

39% of the total residential growth in Bozeman between 1990 and 2000 was accommodated in either large or medium-sized lot suburban single-family developments. Another 39% was single-family attached housing, and 20% was in multifamily units. The remaining 2% was accounted for by mobile homes (Epple, 2001). The majority of the truly affordable housing in the area has been concentrated in the nearby town of Belgrade, which has metamorphosed rapidly from a modest but cohesive Western town into a tawdry amorphous dormitory community.

Nearly all of the commercial growth in Bozeman during the past decade has been accommodated in 'strip' centres, 'big box' retail or the rather euphemistically named 'neighbourhood commercial centres' (Epple, 2001). These 'neighbourhood centres' are dispersed throughout suburban areas of the city, and typically include a gas station/convenience store supplemented by adjacent service retail or office space. Most are accessed almost exclusively by automobile, and virtually all serve as detached sections of retail strip development, rather than as authentic pedestrian-oriented centres for their respective neighbourhoods.

Density and 'Living the Myth'

The overall density of Bozeman remains quite low, at a bit less than 2400 people per square mile (927 per km²), or 3.6 people per acre. The current average household size within the city is 2.3 people, so the overall housing density is 1.6 units per gross acre (3.9 per hectare). The gross average density of the 4405 acres currently zoned 'Residential' within the city limits is about 3 units per acre (7.4 per hectare) (Epple, 2001). So, it would appear that there is plenty of rooms to roam on the range, with 'land, lots of land, and the starry skies above'. The expansive Western lifestyle of hiking, skiing, fly fishing, log cabins and cowboy clothes should still be available to traffic-worn commuter slaves fleeing the cities of the East, the Midwest and even the West Coast to pursue the Rousseauian myth in Montana, which complete with cell phones, gas-guzzling sports utility vehicles (SUVs) and a fist full of Frequent Flyer tickets, of course. So what could possibly be wrong with this picture?

Ecosystem

The Gallatin Valley, like most Western landscapes, is very powerful yet very fragile. Surrounded and dominated by rugged

mountain ranges, the fertile valley is well watered by a network of snow-fed rivers and streams, augmented by a system of engineered irrigation ditches. A short growing season combines with a regular drought cycle to limit vegetation in the valley to native grasses interspersed with occasional trees, which are generally concentrated around the water courses. The lower mountain slopes, where the snowfall is greatest and stays the longest, are covered with sporadically logged coniferous forests, while the valley grassland remains substantially open. The ecosystem is a delicate one, relentlessly subjected to climatic extremes, drought, and wildfire, and now, to generally uncontrolled development.

Political and environmental constraints

The persistent (although myth-based) pioneer mindset which champions personal independence and the ultimate right of total control by the landowner resists any form of governmental restriction, in spite of the West's long history of development by government fiat. The concept of transferring development rights from one site to another is viewed with great alarm, even though it is simply a gentle extension of the long-standing Western concept of separating specific usage rights (such as mineral rights, water rights, access easements) from ownership of the land itself. It is not politic to even mention the American aboriginal concept, which viewed 'land' as a communal resource.

Virtually every Western town or city owes its original master plan to railroad architects and engineers from 'back East', but the reintroduction of responsible physical planning or urban design is currently viewed as a serious abrogation of a God-given right to 'do as I please on my own land', smacking of socialism or even outright communism. Increasingly, however, conflict over the use of limited natural resources in the form of battles over water rights, hunting rights and mineral rights is bringing these complex issues to the fore. Even the most rapacious land developers are beginning to concede that the visual landscape is being despoiled at an unsustainable rate by uncontrolled development, devaluing all other adjacent land economically in the process. Any construction in the valley is immediately visible, even from afar, due to the scarcity of mature trees. Restoration of a disturbed landscape takes a very long time in Montana; the earth heals slowly, and trees mature