

***SUMMARY OF COMMENTS on June 2008 Draft “Themes & Policies”
THEME ONE***

Promote Stewardship of Wildlife Habitat and other Environmentally Sensitive Areas and Resources

Big Picture:

Based on the community’s consistently voiced top priority, Theme One should be the foundation of this Plan, rather than an isolated theme. Strategic conservation of the county’s unparalleled wildlife and other natural resources needs to be the basis/foundation of land-use planning decisions. Why? Teton County, including the Town of Jackson, provides an extremely unique planning context. As such, the themes and policies should meaningfully speak to this context – and what it means to be a gateway community committed to stewardship of two premier national parks and one of the last relatively intact ecosystems in North America. In short, the current draft *inadequately* describes the context of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, its irreplaceable wildlife, and how future development and conservation in Jackson Hole can heavily influence regional wildlife habitat and movement corridors and the long-term integrity of the ecosystem.

In general, the current Plan lacks a clear recognition of all the factors that affect our community’s ability to protect wildlife, and therefore insufficiently addresses them. Specifically, while it points to the importance of “patterning” development in a way that protects important habitat, it fails to adequately consider the ways in which both the overall amount of allowable development and the rate of growth can have major impacts on “stewardship” outcomes. By doing so, the Plan highlights the importance of direct effects of development, but undervalues the importance of indirect effects/off-site impacts and cumulative impacts. Indirect and cumulative effects provide substantial threats to achieving our community’s goal to protect wildlife and their habitat; stronger policies are needed to reinforce this recognition.

Key Issues:

- Smart “development patterns” are just one piece of the puzzle in protecting wildlife. We also need to pay attention to other factors, such as the total amount or intensity of development, the rate of development, traffic infrastructure, and dynamic vegetation and habitat conditions (such as those triggered by climate change), to name a few.
- Being cautious (i.e., conservative in terms of development intensity) in land-use decisions is essential, particularly in cases where we lack data, or have outdated data, on particular species or geographic areas.
- It is important to consistently **spell out potential consequences of land-use decisions on wildlife viability**. If development standards are not significantly strengthened in environmentally sensitive areas, individual species are likely to be displaced and the viability of wildlife populations overall will be threatened.
- Habitat connectivity needs to be addressed in significantly greater detail.
- Limitations of science need to be acknowledged, in particularly regarding the identification of “exact thresholds.” Again, where data is lacking, we should be cautious while making land-use decisions.
- Direct, indirect and cumulative effects of development stand to threaten wildlife populations; monitoring must include an analysis of these different forms of “effects.”
- In terms of research priorities, the County should identify the best data collection and management approaches to protect “all native species.” Specifically, the County needs to identify additional species and habitat types that are more representative of diverse species’ needs (in addition to “species of concern”.)
- The Plan speaks to the importance of monitoring, but needs to specifically identify a framework and timeline that is funded and feasible. It needs to better articulate guidelines for monitoring and subsequent modification of land development regulations.
- The differences between “NRO” and “natural resource priority areas” need to be clarified.
- Scenic resource policies need a much closer look, particularly as they relate to this theme.
- Policies (for example, to “protect hillsides”) do not reflect a clear prioritization of values.
- Terminology use is sometimes unclear or inconsistent. Examples include: “steer development away,” “avoid,” “restrict,” “promote,” “require,” and “encourage.” “Will” needs to replace “should” in many cases.
- In light of positive efforts to lessen the footprint in the region, overall numbers (residents, commuters and visitors) still matter. Increased human activities in the region threaten the health of wildlife populations on a day-to-day basis.