

**Rural Initiatives Response to Ms. Kathleen Sims' Question of June 9, 2010**

*Question from Ms. Sims: "The first is a question for Rural Initiatives and the question is this: it appears that Rural Initiatives took agency comments to direct Rural Initiatives to squeeze the boundaries of various RP districts from that proposed by Dr. Hicks, and on what basis did they do that?"*

**Rural Initiatives Response:**

Rural Initiatives reviewed the data used to form the draft Seeley Lake Regional Plan (Plan) as forwarded to the Commissioners by the Planning Board (labeled the "October 2009 Planning Board Draft"). As requested by the County Commissioners, Rural Initiatives then solicited additional comment from the Lolo National Forest (LNF), Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) and the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) on the April, 2010 proposal presented by Dr. Hicks of Plum Creek as it related to the October document. Staff utilized the comments contained in the record, the most recent information presented by various agencies, Plum Creek, and the public, and drafted the "May 2010 Draft for Review" memorandum and accompanying land use designations map.

Based on this information, the boundaries of Resource Protection (RP) lands were altered from the October 2009 Draft for the May 2010 discussion, as described in the May 20, 2010 memorandum. In some instances, the changes mimic the lines drawn by Plum Creek on the map submitted by Dr. Hicks in April 2010. For instance, the RP1 and RP2 lands were combined into RP1 designations as proposed by Plum Creek. This designation contains the highest value resource lands. The staff's May 2010 boundaries along the east side of the "Blanchard Block" also follow Plum Creek's suggested April 2010 boundaries. However, densities and boundaries in the May 2010 discussion map also differ from those proposed by Plum Creek in some areas, including the area around Placid Lake and along Game Ridge, where information indicates that sensitive lands need greater, rather than less protection from the impacts typically associated with rural development in Montana.

One method of reducing developments' impacts on fisheries, wildlife, water quality and human health and safety is to reduce density. Methods such as clustering, transferring development credits and other measures can also be used to reduce or mitigate impacts of development.

As a Missoula County department, Rural Initiatives (RI) is neither directed by nor subject to direction from state or federal agencies such as the FWS, LNF or FWP. However, we value the expertise of these agencies, especially as it relates to resource management, land use planning and the character of rural areas in Missoula County.