

Crook County Goals and Implementation DRAFT

The Crook County Land Use Plan serves as a forward-looking guide intended to help shape the county's long-term growth, development patterns, and community character. Rather than prescribing a rigid set of rules, the plan establishes an overarching vision for what Crook County aspires to become. That vision is supported by a framework of goals, implementation steps, potential partnerships, and suggested timelines, all designed to help decision-makers, residents, and other stakeholders understand how the county can move intentionally from its current conditions toward its desired future. In essence, the plan offers a roadmap for getting from where the county is today to where it hopes to be tomorrow while remaining flexible enough to adapt to changing needs and circumstances.

It is important to underscore that the guidance provided within this section of the plan is advisory rather than regulatory. The document is not intended to function as law, nor does it bind the county to any fixed course of action. Instead, it provides structure, direction, and clarity to conversations about land use, growth, and resource management. Crook County explicitly acknowledges that any component of the Land Use Plan, including this guidance section, may be revised, updated, or replaced as community needs to evolve. This ability to modify the plan ensures the county remains responsive to new information, emerging challenges, and shifting priorities.

Because the plan's contents are not regulatory, they do not create enforceable rights or obligations. Rather, they serve as a shared reference point: a tool to help elected officials, staff, landowners, and community members work toward common goals with a clearer sense of purpose. The information contained in the plan is meant to promote collaboration, informed decision-making, and long-range thinking while still allowing Crook County the flexibility it needs to chart a course that best serves its residents over time.

Vision Statement

Crook County envisions a future in which the community's exceptional quality of life is both protected and strengthened through thoughtful stewardship of its natural resources and continued investment in essential public services. The county is committed to managing its land, water, wildlife, and open spaces with wisdom and care, ensuring that these irreplaceable assets remain healthy, resilient, and accessible for generations to come. At the same time, Crook County will work to enhance core services, including infrastructure, emergency response, education, transportation, and community facilities, that support daily life and foster long-term stability.

Together, these priorities form a balanced vision: one that honors the county's rural character and natural beauty while empowering its residents with the services, opportunities, and support needed to thrive. By uniting resource stewardship with strategic community investment, Crook County strives to create a sustainable, vibrant, and future-ready place that continues to reflect the values and aspirations of its people.

Goals, Action Steps, Implementation, and Partnerships

Goal 1: Protecting Natural Resources

Protect and sustain Crook County's natural resources and working landscapes through responsible management and collaborative, long-term conservation.

Action Steps

- 1. Develop a Natural Resource Review Process** - Develop a Natural Resource Review Process for major development applications that balances Crook County's commitment to private property rights with responsible resource stewardship. The process will outline how information on priority open spaces, water resources, wildlife habitat, and agricultural lands should be considered during development review. This process will help identify potential impacts and offer voluntary options to avoid or minimize conflicts while maintaining maximum landowner flexibility.

This action step is meant to be used at the subdivision review level. Potential impacts will offer voluntary choices on how mitigate issues related to open spaces, water resources, wildlife habitat and agricultural lands. The natural resource concerns and voluntary mitigation may be developed by a working group made up of County staff, Planning Commission, Conservation District and developers. The resulting work product can be adopted by the County Commissioners as a guidance tool during subdivision review. The cost would be absorbed into the day to day operating budget of the county. A grant may be applied for to assist with the staff time involved.

- 2. Develop a Crook County Water Resource Protection Program** - Create and implement a County Water Resource Protection Program. The program will provide a clear, early-stage method for evaluating whether reliable water supplies exist for proposed development and will support the protection of both surface and groundwater. This effort will use local hydrogeologic knowledge, available well and aquifer data, and mapped surface-water features to guide applicants in identifying water sources, understanding potential impacts on nearby wells and waterways,

and considering voluntary practices that protect water quality and long-term aquifer sustainability.

This action step is meant to provide guidance for all types of development. It should be useful for small development as well as subdivision undertakings. It is to provide maps, information and data; along with steps that can be taken to mitigate issues with wells and waterways. It is a partnership effort between Crook County and the local conservation district. Agency staff from both organizations along with the Planning Commission and Conservation District Board members would be tasked with developing the guidance document and processes. The County/Conservation District may apply for grants to help fund the effort with a local matches.

Implementation Schedule

Short-Term (1-3 Years)

1. **Form Working Group** – Establish a collaborative team to guide development of the Natural Resource Review Process and Water Resource Protection Program.
2. **Map Priority Resource Areas** – Update and refine mapping of groundwater recharge areas, surface-water features, wildlife habitat open spaces, agricultural lands, rangelands, and other key resources using the 2021 Natural Resource Management Plan and data from this land use plan update.
3. **Compile Water Resource Data and Hydrogeologic Information** – gather well logs, aquifer and watershed data, and local hydrogeologic knowledge to support early water-availability evaluations.
4. **Develop Draft Processes** – Prepare draft versions of the Natural Resource Review Process and the County Water Resource Protection Program, outlining how resource information will be considered during development review.
5. **Engage Stakeholders and Pilot Draft Processes** – Work with landowners, agricultural operators, developers, and community organizations to refine both drafts and test them on select development proposals.

Long-Term (3+ Years)

1. **Finalize Both Processes** – Incorporate stakeholder input and pilot feedback into final versions of the Natural Resource Review Process and Water Resource Protection Program.
2. **Integrate Into Development Review** - Apply both processes to major development applications to support early discussions, identify resource considerations, and present voluntary stewardship options.

3. **Monitor and Report on Water Resources** – conduct annual monitoring of surface and groundwater conditions and share findings with County leadership.
4. **Review and Improve Annually** – Evaluate both processes each year and recommend updates based on new data, community feedback, and development trends.

Goal 2 – Rural Way of Life While Preparing for Future Growth

Ensure Crook County remains resilient and rural by guiding growth that respects community values, supports working lands, and prepares for future needs.

Action Steps

1. **Develop Guidance to Support Working Lands** - Develop simple, non-regulatory guidance that helps landowners understand how proposed development can coexist with nearby agricultural and ranching activities. This complements the Natural Resource Goal by focusing on land-use compatibility and rural lifestyle rather than environmental resource review.

This action step is meant to show practical steps to take so development may coexist with nearby agricultural and ranching activities. Planning staff, ranchers, developers, farmers and homeowners would be given the responsibility for putting together the guidance. Any number of steps to mitigate impact can be addressed such as fencing, erosion control, buffers, as well as others. The information can be provided to anyone who desires to develop land. The cost should be low and be absorbed into the County budget. As an option the County may seek grant funds to pay for the effort.

2. **Encourage Growth Near Existing Communities and Services** - Share advisory information highlighting areas already served by roads, utilities, and emergency services to help direct growth to where it can be best supported. This complements the Natural Resource goal by focusing on growth pattern efficiency rather than natural resource protection or water availability.

This action step needs cooperation between the County and all of the municipalities in order to be useful. An interlocal agreement may be developed to share information and data about all utilities, emergency services and roads. The County as well as the municipalities may use the information not only to inform developers but also as a tool for capital improvement programs. Elected officials and staff are

responsible for this action step. The cost is low and should be able to be absorbed by existing budgets.

- 3. Engage the community about new growth and its implications.** Provide accessible educational materials and host listening sessions focused specifically on growth patterns, development expectations, and potential impacts on community values and rural character.

This action step is meant to be developed by Planning staff along with volunteer assistance from interested community members. Listening sessions may be incorporated into Planning Commission meetings or may held as a separate event. Educational materials may be obtained from a wide range of sources, as well as be developed locally. The cost may be able to be absorbed into the existing County budget, and grants may be applied for help pay for the education program from a wide range of sources.

- 4. Review County Development Standards to Support Responsible Growth -** Periodically evaluate subdivision standards, infrastructure expectations, and other development-related tools to address growth-related needs, pursuing any updates only with broad community support.

This action step is viewed as being the responsibility of staff. The once every three year review would attempt to resolve ongoing issues with the content and processes of existing regulations. An example is the impact that new subdivisions have on the existing county road system. An amendment to the subdivision regulations may initiate traffic impact fees to help mitigate the direct consequences of new traffic brought about by a new subdivision upon the county road system. Another example is to use the existing state statutes within the subdivision regulations to determine the impact of new wells and septic systems being installed.

Any amendment to the existing regulations should have broad public support. This can be partially determined by engaging the community about new growth and its implications (see Implementation Step 3). Information may also be obtained from the state statutes, such as when a subdivision is to have a perimeter fence to protect agriculture lands. Material for review may also include relevant outcomes from an interlocal agreement between the County and the municipalities on matters of common interest (water/sewer) related to new growth (See Implementation Step 2).

Changes to existing regulations is meant to be thoughtful by using public outreach (Implementation Step 3) and learning from cooperatives outcomes (Implementation Step 2). It also incorporates reviewing state statutes and closing problematic loopholes which cause issues with the community.

Broad public support for regulatory changes are key to managing new growth. Without broad public support, the community can be divided on how to best manage new growth. Such division only helps new growth, not the concerns of people who live in Crook County.

Implementation Schedule

Short-Term (1-3 Years)

1. **Develop Voluntary Guidance Materials** – Create clear, non-regulatory guidance that helps landowners and applicants understand compatibility with working lands, rural character, and existing development patterns.
2. **Identify Areas that Can Support Growth** – Prepare simple, advisory maps and summaries showing where infrastructure and community series can most effectively support future development.
3. **Engage the Community on Growth Expectations** – Host listening sessions and distribute user-friendly educational materials to gather input and clarify community priorities for how growth should occur.
4. **Pilot Guidance in Development Review** – Begin using the draft guidance to test clarity, usefulness, and alignment with landowner expectations.

Long-Term (3+ Years)

1. **Refine and Apply Guidance Consistently** – Finalize voluntary guidance tools based on pilot use and community feedback, and incorporate them into standard practice during major development reviews.
2. **Update Growth and Resource Information Periodically** – Refresh maps and summaries as development patterns change, infrastructure expands, or new information becomes available.
3. **Review Development Standards as Needed** – Evaluate subdivision and related standards periodically to ensure they continue to support responsible growth, emergency access, and community priorities, pursuing updates only with broad local support.

Goal 3 – County-Wide Partnerships

Collaborate with local and regional partners to improve infrastructure efficiency, expand youth opportunities, increase housing affordability, and support long-term economic development in Crook County.

Action Steps

- 1. Coordinate Infrastructure Planning with Local and Regional Partners** - Work with municipalities, water and sewer districts, and state agencies to identify where existing or planned infrastructure can most efficiently support new development and to pursue shared funding opportunities for system improvements.

The coordination is meant to occur at the subdivision review level.

This action step is to be carried out by Planning Staff. It is connected with Goal 2, Action Step 2. An interlocal agreement between the County and the municipalities makes this achievable. The cost is attributed to staff time.

The coordination of infrastructure planning for water and sewer may also involve the Wyoming Water Commission as well as the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality.

Pursuing shared funding opportunities for system improvements is useful when water/sewer goes beyond the municipal boundary. This enables more density near the municipality and creates a better cost efficient method to deliver those services. In such a instance it would be developer who would be cost sharing or pay the entire amount for an extension of water/sewer service.

- 2. Expand Youth Opportunities through Community and Regional Partnerships-** Collaborate with schools, workforce programs, local businesses, and regional economic groups to create pathways for youth employment, vocational training, internships, and small-business development within the county.

This action step is a partnership between the School District, Wyoming Workforce Services and interested businesses in Crook County. The cost can run from low to high depending upon the program offered. It is not meant to be paid for by the Crook County budget. Grants may be pursued to assist paying for programs.

Expanding youth opportunities in Crook County through vocational training and internships is an economic development tool which aims at the future. The overall median age, as well as the percentage of people 65 years or older is increasing; retaining young people is an investment for the betterment and stability of the community.

Small business development within Crook County is also an economic development tool. Small businesses are often locally owned, provide services and goods, and sometimes viewed as the heart of a community. It's a place to meet for coffee or gather at a hardware store. Small businesses provide employment and contribute to the Crook County economy. Their retention and development is woven with the economic success of the community.

This action step is connected with Action Step 4, and should be a part of economic development activities.

- 3. Support Housing Affordability through Collaboration and Incentives** - Partner with municipalities, developers, financial institutions, and state housing programs to explore voluntary tools, such as incentives, public-private partnerships, and infrastructure coordination, that encourage the development of attainable housing for local residents.

Housing affordability is a complicated matter. There are no simple solutions. However, the County may initiate an interlocal agreement with municipalities to kick off the support for housing affordability. The County may explore any type of regulatory incentive it may have to promote housing affordability. Financial institutions may work with the Wyoming Community Development Authority (WCDA) to promote first-time homebuyer programs. These steps can be taken at little to no cost to the County.

- 4. Advance Economic Development through Targeted Collaboration** - Work with regional economic development organizations, chambers of commerce, industry partners, and state agencies to attract new businesses, support expansion of existing industries, and identify opportunities in sectors such as agriculture, outdoor recreation, tourism, and trades.

Expanding local industries, along with identifying opportunities in agriculture, tourism, outdoor recreation and trades builds the economic portfolio of Crook County.

The economy is built up because now more than 400,000 people visit Devil's Tower annually; agriculture is consistently a large employer, and bentonite is a mainstay natural resource industry in Crook County.

Crook County may create its own vision of what economic development should be. Help to create that vision is available through the Wyoming Business Council, which can guide the community through that process.

Economic development is a community wide effort. It can be an interlocal agreement between the County and municipalities. It can also happen through a chamber of commerce working across different communities. Local industries and businesses need to play a part. There are many resources available at the state level to assist economic development.

Among the resources available at the state level the Wyoming Business Council, Wyoming Small Business Development Center, Wyoming Workforce Services and Wyoming Women's Business Center stand out. These agencies are ready to work with businesses: startups, as well as existing small to large businesses.

Stepping into economic development means there is a cost. The cost to the County for economic development can vary depending upon what type of project is undertaken and the grant monies which may be available. The same may be said for a business and the type of program it chooses to undertake.

Implementation Schedule

Short-Term Actions (1-3 Years)

1. **Establish Key Partnerships** - Coordinate with municipalities, water and sewer districts, schools, local businesses, and regional economic organizations to define shared priorities for infrastructure, youth opportunities, housing, and economic development.
2. **Identify Infrastructure Opportunities** - Map areas where existing or planned water and sewer systems can efficiently support future development, and identify potential joint funding or improvement projects.
3. **Initiate Youth Pathways Programs** - Work with schools, workforce agencies, and local employers to launch or expand internship, apprenticeship, and vocational training opportunities for Crook County youth.
4. **Explore Housing Affordability Tools** - Meet with developers, financial institutions, municipalities, and state housing programs to identify voluntary incentives, partnerships, or infrastructure strategies that can help increase attainable housing.
5. **Conduct Economic Development Outreach** - Coordinate with regional and state partners to identify industries and business types that align with Crook County's strengths and rural character.

Long-Term Actions (3+ Years)

1. **Advance Multi-Partner Infrastructure Projects** - Implement shared water and sewer improvements where appropriate, with continued coordination among communities, special districts, and state partners.
2. **Expand and Sustain Youth Programs** - Grow long-term career pathways, workforce programs, and mentorship opportunities that help young residents remain and succeed in Crook County.
3. **Implement Housing Solutions with Local Support** - Pursue voluntary tools, such as public-private partnerships, infrastructure coordination, or incentive-based programs, based on community interest and demonstrated housing needs.
4. **Promote Targeted Economic Development** - Work with regional and state partners to foster business growth in sectors that support Crook County's economy (e.g., agriculture, trades, recreation, small business development).
5. **Evaluate and Adjust Over Time** - Review progress every 2–3 years and adjust priorities based on new opportunities, economic conditions, and community feedback.