



IDAHO
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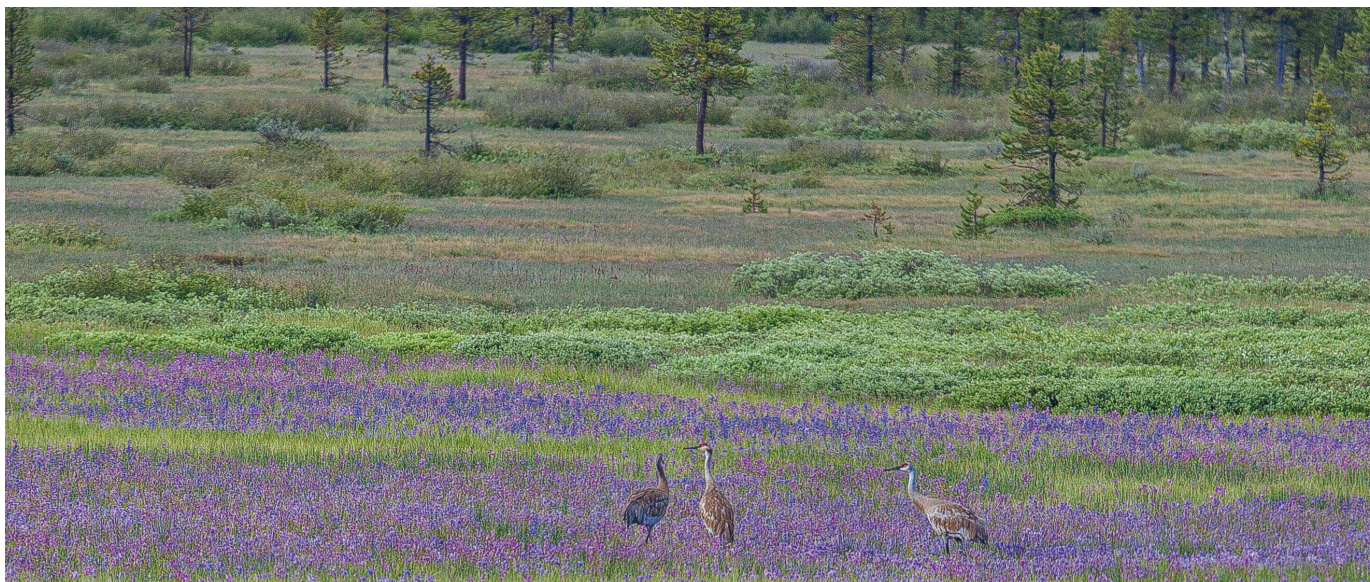
The Kootenai River Valley is a true gem of North Idaho, but pollution originating upstream in Canada has been wreaking havoc on the river for decades.

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Sandhill cranes in a field of camas lilies. Ed Cannady photo.

Making a Difference for Wild Idaho

Snow is gone in all but the high country. Rivers and streams are surging. Flowers dot the hillside with bursts of yellow and white. Blue camas lilies blanket low lying wet meadows.

Birds are chirping and flitting about with grass and twigs in their beaks, building nests that will soon hold eggs. A walk in the backcountry might give you a chance to see a spindly legged fawn, tan with white dots.

Our public lands make so much possible. Wild Idaho is truly remarkable.

In northern Idaho we are working to protect wetlands and streams from destruction as sensitive areas are eyed as places to site new buildings.

Further south we are working to stop efforts to blast and dig giant open-pit gold mines that would harm water quality and salmon. We are a voice of reason, trying to scale back a Bureau of

Land Management decision to sanction hundreds of miles of unlawfully user-built motorized all-terrain vehicle routes.

In the east we are working to protect and restore the connectivity of landscapes so that native wildlife, including grizzly bears, can thrive.

Keeping public lands accessible to all, and managed so that nature's wonders, and the magnificent web of connected life, will be there for future generations, requires constant vigilance and passionate engagement.

Your support of ICL makes this possible. Together we are making a difference. Together we are protecting the Idaho that you love.



Justin Hayes
Executive Director

Change is The Law of Life

“Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future.”

— Former President John F. Kennedy

I have recently been thinking more about change, as I completed my term as board chair in May and write my last “Letter from the Chair.” It has been an honor to serve ICL and conservation in our beautiful state of Idaho in this role for the last three years. But, just as nature shows us every season—change is often good.

Board terms are a healthy governance practice, bringing in new talent and perspectives. Jim DeWitt is transitioning to Chair. He brings six years of strong contributions on the board and deep experience in nonprofit law and management. He’s also an accomplished birder!

I remember my excitement when I joined the board eight years ago. Rick Johnson was the Executive Director, and we were all celebrating one of ICL’s great accomplishments during that period: the passage of the Boulder-White Clouds Wilderness Bill. I saw up close how ICL lived its values in “taking the long view” for the big wins. I was on the board that elected Justin to follow Rick as Executive Director, a smooth transition, and the good work continued.

ICL has grown during this time, building new programs and strengthening our internal foundations. This growth is only possible because of the growth in your support and membership—thank you! Even as challenges change over time, ICL adapts and finds the path forward to deliver positive results. We are able to do so because of people like you.

We saw other board transitions as well this spring. David Eichberg, Jim Norton, and Bill Weppner completed their terms. We are deeply



*Jim McClure-Jerry Peak Wilderness.
BLM Idaho/Bob Wick photo.*

thankful for their immense contributions and will miss them greatly. In their place, we welcome Kalli Axford, David Garman, Heidi Shelton, and Todd True. Each brings valuable experience and commitment to ICL’s work.

I have many special memories from over the years: the pride in important programmatic “wins,” the 50th anniversary celebrations and reflections, board and staff retreats around the state with time to ponder deep questions, and special relationships with other members of ICL’s community.

As I pass the baton, I am grateful for the opportunity to serve. Thank you.



Rebecca Patton

Chair

*Idaho Conservation
League Board of Directors*

Activation of International Treaty Brings Hope for Idaho's Kootenai River

The thought of Fernie, British Columbia (B.C.) conjures images of a quaint Rocky Mountain town that's a haven for adventure and travelers; full of small town charm, gorgeous recreation, and an international vibe. But there's a dark underbelly.

Pollution from mountaintop removal coal mines near Fernie, B.C. is harming fisheries and water quality in the Kootenai River in Idaho. For decades, a corporation called Teck Resources has been blasting Fernie's nearby mountains to exploit coal, and shipping most of that coal across the world to be burned for steelmaking in China and other parts of Asia. In addition to the climate impacts, pollution downriver is undermining the rights of the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho and the fisheries they rely upon. For many years, our hands have been tied to address the pollution that originates across the international border. Not anymore. This problem is now set to be addressed on the international stage.

After more than five years of advocacy by ICL, and decades of effort by Tribes, First Nations, and other partners, the Boundary Waters Treaty



Selenium pollution in Idaho's Kootenai River is harming an array of fish, including westslope cutthroat trout, burbot, and the endangered Kootenai River white sturgeon, pictured here. USFWS photo.

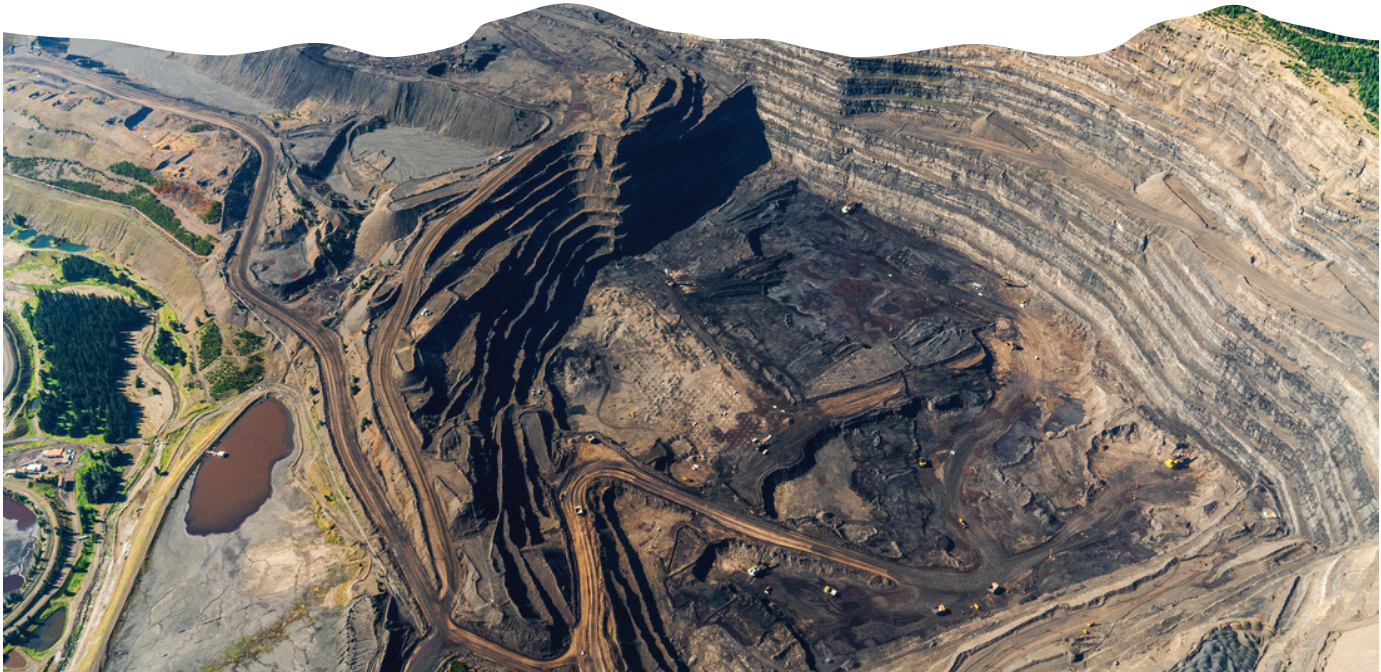
of 1909 has now been activated to resolve this transboundary mining pollution dispute. Under this treaty, the International Joint Commission (IJC) is the independent body that resolves water pollution disputes between the United States and Canada. Although mines in B.C. are polluting waters that flow into Alaska, Washington, Montana, and Idaho, this is the first time in 40 years where the IJC is authorized to go to work to protect downstream waters.

And, for the first time ever, Tribes and First Nations have their rightful seats at the dispute resolution table. The governance board includes representatives from the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho, the state of Idaho, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, the state of Montana, the United States federal government, the four governments of the Ktunaxa Nation north of the international border, the B.C. government, and the Canadian federal government.

While this IJC referral is a huge success and a major milestone, the work of reducing pollution is just beginning. The installation of mitigation technologies to protect downriver fisheries from selenium poisoning must be a key component of this work. According to a recent study by the U.S. Geological Survey, selenium pollution levels have quadrupled since 1985, and nitrates have increased 600 times. Both of these pollutants can harm fish, aquatic life, and people. An ongoing cleanup plan must be implemented to manage the contamination forever, and no new mining should be permitted until current pollution is controlled.

The stakes are high. A recent report by independent consulting firm Burgess Environmental Ltd, calculates that **it will cost at least \$6.4 billion to reverse rising selenium pollution.**

To complicate things, Teck's coal assets will likely be sold this summer to a bad actor multinational corporation called Glencore. Glencore's terrible track record includes environmental and human rights violations, and it is already responsible for a Superfund designation at its Columbia Falls Aluminum Smelter in Montana. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA)



Fording River coal mine in British Columbia. EcoFlight photo.

Superfund program is responsible for cleaning up our nation's most contaminated places, and the corporations responsible for the pollution are not always required to pay.

For example, downriver from Idaho in Washington State, after the Kootenai River flows into the Columbia River, the EPA recently recommended a Superfund designation due to lead pollution from Teck Cominco's smelter in Trail, B.C. Teck Cominco is not being held accountable to fund the cleanup in that situation. Who will pay for the mine contamination in the Kootenai River that Teck has created and Glencore has pledged to continue?

It's critical that adequate financial assurances are in place before Glencore is allowed to buy Teck's coal assets, so taxpayers in the United States don't end up footing that bill. The IJC has the power to **ensure that the corporation reaping the profits and causing the pollution also pays for the cleanup.**

Due to the scale of the problem and uncertainty about cleanup, we need assurances that **no new mines or mine expansions** will occur until the

current problem is fixed. Despite the unresolved pollution, B.C. started a permitting process for a new mountaintop removal coal mine in the same watershed, called the Crown Mt. Coking Coal Project. ICL has weighed in, asking the province to deny the permit.

Finally, due to the irreversible impacts to the landscape in British Columbia, other lands need to be protected so that displaced wildlife have a chance to thrive.

The IJC has a mighty task in front of them, and we are sure this independent commission is the right one for the job. The Boundary Waters Treaty is very clear in its intent, that "waters flowing across the boundary shall not be polluted on either side to the injury of health or property on the other." ICL agrees—and we know you, our supporters, do too. Every Idahoan deserves clean water. We'll be there every step of this process to ensure that the Kootenai River can provide just that.

Jennifer Ekstrom
North Idaho Director

An Uncertain World for Wolverines

Last December, after nearly 30 years of court battles and scientific hopscotch, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) finally determined that combined impacts from climate change, winter recreation, and impediments to dispersal from roads and development warrant the listing of wolverines in the lower 48 as “threatened” under the Endangered Species Act.

The agency’s monumental decision was first signaled by the 2023 release of a Species Status Assessment (SSA), which rigorously detailed current distribution, habitat needs, genetic fitness, stressors, and key uncertainties facing wolverine populations. While a 2018 SSA identified loss of snowpack and elevated winter temperatures from climate change as significant stressors to wolverines, last year’s version looked more closely at how “more prevalent, intensified and lengthened” spring snow deficits might change the way wolverines interact with each other and the habitat on which they depend.

Wolverines require large, isolated, undisturbed tracts of wild country and use deep, high-elevation snowpack to den and rear their kits. The windswept



While female wolverines can occupy up to 150 sq. miles of habitat, lone males have been known to use home ranges almost four times that size. Ed Cannady photo.

alpine cirques of Idaho’s backcountry offer some of the best core wolverine habitat and food sources of all Rocky Mountain states. However, the USFWS has concluded that prime wolverine country is increasingly jeopardized as climate change impacts alpine environments. Although it looks different at different elevations, “snow drought” conditions are further fragmenting wolverine habitat and restricting occupied range.

Scientists evaluate the long-term viability of a species based on its ability to adapt to catastrophic events or changes related to habitat and genetic fitness. In the case of wolverines, some of those adaptive responses come quickly, while others happen over long periods of time through evolutionary processes.

But, assessing climate risks to wolverines is a tricky business. Key uncertainties around landscape connectivity, gene flow, reproduction, and prey availability still linger. Small, isolated populations of any animal are generally more vulnerable. The complex interplay between climate change and other stressors like human disturbance will exacerbate that vulnerability, making the wolverine’s ecological niche even less secure. The question now is how severe will changes be and what impact will they have on the 300 or so wolverines that remain in the lower 48 states.

Looking ahead, ICL will encourage the USFWS to account for climate change and other potential environmental uncertainties as the agency drafts a wolverine recovery plan and designates critical habitat. That plan must maximize the potential for wolverines to persist over a wide range of historic habitat, thereby improving the animal’s ability to adapt to increasing stressors. Conservation measures and recovery actions must also ensure safe dispersal corridors between core habitat areas. Thus far, wolverines have proven to be a resilient species. Let’s work together to use new wolverine protections of this elusive, but charismatic critter endures.

Jeff Abrams
Wildlife Program Associate

From Northwest Rivers to the Nation's Capital: Youth Drive Momentum for Columbia Basin Restoration

In December, the Columbia Basin Restoration Initiative was released as a result of the 30-year-long litigation between Northwest Tribes, conservation organizations like ICL, and the U.S. Government. Our very own Executive Director Justin Hayes attended the ceremonial signing of this historical agreement at the White House in February, celebrating a huge milestone while also looking ahead to the work still to be done. Just a few months later, Northwest youth—including ICL's Youth Salmon Protectors—took to the nation's capital to further advocate for this restoration effort. Now, more than ever, it is integral that informed constituents—no matter their age—discuss this Initiative with their elected officials.

Walking into a congressional office and being the youngest person there can be intimidating, until you remember you're not alone. Generations of Snake River advocates stand behind you, hours spent fighting for the wild places you love have prepared you for this, and you know you don't have any choice other than to go in and share your story.

In April, seven Youth Salmon Protector members from across the Pacific Northwest did just that. We spent a week traversing Capitol Hill, days booked with back-to-back meetings with agencies and elected officials from Oregon, Idaho, and Washington. Youth from the newly founded Nimiipuu Youth Salmon Protectors chapter shared personal stories with decision makers, expressing the urgency to save wild salmon, and in turn, save the Salmon People themselves. Following in Justin's footsteps, we shared the importance of this Initiative with decision makers in D. C., continuing to put pressure on those who have yet to voice their support for salmon.

It is clear from our meetings that no representative wants to see salmon go extinct, rather they are concerned about how this Initiative will impact those they are elected to represent. We know how this will impact them.

Constituents will be able to see healthy salmon runs in their lifetime. They will be able to hike, camp, and hunt in thriving ecosystems. They will have a reliable and productive power grid and transportation alternatives. They will not have to know an Idaho without wild salmon. Recognizing that all stakeholders are taken into consideration with this agreement, we know that this is the clear path forward. We can make sure that nobody gets left behind.

Youth Salmon Protectors will continue to fight for our future, a future where we will see red fish in Redfish Lake. A future where we know our voices are heard, and Tribal Treaties are being upheld. We will continue to find a seat at the table, even if we have to pull up a chair ourselves. This fight is far from over, and we are far from done fighting.

Lilly Wilson

Youth Engagement Organizer - University Outreach



In April, Youth Salmon Protectors with the Nez Perce Tribe, WA Youth Ocean & Rivers Conservation Alliance, and ICL traveled to D.C. to meet with elected officials and pressure Congress to urgently work to restore salmon runs in the Columbia Basin.



Solar energy is perhaps the most immediate tool in the toolbox to protect our quality of life from continued impacts of climate change.

Here Comes the Sun—and Solar—on Public Lands in Idaho

Public lands in Idaho have many uses, from hiking, biking, and horseback riding to ranching, ATV riding, and motocross. Soon, lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) will provide another public benefit: clean energy.

We need solar energy to replace our dirty fossil fuel plants, and because electricity on the grid benefits all of us, it makes sense to locate these facilities on public lands in some instances or places. Recognizing the need to site solar projects on public lands while also considering other values, the BLM recently released an updated Western Solar Plan. This plan aims to help guide these projects while proactively protecting special areas across the West from development. In Idaho, less than one percent of all BLM-administered lands are slated to have solar on the ground. That's larger than what American Falls Reservoir occupies, but far less space than the BLM's new Bennett Hills Backcountry Conservation Area.

ICL appreciates that the BLM included pre-planned protections in this proposal. There are 21 resource and cultural-based exclusion zones that are automatically excluded from development. Some of these include habitat for threatened and endangered species, Sage-grouse habitat, recreation areas, big game corridors, visual resources, national monuments, scenic rivers, and Tribal interest areas, among many others. Those exclusion criteria are the bare-bones criteria; each solar development will still require project-specific National Environmental Policy Act analysis. In addition to these restrictions, the BLM is proposing to locate solar power only near transmission lines, which is a very practical requirement of our energy systems.

While there is still room for improvement of this plan (for example, ICL submitted comments asking BLM to update their wildlife migration and winter range maps), we generally agree with the proposal. This is smart planning from the BLM, and it comes at a great time—electricity generated from solar is about three-times cheaper than electricity from a methane-gas plant. We should all be happy to say, “here comes the sun!”

Adrian Gallo
Climate Program Manager

CENTRAL IDAHO

Bringing Bears Back to the Bitterroot

The Bitterroot grizzly bear recovery zone encompasses the Selway-Bitterroot and Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness Areas. The 6,000 square miles of wild lands in central Idaho offer abundant food, secure habitat, and room for bears to roam.

ICL is heartened that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) is renewing efforts to restore grizzly bears in this large, unoccupied swath of important core habitat. We offered comments to the agency that will help shape recovery alternatives in a draft plan due next year.

We believe that restoration measures should focus on allowing bears to naturally recolonize the Bitterroot and ensuring they can move there from other recovery areas like Yellowstone, Glacier, and in North Idaho. For a variety of reasons, ICL is NOT in favor of the “reintroduction” of bears, releasing them into the Bitterroot at this time.

ICL is also encouraging the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) and other wildlife managers to take precautionary steps to minimize potential for conflict between bears and people, using practices that are common and widely accepted in other areas with grizzlies.

We’re eager to see the general public engage during this historic conservation effort. There are human implications of having bears back in a wild chunk of Idaho’s backcountry. When folks in eight counties adjacent to the Bitterroots were surveyed in 2000, 62 percent supported restoration efforts. With important, heartfelt community conversations, we can arrive at durable recovery solutions for grizzlies AND people.

Jeff Abrams

Wildlife Program Associate



A grizzly cub stands upright. Ed Cannady photo.

NORTHERN IDAHO

A New Opportunity to Protect Wildlands in the Idaho Panhandle

There are no protected wilderness areas in Idaho’s nine northern counties, but an opportunity is emerging on the horizon to change that.

ICL has been meeting with community interests in Bonner and Boundary Counties for the last several months, including motorized recreationists, mountain bikers, hikers, loggers, Tribes, farmers, ranchers, and others. These conversations reveal that there is broad community interest in crafting federal legislation to protect wilderness areas, recreational access, and wildlife habitat.

There are approximately 68,000 acres of potential wilderness areas in the Scotchman Peaks, Selkirk, and Salmo-Priest Roadless Areas. There’s another 20,000 acres of national forest lands in the upper Pack River that could be

protected from logging, road construction, and mining while allowing summer non-motorized recreational access and winter motorized recreational access.

There is also an opportunity to protect public access and wildlife habitat. Like a checkerboard, there are alternating sections of private lands in the Selkirks. Trails accessing cherished locations like Two Mouth Lakes, Myrtle Peak, Red Top, and West Fork Lake cross these private lands and could be closed at any time. Public access and the wildlife habitats on these lands could be protected by swapping them for Forest Service lands elsewhere.

Community representatives are scheduled to begin meetings this spring, with a goal to craft a legislative proposal for introduction in Congress in 2026. Stay tuned for opportunities to support this effort that would protect these special places and further Idaho’s reputation as The Wilderness State.

Brad Smith
Conservation Director



Backpackers on Parker Ridge in the Selkirk Mountains. Brad Smith photo.

SOUTHERN IDAHO

Advocating for Balanced Travel Management Plans in the Owyhees

Like a dashed tan line against the green-gray sagebrush, a herd of pronghorn trails up and over the ridge and out of sight as I drive past. It is Spring in the Owyhees and both the animals and people are looking for ways to navigate past each other on game trails and two-track roads.

Finding the right balance between wildlife protections and motorized access can be tricky. In most of the Owyhee travel plan decisions so far, the BLM has acceded to the demands of a subset of recreationists who want to permanently enshrine illegal routes, regardless of the

impacts to wildlife or other recreationists. For the Snake River Birds of Prey NCA, however, the BLM did a far better job striking a better balance—thanks to over 600 comments from ICL members and advocates.

While the travel plans are a mixed bag so far, the act of ground truthing the trails in the Owyhees renewed my sense of optimism for the landscape. The vast majority of motorized recreationists, mountain bikers, equestrians, hikers, and wildlife advocates see the need to leave space on the landscape for wildlife, ensure the trails are maintained, and educate users about recreating responsibly. We are hopeful that the BLM will recommit to this vision.

John Robison
Public Lands & Wildlife Director



Thoughtful recreationists, wildlife advocates, and sportsmen are working together to keep these lands free for all, instead of a “free-for-all.”

EASTERN IDAHO

County Ordinances are Preventing Energy Freedom

Solar power is the cheapest way to make electricity. It is three times cheaper than methane gas, to be exact. But despite the obvious benefits, some counties in Idaho are hesitant to allow the location of renewable energy within their borders. Unfortunately, Bannock County recently went so far as to re-institute a ban on solar projects—including on private lands. Twin Falls County is currently examining the topic of siting renewable energy as well, and other county commissions will soon have this on their radar

This is a setback, but it's not catastrophic. Once people realize they can get about as much income—if not more—by leasing their land for solar power as they can growing alfalfa, they might change their mind. For many farmers, leasing their marginal lands as a solar farm is starting to sound much better than working in increasingly difficult conditions of a changing climate.

Counties will also see a financial windfall. Idaho counties currently receive a 3.5 percent electricity sales tax. For a small solar project (~100 MW), this could mean \$180,000 annually for 20+ years. For a large project, this can exceed \$1 million annually. There are huge financial benefits for people who add solar to their lands, and at the end of the day, we will all benefit from a clean energy economy.

Adrian Gallo

Climate Program Manager

WEST CENTRAL IDAHO

Keeping a Watchful Eye on the Stibnite Gold Project

The Stibnite Gold Project is a proposed open-pit cyanide leach mine east of Cascade and McCall in the headwaters of the East Fork South Fork Salmon River. The project is proposed by mining company Perpetua Resources. ICL and our partners have identified numerous concerns with the project, including unacceptable impacts to fisheries, wildlife, and water quality, to name a few. The proposal also raises significant concerns regarding transportation and impacts to roadless and Wilderness areas.

ICL has been engaged on the mine's development and permitting for many years, but things are starting to heat up. The Forest Service is expected to issue a final environmental impact statement (EIS) for the mine this summer, with a final decision on whether construction of the mine will be allowed to move forward or not by the end of 2024. ICL and our partners will rigorously review the final EIS to ensure the Forest

Service's conclusions are accurate and compliant with all environmental laws. Meanwhile, the Nez Perce Tribe, ICL, and Save the South Fork Salmon received a preliminary order on our appeal of water right applications filed by Perpetua Resources for the project. Our coalition has serious concerns regarding how the excess diversion of water at the site would threaten endangered species like Chinook salmon, steelhead, and bull trout.

The hearing officer appointed by the State of Idaho did grant the water rights to Perpetua Resources but, in a significant victory, included stringent conditions on exactly how much, where, and when water can be withdrawn, giving the fish in the area a fighting chance. While Perpetua Resources has appealed this preliminary ruling, this is a big step in the right direction.

From Idahoans and wildlife having clean air to breathe, to native fish having cold water to live, to recreationists having room to play—the Stibnite Gold Project poses too great of a risk in this iconic area of Idaho.

Will Tiedemann

Regulatory Conservation Associate



ICL will be leading a field trip to the Doyle Mountain area (pictured here) in the Fall of 2024.

Idaho dredge mining in the crosshairs

Dredge mining in Idaho has long been a point of contention, with concerns about its impact on rivers and streams culminating in a 1954 voter initiative to protect Idaho's waters. Seventy years ago, 85% of voters agreed that protecting rivers from the harmful effects of dredge mining should be a priority.

Fast-forward to today. Dredge mining is still in the spotlight due to ongoing legal battles and a newly proposed state permit.

ICL's case against California dredge miner Shannon Poe, initiated in 2018, is a key example. Last November, the ruling against Mr. Poe was upheld by the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals, along with his \$150,000 penalty for discharging pollutants into the South Fork Clearwater River without obtaining the necessary permits under the Clean Water Act, Endangered Species Act, and other regulations. He has now petitioned the U.S. Supreme Court to hear his appeal, arguing that since dredge miners work within the river,

there's no addition of pollutants and therefore, no need for permits. Among other things, his argument overlooks the fact that "dredged spoils" are explicitly listed in the Clean Water Act's definition of "pollutants."

Meanwhile, the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (IDEQ) has issued a draft General Permit for dredge mining, largely mirroring a 2018 EPA permit, which restricts dredge mining in most salmon, steelhead, and bull trout habitats.

While ICL and others provided feedback on improving and clarifying the permit, the uncertainty surrounding the Supreme Court's decision in the Poe case raises concerns about whether any permits will even be required.

That's why ICL and our legal team at Advocates for the West and Earthjustice are preparing our Supreme Court response brief to support the existing ruling against Poe, and to ensure that Idaho's waterways are protected from the negative effects of dredge mining for generations to come.

Jonathan Oppenheimer
Government Relations Director



Shannon Poe's dredge mining damaged the South Fork Clearwater River in 2018. Jonathan Oppenheimer photo.



The proposed Stibnite Gold Project would consist of three open-pits, a massive waste rock dump site, a 400' high dam holding back 100 million tons of toxic mine tailings, and an extensive network of roads and other infrastructure in the remote headwaters of the East Fork South Fork Salmon River. EcoFlight photo.

A Big Win for Idaho's Clean Air and Clean Water

As mentioned earlier in this newsletter, mining company Perpetua Resource's proposed Stibnite Gold Project is an open-pit cyanide vat leach mining project that is a disaster waiting to happen.

In efforts to hold Perpetua Resources accountable to all environmental laws and protections, ICL has been reviewing, commenting on, and in some cases, appealing the various air and water pollution permits the mine must obtain before it begins operations.

Back in March, the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) Board held a hearing on ICL's and partner group's appeal of the Stibnite Gold Project's air pollution permit that was issued in July 2022. Our coalition objected to the vast amounts of particulate matter and arsenic that will be released from the mine's activities and could threaten public health.

On May 1st, the Board ruled in our favor on one of several issues in a very big way. Specifically, the Board agreed that DEQ staff improperly analyzed the amount of arsenic the mine would emit. In a statement, the Board called staff's analysis

“short-sighted” and responsible for creating “a misleading risk analysis that greatly underestimates the actual cancer risk (of arsenic emission).” As a result, the Board unanimously voted to remand the issued permit, sending it back to staff to properly address arsenic emissions.

ICL also found significant issues with a draft water quality certification that Perpetua Resources applied for. This certification analyzes how the mine would impact surface water quality, and we found that the certification's analysis fails to meet Idaho regulations. We submitted extensive comments to DEQ on this issue.

Perpetua Resources still has to receive a wastewater discharge pollution permit and a cyanidation permit from DEQ. As always, ICL plans to diligently review these permits to ensure human health and the environment are protected! Thus far, we have been consistently underwhelmed by the pollution management plans for this “state-of-the-art” mining project, and are pleased when state and federal agencies agree with us on these key provisions and send the permits back for additional work.

Will Tiedemann
Regulatory Conservation Associate

ICL Legislative Update: A Session for the Ages



Mary Beth Whitaker photo.

The storm clouds broke, the flowers bloomed, and a warm springtime sun shone on the Idaho State Capitol on April 10 as the final gavel fell, bringing the 2024 Idaho Legislature to a close. It was a fast-paced and tumultuous 97-day session that kept ICL hustling and bustling. Legislators introduced over 600 measures, and for the 51st consecutive year, ICL was there every day of the session, advocating for the water you drink, the air you breathe, and the lands and wildlife you love.

The odds may seem stacked against us, with powerful and well-funded opponents, but as we reflect on the session that was, we're pleased to report that on many important issues, ICL held its own!

The turmoil started in January as the budget-setting committee implemented changes that threatened to slash budgets and public oversight. It ultimately led to the ouster of House Majority Leader Rep. Megan Blanksma (R-Hammett) from her leadership position. With the budget changes, many decisions were made behind closed doors, but the fears over deep budget cuts didn't materialize. Still, in one morning alone the committee approved \$12 billion in funding, representing over 85% of the entire state budget.

One of ICL's funding priorities for the year was to boost state funding to prevent further introduction and spread of invasive mussels. Last fall, quagga mussels were discovered for the first time in Idaho in the Snake River, near Twin Falls. A full blown infestation could devastate critical fish habitat and cost the state over \$100 million per year, so the record \$11.6 million that was allocated for prevention seems like a relative bargain. Moving forward, we will work with state agencies to ensure those funds are well spent to keep our lakes, rivers, and streams free from invasive pests.

We're also pleased to report that the Gem State Air Quality Initiative was fully funded. This program will make Idaho eligible for a portion of \$5 billion in federal grants to improve air quality and reduce climate pollution, allowing all Idahoans to breathe a little easier.

On policy issues, one of the most noteworthy accomplishments was our defeat of not one, not two, but three bills that sought to shield pesticide manufacturers from liability. For decades, Idaho's corporate and agricultural interests have generally gotten their way in the statehouse. Thankfully, when it came to granting legal immunity to the pesticide industry, it was simply a bridge too far.



Concerns with water quality in the mid-Snake River have long been a focus of ICL. The discovery of Invasive quagga mussels has provided an impetus to redouble efforts to restore the Snake to a healthy, ecologically functioning river. ISDA photo.

Back in January, the bill was introduced and ICL rallied farmworkers and public health advocates, citizens, and other partners to oppose the bill. It was defeated in the Senate by a razor-thin four-vote margin. The effort to grant legal immunity wasn't done yet, and enjoyed the support of House and Senate leaders including Senate President Pro-Tem Chuck Winder (R-Boise), Senate Majority Leader Mark Harris (R-Soda Springs), House Speaker Mike Moyle (R-Star), and eight committee chairs.

The legislation was drafted by Bayer (the German pharmaceutical company that purchased Monsanto), which operates mines in southeast Idaho that produce phosphate, the key ingredient in Roundup. Since the acquisition in 2018, the company has paid out over \$13 billion in settlements and jury awards based on claims that their product causes cancer.

But it wasn't just Bayer, other supporters of the bill included a veritable who's who of Idaho political power: potato, sugar beet, and grain growers, Idaho Association of Commerce & Industry, Idaho Mining Association, Idaho Water Users Association, Idaho Dairymen's Association, and even the Chinese People's Liberation Army. You heard that right...one of the proponents of the bill, literally, has a nuclear arsenal.

You see, the Chinese government acquired Syngenta which produces Paraquat, a pesticide that some have linked to Parkinson's disease.



An air tractor sprays pesticide. USFS photo.

The U.S. Department of Defense has listed the parent company ChemChina as a military state company, and the Trump and Biden Administrations both issued sanctions, restricting any investments. Nonetheless, many Idaho legislators supported the effort to shield these companies from legal claims, which would have been a billion-dollar gift.

However, against all odds... we won!

Following the bill's February 15 defeat in the Senate (all 7 Democrats joined 12 Republicans in opposition), a new version was introduced in the House. It never had a hearing due to lack of support. In mid-March when the third version was introduced, President Pro-Tem Sen. Chuck Winder proclaimed it was a "going home bill," meaning that he saw it as a must-pass bill. Until the end of the session, ICL and partners vigilantly watched for the bill to arise in committee. Thankfully, it never did. Because it lacked the votes needed to pass.

While Idahoans may have dodged the bullet this year, we are concerned it's likely to return in 2025. ICL and partners will work in the interim to educate lawmakers and citizens on the importance of protecting justice and public health for all Idahoans.

Public Lands & Wildlife in the Crosshairs

On public lands and wildlife, ICL supported efforts to compensate for livestock losses related to wolves and grizzly bears. Importantly, the bill also funds conflict prevention efforts and could attract additional federal grants to promote coexistence and compensate ranchers. We also helped stop a bill that would have prohibited conservation officers from entering private lands to investigate poaching.

It wasn't all rainbows and sunshine, though. We were disappointed to see a private elk farming bill pass that weakens rules designed to prevent the spread of Chronic Wasting Disease that threatens wild elk and deer herds. We also were unable to stop a bill that exempted two Owyhee County ranchers from public auction requirements for their grazing leases on



It's long been recognized that both rural and urban residents of Idaho care deeply about native wildlife species. Multiple bills this legislative session aimed to help reduce conflicts associated with native predators like grizzly bears and wolves. Ed Cannady photo.

state lands, literally taking money from Idaho schoolchildren and giving it to ranchers. We'll be watching to see if the Idaho Land Board implements the bill. If they do, it invites litigation because it would violate the Idaho Constitution.

We were also disappointed to see a pro-dam, anti-salmon memorial sail through with almost no opposition. Regardless of the Idaho Legislature's non-binding statement on the four lower Snake River dams, across the country, the Biden Administration, the states of Oregon and Washington, and sovereign Tribal Nations inked an agreement at the White House in February that seeks to implement key projects needed to replace the services provided by these four dams.

Climate Change a Non-issue to the Legislature

With regards to climate change, aside from the funding allocated for the Gem State Air Quality Initiative, there wasn't much action this session. In fact, the Energy, Environment and Technology Committee hardly met at all this year.

Early in the session, we did see a draft bill from the Idaho Association of Counties seeking to limit renewable energy projects, but it never saw the light of day. Nevertheless, we expect it to arise next year.

The Cutting Room Floor

Other bills that ended up on the cutting room floor included a bill that sought to roll out the red carpet for crypto-currency mining. Similar bills in other states have rattled communities and strained the electric grids. We also opposed a bill that would have upended the Ada County Highway District Commission, which has increasingly supported alternative transportation initiatives. We were pleased to see both bills fail in the House.

A handful of other bills also stalled out that dealt with public rights of way, incentivizing wolf hunts, opposing grizzly bear reintroduction, and even one that sought to limit cannibalism...

The 2024 Session that was...

In the end, it was a roller coaster of a session. ICL is thankful to all of you, our members, for ensuring that we can continue to serve, year in and year out, as Your Voice for Conservation in the Statehouse.

As we advance our collective mission, we stand by our original commitment from 1973 to strengthen the voice of Idahoans to protect the air you breathe, the water you drink, and the land and wildlife you love. We remain proud to carry forth that legacy!

With that...2025 Idaho Legislature, here we come!

Jonathan Oppenheimer
Government Relations Director

From Earth Day to Every Day: A Legacy of Environmental Advocacy in Idaho

Spring is a busy time in Idaho's landscapes, with more people and wildlife alike out and about on our public lands. It is also a busy time for environmentalists. More minds are on Idaho's environment as people head outdoors, and Earth Day marks a major holiday for ICL and others that care about Idaho's clean air, clean water, public lands, and wildlife.

When the first Earth Day happened in 1970, millions of Americans mobilized to start what would become a worldwide movement. Twenty million people (10% of the U.S. population at the time!) took to the streets, college campuses, and cities across the country to protest environmental ignorance. This first Earth Day is credited with launching the modern environmental movement that we know today, and pressuring Congress to do more to address pollution (like passing landmark legislation including the Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act).

Longtime ICL member Bill Mauk happened to be on the staff that coordinated with other young activists for the first Earth Day. We caught up with him to see what it was like—and to talk about what it became.

Bill reminisced on the early days of grassroots organizing when there was no email, internet, or fax machine—just a mailroom. More than 50 years later, Bill says it has grown into something bigger than he ever imagined. Just here at ICL, we celebrate an Earth Day, Week, and Month, hosting events across the state and beyond. From beach cleanups, to advocacy trips to D.C., to community celebrations large and small—we aim to make sure there is something for everyone.

The way we work has also changed. We consistently find ways to grow our conservation community and leverage grassroots and grassroots influence



Earth Day with ICL in 1994. Diane Ronayne photo.

by delivering the right message, to the right people, at the right time. We bring new people in by focusing on reaching supporters from all ages and backgrounds, capturing the attention of a diverse audience, and ensuring that supporters stay energized with opportunities meaningful to them. Using place-based engagement, outreach, and marketing efforts, we mobilize people locally, regionally, statewide, and beyond—helping earn some of the conservation wins you read about in this newsletter.

But even in this modern era of communication, core to our success is the power of grassroots advocacy. ICL knows that change cannot happen without the efforts of grassroots movements. That's why grassroots organizing has been such a huge part of ICL's work and culture since our founding. And although our grassroots work may look a bit different than it did in 1973, just as Earth Day does, at its core it remains the same. Bill said it best as he reflected on the day that launched a movement: "You felt like you were doing something that made a difference."

Thank you for helping ICL make a difference. Your voice matters, and united, we are a power and protector for a wild Idaho.

Lana Weber
Community Engagement Manager

A Brighter Future Starts Today

As you read this newsletter, I hope you are inspired by the work ICL does to protect the air you breathe, the water you drink, and the lands and wildlife you love. Some of our conservation efforts to protect what makes Idaho special can often take years—sometimes even decades. It took nearly 30 years for ICL to secure the Boulder White Clouds as Wilderness. It took the same amount of time to earn Endangered Species Act protections for wolverines. It's taken just as long to pressure the federal government to protect wild salmon and steelhead by putting us on a path toward breaching the four lower Snake River dams and replacing their services. Thanks to you, these things are getting done.

Much more work needs to be done to reach our conservation goals and protect what makes Idaho special. Protecting Idaho's environment is a forever fight for the Idaho Conservation League—but we can only do it with the support of people like you.

Our conservation community is what makes every win—big or small—possible. But the wins that we hope to see in the coming months and years will only be possible with your continued support. Imagine a future where our rivers, lakes, and streams are teeming with wild salmon and steelhead. Where our public lands are protecting iconic native species like wolverines and grizzly bears. Where wildlife that we've lost—like bison—are back where they belong. Where Idaho's future is resilient to climate change because of the work done by ICL and partners.

You can help us shape that future for Idaho. Please consider making an additional gift to ICL today, or become a *GEM State Protector* by Giving Every Month for conservation in Idaho. Idaho's air, water, lands and wildlife need your support today for a brighter tomorrow. Thank you for your continued support as we build a better future for Idaho together.

Diana Burrell
Development Director



The iconic American bison is not only recognized as our national mammal, but is regarded as a keystone species for its contributions to the health of our grassland ecosystems. Ed Cannady photo.

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Board Updates

Springtime brings changes to Idaho's landscapes as well as changes to ICL's Board of Directors! In May 2024, three board members who have completed their terms will leave the board—David Eichberg, Jim Norton, and Bill Weppner. We are deeply grateful for their contributions over the years, and excited to keep them as members of ICL's conservation community. In their place, we will welcome four new board members—Kalli Axford, David Garman, Heidi Shelton, and Todd True. Each brings valuable experience and commitment to ICL's work.

To learn more about our new board members, head to idahoconservation.org/about/board-of-directors/ or scan the QR code.





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Spring into Action for Idaho's Environment!

In spring, Idaho's landscapes come alive. Hills turn green and inviting, wildlife emerge with their young, and sunshine brings more people outside. In spring, we are reminded that life in Idaho is special. It is a way of life based on clean air and water, abundant wildlife, world-class recreation, and caring communities.

But Idaho is changing. Our environment faces threats old and new.

Help ICL protect Idaho's special way of life and build the future that Idaho deserves. Spring into action for Idaho's environment today by making a special gift to ICL at idahoconservation.org/donate or at the QR code below!

Make A Gift



A bighorn lamb leaps across the rocks. In the spring, lambs are born up on high ledges protected from predators. Ed Cannady photo.