

My name is Carole Jorgensen, Conservation chair and board member of Flathead Audubon Society. I'm speaking on behalf of our President, Darcy Thomas.

We have over 500 members and many more who participate in Audubon activities. We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the proposed growth policy. We provided detailed written comments on April 24, 2025. We re-submitted those comments on February 3, 2026. I will highlight the key features of our written comments and provide justification for the guidelines that will help maintain the incredible living conditions of Kalispell for people and the organisms that share our city.

In our detailed written comments, we emphasized the importance of the area's natural environment. The natural environment is essential to the character, resiliency and livability of our community and should be fully elevated and integrated throughout the plan. A stand-alone chapter on the natural environment is meaningless unless it is clearly integrated into other parts of the document to ensure developers know when and where they need to be aware and consider various options.

For example, the vision statement should include a simple addition such as

Recreational access to public areas, the incredible views and the important functions of the natural environment are maintained”

The environmentally sensitive Resources Map, Figure 3 shows the 100 year floodplain, wetlands, hydric soils and steep slope, but it lacks any wildlife information such as big game habitat, wildlife connectivity, and unique places such as the staging area for Sandhill cranes. It fails to indicate the importance of the Flathead River and its tributaries to maintaining Flathead Lake's water quality. The document should incorporate the more unique and critical ecological information across the planning area. This information can be obtained from state and federal agencies. Once lost or destroyed some of these unique ecological areas and the services they provide cannot be restored or replaced.

We need to provide sustainable homes for our people but concurrently need to provide sustainable living conditions for the organisms that share our living space. Birds, insects,

plants, fish and other organisms continually work for us by providing food, pollinating crops, orchards, gardens, help reduce adverse effects of insect populations, clean up detritus and dead things, and provide us with song, inspiration and psychological support. AND, if we provide simple habitat, they provide these services for free.

A study in Conservation Magazine found a positive correlation between the number of bird species in a neighborhood and the median value of homes sold, increasing values up to \$30 000 in bird friendly neighborhoods.

Montana bird watchers spend around \$260 million annually on their interest in birds and add over \$680 million and 4000 full and part time jobs to Montana's economy.

The 2022 World Wildlife Living Planet Index showed a 73% decline in the average size of monitored wildlife populations since 1970. North American bird populations have plummeted over 3 billion birds during the same time frame. Urban areas support as much as 20% of bird populations. Guidance to protect riparian areas, avoid and reduce light and noise pollution, provide green spaces, maintain buffers and movement corridors, and using native vegetation can be incorporated throughout the document at minimal costs to developers or residents. These conditions also help the human environment, reduce water use, and help maintain conditions that make Kalispell special.

We encourage the Council to incorporate by reference, materials from Living in the Flathead, which provides proactive guidance for residents and developers about living here, regarding fire, wildlife, water.

Environmental and living conditions change often in unpredicted ways. Even the best planning document will need to respond to those changes. We recommend updates to various chapters and subsections to better integrate natural environmental values as new information becomes available.

We encourage incorporation of Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks (FWP) RECOMMENDATION for SUBDIVISIONS and DEVELOPMENT, compiled by Montana professionals.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on the proposed Growth Policy. We hope you will incorporate these needed revisions to give the document more sustainability, depth, balance and credibility. We would be happy to participate in any future updates.