

Future West

Year One Progress Report

November 2010



 **FUTURE
WEST**
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Introduction

In a time of rapid change, it is essential that communities be engaged in determining their own destiny. In the Northern Rockies, where the scenic beauty of natural landscapes and abundant fish and wildlife are the magnet for growth, “saving the goose that lays the golden egg” has fostered a sometimes bewildering array of attention from governments, public agencies and non-profit institutions. Yet in spite of these good intentions, the active role of citizens is often taken for granted, bypassed or overlooked.

Future West was founded to make sure that the hearts and minds of citizens in this region are engaged to achieve the future they want including sustainable communities and a healthy natural environment.

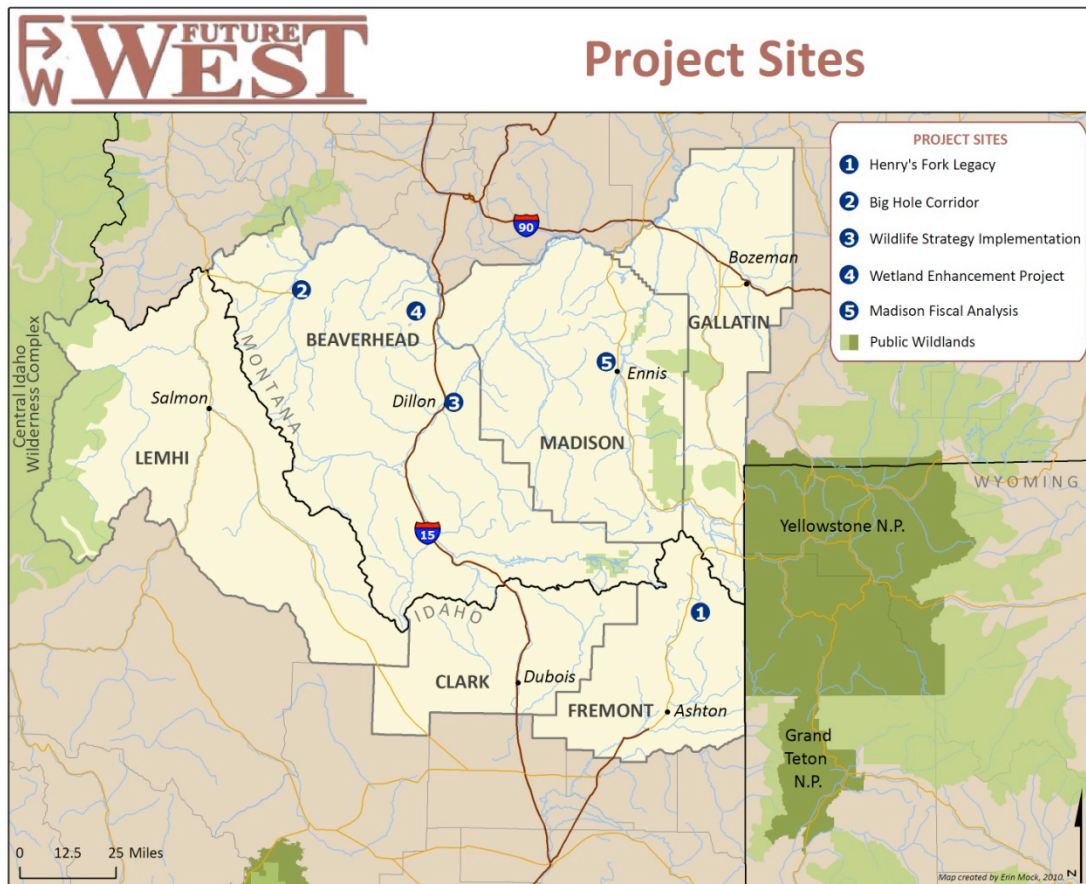
Since the establishment of Future West in November 2009, the necessary administrative, communication, and logistical requirements have been addressed, and our staff is engaged to full capacity in important community-based conservation projects. Looking back, we are pleasantly surprised by what we have accomplished in the past year and we are profoundly grateful to the individuals and institutions that have invested in our mission and helped us to a successful launch.

Below is a summary of activities since our start up. The message within the detail is that there is no doubt of the need for the kind of work we do, and we must attract the resources needed to broaden the spectrum of landscapes and communities that will benefit from our help. With that in mind, we deeply appreciate your support and interest in our work and look forward to continued collaboration.

Progress Overview

In its one year of existence, Future West (FW) has made considerable advancements:

- The organization has been registered as a non-profit corporation in Montana with an office in Bozeman, a high quality website, a staff of two, over 20 professional “Associates” (eight Associates have participated in Future West projects) and a Board of Directors.
- A messaging and marketing workshop helped Future West staff frame the organization as a non-profit consulting group that helps communities achieve the future that they want.
- The Craighead Institute is the fiscal sponsor of Future West. Craighead Institute and Future West staff interacts frequently and have developed funding proposals and collaborated on joint projects.
- Current funding includes foundation grants, individual donations, and fee for service contracts.
- *Future West has launched several exciting community-based conservation projects in the “High Divide Region” -- the chain of Idaho and Montana counties linking Greater Yellowstone with the wilderness areas of Central Idaho. An ambitious new project has been initiated along the Rocky Mountain Front in Montana, and several other project opportunities are ripe for Future West engagement. Current projects are described below:*



The Henry's Fork Legacy Project

The Henry's Fork Legacy Project is a network of local organizations working to advance conservation priorities in the ecologically rich Henry's Fork watershed in Idaho near the Western edge of Yellowstone Park. Future West has been hired to help facilitate the project, provide technical assistance to the group, and take the lead in the development of communication and outreach materials.

- Project participants include state and federal land and wildlife agencies like Idaho Fish and Game and the Forest Service, and non-governmental organizations including the Teton Regional Land Trust, Nature Conservancy, the Henry's Fork Foundation and others.
- Recognizing the ecological connection between the public and private lands of the Henry's Fork watershed, the group has identified specific private land parcels for conservation.
- A three-pronged approach for protecting critical landscapes has been launched. Working groups have been organized for each of these strategies and on the ground projects are being initiated. These three strategies include:
 - 1). Protecting land through conservation easements, purchase of land, and land exchanges.
 - 2). Working with private land owners to improve land use practices, enhance wildlife habitat, and reduce conflicts with wildlife.

3). Monitoring and supporting effective public and private land planning processes that protect open space and conserve wildlife habitat and working farms and ranches.

- Together with Resource Media, facilitated a “messaging workshop” for the group and developed communication materials such as maps and brochures and an image library.
- In addition to helping to protect the integrity of what is arguably the most ecologically important landscape in Greater Yellowstone, this project also serves as a model for other public-private partnerships aimed at conserving large landscapes.

Big Hole River Watershed Project

Montana’s Big Hole River is one of the nation’s best known trout fisheries. It also harbors rare Arctic grayling. Significant efforts to protect the river and its riparian corridor has resulted in improved water and fisheries management, river and stream bank restoration, and the establishment of building setbacks along the entire river. Future West is helping rural landowners and county governments create and implement strategies that can further improve floodplain management along the river corridor which passes through four counties. The process features ample participation from rural landowners, county officials, and the conservation community. Future West is facilitating the exploration of a two-part conservation strategy:

1). Incentives for land and water conservation

- The incentives program is focusing on 10 year leases that would financially reward landowners for managing and protecting important habitat in the floodplain and river corridor.

2). Land use regulations and improved decision making on floodplain issues

- The floodplain management improvements may include the adoption of “No Adverse Impact” into the floodplain regulations as the foundation for development decisions on proposed new development along the river. Keeping development out of the 100 year floodplain would be in addition to maintaining the current 150 foot setback.

If approved, this proposal would be the most progressive floodplain regulation in Montana and a model for other watersheds.

Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) State Conservation Strategy Implementation in Beaverhead County

Like other states, Montana has drafted a Comprehensive Fish and Wildlife Conservation Strategy which inventories the state’s fish and wildlife heritage and diverse ecosystems. The Strategy also discusses threats to these resources and suggests actions needed to mitigate or avoid impacts. As a tool for implementing this plan, the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) have developed a Crucial Areas Planning System (CAPS). The CAPS offers a wealth of GIS-based data on fish and wildlife resources and habitats, and includes information on potential threats like rural growth, energy development, highway projects, transmission corridors etc. This information will be very useful to county planning efforts, conservationists, landowners and even developers. Future West has been chosen by FWP to help implement CAPS and Beaverhead County has agreed to be the pilot project. This

cutting edge initiative will provide useful lessons as CAPS is implemented statewide.

- Initial discussion between FWP, Future West and Beaverhead County has resulted in a list of short and long term project initiatives. First on the list -- a demonstration of CAPS and a discussion of its utility with the Beaverhead County Planning Board and Commissioners. CAPS was also demonstrated at a regional meeting of Southwest Montana land use planners hosted by the Beaverhead County Planning Department.
- The County Growth Policy is due for a review and revision and CAPS will be utilized in this process.
- Creation of a “Beaverhead County Atlas” is being planned that will address both natural and socioeconomic resources and data. CAPS will serve as a major source of data for this product.
- Related to this project is the completion of “Model Wildlife Subdivision Regulations” by an ad hoc working group (including Future West), that will be completed in the next few months. This information will be offered to Beaverhead County planners and Planning Board and assistance will be provided for the adoption of these innovative wildlife regulations.

Wetland Reserve Enhancement Program Outreach

With the support of Ducks Unlimited (DU), Future West is serving as the “Development Coordinator” to identify strategies and opportunities for implementing the Wetland Reserve Enhancement Program (WREP). WREP is a landowner incentive program for wetland restoration, enhancement, and conservation with a focus on the Upper Missouri Headwaters. Recently this program was revised to make it more attractive to landowners through incentive-based wetland preservation efforts.

- *Future West staff is helping to coordinate this program and related outreach activities working with DU, Natural Resource Conservation Service and a variety of local conservation and watershed groups.*
- Many landowners have been contacted through these outreach activities and there is building interest in entering into WREP easement agreements. Enrollment for 2010 increased from one producer last year to 15. Five landowners have already signed up for 2011.

Madison County Fiscal Impact Analysis and Landscape Conservation Project

Madison County, Montana is well known for its abundant wildlife and blue ribbon trout fisheries. Less known is the fact that nearly 25,000 acres of what appears to be protected open space, has actually been subdivided though not yet developed. This includes several critically important habitats. County officials and local conservationists are concerned about both the environmental and fiscal costs of the development of these lands and they are cooperating with Future West and one of our Associates – RPI Consulting – to complete a “fiscal impact analysis” that will quantify the potential costs of providing county services and road maintenance to far-flung subdivisions. This study will be followed with an exploration of options and opportunities for restoring this subdivided (on paper) landscape through the redesign of subdivisions or the purchase of land or easements. In addition to assessing the fiscal impacts of development, the application of Craighead Institute’s (Future West’s fiscal sponsor) wildlife impact model is also providing a clearer assessment of the impacts of development on wildlife. Future West is coordinating this project. The report will be completed in November of this year.

Rocky Mountain Front GIS Suitability Analysis, Decision Support System and Training

Future West has been contracted by Teton County, Montana to coordinate the collection, analysis and application of GIS data layers relevant to important county issues along the Rocky Mountain Front. The project will aggregate all relevant GIS data layers, deliver this information in a usable form, facilitate multiple training workshops to ensure that counties have the skills and capacity to use this information, and provide on-going technical support to GIS users. Another project goal is to organize a Rocky Mountain Front GIS Cooperative that can facilitate the exchange of information and expertise between regional GIS users.

Future West has assembled a highly skilled team of professionals from its network of “Associates,” to tackle this challenging yet important project.

The Northern Rockies “Post Building Boom” Smart Growth Summit

Future West staff organized and hosted a regional gathering of organizations in the Northern Rockies that promote smart growth and land use planning to discuss new strategies for dealing with these issues in a “post building boom” environment. Opportunities for shifting this movement from a primarily reactive mode to more of a proactive stance were identified. And, shared strategies for implementing these ideas were discussed. Now Future West is working in partnership with these organizations to take advantage of these new trends in real estate development.

Facilitation Services to Other Organizations

In addition to the above projects, Future West has been asked to provide facilitation and strategic planning services on a fee for services basis to different organizations ranging from the Gallatin Grassroots Forum (a local growth management group) to an organization promoting walkable communities. These projects have generated funds and exposure for the organization and its staff.

New Opportunities

Staff workload has precluded significant efforts to broaden the geographic or programmatic focus of the organization. Nevertheless there has been some proactive outreach to other organizations that might bring new opportunities to Future West -- if funding allows for staff expansion. For example:

- A consortium of conservation organizations has drafted a shared strategy for conserving the Crown of the Continent Ecosystem which includes and surrounds Glacier National Park and this strategy could be a national model for the implementation of climate change adaptation strategies. Future West staff contributed a set of recommendations for incorporating development and growth management related activities into the suite of proposed climate adaptation strategies.
- *Future West has hosted capacity building workshops for other conservation organizations on topics such as “effectively communicating growth and development issues.” Plans are being drawn up to expand this work, especially in the Greater Yellowstone area.*
- The expansion of renewable energy projects like wind farms and associated transmission corridors also could result in new FW projects related to helping communities plan for and engage in proposed energy projects. FW staff is already participating in related discussions and building partnerships with organizations involved in these projects.

In Conclusion

With the valued support of individuals, foundations and community partners, Future West has:

- Become a viable, active and well-known player in the field of community-based conservation in the Northern Rockies with several important on-the-ground conservation initiatives well underway in several ecologically important landscapes.
- Set the stage for continued expansion of community-based conservation projects and capacity-building support for other organizations.
- Completed basic administrative, organizational, development and communications tasks.
- Achieved most of the goals outlined in an organization “Prospectus” drafted before incorporation.

Finally, staff is extremely pleased and grateful for the enthusiastic support they have received from other non-profits, foundations, community partners, and individual donors.

To learn about how you can support Future West, contact:

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