



University of Idaho

Rangeland Center



UNIVERSITY OF IDAHO RANGELAND CENTER

STRATEGIC PLAN

2025-2029

[RANGELANDCENTER.ORG](https://rangelandcenter.org)



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Rangeland Center at the University of Idaho was established in 2011 by the Idaho State Legislature to address contemporary challenges facing Idaho rangelands and the communities that rely on them. The Center's interdisciplinary approach and emphasis on partnerships with agencies and organizations working on rangelands advances the study and management of rangelands in Idaho and the region. This strategic plan represents two years of

discussion among Center members, our Partners Advisory Council (PAC), and key individuals who care for and live on Idaho rangelands. To accomplish the goals laid out by the Idaho State legislature the Rangeland Center employs strategies of connection, coordination, collaboration, and communication to identify, prioritize, and address information needs related to sustainable rangeland management.



STRATEGIC PLAN

From our discussions with stakeholders, we have expanded the five focus areas from the previous strategic plan to ten priority topics that rangeland stakeholders see as affecting the health, productivity, and uses of rangelands in the next decade. These priority topics address challenges related to: 1) fire and fuels, 2) invasive plants, 3) restoration of rangeland systems, 4) grazing, 5) recreation, 6) energy development, 7) rangeland wildlife, 8) watershed function, 9) soil health, and 10) climate variability.

For each of these priority topics, stakeholder comments were used to identify needs associated with coordination, communication, collaboration, and connection. These needs serve to focus Rangeland Center activities and outputs. We will work with our PAC to evaluate the relevance of specific rangeland challenges and evaluate projects on an ongoing basis. With this strategic plan, the Rangeland Center strives to continue development of an effective organization that creates insight and fosters understanding for the stewardship of rangelands.



VISION

The Rangeland Center serves current and future generations by promoting stewardship of the rangeland resources which are vital to the ecological and economic health of Idaho and the region.

MISSION

The mission of the Rangeland Center is to empower the researchers and educators in Idaho who create knowledge and foster understanding for the stewardship and management of rangelands and to promote active partnerships with the individuals, organizations and communities who work and live on Idaho's rangelands.



INTRODUCTION

Rangelands (grasslands, shrublands, woodlands, and deserts) make up over half of Idaho's land area. These are diverse lands, comprised of the upland, wetland, and riparian habitats for many species. Rangelands provide value to Idahoans in many ways, including forage for livestock, clean water, recreational opportunities, and many of Idaho's iconic scenic vistas. These landscapes are complex mosaics of private and public ownership, necessitating collaborative approaches to management.

Sustainable management of Idaho's rangelands in the current context of ecological, economic, societal, and climatic changes necessitates integrative thinking, innovative practices, and collaborative approaches to maintain and restore these lands and the human communities that rely on them. The Rangeland Center works at the confluence of research and application, offering timely and relevant science to inform land management and providing hands-on learning opportunities for students, land managers and all Idahoans. The Rangeland Center fosters collaboration and builds partnerships with individuals and organizations to understand and craft

solutions for today's rangeland challenges by connecting academic expertise with local knowledge from those who manage and live on the land. The Rangeland Center Strategic Plan directly addresses two of the five pillars of the University of Idaho's 2026-2030 Strategic Plan. The Center and its members "harness research innovation and partnership" by encouraging and supporting interdisciplinary research and outreach and by engaging stakeholders from Idaho's communities to benefit our state and region. Additionally, the Center contributes to "optimizing operational excellence" by engaging our members across Idaho to effectively respond to emerging needs, challenges, and opportunities.

In the next five years (2025-2029), the Rangeland Center staff, Center members, and the PAC will develop projects and implement activities in the priority topics identified in this plan. We will seek partnerships and secure resources to accomplish our goals and leverage our resources to build greater capacity in our efforts.



GOALS

The goals of the Rangeland Center originate with the 2012 Idaho legislative act that established the Center and charged it to:

- *Create insight and foster understanding for the stewardship and management of rangelands*
- *Work in union with external partners to focus research, education and outreach to produce solutions that are responsive and relevant to contemporary rangeland issues*
- *Engage partners and stakeholders to jointly provide leadership for discovery of new knowledge and create science-based solutions for rangeland management*
- *Provide objective and relevant rangeland information for individuals, organizations and communities*
- *Offer learning opportunities for land stewardship*
- *Encourage and facilitate applied research to address specific issues and management challenges that arise on Idaho's diverse rangelands.*



STRATEGIES

The fundamental approaches of the Rangeland Center are **Connecting**, **Coordinating**, **Collaborating**, and **Communicating**.

The primary role of the Center is **CONNECTING** rangeland stakeholders with researchers and students to understand challenges facing rangelands and the communities dependent on them and to jointly develop solutions.

Through these connections, the Center **COORDINATES** research and outreach activities to address rangeland management needs.

A core philosophy of the Rangeland Center is **COLLABORATING** across disciplines and organizations to bring the best science to bear on Idaho's rangeland management challenges.

Finally, the Center prioritizes **COMMUNICATING** science-based information via education, outreach, and Extension to support rangeland management and promote the research projects and results of our members.



PRIORITY TOPICS

At the conclusion of the previous strategic plan, the Rangeland Center initiated an effort to focus and guide our work in the next five years. In 2023, the Center hosted listening sessions in the communities of Salmon, Challis, Pocatello, Shoshone, Boise, Sandpoint, and Cottonwood. A diverse cross-section of stakeholders attended the listening sessions, representing federal, state, and local resource management agencies and commissions, conservation organizations, consultants, farmers and ranchers, recreation groups, and elected officials.

Through feedback gained during the listening sessions with stakeholders and input from our PAC, ten priority topics emerged for sustainable rangeland management. These topics are an expansion of the five challenge areas from the Center's previous strategic plan, highlighting how the importance of some topics has grown since 2016.

By synthesizing the comments from each of the 8 stakeholder meetings, consistent themes emerged as to the areas needing focus for each topic. These suggestions were grouped into the Center's strategies of Connection, Coordination, Communication, and Collaboration. Stakeholder-provided suggestions are provided as examples of the needs identified in each focus area.

Each of the priority topics has considerable research, outreach, and management implementation needs. It is beyond the scope of the Rangeland Center to make large contributions to rangeland management in each of these topic areas. However, the priority topic areas serve as a means for organizing the Center's work, helping identify the most pressing needs, and ensuring the Center focuses on topics of highest importance to rangeland stakeholders.



2025-2029 PRIORITY TOPICS

FIRE & FUELS

Fire and fire frequency on rangelands impacts plant diversity, forage availability, and frequency of fire further affects ranchers' income when public lands are closed to grazing during recovery after fire. Annual grasses contribute to large-scale fire and loss of sagebrush. At higher elevations, sagebrush density can dominate fire effects suggesting loss of a mosaic of sagebrush densities across mountain big sagebrush landscapes. Stakeholders identified the need for additional coordination of research, communication via outreach and education, increased collaboration to implement management solutions, and connections between individuals and organizations working to manage fire and fuels on rangelands.



INVASIVE SPECIES

Invasive species impact rangelands with respect to productivity, diversity, value for other rangeland uses, and access to users. Invasive species include diseases like West Nile virus that stress populations of birds, and invasive plants like cheatgrass that reduce land productivity, diversity of plant communities, and fire return intervals. Invasive species are a persistent and growing threat to the sustainability of Idaho's rangelands, incurring millions of dollars per year in management costs and economic losses. Stakeholders identified the need for coordination of additional research, continued work on communicating via education and outreach, and increased collaboration related to invasive species management.

2025-2029 PRIORITY TOPICS



RESTORATION

Restoration of degraded rangelands and reclamation of lands disturbed through energy development and other activities promote natural processes that lead to sustainable and resilient ecosystems. Across the state, stakeholders discussed many aspects of restoration including how to improve the success of plantings and revegetation, and availability (in terms of quantity and affordability) and use of seeds from diverse species in restoration. Stakeholders identified needs for coordination of additional research, continued work on communication via education and outreach, and improved collaboration related to rangeland restoration.

GRAZING

Livestock grazing is most often recognized as the dominant use of rangelands for economic gain and rural community stability. Grazing is also influential in terms of how it affects other rangeland values including wildlife, recreation, and open space. Stakeholders identified needs for coordination of additional research, continued work on communication via education and outreach, and improved collaboration related to grazing management.

2025-2029 PRIORITY TOPICS

RECREATION

Over the past decade, public recreation on rangelands has increased dramatically. In turn, the impacts of recreation and conflicts between recreators and other rangeland users have also grown to the point that recreation must be considered as its own land use and managed accordingly. Stakeholders across Idaho raised concerns over how to manage recreation to provide access while limiting conflicts and negative impacts. Stakeholders identified needs for coordination of additional research, continued work on communication via education and outreach, and improved collaboration related to rangeland recreation.

ENERGY DEVELOPMENT

The drive for US energy independence and clean energy solutions has put increasing pressure on rangelands. While Idaho is not a significant producer of oil and gas, our public and private rangelands are increasingly seen as potential sites for solar, wind, and geothermal energy installations. Simultaneously, Idaho is experiencing increased applications on rangelands for energy infrastructure projects such as transmission lines and distribution facilities. Energy development is different from other rangeland uses in that it has the potential to permanently change the character of rangeland systems through activities including road building and infrastructure installation. Stakeholders identified needs for coordination of additional research, continued work on communication via education and outreach, and improved collaboration related to energy development on rangelands.

RANGELAND WILDLIFE

Idaho is home to iconic symbols of rangelands like the Greater sage grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) and pronghorn (*Antilocapra americana*) as well as many other species that call rangelands home or pass through. Rangelands must be managed in a way that recognizes these species' needs as well as the multiple uses that occur on these lands. Stakeholders identified needs for coordination of additional research emphasizing the social, economic, and ecological interconnections among wildlife and rangeland communities, continued work on communication via education and outreach, and improved collaboration on developing policies and implementing management actions related to rangeland wildlife.



2025-2029 PRIORITY TOPICS

WATERSHED FUNCTION

Idaho's rangeland stakeholders saw challenges on how to maintain and improve watershed function when facing interacting factors like climate variability, invasive species encroachment, and loss of critical wildlife species. Stakeholders identified needs for coordination of additional research, continued work on communication via education and outreach, and improved collaboration related to sustaining watershed function on rangelands.



SOILS AND SOIL HEALTH

Healthy soils are the basis for sustaining rangeland productivity and resilience. While much attention has been focused on soil health in recent years, ranchers and rangeland managers struggle with conflicting messages about the effects of management (e.g., grazing) and disturbance (e.g., fire, invasive species) on soil health. Additionally, while the opportunity for rangeland soils to store carbon is strongly promoted by carbon market businesses, the magnitude and variability of that potential is unclear. Stakeholders identified needs for coordination of additional research, continued work on communication via education and outreach, and improved collaboration related to soil health and soil carbon in rangelands.

2025-2029 PRIORITY TOPICS



CLIMATE VARIABILITY

Idaho is experiencing extremes in temperature and precipitation and changes in seasonal weather patterns. Rangeland managers in Idaho need strategies for both adapting to these changes and mitigating further changes. Stakeholders identified needs for coordination of additional research, continued work on communication via education and outreach, and improved collaboration related to sustaining rangeland systems in the face of increasing climate variability.





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Promoting collaborative solutions for rangelands