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 & 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.

Action Steps

Develop a Natural Resource Review Process

Create a Natural Resource Review Process for major development applications that balances Crook County's commitment to private property rights with responsible resource stewardship. This process will clarify how information on priority open spaces, water resources, wildlife habitat, and agricultural lands should be evaluated during development review. It will help identify potential impacts early and provide applicants with voluntary options to avoid or reduce conflicts while maintaining maximum landowners' flexibility.

This process will be applied during subdivision review. A multi-agency working group, including County staff, the Planning Commission, the Conservation District, and local developers, will prepare the guidance. The County Commissioners may adopt the final work product as an advisory tool for use during subdivision review. Work can be supported through existing operating budgets, with the option of pursuing grants for staff time.

Develop a Crook County Water Resource Protection Program

Create and implement a County Water Resource Protection Program that provides a clean, early-stage method for assessing the availability and reliability of water for proposed development. The program will use local hydrogeologic information, well and aquifer data, and mapped surface-water features to help applicants understand water sources, potential impacts on nearby wells and waterways, and voluntary best practices that protect water quality and long-term aquifer sustainability.

This program will serve all scales of development, from small individual projects to major subdivisions. It will provide maps, data, and decision-support tools, along with recommended steps to mitigate potential well and surface-water impacts. The program will be developed collaboratively by County staff and the Conservation District, with

DRAFT

participation from the Planning Commission and Conservation District Board. Grant funding may be sought, with local matching funds as needed.

Recommendations to the Board of County Commissioners

1. Adopt amendments to the Subdivision Regulations to:
    a. Require hydrology studies for subdivision to demonstrate water quantity and quality adequacy.
    b. Establish impact-fee authority for major subdivisions to help development pay for its own impacts (roads, emergency services, water systems).
    c. Clarify water-delivery standards for residential development to prevent over-extension of limited aquifers.
2. Form a multi-agency Natural Resource Working Group, including:
    a. Planning & Zoning Commission
    b. County Commissioners
    c. Conservation District
    d. Local developers/landowners

This group will advise the Board and develop guidance tools for water resources, wildlife habitat, agricultural lands, open space, and voluntary mitigation options.

3. Direct County staff and the Conservation District to jointly develop a County Water Resource Protection Program, including:
    a. Mapping of aquifers, recharge zones, and hydrologically sensitive areas
    b. Guidelines for evaluating impacts on wells and surface water
    c. Voluntary best-practice recommendations for applicants
4. Require the Natural Resource Review Process to be used during subdivision review for early identification of resource conflicts.

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.

DRAFT

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

Develop Guidance to Support Working Lands

The County will create a simple, non-regulatory guidance to help new development coexist with nearby agricultural and ranching operations. Planning staff will lead this effort with direct input from local ranchers, farmers, developers, and homeowners, ensuring the guidance reflects practical, real-world needs. Topics may include fencing responsibilities, erosion control, buffers, livestock compatibility, dust management, and other common issues. These materials will be made available to anyone considering development in the County. Costs for preparing this guidance are expected to be low and can be absorbed into the County's existing operating budget, with the option to pursue grants if additional funding is needed. This step supports the rural way of life using existing agencies and resources without raising taxes.

Encourage Growth Near Existing Communities and Services

The County and municipalities will work together to share advisory information that highlights areas where roads, utilities, emergency services, and community facilities

DRAFT

already exist. Planning staff and municipal partners will compile simple maps and summaries that show the locations best suited to support future growth. This cooperation may be formalized through interlocal agreements that allow the county and towns to exchange data about infrastructure capacity and service availability. The resulting information will guide developers toward areas where growth is more cost-efficient and easier to support. Because this effort relies on existing staff and current budgets, it does not require new taxes and reinforces the principle that growth should occur where services already exist.

Engage the Community About Growth and Its Implications

Planning staff, with voluntary help from community members, will develop clear educational materials and host listening sessions to help residents understand growth patterns, rural living expectations, and the potential impacts of new development. These sessions may be incorporated into Planning Commission meetings or scheduled as separate community events. Materials may be drawn from existing resources or created locally and should address issues such as emergency access, service limitations, rural road conditions, and how development affects community values. This outreach can be completed within existing County budgets, with the option of applying for grants to support additional education efforts. The goal is to build shared understanding and public alignment before making regulatory updates.

Review County Development Standards to Support Responsible Growth

Every three years, County staff will evaluate subdivision and development standards to ensure they remain aligned with community expectations, address emerging growth pressures, and reflect lessons learned from the previous review cycle. This review will consider input from public outreach efforts, state statutes, municipal coordination, and community concerns. Potential updates may include tools such as traffic impact fees, fencing standards to protect agricultural lands, or clearer requirements for evaluating the impacts of wells and septic systems. Any regulatory changes should be pursued only when broad public support exists, recognizing that unity strengthens responsible growth management while division undermines it. This review process relies on existing staff capacity and does not require new taxes, while reinforcing the core expectation that development should pay for the impacts it creates.

Recommendations to the Board of County Commissioners

1. Adopt subdivision amendments establishing traffic impact assessments and allow impact fees for road improvements caused by new subdivisions.
2. Direct Planning Staff to prepare Advisory Growth Suitability Maps that highlight:
    a. Access to maintained roads

DRAFT

    b. Emergency response travel times
    c. Proximity to utilities and community services
    d. Existing clusters of development

These maps guide applicants but do not regulate land use.

3. Enter into interlocal agreements with municipalities to:
    a. Share infrastructure capacity data (water/sewer)
    b. Coordinate growth areas
    c. Support joint capital-improvement planning

   Existing elected officials and staff carry out this cooperation using current budgets.
4. Initiate a County-led public education program on rural living issues, including:
    a. Fencing, livestock, and agricultural compatibility
    b. Fire risk and emergency access
    c. Water supply realities
    d. Winter road access expectations

   Materials will be developed by Planning staff with support from volunteers and partner agencies; costs are minimal and can be absorbed or grant-funded.
5. Establish a three-year review cycle of development standards to ensure regulations remain aligned with community expectations. Reviews are led by County staff with Planning Commission oversight.

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)

DRAFT

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

Coordinate Infrastructure Planning with Local and Regional Partners

The 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. Planning Staff will lead this work, primarily during subdivision review, in coordination with Goal 2's emphasis on directing growth toward serviced areas. Interlocal agreements between the County and municipalities will formalize roles and expectations and allow information to be shared effectively. State partners such as the Wyoming Water Development Commission and the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality may also participate when water or sewer planning extends beyond municipal boundaries. Joint planning helps avoid unnecessary duplication, supports cost-efficient service delivery, and ensures that developers, rather than taxpayers, fund infrastructure extensions when projects occur outside service limits. The County's costs for this work are limited to staff time.

Expand Youth Opportunities through Community and Regional Partnerships

The County will collaborate with the School District, Wyoming Workforce Services, local employers, and regional economic organizations to expand opportunities for youth employment, vocational training, internships, and small-business development. These programs help address Crook County's changing demographics, including an aging population and the need to retain younger residents. Youth workforce development and small-business support are critical long-term economic development tools that strengthen local industries and community vitality. The County is not expected to fund these programs

DRAFT

directly; instead, partners may use grants, state programs, and private-sector contributions to support activities. This action also aligns with the County's broader economic development efforts by building a skilled local workforce and strengthening locally owned businesses.

Support Housing Affordability Through Collaboration and Incentives

The County will work with municipalities, developers, financial institutions, and state partners such as the WCDA to identify voluntary tools that can encourage the development of attainable housing for local residents. These strategies may include public-private partnerships, infrastructure coordination, regulatory incentives, or the promotion of first-time homebuyer programs. Because housing affordability is a complex challenge without a single solution, collaborative efforts across agencies are essential. An interlocal agreement with municipalities can provide a structure for ongoing coordination. These initiatives can be pursued at little or no cost to the County and rely primarily on technical support, shared information, and voluntary participation from development and financial partners.

Advance Economic Development through Targeted Collaboration

The County will coordinate with regional economic development organizations chambers of commerce, local industries, and state agencies to attract new businesses, support the expansion of existing industries, and identify opportunities within agriculture, tourism, outdoor recreation, and skilled trades. These sectors already contribute significantly to Crook County's economy, anchored by strong agricultural activity, increasing visitation to Devil's Tower, and ongoing natural resource industries such as bentonite. The County may choose to shape its own economic vision with assistance from partners like the Wyoming Business Council, Wyoming Small Business Development Center, Wyoming Workforce Services, and the Wyoming Women's Business Center. Economic development always carries some costs, but those costs can vary widely depending on the scale of initiatives and the availability of grant support. Broad participation from local businesses, municipalities, and state partners ensures that development efforts reflect community priorities and strengthen Crook County's long-term economic resilience.

Recommendations to the Board of County Commissioners

1. Execute formal interlocal agreements with municipalities, water/sewer districts, and state partners for shared infrastructure planning.
2. Direct staff to identify and pursue joint funding opportunities for infrastructure expansion in areas where growth is likely.
3. Support a Youth Workforce Partnership Initiative with schools, employers, and state agencies to retain young residents

DRAFT

4. Initiate a housing affordability collaboration team that includes municipalities, developers, financial institutions, and the Wyoming Community Development Authority (WCDA) to explore voluntary incentives and partnerships for attainable housing.
5. Develop a Countywide Economic Development Coordination Strategy focusing on agriculture, outdoor recreation, tourism, small-business development, and trades and vocational pathways.
    a. Trades & vocational pathways

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.

DRAFT

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.

Best Practices from other Rural Wyoming Counties

Rural counties across Wyoming face many of the same challenges as Crook County, balancing private property rights, natural resource stewardship, water availability, and growth near small communities. The following examples show how other counties structure their land-use approaches in ways that offer useful guidance for Crook County's advisory, non-regulatory plan.

Natural Resource Stewardship & Review Processes

Sheridan County – Conservation District - Led Subdivision Review

Sheridan County's Conservation District is mandated to provide natural-resource evaluations for all subdivisions, including soils mapping, water considerations, and open-space issues. Developers submit materials directly to the Conservation District, which then issues non-binding but influential recommendations.

Relevance to Crook County

- Demonstrates how a non-regulatory review can still improve outcomes.
- Reinforces Crook County's plan to use voluntary early-stage natural-resource review for subdivision applications.
- Shows that staffing through a partner agency reduces county workload.

Weston, Johnson, Carbon, and Fremont Counties – DEQ-Integrated Subdivision Processes

Wyoming DEQ's statewide review table shows that many rural counties (including Weston, Johnson, Carbon, and Fremont) require DEQ involvement or reserve the right to refer subdivisions for hydrologic, water-quality, or nitrate-loading review.

Relevance to Crook County

- Supports Crook County's proposal that developers provide hydrology studies for water adequacy and impact.
- Validates use of subdivision-level amendments for water quantity/quality evaluations.

DRAFT

Rural Way of Life & Growth Preparedness

Park County – Rural Area Policies & Advisory Growth Guidance

Park County uses a Land Use Plan (2024) that provides advisory planning areas and compatibility guidance, not regulatory zoning. These policies help educate landowners about rural characteristics, agriculture, access, wildlife, and encourage voluntary3. coordination rather than mandates.

Relevance to Crook County

- Demonstrates how to give informational maps and rural-compatibility guidance without restricting property rights.
- Shows that rural counties effectively use education and advisory tools rather than prescriptive regulation.

Sublette County – Rural Character Preservation in Its Comprehensive Plan

Sublette County's Comprehensive Plan emphasizes preserving rural character, open spaces, and natural resources by prioritizing public education, advisory guidance, and multi-agency cooperation.

Relevance to Crook County

- Reinforces Crook County's intent to use community education and non-regulatory guidance.
- Offers a model for voluntary clustering and compatibility recommendations.

Partnerships, Economic Development, and Infrastructure Coordination

Sweetwater County – Resource & Land Use Coordination with State & Federal Agencies

Sweetwater County uses a Land and Resource Use Policy that aligns county goals with state and federal land agencies, including rangeland, water, wildlife, and soil considerations.

Relevance to Crook County

- Supports Crook County's plan to enhance interagency coordination, especially for water, agriculture, and public lands.
- Shows how counties frame partnerships as economic development tools (e.g., energy, tourism, agriculture).

Statewide Example – Wyoming County Commissioners Association Natural Resource Plans

Most rural Wyoming counties, including Crook County, have adopted Natural Resource Management Plans to strengthen their role in federal coordination, resource policy, and land-use consistency reviews.

DRAFT

Relevance to Crook County

- Validates Crook County's use of its own Natural Resource Management Plan as a foundation.
- Reinforces the steering committee's direction that Crook County should provide clear recommendations for action to the Board of County Commissioners.

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