

# North Fork Shoshone River Access Project Plan and Environmental Assessment

**BLM**

Wyoming State Office — Cody Field Office



**March 2008**

**CODY FIELD OFFICE  
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT**

Special Rec. Permit No: N/A		EA Number: WY-020-E06-009
Proposed Action Title/Type: North Fork Shoshone River Access		
Applicant (if any): BLM		
T. 52 N.	R. 104 W.	Sec(s): 18,19
Author: Bye-Jech, Outdoor Recreation Planner		Date: 02/25/2008

**Need for Proposed Action**

The proposed action would allow the construction of a boat ramp and ancillary facilities on the North Fork of the Shoshone River about 18 miles west of Cody, Wyoming. A boat ramp in this location would provide improved fishing and float access and allow more flexibility in the length of floats. Presently, boaters put-in near the Forest Service boundary and take-out at Gibbs Bridge at Buffalo Bill State Park covering about 12.3 river miles. The proposed boat ramp would cut the float in half. This would provide more options for floaters. A developed recreation site is needed to provide basic facilities to meet the safety and health needs of visitors and to reduce impacts to other resources. See Exhibit A entitled “North Fork Shoshone River Access Recreation Project Plan”, Exhibit B entitled “North Fork Shoshone River Access Points”, and Exhibit C entitled “North Fork Shoshone River Access.”

**Relationship to Statutes, Regulations, Policies, Plans or Other Environmental Analyses**

The principal statute law governing public land management is the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976.

This environmental assessment is tiered to, and incorporates the following document by reference: The Cody Resource Management Plan (RMP) and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), 1990. The Cody Record of Decision (ROD) and Approved RMP, 1990 specifies general management direction for the Cody Field Office, including management of recreation resources. The ROD (page 22) contained the following management objective: "To enhance opportunities for primitive recreation, while increasing visitor services in some areas (to meet needs for more developed forms of recreation)."

The ROD (page 22) also identified the “Rivers Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA)” to recognize and manage the high value recreational opportunities on the North Fork and South Fork of the Shoshone River, the main stem of the Shoshone River, and the Clarks Fork of the Yellowstone River. The ROD (page 38) contained the following management objective for wildlife and fish habitat: “To maintain and enhance fish and wildlife resources so that the forage production and quality of rangelands and fish and wildlife habitat will be maintained or improved.”

In 1983, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD) signed a cooperative agreement, which covered select public lands along the North Fork and South Fork of the Shoshone River and the Clarks Fork of the Yellowstone River. The River’s Rest parcel was included in this agreement. The agreement included the following mutual objectives: “1.To provide recreation opportunities, particularly fishing and hunting for the public by identifying lands available for public use, providing access, and developing and maintaining minimal facilities and 2.To protect the fisheries, wildlife, and public land resources on the sites covered by this agreement by cooperative management.”

## **PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES**

### **Alternative I – Proposed Action – Approve the construction of a boat ramp and related facilities at the North Fork Shoshone River Access.**

Alternative I, the proposed action, would approve the construction, operation, and maintenance of the North Fork Shoshone River Access. The following is a description of the conceptual design elements:

The proposed day use recreation site would include the following facilities (see Exhibit C, the conceptual drawing entitled “North Fork Shoshone River Access”). A short access road (about 400-500’ long and 24’ wide), a parking area sized for about six vehicles towing boat trailers (about 400-500’ long and 160’ wide which includes a single lane road around the parking lot and the backup lane for the boat ramp), and a boat ramp would be constructed. The access road and parking area would be graveled using a locally available, visually neutral gravel source, which blends with landscape colors. The boat ramp would have a gravel surface unless enough funds are obtained to put in cement planks. A toilet, signs, visitor register, and kiosk (covered bulletin board) would be installed. The unisex toilet would be a single vault and would be accessible to persons with disabilities. The footprint for the toilet building and the concrete approach to the building would be about 20’ x 20’. The boat ramp would be about 16’ wide and the length would be determined by the need for a 12 to 15% slope at the end of the ramp (about 40-60 feet long). About two acres of the 17-acre parcel would be disturbed by the development. The proposed boat ramp location would require very few trees and shrubs to be removed from the riverside. A temporary construction fence would be installed before any surface disturbance occurs which would delineate where equipment and vehicles are allowed to work. An archeologist would monitor construction.

After construction, the temporary fence would be replaced with a low profile, post and cable fence to delineate the road and parking area and keep vehicular use on graveled surfaces.

A short boundary fence would be installed on the eastern boundary of the parcel from the riverbank north to intersect with a grazing pasture fence. The boundary fence would be steel post with woven wire (35" tall) on the bottom and one strand of smooth wire on the top at about 40" tall. This design would help catch windblown litter while still allowing wildlife passage. The wire fence on the south side of the triangular pasture would be rebuilt in place. The western boundary fence is not located online. This fence would be moved or rebuilt at a later date. Precisely marking the property boundaries would help discourage trespass onto adjacent private lands. There are several boundary marker signs in place but more would be installed to clearly show where the public land ends. The site would be managed by BLM for day use only (no camping or fires would be allowed). There would be no garbage cans, fire rings, or picnic tables installed. The site would be designed primarily for boating access but visitors may also fish along the shore.

The Wyoming Transportation Department (WTD) is planning road reconstruction of U.S. Highway 14-16-20 beginning in about 2011 or 2012. In the vicinity of the parcel, the roadwork would involve reconstruction of the road. WTD will purchase land and widen the shoulders of the highway from 5' to 8'. The two driving lanes will remain 12' wide and no turning lane will be constructed. Drainage pipes and box culverts will be replaced. They will replace fencing along the highway and move any cattle guards that are in place. The current height of the road will be lowered about 5' to remove a "bump" in the vicinity of the turnoff to Four Bear Trailhead (just east of the parcel). Permission would be requested to construct a 24' wide approach, as part of the recreation site development, on the south side of the highway across from and slightly west of the Jim Mountain Road intersection.

The conceptual site plan shows the concept of what is proposed, not the exact layout. The final layout will be influenced by many factors including: grade, the presence of rock, and sufficient turning radius for vehicles with trailers. The conceptual plan shows the road, parking lot, boat ramp, toilet building and potential plantings.

A kiosk and various signs would be placed to provide information, traffic control, and interpretation. Users would be encouraged to pack out their own trash. BLM staff would maintain the recreation site. The BLM Ranger, the Wyoming Game and Fish Department Warden, and the Park County Sheriff would provide law enforcement.

## **Alternative II – No Action**

The proposed North Fork Shoshone River access would not be built. Basic facilities would not be provided to meet the safety and health needs of visitors. An opportunity to provide additional access and greater flexibility in length of floats would not occur. Floaters would continue to float the river by using the access by the Forest Service boundary to launch and taking out by Gibb's Bridge.

Some floaters would continue to try and use the undeveloped, unsafe location on the south side

of the river by the Wapiti parcel to launch or take out, which is a shorter float.

## **Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Analysis**

Three other alternatives were considered but eliminated from detailed analysis as none of the alternatives would have successfully accomplished the proposed action.

Alternative locations on the parcel were considered. On the west end of the parcel, in T. 52 N., R. 104 W., Section 19, topography severely limits the size of the usable area. The boat ramp and vehicle turnaround area would be located very near the private residence to the west. The parking area and toilet would have to be placed closer to the highway, which would impact visual resources.

A location on the north side of the North Fork of the Shoshone River at the Wapiti Fishing Access site in T. 52 N., R. 104 W., Section 19 was considered. This site does not provide good sight lines for floaters, as a curve in the river is located at the top end of the parcel. The presence of large boulders in the river makes the site not as safe for boat ingress and egress. Locating a boat ramp at the lower end of the parcel would require placing an access road down a steep slope to get to the river's edge. It would also require greater disruption of the riparian vegetation than the proposed location. On the west side of the parcel, there is an existing primitive road, which goes down to the shore but it is not suitable to provide boating access. At the end of the road, there is not sufficient room to turn around, private land is encountered, and the road is too long and steep to back down. Also, there is not a suitable place for a boat ramp as the location is too close to a major curve in the river to use it safely.

A location on the south side of the North Fork of the Shoshone River at the Wapiti Fishing Access site in T. 52 N., R. 104 W., Section 19, was considered. Stagecoach Trail, a Park County road, provides access to the BLM-managed land parcel. Currently, some recreationists park along the edge of the road within the county road right-of-way and carry their raft or small boat down the bank to the river. The road is narrow and has no shoulder. The sight distance is poor as there is a curve and hill to the west and a hill to the east. There are no developed pullouts or turnaround areas by the parcel. The land drops off sharply on the north side of the county road and the recreation site access road would be steep. Ingress and egress from this site would not be safe, especially pulling a boat trailer. The land parcel does not have sufficient room to accommodate an access road, parking area, boat ramp, toilet, and turnaround area. The site contains an old concrete bridge abutment and a gauging station structure, which is still in use.

## **AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT**

### **General Area Description**

The proposed boat ramp development is located on the North Fork of the Shoshone River. Access to the site is obtained by traveling about 18 miles west of Cody, Wyoming on U.S. Highway 14-16-20 (the road to the east gate of Yellowstone National Park). The parcel lies

south of the highway and north of the river and is directly across from the Wapiti Fire Station and the Jim Mountain Road. Buffalo Bill State Park lies about five miles to the east and the Shoshone National Forest is located about five miles to the west. See Exhibit B entitled “North Fork Shoshone River Access Points” and Exhibit C entitled “North Fork Shoshone River Access.”

## **Vegetation, Water, Weeds, Threatened and Endangered Plants, Visual Resources**

The terrain in the area of the proposed recreation site consists of a flat to gently sloping terrace adjacent to the North Fork of the Shoshone River. Several small, ephemeral drainages dissect the parcel. The upland vegetation is generally dominated by sagebrush and bunchgrasses. The vegetation on the uplands includes: big sagebrush, smooth brome, needle-and-thread grass, Indian ricegrass, crested wheatgrass, fringed sage, prickly pear cactus, rubber rabbitbrush, green rabbitbrush, skunkbrush sumac, and rose pussytoes. Vegetation along the river includes: narrowleaf cottonwood, juniper, limber pine, coyote willow, silverberry, skunkbrush sumac, wild licorice, horsetail, wood’s rose, clematis, and currants.

Noxious weed species were not observed on the parcel, but cheatgrass and thistle are likely to be present. Weed treatments are conducted as needed by BLM.

There are no known Threatened or Endangered plant species in the area.

The Cody RMP identified a Visual Resource Management (VRM) Class of II for BLM-managed public lands along the North Fork of the Shoshone River. VRM management classes determine the amount of modification allowed to the basic elements of the landscape. Class II is described as: “Changes in any of the basic elements caused by management activity should not be evident in the characteristic landscape. Contrasts are seen but must not attract attention” (RMP/ROD Appendix H. p. 99).

## **Wildlife, Threatened and Endangered Wildlife, Sensitive Species, and Fisheries**

The project area contains both upland and riparian habitat for wildlife. The upland area provides mixed shrub grassland habitat that supports a small resident population of small mammals including rabbits, mice, ground squirrels, and gophers. Mule deer utilize the parcel throughout the year and it provides important winter range. Historically the area was likely also used by antelope and elk (during winter periods), but these species rarely use this site. The proposed project area is surrounded by private lands that have been extensively modified by human activities and developments subsequently, wildlife use by larger species is currently limited. US Highway 14-16-20 and county roads have also fragmented wildlife habitat and private roads and residences have been built on private lands on all sides of this public land parcel.

Historically this project area (because it is located along the North Fork of the Shoshone River corridor) likely was used by a large variety and diversity of wildlife, but current use is infrequent and very short term for most of the wildlife species that could occur in the North Fork valley. Potentially, several threatened or Special Status species could pass through the project area. These include; grizzly bears, bald eagles, wolves, and lynx. This parcel and surrounding area does not provide any important food, cover, or reproductive habitat for any of these species and any use would be very brief travel through to reach more useful habitat. Similarly, there is potential for several other BLM Sensitive Species to pass through or briefly use the parcel. However, this site does not provide any important habitat or functionally support any of these species. Potential BLM sensitive species that might be observed include: bat species, trumpeter swans, peregrine falcon, greater sage grouse, loggerhead shrike, sage sparrow, additional migratory birds, and northern leopard frog. In addition, several riparian/aquatic-dependent species including otters, beavers, muskrats, mink, waterfowl and shorebirds, and osprey could potentially occur along the river corridor, but would not have any important or necessary habitat features at this site. Game species that could occur at this site include mule deer, whitetail deer, chukar, grey partridge, and waterfowl. Hunting use is minimal due to surrounding structures, highway and road traffic, and numerous safety concerns.

The North Fork of the Shoshone River is a blue ribbon fishery and supports Yellowstone Cutthroat trout (BLM sensitive species), rainbow and brown trout, whitefish and numerous nongame fish species. The aquatic habitat is very good for cold-water fishes and is considered to be high quality within the state of Wyoming.

## **Cultural Resources and Native American Religious Concerns**

The site of the proposed boat ramp and associated facilities has been inventoried for cultural resources. Proximity to the North Fork of the Shoshone River would account for a high site density expectation. Site types would presumably include habitational (residential) locales, with subsistence (food processing) activities reflected in the material remains. Sites are present all along the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> terraces of the Shoshone River. Stipulations would be applied to surface disturbing activities. The BLM and Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office have concurred on a No Adverse Effect determination.

The area under consideration contains no known areas or locations of religious or cultural concern to Native Americans.

## **Special Management Areas**

The Cody Record of Decision (ROD) and Approved RMP, 1990 specifies general management direction for the Cody Field Office, including management of recreation resources. The ROD (page 22) identified the “Rivers Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA)” to recognize and manage the high value recreational opportunities on the North Fork and South Fork of the Shoshone River, the main stem of the Shoshone River, and the Clarks Fork of the Yellowstone River.

In 1983, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD) signed a cooperative agreement, which covered select public lands along the North Fork and South Fork of the Shoshone River and the Clarks Fork of the Yellowstone River. The River’s Rest parcel was included in this agreement. The agreement included the following mutual objectives: “1. To provide recreation opportunities, particularly fishing and hunting for the public by identifying lands available for public use, providing access, and developing and maintaining minimal facilities and 2. To protect the fisheries, wildlife, and public land resources on the sites covered by this agreement by cooperative management.”

## **Recreation**

The proposed project area is an undeveloped parcel of BLM-managed public land. There are no internal access roads, parking areas, or large signs advertising the site. Small marker posts are located on the boundaries to indicate land ownership. There are some local fishermen who are familiar with the site and use it for bank or wade fishing. They park in the parking lot at the Wapiti Fire Hall across the highway. Some of the nearby landowners use the site for short walks. Some recreationists floating the river stop there to picnic, as it is midway between the put-in near the Shoshone National Forest boundary and the take-out at Gibb’s Bridge in Buffalo Bill State Park. Persons floating the river and fishing can pull ashore and fish from the bank or wade fish or drop anchor and fish from the boat. Current visitor use is low for those accessing the site from the highway. Since the site does not have a large sign indicating that the land is available for use, most people are unaware that it is public land. Visitor use is high for floating and fishing activities on the North Fork of the Shoshone River as a whole. The amount of current visitor use of the site from boaters is unknown.

## **Livestock Grazing**

The proposed project would be on a parcel of land that is included in an existing BLM grazing allotment. The current grazing lessee, although licensed to use all of the parcel, primarily uses a small portion of the area which is included in a triangular-shaped, fenced pasture for horse use. The pasture includes both public and private lands. The new access road would be designed to avoid this pasture entirely or at most, cut through the tip of it near the highway if necessary. The rest of the facilities would not lie within that pasture. Grazing in the allotment is governed by federal grazing regulations and agreements.

The proposed action is located within the Shoshone River Pasture of the Rivers Rest BLM Allotment (03070) and is located on both sides of the Shoshone River. The lease number is GR4901669.

The allotment is scheduled for use by horses as follows:

<u>Allotment/Pasture</u>	<u>Livestock</u>		<u>Grazing</u>		<u>%PL</u>	<u>Type Use</u>	<u>AUM's</u>
	<u>Number</u>	<u>Kind</u>	<u>Begin</u>	<u>End</u>			
Rivers Rest (03070)	11	Horse	03/01	05/02	100	Active	23
Rivers Rest (03070)	11	Horse	09/01	10/25	100	Active	20

The lease has a further stipulation “Grazing use on those lands south of the Yellowstone Highway is to be made on an on/off basis throughout the above grazing period so long as said use is not damaging to the federal range.”

The Allotment has approximately 271 acres with an average stocking rate of 6.3 acres/AUM. The Shoshone River Pasture, with about 25.5 acres, has 4 AUM's based on the average stocking rate.

The Shoshone River Pasture has the North Fork of the Shoshone River running through the south 1/3 of the pasture, which is its primary source of water.

The range sites are primarily gravelly and loamy with 10-14” precipitation. These sites are typically dominated by bunchgrasses and sagebrush. The vegetation on the proposed site appears to be dominated by these species.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS**

The following are mandatory elements and/or environmental resources that are required for consideration in all NEPA analyses. All of these elements were reviewed against the Proposed Action and No Action Alternatives and any element that was affected from consideration of the proposal is discussed and analyzed in the narrative.

MANDATORY ELEMENTS	Alt. I- Proposed Action	Alt. II – No Action
Air Quality	n/a	n/a
Areas of Critical Environmental Concern	n/a	n/a
Cultural Resources	See text	See text
Farm Lands (prime or unique)	n/a	n/a
Flood Plains	n/a	n/a
Native American Religious Concerns	See text	See text
Wastes, Hazardous or Solid	n/a	n/a
Water Quality, Drinking or Ground	See text	See text
Wetlands/Riparian Zones	See text	See text
Wild and Scenic Rivers	n/a	n/a
Wilderness	n/a	n/a
Environmental Justice	n/a	n/a
Invasive, Non-Native Species	See text	See text
Threatened or Endangered Species	See text	See text

In addition to the mandatory elements, a discussion of vegetation, water, visual resources, Special Management Areas, recreation, fisheries, livestock grazing, and other wildlife is also included.

The following impact analysis consists of those impacts that were considered to be substantial enough to warrant narrative as determined by the preparers and reviewers. The threshold of impacts is directed at “real environmental issues” that affect the “quality of the human environment” as stated in the policy of CEQ regulations 40 CFR 1500.2.

## **Alternative I - Proposed Action (environmental consequences)**

### **Vegetation, Water, Weeds, Threatened and Endangered Plants, Visual Resources**

Vegetation would be removed and soil compacted on about two acres of the 17-acre parcel (the acreage of the parcel north of the river is about 17 acres). The upland vegetation is primarily sagebrush and grasses. Construction of the boat ramp would require removal of a few trees, shrubs, and other vegetation on the riverbank. The road and parking area would be graveled. The boat ramp would be constructed of concrete planks if funding were available. If funding were not available for a concrete ramp, then the ramp would be made of soil and surfaced with gravel. Removal of vegetation and soil compaction would result in increased runoff and erosion but gravel surfacing would partially mitigate this effect. A concrete boat ramp would result in increased runoff. Greater public access would increase trampling by people on the upland vegetation potentially reducing their vigor and condition depending on the intensity of such trampling. Increased activity along the river’s edge would also be expected, with trampling damage to riparian vegetation increased with potential for less stable banks. The upper half of the bank is vegetated; the lower half of the bank is steep and consists of loose rock with little riparian vegetation. The loss of vegetative cover in either area would increase the potential for erosion and decrease the stability of the soils.

Placement and use of a sealed vault toilet would not have a negative effect on water quality. The sealed vault would be pumped regularly and the toilet would be purchased from a reputable company providing quality products. Installing a toilet would provide a minor, positive effect on water quality as opposed to not having a toilet available.

Construction of the facilities could result in the spread of noxious and other weeds. The area will be surveyed for the presence of noxious weeds and they will be treated before surface disturbance is conducted. After construction, weed treatments would continue to be done by BLM.

Increased visitor use would increase the chance of spreading noxious weeds and invasive flora/fauna. Educational information, as shown in the following paragraph, would be posted on the kiosk to make visitors aware of steps they can take to reduce the spread of noxious weeds and invasive flora/fauna.

### Guidelines for preventing the spread of Invasive Non-Native Species

There is a potential for river related recreation activities to spread noxious weeds and invasive flora/fauna, such as zebra mussels, New Zealand mud snails, and the parasite (*Myxobolus cerebralis*) causing whirling disease. Weed seeds and invasive species may be spread by equipment used during river related activities such as vehicles, boats, and boots. Please learn to identify these species and ensure that your equipment is cleaned properly before you move from one body of water to another. To learn more information about invasive species in your area and how to reduce their spread, please contact the local BLM or Wyoming Game and Fish Department.

Sensitive plant species are not known to occur on the site.

Visual resources would be negatively impacted by new facility development. The effects would be mitigated by placing the developments away from the highway, making use of topography to partially screen some of the developments, planting vegetation to partially screen the facilities, and using paint colors and gravel which blend into the landscape. The highway corridor contains numerous facilities including residences, businesses, power lines, fences, barns, resorts, and parking lots. The new facility would add additional development to this already developed segment of the North Fork corridor.

### **Wildlife, Threatened and Endangered Wildlife, Sensitive Species, and Fisheries**

For wildlife in general, Alternative I, the Proposed Action, would result in more human use and activity at the site and would cause some reduction in wildlife use of the area. There would be a small loss of upland habitat due to road, parking, toilet, and ramp disturbance. Primary human seasonal use would be during warmer months when wildlife use is less. The fishery might be affected by increased use in this localized spot but should not be affected for the North Fork watershed. Waterfowl and riparian/aquatic-dependent mammals would use the area during spring and fall and should only be minimally affected. The use of the area by neo-tropical bird species may decrease. This site has been reduced in wildlife values due to surrounding human uses on private lands. This development will have insignificant impacts to wildlife when compared to other activities and developments on private lands along the North Fork corridor. However, future changes on adjacent private lands could make this public land parcel more important for wildlife as a remaining non-developed parcel in an increasingly developed area.

There would be no affect to Threatened and Endangered species and no impacts to habitat for these species. Sensitive species are unlikely to be affected by the proposed alternative due to very limited use of the site and lack of important habitat features, but could show some minor reduction in seasonal use with the proposed action. This area is only a pass-through area for Threatened and Endangered and Special Status species.

## **Cultural Resources and Native American Religious Concerns**

The proposed action includes measures to protect cultural resources.

The proposed action would be subject to the following stipulations for the protection of cultural resources:

Cultural Resources, Standard Stipulations. The BLM is responsible for informing all persons associated with this project that they may be subject to prosecution for knowingly damaging, altering, excavating or removing any archaeological, historical, or vertebrate fossil objects or site. If archaeological, historical, Native American, or vertebrate fossil materials are discovered, the BLM is to suspend all operations that further disturb such materials and immediately contact the Authorized Officer (AO). Operations are not to resume until written authorization to proceed is issued by the AO.

The authorized officer will evaluate, or will have evaluated, such discoveries not later than five working days after being notified, and will determine what action shall be taken with respect to such discoveries. The decision as to the appropriate measures to mitigate adverse effects to significant cultural or paleontological resources will be made by the authorized officer after consulting with the holder.

The BLM is responsible for the cost of any investigations necessary for the evaluation, and any mitigative measures required by the AO. The AO will provide technical and procedural guidelines for the conduct of evaluation and mitigation. Upon verification from the AO that the required evaluation and/or mitigation has been completed, the operator will be allowed to resume operations.

Native American Resources. The area under consideration contains no known areas or locations of religious or cultural concern to Native Americans. If such areas are subsequently identified or become known through the Native American notification or consultation process they would be considered during the implementation phase. The BLM would take no action that would adversely affect these areas or locations without consultation with the appropriate Native Americans.

Human Remains. If human remains are discovered or suspected the holder shall suspend operations immediately, physically guard the area, and notify BLM immediately.

Archaeological Resources Protection Act Stipulation. No person may excavate, remove, damage, or otherwise alter or deface or attempt to excavate, remove, damage, or otherwise alter or deface any archaeological resource located on public lands or Indian lands.

## **Special Management Areas**

The Cody Record of Decision (page 22) identified the “Rivers Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA)” to recognize and manage the high value recreational opportunities on the North

Fork and South Fork of the Shoshone River, the main stem of the Shoshone River, and the Clarks Fork of the Yellowstone River. Construction of the proposed boat ramp and associated facilities would allow recreationists to access and make use of this public land parcel.

Presently, persons who wish to access the land from the highway park across the highway in the Wapiti Fire Station's parking lot and walk across the highway and crawl through a fence. Providing an access road and parking lot would make access to the site easier and safer. Providing a restroom would give persons who are floating the entire 12-mile stretch a convenient location (halfway) to take a break. This may help to reduce the incidents of persons stopping on private lands along the river to take breaks. Providing a restroom would have a minor, positive effect on water quality as opposed to no facility provided.

Constructing the facilities also conforms to the direction in the cooperative agreement signed in 1983 between BLM and the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, which included the River's Rest site. The agreement included the following mutual objectives: "1. To provide recreation opportunities, particularly fishing and hunting for the public by identifying lands available for public use, providing access, and developing and maintaining minimal facilities and 2. To protect the fisheries, wildlife, and public land resources on the sites covered by this agreement by cooperative management."

## **Recreation**

The proposed action would have a beneficial effect for most recreationists as it would improve the quality of the experience by providing an additional access point for recreational activities associated with the North Fork of the Shoshone River. The location is ideal for providing an opportunity for shorter float trips. The ability to utilize a shorter float is advantageous for persons who would like to float the river but have a limited amount of time; for parties with young children, the elderly, or persons with disabilities for which a long float might be too taxing. It also is useful when the wind or weather conditions change and completing the 12-mile float becomes problematic. The time needed to float the river from near the Forest Service boundary to Gibbs Bridge at Buffalo Bill State Park varies from about three hours to four and a half depending upon water flows and wind conditions. These times do not include commuting or loading and unloading boats and equipment.

The proposed action would result in both a negative and positive effect for those visitors who already use the site for bank fishing. The increase in visitor use expected from developing the site would negatively impact the experience of current users who essentially have had the place to themselves. Positive effects would include having a parking area on site and a restroom.

Nearby landowners who currently use the site would encounter more visitors than currently and this would have a negative effect on their visit if they prefer to have solitude. Also, nearby landowners would view and have to deal with the public more than at present.

Construction of the North Fork Shoshone River Access would increase visitor use above current levels. A kiosk would be located on site to provide information about land ownership in the river

corridor, rules for using the site, outdoor ethics, safety, access rules, invasive species, and fishing information. BLM employees including the recreation planner and maintenance staff would have an opportunity to interact with visitors and answer questions.

The BLM Ranger would enforce BLM regulations. Wyoming Game and Fish Department Wardens would also visit the site providing information and enforcing fishing regulations. The Park County Sheriff's office would be available for enforcement of items under their jurisdiction.

## **Livestock Grazing**

The proposed action would remove forage from about two acres of public land. This would result in a fractional reduction in forage availability in the Rivers Rest Allotment (about 1/3 AUM). No adjustment to the grazing lease is required under this alternative.

With greater public exposure to the area, there is a greater likelihood that the public would interact and possibly harass the livestock potentially resulting in injury to the public or livestock.

The grazing lessee prefers to use the triangular pasture rather than the rest of the land on the parcel. The proposed facilities would be located outside the triangular pasture. The triangular pasture provides about ½ AUM on about 3 acres of public land and more on the private land. The remaining portion of the pasture north of the river (about 14.5 acres) provides about 2 ½ AUMs and the portion of the pasture south of the river provides about 1 AUM on about 6 acres. Areas other than the triangle pasture have not been used in recent years due, in part, to lack of fencing suitable to contain livestock along the North Fork Shoshone river and prevent trespass onto other private lands

The potential impact of horse and people interactions is reduced by the current grazing schedule on the operator's lease and the lack of grazing use in the proposed access development area. However, if in the future the operator would like to schedule use during the summer period, the interaction with the public could increase.

## **Cumulative Impacts**

**Past Actions:** The North Fork of the Shoshone River corridor contains U.S. Highway 14-16-20, which has a high volume of traffic during the summer season as tourists access Yellowstone National Park. The ten mile long highway corridor between Buffalo Bill State Park and the Shoshone National Forest boundary contains predominately private land with residences, barns, businesses, resorts, power lines, fences, and other developments quite visible. The highway corridor through the Shoshone National Forest is natural in appearance with signs and roads to resorts located periodically along its length. Several campgrounds are located in the corridor as well.

**Present Actions:** A new housing development is underway near Wapiti.

**Reasonably Foreseeable Future Actions:** The Wyoming Transportation Department plans to

conduct work on a nearby section of U.S. Highway 14-16-20 beginning in 2011 or 2012.

Over time, it can be expected that additional housing will be constructed in the highway corridor. Lands which are now primarily used for grazing livestock or producing hay would be converted to residential acreage. Depending upon future demand, there is a possibility that additional resorts or motels could be constructed.

The addition of the boat ramp and associated facilities at the North Fork Shoshone River site is a minor addition to the facilities already present in the adjacent highway corridor. The corridor itself is developed but there are vast acreages of designated wilderness areas on the Shoshone National Forest. The North Absaroka Wilderness contains about 350,488 acres and lies about five miles to the northwest and the Washakie Wilderness contains about 704,529 acres and lies about three miles to the southwest.

The cumulative impact on wildlife from the proposed development is negligible.

## **Residual Impacts**

See section entitled “Alternative I – Proposed Action (environmental consequences).”

## **Alternative II – No Action (environmental consequences)**

Under Alternative II, the North Fork Shoshone River Access would not be built. An opportunity to provide additional, safe access and greater flexibility in length of floats would not occur. Basic facilities would not be provided to meet the safety and health needs of visitors. Some floaters would continue to try and use the undeveloped, unsafe location on the south side of the river by the Wapiti parcel to have a shorter float.

## **Vegetation, Water, Weeds, Threatened and Endangered Plants, Visual Resources**

Since facilities would not be constructed, removal of vegetation and compaction of soil on about two acres would not occur. The potential increase in runoff and possible erosion from changing the ground surface from vegetation to gravel (or cement for the boat ramp) would not occur.

Even if the facilities were not developed, an increase in recreation use would be expected to slowly develop over time as more people become aware of the public land parcel. The increase in use would be less than if the site were developed. Increased recreation use would result in soil compaction and increased runoff and erosion from any new trails developed by visitors.

Since the facilities would not be constructed, an increase in the spread of noxious and other weeds from construction would not occur. Increased visitor use over time would increase the chance of spreading noxious weeds and invasive flora/fauna but this risk is reduced when vehicular access is prohibited. Since the facilities would not be developed, educational

information would not be posted on site to make visitors aware of steps they can take to reduce the spread of noxious weeds and invasive fauna.

If a weed problem is identified on the site, BLM staff would treat the weeds.

Sensitive plant species would not be affected by the No Action alternative, as they are not known to occur on the site.

Visual resources would not be negatively impacted by the new facility as it would not be developed. The highway corridor contains numerous facilities including residences, businesses, power lines, fences, barns, resorts, and parking lots that already impact visual resources.

## **Wildlife, Threatened and Endangered Wildlife, Sensitive Species, and Fisheries**

The No Action alternative would result in no change from current status for wildlife resources. If visits to the site increase over time, even without development, there would be an increase in disturbance to wildlife. Future changes on adjacent private lands could make this public land parcel more important for wildlife as a remaining non-developed location in an increasingly developed area.

There would be no affect to T&E species and no impacts to habitat for these species. Sensitive species are unlikely to be affected by this alternative due to very limited use of the site and lack of important habitat features, but would not experience a minor reduction in seasonal use that could have occurred with the proposed action. Future changes on adjacent private lands could make this public land parcel more important for wildlife as a remaining non-developed location in an increasingly developed area.

## **Cultural Resources and Native American Religious Concerns**

Information on cultural resources has already been obtained for the area. Stipulations would have been applied during construction to protect undiscovered cultural resources. Even with stipulations, cultural resources might have been unearthed and impacted upon discovery. This would not occur under the No Action alternative, as no construction would be done.

## **Special Management Areas**

Not constructing the facilities would forego an opportunity to improve access to the North Fork of the Shoshone River. The Cody ROD (page 22) identified the “Rivers Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA)” to recognize and manage the high value recreational opportunities on the North Fork and South Fork of the Shoshone River, the main stem of the Shoshone River, and the Clarks Fork of the Yellowstone River. The cooperative agreement signed in 1983 between BLM and the Wyoming Game and Fish Department included the River’s Rest site. The agreement included the following mutual objectives: “1. To provide recreation opportunities, particularly fishing and hunting for the public by identifying lands available for public use, providing access, and developing and maintaining minimal facilities and 2. To protect the

fisheries, wildlife, and public land resources on the sites covered by this agreement by cooperative management.”

An opportunity to provide facilities to improve access and to improve the recreational experience for most of the visitors while protecting resources would not occur.

## **Recreation**

The No Action alternative would impact some recreationists, as it would not improve the quality of the experience as an additional access point for recreational activities associated with the North Fork of the Shoshone River would not be provided. This ideal location for providing an opportunity for shorter float trips would not be utilized. Shorter float trips would not be available for persons who would like to float the river but have a limited amount of time; for parties with young children, the elderly, or persons with disabilities for which a long float might be too taxing. Shorter floats would not be available when the wind or weather conditions change and completing the 12-mile float becomes problematic. For recreationists who don't want a shorter float opportunity, there would be no effect on their recreation experience from not building the facility.

Leaving the parcel in its current state does not improve access for the public from the highway. An access road and parking lot would not be built and access to the site would not be made easier or safer. Presently, persons who wish to access the land from the highway park across the highway in the Wapiti Fire Station's parking lot and walk across the highway and crawl through a fence. This would continue if the site were undeveloped.

A restroom would not be provided. Persons who are floating the entire 12-mile stretch would not have a convenient location (halfway) to take a bathroom break and use a facility. An opportunity to reduce the incidents of persons stopping on private lands along the river to take bathroom breaks would be foregone. The minor improvement in water quality that a restroom would provide would not occur.

The increase in visitor use expected from developing the site would not occur and the current users would continue to have the place to themselves. The present quality of their fishing experience would continue. However, over time, recreation use is expected to increase even without development as more people become aware of this public land parcel and as populations grow. But the growth in use would be less than if the site were developed.

Nearby landowners would not have to view, encounter, or deal with more visitors from development of the site as it would not be developed. However, as stated above, use would likely increase over time.

Since a kiosk and other facilities would not be provided, an opportunity to more easily interact with visitors and provide information would not occur.

## **Livestock Grazing**

The no action alternative would not impact present grazing activities in this allotment. There would be less of a chance for interactions between visitors and livestock if the site were not developed.

## **Cumulative Impacts**

**Past Actions:** The North Fork of the Shoshone River corridor contains U.S. Highway 14-16-20, which has a high volume of traffic during the summer season as tourists access Yellowstone National Park. The ten mile long highway corridor between Buffalo Bill State Park and the Shoshone National Forest boundary contains predominately private land with residences, barns, businesses, resorts, power lines, fences, and other developments quite visible. The highway corridor through the Shoshone National Forest is natural in appearance with signs and roads to resorts located periodically along its length. Several campgrounds are located in the corridor as well.

**Present Actions:** A new housing development is underway near Wapiti.

**Reasonably Foreseeable Future Actions:** The Wyoming Transportation Department plans to conduct work on a nearby section of U.S. Highway 14-16-20 beginning in 2011 or 2012. Over time, it can be expected that additional housing will be constructed in the highway corridor. Lands which are now primarily used for grazing livestock or producing hay would be converted to residential acreage. Depending upon future demand, there is a possibility that additional resorts or motels could be constructed.

Under the No Action alternative, the boat ramp and associated facilities at the site would not be built. The parcel would remain in a natural condition. This would not have much effect on visual resources or wildlife resources as the adjacent corridor is already developed. The new facilities would have been a minor addition to the facilities already present. However, future changes on adjacent private lands could make this public land parcel more important for wildlife as a remaining non-developed location in an increasingly developed area.

The highway corridor itself is developed but there are vast acreages of designated wilderness areas on the Shoshone National Forest. The North Absaroka Wilderness contains about 350,488 acres and lies about five miles to the northwest and the Washakie Wilderness contains about 704,529 acres and lies about three miles to the southwest.

## **Residual Impacts**

See section entitled “Alternative II – No Action (environmental consequences).”

## **Conformance with Existing Land Use Plans**

The Cody Resource Management Plan (RMP) was approved on November 8, 1990.

Based on the RMP and the analysis contained in this EA, both Alternative I – Proposed Action, and Alternative II – No Action, would be in conformance with the Cody RMP objective for recreation management.

## **Distribution**

The updated Environmental Assessment and the Decision Notice will be available on the internet in late March or early April, 2008.

## **Public Involvement**

The Environmental Assessment/Recreation Project Plan was distributed to the public for review and comment in January, 2007. It was sent to persons who expressed interest during the scoping phase; adjacent landowners; Wyoming Game and Fish Department; the East Yellowstone Chapter of Trout Unlimited; the Park County Recreation Board; Park County Commissioners; Special Recreation Permittees who use the North Fork of the Shoshone River; the Shoshone National Forest; and the Superintendent of Buffalo Bill State Park. The comment period ended on February 13, 2007. Comments were received from fifteen individuals or agencies, 87% were in favor of the proposed facility development and 13% were against it. Following is a listing of the main points included in the comments.

Issues, concerns, and statements raised by those who are in favor of the development included the following items: support projects which provide and enhance public access; access is much needed on the lower North Fork where so much river frontage is privately owned; this will benefit many residents of Park County who enjoy boating and fishing; have been working with BLM since 2005, to develop this site; site has been in the BLM/WGFD Cooperative Agreement since 1983, for public fishing and hunting so recent movement of a plan to develop is welcomed and will provide an excellent opportunity for the angling public; aquatic impacts to the North Fork should be limited to cutting of the bank to install boat ramp; site selection was based on minimal bank disruption with consideration of safety and adequate sight lines for the floating public; increased angler use at the site should not impact the fishery because this is a relatively small area that lends itself more toward an ingress/egress boat launch site and will break up the current much longer float distance; excellent idea, raft access to the North Fork is too scarce and difficult and as rafting is such a pleasurable, low-impact recreational use of our rivers, it should be facilitated by improving access; access at the gauging station is dangerous, a steep hike up the bank and just not safe; the property is a great location for our river floating needs; please build at your earliest convenience; in favor of improved access in that area; have floated numerous times in the past and will continue to float; our raft is heavy and the area by the gauging station is not an option, it is steep and the footing is horrible; proposed location is ideal takeout point in high water or perhaps a launch point in low water; as a rule, rafters and kayakers are very environmentally conscious and pick up after themselves and don't abuse the landscape; proceed with development as soon as possible; location of the proposed ramp is just about perfect for a day trip and would take care of parking problems on

Stagecoach Trail; float trip from Forest Service boundary to the reservoir is too long but there is no place to pull out with a heavy raft and there is no appropriate parking for a truck and trailer so you have to float the whole distance; being able to start or end a trip at the proposed site would be highly appreciated; location is ideal as it is midway between the forest boundary and Gibbs Bridge; access is becoming so difficult on the North Fork below the forest that having this area available for floaters will prove to be extremely beneficial; additional benefit will be the minimizing of possible trespass problems by those seeking to locate isolated parcels of public land to access the river for boat launching or takeout; fully support the development and will provide labor and materials to construct and install a kiosk and visitor register box and would be willing to assist with other labor.

Suggestions made by those in favor of the proposed action included: the design might not work, not enough room to back-in to launch if someone is parked in the way, redesign the parking lot, perhaps have the boat ramp be separate from the parking lot; a takeout is needed by Red Pole Ranch or in the state park; trash cans should be provided; often there are headwinds about 3:00 pm about 800 yards above Gibbs Bridge; people trespass on private land, need plenty of on-site signs on the shore down by the river and up on the riverbank so the public knows where the property lines are; don't need a kiosk, the locals will know what it is for, no need to post more bureaucratic nonsense and ruin the view; don't need signs, locals know where to go; if you can't figure out where to go you don't need to be there; signs ruin the visual aspect of being in the country; no need for a visitor register, don't know of anyone who has ever signed one, why do you need it, takes up space; should have a garbage receptacle or garbage will be blown to the local landowners; provide enough access so local fire station can access water at any time of the year; I don't need elaborate facilities, just a rough road with turnaround; no need for gravel, restroom, trash cans or anything like that just a clear shot to the river with the brush cleared at the river bank and a reasonably low bank.

Issues, concerns, and statements raised by those who are against the development included the following items: walk-in access has always been possible there, proposed development is for vehicle and boat access; much development has and will occur in the North Fork, there are few undeveloped BLM or public parcels from the forest boundary to Cody, this development is a plan to develop "all" lands along the river, no parcels will be left natural intended primarily for fish and wildlife use; BLM fish and wildlife objective from the Resource Management Plan is not met with this development; implement Alternative II and don't build the site; you may be overlooking the consequences of building an additional boat launch on this parcel; building this will increase the river float traffic, this may improve the recreational experience for river floaters as well as fisherman, but adding additional access for boats will also allow more access across private property; in theory this doesn't hurt anything and floating the river is legal, there are fishermen who care not if they follow the regulations, some intentionally beach on private land to fish and some don't care if they are ticketed;

well intentioned as this project may be, people who own private property will have a continuing source of discord as they deal with even more folks who want their money's worth; the quality of river fishing, wildlife, and public land resources will be on a steady decline as each of your development opportunities gets loved to death by the public.

Suggestions made by those against the proposed action included: if Alternative I is chosen, no continuous fencing should be done on the river (unless far enough away) nor along the east or west boundaries so wildlife movements are not impeded; small segments of buck and rail or other naturally aesthetic fencing should be used if necessary; signs should be used; revisit the Wapiti parcel and look at possibility of bulldozing existing road to reduce the incline; look and see how much area along river is available; there is plenty of room for a turnaround and locating the launch well below the boulders in the river would be safe; concrete ramp would not be required due to gentle slope; the toilet is already installed; more than enough flat parking is available above the toilet area; why not fully develop the Wapiti parcel for less cost and leave the proposed location in pristine condition; this is a better way to accomplish the objectives of the 1983 cooperative agreement between BLM and WGFD; Teddy Roosevelt made the remark that the North Fork route to Yellowstone was the most scenic 75 miles in America, this country is worth protecting and irresponsible decisions (even though well intentioned) concerning land use will destroy what little is left.

An open house was held on July 26, 2005 from 3:00 to 7:00 pm at the BLM office in Cody and 21 people attended. BLM and Wyoming Game and Fish Department employees participated. The proposal was explained and comment forms were made available. For those people unable to attend the open house, an invitation was made to visit the BLM office on July 27 or 28 from 8:00 to 4:30 and discuss the proposal. On July 12, 2005 a news release was sent out to 49 entities including newspapers, radio, television, Park County and neighboring counties, special interest groups, and Field Representatives for Senator Craig Thomas, Senator Mike Enzi and Representative Barbara Cubin. The news release advertised the open house.

Comments were received from thirty-six individuals, 72% were in favor of the proposed facility development and 28% were against it. Following is a listing of the main points included in the comments.

Issues, concerns, and statements raised by those who are in favor of the development included the following items: a boat ramp is needed at River's Rest, it would provide a much better location than trying to use the spot by the gauging station on the south side of the river at the Wapiti parcel; providing a safe boat ramp would be very useful; we float the river often and the only garbage we see is live bait containers; the boat ramp will increase river use quite a bit which is a positive effect; the ramp would provide for shorter floats and a six mile float is a good distance for a day trip; it is important to develop these small parcels of public land, the recreating public is increasing and more opportunity is needed; this is a much-needed access, it would allow safe access from the highway and would provide on-site parking; development of this site would make a nice rest stop for persons doing the longer float from the Forest Service boundary to Gibb's Bridge; development of the site would allow fishing access and the more access the better; develop the facility and allow livestock grazing on the property; the longer float is too long for some of the guests so having shorter floats is important; the upper river and the lower river are two different qualities of water, a ramp at River's Rest would provide for more choice in what type of water to float and length of float; lifelong Cody resident who is dismayed at lack of floating access on local rivers, there is a need to logically plan boating

access and River's Rest would be highly appreciated; this is a perfect spot to break up the longer float; develop the facilities as soon as possible; this is a great launch spot and would benefit sportsmen; any boating access is needed and it would help elderly clientele, and Cody is behind the times in river access.

Suggestions made by those in favor of the proposed action included: limit the number of guides so the river isn't overrun by commercial users; provide garbage cans; if funding is a problem, do the development in phases with the toilet the last phase; it is important to mark land ownership boundaries at the site and post a map showing land ownership; punch a road in now so the site can be used while you are waiting to do the full development.

Issues, concerns, and statements raised by those who are against the development included the following items: the North Fork area is already too highly developed, we do not need additional development; public use of the site would increase with a resultant increase in litter and trespassing on private lands; vandalism and theft on private lands could increase; usually there isn't enough water for floating so people won't use the boat ramp; there will be too little use to justify the expense of putting in the developments; hardly anyone ever fishes there; there is enough access already on the North Fork of the Shoshone River; because the State Park charges for use, people are looking for other locations to access the river; the boat ramp is not needed; don't develop the parcel as it is one of the last natural areas on the North Fork between the Shoshone National Forest and Buffalo Bill State Park; it is an increasingly rare area close to a river; it is a unique parcel as it is one of few which is undeveloped and non-irrigated, is used extensively by wildlife, and has native vegetative species; it is important to wildlife as a migration corridor and is also used by eagles, river otters, sandhill cranes, and waterfowl; river use is mainly commercial users floating (not many fishing); increased use of the parcel would impact this natural area; existing developed river access points exist both west and east of Wapiti where boat access is achievable; the new boat ramp would only be used four months of the year; there's already an access below Wapiti post office, it would be cheaper to upgrade that; the current river users are not asking for this development, there is no need at this site as they use unofficial spots to load and unload boats; no need to shorten the float; putting in a development would encourage inexperienced boaters to float the river and this would cause safety problems and they may not be as aware of the state access rules and would trespass on private lands; a ramp is needed above Gibb's Bridge rather than at River's Rest; would water supplies be affected by placement of a toilet?; there would be impacts to cultural resources; spending funds on development here is not a wise use of taxpayer dollars; who will clean up the litter at the site and make sure people aren't camping or using campfires?; there is limited bank fishing there and development of the facilities would put too much pressure on this small parcel of land and the fishery there; it is a short distance to Gibb's Bridge and a boat launch is not needed here; not every river access point has to be highly developed to provide a quality recreational experience.

Suggestions made by those against the proposed action included: if you have to develop it, put a parking lot next to the highway and have walk-in access to the river; don't allow camping; grazing should continue on the site; post a map on the site and rules against littering, trespassing, and harassment of wildlife; and improve signs at the boundaries to help prevent trespassing on

private lands.

Since about 1999, several field visits have been made to the site and there were contacts with neighboring landowners. The proposal was discussed at various interagency meetings over the years. The 1983 Cooperative Agreement between BLM and WGFD included the River's Rest site.

## **Other Persons and Agencies Consulted**

BLM employees consulted about the proposal include:

Tom Lahti, Landscape Architect, Wyoming State Office  
Monica Goepferd, Engineer, Worland Field Office  
Alberta Settle, Engineer, Worland Field Office  
Dennis Saville, Wildlife Biologist, Cody Field Office  
Kierson Crume, Archeologist, Cody Field Office  
Anna Yoder, Archeologist, Cody Field Office  
Criss Whalley, Rangeland Management Specialist, Cody Field Office  
Jerry Jech, Natural Resource Specialist, Cody Field Office  
Jack Mononi, Rangeland Management Specialist, Cody Field Office  
Ann Perkins, Planning and Environmental Coordinator, Cody Field Office  
Gretchen Hurley, Environmental Coordinator, Cody Field Office

Wyoming Game and Fish Department employees consulted about the proposal include:

Steve Yekel, Regional Fisheries Supervisor, Cody Regional Office  
Jason Burckhardt, Fisheries Biologist, Cody Regional Office  
Steve Ronne, Habitat/Access Maintenance Supervisor, Cody Regional Office  
Craig Sax, North Cody District Game Warden, Cody Regional Office

**EXHIBIT A**

**NORTH FORK SHOSHONE RIVER ACCESS**

**RECREATION PROJECT PLAN**

**I. INTRODUCTION**

**A. Background**

In 1983, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD) signed a cooperative agreement, which covered select public lands along the North Fork and South Fork of the Shoshone River and the Clarks Fork of the Yellowstone River. The River’s Rest parcel was included in this agreement. The agreement included the following mutual objectives: “1. To provide recreation opportunities, particularly fishing and hunting for the public by identifying lands available for public use, providing access, and developing and maintaining minimal facilities and 2. To protect the fisheries, wildlife, and public land resources on the sites covered by this agreement by cooperative management.”

This plan is written to describe the proposed river access and boat ramp development, which would be built on the North Fork Shoshone River parcel of BLM-managed public land.

**B. Location and Access**

The proposed boat ramp development is located on the North Fork of the Shoshone River. Access to the site is obtained by traveling about 18 miles west of Cody, Wyoming on U.S. Highway 14-16-20 (the road to the east gate of Yellowstone National Park). The parcel lies south of the highway and north of the river and is directly across from the Wapiti Fire Station and the Jim Mountain Road. Buffalo Bill State Park lies about five miles to the east and the Shoshone National Forest is located about five miles to the west. See Exhibit B entitled “North Fork Shoshone River Access Points” and Exhibit C entitled “North Fork Shoshone River Access.”

**C. Relationship to Approved Plans**

The Cody Record of Decision (ROD) and Approved Resource Management Plan (RMP) signed in 1990 contained, on page 22, the following management objective: "To enhance opportunities for primitive recreation, while increasing visitor services in some areas (to meet needs for more developed forms of recreation)." The ROD, also on page 22, identified the "Rivers Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA)" to recognize and manage the high value recreational opportunities on the North Fork and South Fork of the Shoshone River, the main stem of the Shoshone River, and the Clarks Fork of the Yellowstone River. The ROD, on page 38, contained the following management objective for wildlife and fish habitat: "To maintain and enhance fish and wildlife resources so that the forage production and quality of rangelands and fish and wildlife habitat will be maintained or improved."

#### **D. Project Description**

See Exhibit C, the conceptual drawing entitled "North Fork Shoshone River Access." The proposed day use recreation site would include the following facilities. A short access road (about 400-500' long and 24' wide), a parking area sized for about six vehicles towing boat trailers (about 400-500' long and 160' wide which includes a single lane road around the parking lot and the backup lane for the boat ramp), and a boat ramp would be constructed. The access road and parking area would be graveled using a locally available, visually neutral gravel source, which blends with landscape colors. The boat ramp would have a gravel surface unless enough funds are obtained to put in cement planks. A toilet, signs, visitor register, and kiosk (covered bulletin board) would be installed. The unisex toilet would be a single vault and would be accessible to persons with disabilities. The footprint for the toilet building and the concrete approach to the building would be about 20' x 20'. The boat ramp would be about 16' wide and the length would be determined by the need for a 12 to 15% slope at the end of the ramp (about 40-60 feet long). About two acres of the 17-acre parcel would be disturbed by the development. The proposed boat ramp location would require very few trees and shrubs to be removed from the riverside. A temporary construction fence would be installed before any surface disturbance occurs which would delineate where equipment and vehicles are allowed to work. An archeologist would monitor construction. After construction, the temporary fence would be replaced with a low profile, post and cable fence to delineate the road and parking area and keep vehicular use on graveled surfaces.

A short boundary fence would be installed on the eastern boundary of the parcel from the riverbank north to intersect with a grazing pasture fence. The boundary fence would be steel post with woven wire on the bottom (35" tall) and one strand of smooth wire on the top at about 40" tall. This design would help catch windblown litter while still allowing wildlife passage.

The wire fence on the south side of the triangular pasture would be rebuilt in

place. The western boundary fence is not located online. This fence would be moved or rebuilt at a later date. Precisely marking the property boundaries would help discourage trespass onto adjacent private lands. There are several boundary marker signs in place but more would be installed to clearly show where the public land ends. The site would be managed by BLM for day use only (no camping or fires would be allowed). There would be no garbage cans, fire rings, or picnic tables installed. The site would be designed primarily for boating access but visitors may also fish along the shore.

The Wyoming Transportation Department is planning road reconstruction of U.S. Highway 14-16-20 beginning in about 2011 or 2012. In the vicinity of the parcel, the roadwork would involve reconstruction of the road. They will purchase land and widen the shoulders of the highway from 5' to 8'. The two driving lanes will remain 12' wide and no turning lane will be constructed. Drainage pipes and box culverts will be replaced. They will replace fencing along the highway and move any cattle guards that are in place. The current height of the road will be lowered about 5' to remove a "bump" in the vicinity of the turnoff to Four Bear Trailhead (just east of the parcel). Permission would be requested to construct a 24' wide approach, as part of the recreation site development, on the south side of the highway across from and slightly west of the Jim Mountain Road intersection.

The proposed project is included in a BLM grazing allotment. The current grazing lessee, although licensed to use all of the parcel, primarily uses a small portion of the area which is included in a triangular-shaped, fenced pasture for horse use. The pasture includes both public and private lands. The new access road would be designed to avoid this pasture entirely or at most, cut through the tip of it near the highway if necessary. The rest of the facilities would not lie within that pasture. Grazing in the allotment is governed by federal grazing regulations and agreements.

The conceptual site plan shows what is proposed, not the exact layout. The final layout will be influenced by many factors including: grade, the presence of rock, and sufficient turning radius for vehicles with trailers.

A kiosk and various signs would be placed to provide information, traffic control, and interpretation. Users would be encouraged to pack out their own trash. BLM staff would maintain the recreation site. The BLM Ranger, the WGFD, and the Park County Sheriff would provide law enforcement.

#### **E. Coordination with Others**

The Environmental Assessment/Recreation Project Plan was distributed to the public for review and comment in January, 2007.

It was sent to persons who expressed interest during the scoping phase; adjacent

landowners; Wyoming Game and Fish Department; the East Yellowstone Chapter of Trout Unlimited; the Park County Recreation Board; Park County Commissioners; Special Recreation Permittees who use the North Fork of the Shoshone River; the Shoshone National Forest; and the Superintendent of Buffalo Bill State Park. The comment period ended on February 13, 2007. Comments were received from fifteen individuals or agencies, 87% were in favor of the proposed facility development and 13% were against it. Following is a listing of the main points included in the comments.

Issues, concerns, and statements raised by those who are in favor of the development included the following items: support projects which provide and enhance public access; access is much needed on the lower North Fork where so much river frontage is privately owned; this will benefit many residents of Park County who enjoy boating and fishing; have been working with BLM since 2005, to develop this site; site has been in the BLM/WGFD Cooperative Agreement since 1983, for public fishing and hunting so recent movement of a plan to develop access is welcomed and will provide an excellent opportunity for the angling public; aquatic impacts to the North Fork should be limited to cutting of the bank to install boat ramp; site selection was based on minimal bank disruption with consideration of safety and adequate sight lines for the floating public; increased angler use at the site should not impact the fishery because this is a relatively small area that lends itself more toward an ingress/egress boat launch site and will break up the current much longer float distance; excellent idea, raft access to the North Fork is too scarce and difficult and as rafting is such a pleasurable, low-impact recreational use of our rivers, it should be facilitated by improving access; access at the gauging station is dangerous, a steep hike up the bank and just not safe; the property is a great location for our river floating needs; please build at your earliest convenience; in favor of improved access in that area; have floated numerous times in the past and will continue to float; our raft is heavy and the area by the gauging station is not an option, it is steep and the footing is horrible; proposed location is ideal takeout point in high water or perhaps a launch point in low water; as a rule, rafters and kayakers are very environmentally conscious and pick up after themselves and don't abuse the landscape; proceed with development as soon as possible; location of the proposed ramp is just about perfect for a day trip and would take care of parking problems on Stagecoach Trail; float trip from Forest Service boundary to the reservoir is too long but there is no place to pull out with a heavy raft and there is no appropriate parking for a truck and trailer so you have to float the whole distance; being able to start or end a trip at the proposed site would be highly appreciated; location is ideal as it is midway between the forest boundary and Gibbs Bridge; access is becoming so difficult on the North Fork below the forest that having this area available for floaters will prove to be extremely beneficial; additional benefit will be the minimizing of possible trespass problems by those seeking to locate isolated parcels of public land to access the river for boat launching or takeout; fully support the development and will provide labor and

materials to construct and install a kiosk and visitor register box and would be willing to assist with other labor.

Suggestions made by those in favor of the proposed action included: the design might not work, not enough room to back-in to launch if someone is parked in the way, redesign the parking lot, perhaps have the boat ramp be separate from the parking lot; a takeout is needed by Red Pole Ranch or in the state park; trash cans should be provided; often there are headwinds about 3:00 pm about 800 yards above Gibbs Bridge; people trespass on private land, need plenty of on-site signs on the shore down by the river and up on the riverbank so the public knows where the property lines are; don't need a kiosk, the locals will know what it is for, no need to post more bureaucratic nonsense and ruin the view; don't need signs, locals know where to go; if you can't figure out where to go you don't need to be there; signs ruin the visual aspect of being in the country; no need for a visitor register, don't know of anyone who has ever signed one, why do you need it, takes up space; should have a garbage receptacle or garbage will be blown to the local landowners; provide enough access so local fire station can access water at any time of the year; I don't need elaborate facilities, just a rough road with turnaround; no need for gravel, restroom, trash cans or anything like that just a clear shot to the river with the brush cleared at the river bank and a reasonably low bank.

Issues, concerns, and statements raised by those who are against the development included the following items: walk-in access has always been possible there, proposed development is for vehicle and boat access; much development has and will occur in the North Fork, there are few undeveloped BLM or public parcels from the forest boundary to Cody, this development is a plan to develop "all" lands along the river, no parcels will be left natural intended primarily for fish and wildlife use; BLM fish and wildlife objective from the Resource Management Plan is not met with this development; implement Alternative II and don't build the site; you may be overlooking the consequences of building an additional boat launch on this parcel; building this will increase the river float traffic, this may improve the recreational experience for river floaters as well as fisherman, but adding additional access for boats will also allow more access across private property; in theory this doesn't hurt anything and floating the river is legal, there are fishermen who care not if they follow the regulations, some intentionally beach on private land to fish and some don't care if they are ticketed; well intentioned as this project may be, people who own private property will have a continuing source of discord as they deal with even more folks who want their money's worth; the quality of river fishing, wildlife, and public land resources will be on a steady decline as each of your development opportunities gets loved to death by the public.

Suggestions made by those against the proposed action included: if Alternative I

is chosen, no continuous fencing should be done on the river (unless far enough away) nor along the east or west boundaries so wildlife movements are not impeded; small segments of buck and rail or other naturally aesthetic fencing should be used if necessary; signs should be used; revisit the Wapiti parcel and look at possibility of bulldozing existing road to reduce the incline; look and see how much area along river is available; there is plenty of room for a turnaround and locating the launch well below the boulders in the river would be safe; concrete ramp would not be required due to gentle slope; the toilet is already installed; more than enough flat parking is available above the toilet area; why not fully develop the Wapiti parcel for less cost and leave the proposed location in pristine condition; this is a better way to accomplish the objectives of the 1983 cooperative agreement between BLM and WGFD; Teddy Roosevelt made the remark that the North Fork route to Yellowstone was the most scenic 75 miles in America, this country is worth protecting and irresponsible decisions (even though well intentioned) concerning land use will destroy what little is left.

An open house was held on July 26, 2005 from 3:00 to 7:00 pm at the BLM office in Cody and 21 people attended. BLM and Wyoming Game and Fish Department employees participated. The proposal was explained and comment forms were made available. For those people unable to attend the open house, an invitation was made to visit the BLM office on July 27 or 28 from 8:00 to 4:30 and discuss the proposal. On July 12, 2005 a news release was sent out to 49 entities including newspapers, radio, television, Park County and neighboring counties, special interest groups, and Field Representatives for Senator Craig Thomas, Senator Mike Enzi and Representative Barbara Cubin. The news release advertised the open house.

Comments were received from thirty-six individuals, 72% were in favor of the proposed facility development and 28% were against it. Following is a listing of the main points included in the comments.

Issues, concerns, and statements raised by those who are in favor of the development included the following items: a boat ramp is needed at River's Rest, it would provide a much better location than trying to use the spot by the gauging station on the south side of the river at the Wapiti parcel; providing a safe boat ramp would be very useful; we float the river often and the only garbage we see is live bait containers; the boat ramp will increase river use quite a bit which is a positive effect; the ramp would provide for shorter floats and a six mile float is a good distance for a day trip; it is important to develop these small parcels of public land, the recreating public is increasing and more opportunity is needed; this is a much-needed access, it would allow safe access from the highway and would provide on-site parking; development of this site would make a nice rest stop for persons doing the longer float from the Forest Service boundary to Gibb's Bridge; development of the site would allow fishing access and the more access the better; develop the facility and allow livestock grazing on the property; the

longer float is too long for some of the guests so having shorter floats is important; the upper river and the lower river are two different qualities of water, a ramp at River's Rest would provide for more choice in what type of water to float and length of float; lifelong Cody resident who is dismayed at lack of floating access on local rivers, there is a need to logically plan boating access and River's Rest would be highly appreciated; this is a perfect spot to break up the longer float; develop the facilities as soon as possible; this is a great launch spot and would benefit sportsmen; any boating access is needed and it would help elderly clientele, and Cody is behind the times in river access.

Suggestions made by those in favor of the proposed action included: limit the number of guides so the river isn't overrun by commercial users; provide garbage cans; if funding is a problem, do the development in phases with the toilet the last phase; it is important to mark land ownership boundaries at the site and post a map showing land ownership; punch a road in now so the site can be used while you are waiting to do the full development.

Issues, concerns, and statements raised by those who are against the development included the following items: the North Fork area is already too highly developed, we do not need additional development; public use of the site would increase with a resultant increase in litter and trespassing on private lands; vandalism and theft on private lands could increase; usually there isn't enough water for floating so people won't use the boat ramp; there will be too little use to justify the expense of putting in the developments; hardly anyone ever fishes there; there is enough access already on the North Fork of the Shoshone River; because the State Park charges for use, people are looking for other locations to access the river; the boat ramp is not needed; don't develop the parcel as it is one of the last natural areas on the North Fork between the Shoshone National Forest and Buffalo Bill State Park; it is an increasingly rare area close to a river; it is a unique parcel as it is one of few which is undeveloped and non-irrigated, is used extensively by wildlife, and has native vegetative species; it is important to wildlife as a migration corridor and is also used by eagles, river otters, sandhill cranes, and waterfowl; river use is mainly commercial users floating (not many fishing); increased use of the parcel would impact this natural area; existing developed river access points exist both west and east of Wapiti where boat access is achievable; the new boat ramp would only be used four months of the year; there's already an access below Wapiti post office, it would be cheaper to upgrade that; the current river users are not asking for this development, there is no need at this site as they use unofficial spots to load and unload boats; no need to shorten the float; putting in a development would encourage inexperienced boaters to float the river and this would cause safety problems and they may not be as aware of the state access rules and would trespass on private lands; a ramp is needed above Gibb's Bridge rather than at River's Rest; would water supplies be affected by placement of a toilet?; there would be impacts to cultural resources; spending funds on development here is not a wise use of taxpayer dollars; who

will clean up the litter at the site and make sure people aren't camping or using campfires?; there is limited bank fishing there and development of the facilities would put too much pressure on this small parcel of land and the fishery there; it is a short distance to Gibb's Bridge and a boat launch is not needed here; not every river access point has to be highly developed to provide a quality recreational experience.

Suggestions made by those against the proposed action included: if you have to develop it, put a parking lot next to the highway and have walk-in access to the river; don't allow camping; grazing should continue on the site; post a map on the site and rules against littering, trespassing, and harassment of wildlife; and improve signs at the boundaries to help prevent trespassing on private lands.

Since about 1999, several field visits have been made to the site and there were contacts with neighboring landowners. The proposal was discussed at various interagency meetings over the years. The 1983 Cooperative Agreement between BLM and WGFDD included the River's Rest site.

BLM employees consulted about the proposal include:

Tom Lahti, Landscape Architect, Wyoming State Office  
Monica Goepferd, Engineer, Worland Field Office  
Alberta Settle, Engineer, Worland Field Office  
Dennis Saville, Wildlife Biologist, Cody Field Office  
Kierson Crume, Archeologist, Cody Field Office  
Anna Yoder, Archeologist, Cody Field Office  
Criss Whalley, Rangeland Management Specialist, Cody Field Office  
Jerry Jech, Natural Resource Specialist, Cody Field Office  
Jack Mononi, Rangeland Management Specialist, Cody Field Office  
Ann Perkins, Planning and Environmental Coordinator, Cody Field Office  
Gretchen Hurley, Environmental Coordinator, Cody Field Office

Wyoming Game and Fish Department employees consulted about the proposal include:

Steve Yekel, Regional Fisheries Supervisor, Cody Regional Office  
Jason Burckhardt, Fisheries Biologist, Cody Regional Office  
Steve Ronne, Habitat/Access Maintenance Supervisor, Cody Regional Office  
Craig Sax, North Cody District Game Warden, Cody Regional Office

## **F. Setting**

There are no public utilities developed on site. U.S. Highway 14-16-20 provides access to the parcel and parallels it on the north side.

In 2005, about 285,690 people entered Yellowstone National Park via this

highway. Local traffic includes people who reside year round or seasonally in the North Fork corridor and those who work at the many lodges and ranches. There are no roads or parking areas on the parcel itself. The City of Cody lies about 18 miles to the east. The Shoshone National Forest boundary lies about 5 road miles to the west. Other portions of the Shoshone National Forest boundary lie about 1 mile to the northwest of the parcel and about 2 ¼ miles to the southwest. The Washakie Wilderness Area includes 704,529 acres and the northeast boundary lies about 3 ¾ miles to the southwest of the North Fork Shoshone River parcel. The North Absaroka Wilderness Area includes 350,488 acres and the southeast boundary lies about 5 miles to the northwest of the parcel. The Environmental Assessment portion of this document provides information on vegetation, wildlife, and other resource values present on the parcel.

## **II. DATA ANALYSIS SUMMARIZATION**

### **A. Social Data Analysis Summary**

#### **1. User Profile**

##### **a. Activity Preference**

The recreation site would be used by residents and visitors to the Bighorn Basin. Primary activities would include floating and fishing from boats or from shore. The boat ramp would serve as a take-out for persons floating from the put-in on the Shoshone National Forest about 6.4 river miles upstream. It would serve as a put-in for persons wishing to float down to Buffalo Bill Reservoir about 5.9 river miles downstream. Some visitors traveling on Highway 14-16-20 may use the site as a rest stop and for sightseeing.

##### **b. Vehicles and Other Specialized Equipment**

Visitors to the site would use sedans, pickup trucks, recreational vehicles of all types, and motorcycles. Boat trailers for hauling rafts, drift boats, or other watercraft would also be utilized.

##### **c. Party Size and Length of Stay**

For bank fishing on site, the average party size is estimated to be 2-3 persons. Length of stay is estimated to be 1-2 hours.

For fishing from boats or rafts, the average party size is estimated to be 2-3 persons. Length of stay at the recreation site would be

short, about ½ hour to 45 minutes to load or unload boats. For floating trips, the group size would vary from 3-4 in a small raft or drift boat to 8-10 in a large raft. Length of stay at the recreation site would be short, about ½ hour to 45 minutes to load or unload boats. For persons using the site as a rest stop, the average party size is estimated to be 3-5 persons with an estimated length of stay of 15 minutes.

**d. Seasons, Times, and Amount of Use**

The primary floating season is from about April 15 to August 31 depending upon water levels in a given year. The primary fishing time period is July through October. Depending upon water levels and weather conditions fishing would also occur in the fall and early spring. There is a fishing closure each year from April 1 through June 30 on the North Fork of the Shoshone River from Newton Creek to Gibbs Bridge to protect spawning fish. The North Fork Shoshone River parcel is situated within this closed portion of the river. Recreational floating is still allowed during this fishing closure. Current, actual visitor use is unknown since the site is undeveloped. Estimated current use is 50 to 100 visits per year. A visit is defined as a person visiting the public lands for any amount of time during a day (for example: 1 hour, 12 hours). Future visitor use (noncommercial) is estimated to be from 200 to 300 visits per year for activities including floating only, floating with fishing, and bank fishing. Future visitor use involving commercial trips is highly speculative but could range from 275 to 375 visits per year depending upon the popularity of the float, demand, and other factors. The site may also receive some use as a rest stop for tourists traveling to and from Yellowstone National Park but the amount of such use is unknown at this time. As the population in Cody and the surrounding area increases over time, visitation to the site would be expected to increase.

**e. Demography**

Visitor Origin: Bighorn Basin residents are expected to make up about half of the visitors to the site. However, because the site is located on Highway 14-16-20 which is one of the major routes to Yellowstone National Park, tourists will also visit the site. Other major tourist attractions in the area include the Shoshone National Forest, Buffalo Bill State Park, and the Buffalo Bill Dam Visitor Center.

Commercial use of the site would primarily involve tourists.

## **2. User Requirements**

Visitors to the recreation site would like to have a boat ramp which is easy and safe to use, adequate parking, and a road design which allows for a turn-around area. The site must accommodate large vehicles and boat trailers. Visitors also would like to have access to a restroom. The restroom will be accessible to persons with disabilities. A map of the recreation site and river corridor will be posted on a kiosk with land ownership shown. Safety information, Wyoming access rules, BLM regulations, and fishing information and regulations will also be posted.

### **III. PROJECT PLAN CONCEPT**

See Exhibit C, the conceptual drawing, entitled “North Fork Shoshone River Access” for a sketch of the proposed facilities. The sketch shows the road, parking area, boat ramp, toilet building, and possible plantings.

### **IV. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT OVERVIEW**

If sufficient funding were available, the recreation site would be built in one phase. If funding is only available over a multi-year period, the development may be phased with Phase I including construction of the approach, access road, parking lot, and boat ramp. Installation of a cattle guard, signs, kiosk, and visitor register box would also be included in Phase I. Existing boundary fencing would be moved or replaced to better mark the exterior boundary of the BLM-managed public land parcel at River’s Rest in Phase I. Phase II would include the toilet with concrete approach and landscaping.

Several Class III Cultural Resource inventories have been executed. The Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office has concurred that no contributing portions of historic properties will be adversely affected by the project, as planned. Required permits related to installation of the restroom and construction of the recreation site would be sought. This would include a Corps of Engineers 404 Permit for the boat ramp; a Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality Small Construction General Permit for Storm Water Discharge; a Park County Sewage Disposal System permit for the vault toilet; and a flood determination letter from Park County (if required). An approach permit from the Wyoming Transportation Department would also be sought. Any required agreements with the partners would be obtained.

### **V. PRELIMINARY PROJECT COST ESTIMATES**

The estimated cost of the project is about \$70,000.

The project includes construction of an approach, access road, parking area, and boat ramp; graveling of the road and parking area; purchase and installation of a single-vault toilet; construction of a concrete apron in front of the toilet building; landscaping;

installation of a kiosk and visitor register box; and purchase and installation of signs. A cattle guard would also be installed at the highway fence. Existing boundary fencing would be moved or replaced where needed to mark the public land boundary. An itemized listing of the estimated project costs follows.

Estimated Costs

Boat ramp	\$12,000
Single-vault toilet (includes delivery and installation)	17,000
Concrete apron for toilet building	2,000
Approach, road, and parking lot (construction and graveling)	25,500
Kiosk and visitor register box	1000
Signs	500
Cattleguard, fencing, post and cable	<u>12,000</u>
TOTAL	\$70,000

Prospective partners providing funding, labor, and/or donated materials include: Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Park County Recreation Board, East Yellowstone Chapter of Trout Unlimited, and Bureau of Land Management.

MISSION STATEMENT

It is the mission of the Bureau of Land Management to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.