



Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance
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“Effective population” matters

Somewhere in the neighborhood of 20,000 people live in Teton County year round. Many, many more people visit here, commute to the valley to work, or work here seasonally. Jackson Hole in 2009 is still, while to a lesser extent than in the past, a transient, seasonal community. All it takes is a stroll around the Town Square or down the aisles of Albertsons to know that our yearly visitor and seasonal worker populations are concentrated into several months. November is not the high season. July, well, we’ve all been here in July.

Our current Comprehensive Plan, approved in 1994, includes an analysis of “effective population,” or how many people are here on a given day, including visitors, transient workers, commuters and permanent residents. This is a critically important number to use when planning for infrastructure including roads, sewer and water, and other basic amenities so that they can be designed with this huge swing in population numbers in mind. According to a 1993 study by the Alliance for Responsible Planning (now the Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance) – with help from the Chamber of Commerce – there is an estimated swing of about 34,000 people between the summer high season and the spring off-season. A 34,000-person difference.

Here in Teton County, we must acknowledge that we have a complex population structure that is seasonally driven. As our permanent population continues to grow, even as our visitor numbers remain relatively consistent, the effective population is on the rise as well. To only plan for those who are here in the spring and fall is to ignore the demographic realities of our community.

The Comprehensive Plan is currently being reviewed by the public and by planning commissioners from the Town and County. A consideration of the effective population of this community must be incorporated into the Plan. This community is unique in the volume of visitors that are funneled here from the National Parks and the irreplaceable natural beauty that we are lucky enough to live within. To accommodate our ever-expanding-and-contracting population, planning in Jackson and Teton County must be based on a realistic understanding of the dynamics of our community.

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