

COMMENTS ON: BONNER COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN: GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND POLICIES:
SUGGESTED UPDATES- JULY 19,2022

Emailed to the Bonner County Planning Commission August, 9 2022

My name is Donald Morris and am a Bonner County resident. I own a 400 acre Christmas Tree and Landscape Tree Farm in Elmira with my father and an additional 1,000 acres of timber and hay ground with my family. The 1,400 + acres of property is located at 1976 Elmira Road, with approximately 80 acres located off Hwy 95 about a mile North of Samuels Road. The property is titled in a variety of Family Businesses and Trusts, but all principals are members of my family including my father, and siblings.

I attended the August 2, 2022 Planning Commission Workshop. I apologize for not being properly prepared by reading the full "Suggested Updates" and understanding the true purpose of the meeting. Upon further informing myself, I would have to disagree with several comments made that evening. Many commentators suggested that the County was "putting the cart before the Horse". After understanding the purpose of the meeting, I would say it is more like "fixing the wheel on the cart, so the Horse can keep pulling it".

In general, I agree with most of the updates and modifications to the Goals, Objectives and Policies. They mostly streamline the wording. I do believe clear Goals, Objectives and Policies need to be completed prior to evaluating the greater Comprehensive Plan.

I will be focusing my comments on the AGRICULTURE section, which appears to be a completely new section.

Most of our family land was purchased in 1978. My father started the Christmas Tree and Landscape Tree operation plantings in 1980, now known as Sandpoint Ranch Tree Farm, Inc. Prior to that, all of the land was in Hay or Timber. We continue to hay the 80 acres off Hwy 95, have rotationally harvested timber on approximately 900 acres, and farmed the tree nursery on the 400 acres, the balance of the land is basically unusable, low land or drainage area.

I have made my living on this farming operation since 1987 part- time, and since 1995 full time. The County can't "Regulate" Agriculture into existence, the County must "Encourage" the continuation of agriculture through its many means. I too love the rural nature of Bonner County, but that is maintained at the direct expense of the large land owners. In other words, The owners pay for the support and maintenance of their land. I do not believe that my neighbors have any right to my property outside of my compliance with the Federal, State and County Regulations. I do not believe large parcels should be unduly restricted to the benefit of the non-owners. Large land owners, who are operating their land as farms or for timber need to have protection and support from the County, not a series of restrictions.

These types of operations are very dependent on family participation and other manual labor sources. When family no longer wants to participate in the Farming Operation, as is currently the case with our operation, it is the challenge of the primary operator to locate alternative labor. Support of "Work Force" housing for full time workers would be very helpful for many industries in our County. Currently,

our County, and specifically Sandpoint, has a large volume of Section 8 subsidized housing. I believe some of the highest per capita that I have seen anywhere. This is **not** "Work Force" housing. I have had employees attempt to gain access to this housing whom where told "They made to much money" when they were making less than \$15.00 per hour. I know a few people who do live in this type of housing and they need to be careful as to the number of hours they can work, so they don't lose their housing. I understand that these are Federal Housing Programs, but can they County do anything to open up the earning capacity of the residents in these facilities?

Also, on Housing, the County needs to maintain the ability of land owners to build work force housing on their property. According to the Planning Director, Jacob Gabell, the zoning currently allows this on AG/Forestry and Rural Residential Zoning. Please keep this in place.

The County should include, in the AGRICULTURE section of the Goals, Objectives, and Policies, **a clear statement of support for the Idaho State Right to Farm Act**. These operations, should not have to defend themselves against outside pressures who don't like how the operation is being run. I have had many people contact me, who are looking at purchasing small adjoining properties and ask if we are an "Organic" operation. I inform them that we use pesticides and herbicides in compliance with federal regulation. I don't want to find that I am being sued because my neighbor has an organic vegetable garden and claims I am contaminating their garden.

I believe the County needs to **strike the (=/> 20 Acres)** reference from the Policies Section of AGRICULTURE. I do not see how this "Encourages" agricultural operations. It actually places restrictions on some current and potential operations. The current zoning and land use provide for 10 acre zoning in the Ag/Forestry section. I further believe that the AGRICULTURE section should also support the Rural Residential 10 acre zoning as part of the AGRICULTURE section. As stated before, the County needs to "Encourage" agricultural operations. Parcels with 10 acres can still provide for a home site and enough land to qualify for the Ag exemption or the Timber exemption. Our property in Elmira has either Rural Residential 10 or Ag/Forest 10 Zoning and Land Use designations on it. I fought for almost 5 years, from the finalization of the current Comp Plan in 2005 to our approval of a Comp Plan Amendment, in 2010, in order to secure these designations. I intend to fight to maintain that designation in the future.

As I mentioned above, my family has owned this property for over 45 years, the only transfers have been between family or family controlled business. I have made my living on this land for over 35 years. It is our goal as a family to maintain this property as a Family Legacy Property. It is my goal as a Farm Operator to maintain this farm in perpetuity. I have hired managers from the community to oversee the farm daily operations of Sandpoint Ranch Tree Farm, Inc. It has payroll expense in excess of \$350,000.00 per year and contributes to the County Economics through employee expenditures and product sales where applicable, such as supplying trees to local Landscapers and Yokes Grocery store with Christmas Trees. My next task is to find a way to replace myself before I'm 6' in the ground (hopefully, I have a few years to do that). However, should these plans fail, we as a family need alternatives. I don't know what my grand kids or great grand kids will want to do. The Rural Residential 10 zoning and land use provide the opportunity to do density transfer or offers density bonus within the structure of a PUD. If we had to seek that out, such a plan with a PUD would allow us to provide better land use design with more reserved open space for public access as well as farming such as Hay production and efficient building areas. It would also allow the County more control over the plan, as

opposed to a checker board 10ac or 20ac subdivision. This also give us the flexibility of providing a Family Split of 10ac for our immediate family without taking 20 acres out of production of the farm. I believe these options, of a PUD, should exist in the Ag/Forest designation too.

Thank you for your time and thank you for your efforts on these matters of Bonner County.

Donald Morris