FRONTIER

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

2026-2030

FrontierCR.org

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Jeff McCurdy
President/CEO

The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) 2025–2029 for South-Central Idaho, developed by Frontier Community Resources (FrontierCR), outlines a strategic framework to promote regional economic resilience, growth, and equity. FrontierCR, a designated Economic Development District (EDD), serves the eight counties and 34 cities of South central Idaho in a predominantly rural region with a population of approximately 210,000.

Mission and Purpose

FrontierCR's mission is "To develop partnerships to promote economic opportunities by acting as a catalyst in providing resources that foster resilient communities across Southern Idaho". The CEDS serves as a roadmap for aligning regional priorities with federal support to stimulate job creation, infrastructure development, and business growth.

Key Findings and Regional Context

- Demographics: The region is experiencing steady population growth, with a significant Hispanic population (25.2%). Despite low unemployment, underemployment and poverty remain concerns.
- Workforce: Challenges include a shrinking labor force, language barriers, and low educational attainment. However, regional efforts are underway to expand training and apprenticeship programs.
- Assets: The region boasts a prime geographic location, abundant outdoor recreation, opportunity zones, and strong agricultural and food processing industries.
- Infrastructure: Transportation, water, energy, and broadband are critical areas of focus. Projects like the Snake River Canyon bridge and broadband expansion are central to future development.
- Resilience: The strategy addresses vulnerabilities such as extreme weather, cybersecurity threats, housing shortages, and childcare deserts.

Strategic Goals

1. Promote Regional Economic Empowerment: Enhance manufacturing, logistics, and innovation; support tourism and downtown revitalization; expand small business support.
2. Stimulate Regional Community Prosperity: Improve infrastructure, healthcare access, housing, and land use planning; promote water-smart policies.
3. Strengthen Workforce Development: Align education and training with industry needs; expand food science and processing programs.

Evaluation Framework

The strategy includes measurable benchmarks and performance indicators to track progress across key initiatives, including small business support, infrastructure funding, healthcare access, and workforce training.

COMMONLY USED ACRONYMS

CDBG: Community Development Block Grant
CREC: Center for Regional Economic Competitiveness
CSI: College of Southern Idaho
CTE: Career Technical Education
DEQ: Department of Environmental Quality
DOL: Department of Labor
EDA: Economic Development Administration
EDDI: Economic Development Districts of Idaho
EPA: Environmental Protection Agency
FHS: Family Health Services
IDOC: Idaho Department of Commerce
IRP: Intermediary Relending Program
ITD: Idaho Transportation Department
NADO: National Association of Development Organizations
PTAC: Public Transportation Advisory Council
REDS: Rural Economic Development Services
RLF: Revolving Loan Fund
SBA: Small Business Administration
SBDC: Small Business Development Center
SIEDO: Southern Idaho Economic Development Organization
U of I: University of Idaho
URA: Urban Renewal Agency
URD: Urban Renewal District
USDA-RD: U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development
WFD: Workforce Development

SUMMARY BACKGROUND

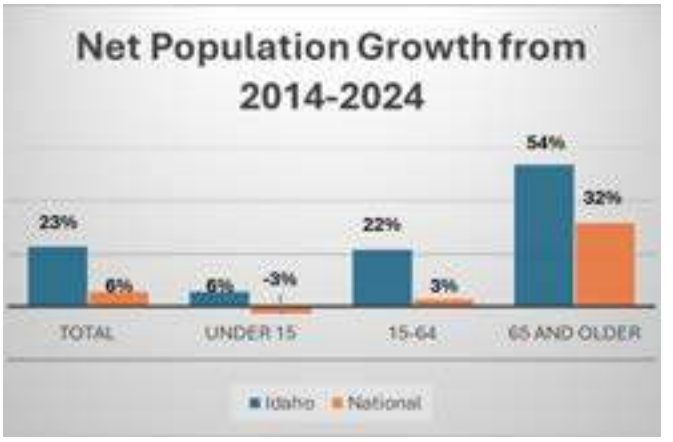
DEMOGRAPHICS

The South Central region has a population of 210,746 and is comprised of eight counties and thirty-four cities. The region is considered predominantly rural with only one city (City of Twin Falls) with a population over 50,000. The region is primarily White; however, Hispanics comprise 25.2% of the total regional population, almost double the statewide percentage of 13.3% and 6% higher than the national percentage of 19%.

The City of Twin Falls is the eighth largest Idaho city and the largest community in the Region with a population of 53,219 according to the latest 5-year estimate from the American Community Survey. Twin Falls serves as the major retail, wholesale, medical and educational center for the Region. Boise, the State Capital, is located roughly 120 miles to the west along Interstate 84. Boise's estimated population exceeds 236,000 and is the State's largest community. The City of Pocatello lies roughly 120 miles to the east along Interstate 86 and is the sixth largest city in the State.

The Senior Connection in Hailey, above, is one of many Senior Centers to have benefited from Community Development Block Grant funding.

Population Changes



From 2014 to 2024, Idaho's population increased by 23%, with projections showing that trend continuing for years to come. The state has been a top-ranked state for population growth numerous times in the last decade. Regionally, South Central Idaho saw 16.7% population growth since 2010, with 13.5% growth in Working Age Population.

Socio-Economic Status

While regional unemployment is routinely below the state and national averages, the regional poverty rate is above the state average with the median household income also lagging. This underscores the concern of underemployment and the need for additional good paying, benefited positions within the region.

Unemployment Rate

- Region - 3.4%
- Idaho - 3.7%
- Nation - 4.3%

Median Household Income

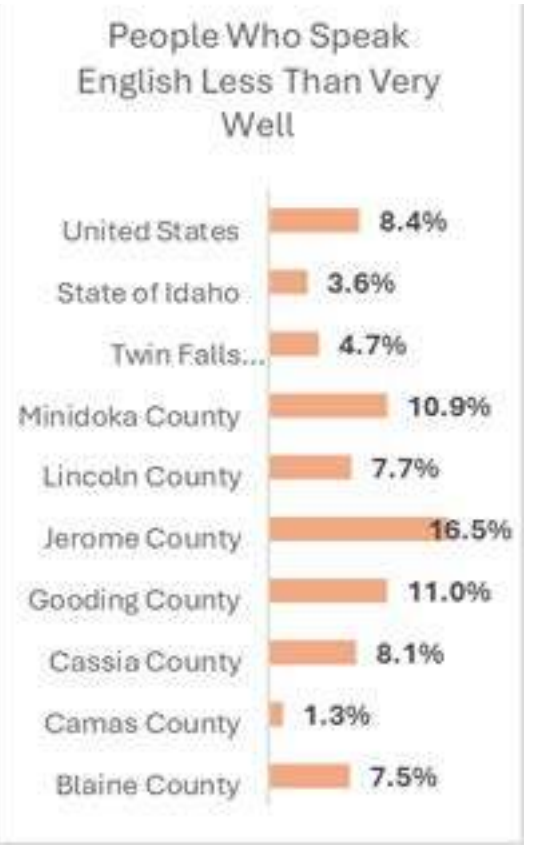
- Region - $67,527
- Idaho - $74,636
- Nation - $78,538

Poverty Rate

- Region - 11.4%
- Idaho - 10.6%
- Nation - 12.4 %

Workforce Utlization

People remain the most important piece in the regional economic development puzzle. Maximizing local talent is critical to the continued success of the region. On the surface the labor market has positive indicators, such as the regional unemployment rate trending lower than both the state and national rates. Nevertheless, there are several demographics within the labor force that are cause for concern including a shrinking workforce and underutilization of workforce talents. Between August 2024 and August 2025, the regional labor force decreased by 340 people while overall employment declined by only 240. Overcoming language barriers among workers is another key component to fully utilizing the region's labor force. Language data shows a significant portion of the regional population with limited English proficiency. These workers often accept low-paying, low-skilled jobs, resulting in underemployment for a significant segment of the workforce. A significant portion of Idaho's workforce is comprised of unauthorized immigrants. According to a 2024 report from the University of Idaho James A. and Louise McClure Center for Public Policy Research, there were 35,000 unauthorized immigrants in 2021 and 86% of those immigrants are working. These workers fill an unmet need in agriculture, construction, and service industries. Without them, business growth would be limited and, in some cases, would require scaling back production due to lack of staffing. Fully utilizing the entire regional population to develop a qualified labor force is needed to retain businesses and quality jobs within the region.



Educational Attainment

The region continues to struggle with overall education attainment. At a regional level, 85.4% of those 25 and older have earned at least a high school diploma, compared to Idaho's 91.4%. The region also trails the state to the attainment of a bachelor's or graduate degree. However, historical analysis shows the region is making progress in narrowing the gap. Collaboration among regional stakeholders including College of Southern Idaho (CSI) and major employers has both increased demand and access to higher education opportunities. The CSI Workforce Development and Training department has provided customized training to regional employers including Chobani, Cliff Bar, and Idaho Power just to name a few. They also provide numerous registered apprenticeship programs that allow on-the-job training. State efforts to provide funding opportunities to high-school graduates focusing on in-demand fields have also increased access and opportunity.

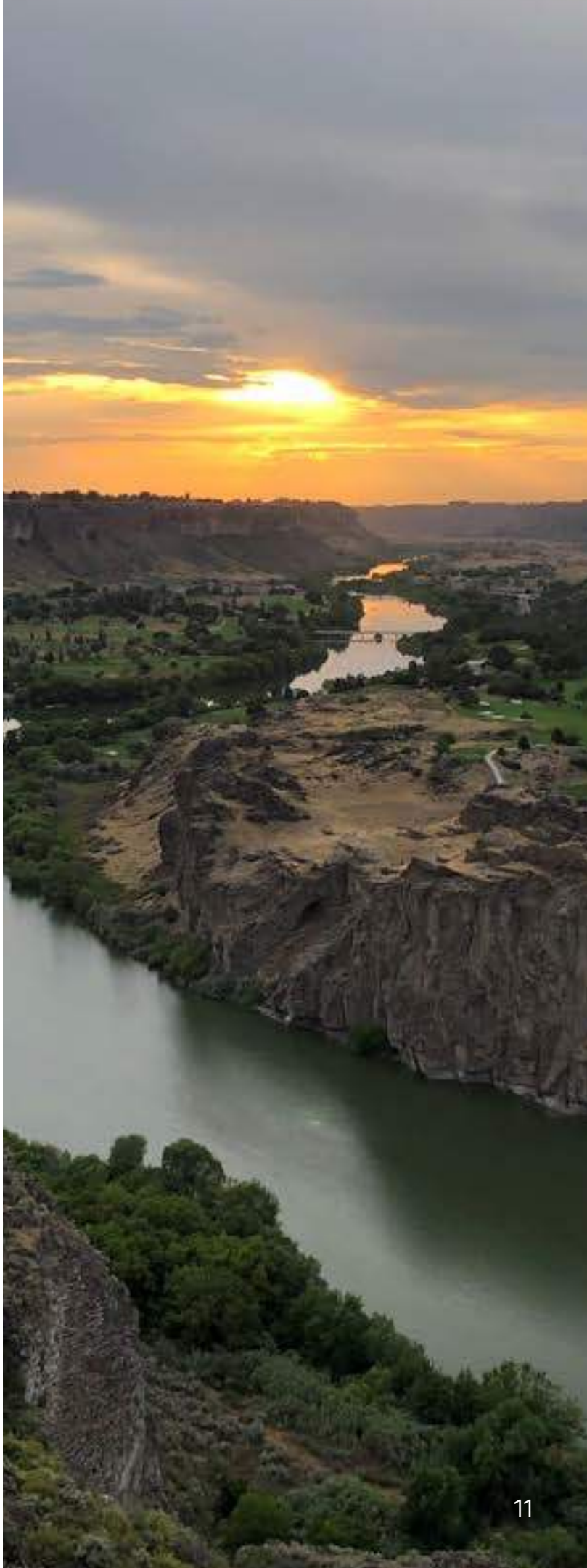
Additionally, the three Idaho University's provide access to bachelor's degrees and research opportunities through a Higher Education Center located on the College of Southern Idaho campus and the University of Idaho Center for Agriculture, Food, and the Environment (Idaho CAFÉ). Currently under construction, Idaho CAFÉ will include the largest research dairy in the nation. The dairy is slated to begin milking operations in 2026 with 400 cows with the potential to grow to 2,000 cows. The dairy will focus on innovation, identifying ways to make the industry more efficient. The facility will also include distance-learning classroom space for traditional college coursework, extension courses, and workforce development.

REGIONAL ASSETS

Prime Geographic Location

Centrally located in the southern portion of the State of Idaho, the region is home to several conservation areas, nationally designated recreation areas, protected wildlife habitats, and historic communities. These resources contribute to the economic vitality and livability of the region. The region is composed of eight counties, thirty-four incorporated communities, and encompasses 11,502 square miles. Of the 7,364,864 acres, approximately 63% are public lands, which brings distinctive economic challenges including a limited property tax base, changing federal legislation and guidance, buildable land constraints, and increasingly popular travel destinations.

The Region is comprised of a complex mixture of different land types. The mountainous area in the southeast portion of the region lies in the Basin and Range Geomorphic Province; the mountainous or hilly areas of the South Central and Southwestern portions are part of the Owyhee Uplands section of the Columbia Intermountain Province; the central part of the Region from east to west, lies in the Eastern Snake River Plain. The Snake River Plain boarders the southern side of the basaltic Mount Bennett Hills with the fertile agricultural lands of the Camas Prairie on the southern side. The Camas Prairie Centennial Marsh Wildlife Management Area in Camas County provides more than 6,000 acres of aquatic and upland habitat for waterfowl breeding and nesting. Historically, the area was used by the Bannock, Shoshoni, and Northern Paiute tribes for camas root gathering and summer hunting.



Further north lies the rugged Idaho Batholith mountains – the Soldiers, Pioneers, Boulders, and Sawtooth's. Elevations range from 2,000 feet where the Snake River exits Gooding County to 12,078 at Hyndman Peak east of Ketchum. With some areas referred to as high desert and others as forested mountain, the Region exhibits numerous soil types and natural vegetation varieties.

Due to these varied landforms, the overall regional climate is considered moderate. Although the area has four seasons, there exists a wide range of temperatures and conditions throughout the year. The higher mountain areas generally experience more snow and cold, while the Hagerman Valley, nestled in the Snake River canyon, is capable of raising fruit and melons. Avid golfers can play nearly year-round, while skiers can generally enjoy snowy conditions from November through April.Rangeland constitutes the major land use with over half (56.5%) of the Region designated as Range. Agricultural uses require approximately 1.7 million acres (23%) of the available land. Lava flows have caused the classification of slightly over 1 million acres in the Region as "barren". Development in Lincoln County is seriously affected by this problem as more than half of the County's available land area is designated as barren. Lava flows also present land use challenges in Blaine, Jerome, and Minidoka Counties. Forestland covers six percent (6.01%) of the Region. Only one-half of one percent (0.5%) of the Region is classified as Water and four-tenths of one percent (0.4%) as Urban.

OUTDOOR RECREATION POSSIBILITIES

Southern Idaho offers an impressive array of outdoor recreation opportunities that cater to adventurers, nature enthusiasts, and families alike. From hiking through scenic canyons and mountain biking across rugged terrain to hunting in vast wilderness areas and fishing in pristine rivers and lakes, the region provides year-round activities for all skill levels. In the winter months, snowmobiling and skiing become popular pastimes, while warmer seasons invite ATV trail riding, camping, and wildlife viewing. Beyond its traditional outdoor offerings, Southern Idaho also attracts visitors from across the globe with its unique geological features and its rich cultural heritage, including historic sites and vibrant local communities. These uncommon attractions, combined with the region's accessibility and natural beauty, make Southern Idaho a premier destination for outdoor recreation and exploration.

"AS A LIFELONG IDAHOAN, I HAVE VISITED ALL CORNERS OF OUR DIVERSE STATE AND STILL FIND MYSELF DISCOVERING NEW PLACES TO EXPLORE"
GOVERNOR BRAD LITTLE

Base Jumping

Another opportunity for the extreme sport enthusiast is the Perrine Bridge across the Snake River in Twin Falls. This is one of the few places in the U.S. where jumping off a bridge is not only permitted but embraced. When the weather is warm and the wind is right, BASE (Buildings, Antennae, Spans, Earth) jumpers come from around the globe to jump off the Perrine Bridge in Twin Falls. With the banks of the Snake River providing the landing spot over 486 feet below, the Perrine Bridge offers some of the most ideal and breathtaking jumping conditions.

Sawtooth National Recreation Area

The Sawtooth National Recreation Area (SNRA) is primarily located in Blaine and Custer Counties. With spectacular scenic beauty and recreational opportunities, the SNRA offers year-round outdoor activities. Established in 1972, the SNRA covers roughly 758,000 acres. Within the recreational area 217,000 acres are designated as Wilderness. The SNRA boasts five mountain ranges, 1,142 lakes, 1,000 miles of streams, and 740 miles of maintained hiking trails, and 36 developed campgrounds.

Boating

From raging whitewater rapids to calm flat-water, the region is blessed with an abundance of water opportunities on one of the premier rivers of the West - the Snake River. Centennial Park in Twin Falls provides river access for canoeing, kayaking, and paddle boarding. Further south in the Hagerman Valley, there is a whitewater stretch that is a favorite with paddlers of all abilities including Class II and Class III rapids. It combines big water with modest rapids in the warmest part of the state. More advanced whitewater enthusiasts can tackle big rapids on the “Murtaugh Stretch”. This 14-mile section of the Snake River is renowned for its 16 class III, IV and V rapids. Other fishing and boating opportunities include Salmon Falls Creek Reservoir, Murtaugh Lake, Wilson Lake, Magic Reservoir, and countless other streams and water bodies.

Rock Climbing

City of Rocks National Reserve and Castle Rocks State Park rivals Yosemite National Park as a western favorite for technical rock climbers and is widely considered one of the top rock-climbing destinations in the world. Designated as a National Reserve in 1988, this area holds a prominent place in the history of the Oregon and California trails. Wagon ruts and axle grease graffiti left by pioneers can be seen among the massive rock formations rising from the valley floor.

Opportunity Zones

Established by Congress in 2017 through the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, Opportunity Zones (OZ) encourage long-term investments in low-income urban and rural communities. Private investment projects that place 90% or more of their funds into an Opportunity Zone can earn tax relief on the capital gains generated through those investments. The South Central region boosts five designated areas: City of Buhl, Gooding County, City of Jerome, City of Rupert, and City of Twin Falls. Originally set to expire at the end of 2026, the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, passed in July 2025, made the program permanent. The South Central region is home to the first completed OZ project with 2nd South Market, a 13,000 square-foot food hall located in downtown Twin Falls. The hall provides space for seven food and beverage vendors that employ nearly 80 people. Owners Lisa and Dave Buddecke attributed the OZ program to being instrumental in the food hall's success (See Appendix 3 for city/county specific information)[i].

2nd South Market in Twin Falls is Idaho's first food hall. It was created utilizing Opportunity Zone tax incentives. In August 2025, Idaho Senator Mike Crapo and Scott Turner, Secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) toured the business.

Transportation

Transportation and transportation related issues are always at the forefront of economic development considerations. The region has been able to attract several manufacturing, processing, and distributing firms by capitalizing on our central location for the Pacific Northwest and Pacific Rim markets. Maintaining transportation infrastructure is a critical part of our overall economic development strategy.

Metropolitan Transportation Planning

In December 2023 the Magic Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization (MVMPO) was formed, as required by federal status for urban areas with a population of 50,000 or greater. The organization member agencies include the City of Kimberly, City of Twin Falls, Hillsdale Highway District, Twin Falls Highway District, Jerome Highway District, Twin Falls County, Jerome County, and ITD – District 4. The organization meets regularly to carry out transportation and transit planning activities. MVMPO is currently developing Vision 2050: Connecting Magic Valley, the region's first comprehensive transportation plan. The plan will focus on safety, mobility, state of good repair, economic vitality, resiliency & environment, fairness & accessibility, and growth management.

Rail Service

Eastern Idaho Railroad operated by WATCO, the region's short-line railroad, provides logistics and freight services for the area's perishable food producers. A 110,000 square-foot food-grade warehouse in Burley provides rail service five days a week. The facility specializes in perishable food items, powdered milk, lumber, steel, plastic resin and industrial packaging.

While rail services for moving commodities are available, the region suffers a complete absence of passenger rail service. Amtrak discontinued the Pioneer Route, which ran between Seattle and Chicago, in 1997. The route had four stops in southern Idaho, including Shoshone. In 2023 the City of Boise and other stakeholders began an initiative to bring passenger rail back to the area. To move the project forward funding is needed to complete feasibility studies, engineering, environmental reviews, and construction.

Commercial Air Service

Friedman Memorial Airport (SUN) in Blaine County is Idaho's second busiest airport. It serves the communities of Blaine County, including Ketchum, Sun Valley and Hailey and the world-famous Sun Valley Resort. SUN offers non-stop commercial air service to Salt Lake City, Seattle, and Los Angeles. Due to site limitations, which cause winter weather-related diversions, an effort has been under way for some years to relocate SUN out of the relatively narrow mountain valley to flatter terrain to the south.

Regularly scheduled commercial air service is also available at the Magic Valley Regional Airport located roughly 10 miles south of Twin Falls. The airfield is capable of handling single engine aircraft, small private jets, and the occasional 727. Decreased travel demand, due in part to COVID-19, resulted in a reduction of flight offerings, The minimal service has created economic hardships for area business and tourism travelers. To ensure continued service to Salt Lake City, the City of Twin Falls and Twin Falls County approved a minimum revenue agreement with SkyWest in Spring 2022.

Airfreight service for overnight delivery is also available through several major carriers. Two commercial and twelve general aviation airports also service South Central Idaho: Friedman Memorial, Magic Valley Regional, Gooding Municipal, Burley Municipal, Buhl Municipal, Camas County Airport, Hazelton Municipal, Oakley Municipal, Jerome County, Pine Airport, Picabo Airport, Minidoka Airport, Carey Airport, and Magic Reservoir Airport. These airports provide vital services to South Central Idaho such as charter flights, emergency medical transport, easy access to Idaho’s backcountry for recreation, agriculture support, and wildfire suppression.

Highway

Despite consistent efforts to improve mobility within the region, communities continue to face the ongoing issues of increasing traffic congestion, deteriorating roadways, limited alternatives to automobile travel, and archaic funding mechanisms that do not keep pace with the needs of the system. Notwithstanding efforts at the State level to add new revenue to address immediate highway improvement issues, funding for the roadway network has not kept pace with either maintenance needs or the need to increase capacity where traffic volume has grown most significantly.

The ability to move perishable food products quickly and reliably is key. The 2023 Strategic Freight Plan by the Idaho Transportation Department (ITD) identified trucks as the predominate mode of transportation for freight. Ensuring sufficient and safe highway systems is critical. The Perrine Bridge in Twin Falls functions as a major throughfare with over 40,000 crossings per day, with 31% being freight vehicles. The 1,500 foot bridge opened in 1976 with four lanes and is the eight-highest bridge in the U.S. Idaho Congressional Representative Mike Simpson identified this area as one of the state's worst choke points in May 2023. Rapid regional population growth (the Magic Valley has grown by 40% in the last 20 years) and expected future growth have made an additional Snake River crossing to enhance mobility, alleviate congestion, and improve safety a paramount concern for the region.

There is support for construction of an additional bridge by both the Jerome and Twin Falls County Commissioners, which could elevate traffic concerns entering and exiting the City of Twin Falls. An additional bridge would also simplify shipping routes for interstate trucking. ITD initially identified fourteen possible crossing options. Those fourteen alternatives have been narrowed to four and are currently being reviewed as part of a National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) environmental review. This process is expected to last until 2028.

Commercial Truck Driving

Seasonal agricultural commodities and value-added products produced in South Central Idaho rely primarily on the trucking industry to get products to market. High retirement rates among the existing workforce and increased demand due to increases in online shopping during the COVID-19 pandemic led to "almost 9,500 unique job posting throughout Idaho in 2021 for heavy and tractor-trailer truck drivers". Intentional recruitment efforts, including a new registered apprenticeship program are steps in the right direction. Collaborations among Mountain West leadership to negotiate current age restrictions on interstate travel would also lessen the strain of too few drivers.

WATER

In South Central Idaho, water is the lifeblood of practically every aspect of the regional economy. The region was nicknamed "Magic Valley" because of the blooming of the desert triggered by irrigation. The harnessing of the Snake River, Wood River and Snake River Plain Aquifer has created an agricultural oasis supporting many diverse crops. However, during times of drought, this oasis can turn on itself, crippling the regional economy. For example, known for its potato production, Idaho also leads the nation in potato seed production. This commodity can be severely impacted by hot, dry drought conditions, leading to reduced yields.

Totally dependent on snowfall in the upper basins of Grand Teton and Yellowstone National Parks, the economic security of the region relies heavily on a dynamically changing asset that is impervious to our needs. For example, in July 2021, all of Idaho was considered abnormally dry according to the National Integrated Drought Information System. South Central Idaho was categorized as “in extreme drought” with portions of the region categorized as exception drought. Snowpack for 2022 proved to be disappointing as snow was already melting April 1, the benchmark for peak snowpack. On April 29, 2022, Governor Little approved an Idaho Department of Water Resources emergency drought declaration for all 34 counties in Southern Idaho, with reservoirs between 20-65% of capacity[i]. A year later, the region was blessed with above normal snowpack and a cool spring, which eased drought conditions and allowed for some aquifer recharge. In 2024 the magnitude of water issues in the state came to a head when a curtailment order was issued to 6,400 junior groundwater users due to a predicted water shortfall. While the curtailment only lasted three weeks and ultimately a new water agreement was reached in November, it showed what a precious resource water continues to be for the region and the state.

Being prepared for future drought conditions is essential to maintaining regional prosperity. Exploration and promotion of techniques to reduce water consumption and increase efficiency, such as converting irrigation canals to closed pipelines and implementation of soil moisture monitors is needed to ensure the region’s continued ability to produce agriculture products. Cloud seeding also provides an opportunity to more effectively utilize water resources. “Cloud seeding is a physical process whereby a seeding agent comprised of minute particles is released into an existing cloud formation, providing a surface for supercooled liquid water molecules to bond and formulate ice crystals. Water molecules freeze on contact with the particles and begin to grow into a snowflake as it encounters other water molecules, until the snowflake reaches a density heavy enough to fall to the ground as precipitation.”[ii] Four cloud seeding projects currently exist in Idaho as part of a collaborative partnership between the Idaho Water Resource Board, Idaho Power Company, and local water users, The program operational periods run from November 1st to March 31st.

As a result of the overwhelming connection between water and the economy, the region’s leaders must pay special attention to water quality and quantity issues.

BROADBAND ACCESS

The lack of adequate broadband in many areas of the South Central region was brought to light during the 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic as world-wide stay-at-home orders were issued. In response, FrontierCR prepared eight successful applications that yielded $7.2 million in Idaho Broadband Grant Awards to rural Idaho communities. While the majority of stay-at-home orders have been lifted globally, the pandemic continues to reshape how many choose to work. Nationally, those who can work from home are choosing to do so at a higher rate than prior to the health crisis. Additionally, the ability to work from home gives workers the option to live anywhere with consistent internet access, making leaving large urban areas a reality. The wide-open spaces of Idaho have proved to be an attractive option. In 2021, Idaho was the fastest growing state in the nation.

This shift in preference to work from home and to do so in rural Idaho can only be supported with ongoing improvements to broadband coverage and connectivity. High-speed internet access has shifted from a luxury to an infrastructure necessity in order for cities and counties to attract and retain individuals, businesses, and industry. Despite the efforts to improve broadband access Idaho is currently lagging behind the rest of the nation. Only 79.8% of Idaho residents have access to 100 Mbps broadband (46th in the nation) and only 68.4% have access to 1G broadband (32nd in the nation). Closing the digital divide across South Central Idaho ensures regional access to education and healthcare while making our communities more attractive to industrial development and growth.

SMALL BUSINESS LENDING

Frontier Community Resources helps strengthen economic vitality of the region by assisting small businesses in obtaining commercial financing. The FrontierCR Loan Program focuses solely on the progression of small businesses. Business owners are walked through step-by-step to find financing solutions that will meet their ever-changing needs. All types of for-profit businesses, from the entrepreneur looking to launch a new product to the seasoned business looking to expand their operations, are assisted through this program. Collaborating with banking partners, in addition to working with clients individually, allows FrontierCR to provide financing for real estate, equipment, inventory, tenant improvements and working capital.

Occasionally, there are some instances where lending institutions are unable to finance certain projects. In those instances, FrontierCR administers an array of internal loan programs in which we can take on the financing of an entire project. Borrowers must have marketable skills, service, or product available to the public. Applicants must demonstrate that the business has or will have adequate cash flow and profit to repay the loan. See Appendix 2 for more information on the individual loan programs administered by FrontierCR. This effort has positively supported the economic growth and businesses throughout the region and the entire State of Idaho. FrontierCR will continue its efforts in administrating these loan programs to promote economic growth.

ENERGY

Hydroelectric power is a major resource in bringing electricity to the eight counties of South Central Idaho. Additionally, living above the hot spot that created Yellowstone National Park provides a ready source of geothermal resources for power generation and hot water for space heating. This regional asset contributes to Idaho's low utility rates. In 2025, Idaho had the lowest residential electricity rates in the nation. The diversification of Idaho's energy sources will ensure the continuation of these low rates.

Idaho utilizes numerous forms of renewable energy to meet the growing demands of the state and nation. In 2023, 68% of electricity generated in Idaho was from renewable sources, making Idaho 5th in the nation. In 2021, wind power accounted for 16% of the net electric grid in Idaho, generating 2,655,000 megawatt hours. The Snake River Plain, which encompasses South Central Idaho, is an area with high wind-generate potential within the State of Idaho. As of May 2023, 15 wind turbine projects and 170 turbines were operational in South Central Idaho, with additional farms being discussed.

Efforts to utilize anaerobic digesters to convert methane rich gas from manure into natural gas is also underway in the region. In November 2021, Shell Oil Products US announced plans to construct a renewable natural gas production facility within an operating dairy in Wendell. The facility will have the capacity to produce as much as 400,000 MMBtu per year of natural gas.

HEALTH CARE & EMERGENCY SERVICES

Between 2018 and 2020, Idaho experienced a significant loss of its rural nursing workforce—26%—which has had lasting impacts on healthcare access and affordability. Workforce shortages decreased access to healthcare and contribute to overall higher medical costs. In both 2021 and 2022, several Idaho hospitals were forced to activate “crisis standards of care,” including the rationing of services, due to overwhelming demand and limited resources. The COVID-19 pandemic and its variants pushed the healthcare system to its limits, highlighting the state’s inadequacies.

In response, numerous not-for-profit healthcare providers—including Family Health Services, North Canyon Medical Center, and St. Luke’s Magic Valley Regional Medical Center —have stepped up to expand access and innovate care delivery. Their efforts include establishing rural community clinics, implementing tele-pharmacy services, offering on-demand physician access via mobile devices, and enabling mobile access to medical records. Additional initiatives include Community Health EMS, Hospital at Home programs, Center for Community Health outreach, mobile 3D mammography, on-site occupational health services, embedded school counselors, and the construction of affordable housing for hospital staff. As the region continues to grow and urban density increases, emergency services face mounting challenges in keeping communities safe. Across South-central Idaho, nearly every community has identified updated equipment and expanded training as top priorities to meet evolving public safety needs.

BROWNFIELD REVITALIZATION PROGRAM

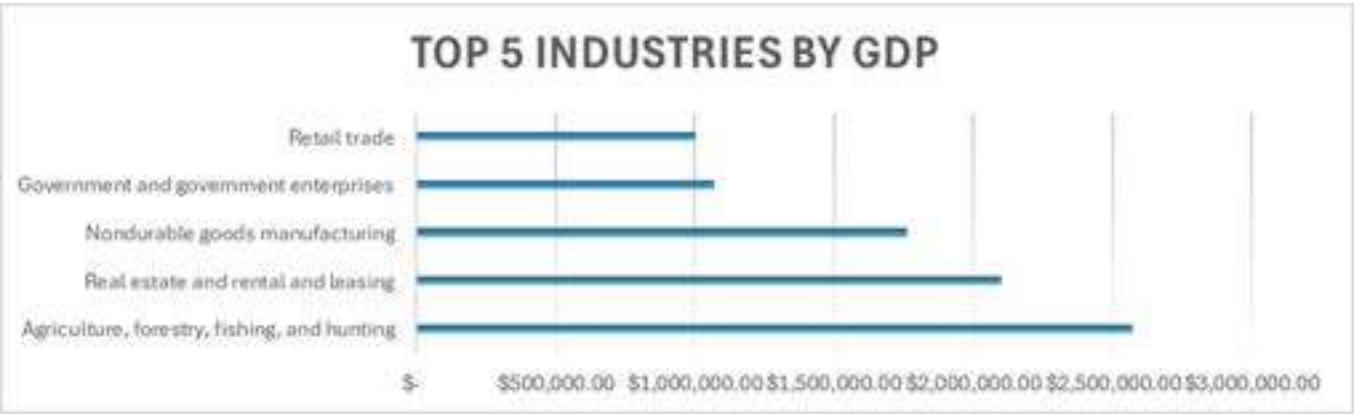
Since 2021, Frontier Community Resources has utilized funding from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to encourage the revitalization of potentially contaminated properties in South Central Idaho. Funding from EPA was used to complete Phase I & Phase II Environmental Assessments and Cleanup Planning on properties where historical use creates a probability of contamination, which discourages reuse. In addition to assessment funding, Frontier CR also received funding to establish a loan program for cleanup of contaminated properties. Environmental assessments can provide the necessary information for a purchaser to feel confident in moving forward with the purchase, remodel, and eventual revitalization of a potentially contaminated property. The loan program provides access to capital specifically for contamination cleanup, which is not readily available in most communities. Idaho Therapy in Motion (below) in Gooding was able to utilize the assessment program to determine if hazardous materials were found at the property they were purchasing. A previously vacant building on Main Street is now an operating business, providing the community with a needed service.

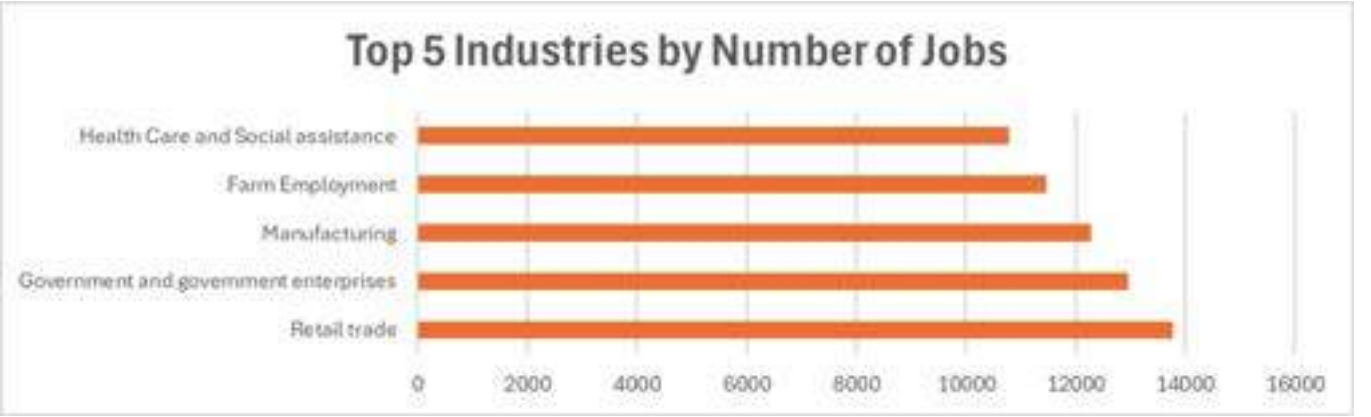
COLLABORATION

Collaboration among community and economic development professionals is a key factor in the region's success. In 2023, Idaho was selected as one of six states to receive technical assistance from the Center for Regional Economic Competitiveness. Funded by EDA and NADO, the "Policy Academy" initiative was based on a need to better align planning efforts. Named 44Go! to represent the forty-four counties in the state, the initiative vision is to formalize and institutionalize collaborative regional and state planning processes to create an inclusive economic development community within the state. Significant time was spent building relationships among the academy participants and identifying the role each organization plays in economic development. Participants concluded culture change among the state's economic development professionals, including long-term commitment to ongoing collaboration, transparency, and expanded communication efforts is the first step to align planning efforts and for state-wide economic prosperity.

INDUSTRY CLUSTERS

South Central Idaho is home to a diverse and dynamic economy, driven by a blend of healthcare, education, food processing, agriculture, and tourism. Key industry clusters in the region include advanced food manufacturing, agribusiness, health services, and education. Major employers reflect this economic diversity: St. Luke's Magic Valley Regional Medical Center is the largest health care provider in the region, while Chobani, Glanbia Foods, Amalgamated Sugar Company, and McCain Foods represent the region's robust food processing and agribusiness industries. Sun Valley Resort highlights the importance of tourism and recreation, and educational institutions like the College of Southern Idaho, Twin Falls School District, and Cassia County Joint School District play a vital role in workforce development. Additionally, large retailers such as Wal-Mart contribute to the region's retail and service economy. Together, these employers, as well as a robust small-business ecosystem, form the backbone of South Central Idaho's economic vitality and community well-being.





AGRICULTURE

The South Central region is an agriculture and manufacturing hub. Once an unforgiven desert, the implementation of surface irrigation made farming a reality. Today, agriculture production and the associated food and beverage processing account for a significant portion of the State of Idaho's gross revenues in both sales and GDP. In 2020, 47% of the state agriculture sales were produced in South Central Idaho[i]. The high density of agriculture production in the region has attracted numerous facets of the food processing industry cluster. In 2015, the U.S. Department of Commerce recognized South Central Idaho under the Manufacturing Communities Partnership program "as one of the most diverse food baskets in the nation."

Export of agriculture goods and products is essential to regional and state economic sustainability. In March 2024, the Idaho State Department of Agriculture reported Idaho produces more than 185 commodities on its 22,877 farms and ranches. The State produces enough food product for every Idahoan to consume daily 165 slices of bread, 34 potatoes, 3 pounds of sugar, 2 pounds of cheese, 2 pounds of beef and one cup of beans.

The region is home to the nation's largest sugar beet factory, the world's largest yogurt factory, several American-style cheese production facilities, and 80 fish farms. Ninety-eight percent of the state's aquaculture production occurs in Twin Falls, Gooding, and Jerome counties.

While the area is a powerhouse in agricultural production and processing, the paramount concern is how to improve efficiencies to insulate the region from external forces and take the region to the next level of global competitiveness. Development of sustainable manufacturing and production processes for global export is essential to ensure continued prosperity and growth of the region.

2024 IDAHO AGRICULTURE PRODUCTION

FOOD PROCESSING

Southern Idaho boosts a significant food processing concentration at about 6.5 times greater than the nation. This concentration led the U.S. Department of Commerce under the Investing in Manufacturing Communities Partnership (IMCP) to designate South Central Idaho as an “All Things Food” Manufacturing Community in 2015. “A powerhouse of agricultural production and processing, the region is home to a diverse cluster of big name, globally recognized processors and home-grown food production facilities” (www.americanmcc.org). Included are household names like Chobani yogurt, Idahoan potatoes, and Clif Bar energy foods. Additionally, the region is home to premier brands such as Riverence Steelhead and Rainbow Trout and True West Beef.

Cheese and dairy products account for a large portion of the food processing cluster. The number and size of dairy operations in the eight-county area has led to the creation of a range of dairy-related expansions and business recruitment. Among these are Agropur, Chobani yogurt, Darigold milk, Idaho Milk Producers, Brewster Cheese, Gossner Foods, Glanbia Nutritionals, and High Desert Milk producing a range of Greek yogurt, butter, milk, as well as cheddar, Swiss and powdered cheese products.

The region is host to manufacturers of products found in many American pantries including whey protein for smoothies and cheese powder for mac-n-cheese. South Central Idaho also produces significant amounts of beef, pork, lamb, and poultry products. Falls Brand pork, True West Beef, Lava Lake Lamb, and Harmony Hens are just a few producers who contribute to the diverse array of products generated in the region.

The South Central Idaho location provides regional food processing companies with a competitive advantage for reaching many west coast markets in under twenty-four hours, making the most of the region’s cornucopia of raw materials and lower energy costs. An abundance of available land for food processing development allows for all aspects of the supply chain to be centrally located, which promotes ongoing cluster collaboration. The region continues to welcome small start-up companies as well as major manufacturers from around the world.

The large concentration of agriculture and food processing businesses has also established supply chain opportunities. Standard Nutrition, PerforMix Nutrition Systems, and Standlee Hay produce grains, alfalfa crops, and animal feeds to support the dairy industry. WOW Logistics provides warehousing and transportation services for finished dairy products – including refrigeration space and dry milk/whey storage. Bayer Crop Science conducts agriculture research and development. Magic Valley is also home to a mini cluster of chemical, plastic and packaging manufacturers, including injection mold, cardboard boxes, and Styrofoam manufacturers.

CONSTRUCTION

Construction contributes a sizable amount to the state GDP at $80.9 billion in 2019. From February 2020 to February 2022, Idaho saw a 13.1% increase in construction employment, the largest in the nation[i]. Construction also is a large industry employer for South Central Idaho. Compared to nationwide employment distribution, construction is one of 6 occupational groups where employment is more highly concentrated. Construction accounts for nearly 6% of regional employment. The impact the construction industry has on the regional economy focuses on the need for community land use planning.

EXPLORE IDAHO

TOURISM

The region features internationally recognized tourism and outdoor recreation destinations. The region is home to four commercial ski areas: Soldier Mountain, Pomerelle, Magic Mountain, and Sun Valley. Miles of backcountry skiing as well as Nordic trails are available in several parts of the area. Snowmobiling is also a significant local pastime with groomed trails and warming stations providing visitors with support for outdoor adventure.

The world-famous Sun Valley Resort in Blaine County brings countless tourists to the region. In an effort to diversify, the Sun Valley Resort has positioned themselves as a year-round destination. Mountain biking, camping, hiking, and other fair-weather activities are now drawing a significant number of visitors to help local businesses survive the end-of-ski-season slump. Other outdoor activities attract visitors from around the globe and contribute to the broadening of the economy.
The region also boasts numerous state parks and national monuments, including Thousand Springs State Park, Minidoka National Historic Site, Craters of Moon National Monument and Preserve, Lake Walcott State Park, and the Hagerman Fossil Beds National Monument. In April 2022, a $2.3 million visitor center was opened in Hagerman with the goal of enhancing visitor experience with "new opportunities for historical interpretation, improved recreational access, and economic vitality for the Hagerman Valley." Tourism, including hotel and food sales, contributes $159 million annually to the regional economy. In addition to outdoor activities, the region's top attractions include historic places, agritourism, cultural activities, and brewery tours.

The 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic decimated tourism throughout Idaho and the Region. The state saw a 29% decrease in overall spending during 2020, compared to 2019 (US Travel Association). Tourism related employment, which is 5.1% of Idaho's total private industry employment, was threatened by this decrease in spending and tax receipts. Diversification of tourism offerings will be necessary to prevent future losses.

While spending decreased, the number of individuals accessing outdoor attractions such as the City of Rocks dramatically increased during 2020 and 2021. Outdoor recreation became a paramount avenue for individuals during the pandemic who were seeking an escape from quarantine. In 2020, Idaho saw 7.7 million state park visitors, a 1.2 million increase from 2019. This increase put additional strain on Idaho parks and recreation facilities and park staff as they worked to combat increases in garbage, sanitation issues, and public negligence. Additionally, the region's reliance on outdoor recreation opportunities creates a roller-coaster of demand with significant downturn during off-seasons. Expansion of indoor opportunities would assist in stabilizing the industry throughout the year. Initiatives for the development of a convention center in the Magic Valley are underway.

RESILIENCE

MUNICIPALITY INFRASTRUCTURE

Many small, rural communities in the South Central region face significant challenges in completing essential infrastructure upgrades. Expanding and improving municipal water and wastewater systems is critical—not only to protect public health, but also to support economic growth by attracting new businesses.

Upgrades to water lines, pumps, and storage tanks are also vital for ensuring adequate fire protection. Currently, many communities still rely on outdated two and four-inch pipes, which cannot deliver sufficient water volume to effectively combat structure fires. However, undertaking these upgrades is a major challenge due to the high costs and the scope of work involved. For small rural cities, maintaining affordable user rates while completing these projects requires a careful balancing act.

Fortunately, a variety of funding sources offer competitive opportunities to support these efforts. These include the Idaho Community Development Block Grant, USDA Rural Development Loans and Grants, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers infrastructure grants, EDA Public Works Program, DEQ State Revolving Fund Loans, DEQ Loan Forgiveness, and DEQ ARPA grant funds. These state and federal programs are essential for enabling communities to make necessary improvements. Without them, user rates would rise to levels that many residents simply could not afford.

CYBERSECURITY

Despite efforts to secure Idaho's digital infrastructure, including the 2015 creation of a statewide cybersecurity task force, the state has continued to be bombarded with cyberattacks, including malware crippling Twin Falls County operations and county court proceedings in 2021. Regional leadership must prioritize adoption of the cybersecurity task force's 18 recommendations, including public awareness and education to ensure our digital infrastructure remains safe and reliable.

EXTREME WEATHER EVENTS

The Fifth National Climate Assessment identified extreme heat, flooding and wildfires as climate hazards that are threatening health and prosperity in the Northwest, including Idaho. Additionally, the South Central Idaho region must combat impacts of earthquakes and invasive species.

Extreme weather events, including consistently warmer temperatures across the region, has led to declines in mountain snowpack which impacts both regional recreation industries and water systems. Snow-based recreational industries are harmed by shorter seasons while warm-weather activities must address operational and maintenance challenges related to flooding, erosion, and poor air quality. Agricultural related industries are vulnerable these challenges impact the quality and quantity of crop production, increased probability of pests, and worker exposure to extreme heat and wildfire smoke.

Wildfire

Elevated fire danger is an unwelcome companion to the persistent drought and high temperatures experienced in the regional summer months. Each year, wildfires from within the region and beyond destroy private property, diminish air quality, and ravage public lands key for outdoor recreation, rangeland grazing, and wildlife habitat. Additionally, the smoke for wildfires leads to ozone pollution, which is harmful to crop production, particularly potatoes. The main methods used by city, county, and states to prevent human-caused wildfires are through education, burn permits, and fire restrictions. Active forest management is also used to prevent natural fires from becoming large-scale events. Finally, the Idaho Department of Lands Fire Management (IDL Fire) collaborates with rural fire departments to suppress and prevent fires on more than six million acres of forests and rangeland, with a goal to limit destruction to less than 10 acres.

Residential property insurance is becoming increasingly difficult for Blaine County residents to secure due to fire concerns. Ten of thirteen major carriers are no longer writing policies for new homeowners and existing clients are being dropped due to the level of risk. Those carriers who are still issuing policies are implementing significant restrictions as a condition of the policy and have radically increased premiums.

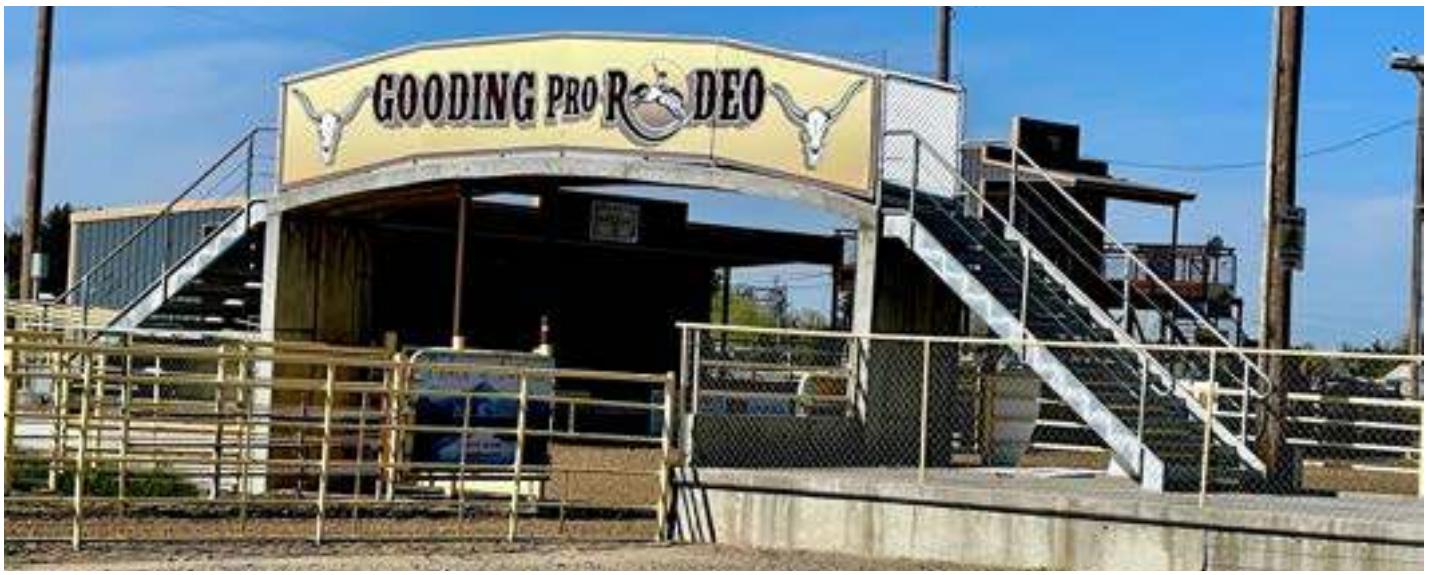
Invasive Species and Infestations

The agriculture and tourism sectors are particularly susceptible to damage due to insect infestations and non-native invasive species. In 2023, grasshopper and Mormon cricket outbreaks were detected in three Idaho counties, including Cassia County. These insects can damage plant growth and seed production. Quagga mussels were also detected in the Mid-Snake River, which required implementation of a rapid response plan by the Idaho Department of Ag. This response plan included closing the affected area to watercraft and curtailed late summer tourism activities. Left unchecked, the mussels have the potential to cause hundreds of millions of dollars in damage by clogging water pipes and damaging wildlife habitat. The mussels also led Gooding County to declare a local disaster emergency.

Earthquake

Numerous active faults in South Central Idaho puts Idaho at risk for both large-scale, infrequent earthquakes and small, frequent swarms of quakes. The most recent large-scale quake occurred in March 2020 and measured a magnitude of 6.5, the second largest in state history. The quake caused the Stanley Lake delta to liquify and collapse.

In the year following the Stanley Earthquake more than 3,200 aftershocks were recorded. The most recent aftershock on May 10, 2022, was detected at Triumph Mine, an abandoned lead, zinc, and silver mine which has been designated as a Brownfield site due to the presence of contaminated tailings and water discharge. The earthquake was detected on the lower tailings pile. While cleanup and mitigation of the site have lowered air and water contamination to below federal standards, damage to the discharge system piping due to an earthquake could cause the release of heavy metal contamination into nearby river systems. These seismic events serve as reminders of the active nature of Idaho's faults and the need for planning and emergency preparedness.



HOUSING

Rapid population growth coupled with rising construction costs has caused a perfect storm in the Idaho housing market since 2021, particularly for affordable and workforce housing. Low inventory and vacancy rates drove average home prices out of reach for the average worker. The Idaho Press reported on January 6, 2022, that between 2015 and 2022, housing prices increased by more than 150%. In comparison, worker income only grew between 25% and 32% for the same time period.

In contrast, by Fall 2025, the Idaho housing market cooled down due to high prices and relatively high mortgage rates. According to Redfin, in September 2025, while the median sale prices were up 2.7% year-over-year ($495,800), the median days on the market had increased by 14 (60 days). Data also shows a significant number of households are cost-burdened due to high housing costs. According to the National Economic Resilience Data Explorer (NERDE) 23.78% of homeowners spend 35% or more on mortgage costs, while 33.01% of renters spend 35% or more on gross rental costs as a percent of total household.

As one of the fastest growing states in the country, Idaho is experiencing a housing conundrum. Housing inventory has been unable to keep pace with demand, which has driven home prices out of reach of many locals who are now competing with out-of-town buyers who have larger budgets due to the elevated real estate markets they are escaping. Zillow found Idaho home prices rose 20% in 2020. Rental properties are also seeing extreme influxes making finding affordable housing increasingly difficult for “young, single, and lower income persons.” The housing crisis is not unique to Idaho metropolitan areas or resort towns. The same concerns are being echoed across the state as more and more residents struggle to find suitable housing. This struggle is directly impacting workforce availability as employers struggle to recruit new workers. Without additional housing units economic growth will be limited.

Collaboration among city/county leadership and community stakeholders to identify realistic solutions will be necessary to combat this increasingly urgent crisis. Actions to be considered include incentives towards the construction of multi-family housing, updating city/county zoning ordinances to make construction faster and less expensive as well as promoting Brownfield assessment and cleanup to revitalize blighted properties. This has the added benefit of protecting public health from contamination, taking pressure off greenspace, and curbing urban sprawl.

In May 2022, the City of Ketchum proposed to voters a local option tax which would have provided a revenue stream to implement a Housing Action Plan focused on providing workforce housing. Failure of the proposed tax has sent city leadership back to the drawing board to identify ways to finance implementation of the housing plan. Private efforts, such as the Quigley Farm development, are working to address the housing shortage, but a broad, long-term plan is needed to combat the growing crisis.

South Central Community Action Partnership (SCCAP) is also working to provide access to affordable housing through their Self-Help Housing program. Six to ten families are selected at a time to complete a group build project, where families provide 65% of the construction labor, which earns them immediate equity when they close on the property. Since 2010, SCCAP has assisted over 120 families but has a waitlist of over 300 families. Creative solutions, like the Self-Help Housing program, will be necessary to solve this crisis.

SUPPLY CHAIN

The perishable food products South Central Idaho produces relies on a dependable, efficient transportation system to move products from the farm to the producer and into the hands of the consumer. The national lack of interstate commercial truck drivers and backlogs at the nation's ports disproportionately affects agriculture. Solving this issue will require collaboration among regional stakeholders and Congressional representatives to find solutions to these bottlenecks and the unintended consequences to changes in transportation regulations over the last few years.

CHILDCARE

In February 2021 the Idaho Association for the Education of Young Children and the University of Idaho's McClure Center for Public Policy Research released a needs assessment of Idaho's childcare system. The report identified that 50% of Idahoans live in a childcare desert where licensed childcare services either do not exist or there are more than three children for every spot at a facility. The study also found 81% of providers only operate Monday – Friday, making services unavailable to employees working weekends or 12-hour shifts.

The high cost of childcare is also a stumbling block. Over the last two decades the cost of childcare has more than doubled, but wages have not kept pace. Individuals are being forced to decide between giving up their career or deter starting a family. Expanded services for both infant care and early childhood education are necessary to ensure our labor force is reliable. The 2025 Bipartisan Policy Center's Childcare Gaps Assessment Update found Twin Falls County had a gap of 1,690 spots, or 38.2%, causing an economic impact of more than $103 Million, including household income losses, business productivity losses, and tax revenue losses. Additionally, the region's manufacturing dominate economy makes the lack of 24-hour facilities a major impact on the workforce.

CONCLUSIONS

Identification of regional vulnerabilities allows FrontierCR and its stakeholders to develop an action plan to ensure disaster recovery and economic resiliency. Initiatives to bolster the economy from potential disruptions include workforce training, transportation & logistics, infrastructure improvements, and supply chain development. The large concentration of food production and processing makes the region vulnerable to disruptions within the logistics systems which get products to market. Fuel prices, driver shortages, skilled workforce deficiencies, and road/weather conditions contribute to price increases and delays. Current South Central Idaho food processors routinely voice frustration and concern over the lack of adequate labor force for good jobs. Commitments from companies hoping to build new and expanded processing facilities in the region have been delayed due to concerns surrounding the availability of a qualified workforce and water/wastewater infrastructure. Given global population increases are projected to require a 70% increase in food production by 2050, the ability to attract and retain a qualified labor force is a predominate issue for South Central Idaho.

REGIONAL SWOT

STRENGHTS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES, THREATS

A SWOT Analysis is a strategic planning tool that allows organizations to collaboratively identify internal strengths and weaknesses as well as external opportunities and threats. The following regional assets and potential hurdles have been identified by community stakeholders as areas which contribute the potential of the region to prosper.

Strengths

- Low Crime Rate
- Job Growth
- Scenic natural resources
- Quality higher education opportunities
- Low Electric Rates
- Proximity to numerous west coast markets
- “All Things Food” designation
- Collaborative attitude
- Diverse Entrepreneurial Ecosystem
- Strong Economy
- Business Friendly State
- High Quality of Life
- Family friendly environment
- Variety of K-12 options
- Plentiful recreation opportunities
- Workforce Development Partnership
- Expansive Healthcare services
- Not-for-profit Hospital system

Weaknesses

- Aging and undersized public infrastructure
- Limited rural healthcare access
- Lack of affordable housing
- Overall housing shortage
- Limited childcare facilities and early childhood care
- Limited public transportation in rural areas
- Limited Behavioral Health services
- Lack of investment toward innovation
- Limited workforce in specialized areas
- Distance from major metro areas

Opportunities

- Attraction of new companies and industry sectors including secondary suppliers to primary industry cluster.
- Broadband connectivity has expanded … (more attractive to businesses)
- Ample resources for renewable energy development
- Potential for passenger rail services
- Expanded logistics opportunities
- Health care planning for the future
- Larger market due to population growth
- Recreational entrepreneurship

Threat

- Loss of small business
- Downtown deterioration
- Aging and absent infrastructure
- Supply chain disruption
- Rising cost of real estate
- Global Pandemic
- World Conflicts
- Wildfire
- Drought
- Weather
- Invasive Species
- Transportation infrastructure not keeping pace with growth

ACTION PLAN

VISION

Support South Central Idaho in becoming a thriving and vibrant region by:

- Cultivating an environment that supports diverse, sustainable, geographically dispersed, and globally competitive industries.
- Fostering a culture that empowers individuals to lead productive, prosperous, and meaningful lives.
- Enhancing the region's unique characteristics, strengths, and assets to improve economic competitiveness.

GOAL 1: PROMOTE REGIONAL ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Objective 1: Strengthen South Central Idaho's role as a commercial hub by enhancing manufacturing capabilities and transportation infrastructure.

Strategies:

1. Advocate for the development of an additional crossing over the Snake River Canyon in the Magic Valley.
2. Identify, prioritize, and secure funding for future transportation corridors.
3. Promote regional logistics opportunities.
4. Support the expansion of research and innovation resources.

Objective 2: Support existing industries and assets to reinforce regional distinctiveness.

Strategies:

1. Promote the Mini-Cassia Manufacturers Alliance to collaborate on workforce training and infrastructure needs.
2. Support the tourism cluster by securing funding for revitalizing and expanding outdoor trail systems.
3. Assist in identifying funding opportunities for the development of a multi-use convention center.
4. Facilitate downtown revitalization efforts in rural communities.
5. Strengthen Main Street programs to foster business growth and vibrant marketplaces.
6. Advocate for the modernization and expansion of critical infrastructure, including water, wastewater, broadband, green energy, electrical systems, and stormwater management.

Objective 3: Establish a unified approach to small business support and entrepreneurial development.

Strategies:

1. Facilitate collaboration among federal, state, and local resource providers, educators, and financial institutions to deliver workshops and promote mentoring programs.
2. Provide training and support services for entrepreneurs, including access to business financing programs.
3. Leverage state and federal funding to support regional small business loan initiatives.
4. Engage in networking through workshops, conferences, civic groups, and professional organizations to stay informed on evolving financing opportunities.
5. Promote diverse financing options to regional financial institutions, chambers of commerce, and civic organizations.
6. Encourage communities to develop mentorship programs and start-up incentives for youth entrepreneurs.
7. Advocate for the creation and promotion of a statewide revolving loan fund.
8. Support expanded workforce development programs aligned with emerging industry clusters.

Key Partners

- IDOC
- SBDC & SBA
- Regional Financial Institutes
- Chambers of Commerce
- Civic Groups
- Higher Education
- Community Leaders
- Food Production Industry Leaders
- Financial Institutions
- EDDIs
- ITD
- Industry Leadership

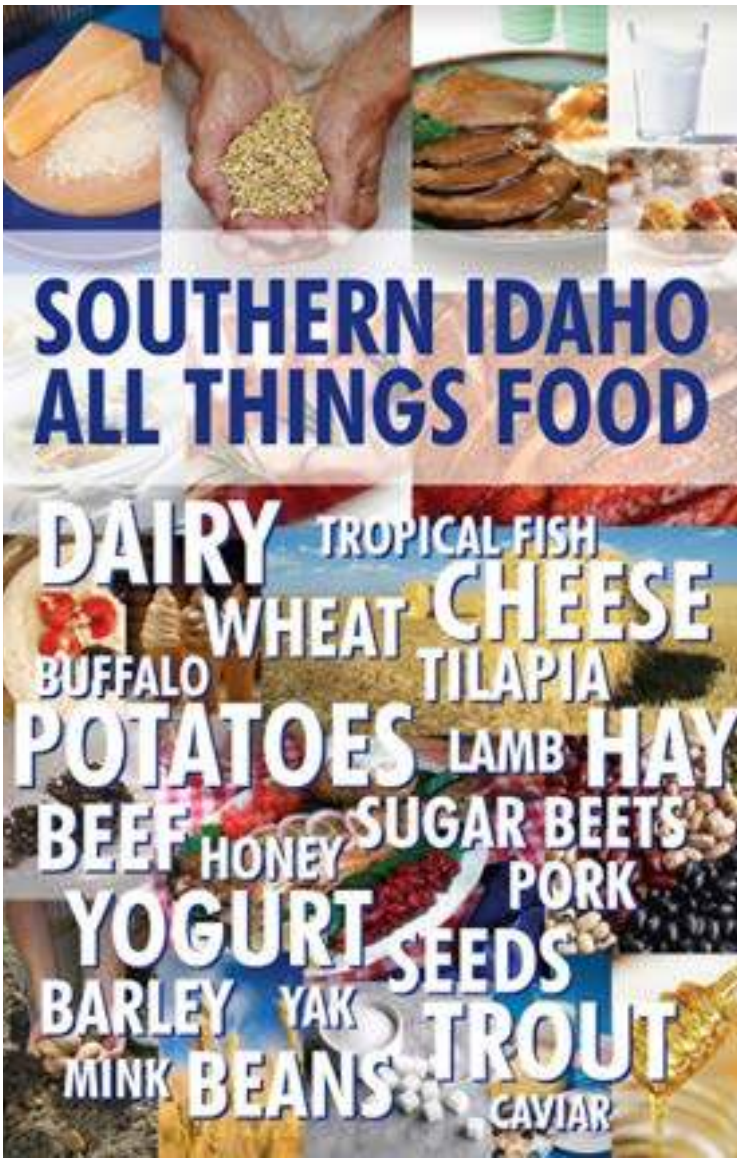
Funding Sources

- SBA
- EDA
- IDOC REDS program
- USDA-RD
- EDA Partnership Planning Program

OPPORTUNITY, GRIT, AND INNOVATION UNTIE IN IDAHO.

IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

GOAL 2: STIMULATE REGIONAL COMMUNITY PROSPERITY



Objective 1: Expand and enhance community infrastructure.

Strategies:

1. Advocate for the development of asset mapping tools to help communities identify local resources and competitive advantages.
2. Pursue funding at the local, state, and federal levels to improve infrastructure and quality of life, including broadband, wastewater, water systems, roads, parks, and downtown areas.
3. Identify strategies to improve access to high-speed broadband.
4. Facilitate exploration of fixed-route and on-demand public transportation options in the Wood River Valley and Twin Falls/Jerome economic centers.
5. Ensure regional representation on the ITD Public Transportation Advisory Council.
6. Promote the development of multimodal transportation infrastructure, including electric vehicle charging stations, bike lanes, and walkable communities.
7. Support assessments of water and wastewater capacities to identify gaps and opportunities for industrial growth.

Objective 2: Provide resources that enable residents to lead productive, prosperous, and meaningful lives.

Strategies:

1. Ensure access to healthcare for vulnerable populations, including rural residents, homebound individuals, economically disadvantaged groups, veterans, and seniors.
2. Promote funding opportunities to build capacity in emergency medical services, fire departments, and law enforcement agencies.
3. Encourage regional collaboration to improve access to affordable housing, mental health services, transportation, and other essential services.
4. Support the development of housing options that are appropriately sized and priced for all income levels.
5. Promote initiatives that foster community connectivity to address loneliness, depression, and suicide.
6. Engage with national organizations to expand access to economic development tools (e.g., NADO, CDFA, NADCO).

Objective 3: Support community planning efforts related to land use.

Strategies:

1. Promote the assessment and remediation of Brownfield sites through outreach and financial assistance.
2. Encourage coordination among jurisdictions and public engagement during comprehensive plan updates to prevent development conflicts.
3. Advocate for energy-efficient building practices in public and private development projects.

Objective 4: Advance innovative water-use policies.

Strategies:

1. Explore mechanisms to support innovative water-use practices, such as aquifer recharge and water recycling.
2. Encourage water-smart land use and development strategies.
3. Promote education and outreach on responsible water use.
4. Investigate public-private partnerships for infrastructure improvements.

Key Partners

Regional City Councils
City Administrators
County Commissions
City Water Managers
IDOC
FHS
Idaho Rural Partnership
IDT
Idaho DEQ
St. Luke's
SCPHD
US EPA
NADO

Possible Funding Sources

EPA
CDBG
RCIF

GOAL 3: STRENGHTEN WORKFORCE ATTRACTION, DEVELOPMENT AND RETENTION

Objective 1: Build and maintain a skilled workforce that meets current and future labor market demands.

Strategies:

1. Expand regional offerings in food science and food processing research and training.
2. Collaborate with regional experts to assess and address workforce needs.
3. Connect industries with flexible educational opportunities, including certifications and specialized training.
4. Develop a network of entrepreneurial mentors to link education with innovation.
5. Maintain diverse training programs for incumbent workers, recent graduates, and advanced learners.
6. Offer varied educational delivery methods to meet regional needs.

Key Partners

- CSI
- U of ID
- SBDC
- Idaho DOL
- CSI-WFD
- Business Plus
- FHS - AHEC

Funding Sources

- EPA
- USDA-RD
- SBDC
- Workforce Development Council

EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

To implement the region's development strategy, FrontierCR must simultaneously direct efforts toward numerous individual activities and/or projects. Understanding the possibilities and limitations of the region's economy is critical to successful community economic development. FrontierCR maintains direct contact with regional agencies and organizations to ensure continuous assessment of the goals and objects identified in this strategy.

The following goals have been identified as priorities to advancing the economic prosperity of South Central Idaho. Strategies for achieving these goals and methods for evaluating success will guide FrontierCR and the regional communities in research-based decision making.

Priority Strategy	Steps	Measurement	Benchmark	Results
Objective: Establish a unified approach to small business support and entrepreneurial development.				
Provide training opportunities and support services for regional entrepreneurs including access to business finance programs.	Partner with SBDC to provide synchronized training.	# of hours of technical assistance provided by the RDBG program	300	
Promote diverse financing options to regional financial institutions, chambers of commerce, and civic organizations.	Attend professional and community events. Actively market funding options.	# of loans funded	10	
		$ funded	$2.25 Million	
Date Source: Internal FrontierCR data				

Priority Strategy	Steps	Measurement	Benchmark	Results
Objective: Expand and enhance community infrastructure.				
Pursue funding at the local, state, and federal levels to improve infrastructure and quality of life.	Connect with local government leadership to identify community needs. Explore funding options.	% of regional/state proposals funded	70%	
		% of national proposals funded	30%	
Date Source: Internal FrontierCR data				

Objective: Provide resources that enable residents to lead productive, prosperous, and meaningful lives.				
Ensure access to health care for vulnerable populations.	Collaborate with regional health care providers on ways to expand services.	# of regional counties where primary care physician's ratio is below the state	4 of 8	
Date Source and limitations: www.countyhealthrankings.org				

Priority Strategy	Steps	Measurement	Benchmark	Results
Objective: Support community planning efforts related to land use.				
Promote the assessment and remediation of Brownfield sites through outreach and financial assistance.	Attend community meetings to discuss program. Meet with regional city/county leadership to discuss development plans.	# of properties assessed	One property per year when funding is available	
		% of total assessed properties being redeveloped	50%	
		# of RLF loans for cleanup	1 per year	
Date Source: Internal FrontierCR data				
Objective: Build and maintain a skilled workforce that meets current and future labor market demands.				
Collaborate with regional experts to assess and address workforce needs.	Attend Mini-Cassia Manufactures Alliance Meetings Participate in Business Plus Quarterly Meetings Promote industry connections with CSI Workforce Development	Regional Unemployment Rate	At or below State rate	
		Region Per Capita Personal Income	At or Above State Amount	
Data Source: https://lmi.idaho.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/SouthCentral.pdf				

For more information contact
Frontier Community Resources at (208) 732-5727