



# West Glacier Vision Plan

Flathead County, Montana | 2023

# Land Acknowledgment

A land acknowledgment is a statement that formally recognizes the historical and continuing connection between indigenous peoples and their native lands. It is an important social justice and decolonial practice that promotes indigenous visibility and honors those who have stewarded Montana's land for generations. In this spirit, we acknowledge that the lands and waters of this great state are the traditional homelands of many tribes.

As a vision plan, this is particularly relevant. This plan captures the particular vision of this community at one point in time and in response to the intuitive perception of growth and impacts that became overwhelming to a small community of roughly 300. We must assume that this plan would likely be different if conducted at any number of points in time with different peoples in the past, especially with our Indigenous predecessors who did not own the lands, but respected and stewarded them in harmony nonetheless.

We would like to begin by acknowledging that this place is the traditional land of the Siksitaistapi (Sick-si-GAY-si-tapi), Kootenai (KOOT'-i-neh), Séliš (SEH'-leesh) and Qlispé (qw-leese-PEH) People. We offer this acknowledgment to recognize Indigenous peoples enduring connection to their traditional territories, to observe the history of the land that is currently shared by many peoples, and to recognize stewardship as a shared responsibility of all those who reside in a territory. We respect and honor the longstanding relationships these tribes and others have to this land, as they are its original caretakers.

For more information on these tribes, please see  
<https://www.nps.gov/glac/learn/historyculture/tribes.htm>

and the Native American Speaks Program at  
<https://www.nps.gov/glac/planyourvisit/nas.htm>

# Acknowledgements

---

The 2023 West Glacier Vision Plan is the result of the enthusiasm, hard work and commitment of many individuals and groups in the community. They include those named below, but also many others from the West Glacier and greater Flathead County area:

## West Glacier Planning Team

Mary T. McClelland, West Glacier Community Organizer  
Monica Jungster, Montana House, Owner  
Gary Rodgers, Pursuit, Chief Operating Officer, Glacier/Alaska  
Mark Mussman, Former Director of Planning, Flathead County  
Sarah Lundstrum, National Park Conservation Association  
Jeff Mow, Superintendent, Glacier National Park  
Mary Riddle, Chief of Planning, Glacier National Park  
Patsy McEntee, NPS Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program  
Sharon Bengtson, West Glacier & Greater Middle Canyon Community Representative

## Thank You to the Flathead County Planning and Zoning and the Flathead County Commissioners (August 2021)

Planning Director Erik Mack  
Flathead County Planning & Zoning Board  
Jeff Larsen, Tyler Hoffman, Verdell Jackson, Buck Breckenridge,  
Greg Stevens, Sandra Nogal, Elliot Adams  
Flathead County Commissioners Pamela Holmquist,  
Randy Brodehl, Brad Abell  
Middle Canyon Land Use Area Committee

## Thank You to our Technical Advisors

Robert Davies, USFS  
Rachel Schmidt, MT Office of Outdoor Recreation  
Jan Stoddard, Montana Office of Tourism & Business Development  
Jenn Thomsen, University of Montana Department of Society & Conservation  
Alicia Ulwelling, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation  
Onno Wieringa, Flathead Lakers  
Stephen Frye, Fire Professional and Flathead Basin Commission  
Rick Trembath, Fire Professional

## Stakeholders

Flathead Conservation Roundtable  
West Glacier Preservation Association  
Dave Prunty, Flathead County Transportation  
Doug Mitchell, Glacier Conservancy  
Marc Ducharme, Xanterra  
Flathead County Transportation and Emergency Services Crown of the Continent Community of Practice  
Kara Grau, Institute of Tourism and Recreation Research/UMT  
Diane Medler, 2020 Director of Kallispell Chamber of Commerce

Racene Friede, Glacier Country Tourism  
The Glacier Park Business Community  
Shelby & Dave Hampton, Glacier Outfitter  
Aubrie Lorona, Discovery Center, Swan Mountain Outfitters  
Denny Gignoux, Glacier Guides and Montana Raft Company  
Darwon Stoneman, Glacier Outdoor Center/Glacier Raft Company/  
Glacier Anglers Byron & Lee Beers, Great Northern Resort  
Alexa & Justin Carrol, Wild River Adventures

Editing and final formatting completed by Rachel Shouse.

# Table of Contents

---

Executive Summary	Page	6
<hr/>		
Chapter 1: Introduction and Background		8
<hr/>		
A. Why a Vision Plan		8
B. Need for the Project Plan		8
C. Elements of the Plan		8
D. Planning Process		9
<hr/>		
Chapter 2: West Glacier Community Profile		12
<hr/>		
A. Area Description and History		12
B. Community Character and Aesthetics		14
C. Community Self-Identity		16
D. Demographics and Development Trends		16
E. Transportation, Connectivity and Environment		17
F. Forest Conditions, Wildfire and the Community		20
G. Relevant Planning Efforts		21
<hr/>		
Chapter 3: West Glacier Vision: Goals, Principles and Actions		22
<hr/>		
A. Goal 1: Preserve Community Character and Sense of Place		24
B. Goal 2: Create a Safe and Resilient Community		28
C. Goal 3: Enhance Community Communications and Participation		32
D. Goal 4: Support Sustainable Outdoor Recreation Opportunities		35
E. Goal 5: Provide Seamless Transportation Connections		40
<hr/>		
Chapter 4: The Path Forward – Implementation		44
<hr/>		
Appendices *		
<hr/>		
A. Flathead County Planning Definitions, Terms and References		47
B. U.S. Department of Interior Commendation		49

\* Supplemental appendices are available upon request. Please email [middlecanyonmt@gmail.com](mailto:middlecanyonmt@gmail.com) to request.



# Executive Summary

---

The West Glacier Vision Plan (WGVP) reflects the community's passion for their heritage and energy for focusing efforts on resiliency and development that is compatible with a rural Montana environment. West Glacier identifies closely with long-standing connections to the pristine landscapes of Glacier National Park, the Middle Fork of the Flathead Wild and Scenic River, and Flathead National Forest. As a result, each recommended action in the plan was carefully considered with the overarching vision to nurture and care for what exists in West Glacier today including the preservation of its wilderness qualities, natural resources, cultural and unique residential and recreational experience. West Glacier is the welcoming host to visitors to Glacier National Park, famous for its diversity of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems and wildlife, ancient sedimentary rock mountains, and old-growth forests. The population of a few hundred residents along with the seasonal tourism businesses are the protectors and representatives of this community that have built their livelihood stewarding the rugged beauty that surrounds them.

## Community Vision Statement

*West Glacier envisions their community as a place where recreation, healthy lifestyles, and sustainable development converge to provide a high quality of life, while retaining unique historic character, habitat, and abundant natural scenic beauty.*

Conducting a visioning project through 2020 created planning challenges that ultimately did not alter the planning timeline. However, the COVID-19 pandemic changed the way public outreach and engagement could be accomplished in later phases of the project due to the loss of in-person meetings. Fortunately, the planning team held a round of very successful in-person public and stakeholder engagement meetings in February 2020 and synthesized participants' comments. Because of the seasonality of many of West Glacier's businesses and residents, additional meetings had been planned for June when the maximum number of people from the community could be convened together. For health and safety concerns, it was then necessary to shift to a combination of virtual meetings and online engagement opportunities to gain additional feedback from a diverse cross-section of people. The project planning team reached out to part-time and long-time residents, vacation rental owners, business owners, government agencies, and local non-profits.

In addition to adapting the project planning process to accommodate the challenges of the pandemic, it was also necessary for this team to coordinate closely on organizational challenges throughout the year. This working group proved beneficial to the community and each other for the sharing of information and highlighted the need for an ongoing collaborative multi-organizational working group to be formed as an outcome of this process.

From the variety of public feedback collected, several themes emerged around which community value statements evolved. Under each of these statements, action areas with specific strategies were developed as a means for accomplishing each goal. These goals included the following:

1. Preserve Community Character and Sense of Place
2. Create a Safe and Resilient Community
3. Enhance Community Communications and Participation
4. Support Sustainable Outdoor Recreation Opportunities
5. Provide Seamless Transportation Connections

## Moving Forward

While the planning team worked within the new parameters of the 2020 pandemic, there were many challenges in engaging all those with an interest in the future of West Glacier. Online tools and virtual meetings could not fully replace the focus group workshops that had been planned. As the community moves forward with the vision plan, there is a recognition that it is a living document that should be revisited and discussed fully and openly when people can safely meet again in person. The plan should also be reviewed and updated on a regular basis.

As a community-driven plan, the WGVP has been developed to support focused collaborative work to preserve common core values of the community into the future. The intent of the plan is to focus planning efforts and policies to address current issues and future opportunities. It is a planning document that aids in making decisions on land use, redevelopment, public services, facilities, infrastructure, environment, and community communications.

The project is a voluntary effort dependent on the collective, shared values of West Glacier residents and stakeholders. Achieving these goals will require that working groups organize around areas of interest in the action items identified in the plan.

With the communication channels that have been opened and the framework established, the community has a path to the shared imagined vision. In order for the WGVP to be fully realized, it will need to go through a formal adoption process by Flathead County which can happen as either an addendum to the 1994 Canyon Plan or as a separate, stand-alone Neighborhood Plan. To this end, the development of the WGVP follows the prescribed guidelines of creating a neighborhood plan outlined in the Flathead County Growth Policy, including

initial organizational meetings, identifying existing conditions, drafting the community vision, characteristics, and goals, and preparing the draft – all steps the WGVP has taken that will help it move forward into the future. As this plan enters the next steps of county and public reviews and comment period, the final route to adoption will be determined and communicated. We invite feedback and discussion on all parts of this plan and offer the opportunity for any individual or organization to participate in support of these goals.

Read on and discover what the future holds for this special place.



# Chapter 1: Introduction and Project Background

## A. Why a Vision Plan? Why Does it Matter?

The West Glacier Vision Plan (WGVP) is a community-driven planning project with the aim of establishing the core values of the community so that strategies to retain desired conditions may be developed. This plan builds upon previous planning efforts and creates a roadmap for future planning. The plan's intent is to refocus planning efforts and policies to address current issues and future opportunities. It is a document that aids in making decisions on land use, redevelopment, public services, facilities, environment, and community communications.

The West Glacier Vision Plan recommends a multitude of policies to take advantage of new and unique opportunities while staying true to the community's roots to provide the best quality of life for residents, visitors, employees, and businesses. For the plan to remain effective, it must be regularly reviewed and updated to address current standards, goals and strategies, and future needs, as well as to provide updated social, economic, and environmental sustainability elements. Furthermore, it is essential that the plan remains current with changing local, regional, and global conditions.

*This Plan is Important to:*

*Locals and Visitors:*

The plan identifies community character elements and locations for improvements to community identity and visitor awareness.

*Business and Property Owners:*

The plan provides direction on the topics of development, policies, programs, natural environment, and services to be planned for with the County and other Flathead Valley communities for a sustainable future.

*County Officials:*

The plan will give guidance on county-level planning proposals and ways to implement and activate the plan.

## B. Elements of the Plan

Chapter 1: Introduction and Background – This section describes the reason for the plan and its organization. The planning and public process are described, as well as the intent for how the plan will affect change.

Chapter 2: West Glacier Community Profile – This section provides the background and “memory” of the community, noting its development and existing conditions that create both challenges and opportunities.

Chapter 3: The Desired Future Conditions for West Glacier: Goals, Principles, Actions, and Strategies – This chapter articulates the goals identified by the community, describes the principles that support them, and the actions and strategies the community may pursue to reach those goals.

Chapter 4: The Path Forward: Implementation – This section discusses the challenges and opportunities of implementing the vision and how to keep it relevant for the future.

## C. Need for the Project Plan and Purpose

The purpose of this plan is to identify key community values for West Glacier that can guide planning and policy improvements, aiding in decision-making





on community character, land use, development and redevelopment, public services and facilities, economic development, and transportation. The plan is intended to be both visionary and practical. The plan will be reviewed annually and updated periodically to continue to reflect the vision and priorities of the community. Implementation of the plan will require further action from the community, staff, Planning Commission, County Planning Department, County Commissioners, and partners, as necessary.

West Glacier is the small gateway community at Glacier National Park's (GNP) west entrance. Since 2016, it is now host to unprecedented visitation over the summer months between June-September and thousands of visitors and vehicles per day. For decades, the quaint community and outdoor recreation-oriented businesses have been able to maintain the rural, historic, and iconic appearance that visitors have enjoyed and expected. West Glacier is also bordered by the Flathead Wild and Scenic River (specifically the North Fork and Middle Fork of the Flathead River) which have also experienced significant growth in outdoor recreational use. Together with Waterton Lakes National Park, GNP is the world's first legislated International Peace Park (IPP), a World Heritage Site, International Biosphere Reserve, and the first transboundary Gold Tier International Dark Sky Park. Waterton-Glacier IPP lies at the center of the Crown of the Continent transboundary ecosystem, about 18 million acres that straddles the international boundary between Canada and the US.

In 2016, during the National Park Service Centennial, Glacier National Park had a record 3 million visitors in a single year for the first time (Annual Park Recreation Visitation, 2017). Residents of the gateway community of West Glacier woke up to the reality that the number of visitors was more than the population of the city of Chicago, all funneling through the singular two-lane collector road of West Glacier's "Main St", the start of the Going-to-the-Sun Road (GTSR) before it enters Glacier National Park.



Visitation increases in prior decades were more gradual and easier to absorb and manage. This surge is attributed to a number of factors including the public's ease of mobility, increased international travelers, social media, a shuttle system on the GTSR that began in 2007, and the promotions and celebrations conducted nationwide by state and tourism partners for the NPS 100th birthday.

While the community's history is so closely tied to the park and the bustle of summer, visitors have always been part of West Glacier's way of life and this dramatic increase in visitation felt overwhelming. This new normal brought with it a new question. How would West Glacier maintain its unassuming character and values for recreation, high quality of life, simple historic charm, and resiliency amidst wild and natural scenic beauty? How would the community on the doorstep of the Glacier National Park maintain this sense of place and stewardship?

A new study published in the Journal of the American Planning Association shows that numerous towns across the Intermountain West were struggling with growth issues before COVID-19 hit, "leading to some problems traditionally thought of as urban issues, like lack of affordable housing, availability of public transit, congestion, and income inequality."<sup>1</sup>

West Glacier residents value and acknowledge their authenticity, especially when their home is put into the context of other gateway communities. Residents look at other gateway communities and observe conditions that West Glacier doesn't have – and doesn't want. When they visit these places, they see what could be a possible future and it raises serious concerns. When a gateway community had yielded to the pressures of an increasing tourist population and impatient development, the town no longer had the same safe and comfortable character for those that lived there – or for the visitors either. This plan is a response to these concerns and a community agreement to work collaboratively towards a common vision of the future.

## D. Planning Process

Flathead County is home to a wide variety of residents and businesses, all of whom feel a special attachment to the forests and valleys of their surroundings. From the scenic natural landscape of the terrain that rises above the area, to the riparian environment fed by the Three Forks of the Flathead River, there is an inherent draw to recreation and enjoyment of free time throughout the Flathead Valley. This planning process encouraged an open dialogue about West Glacier and its meaning to both local residents and the other communities of Flathead County.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01944363.2020.1791728>

The planning process was led by the community through Mary T. McClelland, a local community organizer with support from the National Park Service Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance program (RTCA), a community-based design and planning arm of the NPS offering technical assistance grants. Early in the process, the project goals inspired a number of partners to dedicate resources and agree to support the planning process. The planning team worked together throughout 2020 and remained committed through the COVID-19 pandemic to maintain focus on the community goals and continuing outreach. This team included the West Glacier community organizer, Flathead County Planning Department, National Park Conservation Association, Glacier National Park, Montana House, Pursuit Inc, USFS Hungry Horse Ranger District, and RTCA. The entities worked collaboratively through the process on all planning tasks and in soliciting and responding to public feedback. The creation of the leadership team of stakeholders was recognized as an important step in improving community communications and awareness of community issues.

## Public Involvement

The West Glacier Vision Planning Team has been committed to an equitable and transparent planning process for the public and realizes that a community-supported plan is one that will be more sustainable. As a result, this planning process was structured to allow for as much community project awareness and feedback as possible in order to educate and engage residents with varying backgrounds and interests in the community. The community advertised the project and public meetings through numerous newspaper features, highlighting the issues at hand and provided a variety of opportunities for engagement, discussion, and feedback.

## The following public engagement methods were used:

- Mindmixer Interactive engagement website
- Stakeholder focus discussion groups
- (2) In-person public meetings (February 2020)
- Public Zoom meeting (August 2020)
- Dozens of 1:1 conversations
- Biweekly planning team meetings
- Regular project communication and updates through newspaper coverage
- A part-time and full-time residents' mailing to share project information and COVID-19 and wildfire safety information

The week of February 10, 2020, was a very productive week of stakeholder and public meetings. A great deal of information was synthesized and spoke clearly to the five goal statements developed in this plan. This information also supported the vision statement articulated in this plan. While the original public engagement strategy envisioned more public meetings in June, the COVID-19 pandemic prevented the use of in-person public meetings later in the process. As a result, the planning team reached out to stakeholder groups to review parts of the plan that were of specific importance to them. In this way, the project continued to gain feedback and content, resulting in this draft plan.

## How Does the Plan Work?

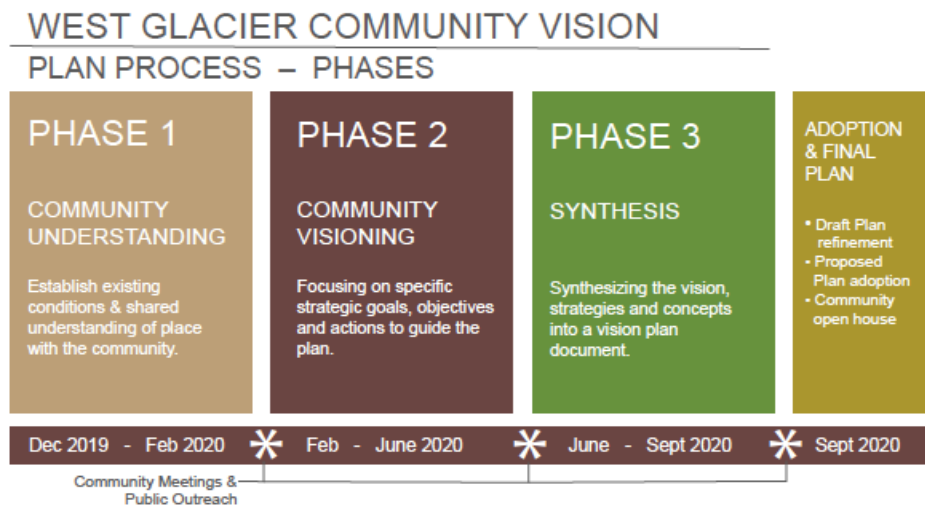
Developed through a dynamic, community-driven planning process, the West Glacier Vision is built around five vision goals:

1. Preserve Community Character and Sense of Place
2. Create a Safe and Resilient Community
3. Enhance Community Communications and Participation
4. Support Sustainable Outdoor Recreation Opportunities
5. Provide Seamless Transportation Connections

These goals create the general structure for the plan. Within the chapters, each theme is further supported by its principles, illustrative framework map(s), and strategies. While the goals are separated into individual chapters, they are intertwined and often refer back to each other's success as linked.

In order for the West Glacier Vision Plan (WGVP) to be fully utilized, it will need to go through a formal adoption process. The plan is an official document of policy with an adoption process that can be accomplished by making it an Addendum to the 1994 Canyon Plan.

More details on this can be found in Chapter 4: The Path Forward – Implementation.



## Vision and Goal Statements

A vision is a big-picture statement communicating the future of an area or community and compelling action by identifying what matters most to the community.

Goal statements identify the shared values and desired outcomes that the community wants to focus on. Goals are outcome statements that define what an organization is trying to accomplish, both programmatically and organizationally.

The five goal statements in Chapter 3 were developed through a series of community and stakeholder conversations, and represent the aspirational outlook for West Glacier's future. They are overarching statements that describe the desired future of the area based on shared community values.

## Principles

Principles are guiding characteristics, assumptions, or facts that help us understand the parameters of the goal. The principles fall under each of the goal statements to elaborate on the future setting, character, and opportunities for the community for the next 10 to 15 years.

## Action Areas and Strategies

The strategies are the last and most specific component of the plan and are expressed as part of the action areas that group related action priorities for each goal area. A strategy is a statement of intent or expectation – a course of action that provides clarity on the methods for achieving the principles. The action priorities are expressed within Chapter 3 and are grouped under action areas.

### Special Notes

- **This plan is not regulatory:** This document is a vision document that provides a planning roadmap for planning work that supports the community values identified in the plan. It is not a regulatory document in any way; all regulatory changes still proceed through the Middle Canyon Land Use and Flathead County Planning processes.
- **Private property rights:** This plan respects all rights to private property and encourages active collaborative participation of all residents, businesses, and stakeholders in the county. All actions are reliant on willing participation and collaboration.



# Chapter 2: West Glacier Community Profile

## A. Area Description and History

West Glacier is an unincorporated community and census-designated place (CDP) in eastern Flathead County, Montana, at an elevation of 3,169 feet (966 m). The town is at the west entrance to Glacier National Park and is located on U.S. Route 2 and a main line of the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) Railway. The West Glacier community is tucked into the Middle Fork of the Flathead River corridor which is also the southwest boundary of Glacier National Park. Through this corridor flows east and westbound traffic on Hwy 2 as well as the BNSF Railroad. West Glacier is an area of approximately 3 sq. mi. almost entirely surrounded by National Forest and National Park designated public lands.

The West Glacier gateway community is located within the Canyon Area Land Use Regulatory System (CALURS) in the Middle Canyon Region of Flathead County. The Middle Canyon Region encompasses the communities of Lake Five and West Glacier and is more specifically described as being all that land lying easterly of the Flathead River in Sections 1-17 of Township 31 N, Range 19 W, P.M.M., Flathead County, Montana and those portions of Sections 26, 27, 34, 35, 36 of Township 32 N, Range 19 W, P.M.M., Flathead County, Montana lying southerly of the Flathead River.

As many Glacier National Park visitors eagerly make their way to enter the park, many do not realize that before taking their iconic photo at the park entrance sign, they had traveled through a small community with a history closely tied to the park.

The community of West Glacier, formerly known as Belton, owes its existence both to the extension of the Great Northern Railway through the Canyon and to the development and designation of Glacier National Park. The railroad station, originally only an old boxcar, was established in 1891, the same year the railway was established. The Great Northern Railway line reached Columbia Falls in 1892 and soon stretched all the way to the West Coast. By 1898, a new store-saloon was operated near the station. The post office was established in 1900. Many of the residents receiving mail appeared to be rangers, guides, and packers.

The Belton Station “served local residents, businesses, and a growing number of tourists.” In some ways, Belton/West Glacier was always a stopping-off point for Glacier National Park tourists. The park was created in 1910, and in the same year, the Great Northern Railway constructed “both the main Belton Chalet and the new train depot.” The depot was the center of the town’s activity in those days, especially in the summer, as visitors arrived for their stay in the national park.”

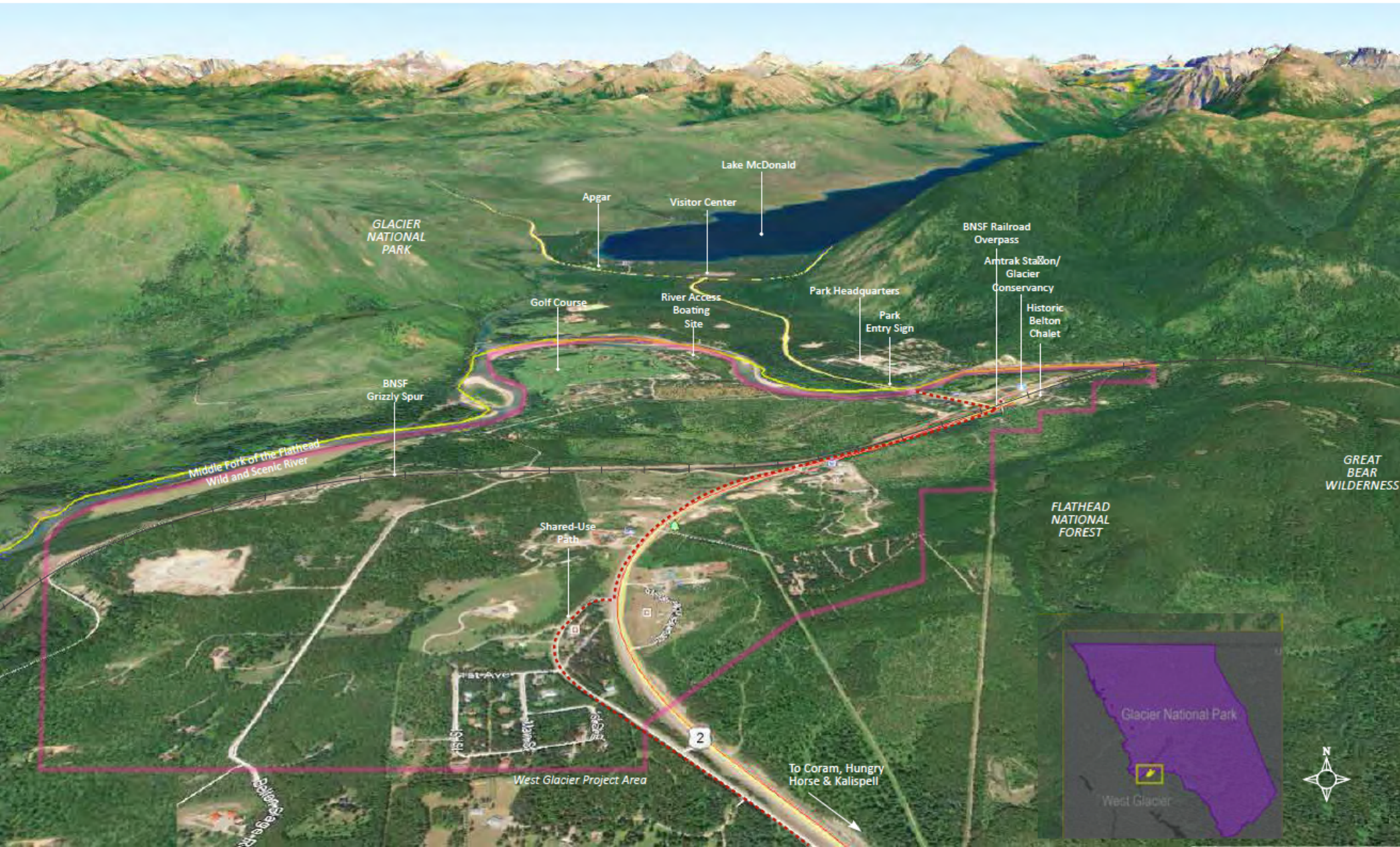
Before the establishment of Glacier National Park, the railroad, and the arrival of the homesteaders, native people inhabited the area including the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. What was originally tribal homelands is now known as Apgar, on the shores of an ancient water body known as Lake McDonald.

Eventually, homesteaders and other white settlers arrived to the area in the early 1890s. One of the early settlers of West Glacier recalled in a historical interview that, “there was an old Indian trail that the Blackfeet and Flathead Indians traditionally used to cross the mountains and Marias Pass that ran right in back of her present home.” According to the account, she remembered one of the last times the Indians came through circa 1915.

Over the next forty years, the infrastructure in and around Belton continued to grow. Roads were built, buildings were constructed, and the layout of the town literally shifted (approximately 500 yards to the west). A road connected the Flathead Valley and Belton in 1911, and the Going-to-the-Sun Road saw its completion in 1932. In 1938, the Belton Mercantile opened a new store along the new entrance which led to a new bridge that led visitors over the Middle Fork of the Flathead River and into Glacier National Park. The stores in town saw new ownership too. In 1946, the Lundgren brothers (Dan, Ev, and Conrad) partnered with David Thompson and purchased Belton Mercantile Properties. During the WWII years, visitation was slow and in 1949 Belton changed its name to West Glacier, one that would help tourists in identifying its geography.

In 1949, the community included many employees of the U.S. Forest Service, Glacier National Park, and Civilian Conservation Corps. By 1951, the population had increased to 300, and it later declined slightly through the 1950s and early 1960s. According to the State Historic Preservation Office, there are two sites of historic significance in West Glacier. One is the Belton Chalets and the other is Belton Railway Depot, currently home to the Glacier Natural History Association. The Belton Chalets are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The original silver bridge was built in 1937 (when the Old Bridge route was no longer the park’s main entrance) and then the silver bridge was destroyed in the 1964 flood and rebuilt in 1965.<sup>1</sup>

Locals report that from the early 1900s to the 1970s, there was “one cohesive community” of park workers and West Glacier residents. There were winter parties, dances, a ski club, ice fishing, card games, and school plays as well as ‘potlucks’, movie nights, and roller-skating in the GNP Headquarters Community Building. In the 60s, park employees and West Glacier residents would meet at “the regular old Montana watering hole, Freda’s.”



In the 90s, with the development of the Citizen Initiated Zoning District (resulting in the Canyon Plan and Canyon Area Regulatory System that became part of the Flathead County Plan) these precautions were stated in writing. “Growth cannot continue forever within the context of finite resources, so economic ‘growth’ cannot be a long-term goal, however, economic stability can be achieved.” There evolved a “collective understanding residents and businesses share in a conservative approach towards development and uphold those values that include air quality, water quality, wildlife diversity and low-impact recreation. And the practices that will help determine the density and character of development that will avoid degradation of values.”

## B. Community Character and Aesthetics

There are many factors that contribute to a community’s character and culture. The physical realm and built environment are just as important to this character as the events, public processes, and those friendly hellos on the street. Architecture, landscape, arts, music, and outdoor recreation all play an increasingly critical role in the community’s character. West Glacier is an authentic mountain community with a culture defined by and fundamentally linked to its surrounding natural environment and rural heritage.

### Character Areas

#### GOING TO THE SUN ROAD (GTSR), WEST GLACIER’S “MAIN STREET”

West Glacier is overwhelmingly defined by U.S. Highway 2 and the intersection with GTSR which also serves as the community’s “Main Street”. The GTSR Main Street is one of the hamlet’s more pedestrian-scaled areas, with outdoor seating and landscaped areas between public sidewalks and building fronts. However, the overall feel of the area is still dominated by vehicular and transportation needs, both in terms of access to the park, the BNSF overpass, and the scale of Hwy 2. Businesses along Hwy 2 have large building setbacks and parking lots in front of many of the buildings.

Recent improvements to the GTSR Main Street corridor have improved pedestrian visibility and awareness, though the Main Street still functions as the last commercial zone before reaching the park, roughly one mile from the BNSF overpass.

The aesthetic of West Glacier main street can be attributed largely to the Lundgren family and David Thompson who established and preserved the “Swiss Chalet” mountain village architectural style that proliferated across Europe in the 19th century.<sup>2</sup> This effort gives the hamlet a clearly defined, cohesive architectural character which contributes to its authentic look and feel.

2 <https://artsandcraftshomes.com/house-styles/the-swiss-chalet-1885-1910>

The predominant public spaces within the community consist of outdoor seating areas along the West Glacier stretch of GTSR, between the BNSF overpass and the bridge over the Middle Fork of the Flathead road bridge. The surrounding public lands offer extensive trail and outdoor recreation areas to hike, bike, fish, raft, and enjoy the surrounding natural environment.

The preservation of West Glacier’s small-scale development and architectural authenticity was so noteworthy that in 1987, the Lundgren family received an award from the US Department of Interior, which recognized their simple approach that blended with the character of the park. It was a special commendation for “sheltering and protecting the West Entrance of Glacier National Park from inappropriate development and for maintaining the village historic character.”<sup>3</sup> (See Appendix B). This charming and straightforward approach to growth in the village of West Glacier managed to “keep business simple”. But what started out as unintentional limited growth born from sheer necessity, became long-term preservation of small-scale residential and commercial development. For nearly 70 years, the family’s operational approach made it work and it became part of the experience for visitors heading to Glacier National Park. The second generation of West Glacier main street business owners recognized the place-based value for maintaining the historic aesthetic of the businesses.

### RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOODS

The hamlet’s residential areas can be described as primarily private homes that tend to occupy larger, more wooded lots with dedicated garage parking. These areas are notable for their lack of internal and external connectivity, specifically sidewalks or internal pedestrian/bike paths, although they could benefit from enhanced pedestrian and bike connections.



3 Peterson, 2014; Crown of the Continent Geotourism Program

Neighborhoods are characterized by winding roads and steep topography and most homes are hidden from view from the major roadways. This gives the appearance that the majority of properties are commercial; thereby hiding the long-standing residential community that thrives quietly beyond the surface.

## Business Development

West Glacier's community includes residents, visitors to Glacier NP, and long-time businesses such as the Mercantile. There are also many businesses that have stood for decades providing guided access to the river and trails as well as food, refreshments, and other visitor needs. These river and trail stewards are also an integral part of the well-being of West Glacier.

The intent of Flathead County's 1994 Canyon Plan (Neighborhood Plan) was to keep development centralized, limit highway strip development, and insulate West Glacier from the hustle and bustle of sprawl so evident in other gateways. This development is also limited by the large tracts of USFS lands that buffer West Glacier from other communities. The 1994 Middle Canyon Land Use Plan is the zoning and regulatory plan that has helped guide business and is noted as the chief reason commercial uses and development have remained small-scale.

West Glacier's business growth is largely self-limiting for two reasons: one, because of the limited private commercial property available in an area made up primarily of federal public lands. The second reason is because of the extreme seasonality of the area; Glacier National Park is largely inaccessible to visitors in the winter while the GTSR is impassible by snow. With only limited access from Apgar, few businesses are open through Glacier's off-season. Less than a third of residents reside in West Glacier through the winter months. As a result, businesses that consider West Glacier as a place to develop must make enough from June to October to be profitable year-round.

In 2014, the Lundgren Family sold West Glacier Mercantile to Glacier Park Incorporated (GPI), the former concessionaire for Glacier National Park (GNP) for more than thirty years. GPI was favored because they understood that keeping West Glacier in historic and iconic context is good for business.<sup>4</sup> GPI's parent company, Pursuit, maintains that they intend to keep that mission to "connect people to iconic places through unforgettable and inspiring experiences", and as stewards of West Glacier Village, they understand the responsibility to preserve the qualities that make it such an inspirational place for visitors and residents.

---

<sup>4</sup> The Beacon, Tristan Scott, 2014; Glacier National Park Travel Guide, Perry Rosenbloom, 2014.

Pursuit intends to preserve their "core fundamentals in West Glacier and draw inspiration from the quaint and historic nature of the village." This small community has had a long and celebrated history of not just hosting GNP visitors to Glacier National Park, but "welcoming them with a unique and genuine charm. Whether rehabilitating structures in need of repair or developing new experiences." Pursuit has pledged a commitment to approach change with a "sincere mindfulness of those attributes."

These and other business changes along with the growing number of visitors now passing through West Glacier intensify the pressures and development issues on this unique and finite place.

## Our Community Today

Today, a community presence persists, despite the number of part-time residents and visitors. Over time, the community feel has shifted as a result of many small changes: the TV was invented, it is no longer mandatory for park employees to live at headquarters, there are many more part-time and seasonal residents, and the rise of social media has affected social behavior. And yet, this small rural community continues to maintain lifelong residents committed to maintaining the qualities that create a lasting impact on all those who pass through.

There is a great sense of community responsibility in West Glacier because of its proximity to the park. Residents realize they are not the only ones who care about preserving that sense of place, the greater community, the businesses, the visitors, and surrounding stakeholders all benefit from taking care of West Glacier – it is a value shared by communities 'down the line' and into the Flathead Valley and throughout the state of Montana to preserve this place into the future.



## C. Community Self-Identity

During the February 10 and 12 West Glacier Community meetings, the group of local residents engaged in an activity where they could describe their community as the “host of a party.”

“If West Glacier hosted a party, what kind of a host would it be? What music would be playing? Food served? Kinds of activities?”

### At the West Glacier meeting, descriptions included the following:

Bonfires and Beethoven; love September with a sigh of relief; I want vs have to; helpful of neighbors; hosting the party vs attending; potluck in the backyard with a bonfire; in winter go south; fleece gloves, scarf, boots, coffee; in recovery; peaceful; calm; periods of quiet; hibernation; summer; life of the party; talk to people visiting; excitement; energy; smiles; all are on vacation; conflicted; protective; exhausted visitors; make me take a second look and be appreciative; locals know the back ways and secret spots.

Potluck – everyone is welcome; sharing stories; no exaggerations; add tourist incidents as anecdotes; creating balance of winter and summer and respectful environment and people; sophistication; pride; resilience; history and culture party; personal and relationship-oriented; would end early; the host is a local that invites random visitors over; local is a mentor and role model; Leave No Trace – cleans up; night sky party; very protective and possessive of the area; futuristic; bringing history and culture into the future; party is an opportunity for networking with anyone.

### At the Kalispell meeting, descriptions included the following:

Crazy and peaceful; would wear outdoor clothing; emergence; coffee, water, microbrew; tolerance, fun, dangerous, open-minded; nature connected; hanging out on the porch; connected with God, spiritual; mix of traditions and the park; open vs closed; wallflower; caring and protective; hard-working; local and crafty; other-people focused not digitally obsessed; self-aware and world aware.

## D. Demographics and Development Trends

Figures from the 2020 US Census yielded the following key findings:

- Household size has decreased. The median age has decreased.
- Family growth has been greatest where affordable housing is available.
- The aging population and influx of retirees continue to outpace the growth of other demographic sectors.

West Glacier has approximately 221 full-time residents as of the 2020 census. Median resident age: 59 years Montana median age: 39.9 years. Countywide, the population has increased from 74,471 in 2000, to an estimated 90,928 in 2010, to 104,357 in 2020, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.<sup>5</sup> Native Montanans are now greatly outnumbered by new residents. A large percentage of new residents are retirees and middle-aged professionals.

Estimated median household income in 2020:<sup>5</sup>

West Glacier: \$63,750 MT: \$56,539

Estimated median house value in 2020:

West Glacier: \$422,200 MT: \$261,500

Mean prices in 2020: all housing units: \$360,249; detached houses: \$382,400; median gross rent in 2020: \$650

March 2019 cost of living index in West Glacier: 88.2 (less than average, U.S. average is 100)

Percentage of residents living in poverty in 2019: 5.6%.

A short distance from any developed area is Glacier National Park, Flathead National Forest, designated wilderness areas, many options for hiking on federal and state lands, designated hiking areas, two ski resorts, eight golf courses, Flathead Lake, and Hungry Horse Reservoir. With the abundance of recreational opportunities and aesthetic values, it is not hard to see why Flathead County is among the fastest growing, and the 3rd most populated county in Montana.

Colleges and universities nearest to West Glacier include Flathead Community College, Blackfeet Community College, Salish Kootenai College, and the University of Montana in Missoula.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/flatheadcountymontana/PST045219>, <http://www.city-data.com/city/West-Glacier-Montana.html>



## Development Pattern/Zoning Mix

Located in Northwest Montana, Flathead County encompasses 3,262,720 acres or 5,098 square miles. Approximately 94% of the land mass is National or State Forest Land, Wilderness, Agricultural, and Corporate Timber Land, thus confining development to the remaining 6% of the area.

The most significant event that shaped the current development pattern was a natural disaster in the form of the Flood of '64, a 500-year flood that devastated the area around Glacier Park and beyond. Eventually, the water receded, and the damage was assessed and repaired. What remains today is a West Glacier that continues to resemble the Belton of the 1930s.

## Housing

The town population contains an interesting mix of both full and part-time residents, with a significant majority of all housing units owned by Montana residents. There is some ownership outside the state and a few international holdings. Additionally, the town has little diversity in the availability of current housing inventory. All existing housing stock consists of single-family detached dwellings.

According to the Flathead Beacon:

“In May 2020, 115 sales closed in Flathead County. In June, that number increased to 2,124. Compared to the same two-month period last year, closed sales are up by 408, or nearly 11 percent. And remember, the real estate market had a solid year in 2019.”<sup>6</sup>

It is estimated that perhaps 20% of the housing stock is owned by full-time residents. Consistent with other intermountain west communities, there are increasing numbers of second homeowners who, upon retirement, become part-time residents. According to Air DNA, West Glacier's zip code area has 63 homes that are rented out through Airbnb and VRBO.<sup>7</sup>

Of West Glacier's housing units, resident-occupied units are decreasing as short-term rentals have increased (VRBO, Airbnb, etc.). The area has a significant shortage of workforce housing which is exacerbated by park visitation rates which has motivated the growth in short-term rentals. The discrepancy between workforce housing needs in the community and suitable housing availability is perhaps best illustrated by the current (2020) community and business discussions about how the CALURS zoning plan may be adapted to allow “work camps” for seasonal workers.

<sup>6</sup> <https://flatheadbeacon.com/2020/07/16/the-great-migration>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.airdna.co/vacation-rental-data/app/us/montana/west-glacier/59936/overview>

## Issues and Opportunities

- A shortage of workforce housing impacts both the economic sustainability and culture of the community.
- As the short-term rental population increases, longtime residents have felt the strain of losing the “community-minded” respectful behavior they enjoyed for so long.
- Much of the existing housing stock used for employee housing has been turned over to the more lucrative business of short-term rentals.
- Due to the closure of most of the park during the winter and a lack of a year-round population, it is difficult to sustain most businesses and many were established as seasonal businesses through the CALURS Plan.
- There is a lack of clearly defined community gateways, branding, and wayfinding throughout the town.
- The limited amount of designated social gathering spaces impacts West Glacier's sense of identity and opportunities to tell West Glacier's story to visitors.
- Residential growth patterns over time have not trended toward planned development which can be used to encourage walkability, transit use, and a more vibrant community. Housing clusters and individual businesses are significantly separated and require driving between destinations.
- Maintenance of a unified design aesthetic through the corridor, landscape/streetscape, and wayfinding/identity elements can help create a cohesive connection.

## E. Transportation, Connectivity and Environment

A balanced, multi-modal system is needed to provide options for residents and visitors alike. People choose transportation based on many different factors



including destination, speed, convenience, weather, and even baggage for those traveling through. A person may choose different modes depending upon their needs on any particular day, and the best transportation systems make those choices available and easy. A flexible system responds to both existing and future needs. Existing needs demand a system that can respond to seasonal changes in volume, pattern, and mode. Future flexibility requires thoughtful consideration of how both user expectation and technology changes may impact physical systems.

### *Getting Around Town*

U.S. Hwy 2 is the main highway passing east-west through West Glacier. It circumvents the southern border of Glacier marked by the Middle Fork of the Flathead, a designated Wild and Scenic River. But when visitors turn off the highway onto Going-to-the-Sun Road that passes under the BNSF Railroad overpass, they enter into a different time and world. As the main transportation corridor for the park, this early stretch of GTSR serves as both an entrance road and a local main street, and visitors associate the GTSR businesses (owned by Pursuit) with the park and the style of architecture found within the park boundary. As a result, many don't recognize West Glacier as a community in itself. Pedestrian and bicycle crossing opportunities are limited, with the distance between marked crosswalks being approximately 140 feet. Rafters carry paddles and gear from the nearby Middle Fork of the Flathead River back and forth along the narrow sidewalks between their parked cars and rafting outfitters' access points.

### *Issues*

- Existing low-density residential development patterns, combined with winding roads and topography, make comprehensive transit coverage challenging.
- Non-vehicular linkages abound within the County but are not completely linked as a system. There are places along the Gateway to Glacier Trail and through West Glacier where it is unclear if cyclists should ride on the highway shoulder, mix with traffic, or ride on the sidewalk.
- "Main Street" sidewalks provide pedestrian access through the business area, but connectivity overall is varied and often sub-optimal.
- Designated pedestrian and bicycle crossing opportunities across Main Street are limited. Two lighted pedestrian crossings were added, but a comprehensive study was never completed.
- The area's paved bicycle system is limited to the Gateway to Glacier Trail which narrows and ends at the BNSF overpass.
- Regional transit service has no central point or facility for transfer between local buses, regional buses, private shuttles, and other potential or future options.
- Parking has been limited and competes with the needs of the rafting companies.

### *Opportunities*

- Additional pedestrian connections to and along Main Street can be implemented to improve non-vehicular connections throughout West Glacier. This would reduce the number of pedestrian conflict points.
- Several developments oriented toward Main Street offer opportunities to rethink the public realm through pedestrian-focused design. Recent removal of parallel parking and addition of pedestrian crossings has created better vehicular visibility and a safer pedestrian environment.
- A Regional Transit Center in the county could provide for regional transit options, private shuttles, and other potential or future options.
- Completing the Gateway to Glacier Trail can provide a continuous connection through town and increase the vitality and safety of the community.

### *Getting Around the Region*

In rural Montana, roads are not built for high-volume traffic. There also exists an expectation that a visitor comes prepared for limited services. West Glacier is unlike other gateway "towns" that supply the full-service selection to visitors. The closest town to offer a wide selection of services is Columbia Falls and choices become more limited as visitors travel closer to the park.

Residents and visitors are primarily motor vehicle-reliant, though Amtrak offers regular service via the Empire Builder train route running east and west between Seattle and Chicago, passing alongside Glacier National Park. Stops are in East Glacier, West Glacier (Belton), and Whitefish.

Shuttles within Glacier National Park run from Apgar Visitor Center to St. Mary Visitor Center, heading up and over the Going-to-the-Sun Road. These shuttles are free and are great for hikers and bikers. There are also cheap (\$5-10) shuttles that travel from Whitefish, Columbia Falls, and Kalispell to Glacier National Park. There is also a transit system that serves as a collaboration between the park and Mountain Climber of Flathead County.

### *Environment and Amenities*

While not many amenities and recreational opportunities exist within West Glacier limits, it is part of the larger Flathead Valley that provides abundant public lands and trails that draw both residents and visitors to the community.

### *Issues and Opportunities*

- Public access to the Middle Fork of the Flathead Wild and Scenic River is a key amenity in West Glacier, serving both commercial and private recreational needs. The riparian corridor is also valuable habitat for wildlife and bird watching.

- The Flathead Valley Trails Plan, completed in 2014, outlines priority trails.
- The community has the desire to support protecting the natural features of the area, such as air quality, water quality, and scenic views.

### Wildlife

West Glacier is surrounded by a million acres of wilderness in the form of Glacier National Park and the Great Bear Wilderness. These unique ecosystems are bridged by the Wild & Scenic Middle Fork of the Flathead River. Together these conditions make an incredibly rich habitat for wildlife including elk, deer, mountain lion, grizzly and black bear, wolf, bald eagle, and many other migratory and native birds and small mammals. The community should protect wildlife, habitat, movement corridors, and scenic vistas. When development occurs, it should be sized, located, and designed to avoid or limit impacts to wildlife and the natural environment. The Canyon and CALURS plans identified the need to plan for the integration of humans into the habitat of the many species that inhabit the area. The following descriptions of habitat in the Canyon are from the Canyon Plan:

The abundance, variety, and distribution of wildlife is largely influenced by the quality, variety, quantity, and availability of habitat. These variables differ throughout the Canyon. In some instances, wildlife habitat is occupied by conflicting uses. In many situations, the habitats of the Canyon serve specialized seasonal needs or may provide important travel linkages between other regional destinations. The presence of several Threatened & Endangered species in the region greatly influences local land use and resource management decisions. The Montana Department of Natural Resources and Environment should be consulted for current resource maps pertaining to wildlife and vegetation. Please refer to the maps during discussion of the ensuing topics.

Habitat in the Canyon is capable of supporting such big game species as elk, mule deer, white-tailed deer, moose, mountain goat, and black bear. Generally, elk and mule deer summer in the upper elevations of major drainages and use

mid-slope cover to seek security and thermal relief. White-tailed deer and moose select the lower elevations associated with riparian habitat. In general, south to west-facing slopes are favored as wintering sites for a variety of reasons. Spring ungulate ranges can vary widely depending on the amount of snowfall during the winter as well as the amount of warm, sunny weather during the early spring. The spring ranges tend to include at least some portion of the winter range as well as those drainage bottoms that contain grass/forb openings. It is the “green-up” areas that will attract ungulate animals in the early spring. As ungulates begin changing their diet primarily from a woody diet of shrubs/trees to grass/forbs, ungulates will generally go for the low elevation, snow-free, grass/forb abundant habitats.

Habitats vary widely with regard to elevational location from year to year. For some herd groups, there are traditional sites, for others young may be born on sites that are “on the way” to summer ranges. One approach is to combine the winter range with the spring range for purpose of showing the relationship between the two. The idea is to avoid impacting these considerably overlapping habitats. In other words, it’s not a matter of only impacting one range or the other, unplanned development needs to support both winter and spring ranges. Travel corridors and linkage zones are based on the assumption that large mammals use drainages as natural movement zones. Not only bears, but mammals such as mountain lions, wolves, wolverines, and lynx, make use of drainages for travel routes. Blocks of mature and old-growth forest provide linkages across the Middle Fork Valley for a host of species that achieve higher densities and productivity levels in those forest age classes.

### Recreation

The primary recreation activities in West Glacier and throughout the surrounding National Forest are hiking, rafting, fishing, and cross-country skiing. The Flathead River is another recreational opportunity for activities such as fishing, hiking, and raft and boat trips. Local campgrounds include those in the Forest Service Hungry Horse Ranger District, Glacier National Park, KOA, and other privately managed campgrounds in the Canyon.

## SUCCESS

West Glacier is an authentic mountain community with a culture defined by and fundamentally linked to its surrounding natural, wild environment. The community is firmly rooted in its relationship to the surrounding national forest, its trails, and its stunning views. This relationship is both the community’s past and its future, and it is critical to integrate this relationship into every aspect of the area’s decision-making process, from physical infrastructure projects, to economic development goals, to policy and governance. Each one of us, whether consciously or not, seeks a place where we feel at home. For many of the people in West Glacier, home has been defined by the opportunity to recreate in and live in harmony with the surrounding natural environment.

A new RV Campground opened in West Glacier in 2019 and is owned and operated by Pursuit. Trailheads are located all throughout the community and most are easily accessible via local roads or the Glacier Gateway Trail.

## F. Forest Conditions, Wildfire and the Community<sup>8</sup>

West Glacier is a community surrounded by forest, so forest fire events are inevitable and should be expected to happen. In looking critically at the forested backgrounds of pictures taken of the West Glacier area through time, forestry experts estimate that there is more mature forest (biomass) now than ever before. Some historical photos show the effects of the 1929 Half Moon Fire and what the area forest was like prior to the 1929 fire. It had fewer large trees and much more of a mosaic depicting more frequent less severe fire events. An average acre of forest in the area grows from 1 to 2 tons of biomass/year and the average decomposition is less than ½ ton/year. It keeps accumulating until it burns or is treated manually.

In accessible private and public lands allocated for periodic mechanical treatments, there are many options to reduce wildfire risk around homes, infrastructure ingress and egress, and valuable community assets by reducing forest fuels. Breaking up horizontal and vertical continuity of fuels by increasing the distance between tree crowns and removing ladder fuels (6-10' from the ground) often decreases the chance of crown fire, decreases fire intensity, and offers greater opportunities for suppression operations to be successful, while also increasing wildfire resilience and recovery post-fire. Today's forestry equipment can produce more aesthetically pleasing treatment results for landowners than the old logging machinery of years past. The now lodgepole forested area between the GNP entrance gate and Lake McDonald was essentially a total clear-cut following the 1929 Half Moon Fire, salvage logging and then the Civilian Conservation Corps' effort to fell all the remaining standing dead trees and pile burn them. The amount of time between fires is an important consideration – the longer interval, the more fuel available, and the greater the potential for more fire intensity and severity. While fire history and scars on the landscape indicate that fires do most often spread from west and south, we have seen in recent past that it's better to prepare for any eventuality, as wind events are unpredictable and can drive fires downslope, in previously burned areas (Howe Ridge), or contradict the normal; it's better to prepare for the worst case. There are also some “good” areas within the community for “sheltering in place” which should be discussed along with evacuation. There were areas identified within the town of Paradise, CA where residents would have lived had they known to shelter there – instead, they died trying to evacuate.

<sup>8</sup> This summary assessment was provided courtesy of Rick Trembath, Flathead Forestry and Fire Consulting 11/8/2020 and Alicia Ulwelling, Montana Department of Natural Resources & Conservation, 10/5/2022.

The topography of the mountains and valleys surrounding the West Glacier community increases the potential for severe fire behavior. A fundamental principle in being “firewise” and preparing correctly for wildfire is that we need to reduce the fuels and prepare buildings and infrastructure for expected wildfire intensity. The lodgepole pine forest in much of the area is of a mature age and is increasingly susceptible to Mountain Pine Beetle mortality.

Once dead, it will not stand long, and when it's on the ground will increase fire risk. The 1929 Half Moon Fire provides the basis for area fire behavior prediction. It made runs of many miles in one burning period – from near Lake Five to Nyack in about 12 hours. No one should underestimate potential fire behavior.

Wildfire risk preparation is best done for the fire that develops locally in minutes or hours during a wind event, rather than a fire like the 2003 Roberts where the community had several days to prepare. Communities also need to prepare their infrastructure assets to withstand fire; like cell towers, railroad assets, electrical substations, water towers, pump houses, wooden bridges, community buildings, etc. Home and landowners may impact future outcomes by doing work around their home and property within and beyond the Home Ignition Zone – the area 0-100+ feet around any structure.

There should also be some discussion regarding the “Management” of surrounding public land forests not accessible or available for mechanical treatment – namely Glacier National Park and Flathead Forest. Whenever natural fire ignitions from lightning are put out, we are deferring the area that would have burned to a later burn where there will be more fuel loading the next time. Through successful aggressive fire suppression, we are managing the forest for infrequent higher-intensity burns later on. When and where to put out fires versus allowing them to burn and the use of prescribed fire is a very complex issue. Engaging with Glacier NP and the Flathead NF about opportunities for coordinated, cross-boundary forest management should be a part of the community discussion regarding wildfire risk.



## G. Relevant Planning Efforts

Referenced plans (with hyperlinks when available) include:

Canyon Area Land Use Regulatory System (CALURS)  
<https://www.survivalreality.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/CALURS-Zoning.pdf>

As an unincorporated community, West Glacier is without local municipal governance but rather by the county with a Citizen Advisory Committee appointed by local Commissioners who work with land use issues in the neighborhood guided by the Canyon Area Land Use Regulatory System (CALURS). This plan is based on decades of citizen planning efforts by residents with great foresight starting in the 70s, and is styled specifically for this vulnerable spot in the gateway. The Canyon Plan, in place since 1994, has been a strong foundation for West Glacier even as times have changed. The committee works with the community to make changes in the form of amendments and periodic citizen review panels.

The Canyon Plan  
(Neighborhood Plan Amendment to Flathead County Master Plan)  
<https://d339kx0h3ogahu.cloudfront.net/Live/Projects/westglacier/files/229888/CANYONPLAN.pdf?637123906454370000>

2020-2024 Montana Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan  
[https://files.cfc.umt.edu/humandimensionslab/SCORP\\_2020-2024.pdf](https://files.cfc.umt.edu/humandimensionslab/SCORP_2020-2024.pdf)

3 Forks of the Flathead Wild & Scenic River Comprehensive River Management Plan  
<https://www.fs.usda.gov/detailfull/flathead/home/?cid=fseprd573051&width=full>

Outstanding Remarkable Values Assessment of the Flathead River System (2013)  
[https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE\\_DOCUMENTS/fseprd570451.pdf](https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fseprd570451.pdf)

Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) 2020 For Flathead County  
[https://flathead.mt.gov/fireservice/documents/Community\\_Wildfire\\_Protection\\_Plan\\_2020\\_v3\\_July\\_9\\_final.pdf](https://flathead.mt.gov/fireservice/documents/Community_Wildfire_Protection_Plan_2020_v3_July_9_final.pdf)

Firesafe Flathead  
[www.firesafeflathead.com](http://www.firesafeflathead.com)

Fire Adapted Community Learning Network  
<https://fireadaptednetwork.org>

Fire Adapted Montana  
<https://www.fireadaptedmontana.org>

Reducing Wildfire Risks  
[https://www.nfpa.org/-/media/Files/Training/certification/CWMS/ReducingWildfireRisksH1\\_Z.ashx](https://www.nfpa.org/-/media/Files/Training/certification/CWMS/ReducingWildfireRisksH1_Z.ashx)

Resources on increasing home safety  
<http://www.nfpa.org>

Fire Behavior and Forest Types  
<https://www.nps.gov/articles/wildland-fire-lodgepole-pine.htm>;  
[https://cfri.colostate.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2021/01/FireEd-Infographic-Web\\_Print-1.pdf](https://cfri.colostate.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2021/01/FireEd-Infographic-Web_Print-1.pdf)

2018 Flathead County Trails Plan  
[https://flathead.mt.gov/planning\\_zoning/documents/8.31.18FCTrailsPlan-2018Draft.pdf](https://flathead.mt.gov/planning_zoning/documents/8.31.18FCTrailsPlan-2018Draft.pdf)

USFWS/ Headwaters Economics Socioeconomic Profile for Flathead County (Jan 2020)  
<https://headwaterseconomics.org/tools/usfws-indicators/>

The Draft Montana Forest Action Plan  
<http://dnrc.mt.gov/public-interest/environmental-docs/2020/october/montana-forest-action-plan>

The Montana Forest Action Advisory Council (MFAAC) has worked collaboratively to draft long-term, landscape recommendations to improve forest health and reduce wildfire risk while protecting our natural resources. The MFAAC welcomes the input of Montanans as they work together to protect their communities. The Montana Forest Action Plan is an important step in working with partners and neighbors across the state to get more work done on the ground. The public release of the draft Montana Forest Action Plan shows the commitment to cross-boundary work that both the DNRC and partners are moving forward with.



Summer CCC camp at Agate, Lake McDonald in background, 1933-1934. Glacier National Park had a peak CCC enrollment of one thousand five hundred men, and eight camps were established to house them. Agate, Belton, and McDonald Creek were the main camps on the park's west side. (Photo courtesy Montana Historical Society)

# Chapter 3: West Glacier Vision: Goals, Principles and Actions



## **VISION:**

West Glacier envisions their community as a place where recreation, healthy lifestyles, and sustainable development converge to provide a high quality of life, while retaining unique historic character, habitat, and abundant natural scenic beauty.

# 5 value statements

1. Preserve  
Community  
Character and  
Sense of Place

2. Create a  
Safe and  
Resilient  
Community

3. Enhance  
Community  
Communications  
and Participation

4. Support  
Sustainable  
Outdoor Recreation  
Opportunities

5. Provide  
Seamless  
Transportation  
Connections

HOW WILL WE GET THERE?

**Supporting  
Principles**

Describe the specifics of  
the vision statements

**Strategies**

Action items for  
achieving the principles



PURSU, T

# GOAL #1

**Preserve  
West Glacier  
community  
character &  
sense of place**





## Goal #1: Preserve West Glacier Community Character and Sense of Place

### PRINCIPLES:

West Glacier's unique setting is defined by the community's ongoing value for:

- Celebrating and sharing the natural beauty of the resources they live among.
- Preserving the concept that West Glacier's natural landscape extends to Glacier NP and Flathead NF boundaries which preserves the movement of wildlife, plants, hydrology, and other natural systems through the area.
- Preserving a sense of discovery, authenticity, and wildness that can coexist here within this unique human community.
- Celebrating its historical context and preservation of period architecture which harkens back to the time of the park's designation. Preserving the existing "parkitecture" as standards and building style that matches the period of when the park was created.
- Retaining business development within the hamlet's designated Middle Canyon Land Use commercial zone that is scaled and appropriate with the size of the community.
- Guiding sustainable business development that provides opportunities and support mechanisms for business growth for both small and big businesses alike. Support a business landscape that allows desired business conditions we want to maintain with the ability for the range of diverse players to adapt and weather uncertain economic times.
- A community with a small base of year-round residents with limited infrastructure supportive of a rural mountain town.
- A welcoming and friendly attitude towards all visitors, but desires that visitors come with an awareness and respect for the resource that they have had a role in stewarding over the generations.

### Action Area Priorities

- Preserve the authenticity of rural Montana and its value for public land stewardship.
- Maintain a minimal level of amenities and development that feels appropriate but balanced with visitor-based needs.
- Maintain the historic feel of a unique, small-town, pedestrian-friendly community by identifying placemaking priorities.
- Guide sustainable and appropriate business development.

## ACTION AREA 1: PRESERVE THE AUTHENTICITY OF RURAL MONTANA AND ITS VALUE FOR PUBLIC LAND STEWARDSHIP

Maintain West Glacier's authentic, unpretentious community anchored within the hamlet's deep spirit of connection to nature and history. A community that wants to preserve a particular place in time that remains remarkable for both residents and visitors alike.

- Ensure that the built environment continues to be integrated and scaled appropriately with mountain and recreational amenities (e.g. connections to trails, integration with the Flathead River, bike lanes and paths, etc.).
- Define and enhance the community gateways that speak to the experience and values of West Glacier.
- Strengthen and maintain the sense of connection between the park and the Sun Corridor through town.
- Educate visitors and residents about the history of the area and larger region.
- Ensure the identity of the hamlet is reflected in local policies and codes, such as through Design Guidelines, CALURS ordinance amendments, and an updated Canyon Neighborhood Plan.

## ACTION AREA 2: MAINTAIN A LEVEL OF AMENITIES AND DEVELOPMENT THAT FEELS APPROPRIATE BUT BALANCED WITH VISITOR-BASED NEEDS

Maintain a community that desires limits on development and strives for commercial uses that feel compatible with the rural nature of their community.

- Continue to create an authentic Main Street as a collection of outdoor gathering spaces and "people" places that celebrate West Glacier
- Study, design, and implement a new street layout to help create an accessible, welcoming, and safe West Glacier Main Street.
- Work with businesses to provide recreational and cultural amenities that benefit both residents and guests alike
- Continue to provide support services to small existing and new local businesses as they adapt to growth and change.
- Work with landowners to encourage land uses that support the community character principles.
- Support quality and compatible design and encourage unique and high-quality building construction and energy efficiency.

*RIGHT: Colors selected from the natural environment and historic architectural uses can provide consistency and guidance for new and renovated landscapes.*



### ACTION AREA 3: MAINTAIN THE HISTORIC FEEL OF A UNIQUE, SMALL-TOWN PEDESTRIAN-FRIENDLY COMMUNITY BY IDENTIFYING PLACEMAKING PRIORITIES

- A comfortable, safe, and aesthetically pleasing environment that is walkable and bikeable.
- By promoting outdoor-focused design details and seamless integration between the built environment and the natural environment we can continue to enhance this connection.
- A unique nature-based atmosphere as a backdrop for gathering spaces that foster ideas of community, creativity, entrepreneurship, and a fun, simple life.

In addition to its unparalleled nature-based setting, West Glacier also has a variety of public and private gathering spaces. These spaces allow for community gatherings and special events that bring people together. The following places have been customary gathering places for the community over the years:

- Montana House Kintla Camp – private, events, meetings
- Community Building and Conference Training Hall in GNP Headquarters
- WG Firehall – meetings
- WG Elementary School – meetings and events
- WG Seasonal Farmer’s Market – outdoor events
- WG Seasonal Glacier Raft Outdoor Center and other raft companies with conference space – private, events, and meetings



- Coram Stonefly Inn – private, events and casual meetings
- Coram Glacier Grill – private, breakfast, and lunch casual meetings
- WG Seasonal Belton Restaurant and Highland Café – private, small meetings
- WG Post Office – public, lots of informal, spontaneous meeting
- Coram Dew Drop Inn – private, at least one Fireman’s fundraiser was held here in the past
- West Glacier Frita’s Bar – private, used to be a locals place to socialize, though frequented more by visitors to stop and have a drink after a day in the park
- Highland Cafe

### PLACEMAKING PRIORITIES

- Utilize CALURS Neighborhood Plan and regulations to address sustainability and maintain an authentic “sense of place” through text amendments.
- Improve public understanding of the CALURS process and representation by the community.
- Through amendments, update the 1994 Canyon Plan, a neighborhood plan that focuses on the specific needs of West Glacier and adjacent communities.
- Explore/utilize educational and interpretive strategies to expand awareness of the historical value and events that created the place (including West Glacier and surrounding communities) and increase awareness of proximity to the surrounding public and tribal lands.
- Connect with the Salish/Kootenai & Blackfeet on West Glacier planning recommendations. Ask “How can tribal history be incorporated into the sense of place”?
- Design guidelines are sets of recommendations on how to apply design principles to provide a positive user experience. Develop a design palette to guide landscape and construction projects to guide place-making consistency and aesthetics. Develop a suggested plant list supporting the planting of native and water-sensitive species.
- Implement Entryway Beautification Project at the intersection of BNSF Overpass and Hwy 2. Consider entryway improvements that communicate West Glacier’s identity, history, values, and presence.
- Name West Glacier’s “Main St” which is technically GTSR.
- Allow for publicly accessible spaces in both design and policy, meeting the goal of being an inviting community.
- Promote the creation of small-scale, low-cost neighborhood resources that foster community (e.g. Little Free Libraries).
- Continue to support community gatherings and events that bring people together.
- Include design details, interpretive elements, and public art that references local history and features as an integrated part of “Main Street” streetscape enhancements.

- Create a conceptual illustrated plan to articulate the hamlet’s space uses and connectivity.

#### **ACTION AREA 4: GUIDE SUSTAINABLE AND APPROPRIATE BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT**

- Create an informal “business pledge” that all businesses can come together around, encouraging support, collaboration, and value for preserving the setting.
- Foster and support constructive relationships and discussions between residents and businesses.
- Provide resources for equitable business planning under “difficult or precarious” economic environments including small business loans, networking with Chambers of commerce, Flathead Economic Development Agency, and USDA Rural Community Aid.
- Explore revitalization of the Middle Canyon Business Group. Efforts to coordinate would be advantageous, including park businesses. Businesses could benefit from working together towards a common goal.
- Utilize the communications network developed from this process to continue coordination.
- Continue to evolve CALURS to address community and business needs through text amendments. MCLUAC Board has five representatives and is a Citizen Review Panel whose role is to review and recommend actions on all West Glacier-related applications having to do with proposed land use changes pending in the Flathead County Planning and Zoning Office (FCPZ). This is an advisory role for Flathead County.
- Encourage responsible but flexible housing for the local workforce within commercial developments. Fully integrate workforce housing through a CALURS ordinance.

- Explore opportunities to grow higher education programs at UMT or regional trade schools to expand support for communities through sustainable recreation and sustainable tourism planning.
- Investigate opportunities and coordinate projects with other local communities and Flathead County on affordable/attainable housing.
- Promote leadership development and encourage diversity of culture and thought in county planning processes.
- The community should protect wildlife, habitat, connectivity corridors, and scenic vistas. When development occurs, it should be sized, located, and designed to avoid or limit impacts to wildlife and the natural environment.



SUCCESS

#### **Pursuit’s Commitment to the Historic Rural Sense of Place**

West Glacier is unique in that businesses that operate in this area are also stewards of the natural resources as well as of the historic character of the place. Pursuit is one of these businesses that have embedded values for authentic places and experiences into their mission. Pursuit is both a business and an advocate in this way but articulates their “responsibilities to manage our impact on the environment, foster respect for people and champion our communities” through their marketing. This kind of pledge is important to many “green” travelers and visitors who want to experience genuine places that have a timeless character. For others, the pledge creates an awareness of the efforts made to preserve that natural setting and community character.

For more information on Pursuit’s “Promise to Place” see:

<https://www.pursuitcollection.com/Website/media/pursuit/Documents/Sustainability/Pursuit-Promise-to-Place-2018-Sustainability-Report.pdf>

**GOAL #2**

**Create a safe  
& resilient  
community**



## Goal #2: Create a Safe and Resilient Community

### PRINCIPLES:

- A safe and resilient community integrates a culture of emergency preparedness, public health, and flood and wildfire awareness into the activities and communications of residents, businesses, and visitors. Such a community also integrates climate resiliency and sustainability into the community's practices and strategies for a strong and vibrant future.
- West Glacier aspires to become a regional leader among Montana mountain towns in responsibly interacting with and utilizing its surrounding natural resources. Appreciation and protection of this wild natural environment means implementing policies that guide the actions of residents, businesses, and visitors so that people, the forest, and wildlife are protected.
- The community envisions a future where its residents operate in ways that are good for both people and the planet, now and for the future. In order to provide the quality of life that residents and visitors expect and desire, it is crucial that the community create and maintain conditions under which humans and nature can exist in productive harmony, that allow us to meet the social, economic, and environmental needs now and in the future.

### Community Resiliency Action Area Priorities

- Communications for Community Readiness
- Establish West Glacier/Middle Canyon Area as a Fire-Adapted Community
- Support Forest Health and Conservation through Land Use Planning
- Create a climate action plan by pursuing collaboration with other communities

### ACTION AREA 1: COMMUNICATIONS FOR COMMUNITY READINESS

Create, produce, and distribute a communications plan for community and environment safety awareness, including wildfire safety practices, emergency preparedness, Leave No Trace, and public health.

- Develop specific interagency PSA on wildfire safety for residents, businesses, and visitors (Flathead County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) 2020 wildfire recommendations.) Work with local businesses, residents, and partners to distribute and promote common wildfire-safe messaging to visitors.
- Incorporate wildfire/flood preparedness communication and procedures into a short-term rental county newsletter provided to all new permit holders.

- Work with Flathead National Forest Hungry Horse Ranger District and Montana DNRC to develop, promote and implement a Community-Based Smokey Bear Sign to promote fire awareness to visitors of communities that reside in areas with wildfire risk.
- Partner with DNRC and Climate Action Plan Committee on annual Wildfire Preparedness Workshops. Include information on wildfire preparedness in education and outreach materials. Work with DNRC to promote residential fire audits
- Work with the Crown of the Continent Roundtable on community-oriented large landscape conservation efforts. For example, develop a "Crown of the Continent Conservation Community" Tourism rating system and become the model or pilot "gold star community".
- Expand wildfire communications and education to youth, for example, through Glacier Institute. Inquire what is required for certified instruction on these topics, if any.

### ACTION AREA 2: ESTABLISH THE GLACIER PAK AREA AS A FIRE-ADAPTED COMMUNITY

Fire-adapted communities are defined by the National Wildfire Coordinating Group as "A human community consisting of informed and prepared citizens collaboratively planning and taking action to safely coexist with wildland fire." More fully, fire-adapted communities are knowledgeable, engaged communities where actions of residents and agencies in relation to infrastructure, buildings, landscaping, and the surrounding ecosystem lessen the need for extensive protection actions and enable the communities to safely accept fire as part of the surrounding landscape."<sup>1</sup>

Also, see the Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network:  
<https://fireadaptednetwork.org>

- Promote and implement the recently updated Flathead County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) 2020 and coordinate work with Firesafe Flathead, the Fire Adapted Community Learning Network, and Fire Adapted Montana.
  - [https://flathead.mt.gov/fireservice/documents/Community\\_Wildfire\\_Protection\\_Plan\\_2020\\_v3\\_July\\_9\\_final.pdf](https://flathead.mt.gov/fireservice/documents/Community_Wildfire_Protection_Plan_2020_v3_July_9_final.pdf)
  - [www.firesafeflathead.com](http://www.firesafeflathead.com)
  - <https://fireadaptednetwork.org>
  - <https://www.fireadaptedmontana.org>
- Implement a community wildfire assessment. See the Fire Adapted Communities Self-Assessment Tool (FAC SAT) here:  
<https://fireadaptednetwork.org/resources/fac-assessment-tool/>

<sup>1</sup> <https://fireadapted.org/>

- Implement an annual community emergency preparedness day where the community helps each other with fuel reduction projects, fire-safe best practices, and evacuation procedures.
- Work with Montana DNRC to establish West Glacier's priority level in the Montana Forest Action Plan (parts of Flathead County are identified but West Glacier shows no data). Pursue discussion with DNRC about Forest Action Plan – where does West Glacier fit and why is it currently not included?

*The Montana Forest Action Advisory Council was asked to use their expertise and experience to identify Priority Areas for Focused Attention in need of active landscape-scale forest restoration and management that address wildland fire risk and forest health issues across Montana's forests. Landscapes across Montana that have high wildfire risk to communities and infrastructure, as well as areas with significant forest health concerns, were identified using data-driven GIS analysis. These areas are of the highest priority for implementing landscape-scale, cross-boundary forest restoration and management. <https://www.montanaforestactionplan.org/pages/priority-areas>*

### **ACTION AREA 3: SUPPORT FOREST HEALTH AND CONSERVATION THROUGH LAND USE PLANNING**

Conversion of natural areas and farmland to developed property may result in increased habitat fragmentation, loss of biodiversity, disruption of natural landscape processes, degradation of water resources, increased flooding, nonpoint-source pollution, and growing public and private costs for servicing dispersed development.

#### *Conservation*

- Support community forest biodiversity and control the invasion and spread of undesirable non-native plants, animals, and insects.

- Support trail routes to minimize ecological impacts while enhancing access and recreation.
- Protect the integrity of riparian zones, wildlife habitat, and movement corridors through the use of conservation easements and other land protection measures. Refer to the USDA/FS Riparian Buffer Design Guidelines for determining suitable land uses and setbacks for riparian zones: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/treearch/pubs/29202>
- Foster alliances and partnerships with organizations that are working toward a healthy and thriving environment.
- Support education and understanding of public lands through appropriate recreational activities, formal and non-formal education, and interpretive programs through local businesses and organizations.
- Protect significant viewsheds to maintain our connection with the natural and cultural environment.
- Become a Dark Sky Community.
- Update landscape design guidelines to clearly address any conflicts with the natural environment and wildlife. Look at the North Fork Improvement Association document for best practices on living with wildlife.

#### *Waste and Pollution*

- Identify and develop viable, sustainable strategies designed to divert an increasing portion of the community's waste stream from landfills with the eventual goal of being a zero-waste community.
- Explore options for recycling and waste reduction strategies. Identify who is doing recycle/reuse advocacy and campaigns in the Flathead Valley and determine ways to collaborate.
- Collaborate with other communities and organizations to develop local communications and bear-proof infrastructure that will accommodate recyclables, organics, and hazardous waste disposal.
- Commit to acting as a resource in assisting citizens and visitors to practice appropriate waste disposal.

**SUCCESS**

### **Montana House Leadership in Community Wildfire Preparedness: Programming and Public Meetings**

The iconic Montana House in Apgar, an authentic Montana artisan gift shop, has been an important community center since 1960 – a year of multiple wildfires near the West Glacier area. Since the 1967 Glacier Park wildfire and the 2003 mega wildfire in Glacier National Park (GNP), wildfire has become an annual reality for the community creating a growing need for such a center. The Montana House stepped up to meet that need.

Responding to the changing climate and increasing vulnerabilities of the community, owner Monica Jungster provided the Montana House Kintla Event and Meeting Room and spurred into action. They have proactively collaborated with multiple agencies and experts including GNP, Flathead National Forest, Flathead County Emergency Services, and the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation – initiating the development of community-specific wildfire awareness programs, providing wildfire resources, and fostering preparedness through educational meeting planning and affecting policy countywide. The Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation has stated the impactful work as a model for other communities.

- Regarding potential hazardous railway spills, work with BNSF to address needs for additional egress for emergencies as well as concerns related to oil/hazardous material spill response.
- Include Flathead Basin Commission (FBC) recommendations and pursue resources to support more extensive water quality monitoring by working with FBC, the Conservation District, and technical community and management agencies.
- Address environmental health through ordinances that address age and replacement schedule of septic infrastructure. For example, Lewis & Clark County requires inspections of septic in land transfers.
- Create a technical advisory group that monitors this water quality at non-point sources. Engage Flathead Lake Biological Station, at Yellow Bay, for partnering in this effort.

#### **ACTION AREA 4: PURSUE COLLABORATION WITH OTHER COMMUNITIES TO CREATE A CLIMATE ACTION PLAN**

Based on recommendations from comparable climate adaptation plans the following may be considerations for the West Glacier and Middle Canyon area:

##### *Sustainable Community Infrastructure*

- Reduce our environmental footprint by conserving energy and water, reducing waste, increasing recycling, and addressing resiliency.
- Support comprehensive sustainability planning as part of the 2021 Flathead County Growth Plan.
- Maximize cost savings by conserving water and by reducing capacity demands on the wastewater treatment plant.

- Support local businesses, increase local production of food, and reduce waste.
- Support more public transit, bicycle, and pedestrian-friendly options.

##### *Community Health*

- Foster equitable access to healthcare facilities and services.
- Provide access to healthy food by promoting local food supply through farmers' markets and connections to local farming communities.
- Provide information on available health resources through communications outlets.

##### *Energy*

- Consider incentives to encourage new construction to substantially exceed minimum code requirements for energy efficiency and renewable energy use.
- Strengthen strategic partnerships between the community and county entities to establish learning networks for people on how to build sustainable systems, including:
  - Install rain sensors to reduce irrigation waste
  - Convert lawns to native plants
  - Develop educational programs with non-profit
  - Flathead Basin Commission has facilitated the mapping and monitoring of stormwater discharge and encourages the creation of rainwater gardens for stormwater capture and filtration
  - Investigate Audubon certification for the golf course

For region-specific resiliency planning, refer to the following tools and Montana climate planning guidance and efforts to identify community-supported strategies for adaptation:

- Climate Adaptation Knowledge Exchange (CAKE): Incorporate community climate adaptation: <https://www.cakex.org/tutorials>
- Climate Smart Glacier Country: <https://climatesmartglaciercountry.org/>
- 2020 Climate Ready Missoula: Building Resiliency in Missoula County <https://www.adaptationclearinghouse.org/resources/climate-ready-missoula-building-resiliency-in-missoula-county.html>
- 2018 City of Whitefish, MT Climate Action Plan: <https://www.cityofwhitefish.org/DocumentCenter/View/339/2018-Climate-Action-Plan-PDF>
- 2016 Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Reservation Climate Change Strategic Plan: <http://csktclimate.org/downloads/Climate%20Change%20Strategic%20Plan/CSKT%20Climate%20Change%20Adaptation%20Plan%204.14.16.pdf>
- 2007 Montana Climate Action Plan (the state has no current climate adaptation plan): [https://uccrnna.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Montana\\_2007\\_Climate-Action-Plan.pdf](https://uccrnna.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Montana_2007_Climate-Action-Plan.pdf)

# GOAL #3

**Enhance  
community  
communications  
and  
participation**





## Goal #3: Enhance Community Connections and Participation

### PRINCIPLES:

Community members are always diverse in the ways that they want to receive information. Differences in communication preferences make it difficult to rely on any one form to reach the broader group. This planning process highlighted the communication sources that were already strong but also identified some communication needs that should be addressed as action items.

Provide a range of communication outlets for West Glacier to participate and collaborate in community planning and discussions about how they can work together to support their vision goals. During public outreach, when the community voiced communication preferences, e-newsletters and website clearinghouses were ranked the two most desired formats for acquiring community information.

#### Communications Action Area Priorities:

- Establish a community and business-wide independent, non-biased E-newsletter
- Create a website clearinghouse
- Continue local and regional newspaper community updates
- Continue public meetings and in-person community events
- Maintain a diverse collaborative working group for vision implementation
- Establish and Outdoor Public Information Kiosk at the West Glacier Post Office or other public space

### ACTION AREA 1: ESTABLISH A COMMUNITY AND BUSINESS-WIDE INDEPENDENT, NON-BIASED E-NEWSLETTER

- Pursue the creation of a non-biased e-newsletter generated by the community which distributes a variety of community and business information. While the West Glacier Preservation Society has a sizeable newsletter distribution and regularly provides a wide range of information to the community, the organization is not viewed as non-biased which reduces trust in the communication outlet by some.
- Work on one master mailing list that everyone gets. Have a standardized format attachment that goes out to the community and every business gets in the habit of posting in their lobbies, kiosks, and visitor information centers so that the traveling public can get the message too. Link to the information on websites and maybe even the NPS RAD display.

### ACTION AREA 2: CREATE A WEBSITE CLEARINGHOUSE

Website clearinghouses such as the county website is a favored platform when the community desires information but doesn't want to have it forced upon them through mailings or email.

- Pursue the creation of a separate West Glacier, Middle Canyon, or "Unincorporated Flathead Communities" sub-page of the county website where a variety of community information can be posted.

### ACTION AREA 3: CONTINUE LOCAL AND REGIONAL NEWSPAPER COMMUNITY UPDATES

Newspaper outlets are a long-standing source of information for residents and businesses in the Flathead Valley. Some examples include the Flathead Beacon, Hungry Horse News, the Missoulian, and the Montana Free Press. These outlets reach a wide audience and can advertise for events and other public outreach

#### SUCCESS West Glacier Vision Collaborative Working Group

The planning and coordination of this project required the support and resources of a diverse team of individuals. This team brought validity and attention to the need for this project and the values that tied them personally and organizationally to the collaborative effort. The team of eight was made up of federal agencies, small and large businesses, conservation advocates, county planning, and local community organizers. As part of the planning process, this working group helped advise on public engagement strategy, identification of stakeholders and planning process. Despite working on this plan through the COVID-19 pandemic, the group maintained energy to work on the project and reaffirmed the value and need for a collaborative working group to continue into the future.

activities. Unlike e-newsletters and websites, newspaper distributions report what is provided for particular events but may not be comprehensive in representing all of the resources or activities going on in any one community.

#### **ACTION AREA 4: CONTINUE PUBLIC MEETINGS AND IN-PERSON COMMUNITY EVENTS**

Public meetings are often the most desired way to provide an open forum for feedback and appeal to the social side of community planning and debate over issues. One of the downsides of public meetings is that evening meetings can challenge residents who work service-based jobs, those families with young children, or disabled members of the community. In the pre-COVID era, little was done to equalize the disparity that resulted from this, though our experience with the pandemic has now motivated more forms of communication to accommodate engagement through virtual forms as well. There is no doubt that public meetings and in-person community events remain a popular form of communication about community issues in West Glacier though they remain irregular, topical, and spearheaded by a variety of residents and business owners. As a result, without a non-biased newsletter or website clearinghouse, events are advertised via personal email chains so the broader community may not receive these communications and be aware of how they may be able to engage with their community.

- Create a Facebook Page that allows residents and businesses to post information, ideas, and events in real time. This could also foster the growing interest in work groups that could focus on the different goals and actions identified in this plan.

#### **ACTION AREA 5: MAINTAIN A DIVERSE COLLABORATIVE WORKING GROUP FOR VISION IMPLEMENTATION**

The planning and coordination of this project required the support and resources of a diverse team of individuals. This team brought validity and attention to the

need for this project and the values that tied them personally and organizationally to the collaborative effort. The team of eight was made up of federal agencies, small and large businesses, conservation advocates, county planning, and local community organizers. There was agreement as the year-long community process came to a close that the multi-disciplinary group was advantageous and that a similar group should continue. As a result, the following recommendation has been made for moving forward:

- Develop a new West Glacier Vision Collaborative Working Group that prioritizes and focuses work on the actions identified in this plan. This group should include the existing participants but should be expanded to include more people who represent a broader interest in the community of both the residents and businesses. Efforts should be made to engage diverse audiences and a broad range of generations, including new residents.
- One aspect of this plan affirms the idea that West Glacier cannot achieve this alone, that as visitation and population in the county grows, that there will likely be a growing desire to preserve the community and setting dear to them. This West Glacier Vision Group (WGVG) should make efforts to be inclusive of other communities in thinking about how to communicate and work together to achieve common goals.

#### **ACTION AREA 6: ESTABLISH AN OUTDOOR PUBLIC INFORMATION KIOSK AT THE WEST GLACIER POST OFFICE OR OTHER PUBLIC SPACE**

- West Glacier is limited in the availability of public space to post information for the community and visitors, but the US Post Office located along West Glacier's "Main Street" has performed this function over the years.
- An outdoor kiosk can be small-scale, simply designed, and integrated into the character of adjacent buildings while also becoming an informal gathering point for the community. Such a structure can provide historical and interpretive information for all as well as relevant community information. If this kiosk is pursued, posting and management guidelines will need to be established.

#### **2020 Pandemic Public Service Announcement**

The West Glacier Vision Planning Team developed a public service announcement (PSA) that was distributed in the community and mailed to both full-time and part-time residents. The PSA updated the residential and business community on project progress and activities and also provided guidance on best practices around COVID-19 health precautions as well as wildfire safety and short-term rentals. Other COVID-19 collaboration activities included Pursuit working with Glacier National Park, County Health, and Kalispell Regional Hospital to set up a seasonal clinic in one of their buildings in West Glacier.

# GOAL #4

**Support sustainable outdoor recreation opportunities while conserving habitat & natural resources**



## Goal #4: Support sustainable outdoor recreation opportunities while conserving wildlife habitat and natural resources that define this place.

### PRINCIPLES:

- A community that embraces its connections to the surrounding national park and national forest environment and all the opportunities and challenges that come with it.
- While the park offers world-class national park experiences and the national forest offers a more rugged range of outdoor opportunities, existing amenities should be evaluated for sustainability, resource and wildlife impacts, and ability to meet the needs of residents and visitors.
- Public land stewardship and regional recreation planning require the coordination and cooperation of a variety of partners, including tourism and outdoor recreation organizations who can be advocates for responsible recreation use.
- These goals align with the goals of the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan that are applicable to West Glacier.
- The Canyon Plan references the Middle Fork Geographic Unit in limiting activities to low-impact recreation in the Middle Canyon and prohibiting motorized vehicles (Section II-5). CALURS also designates and defines passive recreation use for the Middle Canyon and allows Minor Land Uses 7a.6 (Tourist equipment rentals, non-motorized).

### Outdoor Recreation Priorities:

- Trail and Path Connectivity
- River Corridors and Accesses
- Stewardship of Public Lands
- Regional Recreation Opportunity Planning

## ACTION AREA 1: LOCAL AND REGIONAL TRAIL CONNECTIVITY

West Glacier is immersed in a setting for rich outdoor recreation experiences which means that the community is impacted by traffic congestion by visitors looking to move between river accesses to trailheads to camping areas to food/beverage amenity areas. Pedestrian and bike connectivity around town can reduce traffic congestion and provide a more enjoyable experience for all.

- Small rural towns such as West Glacier are delightful for their walkability: Flathead County has a trails masterplan that identifies desired trail improvements for the Glacier Park Area. In addition to new parking, camping, and social amenities in town, recommendations from the Flathead Wild and Scenic River Plan should inform pedestrian connectivity and wayfinding recommendations.
- Explore opportunities for improvements in West Glacier-based shared-use path connections. Look at the trails master plan for existing recommendations and identify connections that require safety or design improvements.
- Provide a safe, accessible, dedicated bike lane and pedestrian path along West Glacier Main Street to avoid pedestrian/bike/vehicle conflicts and allow everyone convenient, easy access to amenities.
- Design roadways with hikers and cyclists in mind, with particular attention to posted speeds, width, and other pedestrian/cyclist awareness measures.
- Maintain trailhead and forest access points and easements within and through residential and commercial developments. This access can be as simple as signage and a hiker/biker/horse width easement.

In 2018, the Flathead County Trails Plan was updated. Public outreach and surveys performed as part of the process highlighted county residents' view of trails as a great investment because they improve community health, provide opportunities for people to enjoy the outdoors and alternative commuting options, and attract visitors to Flathead County. Specific needs expressed by community members included:

- A desire to see further expansion and better maintenance of existing trails.

SUCCESS

### Gateway to Glacier Trail

Gateway to Glacier Trail (G2GT) is a non-profit citizens' organization with the goal of building a safe non-motorized path from Columbia Falls to West Glacier, Montana. The citizen group came together in 2011 to advocate and raise funds for a non-motorized trail connecting to the existing Hungry Horse to Coram Trail. The group has received grants, including the Community Transportation Enhancement Program (CTEP) funds and Federal Land Access Program (FLAP) funds, successfully negotiated easements with Columbia Falls Aluminum Company, and negotiated with the Montana Department of Transportation regarding the future reconstruction of Highway 2 through Badrock Canyon to include a non-motorized trail.

- A strong desire to connect Kalispell, Whitefish, and Columbia Falls through paved bike paths.
- Need for safety education to inform bicyclists that they need to be aware of horses if separating the trails is not possible (multiple-use etiquette signs).
- An online map of area bike trails. Trailforks is an app that anyone can use and contribute to.
- A need for better parking for horse trailers.
- Connect trail systems to each other with bike lanes and shared use paths.
- Add a shared-use path around Flathead Lake.

*The 2018 Flathead Trails Plan Survey results found the following primary activities on trails: (713 responded)*

Walking 59%	Hiking 65%
Biking 57%	Running 28%
Horseback riding 17%	Cross country skiing/Snowshoeing 40%
Snowmobile 5%	ATV 3%
Motorcycle 3%	Do not use trails 2%

## ACTION AREA 2: FLATHEAD RIVER CORRIDOR AND ACCESS

The Middle Fork of the Flathead River flows through West Glacier, between Glacier National Park and the Flathead National Forest, and is dually managed by the two agencies. In addition, the Flathead River is a Wild and Scenic River (WSR), under the Wild and Scenic River Act, “including the North Fork from the Canadian border to its confluence with the Middle Fork, the entire Middle Fork, and the South Fork from its headwaters to the Hungry Horse Reservoir.” The free-flowing character, diverse and intact ecosystems and remarkable values are what make the Flathead River unique and vital to protect and conserve for the viability of natural systems and the enjoyment of present and future generations (Flathead Wild and Scenic River Management Plan, 1980).

This conservation-oriented community recognizes the role water plays in the natural environment, recreation, and ability to live here in a responsible and sustainable way. As the Middle Fork of the Flathead flows through West Glacier, it provides an unprecedented natural backdrop, a vital wildlife habitat, and a crucial resource to support our residents and guests. Rivers are a natural draw, attracting people, wildlife, businesses, and recreation. Additionally, everything that we do has an impact on downstream users.

This means promoting the need for policies that ensure a resilient and healthy ecosystem. The CALURS development standards should act as an extension of these policies and encourage water health, conservation and efficiency in our built environment, adjacent development, and planned uses.

Flathead River Wild & Scenic River Management Plan is underway. Information can be found here:

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/detailfull/flathead/home/?cid=fseprd573051&width=full>

Current Flathead River Use (From 2018 Wild and Scenic River Use Report courtesy University of Montana College of Forestry and Conservation): *The river exists in the context of rapid social and environmental change. Both Glacier NP visitation and the population of the region surrounding the river are increasing at a rapid rate. More people could mean more river corridor users and increased use. Additionally, there are new types of users in the corridor. Crafts are becoming more affordable and lighter-weight and many recreationists do not need a guide to help them down the river. As a result, the Flathead River is experiencing more shore parties, dispersed camping, and extended seasons. This could affect peoples’ perceptions of crowding and may explain increased impacts along shores.*

As of the writing of this plan during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, nationwide trends in boating and fishing are showing an increase of 10%.<sup>1</sup>

## RIVER AND RIPARIAN ACTION PRIORITIES

- Protect existing physical and visual access to waterways within and around the town.
- Maintain healthy stream flows for ecological, recreational, and scenic purposes.

<sup>1</sup> Outdoor Recreation Caucus briefing: Recreation During COVID-19. October 21, 2020



- Strengthen the Flathead River and its associated floodplain as a recreational and economic amenity while preserving the riparian habitat.
- Protect and interpret the viability of natural wetlands and watercourses as a key component of our natural and built environments.
- Maintain river buffers through the Canyon neighborhood plan and MCLUAC ordinances that limit the impacts of particular detrimental human uses. Utilize rain gardens and other stormwater capture strategies for treating road pollutants before reaching the river.
- Incorporate comprehensive stormwater systems (where possible) that improve water quality and contribute to the ecological functioning of watersheds.
- Restore or enhance degraded or disturbed waterways to improve ecological conditions, aesthetics, and recreation.
- Extend trails and create additional linkages, as appropriate, to link to waterways.
- Promote public safety and river health by creating regulatory ordinances to update failing septic systems.
- Continue active participation in the Flathead River Wild and Scenic River Plan and explore opportunities to improve the West Glacier river access.
- Engage the community in developing parking lot, kiosk/information, and access improvements with consideration that the access/parking is set within a residential setting.
- Consider developing capacity limits for the West Glacier river access and parking lot to mitigate impacts to the environment and to residents. Potential river access parking expansion at the West Glacier River Bend Drive access could make existing congestion and overflow parking even worse in this residential area.
- Work with the University of Montana College of Forestry and Conservation and other agency and non-profit partners to develop more comprehensive user data and data monitoring for water quality. Evaluate the need for permitting of private boats in this reach due to the impacts of increased use.
- Consider how more parking increases traffic safety hazards on an already congested section of road from Hwy 2 to the River Bend Dr access. Evaluate the viability and impacts of developing down-river access sites to offset high river use in this residential setting.
- Planning for wildlife: the community needs to decide if it is important to maintain or recover a high level of wildlife diversity by discussing objectives with the Hungry Horse Ranger District and NPS – habitats on all these lands are interrelated and affect one another. To achieve these goals, if privately owned land includes important wildlife habitat, a landowner may wish to consider some type of conservation easement to benefit wildlife and maintain community values. These sites could be identified in the yearly work planning process. The community and the planning board could then help willing and motivated landowners locate possible sources of financial compensation in lieu of development.

### ACTION AREA 3: STEWARDSHIP OF PUBLIC LANDS

West Glacier is defined by the inspiration that its natural environment leaves on everyone who spends time in the area. It is defined by its wildlife bounding out of the woods; and, by the pure waters of the Flathead River as it flows through the area. As an outdoor community physically linked to a healthy and thriving natural and human environment, its residential and business community is protective of the environment they live and work amongst. They are a community that has a long history in the area and is observant of the changing conditions from year to year. As a result, they are advocates for the protections that public lands provide and also stewards who help educate and enforce that high-value natural environment.

#### Key Stewardship Actions

- Work with State Offices of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism and Economic Development to develop a state-specific Recreate Responsibly Toolkit for residents and businesses to communicate about responsible use of natural resources to visitors.
- Find other common public spaces to convey the community's public service messages about wildfire safety, public safety, wildlife safety, and Leave No Trace practices.
- Develop new partnerships with other NGOs that help support collaborative educational methods/materials and local community stewardship projects including river stewardship activities. See the Appendices for a list of possible partners listed under resources.



## ACTION AREA 4: REGIONAL RECREATION OPPORTUNITY PLANNING

### *Collaborative regional recreation planning opportunities:*

- Collaborate with public, private, tribal, and non-profit entities to increase recreation opportunities and economic benefits for everyone. Examine regional solutions when responding to evolving recreational preferences and opportunities (e.g. determining where a facility would fit best)
- Recreation asset mapping at the county and regional level can help identify new opportunities and capitalize on and enhance existing recreational facilities.
- Develop or increase recreational opportunities suited to short, daily activities.
- Cultivate opportunities for removing barriers for non-typical and underserved audiences such as seniors/retirees, youth, and people with physical or mental disabilities.
- Actively track and evaluate outdoor recreational trends and events to expand the relevancy and competitiveness of Flathead County opportunities beyond Glacier NP.
- Actively market shoulder and cross-seasonal opportunities and the range of opportunities available to all skill levels.
- Develop a multi-jurisdictional, county, or regional recreation map (web/app-based) to better support recreation opportunities and local economies outside of Glacier NP.
- Maintain a centrally located outdoor activity information center to provide information on resources (trailheads, locations, maps, and activities) and private services (outfitters, guide services, gear rentals, and programs).
- Work with partners to better market wilderness expectations and values.
- Expand collaborative planning work with the University of Montana Institute of Tourism and Recreation Research and regional tourism entities to support data collection efforts that address visitor management challenges and opportunities.
- Support outdoor recreation businesses interested in finding a home in West Glacier that allows them to innovate and succeed.



# GOAL #5

**Provide seamless transportation connections that consider both people & wildlife connectivity**





## Goal #5: Provide seamless transportation connections that consider both people and wildlife connectivity

### PRINCIPLES:

Seamless transportation is defined as transportation that meets the needs of system users so that where one mode of transit ends, others may be accessed easily from that same location.

Public transit in rural settings must be:

- Flexible and utilize a variety of transit types. Rural transit, even with seasonal high visitation, can be challenging to finance without reliable ridership in off-seasons.
- Collaborative and enhance planning and cooperation at the local, county, regional, and state levels.
- Comprehensive in its ability to provide sufficient coverage, frequency, and choice to address an array of travel goals and destinations. A successful system centralizes and simplifies options.

### Transportation Priorities

- Support Regional Transportation Planning
- Support West Glacier Alternative Transportation Planning and Connectivity
- Support Context-Sensitive Parking Solutions
- Support Wildlife-Friendly Transportation Corridors

### ACTION AREA 1: SUPPORT REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

Transportation options across the state and nation are rapidly changing. From additional rail opportunities to self-driving cars, new technologies are transforming the way people get around. Autonomous and shared vehicles will affect how public rights-of-way are planned, parking is accommodated, and infrastructure improvements are designed. It is important to ensure that Flathead County and West Glacier are poised to take advantage of new trends in transportation and transit.

Centralized opportunities for public transit are reliant upon the planning for a transit center in conjunction with a public parking garage or other centralized and appropriate location. Such a transit center should accommodate all existing modes (i.e. buses, local/ regional shuttles, rental car facilities, and bikeshare

facilities). Such regional planning would provide enhanced regional connections between the transit center, local communities, and the Glacier NP GTSR shuttle at Apgar Visitor Center.

- Work with existing transportation partners to enhance and increase our ability to serve both residents and guests. Enhance planning and cooperation at the regional scale with the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT), Federal Highways Administration, Flathead County, Glacier National Park, and Glacier Country Tourism to collaborate on planning and communication solutions. These coordination meetings have taken place and more are planned for the future.
- Collaborate with other communities and the county on regional transportation solutions.
- Coordinate with Amtrak and West Glacier to ensure connectivity from the Belton Station to local and regional transportation options.
- Explore regional transportation options and connections such as light rail, BRT, or expanded bus service between Kalispell, Columbia Falls, Whitefish, and other locations within the region.
- A park & ride exists at the intersection of Hwy2 and 206 in Columbia Heights. Evaluate adequacy and further needs.
- Identify needs and opportunities for electric vehicles and the sharing economy. Cultivate an environment that attracts and supports entrepreneurs and innovators in transit technology including shuttle and ride-hailing entrepreneurs.
- Address traffic congestion and wayfinding signage issues on Hwy 2 and GTSR entry road with MDT:
  - As a community, identify key contacts with MDT and develop meaningful working relationships for ongoing coordination.
  - Work with MDT to perform safety analysis and traffic study. Hwy 2 and the entrance road are up for safety review. Crash data and potential crashes could prioritize funding to mitigate problems.
  - Work on bringing the speed limit on Hwy 2 down to 45 from KOA, as well as from Marias pass.
  - Add a left turn lane on Hwy 2 into the KOA.
  - Address traffic confusion over the merge lane along Hwy 2 turning west from Going-To-The-Sun Road. Evaluate the need to reduce speed along Hwy 2 through West Glacier as businesses report very hazardous traffic conditions for traffic moving in and out of business parking lots. Also, evaluate the need for a bypass lane along Hwy 2 through West Glacier. The issue with getting traffic merging onto Hwy 2 west is that people don't know they don't have to stop which leads to some accidents.
  - Continue the use of MDT digital signage to communicate traffic and construction issues.
  - Complete/analyze/expand UMT traffic data to improve data-based planning. Pursue resources for enhanced data collection to support regional decision-making.

- Confirm MDT's timeline for performing studies and traffic count.
- Work with MDT on developing context-sensitive wayfinding and business signage along West Glacier's Main St and along Hwy 2 that does not have to adhere to the standards of the Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices.

*The 2020 pandemic saw extreme back-ups on Hwy 2 due to the out-and-back travel route caused by the closure of the east entrance of the park. The highway patrol directed traffic as a result.*

## **ACTION AREA 2: SUPPORT WEST GLACIER ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION PLANNING AND CONNECTIVITY**

Alternative transportation is defined as any transportation mode that is an alternative to the dominant model of a single-driver, car-based system. A successful pedestrian and cyclist environment provides a human-scaled atmosphere with elements such as landscaping and art. US Hwy 2 creates a challenging traffic environment with its wide travel lanes and high speeds because there is a mix of traffic converging within the same few miles. As a state highway, it must fulfill critical regional functions in moving people, goods, and services. However, as the road that presents the critical directional turn through the BNSF overpass and onto GTSR and West Glacier's "Main Street", it sets the character and feel of the community. The key to balancing Main Street's character is to maintain its scale and pace of movement and by adding interest. Many of the design features that provide a pleasant aesthetic experience also provide functional traffic calming benefits and increased safety for pedestrians and cyclists. West Glacier's pedestrian priorities focus on creating a safe, continuous, comfortable walking environment. This Action Area focuses on promoting walking and cycling through design and Right-of-Way improvements around the community.

- Provide a bicycle system that offers both recreational and in-town connectivity and accommodates all levels of riders.
- Complete the Gateway to Glacier Trail to ensure it functions as the primary bicycle corridor.
- Focus on improving motorist awareness and mutual share-the-road behavior on all roadways through signage and appropriate roadway widths.
- Improve the pedestrian experience through enhanced connectivity locally.
- Initiate a comprehensive signage program to provide intuitive wayfinding throughout West Glacier.
- Enhance crosswalks through Pedestrian Activated Warning Lights or In-Road Warning Lights. Pedestrian Activated Warning Lights are pedestrian devices that are dark until activated by the pedestrian. In-Road Warning Lights are lights that are installed flush within the roadway surface and provide an additional level of driver awareness of crosswalks.

- Work with businesses to maintain a continuous, human-scale street frontage along Main Street.
- Work with developers and utility providers to integrate non-buildable areas within easements into the public realm (e.g. public plazas, parklets, or dining areas).
- Work with Main Street property owners to reduce visual impacts and physical conflicts created by vehicular access points (i.e. curb cuts).
- Enhance existing pedestrian crossings to increase pedestrian safety and visibility as well as motorist compliance.
- Plan phased in replacements for street trees along Main Street with any street improvements in order to maintain historic landscape character.
- Collect more data/information to further address safety and pedestrian traffic around the community:
  - The two existing pedestrian crossings helped but still impede traffic.
  - Address River Bend Dr safety: Hazardous road conditions exist from the 10mph 'Y' curve through the two 90-degree turns as one enters the Golf Course residential and clubhouse area. The county put up the 10mph sign on the most dangerous corner after being notified of the frequency of near terrible collisions. Residents report that hazardous conditions persist.

## **ACTION AREA 3: SUPPORT CONTEXT-SENSITIVE PARKING SOLUTIONS**

Public parking is limited in this small community but visitors require parking close to natural recreation amenities such as the Flathead River and in-town amenities such as the mercantile and other stores. A recent collaborative business project focused planning and resources on an expanded parking lot in West Glacier to accommodate the rafting outfitters' patrons. Previously, these patrons utilized on-street parking along GTSR in town which has been eliminated to encourage pedestrian safety through enhanced crosswalks. This parking lot will be under construction for 2021 and is along the river and convenient for rafters.

- Use wayfinding elements to help direct people to underutilized parking facilities.
- Evaluate parking needs around Belton and Amtrak station/Depot/Conservancy and plan for improved safety/delineation/communication.
- Support the inclusion of publicly accessible electric vehicle (EV) charging stations at existing parking facilities.
- Consider the use of roundabouts to act as a traffic-calming measure and an opportunity for an aesthetic gateway treatment.

## ACTION AREA 4: SUPPORT WILDLIFE-FRIENDLY TRANSPORTATION CORRIDORS

For reducing the impacts of roads on wildlife, we can take two approaches: one, alter the design of existing roads to facilitate safe wildlife crossings and reduce surrounding environmental impacts, and two, proactively incorporate wildlife into transportation planning so that new roads avoid sensitive areas and habitats to begin with. The following ideas were expressed by stakeholders as future actions in transportation planning for wildlife:

- MDT has indicated that there are no current highway projects that would warrant incorporating new infrastructure for wildlife.
- Laura Reynolds wants to do a survey of animals for DOT.
- NPS was recording wildlife crossings on Hwy 2. Refer to the study results and recommendations to develop and prioritize projects and strategies. Look at related studies by the Salish as an example. Banff has implemented a wildlife crossings program – evaluate success rates, how it is working and if there are lessons learned for this area.

## RESOURCES

- Federal Transportation Administration Resources: <https://www.transit.dot.gov/regulations-and-guidance/transportation-planning/rural-transportation-planning>
- Federal Lands Access Program (FLAP): <https://highways.dot.gov/federal-lands/programs-access>
- MT Updates: <https://highways.dot.gov/federal-lands/programs-access/mt>
- Linking Conservation and Transportation: Using the State Wildlife Action Plans to Protect Wildlife from Road Impacts: [https://defenders.org/sites/default/files/publications/linking\\_conservation\\_and\\_transportation.pdf](https://defenders.org/sites/default/files/publications/linking_conservation_and_transportation.pdf)



# Chapter 4: The Path Forward – Implementation

*“A successful plan is...a clearly articulated plan implementable via local buy-in and support.”*

The Path Forward describes an approach that ensures that the community is moving forward with considerations for possible changing conditions and adapting as they prioritize actions over time. For the West Glacier Vision Plan to be realized, it will take the work of the entire community. It will also need to be reviewed and updated periodically. This chapter outlines the implementation and review framework.

## Vision Plan Adoption

In order for the West Glacier Vision Plan (WGVP) to be fully utilized, it will need to go through a formal adoption process. The collaborative efforts of the Flathead County Planning Board, the Middle Canyon Land Use Advisory Committee, the West Glacier Vision Planning Team, stakeholders, and community members will work to make the WGVP an Addendum to the Canyon Plan.

## As an Addendum to the 1994 Canyon Plan

The Canyon Plan was officially adopted on May 17, 1994. This Neighborhood Plan encompasses approximately 12,000 acres of property, starting at the entrance of Badrock Canyon and continuing east to Marias Pass. While the Canyon Plan is getting close to 20 years old, many, if not all, of the goals and policies outlined in the Plan are still applicable today.

The advantage of adopting the WGVP as an addendum to the Canyon Plan is that the Canyon Plan has also been included in the Flathead County Growth Policy and will not need to go through a further process to be included in the Growth Policy. The vision plan goals are in alignment with the Flathead County Growth Policy definition of a Growth Plan<sup>1</sup> and with the Canyon Plan.

This vision plan represents the shared values of the community but it does not say how regulations need to change. Vision plans provide a general direction for planning actions; it is not a regulatory document. If the community wants to amend CALURS with a specific regulatory request, it would go through the existing and well-established channels of amending/updating CALURS one issue at a time, as they become relevant. That gets done through the Middle Canyon Land Use Advisory Committee on a case-by-case basis and is driven by the needs of the community.

<sup>1</sup> Growth Policy definition from the Flathead County Growth Plan: (CHAPTER 10) A Growth Policy is a non-regulatory document created to “ensure the promotion of public health, safety, morals, convenience or order or the general welfare, and for the sake of efficiency and economy in the process of community development” (76-1-10 M.C.A.). A Growth Policy does so by working with community members to identify a collective vision and develop goals and policies to support and implement that vision over time.

This plan focuses almost exclusively on the area in and around West Glacier and the western entrance to Glacier National Park. This plan also identifies the challenges and opportunities that have emerged in the area as a result of the dramatic increase in park visitation over the past decade. The development of the WGVP as described in the body of the plan follows the prescribed guidelines of creating a neighborhood plan outlined in the Flathead County Growth Policy, including initial organizational meetings, identifying existing conditions, drafting the community vision, characteristics, and goals, and preparing the draft. The formal adoption process is similar to the process outlined above with some minor deviations. Because this plan concentrates on an area known as the Middle Canyon, the Middle Canyon Land Use Advisory Committee should conduct a noticed meeting in order to take comments on the plan from members of the public. This committee can then forward a recommendation to the Flathead County Planning Board. This board will conduct a public hearing to take additional comments from members of the public.

Including the WGVP as an addendum to the Canyon Plan as the method of formal adoption makes it become part of the Flathead Growth Policy, with no regulatory requirements, and instead works in tandem with the Canyon Area Land Use Regulatory System (CALURS) in the same way the Canyon Plan does. The Growth Policy definition from the Flathead County Growth Plan states that it “is not regulatory, but forms the conceptual foundation for future land use decisions and is a basis for future regulations as communities see the need to address specific issues.” CALURS is well established and changes to it have occurred as community and county needed. As is stated in M.C.A. Section 76-1-601, amendments “...may be warranted in order to adequately protect public health, safety, morals, convenience, order, or general welfare in the process of community development. Amendments may be proposed by citizens or governing bodies, and may involve changes to text. (Source: Section 76-1-601 of Montana Code Annotated (M.C.A.))

The Middle Canyon Land Use committee forwarded a recommendation to the Flathead County Planning Board in the summer of 2021. The WGVP draft was on the county website from April to August for public review.

After, a period of review and a workshop with the Planning Board will be conducted where additional comments from members of the public will be collected. At the conclusion of the public hearing and board discussion, the Planning Board may then adopt a resolution, recommending the Flathead County Commissioners adopt the proposed WGVP. The commissioners shall consider this recommendation and adopt a resolution of intent and subsequently adopt the WGVP as an amendment to the Canyon Plan as outlined in 76-1-603, M.C.A.

## *WGVP and the 1994 Canyon Area Land Use Regulatory System (CALURS)*

Subsequent to the adoption of the Canyon Plan in 1994, land use regulations were developed to implement the goals and policies of the plan. The WGVP encompasses an area that is located within the Middle Canyon area as defined in CALURS. It is anticipated that with the adoption of this plan, specific amendments to CALURS may be necessary to implement the goals, policies, and vision of the WGVP. As currently written, CALURS appears to be lacking in regulations that specifically address the opportunities that exist within the planning area of the WGVP. Also lacking in CALURS is the ability to develop commercial or mixed-use projects that can better serve the growing number of visitors to Glacier National Park. Once the WGVP is adopted, development pressure within the WGVP planning area should be monitored to determine how the land use regulations can be amended to facilitate the continuation of the community's vision of West Glacier while providing an enhanced visitor experience. Some elements that should be considered in any amendment to CALURS are clearly enumerated design standards, including architectural standards, landscaping, signage, buffering, and parking standards. Another existing element of CALURS that should be considered is expanding the "designated service area." This is an area within the heart of the West Glacier community that is, currently, reserved for non-residential development. With additional performance standards and other impact mitigating regulations, the service area could be expanded to facilitate additional development as long as that development continues to comply with the vision outlined in the WGVP.

## *WGVP and the 2022 Flathead County Growth Policy*

The current Flathead County Growth Policy was adopted on October 12, 2012. While known in many areas as a comprehensive plan, the growth policy outlines goals and policies for future development and the delivery of services throughout the county. Montana Code suggests that a growth policy be reviewed and updated as needed every five years. The pending release of the official 2020 census data coupled with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, a comprehensive update of the growth policy which was planned to get underway in the first half of 2020 has been delayed. With the formal adoption of the WGVP, the community vision and goals outlined in the plan will be incorporated into the updated growth policy, including the need to address transportation needs and maintained the existing character of the West Glacier area.

## *Amendments to the West Glacier Vision Plan*

As amendments to the WGVP become necessary, the Middle Canyon Land Use Advisory Committee and the Flathead County Planning Board will be responsible for making recommendations to the County Commissioners. The County Commissioners will be responsible for adopting a final resolution and adopting any amendments. A major update to the WGVP shall be considered every ten years. Plan amendments may be accomplished by one of the following planning actions:

Administrative Plan Amendments – Editorial or minor changes or revisions to the plan text, figures, or maps that reflect updated information, or grammatical or punctuation corrections may be processed with other plan amendments.

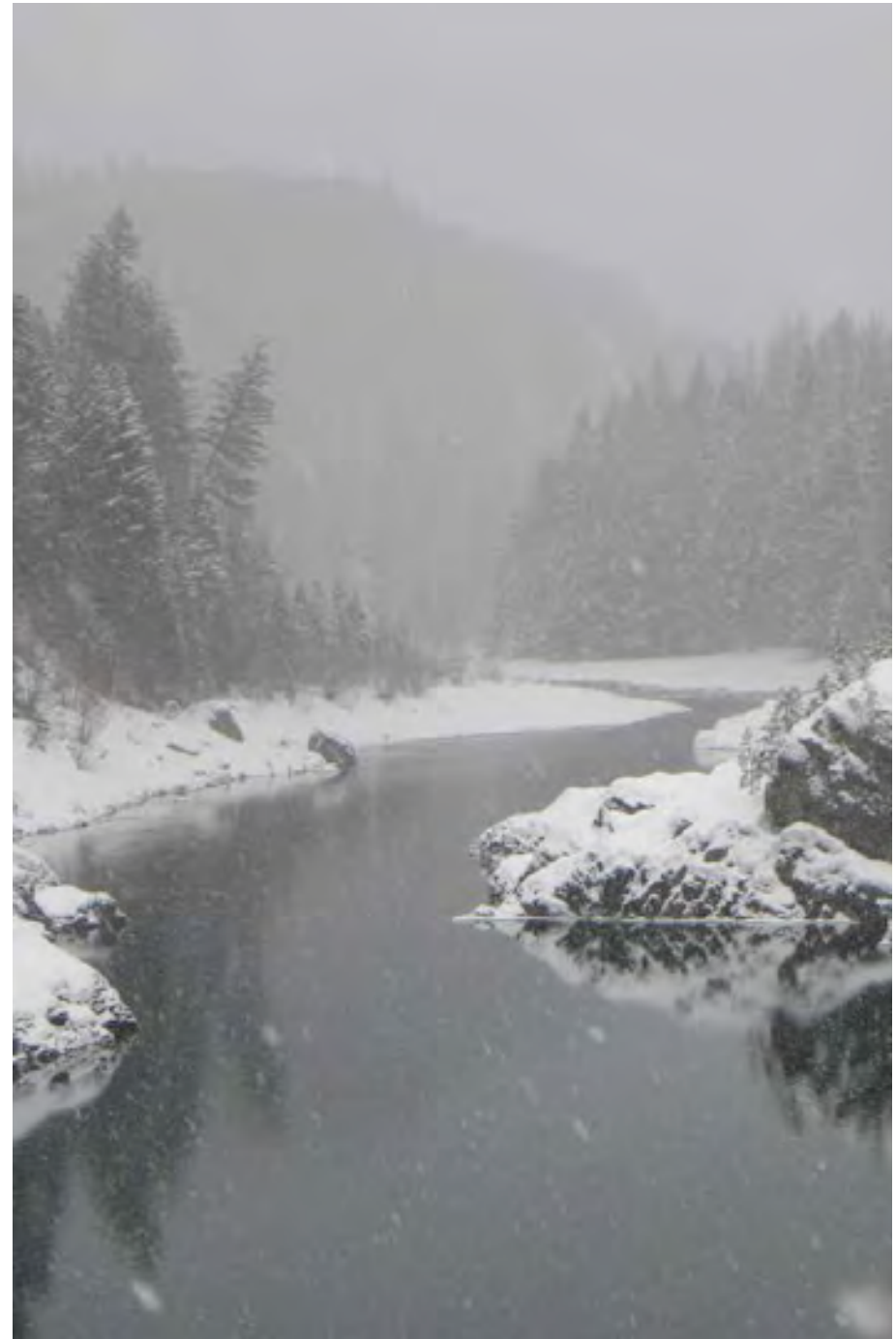


- Vision Plan Amendments – Changes to language that alter the intent of the plan’s principles or policies should incorporate a public process and formal adoption by the County Commissioners.
- Major Plan Update – A chance to reconfirm the plan’s vision and direction with the public every ten years or as conditions in the area substantially change. Major plan updates can be directed by the residents of the WGVP planning area, county planning staff, the Planning Board, or the County Commissioners.
- Action Plan – The Action Plan is a working document developed from ideas and strategies from the community, combined with best practices from similar community planning efforts. Collectively, it can continue to evolve and be worked on through focus groups in order to identify priorities and feasible approaches specifically tailored to this community and this plan.

### Partnerships, Community Roles & Vision Plan Collaborative Working Group

The entire community, both residents and businesses have a role in realizing this vision plan, and it is essential that the community remains vested throughout implementation. The following are some suggestions for how the plan may move forward on an annual basis:

- An open, collaborative working group made up of a cross-section of residents, businesses, agencies and/or partner organizations should meet quarterly or at a regular frequency to exchange information regarding priority efforts they are working on or WGVP actions they might collaborate on. This group is referenced as a communications strategy in Goal #3.
- This group may consider working with neighboring communities to grow support and pool resources to find mutually-beneficial solutions to shared issues.
- The WGVP goals should be reviewed annually with community work groups created to prioritize the actions the groups would like to work on. These groups should be self-selected and open to anyone interested. The only prerequisite is that the groups be collaborative in nature and willing to be open to new ideas and approaches. Efforts should be made to engage new and diverse community members. Working groups should be open to new members at any time.
- The working groups should determine a method for reporting out on progress or at decision-making points to the community through community meetings, digital outlets, newsletters, or other outlets.



# Appendix A

## Flathead County Planning Definitions, Terms and References

The following includes references to the MONTANA CODE ANNOTATED:

Section 76-1-601 of Montana Code Annotated (M.C.A.) establishes a requirement for all county and municipal jurisdictions in the state of Montana to prepare a growth policy. A growth policy is not regulatory but forms the conceptual foundation for future land use decisions and is a basis for future regulations. The Flathead County Growth Policy was adopted on March 19, 2007, and is intended to provide guidance for growth in Flathead County.

Amendments to the Growth Policy may be warranted in order to adequately protect public health, safety, morals, convenience, order, or general welfare in the process of community development. Amendments may be proposed by citizens or governing bodies and may involve changes to text.

### CHAPTER 11: NEIGHBORHOOD PLANS

Montana state law allows any county or municipality in Montana to prepare a growth policy, pursuant to 76-1-106(1) M.C.A. While the growth policy is designed to be a comprehensive policy document, it may contain more site specific neighborhood plans pursuant to 76-1-601(4). Each neighborhood plan must be consistent with the growth policy. Land use decisions guided by a neighborhood plan should reflect a community's vision of how they intend to grow in the future. In the absence of a neighborhood plan, land use decisions are guided by the growth policy and existing regulatory documents, as applicable. The intent of this chapter is to provide a general framework to facilitate the preparation, revision and update of neighborhood plans in Flathead County.

### HOW THE WGVP GOALS MEET THE FLATHEAD COUNTY GROWTH PLAN VISION STATEMENTS

The WGVP meets all of the Flathead County defining community characteristics in the Growth Plan. The FC Growth Plan vision statements are embodied in the WGVP.

### HOW THE WGVP GOALS ALIGN WITH THE FLATHEAD COUNTY GROWTH PLAN GOALS:

The seven elements of the public's vision in the FC Growth Plan:

- i. Protect the views.
- ii. Promote a diverse economy.
- iii. Minimize traffic
- iv. Maintain the identity of rural communities.
- v. Protect access to and interaction with parks and recreation.
- vi. Properly manage and protect the natural and human environment.
- vii. Preserve the rights of private property owners

WGVP Goals [FC Growth Plan Vision Statements included]:

### CHAPTER 11: NEIGHBORHOOD PLANS

1. Preserve Community Character and Sense of Place [i, iii., iv., vi.]
2. Create a Safe and Resilient Community [ii., iii., v., vi.]
3. Enhance Community Communications and Participation [all County Growth Plan vision statements are important in this WGVP Goal]
4. Support Sustainable Outdoor Recreation Opportunities [v., vi., vii.]
5. Provide Seamless Transportation Connections [all County Growth Plan vision statements are important in this WGVP Goal]

Action Areas – Action areas are determined by working group priorities for any goal area. Working groups evolve out of individual’s or community needs (e.g. Wildfire Preparedness). The action priorities in Chapter 3 of WGVP are grouped in similar action areas. This Action Plan is a ‘live’ document and may be updated as needed by volunteer community member and stakeholder working groups in collaboration with Flathead County Planning & Zoning.

Climate Resiliency – The ability to prepare for change, adapt to, or recover from weather pattern changes. For example, the creation of the Community Wildfire Adaptive Program, to better prepare for the increased wildfire trends, began independently of this plan but quickly became Working Group model for other action areas, demonstrating how all the shared values, goals and vision are intertwined.

Declaration of Rights in the Montana Constitution Article II Section 3 – “...inalienable rights include the right to a clean and healthful environment and the rights of pursuing life’s basic necessities, enjoying and defending their lives and liberties, acquiring, possessing and protecting property, and seeking their safety, health and happiness in all lawful ways. In enjoying these rights, all persons recognize corresponding responsibilities.”

Goal Statements – Goal statements identify the shared values and desired outcomes that the community wants to focus on. Goals are outcome statements that define what an organization is trying to accomplish, both programmatically and organizationally. The five Goal Statements in Chapter 3 were developed through a series of community and stakeholder conversations and represent the aspirational outlook for West Glacier’s future. They are overarching statements that describe the desired future of the area based on shared community values.

Healthy Lifestyles – see Declaration of Rights Montana Constitution (above)

Principles – Principles are guiding characteristics, assumptions or facts that help understand the parameters of the goal. The Principles fall under each of the goal statements to elaborate on the future setting, character, and opportunities for the community for the next 10 to 15 years.

Sustainable Businesses – Businesses that practice the triple bottom line – economic, ecological and social costs and benefits to ensure the same resources are available for the future of their business and the future of the community.

Sustainability/Resiliency – To maintain the quality of life in ways that are ecologically stable, socially responsible and economically viable. Strategies - A Strategy is a statement of intent or expectation—a course of action that provides clarity on the methods for achieving the Principles. They are modifiable and flow with the Principles underlying.

Vision Statement – A vision is a big-picture statement communicating the future of an area or community, compelling action by identifying what matters most to the community. The West Glacier Vision Statement as an Amendment to the Canyon Plan, is in alignment with Flathead County Growth Policy Vision Statements (see Appendix A).





# Appendix B

## Department of Interior Commendation to the Lundgren Family



*Our physical health, our social happiness, and our economic well-being will be sustained only by all of us working in partnership as thoughtful, effective stewards of our natural resources.*

*Conservatives for Responsible Stewardship  
Ronald Reagan*