

HEADWATERS ECONOMICS

RESEARCH UPDATE

January 2008

www.headwaterseconomics.org



HEADWATERS
ECONOMICS

HOME DEVELOPMENT ON FIRE-PRONE LANDS FIRE FIGHTING COSTS WILL SOAR IF TRENDS CONTINUE

More and more people are building homes in the western “wildland urban interface,” the forested areas where housing borders undeveloped public lands. With more homes built in forested areas, it has become increasingly expensive to fight the inevitable wildfires that are part of life in the arid West. Building remote homes on the outskirts of western wildlands is placing a huge strain on U.S. firefighting efforts. The cost to U.S. taxpayers of protecting privately owned properties in the wildland urban interface has been estimated by Forest Service managers to be as high as \$1 billion each year.

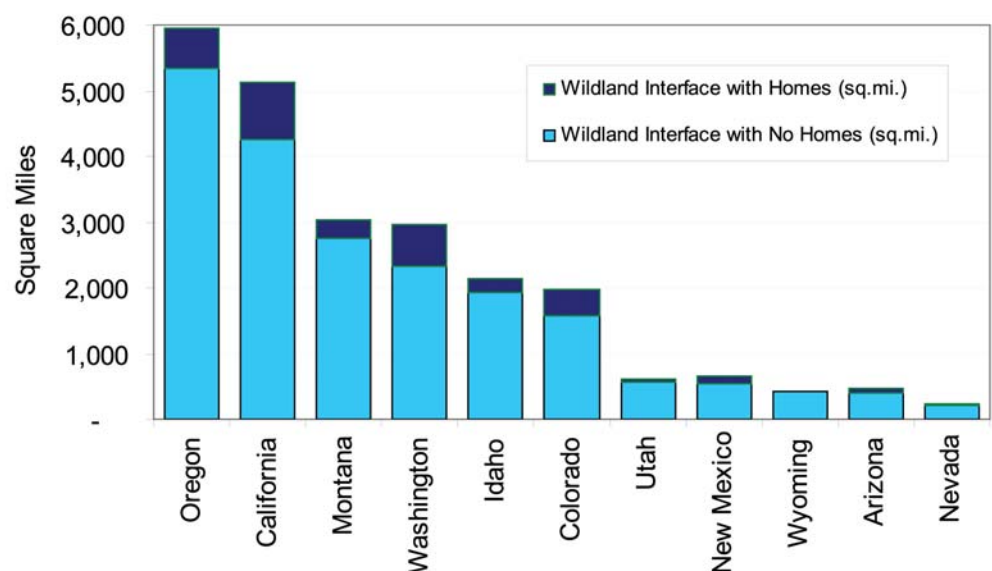
Most studies of wildland fire and residential development have focused on the cost of firefighting, damage to private property and solutions such as fuel reduction and fire-safe home building. While some studies quantify the number of homes being built near national forests, until now little research has demonstrated the potential severity of the problem in the future.

Headwaters Economics has prepared maps and graphs illustrating this emerging problem for western communities.

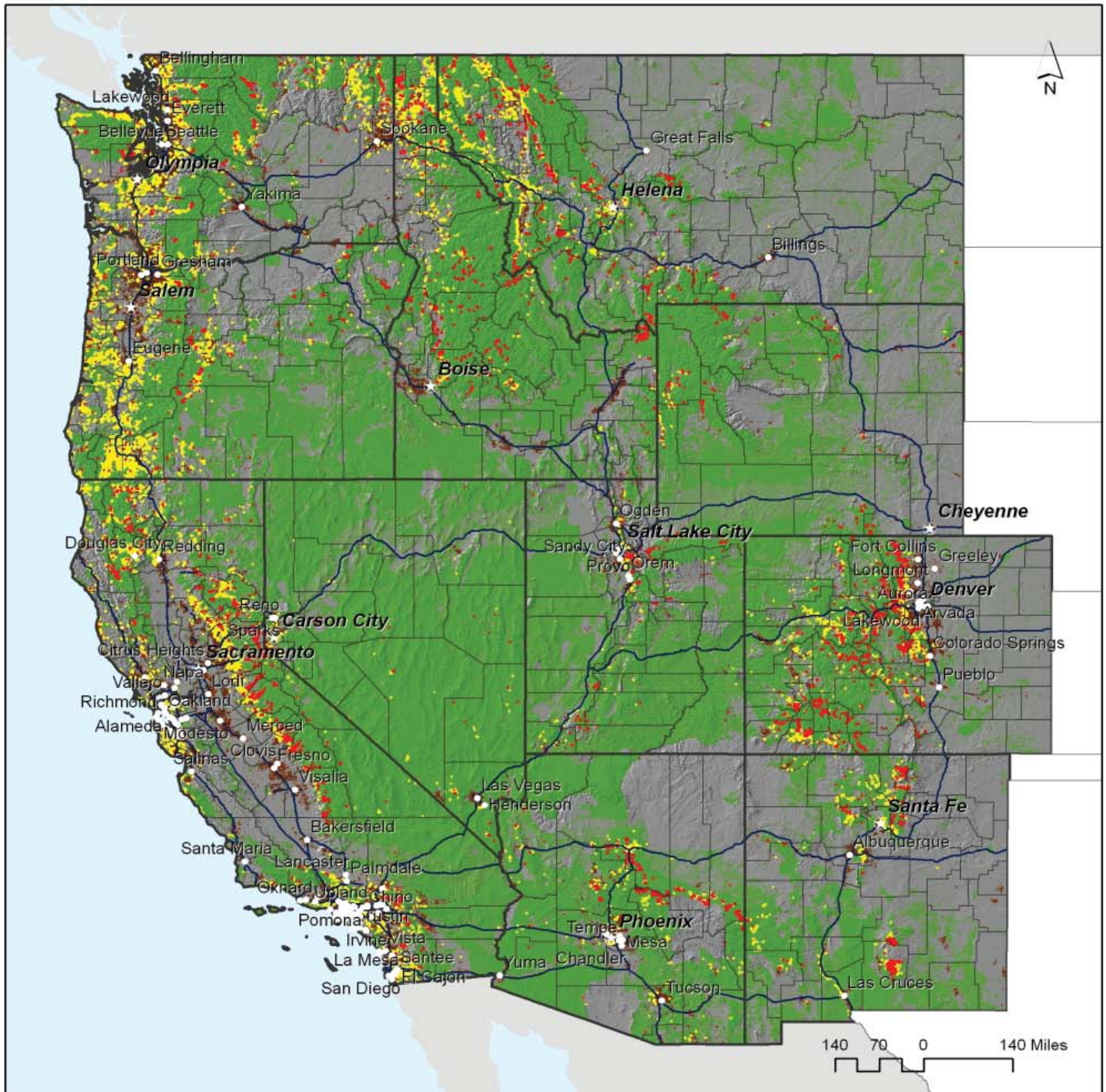
Our analysis takes a long view, looking at the potential for more home construction next to fire-prone public lands and implications for future wildfire fighting costs. With the release of these findings, we hope to refocus the attention of policy makers and western communities on the ramifications of current growth trends, and open a dialogue about the needed course correction to keep homes and firefighters safe and firefighting costs in check.

Only 14% of the available “wildland urban interface” in the West is currently developed, leaving tremendous potential for new home construction in the remaining 86%.

Homes in the Wildland Interface



Residential Development at the Public/Private Land Interface



Forested Public/Private Land Interface		Counties	
	Residential within 500m of Public Land		Counties
	and > 50% Second Homes	Major Cities	
Residential			State Capital
	Including Urban, Suburban, Exurban		Population > 50,000
Public Lands		Major Roads	
	Public Lands		Limited Access Highway

Data Sources: US Census, US Geological Survey, Conservation Biology Inst., Arizona State Lands Dept., Montana Natural Heritage Program

World Mercator Projection
Map Date: 7/2/2007



KEY FINDINGS:

- * Only 14% of forested western private land adjacent to public land is currently developed for residential use. The remaining 86% can still be developed.
- * Given the skyrocketing cost of fighting wildfires in recent years (on average \$1.3 billion each year between 2000-2005), this potential development would create an unmanageable financial burden for taxpayers.
- * If homes were built in 50% of the forested areas where private land borders public land, annual firefighting costs could range from \$2.3 billion to \$4.3 billion per year. By way of comparison, the U.S. Forest Service's annual budget is approximately \$4.5 billion.
- * One in five homes in the wildland urban interface is a second home or cabin, compared to one in twenty-five homes on other western private lands.
- * Residential lots built near wildlands take up more than six times the space of homes built in other places. On average, 3.2 acres per person are consumed for housing in the wildland urban interface, compared to 0.5 acres on other western private lands.

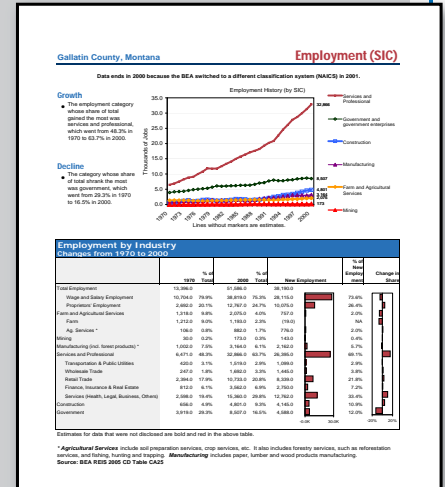
See statistics for your state and county:
www.headwaterseconomics.org/wildfire

ALSO AT HEADWATERS ECONOMICS

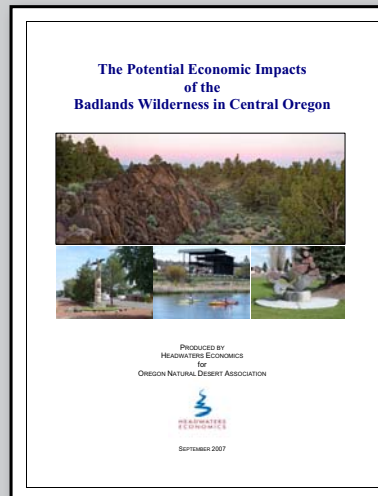
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Economic Profile System

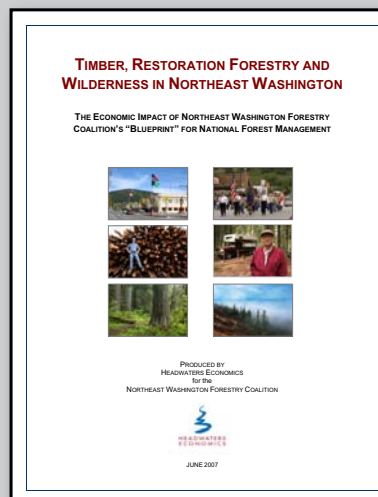
An improved 2007 version of the popular (and free) automated system for producing custom socioeconomic profiles for any geography in the U.S.



EXAMPLES OF CUSTOM RESEARCH:



Central Oregon's economic growth is driven by quality of life, making the potential new Badlands Wilderness a positive contribution to the economy.



A proposal by a broad coalition of industry and conservation interests in Northwest Washington would create timber jobs, restore the landscape and designate a new Wilderness area, with positive benefits to the economy.

WE'RE GROWING!

We welcome Mark Haggerty and Julia Hobson Haggerty to the Headwaters Economics team.



MISSION STATEMENT:

Headwaters Economics is an independent, nonprofit research group. Our mission is to improve community development and land management decisions in the West.

HEADWATERS ECONOMICS

Mail:

P.O. Box 7059, Bozeman MT 59771

Deliveries:

810 N. Wallace Avenue, Suite B, Bozeman MT 59715

Staff:

Ray Rasker, Ph.D. 406.570.7044

Ben Alexander 406.599.7423

Patty Gude 406.599.7425

Jeff van den Noort 406.599.1653

Mark Haggerty 406.570.5626

Julia Hobson Haggerty, Ph.D. 406.600.1766

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