



# IDAHO AT A GLANCE

## Wastewater and Drinking Water Systems in Idaho

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### OVERVIEW OF IDAHO'S WATER SYSTEMS

**Wastewater systems** collect and treat water that flows from indoor uses, such as homes and businesses. **Drinking water systems** supply safe, reliable drinking water to homes, businesses and other structures requiring water service. This *Idaho at a Glance* focuses on domestic wastewater and drinking water systems and excludes industrial systems, except where specified.

In 2024, there were an estimated **450 wastewater systems in Idaho, many of which were small**, each serving 3,300 users or fewer. Five large systems each served over 100,000 users.

In 2025, **Idaho had 2,016 drinking water systems, the vast majority of which were small**, serving 3,300 or fewer users each. Three large systems each served more than 100,000 users.

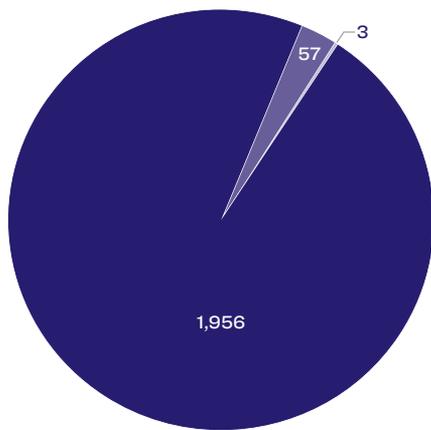
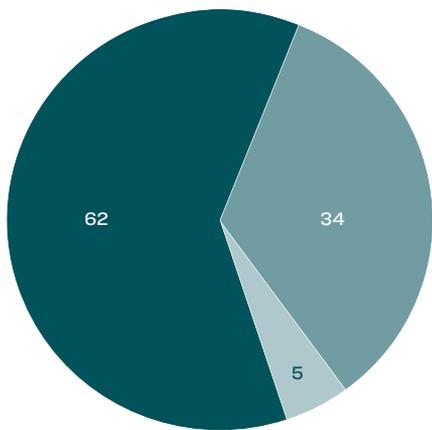
Wastewater and drinking water systems consist of physical infrastructure and the people and governing bodies that run them. They are physically distinct, but they can share an owner, operator and/or governing body.

**Wastewater Systems<sup>†</sup> in Idaho, by Size**

2024

**Drinking Water Systems<sup>†</sup> in Idaho, by Size**

2025



<sup>†</sup>Not all wastewater systems report the number of users. Figure summarizes information from 101 wastewater systems in Idaho.

<sup>††</sup>Number of drinking water systems includes industrial systems.

Source: Idaho Department of Environmental Quality "IPDES Classification List" and "Active Public Water Systems." Obtained on request.

Not all homes and businesses in Idaho are connected to wastewater and/or drinking water systems. Many use private wells and septic systems.

## FINANCING FOR WASTEWATER AND DRINKING WATER SYSTEMS

Wastewater and drinking water systems charge their users for the services they provide. **Smaller systems may need to charge higher service fees per capita to cover their ongoing operational costs and large periodic expenditures** associated with infrastructure improvements.

Periodic expenditures, or capital investments, are primarily driven by three factors:



**Lifespan:** Many wastewater and drinking water systems were constructed in the previous century and may be reaching the end of their lifespans.



**Regulation:** As environmental and public health regulations change, upgrades to wastewater and drinking water infrastructure are often required.



**Growth:** More people, homes and businesses lead to increased need for wastewater and drinking water infrastructure and services.

**Not all wastewater and drinking water systems are able to fully cover their costs through fees.** System managers in Idaho use revenues from service fees, development impact fees and connection fees in combination with financing opportunities, such as grants and loans offered by federal, state, local, non-profit and private sector entities. Loans are often paid back by users over time through service fees. In some cases, infrastructure improvements may be financed through local taxing districts.

**The Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Funds (SRFs)** were created by Congress to finance wastewater and drinking water improvements. They are used to fund water quality protection efforts and serve public health needs. **The SRFs are a central financing mechanism for wastewater and drinking water infrastructure throughout the U.S. and in Idaho.** Idaho's SRFs are administered by the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (IDEQ).

Other sources of financing for Idaho's wastewater and drinking water infrastructure include the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development Program, the Idaho Community Development Block Grant Program, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, direct federal appropriations and more.

## REGULATING WASTEWATER AND DRINKING WATER

The federal Clean Water Act regulates the discharge of wastewater and the federal Safe Drinking Water Act regulates the safety of drinking water. Under both acts, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) sets standards for wastewater and drinking water quality. IDEQ is responsible for implementing these standards. Standards and regulations change over time with new information about potential human health and environmental impacts.

### CONTAMINANTS IN DRINKING WATER

**Drinking water infrastructure needs are expected to increase in the future due to regulations related to contaminants in drinking water.** Nationwide and in Idaho, system operators, managers and industry experts are concerned about systems' ability to achieve target levels for contaminants for both current and future regulations.

Regulated contaminants fall into five main categories: microorganisms, disinfectants and disinfection byproducts, inorganic chemicals, organic chemicals and radionuclides. **Two recently regulated contaminants in drinking water are lead and per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS).**



**Lead service lines** and other lead-exposed pipes that bring water into homes and businesses are a leading source of lead exposure in the U.S. Lead poisoning damages the nervous system and is particularly dangerous for children. Federal regulations that began in 2024 impose strict limits on lead levels and require systems to replace all lead and lead-exposed service lines within 10 years. **In Idaho, as of 2025, 21 drinking water systems have identified lead or lead-exposed service lines needing replacement.** \$57 million in federal funding has been allocated to Idaho to support lead-related projects.

## GROWTH AND INFRASTRUCTURE IN IDAHO

In a 2021 survey of wastewater and drinking water system managers, **growth was a top driver of infrastructure needs in Idaho.** Population and housing growth put pressure on existing wastewater and drinking water systems. Idaho has gained new homes and people every year since 1988 and is expected to continue to grow.

In Idaho, between 2011 and 2023, approximately **65% of newly constructed homes connected to wastewater systems and 77% connected to drinking water systems.** The remainder of new homes connected to septic systems and/or wells.



Idaho's population reached **2 million people** in 2024, more than doubling since 1980.



Idaho gained **146,000 housing units**, a 22% increase, between 2010 and 2023.

To learn more about population change in Idaho, see *Idaho at a Glance: Population Change in Idaho (2025)*. Available at: [uidaho.edu/IdahoataGlance](http://uidaho.edu/IdahoataGlance)

## IDAHO'S WASTEWATER AND DRINKING WATER WORKFORCE

The wastewater and drinking water workforce encompasses those working directly with physical infrastructure, including operators and technicians, and associated jobs, such as office clerks, bookkeepers, managers, engineers and tradespeople. **Many of these jobs are in high demand in Idaho.**

Wastewater and drinking water systems offer jobs with competitive wages and career mobility. **The many opportunities for workers within the sector may create challenges for recruitment and retention, especially for small systems.**

**\$53,250**

*Median wage of wastewater and drinking water operators in Idaho*

**\$46,470**

*Median wage across all occupations in Idaho*

Idaho has one registered apprenticeship program for wastewater and drinking water system operators, launched in 2018 by the Idaho Rural Water Association.

As the population of Idaho and the U.S. ages, there is concern about replacing workers as they enter into retirement. An estimated two-thirds of wastewater and drinking water operators are ages 35-54 and just over one-quarter are ages 55 and older.

# INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS IN IDAHO

Wastewater and drinking water infrastructure needs include rehabilitation, replacement and upgrades to address aging infrastructure and/or accommodate new regulations or population growth. **Infrastructure needs are most often expressed in terms of the cost of anticipated projects.**

**Idaho's wastewater infrastructure needs are estimated to be \$617 million** in FY2025 and at least \$730 million in FY2026. In FY2022-FY2024, estimated wastewater infrastructure needs neared or surpassed \$1 billion annually.

**Idaho's drinking water infrastructure needs are estimated to be \$369 million** in FY2025 and at least \$335 million in FY2026. In FY2023 and FY2024, estimated drinking water infrastructure needs surpassed \$500 million annually.

Idaho's FY2025 wastewater and drinking water infrastructure needs:

**\$986 million**

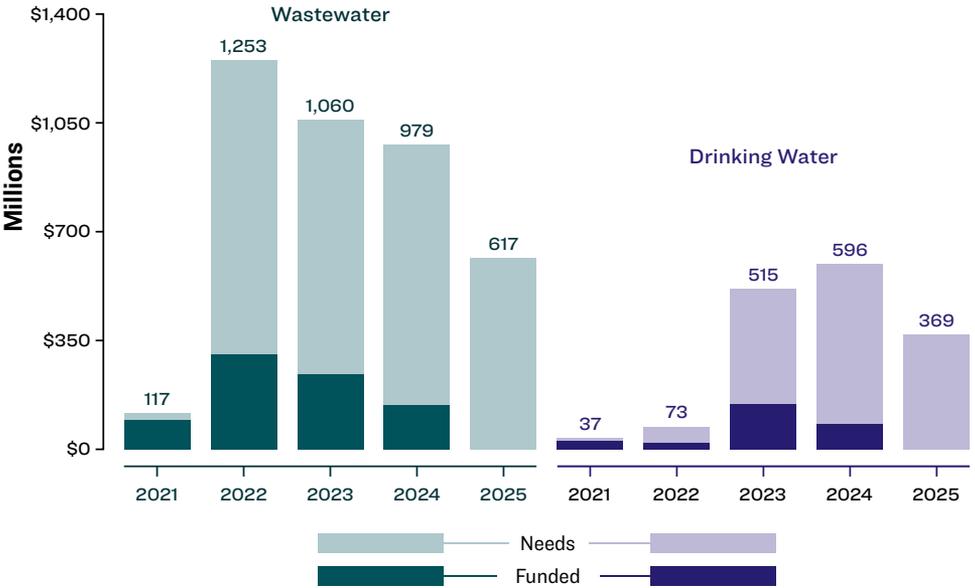
Idaho's FY2026 estimated wastewater and drinking water infrastructure needs:

**Over \$1 billion**

**Not all wastewater and drinking water infrastructure needs in Idaho are funded in a given fiscal year.** The portion that is funded depends on the number and size of the financing requests and the funds available from the primary federal, state and non-profit entities that finance wastewater and drinking water infrastructure projects in Idaho.

## Infrastructure Needs and Funding for Wastewater and Drinking Water Systems in Idaho

State FY2021-FY2025



Note: Complete data on funded amounts for FY2025 were not available at time of publication.  
Source: Author's calculations.

**SOURCE:** This *Idaho at a Glance* is based on the full-length research report, *Wastewater and Drinking Water Systems in Idaho: Infrastructure Needs, Growth and Workforce* (2025). The report and this *Idaho at a Glance* were created with funding from the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality through administrative set-aside funds from the State Revolving Funds. View the full report: [go.uidaho.edu/WWDW2025](https://go.uidaho.edu/WWDW2025).



**SPECIAL THANKS** to the Association of Idaho Cities, Idaho Rural Water Association, our external reviewers and our advisory board.



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