

Recreation Project Plan South Park River Access

I. Introduction

The Snake River is a primary recreation resource within the affected region. General public and commercial users access the Snake River at a variety of locations including (in sequence from up river): a Grand Teton National Park administered access at Moose, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) administered access at Wilson, a Wyoming Game & Fish leased access on private property at South Park (Von Gontard's Landing), two privately controlled accesses at Hoback Junction and five USDA Forest Service administered accesses at Astoria, Pritchard, Elbow, West Table and Sheep Gulch (USDA Forest Service accesses extend into Lincoln County).

The existing South Park Bridge river access, named "Von Gontard's Landing", is located six miles south of Jackson, Wyoming. The access area has experienced an increased level of use that has led to users expressing concerns regarding user capacity and highway safety. The BLM manages a 23 acre parcel directly across the river from the Von Gontard's Landing access area. River users and representatives of Teton County approached the BLM about the possibility of developing the BLM parcel as an alternative river access and as a means to address safety and capacity issues.

Discussion between Teton County and the BLM began in the Autumn of 1999. The BLM and Teton County entered into an agreement to work together towards developing a new river access on the BLM administered public lands. The County prepared five alternatives for consideration and a draft Environmental Assessment (EA.), which were submitted to the BLM in Spring of 2001.

The project was put on hold as the BLM Pinedale Field Office began public scoping for the preparation of the Snake River Resource Management Plan (SRRMP). The SRRMP has since been completed. The SRRMP identifies the site as a location where a boat launch and river access should be developed. In response to the results of the Snake River RMP, and the high level of public support regarding the development of an alternative river access at South Park, the BLM initiated the preparation of a Recreation Project Plan (RPP) with the goal of developing a plan for the site. This RPP is intended to be conceptual in nature and can be altered in the future based on further engineering, design development and funding priorities.

A. Relationship to Approved Recreation Area Management Plan

A Recreation Area Management Plan (RAMP) has not been prepared for this area. The subject property has been identified in the Snake River RMP as a location where a boat launch and river access should be developed. A three day public scoping process was conducted to assess current issues, visitor use, user profiles, future needs and to allow the general public to express their concerns regarding the management of the area. Fourteen public meetings were conducted with area stakeholders, which included federal and state agencies, local



Public open house



Public open house

governments and elected officials, permit users (gravel extraction industries and commercial fishing guides), local residents, environmental interests, recreational uses, businesses and contiguous property owners .

Eight alternative conceptual plans were generated during the meetings, in addition to the “No Action” alternative. Three of the alternatives served as the basis for all the plans with the other five representing variations. The alternatives were posted at a public open house following the stakeholder meetings. At the open house, stakeholder participants and the general public were invited to review the conceptual plans and provide additional comment. The preferred plan and the alternatives, are consistent with the input received from the public scoping process and the open house.

B. Project Objectives and Justification

Project Objectives

- Provide safe vehicular/trailer ingress/egress along Highway 189/191 for the South Park bridge river access;
- Provide conceptual plans for developing facilities for the 23 acre BLM site that include:
 - adequate parking capacity,
 - staging areas for unloading/loading of commercial outfitter customers, private boaters and equipment,
 - access to launching/take-out point from loading/unloading area,
 - public facilities and amenities
 - screening from highway, residential and industrial areas;
- Anticipate future improvements that may be necessary to accommodate increased use over the next twenty years;
- Accommodate the needs of all river uses and users including, but not limited to, scenic floaters, boat and bank anglers, kayaking and canoeing, picnicking, and other day-use activities;
- Accommodate the needs of private river users as well as commercial users;
- Minimize the impact on the natural and cultural resources within the project area, and protect the water quality of the river;

- Develop a plan that is compatible with adjacent land uses on private land;
- Maintain access to the permitted seasonal sand and gravel extraction operation on adjacent private land;
- Protect the wildlife, wetland, riparian, and scenic resources on and near the site;
- Develop a plan that is compliant with the Uniform Federal Accessibility Standards or Americans with Disability Standards Act Accessibility Guidelines.

Project Justification

The Von Gontard's Landing river access site is located on the northern bank of the Snake River below the South Park Bridge. The site was developed in the 1980s through a lease agreement between the private property owner and the Wyoming Game and Fish Department in response to increased pressure for public access to this segment of the Snake River. As the primary river access point serving the destination resort town of Jackson, Wyoming, the site serves locals as well as area visitors and has experienced steadily increasing use.

Access to the site is provided via a steep and narrow road that drops down steeply towards the river from the west side of Highway 189/191. Exiting the site can be dangerous due to the fact that the section of access road that meets the highway is a steep up-hill (Figure 1). This steep portion of road limits sight distances and makes it difficult to accelerate to highway speed. Southbound motorists that want to access Von Gontard's are required to slow down considerably on a downhill section of highway in order to make the right-turn onto the access road. This creates a slowdown in the traffic following these vehicles. Ingress to the site by traffic heading north on 189/191 can be dangerous due to the fact that the left-turn requires crossing fast-moving on-coming traffic. If southbound traffic volume is heavy, the northbound motorists that want to turn into Von Gontard's Landing are required to stop on the Highway, forcing following vehicles to stop.

The Jackson Hole area of the Rocky Mountain Region is experiencing rapid growth in both year-round population and in popularity as a vacation destination and resort area. The level of summer outdoor recreational activity is rapidly increasing, with river related recreation being among those experiencing the greatest increase.

Increased traffic volume on US Highway 189/191 is a result of local population growth and the area's high popularity as a tourist destination. With sand, gravel and concrete operations located near and south of the South Park Bridge, heavy equipment and construction related traffic has a constant presence along the highway during the peak river access season. The heavy equipment traffic coupled with tourist, local and commuter traffic, creates a high traffic situation.



Figure 1

The need to develop a Recreation Project Plan for an alternative river access area on the BLM site at South Park Bridge is supported by the combination of the increasing traffic volume on Highway 189/191, the increased visitation to Von Gontard's Landing and the fact that ingress/egress from Von Gontard's can be dangerous. This twenty-year project plan will provide solutions that address the current safety issues and anticipated future use levels.

C. Coordination with Other Public Agencies

The following Federal, State and Local agencies, departments, and offices were contacted to participate with the project scoping and document review:

Federal Agencies:

- USDA Forest Service, Jackson District Ranger's Office *
- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service *
- US Fish & Wildlife Service *
- US Army Corps of Engineers
- Bureau of Reclamation *
- Bureau of Land Management, Pinedale Field Office

State Agencies:

- Wyoming Department of Transportation *
- Wyoming Department of Game and Fish *

Teton County Agencies:

- Board of County Commissioners*
- Department of Community Development*
- Parks & Recreation Department*
- Road and Levy Department
- Sheriff's Department*
- Emergency Services*
- Fire District*
- Engineering Department*
- Department Parks & Recreation Board *

Local Agencies: Jackson Town Council

The listed Federal, State and local government agencies that participated in the scoping meetings or provided subsequent comments are indicated by an *. Their comments are noted in Appendix A. Teton County representatives provided additional comments at the 100% draft level of this document. These comments and the BLM response are documented in Appendix C.

In addition to the comments received from the government agencies, 84 members of the public provided comments as well. Their comments are recorded by interest group and comment content in Appendix B.



Von Gontard's Landing sign

D. Location and Setting

The project site is located in the upper Snake River Basin in northwestern Wyoming (Figures 2 and 3). The upper Snake River Basin drains a large portion of the northwestern Rocky Mountains. The BLM parcel is located at the southern edge of a geographical area known as South Park. The southern edge of South Park marks the boundary between the relatively flat Snake River Plain and the steep and narrow Snake River Canyon to the south. The project site is located six miles south of the town of Jackson, and is bisected by Highway 189/191.

This region is well known for its recreational and natural amenities. The natural scenery, geography and wildlife draw visitors from around the world. Tourist attractions include: two National Parks, two ski resorts (one world class), several major mountain ranges, the National Elk Refuge and other wildlife areas, a major river system, access to public lands, and many recreation areas.

The project site is one of several isolated BLM parcels along the Snake River in Teton County. The parcel is surrounded entirely by private lands. Throughout the region, private land tends to dominate the valley bottoms, with United States Forest Service managed lands encompassing the forested areas and higher elevations. Interspersed throughout the area are also many Wyoming State managed lands.

Primary access routes to the area include the north-south routes of US highway 26/89/189/191, and the east-west route of Highway 22. The site is within a few hours drive of several large metropolitan areas, including Salt Lake City, UT, and Cheyenne, Casper, and Sheridan, WY. Many smaller cities and towns lie in closer proximity to the site including: Jackson, Lander, Pinedale, and Rock Springs, WY, Driggs, ID, and Logan, UT. Regional, national and international visitors also reach the area via Jackson Hole Airport, which is served by multiple daily major airline flights as well as many private planes.

The project site occupies approximately 23-acres on the west shore of the Snake River. The site is bisected by a major regional highway right-of-way, creating an east and a west side to the parcel, each occupying approximately 11.5 acres (Figure 4). The highway elevation is approximately 20 feet higher than the surrounding BLM property. The west side of the parcel is primarily flat, open, and vegetated with grasses, while the east side has natural landforms, mature trees, a large gravel bar, and a large flat meadow area.

