



Conservation Recommendations
for the Northern South Park Neighborhood Plan
by Chelsea Carson, Conservation Program Manager
March 20, 2021

South Park is a microcosmic representation of the struggle in Jackson and Teton County to both provide for our essential workers' housing needs *and* preserve and protect wildlife, their habitat, and scenic vistas and working lands. In exchange for an upzone in Northern South Park (NSP), we believe the NSP neighborhood plan should include a large-scale conservation initiative and set a precedent for integrating the community's priorities of ecosystem stewardship with affordable housing. This proposal is based in our Comprehensive Plan:

“South Park is, and should continue to be, the agricultural southern gateway into Jackson. The existing agricultural open space that defines the character of the district, provides a scenic foreground for Teton views, wildlife habitat connectivity, reference to our community's heritage and stewardship ethic, and a quiet rural setting for residents. The most important habitat in the district is the Flat Creek riparian corridor; however, **the intensity of wildlife vehicle collisions on South Highway 89 shows the importance of the district's open space for wildlife movement in all directions.** ...

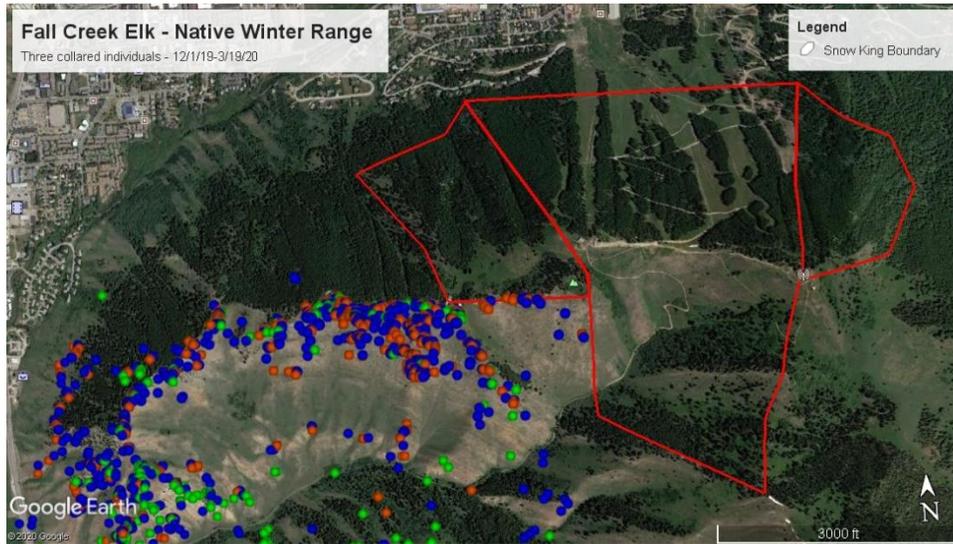
The district should maintain the character that it has today. **Agriculture and other means of preserving open spaces should be encouraged**, and development should be directed into a Complete Neighborhood wherever possible... **Wildlife habitat connectivity and permeability should be enhanced through existing development and across Highway 89.**” – Jackson/Teton County Comprehensive Plan pg. IV-72 [our emphasis]

Baseline inventories, observations, environmental assessments, and wildlife-vehicle collision data all indicate a significant wildlife presence in the greater South Park area. Elk, mule deer and moose, raptors, trumpeter swans, songbirds, migratory birds and a variety of waterfowl, amphibians and reptiles both live in and move through the region.

There is significant documented evidence of ungulate movement, specifically mule deer and elk, throughout the Snake River Corridor, throughout the Leeks Canyon / Game Creek area of the Bridger-Teton National Forest, and across S. Highway 89 (Teton County Wildlife Crossings Master Plan; Wyoming Game and Fish).

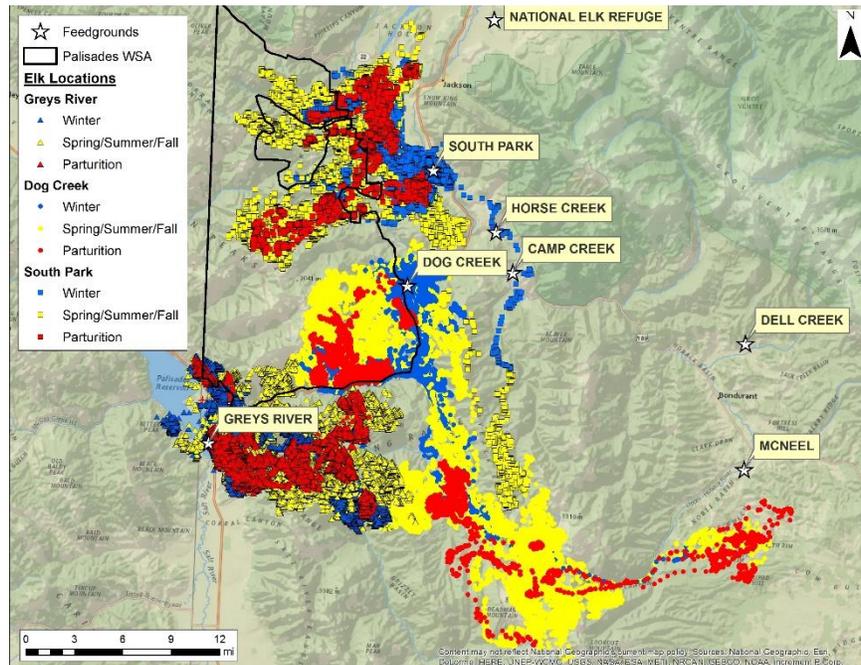
We propose protecting a 200-acre wildlife movement corridor across Central South Park, in coordination with a significant upzone in Northern South Park. In this memo, we share recent publicly-accessible data and information about wildlife habitat and movement in South Park.

Wyoming Game & Fish recently obtained collar data of elk in Leeks Canyon / Josie's Ridge:



Elk distribution from radio-collared data points; Wyoming Game and Fish

As well as data showing significant elk distribution along the Snake River Corridor:



Elk distribution from radio-collared data points; Wyoming Game and Fish

According to the Teton County Wildlife Vehicle Collision Database, S. Highway 89 presents some of the highest fatality rates for large ungulates in Teton County and the highest costs associated with wildlife-vehicle collisions:

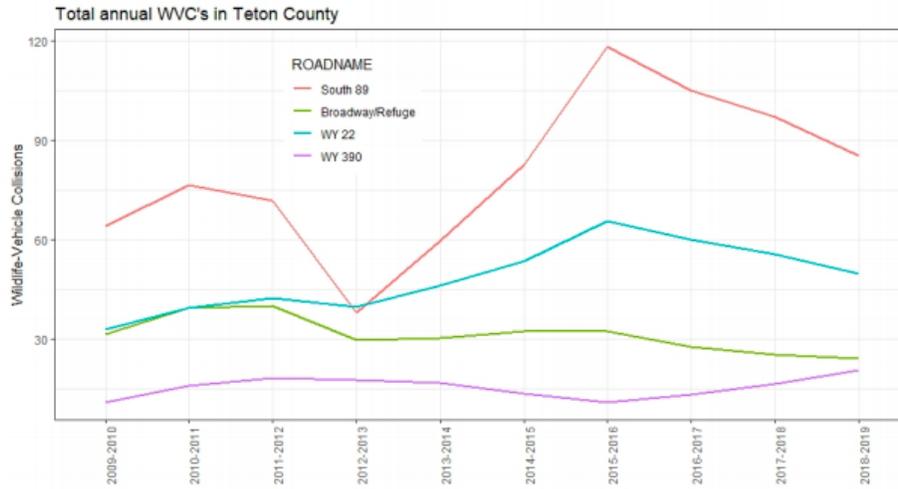


Figure 4. Annual wildlife vehicle collisions on South 89, Broadway/Refuge, WY 22 and WY 390 (2009-2019) (year equals May 1-April 30).

*Jackson Hole Wildlife Foundation:
Teton County Wildlife Vehicle Collision Database Summary Report 2018-2019*

And the Teton County Wildlife Crossings Master Plan identifies S Hwy 89 as a hot spot and potential location for wildlife permeability:



Figure 33. (Potential) mule deer migration corridors through and around Jackson.

Figure 33 from the Teton County Wildlife Crossings Master Plan

Cumulatively, the habitats provided in and around South Park contribute to the overall ecological health of the larger Snake River ecosystem. Biologists hope to work with landowners to enable wildlife movement and migration through the South Park area. Establishing **an agricultural conservation greenbelt south of the new development in NSP** would enhance wildlife utilization and permeability of this area.

The influx of residents and cars from NSP will create more opportunities for human and wildlife interactions. It will be imperative that wildlife has alternatives for moving around the expanded urban footprint rather than through it. A greenway of conservation easements north of the county-owned Valley Springs Ranch (where a wildlife crossing structure could be located if coordinated with landowners) extending west would provide connectivity from the Bridger-Teton wrapping around Snow King and across S Hwy 89 into the private, public, and protected areas leading into the Snake River Corridor and across Hwy 22.

This conservation greenbelt would also help protect the Flat Creek corridor, which has been identified as important riparian habitat for aquatic and terrestrial species, a critical resource for water quality and stormwater runoff, and worthy of intense preservation and restoration measures and funding (Flat Creek Management Plan 2019 Revision). The Comp Plan states, “The Flat Creek corridor should be preserved and enhanced with a focus on wildlife habitat and movement” (IV-72). It is well documented that riparian corridors are among the most important habitat for water quality protection, wildlife preservation, and agricultural production (Johnson & Buffler 2008). Landowners are currently participating in a government-funded restoration project to restore Flat Creek back to a natural state after historical straightening and widening altered the functionality of the stream. The parcels containing Flat Creek from Northern South Park to the Valley Springs Ranch property are some of the last remaining agricultural lands in the watershed and are our last best opportunity to protect the creek.

Finally, a greenbelt of protected land would uphold the rural and agricultural character of South Park by protecting working lands, scenic hayfields, and long-range vistas. Maintaining these scenic viewsheds is an important community objective that would maintain property value and wildlife habitat.

Our community has long considered development in NSP in tandem with conservation elsewhere. The original description of NSP in the 2012 Comprehensive Plan provided “the allowance for development when associated with an opportunity to provide meaningful permanent open space by clustering development into the subarea from a Conservation or Preservation Subarea.” Although the wording was revised in the recent Comp Plan Update, the principle still stands, and Chapter 3 in the Comp Plan suggests these strategies for implementation:

- “Explore tools for transferring development potential from Preservation and Conservation Subareas of ecological significance to Stable and Transitional Subareas in the Town and County” (3.1.S.2)
- “Explore growth boundaries and associated expansion regulations and criteria for Complete Neighborhoods in the Town and County.” (3.1.S.4)

A protected movement corridor in South Park could be achieved through voluntary conservation, philanthropic funding, or offset by additional density as a part of the neighborhood planning process.

We offer this data and analysis as a resource to the landowners, County staff and elected representatives, and community. We hope they will use this data and analysis as a resource as our community crafts a neighborhood for everyone, including wildlife.

Citations

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Girard, C.E., Gosselin, E.N., Remlinger, B. E., and Stallings, B.M. 2019. Flat Creek Watershed Management Plan, Teton County, WY 2019 Revision. Teton Conservation District, Jackson, WY

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Teton County GIS map

["Teton County Wildlife Crossing Master Plan"](#). *Teton County Wildlife Crossings Master Plan*. May 31, 2018.

Wyoming Game and Fish radio-collared elk distribution maps