



IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME
 UPPER SNAKE REGION
 4279 Commerce Circle
 Idaho Falls, Idaho 83401

C.L. "Butch" Otter / Governor
 Cal Groen / Director

June 25, 2008

TETON COUNTY
 PLANNING & ZONING

JUL 07 2008

RECEIVED

Sue Bagley
 Deputy Planning Administrator
 Teton County Planning and Building Department
 89 North Main Street, Suite 4
 Driggs, ID 83422

RE: Mahogany Ridge PUD

Dear Sue:

Idaho Department of Fish and Game staff has reviewed the preliminary plat for the 3,836-acre Mahogany Ridge PUD. This large proposed development consisting of 1,381 building lots is located west of the Teton River in the Bates area, Teton County Idaho. The proposed development is adjacent to a large area of U.S. Forest Service and U.S. Bureau of Land Management land, not State of Idaho land as shown on the preliminary plat. Resident species of fish and wildlife are the property of all citizens within the state (Idaho Code § 36-103(a)) and decisions affecting fish and wildlife therefore are the concern of all Idahoans. The Idaho Department of Fish and Game (Department), and the Idaho Fish and Game Commission, are charged with the statutory responsibility to preserve, protect, perpetuate, and manage all fish and wildlife in Idaho (Idaho Code § 36-103(a)). As such, we advocate that fish and wildlife receive equal consideration with other resources in decisions affecting land and water management.

This area is mostly farmland and is used to raise hay, grain, and potatoes. Elk, moose, mule deer, and white-tailed deer are all occasionally observed in the project area. Moose and white-tailed deer travel through this area at any time of year when moving between the willow habitats along the Teton River and the Big Hole Mountains, but it is not considered a migration corridor. The project area is also not considered big game winter range or important summer habitat. Farms with haystacks and tree farms in the area often have problems with big game depredations during the winter. Most of these sites have now been fenced or paneled to keep big game out of stored hay. Sharp-tailed grouse are periodically observed in the project area near wooded areas, however the Department has no records of any sharp-tail leks in the area. There is a small area of riparian and wetland habitat in the northeast corner of the project area that likely supports nesting waterfowl and other water birds. Many other songbirds and small mammals typically associated with farmland are found throughout the area.

The grain fields in this area attract large numbers of birds feeding on waste grain in the fall or on new growth in the spring. Sandhill cranes, Canada geese, ducks, and trumpeter swans all feed in these grain fields. This area is considered an important staging area for sandhill cranes. However, the large number of cranes concentrated in this area has resulted in problems with crop depredations. To address this problem, the Department initiated a sandhill crane depredation hunt in the early 1990's. Currently the Department issues 100 sandhill crane hunting permits annually in Teton County, in part, to address this issue.

Keeping Idaho's Wildlife Heritage

The preliminary plat shows 1,381 building lots scattered across the entire project area. The plat shows 2,816 acres of 'open space'. Although this is more than 50% of the project area, the arrangement of the building lots, roads, and open space leave almost no functional wildlife habitat. Most of the open space areas are surrounded by proposed building lots or pre-existing residential developments. The open space acres would be more beneficial to existing wildlife species if the lots were all clustered into one section of the development, and the remaining acreage left perpetually protected in one strategically-located block near the public land. Open space designs shown on this plat primarily serve the lot-owners and families nearby these spaces, but are not particularly useful to wildlife. The developer is encouraged to reconfigure the entire development such that the building lots are clustered and there is some meaningful open space.

If the open space areas are not expected to be farmed in the future, it is critical that these areas be revegetated before noxious weeds become established. Continuing to farm some large areas of re-configured open space could help somewhat minimize the complete loss of all wildlife habitat value other than for backyard-type wildlife.

Developers of this project should be required to provide mitigation commensurate with the loss of public wildlife and their habitats. We offer the Department's services to Teton County in gauging the adequacy of a mitigation proposal, designed and offered by the developer. We also encourage the Teton County Planning and Building Department to include the recommended Plat Notes attached to this letter.

Thank you for providing us an opportunity to comment on this proposed development. Please contact Kim Ragotzkie of my staff if you have any questions about our comments.

Sincerely,



Steve Schmidt
Regional Supervisor

SLS:KER:jms

cc: Gary Vecellio, IDFG
Terry Thomas, IDFG
Doug Petersen, IDFG
Russ Knight, IDFG
Wendy Reynolds, BLM - Upper Snake Field Office
Jay Pence, USFS - Teton Basin Ranger District

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Attachment (1): Recommended Plat Notes for the Mahogany Ridge PUD

Keeping Idaho's Wildlife Heritage

Recommended Plat Notes for the Mahogany Ridge PUD:

1. Plat notes should discourage the construction of fences except as needed to confine livestock or pets. If property boundary fences are built, they should be wildlife friendly designs. Buck-and-rail and woven wire fences should be prohibited. Barbed wire fences should not be taller than 42 inches, have smooth wire on top, and better yet be constructed to be let down in winter.
2. Plat notes should require that pets, both dogs and cats, be restrained at all times so they do not harass big game and ground-nesting birds, especially sharp-tailed grouse.
3. Plat notes should require all utility lines be buried to minimize the risk of bird-powerline collisions. The large numbers of sandhill cranes and trumpeter swans in the area make this especially important.
4. Plat notes should include an agreement that landowners cannot file a claim against the Idaho Department of Fish and Game for wildlife damage to their property.
5. Plat notes should include language prohibiting the feeding of wildlife other than songbirds, especially elk and deer. Recent legislation strictly prohibits the private feeding of big game animals in this area (IDAPA 02.04.25.001). Bird feeders should only be permitted during the months bears are in hibernation (December through February).
6. Plat notes should require that any hay or other domestic livestock feed stored on the property be tightly paneled to exclude elk and deer. Design specifications are available from the Department.
7. Noxious weeds must be controlled.
8. Garbage should be kept in bear proof containers and removed at least once a week.

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