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OPINION

## It's time to end growth in Jackson Hole

Guest Shot / By Robert Frodeman

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Last week's editorial in the News&Guide — “A tipping point is upon us” — mentions some of the developments (proposed or approved) that have placed our community at a critical juncture:

- 226 new housing units at the site of the Virginian RV park.
- 194 apartments on South Park Loop Road.
- 72 homes to be built by Teton County School District.
- 21 townhomes proposed by the Presbyterian Church.
- An 89-room hotel, 25 short-term condos and 14 affordable units proposed at the Kudar Motel, and most, if not all, mature cottonwoods cut down.
- 1,437 homes for northern South Park.
- A 362,000-square-foot mega-hotel on North Cache: 171 rooms, 36 condos, a spa and fitness center, retail space, two restaurants, two bars, a rooftop deck, meeting space and underground parking



That's 2,348 units, nearly half the existing housing units in Jackson.

The opinion piece describes the consequences of all this: more pressure on our water and sewer systems and on our fire personnel and EMTs, and more crowding and traffic, leading to more road building, such as the expansion of Highway 22 to Wilson to five lanes and finishing Tribal Trail Road. (It doesn't mention other possibilities, such as an overpass at the "Y" intersection of Broadway and Highway 22 or widening North Cache.)

The editorial highlights the challenges before us. But then something odd happens. After noting the possible "cascade of new problems and taxpayer expenses," it stops before the conclusion: that such development is unsustainable. It has to stop, and the sooner the better.

The fact stares us in the face: Growth must end. We live in a limited space. More than 97% of Teton County is public land; almost all the rest is developed or protected by conservation easement. Unless we are willing to kick the elk off the refuge, the end of development, i.e., build-out, is near. And even booting the elk (which would require an act of Congress) would only delay the inevitable. The question before us is: Will we stop the endless cycle of development before we wreck everything we hold near and dear about Jackson Hole?

Yes, we need affordable and workforce housing. But developments like The Loop or northern South Park won't fix anything. They would simply offset, in part, the need to house still more workers created in connection with the new housing. The Loop would not offset all the jobs created at the new hotel on North Cache. And putting 1,400 units in northern South Park — for many years the majority of which likely will be luxury housing — would result in the demand for still more stores and restaurants, as well as landscapers, masseuses personal chefs and personal trainers, all of whom would need housing.

It's a positive feedback loop, an endless cycle where things only get ratcheted up. And it's got to end. In fact, it will end. The only question is how much longer this will go on before we recognize the inevitable.

Make no mistake: Serious challenges will follow upon ending growth. People still will want to move here, and the owners here will want to grow their businesses. We certainly can't stop people from coming. (But we can make it one in, one out.) And no, it's not fair to lock the door behind us after we have gotten ours. But we can develop policies to make the process as fair as possible.

These points about growth are also true for our national parks. Grand Teton and Yellowstone are bumping up against limits — some would say that they already have exceeded a proper level of visitation some time ago. This is why timed entry is becoming common at parks such as Arches and Zion. And our national forests are not far behind.

I see two next steps. First, we should engage urban planners who work on strategies for transitioning communities toward a no-growth future. (This is quite different from so-called “smart growth,” which is still growth.) Second, we need to elect candidates willing to address the dilemma we’re facing: How do we shift to a non-growth economy and culture?

These challenges will be daunting. Our history and culture are rooted in a sense of infinite space and resources. “Go West, young man!” was a call for freedom and independence. But we have run out of space in many of the favored places across the West. The same is true overseas: Venice, Italy, with a population of 50,000, gets 30 million visitors a year. In response, it limited the number of cruise ships, capped the size of tourist groups to 25 at a time and charges tourists to enter the city.

The changes that are coming will affect all of us. Some of them will be uncomfortable. But the alternative is to delay the inevitable at the cost of losing what we cherish. The sooner we acknowledge this reality, and elect politicians who will help us work through the alternatives for creating a sustainable future, the better.

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*Hoback resident Robert Frodeman’s book, “A Watershed Moment: The American West in the Age of Limits,” will be published this fall. He can be reached at [robert.frodeman@gmail.com](mailto:robert.frodeman@gmail.com). Guest Shots are solely the opinion of their authors.*