



3/2/22

Karen Jerger
Rafter J HOA

Dear Karen,

Thank you for contacting Teton Conservation District (TCD) regarding the Rafter J Homeowners Association's Open Space and Trails Assessment. After reviewing the concept plans, summary of findings, and survey results, TCD staff generated the following thoughts for your consideration:

Wildlife:

The Concept Plans state that "(4) signs will be added in the Flat Creek Corridor reminding users to be respectful of wildlife and to please leash their dogs if wildlife is present or nearby." This is a good start. When deciding on language to include on signs, it may be helpful to highlight that wildlife is always present and nearby. It is common to become aware of wildlife after it is too late to control your dog.

Large contiguous patches of willows, such as the ~12 acre patch of willow in the South East Flat Creek Corridor and the ~5 acre patch north of Big Trail Drive, hold significant nesting value to migrant songbirds. Some steps residents can take to improve the functionality of this habitat are to:

- 1) Limit the presence of free-ranging domestic cats in the open space. A [2012 synthesis](#) of 38 studies investigating predation rates of birds by cats, estimated that a single domestic cat kills up to 34 birds a year.
- 2) Prevent corvids (ravens, crows, and magpies) from accessing trash and supplemental foods. Corvids that gain access to human foods typically produce more offspring. Unnaturally high populations of corvids exert unnaturally high predation pressure on songbirds and their nests.

Consider working with the neighboring property in the North Big Trails area to install PVC fence marking material on the barbed wire fence spanning Flat Creek. This simple modification could reduce flight hazard to waterfowl utilizing Flat Creek as a flight corridor.

It is admirable that 93.7% of Rafter J survey respondents are open to considering the needs of wildlife when recreating in the Open Space. Limiting human presence on specific areas of the open space has the potential to increase value of habitat to wildlife, particularly in winter. TCD would recommend considering a seasonal Open Space closure **only** if it was supported by a near unanimous percentage of homeowners. As noted in the Open Space and Trails Assessment, restricting access will be impossible to enforce, and potentially detrimental to encouraging good stewardship.

Teton Conservation District is a local government entity whose mission is to work with the community in the conservation of natural resources for the health and benefit of people and the environment.



Water Quality:

Sign language should include a reminder to stay on trails when possible. Social trails and braiding trail networks lead to increased erosion during flood events, increasing sediment transport into Flat Creek. New constructed trails in design alternatives should have a buffer from the water's edge of 10 ft or more, reducing the chance for the foot traffic to accelerate erosion of the streambank.

Sign language should reference that Flat Creek is an impaired stream on Wyoming's 303(d) list for "Physical Substrate Habitat Alterations", i.e. increased sediment delivery clogging interstitial spaces in gravel used for cutthroat trout spawning and macroinvertebrate habitat. For the average user, language could be "staying on the trails prevent erosion of new trail surfaces, reducing sediment transport to Flat Creek."

Last summer, Flat Creek experienced some of the highest recorded daily max temperatures since monitoring began. Temperatures of 70°F or above are considered stressful to cutthroat trout populations. A reminder to trail users: fishing is extremely discouraged during times when Flat Creek experiences these water temperatures, as it can and does increase mortality during warm periods.

Invasive Species:

Continue to leverage expertise of Teton County Weed and Pest to describe the current presence of invasive vegetation and the efficacy of future treatments. Service days coordinated strategically throughout the growing season can be an effective means of controlling invasive species. Volunteer days are great opportunities for homeowners to learn something new and cultivate pride through stewardship.

Thank you for taking a thoughtful approach in your updates to the Rafter J Open Space.

Sincerely,

Carlin Girard
Executive Director
Teton Conservation District

Teton Conservation District is a local government entity whose mission is to work with the community in the conservation of natural resources for the health and benefit of people and the environment.



Teton Conservation District is a local government entity whose mission is to work with the community in the conservation of natural resources for the health and benefit of people and the environment.

420 W. Pearl Ave. | PO Box 1070 | Jackson, WY 83001 | (307) 733-2110
www.tetonconservation.org | info@tetonconservation.org