



IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

UPPER SNAKE REGION
4279 Commerce Circle
Idaho Falls, Idaho 83401

C.L. "Butch" Otter / Governor
Virgil Moore / Director

June 20, 2013

Angie Rutherford
Teton County Planning and Building Department
150 Courthouse Drive
Driggs, ID 83422

RE: Proposed Amendments to Master Plan & Final Plat of River Rim Ranch PUD Division II

Dear Angie:

Idaho Department of Fish and Game (Department) received a request from Teton County to review an application submitted by River Rim Ranch to amend their Planned Unit Development (PUD) Master Plan and the Phase I Plat (River Rim Ranch Amendment). We understand the original PUD Master Plan was approved in 2006 prior to adoption of Teton County Wildlife Overlay regulations and ordinances. The Department is familiar with the River Rim Ranch PUD and provided a comment letter to Teton County on March 7, 2006 concerning potential wildlife effects and recommendations to avoid and minimize those effects. Since that time development has occurred but in areas where there has not been development, our 2006 comments are still relevant.

Fish and wildlife are property of all Idaho citizens, and the Department and the Idaho Fish and Game Commission are expressly charged with statutory responsibility to preserve, protect, perpetuate and manage all fish and wildlife in Idaho (Idaho Code 36-103 (a)). In fulfillment of our statutory charge and direction as provided by the Idaho Legislature, we offer the following comments and recommendations. The purpose of these comments are to assist the decision-making authorities in Teton County by providing technical information addressing potential effects on wildlife and wildlife habitat and how any potential effects might be avoided, minimized or mitigated. It is not the purpose of Idaho Department of Fish and Game to support or oppose this proposal.

The Department's primary concern with the proposed River Rim Ranch Amendment deals with the South Canyon Area (Division II, Phase VI) which overlaps a big game migration corridor and seasonal range area (big game overlay). As mentioned above, we understand that residential lots and roads were already platted and approved within this narrow big game overlay and greatly appreciate Teton County in seeking additional comments. The River Rim Ranch Amendment depicts a similar residential housing and road footprint within the big game overlay. We recognize and also appreciate the attempt of River Rim Ranch to incorporate a small wildlife corridor within the existing big game overlay as described in Biota's Wildlife Habitat Overlay and Landscape Management Assessment that accompanied the application. However, we do not

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agree that proposed development within the big game wildlife overlay would not adversely impact migration of deer and elk through the subdivision. We conclude that reducing the size and width of the migration corridor and having residential housing pressures (e.g. pets, use of ATVs, snowmobiles, roads, and other human activities) may adversely affect deer and elk migration through the PUD. Much time and collaboration went into identifying sensitive and critical wildlife areas for the County approved wildlife overlay. The existing agriculture land provides an unimpeded path of migration as compared to roads and a residential subdivision. Consequently, by recognizing the needs of wildlife and implementing proper planning the River Rim Ranch is likely to preserve some of the wildlife characteristics currently observed. We recommend that Teton County officials work with the applicant to help maintain as much of the migration corridor as possible to provide a buffer for migrating deer and elk and help minimize effects on migration. We also recommend mitigation aimed at enhancing existing migration corridor habitats, particularly agriculture land, with native shrub, grass and tree species to help provide security cover and forage in the corridor. We believe a balance can be struck between development and wildlife by maintaining at least a 2000 foot wide corridor that is properly planted, irrigated and monitored for vegetation survival.

The Department recognizes canyon rim habitats as very important for wildlife. Intensive housing development on the canyon rim, without setbacks, may pressure big game animals away from forage and migration areas and decrease available wildlife habitat. The Department recommends a minimum setback (e.g. 500 feet) on all buildings from the edge of the canyon where natural vegetation begins. This will help minimize adverse effects to wildlife and allow increased movement and utilization along the canyon rim. To help mitigate development along canyon rim areas, we recommend planting native trees and shrubs to offer security cover and forage.

We provide these comments and recommendations in hope that wildlife continues to perpetuate within the River Rim Ranch PUD and surrounding area. Deer and elk rely on a network of connected habitats to migrate from winter to summer range as identified in the Big Game Migration Corridors and Season Range Maps approved in Teton County Developmental Code. Please contact our Environmental Staff Biologist, Tom Bassista, if additional technical information is required by Teton County concerning this proposal. Thank you for providing us with an opportunity to comment on the River Rim Ranch PUD Amendment.

Sincerely,



Steve Schmidt
Regional Supervisor

SLS:TPB:jms

cc: Terry Thomas, IDFG
Doug Petersen, IDFG
Robert Cavallaro, IDFG

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