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By Meg Daly on December 13, 2016

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Federal purchase of land ensures an endangered portion of GTNP is now protected.



(Photo: Grand Teton National Park Foundation)

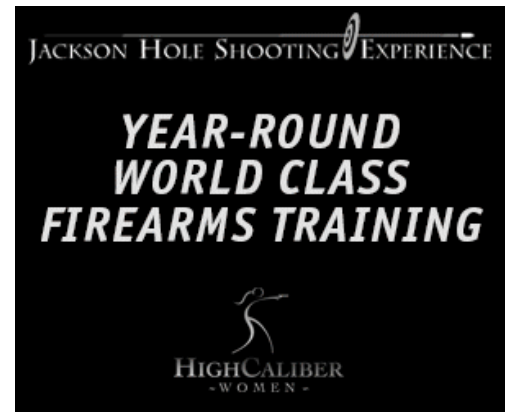
Jackson Hole, WY — It was a disturbing image—a swath of mansions or hotels obstructing a once unadulterated view of the Tetons along Antelope Flats. It was an image that could have become reality, but yesterday the Park Service announced the 640-acre parcel has been saved from development.

The historic \$46 million dollar purchase was thanks to a public-private partnership between Department of the Interior, Grand Teton National Park Foundation and the National Park Foundation.



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Antelope Flats lies within Grand Teton National Park east of Moose, bordering Kelly and the National Elk Refuge. Home to numerous species of wildlife, including bison, antelope, moose, sage grouse and wolves, the land is important habitat as well as an iconic area in the park.

“It’s the largest elk migration corridor in the country for the largest elk herd in the world,” said Leslie Mattson, president of Grand Teton National Park Foundation. “To think about 18 home sites on that parcel was frightening.”

The Park Foundation and other partners have been scrambling to raise \$23 million dollars by the end of 2016 in order to secure the purchase. Otherwise the land was slated to go up for public auction in 2017, and could have been developed residentially or commercially.

The property was what’s known as a school trust land, which is a tract of land given to a state by Congress when entering the union. Sales of school trust lands fund public schools.

“It’s a win-win for conservation and schools in Wyoming,” Mattson said. “Raising money for conservation and public education was really important for us.”

Wyoming has a constitutional obligation to earn income from its state school lands, which left Antelope Flats as well, as another remaining tract of land along the Gros Ventre Road, vulnerable to sale at auction. According to a release from the U.S. Department of the Interior, efforts by the department to acquire the property have been ongoing for many years.

The National Park Foundation, the Jackson Hole Land Trust and the Knobloch Family Foundation each donated \$1 million to the \$23 million goal.

Jackson Hole Land Trust executive director Laurie Andrews hailed the purchase as beneficial to both wildlife and the local community.

“We typically focus our efforts on private land,” Andrews said. “But the board of the Land Trust recognized the significance that the Antelope Flats parcel holds to the connectivity of Grand Teton National Park, both for the wildlife that uses the space for habitat and migration, and for visitors to the park who enjoy the view and recreational opportunities that the space provides.”

The remaining Kelly/Gros Ventre parcel is the last Wyoming school trust land in Grand Teton National Park. Mattson said the foundation will await the new administration to see how to move forward with possible purchase of that land.



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About Meg Daly

Meg Daly is a freelance writer and arts instigator. She grew up in Jackson in the 1970s and 80s, when there were fewer fences, but less culture. Follow Meg on Twitter @MegDaly1

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