West Central Mountains: Resilience Assessment Synthesis

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Sustainable Economy

- Business & Economy
- Employment
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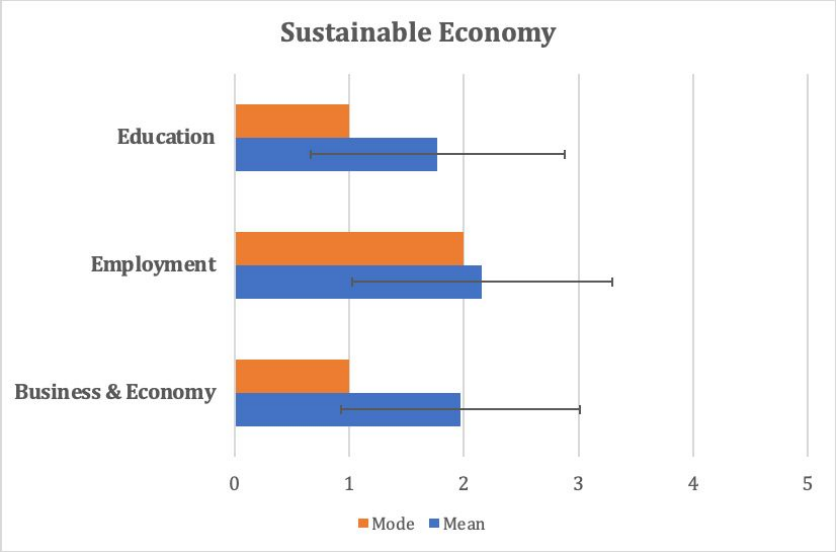
Survey Data (graph to the right) presented on a scale of 1 (weak) to 5 (stong)

There were 48 Responses for Sustainable Economy Survey

Survey Results (perceptions of topic area strengths)



Overarching Strengths

- **Strong and Stable Public Sector Employment.** Government, education, and healthcare sectors provide consistent, year-round jobs that help buffer the region from economic volatility.
- **Consistent Growth in Health Care, Education, and Skilled Trades.** Employment in these sectors grew by **8.5% from 2011 to 2021**, with strong demand projected to continue. Opportunities also exist in skilled trades.
- Economy **buffered by a strong non-labor income, which supports the local economy during times of economics stress**.
- **Momentum Toward a More Resilient and Inclusive Economy.** The region is increasingly investing in expanding stable, year-round employment opportunities—both by growing non-seasonal sectors and by professionalizing tourism, resort, and hospitality work through enhanced education, training, and career pathways.
- **Strong Education and Workforce Infrastructure**
  - Strong K-12 school districts with college-level dual credit course options
  - Cross sector Career and Technical Education (CTE), training, and apprenticeship programs available
- **Community and Institutional Support for Economic Development.** Organizations like the West Central Mountains Economic Development Council (WCMEDC) and the University of Idaho Extension contribute to workforce and community development through complementary efforts. WCMEDC focuses directly on economic development and small business support, while the University of Idaho Extension plays a key role in agricultural education, 4H, and community development. Their collaboration supports broader economic resilience, particularly in areas like food systems, arts, and land-based livelihoods.

Sustainable Economy

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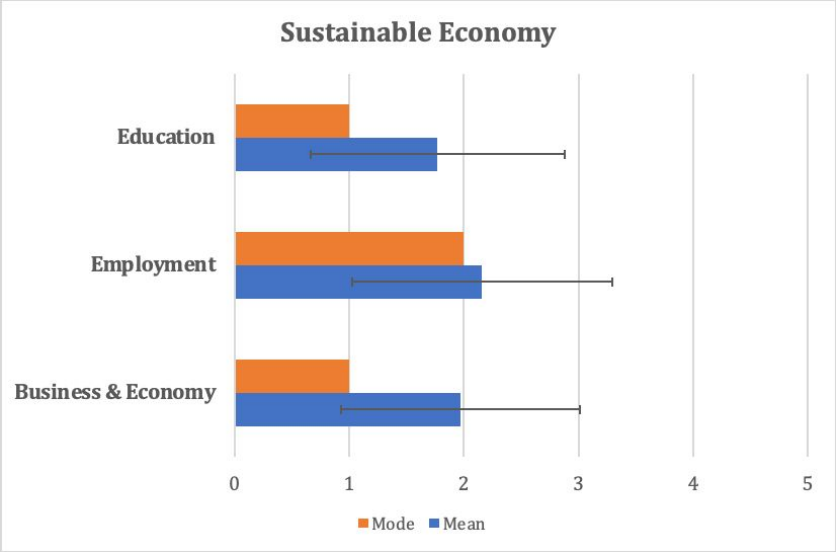


Overarching Challenges

- **Persistent Dependence on Seasonal, Low-Wage Tourism Jobs.** Despite some economic diversification, Valley County remains heavily reliant on a seasonal tourism and recreation economy, leading to employment instability, low wages, and limited career advancement for many residents—particularly in service roles like food preparation and hospitality.
- **Severe Workforce Housing Shortages.** High housing costs and a shortage of affordable, long-term rentals limit employers' ability to attract and retain workers. Even when jobs offer livable wages, many employees are priced out of the local housing market, leading to commuting burdens or out-migration.
- **Widening Income Stratification and a 'Missing Middle Class'.** The region's economy is increasingly split between high-income retirees/second homeowners and low-wage service workers, creating a hollowing of middle-income job opportunities. This economic divide reduces long-term stability and community resilience.
- **Labor Shortages Across Key Sectors.** Employers across health care, education, and trades report difficulty filling open positions, despite high demand. Many skilled workers commute from outside the region due to unaffordable housing.
- **Underutilized Workforce Development Resources.** Many workforce training programs (e.g., CTE, CNA, construction trades) exist but suffer from **low awareness, underfunding, or participation barriers**.
- Workforce demand is high, but job openings are often difficult to fill—not only because of housing challenges, but also due to underutilization of available training programs. While opportunities for workforce development exist through schools, nonprofits, and community partners, many residents are either unaware of them, unable to participate due to work or family obligations, or unclear on how these programs connect to local job opportunities.
- **High Cost of Goods, Services, and Business Operations:**
  Limited transportation access (no rail, interstate, or commercial airport) makes freight expensive, contributing to high costs for construction materials, goods, and services. These persistent cost pressures make owning a business and living in the region more expensive than in many comparable areas.
- **Distorted Housing Market Driven by Cash Buyers:**
  An influx of cash into the real estate market has inflated home values, skewed comparable sales data, and eroded opportunities for local homeownership. Combined with rising interest rates, this dynamic has significantly worsened housing affordability for working residents.

Sustainable Economy
Community Member Perceptions

Areas of Divergence

1. **Economic Base:** The region is seen either as a well-diversified economy experiencing growth across multiple sectors (e.g., healthcare, education, construction, government), or as overly dependent on seasonal tourism and hospitality, lacking long-term economic resilience.
2. **Workforce Availability and Skills:** Some describe strong demand across trades, hospitality, and public sectors, with employers ready to train and jobs widely available; others emphasize chronic labor shortages driven by high housing costs, low wages, and a lack of qualified or willing workers.
3. **Entrepreneurship and Small Business Support:** The region is viewed either as supportive of entrepreneurs through local investment, chamber engagement, and networking opportunities, or as lacking the infrastructure, funding, and accessible resources needed for non-tourism ventures to thrive.
4. **Job Quality and Career Viability:** Perceptions vary between a growing number of job opportunities across skill levels—especially in tourism and public sectors—and a local job market dominated by low-wage, seasonal positions with limited benefits or career advancement.
5. **Workforce Development:** Some highlight the presence and expansion of training programs offered by schools, nonprofits, and community partners; others describe these efforts as fragmented, underutilized, or disconnected from employer needs and local economic realities.
6. **Education-to-Employment Pipeline:** While there is movement toward aligning education with local industries—particularly in trades, hospitality, and healthcare—many believe that schools still prioritize college over career readiness, resulting in gaps in vocational and technical training.
7. **Access and Participation in Training:** Available resources such as CTE programs, scholarships, and employer-sponsored training are acknowledged by some, while others note that low awareness, limited outreach, and the immediate demands of work prevent participation.
8. **Youth Retention and Opportunity:** Programs like the Youth Advocacy Council, Ignite Idaho, and 4H are seen as promising efforts to engage youth in local career paths, yet there remains a strong perception that young people feel disconnected from local opportunities and must leave the region to succeed.

Sustainable Economy
Community Member Perceptions

Opportunities Suggestions by Community Members

Business, Economy, and Employment:

- Potential to grow sectors, such as clean energy, light manufacturing, and tech-enabled remote work.
- The proposed Perpetua Resources mine may catalyze year-round employment, service industry demand, and infrastructure investment. However, economic impacts will be muted if housing and water infrastructure are not improved, and the environmental impacts may be long lasting if not managed responsibly.
- Regional libraries—including those in McCall, Cascade, New Meadows, and Donnelly—offer untapped potential to support entrepreneurship and innovation. Existing and planned library resources (such as shared workspaces, technology upgrades, and expanded facilities) could serve as valuable incubators for local business growth if more fully leveraged, promoted, and connected across the region. Donnelly, while still in early stages, is exploring options for future library expansion.
- Increased communication, centralized resource lists, and stronger partnerships can enhance workforce development efforts.
- Capitalizing on remote work trends and outdoor recreation to attract skilled residents who contribute non-labor income and volunteerism.

Education:

- Underutilized funds (e.g., liquor tax allocations) could support workforce training through CTE and college reimbursement programs. Currently, of the $50K available to the county, only ~$6K is used annually by local students for higher education. County is hoping to invest these funds in school-based CTE programs instead.
- Increase engagement with regional youth stakeholders and schools to better understand vocational needs and identify more tailored career development opportunities for young adults. This could include student surveys, focus groups, or partnerships with school districts to align training programs with local job markets.
- Develop a regional list of workforce development opportunities is needed to improve access and coordination. Here is a start to the list.

Sustainable Economy

Misconceptions	Clarifications
High-paying jobs are rare and inaccessible.	High-paying jobs do exist across both public and private sectors in Valley County, including in healthcare, education, government, and resort operations. However, access to these jobs is limited by housing affordability, labor shortages, and lack of awareness or participation in available training programs—factors that can make them feel inaccessible to many residents
The WCM region lacks year-round or living-wage jobs.	Many year-round, living-wage jobs exist, especially in government, healthcare, and education. However, housing costs and labor shortages make it hard to fill these positions. While some service sector jobs are low-wage, many service sector jobs offer potential for growth, particularly in hospitality, healthcare, and public services. These jobs also provide entry points into the workforce, especially for students, retirees, and new workers.
The economy is not diversified and relies solely on tourism.	While tourism is a major and volatile sector, the economy has diversified over the past 30 years with strong government, healthcare, retail, and entrepreneurial activity. However, persistent seasonality in major sectors (e.g., tourism, construction), workforce shortages, and housing challenges continue to limit year-round stability and economic resilience.
There are few or no workforce development programs.	Multiple programs exist (CTE, CNA, EMT, trades, culinary, etc.), but they are under-promoted or poorly accessed. Employer staffing challenges further limit participation.
Local youth leave only because there are no viable jobs.	While limited awareness of local job and training opportunities contributes to youth outmigration, it is not the only factor. Many young people leave to pursue new experiences, higher education, or urban lifestyles. Efforts to improve local career pathways through CTE, apprenticeships, and workforce development programs are expanding, though better communication is needed to connect youth with viable long-term opportunities in the region.
There is no business support for entrepreneurs or small businesses.	The West Central Mountains region offers a variety of resources to support entrepreneurs and small businesses—including chambers of commerce, public libraries with emerging makerspaces, and programs led by the West Central Mountains Economic Development Council (WCMEDC). However, accessing and promoting these resources can be challenging due to limited centralized communication, rural geography, and the absence of a single coordinating hub. Additionally, the region is often grouped under the broader “Southwest Idaho” designation, which can make it harder to compete for visibility and funding alongside the more populous Treasure Valley. Continued efforts to improve coordination and visibility would help maximize their impact.

Sustainable Economy

Root Challenges

- **Rapid Population Growth Driven by Amenity Migration and Non-Labor Income** leads to strained infrastructure without proportional economic contribution, a lack of housing affordability and availability undermining workforce retention, and a widening income stratification that contributes to a shrinking middle class
- **Lack of housing affordability and availability** undermines workforce retention, local hiring, and community stability
- **Heavy reliance on seasonal tourism limits economic stability:** Despite significant economic diversification, Valley County remains heavily reliant on a seasonal tourism and recreation economy
- **Workforce development program underutilization:** Despite the availability of multiple workforce training programs (e.g., CTE, CNA, EMT, trades, culinary), they are under-promoted or poorly accessed, and employer staffing challenges further limit participation. This may also lead to misaligned high school education pathways to prepare youth for local career opportunities.
- **Challenges in Regional Collaboration and Communication** with respect to support for entrepreneurs and small businesses, and workforce development programs.
- **Underinvestment in infrastructure and fiscal constraints**: Aging and underdeveloped infrastructure (e.g., housing, water, sewer, broadband, roads) limits economic growth, workforce stability, and overall community resilience
- **High in-commuting for jobs and out-commuting for livable wages signals a mismatch in local job quality and housing affordability**, which highlights a fundamental imbalance in the local economy. Many available jobs are seasonal, low-wage, or lack benefits, making them unsustainable for long-term stability, while middle-income opportunities are limited, contributing to out-migration

Sustainable Economy

Future Research Opportunities

1. Who is Filling the Jobs?

- **What's unclear:** While job openings exist across sectors, it is not well understood *who* is taking them—especially in tourism, trades, education, and healthcare.
- **Why it matters:** Understanding the workforce composition (local vs. commuting workers, J1 visa holders, retirees, youth, second-home residents) would clarify labor market dynamics and reveal hidden constraints.
- **Next step:** Conduct employer surveys and workforce demographic and satisfaction studies.

2. Why Aren't Available Workforce Programs Being Used?

- **What's unclear:** Despite having CTE, CNA, EMT, and trades training programs, participation is low. It's unclear whether the barriers are awareness, scheduling conflicts, financial limitations, or cultural perceptions.
- **Why it matters:** Without understanding the **true reasons** behind underutilization, program improvements and outreach efforts may miss the mark.
- **Next step:** Survey potential participants (students, employers, adult learners) to understand barriers to training engagement.

3. What Do Local Youth Want for Their Future?

- **What's unclear:** There's anecdotal evidence of youth outmigration, but no regional data on youth aspirations, job interests, or perceptions of local opportunities.
- **Why it matters:** Youth retention strategies require insights into *what young people value* and whether they see a future for themselves in the region.
- **Next step:** Launch a regional youth survey and/or focus groups in high schools.

4. What Businesses and Services Are Missing?

- **What's unclear:** While small business development is a recognized opportunity, there is no comprehensive analysis of what types of businesses are most needed or most viable (e.g., light manufacturing, trades, childcare, eldercare, local food systems).
- **Why it matters:** Economic development efforts need clearer targets to guide investment and recruitment strategies.
- **Next step:** Conduct a business gap analysis and community needs assessment.

5. How Are Second Homeowners and Remote Workers Contributing (or Not)?

- **What's unclear:** While second homeowners and remote workers bring non-labor income and economic activity, their net impact on workforce availability, housing affordability, and civic engagement remains poorly understood.
- **Why it matters:** Better understanding this population's role can guide policy around taxation, community participation, and land use.
- **Next step:** Develop a profile of second homeowners and remote workers (surveys, interviews, utility or property tax data).

6. How Do We Measure Job Quality Beyond Wage?

- **What's unclear:** Many discussions conflate "living wage" with "job quality," but no current framework captures local job *satisfaction*, *benefits*, *stability*, or *career pathways*.
- **Why it matters:** We need to understand not just if jobs are available, but if they are **sustainable and fulfilling** for long-term community well-being.
- **Next step:** Develop a regional job quality index or survey tool.

Challenge Tree (Sustainable Economy)

High in-commuting for jobs and out-commuting for livable wages reveals mismatch between local wages and housing costs

The local economy remains heavily dependent on seasonal tourism, resulting in job instability, low wages, and limited advancement, especially in service sectors

Low service-sector wages and higher living costs widen the economic gap between affluent residents and those in lower-paying jobs

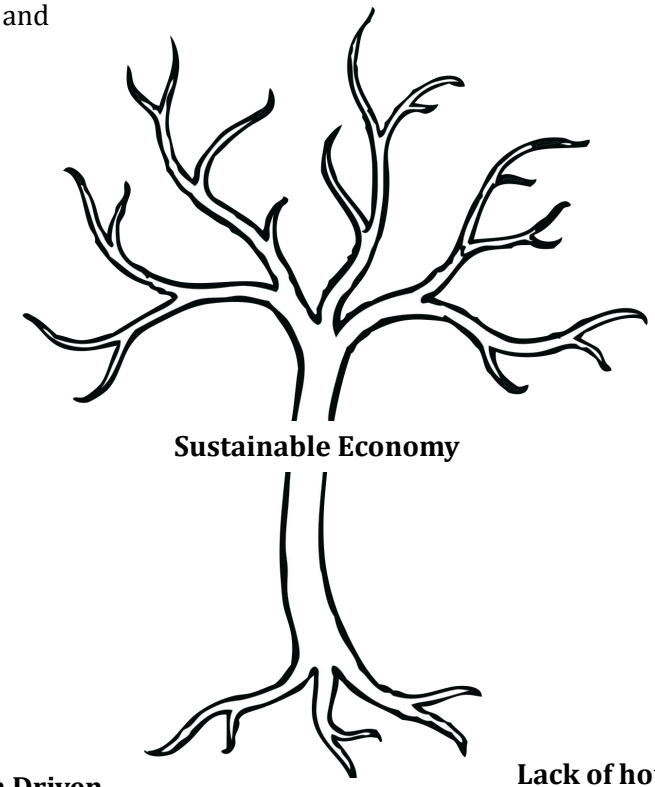
The economic divide between high-income retirees and low-wage workers is growing, eroding middle-income opportunities and community stability

Existing workforce development resources face low participation due to limited awareness, funding, and access barriers

High housing costs and a lack of affordable, long-term rentals hinder worker retention, even for jobs offering livable wages

Employers in healthcare, education, and trades struggle to fill positions, often due to unaffordable local housing

Residents experience challenges balancing local culture with tourism and growth



Sustainable Economy

Rapid Population Growth Driven by Amenity Migration and Non-Labor Income

Lack of housing affordability and availability

Challenges in Regional Collaboration and Communication

Heavy reliance on seasonal tourism limits economic stability

Workforce development program underutilization or poorly connected to employer needs

Underinvestment in infrastructure and fiscal constraints

High in-commuting for jobs and out-commuting for livable wages signals a mismatch in local job quality and housing affordability

Thriving Today and in the Future

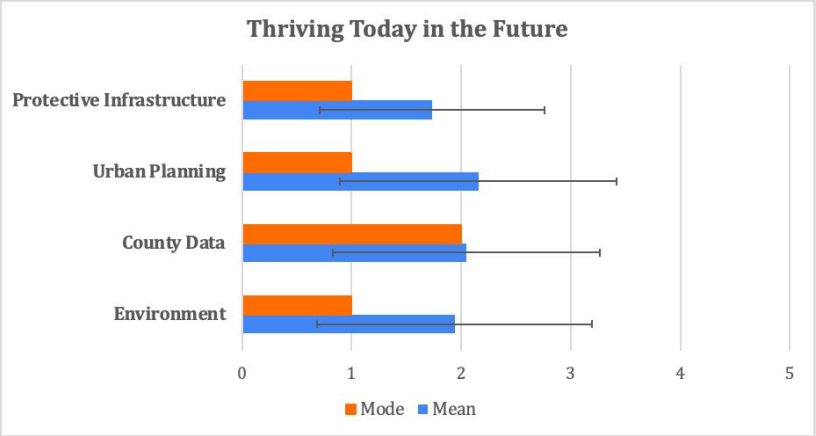
Thriving Today and in the Future

- Environment
- County Data
- Urban Planning
- Protective Infrastructure

Survey Data (graph to the right) presented on a scale of 1 (weak) to 5 (stong)

There were 31 Responses for the Thriving Today and in the Future Survey

Survey Results (Resilience Characteristic)



Overarching Strengths

- **An abundance of long-term plans** addressing many of the WCM region's pressing issues. The WCM region uses plans at local, county, and regional levels ranging from broad to specific topics to inform policy development and guide societal change.
- **A data-driven approach to the decision-making process.** Diverse data sets and technical reports on topics of water quality, population change, natural hazard risk, economic trends, and land use are all important determinants of actions and policies made.
- **Ongoing development of the North Fork Payette River Watershed Master Plan** based largely on the efforts of multiple watershed coalition working groups.
- **Formalized collaborative working groups and capital enhancement projects,** such as the City of Cascade Geothermal Project and the South Lake Recreational Water and Sewer District (SLRWD), are providing critical data and other resources to support decision-making and improve infrastructure.
- **Local Leadership in Climate and Environmental Planning:** The City of McCall is emerging as a regional leader in proactive climate and environmental planning. It is currently drafting a Climate Action Plan to enhance resilience and adaptation within city limits and has already implemented advanced environmental regulations—such as the Shoreline Environs Overlay, Navigable Water Zone, and minimum wetland setbacks, including protections for both delineated and "suspected" wetlands.
- **Strong partnerships with local, county, state, and federal stakeholders.** Partners, such as **IDEQ**, the **Big Payette Lake Water Quality Council**, the **Rotary Club**, **Friends of Lake Cascade**, **Valley Soil & Water Conservation District**, and others, aide in successful implementation of policies and plans by providing:
  - Funding support,
  - Data collection and access,
  - Volunteer networks, and
  - Outreach and education opportunities

Thriving Today and in the Future

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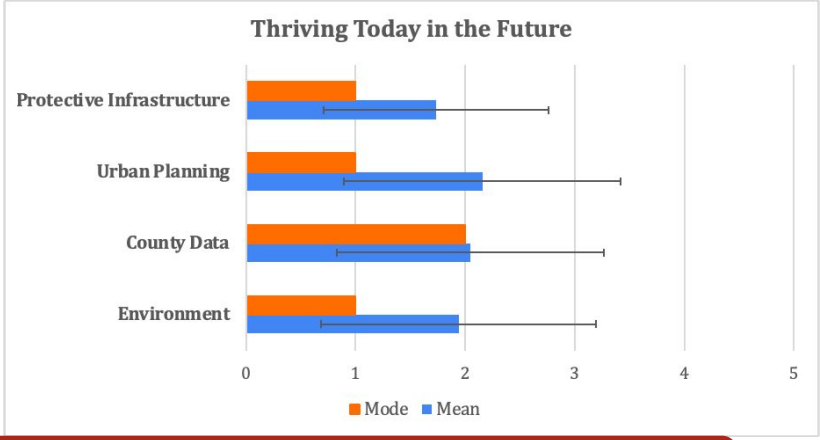


Overarching Challenges

- **A lack of long-term, reliable funding** greatly limits the ability of plans and policies the be effective. Without secure funding, there is a **lack of institutional capacity** at local levels to comprehensively address issues. This reduced institutional capacity creates compounding delays or gaps in:
  - Infrastructure upgrades,
  - Long-term monitoring,
  - Data collection, and
  - Policy enforcement
- There are **barriers to enforcement of development restrictions and environmental regulations.** Enforcement policies and mechanisms vary across jurisdictional boundaries, which creates confusion around enforcement responsibility and action at the local level. A lack of staff also create an overreliance on voluntary compliance as an enforcement mechanism.
- There is **strong divergent thinking within the community** on foundational environmental issues, which makes consensus building toward a solution difficult.
- **Fragmented Transportation Planning Along SH55:** Rapid development along the SH55 corridor—particularly between Lake Fork and McCall—has resulted in growing concern about unrestricted access points and traffic safety. Community members perceive that the Idaho Transportation Department (ITD) evaluates development proposals individually, without fully accounting for cumulative transportation impacts, which could undermine long-term corridor safety and functionality. However, the **Idaho Transportation Department (ITD)** has announced a plan to conduct a **corridor study** to improve health and safety, including slower-moving vehicle considerations.

Thriving Today and in the Future

Areas of Divergence

1. **Success of Environmental Conservation:** Community members express both appreciation for the region's natural resources—especially water-based assets like Payette Lake—and concern that environmental considerations are often deprioritized in favor of development in sensitive areas.

2. **Recognition of Environmental Risks:** Some perceive that environmental protections are in place and improving, while others feel environmental risks are not taken seriously by decision-makers and that development often proceeds without sufficient oversight.

3. **Regulatory Enforcement:** There is a perception that while regulations exist to guide development, enforcement is inconsistent or ineffective—due to lack of clarity across jurisdictions, or limited local capacity.

4. **Data-Driven Decision-Making:** Community members recognize efforts to use data in decision-making, but also express concern that data is sometimes incomplete, outdated, or not consistently shared or applied across jurisdictions.

5. **Relevant Stakeholder/Expert Inputs to Decision-Making:** Some perceive that experts and agencies are consulted during development review, while others feel that input from critical stakeholders—such as emergency services—is not consistently valued or incorporated.

6. **Wildfire Risk Management:** There is a perception that wildfire risk is considered in some planning processes, particularly in McCall and newer subdivisions, but that mitigation is not yet a standard or consistent element of development across the region.

7. **Growth and Infrastructure Investment:** Community members observe that while infrastructure improvements are discussed and underway in some areas, housing development is frequently seen as outpacing investment in essential systems like water, sewer, and roads.

Thriving Today and in the Future

Opportunities Suggestions by Community Members

Environment:

- There is a tremendous potential for the WCM region to serve as the primary watershed steward for the region and advocate for stronger environmental funding and protection for critical water sources. The North Fork Payette River Watershed Coalition has undergone various watershed studies to better understand development and infrastructure impacts on water quality and quantity for the region to support decision-making and policy implementation.
- The WCM region can leverage eco-tourism revenues to more sustainably manage land use on recreational lands.

County Data:

- Convert historic data, which commonly remains inaccessible in paper files and formats, into digital datasets that be can used to track historical trends and project future changes.
- Share data used for decision-making on all environmental concerns into a centralized location. This would increase public transparency and interagency collaboration to identify and fill data gaps.

Urban Planning:

- There is an opportunity to reduce conflict between land use planning and individual property rights by fostering dialogue and education around how thoughtful planning can protect shared community assets without infringing on personal freedoms. Building a shared understanding that planning and property rights are not inherently in opposition could help bridge divides and increase support for sustainable development efforts.
- Increase transparency in the development review process to reduce confusion in enforcement of regulations, particularly in sensitive areas such as floodplains and the wildland urban interface.
- Valley County has an opportunity to take a more proactive role in planning and zoning to preserve and enhance the scenic corridor and other natural assets of the WCM region. The Idaho Transportation Department (IDT) is currently conducting a corridor study focused on improving health and safety, including considerations for slower-moving vehicles.
- **Expand Environmental Protections Beyond Federal Baselines:** Current county-level regulations rely heavily on federal standards (e.g., Army Corps of Engineers wetland delineation), which may exclude “suspected” wetlands and smaller-scale impacts. Local governments have the authority to adopt stricter standards reflecting community values. There is an opportunity for Valley County to follow McCall’s example in adopting enhanced floodplain and wetland protections to better manage environmental risk.

Protective Infrastructure:

- Allocate resources to maintain and develop upgraded infrastructure, such as floodwater systems, septic systems, and transportation networks, to match the pace of expanding residential development.

Community Engagement:

- **Use Community Engagement to Inform Planning and Build Trust:** To better understand divergent perspectives and identify shared community values, Valley County could conduct a public survey or structured engagement process focused on planning and zoning priorities. This could provide a clearer picture of what residents and property owners care about most and help guide updates to the P&Z process. It may also help reduce conflict and foster a sense of ownership.

Thriving Today and in the Future

Misconceptions	Clarifications
There are no fire-wise building codes.	Valley County adopts the 2015 International Fire Code for all proposed developments. The county also provides additional information and resources to educate the public on property-level wildfire mitigation strategies. Despite these efforts to reduce wildfire risk, residents and properties experience unequal wildfire vulnerabilities.
There is no standardized review process.	The Valley County P&Z Department review all building permits and enforce zoning ordinances and codes. Other jurisdictional enforcement agencies at state, federal, and local levels also have formalized review processes for development proposals. However, proposed developments can overcome regulations in the formalized review process, which leads to new development in areas deemed undesirable by the public.
There is no zoning in the county.	Valley County has only one general zoning designation. While zoning technically exists, the absence of multiple, differentiated zones contributes to perceptions of unregulated growth and weak land use oversight. This structure also makes it more difficult to enforce development standards, particularly in environmentally sensitive or high-risk areas. That said, Valley County's Planning and Zoning Department is responsible for implementing and enforcing zoning ordinances and building codes. A lack of financial resources and institutional capacity, however, create challenges in zoning enforcement.
Wetlands are frequently filled without consequence.	The review of development within floodplains and wetland areas is done collaboratively across jurisdictional boundaries and is highly regulated with strict standards. However, developments can leverage substantial resources to overcome those standards by offsetting environmental impacts and meeting building codes.
There is minimal effort to secure new funding.	Valley County and cities of the WCM region have developed frameworks for prioritizing grant applications and actively work to identify funding mechanisms with their partners. One option that has been growing in popularity is leveraging eco-tourism revenues and taxes as a funding mechanism to support environmental conservation policies. Significant changes and uncertainty with federal and state grant opportunities, funds that have been critical to previous environmental conservation actions, have made securing long-term funds more challenging.

Thriving Today and in the Future

Root Challenges

- **Rapid Population Growth Driven by Amenity Migration and Non-Labor Income**
- **Insufficient assessment of the condition, capacity, and future needs of protective infrastructure:** There is a critical need for comprehensive data on drainage systems, road networks, and utilities to identify vulnerabilities, prioritize maintenance, and support sustainable growth planning.
- **Underinvestment in infrastructure and fiscal constraints**: Rural tax base limits capacity to fund needed improvements or match state/federal grants. New residential development is outpacing infrastructure maintenance and upgrades.
- **Lack of comprehensive studies on water resource availability, capacity, and development impacts:** Limited hydrological analysis and groundwater modeling hinder the ability to manage growth responsibly and protect water quality and supply—especially in light of drought risk and aquifer dependence.
- **Challenges in Regional Collaboration and Communication:** Despite following a clear process, residents frequently report feeling uninformed or their voices unheard about key planning decisions, which undermines trust, reduces community buy-in, and limits the effectiveness of local policies and programs. Conflicting views and priorities on environmental issues across jurisdictions and within the broader WCM community—paired with a reluctance to actively listen and engage with differing perspectives—hinder efforts to find common ground and build consensus.
- **The long-term impacts of rapid residential growth on water resources and environmental risk in the WCM region are not well understood.** As a result, planning efforts may fall short in addressing future water demand, infrastructure needs, and natural hazard vulnerabilities—putting the region at risk of environmental degradation, resource shortages, and unsustainable development.

Thriving Today and in the Future

Future Research Opportunities

1. Are Plans and Policies Effective?

- **What's unclear:** Despite numerous plans and policies across jurisdictional boundaries and disciplinary topics, it remains unknown if those plans and policies have been effective at reaching regional goals and objectives or reducing environmental risks and concerns for residents.
- **Why it matters:** Adaptive management – the overarching framework of governance in the WCM region – requires continual evaluation of strategies, actions, policies, and plans to better understand the impacts of decision-making and make improvements where possible.
- **Next step:** Identify key metrics related to plan or policy goals and conduct a temporal analysis on trends of key metrics.

2. What Are the Long-Term Impacts of Expanded Residential Growth?

- **What's unclear**: Despite the steady population growth observed in the WCM region, the long-term impacts of projected continued growth on critical factors such as water quality, water availability, and natural hazard risk are not well understood. New residential development is currently outpacing infrastructure upgrades and maintenance, leading to water quality and availability concerns. Furthermore, population growth is not being adequately factored into land and water planning to ensure long-term sustainability. There is also limited understanding or communication about aquifer capacity, despite ongoing development and water use restrictions, and few water and sewer studies exist.
- **Why it matters**: Understanding future projections and scenarios is crucial as it can directly inform policies and plans, thereby helping to create a sustainable future for the region. A lack of this understanding could lead to continued environmental degradation and increased vulnerability to hazards.
- **Next step**: Digitize historic paper records to analyze long-term trends between population/residential growth, environmental risks, and (where possible) water availability. Use consistent cross-jurisdictional data to map population growth projections, identify growth drivers, locate wells/septic systems, and project water demand. Compare demand with supply to inform drought preparedness and conduct Water Availability and Budget Assessments.

Challenge Tree (Thriving Today in the Future)

Water supply and quality threatened by aging septic systems and inadequate monitoring

New residential development is outpacing infrastructure maintenance and upgrades.

Insufficient capacity for data collection, monitoring, and plan implementation

Inconsistent enforcement of land use and environmental regulations

Redundancy in planning that does not offer clear enforcement mechanisms

Reactive instead of proactive resource allocation

Water quality issues such as harmful algal blooms (HABs), increased turbidity, contamination

Lack of public trust in decision-making process

Lack of public awareness and recognition of environmental issues

Overreliance on volunteerism and voluntary compliance

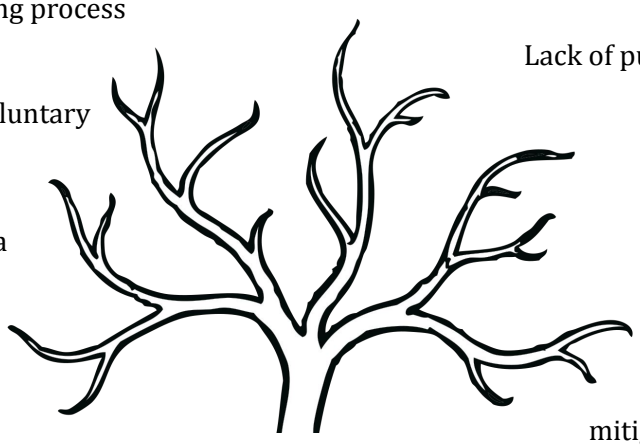
Propagating negative perceptions of decision-making and development approval processes

Gaps in long-term monitoring data

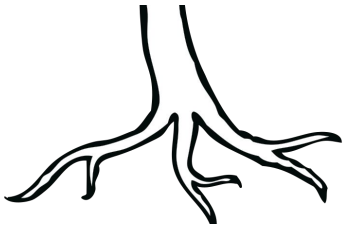
Delays in infrastructure maintenance and upgrades

Outdated stormwater mitigation and septic systems

Reduced staffing and personnel



Thriving Today and in the Future



Rapid population growth driven by amenity migration and non-labor income

Lack of comprehensive studies on water resource availability, capacity, and development impacts

Limited data and analysis on aquifer capacity and drought impacts leave the long-term effects of residential growth on water quality and availability uncertain

Challenges in regional collaboration and communication with respect to planning, policies, and programs

The long-term impacts of rapid residential growth on water resources and environmental risk in the WCM region are not well understood

Underinvestment in infrastructure and fiscal constraints (due to limited local tax base)

Rapid residential development is outpacing infrastructure investment and planning.

Public skepticism and lack of trust in planning and decision-making processes

Built to Last

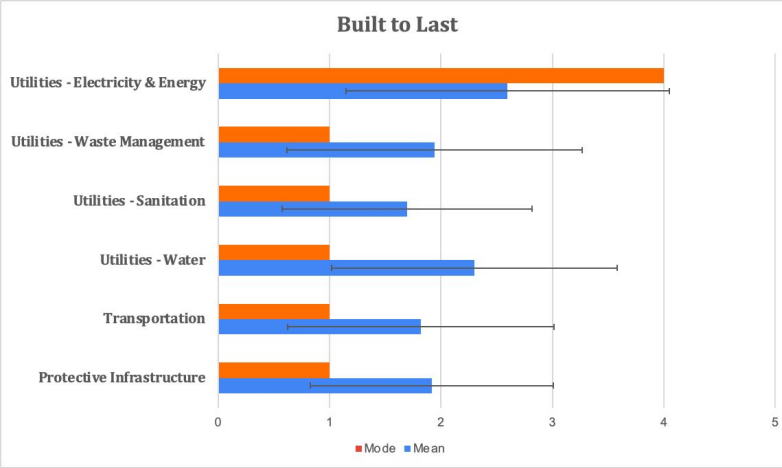
Thriving Today and in the Future

- Protective Infrastructure
- Utilities - Water
- Utilities - Wastewater/ Sanitation
- Utilities - Waste Management
- Utilities - Energy and Electricity

Survey Data (graph to the right) presented on a scale of 1 (weak) to 5 (stong)

There were 35 Responses for the Thriving Today and in the Future Survey

Survey Results (Resilience Characteristic)



Overarching Strengths

- **Abundant Natural Resources and Recreation**
  The region is prized for its scenic beauty and year-round recreational opportunities—from lakes and rivers to trails and ski areas—which not only support mental well-being and community pride but also drive a tourism-based economy that helps offset local taxes.

- **Strong Community Engagement and Partnerships**
  A culture of volunteerism, regional collaboration, and community-driven initiatives (e.g., ABC competition, Search and Rescue, watershed partnerships) has led to funding wins and strengthened cross-agency cooperation with local, state, and federal partners.

- **Established Planning and Adaptive Management**
  The region benefits from up-to-date comprehensive and transportation plans, as well as adaptive resource management frameworks (e.g., Waterways Management Plan) that support long-term sustainability and guide infrastructure, land use, and recreation planning.

- **Recent Infrastructure Investments**
  Municipalities like McCall and Donnelly have made significant upgrades to water systems, stormwater drains, and sewer infrastructure. The county also maintains a robust road and bridge network, and the region is supported by solid waste and backup power systems in key facilities.

Built to Last

Thriving Today and in the Future

- Protective Infrastructure
- Utilities - Water
- Utilities - Wastewater/ Sanitation
- Utilities - Waste Management
- Utilities - Energy and Electricity

Survey Data (graph to the right) presented on a scale of 1 (weak) to 5 (stong)

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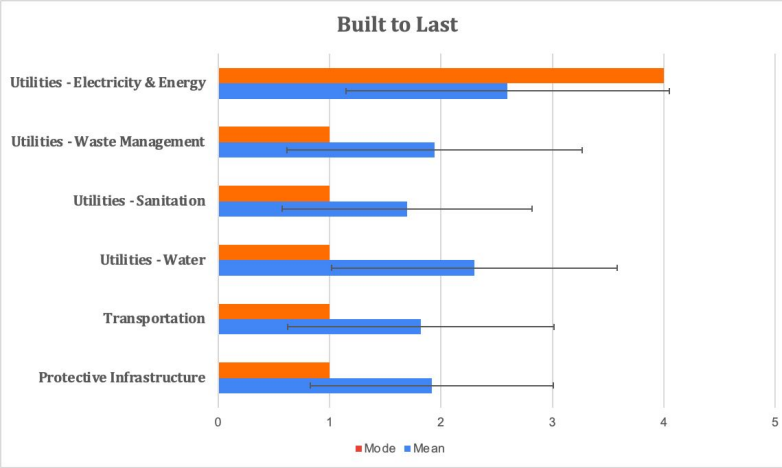


Overarching Challenges

- **Rapid Growth Straining Infrastructure**
  Population and tourism growth are overwhelming roads, utilities, and services. Traffic, deteriorating roads, and lack of funding—especially for repair and maintenance—are compounded by inconsistent development contributions and more extreme weather cycles.

- **Water Supply and Quality Risks**
  Water availability for future growth is uncertain, with Payette Lake threatened by pollution and drought vulnerability. Declining water quality in local lakes and concerns over aging septic systems and insufficient monitoring contribute to rising anxiety about long-term supply.

- **High Wildfire Risk and Gaps in Preparedness**
  Wildfire is the region's top hazard, worsened by expanding development into fire-prone areas and a lack of resident awareness. Some critical infrastructure—such as sewer systems and schools—lack backup power, limiting emergency resilience.
- **Affordable and Workforce Housing Shortage**
  A severe lack of affordable housing—exacerbated by the dominance of short-term rentals—makes it difficult to recruit and retain local workers. Housing costs are rising sharply, with many households spending well over 30% of income on shelter.
- **Limited Active and Public Transportation**
  Walking and biking infrastructure outside McCall is sparse and unsafe due to potholes, lack of shoulders, and heavy traffic. Public transit is limited in frequency, reliability, and coverage—especially for areas south of Cascade.
- **Road Infrastructure Planning vs. Implementation Gap:** While Valley County has a master transportation plan in place to guide road improvements and future connectivity, implementation remains stalled due to limited funding. This gap between planning and execution contributes to ongoing maintenance backlogs and restricts the region's ability to accommodate growth safely and efficiently.

Built to Last
Community Member Perceptions

Areas of Divergence

Protective Infrastructure – Some report severe failures like flooding and poor drainage, while others see no major issues and point to McCall's improvements and regular maintenance checks.

Road Network Quality – Many describe deteriorating, pothole-ridden, and seasonally impassable roads, while some argue the network is adequate for the region's harsh conditions.

Walking and Biking Safety – Some see walking and biking as unsafe and poorly planned, especially along HWY 55, while others feel the community offers good options for a rural area.

Public Transportation – Some view transit as limited, unreliable, or absent in certain areas, while others find it adequate and praise Mountain Community Transit's service.

Drinking Water Availability and Quality – Some are confident in safe, abundant water, while others worry about untested wells, water discoloration, threats to Payette Lake, and reliance on vulnerable junior water rights.

Water Supply for the Future – Some believe supplies are abundant per IDWR, while others argue they're already insufficient and fault the lack of required studies for new development approvals.

Waste Management Oversight – Some see frequent service problems and poor maintenance, while others note planned improvements and existing DEQ oversight.

Backup and Emergency Power Systems – Some believe critical infrastructure has adequate backup power, while others stress that key services like sewer systems and schools lack reliable generators or contingency systems.

Opportunities Suggestions by Community Members

- **Expand and Improve Waste Services**: Launch combined curbside recycling and compost pickup, support community composting, improve transfer station maintenance and oversight, and increase the frequency of hazardous waste disposal. Explore new landfill sites and invest in technologies to reduce waste volume.
- **Strengthen Water Management and Conservation**: Increase valley-wide well monitoring, require water availability studies for new developments, enhance conservation education, develop a comprehensive drought and emergency water supply plan, and update outdated water management plans. Protect Payette Lake from pollution and secure its water rights.
- **Upgrade Wastewater and Protective Infrastructure**: Repair McCall's leaking sewage liner, enforce stronger septic regulations, promote homeowner maintenance through education, and invest in new wastewater treatment facilities and capacity planning. Establish routine maintenance for ditches, culverts, and related infrastructure.
- **Improve Active Transportation Networks**: Develop bike and pedestrian paths along Highway 55 and connect trails by repurposing unused railroad corridors.
- **Secure Funding and Require Developer Contributions**: Pursue grants for infrastructure repairs, require developers to upgrade adjacent roads and fund sewer connections, and consider a tourism-related tax (e.g., 1% on out-of-area credit card transactions) to support road improvements.
- **Enhance Public Transit Access**: Expand public transportation routes and hours, especially for evening workers and growing neighborhoods, and electrify buses to improve environmental performance and system appeal.

Built to Last
Community Member Perceptions

Misconceptions

- Aging culverts and ditches are not regularly maintained or replaced.
- There is a lack of regular, county-wide maintenance schedules for culverts and ditches.
- General public lacks information about flood risks, infrastructure condition, and maintenance plans.
- Public education on water conservation is limited or ineffective.
- There is no comprehensive groundwater monitoring or hydrologic assessments
- Recycling is drop-off only, with no curbside services..
- Very few efforts exist to explore renewables like solar, wind, or biomass
- Limited forward planning for pedestrian and bike routes.

Clarifications

- Valley County performs county-wide culvert and ditch maintenance, managed through the iWorQ system[1]
- A formal program exists, including replacement and upkeep of drainage infrastructure[1]
- Hazard Mitigation Plan outlines regular public education, meetings, and outreach efforts[2]
- Public outreach, nitrate education, well testing, and signage are part of water conservation plans[3][4]
- Monitoring programs are in place by DEQ and IDWR, including the Lake Cascade Groundwater Project[5][3]
- Curbside recycling is available in Donnelly and managed under a county contract with Lakeshore Disposal[6][7]
- Local plans encourage development of solar, wind, geothermal, and biomass energy systems[6][8]
- McCall and Valley County have funded pathway planning efforts and long-range trail strategies [9][1]

Root Challenges

- **Insufficient assessment of the condition, capacity, and future needs of protective infrastructure:** There is a critical need for comprehensive data on drainage systems, road networks, and utilities to identify vulnerabilities, prioritize maintenance, and support sustainable growth planning.
- **Lack of comprehensive studies on water resource availability, capacity, and development impacts:** Limited hydrological analysis and groundwater modeling hinder the ability to manage growth responsibly and protect water quality and supply—especially in light of drought risk and aquifer dependence.
- **Challenges in Regional Collaboration and Communication:** Despite following a clear process, residents frequently report feeling uninformed or their voices unheard about key planning decisions, which undermines trust, reduces community buy-in, and limits the effectiveness of local policies and programs.
- **Underinvestment in infrastructure and fiscal constraints**: Rural tax base limits capacity to fund needed improvements or match state/federal grants. New residential development is outpacing infrastructure maintenance and upgrades.
- **The long-term impacts of rapid residential growth on water resources and environmental risk in the WCM region are not well understood.** As a result, planning efforts may fall short in addressing future water demand, infrastructure needs, and natural hazard vulnerabilities—putting the region at risk of environmental degradation, resource shortages, and unsustainable development.

Built to Last

Future Research Opportunities

1. Is There Enough Clean and Reliable Water for the Sustainable Future?

- **What's unclear:** The long-term availability and quality of local water sources (aquifer), including the impact of pollution, drought, aging septic systems, and unregulated development on aquifers and lakes like Payette.
- **Why it matters:** Clean water is essential for public health, ecological stability, and sustainable development. Without clear data, future growth could threaten water security.
- **Next step:** Conduct hydrologic and water quality studies, evaluate conservation practices, and design a groundwater monitoring network.

2. Are Our Roads and Drainage Systems Ready for Growth and changing long term weather patterns?

- **What's unclear:** The condition of aging culverts, ditches, and roads; the adequacy of stormwater infrastructure; and the funding needed for maintenance and upgrades.
- **Why it matters:** Infrastructure failure increases flood risk, disrupts mobility, and reduces resilience to extreme weather and growth pressure.
- **Next step:** Complete a county-wide inventory, perform hydrological modeling, and create a sustainable funding and maintenance plan.

3. Is Our Waste System Efficient and Sustainable?

- **What's unclear:** How much waste is generated locally, whether curbside recycling or composting is viable, and how best to maintain the transfer station.
- **Why it matters:** Poor waste management increases costs, reduces landfill life, and impacts the environment.
- **Next step:** Conduct a waste characterization study, pilot curbside services, and assess new technologies and renewable energy integration.

4. What is the condition of aging drainage infrastructure in the region, and how much funding is needed for its maintenance and upgrades?

- **What is unclear:** It remains unclear how widespread deterioration is across critical drainage infrastructure and how inadequately maintained systems contribute to localized flooding. Additionally, there is a lack of clarity around the funding necessary to address both current deficiencies and future demands driven by changing climate conditions.
- **Why it matters**: Infrastructure vulnerabilities heighten the region's disaster risk. Failure of this infrastructure increases flood risk, disrupts mobility, and reduces overall resilience to extreme weather events. There is a chronic lack of maintenance planning and funding, especially at the county level. Respondents see an opportunity to improve disaster resilience by upgrading and hardening infrastructure and utilities, particularly sewage systems and stormwater drainage solutions.
- **Next step**: Complete a county-wide inventory of these systems, perform hydrological modeling, and create a sustainable funding and maintenance plan.

5. Is Our Energy System Resilient, Affordable, and Aligned with the Future?

- **What's unclear:** Backup power availability for critical services, rural heating reliability, long-term electricity plans, and barriers to renewable energy or efficiency improvements.
- **Why it matters:** High energy costs strain low-income households, and power outages threaten essential services. Missed renewable opportunities limit resilience and sustainability.
- **Next step:** Conduct an energy audit, expand backup and efficiency support for vulnerable households, research renewable energy options, and address policy or funding gaps.

Challenge Tree (Built to Last)

Deteriorating roads and drainage leading to flooding, safety risks, and service interruptions

Water supply and quality threatened by aging septic systems

Outside McCall, walking and biking are unsafe due to poor infrastructure. Public transit is limited, especially south of Cascade

Strained water, wastewater, and road systems unable to keep pace with development

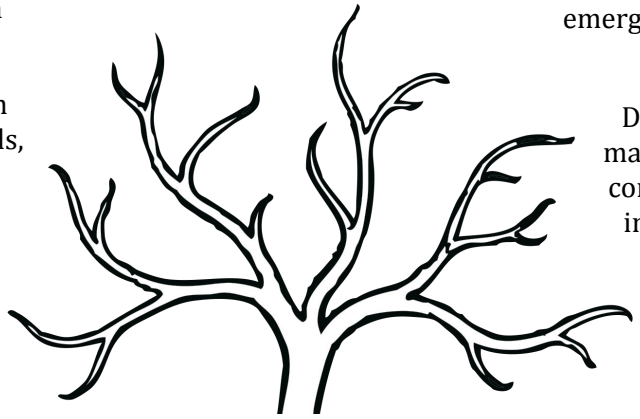
Aging septic systems and poor monitoring worsen water quality concern

Critical infrastructure lacks backup power, reducing emergency resilience

Rapid population and tourism growth are overwhelming roads, utilities, and services

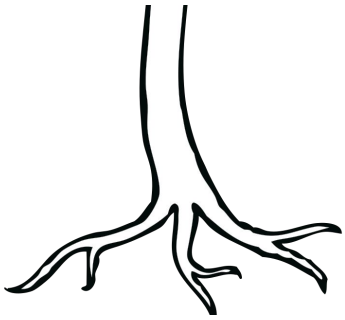
Deteriorating roads, underfunded maintenance, inconsistent developer contributions, and extreme weather intensify the infrastructure strain

Future water supply is uncertain due to pollution and drought threats, especially in Payette Lake



High wildfire risk is amplified by development in fire-prone areas and limited public awareness.

Built to Last



Challenges in regional collaboration & communication

Lack of comprehensive studies on water resource availability, capacity, and development impacts

Insufficient assessment of the condition, capacity, and future needs of protective infrastructure

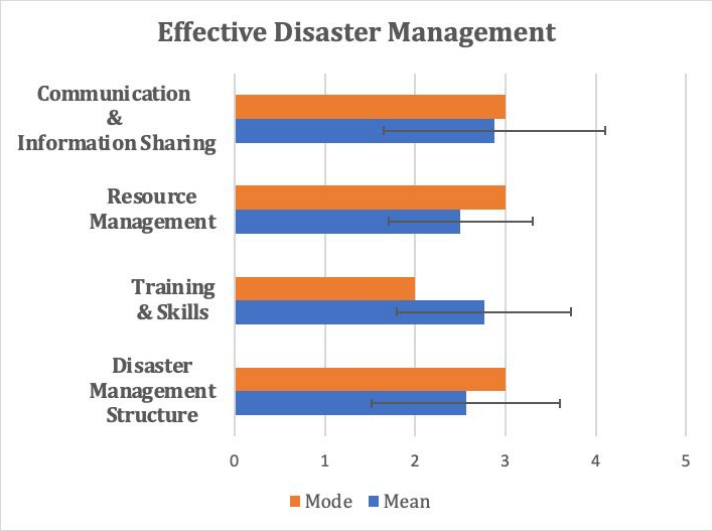
The long-term impacts of rapid residential growth on water resources and environmental risk in the WCM region are not well understood.

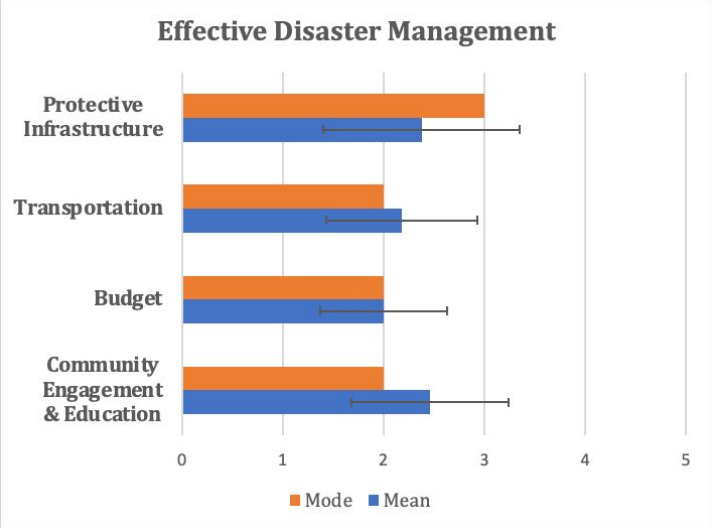
Underinvestment in infrastructure and fiscal constraints (due to limited tax base)

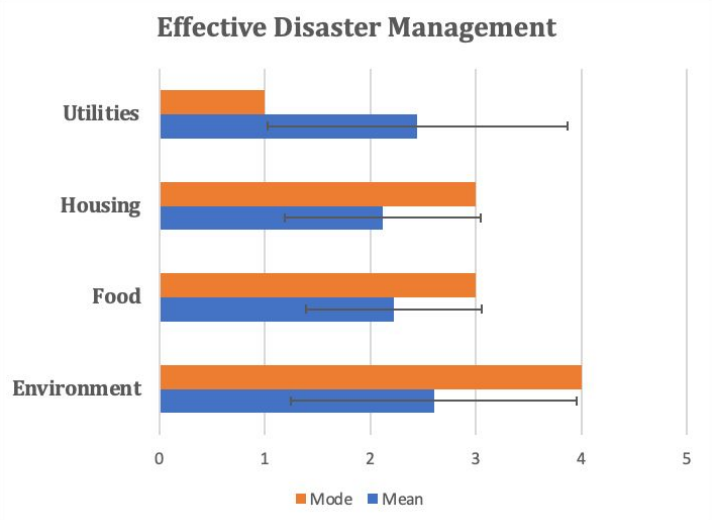
Rapid growth and tourism increasing pressure on outdated infrastructure

Effective Disaster Management

Survey Results (Resilience Topics)







- Disaster Management Structure
- Training & Skills
- Resource Management
- Communication and Information Sharing
- Community Engagement and Education
- Budget
- Transportation
- Protective Infrastructure
- Environment
- Food
- Housing
- Utilities

Survey Data (graph to the left) presented on a scale of 1 (weak) to 5 (stong)

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Strongest to Weakest Resilience Topic:

1. Communication & Information Sharing
2. Training and Skills
3. Environment
4. Disaster Management Structure
5. Resource Management
6. Community Engagement and Education
7. Utilities
8. Protective Infrastructure
9. Food
10. Transportation
11. Housing
12. Budget

Effective Disaster Management

Overarching Strengths

- **Regional Commitment to Hazard Identification and Disaster Planning.** In addition to regularly updating the All-Hazards Mitigation Plan, the region maintains an Emergency Operations Plan, a Continuity of Operations Plan, and Wildfire Protection Plans, among others.
- **Growing Attention to Wildfire Hazard.** The West Central Mountains Region is improving its capacity to prepare for and respond to wildfire events. There are now firewise building requirements for new developments, the All-Hazards Mitigation Plan has a complete Wildfire Annex, and a Wildfire Working Group works on education and fuels reduction.
- **Well-trained Personnel and Interagency Communication.** While some survey respondents believe training is overly focused on wildfire, there is a strong consensus that the West Central Mountains region maintains highly trained disaster management personnel. In addition, the region maintains interoperable communication systems (e.g., StateComm) that allow for coordination across agencies.

Overarching Challenges

- **Insufficient Resources and Funding for Disaster Management.** Local agencies are spread thin, and individuals often hold multiple roles. As with many rural communities, the West Central Mountains Region lacks the capacity of larger urban areas. Disaster management is therefore seen as primarily reactive rather than proactive.
- **Infrastructure Vulnerabilities Heighten the Region's Disaster Risk.** Aging infrastructure–such as stormwater, wastewater, and road systems, among others–create additional risk in disaster scenarios. Without significant protective and critical infrastructure upgrades across the region, it will become increasingly difficult to keep communities safe during disasters.
- **Discrepancies between County and City Codes.** Disaster management relies on the enforcement of regulations in hazard areas, and notable differences between county and city codes place additional stress on disaster mitigation and response efforts. Without a unified set of hazard zone regulations, it is difficult to equitably manage land and developments.
- **Road Infrastructure Planning vs. Implementation Gap:** While Valley County has a master transportation plan in place to guide road improvements and future connectivity, implementation remains stalled due to limited funding. This gap between planning and execution contributes to ongoing maintenance backlogs and restricts the region's ability to accommodate growth safely and efficiently.

Effective Disaster Management
Community Member Perceptions

Areas of Divergence

Expertise – Some believe responders are well-trained and prepared, particularly for wildfire, while others feel personnel are stretched too thin and lack training for hazards beyond wildfire.
Interagency Coordination – Some see strong interagency collaboration, while others perceive a lack of consistent regional coordination.
Public Communication – Some view communication with the public as adequate, while others feel information is not effectively shared before, during, and after emergencies.

Opportunities Suggestions by Community Members

Increased Community Engagement and Education. Respondents believe there is an opportunity to more effectively engage with the broader public about disaster preparedness and hazard mitigation. They recommend additional training opportunities, such as firewise landscaping and evacuation procedures. They also suggest an emphasis on a greater diversity of hazards and disasters beyond wildfire.

Plans for Emergency Shelters and Temporary Housing. Respondents feel the plan for emergency shelters and temporary housing are not detailed enough. They recommend the identification of standardized evacuation shelters, such as schools.

Securing Additional Financial Resources. While most respondents agree that the West Central Mountains Region is lacking adequate financial resources, they note the region's ability to access alternative sources of funding from federal, state, philanthropic, and nonprofit sources. The region has an opportunity to further leverage grantwriting and networking skills to supplement existing resources.

Strengthening Codes and Enforcement. Some respondents believe disaster management can be improved by strengthening development ordinances and more strictly enforcing codes. In addition, there is a perceived opportunity to unify the requirements of counties and cities to create a more standardized process for development in hazard zones.

Upgrading Infrastructure and Utilities. Respondents see an opportunity to improve disaster resilience by upgrading and hardening the region's infrastructure and utilities. While there are numerous potential projects, the most commonly mentioned infrastructure projects included upgraded/centralized sewage systems and more effective stormwater drainage solutions.

Pursue clarification from state agencies and insurance providers regarding the legal authority of local jurisdictions in Idaho to adopt and enforce Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) codes. This effort would address uncertainty stemming from the state's adoption of the 2018 baseline building code, which does not include the International Code Council's 2020 WUI model code. Clear guidance would enable local governments to understand their options for managing development in high-risk WUI areas and support coordinated action to reduce wildfire vulnerability.

Effective Disaster Management
Community Member Perceptions

Misconceptions	Clarification
The West Central Mountains Region lacks an Emergency Operations Plan.	Valley County does have an EOP. This plan is not currently available because the county is working on a new, updated version.
The West Central Mountains Region is unprepared for wildfire risk.	While survey respondents may feel the region is inadequately prepared for wildfires, there has been significant momentum surrounding wildfire hazard. New subdivisions are now required to have Fire Protection Plans, and the Valley County Board of Commissioners recently started the Valley County Fire Working Group.
Development is unrestricted in hazard zones.	The West Central Mountains Region employs a variety of protective zoning ordinances and development requirements in flood and wildfire areas.

Root Challenges

- **Underinvestment in infrastructure and fiscal constraints.** The West Central Mountains Region requires widespread infrastructure improvement projects, including wastewater, stormwater, and transportation systems. These projects require more financial and human resources than are currently available in the region.
- **Loss of federal support.** Historically, rural communities like the West Central Mountains Region relied heavily on federal grants for hazard mitigation and disaster relief. With the termination of many FEMA program, communities are left without adequate resources to address key hazard and disaster concerns.
- **Rapid Population Growth Driven by Amenity Migration and Non-Labor Income.** Tourists and second-homes place an additional burden on infrastructure, communication, hospitals, and evacuations, among other operations. Emergency services struggle to account for the added demand when compounding growth and tourism. However, second homeowners contribute a substantial share of the property tax.
- **Challenges in Regional Collaboration and Communication** with respect to emergency operations, in particular engaging elected officials across all jurisdictions, and public hazard preparedness. Despite this challenge, there is a large and engaged hazard planning group in Valley County.
- **The long-term impacts of rapid residential growth on water resources and environmental risk in the WCM region are not well understood.** As a result, planning efforts may fall short in addressing future water demand, infrastructure needs, and natural hazard vulnerabilities—putting the region at risk of environmental degradation, resource shortages, and unsustainable development.

Effective Disaster Management

Future Research Opportunities

1. What are the impacts of the BRIC Program Termination?

- **What's unclear:** FEMA Building Resilience Infrastructure and Communities Program funded hazard mitigation efforts and Hazard Mitigation Plan Updates for rural communities around the United States. Following the termination of the program, how will the West Central Mountains Region fund crucial disaster mitigation projects?
- **Why it matters:** The West Central Mountains Region, like many rural areas, is capacity-limited and lacks the resources to conduct widespread disaster mitigation efforts. The region also lacks the capacity to update the All-Hazards Mitigation Plan every 5 years to be in compliance with FEMA requirements. Federal grants historically played a key role in the regions disaster mitigation projects.
- **Next step:** Work with disaster management officials to identify alternative sources of funding for hazard mitigation projects.

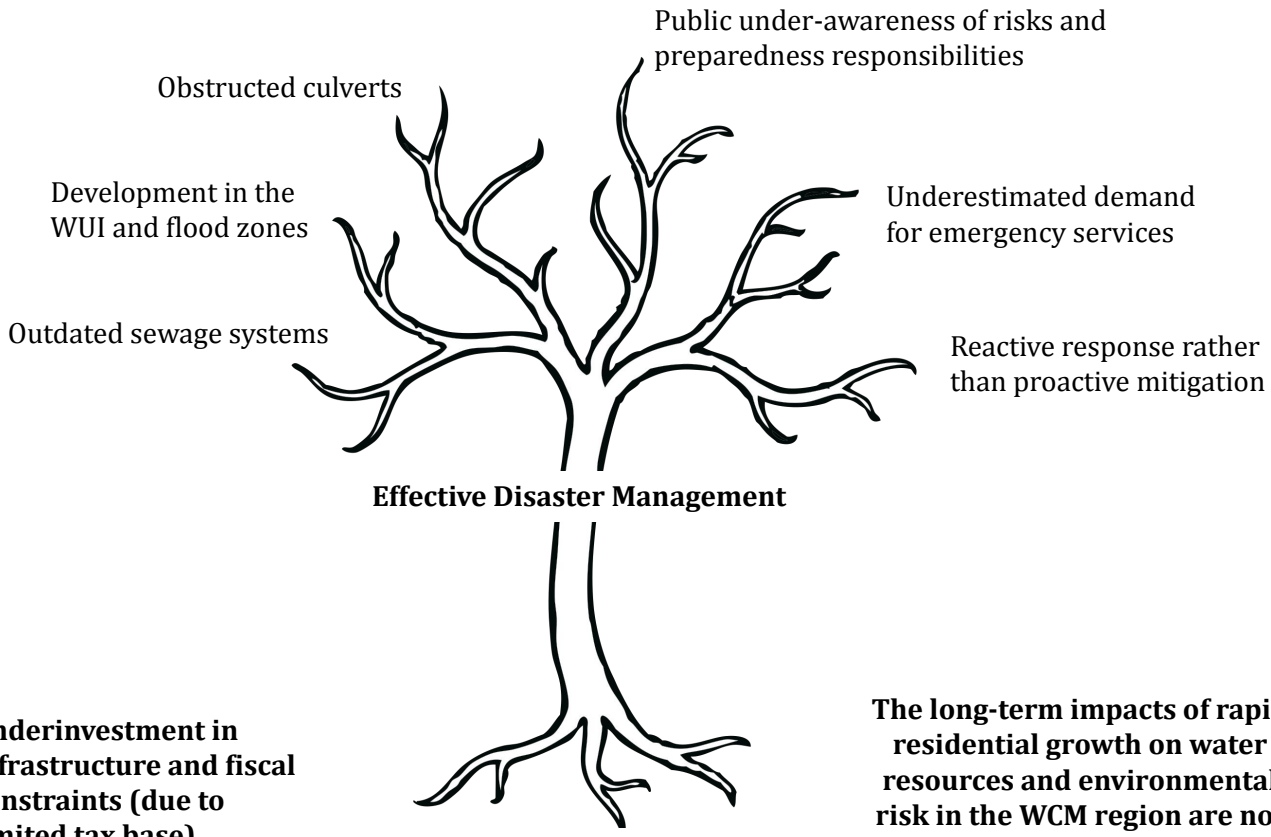
2. Where are the region's hazard vulnerabilities?

- **What's unclear:** In the region's existing All-Hazards Mitigation Plan, there are a variety of potential hazards outlined. However, there is no analysis of which places and which people are most vulnerable to these hazards.
- **Why it matters:** Vulnerable people and places can experience significantly greater impacts from disaster events. Understanding local vulnerabilities can help decision makers more effectively allocate resources to keep the community safe.
- **Next step:** In the next All-Hazards Mitigation Plan update, conduct a vulnerability assessment that identifies vulnerability across the region.

2. Is development in hazard zones a problem?

- **What's unclear:** There is widespread concern that new development projects are moving forward in known wildfire and flood hazard zones. However, the cities and county have regulations that restrict or require protections in specific hazards.
- **Why it matters:** In some cases, development projects can successfully skirt around or buy their way through hazard zone ordinances. If this is the case, these new developments may be putting future residents at risk.
- **Next step:** Conduct interviews with local planners, developers, and residents to better understand the approval process for new developments.

Challenge Tree (Effective Disaster Management)



Underinvestment in infrastructure and fiscal constraints (due to limited tax base)

The long-term impacts of rapid residential growth on water resources and environmental risk in the WCM region are not well understood

Loss of federal support

Challenges in Regional Collaboration and Communication

Striking the balance of serving the resident population and when we have second homeowners and visitors here (same with healthcare).

Rapid Population Growth Driven by Amenity Migration and Non-Labor Income

Limited federal funding for mitigation projects (e.g., BRIC program termination)