

Video: Modeling animal tradeoffs shaped by landscape complexity

October 28 2016, by Miles O'brien

The Lemhi Valley is a high desert sagebrush steppe environment in eastern Idaho, along the border with Montana. It's a critical habitat and a gorgeous piece of intact sagebrush landscape, according to University of Idaho mammalian ecologist Janet Rachlow. It also happens to be home to the pygmy rabbit, which is the reason Rachlow and her colleague, Washington State University foraging ecologist Lisa Shipley, are here with a group of research students.

Data from tracking collars the team puts on the rabbits and imagery from [unmanned aerial vehicles](#) help generate maps that show where and when the rabbits spend their time, and ultimately, how the mammals use and shape this ecosystem.

Rachlow and Shipley, along with Boise State University physiological ecologist Jennifer Forbey, have chosen a broad approach, looking at behavioral, nutritional, chemical, spatial and physiological ecology to evaluate comprehensively the factors that influence habitat use. What they learn about the links between habitat features and habitat use could help inform future decisions involving land management and restoration for these types of environments.

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