

Wildlife versus jobs: a false tradeoff  
By Jeff Klausmann

The headline of a recent advertisement blares, "IS YOUR JOB TIED TO THIS MAP?" This alarmist rhetoric misrepresents the status and purpose of the proposed wildlife overlay map.

The draft PUD ordinance and wildlife overlay are just that: drafts. They are being readied for public testimony next week. No doubt, a broad spectrum of opinions will be heard.

The proposed wildlife overlay is a scientifically credible map that was developed by the Teton Regional Land Trust for its own purposes. It has been reviewed by a group of conservation planners and land managers, and the Idaho Department of Fish and Game decided to incorporate the mapping "as-is" into its own Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy. As taxpayers we should be thrilled by this generous contribution. A similar, outside effort could cost the county tens of thousands of dollars eventually arriving at the same conclusions.

A central goal of the PUD ordinance is to add fairness and objectivity to a process that has recently become expensive and confusing for developers because they and the county are unclear about what information is required and how it will be used in the subdivision process. The purpose of any natural resource overlay is to identify sensitive areas that deserve extra attention during planning, not to rule out or unduly burden development. Knowing that a property is in a resource overlay area would require developers and the Planning and Zoning Commission to evaluate potential conflicts with valuable public resources and achieve balanced solutions.

Fish, wildlife, and other natural resources are economic assets for our community. Natural resource based activities such as hunting, fishing, birding, and wildlife viewing add billions to the US economy every year. According to the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Idaho Sportsmen contributed almost \$600 million to the state's economy in 2006. Idaho Fish and Game estimated that in 2003 fishing alone added nearly \$1million dollars to Teton County's economy.

Consideration of wildlife during the planning process will strengthen economic progress in Teton County, not wreck it. There is already a glut of nearly 15,000 platted and approved rural lots in the county. Even before the global economic slowdown, these lots were largely stagnant. Given the huge oversupply, it is hard to see how more lots scattered helter-skelter across the valley will contribute to real economic development.

The draft ordinance is not intended to shut down development. As a participant in the PUD working group I can assure you this idea was never even on the table. The aim is to even-handedly consider tradeoffs between developers' goals and conservation of public natural resources, the very resources that draw people to our region.

Is your job tied to the overlay map? You bet it is! Natural resources, quality open space, and outdoor recreation are the engine of economic growth in Teton County. They are why so

many people want to live here. Failure to plan responsibly will squander the very natural resources that attract visitors and residents alike to our remarkable valley.