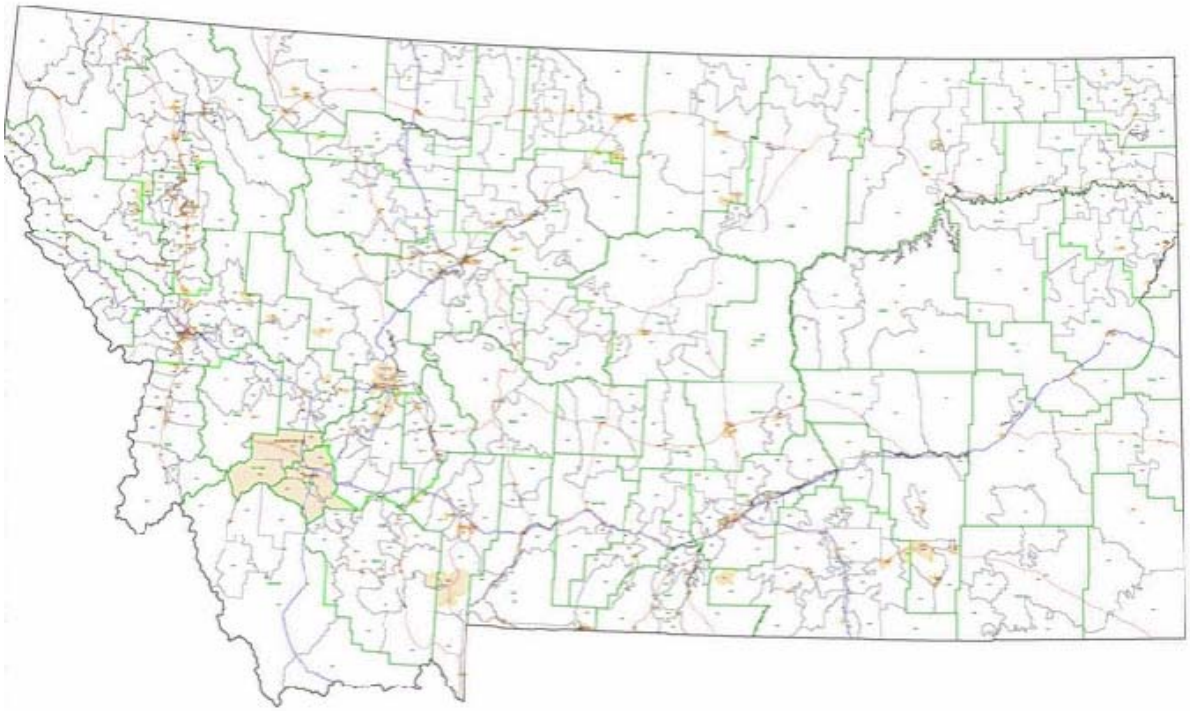
CREATING THE FUTURE OF THE NINEMILE VALLEY:
AN EXPLORATORY ASSESSMENT



PREPARED BY
NATURAL RESOURCES CONFLICT RESOLUTION PROGRAM

PUBLIC POLICY RESEARCH INSTITUTE
THE UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

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Preface

The Natural Resources Conflict Resolution (NRCR) Program at The University of Montana is an interdisciplinary program designed to train future leaders in the skills of multi-party collaboration and conflict resolution. It is the only graduate-certificate program of its kind in North America.

The NRCR Program is administered by the Public Policy Research Institute, an applied research and education center based at The University of Montana. Its mission is to foster sustainable communities and landscapes through collaboration and conflict resolution. To help achieve this mission, the Institute conducts action-oriented research and produces policy reports to inform and invigorate public policy and to examine current issues in the use of collaborative methods to prevent and resolve public disputes.

To ensure that the policy reports are relevant, the Institute partners with appropriate organizations involved in public policy and public dispute resolution. Each policy report integrates scholarly research with the views and opinions of people interested in or affected by the topic. The Institute uses various means (such as interviews, surveys, and policy dialogues) to engage stakeholders in naming problems and framing options, and then supplements this understanding with the best available information and ideas in the appropriate literature. In some cases, a policy report may serve as a catalyst for a multi-party dialogue or negotiation. In other cases, it may simply capture the status of a particular topic and provide a useful analysis of the past, present, and options for the future. The Institute carefully selects topics to address after consulting with citizens, leaders, and scholars, and determining its own interest and capability for addressing the topic.

Creating the Future of Ninemile Valley is a work in progress. It is not an end in itself. Rather, it is intended to inform and invigorate efforts to address growth, land use, and wildlife issues in the Ninemile. The faculty and students associated with the NRCR Program remain ready, willing, and able to work with citizens and officials to create the desired future of the Ninemile Valley.

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Executive Summary

Introduction

- The Ninemile Valley is a small, rural community located about 20 miles west of Missoula, Montana.
- Growth has been gradual here, but as more and more people move into this region, many of the social, economic, and environmental values that attract people to the area are threatened.
- During the summer of 2007, faculty at The University of Montana talked to people affiliated with the Ninemile Wildlife Working Group, Trout Unlimited, and the U.S. Forest Service about the possibility of engaging a selected number of graduate students during the fall of 2007 to conduct a "situation assessment" on the Ninemile Valley.
- This draft policy report is based on interviews with residents and other people interested in the Ninemile Valley, as well as a review of appropriate literature. It provides a brief introduction and historical overview to the Ninemile Valley, examines population growth trends and projections, presents the findings of the interviews, and presents a menu of options on how the community might proceed.

Methodology

- To complete the situation assessment of the Ninemile Valley, graduate students conducted interviews with a sample of residents in the valley and reviewed previously published sources. Because this project was conducted within the timeframe of an academic semester, the assessment is not comprehensive nor an end in itself. It is designed to catalyze a discussion about the future of the Ninemile Valley.
- Throughout the project, students and faculty were guided by the *Model Standards of Conduct for Mediators*, as defined by the Association for Conflict Resolution.
- A public forum will be convened on December 6, 2007, to present and discuss this report, and to explore possible next steps.

The Ninemile Valley: History and Trends

- The Ninemile Valley is an unincorporated community located approximately 20 miles west of Missoula, Montana, on the western edge of Missoula County. The area was originally settled during the gold mining boom of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.
- The Ninemile Valley is home to rich and diverse wildlife and fish populations. The most dramatic wildlife story in the Ninemile revolves around the re-colonization of the area by the gray wolf.
- Through the early part of the 20th century, private land in the valley bottom was divided among a few large ranches. Between 1970 and 1990,

residential development on medium sized parcels became more evident, with common parcel sizes ranging from 5 to 40 acres.

- The Ninemile Valley is a mixed ownership landscape containing a total of 142,791 acres. The majority of land is publicly owned, administered by the USDA Forest Service, Lolo National Forest (81% of the land base). Private land held by small landowners is the next largest ownership category, occupying 16% of the land base, mostly in the valley bottoms.
- The county-wide trend in growth and development suggests a likely scenario for growth in the Ninemile Valley--it has the potential to become a significant bedroom community for the City of Missoula. Consequently, many of the social, economic, and environmental values that define the unique character of the valley may be threatened.

The Existing Legal, Institutional, and Civic Framework

- Depending on what, if anything, citizens and officials decide to do to address change in the valley, there are a number of existing laws, policies, and regulations that will influence future land use decisions.
- In addition, several citizen-based initiatives have formed to address one or more of the changes taking place in the Ninemile Valley.

Findings and Analysis

- The following interview findings are categorized according to the issues and themes framed by the interview questions. The findings are summaries of what interviewers heard and reflect the specific questions asked. The findings do not represent an exhaustive study of land use, growth, and wildlife issues in the region, nor are they an end in themselves. *Some interests and opinions may not be represented here and some factual inaccuracies may be present.*
- **What's special about the Ninemile Valley?** The quiet, country lifestyle lends itself to a shared appreciation for nature, wildlife, open spaces, and Ninemile Creek.
- **How is the Ninemile changing and what are the important issues?** The interests and concerns raised in the interviews spanned the issues of growth, land use, and wildlife. These issues and concerns have been organized into four main themes: water quality and supply, wildlife, increased road traffic, and general landscape interests.
- **What are the potential areas of conflict? Our interviews found shared or common** interests, interests that are different but compatible, and conflicting interests.
- **What needs to be done?** While there is substantial support for both encouraging and limiting growth in the valley, an overwhelming number of interviewees prioritized putting some sort of plan in place.
- **What are the challenges to moving forward? People will need to focus on** building a sense of community (based on common and compatible interests) and building the capacity to jointly solve problems.

Options to Move Forward

- Given the interests and concerns expressed by the interviewees, along with their suggestions on how to proceed, five options to move forward are presented. The options are not listed in any order of priority and are not mutually exclusive.
- Option 1 -- Maintain the Status Quo
- Option 2 -- Convene a Community-based Forum
- Option 3 -- Facilitate Learning
- Option 4 -- Develop a Plan
- Option 5 -- Build Physical Infrastructure

Community Forum

- On December 6, 2007, 25 people with an interest and concern in the Ninemile Valley participated in a two-hour conversation at the Ninemile Community Center.
- The conversation revolved around five principal themes or topics:
  - ☐ Facilitate communication among valley residents;
  - ☐ Learn from the recent planning effort;
  - ☐ Build a sense of community identity;
  - ☐ Identify an appropriate convener to continue the conversation; and
  - ☐ Harness appropriate resources.
- Since the community forum, the Public Policy Research Institute, which manages the NRCR Program, was approached by the Orton Foundation to submit a proposal to fund a community dialogue and planning process.
- The Institute plans to meet with the Board of Directors of the Ninemile Community Center Association and others in January 2008 to explore this opportunity.

Conclusions

- This report -- *Creating the Future of Ninemile Valley* is a work in progress. It is not an end in itself. Rather, it is intended to inform and invigorate efforts to address growth, land use, and wildlife issues in the Ninemile.
- The faculty and students associated with the NRCR Program remain ready, willing, and able to work with citizens and officials to create the desired future of the Ninemile Valley.
- The next step is for the community of the Ninemile Valley to determine what, if anything, it wants to do in the face of change.

Introduction

The Ninemile Valley is a small, rural community located about 20 miles west of Missoula, Montana. Like many such communities in the Rocky Mountain West, it is experiencing rapid change. As more and more people move into this region, many of the social, economic, and environmental values that attract people to the area are potentially threatened.

As explained more fully in this policy report, citizens and officials have taken some action in response to this change. Yet many outstanding issues related to land use and growth, wildlife management, water use and its impact, transportation corridors, etc., remain. Perhaps the overriding issue – again, similar to other rural communities in the Rocky Mountain West – is the community's lack of opportunity and/or capacity to come together, forge a common vision for the region, and implement actions to sustain and enhance what people value most about the area.

During the summer of 2007, faculty at The University of Montana talked to people affiliated with the Ninemile Wildlife Working Group, Trout Unlimited, and the U.S. Forest Service about the possibility of engaging a group of graduate students during the fall of 2007 to conduct a "situation assessment" on the Ninemile Valley. A situation assessment is a standard tool in collaboration and conflict resolution to clarify issues and concerns, identify stakeholders, and generate options on how to address community-based (and/or public policy) issues. The faculty and people affiliated with these groups agreed that this project would be timely, would provide a hands-on learning experience for graduate students, and would also help the community figure out what, if anything, it wants to do in the face of change.

This policy report is the outcome of the effort of nine students and two faculty associated with the university's Natural Resources Conflict Resolution Program (See Appendix 1 – Project Team Members). It provides a brief introduction and historical overview to the Ninemile Valley, examines population growth trends and projections, presents the findings of the interviews conducted with people who live and work in the Ninemile, and presents a menu of options on how the community might proceed.

As mentioned in the Preface, *Creating the Future of Ninemile Valley* is a work in progress. It is not an end in itself. Rather, it is intended to inform and invigorate efforts to address growth, land use, and wildlife issues in the Ninemile. The faculty and students associated with the NRCR Program remain ready, willing, and able to work with citizens and officials to create the desired future of the Ninemile Valley.

Methodology

To complete the situation assessment of the Ninemile Valley, graduate students conducted interviews with a sample of residents in the valley and reviewed previously published sources. Because this project was conducted within the timeframe of an academic semester, the assessment is not comprehensive nor an end in itself. It is designed to catalyze a discussion about the future of the Ninemile Valley.

For the interviews, students and faculty developed 10 open-ended questions concerning value, change, and conflict in the Ninemile Valley. These questions and a letter of introduction were sent to 43 people identified largely by the Ninemile Wildlife Movement Areas Workgroup (see Appendix 2 - Letter of Introduction and Appendix 3 - Interview Questions). Students and faculty added some names based on our goal to interview a cross-section of perspectives from various community members (See Appendix 5 – List of Individuals Interviewed). Throughout the interview process, interviewees suggested other people who are interested and concerned about the future of the Ninemile Valley (See Appendix 4 – Master List of Contacts). Due to time and resource constraints, however, not all of these individuals could be interviewed.

Each interview lasted 30 to 90 minutes. All interviewees were encouraged to contact students after the interview with any further thoughts or questions. Most interviews were conducted in person, and interviewers took detailed notes. This report summarizes respondents' comments, although it does not attribute particular comments to any specific individuals. The students qualitatively evaluated the responses provided by interviewees. Since the interviews were not intended to statistically represent the views of any particular social group, there was no effort to weight one idea over any other, other than noting whether a response arose from a single interview or was common to multiple respondents. Rather, the emphasis was on capturing the range of attitudes and perceptions of those interviewed.

In addition to the interviews, the graduate students also conducted a limited literature search on other communities involved in this type of planning. After completing the interviews and research, the students prepared this draft policy report summarizing the diverse comments and suggestions offered by the interviewees, along with the findings and conclusions from policy research.

A community forum was convened by the students and faculty on December 6, 2007, to present and discuss this report, and to explore possible next steps. A list of attendees present at the community forum is attached as Appendix 6 – Community Forum Participants. A summary of the community forum is provided in this report starting on page 33.

Throughout the project, students and faculty were guided by the *Model Standards of Conduct for Mediators*, as defined by the Association for Conflict Resolution. In sum, the students and faculty made every effort to remain impartial and nonpartisan; we are not an advocate for any particular interest or outcome.

The Ninemile Valley: History and Trends

The Ninemile Valley is an unincorporated community located approximately 20 miles west of Missoula, Montana, on the western edge of Missoula County. The area was originally settled during the gold mining boom of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.[1] The present-day Ninemile Community Center is a converted schoolhouse, a remnant from the earliest development days. The most prosperous mining lasted only a few decades, and by the 1920s much of the activity had moved to newer resource bases. The town was named for the Nine-Mile house, a saloon and restaurant located near the junction of Ninemile Creek and Mullan Road (the road that connected Fort Benton and Walla Walla completed in 1862).

Through the early part of the 20th century, private land in the valley bottom was divided among a few large ranches. During the Depression of the 1930s, the Ninemile Valley became the site of the nation's largest Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) base. Crews worked in the valley building and improving access roads and erecting permanent structures at the present U.S. Forest Service ranger station. With a growth in population and changing economic conditions after World War II, the ranches in the Ninemile slowly broke apart into smaller family farms with less and less emphasis on production agriculture.

Between 1970 and 1990, residential development on medium sized parcels became more evident, with common parcel sizes ranging from 5 to 40 acres. Two subdivisions were laid out in the Ninemile--Piney Meadows and Ridgewood Ranchettes--and development continued in relatively small parcels along Remount Road in the lower Ninemile. Since 1990, with accelerating population growth throughout western Montana, the area has changed more rapidly because it offers a rural lifestyle within easy driving distance of Missoula's hospitals, university, shopping, and restaurants. Development concerns have led to conservation easements on several properties as a means to protect resource values.

The Natural Landscape

The geography of the Ninemile Valley is typical of western Montana valleys – river bottoms giving way to broad benchlands that lead to the toes of steeper mountain slopes. Elevations range from 3,000 to 6,793 feet at Edith Peak. The climate is modified maritime, with precipitation averaging about 14 inches per year in the lower valley, increasing with elevation in the surrounding forested mountains. Seasonal precipitation and prolonged summer heat create conditions conducive to summer wildfires, Recent drought has amplified

wildfire risk, which is especially worrying to people who live in and around these dry forests. Natural vegetation is drought-resistant species in the lower elevations, with Douglas fir and ponderosa pine as the dominant trees. Much of the original forest was harvested in the early part of the 20th century, and 70 years of wildfire suppression has created a forest, structure and composition. In lower valley meadows and along roads, noxious weeds, especially spotted knapweed, have become prevalent in the past two decades.

Pre-settlement conditions in the Ninemile Valley supported healthy populations of ungulates, fish, and large predators, as Ninemile Creek created a natural corridor for wildlife to move north and south between major mountain ranges. To protect their livestock, early settlers eradicated predators, leading to an expansion of mule deer and elk populations already thriving thanks to the valley's relatively mild weather and abundant forage on early farms and ranches. As forest cover returned in the latter part of the 20th century, habitat conditions favored whitetail deer. Higher levels of thermal cover from thick young trees reduced whitetail winterkill, while diminished forage reduced habitat quality for elk and mule deer.

The most dramatic wildlife story in the Ninemile revolves around the re-colonization of the area by the gray wolf. Protected by the Endangered Species Act in 1973, the gray wolf re-colonized the Northern Rockies in the 1990s. Wolves have been present in the Ninemile for at least 13 years, and the resident pack has produced successful litters in most years. The Ninemile pack has occasionally preyed on livestock, heightening concerns among landowners about the security of their livestock and pets.

Landowners and others contacted for this report identified the following characteristics regarding major wildlife species:

Big Game Animals -- Two distinct elk herds inhabit the Ninemile. The first lives in the western foothills of the Ninemile and winters above Alberton. The second herd roams on the east side of the valley and winters on Cayuse Hill. A large population of whitetail deer roams throughout the valley, but winters primarily in the valley bottom. Mule deer also live here, but prefer to winter in distinct pockets in the mid-elevations of the slopes. Bighorn sheep are found most commonly in the upper (northwestern) regions of the Ninemile Valley, but they move throughout the drainage. Mountain goats frequently pass through the Ninemile, and moose are increasing in number due to recent wildfires, wintering in the high north areas of the valley.

Fur Bearers and Other Mammals -- Marten are found throughout the Ninemile Valley. There are occasional sightings or trappings of fisher, wolverine, mink, and otter dwelling within the riparian zones. Grizzly bears are also sighted in the region occasionally. In 2001, a young adult male grizzly (collared) was marauding homes in the Ninemile Valley, searching for food, before he was

taken down. Black bears are common in the Ninemile Valley. Bobcat, mountain lion, and an occasional lynx are also seen in the valley.

Birds -- Many species of birds frequent the Ninemile Valley, including osprey, grouse, warblers, and hummingbirds, to name but a few. Several bird species of concern are also found in the Ninemile: bald eagle, northern goshawk, northern hawk owl, flammulated owl, olive-sided flycatcher, and peregrine falcon.[2]

Fisheries -- Brown trout, mountain whitefish, rainbow trout, brook trout, largescale sucker, longnose sucker, westslope cutthroat trout, and bull trout are all present in varying quantities in Ninemile Creek.[3]

As the human population increases in the area, human/wildlife conflicts become inevitable. Accidents involving vehicles and animals along Interstate 90 and Ninemile Road are frequent. Garbage, fruit trees, and other organic matter become tempting treats to bears, deer, and other small mammals, creating a source of tension for human inhabitants of the area.

Land Ownership

The 119,609 acres of the Ninemile Valley (not including the Sixmile Valley) are a mixed-ownership landscape. The majority of land is publicly owned, administered by the USDA Forest Service, Lolo National Forest (81% of the land base). Private land held by small landowners is the next largest ownership category, occupying 16% of the land base, mostly in the valley bottoms. Appendix 7 presents a map showing the land ownership pattern in the Ninemile Valley, while the following pie chart identifies the land ownership categories in the Ninemile.

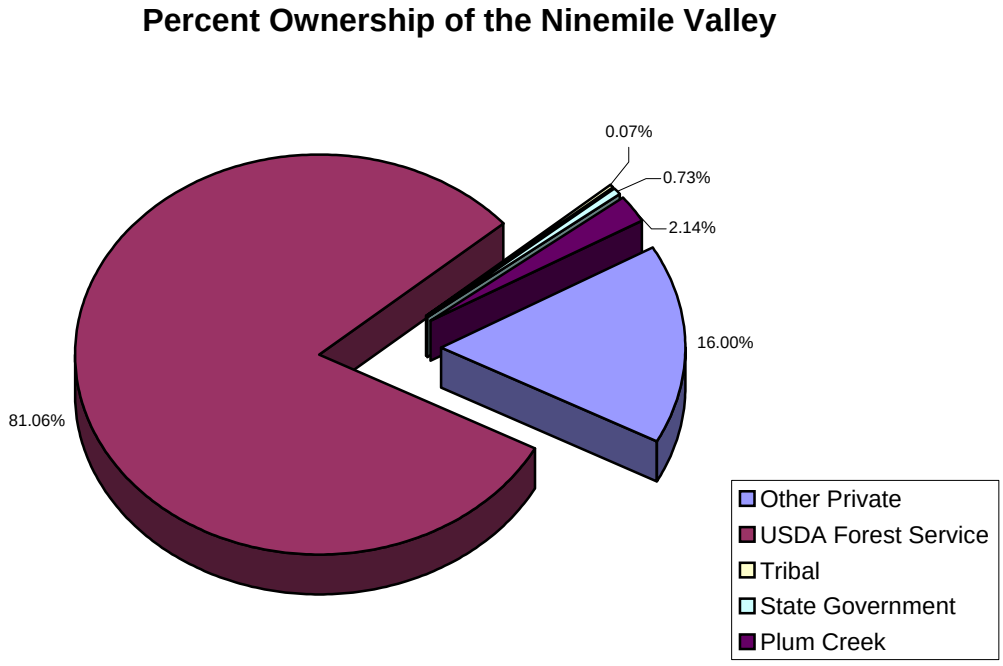

Chart 1: Displays percent ownership of the Ninemile Watershed. Total Land Base = 119,609 acres. Data Source: http://nris.mt.gov

Population Growth Trends and Projections

Given that the Ninemile Valley is an unincorporated community, census data on population growth do not align with the valley geography and community settlement patterns. The population growth pattern of the Ninemile Valley can, however, be inferred from other sources, such as the growth of Missoula County in general, and the number of permits for wells and septic systems. As explained below, the population growth pattern of the Ninemile Valley appears to follow the general growth pattern of Missoula County.

As indicated in the following charts, population in Missoula County has steadily grown over the past two decades. Population growth in the county is projected to increase an additional 48% by the year 2030. Past population trends show a 71% increase in population from 1970 – 2005. Most of this growth is based on immigration rather than natural increase (number of births minus deaths).

This county-wide trend suggests a likely scenario for growth in the Ninemile Valley--it could become a significant bedroom community for Missoula, and

consequently, many of the social, economic, and environmental values that define the unique character of the valley may be threatened.

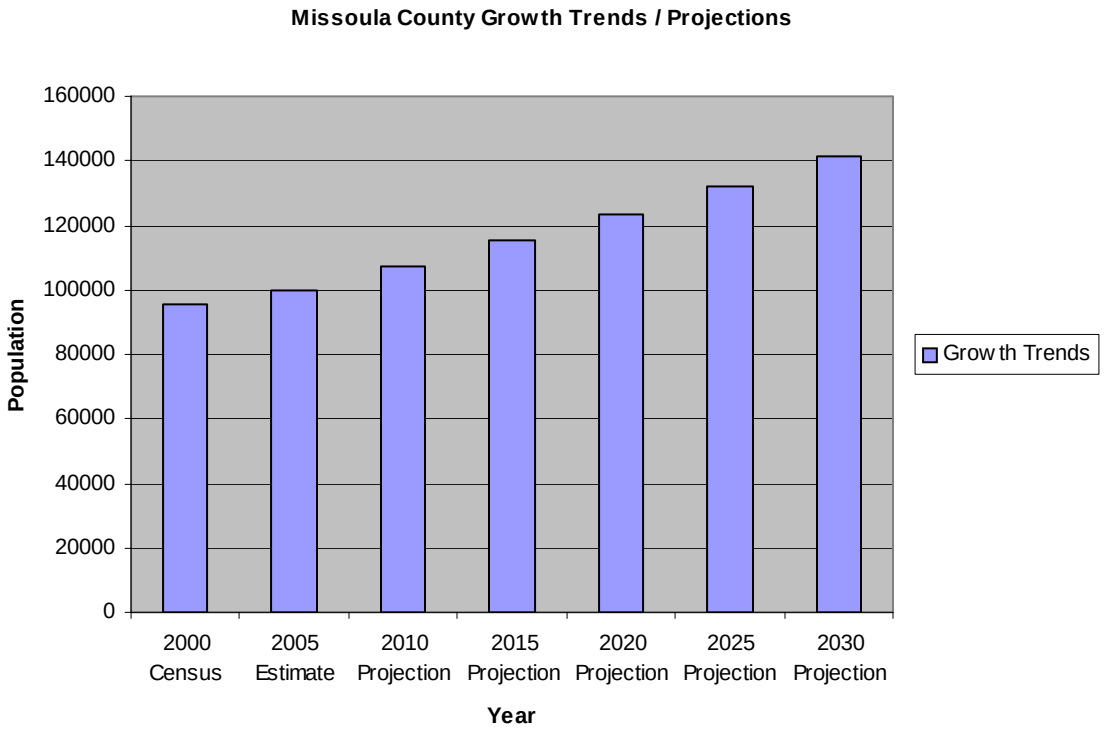

Chart 2: Data Source: Provided by the Census and Economic Information Center, Montana Dept. of Commerce, Helena, with permission from NPA Data Services, Inc., Arlington, VA (703 979-8400). 11/06.

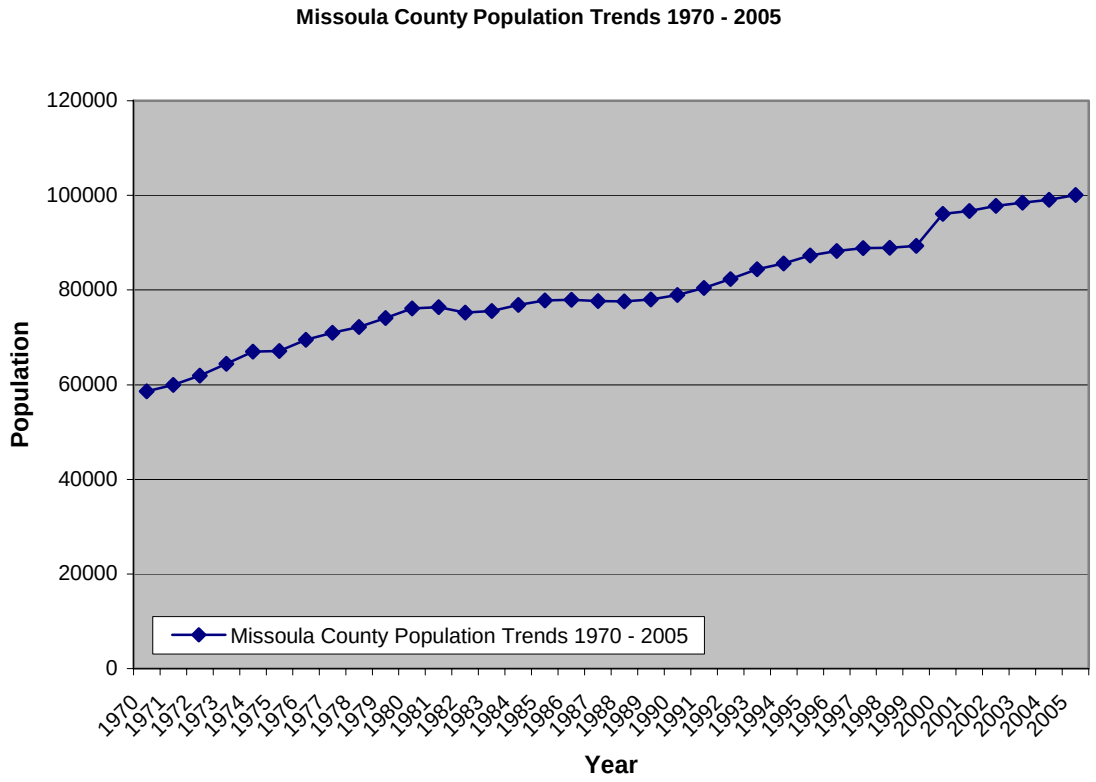

Chart 3: Missoula County Population Trends 1970 – 2005. This shows a 71% increase over the 35 year time period. Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

We also examined the approval of septic systems within the Ninemile Valley. Approved septic systems are good indicators of future growth and development, given that the Montana Subdivision and Platting Act of 1976 states that "If an (subdivision) applicant proposes to use subsurface wastewater treatment systems…the minimum lot size must be one acre for each living unit."[4] Smaller lot sizes may be approved under certain criteria. There are a very limited number of plats less than one acre in the Ninemile Valley. Therefore, it can be assumed that for one approved septic there is at least a one-acre lot that can be developed.

Based on this assumption, we examined the Missoula County Health Department's *Approved Septic System Applications for 1971 – 2006* (see the following chart). This chart illustrates that the number of approved septic systems in the Ninemile Valley has steadily increased over time, suggesting that the human population in the valley is increasing.

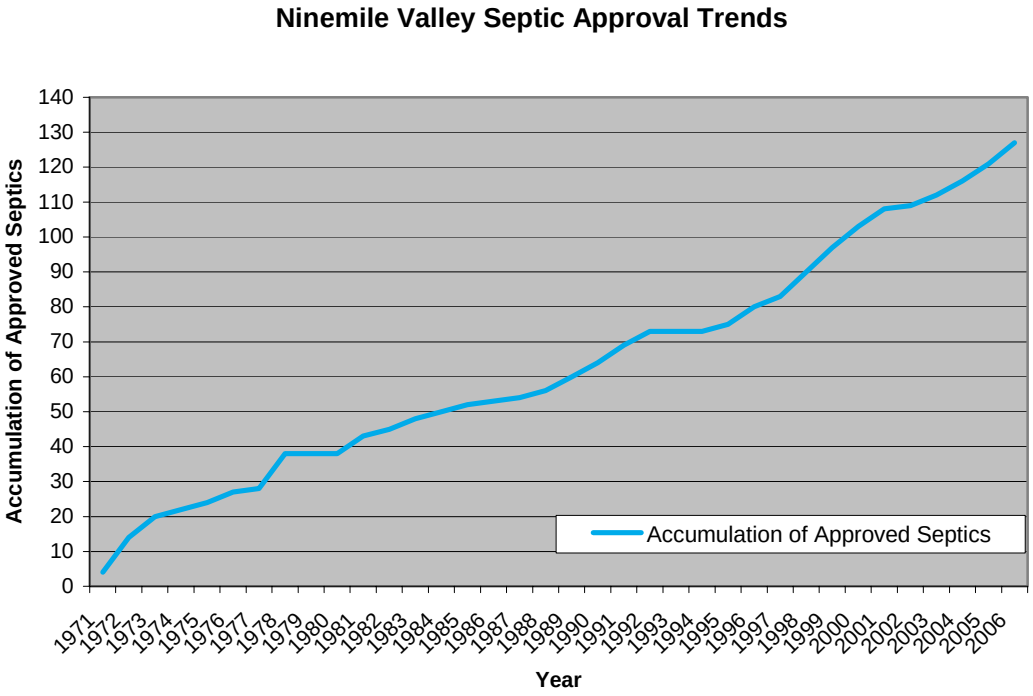

Chart 4: Approved septic systems over time, Ninemile Valley. Data Source: Missoula County Health Department

The Existing Legal, Institutional, and Civic Framework

Whether the existing growth and development trends in the Ninemile Valley are desirable or not is largely up to the residents and other people who care about the region. Depending on what, if anything, citizens and officials decide to do to address change in the valley, there are a number of existing laws, policies, and regulations that will influence future land use decisions. In addition, a number of ongoing citizen-based initiatives are addressing the changes taking place in the Ninemile Valley.

Rather than provide an exhaustive summary of the existing legal, institutional, and civic framework that will influence future land use choices, we have provided the following menu to help raise awareness and understanding of the variety of constraints as well as the opportunities provided by these various rules, regulations, and activities. Where available, we have included a web site address where you can go to more.

Legal and Institutional Framework

- ☐ **Missoula County Growth Policy** -- www.co.missoula.mt.us/opgweb/LongRange/ GrowthPolicy.htm
- ☐ **Missoula County Office of Planning and Grants for Zoning and Subdivision Regulations** -- www.co.**missoula**.mt.us/opgweb/
- ☐ **Streamside Setback and 310 Law --** http://dnrc.mt.gov/cardd/consdist/what_dist_do.asp
- ☐ **Lolo National Forest Plan** -- http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/lolo/projects/
- ☐ **Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes --** http://www.cskt.org/
- ☐ **Department of Environmental Quality 319 Nonpoint Source Pollution Grant** --www.deq.state.mt.us/wqinfo/nonpoint/NonpointSourceProgram

Citizen-based Efforts

- ☐ **Conservation Easements** -- http://mtlandreliance.org/atlas/Land-Atlas-6.html
- ☐ **Neighborhood & Homeowner's Associations**
  - River Run Homeowner's Association (Sharon Hamilton at 626-0679)
  - Big Horn Homeowner's Association (Shara Blair at 626-4220).
- ☐ **Ninemile Wildlife Working Group** http://watersheds.montana.edu/groups/details.asp?groupID=48
- ☐ **Trout Unlimited / Watershed Council** -- www.montanatu.org

Findings and Analysis

The purpose of conducting interviews in the Ninemile Valley was to develop a common understanding of the issues and concerns of people within the Ninemile community. The following interview findings are categorized according to the issues and themes framed by the interview questions. The findings are summaries of what interviewers heard and reflect the specific questions asked. The findings do not represent an exhaustive study of land use, growth, and wildlife issues in the region, nor are they an end in themselves. **Some interests and opinions may not be represented here and some factual inaccuracies may be present.** When relevant, direct quotes from the interviews are used without attributing ownership.

What's special about the Ninemile Valley?

Interviews began with inquiries into what attracted interviewees to the area and what unique characteristics define the Ninemile. Residents of the Ninemile appreciate the rural qualities of the area. The quiet, country lifestyle lends itself to a shared appreciation for nature, wildlife, open spaces, and Ninemile creek. "It's like living in an enchanted valley."

Proximity to public lands also provides for convenient recreation and hunting opportunities. Additionally, many residents appreciate ease of access to Missoula, The University of Montana, job opportunities, and arts and culture.

How is the Ninemile changing, and what are the important issues?

Several questions drew overlapping responses on the topic of change in the Ninemile. The interests and concerns raised in the interviews spanned the issues of growth, land use, and wildlife. These issues and concerns have been organized into four main themes: water quality and supply, wildlife, increase in traffic on roads, and general landscape interests.

Water

Water quality and supply are of particular concern to residents. Perceived threats to quality revolve around issues of septic management, livestock use, damage to the creek as a result of drilling wells, and residual contamination from historical mining. Drought has reduced the water level of Ninemile creek, a natural resource in demand for irrigation and to water animals. Some interviewees claimed that the ever-increasing human demands on this already scarce resource have been exacerbated by residents who might be diverting

water beyond the limits of their water rights (apparently there is ongoing litigation over this issue).

Wildlife
Interviewees voiced several concerns about wildlife: loss of habitat, livestock fencing, attractants, and mortality. For example:

- Growth in the area has led to greater encroachment on habitat and migration patterns.
- While beneficial to ranchers protecting their livestock, fencing also inhibits wildlife movement.
- The availability of birdseed, trash, pet/livestock food, and fruit trees encourages wildlife to become habituated to and dependent on human presence, leading to an increase in wildlife/human conflicts and wildlife mortality.

One of the most contentious wildlife concerns is the presence of wolves. Indeed, results of the interviews indicate it is the most divisive wildlife issue in the community. Some people appreciate the balance large predators provide to the ecosystem and encourage their presence in the area. Some appreciate species diversity but find it frustrating to bear the brunt of predator protection (both economically and ideologically) when it directly impacts the safety of their own interests. Finally, there are those for which predator protection is not a high priority.

Traffic
The increase in traffic on roads has led to the following concerns:

- Increased dust
- Road kill
- Collisions
- Emergency access as it relates to wildland fire (one way in/one way out)

A few of interviewees expressed an awareness or concern with the decommissioning of some Forest Service roads.

Landscape
The landscape of the Ninemile is both a source of pride and unease among interviewees. While its inherent beauty is a draw, the aesthetic of the area is slowly changing. One resident aptly noted, "There used to be a half a page in a phone book but now there's a lot more people."

Still, there is a worry that the infrastructure of the area is not keeping up with this growth, and perhaps cannot handle development at the current rate. "It has grown so damn much without any planning."

Recent awareness of increased development has brought up discussions on zoning. While some hope zoning can direct—or even control—growth in a positive way, others worry that zoning will negatively impact the value of their property. The latter fear is common among those generally interested in raising their standard of living or planning for retirement.

Other areas of concern relevant to the landscape of the area are:

- Fire prevention
- Invasive weeds
- Recreational use (fishing)
- Stream protection and fisheries health
- Overgrazing of livestock (in both riparian areas and pastures)
- Divorce and inheritance laws, lending themselves to the division of larger parcels into smaller ones

Relationships
The rural qualities of the Ninemile have fostered both long-standing relationships and recent alliances that help facilitate better community relations and management of resources. Throughout the interviews, people identified the following working relationships in the community:

- Agency collaborations with the Wildlife Working Group and Trout Unlimited.
- Agencies working among themselves.
- Montana Water Trust with senior water rights holders.
- Various active members of the community with other members and groups.

What are the potential areas of conflict?

The interviews revealed areas of widespread agreement, and also of disagreement. We've sorted these into three categories: common interests, different but compatible interests, and conflicting interests. Experience in other regions has taught us that the most effective way to move forward is to start from areas of common ground and gradually build understanding and win-win solutions where interests diverge.

Common interests surfaced in almost all of the interviews conducted:

- A connection to the natural aspects of the Ninemile landscape.
- Appreciation for the presence of ungulate or non-predator wildlife.
- Attachment to the rural lifestyle with access to amenities in nearby Missoula.

- Appreciation for the aesthetics and recreational value of Ninemile Creek.

There were certain *interests with different, but compatible, qualities*:

- Fisheries health and visual aesthetics of the creek could be compatible with development. Many interviewees suggested that preserving the creek will add value to future development.
- Those who wish to preserve a rural lifestyle and limit growth have the opportunity to align their interests with development through proper planning.
- There are many who are accepting of growth so long as the infrastructure keeps up with the increase in development.
- Many wildlife enthusiasts and livestock managers want to participate in the protection of predators, but solutions must recognize who bears the brunt of work and costs.
- When thinking about wildlife in general, "There is no such thing as a perfect subdivision, but coexisting with wildlife can be done."
- Zoning is a contentious issue. While some believe that it can protect the integrity of the land with smart growth planning, there are those who believe that it will bring more people to the area or impact the value of land at the time of sale. "If you're around western Montana, you'd better realize those days [of private property rights] are gone. If rural is important to you, you'd better get behind zoning." [THESE STATEMENTS ARE CONFLICTING, RATHER THAN "COMPATIBLE." MOVE TO THE NEXT SECTION? OR IS THERE A REASON TO KEEP ZONING HERE?]

The *interests that appear to be of the most conflict* are:

- Diverging views on the presence of wolves and other large predators. To build agreement, people will need to address issues regarding predation on livestock and pets, and ungulate population density.
- Diverging perspectives on water consumption and protection of riparian areas in the Ninemile watershed. To build agreement, people will need to address issues relating to water quantity, quality, rights, and monitoring.

What needs to be done?

Some people want to encourage growth in the valley, while others want to limit it. But most of the people we interviewed said that the time might be ripe for putting a plan in place. This suggests a general displeasure with the de facto growth thus far in the valley. It may be a motivating factor to developing

a strong, cohesive community voice that communicates what the Ninemile should look like in the future.

The following list is not an exhaustive list of possible tasks to be undertaken by the community. Some of these tasks require expertise that will likely come from outside the community, and there may be some suggestions that are not agreed on by the majority of the community.

Yet it is highly significant *that these ideas surfaced from within the community* during the interview process. Further community conversations will be needed for residents to rally around any particular plan or strategy, but the interviews clearly show that the community feels a need to shape the future of the valley, rather than let particular interests decide the fate of the Ninemile.

This list will likely expand during future community conversations; to date, specific suggestions include:

1) Suggestions for monitoring and enforcement, both from within the community and from appropriate agencies. Specifically:
   - ☐ Mitigate wildlife attractants.
   - ☐ Encourage accountability with land use activities - among developers, agencies, and private landowners.
   - ☐ Monitor water allocation, consumption, and general riparian health.
   - ☐ Encourage enforcement of the rules and regulations that are already in place.

2) Suggestions for developing a community-based effort. Specifically:
   - ☐ Prioritize goals and outline a vision for the area,
   - ☐ Get a facilitator or mediator to help the community define next steps.
   - ☐ Develop a community voice.

3) Suggestion to consolidate and summarize information on current regulations. [NOTHING HERE?]

4) Suggestions for considering formal action. Specifically:
   - ☐ If growth will not be stopped, a plan should be developed.
   - ☐ Consider setbacks for both riparian areas and property boundaries.
   - ☐ Continue with efforts to enhance the wolf management plan so that it provides solutions for more of the stakeholders involved.
   - ☐ Proactively coordinate with county commissioners by providing them with a plan for the Ninemile.

What are the challenges to moving forward?

Several interviewees suggested that planning for progress would be inhibited by some of the following factors. Most interviewees cited the absence of a strong, cohesive community and identified a general divide between new and prior residents. Perceptions of this divide included differing socioeconomic status, strength of voice or stake in community affairs, and the ethic attached to private property rights. From there, the following concerns emerged:

- Increase in no-trespassing signs.
- Growing sense of confrontation.
- Not-in-my-backyard sentiment.
- Conflict over wildlife management.
- Growth of exclusiveness with increase in newcomers (perceived tendency to exclude once you're "in").
- Diminishing trust among individuals.
- Differing expectations of government services.
- Differing expectations of private land use, "They just don't understand what it means to live in rural Montana."

Specific barriers to dialogue revolve around the form of participation in community discussions. Some residents said that community members only gather when there are contentious issues to discuss. When gathered, discussions are often based on emotions and values instead of logic and facts. Personal or individual conflicts among neighbors also have the potential to inhibit collaboration on unrelated community issues.

What is the community's capacity to solve problems?

To achieve progress on many of the issues listed above, several needs must be acknowledged:

- Need for a joint framing of the questions that are unanswered at this time.
- Need for leadership that has credibility within the community and is able to bridge perceived differences.
- Need for agreement on science and other supporting information that enlightens discussions on wildlife and water issues.
- Need for resources (time, money, and expertise) to facilitate progress.

Options to Move Forward

Based on the interests and concerns expressed by the interviewees, along with their suggestions on how to proceed, this section presents five options to move forward. The options are not listed in any order of priority and are not mutually exclusive.

Option 1 -- Maintain the Status Quo

One option for the Ninemile Valley is to stay the course. This is a viable option if Ninemile residents are comfortable with the existing state of affairs and current development trends. Residents should realize that rejecting the status quo means accepting that some type of action must be taken.

Option 2 -- Convene a Community-based Forum

The majority of interviewees felt that convening a community-based forum would be helpful to encourage discussion. The basic idea here is to engage the right people with the best available information to address issues of common concern. If a critical mass of people living within or otherwise concerned about the Ninemile Valley agrees to convene such a forum, Appendix 9 provides a set of principles on how to design, participate, and implement the results of such a process. The following subsections focus on some of the key questions in designing a community-based collaborative forum, and offer some options on how to proceed.

Who should convene?
Consistent, credible, legitimate leadership is needed when convening a community-based forum. This leadership provides organizational and logistical information, while also ensuring a productive atmosphere during the course of the meeting. This may be a separate role from that of facilitator. A facilitator is a neutral third party, acceptable to all members of the group, whose role is to help facilitate communication, understanding, and agreement.

Effective leadership can come from many different places, and the pros and cons of each should be carefully examined.

- For the Ninemile, one option is to access the resources offered by the Natural Resources Conflict Resolution Program at The University of Montana, Missoula. Students and faculty associated with this program are ready, willing, and able to help convene, facilitate, (mediate when

necessary), conduct research, produce documents, and otherwise support the efforts of a community-based collaborative group.

- The county can also provide some leadership in this area. The county commissioners and/or the Rural Initiatives program might play a role in convening. Missoula County Rural Initiatives "is charged with planning and implementation measures designed to protect the cultural, historic, economic, and natural resources of the County while providing for and directing growth outside the Missoula valley," and can provide necessary assistance and information.[5] Aside from this program, the county's role may be limited to guidance and participation, most likely by county commissioners, as opposed to direct leadership.

- Finally, leadership can come from within the community. Because residents have a personal stake in the outcome of any forum, they may provide the most effective leadership. However, it is important that the leadership role be consistent, compelling, and fair. Whether it comes from the university, the county, the community, or a combination, leadership should be both legitimate and respected.

Who should participate?

When deciding who will participate in a community-based forum, it is essential to include *all* stakeholders involved in the issue (a stakeholder is any person or organization that has an interest or concern in the conflict, situation, or issue). Any action to come out of collaboration will be stronger and more reliable if an agreeable decision is reached among all stakeholders. There are three stakeholder categories to consider: those who are interested in and affected by the issue, those who are necessary for implementation and action, and those who might undermine the process/outcome. Including all parties who fit in these categories helps ensure productive results.

In the case of the Ninemile, stakeholders cross a range of boundaries. They include, but are not limited to, Ninemile residents (representing all viewpoints), developers active in the area, real estate agents, county commissioners, wildlife enthusiasts, nonprofit organizations, local business owners living or working in the Ninemile, and various government bodies (Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, the US Forest Service, County Commissioners, etc). Additionally, the type of participation expected of stakeholders must be defined before the forum convenes. This will allow conveners to determine the schedule of meetings and their level of participation. Will some groups act as information resources, as leaders, or as stakeholders? Regardless of the role, the success of the forum requires consistent participation by all parties.

What is the scope and purpose?
A community-based forum should cover all the major issues and concerns stakeholders have in the Ninemile. This can be done in a few different ways. Conveners can choose to start small, addressing only one or two issues at a time. Or they can organize a forum that encompasses all concerns at once. The participants must decide the most effective tactic for this process.

The most prominent concerns detailed in this report as expressed by interviewees include: water issues, wildlife protection, the integrity of the urban-wildlife interface, increased road traffic, and landscape changes. Additionally, many interviewees felt that some form of oversight was needed over the growth occurring in the Ninemile. This can be accomplished through the development of a community plan that details a vision for the area from the community's perspective. A community-based forum can address all of these important issues by encouraging deliberation among stakeholders. For a complete discussion of these concerns as determined by our assessment, please see the "Findings and Analysis" section of this report.

How will decisions be made?
Another critically important design question that needs to be addressed early on is how the community-based forum will make decisions. A variety of options are possible. For example, participants might agree to seek consensus, defined as "when the participants agree on a package of provisions that addresses the range of issues being discussed. Participants may not like all aspects of an agreement, but they do not disagree enough to warrant their opposition to the overall package." A consensus-bulding approach must also spell out how to ensure that decisions are implemented and actions are monitored.

Consensus is not always reached. In designing any community-based forum, participants should consider "fallback" mechanisms. These should be designed to provide an incentive for participants to build agreement as opposed to allow the fallback to become the "de facto" decision rule. Several fallback techniques are available:

- Identify areas requiring further research and identify who should do it.
- Rely on a super-majority vote (e.g., 75 percent).
- Seek a recommendation from a government official or independent expert on how they would resolve the issue. This procedure may provide an incentive for the parties to come back to the table and resolve the issue.
- Include statements defining areas of disagreement as well as agreement.
- Provide for a minority report.
- Let the authorized decision maker impose a decision.

Role of Facilitator/Mediator
A facilitator is a neutral third party, acceptable to all members of the group, whose role is to help the group increase its effectiveness by improving communication, understanding, and agreement. Facilitators have no substantial decision-making authority, but simply ensure a smooth process. Based on our assessment of the situation in the Ninemile, we suggest the initial use of a facilitator to help design the process. Should the situation change, a more formal mediator can be integrated into the process in the future.

How should the community-based forum be funded?
There are several options available to meet funding needs.

1) Rely on the Natural Resource Conflict Resolution (NRCR) program to convene, facilitate, conduct research, and so on.
2) Seek funding from:
    a. The Lincoln Institute of Land Policy: www.lincolninst.edu
    b. The Orton Family Foundation: www.orton.org
    c. The National Forest Foundation: www.natlforests.org/conservation_partnerships.html
    d. Or perhaps other foundations to support one or more elements of an overall community-based strategy.
3) There are additional funding opportunities to explore through sources like the Red Lodge Clearinghouse's Collaboration Resources/Funding Searches at: www.redlodgeclearinghouse.org. Funding opportunities are available depending on the reason for collaboration, for example: watershed restoration, wildlife area establishment/monitoring, pest management, etc.
4) Seek support from Missoula County, particularly the Rural Initiatives office.

Option 3 -- Facilitate Learning

There are many issues and concerns facing the residents and stakeholders in the Ninemile Valley, but people may not all have a clear understanding of these issues. As a result, one option is to inform and educate people and otherwise facilitate a learning process. The question here – at least in part – is what do people need or want to know?

One place to begin is to build a common understanding of trends seen in the Ninemile. For example, many interviewees felt that growth was occurring all over the corridor, but they could not describe the nature of that growth. The same is true for wildlife populations in the area. How are they changing? How do they use the area? These questions must be answered to effectively develop a vision for the future of the Ninemile.

Another way to facilitate learning among stakeholders is to develop education campaigns. One example of how this may be effectively done is to prepare and distribute a "Code of the Ninemile." This document would act as a guide for those interested in purchasing land in the area by providing information about the unique rural landscape of the Ninemile and setting out expectations for the conduct of residents. Once developed, the "Code of the Ninemile" would be distributed among realtors, developers, and all newcomers. The creation of such a code would empower Ninemile residents as well as informing future landowners about the neighborhood in which they are choosing to live (See Appendix 10 - Sample Code of the West). Similar education campaigns can be designed around other issues, such as water rights or traffic concerns.

Stakeholders can also learn from other examples. Many other communities have faced or are facing similar situations to that of the Ninemile. Residents of the valley can learn from these experiences when attempting to address their own concerns. One example is the Blackfoot Challenge, a landowner-based group that coordinates management of Montana's Blackfoot River, and works to keep large landscapes intact and rural lifestyles vital.[6] They provide leadership for public agencies by focusing on where participants can agree, not on what divides them. Another example is the Clearwater Resource Council. This group "initiates and coordinates efforts that will enhance, conserve, and protect the natural ecosystems and rural lifestyle of the Clearwater River region for present and future generations."[7] Finally, the Swan Ecosystem Center invites people with diverse perspectives to learn about the watershed and become involved in public and private land management.[8] They are working to build a strong, vital, responsible community while simultaneously maintaining a valuable partnership with the U.S. Forest Service. By accessing strategies and action taken by these and other communities, or inquiring about the process they are using to facilitate discussion, Ninemile stakeholders can inform their own decisions and ensure more effective collaboration.

Another useful way to facilitate learning is to use "learning support tools" to develop alternative futures and scenarios, and to assess their impacts. Many different types of tools are available to assist communities – go to www.Placematters.co to see a very comprehensive menu of these tools and their purpose. The executive director of Placematters, along with contacts at the Orton Family Foundation and the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, have expressed some preliminary interest in working with the people in the Ninemile Valley to adapt one or more "learning support tool" to this small, rural area.

Option 4 -- Develop a Plan

Another option, again not mutually exclusive to the others, is to prepare some type of plan to manage growth and development in the Ninemile Valley. A

majority of the interviewees expressed interest in this option. Once again, there are several options here in terms of what type of plan might be most valuable, what planning tools would be appropriate, and how to link any ad hoc planning effort to a formal decision-making process.

Types of Plans

There are at least three options in terms of types of plans:

- *Land Use Plan* – A land-use plan focuses on the use and conservation of land in the affected area. It may focus on private land, and provide some direction on how private landowners should relate to public land managers.

- *Watershed Plans* -- Watershed plans allow communities to address issues related to water quantity and quality, as well as the administration of water rights (particularly in times of drought). Watershed plans can focus on ways to coordinate water usage and enforce water quality standards. They can implement policies dealing with septic system standards and sewer availability and planning.

- *Integrated Plans* --Integrated plans address the issues of both land use and watersheds. The typical components of an integrated or comprehensive plan include community profile, demographics, land use, water use, wildlife management, economic development, housing, public facilities and capital improvements, transportation, and historic preservation.

Implementation Tools

A number of tools are available to implement land use, watershed, and integrated plans. The following menu lists both regulatory and non-regulatory (or incentive-based) tools, and explains the purpose of the most widely used tools.

- *Regulatory Tools*
  - **Zoning Ordinances** -- Zoning regulations spell out allowable land uses and the smallest lot size from which a parcel can be subdivided and sold. Zoning can preserve the rural quality of an area in perpetuity or until regulations are revised due to local needs.[9]
  - **Subdivision Regulations** -- Subdivision regulations set standards for streets, drainage ways, sewage disposal, water systems, and other aspects of public welfare. They ensure that new developments provide a wholesome living environment for residents. These regulations can address issues such as lot size, public access, and the availability of public services to each lot created. They also help to conserve natural,

scenic, historic, and recreational values. These regulations can also eliminate the need for excessive public expenses by making the developer responsible for the installation of basic public facilities before the recording and sale of lots.

- **Stream and Boundary Setback Regulations --** Stream setbacks are instigated to protect riparian areas, water quality and species of value. Boundary setbacks from public lands protect the privacy of landowners and the quality of experience for users on public lands.[10]
- **Special Improvement Districts for Sewer --** A special improvement district for sewer levies fees on landowners to fund installation of a sewer system. Failing, faulty septic systems can then be removed, greatly reducing the risk of contamination to surface and groundwater. A possible downside is that an amenity like a sewer system can draw more people and development to the area.

☐ *Non-regulatory/Incentive-based Tools*

- **Conservation Easement***s* – A conservation easement is a voluntary legal agreement between a landowner and a Land Trust that limits certain uses (usually subdivision and development) of the land in order to protect specific conservation values. Each conservation easement is unique to the specific needs of the landowner, and of the parcel of land. With an easement in place, the landowner continues to own and manage the land and has the right to sell it or pass it on to heirs. Future owners also will be bound by the easement's terms, and the land trust is responsible for making sure the easement's terms are carried through into perpetuity.[11]
- **Other Tax-incentive Programs** – Local, state, and federal governments can authorize a number of conservation tax breaks. A detailed review of these tools is presented in *Sustaining Montana's Working Landscapes* (Policy Report # 2, Public Policy Research Institute, The University of Montana). It is available at www.umtpri.org.
- **Voluntary Programs** – The U.S. Department of Agriculture offers tools through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to provide financial and technical assistance to ranchers and farmers trying to manage water, erosion control, and threats to water, soil, and related natural resources. These programs include the Conservation of Private Grazing Land Program, Conservation Security Program, Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program, and many others.[12]

☐ *Other Tools*

- Development Review
- Citizen-initiated Development Review
- Fiscal Impact Analysis
- Environmental Impact Analysis
- Checklists for Sustainability

From Ad Hoc to Formal Plans

While residents and others may choose to develop an informal, ad hoc plan, they will want to seriously consider the implementation and enforcement of any plan that is developed. Assuming that participants would want the plan to have some teeth, they will need to link any effort to formal decision-making systems, starting with the Missoula County Board of Commissioners.

If participants eventually determine that they would like zoning, subdivisions, and other regulations, they will need to ask the County Commissioners to act accordingly. Therefore, it is important that the formal decision-makers be included in any community-based forum that may convene in the Ninemile corridor.

One way that a grass-roots, citizen-driven effort can be formalized is through *neighborhood planning*--a mechanism that is increasingly used to encourage the maintenance and enhancement of a particular neighborhood. Such plans are often driven by significant changes in land use, proposed new development, the need for public improvements, social and economic changes, and/or the need for revitalization. Decisions regarding when to prepare a plan are based upon need or the number of years since the last plan was prepared. An effective planning process allows citizens and planning experts to jointly discuss and develop guidelines to better coordinate resources and to define neighborhood revitalization and development goals. A good plan also spells out how the community and key stakeholders will implement the plan's actions and goals. Once a plan is officially adopted by the County Commissioners, it can serve as the guide for implementing public improvements, private investments, and neighborhood self-help programs.

Another way of linking an ad hoc planning effort to the formal decision-makers is to work closely with *Rural Initiatives*, an office of Missoula County that is responsible for planning and implementation measures designed to protect the cultural, historic, economic, and natural resources of the County while providing technical assistance outside the Missoula Valley. The office advises the County Commissioners on issues that are important to rural residents and helps those residents by providing information on legislation, regulations, and policies pertaining to Missoula County. Rural Initiatives lends assistance to communities in the avenues of land use planning, such as:

- Land use implementation.
- Rural outreach and issue investigation.
- Natural resource monitoring and protection.
- Creation of, and assistance to, formal representative bodies from rural areas (Community Councils/Clubs, Open Lands Working Group, service clubs, park boards/associations, etc.).

- Agricultural and timber land protection tools and funding mechanisms.
- Water course and water source protection through land use planning/implementation.
- Cultural resource protection and enhancement recognizing regional diversity.
- Interagency coordination with state, federal, and tribal agencies.

Option 5 – Build Physical Infrastructure

Building physical infrastructure might be undertaken under existing regulations along with cooperating landowners. Based on interests identified in interviews, the following potential actions may be undertaken.

Wildlife Underpass

To protect wildlife and drivers, a wildlife underpass could be installed on Interstate 90 at Cayuse Hill . To gain support and funding from the Montana Department of Transportation, this option would require the land on either side of the interstate to be protected in perpetuity, with a conservation easement or other device.

Wildlife Fencing along Interstate 90

Wildlife fencing can be used as an alternative to a wildlife underpass. Fencing can channel wildlife to locations along highway that are more suitable and safe to cross. Actual locations and fencing standards would need more analysis and are beyond the scope of this report.

Road Surfacing

The main road in the Ninemile could be paved or resurfaced to reduce dust during the summer months. Downsides to improving the road include possible increases in traffic and housing development, which could also increase vehicle/wildlife collisions on the road.

Community Forum

On December 6, 2007, 25 people with an interest and concern in the Ninemile Valley participated in a two-hour conversation at the Ninemile Community Center. After a short presentation by the students of the NRCR program on the findings and options that emerged from the interviews, the participants engaged in a robust conversation about the past, present, and future of the Ninemile.

The conversation revolved around five principal themes or topics:

- Facilitate communication among valley residents;
- Learn from the 1996-1997 planning effort;
- Build a sense of community identity;
- Identify an appropriate convener to continue the conversation; and
- Harness appropriate resources.

Facilitate Communication among Valley Residents

One of the dominant themes during the conversation was the need to improve and facilitate communication among valley residents. Many people at the meeting expressed frustration with the lack of a common, consistent vehicle to "get the word out" about community events, activities, and opportunities. Several participants said that they only learned about this meeting at the last minute, and most likely other residents are interested in the topic but unaware of this opportunity.

To improve communication, the participants identified several possibilities:

- Publish an article in the *Clark Fork Chronicle*, and use this media on an ongoing basis to facilitate communication and understanding about issues facing the Ninemile Valley. Establish an ongoing message board, events calendar, and/or a short features section on people and places in the Ninemile.
- Publish an article or editorial in the *Missoulian*, and likewise use it to facilitate communication and understanding among people who care about the Ninemile Valley.
- Establish a phone tree.
- Create an email distribution list.
- Use the "sandwich boards" posted on Remount Road and Ninemile Road to provide notice of public meetings.
- Focus some activities to inform, educate, mobilize, and engage younger people in the Ninemile Valley.

For starters, the participants should distribute this report and test the desirability of convening some type of community-based process to facilitate dialogue and shape the future of the valley.

Learn from the 1996-1997 Planning Effort

Another dominant theme expressed during the community forum was the planning effort in 1996-1997. The *Ninemile Valley Comprehensive Plan Amendment*, which is available on the PPRI web site at www.umtpri.org/projects/Ninemile, was a citizen-driven effort to guide growth, development, and conservation of the Ninemile Valley. The planning process did not produce a final plan, and according to some of the participants, created a division among many valley residents that were not consulted in the development of the plan (apparently, a draft of the plan was mailed to every resident in the valley). Many of the participants were surprised that this planning process was not addressed in this report.

Build a Sense of Community Identity

In addition to the bad feelings generated by the 1996-1997 planning process, many of the participants also said that additional community ill-will stems from unfriendly signs on personal property and the sale of private property. Moreover, according to some of the participants, nearly three-fourths of Ninemile residents don't know about the Community Center, and some newcomers to the Ninemile Valley are apparently moving to the region for "privacy," not community.

As a result, many participants in the community forum agreed that some community-healing and trust-building was needed if the community is to move forward to shape its future. Participants suggested several ideas:

- ☐ Sponsor community events to build trust, communication, relationships, and a sense of community. For example, host community events such as a potluck, winter festival, spring fling, and the upcoming series on wildlife. Provide kid-friendly activities and encourage families to attend;
- ☐ Start small and build on success; don't necessarily start by seeking to write a plan;
- ☐ Use this report to explore options on how to proceed;
- ☐ Include the Salish/Kootenai Tribes and county officials at the beginning of any community dialogue and planning;
- ☐ Involve youth in wildlife observation, monitoring, and education; and
- ☐ Encourage residents to decide how they want to be involved.

Identify an Appropriate Convener to Continue the Conversation

Another important theme that emerged during the community forum--and during informal conversations after the forum--is the need to identify an appropriate convener to continue this conversation. Some of the options that were mentioned include the county, the NRCR Program, and the Ninemile Community Center Association.

Many participants (as well as faculty associated with the NRCR Program) strongly urged the community to look within, to find people and/or an organization that is credible, legitimate, and has some capacity to play this type of leadership role. Some participants believe that the Ninemile Community Center Association might be an appropriate vehicle because it is community-based, every resident in the valley belongs to the association, and it has more credibility and legitimacy than any other possible convener.

Harness Appropriate Resources

Once the Ninemile Valley community has identified an appropriate convener, the next step is to harness appropriate resources and go to work. During the community forum, the participants mentioned that the following organizations and programs might be willing to assist the community in facilitating a dialogue and exploring the possibility of creating some type of plan or other set of activities:

- *Rural Initiatives*, a program of Missoula County, offered to share its experience with community-based planning efforts in other places throughout the county. The program provides a variety of technical assistance services and requires "the community" to petition the program for assistance. The county also completed a *Weed District Survey* of all residents in the valley, and it may contain some useful information.
- The *U.S. Forest Service* and *Trout Unlimited,* both active organizations in the Ninemile Valley, offered to share their expertise to citizens as they move forward.
- *The University of Montana's Natural Resources Conflict Resolution Program* offered to help convene and facilitate future community forums, and to provide appropriate research.

Since the community forum, the Public Policy Research Institute, which manages the NRCR Program, was approached by the Orton Foundation to submit a proposal to fund a community dialogue and planning process. The Institute plans to meet with the Board of Directors of the Ninemile Community Center Association and others in January 2008 to explore this opportunity. The Institute, via the NRCR Program, has engaged one

graduate student during the spring 2008 semester to help staff this effort. If you are interested in exploring this opportunity, please contact us as soon as possible.

Conclusions

This report--*Creating the Future of Ninemile Valley*--is a work in progress, not an end in itself. Rather, it is intended to inform and invigorate efforts to address growth, land use, and wildlife issues in the Ninemile. The faculty and students associated with the NRCR Program remain ready, willing, and able to work with citizens and officials to create the desired future of the Ninemile Valley.

The next step is for the community of the Ninemile Valley to determine what, if anything, it wants to do in the face of change. The first step to move forward is to identify leadership--who is ready, willing, and able to convene meetings, mobilize and engage people, empower them to craft a common vision and take action? It is also important to consider who should participate in any follow-up discussion. As a general rule, it is best to invite people and organizations that are interested in or affected by the issues in question, those that are needed to implement any likely outcomes, and those that might try to undermine the process or any outcomes if they are not part of the process.

We hope that this report serves as a catalyst that will lead to a sustainable community and landscape in the Ninemile Valley.

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