

COMMUNITY PLANNING:
**Building Capacity
to Steward a
Livable Future**

WOOD
RIVER
LAND
TRUST



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Executive Summary

Based on the dynamics of growth in the Wood River Valley, climate change in the region, and the importance of conservation to quality of life in Blaine County— Land Trust views community planning as an additional and necessary tool to advance its mission to protect, sustain, and inspire the treasured landscape, life-giving waters, and special place that is the Wood River Valley. The new Community Planning program at the Wood River Land Trust is dedicated to managing growth for conservation.

With an inclusive, interjurisdictional, and cross-sector approach, community planning can build capacity to steward a livable future. By coalescing those who are dedicated to the quality of Blaine County's natural environment and life in the community— active citizens, engaged philanthropists, partner organizations, and our leaders in local government— we can maximize the impact of the resources available to us. Altogether, we are better positioned to manage growth, discourage sprawling development, and protect our beautiful environment.

Engaging people and organizations across sectors, the Land Trust identified five focus areas for the new Community Planning program: habitat conservation, water availability, transportation mobility, community housing, and livability. Drawing the connection between land use decisions and the ideals of the five focus areas— this document introduces community planning as a tool for conservation.

Further, this document respects and upholds the existing policies of the local jurisdictions. Recognizing the significant overlap in the policies of Blaine County and its cities, the Community Planning program charts objectives that adhere to shared goals and uphold the ideals of the focus areas. What follows is neither a comprehensive plan nor a slate of policy recommendations, it is a summary of the purpose, scope, and objectives of the Land Trust's new Community Planning program.

Chapter 1: Community Profile offers an overview of emerging trends and demographics in Blaine County, as well as baseline characteristics for each focus area. The baseline characteristics detail the current conditions and fundamental dynamics of each focus area.

Chapter 2: Shared Goals is based on an inventory of the County and cities' Comprehensive Plan policies, which govern land-use decisions and the development of their Municipal Codes. The shared goals communicate the scope of the Land Trust's work in each focus area.

Chapter 3: Action Plan outlines the Land Trust's objectives in each focus area. Each objective adheres to one of five approaches: engagement, evaluation, education, encouragement, and coordination. The five-pronged approach and high-level nature of the objectives allow for flexibility in future implementation of the Community Planning program.

"Community planning is another tool in our box, to manage growth in a way that furthers local conservation efforts" said Executive Director Amy Trujillo. "Planning decisions shape a community. Planning influences whether a community's design and development patterns will threaten or protect healthy open spaces, in turn affecting the quality of life for the people in it." Outgoing President Scott Boettger— who served as the founding Executive Director from 1997-2023— described the new Community Planning program as proactively pursuing the Land Trust's mission "in its truest sense, that is to protect and sustain the special place that is the Wood River Valley."



What is community planning?

Community planning welcomes everyone to participate in the land use decisions, projects, and programs that shape where they live. The "planning process helps communities define their goals and a path to achieving them."¹

Inclusive community engagement strategies—that meet the needs of community members—are necessary for equitable involvement and key to community planning. Conventional planning can fall short of achieving equity when only professional planners, elected leadership, and private developers are involved.

By considering social, environmental and economic interests on a large scale², community planning seeks to maintain and augment the qualities that a community cherishes about its place.³ "Planning helps create communities of lasting value," writes the American Planning Association.⁴ "While architects often focus on a single building, a planner's job is to work with residents and elected officials to guide the layout of an entire community

or region. Planners take a broad view and look at how the pieces of a community— e.g., buildings, roads, and parks— fit together like pieces of a puzzle."⁵

Locally, Blaine County and its cities have internal planning departments. Government agencies with statewide and regional purviews, also have planners working to shape the look, feel and function of our community. Now, the Wood River Land Trust is entering the space— to plan for conservation across Blaine County.

"Building capacity, readiness, and partnerships across government institutions and community stakeholders — such as community-based organizations, community advocates, or residents — is critical in order for an equitable planning process to unfold."⁶

Introduction

The Wood River Land Trust enters the community planning arena at a time of significant change—and mounting challenges—in many pockets of the American West. As an area with easy, extensive access to nature, Blaine County and its cities fall into what a growing body of research refers to as a Gateway and Natural Amenity Region, or “GNAR” community.⁷ Increased visitation and “amenity migration”— population growth driven by a desire to get close to the natural world and outdoor recreation— have made boom towns of these once small hamlets, overwhelming those tasked with governing people and providing for social needs.⁸



In the backdrop, climate change heightens the need for communities to manage growth and prioritize sustainable development. Warming temperatures are diminishing our winters— triggering earlier snowmelts, lessening the capacity of the snowpack to store water through the hottest months of the year, and overall compromising our water supply.⁹ More frequent and intense drought and wet periods further stress the ecology of the Big Wood River basin.¹⁰ The Land Trust’s planning goals contribute to the global effort to mitigate climate change by reducing emissions, as much as they accept the local responsibility to adapt to the living conditions of climate change.

Post-pandemic, GNAR communities like Blaine County are still grappling with the socioeconomic effects of changing demographics, as well as the environmental effects of increased visitation and climate change. Amid change, the Land Trust maintains its commitment to protect, sustain, and inspire the treasured landscape, life-giving waters, and special place that is the Wood River Valley.

After two years of community engagement— first with the wider community in 2022, then with community partners in 2023— the Land Trust is now announcing the scope, objectives, and approach of the Community Planning program. Most of all, the Land Trust seeks to demonstrate how community planning can build capacity to steward a livable future, one that conserves the cherished natural environment of Blaine County.

Based on community feedback, staff identified five areas of community concern and honed them into the foci of the new Community Planning program.

- 1. Habitat conservation** – In broad strokes, the community cherishes Blaine County’s natural environment and access to open space. They recognize the ongoing need to protect wildlife and natural resources, restore the Big Wood River and its floodplain, and prepare for natural hazards linked to climate change. More than ever before, the community recognizes the risk of losing surrounding open space to new, sprawling¹¹ development.
- 2. Water availability** – With a changing climate, the community worries whether there will be sufficient water for a growing community, regional agriculture and the Big Wood River’s ecosystem. Consistently, the community sees additional opportunities to reduce demand for water, increase efficiency and manage usage conjunctively, across the region.
- 3. Transportation mobility** – Closely tied to the housing crisis, the community is boggled by the patterns of traffic congestion and the increasing length of work commutes into the Wood River Valley. With a legacy of supporting local transit services and active transportation facilities, the community voices support for sustainable transportation modes. Yet, data suggests that residents’ travel behaviors do not align with their stated values— Blaine County is largely car-dependent. The community supports walking, biking, and riding transit, as long as they can safely and conveniently get to where they need to go.
- 4. Community housing** – Amenity migration to Blaine County, during the COVID-19 pandemic, exacerbated the County’s longstanding housing challenges and created a crisis. Housing costs remain unprecedentedly high, driving profits and incentivizing residential development. That said, new market-rate housing doesn’t equate to housing for our local workforce and long-time community members— much of the housing stock is unaffordable to them. The community is calling for creative policy solutions that are necessary for the people who keep the wheels of our community spinning.
- 5. Livability** – The community, especially long-time residents, are concerned about maintaining the quality of place and life that drew them to Blaine County. Residents say the values that underpin local life have been buffeted by growth and demographic changes. They also recognize the importance of shared spaces where people can come together to enjoy nature, volunteer for community causes, and get to know each other. Understanding how physical environments can be planned to enhance social connectedness in Blaine County, the Land Trust embraces community planning for livability.

While three of the focus areas— habitat conservation, water availability, and livability— may intuitively relate to the value of conservation and mission of the Land Trust, the connection between transportation mobility and community housing to conservation is more nuanced. The connection is grounded in the principles of compact community design, and relies on transportation and housing objectives to counteract the forces that drive sprawling¹² development. If communities are planned to allow for increased land use efficiency in smart places and incentivize sustainable modes of travel and community housing, the Land Trust is better positioned to conserve our surrounding natural beauty. Other benefits— like efficient use of natural resources, reduced emissions and increased social interaction— stand with compact development. Our new Community Planning program exists to explain the merits of the five focus areas to quality of place and life in Blaine County, as well as to propel solutions that conserve our community’s cherished environment and prepare us for a livable future.

Chapter 1: Community Profile

OVERVIEW

Nestled in and around five mountain ranges, Blaine County spans nearly 1.7 million acres of south-central Idaho.¹³ Its five cities sit at the doorstep to massive swaths of public land, featuring iconic vistas. The County's natural beauty and incredible access to outdoor recreational activities—skiing, fly-fishing, mountain biking, trail running, and more—are key to the community's history, culture and economy. Its remote location adds to the appeal. In any direction, a traveler can head 60 miles from an incorporated city and still fall within the county limits—oftentimes landing in backcountry wilderness.¹⁴

From the alpine forests and lakes in the north to the sagebrush steppe and lava fields in the south, Blaine County encompasses a diverse geographic range. The county is mostly covered in brush and classified as semi-arid; some 60% of annual precipitation falls as snow from November to March.¹⁵ Riparian areas and wetlands are fed and sustained by the annual snowpack, which holds a median peak of 16.2 inches of snow-water equivalent before running off into the Big Wood Basin through spring and summer.¹⁶ The first record of humans in the region dates back

approximately 4,000 years, when the northern Shoshone and the Bannock tribes followed game through the mountains.¹⁷ The arrival of white trappers and traders in the early 19th century broke that pattern. Searching first for furs and later gold, Europeans and Americans explored the region through the first half of the 1800s with little lasting footprint. In the 1860s, though—around the time of the 1863 establishment of the Idaho Territory—word of lead and silver shifted focus to the mountains and its surrounding valleys.¹⁸ Goodale's Cutoff, a spur of the Oregon Trail, shunted prospectors to the Wood River Valley, where they set up the camps that became towns.¹⁹

Settlement brought tensions. Hostilities peaked during the 1878 Bannock War. Angry over broken treaties and disturbances to their traditional agricultural lands, the area's tribes took up arms against settlers backed by federal troops in what is now Blaine and Camas counties. The U.S. troops scattered the Bannock force and ultimately moved them off the land to reservations at Fort Hall and Duck Valley.²⁰

From there, Blaine County settlers followed the well-trod track of the mountain West. Technological advances and transportation improvements helped silver and lead extraction boom, until prices sent it bust. The Oregon Short Line, a subsidiary of the Union Pacific, moved in and, in part, determined the economic fortunes of towns in Wood River Valley. By the 1890s, labor issues, rising costs and sinking prices signaled the end of the valley's mining heyday; extraction slowed and ranchers moved in.²¹ During the early 20th Century, Ketchum was the world's second-largest sheep center, trailing only Sydney, Australia.²²

Focus would soon shift once again. Amid the Great Depression, Union Pacific Chairman Averell Harriman tasked Austrian Count Felix Schaffgotsch to find a location for a new resort. He settled on the northern Wood River Valley, and in 1936 Sun Valley Resort opened to immediate success.²³ Sun Valley Resort brought attention to the region's beauty and recreational opportunities. Environmental protection efforts, spearheaded by US Senator Frank Church in the early 1960's, led Congress to form the Sawtooth National Recreation Area in 1972. To this day, the national recreation area designation offers a more humble and quiet set of environmental protections than those granted by national park status.²⁴

Today, Blaine County profiles as what researchers call a "gateway" community: a set of small towns with outsized access to increasingly popular natural amenities.²⁵ Full-time and seasonal residents say that access to outdoor recreation is the top contributor to quality of life in the Wood River Valley.^{26,27} Its location has led to great wealth and opportunity in Blaine County, as well as challenges uncharacteristic of rural communities. "Big city" problems like a dearth of affordable housing, traffic congestion and looming sprawl require a suite of unique solutions to keep Blaine County, in the words of researchers at Headwaters Economics, from being "loved to death."²⁸

In 2022, nearly 23% of Blaine County's 13,365 jobs were directly in the leisure and hospitality industry, by far the economy's largest sector.²⁹ Just under 17% of jobs were in construction, the second largest sector and about 15% of the workforce was in the trades, transportation or utilities.³⁰

Blaine County's average annual wage, about \$57,000, is slightly higher than that across the State of Idaho, and well below the national average wage of \$76,180.³¹ Low-paying hospitality jobs pull down the average. In 2022, workers in that sector averaged \$36,246 annually, nearly 40% less than the county's mean wage.³²

While there is no comprehensive data on the cost of living in Blaine County, indicators like food costs³³ and local surveys like the St. Luke's Community Health Needs Assessment suggest a high cost of living.³⁴ Housing sales prices from 2023 indicate that an approximate annual income of \$237,000—about 300% the median family income—is needed to purchase a home of the average sales price in Blaine County.³⁵

Real estate turnover during the pandemic ushered an influx of older adults, presumably retirees, into the County.³⁶ Based on driver's license registrations from the Department of Motor Vehicles and tax filings from the Internal Revenue Service, Sun Valley Economic Development recorded a trend of increasing gaps. The people who moved into Blaine County are older and wealthier than the community at large.³⁷ Over the course of 2010-2022, the median age in Blaine County rose by 5 years, more remarkably it increased by 10 years in Ketchum.³⁸

Blaine County By The Numbers⁴⁶

- Population: 24,866
 - 73.2% white
 - 23.7% Hispanic or Latino
- Population density: 9.2 people per square mile
- Percentage of people over 65 years old: 22.3%
- Percentage of people under 18 years old: 19.0%
- Median household income (2022 dollars): \$81,794
 - Percent in poverty: 6.9%
 - Percent within ALICE threshold: 41%⁴⁷

Wealth disparities in Blaine County are apparent across its geography. Home prices in Ketchum and Sun Valley are 2-3 times as much as those in Bellevue and Carey.³⁹ Caught in the middle, much of the City of Hailey's housing market is trending upwards and out of reach for locals looking to enter the market. A "down valley" syndrome, common in GNAR communities, pushes residents making local wages further away from employment hubs and amenities as cost of living is driven up by second-home owners, visitors and higher-earning remote workers.⁴⁰

Per the guidance of the American Planning Association, planners are tasked with devising solutions that ameliorate inequalities and promote social equity. Every land use decision or plan, across policy areas, presents an opportunity to center equity and enhance quality of life for all.⁴¹ Triggered by the rise of inequality in historically sleepy, rural towns—the GNAR Initiative reinforces the economic, environmental and social needs found in communities like Blaine County.⁴²

drove workers further from their jobs and compromised quality of life for many long-time residents.⁴⁴

In the process of that study, researchers coined a term to group these places under a common umbrella: "Gateway and Natural Amenity Regions," or "GNAR" communities. The authors of that original report, Drs. Danya Rumore and Philip Stoker, identified three pillars of "GNAR" communities:

1. They must be a census designated place of 150 to 20,000 people.
2. They are within 10 miles of the boundary of a national park, national monument, national forest, state park, wild and scenic river or other major river, or lake.
3. They are more than 15 miles from a census-designated urbanized area by road.⁴⁵



What is a GNAR community?

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, environmental planning researchers began to study the challenges experienced by small cities and rural towns located near popular outdoor destinations across the American west.⁴³

With a rising demand for access to national parks, public lands, scenic rivers and other natural amenities like ski areas, researchers at the universities of Arizona and Utah found that these regions faced development pressures and planning challenges rarely tackled in rural areas. Surveying public officials, researchers found that population growth associated with "amenity migration" presented more complex and upsetting challenges than increased tourism. Unlike tourism, the challenges of amenity migration threatened the small-town character and ethos cherished by the survey's respondents. Housing and cost of living were chief concerns among respondents—two factors that

Baseline Characteristics:

HABITAT CONSERVATION

Idaho as a State, is ranked as the 14th largest in the Country and 3rd highest in its percentage of federally protected land.^{48,49} Nearly two thirds of the State of Idaho is public lands— approximately 62% is federally owned and managed.⁵⁰ Another four percent is made up of State

endowment trust lands.⁵¹ Out of all the states, Idaho ranks 38th in the nation for its total population of nearly 2 million.⁵² This equation makes Idaho the 6th least densely populated state in the nation, Idaho is home to approximately 22.3 people per square mile.⁵³

Between 2010-2015, Idaho's population gradually increased. Between 2016-2019 the state's rate of population growth doubled on average.⁵⁴ Then, in concert with the start of the COVID pandemic, the State's average rate of population growth reached unprecedented highs.⁵⁵ Population trends— as well as patterns of development⁵⁶—have compromised open space, increased loss of agricultural lands and espoused a sense of unwanted change in rural communities in Idaho.⁵⁷ Blaine County is no exception, residents surveyed by the Wood River Land Trust pointed to habitat conservation—including protections for open space, wildlife and watersheds—as a community priority, in need of attention.⁵⁸

"When/If Idaho communities once again face rapid rates of population growth, pressures on Idaho's valuable agricultural land and natural resources will increase,"

write Stephanie Witt and Carole Nemnich, authors of a 2011 Boise State University Public Policy Center study on land use practices in the state. "Effective land use planning will play a critical role in shaping the design of our built environments."⁵⁹

The physical geography of Blaine County funnels development into the valley floor, along the Big Wood River corridor. More than 80% of the county is public land, spanning the mountainous terrain to the north, east, and west; as well as the lava fields to the south. Nearly all of the County's public land is federal, managed by the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, Idaho Department of Lands, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, the Bureau of Reclamation and National Park Service.⁶⁰ Even more is protected by non-profit conservation efforts and zoning for agriculture, hillside protection and recreation.⁶¹

What is at risk? Development in the floodplain impacts riparian habitats, the side canyons are subject to sprawling development and prime farmland is forced to compete with a valuable housing market. Buildable areas overlap with the scarce sage grouse habitat in the sagebrush steppe,⁶² which by now have lost half of their historic range.⁶³ Big game migration routes encompass the valley, crossing State Highway 75 north of Ketchum and U.S. Highway 20 near Stanton's Crossing, Timmerman Junction, and Fish Creek.⁶⁴ Between Hailey and Ketchum, resident deer and elk populations meander across SH75 to access the river and forage in their winter range.⁶⁵ Subdivisions overlap with the Big Wood River's floodplain up and down its length,⁶⁶ as well as prime farmland in the Bellevue triangle and Little Wood River drainage and subarea.⁶⁷

Blaine County's community and built environment are invariably connected to the conditions of the surrounding sagebrush steppe, forests and waterways. Natural hazards, posed by wildfires, avalanches, and floods don't heed jurisdictional boundaries. While a variety of local entities respond to natural disasters, coordinated and proactive

planning across the community and region can further mitigate risks. Coalitions of conservation, restoration and outdoor recreation groups engage federal and state agencies to steward open spaces. Managing development in the Wildland-Urban Interface becomes especially critical as climate change pushes us into new fire regimes and unpredictable flooding events.⁶⁸

Unlike many other states that take active roles in managing and moderating growth, Idaho does not have a state agency dedicated to growth management. Passed in 1975, Idaho's Local Land Use Planning Act requires cities and counties to draft their own comprehensive plans to guide development but offers little in the way of statewide support or technical assistance for sustainable growth.⁶⁹ As such, interjurisdictional cooperation is essential to shaping sustainable development and actualizing regional sustainability goals.⁷⁰

Transfer of Development Rights Program

One tool that Blaine County leverages to manage its growth is a transfer of development rights (TDR) program. The program allows landowners to sell and transfer the development rights associated with a parcel of land in a sending area, to another in a receiving area. Designated sending and receiving areas traditionally direct development into cities and conserve open space in rural areas.⁷¹ After more than a decade idle, Blaine County's program saw transactions in 2021⁷² and 2023.⁷³

The County's program is limited by several factors known to bolster other programs.⁷⁴ Firstly, there is no communications hub to connect potential sellers and buyers. Secondly, the sending and receiving areas are both in the County; the program is not interjurisdictional. Participants cannot apply TDRs within city limits, where infill and density is most appropriate. Thirdly, the program lacks a bank or fiduciary agent that can facilitate transactions or stimulate activity when there is a lull.

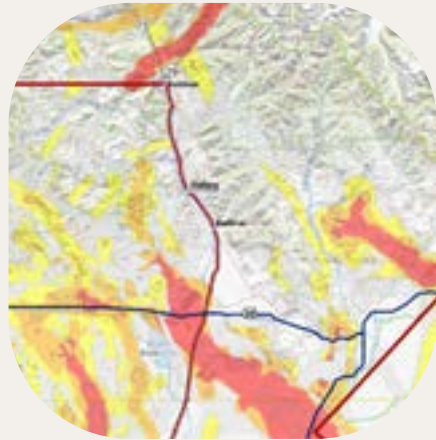
A Boise state study suggests that "antigrowth sentiment in the area" and aversion to increased density in downtown cores limits the effectiveness of the TDR program and may inadvertently encourage sprawl outside urban centers, or promote the development of unprotected land near but not inside receiving areas.⁷⁵ Though these confines limit the efficacy of the program in its current form, there is potential of a revamped program. A 2023 study estimates that an expanded program could shift nearly 6,000 units out of the County, into city boundaries—conserving more than 56,000 acres in sending areas.⁷⁶ Beyond habitat conservation, compact development poses benefits to all five of the Land Trust's community planning focus areas.



Erosion⁸²



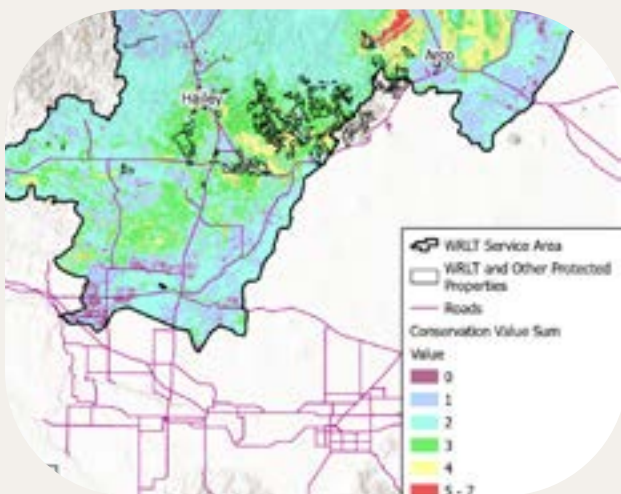
Rip Rap⁸³



Big Game Migration⁷⁸

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"When/If Idaho communities once again face rapid rates of population growth, pressures on Idaho's valuable agricultural land and natural resources will increase,"



WRLT Conservation Priorities by Value Sum⁷⁹

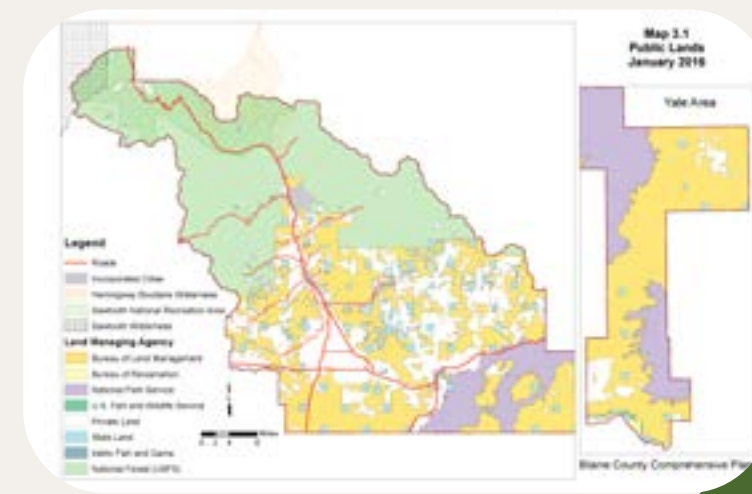
Local Species of Concern

Of the endangered, threatened and sensitive species listed by Idaho's Department of Fish and Game as the "Species of Greatest Conservation & Information Need,"⁷⁷ Blaine County is home to:

- | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------|
| Steelhead | Cuckoo |
| Sockeye Salmon | Wolverine |
| Chinook Salmon | Snake River Physa |
| Pacific Lamprey | Bliss Rapids Snail |
| Greater Sage Grouse | Blind Cave Leiodid |
| Western Yellow-billed | Beetle |



Sage Grouse⁸¹



Public Lands in Blaine County⁸⁰

Regional Coordination

In addition to the Blaine County government and the five cities therein, community partners in habitat conservation include:

Heart of the Rockies

Idaho Conservation League (ICL)

Idaho Department of Lands (IDL)

Idaho Fish & Game

The Pioneers Alliance

The National Forest Foundation

Natural Resources and Conservation Services, USDA - Idaho Office

Sawtooth Society

Trout Unlimited

The Nature Conservancy

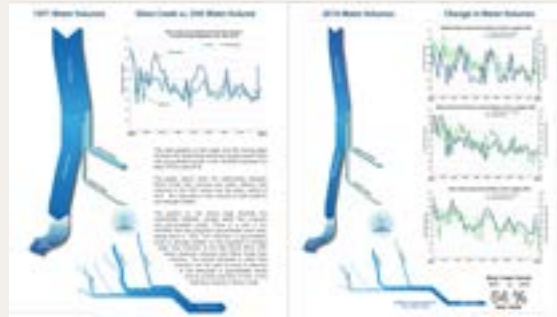
University of Idaho

US Forest Service (USFS)

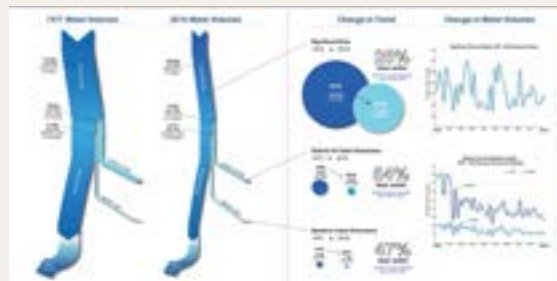
Baseline Characteristics:

WATER AVAILABILITY

Blaine County sits atop two principal aquifers.⁸⁴ One being an unconfined aquifer that follows the valley floor, roughly mimicking the path of the Big Wood River from north to south. Water flows down the valley and either stays shallow or goes down into a deeper, confined aquifer south of Baseline Road in the Bellevue Triangle. The two aquifers reconnect near the community of Gannett, where the pressure of the confined aquifer pushes the water up above the ground, forming the springs and tributaries that feed Silver Creek. Whereas precipitation and snowmelt channeled through supporting tributaries feed the Big Wood, Silver Creek depends on this groundwater upwelling to maintain flows. In turn, the aquifers are recharged by stream seepage and precipitation filtering downward.⁸⁵



Correlated Change in Surface and Ground Water Volumes¹²²



Change in Surface Water Flows¹²³

As recently the early 1970s, when Idaho established an permitting system for surface water rights,⁸⁶ there was a general view that development and land uses did not impact the County's water supply.⁸⁷ Now, there's evidence that environmental changes, regional growth and overallocation have severely impacted groundwater levels over time.⁸⁸

A 2007 report prepared in collaboration with local entities and published by the US Geological Survey showed "significant declining trends" at three wells that the Survey identified as representative of the valley's groundwater system.⁸⁹ Ground water monitoring since 1975 backs those findings with a clear downward trend.^{90,91} Population and

water level trends over the 50-year period are addressed in the 2007 USGS report, speculating a relationship between consumptive uses and groundwater levels.⁹² The 2022 Order Establishing Moratorium on most new appropriations declares the "surface and ground waters of the Big Wood River drainage [to be] connected."⁹³

An analysis of the annual streamflow volumes of the Big Wood found that it was 26% lower in 2016 than it was in 1970.⁹⁴ Water available to the area's two principal diversion canals, which deliver a majority of the surface water used for agricultural irrigation in the south valley, was cut in half.⁹⁵ Silver Creek, the bellwether for the south county's aquifer, saw flows fall by 54% from 1975 to 2016.⁹⁶ Both measures indicate an overall decline throughout the water system. Decreases in surface water flows and groundwater levels are interconnected, and susceptible to the pressures of climate change.

Climate change is exacerbating drought and triggering snowmelt earlier in the year. Average

temperatures are steadily increasing year round,⁹⁷ compromising the capacity of the region's snowpack to store water through spring and into summer.⁹⁸ Spring runoff has and will continue to begin earlier each year, significantly reducing streamflows during the hottest months of the summer.⁹⁹ More frequent and intense drought and wet periods further stress the ecology of the Big Wood River basin.¹⁰⁰ Meanwhile, more efficient irrigation methods and water delivery methods offer less aquifer recharge. Lower ground water levels throughout the aquifer have reverberated system wide.

varies widely year to year. In May 2023, it was upward of 98% full; two years earlier, it was just 4% full, leading to a 26 day irrigation season for its shareholders.¹¹⁹

Little Wood Reservoir is a smaller body, holding about 30,000 acre-feet. Managed by the Little Wood Irrigation District, the reservoir's water is important to agricultural users around Carey.¹²⁰ Residential development in Carey depends on ground water from wells, which the county considers "reasonably shallow."¹²¹

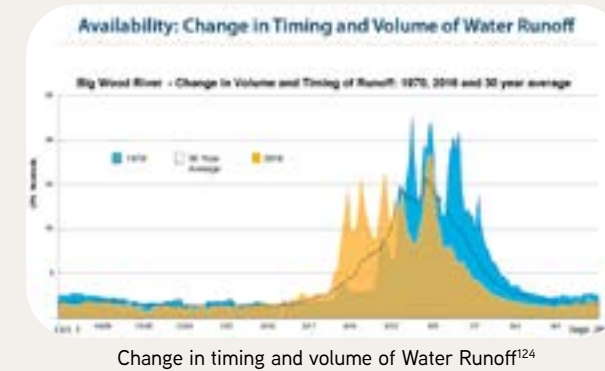
Increased water demand, locally and regionally, further stresses local water resources. Agriculture—by far the system's largest segment of water users—has felt the pressures of diminished water resources in recent years.¹⁰¹ Agricultural uses account for almost 74% of water use across the Big and Little Wood Drainage in Water District 37.¹⁰² In 2016 they accounted for 125,000 of 169,687 acre-feet in 2016, some 40.7 billion gallons.¹⁰³ Domestic wells were the second biggest user, consuming 24,907 acre-feet that same year; municipalities used 11,000; golf courses used 8,380; and snowmaking used 400.¹⁰⁴

In Idaho, like most Mountain West states, the water rights supporting this usage are based on a doctrine known as 'Prior Appropriation,' which stipulates that older water rights have priority in times of scarcity. It's commonly summed up as 'first in time, first in right'; in other words, a user can fill their allocation only after all the users who came before have filled theirs. Locally, the oldest surface water rights date back to the 1880s. More junior claims, like many of the groundwater wells in the Bellevue Triangle, commonly originated in the 1940s.¹⁰⁵ When water is scarce, senior users can 'call on' junior users to curtail use in order to fulfill senior allotments—something experts forecast will happen more and more going forward.¹⁰⁶

Much has changed since the majority of local water rights were allocated and the Doctrine of Prior Appropriation was established—therein lies the tension. Old rights are based on the hydrological and climatic conditions that predate Idaho's statehood. Today, there is less water available in the west than there was when the legal framework took shape. Furthermore, the Prior Appropriation Doctrine encourages individual users to protect their stake—not the basin as a whole. In recent years, senior surface right users have issued water calls against upstream groundwater users¹⁰⁷—something that will likely grow more common if climate and use trends continue.¹⁰⁸

To mitigate these challenges, the Idaho Department of Water Resources issued an order in 1991 designating the Big Wood River Ground Water Management Area, spanning from Magic Dam north up the Big Wood River, east to upper Silver Creek and west to the Camas Prairie.¹⁰⁹ The Management Area includes a variety of surface and groundwater users— but not all domestic users in the unincorporated County. The 1991 order also established a Management Policy, restricting new appropriations of water.¹¹⁰ The policy helped weaken the downward trend in ground water levels that steepened over the previous 50 years; however the levels have not rebounded.¹¹¹

In 2020, the Director of the Idaho Department of Water Resources convened select users to serve on an Advisory Committee for the Management Area.¹¹² Over the course of two years, the Advisory Committee drafted and adopted a Management Plan that includes a suite of programs to mitigate the impacts of groundwater pumping and to maintain streamflow targets.¹¹³ The Plan's goals include supporting the availability of ground and surface water, stream health, as well as the aquifer health.¹¹⁴ It calls for tactics, such as fallowing acres within groundwater districts, limiting groundwater pumping for irrigation seasonally, establishing a fund to finance water conservation and infrastructure projects, delivering water from the Snake River, and cloud seeding.¹¹⁵ The 2022 plan is set to expire at the end of 2024, and the Advisory Committee is currently discussing updates to the Plan.¹¹⁶



Change in timing and volume of Water Runoff¹²⁴

Regional Coordination

In addition to the Blaine County government and the five cities therein, community partners in water availability include:

Big Wood Canal Company

Big Wood River Groundwater Management Advisory Committee

Big Wood Water Collaborative

Boise State University

Conservation, Infrastructure & Efficiency Fund (CIEF) Committee

Galena Ground Water District

Idaho Conservation League

Idaho Department of Water Resources

Natural Resources and Conservation Services, USDA - Idaho Office

Silver Creek Alliance

South Valley Ground Water District

Sun Valley Water and Sewer District

The Nature Conservancy

Reservoirs

The Magic and Little Wood reservoirs are the county's two largest man-made reservoirs.¹¹⁷ Primarily, both are used to store water for irrigation.

Owned by the Big Wood Canal Company, Magic is by far the biggest, with a maximum capacity of 191,000 acre-feet.¹¹⁸ Filled by the Big Wood River and Camas Creek, Magic is a gross indicator of water availability in the Big Wood River Basin. The amount of water in the reservoir



Photo: John Finnell

Regional Coordination

In addition to the Blaine County government and the five cities therein, community partners in transportation mobility include:

Blaine County Recreation District

Blaine County Regional Transportation Committee

Blaine County School District

Environmental Resource Center (ERC)

Idaho Transportation Department (ITD), including its subsets like the Office of Highway Safety

Mountain Rides Transportation Authority

The Senior Connection

Sun Valley Resort

Baseline Characteristics:

TRANSPORTATION MOBILITY

Though classified as a minor arterial,¹²⁵ State Highway 75 represents the north-south spine of Blaine County and is by far its busiest roadway.¹²⁶ To the south– SH75 connects with US Highway 93 in rural Lincoln County,¹²⁷ then to the nearest metropolitan area and the region’s largest city, Twin Falls.¹²⁸ The 116-mile stretch of SH75– between Shoshone and Stanley, to the north in Custer County– is federally designated as the Sawtooth Scenic Byway for its cultural, historic, natural, recreational and scenic qualities.¹²⁹ Local zoning aims to protect the qualities of the byway by prohibiting billboards, limiting commercial development beyond the cities, preserving hillside open space, and managing landscape features within the County’s Scenic Highway Overlay District.¹³⁰

As SH75 moves through the Wood River Valley, it doubles as Main Street for the Bellevue, Hailey and Ketchum downtown cores. At points SH75 is just two lanes, although it repeatedly swells to five. While the speed limit is posted at 25 MPH in the downtown sections, the majority of the corridor is posted at 55 MPH and subject to a higher design speed.^{131,132} Crossing Main Street in Hailey at Croy Street means crossing more than 60 feet of pavement. In Bellevue at Broadford Road, it means crossing more than 80 feet of pavement. Wider roads are known to compromise safety, especially for pedestrians and bicyclists, because wider lanes and roads accommodate higher vehicle speeds¹³³ and lower visibility/sight distance.¹³⁴ The descriptor “stroads” draws attention to the safety issues associated with multi-lane arterials like Blaine County’s Main Streets on SH75.¹³⁵ Aside from bus pull-outs and a forthcoming Park n’ Ride mid-valley, there is no other infrastructure on SH75 designed to give transit or high-occupancy vehicles an advantage over cars.^{136,137}

Travel behavior patterns on State Highway 75 are seasonal, peaking annually in July as tourists and summer contractors¹³⁸ take to the roads. Average daily traffic (ADT) counts on State Highway 75 peaked in July 2021 with an average of roughly 21,400 vehicle trips per day.¹³⁹ Tallies have generally stayed above pre-pandemic levels since, with some 20,300 average daily trips in July 2023 and no fewer than 12,600 daily trips in all other months.¹⁴⁰

Regionally, jobs are concentrated in the Wood River Valley—places where housing costs are traditionally highest.¹⁴¹ The employment hubs in the Wood River Valley attract commuters from across the county and well outside it, spanning southern-central Idaho.¹⁴² In 2021, 34.8% of workers in Blaine County traveled 50 miles or more to their jobs, whereas 34.3% of workers traveled less than 10 miles to their jobs.¹⁴³ The remaining 30.9% of commuters traveled an average distance between 10 to 50 miles to their jobs– with 24.5% commuting between 10 and 24 miles, and 6.4% traveling between 25 and 50 miles to their jobs.¹⁴⁴

Increasing rates of vehicle trips exacerbate regional issues and counter Blaine County’s goals for a “multimodal” transportation system.¹⁴⁵ Transportation was the county’s largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in 2018, contributing 40% of all carbon dioxide.¹⁴⁶ And, crash data ending in 2021 shows a “concerning trend” on State Highway 75, the valley’s main spine, according to ITD.¹⁴⁷ From 2018 to 2022, drivers reported 1,581 total crashes in Blaine County; 27 were fatal and 53 resulted in serious injuries.¹⁴⁸ Of those crashes, more than one in five involved wildlife and 45% occurred on state roads.¹⁴⁹ Vehicle trips not only have high safety and environmental costs, they are also materially expensive. Various levels of government are exploring mechanisms to recoup the costs that vehicles impose on roadway preservation and maintenance, by vehicle miles traveled and weight classifications.^{150,151}

Mountain Rides Transportation Authority, the local transit agency provides fixed-route bus, demand-response paratransit and non-emergency medical transportation, plus vanpool services. Such transit services increase community mobility options, providing alternatives to vehicle travel. After a dip during the pandemic, transit ridership has continued to grow. Most notably, the north-south Valley Route, the principal commuter service

between Bellevue and Sun Valley, has seen massive year-over-year gains in recent years. Over the course of 2023, the route clocked over 340,000 rides on the Valley Route– about double the number in 2021.¹⁵² Mountain Rides is currently integrating battery electric buses into its fleet, which significantly cut fuel costs and greenhouse gas emissions.¹⁵³ In November 2023, more than 90% of Mountain Rides miles were traveled by electric buses, resulting in an 89% drop in emissions. The transportation authority aims to open a new battery electric bus facility in 2025 to support its fleet.

Mobility options that provide alternatives to single-occupancy vehicle trips align with locally shared goals and policy statements that call for a safe and connected multimodal network.¹⁵⁴ Such goals emphasize providing infrastructure for active transportation modes, as well as end goals that support road safety and reduce travel times for commuters on SH75.¹⁵⁵

Stretching 20 miles from Bellevue to Ketchum, the Wood River Trail– a two-lane “rail-to-trail” paved path¹⁵⁶– offers a major amenity for recreationists and commuters alike.¹⁵⁷ Commonly called the “bike path” in the summer, the BCRD maintains the trail as a groomed Nordic facility in the winter. Active transportation infrastructure throughout the cities and downtown cores connect to the WRT.¹⁵⁸ Example facilities include rectangular rapid flashing beacons (RRFB), bulb-out curbs, in-street pedestrian crossing signs, shared-use paths, bicycle lanes and tracks, sidewalks, ADA curb ramps, and more.¹⁵⁹ The Blaine County Community Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan– published in 2014,¹⁶⁰ then updated in 2016 and 2024– guides bike and pedestrian development across Blaine County.¹⁶¹



Wood River Trail¹⁷⁷

Planning for Mobility

Community design shapes a community’s travel behavior patterns. In turn, the characteristics of a transportation network– including the types of infrastructure and transit services available– influence ongoing land uses and planning. Where people live, work and how they travel in between the two– in addition to other locations– make up travel behavior patterns. Land use and transportation planning are interrelated– just as development patterns affect roadway designs, roadway designs shape travel behavior and the social process of land use planning.¹⁶³

Automobile dependency for everyday basic needs is reflected in land use planning with segmented, single-use zoning districts; long high-speed road segments; disconnected neighborhoods; and sprawled¹⁶⁴ development. Longer distances between basic needs and differing land uses incentivize vehicle travel.¹⁶⁵ By design, transportation networks that lack facilities for walking and bicycling compromise vulnerable road users.^{166,167}

Transportation agencies across the United States have historically, and conventionally, relied on travel demand forecasting tools to re-engineer roads that increase vehicle throughput to increase roadway “capacity.”¹⁶⁸ Yet, case studies from around the country and world demonstrate that expanding roadways to increase “traffic throughput” is only found to temporarily relieve congestion and in the long-term “induce[s] demand.”¹⁶⁹ Planning for car traffic begets car traffic– negatively impacting road safety, community health and access to basic needs.¹⁷⁰

Multimodal streets are more spatially efficient than those designed for private vehicle travel, they accommodate more people per square foot.^{171,172} “Repurposing street space” and measuring throughput or capacity by people, rather than by vehicles, presents a paradigm shift with mobility benefits.¹⁷³ Mobility– the right and act of moving– hinges on accessible design for all people. In order for people of different ages, abilities and means to access everyday basic needs, a transportation network needs to be safe, convenient and connected by design.¹⁷⁴ Beyond the design of a street or roadway, planning for mixed land uses and density in key places¹⁷⁵– for example, alongside transit corridors– shortens trips and increases access to network facilities. Planning for mobility relies on the 3D’s of land use planning: density, diversity and design.¹⁷⁶



Mountain Rides’ Transit Services¹⁶²

Baseline Characteristics:

COMMUNITY HOUSING

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the housing crunch escalated to crisis levels quickly. Between 2019-2020, Blaine County's population grew by about 6%-- about six times greater than the average annual rate of population growth for the prior nine years.¹⁷⁸ Most dramatically, the City of Ketchum's population grew by ~25% from 2019-2020.¹⁷⁹ During that time the City of Sun Valley grew by ~20%, the City of Hailey grew by ~6%, the City of Bellevue grew by ~4%, and the City of Carey grew by 0.3%.¹⁸⁰ Growth has since slowed, but the overall population remains unprecedentedly high.¹⁸¹

During that time, long-time property owners extended their visits in their second homes.¹⁸² Still, more people-- including many retirees-- came to Blaine County looking to buy.¹⁸³ The median age of the population increased by 10 years in Ketchum and 5 years in Hailey.¹⁸⁴ The median sales price of a home in Blaine County jumped from \$477,000 in 2019, \$876,000 in 2022,¹⁸⁵ to \$1MM in 2023.¹⁸⁶ The estimated annual income needed to purchase a home increased to approximately \$240,000/year in 2023,¹⁸⁷ not too far off from the average adjusted gross income of people moving into Blaine County in 2022: \$261,663.¹⁸⁸ In contrast, the average adjusted gross income of people moving out of the County was \$78,415 in 2022.¹⁸⁹ The data suggests that an out-of-state market is driving the demand and prices of homes in Blaine County, not long-time residents earning local wages.

Renters found themselves squeezed in the middle. Over the three-year span covering the pandemic (2019-2022), monthly rents on long-term properties rose by 65%.¹⁹⁰ American Community Survey data suggests that 38% of renting households in Blaine County are cost-burdened,¹⁹¹ meaning that they are spending upwards of 30% of their incomes on rent.¹⁹² Employers in the County provide financial assistance to their employees who are burdened

by housing costs, as do philanthropic initiatives that provide a suite of housing assistance.¹⁹³

The "affordability gap" has grown stark in Blaine County, over the past 10 years.¹⁹⁴ Where two median earners could afford to buy or rent a two-bedroom unit in a multifamily home in 2014, rising prices and stagnant wages put that well out of reach.¹⁹⁵ In 2021 the median available two bedroom

rental apartment cost \$12,600 more per year than what was affordable to a household of two median earners.¹⁹⁶ Similarly, that same household was about \$390,000 short of affording to purchase a similar unit.¹⁹⁷ Prices have risen since.¹⁹⁸

Costs have driven families into precarious living situations. One in 40 Blaine County residents live in an overcrowded¹⁹⁹ home, and about 1 in 200 people live in a unit without plumbing or a kitchen.²⁰⁰ In January 2023, Blaine County's first point-in-time count of people experiencing homelessness found 125 people in a shelter or transitional housing and 14 people living unsheltered.²⁰¹ Blaine County Housing Authority recently assessed that 40% of local residents are at risk of displacement.²⁰²

Community housing units are key to meeting the needs of local residents, especially those earning local wages or on fixed-incomes. Community housing describes residential units that are legally restricted, by priority, for local use and occupancy.²⁰³ Restrictions vary by mechanism and criteria, like average annual income or household size. Community housing restrictions, however much they vary to meet different housing needs, offer permanence for local residents who struggle to afford market-rate rents and prices.

In 2022, the City of Ketchum's Housing Action Plan measured that Blaine County needs at least 4,700 additional community housing units through 2030, in order to address the current housing needs and accommodate forecasted population growth.²⁰⁴ The target number of community housing units equates to approximately 5 times the number of existing community housing units (943 units).²⁰⁵ For further comparison, an average of 148 new residential units were built annually in the County between 2020-2023.²⁰⁶ Most substantially, the City of Hailey is home to approximately 550 community housing units, equating to about 16% of Hailey's housing stock.²⁰⁷

The Hailey Housing Needs Analysis estimates a need of 838 community housing units over the next 10 years-- 67 being in need of renovation or replacement and 771 new community housing units to accommodate for population growth and severe overcrowding.²⁰⁸ Ketchum, which currently has about 500 long-term rentals against upwards of 2,000 short-term and seasonal units, seeks to build, preserve, or convert a minimum of 660 units into community housing in the next ten years.²⁰⁹ While the other municipalities-- Blaine County, plus the cities of Sun Valley, Bellevue, and Carey-- have participated in housing solutions, none of them have identified a target number of community housing units to provide. The cities of Hailey and Ketchum's target community housing units total to 1,498 or approximately one third of the total number of community housing units needed across the County.

There is no silver bullet-- no one solution-- to the local housing crisis. Rather, a myriad of partial solutions are needed to meet a diversity of needs and complement one another. Some solutions work better in certain parts of the valley, depending on property values and the housing structure types available in the market. Some solutions are better suited to higher area median income groups than others.

Certain entitlement processes allow for greater flexibility when developing a parcel of land. For example, entitlement through a Planned Unit Development Agreement allows for a developer to petition a waiver to zoning requirements in exchange for providing a benefit, such as community housing units. Similarly, Annexation Agreements allow for flexibility in zoning requirements and may entail an exchange of benefits and waivers, including the provision of community housing.

For smaller developments, zoning regulations can incentivize the provision of community housing through the Design Review process. For example, the City of Ketchum's zoning code offers a density bonus to developers that build community housing units or pay an in-lieu community housing fee.²¹⁰ The City of Hailey's zoning code offers a density bonus for cottage developments if a certain number of units are restricted as community housing.²¹¹ Besides the aforementioned entitlement processes and zoning codes, no other mechanisms currently exist to incentivize the provision of community housing units in Blaine County.

With funding, local governments and housing partners may deed restrict existing units. Currently partnered with the Blaine County Housing Authority, the City of Ketchum is piloting a "preservation" program that grants homeowners and potential buyers 15-30% of the cost of a housing unit to deed-restrict to locals living and/or working in Blaine County.²¹² Currently partnered with ARCH Community Housing Trust, the City of Hailey's "Locals Only" program offers to subsidize 20% of a home's cost in exchange for a similar community housing deed restriction for "locals."^{213,214}

In other cases, the cities have purchased and funded the development of new community housing units. The 51-unit community housing "Bluebird Village" in downtown Ketchum is being developed by a cross-sector partnership. In 2023, the City of Hailey purchased one of two townhouses that were deed-restricted as community housing, through a PUD Agreement,²¹⁵ as well as a Tiny Home on Wheels,²¹⁶ to be used for housing Hailey Fire Department staff. In partnership with the City of Hailey, the City of Sun Valley purchased a historic structure on a 2-acre lot-- to develop into community housing for locals.²¹⁷ It is common for employers in Blaine County to invest in housing for their employees.

Support for community housing initiatives is currently at a historic high across the County. In May 2023, voters in Hailey, Ketchum and Sun Valley overwhelmingly voted to renew and reallocate an existing local-option tax (LOT), for community housing efforts.²¹⁸ The success of the ballot measure indicated the widespread acknowledgement of the need to support community housing efforts. The LOT revenue is the first dedicated stream of tax-revenue for community housing in Blaine County.

"Not only does the referendum result in additional financial support for our housing initiatives," Ketchum Mayor Neil Bradshaw told the Idaho Mountain Express newspaper at the time, "but it also clearly demonstrates that our community views workforce housing as a priority for our town."²¹⁹ Under the leadership of the City of Hailey's Mayor Martha Burke--who pledged a public process to deliberate housing solutions and how to spend the newly allocated funding-- the City created a citizens' Housing Committee.²²⁰

Regional Coordination

In addition to the Blaine County government and the five cities therein, community partners in community housing include:

ARCH Community Housing Trust

Blaine County Charitable Fund

Blaine County Housing Authority (BCHA)

Idaho Housing and Finance Association (IHFA)

Wood River Community Housing Trust

Sun Valley Board of Realtors



A single-family community housing unit developed by ARCH Community Housing Trust²²¹



About one third of the community housing units are provided by developers benefiting from federal tax-credits.²²²

Regional Coordination

In addition to the Blaine County government and the five cities therein, community partners in livability include:

Blaine County Recreation District (BCRD)

Blaine County Education Foundation

Blaine County School District

Bureau of Land Management (BLM)

Hailey Urban Renewal Agency

Ketchum Urban Renewal Agency

The Hunger Coalition

The Senior Connection

Spur Foundation

St. Luke's Wood River Foundation

Sun Valley Economic Development (SVED)

Sun Valley Institute for Resilience

Visit Sun Valley

Wood River Trails Coalition

Baseline Characteristics:

LIVABILITY

Among planners, livability is generally regarded as “the sum of various elements that add up to a community’s quality of life— including the built and natural environments, social stability and equity, economic prosperity, educational and cultural opportunity.”²²³ The AARP measures livability for every neighborhood and community across the country, based on assessments of “the services and amenities that affect people’s lives the most.”²²⁴ AARP’s Livability Index relies on housing, neighborhood location, transportation environment, health, engagement and opportunity indicators— because livability is largely influenced by the physical qualities of a place and community.

In seeking to maintain and enhance quality of life for the diversity of people in Blaine County, the Wood River Land Trust’s community planning program will focus on land use decisions that impact livability locally. Livability factors hinge on connection or access to basic needs, access that reduces stress and supports independent living. Local policy statements prioritize livability; valuing access to healthy food, enjoyment of nature, participation in the local economy, social connection to each other and representative leadership, reflecting the diversity of people and cultures in Blaine County.²²⁵

If these are the elements that make for a happy life in Blaine County—if they underpin and amplify “quality of place” in the parlance of Sun Valley Economic Development—some cracks are starting to show. Aspects of this small-town self-image are challenged by growth accelerating in resort areas and gateway communities across the mountain west, including the Wood River Valley.²²⁶

The 2022 Resident Opinion Survey from Visit Sun Valley found that 43% of full-time residents said that the quality of life in the Wood River Valley was in decline, compared to 26% of second-home owners.²²⁷ Locals were also more likely to say that the valley was too crowded, too expensive and changing in ways that concerned them. A smaller percentage of locals (47%) than seasonal residents (63%) said that they were “very proud” of the Wood River Valley as a place to live.²²⁸

These polls, though, fail to capture the whole valley; the south valley communities were underrepresented. Overrepresentation of the northern cities means that respondents were more likely to be older, whiter and wealthier than the valley as a whole— 97% of respondents were white. These older residents are also better equipped to weather the valley’s mounting costs,²²⁹ including housing and food, and are less likely to rely on wages from the local economy for money.²³⁰ While the survey asked important and insightful questions— worthwhile asking again, across the County— its methodology and findings ought to be considered as a symptom of local disparities, rather than representative findings. Why did the survey unintentionally overrepresent the north valley? And, had it considered the opinions of people living in the south valley, would its findings have been different?

The county’s southern cities are not only younger but also more diverse, supporting a large and growing Latino population. In 2023, 45.8% of students in Blaine County School District were Hispanic or Latino; 50.5% were white.²³¹ Carey, the county’s youngest community, is already majority Latino.²³² Compare that to the whole county, where 23.7% of people identified as Hispanic or



Children practiced safe-cycling skills through place-based education with Mountain Rides’ former Safe Routes program in 2021.

Latino, and 73.2% said they were white.²³³

Ketchum and Sun Valley, the cities with the highest housing costs, have median ages of 51 and 64 respectively.²³⁴ The population skews younger moving south: 41 in Hailey; 37 in Bellevue and 30 in Carey.²³⁵ Overall, Blaine

County’s median age rose from 38.8 in 2009 to 45.9 in 2023. From 2021 to 2022, Blaine County had the joint highest jump in median age of any county in the country.²³⁶ The shift in median age is not solely attributed to growth but also population change.²³⁷ People have migrated out of the County, and the people moving in are significantly older and wealthier.^{238,239}

With population change, the County has grown increasingly racially segregated. Based on the U.S. Census Bureau’s racial dissimilarity index, Blaine County is the second most segregated county in Idaho.²⁴⁰ To achieve integration in neighborhoods and cities throughout the County, so that “each neighborhood’s racial/ethnic composition [would] match that of the larger area”²⁴¹ or County, nearly 40% of residents would have to move census tracts.²⁴²

Zooming out, the picture is one of a county with stark disparities— a county that is home to extreme wealth, as well as to a working class struggling to keep pace with the high cost of living. The United Way found that, while Blaine County’s median household income was higher than Idaho’s average, 41% of households here can’t afford the basic cost of living in the area.²⁴³ In 2018, the nonprofit Economic Policy Institute announced Blaine County to be the most unequal county in Idaho, with the top 1% of earners making on average 46.8 times more than the bottom 99%.²⁴⁴ That coefficient makes Blaine the 27th most unequal county in the United States. Looking at other resort mountain towns— Teton County, Wyoming is the most unequal in the country, where the 1% make 142.2 times more than the bottom 99%.²⁴⁵ Only three other mountain resort town counties experience greater inequality than Blaine County— two in Colorado and one in New Hampshire.²⁴⁶

How inequality affects livability— including access to the recreational, social and cultural amenities in Blaine County— is anecdotally understood yet understudied. “Livability is frequently used as an umbrella of indicators. However, in many cases, the indicators are chosen first and then gathered under the livability ‘umbrella’ rather

than following from a distinct conceptual framework.”²⁴⁷ As a community, the planners in Blaine County have not settled on a set of core community values, nor a distinct conceptual framework for livability. Once there is consensus on a local definition for livability, recent studies and data points can be referenced to measure it. From afar, the AARP rates Blaine County as having an Overall Livability Score of 57— ten points above the average county score in the nation and eleven points below the highest scoring county. Within the County, Hailey and Bellevue achieved the highest score of 62. Ketchum scored 61, Sun Valley scored 57 and Carey scored 48.

Acting as a buffer, the local philanthropic community supports a suite of non-profit organizations providing access to basic needs— including housing, food, education and more. The non-profit community significantly offsets the consequences of the socioeconomic disparities in Blaine County, oftentimes “supply[ing] community support where government funding falls short.”²⁴⁸ Across sectors, health and human services organizations consist of the largest number of non-profit organizations in Blaine County; locally, the sector also experienced the most significant increase in non-profit organizations since 2017.²⁴⁹

According to Spur Community Foundation, 8% of annual Blaine County revenue, or \$96 million, comes from nonprofits.²⁵⁰ “The nonprofit sector is a major player in the local economy, supplying 10% of the jobs in Blaine County and paying out about \$30 million in salaries and wages annually to local workers.”

Nonprofits in Focus

Looking at philanthropic giving in 2021, non-profit organizations in the Health and Human Services sector received by far the most funding— \$31,374,000. In order of decreasing magnitude, the Arts and Culture sector received \$14,118,000, Education received \$10,287,000, Environment \$4,298,000, Animal Welfare received \$3,245,000, Sports and Recreation, received \$1,871,000, Housing received \$829,000 and Economic Development received \$482,000.²⁵²



At the height of the COVID pandemic, the City of Ketchum piloted the long-term “open street” vision for downtown 4th Street by closing it to cars and opening it up to people.²⁵³



Teens and staff share a nutritious meal at The Hunger Coalition.²⁵¹

Chapter 2: Shared Goals

PROCESS

Recognizing the significant overlap in Comprehensive Plan policy statements from Blaine County and its cities^{254,255,256,257,258,259}, the Wood River Land Trust scoped the Community Planning program and its action plan objectives (Chapter 3) to stem from goals shared between three or more municipalities. This Chapter 2: Shared Goals presents the shared goals that are a synthesis of the policy statements referred to in the following tables. Furthermore, the following tables present aspirational ideals meant to house and guide shared goals.

POLICY BACKING

For each focus area, see the policy statements that support the shared goal. From the Land Trust's perspective, shared goals in each focus area work towards the following set of ideals.



HABITAT CONSERVATION

IDEAL: Managing growth preserves the open space that affords Blaine County's natural beauty, agricultural lands, wildlife habitats, and environmental resilience.

SHARED GOALS

SUPPORTING OBJECTIVES

H.1 - To preserve open space and the natural features unique to the Blaine County communities, accommodate growth with infill and compact development.

[Blaine County](#) - Chapter 2: Housing, Policy Statements A-1, A-3, A-5. Chapter 5: Natural Environment: Resources, Hazard Areas, and Conservation, Policy Statements C-10. Chapter 6: Public Services, Facilities and Utilities, Policy Statement B-8; Chapter 7: Economic Development, Policy Statement C-6. Chapter 8: Land Use, Policy Statements A-1, A-3, A-8, A-10, C-4, C-5, C-8, LW-7

[City of Bellevue](#) - Chapter 5: Land Use, Goal 1, Objective 1. Chapter 6: Natural Resources, Goal 2, Objective 8. Chapter 12: Housing, Goal 2, Objectives 1, 2. Chapter 13: Community Design, Goal 1, Objective 3.

[City of Hailey](#) - Section 1: Natural Resources, Energy and Air Quality, Goal 1.1. Section 5: Land Use, Population and Growth Management, Goals 5.1, 5.4, 5.6, 5.7.

[City of Ketchum](#) - Chapter 1: Community Vision and Core Values 5, 10. Environmental Quality and Scenic Beauty. Chapter 4: Community Design and Neighborhoods, Goal CD-1, Policy CD-1.3. Goal CD-2, Policies CD-2.2, 2.4; Chapter 6: Parks, Recreation, and Open Space, Goal OS-3, Policies OS-3.1, 3.2. Chapter 12: Future Land Use, Goal LU-1, Policy LU-2.1.

[City of Sun Valley](#) - Principle I: Goal 1, Objectives 1.1, 1.4. Principle II: Goal 5, Objectives 5.1, 5.2.

H.2 - Minimize the impact of development on habitats and wildlife, especially in the floodplain and on hillsides.

[Blaine County](#) - Chapter 3: Recreation, Policy Statements F-1, F-2. Chapter 5: Natural Environment: Resources, Hazard Areas, and Conservation, Policy Statements C-3, C-7, C-8, C-9, C-10. Chapter 8: Land Use, Policy Statements C-6, C-7, LW-9, LW-10, LW-11.

[City of Carey](#) - Land Use, Overlay Areas, Objective 1.

[City of Bellevue](#) - Chapter 6: Natural Resources, Goal 1, Objective 1. Chapter 6: Natural Resources, Goal 2, Objective 2.

[City of Hailey](#) - Section 1: Natural Resources, Energy and Air Quality, Goal 1.1.

[City of Ketchum](#) - Chapter 5: Natural Resource Stewardship, Goal NR1, Policies NR1.1, 1.2, 1.3. Goal NR2, Policies NR2.1. Chapter 6: Parks, Recreation, and Open Space, Goal OS-2, Policies OS2.1.

[City of Sun Valley](#) - Principle I, Goal 1, Objectives 1.2, 1.3.

H.3 - Reduce the risks of natural disasters-- such as avalanches, wildfires, and floods-- through site and community design.

[Blaine County](#) - Chapter 2: Housing, Policy Statement A-4. Chapter 5: Natural Environment: Resources, Hazard Areas, and Conservation, Policy Statements C-10, D-1, D-2, D-4, D-5, D-8. Chapter 6: Public Services, Facilities and Utilities, Policy Statement C-1, C-6. Chapter 7: Economic Development, Policy Statement D-4. Chapter 8: Land Use, Policy Statements LW-8

[City of Carey](#) - Land Use, Overlay Areas, Objectives 2. Hazardous Areas, Objectives 1, 3; Natural Resources, Desirable Goal 2.

[City of Bellevue](#) - Chapter 7 - Hazardous Areas, Goal 2, Objectives 1, 2, 3.

[City of Hailey](#) - Section 2: Hazardous Areas and Wildland Fire Hazards, Goal 2.1.

[City of Ketchum](#) - Chapter 9: Public Safety and Utilities, Goal PSU-1, Policy PSU-1.2, 1.4.

[City of Sun Valley](#) - Principle I, Goal 1, Objective 1.5.

WATER AVAILABILITY

IDEAL: Robust stream flows and groundwater levels sustain watershed health and water availability in Blaine County.

SHARED GOALS	SUPPORTING POLICIES
W.1 - Support the monitoring and management of water consumption, across user groups.	Blaine County - Chapter 5: Natural Environment: Resources, Hazard Areas, and Conservation, Policy Statement E-3, E-5, E-10, E-12. Chapter 6: Public Services, Facilities and Utilities, Water and Wastewater Policy Statements C-8, C-12. Chapter 7: Economic Development, Policy Statement D-7, E-2; Chapter 8: Land Use, Policy Statements B-5, B-8.
	City of Carey - Natural Resources: Desirable Goals 1,3, Objective 1. Land Use, Agricultural/Residential Low Density Areas, Desirable Goal 6.
	City of Bellevue - Chapter 2: Population, Goal 4, Objective 1, Action 4. Chapter 6: Natural Resources, Goal 1, Goal 2, Objective 6; Chapter 8: Public Services, utilities, and Facilities, Goal 1, Objectives 1, 2.
	City of Hailey - Section 1: Natural Resources, Energy and Air Quality, Goals 1.1, 1.2
W.2 - Mitigate the impacts of existing and new development on water availability.	Blaine County - Chapter 5: Natural Environment: Resources, Hazard Areas, and Conservation, Policy Statement E-4, E-13, E-14, E-16. Chapter 6: Public Services, Facilities and Utilities, Water and Wastewater C-9, C-10. Chapter 7: Economic Development, Policy Statement D-7. Chapter 8: Land Use, Policy Statements B-5, B-6.
	City of Carey - Natural Resources: Desirable Goal 1, Objectives 1, 2, 3, 7. Land Use, Agricultural/Residential Low Density Areas, Desirable Goal 7.
	City of Bellevue - Chapter 6: Natural Resources, Goal 2, Objective 4. Chapter 8: Public Services, utilities, and Facilities, Goal 1, Objectives 2. Chapter 13: Community Design, Goal 1, Objective 3.
	City of Ketchum - Chapter 1: Community Vision and Core Value 10. Chapter 4: Community Design and Neighborhoods, Goal CD-2, Policies CD-2.5. Chapter 5: Natural Resource Stewardship, Goal NR-3, Policies NR-3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4. Goal NR-4, Policies NR-4.1, 4.2, 4.3; Goal NR-6, Policy NR-6.5. Goal NR-8, Policy NR-8.1. Chapter 9: Public Safety and Utilities, Goal PSU-2, Policy PSU-2.1
W.3 - Reduce water consumption to support fishery health.	Blaine County - Chapter 5: Natural Environment: Resources, Hazard Areas, and Conservation, Policy Statement E-6, E-7, E-8, E-9.
	City of Hailey - Section 1: Natural Resources, Energy and Air Quality, Goal 1.1.
	City of Ketchum - Chapter 1: Community Vision and Core Value 6. Chapter 5: Natural Resource Stewardship, Goal NR-1, Policies NR-1.2.
	City of Sun Valley - Principle 1: Goal 1, Objective 1.3.

TRANSPORTATION MOBILITY

IDEAL: A multi-modal transportation network increases land use efficiency, connectivity, and mode choice in Blaine County.

SHARED GOALS	SUPPORTING POLICIES
T.1 - Leverage land-use decisions to reduce automobile dependency and single-occupancy vehicle travel.	Blaine County - Chapter 1: Transportation, Policy Statements A-2, A-4, A-5, A-7, B-2, B-3, C-6, E-3, E-4, E-5. Chapter 2: Housing - Policy Statement A-5; Chapter 6: Public Services, Facilities and Utilities, Health and Social Services Policy Statement, C-18. School Facilities and Transportation, C-19; Chapter 8: Land Use, Policy Statement C-13.
	City of Carey - Transportation System, Desirable Goal 1. Economic Development, Desirable Goal 1.
	City of Bellevue - Chapter 3: School Facilities and Transportation, Goal 1, Objectives 1, 3. Chapter 9: Transportation, Goal 1, Objectives 3, 4, 5. Chapter 12: Housing, Goal 1, Objective 1.
	City of Hailey - Section 5: Land Use, Population and Growth Management, Goals 5.1, 5.2, 5.5. Section 13: School Facilities and Transportation, Goal 13.1.
	City of Ketchum - Chapter 7: Mobility, Goal M-1, Policies M-1.1, 1.3. Goal M-2, Policies M-2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.8. Goal M-6, Policy 6.3; Goal M-8, Policies M-8.3, 8.4, 8.5.
	City of Sun Valley - Principle I, Goal 3, Objective 3.1. Principle II, Goal 5, Objective 5.3.
T.2 - Enhance the Main Street corridors for the safety and enjoyment of all road users, especially pedestrians and commuters.	Blaine County - Chapter 1: Transportation, Policy Statements A-10, C-1, C-3, E-6, E-7.
	City of Carey - Transportation System, Objective 7.
	City of Bellevue - Chapter 7: Hazardous Areas, Goal 2, Objective 5. Chapter 9: Transportation, Goal 1, Objectives 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. Chapter 13: Community Design, Goal 1, Objective 2.
	City of Ketchum - Chapter 7: Mobility, Goal M-1, Policies M-1.2. Goal M-4, Policies M-4.1. Goal M-7, Policy M-7.1.
T.3 - Promote active and public transportation options for residents and visitors.	Blaine County - Chapter 1: Transportation, Policy Statements A-2, A-4, A-6, A-7, A-11, B-1, B-2, B-3, B-4, B-5, D-2, E-1, E-3, E-4, E-5, E-7. Chapter 3: Recreation, Policy Statements E-2, E-3, E-5, E-7, E-9. Chapter 7: Economic Development, Policy Statements C-11.
	City of Bellevue - Chapter 3: School Facilities and Transportation, Goal 1, Objectives 1, 3. Chapter 7: Hazardous Areas, Goal 2, Objective 5. Chapter 9: Transportation, Goal 1, Objectives 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. Chapter 10: Recreation, Goal 1, Objectives 5. Chapter 13: Community Design, Goal 1, Objective 2.
	City of Hailey - Section 10: Transportation, Goal 10.1. Section 13: School Facilities and Transportation, Goal 13.2.
	City of Ketchum - Chapter 1: Community Vision and Core Values 10. Chapter 7: Mobility, Goal M-1, Policies M-1.3. Goal M-2, Policies M-2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 2.7, 2.8. Goal M-4, Policies M-4.1. Goal M-5, Policies M-5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4. Goal M-6, Policies M-6.1, 6.2, 6.3. Goal M-7, Policy M-7.2. Goal M-8, Policies M-8.1, 8.2. Chapter 10: Community Health and Wellness, Goal CHW-4, Policies CHW-4.1, 4.2.
	City of Sun Valley - Principle II, Goal 7, Objectives 7.1, 7.2, 7.3, 7.4. Principle III, Goal 8, Objectives 8.4.

COMMUNITY HOUSING

IDEAL: Infill and redevelopment meets the community's needs with housing that is stable, comfortable, and affordable to the people who work in Blaine County.

SHARED GOALS	SUPPORTING POLICIES
CH.1 - Support the provision and monitor the need for community housing units.	Blaine County - Chapter 2: Housing, Policy Statements C-1, C-2, C-3, C-4, C-5, C-6, C-7, C-8, D-1, D-2. Chapter 6: Public Services, Facilities and Utilities, Health and Social Services, C-18. Chapter 8: Land Use, Policy Statement A-5, A-6, C-2.
	City of Carey - Housing, Desirable Goals 1, 5. Land Use, Future Land Use Objectives 5, 7.
	City of Bellevue - Chapter 2: Population, Goal 3, Objective 1.
	City of Hailey - Section 7: Demographics, Cultural Vitality, Social Diversity & Well-Being, Goal 7.1. Section 8: Housing, Goal 8.1
	City of Ketchum - Chapter 3: Housing, Goal H-1, Policies H-1.1, 1.2; Goal H-2, Policy H-2.1.
	City of Sun Valley - Principle I, Goal 3, Objective 3.1.
CH.2 - Support the option for the people of Blaine County to live where they work.	Blaine County - Chapter 2: Housing, Policy Statements A-1, A-3.
	City of Ketchum - Chapter 3: Housing, Goal H-1, Policy H-1.1, 1.2.
	City of Sun Valley - Principle I, Goal 3, Objective 3.1. Principle III, Goal 8, Objectives 8.3.
CH.3 - Encourage a diversity of unit types to accommodate the range of housing needs in Blaine County.	Blaine County - Chapter 2: Housing, Policy Statements B-1, B-3, B-4, B-5, B-6, B-9, B-10, B-11. Chapter 6: Public Services, Facilities and Utilities, Health and Social Services, C-18.
	City of Carey - Housing, Desirable Goals 1, 2; Objectives 1, 2.
	City of Bellevue - Chapter 12: Housing, Goal 1, Objective 1; Goal 2, Objectives 1, 2.
	City of Hailey - Section 8: Housing, Goal 8.1.
	City of Ketchum - Chapter 3: Housing, Goal H-1, Policy H-1.1, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5; Goal H-3, Policies H-3.1, 3.2, 3.3
	City of Sun Valley - Principle I, Goal 3, Objective 3.1.



*Hailey's Comprehensive Plan articulates the economic, environmental and social benefits "realized when workers live in their own community"-- as a basis for their two Section 8: Housing goals. However, the exact wording of the goals does not align them with Shared Goal CH.2 (see page 38).

LIVABILITY

IDEAL: Land use decisions enhance quality of life for the diversity of people in Blaine County, across demographics.

SHARED GOALS	SUPPORTING POLICIES
L.1 - Community design supports access to basic needs.	Blaine County - Chapter 1: Transportation, Policy Statements A-2, A-4, A-6, A-7, A-11, B-1, B-2, B-3, B-4, B-5, D-2, E-1, E-3, E-4, E-5, E-7. Chapter 3: Recreation, Policy Statements E-5, E-9, F-6. Chapter 7: Economic Development, Policy Statements C-1, C-11, C-13. Chapter 8: Land Use, Policy Statements LW-5, LW-13.
	City of Carey - Transportation System, Desirable Goal 3. Housing, Desirable Goals 1, 5, 6. Recreation, Desirable Goals 4, 5. Education Facilities, Desirable Goal 6
	City of Bellevue - Chapter 2: Population, Goal 3, Objective 1. Chapter 3: School Facilities and Transportation, Goal 1, Objectives 1, 3. Chapter 4: Economic Development, Goal 1. Chapter 5: Land Use, Goal 3, Objectives 1, 3. Chapter 7: Hazardous Areas, Goal 2, Objective 5. Chapter 9: Transportation, Goal 1, Objectives 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. Chapter 10: Recreation, Goal 1, Objective 5. Chapter 12: Housing, Goal 1, Objective 1. Chapter 13: Community Design, Goal 1, Objective 2.
	City of Hailey - Section 6: Economic Development, Goal 6.2. Section 10: Transportation, Goal 10.1. Section 13: School Facilities and Transportation, Goal 13.2.
	City of Ketchum - Chapter 3: Housing, Goal H-1, Policies 1.2, 1.4; Goal H-2, Policy H-2.1. Chapter 6: Parks, Recreation and Open Space, Goal OS-1, Policies OS-1.1, 1.2, 1.5. Chapter 7: Mobility, Goal M-2, Policies M-2.1, 2.8; Goal M-4, Policies M-4.1; Goal M-5, Policies M-5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4; Goal M-6, Policies M-6.1, 6.2, 6.3. Chapter 10: Community Health and Wellness, Goal CHW-4, Policies CHW-4.1, 4.2; Goal CHW-5, Policies CHW-5.1, 5.2, 5.3. Chapter 11: High Performing Community, Goal HI-8, Policy HI-8.1.
	City of Sun Valley - Principle I, Goal 3, Objectives 3.1, 3.5. Principle II, Goal 6, Objective 6.1; Goal 7, Objectives 7.1, 7.2, 7.3. Principle III, Goal 8, Objectives 8.1, 8.3, 8.4.
L.2 - Increase community inclusion, representation and connectedness in the planning and design of public spaces.	Blaine County - Chapter 3: Recreation, Policy Statements E-1, F-4. Chapter 8: Land Use, Policy Statement A-, LW-1.
	City of Carey - Historical Background, Special Areas and Sites Section, Desirable Goal 1
	City of Bellevue - Chapter 2: Population, Goal 5, Objective 1. Chapter 10: Recreation, Goal 1, Objective 1. Chapter 13: Community Design, Goal 1, Objectives 1, 2.
	City of Hailey - Section 7: Demographic, Cultural Vitality, Social Diversity & Well-Being, Goal 7.1. Section 11: Community Design, Goal 11.1.
	City of Ketchum - Chapter 11: High Performing Community, Goal HI-3, Policies 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4; Goal HI-5, Policies HI-5.2, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5; Goal HI-7, Policies HI-7.1, 7.2, 7.3; Goal HI-8, Policy HI-8.1.
L.3 - Land use decisions support healthy environments and lifestyles.	Blaine County - Chapter 1: Transportation, Policy Statements A-2, A-4, A-6, A-7, A-11, B-1, B-2; Chapter 3: Recreation, Policy Statements B-3, B-4, C-1, C-2, C-3, C-4, C-5, C-6, C-7, C-8, D-1, D-2, D-3, D-4, D-5, D-6, E-4, E-6, E-8, F-1, F-2, LW-7. Chapter 5: Natural Environment, Policy Statement C-11, C-16. Chapter 8: Land Use, Policy Statements A-6, A-9, SC-9, NV/G-5, C&Y-3, C&Y-4.
	City of Carey - Recreation, Desirable Goals 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.
	City of Bellevue - Chapter 4: Economic Development, Goal 1. Chapter 5: Land Use, Goal 3, Objective 3. Chapter 6: Natural Resources, Goal 2, Objective 3, 4, 7, 8. Chapter 8: Land Use, Policy Statement A-9. Chapter 9: Transportation, Goal 1, Objectives 1, 2, 3, 4, 5; Chapter 10: Recreation, Goal 1, Objective 1, 5. Chapter 13: Community Design, Goal 1, Objective 3.
	City of Hailey - Section 1: Natural Resources, Energy and Air Quality, Goals 1.1, 1.5. Section 4: Recreation, Parks and Lands, Goal 4.1. Section 5: Land Use, Population and Growth Management, Goals 5.4, 5.5.
	City of Ketchum - Chapter 4: Community Design and Neighborhoods, Goal CD-2, Policy CD-2.1. Chapter 6: Parks, Recreation and Open Space, Goal OS-1, Policies OS-1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 1.7, 1.8; Goal OS-2, Policies OS-2.1, 2.2; Goal OS-3, Policies OS-3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5. Chapter 10: Community Health and Wellness, Goal CHW-4, Policies CHW-4.1, 4.2, 4.3; Goal CHW-6, Policies 6.1, 6.2.
	City of Sun Valley - Principle I, Goal 1, Objectives 1.1, 1.3, 1.4; Goal 3, Objective 3.2. Principle II, Goal 7, Objectives 7.4. Principle III, Goal 8, Objectives 8.2.

Chapter 3: Action Plan

APPROACHES

In shaping the scope and objectives of the Community Planning program at the Land Trust, the leaders in local government identified five approaches through which they welcome our support and partnership:



ENGAGE:

Centering the community, the “engage” approach describes how the Land Trust will listen to, share information with, and involve stakeholders in land use planning. On various levels and through a mix of mediums, we will facilitate and host conversations about how to steward a more livable future for the people and wildlife of Blaine County.



EVALUATE:

The “evaluate” approach prioritizes access to up-to-date information. Reliable and relevant data is necessary to respond to the community’s concerns, inform planning decisions, and prioritize solutions. Importantly, accurate information can also help build consensus. We see where there are gaps in knowledge and understanding, then collaborate with partners to investigate the dynamics behind community needs and potential solutions.



EDUCATE:

When community issues or needs arise, they generally stem from a complex combination of factors. Ecological, hydrologic, geographic, economic and social trends influence the baseline characteristics of the Community Planning focus areas– summed up in our lived experience. Education supports us to understand the complexity of our lived experience, including the challenges we need to resolve and the solutions that support our shared goals.



ENCOURAGE:

The Land Trust recognizes the remarkable alignment between its vision for conservation and the shared goals of our leading partners, in local government. All the while, the Land Trust understands the pressures of competing priorities and developmental markets that threaten to compromise the bountiful environment and quality of life that the local community cherishes. The Land Trust is prepared to encourage its partners to act in alignment with our core values, when it’s most important to do so.



COORDINATE:

When the community needs a leader to address a community need or problem, the Land Trust is poised to coordinate solutions. Coordination involves going between people and groups to organize deliberation, resolution and action. Being flexible– plus overseeing a service area that is regional, not just local– the Land Trust is well positioned to work up and down the valley, between jurisdictions. Coordination is needed to coexist and make efficient use of resources.

OBJECTIVES

For each focus area and shared goal, see a subset of high-level objectives. The objectives abide by the aforementioned approaches in Chapter 3: Action Plan, Approaches. Objectives are intended to be broad, so that they offer flexibility in implementation. See the following section, Chapter 3 Action Plan, Implementation, for information about how objectives will be prioritized and over time.

HABITAT CONSERVATION

Ideal: Smart growth preserves the open space that affords Blaine County’s natural beauty, agricultural lands, wildlife habitats, and environmental resilience.

SHARED GOALS	OBJECTIVES	
H.1 - Accommodate growth with infill and compact development, to preserve open space and the natural features unique to the Blaine County communities.	H.1.a - Engage the community and governmental partners to embrace compact development, envisioning and mapping growth boundaries.	
	H.1.b - Educate homeowners and the wider community about the environmental benefits of compact development, including its relevance to open space preservation.	
	H.1.c - Educate the community about the characteristics and driving forces behind sprawl.	
	H.1.d - Evaluate land use regulations in the floodplain and canyons to clarify the environmental impacts and trade-offs.	
	H.1.e - Evaluate land use efficiency broadly, including opportunities for infill and redevelopment on vacant and underutilized land, within city limits and impact areas.	
	H.1.f - Encourage incentives to preserve agricultural lands.	
	H.1.g - Coordinate a revamp of the Transfer of Development Rights program to incorporate a bank, communications hub, and the south valley cities.	
	H.2 - Minimize the impact of development on habitats and wildlife, especially in the floodplain and on hillsides.	H.2.a - Encourage projects and programs that minimize human-wildlife interactions.
		H.2.b - Encourage incentives to preserve open space near critical and sensitive areas.
H.2.c - Coordinate incentives for river, tributary, and floodplain reconnection.		
H.2.d - Coordinate incentives to replace rip rap on streambanks with natural treatments.		
H.2.e - Coordinate incentives to support backyard habitats.		
H.2.f - Coordinate incentives to remove fencing that is not wildlife friendly		
H.3 - Reduce the risks of natural disasters-- such as avalanches, wildfires, and floods-- through site and community design.	H.3.a - Educate the community about the importance of open space and compact community design to community resilience.	
	H.3.b - Educate the community about how natural flood treatments can mitigate the risks of flooding.	
	H.3.c - Coordinate incentives for residents to mitigate the risks of wildland fire on their properties.	

WATER AVAILABILITY

Ideal: Healthy stream flows and groundwater levels maintain long-term fishery health and water availability in Blaine County.

SHARED GOALS	OBJECTIVES
W.1 - Support the monitoring and management of water consumption, across user groups.	W.1.a - Engage the community to be aware of current stream flows, known ground water levels, seasonal predictions, and water usage across the County.
	W.1.b - Educate the community about the connections between climate change, water availability, and the need to conserve water.
	W.1.c - Encourage increased monitoring of water levels, diversions, and usage.
	W.1.d - Encourage participation in conjunctive management.
	W.1.e - Encourage caps for different uses.
	W.1.f - Coordinate water demand reduction strategies, locally and regionally.
W.2 - Mitigate the impacts of existing and new development on water availability.	W.2.a - Engage the community in growth scenario planning for the management of ecosystem services and natural resources, like water.
	W.2.b - Evaluate prospective water usage with developable land.
	W.2.c - Evaluate water usage of domestic irrigation.
	W.2.d - Educate the community about how compact development uses water more efficiently.
	W.2.e - Coordinate incentives for developments to incorporate water retention systems.
	W.2.f - Coordinate the development of incentives for water smart landscaping- for individual users, HOA's, as well as landscaping companies.
SHARED GOAL 3: W.3 - Reduce water consumption to support fishery health.	W.3.a - Engage community partners to lease, sell, and donate their water rights for conservation efforts.
	W.3.b - Evaluate the minimum stream flows necessary for fishery health in critical areas.
	W.3.c - Encourage agreements that transfer senior water rights to augment minimum stream flow rights.
	W.3.d - Coordinate easements that reduce water consumption.

TRANSPORTATION MOBILITY

Ideal: A multi-modal transportation network increases land use efficiency, connectivity, and mode choice in Blaine County.

SHARED GOALS	OBJECTIVES
T.1 - Leverage land-use decisions to reduce automobile dependency and single-occupancy vehicle travel.	T.1.a - Evaluate how much land in the cities is designated for passenger vehicle parking.
	T.1.b - Educate the community about the relationship between land use patterns and travel behavior.
	T.1.c - Encourage transit oriented design and first/last-mile solutions in land use planning.
T.2 - Enhance the Main Street corridors for the safety and enjoyment of all road users, especially pedestrians.	T.2.a - Engage the public in the large infrastructure projects slated for State Highway 75, along the rural and the downtown sections.
	T.2.b - Educate the community about infrastructure designs that incentivize modes of travel that would increase land use efficiency, connectivity, and mode choice in Blaine County.
	T.3.c - Evaluate the origins and destinations of commuter trips on State Highway 75.
	T.3.d - Encourage infrastructure that increases and enhances mobility options on State Highway 75.
T.3 - Promote active and public transportation options for residents and visitors.	T.3.a - Engage the City governments to become designated as Bicycle Friendly Communities through the League of American Bicyclists.
	T.3.b - Engage the community in mode shift, as well as in the public processes behind transit service design and active transportation network decisions.
	T.3.c - Evaluate transit travel time reliability and seasonal congestion metrics.
	T.3.d - Encourage an initiative to guarantee funding for transit services.
	T.3.e - Encourage mobility options for older adults and people with disabilities.
	T.3.f - Coordinate the provision, monitoring, and sharing of transportation data across the County.



COMMUNITY HOUSING

Ideal: Infill and redevelopment meets the community's needs with housing that is stable, comfortable, and affordable to the people who work in Blaine County.

SHARED GOALS	OBJECTIVES
CH.1 - Support the provision and monitor the need for community housing units.	CH.1.a - Evaluate the nexus between new market-rate development, job generation, and community housing needs.
	CH.1.b - Educate the community about the current provision of market-rate and community housing for households across different income groups and municipalities.
	CH.1.c - Educate the community on the municipal definitions of community housing and how it is created, preserved, and managed.
CH.2 - Support the option for the people of Blaine County to live where they work.	CH.2.a - Engage the community to discuss the benefits of housing developments that increase land use efficiency and provide community housing.
	CH.2.b - Engage the community in scenario planning to understand how community housing needs may increase if economic leakage decreases.
	CH.2.c - Encourage planning and zoning incentives to build or fund community housing units near employment hubs.
	CH.2.d - Coordinate the community housing development of the West Bullion Street property.
CH.3 - Encourage a diversity of unit types to accommodate the range of housing needs in Blaine County.	CH.3.a - Educate the community about the benefits of diverse housing structure types, especially smaller units, to smart growth and compact community design.
	CH.3.b - Encourage the development of Municipal Code incentives to diversify housing unit types in single-family zoning districts, including but not limited to plexification and co-housing solutions.
	CH.3.c - Encourage the live/work units in single-use zoning districts.



LIVABILITY

Ideal: Land use decisions enhance quality of life for the diversity of people in Blaine County, across demographics.

SHARED GOALS	OBJECTIVES
L.1 - Community design supports access to basic needs.	L.1.a - Educate the community about the overlap between livability and the other, aforementioned program focus areas.
	L.1.b - Educate the community about the benefits of mixed-use development to mobility and social connectedness, as well as to smart growth.
	L.1.c - Encourage the creation and enhancement of public spaces with universal access.
	L.1.d - Encourage higher density development along transit corridors.
	L.1.e - Coordinate the development and piloting of Municipal Code that introduce mixed-uses in single-use zoning districts.
L.2 - Increase community inclusion and representation in the planning and design of public spaces.	L.2.a - Engage a diversity of people to participate in land use planning and decisions.
	L.2.b - Engage community partners in the regional and local food system in land use planning and decisions.
	L.2.c - Encourage the local governments to build capacity for Spanish language translation and community engagement.
	L.2.d - Coordinate regular updates to the Resident Opinion survey to understand and track sentiments about quality of place, including groups of people who are underrepresented in the community.
L.3 - Land use decisions support healthy environments and lifestyles.	L.3.a - Engage the local cities to join the Main Street America Network, and other rural development initiatives that center environmental and social sustainability.
	L.3.b - Engage the community experience and discuss the benefits of compact development patterns to community health.
	L.3.c - Encourage the development and improvement of Municipal Code that protects view corridors, dark skies, air quality, noise control, and water quality across Blaine County.
	L.3.d - Coordinate placemaking demonstrations and events that encourage physical activity and social connectedness.
	L.3.e - Coordinate a case study on Blaine County communities as part of the Gateway and Natural Amenity Region (GNAR) Initiative.

IMPLEMENTATION

At the start of our fiscal year every spring, the Wood River Land Trust compiles its Annual Operating Plan (AOP). Priority objectives from the lands, river and community planning programs make up the AOP. Going forward, the community planning program will designate objectives from the Chapter 3 Action Plan in the AOP and update the timeline below. See below for a timeline of the 2024-2025 priority objectives, organized by color and focus area.

Habitat Conservation

H.1.g - Coordinate a revamp of the Transfer of Development Rights program to incorporate a bank, communications hub, and the south valley cities.

H.2.e - Coordinate incentives to support backyard habitats.

Water Availability

W.2.a - Engage the community in growth scenario planning for the management of ecosystem services and natural resources, like water.

W.2.e - Coordinate incentives for developments to incorporate water retention systems.

W.2.f - Coordinate the development of incentives for water smart landscaping- for individual users, HOA's, as well as landscaping companies.

Community Housing

CH.1.c - Educate the community on the municipal definitions of community housing and how it is created, preserved, and managed.

CH.1.b - Educate the community about the current provision of market-rate and community housing for households across different income groups and municipalities.

CH.2.d - Coordinate the community housing development of the West Bullion Street property.

CH.1.a - Evaluate the nexus between new market-rate development, job generation, and community housing needs.

Transportation Mobility

T.2.a - Engage the public in the large infrastructure projects slated for State Highway 75, along the rural and the downtown sections.

T.3.d - Encourage infrastructure that increases and enhances mobility options on State Highway 75.

Spring
2024

Summer
2024

Fall
2024

Winter
2025

Spring
2025

Conclusion:

Residents of gateway communities throughout the West report feeling overwhelmed by the forces shaping their hometowns, and local officials often say they're under-equipped to manage the storm.²⁶⁰ But the pressure driving these challenges has also shaped a range of innovative approaches and place-based tools for managing growth in the rural American West.²⁶¹ The Land Trust's Community Planning program has joined this growing roster as another hand equipped to steward a sustainable, livable future in Blaine County.

The process of scoping the Community Planning program has been as important as the product that is this guiding document. From fall 2023 through spring 2024, more than 50 staff people from about 20 organizations informed the basis and approach of the Community Planning program. Even more Wood River Land Trust supporters and members of the community established the five focus areas in 2022. The concerns of the wider community, as well as the advice of close community partners, has shaped the substance of this document and the scope of the new Community Planning program.

Both the process and product highlighted two overarching threads. Firstly, many community partners are already aligned in their community vision and policy statements. There are numerous forums where regional coordination is happening and effective. Secondly, the issues that threaten the cherished qualities of Blaine County are not confined to any one town or jurisdiction. They jeopardize shared goals up and down the valley, across the County. Sustainability issues consist of interwoven dynamics that test our environmental, economic and social fabric— they don't heed traditional boundaries. They demand proactive, regional solutions that can match their scale and scope.

With support of the cities and Blaine County, the Wood River Land Trust's Community Planning program will leverage its role in conservation, regional purview and robust philanthropic engagement to take on the approaches and objectives identified in the Chapter 3: Action Plan. Through public engagement, data evaluation, community education, policy encouragement, and project coordination— the Community Planning program will enhance local capacity to address community needs and propel effective solutions. Altogether— championing cross-sector partnerships and local relationships— we are better prepared to manage growth for conservation and steward a more livable future in Blaine County.

The objectives laid out in the Chapter 3: Action Plan are intentionally broad, they allow for flexibility in implementation. Each year, the Community Planning program will communicate which objectives it will pursue and how— in the organization's Annual Operating Plan. As our community evolves, so must our approach. The Land Trust plans to update this document's policy inventory and action plan every three to five years to reflect changes on the ground, acknowledge gaps in our knowledge as we find them and celebrate progress as we make it.



Endnotes:

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