

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.

