

September 3, 2021  
Teton County Board of County Commissioners

**Re: BLM Land Transfer Project**

Dear Chair Macker and Commissioners,

Thank you for your interest in acquiring the BLM parcels along the Snake River and Gros Ventre River corridors to ensure that the wildlife habitat and public recreational opportunities they currently provide are protected in perpetuity. We support the transfer of these parcels to the Teton County government and are grateful for the opportunity to comment on the BLM Land Transfer Project to ensure that our community values of ecosystem stewardship are realized through these important public land transfers.

The Snake River Corridor provides critical permanent wildlife habitat within the Jackson Hole valley, as well as important connectivity for animals migrating through the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. 85% of wildlife species in Wyoming rely on riparian habitat, even though riparian areas make up less than 2% of the state's landscape. With the Snake River corridor being the largest riparian corridor in our valley, it disproportionately serves a large percentage of our native wildlife species as habitat, shelter, and native vegetation to forage. It's protection is critical to ensure those functions stay intact for wildlife.

The BLM parcels considered for transfer to Teton County are primarily within the riparian area of the Snake River Corridor. To ensure that wildlife habitat is protected in perpetuity, we would like to see conservation easements which prohibit development of amenities on parcels with high value wildlife habitat and direct infrastructure to areas of lower conservation value. We'd like to see increased wildlife habitat protections on parcels 9/10 and 26. These parcels are vital for wildlife movement throughout the Snake River corridor and around development, as they are located adjacent to community supported wildlife crossings. The best use for these parcels is to secure it as wildlife habitat in perpetuity through conservation easements held by a third party entity (such as the Jackson Hole Land Trust), which would increase the function of wildlife crossings and offer space for wildlife from competing public uses.

As residential development and tourism grow, the impact on our wildlife intensifies. We recommend the conservation easements placed on high value wildlife habitat areas be finalized before management turns over to the county. This would ensure protection even if management priorities change in the future. With a variety of existing uses and habitat functions between the varying parcels, we are confident the goal of wildlife protection can be balanced with public access and recreational opportunities. To help determine allowed and prohibited uses on each parcel and align management with the goals set by our community's Comprehensive Plan, we suggest the transfer terms require Teton County to apply the Teton County Land Development Regulations to each of the parcels the same way they would apply to private lands. This way, development and management follow our vision of ecosystem stewardship, such as prohibiting development in focal species mapping priority areas or in the Natural Resource Overlay. Allowed development and uses in these areas either must be compatible with wildlife use or approved through an Environmental Assessment.

As it stands, the parcels would be overseen by the Parks and Recreation Department. We encourage the county to jointly fund or create an Ecosystem Stewardship Department to oversee the transfer

and management of these parcels to assure the goals of wildlife protection are prioritized and public access is best managed for ecosystem stewardship.

We greatly appreciate Teton County's interest in transferring management of the BLM parcels to safeguard public access, recreational opportunities, and wildlife habitat.

Thank you,

*Chelsea Carson*

Chelsea Carson  
Conservation Program Manager  
Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance