

# A nod for Moose-Wilson path

By Michael Polhamus | Posted: Wednesday, September 10, 2014 4:30 am

Teton County commissioners are asking for help from the public to write a letter about Moose-Wilson Road to Grand Teton National Park.

On Tuesday the Teton County Board of Commissioners released a draft of its comments on four alternative actions that Grand Teton has proposed for the road. In the letter commissioners support construction of a separated pathway paralleling the road. They also propose increased public transit along the road and realignment of the road's north end to avoid wildlife habitat.

Commissioners also wrote that Grand Teton should anticipate that a transit system, pathway construction and pathway maintenance will all be paid for with private dollars.

Public review of the document "is what the board wanted," Teton County public information officer Charlotte Reynolds said. "They wanted people to see what their positions are."

If they have comments on the commissioners' letter, she said, "we want to know what they think."

Commissioners "pretty clearly outline their position and what they would like to see," she said.

After lauding National Park Service managers for their efforts, commissioners say in the letter that they'd like to see less traffic.

"It is a shared goal among each member of this commission and, indeed, the entire community, to support Grand Teton National Park in your need to reduce traffic meaningfully," the letter states.

Toward that end commissioners support a new pathway along the road.

"Meaningfully reducing motorized traffic can be aided by nonmotorized alternatives for the public," they wrote.

They also state that whatever path Grand Teton takes to manage the road it should include public transportation.

"Public transportation, either in partnership with another entity such as Teton County, Teton Village, Grand Teton National Park Foundation, or provided by the park, should be one of the adaptive tools [the National Park Service] could use in the future to reduce congestion along Moose-Wilson Road and throughout the park," the letter states.

The commission, its members wrote, also support "all measures to realign the north end of the road, both around the beaver ponds and the connection to Teton Park Road west of the existing entrance station.

"GTNP has long held this good idea," commissioners wrote, "and we want to support the park in its

efforts to help wildlife, particularly bears and beavers that are constrained near the hillside by the existing road.”

The path and the transit, commissioners suggest, could be provided with private funds.

“We encourage the NPS to plan that the additional tools to reduce traffic levels — transit, a multimodal pathway and possibly maintenance of the entire pathway system — be paid for with private dollars,” they wrote. “Just as has been done at Jenny Lake for the \$16 million in improvements, all privately raised, we too hope you will plan for private dollars so as not to burden the NPS and GTNP budgets.”

The Jackson Town Council agreed Monday to work with county commissioners to weigh in on the issue, but not before Councilor Jim Stanford railed against the idea of building a pathway along the road.

Twenty-four acres of vegetation and 3,000 trees would be razed to make way for the path in a narrow, sensitive strip of wildlife habitat, he said.

Pathways aren’t built with a “shovel and pick ax,” he said, before mentioning the heavy machinery being used to build a pathway along West Broadway.

“Picture that tearing a hole through the heart of this corridor over two summers,” Stanford said. “This is going to have a tremendous and detrimental effect on one of the most sensitive areas of the park.

“This letter says we can plant native grasses. If that isn’t putting lipstick on a pig, I don’t know what it is.”

The quality of the park is being eroded, collectively, by people with interests in recreation and even profit, he said.

“At a certain point we have to protect the park from ourselves,” Stanford said.

The problem is too many cars and, partially, expansion and development at Teton Village, he said. A pathway won’t address those issues, he said.

Mayor Mark Barron said the Laurance S. Rockefeller Preserve’s popularity is a key driver of traffic on Moose-Wilson Road.

Jackson Hole Mountain Resort President Jerry Blann also said that while the village does generate some traffic on Moose-Wilson Road, so does the Laurance S. Rockefeller Preserve.

When donating the former JY Ranch to Grand Teton National Park in 2001, Laurance S. Rockefeller spoke of his concern that the treasured areas might suffer from their popularity.

“The plan developed for the future of the JY seeks to achieve delicate balance between conservation of nature and public access and use,” Rockefeller said at the May 26, 2001, dedication ceremony. “In too many places in the national parks, overcrowding and overuse are progressively destroying the very values people seek in coming to our parks.”

Rockefeller's donation is now the Laurance S. Rockefeller Preserve, located within Grand Teton on Moose-Wilson Road.

The council approved a motion 4-1 asking the town to work with commissioners to address the issue.

The commissioners' draft comment letter can be found on the county's website.