

1. INTRODUCTION

Beginning in March, 2008, the Big Horn County Commissioners appointed the Land Use Plan Steering Committee, a group of volunteers interested in county planning, to work with the County's planning consultants to produce a new land use plan.

At the most basic level, a county land use plan is a plan that uses text and maps to designate the future use of land within the county's jurisdiction and is the foundation of a county's planning and zoning program. Beyond that, land use plans typically have the following features:

The county land use plan deals with the **physical development** of the county (as opposed to economic or social development). To accomplish this, a land use plan designates the kinds, location, and intensity of future land uses. Land uses addressed in a plan can include agriculture, timber production, housing, commerce, industry, recreation, open spaces, public utilities, public facilities, and other land uses.

The plan is **future oriented** and projects the development of the county to a future point in time, such as 10 or 20 years from the present.

A land use plan typically **contains both textual policies and maps**—the text states land use policies and reasoning used at arriving at the decisions in the plan, and often a listing of implementation actions. The maps illustrate in general geographic terms where future development should occur.

The land use plan is **not a law or regulation** but instead is a set of guidelines. Counties may adopt land use regulations (such as zoning and subdivision controls) in order to implement the plan. But the plan itself is not regulatory.

Wyoming counties can and should have their land use plans address each county's unique concerns. At a minimum, the plan should focus on the physical development of the county. The plan should study future land use needs and recommend a future land use pattern. The plan recommendations should include maps of future land use and text setting forth the county's planning policies and the rationale behind them. The plan should include a list or outline of implementation measures—the actions that will need to be taken to carry out the plan—including recommendations concerning zoning, subdivision controls, and public facilities.

1.1. PURPOSES OF THE PLAN

The purpose of the Big Horn County Land Use Plan is to provide a general approach to the location, distribution, and character of future land uses in the county. The Land Use Plan is a document to guide future policies and actions. It is not a regulation or a law, but it may influence changes to local regulations. It is a plan for action, identifying where the county wants to go in the future and a path to enable the reality of that desired future.

Even without rapid population growth, there is still a need to plan for future land use. One reason is that a good land use plan should be flexible enough to accommodate some unexpected growth. Rapid growth often catches communities by surprise. Planning now helps hedge against that possibility.

A second reason for planning now is that even with modest growth, bad outcomes can result through a lack of planning. A good plan will address county development issues including second home development, subdividing agricultural land, and encouraging building near towns. Whether growth is rapid or slow, development will be better when it follows a well-planned pattern.

This Land Use Plan consists of three basic components:

- Goals and strategies, which indicate in a general way the objectives for future land use over the next 20 years
- A comprehensive plan map, which depicts a conceptual desired arrangement of land uses.
- An inventory of existing land uses, infrastructure and transportation, natural resources and natural hazards

1.2 WYOMING COUNTY PLANNING STATUTES

Certain laws in Wyoming require and authorize counties to prepare land use plan. Unlike many states, Wyoming does not require specific content for land use plans. The state laws (statutes) also spell out the basic legal process for preparing and adopting land use plans. It is intended that this land use plan for Big Horn County will comply with all statutory requirements.

The Wyoming Land Use Planning Act of 1975 (Wyoming Statutes, Title 9, Chapter 8, Articles 1-3) defines “land use planning” as “the process which guides the growth and development of an area and assures the best and wisest use of that area’s resources now and in the future.” The Act defines “local land use plan” as “any written statement of land use policies, goals and objectives adopted by local governments. Such plans shall relate to an explanation of the methods for implementation, however, these plans shall not require any provisions for zoning. Any local land use plan may contain maps, graphs, charts, illustrations or any other form of written or visual communication.” The Act requires each county to prepare a land use plan.

The county planning commission statute (Wyoming Statutes, Title 18, Chapter 5, Article 2) authorizes the county planning commission to prepare a comprehensive plan including zoning for promoting the public health, safety, morals and general welfare of the unincorporated areas of the county”. This statute does not include a definition of a plan. The statute specifies that the planning commission shall hold at least one public hearing before certifying the plan to the Board of County Commissioners.

**BIG HORN COUNTY
2009 LAND USE PLAN**

*Surface Management
Big Horn County*

LEGEND

Land Surface Management Status

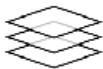
-  Bureau of Land Management
-  Bureau of Reclamation
-  Department of Defense
-  Forest Service
-  Forest Service Wilderness
-  National Park Service
-  State
-  Private (including local government and local tax exempt property)

Other Map Features

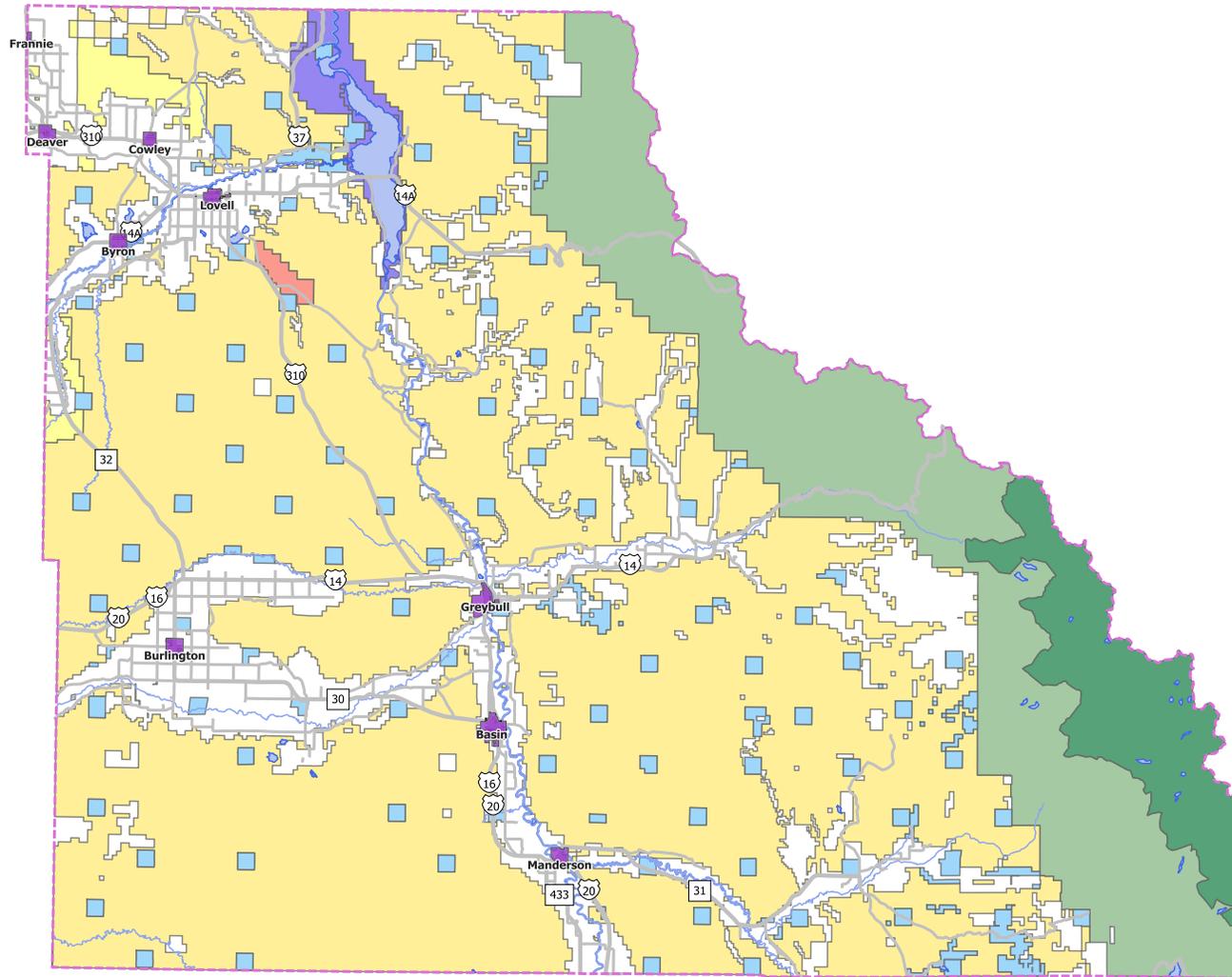
-  Towns
-  Water Bodies
-  Rivers
-  Roads
-  County Boundary



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1.3. BACKGROUND

1.3.1. PLANNING IN BIG HORN COUNTY

This plan is an update to the 1977 Big Horn County Comprehensive Plan. The 1977 Plan included resource policies and development policies for the entire county and also included separate policies for nine different geographic sub-areas of the county. Over the course of the more than 30 years since the 1977 Comprehensive Plan, there have been changes in the county's land use and economics and in state and local laws related to land use. There have also been changes in approaches to land use planning at national, state, and local levels.

Big Horn County is comprised of public and private lands. Private lands account for about 19% of the total land area within the county. Private lands fall either within the jurisdiction of the nine incorporated municipalities or within the jurisdiction of the unincorporated areas of the county. The remaining 81% are lands managed by state and federal governments. There are a variety of plans at the local, state, and federal levels.

Of the nine incorporated communities in Big Horn County, only Basin, Deaver and Manderson do not have current plans. Recently completed or updated plans include: Burlington Community Development Plan, 2004; Byron Town Plan, 2007; Cowley Master Plan, 2007; Frannie Community Development Plan, 2005; Greybull Community Development Plan, 2005; and Lovell Town Master Plan, 2006.

State lands in Big Horn County are managed by the Office of State Lands and Investments, which produces a biennial strategic plan. The State of Wyoming produces a number of other plans that affect lands and resources throughout the state. These include plans for wildlife (Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy 2005), housing (State Consolidated Plan for Housing and Community Development), historic preservation (Comprehensive Statewide Historic Preservation Plan 2005-2013), economic development (e.g., Wyoming Recovery and Reinvestment Plan 2009 as well as various regional economic development plans), water (Wyoming State Water Plan), etc.

There is no shortage of federal planning documents on a variety of topics as well. In addition to general national planning documents, there are plans that relate specifically to lands managed by the federal government in Big Horn County. The Big Horn National Forest has the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (2005). The Bureau of Land Management was in the process of preparing the Big Horn Basin District Resource Management Plan (RMP) at the time the Big Horn County Land Use Plan was being prepared. The Big Horn Basin RMP will result in one document to update three existing RMPs: the Washakie RMP (1988) and Grass Creek RMP (1998) for the Worland Field Office; and the Cody RMP (1990). The National Park Service, Department of Defense, and Bureau of Reclamation together manage approximately three percent of the total land area within the county, and each has a separate planning process.

The Big Horn County Land Use Plan is intended to set a direction for the lands within the jurisdiction of the county. Establishing the desired future of the county will also enable to the county to work more effectively with the municipalities, and state and federal government agencies.

1.3.2 DESCRIPTION OF THE PLANNING PROCESS

This section describes the planning process used to produce the new land use plan. Work on the plan began in 2007 when the County Planning and Zoning Commission conducted a landowner opinion survey on planning issues. With over 900 landowners participating, the survey results provided important direction concerning landowner views on future planning.

In 2008, the Board of County Commissioners hired the planning consultants MMI Planning of Cody and Cossitt Consulting of Park City,

Montana, to prepare a new land use plan. The Commissioners also called for volunteers and then appointed a “Land Use Plan Steering Committee” to work with the consultants in preparing the plan. The steering committee consists of two members of the County Planning and Zoning Commission and nine other members who are not affiliated with county government.

Throughout the process, there has been an emphasis on involving the public including:

- The landowner survey involved over 900 county land owners who sent in their survey responses.
- The Land Use Plan Steering Committee consisting of volunteer citizens from all areas of the county.
- Establishment of the plan website, www.bighornplan.info, where all materials and announcements have been available during the process.
- Open house public meetings in December 2008 and June 2009 where the public was invited to learn about the plan and provide comments.
- Legally required public hearings at the end of the process.

The steering committee and consultants began work in early 2008. The planning process they used consists of three major phases: Inventory; Primary Goals and Planning Strategies; and Plan Preparation. These phases are:

1) **Inventory**

This phase is the process of collecting the background information that is necessary for preparing a county land use plan. Background information was assembled on the topics of:

- Population growth trends
- Housing conditions and demand
- Economic trends and conditions
- Infrastructure and the capacity of the county and its towns to accommodate growth
- Mapping of agricultural lands
- Mapping of land features that limit development potential such as steep slopes, floodplains, and etc.
- Mapping of the planning and regulatory considerations such as population density and land surface management
- Review of Big Horn County citizen opinions, perspectives and expectations as obtained from the 2007 Big Horn County landowner survey.

2) **Primary Goals and Planning Strategies**

This second phase of the planning process concentrated on involving the county’s citizens in the identification of goals for land use in Big Horn County. The purpose was to establish countywide consensus on the basic goals that will form the foundation of the plan, which are called the Primary Goals. The Primary Goals are concise, general statements on land use issues that can be supported by most people in the county.

The consultants and steering committee prepared a draft set of goals. These draft goals were then presented around the county at open house meetings where the public was invited to provide comments, concerns, and suggestions. At these sessions, the consultants also presented an overview of findings from the Inventory Phase. In response to the public input, the steering committee revised the goals. The result

of this process is a basic mandate for the direction of the plan and what it is supposed to achieve.

After the Primary Goals were finalized, the consultant and steering committee developed corresponding Planning Strategies intended to achieve the goals. The Planning Strategies summarize the main themes of action the County should undertake to achieve the Primary Goals. The Primary Goals and Planning Strategies are presented in Chapter 2.

3) Plan Preparation

After completing the Primary Goals and Planning Strategies, the steering committee and consultants worked to produce a complete draft land use plan. The final effort included maps designating growth areas and future land use as well as recommended implementation tools — the programs and regulations that can be used to implement the plan.

After producing the draft plan, the steering committee and consultants will hold another series of open house meetings around the county to gather public comments on the draft plan’s contents and receive feedback for improving the draft. At the conclusion of the meetings and following any needed revisions, steering committee and consultants will present a final plan to the Planning & Zoning Commission for review and approval.

At that time, the Planning & Zoning Commission will become responsible for reviewing the plan, making any changes it may require, holding at least one public hearing, and adopting and certifying the plan to the Board of County Commissioners. The County Commissioners would then hold their own hearing(s) and may then adopt the final plan.

1.4. HOW THIS PLAN IS ORGANIZED

This Land Use Plan is organized in three main sections:

1. **Introduction:** This provides the overall context for the Land Use Plan.
2. **Plan for the Future:** This section is the heart of the Land Use Plan. It includes the goals and strategies, future land use (conceptual map), and how the plan will be implemented, including details on timetable for actions.
3. **Inventory:** This provides an overview of existing conditions at the time the Land Use Plan was prepared. It addresses these topics:
 - Population
 - Housing
 - Land Use and Development
 - Agriculture
 - Economics
 - Infrastructure
 - Maps of Land Use, Land Types, Natural Constraints,
 - Infrastructure, Regulatory Limitations
 - Public Opinions about Land Use

Appendices include definitions, sources used, details on potential implementation actions, and a sample of maps used in preparation of the plan.