

Going the distance

Perseverance is key – we still have a ways to go to get to a better Comp Plan.



Becky Tillson

By Kristy Bruner,
Alliance Community Planning Director

If you didn't already know, one glance at the Comp Plan timeline at right will tell you what a long haul the Comp Plan revision has been. And it looks like it's far from over.

Three rewrites and more than three years after the process began in 2007, our elected officials are finally on deck to take their swing at the themes and policies section of the latest draft plan in coming months.

What's the message they need to hear? This is it in a nutshell: **While the third draft of the Comp Plan is an improvement over the second draft, much more work needs to be done to make it better than our existing plan, and to ensure that it includes the policies needed to protect Jackson Hole's irreplaceable wildlife, scenery and community character.**

It's also essential to understand that the draft plan has still not been reviewed in its entirety. The planning commissioners decided to postpone dealing with the critical Future Land Use Plan (FLUP) section of the draft.

The 65-page FLUP was meant to make the draft plan more predictable and to provide concrete guidance for future land development regulations and land use decisions. To save wasted effort, the planning commissioners deferred their review of the FLUP in case the town and county electeds end up making major changes in the themes and

policies section. **Essentially, this postponement means that many of the really hard decisions are still ahead of us.**

Specifically, the FLUP details what types of development and conservation efforts are appropriate across 25 districts in the valley. It also provides wide ranges of expected development potential for newly proposed land-use types, and, perhaps most significantly, it includes tables that rank how seven priorities will take precedence in each of these districts. For example, community surveys showed that protecting Jackson Hole's wildlife and natural resources is our number one priority. The FLUP ranks this priority first in eight of the largest 25 districts that it divides the valley into. But it disturbingly ranks wildlife protection fourth through seventh in the remaining 17 districts – *last or next to last in 12 of those.*

Knowing that the electeds will likely make changes in the themes and policies section, it's even harder to say how the FLUP section of the draft (which is supposed to manifest the themes and policies) will play out.

Whatever the case, your input will continue to be critical throughout the next phases of the Comp Plan revision process. We'll keep you posted at www.jhalliance.org, and keep right on working for a strong plan that will protect what we all cherish about Jackson Hole – our wildlife and quality of life. Other concerns – and kudos – regarding the third draft are outlined on the next page. ■

Comp Plan timeline

July 2007: Jackson and Teton County officials kick off what they describe as “an update” of our community's Comp Plan from 1994.

Early 2008: Community surveys are conducted, which all show strong support for protecting wildlife and managing growth responsibly.

June 2008: First draft of a totally rewritten Comp Plan is released.

April 2009: Second draft comes out.

July 2009: The Jackson and Teton County planning commissions begin jointly reviewing the second draft.

May 2010: A third draft incorporating joint recommendations from the planning commissions is released.

July 2010: The planning commissioners decide to pass along the themes and policies section of the third draft (with some changes) to the Jackson Town Council and the Teton Board of County Commissioners. They also decide to hold off on reviewing the Future Land Use Plan section until after the elected officials have finished with the themes and policies.

November 2010: Earliest that the town and county electeds are expected to begin their review of the revised third draft.

The Alliance's full comments on the third draft of the Comp Plan that was released in May are all available on our website via www.jhalliance.org/library.htm#comments. (Although we don't expect major changes in the revised third draft, we'll post comments on it when it's released later this fall.)

Below are some key points that we hope the town and county elected officials keep in mind during their review. **Here's the main point: Jackson Hole deserves a Comp Plan that will preserve and protect the valley's irreplaceable wildlife and quality of life, period.**

THE GOOD

Thanks to an involved community and much work by the volunteer planning commissioners, the third (and current) Comp Plan draft:

- Identifies wildlife protection as the plan's overall top community priority.
- Upholds scenic vistas protection and rural character preservation (in the county) as top priorities.
- Recognizes that any and all growth has impacts on wildlife and natural resources.
- Includes policies and language that acknowledge that the overall amount of growth (in addition to development pattern) in the valley matters.
- Includes some language to limit growth to established development allowances, while encouraging preservation of open spaces and existing neighborhoods. (The goal allowing scattered, town-level-density nodes throughout the county has been removed for now).
- Includes language that generally suggests the need for caps on development potential.
- Includes language that our economy cannot be dependent on growth and expansion.
- Identifies wildlife and natural resources as the foundation of our economy.
- Includes language to confine development footprints to the Town of Jackson.
- Promotes alternative transportation and energy conservation measures.
- Includes some language about the importance of fiscal responsibility for impacts caused by new development. ■

Give a Buck about Jackson Hole!

The Alliance is excited to be launching a new fundraising campaign. Called "Give a Buck about Jackson Hole," our campaign strives to raise an average of just \$1 per resident of Teton County toward our Grow Slow, Grow Smart community planning work.

Our goal, therefore, is approximately \$20,000

– to be adjusted when final 2010 Census numbers are released.

As you know, in an ecosystem as unique as ours, wildlife cannot survive without strong community planning. If we as a community want to maintain our world-renowned character as a gateway to two of the nation's favorite national parks, then there's no more important time to make a difference than during the Comp Plan rewrite.

The next critical phase of comprehensive planning work is nearly upon us (a draft of core visions and policies is passing from the

THE BAD & UGLY

• While the draft plan does have some positive aspects, in many ways it's a big step backwards from our current Comp Plan from 1994.

The 1994 plan provides much more context for our community vision, more documentation of existing conditions and challenges, and more data and reference to its role in planning. It also establishes community character preservation as a basis for land development regulations, clearly spells out the rationale for specific policies and regulations, and provides a clearer framework for distinguishing between proposed regulatory versus non-regulatory actions. All these things are lacking in the new draft.

• The draft plan identifies wildlife as our community's overall top priority, but it's missing the detailed language, data, action plans and specific timelines that could direct subsequent regulations to actually protect wildlife.

• Because of existing entitlements and base property rights, Jackson Hole already has the potential to nearly double its existing housing units and commercial square footage. **Simply put, the amount of entitled but not yet built homes and businesses could double the valley's footprint and population over time. How much more expansion on top of this does our community want or need?**

The draft plan still doesn't adequately answer this question, nor does it adequately address the impacts of expansion on our community. The draft needs to connect the dots between the amount of overall expansion it permits and the consequences of that expansion.

• Many of the draft's policies, such as ones concerning the transfer of development rights and others that call for density neutrality, are unclear, incomplete and often contradictory.

• In contrast to our existing plan, community character preservation is no longer the overarching concept that ties the entire plan's goals together. It's now unclear what framework will be the underlying basis for the new land development regulations. Also, the draft needs more, not less, detail about what is meant by "community character" than the '94 plan. We can't protect something that's not defined.

• Many of the hard questions remain to be answered, particularly given that our community has not yet started a review of the Future Land Use Plan (see Page 14). Ideally, the themes and policies section would be clear enough to predictably guide the FLUP maps, but to date this has not been the case.

• The housing chapter in particular has unclear language that would leave the door open for different interpretations in the future. Affordable housing issues have been a major and often controversial factor in past land use decisions, so it's important to have as much consensus and predictability as possible within the plan to avoid contentious debates in the future. (This Comp Plan revision process was supposed to result in more predictability, not less.)

• The revision process has lacked the analyses (fiscal impacts, transportation, natural resource inventories, etc.) that are necessary for responsible comprehensive planning. ■



planning commissions into the hands of the ultimate decision makers, our elected officials). We want to make sure we will have the resources we need over the next crucial year to continue to dig in, analyze, propose solutions and alert citizens to important points in the critical planning process underway.

Please look for Give-a-Buck jars at Alli-

ance events and consider hosting a jar at your business. Or simply throw a little extra into your next regular membership donation and mark it "Give a Buck," and we'll make sure it goes toward this critical community planning fund.

Together, we've made considerable strides already in the Comp Plan process to ensure the community's highest priorities are taken into consideration. With your partnership, we will continue to build a strong plan for the future of our valley! – *Cindy Harger*



Which came first: Bigger roads or more cars?

And can our community hatch better ways to deal with traffic woes than building wider roads?

By Dorothy Jankowsky,
Alliance Communications Director

A perfect storm of traffic trouble struck Jackson Hole on July 16, 2009. Vehicles stopped or slowed to a crawl in all directions when a gas leak at the north end of Jackson shut down traffic on Highway 89, an overturned tractor trailer in the Hoback River Canyon partially blocked Highway 191, work on the Snake River Bridge held up drivers on Highway 22, and construction at Alpine Junction constricted the remaining gateway to Jackson Hole.

“There’s only a couple ways in and out of here,” a Jackson police officer was reported saying at the time. “And when there’s trouble on a couple of them, it gets to be a mess.”

Anyone stuck in that mess – or in any of the other traffic tie-ups that seem to occur with increasing frequency – can relate to how growth affects the valley’s transportation system. Expansion leads to more people and vehicles on the road, which leads to more demand for more and wider roadways. But, as with most growth-related problems, trying to grow our way out of them isn’t the answer.

The transportation chapter of the current draft of the Comp Plan states that:

- Traffic congestion and wider roads are inconsistent with the rural character and natural and scenic resource values of the community.
- Teton County’s development pattern – like

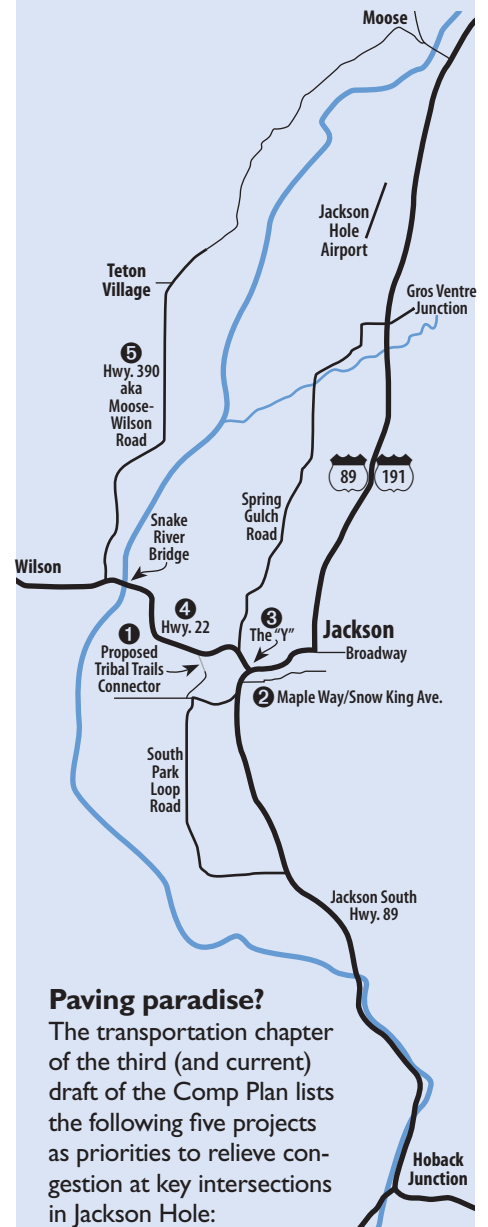
many rural, mountain communities in the West – depends upon automobiles to move people to and from services and work.

- Traffic is growing at a faster rate than population in Teton County, and traffic levels have reached capacity on many of the community’s major roadways.

The draft plan proposes to remedy these issues by “increasing alternative transportation modes” (such as START bus transit and pathways for bikes and pedestrians), “reducing reliance on single-occupancy motor vehicle travel” and “maintaining a safe, efficient, interconnected multi-modal transportation system.” However, the draft acknowledges that “Realistically, the continued convenience, affordability, availability and necessity of the automobile limits the amount of traffic reductions that will be achieved through travel mode shifts. Intersection and roadway improvements will still be required in some areas.” (See box at right.)

The Alliance agrees that increasing alternative transportation choices will help relieve some of the pressure. But we also want to point out that **making sure community development and redevelopment both occur at a reasonable rate will also reduce demands for more and bigger roads.**

If the valley’s transportation system can’t be changed to accommodate additional growth without harming our wildlife and quality of life, then the buildout permitted under the Comp Plan should be reduced accordingly. ■



Paving paradise?

The transportation chapter of the third (and current) draft of the Comp Plan lists the following five projects as priorities to relieve congestion at key intersections in Jackson Hole:

- 1 Construct the Tribal Trails Connector between Highway 22 and South Park Loop Road. (Read more about this on Page 18.)
- 2 Upgrade the Maple Way/Snow King Ave. corridor.
- 3 Reconstruct the “Y” intersection of Highway 22/89/26.
- 4 Pursue a multi-lane roadway with the Wyoming Department of Transportation on Highway 22 between Jackson and Highway 390.
- 5 Redesign Highway 390 from Highway 22 north to Teton Village.

Coupled with WYDOT’s proposed expansion of Jackson South Highway 89 to five lanes (see Page 18), we’re talking about a lot of pavement in the valley’s future.



Ever feel like a deer in the headlights?

Just imagine how the deer feel.

According to the Wyoming Department of Transportation, about one-quarter of the state highways in Teton County are slated for reconstruction and expansion in the next 10 years. What will this mean for driver safety and wildlife?

The Alliance's December 2 annual meeting will feature a special presentation on wildlife crossings. See Page 21 for details.

Road kills already take a toll on the valley's wildlife, not to mention on motorists and their vehicles. For example, WYDOT reports that between 1995 and 2004, there were 202 documented crashes in the seven-mile stretch of the Jackson South Highway 89 from the southern end of South Park Loop Road to Hoback Junction. Ninety-three of these crashes (almost half) involved animals.

Wider roads, more cars and higher traffic

speeds all increase the potential for wildlife-vehicle collisions. That's why the Alliance has begun working on a campaign to promote safe wildlife crossings.

With seed money from a 1% for the Tetons grant that we received in June,

we hope to put Jackson Hole on the road to some transportation solutions that uphold our community's priorities, such as protecting wildlife and community character, while ensuring driver safety.

The Wildlife Matters article below outlines a framework recently developed for western Montana that might work here, too. If you'd like to get involved with this effort, please contact Louise Lasley at (307) 733-9417. ■

Keeping habitats connected takes cooperation

By Dylan Taylor, Conservation Director, American Wildlands

Habitat connectivity – a critical conservation goal for wildlife managers and conservationists – faces an ongoing threat from human transportation systems. Ensuring habitat connections across roads and railways is critical to maintaining healthy populations of native wildlife. But as our roads become more traveled and development encroaches upon habitat, wildlife species face the daily challenge of finding safe places to cross. With increasing frequency, their attempts result in animal-vehicle collisions with dramatic, and often deadly, results for wildlife and drivers.

At American Wildlands, we are actively working to create solutions to this problem. Our Safe Passages program addresses the negative impact of highways on wildlife in the Northern Rockies.

In 2009, we released our *Wildlife Highway Mortality and Linkage Assessment: A Prioritization and Planning Tool for Western Montana* (available at www.wildlands.org). We initiated this effort to create a rapid assessment to help transportation planning agencies identify and prioritize sites for wildlife-motorist safety projects in western Montana. Our assessment incorporated expertise from multiple collaborators, as well as the best available wildlife linkage and animal-vehicle collision data. This in-depth analysis highlighted locations where numerous collisions coincided with important wildlife linkage areas.



Collaboration was the key to this process and resulted in a comprehensive, highly usable planning product. By including a diverse range of stakeholders – the Montana Departments of Transportation and Fish, Wildlife and Parks, the U.S. Forest Service, and numerous county and conservation organizations – we were able to expertly refine our analysis methodology, clarify potential obstacles, find opportunities, and identify on-the-ground sites for future collaboration and wildlife conservation activities. Without the participation of these important partners, our effort would not have had legs.

American Wildlands continues to facilitate this group as we work to create a shared statewide roadkill database, increase wildlife-transportation cooperation between various stakeholders, and create an agency-led wildlife and transportation committee.

Based on the success of our collaboration, we highly recommend this strategy to communities struggling with the interface between transportation planning and wildlife movement needs. The methods and working group process outlined in our assessment were designed to be easily replicated. For Teton County stakeholders, adoption of a similar cooperative framework could lead to an effective, practical decision-support tool to make area roads safer for wildlife and people. ■

The Wildlife Matters Campaign is supported by EcoTour Adventures, Skinny Skis and Patagonia, Inc.

In addition to the items discussed on previous pages, the Alliance keeps track of numerous other community planning matters affecting the valley. Below are some of them; please check our monthly Alliance Action e-newsletters, available via www.jhalliance.org/library.htm, for more.

Jackson South Highway 89 final EIS due out ‘soon’

Wyoming Department of Transportation officials now say that the final environmental impact statement on the expansion of Hwy. 26/89/289/191 from south of Jackson to Hoback Junction is due out early this fall. (It was expected in May.) The draft EIS proposed two disappointing 5-lane alternatives for this 7-mile section of road, and it’s unlikely there will be any pleasant surprises in the final EIS. From the time this project was first raised many years ago, the Alliance has opposed making the highway five lanes wide, given the impacts it would have on wildlife and community character. (We have supported a modified 3-lane alternative.) Moving forward, the Alliance will work to ensure that the best possible wildlife mitigation measures are incorporated into this project’s design. We’ll also continue to question the need for a 5-lane highway throughout this section of road and to explore other options.

Tribal Trails Connector back in the news

The Tribal Trails Connector is a proposed new road that would link the northern part of South Park Loop Road to Hwy. 22, roughly paralleling the bike path southeast of the entrance to Teton Science Schools. For years now, Jackson and Teton County have discussed building this road, which would allow vehicles to bypass the “Y” intersection of Hwy. 22 and Broadway. Recent studies have indicated that this connector could relieve existing and future traffic congestion at the Y, but modeling for the studies appears to have been based on inaccurate regional growth projections. Modeling is only as good as the assumptions on which it’s based, and because our community is still discussing questions regarding growth as part of our ongoing Comp Plan revision, the assumptions for development patterns in South Park may well change. The Alliance believes that before any decisions are made about the Tribal Trails Connector, specific recommendations for traffic improvements in the South Park area should be based on our new Comp Plan. Another concern is that the streets the connector will link to are not designed to carry other than local neighborhood traffic. We also believe problems with the Y intersection should be fixed before new roads are built in the area.

Melody Ranch gravel pit gets 10-year special use permit

As long as we continue to build more roads in Teton County, we’re going to need gravel, which will have to come from somewhere. Exactly where has been the subject of debate for years, and the county’s 2009 gravel study outlined several options, including the Melody Ranch pit. In July, the Teton County commissioners approved a special use permit for this pit that will allow operations to continue for at least another 10 years. The new permit does include some mitigation, but it’s important to remember that the Melody Ranch development was initially approved based on preserving certain areas, including where the pit is, for open space, wildlife and scenic values, not for a long-term industrial operation.

County approves River Crossing expansion

In June, the Teton Board of County Commissioners voted to approve plans for the River Crossing Church expansion, which allows buildings with a combined total size bigger than Albertsons in the Rafter J residential neighborhood. Several commissioners said they felt they had little choice but to approve the proposal because records of past approvals regarding River Crossing’s development plans were unclear, and the county regulations governing such development aren’t clear, either. This highlights the need for more explicit land development regulations for our community – regulations that will actually uphold community priorities as well as increase predictability for decision makers, the public and landowners.

JH Golf & Tennis master plan amendment sought

This fall, Teton County is expected to consider an application to change Jackson Hole Golf & Tennis Resort’s master plan so that dogs would be allowed in the resort’s affordable housing development. While the Alliance is supportive of both dogs and affordable housing in the Jackson Hole community, we also support keeping the master plan as it is. Prohibiting dogs in this affordable housing development was a condition of its approval, meant to help mitigate the development’s high-density impacts in a sensitive area for wildlife. Backing out on this commitment now would set a bad precedent and lead to the erosion of protections for wildlife.

Natural Resources Technical Advisory Board okayed

In June, 10 months after first considering an environmental advisory board, the Jackson Town Council and Teton Board of County Commissioners jointly approved a resolution to create one. As approved, the board will be appointed by town and county electeds, who will decide what issues the board considers – a departure from initial proposals that the group be self-directed. Basically, the volunteer board will interpret existing science on the health of the area’s ecosystem, identify data gaps, analyze existing policy and work with planning staff to improve policies and policy-making, but only as directed by the electeds. While this falls short of the originally proposed intent for the board to assess our ecosystem’s overall health, to consider cumulative impacts of development and to be free to set its own research priorities, we hope that its role will evolve as time goes by.

Town considers major zoning change

In July, the Jackson Town Council directed the planning staff to prepare a text amendment that would allow accessory units within the auto-urban residential zoning district to be sold separately to independent owners. (One single-family residence and two accessory-residential units are allowed on single lots in this district, but current regulations stipulate that all three structures must be owned by one owner.) They also decided that similar changes to three more districts – the business conservation, auto-urban commercial (within the lodging overlay) and possibly mobile home park zoning districts – should also be included in the discussion. Together, these zones cover a huge portion of downtown Jackson, and they’re a source of affordable rentals, so there’s concern that this zoning change could inflate housing prices and displace workers. The proposed amendment would ostensibly open up homeownership opportunities to more people; however, the assumption that smaller homes are necessarily more affordable has been disproved time and again in desirable Jackson Hole, unless some sort of deed restriction is attached to the property. The timing of possible changes before the new Comp Plan is finalized is also a concern. Formal review of the new text amendment is expected to begin in October.

Town enacts moratorium on planned mixed-use tool

In a surprising but welcome turnaround, in April the Jackson Town Council unanimously enacted an emergency one-year moratorium on the planned mixed-use development tool. During the three-plus years since the Comp Plan revision started, the Alliance twice asked town officials to consider a moratorium on the flawed tool, which allows increased development potential in exchange for questionable community benefits. (The fact that the Jackson Town Council was approving PMDs during the revision contributed to development pressures that undermined the process. A Comp Plan can’t protect something that’s already gone.) What’s next – changes to the tool, or a repeal? We’ll keep you posted.

County cuts PUD-AH and PUD-Planned Resort tools

In another positive step for the Comp Plan revision process, in March the Teton County commissioners voted to eliminate two unpredictable planning tools – the Planned Unit Development-Affordable Housing and Planned Unit Development-Planned Resort tools – from existing regulations. ■