

## UINTA COUNTY, WYOMING

### “THE CODE OF THE WEST”

#### **What you can expect when buying, building, or developing in Uinta County, Wyoming.**

**The “Code of the West”** was first chronicled by the western novelist, Zane Grey. Men and women who settled the western frontier were bound by an unwritten code of conduct. In keeping with that spirit, we offer this information to help people who have chosen to build and/or live in the unincorporated areas of Uinta County, Wyoming.

#### **Welcome to Uinta County:**

Life in the country can be rich and rewarding, treasured by both Uinta County residents who have been here for generations, and those who have recently moved here. It’s important that new property owners and homeowners understand that life in the rural parts of the county is different from life in town. The county government cannot provide the same level of service that city and town governments provide. The information included in this Uinta County version of “The Code of the West” is intended to help you make an educated and informed decision as you consider purchasing or

developing land in the unincorporated areas of Uinta County.

### **What kind of access to property is available outside of town?**

The fact that you can drive to your property does not necessarily guarantee that you, your guests or an emergency vehicle (Sheriff, Ambulance, Fire, etc.) can get there easily, or even during all seasons.

Please consider:

- **Response times for emergency services cannot be guaranteed.**
- **There can be problems with legal aspects of access**, especially if you have access across someone else's property. Make sure you have legal easements if you need them (deeded and recorded, not just verbal). You may want to get legal advice if you have questions regarding your own access to a County Road or State Highway.
- **Uinta County maintains hundreds of miles of roads, but many private properties are served by roads which are not County maintained.** Some roads that have been used for many years by the public are not maintained by the County. Make sure you know what kind of road maintenance is available and who pays for it.

- **Many large construction vehicles cannot navigate small, narrow and primitive roads.** If you plan to build, check out construction access. Private driveways should be wide and sturdy enough to support either emergency and/or construction vehicles.
- **If your driveway or private road will connect to a County Road you will need an Access Permit.** Call the Uinta County Planning office to find out more. If your access will be directly onto a Wyoming State Highway you will need to check with the Wyoming Department of Transportation about obtaining a Highway Access Permit.
- **In general, school buses travel only on County Roads or State Highways** and not on subdivision or private roads. In some outlying areas school bus transportation may not be provided at all. Check with the administration office of the district your children will attend to find out about busing.
- **In extreme weather, some roads may become impassable.** You may need a four-wheel drive vehicle, snow tires and/or chains, and perhaps even another mode of transportation to travel during those circumstances.

- **Gravel roads generate dust.** If this bothers you, you may not want to be in an area accessed only by gravel roads and for which no paving is planned. If you have questions about whether roads are scheduled for improvement, check with the subdivision property owners association, or with the Uinta County Planning office.
- **Unpaved roads are not always smooth and are often slippery when wet.** You may experience an increase in vehicle maintenance costs when you regularly travel on rural county roads.
- **Newspaper, parcel and overnight package delivery, and U.S. Mail delivery may not always be available to rural areas.** Check with the agencies that provide these services before assuming you can get delivery.
- **It may be more expensive and time consuming to build a rural residence** due to delivery fees and the time required for inspectors, contractors, etc. to reach your site.

### **What about Sewer, Water, Electricity, Telephone, Television, and Natural Gas?**

The utilities that you may be used to having when you live in a town or city may not be

available in rural areas. Please think about these situations:

- **The availability of telephone communication can be delayed,** particularly in the more remote areas of the County. In some areas, the only telephone service available may be a party line. It may be difficult or even impossible to obtain a separate line for fax or computer modem uses, and in some areas, cellular phones may not have service. Check with the local telephone service providers to find out what services will be available to you.
- **If central or municipal sewage treatment is available to your property, find out who provides the service,** and what costs are associated with it.
- **If no central sewage treatment is available,** you will be using or constructing an individual Small Wastewater Treatment Facility (septic system). If there is an existing system you may consider having the septic tank pumped and inspected by a reliable service. Call the Uinta County Planning office about obtaining a permit for construction of any new system or alteration of any existing system.

- **If a central or municipal water supply is available to your property,** find out who supplies it and what costs are associated with it.
- **Be sure you know what water rights are available with your property.** Is there a water well permit? Is there a decree to a spring on or off the property? If water is provided by a spring or well located off your property, do you have an easement allowing you to access and repair it? If you have deeded water rights (for agricultural or domestic use), listed as “acre feet”, or certain “second feet”, find out what that really means for you. You may not be able to drill a well or have real access to a water supply without getting approval from the Wyoming State Engineer’s office. You will need to know what kind of time and expense that may entail. You may want to contact an attorney or an engineer, as well as your realtor to help get this information.
- **Not all wells are permitted to allow watering of landscaping or livestock.** Make sure that you have the proper permits or are protected in the event you cannot obtain the proper permits from the Wyoming State Engineer’s office before you move ahead with your plans.

- **Having a water well permit does not guarantee that there will be water where you dig or drill for it.** Some areas of rural Uinta County have water wells that are several hundred feet deep. Consider those potential drilling and installation costs in your development planning.
- **You may or may not own the water that runs through your property in a stream or irrigation ditch.** Unless you have actually purchased water rights or have had those rights assigned to you, the water cannot be legally taken out of the stream or ditch. You may want to check with your attorney to make sure you have adequate, legal water rights with your property.
- **The Wyoming State Engineer's office, not Uinta County issues water well permits.** You can contact their office in Cheyenne directly or you can pick up an application in the Uinta County Planning office.
- **Electric and natural gas service may not be available in the more remote areas of Uinta County.** Check with each of these service providers to make sure you have the services you want before you commit to a construction or development project.

- **Some of your utility service lines may have to cross properties owned by other people** in order for service to be extended to your property. Make sure the proper legal easements are in place to allow lines to be installed to your property.
- **Electric power may not be available** in single and three phase service configurations. If you have special power requirements, check with the service provider to ensure the service available to you.
- **The cost of electrical service usually** includes both a fee to hook into the system (which may require extensive line installation if none exists), and a monthly charge for energy consumed. Check with the service provider about costs in your area.
- **Power outages can occur in outlying areas** more often than in more developed areas. Not only can these disrupt your computer modem's internet connection, you won't be able to get water from your well, or maybe even heat your home.
- **Trash collection in rural areas is generally limited to two choices:** A commercial pickup service which



charges a regular fee, or hauling your trash to a Uinta County Landfill. If you have questions about landfill hours and fees, call the Uinta County Solid Waste office located in the County Complex.

- **Most rural areas of the County are not wired for cable television.**

Reception through a regular antenna may be very poor at best. A satellite receiver may be required if you wish to have television.

### **What Can I Do On My Property?**

Many issues can affect your property in addition to those concerning utilities and access. It's important to research them before purchasing or developing land.

- **Not all parcels are “legal”.** A parcel must have been created under compliance with the Resolution For Subdivision of Land For Uinta County, Wyoming March 1979, or existed before then, or created by an approved exemption to the subdivision laws before a Land Use Certificate, Small Wastewater permit or Access permit is issued. In some cases, parcels may have been created by some other legal means allowed by Wyoming State law. If you have a parcel which isn't in one of these

categories, or if you don't know how to determine its status, check with the Uinta County Planning office.

- **Zoning Designation** does not necessarily dictate the assessed valuation of your property. Check with the Uinta County Assessor's Office with questions.
- **Other property owners may have easements which require you to allow construction of roads, power lines, water lines, sewer lines and other utilities, as well as maintenance of irrigation ditches across your land**, which may restrict your own development and building options. There may be easements that haven't been recorded, but are "historic". Title abstract and title insurance companies, or an attorney or other professional may be able to help you.
- **Many property owners do not own the mineral rights under the surface of their land.** By federal law, owners of mineral rights have the right to extract the minerals, even if that activity changes "surface characteristics". It's important that you know what minerals may be located under your land and who owns the rights to them. Check your deed, and if you don't understand it, you may want to contact your attorney or other professional to help you.

- **You may be provided with a plat for your property by your realtor,** or other seller. You may wish to obtain the services of a licensed Wyoming surveyor to ensure the accuracy of your survey.
- **Fences that separate properties may or may not be on legal boundary lines.** A survey of the land is the only way to confirm the location of your property lines.
- **Whether you want to construct a single family home,** a guest house, to subdivide, or open a store, your plans may require a **zoning Map Amendment,** as well as **driveway Access Permit,** a **Small Wastewater permit,** a **Land Use Certificate** or other permit requirements. Check with the Uinta County Planning office to find out what you'll need and when you'll need it.
- **Many subdivisions and planned developments have covenants and design guidelines that limit the use of the property.** Find out if there are covenants (either ask your realtor or check with the Uinta County Clerk's office), make sure that you can live with the rules of that subdivision.
- **Homeowners and property owners associations often are responsible for the maintenance of roads, utilities and other**

**common elements in subdivisions.** Check the subdivision's covenants to learn if an association has that responsibility. Check with your realtor or some of your future neighbors to learn if an association is functioning. A dysfunctional or non-operating association can cause problems for you, and may even involve you in expensive litigation.

- **Dues are almost always a requirement for those subdivisions that have a homeowners association.** The by-laws of the association should outline how the organization operates and how dues are set, collected and spent.
- **The property that is an open meadow today may not be forever.** Check the, recorded plat of your subdivision to see what uses are platted within it. In addition, check with the Uinta County Planning office to determine if those uses have changed since the plat was recorded. You can also talk with the planning office about the process that properties undergo for zoning map amendments, and how you will be notified if changes are proposed next to you.
- **You are responsible for keeping your dog on your property.** Wyoming State law allows dogs that are harassing livestock, wildlife, or posing a danger to other people to be destroyed immediately.

## You Shouldn't Mess With Mother Nature

Rural residents usually can expect to experience more challenges with the “elements” when they become unfriendly than residents who have access to municipal services.

- **Trees are a wonderful environmental amenity**, but can also endanger your home in a forest fire. The Wasatch-Cache National Forest Service office can offer a list of recommendations to help you protect your home from fire as well as protecting the trees from igniting if your house catches on fire. If you start a forest fire, you could be found legally responsible for paying the costs of putting it out. Helping to prevent a catastrophe before it happens benefits you as well as your neighbors and the forest.
- **Steep slopes can slide in unusually wet weather.** Large rocks can also roll down steep slopes and present a great danger to people and property.
- **You may be required to have a geotechnical study conducted before you can obtain a small wastewater permit, a land use certificate or access permit.** Geologic hazards such as mudslides, rock-fall, avalanche and unstable slopes can be common in Uinta County. Collapsing and

expansive soils can buckle concrete foundations and twist steel I-beams.

- **Be cautious about placing improvements on North-facing slopes.** North facing slopes or canyons rarely have direct sunlight in the winter. Snow may accumulate there and not melt throughout the winter.
- **Building designs which avoid “valleys” over outside entrances,** and have roof slope direction which prevent “dumps” of snow and ice accumulations on sidewalks and garage entrances will help prevent dangerous conditions and headaches during long winters.
- **A property owner who builds his home in a ravine** finds that the water that drained through the ravine now drains through his house. The topography of the land can tell you where the water will go when rain and spring runoff from snowmelt occur.

## Wildlife

Nature can provide you with some wonderful neighbors. However, some may be of concern to you and require extra care when you build and live in a rural or remote area.

- **Some subdivisions may prohibit the keeping of dogs,** which may harass wildlife,

or require that they be kept confined on the property. Some may limit the number of cats you may keep, and require that they be confined to prevent decimation of native bird populations.

- **Coyotes, skunks, squirrels, raccoons, deer, elk, moose, etc.,** can be annoying at times. Other times they may be destructive and dangerous. You will need to learn how to deal with them.
- **Threatened and endangered species of wildlife may be present in certain areas.** Check with the Wyoming Game and Fish Department about concerns related to the area of your property.
- **Hunting has been a way of life in Uinta County for generations.** Neighbors may allow legal hunting activities on their property. Informing yourself of areas where such activities are allowed may be important to you. Again, check with the Wyoming Game and Fish Dept. if you have questions.
- **Harsh winters can bring unexpected herds of elk and deer onto private lands.** They may damage fences, pastures and other personal property. Checking with the Wyoming Game and Fish Dept. about how to address these potential problems before they occur will help both you and the wildlife.

## **Agriculture, Our Heritage and Key to our Future**

The families who settled Uinta County brought water to the sagebrush valleys and were part of an ingenious system of water diversion, which has allowed agriculture to become an important part of our environment. These ranchers were truly the first environmentalists, and it is their irrigated meadows that create and maintain the beautiful green open spaces of our valleys. Minimizing the undesirable impacts of growth on ranching operations will help keep Uinta County a beautiful place to be.

- **Wyoming has an “Open Range” law.** This means if you do not want cattle, sheep or other livestock on your property, it is your responsibility to fence them out, and not the ranchers.
- **Agriculture is a major economic contributor to Uinta County.** If you choose to live among and next to ranching operations, you may be affected by them. You have an opportunity to help keep ranching operations viable by learning how to be a good neighbor to this important part of our county.
- **Ranchers often work around the clock, especially during calving season in the spring and hay harvesting time in middle**



**to late summer.** Occasionally, adjoining agricultural operations may disturb your otherwise quiet surroundings. Those times will pass.

- **If you are traveling on a dirt or gravel road adjacent to ranch lands,** drive slowly and with care. Excess dust can affect both the health of the cattle and the quality of hay in the fields. Occasionally cattle may get out on the road, avoiding hitting an animal is healthy for both you and the animal.
- **Ranchers occasionally burn their ditches to keep them clean of debris, weeds and other obstructions.** This burning may bother you momentarily, but it is not a regular occurrence.
- **Chemicals may be used to control weeds and remove vegetation that impedes the flow of irrigation ditches, or may be harmful to livestock.** Ranchers, just as all others, must operate within the constraints of public health and safety laws which affect the use of those chemicals.
- **Livestock may cause odors and noise, which may be objectionable to some.** If you find them annoying, you may want to consider that before you purchase or develop property.
- **Livestock are occasionally moved on public roads.** When you encounter a

livestock drive, please pull over to the side and allow the drive to pass. Or, if a rider directs you to move forward, do so slowly. The delay will only cost you a few minutes. Enjoy the scene, this is the real west and is a critical part of your neighbor's ability to earn a living.

- **Uinta County uses a noxious weed control program in compliance with Wyoming State law.** If your property has noxious weeds on it you may be required to control them. The Uinta County Weed and Pest office can help with concerns.

#### **Some final thoughts:**

- Though Uinta County receives property taxes from its property owners, the amount of taxes collected generally do not cover the cost of services provided to rural residents. In general, other revenue sources subsidize the lifestyles of those who live in rural areas making up this shortfall.
- Many issues arise when you consider taxes. Typically you will have concerns about whether your property will be taxed as residential, agricultural, commercial, etc., and what methods are used to arrive at the assessed amounts. The Uinta County Assessor's office can help answer those questions.

- Please take the time and effort to study the history of Uinta County. This will help give you an understanding and appreciation for the pioneers who first settled this land. It is our hope that through this understanding, you will approach your construction and development in a thoughtful and sensitive manner, which will help to protect our unique community, our natural resources and our historic way of life.
- The information in this Uinta County version of “The Code of the West” is not all inclusive. There will likely be issues that occur to you, or that you encounter that are not included here. If you have questions, the agencies listed below will do their very best to help you find the help you need.
- This information is provided by the Uinta County Planning office with the help of similar resources produced by other counties throughout the Mountain West. We offer this information and these suggestions with the sincere hope that they will help you as you decide to build, develop and live in Uinta County.

