

# PART THREE: PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

This part introduces the vision statement and planning goals, which describe what Pondera County should strive to be in the future. Supplementing these goals are detailed “planning strategies” that outline specific policies to adopt and actions to undertake to accomplish the goals. In addition, a future land use plan provides a geographic perspective of the desired future of Pondera County.

## VISION AND PRIMARY GOALS

### Vision for Pondera County’s Future

A vision statement is a concise description of what a community desires for its future. It is the long-term foundation for actions to be taken as part of the 20-year plan.

The Pondera County vision statement is the result of discussions at growth policy committee meetings and public open houses regarding what people value most about Pondera County, what they would most like to retain for the future, and what most needs to be changed.

Pondera County Vision Statement:

Pondera County is a unique treasure of Montana. We value our family, friends, and community, hard-working agricultural background, small town rural lifestyle, and fishing and hunting. We embrace opportunities for economic development, and better lives, respectful of the extraordinary natural and human resources of our county. Within a short drive, there is access to more urban activities and diverse recreation.

### Primary Goals

The primary goals are short statements clarifying direction and addressing key issues needed to achieve the vision.

The Pondera County Growth Policy is based on the following primary goals. The goals interrelate and overlap with each other. It is important to consider each goal within the

overall context of the Vision Statement and the other goals. Because the goals are so connected, they have not been assigned any priority order in the following list.

**GOAL A: ECONOMY**

Diversify and expand the Pondera County economy and increase the number of jobs that pay a living wage.

**GOAL B: COUNTY LAND DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS**

Continue with land uses in the unincorporated areas of the county that are primarily agricultural.

**GOAL C: PUBLIC SAFETY**

Provide for safety from natural disasters and adequate emergency response for fire and medical care.

**GOAL D: HOUSING**

Expand safe, affordable housing choices for all ages and incomes focusing first on housing in existing communities of Brady and Dupuyer in the unincorporated areas, and supporting efforts of Conrad and Valier.

**GOAL E: INFRASTRUCTURE—ROADS, SIDEWALKS, WATER, SEWER, BUILDINGS**

Provide cost efficient and effective public infrastructure for the long-term.

**GOAL F: DRINKING WATER QUALITY**

Protect drinking water quality.

**GOAL G: NATURAL AREAS**

Retain natural areas for a variety of uses including wildlife habitat, hunting and fishing, outdoor recreation, and tourism.

## PLANNING STRATEGIES

The Pondera County Growth Policy is a comprehensive, long-range plan intended to guide growth and development in Pondera County. The Vision Statement is a short declaration of what Pondera County will strive to be. The Primary Goals further define how to achieve the vision, but are still fairly general. More detail is needed to explain how to achieve the goals and vision. The Planning Strategies of this section provide that detail.

The Planning Strategies and the Future Land Use Plan (in the next section) are the main action steps and policies for the Pondera County Growth Policy. The Future Land Use Plan provides specific guidance for future zoning and incorporates elements of the goals and planning strategies.

This section on Planning Strategies provides a re-statement of each goal. Following each goal, a context is provided in the form of a brief discussion of the rationale or background for the goal and identification of issues leading to the specific planning strategies. The context reflects comments from the Pondera County Growth Policy Committee and from public comments, opinion survey results, and the inventory analysis conducted by the Cossitt Consulting team. Following the discussion of context, are the objectives (desired results for each goal), and the specific Planning Strategies.

Implementation of goals and objectives is predicated on the following guiding policies:

### Guiding Policies:

- Policy #1: Identify and use applicable grant and outside funding sources to the greatest extent possible.**
- Policy #2: Consider new or additional taxing only as needed, and tied to specific objectives and outcomes.**
- Policy #3: Projects will be managed openly, with information available to the public and public involvement encouraged.**
- Policy #4: Encourage a can-do and positive attitude about the community.**

## ECONOMY

**GOAL A: Diversify and expand the Pondera County economy and increase the number of jobs that pay a living wage.**

### CONTEXT

The 2010 survey of persons who own land in the unincorporated areas of the county indicates that there is support for strengthening the economy. In response to a question about needs of Pondera County, the highest ranked factors were employment opportunities (87%), agricultural production (77%), retail businesses (77%), and industrial development (70%). 81% agreed with a goal to support economic development by encouraging new businesses and industries.

Pondera County has a strong reliance on agriculture and would like to expand the economy. There is a desire to bring in new jobs and to provide more types of businesses that can weather through times when agricultural commodity prices are low or production is down due to weather or other unforeseen circumstances.

Brady and Dupuyer have lost population and both communities want to stay vital. To do that, the communities will need to attract new residents and expand business opportunities. The Brady School has been empty for some years and can be put to a good use that can revitalize Brady.

Building a strong economy connects very directly to the other goals in this growth policy, such as housing and infrastructure.

### OBJECTIVES

- ✓ New businesses in the county provide new jobs with living wages
- ✓ Increase in population and younger, workforce age families
- ✓ Overall county economy is stronger

### PLANNING STRATEGIES

**Strategy A-1:** Develop and implement a long-range economic plan for the county, building on its strengths such as agricultural production, natural resources (including wind generation potential, water, access to interstate highway, rail, and energy transportation corridors, etc.)

**Strategy A-2:** Coordinate county-wide economic plan that builds on strengths and assets of Conrad, Valier, and unincorporated areas of the county.

**Strategy A-3:** Participate in multi-county Community Economic Development Strategy planning with Pondera Port Authority, Sweetgrass Development, and Northcentral Montana RC&D to qualify for Economic Development Administration (EDA) and other types of funding.

**Strategy A-4:** Support efforts to re-use the Brady school. Consider efforts that will not necessitate considerable investment in other infrastructure. Some possibilities include using it

for senior housing (for which HUD or other funding sources might be available) and/or a commercial kitchen.

## COUNTY LAND DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS

**GOAL B: Continue with land uses in the unincorporated areas of the county that are primarily agricultural.**

### CONTEXT

The 2010 survey indicates support for retaining agricultural land in production. 74% responded that they would like to see new residential development occur in existing communities or near existing development (61%). Agricultural lands (dry farm land, range and grazing lands, and irrigated crop lands) were identified as the most important land to conserve with between 72% and 76% of respondents selecting these as very important. The highest ranked land use planning goal concepts were continuation of ranching and agriculture (92%). Respondents also supported reducing impacts from new development on agriculture.

Land outside of municipalities and communities (including Hutterite residential colonies) is almost entirely in agricultural production as either crops or grazing land. Land has retained its highest economic value as agricultural use. Pondera County is unique among counties along the Continental Divide in that it has not been subdivided for residential use. Residents are proud of the ties to agriculture but also want to be able to do what they want with their property.

The Pondera County weed district has had a weed management plan since 1987 and it is updated every two years. Despite best efforts, noxious weeds are present in the county and primarily spread by roads and waterways. Noxious weed spread is an economic burden to the county and agricultural producers, and diminishes wildlife habitat. To facilitate the economic stimulation of Brady and Dupuyer, it would be good to encourage new residential development in those communities.

The county has subdivision regulations but they are not current with state law.

### OBJECTIVES

- ✓ More new residential development occurs in existing communities.
- ✓ New residents are informed of the rural nature of the county and do not expect city-type services in remote parts of the county.

### PLANNING STRATEGIES

**Strategy B-1:** Retain farming and ranching as the preferred uses in rural areas.

**Strategy B-2:** Coordinate with incorporated municipalities on preferred land use patterns in future expansion areas identified in the growth policies for Valier and Conrad.

**Strategy B-3:** Encourage new residential and business development to locate within existing communities or within identified adjacent future growth areas for Valier, Conrad, Brady, and Dupuyer.

**Strategy B-4:** Develop an infrastructure extension policy for Brady Water-Sewer District that promotes more houses and businesses to be built on vacant lots in the Brady community prior to providing extensions out of the current service area.

**Strategy B-5:** Develop and distribute a “Code of the West” information brochure about living and doing business in unincorporated Pondera County. Include the County’s Right to Farm policy.

**Strategy B-6:** Update the county subdivision regulations and develop review procedures for exempted divisions, including review of filed documents that create divisions without survey.

**Strategy B-7:** Continue and support county weed district efforts to limit noxious weeds.

## PUBLIC SAFETY

**GOAL C: Provide for safety from natural disasters and for adequate emergency response for fire and medical care.**

### CONTEXT

There was only one item in the 2010 survey related to public health and safety. Personal health and safety was one of the possible answers to the question, “Why do you live or own property in Pondera County?” 37% responded that it was a very important factor and another 34% indicated it was a somewhat important factor.

Pondera County has a Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plan and a Community Wildfire Protection Plan. Those plans have specific recommendations for actions to address public safety in the county. The fire department and emergency medical units rely on volunteers. Attracting and retaining volunteers for both fire and medical units is an on-going challenge which could become even more difficult with an increasingly older population.

The flood prone area maps in Pondera County consist only of those for the Pondera Creek drainage that flows along the southern edge of Conrad and the Dry Fork of the Marias River north of Conrad. The flood prone area maps appear to be incorrect and may overstate the potential flood area in and around the city. Erosion on Dupuyer Creek banks will eventually cause septic drain fields to become exposed and contaminate Dupuyer Creek, according to the Floodplain Manager. The scheduled update to the Pondera County Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plan will include examination of flood-prone areas and will need to address the Dupuyer area issues.

### OBJECTIVES

- ✓ Pondera County continues to have well-trained emergency response units for fires and medical emergencies.
- ✓ Pondera County is prepared for orderly response to disasters and reduces situations that can make disasters worse.

### PLANNING STRATEGIES

**Strategy C-1:** Implement applicable strategies from the Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plan and Community Wildfire Protection Plan and update plans as needed.

**Strategy C-2:** Support fire department and emergency medical response to ensure continued service, including encouraging volunteerism to provide staffing.

**Strategy C-3:** Work to have Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation(DNRC) help study and correct previously identified flood prone areas and maps.

## HOUSING

**GOAL D: Expand safe, affordable housing choices for all ages and incomes focusing first on housing in existing communities of Brady and Dupuyer in the unincorporated areas, and supporting efforts of Conrad and Valier.**

### CONTEXT

In the 2010 survey, need for housing ranked lowest as a need for Pondera County out of a list that included 12 other items including employment, businesses, senior services, and improved roads and bridges. 36% of respondents indicated housing was a need while nearly as many (34%) said that they had no opinion. This may indicate that many people do not have enough information to form an opinion.

Affordable-low income housing and rental housing were identified as top priorities in the public meetings held in 2010 for the growth policy. The survey in Dupuyer in 2006 identified need for more housing. Housing upgrades are also needed in Brady, and the Pondera Port Authority has recently completed a new house there.

There is a legitimate public interest in facilitating removal of older mobile homes that do not meet safety standards and replacing them with affordable site-built homes or with manufactured housing that meets the HUD code. Approximately 100 mobiles in the unincorporated area of the county are pre-1976 models and did not meet safety standards.

Housing units in “Fair” condition (marked deterioration and needs much repair) or worse condition comprises approximately 40% of all non-mobile home housing units (in the county.)

### OBJECTIVES

- ✓ Condition of housing stock is improved
- ✓ More options for affordable housing

### PLANNING STRATEGIES

**Strategy D-1:** Encourage safe, affordable housing for workforce and low income individual to rent and/or purchase.

**Strategy D-2:** Encourage rehabilitation or replacement alternatives to non-compliant mobile homes and substandard housing.



## INFRASTRUCTURE – STREETS, SIDEWALKS, WATER, SEWER, LIGHTING

**GOAL E: Provide cost efficient and effective public infrastructure for the long-term.**

### CONTEXT

2010 Survey results indicate support for cost efficient and effective public infrastructure. 58% of all respondents thought that roads and bridges needed improvement. 81% agreed that new development is served with adequate infrastructure such as roads, water, and sewer. 85% agreed with a goal concept that would ensure new development pays for the public services and infrastructure needed to support the development.

County roads and other infrastructure designed for cost-efficient delivery over the long-term result in lower taxes to support that infrastructure. The county does not have a current capital improvements program that comprehensively addresses roads, bridges, buildings, and airport facilities. Planning ahead in five-year increments is recommended to ensure comprehensive review of needs and proposed projects. Granting agencies like to see Capital Improvements Programs because it reflects a standardized process and public involvement in identifying projects and priorities.

Cell phone and internet service issues were raised as issues in meetings held in 2010-11 for this growth policy.

Extending water supply lines can induce residential growth where it was not previously possible. It can be a boon for the resident wanting to locate there, but in the long-run can create costs for the county for road maintenance and other services that are not adequately offset by property tax revenues. As North Central Montana Regional Water Authority develops their facilities in Pondera County, new residential development in remote parts of the county may become more possible.

Major developments, such as the Montana Alberta Tie Line (MATL), oil and gas projects, major water lines, and others can provide some economic benefit to the county, they can also create costs as well. Effects of heavy equipment on roads and bridges can cost the county in repair, upgrades, and maintenance.

### OBJECTIVES

- ✓ County infrastructure upgrades and improvements are addressed through a standardized Capital Improvements Program
- ✓ More state and federal funding for projects is available to the county

### PLANNING STRATEGIES

**Strategy E-1:** Develop and implement a capital improvements program for county infrastructure and facilities.

**Strategy E-2:** Improve cell phone and internet service to stay competitive with what is needed by residents and businesses.

**Strategy E-3:** As new water lines are proposed to cross the county, identify the long-term costs and benefits to county of new development in unincorporated areas.

**Strategy E-4:** Work to ensure that major projects such as wind farms, transmission lines, oil and gas projects, and major water transmission facilities (such as North Central Montana Regional Water Authority) address impacts to county roads and bridges.

**Strategy E-5:** Review and revise as needed the subdivision regulations to ensure that new development is served by adequate infrastructure such as roads, water and sewer and that new development pays its share of extensions and improvements.

## DRINKING WATER QUALITY

**GOAL F: Protect drinking water.**

### CONTEXT

Air and water quality was the highest rated factor among reasons why people live or own land in Pondera County, according to the 2010 survey. 91% of all respondents agreed with a goal concept that would ensure new development does not impair water supplies for established users.

In the summer of 2010, all of the 17 water discharge permits in the county had expired, including the municipal waste water discharge permits. Some of these are being addressed but others still need attention.

Water quality has been raised as an issue over the past several years in Dupuyer. Water at the Dupuyer School was not potable in December 2010.

### OBJECTIVES

✓ Residents have good quality water for domestic use

### PLANNING STRATEGIES

**Strategy F-1:** Encourage privately initiated analysis of drinking water quality in the Dupuyer area.

**Strategy F-2:** Cooperate with the state to bring water discharge permits in the county up-to-date.

## NATURAL AREAS

**GOAL G: Retain natural areas for a variety of uses including wildlife habitat, hunting and fishing, outdoor recreation, and tourism.**

### CONTEXT

About half of the 2010 survey respondents selected “scenic beauty/mountain views” as a very important reason for why they live or own property in Pondera County. Wildlife and wildlife habitat and recreation opportunities were at the bottom of the “very important” list but still important. 75% listed wildlife and wildlife habitat as either very important or somewhat important. 70% listed recreation as very important or somewhat important.

Hunting and fishing are part of the long-time subsistence and recreational activities in this area. Being able to get outdoors is important to local residents and visitors.

Noxious weeds are a significant problem in the Swift Reservoir recreation area.

### OBJECTIVES

- ✓ Deer and elk numbers are managed and create less damage on hay and other crops.
- ✓ Those who like to hunt, fish, and recreate outdoors will be able to do so in Pondera County.

### PLANNING STRATEGIES

**Strategy G-1:** Retain existing accesses to public lands and support new accesses where landowners are willing.

**Strategy G-2:** Reduce areas of noxious weeds in the Swift Reservoir area and work to control spread of noxious weeds in the area.

## FUTURE LAND USE PLAN

The Land Use Plan section of the growth policy provides a general view of future land use for Pondera County over the next 20 years. The Land Use Plan organizes all the expected future growth, development, and redevelopment into a pattern that is consistent with the Town's Vision Statement and Goals. The plan represents how Pondera County should develop over the next 20 years by showing the locations and characteristics of major land use types, such as commercial, industrial, residential, and so forth.

The Land Use Plan consists of the Future Land Use map and the Land Use Designations. This section contains the Land Use Designations which describe the Land Use Areas depicted on the Future Land Use Map. Each area depicted on the map is individually discussed. Development specifications for each area are also presented.

It should be noted that the Land Use Plan is intended to be fairly general. The boundaries between different type areas are not distinct and the specifications for development in each area are general, as well. The Future Land Use Map will provide guidance for zoning decisions but it is not as precise as a zoning ordinance. Many details about land use characteristics in each type of area and the exact boundaries of areas will be worked out when revising the zoning ordinance.

The Town should use the Land Use Plan as a guide for all land use decisions including all zoning decisions. The Land Use Plan should also be consulted in the planning of public improvements. In addition, the private-sector is encouraged to follow the Land Use Plan in the planning of real estate developments.

As part of the planning process, the consultants developed two alternative Future Land Use Maps. One, called the Compact Community Alternative, looked at a more traditional development pattern with most development taking place in the town at town densities and less sprawling land use at the edges of the town. The second, called the Expansive Community Alternative, allowed for a less defined growth pattern where the edges of the town are less distinct and low density development extends further from the town into the rural areas.

## FUTURE LAND USE DESIGNATIONS

### Communities

The communities shown on the Future Land Use Map are Dupuyer, Valier, Conrad, Brady, and Heart Butte. Pondera County does not make any land use planning decisions about Heart Butte so it is not discussed further here. The remaining communities include the County's incorporated places, the city of Conrad and town of Valier, and the unincorporated communities of Dupuyer and Brady.

The incorporated communities have (or soon will have) their own planning boards and growth policies. With respect to Conrad and Valier, the primary concern of Pondera County is land use planning in close proximity to the communities. It is important for the County and communities to coordinate their land use planning in these areas.

The unincorporated communities of Brady and Dupuyer do not have their own planning boards or growth policies. Instead they are covered by the planning authority of Pondera County. For these communities, it is important for the County to facilitate their improvement and development.

The Future Land Use Map shows in general terms where the communities are likely to annex or expand to accommodate future growth. The locations for future community growth in Conrad and Valier should be determined by reference to the growth policies adopted by Valier and Conrad.

#### Planning Directions for Communities Planning Areas

- Growth and development within the incorporated communities of Conrad and Valier should take place in accordance with the adopted growth policy of the community.
- Growth and development in areas close to Conrad and Valier but still in the county should take place in accordance with the adopted growth policy of the community provided the community growth policy is consistent with the Pondera County Growth Policy.
- Growth and development within unincorporated communities, including Brady and Dupuyer, should take place in accordance with the adopted Pondera County Growth Policy.
- All growth and development should follow the following guidelines with respect to the established communities:
  - Residential and business development should locate in the established communities and in defined growth areas near the communities.
  - Expansion of community infrastructure and services (municipal water and sewer, and a full range of other public support services) should be limited to areas that are planned for community expansion.
  - Expansions of the communities should occur as extensions of the town- or city-form and densities.
  - Infrastructure improvements should be coordinated to enable the county's communities to grow in a planned, orderly way.

## **Agriculture**

This planning area encompasses the majority of land in the county. Almost all of the private land within this planning area is presently used for agriculture or related uses. The area has experienced very little subdivision activity in the past and has no large subdivisions within it. The agricultural area of Pondera County is uncommonly intact and uninterrupted by non-agricultural land uses. County policies for the future should encourage a continuation of this land use pattern.

#### Planning Directions for the Agricultural Area

- Land use should continue to be primarily agriculture and ranching.
- Commercial or industrial uses associated with agricultural operations are appropriate for this area.

- Energy-related development including oil and gas production and wind energy are appropriate provided they are generally compatible with agricultural operations.
- Major subdivisions are not appropriate for this planning area, except as planned for in expansion areas around existing communities (per this growth policy and those of Valier and Conrad)
- Non-agricultural development on the most productive agricultural land, particularly irrigated land, should be avoided or minimized.
- New development should be designed sustain critical wildlife habitat areas.
- New development should be designed to complement or blend in with scenic resources.
- New developments should avoid creating problems for existing agricultural irrigation and drainage systems (e.g., inadequately-sized culvert crossings, fences along irrigation rights-of-way, etc.).

## Recreation

This planning area is the contiguous block of public lands at Swift Dam. This area will remain a major recreation area in the future. The area includes land managed by Pondera County, the State of Montana, and the Bureau of Land Management.

### Planning Directions for the Recreation Area

- No major land use changes are anticipated for this area.
- The existing recreational opportunities should continue in the future.
- Land uses that support the tourism economy including public and private recreational areas and tourist facilities should be encouraged.

## Blackfeet Reservation

Part of the Blackfeet Reservation, originally formed with 1855, is partly in Pondera County. Pondera County has certain limited planning jurisdiction on the Reservation.

A combination of state law and U.S. Supreme Court decisions have assigned to Pondera County (and denied to the Tribe) the jurisdiction over certain subdivisions within the Reservation boundaries. This situation applies on the Reservation when the subdivided land is allotted (fee) land owned by persons who are not tribal members.

The Blackfeet Nation might not have formal approval authority over such subdivision but would have legal rights if the subdivision would "imperil the political integrity, economic security, or health or welfare of the tribe"<sup>1</sup>. On this basis, the tribe can mount a legal

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<sup>1</sup> Zaferatos, Nicholas C. 1998. Planning in the Native American Tribal Community. *Journal of the American Planning Association*. Vol. 4, No. 64.

challenge to county approval of a subdivision on the reservation. Given this situation, a cooperative approach to county review of subdivisions on the Reservation may be the best approach for resolving the jurisdictional interests of the county and the tribe in the subdivision process.

#### Planning Directions for the Blackfeet Reservation

- Pondera County should establish a cooperative subdivision review process with the Blackfeet Tribe to incorporate tribal concerns when reviewing any subdivision within Reservation boundaries. This would involve forwarding subdivision applications to the tribe for comment. The county should try to resolve all tribal concerns prior to granting subdivision approval.

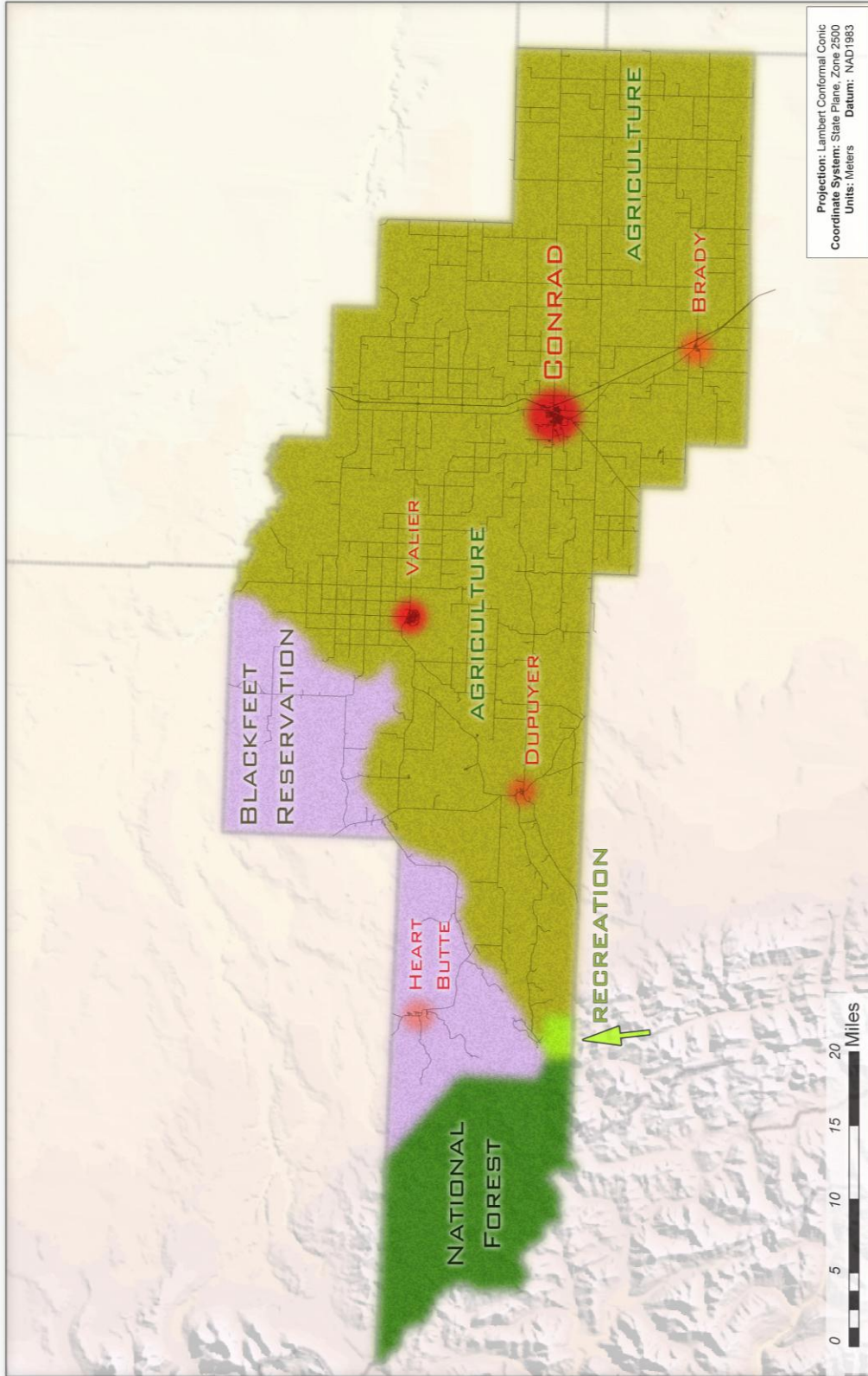
### **National Forest**

Part of the Lewis and Clark National Forest is in Pondera County. About 10 percent of the land area of Pondera County is in the National Forest. This area is managed by the U.S. Forest Service.

#### Planning Directions for the Lewis and Clark National Forest

- Multiple use policies should continue as the main focus of forest management.
- Adequate access to public lands should be maintained.
- Proposed Forest Service action and plans that may impact Pondera County should be coordinated with the county.





**Pondera County, Montana**  
 The Future Land Use Map is the County's visual guide to future planning. The map is a geographic expression of the Growth Policy's goals and strategies. The Future Land Use Map represents an ideal land use pattern for the future. The Future Land Use Map establishes five basic planning areas within the county. Each planning area has a set of Plan Directions that should be viewed as guidelines for public policy consideration and future land use decisions. This map was prepared March 2011 by Global Positions, LLC as part of the Pondera County Growth Policy Project. Spatial data (base map) were obtained from the Montana Geographic Information Clearinghouse - Montana Natural Resource Information System (NRIS).

**PONDERA COUNTY**  
**FUTURE LAND USE MAP**  
 Map 22

Projection: Lambert Conformal Conic  
 Coordinate System: State Plane, Zone 2500  
 Units: Meters Datum: NAD1983

0 10 20 Miles