

# **Swan Valley Regional Plan**

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# Swan Valley Regional Plan

## Introduction

### Vision Statement

The people of the Swan Valley acknowledge their heritage and rural character and want to remain in control of their own destiny. 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.” Sec. 76-1-103, MCA.

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



Neighborhood Meeting, 2014

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 are 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.

**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 are 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's 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 provides the basic necessities of food, water, and cover for wildlife. Much of this area is valuable habitat for a number or 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.

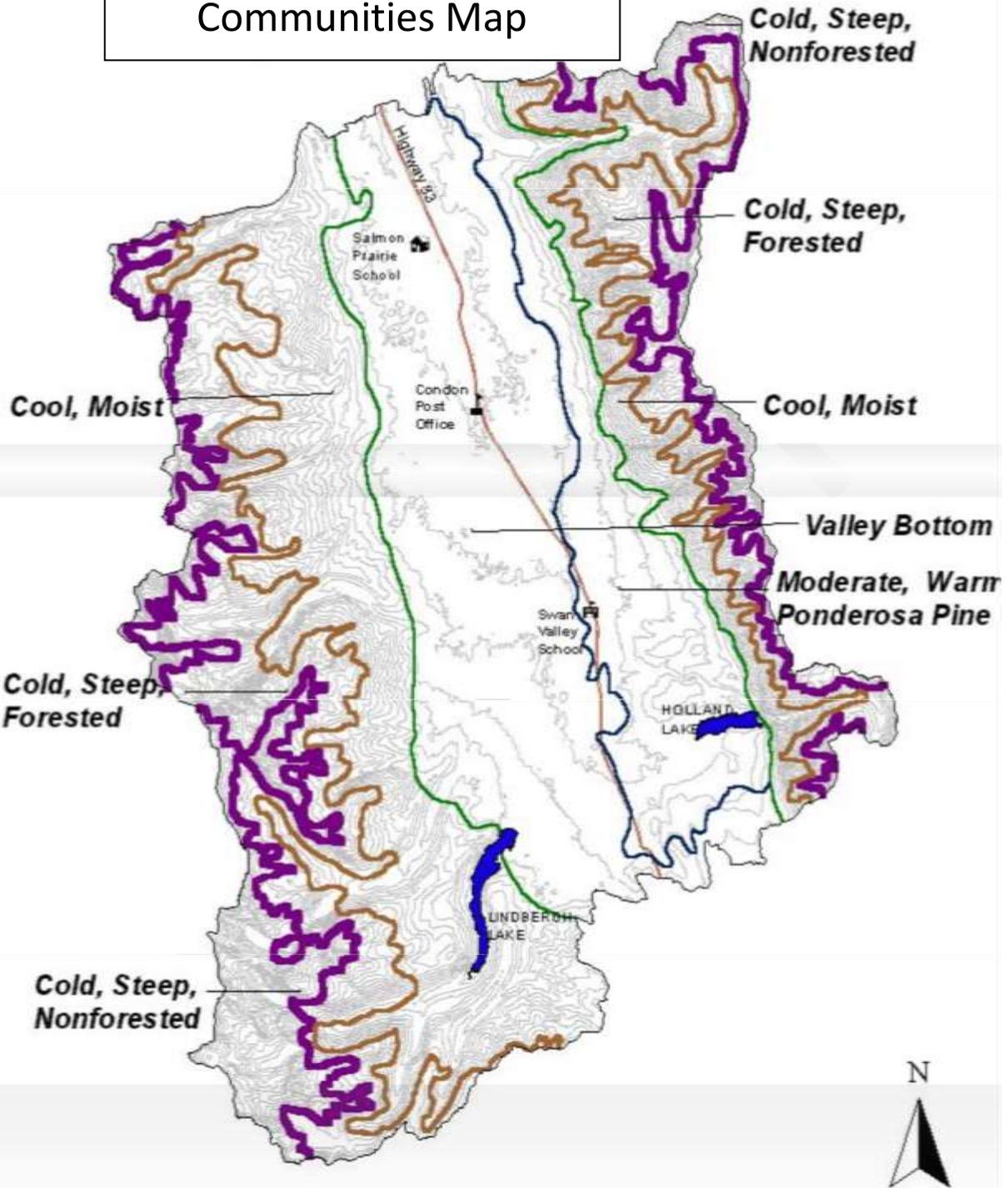
This particular forest community is used extensively by wildlife for foraging, and dense stands of Pacific yew provide cover even during hunting season. The area is also valuable winter range, and the moderate, warm ponderosa pine forest community “correlates with the historic and most functional winter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



Map 1.1 Upper Swan Valley Forest Communities

## 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

(For more information see Appendix A)



Photo 1.3 Glacier Creek, as viewed from Glacier Creek Road.

#### **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

(For more information see Appendix B)

#### **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.

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 mountain snail (*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.

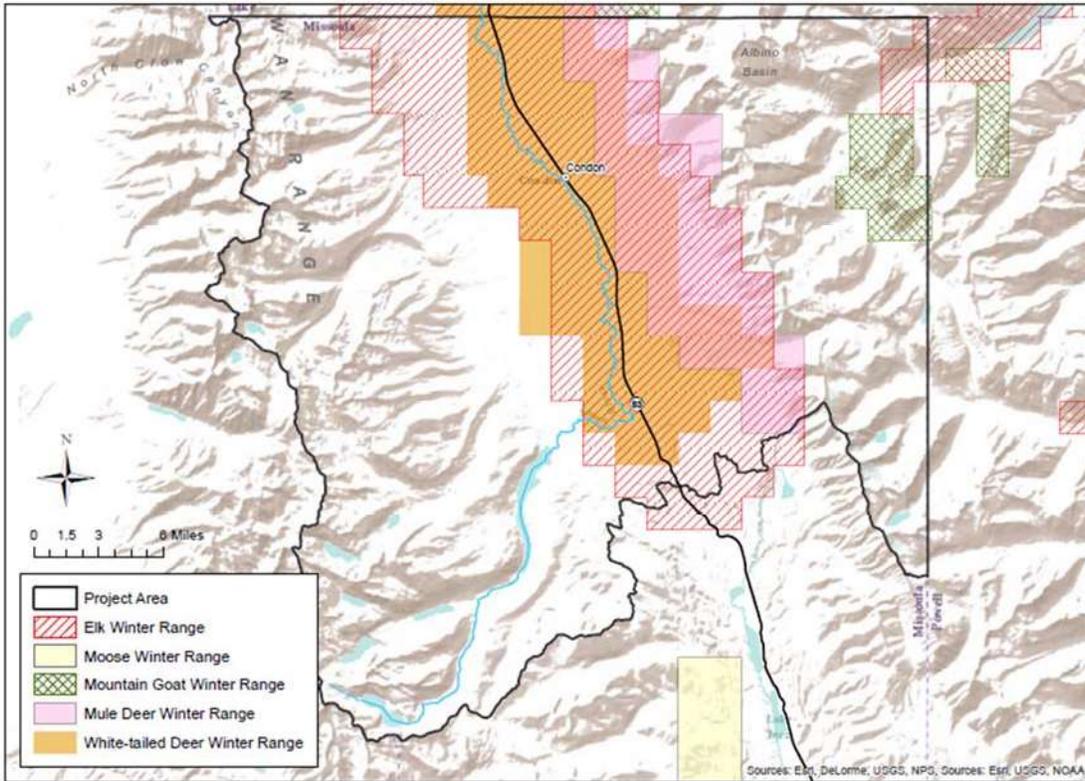
The carinate mountainsnail typically occupies habitat consisting of talus slopes, usually south facing, and covered with a sparse canopy of Ponderosa pine, mountain ash, and serviceberry. Threats to the mountainsnail include grazing, fire, disturbance of the talus slope for gravel extraction or trail 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



Map 1.8 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. For more information refer to the current Flathead National Forest Plan.

## 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 United States Forest Service (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.



Photo 1.11 Dust suppressant applied adjacent to a bridge over the Swan River

## 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.

(For more information see Appendix C)

### **1.13 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.

### **1.14 Goals, Policies, and Actions**

#### **Goals:**

- 1. Protect and enhance air and water quality in the Upper Swan Valley.**
- 2. Protect and enhance wildlife, wildlife habitat, and connectivity.**
- 3. Participate at every level of government and have an active voice in natural resource management, planning, and decision making.**
- 4. 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.**

#### **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. Encourage the preservation of wildlife corridors.**
- 6. 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 Montana 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 River 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



Photo 2.0 Swan Valley Centre is one of two establishments in the planning area offering groceries and limited apparel and household items. Auto repair services are also on site.

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.

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



Photo 2.1 Cell tower behind the Community Church in the Upper Swan Valley

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 that 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 1960s. 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 lands of 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 1960s, 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:** Home construction will always be an important part of the local economy in the Upper Swan.

**Guiding/outfitting:** Outfitting and guiding are important local pastimes in the area, and money spent on those services enter 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 is to promote tourism. 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 offer growth potential for the future. An increasing number of private homes are being offered as vacation rentals.

**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.

## **2.3 New Industrial Development**

The Swan may be best suited for small-scale manufacturing. For example, industry using small-diameter stems from thinning, fuel reduction, and other forest management activities as its raw material. Suitable locations within the community are identified in the Land Use Element.

## **2.4 Goals, Policies, and Actions**

### **Goals:**

- 1. Seek a base economy that will be compatible with the qualities and character of the Upper Swan Valley while providing a flow of dollars into the community and jobs for its residents.**

- 2. Build upon the existing base of timber related industries, outfitting, and lodging.**

**Policies:**

- 1. Support active public participation in timber sales planning within the Upper Swan planning area.**
- 2. Support small-scale lodging (independent motels, B&Bs) and resource based visitation in the Upper Swan.**
- 3. Discourage large-scale “highway oriented” businesses that are not consistent with the Valley’s rural character and qualities.**
- 4. Encourage compatibly scaled businesses that will use “non-timber” forest products.**
- 5. Encourage local sourcing of labor and materials.**
- 6. Promote logging, log home construction, small-scale lodging, and sustainable resource-based recreation in order to provide jobs and income for the Upper Swan Valley population.**

**Actions:**

- 1. Discuss developing design standards for commercial and industrial development with Missoula County, to ensure consistency with the Upper Swan’s scale and character and to protect the scenic qualities of the Hwy 83 corridor.**
- 2. Encourage local retail and service to remain and expand the variety of goods and services available.**
- 3. Encourage the Swan Valley Community Council to explore the production of an “Upper Swan Valley Products and Services Directory”.**
- 4. Establish a local citizens’ committee to work cooperatively with the USFS and private land owners to improve recreational access to public lands.**
- 5. Support and encourage the private development of modestly sized RV parks and campgrounds in order to broaden the accommodations base for visitors to the Upper Swan.**
- 6. Encourage the USFS to improve and upgrade public campgrounds.**
- 7. Consider the development of a safe bikeway interconnection with the Adventure Cyclists’ Great Divide mountain bike route and the Seeley Lake Bikeway system.**

### **3.0 Land Use**

The Upper Swan Valley-Condon has its own set of unique and valued characteristics that must be understood and appreciated for any type of long range planning activity to take place. For example, people in the Upper Swan place a high value on knowing their neighbors, even though they may live a half-mile away down an unpaved road. There are important community gathering places like the Community Hall/Library/Swan Valley Centre, Mission Mountain Mercantile, the Hungry Bear, and the Holland Lake swimming beach, even though they are widely dispersed and not within walking distance for Valley residents. The sense of community is strengthened by the shared experiences with nature and building a life in a rural area.

Upper Swan residents must decide what kind of community they wish to have. The information in this plan should be used as a guide for new development. This section of the plan brings that information together to make recommendations for land uses in the planning area.

#### **3.1 Land Ownership**

The USFS is the largest land owner in the Upper Swan planning area. Of the 238,400 acres that comprise the planning area, almost 213,000 acres are in public ownership. The vast majority of the publicly owned land is in the Flathead National Forest, including portions of the Mission Mountains and Bob Marshall wilderness areas. This leaves about 10.6% of all land within the planning area is in private ownership.

Generally, the privately owned land is located in the Valley floor along the Hwy. 83 corridor. However, there are a number of large-lot subdivisions and residential areas lying two to three miles from the highway, accessed mostly by county roads.

#### **3.2 Residential Land Use**

The residential lots in the planning area are generally 4 to 20 acres in size. The median lot size (50th percentile) of all privately held land in the planning area is 6.8 acres, driven primarily by the small lots that have been created around Lindbergh Lake.

There are approximately 275 properties of 20 to 650 acres in size, where new development could occur.

#### **3.3 Non-Residential Land Use**

Little land is devoted to commercial, industrial, semi-public, and community facility type uses. The Economic Development Element lists 25 businesses currently operating in the planning area, which account for most of the non-residential land use. Most businesses are located along Hwy. 83 providing visibility and exposure to highway traffic. Additional commercial and industrial development should be located and developed in a way that enhances the rural character and without detracting from the natural beauty of the area.

Approval of subdivisions for commercial or industrial uses could achieve comprehensive plan compliance by building according to the recommended standards that achieve the goals of protecting rural character without adverse impacts to the resources valued by the community.

### **3.4 Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI)**

The wildland-urban interface is often described as an area “where structures and other human development meet or intermingle with undeveloped wildland or vegetative fuel”. The mapped WUI in the planning area may be found in the Seeley-Swan Fire Plan, 2013 Revision in section 6.2.1. In general, any land on the valley floor is considered to be in the WUI. Standard practices in the WUI include constructing roofs using flame resistant materials, keeping an area of at least 30 feet around all structures free of flammable vegetation, and avoiding placing structures on slopes of greater than 30%. Information to help homeowners reduce the vulnerability of their homes and property to wildfire is available from several sources, including Firewise ([www.firewise.org](http://www.firewise.org)) and Keep Montana Green ([www.keepgreen.org](http://www.keepgreen.org)). Also, the U.S. Forest Service is encouraged to remove (or cause to be removed) trees and other fuels from public lands within the WUI to supply local mills and further reduce the possibility of wildfire.

### **3.5 Regulatory Framework**

**Participants in the visioning sessions and neighborhood review meetings indicated a decided preference for new development to respect the character and qualities of the community and for it to be compatible with existing development. However, there was no significant support for regulations to accomplish these objectives.**

Missoula County does not administer a general zoning code in the planning area. However, the County does administer a building code (including plumbing, electric, and energy codes), sanitation standards, and floodplain regulations along the Swan River. Missoula County Conservation District does administer 310 permits for work in and around waterways.

In addition, there is a “Part 1” zoning district in the Lindbergh Lake area. (Zoning enacted pursuant to Part 1, Title 76, Chapter 2, MCA is often referred to as “citizen initiated zoning”.) The Lindbergh and Cygnet Lakes district was formed in 1970 and expanded in 1994.

As set forth in the judgement handed down by the Montana Supreme Court in *Heffernan v. City of Missoula*, in making a land use decision the governing body must be “guided by and give due consideration to” an adopted growth policy. However, the growth policy cannot be applied in a “regulatory” fashion.

**(For more information see Appendix D)**

### **3.6 Asset Based Approach to Future Development**

In order to guide future development while still protecting the character and qualities that people of the Upper Swan value, this plan recommends a qualitative system for residential and non-residential development based upon outcomes. This system is intended as a guide for Missoula

County, in making land use decisions. This system is not regulatory, but should be used with decision-making criteria set forth in state law and/or other long-range plans and policies. By following this guide, the land development review process can be made more efficient and predictable for developers and residents. This plan is intended as a powerful statement of the community's vision and values; and a statement that should be taken into account in the County's long-range planning, setting of budgetary priorities, and program development.

Outcomes are measured by how they affect the assets that the community values. Among the key assets that the community has identified through this planning process are:

- **Clean air and water**
- **Wildlife and wildlife habitat**
- **Rural, and wild, character of community**
- **Open spaces**
- **Scenic views and vistas and the scenic qualities of Swan Valley and surroundings generally**

For purposes of this regional plan, rural/wild character is one that is defined more by the **natural** environment than by the **built** environment. The mountains, forests, rivers and streams, wildlife, open spaces, and scenic views and vistas are so valued by the community that residents strongly desire to see them preserved and enhanced.

### **3.7 Areas for Additional Residential Development**

A number of areas exist within the planning area where there are relatively large, vacant, privately owned tracts of land that are near existing roads, some existing residential development, and electric service. In fact, many of these areas lie within two miles of Hwy 83, where it is less likely that development will be at odds with community assets. For example, while most all development along Hwy 83 lies within critical wildlife habitat, development that is nearer to the roadway (with a reasonable setback) and adjacent to existing development, is far less likely to fragment wildlife habitat or infringe upon a travel corridor.

As with anywhere in the planning area, site specific wildlife assessments are needed to identify and protect the most valuable habitat. These are areas where additional development **could** take place, and where the community would likely be receptive to residential development.

### **3.8 Deleted**

### **3.9 Future Development Potential**

Subdividing is the process of dividing land into lots, blocks, rights-of-way, and for prescribing easements for access and/or services. Subdivisions, and subdivision regulations can protect natural resources and ensure that local facilities and services will not be overburdened by the subdivision, and will continue to provide for the needs of the community.

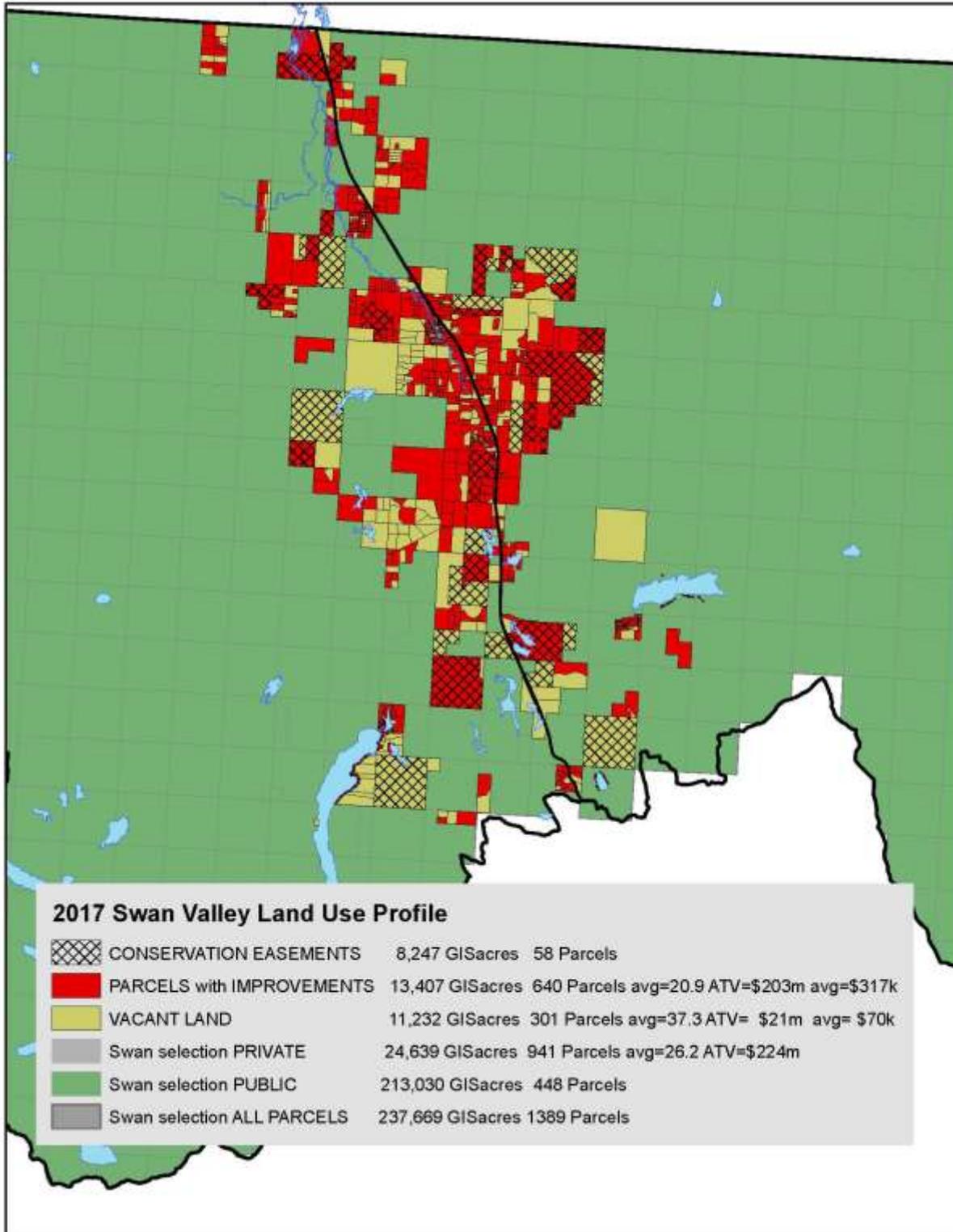
Upper Swan residents should pay particular attention to the manner in which the primary subdivision review criteria are interpreted and applied by the Missoula County Planning Board and Board of County Commissioners. The review criteria, as set forth in Sec. 76-3-606(3)(a), MCA are the subdivision's potential impacts on:

- Agriculture
- Agricultural water facilities
- Local services
- The natural environment
- Wildlife
- Wildlife habitat
- Public health and safety

The Upper Swan community has the option of addressing these criteria in the Implementation Element of this plan. State law requires that the County growth policy provide a statement that defines the criteria and how the County will evaluate and make decisions on proposed subdivisions with respect to the criteria. This plan presents an opportunity for the people of the Upper Swan to define and interpret the criteria for themselves, and to send a clear message to Missoula County officials how they wish to see these criteria applied in decision making.

One pivotal issue that has already arisen in subdivisions proposed for the Upper Swan is that of "fragmentation" of wildlife habitat. While wildlife habitat can be easily preserved site by site through clustering, this can result in fragmentation of the habitat unless the site is planned and developed in careful coordination with adjacent and nearby properties. Fragmentation can also lead to the loss of "wildlife corridors" that are used by animals daily and seasonally.

The distribution of vacant and occupied (seasonal and primary) privately owned land both with and without conservation easements is depicted on Map 3.9.



Map 3.9 2017 Swan Valley Land Use Profile. Provided by John Keller, Clearwater Realty.

### **3.10 Clustering**

Clustering is a tool in land use planning and development. Like any tool, it has value and can be used productively, but it is not necessarily the best tool in all situations. Clustering is simply the location of lots or building sites in one or more specific areas of a development in order to achieve a strategic advantage. Clustering can be done at any density with any residential product type (Non-residential clustering has advantages all its own). Clustering may involve locating smaller lots around open space, but it also may involve no open space at all.

Cluster subdivisions are provided for in both the Montana Subdivision and Platting Act and the Missoula County Subdivision Regulations. In most zoning codes, cluster development is possible through a planned unit development (PUD) option. But clustering is not a development short cut. A clustered subdivision is subject to the same primary review criteria as any other subdivision. They are subject to sanitation and potable water standards, and must comply with building codes where applicable.

In the Upper Swan Valley planning area, clustering can be used in a number of ways to protect wildlife habitat and other environmentally sensitive lands. However, area residents have clearly indicated that they do not want clustering used in any manner that will compromise the scale, character, and wildland qualities that the community values. Along these same lines, they do not want clustering (or any other type of development) to create an unsustainable septic system density such that wastewater collection and treatment becomes necessary to protect public health.

### **3.11 Access to Public Lands**

In many parts of Montana (as well as other western states with a high percentage of public lands), access to public land is often gained through private property. Requiring public access through private land through development review is a complex issue. The County must sort out the nature of the public easement (who can use it), maintenance and upkeep (who keeps the road passable and safe); liability (who is responsible if someone gets hurt due to a defect in the road); and jurisdiction (public roads should have a public entity with jurisdiction over the road).

It behooves any local government to make an effort to work with landowners to keep public access open even after development. This can be done through a variety of ways including identifying public access as a “community benefit” in a planned unit development (PUD) option, or allowing as credit for required open space in a subdivision. This same consideration should be made in structuring conservation easements. All interests should work to ensure that any traditional public access to public lands beyond the subject property are preserved. Private property land owner rights must be protected and acknowledged.

### 3.12 Goals, Policies, and Actions

#### Goals:

1. **Maintain the open land, rural character, and wild qualities of the Upper Swan Valley.**
2. **Maintain access to public lands, including wilderness areas.**
3. **Promote a logical and efficient relationship between residential and non-residential land uses in the Valley.**
4. **Preserve the scenic qualities of the Upper Swan Valley, including vistas of surrounding mountains and forests, and the visual qualities of the Hwy 83 corridor.**
5. **Encourage development that makes the most efficient use of existing infrastructure.**
6. **Make the development review process more predictable and efficient.**

#### Policies:

1. **Support, and where possible, incentivize appropriate and beneficial development that is consistent with the rural character of the Upper Swan.**
2. **Promote fire wise construction, fuels mitigation, and property maintenance practices within the wild land-urban interface (WUI).**
3. **Encourage growth in the Upper Swan Valley that will keep housing and population compatible with the rural character and wild qualities of the area.**
4. **Encourage modest, sustainable development in and adjacent to existing residential and service clusters where infrastructure is already available or can be readily extended.**
5. **Discourage any type of business, industry, public facility, or project that would degrade the area's air and/or water quality.**
6. **Promote "living with wildlife" principles as set forth by Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks.**
7. **In the development review process Respect the right to use and enjoy property.**

#### Actions:

1. **Explore forming a local subcommittee of the Missoula County Planning Board that would develop standards to protect the scale and rural character of the Upper Swan.**
2. **Investigate design standards for new development that will retain the visual qualities of the Hwy 83 corridor.**
3. **Seek an understanding with Missoula County officials as to what constitutes fragmentation of wildlife habitat in subdivision development.**
4. **Encourage the USFS to remove trees and other fuels for delivery to local lumber mills and to reduce fuels on public lands in the valley floor.**
5. **Allow for resource-based commercial recreation (lodging, outfitting, etc.).**

## 4.0 Housing Element

Shelter is a basic necessity for all people. But in some parts of the west, including here in Montana, the market price of safe, decent housing has surpassed the ability of many people to purchase or even to rent it. That is why many communities across the country have formed housing authorities, housing trusts, or have established other programs to help close the gap between the cost of housing and the ability of people to afford it. Some of these programs may focus specifically on “work force housing”, which can be an important factor in economic development and/or maintaining community social and economic diversity. Federal programs such as FHA, USDA Rural Development, and insured loan programs are generally available in rural areas. Also, the Montana Department of Commerce has a housing division that administers various programs around the state.

### 4.1 Existing Housing Stock and Conditions

According to the 2010 Census, there were **682** total housing units in the geographic area represented by the 59826 zip code (which roughly corresponds to the Upper Swan Valley planning area except for an area around the summit and adjacent to Lindbergh Lake). At the same time, the Census reports that only **253** of these units were “occupied”, and that **429** units were “vacant”. This is indicative of the substantial number of “seasonably occupied” homes in the planning area, although this figure certainly includes some units that are vacant for other reasons.

Data on the structural condition of housing are only available from the Montana Department of Labor by county or municipality. However, age data alone can be helpful in making some generalizations about housing conditions and livability. Typically, houses built prior to the mid-1970s tend to have sub-standard insulation, potential for lead paint, and general deferred maintenance.

**Table 4.1**  
Age of Housing – Zip Code 59826

Year Built	% of Housing Units 59826
2010 or later	0.8%
2000 – 2009	19.9%
1980 – 1999	29.9%
1960 - 1979	37.2%
1940 – 1959	6.5%
1939 or Earlier	5.7%

Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey



Photo 4.1 Family size home in Swan Valley. Many homes such as this are on 2-10 acres of land, and the upward price pressure from the seasonal home market can make a modest home unaffordable for local wage earners.

#### **4.2 Housing Unit Types**

Of the 664 total housing units in the 59826 zip code reported by the American Community Survey in 2013, 594 (89.5%) were single-family detached site built or factory built homes. There were also eight single-family attached homes currently serving as vacation rental condominiums), two units attached in other structures, and 60 mobile homes.

#### **4.3 Housing Affordability**

In 2017, the median value of occupied housing in the 59826 zip code was **\$315,000**.

Encouraging smaller lots closer to existing residential areas and to commercial services may be an effective way to target residential lots to local residents and the future workforce, but this strategy alone will not close the affordability gap significantly. This is especially true if the smaller lots are platted in conjunction with open space or common area in a cluster type development. While clustering can be a valuable tool for preserving wildlife habitat and other environmentally sensitive areas, the open space preserved still adds value (and therefore, costs) to the actual lots. Residents of the planning area are willing (as indicated by the visioning sessions and neighborhood meetings) to explore smaller lots, accessory units, and other measures to provide workforce housing, but not at the expense of the Upper Swan's rural and "wildland" character.

#### **4.4 Buildings for Lease or Rent**

Provisions for buildings for lease or rent (BLR) were passed and signed into law during the 2013 session of the Montana state legislature. Definitions, requirements, exemptions, and review and approval procedures are set forth in Sec. 76-8-101 through 114, MCA. Missoula County adopted its own BLR standards and procedures in August, 2013.

Certainly the BLR provision has the potential to increase the number of dwelling units in the planning area with little or no additional public review (or notification) other than sanitation. Sanitation review provides assurances that there is adequate land to serve multiple septic systems, including adequate distances from domestic drinking water wells that also serve the multiple units. Other regulations will still apply such as floodplain restrictions and lakeshore regulations. BLR are also subject to the building code county wide.

#### **4.5 Goals, Policies, and Actions**

##### **Goals:**

- 1. Support adequate supply and variety of housing types to meet the demands of current and future residents.**
- 2. Incorporate affordability into the review process for new development, balanced with the natural resource goals of the plan.**

##### **Policies:**

- 1. Encourage smaller, more attainable lots in and adjacent to areas that already provide some services and have readily available infrastructure.**
- 2. Support appropriate and well-planned subdivisions and other types of developments designed for alternative housing types that meet the standards previously outlined.**

##### **Actions:**

- 1. Seek partnerships with local government and the private sector to provide affordable housing.**

## 5.0 Transportation Element

In the Upper Swan Valley, Hwy. 83 provides access south over the Seeley-Swan divide to Seeley Lake, and north to Big Fork and Kalispell. The planning area's location between two mountain ranges precludes the possibility of an east/west connection. Hwy. 83 has a pavement width of approximately 28 feet, including a 12 foot travel lane with a two foot shoulder in each direction. There is no bicycle lane or pedestrian access on this highway anywhere in the planning area.

### 5.1 Highway 83 Traffic Counts

Annual average daily traffic (AADT) in 2014 was 1,180 at a counter station located one mile north of Condon, and 990 for a counter just north of Pierce Lake. AADT is a "seasonally adjusted" value based upon the time of year that the count was taken and the classification of the roadway. Actual daily trips during peak driving seasons can be higher than AADT and significantly lower during off-peak seasons. The raw count for a location one mile south of Condon, taken in August, 2013, is **1,826** (estimated) compared with the 2013 AADT of **1,060**. For the Pierce Lake count location, the one-day August, 2013 count was **1,779** (estimated) compared to the AADT of **1,040**. This essentially means that on any given day during the peak summer driving season, there are 700-800 more trips per day on Hwy. 83 than the seasonally adjusted AADT would indicate.

<b>Table 5.1 Annual Average Daily Traffic; Hwy 83 (approx. one mile north of Condon) Year</b>	<b>AAD T</b>
<b>2010</b>	1,360
<b>2011</b>	1,130
<b>2012</b>	1,180
<b>2013</b>	1,060
<b>2014</b>	1,180

### 5.2 Highway Speeds and Safety

Residents are concerned about the speeds at which vehicles of all types travel on Hwy. 83. The posted speed limit is 70 mph for passenger vehicles and 60 mph for trucks, with a nighttime limit of 55 mph. Due to what is perceived to be increased side friction from businesses and county roads which access Hwy. 83, and the increase in the number of long distance cyclists, some residents felt that highway speeds should be addressed in the planning process.

In a speed study conducted from between July, 2009 through October, 2012, MDOT concluded that the 55 mph nighttime speed limit was not supported, and that the night limit should be raised back up to 65 mph. In 2013 the Montana Transportation Commission considered MDOT's recommendation to increase the nighttime speed limit. Many residents, as well as the Montana Fish and Wildlife Commission voiced their objection. The 55 mph signs remain posted on Hwy 83 today. In an e-mail to the *Seeley-Swan Pathfinder*, a Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife

and Parks (FWP) wildlife biologist stated that lethal animal-vehicle collisions declined 34% following posting of the 55 mph nighttime speed limit. The same FWP biologist noted that whitetail deer populations in the area were actually on the rise during the most recent study (2010-2012) that showed fewer lethal collisions with wildlife. This was attributed to the 55 mph nighttime speed limit, and the community consensus appears to be that the lower nighttime speed limit remain in place. In addition, many in the community have begun discussing crossings similar to the ones installed on Hwy 93 when it was last reconstructed. These crossings separate the wildlife from the vehicles, making the roadway safer for both.

Summertime traffic (both motor vehicles and cyclists) is expected to increase on Hwy. 83. This volume of highway users poses safety concerns. Improvements to the infrastructure could provide safer travel for everyone.

### **5.3 School Safety**

The Swan Valley Elementary School is located along the west side of Hwy 83 approximately three miles south of Condon. Vehicles, including buses, access the school directly from the highway. There is a no-passing zone on the highway adjacent to the school. Other safety measures advocated by the community include extending the no-passing zone farther north, installing flashing signals to indicate the school zone, reduced speed limits during school hours, and visible law enforcement.

### **5.4 Road Maintenance**

Missoula County maintains county roads in the planning area. General maintenance includes snow plowing, grading and reapplying gravel when needed, and dust suppression.

### **5.5 Transit and Para-transit**

Transportation to medical appointments are available for veterans or senior citizens of the Upper Swan Valley via the Disabled American Veterans (DAV), the Veterans Transportation Service (VTS) and, I Ride Seeley Swan Van Service, a joint effort between Swan Valley Senior Services and the Seeley Lake Community Foundation.

### **5.6 Goals, Policies, and Actions**

#### **Goals:**

- 1. Maintain a high level of mobility, access, and circulation for Upper Swan Valley residents and visitors.**
- 2. Promote public transportation in the Hwy 83 corridor serving Swan Lake, the Upper Swan Valley, Seeley Lake, Missoula, and Kalispell.**

#### **Policies:**

- 1. Require developers to make road improvements to mitigate any adverse impacts from subdivisions commensurate with the rural character of the area.**
- 2. Work with local Montana Department of Transportation officials to continue to evaluate improvements to Hwy 83 that will make it safer for motorists and wildlife.**

**Actions:**

- 1. Support a bikeway along the Hwy 83 corridor that links to the Seeley Lake bikeway system.**
- 2. Request a more visible presence of highway patrol in front of the Swan Valley School.**
- 3. Seek other funding sources and/or other alternatives for dust abatement on county roads.**

## **6.0 Public Facilities and Services**

Law enforcement, fire protection, potable water and wastewater systems, emergency medical services, parks, playgrounds, schools, community centers, libraries--- all public facilities and services that make life in any community, urban or rural, safe, and more pleasant. People in rural communities do not have access to neighborhood and community parks, but they tend to recreate in natural areas using trails and streams near their homes. However, some facilities and services are needed by ALL communities, and this element will focus primarily on those.

## **6.1 Emergency Services- Fire/Medical**

The Swan Valley Emergency Service (SVES) provides volunteer structural and wildland fire suppression, prevention, and emergency medical services throughout most of the Upper Swan Valley planning area and into southern Lake County. The SVES operates out of two stations, Station One being located in Condon just south of the Community Hall. Station Two is located in Lake County and its primary function is vehicle placement for a faster response in that part of the service area.

The current SVES force is 24 volunteers which includes 16 active firefighters and 14 emergency medical technicians (EMTs), with 4 members certified in both. Like many volunteer fire districts and service areas in Montana, the SVES is always looking for new members, but often experiences recruiting problems due to an aging population and increasing numbers of part time residents. All members of the SVES meet the state requirements each year. Financial support for both fire and medical emergency services is provided through a \$75 annual assessment on each property owner's tax bill.

The Seeley-Swan Fire Plan, updated in 2013, provides detailed description of fire hazards, terrain, infrastructure, land use patterns, and fire policies including fire protection measures for the wildland-urban interface (WUI). Volunteers routinely respond to wildland fires any time they are dispatched by Lake and Missoula County Emergency Response Centers (911). The U.S. Forest Service and Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) also respond to wildland fires. The Insurance Service Office (ISO) rating is 8.5 for properties within five (5) road miles of either Station One or Two. SVES volunteers will perform fire prevention inspections upon request, but no such inspections are required by county or state government, and inspections are not binding upon the property owner. FSA officials indicate that they respond to approximately 10 emergency medical service calls for every fire call.

SVES maintains the following vehicles:

- One Type 3 wildland engine with compressed air foam system (CAFS)
- One Type 6 wildland engine
- Two Type 1 engines with CAFS
- Three water tenders (4,000, 3,200, and 2,700 gallons capacity)
- One ambulance



Photo 6.1 Swan Valley Fire Service Area's Condon station.

## 6.2 Law Enforcement

Law enforcement and police patrol are provided by the Missoula County Sheriff's Office with two deputies to the Seeley-Swan area. Deputies are dispatched by the Missoula County Emergency Response Center (911) from a substation in Seeley Lake.

The Sheriff's Office has reciprocal response and assistance agreements with Lake and Powell counties, and is contracted by the U.S. Forest Service for patrol around Holland Lake and other active areas within the Flathead National Forest.

Regardless of whether a deputy is dispatched from home or from an administrative site, the targeted response time is 15 minutes. Some members of the community have expressed a desire for a greater police presence in the Upper Swan, and the addition of a third deputy would provide that. The Montana Highway Patrol also conducts vehicle patrols in the area, mostly along Hwy 83 for enforcement of traffic laws.

## 6.3 Swan Valley Library

The Missoula Public Library maintains a branch in the Swan Valley housed in a 624 square foot log building attached to the Community Hall. The structure was built in 1978, and is operated and maintained by one half-time employee (20 hours per week) and a five-member local board.

The Swan Valley Library is part of a shared catalog system. Collections are exchanged with the main library and other branches by means of couriers to offer patrons the widest variety possible.

In addition of a collection of fiction, non-fiction and reference materials, the Swan Valley library also offers books on CD, DVDs, and has Wi-Fi on site. Current issues of the Seeley-Swan



Pathfinder and the Missoulian newspapers are available in the library. New issues of several periodicals can be checked out. There are also donated older periodicals for patron use. Patrons can use public computers in the library.

The Swan Valley Library holds a discussion on a chosen book each month. The books used in the monthly discussion are available at the library to check out. Story Time for young children is held each Friday.

Photo 6.3 Swan Valley Community Library.

## 6.4 Aging Services

Missoula Aging Services partners with the Swan Valley Senior Services for local coordination and outreach. Congregate meals are provided 2 days per week at the Hungry Bear Restaurant and Meals On Wheels are dispatched Monday through Friday from the Hungry Bear to area residents.

A Missoula Aging Services Resource Specialist is based in Seeley Lake for Seeley-Swan area residents. The Specialist is the local face of Missoula Aging Services and provides assistance and referrals in transportation, Medicare, Medicaid, nutrition programs, in home services, caregiver support, volunteer opportunities, and over 600 resources for Missoula County seniors.

The current residents of the Swan Valley have identified a number of additional facilities and services they would like to see in the Condon area:

- Long-term in-home health care and living assistance; trained but non-medical persons to assist seniors with showering and general hygiene, medications, minor household chores, etc.
- A senior center for recreation, socializing, education, etc.
- A shopping and delivery service for seniors who can no longer drive, or do not care to drive themselves.

## 6.5 Parks & Recreation

County-owned facilities in the Condon area include the Community Hall and Library, Alpine Meadows Park, and the Mission-Swan Park.

The Missoula County Parks and Trails Master Plan classifies the Community Center (Community Hall and Library) as “community parks”, and Mission-Swan and Alpine Meadows as “conservation parks”.

## **6.6 Schools**

The single public school in the planning area is the Swan Valley Elementary School located on the west side of Hwy. 83 approximately 7 miles south of Condon. It has pre-school through 8th grade and for the 2017-2018 school year, has a total enrollment of 29. The teaching staff includes two full time teachers, one full time classroom teacher/Supervising Teacher, one full time secretary, one part-time pre-school teacher, and two part-time teacher aides. Contracted services with Seeley Lake Elementary include a part-time administrator, a part-time school counselor, special education services and a District Clerk. Students in grades 9 through 12 are transported by bus to the high school in Seeley Lake. The Swan Valley School has provided and is looking to continue to develop and provide additional continuing education opportunities for adults as well as teacher education. At visioning sessions, some residents expressed the desire to have some life-long learning opportunities available locally.

Recently, the Swan Valley Elementary School District Board of Trustees completed a strategic plan that looks out some 30 years into the future. This plan is part of an on-going strategic process that sets forth the District’s core ideologies and vision for the future. It was adopted by the Board in February of 2015, then revised again at a planning session prior to the 2015-16 school year. The plan and the process of which it is a part are intended to maintain the school’s high academic standards and technological edge into the future. The District’s future goals as set forth in the plan include:

- Maintain and expand enrollment. Increase enrollment outreach so that approximately 5% of the school’s students are from out of the area and pay tuition.
- Keep a high quality, motivated staff and faculty that fully support the vision for the school and the district.
- Maintain and continue to develop leadership at the administrative and board levels.
- Continue to provide facilities to support student learning and the identified vision and initiatives of the strategic plan. (A facilities plan has already been developed.)
- Support and engage the community in a manner that enhances programs and opportunities for students.

## **6.7 Museum and Heritage Site**

The Upper Swan Valley Historical Society owns and operates Swan Valley Museum which features artifacts and other historic and cultural resources from the valley’s early settlement period.

## **6.8 Refuse Disposal**

Household and commercial refuse disposal in the planning area is provided on a monthly fee basis by Republic Services. Collection is once per week, and Republic sends collection packers down most county roads. For a fee, some Swan residents opt to haul trash to Seeley Lake or to the Lake County Transfer site.

## **6.9 Swan Valley Connections**

Swan Valley Connections is an education and conservation nonprofit that serves landowners in the Swan watershed.

Swan Valley Connections offers technical and funding assistance for residents, including:

- Swan Valley Bear Resources
- Forest Stewardship (Beetle Pheromones, Fuel Reduction)
- Noxious Weed Control and Eradication
- Wetland Restoration
- Visitor Services (on behalf of the USFS)
- Natural Resource Education for all ages

## **6.10 Goals, Policies, and Actions**

### **Goals:**

- 1. Ensure adequate public facilities and services to support the current and future population and economic activity of the Upper Swan Valley.**
- 2. Seek greater support for community infrastructure and services from Missoula County.**

### **Policies:**

- 1. Continue support for localized services such as the Swan Valley Fire Service Area, Quick Response Unit, and local search and rescue.**
- 2. Ensure that developers mitigate impacts of development on public services.**
- 3. Recognize that levels of service for public facilities and services is partly a function of location and access.**

### **Actions:**

- 1. Support the continued operation of the local library and its efforts to expand services and materials available to the community.**
- 2. Continue to provide support for the Swan Valley Elementary School and to assist where needed to help the District realize the vision and goals set forth in the strategic plan.**
- 3. Explore the feasibility of a trash transfer station and community recycling program.**
- 4. Utilize the resources of the Swan Valley Community Foundation in order to access grants and programs for recreational, cultural, and community services and facilities.**

- 5. Explore partnerships to provide adult and continuing educational opportunities for the Upper Swan.**
- 6. Explore the feasibility for improved/increased medical services in the Upper Swan, including home health care.**
- 7. Work with Missoula County to achieve a better police presence in the area.**
- 8. Work with Missoula Aging Services to bring more needed services to the Upper Swan.**
- 9. Explore the feasibility of establishing a senior center in the Condon area.**

## **7.0 Implementation Element**

The Implementation Element sets forth the processes and procedures, and identifies the partnerships and collaborations, needed to get things done.

### **7.1 Special Programs and Studies**

Some of the issues addressed in this plan require more detailed study than can reasonably be provided in the plan itself. In addition, such studies require special expertise and resources that may not be available to those who prepared this plan. The speed and safety studies for Hwy 83 recommended in the Transportation Element and the ground water study recommended in the Natural Resources and Environment Element are two examples. These studies fall under the purview of outside agencies----the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) and the United States Geological Survey (USGS) and/or the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC)----and would have to be requested by Missoula County.

### **7.2 Education and Outreach**

Many of the plan's action statements can be accomplished through voluntary efforts by citizens in the community. Communicating the regional plan's vision to the public is critical. Education and outreach efforts can include disseminating information through publications, brochures, news releases, service announcements, displays, and other public relations methods. It also means obtaining regular feedback through task forces, surveys, public meetings, and customer service questionnaires. Programs such as these would be most effective if carried out by Missoula County in close cooperation with the Community Council.

### **7.3 Site Planning and Design Guidelines**

Site planning and design guidelines describe and illustrate planning and design techniques, features, and treatments that promote good community compatible design and environmentally sound practices. Guidelines could show proper setbacks, screening, tree preservation for buffering and filtered views into the site, and the appropriate scale for structures. In the Upper Swan Valley, guidelines would be an educational and communication tool with compliance voluntary. A design manual would be best produced by Missoula County in cooperation with the Community Council and citizens of the Swan Valley.

### **7.4 Regulations**

In a typical long range plan (growth policy, neighborhood plan, downtown revitalization, etc.), land development regulations of some kind are almost always an option for plan implementation. The possibility of establishing regulations in the Upper Swan was discussed by the Planning Committee early on in this planning process, and was raised again at the neighborhood meetings conducted during the summer of 2014. Basic zoning was discussed as were critical areas regulations and site design standards. However, it was concluded by the Planning Committee

that regulations of any type have insufficient support in the community for them to be recommended in this plan.

The Land Use Element in this plan devotes considerable discussion to the ramifications of having no land development regulations in the planning area. (Sanitation standards and building codes are administered in the planning area.) In the absence of a zoning code and the site design standards (setbacks, height of structures, landscape standards, lot coverage, etc.) that are part of the zoning code, residential and non-residential structures can be built almost anywhere and in almost any manner. This is contrary to what the community expressed in the neighborhood meetings that future development should be compatible with the community in terms of scale, character, and quality. But these attributes cannot be assured without regulations of some kind. In that regard, there are two action statements in the Land Use Element that read:

1. Explore a zoning code or permit system that would incorporate standards to protect the scale and rural character of the Upper Swan.

2. Investigate design standards for new development that will retain the visual qualities of the Hwy 83 corridor.

Therefore, the community still has regulatory options should it decide to explore them. The community can request the Community Council to work with Missoula County to act upon the first statement above. Or, if scale, character, and quality are more important than the actual use of the land, the community can ask the Council to explore a design standards ordinance with the County. By the same token, if the community feels that natural resources are not being adequately protected by voluntary measures, they can ask the Council to explore critical areas standards with Missoula County. Only Missoula County is empowered to enact and administer these regulations.

## **7.5 Primary Review Criteria**

Sec. 76-1-601(3), MCA, requires that local governments include in their growth policies definitions of the subdivision review criteria set forth in Sec. 76-3-608(3), and, how those criteria will be applied in subdivision decision making. While this regional plan is actually a “neighborhood plan” under Montana law and not a growth policy, it is still helpful for the people of the Upper Swan Valley community to communicate to the Missoula County Planning Board and Board of Commissioners how they would like to see these criteria defined and applied in the planning area. Some issues that may arise in subdivision review may be unique to (or especially important to the people of) the Upper Swan, and may not be specifically included in the County growth policy. This section will only address those unique or locally important issues, and will not attempt to restate the manner in which the review criteria are defined and described in the Missoula County Growth Policy. The primary review criteria are impacts of proposed subdivisions on the following:

- Agriculture
- Agriculture water user facilities
- Local services
- Natural environment
- Wildlife

- Wildlife habitat
- Public health and safety

**Agriculture:** In addition to the standard agricultural activities of crop growing and the raising and caring for livestock, commercial fruit and vegetable gardens (including their organic status if applicable) should be considered agriculture, as should beekeeping. A finding of fact of adverse impact on any of these activities should be subject to conditions of record requiring mitigation, or to denial of the preliminary plat.

**Agriculture Water User Facilities:** These are usually facilities such as ditches and head gates, but could also include appurtenances such as maintenance roads and easements. As there are few irrigated pastures or fields in the planning area, no additions to Missoula County's application of this criteria are needed.

**Local Services:** These services are essential services such as law enforcement, fire protection, and emergency services. Law enforcement is provided by the Missoula County Sheriff's Office, and fire suppression and emergency medical services are provided by the Swan Valley Fire Service Area. Local services can also include roads and access. As such, access should be an issue in evaluating impacts of a subdivision on local services. Roads may not be adequate for emergency access and/or the service providers may not have the vehicles and equipment to reach the proposed subdivision.

**Natural Environment:** This topic generally covers air and water quality, but it can also include hazards such as potentially unstable slopes, avalanche zones, and floodplains. Impacts to cultural and historic resources are often assessed under this topic as well. Because of the high density of perennial and intermittent streams in the planning area as well as the lack of a storm drainage system, water quality can be impacted by silt and pollution-laden run-off from paved and unpaved parking, drive, and vehicle storage areas. Detention/retention ponds or vegetated swales would be reasonably effective mitigation measures. Storm water information should always be provided with any preliminary plat submittal. Also, no occupied structure should encroach upon a floodplain.

**Wildlife/Wildlife Habitat:** Impacts on wildlife and wildlife habitat are often considered together because impacts to wildlife are most often impacts to the habitat, and not the animals themselves. The most common impact to habitat is the direct loss of critical habitat caused by the proposed subdivision. In addition to this direct loss, this plan proposes that fragmentation of remaining habitat also be considered an adverse impact. Fragmentation can be mitigated by eliminating building lots and clustering building lots. If fragmentation of critical wildlife habitat cannot be effectively mitigated, it should be considered grounds to deny the preliminary plat.

By the same token, impacts on daily and/or seasonal big game and predator migration corridors should be evaluated as an impact on wildlife habitat. In the absence of an alternative means to move about, encroachment and/or blocking of these corridors could keep animals from reaching food, water, shelter, breeding and/or calving grounds, and access to seasonal habitat. Effective

mitigation may include density reductions and/or clustering, and failure to mitigate may be grounds for denial of the preliminary plat.

**Public Health and Safety:** Some considerations here duplicate those in Natural Environment, but others include wildfire hazards and man-made hazards and potential dangers such as explosions, exposure to toxins (a tanker car derailment would be an example of this), dam failure, seismic activity, and traffic hazards. In addition, topics of a public health nature could include threats to well water and impacts associated with individual sewage disposal systems---- especially **cumulative** impacts. As stated elsewhere in this document, the people of the Upper Swan planning area do not wish to replicate the experiences of many other communities around Montana, which because of the number and densities of septic systems, were required to turn to central wastewater collection and treatment----even though individual septic systems had all been installed and operated according to state and county regulations. In the case of septic system density, the actual impact of a single subdivision may be difficult assess. The density question itself is one of cumulative impact-----of many septic systems in (perhaps) many subdivisions impacting the environment over time. The actual impact has yet to be measured, and can only be modeled, because the phenomena has yet to occur. Still, the issue of **cumulative** impact of individual sewage disposal systems on public health----and the particular impacts on ground water----should be considered in subdivision review.

## **7.6 Initiating Implementation Actions**

For a Community Council, which is an arm of county government, the most effective way to initiate any sort of program to implement the regional plan is to work directly with Missoula County. The Council may wish to prioritize the action items in the plan, or work with the County to set priorities. In any event, the Community Council should meet with the Board of County Commissioners in workshop session to discuss the action items and formulate a strategy to work together to see them accomplished.

## **7.7 Implementation Time Frame & Updates**

Generally, this plan looks at a time horizon of approximately 20 years. However, it is intended that this plan be examined and revisited every five years. That does not mean that the plan must be rewritten every five years, but data sets should be updated, trends checked and possibly re-examined, and goals, policies, and actions re-evaluated for effectiveness. A total rewrite should be considered if the plan no longer expresses the vision, culture, attitude, and values of the community, or it simply becomes outdated due to changes in state or federal law (as the 1996 plan had become, precipitating the need for this planning effort).

## **7.8 Plan Amendments**

All procedures and criteria for text and map amendments to this regional plan shall be set forth in the land development regulations and/or policies of Missoula County. However, criteria for amendments may generally include:

- A specific error was made in the regional plan that necessitates an amendment to the text or maps in order to preserve a property right, or to preserve or achieve equal protection under the law. (Example: A property may have been treated differently than a similarly situated property in the same general area under the same general conditions.)
- Community conditions have changed to the degree that amendments to maps and/or text will facilitate achieving community goals and the overall vision of the planning area's citizens. (Example: A new business or industry may cause a need for workforce housing, and increased population numbers may create a greater market and need for additional commercial and service businesses.)
- There is a clear community benefit in terms of achieving goals, resolving problems or issues, or furthering the realization of the Upper Swam-Condon community vision. (Example: A proposed amendment may produce desired community benefits such as affordable housing, bike and pedestrian trails, or other transportation alternatives.)

## **Appendices A-C**

### **Appendix A—Element 1 Natural Resources**

#### **1.4 Bull Trout Habitat Conservation**

During visioning sessions and subsequent neighborhood meetings, residents have made it clear that they place great value on clean air and water, and preservation of wildlife and wildlife habitat. However, in discussing how best to meet the objective of protecting these assets the planning committee opted for voluntary measures in the form of best management instead of critical area stands or similar regulations. (Note: In the event of a subdivision filed, BMPs may become mandatory as conditions of preliminary plat approval in order to meet the primary review criteria set forth both in state law and in the Missoula County subdivision regulations, to minimize impacts to wildlife and wildlife habitat.

Bull trout and their habitat have been studied extensively in western Montana...the Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) and final EIS conducted by the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) and completed in 2010. This habitat plan is for five species, three of which are listed by the Endangered Species Act (ESA): Grizzly bear, Canada lynx, Bull trout, Westslope cutthroat trout and Columbia redband trout (not present in the planning area).

The purpose of the HCP is to set forth habitat conservation standards and guidelines to minimize ‘takes’ of listed species during harvesting activities on DNRC trust lands. However, these standards provide a sound basis for BMPs to be implemented anywhere development activity impacts the habitat of listed species. Standards for the conservation of bull trout habitat will also prove effective in preserving habitat for other cold water fish as well.

Generally, the HCP calls for a buffer of unharvested timber 50 feet in width from mean high water of a stream. In some cases, a secondary buffer that allows some harvesting may be required. No roads may be constructed within the buffers (unless they are crossing the stream, in which case a 310 permit from the local conservation district is required), and no vegetation may be removed that is protecting the creek banks against erosion (and siltation) and/or maintaining shade over the water body to prevent warming.

### **Appendix B—Element 1 Natural Resources**

#### **1.12 Ground Water Quality**

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.

Since 1993, every permit for an individual sewage disposal system in Missoula County has been subjected to a non-degradation analysis. Under this analysis, a mixing zone running parallel to the direction of ground water flow ensures that both nitrate and phosphorus levels will not exceed acceptable levels at the end of the plume. The purpose of this analysis is to protect high quality ground and surface waters. While this is a very high standard of analysis, local health

departments are permitted to administer standards more stringent than those of the state with approval from the County Board of Health.

It is quite typical for a “source water” basin, and especially one with a small and dispersed population, to have exceptionally clean ground water. However, localized contamination can occur anywhere at any time due to faulty or failed septic systems and/or drain fields. Also, no comprehensive ground water study has ever been conducted for this area. Anecdotally, it is known that some wells in the planning area have become dry or at least are not experiencing the productivity they once did. Whether this is due to recent dry weather or to some other factor(s) is unknown.

### **Appendix C—Element 3 Land Use**

**3.5 Additional information regarding Regulatory Framework (or land use regulations) in Missoula County:** Missoula County does not administer a general zoning code in the planning area. However, the Conservation District has an effective palette of best management practices for stabilizing slopes, protecting stream banks from erosion and failure, and for protecting wetlands and the water quality of streams.

## **Acknowledgements**

The Condon Community Council and the Planning Committee of the Community Council wish to thank all those who have had a part in bringing the Swan Valley Regional Plan to completion. The effort to update the Community Plan occurred over a period of time and involved many individuals, too numerous to list. The Plan could not have been completed without all those who participated in neighborhood meetings, Council and Planning Committee meetings and submission of revision recommendations along the way. If you participated in any way to bring the Plan to completion please accept a heartfelt thank-you for your interest in the Condon community.