

Scoping Document for Proposed Snake River Canyon Projects
Jackson Ranger District
Bridger-Teton National Forest
Teton County, Wyoming

Proposed Action

The Jackson Ranger District of the Bridger-Teton National Forest is proposing eight projects associated with recreation facilities along the Snake River Corridor. Please see attached map for each project location.

The projects are:

1. Elbow Boat Ramp Infrastructure improvements
2. Installation of two seat toilet facility at Pritchard Boat Ramp.
3. Installation of a water system at West Table Boat Ramp.
4. Installation of pay phones at the Sheep Gulch and West Table day use areas.
5. Installation of a single-vault toilet put in at Blind Canyon/Kahuna access.
6. Improving existing 6-seat toilet facility West Table Boat Ramp
7. Replacing existing toilets with two 2-seat toilet facilities, and constructing a new changing facility at the Sheep Gulch Boat Ramp
8. Replace port-a-Johns with vault toilets at Astoria Boat Ramp and East Table Boat Ramp

Selection of appropriate time of construction and installation will be made based upon wildlife breeding periods, visitor use levels in the project area, high water, and weather conditions. Each of these projects is proposed to occur in currently disturbed areas of heavy use along the Snake River corridor. Most of the proposed projects have been recommended by river users (rafters, fishermen and hunters). In addition, many on the proposals would be funded by organizations such as the Snake River Fund and Jackson Hole One Fly Foundation. By completing these projects, the Forest Service hopes to benefit the natural community along the Snake River Corridor, while at the same time, increasing safety for river visitors. The benefits to the natural community include increased sanitation and water quality, along with the prevention of unnecessary impacts on the Snake River Corridor. Through the completion of these eight projects, the Forest Service hopes to provide a more enjoyable experience through cleaner, more sanitary recreation facilities, potable water for improved health and safety of visitors, and a more efficient emergency support system throughout the Snake River Corridor. The public's interests and concerns are highly valued and will be taken into consideration in the decision making process.

Purpose and Need for Action

Project 1: Elbow Boat Ramp Infrastructure improvements

Current use of the Elbow Boat Ramp is primarily by fishermen throughout the summer and fall months. This area is also used by numerous river rafters looking to not have to be involved in the "circus" environment found on a busy day at West Table Boat Ramp. The fall months also bring a large number of hunters with stock trailers who prefer to ride across the river and up Bailey Creek on their annual hunting trips.

The boat ramp consists of primary a dirt area with a steep dirt ramp requiring a four-wheel drive vehicle to back down and exit the ramp when placing a watercraft in the river. The ramp site connects to the river at a straight-a-way section with a huge long gravel bar running with the flow beginning approximately eight feet out from where the ramp ends and the river bottom begins. Vehicles and trailers backing into the water release numerous toxins and petroleum products that drip and collect on the bottom of vehicle chassis creating poor water quality situation that could be averted. Vehicles and trailers backing into the water also often carry seed for noxious weeds from other areas and rivers, that if delivered into the waterway, cause

spread and growth of these exotics downstream where they grow and add more plants to the watershed each year.

In an effort to improve ramp conditions the Forest Services proposed the following for the Elbow Boat Ramp:

- Move the ramp from its current location down river to an area where currents are not perpendicular to the ramp, and backing vehicles into the river is not necessary and a small eddy can be set to allow for boats to be rigged and launched from a position in the water.
- Grade and place compacted road base in a parking area laid out to accommodate numerous vehicles with trailers.
- Provide and place boulders necessary to keep vehicles out of rehab areas where vehicles are not supposed to be.
- Modify streambank and rock placement to provide a small riverside eddy at the end of the ramp.
- Install a two-hole vault toilet at the site made of fly ash, a coal burning waste product.
- Replace the bulletin board/information kiosk and signs from the site that vandals destroyed and threw in the river during the 2003 season.

Project 2: The installation of two vault toilets at Pritchard Boat Ramp

Currently, Pritchard boat ramp has from one to four portable chemical toilets on-site throughout the spring, summer and fall. The number of toilets on-site depends on demand. Pritchard currently has the most units on-site (4), during the months of June through August, which are also the busiest months of the year on the Snake River Corridor. There are several problems associated with using portable toilets at Pritchard Boat Ramp. First, present portable toilets do not meet the requirements under the Americans with Disabilities Act. Second, these toilets require delivery, maintenance, pumping, installation and break-down visits by the toilet owners throughout the summer. This constant flow of service to the portable toilets is inefficient (cost and time), adds to other impacts on wildlife, and inconveniences the public that use this site. Third, in the past, these portable units have been tipped over by vandals, leading to human waste leaching into the river system.

In order to resolve these problems, the Jackson Ranger District proposes the construction of a Two-Seat Vault Toilet Comfort Station that would replace the existing portable chemical toilets at Pritchard Boat Ramp. The vault toilets would be constructed of fly ash, a byproduct from the burning of coal in power plants, and would resemble current construction standards on National Forests including “sweet smelling technology” and ADA compliance. The construction of these units would take place off-site, and require only a one-to-two day site preparation and installation, which would occur outside of bald eagle nesting periods. The facilities would be placed close to the highway and set back into surrounding vegetation as far away from the water and eagle’s nests as possible. The toilets will be designed with the possibility of pre-season floods occurring that may reach up to the highway level and envelope the lower portions of the toilet facilities. The new vault toilets will be equipped with O-rings and other sealing technology that will prevent the facility from flooding, and will be equipped with extra vents that can serve as drains in the event of breach. The management plan for the toilets would be to have them fully drained and sealed in the late fall/ early winter, before snow levels prevent access to the toilets. The doors would remain locked and unavailable for use until the spring run-off has passed, and it is clear that water levels will not rise again to a level that might inundate the units.

In the past, Pritchard Boat Ramp has been a point of contention in previous planning efforts due to bald eagle concerns. The Jackson Ranger District does not foresee any additional impacts from the installation and use of vault toilets. We feel that impacts would decrease due to the inability to tip over the toilets, the need for fewer pumping and maintenance visits, and decreasing the amount of human waste that is left on the site when toilets are not available.

Pritchard Boat Ramp is currently a recreation area with high use and existing disturbance to natural surroundings. It is not a pristine area. The installment of a new vault toilet system is proposed to

accommodate existing recreation use levels while concurrently meeting ADA standards and increasing efficiency and sanitation of the site.

Project 3: The installation of a water system at West Table Boat Ramp

The desire to have potable running water available for public use at West Table Boat ramp is not a new one. In years past, the Jackson District has drilled wells in an attempt to have running water. Wells in the Snake River Canyon have generally proven to provide water that is too high in nitrates to fall within EPA standards. The Jackson Ranger District is proposing to tap a spring creek somewhere within the East or West Table drainages that will be pumped and/or gravity-fed underneath the highway and into a holding tank.

The primary use of this water would be for human consumption by river users and persons camping in areas where water is not available. Dehydration is a common occurrence during our dry summer months. By providing potable water to visitors, health and safety will increase. We do not foresee any negative impacts related to this project occurring in such a high use area.

Project 4: Installation of pay phones at Sheep Gulch and West Table day use areas

Currently throughout the Snake River Corridor, there is no form of consistent emergency communication available. In past years, there have been numerous emergencies including rescues, injuries, and drowning that have required an immediate response to decrease further damage or chances of survival. In some of these instances, there have been Forest Service personnel nearby to call for additional emergency services. In other circumstances, people have been forced to drive to the nearest phone in Alpine or Hoback, Wyoming to make contact with emergency services. Cellular reception throughout the entire Snake River Canyon is very weak, and generally not available on small cell phones that are used today. It is possible that the delays in river users being able to summon aid, has led to results that may not have occurred if rescuers were able to be summoned earlier, and had the opportunity to reach the victim during the “golden hour.”

The Jackson Ranger District proposes to install an emergency phone system at Sheep Gulch and West Table day use areas, the two main put-in and take-out locations in the Snake River Corridor. The installation of this phone is intended to aid the public in the event of an emergency requiring specialized personnel and equipment. Other uses predicted for these phones would include additional emergencies such as people who lock themselves out of their vehicle, vehicle accidents and break-downs in the canyon, and situations where trip logistics resulted in persons being marooned or left behind. The phone system will be cell-based, and will require the installation of an antennae and locked equipment box. It is intended that the security box containing the phone technology will be contained in a locked box bolted inside of one of the existing restrooms or related pipe chase. Any antennae required will be placed on top of the restroom or be set back into the vegetation. The site chosen will be that which will have the fewest impacts on surrounding resources, and will not violate any of the scenic or other remarkable values of the river corridor.

Project 5: Installation of a single vault toilet at Blind Canyon/Kahuna Access

During the reconstruction of Wyoming Highway 89, the Wyoming Department of Transportation (WYDOT) consumed the roadside parking area where the public gained access to Lunch Counter Rapid. They replaced the lost parking with a parking lot built at what has traditionally been called “Blind Canyon,” a small road and parking area directly upstream from Lunch Counter Parking. This new parking lot has approximately 30 parking spaces, and trails to the river from the parking area have been constructed. In the parking lot design, WYDOT specified and designed an area for a vault toilet to be installed. This toilet would be in an already disturbed area that will receive a great deal of use during the summer months. Its construction would match the construction and placement qualities of the units described above for Pritchard Boat Ramp. The Blind Canyon recreation site currently receives high levels of use, therefore we believe a vault toilet would be more appropriate than a portable toilet. As with Pritchard Boat Ramp, high

use leads to an increased need for efficiency and sanitation. Also, this vault toilet would meet ADA standards, where a portable toilet would not.

Project 6: Improving existing 6-seat toilet facility West Table Boat Ramp

The existing West Table Boat Ramp toilet facility is structurally sound and the capacity supports current and future use predictions. However, vault toilet technology has improved dramatically since the construction of the current facility. Modern venting and fan systems would be installed to bring the toilet facility up to today's standards.

Project 7: Replacing existing toilets with two 2-seat toilet facilities, and constructing a new changing facility at the Sheep Gulch Boat Ramp

The existing toilet facility at the Sheep Gulch Boat ramp is not adequate both in terms of capacity and engineering. A larger, more modern toilet and changing facility would be installed to meet recreation demands and ADA standards while increasing efficiency and sanitation of the site.

Project 8: Replace Port-a-Johns with vault toilet at Astoria Boat Ramp and East Table Boat Ramp

The Astoria and East Table Boat Ramps have received high enough use to justify the installation of Porta-a-Johns in previous years. Installation of vault toilets would increase efficiency and sanitation of both sites. Also, both vault toilets would meet ADA standards, where portable toilets do not. Toilets facilities would be in already disturbed areas that will receive a great deal of use during the summer months. Its construction would match the construction and placement qualities of the units described above for Pritchard Boat Ramp.

Nature of Decision to be Made

Based on environmental analysis and public input, the Jackson Ranger District's District Ranger will decide whether or not to implement the proposed projects for the Snake River Canyon or implement alternatives to the proposals within the Snake River Canyon.

Request for Comments

The purpose of scoping is to invite your comments and identify any issues and concerns you may have with the proposed projects for the Snake River Canyon. If there are any questions concerning these proposals, please contact the person listed below for more information.

David Cernicek (Snake River Manager, Jackson Ranger District, 1-307-739-5417) or
Linda Merigliano (Recreation/Wilderness Program Manager, Jackson Ranger District, 1-307-739-5400)

Comments should be as fully informed as possible to assist us in the analysis. Please respond with written comments by **July 9, 2004**. Please direct comments to:

Snake River Canyon Projects
c/o Nancy Hall, District Ranger
Bridger-Teton National Forest, Jackson Ranger District
P.O. Box 1689
Jackson, WY 83001

Comments may also be submitted via e-mail to: dcernicek@fs.fed.us

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 appeal the subsequent decision under 36CFR Part 215.

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 circumstance, 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 then requester that the comments may be resubmitted with or without name and address within the next 10 days.