

# **GALLATIN WILDLIFE**

**ASSOCIATION**

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Dear City Commissioners:

Through recent news reporting, print media and an appeal by interested parties, our organization has become aware of the ongoing issues of water rights on Lyman Creek. The Gallatin Wildlife Association doesn’t get involved in water rights issues, but we do get involved in issues pertaining to water quality and riparian issues as they pertain to fisheries and wildlife habitat. It is for that reason that we would like to enter the comments below to be included in the official record.

Gallatin Wildlife Association (GWA) is a local, all volunteer wildlife conservation organization dedicated to the preservation and restoration of wildlife, fisheries, habitat and migration corridors in Southwest Montana and the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, using science-based decision making. We are a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization founded in 1976. GWA recognizes the intense pressures on our wildlife from habitat loss and climate change, and we advocate for science-based management of public lands for diverse public values, including but not limited to hunting and angling.

Our interest in this issue is to be an advocate for fisheries and wildlife. We view the ongoing debate between the two parties, a private landowner and the city, as an interesting dichotomy. Our mission is to speak for the natural world and to protect the natural systems that preserve our flora and fauna. In this case, it is clear that Lyman Creek is a vital habitat for fisheries and wildlife, species that inhabit this portion of the Bridger Range. We understand the high demand for clean water in a booming economy. But that in and of itself is the problem. Politicians and businesses want to promote growth and high-paying new jobs to help enrich the local economy, but by doing so, they don’t stop to consider what is at risk.

In a small city like Bozeman, a city that prides itself on its rural mountain setting with beautiful scenery and bountiful wildlife, adding an influx of much wanted growth will change the city’s character nearly every time. It is that natural surrounding which will take the hit, making the community less attractive and desirable. The only exceptions are when city and county officials plan ahead and develop alternative planning methods that provide a measured approach to the issue of growth. Our organization has brought this issue before the community several times forewarning of the changes before us. The city of Bozeman needs to do better. Gallatin County needs to do much better. But now with climate change and an untold increase demand on water, Bozeman faces some serious water challenges ahead.

With that being said, we should not allow the city or any other entity to manipulate or destroy the natural systems around us. Just because the city or any entity may think they have the power to do so doesn’t mean they should, or that the people should allow it to occur. That scenario has already taken place across the west too many times. Let’s not allow that to happen in Bozeman. Lyman Creek is a known habitat for many species of wildlife, spawning grounds for brown and rainbow trout, fish that help maintain populations downstream in Bridger Creek.

It is these small niches like Lyman Creek that provide the biodiversity of the region. The riparian habitat feeds and allows that integrity to maintain itself in that forest/grassland interface. It is those types of habitats where biodiversity is the richest in species diversity and numbers. If Lyman Creek were to dry up, the character of that interface will change. We might be the poorer for it, but the fisheries and wildlife will suffer the greater harm and that is why we do what we do.

Before we close, we would also like to remind the city that as part of the Sensitive Lands project, this is a prime example of the type of habitat the city, county and fellow stakeholders pledged to protect. This is our mission. We suggest the city find a way to settle this conflict to the benefit of both parties. But as a wildlife advocacy organization, we need to see this disagreement settled to the benefit of the fisheries and wildlife, not to their detriment. There must be a way to maintain the character of the valley floor and foothills to maintain the region’s natural biodiversity. Planning for growth should not be our only concern in the decision-making process. There are other critical priorities at stake. Mankind is a selfish creature. Can we look to do something right for once beyond ourselves?

Thank you for your time. We will be watching. We would like to be part of the solution, not the problem.

Sincerely,



Clinton Nagel, President

Gallatin Wildlife Association