



125 W. Main St
Bozeman, MT 59715
(406) 624-6117

www.altaplanning.com

memo

To: Tim Young, Wyoming Pathways
From: Joe Gilpin
CC: Stakeholder List
Date: 11/24/14
Re: Greater Yellowstone Trail – Stakeholder Meeting Summary

On November 21st Wyoming Pathways and Alta Planning + Design led a stakeholder/partner meeting from 9:30 am to 1:30pm at Harriman State Park near Island Park, Idaho. Approximately 60 individuals were invited with 25 attending the meeting.

Meeting Summary:

Project Background:

Joe Gilpin (Alta) provided an overview of the project including the context of the region, and a photographic tour of the corridor, which was able to showcase much of the route. This was important as many of the stakeholders of the project have been regionally focused and may not have understood the context of the entire corridor. In all, 104 miles of the approximately 170-mile trail corridor are currently usable by non-motorized users. Bicyclists may link most of the existing segments together with extremely low-volume forest service and county roads. The main barrier to riding the route from end to end is Wyoming Highway 22 over Teton Pass on the west side where there isn't a suitable alternative. Existing portions of the trail are paved in Wyoming and in Idaho south of Driggs. The corridor has substantial potential as a unified marketed amenity that will provide unmatched scenic beauty and the potential for historical interpretation including railroad, Native American, and agricultural history.

Draft Project Proposals:

Alta presented six Wyoming projects, nine Idaho projects and one Montana project along the project corridor from Grand Teton National Park to West Yellowstone (with brief mention of two other regional trail projects heading to the north from Gardiner MT could be incorporated into the Greater Yellowstone Trail). Distances, partner agencies and stakeholders and general details were provided for each project along with some photos of the corridor. Generally supportive feedback was provided and the group indicated that the project team was on the right track with regard to the overall direction of the project recommendations.

Considerable time was spent discussing project ID-9, which is the existing ATV trail 001 in the Caribou-Targhee National Forest. Currently ATVs and motorized vehicles with a wheelbase of 50 inches or less and other non-motorized users share the trail. The concept plan will not propose to reduce or eliminate access to motorized users. The goal discussed is to provide safe and enjoyable access for both motorized and nonmotorized users. Several alternatives to accomplish this were presented to the group. Additional review and discussions will be needed, and the CTNF will need to complete environmental planning (NEPA) for any significant new proposal.

Where possible, parallel non-motorized trails may be desirable (particularly though the Big Springs area), and in other areas improved surfacing and a widened tread may be desirable. Future planning will dig into this topic in more detail.

Trail Paving Options

Surfacing options for the route were also discussed. This included advantages and disadvantages of paving versus natural surface trail treads and their estimated maintenance costs and obligations. The consensus of the group was to consider paving the Ashton to Tetonia rail to trail, but to treat everything north of the Warm River Campground as natural surface. Paving would be particularly problematic for the portion of the trail to be shared with ATVs. If properly graded and hardened, a natural surface trail should be able to provide a reasonable level of service to most bicyclists.

Funding

Construction and maintenance funding are both significant hurdles to a successful vision. Traditionally, trail construction is typically easier to come by with grant and other sources of funding being available at the local, state or national level. Funds to maintain trail surfacing, bridge inspections and repairs, bathroom maintenance and trash removal are typically not provided in capital funding projects. Yet many similar trail systems around the country have developed mechanisms for stewardship. Most of the Greater Yellowstone Trail project stakeholders (especially the land managers) indicated a strong desire to identify and create a plan for long-term maintenance prior to or concurrently with any pursuit of capital funds for trail construction. "Friends of" groups were discussed, as well as a user fee system; however, there may not be good mechanisms to implement a user fee system given the project length, multiple jurisdictions and numerous access points to the trail. Idaho State Parks indicated a willingness to discuss maintenance on connected sections of the trail they currently maintain from Ashton to Tetonia trail, but additional funding for equipment, material, and personnel would need to be identified and provided.

Economic Benefits

Some of the potential economic benefits of the trail were discussed including recently complete studies in Montana and ongoing studies in Idaho and Wyoming. Benefits could include job creation, attraction of new residents and businesses, and additional tourism revenue for the region. The Hiawatha trail in northern Idaho was used as a case study, this 15-mile natural surface trail attracted almost 38,000 visitors in 2012 (an average of 300 per day during its open season)

Breakout Activities

Two Breakout activities were conducted in the afternoon that organized the project stakeholders in different ways. Both activities asked groups to state the project's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The first activity asked them to do this by region of the project. Attendees from Montana, Wyoming, Fremont County ID, and Teton County ID were grouped together and asked to think about local issues. For the second activity, participants were broken out by stakeholder type. This included a project wide SWOT analysis by land managers (State Park and USFS districts), City/County staff and elected officials, and advocates.

The raw SWOT analysis is provided as an attachment, but in general all groups recognized the strengths and obviousness of the work done to date, the potential economic benefits and the number of groups and unity that exists amongst stakeholders. Weaknesses also included the diversity of groups, and funding both for construction and maintenance. Opportunities included showcasing the history and beauty of the area and increasing tourism. There were lots of ideas to promote the project and to build in existing and potential new events to the trail. Threats included potential future ATV/bicycle conflicts north of Ashton, lack of maintenance funding, and not being able to get the word out well on a national scale.

Next Steps

Alta Planning + Design will continue to work on the Concept and Action Plan that is being developed. The input from the Harriman State Park meeting will be incorporated, and additional refinements of the maps will be completed. Wyoming Pathways, Bike Walk Montana, and Idaho Walk and Bike Alliance will continue to assist in developing the plan and helping gather input from the region.

The project intends to complete the Concept Plan by the end of January 2015. Input continues to be welcome from stakeholders, land managers, and users.