

## **Managing Growth - What Does This Mean to the Community?**

As discussed in last week's article in the Pathfinder, Seeley Lake is a unique community with natural resources that are important at a global scale. We also have a thriving community with homes and cabins that so far, have only encroached on less than 5% of the Valley. Unplanned growth has the potential to change our unique environment and rural lifestyle that make Seeley Lake such a quality place to live.

Growth is important to the community and should be encouraged in the best areas and in the right amounts to maintain the kind of community we want to live in. How can growth be managed? Missoula County is encouraging its rural communities to prepare regional growth plans with recommended densities for dwellings. Such planning would identify our community's vision of future development within the Valley. Some areas of the Valley could accommodate development without major effects on our natural resources and rural lifestyle, while minimizing the effects on roads, utilities, and existing services. The development of areas outside the existing footprint of the community would likely pose a greater tax burden for all residents. In such areas, numbers and placement of new lots determine not only the area being affected, but also the number of people, cars, pets, and related causes of impacts.

The Seeley Lake Community Council is currently developing a map of recommended densities in the Valley, building from the work that went into the Development Guide in 2002. The Council is identifying areas where more development should be compatible with the rural lifestyle and natural resources of the Valley. So far the Council has identified the town area, outlying neighborhoods, acres adjacent to currently settled lake shores, and some areas adjacent to Highway 83, as suitable candidates. The other major consideration for growth planning is what the community of Seeley Lake envisions. Where are the most suitable areas for new growth, and what areas should remain with lower levels of development? How much development should occur in various areas?

Our County Commissioners have emphasized the importance of citizen participation in the design of the regional land use plan. Managing growth through desired housing densities is not about regulating an individual's rights or lifestyles. It is simply about having the community set some vision of what it would like the Clearwater Valley to look like in the future, by encouraging growth in the most suitable areas and discouraging growth in sensitive areas. Density planning involves balancing environmental concerns, community vision, and population expansion. Density planning can influence the ultimate size of Seeley Lake, but more importantly it will funnel growth into the most appropriate areas while maintaining the quality environment and lifestyle that our community values.