



Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance  
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## **Build a better Comp Plan for wildlife**

Tomorrow, Nov. 12, is the deadline to submit written comments on the new comp plan's rewritten version of Theme One – now titled "Practice stewardship of wildlife, natural resources, and scenic vistas." Town and County planning commissioners plan to discuss this chapter one last time, Nov. 19, prior to forwarding it for review by elected officials. A good plan is critical to the future of this valley, so our community should make sure that we have the best possible plan moving forward, one that will help to protect a Jackson Hole that we still want to see in 20 years. If you appreciate our valley for the conservation legacy that it holds, you should be aware of the successes and failures of the recent chapter rewrite and how you can help make it better.

We appreciate the hours and hours of work that the volunteer commissioners have put into this process. It is no easy task, and their efforts should be commended. Some important improvements were made during their initial review, such as the establishment of an Environment Commission, the commitment to identify more wildlife indicator species, and a reinstatement of the value of scenic vistas. However, there have been some significant failures, due partly to a lack of support from both planning commissions.

Following are a few major issues that must be addressed in the next round of review in order to improve this chapter.

First, the rewritten draft of Theme One that is sent to elected officials should incorporate comments submitted by the Wyoming Game and Fish Department. Unfortunately, despite numerous requests by the public, these specific recommendations were never individually reviewed in public hearings. Also, due to a failed vote by the Town Planning Commission, no attempt was made to incorporate the agency's suggestions in the rewrite just released. As a result, the new chapter still lacks critical science-based language that would increase our chances of actually protecting wildlife.

Second, because the presence of wildlife is something that makes our community unique from all others and is a driving factor in our economy and quality of life, specific language should be incorporated that states that wildlife protection should be the primary consideration in all land use decisions. This way, all types of impacts of development on wildlife are considered in a decision, including direct, indirect and cumulative impacts. Also, the rewrite did not go far enough to explain how the amount of new growth, regardless of where the growth occurs, also greatly influences our success in protecting wildlife.

Third, in the future, the public should be given the chance to vote on a dedicated funding source to acquire permanent open space in the valley. Continued acquisition of permanent open space is a critical wildlife protection and growth management policy, and therefore an essential component to uphold our top two priorities. While we are currently in troubling economic times, the plan should include policies with the long-term community vision in mind.

Fourth, the role of indicators and monitoring needs to be better defined. While the intention to monitor achievement of different policies throughout the plan is a step in the right direction, and an improvement upon the 1994 Plan, its effectiveness is still highly questionable for a couple reasons. The new chapter still lacks a description of baseline conditions or quantifiable starting points for each of the indicators. It also lacks language to explain how monitoring will actually be used to direct changes in wildlife-related policies. For instance, moose and mule deer populations are already below agency targets. How is this observation expected to shift the way we make decisions? Currently, the new chapter provides no guidance on questions like these.

Last, but not least, our community should not lose sight of what we set out to accomplish in this planning process – an improvement of the 1994 Plan. The rewritten Theme One chapter raises some fundamental questions about whether this process is efficiently building upon what our 1994 Plan already provides. Before finalizing this chapter, and moving on to other chapters where the same broad issue applies, an explanation should be presented as to why significant portions of the 1994 Plan that include specific language for protecting wildlife, wildlife habitat and scenic vistas were not utilized in the new plan. It appears that in an effort to be concise, essential components were removed that should not have been.

Looking decades ahead, I think most of us want Jackson Hole to still be defined as a small, friendly mountain town amidst a rural landscape, including freely roaming wildlife, vast open spaces, scenic vistas, and unparalleled recreation opportunities. Now is the time for you to speak up for a stronger plan. Future generations will thank you.

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