

# Balancing Act

Comprehensive plan update is our chance for a future that sustains quality of life.

Cautionary tales about paving over paradise range from the classic fable about killing the goose that laid the golden egg to the old saying “Don’t poop where you eat.”

The point is clear – unplanned growth could destroy the very qualities that draw people to Jackson Hole in the first place: our unparalleled wildlife, scenery, open spaces and community character.

The statistics on Page 2 show how much Teton County has grown in the past 30 or so years. And since many of the people who can afford to live anywhere in the world apparently want to live here (at least part of the time), the pressure to grow even more isn’t going away anytime soon.

The good news is, our community can help decide how, and how much, we want to grow. The Jackson/Teton County Comprehensive Plan is currently being updated, which gives each one of us the opportunity – and responsibility – to say what’s most important to us, and to help decide *how* to grow so that what’s important is protected.

Balancing growth with conservation won’t be easy, but we hope the following information will show that balance is possible, and it’s not going to happen without your help. ■





# Too Big for our Britches?

## Just how much has Jackson Hole grown, and why does it matter?

It's challenging to get a handle on growth in Jackson Hole. Many statistics aren't current, it's tricky to count commuters and tourists, plus it's often difficult to compare "apples to apples." It's also hard to quantify the qualities of small-town life that we cherish and want to preserve.

That said, it's still critical to try to measure Jackson Hole's growth for many reasons. As population and building numbers increase, their impacts increase. Jackson Hole lies at the heart of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, home to a collection of wildlife species not found anywhere else on Earth. So we can't afford to make mistakes in our planning and growth.

We also need to think about how many people Jackson Hole can bear without permanent damage being done to the valley. What's the ability of our built resources (roads, wastewater treatment plants, etc.) and natural resources (aquifers, wildlife, air, etc.) to absorb population growth and related development without degradation? Finding these answers will take research. Meanwhile, here are some ballpark numbers for you to consider:

| <u>Total Population</u><br>(Teton County, Wyo., residents) | <u>1980</u>  | <u>1990</u>   | <u>2007</u>   | <u>Estimated at Buildout</u> |
|--|--------------|---------------|---------------|------------------------------|
|  | <b>9,491</b> | <b>11,173</b> | <b>20,002</b> | <b>37,580</b>                |

Number of new people expected to become Teton County residents between 2005 and 2020, according to the Wyoming Department of Transportation: **7,000**.

Number of registered vehicles in Teton County in 1980: **12,106**. The number in 2007: **36,000**.

Average daily number of vehicles traveling on Highway 22 between Jackson and Wilson in 1994: **11,500**.  
Average number in 2007: **16,029**.

Number of calls (making reports and requesting service) to Teton County Sheriff's Office and Jackson Police Department dispatch in 2000: **29,684**; in 2006: **87,408**.

|   | <u>Number of Existing Housing Units</u> | <u>Estimated Capacity for Additional Housing Units*</u> | <u>Total Existing and Potential Housing Units*</u> | <u>Amount of Existing Non-Residential Development</u> | <u>Estimated Capacity for Additional Non-Residential*</u> | <u>Total Existing and Potential Non-Residential*</u> |
|---|---|---|--|---|---|--|
| In Unincorporated Teton County (as of 2005) | <b>7,200</b>                            | <b>5,200*</b>   | <b>12,400*</b>                                     | <b>4.6 million sq. ft.</b>                            | <b>1.2 million sq. ft.*</b>                               | <b>5.8 million sq. ft.*</b>                          |
| In the Town of Jackson (as of 2007)         | <b>4,100</b>                            | <b>3,950*</b>   | <b>8,050*</b>                                      | <b>4.9 million sq. ft.</b>                            | <b>664,500 sq. ft.*</b>                                   | <b>5.6 million sq. ft.*</b>                          |
| County and Town Combined                    | <b>11,300</b>                           | <b>9,150*</b>   | <b>20,450*</b>                                     | <b>9.5 million sq. ft.</b>                            | <b>1.9 million sq. ft.*</b>                               | <b>11.4 million sq. ft.*</b>                         |

\*These rounded numbers are all based on current "base" zoning, without the possibility of upzones. A report by the Comp Plan consultant, Clarion Associates, conservatively estimates that if "zoning options" are taken into account, Teton County and Jackson combined could reach a buildout of 21,580 housing units, 13.1 million square feet of commercial and office space, and a population of 37,580 residents.

Sources: Clarion Associates' Existing Conditions Snapshot, Jan. 30, 2008; Wyoming Department of Transportation; The Charture Institute; U. S. Census Bureau; 2007 Teton County Housing Needs Assessment; Teton County Sheriff's Office, Teton County Assessor



**Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance**

Partnering for a wild & beautiful valley since 1979

The Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance published this brochure to encourage friends and neighbors to stand up for our unique community, wildlife and natural resources.

For more information on how you can get involved, please contact us at (307) 733-9417 or info@jhalliance.org, or visit our website at www.jhalliance.org. Thanks!

# Intelligent Growth Considers Context

Development can't be smart if it ignores Jackson Hole's unique setting.

Jackson Hole is a critical part of an unparalleled ecosystem that includes some of the world's most cherished wildlife and wildlands. That's why we have a unique responsibility to take an intelligent approach to growth. Our community is undeniably linked – ecologically, economically and culturally – to the landscape in which it sits. How we grow affects the health of this ecosystem, and the quality of life and experience for all who live and visit here.

Knowing this, how should we plan our future? By heeding these wise words: A land-use decision tends to be the right one if it considers both the large scale and the long term. To grow intelligently in Teton County, we need to make land-use decisions within the context of long-term consequences to the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem.

There's little we can do about the density and type of development that already exists here, but our community has a key role in directing future land-use decisions. Smart growth is possible because communities, through the use of comprehensive plans, have the right to determine their own character and extent of development. For example, in places without comprehensive planning, you'll be hard pressed to find smart growth. You're more likely to find sprawl that's a result of individual, piecemeal decisions.

And planned growth can only be as effective as corresponding zoning regulations and their enforcement. Devising a smart plan, and having the commitment to enforce it, are both essential.

It's also necessary to grow slowly, so changes can be monitored and corrections made if need be. But the lesson doesn't stop at "Grow Slow, Grow Smart." The ecological and social impacts of growth depend on the rate at which development occurs, the patterns in which it's imposed, and the scale or intensity at which it's applied. To be smart, these diverse aspects of growth must be evaluated collectively. Consequently, a smart community is one that grows at a responsible rate; plans development patterns that are strategically configured to protect key resources, ecological functions and a high quality of life; and includes densities and scales of development appropriate to sustaining community character and achieving compatibility with the underlying ecosystem.

Jackson Hole's unique context is that it's a gateway community to an incomparable ecosystem. Let's all follow this guiding principle from our present Comprehensive Plan: "Teton County's wildlife and scenic resources are a local and national treasure, and, therefore, the community recognizes a stewardship responsibility for their protection. Future development in Teton County will take place in this context." ■

## What's Smart Growth?

The following 10 principles of smart growth have been accepted by most organizations working for sustainable development. (Sustainability refers to using a resource so that it's not depleted or permanently damaged.) The principles are all subject to interpretation, however. Truly intelligent growth means applying them within the big-picture context of our unique gateway community.

- Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty and critical environmental areas.
- Create walkable neighborhoods.
- Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration.
- Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place.
- Make development decisions predictable, fair and cost-effective.
- Mix land uses.
- Create a range of housing opportunities and choices.
- Provide a variety of transportation choices.
- Strengthen and direct development towards existing communities.
- Take advantage of compact building design.

## Why is it so important to protect wildlife habitat on private lands?

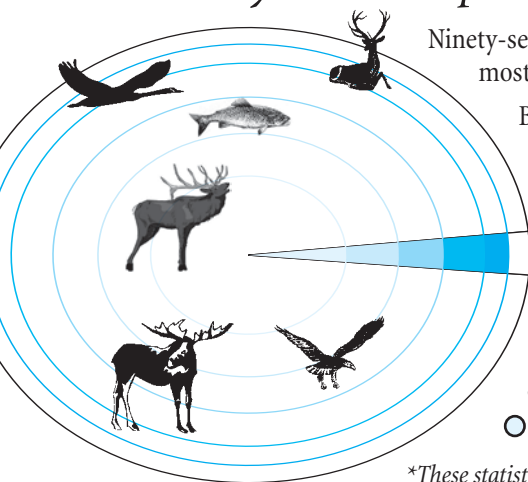
Ninety-seven percent of the approximately 2.7 million acres of Teton County is public land. This limits most development to the remaining 3 percent, about 76,560 acres of privately owned lands.

But even though private lands make up only a small part of the county, they tend to be located in prime spots for people – and for wildlife – on bottom lands near rivers, in areas with the warmest temperatures, the least snow and the most fertile soils. So wildlife ends up competing with humans for habitat, especially during winter, the most stressful time of the year for moose, deer, elk and other native species dependent on private lands for survival.

### Private lands in Teton County hold approximately:\*

- 90% of mule deer winter range
- 80% of crucial winter range for trumpeter swans
- 64% of the spawning grounds for fine-spotted Snake River cutthroat trout
- 43% of the crucial winter range for moose
- 41% of Jackson Hole's bald eagle nests
- 22% of crucial winter range for elk

\*These statistics are from a 1994 study funded by the Alliance – see Page 8 for stories about efforts to get more current data.



# Better Plan Leads to Better Protection

Setting priorities, as well as goals, is a focus this time around.

The most important task facing Jackson Hole right now is creating a Comprehensive Plan that works to protect what makes our community and landscape unique.

Our current Comp Plan was passed in 1994, and it's clear that many factors, such as intense development pressure, rather than the community vision outlined in that plan, have been shaping Jackson Hole since then.



This year's plan update process gives us the opportunity to evaluate where we are, re-evaluate where we want to go, and figure out how to get there.

Growth in Teton County is a complex issue because private land is scarce and the stakes are high. Many people want a simpler, more predictable Comp Plan that leaves less room for interpretation. Many also want the new plan to provide direction in terms of priorities, rather than simply to outline community goals. Such a plan would include clear direction when diverse interests appear to conflict.

Why is this clarity essential? It provides predictability, fairness and cost-effective decision-making to land owners, land purchasers, government and the public. Most important, it ensures that the community's vision will be upheld despite pressures to change land-use practices. On a practical level, the Comp Plan update is just the first step of a longer process to revise our land development regulations. These regulations implement the Comp Plan and include specific development standards, zoning techniques and so on. This revision will follow the adoption of the new Comp Plan, which is expected this fall.

## What's a Comp Plan?

A Comprehensive Plan is a long-range blueprint to guide the growth and development of a community according to the vision of members of that community. The Town of Jackson and Teton County are jointly updating our 1994 Comp Plan so it will reflect current conditions and community values.

A vision is a statement saying what kind of place the people living there want it to become. These were all stated visions of the 1994 plan: Preserving scenic vistas, wildlife diversity and abundance; continuing ranching and other traditional agriculture; and maintaining 1) good quality air and water, 2) a strong economy based on visitation, and 3) a balanced community not dominated by lodging and resorts.

To date, Clarion Associates, the Comp Plan consultant, has held three meetings for the general public that focused on: an analysis of the 1994 Comp Plan and current conditions; determining new guiding principles, goals and policies; and identifying land-use alternatives and preferences for a new plan (see below). ■

## BEST CASE SCENARIO?

The Jackson/Teton County Comp Plan update is now in the critical land-use planning phase, during which planners have asked the public to make difficult but necessary choices about future development.

In February and March, town and county planning staff asked people to vote on four growth scenarios: Wildlife Conservation Focus, Compact Centers and Housing Focus (a scenario most similar to the 1994 Comprehensive Plan currently in effect), Jackson "Town as Heart" Focus

and Limited Growth Focus. Each scenario was designed to be an extreme example of the kinds of tradeoffs that valley residents will need to make as they set priorities for the Comp Plan vision. Survey results are available at [www.jacksontetonplan.com](http://www.jacksontetonplan.com).

Planners intend to meld these results into one hybrid land-use scenario to reflect the community's vision. They'll present that scenario for comment at the next public meeting, which is tentatively set for early May. ■

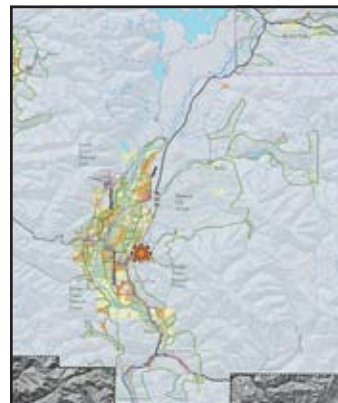
Scenario A: Wildlife/Conservation



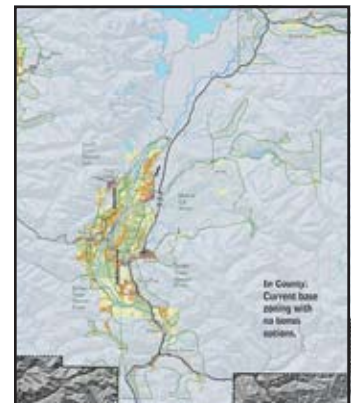
B: Compact Centers and Housing



C: Jackson "Town as Heart"



D: Least Growth



For details on how you can participate in the Comp Plan update, visit [www.jacksontetonplan.com](http://www.jacksontetonplan.com).

# Balancing Actions

Solutions and tools to help manage growth are there if we look.

The 1994 Comprehensive Plan did a lot of things right. It established urban, suburban and rural character districts; increased the minimum lot size in undeveloped areas from one home per 3 acres to one home per 35 acres; laid the foundation for Natural and Scenic Resource Overlays to help preserve wildlife and views; and set goals for affordable housing and transportation. But data from an analysis of the '94 plan, available at [www.jacksontetonplan.com](http://www.jacksontetonplan.com), shows that although the plan has had some successes, a lack of enforcement – plus Teton County's rate of growth since '94 – have far outstripped its ability to manage that growth.

Here's a roundup of planning tools that could be used in combination to ensure that our community will "Grow Slow, Grow Smart." All have advantages and disadvantages, and all should be explored as our community goes through the Comprehensive Plan update process. Visit [www.jhalliance.org/issuesgrowth.htm](http://www.jhalliance.org/issuesgrowth.htm) for more information.

## Development Caps

A development cap is a technique that sets an upper limit on the total amount of development or population buildout within a community. Development caps usually follow one of two methods. One quantifies the maximum buildout of a community, based on the ability of its infrastructure and natural resources to absorb growth without degradation, and it restricts development from exceeding that level.

The second method restricts annual growth to a predetermined percentage. For instance, Boulder, Colo., adopted residential growth limits in the 1970s that capped permits for new homes at 450 per year to keep its annual growth rate below 2 percent. More recently, Boulder sought to limit its amount of commercial growth because jobs were growing faster than population. A drawback of caps is that they could cause more pressure on outlying communities, such as Star Valley and Teton County, Idaho, to grow.

## Infill Strategies

Since the type and location of growth are just as important as the amount and rate of growth, many communities are devising infill and redevelopment programs to combat sprawl. In Teton County, this translates into the "Jackson as Heart of the Region" or "Town as Heart" concept, under which denser residential and mixed-use development is encouraged in town in the hope that it would limit sprawl in the county. Adding density in Jackson, where infrastructure and services already exist, makes sense. But what good is it to grow "up" in town without restrictions on growing "out" into the county? Jackson and Teton County must coordinate their planning efforts to gain the most benefit. Here are some common infill strategies:

- **Community and Urban Growth Boundaries:** This strategy uses infrastructure and urban service extension policies to define areas where new development will or will not have access to municipal services, like sewer and water, thus steering new development toward designated growth areas. Jackson has public lands blocking development to the north and east, so the pressure to grow is to the south and west. Where to draw the line is the rub.

- **Transfers of Development Rights:** TDRs are the process by which development rights are transferred from a parcel in a "sending district," where land conservation is sought, to a parcel in a "receiving district," where property development is desired. This strategy works with a Community Growth Boundary: Areas outside the boundary are downzoned, but, while

losing rights to develop their properties at formerly permitted densities, property owners in the sending districts get development rights that they can sell to landowners in the receiving districts. Planners are currently exploring whether TDRs are legal and feasible under Wyoming statutes.

- **Zoning and Overlay Changes:** Overlays, such as the Natural Resource and Scenic Resource overlays, designate areas that rate special protection (see Page 8 for more about overlays). Zoning regulations are the nuts and bolts of implementing smart growth plans. Both must be evaluated often – and enforced fairly – to make sure they're working as intended. For instance, this past fall, the Jackson Town Council approved a zoning change to allow residential uses on the second and third floors of buildings in districts zoned commercial. More amendments that would increase density in town are being considered, but again, to avert costly sprawl, upzones in town must be balanced by downzones elsewhere in the county.



## Open Space Protection

Some communities have raised funds through special taxes, such as a 1 percent real estate transfer tax, to preserve open space by buying development rights from property owners. When a landowner sells his or her development rights, the right to develop or subdivide that parcel is permanently relinquished, and the restriction is recorded in a conservation easement attached to the property deed. In this area, the Jackson Hole Land Trust, Teton County Scenic Preserve Trust, The Nature Conservancy and willing landowners have been the leaders in securing easements. As of August 2007, the Land Trust had helped protect about 20,440 acres, or almost 27 percent of private land in the county.

## Community and Environmental Impact Statements

For developers to be granted an upzone (an increase in density from existing zoning), they must show that the community benefits from the upzone and proposed development will outweigh the costs of its impacts. Some counties require a community and environmental impacts analysis as part of the application process for any development proposal that asks for a major upzone. That way an informed, intelligent decision can be made.

## Impact Fees and Mitigation

Impact fees are paid by property developers to local governments for infrastructure to support new development. In 1996, Jackson and Teton County considered, but did not adopt, impact fees. Mitigation of the impacts of development, such as an increased need for affordable housing and degradation of wildlife habitat, is discussed on Pages 6 through 8. Requiring developers to help relieve the community costs caused by their developments is yet another way of managing growth. ■

# Catch 22?

## Exploring the link between affordable housing and land-use planning.

One of the common consequences of rapid growth is a lack of affordable housing, because both commercial and residential growth create a demand for new workers, who need places to live.

So ironically, quickly building high-density developments that provide some affordable housing can actually generate a demand for *more* affordable housing.

This vicious circle highlights the complexity of the relationship between affordable housing and responsible land-use planning. Development of affordable housing has both benefits and costs for our social and natural environments, and finding a balance through responsible planning is the difficult task ahead for Jackson Hole.

For decades, the Conservation Alliance has recognized the importance of social diversity in our community and has actively supported measures, such as affordable housing, to protect it. We've also recognized that affordable housing is only one component of the much broader issue

of community growth, and therefore it shouldn't be addressed in a vacuum. We believe that if viable solutions are to be found, the issue of affordable housing must be fully understood.

Preserving existing workforce housing, and making sure community development and redevelopment both occur at a reasonable rate, will reduce demands to produce additional housing. Outlined below are other pieces of the puzzle that our community needs to consider in a comprehensive way.

We're fortunate to be updating the Jackson/Teton County Comprehensive Plan, which gives us the opportunity to set priorities and work toward solving our community's need for affordable housing. Of course, taking a comprehensive approach isn't always the easy route. But then again, easy paths rarely lead to the best possible outcome. Protecting Jackson Hole is worth the extra effort of comprehensively tackling the important issue of affordable housing. ■

### To comprehensively address our affordable housing problem, we need to:

- Support the concept that as a gateway community, Jackson Hole has a unique obligation to develop land in a way that preserves our one-of-a-kind environment, economy and community. To protect wildlife and our unique role in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, we also need to consider the capacity of our area to absorb the impacts of growth.
- Employ diverse strategies to complement the production of new affordable housing. For example, Burlington, Vermont's affordable housing agenda is built around three "Ps": "Protection of the vulnerable, preservation of existing affordable housing and production of new affordable housing."
- Balance rental and ownership housing through production and preservation to meet the needs of both our seasonal workforce and the permanent resident population. Redevelopment policies, such as Jackson's controversial apartment-to-condominium conversion process, should be evaluated in this light. (It's been the practice of the Town of Jackson to streamline condominium conversions, which haven't had to abide by affordable housing mitigation requirements that other development types must comply with. Thus renters who are integral to our community, and part of the workforce, are being displaced. Town planners and officials are currently revisiting condo conversion policies.)
- Increase mitigation requirements for affordable housing to *at least* a 40 percent rate for Teton County and the Town of Jackson, as recommended by the Teton County Housing Authority's 2007 Housing Needs Assessment. (See "Mitigating Impacts" above right for details.)
- Strengthen density guidelines and development standards for the Planned Unit Development-Affordable Housing zoning district to ensure a more predictable balance with other community needs. (The current PUD-AH zoning district has no limit on the number of housing units a developer can be awarded as a bonus for providing 50 percent traditional affordable housing. This has resulted in development proposals like Teton Meadows Ranch, which is seeking an upzone to 500 units on a 288-acre parcel currently allowed only 8 units under its base rural zoning, or up to 49 units if a density bonus were awarded for 70 percent open space protection. Visit [www.jhalliance.org/issuesgrowth.htm](http://www.jhalliance.org/issuesgrowth.htm) for more information on this and other current specific development proposals.)
- Map appropriate locations for affordable housing that minimize impacts to wildlife and follow Smart Growth principles (see box on Page 3).

### MITIGATING IMPACTS

In December, the Teton Board of County Commissioners approved amendments to increase affordable housing mitigation rates for new residential developments in the county from 15 to 25 percent. In the Town of Jackson, a proposed similar amendment remains in limbo.

However, even 25 percent is not enough. *Developers need to supply at least enough affordable housing to satisfy the demand for affordable housing new developments themselves will generate.* The 2007 Housing Needs Assessment, available from the Teton County Housing Authority, recommends increasing the mitigation rate to a *minimum* of 40 percent just to "keep up" with housing needs associated with new growth. (For comparison, in Aspen, Colo., 60 percent of new housing units are required to be affordable.)

The report also states that 87 percent of the time, developers in Teton County have been allowed to just convey land to fulfill affordable housing requirements, rather than build actual affordable homes: "The resources required to develop these projects...were not paid for by the developer *even though town and county rules required it*, and should be recognized as a form of subsidy by the community."

This, plus substandard mitigation rates, have both caused pressure to allow high-density spot zoning in inappropriate places, risking our community's wildlife and rural character.



## Why is there a shortage of affordable housing here?

Demand is exceeding supply. Our unmatched scenery, wildlife and recreational opportunities give this area tremendous appeal. Simply put, many people who can afford to live anywhere in the world want to own a piece of Jackson Hole. And they're outbidding many of our local working families. According to the 2007 Teton County Housing Needs Assessment, average single-family home prices in Teton County increased by about 80 percent between 2000 and 2005, while average wages increased by only 22 percent. This means that local wage earners are being priced out of the housing market. On top of this, Jackson Hole's commercial and residential growth create a demand for new workers, who have to live somewhere. Many new employees can't afford local housing, so they commute.

### BY THE NUMBERS

- Since the chapter on affordable housing was added to the current Comp Plan in 1995, a total of 819 affordable and employee housing units have been built in Teton County. About 51 percent resulted from mitigation requirements placed on developers; 15 percent from incentives in the Land Development Regulations; 15 percent from direct development by the Teton County Housing Authority, Jackson Hole Community Housing Trust, Habitat for Humanity and Pioneer Homestead; and 10 percent from private employers.\*
- The median single-family house price in Jackson Hole exceeds \$1,000,000, and essentially no ownership unit is available under \$500,000.\*
- What it would take to buy a \$500,000 home, according to Jackson State Bank: A \$25,000 minimum down payment; a \$475,000 loan; and a resulting \$3,800 monthly payment, including taxes and insurance. (This assumes 7 percent interest on a 30-year fixed mortgage.) The minimum annual income to qualify for this loan: \$136,000
- Teton County's median household income: \$81,000 (*Charture Institute*)

\*Source: 2007 Analysis of 1994 Comp Plan

## More homes don't mean extra tax revenues\*

*The Sonoran Institute has conducted a number of fiscal impact studies on Western communities, which have shown that residential growth rarely pays for itself and indeed often costs communities more than it generates in tax revenues. Another study, "Fiscal Impacts of Growth in Teton County, Wyoming" was commissioned by the Conservation Alliance in 2000 and confirmed these findings for Jackson Hole. (It's available online at [www.jhalliance.org/libraryreports.htm](http://www.jhalliance.org/libraryreports.htm).)*

County officials and other elected leaders are often led to believe that land converted to residential use will provide local government with extra revenue due to an expanded tax base. Acres of houses generate more income from taxes than acres of ranch land and open space. But when the costs of public infrastructure and services, such as schools, teachers, roads, public transportation and law enforcement, are taken into account, the financial contributions that homeowners make to tax revenues are far outweighed by increased demand for these services.

In general, Cost of Community Services studies around the country have found that counties receive more tax revenue from commercial and industrial uses than has to be spent in the form of services for them. The same is true for farmland and open space. But residential use, which usually generates more gross tax revenue than the other types of use, often leaves a county

*\*Excerpted from "Ten Truths & Trends in the New American West," Sept. 2006, used with permission from the Sonoran Institute, [www.sonoran.org](http://www.sonoran.org).*



Patterns of land use affect the costs of providing public infrastructure and services such as roads, schools, water, sewers and garbage collection. Studies show that these costs tend to increase with sprawl (dispersed development outside existing town boundaries), and can be reduced with Smart Growth (compact, planned development within town boundaries). See Page 3 for more on Smart Growth.

*Photo by Erika Muschaweck*

with a net financial loss after the costs of roads, schools, sewers and the like are factored in.

Uncontrolled residential development generally leads to either increased property taxes or decreased public services.

### COMMUNITY COSTS RELATED TO GROWTH\*

#### Costs for infrastructure & services:

- School facilities (K-12)
- Sanitary sewer system
- Storm drainage system
- Transportation system
- Water service facilities
- Fire protection facilities
- Parkland & recreation facilities
- Police facilities
- Library facilities
- General government facilities
- Electric power generation & distribution
- Natural gas distribution system
- Solid waste disposal facilities
- Wages for people to staff these facilities

#### Environmental costs & other impacts:

- Decreased air quality
- Decreased water quality
- Increased rates of resource consumption
- Increased noise
- Lost open space & resource lands (farms, forests)
- Lost visual & other natural amenity values
- Lost wildlife habitat
- Increased regulation
- Lost mobility due to traffic congestion
- Higher cost of housing
- Higher cost of living
- Increased crime
- Lost sense of community
- Costs to future generations

\*Source: "Better Not Bigger" by Eben Fodor, available at Teton County Library

# Saving a Space for Wildlife

Improving the Natural Resource Overlay tool is key to habitat protection.

Wildlife needs unbroken, connected habitat on both public and private lands to survive. And even though privately owned lands make up only 3 percent of Teton County, many are located in the best areas for wildlife (see sidebar on Page 3). So development activities on private lands have both direct impacts on native species, such as habitat loss and fragmentation, and indirect impacts, such as the effects of increased noise and pets. To balance both human and wildlife needs, it's critical to identify where to steer future development.

This starts with having good information about which areas are most important for wildlife, so the Conservation Alliance has teamed up with the Conservation Research Center of Teton Science Schools, the Wyoming Game and Fish Department and others to compile the best available scientific data on wildlife habitat in the county. These data on species like moose, elk, mule deer, trumpeter swans, bald eagles and trout include crucial

winter ranges, migration corridors, year-round ranges, nesting sites and spawning grounds. Through this project, we are reassessing the Natural Resource Overlay zone (NRO), which was established in 1994 but hasn't been reviewed since then (see box below). Our project aims to determine if the NRO still encompasses Jackson Hole's most critical wildlife habitat and corridors. Just as important, we're identifying information gaps, such as understudied geographic locations and species.

Our community is fortunate to have the NRO as a planning tool. That said, the extent to which it can actually curb development and its impacts is limited. For this reason, the Alliance has also undertaken research to determine if the NRO has been effective in limiting development in crucial areas for wildlife, and whether development trends, in terms of location and intensity, have put species at risk. In the months ahead, we'll also analyze to what extent the NRO addresses

critical conservation issues, such as landscape connectivity and cumulative impacts. Our community needs more protection for functional, contiguous, long-term wildlife habitat than what our current NRO provides, so the Conservation Alliance will advocate for complementary policies and planning tools to achieve this goal.

Making sure that we know the right places to prioritize for protection – and that we implement the most effective policies and planning tools to achieve that protection – are critical steps to take as part of our community's Comprehensive Plan update. The first phase of our NRO project reconfirmed that what happens on privately owned lands in Teton County definitely matters to wildlife. Stay tuned for news on the next phase later this year. ■

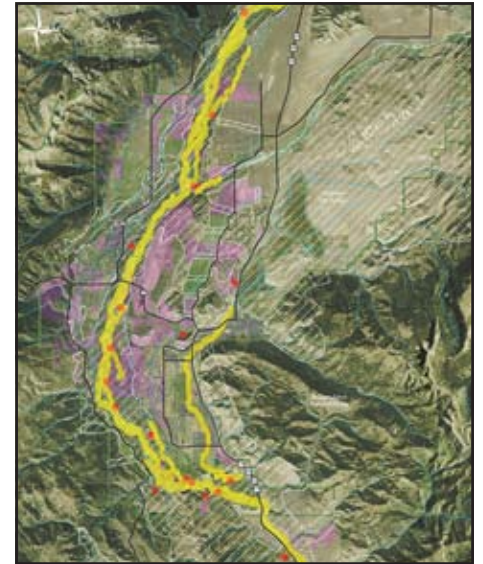
*We'd like to thank the Community Foundation of Jackson Hole, the Wyoming Community Foundation, and individual donors for making this NRO project possible.*

## What's the NRO?

Preserving the diversity and abundance of Jackson Hole's wildlife is one of the goals of the 1994 Comprehensive Plan, and the Natural Resource Overlay is a planning tool to help accomplish that goal. The NRO is a designation on town and county zoning maps that shows the location of lands with special wildlife values. Regulations require the developer of a property in the NRO to do an analysis of the potential environmental impacts of the development. Also, if developers disturb private lands that the county has determined are critical wildlife habitat, they're required to mitigate by improving habitat on other private land in the county on a basis of two acres of habitat enhancement for every one acre of disturbed NRO land.

Since so much of Teton County's privately owned land is crucial for wildlife (see sidebar on Page 3), it's probably time to consider requiring an environmental analysis as part of the application process for *any* development proposal that asks for a major upzone, whether it's in the NRO or not.

To survive, wildlife needs year-round access to food and water, large areas undisturbed by humans and pets, and corridors to be able to move between summer and winter habitat. We've mapped the best data on wildlife habitat in Teton County; the one at right shows bald eagle nesting areas. The maps will be available at [www.jhalliance.org/maps.htm](http://www.jhalliance.org/maps.htm) in April.



The number of plant and animal species listed as either threatened or endangered under the U.S. Endangered Species Act has topped 1,300. For the vast majority of these species – almost 85 percent – habitat loss and fragmentation are the major causes of their imperilment as well as the most significant threats to their conservation. There is no doubt that the number of imperiled species will continue to grow as more habitat is converted for, and fragmented by, human development and use. Moreover, across North America, even many non-imperiled species are finding their habitats impaired, their ranges diminished, and their numbers in retreat. The time to act is now, before additional species populations begin to decline precipitously.

– *Lasting Landscapes: Reflections on the Role of Conservation Science in Land Use Planning, Environmental Law Institute, 2007*

Our generation faces the greatest challenge of all. The Greater Yellowstone region is growing at two times – and habitat loss at six times – the national rate.... At the current rate of permanent habitat loss, the extraordinary wildlife that characterizes this region will not be maintained for future generations.

– *Paul Hansen, Director of the Nature Conservancy's Greater Yellowstone Program, Jackson Hole News&Guide Guest Shot, Feb. 27, 2008*