# Natural Resources Analysis

Proposed Torre Subdivision Parcel: RP05N45E360250 Teton County, ID



July 1, 2024

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#### INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this document is to provide a Natural Resources Analysis (NRA) for Parcel RP05N45E360250 on Cemetery Rd (the Property) to document existing conditions and assess potential impacts of a proposed residential subdivision to the area's protected natural resources under Teton County Idaho Zoning Ordinance, Title 9 Division 9-3-2 (C-2-B), Natural Resource Analysis (NRA) Standards (Teton County, 2013b). The proposed subdivision of the 4.98-acre Property is located east of the Town of Driggs and within the Driggs Area of Impact (AOI). Under current Driggs AOI zoning, updated June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2023, the Property is zoned ADR-1.0, 1.0 acre Average Density Residential. Subdivision applications in the Driggs AOI are subject to the Driggs AOI Zoning Ordinance and the Teton County Subdivision Ordinance and are administered by Teton County. An application for the subdivision was originally submitted for the Property in Spring, 2022; therefore, the application is being submitted as an NRA under the previous Teton County Subdivision Ordinance and NRA Standards effective through August 2, 2022. The Property is located within the *Songbird/Raptor Breeding and Wintering* Wildlife Habitat Overlay as defined in Titles 8 and 9 (Teton County, 2013a & b).

Alder Environmental (Alder) conducted site visits on August 4, 2020 and June 18, 2024 to complete an existing conditions inventory and wildlife habitat assessment during different times of year and over a multi-year timeline. This Natural Resources Analysis identifies the proposed Torre subdivision and demonstrates compliance with Teton County Idaho Subdivision Regulations outlined in Division 9-3-2 (C-2-B), *Natural Resource Analysis Standards* (Teton County, 2013b).

## **GENERAL LOCATION**

The Property is located on Cemetery Road 1.3 miles east of the Driggs City Center and State Highway 33. Figure 1 depicts the Property on USGS quadrangle 7.5-minute topographic map. The Property is surrounded by historic agricultural fields where density of residential development has slowly been increasing. The Property is in the Driggs Area of Interest due to its proximity to the city. Though zoning allows for an average lot size of 1 ac, most of the surrounding properties are still relatively large. A public cemetery, county landfill, and private gravel extraction facilities are in the immediate vicinity.

The Property is situated about 0.1 miles southeast of Teton Creek (Figure 1), which provides an important riparian corridor for wildlife in the area. The proposed subdivision is on generally flat land with one small slope running southeast to northwest in the southeast portion of the Property. The 4.98-acre Property can generally be described as historic agricultural meadow that is no longer active. The agricultural meadow is transitioning to mesic grassland and shrubland with a small patch of sagebrush steppe and a couple of small, isolated cottonwood tree stands. There are no hydrologic features on the property. The historic irrigation ditches visible in the eastern and northern portions of the Property are no longer used and have converted to uplands (Figure 2).

## **OVERLAY AREAS**

#### WILDLIFE HABITAT OVERLAY

The northwestern 2/3 of the Property is mapped within the Teton County Wildlife Habitat Overlay *Songbird/Raptor Breeding and Wintering* Wildlife *Big Game Migration Corridors and Seasonal Range* and the entire Property falls within *Songbird/Raptor Breeding and Wintering* Wildlife Habitat Overlay (Figure 3). These designations are due to the Property's proximity to Teton Creek and the historical riparian corridor. Teton County requires that development on properties that lie within the Wildlife Habitat Overlay avoids or minimizes disturbance to wildlife habitat (Teton County, 2013a).

## **EXISTING CONDITIONS INVENTORY**

Existing natural resource conditions on the Property were identified through aerial imagery review (2019 and 2023 Teton County) and during two site visits conducted on August 4, 2020 and June 18, 2024. Alder categorized plant communities based on Teton County's vegetation classification system (Merigliano, 2009). This classification system does not include all of the identified vegetation types, so Alder added additional ones (i.e. cottonwood forest and mesic grassland).

Vegetative cover types found on the Property include mesic grassland, cottonwood forest (mature and immature), sagebrush steppe, and disturbed areas (roads). The vegetative cover types observed during field observations (June 18, 2024) are summarized below in the narrative, Table 1 and Figure 2.

The vast majority (4.26 ac) of the 4.98-acre Property consists of historic agricultural meadow that has converted to mesic grassland since ditch maintenance and irrigation of the Property halted and the site has become drier. The mesic grassland is dominated by smooth brome (*Bromus inermis*), oregon grape (*Mahonia aquifolium*), and crested wheatgrass (*Agropyron cristatum*). Other species prevalent in the agricultural meadows are yellow salsify (*Tragopogon dubius*), musk thistle (*Carduus nutans*), and common goldenrod (*Solidago canadensis*). As the grassland meadow has become drier with time, mesic shrub species like sagebrush have also established due to lack of irrigation or cultivation. Sparse sagebrush shrubs are now scattered in throughout the mesic grassland area. Mesic grassland communities can provide summer grazing forage for ungulate species (elk and mule deer) as well as foraging areas for raptors.

Disturbed areas comprise 9% of the Property and consist of Cemetery Road and a gravel access driveway.

VEGETATIVE COVER TYPES	DOMINANT SPECIES	ACRES (AREA)	% OF TOTAL AREA
Immature Cottonwood	Populus angustifolia	0.01	<1%
Mature & Immature Cottonwood	Populus angustifolia	0.07	1%
Sagebrush Steppe	Artemisia tridentata & Chrysothamnus viscidiflorus	0.21	4%
Mesic Grassland	Bromus inermis, Mahonia aquifolium, Carduus nutans	4.26	86%
Disturbed (road, gravel driveway)	NA	0.43	9%
Grand Total		4.98	100%

#### Table 1. Vegetative Cover Types

The southeast portion of the Property has a small west to northwest facing slope that is comprised of 0.21 acres of sagebrush steppe. The dominant species are big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*), and yellow rabbitbrush (*Chrysothamnus viscidiflorus*) with a couple of chokecherry (*Prunus virginiana*) shrubs at the toe of the slope. Sagebrush steppe cover types may be used by wildlife species like ungulates and songbirds for forage and cover.

A 0.07-acre narrowleaf cottonwood (*Populus angustifolia*) stand comprised of both mature and immature trees is located on the western edge of the Property. Cottonwood stands can provide suitable nesting and roosting habitat for raptors and songbirds as well as important cover for elk, mule deer, and other wildlife traveling through the agricultural meadows in the vicinity. A second small cottonwood stand with two immature trees is located on the eastern edge of the Property. These areas may be used by ungulates, raptors, or songbirds for nesting, foraging, or cover. However, the small size of these areas limits their value as critical habitat.

Other existing conditions as required by Title 9, Division 9-3-2 (C-2-b-i)) Existing Conditions Inventory:

- Floodplains do not exist on the Property, based on current FEMA Special Flood Hazard Area (SFHA). The current effective floodplain for Teton Creek is approximately 400 ft north of the Property.
- The Property is in an area of "low" geological or seismic hazard. The entire Property is located within Class 1 Low Liquefaction Susceptibility based on potential for saturation and presence of cohesionless sediments (Phillips, 2011).
- Based on the 2015 Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) Map for Teton County, Idaho from the 2016 Teton County Idaho Wildfire Protection Plan, the entire Property is located within the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI). Designations of "high" or "extreme" wildfire danger were not found in the 2016 Plan.
- Based on the site visit and inventory, there are no ridges or rock outcroppings present on the Property.

## WILDLIFE HABITAT ASSESSMENT

The Teton County Wildlife Habitat Overlay map layers *Songbird/Raptor Breeding and Wintering Habitat* and *Big Game Migration Corridors and Seasonal Range* are both mapped on the Property (Figure 3). These designations are likely a result of the Property's proximity to Teton Creek and the historic extent of the riparian corridor which has been reduced with encroachment of development and agriculture. Alder confirmed that the Property does not contain riparian corridor vegetation and habitat characteristics but is rather dominated by historic agricultural meadows that have transitioned to mesic grassland cover due to lack of irrigation. Figure 3 identifies the Wildlife Habitat Overlay mapped within the Property and Figure 2 depicts the vegetative cover present in the Property that may provide habitat for Teton County indicator wildlife species.

The narrative below evaluates habitat for indicator species shown on the Wildlife Habitat Overlay map for the Property per Title 9 requirements. Existing vegetative cover types mapped during the June 2024 site visit were used for this analysis as well as available data and reports from the Idaho Fish and Game Department (IDFG) and other public data sources.

Online Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) maps containing modeled probabilities of elk winter range, elk summer range, elk migration corridors, mule deer winter range, and mule deer summer range were reviewed for the Property and CUP area (IDFG 2020a). Species Observation data from the Idaho Species Diversity Database were also reviewed for occurrences of other wildlife indicator species in the vicinity of the Property and CUP area (IDFG 2020b).

#### Elk

The Teton County *Big Game Migration Corridors and Seasonal Range Overlay* is mapped on the Property and north of the Property (Figure 3). This designation is likely due to the historic riparian corridor that connects the foothills of the Teton Range to the Teton Basin; however, increased development in the area over the past several decades has degraded and fractured this corridor. Elk migrate seasonally from higher to lower elevations between summer and winter ranges. Teton County defines mountain shrubland as indicator habitat for elk which includes mountain mahogany shrublands and tall shrubland dominated by chokecherry, serviceberry, and other native deciduous shrubs. Though a few chokecherry shrubs are found on the Property, no vegetative cover on the Property qualifies as mountain shrubland or vital elk habitat. Elk may pass through the Property during seasonal migrations; however, in this region – defined by IDFG as the Palisades Zone – winter range is limited and more representative of mule deer habitat. Known locations of elk herds in the Teton Basin include a herd east and south of Victor, and a herd along the Teton River in Teton Basin. The Teton River herd likely travels from the Big Hole Mountains on the western side of the valley (IDFG 2019).

IDFG habitat suitability modeling for elk seasonal range maps the Property as low suitability for winter range and low suitability for summer range and no high suitability range is mapped in the vicinity of the Property (IDFG, 2022). 2020 IDFG suitability modeling maps the Property within a moderate probability area for elk migration with a high probability elk migration corridor area occurring to the west and north of the Property north of Ski Hill Road and east of Driggs (IDFG 2020a; Appendix C).

#### MULE DEER

Mule deer migrate seasonally from higher to lower elevations between summer and winter ranges and the Teton County *Big Game Migration Corridors and Seasonal Range Overlay* is mapped on the Property and to the west of the Property (Figure 3). Teton County defines mountain shrubland as indicator habitat for mule deer which includes mountain mahogany ecosystems or tall shrublands dominated by chokecherry, serviceberry, and other native, deciduous shrubs. Mule deer may forage in the sagebrush habitat or chokecherry shrubs on the Property but no vegetative cover on the Property qualifies as mountain shrubland and the sagebrush habitat is likely too small to serve as vital mule deer habitat. Mule deer moving from the Teton Range foothills to lower elevations may occasionally pass through the Property during seasonal migrations and use the small area of sagebrush habitat for cover or forage, but lack of connectivity to additional habitat limits the value of the habitat on the Property. Mule deer winter habitat – south facing shrub dominated slopes (TRLT, 2006) – is not present on the Property and is limited in this region due to agriculture and residential development.

IDFG habitat suitability modeling for mule deer seasonal range maps the Property as moderate to low suitability for winter range and low suitability for summer range and high suitability habitat is not identified nearby (IDFG 2022).

#### RAPTORS

There are no Bald Eagle nests on the Property, but the cottonwood riparian forest corridor along Teton Creek within a half mile of the Property provides important nesting habitat and winter habitat for Bald Eagles (TRLT 2006). Bald Eagles may temporarily roost in the mature cottonwood stand on the Property, but the small size of the cottonwood stands and distance from Teton Creek (approximately 650 feet) makes it less suitable as nesting habitat.

Other raptors that may occur within half a mile of the Property and classified as Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) by the Idaho Comprehensive Wildlife Strategy include Great Gray Owl, Ferruginous Hawk, Golden Eagle, and Short-eared Owl (IDFG 2017). The Teton Creek riparian corridor and surrounding open agricultural meadows and sagebrush steppe provide potential nesting habitat for these species. The mature cottonwood on the western edge of the Property may also provide suitable nesting habitat for raptors but no raptor nests were found on the Property during the site visit. Raptors are most likely to utilize the agricultural meadows and sagebrush steppe on the Property as foraging habitat and select nesting habitat outside of the Property where more substantial habitat exists.

#### SONGBIRDS

Songbirds such as Western Meadowlarks and Savannah Sparrows may utilize the agricultural meadows on the Property for nesting and foraging habitat. Additionally, Sagebrush Sparrows and Sage Thrashers are SGCN that could potentially nest within the sagebrush steppe habitat on the Property; however, the small size of this habitat type on the Property diminishes its value. The Teton Creek riparian corridor with forest and shrub cover located north of the Property provides more adequate cover and forage for a diversity of nesting and wintering songbird species.

# IMPACT ANALYSIS & MITIGATION PLAN

The proposed subdivision involves dividing the Property into five lots. Four approximately 0.36 acre lots are proposed on the northeastern end of the Property and accessed from a proposed road off of Cemetery Road. Lot 5 will encompass the remaining 3.33 acres on the eastern and southern portion of the Property. The proposed Torre Subdivision building envelopes will cluster development with approved building envelopes in the neighboring Mumford Solly's subdivision to the west and allows open areas to remain for wildlife movement in the southern and eastern 3.33 acres where development density will be low (Figure 2).

Proposed lots 1-4 consist entirely of mesic grassland cover types and disturbed areas where the gravel access road exists. Lot 5 is also dominated by mesic grassland and contains small areas of sagebrush steppe and cottonwood forest. The Wildlife Habitat Overlay is mapped on all lots including the *Songbird/Raptor Breeding and Wintering Habitat* and *Big Game Migration Corridors and Seasonal Range* (Figure 3). Mule deer or elk may seasonally pass through the Property or occasionally use the small cottonwood stands or sagebrush steppe on Lot 5 for cover or forage; however, vegetative cover within the proposed lots does not likely provide substantial or vital habitat for ungulate species due to the small size of the habitat and lack of connectivity to additional habitat. Raptors and songbirds may forage in the agricultural meadow on Lots 1-5 and could potentially nest in the cottonwoods or sagebrush on Lot 5, but they are more likely to use the more substantial habitat north of the Property along Teton Creek. No signs of ungulates or nesting birds were observed during the August 2020 or June 2024 site visits.

Minimization and mitigation of disturbance to wildlife habitat protected by the *Wildlife Habitat Overlay* is required under both the previous Teton County LDC and the updated LDC effective August 3, 2022 (Teton County, 2013; Teton County 2022). Proposed Torre Subdivision building envelopes are designed to mirror approved building envelopes in the Mumford Solly's subdivision adjacent to the Property, allowing for clustered development and preservation of open habitat to preserve wildlife movement and use. The proposed building envelopes in Lots 1-4 will impact mesic grassland and disturbed cover types; no impacts to vital nesting, breeding, or wintering habitat for indicator species will occur. The proposed building envelope in Lot 5 will impact approximately 0.05 ac of sagebrush steppe habitat along the northwest facing slope on the southern end of the Property (Figure 2). However, 0.16 acres of sagebrush habitat will be preserved and will continue to provide potential cover and forage for ungulates, raptors, or songbirds if they were to move through the area. The proposed building envelopes will allow for preservation of cottonwood trees, most of the sagebrush steppe habitat, and choke cherry shrubs.

Construction activities associated with installation of subdivision infrastructure or future building permits may temporarily and indirectly impact indicator species. Migrating elk or mule deer may avoid the area during construction and songbirds may choose to nest elsewhere due to noise and human activity. Impacts will be minimized by avoiding removal of any shrub habitat during nesting season.

The proposed 5-lot subdivision may have minor, long term impacts for big game, raptors, and songbirds because housing density and human activity will increase in an area that may be used as a movement corridor by elk or mule deer or as foraging and occasional nesting habitat for songbirds and raptors. To preserve big game movement corridors, development will be clustered within the proposed subdivision to allow ample space to remain for use by ungulates. Preservation of shrub and forest cover types on Lot 5 will minimize impacts to songbirds and raptors. Non-wildlife friendly fencing will be avoided, livestock will be managed to avoid contact with wild ungulates, and domestic pets will not be allowed to roam free or will remain under voice control. Additional mitigation efforts that will offset impacts of the proposed subdivision and may be pursued by the applicant or future owners include enhancing habitat by planting native trees and shrubs in disturbed grassland or agricultural meadow cover types. Additional measures for minimizing impacts to indicator wildlife species are outlined below in the Land Management Plan.

## LAND MANAGEMENT PLAN

The quality of habitat on the Property under the conditions of the proposed subdivision will be maintained if impacts to forest and shrub habitats are avoided; however, wildlife movement and habitat use might be impacted due to increased development density. The subdivision Covenants, Conditions and Restrictions (CC&Rs) will establish land management standards and designate responsibility of implementation and maintenance to individual landowners or the Homeowner's Association (HOA). Adequate funds for land management shall be maintained by individual landowners or by the HOA through fee collection. When applicable, qualified professionals should be solicited to assist with proper management.

The following management provisions will be addressed in the proposed subdivision CC&Rs:

<u>Open Space Management</u> – Common open space is not designated in the proposed subdivision design; however, a management plan for areas with indicator habitat in Lot 5 should be established in the CC&Rs, outlining requirements for monitoring and maintaining habitat to conserve and enhance value for wildlife and protect freedom of movement. It will be the responsibility of individual lot owners, under the requirements of the CC&Rs, to control for state listed noxious weed species according to state laws and keep weed presence at a minimum. Weed control provisions should prohibit the use of herbicides in wildlife habitat during breeding season and recommend control measures that allow native plant species to persist. Existing natural features that enhance the attractiveness and habitat quality on the Property will be preserved, including the shrub and forested cover types.

<u>Lighting</u> – Outdoor lighting will be designed to downcast. Bright lights detrimentally affect wildlife movement and hinder avian species navigation abilities. Motion detector lights are encouraged, but they shall meet the requirements for floodlights and when not needed (e.g. the residence is unoccupied), lights will remain off for the benefit of wildlife.

<u>Pet Control</u> – Household pets (primarily dogs and cats) living on the Property will be contained in a designated, enclosed area to prevent interactions with wildlife. Domestic cats should not be permitted to roam freely outdoors to prevent mortality of songbirds and waterbirds protected by Teton County.

<u>Livestock Management</u> – If livestock are contained within the proposed subdivision, particular care will be taken to avoid co-mingling between livestock and big game animals given that elk and occasional mule deer may seasonally move through the Property. Fencing should keep livestock clustered near developed areas and out of indicator habitat.

## **DESIGN REVIEW**

The proposed Subdivision of Parcel RP05N45E360250, located east of the City of Driggs and in the Driggs AOI, contains lands included in the *Wildlife Habitat Overlay* as defined in Titles 8 and 9. The proposed subdivision would include four 0.36-acre lots and one 3.33-acre lot (Figure 2). The locations of the lots are designed according to zoning lot requirements and so that building and development areas for each can be located outside of indicator habitat for Teton County protected wildlife species (Figure 2). The following design criteria will be followed to ensure that the proposed development complies with Teton County Title 8 and 9 regulations.

<u>Building Envelopes</u> – Habitat fragmentation will be avoided by clustering building envelopes based on established building envelopes in the vicinity and preserving most of the higher quality wildlife habitat and native vegetation on the Property. Connectivity of wildlife habitat will be preserved by preserving open space and shrub and forest cover to allow for wildlife movement.

<u>Fencing</u> – All fences on the Property will be designed to minimize impacts on indicator species' current use of the Property and habitat connectivity. Fencing shall be designed by a qualified person and will consider adjacent land use and potential movement of ungulates from summer to winter ranges

through the Property. Guidelines will be followed as outlined in Teton County Idaho Zoning Ordinance, Title 9 Division 9-3-2 (C-2-c-WH-vi-b) (Teton County, 2013b). Livestock fencing should serve to contain livestock close to development, keep grazing intensity low enough to preserve wildlife habitat in the area, and avoid interactions with wild ungulates.

<u>Habitat Impacts</u>—Impacts to indicator species habitat, which consists of immature and mature cottonwood and sagebrush steppe, will be avoided. Future building plans will be designed to preserve space for wildlife movement.

<u>Utilities</u>—All future service utilities will be located underground and outside of indicator habitat.

#### REFERENCES

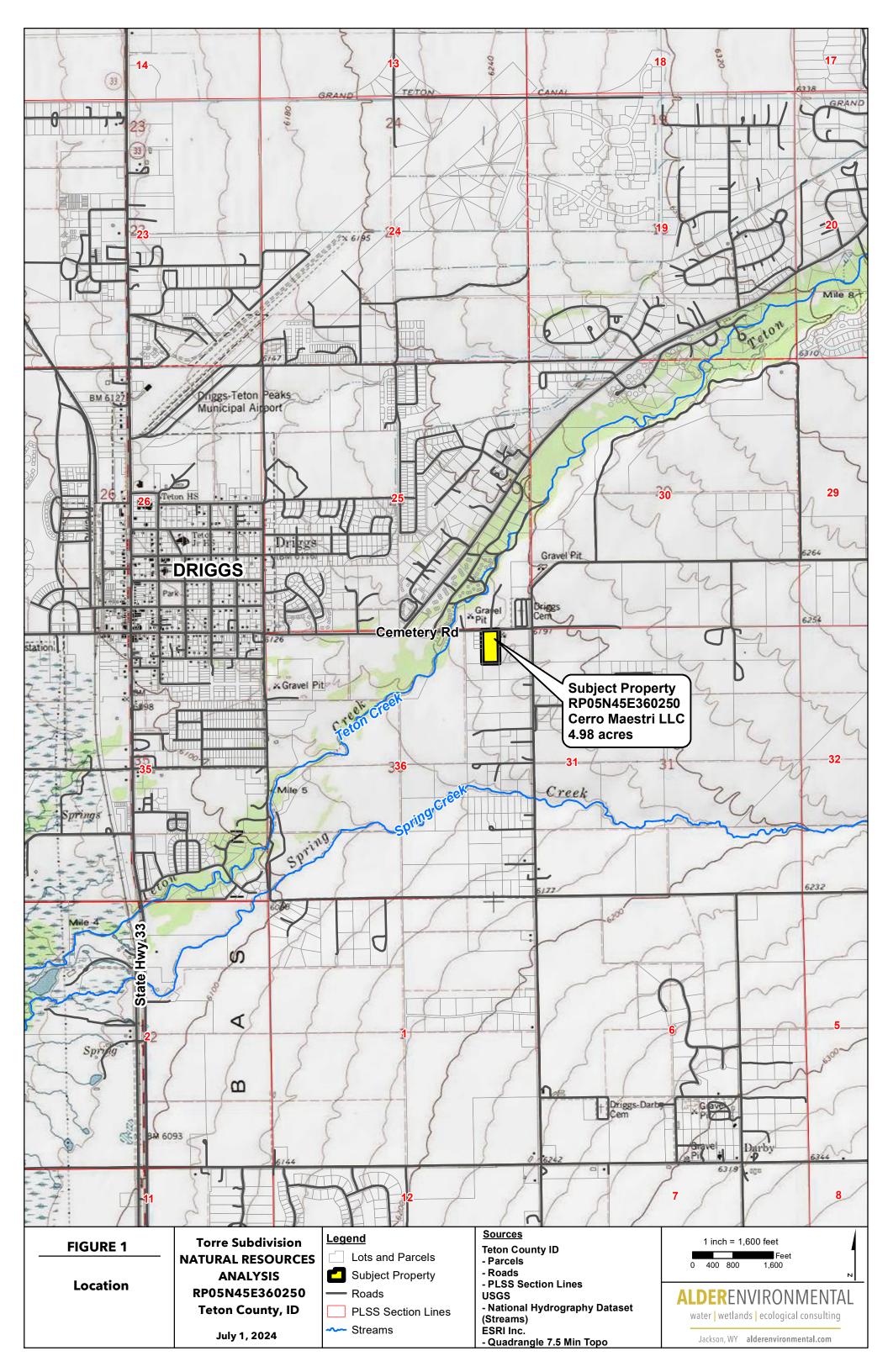
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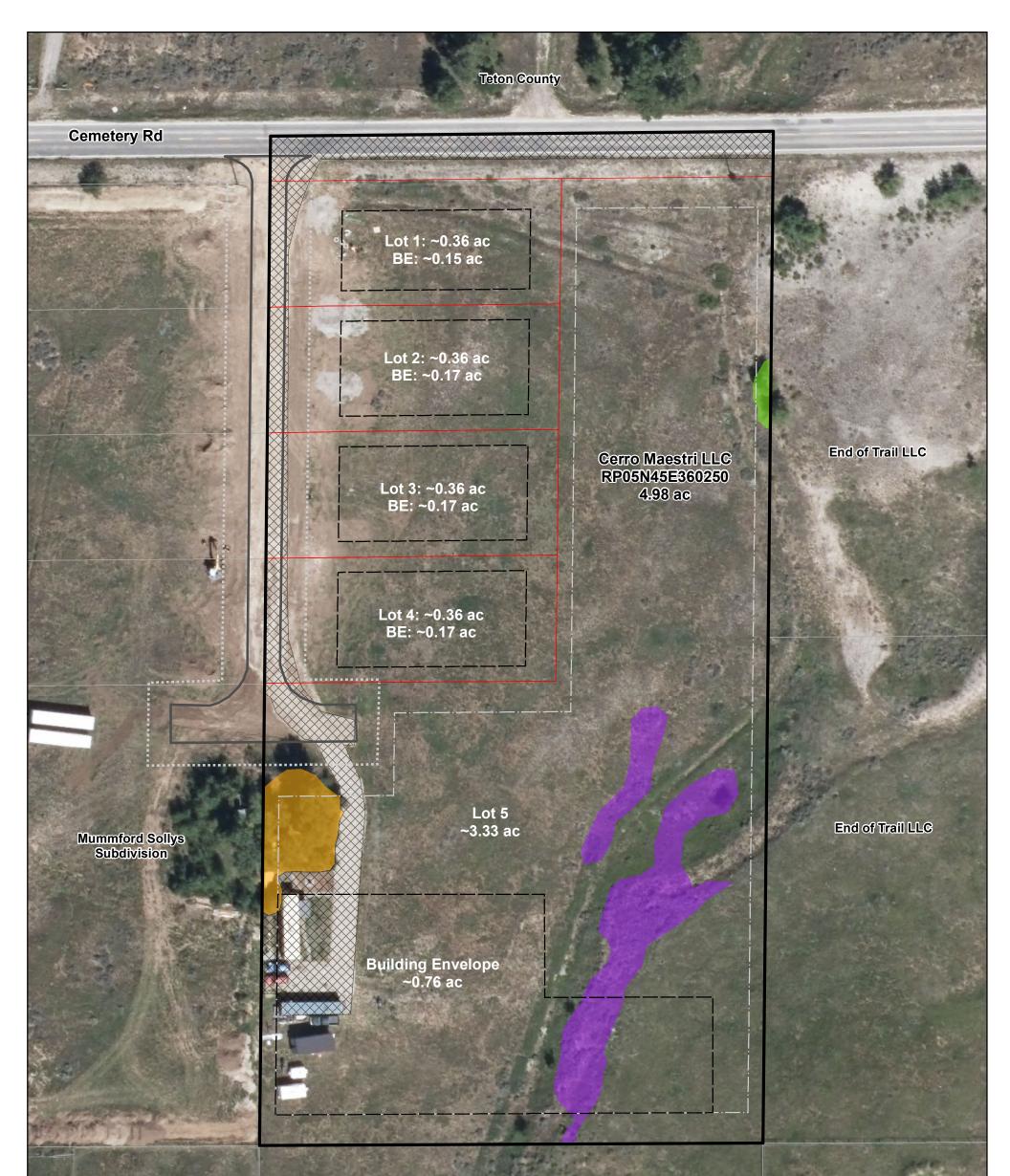
#### **APPENDIX A: FIGURES**

Figure 1. Location

Figure 2. Existing Conditions and Proposed Subdivision

Figure 3. Wildlife Habitat Overlay

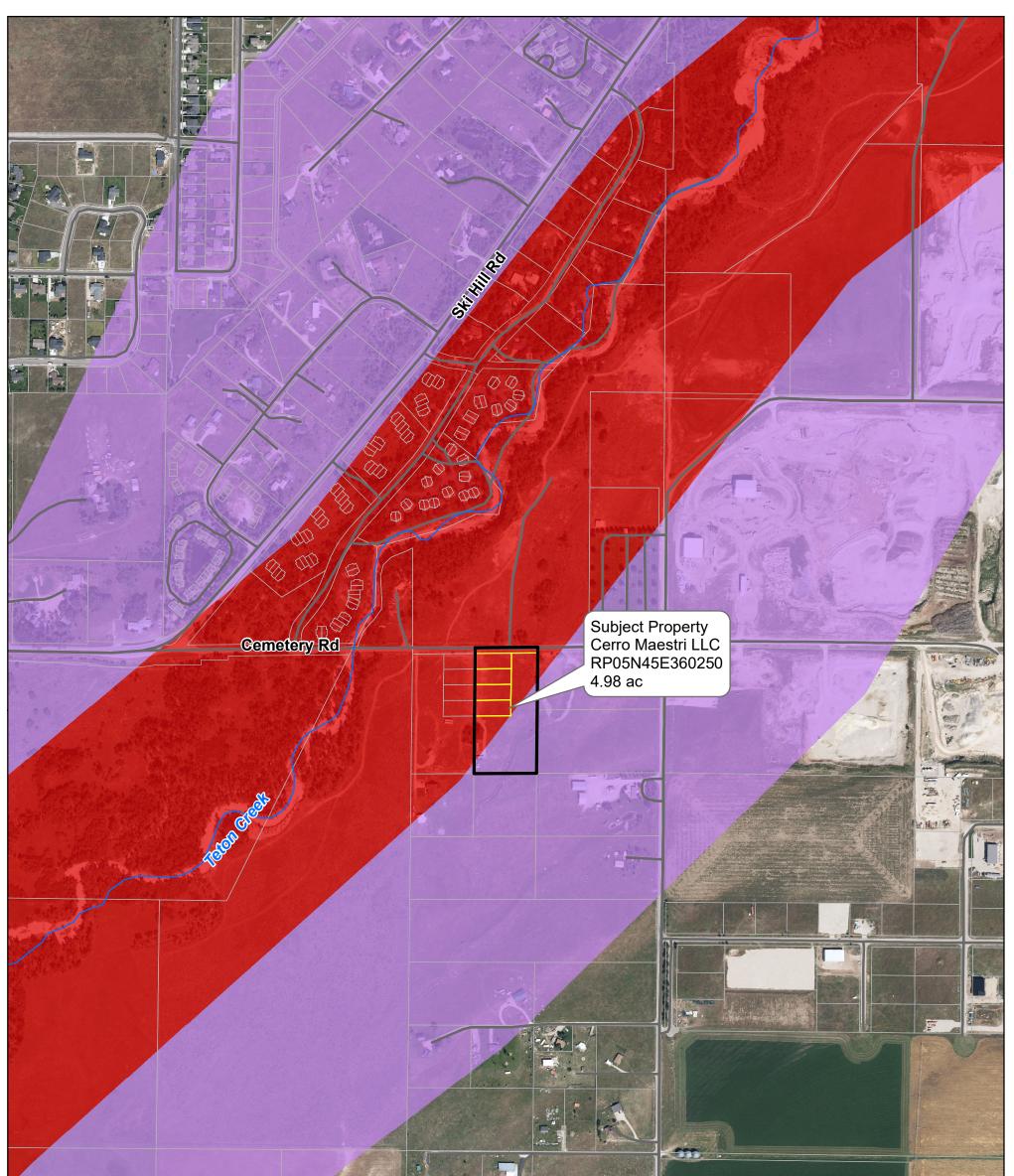




#### 119 S 750 E

#### 140 S 1000 E





		Spring Greek		Overlay A Migration Corridors and Seasonal Range (Raptor Breeding and Wintering Habitat
FIGURE 3 Wildlife Habitat Overlay	Torre Subdivision NATURAL RESOURCES ANALYSIS RP05N45E360250 Teton County, ID	Legend Subject Property Roads Lots and Parcels Streams (NHD)	Sources Teton County ID - 2023 Aerial Imagery - Property Lines - Roads - Wildlife Habitat Overlay USGS - National Hydrography Dataset (NHD)	1 inch = 500 feet 0 125 250 500 N ALDERENVIRONMENTAL
July 1, 2024		Proposed Lots	Refugio Engineering PLLC - Proposed Lots	water   wetlands   ecological consulting Jackson, WY alderenvironmental.com

# SITE PHOTOS – PROPOSED TORRE SUBDIVISION



**Photo 1.** Looking east at mesic grassland in the foreground with the northwest facing slope and sagebrush steppe in the background (June 18, 2024).



**Photo 2**. Looking north along the eastern property boundary from the southeastern end of the Property at the sagebrush steppe habitat and a few chokecherry shrubs (June 18, 2024).



**Photo 3**. Sagebrush steppe and mesic grassland in the flat terrain below the slope in the southeastern end of the Property, looking northeast (June 18, 2024).



Photo 4. Looking south from northern edge of the Property (August 4, 2020).



Photo 5. Looking west from the northeast property corner along Cemetery Road (August 4, 2020).



**Photo 6.** Looking south along the eastern Property boundary at historic irrigation ditches in the foreground with a small immature cottonwood stand in the background (August 4, 2020).



Photo 7. Looking southwest across the Property from the northeast Property corner (August 4, 2020).



**Photo 8.** Looking north along the eastern property boundary at a small immature cottonwood stand (August 4, 2020).



**Photo 9.** Looking south at a historic irrigation ditch near the eastern Property boundary within proposed Lot 1 (August 4, 2020).



**Photo 10.** Looking east at the sagebrush steppe hillside in the southeast portion of the Property (August 4, 2020).



**Photo 11.** Looking west at the mature and immature cottonwood stand on the western edge of the Property within proposed Lot 5 (August 4, 2020).



**Photo 12.** Looking north at the mature and immature cottonwood stand on the western edge of the Property (August 4, 2020).

APPENDIX C: IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME BIG GAME HABITAT SUITABILITY MODEL MAPS (IDFG 2020A)

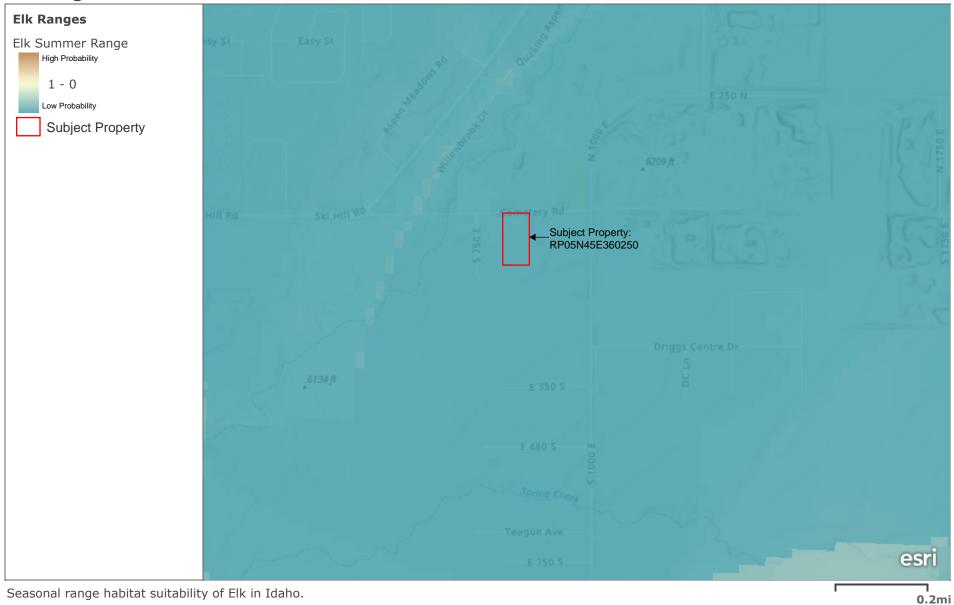
# **Elk Ranges**



Seasonal range habitat suitability of Elk in Idaho.

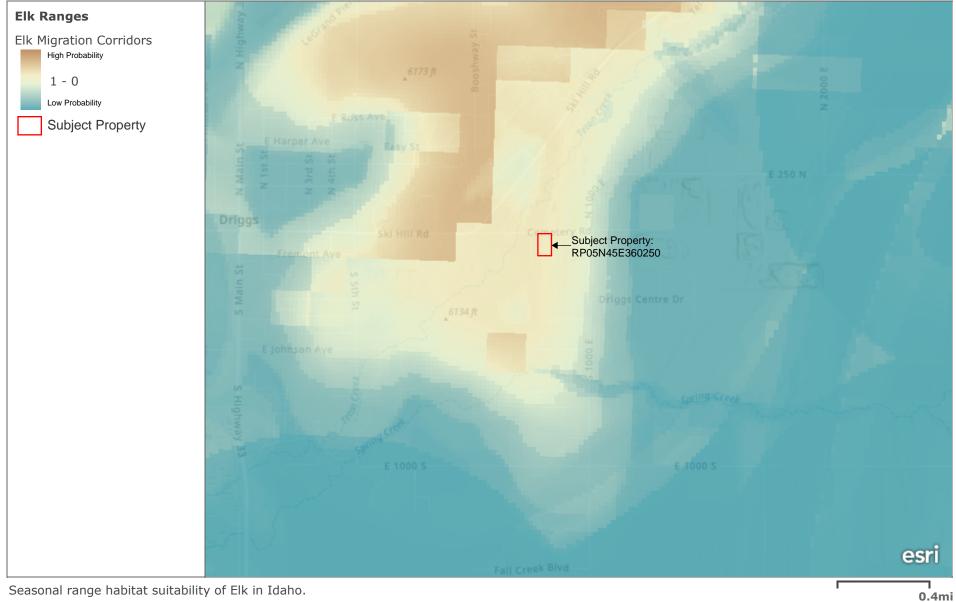
Esri, NASA, NGA, USGS, FEMA | Esri Community Maps Contributors, County of Teton, Esri, HERE, Garmin, SafeGraph, INCREMENT P, METI/NASA, USGS, Bureau of Land Management, EPA, NPS, US Census Bureau, USDA | Idaho Fish and Game

# **Elk Ranges**



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Esri, NASA, NGA, USGS, FEMA | Idaho Fish and Game | Esri Community Maps Contributors, County of Teton, Esri, HERE, Garmin, SafeGraph, INCREMENT P, METI/NASA, USGS, Bureau of Land Management, EPA, NPS, US Census Bureau, USDA