

Climate Connections

Idaho has many geographic landscapes, including mountains, valleys, and plains. The state is divided into four different climatic regions: northwestern, central, southeastern, and southwestern. Each has unique soil and climate conditions that effect what plants and animals survive there. Each region goes through four seasons but each season manifests differently according to the geographic location.

Higher altitudes have mild summer days and are extremely cold during the winter months. Lower valleys and plains rarely drop to degrees below zero, even in winter. The Pacific Ocean doesn't directly affect temperature; however it does effect the amount and types of precipitation, which include sleet, hail, and snow.

Northwestern Idaho is quite mountainous and heavily forested. Along the western edge of the upper panhandle is the Palouse Valley where dry land farms grow wheat, barley, lentils, and beans. Central Idaho is nearly all mountains; the growing season in central Idaho is short, relatively cool, and supports vineyards of wine grapes. The rugged and remote mountains of central Idaho are the home of Canadian wolves, re-introduced to the area in 1995.

Southeastern Idaho includes high plains and deserts in the west and foothills and high mountains in the east. Desert soils there are often dry and alkaline, which can be a problem for fruits and vegetables. However, this soil type is perfect for tubers and is the best medium for the state's famous potatoes. Southwestern Idaho has mild winter temperatures and a long, warm growing season. Here specialty crops flourish, including commodities like oilseed, mint, and lavender. Livestock production is also a big part of the local economy.

Each of Idaho's regional climate zones has unique properties that make it suitable for a variety of plants and animals that thrive in the state. Earth's systems come together to create a unique environment in Idaho.

