Roots of Prosperity
SECURING PARK COUNTY’S NATURAL HERITAGE AND ECONOMIC FUTURE
About This Report

In the summer of 2006, the Greater Yellowstone Coalition commissioned an economic analysis of Park County. That analysis provides the backbone of *Roots of Prosperity: Securing Park County’s Natural Heritage and Economic Future*. This report also draws on interviews with area business leaders and a wealth of additional information to examine the economic importance of Park County’s natural setting, abundant wildlife, and top-notch recreation opportunities.

Unless otherwise noted, the data and information presented in the text are taken from *The Park County Economy — Restructuring and Change in a Growing Region* by Dr. Larry Swanson (O’Connor Center for the Rocky Mountain West, University of Montana, September 2006).

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Quick Facts: Park County

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Towns:</th>
<th>Cody, Powell, Meeteetse, Clark, Mammoth</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population:</td>
<td>26,410 in 2004</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acreage:</td>
<td>4,524,923 acres</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Public land ownership in 2002:

- Federal government: 3,591,220 acres (79.4%)
- State government: 229,702 acres (5.1%)
- Local government: 5,907 acres (0.1%)

Private land ownership in 2002:

- Total: 698,094 acres (15.4%)
- Agriculture: 678,200 acres (97% of all private land)

Magnitude of development:

- 1970: 1,830 residences in rural areas
- 4,405 acres occupied
- 1999: 4,231 rural residences
- 51,805 acres occupied

Sources:

- 2002 Wyoming Department of Revenue Annual Report
- Hernandez, Patty C. Rural Residential Development in the Greater Yellowstone

These days, economic development is an important concern for Park County’s business community, and growth seems to be on everyone’s minds. *Roots of Prosperity* offers critical information that will help inform ongoing efforts to shape the area’s future, and to protect the quality of life that is so important here.

Gene Bryan
Executive Director, Cody Chamber of Commerce, 2002-2006
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction: The economic importance of Park County’s natural heritage .......................................................... 2

Landscape drives economic activity .......................................................................................................................... 4

Attractiveness spurs recent growth ....................................................................................................................... 5

Economic evolution ............................................................................................................................................... 6

People and houses ............................................................................................................................................... 8

Rural housing eating up farms and wildlife habitat ............................................................................................. 10

Public lands essential to natural heritage ............................................................................................................ 12

Recommendations ............................................................................................................................................... 14

References............................................................................................................................................................ 17
INTRODUCTION:
THE ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE
OF PARK COUNTY’S NATURAL HERITAGE

Park County was one of the West’s original amenity destinations, luring visitors and residents with outstanding fish and wildlife populations, proximity to Yellowstone National Park, spectacular scenery, and farming potential. Among the more famous and influential was Colonel William “Buffalo Bill” Cody. In the mid-1890s, some twenty years after first seeing Wyoming’s Bighorn Basin, he returned to the area. Along with several friends, Buffalo Bill was determined to build a community that would take advantage of the area’s natural appeal. The rest, as they say, is history.

Over time, our rich natural resources fostered an economy that encompassed farming and ranching, oil and gas drilling, and manufacturing. As important as these aspects have been and continue to be, the area’s attractiveness remains our most important economic asset.

Is Park County destined to be discovered?

Across the western United States, many communities share the county’s outstanding appeal—scenic landscapes with an open, rural feel; diverse opportunities for outdoor recreation; large tracts of public lands; abundant wildlife and fish; and small, friendly towns. Highly attractive areas like Park County are growing—drawing people, income, and businesses. Some are adding population at an almost unbelievable rate. The neighboring Teton counties in Idaho and Wyoming surpassed 60 percent growth in the 1990s.

Foremost on the minds of many of our neighbors is: Are we fated to become one of the West’s new boomtowns? This question is met with a diversity of opinions about what is next on Park County’s horizon.

Clearly our population is not booming now. Yet, even at its current, modest rate of growth, the county is seeing a pace and pattern of development that makes many who live here uneasy and puts pressure on the surrounding landscape.

This is a critical time for planning and action. Concerns about the impacts of growth are mounting, but we still have breathing room to position our communities for the kind of prosperity that respects and maintains the reasons people want to live here.

Park County’s natural advantage

This is not a good time to sit back and wait to see what kind of changes come. There is ample evidence that larger-scale economic shifts are starting to have an effect, enabling more and more people to live here without relying on local jobs for income. The old adage that “people follow jobs” is being turned on its head. As population pressures build in the West (see Figure 1), we have every reason to expect that Park County will become more popular—and more populous.

Figure 1. In the coming decades, population growth along the coasts and in the Southwest is expected to continue, largely propelled by foreign immigration. As these areas grow more crowded, the lure of the West is likely to remain strong. The U.S. Census Bureau projects that the West will see a population growth rate of 46 percent between 2000 and 2030. The West will be the nation’s fastest-growing region, with nearly 29 million new residents. The top-quality public lands and small, attractive communities in the Greater Yellowstone region—and in Park County—will continue to be a magnet for newcomers.
Cody, Powell, Meeteetse, Clark, and their Park County neighbors enjoy access to some of the highest-quality public lands in the country, anchored by Yellowstone, the world’s first national park, and the Shoshone, the nation’s first national forest. One business leader described the recreation potential here as “virtually untapped.” And our communities have plenty of appeal for people looking for a slow pace, friendly atmosphere, and good schools.

Park County’s natural advantages underpin the third largest tourism economy in Wyoming. But more important from an economic standpoint is their magnetism for long-time residents, newcomers, returning residents, and those who might someday call this part of Wyoming home. They are the engines that drive our economic success.

Taking stock, taking action
Our future prosperity will depend in large part on how successfully we plan for the growth that is to come. Protecting Park County’s natural appeal is more important than ever, because it underlies the quality of life that is among the county’s most enduring economic advantages.

Preserving our natural heritage—clean air and water, beautiful vistas and open spaces, plentiful wildlife, varied outdoor recreation, and well-managed natural areas—must become an integral part of Park County’s economic development strategies.

Figure 2. Most of Park County’s new housing is built in rural areas rather than within existing towns. These three maps show the expansion of housing development in the county’s rural areas, suggesting the changes in store. Between 1970 and 1999, the number of houses built in Park County’s rural areas increased by 130 percent. During the same time, the amount of land taken up by those homes ballooned by over 1000 percent. Building homes on farmland and in forest areas eats away at wildlife habitat, open space, and the area’s rural character.
Maps: Erin Q. Mock, Sonoran Institute. Analysis: Patty Gude and Sonoran Institute

I owned a western clothing company in Cody for twenty years, moved away, and then came back. People come and stay with us at the Chamberlin Inn for a few days or a week and ask what there is to do. One of the best options is outdoor recreation—hiking, horseback riding, or taking a tour out to see the wild mustangs. The quality of the environment is important to us and our business.
Susan Diehl
Chamberlin Inn

Cody needs to grow its winter appeal, and draw people to visit who are here for more than part of a day. As far as development goes, we have to balance what’s good for our pocketbooks in the short term with what is good for the environment in the long term.
Amy Cowan-Banks
The Retreat
LANDSCAPE DRIVES ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

In 1915, Wyoming dude ranching was born at Valley Ranch, along the south fork of the Shoshone River. Ranch guests arrived by railroad, staying for weeks at a time to enjoy the outdoor attractions of the wild West.

From the county’s earliest days, tourism, outfitting, hunting, fishing, and other forms of outdoor recreation have been staples of the economy. Today, Cody and the Buffalo Bill Historical Center both rank among the twenty most popular visitor attractions in Wyoming. Four of the top five are in Yellowstone National Park.

Park County has the third largest tourist economy in the state, behind Teton County (Jackson) and Laramie County (Cheyenne). One in five jobs in the county are directly supported by travelers’ expenditures, more than double the statewide average.²

Research shows that, for Wyoming visitors, outdoor recreation and the natural environment are much more important than they are nationwide. The most popular outdoor activities, listed in order, are:

- Hiking
- Camping
- Fishing
- Birdwatching
- Backpacking; and
- Spending time at the lake.³

An overview of recreation-related businesses in the county shows expansion beyond the traditional core of horse outfitters and fishing guides. Businesses offer equipment and trips in a wide range of outdoor activities including mountain biking, skiing, ice and rock climbing, backpacking, and kayaking.

Add to this equation the money that area residents spend on recreation—whether on gas for snowmobiles or feed and veterinary services for horses—and the true breadth and depth of the economic activity directly related to our natural setting begins to come into focus.

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Figure 3. Travel-related employment accounts for 20 percent of all jobs and 14 percent of labor earnings in Park County. Despite a concentration of seasonal, part-time, or low-paying jobs, earnings from travel-related jobs have been growing more rapidly than the total number of jobs. This trend suggests growth in higher-paying jobs, jobs that offer longer hours, or both.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Travel Spending in Park County</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total travel spending in Park County, 2004</td>
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<tr>
<td>Estimated angler expenditures, 2002</td>
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<tr>
<td>Estimated travel expenditures for wildlife watching, 2004</td>
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<td>Estimated big game hunter expenditures, 2003 (elk, deer, antelope)</td>
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<th>Park County Jobs Generated by Travel Spending*</th>
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<td>Park County jobs directly generated by travel spending, 2003</td>
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<tr>
<td>Growth in number of jobs created by travel spending, 1997-2004</td>
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<tr>
<td>Park County labor earnings directly generated by travel spending, 2003</td>
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<td>Growth in labor earnings generated by travel spending, 1997-2004</td>
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I went to college out-of-state, but came home to Cody to start my business two years ago. The recreational opportunities in Park County are abundant and virtually un tapped. Hunting and fishing and camping have always been really important here, and I don't see that going away. The great thing is that there's also a growing interest in the kinds of recreation I really love—kayaking, climbing, mountain biking, more adventure-oriented activities.

Andy Quick
Gradient Mountain Sports
**ATTRACTIVENESS SPURS RECENT GROWTH**

Ask around, and you will find a lot of common ground about what makes Park County a great place to live. You are likely to hear a lot of stories similar to Tim Mahieu’s. An investment representative, Mahieu moved to Cody five years ago: “I like the laid-back, slower pace of Cody. And it’s surrounded by great elk hunting and fishing. It’s no problem for me to spend plenty of time walking around in the mountains.”

Among the most significant community assets noted by Cody residents in a 2005 research project were community safety, the natural landscape, and cultural attractions. The commitment to small-town living and outdoor recreation is repeated across the Greater Yellowstone region. Local business owners in one three-county study overwhelmingly rated quality-of-life factors as more important than traditional business climate variables such as tax structure and cost of doing business.

**Why Park County is growing**

People are responding to Park County’s appeal. During the 1980s, however, population growth in the county slowed to a crawl. As the energy boom turned into a bust, the exodus of Park County residents was led by young people leaving to seek higher education and higher pay. But, during the 1990s, more people moved here than left, a trend that has continued since then.

Park County’s ability to draw and hold residents is rooted in the area’s attractiveness and made possible, in large measure, by shifts in the larger national and global economies.

Knowledge-based industries have risen to prominence. Many of their services and products—ranging from computer programming and engineering to advertising and business consulting—can be produced nearly anywhere. Advances in communications technology enable business to be conducted from remote locations and make it easier for local businesses to promote the area’s amenities in far-flung places. Growing income from investments and retirement funds gives more people the ability to live where they want. Relatively low interest rates and uncertainty in other markets have made real estate an especially attractive investment.

Immigration and continued population growth trends at the national level set a context for what we are likely to experience. In the West, particularly in parts of the interior West, population growth is expected to continue more rapidly than the national average. As the Southwest and West Coast grow more crowded with concentrations of new residents, led by high rates of immigration, the lure of smaller, established trade centers such as Powell and Cody is likely to remain strong (Figure 1, page 2).

![Figure 4. For Park and other counties in the region, the 1990s were better years than the 1980s. But growth is not shared equally among these neighbors.](image-url)
ECONOMIC EVOLUTION

Before 1987, the mining sector—including oil and gas—was the largest source of labor earnings in Park County. By 2004, it had dropped to sixth. The size and value of agricultural production contracted during the early 1980s, with declines leveling off in the early 1990s. These two traditional industries are still important, but growth in other sectors is helping diversify and lend stability to the economy. The 1990s marked a period of economic restructuring throughout the region, changes that are shared by Park County (see Figure 5).

Economic growth tied to area attractiveness
Self-employment has been increasing more rapidly here than wage and salary jobs. Between 1990 and 2004, 42 percent of the county’s job growth was among the self-employed, which currently represent about a quarter of all workers. This trend could signal a rise in the importance of independent professionals, contractors, and small business owners—broadening the base of locally owned, locally generated economic activity.

Non-labor sources of income have become more important over time, as well. These include transfer payments (mostly retirement funds) and investment income. Soon, it is likely that over half of all personal income in Park County will come from these non-labor sources.

Both of these trends highlight the importance of maintaining the area’s attractiveness. Entrepreneurs and retirees, of growing importance in our local economy, are among those who are able to choose where they live and where they create economic activity.

Changing opportunities
The changing economy is bringing new opportunities for economic development. A 2005 Wyoming Business Council report identified several types of businesses and professionals that fit well with Park County’s location and assets.

This report finds that, among the most promising areas for economic growth is attracting and supporting entrepreneurs and self-employed individuals in a range of knowledge-, art-, and craft-based industries. The engine for growth in these industries, the report states, “is likely to be the attraction of

![Image of Park County Travel Council]

Figure 5. Park County's economic growth has been concentrated in services, retail trade, finance, insurance, and real estate, construction, and local government.
the quality of life for professionals seeking a more laid-back and recreation-oriented lifestyle.”

As David Reetz, Chairman of the Powell Valley Economic Development Alliance notes, “Our efforts can’t focus only on attracting newcomers. People who already live there make our communities what they are now, and they will be a critical part of our county’s continued economic growth. During the mid-1990s, Powell Valley Economic Development Alliance targeted 16 desired business types as part of our economic renewal effort. Since then, new businesses have started up in all of these areas, nine of them opened by Powell residents, and seven by newcomers.” Maintaining the area’s natural heritage and small-town quality of life is as important for those who already live here as it is for drawing new residents and business activity.

I moved to Cody two years ago to retire in this wonderful, rural setting. But it’s more accurate to call myself “semi-retired,” because the consulting business I started here keeps me so active in the community.

I’m optimistic about the future. The retiree population moving here is a tremendous asset. Because they are economically independent, they take almost nothing from the community and give a tremendous amount back. They are big consumers, especially initially as they build and furnish their new homes. They also volunteer and do a lot of valuable service. Like me, I think that newcomers—even retirees—will be actively interested in making positive contributions to this area.

Charles Moore
Creative Management Solutions

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**Figure 6.** Park County’s per capita income and median family income have been growing and are relatively high among nearby counties. But the poverty rate has also been growing, which is a concern.
PEOPLE AND HOUSES

Look around the Greater Yellowstone region, and you’ll find areas that have seen their populations explode by 20, 40, 60 percent and more during the last 15 years. Park County’s growth has been more modest—around one percent per year during that time (see Figure 7). Interviews with local business leaders suggest a slower pace is just fine with area residents. Talk about the type of growth people want and the sentiments you are likely to hear are “manageable,” “well-planned,” and “without damaging the environment.”

How quickly should we expect to grow?
Park County is an isolated rural county with a small population, no large cities, and a limited relationship with a larger regional trade center or metropolitan area. Despite the flow of shopping dollars north, the flow of recreation dollars south, and other ties, our communities function largely independently of Billings.

Growth isn’t as predictable or consistently high among rural areas as it is in larger trade centers with the kinds of natural amenities Park County enjoys. In these centers, such as Bozeman and Idaho Falls, concentrations of services, higher-paying jobs, educational institutions, and transportation connections have contributed to population growth rates averaging 25 percent during the 1990s.

Teton County, Wyoming, another isolated rural county, has a growth curve bordering on the incredible. During the 1990s, this population (containing Jackson) grew more than 60 percent, with significant spillover effects on neighboring Teton County, Idaho. During the 1990s, Jackson’s Idaho neighbor grew by nearly 80 percent, and its growth rate has outpaced that of Wyoming’s Teton County since 2000.

Continued growth in trade centers and other areas of the Greater Yellowstone region may make less-populated areas such as Park County more attractive to more people. This is just one reason that projecting a one percent annual growth rate may be conservative.

What does that mean for the landscape?
Even at the current population growth rate, Park County will add some 2,800 housing units by 2020. In 2020, one in five homes here would have been built in the preceding 15 years. If population growth accelerates, the county would need to accommodate more residential development. At an average two percent annual population growth, approximately 5,200 new housing units would be built by 2020. Then, one of every three homes would be less than 15 years old.

Are we prepared to manage this growth? According to a former Park County planner, the answer is no. “Park County’s planning and zoning system is probably better than most in Wyoming and Montana,” notes Bo Bowman. “Still, the
My husband and I moved here two years ago to give my online bookstore a home. I’d say this area presents challenges for business owners because of the rising costs of property here. Finding a home has been more of a challenge than we expected, but this summer we were able to find a good location with reasonable rent for the store.

Laura Verderame
LJ’s Books

county could be much better prepared to manage growth. No thorough studies of county groundwater resources have been conducted, some areas of the county operate under regulations that do not protect groundwater from septic systems, and there is no county-wide zoning plan.”

Adding to development pressures is a growing proportion of seasonal homes, which has also raised concerns about maintaining an engaged community and housing that working families can afford. Between 1990 and 2000, the number of seasonal homes in Park County grew 34 percent, more than double the rate of increase nationally. These homes, which are occupied only part time, now make up nearly seven percent of the housing stock in Park County.12

Figure 7. During the 1990s, Park County grew more slowly than most of its peers (similar counties near concentrations of high-quality public lands). Growth in Park County has continued to be steady during the first part of this decade. Sustained growth in larger regional trade centers and the Yellowstone region as a whole could translate into continued growth in areas like Park County.

A year ago, we sold our home and business in Bozeman and moved back to Cody. We like the slow pace, better schools, and the business-friendly tax system. Living in Cody lets us continue to enjoy the mountains without the glitz and population of Bozeman. In a digital world, it’s almost insignificant where I conduct my business from. I create ads for businesses all over the country.

More and more people are coming to this area to see Yellowstone, but then deciding they want to stay. We have to have the vision that dollars that come here are dollars that could stay. So we have to develop the kinds of business and grow the type of economy that will benefit the land.

Scott Morrison
Morrison Creative Consultants
**Rural Housing Eating Up Farms and Wildlife Habitat**

Most new homes in Park County are built outside of established towns on land that was once farmland, rangeland, or forest. Since 1970, the number of rural homes has more than doubled. But the acreage they occupy increased **twelve times**.¹³

A study of rural housing development in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem projected that, without changes in existing growth management policies, one-half of the most sensitive and highest-quality habitat on agricultural lands would be converted to residential use by the year 2020.¹⁴

![Deer in the Field](image1.jpg)

**Changes in agricultural land ownership and management**

Agriculture here is marked by a strong, working farm and ranch community that exists side-by-side with an increasing number of non-traditional landowners. Park County has a long history of “amenity ownership” of agricultural lands, especially west of Highway 120. This type of ownership—by people who are more interested in their properties’ natural features or recreational opportunities than in production—appears to be growing more prevalent, even in areas to the east.

A recent study of ranching in the Greater Yellowstone area found that, compared with the rest of the region, Park County retains a concentration of large ranches, many of which are still controlled by long-time family owners.¹⁵ But the picture is changing.

**Figure 8.** In 1970, rural homes sat on an average of 2.4 acres each. By 1999, that average lot size had exceeded 12 acres, creating a larger impact on the landscape.¹⁶

Between 1997 and 2002, the number of agricultural operations of 10 to 49 acres doubled, while numbers in most larger categories of farms decreased. Rapid growth in the number of agricultural operators in their 40s and 50s during the same time period suggest that there has been an increase in smaller “lifestyle” enterprises not aimed at commercial production.¹⁷ The proliferation of small, horse-oriented parcels along the corridor between Powell and Cody illustrates this trend.

**Wildlife Habitat in Park County**

![Map of Wildlife Habitat](image2.jpg)

**Figure 9.** Private lands provide key habitat for big game in Park County. Elk, deer, moose, antelope, and bighorn sheep use a connected mix of private and public lands throughout the year. Conserving habitat on private lands is as important as managing habitat on public lands.

Map: Erin Q. Mock, Sonoran Institute. Data: Wyoming Game and Fish Department
The tenuous economics of conducting agriculture in places like the Wapiti Valley is forcing the conversion of Wyoming’s wildlife habitat into vacation homes. In the face of this conversion, Wyoming must create better incentives for maintaining and improving habitat on private lands.

Pearre Williams
Wapiti Valley Landowner

Habitat loss has always been an issue in Cody, but it’s always been a soft issue. It didn’t really strike home until a large-scale development proposal threatened to take prime habitat to build houses.

Monte Horst
Ishawoaa Outfitters

How residential development threatens wildlife habitat
The backcountry areas at the heart of the Greater Yellowstone region provide important wildlife habitat. But, as the map in Figure 9 illustrates, habitats on public and private lands are linked. Private lands encompass a large share of certain crucial habitat types, such as riparian areas and elk winter range. Wildlife populations within wilderness and other protected areas such as Yellowstone National Park are likely to decline as habitat is degraded outside their boundaries.18

Existing growth management policies will provide minimal protection to wildlife. Park County has growth regulations in place. However, without specific provisions to protect crucial wildlife habitat, these will not protect the best and most sensitive areas that should rank as high priorities for conservation.

Residential development in rural areas affects wildlife and habitat by:

• Encouraging non-native species and making it harder for native species to reproduce and survive;
• Breaking up blocks of habitat and reducing plant cover, making it difficult for wildlife to range freely, find shelter, and forage;
• Increasing human conflicts with wildlife, including pet and livestock problems and roadkill;
• Making it difficult to allow wildfires and floods to renew the landscape;19 and
• Changing flows, vegetation, and water quality in streams and rivers.

Park County
RANKS 15TH
AMONG 263
COUNTIES IN THE
Rocky Mountain West
IN ACREAGE
OF PRIME RANCHLAND
AT RISK FOR CONVERSION
TO RURAL RESIDENTIAL
DEVELOPMENT BY 2020.20
**Public lands essential to natural heritage**

Some 80 percent of land in Park County is federally managed, with more under state ownership. How these public lands are managed has a significant impact on the quality of our natural environment, recreational opportunities, and economy.

Interviews with local business leaders reveal a range of concerns about the county’s rich base of public lands, especially the Shoshone National Forest and Yellowstone National Park. Many of these concerns are driven by the region’s growing residential population and increasing visitation.21

**Managing recreation on public lands**

While Yellowstone National Park is the main attraction for visitors from across the country and around the world, locals tend to recreate closer to home in the Shoshone National Forest. Nationwide, the majority of national forest visitors live within 50 miles of the forest, and that pattern holds true in Park County.22

More people in Park County translate into more recreation pressure on the forest, and on our rivers and streams. And the face of recreation is changing. Shoshone National Forest planning documents identify off-highway vehicle use as one of the fastest-growing forms of outdoor recreation nationwide and on the Shoshone. Other recreation activities on the rise include mountain biking, rafting, kayaking, rock climbing, ice climbing, snowmobiling, day hiking, fly fishing, and scenic driving.23

Accommodating growing and diversifying recreation activities poses challenges for forest managers. Key among these:

- Managing mixed uses on travel routes;
- Allocating commercial use permits to limit user impact yet provide for a range of recreation activities—and opportunities for local businesses;
- Managing recreation in occupied grizzly habitat to reduce conflicts between peoples and bears, provide adequate bear habitat, and ensure sufficient recreation opportunities on the forest.24

**Funding for facilities and visitor services**

Yellowstone National Park’s chronic funding woes have been well-documented. In 2002, its operating budget was 35 percent short, with funding shortfalls being particularly severe in education, interpretation, law enforcement, and other visitor services.25
Perhaps because so many locals recreate on the Shoshone, national forest funding issues seem to hit closer to home. One business owner stated, “The Forest Service can’t even keep a trash can or toilet open at many access sites due to cuts in its budget. People aren’t going to return to a place where they see unkempt trails, parks, or campsites with inadequate facilities.” Park County has contributed funds to help keep nearby campgrounds and facilities open for use by visitors and residents.

Funding for recreation and facilities on the forest varies from year to year. “This year, we have been pretty well funded and able to address most needs in operating campgrounds, administering recreation special use permits, and hiring rangers to work within several of the wilderness areas,” said Burns Davison, Shoshone recreation staff officer. “We received funding for two trail projects that had been backlogged. However, the forecast for the coming fiscal year is a reduction of 10 percent in recreation, heritage, and wilderness, and 20 percent in trails.” Seesawing budgets are an obstacle to beneficial and consistent management of public lands and to maintaining high-quality recreation opportunities.

Oil and gas development
Oil and gas development is proceeding at an unprecedented rate in the West. Previous experience suggests that energy development can be an economic boon—for a while, until the inevitable bust follows. In a county with so many concerns about the pace and scale of residential development, the specter of this kind of boom and bust is worrisome. As Jake Fulkerson of QM Appraisal, says, “Pressure from the oil and gas industry scares me. I’m happy to see Wyoming’s Senators speak out against further energy development around the Shoshone National Forest.”

A recent Trout Unlimited report captures the environmental consequences and concerns well:

The ecological effects of traditional gas and oil and coal bed methane development on public lands are extensive. Although the actual “footprint” of a well or pad may be relatively small, production requires pervasive infrastructure and development such as roads, pipelines, and transmission corridors that can contaminate ground and surface water supplies, reduce water quantity, degrade fish habitat, and fragment wildlife corridors, calving grounds and nesting areas. Since very little research has been conducted, there is more that we don’t know than know.
RECOMMENDATIONS

Park County is currently enjoying a moderate rate of growth that is adding to our economic vitality. But that growth is playing out in ways that make many uncertain about the future of our natural heritage, which is so important in drawing people’s attention and loyalty here.

In contrast to some of our faster-growing neighbors around the Greater Yellowstone region, how can Park County get out ahead of the curve? What can we do to avoid the downsides of unmanaged growth, while positioning ourselves for a bright economic future?

1) Integrate landscape protection and economic development to ensure quality of life over the long term.
   
   For example:
   - Expand tourism activity in spring, fall, and winter in ways that do not disrupt wildlife. Communities across North America hold spring wildlife viewing festivals, drawing visitors from around the world.
   - Broaden economic development planning to include landscape protection and habitat conservation. Second home construction and resort development can pose particular conservation challenges and should not be the focus of economic strategies.
   - Encourage business leaders to take an active role in land use planning, agricultural and open space protection, and related issues.

   ![](image)

   **Support for Protecting Wildlife Habitat**

   | I have a great deal of concern for protecting wildlife habitat | 92.4% |
   | I would be willing to contribute to protecting wildlife habitat even if I never see or enjoy the animals | 63.8% |
   | Current habitat is adequate for most wildlife species in the Yellowstone area | 45.2% |

   Figure 10. A 2005 study found strong support for protecting wildlife habitat among residents of Park County and four other counties immediately adjacent to Yellowstone National Park.  

2) Promote responsible development that pays its way, protects important wildlife habitat, and maintains our scenic beauty and rural landscapes.

   For example:
   - Coordinate growth planning to protect important wildlife habitat, open space lands, and water resources. Sheridan County and the City of Sheridan, for example, have put in place a coordinated growth plan for both jurisdictions.
   - Promote development near existing infrastructure, and in or near towns, reducing costs to local government and helping preserve open lands.
   - Implement innovative practices that address challenges Park County faces. For example, Lincoln County, with a percentage of seasonal homes double that of Park County, requires new septic systems to be periodically activated via telephone connection if they sit unused for a long time. Keeping septic systems operating properly helps protect groundwater from pollution.
   - Address the cost of housing in city and county development planning. Compared to Teton County,
The 2005 State of the Rockies Report Card gave Park County an A for civic engagement, and ranked it among the top ten counties of its size in the Rocky Mountain West.

which has similar natural amenities, Park County has a larger base of private land. Putting policies in place to manage growth will not, by itself, drive up the cost of housing and force spillover development into neighboring areas. However, keeping housing prices in range of working families still must be a goal in local development strategies.

3) Endorse conservation of agricultural lands in ways that account for both working farmers and ranchers and amenity owners.

For example:
- Promote the use of conservation easements, purchase of development rights, and other financial incentives to help farmers and ranchers stay in business while protecting their land from development.
- Ensure there is adequate land trust capacity to facilitate continued agricultural use of land that has already been subdivided but not yet developed.
- Consider innovative development practices that conserve agricultural lands and open space. Some parts of the Greater Yellowstone region have implemented minimum lot sizes—often 20 acres—in an effort to preserve agricultural lands. The problem with this approach, as one regional expert says, is that parcels like these are “too small to farm and too big to mow.” Instead, the county might encourage development clustered closer together, while conserving larger tracts of open space, habitat, and working agricultural lands.

- Begin a statewide dialogue to explore the pros and cons of creating a separate property tax category for landowners who manage their lands primarily for wildlife habitat value. This tax structure may encourage the use of low-cost methods of managing land for wildlife (e.g., reseeding a hayfield with native grasses) that have other conservation benefits such as reducing water use.

4) Focus on making our communities better places to live for young adults looking for opportunity and older adults looking for what they need as they retire.

For example:
- Get fresh ideas and buoy new leadership by encouraging younger business people, the self-employed, and the semi-retired to participate in the Chamber of Commerce and other aspects of the business community.
- Boost business diversity by supporting locally-generated micro-business projects. For example, create a small business mentoring program that pairs active or retired business owners with those just starting out or youth interested in starting a business. Offer entrepreneur education focused on fostering “job creators,” not just job seekers.
• Expand existing workforce and entrepreneur training efforts through Northwest College. Connect these with economic development goals and local business needs, and educate local employers about their benefits.

• Create opportunities for new and seasonal residents to get involved in the community. Area nonprofit organizations, for example, might reach out for help with events, volunteer opportunities, and boards. The Chamber of Commerce could host periodic ice cream socials aimed at engaging these segments of the community.

5) Emphasize recreation and wildlife in federal lands management.

   For example:

   • Recognize the value of the Shoshone National Forest for recreation. Weigh in with Wyoming’s congressional delegation to promote a budget that sustains that priority. Participate in the Shoshone forest planning process to support thoughtful forest management and maintain the character of the forest. Urge caution in allowing oil and gas development on the forest.

   • Ask business leaders to weigh in on issues related to public lands management. Ensure that timber harvest and road management are appropriate and designed to maintain critical wildlife habitat and hunt quality.

   • Encourage management of Bureau of Land Management lands to maintain valuable habitat and provide recreation opportunities in appropriate areas.

6) Promote ongoing learning and dialogue.

   For example:

   • Coordinate among neighboring communities, counties, and agencies in setting regional goals to advance common values such as conserving habitat.

   • Strengthen relationships with public land management agencies to ensure the protection of the assets they control and the ability to identify and take advantage of economic development opportunities.

   • Encourage community-driven, cooperative and collaborative approaches to creatively resolving issues such as the use of area resources for different types of recreation.

   • Engage as much of the community as possible in considering issues related to quality of life, economic development, landscape conservation, and growth management.

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The smartest communities in the Rocky Mountain West are seeing that quality of life has become their economic ace in the hole. As this awareness spreads, there is also a lengthening of many people’s economic horizons. Increasing numbers of investors, builders, decision-makers and citizens are convinced that it makes better economic sense to protect open or working landscapes and thriving ecosystems than to make shorter-term profits with developments that undermine the overall livability of the community.

   Daniel Kemmis
   O’Connor Center for the Rocky Mountain West
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