



Ruckelshaus Institute
of Environment and
Natural Resources

Lander Trail Charrette Report

Summary and Recommendations



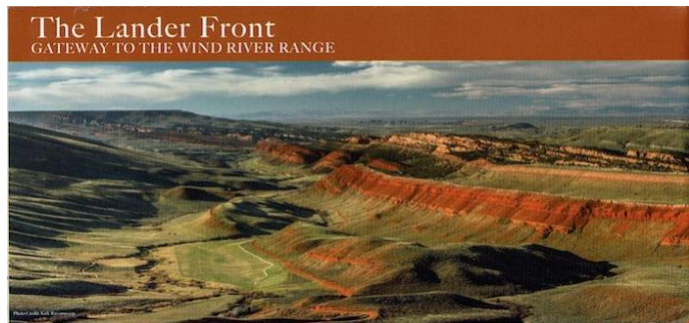
Ruckelshaus Institute
June 2019



Introduction

Lander Wyoming is known for abundant access to a variety of public lands. The Lander Front, a corridor that follows the eastern foot of the Wind River Mountains, contains hundreds of miles of trails, used and loved by the community of Lander (population 7,500) and thousands of visitors a year. The Lander area trail systems are managed by an assemblage of local, state and federal agencies. Trails are also stewarded by local and regional volunteer groups. In addition to being a destination for hiking, mountain biking, rock climbing and other activities, the Lander Front functions as wildlife habitat and grazing land, and is designated by the Bureau of Land Management as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern (Lander Slope ACEC).

Growing population and public land visitation, combined with a trend of more people seeking closer to home recreation options, is resulting in increased demands and impacts on Lander's front country trails



and surrounding landscapes. Compounding this are significant Federal budget cuts that have limited the land management agencies ability to maintain existing trails, and greatly challenged their ability to plan and build the new trail systems being asked for.

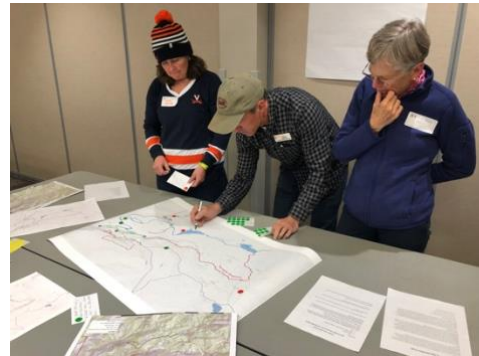
These realities informed the need for a stakeholder discussion on the current state and possible future of Lander's front-country trails. Wyoming Pathways, a group that works across the state to enhance people powered activities on public land, partnered with the Ruckelshaus Institute to host this conversation. The Ruckelshaus Institute, a division of the Haub School of Environment and Natural Resources at the University of Wyoming, advances the understanding and resolution of complex natural resources challenges through stakeholder driven processes. Wyoming Pathways acted as the convener, and Ruckelshaus provided facilitation services. Wyoming Pathways previously worked with Ruckelshaus to host a trail charrette in Laramie in 2016, which provided a template for this event.

On April 5th and 6th 2019, a trail charrette and open house were held for the community of Lander, both open to the public. A charrette is an intensive period of design or planning activity. Charrettes serve as a way of quickly generating a design solution while integrating the aptitudes and interests of a diverse group of people. Although the structure of charrettes may vary, the general idea of a charrette is to create an innovative atmosphere in which local stakeholders come together to collaborate and "generate visions for the future".

In this case, the focus of this collaborative process was on creating stakeholder driven recommendations for Lander's front-country nonmotorized trail systems. This was defined as trails within a 15-20 minute drive from town.

A team of local volunteers assisted with outreach, planning, and data gathering. Ruckelshaus and Wyoming Pathways wish to express their sincere gratitude for all the local contributions to the Lander Trail Charrette.

Wyoming Pathways and Ruckelshaus outlined five desired outcomes for the event:



1. Provide a summary of current conditions, agency plans, and generate consensus on issues and needs.
2. Identify trail system needs regarding planning, access, maintenance of existing trails, construction/reconstruction, signing, data collection, and use management.
3. Generate a set of consensus needs for the Lander area trail systems that will help guide future planning and funding activities, and prioritize to help focus limited resources.
4. Identify Lander area trail system partners and volunteer organizations willing to help address priority needs, and outline steps to encourage additional community trail stewardship efforts.
5. Provide the community and local land managers with a summary report of the recommendations.

Management Background and Summary of Current Conditions

The trail systems and associated landscapes under discussion are managed by four different land management agencies, two federal and two state. They are the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Lander Field Office; United States Forest Service (USFS) Shoshone National Forest Washakie Ranger District; Office of State Lands and Investments (OSLI); and Wyoming State Parks, Historic Sites, & Trails Sinks Canyon State Park. Some existing and potential trails are also located in the City of Lander and in Fremont County. User created trails, such as those on the Bus Loops, are not managed as designated trail systems. Because the public trail systems span multiple jurisdictions, there can be confusion among trail users regarding differences in land management methods. Likewise, agencies can work in isolation and not coordinate with neighboring public land managers. Thus, a desired outcome of the Charrette

was to help both the public and the land managing agencies better understand the varying mandates, planning processes, management structures and budgets each of the agencies individually have. The management landscape is complex, and recreational trails have different targets and prominence in the priorities of each entity. What follows is a brief summary of the recreational and trail management framework organized by relevant areas, as shared during the presentations from agency representatives at the charrette. In order to identify needs and opportunities, it is critical to understand existing conditions and plans.

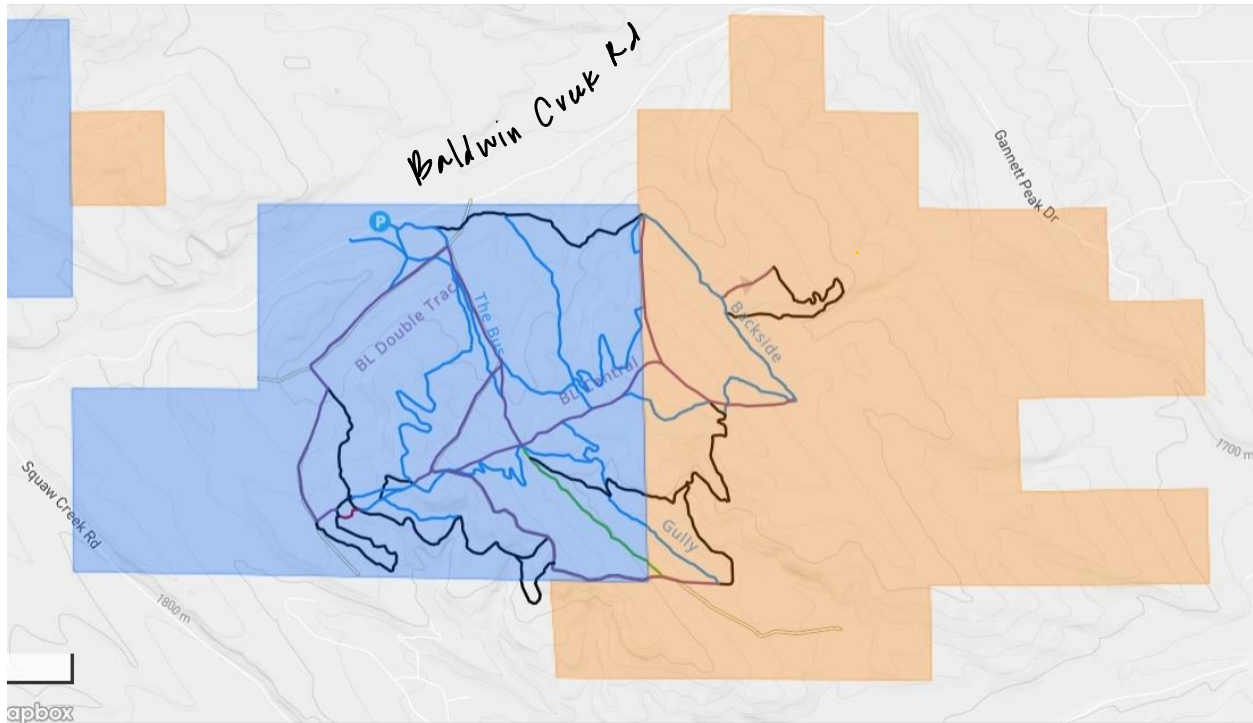
The three key areas discussed at the charrette were The Bus Loops, Sinks Canyon and Johnny Behind the Rocks. These areas have the most heavily used and the highest concentration of Lander's front country trail systems. In addition, the concept of creating new city/county trails to connect people directly from Lander to the Bus Loops and Sinks Canyon trail systems emerged as an additional area of public interest to explore.



During the charrette, we split Sinks Canyon into “Upper” and “Lower”, with the border at Bruce’s Trailhead. The thought was this would help participants discuss the State Park and high use areas down canyon separately from trail systems extending deeper into the Shoshone National Forest (such as Fossil Hill, Frye Lake, Worthen Meadows, Sheep Bridge, Lower Middle Fork, and Fairfield Hill). However, the comments made it clear that participants conceptualize the area as continuous. “Upper” and “Lower” will not be used in this report, but we will discuss land management boundaries.

What follows is a brief recreation management background and description of each area that explains the need for trail planning in that zone.

The “Bus Loops”



Area in blue is managed by OSLI, area in orange is managed by the BLM

The area referred to by many Lander locals as “The Bus Loops”, accessed off Baldwin Creek Road, offers the closest recreational trails to the City of Lander. Lands associated with the popular user created trail network are managed by two agencies: The Office of State Lands and Investments (OSLI) and the BLM.

Approximately 20-miles of grazing and user-created informal trails currently exist, but the trail conditions vary significantly., and the lack of planning shows in the current spider web of trails, many of which suffer from erosion and braiding. Lander’s recreation user groups, especially mountain bikers and hikers, have expressed keen interest in a purpose-built sustainable trail system at the Bus Loops. They have identified the need for trail planning in cooperation with the two land managing agencies and local government.

There is a total of 800 acres of state land associated with the Bus Loops in two parcels. The state land is formally classified as “Common School Trust Lands”. The Trust Lands associated with the Bus Loops have current grazing leases and road easements, but no temporary use permits or special use leases. Cows graze the area seasonally.

Special Use Leasing is an option for permitting a developed Bus Loops public trail system on State Trust Lands. In 1988, the State Board of Land Commissioner's adopted the Public Hunting, Fishing and General Recreational Use Chapter, which formalized public hunting and fishing as privileges and introduced general recreation use privilege.

Generally, any organized uses of Trust lands must pay a fee to support public K-12 education and other state-designated beneficiaries. Formally building, maintaining, mapping, signing, and advertising a designated trail system is considered an organized use, and thus would require an agreement with the State of Wyoming. There is an application fee, and there would discussions with any existing lease holder as part of the OSLI review process. More information about recreation on State Trust lands can be found on the project website.



A good example of this type of organized recreational use on State Trust Lands is the Laramie Schoolyard trail system underway on State Land just east of the city. The community negotiated a Special Use Lease with the OSLI. The lease is held by Albany County, and the local trail user groups raise the annual State lease fee of \$1,200 and have begun to improve and maintain the trails.

The OSLI notes that grazing and agricultural lessees are frequently the stewards of state trust lands, and along with adjacent landowners, they are essential partners in successful recreational leases. To create a Bus Loops trail system, the OSLI will require a recreational special use lease (SUL) applicant to consult with any existing lease holders, i.e. grazing lease holders, prior to issuance of a special use lease. If the applicant for a SUL obtains written consent from the existing lessee (s) to the issuance of a special use lease, the special use lease shall be deemed to not result in substantial impairment of the existing lease (s). OSLI can choose to approve a SUL regardless of whether the surface lessee agrees with permitting the proposed use. If the lessee disapproves of the proposed use, OSLI will have a discussion with them as to why they disapprove. The OSLI then can decide to not recommend the proposed use, determine a way to mitigate the lessee's concerns, or recommend the lease be approved regardless of the lessee's preference. The OSLI prefers that the various users reach collaborative solutions.

Parking is also becoming an issue for the Bus Loops. The main access is from an informal parking area along Fremont County's Baldwin Creek Road, which is becoming congested as trail use has

increased. A designated parking area was created on state lands via an approved OSLI Board Matter in 2009, however recreation users don't always use the designated parking lot. The parking area is located on State Section #1633100, north of Baldwin Creek Road, just east of the corrals. This is an example where signage may help dispel confusion.

East of the state land parcel, the BLM designated 'The Bus at Baldwin Creek Recreation Management Zone'. This is a special planning designation the BLM uses "to provide for recreational opportunities, such as developing trailhead areas for hikers, mountain bikers, or off-road vehicle users" as described in the 2014 Lander Resource Management Plan. Recreation Management Zones are subdivisions of Special Resource Management Areas (SRMAs), which "recognize unique and distinctive recreation values and are managed to enhance a targeted set of activities, experiences, benefits and recreation setting characteristics, which becomes the primary management focus"¹. This means the BLM formally recognized the priority of managing for recreation in this area.

Over the past few years, the Lander Cycling Club explored the concept of securing a recreation lease for the state school parcel in order to build and maintain trails. Complications arose over what entity could best contract with the State, but discussions continue. One possibility being explored is a partnership with the BLM and Lander Cycling Club, where the BLM could secure the recreational lease with State Lands, and develop an integrated trail system plan for the combined School Trust and BLM Bus Loops parcels. Lander Cycling and other local volunteers would commit to a long-term partnership to assist with the Bus Loops trail work.

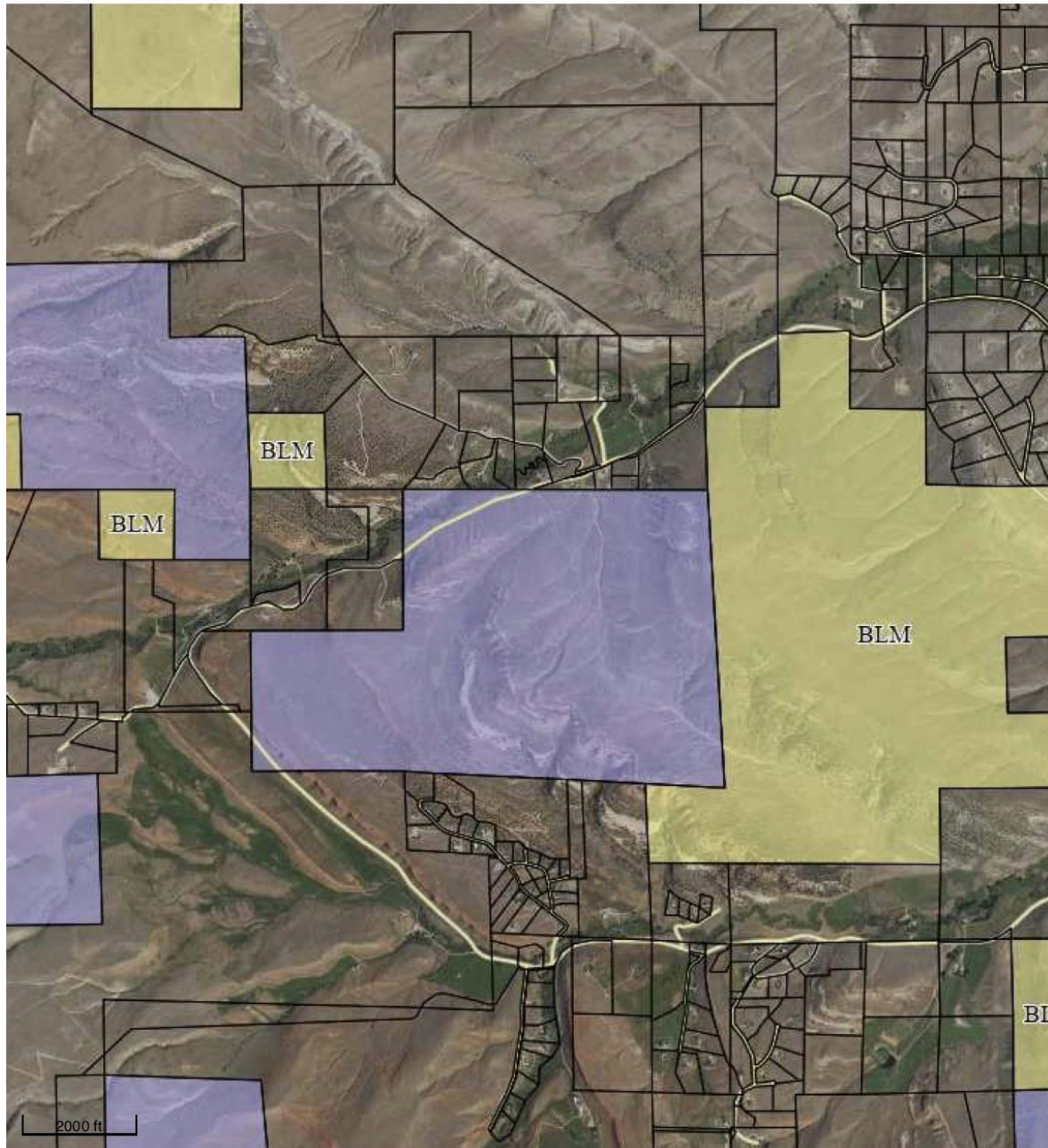


To assist in evaluating the potential improved trail system and partnership, the BLM Lander Field Office has contracted with IMBA Trail Solutions to complete an assessment of the existing trails and issues, and to develop conceptual planning recommendations for the Bus Loops. IMBA completed an initial assessment and will provide a report for the BLM by fall 2019. Based on the findings and further review, the BLM will evaluate how to move forward. Options could involve a partnership with OSLI. Any

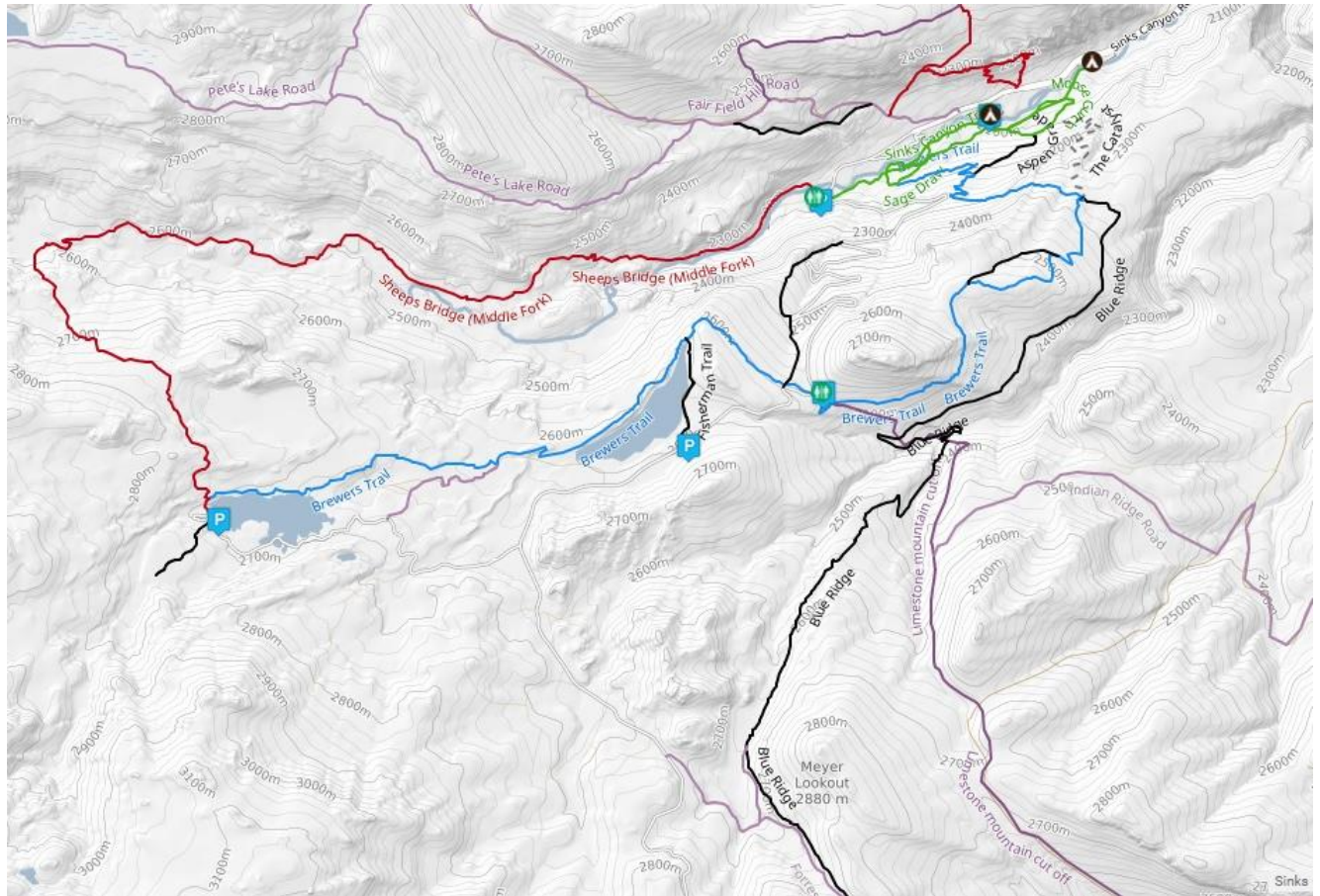
¹ BLM RMPs for Western Oregon Recreation Definitions:
<https://www.blm.gov/or/plans/rmpswesternoregon/files/outreach/RecDefinitions.FINAL.pdf>

BLM planning process would include conducting an Environmental Assessment to study the proposal formally, which would include considering public comment and adhering to federal regulations.

Fremont County Wyoming MapServer



Sinks Canyon

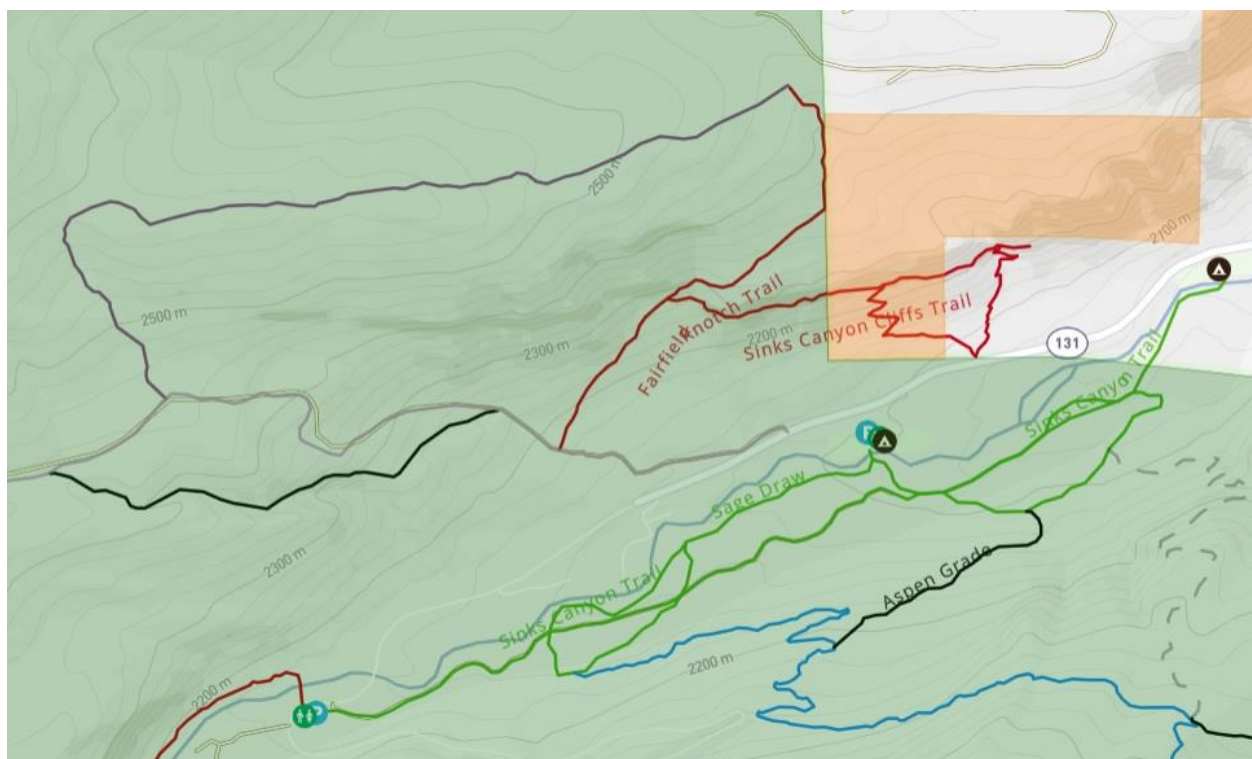


Sinks Canyon is a major recreation area for Lander residents and tourism visitors. The main trail systems are managed by the USFS and Wyoming State Parks. There is also BLM land on the north side of the highway that contains a section of cliffs popular with climbers. The initial 12-mile section of canyon from Lander to Bruce's parking area includes Sinks Canyon State Park and popular front country recreation on the Shoshone National Forest. This is a zone of heavily concentrated use that includes campgrounds and interpretive natural history trails along the Middle Fork of the Popo Agie River. The north side of the canyon hosts steep climber trails to access the many climbing routes on the dolomite cliffs. Bruce's Trail Head and adjacent Picnic Site serves as an access point for the Shoshone National Forest mountain biking, equestrian, and hiking trails up the Middle Fork and Brewers Trails. The area also provides backcountry access into the Wind River Mountains, acting as a departure point for wilderness backpacking and horsepacking trips.

Sinks Canyon State Park is managed by Wyoming State Parks, Historic Sites & Trails, a Division of Wyoming State Parks & Cultural Resources. State Parks receives direction from the State Parks and

Cultural Resources Commission, a nine-member advisory board appointed by the Governor. The State Park includes a visitor center, campgrounds, and interpretive trails along the Popo Agie River. There are currently about 3.5 miles of hiking trails and multi-use trails, including a short section of the Sinks Canyon Trail that is groomed for fat biking in the winter that connects to National Forest trails.

The charrette was attended by Sinks Canyon State Park staff Assistant Superintendent Amanda Atkinson and Deputy Administrator Dave Glenn. The Park Superintendent Jamie Simonson attended the Saturday session. Sinks Canyon State Park is in the early stages of a Master Plan update process, and Atkinson encouraged charrette participants to attend upcoming public meetings and noted how the Sinks Master Plan dovetails with the charrette goals of studying trail needs within the park and assessing connections to adjacent Shoshone National Forest lands. More information about the Master Plan can be found on the Sinks Canyon State Park website, which states, “Wyoming State Parks is kicking off the development of a 20-year master plan for Sinks Canyon State Park that will direct future improvements and guide continued management of the park as a major recreational asset in Wyoming”.



The Shoshone National Forest is shown above in green. The trails in this area are managed by the Washakie Ranger District South Zone Trails Program. Their area of operation includes all non-motorized trails on the Washakie Ranger District and the Wind River Ranger District, managed by a single trail crew

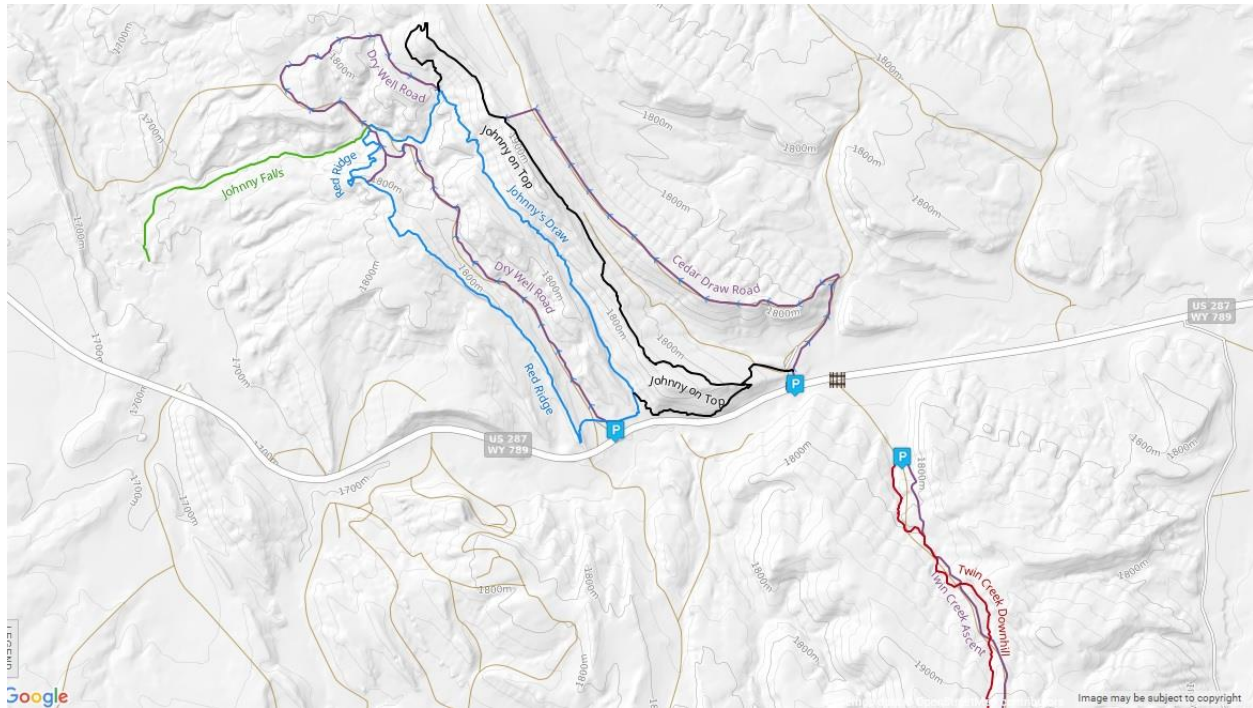
that is responsible for 500 miles of non-motorized trail (150 non-Wilderness, 350 Wilderness). Recent significant trends include a decrease in annual federal trail maintenance funding and an increase in front-country user demand.

Recent work on Sinks area trails includes five miles of new trail construction on Upper Brewers trail, two and half miles of major trail rehabilitation on Sheep Bridge trail, six miles of major trail rehabilitation on the Lower Middle Fork trail, and two miles of new trail construction on Middle Fork Stock Bypass. The Brewers Trail Extension Project, completed in 2018, is a popular addition to the trail network. This year Wyoming Pathways is has a partnership agreement with USFS to build bridges on the Upper Brewer's Trail.

From the Washakie Ranger District's perspective, any "new construction" non-motorized trail project proposals would be more feasible if spread out to other non-Sinks Canyon areas (Willow Creek, Beaver Creek, Limestone Mountain, Fiddlers/Christina/Louis Lake triangle, Pete's Lake, Dickinson Park). This is due in part to concerns with Sinks Canyon's high trail density and use levels, and the issues that go along with that, like watershed health, wildlife habitat, and user conflicts. Another concern listed was the lack of a "Washakie Front Country Recreation Strategy", a strategic master plan that would outline a long-term response to increased recreational pressures. More information is included in the USFS presentation shared at the charrette, which can be found on the Lander Trails project website.



Johnny Behind the Rocks



Johnny Behind the Rocks (JBR) is managed by the BLM Lander Field Office as a designated Recreation Management Zone (Lander BLM 2014 Resource Management Plan). The BLM is directed by a “multiple use, sustained yield” mandate. This means BLM must balance recreational needs with other uses that include agriculture, mineral leasing, and timber harvesting. The special recreation designation allows the BLM to manage JBR with recreation as a priority. The Lander Field Office manages 2.5 million acres of BLM land in Fremont and nearby counties, including JBR, The Bus Loops, and surrounding lands.

Located about twenty minutes southeast of Lander, JBR is an established recreation destination with a trail system developed collaboratively by the Bureau of Land Management, local Lander Cycling Club, and the IMBA Trail Solutions Program. Over the past decade, the BLM has substantially improved the existing trails, constructed a new trailhead and installed information signage. Local volunteer crews contributed significant time to help reconstruct and add to the existing trail system.

Johnny Behind the Rocks currently has 15 miles of multi-use singletrack trails, and building on that success, in July 2018 the Lander Field Office issued a decision to approve forty plus miles of new trails at JBR, for a future total trail system of approximately 60 miles. It was simultaneously announced that 4000 acres of BLM land at JBR would be withdrawn from mining.

The charrette was an opportunity for the BLM representative at the charrette, Jared Oakleaf, the Lander Field Office outdoor recreation planner, to share information about the plans, answer questions, and discuss what the BLM is looking for from the community in the early stages of implementation. The BLM currently plans to start with constructing a beginner trail loop in the summer of 2019 accessed from the JBR parking area, and is seeking continued community partnerships to support the trail work.

The Johnny Behind the Rocks Master Trails Plan Decision Record and other pertinent documents are available on the BLM National NEPA Register website.



Lander Trail Charrette – Methods and Planning Process

The Lander Trail Charrette was a community based collaborative discussion. The charrette and open house were open to the public, and focused on generative group learning and group work. This structure was intended to meet the desired outcome of a stakeholder generated list of consensus issues and needs for Lander area trails. The purpose of the charrette was not to make decisions, but to gather input from a range of perspectives. The planning and decision process remains the responsibility of each land managing agency. Discussing specific alternatives and implementation solutions is a next step for the community and decision-making entities to build on the outcomes of the charrette.



Prior to the meeting, key stakeholders were identified. These included land management agencies, recreational groups, local government officials, and conservation non-profits. The success of the meeting depended on the participation and involvement of all these affected parties. Likewise, successful follow up actions will also require participation of these same government agencies and involved citizens.

Inclusion of all stakeholder groups and adequate time for public input was a critical step in the process. A stakeholder list was drafted with input from Lander locals. Discussions were completed with the public land agencies to secure their participation and gather background information. The meetings were originally intended to take place January 2019, but the federal government shutdown and Wyoming legislative session impacted the schedules of key stakeholders. Postponing until April allowed all the key players to be in the room. According to the sign-in sheets total attendance was 52 on Friday and 32 on Saturday.

Stakeholders included:

- Federal Land management agencies, USFS and BLM
- Local recreation groups: Lander Cycling Club, Backcountry Horsemen, WyoClimbers, Lander Nordic Ski Association

- Other users: grazing leasee
- Local government: Lander City Council members, Fremont County Commissioners
- State government OSLI and State Parks
- Local businesses: Bike Mill, Gannett Peak Sports, Lander Chamber of Commerce
- Local non-profit groups: Wyoming Outdoor Council, Greater Yellowstone Coalition
- Local educational organizations: Central Wyoming College, National Outdoor Leadership School

Several options were provided for public input prior to the charrette. The website, landertrails.org, had two submission options: a map-based commenter and a separate submission form. A small number of comments (seven) were received by these modes. ZeeMaps, the web-based map commenter had some limitations,



which may have impacted usability and likelihood of individuals to submit comment. A recommendation for future charrettes would be to consider a different platform. The existence of TrailForks, a platform with greater capabilities, may have made ZeeMaps feel redundant. The Facebook page was another way for people to submit comment and a method of promoting the event. Some attention was received this way (100 people “interested” in the charrette for example). Wyoming Pathways and The Ruckelshaus Institute shared the event on their respective webpages. A press release was distributed widely in February.

Charrette and Open House Process

The Friday charrette began with welcome and introductions from Wyoming Pathways and Ruckelshaus. Participants then heard presentations from the four land management agencies with important background information such as the current status of trail systems, future projects, and current challenges and limitations.

After the presentations, trail system goals were highlighted. Goals are broad target statements that ultimately aid in the evaluation of specific options. System goals were suggested and opportunity was provided to brainstorm and clarify the goals. There was a general consensus on the following.

Lander Area Trail Goals:

- **Enhance manageability:** Create a well-planned front country trail system that provides quality public land access and that can be maintained and managed
- **Construct sustainable trails:** Purpose-built quality trail systems, minimum erosion, functional tread, intact streambanks, minimum wildlife disturbance
- **Accommodate spectrum of trail users:** Offer a variety of trail experiences that allow people to connect to the land, build a land ethic, encourage healthy lifestyles; trails that enhance the local economy and community quality of life
- **Reduce conflict:** Create a system that through good design and management, reduces trail user conflicts and that respects livestock and landowners rights
- **Involve the community:** Engage youth, community residents, and non-profit organizations directly in the care and stewardship of public lands

The group completed two needs assessments breakout activities. The needs assessments enabled participants to articulate the current conditions of Lander's front country nonmotorized trail systems, then generate desired conditions. A needs assessment is as a list of things that need to change or be done in order to meet goals. For example, to meet the goal "Accommodate spectrum of trail users", charrette participants identified that Lander could use more beginner trails with flatter grades.

Participants completed needs assessments at a system level and at a trail specific level. Map work was critical to these breakout sessions. Trail maps were primarily sourced from TrailForks, a bike trail database and management system app. USFS and BLM also provided printed maps with current and proposed system trails.



In breakout groups, participants filled out "needs assessment grids" with pre-determined categories. The discussions were explorations of existing conditions and enabled participants to gain an understanding of what is important to trail users. The first breakout session on system needs required table moderators, roles which the planning team and Pathways board members stepped into. For the second activity, the room was organized by geographic area, and involved more detailed map work. Each geographic station had a set of materials: maps, colored dot stickers, and a needs assessment grid.

The needs categories were color coded. After identifying needs participants then prioritized them. Each participant had a certain number of votes, represented by adhesive dots, that they could distribute to the needs they deemed the most important. Participants could place all five of their dots on a single comment, or distribute their dots across several needs (strength of preference indication).



Amanda Atkinson, Assistant Superintendent of Sinks Canyon State Park helps moderate a breakout session

Following the all-day Friday Trail Charrette, the Open House took place on Saturday morning. Large maps of each area were placed around the venue. Participants were instructed to write their comment on an index card and then place a dot on the map with a corresponding number. Comments and maps were collected at the end of the charrette and entered into Excel spreadsheets. Comments are available for viewing on the project website.



Charrette participants engage in map work

Trail Charrette Results and Discussion

Overall Lander Area Trail Systems Summary Ideas

System-wide needs were sorted into four categories: Planning, Data & Info, Education & Use Management, and Other. The Planning category received the most comments (48). Education & Use Management received 33 comments, Other received 14 comments, and Data & Info received six comments. Several themes received consistent comments:

- Develop an integrated trail system master plan for the Lander area public lands, such as a “Lander Front Country Recreation Strategy” that provides a community vision for trails, addresses trail sustainability, and finds consensus around trail density and variety.
- Trail planning and NEPA should be initiated by the responsible land manager for the main recreational trail areas in Lander, especially the Bus Loops and Lower Sinks Canyon.
- Organize a collective or coalition of user groups (“joint community trail commission”) to work with management agencies to identify/secure funding to implement trail building projects (new construction and maintenance/repair).

- Explore feasibility of creating non-motorized connector trails from the population hub in Lander to the primary front country recreation areas.
- Increase trail user education efforts. The addition of educational signage was requested for all areas (user etiquette/trail sharing norms, maps).

Constructing trails to connect systems on public land to Lander emerged as an overwhelmingly popular idea. This was especially true in the number of comments requesting a non-motorized connector from Sinks Canyon to the City of Lander. An educational campaign was also identified as an important need, and that education could come from multiple distribution avenues, such as user groups, local businesses and the Chamber of Commerce.

Names were gathered at the charrette with the idea of exploring the creation of a new volunteer group, which could help to secure funding sources and implement trail projects. Developing such a coalition or “Friends” group to partner with the land agencies to build trails could be an alternative or supplement to the agency process for trail building. Concerns expressed about a user coalition included drawing from the same small group of individuals (such as the existing volunteer groups that do this kind of work). Other concerns included increased future use (higher instances of user conflict), invasive species management for all areas, and sensitivity to private property rights and grazing rights.

Bus Loops Trail System Comment Summary

The Bus Loops received 96 comments. Maintenance/reconstruction was the most popular comment type for the Bus Loops, reflecting the overall request for a Master Trail Plan. The need for a sustainable rebuild and closure of rutted/repetitive trails was made clear. The number of comments made about the Baldwin Creek Road parking/access point (trailhead) reflect a need to address this area. Facilities and signage were common requests. The Backside also received a number of comments, primarily about new trail construction. The Backside is part of the BLM Recreation Management Area. Connection to town from the Backside (BLM land) received six priority votes. Access from Spriggs Drive was a suggestion. (This would take cooperation from a private landowner). Gannett Peak Drive was another suggested access point, and overlaps with BLM land.



As one commenter wrote, “the Bus Loops is receiving a level of recreational use it was not designed for.” This has resulted in problematic informal parking area and an expanding network of existing trails, many of which are unsustainable and redundant. Three core ideas address this reality:

- Pursue a recreational lease with the BLM, OSLLI, and Lander community.
- Create a Bus Loops Master Trail Plan with management agencies and user groups.
- Construct an improved parking area. The access point/parking area had several subcategory needs, almost equally split between facilities and signage.

Trail Specific and Priority Ideas:

- Improve trail quality and sustainability, and potentially reduce the number of trails as part of a trail Master Plan.
- Install trail wayfinding signage.
- Maintenance/reconstruction needed on Juniper Alley and Slickrock Access Drop.
- Long term goal of connectivity to town from the Backside.
- Improve access and parking.

The ideas listed above received the highest numbers of priority votes.

Sinks Canyon

Sinks Canyon had the highest number of comments (97 total) just surpassing the Bus Loops. New construction was the most common comment type. The proposed non-motorized connector from Sinks Canyon to Lander received eight priority votes and repeated comments.



The topic of new trails in Sinks Canyon emerged as an area of disagreement between trail users and the Forest Service. While some users are requesting the addition of several new front country trails, the Washakie Ranger District wants to focus on improvements to existing trails in Sinks Canyon. The number of trails Sinks Canyon can sustainably support is a suggested area of discussion and planning. This includes conversation around trail density, trail purpose and benefits, and trail impacts and mitigation. Additional planning and evaluation are recommended to assess the opportunities and engage the

Lander area stakeholders and the Shoshone National Forest. The Sinks Canyon State Park masterplan also offers an opportunity to plan trails that could connect to the National Forest.

Sinks Canyon Trail System Comment Summary

- Provide a greater range of trail difficulty, particularly the addition of more “green” trails for children and beginners.
- Implement education campaign through signage (maps, land management boundaries, user etiquette) and other user outreach methods.
- Construct proposed Sunnyside Trail from Sinks State Park to Bruce’s.
- Construct proposed Rim Trail.
- Construct Sinks Canyon non-motorized connector – to Lander, or farther down canyon (Sinks Canyon Center).
- Construct climber access trail to Cypress Wall.

Trails with the most repeated comments included the Stock Bypass, proposed Sunny Side Trail, and Fairfield Hill. The proposed Sunny Side Trail received five favorable comments at the Open House, noting that the existence of such a trail would extend the mountain biking season, and the existing climber access trails are too steep for riding. In regards to the proposed Rim Trail, an Open House commenter explained, “This trail would reduce mountain bike traffic on the switchbacks. Consider keeping this trail a little more moderate/flowy to help mountain bikers who want to ride upper, but not lower, Brewer’s. Input on the Stock Bypass included need for connection to existing trails and the need for signage to reduce confusion about single vs multiple use trails. A few comments repeated the need for erosion control on Sheep’s Bridge trail.



Johnny Behind the Rocks

JBR already had significant planning and momentum prior to the charrette. Identifying partnership opportunities and funding sources for implementation of existing plans is the next step for JBR.

JBR Trail System Comment Summary

- Address erosion issues.
- Work towards partnership solutions to build the trails proposed in the Master Plan.

Trail Specific and Priority Ideas

- Maintenance/reconstruction to address erosion/wash-out on Drywell Road.
- Install bathroom at trail head.
- Construction of beginner trail (in planning stages).

Addressing erosion on Drywell Road received six priority votes. Commenters expressed concern about a feedback loop of washouts. In connection, a reoccurring comment for JBR was the suggestion of seasonal closures during mud season. It should be noted the Record of Decision for the Johnny Behind the Rocks Master Trails Plan states “The BLM and partners will implement a voluntary seasonal closure...The BLM will consider an emergency closure order if winter severity, trail conditions, or winter use levels create cause for concern. BLM will evaluate winter use management options should a 10% increase of winter visitor use occur over a five year average”². Concerns about the impacts of increased use to adjacent property owners received several mentions.



Additional Areas

Beaver Creek Nordic Area was an additional zone that received comments, primarily requesting adding facilities like a storage shed.

Feedback on the Process

At the end of the charrette, we asked for participant feedback about the process. Suggestions included allocating more time for agency staff to share knowledge, additional commenting categories (i.e. “close this trail”), and written instructions for breakout activities. It is recommended to have note-takers to capture breakout session conversations.

² Decision Record for the Johnny Behind the Rocks Master Trails Plan: https://eplanning.blm.gov/epl-front-office/projects/nepa/69803/151499/185728/DR_JBR_MTP.pdf

Conclusion and Recommendations

Almost 400 comments were received from the charrette, open house, and other methods of public input. The level of attention ideas and areas received (duplicate comments, number of comments on a specific theme or trail) in addition to the priority voting activity, inform the recommendations below.

Recommendations

- Develop an Interagency Lander Front Country Recreation Strategy and Partnership (shared understanding and consensus agreement on management actions).
- Form a coalition of user groups/form a “Friends” group (Models exist for user group coalitions, such as Common Outdoor Ground in Laramie, or the Montana Trails Coalition) to assist in securing funding, implementing trail projects, and educating the public about sustainable trail use.
- Prioritize Bus Loops Trail Master Plan and Action Plan with BLM/OSLI and local partners.
- Conduct a non-motorized Trail Planning process for the area of Sinks Canyon managed by Shoshone National Forest.
- Community participation in Sinks Canyon State Park Master Plan.
- Explore feasible routes and land ownership of potential nonmotorized trails connecting from the community of Lander to the Bus Loops and Sinks Canyon trail areas.

Together, these actions would create the opportunity to refine system goals and identify what options from the charrette meet those goals. These planning actions may help the community and land management agencies prepare for and respond to increasing pressure on Lander’s front-country trail systems.

The desire for the ability to access front country trail systems without having to get into a car was evident. To achieve that goal would require interagency partnerships with local government and land managers (including transportation agencies) and the involvement of private landowners.

The charrette and open house demonstrated the Lander community is passionate about their trails. The Ruckelshaus Institute and Wyoming Pathways would like to sincerely thank all the participants, land managers, engaged citizens, and volunteers that made this event possible.

Resources

BLM Record of Decision and Approved Resource Management Plan Lander Field Office:

[https://eplanning.blm.gov/epl-front-office/projects/lup/18602/90393/108369/LFO ROD and Approved RMP 2014 0624.pdf](https://eplanning.blm.gov/epl-front-office/projects/lup/18602/90393/108369/LFO_ROD_and_Approved_RMP_2014_0624.pdf)

BLM Johnny Behind the Rocks NEPA documents: <https://eplanning.blm.gov/epl-front-office/eplanning/planAndProjectSite.do?methodName=dispatchToPatternPage¤tPageId=102337>

Sinks Canyon Master Plan: <http://wyoparks.state.wy.us/index.php/sinks-canyon-master-plan>

Lander Trails Project Website: www.landertrails.org

TrailForks (bike trail database and management system) for Lander:

<https://www.trailforks.com/region/lander/>

The Lander Front: Gateway to the Wind River Range map (available at NOLS headquarters)

