

September 23, 2015

Attn: Sue Stresser, District Ranger
US Forest Service, Shoshone National Forest
Wapiti/Clarks Fk/Greybull Ranger Districts
203A Yellowstone Avenue
Cody, WY 82414

Dear Sue,

I am writing on behalf of a group of river users who have been convening regularly since 2011 to create the Cody Wild West River Fest. We appreciate the opportunity to offer feedback on motorized travel on the Shoshone National Forest. Although we are advocating for the improvement of access to the North Fork of the Shoshone for non-motorized boating, these boats are typically transported through the Forest via motorized pathways.

Our group, representing a variety of community interests and perspectives, has been working together for years to improve conservation and recreation on the Shoshone River. To date, the group has completed a number of projects, including the creation of the annual Cody Wild West River Fest, the improvement of infrastructure at Cody's primary river access, and the removal of hundreds of acres of invasive Russian olive from the river corridor. Currently, we are focusing our attention on improving access to the Shoshone River for non-motorized boating. Non-motorized boating is a low impact activity that allows river enthusiasts to enjoy the Shoshone River system, one of northwest Wyoming's most underappreciated natural resources.

On the Shoshone National Forest (SNF), rafters, kayakers, and other boaters access the North Fork of the Shoshone at Sleeping Giant Recreation Area, Newton Creek, Mummy Cave, Elk Fork, Horse Creek Picnic Area, and the Forest Boundary. Of these, only Mummy Cave has a boat ramp (albeit a dirt ramp), and some require that boats be carried over obstacles and significant distances to reach the water's edge. Infrastructure improvements are needed at all of these sites.

In order to understand which improvements river users would prioritize, over the past year, we have collected dozens of written surveys and conducted in-person interviews with whitewater enthusiasts, anglers, and other river users. Those surveys and interviews revealed three sites on the SNF where improvements are highly desired: Sleeping Giant Recreation Area, Horse Creek, and Forest Boundary. The Sleeping Giant Recreation Area is developed with a paved drive, pit toilets, and a few picnic sites. This site emerged among those surveyed as their highest priority for improvement. In particular, river users identified the need for a boat ramp and expanded parking. While many North Fork boaters launch at this site, the lack of a boat ramp forces boaters to carry their boats through a picnic site and over various obstacles that reduce their ability to launch safely and with limited impact. In addition, limited parking here forces boaters either to park on the highway where safety is threatened, or to leave their vehicles in the way of other users.

The Horse Creek Picnic Area, which already has pit toilets, a small parking area, a picnic area, and a playground, also emerged as a high priority for access improvements due to the need for a boat ramp and expanded parking. The challenging Devil's Elbow rapid lies directly downstream of this access site, and, presently, there exists no safe and easily identifiable location to take out of the North Fork upstream of this rapid. Construction of a boat ramp in this location would allow for safe passage down the North Fork without necessitating navigation of the Devil's Elbow. Parking at this site could be improved to reduce carrying distance between the river and the existing parking area.

Finally, the Forest Boundary was identified as a high priority area for access improvements. Although this location is a popular launch and take-out site for fishermen, rafters, and other boaters who frequent the North Fork, it currently consists of only a packed dirt road. A gravel or graded boat ramp would facilitate boater access and safety while also reducing erosion at this site. The addition of pit toilets would provide obvious benefits both to river users and the site itself. Although these three sites are river users' highest priorities for access improvements through the Forest, river users also identified the need for improvements at other river access points on the river. The Newton Creek access consists of a dirt road and is in need of pit toilets, expanded parking, and a boat ramp of some kind. Mummy Cave has a dirt road and a gravel boat ramp but could use pit toilets and a developed boat ramp. Finally, Elk Fork has pit toilets and tables but could use a boat ramp.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer these suggestions for improving access to the North Fork of the Shoshone for non-motorized boating. We look forward to touring these sites with relevant Shoshone National Forest personnel in the near future when we can discuss what sorts of support the Forest might need from us to facilitate these improvements.

On behalf of the Cody Wild West River Fest steering committee,



Katherine Thompson
steering committee member