



The Idaho Conservationist



In March, over 1,700 Idahoans gathered at the Capitol building in Boise to rally for public lands and send a clear message to elected officials: Keep public lands in public hands!

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Justin Hayes

Holding Two Things

You'd have to be living under a rock to not feel it—the environment is under serious assault right now.

Across the country, a relentless wave of Executive Orders is rolling back protections for clean air and water, undermining climate action, and putting wildlife and their habitats at risk. In Congress and here at home in the Idaho Statehouse, public lands are being targeted—threatened by proposals to sell them off, or hand them over to state control to serve the interests of extractive industries.

The dismissal of federal scientists and land managers, the canceling of critical programs and long-fought funding—this is not just a political shift. It's a wholesale attack on the people, places, and protections that safeguard our natural world. It feels overwhelming.

And yet—step outside.

The hills are greening. Cottonwoods are leafing out. Across a quiet lake, the sun catches the ridge just right. Sandhill cranes are making their eerie rattling caw in open meadows, and spotted mule deer fawns on ridiculously gangly legs stumble after their mothers in the woods. Creeks are surging with snowmelt. Stars press in overhead.

This is the Idaho you love. This is what we're fighting for.

In times like these, it's easy to feel helpless—even hopeless. But don't. Be angry. Be frustrated. Get fired up. *But don't give up.*

Here at ICL, we're holding two things at once: the deep frustration and sorrow of watching protections potentially unravel... and the passion, determination, and hope that drives us to act. To defend our lands and waters and to push forward, protecting what makes Idaho special.

Because this place is worth it. The work is worth it. You and I are in this together. And thanks to you—your support, your voice, your belief in wild Idaho—we are in this fight forever. Onward.

Justin Hayes
Executive Director



Jim DeWitt

Idaho Needs More Voices Like Yours

There's a place just a few hours' drive from Boise where the old magic still works.

To experience it, arrive in the high sagebrush steppe on an early spring morning while it's still dark. As the sky begins to brighten, the sounds pick up. One "paloop!" followed by a chorus of responses, gradually quieting until the cycle repeats.

The male Greater sage grouse are tuning up for the morning dance at a special spot known as a lek. As the sun breaks the horizon, a few females will fly in, watching carefully, looking for the best mates. And when they do, the males redouble their efforts.

A truly remarkable experience. It's the closest thing to magic I know.

The dance is timeless. Unfortunately, wildlife habitats are not. Habitat loss—including destruction of the sagebrush steppe upon which sage grouse depend—has devastated sage grouse populations.

ICL has a long history of working on sage grouse conservation, but knows it is not enough to protect sage grouse; other species need to be protected as well. A healthy sagebrush ecosystem supports a host of treasured Idaho wildlife, from sage grouse to mule deer and pronghorn. The goal is to have healthy populations of native wildlife in Idaho now and forever.

More than anything, sage grouse and other wildlife need allies. They need people who care and act on their behalf. Thankfully, the birds have a strong, savvy ally in the form of the Idaho Conservation League—and in you. ICL understands that all species are important—keeping all the parts. ICL also understands there are many magic natural areas to be cherished across the Gem State, from the towering old growth cedar forests of the northern panhandle to these sagebrush steppes of the Snake River Plain.

Sage grouse were back dancing at their ancient leks this spring. But how will Idaho's wildlife heritage fare in the uncertain future? That's up to us. Thank you for supporting the Idaho Conservation League.

Jim DeWitt

Chair

Idaho Conservation League Board of Directors

A male Greater sage grouse on full display in the Snake River Plain. Jim DeWitt photo.

Idahoans Rally to Keep Public Lands in Public Hands—and Congressman Simpson Steps Up!



Despite a stormy start to the day, over 1,700 Idahoans showed up to the Public Lands Rally in Boise in March, proving that even the rain won't stop Idahoans from speaking up for their public lands. ICL Staff photo.

On a cool drizzly morning this spring, over 1,700 Idahoans rallied on the steps of the Idaho Statehouse to celebrate, champion, and defend Idaho's public lands. Folks showed up riding horses, carrying kayaks, dressed in camouflage hunting gear, and wearing whitewater life jackets. The speakers emphasized how intertwined public lands are with life in Idaho.

The message was clear: public lands define us as Idahoans, and they are essential to our culture, heritage, economy, and way of life.

The primary "ask" at the rally was for Idaho's Congressional delegation to support the *Public Lands in Public Hands Act*, originally co-sponsored by Rep. Zinke (R-MT) and Rep. Vasquez (D-NM). This bill says that, with limited exceptions, the federal government cannot sell off more than 300 acres of public lands without congressional approval. ICL has invested significant resources into organizing grassroots support for these efforts, and ICL members are putting pressure on elected officials by asking them to Stand by Our Lands!

On April 8, just a few weeks after the rally, **Rep. Mike Simpson (R-ID) stepped up and co-sponsored the bill.** For over a decade,

Congressman Simpson championed the protections of the Boulder-White Clouds and led a collaborative effort to protect over 275,000 acres of this scenic landscape as Wilderness. This August we'll celebrate the 10th anniversary of Hemingway-Boulder, Cecil D. Andrus-White Clouds, and Jim McClure-Jerry Peak Wilderness Areas.

Idaho's other Congressmen have yet to step up in support of public lands. Senator Mike Crapo has a track record of protecting public lands in the Owyhee Canyonlands and championed a collaborative solution that protected over 532,000 acres of Wilderness and designated 16 Wild and River sections totalling 330 miles. However, Senator Crapo recently stated on a podcast that he preferred State ownership. While Senator Crapo has said he supports keeping National Parks under federal ownership, that is small consolation given that Idaho has no National Parks.

Senator Risch also has experience with public lands and serves as a member of relevant oversight committees. In the past he led efforts to protect Idaho's 9 million acres of roadless forests and has endorsed collaborative forest restoration

efforts around communities, but has been largely silent on this issue. Congressman Russ Fulcher has also offered some support for local forest restoration collaboratives, but is also on record as a full-throated supporter of transferring lands to the state “one piece at a time.” That’s a slippery slope indeed.

Meanwhile, the Idaho legislature passed Senate Joint Memorial 104, which calls for seizing control of the Camas National Wildlife Refuge from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and putting it under state control (the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has so far not complied). Idaho’s own Attorney General Raúl Labrador has also doubled down on taking ownership away from the American public, even after the Supreme Court rejected his amicus brief asking the court to do just that.

The argument for “state control” is false on several fronts. First, in both the Idaho Constitution and Statehood Act, the State of Idaho forever disclaimed all right and title to the unappropriated federal lands, leaving them in ownership of the federal government to be managed on behalf of the American people. Second, public lands transfers or sell-offs remove any public say in how these lands are managed and remove multiple use from consideration. And any land transfers to the state would be on a fast track to privatization. The State simply cannot afford the firefighting and other costs to manage these lands. Firefighting costs this last year in Idaho were more than \$400 million, which were spread out among all 340 million American

taxpayers. If these were state lands, the costs would be paid by Idaho’s 2 million residents. In order to balance the budget, the State’s options would be to significantly raise taxes on Idahoans (not going to happen) or to sell them off. In fact, since Statehood, the State of Idaho has already sold off one-third of their land holdings. **Once these lands are sold off to the highest bidder, we have seen what happens: trailhead signs disappear and lines of “No Trespassing” signs go up. Once they are sold, we are never getting them back.**

Special interests are also using affordable housing needs as yet another excuse to sell off public lands, although there are no guarantees that the housing will be affordable. The public lands closest to homes often host the most popular parks and trails. If these are privatized, we can expect “McMansions” and leapfrog sprawl to take over precious open space.

Even if Congress passes the *Public Lands in Public Hands Act*—and the President signs it—our work is not quite done. The legislation requires an act of Congress to sell public lands—but there are signs that Congress may be gearing up to do just that. In the ongoing budget reconciliation process, some are considering public lands as an asset on the country’s balance sheet that could be sold to offset additional tax cuts and subsidies. We were disappointed that both Senators Crapo and Risch recently voted against a bipartisan amendment that would have taken public lands sales off the table.

So as you head out on the trails this spring, keep up the drumbeat to keep public lands in public hands. We are hopeful that Senators Risch, Crapo, and Rep. Fulcher will soon follow in Rep. Simpson’s steps and speak up for our public lands—and for Idahoans.



John Robison
Public Lands & Wildlife Director

Buckle Up Idaho, It's Gonna Be a Bumpy Ride

The Trump administration's environmental and trade policies are rolling out at breakneck speed, leaving a mark on Idaho's forests, waters, energy, agriculture, and other resources.

This spring, in a move to boost domestic timber production, the administration issued an executive order to expedite logging across our national forests, including millions of acres in Idaho inside the Frank Church and Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness Areas. It's unclear whether it was an administrative error, since the order was so rushed, but we're taking it seriously. The strategy removes key environmental safeguards and appears to sideline collaborative forest restoration efforts that ICL helps lead.

The administration also took steps in their first week to block renewable energy projects in Idaho. Notably, an executive order halted the development of the Lava Ridge Wind Project in southern Idaho. The project, which had received approval from the Bureau of Land Management, was intended to produce up to 1,200 MW that could power up to 325,000 homes. ICL will continue to work with state and federal leaders to find alternative energy solutions that address the root causes of climate change.

Significant cuts to the federal workforce and grants have also left many Idahoans reeling as the administration's Department of Governmental Efficiency (DOGE) makes cuts that impact Idaho's forests, rivers, and wildlife. Nationally, over 3,000 employees at the U.S. Department of Agriculture were fired, with thousands more scheduled for further reductions. That includes hundreds in Idaho, impacting farms and forests across the state. Another example, over 1,000 staff cuts at the National Oceanic and

Atmospheric Administration will impact water, climate, and fisheries work in Idaho. Among other pending shifts, fire management changes are likely to roil the 2025 fire season, which is already well underway in some parts of the country.

The administration's directives to expedite mining projects have also raised ICL's concern. Like the logging proposal, these presidential orders attempt to bypass environmental protections by prioritizing mining over other federal land resources, like roadless areas and steelhead habitat in the headwaters of the Salmon River, among other places. ICL will be watching closely and responding appropriately.

While there is little doubt that there are opportunities to reduce excessive spending and inefficient government programs, ICL remains concerned that the administration's actions lack the careful consideration needed to reform federal programs. Instead of a thoughtful, transparent process, the President and his DOGE team appear more focused on sowing confusion than finding solutions. Additionally, fully implementing many of these shifts would require changes to bedrock environmental laws—like the Clean Water Act and Endangered Species Act—which are changes that only Congress can make.

As this unfolds—both in Idaho, and in the halls of Congress—one thing is certain... ICL will be there every step of the way, standing up to protect the air you breathe, the water you drink, and the lands and wildlife you love. The road ahead is bound to be bumpy, but with your support, we're ready to ride. Buckle up—there's a lot worth fighting for!

Jonathan Oppenheimer
Government Relations Director

It's Time to Reimagine Wildlife Conservation in Idaho

The challenges of modern wildlife conservation are far more complex than anything managers faced when the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) was created by a citizens' initiative in 1938.

Earlier this spring, IDFG gathered input from Idahoans all across the state after they announced an effort to update the agency's strategic plan. The once-in-a-decade effort is now rounding the bases and heading for home plate.

This critical opportunity offered Idahoans a way to talk directly to IDFG about the joys that native wildlife brings to our lives. We're deeply grateful to ICL supporters who raised their voices, urging the agency to think bigger—to embrace bold and imaginative strategies that match the scale of today's challenges. Threats like habitat fragmentation, invasive species and disease, sprawl, and climate change cannot be tackled by the same mindset that resulted in vanishing, overexploited game species in the late 1800s.

The problem is that, even though 95% of Idaho's species are not hunted, trapped or fished, only 3% of IDFG's budget is dedicated to their conservation. The vast majority of Idaho's wildlife—including pollinators, amphibians, birds, and most mammals—are left out. This runs counter to the mission of IDFG—to manage ALL of Idaho's wildlife on behalf of ALL Idahoans. To be a more resilient, contemporary, science-driven wildlife agency, IDFG needs to give nongame species a bigger seat at the table. Gifford Pinchot, the first US Forest Service Chief, called it conservation for “the greatest good for the greatest number of people.” This pivot would be smart for wildlife and smart for Idaho.

IDFG must also reimagine a funding model based on contributions from a wider diversity of Idahoans. The agency's heavy reliance on hunting and fishing revenues is inadequate to fulfill their stewardship responsibilities to all wildlife. With popular support for new revenue

sources, we can ensure that all of Idaho's wildlife is taken care of. We don't need a bigger slice, we need to grow a bigger conservation pie.

Idaho's wildlife belongs to all of us! The future of wildlife in our state must not be taken for granted. IDFG's new strategic plan will be released later this year. ICL's hope is that the agency pays close attention to the many voices of Idahoans that love all wildlife and takes action to address the immense challenges our native critters face. It's time for IDFG to work with all wildlife advocates to build a stronger, more resilient wildlife management agency for everyone.

Jeff Abrams
Wildlife Program Associate



An American marten (also known as pine marten) in the South Fork Salmon River watershed. In the 1950s, IDFG live-trapped and relocated pine martens into sections of central Idaho—the same era the agency parachuted beavers into the Middle Fork Salmon River. ICL hopes to see bold strategies like these help protect Idaho's wildlife heritage into the future. ICL Staff photo.

Idaho's Energy Future: The Need for Renewables

Idaho's population growth and the construction of massive data centers are driving up electricity demand. With the state currently importing about 40% of its power, we must prioritize efficiency and expand renewable energy generation.

The fossil fuel industry wants more coal and gas plants, but these sources are not only harmful to the climate—they're also more expensive than wind and solar. Despite this, recent policy proposals and decisions threaten Idaho's transition to clean energy.

The cancellation of the Lava Ridge Wind Energy Project by the Trump Administration limits the ability to meet Idaho's growing demand with renewables. Some counties have enacted moratoriums, bans, or significant restrictions on renewable energy projects, making it even harder to meet demand and driving up electricity rates.

The Bonneville Power Administration's recent proposal to join an Arkansas-based energy market instead of a western regional market could limit access to solar energy from the sunny southwest.

The good news? Economics favor renewables. Wind and solar energy is cheaper than energy from fossil fuels, and these types of projects are advancing on private and state lands, generating local tax revenue, and helping Idaho meet its energy needs. Unlike projects on federal lands, like Lava Ridge, these state and private projects face fewer political roadblocks.

Meanwhile, some state legislators proposed legislation this year that would make it harder to develop wind power, such as a punitive tax on turbines. Another measure sought to restrict ownership of transmission lines to Idaho-based entities—ignoring the fact that interstate transmission is critical to keeping our lights on. Fortunately none of these bills passed.

If Idaho is going to be successful, we must embrace smart energy policies that prioritize affordability and sustainability. Renewables are the future—ICL is working to ensure our leaders support them.

Brad Smith
Conservation Director



Renewable energy projects can benefit all Idahoans by making our utility bills cheaper, creating a more reliable and resilient energy grid, and protecting our special way of life from the impacts of climate change. ICL Staff photo.

CENTRAL IDAHO

It's Time to Address the Elephant

Rather than an elephant in the room, we have an elephant on the trails. He's scattering pieces of garbage, carrying a blaring Bluetooth speaker, feeding a chipmunk candy for Instagram, and turning his back on a not-quite-out campfire to go poop somewhere scenic, maybe by a lake. This "elephant" appeared when our federal land management agencies were targeted with mass firings.

Idaho's most-visited (and most-treasured) recreation areas will be stretched to the limit by visitors this summer. That's not unusual. What is unusual is that there won't be anyone to clean it up, to educate and inform, and to lessen impact. This isn't a theatrical statement: the Sawtooth National Recreation Area, at the time of this writing, has no dedicated rangers. The office is relying on rotating "ranger hitches" that will only patrol certain weekends of the summer.

It's with that reality in mind that ICL gears up for one of the most important seasons of our Wilderness Steward Program yet. Since 2016, ICL's Wilderness Stewards have worked to restore and protect wilderness character throughout central Idaho. On independent patrols, these volunteers act as an extension of the hands, ears, and eyes of rangers, collecting trash, educating the public about wilderness regulations, sharing *Leave No Trace* Practices, and recording data for the U.S. Forest Service and the National Park Service. If you want to make a difference this summer, consider becoming a Wilderness Steward and help deal with the elephant on the trails. Reach out to stewards@idahoconservation.org

Lexi Black

Community Engagement Associate



Wilderness Stewards dismantle a fire ring in the middle of an otherwise healthy, grassy meadow. Lexi Black photo.

NORTH IDAHO

Restoring the Kootenai: An International Opportunity

Clean water, healthy fisheries, and Indigenous rights are values shared by people living in the Kootenai River watershed on both sides of the U.S.-Canadian border.

These values are threatened by Canadian coal mines near Fernie, B.C., which are polluting the Kootenai River with selenium and other contaminants. As these pollutants flow into Idaho, it undermines the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho’s work to restore fisheries, including endangered Kootenai River white sturgeon and burbot. Pollution control at the mines isn’t working and toxins are increasing.

But solutions may be in sight. With pressure from ICL, the International Joint Commission (IJC), which

oversees water disputes between the U.S. and Canada, recently launched a formal study—the first ever to include Tribes and First Nations in decision-making. A Study Board, blending scientific and Indigenous knowledge, will assess damage and recommend solutions. An interim report is due in fall 2025.

As a member of the IJC’s Public Advisory Group, ICL is calling for robust water treatment, corporate accountability, an end to new mines and expansions, enforceable transboundary water standards, and long-term water quality monitoring.

This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to restore and protect the Kootenai River with strong, enforceable recommendations from the IJC. The future of the Kootenai River—and all it sustains—depends on it.

Jennifer Ekstrom
North Idaho Director



Mountaintop removal coal mines in British Columbia undermine water quality in Idaho. EcoFlight photo.

SOUTHERN IDAHO

The Latest on CuMo Mine

This summer, over 100,000 floaters will cool off in the Boise River. The Boise River is the most heavily recreated river in Idaho, and it supplies over a third of the City of Boise’s drinking water. Simply put, the Boise River is priceless.

This summer is also when Idaho Copper, a Canadian mining company, will start a four-year plan in the Boise River headwaters to look for copper (Cu) and molybdenum (Mo). The CuMo mine exploration project will construct eight miles of roads, clear 122 drill pads, and drill over 240 holes, some over 2,500 feet deep. Exploration like this is not benign, and an eventual open pit mine would pose an existential threat to the Boise River watershed.

ICL and our partners are taking a close look at the Forest Service’s authorization for the CuMo Project. We have successfully challenged the project in court twice because the Forest failed to perform baseline surveys for groundwater and Sacajewea’s bitterroot—a native plant found only in this area. We are also concerned that the Forest Service may not have enough staff over the coming years to properly administer, monitor, and manage this project and ensure that public resources are protected.

ICL also recognizes that some places are just too precious to mine—too precious to risk. The headwaters of the Boise River is one of those places.

John Robison
Public Lands & Wildlife Director



EASTERN IDAHO

ICL Tackles Air Pollution in Southeast Idaho

During the spring of 2024, ICL began to investigate air pollution violations from major industrial facilities across Idaho. In particular, ICL was concerned about excess emission events (EEEs)—an emission release that exceeds permitted limits. The Clean Air Act requires facilities having an EEE to file a report, available to the public, with details of the event and an estimate of any emissions that were in excess of their permit.

Via public records request, ICL determined that P4 Production, LLC (P4)—a phosphate mining and processing company located in Soda Springs that is a subsidiary of Bayer and one of Idaho’s largest air polluting facilities—had been submitting hundreds of EEE reports each year without including estimates of how

many pounds or even tons of pollutants were actually released.

Last summer, ICL and our partners at Advocates for the West, the National Environmental Law Center, and Environment America filed a notice of our intent to sue P4 for this improper reporting. This spring, we reached a settlement agreement. Under the terms of the agreement, P4 Production will accurately disclose the types and amounts of air pollutants it releases during EEEs moving forward and will correct emissions data that was missing from past reports.

Public disclosure of toxic emissions is a cornerstone of the Clean Air Act, and allows communities to stay informed about the air they breathe. ICL is hopeful that our success against P4 will motivate other polluters to ensure they file their reports correctly, comply with their permits, and that the public has access to this important information.

Will Tiedemann
Conservation Associate

WEST CENTRAL IDAHO

Stibnite Mine Faces Continuing Challenges

Over a year ago, ICL and our partners appealed the Stibnite Gold Project’s air quality permit. The Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) Board agreed the agency failed to properly consider the health impacts of arsenic pollution. We anticipate DEQ will issue a new decision in mid-May.

ICL also challenged DEQ’s water quality certification, citing failures to address impacts to West End Creek, the risk of heavy metals contaminating the East Fork South Fork Salmon River, and airborne pollution entering waterways. DEQ is now reexamining the project’s water quality impacts.

Meanwhile, Perpetua Resources, the company behind the mine, announced in February that estimated construction costs have jumped nearly 75%—from \$1.3 billion to \$2.2 billion—while recoverable antimony estimates have been downgraded. In March, shareholders filed a class action lawsuit alleging Perpetua made “false and misleading statements” to inflate its stock price.

ICL and our partners continue to challenge the Stibnite mine at every opportunity, and remain committed to protecting the East Fork South Fork Salmon River watershed from irreversible harm.

Randy Fox
West Central Idaho Director



Wildfire smoke tints the sunset over the East Fork South Fork Salmon River. ICL Staff photo.

Proposed Legislation Promises Extinction for Salmon

In January 2025, Senator Jim Risch (R-ID) and Representative Dan Newhouse (R-WA) introduced the *Northwest Energy Security Act*—a bill that would lock in harmful and illegal dam operations on the Snake and Columbia Rivers. Backed by other Congressional Republicans, including Senator Mike Crapo (R-ID) and Rep. Russ Fulcher (R-ID), this proposal ignores science and Tribal rights. To boot, enacting it would actually increase regional power costs.

This bill flies in the face of a strong scientific consensus: the removal of the four lower Snake River dams is essential to restoring salmon and steelhead populations. Decades of data—and the recent work of the Nez Perce Tribe—show many Snake River salmon populations are nearing extinction. Warmer waters, toxic algae, and invasive species have pushed fish to the brink. Yet Risch, Newhouse, and other Northwest Republicans continue to propose policies that ignore this reality, and even make inaccurate claims about the benefits of the dams—such as flood control, which these dams do not provide.

For several years, federal agencies, states, and Tribes have collaborated and negotiated to improve federal dams operations in order to protect fish in their migration while preserving hydroelectric generation. These operational changes would benefit and preserve salmon until broader actions—like dam breaching—are taken to truly restore them. Unfortunately, this bill would reverse this progress, harm salmon, and increase costs, which would show up on electric bills.

Rather than doubling down on unlawful and failed strategies that will never recover salmon, we should instead work together toward lasting solutions that satisfy everyone that depends on Northwest rivers and the fish running through them. With our partners, we're fighting to make sure this bill never becomes law. Then, we're pushing for a future built on abundant salmon, thriving communities, and Tribal justice—not politics as usual.

Mitch Cutter
Salmon & Energy Strategist

Mountains of Manure: Idaho's Mounting Problem

If you've ever driven through southern Idaho, you've probably wrinkled your nose and thought, *What's that smell?* The answer: cow manure—lots of it. Idaho ranks third in the nation for dairy cows and has a sizable beef cattle industry as well, with the vast majority on massive concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs), where up to 100,000 cows are packed into industrial-scale facilities.

Idaho's nearly 1 million dairy cows generate about 94 million pounds of solid waste per day! Add in beef cattle, and the total soars to nearly 140 million pounds daily—enough to bury Boise State's iconic blue football field 42 feet deep in manure every single day. Over the course of a year, that football field-sized manure pile would tower 15,000 feet high—far taller than Idaho's highest peak, Mt. Borah.

Cow manure is loaded with nitrogen and phosphorus. Too much of these pollutants can be a bad thing, contaminating our drinking water

supplies and fueling outbreaks of toxic algae in our waterways. This pollution can end up in our rivers (via runoff) and in our groundwater (via leaching).

Even though we know that cow waste is impacting our water quality, there are significant barriers to identifying the top polluters and holding them accountable. CAFO waste management plans are classified as “trade secrets” under Idaho law, and not a single one of Idaho's 274 CAFOs has a Clean Water Act permit to regulate pollution discharges, because they claim to not have any.

Cows are not going away in Idaho anytime soon, nor is ICL advocating for that to happen. But we must acknowledge the environmental cost of supporting over 1.4 million cows in the state and take steps to minimize the impacts.

Josh Johnson
Central Idaho Director



2025 Legislative Report



ICL Government Relations Director, Jonathan Oppenheimer auctioneering at *Wild Idaho!*. After 23 years with ICL, Jonathan Oppenheimer will be leaving ICL for new opportunities. Kelly Hewes photo.

The 2025 Idaho Legislative Session is in the rearview mirror, and Oh Boy! was it an active session. While we certainly had our share of to-be-expected losses, we also had some notable wins, and were able to defeat some of the most dangerous bills.

As we anticipated early in the session, the political winds took a sharp right turn in the statehouse after several farther-right

candidates ousted incumbents in the May 2024 primary. The resulting shift posed challenges, but also opened doors.

One of ICL’s top concerns going into the session was the potential for pesticide and chemical manufacturers to resurrect a new version of their legal immunity bill after we defeated it three times in 2024. The effort to exempt thousands of these dangerous products from litigation was led by Bayer, the multinational pharma and chemical corporation, which has been reeling from billion-dollar payouts related to health impacts from their herbicide RoundUp. The bill was introduced early in the session, but ICL was prepared. Alongside farmworker and consumer advocates, we released polling data that showed 89% of Idahoans opposed giving pesticide companies legal immunity. We led a diverse coalition against the bill, and thanks to strong bipartisan opposition, it quickly lost momentum. The bill never even received a hearing.

Several other bills met a similar fate; they were introduced, only to stall out without a hearing. That included several troubling wildlife bills. One of the most concerning proposals would have made it more difficult for state efforts to relocate

or reintroduce wildlife—even in cases where animals were causing conflicts and needed to be moved. It would have required captured animals to be held for at least 40 days before they could be released. We’re relieved this bill didn’t move forward.

One that unfortunately did pass was a non-binding resolution calling for the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to remove grizzly bears from the Endangered Species list. ICL opposed the measure because federal recovery goals—which need to be met before grizzlies can be delisted—have not been reached. Regardless of their status, ICL will continue to work to promote coexistence and to ensure that grizzly bears, and all native Idaho species, remain in the wilds of Idaho where they belong.

On the climate front, given the palpable animosity toward renewable energy, and especially wind turbines, the legislature rolled out numerous roadblocks seeking to stall new projects. One would have imposed a \$25,000-per-foot tax on windmills, topping out at over \$9 million per wind turbine. Thankfully it wasn’t taken seriously, and was never heard in committee. Aside from



Boise Capitol. ICL Staff photo.

a couple of non-binding resolutions, only one renewables-related bill passed, and in the end ICL supported it. It was amended to give energy developers more time to install new technology that limits the need to activate blinking lights unless airplanes are nearby. ICL has supported renewable energy since 1973, and agrees with utilities and state regulators that renewables represent the lowest risk, lowest cost source of power for consumers, AND that we need to find ways to minimize impacts associated with any new energy projects. That includes minimizing the need for obtrusive lighting that impacts our dark skies and views from communities, which is what this bill does.

Now, we don't want to give the impression that we were completely successful this session. You probably aren't surprised to learn that there were a number of bills that became law, despite staunch opposition from ICL. Shocking, we know.

In particular, we were discouraged to see two bills enacted that threaten road safety for walkers, bikers, and drivers. Local highway commissioners oversee most of Idaho's roads, but thanks to the new measures, they're now forced to focus on straightening and widening roads—while calming and safety projects that protect pedestrians and

cyclists have been shoved to the shoulder. These new laws fly in the face of advice from transportation professionals: slow traffic to reduce Idaho's rising number of road deaths and injuries. 2023 was the deadliest year in two decades with 277 total road fatalities, 39 of whom were Idaho cyclists and pedestrians. These deaths are preventable.

These laws will increase road fatalities. Whether walking, bicycling, using mobility aids, or driving, all Idahoans should be able to travel safely.

We were also disappointed by the passage of several public lands-related measures. One non-binding resolution encourages the federal government to transfer ownership of the federal Camas National Wildlife Refuge to state ownership. ICL has long opposed efforts by the state to seize control of public lands. We were on the frontlines during the Sagebrush Rebellion in the late 70's, and have fought every effort to seize or transfer public lands to state or private ownership. This time was no different. ICL was one of the few voices opposing this resolution, and despite robust opposition, along with concerns expressed by the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes over loss of treaty rights, the measure passed overwhelmingly.

Wildfire, ranching, and water were also hot public lands-related topics that arose during the session. One bill would authorize the Governor to send in state firefighters to fight fires on National Forests and Bureau of Land Management lands in a manner that violates the existing Idaho-Federal cooperative wildfire agreements. It passed and, if used, could expose Idaho to significant liability and budget-busting fire suppression costs that would unlikely be reimbursed by the feds. Another bill will open



Cynthia Gibson will be taking the helm of ICL's government relations work moving forward.



A grizzly bear stands upright in the wilds of Idaho. Ed Cannady photo.

Idahoans' wallets to pay for ranchers' and water users' private legal costs. It too passed, and the Governor signed both bills into law despite our veto requests.

We also opposed a proposal from the mining industry to weaken regulations designed to protect the environment from cyanide, a toxic compound used in gold mining operations. This is especially concerning, because the new rules will apply to the pending Stibnite Gold Project near Yellow Pine, which ICL is challenging in federal court due to its potential impacts on fisheries, water quality, roadless areas, and other sensitive resources. The bill replaced the carefully negotiated 2022 rules for cyanidation permits with new rules that were more to the mining industry's liking. Since the 1980s, cyanide spills at the Yellowjacket and Blackbird Mines, both near Salmon, released 40,000 gallons of cyanide-contaminated waste, resulting in significant downstream impacts. In the Owyhee Mountains, over 100 waterfowl died after landing in cyanide-laced tailings pond at the DeLamar Mine. While Montana prohibits the use of cyanide, Idaho rolls out the red carpet.

As the dust settles on the 2025 legislative session, Idaho's political landscape continues to evolve—and with it, the stakes for our environment and communities. While we're proud of the wins we secured and the harmful bills that we halted in their tracks, many of the setbacks serve as a sobering reminder for the work that remains. From protecting Idaho's cherished wildlife and wild places to fighting for clean energy and healthy communities, ICL remains as committed as we were in 1973 to stand up for Idaho's land, air, water, and wildlife. With your continued support, we'll keep showing up—in the marbled corridors of the Capitol, in oak-paneled courtrooms, and on Main Streets in countless communities across the state. Together, ICL has proven time and time again that united, determined, and passionate voices can make a difference. With your continued support, we will continue to fight for the lands, waters, wildlife, and people that make Idaho special—because Idaho is...and always will be, worth it.

Jonathan Oppenheimer
Government Relations Director

Cynthia Gibson
Government Relations Associate

Your Legacy for Idaho's Future

Spring brings a sense of renewal. Warmer temperatures and blooming wildflowers color the land, while birdsong and the hum of bees signal life stirring again. Bears awaken from hibernation, baby animals like fawns and cubs take their first awkward steps, and we too, emerge from our winter dens—grateful for the nourishment and wonder Idaho's wild places offer our minds and spirits.

In this season of growth and hope, we reflect on the future of Idaho—the one we cherish and the one we hope to leave behind. What would become of our crystal-clear North Idaho waterways or the East Fork of the South Fork Salmon River if mining and development went unchecked? What would our skies look like without ICL holding polluters accountable? What would happen to the vast public lands that define our way of life and shelter Idaho's iconic wildlife if they were sold off to the highest bidder?

Thanks to you, we're here now—fighting for Idaho and laying the foundation for the future. We're so grateful for your support. And today, we invite you to consider taking one more step: include ICL in your will or estate plan.

Whatever your age, a thoughtfully crafted estate plan protects your loved ones and the Idaho you treasure. By including a gift to ICL in your plans, you create a lasting legacy—ensuring clean air, clean water, thriving wildlife, and public lands for generations to come.

ICL partners with [FreeWill.com](https://www.FreeWill.com), a free and simple tool that helps you create your will and explore other essential estate planning steps. For more complex needs, it's a helpful first step before meeting with a legal professional.

As Idaho's wildflowers blanket our meadows and hillsides this spring, we invite you to plant a legacy that will continue to blossom for years to come.

Please contact Diana Burrell with any questions, or to let us know you have already named ICL in your will, at dburrell@idahoconservaton.org or 208-345-6933 x 217.

Diana Burrell
Development Director



From left to right, Boise Mayor Lauren McLean, Lilly Wilson (Youth Salmon Protectors/ICL), Ella Jenveja (Youth Salmon Protectors/ICL), and Taelyn Baiza (ICL Artist in Residence) celebrate the unveiling of the Youth Salmon Protectors' new mural at the Boise WaterShed



Celebrating ICL's 2024-2025 Artist in Residence, Taelyn Baiza!

Since 2013, ICL has celebrated Idaho's natural beauty—and the advocacy that's done to protect it—through our Artist in Residence program. This year's artist, Taelyn Baiza, is wrapping up her residency with a stunning body of work. From drawings showcasing the biodiversity of healthy ecosystems, to woodburnings of iconic Idaho critters, to a permanent mural at the Boise WaterShed, we are deeply grateful for Taelyn's contributions to conservation. Taelyn is also a member of Youth Salmon Protectors, highlighting her passion and deep commitment to protecting the natural world. That's not to mention she's created these elaborate works and continued her advocacy on top of the demands of completing her first year of college. We can't wait to see what she achieves next! To see more of Taelyn's art, follow her on Instagram at [@taelynbaizaart](https://www.instagram.com/taelynbaizaart)



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Resources Manager

Rachel Brinkley
Community Engagement
Associate

Diana Burrell
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Plant the Seed for Conservation!

You know that Idaho is a special place, and you can protect it. Plant the seed for wild Idaho to flourish for years to come by supporting the Idaho Conservation League! We work hard to defend your favorite places and critters in Idaho, but we can't do it without you. Join us and protect Idaho's natural heritage for now and future generations.

Scan the QR code to make a gift or go to idahocl.org/N0525

Make A Gift



A Clark's nutcracker holds the seed of a whitebark pine in its beak. These two species have created a coevolved mutualism, meaning that both species have interacted in ways that have influenced the other species' evolution over time. While the nutcrackers rely heavily on the food and shelter whitebark pines provide, the trees rely on the birds to help germinate their seeds. The Whitebark pine is listed as "threatened" under the Endangered Species Act. Ed Cannady photo.

To Contact ICL: 208.345.6933 | icl@idahoconservation.org
www.idahoconservation.org