

THERMOPOLIS COMMUNITY TRAILS PLAN

October 2020



A hiker enjoys the view from the Milek Bench along the new T Hill Trail in Hot Springs State Park.

PARTNERS:



INTRODUCTION

Purpose

Thermopolis and the surrounding countryside are blessed with an abundance of outdoor recreation opportunities. Tourists are drawn by the Big Horn River, Hot Springs State Park (HSSP), dinosaur dig sites, and spectacular landscapes and vistas. The area has the attractions and natural features to be an outdoor recreation destination, and it's easy to see why local stakeholders are advancing a vision of Thermopolis becoming an increasing draw for travelers, tourists and outdoor recreationists alike.



Google Earth image of Thermopolis, facing north

A group of residents banded together in January 2019 to form the Hot City Outdoor Alliance, with the stated purpose, “To receive, administer and disburse funds that are tax

exempt to develop and support outdoor recreation projects and programs that enhance the economy, community, and environment of Hot Springs County, Wyoming for the benefit of current and future generations.” This group has collaborated with representatives from the Town of Thermopolis, Hot Springs County, Wyoming State Parks and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), as well as the private sector, to identify and promote a range of diverse recreation opportunities in the region, with non-motorized trails being a key component. Moving forward, the Alliance approached Wyoming Pathways later in 2019 for advice on how to craft a community trail system. Wyoming Pathways assisted the Alliance in securing a planning grant

and contracting with trail consulting firm TPT, LLC to evaluate the opportunities for trails in the Thermopolis area and make recommendations on how to best proceed.



The scope of work for this plan specified creating a conceptual-level plan and vision for a destination trail system in the Thermopolis area. Phone interviews conducted with numerous local citizens confirm the

community's desire to create such a system. The plan included a robust public engagement process, discussion of funding options, evaluation of natural surface trails and road bicycling corridors and review of relevant planning documents for trail related issues.

There appears to be substantial community interest in developing a mountain bike and hiking trail system that follows the International Mountain Bike Association (IMBA) trail design standards. Trails designed for mountain bikes are enjoyable for riding and are also suitable for trail running and hiking. A good example is the T Hill trail built in Hot Springs State Park during 2019 using IMBA standards as a guide.

Creating a destination trail system results in people traveling to a community specifically to use trails, and Thermopolis has the potential to grow in that direction. There are several small western town examples that have reinvigorated their community with mountain bike tourism; these include Moab, Utah; Downieville, Cal.; Oakridge, Ore.; and Fruita, Colo. Mountain bikers tend to spend more per capita than hikers, according to the Outdoor Industry Association, whose research found that in a recent year (2017), mountain bike tourism accounted for more than 26 billion dollars in the United States.



Workers build retaining wall on T Hill Trail (2019)

Focus on biking and hiking

Mountain bikers seek out professionally designed trail systems and will stay (and spend money) in communities that feature close-to-town trails. Developing a network of mountain biking and hiking trails has great potential to attract people to Thermopolis.

The elements that go into a destination trail system can be significantly different than a local user trail system. Requirements include:

- Well-constructed and maintained trails, including unique or exciting features and also perceived by users as “flowy and fun” that provides incentive for cyclists who are willing to travel
- Enough trail length and diversity to keep a visitor occupied for at least one day. Factors in length include sheer mileage of trail as well as style, technicality and elevation gain; a general rule of thumb is offering at least 12 hours of trail experience
- The use of various types of media to raise awareness of the system and making it easy to locate and access
- Descriptive trail names, with clear, easy-to-follow directional signage supplemented with easy-to-comprehend, trailside maps

- Well-equipped trailheads, ideally with an information kiosk, trail map, adequate parking and regularly maintained restrooms
- Public access to trailheads. (Having to contact someone to ask permission to cross their property is not adequate access.)
- Improved roads to trailheads, routes that accommodate recreational vehicles
- In addition, an on-road Bicycle Route System identified, with one-hour to one-day rides and loops of varying lengths and difficulty, generally on low-volume roads, or routes with wide shoulders if on highways.

Community support is an important aspect in gaining destination trail system status. IMBA started the Epic Ride designation program to highlight top tier trails. However, they quickly learned while good trails are key, there needs to be a great support community to be a destination. The next level is what is called a “Ride Center;” indicating a deeper and all-encompassing experience. A closer look at the characteristics of a Ride Center reveals that almost half of the criteria relate to the community.

IMBA Ride Centers

A presentation at the 2016 IMBA World Summit highlighted what it takes to achieve ride center status. Following are a dozen key points from their presentation:

1. Get to know mountain bikers and their culture
2. Find the genuineness of your destination
3. Find out whose expectations you can fulfill most
4. Make a plan
5. Get the local community and stakeholders on board
6. Develop well planned and maintained signature trails
7. Make them feel at home
8. Develop a strong brand
9. Tell the world about your amazing destination
10. Ask them how you can improve your offer
11. Cooperate with other destinations
12. Start riding

Along with Ride Centers, the League of American Bicyclist has the Bicycle Friendly Community program, which Thermopolis could apply to for recognition and use in tourism promotions.

Trying to put all of the elements of a destination community in place can be daunting, but Thermopolis has the natural resources and community spirit to become a great trail destination. By following action plan and prioritized recommendations in this plan, advocates can quickly make progress towards the goal of an active community and successful trail destination.

Funding for this plan

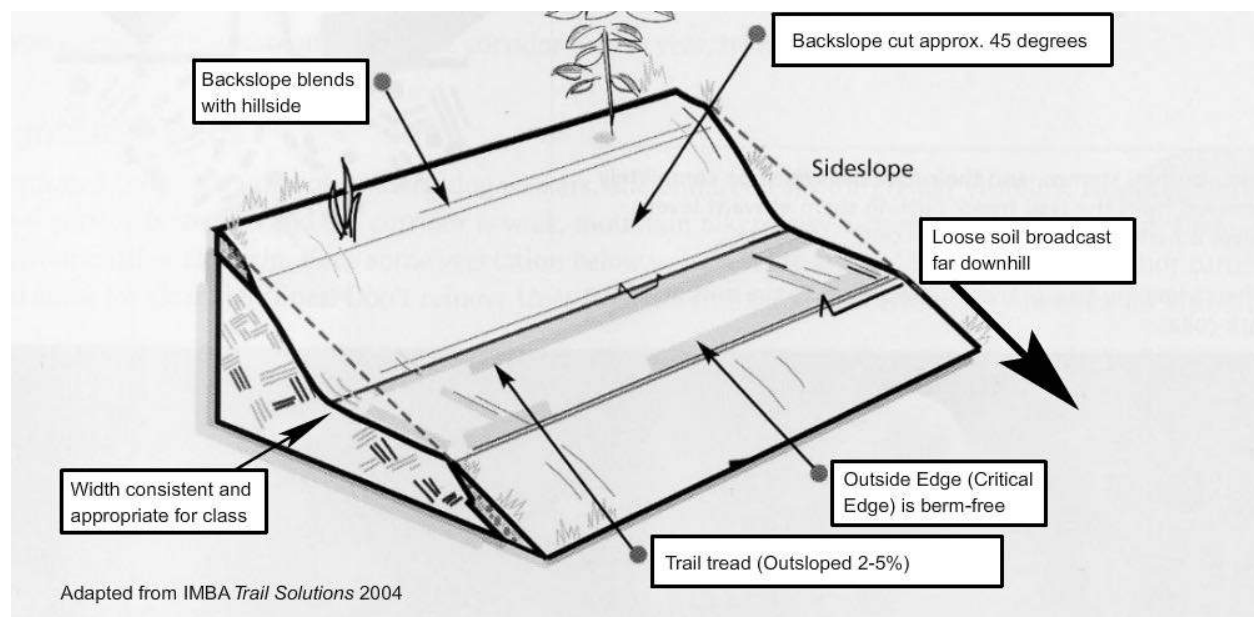
Wyoming Pathways secured a \$5,000 planning grant from the Laura Jane Musser Foundation, which was matched by the Hot City Outdoor Alliance, the Worland Field Office of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and private donations, for a total investment of \$10,000. Wyoming Pathways is contributing the staff time to administer the Musser grant, and to manage the contract with TPT, LLC to prepare this report.

CHAPTER 1: TRAIL DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION

Trail Design and Sustainability

The specific alignment of trail tread should be built to accommodate mountain bikers, as this user group obtains speeds greater than a hiker or runner. Comprehensive trail design and construction guidance can be found in *Trail Solutions: IMBA's Guide to Building Sweet Singletrack*, *Managing Mountain Biking: IMBA's Guide to Providing Great Riding and Bike Parks: IMBA's Guide to New School Trails*. (IMBA is the acronym for International Mountain Biking Association.) Below are some basic trail design sustainability guidelines as described in the above-mentioned publications.

When describing a trail, there are four major components to remember. The *tread* is the relatively flat surface that the user travels upon. The *critical edge* is the outer or downhill edge of the trail tread. The *backslope* is the area immediately uphill from the tread. The *hinge* is the intersection of the tread and the backslope.



A sustainable trail sheds water off the trail while keeping users on the tread. Trail location, alignment, grade, drainage and soil texture are the most important factors affecting sustainability. A common sustainable trail design is *rolling contour*, characterized by a sidehill location, a gentle trail grade, grade reversals, and an out-sloped tread that tilts slightly toward the critical edge. Applied collectively, the eight following principles result in sustainable trails that are low maintenance, fun to use, and more likely to manage risk, environmental impact, and user conflicts.

- The best location for trails is on sidehills, as opposed to flatter terrain like meadows, or valley floors.
- Trails should gently traverse the slope, rather than traveling directly up or down it. Trails that directly ascend the hillside are known as “fall-line” trails.

- To ensure a sustainable alignment, a trail’s grade should never exceed half of the grade of the sidehill it is located on. This is known as the “half rule.”
- The average slope of the trail should generally be 5-8% and not exceed 10%. This average may be lower depending on the soil texture.
- A grade reversal is a spot at which a trail briefly changes elevation, dropping subtly before rising again. This change in grade forces water to exit the trail at the low point of the grade reversal, before it can gain more volume, momentum, and erosive power.
- The critical edge of the trail should tilt slightly down and away from the hinge, this is called the “out-slope.” Proper out-slope will cause water to sheet across and off of the trail in a gentle, non-erosive manner instead of funneling down the trail’s center, this known as “sheet wash.” Most trails should be built with a 2% - 5% out-slope.
- Proper trail design with gentle grades and sidehill location can minimize soil displacement. In areas with loose soils or high traffic, consistent flow, in-sloped turns, and tread armoring (embedding stone) are also frequently necessary.

As in design, it is recommended that a trail building professional play a significant role in the design and construction, and improvements of the natural surface trails. It is also recommended that the consultant/contractor understand the specific needs, materials and techniques associated with trail building. The use of contractors primarily experienced in road or general construction is *not* recommended, as these firms and individuals are not versed in the needs of trail users. To create local skills, there are excellent trail building resources available for community volunteers interested in trail building and maintenance. For a modest annual investment, there is also the potential for the Hot City Outdoor Alliance to fund a seasonal trail builder position, which could then help manage routine maintenance, train volunteers, and lead events.

Trail Flow

With good trail flow, the speed at which a rider travels on the trail should be fairly consistent, and the rider will not have to brake and accelerate frequently. Transitions between faster and slower flow will need to be gradual, with progressively increasing and decreasing turn radii and frequent uphill segments to reduce speed where needed. Downhill grades should not come right before tight turns. Adjusting in-slope and out-slope (camber) of the trail tread to match the flow also helps riders stay on the trail and allows higher speeds.

Local Conditions

Understanding local soils and bedrock formations is critical to trail design and construction. In Thermopolis, the Chugwater Formation may be the most dramatic soil type. Composed of siltstone and shale with interspersed sandstone, Chugwater Formation exhibits a bright red color and can be visually stunning on the landscape. However, it has little cohesion as a soil and can have a problematic pudding-like consistency when wet. Although the red soils may be eye-pleasing, trails need to avoid them soil; if a Chugwater soil must be traversed, it needs to be at a very low grade and the tread, critical edge, and even back slope, must be armored with rock.

The Morrison Formation which overlays the Chugwater Formation is much better for trail development, and the Dinwoody Formation which underlies the Chugwater Formation contains acceptable soils for trail construction.

Also, in some areas where hot mineral water came to the ground surface, a type of limestone called travertine was deposited. Travertine can vary in hardness; where it is solid, it can be a very good trail building material.

Nugget sandstone also overlays the Chugwater Formation in spots and is an excellent material for trail tread and features.

Signage and Wayfinding

The development of a trail network requires the development of a comprehensive system of signs for the trail system as well as branding. Signs are the most important communication tool between land managers and trail users. A well-implemented and maintained signage system enhances the user experience, helps visitors navigate the trail network, and provides information about the area. Ideally the trail system would also have a complimentary website for visitors to view trail maps, locate access points, and to find more information to plan a trip.

A variety of signs can be created to help users identify trails and their location, select routes, remain confident in their trail choices, guide users to destinations and key points of interest, provide information on regulations and allowed uses, learn about responsible recreation and trail etiquette, learn about resource protection, and reduce risk and hazards. Signs can be informational/ directional, regulatory/warning, and educational/interpretative.

Directional signs provide navigational information, from a simple blaze to elaborate maps. Informational signs, usually positioned at the trailhead, provide details such as trail length and difficulty. These include trailhead identification signs, signs at a trailhead kiosk (to include a complete map and description of nearby trails and facilities, local regulations, emergency contact information, and educational messages), trail intersection signs, waymarks, difficulty rating signs, allowed activities, road/trail intersections, and emergency signs.

Regulatory signs delineate rules, such as prohibited activities, direction of travel, or other restrictions. Warning signs are used to caution trail users of upcoming hazards or risks. These include visitor rules and regulation signs, allowed activities, road/trail intersections, and emergency signs.

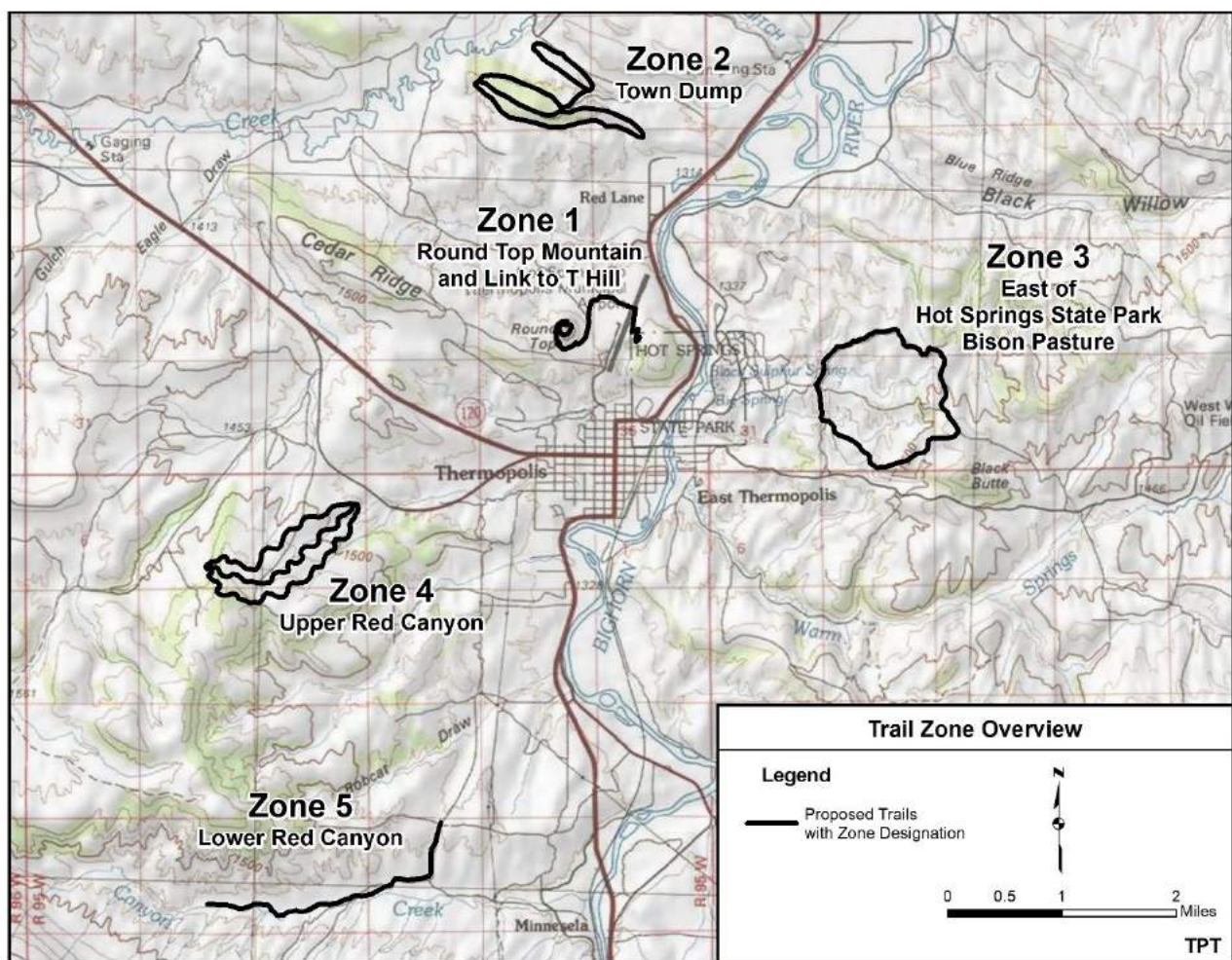
Educational signs provide guidelines for responsible recreation and trail etiquette. Interpretative signs describe natural or cultural resources. These include education/responsible use signs, and interpretative signs.

Also useful are postings and regular updates to the main online trail map utilities, such as Trailforks, MTB Project and Hiking Project. These sites are popular among recreationists and are a good opportunity to present information, including photos and user reviews. They can also serve as elements in a marketing program for the town.

CHAPTER 2: POTENTIAL TRAIL DEVELOPMENT ZONES

Five distinct trail zones, as illustrated on the map below, were investigated in the Thermopolis area for shared use trail development. Zone numbering indicates relative prioritization of the potential project(s).

Because trails in Hot Springs State Park are planned and administered directly by the Wyoming Department of State Parks and Cultural Resources, they were not assigned as a “zone” status for the purposes of this assessment. They are mentioned in Chapter 6 -Planning and Land Use Documents, specifically the HSSP Master Plan, and illustrated in the associated Figure 4-12 on page 24.



Zone 1: Round Top Mountain

Existing Conditions

Round Top mountain is a major landmark in the immediate Thermopolis area, prominent from all three highway entrances into town. Several businesses in Thermopolis are named after or use Round Top as a logo.

Round Top was donated to Hot Springs County in 1986 by the Lewis Freudenthal family. The south side of Round Top has the highest elevation approach, with a maintained gravel public road linking that approach into town. The road terminates in a small parking area where a monument recognizing the Freudenthal donation is located.

From the parking area, an informal and crude hiking trail ascends the south face of Round Top. The trail averages over a 20% grade and exceeds 30% in places, making it unsuitable for many potential users, particularly those with even minor disabilities. The trail tread is eroded and increasingly deteriorated the higher it climbs, transitioning into a hazardous scramble through rimrock before reaching the top. It appears the Round Top trail receives limited usage due to its poor and frankly unsafe condition.



View from golf course of Round Top. Existing trail to summit requires steep and difficult scramble through rim rock.



Recommendation

Developing a sustainable, safe and accessible trail to the top of Round Top should be the highest trail priority for the community. Being the highest point near Thermopolis, Round Top is a community icon. Because it offers some of the best vistas in the areas, public interest in summiting Round Top is substantial.

In 2019 HSSP built a formal trail to the top of T Hill. Hiking and riding or walking to the top of T Hill quickly become one of the most popular things to do in Thermopolis. The success of the T Hill trail generated community support to look for other trail opportunities in the area. T Hill is lower than Round Top and located immediately to the east. There is a potential to link these two landmarks with a trail. This will give the ability to hike and ride all the way from Hot Springs State Parks to Round Top Mountain.

Round Top is owned entirely by Hot Springs County, and therefore with the County's support, it would require limited additional permitting. Work could conceivably begin as soon as funding is available. Round Top has good public access and a good location for a trailhead with parking.

Round Top has very steep hillsides, with over 50% grades in some areas, and is sometimes confused for a volcano. The surface is predominantly Chugwater Formation and Morrison Formation soils with travertine stone blocks. The Chugwater Formation (i.e., red soil) is highly erosive and should be avoided by any trail alignment. Additionally, the grade of any trail should average 10% or less and reach 15% for only short (no more than 25 feet) distances. The tread width would need to be 30 to 36 inches to account for the steep sidehill and the critical edge should be armored in many locations. Back slope armoring might also be needed in locations. The planning analysis has identified a feasible trail corridor that could adhere to these trail criteria and snake through gaps in the band of rim rock before flattening out into a loop around the top.



The trail would measure approximately 2,000 lineal feet from its base to where it breaks out onto the rim. The climbing portion of the trail would be a difficult build, requiring specialized trail construction machinery and should be budgeted at \$10 - \$12 per lineal foot. Constructing a loop trail (about 1,800 feet in length) atop the rim would be much easier and can be constructed at \$3 - \$5 per lineal foot and could be a suitable, in whole or part, as a volunteer, hand-built project.

A big plus is the good and easy public access to the site, but the parking area would need to be enlarged, leveled and graveled. An information kiosk would need to be added to the parking, and directional signage would be required on the trail.

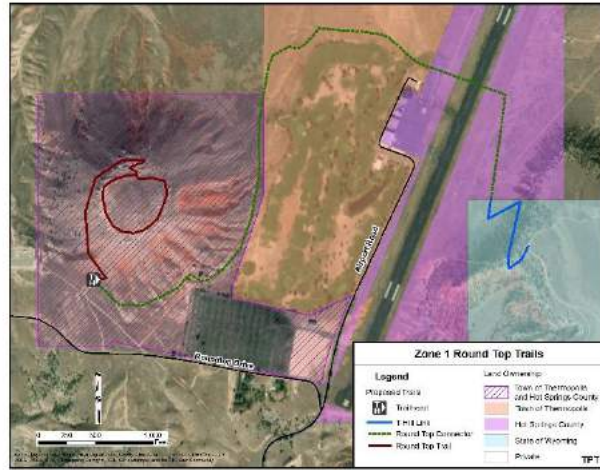
An important adjunct to any project to construct a new trail up Round Top would be decommissioning and reclaiming the existing trail which is unsightly and presents a chronic erosion and safety issue.

Construction could conceivably begin by the spring of 2021. The project proponent will need to work with the county to get approval to build the trail and make trailhead improvements. The project partners have applied for a Laura Jane Musser Foundation Implementation grant. This grant is non-federal money and thus can be used as a match against a LWCF grant. The next deadline for an LWCF grant is Dec. 31, 2020. Combined, the grants should be enough to build the trail. The county will need to act as a sponsor for the LWCF grant. The Alliance is invited to approach Wyoming Pathways for assistance with hiring the trail contractor, administering the construction contract and tracking finances.

Zone 1: Roundtop Link to T Hill

Existing Conditions

Completion of a trail up and down Roundtop could lead to a follow-up project to link to the existing T Hill trail. Being as Round Top and T Hill are both prominent features and in close proximity, connecting them by trail would be very popular and it seems reasonable, and would have a high priority. The link trail would require HSSP construct a trail from the west side of T Hill, beginning at the loop section of the T Hill down to the abandoned runway at the former Thermopolis Airport.



The link trail would likely cross the abandoned airport runway and then parallel a two-track road around the south side of the Thermopolis Golf Course in the vicinity of the driving range. On the west side of the golf course, the link trail would cross onto county property and work its way around the area east of Round Top near a water tank adjacent to the Cemetery. From there, the trail would follow a contour path to the Round Top trailhead. The area between the golf course and the east flank of Round Top also has intermittent patches of exposed Chugwater Formation and care would need to be taken to avoid these soils and to keep trail grades low. Since this project is entirely on Town of Thermopolis and Hot Springs County lands, depending on the source of construction funding, NEPA review might be avoided.

Recommendation

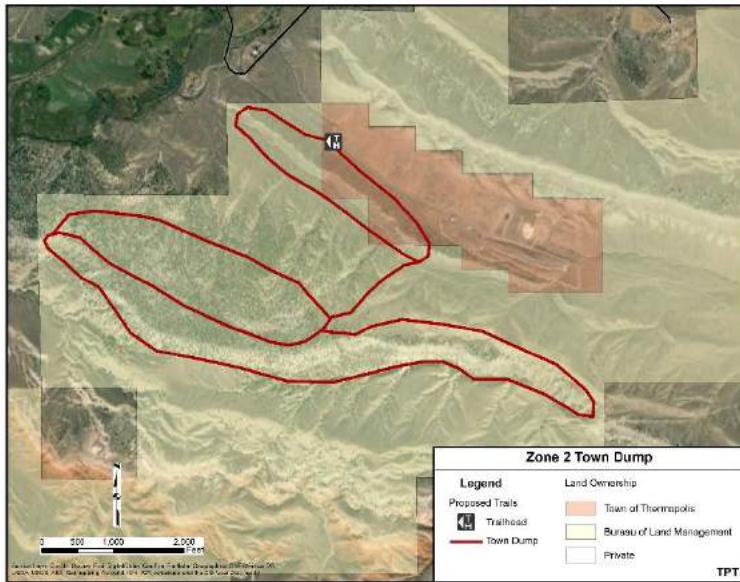
The Round Top trail and trail from T Hill to the abandoned airport should be completed before the link trail is built. Approval would need to be acquired to cross the abandoned runway and golf course property. A consultant knowledgeable and experienced in sustainable trail design should be employed to lay out the trail between the golf course and the Round Top trailhead. Crossing the abandoned runway and the golf course property would require primarily signage. The trail construction between the golf course and the round Top trailhead would be relatively straight forward and with a cost in the \$3 - \$5 per lineal foot range, and will be suitable as a volunteer work component.

Zone 2: Town Dump Property

Existing Conditions

Most of this potential trail area is on a BLM administered lands which surrounds the Thermopolis town dump, which is located on town-owned property. The road to the dump is paved, and a good location for a future trailhead with ample parking could be designated on the south side of the road.

This property has two ridges with numerous, large exposed Nugget sandstone blocks. Opportunities to develop trails on the exposed sandstone are good, and the property has attractive



views of Thermopolis. Other positives of the parcel are suitable grades for trail development, good soils and stands of large juniper providing shade and vegetative cover. Potential exists to link this trail system to the Round Top – T Hill link trail, but would require crossing private property.

This property has the best terrain for mountain bike development, compared to the other locations evaluated (so far) in the Thermopolis area. The entire property measures about 1,800 acres, but less than half of the

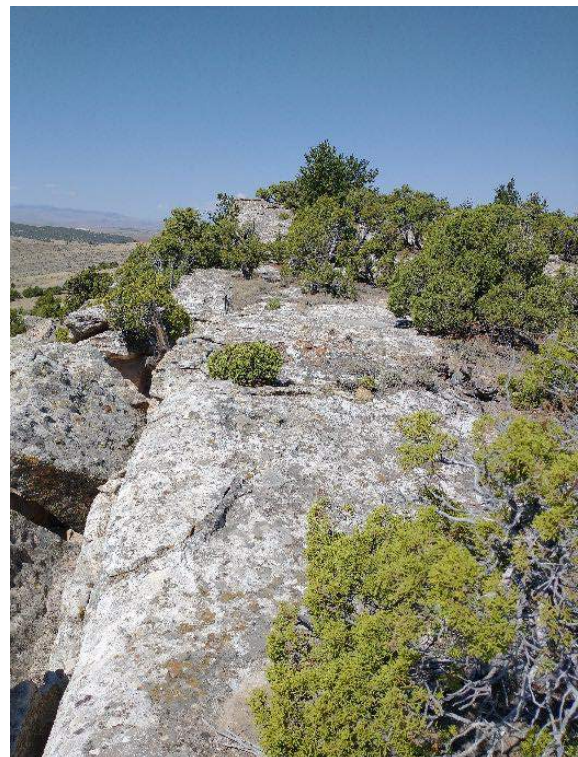
parcel would be used for trails. By itself, the area is not large enough to constitute a destination, but in coordination with other trail developments in the area, would contribute to destination status and constitute a very popular riding area for locals and visitors alike.

Recommendation

A small stacked-loop system should be developed, making sure to incorporate the exposed sandstone. An experienced trail professional should be hired to conduct trail design and layout. A reasonable construction cost estimate is \$5 - \$7 per lineal foot, but with training and direction, much of the work could be accomplished by volunteers.

The project proponent would need to coordinate with BLM to begin the process of trail development, anticipating one to two years for completion of the NEPA process. Funding would need to be generated for an archaeological survey and wildlife inventory. Also, fundraising efforts for trail construction is advised to begin as soon as approval is granted by the BLM. It may be feasible to combine environmental compliance for this area with other BLM trails proposed, and more efficiently complete the NEPA.

Whether a grazing lease exists also needs to be confirmed.



Sandstone outcrops should be incorporated into any trails built in Zone 2

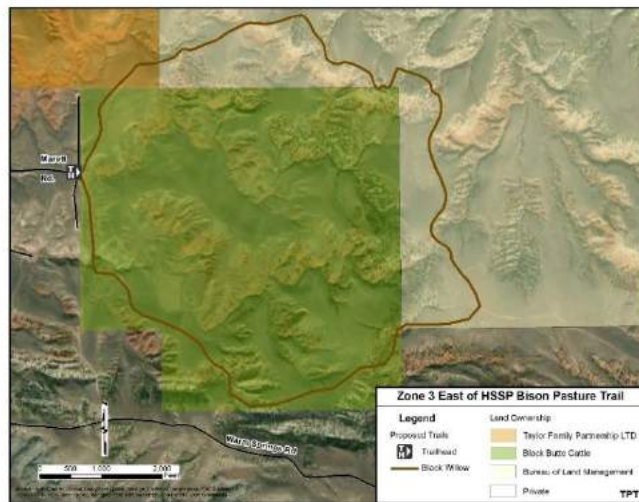
Zone 3: East of Hot Springs State Park Bison Pasture

Existing Conditions

Hot Springs State Park is one of Wyoming’s most popular tourist destinations, with annual visitation exceeding 1 million people. The bison pasture is a popular component of the park, with paved roads for tourists throughout. There are also trails that are within and adjacent to the pasture. One of the roads reaches the east boundary of the pasture, where a gate provides access to adjacent private property. The area around the gate is ideal for a trailhead and parking area.

The square-mile area immediately east of the bison pasture, owned by Black Butte Cattle Company, holds promise for trail development. Owner Burkard Pohl is also the owner of the Wyoming Dinosaur Center. Mr. Pohl is a community minded individual and might be amenable to trail development on this parcel. To the north and east of the Black Butte property is the Black Willow allotment administered by the Bureau of Land Management, whose representatives have indicated interest in trail development. There could be opportunities for the County to negotiate land swaps for isolated State Lands sections on the large Black Butte Cattle Company ranch, and then get a recreation lease with OSLI, a process that was recently successful in Laramie WY.

There is also a small section of Taylor family property (a few hundred yards of existing two track road) that will need to be crossed to make the loop work. The Taylors will need to be approached about their willingness to allow public access. If they are amenable, this commitment will also need to be confirmed in a written agreement.



Several high points with outcrops of travertine and Nugget Sandstone punctuate this property and offer ideal vista points. The property also has several Chugwater Formation badlands that add to the beauty of the property; however, these areas should be avoided with trail development. Several benches and ridges are suitable for trail development and have adequate soils. Approximately one mile east of the gate, spectacular views to the east and north are available.

This is the only area evaluated for trail development that is directly adjacent to the east boundary of the state park. With the park already a major tourist destination with roads, trails, restrooms, water, lodging and food, it makes sense to develop trails adjacent to the park first. The Black Butte Cattle Company property and Black Willow allotment combined have enough acreage to design a large, “stacked loop” trail system, which would go a long way in developing a destination-style trail system.

Recommendation

Preliminary investigations identified a five-to-six-mile loop, starting at the gate and circumnavigating the Black Butte property. This loop could be built with sustainable grades, mostly on good soils with good trail flow. The trail will access several scenic areas and overlooks. Further, the opportunity exists to create shorter loops through the center of the Black Butte property, supplemented by several longer, interconnected loops on the BLM administered lands. Proximity to HSSP will heighten its use and popularity.



Black Butte dominates the view in Zone 3

Further communication with representatives of Black Butte Cattle Company will need to confirm their willingness to allow trail development. This commitment should be confirmed in a written agreement, preferably a formal easement granted to the County or Town to allow public trail use, which would open up recreational trail grant opportunities.

This project involves federal land and therefore will require completion of the NEPA process. A two-year lead time is estimated, so for example, to begin trail construction in the summer of 2022, the project proponent will need to start working with the BLM in the fall of 2020. Assuming few

environmental, cultural or user conflicts, the NEPA process generally takes about one year and may require funding for the archaeological survey and wildlife inventory.

This project will be a good candidate for a Recreational Trails Program (RTP) construction grant. NEPA needs to be completed or well underway to be eligible to apply for an RTP grant in the fall of 2021. An eligible sponsor needs to apply for the RTP grant, like the BLM or local government. There is a cattle grazing lease on the BLM administered lands and the project sponsor will need to work with the owner of the lease.

Most of the initial loop could be machine built and should be budgeted at \$5 - \$7 per lineal foot. There is good public access through HSSP to the Black Butte Cattle Company gate. A parking area would need to be developed at the gate and an information kiosk should be installed. Some directional signage would be required on the trail. HSSP will need to approve the trail head, if it is developed on their property.

As the trails grow in use and popularity, multiple opportunities exist to add interconnected loop trails to the original loop, creating a stacked loop trail system.



Zone 3 offers numerous scenic overlook opportunities

Zone 4: Upper Red Canyon

Existing Conditions

The rims above Red Canyon offer arguably the most spectacular vistas in the Thermopolis area. The area is administered by the BLM with some private inholdings, and it has been designated by the BLM as a recreation area. The area owes its name to the exposed Chugwater Formation soils in the canyon walls. While beautiful, the canyon has steep grades with poor soils and it would be very difficult to locate and build sustainable trails. Outcrops of sandstone, which would be suitable for trail development, are located sporadically along the canyon rim, but steep grades and gaps between sandstone outcrops and private land make finding a suitable trail location difficult.

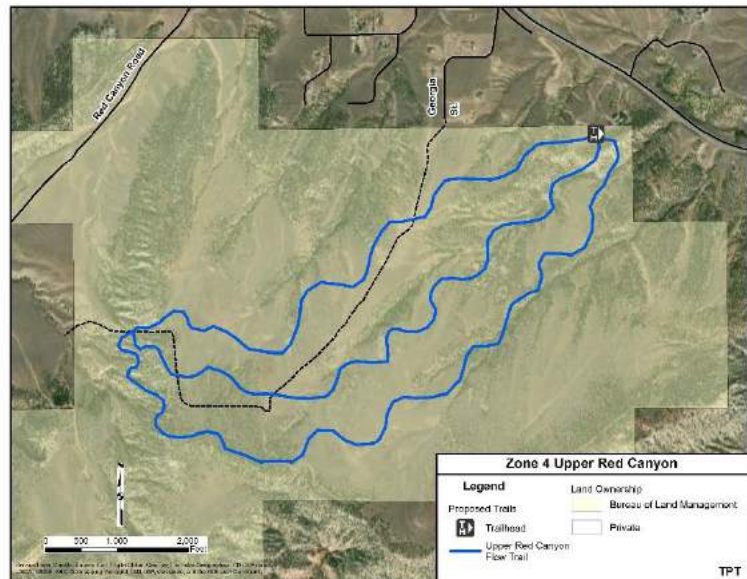
Access to the upper portion of Red Canyon is via State Highway 120 from Thermopolis (about 4 miles) and then on Red Canyon Road. Getting to the BLM property from State Highway 120 requires crossing the Sage Valley subdivision. The roads in the subdivision are maintained gravel, and are steep in some areas and prone to developing a washboard surface.

Leaving private property, a BLM two-track road provides access to the canyon rim. For some of the distance, the road climbs a ridge, and is often overly steep and in generally poor condition. The overall climb from Sage Valley to Red Canyon rim is about 800 vertical feet. Grades along the ridge has grades averaging from 10% to 15%, with decent soils, large nugget sandstone blocks and mature stands of juniper. Three gullies emanate down the ridge and are marked by abundant, loose sandstone blocks.

A grazing lease is in effect on the ridge leading up to the Red Canyon rims.

Recommendation

A climbing trail could be developed from the trailhead to the top of the Red Canyon Rim, and along the top of the rim itself, a “cross-country” style trail could be developed. The ridge leading up to the Red Canyon rim lends itself to creation of a mountain bike “flow” park. Flow parks originated at ski areas as a summertime use, with mountain bikers riding a chair lift to the top of the mountain. The ski areas built a series of downhill trails that did require little or no pedaling, and if built properly, little braking. Features such as, berms, table tops, gap jumps, booters, and kickers serve to slow riders down and add fun to the experience. The ski areas learned to create beginner flowlines, intermediate flow lines and advance flowlines, much like green, blue and black-rated ski runs.



Flow trails generally have about a 5% - 7% grade. The Red Canyon ridge has about 800' vertical feet, allowing for a 2.5 to 3-mile long flowline, depending on grade. The terrain is ideal for the development of flowlines and there is plenty of room for three to five lines. The terrain will allow for the development of beginner to advanced flowlines. The BLM road can be used to shuttle riders and bikes to the top of the ridge.

Flow parks have become very popular nationally and have been a great boost to ski areas summer season. The Jackson Hole Ski Resort and Grand Targhee Resort in Wyoming have developed MTB flow parks. This would be a unique thing for Thermopolis and could be a huge draw with mountain bikers.

If a flow park is developed, the trailhead and parking area should be at the low point to the left of the BLM gate. A flow park could generate a substantial increase in traffic through the Sage Valley subdivision. The project proponent would need to advise the residents of Sage Valley about increased traffic. Better yet would be finding a way to access the BLM property without crossing Sage Valley.

Trail development has a potential to impact the cattle grazing leasee on the property, and the project proponent should advise the grazing lease about that potential.

The BLM road is a fall-line two-track road in poor shape and would deteriorate with increased traffic.

Given the scale of these issues, the planning and NEPA process is anticipated to be lengthy; therefore, the project proponent is advised to keep that in mind while setting priorities for the overall development of a Thermopolis Trail System.



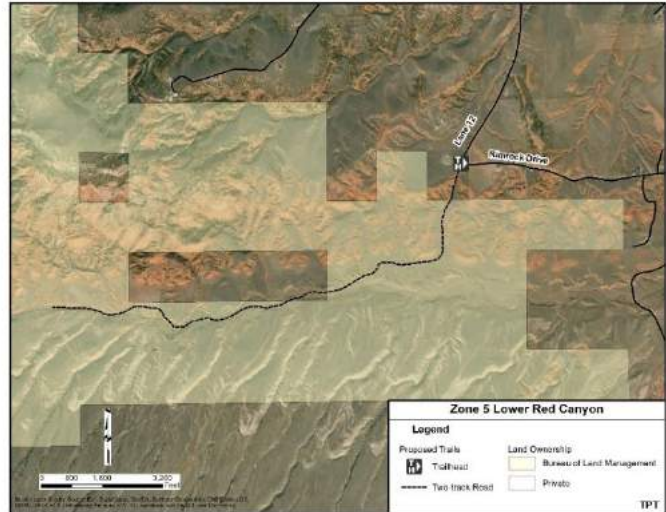
The north-facing aspect of Red Canyon Rim lends itself to development of a 'flow' trail system

Zone 5: Lower Red Canyon

Existing Conditions

The base of Red Canyon is one of the more spectacular scenic areas in the Thermopolis region. This area is administered by the BLM with some private inholdings and has been designated by the BLM as a recreation area. While beautiful, the canyon has steep grades with poor soils and it will be very difficult to build sustainable trails in this area.

From the creek at the base of the canyon there are large red cliff faces with interspersed deeply incised ravines. None of these ravines extend to the top of the canyon and most are only few hundred yards in length. The ravines are inviting but do not lend themselves to sustainable trail construction. Most of the ravines are deeply incised and uphill travel is only possible following the drainage beds at the bottom and attempting to cross from the head of one ravine to another is very difficult to impossible. Simply being down in one of the ravines during a heavy rain event could be very hazardous.



Red soils of the Chugwater Formation are common in Zone 5; while beautiful, they are not suitable for trails.

Access to lower Red Canyon is best from the Rim Rock Road. The portion of the road closest to the canyon has a curve that is suitable for a trailhead and parking. It is a little over 2.5 miles from this trailhead to the start of the canyon face and ravines. The 2.5 miles is mostly rolling hills with marginal soils and sage brush. Access requires crossing a couple hundred yards of the Arapaho Ranch. Local project proponents have been in contact with the ranch to discuss public access. It also appears the public may need to cross some Burlington Northern and Santa Fe Railroad lands to access Red Canyon. These access issues need further review.

Recommendations

It is probably most sensible to leave this as an informal hiking area. The project proponent would need to develop a trailhead and parking on the Rim Rock Road, then develop access from the trailhead to the cliff face. An existing two-track road connects the potential trailhead location to the cliff face; this two-track could be signed to provide easy access. The project proponent would need to contact the private landowners to determine whether public access could be permitted. If so, the public would then be free to explore the ravines at their own discretion.

Any project in this zone would require NEPA compliance with the BLM.

CHAPTER 3: ROAD and GRAVEL BIKING OPPORTUNITIES

Road and gravel biking are increasingly popular outdoor activities for travelers. Providing options for both on-road cycling and natural surface trails for mountain biking and hiking activities can be an important part of a well-rounded outdoor recreation infrastructure for the Town of Thermopolis. Bike route systems provide added options for visitors to consider adding another day to a visit.

On-road biking routes, including some gravel options in the Thermopolis area, were evaluated as part of this assessment. (See map on Page 20.) When choosing where to ride, cyclists look for routes of varying lengths and challenge, typically rural roads with limited traffic, or highways with safe shoulders, so those opportunities were sought out. Also considered were roads convenient to downtown Thermopolis and that access rural areas with scenic vistas that highlight and help people explore the rural landscape by bicycle.

Several routes offer an enjoyable road biking experience in the Thermopolis area. The Hot City Outdoor Alliance could consider creating a website and bike map for the Thermopolis area, which would describe the routes, length, and conditions encountered.

East River Road

Starting at Hot Springs State Park, a rider can follow the East River Road (County Road 8) along the Bighorn River for approximately 8.5 miles. This is a beautiful ride along the river, passing by some rural homes and ranchland. Heading north from the State Park, East River Road is paved for approximately 4 miles, and features minimal traffic and low-speed vehicular traffic. The route traverses gently rolling terrain, and there are opportunities to stop at several Bighorn River public access points.

Road cyclists can ride to the end of the pavement and return to the park, for approximately a 10-mile round trip from downtown Thermopolis. Riders willing to add some gravel road riding can continue along the gravel section for an added 4.5 miles. Visitors can make this a loop by riding the East



East River Road offers a rural riding experience with minimal, low-speed traffic, and along the way, close-up views of the Bighorn River.

River Road north to Wyoming State Highway 172 at Lucerne. The rider will turn west and ride WYO 172 for approximately 1.7 miles. This paved highway has minimal shoulders but low traffic volumes. The rider then turns left onto US 20/WYO 789 and goes about 7 miles back into

Thermopolis. The south bound highway has a wide paved shoulder but has higher traffic speeds and volumes. The north bound highway has narrow shoulders in a few places. This loop ride does require riding approximately 4.5 miles of maintained county gravel road.

Another option for cyclists seeking a longer distance is to add an out-and-back ride on WYO 172, a rural paved road with low traffic volumes. WYO 172 extends eastward nearly 10 more miles before turning into a county road, also paved.

Hot Springs State Park and Bison Pasture Roads

Hot Springs State Park has approximately eight miles of hilly, paved roads in the park proper and bison pasture. All these roads are two-lane roads with reduced speed limits and sparse traffic.

There are three interconnected loops that provide multiple riding options. The pasture is an open high desert prairie and there are beautiful vistas, especially on the east boundary. There is an approximately 300-foot vertical rise from the river to the top of the pasture, giving an opportunity to climb and descend. There is minimal vehicle traffic in the pasture, but riders do need to monitor for bison.



Cyclists who venture into the pasture area of Hot Springs State Park have the opportunity to view -- at a safe distance -- bison, big and small.

Missouri Flats Road

Missouri Flats Road (County Road 25) is a 10-mile-long paved road connecting WYO 120 and WYO 170. The road is paved, has limited traffic and goes through a mixture of rural subdivisions and ranch lands. Cyclists can ride out a 20-mile loop ride, or up to 32 miles can be accomplished starting from Thermopolis by riding north on WYO 120 approximately six miles to Missouri Flats Road. WYO 120 has considerable traffic volumes but does have a wide paved (typically six to eight feet) shoulder. Turn left onto Missouri Flats Road, and ride 10 miles west to WYO 170. Turn right on WYO 170 and ride eight miles east to return to WYO 120. WYO 170 has moderate traffic volumes. The first half mile of WYO 170 has a two-foot paved shoulder and the remainder of the highway has a five-foot paved shoulder. At WYO 120 turn right and ride 8.5 miles back to town. The ride can be shortened by approximately eight miles by utilizing Jones Road to shortcut from Missouri Flats Road to WYO 120.

Wind River Canyon

Going through the Wind River Canyon on US 20/WYO 789 is probably the most spectacular ride in the region. The highway is the only paved road between the Big Horn Basin and Shoshoni to the south and has considerable traffic volumes. For approximately 15 miles southward from Thermopolis, US 20 gently winds up the Wind River Canyon along moderate curves with a paved seven-foot shoulder with frequent riverside pullouts to view the canyon and Wind River.



Majestic cliffs and tumbling white water provide a visual treat for riders who take a spin on wide-shouldered US 20 within Wind River Canyon.

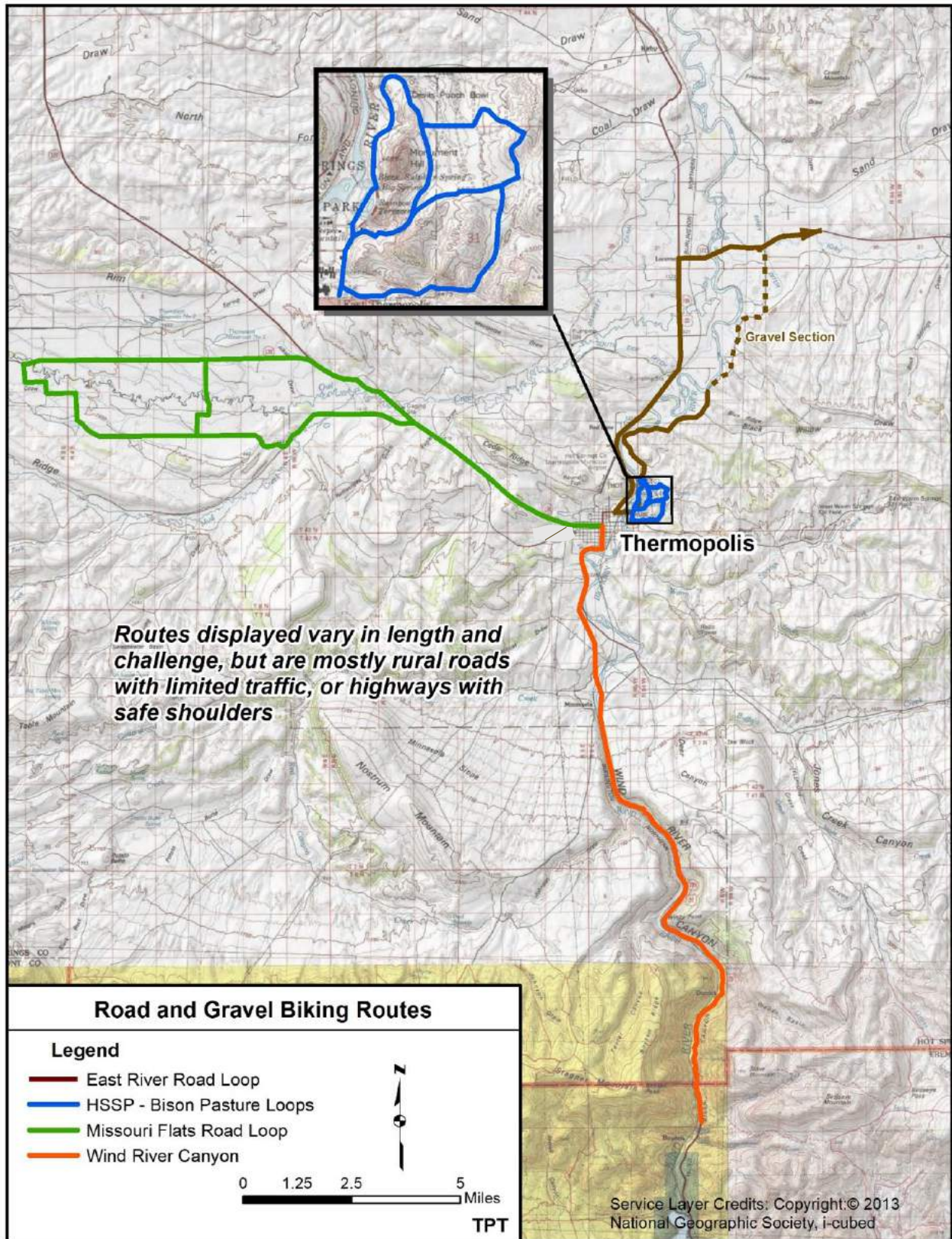
Eventually US 20 narrows and riders are advised to turn around before the highway reaches a series of three tunnels near the south end of the canyon. There is no lighting and no shoulder in the tunnels, so it is considered unsafe for cyclists to ride through the tunnels.

However, a very enjoyable out-and-back ride is possible from Thermopolis up Wind River Canyon, proceeding as far as one wants, before reversing direction and returning to town. Entering the south side of Thermopolis, cyclists also have the option to use less-traveled Buffalo Creek Road and WYO 173 for three miles to reduce travel on the busier main highway.

Great American Rail Trail

The Rails to Trails Conservancy, a national trail organization, recently announced their vision of the Great American Rail Trail that will eventually cross America from Washington, D.C. to Washington state using abandoned rail lines and pathways. The route includes a 500-mile stretch across Wyoming that goes through Thermopolis.

The Thermopolis Trail Plan evaluated three potential routes for the Great American Rail Trail through the Thermopolis area. Birdseye Pass is the location of the original road into Thermopolis. The pass has a wonderful history and spectacular vistas but crosses private property, and much of it is a gravel road. The old highway from Lysite to Thermopolis is entirely a gravel road, rough in places with no services. The easiest route is along the Wind River Canyon, which is spectacular, but portions of the road have narrow shoulders and there are the three narrow, unlit tunnels that would be unsafe on a bike. The Thermopolis Trail Plan will provide the local area route analysis to Rails to Trails for their ongoing route research.



CHAPTER 4: Funding Opportunities

Following is a general overview of grant opportunities for prospective trail projects. Numerous and detailed rules and regulations -- beyond what is stated here -- apply to each of these programs. Therefore, it is important the applicant review the program guidelines thoroughly before submitting an application.

Land and Water Conservation Fund

The longstanding Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) provides funding to acquire lands for public outdoor recreation, as well as develop public outdoor recreation facilities as defined in the SCORP. The Great America Outdoors Act, enacted earlier this year, renewed LWCF funding, which is divided between federal and state “sides.”

The federal side funding, overseen by the Department of Interior, is allotted to the federal agencies based on need. The state side of the LWCF is based on population and cannot be used on federal lands. It is overseen by the National Park Service (NPS) and administered by the Wyoming Department of State Parks and Cultural Resources (SPCR). Wyoming will be receiving a little more than \$4,000,000 annually in state-side LWCF funding.

Municipalities, counties, school districts and state agencies are eligible to apply for state-side funding, which requires a 50% reimbursable match. The project type must be identified as a priority in the SCORP. If the project is funded, the project area will be subject to Section 6F of the Act and the project sponsor will agree to designate the area for public outdoor recreation for perpetuity.

Prospective grant recipients can download an LWCF grant application from the SPCR website. The application deadline is Dec, 31, 2020, after which submissions will be reviewed by Wyoming State Parks staff. Grant applications are evaluated in accordance by what’s called the Open Project Selection Process (OPSP), which yields a list of project rankings. The rankings are in turn forwarded to the Wyoming State Parks and Cultural Resources Commission for preliminary approval. The last step is review and final approval by NPS.

Recreation Trails Program

Funding for the Recreation Trails Program (RTP) comes from fuel taxes on outdoor recreation vehicles. The program is overseen by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and administered by the WY State Parks and Cultural Resources. Wyoming annually receives about \$1.4 million in RTP funds, divided into 30% for motorized trails, 30% for non-motorized trails and 40% for diversified trails. This leaves approximately \$400,000 annually for non-motorized trail projects statewide. The applicant must be a municipality, county, state agency, federal agency, nonprofit, or private entity (must be for public trails) to apply for the funds. RTP does not require a cash match, but there is a greater chance of receiving funding if the applicant has at least a 20% cash match. RTP funds can be spent on federal lands.

Grant applications are available on the SPCR website. The next application deadline is December 2, 2020. Prior to making a submission, RTP applicants are required to gain pre-approval by Wyoming State Parks. RTP applications are reviewed and ranked by the State Parks

staff using pre-set evaluation guidelines. The pre-application deadline is October 4, 2020. These rankings then go to the Wyoming State Trails Advisory Committee for review and comment, and the SPCR director subsequently making final determination of the rankings. Final review and approval of the applications is conducted by FHWA,

Transportation Alternatives Program

The Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP), first established in 2012, provides funding for a variety of programs and projects defined as transportation alternatives, including:

- On- and off-road pedestrian and bicycle facilities (such as improved pedestrian sidewalks for creating a more walkable community, or paved pathways);
- Safe Routes for Non-Drivers;
- Conversion of Abandoned Railway Corridors to Trails; and
- Scenic Turnouts and Overlooks.

TAP has been used in communities around Wyoming for pathways and sidewalks, but is not a resource for funding natural surface trails. Further information about the program is available on the WYDOT and FHWA web site.

Laura Jane Musser Foundation

The private-sector Laura Jane Musser Foundation provides for up to \$5,000 for planning grants. (A Musser grant is helping to pay for this plan.) The Musser Foundation also awards rural initiative implementation grants for up to \$25,000. Funding eligibility is limited to communities with populations less than 10,000, and applicants must be a 501(c)(3) or local government, and be located in Colorado, Hawaii, Minnesota, or Wyoming. Several other requirements are associated with the grant. The next application deadline is Oct. 1, 2020.

Glade M. Edwards Foundation

This is another private sector foundation. Based in Thermopolis, it has been in operation for 35 years. Further inquiry should be undertaken to determine whether the Edwards Foundation is a possible source of funding for trail development.

CHAPTER 5: PLANNING and SUPPORT DOCUMENTS

Stakeholders and supporters of an improved trail system in Thermopolis and Hot Springs County area are encouraged to become familiar with documents that relate to this initiative and be aware of rules or regulations that could potentially facilitate – or impede – trail development. An initial review of these documents does indicate support, in an overall sense, for recreational developments and trails.

Following are excerpts that refer to outdoor recreation and trails in the Hot Springs State Park Master Plan (2016), Governor’s Task Force On Outdoor Recreation (2016), the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP, 2019 update), Wyoming Bicycle and Pedestrian System Report (2018), the Hot Springs County Land Use Plan (2002; update scheduled for late 2020), and the related Hot Springs County Natural Resource Plan. (2014). Also pertinent are the Big Horn Basin Outdoor Recreation Collaborative and the National Environmental Policy Act.

Hot Springs State Park Master Plan

This is a site-specific plan that was developed to direct development, maintenance and administration of Hot Springs State Park for 20 years. The plan addresses most elements of developing and managing the park and in Section 4, specifically discusses trail development.

Section 4-20, Trails

An interconnected multi-use trail system that accommodates a broad range of users, including hikers, mountain bicyclists, etc. will connect the park’s unique natural, cultural, and historical resources with greater Thermopolis and the county.



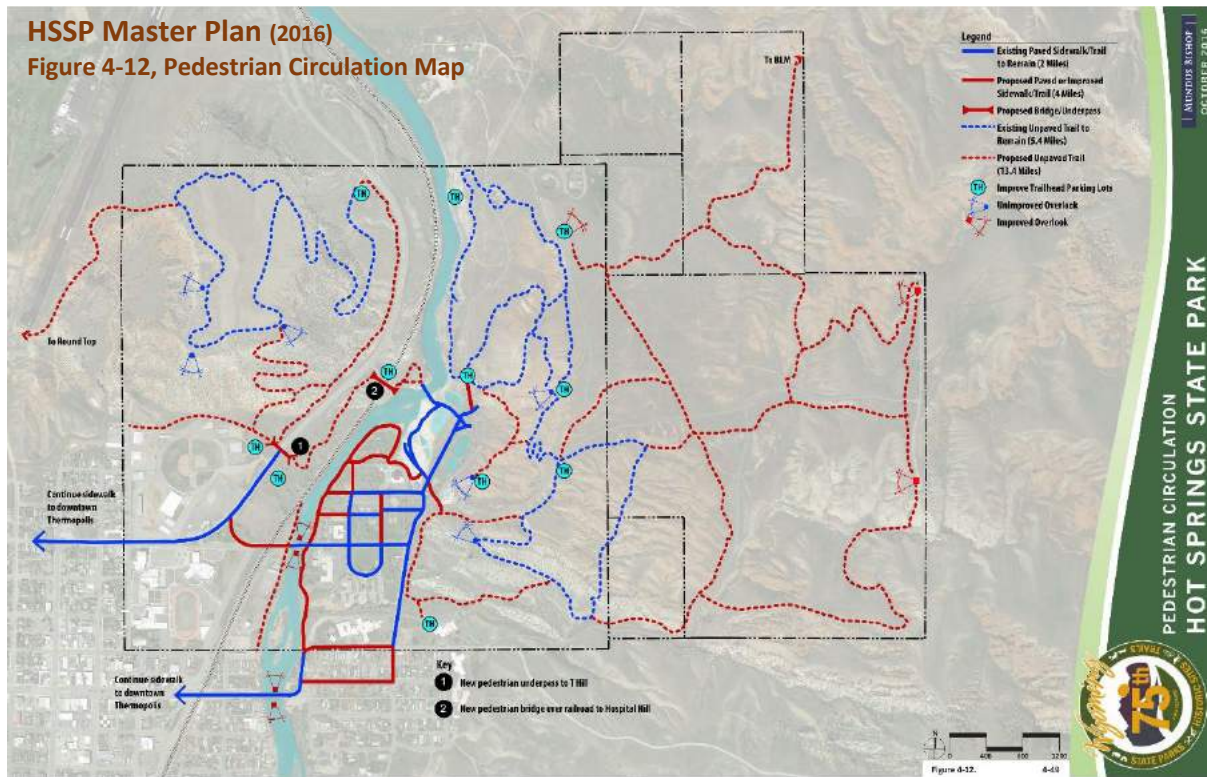
Wording in Section 4-20 also calls for improving and expanding the park’s pedestrian trail system:

- Eight miles of trails will be added in natural areas
- A bridge over the railroad (in its original location) will connect the east and west park trail system at Hospital Hill.
- An above, below, or at grade pedestrian connection at highway 20 to connect the Visitor orientation complex to T Hill will be considered.
- A loop trail from the visitor center will be established
- The Riverwalk trail will connect to the west and east sides of the from Park Street to Broadway Street.

Regional trail connections will be expanded with connections to:

- Round Top with a new trailhead located near the cemetery.
- BLM land, northeast of park property.

Section 4 of the HSSP master plan presents a map of possible future trail development in the park. The map was conceptual, and actual trail alignments will differ. Since then, the T Hill trail was completed (in 2019) and additional work is under way during the summer and fall of 2020.



Governor’s Task Force on Outdoor Recreation

This document’s executive summary explains the creation and purpose of the task force.

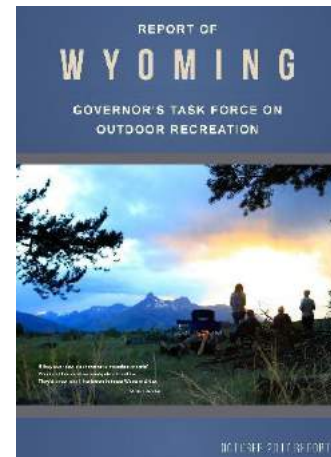
Executive Summary

Outdoor recreation is integral to Wyoming’s historical, cultural and economic identity and has incredible potential for industry growth and diversification. Recognizing this opportunity, Gov. Matt Mead charged the Department of State Parks and Cultural Resources (SPCR) with spearheading an Outdoor Recreation Task Force. The 26-member task force represented a board spectrum of business, government agencies, non-profit organizations, and outdoor recreation interest groups.

Task force members generated their recommendations after conducting a series of multi-day meetings. The group incorporated public input received via comment periods at each meeting, statewide listening sessions, written comment cards, and a comment form on the task force website. Consensus developed two major themes: (1) enhancing the outdoor recreation economic sector, and (2) recreation use and access.

The goal was to provide information and recommendations for the Governor’s consideration, with the hope that these recommendations could ultimately be translated into action. To this end,

the task force report includes ideas for implementing recommendations. Starting with more than 500 possible implementable options, the task force distilled and consolidated the options into 11 major recommendations and 59 sub-recommendations. Members expressed their hope the report would facilitate decision-making by Wyoming legislators, business leaders, federal agencies, local governments and other interested parties.



The final recommendations passed a consensus vote of the task force. While all recommendations were deemed important, in the end, the members rated three recommendations as the highest priorities:

- Dedicate resources and funding at the state government level to provide continuity and accountability, and to ensure ... recommendations are implemented.
- Attract and retain outdoor recreation businesses.
- Improve, expand, and maintain digital and physical infrastructure that connects communities and local businesses.

The recommendations and associated sub-recommendations were presented with ideas for implementation. Several of the sub-recommendations relate directly to trails.

Recommendation 4.1

Develop a prioritized method to secure new access and connectivity to and on public lands, taking into consideration factors such as cost, conservation needs, economic impact, historical use, and value to the public, regardless of age and ability.

Recommendation 10.6

Build and maintain trails and other infrastructure by capitalizing on youth and veterans' programs and paying visitors, as well as collaboration through existing programs.

Recommendation 10.8

Designate and develop high-quality, purpose-built non-motorized areas to increase access for users.

Big Horn Basin Outdoor Recreation Collaborative

One of the recommendations of the Outdoor Recreation Task Force was to create outdoor recreation collaboratives, with the goal of gathering recreation managers/professionals on a regional level and devising ways to improve recreation opportunities. The first such outdoor recreation collaborative was developed in the Bighorn Basin.

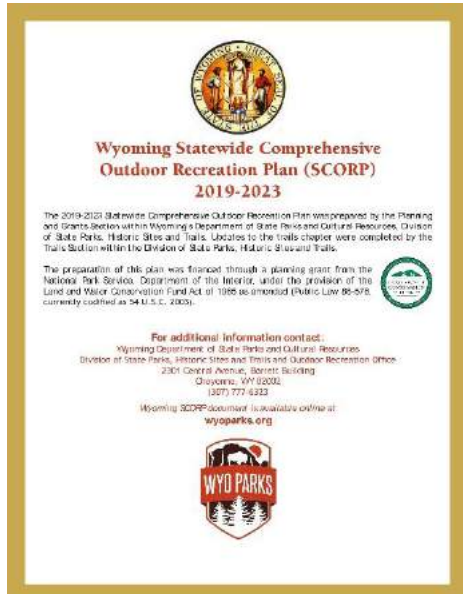
The Big Horn Basin Outdoor Recreation Collaborative is continuing to explore ways to promote outdoor recreation, develop new recreation opportunities, and create a plan to enhance the Big Horn Basin's recreation-based economy and quality of life. The collaborative includes business

owners, government employees, members of outdoor recreation interest groups, and other interested persons. The Wyoming Outdoor Recreation Office and Wyoming State Parks facilitate discussions and help inform members of potential funding resources to support initiatives.

Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan

The following excerpts are taken directly from the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) and explain the purpose and goals of the SCORP.

The 2019 update of the SCORP serves as a guide for local, state and federal agencies in the development and provision of future outdoor recreation opportunities. The purpose of this five-year SCORP is to identify the outdoor recreation needs of the citizens and of visitors to Wyoming and to develop a program to address those needs.



The SCORP examines Wyoming's outdoor recreation resources and is used as an information resource and guidance tool. It is an endeavor to help guide the recreation industry in Wyoming while protecting and enhancing Wyoming's natural resources. Most of the individual state parks and historic sites have master plans, although many of them are outdated. Federal land managers have plans for their respective areas, but not an overall Wyoming plan. Many of the private providers have their marketing and/or long-range goal plans, but an overall plan does not exist showing opportunities in Wyoming.

Completion of the 2019 – 2023 SCORP ensured Wyoming's continued eligibility to participate in the state-side of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) program. The plan will guide investment of LWCF monies in Wyoming to be distributed wisely based on the demonstrated needs of the citizens of the state.

The following recommendations from the SCORP pertain to trail development.

- Identify areas desirable for outdoor recreation and explore land consolidation and/or cooperative management between private, state and federal land managers.

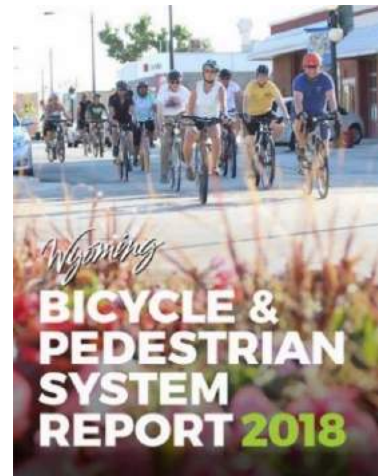
- Meet the current recreational needs of the population, including, but not limited to:
 - Outdoor recreational facilities;
 - Trails and pathways;
 - Community recreation facilities; and
 - Addressing accessibility barriers, including but not limited to, facilities for all abilities and lack of equipment or proximity from home.

The 2019 SCORP has a list of priority recreation projects that are eligible for LWCF funding. Stakeholders should remember that if a project type is not on this list, LWCF monies cannot be used, and also, that non-motorized trails are identified as a priority.

Wyoming Bicycle and Pedestrian System Report

A legislatively created task force issued a detailed report in 2018 that outlined significant benefits that could be realized by Wyoming communities by enhancing walking and bicycling infrastructure and options. Recommendations in the report focused on economic, health, quality of life and safety improvements.

The report includes helpful information on rural bicycle routes, walkable downtowns, and pathways systems. Chapter 4 of the report addresses natural surface trails. Included is a listing of trail design guides and an overview of funding sources. In addition, it presents tips for how to leverage volunteer involvement when pursuing trail construction and maintenance and strategies that can be employed to promote trail visitation.



National Environmental Policy Act

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) was one of the first laws written that establishes the broad national framework for protecting our environment. NEPA's basic policy is to assure that all branches of government give proper consideration to the environment prior to undertaking any major federal action that significantly affects the environment.

All projects that are on federal land, utilize federal funding or require a federal permit are subject to a NEPA analysis. The NEPA analysis takes into account impacts on things, such as, wildlife, cultural resources, environmental justice, noise impacts, air impacts, and many more items.

The NEPA process is intended to evaluate relevant environmental impacts of a federal project or other action mandated by law. This process begins when an agency develops a proposal addressing a need to take action. If it is determined that the proposed action is covered under NEPA, there are three levels of analysis that a federal agency must undertake to comply with the law. These three levels include the preparation of a Categorical Exclusion; an environmental assessment; and either a Finding of No Significant Impact, or alternatively, the preparation and drafting of an environmental impact statement.

A NEPA analysis will be required for all trail projects taking place on BLM land. For basic projects NEPA takes about year to complete and may require the project proponent to pay for an archaeological survey and/or wildlife inventory.

Hot Springs County Land Use Plan

Section G. Recreation and Public Lands.

1. Absolute policies: Appropriate existing access to public lands and public recreational areas shall be maintained in all new developments.
2. Relative policies: Large residential developments are encouraged to provide adequate recreational space maintained by a homeowners' association. For the purposes of this policy, a large development will be defined as: (1) Subdivisions where the density is higher than one



dwelling unit per two acres, with 50 or more potential population. (2) Subdivisions where the density is lower than one dwelling unit per two acres, with 150 or more potential population. (3) Mobile home parks, condominiums, townhouses or multiple-family dwellings with over five units. b. The space needed will be evaluated in light of adjoining or nearby public recreational facilities. The use of river front, flood plain or slope areas suitable for recreational space will be encouraged, with a weight of four where lots are under two acres and with a weight of two where they are over two acres.

Hot Springs County Natural Resource Plan

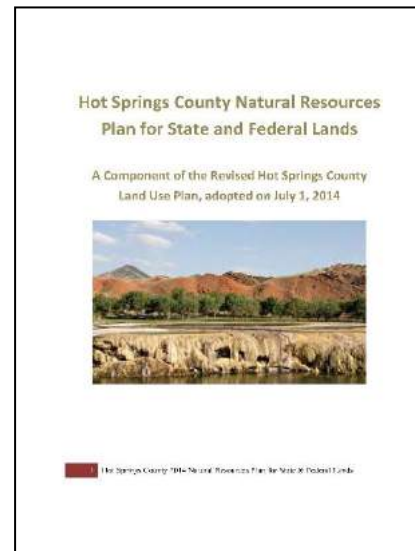
Chapter 3: Public Land, Recreation and Tourism

Recreation and Tourism Definition: Recreation is defined as an action or lack-there-of, which results in relaxation, entertainment, and is enjoyed by those who participate. Tourism is traveling as, for recreation, relaxation, and entertainment. **Background:** Hot Springs County offers a variety of recreation and tourism opportunities for residents and visitors alike. Public surveys have shown the recreation opportunities locally available are especially important to local residents and visitors.

Heightened and more proactive efforts to expand recreation and tourism opportunities will only enhance the quality of life and make a significant contribution to sustaining the custom, culture and economic stability of the County. The forests, campgrounds, rivers, streams, lakes, and hot springs of the County, the Owl Creek mountains and Hot Springs State Park make significant contributions to the quality of the experience enjoyed by tourists and recreationists. Privately owned concessionaires rely heavily on public land management for their livelihoods. Tourists rely on public land management to assure a positive experience, and residents rely on public land management to maintain their quality of life. Most recreation and tourism opportunities occur on public land, but draw on County resources and infrastructure to provide support for that experience. ...

Goals (partial)

- The County serves as a gateway to many tourist attractions and recreational opportunities. Based on our abundant game and non-game wildlife and livestock populations, recreation and tourism will play a valuable role in the County's economy and will continue to represent our customs and culture. ...
- Preservation, enhancement and protection of all natural habitats shall be strongly encouraged. We must preserve our culture, customs, heritage and our way of life while preserving and protecting our wildlife, historical sites, geological sites, and vegetation. The County encourages recognition and protection of sites, structures and landscapes, roads and trails within the County so that our Western way of life can be preserved.
- People must have access to public lands in order to enjoy our open space values. At no time should the integrity of the land be compromised. Precaution must be taken to maintain the beauty



of Hot Springs County. Development along all public roads leading to or crossing public lands deserves special attention to assure that the views are not degraded or compromised.

Public Policy

1. Hot Springs County supports recreation and tourism opportunities carried out in an environmentally responsible manner consistent with sustaining local businesses that rely on tourism and recreation.
2. The County will promote cooperative agreements with other communities to develop heritage and cultural corridors and will take appropriate action in support of efforts to create facilities and signage to bolster access in and through the County.
4. The County strongly supports State and Federal offices and agencies efforts to provide public facilities including sufficient sanitary facilities on major highway corridors, at recreation areas, historic sites, and other attractions throughout the County. State and Federal land use and management plans need to incorporate standards and objectives for public facilities, which sustain and support local recreation and tourism economic interests. ...
9. ... The County shall support and protect recreational resources on public lands so that all users will have a clean, safe and enjoyable experience.
10. The County relies on its cooperative agreements, RS 2477, the Wyoming Wilderness Act, NEPA and broad-based legal precedent, which all assure continued access of public land, and place the burden on State and Federal officials to prove why access must be curtailed. The County supports retention of existing access to public land, and will oppose management initiatives, which restrict or limit access or may impact the livelihoods and/or quality of life of Hot Springs County residents. ...
13. Access must be provided to public lands along roadways traveling through these lands. Designated off road travel and primitive camping should be maintained in a way that will allow access yet protect the environment.
16. Projects which link cultural heritage and tourism on public lands have the potential to become important components in the County's tourism program. The County will actively participate in regional tourism efforts affecting public lands that link and promote the County's unique attractions and activities. This participation will encourage efforts that will attract new and repeat visitors to this community's businesses. ...

Recreational Use

The Final Grass Creek Resource Management Plan/EIS of June 1996 included recreational use considerations. ... (The) Grass Creek recreational use figures projected an approximate 10.75% increase in usage on the BLM administered public land. Although precise tables and figures are not readily available for the Shoshone Forest and Washakie Resource Area plans, the County desires to increase recreational usage by 12-15% in all forthcoming plans.

CHAPTER 6: COMMUNITY TRAIL PLAN - ENAGAGEMENT and PUBLIC OUTREACH

The vision of a destination trail system in the Thermopolis area and the effort made to advance that concept exemplifies the spirit of homegrown community engagement and grassroots organizing. The idea originated with local residents who formed the non-profit Hot City Outdoor Alliance in 2018 and have taken the lead to build public enthusiasm and support for expanding and diversifying what Thermopolis and Hot Springs County has to offer to residents and visitors alike.

Hot City Outdoor Alliance mission:

“To develop and support outdoor recreation projects and programs that enhance the economy, community, and environment of Hot Springs County for the benefit of current and future generations.”

From the outset, members of Hot City Outdoor Alliance were thinking about trail development as an item to explore in pursuing their objectives. Interest in multiple-use trails got a boost following positive results of the T Hill Trail project, undertaken last year (2019) in Hot Springs State Park. Discussions between the Alliance and statewide bicycling and walking advocacy organization Wyoming Pathways ensued, and in 2019, the groups decided to join in a partnership to develop a Thermopolis Community Trail Plan. The intent of the trail plan is to not only help guide development of future natural surface trail systems in the area, but also identify a local bicycle route system on paved and gravel road routes.

At the outset, stated public involvement goals of the trail planning effort include:

- Gather and document public input to inform the planning process and to better understand the needs of the Thermopolis community and visitors;
- Create an advisory steering committee to provide input on the trail plan and to help with public involvement;
- Work with Wyoming Pathways, Hot City Outdoor Alliance, and area land managers, including Wyoming State Parks and the BLM, to best share the draft proposal with the public, local and state officials, and other interested parties; and
- Evaluate and incorporate public input to improve the plan; and
- Provide recommendations for developing a community trail and active transportation network, with prioritized steps to move forward.

Trail consulting firm TPT, LLC, was brought on board to further the planning process and assist in assembling the steering committee, whose membership is drawn from the Outdoor Alliance, as well as the Bureau of Land Management, the Town of Thermopolis, Wyoming State Parks, the Thermopolis-Hot Springs Chamber of Commerce and local residents interested in bicycling and hiking. In July the consultant conducted a series of phone interviews with potential steering committee members, local business leaders, local political leaders and interested members of the public. The results of these interviews were used to structure the on-site meetings and tours, develop the outline for the for this report and create the steering committee. Later in July, the consultant, working directly with members of the steering committee, began making on-site investigations in various locations identified by local residents as having potential for trail development.

Meanwhile, the steering committee began publicizing the trail planning effort via various forms of media, including newspaper and social media, and also word of mouth (actually an effective means given the relatively small but highly interconnected population of Thermopolis and Hot Springs County). Wyoming Pathways contributed to raising awareness with media advisories.

After a round of preliminary, on-the-ground investigations was nearing conclusion, a public open house was conducted the evening of Aug. 3 at the Thermopolis Volunteer Fire Station. The more than two-dozen attendees, mostly from the general public, were given a list of questions to consider and serve as conversation starters.

The attendees included representatives from the town council and county commission. The participants were also encouraged to ask their own questions and provide comments as they saw fit. The consultant and members of the steering committee were on hand to describe project goals and solicit input. Visual aids included an area map to help viewers orient themselves to potential trail development zones, and large paper scrolls were placed on tables to make it easy for participants to leave written comments.

A common theme among commenters was a desire for a future trail system to be accessible from town and to offer variety to accommodate different types of uses (hiking, biking, cross-country skiing), and also a variety in lengths. Multiple comments also addressed a perceived need for trails which would be classified as “easy” or “moderate” in difficulty and which would be suitable for all ages and fitness levels. Interest was also expressed in promoting road biking, equestrians and river sports such as kayaking. The role of trail development, and enhanced outdoor recreation in general, in promoting tourism and economic development was also recognized by commenters. Also mentioned was the role in health and wellness promotion offered by having more and better trails and outdoor recreation opportunities. The event was covered by reporter Jurri Schenck from the *Thermopolis Independent Record*.



Discussion during Aug. 3, 2020 Thermopolis Community Trails Plan public open house.

Thermopolis Community Trails Plan

Public Open House * Aug. 3, 2020

Suggested questions and conversation starters

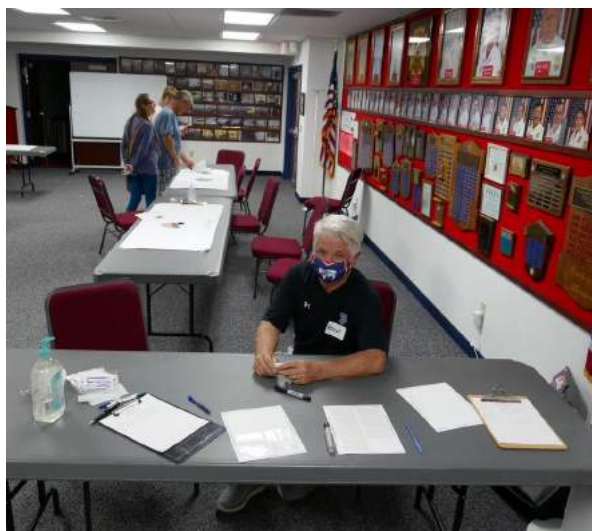
1. What do you hope to accomplish with a trail system? (community use, economic development, etc.)
2. What type of trails do you want to have? (hiking, mtn. biking, equestrian, etc.)
3. Are there areas that you feel should have trail development?
4. Are there areas that you feel should not have trail development?
5. Are you aware of opportunities to develop partnerships to develop, manage, and/or promote trails in the Thermopolis area?
6. Do you have an example of another trail system that you like? If so, why is it a good example?

outdoor recreation in general, in promoting tourism and economic development was also recognized by commenters. Also mentioned was the role in health and wellness promotion offered by having more and better trails and outdoor recreation opportunities. The event was covered by reporter Jurri Schenck from the *Thermopolis Independent Record*.

In his article, Schenck traced the origins of the Outdoor Alliance and described how steering committee members envisioned trail development as being a primary ingredient in boosting both tourism and outdoor recreation in the Thermopolis/Hot Springs area. The article

went on to outline the planning process for trails and how public input was being solicited and encouraged. Schenck also wrote about how the organizers were aiming to gather information from interested parties as to their thoughts and preferences about a range of issues relating to the initiative.

A draft plan was completed and circulated for public review in September. A second public open house was conducted Oct. 8 to give the public an opportunity to provide input on the final draft of the plan. About a half dozen people attended the second open house, which used a similar format to the first. Representatives of the steering committee, Wyoming Pathways and TPT, LLC provided a brief overview of the draft plan and then the public was invited to provide comment. Everyone voiced support for the trail plan and trail development in Thermopolis. Comments included doing a land transfer between the Black Butte Cattle Company and OSLI, promoting eco-tourism to improve the economy in Thermopolis, developing a long-term trail maintenance plan, and working with the county to determine whether Red Canyon Road is a public road.



HSSP Superintendent Kevin Skates welcomed attendees who turned up for the second public open house, conducted Oct. 8, 2020.

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photo by Jurri Schenck

Blazing new trails

Dusty Lewis of Hot City Alliance looks over a map of the region with Chelsea and Mike Nelson as they explore new potential trails and get recommendations from the public at their open house.

Hot City Alliance open house

by Jurri Schenck

Not much more than a year ago Dusty Lewis and Wade Lippincott were sitting in Lewis's shop and said they should start a nonprofit organization with the vision of developing trails for the Thermopolis and Hot Springs County area to bring in more tourism and outdoor recreation. Since then, their efforts have snowballed into a greater increase of success and community support with their nonprofit Hot City Alliance.

Hot City Alliance held an open house on August 3 seeking community input on what trails they wanted to see developed. Lippincott said, "We haven't had an open house to the public before. The meetings are always open to the public and we haven't really advertised them." He added that along with the trails study group working hard, community input was also needed.

Lewis added, "The open house was information gathering. There were some suggestions from community members of places to look at."

Lippincott explained that you need a GPS tracker to specifically map out and define the potential trail.

They are looking for community input, for suggestions on what trails people want and what kind of new developments they would like to have. There can be different kinds of trails and different kinds of people who they are targeted for.

According to the polling done at the open house, the strong majority of people said that they want trails that will draw people from out of town.

Lewis said, "The open house was to confirm that on a bigger level."

Partnering with Hot City

Alliance are Todd Thibodeau, an independent contractor, and Bruce Burrows of Wyo Pathways who are contracted trail builders and also facilitators for finding funding and doing community analysis of what kind of trails the town wants and what options are out there.

They are contracted to do the study and the grants Hot City Alliance acquires goes to pay for them. Monies came from the BLM, the Rec Department and the Moser Foundation.

Lippincott said, "To get the grant money you need a plan and a cost analysis. This report will give us a draft to follow. It helps us plan."

They also explained that the study can be for their higher priority trails to develop first and then move onto the next series of trails in their pipeline and building upon each other as they apply for grants. The areas that are successful have a project every single year and are constantly working.

Areas like Cody, Jackson and Lander always have something they are submitting and are always in the works. "We are early on and the good news is there is a lot of work to be done on a local level."

Next the contracted trail developers, Thibodeau and Burrows, will look at the areas they researched and walked with Google Earth and use other tools.

There will be another open

house and a presentation potentially in September. There will be more opportunities for the community to provide input and data and show support.

"Let us know what you're excited about," said Lippincott.

Lewis also said that he encourages the community to reach out to the state level authorities and let them know they are excited and interested in the trails and development.

Lippincott concluded, "This is for the community. There is just so much more potential here in Thermopolis for economic gain, good health. I certainly don't want the Alliance to come across as anything but an open forum. I don't want it to come across as a closed forum. People can come in. The Alliance is as much theirs as it is ours."