

# IDAHO RANGELAND Resources Commission

2022 Annual Report

## IRRC Public Opinion Poll finds mixed results

The latest IRRC public opinion poll, conducted by Boise State University, the University of Idaho, and Idaho State University, showed reduced support for livestock grazing on public lands, a sharp increase in “don’t know” responses, and similar outcomes for other questions about the effect of livestock grazing on public rangelands compared to previous polls.

The poll also had a new recreation section showing greater concern about the impact of increased recreation use on public lands and hinted at preferred solutions to deal with resource impacts and overcrowding.

A total of 1,048 residents responded to the survey, including 786 web-based responses and 262 phone-based responses. The survey showed representative views of

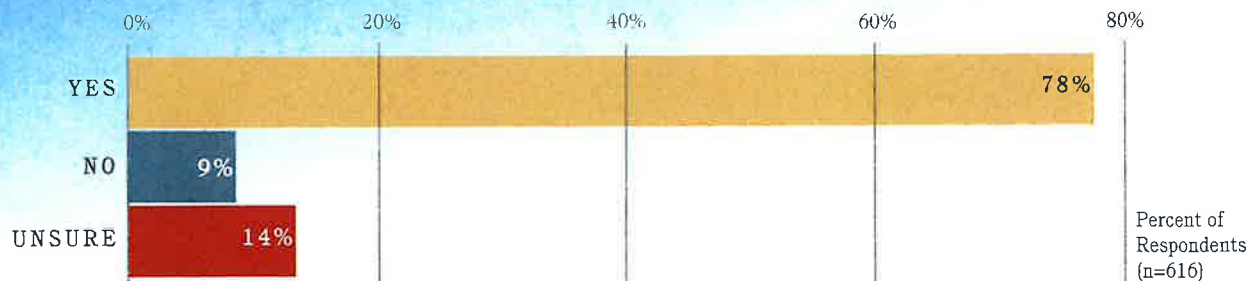
both urban and rural residents, poll officials said.

The initial survey data was compiled in October and November 2021. An additional question was re-surveyed in the summer of 2022, with 616 Idahoans responding.

The re-survey question was, “*Do you approve of the use of public lands for livestock grazing?*” Seventy-eight percent said yes, 9% said no, and 14% were unsure.

Initially, poll researchers had asked the question a different way: “*Do you approve of the use of public lands for livestock production?*” The response showed only 61% of the respondents approved of livestock production on public lands. This compared to responses in 2010 and 2014 polls showing 89% and 90% approval of the use of livestock grazing on public lands. *Continued next page*

### Do you approve of the use of public lands for livestock grazing?





### *Poll Finds Mixed Results Continued:*

Upon learning about the wording change by the pollsters on this question, the IRRC Board of Directors asked them to re-survey the question so it was consistent with the question asked in previous polls. IRRC staff and board members thought perhaps people were responding to feedlots when asked about “livestock production.”

The re-survey increased the result to 78%, but that still raised questions, seeing that the “Don’t Know” answer went up significantly. Overall, survey respondents were overwhelmingly female (61%), compared to male (36%). In general, the number of “Don’t Know” or “Unsure” answers went up considerably compared to previous polls, indicating that IRRC has more work to do on the education front, which is our primary mission. The poll also found that males were certain about their answers, while females were more uncertain about various topics.

The most common ways survey respondents used sagebrush landscapes was by hiking (62%), camping (53%), and wildlife and bird watching (46%).

Respondents approved most strongly of recreational uses of public lands, with 84% or more approving of hiking, wildlife and bird watching, camping, horseback riding, mountain biking, and guided recreation, while logging received the lowest approval rating (45%).

A majority of respondents (51%) stated that the condition of Idaho’s rangelands is “good” or “very good”.

### **Other results:**

- Most respondents believe that cattle (70%) and sheep (68%) producers manage rangelands in a responsible manner, and 73% of respondents felt that ranches and farms are important to the preservation of wildlife habitat.
- Seventy-six percent of respondents agreed that livestock grazing should be kept as part of the management of public rangelands.
- Nearly one half (44%) of respondents felt that wildfire was a “significant” or “severe” problem for Idaho’s rangelands, with an additional 31% stating it was a “moderate” problem.
- Sixty percent or more of respondents felt that reducing the risk of wildfire to communities, maintaining wildlife habitat, and preventing the spread of invasive species are “high” priorities for making decisions about public rangelands.
- Respondents frequently believed their personal recreational use of public lands to have “somewhat” to “very” positive impacts on the environment (42%) and to have “neither positive nor negative” impacts on other public lands users (40%).



- Sixty percent or more of respondents felt that traveling off of designated trails, displacement of wildlife, overcrowding by recreationists, soil and vegetation disturbance, and traveling outside of recreational areas were “moderate” to “very serious” problems related to recreation on public lands.
- As for solutions to recreation impacts, respondents supported traffic-control solutions (e.g., seasons of use, single-use areas) more strongly than fee-based solutions (e.g., annual use pass, daily access fee). Seasons of use and single-use areas were the most strongly supported, with 73% and 67% of respondents, respectively, supporting those measures “somewhat” or “strongly”. Lottery-based permits were the least supported measure, with 32% of respondents supporting this measure “somewhat” or “strongly.”

In 2021, pollsters asked a new question about how various factors should be prioritized when making decisions about public rangelands.

“Reducing the risk of wildfire to communities” was ranked as a high priority by the highest percentage of respondents (70%), followed by “maintaining wildlife habitat” (66% high priority) and “preventing the spread of invasive species, such as cheatgrass” (60% high priority).

Respondents were split in considering “the economic well-being of local communities” as a high priority (44%) or a medium priority (42%).

“Recreational opportunities and access” received the lowest priority ranking overall, with 31% of respondents considering this a high priority and 47% a medium priority in decision-making about public rangelands.

**Conclusion:** The most important findings from this study indicate that Idahoans use and derive economic benefits from these landscapes in a multitude of ways, believe livestock grazing should be kept as part of public rangelands management, and view the maintenance of wildlife habitat and prevention of wildfires to be high priorities for Idaho’s rangelands.

A majority of respondents believe that cattle and sheep producers manage rangelands in a responsible manner and that Idaho’s rangelands are in “fair” to “good” condition.

**Darcy Helmick, Chair** **Gretchen Hyde, Executive Director**

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## Education Update

The new IROAM educational trailer and tents are making an impact across Idaho. At a recent forum on Rural Education in Idaho, IRRC was asked to share the IROAM tent and trailer to educational leaders. The approach of taking an educational experience to the students rather than expecting teachers to add another "thing to do" to their list was heralded as a great way to assist teachers and adding foundational knowledge to their curriculum—without overwhelming them with another task.



*Dr. Karen  
Lauchbaugh teaching  
teachers group*

This past year, IRRC hosted two AmeriCorps members who helped spread the word and take the IROAM experience to schools. Unfortunately, finding replacements for this year has been difficult. Jackie Ingram, Melanie Mosekian, and I have been all over Idaho this fall impacting thousands of kids. The Boise School District incorporated IROAM into the Environmental Experience this fall as part of a pilot program. The goal is to reach all 5th grade students in the Boise schools in the next few years. The "Four Seasons with Sage" are being distributed statewide as well.

As always, if you have connections with a local school and would like to see this incorporated into their curriculum, please help IRRC find a contact. Word of mouth is the best way to market materials to schools. IROAM Ambassador trainings are also available for anyone interested in helping with this program. It is so rewarding to see the student's interest and knowledge increase about rangeland and livestock grazing. Join the IROAM team today! **Gretchen Hyde, Executive Director**



*7th Graders learning about plants*

## Recreate Responsibly Idaho campaign gets traction

The IRRC was one of more than 10 state and federal agencies participating in the Recreate Responsibly Idaho campaign in Summer 2022. Agency partners worked together on an earned media outreach campaign – primarily weekly social media posts and press releases on big outdoor holiday weekends, Memorial Day to Labor Day.

Steve Stuebner, writer and producer of Life on the Range, served as the statewide RRI coordinator, working closely with Robbie Johnson and Scott Phillips at the Idaho Department of Lands, on earned media outreach. Steve's services for RRI were funded by the BLM.

The Idaho Department of Commerce led a paid media campaign in 2022 with a \$450,000 budget (up from \$300K in 2021), using TV advertising, Google, Facebook and Instagram ads to drive traffic to our Recreate Responsibly Idaho Facebook page, and RRI Instagram page and RRI YouTube channel.

The goal of both campaigns is to reduce incidents of “bad behavior” with outdoor recreationists – leaving trash behind at campsites, failing to put out campfires, poor trail etiquette, bad camping practices, tearing up meadows or hillsides with OHVs and more.

The paid campaign enticed people on social media to take a 10-question quiz about outdoor ethics on [recreate.idaho.gov](https://recreate.idaho.gov). More than 5,000 people took the quiz.

Our social posts with the most engagement were:

- Evacuation tips in the event of a wildfire from our friends at Firewise –25,000 engagements.
- LOTR Sheep Guard Dogs video, underscoring the importance of leaving the dogs in the field, 13,300 engagements and 99 shares.
- Off-Highway Vehicle tips – 15,000 engagements.
- No Fireworks on public lands over the 4th of July holiday - 17,500 engagements, 76 shares.
- Water safety, emphasizing the importance of wearing life jackets – 8,000 engagements.

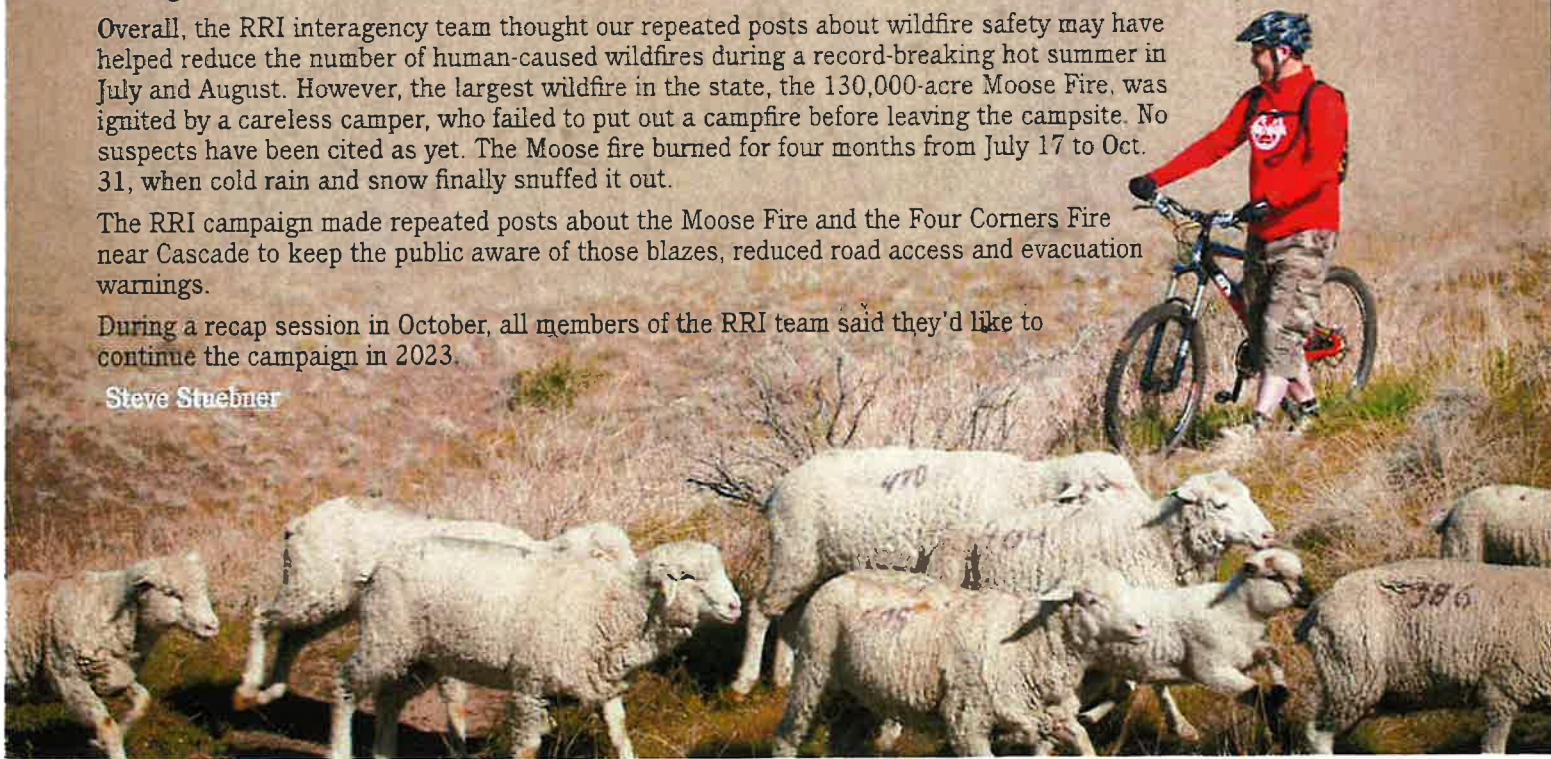
The Idaho Department of Lands shared our RRI social posts using GovDelivery by Granicus, a service that empowers government agencies to communicate directly with constituents via email and SMS/text messaging. IDL gained 910 subscribers during the summer campaign, leading to more shares and engagement.

Overall, the RRI interagency team thought our repeated posts about wildfire safety may have helped reduce the number of human-caused wildfires during a record-breaking hot summer in July and August. However, the largest wildfire in the state, the 130,000-acre Moose Fire, was ignited by a careless camper, who failed to put out a campfire before leaving the campsite. No suspects have been cited as yet. The Moose fire burned for four months from July 17 to Oct. 31, when cold rain and snow finally snuffed it out.

The RRI campaign made repeated posts about the Moose Fire and the Four Corners Fire near Cascade to keep the public aware of those blazes, reduced road access and evacuation warnings.

During a recap session in October, all members of the RRI team said they'd like to continue the campaign in 2023.

**Steve Stuebner**



## LOTR roundup for 2022

The Life on the Range crew started out the 2022 field season by traveling to the Sterling Wildlife Management Area near Aberdeen to do a story about targeted grazing in a wildlife refuge to reduce an overburden of dead vegetation to allow new plants to grow, while also providing winter forage for livestock.

This was a partnership story with Maria Pacioretty, habitat biologist with the Idaho Department of Fish and Game, and Pingree cattle ranchers Dallin and Chase Carter.

"We have a biomass problem. It's really thick, almost impenetrable," Pacioretty said. "It's almost suffocating in a sense."

After two years of targeted grazing in the winter months on frozen ground, follow-up range monitoring shows that the grazing is opening up the land for sunlight to penetrate to the ground, and new wetlands plants are emerging. The Carters have been herding cattle and using solar hot wire fencing to focus the cattle on

specific areas that need attention.

It's a win-win situation at Sterling WMA. We were happy to spotlight this conservation success story for the Life on the Range video series. The story, "Targeted Grazing at Sterling Wildlife Management Area," has had more than 5,700 hits on YouTube so far, plus our written feature story was shared in the Idaho Falls Post Register's Farm & Ranch publication and the Idaho Farm Bureau's Producer magazine, reaching tens of thousands more readers.

In the spring, we rolled out a new in-depth story about the Cheatgrass Challenge, a project led by the Natural Resources Conservation Service in partnership with the Salmon-Challis National Forest, the Bureau of Land Management Salmon Field Office, Mule Deer Foundation, Governor's Office of Species Conservation, private landowners and more.

The strategy of the Cheatgrass Challenge is to "Defend the Core, Grow the Core," in terms of eliminating the



*Left top: IDFG has been monitoring plant growth in the refuge each summer to track progress. IDFG photo*

*Above: Ranch hand Cole Lewis herds cattle toward the Sterling Wildlife Management Area. Photo by Steve Stuebner*

*Left: pre-grazing decadent vegetation built up over the years, blocking sunlight from reaching the ground for new plants to grow. IDFG photo*

*Steve Stuebner is the writer and producer of the Life on the Range education series, a public education project sponsored by IRRRC.*

spread of cheatgrass and invasive noxious weeds in areas of Idaho where we have a stronghold of native vegetation. We traveled to the Salmon area to showcase the work being done on the Cheatgrass Challenge. The Forest Service did aerial herbicide spraying with helicopters to kill cheatgrass in selected sites, while the BLM hired ground crews to spray cheatgrass invasions.

Ground crews GPS'd their spray tracks so the land management agencies can track results. Once the cheatgrass invasions are suppressed, the native plants and forbs are re-emerging and coming back strong.

The Cheatgrass Challenge is a long-term project that will target new areas for treatment in the years to come.

During the summer, we worked on a 10-year anniversary story on rancher-led Rangeland Fire Protection Associations (RFPAs) in Southern Idaho, and a story

on carbon sequestration in rangelands with Blackfoot ranchers Mark and Wendy Pratt. In the late fall, we traveled to Salmon to work on a story about the 130,000-acre Moose wildfire, and how that affected Carmen Creek ranchers Jay and Chyenne Smith.

The RFPA story has shown significant success as more than 10 RFPAs have formed across Southern Idaho since 2012. More than 325 ranchers have received full red-card training from the Bureau of Land Management. In the Three Creek RFPA, ranchers pre-position fire suppression equipment (trucks and water) in very remote locations to help with initial attack. In many instances in recent years, RFPAs have worked in tandem with the BLM and local rural fire departments to speed up initial attack and keep range fires smaller. Every year is different! But we were happy to shine the light on this success story in cooperation with the Idaho Department of Lands and the BLM.

See more at [idrange.org/life-on-the-range](http://idrange.org/life-on-the-range).

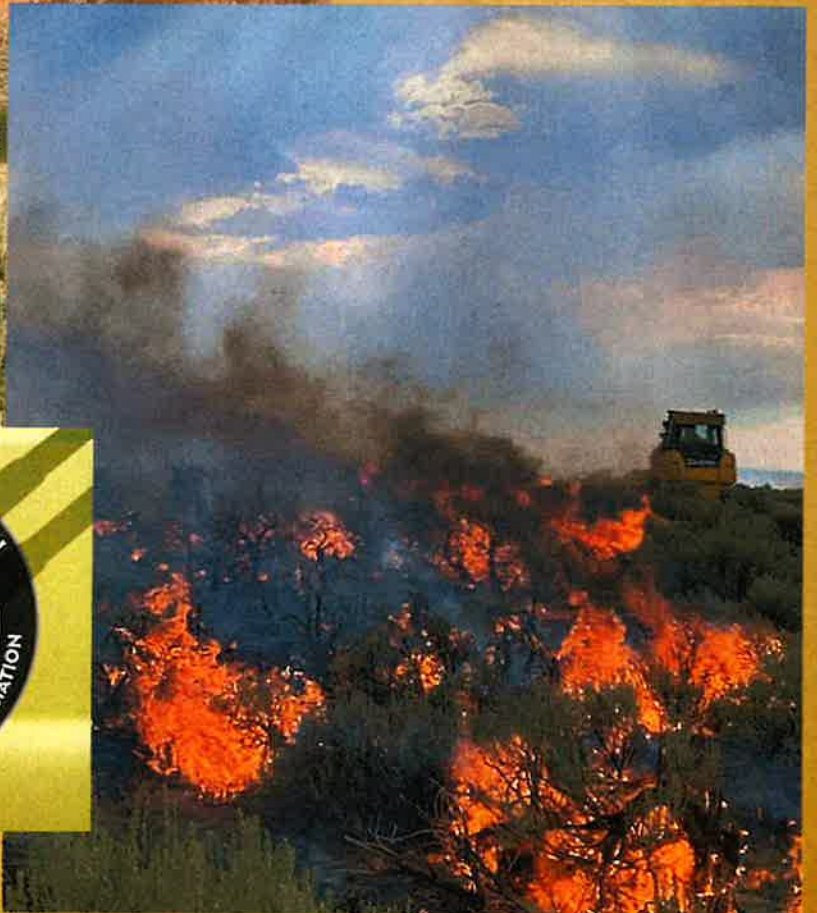


*Above: Lori Satterwhite records plant growth while range monitoring in Shoshone Basin*

*Top: a rancher's dozer digs fireline on a wildfire in Shoshone Basin*

*Right: Ranchers work on initial attack on a wildfire in Shoshone Basin*

*All photos courtesy Lori Satterwhite, Shoshone Basin RFPA*





Total Revenue \$392,788



- Assessments
- Grants
- License Plate
- Trespass Fines
- Other



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## IRRC FY 2022 Financial Statements:

The IRRC appreciates every dollar contributed by ranchers, landowners, and partners. The IRRC is audited annually and presents the financial statements to the germane legislative committees. Grants and assistance agreements augment the IRRC budget. IRRC supports the Life on the Range outreach program, underwrites with proactive messages about rangeland and ranching NPR in Boise and Pocatello and is active on social media. Local grant projects are funded by IRRC and are available for 2023 as well.

The education, public relations, and research programs would not be possible without the support of the ranching community. The "On the Range" license plate is another source of funding which goes directly into the educational campaigns.

### IRRC Board and Advisory Members:

A volunteer board of five voting members, appointed by the Governor, governs the IRRC.

#### IRRC Board Members

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- Jerald Raymond, Vice Chair**  
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- Dawn Holmes**  
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- Merrill Beyeler**  
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- Idaho Department of Lands Director*
- Idaho State Department of Agriculture Director*
- Office of Species Conservation Director*
- Natural Resource Conservation Service, Idaho State Conservationist*
- US Fish and Wildlife Idaho State Director*
- US Forest Service Forest Supervisors*
- University of Idaho College of Natural Resources Dean*
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