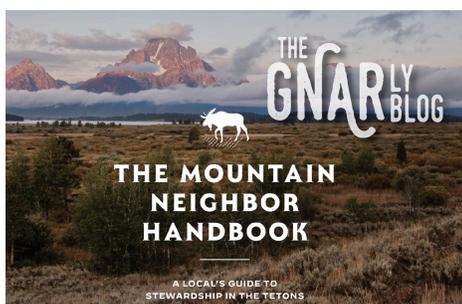


The Mountain Neighbor Handbook: A Local's Guide to Stewardship in the Tetons

Phoebe Coburn & the Teton Conservation District

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By: Phoebe Cobun & the [Teton Conservation District](#)

Almost every winter in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, a moose drowns in an artificial pond in someone's backyard when it breaks through a soft spot in the ice above an aerator. If the moose is lucky, [Wyoming Game & Fish Department](#) arrives in time to lasso it around the neck and winch it out. Throughout, those witnessing this spectacle are traumatized, as is the moose. Add a calf moose to this equation, and the hysteria, regret, and blame are compounded.

While county regulations exist that stipulate how aerators can be used in ponds, the new owner of a dream home in Jackson is not going to predict this scenario until it literally falls into their backyard.

Teton County is surrounded by some of the most remote and intact wilderness in the lower 48 states, but

conservation is at risk of being outpaced by development. Drowning moose are not the only challenge we face. Wildlife conflict, invasive species, stormwater runoff, busy trailheads, energy use, and more—all present similar, sometimes daunting challenges in our community.

And, like many rural communities, demands on natural resources intensified during the pandemic with an influx of new residents and increased visitation on public lands.

“Most people mean well and want to lighten their impact on the environment,” says Phoebe Coburn, Communications Specialist for Teton Conservation District, “but there’s a lack of accessible information and many just aren’t aware of regulations and common practices that protect wildlife and the ecosystem.”

The need for engaging and action-oriented information about natural resource conservation practices specific to the area—especially on private land—inspired the creation of [The Mountain Neighbor Handbook: A Local's Guide to Stewardship in Teton County](#). The 52-page booklet covers everything from wildlife and habitat to energy and waste. It helps readers navigate the realities of living in this wild place and invites them to become local environmental stewards.

A [recent article in Mountain Journal](#) highlights [The Mountain Neighbor Handbook](#) as one idea to help conserve the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem—author Todd Wilkinson writes, “There ought to be one of these in every rural valley.”

Teton Conservation District has received requests for the handbook almost daily since its release in October 2022. Nearly 4,000 print copies have been distributed and the digital version has been viewed more than 3,200 times. A new print run is already underway to keep up with demand.

For other communities interested in exploring a similar project, Teton Conservation District offers the following suggestions and lessons learned:

- **Leadership:** Teton Conservation District spearheaded the project and served as project administrator, but engaged Teton County, the Jackson Hole Land Trust, and the Town of Jackson through a formal agreement that identified them as ‘lead partners.’ Obtaining local government partnership through county commission and town council approval helped ensure that regulatory statements were accurate. The commitment by all the lead partners continues to be integral to product distribution.

- **Partner Engagement:** The project received widespread community support because of 40+ 'contributing partners' (see list at bottom of page) who authored written content. It may have been less time consuming to have a smaller number of authors write the content, but the diversity of voices and community-wide ownership of the project were key to the project's success.
- **Editorial Control:** The four lead partners retained editorial control over all content submitted by contributing partners. This meant that partners didn't necessarily get to review the final written content before publication, but this sacrifice for efficiency likely saved weeks or months of work. Partners understood and agreed to these terms through a simple one-page contributing partner agreement, acquiescing editorial control to the lead partners. Partners were given a predefined section to contribute, a word limit, and all content was managed within Google Docs.
- **Timeline:** Lead partners agreed on an overarching project plan and established agreements prior to the project start date in January 2022. Written content creation spanned from January through April 2022 and coincided with editing. Graphic design began in May 2022 and wrapped up in early October 2022. With so many partners involved, strict timelines and an organized framework for partner management were necessary. The relatively rapid pace helped maintain momentum and prevented the project from languishing.
- **Target Audience:** Engaging the Teton Board of Realtors and inviting the real estate community to be conduits for distribution has been key to reaching our target audience of new property owners in Teton County. The product also provides a service to real estate agents by easing the burden of introducing new residents to community practices. Seven hundred copies are being distributed to new residents through real estate agents. Roughly 2,800 hardcopies were also mailed to all those who purchased property in Teton County after 2018.
- **Print vs. Digital:** The decision to prioritize a print format was difficult, but we consciously chose to have print at the heart of the project to help it stand out amidst the proliferation of digital media. Mailing hardcopies and personal handoffs by real estate agents was also the most direct way to reach new residents. We chose a thicker paper stock (but still economical, with the highest percentage of recycled paper available) because we didn't want the product to feel disposable, but rather something we hope people will share with friends and neighbors and use as a tool to strike up meaningful conversations.

Content was carefully worded so that hardcopies will remain relevant for many years to come. But, the digital version has also served an important role, especially following printing delays at the time of release. In the long term, we have plans to build out the Mountain Neighbor website with more information and resources.

- **Graphic Design:** Much of the project budget was dedicated to hiring a talented graphic designer to ensure the content was attractive and user-friendly. Hiring a professional copy editor also helped polish the handbook.
- **Release Timing:** The release coincided with the lead up to the 2022 general election. Heightened community engagement during this time helped build interest in the project and provided local government entities and candidates with helpful talking points leading up to the election. Release timing should be an intentional decision that builds engagement opportunities.
- **Positive Attitude:** We chose to create a document that welcomes people into our community's shared vision for conservation, even though cynicism on this topic is pervasive. Given the overwhelming positive feedback from new and old residents, it's clear that this was the right choice.

For more information on *The Mountain Neighbor Handbook*, reach out to Teton Conservation District at info@tetonconservation.org or call us at 307-733-2110.

ABOUT THE TETON CONSERVATION DISTRICT: Teton Conservation District is a local government entity whose mission is to work with the community in the conservation of natural resources for the health and benefit of people and the environment.

Contributors to The Mountain Neighbor Handbook include: *Advocates for Multi-Use of Public Lands, Bantam Design, Bridger-Teton National Forest, Energy Conservation Works, Friends of Pathways, Friends of the Bridger-Teton, Friends of the Teton River, Grand Teton National Park, Greater Yellowstone Coalition, Jackson Hole Bird & Nature Club, Jackson Hole Clean Water Coalition, Jackson Hole Community Pathways, Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance, Jackson Hole Historical Society & Museum, Jackson Hole Land Trust, Jackson Hole Nordic, Jackson Hole Wildlife Foundation, Kevin Krasnow, PAWS of Jackson Hole, Protect Our Water Jackson Hole, Shacks on Racks, Slow Food in the Tetons, Snake River Fund, Teton Area Wildfire Protection Coalition, Teton Board of Realtors, Teton Climate Action Plan, Teton Conservation District, Teton County, Teton County Emergency Management, Teton*

County Solid Waste & Recycling, Teton County Weed & Pest District, Teton Plants, Teton Raptor Center, The Nature Conservancy in Wyoming, Town of Jackson, Treeline Strategies, Trout Unlimited, Wyoming Game & Fish Department, Wyoming Wilderness Association, and Yellowstone-Teton Clean Cities



Phoebe Coburn joined Teton Conservation District as Communications Specialist in 2018. She works to promote the district's programs, projects, and grant opportunities and loves sharing her curiosity for the natural world with others. Phoebe was raised in Jackson, Wyoming and Kathmandu, Nepal and holds degrees in Geography and International Studies from the University of Denver and a Master of Public Administration from the University of Colorado. Readers can reach out to info@tetonconservation.org with questions.