

Idaho: Overview

Everything in the main manual and the skill guides applies in Idaho exactly as written. What's different here is the specific hazard profile and the state, local, and legal context around it. This page is the starting point; the other three pages under Idaho go deeper on laws, local resources, and the data behind the risks named here.

The 1910 Big Burn: the fire that shaped a century of American fire policy

Over three days in August 1910, a wind-driven firestorm burned 3 million acres across northern Idaho and western Montana, killing 87 people, 78 of them firefighters. It remains one of the deadliest wildfires in U.S. history, and its aftermath reshaped how the country fights fire: the young U.S. Forest Service, created only five years earlier, used the disaster to justify an aggressive nationwide “put every fire out” policy that dominated American wildfire management for most of the 20th century, a policy later understood to have made forests denser and future fires worse. See the Risks page for the full data.

The 1976 Teton Dam failure: catastrophic on its first fill

On June 5, 1976, the newly built Teton Dam failed catastrophically during the very first filling of its reservoir, releasing more than one million cubic feet of water per second and draining the entire reservoir within six hours. The flood devastated the towns of Sugar City, Rexburg, and Wilford downstream, killing 11 people, destroying 733 homes and 250 businesses, and causing damage estimated at \$400 million to \$2 billion depending on how total losses are calculated. It remains one of the costliest dam failures in U.S. history. See the Risks page for the full data.

What this means for how you use the rest of this manual

The manual's Tier structure and the skill guides apply without modification. What's different in Idaho: wildfire risk here has a documented history of overwhelming even a well-organized firefighting response, so defensible space and evacuation planning matter as much as in California or Oregon, and the Teton Dam failure is a reminder that even brand-new infrastructure can fail catastrophically and without much warning, worth keeping in mind for any household downstream of a dam.

Sources

- 1910 Big Burn data: Britannica; Forest History Society
- 1976 Teton Dam failure data: Association of State Dam Safety Officials; Idaho Office of Emergency Management

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Idaho: Laws & Legal Considerations

Rainwater harvesting: unrestricted

Idaho places no permit requirement or volume limit on residential rainwater harvesting.

Rule	Idaho
Source water	Rooftop or other catchment
Permit required	No
Volume limit	None at the state level
Permitted uses	Non-potable, typically irrigation and similar uses

Where to find it: the Idaho Department of Water Resources (idwr.idaho.gov) administers water law generally.

Water rights: prior appropriation with a distinctive conjunctive-management layer

Idaho has followed prior appropriation since the Idaho Territorial Legislature adopted it in 1881, later written into the state constitution. What makes Idaho’s system distinctive is how it treats the connection between the Snake River and the aquifer beneath it.

Concept	How it works in Idaho
Basic rule	The earliest-dated beneficial use of a water source holds first claim during a shortage
Conjunctive management	The Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer is hydraulically connected to the Snake River itself, so state regulators administer surface water and groundwater rights as one integrated system when groundwater pumping affects senior surface rights
Priority order	Because surface-water delivery systems predate groundwater pumping in most of the state, surface water users generally hold seniority over groundwater users

Permitless carry from age 18

Idaho has allowed permitless concealed carry since 2019, joining Arkansas, Indiana, Louisiana, and Mississippi as one of the permitless-carry states covered on this site with an 18, not 21, minimum age.

Requirement	Detail
Standard	Permitless carry, concealed, for any U.S. citizen 18+ legally eligible to possess a firearm
2019 change	Idaho Code §18-3302E lowered the permitless age from 21 to 18, effective July 1, 2019
2020 expansion	HB 516 removed the residency requirement and the inside/outside city-limits distinction, extending permitless carry statewide to all eligible U.S. citizens and active-duty military, effective July 1, 2020
Optional license	Remains available through county sheriffs for reciprocity in states that don't recognize Idaho's permitless standard

Idaho's own internal consistency

Idaho’s 18-year-old permitless-carry threshold matches its own age for open carry and long-gun purchases, a single consistent age across all three, which isn’t true of every state covered on this site (Tennessee, for example, sets 21 for its general permitless standard but carves out 18 specifically for active-duty or honorably discharged military).

Sources

- Idaho rainwater harvesting rules: Texas Real Food
- Idaho prior appropriation and conjunctive management: Idaho Legal Services Authority; Idaho State University Digital Atlas
- Idaho permitless carry (2019 age change; HB 516, 2020): Boise Gun Club

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Idaho: Local Resources

Idaho Office of Emergency Management (IOEM)

IOEM coordinates the state's preparedness programs, including National Preparedness Month outreach and statewide earthquake drills built around the "Drop, Cover, and Hold" standard, with participation from K-12 schools, colleges, businesses, and government agencies.

Where to find it: ioem.idaho.gov.

University of Idaho Extension: Master Gardener Program

University of Idaho Extension runs the same category of program as every other state covered on this site.

- **Idaho Master Gardener Program:** a federal-standard minimum of 40 hours of classroom training plus 40 hours of volunteer service to become certified, though specific fees, schedules, and service requirements vary by county.

Where to find it: uidaho.edu/extension/horticulture/master-gardener lists county programs and course schedules.

CERT: statewide coordination with a notable youth program

IOEM serves as Idaho's statewide CERT coordinator, supporting CERT teams in neighborhoods, workplaces, and schools. Idaho's program is distinguished by an explicit youth-CERT emphasis, including a CERT curriculum built into a Meridian charter high school and a dedicated Teen CERT Ready Camp run with Southwest District Health, a level of youth-specific investment not seen on other states' pages covered so far.

Where to find it: ioem.idaho.gov/about/administration-outreach/community-preparedness.

Sources

- IOEM preparedness programs: Idaho Office of Emergency Management
- Idaho Master Gardener Program requirements: University of Idaho

- Idaho CERT and youth CERT programs: Idaho Office of Emergency Management

Idaho: Risks & Trends

Same standard as every other page on this site: every figure below is independently sourced, and figures that vary across sources, or measure genuinely different things, are flagged as such rather than collapsed into one number that looks more precise than the underlying data actually supports.

The 1910 Big Burn

Metric	Figure
Dates	August 20-23, 1910
Area burned	~3 million acres across northern Idaho and western Montana
Deaths	87 total, 78 of them firefighters
Peak winds	Up to 70 mph, driving separate fires into one massive firestorm
Firefighters deployed	~4,000 civilian firefighters plus ~4,000 U.S. Army troops
Long-term policy effect	Prompted the U.S. Forest Service's aggressive nationwide fire-suppression policy for most of the 20th century

A policy legacy worth understanding

The Big Burn’s aftermath led directly to a “put every fire out immediately” national policy. That policy is now understood to have allowed forests to grow denser with unburned fuel over decades, contributing to the larger, more intense wildfires seen across the Western U.S. in recent years, including the fires covered on California and Oregon’s pages. The 1910 fire didn’t just kill 87 people; it shaped the wildfire risk every Western state faces today.

The 1976 Teton Dam failure

Metric	Figure
Date	June 5, 1976, during the reservoir's first filling
Peak flow released	1,000,000+ cubic feet per second
Time to fully drain the reservoir	~6 hours
Deaths	11
Homes destroyed	733 (3,000+ more damaged)
Businesses destroyed	250
Livestock lost	13,000-20,000
Damage estimate	\$400 million (initial Bureau of Reclamation estimate) to \$2 billion (broader total-loss estimates)
Towns most affected	Sugar City, Rexburg, Wilford

Why the damage figures vary so widely

The \$400 million figure reflects an early, narrower federal liability estimate; the \$2 billion figure reflects broader total economic loss across the flooded region. Both numbers appear regularly in sources on this event; presenting the range rather than picking one keeps faith with what the underlying estimates actually measure.

Sources

- 1910 Big Burn data: Britannica; Forest History Society
- 1976 Teton Dam failure data: Association of State Dam Safety Officials; Idaho Office of Emergency Management