

3.8. PUBLIC OPINION

Throughout the process, there has been an emphasis on involving the public and gauging public opinion. This has included the project website, www.bighornplan.info, and two rounds of open house meetings.

In the fall of 2008, Citizens of Big Horn County were invited to provide their comments and suggestions on the draft goals of this plan. The draft goals were showcased at the 2008 open house meetings and comments were taken at the meeting and through the project web site. The steering committee reviewed the comments and used them in creating the final set of goals. A summary of the comments and committee discussion about them is available on the project web site, www.bighornplan.info.

The most extensive public opinion effort was the County's landowner survey. The survey results were a major consideration in formulation of this land use plan.

The survey was conducted in August 2007. The survey was mailed out to approximately 1,900 landowners and 909 surveys were returned with responses. This equates to a response rate of 48 percent. In survey research, a response rate of 50 to 60 percent is usually considered the minimum response needed for the survey results to be unbiased. Significantly lower response rates can allow unrepresentative views to dominate the survey results.

The survey found that most landowners felt the following factors were very important in their decisions to live or own property in Big Horn County:

- Low population
- Air and water quality
- Scenic beauty and views
- Rural Western lifestyle
- Friendly communities
- Family reasons

Most landowners felt that it was very important to conserve all of the following type of lands:

- Irrigated Land
- Grazing Land
- Wildlife Habitats
- Forested Lands
- Scenic Vistas
- Undeveloped, Rural Open Space
- Streamside Vegetation

Conservation of irrigated land was very important to over three-quarters of the landowners.

Most landowners felt it is very important for the county land use plan to address the following issues:

- Loss of Property Rights
- Loss of Agricultural Land
- Loss of Environmental Quality
- Loss of Access to Public Lands
- Infrastructure in Rural Areas
- Public Services in Rural Areas
- County-Town Planning Coordination
- Unplanned Housing Developments
- Junk (cars, equipment, etc.)
- Increased Population Growth

Loss of property rights and loss of agricultural land are very important issues with more than three-quarters of the landowners. When asked about where new residential developments should be located, most landowners felt developments should be located in towns or near existing development.

The highlights of the survey results are presented on the next two pages. The full survey report is available on the project website, www.bighornplan.info. Included in the report are some 254 written comments from survey respondents--these comments amounted to type-written 34 pages.

Why do you live or own property in Big Horn County?

Please rate each of the following items for its importance in your decision to live or own property in the county.

	Low Population	Air & Water Quality	Scenic Beauty & Views	Rural Western Lifestyle	Cost of Living	Friendly Communities
Very Important	67%	65%	63%	63%	52%	52%
Somewhat Important	22%	24%	26%	22%	34%	31%
Not Important	6%	4%	5%	8%	7%	10%
No Response	5%	6%	5%	6%	7%	7%

	Family Reasons	Wildlife & Wildlife Habitat	Recreational Opportunities	Personal Health/Safety	Business or Job Opportunity	Other (Write-Ins)
Very Important	52%	48%	41%	33%	31%	4%
Somewhat Important	18%	31%	34%	36%	25%	1%
Not Important	22%	14%	16%	23%	33%	0%
No Response	8%	7%	9%	9%	10%	95%

How important to you is conservation of the following kinds of rural land in Big Horn County?

(Check one answer for each item)

	Irrigated Land	Grazing Land	Wildlife Habitats	Forested Lands	Scenic Vistas	Undeveloped, Rural Open Space	Streamside Vegetation	Other (Write-Ins)
Very Important	76%	67%	64%	66%	65%	59%	54%	2%
Somewhat Important	18%	24%	28%	25%	27%	27%	33%	0%
Not Important	5%	6%	6%	6%	6%	10%	9%	0%
No Response	1%	3%	3%	4%	3%	4%	4%	98%

Where would you like to see new residential development occur?

Do you agree or disagree with the following locations?

	In Towns	Outside Towns	Near Existing Development	Away from Existing Development	Spread out on 35 acre lots	Other (Write-Ins)
Agree	84%	20%	64%	9%	25%	2%
Disagree	2%	32%	6%	46%	36%	1%
Neutral	12%	41%	26%	38%	33%	1%
No Response	2%	7%	4%	8%	7%	96%

How important do you feel it is for the updated county plan to address each of the following?

	Loss of Property Rights	Loss of Agricultural Land	Loss of Environmental Quality	Loss of Access to Public Lands	Infrastructure in Rural Areas	Public Services in Rural Areas
Very Important	85%	75%	72%	72%	71%	64%
Somewhat Important	10%	18%	21%	19%	23%	28%
Not Important	2%	5%	3%	6%	4%	5%
No Response	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%

	County-Town Planning Coordination	Unplanned Housing Developments	Junk (cars, equipment, etc.)	Increased Population Growth	Used Mobile Homes	Other (Write-Ins)
Very Important	64%	62%	59%	58%	46%	2%
Somewhat Important	28%	26%	25%	31%	33%	0%
Not Important	5%	7%	13%	7%	15%	0%
No Response	3%	4%	3%	4%	5%	98%