

January 17, 2020

Teton County Board of County Commissioners
Jackson Town Council & Mayor

RE: Conservation staff position budget request

Dear Commissioners, Mayor & Councilors,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment as you prepare your budgets. As members of the emerging Systems of Conservation group facilitated by the Community Foundation, we have come together to recommend that you create a conservation-focused position in local government, to fully implement the Comprehensive Plan vision: “preserve and protect our area’s ecosystem” for the purpose of economic, social and environmental health.

We are grateful for the work that County and Town staff already do on behalf of the ecosystem, and we know some planners have backgrounds in natural resource management / biology. However, there is no position focused on aligning local government actions with natural resources / ecosystem conservation goals. We recommend creating the following position in your upcoming budget:

Conservation Planner (title TBD)

This person would be an ecosystem ombudsman or steward. Proposed job duties include:

- Coordinate among departments (planning, building, engineering, public works, etc) and other agencies (public lands managers, Wyoming Game & Fish [WGFD], WYDOT), to ensure local government successfully protects and preserves our area’s ecosystem
- Ensure that the ecosystem is always prioritized during development and infrastructure projects. For instance, wildlife habitat, movement corridors, and water quality should be integrated into all road, bridge/culvert, and zoning decisions
- Ensure that key ecosystem-related projects are completed instead of falling through the cracks
- Provide ecological information to assist elected representatives in making key decisions
- Oversee the Teton County Scenic Preserve Trust and its easements (formerly a county staff position until the Great Recession)
- Create and coordinate volunteer Conservation / Ecosystem Commission (or reinvigorate the Natural Resources Technical Advisory Board [NRTAB]).

Here are a few specific examples of where this position could provide needed capacity:

- Re-engage the Natural Resources Stakeholder Group to finish the Natural Resources land development regulations
- Engage with Teton County Public Works Department, WGFD, and public land managers to ensure a Wild & Scenic River compatible approach to protecting the pathway and highway bridge at the Gros Ventre River
- Hire a public lands protection expert to plan for the BLM parcels along the Snake River that BLM has identified for disposal
- Coordinate the county’s response to proposed federal revision to the sage grouse habitat conservation plan

- Lead the county's response to proposed helicopter tours (e.g. commission a synthesis of research on impacts of helicopter tours on wildlife).
- Lead the county's development of comments on federal NEPA processes
- Coordinate among various local agencies to develop an integrated water quality action plan based on thorough science.

In addition to this priority position, we support the momentum we are seeing around the community regarding broader sustainability and transportation issues, and we support your budgeting for and hiring a sustainability coordinator and transportation director.

Please be in touch with any questions and consider us ready to help.

Sincerely, *the following members of the Systems of Conservation collaborative:*

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