

Race Against the Peak: How Jackson Hole Is Building a Market for Clean Energy Before the Grid Runs Out of Room

Building a Clean Energy Investment Pipeline in Jackson Hole, Wyoming

AT A GLANCE

Investment Priorities

Building Energy Efficiency & Electrification, Cold Climate Heat Pumps, Weatherization, Affordable & Workforce Housing Upgrades, Community Solar, Distributed Energy Generation & Storage

Pipeline Value

\$36.8 million across 21 project opportunities — affordable housing retrofits, public building upgrades, nonprofit and community-serving facilities, and early-stage district geothermal concepts

Key Partners

Energy Conservation Works (ECW); Town of Jackson; Teton County; Lower Valley Energy (LVE); Jackson Hole Community Housing Trust; Jackson/Teton County Housing Authority; Apex Analytics; Energy 350; Comfort Ready Home; Teton County School District; Teton County Public Works & Facilities

Community Impacts

Only 57% of the local workforce can afford to live in Teton County. Projects prioritize affordable and deed-restricted workforce housing where residents face high energy burdens. An updated GHG inventory shows buildings account for 28% of community emissions — up from approximately 17% previously — fundamentally reshaping the case for investment in the building sector.

Strategic Role

Market Builder | Coalition Convener | Finance Program Operator

The Path Forward

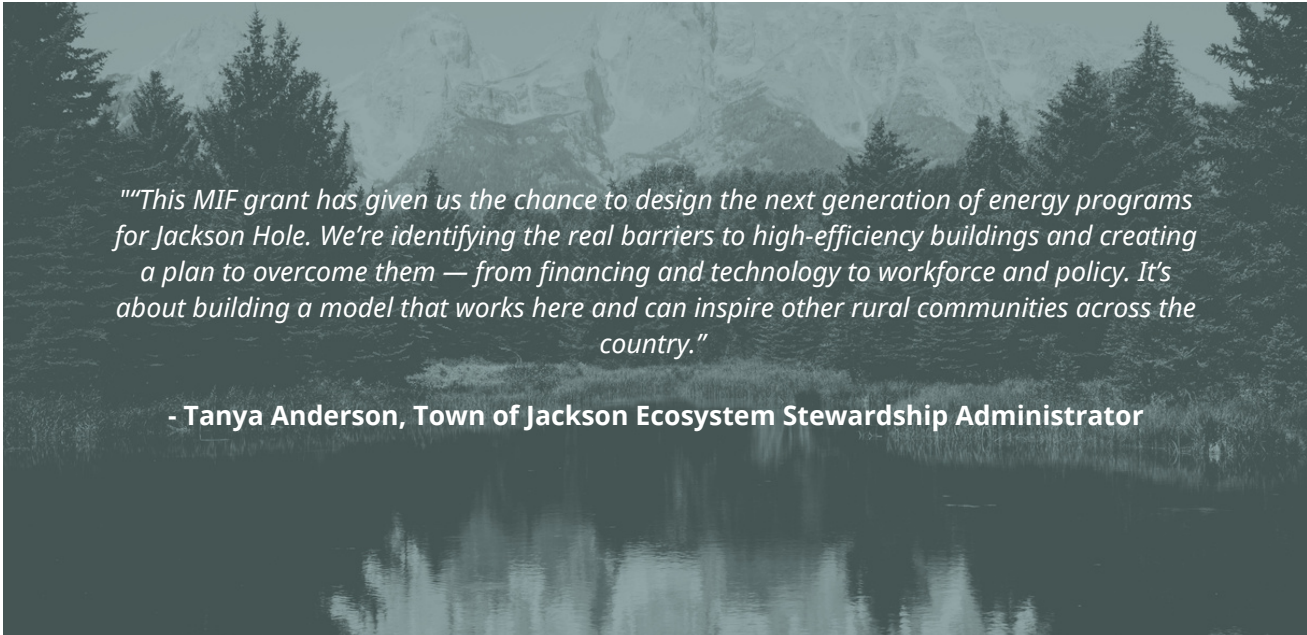
Deploying the newly launched Community Energy Leverage Fund's first round; advancing Pioneer Homestead through the leverage fund pipeline; relaunching ECW's commercial loan program with on-bill financing; and pursuing voluntary stretch codes for new construction and retrofits — all while building the aggregation model that makes small-market clean energy investable.

THE BIG PICTURE

The Challenge: In Jackson Hole, a valley of 23,000 year-round residents that has some of the country's most expensive real estate, and where electricity rates are just \$0.06/kWh, energy bills should barely register as a concern. But the numbers tell a different story. Between 2007 and 2024, residential gas usage grew 8.7% annually. Electric usage grew at nearly twice the rate of new connections. On the coldest winter mornings — when Teton County's dense stock of electric resistance heaters all fire at once — Lower Valley Energy's transmission lines over Teton Pass are already straining at capacity. Without action, the valley faces a hard choice within the next decade: new transmission over one of Wyoming's most iconic mountain passes, a natural gas peaker plant in Afton, or rising electricity prices. Energy Conservation Works exists to make none of those things necessary.

Jackson's clean energy market is stalled by barriers that reinforce each other. Construction costs of \$750–\$1,000 per square foot — five to six times the national average — make efficiency easy to value-engineer out. A housing crisis so severe that contractors can't find or retain skilled workers. Electricity rates so low they undercut the financial case for upgrades. And a municipality that lacks the staff capacity to manage external financing, meaning project after project gets funded internally through Special Purpose Excise Tax or deferred entirely when budgets run over.

The Solution: ECW used the MIF grant to do the groundwork that market transformation actually requires: map the building stock, surface the barriers, engage the contractors and developers who do the work, and design the policy and financing tools that close the gap. The result is two new programs launching in the summer of 2026: a reactivated commercial loan program, and a neighborhood-scale aggregation model that could finally make Jackson's sub-scale project landscape attractive to capital.



"This MIF grant has given us the chance to design the next generation of energy programs for Jackson Hole. We're identifying the real barriers to high-efficiency buildings and creating a plan to overcome them — from financing and technology to workforce and policy. It's about building a model that works here and can inspire other rural communities across the country."

- Tanya Anderson, Town of Jackson Ecosystem Stewardship Administrator

CREATING THE FOUNDATION: MARKET INTELLIGENCE, PROGRAMS, AND POLICY

A GHG Inventory That Changed the Story. Concurrent to the MIF grant, an updated community GHG inventory was conducted using the Global Protocol methodology. The previous inventory attributed 82% of emissions to transportation. The new one tells a different story: transportation is now approximately 55%, and buildings have emerged as a larger share than previously understood, accounting for 28% of community emissions. For local government operations, 59% of emissions come from buildings — and 58% of those come from natural gas. This reframing matters enormously. It makes the investment case for building efficiency not just a climate argument but a data-driven emissions strategy, put forth to the Teton Climate Action Partnership and the town council. The building sector is now on the map.

Two New Programs Launched Summer 2026. The MIF grant directly catalyzed two new financing programs: The **Community Energy Leverage Fund** — funded through a separate Specific Purpose Excise Tax (SPET) grant and informed by MIF — launched its first round with approximately \$1 million available, scaling to \$3 million total. Open to local governments, co-ops, nonprofits, businesses, and school districts, the fund requires matching funds and offers grants covering predevelopment through construction. The fund's structure was shaped directly by the work the MIF grant period enabled. The **Commercial Loan Program Relaunch** addresses what MIF's market intelligence confirmed: the commercial built environment in Jackson runs heavily on natural gas, and financing barriers have kept building owners from making impactful upgrades to reduce emissions and energy usage. The relaunched program offers flexible terms, no energy audit requirement, on-bill financing through LVE, and low interest rates — removing the barriers that prevented commercial participation under the previous structure.

Heat Pump as the Answer. The MIF roundtable and market assessment converged on one clear finding: heat pumps are the priority technology for Jackson Hole's building sector. That means cold-climate air-source units capable of maintaining 70%+ capacity at 5°F; ductless minisplits for retrofitting electric resistance buildings; dual-fuel systems for homes with gas furnaces; and heat pump water heaters optimized for performance at -30°F. A heat pump water heater pilot is now underway in Jackson Housing Trust affordable housing funded through a Community Foundation of Jackson Hole grant. A neighborhood-scale heat pump aggregation model has also been developed — targeting 1980s condo clusters with similar layouts where even 3–4 participants can negotiate contractor and planning discounts. Because contractors typically travel from Idaho, geographic bundling adds real efficiency. ECW has a briefing deck on this model and is actively seeking partners to pilot it.

Policy Groundwork. A voluntary stretch code project is exploring whether Jackson can establish performance standards above code for new construction, with incentivized compliance. Stakeholder engagement identified technical assistance and financing incentives as the most valued tools. Separately, a proposed AC-to-heat-pump replacement requirement and updated electricity rate structures — tiered rates, time-of-use options — would strengthen the financial case for efficiency investments that currently struggle against LVE's flat rates. A new utility CEO and a new wholesale power contract create an opening to advance these conversations that didn't exist a year ago.

PROJECTS SEEKING CAPITAL: PRIORITY PIPELINE

Pioneer Homestead Senior Living — 78 Units | \$468,000 efficiency financing. An affordable nonprofit apartment complex built in the late 1970s serving seniors and people with disabilities across three 3-story buildings. ECW developed an energy improvement pathway through MIF: replace PTACs with heat pump PTACs, upgrade insulation, add smart controls.

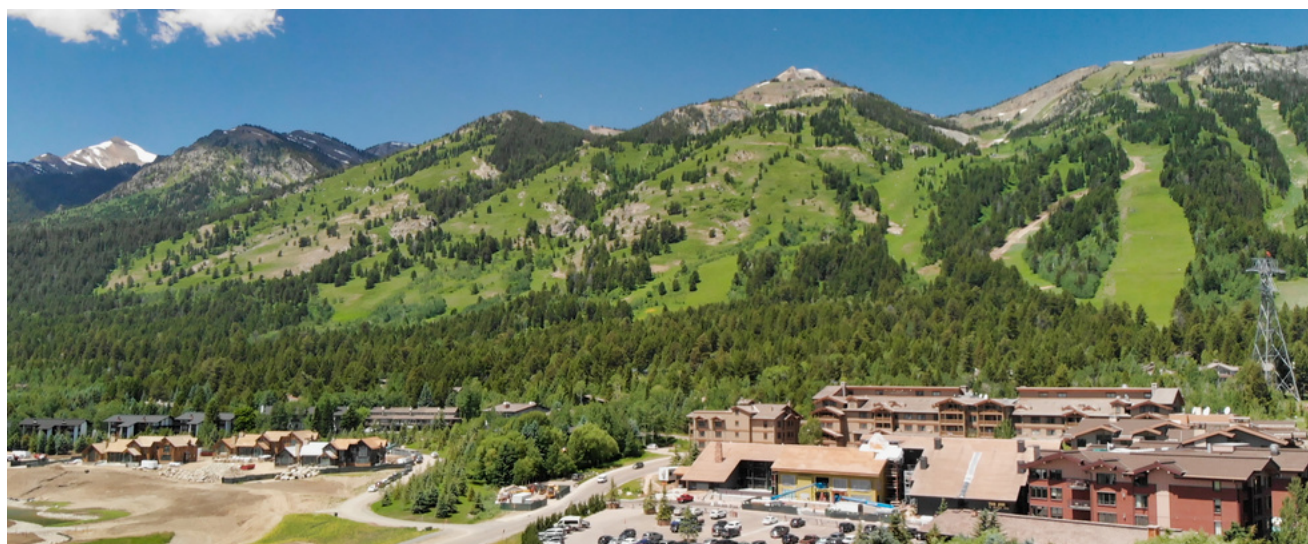
Horse Creek — 26 Affordable Single-Family Homes | \$1.04M efficiency / \$33.8M total. New construction breaking ground in 2028, developed by the Jackson Hole Community Housing Trust. An opportunity to embed cold-climate heat pumps, heat pump water heaters, advanced envelope, and solar-ready wiring from the ground up — before the efficiency gap opens.

Northern South Park — 600+ Units, Phase 1 | \$24M efficiency / \$900M+ total. A 200+ acre master-planned development, 70% deed-restricted, Phase 1 Master Site Plan approved May 2025. Scale creates a rare opportunity for district geothermal or bulk heat pump procurement. The pipeline's most transformational long-term project — and the Virginian RV Park (200+ units also in planning) represents a near-term parallel opportunity if sustainability goals survive budget pressures.

Public Building Portfolio. Eight public buildings were flagged as high-priority in the Beyond Efficiency Benchmarking Report: Teton County Jail, Library, Fire/EMS Stations, Administration Building, Heritage Arena, and Recreation Center. The school district's Jackson Elementary LED upgrade has a \$70,000 bid in hand — shovel-ready, waiting only for funding. The challenge for all municipal projects: Town and County typically use internal SPET and energy mitigation funds, and lack the staff capacity to manage external loans or grants. Budget overruns routinely cut green features — solar panels deferred to "solar ready," efficiency measures dropped when Justice Center costs ran over.

Community Solar — Wyoming's First | \$1.9M SPET committed

ECW is developing Wyoming's first community solar project, with \$1.9 million in SPET funds already earmarked and utility financing through the Rural Energy Bank. A landmark project for the state — demonstrating that shared solar is viable in a rural, cold-climate context.



PROVEN IMPACT & NEXT STEPS

The MIF grant enabled ECW to build a market intelligence base, a cold climate technology roadmap, a GHG inventory that elevated the building sector's share of emissions — nearing equal footing with transportation within the Town of Jackson and municipal operations, though still a smaller share community-wide, two new financing programs, a relaunched commercial loan product, and a neighborhood aggregation model ready to pilot. The coalition relationships, the contractor engagement, and the policy groundwork — none of that existed in coordinated form prior to the grant.

Aggregation as the Missing Piece. The insight that emerged most clearly from the grant period: an important gap is aggregation capacity. Local governments are wearing too many hats to bundle projects, do customer acquisition, and attract capital simultaneously. Big cities do this routinely. Small cities don't have the staff. ECW's neighborhood-scale heat pump model is a direct answer — and identifying the right aggregator partners, whether HOAs, housing trusts, or a dedicated intermediary, has been the coalition's most important near-term work.

The Efficiency-as-Grid-Investment Frame. The non-wires alternative concept — treating efficiency investment as a substitute for transmission infrastructure — is the frame that makes this a utility story as much as a climate story. LVE is a member-owned cooperative whose board answers to its customers. A new CEO, a new wholesale power contract, and a peak demand problem that isn't going away create an opening to negotiate demand-side investment as an alternative to building a new line over Teton Pass. Every dollar of efficiency that reduces winter morning peak load is a dollar that doesn't go into infrastructure the valley didn't want.

The Strategic Opportunity. Jackson Hole has genuine urgency, existing financing infrastructure, a utility partner whose incentives are aligning, and a community that voted yes for energy conservation with public dollars. What the MIF grant added is the evidence base, the programs, and the coalition to act on all of it. For partners looking for a prepared rural market in the Mountain West where the grid problem, the affordability problem, and the efficiency opportunity all align, Jackson Hole is a place to start.

This case study was funded through the Municipal Investment Fund, a partnership between ICLEI USA and CGC to support local governments, tribes, and their partner not-for-profit organizations develop public-private partnership plans that can accelerate the deployment of capital to clean energy projects.