

# CHAPTER ONE

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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### 1.1 GENERAL

The purpose of the Johnson County Comprehensive Land Use Plan and the planning process used to formulate the Land Use Plan are described in Chapter Two. Two of the primary uses of the Plan are to:

- guide future land use management decisions of the Johnson County Commissioners and the Johnson County Planning and Zoning Commission; and,
- adopt a land use plan that must be considered by federal agencies during their preparation of resource management plans and policies that will influence Johnson County.

The Executive Summary provides a general overview of selected background information, conclusions and recommendations that are derived from the overall Johnson County Comprehensive Land Use Plan. Chapters 2 through 14 of this document provide a more detailed presentation of supporting information that was used to form conclusions and recommendations outlined in this Executive Summary.

### 1.2 SIGNIFICANT FACTORS INFLUENCING LAND USE (CHAPTER THREE)

The history, custom and culture of the people of Johnson County have, in part, shaped the type and location of land uses within Johnson County. Various American Indian tribes, early explorers, trappers and traders, the establishment of the Bozeman Trail, U.S. Government expeditions, and the establishment of military forts, influenced the early settlement and eventual formation of Johnson County in 1879.

These factors attracted the migration of a growing population who eventually became involved in cattle and sheep production, coal mining, and the harvest of raw timber. As the natural resources became better identified, mineral industry companies gradually mined uranium, bentonite, and other minerals, as well as explored and tapped oil and gas reserves. Some landowners that provided access to these natural resources, e.g., oil, re-invested income to finance the construction of new irrigation ditches that stimulated the production of crops and livestock along the Powder River.

The expansion of agriculture and development of other natural resources also led to the formation of various small communities in Johnson County. The communities of Barnum, Buffalo, Kaycee, Mayoworth, and Sussex were established between the late 1800's and 1906. The Town of Linch was not formed until 1951.

Today, employment and income in Johnson County are primarily generated from several economic sectors:

- agriculture;
- oil, gas and mineral exploration and development;

- tourism;
- retail trade; and,
- government.

### **1.3 ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES (CHAPTER FOUR)**

The physical environment, surface and groundwater resources, and wildlife resources will influence future land use development and should be considered in the context of future land use decisions of Johnson County. These resources have important links to agriculture, the mineral industry, the visitor industry, and recreational opportunities for Johnson County residents. The future availability of water resources is essential to all land uses within Johnson County.

### **1.4 AGRICULTURAL LAND USES (CHAPTER FIVE)**

The economic viability of agricultural operations in Johnson County will be influenced by federal and state resource management policies. Much of Johnson County's aquatic and wildlife habitat exists because of agricultural resources. Resource management objectives that are made without adequate consideration of the operational requirements of crop and livestock production may threaten the viability of ongoing agricultural operations. Sustained agricultural production is an asset that is essential to the conservation of land, water, and wildlife resources.

One of the primary concerns of Johnson County is the continued availability of public lands for livestock grazing. Any significant decline in animal unit months may adversely impact the economic viability of many agricultural operations in Johnson County. It is vital that federal agencies consider operational requirements needed to sustain profitable livestock operations in its application of livestock grazing requirements.

The diversification of agricultural operations is often a necessity for agricultural operators to remain financially stable. Agricultural operators often establish guest ranches, recreational outfitter services, guest cabins or other small business opportunities. Johnson County should not discourage the diversification of agricultural operations.

Federal policies on threatened and endangered species may also have a profound effect on agricultural operations. Species that may harm agricultural operations are not limited to predators. Restrictions placed on lands because of most endangered species may affect the economic viability of agricultural operations.

### **1.5 RESIDENTIAL LAND USES (CHAPTER SIX)**

#### **1.5.1 City of Buffalo**

##### Purchase of Fee Simple Single-Family Properties

The predominant demand for housing in Buffalo will continue to be for the purchase of single-family properties. The demand will be for a combination of stick-built homes, manufactured homes, mobile homes, town houses and duplexes.

The demand for single-family home purchases is expected to range between 33 to 132 homes per year during the 2004-2012 period. The primary market for purchases of residential properties is expected to be existing residents of Buffalo who intend to purchase a different home. The coal bed methane labor force and incoming BLM personnel are also expected to generate some demand for single-family home purchases during the 2004-2012 period.

From 2005 through 2012, it is anticipated that the future purchase of residential properties in Buffalo will shift to a growing incoming population 56 years of age and older. This market group includes persons who are nearing or within retirement age.

### Rental Housing

Significant additional rental housing will be needed to meet the demand of seasonal visitor industry workers and existing residents who prefer, and can barely afford, rental housing. Rental-housing demand is also anticipated from the coal bed methane labor force as long as rental housing is available and priced affordably.

Existing occupancies already exhaust the capacity of most available rental housing. Anticipated rental housing demand is well beyond the existing rental housing supply. The lack of rental housing will increase the price of housing and discourage potential residents from locating within the community.

Seasonal visitor industry workers also represent a significant market for rental housing. A portion of this demand can be met through the construction of more RV park/campgrounds and mobile home parks.

### Residential Expansion Areas

Recently completed housing development projects such as Cloud Peak Vistas and Diamond Point Construction Apartments will increase the rental housing inventory in Buffalo and help to ease future rental housing demands.

Similarly, Phase III of the Mountain Ridge Subdivision will help address the future demand for single-family housing. The extent to which the demand for residential property purchases is met will be influenced by available single-family housing inventories.

## **1.5.2 Town of Kaycee**

### Housing Demands

Modest housing demands are expected in Kaycee during the 2004-2012 period (Table 6-21). Much of this demand will be for rental housing for an incoming coal bed methane labor force.

In the aftermath of the August 2002 flood, most residents have remained in the community. Some have replaced homes damaged during the flood (Knapp, 2003). The demand for some new housing from existing community residents was also evident from data gained from the November 2003 housing survey.

### Potential Areas for Residential Expansion

Within the Town of Kaycee, there are various lots that are vacant or undeveloped. In some cases, these properties consist of one or more adjoining residential lots that are associated with an existing single family home. In other situations, existing landowners may be willing to sell one or more vacant lots. However, some lots may no longer be desirable as building sites due to the experience gained during the August 2002 flood in Kaycee.

The Town of Kaycee is considering a proposed subdivision near the mercantile store. The proposed Middle Fork Addition would, if approved, contain 28 lots that could support some future residential expansion.

Some residential expansion opportunities may be feasible north and east of the Kaycee municipal boundary. Residential expansion may require an extension of water distribution and sewer collection lines to these areas.

### **1.5.3 Unincorporated Area**

#### Housing Demand

The unincorporated area of Johnson County can also expect to experience increased housing demands during the 2003-2012 period. New rental housing demands will be generated from an incoming coal bed methane labor force. Some limited demands for assisted living housing will also be generated by persons in the 65+ market group.

The larger 56+ market group will also be the primary source of demand for the purchase of rural residential properties. It is expected that most of this demand will be for properties within about five miles from Buffalo.

### Potential Areas for Residential Expansion

The unincorporated area of Johnson County contains approximately 50 rural residential subdivisions. Johnson County Assessor records for each of these subdivisions indicate that there are about 321 undeveloped lots in these subdivisions.

## **1.6 COMMERCIAL LAND USES (CHAPTER SEVEN)**

### **1.6.1 City of Buffalo**

#### Demand for Commercial Floor Space

Greater expenditures for accommodations, food services, and retail trade are anticipated during the 2003-2012 period. These expenditures will primarily be tied to an expected increase in visitor industry traffic and a growing retirement age population. An increase in coal bed methane employment is expected to supplement the expenditures from visitors and the retirement age market groups.

Increased resident and visitor expenditures will generate demands for additional commercial lands and floor space. It is estimated that such demand will generate the need for approximately 76,000 square feet of additional commercial floor space.

### Potential Areas for Commercial Expansion

Areas desirable for future commercial expansion in Buffalo include undeveloped properties along existing commercial corridors along Main Street, Hart Street, and Fort Street. Some commercial properties along these corridors should also be considered for redevelopment when returns-on-investment are attractive.

The city should consider a continued expansion of retail trade and food services along Lobban Avenue, between Benteen and Bennet Street. This expansion would enable resident and visiting shoppers to walk and/or drive around a looped shopping area. An attractive pedestrian walking area that emphasizes the existing bridge and Clear Creek could be established along Fetterman Street, between Main Street and Lobban Avenue.

The establishment of a one-way circulation pattern along this short segment of Fetterman Street could enable the City of Buffalo to dedicate one lane of the existing street for exclusive pedestrian and bicycle use. This central walkway would create an attractive downtown space that would help attract shopping traffic on both Main Street and Lobban Avenue. As increased shopping activity is realized, the city could consider a central vehicular parking area along Lobban Avenue.

### **1.6.2 Town of Kaycee**

#### Demand for Commercial Floor Space

Significant future expansion of commercial facilities in Kaycee is dependent upon a local marketing strategy to attract greater traffic from Interstate 25.

Assuming that business and community leaders pursue a visitor marketing strategy, it is believed that commercial opportunities will generate demands for about 10,000 square feet of additional commercial floor area during the 2003-2012 period. These demands generally represent additions to existing commercial floor space in the community. The expected amount of floor space for accommodations assumes the renovation or redevelopment of existing accommodations.

#### Potential Areas for Commercial Expansion

Nolan Avenue is the primary corridor where most existing commercial establishments are located and future expansion is desirable. While significant renovation and redevelopment is needed, Nolan Avenue represents the greatest opportunity for commercial expansion because of its central location and connection to Interstate 25 and state highways 190, 191, and 192.

Home-based businesses should be encouraged to stimulate expansion of a variety of retail services. Any zoning ordinance that may be adopted by the Town of Kaycee should permit home occupations in residential areas unless those occupations increase vehicular traffic, create significant parking issues, or generate significant noise in local neighborhoods.

While outside the Kaycee municipal boundary, commercial expansion may also be feasible west of Interstate 25 along State Highway 191. A state rest area, an RV campground, and small truck stop are already located just west of the Interstate. In the event that a truck parking area cannot be developed within the Town of Kaycee, this area would represent an alternative. Commercial expansion might also include the development of a food service establishment or an expanded RV campground.

### **1.6.3 Unincorporated Area of Johnson County**

#### Potential Opportunities for Increased Retail Expenditures and Expanded Technical Services

Retail sales may be increased if truck stops are situated closer to existing interchanges along Interstate 25 or Interstate 90. One potential site is a somewhat developed area that is located just east of the Buffalo municipal boundary, north of the proposed high school site, and immediately west of Interstate 25.

Home-based businesses should be encouraged in the unincorporated areas of Johnson County to expand the variety of retail and technical services. Any zoning regulations adopted by Johnson County should permit appropriate home occupations in rural areas.

## **1.7 INDUSTRIAL LAND USES (CHAPTER EIGHT)**

### **1.7.1 Demand for Industrial Lands**

Johnson County has the opportunity to attract some light industrial operations if more sites are available within a reasonable distance of Interstate 25 and Interstate 90. An opportunity exists for the establishment of regional warehousing and storage facilities for national courier services and distributors of consumer products. Available sites could also support some smaller manufacturing operations.

### **1.7.2 Potential Areas for Industrial Expansion**

#### In the Vicinity of Buffalo

Within or immediately adjacent to Buffalo, there are a few isolated industrial sites. However, there is limited area where investors could develop a new small to medium-sized facility.

The Buffalo Commerce Center is one exception, but industrial lot sizes are relatively small. The mix of residential, commercial and industrial activities in this area is generally not conducive to safe and efficient vehicular ingress and egress from the area. Existing covenants are too restrictive to recruit some types of industrial operations.

Johnson County recently approved a new subdivision of six lots east of Buffalo, which is intended for industrial or commercial use. This small industrial area will be located along U.S. Highway 16, just west of Interstate 90.

There are also potential industrial sites east of Interstate 25. These properties would ideally be connected to the Buffalo water and wastewater systems and be annexed into the city.

- About 170 acres of the Esponda Ranch are readily accessible to Interstate 25 and could easily accommodate 10 to 15 ten-acre sites.
- A second property is situated just west of the Buffalo Commerce Center. This site contains approximately 60 acres. One larger industrial operation could make use of the entire site, or the site could be used by several smaller light industrial enterprises.

## Unincorporated Area

Coal bed methane exploration and production companies are regularly searching for sites where field equipment and materials can be stored and mobilized. Such sites are ideally close to Interstate and state highway routes.

The unincorporated area contains sites suitable for light industrial development. However, many of these sites are situated in remote areas of Johnson County. Consequently, potential industrial sites in the unincorporated area are generally most suited to support oil and gas services, support facilities, and regional utility systems where the proximity to nearby communities is not an important consideration.

## **1.8 PUBLIC FACILITIES (CHAPTER NINE)**

### Demand for Expanded Public Facilities

There is a need for additional county government office space and a new law enforcement center. Johnson County lacks floor space for administrative offices and meeting rooms. Johnson County currently rents other office space for the County Extension Agent, the County Attorney, and the County Coroner. Conflicting meeting schedules hamper the ability of the County Commissioners, the County Planner, and the general public to effectively share the same floor space. Because of the lack of a separate and secure access to the County Court chambers, the transport of prisoners through the Courthouse poses a potential security risk to other Johnson County personnel.

At the time of this report, Justice Concepts Incorporated is evaluating public facility needs of Johnson County and developing alternatives for addressing anticipated facility requirements. Johnson County is considering the development of a new law enforcement center that would include space for the County Sheriff, the county jail, the Buffalo Police Department, and the county court system.

### Potential Opportunities for Future Public Facility Expansion

There are a number of sites and facilities that may be feasible for the development of new offices to support the court system and other administrative activities of Johnson County. For example, the Clear Creek Elementary School, which is situated just west of the Johnson County Courthouse in Buffalo, has been suggested as a viable location for courthouse offices if and when it is vacated by the school system.

The Wyoming Department of Transportation equipment yard along the south side of Fort Street, and immediately adjacent to the existing City-County law enforcement complex, is a potential property that could be considered for the development of other public facilities. The acquisition of this property would likely require some type of land exchange with the State of Wyoming.

Another public facility expansion opportunity is situated in the Town of Kaycee on a vacant lot south of Kaycee Park. This property is the site of an old gun club and is owned by the Town of Kaycee.

## **1.9 COMMUNITY FACILITIES (CHAPTER TEN)**

### **1.9.1 Future Demand For Community Facilities**

The establishment and expansion of more community facilities may take place during the 2003-2012 period. Based on population forecasts, it is expected that some 20,000 square feet of floor space will be required to meet community facility demands. About 75 percent of the floor space is anticipated to support the development of new community facilities; the remainder is expected for expansions of existing community facilities.

### **1.9.2 Potential Areas for Future Community Facility Expansion**

The expansion of community facilities in the unincorporated area may be feasible on vacant properties that are along or accessible from U.S. Highway 16 West. Rural residential subdivisions containing any vacant lots may provide feasible opportunities. For example, there were approximately five vacant properties in the Big Horn Estates Subdivision in 2001 where two churches are already located. An additional 28 lots were vacant in the adjoining Richardson Park Subdivision.

In Kaycee, some undeveloped lots within existing subdivisions may be available for some future community facility expansion. If the proposed Meadow Lark Addition is approved, one lot could be sold to accommodate a new church facility.

## **1.10 RECREATION AND CONSERVATION (CHAPTER ELEVEN)**

### **1.10.1 Demand For Recreation And Conservation**

The U.S. Bureau of Land Management recently reported that recreational use of public lands in the Powder River Basin has increased substantially over the past two decades. BLM anticipates use associated with most recreational activities will increase five percent every five years (U.S. Bureau of Land Management, 2002).

Even in the absence of reliable recreational use data, it can be reasonably concluded that substantially greater recreational activities will be occurring in Johnson County during the 2003-2012 period. The City of Buffalo continues to see a greater number of visitors, a growth in the occupancy of visitor accommodations, and increases in seasonal visitor industry employment. Community leaders indicate that many of these visitors are drawn to recreational opportunities in the Bighorn National Forest and other areas.

Forecasts of recreational demand should be developed as more reliable baseline information becomes available. These forecasts should be developed for recreational activities such as fishing, boating, hunting, hiking, and camping.

### **1.10.2 Potential Areas for Future Recreation and Conservation**

#### Potential Conservation Areas

Through ongoing federal and State efforts to conserve wildlife habitat in Johnson County, the U.S. Forest Service, the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, and the Wyoming Game and Fish Department have identified opportunities for the conservation of fish and wildlife habitat.

Through coordination with these agencies, the need for additional conservation opportunities may be identified.

Even In the absence of new proposed conservation areas, Johnson County can encourage the conservation of aquatic and wildlife resources during its review and consideration of rural subdivision applications. Data available in the Johnson County GIS will better enable Johnson County to consider the impacts of potential projects upon aquatic and wildlife resources, as well as recommend practical conservation measures within new residential subdivision projects.

Continuous coordination with resource managers of the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, the U.S. Forest Service, and the U.S. Bureau of Land Management will help keep Johnson County abreast of the planning and program objectives of these resource management agencies. It will also provide an opportunity for state and federal agencies to hear and react to the concerns of Johnson County (see Chapter 14).

#### Historical Preservation Opportunities

Johnson County is very rich in history. Historical sites include, but are not limited to, Fort Phil Kearny, the Fetterman Battlefield, the Hole-in-the-Wall area, Dull Knife Battlefield, the Crazy Woman Battlefield, the Fort Reno Historic Site and a portion of the Bozeman Trail. Several of these sites lie on privately owned property. Johnson County should explore methods of protecting important areas of historical, archaeological, or architectural significance.

#### Potential Recreational Expansion Areas

One of the most practical opportunities for the establishment of new recreational sites is the Wyoming Game and Fish Department's walk-in program. Should this program have successful results, it is anticipated that more landowners will lease hunting and fishing sites for public recreational use. Johnson County should encourage this type of recreational expansion because it provides attractive recreational opportunities, generates some financial benefits to landowners, and reduces recreational site development costs.

The development of additional conservation areas by the U. S. Forest Service, the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, and the Wyoming Game and Fish Department will generate increased recreational opportunities. Depending upon its assessment of recreational needs, it is possible that the U.S. Forest Service may develop some new recreational areas in the Bighorn National Forest.

## **1.11 TRANSPORTATION (CHAPTER TWELVE)**

### **1.11.1 Transportation Needs**

Several transportation improvements are recommended to better serve the existing and future population of Johnson County:

Airport Expansion – Johnson County should continue existing plans for expanding the capabilities of the Johnson County Airport. This expansion may stimulate some commercial development in the area.

Any future zoning resolution should include some land use restrictions for lands adjacent to the Johnson County Airport. These requirements will enable Johnson County to make future airport expansions and help qualify Johnson County for potential federal funds needed to support future airport improvements.

New Collector Road – A need is developing for a new collector road between French Creek Road and US Highway 16 west of Buffalo. Rural residents on French Creek Road must currently travel the Buffalo street system to reach grocery stores and other commercial areas along Fort Street. In addition, those residents who wish to access US Highway 16 to travel to the Big Horn Mountains for recreational and other trips must also use the Buffalo street system. Since significant growth along the French Creek Road corridor is expected, this problem will only increase. Therefore, this alternative route is highly recommended.

Upgrade of Hart Street – A YDOT project is scheduled for upgrading Hart Street in the City of Buffalo. The improvements will include widening, sidewalks, a center turn lane and replacement of the bridge over Clear Creek. Hart Street serves some properties still located within the unincorporated area of the county adjacent to the City of Buffalo.

US Highway 16 west of Buffalo – WYDOT has awarded the bid to upgrade a section of US Highway 16 west of Buffalo prior to and within the Bighorn National Forest. The construction will take place in 2003 and 2004 and consists of widening and other safety improvements including a new runaway truck arresting system.

### **1.11.2 Recommended Transportation Objectives and Policies**

The following goals and policies are recommended to help provide efficient transportation systems and services within Johnson County, minimize the costs of providing and maintaining transportation infrastructure, and maximize economic opportunities.

1. Care should be taken when planning paving and other road upgrade projects as upgrading roads may encourage development in those areas due to improved access. Roads should be paved or upgraded in areas where growth is desired and in areas where significant growth has already occurred to support existing population.
2. New residential growth should be directed towards existing paved roads when feasible to avoid the capital expense of paving new roads or providing dust control that is ultimately paid for by county taxpayers.
3. Access locations should be limited to the greatest possible extent on all county and state roads, especially those roadways classified as collector and above. This can be accomplished by requiring consolidated accesses and frontage roads. New subdivisions should have an internal street system with minimum accesses onto county or state roadways. These practices help provide safer roads and maintain the ability of those roads to safely handle traffic volumes at higher speeds. Safety and sight distance should be considered prior to granting access permits.
4. The existing county road system should be properly maintained.
5. Dust control on the many miles of county unpaved roads is an ongoing problem that will become increasingly important as the county's population grows. The county should look into cost effective solutions to this problem. Avoiding high-density development along unpaved roads and requiring developers to pave streets in high-density subdivisions is encouraged.

6. Some county roads will continue to receive higher than normal use due to coal bed methane gas development and other industrial activities. Problems include damage to roads, bridges and other components, as well as dust, speeding and other safety issues. The county should work closely with development companies to gain whatever assistance is available for keeping these roads safe and in good condition. Coal Bed Methane and other resource development companies should operate responsibly on county roads and consider compensating the county for any damages they cause to county transportation infrastructure.
7. Storm water runoff within subdivisions can damage roadways, shoulders, borrow ditches and other areas. The county's current subdivision regulations do not adequately address storm water management controls. This problem should be addressed in the next update of the county's subdivision regulations.
8. Whenever feasible, it is desirable to have residential development near established trail systems to provide an alternative to vehicular transportation to residents of those areas. Additional trail systems should be explored in the future in conjunction with new development and when other opportunities arise. The county's subdivision regulations should be modified to incorporate more opportunities for Planned Unit Developments and Cluster Developments to increase the opportunity for new trail systems.
9. There has been recent dialog between the County Planners of Washakie and Johnson Counties concerning an application for a National Scenic Byway or All American Scenic Byway designation for US Highway 16 west of Buffalo over the Big Horn Mountains. Scenic byway designations have been proven to increase visitor traffic and contribute to local economies. This occurs because scenic byway designations are added to tourism and travel maps. Therefore, it is highly recommended that the scenic byway designation be actively pursued and coordinated with Washakie County.
10. Policies of the U.S.D.A. Forest Service that relate to roads in the Bighorn National Forest should consider the effects of such policies on the local tourism economy and other aspects. The Forest Service should solicit and consider comments from Johnson County and its municipalities when decisions are being contemplated.
11. Johnson County should continue existing plans for expanding the capabilities of the Johnson County Airport. This expansion may stimulate some commercial development in the area. Any future zoning resolution should include some land use restrictions for lands adjacent to the Johnson County Airport. These requirements will enable Johnson County to make future airport expansions and help qualify Johnson County for potential federal funds needed to support future airport improvements.

## **1.12 RECOMMENDED VISION FOR FUTURE LAND USES (CHAPTER THIRTEEN)**

Chapter Thirteen recommends a general land use pattern for the unincorporated area of Johnson County. The recommended land use pattern is based upon a variety of information and spatial analyses, as well as three guiding land use recommendations:

1. Concentrate more residential, commercial and industrial land uses in the vicinity of Buffalo and Kaycee,
2. Provide opportunities for diversified rural lifestyles in the unincorporated area, and
3. Conserve important natural resources.

Maps are provided in Chapter 13 that depict recommended land use patterns for the unincorporated area of Johnson County. Recommended land use patterns for Johnson County are expressed via five general land use designations.

1. Rural Living;
2. Community Expansion;
3. Multiple Use;
4. Recreation and Conservation; and,
5. Agriculture.

The general land use designations recognize that most land uses in Johnson County are often highly inter-dependent and occur in combination.

### **1.13 FUTURE LAND AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT (CHAPTER FOURTEEN)**

Chapter Fourteen recommends land and resource management actions necessary to achieve the goals of the Land Use Plan. Working relationships with various federal and state agencies including the U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Wyoming Game and Fish Commission, and State Conservation Districts are identified. Chapter Fourteen also defines some of Johnson County's concerns with resource management plans of those agencies. Ongoing coordination with state and federal agencies is recommended to insure that Johnson County's land and resource management concerns are addressed.

The chapter also outlines Johnson County's current responsibility for land use management, general authority for land management, and recommends possible approaches to future land management.