

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	3
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
A SHIFT IN MAPPING APPROACH	4
PROTECTING WHAT MAKES CROOK COUNTY UNIQUE	5
IMPLEMENTATION AND FLEXIBILITY.....	5
MOVING FORWARD.....	6
CHAPTER 1: VISION & GOALS.....	7
1.1 CROOK COUNTY VISION	7
1.2 LAND USE GOALS.....	7
<i>Goal 1: Protecting Natural Resources and Working Landscapes</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Goal 2: Rural Way of Life While Preparing for Future Growth.....</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Goal 3: County-Wide Partnerships.....</i>	<i>9</i>
CHAPTER 2: ADVISORY LAND USE MAP FRAMEWORK.....	9
2.1 PURPOSE OF THE ADVISORY MAP FRAMEWORK.....	9
2.2 HOW THE ADVISORY MAPS ARE USED	10
2.3 OVERVIEW OF ADVISORY MAPS.....	10
2.3.1 Water & Hydrologic Sensitivity	10
2.3.2 Agricultural Resources	11
2.3.3 Wildlife Habitat Resources	11
2.3.4 Infrastructure & Access Considerations	12
2.3.5 Community Services & Growth Influence.....	13
2.4 RELATIONSHIP TO PLAN GOALS AND IMPLEMENTATION	13
CHAPTER 3: IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK.....	14
3.1 PURPOSE OF THE IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK	14
3.2 GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR IMPLEMENTATION	14
3.3 CORE COMPONENTS OF IMPLEMENTATION.....	14
3.3.1 Aligning Decisions with the Vision, Goals, and Advisory Maps	15
3.3.2 Consistent Use of Existing Regulations and Planning Tools	15
3.3.3 Evaluating Infrastructure Capacity and Service Impacts	15

3.3.4 Monitoring, Updating, and Adapting Over Time	15
3.4 GOAL-BASED IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES	15
3.4.1 Goal 1: Protect Natural Resources and Working Landscapes	15
3.4.2 Goal 2: Maintain a Rural Way of Life While Preparing for Future Growth	17
3.4.3 Goal 3: Strengthen County-Wide Partnerships	18
3.5 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES	20
3.6 IMPLEMENTATION TIMEFRAME	20
CHAPTER 4: MONITORING AND PLAN UPDATES	21
4.1 PURPOSE	21
4.2 MONITORING DEVELOPMENT AND RESOURCE TRENDS.....	21
4.3 REPORTING AND COMMUNICATION.....	21
4.4 PLAN REVIEW AND UPDATES	21
4.5 MAINTAINING THE PLAN AS A LIVING DOCUMENT	22
CHAPTER 5: BACKGROUND AND TRENDS	23
5.1 PURPOSE AND ROLE OF THIS CHAPTER	23
5.2 RURAL CONTEXT AND LAND BASE	23
5.3 POPULATION TRENDS AND GROWTH PATTERNS.....	23
5.4 DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS.....	24
5.5 HOUSING TRENDS	24
5.7 INFRASTRUCTURE AND SERVICES CONTEXT	24
5.8 RELATIONSHIP TO THE LAND USE PLAN.....	25
APPENDIX A – LAND USE MAPS	26
APPENDIX B – TRENDS AND CONDITIONS TECHNICAL REPORT	26
APPENDIX C – PUBLIC OUTREACH SUMMARY	26

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Board of County Commissioners

- ❖ Commissioner Fred Devish
- ❖ Commissioner Bob Latham
- ❖ Commissioner John Davis

Planning and Development Staff

- ❖ Tim Lyons
- ❖ Caleb Peters

Planning & Zoning Commission

- ❖ Morgan Ellsbury
- ❖ Ralph Goodson
- ❖ Mary Yemington
- ❖ Dustin Buckmiller
- ❖ Tony Barton

Land Use Plan Development Steering Committee

- ❖ Dawn Anderson
- ❖ Jeff Carrier
- ❖ Mark Erickson
- ❖ Randy Faust
- ❖ Randy Gantz
- ❖ Scott Graham
- ❖ Keith Haiar
- ❖ Judy McCullough
- ❖ Brandon Riddle
- ❖ Josh Throckmorton

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Crook County Land Use Plan provides a long-range, advisory and non-regulatory framework to guide land use decisions, infrastructure planning, and natural resource stewardship throughout Crook County. The Plan is intended to assist the Board of County Commissioners, Planning Commission, County staff, landowners, developers, and partner agencies in making informed, consistent decisions that reflect local values, rural realities, and long-term community priorities.

Crook County is experiencing incremental but meaningful change. Growth pressures, particularly new residential subdivisions, have increased attention on issues such as water availability, road maintenance, emergency response, agricultural compatibility, and fiscal sustainability. Stakeholders repeatedly expressed concern that while growth cannot be stopped, it must be better understood and more responsibly managed to avoid unintended consequences that burden existing residents or threaten the County's rural way of life.

This Land Use Plan response to those concerns by emphasizing early evaluation, shared information, and voluntary guidance, rather than zoning or prescriptive land-use controls. The Plan does not change allowable land uses, create zoning districts, or impose new regulatory requirements. Instead, it establishes a common framework for understanding where development may be easier or more difficult to support, where key resources deserve careful consideration, and how growth can occur in a way that aligns with Crook County's long-standing values.

A central theme throughout the planning process was the strong importance placed on private property rights. Stakeholder interviews and public input made clear that there is limited support for countywide zoning or rigid land-use mandates. At the same time, many participants emphasized the need for better planning tools, particularly around subdivisions, to ensure that buyers, sellers, and the County have a clear understanding of water supply realities, access limitations, service costs, and rural living expectations before development occurs. This Plan reflects that balance by pairing respect for individual land-use decisions with clearer guidance and transparency.

A SHIFT IN MAPPING APPROACH

Rather than relying on a single, prescriptive Future Land Use Map, Crook County adopts a layered, advisory map framework. This framework is designed to highlight resource considerations and service constraints that affect development feasibility, without assigning land-use categories, densities, or development rights.

The advisory map layers focus on five key topics:

- Water and Hydrologic Sensitivity
- Working Lands and Agricultural Resources
- Wildlife Habitat Resources

- Infrastructure and Access Considerations
- Community Services and Growth Influence

Together, these layers provide a clearer picture of how Crook County's functions today and where additional scrutiny may be warranted for future development proposals. The maps are intended to support early conversations, improve predictability, and reduce conflicts, not to restrict land use or dictate outcomes.

PROTECTING WHAT MAKES CROOK COUNTY UNIQUE

Agriculture and ranching remain the backbone of Crook County's economy, culture, and landscape. Protecting working lands from unnecessary fragmentation, minimizing conflicts between residential development and agricultural operations, and preserving open space were frequent themes in stakeholder input. This Plan elevates agriculture as a priority land use and encourages voluntary compatibility measures, such as buffering, clustering, fencing coordination, and rural living education, to protect both landowners and newcomers.

Water availability emerged as one of the most critical challenges facing Crook County. Concerns about declining groundwater, cumulative well impacts, and the lack of reliable data for development decisions led to strong support for earlier and clearer water evaluations, particularly for subdivisions. In response, the Plan advances development of a Crook County Water Resource Protection Program and supports hydrology studies as a practical planning tool, while maintaining flexibility for individual circumstances.

Infrastructure and emergency services also play a central role in the Plan. Crook County's extensive road network, limited tax base, volunteer-based emergency response services, and seasonal access constraints make dispersed rural development expensive and difficult to serve. The Plan reinforces the principle that growth should pay for its impacts and that development decisions should be informed by realistic service and cost considerations.

IMPLEMENTATION AND FLEXIBILITY

The Land Use Plan is designed to be implemented gradually and collaboratively. Short-term actions focus on mapping, education, coordination, and pilot use of advisory tools. Long-term actions emphasize monitoring trends, refining guidance, and revisiting development standards only when broad public support exists.

Importantly, the Plan is a living document. Crook County recognizes that conditions, data, and community priorities will change over time. The Plan allows for periodic updates to advisory maps, guidance materials, and implementation strategies to ensure continued relevance and effectiveness.

MOVING FORWARD

At its core, the Crook County Land Use Plan provides a shared foundation for discussion, decision-making, and cooperation. It acknowledges that growth brings both opportunity and responsibility, and that thoughtful planning, grounded in local values rather than mandates, offers the best path forward.

By combining respect for private property rights with clearer information, early evaluation, and strong partnerships, Crook County positions itself to remain rural, resilient, and self-reliant, while preparing responsibly for the future.

CHAPTER 1: VISION & GOALS

The Crook County Land Use Plan is a long-range, advisory framework intended to guide the County's approach to growth, land use decisions, and service investments over time. Rather than prescribing regulatory outcomes, the Plan establishes shared expectations for how land, resources, and infrastructure should be considered as change occurs.

The goals in this chapter reflect Crook County's rural setting, limited infrastructure, and strong reliance on working landscapes and natural systems. They emphasize early information, collaboration, and voluntary solutions as the primary tools for managing land use challenges. Implementation of these goals depends on coordination among elected officials, staff, partner agencies, landowners, and community members. The Plan is designed to be flexible and adaptive as conditions, priorities, and opportunities evolve.

1.1 CROOK COUNTY VISION

Crook County envisions a future in which its rural character, working lands, and natural resources remain the foundation of community life, while public services and infrastructure are strengthened to meet changing needs. The County seeks to balance land stewardship with practical growth management by encouraging informed decision-making, early evaluation of impacts, and cooperative problem-solving.

By prioritizing water awareness, protecting agricultural and open landscapes, and coordinating with local and regional partners, Crook County aims to remain resilient, self-reliant, and responsive, supporting current residents and future generations without sacrificing the values that define the community.

1.2 LAND USE GOALS

Goal 1: Protecting Natural Resources and Working Landscapes

Protect and sustain Crook County's natural resources and working landscapes through responsible management, collaborative and early resource evaluation, and voluntary conservation practices.

Crook County's natural resources, including water, agricultural lands, wildlife habitat, and open space, are central to the County's rural character, economy, and long-term stability. This goal emphasizes early identification of potential resource considerations, collaborative information-sharing, and voluntary approaches that respect private property rights while supporting long-term stewardship.

Key Objectives:

- Identify potential impacts to water resources, agricultural lands, wildlife habitat, and open space early in the development review process.
- Improve access to local, county-specific resource information to support informed decision-making by landowners, applicants, and the County.

- Encourage voluntary practices that avoid or reduce conflicts between development and natural resources while maintaining landowners' flexibility.
- Strengthen coordination among County staff, advisory boards, Conservation District, and partner agencies on natural resource considerations.

Implementation Focus

- Develop and apply an advisory Natural Resource Review Process during subdivision review.
- Create and maintain a Crook County Water Resource Protection Program that reflects local hydrogeologic conditions.
- Update and use priority resource mapping and technical information to support early collaborative review.
- Periodically review and refine guidance based on new data, stakeholder input, and experience.

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.

Crook County recognizes that growth will occur over time, but unmanaged or poorly sited development can strain limited infrastructure, emergency services, and rural lifestyles. This goal focuses on education, coordination, and non-regulatory guidance to help align growth with existing services and community expectations.

Key Objectives:

- Support compatibility between new development and existing agricultural and ranching operations.
- Encourage growth patterns that make efficient use of existing roads, utilities, emergency services, and community infrastructure.
- Increase understanding of rural living realities, including service limitations and maintenance responsibilities.
- Periodically evaluate development standards to ensure they remain aligned with community values and growth trends.

Implementation Focus

- Develop voluntary working-lands and rural-living guidance for landowners and applicants.
- Prepare advisory growth-suitability maps highlighting access, services, and infrastructure capacity.
- Engage residents through education, listening sessions, and outreach related to growth and rural expectations.
- Establish a regular review cycle for subdivision and development standards, guided by community input.

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.

Crook County recognizes that many long-term priorities require collaboration across jurisdictions and organizations. This goal emphasizes partnerships that improve coordination, reduce duplication, and align investments with shared community goals.

Key Objectives

- Coordinate infrastructure planning with municipalities, special districts, and state agencies.
- Support youth employment, education, and workforce pathways through partnerships with schools and employers.
- Encourage collaborative approaches to housing affordability using voluntary incentives and shared resources.
- Align economic development efforts with Crook County's rural strengths and long-term sustainability.

Implementation Focus

- Establish and maintain interlocal and interagency agreements for shared planning and infrastructure coordination.
- Identify and pursue joint funding and grant opportunities that support shared priorities.
- Support partnership-based initiatives for youth workforce development, housing coordination, and economic development.
- Periodically review partnership efforts to ensure effectiveness and responsiveness to community needs.

CHAPTER 2: ADVISORY LAND USE MAP FRAMEWORK

2.1 PURPOSE OF THE ADVISORY MAP FRAMEWORK

Crook County's Advisory Land Use Map Framework provides a set of information and layered maps designed to support thoughtful land-use decisions without imposing zoning or prescriptive land-use regulations. This approach reflects community input emphasizing private property rights, local flexibility, and the need for clearer information about development constraints rather than mandated outcomes.

Unlike traditional land-use maps that assign land-use categories or development intensities, Crook County's framework focuses on resource considerations and service realities that determine where and how development can reasonably occur. The maps are intended to improve early communication, reduce uncertainty, and help applicants and decision-makers evaluate potential development proposals before significant investments are made.

This framework directly supports the Land Use Plan’s goals to protect natural resources and working lands, maintain rural character while preparing for growth, and strengthen partnerships across the County.

2.2 HOW THE ADVISORY MAPS ARE USED

The Advisory Map Framework is intended to:

- Inform subdivision and development review at an early stage
- Highlight areas where additional evaluation may be warranted
- Support voluntary mitigation and improved site design
- Provide transparency about infrastructure, access, and service limitations
- Encourage coordination among landowners, County staff, and partner agencies

The maps **DO NOT**:

- Regulate land use or restrict property rights
- Establish zoning or overlay districts
- Assign densities or development entitlements
- Serve as approval or denial tools

All maps are advisory and used in conjunction with adopted subdivision regulations, state requirements, and professional judgment.

2.3 OVERVIEW OF ADVISORY MAPS

Crook County’s Advisory Map Framework includes five primary map categories. Each category provides a distinct lens for understanding land use constraints and opportunities across the County. The categories are intended to be viewed together, recognizing that multiple considerations often apply to the same location.

2.3.1 Water & Hydrologic Sensitivity

Purpose

Highlight areas where water availability, groundwater sustainability, or water quality may require early evaluation during development review.

May Layers May Include

- Known aquifers and groundwater basins (where data is available)
- Identified groundwater recharge areas
- Surface waters, riparian corridors, and wetlands
- Areas with higher existing well density

Planning Context

Water availability was among the most frequently cited concerns during stakeholder engagement. Residents expressed strong interest in ensuring that new development does not negatively affect existing wells, surface waters, or long-term aquifer health.

Planning Guidance

- Supports early-stage hydrology studies for subdivision proposals
- Encourages proactive evaluation of cumulative well impacts
- Reinforces voluntary best practices to protect water quality
- Aligns with the Crook County Water Resource Protection Program

This category does not prohibit development but emphasizes early awareness and informed decision-making consistent with Goal 1: Protect Natural Resources and Working Landscapes.

2.3.2 Agricultural Resources

Purpose

Support continued agricultural and ranching operations while minimizing land-use conflicts between development and working landscapes.

May Layers May Include

- Active agricultural and ranching lands
- Irrigated lands and associated infrastructure

Planning Context

Agriculture and ranching are foundational to Crook County's economy, culture, and open spaces. Stakeholders consistently emphasized the importance of avoiding unnecessary fragmentation of working lands and protecting irrigation systems critical to long-term agricultural viability.

Planning Guidance

- Emphasizes agriculture as a primary land use across much of the County
- Encourages compatibility between new development and existing operations
- Supports voluntary tools such as buffers, clusters, fencing coordination, and disclosure
- Reinforces rural living education efforts

This category advances both Goal 1 and Goal 2 by supporting working lands while preparing for growth.

2.3.3 Wildlife Habitat Resources

Purpose

Communicate the importance of wildlife habitat, seasonal range, and migration connectivity without imposing land-use restrictions.

Map Layers May Include

- Known wildlife habitat areas
- Identified migration corridors

Planning Context

Wildlife is both an ecological and economic asset in Crook County. Stakeholders recognized habitat protection as important but emphasized voluntary awareness over regulatory controls.

Planning Guidance

- Does not designate protected or restricted areas
- Encourages site-specific awareness during development planning
- Supports coordination with wildlife agencies when appropriate
- Promotes design approaches that reduce habitat fragmentation

This category supports Goal 1 through education and coordination rather than mandates.

2.3.4 Infrastructure & Access Considerations

Purpose

Illustrate where development may be more difficult, costly, or challenging to serve due to access or infrastructure constraints.

Map Layers May Include

- Maintained County and State roads
- Limited, unimproved, or seasonally maintained access routes
- High-level emergency response travel times
- General proximity to utilities, where applicable

Planning Context

Road maintenance, emergency response, and seasonal access limitations were recurring stakeholders' concerns. Residents emphasized that dispersed development places a strain on limited public resources and services.

Planning Guidance

- Highlights realistic service and access expectations
- Supports discussion of access standards and emergency response needs
- Reinforces the principle that growth should pay for its own impacts
- Informs infrastructure planning and subdivision design

This category directly advances Goal 2: Maintain a Rural Way of Life While Preparing for Growth

2.3.5 Community Services & Growth Influence

Purpose

Reinforce that growth is generally more efficient and sustainable near existing communities and services.

Map Layers May Include

- Incorporated municipalities
- Existing development clusters
- General proximity to community services such as schools, emergency services, and utilities

Planning Context

Stakeholders widely acknowledged that development near existing services reduces costs and improves service delivery, even while maintaining flexibility for rural development.

Planning Guidance

- Encourages growth near established service areas without mandating locations
- Supports municipal coordination and interlocal planning
- Helps explain fiscal and service realities to developers and landowners

This category supports Goal 2 and Goal 3: Strengthen County-Wide Partnerships.

2.4 RELATIONSHIP TO PLAN GOALS AND IMPLEMENTATION

The Advisory Land Use Map Framework serves as the spatial expression of the Vision and Goals established in Chapter 1. Together, the map categories:

- Support early identification of resource and service constraints
- Provide context for development review and infrastructure planning
- Reinforce voluntary, education-based planning tools
- Improve coordination across agencies and jurisdictions

The framework is intentionally flexible and may be updated as data improves, development patterns change, or community priorities evolve.

CHAPTER 3: IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

3.1 PURPOSE OF THE IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

This chapter describes how Crook County will carry forward the Vision, Goals, and Advisory Map Framework established in Chapters 1 and 2. While the Crook County Land Use Plan is advisory and non-regulatory, effective implementation requires a shared understanding of how its guidance is applied during development review, infrastructure planning, and interagency coordination.

The Implementation Framework translates policy direction into practical action. It emphasizes early evaluation, informed decision-making, and collaboration rather than prescriptive regulation. This approach reflects community input calling for planning tools that protect natural resources and working lands, respect private property rights, and prepare the County for growth without imposing zoning or rigid land-use controls.

3.2 GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation of this Land Use Plan is guided by principles that emerged consistently through stakeholder interviews, public input, and Steering Committee discussion.

The Plan is advisory, not regulatory. It does not create zoning, change allowable land uses, or mandate development outcomes. Instead, it provides a common reference point for understanding land-use considerations and service realities.

Early awareness and evaluation are central to successful implementation. Identifying water availability, access limitations, emergency response constraints, and resource sensitivities at the beginning of the development process helps reduce conflict, cost, and long-term impacts.

All implementation efforts are grounded in respect for private property rights. Landowners retain flexibility in how they use their land, and County tools are intended to inform decisions rather than dictate outcomes.

The framework also reinforces the community expectations that growth should pay for its impacts. Development that increases demand on County infrastructure and services should help address those impacts rather than shifting costs to existing residents.

Finally, implementation relies on partnership-driven solutions. Many land use challenges require coordination with municipalities, the Conservation District, state agencies, schools, service providers, and regional organizations.

3.3 CORE COMPONENTS OF IMPLEMENTATION

The Land Use Plan is implemented through a set of interconnected components that guide how information is used and decisions are evaluated over time.

3.3.1 Aligning Decisions with the Vision, Goals, and Advisory Maps

County leadership, advisory boards, and staff should use the Vision and Goals in Chapter 1 and the Advisory Map Framework in Chapter 2 as central reference points when reviewing subdivision applications and development proposals. These tools help identify key considerations, such as water availability, access constraints, agricultural compatibility, and proximity to services, early in the process and encourage voluntary design improvements.

3.3.2 Consistent Use of Existing Regulations and Planning Tools

Crook County's subdivision regulations, hydrology review processes, access standards, and coordination with state agencies remain the primary regulatory tools affecting development. Implementation of the Plan emphasizes the consistent, transparent application of these existing tools rather than the creation of new regulatory layers, unless broadly supported through a future public process.

3.3.3 Evaluating Infrastructure Capacity and Service Impacts

Infrastructure and service capacity are critical considerations in a rural county with limited resources. Implementation reinforces the importance of evaluating roads, emergency response, water availability, and long-term fiscal impacts before development occurs, helping ensure that growth remains sustainable.

3.3.4 Monitoring, Updating, and Adapting Over Time

The Plan is intended to remain relevant as conditions change. Implementation includes monitoring development activity, updating advisory maps as new data becomes available, and refining guidance tools based on experience and community feedback.

3.4 GOAL-BASED IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

The following sections describe the implementation strategies for each Land Use Goal. These strategies translate the Vision and Goals of Chapter 1 into coordinated actions, partnerships, and timeline. All actions and recommendations are advisory and subject to future public process and Board consideration.

3.4.1 Goal 1: Protect Natural Resources and Working Landscapes

Protect and sustain Crook County's natural resources and working landscapes through responsible management and collaborative, early resource evaluation, and voluntary, collaborative conservation practices.

Crook County's land, water, wildlife, and agricultural resources are foundational to the County's identity, economy, and long-term resilience. Stakeholder input consistently emphasized the importance of protecting groundwater, surface waters, irrigated lands, and working agricultural landscapes from incremental impacts associated with development. At the same time, there was strong agreement that resource protection efforts should emphasize early evaluation, shared information, and voluntary options rather than prescriptive land-use regulation.

Action Steps

Natural Resource Review Process

Crook County will develop a Natural Resource Review Process for major development applications to clarify how information related to priority open spaces, water resources, wildlife habitat, and agricultural lands is considered during subdivision review. The process will focus on early identification of potential impacts and provide applicants with voluntary options to avoid or reduce conflicts, while maintaining flexibility for landowners. A multi-agency working group, including County staff, the Planning Commission, Conservation District representatives, and local developers or landowners, will prepare the guidance for consideration by the Board of County Commissioners.

Water Resource Protection Program

Crook County will develop and implement a Water Resource Protection Program to support early-stage evaluation of water availability and reliability for proposed development. The program will use local hydrogeologic information, well data, aquifer information, and mapped surface-water features to inform applicants and decision-makers. It will apply to development at all scales and include voluntary best-practice recommendations to protect water quality and long-term aquifer sustainability. County staff will coordinate the development of the program with the Conservation District, Planning Commission, and Conservation District Board, and pursue grant funding where appropriate.

Recommendations to the Board of County Commissioners

- Amend subdivision regulations to require hydrology studies demonstrating adequate water quantity and quality.
- Establish an impact-fee authority for major subdivisions to ensure development contributes to the costs of roads, emergency services, and water systems.
- Clarify water-delivery standards for residential development to prevent over-extension of limited aquifers.
- Form a multi-agency Natural Resource Working Group.
- Direct County staff and Conservation Districts to jointly develop the Water Resource Protection Program, including mapping of aquifers, recharge zones, and hydrologically sensitive areas.
- Use the Natural Resource Review Process during subdivision review for early identification of potential resource conflicts.

Implementation Schedule

Short-term Actions (1-3 years)

- Form the multi-agency Natural Resource Working Group
- Compile existing water, well, aquifer, and resource data
- Develop draft advisory tools, including the Natural Resource Review Process and Water Resource Protection Program
- Pilot the advisory tools during subdivision review and refine them based on feedback

Long-term Actions (3+ years)

- Refine and apply advisory tools consistently during development review
- Monitor surface and groundwater conditions over time
- Update resource information and advisory guidance as new data becomes available
- Conduct periodic reviews to ensure tools remain effective and aligned with community priorities

3.4.2 Goal 2: Maintain a Rural Way of Life While Preparing for Future Growth

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

Stakeholder and public input reflected broad acceptance that growth will occur in Crook County, coupled with concern about cumulative impacts on roads, water supplies, emergency response, and rural character. Residents emphasized the need for realistic expectations about rural living and clear guidance to help new development coexist with existing land uses and service limitations.

Action Steps

Guidance to Support Working Lands

Crook County will develop simple, non-regulatory guidance materials to help new development coexist with nearby agricultural and ranching operations. Planning staff will prepare these materials with direct input from ranchers, farmers, landowners, and developers. Guidance may address fencing responsibilities, erosion control, buffering, livestock compatibility, dust, and other common rural issues. These materials will be educational in nature and made available to landowners and applicants.

Encourage Growth Near Existing Communities and Services

The County will work collaboratively with municipalities to prepare advisory information and maps highlighting areas where roads, utilities, emergency services, and community facilities already exist. This information will help applicants understand where growth can be more efficiently supported and may be coordinated through interlocal agreements for data sharing and infrastructure planning.

Community Education on Growth and Rural Living

Planning staff will develop educational materials and host listening sessions to help residents and prospective landowners understand growth patterns, rural living expectations, emergency access limitations, and service realities. These efforts may be incorporated into Planning Commission meetings or held as separate community sessions.

Review Development Standards Periodically

County staff will evaluate subdivision and development standards every 3 years to ensure they remain aligned with community expectations and changing conditions. Potential updates may

include traffic impact assessments, fencing standards, or clearer evaluation of well and septic impacts. Any regulatory changes would be pursued only with broad public support.

Recommendations to the Board of County Commissioners

- Adopt subdivision amendments allowing traffic impact assessments and impact fees for road improvements associated with new subdivisions.
- Direct Planning staff to prepare advisory Growth Suitability Maps identifying access to maintained roads, emergency response travel times, proximity to utilities and services, and existing development clusters.
- Enter into interlocal agreements with municipalities to share infrastructure capacity data and coordinate growth planning.
- Initiate a County-led public education program addressing rural living expectations, fire risk, emergency access, water supply realities, and winter road access.
- Establish and maintain a three-year review cycle for development standards.

Implementation Schedule

Short-Term Actions (1-3 Years)

- Develop voluntary guidance materials to support rural compatibility and working lands
- Prepare advisory maps highlighting access, infrastructure, and service considerations
- Engage the community through education, outreach, and listening sessions

Long-Term Actions (3+ Years)

- Apply voluntary guidance and advisory tools consistently during development review
- Update advisory maps and materials periodically as conditions and data change
- Refine guidance based on development trends, community feedback, and implementation experience

3.4.3 Goal 3: Strengthen County-Wide Partnerships

Collaborate with local and regional partners to improve infrastructure efficiency, expand youth opportunities, support housing affordability, and foster long-term economic resilience.

Crook County recognizes that many land-use-related challenges, including infrastructure planning, workforce retention, housing availability, and economic development, cannot be addressed solely by the County. Effective implementation of this Plan depends on partnerships across jurisdictions and sectors.

Action Steps

Coordinate Infrastructure Planning

Crook County will work with municipalities, water and sewer districts, and state agencies to identify areas where existing or planned infrastructure can most efficiently support future development. Coordination will occur primarily during subdivision review and through interlocal agreements that clarify roles and expectations.

Expand Youth and Workforce Opportunities

The County will collaborate with schools, Wyoming Workforce Services, local employers, and regional organizations to expand youth employment, internship, apprenticeship, and vocational training opportunities. These efforts support workforce development and long-term economic resilience while helping retain younger residents.

Support Housing Affordability Through Collaboration

Crook County will work with municipalities, developers, financial institutions, and state partners such as the Wyoming Community Development Authority (WCDA) to identify voluntary tools that encourage attainable housing for local residents. Strategies may include partnerships, infrastructure coordination, and promotion of existing state programs.

Advance Economic Development Through Targeted Collaboration

The County will coordinate with chambers of commerce, regional economic development groups, and state agencies to support agriculture, tourism, outdoor recreation, skilled trades, and small business development in ways that remain compatible with Crook County's rural character.

Recommendations to the Board of County Commissioners

- Execute formal interlocal agreements with municipalities, water and sewer districts, and state partners for shared infrastructure planning.
- Direct staff to pursue joint funding opportunities for infrastructure improvements in areas expected to grow.
- Support the establishment of a Youth Workforce Partnership Initiative.
- Initiate a housing affordability collaboration team, including municipalities, developers, financial institutions, and WCDA.
- Develop a County-wide economic development coordination strategy focused on agriculture, tourism, outdoor recreation, small business development, and skilled trades.

Implementation Schedule

Short-Term Actions (1-3 Years)

- Establish partnerships with municipalities, service districts, schools, employers, and regional organizations
- Identify shared priorities related to infrastructure, workforce development, housing, and economic resilience

Long-Term Actions (3+ Years)

- Sustain and strengthen established partnership programs and initiatives
- Advance collaborative projects that address identified priorities
- Periodically evaluate progress and adjust strategies to respond to changing conditions and opportunities

3.5 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Implementation relies on shared responsibility among the Board of County Commissioners, Planning Commission, County staff, and partner agencies. The Board provides policy direction, the Planning Commission serves as the primary advisory body, staff coordinate mapping and early evaluation, and partner agencies contribute data, expertise, and coordination.

3.6 IMPLEMENTATION TIMEFRAME

Implementation actions occur over both short and long-term horizons. Near-term efforts focus on developing advisory tools, education, and coordination, while long-term efforts emphasize monitoring trends, refining guidance, and strengthening partnerships.

CHAPTER 4: MONITORING AND PLAN UPDATES

4.1 PURPOSE

The Crook County Land Use Plan is intended to function as a living, adaptable guide that remains responsive to changing conditions, new information, and evolving community priorities. Ongoing monitoring and periodic updates ensure the Plan continues to support informed decision-making while respecting private property rights and maintaining flexibility.

This chapter outlines how Crook County will track implementation progress, observe development trends, and update Plan components over time as needed.

4.2 MONITORING DEVELOPMENT AND RESOURCE TRENDS

Crook County will monitor land use and development activity using existing data sources and staff capacity. Monitoring is intended to be practical and informational, not regulatory, and will focus on identifying trends rather than evaluating individual projects.

Areas of monitoring may include:

- Subdivision and development activity and general location patterns
- Use and effectiveness of advisory tools during development review
- Trends related to water availability, access, and infrastructure demand
- Observations regarding emergency response and service capacity

This information helps the County identify emerging issues early and informs future planning discussions.

4.3 REPORTING AND COMMUNICATION

Periodic reporting supports transparency and allows County leadership to understand how the Land Use Plan is being applied. At intervals determined by the Board of County Commissioners, County staff may provide brief summaries to the Planning Commission and Board addressing implementation progress, development trends, and opportunities for refinement.

These discussions are intended to support informed decision-making and proactive planning rather than trigger automatic policy changes.

4.4 PLAN REVIEW AND UPDATES

Crook County recognizes that conditions and priorities will change over time. The Land Use Plan allows for periodic review and updates to maintain relevance and effectiveness.

Updates may be considered in response to:

- Shifts in development patterns or growth pressures
- New or improved water, infrastructure, or resource data

- Changes in state or federal policy affecting land use
- Experience gained through Plan implementation

Updates may range from minor revisions, such as updating advisory maps, to broader Plan amendments. Any substantive changes will follow appropriate public review and Board consideration.

4.5 MAINTAINING THE PLAN AS A LIVING DOCUMENT

Through ongoing monitoring, periodic reporting, and thoughtful updates, Crook County intends to keep the Land Use Plan current, credible, and useful. This approach ensures the Plan continues to reflect community values, support informed decisions, and help the County remain rural, resilient, and prepared for the future.

CHAPTER 5: BACKGROUND AND TRENDS

5.1 PURPOSE AND ROLE OF THIS CHAPTER

This chapter provides a concise overview of the key background conditions and long-term trends influencing land use and growth in Crook County. It is intended to give decision-makers, residents, and stakeholders a shared understanding of the factors shaping the County today and likely to influence its future.

The analysis summarized here draws directly from the Crook County Trends and Conditions Summary, which includes detailed data on population, housing, the economy, natural resources, infrastructure, and land use. That full document is included in Appendix A to this Plan and serves as the primary technical reference.

Consistent with the advisory nature of this Land Use Plan, this chapter does not establish policy or regulatory direction. Instead, it provides essential context that informed the Vision, Goals, Advisory Map Framework, and Implementation Strategies presented in earlier chapters.

5.2 RURAL CONTEXT AND LAND BASE

Crook County encompasses approximately 2,865 square miles in northeast Wyoming, characterized by low population density, expansive working lands, and diverse natural resources. Agriculture and ranching remain the dominant land use, accounting for approximately 82% of the County's land area. This landscape defines Crook County's rural character, cultural identity, and economic foundation.

Public lands, including the Black Hills National Forest, Bureau of Land Management lands, National Park Service lands at Devil's Tower, and Keyhole Reservoir, play a significant role in shaping land use patterns. These lands support grazing, timber harvest, mineral development, recreation, wildlife habitat, and tourism, and influence how private lands are accessed, used, and developed.

5.3 POPULATION TRENDS AND GROWTH PATTERNS

Crook County experienced fluctuating population levels for much of the 20th century, followed by a notable shift beginning in 1990. Since that time, the County has experienced more than three decades of consecutive population growth, marking the longest sustained growth period in its recorded history.

Recent growth has been driven primarily by in-migration rather than natural increase, with the majority of new residents choosing to live in unincorporated areas rather than incorporated towns. By 2020, approximately 61% of Crook County's population lived outside incorporated municipalities, reflecting a continued preference for rural living.

Crook County's location, between the growing Rapid City metropolitan area to the east and regional employment centers in Campbell County to the west, has strengthened its role as a rural residential community connected to broader economic systems through commuting and travel.

5.4 DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

The County's demographic profile reflects broader trends across rural Wyoming and the American West, with several characteristics particularly relevant to land-use planning.

Crook County's median age has increased significantly over the past four decades, and residents aged 65 and older now comprise more than one-fifth of the population. This aging trend has implications for workforce availability, housing types, healthcare access, and infrastructure needs.

While overall educational attainment and median household income have increased over time, both remain slightly below statewide averages. At the same time, Crook County has lower poverty rates and higher homeownership rates than Wyoming as a whole, reflecting a generally stable but evolving rural community.

5.5 HOUSING TRENDS

Housing growth in Crook County has increasingly occurred in the unincorporated area, consistent with population trends. From 2000 to 2020, unincorporated Crook County added substantially more housing units than incorporated towns, reinforcing the importance of rural infrastructure, road access, and private water and wastewater systems.

The housing stock is predominantly single-family and manufactured homes, with a relatively high proportion of seasonal, recreational, and occasional-use units. While homeownership remains high, recent market conditions show rising home values and affordability challenges for certain workforce segments, particularly renters and first-time buyers.

Tourism associated with Devil's Tower National Monument, Keyhole State Park, and regional events has grown into an increasingly important economic component, generating visitor spending, jobs, and local tax revenue while reinforcing the value of natural and scenic resources.

5.7 INFRASTRUCTURE AND SERVICES CONTEXT

Crook County's infrastructure systems reflect rural realities. Interstate 90 provides critical regional connectivity, while County roads support development in dispersed locations. Public water and sewer systems serve incorporated towns and limited-service areas; most rural development relies on individual or community wells and septic systems, underscoring the importance of water availability and long-term sustainability.

Emergency services, winter road maintenance, and utility expansion remain constrained by geography, distance, and fiscal capacity. These conditions reinforce community expectations that growth should be understood, planned for, and financially sustainable.

5.8 RELATIONSHIP TO THE LAND USE PLAN

The trends summarized in this chapter directly informed the Vision and Goals (Chapter 1), the Advisory Map Framework (Chapter 2), and the Implementation Strategies (Chapter 3). They highlight why Crook County has chosen an advisory, layered planning approach that emphasizes early evaluation, voluntary guidance, and collaboration over prescriptive regulation.

By grounding future decisions in an understanding of these background conditions, Crook County positions itself to remain rural, resilient, and prepared for change while respecting private property rights and community values.

APPENDIX A – LAND USE MAPS

APPENDIX B – TRENDS AND CONDITIONS TECHNICAL REPORT

APPENDIX C – PUBLIC OUTREACH SUMMARY