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A Survey . . .

# A Quality Life In Idaho

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Fisherman tries his luck on Moose Lake in the upper drainage of the Big Lost River.

Do you like it here? Can you put into words the reasons you enjoy living in Idaho? Why do other people like it here? At the University we wonder about answers to these questions, not only out of curiosity but also because we feel that we should be attuned to the people of the state. To answer these questions we recently circulated a questionnaire throughout Idaho.

Two thousand names were chosen by computer from the state motor vehicle registration list. Questionnaires were sent to selected persons asking them to list what they considered the two greatest advantages and two greatest disadvantages of living in Idaho. They were also asked their age, occupation, if they were native to Idaho, the size of the town where they lived and if they tended to stay in Idaho.

Over 500 people responded to the questionnaire. Distribution by counties was excellent with only Clark and Owyhee counties not represented. Otherwise the percentage of returns from the various counties closely followed the percentages of the population for each county as shown by the 1970 census. Age of respondents

ranged from 17 to 87 with only 18, 20, 79 and 84 year-olds not represented between the two extremes. Thirty-five percent of the sample came from towns over 10,000 in population, 28% came from the country, 24% from medium sized towns (1,000 to 10,000) and 13% came from small towns (under 1,000). Forty-three percent of the respondents were born in Idaho, 40% had moved here as adults and 17% had moved here as children. The most prevalent occupation among respondents was labor at 20% followed by farmers (18%), technicians (14%), office workers (12%) professional (11%), non-categorized (7%), merchandizers (5%), other businessmen (5%) and housewives (4%). Four percent did not indicate any occupation.

### Idahoans Like Idaho

Apparently, we do like it here. Ninety-two percent of the respondents indicated that they intended to stay in Idaho while only four percent did not intend to stay. The remaining four percent were uncertain of their future plans. It appears that most of our population consider Idaho a desirable place to live.

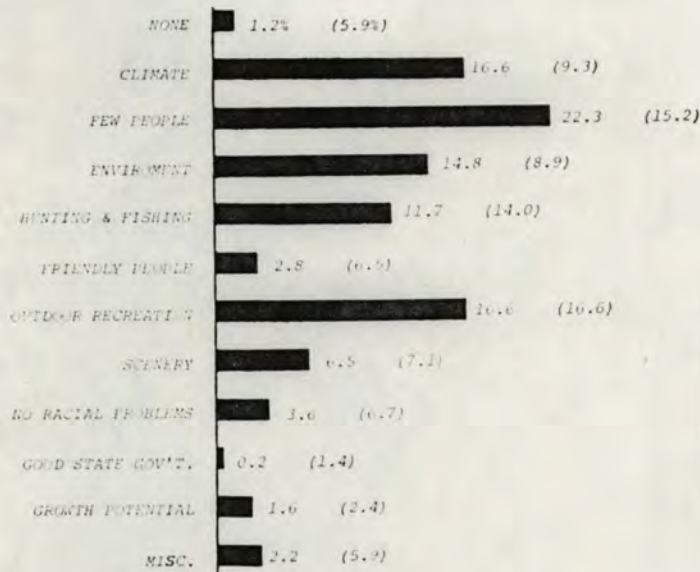
Opinions on the advantages of living here were in surprising agreement. Given two opinions each by over 500 people we could have had an extremely high variety. As it was, we were able to categorize the advantages into 10 distinct classes plus a miscellaneous class. Most of the advantage categories were fairly specific with only the "Environment" category being quite general.

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*The idea for such a survey originated with Dr. D. R. Klein, Leader of the Alaska Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit, and several of his thoughts are incorporated in this article. — THE AUTHORS*

### 1st Advantage

(2nd advantage in parentheses)



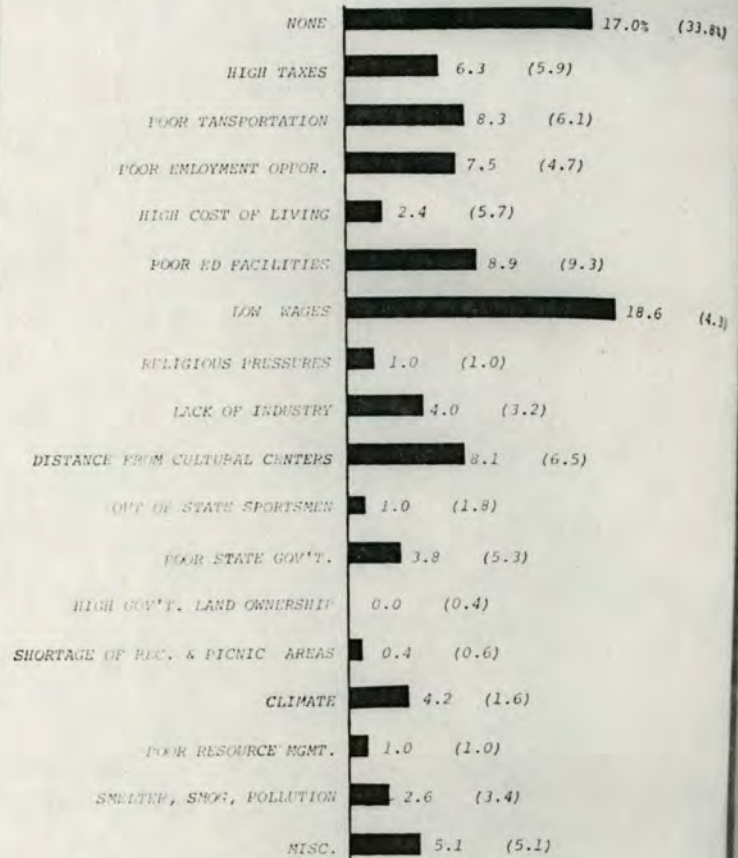
## Advantages and Disadvantages of Living in Idaho as Seen by a Representative Sample of More Than 500 Citizens.

Some could have been lumped together, i.e. hunting and fishing and scenery are all types of outdoor recreation but enough people mentioned them specifically to give them a separate category status. There were a few malcontents who couldn't think of any advantages of living here (1.2%) and another 4.7% who could only think of one advantage.

Low population was the number one advantage mentioned by the most people with climate and outdoor recreation tying for second place. If scenery and hunting and fishing had been included in the outdoor recreation category, it would have been the first choice with 34.8% of the people listing it as their first advantage and 37.7% of the people listing it as their second advantage. There was little difference of opinion among occupations as to the greatest advantage of living here. All but laborers, housewives, and non-categorized occupations had the highest number of respondents listing few people as an advantage. Laborers preferred the hunting and fishing, housewives were split on climate and environment and non-categorized occupations were most enthusiastic about the climate. There was a difference in opinion on the most important advantage between natives and non-natives. Those people born in Idaho thought that few people was the greatest advantage while those who had moved here either as children or adults favored climate as their first choice. There was also a difference of opinion according to the size of town that the respondents lived in — those living in the country and in large towns gave their vote to few people while those living in small and medium size towns thought that outdoor recreation was the greatest advantage.

### 1st Disadvantage

(2nd disadvantage in parentheses)



### Environment Encompasses All

Environment was a popular choice in the general sample and in all classifications of respondents. This category really encompasses all other categories and probably reflects some indecision on the part of those listing it as to what the greatest advantages really are. We would have to conclude that persons listing environment as their first choice just like it here for no particular reason, or for lots of equally important reasons.

It is clear that the people of Idaho prefer their outdoor living without congestion, but could it be better? Not much, apparently. When asked to list disadvantages, 17% of the sample couldn't think of any and another 17% could think of only one. The single major dissatisfaction was low wages and there was some disagreement among occupations on that. Farmers and businessmen were not very concerned over low wages while it was the major concern of laborers, office workers and technicians. Professional people were split between low wages and distance from cultural centers, merchants also thought that distance from cultural centers was the main disadvantage, and the greatest disadvantage category chosen by all other occupations was none. Both natives and immigrants and people from all sizes of towns were in agreement that there are few disadvantages other than low wages. Most of the minor disadvantages might be classified as "pet peeves" shared by several people. Only educational facilities, inadequate transportation, distance from cultural centers and poor employment opportunities seemed of major concern.

## Pollution Not Cited as Problem

It is clear that people live in Idaho because of the quality of life afforded by the natural environment. Pollution was noticeably absent from the list of disadvantages. We do have examples of pollution and we must work to rectify these. A recent Lon Harris poll in Washington state, sponsored by Northwest Bell, found that pollution was regarded the state's number one problem. And Washington residents indicated they were willing to pay the costs of cleaning up. To maintain our advantages we must be willing to do the same.

But we must also do more. "Progress" and "development" it is said, are inevitable. "Progress," by definition, implies an improvement of conditions and shouldn't be measured in terms of population growth and rate of industrial expansion. Development—orderly, planned development—can be regarded the same way. The present quality of life in Idaho, expressed in this poll by people of all ages and in all walks of life, is dependent on Idaho's unique natural environment. This quality of living should not be exchanged merely for a larger paycheck and greater material wealth. Indeed, to do so would destroy the things we prize the most.

We do need additional employment opportunities and a broader tax base to support schools and other services such as cultural centers. Our resources can contribute to a healthier, more stable economy. How these resources are utilized—developed—is the key. The greatest threat to our quality of life is not development per se, but the uncontrolled, exploitive kind where developers are free to use the cheapest methods at hand regardless of the effects on the land, air or water. This may yield the greatest short-term gains to investors but yields the greatest long-term hardships for future generations, as well as the destruction of a way of life for present residents. Long-range planning for development, followed by necessary zoning and other regulations to guarantee a pattern of growth of industry, population, resource use, and public and private services best serves the interests of the people, both in the present and future.

Our course of action appears clear. The citizens of Idaho should set their own standards of value, then work toward achieving them. Our elected and appointed officials in all levels of government should be made



The grassland flats of Big Springs in Owyhee County are favorite sage grouse hunting lands.

aware of these standards and directed to uphold them. By striving to preserve and strengthen our assets so closely tied to the natural environment, and by planning for orderly and wise resource utilization, it may be possible to eliminate many of the disadvantages of life in our state. If we do not recognize those things which we prize the highest and make this effort, then we can expect to be faced with the problems presently besetting many areas of our country. Worse yet, we will have lost the most important thing—our way of life.

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