

# Swan Valley-Condon Area Plan

## Introduction

### Vision Statement

The people of the Swan Valley, Montana are committed to establishing, and maintaining control of their own destiny, respecting their daily customs and culture, while acknowledging their heritage and rural character. The community supports a sustainable local economy based on small service and low impact manufacturing while maintaining the valley as a unique place with its wild grandeur, natural beauty, and fully functional ecosystems.

### Statement of Purpose

The Swan Valley-Condon Area Plan articulates the growth policy for the Upper Swan Valley. We seek to ensure that the Swan Valley community maintains its independence, cultural and historical heritage, and wild ecosystems. This plan provides guidelines, decision-making policy, and criteria for the Swan Valley Community Council, land use planners in the Missoula County Office of Planning and Grants, Rural Initiatives, the Board of County Commissioners, Federal, State, and County agencies, and other private organizations and citizens involved in decisions that affect present and future growth in the Swan Valley.

### Planning Background and Process

The Swan Valley-Condon Area Plan supersedes the 1996 Swan Valley-Condon Comprehensive Plan. This regional plan is authorized under the authority of a governing body to adopt neighborhood plans. “Neighborhood plan means a plan for a geographic area within the boundaries of the jurisdictional area that addresses one or more of the elements of the growth policy in more detail.” Mont. Code Ann. § 76-1-103.

This area plan is organized in conformance with the Missoula County-Wide Growth Policy. It addresses:

- Natural Resources and Environment
- Economic Development
- Land Use
- Housing
- Transportation
- Public Facilities & Services
- Implementation

In the summer of 2012, ten envisioning sessions were held around the planning area from May through August and 513 total comments were collected and recorded. At each session, the following questions were used to focus the group and begin discussions:

- 1. What do you love and treasure about the Swan Valley that you don’t want to see changed?**

2. **What concerns do you have for the future of the Swan Valley?**
3. **What changes, if any, would you like to see?**
4. **What do you want the community to look and be like in the future?**

With information from the envisioning sessions, the Planning Committee formulated goals, policies, and actions (GPA) for each element. During the summer of 2014, these statements were taken back to the community in a series of neighborhood meetings. Based upon comments received at those meetings, the Committee further refined the statements, and had them reviewed and tentatively approved by the Community Council. Through November, 2015, the Committee met monthly (and sometimes more often) to address the issues raised in the community meetings and to draft the text of each element.

For purposes of formulating this plan, the following working definitions of each of these terms was used:

**Goal:** Goals are general statements of desired outcomes of the community. While often broadly written, goals should be stated specifically enough so that it is possible to assess whether progress has been made in achieving them. (add citation)

**Policy:** a set of principles that guide an agency or organization. Policies are mostly (but not exclusively) directed toward Missoula County.

**Actions:** specific items to be accomplished or programs to be developed and carried out. Action statements contained in the plan directed toward both the County and the community as appropriate.

For background information on the history and culture and for its descriptions of natural resources, this plan draws heavily on the *Upper Swan Valley Landscape Assessment, 2004*, sponsored and prepared by the Swan Ecosystem Center, and the *Draft Swan Valley and Condon Community Profile, 2010*, prepared by the Growth Policy Committee of the Swan Valley Community Council.

### **Planning Premises**

At the very outset of this planning process, the Committee wished to make it clear that there were certain premises on which this area plan is based. These premises are listed below:

1. **The residents, property owners, and business people of the Upper Swan Valley are an integral part of the landscape and ecosystem.**
2. **As a result of the Montana Legacy Project, land acreage available for development is approximately 10.6% of the total land in the planning area. 87.2% of the planning area's total acreage is public land.**
3. **The permanent population of the Upper Swan Valley is declining, but the total number of housing units is increasing.**

- 4. The local population is aging. This impacts the types of community services needed and has affected the Swan Valley Elementary School, emergency services, and local economy.**

### **Planning Area Population**

The total population of the Upper Swan Valley planning area has remained fairly steady since the year 2000. According to the U.S. Census, the 2010 population was 521, down from 576 in 2000. The decline of 9.5% over the 10-year period occurred during a period when the population for Missoula County as a whole increased by 14.1%. The 1996 Swan Valley Plan reported a population of about 450 people that permanently reside in the Missoula County portion of the Swan Valley.

In 2000, the median age in the planning area was 46.7 years compared to the Missoula County median age of 33.2 years, By 2010 the median age in the planning area had risen to 55.6 years, a 19.5% increase in only ten years. The 2010 median age for Missoula County was 34.3 years and for Montana as a whole, 39.8 years old.

This spike in the median age of the planning area population can be explained by shifts at both ends of the age cohort scale. In 2000, there were 100 children 14 years of age or younger. By 2010 this number was only 63. In 2000, there were 144 people age 65 to 84, but by 2010 this number had risen to 188. This substantiates what residents of the Upper Swan Valley already know, and that is families with children are leaving the area and very few (if any) are moving in. Also in 2010, persons 65 years of age and older comprised 25.9% of all persons in the planning area, while the percentages of persons of this age in Missoula County and the state were 11.4% and 14.8 respectively. These factors indicate that people who are relocating to the Upper Swan tend to be retirees.

The aging of the planning area population is not expected to change anytime soon unless some type of economic activity is brought to the Upper Swan, or at least to some other area within reasonable commuting distance. And with a 2010 population of only 96 persons aged 20 to 44, that raises the question that if a new business or industry were to relocate to (or start up in) the Upper Swan Valley, would there be a ready work force with such a small population of working age persons? Job opportunities bring job seekers. The more likely scenario for any new business or industry would be to 'bring their workforce with them', which would result in new working age persons locating in the area. With the Valley's small labor force, any new business will probably result in some in-migration.

### **1.0 Natural Resources and Environment Element**

While most communities are defined by their built environment, the Upper Swan Valley is defined by its natural environment and resources. Clear flowing streams, timbered mountainsides, and abundant wildlife contribute to a wildness, rural character, and wilderness qualities that set the Upper Swan apart. During the visioning session and neighborhood meetings held during the early stages of this planning process, residents

identified rural character and wilderness qualities as assets worth preserving even as the community grows and changes.

## 1.1 Forest Communities

There are five basic forest communities in the Upper Swan:

- Valley Bottom
- Moderate warm Ponderosa pine
- Cold, steep, forested
- Cold, steep, non-forested
- Cool, moist

With few exceptions, land development in the Upper Swan has taken place in the valley bottom and moderate warm Ponderosa pine forest community. Areas within the cool, moist and cold, steep, forested communities have historically produced commercial timber. The Forest Community map from the *Landscape Assessment* is provided on page 4.

**Valley bottom:** As its name implies, this forest community encompasses most of the valley floor. It runs along both sides of Hwy. 83 in the northern part of the valley, and along the west side in the southern part of the valley. The valley floor is undulating but generally flat.

Productive soils and ready access made this area popular for homesteading and subsequent development of mostly large-lot residential properties. Where development has not occurred, the area is forested with a variety of conifer and deciduous trees. Upland portions of the forest are a mix of western larch, western white pine, lodgepole pine, Douglas fir, Ponderosa pine, Englemann spruce, and grand and subalpine fir.

The Swan River, numerous tributaries and the adjacent riparian zones are travel corridors for large and small animals. Riparian areas generally feature cottonwood, birch, and aspen around their borders. This mix of upland and riparian forest habitats provide the basic necessities of food, water, and cover for wildlife. Much of this area is valuable habitat for a number of species.

Typical of a glaciated landscape, the valley floor is interspersed with wetlands consisting of fens, marshes, vernal pools, and ponds. Some of these wetlands are large and complex, such as the Glacier Slough. Others are extremely small and simple in structure. As the *Landscape Assessment* points out, existing maps and photos do not adequately show the number or types of wetlands present in this area. Depending on type and location, wetlands can be beneficial for holding moisture longer into the summer, as firebreaks, wildlife water and shelter areas, and for recharging ground water. Without an adequate wetland inventory and assessment, it is difficult to evaluate the benefit of individual or even small groups of wetlands that might be proposed to be altered for development.

**Moderate, warm Ponderosa pine:** Generally, this forest community comprises the remainder of the valley floor in the Upper Swan Valley planning area. In the southern (upper) area of the valley, it runs generally from Hwy. 83 to the foot of the Swan Range, and tapers down to a much

thinner transition area against the foothills of the Swan Range in the northern half of the planning area. To the east lies the cool, moist forest community which is mostly in public ownership with little if any development expected over the planning period.

Like the valley bottom, the moderate, warm Ponderosa pine forest community features a pattern of riparian areas and potholes, but is also characterized by Ponderosa pine and western larch growing in the higher and drier areas. The presence of these trees makes this forest community different from others in the valley. Also, the climate is warmer and drier than the valley floor because it is generally west facing.

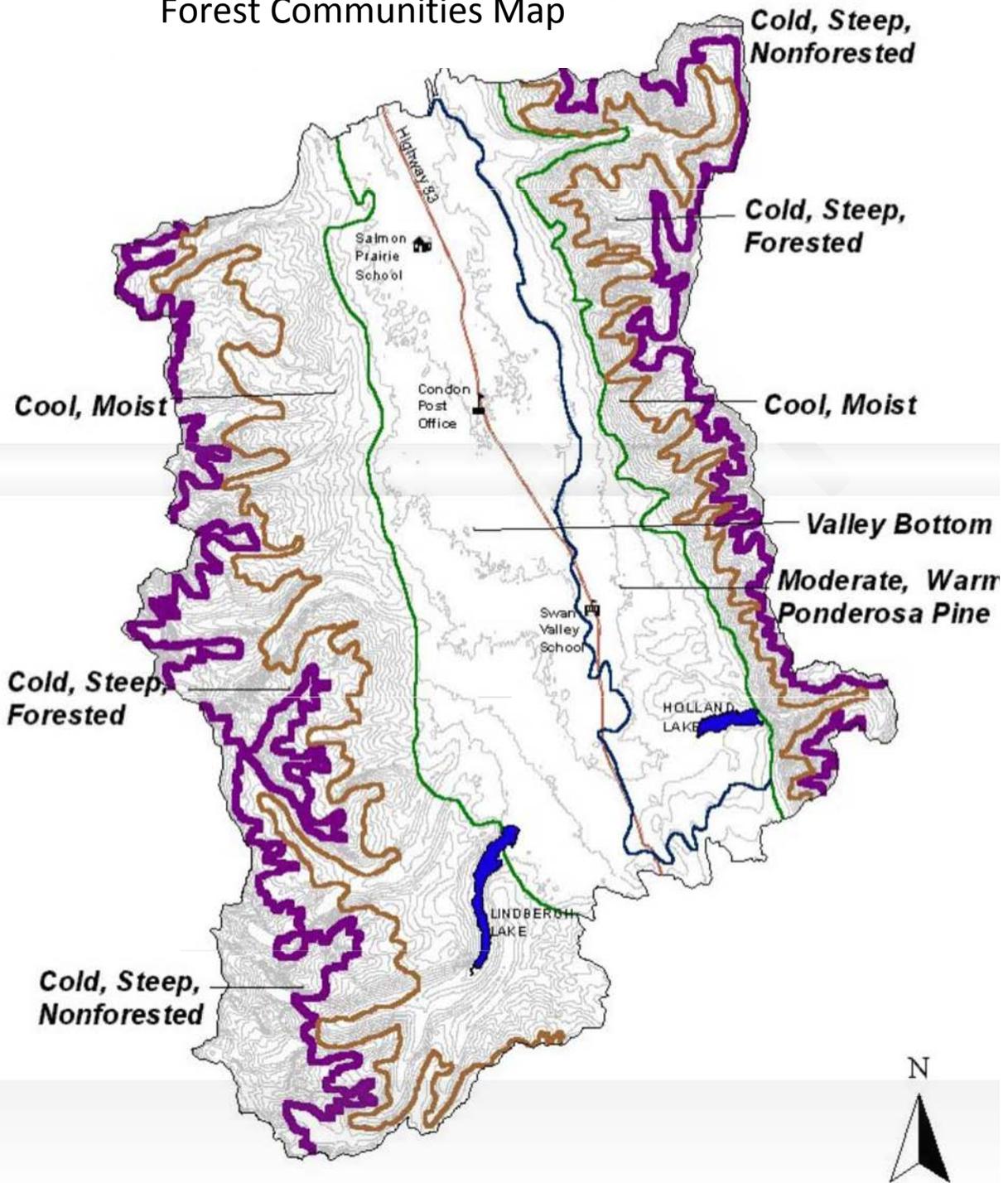
This particular forest community is used extensively by wildlife for foraging, and dense stands of Pacific yew provide cover even during hunting season. The area is also valuable winter range, and the moderate, warm Ponderosa pine forest community “correlates with the historic and most functional winter range for deer and elk” according to the *Landscape Assessment*.

**Other forest communities in the planning area:** While there are three additional forest communities in the planning area, they lie mostly on public lands. They are:

- **Cool, moist**
- **Cold, steep, forested**
- **Cold, steep, nonforested**

Complete information about all ecosystems in the Upper Swan Valley Planning Area may be found in the *Upper Swan Valley Landscape Assessment*.

# Upper Swan Valley Forest Communities Map



## 1.2 Habitat Types

The upper Swan Valley is rich in wildlife and wildlife habitat. In order to gain a better understanding of which wildlife species use the various habitats found in the planning area, it is helpful to use the forest habitat types found in the *Draft Swan Valley and Condon Community Profile*.

The United States developed forest habitat types as an ecological classification system to describe forest communities and plant associations. Each habitat type includes information on the geographic, physiographic, climatic, and edaphic (soils) features of a particular site, and relate them to the mature and potential climax communities that the site can support. Habitat types also include imbedded information on successional development, vegetation, timber, insect and disease, wildlife, fire, and other observations useful for planning and resource management.

Each habitat type is named according to the climax community type or association it represents. For the sake of simplicity in the face of so much ecological information imbedded in each type, each habitat type has a two-part name: the first part for the potential climax tree species, and the second for a prominent undergrowth plant. An example is *Abies lasiocarpa/Clintonia uniflora*, which is the subalpine fir/queencup beadlily habitat type. Other species of trees and understory are present in the habitat type, of course. Furthermore, the two species for which the habitat type is named may not even be present if the ecosystem is in a seral stage of ecological development. The naming convention does not imply that climax communities dominate the habitat type or that management objectives exist to create them.

From the Habitat Type map provided on page 59 of the *Draft Community Profile*, the distribution of wildlife habitat for specific species can be **generally** determined. Wildlife use of a specific habitat type is heavily influenced by the on the ground seral stages that may or may not be present and are not shown on the Habitat Type map.

**Table 1.2 Potential Wildlife Use of Habitat Type by Species**

Habitat Type	Species
Whitebark Pine/subalpine fire	Grizzly bear (high elevations), clark's nutcracker, wolverine (high elevations), pika
Subalpine fir/woodrush	Lynx, wolverine
Subalpine fir/ bear grass	Grizzly bear, Mule deer (summer range), wolverine
Subalpine fir/ fool's huckleberry	Grizzly bear, lynx, wolverine, mule deer (summer range)
Subalpine fir/ twin flower	Lynx, marten, fisher
Subalpine fir/ queencup beadlily	Lynx, marten, fisher
Grand fir/ beargrass	Marten, Lynx, fisher marten,
Grand fir/ queencup beadlily	Lynx, fisher, marten
Western red cedar/ queencup beadily	Fisher, Marten, boreal toad
Douglas fir/ ninebark	Whitetailed deer, mule deer, elk (winter range), flammulated owl, northern goshawk, clark's nutcracker (winter feeding)
Douglas fir/ snowberry	Whitetailed deer/mule deer/ elk (winter range), flammulated owl, northern goshawk, clark's nutcracker (winter feeding)

Herbaceous fens	Northern bog lemming
Lakes > 10 acres and <6000'	Common loons
Cottonwood/quaking aspen	Great blue heron, veery, bald eagle, black bear, ruffed grouse

**Source:** Habitat types from the *Swan Valley and Condon Community Profile*, wildlife use by habitat type supplied by Mark Ruby, wildlife biologist, U.S. Forest Service, Kalispell, MT

### 1.3 Surface Water Quality

Most water bodies in the planning area do not exceed the total maximum daily load (TMDL) of sediments and other materials. Missoula County has adopted measures to protect surface waters when development is proposed on or near areas of riparian resource. The Missoula County Subdivision Riparian Area regulations are development standards that address prohibited uses, location on or near a riparian area, protection of riparian resource, use of riparian areas to satisfy park dedication requirements or for purposes of determining density allocations or number of lots. Standards are also provided for road construction within the riparian resource area. Finally, the subdivision regulations require that each subdivision proposal that encompasses areas of riparian resource, include a management plan that contemplates future use of the area:

- Proposed access

- Proposed use

- Restoration

- Mitigation of impacts from all proposed uses

- Buffers to mitigate impacts of development adjacent to areas of riparian resource

### 1.4 Bull Trout Habitat Conservation

Planning area residents have made it clear that they place great value on clean air and water, and preservation of wildlife and wildlife habitat. The Community opted to recommend voluntary measures in the form of best management practices.

One of the most definitive studies of the Bull Trout and its habitat is DNRC's Habitat Conservation Plan.

Many lakes and streams in the Upper Swan planning area support populations of the "threatened" bull trout, including:

- Swan River
- Elk Creek
- Cold Creek
- Holland Lake

- Holland Creek
- Lindberg Lake
- Cooney Creek
- Jim Creek

### **1.5 Grizzly Bear Habitat**

Grizzly bears make extensive use of the Upper Swan Valley. According to a survey of 10 radio collared bears by Hicks et al from 2001 to 2005, grizzlies demonstrated broad use of the valley. Scientists have documented that the grizzlies' ability to move freely between the Swan and Mission mountain ranges is key to maintaining their genetic diversity. However, high speed traffic on Highway 83 presents a dangerous impediment to inter-mountain range travel. (Sec. 5.2 of this plan contains a discussion and data on vehicle/wildlife crashes along Highway 83.)

In places like the Upper Swan Valley, bears and man coexist in the same habitat. Bears move freely throughout the valley floor to travel between the Mission and Swan mountain ranges. There are approximately 25,000 acres of private land in the valley, some developed with homes and businesses. The community's challenge is to guide future growth in a manner that respects wildlife and the habitat on which they depend balanced against other goals in the plan.

Preservation of travel corridors has been addressed in land subdivisions proposed in the planning area. The primary review criteria for local government's review of subdivisions includes the subdivision's impact on "...the natural environment, wildlife, [and] wildlife habitat..." The grizzly is a threatened species under the Federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). The grizzly bear and its daily and seasonal travels will continue to be an issue in any land subdivision in the planning area.

### **1.6 Canada Lynx Habitat**

Like the grizzly bear, the Canada lynx is a threatened species under the ESA and make some use of land within the Upper Swan planning area. And therefore, like the grizzly, lynx and their habitat will be an issue in future land subdivisions.

As discussed earlier, the *subalpine fir/queencup beadlily* is the most prominent habitat type on the valley floor, and portions of this habitat type may be used by lynx in the Swan Valley.

Abundant in Canada and Alaska, the United States is considered to be southern end of its range. Prey species include squirrels, small rodents, grouse, and hares. Measures to preserve and support habitat for lynx as well as their primary prey include:

- Maintaining coarse woody debris where possible and practical. This entails leaving some downed logs of 15 inches dbh or greater and not harvesting them for other uses.

- Minimize potential for disturbance to possible den sites, which also include coarse woody debris.
- Preserve stand structures or attributes that provide habitat for prey species.
- Limit conversion of lynx habitat to other land uses in primary lynx areas of the valley floor.
- Provide for habitat connectivity on the landscape where ownership and parcelization allow.

### **1.7 Other Listed Species**

Three other species found in the Upper Swan Valley are listed as "sensitive" or "species of concern" under the federal Endangered Species Act. They are, the common loon (*Gavia immer*), carinate mountainsnail (*Oreohelix elrodi*) and water howellia (*howellia aquatilis*).

Common loons nest in a few of the Upper Swan Valley's small lakes, including Loon Lake north of the Kraft Creek Road (which abuts by private property) and Pierce Lake near the Swan-Clearwater Divide.

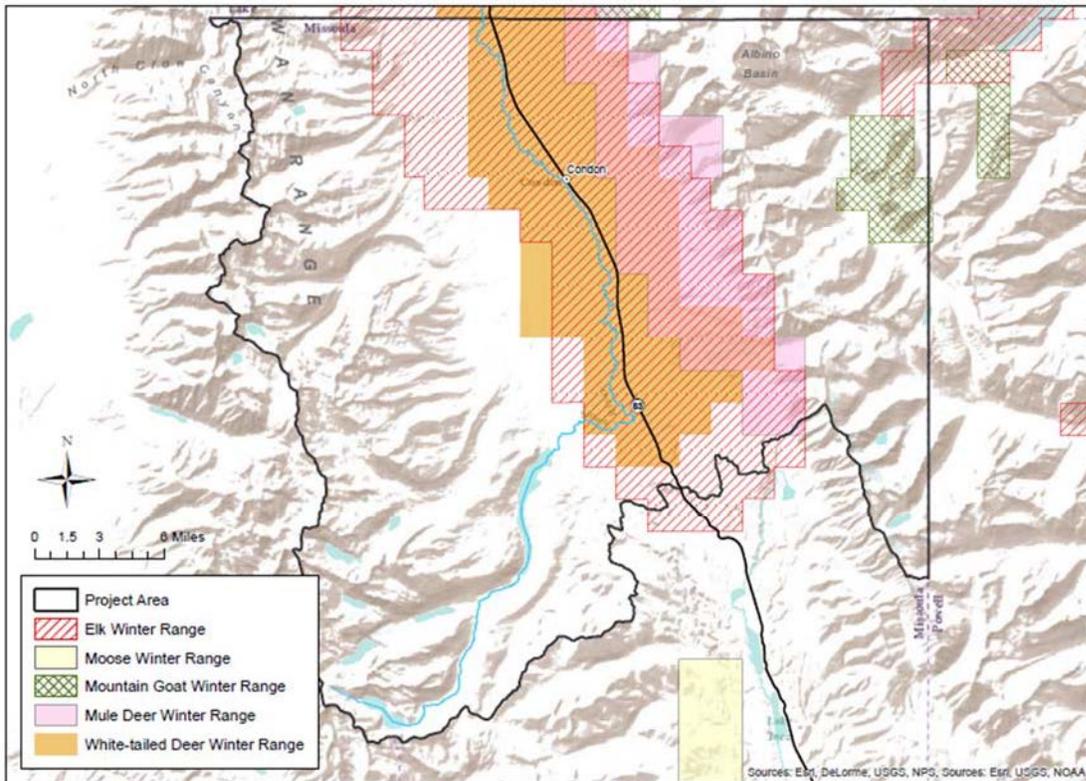
The carinate mountainsnail typically occupies habitat consisting of talus slopes, usually south facing, and covered with a sparse canopy of Ponderosa pine, mountain ash, and serviceberry. Threats to the mountainsnail include grazing, fire, disturbance of the talus slope for gravel extraction or trail building and maintenance, and, if the talus is covered by Ponderosa pine, Douglas fir, or Western Larch, logging can be a threat. Surveys should be taken prior to any disturbance of potential habitat.

The Swan Valley is the only area of Montana where the water howellia is found. The 218 known occurrences in the Swan represent 72% of the known occurrences in the world. This plant inhabits small depressional wetlands with consolidated bottoms which partially or completely dry up by fall. The wetlands include shallow, low-elevation glacial pothole ponds and former oxbows with margins of deciduous trees and shrubs. Seeds germinate only when ponds dry out and the seeds are exposed to air. This plant tends to root in shallow water at the edges of deeper ponds that are typically surrounded by deciduous trees. Many water bodies associated with the water howellia are not necessarily protected by Sec. 404 of the Clean Water Act, even though they lie in the valley bottom on private land where development could occur. In fact, many of these water bodies are 'non-tributary' marshes or ponds and "pocket wetlands" that are not characterized by the Clean Water Act as jurisdictional wetlands. Careful and thorough surveys should be taken prior to any disturbance of areas likely to support the water howellia. (Note: Descriptions taken from Montana Field Guides for the respective species. Additional information on the water howellia provided by Luke Lamar of Swan Valley Connections.)

### **1.8 Big Game Winter Range**

As the map on the following page indicates, indigenous ungulates make significant use of the valley floor and nearby slopes during the winter months. Elk and white-tailed deer are likely to be encountered anywhere on the valley floor in winter. Mule deer tend to use the western slopes of the Swan Range and mountain goats winter higher up, also in the Swan Range. Open travel corridors will be used by ungulates as well as by bears and the lynx.

## Winter Ungulate Habitat in the Swan Valley



**Source:** Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Region 1. Data compiled and map constructed 2015.

### 1.9 Wildlife Friendly Fencing

Because of the highly placed value on wildlife and wildlife habitat by citizens of the Swan Valley, this plan recommends the use of “wildlife friendly” fencing when new fences are built or old fencing is repaired.

Since 2008 the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks has published a manual titled *A Landowners Guide to Wildlife Friendly Fences: How to Build Fence with Wildlife in Mind*. A second edition was published in 2012, and it contains recommendations on how to build sturdy, effective fencing on different types of terrain while allowing wild animals to move over, under or through the fencing with far less risk of injury or death than fencing generally used to around the state. In most cases, wildlife friendly fencing is no more expensive to build or maintain than ordinary types of fence. **At this time there are no regulations on fencing in Missoula County, and any and all decisions about the type of fencing and materials used rest with the property owner.**

### 1.10 Future Forest Management Activities

A revised plan for the Flathead National Forest is in draft form, the public comment period having ended in May, 2015. The plan projects that some 3,500 acres per year will be subject to some type of harvest within the first decade of the plan, and some harvests, both timber and non-timber, will take place in the planning area. Former Plum Creek Timber lands will need additional time to fully regenerate and grow to merchantability standards, intermediate stand treatments to include pre-commercial and commercial thinning opportunities will add some low-volume harvest opportunities in coming years.

### **1.11 Air Quality**

Missoula County's air quality program includes the Condon area, but does not have a permanent air quality monitor in or near Condon. The USFS installs temporary monitor during open burning and wildfire seasons in order to track air quality. The County does not issue air pollution alerts or warnings in the Condon area, but it does issue health advisories during wildfires, and set outdoor burning restrictions to limit the impacts of burning on the area's air quality.

Some localized air pollution occurs as a result of dust from unpaved roads. Missoula County applies dust suppressant to some County roads.

### **1.12 Ground Water Quality**

Ground water quality in the Upper Swan Valley is very good, with extremely low rates of nitrate-nitrite, coliform, arsenic, and other potential contaminants showing up in water samples. Ground water sampling data is available from the Missoula County, and samples from the five "public water systems" were examined:

- Hungry Bear Steakhouse
- Liquid Louie's
- Swan Valley School
- Swan Valley Café
- Condon Work Center

All recent sample records examined showed approximately one-tenth to one-one hundredth of the concentration of various constituents allowed by drinking water standards.

Proposed subdivisions are subject to the Montana Sanitation in Subdivision Act. No testing has indicated any cause for concern. State and local health regulations are effective in ensuring clean, healthy ground water that is suitable as a potable water source.

### **1.13 Noise**

The peace and quiet of living amid the mountains and forests is one of the great attractions of the Upper Swan Valley. Residents mindful of preserving this important amenity would like for future development to comply with some reasonable noise standard so that they can continue to enjoy their properties as they always have.

### **1.14 Light Pollution**

One of the many joys of living in a rural area is experiencing the compelling beauty of the night sky. From the Upper Swan, the aurora borealis is frequently visible. Subdivision approval may require down cast light fixtures and full cut-off luminaires, and not allow light trespass or glare that is visible from off site. Development and site improvements that create light spillover, trespass and glare are discouraged.

### **1.15 Goals, Policies, and Actions**

#### **Goals**

- **Protect and enhance air and water quality in the Upper Swan Valley.**
- **Protect and enhance wildlife, wildlife habitat, and connectivity.**
- **Participate at every level of government and have an active voice in natural resource management, planning, and decision making.**
- **Clean, healthy ground water that is suitable as a potable water source is an asset that community residents value and wish to see preserved into the future**

#### **Policies**

- 1. The Swan Valley Community shall continue to participate (through Missoula County if necessary) in the forest, travel, and facility planning processes and shall continue to advocate for public access to public lands.**
- 2. Encourage and support development that respects and preserves the scenic and visual qualities of the Upper Swan.**
- 3. Encourage Missoula County Environmental Health to continue administering the most effective and beneficial standards for individual sewage disposal systems in order to keep ground and surface water in the Swan Valley as free of nutrients and other pollutants as possible.**

#### **Recommended Actions:**

- 1. Cooperate with resource management agencies to develop a series of best management practices (BMPs) that can be used to preserve and enhance the hydrologic and environmental functions of streams and wetlands.**
- 2. Participate in management decisions for public lands and resources in the planning area. Work with land and resource managers to monitor future changes in habitat and natural resources possibly caused by changing climate or**

**weather patterns.**

- 3. Encourage the use of “wildlife friendly” fencing.**
- 4. Encourage Missoula County to produce a comprehensive ground water study for the quality and quantity in the planning area.**
- 5. Ensure that wildlife corridors are preserved to the extent possible and practical.**
- 6. Discourage land uses that will produce excessive, sustained noise levels.**
- 7. Raise awareness of the importance of experiencing the night sky and use of techniques and hardware to prevent glare and light intrusion.**

## **2.0 Economic Opportunity Element**

**During the visioning sessions, some participants commented that they would like to see a wider variety of goods and services available in the area**

Economic activity that brings dollars into the community includes log home construction, logging, outfitting and guide services, accommodations, sawmill work, non-profit activities and government. Local real estate companies also bring dollars into the community, in the form of commissions to brokers and agents. Pensions and investment income, also contribute to the economic base. Two grocery stores and rental storage units are examples of economic activities that circulate dollars in the community.

A windshield survey revealed the following businesses that advertise along Highway 83 in the planning area:

1. Holland Lake Lodge: accommodations, weddings, family gatherings.
2. Clearwater Mountain Properties: real estate.
3. CLB Custom Landscape Services.
4. Grace’s Greenhouse: plants and garden supplies.
5. Hungry Bear Steakhouse: restaurant, tavern.
6. Unravel Spa & Salon: hair, nail care.
7. Swan Valley School: public elementary and middle school.
8. Mountain View Log Homes: custom log home builder.
9. Swan Valley Connections: conservation and education non-profit.
10. Montana Hand Crafted Log Homes: custom log home builder.
11. Liquid Louie’s Bar: restaurant, tavern.
12. Swan Valley Historical Society Museum: local history museum.

13. Swan Valley Emergency Services: fire and EMS district.
14. Swan Valley Center: groceries, auto repair.
15. Swan Valley Community Center and Library: meeting hall and public library.
16. Swan Valley Firewood: sales of locally sourced fire wood.
17. Storage Units: rental storage units.
18. Standing Stones Bed-Inn Breakfast: accommodations.
19. Photographers' Formulary: photo supplies
20. Swan River Valley Real Estate: real estate sales.
21. Mission Mountains Mercantile: groceries, motor fuels.
22. United States Post Office, Condon, MT: US post office.
23. Nordique Systems Log Homes: log home builder.
24. Swan Valley Lodge: vacation rentals.
25. Rohrer Film and Video

In addition to the entities listed here, there are a number of general contractors and home businesses operating in the planning area. According to the U.S. Census, in 2012 there were 25 separate business establishments in the 59826 zip code with 74 employees and a payroll of approximately \$1.7 million.

The Swan Valley also has an active and vibrant community of artists. There are over 20 artists living and working in the Swan and nearby communities, many of which are affiliated with Alpine Artisans, Inc. Alpine Artisans conducts a self-guided Tour of the Arts in the Seeley Lake, Swan Valley, and Ovando communities, and stages a Tour of the Arts event annually in October that attracts locals and visitors from around the country, Canada, and even overseas. Between art sales and visitation, this is a significant influx of dollars into the three local economies.

The Upper Swan has few local options for purchasing groceries, household items and other consumer goods, and dining and entertainment opportunities. It is the community's perception that most of the community's retail dollars are spent in Seeley Lake, Missoula, Big Fork, and Kalispell. Community members would like to see a wider variety of goods and services available in the area.

## **2.1 Barriers to Economic Development**

**Access:** The Upper Swan Valley is physically isolated from other communities in the area. While this isolation, wildness, and decidedly rural character are valued by many residents, they do not lend themselves to traditional economic development. Swan Valley's location on Hwy 83, between the activity centers of Seeley Lake to the south and Big Fork to the north, and with no east-west highway connections due to mountain ranges, is a decided disadvantage

**Infrastructure:** The Upper Swan Valley lacks critical support infrastructure for conventional urban or small town economic development. There are no public water or sewer systems, no storm drains, and few local roads are paved other than Hwy 83.

Labor: Data indicates that the Upper Swan Valley population is aging, while at the same time, families with children are declining. Both trends reduce available work force in the valley. If such a large business were to move to the Upper Swan Valley, it might need to bring in workers from elsewhere and/or recruit workers who would commute from nearby communities.

Land: There is adequate private land for a new business or industry to locate in the Valley. The likely location of any new business would be on or very near Hwy 83. A new business will want the exposure that the highway offers.

That the community will want businesses and industries along the highway that will respect and preserve the small scale and rural character and qualities of the Valley. Although there is no zoning in effect along Hwy 83, this plan is intended to provide guidance for new businesses locating in the highway corridor, such as setbacks, height, fencing, and landscaping.

Electronic Communication: DSL download speeds in the planning area are 10mbps and wireless is 3mbps according to data from the National Broadband Map.

The Upper Swan enjoys very good 4G personal cell phone service, but broadband download speeds are not currently adequate to support an expanded business or industry relies upon electronic communication.

## 2.2 Potential of Past and Current Economic Activity

Timber harvesting: Logging activity in the Upper Swan will continue to be a significant contributor to the base economy, although not at the rate of the 1960's. This is due to the need to maintain sustainable forests. Plum Creek Timber Company's logging was not sustainable over the long term, as most experts, including Plum Creek foresters, agree. But those lands, now part of the Flathead National Forest, will continue to grow trees and provide economic opportunity in the future, as will the original Flathead National Forest lands, as the USFS strives to increase pace and scale of stewardship and restoration activities. Valley forests will continue to provide economic benefit through restoration activities and sustainable harvesting practices. The private lands in the Swan Valley will need management to reduce the risk of forest fire within the community, providing jobs for local contractors. The industry will not reach the peak employment or harvesting levels of the 1960's, due to continuing mechanization of the industry and the public's desire for sustainability. Climate change may also play a role in future timber harvesting to maintain healthy resilient forests.

Residential Construction: There will always be some demand for log homes in the Upper Swan, but that industry too is changing. Fewer of the 4,000 to 6,000 square foot homes are being built, and more modest cabins of 800 to 1,000 square feet are being ordered. Log homes do not have an efficient energy profile compared to modern building codes which are demanding increased energy efficiency. And while a log home can meet contemporary energy efficiency requirements, this adds to the cost and tends to push buyers toward more conventional lumber framed home.

Guiding/outfitting: In the past, outfitters and guides were based in the local area. Money spent on those services at least entered the local economy. There is a local trend towards larger companies

that are based outside of the area. The Upper Swan should establish relationships with organizations and agencies whose mission it is to that promote tourism. Increased publicity about the fishing, hunting, and other outdoor pursuits available in the Upper Swan will help to support this particular economic activity.

**Resource-based recreation:** This activity includes fishing, hiking and backpacking in summer and cross country skiing, snowshoeing, and snowmobiling in winter. Additional lodging and restaurants are necessary to expand this economic activity. Cross country cycling is a relatively new form of tourism in the Swan. Cyclists with large paniers and small cargo trailers can be seen along Hwy 83 throughout the summer months. A “bike hostel” with additional supporting facilities, would benefit the growth of this form of recreation through the Swan. The community could seek support for a bikeway interconnection with the Adventure Cyclist’s Great Divide mountain bike route and the Seeley Lake Bikeway system, as a means of promoting both local and long distance riding.

**Eco-tourism:** Ecotourism is the "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education" according to the International Ecotourism Society. There are approximately 210,000 acres of public land in the planning area, much of it national forest and wilderness. This is land suitable for ecotourism in and near the community. The Crown of the Continent Roundtable and other organizations are promoting ecotourism. Partnering with these organizations could advance this economic activity.

**Accommodations:** Providing lodging to support other activities such as resource based recreation and ecotourism is essential. Dining and shopping are available in nearby communities but would likely become more available with lodging. With national and regional promotion of the Upper Swan as a destination for high quality outdoor recreation and ecotourism, accommodations offers growth potential for the future.

**Transfer payments:** Retirees are a significant part of the economy of the Upper Swan. An opportunity exists to provide a ‘retirement center’ and ‘retiree housing’. Retirees spend money in the local economy via transfer payments that do not rely on the local job market.