

# Summary of Key Issues

- Introduction ..... 2
- Growth and Development ..... 2
  - Clear ACI Agreements ..... 2
  - Appropriateness of Current Zoning Designations ..... 2
  - Property Rights Balance..... 3
  - Costs of Rural Development ..... 3
  - Suburban-Agriculture Interface Issues..... 3
  - Consumption of Agricultural Lands ..... 3
  - Wildland Interface Issues..... 4
  - Rise in Housing Costs ..... 4
- County Character and Image ..... 4
  - North and South County Distinct From Each Other ..... 4
  - Bannock County Identity or Image ..... 5
  - County Character and Heritage ..... 5
  - Quality of Life in the County..... 5
- Economic Vitality..... 5
  - Economic Diversity and Vitality ..... 5
  - Drought Impacts..... 6
- Infrastructure and Services ..... 6
  - Siting Future Power Plants, Transmission Lines, and Major Facilities ..... 6
  - Sewer Service Expansion ..... 6
  - Safety and Sustainability of Water Supply ..... 6
- Environmental Quality ..... 7
  - Wildlife Habitat and Migratory Route Protection ..... 7
  - Water Pollution Issues..... 7
  - Contamination from Mining and Processing Activities ..... 7

## **Introduction**

This summary provides an overview of the “key issues” facing the County to be addressed through the planning process. County staff, the Citizen’s Advisory Committee, County elected and appointed officials, the cities of Chubbuck and Pocatello, and the public helped identify and refine these issues. In the coming months, the planning process will further discuss these issues to evaluate potential policies and land use patterns that appropriately address these issues.

The issues are categorized under five general topics:

- Growth and Development;
- Community Character and Image;
- Economic Vitality;
- Infrastructure and Services; and
- Environmental Quality.

## **Growth and Development**

### **Clear ACI Agreements**

Idaho law requires counties to establish Area of City Impact (ACI) agreements with incorporated towns and cities within their boundaries. While the County has delineated ACIs with its communities, including Pocatello and Chubbuck, these agreements do not establish clear guidance on such processes as annexation and service expansion. The development of more detailed 2-party agreements (input and oversight) to guide activity within the ACI will assist with land use planning and development, as well as infrastructure investment and service expansion within these areas.

### **Appropriateness of Current Zoning Designations**

County zoning provides a small number of broad categories to guide land use patterns. In smaller towns, zoning designations provide minimal guidance regarding mix and transition of uses or how clustered developments should be planned. In addition, zoning designations within Pocatello and Chubbuck ACIs may need to be reassessed as water and sewer infrastructure is expanded and could potentially accommodate more urban densities. This plan will evaluate alternatives for land use and development patterns to address some of these underlying zoning questions through the future land use scenarios.

## **Property Rights Balance**

---

The future land use plan and supporting policies will need to continue establishing a fair balance between the goals of the community and the rights of individual property owners. The Comprehensive Plan process helps explore and discuss a variety of tools to help foster fair and equitable land use strategies.

## **Costs of Rural Development**

---

Studies show that rural development creates higher costs to serve than if the same development were to occur in an established town or city. These costs are monetary and environmental. Additional infrastructure and services have direct financial costs through the expansion of roadways as well as ongoing service costs. Current policies do not impose impact fees or require new development to cover the costs of additional infrastructure that will be needed to serve the development in the future (e.g., sewer lines), much less the ongoing costs of service and maintenance provision. In addition, more septic systems mean more sources of aquifer pollution, an environmental cost for the community with long-term implications. This plan will need to explore appropriate development patterns and policies to ensure infrastructure and service quality and efficiency.

## **Suburban–Agriculture Interface Issues**

---

Suburban areas increasingly encroach upon agriculture and result in homeowner complaints against farmers for smell and noise nuisances, despite existing Right-to-Farm provisions. New and expanding livestock operations, for example, have faced opposition from nearby residents based on environmental nuisance and health concerns. The Comprehensive Plan will need to work to resolve/address these land use conflicts. One opportunity will be the creation of a future land use plan map that will illustrate, and thereby make predictable, future land use patterns to current and future property owners.

## **Consumption of Agricultural Lands**

---

Two main market forces result in a decline in agricultural land supply in the County. First, increased demand for land to develop makes the sale of agricultural land to developers a more financially attractive option for farmers wishing to retire or heirs with no desire to continue the agricultural operation. Second, the global scale of food production and consumption drives down pricing to an extent that makes running a profitable agricultural enterprise challenging, particularly for independent farmers. This plan will need to evaluate agricultural land conservation priorities and establish appropriate goals, policies, and strategies to support community objectives.

## **Wildland Interface Issues**

---

Years of drought in western states have resulted in increasingly worse wildfire seasons. The summer of 2006 was a record-setting year for both number of fires and total acres burned. At the same time, development in many western states has sprawled out into rural and forested areas, exacerbating the risk of human-initiated fires and the scale of damage a fire can do to life and property once started. This trend has been true in the County, where development has increasingly pushed into more rural areas towards public lands where the potential of wildfire damage is higher. The County has adopted a Wildland Interface Code that establishes development and landscaping guidelines to help reduce potential for wildfire damage. Through this plan, the County can consider development strategies and policies (e.g., timber management practices) to help further reduce risk of forest fires and the damage that can be done to forests, wildlife, people, and property.

## **Rise in Housing Costs**

---

The recent pace of development has resulted in higher land prices which, in turn, have caused housing costs to escalate. Retaining a supply of housing that is attainable for members of the workforce, including service providers such as teachers, police and fire personnel is a challenge in many western communities. The issue is not of great proportions in Bannock County as of yet the County, through this Comprehensive Plan, will need to work proactively to address this issue to ensure a broad spectrum of housing types and values in the future before land prices and development patterns make finding solutions more complex and challenging.

## **County Character and Image**

### **North and South County Distinct From Each Other**

---

The built environment, economy, and character of the County vary greatly within the community, particularly from north to south. The northern portion is the most urbanized area of the County. It is also the major population and employment center. The southern portion is more rural and agricultural with little commercial or employment activity. The concentration of people and industry in the north has resulted in a tendency for planning and policy activities to disproportionately focus on the needs of the north over those of the south. This plan and the planning process will need to ensure broad participation from all areas of the County so that it serves the needs of the County as a whole.

## **Bannock County Identity or Image**

---

Bannock County, though not well known by those outside the region, is a point of pride for its residents who appreciate the sense of community, history, and natural beauty. Some, however, would like to see the County project a distinct identity or image to current or potential residents and visitors. As part of the visioning process of this planning effort, residents can identify assets of the County and define their vision for the community's future in a concise statement.

## **County Character and Heritage**

---

The County contains a number of distinctive historic and natural features, such as historic structures and the lava cliffs. Poorly planned development could endanger these assets. The County also has a rich archeological environment that includes both human and non-human resources. Dinosaur fossils have been excavated in the area and petroglyphs are widespread in lava flows. This Plan process will need to identify heritage protection goals and then establish development patterns and policies that support rather than conflict with those goals.

## **Quality of Life in the County**

---

Many residents have expressed the importance of retaining the quality of life in the community. Residents understand that increased employment and development activity would benefit new and existing residents and that property owners have the right to develop their property. At the same time, residents value certain attributes of the county and the lifestyle it affords. They do not wish to see these aspects lost in the face of development. The County will work to define and prioritize important features that together foster a high quality of life in the county through this Plan process. This plan will need to balance development with the county's values and goals as a whole so Bannock County's high quality of life is retained.

## **Economic Vitality**

### **Economic Diversity and Vitality**

---

The County has an economy based in resource activity and shipping (mining, agriculture, forestry, railroad), government (civic government, Idaho State University (ISU), federal and state agencies, K-12 educators, and other federal, state, and county service providers) and University related research and technology industries. This last area comprises a recent economic growth area, with the new medical center becoming an anchor for an emerging biomedical research cluster. The addition of this employment is a positive move towards economic diversification as well as adding primary jobs to the area. This plan should address policies and activities that continue to support increased economic diversity and encourage continued attraction of environmentally-sound industries.

## **Drought Impacts**

---

Ongoing drought conditions in Idaho impact municipal water supplies and have imposed hardship on potato farming and dairy/ranching activities. The US Department of Agriculture has several programs, including a low-interest emergency loan program to assist farmers through times of emergency, for which drought conditions have qualified Bannock and adjacent counties to be eligible in recent years. This plan will need to explore water management and conservation policies to ensure an adequate water supply for agriculture while maintaining supply and water quality standards for potable water to meet the needs of current and future development.

## **Infrastructure and Services**

### **Siting Future Power Plants, Transmission Lines, and Major Facilities**

---

As the County continues to develop, it will need to plan for and implement additional infrastructure to safely and adequately serve the growing population. This includes planning the locations for future power plants and transmission lines as well as other major facilities such as water treatment plants or wind farms. Advance planning can allow for appropriate land use planning and land acquisition to facilitate implementation in the future.

### **Sewer Service Expansion**

---

Sewer lines do not serve the majority of households within the unincorporated County; they are on septic systems. Areas with a concentration of septic tanks have been shown to be linked to aquifer contamination. The County is currently considering reducing the minimum acreage requirement for septic systems from five to 2.5 acres. A coordinated annexation and services agreement between the county and jurisdictions could address the timing and location of sewer extension and reduce the number of homes on septic.

### **Safety and Sustainability of Water Supply**

---

Portneuf River Valley has a per capita water use that is nearly two times the national standard. In addition, much of the development within the County is on septic, a source of aquifer pollution. Further development will impact aquifer health and recharge/supply. Greater understanding and consensus is needed on existing studies and data. This Plan should also address long term strategies needed to reduce consumption, safeguard aquifer recharge areas, and conserve the health of the aquifer that serves the area.

## Environmental Quality

### **Wildlife Habitat and Migratory Route Protection**

The County is home to critical habitat for Mule Deer and other wildlife. Land use planning will need to appropriately consider the location and connectivity of these habitat areas to ensure the continued health of the Mule Deer population as well as other wildlife.

### **Water Pollution Issues**

Current irrigation practice for cattle grazing pastures involves flooding the field. This results in cattle wastes being “flushed” into streams. In more urbanized areas, stormwater runoff can deteriorate stream channels and flush a variety of pollutants from streets and surfaces into the streams. Organic and inorganic pollutants impact the water quality, raise water temperatures, and harm fish and other stream wildlife. Stream and wetland protection measures should be explored as part of this plan to safeguard the quality of the water and stream habitats that support the population, economy, and wildlife of the area.

### **Contamination from Mining and Processing Activities**

Bannock County is home to many active and inactive mining activities. The 1,540-acre FMC site west of Pocatello in adjacent Power County illustrates the negative liability that can be left to a community after a mining or processing activity ceases operation. The FMC site, an old phosphorous processing plant with several waste ponds, has been declared a Superfund site. Remediation of this site is currently underway but will take a long time, given the overburdened nature of the Superfund program and complicated nature of cleanup activities. Due to the proximity of this site, future uses of this property will impact Bannock County, and particularly Chubbuck and Pocatello. Uses being considered include research and development, power generation, and emerging energy technologies.

Other active and inactive mining sites throughout the County, including those with naturally occurring radon, will need to be considered in the planning of future development. This plan should explore alternate remediation options, such as Voluntary Cleanup Agreements, that could successfully clean properties and put them back into productive use for the community.