

POWELL COUNTY

OLD YELLOWSTONE TRAIL MANAGEMENT AND FACILITIES PLAN

September 2018

Draft

Reviewed by: Powell County Parks Board
Adopted by: Powell County Commission
Adopted by Resolution: September ____, 2018

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1.0 Executive Summary

Powell County has obtained ownership of a significant length of the historic Milwaukee, Chicago, Saint Paul and Pacific Railroad right of way as the foundation for a recreational trail system that would run from the community of Garrison southward to the City of Deer Lodge. The trail would run through multiple property ownerships and require a thoughtful and balanced approach to managing recreational uses to ensure that the existing ranching operations continue unhindered and private property is undisturbed. The entire length of the proposed trail system is 11.9 miles. (See Figure 1)

The project will be completed in at least two phases. The first phase would include developing the County-owned right of way into a trail, which is 7.5 miles long. The second phase would establish a trail across state-owned land onto a County-owned right of way and then through the Grant Kohrs Ranch National Historic Site (GKR) to the City of Deer Lodge. This section is approximately 4.5 miles long.

Acquisition of the old railroad right of way was accomplished using funds provided by the Natural Resources Damage Program (NRDP) of the State of Montana. NRDP has now allocated the funds to install the improvements necessary to create a safe, useable recreational trail system. The County Park Board developed this plan to ensure the new trail facilities meet the needs of users and that the trail is managed in a logical and consistent manner.

The Park Board used its knowledge along with the input of County and City residents to identify the types of recreational uses that should be allowed along the trail system. The selection of uses was meant to minimize conflicts between users and adjacent property owners and to ensure trail users have a safe and enjoyable experience. Table ?? lists the uses that will be allowed on the trail system.

Table 1 – Recreational Uses Allowed on the Trail

Walking/jogging
Biking (<i>not currently allowed in GKR</i>)
Access to fishing
Wildlife watching
Access to hunting
Horseback riding
Dog walking (limited area)

The trail system proposed by the County will require the installation of facilities for handling vehicle traffic, garbage, waste and providing guidance and information. Table 2 outlines the new improvements that are proposed for the project. The exact type of improvements to be completed will vary from Phase 1 to Phase 2.

Table 2 – Proposed Improvements for the Trail System

Improvement of the Existing Bridges and Trail Surface
Trailheads-parking
Gates and fencing
Signage
Garbage cans
Vault toilets
Benches
Fishing access
Culverts for stormwater

2.0 Purpose of the Project

2.1 Planning Process

This plan provides a framework for the trail systems use, management and improvement. The plan is based upon the knowledge of the Park Board, County Commission and with input from residents of Powell County and the City of Deer Lodge. The planning process was used to identify the opportunities and challenges that exist with establishing and managing a new recreational trail through part of the Deer Lodge Valley. The plan is also meant to provide a sensible approach to constructing improvements and providing maintenance in a logical and economically sustainable manner.

Ultimately this plan answers the following questions:

- What types of recreational uses will be permitted on the trail,
- What improvements are needed to ensure the trail is safe and enjoyable, and
- How will the trail be managed?

2.2 Steps in the Process

The development of the plan involved several steps and required four months to complete. The primary steps included:

- Distribution of an online Survey: July-August 2018
- Public open house: August 2018
- Compiling the draft plan: August - September 2018
- Review of draft by County Park Board: September 2018
- Edits to draft plan: September 2018
- Final draft available for public review: September-October 2018

- Public outreach with adjacent landowners (September or October)
- Park Board public hearing on final draft: October 2018
- County Commission adoption of plan: October 2018

2.3 Project Phases

The construction of the Old Yellowstone Trail consists of two phases. The first phase consists of the old railroad right of way owned by the County. The second phase is still in the conceptual stage and will require more planning and negotiations, but based upon property and right of way ownership is very viable.

2.3.1 Phase 1

[INSERT CMSPP LOGO] The first phase is located on a portion of the historic Chicago, Milwaukee, Saint Paul and Pacific Railroad (CMSPP) right of way. The CMSPP operated from 1908 until 1980, when the company went bankrupt. Upon bankruptcy, the right of way was sold to the LB Foster Company, a Delaware corporation, and then was sold to James P. Branning in November 1998. Ultimately, Mr. Branning sold the property to Powell County, with the Natural Resource Damage Program providing the funds for the purchase and transfer of ownership.

This phase extends southward from Sawmill Road in the community of Garrison, Montana past Rock Creek Road/Kohrs Crossing to the southern end of the County owned right of way. Two trailheads will be constructed for this section of trail, one at the north terminus of the trail system where Sawmill Road intersects with the old railroad right of way and the other at Kohrs Crossing/Rock Creek Road. (See Figure 2 Phase 1)

2.3.2 Phase 2

The proposed second phase of the trail would be routed through multiple property ownerships, including: the State of Montana, Powell County and the U.S. Department of Interior, National Park Service and several private properties. The trail would run from the old CMSPP right of way currently owned by Powell County, through State owned land, then to a County owned road right of way and then through the Grant-Kohrs Ranch National Historic Site terminating on Washington Street within the City of Deer Lodge. (See Figure 3 Phase 2)

Developing a recreational trail through the state-owned land will require negotiations with the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) to construct a trail and to ensure continued use by the current lessee. The County wants to ensure that the lessee can effectively continue their use of the property for grazing livestock.

Once the trail in Phase 2 crosses state-owned land, it would connect to the County-owned right of way for the *Garrison Back Road*. The road right of way is currently used to facilitate the ranching operations, but the road has never been formally abandoned by the County. Therefore, the road right of way is available for public use as a recreational trail. Nonetheless, the County wants to ensure that the establishment of a trail will not interfere with the adjacent ranch owner's ability to effectively continue their use of the property.

Therefore, with the assistance of the Natural Resource Damage Program, the County would provide the improvements (fencing/gates) needed to ensure that the property could still be used for livestock operations.

The county-owned road right of way would then provide a connection to the Grant-Kohrs Ranch National Historic Site (GKR), which is managed by the National Park Service. The existing trail system within GKR is open to certain recreational uses such as walking and wildlife watching. Dogs are limited to certain areas of the site, and bicycling is not currently allowed. The staff at Grant Kohrs has indicated a willingness to work with the County to permit bicycling in the future as the Phase 2 trail system is developed, but this will take a formal review process by the National Park Service.

The southern terminus of the trail system is proposed to end at Washington Street in the City of Deer Lodge where the street enters the Grant-Kohrs Ranch National Historic Site (GKR). Ideally, an expansion to the existing trailhead would be constructed within the GKR to provide enough room for parking and other facilities, such as a signage and vault toilet. The development of such a trailhead within GKR would require a formal review process by the National Park Service. If the trailhead cannot be constructed within the National Historic Site, then the other option would be to develop very a small trailhead within the right of way for Washington Street. The City Council for the City of Deer Lodge would need to review and approve any such facility as it is located within the right of way owned by the City. If the trailhead were located within the right of way, it would also be essential to get the input and advice of adjacent and nearby property owners about how to appropriately complete the project.

It is important to note that Phase 2 of the trail system is in the conceptual stage and will require significant negotiations and review before it is finalized and constructed.

3.0 Resident Outreach and Engagement

The input of County residents was essential to determining how the new trail will be managed and what improvements would be necessary to make the trail a safe and enjoyable facility. The County used several methods to gather the advice and guidance of potential users, including: an online survey, facilitating an open house, a newspaper article and holding public hearings before the County Park Board and the County Commission. The following is a more detailed description of those methods.

3.1 Resident Survey

As part of the effort to gather the advice and guidance of residents in Powell County, the City of Deer Lodge and elsewhere, an online survey was created using Survey Monkey. The survey provided people with an easy method to participate in the planning process without having to attend meetings or write and send letters or emails.

The survey contained 4 questions that focused upon what people thought were the most appropriate recreational uses to permit on the trail and what new improvements would make the trail enjoyable. Sixty-six (66) people completed the survey. Forty-seven (47) of the respondents lived in either Powell County or the City of Deer Lodge.

According to the people who participated in the survey, recreational uses for the trail were ranked as most appropriate as follows:

1. Walking/jogging
2. Bicycling
3. Dog walking
4. Horseback riding
5. Motorized use i.e. ATV's

Survey respondents then identified the top five most important improvements that should be made as:

1. Garbage disposal
2. Benches
3. Signage and maps
4. Toilets
5. Parking

3.2 Newspaper Articles

The Silver State Post newspaper regularly covered the process of the County acquiring the old railroad right of way for a recreational trail. During the development of this plan, the paper ran a story specifically focused on the process of determining what types of uses would be permitted on the trail and what improvements the County might consider constructing. The story highlighted the open house that the County hosted for residents.

[INSERT PICTURE OF STORY]

3.3 Open House

As part of the effort to gather the advice and guidance of residents, the County organized and facilitated an open house on August 21, 2018. The open house was meant to provide more information on the trail project and to gather further input and guidance from residents about uses and improvements. The event was informal with members of the County Park Board, County staff and consulting planner on hand to answer questions and to note attendee comments and suggestions. Fifteen people attended the open house.

[INSERT PICTURE OF OPEN HOUSE]

3.4 Park Board and Commission Hearings

Upon the completion of the draft trail plan, the Park Board held a formal public hearing on September 26, 2018 to provide residents with an additional opportunity to comment on draft plan and the Board's recommendations to the County Commission on how to manage and develop the new trail. The Park Board voted ?? to recommend adoption of the plan by the County Commission.

The County Commission considered the Park Board's recommendation at a regularly scheduled meeting in October of 2018. The Commission formally adopted the plan in October of 2018

4.0 Management of the Trail

The most important decisions made during the development of this plan were determining what types of recreational uses should be permitted on the new trail. These decisions guided how the trail would be managed and what types of improvements would be constructed for users.

From the beginning of its conversations about trail and its management, the County Parks Board envisioned the trail serving multiple uses such as walking, biking and wildlife watching. Nonetheless, they understood that certain combinations of recreational activities could result in conflicts between users and adjacent property owners.

4.1 Determining Use

The entire length of the trail is surrounded by a combination of private and publicly owned lands. The current ownership of the properties that the existing trail and proposed trail will cross or be adjacent to are as follows:

Phase 1 Trail (existing):

- Montana Rail Link Railroad is an operational railroad right-of-way
- Individual private property owners
- State of Montana
- Rock Creek Cattle Company
- Bighorn Cattle Ranch

Phase 2 Trail (proposed):

- State of Montana
- Individual private property owners
- United States Department of Interior, National Park Service

4.1.1 Dogs

One thing to note is that many of these properties are managed for livestock. This was a critical factor when the Park Board considered whether to allow dogs along any sections of the trail. Uncontrolled dogs along the trail could result in harassment of livestock and either injury to livestock or damage to property such as fences.

The Board made the decision to recommend that dogs not be allowed along most sections of the trail system. The exception to this would be to permit dogs on the section of trail in Phase 1 that is located from Kohrs Crossing southward to the end of the old right of way the County owns. The Board decided to do this to balance the strong support for walking dogs with the need to limit the potential for conflicts between ranching operations and the owners of dogs. The rationale for allowing dogs on the section south of Kohrs Crossing is that much of this section is located within the floodplain and riparian area of the Clark Fork River and generally sees the least use by livestock of any section of existing or proposed trail.

Dogs would not be allowed along a large section of the Phase 2 trails due to the high use by livestock, particularly as the trail crosses private property. Leashed dogs are allowed within this portion Grant Kohrs National Ranch Historic Site. Ultimately, the Board's decision is meant to try to reduce potential conflicts and to accommodate a use that had high support by residents.

It is also important to note that Montana state law is very clear that dogs that are harassing livestock on private property can be killed by the owner of the livestock or an employee of the owner. The County wants to avoid such circumstances, and therefore, dog use on the trail will be strictly managed.

4.1.2 Motorized Use

Based upon its own experience and upon the input received from County residents and others, the County Park Board decided that motorized recreational vehicles should not be allowed on the trail system. Mixing non-motorized uses such as walking and biking with motorized uses such as ATV's and motorcycles could create not only a safety hazard for all users, but also potentially lead to conflicts between different users as well. In addition, the Board felt that the allowing motorized use on the trail would decrease the recreational experience that non-motorized users would have.

4.2 Recreational Uses Allowed on the Trail

After significant discussion, analysis and public input, the Park Board made the decision to recommend that the following recreational uses be allowed on the trail system.

- Walking/jogging
- Biking
- Access for fishing
- Wildlife watching
- Access for hunting
- Horseback riding

- Dog walking (only Kohrs Crossing southward to the end of the County owned property)

The County Commission approved the list of uses with their formal adoption of the plan.

4.3 Cooperative Management with Ranching /Agricultural Operations

As noted earlier, the trail system is surrounded in many areas by cattle ranching operations. In some cases, the property and trail owned by the County separates ranching operations that are under a single ownership. Historically, these operations crossed the old railroad right of way to access different properties to conduct day to day activities.

Powell County wants to not only minimize any conflicts between recreational users and these operations, but wants to ensure that the use and maintenance of the trail does not hinder the ability of these ranching operations to perform their day to day tasks. These tasks can range from moving cattle from one pasture to another, calving and winter time feeding.

The County is willing to work with the surrounding ranching operations to provide the necessary infrastructure and management system to ensure the efficient and safe conduct of their operations. Such infrastructure and management can include:

- Construction of fencing and gates where appropriate
- Installation of cattle guards in the trail to facilitate the crossing of cattle in appropriate locations
- Prohibition of dogs along many sections of the trail

4.4 Operations and Maintenance

Often the operations and maintenance of new recreational facilities is overlooked by the upfront expenditures on construction. While Powell County is excited and hopeful about the positive impact that will be made by the trail system upon the County, the County is concerned about how to fund the long-term operations and maintenance of an 11-mile-long trail system.

At the present time, the Natural Resource Damage Program has indicated verbally that they are willing to provide the County with a substantial amount of funds to help cover the operations and maintenance of the trail over the next 5 to 10 years. This is truly an amazing offer and will help the County establish an effective management system for the trail. Nonetheless, the County needs to consider how it will pay for maintenance beyond this time. The County is economically limited in its ability to provide additional resources for recreational purposes. Therefore, it will be important for residents of the County and recreational groups to help provide the time and resources to ensure the trail system remains a safe and enjoyable asset for decades to come.

5.0 Trail Improvements

5.1 Overall Improvement Concept

As mentioned earlier in the document, development and improvement of the overall trail system will be completed in several steps.

In Phase 1, the first step will be to simply ensure that the portion of the trail made up of the old railroad right of way is safe for use by recreationists. The next step in this phase will be to construct amenities such as toilets, benches, etc.

Phase 2 would involve improvements that would provide a connection between the property currently owned by the County and the proposed trailhead at Washington Street. This would include building a new trail across the land owned by the State of Montana, improving the surface of the old County road within the County right of way as necessary and constructing a trailhead at Washington Street in Deer Lodge.

A list of proposed improvements for each phase and when they could be completed is listed below.

Phase 1 Fall-Winter 2018-2019:

- Upgrade the old railroad bridges to ensure they are safe for pedestrian, bicycles and maintenance vehicles
- Improving the surface of the old railroad right of way to make is useable for recreationists
- Constructing basic trailheads with parking at Sawmill Road and Kohrs Crossing
- Installing fencing and gates at each trailhead to allow the passage of permitted uses and to allow for maintenance of the trail
- Installing signage at each trailhead and along the trail identifying permitted uses, private property, etc.

Phase 1 Spring-Summer 2019:

- Finalize any trailhead improvements, such as parking surfaces
- Install vault toilets at the Sawmill and Kohrs Crossing Trailheads
- Install garbage cans at the trailheads and along the trail
- Install benches along the trail
- Install fencing, gates and cattle guards as appropriate, and
- Construct walk down fishing accesses at appropriate locations along the trail, a

Phase 2 Improvements (implementation schedule to be determined)

- Construct a trail across state-owned land
- Install culverts and/or trail bridges at appropriate locations along the County road
- Improve the surface of the County road for recreational use as appropriate
- Install fencing and gates as appropriate

- Construct a trailhead at Washington Street
 - Parking
 - Signage
 - Vault toilet
 - Gates and fencing

Out of necessity, the County will be opportunistic when it comes to completing the list of improvements. Therefore, while the list serves as the basic approach and schedule for improvements along the trail system, if an appropriate funding opportunity arises to help implement a project sooner, it will be pursued.

6.0 Improvement Funding/Acquisition

While the Natural Resource Damage Program of the State of Montana has generously provided the County with the resources to purchase a large portion of property for the trail, to construct improvements and to provide for early operations and maintenance costs, those resources are not unlimited. Ultimately, the County will need to examine other opportunities for funding the long-term operations and maintenance of the trail system. The exception would be those portions of trail located within the Grant Kohrs National Historic Site, which is maintained by the National Park Service. One potential option for providing improvements may be through the acquisition of surplus materials from federal agencies. These might include benches, picnic tables etc.

Determining how to fund long-term operations and maintenance and any future improvement projects along the trail system will be one of the most difficult and important issues for the County and trail users to address. Any future funding sources for operations and maintenance or for new improvements will need to limit the financial burden upon County residents.

Table 3 provides a brief description of potential funding sources that might help finance future operations and maintenance on the trail and new improvements that are not being considered now. It is important to note that this is not an all-inclusive list of every potential funding opportunity.

Table 3 - Potential Funding Sources for Potential Improvements

POTENTIAL IMPROVEMENT	FUNDING OPTIONS
Parking Areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local building contractors • Land and Water Conservation Fund
Picnic Shelters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land and Water Conservation Fund • Private Foundations: Dennis and Phyllis Washington Foundation, Town Pump Foundation, BNSF Foundation, Walmart Foundation, First Interstate Bank Foundation, NorthWestern Energy Community Works
Restrooms - Additional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land and Water Conservation Fund • MT Department of Commerce: Tourism Grants Program

Signage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MT Department of Commerce: Tourism Grants Program
ADA Accessible Trail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land and Water Conservation Fund • MT State Parks: Recreational Trails Grant Program • MT Department of Transportation: Transportation Alternatives Program

7.0 Plan Review and Updates

The County Planning Director will manage the overall implementation of this plan. The Director will do this with the support and advice of the County Commission, the Parks Board, and residents. Because the development and management of the trail system is a significant undertaking, Planning Director and Park Board will review the plan on an annual basis to assess progress in achieving the plan’s recommendations. They will also determine if the management guidance and prioritization of projects in the plan is still relevant. Based upon this annual review, the Planning Director and Park Board will provide the County Commission with a report detailing which projects have been implemented, identifying any management opportunities or difficulties encountered, and how the plan and its recommendations might be revised.

The plan is intended to provide guidance for only the next five (5) years and it is anticipated that the plan would be fully updated in or around the year 2022, if not before then.