moderating growth, Idaho does not have a state agency dedicated to growth management. Passed in 1975, Idaho's Local Land Use Planning Act requires cities and counties to draft their own comprehensive plans to guide development but offers little in the way of statewide support or technical assistance for sustainable growth.²² As such, interjurisdictional cooperation is essential to shaping sustainable development and actualizing regional sustainability goals.²³

Transfer of Development Rights Program

One tool that Blaine County leverages to manage its growth is a transfer of development rights (TDR) program. The program allows landowners to sell and transfer the development rights associated with a parcel of land in a sending area, to another in a receiving area. Designated sending and receiving areas traditionally direct development into cities and conserve open space in rural areas.²⁴ After more than a decade idle, Blaine County's program saw transactions in 2021²⁵ and 2023.²⁶

The County's program is limited by several factors known to bolster other programs.²⁷ Firstly, there is no communications hub to connect potential sellers and buyers. Secondly, the sending and receiving areas are both in the County; the program is not interjurisdictional. Participants cannot apply TDRs within city limits, where infill and density is most appropriate. Thirdly, the program lacks a bank or fiduciary agent that can facilitate transactions or stimulate activity when there is a lull.

A Boise state study suggests that "antigrowth sentiment in the area" and aversion to increased density in downtown cores limits the effectiveness of the TDR program and may inadvertently encourage sprawl outside urban centers, or promote the development of unprotected land near but not inside receiving areas.²⁸ Though these confines limit the efficacy of the program in its current form, there is potential of a revamped program. A 2023 study estimates that an expanded program could shift nearly 6,000 units out of the County, into city boundaries—conserving more than 56,000 acres in sending areas.²⁹ Beyond habitat conservation, compact development poses benefits to all five of the Land Trust's community planning focus areas.



Erosion³⁵



Rip Rap³⁶

Regional Coordination

In addition to the Blaine County government and the five cities therein, community partners in habitat conservation include:

Bureau of Reclamation

Heart of the Rockies

Idaho Conservation League (ICL)

Idaho Department of Lands (IDL)

Idaho Fish & Game

The Pioneers Alliance

The National Forest Foundation

Natural Resources and Conservation Services, USDA - Idaho Office

Sawtooth Society

Trout Unlimited

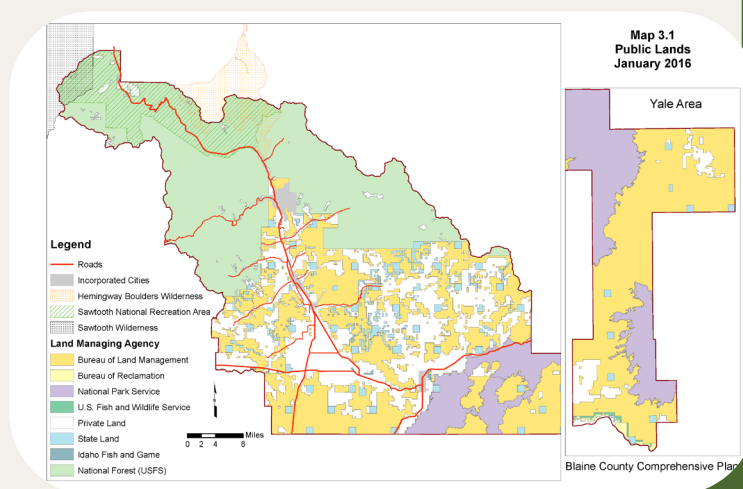
The Nature Conservancy

University of Idaho

US Forest Service (USFS)



Sage Grouse³⁴



Public Lands in Blaine County³³

Shared Goals

PROCESS

Recognizing the significant overlap in Comprehensive Plan policy statements from Blaine County³⁷ and its cities– Carey,³⁸ Bellevue,³⁹ Hailey,⁴⁰ Ketchum⁴¹ and Sun Valley⁴²– the Wood River Land Trust scoped the Community Planning program and its action plan objectives (Chapter 3) to stem from goals shared between three or more municipalities. This Chapter 2: Shared Goals presents shared goals backed by Comprehensive Plan policy statements, as displayed in the following tables. Furthermore, the following tables present aspirational ideals meant to house and guide shared goals.

POLICY BACKING

For each focus area, see the policy statements that support the shared goal. From the Land Trust’s perspective, shared goals in each focus area work towards the following set of ideals.



HABITAT CONSERVATION

IDEAL: Smart growth preserves the open space that affords Blaine County's natural beauty, agricultural lands, wildlife habitats and environmental resilience.

SHARED GOALS	SUPPORTING POLICIES
H.1 - To preserve open space and the natural features unique to the Blaine County communities, accommodate growth with infill and compact development.	Blaine County - Chapter 2: Housing, Policy Statements A-1, A-3, A-5. Chapter 5: Natural Environment: Resources, Hazard Areas, and Conservation, Policy Statements C-10. Chapter 6: Public Services, Facilities and Utilities, Policy Statement B-8; Chapter 7: Economic Development, Policy Statement C-6. Chapter 8: Land Use, Policy Statements A-1, A-3, A-8, A-10, C-4, C-5, C-8, LW-7
	City of Bellevue - Chapter 5: Land Use, Goal 1, Objective 1. Chapter 6: Natural Resources, Goal 2, Objective 8. Chapter 12: Housing, Goal 2, Objectives 1, 2. Chapter 13: Community Design, Goal 1, Objective 3.
	City of Hailey - Section 1: Natural Resources, Energy and Air Quality, Goal 1.1. Section 5: Land Use, Population and Growth Management, Goals 5.1, 5.4, 5.6, 5.7.
	City of Ketchum - Chapter 1: Community Vision and Core Values 5, 10. Environmental Quality and Scenic Beauty. Chapter 4: Community Design and Neighborhoods, Goal CD-1, Policy CD-1.3. Goal CD-2, Policies CD-2.2, 2.4; Chapter 6: Parks, Recreation, and Open Space, Goal OS-3, Policies OS-3.1, 3.2. Chapter 12: Future Land Use, Goal LU-1, Policy LU-2.1.
	City of Sun Valley - Principle I: Goal 1, Objectives 1.1, 1.4. Principle II: Goal 5, Objectives 5.1, 5.2.
H.2 - Minimize the impact of development on habitats and wildlife, especially in the floodplain and on hillsides.	Blaine County - Chapter 3: Recreation, Policy Statements F-1, F-2. Chapter 5: Natural Environment: Resources, Hazard Areas, and Conservation, Policy Statements C-3, C-7, C-8, C-9, C-10. Chapter 8: Land Use, Policy Statements C-6, C-7, LW-9, LW-10, LW-11.
	City of Carey - Land Use, Overlay Areas, Objective 1.
	City of Bellevue - Chapter 6: Natural Resources, Goal 1, Objective 1. Chapter 6: Natural Resources, Goal 2, Objective 2.
	City of Hailey - Section 1: Natural Resources, Energy and Air Quality, Goal 1.1.
	City of Ketchum - Chapter 5: Natural Resource Stewardship, Goal NR1, Policies NR1.1, 1.2, 1.3. Goal NR2, Policies NR2.1. Chapter 6: Parks, Recreation, and Open Space, Goal OS-2, Policies OS2.1.
H.3 - Reduce the risks of natural disasters—such as avalanches, wildfires, and floods—through site and community design.	City of Sun Valley - Principle I, Goal 1, Objectives 1.2, 1.3.
	Blaine County - Chapter 2: Housing, Policy Statement A-4. Chapter 5: Natural Environment: Resources, Hazard Areas, and Conservation, Policy Statements C-10, D-1, D-2, D-4, D-5, D-8. Chapter 6: Public Services, Facilities and Utilities, Policy Statement C-1, C-6. Chapter 7: Economic Development, Policy Statement D-4. Chapter 8: Land Use, Policy Statements LW-8
	City of Carey - Land Use, Overlay Areas, Objectives 2. Hazardous Areas, Objectives 1, 3; Natural Resources, Desirable Goal 2.
	City of Bellevue - Chapter 7 - Hazardous Areas, Goal 2, Objectives 1, 2, 3.
	City of Hailey - Section 2: Hazardous Areas and Wildland Fire Hazards, Goal 2.1.
H.3 - Reduce the risks of natural disasters—such as avalanches, wildfires, and floods—through site and community design.	City of Ketchum - Chapter 9: Public Safety and Utilities, Goal PSU-1, Policy PSU-1.2, 1.4.
	City of Sun Valley - Principle I, Goal 1, Objective 1.5.

Action Plan

OBJECTIVES

For each focus area and shared goal, see a subset of high-level objectives. The objectives are intended to be broad, so that they offer flexibility in implementation. The following Implementation section provides information about how the objectives will be prioritized over time.

APPROACHES

In shaping the scope and objectives of the Community Planning program at the Land Trust, the leaders in local government identified five approaches through which they welcome our support and partnership. Every objective adopts one of the following approaches:



ENGAGE:

Centering the community, the “engage” approach describes how the Land Trust will listen to, share information with, and involve stakeholders in land use planning. On various levels and through a mix of mediums, we will facilitate and host conversations about how to steward a more livable future for the people and wildlife of Blaine County.



EVALUATE:

The “evaluate” approach prioritizes access to up-to-date information. Reliable and relevant data is necessary to respond to the community’s concerns, inform planning decisions, and prioritize solutions. Importantly, accurate information can also help build consensus. We see where there are gaps in knowledge and understanding, then collaborate with partners to investigate the dynamics behind community needs and potential solutions.



EDUCATE:

When community issues or needs arise, they generally stem from a complex combination of factors. Ecological, hydrologic, geographic, economic and social trends influence the baseline characteristics of the Community Planning focus areas– summed up in our lived experience. Education supports us to understand the complexity of our lived experience, including the challenges we need to resolve and the solutions that support our shared goals.



ENCOURAGE:

The Land Trust recognizes the remarkable alignment between its vision for conservation and the shared goals of our leading partners, in local government. All the while, the Land Trust understands the pressures of competing priorities and developmental markets that threaten to compromise the bountiful environment and quality of life that the local community cherishes. The Land Trust is prepared to encourage its partners to act in alignment with our core values, when it’s most important to do so.



COORDINATE:

When the community needs a leader to address a community need or problem, the Land Trust is poised to coordinate solutions. Coordination involves going between people and groups to organize deliberation, resolution and action. Being flexible– plus overseeing a service area that is regional, not just local– the Land Trust is well positioned to work up and down the valley, between jurisdictions. Coordination is needed to coexist and make efficient use of resources.

HABITAT CONSERVATION

Ideal: Smart growth preserves the open space that affords Blaine County's natural beauty, agricultural lands, wildlife habitats and environmental resilience.

SHARED GOALS	OBJECTIVES
H.1 - To preserve open space and the natural features unique to the Blaine County communities, accommodate growth with infill and compact development.	H.1.a - Engage the community and governmental partners to embrace compact development, envisioning and mapping growth boundaries.
	H.1.b - Educate homeowners and the wider community about the environmental benefits of compact development, including its relevance to open space preservation.
	H.1.c - Educate the community about the driving forces, characteristics and consequences of sprawling development.
	H.1.d - Evaluate land use regulations in the floodplain and canyons to clarify the environmental impacts and trade-offs.
	H.1.e - Evaluate land use efficiency broadly, including opportunities for infill and redevelopment on vacant and underutilized land, within city limits and impact areas.
	H.1.f - Encourage incentives to preserve agricultural lands.
	H.1.g - Encourage a revamp of the Transfer of Development Rights program to incorporate a bank, communications hub, and the south valley cities.
H.2 - Minimize the impact of development on habitats and wildlife, especially in the floodplain and on hillsides.	H.2.a - Encourage projects and programs that minimize human-wildlife conflicts.
	H.2.b - Encourage incentives to preserve open space near critical and sensitive areas.
	H.2.c - Coordinate incentives for river, tributary, and floodplain reconnection.
	H.2.d - Coordinate incentives to replace rip rap on streambanks with natural treatments.
	H.2.e - Coordinate incentives to support backyard habitats.
	H.2.f - Coordinate incentives to remove fencing that is not wildlife-friendly
H.3 - Reduce the risks of natural disasters—such as avalanches, wildfires, and floods—through site and community design.	H.3.a - Engage homeowners associations to mitigate hazards on their properties.
	H.3.b - Engage community partners to build capacity for hazard mitigation.
	H.3.c - Educate the community about the importance of open space and compact community design to community resilience.
	H.3.d - Educate the community about how natural flood treatments can mitigate the risks of flooding.
	H.3.d - Coordinate incentives to mitigate the risks of wildland fire on private property, including fuels reduction and home hardening.

WOOD RIVER LAND TRUST



**SCAN HERE
to view the
full report**



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