



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

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Scoping Greater Snow King Area Trail Projects



Bridger-Teton National Forest
Jackson Ranger District
Teton County, Wyoming



Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide information about five projects proposed in the Greater Snow King area (GSKA) to improve the quality of recreation opportunities close to town, reduce use conflicts, repair resource damage, and balance growing recreation use with the need to protect important wildlife habitat. These projects will not address all of the needs associated with growing recreation use in the GSKA but are intended to address improvements needed to make the summer trail system work better for all visitors. We invite your review and comment regarding these projects. Your feedback will be used to refine the proposed projects or to develop alternatives to the proposals.

This scoping document is tiered to the proposed Skyline trail and Putt-putt trail projects previously released for public review and comment in March 2011. Although there was considerable public support for these projects, several concerns arose, notably (1) what is the “master plan” for trail development? and, (2) How will wildlife populations be protected in the face of growing recreation use? In response to these concerns, the Jackson District Ranger put the proposed Skyline and Putt-putt trail project on hold pending a more holistic examination of the trail system across the Jackson Ranger District. With involvement and assistance from many people in the community, the Forest Service conducted an assessment of the entire district trail system incorporating resource characteristics, trail user desires and trends, wildlife habitat and conflict potential, and Forest Plan direction. This examination resulted in release of a “Summer Non-motorized Trail Assessment” for the Jackson Ranger District in April 2014. The executive summary of the Trail Assessment can be found at: www.fs.usda.gov/btnf/ (under “Highlights”)

As a result of the District-wide trail system assessment and continuing dialogue regarding the Greater Snow King Area, additional trail improvements emerged, notably related to improving opportunities for hiking while also responding to growing mountain bike use. The five projects proposed now for public review and comment are those considered necessary to improve how use is managed in the GSKA.

Purpose and Need

Trails facilitate access to the outdoors providing multiple benefits to individuals as well as contributing to community character and vitality. Within the Jackson Hole region, recreation use is growing rapidly and is evolving. Notably, there is more demand for close-to-home, easily-accessed, day use opportunities and more desire for use-specific, high quality trails. There is also increasing demand for quiet activities that provide opportunities for release, reflection, and observing nature while at the same time there is increasing demand for activities that provide opportunities for challenge, high adventure, as well as social experiences. Jackson Hole is at the forefront of these recreation trends and nowhere is this more apparent than in the Greater Snow King Area due to its proximity to town and the community population centers.

Although great strides have been made since the late 1990s to improve trails, repair resource damage, engage partners and volunteers, promote use ethics, and install signing, it is clear that more needs to be done. Action is needed not only to better accommodate existing use in a manner that helps reduce conflict, provide opportunities for quality experiences, and minimize impact on wildlife and the environment but is also needed to manage the growth in use that the area will receive in coming years. Accurately estimating the amount and type of use is notoriously difficult due to variability in use patterns. However, monitoring observations combined with anecdotal evidence suggests that the number of people encountered on the trail has increased as has the percent of use from mountain bikers. For example, monitoring in 2003 during July and August suggested an average of 16.7 people encountered per day with use evenly split between hikers and mountain bikers. Ten years later, monitoring during July and August suggests an average of 21 people encountered per day with approximately 64% of the use from mountain bikers. This monitoring does not include Snow King Resort which is dominated by hiking use. During the ten years from 2003 to

2013, the trail system has grown from approximately 40 miles to 50 miles. Public input since 2011 consistently indicates that in addition to focusing more attention on protecting wildlife, there is strong sentiment that some additional trails are needed. In particular, input from hikers suggests that while most mountain bikers are courteous, the sheer number of mountain bikers has increased to the point where it is difficult to walk without frequently stepping off the trail to let bikes pass. Input from mountain bikers and trail runners suggests that adding options for longer loop rides would help meet growing public use and contribute to Forest Service goals especially those related to promoting healthy lifestyles and connecting the community with public land.

In light of the discussion offered above, the proposed projects have four specific purposes:

- Reduce congestion and conflict between hikers and bikers by separating use where possible.
- Improve loop opportunities for quality recreation experiences for both hikers and bikers while also providing corridors for horse access to the Wilderness.
- Improve resource conditions by reducing the presence and development of unmaintained, non-system trails and increasing the sustainability of selected system trails.
- Provide additional opportunities to enhance the connection between the community and the National Forest through involvement in trail stewardship and restoration projects.

Proposed Action

Effective management of recreation use requires first articulating the area's values and describing the desired resource conditions and recreation opportunities (i.e. what you are trying to protect). For the Greater Snow King area, this information can be found in Appendix A. Managing use to protect the area's values then requires attention to the four E's (1) engineering – i.e. the design of the trail system and associated facilities including restoration, (2) education, (3) enforcement, and (4) evaluation. The five projects proposed in this scoping are related to the first E – updating the design of the trail system to better handle current and foreseeable future use so that desired conditions can be achieved. Education, enforcement, and evaluation efforts will continue with increasing attention on education to promote respect for land and wildlife and respect for people.

All trail construction and reconstruction would be completed using a combination of trail crews and supervised volunteer groups using hand tools to produce a single-track, native surface trail. Extensive layout work would be completed prior to construction to ensure sustainable trail grades, proper drainage and to meet design specifications for the primary use of the trail. Trail signs, consistent with what currently exists in the GSKA, would be installed to help trail users navigate the system and trailhead signing would provide information about responsible use. Funding for layout and construction would be provided by grants and donations and maintenance responsibilities would be absorbed by partnership efforts for the entire GSKA. Current efforts to treat noxious weeds would continue to avoid the spread of weeds into areas of new disturbance. Restoration of unwanted, non-system trails would also be accomplished by a combination of trails crews and supervised volunteer groups. Unwanted trails would be physically closed using a combination of aspen mesh, natural debris and plants. Signs would be installed where needed to reinforce trail closures. The Map shown on the following page displays the location of the five projects.



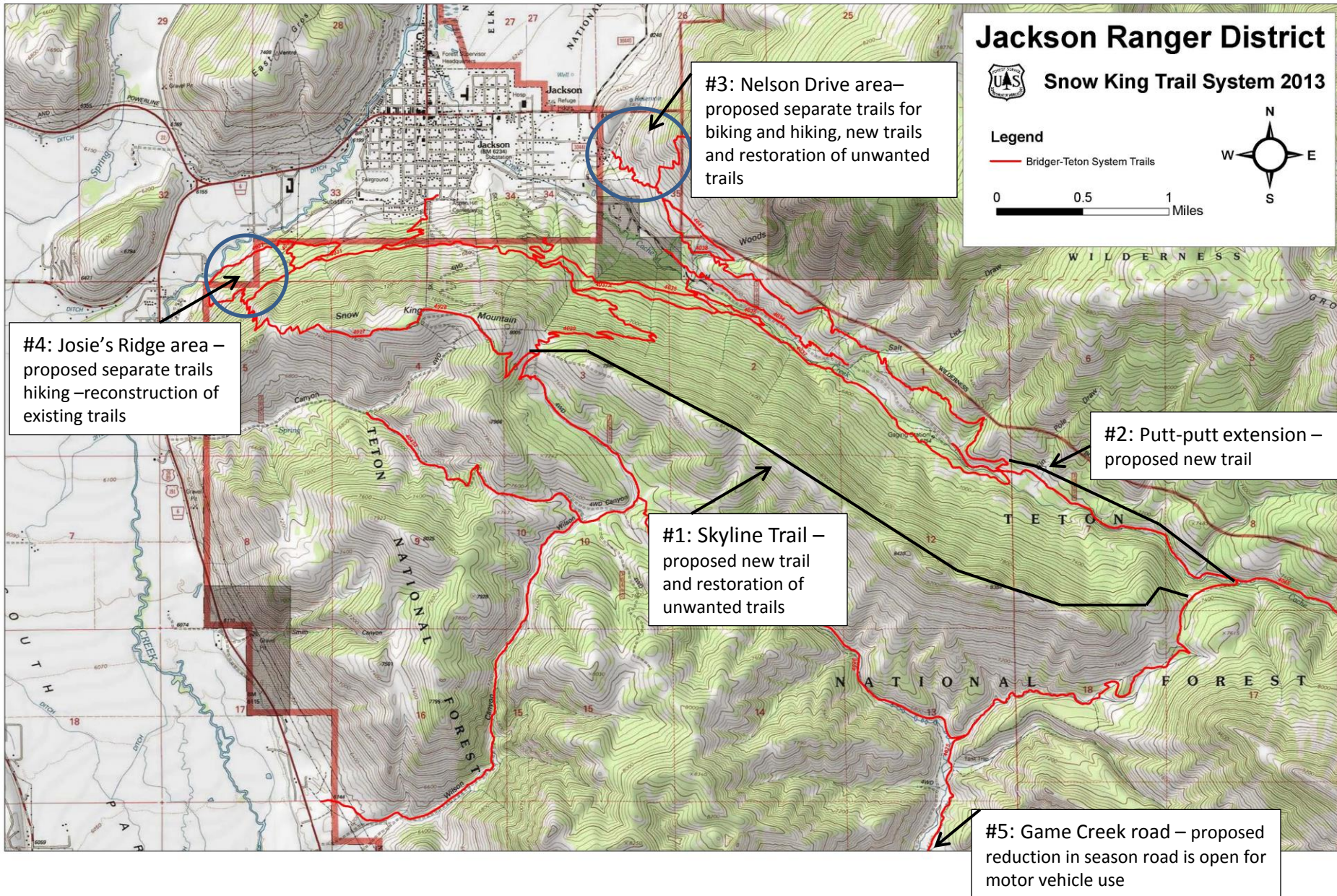
Constructing new trail



Closing and restoring unwanted trails



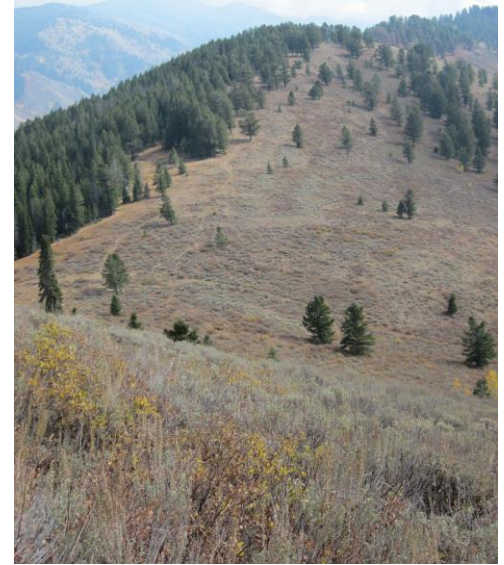
Proposed Trail Projects 2014



Project #1 – Skyline Trail

This project would require approximately 5.5 miles of new trail construction. This trail would be located on the ridge east of Snow King Mountain between Ferrin’s and the Game Creek saddle (see Map on page 6). In order to minimize impact on wildlife, the trail would be located on north-facing forested slopes to the maximum extent possible while still taking advantage of key vistas. This design means that the trail would likely not be snow-free until mid-June thereby providing security for wildlife during the spring when animal’s energy reserves are low. Special attention would be given to sight distances to reduce potential encounters between trail users and between people and wildlife. Portions of the ridge burned during the 2012 Horsethief Canyon Fire and fire lines were established to help control the fire. Where such fire lines are still evident and are sustainable, they would be incorporated into the trail to minimize new disturbance. The trail would be designed and built to serve primarily mountain bikers and trail runners although it would also serve hikers and hunters. Unwanted, user-created trails beginning to develop on the ridge would be closed and restored. Construction of the Skyline trail would create a highly scenic loop opportunity that would help serve growing recreation use and would help concentrate bike use in the Cache Creek drainage, thereby relieving some pressure on the lower Game Creek drainage which contains important riparian habitat for wildlife.

Skyline Ridge showing user-created trails beginning to develop



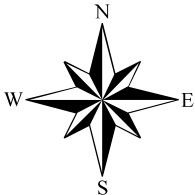
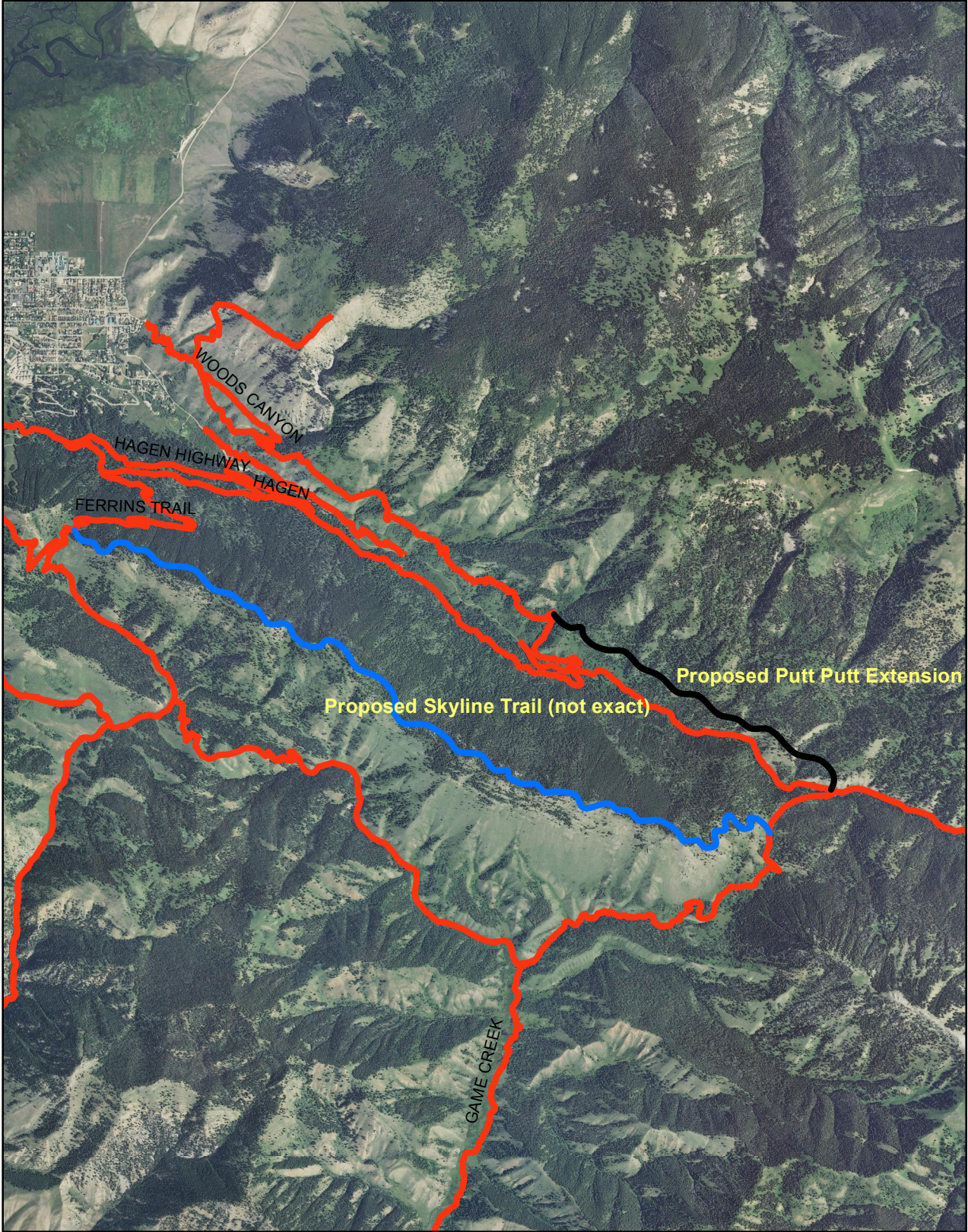
Project #2 – Putt-putt Trail extension

This project would require approximately 1.5 miles of new trail construction that would extend the Putt-putt trail to the junction with the Game Creek trail (see Map on page 6). Layout work would ensure the trail did not encroach within the Gros Ventre Wilderness. The trail would be designed and built to serve primarily mountain bikers and trail runners although it would also serve hikers and hunters. Extending the Putt-putt trail would create a loop with the Skyline and Game Creek trails leaving the main Cache Creek trail more available for horse riders and hikers to use with less chance of encountering mountain bikers. While use conflict is not often reported today in upper Cache Creek, as the amount of use continues to increase, this separation of use types through design will become increasingly important to retain quality opportunities for all non-motorized uses.

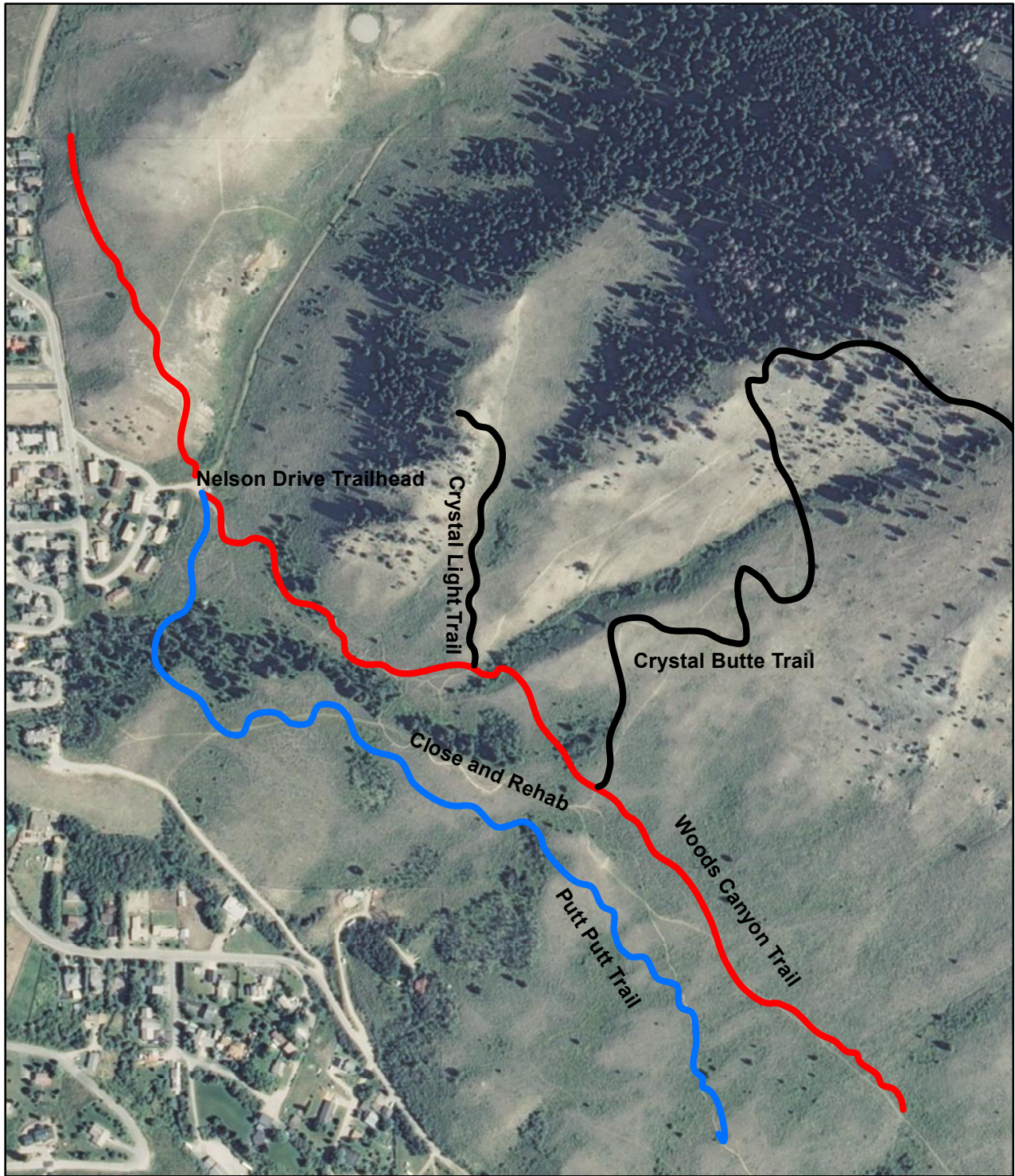
Project #3 – Nelson Drive trail reconstruction, use separation and restoration

This project would involve approximately 1.2 miles of trail reconstruction and 2000 feet of trail closure and restoration (see Map on page 7). A portion of the current Putt-putt trail would be reconstructed and designed for hiking use only and would be called the Woods Canyon trail. This trail would provide a walking trail that would connect with the existing Crystal Butte, Crystal Light and Woods Canyon trails which are already designated for hiking use only since these trails are partially located within the Gros Ventre Wilderness. Providing a designated hiking trail that connects to the existing hiking trails would remove a major source of conflict between hikers and mountain bikers and would provide loop options for hikers in the vicinity of east Jackson neighborhoods, St. John’s Medical Center and the Senior Center. The current Putt-putt trail would be re-located slightly south of its current location but would still connect with Nelson Drive. It would be designed and built to serve mountain bikers recreating the same flow and design features that make the current trail popular while also improving its sustainability and removing some existing user-created trails that are eroding and not sustainable. Immediately north of Nelson Drive, the heavily-used non-system trail to the hill top would be reconstructed in place to prevent trail widening and reduce erosion. This trail would be designed for hiking use only.

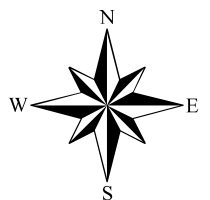
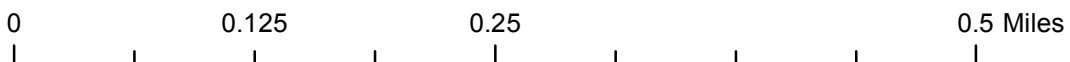
Proposed Skyline Trail and Putt Putt Extension



Nelson Drive Proposed Changes



- New Woods Canyon Trail (Designed for hiking)
- New Putt Putt Trail (Designed for Biking)
- Existing Hiking Trails



Project #4 – Josie’s Ridge trail reconstruction, use separation

This project would involve reconstructing the lower portion of the Josie’s Ridge trail in place to improve trail sustainability and prevent trail widening. Existing log steps would be replaced with rock steps, the trail would be rebuilt where needed and additional drainage would be installed. The lower portion of the Josie’s Ridge trail would also be designated for hiking use only (see Map on page 8). By connecting lower Josie’s Ridge with the new hiking trail located on Town property, a two-mile walking loop would be provided adjacent to town. Mountain bikers would still be able to access the Flat Creek/Russ Garaman pathway by using the K-C trail or Linda’s trail off of Sink or Swim. User-created, unwanted trails beginning to develop in the area would be closed and restored to prevent visual scars from appearing and protect soil and vegetation.

Project #5 – Game Creek road – change in seasonal restriction for motor vehicle use

This project would not involve any on the ground work but would change the season of use motor vehicles are allowed to travel on the road. Currently, the motor vehicle use map shows that the Game Creek road is open for motor vehicle use on the designated road from July 1st to November 30th annually. Approximately 1.6 miles of the road is open from the trailhead to a creek crossing. The road historically has provided limited access associated with gathering firewood and hunting. The road is a native dirt surface and receives little to no maintenance, since maintaining other heavily used Forest roads is a much higher priority. Over the years, expanding beaver activity has flooded portions of the road or persistence rain has forced temporary closures in an attempt to prevent resource damage. Due to the limited existing access, lack of maintenance funds, and emphasis to protect riparian wildlife habitat, the Game Creek road is proposed to be open for motor vehicle use only during the fall hunting season from September 1st through October 30th annually. This change in the season of use would be more consistent with how the road is actually managed on-the-ground today.



Decision to be Made

Based on public input and environmental analysis, the Jackson District Ranger will decide whether or not to implement the proposed projects as described in this document or implement an alternative to the proposal.

How to Comment

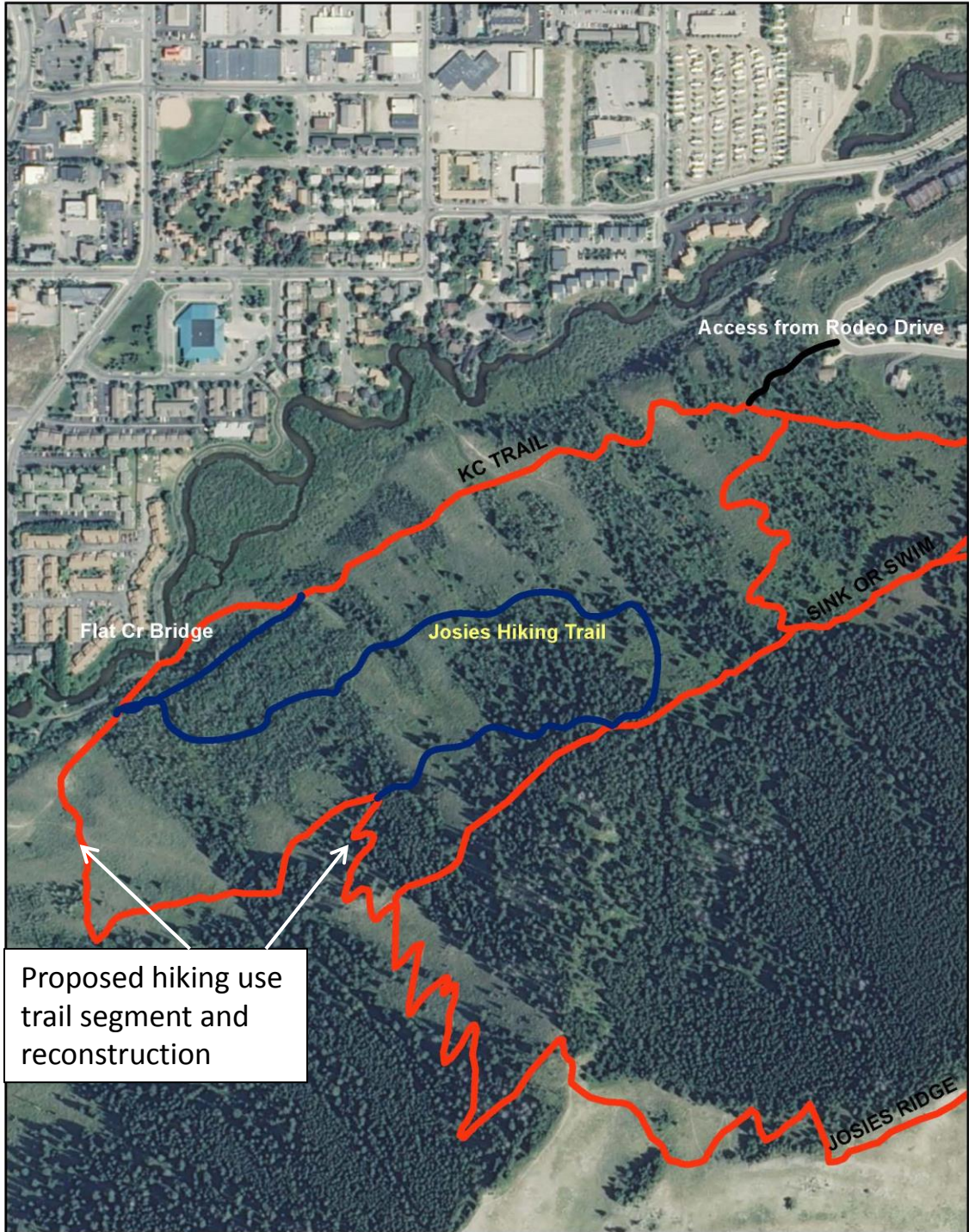
The purpose of scoping is to invite your comments and identify any issues or concerns with the five proposed projects. I would appreciate hearing from you by **September 26, 2014**.

Please send written comments to:

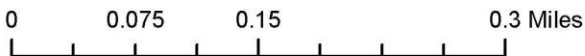
Greater Snow King Area Trail Projects
Bridger-Teton National Forest- Jackson Ranger District
P.O. Box 1689
Jackson WY 83001

Comments may also be submitted via email to: imerigliano@fs.fed.us

Josies Ridge Area



Proposed hiking use trail segment and reconstruction



Contact for Information

If you have any questions about these projects or need more information, please contact Linda Merigliano, Recreation/Wilderness/Trails Program Manager, at (307) 739-5428

PLEASE NOTE: Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposed action and will be available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, those who submit anonymous comments will not have standing to object to the subsequent decision under 36 CFR Part 218.

Additionally, pursuant to 7 CFR 1.27(d), any person may request the agency to withhold a submission from the public record by showing how the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) permits such confidentiality. Persons requesting such confidentiality should be aware that, under FOIA, confidentiality may be granted only in very limited circumstances, such as to protect trade secrets. The Forest Service will inform the requester of the agency's decision regarding the request for confidentiality, and where the request is denied, the agency will return the submission and notify the requester that the comments may be resubmitted with or without name and address within 10 days.

Appendix A

Greater Snow King Area and National Forest Recreation Direction

To understand the proposed trail projects, it is necessary to understand what guides Forest Service recreation and trail management and the history of recreation management in the Greater Snow King area. This section provides the background to answer these questions and understand how we got to this point. Notably, recreation and trail management in the Greater Snow King Area is tiered to National Forest Policy (FSM 2300, FSH 2309.18) and the Bridger-Teton Forest and Land Management Plan (1990). Recreational trail management in the Greater Snow King Area is also guided by a recreation strategy developed in 2001 as well as the April 2014 Jackson District summer non-motorized trail assessment.

National Forest Policy Direction (Forest Service Manual 2300 and Forest Service Handbook 2309.18) In 2010, the Forest Service developed a “Framework for Sustainable Recreation” to focus on three goals: (1) the contribution of recreation to economic recovery and community vitality, (2) the contribution of recreation to improving people’s physical and mental health, and (3) the contribution of recreation to enhancing community life – connecting people with their natural and cultural heritage. This is now reflected in National Forest Policy for Recreation Management with the following stated objectives:

1. Serve visitors and local communities. Provide a broad range of nature- and heritage-based outdoor recreation and tourism opportunities for the responsible use and enjoyment of local communities and their visitors.
2. Strive to protect and enhance natural, scenic, cultural, wilderness, and wild and scenic rivers resources.
 - a. Create an integrated and sustainable program that fosters conservation of natural and cultural resources.
 - b. Reduce the impacts and conflicts resulting from recreational use through education, management, monitoring, and enforcement.
3. Address public safety through utilization of appropriate risk management approaches across the spectrum of recreation settings.

More specifically to trails, National Forest Policy directs Forests to “*plan and develop trails based on decisions documented in the applicable land management plan.*” The policy also outlines five trail fundamentals: (1) Trail type – the predominant trail surface, (2) Trail Class - the desired scale of development for a trail, (3) Managed Use – the modes of travel that are actively managed and appropriate on a trail, (4) Designed Use – the mode of travel that requires the most demanding design parameters, and (5) Design Parameters – the technical guidelines for the survey, design, construction, maintenance, and evaluation of a trail based on its designed use and trail class. The Policy also establishes National Quality Standards for trails tiered to health and cleanliness, resource setting, safety and security, responsiveness to visitors, and condition of facilities.

Forest Plan Direction (Bridger-Teton National Forest Land Management Plan 1990)

Most relevant to the Greater Snow King Area are the Desired Conditions applicable to the area:

Desired Condition 9A – lower Cache Creek drainage

Developed recreation is the focus. You find many signs of people. You see little or no evidence of resource development except for recreation. Facilities are often evident but harmonize and blend with the natural setting. Trails are provided for the convenience of people. No limit should exist on the number of groups encountered per day.

Desired Condition 9B – Snow King Resort area

Ski area management is the focus. You find many signs of people. You see little or no evidence of resource development except for recreation. Facilities are often dominant but harmonize and blend with the natural setting. Trails are permitted in and around sites. Short trails provide access to facilities and opportunities for interpretation should be developed. No limit should exist on the number of groups encountered per day.

Desired Condition 2A – upper Cache Creek drainage

Primitive and semi-primitive non-motorized dispersed recreation opportunities are the focus. You find few, if any, signs of people as you travel through the area. Encounters with other people diminish as you move away from nearby roads and trailheads. Trails allow easy passages by hikers, horses, llamas, and mountain bikes. The forest presents a natural appearance. The trail system should accommodate and dispersed use without encouraging concentrated use. Trails should be developed providing experiences at all levels of difficulty. The maintenance level should be that needed to protect soil and water values and provide for user safety and user convenience appropriate to the trail's difficulty level. An average of 12 groups should be encountered per day.

Desired Condition 10 and 12 – Game Creek, Wilson Canyon, Leeks Canyon, Josie's Ridge

Providing important habitat for big game is the focus (winter range, calving areas, security areas) along with big-game hunting and dispersed recreation. Non-motorized trails are offered to a variety of users and managed consistent with the recreation setting and compatible with wildlife objectives. Existing roads and trails should be used where possible. The maintenance level should be that needed to protect soil and water values and provide for user safety and user convenience appropriate to the trail's difficulty level. You find few signs of people away from existing roads. An average of 12 groups should be encountered per day.

Desired Condition 6 – Gros Ventre Wilderness

Emphasis is on providing for the protection and perpetuation of essentially natural bio-physical conditions. Solitude, a low level of encounters with other users, and little evidence of past use are important. Preserving wilderness character is required.

Recreational Trail Plan Direction (Greater Snow King Area)

Efforts to manage recreation use in the Greater Snow King area beyond the Resort date back to 1974 when two-track roads off of the Cache Creek road were closed to summer motor vehicle use. This action was followed closely in 1976 when an environmental study established day use recreation as the management direction for the Cache Creek drainage and the upper portion of Cache Creek road was closed to motor vehicles. In 1988, discharging firearms within ¼ mile of the Cache Creek road was prohibited and in 1993, the lower portion of the Cache Creek road was closed to motor vehicles and the current trailhead and picnic area was improved. Efforts to repair trails ramped up in the 1990s infused by new grant funding. The Greater Snow King Area Strategy developed in 2001 included a three-prong approach to address trail challenges, user challenges, and resource challenges associated with growing recreation use summarized by the slogan *"Sustainable Trails, Respect for People, Respect for Land"*.

The 2014 Summer Non-motorized Trail Assessment for the Jackson Ranger District identified the area and trail emphasis for nine distinct geographic areas. The analysis incorporated resource characteristics, trail user desires and trends, wildlife habitat and conflict potential, and Forest Plan direction including special Congressional designations. Four large geographic areas emphasize wildlife habitat security and multi-day backcountry or wilderness opportunities with primitive trails catering primarily to horse and hiking use. Five geographic areas provide accessible day use opportunities. Concentrated hiking and biking opportunities are emphasized in three of these areas: Greater Snow King, Teton Pass, and Jackson Hole Mountain Resort.

Desired Condition/Vision for the Greater Snow King Area:

The Greater Snow King area is highly valued for providing convenient access that offers non-motorized trail opportunities close to town. It is also valued for its beauty and scenery including the ability to enjoy a quiet moment observing birds, flowers, and other natural features. In light of these considerations, the emphasis for the Greater Snow King Area is to manage for day use activities with emphasis on promoting community stewardship, healthy lifestyles, and connection with nature. The proximity of the town of Jackson and residential areas abutting this area make it a natural choice to encourage healthy outdoor activity and opportunities to learn and connect with nature. The potential to engage partners and volunteers in stewardship and learning about nature is also high. The vision is that this area can serve as a model for accommodating high recreation use with an emphasis on hiking and biking (with limited corridors for horse riding) while also promoting respect towards the land, wildlife and other people, thereby bridging conservation and recreation interests. A well-defined trail network is provided to concentrate visitor use and visitor impacts but is designed to visually blend into the environment. A variety of trail difficulty levels should be provided with trail catering to novice hikers and bikers closer to town. Focus access to the trail system through Snow King Resort and other town portals that allow people to walk or bike without driving to the maximum extent possible. Shared use occurs on the majority of the trail system requiring attention towards use ethics, however some use separation will occur in congested areas near trailheads. Visitors should have outstanding opportunities to connect with nature through natural sounds and smells and views of largely undeveloped natural landscapes. Although the emphasis is to manage the area for high day use, it does not negate the need for recreationists to minimize their impact on wildlife and other resources. Trail development will still avoid sensitive habitats such as riparian corridors, will maintain some sizable areas of secure habitat, and use design techniques that help reduce potential encounters between people and animals. Educational efforts would emphasize the importance of minimizing wildlife disturbance and avoiding conflicts, notably with mountain lions and moose. The map on page x displays the different emphasis for recreation use within the Greater Snow King Area.

The following four goals summarize the emphasis for the Greater Snow King Area:

1. *Sustainable trails:* Create a sustainable well-developed and maintained trail system that offers a spectrum of trail types that provide quality experiences for people to easily connect with nature. Focus on hiking and biking opportunities with limited corridors for horse riding.
2. *Respect for Land and Wildlife:* Minimize wildlife disturbance through trail design and strong educational programs to avoid wildlife encounters, notably with lions and moose. Protect plant, plant and water resources through aggressive weed prevention programs, reducing dog waste, and restoration projects to prevent unwanted user-created trails and repair other damaged sites.
3. *Respect for People:* Promote responsible, respectful shared use of trails and encourage unity among trail users.
4. *Connect and engage people with trails and nature:* Provide opportunities for people to participate directly in taking care of trails and natural resources through partnerships and volunteer programs. Encourage activities that allow people to learn more about nature and help develop a sense of place. Link the trail system with healthy lifestyles encouraging connections that allow people to connect with trail by walking or biking from town.

Trail Emphasis for the Future – Greater Snow King Area

