

A Toolkit to Protect the Integrity of Greater Yellowstone Area Landscapes



Greater Yellowstone Coordinating Committee
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On the cover: Teton County, Idaho. GYCC file photo.

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Introduction

Between 2000 and 2007 the U.S. Census estimated the population of twenty Greater Yellowstone Area (GYA) counties grew by 54,000 people. In the same period, the Census estimated over 26,000 housing units were added to these counties. The richness of the natural amenities, proximity to public lands, and outdoor recreation opportunities draw people to the area. Technology and access to commercial air transportation allow people to make a living even if their work is derived outside of the region.

Development patterns on private lands near public lands can affect wildlife migration, air quality, water resources, and fire fighting on federal lands. The USDA Forest Service in particular in its *Open Space Conservation Strategy* (2007) has acknowledged that development of open space affects the agency's ability to manage national forests and grasslands.

“At stake is the ability of private and public forests and rangelands to provide clean water, scenic beauty, biodiversity, outdoor recreation, natural-resource-based jobs, forest products, and carbon sequestration. Development in many parts of the country—including growth adjacent to the national forests and grasslands—increases the risk of wildfire for people and property, raises the cost and risk of fighting fires, contributes to the spread of invasive species, increases conflicts among recreational users, reduces access to recreation lands, and fragments fish and wildlife habitat. (Open Space Conservation Strategy page 3.)

The growing pace of residential and commercial development of private lands in the GYA can threaten the long-term health and integrity of the ecosystem. The development of these private lands can adversely impact critical wildlife and plant habitats, riparian areas and watersheds, historic access to public lands, recreational opportunities, open space and natural landscapes. While development will continue, the location and type of development are important components of protecting public land and resource values.

“Protecting the Integrity of GYA Landscapes” is a top priority for the Greater Yellowstone Coordinating Committee (GYCC). The Yellowstone Grizzly Coordinating Committee agrees that broad landscape protection is critical to the continued recovery of the Yellowstone grizzly bear. Recognizing that conservation efforts are on a voluntary basis with willing landowners, the GYCC goals of this priority item include:

- Establish logical and effective ownership patterns for public and private landowners.
- Protect critical habitat including big game winter habitat, rare and unique plant communities, and valuable riparian habitat.
- Protect critical open space, natural appearing landscapes, and recreation opportunities including access to public lands.
- Share information, and assist with development of partnerships that help protect critical habitat and open space.

To advance these goals, this toolkit has been developed for agency staff, particularly line officers, to provide information on:

- 1) Voluntary land conservation tools, and

- 2) Participation in local planning discussions as a stakeholder to provide information on how growth decisions will affect public land resources, respecting local authority.

The toolkit provides information on the following topics.

1. The current land status in the GYA, displayed as maps of:
 - Public and Tribal lands
 - Public and Tribal lands with National Forest inholdings displayed
 - Existing conservation easements and preserves
 - High priority conservation lands, as determined by the Heart of the Rockies Initiative
 - Status of GYCC Federal Agency Acquisition Priorities as of 2007
2. General discussion of land adjustment tools.
 - Land acquisitions (both purchases and donations)
 - Conservation easements (both purchased and donated)
 - Land exchanges
 - Access (road and trail) easements and dedicated public access
3. Guidance for public agency participation in local land use.
 - Overview of State and County land use regulations
 - Key components to commenting on local land use actions
 - Example comment letters
4. Case studies of successful regional conservation efforts.
5. GYA land trusts and conservation partners.
6. Conservation buyers in the GYA.
7. Sources of funding for land acquisition and easements.
8. Sources for land stewardship without land or easement purchase.
9. Key strategies and research data.
 - Forest Service Open Space Strategy
 - Forests on the Edge

The toolkit is intended as a living document. It will be posted to the GYCC website to allow periodic updates (<http://www.fedgycc.org/>). Hard copies will be distributed in a notebook format to allow new material to be added when available.