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## In response to water quality concerns, Teton County may ban manmade ponds

Water quality advocates say ponds can lead to more evaporation, pollution and higher water temperatures.

By Charley Sutherland / Government Reporter  
Sep 2, 2026



People test out paddle boards last summer at R Park during the annual Summer Solstice Celebration. The county is considering banning the development of artificial ponds, citing water quality concerns.

PEARL SPURLOCK / NEWS&GUIDE FILE

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Citing water quality concerns, Teton County is set to consider a temporary pause on permits for new artificial ponds next week.

“They’re not good for the overall health of the aquatic system,” Board of County Commissioners Chair Mark Newcomb said in a Tuesday interview.

The county has prepared a resolution to place a moratorium on new ponds that it plans to consider Sept. 8, Newcomb said.

Ponds bubbled to the surface as commissioners held a two-day workshop that focused broadly on water quality and, more specifically, on implementing several water quality-related projects laid out in a management plan that commissioners approved in 2024. Commissioners were tasked with deciding which water quality projects to pursue and how to pursue them.

It would not be the first time the county has taken aim at human-created ponds. In 2017, the county put a stop on new pond and berm permits because of environmental concerns. The county lifted those restrictions 11 months later, while implementing a suite of new regulations officials said would bolster environmental protections.

People like to build ponds in part because they draw big animals to their property, said Planning Director Chris Neubecker, but most ponds essentially swap out one creature’s habitat for another’s. Algae also can grow in ponds, and homeowners sometimes use chemicals to eliminate the algae. That can be a source of pollution if the pond is connected to another water body, Neubecker said. Thin ice can also trap large animals.

“On the net, I would say they’re negative,” Neubecker said. “They are certainly very popular.”

The county does already have regulations on ponds, said Chris Peltz, the county’s water resources coordinator. The county has three types of allowed ponds: “agricultural” ponds, “ornamental” ponds and “habitat” ponds. The county opted to no longer allow fire suppression ponds about a year ago, Peltz said.

Technically, all artificial ponds are supposed to “appear to be naturally occurring and consistent with the surrounding features,” Peltz said. The problem is, that doesn’t happen particularly often.

Ponds have become quite popular across the county in recent years.

When asked Monday, Neubecker didn't know exactly how many applications for new ponds the planning department received in 2025 but said the prevalence of surface water has "drastically changed" since the 1950s.

"We're starting to look like Minnesota, the land of 10,000 ponds," water quality advisory board member Bill Mulligan told county commissioners Monday. "They're huge vectors for introduction of chemicals, pesticides [and] fertilizers."

The water quality advisory board is a volunteer group created in 2024 to advise county commissioners on water quality projects, policies, and initiatives. Water quality board members urged the commission to enact a full prohibition on humanmade ponds.

Alta resident Scott Pierson was the only person who addressed commissioners Monday who was skeptical of a pond prohibition. Pierson pointed to the ponds at the Jackson Hole Land Trust's R Park.

"If you don't think R Park has a community value, I feel sorry for you," Pierson said.

Protect Our Water Jackson Hole Executive Director Phil Powers was pleased with the county's direction on pond policy. Ponds can lead to more water evaporation, warmer water and can create breeding grounds for mosquitos.

"In a world where water is ever more precious, ponds both allow it to evaporate and warm it," Powers said in a Tuesday interview.

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## Charley Sutherland

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