

April 4, 2022

Teton County Board of County Commissioners

Re: Wildlife Feeding & Bear Conflict Area LDR Text Amendment

Dear Board of County Commissioners,

We are pleased to see the proposed updates to Section 5.1.3: Wildlife Feeding in the Teton County Land Development Regulations (LDR). With the arrival of spring and increased animal movement throughout our valley, we support approving and adopting the revised version of Section 5.1.3 as soon as possible. We are grateful for the immense amount of work that the Planning Commission, staff, and community members have put into the draft so far and believe the updated version contains measures that will greatly improve human-wildlife coexistence in Teton County. We support the overall updated language on securing attractants and feeding regulations county-wide, and most notably, the expansion to a county-wide requirement of Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee (IGBC) approved bear-resistant trash cans.

Our community wrote clear goals for ecosystem stewardship and conservation funding into the 2012 Comprehensive Plan, and we are grateful that the County is updating its LDRs concerning the feeding of wild animals and wildlife friendly fencing to help realize these goals. However, proper education and enforcement is needed to ensure compliance with the new regulation language, as well as funding mechanisms for county and town infrastructure, and for private trash haulers and residents to afford this transition. This language update must be complemented with a strategic implementation plan that addresses financing, public education, additional policy recommendations, and enforcement. We respectfully offer considerations for these subject areas below.

Funding

The updated regulation will come with costs to private landowners, publicly owned facilities, and private businesses responsible for waste removal. To successfully implement a county-wide requirement of bear-resistant trash cans, we need a funding plan that supports private trash hauling companies, public facilities, and residents. Reassurance for residents and waste management professionals will be key to ensuring community acceptance and an equitable transition.

We urge the County to allocate significant public funds in your Fiscal Year 2023 (FY23) Budget to implement the updated regulatory framework, as well as support incentive programs to compliment private efforts. We believe strategically planned funding, if facilitated by the public works project manager, planning staff, and conservation-focused staff like the recently hired ecosystem stewardship administrator, would help these regulations be adopted with benefit and assistance to all. Below we outline potential uses of these funds but ask that county staff evaluate these needs and come forward with a budget request.

1. Replacement and Improvement of all County Infrastructure and Facilities

Public facilities will need to comply with the updated LDR. With revenue in 2022 exceeding predictions, the County has available funds to fully transition all infrastructure and public facilities to be bear and wildlife resistant in the FY23 budget. We encourage the County to lead our community by example and commit funds to reducing wildlife conflicts. County staff could conduct a comprehensive inventory of facilities and infrastructure between Departments (ISWR, Pathways, Parks and Rec, START, Public Works, etc) to comply with the updated LDR. This would include but is not limited to:

- Replacement of all publicly owned dumpsters and garbage containers with IGBC certified containers for waste disposal (including bus stops, parks, pathways, recreational areas, and other publicly owned facilities)
- Securing attractants and removing all non-native ornamental attractants on County public property (including fencing or other wildlife-proofing needs)

2. Public-Private Partnership with Teton County Trash Haulers

Once the revised LDR is adopted all residential garbage containers and applicable commercial dumpsters will need to be updated, modified, or replaced to comply with the IGBC containers requirement. To successfully transition all infrastructure, zero-interest loans could be offered to trash haulers through an RFP process where the company is required to outline an estimated budget to transition to 100% compliance for both residential and commercial customers over a phased timeline.

3. Private Land Conflict Reduction Program

Grants and resources could be made available through nonprofits and other private donations to ensure every resident can afford the cost of a new bear-resistant trash can or other measures of securing attractants. Uses for a privately funded conflict reduction program could include but are not limited to:

- Bear-resistant container cost-share for homeowners and other localized conflict sources
- Bird feeder replacement
- Fruit tree removal, harvest, or replacement program
- Exclusionary fencing for agricultural and residential conflict prevention with beehives, poultry, livestock, gardens, compost, etc
- Funds could be used to assist BearWise Jackson Hole (BearWise JH) efforts

Our organizations, as well as other community nonprofits and private citizens, have expressed a commitment to help raise funds for donated cans through the already established BearWise JH program, which provides on-the-ground support for residences and is outlined in more detail below.

Outreach and Education

Our organizations are committed to working with the County on developing an education and outreach strategy to ensure compliance, safety, and a smooth roll-out of the new regulation. Below we detail ongoing and future efforts to compliment the adoption of the revised Wildlife Feeding LDR.

BearWise Jackson Hole

BearWise JH is a 16-year collaboration between Bridger-Teton National Forest, Grand Teton National Park, Jackson Hole Wildlife Foundation and Wyoming Game and Fish Department. Their mission is to Keep Bears Wild and Humans Safe. In 2021, Teton County representatives started regularly joining BearWise JH meetings and the County has been invited to become an official partner. This collaborative addresses human-bear conflict on public and private lands, proactively and reactively and with the area's best experts and professionals. In 2022, BearWise JH will be hiring a professional that will enable greater outreach, especially on private lands, better coordination between bear-conflict experts, and on-the-ground assistance to landowners.

We believe this established community-wide program would benefit from formal representation from Teton County and strongly encourage you to formally partner with BearWise JH. With official County support and potential funding, BearWise JH could expand their scope of impact and provide all residents resources, on-the-ground support, and educational materials to comply with the updated LDRs as well as provide additional valuable resources for pragmatic solutions for human-wildlife coexistence.

Wild Neighborhoods

The Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance is currently revitalizing our Wild Neighborhoods program, a coalition of local agencies and nonprofits that seek to reduce conflicts and promote coexistence with wildlife through proactive community engagement. This year, the Alliance through Wild Neighborhoods will create and distribute the first Teton County Wildlife Coexistence Community Monitoring Report. The goal of this report is to establish and analyze a baseline of information that will measure and track our community's coexistence successes and challenges over time and assess Teton County's current state of wildlife coexistence, envision community goals, and present actionable recommendations. Our hope is that insight from this report will compliment and advance policy and educational efforts in Teton County, such as including concrete, measurable conservation goals and metrics in the Town and County Comprehensive Plan and Indicator Reports, as suggested by the Planning Commission.

We are engaging numerous local and regional stakeholders to ensure this report is an effective community resource. Outreach will include educational events and collaborative workshops, attending homeowner's association gatherings, and social media campaigns to ensure the report is widely disseminated and used.

Additional Efforts

Our organizations are committed to collaborating with additional organizations with existing broad educational programs to incorporate uniform messaging into outreach efforts, providing greater consistency to the community and magnifying the breadth and effectiveness of BearWise JH. This will include marketing and communications that facilitate widespread community "buy-in" and encourage community members to be a part of the solution.

Other relevant NGO and agency efforts include, but are not limited to:

- Wyoming Wildlife Advocates, in partnership with private citizens, has recently accepted a donation where they will purchase and deliver donated cans directly to residents in Teton County.
- Teton Conservation District wildlife coexistence programs and on-the-ground support for residents
- The Good Neighbor Handbook (GNH), a partnership with Teton Conservation District, the Jackson Hole Land Trust, Teton County, and the Town of Jackson, which aims to increase awareness of Teton County residents for how to live responsibly in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. Sections in the GNH include references to the Land Development Regulations and best practices for securing attractants.
- Friends of the Bridger-Teton wildlife ambassador program
- US Fish and Wildlife Service is hiring new bear specialists, one will be based regionally

Enforcement

Enforcement is necessary to achieve full compliance of the updated feeding regulations. However, we understand the existing challenges the County faces for enforcement. We appreciate the County's commitment to hiring an additional code enforcement officer in FY22 and hope the vacant two positions can be filled as soon as possible.

We also encourage the County to explore alternative opportunities for enforcing the updated regulation. Ideas include:

- An anonymous tip line for reporting noncompliance has been successful in other communities and would allow citizens to help with enforcement.
- Allowing law enforcement, code enforcement, wildlife agency personnel, or other persons designated by resolution of the Board of County Commissioners to issue warnings and citations, in the same manner as a speeding/parking ticket.
- To be allowed to tip at the transfer station, each hauler would have to have their entire inventory be IGBC certified bear-resistant trash cans. If there are supply chain or other issues, they must outline their phased implementation timeline for 100% compliance.
- Residents who haven't made the switch to a IGBC certified bear-resistant trash can are issued a citation at the same cost it would take to purchase a can for a year, encouraging each person to comply.

While the need for revising Section 5.1.3 of the LDR's has been heightened by the increased presence of grizzly bears in Teton County, the long-term history of conflict over trash and the resultant removal of black bears, together with backyard feeding of ungulates and large carnivores, is reason for action now. This issue is not new, and increased revenue to the county puts us in an ideal position to mitigate negative impacts to our natural resources and wildlife.

We urge the County to approve the revised version of Section 5.1.3 as soon as possible and we look forward to collaborating with local community members, stakeholders, community officials, waste management representatives, and NGOs, to communicate and engage homeowners in Teton County to comply with the updated regulation. We encourage open

communication with us as this process moves forward. Together, we can ensure the safety of our residents and our wildlife on which our economy depends.

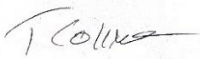
Sincerely,



Chelsea Carson
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Renee Seidler
Executive Director
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Teddy Collins
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Penny Maldonado
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