

Where the Wild Lands Are: Idaho

THE IMPORTANCE OF ROADLESS AREAS TO
IDAHO'S FISH, WILDLIFE, HUNTING & ANGLING



**A Report Produced by
Trout Unlimited's Public Lands Initiative**

The Value of Roadless Areas to Idaho's Fishing and Hunting



The Southern Pahsimeroi Mountains, Idaho

Idaho contains more wild and remote public land than any state outside of Alaska. More than 4 million acres of roadless high desert mountains and deep river canyons exist in the arid southwestern region under the management of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). On public lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service, over 9 million acres of inventoried roadless areas (5000 acres and larger) stretch from the Selkirk Mountains on the Canadian border to the Wasatch Range that Idaho shares with Utah.

Within the rugged reaches of the Boulder and White Cloud mountains, the Pioneers, the Salmon and Clearwater mountains, the Owyhee Canyonlands, and dozens more wild areas, lie some of the most pristine and intact trout, salmon and wildlife habitat left in the lower 48 states. Only a small amount (between 7 and 8 percent) of Idaho is protected by wilderness, national park or wildlife refuge designation.

Idaho's roadless areas cradle some of the most productive fishing and hunting opportunities left in the western U.S. For example, while states such as Oregon, Washington, Utah, and Nevada have moved almost exclusively to limited-entry hunting opportunities with restrictions on tags and hunt areas, many of Idaho's wildest places still offer months-long general deer and elk hunting seasons.

Roadless areas on public lands are owned by all of the American people and managed in trust by the U.S. Forest Service and the BLM. These lands are threatened by unregulated, and sometimes illegal, off-road-vehicle use, noxious weeds and invasive species, road construction and timber harvest. This report will help to ensure that people who care about fishing and hunting opportunities in Idaho are armed with good information so they may positively influence efforts to protect and conserve roadless areas in Idaho and elsewhere.

The future of Idaho's, and the rest of the nation's, roadless public lands have been the source of political controversy and legal wrangling for decades. Trout Unlimited prepared this report because we believe it essential that the voices of anglers and hunters are considered in determining the future of Idaho's roadless public lands. As this report reveals, few interests are more affected by how the Forest Service and BLM manage our roadless areas than sportsmen and women. Our voices need to be heard.

Idaho Facts:

- Idaho contains 52,961,000 total acres.
- Seven percent, or 4,005,653 acres, of Idaho is protected in congressionally mandated wilderness.
- 9 million acres of inventoried roadless areas remain in national forests.
- Approximately 4 million acres of roadless BLM lands remain.
- 32 percent of Idaho's total land base is roadless.



Rapid River, Nez Perce National Forest



Trout and Salmon

Fish are particularly important barometers of land health. All of our actions on the landscape are ultimately reflected by the condition of our rivers and streams and the species that depend on them. When a significant number of native fish populations have been lost, it is clear that many of Idaho's rivers and streams have suffered degradation from roads, logging and other development.

Roads not only deposit large amounts of sediment into streams and rivers, eliciting negative effects on trout and salmon, but studies show that roads built on hillsides above streams are a leading cause of landslides. Sediments from roads and landslides coat rocks and gravel, smothering the eggs of spawning fish and choking out the insects trout rely on for food. Suspended sediments diminish water quality and can impair gill function.

Roadless areas experience far fewer such impacts, and as a result they hold the bulk of healthy native trout and salmon populations in Idaho. As these maps illustrate, there is a striking correlation between roadless areas and superior fish and wildlife habitat.

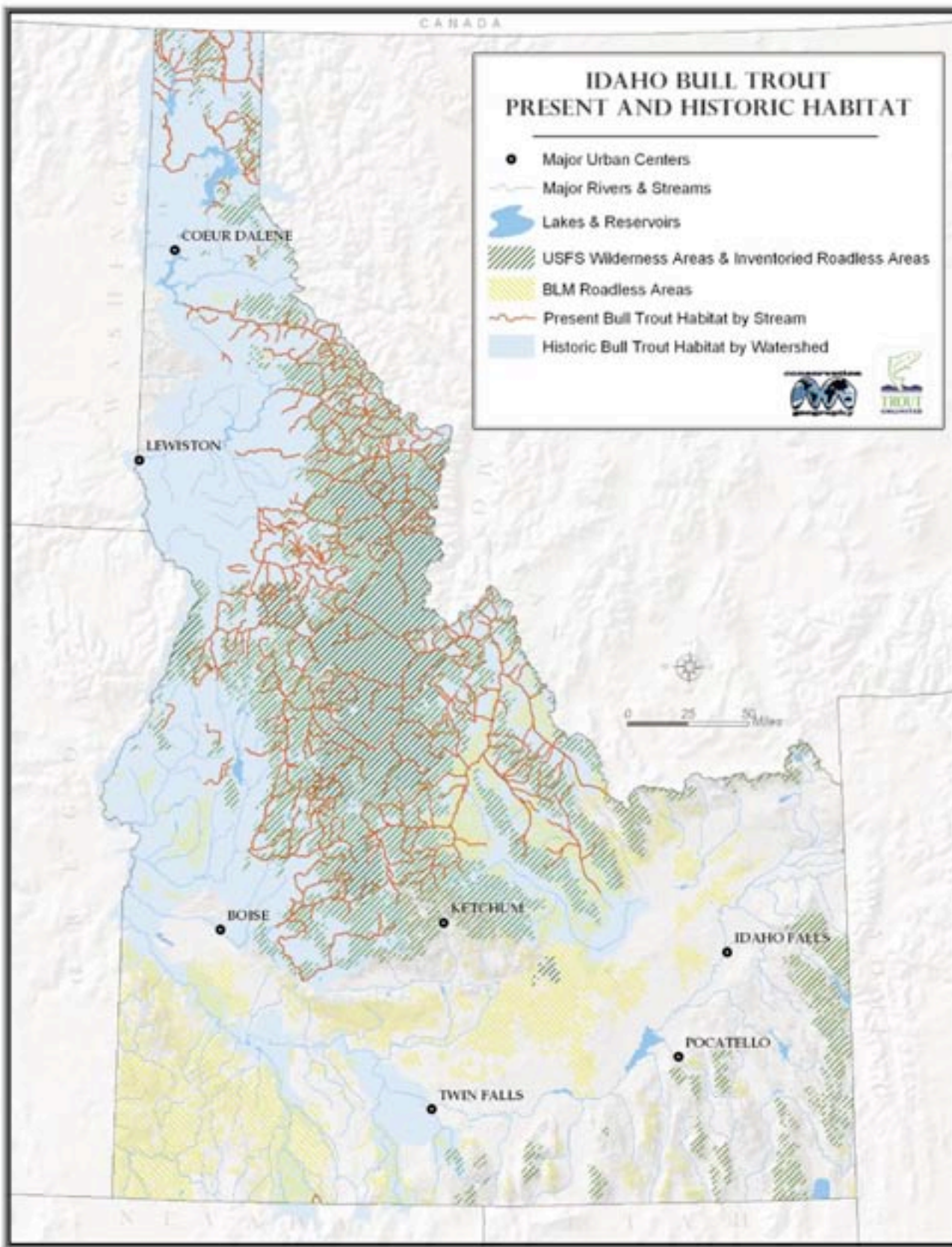
The greatest contributors to the decline of salmon and steelhead populations in Idaho are hydroelectric dams on the Columbia and Snake rivers. Idaho's roadless areas provide crucially important spawning and rearing habitat that can help to "buy time" while the longer term problems associated with dams are resolved.

The table below shows historic habitat and contemporary abundance of selected salmonids in Idaho, and the extent to which these fish rely on roadless lands for their survival.

SPECIES	LOST HISTORIC HABITAT IN IDAHO	CURRENT DISTRIBUTION IN ROADLESS AREAS
Bull Trout	46 % of historic range	68 % of current habitat is in roadless areas
Chinook Salmon	65 % of historic range	74 % of current habitat is in roadless areas
Steelhead	61 % of historic range	74 % of current habitat is in roadless areas
Westslope Cutthroat Trout	16 % of historic range	58 % of current habitat is in roadless areas

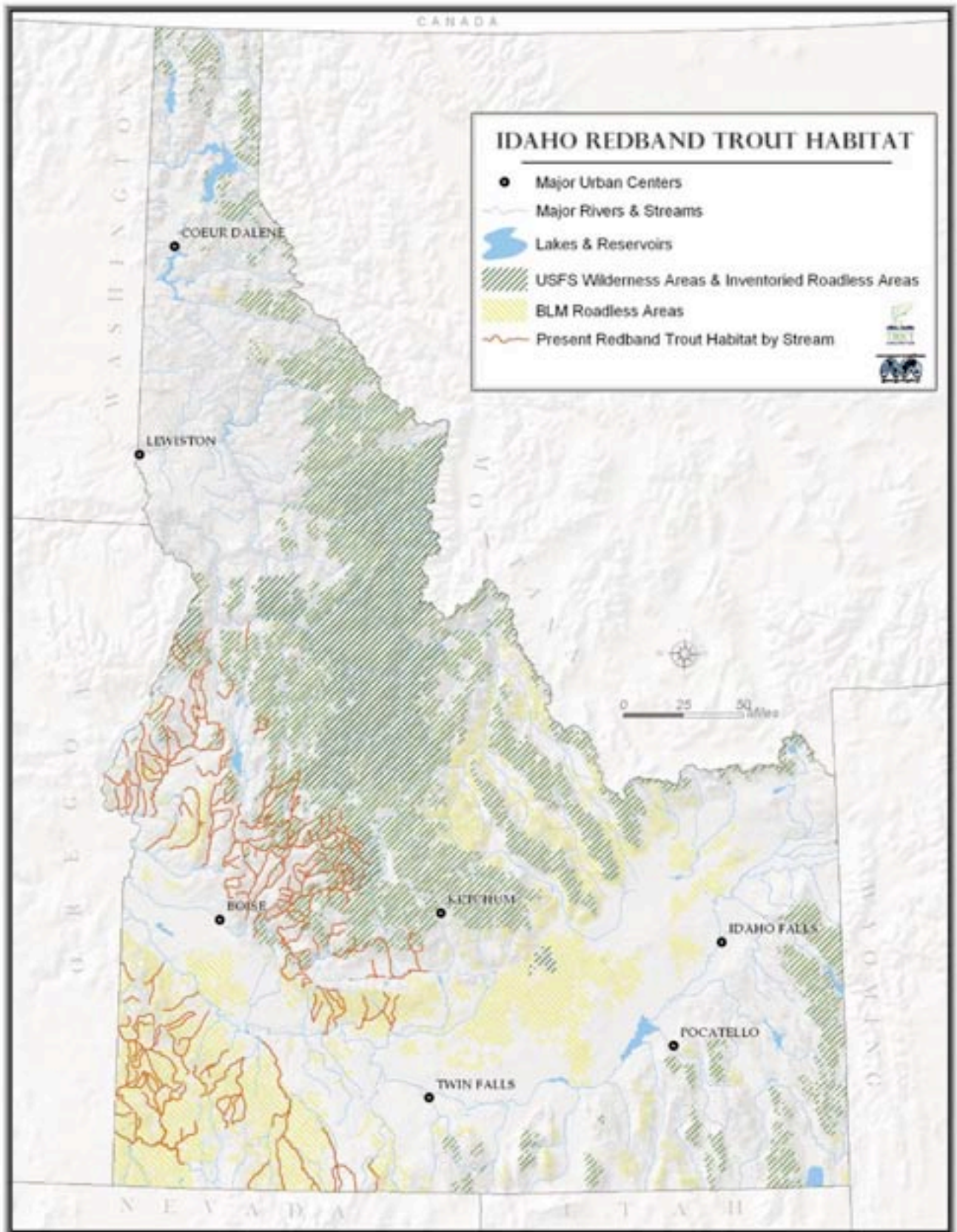
Releasing a wild steelhead photo: Rich Grost





All trout and salmon require clean, cold water, but none more so than bull trout. Because of their low tolerance for disturbance, bull trout are a valuable indicator of habitat quality. It is a sign of degraded habitat that bull trout have been eliminated from almost half their historic distribution in Idaho. As this map shows, nearly 70 percent of existing bull trout

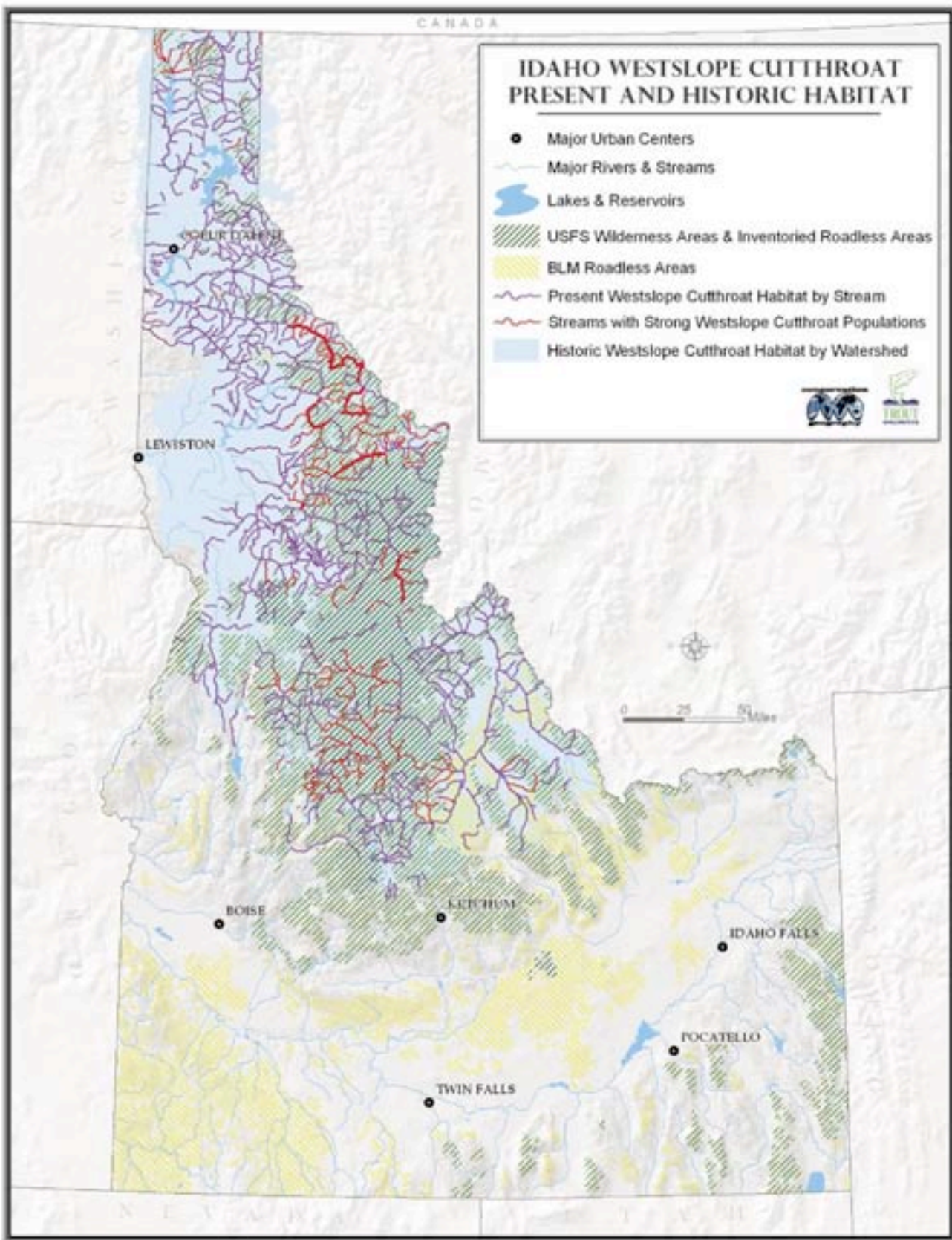
habitat is in roadless areas. Still, bull trout are struggling. Only 7 percent of Idaho's bull trout populations are stable and productive according to the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project (ICBEMP). Roadless areas contain 87 percent of those strong populations. The bottom line: bull trout will not survive without intact roadless lands.



This map illustrates redband populations located outside the range of steelhead. Redband trout of the Owyhee Canyonlands have genetically evolved to survive the harsh, arid climate of this high-desert region. These redbands can survive great fluctuations in temperature and water flow. That they have not been

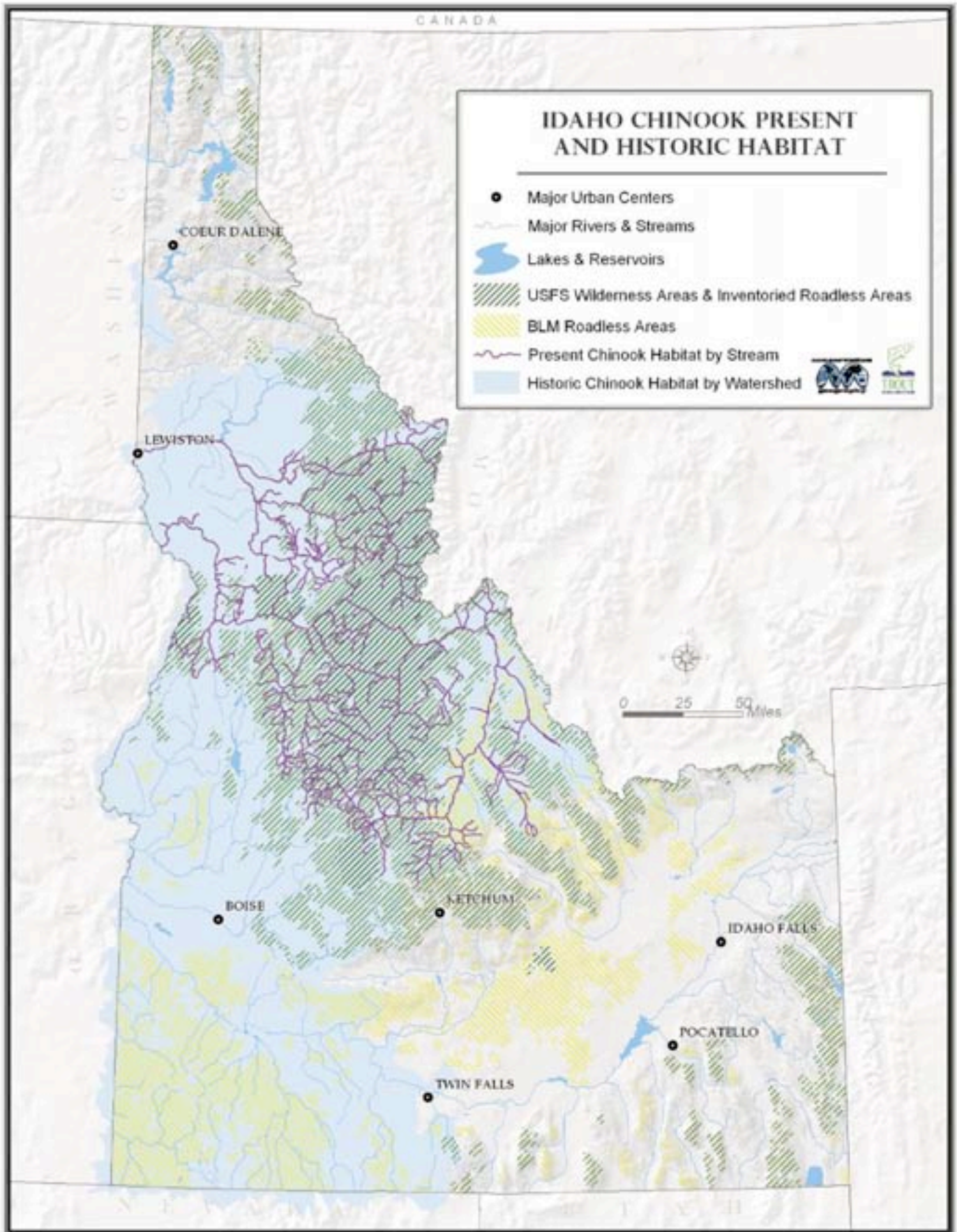
hybridized despite exposure to hatchery rainbows is a testament to the genetic strength of these fish.

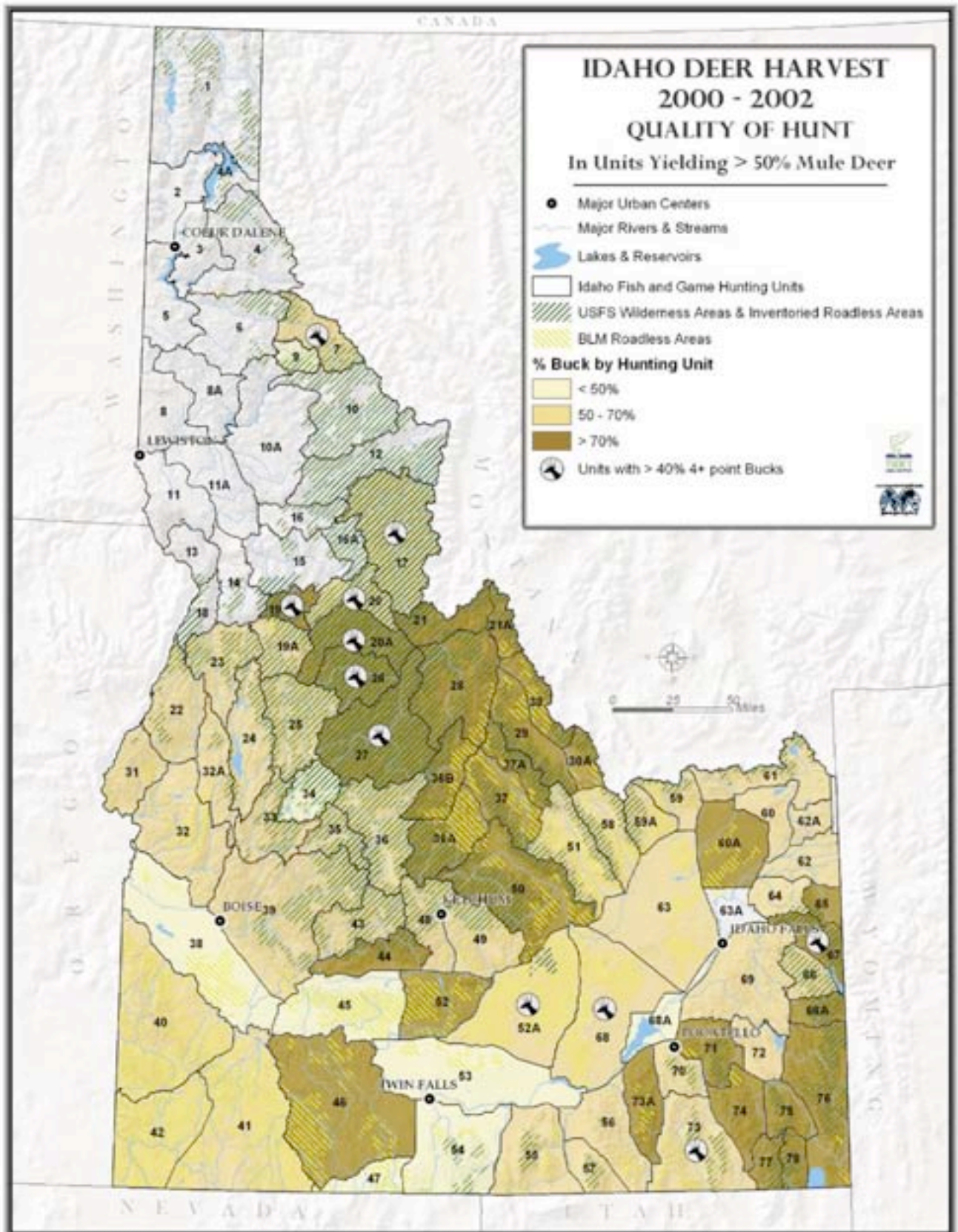
- 48 percent of these redband populations in Idaho are found in roadless areas.



A quick glance at this map would suggest that westslope cutthroat trout can survive in developed and roadless areas alike. After all, only 16 percent of the westslope's historic range has been lost in Idaho. But the reality is not so rosy. 60 percent of

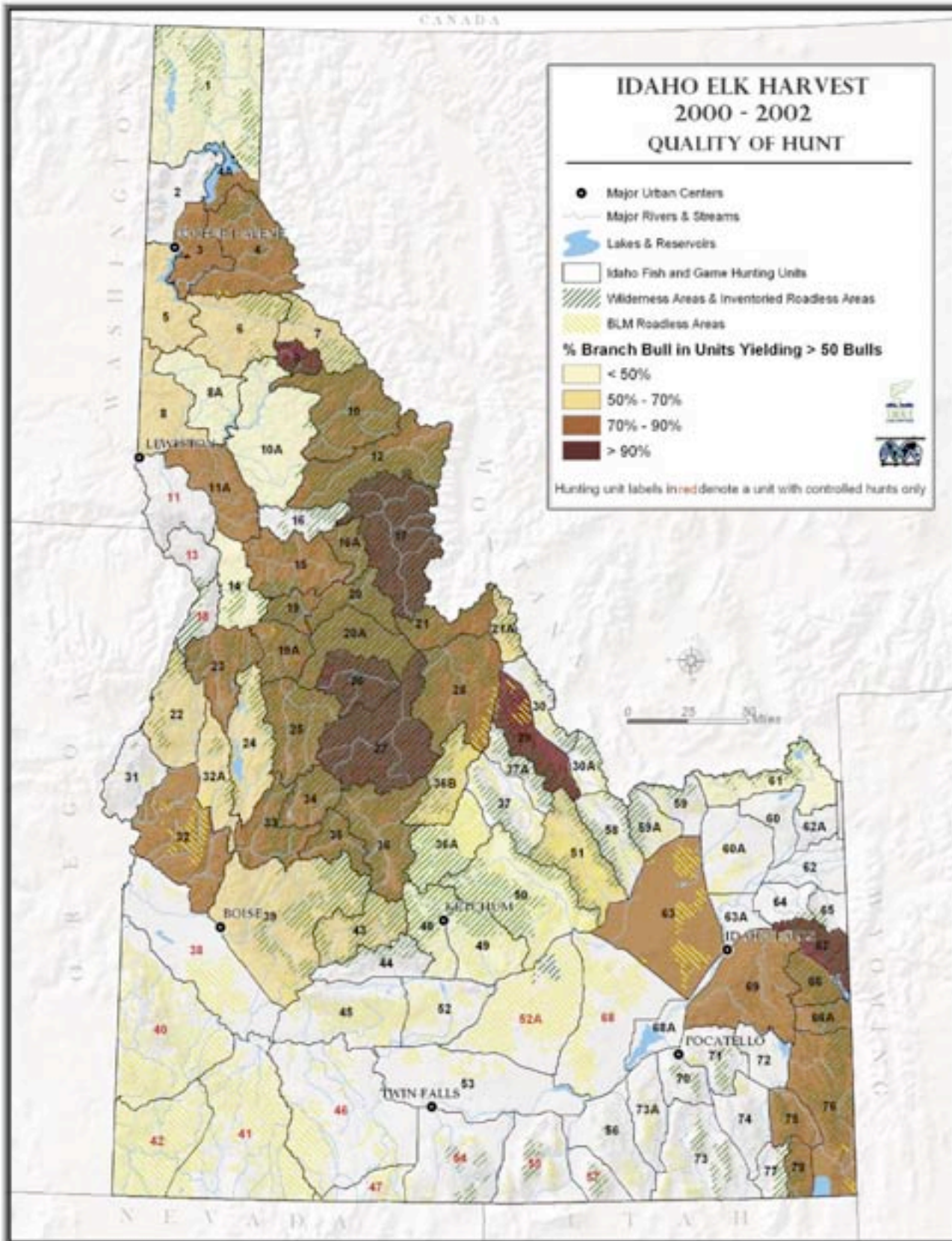
Idaho's westslope cutthroat populations are in decline, and just 16 percent (shown in red) are considered strong. 83 percent of these strong populations are found in roadless areas.





This map measures the quality of mule deer hunting by highlighting (1) hunting units where the highest percentages of bucks were harvested, and (2) hunting units where more than 40 percent of bucks harvested were four pointers and larger. Mule deer rely on undisturbed habitat to maintain good health and grow to maturity; the highest proportions of these mature bucks are harvested in units rich in roadless areas.

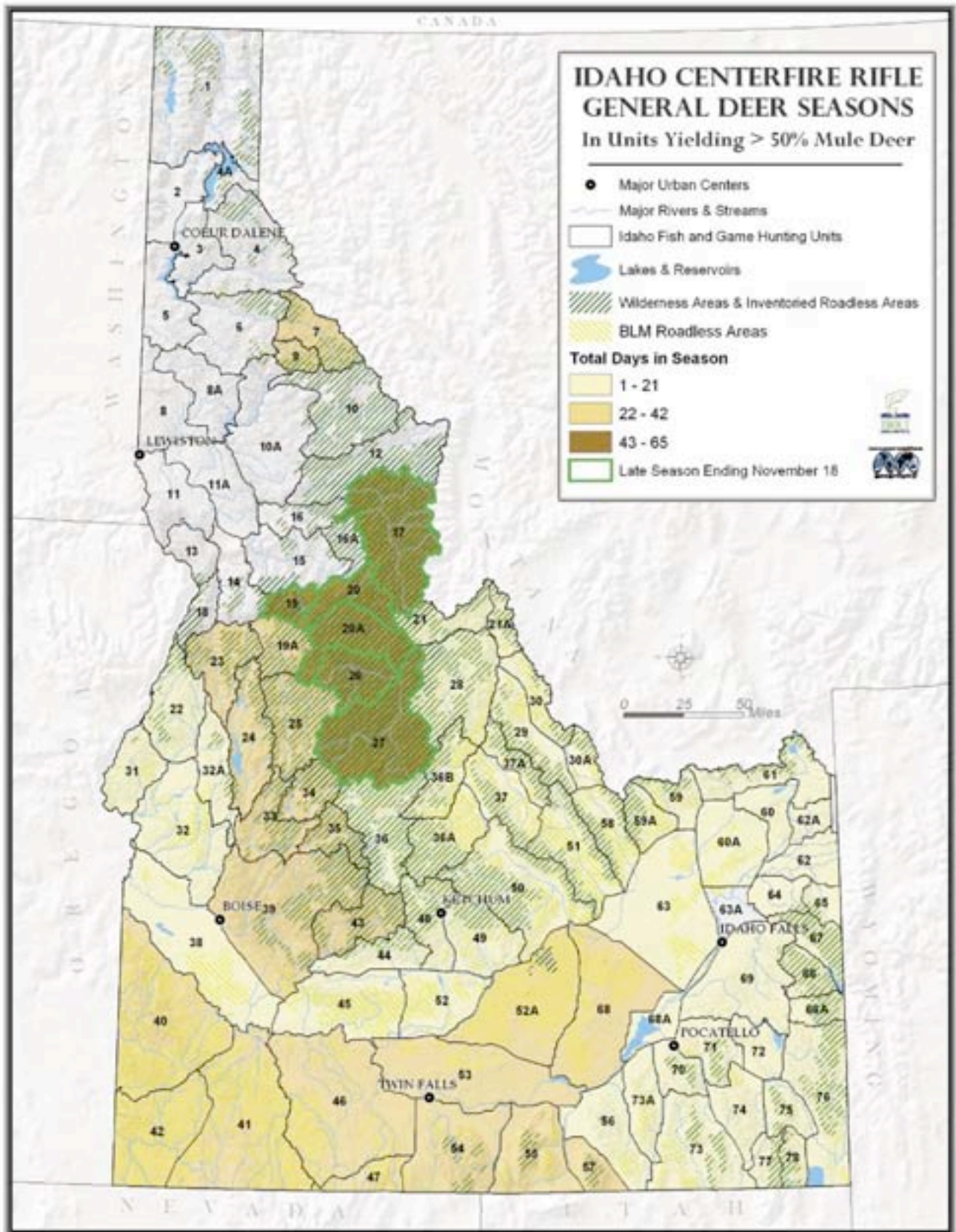
- 51 percent of the land in units yielding more than 70 percent bucks is roadless.
- 72 percent of the land in units yielding more than 40 percent 4+ pt. bucks is roadless.
- 94 percent of the land in units yielding both 70 percent bucks and 40 percent 4+ point bucks is roadless.



This map measures the quality of elk hunting based on the percentage of branch bulls to total bull harvest. Branch bulls are usually two or more years of age and possess “branched” antlers. The harvest of a high percentage of branch bulls is an indication of quality habitat and hunting. Research shows a strong correlation between roadless areas and mature bull elk.

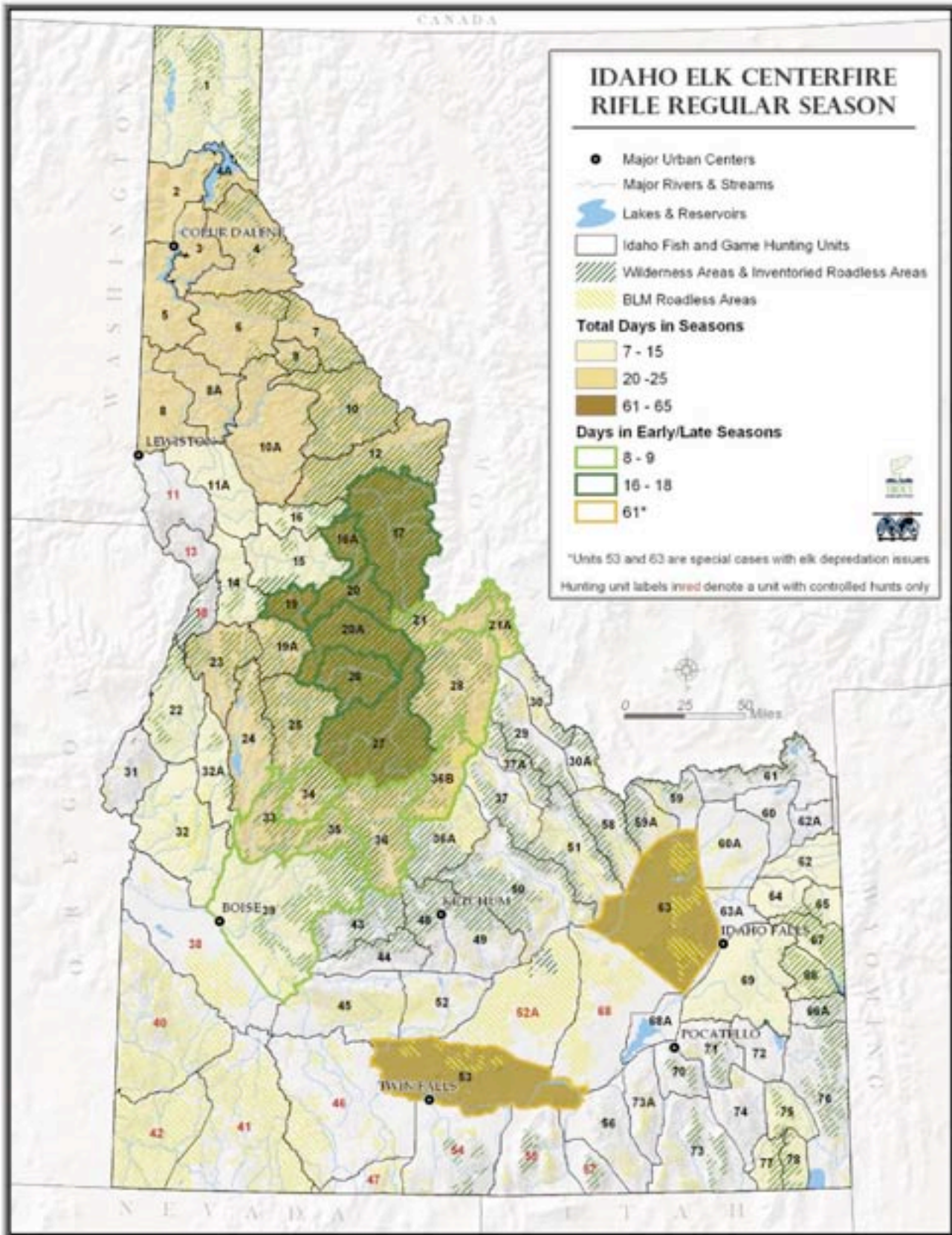
- 88 percent of the land in units yielding more than 90 percent branch bulls is roadless.

Note: Units in which less than 50 bull elk were harvested over a two-year period were excluded. Also excluded were units where only controlled hunts were allowed.

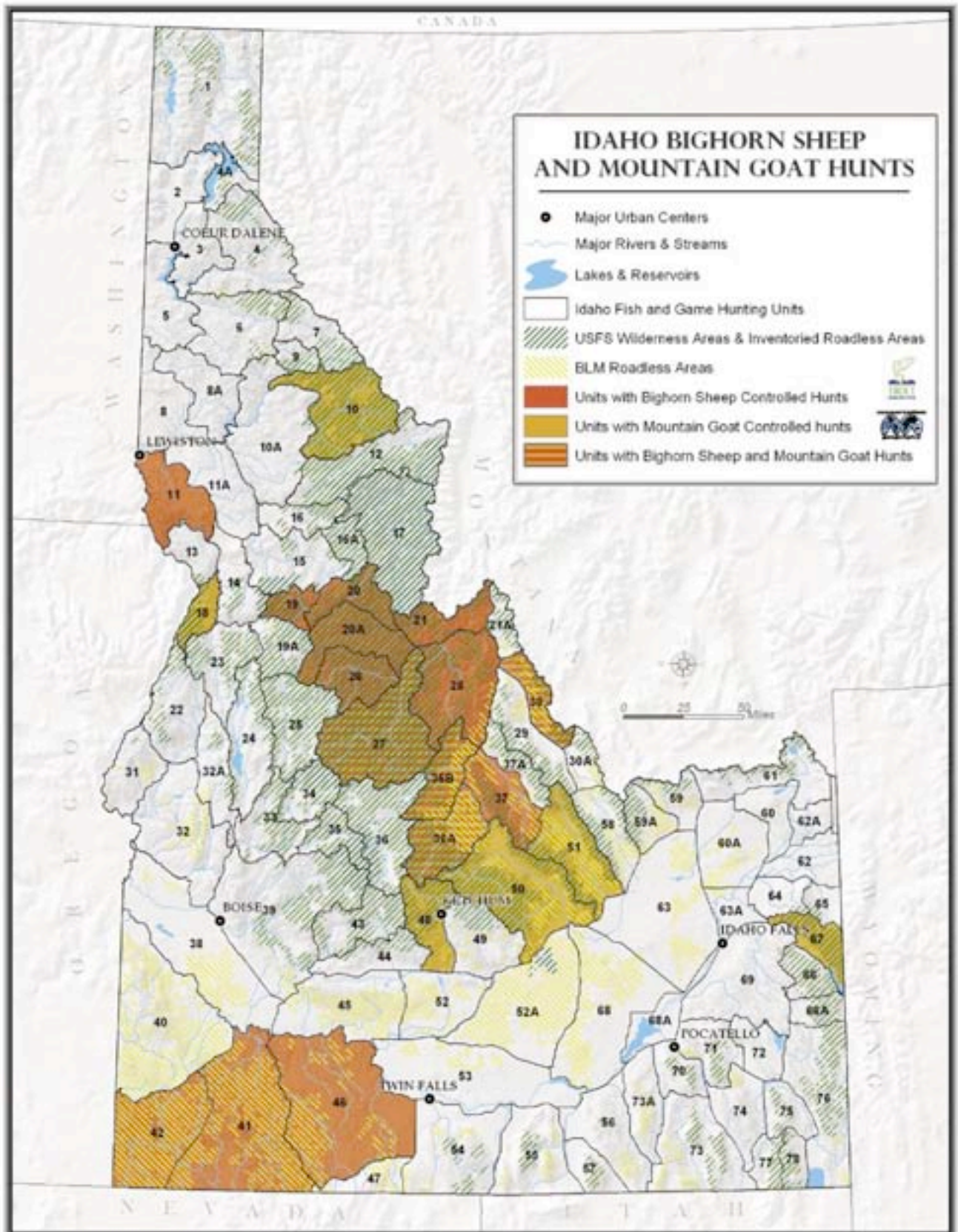


Because they are remote and host such healthy populations of deer and elk, roadless lands generally have the most liberal hunting regulations. This translates to longer general rifle hunts for antlered deer and elk, and opportunities to hunt the popular early or late seasons (September or November). These maps

show the units where the longest rifle seasons are found, and early or late-season hunts are permitted. All of the seasons indicated in these maps are rifle hunts for antlered deer and elk. The central Idaho wilderness provides the greatest opportunities to hunters.

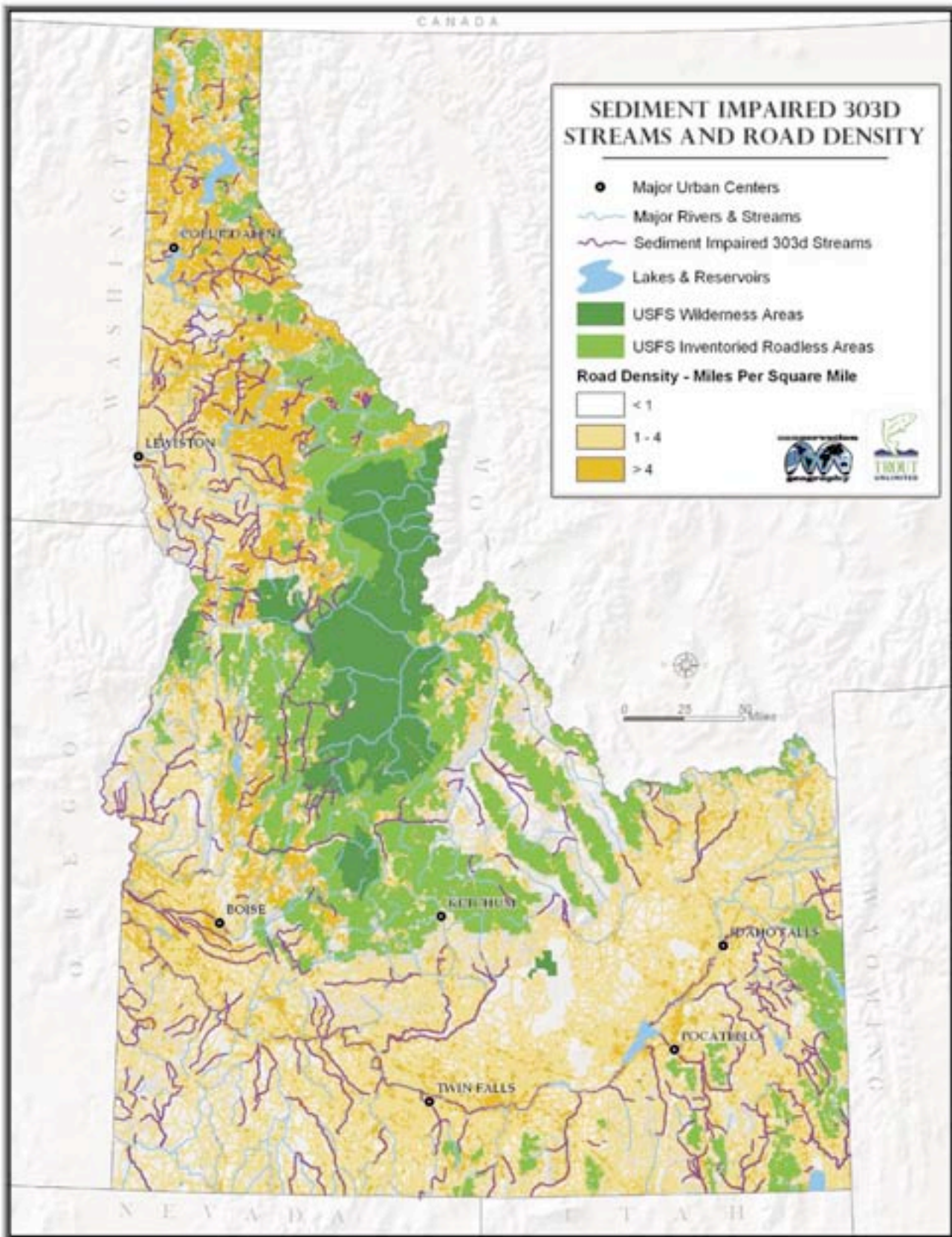


- 98 percent of the land in units with November deer rifle seasons is roadless
- 97 percent of the land in units with more than 61 days in the rifle season is roadless



As in all lower 48 states, the opportunities to hunt bighorn sheep and mountain goats in Idaho are limited. These species are sensitive to human disturbance and thrive in high-elevation roadless lands. Roadless lands make up a large part of the units in which hunting for bighorn sheep and mountain goats is permitted.

- 67 percent of the land in units allowing sheep and goat hunting is roadless.



Roads, particularly those that are poorly maintained or located on steep slopes, contribute greatly to erosion, water quality degradation and diminishment of fish habitat. This map illustrates the relationship between high road density and sediment-impaired streams. Conversely, it shows the relatively low occurrence of sediment-impaired streams in roadless areas.

- 94 percent of 303d sediment-impaired streams are located outside roadless areas.

In the absence of the federal Roadless Area Conservation Rule, Forest Service roadless areas are managed by individual forest plans. Local forest supervisors and district rangers face the difficult task of balancing the exceptional ecological values of roadless areas against local development demands. Without lasting protection, and despite the best efforts of local managers, Idaho's roadless areas will face the death of a thousand cuts by forest plans that cumulatively erode Idaho's roadless base. For example, existing forest plans allow road construction in 61 percent of Idaho's roadless lands; this, in spite of the fact that the maintenance and reconstruction backlog on Idaho's national forest roads exceeds a billion dollars annually.

Forest Service inventoried roadless areas (IRAs) are divided into the following three categories:

1B:

IRAs allocated to a forest plan prescription that does not allow road construction and reconstruction.

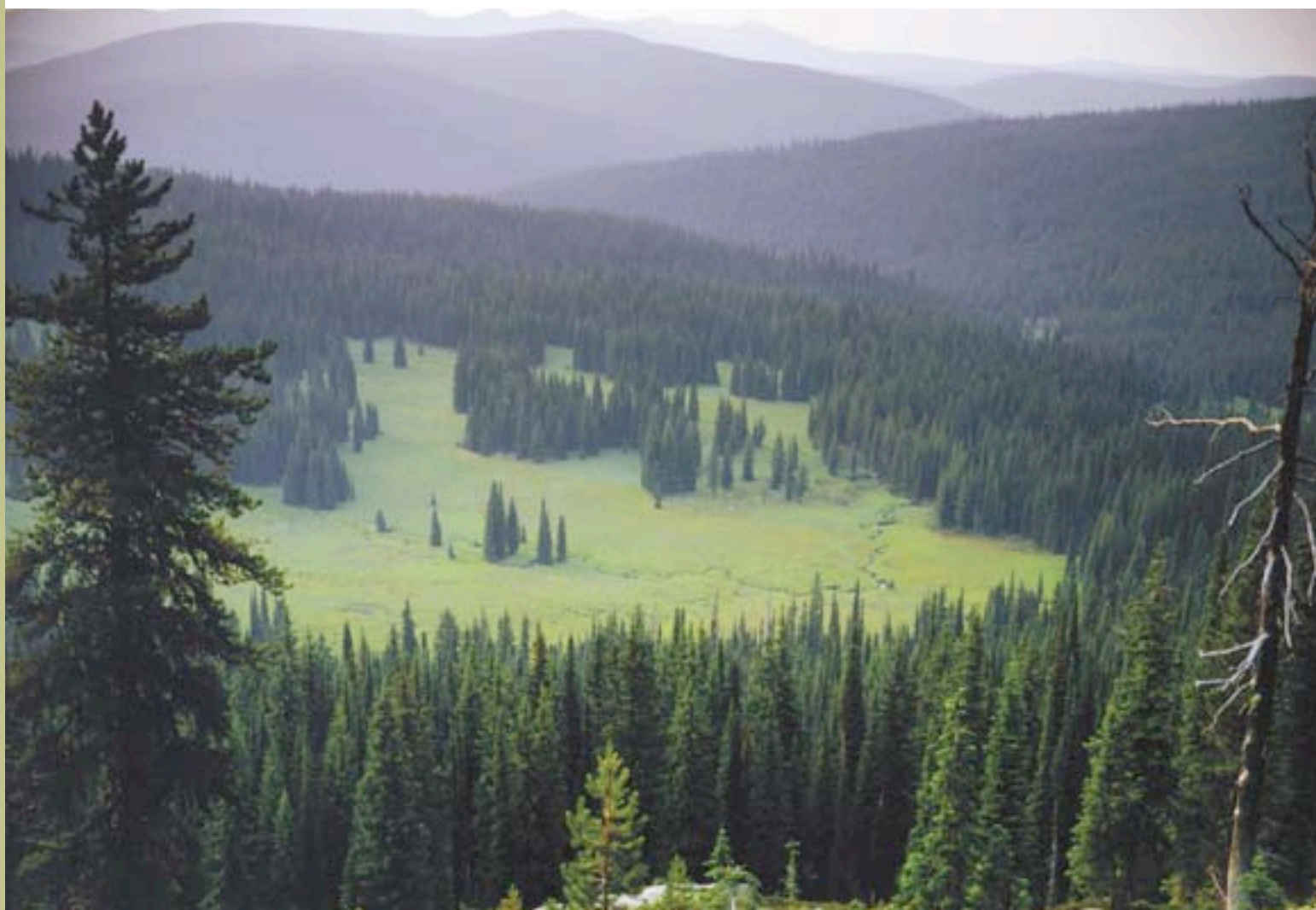
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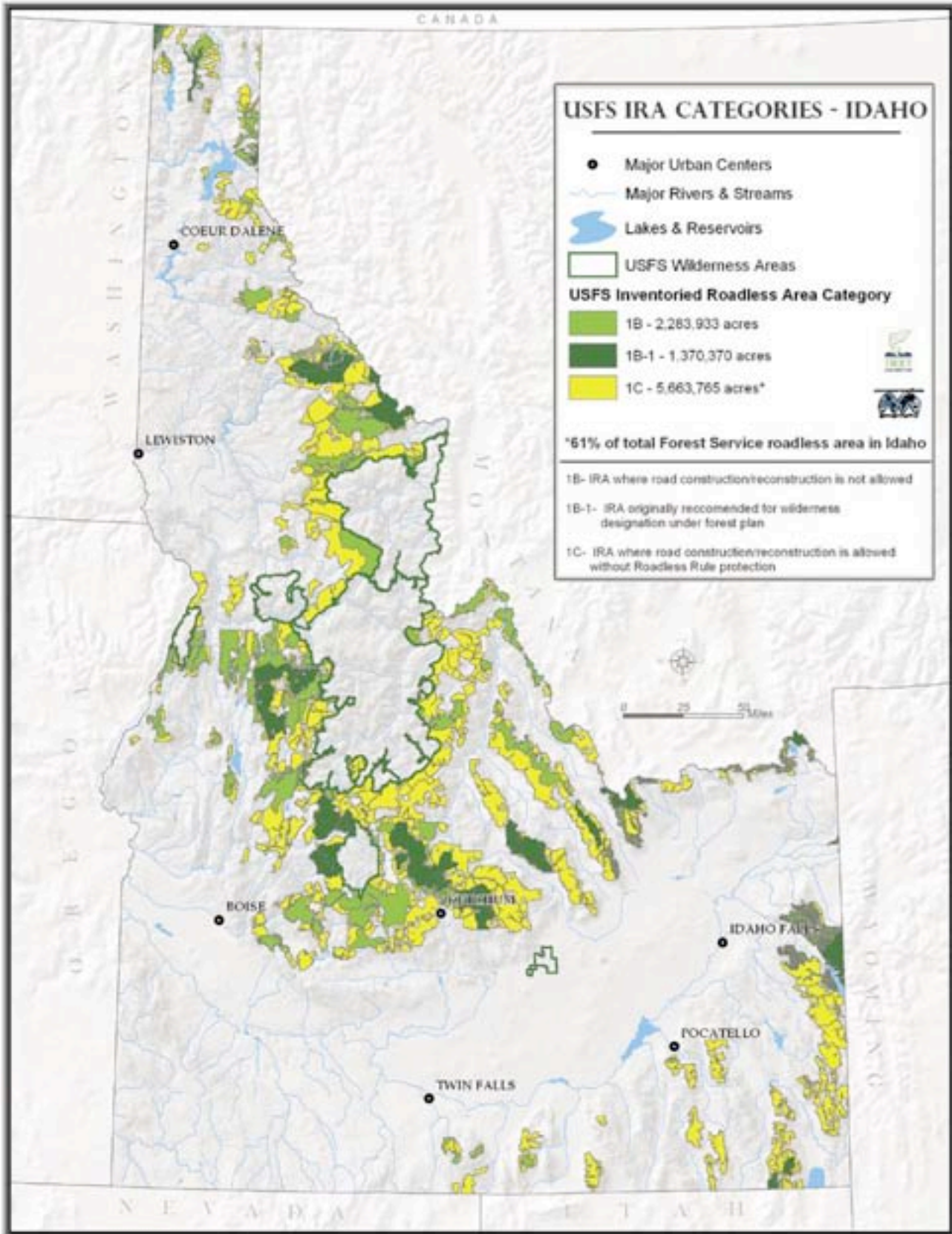
IRAs allocated to a prescription that does not allow road construction and reconstruction, recommended in the forest plan as wilderness.

1C:

IRAs allocated to a prescription that allows road construction and reconstruction. 61 percent of Idaho's roadless areas fall into this category.

Grave Peak, Selway/Bitterroot Wilderness, Idaho





The Boulder-White Clouds

The largest block of national forest roadless land left in the lower 48 states lies east and north of Sun Valley in the Boulder, White Cloud and Pioneer mountains. This wrinkled landscape of granite peaks and rugged canyons is dominated by Castle Peak in the White Cloud Mountains. At 11,815 feet above sea level it not only towers over a half a million acres of road-free wildlands, but it's an icon of Idaho's historical see-sawing land battles.

Fish and Wildlife

It is hard to say which is the greatest draw to anglers in the Boulder-White Cloud area; the superb high mountain lakes; the chinook salmon and steelhead runs on the Salmon River; or the native westslope cutthroat found throughout the area's rivers and streams. The Boulder-White Clouds roadless area also provides habitat for threatened populations of bull trout.

Many species of wildlife found in the Boulder-White Clouds are important either because of their status as threatened or endangered species, or because of their value to hunters. Big game species include elk, mule deer, antelope, bighorn sheep, mountain goat, mountain lion and black bear. Because of the diversity of its terrain, the area provides key winter, summer, and transitional range to mule deer and elk. Hunters also target a number of forest grouse species. Threatened species found in the area are the grey wolf, Canada lynx, and bald eagle.

Land Status

In the late 1960's the lower flanks of Castle Peak were targeted for a web of roads and development designed to serve a molybdenum mine. The mine was thwarted by a concerted effort from Idahoans led by then-Governor Cecil Andrus.

In 1972, after the mine was stopped, Idahoans again stepped to the conservation forefront as they persuaded Congress to pass legislation that designated the Sawtooth National Recreation Area, including the 217,000-acre Sawtooth Wilderness Area. Castle Peak and the immediate surrounding mountains were not included. Congress did instruct the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management to establish a wilderness study area in the Boulder and White Cloud mountains. This resulted in 251,000 acres of the only congressionally mandated wilderness study area in Idaho. Today, that area, as well as the roadless areas in the Pioneer Mountains immediately to the south, contain 582,931 acres of roadless public land.

Representative Mike Simpson (R-Idaho) has pledged to help introduce legislation to protect the area. As this report goes to press the future of these lands remains unresolved.



“I hunt to be out there in those mountains. Roads just get me to the mountains. And we’ve got plenty of roads to get me there. I hunt on foot and sometimes cover 12 to 14 miles a day. Some might say that I’m dumb to carry everything out on my back, but that’s why I hunt.”

Carl Nellis lives in Jerome, Idaho and hunts the Boulder and White Cloud mountains. He's 64 years old.

Owyhee Canyonlands

The Owyhee Canyonlands stretch from Nevada north to the Snake River Plateau. The river canyon dominates this land as it falls from over 9,000 feet above sea level at the river's headwaters in Nevada's Jarbidge Wilderness to 4,000 feet at the confluence of the Owyhee and Snake rivers south of Ontario, Oregon. This elevation difference and the myriad tributary canyons create a diverse range of fish and wildlife habitat. The entire area, which includes the Bruneau River Canyon, is considered one of the most biologically rich high desert regions in the West.

Within the Idaho portion of the Owyhee-Bruneau Region, there are nearly 400 miles of river eligible for wild and scenic river designation.

Fish and Wildlife

This rich, arid and open landscape grooved with deep, sheer-walled canyons, has long been a favorite destination to Idahoans who hunt, fish and camp. The Owyhees are home to cougar and bobcat, as well as huntable populations of pronghorn antelope, elk, mule deer, sage grouse, chukar and quail. It also contains one of the nation's largest populations of California desert bighorn sheep, which has provided not only the hunt of a lifetime for those who have drawn tags, but a unique source of transplant stock that has assisted California bighorn re-establishment efforts in nine different western states.

Before the trio of hydroelectric dams in Hells Canyon blocked the upper Snake River connection to the Pacific Ocean, hundreds of thousands of steelhead and chinook spawned in these canyons. Despite the current absence of anadromous fish, ICBEMP, the largest scientific assessment of forestland and rangeland ecological health ever conducted, ranked the Owyhee-Bruneau Canyonlands as one of the highest areas for overall ecological integrity in the entire Columbia River Basin. Today, fishable populations of redband trout make their home in the desert streams.

Land Status

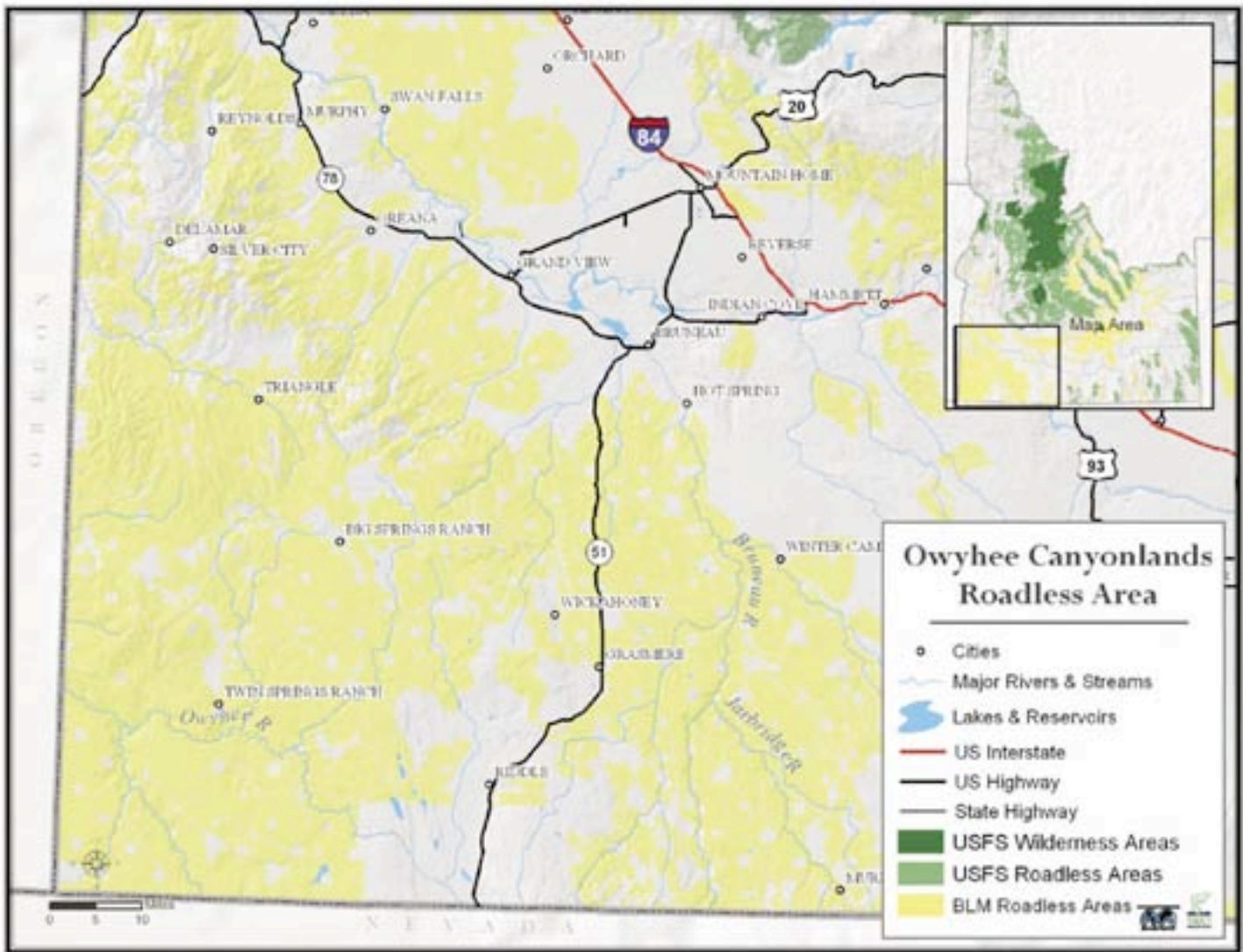
The open landscape and its tremendous ecological and historical values have been threatened by new development and overgrazing. In recent years, off-road-vehicles have become the leading threat to the Owyhee lands. These vehicles travel unimpeded across the desert land, disrupting wildlife and causing conflicts with other users. The cross-country travel also causes erosion problems and the transport of noxious weed seeds to this fragile environment. They also create noise and disruption in an area known for its quiet and solitude.

A coalition of user groups from the conservation, outfitting and ranching communities developed a collaborative effort to introduce legislation that includes a mix of protection measures balanced with responsible use of the land. Trout Unlimited is working to engage hunters and anglers in this and other similar efforts so that wilderness and wild and scenic river designations protect the most important fish and wildlife habitat.



“When it comes to hunting, whether it’s elk and mule deer in central Idaho or antelope in the Owyhees, I hunt first for the roughest and least accessible land. It’s a big part of the hunting experience for me now, to be in this last wild land.”

Jonathan Matthews lives in Nampa, Idaho. He hunts in the Owyhee Canyonlands and the roadless lands near McCall, Idaho.



Rapid River Canyon

Located in west central Idaho, the Rapid River roadless area surrounds 27 miles of the Wild and Scenic Rapid River and its West Fork. The area is characterized by steep canyon walls, pristine tributaries and towering unroaded mountains. Its varied, undisturbed landscape, from high elevation subalpine fir to low elevation Douglas fir and ponderosa pine, makes it valuable fish and wildlife habitat.

Fish and Wildlife

The Rapid River is identified as critical habitat for threatened populations of steelhead and spring and summer chinook salmon. It also provides habitat for threatened bull trout. The recently revised management plan for the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area stated that, "In terms of habitat, the Rapid River watershed is the largest and best remaining aquatic stronghold within the Little Salmon River system." As the habitat for these three threatened species diminishes elsewhere, the Rapid River stronghold becomes increasingly important to their survival and recovery.

The Rapid River is rich with big game species such as mule deer, elk, bighorn sheep and black bear. Also, the canyon's diverse habitat harbors 76 species of birds, including huntable populations of mountain quail, chukar and Hungarian partridge. The area serves as a connectivity corridor between the Little Salmon and Snake River drainages and contains key deer and elk winter range, big game migration routes and bighorn sheep summer range.

Land Status

The wild and scenic portion of the Rapid River roadless area is managed under the Hell's Canyon National Recreation Area plan. The remainder is divided evenly between the Payette and Nez Perce national forests. Much of the land on the west side of the Rapid River is protected as part of the Hell's Canyon Wilderness, but the ridge on the east side is cut by three roads and accompanying timber cuts.



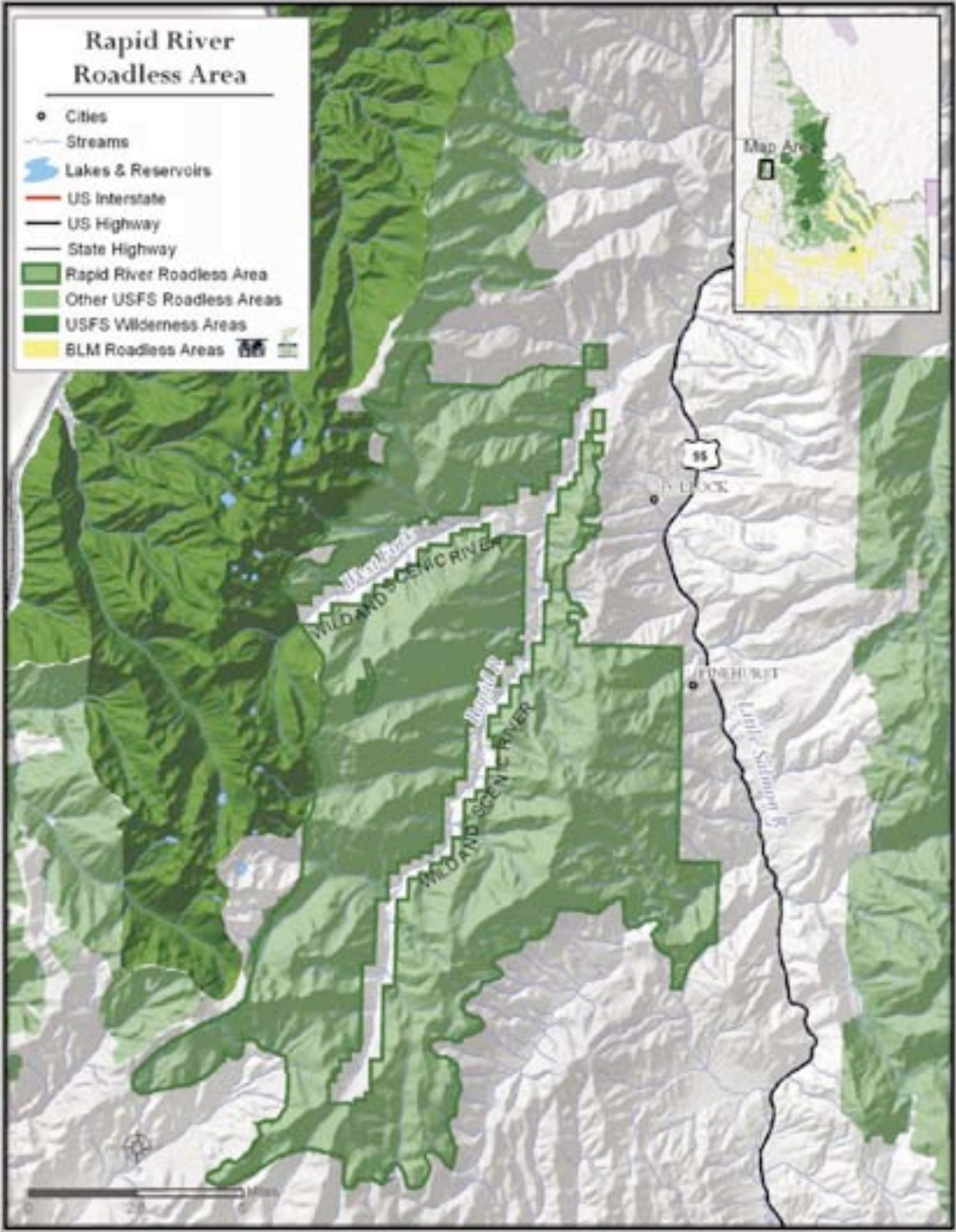
"For me, hunting and fishing is synonymous with wildness. And wildness is only found in roadless/wilderness areas. Idaho's untamed, unroaded lands are the last bastions of what the world once was. Anything else is a poor imitation."

Holly Endersby hunts and lives on the boundary of the Rapid River Roadless area

photo: Scott Stouder

“The Rapid River is really special. The steep, timbered canyon walls protect the water quality and the river holds its ice-cold temperature further downstream than most rivers.”

Carl Evenson, fish and wildlife biologist, has snorkeled the length of the Rapid River and counted chinook, steelhead and bull trout.



Mallard-Larkins Roadless Area

Amid the roads that traverse much of Idaho's Panhandle lies the 260,000-acre Mallard-Larkins roadless area. One of the largest unprotected roadless areas in the lower 48 states, it is a haven for fish and wildlife, as well as a vital source of clean water for the many rivers whose headwaters begin in the Mallard-Larkins.

The Mallard-Larkins is part of a network that includes the Great Burn, Pot Mountain, Weitas Creek and Moose Mountain roadless areas. These roadless areas, divided by only a few roads and clearcuts, combine to create a wildlands complex of over 800,000 acres.

Fish and Wildlife

Fishing is popular in the high mountain lakes and numerous streams and rivers, including the famed Wild and Scenic St. Joe River. Starting on the Bitterroot Divide between Idaho and Montana, the St. Joe supports a healthy westslope cutthroat fishery and provides important habitat for endangered bull trout. The lower St. Joe, a popular road-accessible fishery, benefits greatly from the clean, cold water that flows from roadless headwaters.

The area's diverse, intact forests (from lodgepole pine to wet cedar and hemlock rainforests) are home to big game species such as bear, moose, elk, mule and whitetail deer, as well as a productive mountain goat population. Also found here are pileated woodpecker, northern goshawk, pine marten, grey wolf, lynx and wolverine.

Current Status

Originally proposed for wilderness designation in the 1960s, sportsmen and conservationists have worked to protect the Mallard-Larkins for decades. The Forest Service administratively set aside a small area of about 25,000 acres designated as the "Pioneer Area."

Management of the area is made more challenging by nearby checkerboard sections of private and public lands. The private land has been heavily logged, making the protection of remaining roadless lands such as the Mallard-Larkins even more important.

In addition, large portions of state and private lands to the south and north have suffered clearcutting that has resulted in massive landslides and extensive road failures during flood events in recent decades. Streams and fisheries have suffered impacts in many of these areas, adding to the value of north Idaho's intact roadless areas and the healthy fisheries they support.

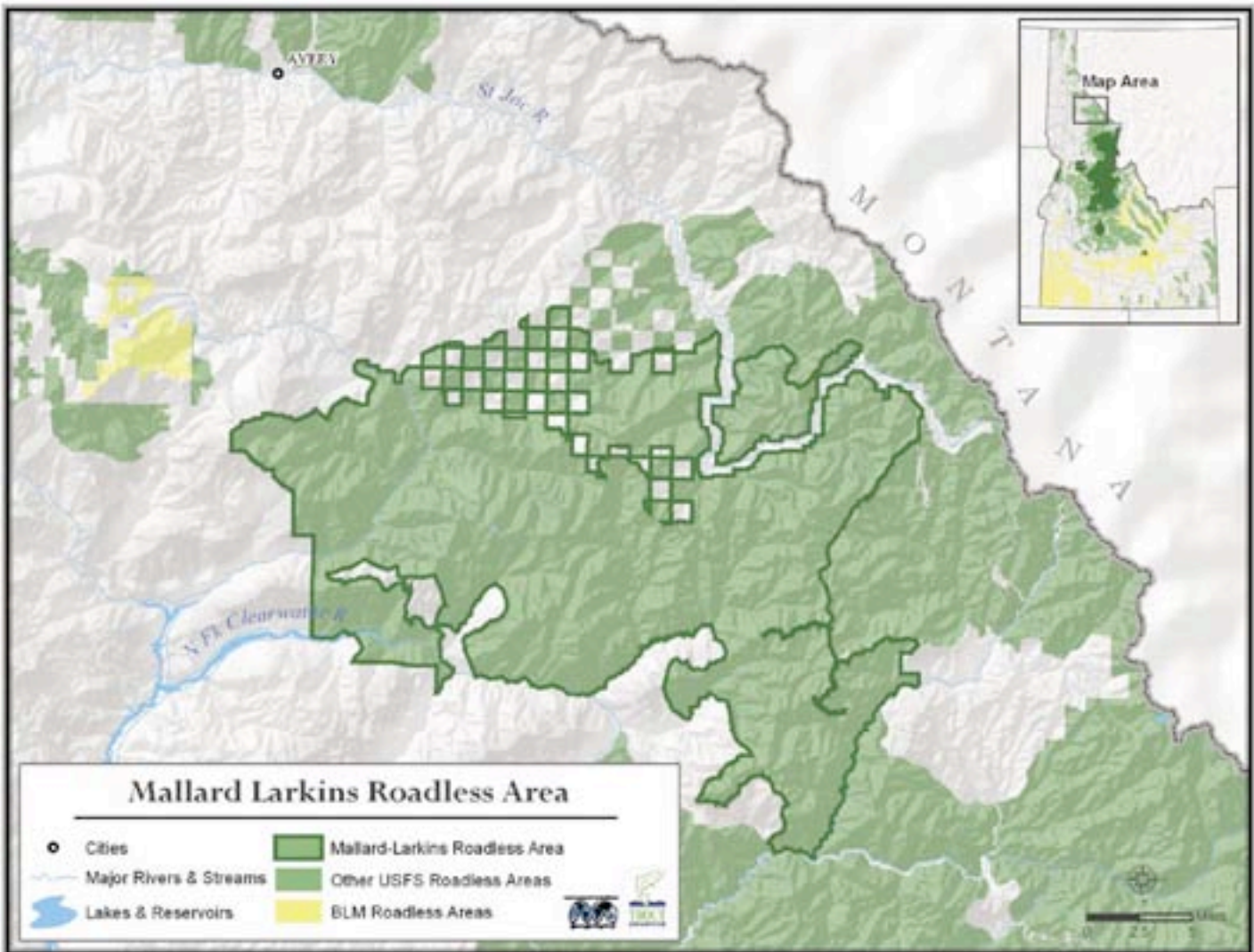
While there is no logging currently planned in the Mallard-Larkins roadless area, the Idaho Panhandle and Clearwater national forests are currently revising their long-term forest plans. Without the involvement of sportsmen and women, roadless areas could be threatened by logging, mining and off-road-vehicle use.

Backside Mallard-Larkins, Idaho Panhandle National Forest



“I have traveled and fished the St. Joe River from its origin at St. Joe Lake all the way to the town of Calder, Idaho. It is many different rivers in that distance, each with its own challenges and rewards. Almost all of that distance holds beautiful mountain-bred cutthroat trout. Who wouldn't love this place?”

Jake Hood, Guide/Manager of Rods n Reels Out West



Fish and Fire

Despite the considerable attention fire management on public lands has received over the last decade, the impacts of fire on native fish and the effects thinning, salvage logging and prescribed fire have had on aquatic species has been largely overlooked.

In the past few years, aquatic scientists have begun to expand our knowledge of how to best manage for native fish in the fire-prone landscapes of the American West. Research findings support a common-sense approach based on the knowledge that western native fish have not only survived fire for thousands of years, they evolved with it.

Trout and salmon benefit from natural fire regimes if their home watersheds are healthy and functioning. Fire can regenerate riparian vegetation, contribute needed woody debris to stream systems and provide nutrients that aid insects and other fish food sources. While fires can trigger landslides and large sediment loads into streams, the negative effects on fish are often short-term with water quality returning to normal after a few years. In fact, such “pulse” sediment loads can serve as a vital maintenance regime to healthy streams.

Fire poses a threat to native fish when populations are isolated and struggling to survive other habitat problems, including chronic sediment from roads, logging and grazing. Fire can pose a serious threat to fish when natural fire regimes have been altered by fire suppression or past logging. In such cases, judicious cutting of small-diameter trees and brush can help restore forest ecosystem health. Given their remote location and relative health, roadless areas should not be a priority for such fuels treatments.

Protecting our remaining roadless areas on public lands from logging and roading is critical to keeping fish populations from further risk. If we have learned anything from history and scientific research, it's that habitat degradation from logging and roading poses a far greater threat than fire.



“Integrating fire and fuels management with aquatic ecosystem conservation begins with recognizing that terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems are linked and dynamic, and that fire can play a critical role in maintaining aquatic ecological diversity.”

Reiman et al, “Status of Native Fishes in the Western United States and Issues for Fire and Fuels Management,” Forest Ecology and Management. In press.



Hanson Meadows, Kelly Creek, Clearwater National Forest

Trout Unlimited's Public Lands Initiative

Protecting The Places We Hunt and Fish

All of our actions on the land are ultimately reflected in the quality of fish and wildlife habitat. More than 50 million Americans hunt and fish. Too often, their voices and interests are lost in the din of controversy that has come to define public land management. The intent of TU's Public Lands Initiative is to cut through the noise and:

- Develop sound scientific and technical information demonstrating the importance of public lands to coldwater fisheries, wildlife and fishing/hunting opportunities;
- Build an alliance of TU members, wildlife and fisheries conservation groups, hunting and angling clubs, and fish and wildlife professionals to advocate for management policies on public lands that protect the long term health of coldwater fisheries as well as wildlife; and
- Inform the broader public of the importance of public lands to protecting and restoring coldwater fisheries and wildlife habitat, and the tremendous fishing, hunting and other outdoor opportunities public lands provide.

Under this initiative Trout Unlimited has established specific field programs to address three major management issues affecting fish and wildlife habitat on public lands:

- Restoring lands degraded by abandoned hard rock mines;
- Responsible oil, gas and coal bed methane development in the Interior West; and
- * Protection of roadless and wilderness areas.

Trout Unlimited staff Keith Curley, Sam Mace and Scott Stouder produced this report.

To learn more, please visit our website at <http://publiclands.tu.org>

Join Trout Unlimited on-line at <http://www.tu.org> or call (800) 834-2419



photo: Scott Stouder

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Backside of the Boulder Mountains., E. Fork Salmon River, Sawtooth National Forest, Idaho



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