

Pretending or defending wildlife?

We are blessed with incredible riches in wildlife and scenery. But our recent stewardship of those riches has fallen short. There was a lot more respect for our treasured natural resources in decades past.

Occasionally, local citizens groups have stepped up where government has failed. A few years back, moose road kills on the Village road were taking a horrendous toll. Then the Highway 390 folks demanded action. Speed limits were reduced and moose cutouts were placed along the roadway to increase awareness. It worked. Ungulate road kill dropped dramatically.

Citizen involvement did the trick. We need that again. Wildlife protection in town has been ignored with regularity.

On North Cache, the Rustic Inn revamp of the old Wagon Wheel Motel doubled the build-out on Flat Creek, displacing countless mule deer. Walgreens was added to Broadway with nary a concern for how mule deer would get around it.

Now a massive access-blocking apartment complex is to be built on Broadway, smack in the middle of the highest mule deer vehicle kill zone in the county. Right on the banks of Flat Creek in the pristine Karns Meadow, on top of the town's drinking water supply.

At last week's town meeting, councilman Jim Stanford made an attempt at standing up for wildlife. "We're already displacing the wildlife, we might as well protect the meadow, protect the creek," he began, before proposing the hundreds of renters in the 90-unit complex

be banned from having dogs. That was the best we could do as a community to protect wildlife: a proposed pet ban. It failed, by the way. Government didn't want to infringe on the rights of people to own dogs.

When asked how mule deer were going to get to the creek after the Sagebrush Apartments blocked their access corridor, planner Paul Anthony threw his hands up and lamented, "We don't have a wildlife crossing plan at this point so we don't know what we are planning for..."

We better get a plan. And soon. In the not-too-distant future local government must deal with the proposed development at Bar J and the sprawling buildout to come from South Park all the way to Hoback.

Wildlife cannot speak for itself. We must.

Our window of opportunity is quickly closing. The decisions made or not made today will affect generations to come. We are quick to defend the developer's right to own, to build, to conquer. We are sluggish to protect what is wild and scenic, too often we do nothing. Our politicians give wildlife little more than lip service.

As our electeds continue with their agenda for a 'Bigger and Grander' Jackson Hole, let's remember what we as a community have expressed over and over again: Protecting wildlife is community value #1.

We should all be committed to lead the way as a shining example of how a community can live in harmony with nature and its inhabitants.