Turning On the Off-Season

Technical Appendix C

Community Workshops Report

YELLOWSTONE BUSINESS PARTNERSHIP

April 2007

November 1, 2006

"Turning On the Off-Season"
Community Workshops Report

During the week of October 23, 2006, the project team conducted workshops in six communities around the Yellowstone-Teton region. Each workshop began with a presentation by Dr. Larry Swanson of "big picture" data about growth and change in the nation, West, and the region.

In summary, the major points of this presentation included:

1) Rapid population growth in many parts of the Yellowstone-Teton region is part of a larger pattern of migration to the Rocky Mountain West, one of the nation's fastest-growing regions. Rapid population growth in the West, and in the Yellowstone-Teton region, has been accompanied by growth in personal income and employment.

2) Areas that, like the Yellowstone-Teton region, have access to high quality public lands, are attracting more newcomers and growing more rapidly than similar areas without these public lands assets. This pattern is true whether looking at population, personal income, or employment.

3) In most parts of the region, the economy is tough for young adults and families. Population growth in the region over the last 15 years has been concentrated in the 40-60 year age bracket (largely representing the baby boom) and teenagers (their children). Much of the region has experienced a decline or very slow growth in the age group between 25 and 39, while older adults with more flexibility and resources to choose where they live moved in. This demographic shift poses challenges for the region's workforce, which are likely to intensify as the population continues to age.

4) While population and economic growth are not distributed evenly throughout the Yellowstone-Teton region, nearly every county in the region is expected to see continued growth for the next 10 years. Over time, growth rates in the three states are expected to moderate; however, the highly attractive areas surrounding the region's core of parks and national forest land will probably continue to grow relatively quickly.

5) Increasing population has translated directly into an increase in housing development throughout most of the region. Some areas are experiencing high concentrations of economic activity in construction, which grew from a $455 million industry across the 25 county region in 1988 to over $1.1 billion in 2004. Relying on construction as an economic centerpiece is clearly not sustainable. However, this activity provides resources for local communities to use in directing their future economic path.

6) Growth in personal income across the region indicates an expansion of the region's wealth—representing opportunities for economic In the 15 years since 1990, personal income has grown by 66 percent, mostly due to increased labor income. (During the same time, population grew by 25 percent.) In addition, nearly every county in the region has seen significant real growth in per capita income since 2000.

For purposes of understanding how the region's economy operates at a finer scale, Dr. Swanson has preliminarily divided the 25-county region into six subregional economies. For the most part, these subregions focus on a regional trade center, as shown in the map that is attached to this report. While there are many ways in which to divide the region, these subregional units seemed to make sense to workshop participants.
Dr. Swanson's analysis to date helps to describe the context in which meaningful progress on seasonality can be made. (For additional detail, see Dr. Swanson's Powerpoint presentation, available on the Yellowstone Business Partnership website.) The presentation was followed by discussion of participants' observations and concerns about economic seasonality and off-season resources that are currently underutilized.

Workshop location	Attendees
Livingston, MT	17— Communities represented: Livingston, Bozeman, Billings. Mix of local elected officials, state and local economic development staff, motel operators, Chamber staff, other business people.
West Yellowstone, MT	26 — Communities represented: West Yellowstone, Island Park, Ashton, Virginia City. Mix of local business operators, federal agency staff, local government officials, museum/wildlife center staff.
Rexburg, ID	11 — Communities represented: Rexburg, Idaho Falls, Island Park, St. Anthony, Blackfoot. Predominantly economic development professionals from county, state, and federal agencies, plus a state parks staffer, local business consultant, motel employee, and a local government official/Chamber director.
Pocatello, ID	8 — Communities represented: Blackfoot, Pocatello, Downey, Montpelier, Malad. Mix of regional, county, and tribal economic development staff, local business people, and museum staff.
Jackson, WY	5 — Communities represented: Jackson, Driggs. Chamber director, local business operators, director

	of a tourist reservations service, and National Park Service staff.
Cody, WY	13 — Communities represented: Cody, Powell, Wapiti, Red Lodge. Mix of local business operators, museum staff, Chamber director, community education staff (Northwest College), nonprofit staff.

In addition to participant ideas and observations expressed during the workshops, we have thus far collected written feedback from several participants. Many participants expressed interest in regular follow-up and continuing the conversation, which we will accomplish partially through e-mail communication.

Major Themes from the Workshops

In their discussions, workshop participants addressed two questions central to this project:

1) What are the major challenges associated with seasonality?
2) What are the underutilized resources and opportunities for expanding off-season economic activity?

<u>Challenges associated with seasonality</u>

Workforce issues. These center on availability of workers, training and retention, housing availability and affordability, and transportation. Many of these issues apply to seasonal as well as year-round workers. Under-employment and lack of benefits are also problems.

Boundaries and jurisdictions. The region's economic activity crosses boundaries, including state and county lines and tourism marketing areas. These boundaries create practical challenges (such as difficulties in creating cross-boundary marketing campaigns) and perceptual barriers.

Lack of communication and coordination. This was identified as a problem both *within* communities, and *among* even neighboring communities. One tangible result is that businesses and communities may know little about their neighbors, and do not collaborate in building off-season activity. Some noted a lack of alignment among local government officials, the business community, and economic development programs.

Lack of connected, packaged information and opportunities for travelers. Marketing efforts within the region often operate competitively, or at least in isolation. There are few efforts to present travelers with itineraries, information, or trip packages that link different parts of the region.

Seasonal management of recreation resources. Historically, seasonal management of national parks and other public lands may have made sense. But that may no longer be the case. Chronic and continued funding shortfalls are a related concern.

Shortcomings in our understanding of shoulder-season visitors and regional residents as a potential off-season market.

Pressures from a rapidly growing regional population. These include growing recreational pressure on public lands and waterways, as well as challenges such as retaining basic service providers such as plumbers and electricians in smaller communities.

Resources and opportunities

Networking and collaboration among communities in the region. Opportunities for working together better include packaging short vacation ideas that incorporate a number of communities, providing better information to travel-related businesses about where to send people as they're traveling down the road, and regional signage. Off-season exchanges of travel packages could help build collaboration (e.g., business leaders in Livingston, Red Lodge, and Powell/Cody might exchange free or discounted lodging and other services during the off-season as a way of forging new relationships).

Building and promoting local events. From wildlife watching festivals to heritage celebrations, off-season events are seen as one way to bring out local residents and visitors from around the region and beyond.

Innovative approaches to structuring seasonal jobs. Sharing seasonal employees is a potential way to generate year-round employment (e.g. between a landscaper and a ski area). In many parts of the region, this may require building complementary economic activity that fits into the off-season (e.g. cottage industries that produce goods to sell locally to travelers). Apprenticeships and other types of working/learning arrangements may provide other options.

Focus on housing. Some participants identified untapped resources, such as vacant space above downtown retail spaces, that might be used to create more worker housing. This is one area in which the business and economic development communities need support from local government—to encourage, plan for, and perhaps fund housing solutions.

Expanding and dispersing educational opportunities. From workforce training to slow-season education opportunities for visitors and residents, smaller communities need easier access to education.

Build on non-seasonal aspects of local economies. Discussions during the workshops reflected two basic approaches to damping seasonal economic fluctuations. One is to build off-season activity. The second is to build year-round activity so that the seasonal parts of the economy have less impact overall.

Tap the growing number of regional residents. Expanding population and financial resources represent an underutilized source of support for off-season and year-round economic activity. Market surveys and other research may help businesses and communities understand better how to tap this market.

Take better advantage of the region's wildlife. Wildlife viewing is a growing recreational activity. Fall and spring are key times for viewing migrating wildlife around the Yellowstone-Teton region.

Better utilize the full range of recreational facilities and opportunities. Facilities development, commercial use permitting, and marketing can all catch up with—and anticipate—the evolution of recreation, including growing demand for pursuits such as ice climbing, mountain biking, and kayaking. Off-season resources such as ski trails can be better marketed and connected with local lodging and other businesses. Connect communities with each other, public lands, and waterways with bike or ski trails.

Working Outline of Phase 1 Research

The "Turning on the Off-Season" project is structured in two phases. The first phase relies primarily on existing data sources to characterize the region's economies and inventory off-season assets.

Below is a working outline of this phase of research, which identifies topic areas and likely indicators for each.

1) <u>Characterize sub-regional relationships</u>
- Traffic flows
- Commuter relationships
- Hospital admissions by zip code
- Newspaper distribution by zip code

2) <u>Characterize sub-regional and county economies</u>
- Population and demographic trends
- Personal income
- Economic structure
- Industry concentrations
- Travel/tourism impacts
- Economic well-being (poverty, income distribution, housing costs, health insurance coverage, job growth compared to population growth)
- Educational attainment
- Availability of fiber optics, ISDN, high-speed Internet service
- Existing cross-boundary governance or collaborative efforts and proposals

3) Characterize seasonality

a) Transportation

- Seasonal traffic flows over time
- Airport emplanements, regional/seasonal air service, subsidies
- Shuttle services
- Seasonal road closures

b) Tourism

- National park opening and closing dates correlated with bed tax receipts, museum attendance, and other indicators of travel activity
- Gauge economic dependence on travel-related activity
- Bed tax revenues, hotel occupancy
- Recreation user days by season

c) Seasonality in other parts of the economy

- Seasonal homes
- Hospitals/medical services
- Employment earnings
- Unemployment
- Cultural and educational organizations (from visitor surveys)

4) Workforce training

- Map providers and curriculum
- Student counts by zip code
- Explore options/need for dispersing opportunities and facilities

5) Health, education, and cultural services

- Relative development of health care sector (e.g., population per hospital bed, health care sector labor income as share of total income)
- Health services available to un- and under-insured
- Educational facilities, both formal and nonformal (colleges and universities, museums, performing arts centers and programs)

6) Wildlife habitat and viewing opportunities

- Map critical wildlife habitat, especially migration corridors and winter range
- Gaps/progress in habitat protection, management
- Projected population/housing growth
- Agricultural land ownership and fragmentation
- Refuge seasons/visitation
- Economic importance of wildlife viewing
- Natural history education/wildlife viewing businesses and nonprofits

7) Recreation

- Recreation user days on public lands
- Place of residence of public lands recreationists
- Areas of too much recreation pressure

•Areas where more recreation could be accommodated
•Recreation facilities and businesses

8) Regional residents as a potential market
•Demographic trends
•Market surveys from within the region (?)
•Trends from arts and cultural organizations that conduct visitor surveys

The Phase 1 report is scheduled to be released in Spring 2007. A fall 2007 conference is planned at the Buffalo Bill Historical Center in Cody, Wyoming, to provide a forum for region-wide discussion of the findings.

The project team requests assistance in identifying existing data sources, reports, on-going studies, and knowledgeable individuals or organizations that may be helpful as we characterize the region's economies and inventory off-season assets. Your help in identifying these sources is invaluable to our success.

Please forward information leads to:

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Directions for Phase 2 Research

One task of the project's first phase is to shape its second phase, which is intended to go beyond existing data sources to more fully address issues related with seasonality in the region's economy. Preliminary research and discussions held during community workshops suggest five potential areas of focus for Phase 2. Should Phase 2 be funded, another series of community workshops will be scheduled in 2007.

1) Housing needs and resources.
The centerpiece of this may be an inventory to provide specific data and ideas. How are the region's employers and employees dealing with challenges of seasonal and affordable housing? Where are the underutilized resources and opportunities?

2) Workforce development and education.
Building on economic analyses generated in Phase 1, we may want to fill in some more specific information about employers' needs, focused directions for economic development in different parts of the region, and the impact of changing demographics. This component would help build the case and chart directions for more dispersed educational opportunities around the region.

3) Regional residents as a resource.
Conduct focus groups or market surveys to more clearly understand area residents as a basis for off-season economic activity.

4) Peer areas and model strategies.
   Conduct a peer review that compares selected areas in the Greater Yellowstone region with similar areas outside the region. This analysis will help reveal how sub-regions or counties within Greater Yellowstone are performing relative to similar areas throughout the West. Identify models or case studies of expanding off-season tourism and business activity, especially at a regional scale.

5) Forums for collaboration and information-sharing.
   The success of this project lies, ultimately, in our ability to make this information available to business and community leaders from around the region—and to use it to promote more communication, collaboration, and strategic thinking both within and among communities.