

March 10, 2020

Jackson Mayor and Town Council
Teton County Board of County Commissioners

Memo: Need for and use of \$5-10M sustainable public funding for ecosystem conservation

Dear Mayor, Councilors, and Commissioners:

Please accept the following recommendations regarding future budgets and potential new revenue streams such as the 7th penny. We appreciated the recent Town Council retreat framework of basic services; current programs; and gaps where our community is currently not funding our values, such as the environment. Recognizing that the need for conservation funding is not universally understood, we developed the following outline to demonstrate the scale of the need, and *potential* uses of funds (pending future budget discussion). This is a large number, which reflects the magnitude of “deferred maintenance” on our ecosystem, and which could successfully be funded by a portion of the 7th penny. While we understand that the 7th penny cannot be legally tied to any specific use, we hope that you will adopt resolutions showing your intent to use new funds to address our serious conservation needs, so we can engage our members in supporting new revenue tools.

Our residents have long called for dedicated conservation funding – yet we haven’t acted.
Our community wrote a clear desire for conservation funding into the 2012 Comprehensive Plan:

“The community should explore the establishment of a dedicated funding source for conservation easements and other measures that protect the wildlife habitat, habitat connections, and scenery valued by the community. Critical habitat, habitat connections and scenic viewsheds are often located on valuable private land. A dedicated funding source would allow the Town and County to work with conservation groups and private land owners to permanently protect from development and actively steward lands valuable to the community.” (Policy 1.4.d)

Now is the time to fund our community values of ecosystem and climate sustainability.
Jackson Hole is the southern end of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem and the Yellowstone-to-Yukon corridor. Climate change directly threatens everything we care about, including many native species and critical ecological processes supporting the area’s important biodiversity. On the positive side, our cold, high mountain terrain may provide critical climate refugia – rare places where wild animals and plants may be able to survive a changing climate. As stewards of this landscape, it is our responsibility to preserve or improve it for future generations.

While many programs and services provided by the Town and County directly or indirectly benefit our ecosystem stewardship goals – from investments in multimodal transportation to improved stormwater infrastructure and smart land-use planning – they are not enough. And as much philanthropy, volunteers, and political support as we provide to private landowners and agencies that manage our lands, we are nowhere near mitigating the increasing pressures and threats on our ecosystem – including climate change, habitat fragmentation on private lands, interruption of wildlife migration and movement corridors, increased visitation, and industrial-scale recreation on public lands.

How we could use additional public funding

We respectfully offer the following as potential uses of increased funding that, if done in concert with hiring an environmental planner or other conservation-focused staff, would help us realize our community vision of “preserving and protecting our area’s ecosystem.” 97% of Teton County is public land, and our water, wildlife, and natural processes rely on the totality of the landscape, both public and private. Public land agencies like the Bridger-Teton National Forest currently lack the resources needed to manage rapidly increasing and diversifying visitor use in Teton County. Encouraging stewardship efforts on private land is equally important to maintaining open space, protecting water quality, preventing rural sprawl, and preserving critical wildlife habitat and movement – and additional funding could better incentivize that work.

Note: this is not a comprehensive and specific proposal, but rather a demonstration of the scale of the need. If additional funds are obtained through the 7th penny or other sources, we expect a vigorous discussion about each potential use listed here.

Potential use of funds	Cost estimate
Hire conservation/sustainability staff : environmental planner, sustainability coordinator, Teton County Scenic Preserve Trust coordinator	\$200K - \$500K yearly
Offset costs of new environmental regulations like the plastic bag ban or bear-proof trash cans	\$1M, one-time
Climate : action planning, energy conservation, carbon capture, offsets, etc.	\$1M yearly
Habitat restoration : matching funds for partner-led restoration projects on public or private lands	\$2M yearly
Purchase of development rights : buy conservation easements on important habitat and open space; buy down future density	\$5M yearly
Landowner incentives to go beyond what’s required: wildlife-friendly fencing, native landscaping, allowing elk on land as feeding decreases, choosing to follow higher tier of Natural Resource Protection than required	\$1M yearly
Water quality : septic or well testing, Flat Creek & Fish Creek, Hoback and other neighborhood water treatment, green infrastructure, wastewater planning and infrastructure, installing more advanced septic than required	\$500K yearly
“Rainy day” fund for environmental crises , such as if aquatic invasive species were to be found in local waterways	\$1M once
Plan for and implement high-value land transfers , such as BLM parcels along Snake River or state lands	\$1M occasional
Research : ecosystem health, cumulative impact study, conservation metrics	\$200K once

Total cost: \$5-10 million annually can accomplish significant conservation outcomes.

We hope this outline is helpful as you develop a vision for potential new funding such as a 7th penny of general revenue, and we hope you will include ecosystem conservation in your plans and resolutions for how to spend those funds. If there is a clear link from new revenue to conservation, ecosystem, and climate action, we will work hard to engage our constituents and the whole community in supporting the ballot measure.

Sincerely,

The following members of the Systems of Conservation collaborative:

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