

Decoding the Code Issue Three: Mapping Our Future

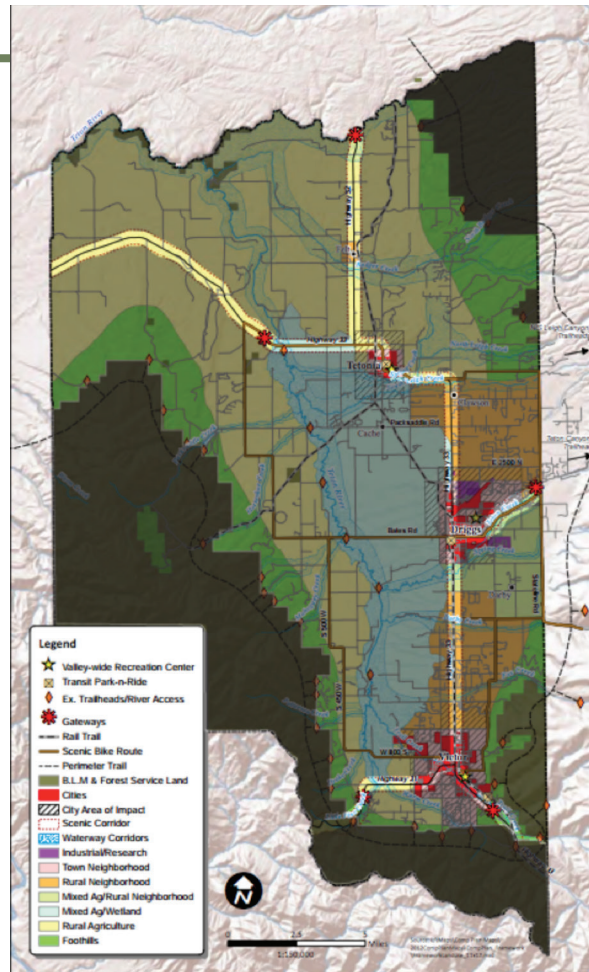
Creating Thorough and User-Friendly Maps to Protect Teton Valley's World-Renowned Scenery and Wildlife.

A drive down Highway 33 offers an interesting, eclectic visual experience. Salvage yards, barley fields, assembly plants, a beloved Drive-In movie theatre, conservation lands, high fences, and open vistas are but just some of the sights one sees on the drive between Driggs, Victor, and Teton. Though most of Highway 33 runs a straight north/south course through the valley, it is flanked by

stunningly different visual experiences. In some portions, one has a full view of the Tetons with little development in the foreground, while other portions are virtually indistinguishable from the cities.

Given the varied landscape along Highway 33, it's interesting to note that the existing scenic corridor is simply the first 330' of area adjacent to the highway, with one set of regulations for this corridor area that clearly has so many different features.

Scenic Corridor: lands identified for enhanced protection in which special landscaping, building placement, fencing, and/or other measures are required in order to protect key scenic vistas.



Proposed Scenic Corridors

The scenic corridor is an area where setbacks and sometimes additional screening is required to shield unsightly uses or to direct views to the mountains. The current scenic corridor regulations have been used with mixed results. Some areas have no screening at all, others are insufficiently screened with fencing or landscaped vegetation that is noticeably out of place for the surrounding area. Unfortunately, the draft code utilizes this same “one size fits all” approach as the current code: a linear corridor with the same prescriptions for buffering/screening no matter what the surrounding landscape looks like. Though there are a variety of landscape options in the draft code, there is no guidance on what landscape treatment is appropriate for a given location, and lands beyond the proposed 500’ corridor are not addressed by the scenic corridor at all.



Teton County, Wyoming uses a Scenic Resource Overlay to protect key vistas that are visible for miles



There is more to a scenic view than what lies within 500' of a highway!

Let's consider what lands are "scenic". Highways are certainly not the only place we experience the majesty of Teton Valley. There is probably a particular scenic vista or patch of landscape that you think is worthy of protection regardless of its proximity to a highway. Teton Valley is chock-full of these killer vistas, and they can be found in many areas throughout the valley.

In business parlance, scenic areas make up our portfolio of assets. In a community where scenery and wildlife are our greatest assets, it certainly behooves us to inventory them, protect them, and seek to increase their value over time. This is why we need to follow the Comp Plan and complete a scenic lands inventory. That way, we'll know the location and character of our most cherished scenic lands and how best to protect them. Once inventoried, these lands can have specific design standards applied in order to avoid the one-size-fits-all approach, which has not proven successful in the past. .



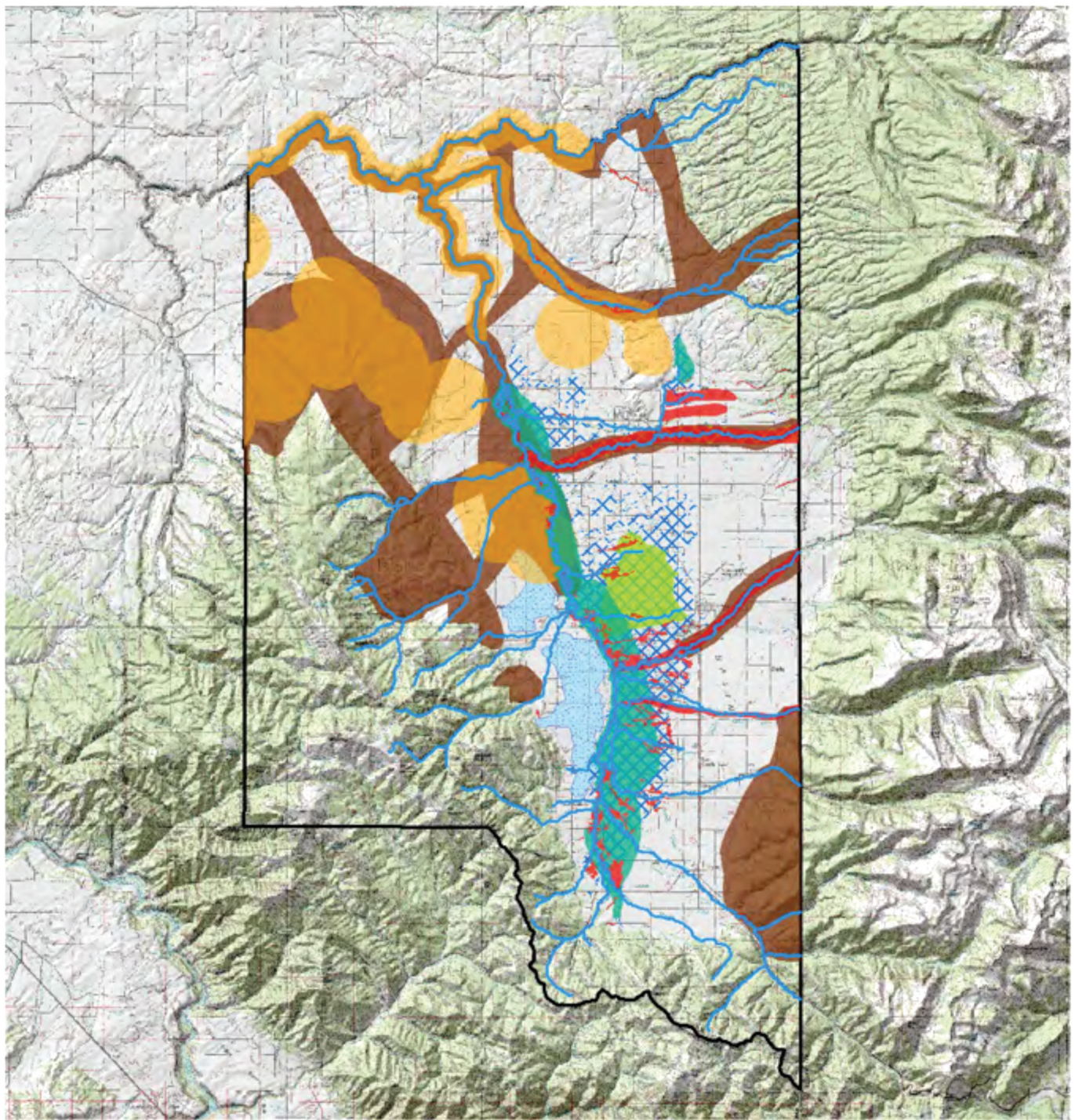
Blaine County, Idaho has a well-mapped Mountain Overlay (above) which has been successful in preventing "ridge houses" such as the one north of Tetonina (below)



Mapping our sweeping vistas is not only necessary to protect our valley's beloved scenery, it is also necessary to strengthening property values. When scenic lands are inventoried, mapped, and protected by reasonable regulations, their monetary worth increases. The same can be said of our natural resources. In 2007, the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation – one of the largest charities in the world that supports environmental conservation – found that Teton Valley was the #1 wildlife habitat conservation priority in the entire Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. In particular, it found that Teton Valley's environment was irreplaceable and extremely vulnerable to overdevelopment. Our scenery and wildlife habitat extend from the Teton Range, across private lands in the valley, and back on up into public lands in the Big Holes. When thinking about scenic lands and wildlife habitat, we must remember that they are a landscape-level resource; in other words, they cannot stop and start at property boundaries – they must run seamlessly between public and private lands as much as possible. Good mapping helps us accomplish this seamless transition.

The north end of the Big Holes, the Teton River bottoms, and the Badger, Spring, and Teton Creek corridors contain some of the most abundant wildlife populations in the region. Our abundant wildlife resources are an immense contribution to Teton Valley's desirability. If we protect and enhance these assets, then we can protect and enhance the value of our lands.

Natural Resource Overlay: a map that displays the habitat of specific species (e.g. big game, songbirds, raptors, trout) in order to identify lands for which additional development regulations are required for the purpose of protecting said species.



TETON COUNTY NATURAL RESOURCES OVERLAY

0 2.5 5 Miles

Scale: 1:275,000

USGS Topographic Quad 1:100,000

Revised Idaho and Wyoming 1982

Data Sources: TRLT Surveys (2002-2007)

IDF&O Data (2003, 2006)

USFWS National Wetlands Inventory (1993)

Gregory Aquatics and Henry's Fork Foundation (2005)

Map by Teton Regional Land Trust, June 2008



TETON REGIONAL LAND TRUST
1000 Park Blvd., Teton, WY 83426 • 307.743.4444 • www.tetonlandtrust.org

- BIG GAME MIGRATION CORRIDORS AND SEASONAL RANGE
- WATERBIRD MIGRATION, FORAGING HABITAT
- WATERBIRD BREEDING, MIGRATION, FORAGING, WINTERING HABITAT
- SONGBIRD/RAPTOR BREEDING AND WINTERING HABITAT
- SHARP-TAILED GROUSE BREEDING AND WINTERING HABITAT
- PRIORITY WETLAND HABITAT
- PRIORITY WETLAND HABITAT - WOODS CREEK FEN
- PRIORITY WETLAND HABITAT - SOUTH LEIGH
- PERENNIAL AND SEASONAL TROUT HABITAT

Existing Teton County Natural Resource Overlay

Let's turn now to Teton County's existing Natural Resource Overlay:

Teton County's Natural Resource Overlay (shown on previous page) is a good start in protecting moose, elk, raptors, songbirds, and other wildlife species (each of which is represented by a certain color on the map). However, it is not always clear when its regulations apply, and what level of analysis is needed to determine wildlife impacts when development is proposed. In addition, the Comp Plan states that we still need to do more to protect our natural resources as current standards represent only the most minimum level of protection.

The first thing to consider is that the most current data should be utilized in order to ensure an accurate wildlife map. The existing wildlife map was prepared by Teton County in 2003, and it would be good for the county to update the wildlife map with available current data. It would also be beneficial to map irreplaceable vegetative communities such as cottonwood corridors and fen wetlands to better understand locations of valuable wildlife habitat. This will allow future development – and conservation efforts – to be planned in a predictable and thoughtful manner. It may also be necessary to determine the important “indicator species” necessary for understanding Teton Valley's wildlife.

Indicator Species: plants and animals whose population indicate the health of the overall ecosystem.

Though big game such as elk, moose, and deer are beautiful and charismatic, their populations don't necessarily indicate whether the overall environment – and their longtime survivability – is in good health. If we protect species such as wetland shrubs, sharp-tailed sage grouse, sandhill cranes, and other possible Indicator Species, then we know we are protecting the overall environment and the array of wildlife within. The first step is to identify what Indicator Species help us better understand Teton Valley's ecosystem, then we can obtain the best data available (hopefully newer than 2003!) and utilize them in natural resource maps. As new data become available, maps should be updated on a periodic basis.



What's good for the grouse is good for the moose!

Secondly, it is important that when mapping wildlife habitat, we actually use maps! Some have proposed the draft Land Use Code contain no maps – only references to underlying data. This is the wrong approach because it would create a complex and incoherent web of regulations with little predictability, and will likely baffle any property owner exploring development and/or conservation options with their land. In fact, the 5th District Court of Idaho struck down Blaine County’s 2008 wildlife ordinance precisely because protected wildlife habitat was not mapped, which caused uncertainty for landowners and the public. Mapping is necessary to protect landscape-level resources such as scenic vistas and wildlife because they do not adhere to property or political boundaries; they are located along corridors that are often miles in length and traverse many properties through public and private land. As such, we need to see the literal big picture to understand how property should be developed when important wildlife habitat and scenic vistas are present.

Mapping scenic lands and habitat not only creates certainty and predictability, it also identifies the properties of highest value. Just as a gold prospector would seek out property containing veins of precious metal, modern-day property owners in Teton Valley who own property in protected scenic and wildlife corridors enjoy greater property value because they contain the valley’s most valuable assets. After all, our scenery and our wildlife are our greatest assets, and no Teton Valley real estate brochure would be complete without a photo of a bull moose against the backdrop of the Tetons.

What are the takeaway issues from this discussion?

Transparency and Predictability. Property owners need guidance as to what type of development will be permitted, and where. The process of obtaining a subdivision or development permit without a clear demarcation of scenic and wildlife areas will be a huge headache for any property owner. Neighbors need to have some assurance that the surrounding wildlife and scenery will be protected, and that property values derived from these features will be held aloft. As Teton Valley continues its transition toward a resort and lifestyle economy, we must be assured that our most important scenic and wildlife assets are not threatened.

Ensuring the integrity of public lands and conservation easements. Public and conservation lands are the epicenter of scenic and wildlife resources. However, as we all know, a single scenic vista or wildlife migration corridor will often extend through many lands, both public and private. By enacting provisions to protect these landscape-level resources, we can ensure that our corner of the Yellowstone ecosystem continues to enjoy its world-famous status.