



2021-2025

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy



**Proudly Servicing South-central Idaho:
Blaine, Camas, Cassia, Gooding, Jerome, Lincoln,
Minidoka, and Twin Falls Counties**



*Above: Snow covered bridge in Blaine County by Adeanna Jenkins.
Front Cover: The Snake River Canyon by Jeff McCurdy.*

Region IV Development Association Board of Directors and CEDS Strategy Committee

RIVDA is governed by a 24-member Board of Directors. This Board is comprised of local elected officials and representatives from private industry, labor, agriculture, higher education, commerce, finance, minority businesses and community organizations.

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Idaho)

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(University of
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Roy Villasenor
(Community Council of
Idaho)

Workforce Development

Brent Tolman
(Outwest Policy Advisors)



Photo: Shoshone Falls in April 2022 by Brandy Lowe.

Executive Summary

Mission: To develop partnerships to promote economic opportunities by acting as a catalyst in providing resources that foster resilient communities across Southern Idaho.



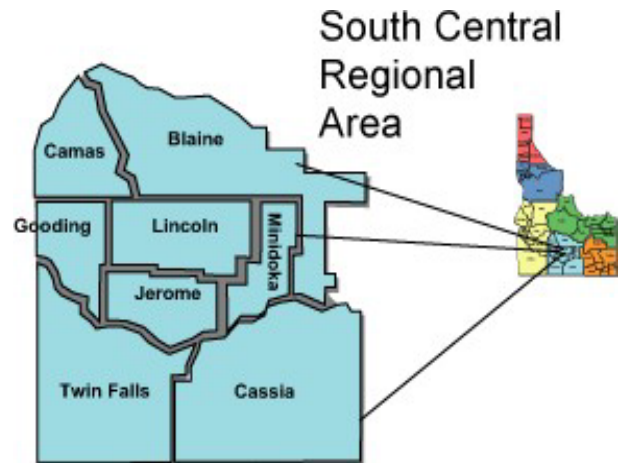
Jeffrey C. McCurdy, President

Region IV Development Association (RIVDA) was established in 1975 by a group of local elected officials seeking to develop professional capabilities to respond to the needs of the area's small towns. By banding together, they hoped to achieve what they could not do alone. Financial resources and time were donated to provide the seed money necessary to start a "Council of Governments" - seeking solutions to common problems and help with the ever-growing demands from the people in our communities.

As a member-driven, private, not-for-profit 501(c)3 organization, activities include:

- Community Development through project planning, grant application development, grant administration, National Environment Review analysis, strategic planning, comprehensive plan updates, and facilitation of regional and state collaboration.
- Small business financing, planning, counseling.

RIVDA serves as the US Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration's designated regional planning organization serving the eight counties of South-central Idaho – Blaine, Camas, Cassia, Gooding, Jerome, Lincoln, Minidoka, and Twin Falls.



A Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) is the result of a planning process that an Economic Development District (EDD) completes in order to focus the region's priorities with the intent to foster economic growth through job creation opportunities and public infrastructure improvements. With support from the U.S. Department of Commerce – Economic Development Administration the RIVDA CEDS analyzes the regional economy, highlights RIVDA's commitment to small business lending, identifies regional strengths and weaknesses, and establishes a regional action plan for economic prosperity.



American Flag suspended above the Snake River Canyon by Tedi Thompson.

Known as the Magic Valley, South-central Idaho lives up to its name. The region boasts breathtaking views, vast opportunities for outdoor recreation, and the prospect of a simpler life with the majority of communities being rural oases. The secret paradise that is South-central Idaho is no longer a secret. Between 2020 and 2021, every county in the region saw an increase in population. Growth in our rural communities has been both positive and negative. According to Axiom, from 2020 to 2022 Idaho was the fastest growing state (4.3%). Numerous South-central counties saw significant growth including Jerome (4.3%), Cassia (3.6%) Twin Falls (3.7%), Camas (6.5%), and Lincoln (3.9%). The importance of city, county, regional, and state-wide planning is more important now than it ever has been. Collaborative efforts to contend with the consequences of rapid population growth and to plan for the future will be necessary to maintain and improve the quality of life for the residents of South-central Idaho.

Diversification of industries, expansion of workforce development services, and investment in public infrastructure are key steps the community stakeholders will need to engage in over the next decade. This document highlights the regional assets and identifies areas of concern for future economic resiliency.

This 2023 CEDS update includes three main changes: 1) the summary background was refocused to more fully reflect the industry clusters contributing to the Southern Idaho economy; 2) the Action Plan, including goals and objectives were restructured to better align with other regional plans; and 3) Benchmarks were established in the Evaluation Framework for each priority strategy and initial data has been documented to facilitate future continuous improvement.

Below: Snake River Canyon seen from Jerome County by Lynn Rivers.



SUMMARY BACKGROUND

The economy of South-central Idaho is driven by agriculture. Once an unforgiven desert, the implementation of surface irrigation made farming a reality. Today, agriculture production and the associated food and beverage processing account for a significant portion of the State of Idaho's gross revenues in both sales and GDP. In 2020, 47% of the state agriculture sales were produced in South-central Idahoⁱ. The high density of agriculture production in the region has attracted numerous facets of the food processing industry cluster. In 2015, the U.S. Department of Commerce recognized South-central Idaho under the Manufacturing Communities Partnership program "as one of the most diverse food baskets in the nation."ⁱⁱ

Did you know?

In 2020, Idaho was third in the nation for milk production at more than 16 billion pounds and is home to nearly 500 family-owned farmsⁱⁱⁱ. As of January 2021, 73% of the state's milk cows were in southern Idaho.



The Magic Valley is home to the world's largest yogurt factory and several American-style cheese production facilities.

State and Regional Agriculture Stats

- The State of Idaho ranks first in the nation in the production of potatoes, barley, peppermint, and trout.
- Idaho produces 14 billion pounds of potatoes each year.
- Idaho is the second largest grower in the U.S. of sugar beets and hops.
- The region raises 49% of the State's cattle and calves, 19% of the beef cows, and 73% of dairy cows.
- Area ranchers account for 54% of the sheep and lambs in the State.
- Idaho produces 70% of U.S. domestic trout.
- The Magic Valley is home to 80 fish farms with 98% of the state's aquaculture production occurring in Twin Falls, Gooding, and Jerome counties^{iv}.

The regional economy revolves heavily around agriculture. Export of those agriculture goods and products is essential to regional and state economic sustainability. In October 2020, the Idaho State Department of Agriculture reported Idaho produces enough food product for every Idahoan to consume daily 189 slices of bread, 40 potatoes, 3 pounds of sugar, 2 pounds of cheese, 2 pounds of beef and one cup of beans. Paul, Idaho (in Minidoka County) is home to the largest sugarbeet factory in the U.S. The ag-friendly environment in Idaho has made the state attractive to non-traditional commodities as well. In 2023, Hagerman Canyon Farms became the largest melon grower in the Pacific Northwest. Development of sustainable manufacturing and production processes for global export is essential to ensure continued prosperity and growth of the region.

Industry Clusters

Food Processing

Southern Idaho boasts a significant food processing concentration at about 6.5 times greater than the nation. This concentration led the U.S. Department of Commerce under the Investing in Manufacturing Communities Partnership (IMCP) to designate South-central Idaho as an “All Things Food” Manufacturing Community in 2015. “A powerhouse of agricultural production and processing, the region is home to a diverse cluster of big name, globally recognized processors and home-grown food production facilities” (www.americanmcc.org). Included are household names like Chobani yogurt, Idahoan potatoes, and Clif Bar energy foods. Additionally, the region is home to premier brands such as Riverence Steelhead and Rainbow Trout and True West Beef.

Cheese and dairy products account for a large portion of the food processing cluster. The number and size of dairy operations in the eight-county area has led to the creation of a range of dairy-related expansions and business recruitments. Among these are Agropur, Chobani yogurt, Darigold milk, Idaho Milk Producers, Brewster Cheese, Gossner Foods, Glanbia Nutritionals, and High Desert Milk producing a range of Greek yogurt, butter, milk, as well as cheddar, Swiss and powdered cheese products.

The region is also host to manufacturers of products found in many American pantries including whey protein for smoothies and cheese powder for mac-n-cheese.

South-central Idaho also produces significant amounts of beef, pork, lamb, and poultry products. Falls Brand pork, True West Beef, Lava Lake Lamb, and Harmony Hens are just a few producers who contribute to the diverse array of products generated in the region.

The South-central Idaho location provides regional food processing companies with a competitive advantage for reaching many west coast markets in under twenty-four hours, making the most of the region’s cornucopia of raw materials and lower energy costs. An abundance of available land for food processing development allows for all aspects of the supply chain to be centrally located which promotes ongoing cluster collaboration. The region continues to welcome small start-up companies as well as major manufacturers from around the world.





Photo: A Glanbia Nutritionals milk truck fills up. Glanbia Nutritionals is the largest barrel cheese manufacturer in the world and one of the largest producers of whey-based ingredients. Four facilities in South-central Idaho process over 900 billion pounds of milk every year^v.

Supporting Clusters

The large concentration of dairy cows has also established supply chain opportunities. Standard Nutrition, PerforMix Nutrition Systems, and Standlee Hay produce grains, alfalfa crops, and animal feeds to support the dairy industry. WOW Logistics provides warehousing and transportation services for finished dairy products – including refrigeration space and dry milk/whey storage. Bayer Crop Science conducts agriculture research and development. The Magic Valley is also home to a mini cluster of chemical, plastic and packaging manufacturers, including injection mold, cardboard box, and Styrofoam manufacturers.

Construction

Construction contributes a sizable amount to the state GDP at \$80.9 billion in 2019. From February 2020 to February 2022, Idaho saw a 13.1% increase in construction employment, the largest in the nation^{vi}. Construction also is a large industry employer for South-central Idaho. Compared to nationwide employment distribution, construction is one of 6 occupational groups where employment is more highly concentrated. Construction accounts for nearly 6% of regional employment^{vii}. The impact the construction industry has on the regional economy places focus on the need for community land use planning.

Transportation

The ability to move perishable food products quickly and reliably is key. The 2023 Strategic Freight Plan by the Idaho Transportation Department (ITD) identified trucks as the predominate mode of transportation for freight. Ensuring sufficient and safe highway systems is critical. The Perrine Bridge in Twin Falls functions as a major throughfare with over 40,000 crossings per day, with 25% being commercial vehicles. Idaho Congressional Representative Mike Simpson identified this area as one of the state's worst choke points in May 2023. The high amount of traffic could be alleviated with an additional Snake River crossing. An ITD study found traffic could be reduced by 39% if a rim-to-rim bridge was constructed west of Twin Falls, connecting to Highway 93. In 2023, the estimated project cost was \$590 million.

Eastern Idaho Railroad operated by WATCO, the region's short-line railroad, provides logistics and freight services for the area's perishable food producers - with a state-of-the-art facility in Burley currently being developed. The new business park will have the ability to serve regional clients and attract additional supply chain partners to a 93-acre site in conjunction with the Mini-Cassia Commerce Authority. Airfreight service for overnight delivery is also available through several major carriers. Two commercial and twelve general aviation airports also service South-central Idaho: Friedman Memorial, Magic Valley Regional, Gooding Municipal, Burley Municipal, Buhl Municipal, Camas County Airport, Hazelton Municipal, Oakley Municipal, Jerome County, Pine Airport, Picabo Airport, Minidoka Airport, Carey Airport, and Magic Reservoir Airport. These airports provide vital services to South-central Idaho such as charter flights, emergency medical transport, easy access to Idaho's backcountry for recreation, agriculture support, and wildfire suppression.

Energy

Hydroelectric power is a factor in bringing electricity to the eight counties. Additionally, living above the hot spot that created Yellowstone National Park provides a ready source of geothermal resources for power generation and hot water for space heating. This regional asset contributes to Idaho's low utility rates. In 2019, Idaho had the third lowest electricity rates in the nation.

The diversification of Idaho's energy sources will ensure the continuation of these low rates. Idaho utilizes numerous forms of renewable energy to meet the growing demands of the state and nation. Idaho Power Company, with their traditional power-generation base of hydro and coal-fired plant, has expanded to also utilize wind power generators to meet their "green goals." In 2021, wind power accounted for 16% of the net electric grid in Idaho, generating 2,655,000 megawatt hours^{viii}. The Snake River Plain, which encompasses South-central Idaho, provides the State's most promising wind resources. As of May 2023, 15 wind turbine projects and 170 turbines are operational in South-central Idaho, with additional farms being discussed. The Lave Ridge Wind Project proposes constructing up to 400 turbines on mostly public land in Jerome, Lincoln, and Minidoka counties. The project has proved to be controversial and has received resistance from ranchers, historians, hunters, and politicians. Preserving existing agricultural production must be central to any mitigation plan as our region looks to harness cheap energy. Likewise, solar energy is being promoted with solar farms replacing underutilized grazing lands. Farms, small businesses, and residents now take advantage of the "sun" as a natural energy alternative. In Spring 2022, Idaho Power began construction of a 120-megawatt utility-scale solar facility. The project, known as Jackpot Solar, is the largest utility-scale solar project in Idaho and helps Idaho Power move towards its goal of being 100% clean by 2045^{ix}.

Efforts to utilize anaerobic digesters to convert methane rich gas from manure into natural gas is also underway in the region. In November 2021, Shell Oil Products US announced plans to construct a renewable natural gas production facility within an operating dairy in Wendell (below). Not only will this provide additional fuel sources by producing as much as 400,000 MMBtu per year, but the process can also help reduce carbon dioxide emissions between 50-100% compared to fossil fuels.

Photo Below: Construction of a digester at Bettencourt Dairy in Gooding County.



Photo courtesy of Shell USA, Inc.

Tourism



*Photo:
Soldier Mountain
Ski Resort in
Fairfield. Photo by
Chris McFarlane.*

The region features internationally recognized tourism and outdoor recreation destinations. The region is home to four commercial ski areas: Soldier Mountain, Pomerelle, Magic Mountain, and Sun Valley. Miles of backcountry skiing as well as Nordic trails are available in several parts of the area. Snowmobiling is also a significant local pastime with groomed trails and warming stations providing visitors with support for outdoor adventure.

The world-famous Sun Valley Resort in Blaine County brings countless tourists to the region. In an effort to diversify, the Sun Valley Resort has positioned themselves as a year-round destination. Mountain biking, camping, hiking, and other fair-weather activities are now drawing a significant number of visitors to help local businesses survive the end-of-ski-season slump. Other outdoor activities attract visitors from around the globe and contribute to the broadening of the economy.

The region also boasts numerous state parks and national monuments, including Thousand Springs State Park, Minidoka National Historic Site, Craters of Moon National Monument and Preserve, Lake Walcott State Park, and the Hagerman Fossil Beds National Monument. In April 2022, a \$2.3 million visitor center was opened in Hagerman with the goal of enhancing visitor experience with “new opportunities for historical interpretation, improved recreational access, and economic vitality for the Hagerman Valley.”^x

Tourism, including hotel and food sales, contributes \$159 million annually to the regional economy. In addition to outdoor activities, the region’s top attractions include historic places, agritourism, cultural activities and brewery tours.

Operation Facelift



As part of the Rural Economic Development Services (REDS) program, cities identified specific beautification projects where funding was not available. REDS staff then worked to secure funding from private and community partners. These projects not only help to improve the streetscape, but they are also a catalyst for community engagement.

Demographics

Socio-Economic Status

While regional unemployment is routinely below the state and national averages, the regional poverty rate is above the state and national averages with the median household income lagging. This underscores the concern of underemployment and the need for additional good paying, benefited positions within the region. Rapid population growth coupled with raising construction costs has caused a perfect storm in the Idaho housing market, particularly for affordable and workforce housing. Low inventory and vacancy rates have driven average home prices out of reach for the average worker. The Idaho Press reported on January 6, 2022, that since 2015, housing prices have increased by more than 150%. In comparison, worker income only grew between 25% and 32% for the same time period^{xi}. The need for broad community strategies to balance the economic pressures is of utmost importance.

Educational Attainment

The region continues to struggle with overall education attainment. At a regional level, 84.10% of those 25 and older have earned at least a high school diploma, compared to Idaho's 91.10%. The region also trails the state in attainment of a bachelor's or graduate degree. The region's heavy agricultural concentration initially drove the lower-skilled labor pool. Agriculture's continuing influence and the rise in value-added food processing jobs have enabled workers in the region to make a decent living without attaining a bachelor's degree. Today, local companies are desperately searching for skilled workers capable of tackling advanced food science and the technical demands of the computer-manufacturing environment.



Photo Above: Construction of a Broadband tower in Bliss courtesy of White Cloud Communications.

Photo Below: The Camas Prairie at sunset by Mary Thompson.



Regional Assets

Prime Geographic Location

Centrally located in the southern portion of the State of Idaho, the region is home to several conservation areas, nationally designated recreation areas, protected wildlife habitats, and historic communities. These resources contribute to the economic vitality and livability of the region. The region is composed of eight counties, thirty-four incorporated communities, and encompasses 11,502 square miles. Of the 7,364,864 acres, federal, state, or local units of government control approximately 63% and roughly 37% is privately held. The City of Twin Falls is the eighth largest Idaho city and the largest community in the Region with nearly 52,000 people according to U.S. Census Bureau 2020 DEC Redistricting Data. Twin Falls serves as the major retail, wholesale, medical and educational center for the Region. Boise, the State Capital, is located roughly 120 miles to the west along Interstate 84. Boise's estimated population exceeds 228,000 and is the State's largest community. The City of Pocatello lies roughly 120 miles to the east along Interstate 86 and is the sixth largest city in the State.

The Region is comprised a complex mixture of different land types. The mountainous area in the southeast portion of the region lies in the Basin and Range Geomorphic Province; the mountainous or hilly areas of the South-central and Southwestern portions are part of the Owyhee Uplands section of the Columbia Intermountain Province; the central part of the Region from east to west, lies in the Eastern Snake River Plain. The Snake River Plain borders the southern side of the basaltic Mount Bennett Hills with the fertile agricultural lands of the Camas Prairie on the southern side. The Camas Prairie Centennial Marsh Wildlife Management Area in Camas County provides more than 6,000 acres of aquatic and upland habitat for waterfowl breeding and nesting. Historically, the area was used by the Bannock, Shoshoni, and Northern Paiute tribes for camas root gathering and summer hunting. Further north lies the rugged Idaho Batholith mountains – the Soldiers, Pioneers, Boulders, and Sawtooth's. Elevations range from 2,000 feet where the Snake River exits Gooding County to 12,078 at Hyndman Peak east of Ketchum. With some areas referred to as high desert and others as forested mountain, the Region exhibits numerous soil types and natural vegetation varieties.

Due to these varied landforms, the overall regional climate is considered moderate. Although the area has four seasons, there exists a wide range of temperatures and conditions throughout the year. The higher mountain areas generally experience more snow and cold, while the Hagerman Valley, nestled in the Snake River canyon, is capable of raising fruit and melons. Avid golfers can play nearly year-round, while skiers can generally enjoy snowy conditions from November through April. Rangeland constitutes the major land use with over half (56.5%) of the Region designated as Range. Agricultural uses require approximately 1.7 million acres (23%) of the available land. Lava flows have caused the classification of slightly over 1 million acres in the Region as "barren". Development in Lincoln County is seriously affected by this problem as more than half of the County's available land area is designated as barren. Lava flows also presents land use challenges in Blaine, Jerome, and Minidoka Counties. Forestland covers six percent (6.01%) of the Region. Only one-half of one percent (0.5%) of the Region is classified as Water and four-tenths of one percent (0.4%) as Urban.

Multiple Opportunity Zones

Established by Congress in 2017, Opportunity Zones encourage long-term investments in low-income urban and rural communities. Private investment projects that place 90% or more of their funds into an Opportunity Zone can earn tax relief on the capital gains generated through those investments. The South-central region boasts five designated areas:

- Buhl City
- Gooding County
- Jerome City
- Rupert City
- Twin Falls City

Region IV Development provides support and resources for small business to take advantage of Opportunity Zone incentives. See Appendix 3 for city/county specific information.

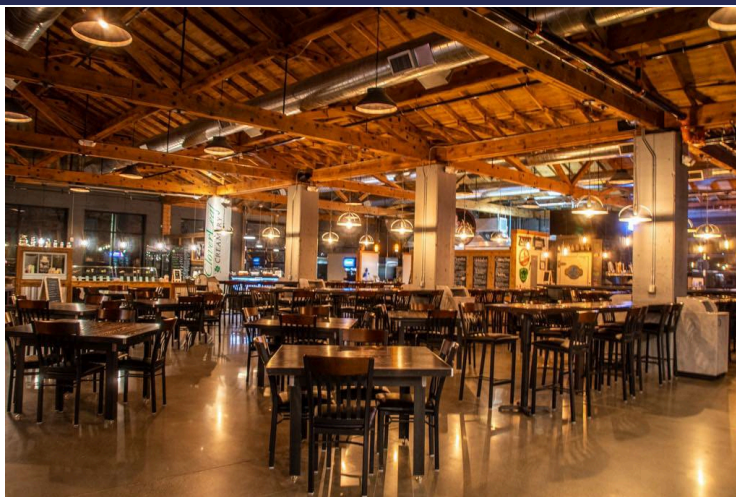


Photo Caption: 2nd South Market, Idaho's first food hall, utilized Opportunity Zone benefits to convert a 94-year-old manufacturing building in the heart of downtown Twin Falls to an entertainment destination. In December 2023, the business was recognized by U.S. Senator Jim Risch as a Local Gem as part of the "Support Local Gems All Season Long" initiative.

Outdoor Recreation Possibilities

Southern Idaho has a plethora of outdoor recreation opportunities including hiking, mountain biking, hunting, fishing, snowmobiling, skiing, ATV trail riding, and much more. The region also draws visitors from all around the world for uncommon attractions and amenities.

Sawtooth National Recreation Area

The Sawtooth National Recreation Area (SNRA) is primarily located in Blaine and Custer Counties. With spectacular scenic beauty and recreational opportunities, the SNRA offers year-round outdoor activities. Established in 1972, the SNRA covers roughly 758,000 acres. Within the recreational area 217,000 acres are designated as Wilderness. The SNRA boasts five mountain ranges, 1,142 lakes, 1,000 miles of streams, and 740 miles of maintained hiking trails, and 36 developed campgrounds.



Base Jumping

Another opportunity for the extreme sport enthusiast is the Perrine Bridge across the Snake River in Twin Falls. This is one of the few places in the U.S. where jumping off a bridge is not only permitted but embraced. When the weather is warm and the wind is right, BASE (Buildings, Antennae, Spans, Earth) jumpers come from around the globe to jump off the Perrine Bridge in Twin Falls. With the banks of the Snake River providing the landing spot over 486 feet below, the Perrine Bridge offers some of the most ideal and breathtaking jumping conditions.



Photo: A base jumper leaps from the Perrine Bridge 486 feet above the Snake River by Michele McFarlane.

Rock Climbing

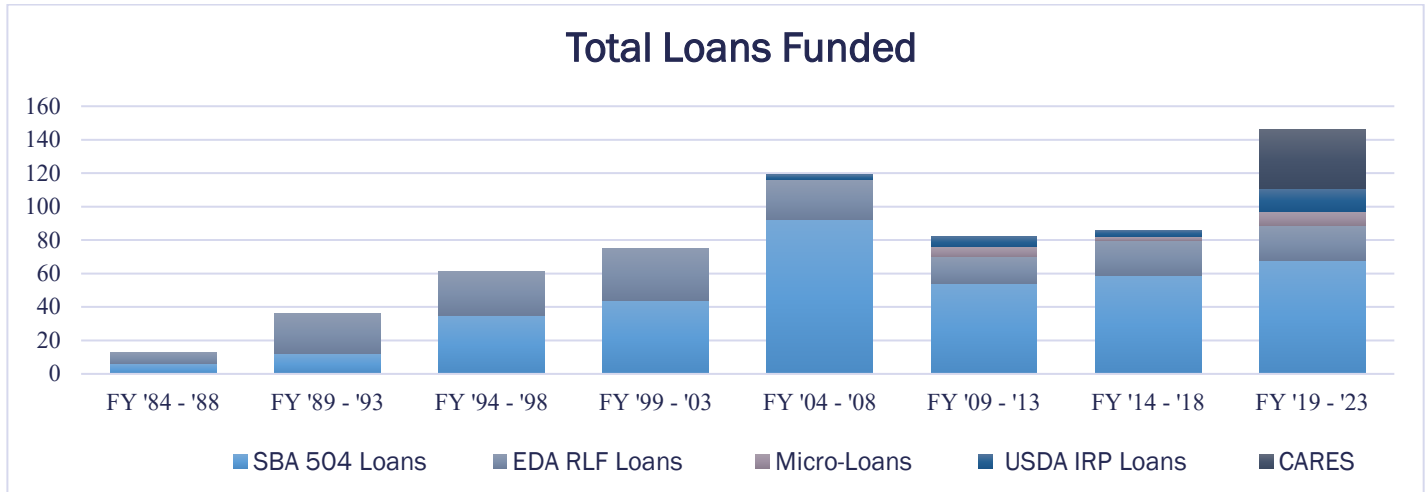
City of Rocks National Reserve and Castle Rocks State Park rivals Yosemite National Park as a western favorite for technical rock climbers and is widely considered one of the top rock-climbing destinations in the world. Designated as a National Reserve in 1988, this area holds a prominent place in the history of the Oregon and California trails. Wagon ruts and axle grease graffiti left by pioneers can be seen among the massive rock formations rising from the valley floor.

Boating

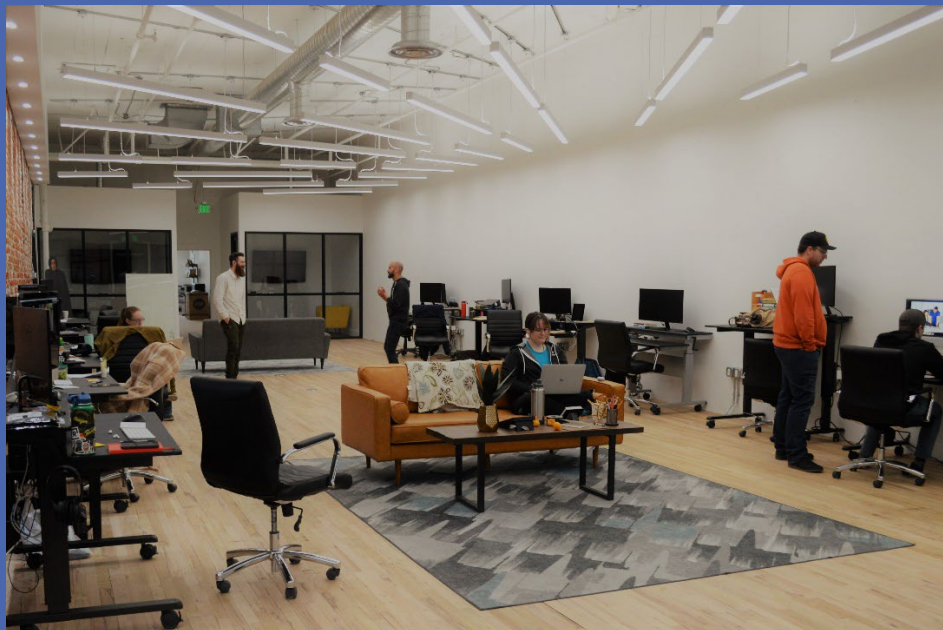
From raging whitewater rapids to calm flat-water, the region is blessed with an abundance of water opportunities on one of the premier rivers of the West - the Snake River. Centennial Park in Twin Falls provides river access for canoeing, kayaking, and paddle boarding. Further south in the Hagerman Valley, there is a whitewater stretch that is a favorite with paddlers of all abilities including Class II and Class III rapids. It combines big water with modest rapids in the warmest part of the state. More advanced whitewater enthusiasts can tackle big rapids on the "Murtaugh Stretch". This 14-mile section of the Snake River is renowned for its 16 class III, IV and V rapids. Other fishing and boating opportunities include Salmon Falls Creek Reservoir, Murtaugh Lake, Wilson Lake, Magic Reservoir, and countless other streams and water bodies.

Small Business Lending Capabilities

Region IV Development helps strengthen economic vitality of the region by assisting small businesses in obtaining commercial financing. The RIVDA Loan Program focuses solely on the progression of small businesses. Business owners are walked through step-by-step to find financing solutions that will meet their ever-changing needs. All types of for-profit businesses, from the entrepreneur looking to launch a new product to the seasoned business looking to expand their operations, are assisted through this program. Collaborating with banking partners, in addition to working with clients individually, allows RIVDA to provide financing for real estate, equipment, inventory, tenant improvements and working capital.



RINARD MEDIA



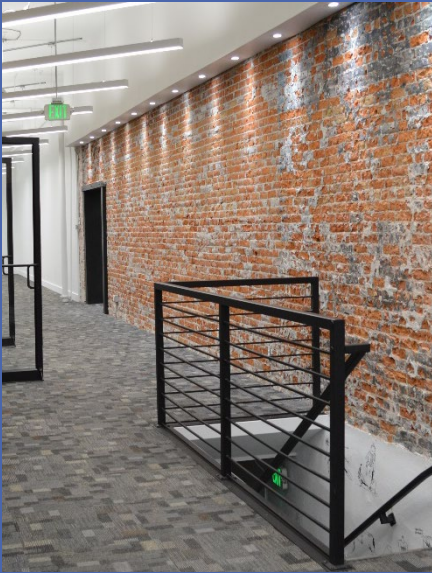
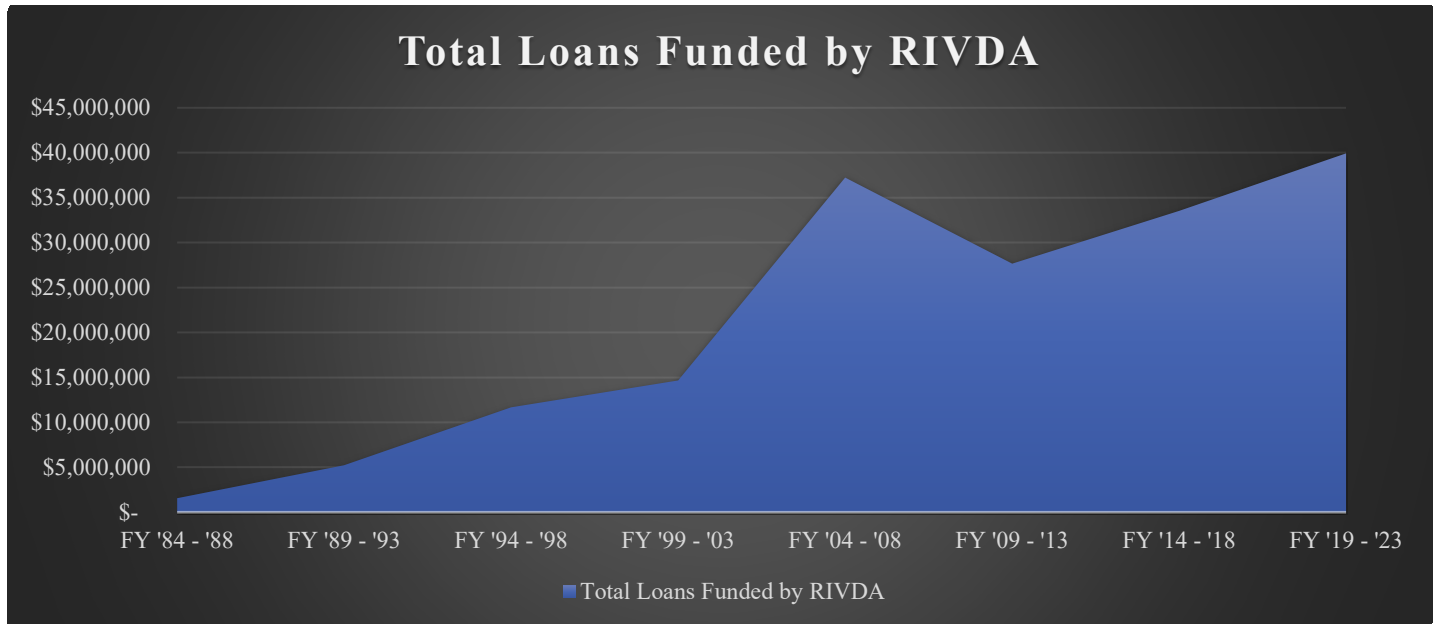


Photo Caption: Rinard Media utilized financing options through Region IV Development to revitalize a 100 year old building in downtown Twin Falls. Functionality was improved upon while preserving the historic features, allowing Rinard Media to grow as an organization.

Occasionally, there are some instances where lending institutions are unable to finance certain projects. In those instances, RIVDA administers an array of internal loan programs in which we can take on the financing of an entire project. Borrowers must have a marketable skill, service, or product available to the public. Applicants must demonstrate that the business has or will have adequate cash flow and profit to repay the loan. See Appendix 2 for more information on the individual loan programs administered by RIVDA.



From 1984 when RIVDA made its first loan through the end of the Fiscal Year 2023, the RIVDA Loan Division has funded 618 loans totaling \$171.5 million. This effort has positively supported the economic growth and businesses throughout the region and the entire State of Idaho. RIVDA will continue its efforts in administrating these loan programs to promote economic growth.

Broadband Access

The lack of adequate broadband in many areas of the South-central region was brought to light during the 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic as world-wide stay-at-home orders were issued. In response, RIVDA prepared eight successful applications that yielded \$7.2 million in Idaho Broadband Grant Awards to rural Idaho communities. While the majority of stay-at-home orders have been lifted globally, the pandemic continues to reshape how many choose to work. Nationally, those who can work from home are choosing to do so at a higher rate than prior to the health crisis. Additionally, the ability to work from home gives workers the option to live anywhere with consistent internet access, making leaving large urban areas a reality. The wide-open spaces of Idaho have proved to be an attractive option. In 2021, Idaho was the fastest growing state in the nation.

This shift in preference to work from home and to do so in rural Idaho can only be supported with ongoing improvements to broadband coverage and connectivity. High-speed internet access has shifted from a luxury to an infrastructure necessity in order for cities and counties to attract and retain individuals, businesses, and industry. Despite the efforts to improve broadband access Idaho is currently lagging behind the rest of the nation. Only 79.8% of Idaho residents have access to 100 Mbps broadband (46th in the nation) and only 68.4% have access to 1G broadband (32nd in the nation).

Closing the digital divide across South-central Idaho ensures regional access to education and healthcare while making our communities more attractive to industrial development and growth.

Idaho Internet Coverage & Availability in 2023

Idaho Internet Facts in 2023



Idaho's Internet Ranking

Idaho currently **ranks 40th** among states in BroadbandNow's annual rankings of internet coverage, speed and availability.



Access to Wired or Fixed Wireless Broadband: **88.3%**

This means that roughly one in ten Idaho residents are not able to purchase an internet plan of at least **25Mbps download** and **3Mbps upload**.



Access to Wired Low-Priced Broadband Plan**: **33.3%**

This means that nearly seven in ten residents are not able to purchase broadband at a price of **\$60/month or less** (excluding promotions and government programs).



Access to Fiber-Optic Service: **42.7%**

This means that six in ten residents are unable to purchase a fiber internet plan.



Number of Internet Providers in Idaho:

The U.S. has more than **2,940 internet service providers**, with most covering very small areas. It is worth searching by zip code to see who is available in your town.

<https://broadbandnow.com/Idaho>. Accessed October 18, 2023

Collaboration

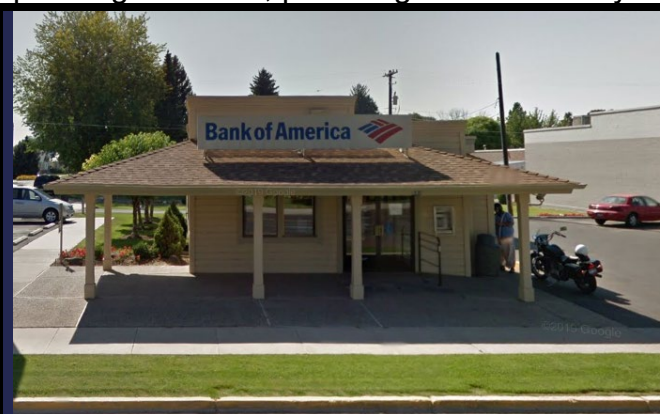
Collaboration among community and economic development professionals is a key factor in the region’s success. In 2023, Idaho was selected as one of six states to receive technical assistance from the Center for Regional Economic Competitiveness. Funded by EDA and NADO, the “Policy Academy” initiative was based on a need to better align planning efforts. Named 44Go! to represent the forty-four counties in the state, the initiative vision is to formalize and institutionalize collaborative regional and state planning processes to create an inclusive economic development community within the state. Significant time was spent building relationships among the academy participants and identifying the role each organization plays in economic development. Participants concluded culture change among the state’s economic development professionals, including long-term commitment to ongoing collaboration, transparency, and expanded communication efforts is the first step to align planning efforts and for state-wide economic prosperity.



Image: Sketchplanations

Brownfield Revitalization Program

Since 2021, Region IV Development collaborated with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to encourage the revitalization of potentially contaminated properties in South-central Idaho. Funding from EPA are used to complete Phase I and Phase II Environmental Assessments and Cleanup Planning on properties where historical use creates a probability of contamination, which discourages reuse. In addition to assessment funding, RIVDA received funding to establish a loan program for cleanup of contaminated properties. *Idaho Therapy in Motion* (below) in Gooding was able to utilize the assessment program to determine if hazardous materials were found at the property they were purchasing. The assessment gave owners providing the necessary information for the purchaser to feel confident in moving forward with the purchase, remodel, and eventual revitalization. A previously vacant building on Main Street is now an operating business, providing the community a needed service.



Before



After

REGIONAL STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES, THREATS (SWOT)

A SWOT Analysis is a strategic planning tool that allows organizations to collaboratively identify internal strengths and weaknesses as well as external opportunities and threats. The following regional assets and potential hurdles have been identified by community stakeholders as areas which contribute the potential of the region to prosper.

<p style="text-align: center;">Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Low Crime Rate ❖ Job Growth ❖ Scenic natural resources ❖ Quality educational opportunities ❖ Low Utility Rates ❖ Numerous Opportunity Zones ❖ Diversity of Agriculture Production ❖ Proximity to several major west coast markets ❖ “All Things Food” designation ❖ Collaborative attitude 	<p style="text-align: center;">Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ RIVDA is “Best Kept Secret” ❖ Aging city water/wastewater systems ❖ Limited rural healthcare access ❖ Lack of affordable housing ❖ Reliance on water reservoirs for agriculture production ❖ Lack of passenger rail access ❖ Underemployment of workforce ❖ Absence of job growth career ladders ❖ Limited air service connectivity ❖ Limited childcare facilities ❖ Milk processing capacity ❖ Lack of centralized business guidance for dairy innovation ❖ Limited public transportation in rural areas
<p style="text-align: center;">Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Attraction of new companies and industry sectors including secondary suppliers to primary industry cluster. ❖ Broadband connectivity has expanded ... (more attractive to businesses) ❖ Ample resources for renewable energy development ❖ Increased federal funding opportunities to promote sustainability and climate resiliency 	<p style="text-align: center;">Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Loss of small business ❖ Downtown deterioration ❖ Aging and absent infrastructure ❖ Supply chain disruption ❖ Rising cost of real estate ❖ Global Pandemic ❖ World Conflicts ❖ Natural Disaster (wildfire, drought)



Resilience for South-central Idaho

Prevent

The ability to avoid a shock

Withstand

The ability to survive a shock

Recover

The ability to bounce back quickly from a shock

While the area is a powerhouse in agricultural production and processing, the paramount concern is how to improve efficiencies to insulate the region from external forces and take the region to the next level of global competitiveness. How does the region make the best use of its assets long-term? What hurdles must be overcome to safeguard the region?

Economic Forces

Workforce Utilization

People remain the most important piece in the regional economic development puzzle. Maximizing local talent is critical to the continued success of the region. On the surface the labor market has positive indicators. The regional unemployment rate in recent years has tended to be lower than both the state and national rates. As well, the region's U-6 rate of 8.2%, which includes unemployed, involuntary part-time, marginally attached, and discouraged workers, is also below the state rate.

Nevertheless, there are several demographics within the labor force that are cause for concern. The largest segment of the region's workforce by age, is comprised of those over the age of 55. As this population retires and exits the workforce, the risk of labor shortages increases. Additionally, women account for less than half the region's labor force, despite total population being divided nearly 50/50. The labor force participation rate in the state has also not rebounded to pre-pandemic levels, indicating a shrinking pool of workers. The ability to retain standards in hiring will become increasingly difficult if the labor force continues to decline. Overcoming language barriers among workers is another key component to fully utilizing the regions labor force. Over the last twenty years, the CSI Refugee Center has assisted in relocating individuals from over 14 countries. Hispanics comprised 24% of the total regional population in 2019, almost double the statewide percentage and 6% higher than the nation. Often with limited English proficiency, these workers often take on low-paying, low-skilled jobs, resulting in underemployment for a significant segment of the workforce. Fully utilizing the entire regional population to develop a qualified labor force is needed to retain quality jobs within the region.

Dairy Capacity

Idaho has reached its limit regarding processing capacity of milk, preventing the ability of regional dairies to grow. The COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted this existing weakness in the dairy supply chain. Because milk processors serve specific markets and were unable to pivot when the market demand shifted due to school closures and community lockdowns, many producers were forced to dump milk. The need to grow and diversify the Idaho dairy market is a paramount concern. Regional stakeholders are striving to establish Southern Idaho as a leader in technological advancement and research for the food processing sector. This initiative and research will focus on improving processing efficiency, reduction of environmental impact, increased workforce safety, and the use of artificial intelligence in food processing

Innovation

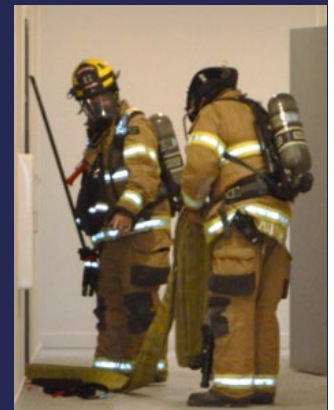
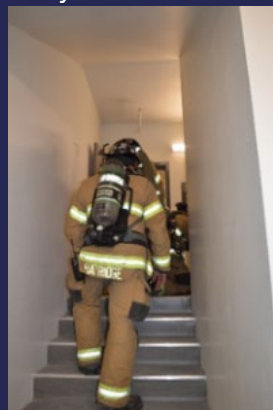
The region has never been short of resources; however, the region lacks centralized expertise for startups and small to mid-size food processors looking to expand or get a new product to the marketplace. The creation of a food innovation center and business incubator, with a niche in dairy, would create a unified foundation to provide opportunities for small businesses, entrepreneurs, existing processors, and local dairymen, farmers, and ranchers wanting to vertically integrate with value-added products.

Emergency Services

As the region grows and cities become more dense, emergency services face ongoing challenges to keep the communities safe. Updated equipment and expanded training is a priority for nearly every community in South-central Idaho. Adequate water supply for fire protection is also a concern. Many cities are still utilizing two- and four-inch pipe to deliver water, which does not deliver adequate volume for structure fires. Upgrading water lines, pumps, and storage tanks to keep residents safe is an enormous task due to the associated costs. Finding ways to complete these projects while keeping water rates low is a balancing act, especially for small rural cities.



Photos: Top - Twin Falls Fire Department's newest engine was put into service August 2022 and replaced a 30-year old engine. Below - A six story mixed-use building in downtown Twin Falls required additional fire training to ensure quick and efficient emergency responses. Photos by Michele McFarlane.

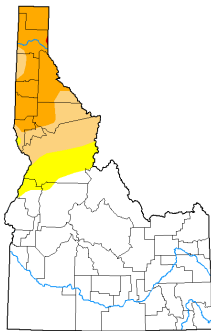


Climate Change and Natural Disasters

The Fifth National Climate Assessment identified extreme heat, flooding and wildfires as climate hazards that are threatening health and prosperity in the Northwest, including Idaho. Climate change, which has led to consistently warmer temperatures across the region, has led to declines in mountain snowpack which impacts both regional recreation industries and water systems. Snow-based recreational industries are harmed by shorter seasons while warm-weather activities must address operational and maintenance challenges related to flooding, erosion, and poor air quality. Additionally, agriculturally related industries are vulnerable as climate change impacts the quality and quantity of crop production, increased probability of pests, and worker exposure to extreme heat and wildfire smoke. To combat these concerns the region must begin mitigation efforts while recognizing the importance of climate justice when creating initiatives.

Drought

Year-to-Year Drought Conditions October 2023



Intensity:

- None
- D0 Abnormally Dry
- D1 Moderate Drought
- D2 Severe Drought
- D3 Extreme Drought
- D4 Exceptional Drought

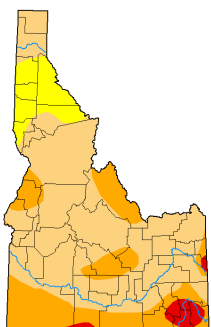
The Drought Monitor focuses on broad-scale conditions. Local conditions may vary. For more information on the Drought Monitor, go to <https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/About.aspx>

Author:
Rocky Billotta
NCEI/NOAA



droughtmonitor.unl.edu

October 2022



In South-central Idaho, water is the lifeblood of practically every aspect of the regional economy. The region was nicknamed "Magic Valley" because of the blooming of the desert triggered by irrigation. The harnessing of the Snake River, Wood River and Snake River Plain Aquifer has created an agricultural oasis supporting many diverse crops. However, during times of drought, this oasis can turn on itself, crippling the regional economy. For example, known for its potato production, Idaho also leads the nation in potato seed production. This commodity can be severely impacted by hot, dry drought conditions, leading to reduced yields. Totally dependent on snowfall in the upper basins of Grand Teton and Yellowstone National Parks, the fortunes of thousands rely on the sometimes stingy and capricious gifts from Mother Nature. In July 2021, all of Idaho was considered abnormally dry according to the National Integrated Drought Information System. South-central Idaho was categorized as in extreme drought with portions of Region IV counties categorized as exception drought. Snowpack for 2022 proved to be disappointing as snow was already melting April 1, the benchmark for peak snowpack. On April 29, 2022, Governor Little approved an Idaho Department of Water Resources emergency drought declaration for all 34 counties in Southern Idaho, with reservoirs between 20-65% of capacity^{xii}. A year later, the region was blessed with above normal snowpack and a cool spring, which eased drought conditions and allowed for some aquifer recharge. While the region is currently in a good water position, that could rapidly change year-to-year. Being prepared for future drought conditions is essential to maintaining regional prosperity.

Although water is primarily used for agriculture, it is also necessary for industrial and domestic use. During 2022, water curtailments on the city and county levels became common with deepening concerns of the potential for municipal wells to go dry. Tourism impacts on the economy are also tied to the availability of water for fishing, boating, swimming, and skiing. Exploration and promotion of techniques to reduce water consumption and increase efficiency, such as converting irrigation canals to closed pipelines and implementation of soil moisture monitors is needed to ensure the region's continued ability to produce agriculture products. As a result of this overwhelming connection between water and the economy, the region's leaders must pay special attention to water quality and quantity issues.

Wildfire

Elevated fire danger is an unwelcome companion to the persistent drought and high temperatures experienced in the regional summer months. Each year, wildfires from within the region and beyond destroy private property, diminish air quality, and ravage public lands key for outdoor recreation, rangeland grazing, and wildlife habitat. Additionally, the smoke from wildfires leads to ozone pollution, which is harmful to crop production, particularly potatoes. The main methods used by city, county, and states to prevent human-caused wildfires are through education, burn permits, and fire restrictions. Active forest management is also used to prevent natural fires from becoming large-scale events. Finally, the Idaho Department of Lands Fire Management (IDL Fire) collaborates with rural fire departments to suppress and prevent fires on more than 6 million acres of forests and rangeland, with a goal to limit destruction to less than 10 acres.

Residential property insurance is becoming increasingly difficult for Blaine County residents to secure due to fire concerns. Ten of thirteen major carriers are no longer writing policies for new homeowners and existing clients are being dropped due to the level of risk. Those carriers who are still issuing policies are implementing significant restrictions as a condition of the policy and have radically increased premiums.

Earthquake

Numerous active faults in South-central Idaho puts Idaho at risk for both large-scale, infrequent earthquakes and small, frequent swarms of quakes. The most recent large-scale quake occurred in March 2020 and measured a magnitude of 6.5, the second largest in state history. The quake caused the Stanley Lake delta to liquify and collapse.

In the year following the Stanley Earthquake more than 3,200 aftershocks were recorded. The most recent aftershock on May 10, 2022, was detected at Triumph Mine, an abandoned lead, zinc, and silver mine which has been designated as a Brownfield site due to the presence of contaminated tailings and water discharge. The earthquake was detected on the lower tailings pile. While cleanup and mitigation of the site have lowered air and water contamination to below federal standards, damage to the discharge system piping due to an earthquake could cause the release of heavy metal contamination into nearby river systems. These seismic events serve as reminders of the active nature of Idaho's faults and the need for planning and emergency preparedness.

Invasive Species and Infestations

The agriculture and tourism sectors are particularly susceptible to damage due to insect infestations and non-native invasive species. In 2023 grasshopper and Mormon cricket outbreaks were detected in three Idaho counties, including Cassia County. These insects can damage plant growth and seed production. Quagga mussels were also detected in the Mid-Snake River, which required implementation of a rapid response plan by the Idaho Department of Ag. This response plan included closing the affected area to watercraft and curtailed late summer tourism activities. Left unchecked, the mussels have the potential to cause hundreds of millions of dollars in damage by clogging water pipes and damaging wildlife habitat. The mussels also led Gooding County to declare a local disaster emergency.

Tornado

While uncommon, tornadoes do touch down in Idaho, causing property damage and potential injury to human life. Remaining prepared for potential weather-related disasters is a necessary aspect of emergency preparedness for the communities of South-central Idaho.

Flooding

In concert with climate change, Idaho's risk for flooding is increasing. Large segments of the region are currently unmapped by FEMA or have outdated maps. The lack of timely, relevant information concerning flood prone properties increases the difficulty in preparing mitigation plans. Collaboration among local governments to plan for worse-case scenarios in relation to flooding will maximize response efforts when a disaster does occur.

Health Care

Between 2018 and 2020 “Idaho lost 26% of its rural nursing workforce.”^{xiii} Workforce shortages decrease access to healthcare and contribute to overall higher medical costs. Multiple times in 2021 and 2022 “crisis standards of care” protocols, including rationing of care, were activated in numerous Idaho hospitals. The COVID-19 virus and subsequent variants taxed the healthcare system to its brink, highlighting the State’s inadequacies. Numerous healthcare providers such as Family Health Services, North Canyon Medical Center, and St. Luke’s Medical are working to expand access through establishment of rural community clinics, implementation of tele-pharmacy services, and construction of affordable housing dedicated to hospital staff.

Deficiencies in Supporting-Clusters

Veterinary Shortage: The dominance of agriculture, particularly livestock, on the regional economy highlights the need for ample supply of related supporting industry clusters, including large-animal veterinary services. U.S. Senator Mike Crapo contended “Qualified veterinarians in agricultural communities across Idaho and the Nation are a key part of maintaining animal health and welfare, and ensuring ranchers and farmers have access to care for their livestock.”^{xiv} Nationally, veterinarians are in short supply with rural areas seeing the largest deficiencies. Six regional areas in Idaho were designated by the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture as shortage areas in rural private practice for 2022. Additionally, the State of Idaho was designated as a shortage area for public practice. Both Cassia County and Twin Falls County were identified as having a shortage in private practice for rural area food animal medicine. Efforts to expand Veterinary Medicine educational opportunities and attract practicing veterinarians is ongoing with local, state, and national leadership engaged.

Commercial Truck Driving: Seasonal agricultural commodities and value-added products produced in South-central Idaho rely primarily on the trucking industry to get products to market. High retirement rates among the existing workforce and increased demand due to increases in online shopping during the COVID-19 pandemic led to “almost 9,500 unique job posting throughout Idaho in 2021 for heavy and tractor-trailer truck drivers”.^{xvi} Intentional recruitment efforts, including a new registered apprenticeship program are steps in the right direction. Collaborations among Mountain West leadership to negotiate current age restrictions on interstate travel would also lessen the strain of too few drivers.

Succession Planning: An often-overlooked aspect of owning an agricultural business is succession planning. “The average age of agriculture producers is relatively high compared with other industry sectors. In Idaho, the average age is 56.4 and varies among the mid-50s across all eight counties in south central Idaho.”^{xv} As the number of baby boomers retiring increases, the consequences of not having viable succession plans is reflected in the diminishing number of farms due to consolidation of operations. The regions reliance on agriculture and food manufacturing demands initiatives be taken to preserve prime farmland from being developed for non-production uses.

Cybersecurity: Despite efforts to secure Idaho’s digital infrastructure, including the 2015 creation of a statewide cybersecurity task force, the state has continued to be bombarded with cyberattacks, including malware crippling Twin Falls County operations and county court proceedings in 2021. Regional leadership must prioritize adoption of the cybersecurity task force’s 18 recommendations, including public awareness and education to ensure our digital infrastructure remains safe and reliable.

Political Unrest

Many aspects of the region's economy have been disturbed by the political unrest saturating our everyday lives. A collective, regional response to combat these issues will be necessary to prevent future impact.

Inflation

While inflation has plagued every region of the U.S. over the last 18 months, the Mountain West, composed of Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Utah, Nevada, Colorado, New Mexico, and Arizona, has experienced the highest rate. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the 12-month percentage change of the Consumer Price Index in December 2020 was 1.0%, the fourth lowest in the country. By March 2022, the percent change was 10.4%, the highest regional increase. The rising cost of housing, utilities, food, and gasoline as well as staffing shortages and minimal unemployment are all contributing factors to the surging inflation. Finding ways to ensure household income keeps up with the inflation rate will be necessary for the South-central Idaho region to continue to prosper.

Political Relationships

As the 2022 Primary Election dominated national news, Idaho appeared as one of the most contentious political environments in the country with political parties becoming fractured and unstable. Cooperation among elected officials and community leaders will be necessary to move the state and region through the negative discourse to a collegial atmosphere where differing ideas can be debated for the betterment of the Idaho people.

International Unrest

The February 2022 Russian Invasion of Ukraine caused significant impact to the global economy. International sanctions against Russia and disruptions to Ukrainian exports, particularly in crude oil, natural gas, and fertilizer has led to volatility in the Idaho Agriculture sector which producers will need to overcome. Additionally, corporate decisions to forgo trading relationships with Russia influence the balance of supply and demand. For example, following the invasion of Ukraine, potato processing giant McCain Foods discontinued construction of a Russian processing facility and halted shipment of finished products. While based in Canada, McCain Foods is a significant presence in the food processing industry in South-central Idaho. Fewer consumers of Idaho grown potatoes, means a potential for supply to exceed demand.

The October 2023 conflict between Hamas and Israel has the potential of igniting a broader war in the Middle East and plunging the world economy into a recession. War in the energy-producing region would lead to more expensive oil which in turn would cause even greater inflation and a slow-down in growth. Events like this remind us how interconnected we are to events happening around the world.

Supply Chain

The perishable food products South-central Idaho produces relies on a dependable, efficient transportation system to move products from the farm to the producer and into the hands of the consumer. The national lack of interstate commercial truck drivers and backlogs at the nation's ports disproportionately affects agriculture. Solving this issue will require collaboration among regional stakeholders and Congressional representatives to find solutions to these bottlenecks and the unintended consequences to changes in transportation regulations over the last few years.



Photo Below— Midway Street Park in Filer by Brenda Hastreiter.

Housing



Photo Caption: The Quigley Farm development currently under construction in Hailey, Idaho blends for-profit and nonprofit models in an effort to provide both purchase and rental affordable housing options.

As one of the fastest growing states in the country, Idaho is experiencing a housing conundrum. Housing inventory has been unable to keep pace with demand, which has driven home prices out of reach of many locals who are now competing with out-of-town buyers who have larger budgets due to the elevated real estate markets they are escaping from. Zillow found Idaho home prices rose 20% in 2020.^{xvii} Rental properties are also seeing extreme influxes making finding affordable housing increasingly difficult for “young, single, and lower income persons”.^{xviii}

The housing crisis is not unique to Idaho metropolitan areas or resort towns. The same concerns are being echoed across the state as more and more residents struggle to find suitable housing. 18% of Idaho middle income households are considered cost burdened, where they are spending more than 30% for housing and utilities. Because these households have an income above the county Annual Median Income (AMI), support is rarely available. Collaboration among city/county leadership and community stakeholders to identify realistic solutions will be necessary to combat this increasingly urgent crisis.

Actions to be considered include:

- Updating city/county zoning ordinances to make construction faster and less expensive.
- Promoting Brownfield assessment and cleanup to revitalize blighted properties. This has the added benefit of protecting public health from contamination, taking pressure off greenspace, and curbing urban sprawl.

In May 2022, the City of Ketchum proposed to voters a local option tax which would have provided a revenue stream to implement a Housing Action Plan focused on providing workforce housing. Failure of the proposed tax has sent city leadership back to the drawing board to identify ways to finance implementation of the housing plan. Private efforts, such as the Quigley Farm development, are working to address the housing shortage, but a broad, long-term plan is needed to combat the growing crisis.

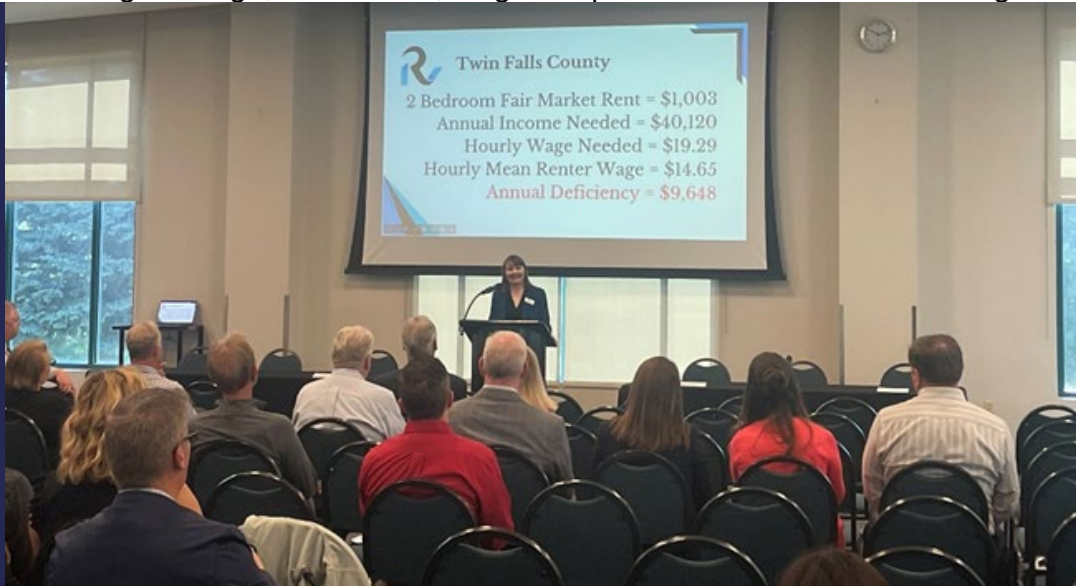


Photo: in June 2023 RIVDA hosted a Workforce Housing Symposium to bring together community members, business leaders, and experts in housing to discuss solutions.

Childcare

In February 2021 the Idaho Association for the Education of Young Children and the University of Idaho's McClure Center for Public Policy Research released a needs assessment of Idaho's childcare system. The report identified that 50% of Idahoans live in a childcare desert where licensed childcare services either do not exist or there are more than 3 children for every spot at a facility. The study also found 81% of providers only operate Monday – Friday, making services unavailable to employees working weekends or 12-hour shifts. The high cost of childcare is also a stumbling block. Over the last two decades the cost of childcare has more than doubled, but wages have not kept pace. Individuals are being forced to decide between giving up their career or deter starting a family. Expanded services for both infant care and early childhood education are necessary to ensure our labor force is reliable. The Bipartisan Policy Center's Childcare Gaps Assessment from 2019 found Twin Falls County had a gap of 32.6% causing an economic impact of more than \$38 Million, including household income losses, business productivity losses, and tax revenue losses.



Photo Above Lincoln County Youth Center by Adeanna Jenkins.

Transportation

Transportation and transportation related issues are always at the forefront of economic development considerations. The region has been able to attract several manufacturing, processing, and distributing firms by capitalizing on our central location for the Pacific Northwest and Pacific Rim markets. Maintaining transportation infrastructure is a critical part of our overall economic development strategy.



Photo caption: Magic Valley Regional Airport at sunrise by Tedi Thompson.

Highway

Despite consistent efforts to improve mobility within the region, communities continue to face the ongoing issues of increasing traffic congestion, deteriorating roadways, limited alternatives to automobile travel, and archaic funding mechanisms that do not keep pace with the needs of the system. Notwithstanding efforts at the State level to add new revenue to address immediate highway improvement issues, funding for the roadway network has not kept pace with either maintenance needs or the need to increase capacity where traffic volume has grown most significantly. Several major capacity constraints exist throughout the region:

- Along the U.S. Highway 93/Idaho 75 corridor from Twin Falls through Ketchum
- Overland Avenue in Burley
- The Perrine and Hansen Bridges over the Snake River linking the City of Twin Falls with U.S. Interstate 84

There is support for construction of an additional bridge by both the Jerome and Twin Falls County Commissioners, which could elevate traffic concerns entering and exiting the City of Twin Falls. An additional bridge would also simplify shipping routes for interstate trucking. I-84 provides the major east/west transportation route through the Region. Just east of Burley, Interstate 86 branches off from I-84 toward eastern Idaho (Pocatello) where it links up with Interstate 15 towards Idaho Falls (north) and Salt Lake City, Utah (south). Another major north/south route is US-93, which provides truckers a more direct access from Canada to California.

Commercial Air Service

Friedman Memorial Airport (SUN) in Blaine County is Idaho's second busiest airport. It serves the communities of Blaine County, including Ketchum, Sun Valley and Hailey and the world-famous Sun Valley Resort. SUN offers non-stop commercial air service to Salt Lake City, Seattle, and Los Angeles. Due to site limitations, which cause winter weather-related diversions, an effort has been under way for some years to relocate SUN out of the relatively narrow mountain valley to flatter terrain to the south.

Regularly scheduled commercial air service is also available at the Magic Valley Regional Airport located roughly 10 miles south of Twin Falls. The airfield is capable of handling single engine aircraft, small private jets, and the occasional 727. Decreased travel demand, due in part to COVID-19, resulted in a reduction of flight offerings. The minimal service has created economic hardships for area business and tourism travelers. To ensure continued service to Salt Lake City, the City of Twin Falls and Twin Falls County approved a minimum revenue agreement with SkyWest in Spring 2022.

Transit

In July 2023 the City of Twin Falls launched a micro-transit system to provide on-demand service within the Twin Falls city boundary and to the Magic Valley Regional Airport. The system provides a valuable service to the community and highlights the need for expanded public transportation within the region. Multi-jurisdictional service would further accommodate residents, given the rural nature of the region.

Rail Service

While main and short-line rail services are available through Union Pacific Railroad and Eastern Idaho Railroad/WATCO, limited rail lines and the complexity of accessing rail cars increases both the cost and time to get products to market, which in turn increases the risk of spoilage of perishable agricultural products.

The region also suffers a complete absence of passenger rail service. Amtrak discontinued the Pioneer Route, which ran between Seattle and Chicago, in 1997. The route had four stops in southern Idaho, including Shoshone. In 2023 the City of Boise and other stakeholders began an initiative to bring passenger rail back to the area. To move the project forward funding is needed to complete feasibility studies, engineering, environmental reviews, and construction.

Tourism

The Pandemic decimated tourism throughout Idaho and the Region. COVID-19 led to a 29% decrease in overall spending during 2020, compared to 2019 (US Travel Association). Tourism related employment, which is 5.1% of Idaho's total private industry employment, has been threatened by this decrease in spending and tax receipts. Expansion and diversification of tourism offerings will be necessary to prevent future losses. While spending decreased, the number of individuals accessing outdoor attractions such as the City of Rocks, dramatically increased during 2020 and 2021. Outdoor recreation became a paramount avenue for individuals during the pandemic who were seeking an escape from quarantine. In 2020, Idaho saw 7.7 million state park visitors, a 1.2 million increase from 2019. This increase put additional strain on Idaho parks and recreation facilities and park staff as they worked to combat increases in garbage, sanitation issues, and public negligence. Additionally, the regions reliance on outdoor recreation opportunities creates a roller-coaster of demand with significant downturn during off-seasons. Expansion of indoor opportunities would assist in stabilizing the industry throughout the year. Initiatives for the development of a convention center in the Magic Valley are being considered.



Photo: One of the few year-round outdoor ice rinks in the country, the Sun Valley Ice Rink hosts Olympic and world-class skaters in its celebrated ice shows throughout the summer.

Conclusions

Identification of regional vulnerabilities allows RIVDA and its stakeholders to develop an action plan to ensure disaster recovery and economic resiliency. Among the initiatives to bolster the economy from potential disruptions includes workforce training, transportation/logistics infrastructure improvements, and supply chain development. The large concentration of food production and processing makes the region vulnerable to disruptions within the logistics systems which gets products to market. Fuel prices, driver shortages, skilled workforce deficiencies, and road/weather conditions contribute to price increases and delays. Current South-central Idaho food processors routinely voice frustration and concern over the lack of adequate labor force for good jobs. Commitments from companies hoping to build new and expanded processing facilities in the region have been delayed due to concerns surrounding the availability of a qualified workforce and water/wastewater infrastructure. Given global population increases are projected to require a 70% increase in food production by 2050, the ability to attract and retain a qualified labor force is a predominate issue for South-central Idaho.

Action Plan

Region IV Development Association's CEDS for South-central Idaho identifies and seeks to implement specific actions that build a suitable economic ecosystem for community development – by recognizing the interconnectedness of place, infrastructure capacities, access to resources, and long-term sustainability; all while staying true to our regional identity.

Vision: Support South-central Idaho in becoming a more thriving, vibrant community by:

- Creating the environment for thriving industries that are diverse, sustainable, geographically dispersed, and globally competitive.
- Fostering a culture that enables people to lead productive, prosperous, and meaningful lives.
- Enhancing our communities' unique characteristics, strengths, and assets to improve economic competitiveness.

Three goals were identified to achieve the regional vision. Objectives within each goal were formulated to guide the strategies and actions RIVDA will pursue.

Goal 1:

Promote regional economic empowerment (EE)

Objective EE1: Promote Idaho as a hub for commerce through enhanced manufacturing capabilities and transportation options.

Objective EE2: Promote the nurturing of existing industries and assets to strengthen regional uniqueness.

Objective EE3: Create a more cohesive approach to small business support and entrepreneurial growth.

Goal 2:

Stimulate Regional Community Prosperity (RCP)

Objective RCP1: Expand and improve community infrastructure.

Objective RCP2: Provide resources for community members to lead productive, prosperous, and meaningful lives.

Objective RCP3: Facilitate community planning efforts in land use.

Goal 3:

Develop systems and networks to support workforce attraction, development, and retention (WADR)

Objective WADR1: Ensure a skilled workforce ample to fulfill current and future labor demands.

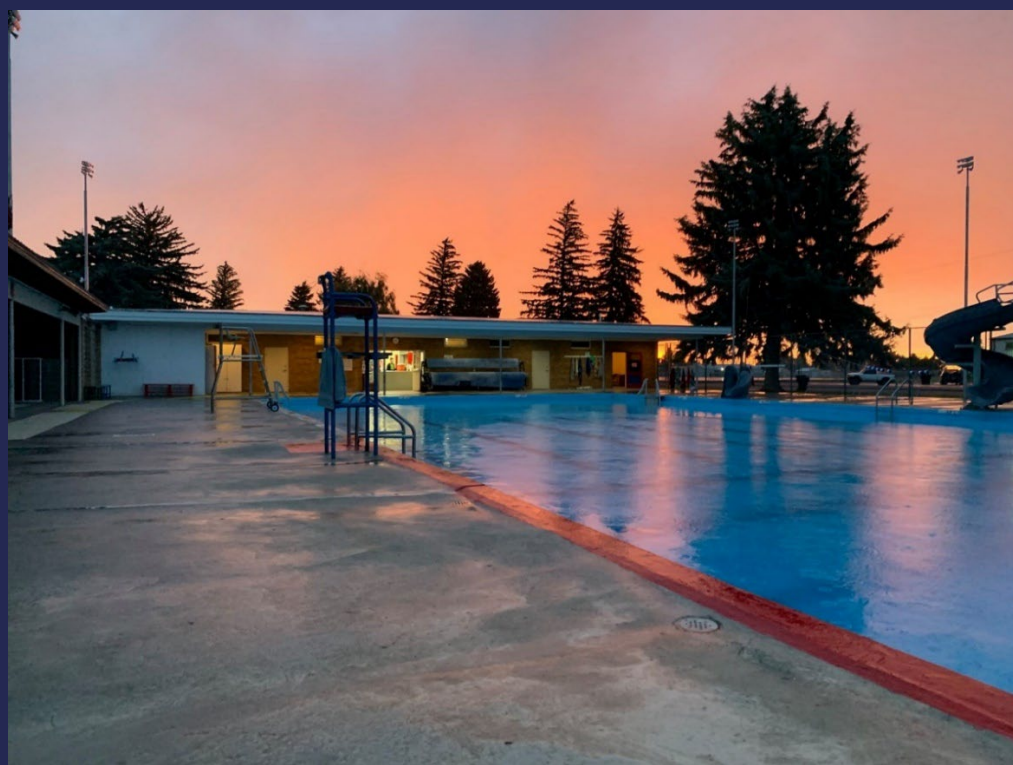
Goal 1: Promote Economic Empowerment (EE)

RIVDA's Role: As the designated Economic Development District for the region, RIVDA will utilize existing relationships, formulate new connections, and leverage assets to promote collaboration throughout the region in order to support economic growth.

Objective EE1: Promote Idaho as a hub for commerce through enhanced manufacturing capabilities and transportation options.

Actions/Strategies

1. Identify future transportation routes and search for financial resources to develop these routes.
 - a. Promote the need for an additional crossing of the Snake River Canyon in the Magic Valley.
2. RIVDA staff serve as a regional representative on ITD's Public Transportation Advisory Council.
3. RIVDA staff and other stakeholders participate in the Mini-Cassia Manufactures Alliance to collaborate with regional businesses on training and infrastructure needs.
4. Regional stakeholders participate to form a Dairy Processing Consortium to direct research and workforce development initiatives.
5. Economic Development organizations and transportation providers meet regularly to learn of their needs and connect them with resources to enhance their services.
6. Regional collaboration with Idaho Transportation Department on policy improvement proposals.



RIVDA specializes in Idaho Community Development Block Grant (ICDBG) project planning and administration, which provides funding for public facilities, infrastructure improvements, downtown revitalization, community & senior centers, disaster recovery, and public park improvements such as community pool facilities.

Photo: Burley Swimming Pool at dusk courtesy of City of Burley.

Objective EE2: Promote the nurturing of existing industries and assets to strengthen regional uniqueness.

Actions/Strategies

1. Support the tourism industry cluster in preserving regional assets through the securing of funding for the revitalization and expansion of outdoor trails.
2. Assist in exploring available funding for the construction of a convention center.
3. Facilitate downtown revitalization in rural communities through REDS Operation Facelift.
4. Support Main Street programs in local communities to support business growth and marketplace.
5. Promote the expansion and modernization of critical infrastructure throughout the region, including water, wastewater, broadband internet, green energy, electrical, and stormwater drainage systems.

Objective EE3: Create a more cohesive approach to small business support and entrepreneurial growth.

Actions/Strategies

1. Collaboration among federal, state, and local resource providers, educators, and banking institutions to present workshops and promote existing mentoring programs.
2. **Provide training opportunities and support services for regional entrepreneurs including access to business finance programs.*
3. Utilize state and federal funding resources (SBA 504, EDA RLF, USDA-RD IRP, USDA-RD Micro-loan, and/or other available financial sources) to finance small business loan projects in the region.
4. Network through workshops, conferences, civic groups, and professional organizations to stay abreast of the evolving financing programs available for small business development.
5. Market diverse financing options to regional financial institutes, chambers of commerce, civic groups, etc.
6. Create a regional food processing research and workforce training center.
7. **Create and promote a state-wide revolving loan fund.*
8. Promote expanded workforce development offerings to support emerging industry clusters.

Key Partners		Funding Sources
IDOC SBDC SBA Regional Financial Institutes Chambers of Commerce Civic Groups Higher Education	Community Leaders Food Production Industry Leaders Financial Institutions State of Idaho EDDIs ITD Industry Leadership	SBA EDA IDOC REDS program USDA-RD EDA Partnership Planning Program

Goal 2: Stimulate Regional Community Prosperity (RCP)

RIVDA's Role: RIVDA will provide technical assistance to regional public and private organizations by identifying project funding options, strategic planning support, and guidance navigating state/federal requirements.

Objective RCP1: Expand and improve community infrastructure

Actions/Strategies

1. Advocate for the creation of asset mapping tools that will allow communities to determine/understand local resources and competitive advantages.
2. *Pursue local, state, and federal funding to increase quality of life with infrastructure improvements including broadband, wastewater, water, roads, parks, downtowns, or other aging infrastructure issues.
3. Identify approaches for communities to expand access to faster broadband.
4. Facilitate exploration of fixed route and on-demand public transportation opportunities for the Wood River Valley and Twin Falls/Jerome economic centers, including preliminary route discussions.
5. Create a regional energy assessment inventory with focus on renewable energy capabilities.
6. Promote assessment of water/wastewater capacities to identify the gaps and potentials of the region's municipal systems for accommodating growth of our industrial base.



*Photo: City of Rupert Historic Town Square at Christmas. In 1987, Rupert was named "Christmas City USA."
Photo courtesy of City of Rupert.*

Objective RCP 2: Provide resources for community members to lead productive, prosperous, and meaningful lives.

Actions/Strategies

1. *Ensure access to health care for vulnerable populations (rural, homebound, economically disadvantaged, Veterans, Seniors).
2. Provide funding opportunities for emergency medical services, fire departments, and law enforcement departments to build capacity.
3. Publicize community data to draw attention to underserved, disadvantaged, and sensitive populations within the region.
4. Collaborate with communities to ensure vulnerable populations have easy access to affordable housing, mental health services, transportation, and other quality of life services.
5. Encourage the development of diverse travel options through adoption of electric vehicle charging stations, bike lanes, and walkable community infrastructure.
6. Support the development on adequate housing opportunities that are right-sized and right-priced for all income levels.
7. Participate in strategic plan alignment by participating in 44Go! initiatives.
8. Promote community connectivity to combat loneliness, depression, and suicide.
9. Engage with national organizations to strengthen and expand access to economic development tools (NADO, CDFA, NADCO).

Objective RCP3: Facilitate community planning efforts in land use.

Actions/Strategies

1. *Promote the assessment and cleanup of Brownfield properties through community outreach and financial assistance.
2. Encourage coordination between jurisdictions when updating individual comprehensive plans to mitigate development conflicts.
3. Utilize and encourage energy efficient building practices for public and private development projects.

Objective RCP4: Encourage the development of innovative water-use policies.

Actions/Strategies

1. Explore opportunities and mechanisms to promote innovative community water-use policies, such as aquifer recharge and water recycling.

Key Partners		Possible Funding Sources
Regional City Councils City Administrators County Commissions City Water Managers IDOC FHS	Idaho Rural Partnership IDT Idaho DEQ US EPA NADO CREC	EPA CDBG RCIF

Goal 3: Develop Systems and Networks to Support Workforce Attraction, Development, and Retention (WADR)

RIVDA's Role: RIVDA will provide coordination services to support collaboration among private industry, municipal administration, county leadership, educational providers, and state agencies to promote development of strategic initiatives.

Objective WADR1: Ensure a skilled workforce ample to fulfill current and future labor demands

1. Actions/Strategies

1. *Expand food science and food processing research and training offerings in the region.
2. Connect with regional experts to understand and support the current workforce needs.
3. Connect industry with on-demand educational opportunities, including trainings and certifications.
4. Develop a network of entrepreneurial mentors to link education opportunities with innovators.
5. Maintain diverse training opportunities for incumbent workers, high-school graduates, and upper-division students.
6. Provide a variety of educational delivery methods and offerings to meet regional needs.

Key Partners		Possible Funding Sources
CSI U of I SBDC Idaho DOL	SIEDO CSI-WFD Business Plus	EDA USDA-RD SBDC Workforce Development Council Grants



*Photo: Bridge at Lions Park in Hailey, ID- a former landfill which used Brownfield funding to remediate the area.
Photo by Michele McFarlane.*

EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

To implement the region's development strategy, RIVDA must simultaneously direct efforts toward numerous individual activities and/or projects. Understanding the possibilities and limitations of the region's economy is critical to successful community economic development. RIVDA maintains direct contact with regional agencies and organizations to ensure continuous assessment of the goals and objects identified in this strategy.

The following goals have been identified as priorities to advancing the economic prosperity of South-central Idaho. Strategies for achieving these goals and methods for evaluating success will guide RIVDA and the regional communities in research-based decision making.

Goal/ Action	Priority Strategy	Steps	Measurement	Benchmark	FY23
EE 3.2	Provide training opportunities and support services for regional entrepreneurs including access to business finance programs.	Partner with SBDC to provide synchronized training.	# of communities participating in Operation Facelift	5	FY23: 10
		Provide business training and support through REDS program.	# of Operation Facelift projects funded	50%	50%
		Promote Operation Facelift in rural communities.	# of hours of technical assistance provided by the RDBG program	300	<u>July 21-June 22</u> 603 <u>July 22-July 23</u> 492

Date Source: Internal RIVDA data

EE 3.7	Create and promote a state-wide revolving loan fund.	Hire Region 3 Business Development Officer.	# of loans funded	10	FY23: N/A
		Create Loan Management Plan.	\$ funded	\$2.25 Million	FY23: N/A

Date Source: Internal RIVDA data



Photo: Blaine County Senior Center in Hailey, ID utilized CDBG funding to make needed improvements.

Goal/ Action	Priority Strategy	Steps	Measurement	Benchmark	Results
RCP 1.2	Pursue local, state, and federal funding to increase quality of life with infrastructure improvements.	Connect with local government leadership to identify community needs.	% of regional/state proposals funded	70%	FY23: 89% 8 of 9)
		Explore funding options.	% of national proposals funded	30%	FY23: 50% (1 of 2)

Data Source and limitations: Internal RIVDA data

RCP 2.1	Ensure access to health care for vulnerable populations.	Collaborate with regional health care providers on ways to expand services.	# of regional counties where primary care physician's ratio is below the state	4 of 8	2 of 8
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Date Source and limitations: www.countyhealthrankings.org

RCP 3.1	Promote the assessment and cleanup of Brownfield properties through community outreach and financial assistance.	Attend community meetings to discuss program.	# of properties assessed	One property per year when funding is available	FY22: 3 FY23: 4
			% of total assessed properties being redeveloped	50%	FY23: 14% (1)
		Meet with regional city/county leadership to discuss development plans.	# of RLF loans for cleanup	1 per year	FY23: 0

Date Source: Internal RIVDA Data

WADR 1.1	Expand food science and food processing training offerings in the region.	Secure funding for expanded research and workforce development training facilities. Develop a food processing consortium to direct research and training needs.	# of unique individuals receiving a Food Processing Technology Degree or Certificate at CSI	≥ 10% increase from previous year	2020-21: 6 2021-22: 7 (+16%)
			Average Employment of Food Manufacturing Industry Sector- Statewide	≥ 2% increase from previous year	<u>2021:</u> 19,453 <u>2022:</u> 20,052 (+3.08%)
			Average Weekly Wage of Food Manufacturing Industry Sector - Statewide	≥ 3% increase from previous year	<u>2021:</u> 19,453 <u>2022:</u> 20,052 (+5.26%)

Date Sources: <https://www.csi.edu/institutional-effectiveness/institutional-research/data-at-a-glance/degrees-awarded.aspx>
<https://lmi.idaho.gov/data-tools/industry-wages/>

The Dairy Industry has evolved into a high-tech field with the use of robots, nutritionists, and climate-controlled environments to ensure cow health and quality milk production.



Photos: Top Left - Suntado Milk Plant under construction in Burley courtesy of Big D Construction; Top Right - A robotic milking arm; Bottom left - Specialized feed storage and trucks are necessary at large dairy operations; Bottom right - Modern milk bulk tanks.



- ⁱ <https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/>
- ⁱⁱ <https://www.eda.gov/archives/2016/imcp/communities/>
- ⁱⁱⁱ <https://agri.idaho.gov/main/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/2021-Idaho-Ag-Facts-Infographic-web.pdf>
- ^{iv} <https://www.uidaho.edu/extension/county/twin-falls/aquaculture>
- ^v <https://idahopreferred.com/members/glanbia-foods/>
- ^{vi} https://www.agc.org/sites/default/files/users/user21902/Construction%20trends%20%26%20outlook_.pdf
- ^{vii} https://www.bls.gov/regions/west/news-release/occupationalemploymentandwages_twinfalls.htm
- ^{viii} <https://oemr.idaho.gov/sources/re/wind/>
- ^{ix} <https://www.kmvt.com/2022/04/29/massive-solar-investment-project-coming-twin-falls-county/>
- ^x <https://www.nps.gov/hafo/learn/news/dedication-of-the-thousand-springs-visitor-center.htm>
- ^{xi} https://www.idahopress.com/news/local/idaho-income-rise-but-housing-costs-far-outstrip-them/article_8c7cd3fe-25e9-5f2ea449-8bcfd5c27e98.html
- ^{xii} <https://www.kmvt.com/2022/04/29/emergency-drought-declaration-declared-34-idaho-counties/>
- ^{xiii} <https://idahocapitalsun.com/2022/02/17/most-of-idaho-is-rural-most-of-idahos-nurses-are-not-a-bill-aims-to-fix-that/>
- ^{xiv} <https://www.crapo.senate.gov/media/columns/weekly-column-addressing-veterinarian-shortages-in-idaho>
- ^{xv} <https://idahootwork.com/2020/01/29/census-of-agriculture-highlights-south-central-idahos-shifting-farm-picture/#:~:text=Producer%20Characteristics, counties%20in%20south%20central%20Idaho.>
- ^{xvi} <https://idahootwork.com/2022/03/02/idahos-high-demand-for-truckers-is-expected-to-continue/>
- ^{xvii} <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/12/business/economy/california-housing-crisis.html>
- ^{xviii} <https://www.boisestate.edu/presidents-writing-awards/high-rent-low-pay-and-no-where-to-go-the-affordable-housing-crisis/>

Appendix 1

Commonly Used Acronyms

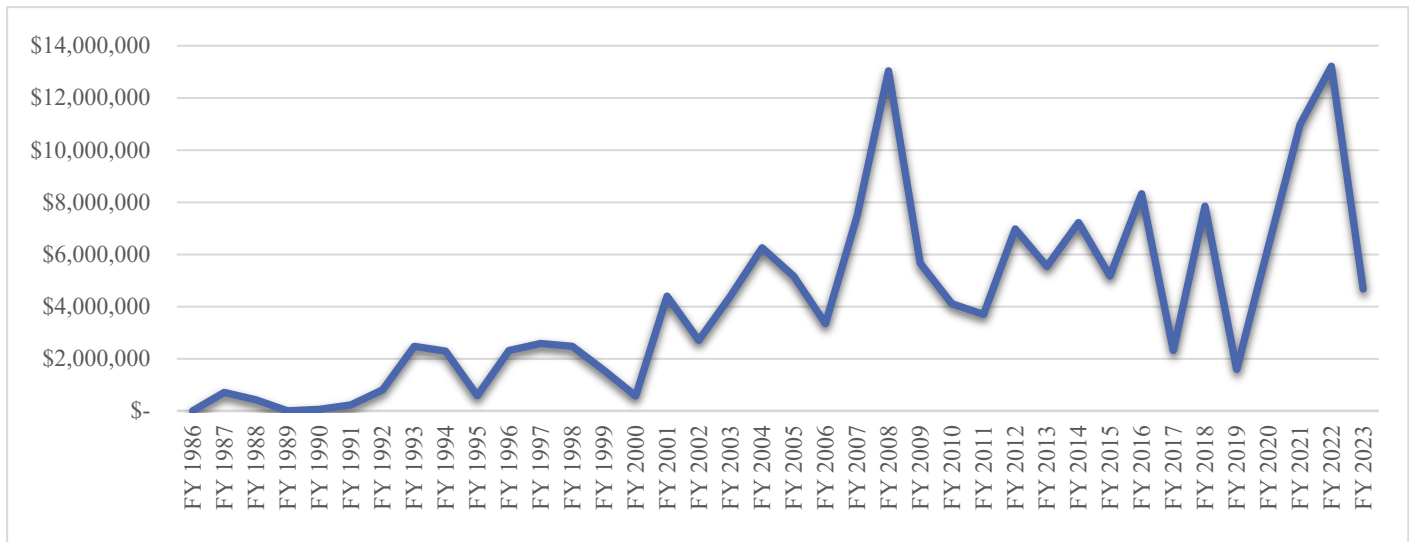
CDBG	Community Development Block Grant
CREC	Center for Regional Economic Competitiveness
CSI	College of Southern Idaho
CTE	Career Technical Education
DEQ	Department of Environmental Quality
DOL	Department of Labor
EDA	Economic Development Administration
EDDI	Economic Development Districts of Idaho
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
FHS	Family Health Services
IDOC	Idaho Department of Commerce
IRP	Intermediary Relending Program
ITD	Idaho Transportation Department
NADO	National Association of Development Organizations
PTAC	Public Transportation Advisory Council
REDS	Rural Economic Development Services
RIVDA	Region IV Development Association
RLF	Revolving Loan Fund
SBA	Small Business Administration
SBDC	Small Business Development Center
SIEDO	Southern Idaho Economic Development Organization
U of I	University of Idaho
URA	Urban Renewal Agency
URD	Urban Renewal District
USDA-RD	U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development
WFD	Workforce Development



Photo: Pond at Sun Valley Resort by Michele McFarlane.

Appendix 2

Small Business Lending Programs



The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) 504 Loan Program offers small businesses an avenue for business financing while promoting business growth, and job creation. This program has proven success and beneficial to small businesses, communities, and participating lenders.

SBA 504 loans are made available through Certified Development Companies (CDCs), SBA's community-based partners. CDCs are certified and regulated by the SBA, and work with SBA and participating lenders (typically banks and credit unions) to provide financing to small businesses, which in turn, accomplishes the goal of community economic development. Region IV Development Corporation (RIVDC) has been designated by SBA as a CDC in Idaho since 1984. The SBA 504 Loan Program provides small businesses with long-term, fixed rate financing for fixed assets (real estate, equipment, and refinancing). Financing for a typical SBA 504 loan is broken into three parts, with 10 to 20% put down by the borrower. An additional 30 to 40% is provided by the CDC/SBA. The remaining 50% is provided by a banking partner. Since 1984, RIVDA has funded 333 SBA 504 loans totaling \$137.6 million.



Photo below: Twin Falls axe-throwing gym "Bearded Axe" utilized RIVDA's small business lending programs for startup and expansion costs.

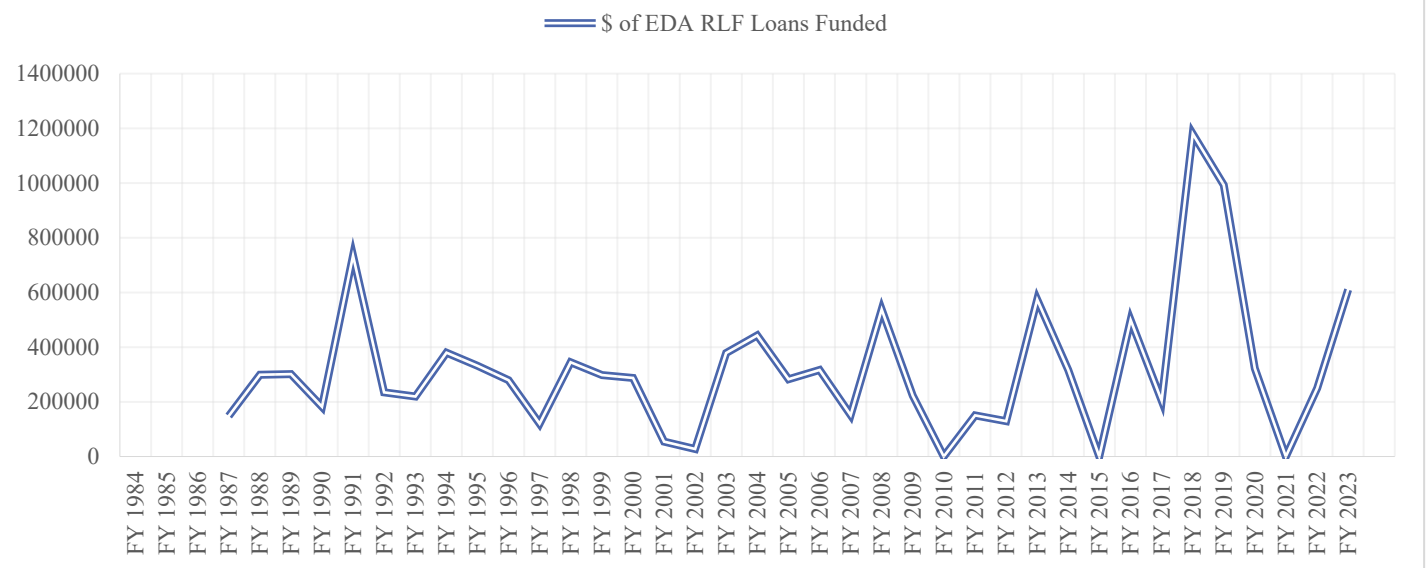
EDA Revolving Loan Program

The U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration provides grants to eligible recipients to capitalize or recapitalize lending programs that service businesses that cannot otherwise obtain traditional bank financing. These grant programs can deliver small business loans which provide access to capital as gap financing to enable small businesses to grow and generate new employment opportunities with competitive wages and benefits. Financing also helps retain jobs that might otherwise be lost, create wealth, and support minority and women-owned businesses. Through this program, business owners can borrow up to \$250,000 for real estate, equipment, inventory, and/or working capital. Interest rates are set at competitive market rates with terms up to seven years for working capital, 10 years for equipment, and 20 years for real estate.



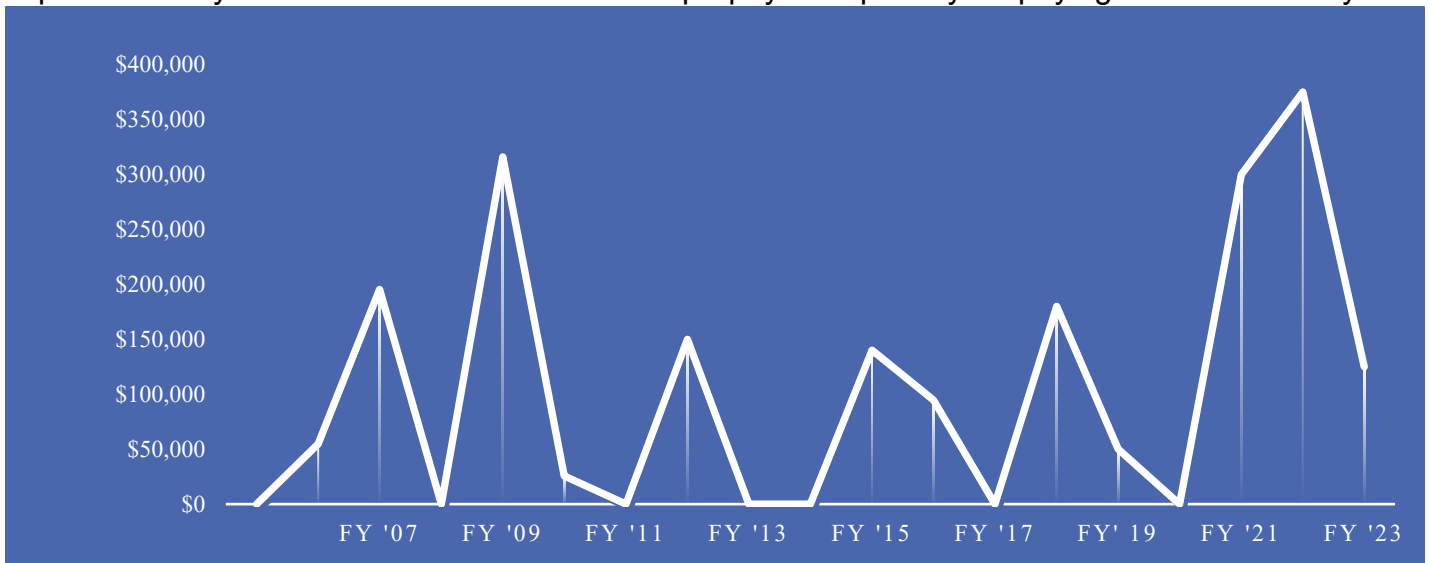
RIVDA has managed revolving loan fund programs since 1987. EDA provided a \$800,000 grant to RIVDA and \$302,000 was raised as local match through the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program. Since 1987, RIVDA has funded 167 loans totaling \$10.5 million in financing. In June 2021, \$3 million of the RLF funds were defederalized, allowing RIVDA greater flexibility in the use of these funds for economic development activities.

\$ OF EDA RLF LOANS FUNDED



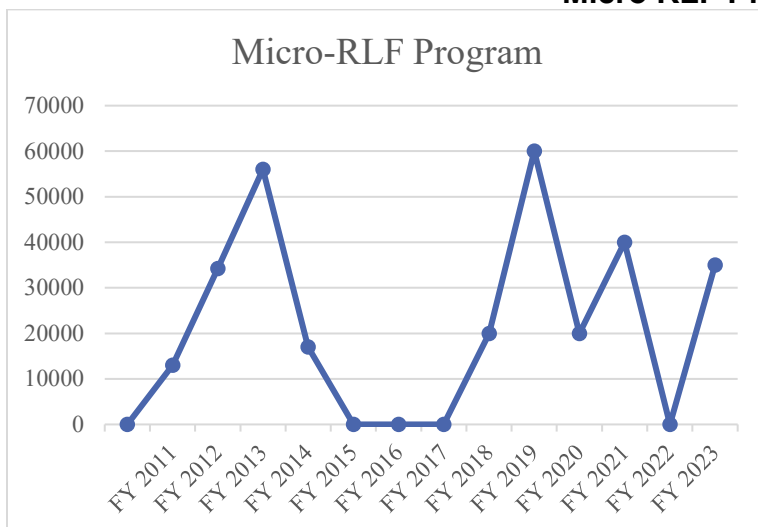
USDA-RD Intermediary Relending Program (IRP)

Since 2007, RIVDA has been administering a loan fund obtained through the U.S. Department of Agriculture – Rural Development Intermediary Relending Program (IRP). The purpose of the IRP program is to alleviate poverty and increase economic activity and employment in rural communities. Under the IRP program, loans are provided to local organizations (intermediaries) for the establishment of revolving loan funds. These revolving loan funds are used to assist with financing business and economic development activity to create or retain jobs in disadvantaged and rural communities. Intermediaries are encouraged to work in concert with state and regional strategies, and in partnership with other public and private organizations that can provide complimentary resources. Through this program, small businesses owners and entrepreneurs can obtain financing up to \$150,000 for real estate, equipment, inventory, and/or working capital. Interest rates are set to market rates at the time the loans are closed with terms up to 7 years for equipment and working capital and 20 years for real estate. There is no prepayment penalty for paying the loan off early.



In 2007, RIVDA’s first IRP fund was established with a \$400,000 loan from USDA-RD and \$100,000 of local matching funds to create a \$500,000 revolving loan program. This program has been so successful, that in January 2020, RIVDA established a second IRP revolving loan fund that totals \$1.05 million (\$1.0 million loan and \$50,000 local matching funds). As of September 2023, RIVDA has funded 27 loans totaling over \$2 million.

USDA-RD Micro RLF Program



The USDA-RD’s Rural Business Development Grant Program provides loans to small businesses for startup and growth through a rural Microloan Revolving Loan Fund. Through this program, entrepreneurs and business owners can obtain financing of \$2,500 to \$20,000 for real estate, equipment, inventory, and/or working capital. RIVDA established its Micro-Loan program in 2011. The fund was initiated with a \$99,000 grant from USDA-RD and \$1,000 of local investment. Through September 2023, RIVDA has funded 16 loans totaling \$295,210.

