

on maps at this scale, the pattern especially occurs in mountain areas of the West. A good example is visible in western Montana: the Bitterroot Valley is becoming a suburban and exurban extension of Missoula.

Depending on your point of view, our 2040 scenario can be seen as offering either positive or negative futures. The public lands figure prominently as a reserve of open space that Westerners will come increasingly to value as the buildable lands develop. But several areas face projected growth that is sure to cause contention. Phoenix continues to sprawl across the desert; cities along Colorado's Front Range merge into one another and send exurban sprawl into the nearby mountains; and development in California's Great Central Valley, so rich in productive farm land, expands to dominate the landscape.

A few places step into the land-use limelight: Spokane spreads out, and towns in Idaho's Upper Snake River Valley grow and begin to merge, as do several small towns on the west side of Washington's Cascade Range. On the eastern border of our maps, though, a huge swath of the Great Plains in eastern Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, and New Mexico that is mostly private land stays green (rural) even in 2040. Population growth and spreading development concentrates in the mountain, desert, and coastal parts of the West, while avoiding the Great Plains.

In the following pages we take a closer look at selected parts of the West.

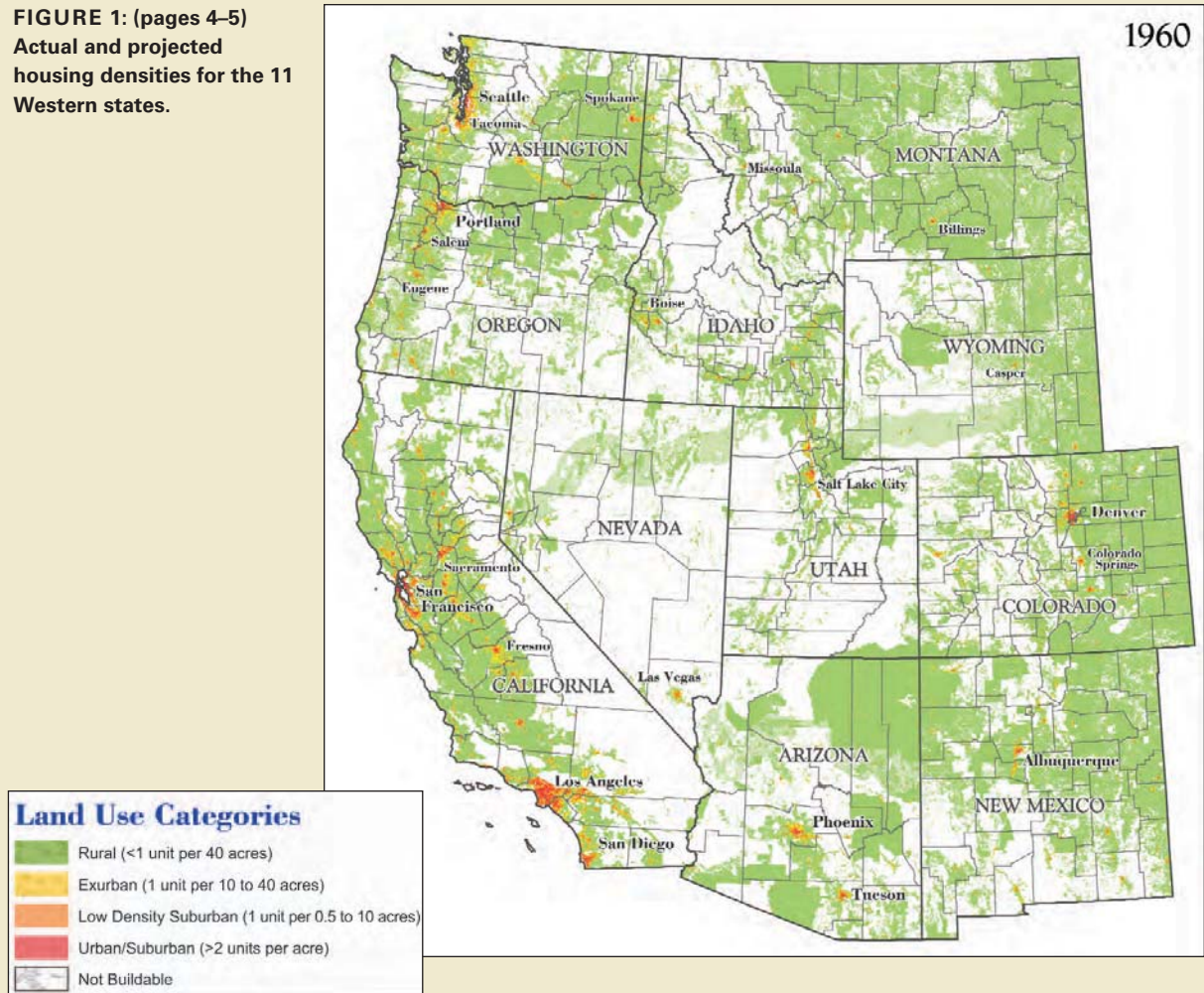
OVERVIEW OF THE WEST

At this scale, the West is dominated by undeveloped rural land, both private (green) and public (white). The private open lands concentrate in a swath along the eastern edge of the maps—out on the Great Plains—in the interior Columbia Basin, on Indian Reservations in New Mexico and Arizona, and within the fertile valleys along the West Coast. Much of this rural land hosts houses, roads, fences, crops, and other developments that you

would notice through the car windshield, but such signs of human use still fall into our rural category. Public lands dominate the Intermountain West, especially the Great Basin in Nevada and Utah.

Actual census data show development spreading between 1960 and 2000, especially along the Pacific Rim. In our projection for 2040, development stands out as a big swath paralleling the West Coast, and the footprints of

FIGURE 1: (pages 4–5)
Actual and projected housing densities for the 11 Western states.



the larger interior cities like Phoenix, Denver, and Salt Lake City, which blossom into significant urban sprawls. Rural valleys across the mountain West, for example in western Colorado, exhibit marked exurbanization by 2040. You can see these maps in motion at www.centerwest.org/futures.

A few caveats: Our maps are just one way to look at Western development, but we hope they generate more searching discussions about how citizens want the region to evolve. Any projection is uncertain, and even the empirical data for 1960 and 2000 required some manipulation to

reflect housing density (as described in the appendix at the end of this report and at www.centerwest.org/futures). Our maps do not reflect private land conservation or open space owned by local governments (most such parcels are too small to show up at this scale). Finally, many development features that affect wildlife habitat and other land values, like highways, military operations areas, industrial complexes, and mines, are not reflected by maps of housing density, so the total footprint of development is larger than we depict here.

