

TETON COUNTY, MONTANA

# GROWTH POLICY UPDATE

2023  

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2028



PREPARED FOR:

**TETON COUNTY**  
MONTANA

TETON COUNTY  
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# TETON COUNTY

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## MONTANA

### 1. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

#### PURPOSE

A Growth Policy is a community's growth and development plan that evaluates existing community conditions and sets goals and future visions for housing, land use, economic development, local services, public safety, natural resources, transportation, and other unique characteristics and features of the community. A Growth Policy is not a regulation or ordinance but serves as the legal basis for enacting them.

The 2023 Teton County Growth Policy is an update to the 2016 Growth Policy, providing a vision for Teton County that indicates how it wants to develop and make public investments over the next 20 years. The Growth Policy provides a long-range focus to help decision-makers set priorities and evaluate whether development proposals are consistent with this vision. The Policy is a tool to coordinate with other government agencies and to communicate to citizens and developers the vision of the community, as well as provide the framework for regulatory updates, land use decisions, and public investments. The Teton County Growth Policy is an invaluable resource for the County.

#### 1.1. GEOGRAPHIC SCOPE

The Teton County Growth Policy is the responsibility of the Teton County Planning Board and takes into consideration all areas of the County, including the incorporated city of Choteau, and the towns of Fairfield and Dutton.

#### 1.2. AUTHORITY

In accordance with Mont. Code Ann. § 76-1-601 through § 76-1-606 (2021), the Teton County Commissioners have authorized the Teton County Planning Board to develop a County Growth Policy to address the most critical issues facing the

County. The requirements outlined in these statutes constitute the contents of this Growth Policy.

#### 1.3. PLANNING IN TETON COUNTY AND INCORPORATED CITY/TOWNS

The Teton County Planning Department is responsible for land use planning in Teton County. Responsibilities include the development and administration of Teton County's Subdivision Regulations, Hazard Mitigation Plan, enforcement of Floodplain Regulations, and overall land use management for the County in accordance with the Growth Policy. The Department also facilitates communication between the landowners/developers and a private consultant who provides a review of certificates of survey prior to filing with the County Clerk and Recorder. This review is intended to identify any clerical errors and omissions and to ensure exempt divisions of land are compliant with the provisions outlined in the Montana Subdivision and Planning Act.

The Planning Department issues new rural addresses and develops project maps for other departments. All 911 address data is created, edited, and disbursed to the appropriate agencies as necessary to facilitate emergency response. When requested, the Department issues floodplain permits and letters to interested parties regarding the absence of zoning in the County.

The Teton County Planning Board consists of volunteer members who represent each incorporated city/town and the unincorporated areas of the County. The Teton Conservation District is represented as well.

The overarching duty of the Teton County Planning Board is to maintain and improve quality of life in communities throughout the County, acting upon such issues as growth, transportation, environmental protection, agriculture, historical preservation, and conservation. The board is largely responsible for setting land use policies and protecting resources throughout the county.

The Planning Board considers plans for new development and provides guidelines for the pattern

and pace of future development. The Board meets on an as-needed basis to review and approve plans and requests related to land development.

The Planning Board adopted updated bylaws on September 19, 2022, that outline the authority, purpose, powers, and duties of the Board. The bylaws of the Teton County Planning Board can be obtained by visiting the Teton County website at <https://tetoncountymt.org/> or by contacting the Planning Department at (406) 466-3130, 19 Main Avenue South, P.O. Box 610, Choteau, MT 59422.

Teton County has recognized the importance of long-range planning for many years. The County adopted a Comprehensive Development Plan in 1981. Subsequently, the County adopted a Development Permit System in 1982 for commercial and industrial uses then updated Subdivision Regulations in 1983.

Since 1981 the State of Montana has amended the Montana Code several times related to planning and subdivisions. In 1993, significant modifications in the law changed the definition of subdivision from "parcels less than 20 acres in size" to "parcels less than 160 acres". Several exemptions were also eliminated, with the result being that more development activity was subject to local subdivision review. Teton County is currently in the process of another update to its Subdivision Regulations to incorporate recent changes initiated by the Montana Legislature.

In 2003 a combination of legislative changes, concern about potential development issues, and the opportunity to incorporate new planning techniques into the plan, prompted an update of the 1981 Comprehensive Development Plan, including changing the name of the plan per legislative statute to the 2003 Growth Policy. A planning process was again initiated in 2015 and resulted in the current Growth Policy being updated by this effort.

More recent activities of the Planning Department/Board include updating Floodplain Hazard Management Regulations. Additionally, Teton County completed a Hazard Mitigation Plan in 2021 and is currently planning an update to its Community Wildfire Protection Plan pending funding to develop

the plan. The County was also a contributor to the Teton County Long-Range Plan completed by the local office of USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service.

The City of Choteau recently adopted a Growth Policy which is coordinated with this policy. The City maintains land use and building codes that regulate development within the city and is in the process of updating zoning and annexation policies. It has also established a Special Improvements District Revolving Fund, a Street Maintenance Fund, and a Street Maintenance District to provide funds for local improvements. Choteau has appointed a Tourism Business Improvement District Board of Directors that utilizes the local hospitality tax proceeds for improvement projects. A City Tree Board has also been established.

The Choteau Area Port Authority is a 5-member board that meets monthly and works in conjunction with the Chamber of Commerce to generate business leads, take advantage of grant opportunities, and generally support economic development activities. The Port Authority is funded by 2 mills from the City of Choteau.

As of 2023 Fairfield and Dutton are establishing zoning regulations and Fairfield is working on annexation policies to address the need for extension of local infrastructure.

Teton County is an active member of the Sweetgrass Development Corporation (SDC). The SDC works with regions to develop the region's own Community Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). This type of region-wide planning highlights capital improvements necessary for the area to provide opportunity for the economic well-being of the communities within the planning area. The CEDS provides monitoring and evaluating of long-term economic goals and strategies for the region, and is updated every five years. The County's association with the SDC provides planning benefits for the County that are otherwise difficult for smaller communities to develop on their own with limited budgets and staff and gives County residents the opportunity to provide input on goals and strategies.

#### 1.4. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The County Planning Board established a public involvement plan for development of the Growth Policy that included a variety of means for public education and input. Each member of the Planning Board was responsible for informing their local governments and residents in their representative areas about the development of the Growth Policy.

The plan included the creation of a project website with links from Teton County and other community social media sites where Growth Policy works session dates and times, and updated Policy drafts were posted. The website provided contact information for making comments on the progress of the document and requested that all respondents provide their name and address.

The public involvement plan, survey results, and other outreach information is in Appendix A.

A public meeting was held on October 4, 2023 to take comments on the final draft of the document.

Press releases were used to inform the public about the progress of the document and announce public meeting opportunities.

Thank you to the following groups and organizations for participating in outreach regarding the content of the Growth Policy:

- » Sweetgrass Development Corporation
- » Teton County USDA NRCS
- » Teton Conservation District

#### 1.5. DOCUMENT ORGANIZATION

The Teton County Growth Policy is organized in a manner that highlights the required elements of § 76-1-601 through § 76-1-606, MCA (2021). Each section provides current information about the element as it relates to the existing conditions of Teton County, the individual incorporated city of Choteau, and the towns of Fairfield and Dutton, followed by projections that may affect the future of the County and associated communities. Goals and objectives developed through the Planning Board's study of each issue, including public input, are also included in each section.

An implementation plan is presented at the end of the document. Utilizing Kate Eby's smartsheet (Eby, 2022) definitions, the planning board developed the implementation plan to include goals, objectives, an action plan, and a timeframe in which the community is planning to accomplish the defined objectives and actions. Goals are a desired outcome or result. Objectives identify specific actions to move toward a common goal. And, the action identifies projects, steps, and resources that help achieve objectives.





## 2. COUNTY BACKGROUND

Teton County is located along the eastern front of the Rocky Mountains with the Lewis and Clark National Forest and majestic mountain peaks comprising the western most portion of the County. The forested habitat, home to grizzly bears and mountain goats, gives way to the dramatic landscape of the great plains. Dinosaurs once roamed this same land, and the wealth of fossil remains in the County are indicative of the rich natural heritage of this area.

Prior to permanent settlement, the Pikuni, Piegan-Blackfoot buffalo hunters, controlled areas along the Rocky Mountain front. In 1867, the U.S. Government established the military post of Fort Shaw a few miles south of Fairfield on the Sun River. The first permanent settlers were squatters and cattlemen who located near the military forts and trading posts at Fort Shaw, Choteau, and Dupuyer.

Teton County was formed on March 1, 1893, from a portion of Chouteau County, with the town of Choteau as the county seat. Teton County was later subdivided when Toole, Glacier, and Pondera Counties were formed.

The County has a rich agricultural heritage with irrigated cropland producing barley, wheat and hay and traditional ranch operations that still have ties to early settlers. Remnants of rail towns scattered throughout the county are symbols of the hopes and dreams of previous generations.

Early stockmen introduced irrigation in the stream valleys and lower benches in the 1880's and 1890's, which was significantly expanded with the development of the Greenfield Irrigation District. The District provides irrigation water for approximately 80,000 acres of land. Water is stored in Gibson Reservoir, Willow Reservoir and Pishkun Reservoir. Development of the reservoirs, canals and distribution system occurred from 1904 to 1936.

There are three incorporated Cities/Towns within the county – Choteau, Fairfield, and Dutton. Other small communities in the county include Bynum, Collins, Farmington, Pendroy and Power. These unincorporated communities originated as grain shipping points located on railroad branch lines.

### CHOTEAU

The city of Choteau was originally named Old Agency and served as reservation headquarters prior to the establishment of the Blackfoot Reservation in 1885. The Old Agency settlement was located three and one-half miles north of the present townsite. In 1876, A.B. Hamilton and his partner Isaac Hazlett moved their store to the present town site and the Old Agency site on the Teton River was abandoned. The Choteau townsite was laid out in 1883 and the initial vote to incorporate the City of Choteau in 1894 failed. The City did not become incorporated until 1913.

### FAIRFIELD

The Town of Fairfield is the second largest community in Teton County and sprang out of economic activity related to the Greenfield District of the Sun River Irrigation Project.

### DUTTON

Dutton, located on the Burlington Northern Branch line in the eastern part of the county, is the third largest town in Teton County. Prior to 1910 it was only a railroad siding named after a Great Northern Railway freight agent.



Figure 2.1 1904 map of Teton County – from Canal Heritage Enterprises (Canalheritage.com)

### 3. POPULATION

#### 3.1. DEMOGRAPHICS

Teton County's total population, according to the Population and Housing Unit Estimates Program, U.S. Census Bureau, was estimated at 6,269 in 2021, showing a gradual increase in population over a 10-year period beginning in 2012. However, between 2000 to 2021, the county's population declined by 167 people or approximately 2.6%.<sup>1</sup>

The long-term decline in population is likely related to a general decline in the birth rate as families are choosing to have smaller families and farms and ranches are getting bigger and turning to automation to reduce the cost or need for laborers. Outside of agriculture, local retail, and some fairly large employers (i.e., Three Rivers Communication), there is very little opportunity for employment in other areas like manufacturing that might provide higher-wage jobs. Agricultural operations are struggling to find and maintain employees due to wage competition in urban areas.

The 2016 Growth Policy suggested that the decline in population was due to difficulty in keeping and attracting young families to the area. This is evident in the age distribution of the existing population over time where older individuals are not leaving the area, but childbearing-aged people are. As will be discussed further in this section, it does appear that there may be an upturn in the number of younger individuals returning to or moving to the area.

A more recent upturn in population numbers can be attributed to the diversification of the county's economy. Job growth has been identified in wholesale, trade, transportation, and public utilities. It may also be related to the attraction of a rural lifestyle during and following the COVID-19 pandemic which was at its peak in 2020 and 2021. Telecommuters, retirees, or previous residents of rural communities were known to find refuge in small communities to escape the more highly populated and restricted areas of the country.

**Table 3.1 Teton County Population<sup>2</sup>**

2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
6,058	6,053	6,035	6,064	6,017	6,100	6,121	6,150	6,242	6,269

Population totals for the Towns of Choteau, Fairfield, and Dutton are shown in Table 3.2 along with a calculation of population for rural and unincorporated communities.

**Table 3.2 Teton County Consolidated City/Towns Population<sup>3</sup>**

Community	2022 population	2012 population	% change
Choteau	1,769	1,680	+5.3%
Fairfield	774	703	+10.0%
Dutton	311	315	-1.3%
Power (unincorporated)	177*	179*	
Total Population of Towns	3,031	2,877	+5.4%
Total County Population	6,368	6,058	+5.1%
Rural and Unincorporated Communities (excluding Power)	3,337	3,181	+4.9%

\*Population numbers for Power are based on the 2015-2019 American Community Survey for 2021 and the 2010 Census for 2012.

The City of Choteau and Town of Fairfield have experienced growth over the last 10 years. The Headwaters Economic Demographic Profile of the County<sup>4</sup> indicates the median age in Choteau and Fairfield declined between 2010 and 2020 but increased in Dutton (see Table 3.3 on the next page). Little change in population has occurred in Power.

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau – Population Estimates Program; [Workbook: CEIC\\_PEP\\_POPULATION\\_SFE \(mt.gov\)](https://ceic.mt.gov/Workbook:CEIC_PEP_POPULATION_SFE)

<sup>2</sup> Montana Census and Economic Information Center (CEIC); <https://ceic.mt.gov/>

<sup>3</sup> Montana Census and Economic Information Center (CEIC); <https://ceic.mt.gov/>

<sup>4</sup> Headwater Economics Economic Profile System; [Home - Headwaters Economics](#)



The profile estimates that there are 115 civilian employees in Dutton, 283 in Fairfield, and 847 in Choteau. Estimated median household income in each Town is \$46,000 in Dutton, \$63,365 in Fairfield, and \$52,500 in Choteau. This data indicates that there are more opportunities for employment and income for working age adults in Choteau and Fairfield which is likely the cause of disparity in growth of the population in the consolidated towns. In addition to better paying jobs, Fairfield and Choteau have health care facilities available and are covered by internet and telephone service. It is also generally known that those communities have invested in more and better water and sewer infrastructure than smaller communities like Dutton and Power and therein is a reason for lack of growth.

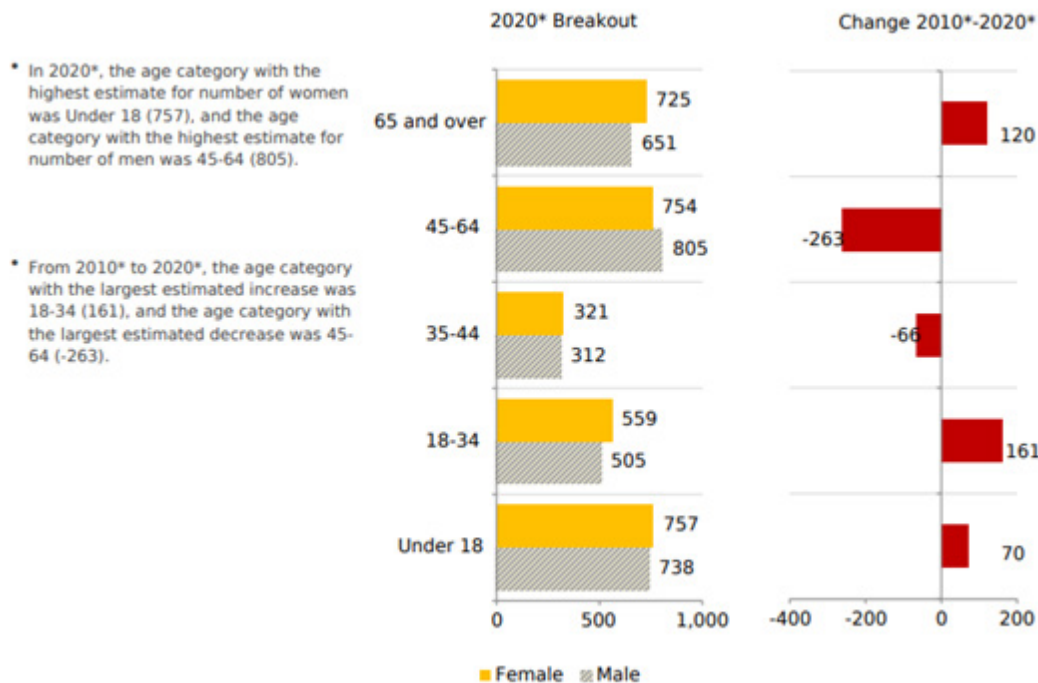
The largest increase in population over the last 10 years has occurred in the rural, unincorporated areas of Teton County. While some of this may be attributed to the recent return of individuals to their family farm or ranch, it is more likely that the lack of land-use regulation in the county is more attractive to builders and developers. City/Town zoning and other land-use regulations are causing migration away from development within the incorporated towns.

Table 3.3 Headwaters Economics Profile of Median Age by Town<sup>5</sup>

Community	Median Age 2020/2010	Under 18	18-34	35-44	45-64	65+
Choteau	43.1/52.4	22.6%	16.7%	12.2%	25.1%	23.4%
Fairfield	33.4/47.6	29%	22.3%	10.7%	21.2%	16.8%
Dutton	55.0/50.2	11.2%	16.1%	6.3%	36.6%	29.9%

The county, as a whole, has experienced growth in population from 2010 to 2020, particularly in the age range of 18–34-year-olds and those 65 years and over. The increase in the elderly population was predicted by the 2016 Growth Policy.

Figure 3.1 Headwaters Economic Profile of Median Age by Gender in Teton County<sup>5</sup>



### 3.2. PROJECTIONS

Montana Census and Economic Information Center (CEIC) projects that Teton County's population will increase steadily over the next 20 years (2022-2042) to approximately 6,647.<sup>6</sup> That trend is expected to continue through 2062.

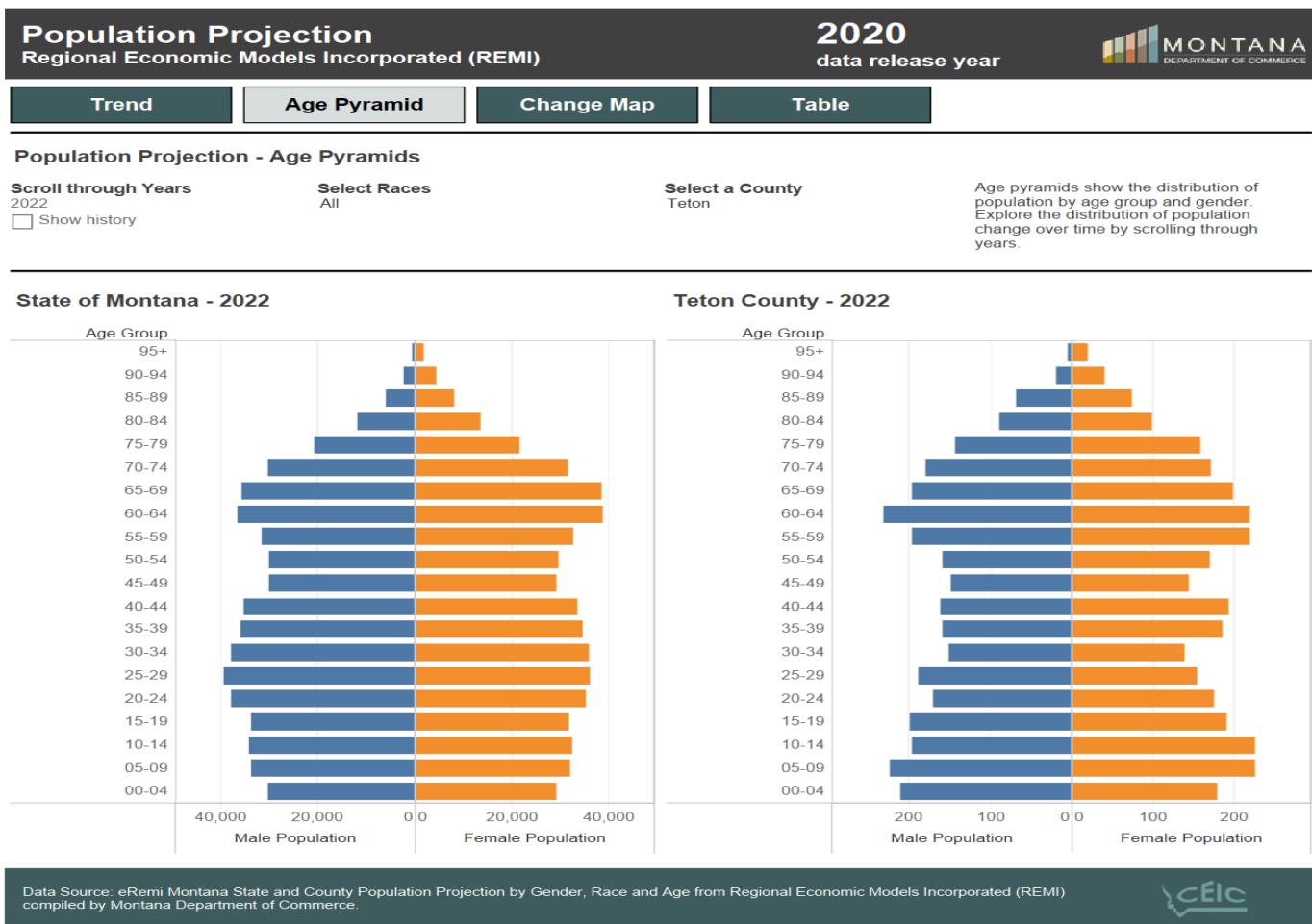
Table 3.4. Teton County Projected Population<sup>7</sup>

Year	2022	2032	2042	2052	2062
Population	6,267	6,392	6,647	6,683	6,401

Factors leading to future growth in the county can be attributed to a diversification of the economy and the attractiveness of the rural lifestyle and attractive communities that are luring individuals out of urban areas.

The 20-year trend from 2022 to 2042 shows the largest growth in the age group 0-4 years and 25-49 years with a decrease in those 55-74 years. Implications for that trend are a need for childcare, affordable housing, and jobs. Access to broadband for remote workers and maternal health care may also be important.

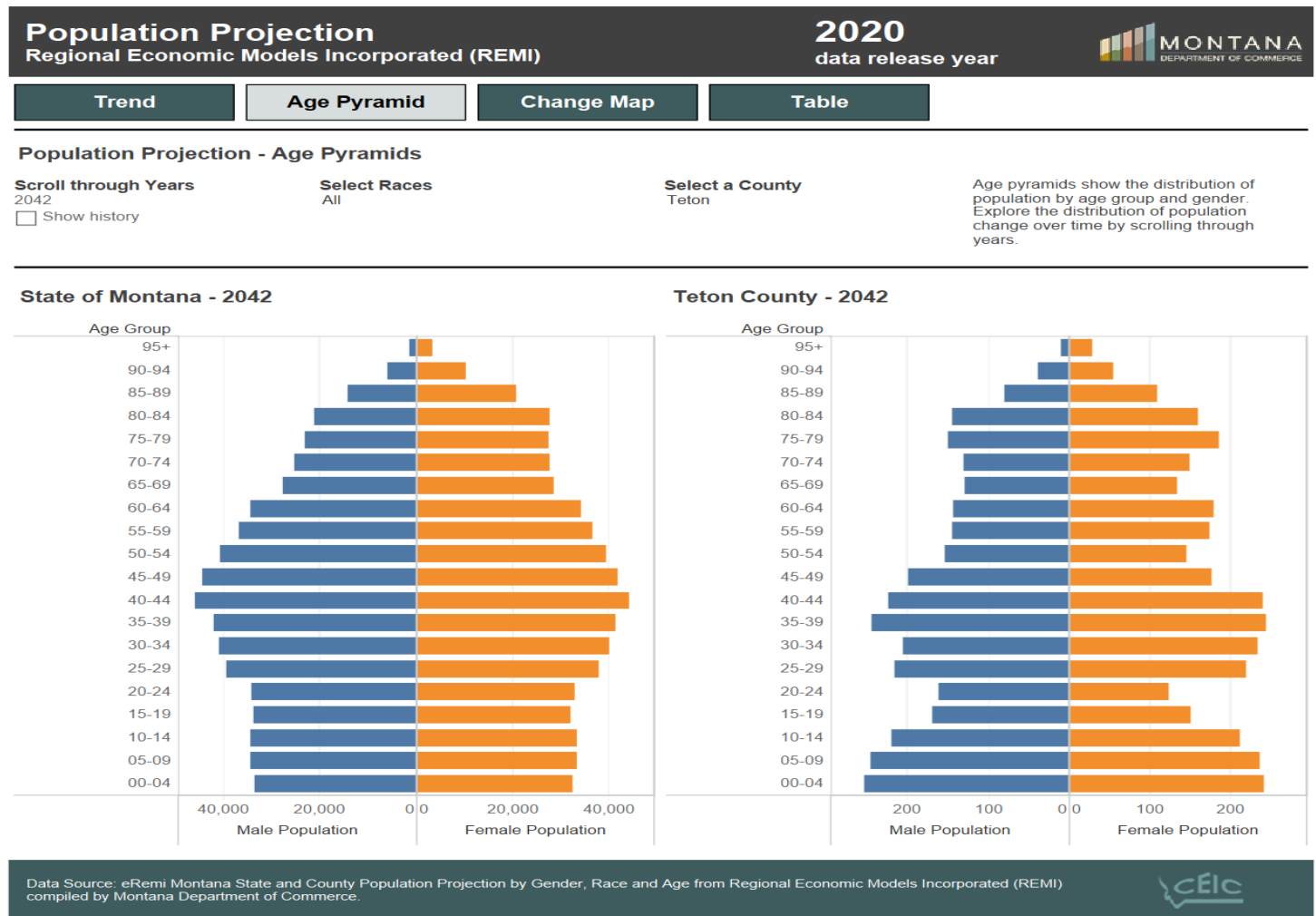
Figure 3.2 CEIC State of Montana and Teton County Age Pyramid 2022<sup>7</sup>



<sup>6</sup> eRemi Montana State and County Population Projection by Gender, Race and Age from Regional Economic Models Incorporated (REMI) compiled by Montana Department of Commerce; [Workbook: CEIC REMI POPULATION PROJECTION COUNTY AGE RACE SFE \(mt.gov\)](#)

<sup>7</sup> Headwater Economics Economic Profile System; [Home - Headwaters Economics](#)

Figure 3.3 CEIC State of Montana and Teton County Age Pyramid 2042<sup>8</sup>



### 3.3. Population Goals and Objectives

Goal 3.1	
Sustainable population growth that maintains a rural lifestyle with growth that produces stable, vital communities.	
Objectives	Actions
Plan for 1% to 2% annual growth.	Utilize Chambers of Commerce and Sweetgrass Economic Development Corporation to market quality of life factors that attract new residents
	Support local government efforts such as addressing blight or other public safety issues to build community values that will attract engaged community members.



**Goal 3.2**

Identify areas in Teton County that are desirable for growth and target capital improvements for these areas.

Objectives	Actions
Encourage high-density in-fill multi-family developments in and near town centers and cities to prevent urban sprawl and preserve open space and agricultural land.	Planning board ensures that the County Subdivision Regulations allow high-density in-fill and multi-family developments.
	Incorporated cities and towns utilize Subdivision and Zoning Regulations to encourage high-density in-fill and multi-family developments.
	Cities and towns seek to provide adequate infrastructure (water, sewer, storm) in areas suitable for growth. This may include acquisition of funding for projects.

**Goal 3.3**

Provide the means to maintain the current population and attract new residents that represent the future of the community.

Objectives	Actions
Maintain and improve infrastructure and services that support older adults or retirees and allow them to remain in the community.	Support housing development and upgrades that provide accessible and attractive housing options for seniors utilizing funding from sources that may include CDBG, HOME, Rural Development.
	Work with SEDC to encourage business and services for older adults (i.e., healthcare, and social centers). Utilize funding from sources that may include CDBG and Rural Development.
	Local government to actively engage young adults in community leadership positions.
	Local government to work with local agencies (youth groups and schools) to promote activities and entertainment for youth.
Design facilities and services to accommodate people of all ages and abilities.	Local government to ensure ADA access to facilities and services, including seeking funding from programs that assist with accessibility (MDT TA, CDBG, Housing Rehab, CDBG Public Facilities).

## 4. LAND USE

### 4.1. LAND DESCRIPTION

Teton County is in the northwest part of Central Montana, situated between the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountain Front and on the edge of the Northern Great Plains. The western portion of the county falls within the Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest, home to majestic mountain peaks with elevations up to 9,000 feet. There are two predominant rivers in the county: the Sun River, flowing along the western and southern boundary of the county, and Teton River, flowing east through the center of the county to the Missouri River. Cropland and rangeland make up a greater part of the landscape throughout the central and eastern parts of the county, as agriculture is a key contributor to the local economy. See Chapter 6, Economic Development, for additional information on Teton County economics.

### 4.2. EXISTING LAND USE

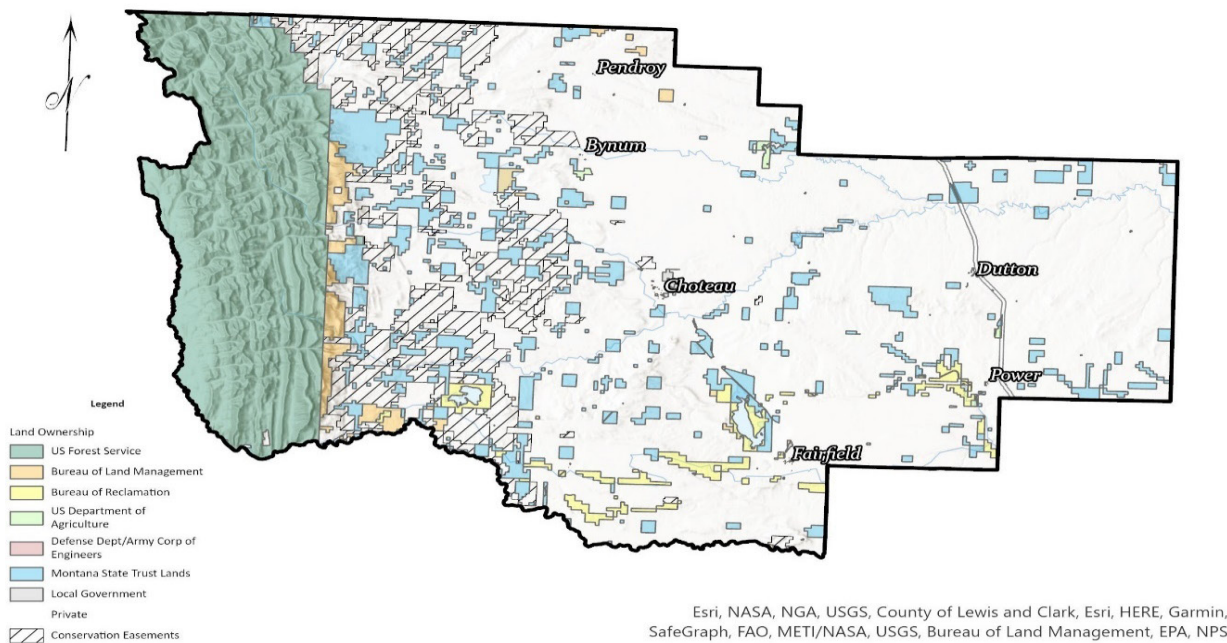
Teton County contains approximately 1,465,426 acres or 2,289 square miles<sup>9</sup>, with 62.6% privately owned and 27.6% owned by a Federal, State, County, or Local Government agency, as seen in the Table 4.1 below. The US Forest Service is responsible for managing the Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest, Rocky Mountain Ranger District, which makes up over 90% of the Federal Lands ownership in Teton County. Other Federal agencies such as the Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Reclamation, US Fish and Wildlife Services, and the US Department of Defense manage smaller areas throughout the county. Montana State Lands make up nearly 9% of the total area in Teton County. More about public land access can be found in Section 10, Recreational Access.

Table 4.1. Teton County Land Ownership<sup>9</sup>

Location	Acres	Percentage of Total
Teton County	1,465,426	
Private Lands	916,857	62.6%
Federal Lands	278,321	19.0%
Forest Service	234,355	16.0%
US Bureau of Reclamation	22,806	1.6%
US Bureau of Land Management	19,336	1.3%
US Fish and Wildlife	1,764	0.1%
US Department of Defense	60	< 0.1%
State Lands	125,547	8.6%
State Trust Lands	107,628	7.3%
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks	17,856	1.2%
State of Montana	44	< 0.1%
MT Department of Transportation	19	< 0.1%
Local Government	960	0.1%
Conservation Lands (not included in public land)	143,741	9.8%

9 Natural Heritage Map Viewer. Montana Natural Heritage Program, <http://mtnhp.org/MapView/>

Figure 4.1. Teton County Land Ownership



Conservation easements make up 9.8% of the land within Teton County. Conservation easements can be held by private or public entities, such as the ones listed in the table below. These lands placed into conservations easements allow the current landowner to maintain ownership though the land is managed with the importance on conservation of agricultural and wildlife habitat. These conservation easements are a way to protect land from certain types of land developments and are perpetual with the land. As to private conservation easement groups, The Nature Conservancy was the only private conservation easement holder which added more land, a total of 293 acres since 2015. However, US Fish and Wildlife added 12,058 acres of land into conservation easements since 2015, mostly located in the north central part of the county.

Table 4.2. Conservation Easements in Teton County<sup>10</sup>

Easement Holder	2015	2022
	Acres	
The Nature Conservancy	66,370	66,370
US Fish and Wildlife Service	26,056	38,114
The Nature Conservancy (Pine Butte Swamp Preserve)	15,379	15,672
The Conservation Fund	7,367	7,367
US Department of Agriculture	6,350	6,350
Boone and Crockett Club (Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Ranch)	6,067	6,067
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation	2,303	2,303
Montana Land Reliance	1,498	1,498

<sup>10</sup> Natural Heritage Map Viewer. Montana Natural Heritage Program, <http://mtnhp.org/MapView/>



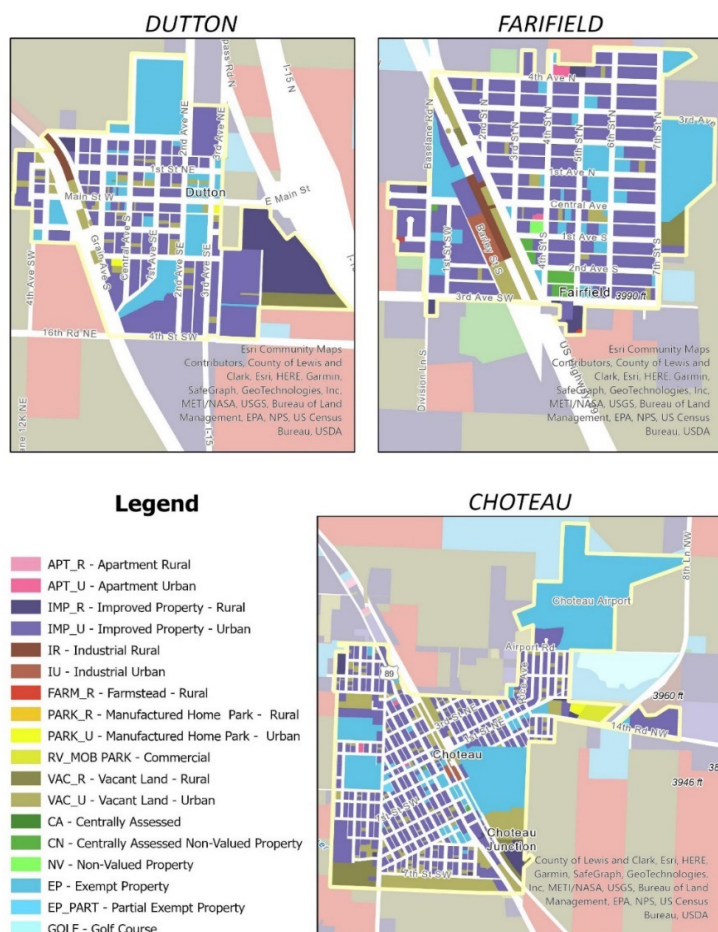
As of 2017, according to the US Department of Agriculture's Census of Agriculture, a total of 887,436 acres, or 60.5%, of land in Teton County is used for Agriculture purposes<sup>11</sup>. This does not include Federal or State lands. Approximately 52% of agricultural land is used for cropland, such as wheat, barley, and hay, and 46% of agricultural land is pastureland for livestock. Both the total number of lands in agriculture and the number of farms/ranches declined nearly 9% from 2012 to 2017, as seen in Table 4.3 below.

Table 4.3. Teton County Agricultural Profile<sup>11</sup>

	2002	2007	2012	2017
Number of Farms	700	770	742	686*
Average Size (acres)	1,758	1,497	1,314	1,294*
Total Land in Farms (acres)	1,230,550	1,152,691	975,173	887,436*

\*The 2022 Census of Agriculture will not be released until Spring/Summer 2024.

Figure 4.2. Dutton, Fairfield, Choteau Land Ownership



The drop in values may be due to the increase in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife increase in Conservation Easement acreage. See Table 4.2. The reduction in total land in farms may also be attributed to land taken out of farm production or vacant land that was deemed agriculture but has since been developed. Since January of 2022, 27 Exempt Divisions of land have been requested and/or approved in Teton County. An Exempt Division provides that certain divisions of land, which would otherwise constitute subdivisions, are exempt from local subdivision review. Examples of an Exempt Division are a gift or sale to a member of the immediate family or relocation of common boundary.

Since most of the land use in Teton County is either agricultural or Forest Service lands, urbanized areas consist of a small percentage within the County. Choteau is the only incorporated city in the County and is the county seat. Fairfield and Dutton are the only two incorporated towns, yet several unincorporated towns are clustered along transportation routes of Interstate 15 and US Highways 89 and 287, and include Bynum, Pendroy, and Power.

Property type is a classification used by Montana's Department of Revenue to determine the type of property for tax purposes. This classification was used to display land use patterns within incorporated areas of Teton

11 County Summary Highlights, 2017, 2012, 2007, and 2002; U.S. Census of Agriculture, Teton County Profile.

County, shown in Figure 4.2. The most predominant property type found within the incorporated areas are shown to be Improved Property- Urban (residential properties) and Exempt Property (Local, State, and Federal entities and religious, charitable, or educational groups).

Choteau is the largest community in Teton County at approximately 933 acres. The city center, along US Highway 89, hosts industrial and commercial businesses with a mix of older residential homes. Single-family homes surround the city's main transportation corridors, US Highway 89 and 287 and State Highway 221. Based on Montana Cadastral Owner Parcels data, 10% of the land area in Choteau are classified as Vacant Land<sup>12</sup>. A growth policy and zoning ordinance is in place for the city of Choteau in consideration of land use growth for the community. Land in Choteau is limited due to zoning, floodplain, conservation easements, etc.

Dutton is located along Interstate 15 and State Highway 221 on the eastern side of the County and is comprised of 227.4 acres. A majority of land use is single family residential with a few industrial businesses located along Interstate 15 and commercial businesses along Main Street through town. Approximately 4% of the land area within the town of Dutton is considered Vacant Land<sup>13</sup>. A zoning ordinance is in place conducted by Dutton's Town Council for consideration of land use within its jurisdiction.

Fairfield is the smallest incorporated town in Teton County by size, comprised of approximately 201 acres, comparable to Dutton. The town is located along US Highway 89, south of Choteau in the southeast corner of the County. Most of the town and its residential homes are located on the east of US Highway 89 with commercial businesses along the transportation corridor. Additional commercial businesses are located along 1st Avenue. The town of Fairfield has approximately 7% of the land area considered Vacant Land<sup>14</sup>. Fairfield does have zoning ordinances with hearings and consideration conducted by Fairfield's Town Council.

### 4.3. FUTURE LAND USE PROJECTIONS

Future property types in Teton County are anticipated to remain Farmstead, Vacant Rural, and/or Improved Rural for agricultural purposes. With the decline of agricultural acreage and number of farms/ranches, along with the increase of population in rural areas of the County (See Table 3.2), the County will likely continue to see living land, or dispersed land use patterns. The use of Exempt divisions allows land to remain in agricultural production while creating a parcel of land for housing. It is anticipated as shown in Table 4.4 that future land use will include the steady use of Exempt subdivisions with consistently low average density of 2.7 people per square mile.

**Table 4.4. Teton County Subdivision Activity<sup>15</sup>**

Year	Minor	Major	Exemption	Total
2016	3	0	13	16
2017	0	1	18	19
2018	0	0	13	13
2019	0	0	14	14
2020	1	0	22	23
2021	1	0	26	27
2022	1	0	16	17



It is no surprise the exempt division is the most common subdivision in Teton County, as it is typically the most common division found in rural counties in Montana. Such Exempt division include family member transfers, agricultural purposes, and common boundary relocation. The table also shows the few land developments which have occurred in the last seven years with a total of six minor and one major subdivision.

<sup>12</sup> Montana Cadastral Owner Parcel dataset

<sup>13</sup> Montana Cadastral Owner Parcel dataset

<sup>14</sup> Montana Cadastral Owner Parcel dataset

<sup>15</sup> Teton County Planning Department

Minor subdivisions can create five or fewer parcels of land, whereas a Major subdivision can create six or more parcels of land. Exempt subdivisions are a division of land which is exempt from local government review. Please refer to the current Teton County Subdivision Regulations for complete definitions and what qualifies as a subdivision.

Land use patterns for the development of residential and commercial property types will most likely continue to be clustered around existing communities and linear along major transportation routes. As seen in Table 3.2, Choteau and Fairfield have experienced a population increase while Dutton is experiencing population decline. Land use policy and regulations are especially important to help communities manage growth.

The City of Choteau Growth Policy states that “due to constraints related to topography, floodplain, and provision of water and sewer service, new annexations will only happen in a selected area surrounding the current city limits. Flooding and floodplains impact where the City might grow in the future.”<sup>16</sup>

#### **4.4. POLICY, REGULATORY, AND FINANCIAL ITEMS**

The County’s Growth Policy and Subdivision Regulations are primary tools employed to guide the use of lands and resources while protecting the rights of private landowners of Teton County residents. Because nearly over a quarter of lands in the County are Federal or State Lands, the Growth Policy is a major instrument for Teton County to coordinate land management activity conducted by federal or state agencies. Cooperative relationships and communication exist between the agencies and the County.

The subdivision review process is a policy to promote development and protect public health and safety, and it does not regulate the location or type of land use development. There are a variety of additional tools that can be used by the County and incorporated city/towns to implement land use goals and objectives. Not all land use policies, and regulatory tools are appropriate for rural Montana communities and, therefore, local governments must carefully consider the use of each of these in their deliberations regarding land use decision.

- » Policies that can be used to implement future land use goals and objectives are:
  - » Land Use Policy
  - » Long range planning
  - » Targeted Economic Development Districts (TED)
  - » Prime farmland / agricultural preservation
- » Regulatory tools that can be used to implement and enforce future land use goals and objectives are:
  - » Subdivision regulations, including design standards
  - » Zoning regulation
  - » Conservations Easements
  - » Floodplain regulations
  - » Buildings for Lease or Rent regulations
- » Financial items that can be used to implement the future land use goals and objectives are:
  - » Grants
  - » Taxation changes
  - » Land acquisition
  - » Capital Improvement Plans
  - » Targeted Economic Development Districts (TED)
  - » Tax Increment Finance (TIF) Districts
  - » Education towards and development of more valuable commodities that thereby make ranches / farms more profitable



## 4.5. LAND USE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goal 4.1	
Protect the natural environment/heritage of Teton County and the Rocky Mountain Front as growth occurs.	
Objectives	Actions
Allow development that is compatible with the natural heritage of the area and supports and protects the natural resources, ecosystem, and recreational opportunities in the county/town/city.	Local government and other stakeholders, including potential developers, actively participate in planning efforts for the Helena-Lewis and Clark Forest.
	Local government and planning boards consult with the public, non-profit agencies, and resource management with area of proposed development early in review stages.
	As development is proposed, local government and planning board procedures include outreach efforts to all landowners in the area to involve them in planning decisions.
	Utilize the MSU/ Teton County Extension to conduct additional study or area plan to collect planning data, identify threats to natural heritage, identify compatible land use activities and strategies such as conservation easements.
Encourage the enhancement of public spaces within Teton County and its communities.	Local government actively encourages state and federal agencies to invest in the enhancement of public spaces.
Goal 4.2	
Preserve agricultural land and promote an environment for successful agricultural operations.	
Objectives	Actions
Encourage development in areas that are not in agricultural production.	Local government to utilize right-to-farm protections in Montana Code. §76-2-901, MCA. Agricultural activities -- legislative finding and purpose. (1) The legislature finds that agricultural lands and the ability and right of farmers and ranchers to produce a safe, abundant, and secure food and fiber supply have been the basis of economic growth and development of all sectors of Montana's economy. In order to sustain Montana's valuable farm economy and land bases associated with it, farmers and ranchers must be encouraged and have the right to stay in farming. (2) It is therefore the intent of the legislature to protect agricultural activities from governmental zoning and nuisance ordinances.
	Identify productive agricultural lands and target for agricultural preservation programs.
	Coordinate with state and federal agencies to promote sustainable agricultural practices.
	Provide information regarding conservation easements and other incentives to preserve agricultural land. Commit to conducting additional studies and encourage activities that meet this goal.
	Local government to coordinate land use policies and infrastructure development to preserve water resources used by agricultural, recreational, municipal, and other beneficial users.
	Work with Teton County/MSU Extension to take actions to educate and support the public in managing invasive species in croplands and pasturelands and regenerating degraded soils to prevent erosion and increase productivity.

## Goal 4.3

Development that is compatible with existing land uses, protects small town character and that minimizes negative impacts.

### Objectives

Establish or maintain policies and regulations that promote compatibility with existing land uses, protects small town character and that minimizes negative impacts.

### Actions

Confine impacts of development to the site (parking, noise, glare, dust, ....) or mitigate with techniques such as buffers between different types of land uses.

Local government to review development standards to determine if they are adequate to meet health and safety concerns.

Local government to encourage preservation of floodplains and wetlands to protect property and minimize impact on the environment.

Local government to consider municipal growth policies to identify areas that are most appropriate for growth within the unincorporated portions of the growth policy planning area.

Local government to coordinate development review with different local, state, and federal agencies that are involved in various aspects of development or may be affected by new development.

Local government to work with state agencies and landowners to identify Brownfield sites and provide education on programs to clean up contaminated properties.

Maintain updated subdivision regulations to reflect changes in state requirements or land use patterns.

Maintain state mandated Buildings for Lease or Rent regulations.



## 5. HOUSING

### 5.1. CURRENT CHARACTERISTICS AND CONDITIONS

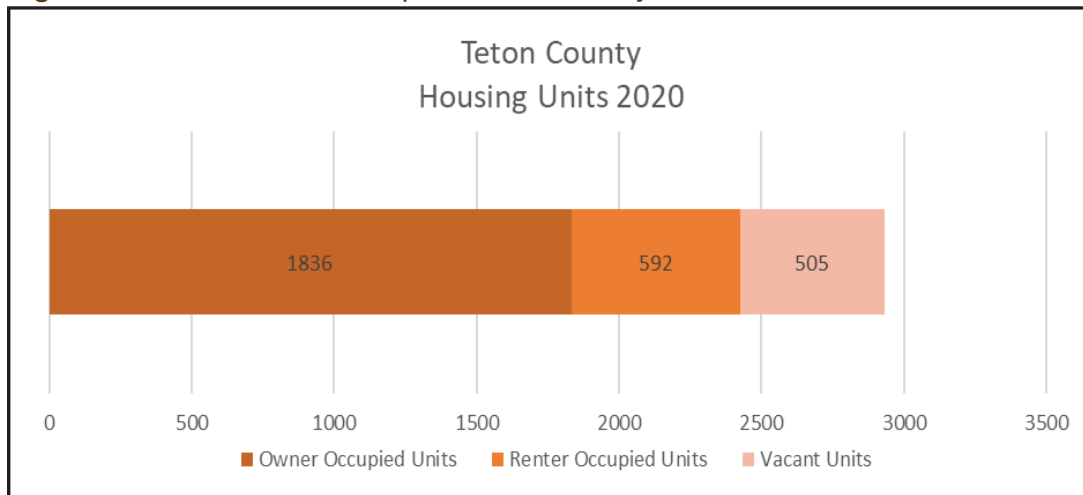
A lack of housing is one of Teton County's primary concerns as the availability of housing is low and minimal new housing is available. There is also substandard housing in need of rehabilitation and a lack of multi-family housing. This issue, coupled with significantly increased prices, may be caused by a lack of economic incentive to build or maintain decent housing, difficulty building or maintaining homes due to the high cost of materials and labor, or elderly residents leaving homes unoccupied.

According to the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) published by Sweetgrass Development in 2022, housing continues to be a concern in most central Montana counties. Housing is one weakness identified in the region, primarily due to both a diminished housing stock and an aging housing stock. To support these findings, according to information provided by Headwaters Economics, more than 30% of the housing stock in Teton County was built prior to 1969, which directly impacts the average home value in the County<sup>17</sup>.

Teton County has a total of 2,935 housing units serving 2,490 households<sup>18</sup>. Information gathered during the 2020 Census indicates that Teton County has a 75.6% homeownership rate, which is slightly above the average homeownership rate for the state of Montana at 69.5%. Even though the population of Teton County has been steadily increasing since 2016, the rate of homeownership has been relatively steady since 2010, at which time the homeownership rate was 75.7%<sup>19</sup>.

The incorporated towns of Dutton and Fairfield are experiencing a drastic need for additional housing, as illustrated by the data presented in Figure 5.2. The low number of vacant housing units in both towns does not allow for population growth without new housing developments.

Figure 5.1. Home Ownership in Teton County<sup>20</sup>



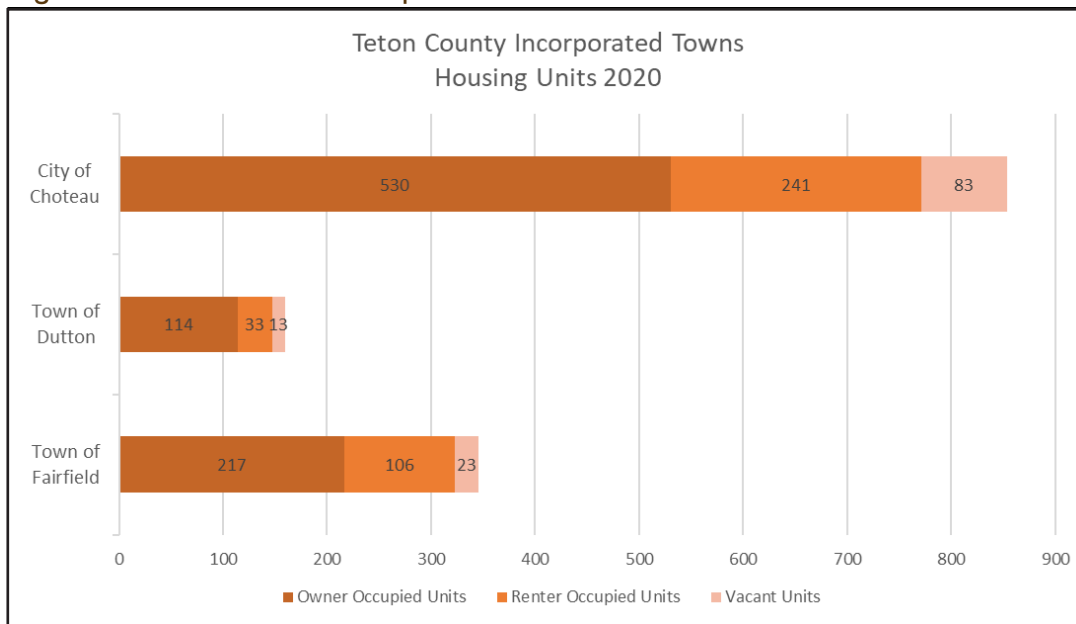
<sup>17</sup> Headwater Economics Economic Profile System; [Home - Headwaters Economics](#)

<sup>18</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 Decennial Census; [https://data.census.gov/profile/Teton\\_County\\_Montana](https://data.census.gov/profile/Teton_County_Montana)

<sup>19</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, [https://data.census.gov/profile/Teton\\_County\\_Montana](https://data.census.gov/profile/Teton_County_Montana)

<sup>20</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 Decennial Census; [https://data.census.gov/profile/Teton\\_County\\_Montana](https://data.census.gov/profile/Teton_County_Montana)



Figure 5.2. Home Ownership in town of Dutton and town of Fairfield<sup>19</sup>

Housing affordability is generally measured by the ratio of homeowner costs to total household income. Housing is considered to be affordable if homeowner costs, which include mortgage payments, real estate taxes, utilities, insurance, and various other fees, are less than 30% of the total household income. Affordable housing is often in the form of multi-family properties, and Teton County has approximately 111 properties with two or more units<sup>19</sup>. As shown in Table 5.1 data from 2020, 34% of households in Teton County are paying more than 30% of their total household income on a mortgage, and 36.1% are paying more than 30% of their total household income on rent<sup>21</sup>.

Table 5.1. Housing Affordability<sup>22</sup>

Percent of Households with Housing Costs Greater than 30% of Total Household Income					
	Teton County	City of Choteau	Town of Dutton	Town of Fairfield	Montana
Mortgage Costs	34%	34.6%	25.6%	8.5%	28.8%
Rent	36.1%	52.4%	25.9%	36.6%	40.4%

The percentage of Low to Moderate Income (LMI) residents in Teton County and incorporated towns ranges from 38% in Teton County to nearly 50% in the town of Fairfield<sup>23</sup>. Housing Choice Vouchers, which are distributed through the Montana Department of Commerce Housing Division, allow low-income families to pay no more than 30% of their income in rent, and disperses the remaining rent directly to the landlord. Subsidized housing in Teton County is listed in Table 5.2.

<sup>21</sup> Headwater Economics Economic Profile System; [Home - Headwaters Economics](#)

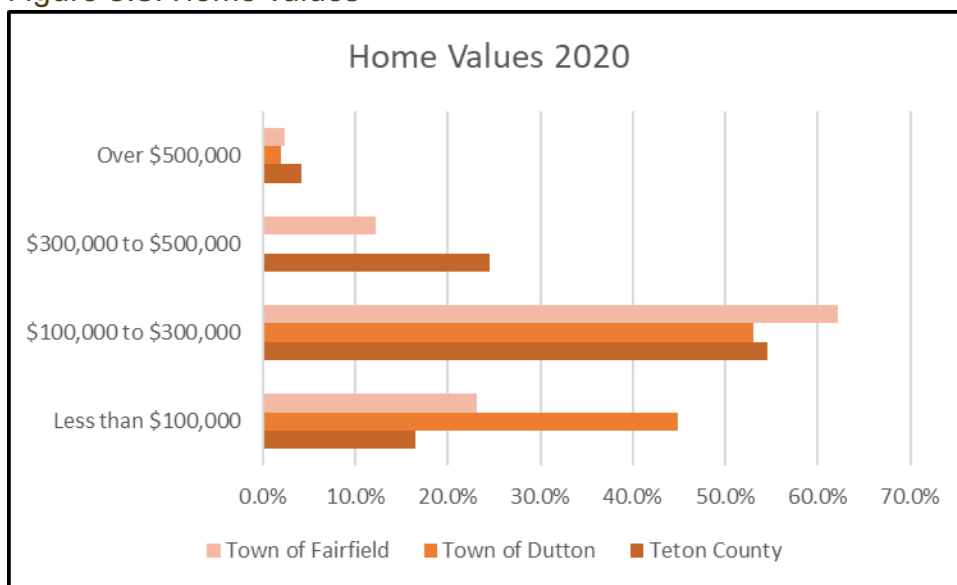
<sup>22</sup> Headwater Economics Economic Profile System; [Home - Headwaters Economics](#)

<sup>23</sup> 2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months; S1701: POVERTY STATUS IN THE PAST ... - Census Bureau Table

Table 5.2. Subsidized Housing in Teton County

Location	Name	Type/Description	Number of Units
Dutton	Sunshine Trail Lodge	Mix of 1- and 2-bedroom units, dedicated for elderly/handicapped residents	10 units total 6 subsidized units
Fairfield	Fairmont	Dedicated for elderly/handicapped residents	8 units total 5 subsidized units
Fairfield	Teton Court	Dedicated for elderly/handicapped residents	12 units total
Fairfield	Front Range Assisted Living	Dedicated for elderly/handicapped residents.	27 units total
Choteau	Choteau Transitional Living Complex	Dedicated for developmentally disabled	6 units total 4 subsidized units
Choteau	Sunset Court	Mix of 1- and 2-bedroom units located in two buildings	16 units total 15 subsidized units
Choteau	Skyline	Retirement community (Subsidized units available)	30 units total
Choteau	Teton Peak	Assisted living facility (Medicaid Waiver available)	
Choteau	Beehive Homes	Assisted living facility	
Choteau	Benefis Hospital	Long Term Care	

Home values in Teton County have been steadily increasing since 2010, when the median value of a home was \$154,700. Based on 2020 Census Data, the median home price in Teton County was approximately \$213,400<sup>24</sup>. The majority of homes in Teton County, as a whole, are valued at less than \$300,000; however, given an influx of residents in recent years, the current median home price is \$315,000<sup>25</sup>. According to the 2022 CEDS written by Sweetgrass Development, a primary goal for the region in general is to “increase available housing with special emphasis on increasing the supply of affordable and workforce housing”. Specifically, the CEDS identifies an overall goal to “Increase available housing with special emphasis on increasing the supply of affordable and workforce housing”.<sup>26</sup>

Figure 5.3. Home Values<sup>23</sup>

The majority of Teton County is rural in nature, and in general, is comprised of older housing which does not provide the same investment value as housing in larger cities and towns. Approximately 46% of the homes in

<sup>24</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 Decennial Census; [https://data.census.gov/profile/Teton\\_County\\_Montana](https://data.census.gov/profile/Teton_County_Montana)

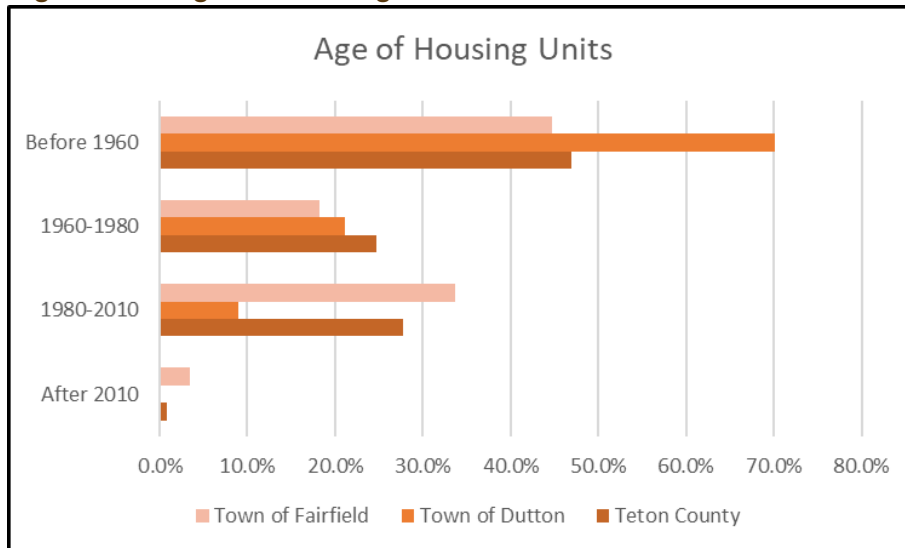
<sup>25</sup> Home Values in Teton County Montana; Teton County, MT | realtor.com®

<sup>26</sup> Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), Sweetgrass Development; 63b205\_f88f1f742bba4adab94f8a08ea78719f.pdf (sweetgrassdevelopment.org)

Teton County were constructed prior to 1960 and are likely in need of repair or improvements based on their age<sup>23</sup>. In addition, homes in rural communities often need rehabilitation and retrofitting for energy efficiency. Teton County, Choteau, Fairfield, and Dutton do not impose any building permit requirements for buildings erected in the County other than those required by the State of Montana.

The County/City/Towns do impose regulations according to the Montana Code Annotated (MCA) § 76-8-1 for the administration and enforcement of the creation of four or more buildings for lease or rent on a single tract.<sup>27</sup>

Figure 5.4. Age of Housing Units<sup>28</sup>



## 5.2. ANTICIPATED FUTURE HOUSING ISSUES

Teton County is experiencing slow and steady population growth as more people seek a more rural way of life, with the largest increase in the age ranges of 18-34 and 65 and over. Interest in living in Teton County by telecommuters or retired individuals over the last several years may account for this change in population demographics. Therefore, affordable housing and housing that supports the needs of seniors will continue to be in demand. The amount of housing available, versus the amount of population influx, may make the affordability of houses, particularly in the more urban regions, difficult for seniors and young families.

To attract young individuals and families seeking to relocate or return to the area, there will be a need for quality, affordable housing; however, it must be noted that with an increase in senior or up-to-date housing that attracts population to the area, there needs to be corresponding improvement in services that support the health and well-being of that population group. This includes medical and emergency services, fire protection, and law enforcement. Many of these services are performed by local volunteers, which, in general, average over 45 years old. It is critical that younger members of the population become engaged in volunteering or it may become more difficult to staff emergency and fire protection service agencies.

In addition to a diminished housing stock, there is a shortage of land or affordable lots suitable to support development of new housing where infrastructure is readily available in Teton County and surrounding incorporated towns. In the city of Choteau, projects are being conducted to provide access to the City's water source but there are residents that are choosing not to use city water in Choteau. Without impact fees in place, the City is limited in the amount of revenue it collects to maintain its water system. These factors contribute to housing availability that is not desirable and, therefore, not conducive to growth.

<sup>27</sup> Lease or Rent – General Provisions, Montana Code Annotated 76-8-1; [Part 1. Lease or Rent – General Provisions - Table of Contents, Title 76, Chapter 8, MCA \(mt.gov\)](#)

<sup>28</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 Decennial Census; [https://data.census.gov/profile/Teton\\_County\\_Montana](https://data.census.gov/profile/Teton_County_Montana)

Housing resources that would be available to the residents of Teton County include:

- » Montana Department of Commerce (MDOC):
  - » Federal Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) managed by MDOC
  - » CDBG Large-Scale Multi-Family Housing Development and Rehabilitation Grants
  - » CDBG Small-Scale Single-Family Housing Rehabilitation Grants
- » HOME grants – provided by HUD and MDOC
  - » Homebuyer Assistance
  - » Affordable Housing Development and Rehabilitation Grants
- » Housing Trust Fund – construction, rehabilitation, and preservation of affordable rental housing for extremely low-income families
- » USDA Rural Development
  - » Housing Repair Loans & Grants
  - » Community Facilities Direct Loans & Grants – multifamily and single-family housing programs
- » NeighborWorks in Great Falls, MT
  - » Homebuyer education
  - » Rental assistance
  - » Home improvement assistance
- » Opportunities Inc. in Great Falls – Housing services for LMI individuals and families, emergency housing assistance, and housing choice voucher assistance.
- » Area III Agency on Aging in Conrad



### 5.3. HOUSING GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goal 5.1	
Meet housing needs for all ages, incomes, and special needs groups.	
Objectives	Actions
Expand housing stock to meet the need for Low to Moderate Income (LMI) families and first-time homebuyers.	Utilize housing organizations such as the Great Falls Housing Authority or Neighborworks to seek resources to improve housing quality, condition, and availability and support efforts to build affordable homes and rentals, including single family homes.
	Local government support housing developers with access to grant and loan funding for multi-family and single-family housing.
	Local government/planning board review regulations to eliminate barriers to multi-family or affordable housing options.
Encourage development/improvement of affordable homes and rentals to meet the needs of a growing workforce, including single family homes.	Local government/planning board to have efficient processes in place that encourage housing development.
	Local government to support housing developers with access to grant and loan funding for multi-family and single-family housing.
	Conduct a housing needs assessment in Teton County and determine potential for rehabilitation grants.
Develop a variety of housing types to meet the needs of the changing population.	Promote and encourage the use of commercial and residential structures, including historic preservation of buildings, to develop rental units in currently unused spaces (i.e., above businesses, within unused government facilities).
	Local government exercises policies to promote development of multi-family rental units in incorporated areas where infrastructure and services are readily available.
	Target expansion and development of housing for seniors, such as assisted living centers and active retirement communities.
	Support land use policies that will encourage redevelopment of land for housing purposes.
	Identify areas in the County to promote developments with a mix of housing types and price ranges, such as single family, townhomes, apartments, accessory units, etc.
Affordable housing for all populations.	Support grant and loan applications for the rehabilitation of existing housing designated for LMI and senior residents.
	Work with housing agencies and lenders to promote programs for home improvement and rehabilitation.
	Support policies and regulations that encourage affordable housing developers.

## 6. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The remoteness of Teton County and the incorporated City/Towns within the County, limited employment opportunities, and limited goods and services all have an effect on the overall economy of the area. Of the total County population of 6,127 residents, 4,632 are over the age of 18 and 2,697 are currently working. Agriculture-related workers make up 19.2% of the employed labor force, 22% are employed by education and health care industries, and 10% are employed with retail trade.

### 6.1. EMPLOYMENT

Total average employment in Teton County has remained relatively stable since 2010, with approximately 60% of the population over 16 years of age currently in the labor force. As evidenced in the data in Table 6.1, Teton County and the city of Choteau and towns of Dutton and Fairfield report the primary industries as education, healthcare and social assistance services. Other industries that employ a significant portion of the workforce in Teton County and Choteau include agriculture and retail trade. In addition to the retail trade, in Dutton, professional, management and administration services employ a significant workforce, while in Fairfield the construction industry accounts for a large employment sector.

Table 6.1. County, City and Town Industries<sup>29</sup>

	Teton County	Choteau	Dutton	Fairfield
Number of Civilian Employees	2,729	847	115	283
Industry	% of Workforce			
Agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting, mining	19.2	9.4	9.6	6.0
Construction	8.9	11.2	2.6	12.0
Manufacturing	3.0	2.4	6.1	0
Wholesale trade	2.8	5.0	7.0	1.1
Retail trade	10.0	14.8	11.3	14.1
Transport, warehousing, utilities	4.7	4.6	3.5	6.4
Information	2.9	1.4	2.6	3.5
Finance, insurance, real estate	4.8	5.2	2.6	9.2
Professional, management, administration, waste management	5.4	5.2	13.0	2.5
Education, health care, social assistance	22.0	19.6	22.6	34.3
Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation, food	7.0	10.0	11.3	3.5
Other services, except public administration	3.9	5.7	0.9	1.4
Public Administration	5.4	5.5	7.0	6.0

Agriculture plays an important role in the economy of western Montana along the Rocky Mountain Front, with approximately 60% of the land in Teton County being dedicated to the industry. According to data published by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, agricultural land in Teton County is comprised of 686 farms, with 887,436 acres in farmland. The market value of agricultural products sold totaled approximately \$131 million, and government subsidies to farm operators funded an additional \$27 million. Government appropriations include such items as crop insurance premiums, and disaster, conservation, and commodity subsidies. Since 1970, Teton County has experienced a 30% decrease in agricultural related employment and an 80% increase in non-agricultural related employment.

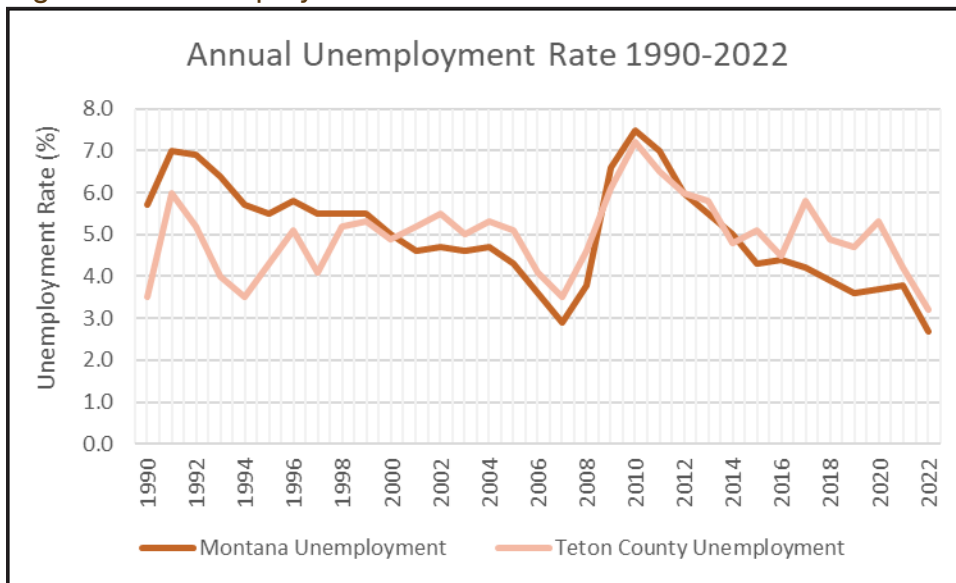
<sup>29</sup> Demographic Profile for Teton County, MT, Headwater Economics Economic Profile System;

Table 6.2. Agricultural Industries<sup>30</sup>

Crops	
Grains, oilseeds, dry beans, dry peas	\$60,993,000
Other crops and hay	\$7,550,000
Livestock, Poultry and Products	
Poultry and eggs	\$1,164,000
Cattle and calves	\$30,470,000
Sheep, goats, wool, mohair, milk	\$1,157,000
Horses, ponies, mules, burros, donkeys	\$879,000
Other animals and animal products	\$1,126,000

Teton County ranks 9th in the state of Montana for total agricultural product sold, and 21st in the State for livestock, poultry, and associated products sold. These numbers provide evidence that the agricultural industry has a large impact on the overall economic health of the County and its residents. Information outlining the number of farms and total acres in farmland in Teton County can be found in the Land Use Section, Chapter 4, of this document.

Unemployment in Teton County was 2.8% as of December 2022, which is 3.9% lower than it was in April 2020, and matches the State unemployment rate of 2.8%. In general, employment in Teton County has remained relatively stable, with a few considerable fluctuations between 2007 and 2010. The unemployment rate for 2022, at 2.8%, is the lowest recorded since 1990, with the highest at 7.2% in 2010.

Figure 6.1. Unemployment Rates<sup>31</sup>

## 6.2. INCOME

Based on information published by Headwaters Economics, in 2020, Teton County had a per capita income of \$27,985 and a median household income of \$56,649<sup>32</sup>. By definition, the per capita income is calculated by dividing the County's total income by the population of the County. In contrast, the median household income is based on the total number of households and families in the County, including those with no income, and is based on individuals aged 15 and over reporting an income.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup> County Summary Highlights, 2017, 2012, 2007, and 2002; U.S. Census of Agriculture, Teton County Profile; USDA - National Agricultural Statistics Service - Montana

<sup>31</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics, Data Finder, <https://www.bls.gov/data/#unemployment>

<sup>32</sup> Demographic Profile for Teton County, MT, Headwater Economics Economic Profile System; [Home - Headwaters Economics](#)

<sup>33</sup> QuickFacts, U.S. Census Bureau, [U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: United States](#)

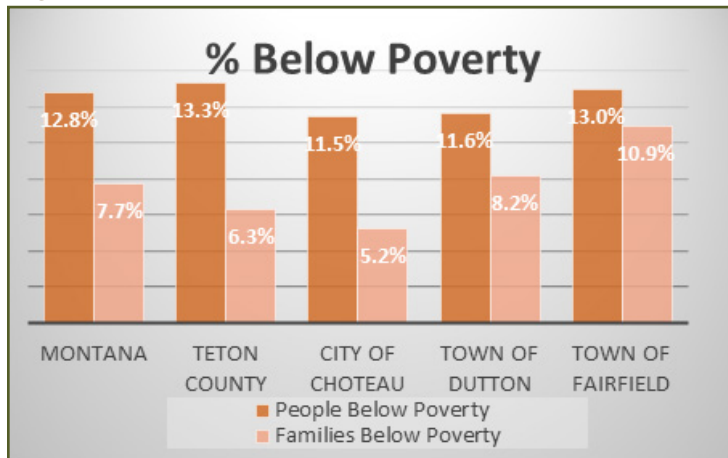
In the time frame from 2016 – 2020, 26.8% of household incomes were in the range from \$50,000 - \$74,999, and in 2020 19.6% of household incomes fell below \$25,000.

Table 6.3. Household Income Statistics<sup>34</sup>

Income and Benefits (dollars)	Teton County	City of Choteau	Town of Dutton	Town of Fairfield
Mean earnings	\$66,068	\$58,582	\$54,004	\$86,599
Mean Social Security income	\$16,861	\$13,673	\$17,281	\$22,308
Mean retirement income	\$21,226	\$18,997	\$27,796	\$23,104
Mean Supplemental Security Income (provided to adults and children with disability or blindness and people age 65+ who meet financial qualifications)	\$10,228	\$8,676	\$4,900	\$8,725
Mean cash public assistance income	\$3,792	\$2,782	\$0	\$0

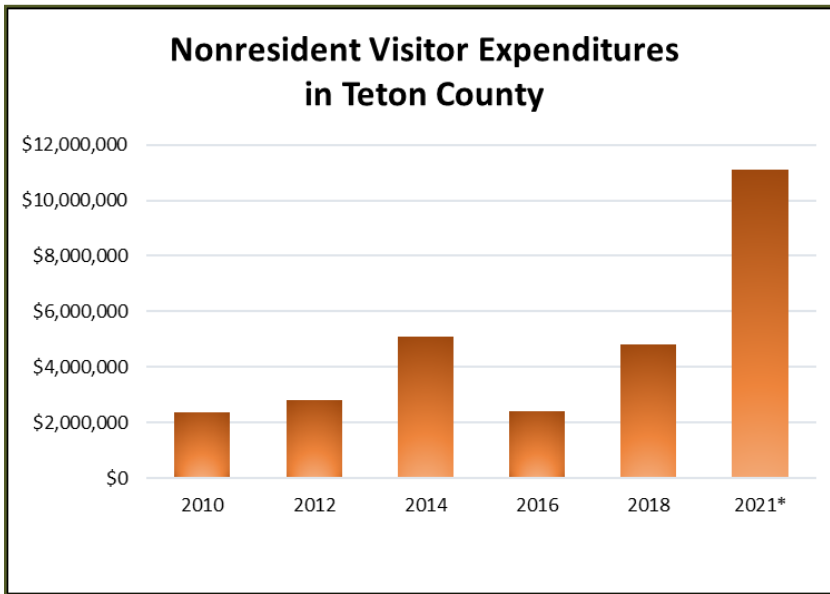
Historically, poverty levels in Teton County are near the state averages, as shown in Figure 6.2; however, the County ranks 30th of 56 counties for poverty levels in Montana.

Figure 6.2. Poverty Levels<sup>33</sup>



Tourism expenditures in Teton County has been fairly steady since 2010, with a sharp increase in spending in 2021. The expenditures include campground expenses, gambling, fuel, grocery, lodging, license/fees, Made in Montana products, outfitter/guide expenses, vacation rentals, restaurant/bar, and retail purchases.



Figure 6.3. Nonresident Visitor Expenditures<sup>35</sup>

### 6.3. FUTURE PROJECTIONS FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Teton County, including both incorporated and unincorporated cities/towns, has seen steady population growth since 2016, which may be attributed to both resident retention and in-migration. In part, this trend may be attributed to a migration to more rural areas due to the COVID-19 pandemic; however, steady growth began prior to the pandemic.

Growth in population only reinforces the need for continued economic development, the attraction of new industry, and increased opportunities for tourism. Promoting the opportunity to enjoy a rural lifestyle, while still earning competitive wages, will attract more people to the area and continue to bolster the economy.

One way to evaluate the economic sectors that deserve the most focus when working to improve the economy of Teton County is to evaluate the number of jobs in each industry, as identified in Table 6.1, and compare that to the number of jobs in each industry within the State of Montana. Base industries are those that have a higher percentage of the workforce locally as compared to statewide percentages, and expansion of these industries will result in additional growth of the overall economy. Likewise, industries that have a lower percentage of the workforce locally as compared to statewide percentages represent areas that may offer new opportunities for economic development strategies. See Table 6.4 for an overview of those industries likely to provide the most economic development.

<sup>35</sup> Institute for Tourism & Recreation Research, University of Montana; [Interactive Data \(umt.edu\)](https://www.umt.edu/interactive-data)

Table 6.4 Employment Data for Teton County<sup>36</sup>

NAICS Title	Teton Employment 2020	Teton Employment Shares 2020	Benchmark Region (Montana) Employment 2020	Benchmark Region (Montana) Employment Shares 2020	Location Quotient (LQ)
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting, Mining	524	0.1920	33072	0.0636	3.019
Construction	243	0.0890	42680	0.0821	1.085
Manufacturing	81	0.0297	25990	0.0500	0.594
Wholesale Trade	77	0.0282	11009	0.0212	1.333
Retail Trade	273	0.1000	63971	0.1230	0.813
Transportation and Warehousing, Utilities	128	0.0469	27257	0.0524	0.895
Information	80	0.0293	8224	0.0158	1.854
Finance and Insurance, Real Estate	130	0.0476	28210	0.0542	0.878
Professional, Scientific, and Management	148	0.0542	45656	0.0878	0.618
Educational Services & Health Care	600	0.2199	120662	0.2320	0.948
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation, Accommodation & Food Services	192	0.0704	59115	0.1137	0.619
Other Services (except Public Administration)	106	0.0388	25014	0.0481	0.808
Public Administration	147	0.0539	29183	0.0561	0.960
Total	2729	1.0000	520043	1.0000	

LQ less than 0.75: New opportunities for economic development strategies

LQ greater than 1.25: Base industry whose expansion will result in increased growth

Although there are 81 active oil and gas wells in Teton County, there is little activity related to natural resource extraction and the employment opportunities that industry might provide. Gravel resources may provide some economic values. Alternative energy resources, like wind, are not likely to be a large source of economic development. Wind energy projects are developed by companies that seek out the areas with the strongest wind resource but also review other critical factors like access to land, access to the transmission lines, ability to sell the electricity, and public engagement are other significant development factors.

<sup>36</sup> Demographic Profile for Teton County, MT, Headwater Economics Economic Profile System;  
[Home - Headwaters Economics](#)

Teton County is classified as “fair” for potential wind energy development, however there are two wind energy projects within the County: Fairfield has six towers and Greenfield has 13 towers. There are also privately owned wind turbines in the County.

Due to the lack of population, industry, and employment it is critical that the County, which has a large amount of state and federal land in its land base, continues to receive Payment In Lieu of Taxes (PILT). This form of payment from the Federal government takes the place of full tax payment and is subject to congressional approval. The failure of this program without a viable replacement would be devastating to the operation of Teton County government.

#### 6.4. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goal 6.1	
Economic Development that supports the agricultural sector of the economy and existing businesses.	
Objectives	Actions
Economic Development activities that help sustain agriculture and existing businesses.	Work with SEDC, MSU Extension, and other agricultural agencies to provide resources that target value-added agriculture or economic development.
	Work with Chambers of Commerce and other programs to support entrepreneur training and programs.
	Encourage study and training activities that identify existing needs of the community and how those needs might be filled by local businesses expanding their offering of goods and services.
	Utilize SEDC for business retention efforts, which includes identifying local business needs for resources and training and that encourages local job creation.
	Work with SEDC, Made in Montana, Grown in Montana and Chambers of Commerce to support local businesses and promote niche markets for local products.
	Monitor the Farm Service agency study of the effects of the Conservation Reserve Program on rural economies.
	Work with Teton County/MSU Extension, educate and support the public in developing local food sources and marketing opportunities, such as farmer’s markets. Additionally, work with local agencies, as needed, to assess the effects of policies such as the Conservation Reserve Program on the local economy.
	Utilize SEDC to coordinate partnerships with landowners, finance institutions, public and non-profit sector to develop programs to support family farms.
	Support that the necessary services and infrastructure are maintained and expanded when necessary to encourage the continuation of local farming and ranching.
	Local government to adopt new regulations and manage existing regulations to support the right to farm and ranch.
	Promote development within cities, existing unincorporated communities, and other areas planned for development where public facilities and infrastructure are available, and away from rural areas and areas used exclusively for agriculture.
	Local government to encourage development of standards that protect the following agricultural activities, including but not limited to spraying chemicals, burning fields, and use of machinery at any hour; control of domestic animals; maintenance of agricultural fencing; protection of agricultural water user facilities, ditches, and water rights.

Goal 6.2	
Diversify the economic base with industries that do not threaten the rural lifestyle and/or create a strain on public services.	
Objectives	Actions
Work with economic development organizations to attract industries that align with the Teton County rural lifestyle and do not create a strain on public services.	Target economic development efforts towards clean industries or industries that use sustainable development techniques.
	Coordinate with local, regional and State economic development programs.
	Cultivate new economy businesses such as telecommunications, alternative energy, internet and home office workers, include businesses for agriculture, value added.
	Develop tourism and heritage resources to capture more tourist dollars that are traveling to Glacier Park (what is working that accounts for sharp rise in tourism dollars?)
	Promote opportunities for economic development based on recreational activities.
Set goals and policies that encourage economic development while protecting the infrastructure and environment in Teton County.	Local government to set policies that minimize environmental impacts of resource extraction industries.
	Local government to develop land use and public infrastructure policies that coordinate with economic development.
	Local government to include performance standards for potential nuisances from commercial and industrial development within regulations.
Address workforce needs of the community.	County, City and Town governments collaborate to support economic development projects including infrastructure, community amenities and housing for workforce.
	Maintain County, City and Town budgets at a level that will support infrastructure such as water, sewer, roads and bridges and that maintains a safe, healthy, and attractive environment such as fire and police protection and weed management.
	Support expanded broadband and cellular service infrastructure within the County.



## 7. LOCAL SERVICES

### 7.1. FIRE PROTECTION

Headwaters Economics produces a report in cooperation with the U.S. Forest Service that analyzes wildfire risk by County. The report considers wildfire risk and exposure, wildfire susceptibility, and land ownership.<sup>37</sup> A report downloaded May 16, 2023 shows that populated areas in Teton County have, on average, greater wildfire likelihood than 25% of counties in the state and risk to homes is 23% greater. 37% of homes in the County are exposed to wildfire from direct sources, such as adjacent flammable vegetation and 60% are exposed to wildfire from indirect sources, such as embers or home-to-home ignition. In general, off-season lack of water availability for fire suppression creates a fire hazard.

Structural fire protection is provided within jurisdictional boundaries of the Teton Fire Fee Service area and municipal fire departments. On federal lands, structure fire suppression is only provided to privately owned structures paying a fee to Teton County Fire Fee Service. Teton County has five rural fire companies and three municipal fire departments providing wildland fire protection on all state and private lands under a cooperative fire control agreement between the Montana DNRC and Teton County. The rural fire companies provide structural and wildland fire protection to all unincorporated areas in Teton County (excluding federal lands) with assistance from the Fire Fee Service and County funding. The municipal fire departments located in the incorporated cities and towns of Choteau, Fairfield, and Dutton provide structural fire protection within their respective city/town limits.

The DNRC provides wildland fire protection on state lands and private lands that have signed up for this service under the affidavit program. The Helena - Lewis and Clark National Forest and BLM have fire protection responsibility for all USFS and BLM lands, respectively, in Teton County. Mutual aid agreements are in place between Teton County and all municipalities. The County has a cooperative fire control agreement with the Montana DNRC and mutual aid agreements with the DNRC, BLM, several surrounding counties, and individual fire companies in Cascade and Lewis and Clark County.

A Statewide Offset Agreement was recently updated. As a result, the Rocky Mountain Ranger District is entering into an agreement with the Lewistown Bureau of Land Management Office to take suppression responsibility for essentially all federal lands west of highway 89. There are 129,090 acres of State Lands in Teton County, for which the DNRC provides wildland protection. The location of State Lands is identified in Section 4, Figure 4.1. The Lewistown BLM currently has suppression responsibility with no local resources; therefore, the RMRD will be responsible for federal lands along the Rocky Mountain Front. This includes BLM, Bureau of Reclamation, and US Fish & Wildlife properties.

Teton County completed a Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP) in October 2021 (<https://tetoncomt.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/2021-Teton-County-Hazard-Mitigation-Plan.pdf>). The Plan includes a section on Wildland Fire which references the Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) that was updated in 2011 for Teton County. The State of Montana Disaster and Emergency Services is currently completing the Montana Regional Hazard Mitigation Project, which will include all Montana counties, municipalities, and tribal nations. The state has been divided into three regions, and Teton County is included in the HMP for the Central Region. Updating the CWPP has been identified as an action item through regional HMP.

<sup>37</sup> Headwaters Economics Economic Profile System: <https://headwaterseconomics.org/eps>

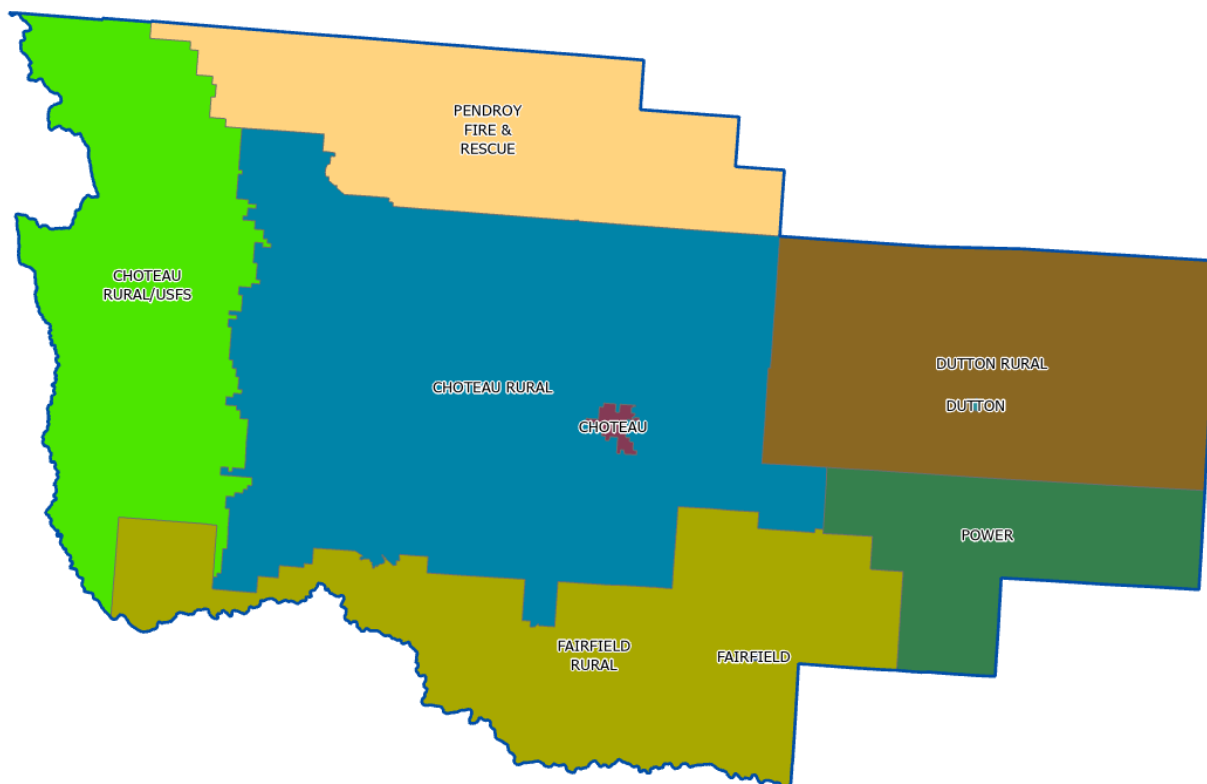
The current CWPP describes the resources available for fire protection in Teton County as summarized in Table 7.1.

Table 7.1. Teton County Fire Districts<sup>38</sup>

Fire District	Description	Issues
Teton County Fire & Rescue	<p>Funding is primarily from a fire service area fee on structures supplemented with County general fund, Payment In Lieu of Taxes (PILT) and Volunteer Fire Assistance Rural Fire Assistance (VFA/RFA) grant funding.</p> <p>The annual fire budget averages \$125,000. Based on current funding and budget, Teton County Fire is likely in a position to maintain and upgrade vehicles and equipment within an acceptable rotation.</p> <p>Provides mutual aid to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cascade County</li> <li>Augusta Fire</li> <li>Pondera County</li> <li>Chouteau County</li> </ul>	<p>Choteau: Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) issues on the Front and river bottom around Choteau. Farm equipment increases fire starts.</p> <p>Dutton: The transmission lines and railroad increase fire starts as well as the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and crops that have a high potential for a large rangeland fire.</p> <p>Power: Similar issues as Dutton</p> <p>Fairfield: Agricultural burns increase fire starts.</p> <p>Pendroy: CRP fields, forestland, and oil, giving a diverse fire regime.</p> <p>Greenfield Irrigation District: Escaped controlled burns.</p> <p>Volunteers: Training and recruiting</p>
Choteau Rural Volunteer Fire District & Choteau Fire Department	<p>The Choteau Rural Volunteer Fire Company and the Choteau Fire Dept. share the same station, fire fighters, and equipment. While the Choteau Fire Dept. has fire protection responsibilities only within the city limits of Choteau, the Rural Fire Company is responsible for wildland and structural fire protection throughout the district. The Choteau Fire Company response area is about 1,157 square miles (787 square miles of private land plus 400 square miles of National Forest).</p> <p>The Company is staffed by volunteer fire fighters. The Company's main fire hall, located at the north end of Choteau, consists of 6 stalls and a meeting room. Outbuildings are used as cold storage.</p>	<p>Inadequate access into new and existing structures in the rural area. Lack of standards or maintenance program for private bridges.</p> <p>Recruiting and training volunteers.</p> <p>High wildland fire risks along the Rocky Mountain Front with response times up to 45 minutes.</p> <p>Narrow width of private driveways</p>
Fairfield Rural & Fairfield City Fire Department	<p>Staffed by volunteers, the Fairfield Rural and the Fairfield City Fire Dept. share the same station, fire fighters, and equipment. The Fairfield City Fire Dept. has fire protection responsibilities only within the city limits of Fairfield, and Fairfield Rural responds to structural and wildland fires throughout the District and surrounding area of approximately 340 square miles. Fairfield responds to all types of emergencies including fire, medical, and rescue. Fairfield may also respond to fires in the Sun River Canyon area. Fairfield is very successful in recruiting volunteers and has a Junior Program that works with high school students.</p>	Wildfires, CRP

Dutton Rural Volunteer Fire Company & Dutton Fire Department	Volunteer organization with a coverage area consisting of farmland, farmhouses, CRP land, and the town of Dutton. The Company serves as an automatic mutual aid partner with the Power Rural Volunteer Fire Company and 5 other fire departments in the County. The Company presently operates a 1000 gallon per minute structural pumper and an enclosed 2-wheel trailer that hauls a Hurst tool, generator, lights, and rescue equipment.	Funding is provided by a limited local community tax budget that barely covers operating costs. The area includes the main north/south arterial of the BNSF railroad and is bisected by Interstate 15, which adds to the vehicle accident and HazMat incident calls.
Power	Volunteer Fire Dept. serving southeast portion of the County. Has a mutual aid agreement with Dutton.	CRP (Cropland Fires) PR I-15 Structure Protection
Pendroy	Volunteer fire department with a response area of approximately 386 square miles (228 of which is private land and 98 are National Forest). The Helena – Lewis & Clark National Forest is responsible for National Forest Lands. The department has mutual aid agreements with other districts to include a Quick Response Unit to respond to medical emergencies and vehicle crashes.	Wildfires, CRP, crop, oil field fires, structure protection, oil pipeline, gas pipeline

Figure 7.1. Teton County Fire District Map<sup>39</sup>



Teton County Fire and Rescue has a response area of 2,293 square miles. Within the fire districts there are 6,445 people, as stated on the Teton County website “22% are under 14 years of age and 20% are over 65 years of age.” The response area includes 2500 residences, 1500 outbuildings, 26 U.S. Air Force Nuclear Missile Launch Sites, and 3 U.S. Air Force Nuclear Missile Control Stations.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Teton County Fire Warden 2001  
<sup>40</sup> Fire Services | Teton County Montana ([tetoncomt.org](http://tetoncomt.org))

## 7.2. EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES (EMS)

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Teton County EMS has stations in five locations within Teton County:

- » Pendroy has a QRU unit with approximately nine volunteers. They average .5 calls per month.
- » Dutton has a station with one full size ambulance. They have five volunteers and receive assistance from their fire department to drive for them. They average two calls per month.
- » Power has a station with one full size ambulance. They have 12 volunteers. They average 1.5 calls per month.
- » Fairfield has two full size ambulances and a suburban that is licensed to transport. They have 14 volunteers and work closely with the Valley QRU that has six on their roster. They average 14 calls per month.
- » Choteau has two full size ambulances and a suburban that is licensed to transport. They have 22 volunteers which include some of their firemen who have EMR licenses. They average 30 calls per month.

The County EMS is licensed to provide Basic Life Support (BLS) with authorization for Advanced Life Support (ALS) services. The service must have a BLS provider on every call but have the authorization to provide ALS if available. We have 68 on our rosters, 1 Paramedic, 11 Advanced Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT), 48 EMT, and 8 Emergency Management Responders.

Teton County EMS is an enterprise department that operates off of revenue generated from their billing of services. A mill levy generates \$45,000 a year that goes towards the replacement of ambulances.

The Teton County EMS provides mutual aid to parts of Cascade County that covers Highway 200 from Sun River to west of Simms. Lewis and Clark County covers a portion of our area in the Sun River drainage near Gibson Reservoir.

## 7.3. LAW ENFORCEMENT

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Teton County Sheriff's Office provides all law enforcement services in the County, including the incorporated areas of Choteau, Dutton, and Fairfield. The Office is also responsible for 9-1-1, Search and Rescue, animal control, drug task force and burn permits. A Forest Service law enforcement officer serves all federal forest lands along the Rocky Mountain Front, an area that includes several counties.

The Teton County Sheriff's Office is located across the road from the Courthouse and adjacent to the Courthouse Annex. The Sheriff's Office has a small jail that cannot house prisoners for any length of time, so prisoners are transported to other counties in the state to be housed.

In 2020 Teton County was among the counties in the State with the lowest offense rate per 10,000 people.<sup>41</sup> With a population of 6,249, there were 195 offenses which translates to 312.05 offenses/10,000. See Figures 7.2 and 7.3.

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<sup>41</sup> Montana Board of Crime Control Statistical Analysis Center; [https://dataportal.mt.gov/t/MBCC/views/CIM-AnnualCountyOffenseRates/Dash\\_AnnualRates?iframeSizedToWindow=true&%3Aembed=y&%3AshowAppBanner=false&%3Adisplay\\_count=n&%3AshowVizHome=n&%3Aorigin=viz\\_share\\_link](https://dataportal.mt.gov/t/MBCC/views/CIM-AnnualCountyOffenseRates/Dash_AnnualRates?iframeSizedToWindow=true&%3Aembed=y&%3AshowAppBanner=false&%3Adisplay_count=n&%3AshowVizHome=n&%3Aorigin=viz_share_link)



Figure 7.2. Offense Rates by Montana Counties Map<sup>42</sup>

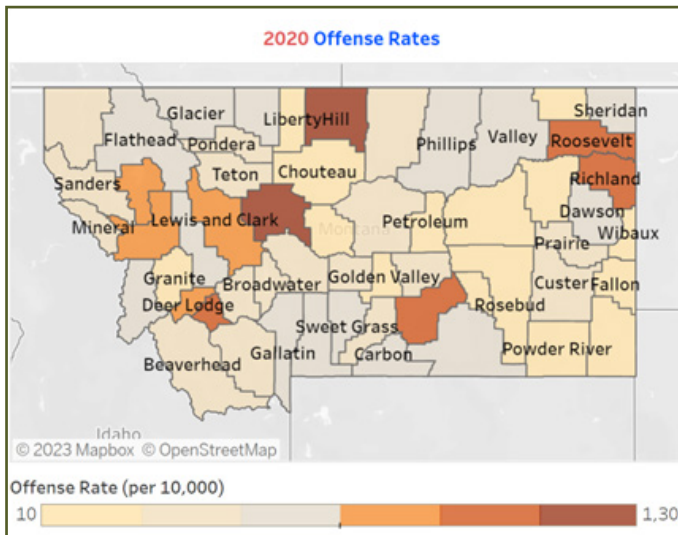


Figure 7.3. Rates of Reported Offenses in Montana<sup>42</sup>

County Name	Offense Total	Population	Offense Rate (per 10,000)
Acme	908	11,043	870.37
Bozeman	986	10,964	899.31
Butte	138	8,836	156.18
Calaveras	324	12,157	266.51
Chico	170	3,261	521.31
Columbia	3,328	35,180	945.99
Concord	421	9,888	425.77
Deer	198	3,684	537.46
Elmore	195	6,249	312.05
Emery	242	4,686	516.43
Essex	695		
Gallegos	467	7,359	634.60
Heatland	60	2,157	278.16
Liberty	6	939	63.90
Yellowstone	16,499	162,990	1,012.27

In Teton County between the years 2012 and 2021 offenses defined as crimes against persons show that most of those offenses reported were assault. Also reported during that time period were two homicides, 10 kidnappings, 51 forcible sex offenses, and seven nonforcible sex offenses reported with most offenses cleared by arrest.<sup>42</sup>

## 7.4. DISASTER EMERGENCY SERVICES

Teton County maintains Disaster and Emergency Services (DES) staff and a Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC) that includes other County staff, the County Commissioners, and representatives from the School District, the local medical center, and Montana State DES. All County jurisdictions rely upon the County DES Coordinator for emergency coordination and response.

With a vision to “institutionalize and promote a Countywide hazard mitigation ethic through leadership, professionalism, and excellence, leading the way to a safe, sustainable Teton County” the LEPC spearheaded the development of an updated Teton County Hazard Mitigation Plan in 2021. The purpose of that document is to create and maintain disaster resistance by identifying mitigation measures, raising awareness, and guiding the expenditure of funds toward taking action to prevent and prepare for reasonably foreseeable natural disasters.<sup>43</sup>

## 7.5. PUBLIC HEALTH

The Teton County Health Department, located in Choteau, provides health, wellness, and prevention services. It is governed by the Teton County Board of Health and Board of County Commissioners. Programs administered by the department include public health emergency preparedness, communicable disease surveillance and response, tobacco use prevention, Women, Infants, and Children Nutritional Supplement Program (WIC), cancer screening services, diabetes prevention, immunizations, and chronic disease self-management classes.

A Teton County Community Health Needs Assessment – Improvement Plan was prepared by the Health Department in collaboration with Benefis Teton Medical Center and the Teton County Community Alliance for Resiliency and Educational Support (CARES) in 2020. That Assessment is an overview of the current health status in Teton County, and community-based objectives and approaches for improving health and quality of life.

<sup>42</sup> Statistical Analysis Center, Montana Board of Crime Control; Workbook: CIM - Annual County Offense Rates (mt.gov)

<sup>43</sup> 2021 Teton County Hazard Mitigation Plan; <https://tetoncomt.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/2021-Teton-County-Hazard-Mitigation-Plan.pdf>

Within the Needs Assessment, Goals and Objectives are listed to set priorities for public health system challenges or needs. These include<sup>44</sup>:

#### **PRIORITY AREA 1: MENTAL HEALTH GOAL**

- » Support access to and improve utilization of mental health resources among residents of Teton County.

#### **PRIORITY AREA 2: THRIVING FAMILIES GOALS**

- » Community-wide support for decreasing Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and increasing resiliency among families and youth so they can thrive mentally, physically, and emotionally.

#### **PRIORITY AREA 3: HEALTH COMMUNICATIONS**

- » Empower community members to engage with their health provider through clear, consistent, collaborative, and culturally appropriate health messaging.
- » The Teton County Health Department also operates under a strategic plan. That plan is developed to communicate the organization's goals, the actions needed to achieve those goals and all of the other critical elements developed during the planning process. The plan set priority areas of focus which include Community, Customers, Operations, Performance & Assessment, and Workforce. The Public Health Director, in a summary letter at the beginning of the plan states "By implementing this plan, we will improve the health of our residents; collaborate with more community partners; maintain a skilled and committed workforce; work across programs to be the most efficient and effective; and measure our successes to make evidence-based decisions. We also will strive to make our work more understandable and accessible to the public through regular assessments and updates. We welcome the community's engagement as we continue to focus on all residents' support and opportunities to achieve their best health."<sup>45</sup>

Plans to develop a new Emergency and Community Health Facility will include a Health Department expansion, to accommodate the space and staffing needs of existing programs, and well as new infrastructure, such as a lactation room to support breastfeeding individuals in the County and space for co-location of a behavioral health provider.

## **7.6. SOCIAL SERVICES**

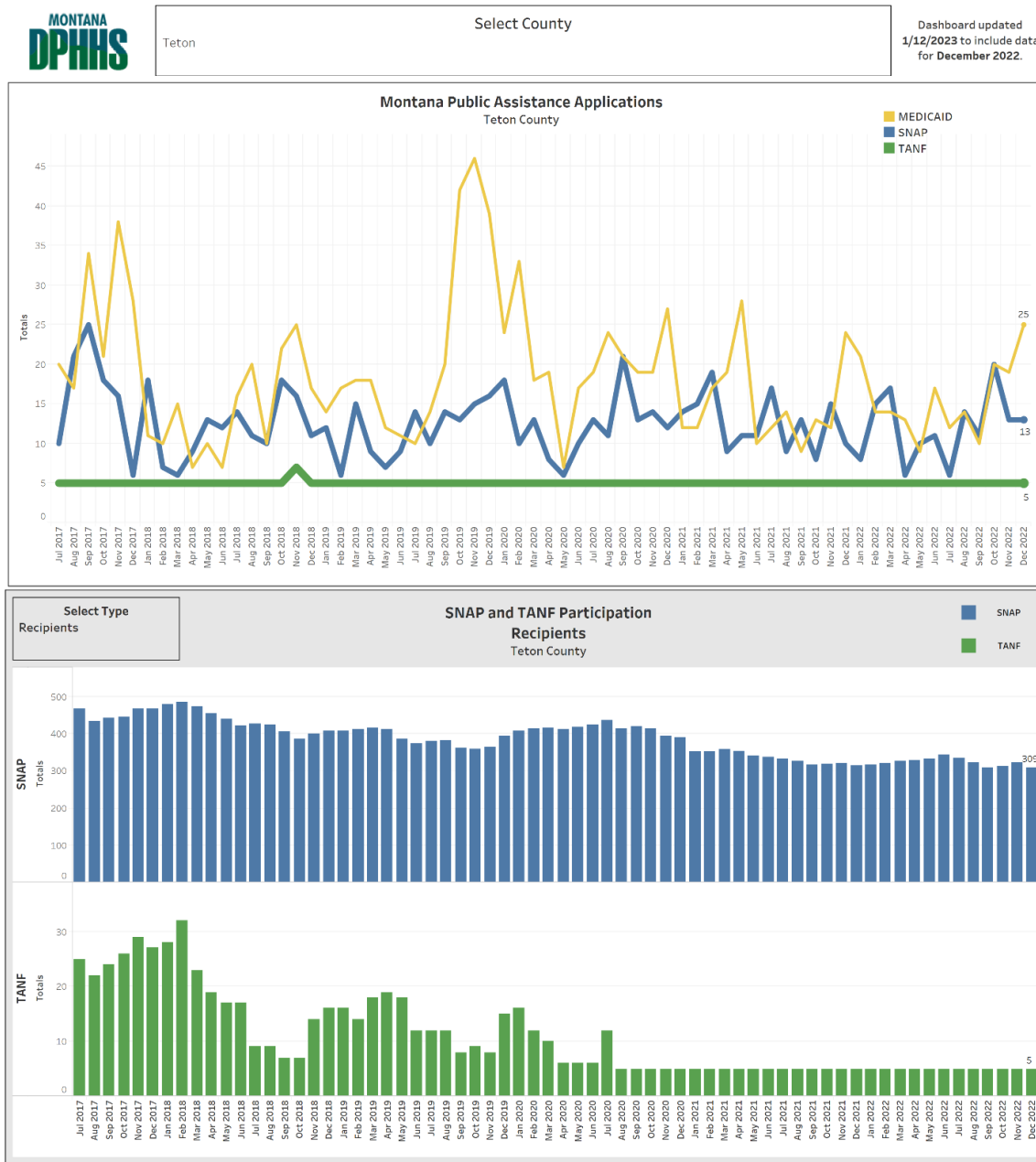
### **PUBLIC ASSISTANCE**

The Office of Public Assistance (OPA) has walk-in services every other Wednesday in Choteau, in the Courthouse basement across from the Treasurer's Office. The OPA administers the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) which provides nutrition assistance for income-eligible households, as well as the Medicaid program and the Temporary Assistance for Needy Children (TANF) Program. Individuals can also apply for Medicaid, SNAP and TANF via phone (1-888-706-1535) or online at [www.apply.mt.gov](http://www.apply.mt.gov). Teton County has had a recent decrease in public assistance recipients as shown in Figure 7.4.

<sup>44</sup> Teton County Community Health Needs Assessment; <https://tetoncomt.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Teton-County-CHNA-IP-2020-Final-3.26.21.pdf>

<sup>45</sup> Teton County Public Health Strategic Plan 2018-2021: <https://tetoncomt.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Strategic-Plan-FINAL.pdf>

Figure 7.4. SNAP, TANF, Medicaid Recipients<sup>46</sup>



## CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

Teton County is served by the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) Child & Family Services Division through an office in Conrad (Pondera County). This service protects children who have been or are at risk of abuse, neglect or abandonment. The division assists with placing children in Foster Care and also provides support for adoption. Ideally, the goal is to maintain a child with its parents through reunification services that include counseling, parent education, and in-home services.

## SENIOR SERVICES

Teton County is a member of the Area III Agency on Aging, and the County supports four senior centers with a mill levy. The centers provide senior meals, meals-on-wheels, homemaker/home chore services, and some limited transportation assistance. Senior Centers are located in Dutton, Power, Fairfield, and Choteau.

<sup>46</sup> Montana DPHHS Public Assistance Dashboard; <https://dphhs.mt.gov/InteractiveDashboards/publicassistance/dashboard>

## OTHER PROGRAMS

A number of other social service programs are also available to County residents, but program offices are out of County. These include the following, all of which are located in Great Falls:

- » Human Resources and Development Corporation
- » Opportunities, Inc.
- » Blind and Low Vision Services
- » Childcare Resource and Referral
- » Developmental Disabilities Program
- » Vocational Rehabilitation Program
- » Child Support Enforcement

## 7.7 EDUCATION

A Superintendent of Schools in Teton County is responsible for general supervision of the public schools, preserving all official school records, advising school trustees, acting as the hearing officer in school controversies resulting from decisions of district trustees, chairing the transportation committee, calculating levies for all school budgets with the County, registering educator and bus driver licenses, and receiving home school notifications. The office of the Superintendent is in the County courthouse.

County School Districts include:

- » Bynum School District
- » Choteau Public Schools
- » Dutton/Brady School District
- » Fairfield Public Schools
- » Golden Ridge School District
- » Greenfield School District
- » Pendroy School District
- » Power School District

Enrollment for all students K-12 is shown in Table 7.2. Overall, Teton County school enrollment has remained relatively steady with a slight jump in the 2019-2020 school year. Those school districts losing enrollment between the 2016-2017 school year and the 2021-2022 school year are Bynum, Choteau, Greenfield, and Pendroy while Dutton/Brady, Fairfield, Golden Ridge, Power, and the Midway Colony schools have had increase. Most notably, the Fairfield school district grew by more than 20 students.

Table 7.2. Teton County Public Schools Enrollment<sup>47</sup>

Schools	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
Bynum	32	25	24	26	21	23
Choteau	181	173	167	168	159	159
Dutton/Brady	91	96	96	97	96	92
Fairfield	306	298	314	319	317	327
Golden Ridge	36	36	34	37	41	45
Greenfield	82	90	97	103	77	78
Midway Colony	14	16	17	16	19	18
Pendroy – Rockport School	19	16	14	12	12	11
Power	106	116	108	122	111	121
Teton County Total	1,058	1,066	1,071	1,112	1,064	1,085

In addition to the community schools, there are also two attendance centers – Miller Colony has 19 students and New Rockport Colony has 35. According to the Office of Public Instruction “Attendance centers have been a part of Montana’s educational landscape for decades. They provide a school district with flexibility to extend a school’s learning environment to an offsite location.”<sup>48</sup> While attendance centers are not defined in law, § 20-1-101(14), MCA defines an offsite instructional center as “an instructional setting at a location, separate from a main school site, where a school district provides for instruction to a student who is enrolled in the district.”

There are no private schools registered in the County; however, there is currently one religious school in the County (7th Day Adventist) and one considering moving to the County from Cascade County (Mennonite School in Fairfield). Families that opt for home schooling must register with the Teton County Superintendent of Schools.

Post-secondary opportunities are limited to online courses offered via internet sources. Nearby institutions offering post-secondary education include:

- » University of Providence, Great Falls
- » Montana State University Northern, Havre
- » Montana State University – College of Great Falls

## 7.8. NOXIOUS WEED MANAGEMENT

The recently completed Teton County Long-Range Plan prepared by the USDA NRCS Choteau Field Office notes a number of noxious weed species known to be present in the County including spotted knapweed, leafy spurge, whitetop, dalmation toadflax, and Russian knapweed.<sup>49</sup> The Teton County Noxious Weed Management District provides the following services:

- » Noxious weed management on public and private lands in Teton County.
- » Provides and distributes bio-control agents.
- » Provides noxious weed education and identification.
- » Assists landowners in preparing noxious weed trust grants.
- » Provides slide-in sprayer for the County residents to use for noxious weed control.

<sup>47</sup> Montana Office of Public Instruction website: <https://gems.opi.mt.gov/school-district-data>

<sup>48</sup> Montana Office of Public Instruction OPI FAQ – Attendance Centers: <https://opi.mt.gov/Portals/182/Page%20Files/School%20Finance/Accounting/Guidance%20and%20Manuals/FY2023/Attendance%20Center%20FAQ.pdf?ver=2023-02-21-090957-737#:~:text=Attendance%20centers%20have%20been%20a%20part%20of%20Montana%E2%80%99s,a%20school%E2%80%99s%20learning%20environment%20to%20an%20offsite%20location>

<sup>49</sup> Teton County Long-Range Plan, USDA NRCS Choteau Field Office; [Teton County | Natural Resources Conservation Service \(usda.gov\)](https://www.usda.gov)



Events held to provide education regarding noxious weed management and opportunities to help with that endeavor include the Teton Canyon Weed Pull and the Buzzy Breen Memorial Bug Collection Day.<sup>50</sup>

## 7.9. LAND CONSERVATION/RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

The vision for the Teton County USDA NRCS Long-Range Plan is to work “effectively with producers in Teton County to address natural resource concerns while improving economic returns.”<sup>46</sup> The Long-Range Plan, developed by the NRCS Choteau Field office with help from the Teton Conservation District with resources contributed by a number of other local resources, highlights high priority resource concerns and sets a direction for Targeted Implementation Plans.

The NRCS/Teton Conservation District met and convened the yearly Local Working Group meeting in March 2023 to identify resource concerns. A new list was identified as follows:

- » Management of Water Flows for Drought Preparations/Management
- » Weeds (County, neighbors, chemical resistant, management)
- » Grazing Management (Public v Private)(Balance)(Range condition)
- » Irrigation Modernization (Efficiency/Infrastructure/Headgates/Water Diversion)
- » Erosion (runoff & wind)
- » Water Quality
- » Flooding/Streambed Impact (stabilization, loss, flow, restoration, migration next to Teton Canyon Road)
- » Wildlife Habitat/Agriculture Values (Balance)
- » Soil Health & Soil Improvement
- » Water Use Efficiency
- » Farming for Carbon Credit
- » Water Development/Streambed Loss (grazing issue and relief may come about as it did 20 years ago)
- » Saline Seep (Still an issue; when it rains it becomes more prevalent)

Based on the feedback from the participants, the 2023 top three resource concerns center around 1) Management of Water Flows for Drought Preparation/Management; 2) Weeds; and 3) Grazing Management.

Prioritization of natural resource problems in 2022 included weeds, wind and water erosion, and flooding impacts to streambeds. Other priorities listed for 2019 and 2021 were water capture, streambed stabilization, and stock water improvements. Targeted Implementation Plans include:

- » Spring Creek Leafy Spurge Management Project will be completed upon final submission of documentation in 2023
- » Muddy Creek and Spring Coulee Irrigation Efficiency 2022 and 2023 TIPS

## 7.10. COMMUNICATIONS

### TELEPHONE

The local telephone network consists of the switching offices, the interoffice backbone, and the local loop. The companies that own and operate the network are referred to as Local Exchange Carriers (LEC). In the study area, 3 Rivers Communications is the local exchange carrier that provides service to the majority of Teton County, except for Dutton, which is served by CenturyLink. 3 Rivers provides service to Teton County and other areas of the State. Cellular Telephone Companies with licenses in all or parts of Teton County include T-Mobile, AT&T Wireless, and Verizon. 3 Rivers has a database of existing cell tower infrastructure and is working to expand the capabilities of existing cell towers.

<sup>50</sup> Teton County web site: <https://tetoncomt.org/weed-department/>

3 Rivers has recently prioritized the installation of fiber optic service to every household they serve and the base infrastructure for fiber optic internet, which is funded by the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).

## **BROADBAND**

"Montana's broadband connectivity is a critical resource for purposes of education and employment, to access eGovernment services, and to participate broadly in our global world."<sup>51</sup>

With the work completed by 3 Rivers in Choteau in 2020, almost every home and business 3 Rivers serves in Teton County is now connected directly to the Internet through its fiber optic network. This includes the Bynum, Choteau, Fairfield, Pendroy and Power communities (3 Rivers is not the incumbent telecommunications provider in Dutton). 3 Rivers has invested tens of millions of dollars in these areas over the past 15 years. Customers connected via the fiber optic network can receive internet speeds of up to 1 Gbps and more.

## **7.11. ELECTRICITY AND GAS**

### **NORTHWESTERN ENERGY**

Northwestern Energy is the electric and natural gas utility that serves the incorporated towns of Teton County. The Northwestern Energy service territory covers approximately 107,600 square miles or 73% of Montana. This area includes 288,000 electric customers and 151,000 natural gas customers in the western two-thirds of Montana. Northwestern Energy electric transmission system consists of over 7,000 miles of transmission lines and associated terminal facilities. The Northwestern Energy system has interconnections to five major transmission systems located in the Western Systems Coordinating Council (WSCC) area, as well as one interconnection to a system that connects with the Mid-Continent Area Power Pool (MAPP) region. Northwestern Energy also has programs for net metering, renewable energy, and energy conservation.

### **SUN RIVER ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE**

Sun River Electric Cooperative was first organized as Sun River Electrification in 1937. It opened its headquarters in Fairfield the following year and still operates at that location. The first electric service was installed in the Sun River Valley from Vaughn to Simms and north to the Fairfield Bench. Today Sun River Electric serves consumers in Cascade, Teton, Pondera, Lewis & Clark, Choteau, Liberty, Toole, and Judith Basin counties. In Teton County, Sun River Electric serves all customers located outside the municipalities of Choteau, Fairfield, and Dutton.

## **7.12. FUTURE NEED FOR ADDITIONAL OR IMPROVED SERVICES**

Population estimates indicate a 20-year trend from 2022 to 2042 with the largest growth in the age group 0-4 years and 25-49 years with a decrease in those 55-74 years. Implications for that trend are a need for childcare services and maternal health. Public health and social service agencies in Teton County may need to be prepared for increased caseloads. Access to broadband for remote workers may also be important.

Public health officials continue to emphasize lifestyle changes to prevent illnesses. Although Benefis Hospital operates the Benefis Teton Medical Center, residents must drive to Great Falls for specialty care. Alluvian Health, also based in Great Falls, is now offering healthcare in Teton County. More public and private development of local activities that promote healthy lifestyles and recruiting additional health care services to the County will benefit the County in the future.

School enrollment may increase in the future which will put pressure on the existing facilities and staff. Building maintenance and teacher/staff recruitment will become critical to address the demand for quality education.

The volunteer fire departments, emergency services, and Sheriff's department face personnel shortages. Due to two-worker families and time limitations fewer people are volunteering for these demanding jobs. Consequently, operating on a totally volunteer basis may be more difficult in the future.

<sup>51</sup> Montana State Library website: [https://mslservices.mt.gov/Legislative\\_Snapshot/Broadband/Default.aspx](https://mslservices.mt.gov/Legislative_Snapshot/Broadband/Default.aspx)

The Teton County Sheriff's Office provides all law enforcement services in the County, including the incorporated areas of Choteau, Dutton, and Fairfield. Small subdivisions in remote areas are harder to serve and may not have adequate access for emergency vehicles.

Qualified EMS responders must be available 24/7. Although serving on the Teton County EMS team is a volunteer service, responders are paid an hourly wage from the time they are paged on a call to the time they are back in service. They are also paid for in county trainings and all standbys.

Maintaining land conservation measures and hazard mitigation planning will be necessary to support the agricultural and recreational economy of the county. This may include additional resources being sought for programs managed by the Weed Management District and the County DES. Recruitment of volunteer emergency services personnel is critical to the ongoing operation of Fire Districts and EMT services.

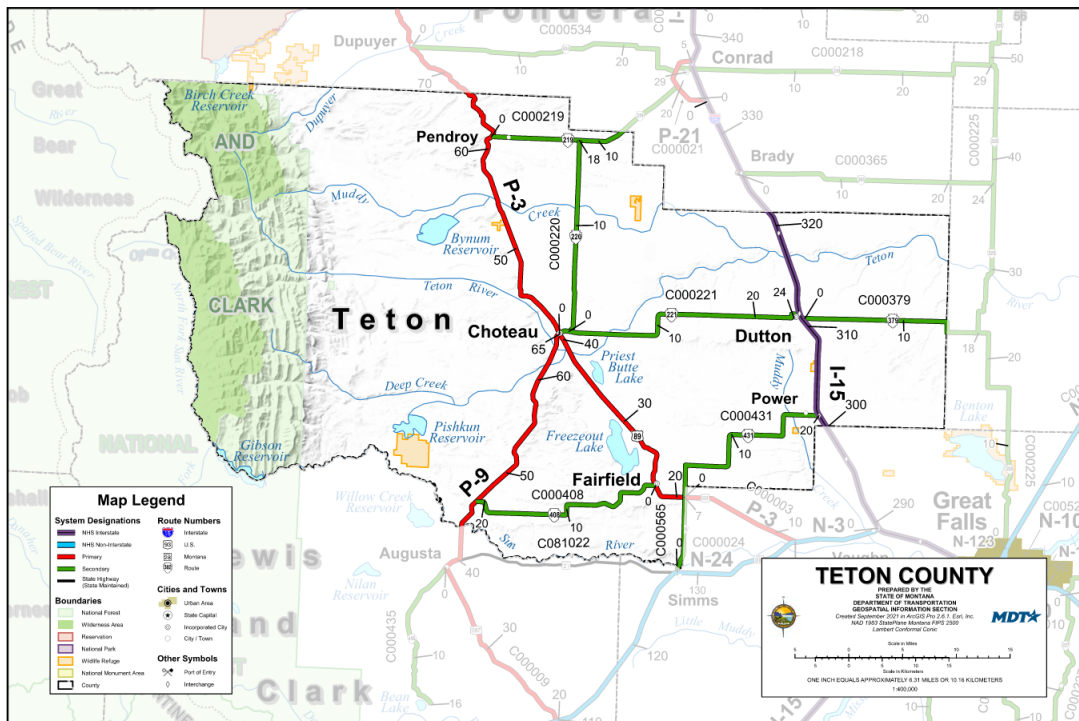
### 7.13. LOCAL SERVICES GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goal 7.1	
Serve the public health and social service needs of all residents in Teton County. (more health care providers, educational opportunities surrounding public health issues)	
Objectives	Actions
Provide public health and social services that promote the health and welfare of Teton County residents.	Support the goals and objectives of the Teton County Community Health Needs Assessment – Improvement Plan and the Teton County Health Department Strategic Plan.
	Teton County/MSU Extension to provide education and group instruction in exercise and mental health.
	Local government to seek funding for the creation of a new Emergency & Community Health Facility.
	Local government to support the social service providers within the County, providing public assistance, child and family services, and senior services.

## 8. PUBLIC FACILITIES

### 8.1. TRANSPORTATION

Figure 8.1 Teton County Highway Map<sup>52</sup>



Teton County has an extensive network of local roads that are under the jurisdiction of the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT), the Teton County Road Department, and the incorporated municipalities of Choteau, Dutton and Fairfield.

The incorporated municipalities maintain the local alleys and streets within their city/town limits. The major arterials within city/town limits are typically state or county highways, while residential streets are local city streets.

Table 8.1 Streets in Incorporated Cities and Towns

	city of Choteau	town of Dutton	town of Fairfield
Miles of Streets	25.4	6.25	7.30
Surface	Gravel alley ways Paved streets	Paved	Primarily Paved
Storm Sewer	Some storm drain infrastructure	Some storm drain infrastructure, primarily open drainage	No storm drain infrastructure
Improvements	Maintenance only	Maintenance only	Maintenance only

The Teton County Road and Bridge Department is responsible for an extensive network of roads and bridges throughout the unincorporated portion of the County that are not included in the state highway system, which is shown in Figure 8.1. The County is responsible for 1,460 miles of roads and 97 bridges. The Road and Bridge Department budget is generally used for road maintenance, equipment, and personnel, and the budget is funded from the County general fund, gas tax, grants, and Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) funds. PILT funds are received from the federal government for public lands within the County.

<sup>52</sup> Teton County System Routes Map, Montana Department of Transportation, [MDT County Maps](#) | [Montana Department of Transportation \(MDT\)](#) ([mt.gov](#))

Table 8.2 Teton County Road &amp; Bridge Information

Teton County Road & Bridge Information	
Miles of Paved Roads	30
Miles of Gravel Roads	1,320
# Bridges over 20-feet in length	47
# Bridges 20-feet or less in length	50

As identified in Table 8.2, bridges are broken into two categories:

- » Major Structure: bridges greater than 20-feet in length, which are inspected biennially by the MDT. Based on current MDT records, there are 88 bridges in this category located in Teton County. Although major structures are inspected by MDT, they may be the fiscal responsibility of Teton County for repair or replacement. Of these 88 bridges, 47 bridges are the responsibility of Teton County.
- » Minor Structure: bridges less than 20-feet in length, which are not inspected regularly by MDT or Teton County crews. There are currently 50 bridges in this category that are the responsibility of Teton County.

Teton County also contains roads on the Interstate System, the National Highway System (primary roads), and the State Highway System (secondary roads).

Table 8.3 Federal and State Highways in Teton County<sup>53</sup>

Classification	Road Name	Location
Interstate	I-15	North-South route
National Highway System Routes (Primary)	US-89	North-South route through central Teton County
	US-287	North-South route from Choteau to Augusta
State Routes (Secondary)	Highway 221	Choteau to Dutton
	Highway 220	Choteau to Conrad
	Highway 408	Fairfield to US-287
	Highway 431	Fairfield to Power
	Highway 219	Pendroy to Conrad
	Highway 379	Dutton to east county line

Federal and state highways are eligible for federal funds and are within the jurisdiction of the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT). MDT prepares a Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) annually, which covers a period of four years. The 2022-2026 STIP identifies the following projects in Teton County:

<sup>53</sup> Teton County System Routes Map, Montana Department of Transportation, [MDT County Maps | Montana Department of Transportation \(MDT\) \(mt.gov\)](#)



Table 8.4 Teton County Projects in the MDT STIP<sup>54</sup>

Fiscal Year	Project Name	Road	Project Scope
2023	Choteau North	US-89	6.896 miles of road reconstruction
2025	Choteau South	US-89	6.42 miles of road reconstruction
2026	Freezeout Lake – North	US-89	5.684 miles of road reconstruction
2023	Power N&S	I-15	7.755 miles of overlay – cold mill
2025	Muddy Creek – 10 M NE Farmington	L-50-11	Bridge Replacement

## 8.2. WATER SUPPLY

Teton County does not currently operate any public water systems; however, public water systems exist in the city of Choteau, town of Dutton and the town of Fairfield, as well as one water and sewer district, and two water districts that also serve as public systems.

Table 8.5 Public Drinking Water Sources in Teton County<sup>55</sup>

Location	Water Source	Population Served	Service Connections
City of Choteau	(4) Wells	1,691	704
Town of Dutton	(1) Well	338	190
Town of Fairfield	(8) Wells	718	374
Bynum-Teton County W&S District	(2) Wells	100	30
Power-Teton County Water District	(1) Intake	167	85
Tri-County Water District	(2) Wells	470	175

## NORTH CENTRAL MONTANA REGIONAL WATER SYSTEM

This water system provides water from Lake Elwell, located in both Liberty and Toole Counties, to communities, rural water districts, Hutterite colonies, and other rural users in seven counties in north central Montana.<sup>56</sup> The system is planned to serve the town of Dutton in the future. Teton County is a member of the Regional Water System, which could feasibly sell water to private entities within the County.

## TRI-COUNTY WATER DISTRICT

The Tri-County Water District serves approximately 460 people located in Teton, Cascade and Choteau counties. The system operates from two wells that pump water to a 192,000-gallon storage tank on Teton Ridge and is only intended for domestic water use. The system is significantly over capacity as it was only designed to serve 175 people and accepts no additional users. Users are assessed a monthly fee and are not metered.

## CITY OF CHOTEAU

The City water system currently distributes water to 80% of the area within the City boundary, serving 704 residences and businesses. Two production wells supply water that is pumped into two storage tanks, with a total storage capacity of 750,000 gallons. The water is treated with chlorine.

<sup>54</sup> Statewide Transportation Improvement Program 2022-2026, State of Montana, Department of Transportation [2022-2026 STIP \(mt.gov\)](#)

<sup>55</sup> Montana Safe Drinking Water Information System, Water Systems, Teton County [Drinking Water Branch \(mt.gov\)](#)

<sup>56</sup> North Central Montana Regional Water Authority [About \(ncmrwa.com\)](#)

**TOWN OF DUTTON**

One well, located near the Teton River, supplies water to the town of Dutton. The water is pumped to a 500,000-gallon storage tank located one-mile south of town and is distributed via gravity flow. The water is treated with chlorine, and although it meets safe drinking water standards, the water has a high mineral content that causes discoloration and odor.

**TOWN OF FAIRFIELD**

The town of Fairfield water system serves 370 connections. The users of the system are primarily residential, and the system is metered. The infrastructure includes eight (8) active wells that pump water to two elevated water tanks with a total capacity of 210,000 gallons. The wells are all very shallow with a limited aquifer; therefore, the water supply from any one well is limited.

**BYNUM – TETON COUNTY WATER & SEWER DISTRICT**

Two wells provide groundwater to approximately 30 service connections that are metered. The system serves approximately 100 users.

**POWER – TETON COUNTY WATER DISTRICT**

One intake source, Muddy Creek, provides water for the unincorporated community of Power. The water is pumped from the creek and treated in a retention pond, where it is then pumped to a 12,000-gallon storage tank where it is further treated prior to being pumped to a 40,000-gallon storage tank in Power. There are approximately 85 connections to the system, and users are charged a flat fee for the first 20,000 gallons of water, and an additional charge for any usage above the flat rate.

**8.3. WASTEWATER COLLECTION AND TREATMENT**

Teton County is not responsible for operating or maintaining any public wastewater systems. Public wastewater treatment and collection systems are located in Choteau, Dutton, Fairfield and Power, while the remainder of the county utilizes individual septic systems that must be approved by the County Sanitarian. The Teton County Sanitarian and the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) must review any development with an area of less than 20 acres.

**CITY OF CHOTEAU**

The wastewater system in the city of Choteau currently serves the area within the city limits and is comprised of 80,736 feet of sewer main line, 258 manholes, and a mechanical treatment facility. The system is primarily gravity flow until it reaches the treatment facility, at which time a lift station and force main are required. This system provides service to 859 residents and businesses.<sup>57</sup>

**TOWN OF FAIRFIELD**

The wastewater system for the town of Fairfield consists of a two-cell facultative lagoon with an area of approximately 11 acres and an average depth of 7 feet. The collection system is comprised of approximately 42,240 feet of sewer mains, 90 manholes, and an outfall line to the lagoon. The system provides service to 356 residents and businesses.

**TOWN OF DUTTON**

The town of Dutton is served by a two-cell non-aerated lagoon system with irrigation that provides service to approximately 224 residents.

<sup>57</sup> City of Choteau Growth Policy Update, January 2022 [Choteau Growth Policy 2022.pdf - Google Drive](#)

## POWER

The community of Power, with approximately 90 residents served, uses a two-cell total retention lagoon for collection of wastewater. The lagoons are approximately 5 acres each and the system is oversized for the population served.

### 8.4. SOLID WASTE

Solid waste services in Teton County are provided by two collection services, two garbage districts and a recycling center.

The North Montana Joint Refuse Disposal District (NMJRDD) serves Teton, Pondera and Glacier Counties. The city of Choteau is a member of NMJRDD. The City collects garbage four days per week, which is hauled to a site north of town operated by NMJRDD, who then transports the refuse to the landfill located near Valier, Montana.

Montana Waste, operating out of Great Falls, Montana, provides collection and disposal services for household and commercial waste. The Town of Fairfield contracts with Montana Waste for solid waste disposal, which is collected once a week. Montana Waste also collects refuse from transfer container sites located in Dutton and Power.

The transfer container sites, located in Dutton and Power, are operated as Refuse Districts. Residents using these sites are assessed for services. If a county resident is not located in a refuse district or municipality that collects solid waste, they are responsible for joining a refuse district or contracting for garbage service.

A recycling collection site is located in the City of Choteau at the City Shop. Cardboard, aluminum, and steel are collected and transported to Great Falls to a larger collection facility.

### 8.5. TETON COUNTY COURTHOUSE/COURTHOUSE ANNEX

The Teton County Courthouse was constructed in 1906 and is home to a number of County Departments, including the Clerk & Recorder, Superintendent of Schools, Treasurer, District Youth Court, District Court, and the County Commissioners. The Courthouse is on the National Register of Historic Places and underwent renovations in 2001.

The Teton County Annex Building, located across the street from the Courthouse, also houses multiple County Departments, including Disaster & Emergency Services, Planning Department, County Attorney, the Weed District Foreman, and the County Sanitarian.

### 8.6. AIRPORT

There are currently three airports that operate in Teton County, located in the City of Choteau, the town of Dutton and the town of Fairfield. The airport in Choteau is the only one on the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) National Plan of Integrated Airport Systems (NPIAS), making it eligible for federal funding. Teton County operates the airports in conjunction with each municipality, and they are used for general aviation only. No commercial passenger service is available from any of the airports. An Airport Board is appointed by the County and municipalities and oversees airport operations. In addition to the airports, there is a helipad located at Benefis Teton Medical Center in Choteau.

### 8.7. TOWN HALL/FIRE HALL/EMS

The city of Choteau office resides in the City Hall building, located just two blocks from the Teton County Courthouse. Choteau is home to the Choteau Volunteer Fire Department and Teton County Fire and Rescue (shared by City and County), whose facility was constructed in 2011 and currently consists of six stalls and a meeting room. There are future plans to expand the fire hall to allow it to serve as an emergency shelter location.

The town of Dutton town services share a facility with the Dutton Fire Department, which has three (3) stalls for vehicles. Town offices in Fairfield are located on Main Street.

The town of Fairfield owns a fire hall with 6 bays that is partially rented to Teton County for equipment storage.

Pendroy and Power fire halls are owned by the County.

Teton County is planning to construct a new 12,000 square-foot EMS facility that will house the Teton County Health Department, the Emergency Medical Services, Search and Rescue, and add an expansion to the Sheriff's Office.

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## **8.8 CEMETERY**

Teton County has a Cemetery Board that governs and manages the various cemeteries within the County. The Cemetery Board is comprised of three trustees, appointed by the County Board of Commissioners, and one County Commissioner. The Board is responsible for supervising all activities within the cemeteries, such as setting rules and regulations.

The Cemetery Board oversees seven (7) cemeteries scattered throughout Teton County, including Bynum, Choteau, Dutton, Farmington, Immanuel, St. Paul, and Sunset Hills. There are additional cemeteries within the County; however, they are primarily Hutterite Colony cemeteries or private families' plots.

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## **8.9. COUNTY/TOWN SHOPS**

The primary site of the Teton County Road and Bridge Department is located east of Highway 220, with district shops located in Pendroy, Dutton, Power, Fairfield, and Choteau. Choteau, Dutton, and Fairfield also maintain City Shops.

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## **8.10. LIBRARY**

Public libraries within Teton County are located in Choteau, Dutton and Fairfield. The libraries are all Joint City/County Libraries. Choteau/Teton Public Library offers several programs for residents, including reading challenges, summer reading programs, story hour, children's activities, the Lego club, and a Community Read book club. The library also offers public services such as public computers, wireless internet, printing and copying, and a meeting room<sup>58</sup>. The Food Bank is located at the Choteau/Teton Library.

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## **8.11. COMMUNITY/SENIOR CENTERS**

According to the Montana Area Agencies on Aging, there are four (4) senior centers within Teton County, located in Choteau, Dutton, Fairfield, and Power. The Senior Center in Choteau provides meals, available for in-house or takeout, and they manage the Meals on Wheels program. Twice a month, the Choteau/Teton County homeschool children come to the Center to interact with users, and local EMTs come quarterly to perform free health screenings. They also have a thrift store that assists with funding programs.

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## **8.13. FUTURE NEED FOR ADDITIONAL OR IMPROVED PUBLIC FACILITIES**

Teton County is currently planning for a new Emergency Services facility to be located in the city of Choteau. The facility will house a number of services and agencies, including the County Health Department, Search & Rescue, Ambulance, Emergency Operations Center, and Morgue.

The Town of Fairfield just completed a Stormwater Preliminary Engineering Report that recommended increasing the size of the storm drains to adequately handle the water and snow runoff. A stormwater improvement project will also keep the streets in better shape.

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<sup>58</sup> Choteau Teton Public Library [Choteau/Teton Public Library \(choteau-tetonpubliclibrary.com\)](http://choteau-tetonpubliclibrary.com)

Fairfield is also in the process of updating both Water and Wastewater System Preliminary Engineering Reports. It is anticipated that a water system upgrade will have at least two more phases including replacing more main lines, valves, and fire hydrants, adding more loops, and another water tower.

### 8.13. PUBLIC FACILITIES GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goal 8.1	
Maintain and upgrade public infrastructure as needed to serve County residents of all ages, incomes and special needs groups.	
Objectives	Actions
Systematically plan and budget for capital improvements within the City, Towns, and County to efficiently maintain and upgrade public infrastructure as needed.	Local government to prepare and utilize the Comprehensive Capital Improvements Plan (CCIP) for Teton County and its incorporated towns. Commission/Councils to review and update CCIP annually as needs change.
	Local government to support upgrades of public facilities for ADA compliance.
	Teton County to support the city of Choteau, and towns of Dutton and Fairfield in their efforts to plan, fund, and build water, sewer, roads, and utilities through state and federal funding mechanisms.
	Teton County Planning Board and local government to encourage leveraging additional resources for infrastructure through private/public partnerships.
	Teton County Planning Board and local government to consider policies that require developers to pay a proportional share for infrastructure upgrades and expansion.
Maintain the existing County roads and bridges efficiently, economically, and based on standard criteria.	Local government to follow the recommendations for maintenance and improvements to the County/City/Towns transportation systems outlined in the CCIP.
	Local government to stay apprised of funding opportunities and secure financial assistance as available from programs that may help leverage local funds in the maintenance of County roads, bridges and pedestrian facilities (i.e., MCEP, FLAP, TA, etc.)
	Local government to work with state and federal agencies to maintain and/or improve road conditions affected by use due to public lands access.
	County/City/Town staff and officials communicate with MDT personnel on a regular basis to take advantage of MDT road, bridge, and transportation alternative programs.



## 9. NATURAL RESOURCES

Teton County offers a diverse landscape from where the Rocky Mountain Front transitions into the Northern Great plains. Abundant wildlife and natural landscapes are a common scenic view throughout the County. The climate is generally pleasant with sufficient growing seasons. Trends of seasonal low precipitation and record droughts pose a potential natural hazards risk to property and resources throughout the County. However, Teton County coordination with local, state, and federal agencies continues to develop and evolve management plans and policies that involve various aspects of the County's natural resources.

### 9.1. LAND COVER

Teton County land cover is nearly 69% agriculture land use and grassland systems, as seen in Table 9.1. Agricultural land cover consists of approximately 36.5% of cultivated crops and approximately 1.5% of pasture/hay fields throughout the County.<sup>59</sup> A majority of the agricultural land cover is on the eastern side of US Highway 89 and a majority of grasslands are on the western side of US Highway 89, rolling up to the forest and woodlands of the Rocky Mountain Front.

Table 9.1 Teton County Landcover Ecological Systems<sup>59</sup>

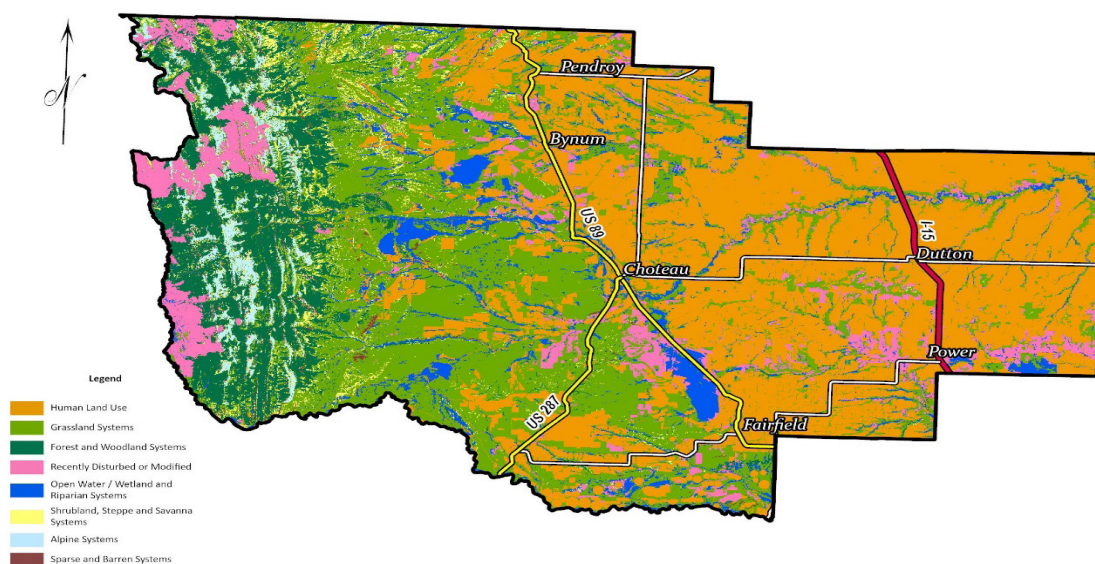
Landcover Ecological System	Acres	Percent
Human Land Use	586,604	40%
Agriculture	560,941	38%
Cultivated Crops	538,181	36.5%
Pasture/Hay/CRP*	22,760	1.5%
Developed		2%
Grasslands Systems	454,715	31%
Forest and Woodland Systems	145,584	10%
Recently Disturbed or Modified	112,856	8%
Wetland and Riparian Systems	82,898	6%
Shrubland and Steppe Systems	45,614	3%
Alpine Systems	30,979	2%
Sparse and Barren Systems	6,177	<1%

\*Note from Montana Natural Heritage Program "Generally speaking, alfalfa grown with center-pivot irrigation will be classified as "Cultivated Crops" rather than "Pasture/Hay".

Spruce, Douglas-fir, lodgepole pine, limber pine, and subalpine fir are the common characteristics found in Teton County's forest and woodland systems, located in the western part of the County. The undergrowth of these spruce and fir forests supports a diverse stand of forbs and shrubs, such as the elderberries. As seen in the Teton County Landcover map (Figure 9.1) large patches of recently disturbed or modified systems can be found in the Rocky Mountains. This is due to major disturbances such as blowdowns from weather storms, previous wildland fires, and insect outbreaks such as the spruce budworm, mountain pine beetle, Douglas fir beetle, and grasshoppers.

<sup>59</sup> Natural Heritage Map Viewer, Land Cover; Natural Heritage Program; [NHP Land Cover \(mtnhp.org\)](http://NHP.Land.Cover(mtnhp.org))

Figure 9.1 Teton County Landcover Map



As the Rocky Mountains transition into the western edge of the Great Plains as foothills and upland meadows, a variety of perennial bunch grasses, forbs, and shrubs cover the landscape. The western wheatgrass begins to emerge as the dominant species as the landscape transitions into lowland prairie. The growing season averages 115 days with an annual precipitation of 13-21 inches, allowing for large variety of mid and short grasses mixed with cultivated crops<sup>60</sup>. Because of the productivity of the area's climate and soil, it is common for non-native and noxious weeds to be widespread.

The spread of noxious weeds is a major concern for residents of Teton County as they threaten rangelands, croplands, and recreation lands. Montana has 36 listed noxious weeds, five regulated plants, and Teton County has one addition to the states list, Musk Thistle, according to the Montana State Noxious Weed List<sup>61</sup>. Highway corridors and waterways such as Deep Creek, Muddy Creek, Sun River, Teton River, and irrigation ditches contribute to the spread of noxious weeds throughout the County. Teton County is active in collaborations with various agencies and organizations for effective weed control management.

## 9.2. RIVERS, STREAMS, LAKES, WETLANDS, AND WATERSHEDS

Teton County consists of five subbasin watersheds: Marias, Two Medicine, Upper Missouri-Dearborn, Teton, and Sun. The significant creeks such as Deep Creek, Willow Creek, and Muddy Creek either flow into the Teton or Sun Rivers and eventually flow into the Missouri River. Nearly 3500 lakes/reservoirs cover Teton County with Freezeout Lake being the largest lake, including six additional ponds, all of which comprise over 42 square miles.<sup>62</sup> Bynum, Pishkun, and Gibson are among other significant lakes/reservoirs and over 230 swamps/marshes provide recreational, ecological, and developmental importance. Because of the diverse importance of the waterbodies in the County and region, many efforts from organizations and agencies tackle to address water quality and quantity issues.

<sup>60</sup> Montana Natural Heritage Program; [Montana Natural Heritage Program \(mtnhp.org\)](http://mtnhp.org)

<sup>61</sup> Montana Noxious Weed Management Plan, 2017; Montana Department of Agriculture; [MT-Noxious-Weed-Management-Plan-Update-2017.pdf](#)

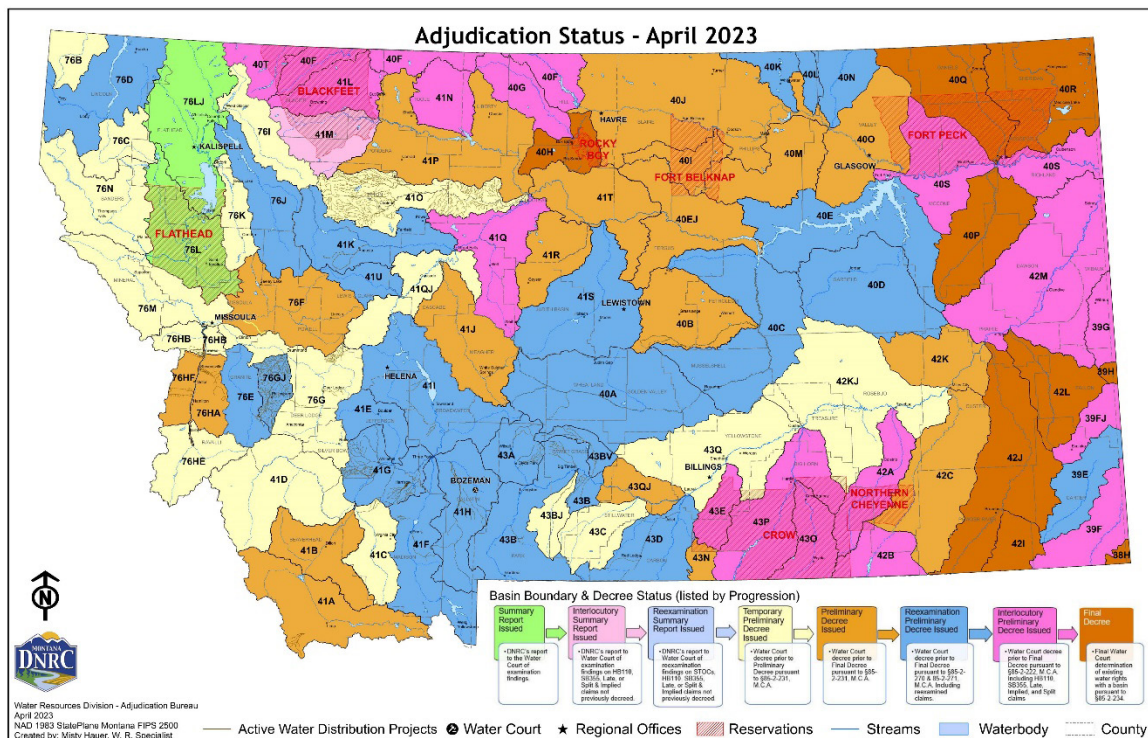
<sup>62</sup> National Hydrography Dataset Model, United States Geologic Survey, 2023.

Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) has responsibility to monitor and assess the quality of Montana's surface waters and to identify impaired or threatened stream segments and lakes. Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) is a report which identifies sources of pollution from streams, rivers, and lakes and determines how much pollution a water system sustains. The latest TMDL report for the Teton River watershed was in 2003 and in 2004 for the Sun River watershed. A total of 22 waterbodies are listed in Teton County<sup>63</sup>. Watershed Restoration Plans are developed to help watershed groups plan and implement restoration activities in their respective watersheds. The Sun River Watershed Group (SRWG) updated their plan in 2022 as one of the organizations advocating to protect water resources and improve water quality within their respective watersheds.

The Montana Department of Natural Resources & Conservation (DNRC) Stream Gage Program operates surface water, groundwater, and reservoir monitoring locations across the state of Montana in an effort to provide accurate real-time measurements of streamflow to assist with water management and distribution. Teton County currently has four active USGS stream gages, two real-time DNRC gages, and 13 seasonal DNRC gages.<sup>64</sup>

The Montana Water Adjudication Program assists local governments with water rights claims and examines all claims pursuant to Supreme Court rules and provides a summary report to the Montana Water Court on each of the water basins in the state.<sup>65</sup> An updated map of the Adjudication Status of water basins in Montana is in Figure 9.2.

Figure 9.2 State of Montana Water Basin Adjudication Status<sup>66</sup>



<sup>63</sup> Water Quality Management Plan & TMDLs for the Teton River Watershed, Montana Department of Environmental Quality; [M14-TMDL-02a.pdf \(mt.gov\)](#)

<sup>64</sup> Stream and Gage Explorer, Montana DNRC; [StAGE - Stream And Gage Explorer \(mt.gov\)](#)

<sup>65</sup> Water Adjudication (Pre-1973 Water Rights) Montana DNRC; [Adjudication \(mt.gov\)](#)

<sup>66</sup> Water Adjudication (Pre-1973 Water Rights) Montana DNRC; [Adjudication \(mt.gov\)](#)

### 9.3. FISH AND WILDLIFE

Teton County landscape provides a diversity of habitat for fish and wildlife from the alpine peaks of the Rocky Mountain Front to the terrace and prairie of the Great Plains. The western portion of Teton County is managed by the Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest and is recognized for exceptional wildlife habitats of big game such as bear, deer, elk, moose, and more. In addition to the National Forest, three Wildlife Management Areas exist: Freezeout Lake, Blackleaf, and Ear Mountain. Three Waterfowl Production Areas: Arod Lake, Brumwell, and Savik, and the Pishkun National Wildlife Refuge that fosters protection for fish and wildlife habitats are also located in Teton County.

There are 65 species of mammals, over 300 species of birds, 32 species of fish, nine species of reptiles, and seven species of amphibians that inhabit areas throughout Teton County<sup>67</sup>. With an abundant diversity of species and ample habitat areas, some mammal and bird species are listed on the Federal endangered and threatened species list. Those species include a shorebird known as the piping plover, a sandpiper known as the red knot, the grizzly bear, and the Canada lynx.

Teton County is among other counties within Montana which have a unique relationship between wildlife and humans, including a key topic regarding the conflicts between County residents and grizzly bears. With sparse and concentrated development within proximity to wildlife habitats, the importance of planning and management is critical for the safety of county residents, protecting their livelihoods, and ensuring wildlife remain an important feature of the County.

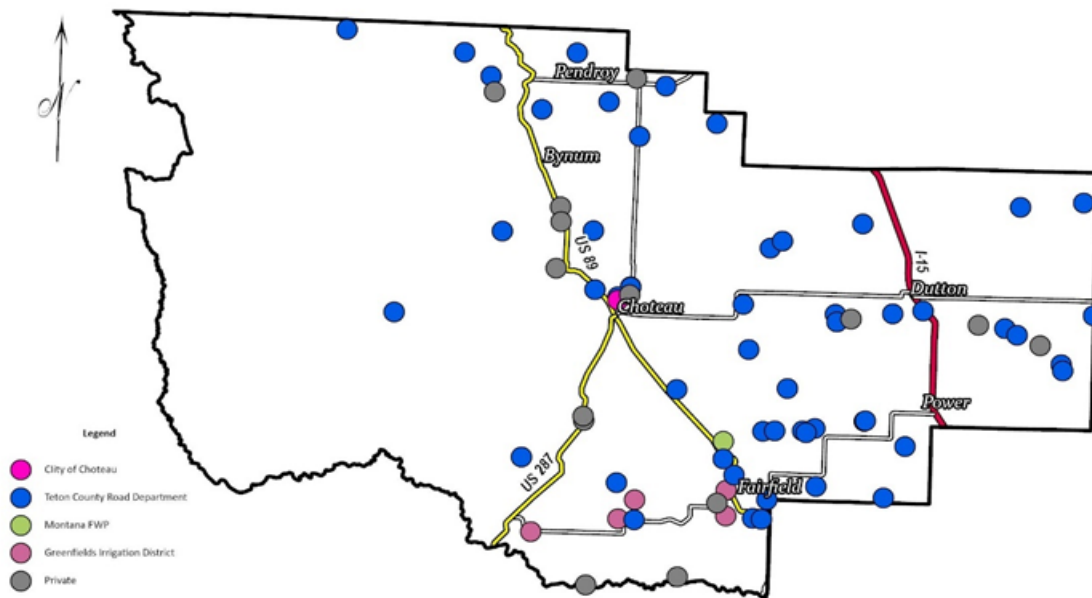
### 9.4. SAND AND GRAVEL RESOURCES

Opencut mining sites allow the extraction of bentonite, clay, scoria, soil materials, peat, sand, or gravel. Teton County is abundant in the important natural resource of sand and gravel deposits, providing a foundation to infrastructure of buildings, roads, and bridges. Currently Montana DEQ has permitted 74 opencut mining sites in Teton County, of which 51 sites are operated by Teton County Road Department and one is operated by the City of Choteau, as seen in Figure 9.2<sup>68</sup>. Access and spatial distance of local gravel resources is important in reducing the cost of transporting and process fees for the overall cost of development. The potential for local extraction of sand and gravel resources influences the overall economic climate, supporting jobs and supplying local construction industries.

<sup>67</sup> Montana Natural Heritage Program; [Montana Natural Heritage Program \(mtnhp.org\)](https://montanaheritage.org/)

<sup>68</sup> Montana Opencut Mining Sites, Montana DEQ; Montana Opencut Mining Sites | Discover DEQ's Data (arccgis.com)



Figure 9.3 Teton County Opencut Mining Sites<sup>69</sup>

## 9.5. WILDLAND-URBAN INTERFACE

The Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) is defined by § 76-13-102 MCA as “the line, area, or zone where structures and other human development meet or intermingle with undeveloped wildland or vegetative fuels.”

The Montana Legislature established the State’s wildfire policy, which requires growth policies to include an evaluation of potential wildland fire. As determined in Teton County, due to public sentiment regarding the Montana definition of WUI, only designated public land is considered a WUI area. The County’s 2011 Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) notes that it should not be assumed that just because an area is not identified as being within the WUI, there is no wildland fire risk. The CWPP planning committee identified wildland fire risk throughout Teton County based on vegetation data, fire history, and fire regime condition class. The plan also made treatment recommendations in areas recognized as having a high fire risk.

Teton County and other agencies have been proactive in creating plans and policies for emergency preparedness as it relates to wildland fire. The County adopted and updated its Hazard Mitigation Plan in 2021, in which it incorporates the 2011 CWPP. Both the 2021 Teton County Hazard Mitigation Plan and the 2011 CWPP can be found in Appendix B. Additional plans that are available to assist in wildfire emergencies include:

- » The 2020 Teton County Emergency Operations Plan, which serves as a coordination and policy document for all disasters and emergencies covering all four local jurisdictions.
- » The 2011 Rocky Mountain Ranger District Emergency Plan for the National Forest Service, which includes a six-mile buffer along the Forest Service boundary into private lands.
- » Teton County – State of Montana Cooperative Fire Management Plan, which establishes a basic level of wildfire protection to all lands in Teton County that are not covered by a wildland fire protection district or under the protection of a municipality or federal agency.
- » Weed plan included with any gravel permitting in the County during reclamation and with new pits/permitting process.

<sup>69</sup> Montana Opencut Mining Sites, Montana DEQ; Montana Opencut Mining Sites | Montana Opencut Mining Sites | Discover DEQ's Data (arcgis.com)



Wildland fire season in Montana and Teton County is generally July to September, with the potential in spring based on prescribed burns, and fire severity or behaviors is simplified by three components: fuels, topography, and weather. The CWPP reveals the average fire size in Teton County from 1980 to 2009 was 109 acres, 14 fires over 1,000 acres, and five fires reached over 5,000 acres burned. The largest fire in Teton County, known as the Fool Creek Fire, occurred in 2007 burning 60,038 acres. Nearly 18% of fires in the County from 1980 to 2009 were ignited by equipment, 11% from lighting, and 6% from power lines. With recent trends of high drought levels, variability of ignitions and proximity to large amount of National Forest lands, the level of fire hazard in wildland-urban interfaces is moderate to high and poses a great risk to life and property. However, for parts of the County in the plains with sparse development the threat to life and property is low to moderate.<sup>70</sup>

## RISK ASSESSMENT

Overall, the threat of wildland fire appears moderate to high for Teton County. This is in large part because of the intense agricultural activities as well as a large amount of National Forest, which is more difficult to access and has a high rate of lightning ignitions. However, for portions of Teton County, depending on conditions and weather partners, the threat may be low to moderate due to development and relatively flat topography. Developments in rural areas face a range of risk factors. Developments that have all or most of the following attributes are at the highest level of risk:

1. Location in or surrounded by heavy fuel loads with a high degree of continuity (i.e., few significant firebreaks). The risk may be particularly high if the fuel load is grass, brush, and smaller trees subject to low moisture levels in short duration drought periods.
2. Steep slopes, which cause fires to spread more rapidly.
3. Limited fire suppression capacity including limited water supply capacity for fire suppression purposes, limited firefighting personnel and apparatus, and typically long response times for fire alarms.
4. Limited access for firefighting apparatus and limited evacuation routes for residents at risk.
5. Construction of structures to less than fully fire-safe practices.
6. Lack of maintenance of firebreaks and defensible zones around structures.

Developments in Teton County, particularly along the Rocky Mountain Front, often face high fire risk because of the combination of high fire hazard (high vegetative fuel loads) and limited fire suppression capabilities. Unfortunately, occupants in many of these areas also face high safety risks, especially from large fires that may spread quickly. The safety risks are often exacerbated by a limited number of roads (in the worst case only one access road) that are often narrow and subject to blockage by a wildland fire. Potential safety issues are also often increased by homeowners' reluctance to evacuate homes.

## MITIGATION

The CWPP contains general mitigation strategies that apply to the entire County as well as specific strategies for high-risk areas in the counties. The general strategies include:

1. Prevention: Outreach and education campaigns to prevent human caused fires.
2. Burning Permits: Open burning on private lands within the County in excess of 25 square feet is not allowed without a burning permit. The County establishes open burn dates and rules. Open burning is not allowed during red flag warnings.
3. Defensible space: "Living with Fire, A Guide for the Homeowner" has recommendations for homeowners on the steps to take in order to create an effective defensible space.
4. Evacuation: The County should establish evacuation plans that identify escape routes and safety zones.
5. Access: Homeowners should create and maintain appropriate access for emergency vehicles including

<sup>70</sup> Teton County Hazard Mitigation Plan Update, October 2021; [2021-Teton-County-Hazard-Mitigation-Plan.pdf](https://www.tetoncountymt.org/files/2021-Teton-County-Hazard-Mitigation-Plan.pdf) ([tetoncountymt.org](https://www.tetoncountymt.org))

- turn-around areas. Private roads should be designed to accommodate emergency vehicles.
6. Facility maintenance: Maintain recreation areas such as trailheads and campgrounds and keep them clear of debris. Install fire rings & barbeque pits to contain fires. Thin and prune trees and vegetation in these areas.
  7. Fire District Response: Recruit and train volunteers and adequately fund local fire districts at adequate levels.
  8. Other: Create a fire-resistant buffer along roads and power line corridors through thinning timbered areas. Strictly enforce fire use regulations.

## 9.6. MINING

Records from the Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology indicate deposits known as the Choteau Titaniferous Magnetite beds are present along the eastern portions of the County. These beds, containing titanium and iron sediments, do not have significant concentrations to be economically feasible for extraction.

The Blackfoot-Valier Coal Field, beginning in Cascade County and extending north to the Canadian border, is in Teton County. Due to the thin, bony, and sporadic distribution of coal, no commercial mining operation is present in Teton County.

## 9.7. ENERGY

There are 81 production and active wells reported in Teton County, according to the Montana Board of Oil and Gas Conservation (MBOGC). Records of oil and gas production have been kept since 1986, which is the year for peak oil and gas production, according to records. Oil production was above 130,000 bbls (billion barrels) and gas production was above 1,000,000 mcf (1 mcf = 1,000 cubic feet). After 1986, oil production steadily declined to 43,367 bbls in 2022. Gas production rapidly declined to approximately 200,000-300,000 mcf in the late 1980's and again rapidly declined to between 40,000-90,000 mcf in the late 1990's and early 2000's with the lowest production from 2008 to 2017.<sup>71</sup>

Table 9.2 Teton County Oil and Gas Production<sup>67</sup>

Year	Oil (bbls)	Natural Gas (mcf)
2004	53636	No Data
2005	52790	530
2006	50348	352
2007	51535	1507
2008	59206	692
2009	62186	681
2010	62055	932
2011	58540	892
2012	60503	610
2013	60427	317
2014	58975	600
2015	59482	359
2016	52815	380
2017	55725	902
2018	53851	1654
2019	52725	3609
2020	44625	3332
2021	46644	3174
2022	43367	1103

Teton County is classified as Class 3 or "Fair" for potential wind energy development in most of the County as compared to other counties in the state that are considered to be good or excellent for wind energy development. Currently two wind energy projects exist in the County: Fairfield and Greenfield.

71 Montana Board of Oil and Gas Conservation; [Board of Oil and Gas Conservation \(mt.gov\)](https://mt.gov/BoOGC/)

## 9.8. CLIMATE AND SOILS

Teton County generally experiences warm summers with average temperatures of 70 degrees Fahrenheit with limited extreme temperatures variance, generally not exceeding 90 degrees Fahrenheit. Winter months in the plains often experience Arctic cold air with lows reaching in the teens between December and February. Frequently these Arctic systems can be interrupted by Chinook winds producing warming temperatures with relatively clear and sunny winter weather.

Teton County experiences an annual precipitation amount of 13 inches to 21 inches with the highest amounts in May and June.<sup>72</sup> Figure 9.3 shows the total accumulation of inches in a year within the Sun-Teton-Marias watershed. Snowpack in the eastern Front Range can be substantial from November to May. The Sun-Teton-Marias River Basin median snow water equivalent (SWE) is approximately 17 inches from 1979 to current, with a maximum up to 32 inches of SWE. SWE represents the depth of water in the snowpack if the snowpack were to melt. The snowpack is critical for spring run-off, generally starting mid-April, replenishing streams and reservoirs throughout the County.<sup>73</sup>

Figure 9.4 Precipitation in Sun-Teton-Marias Watershed<sup>71</sup>

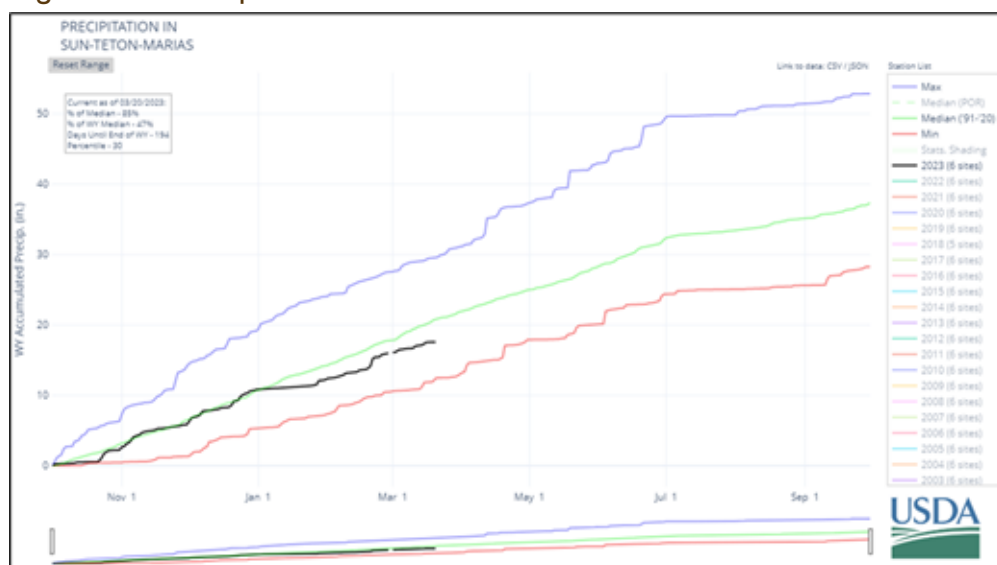
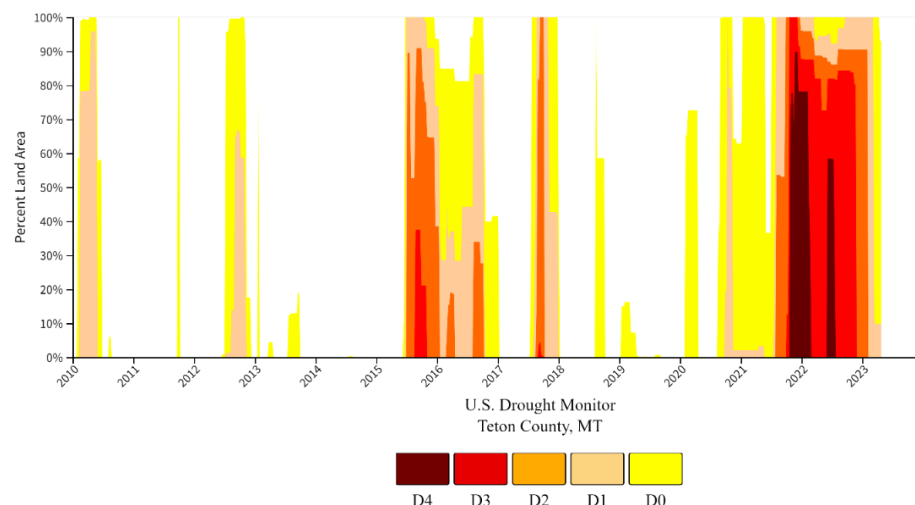


Figure 9.4 Teton County Drought Monitor\* Categories<sup>74</sup>



<sup>72</sup> Climate at a Glance County Time Series, National Centers for Environmental Information, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), [County Time Series | Climate at a Glance | National Centers for Environmental Information \(NCEI\) \(noaa.gov\)](#)

<sup>73</sup> Sun-Teton-Marias Daily Conditions, Natural Resources and Conservation Service, National Water and Climate Center; [Sun-Teton-Marias River Basin \(usda.gov\)](#)

<sup>74</sup> Drought Conditions for Teton County, National Integrated Drought Information System; [Teton County Conditions | Drought.gov](#)

Teton County is underlain by sedimentary rocks of marine and terrestrial sediments of the Cambrian to Cretaceous period. Above that are large amounts of sediment from the Tertiary period. A series of ice ages occurred and resulted in sediment creating the Great Plains. Geological activity is common in the County with mass movement of rock and soil along the mountains, foothills, benches, and stream banks, such as Muddy Creek and Teton River.<sup>75</sup>

Soils in Teton County are categorized by five distinct soil types. Gently sloping to very steep, shallow to deep well-drained soils, ideal for grass, coniferous trees, and bushy shrubs are found in the western area of the county. From the foothills to the area around Choteau, soils are found to be steep to level, shallow to deep, and well-drained off of the shale and sandstone benches. East of Choteau soil is moderately sloping to level, deep, well-drained soils of the upland fans and terraces. These areas from the foothills to east of Choteau with shallow and gravelly soils can be subject to drought. In the eastern part of the County, soil is moderately steep to level, deep, well-drained soils. Soils in this area are affected by absorbed sodium, exhibited by many of the alkaline and saline ponds in the area.<sup>76</sup>

## 9.9. FUTURE PROJECTIONS

Land cover is not anticipated to change in the future and Teton County will continue to foster current production of its natural resources. The variability of climate and natural hazards will always pose a risk to natural resources and property. Nevertheless, with ongoing efforts of coordination with various agencies, the County has planned for protection of its natural resources and assessment of natural hazards. Teton County will continue to cherish traditions and protect all its natural resources, local customs, and the private property rights of their residents.

## 9.10. NATURAL RESOURCES GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goal 9.1	
Preserve the high quality of life and natural heritage of Teton County.	
Objectives	Actions
Improve the overall water quality of the major rivers and streams in Teton County and improve water availability to users along these water corridors.	Local government to support efforts by watershed planning groups through involvement, consultation, technical assistance, and partnerships on projects.
	Local government to enforce the design, construction and permitting regulations adopted by local, state and federal agencies that protect water quality and supply for new development or other activities. Include a public notification to irrigation districts and nearby landowners during the approval process.
	Teton County Planning Board to review land stewardship plans to support all regulations are met per subdivision regulations, such as with major subdivision submittals that address such issues as noxious weed control, wildlife, livestock grazing, other agricultural uses, and protection of water resources.
	Local government to utilize local agencies (MSU Extension) to educate landowners regarding best management practices to protect water quality.
	Local government to adopt standards for development along water corridors.

<sup>75</sup> Teton County Long Range Plan, Natural Resource Conservation Service, <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/2022-09/TetonCounty-Montana-LongRangePlan-2022.pdf>

<sup>76</sup> Teton County Long Range Plan, Natural Resource Conservation Service, <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/2022-09/TetonCounty-Montana-LongRangePlan-2022.pdf>

Support new developments that have adequate water supplies while protecting the water rights of existing landowners.	Local government to monitor the water rights adjudication process and coordinate with agencies on strategies to address water rights.
	Local regulatory bodies to require new development to submit information on the impacts of the proposed development on irrigation districts and existing water rights.
	Local government to require new developments to demonstrate they have adequate water sources without negatively impacting existing uses and prohibit developments unless they satisfy this requirement.
Protect the high quality of life and natural heritage of Teton County, such as wildlife, scenic vistas, clean air and cultural resources.	Local government to work with existing agencies to discourage development in areas with high natural resource value such as wildlife habitat and migration corridors, scenic areas, and archeological sites.
	Local government coordinates development standards for sensitive lands such as floodplains and slopes with regulatory agencies that oversee these activities.
	Local government to coordinate with agencies that manage public lands on land planning issues and actively participate in planning efforts.
	Local government to work with other agencies to educate landowners on agricultural practices that promote conservation and wildlife values.
	Local government to provide information to landowners on private and non-profit efforts to protect important lands.
	Local government to enforce the design, construction and permitting regulations adopted by local, state and federal agencies that protect air quality and other natural or cultural resources.
	Local government to utilize maps and information that identify areas of sensitive lands and lands with high natural resource value to inform their decisions.
	Local government to utilize established relationships with agencies that set public lands policies to encourage the involvement of landowners in decision making process for public lands.
	Local government to develop gravel resources in a manner that minimizes impacts on nearby properties and roads.



## 10. RECREATIONAL ACCESS

### 10.1 ACCESS SITES

Teton County has many recreational opportunities such as hunting, fishing, and hiking, along with cultural and historical sites. Public Land access is scattered throughout the County, commonly as Montana State Lands or National Forest Service Lands. Most of the Montana State Lands provide public access and allow for hunting opportunities. The National Forest Service lands also offer extensive recreational opportunities.

The Helena-Lewis & Clark National Forest encompasses 16% of land in the County, providing access to the vastness of the Bob Marshall Wilderness. The Forest Service manages approximately 234,355 acres in the County, offering eight established campsites, six trailheads, and one rental Forest Service cabin. Gibson Reservoir is one of the recreational sites offering established and dispersed camping, boating, fishing, hiking, off road and horseback riding activities.

Lesser-known outdoor activities, such as rock climbing, will bring traveling enthusiasts to scale the nearly 600 ft limestone of Blackleaf Canyon. Winter months on the Rocky Mountain Front deliver excellent snowmobiling, cross-country, and alpine skiing, including the only operational ski resort along the northern front range, Teton Pass Ski Resort. Teton Pass Ski Resort is an affordable, family fun ski hill covering nearly 400 acres with 43 downhill runs.

Other than the Forest Service, over 169,000 acres of public land, including BLM lands, provide diverse recreational activities within federal and state managed lands. Wildlife viewing and available hunting sites are throughout the County at three Montana FWP Wildlife Management Areas (WMA) and four Fishing Access Sites. Freezeout Lake Wildlife Management Areas is the largest and oldest WMA in the County at 12,000 acres, with a long primary focus on providing upland game birds and waterfowl habitats.

Teton County offers exceptional historical and cultural sites throughout the unique geological landscape. The County also provides two stops along Montana's Dinosaur Trail, a statewide trail across Montana giving a glimpse of historical discoveries of dinosaurs in the state along with the different cultures who inhabited the land a long time ago. Bynum contains the Two Medicine Dinosaur Center, which holds the world's longest dinosaur and features excellent public hands-on dinosaur research and education programs. The Old Trail Museum, located in Choteau, marks the last stop along the Montana Dinosaur Trail and showcases the physical and cultural heritages of the region with exhibits of ancient fossils and unique geology of the Rocky Mountain Front.

Eureka Lake provides boating and fishing opportunities as does Pishkun and Gibson Lakes and many other smaller fishing access sites that include Bynum Reservoir and Arod Lake.

### 10.2. LOCAL RECREATIONAL FACILITIES

#### CHOTEAU

Choteau has a variety of recreational facilities that support varied outdoor interests. These include:

- » Golf course
- » Swimming pool
- » Trap club
- » Walking path
- » Disc Golf course
- » Baseball complex
- » Outdoor bandshell
- » Rodeo grounds
- » Tennis courts
- » City park
- » Mini park
- » Dog park

**FAIRFIELD**

- » Golf course
- » Swimming Pool
- » Park

**DUTTON**

- » Swimming Pool
- » Park

**10.3. FUTURE PROJECTIONS**

The use of land managed by state and federal agencies will continue to increase due to the popularity of outdoor recreation, changes in regulations, and wildlife management. These issues may create management challenges for agencies, given that any management changes often take an excessive amount of time due to required public processes and conflicts related to public land access.

**10.4. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

Goal 10.1	
Enhance the recreational opportunities for residents and visitors to Teton County.	
Objectives	Actions
Improve and maintain access to accessible public lands.	Local government to maintain communication with state and federal agencies for current and future access to public lands.
	Local government to support and encourage the dedication of recreation systems that are adjacent to, or continuations of, existing or planned parks, recreation areas, open space, trails, or public lands.
Support recreational, cultural, and historical economic industries.	Local government, Sweetgrass Development, Chambers of Commerce to contribute to the strong outdoor recreation industry by marketing the abundance and availability the County has to provide.
	Local government, Sweetgrass Development, Chambers of Commerce to continue to preserve and highlight cultural and historical significance. Grant sources available to assist with this include Montana Historic Preservation grants and Montana History Foundation.

# 11. COORDINATION WITH LOCAL JURISDICTIONS AND AGENCIES

## 11.1. COUNTY/CITY/TOWN COORDINATION

Section 76-1-601(3)(g) MCA requires that a growth policy include a statement concerning how local governments will cooperate with other jurisdictional entities in implementing its growth policy. The City of Choteau has its own Growth Policy which was adopted in January, 2022, therefore, that document is implemented as a separate policy area.

The Teton County Planning Board is comprised of residents of Teton County as well as one member each from the city of Choteau, the town of Dutton and the town of Fairfield. The County Planning Board has duties and responsibilities described in by-laws that outline the relationship of the Board to the respective governing bodies, meetings, membership, powers, and duties including their relationship with Planning Staff. In addition, this board is responsible for developing a growth policy for their jurisdiction.

Per the Teton County 2013 Subdivision Regulations, when a proposed subdivision lies within one mile of a third-class city or town, within two miles of a second-class city or within three miles of a first-class city, the county governing body must submit the preliminary plat to the city or town governing body or its designated agent for review and comment. City/town classifications are determined by population of the municipality. A first-class town has a population of over 5,000, second-class has population between 500 and 5,000, and a third-class town has under 500 people. If a proposed subdivision lies partly within an incorporated city or town, the preliminary plat must be submitted to, and approved by, both the city or town and the county governing bodies. When a proposed subdivision is to be annexed into any incorporated city or town, the governing bodies shall coordinate the subdivision review process and annexation procedures whenever possible.

**Table 11.1 Teton County Local Entity Coordination During Subdivision Review or Annexation Procedures**

Local Entity	Coordination Effort
School Districts	Coordination for new subdivisions, shared use facilities, and youth leadership programs.
Economic Development Agencies & Non-Profit Organizations	Regular updates, information sharing, and partnering on economic development efforts by agencies such as Sweetgrass Development, OpportunityLink, and Chambers of Commerce.
Watershed Groups	Sun River Watershed Group: Representative at meetings, information sharing, distribution of educational materials to landowners, notification of pending development reviews, and invitation of input on land development regulations.
Irrigation Districts	Greenfields, Bynum, Eldorado, Eureka/Teton Co-Operative, Farmers Co-Operative, Brady. Information sharing, notification of pending development reviews, invitation of input on land development regulations.
Fire Districts	Coordination through the County DES. Notification of pending development reviews and invitation of input on land development regulations.
Utilities	Information sharing, notification of pending development reviews, invitation of input on land development regulations with Northwestern Energy, Sun River Electric Coop, 3 Rivers Telephone, Water Districts, and Solid Waste providers.

## 11.2. STATE AND FEDERAL AGENCIES

State and federal agencies have the potential to impact resources and influence the use and development of land in Teton County. Agencies including the BLM, USFS, DNRC, USFWS, and FWP occupy approximately 26% of the land in the county (see Land Use Section of this document).

The Teton County Long Range Plan, authored by the USDA NRCS Choteau Field Office, identifies a mission to “work with partners and stakeholders in Teton County to positively impact natural resources”. In addition to the NRCS, partners in the document include the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Teton Conservation District.

Additional intergovernmental coordination is described below.

**Table 11.2 Teton County Government Entity Coordination During Subdivision Review or Annexation Procedures**

Government Entity	Coordination Effort
Helena - Lewis & Clark National Forest	Land Management Plan was updated in 2021. Cooperation between the NF and County entities is a goal throughout many areas of forestwide direction.
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency	Wetlands, hazardous waste, information sharing, and distribution of educational materials.
Malmstrom Air Force Base	Missile sites require coordination of road maintenance. Anticipated projects associated with the Air Force Sentinel program will bring temporary workers to the sites to deliver a full system replacement for the nation's Minuteman III Intercontinental Ballistic Missile System. While this is not expected to increase the population of Teton County, there will be some impacts to County infrastructure.
Bureau of Land Management	BLM manages large sections of land in the County and provides recreational access within the County. Coordination of public land management, including hazard mitigation is critical to the agencies relationship with the County.
State of Montana Agencies	Information sharing, public participation, coordinated review processes with the following agencies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DEQ: review water and sewer systems, permitting and compliance, hazardous waste and solid waste regulations, water and air quality.</li> <li>• FWP: management of wildlife preserves in Teton County.</li> <li>• MDT: maintain state highways within Teton County.</li> <li>• DNRC: water rights and groundwater issues, floodplain management.</li> </ul>

## 12. IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Implementing a strategy for reaching the goals and objectives stated in the Growth Policy is critical to making the document a useful tool for planning the future of Teton County. There are a variety of tools that can be used for implementation, which include regulatory and policy tools, available funding or fiscal tools, and training or educational tools that County government can use. This section lists implementation tools including a mandatory statement by State Law describing how the governing body will review subdivisions within the County. All other tools are contained herein for informational purposes only.

In this section a plan for future review and update of this Growth Policy is also stated.

Finally, an action plan is outlined based on the goals and objectives set for each of the required elements of § 76-1-601 through § 76-1-606, MCA contained in this growth policy. The action plan assigns a timeframe to follow through on implementation.

### 12.1 REGULATORY TOOLS

#### LOCAL REVIEW OF SUBDIVISIONS

Subdivision regulations control the creation of new lots by imposing design and infrastructure standards and by establishing procedures for local government and public review. Regulating the division of land ensures that the development has appropriate services and does not adversely affect resources. Because of the possibility for adverse effects on resources, subdivisions will be reviewed for compliance with the Teton County Growth Policy as well as compliance with subdivision regulations adopted by the County. As with all regulatory tools, subdivision regulations are most effective with consistent use.

As per § 76-3-501 et. Seq. MCA, which requires local government to establish subdivision regulations and outlines the minimum requirements for those regulations, the County completed the process of updating regulations in 2013 and is planning another update following the 2023 Montana Legislative Session.

As per §76-3-608(3)(a), MCA, the governing body must review proposed subdivisions considering the effect on the following review criteria:

- » Agriculture;
- » Agricultural water user facilities;
- » The natural environment;
- » Wildlife;
- » Wildlife habitat;
- » Local services; and
- » Public health and safety.

Teton County Subdivision Regulations that describe each of these criteria, as well as the subdivision evaluation process and requirements for public review, are available in their entirety at the Teton County Department office in the Teton County Annex Building, or on the Teton County website at [Planner | Teton County Montana \(tetoncountymt.gov\)](https://planner.tetoncountymt.gov/).

The town of Fairfield has subdivision regulations that were adopted in August of 2022 with an effective date of September 24, 2024. Their regulations contain "language meant to comply with all of the legislative changes made to the subdivision and platting act since the last update of the Town of Fairfield regulations (2004) and through the 2021 legislative session."<sup>77</sup>

<sup>77</sup> Town of Fairfield Reference Documents: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/63c85d060904a5617935e975/t/63ec15d25dec98743963361a/1676416468065/Fairfield+Subdivision+Regulations+and+Fee+Schedule.pdf>



The Town of Fairfield Subdivision Regulations are available in their entirety at the Town Office or on the Town of Fairfield website: <https://www.townoffairfield.com/reference-documents>.

## ZONING

Teton County does not currently have zoning regulations in place. However, zoning is a commonly used tool for implementing land use policy. Zoning describes the control by authority of the use of land and the buildings that may be placed there. Areas of land are divided by appropriate authorities into zones within which various uses are permitted.

The City of Choteau and the Town of Fairfield utilize zoning. Zoning of the city of Choteau has the primary purpose of promoting public health, safety, and general welfare through implementing the city growth policy. Zoning regulations for the City can be accessed through the City's website via their Municipal Code: [https://choteau.municipalcodeonline.com/book?type=ordinances#name=153\\_General\\_Provisions](https://choteau.municipalcodeonline.com/book?type=ordinances#name=153_General_Provisions). Choteau Zoning Districts include the following:

- » A Residential
- » Airport Planned Development
- » B Residential
- » BR Business/Residential
- » Casino/Adult Use Overlay
- » CB Central Business
- » GI General Industrial
- » HB Highway Business
- » Public/Semi-Public

Zoning permits are required in Choteau for new homes and business construction, additions, fences, signs, etc. and approval must be received from the City Office before any work can begin.

Zoning requirements in the Town of Fairfield can be accessed through the Town's website: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/63c85d060904a5617935e975/t/63e57cbf19a20621c2d446ae/1675984063867/Zoning+Requirements-Setbacks.pdf>.

In addition to the more traditional form of zoning, jurisdictions have explored other zoning approaches that can be used to regulate development of property. Some of these alternatives are described below.

### Development Design Standards

Development design standards include site and building design standards adopted in zoning regulations. These standards are generally adopted with the intent of preserving and enhancing community character. State law supports the use of design standards if they are objective, reasonable, and applied uniformly throughout a community. Considerations for implementing design standards should include the level of administrative review required and the potential for increased development costs.

### Agricultural Zoning

Agricultural zoning is commonly used to restrict land uses to resource extraction and production activities. Other agricultural protection zoning mechanisms include voluntary agricultural districts, agricultural area buffers, area-based zoning or density zoning, fixed area-based allowance zoning and sliding scale area-based allowance zoning.

### Interim/Emergency Zoning

Interim zoning is specifically authorized in state law. It is a temporary land use control that expires unless

replaced with permanent regulations. Interim zoning means a temporary emergency zoning that is conducted while the local government makes revisions to existing zoning ordinances or creates and adopts a final zoning plan or zoning ordinance, or addresses some other local policy issue in the state. It helps to preserve the status quo or at least to limit the extent of change that can occur from zoning activities. It is also called stopgap zoning. Emergency zoning may be put in place by the County Commissioners.

### Decay Ordinance

Decay ordinances are enacted to protect the general public from decaying structures that are deemed unsafe and uninhabitable by a building official. Chapter 94 of the City of Choteau Municipal Code regulates nuisances for health and sanitation purposes. The regulation includes anti-litter regulations and requirements for disposal of noxious material, and abatement of nuisance weeds.<sup>78</sup>

The Town of Dutton also has an adopted Decay and Junk Vehicle Nuisance Ordinance. “The purpose of the ordinance is to give the Town an instrument to aid in compelling property owners to keep their property clean, and free of unsightly or hazardous material.”<sup>79</sup>

### Floodplain Regulations

Teton County adopted their most current Floodplain Hazard Management Regulations in June 2022. The purpose of the Regulations is to “promote public health, safety and general welfare of the residents and minimize public and private losses due to flood conditions in Regulated Flood Hazard Areas”. Floodplain regulations restrict development in areas within the 100-year floodplain of a watercourse in order to protect the watercourses and their flood storage areas, as well as the public health, safety, and welfare.

The city of Choteau separately maintains and enforces floodplain regulations.

Fairfield Subdivision Regulations include floodplain provisions but it has not adopted and does not enforce floodplain regulations.

### Considerations for Regulatory Enforcement

Regulatory or code enforcement programs ensure that property owners comply with a jurisdiction’s land use regulations. The County Planner or City/Town representatives will receive complaints and forward them to the Planning Board for consideration. The Planning Board will make recommendations to the County/City/Town Commissioners/Councilmembers.

## **12.2. FISCAL TOOLS**

### **CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS PROGRAM**

A Comprehensive Capital Improvements Plan (CCIP) is used as a budgeting and financial tool by the County to establish long term goals for maintaining, improving, or building new public facilities. The document identifies specific projects, costs, priorities, timetables, and funding sources, and includes all public facilities owned or maintained by the local government. The importance of a CIP for land use planning is the critical connection between where and when infrastructure is provided and what the desired land use pattern is for a community or neighborhood. It is recommended that a full CCIP be prepared every 10 years at a minimum to include a full study of the capital needs of the County/City/Town.

<sup>78</sup> City of Choteau Municipal Code: <https://choteaumont.org/>  
<sup>79</sup> Town of Dutton: <https://townofdutton.com/town-office>

## IMPACT FEES

Impact fees are charged to a developer by local government at the time of development or building permit review to pay for the impacts of new development on off-site capital facilities such as public sewer, roads, fire, or emergency services. Developing a fair and equitable impact fee program can be complex and often requires local governments to obtain outside assistance. Developers or applicants should expect a comprehensive review of long-term costs to the county/city/town.

## STATE AND FEDERAL GRANTS OR LOANS

Grant programs are a key means of implementing public policy regarding affordable and accessible housing, infrastructure extension, economic development, historic preservation, health and human services, crime victim assistance, environmental remediation, and provision of support to low- and moderate-income households and special needs populations. Acquisition and administration of grants for use by the County includes applying for and complying with the requirements of grant contracts; conducting needs assessments and program evaluations; coordinating community responses to identified needs; and seeking resources for the purpose of addressing a variety of community development issues.

Local entities may also play a role in the acquisition of state and federal grants for non-profit organizations. This may include sponsorship and/or assistance with grant writing and administration and providing technical assistance and direct service program administration. Involving local non-profit organizations in needs assessment and other county planning activities may provide a valuable partnership for addressing community development issues.

Grant and loan opportunities commonly used by local governments include:

- » Montana Coal Endowment Program (MCEP): planning and construction grants for infrastructure including bridges, water systems, and wastewater systems, solid waste management, and storm water management.
- » Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program: planning and construction grants for infrastructure, public facilities, housing, and economic development. CDBG eligibility for construction grants is tied to the benefit the projects will provide for low to moderate income individuals.
- » Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) Renewable Resource Grant and Loan (RRGL) Program: planning and construction grants for public facility projects including drinking water, wastewater and solid waste development and improvement projects. Other renewable resource projects that have been funded include irrigation rehabilitation, dam repair, soil and water conservation and forest enhancement.
- » MDT Transportation Alternatives (TA): grants to improve access to alternative transportation routes along Montana's highways. This can include sidewalks, trails, community gateway features, lighting, and historic rehabilitation.
- » USDA Rural Development (RD): planning and construction loans and grants for communities with fewer than 10,000 people. Grant amounts are dependent on Median Household Income.
- » State Revolving Fund (SRF): low interest loans used to maintain and improve drinking water systems and water pollution control projects.
- » Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF): grant program that provides funding for increased public access to and protection for federal public lands and waters.

## TAX INCREMENT FINANCING AND TARGETED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DISTRICTS

Tax Increment Financing (TIF) is an important fiscal tool that allows jurisdictions to finance certain kinds of development costs within a Targeted Economic Development (TED) District.

### 12.3. GROWTH POLICY TIMEFRAME

#### ANNUAL REVIEW

The Teton County Planning Board will review the Growth Policy on an annual basis and provide a Status Report to the County Commissioners. The Status Report will include:

- » Status of goals, objectives, and actions suggested in the Growth Policy.
- » Recommendation/assessment of goals to be addressed in the following year.
- » Evaluation of need to revise the Growth Policy.

#### CONDITION FOR REVISING THE GROWTH POLICY

This Growth Policy is based on existing conditions and anticipated future conditions. It is impossible to project every potential scenario and, therefore, the policy needs to be flexible to accommodate future issues. The Planning Board will review the Growth Policy and determine if changes are needed under the following conditions:

- » Major proposed actions made outside of County authority with potential to significantly affect implementation of the stated goals, policies, and strategies in this growth policy.
- » Any actions that might affect the health, safety, and welfare of citizens that were inadequately addressed in the growth policy.
- » New development proposals not provided for in the plan.
- » Priorities that need to be reassessed to take advantage of new opportunities such as grants, partnerships, and state and federal programs.
- » Additional public input suggesting the need for changes.
- » Changes in state law regarding growth policies.
- » Court cases and/or litigation that set legal precedent in Montana for growth policies.
- » Individual neighborhood plans developed in accordance with state law (§ 76-1-601, MCA) that is mandated as amendments to the current growth policy.
- » Planning Board evaluation of implementation measures and progress, and determination that modifications would enhance the effectiveness of the growth policy.

#### PROCESS FOR REVISING THE GROWTH POLICY

County Commissioners will be notified in writing by the Planning Board prior to commencing work on the revision.

The Planning Board will follow the process outlined in state law (MCA § 76-1-602 through § 76-1-603, MCA) for adopting a growth policy to provide revisions. The Board will conduct a public meeting on the revisions prior to making their recommendation to the County Commission for adoption. The County Commission will follow the provisions of state law (§ 76-1-604, MCA) to adopt, revise, or reject the changes to the Growth Policy.

## 12.4 ACTION PLAN

---

The Action Plan is a matrix intended as a snapshot of the Goals and Objectives outlined in the Growth Policy. It defines each goal and objective and sets a timeframe for accomplishment. For future tracking, additional columns are added for regulations used in implementation, funding sources, and date completed.

Timeframe is limited to:

- » Ongoing or Ongoing as Opportunities Arise – indicates something the County or other entities are already involved in or are encouraged to become involved in as circumstances, funding, or other opportunities arise.
- » Near term (1-5 years)
- » Mid-term (5-10 years)
- » Long term (<10 years)



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## **Appendix A: Public Involvement Plan**



An Employee-Owned Company

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BOZEMAN, MT 59715  
(406) 522-8594

## Growth Policy Public Involvement Plan

Activity	Survey	Public Meeting/Open House	Website	Press and Other
<b>Tasks to Accomplish</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>□ Utilize results of Sweetgrass Economic Development CEDS Survey</li><li>□ Determine need for additional survey of local issues/needs related to growth.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>□ January 2023 — general educational/open house public meeting<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>□ Planning Board decide when, where, and format; consider multi-community venues</li><li>□ Stahly develop press release and legal ad</li><li>□ Allow for general comments on growth issues (or lack thereof) in Teton County and surrounding communities</li></ul></li><li>□ August 2-23 — public comment on final draft<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>□ Planning Board decide when, where, and format</li><li>□ Stahly develop press release and legal ad</li></ul></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>□ Determine need to create site to post information about the development of the policy, provide awareness of how to get involved, provide plan updates, allow for comment</li><li>□ Post announcements and drafts of document to County web site (also City of Choteau?)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>□ Community outreach—Planning Board members attend City/Town council meetings to provide update</li><li>□ Choteau Acantha—press release regarding Growth Policy in conjunction with each public meeting</li><li>□ Personal outreach to local civic or other organizations including state and federal agencies</li><li>□ Post bulletins in public spaces in all communities</li><li>□ Get various announcements regarding Growth Policy on Commission/Council Agendas as an announcement</li></ul>
<b>Anticipated Start-Completion</b>		Public Announcements: to newspaper to run two consecutive weeks before each public event Planning Office post to web site, Facebook, other?	Provide regular posts and monitoring until 09/22	Legal notice of Public Meetings publish twice two weeks before public meeting dates Press releases: in conjunction with legal notice Personal outreach: throughout



## **Appendix B: Growth Policy Fact Sheet**



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Understand the Growth Policy

Know the key issues involved

Have your say in the outcome



## Teton County Growth Policy Update

*Envisioning the County's future and working to achieve it rather than just reacting to change and dealing with it from one short-range, quick-fix solution to another as events occur.*

### Project Overview

Teton County Commissioners, in an effort to address the most critical issues facing the County now and in the near future, have authorized the County Planning Board to develop a Growth Policy (or Comprehensive Plan).



### What is a Growth Policy?

A Growth Policy is a community's growth and development plan. It evaluates existing community conditions and sets goals for housing, land use, economic development, local services, public safety, natural resources, transportation, and other unique characteristics and features of the community.

A Growth Policy isn't a regulation or ordinance, but it serves as the legal basis for enacting them.

### Why a Growth Policy in a County with little or no growth?

**Change will happen.** Whether that means growth or decline in population and resources, both require a plan to address a variety of issues within the County. The 1999 Montana Legislature changed the terms "master plan" and "comprehensive plan" to "growth policy". The terms are now synonymous under Montana statute. 76-1-601 through 76-1-606, Montana Code Annotated (MCA) establishes minimum requirements for Growth Policies, although local governments still have the option of deciding whether to prepare and adopt Policies for their jurisdictions.

### How do I get involved?

Contact Dani Arps, Teton County Planning Director at [darps@tetoncountymt.gov](mailto:darps@tetoncountymt.gov) or members of the Planning Board:

Lee Huidekoper ([huidekpr@3rivers.net](mailto:huidekpr@3rivers.net)); Ben Rhodes ([brhodes@yahoo.com](mailto:brhodes@yahoo.com)); Brad McBratney ([mcbtratny@3rivers.net](mailto:mcbtratny@3rivers.net)); Chris Hindoién ([chindoién@choteaumont.org](mailto:chindoién@choteaumont.org)); Dale Hanson ([dnffarms@gmail.com](mailto:dnffarms@gmail.com)); Nancy Moorhouse ([tetoncd@yahoo.com](mailto:tetoncd@yahoo.com)); Pandora Rhodes ([prhodes@tetoncountymt.gov](mailto:prhodes@tetoncountymt.gov)); Rich Clough ([rclough@3rivers.net](mailto:rclough@3rivers.net)); Ross Salmond ([rosssal@3rivers.net](mailto:rosssal@3rivers.net)); Chuck Brown ([cbrown@fairfield.k12.mt.us](mailto:cbrown@fairfield.k12.mt.us)); Candace Ellsworth ([elsworth2871@gmail.com](mailto:elsworth2871@gmail.com))

Attend upcoming Public Meetings: watch for announcements in the newspaper or on the County's web site.





## What are the advantages to having a Growth Policy?

- **Maintains community values** – preserves cultural and historical values, helps maintain the character of the community
- **Makes safer communities** - sets standards and promotes projects that improve infrastructure and services (roads, bridges, water resources, sewer systems, solid waste, fire and emergency services, health facilities)
- **Promotes affordable housing**
- **Saves money** - Identifies growth patterns that minimize the cost to provide local services and infrastructure
- **Builds community** - greater understanding of issues
- **Attracts business** - a more attractive and well – planned community
- **Provides funding opportunities** - elevates community management in the eyes of funding agencies

## What are key issues the Growth Policy will focus on?

Statute requires certain elements to be addressed in the Growth Policy and the Planning Board has identified some key issues but the **residents and stakeholders in Teton County have an opportunity to identify additional issues.**

### LAND USE

Analysis of how land is used (residential, commercial, industrial, agriculture, public, transportation) and direction on future use or constraints for future development.

### POPULATION

Projections to help local government estimate type and quantity of public facilities and services required in the future. Analysis of population characteristics to help the community prepare for events such as decrease in school enrollments or an increase in the elderly population.

### HOUSING

Determine type, size, location, quantity, and quality of housing in the community. How will housing options affect land use, transportation facilities, employment, health, recreation, and public facilities. Produce an implementation plan for meeting local housing needs.

### ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

Analyze income and employment information to reflect the County's current economic situation. Analysis will help influence decisions about land area for new businesses, transportation networks, infrastructure (water & sewer), and residential development.

### LOCAL SERVICES

Fire protection, law enforcement, water and sewer service, public health, education, library, social services, parks and recreation, utilities, other governmental or non-governmental services considered of value to the community. How are we doing? What can be better?

### PUBLIC FACILITIES

Roads, streets, bridges, buildings, public infrastructure, and other County facilities. What Capital needs are important?

### NATURAL RESOURCES

Physical and environmental characteristics and constraints evaluation. How will these affect land use, economic development, and health and safety issues related to construction. Includes inventory of sand and gravel resources and their compatibility with existing and future development.

### RECREATIONAL ACCESS

Examine recreational opportunities' role in the County. Determine how growth of the industry might affect land use, natural resources, and public facilities.



## Appendix C: Teton County Results



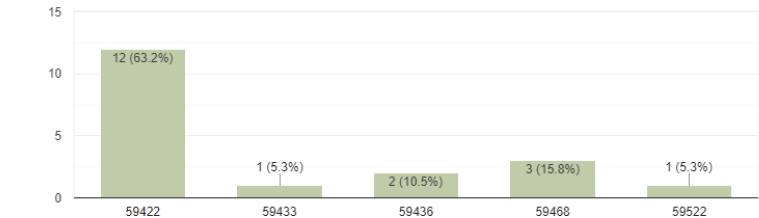
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851 BRIDGER DR., STE 1  
BOZEMAN, MT 59715  
(406) 522-8594

Please provide the zip code of your permanent residence:

Copy

19 responses

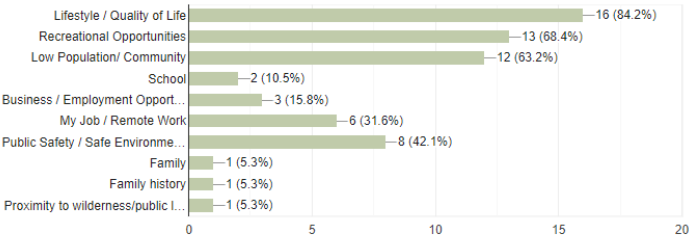


General

Why do you choose to live in Teton County and/or the City/Town you are a resident of (check all that apply)?

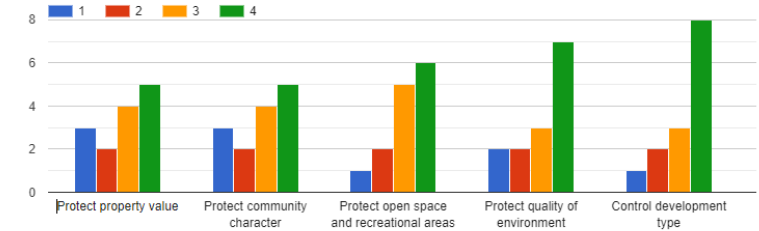
Copy

19 responses



The communities of Dutton, Fairfield, and Choteau currently have zoning regulations. If you live in these communities, please answer this question based on why zoning is important to you:

Copy



If you answered OTHER above, or have further comment, please input here.

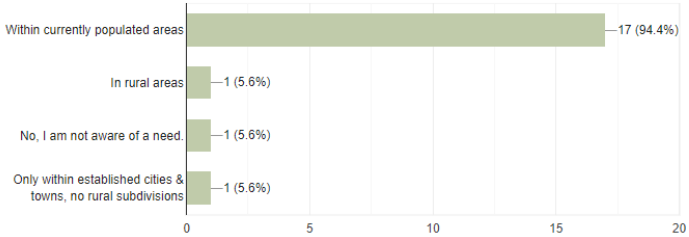
2 responses

NA

Are there areas of the County or in Cities/Towns where residential development should be promoted (check all that apply)

Copy

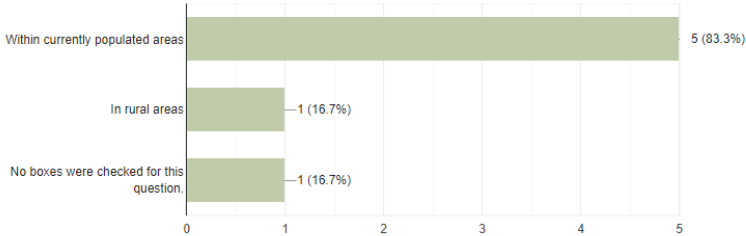
18 responses



Are there areas of the County or in Cities/Towns where commercial development should be promoted (check all that apply)

Copy

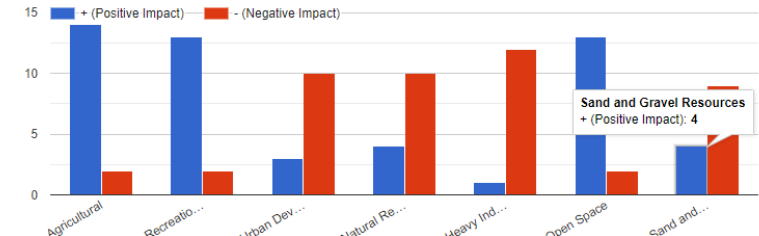
6 responses



Land Use

What activities affect land use in a way that may affect your livelihood or way of life (use +/- to indicate positive/negative impacts).

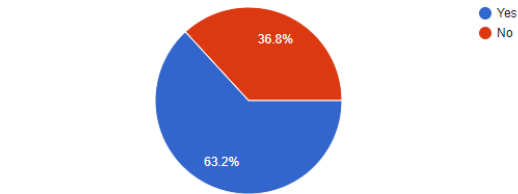
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Rural Teton County currently does not have zoning. Should Teton County consider county-wide zoning?

Copy

19 responses

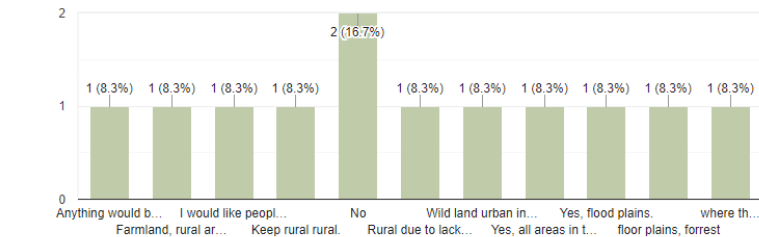


Are there areas of the County/Cities/Towns you feel are unsuitable for growth?

Copy

Where?

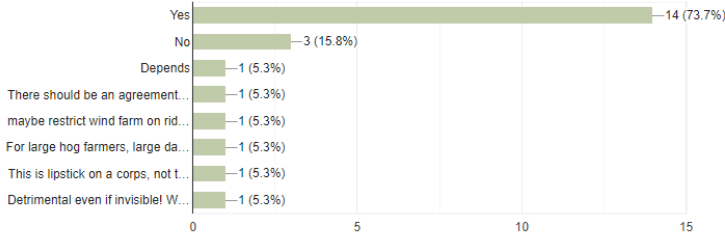
12 responses



If a large-scale industry (windfarm, solar farm, hog farm, feed lot, etc.) were planning to develop in Teton County or from a visible location near a well-used travel way, do you think the County should regulate the location or building of such a development to mitigate potential detrimental aesthetic value?

Copy

19 responses

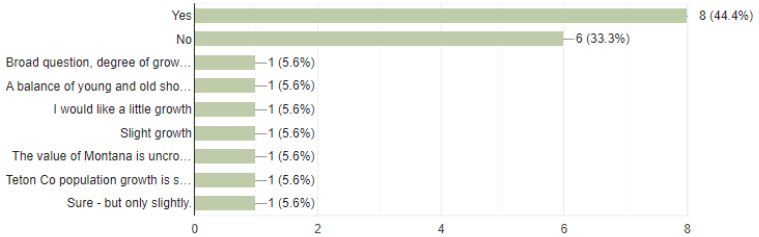


Population

Would you like to see population growth occur in the County or in your community?

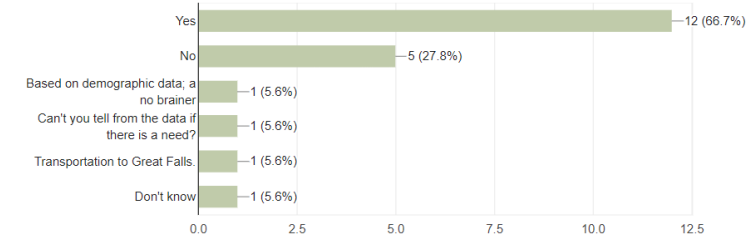
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18 responses



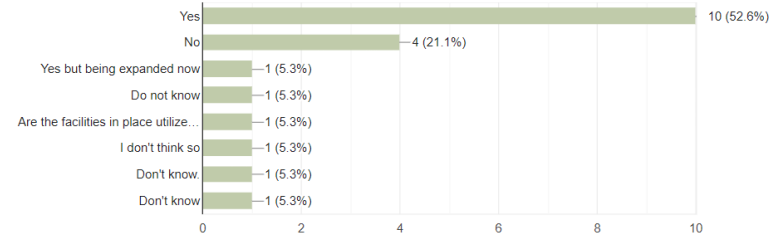
Based on current population demographics, is there a need for additional aging services (i.e. health care, nursing home, assisted living) in the County or in your community?

18 responses



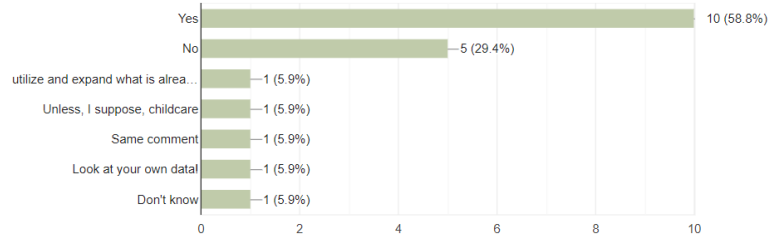
Is there a need for assisted living facilities for elderly or disabled individuals in the County or your community?

19 responses



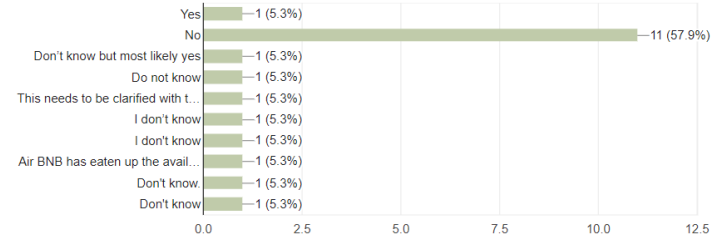
Based on projected populations demographics, is there a need for additional services related to youth and child-bearing age adults (i.e. maternal health care, child care, school expansion) in the County or in your community?

17 responses



Are there adequate long-term rental units available in your community?

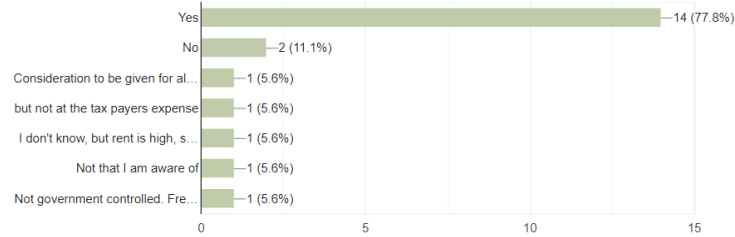
19 responses



## Housing

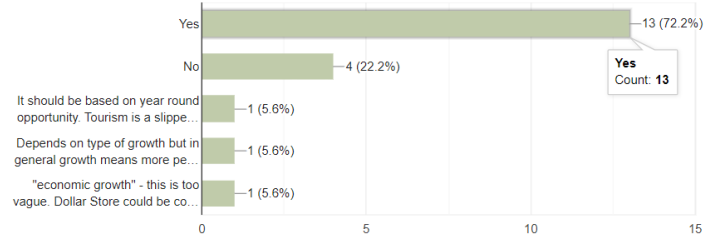
Does your community need additional affordable and/or starter housing for lower income families or senior citizens in the area?

18 responses



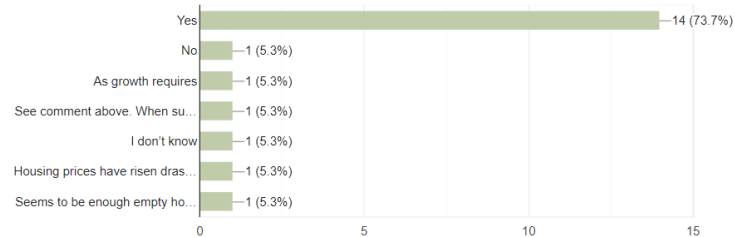
Would you like to see economic growth occur in the County or in your community?

18 responses



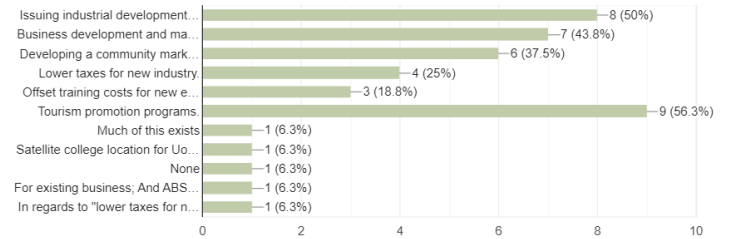
Does your community need additional housing?

19 responses



What economic development activities should be considered to promote new and existing industry/business? Check all activities you feel would be appropriate.

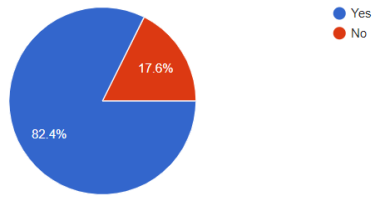
16 responses



### Are more employment opportunities needed in the County?

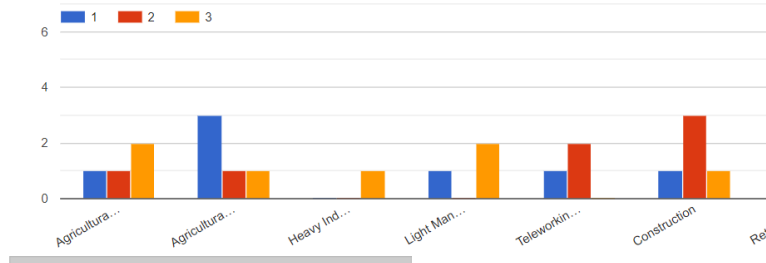
17 responses

[Copy](#)



If yes, please specify the top 3 types of employment opportunities most desirable, placing a 1 on what single item you feel is the highest priority, a 2 for the next highest, and a 3 for the third highest.

[Copy](#)



If you answered OTHER on the question above, please provide further comment here.

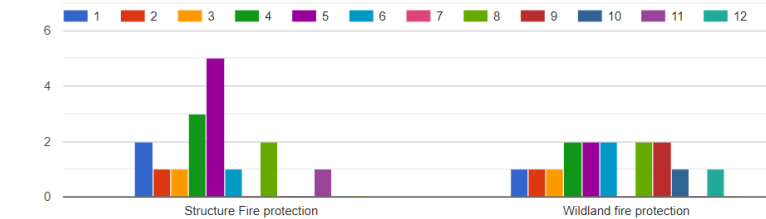
1 response

Comment regarding "Are more employment opportunities needed in the County?" above-There are plenty of jobs but wages need to be higher so people can actually live here.

### Local Services

Please rank the services the County provides that you feel are most important (in order with 1 most important and 13 being least important).

[Copy](#)



If you answered OTHER above, please explain here.

2 responses

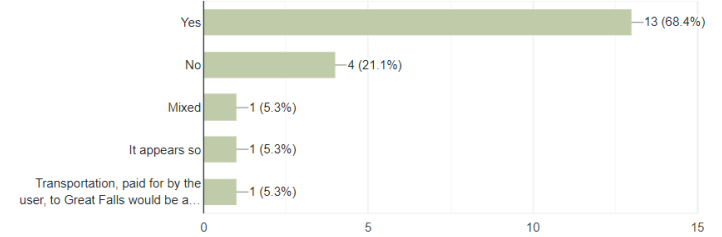
Roads!!!

Roads

### Do you feel the County is adequately providing local services?

[Copy](#)

19 responses



Are there services that the County does not provide that you feel are important to residents of the County and should be provided? (i.e. rural high speed internet, county owned water and sewer, etc.) Comment below.

7 responses

No

County EMS hired positions not volunteer

Child care

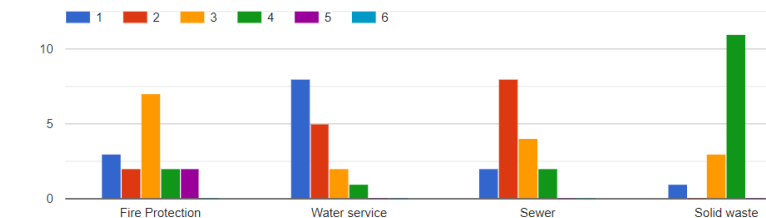
long term planning by professional leaders. the old school commissioner system not efficient.

No.

See comment above.

Please rank the services the City/Town provides that you feel are most important (1 most important; 6 least important).

[Copy](#)



If answered OTHER above, please specify here.

3 responses

New dog park in Choteau, parks for kids.

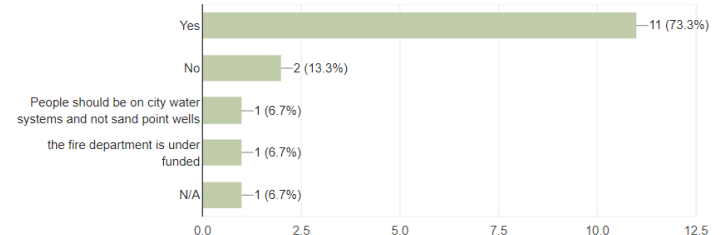
Parks - for dogs, kids.

No answer provided

If you reside within an Incorporated City/Town do you feel the City/Town is adequately providing local services?

[Copy](#)

15 responses





Are there services that the Incorporated City/Town does not provide that you feel are important to residents of the Town and should be provided? (i.e. recreational facilities, water or sewer services, etc.)

Comment:

5 responses

Recycling

Child care paid ems

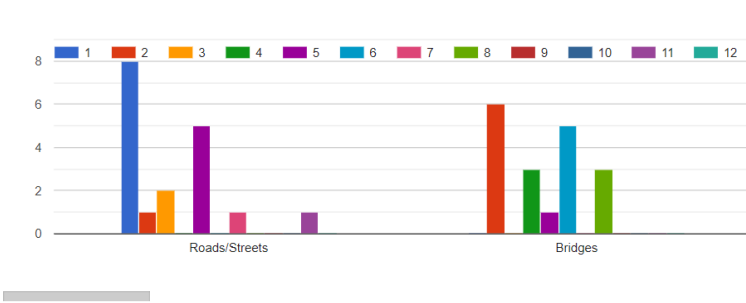
dog patrol

Trash receptacles on Central Street would be nice.

The city has authorized a new privately funded dog park on city property-A wonderful new facility.

Public Facilities

Please rank the County managed facilities you feel are most important (1 most important; 12 least important).



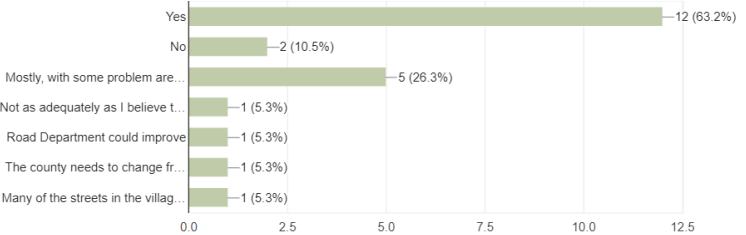
If you answered OTHER above, please specify further here.

0 responses

No responses yet for this question.

Do you feel the County adequately provides and maintains public facilities?

19 responses



Are there facilities that the County does not own or manage that you feel would benefit the residents of the County? (i.e. clinic, park, recreation facilities, museum, refuse site, cemetery, etc.)

6 responses

Childcare

so long as there are sufficient MOUs between the County and the contracting agency and MOUs are routinely reevaluated and reviewed.

Park, cemetery

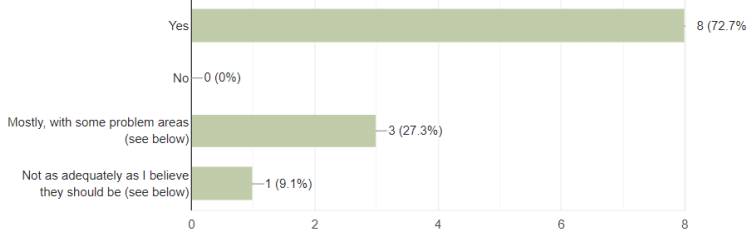
No

No.

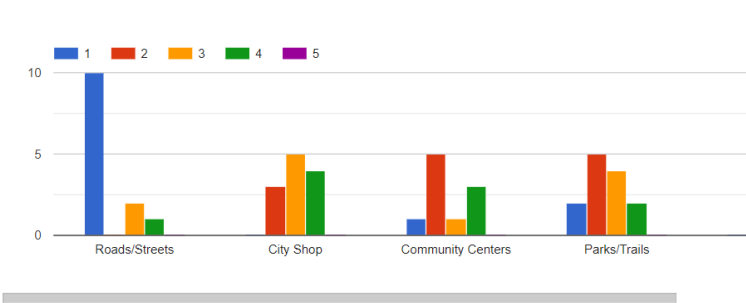
0

If you reside within an Incorporated City/Town do you feel the City/Town adequately provides and maintains public facilities?

11 responses



Please rank the Incorporated City/Town managed facilities you feel are most important (1 most important; 5 least important).



If you answered OTHER above, please specify which ones here.

0 responses

No responses yet for this question.

Are there facilities that the Incorporated City/Town does not own or manage that you feel would benefit the residents of the City/Town? (i.e. clinic, park, recreation facilities, museum, refuse site, cemetery, jail, etc.)

4 responses

Daycare

Snow plowing and street sweeping would be nice.

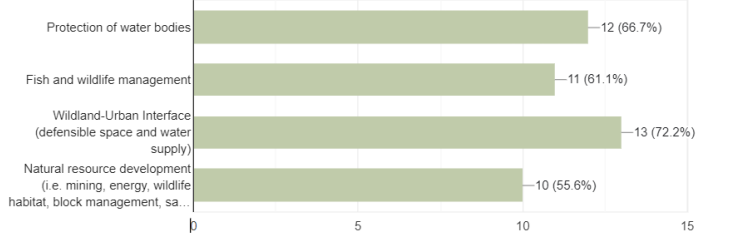
No.

0

Natural Resources

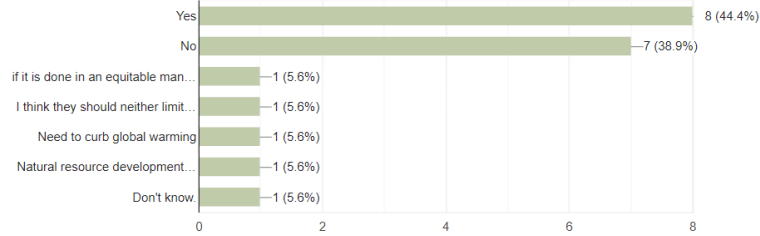
What do you consider to be the most important issues related to the County/city/town natural resources (check all that apply)?

18 responses



Should the County promote the development of natural resources to boost the local economy?

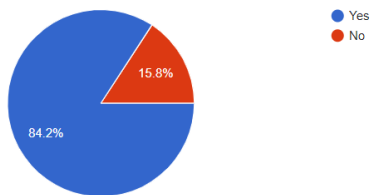
18 responses



## Recreational Access

Are the recreational opportunities in Teton County adequate?

19 responses



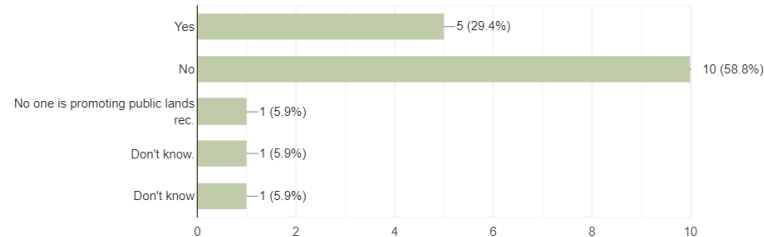
What additional facilities should be pursued by the County to promote recreational access? (improved roads, etc. to established hunting/fishing accesses, camping, etc.)

9 responses

- Improve roads for recreational access
- Hunting/fishing acces
- The dog park and band stand in Choteau are positive additions. let people know what the expectations are and their involvement in continued maintenance and facility upkeep. Roads is a constant agenda item.
- Camping, trails
- Improved roads are definitely needed
- Roads, hunting/fishing accesses, camping
- Improved signs for access to national forest trailheads and points of interest.
- Better signage indicating national forest access.
- Don't know.

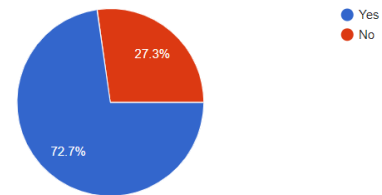
Is recreation in Teton County that is promoted by other government agencies (i.e. Forest Service, BLM, FWP, etc.) causing impacts that should be addressed by the County?

17 responses



If you reside in an Incorporated City/Town are the recreational opportunities in City/Town adequate?

11 responses



What additional facilities should be pursued by the City/Town to promote recreational access? (trails, swimming pool, etc.)

8 responses

- Rolling skating anything for teens
- Walking trails
- pickleball court
- Walking paths would be nice, I love the Fairfield and Choteau pools!
- More walking trails would be an attraction for residents and visitors alike
- Fix the streets-full of pot-holes.
- Citizen groups are funding and operating recreational facilities such as the swimming pool and new dog park-they're doing a great job.
- Pool & dog park & baseball are all operated by citizen groups, which are doing a good job,

## Additional Issues

Additional Issues You Believe the County Should Consider in the Growth Policy

5 responses

- Factor in Floodplain for all future development  
And development is best served by already established water and sewer when capacity is available
- As stated before county run day care and paid EMS
- Reduce zoning regulations in Faiefield.
- Keep it like it is; we've been discovered - No additional promotion or marketing is needed.
- No additional government.

If you wish to receive further notifications about the development of the Growth Policy, please provide the following information:

Name, Address, Phone Number and Email Address

5 responses

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PREPARED FOR:

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