

Town, county pledge sustainability support

By John Spina | Posted: Wednesday, April 12, 2017 4:30 am

The town and county signed a resolution April 3 pledging their support for sustainability initiatives, confirming what residents already know: Sustainability is a fundamental feature of the Jackson Hole community.

For those on the outside looking in, it's an important hallmark.

"By unanimously approving this resolution the town and county [are] telling the world that they support being a world-leading sustainable destination and support initiatives that contribute towards that vision," said Tim O'Donoghue, executive director of the Riverwind Foundation and author of the resolution.

"That's attractive to people who value a destination for sustainability and especially for group travel, which is the bread and butter for Jackson's shoulder seasons," he said.

The resolution, O'Donoghue said, should also help local nongovernment organizations focused on sustainability receive national grants.

As for residents, he hopes the signing of the resolution will spark a discussion about sustainability goals and the appropriate means by which to achieve them.

"It sets the stage for the community to have the conversation about what it means to be a world-leading sustainability destination," O'Donoghue said. "What kind of standards should we be striving for? What issues do we have that are making us less sustainable? What is sustainability?"

"The resolution is really one of those moments in time that can be a catalyst for us to say, 'What can we do to implement this vision?' It's important to give guidance. We can't let our future determined by someone else," he said.

Growth management

Ideally the conversation will lead to an official growth management document that would identify, measure and track how sustainable Jackson Hole is, what actions to take to prevent and mitigate impacts of visitors and residents, and determine which impacts are out of control and what the community has to adapt to.

As Jackson's popularity continues to grow, setting visitation records in recent years, a big part of the discussion is expected to revolve around how Jackson Hole promotes itself.

"I'd like to take it a step further and endorse the idea that the Travel and Tourism Board get behind this," Councilman Jim Stanford said. "Part of the mission statement of the Travel and Tourism Board is promotion that's focused on stewardship and sustainability, and this is a good message the community can embrace."

Most sustainability initiatives, O'Donoghue said, overlook the importance of engagement. By promoting Jackson Hole as a sustainable destination, visitors from other cities, states and countries who are not as familiar with recycling or alternative fuels can become part of the solution.

“We know they’re coming in record numbers,” O’Donoghue said. “At least we can educate them and let them know what we expect as visitors and how to interact with the natural environment and wildlife.”

Talks as early as May

In conjunction with the Jackson Hole Center for Global Affairs, the Riverwind Foundation has begun the process of planning the community-wide discussion. Most recently they met with officials from Grand Teton National Park to talk about the possibility of hosting the event there and having officials from the park act as an “honest broker.”

The event, O’Donoghue said, could happen as soon as May.

“We’re at a very opportunistic time, especially with the eclipse coming this year,” he said. “It’s the confluence of a lot of different factors that we can now take advantage of.”

The signing of the resolution coincides with Jackson Hole being named a finalist for National Geographic’s World Legacy Award in the category of destination leadership, and the United Nations naming 2017 as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development.