

## HIGHLIGHTS

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Rural income levels are below those in urban parts of the state, consistent with patterns across the United States. Though living costs tend to be lower in rural areas, the difference is probably not enough to offset the income gap. Several factors account for lower incomes in rural areas, including the mix of industries, wage rate levels and age of the population.

For all age, ethnic and racial groups, poverty rates are generally higher in rural Idaho for several reasons. Rural adults tend to have lower levels of formal education and participate in the labor force in lower numbers than their urban counterparts. In addition, jobs in rural areas tend to pay lower wages.

Idaho's rural transportation infrastructure is impacted by an evolving public policy that encourages deregulation and the shift of decision making from federal to state governments and from state to local governments. Affordable broadband Internet access is an important rural economic development issue, but there are fewer telecommunication options in most rural areas.

Housing affordability significantly affects both renters and owners in many rural communities, particularly those that are growing rapidly. In five rural counties (and four urban counties) at least 35 percent of all renters spent more than 30 percent of their income on rent payments and utilities. Another important rural housing issue is that a substantial proportion of units are occupied only on a part-time basis for recreational purposes. In five counties – all rural – at least one in four housing units are vacant part of the year.

Spectacular mountain ranges, large expanses of public land and great geographic diversity provide a wide variety of recreation opportunities in rural Idaho. In addition, our state's rich cultural heritage, celebrated by numerous local events in small communities, contributes greatly to the rural quality of life. These assets combined with low crime rates, shorter commute times and cleaner environment make rural Idaho the attractive destination it has become.