



DECISION MEMO
TRAILS CONSTRUCTION/ RECONSTRUCTION NEAR STAR VALLEY RANCH
U.S. FOREST SERVICE
PRATER CANYON, GREEN CANYON AND CEDAR CREEK CANYON
GREYS RIVER RANGER DISTRICT
LINCOLN COUNTY, WYOMING

BACKGROUND

The Town of Star Valley Ranch and the Star Valley Ranch Association developed and approved their concept for making changes and improvements to an existing system of trails up Prater, Green and Cedar Creek Canyons on the Bridger-Teton National Forest. The Forest Service considered the trails concept as received from the Town of Star Valley Ranch and the Star Valley Ranch Association and input from the community. The project area (Map 1) is located to the east of the Town of Star Valley Ranch on the Greys River Ranger District of the Bridger-Teton National Forest in Lincoln County, Wyoming (portions of Township 35N, Range 118W, Sections 20, 21, 28, 29, 32, and 34).

At present, the Prater Canyon trail (077) is the only trail within the project area that currently is included within the public system of trails maintained by the Forest Service. It is accessed via Forest Service Road 10088 which ends near a community water development. Green Canyon has a parking area within the Forest boundary and an unmaintained route for non-motorized travel leading to a water development. This water development serves to irrigate a nearby golf course. Prater Canyon and Green Canyon are located in the Forest Plan Desired Future Condition (DFC 4). The Forest Service is directed through the Bridger-Teton National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan 1990) to prioritize the protection of municipal water supplies in areas identified as DFC 4, which for this proposed project area includes the northern two canyons, Prater and Green. Parking, motorized vehicle use management, and trail maintenance in this part of the project area should be designed to protect municipal water supplies.

The lower section of the project area, inclusive of Cedar Creek Canyon, is identified as Desired Future Condition 12 and is managed to prioritize backcountry big-game hunting, dispersed recreation and wildlife security areas, such as big-game winter range or calving areas. A user created trail located along Cedar Creek is currently used by recreationists and hunters, and has been for several years despite having no official designation in the Forest Service trail system. This trail is in need of maintenance and minor rerouting to reduce erosion into Cedar Creek.

No changes to existing Forest Service Transportation System road designations were proposed or would be implemented as part of this project. Any future decision to alter the current Motor Vehicle Use Map would be part of a future project.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The Town of Star Valley Ranch (Town) conducted its own public scoping in the summer and fall of 2014. The Town notified residents of the trails proposal through a letter, community postings, and website; requested comments; and held public meetings to ascertain resident interest in the proposal. The Town and the Star Valley Ranch Association then approved the trails proposal and submitted the proposal to the Forest Service for consideration in October 2014.

The Forest Service initiated its public scoping for the proposed project on October 24, 2014. This action was listed as a proposal on the Bridger-Teton National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions. The October 24, 2014 scoping document was sent to approximately 208 individuals (including landowners adjacent to the Forest), organizations, and government agencies. A news release was published on October 22, 2014 in the Star Valley Independent to notify the public of a 30 day comment period and a public open house on October 30, 2014. Nineteen people attended the open house and 12 comment letters or emails were received during the scoping period. All comments received were considered in making my decision.

DECISION

I have decided to authorized the proposed action including the a) construction of 2 miles of trails connecting Prater Canyon with Green Canyon; b) improvement/reconstruction of 4.5 miles of existing user-created trail along Cedar Creek and addition of this to the National Forest Trail System; c) establishment of the Green Canyon and Cedar Creek trailheads and improvement of two existing small parking areas; and d) trail maintenance on the Prater Canyon Trail (077) to improve watershed management. The purpose of the project is to provide high-quality non-motorized recreation opportunities while meeting the intent of Desired Future Conditions 4 and 12.

The Forest Service will implement the following proposed action and design features in partnership with the Town of Star Valley Ranch and the Star Valley Ranch Association, whom will use volunteers to implement.

Proposed Action

My decision includes the following:

1. Improve, reconstruct and maintain to Forest Service trail standards an existing 4.5 mile user-created trail along Cedar Creek and add to the National Forest Trail System. Short sections of the trail will be rerouted as necessary to reduce sedimentation to Cedar Creek. Install waterbars and rolling dips where needed to control runoff. (Cedar Creek Trail)
2. Construct and maintain to Forest Service trail standards a 1.1 mile trail from Vista Drive in the Town of Star Valley Ranch to Prater Canyon, following the toe of the slope and add to the National Forest Trail System. (Vista Prater Trail)
3. Construct and maintain to Forest Service trail standards a 0.9 mile trail from the Vista Prater Trail, south of Prater Canyon, to a viewpoint 500 feet in elevation above the mouth of Green Canyon. This trail would extend into and connect with the existing Green Canyon unmaintained route for non-motorized travel and would also be added to the National Forest Trail System. (Valley View Trail)

4. Establish the Cedar Creek Trailhead (Map 2): This trailhead will use the existing parking area on the Bridger-Teton National Forest located north of the Star Valley Ranch barn and silo on Cedar Creek Drive. This will cover up to a total of 30,300 square feet or 0.70 acres. Work to improve this trailhead may include:
 - a. Installation of trailhead signs, an information kiosk, trail signs and a Forest Service boundary sign.
 - b. Installation of approximately 570 feet of fence on three sides of the trailhead to control motorized access.
 - c. Clearing of approximately 500 square feet of vegetation
 - d. Application of road base and gravel and grading of the parking area.
5. Establish the Green Canyon Trailhead (Map 3): This trailhead will use the existing cleared parking area just inside the Forest boundary on Green Canyon Drive. This will cover up to a total of 14,000 square feet or 0.32 acres. Work to improve the trailhead may include:
 - a. Installation of trailhead signs, an information kiosk, trail signs and a Forest Service boundary sign.
 - b. Installation of approximately 800 feet of jackleg fence on each side of the trailhead to control motorized access
 - c. Application of road base and gravel and grading of the parking area.
6. Conduct trail maintenance on the Prater Canyon Trail (077) to improve watershed management.
7. Trail construction and reconstruction will include clearing of brush up to approximately 4 feet wide by 8 feet high along the length of the trail using hand tools, establish or re-establish an unsurfaced trail tread 2 feet wide, construct drainage dips & waterbars and provide gates and other minor features as needed to bring the trails to Forest Service trail standards suitable for hiker and horse use. Additional signs and trail markers will be installed. Barriers and signs will be constructed to curtail unauthorized motorized vehicle use.
8. The Town of Star Valley Ranch and Star Valley Ranch Association volunteers will be responsible through an agreement for constructing, improving, repairing and maintaining the trails and trailheads described in this decision to Forest Service trail standards. A written agreement will be in place prior to implementation of this project.

Design Features:

As part of my decision, the following design features will also be implemented as part of this project to protect natural resources and ensure quality trail experiences:

1. All trail construction and reconstruction will be implemented according to Forest Service standards for Class 3 non-motorized trails designed for hiking as a primary use.
2. Trails will incorporate good line of sight and avoid any blind corners to minimize the potential for sudden encounters between people and wildlife or other users.
3. Flagging tape will be used to mark the "trail corridor". Further establish the course of the trail by inserting pin flags. Final trail layout will be inspected and approved by the District Ranger with staff input prior to construction by Star Valley Ranch volunteers and any live trees that must be cut above 6 inch DBH will be approved by the Forest Service.

4. Constructed trails shall stay within the corridor (within 50' either side of center). Any variations must be approved prior to construction or reconstruction.
5. Positive control points such as rock outcroppings, gentle side slopes, and suitable drainage crossings will be used. These positive control points must be incorporated into the trail to avoid people making their own trails to desirable locations (such as a scenic point). Negative control points such as water or wetlands will be avoided wherever feasible.
6. Avoid long, straight lines. Use natural obstacles to accentuate curves and grade reversals. Construct frequent grade reversals (every hundred feet or more often) to ensure drainage.
7. Incorporate design elements to prevent motorized vehicle use on constructed non-motorized trails.
8. Trailheads will include information signing regarding allowed and prohibited uses and responsible use ethics to minimize potential resource impact and reduce potential conflicts among trail users
9. Implement best management practices to ensure that all sediments and other pollutants are contained within the boundaries of the work area. Disturbed areas that are contributing sediment to surface waters as a result of project activities will be re-vegetated to maintain water quality.
10. Use suitable measures to protect the waterbody when preparing the site for construction or maintenance activities.
 - Clearly delineate the work zone
 - Locate access and staging areas near the project site but outside of work area boundaries, aquatic management zones, wetlands, and sensitive soil areas. Equipment staging areas will be located at least 300 feet from riparian areas.
 - Develop an erosion and sediment control plan to avoid or minimize downstream impacts using measures appropriate to the site and the proposed activity.
 - Ensure all equipment operated in or adjacent to the waterbody is clean of aquatic invasive species, as well as oil and grease, and is well maintained
11. Schedule construction or maintenance operations in waterbodies to occur in the least critical periods to avoid or minimize adverse effects to sensitive aquatic and aquatic-dependent species that live in or near the waterbody. Avoid scheduling work during periods that could be interrupted by high flows
12. Locate or relocate trails to conform to the terrain, provide suitable drainage, provide adequate pollutant filtering between the trail and nearby waterbodies, and reduce potential adverse effects to soil, water quality, or riparian resources.
 - Avoid sensitive areas, such as riparian areas, wetlands, stream crossings, inner gorges, and unstable areas to the extent practicable.
 - Use suitable measures to mitigate trail impacts to the extent practicable where sensitive areas are unavoidable.
 - Use suitable measure to hydrologically disconnect trails from waterbodies to the extent practicable.
 - Design, construct, and maintain trail width, grades, curves, and switchbacks suitable to the terrain and designated use.

- Install and maintain suitable drainage measures to collect and disperse runoff and avoid or minimize erosion of trail surface and adjacent areas.
 - Use and maintain surfacing materials suitable to the trail site and use to withstand traffic and minimize runoff and erosion.
 - Design stream crossings to use the most cost-efficient structure consistent with resource protection, facility needs, and types of use and safety obligations.
 - Designate flexible season of use to avoid periods when trail surfaces are particularly prone to unacceptable erosion, rutting, or compaction.
 - Designate type of nonmotorized uses suitable for the trail width, location, waterbody crossings, and trail surfaces to avoid or minimize adverse effects to soil, water quality, or riparian resources.
 - Monitor trail condition at regular intervals to identify drainage and trail surface maintenance needs to avoid, minimize, or mitigate adverse effects to soil, water quality, and riparian resources.
 - Manage designated trails to mitigate adverse effects to soil, water quality, and riparian resources from over-use when closure and rehabilitation is not practicable or desired.
 - Close and rehabilitate unauthorized trails that are causing adverse effects on soil, water quality, and riparian resources.
13. Implement the following when designing stream crossings:
- Plan and locate surface water crossings to limit the number and extent to those that are necessary.
 - Design and locate crossings to minimize disturbance to the waterbody.
 - Use suitable measures to avoid, minimize, or mitigate damage to the waterbody and banks when transporting materials across the waterbody or aquatic management zone during construction activities.
14. Preventing the spread of aquatic invasive species (AIS) is a priority; therefore all applicable State laws and regulations will be followed to prevent the introduction and a spread of AIS.
15. The trails will be closed from November 15 through April 30 and no trail construction/reconstruction will occur during this period.
16. Trail reconstruction and construction will be completed in two or more phases with the District Ranger and staff reviewing each section before proceeding with work on the next phase.
17. If any cultural materials are discovered during construction, work in the area shall halt immediately, the District Ranger and Forest Archaeologist must be contacted, and the materials evaluated by an archaeologist or historian meeting the Secretary of the Interior's Professional Qualification Standards (48 FR 22716, Sept. 1983)

Rationale for the Decision

I find that the management actions, design features, and project treatment methods are consistent with the intent of DFC 4 to protect municipal water supplies quality, quantity and availability. A storage tank for the Town of Star Valley Ranch's municipal water exists at Prater Canyon along Forest Service Road 10088. No adverse effects are anticipated to the municipal water supply because the water is diverted into a pipe and stored up-gradient of the proposed trails. Likewise, the irrigation water supply for the Star Valley Ranch Association in the Green Canyon is diverted into a pipe upstream of the proposed trails. Therefore, the proposed trail construction will not impact the municipal watershed and is supported by the Town of Star Valley Ranch and the Star Valley Ranch Association, the entities that have an interest in the municipal and irrigation water supplies.

With respect to trail standard and guidelines set forth in the Forest Plan DFC 4, the Forest Plan states that "Standards are intended to be adhered to closely during implementation so they are stated in the future tense as 'will be' requirements. Guidelines are intended to be more flexible, setting parameters rather than tight requirements. So, Guidelines are stated in the future tense as 'should be' or 'may be' directions. A 'should be' Guideline calls for close adherence, requiring frequent application with few and documented exceptions" (Forest Plan p. 122). DFC 4 Standards and Guidelines were designed to minimize the potential for degradation to water quality, quantity and availability. In compliance with this direction, I provide my rationale to construct 2 miles of trail in DFC 4 with respect to the following DFC 4 Standard and Guidelines:

- *Trail System Standard- New trail systems will not be developed* (Forest Plan p. 182): A trail system already exists in Prater and Green Canyons; therefore a new trail system is not being developed. The construction of 2 miles of new trails is a minor expansion to the existing trail system and is offset by the benefits to the public in providing high-quality, non-motorized recreational opportunities near the Town of Star Valley Ranch. Forest visitors will have improved access to the Forest along the west side of the Salt River Range rather than having to drive north to the Town of Alpine to access the Forest via the Greys River Road. The two miles of trails construction would enhance access to and provide a loop connecting the existing Prater Canyon trail (077) with the Green Canyon unmaintained route for non-motorized travel.
- *Trail Density Guideline – Over the life of the plan, an average of no more than 0.5 miles of trail per square mile of area should be attained* (Forest Plan p. 182): The existing trail density for the DFC 4 area within which the Prater Canyon trail is located is 0.13 mile of trail per square mile area. Constructing 2 miles of trail would increase the trail density to 0.31 miles of trail per square mile area within the immediate DFC 4 area. Therefore the trail density would remain below the 0.5 mile per square mile guideline and would comply with the Trail Density Guideline for the immediate DFC 4 area.
- *Encounters per Day Guideline- Parties encounter per day during peak recreational use seasons should not exceed a maximum of two* (Forest Plan p. 182): The Forest Service currently has no data on the number of parties encountered per day during peak recreational use seasons. It is anticipated that the public will increase their use

of existing trails which may be offset by the increase in miles of trail per square mile and enhanced flow of “traffic”. Currently, hikers generally hike up and back on the same trail. The proposed trail provides a trail loop for hikers which may reduce the number of parties they encounter. There is the potential that more than two parties will be encountered during the peak recreational season, but this potential likely already exists under current conditions.

I find that the project is consistent with all other Standards and Guidelines established for DFC 4 and is consistent with all Standards and Guidelines established for DFC 12.

Category of Exclusion

Decisions may be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement (EIS) or an environmental assessment (EA) when they are within one of the categories identified by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 7 CFR Part 1.b.3 or one of the categories identified by the Chief of the Forest Service in Forest Service Handbook 1909.15, section 32, and there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the decision that may result in a significant individual or cumulative effect.

This action is categorically excluded from documentation in an EIS or an EA because there were no extraordinary circumstances or significant issues identified by the Interdisciplinary Team of resource specialists and none were identified by the public during scoping. The applicable category of actions is identified in agency procedures as Construction and Reconstruction of Trails category 36 CFR 220.6(e)(1) and Repair and Maintenance of Recreation Sites and Facilities category 36 CFR 220.6(d)(5). These categories of action are applicable because this project will construct 2 miles of new trails and reconstruct 4.5 miles of user created trail. In addition, two existing parking areas will be improved and updated with trailhead signs, visitor information, and fencing.

Finding of No Extraordinary Circumstances

I find that there are no extraordinary circumstances that would warrant further analysis and documentation in an EA or EIS. I took into account public input, Interdisciplinary Team of resource specialists’ analysis/findings and resource conditions identified in agency procedures that should be considered in determining whether extraordinary circumstances might exist:

- Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species – The Forest Service Wildlife Biologist and Fisheries Biologist reviewed the project and considered potential impacts the proposed action would have on threatened, endangered and sensitive species and their habitats. The Wildlife Biologist concluded that there would be “no effect” on threatened, endangered, and proposed species and “no impact” on sensitive species. The exceptions are ‘potential negative impact, but not enough to measurably or significantly detract from meeting Forest Plan Goals, Objectives and Standards’ for elk, moose, mule deer, pine marten, and migratory birds. The potential effect on wildlife is mainly human disturbance and the potential for displacing individuals. Displacement effects would be no more than minor at the project area level and negligible at larger scales. The Fisheries Biologist concluded reported that Prater Canyon, Green Canyon, and Cedar

Creek were surveyed for fish presence in 2004 and no fish were found. The cause being that streams are dewatered for irrigation and domestic water uses below the forest boundary. Therefore, this decision is consistent with Endangered Species Act and the Forest Plan. See the NFMA/NEPA Resource- Worksheet for District Projects (DeLong 2014) and Extraordinary Circumstances and Forest Plan Consistency Reviews (DeLong et al. 2014) for further analysis.

- Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds – The Forest Service Hydrologist determined that flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds are present but no adverse effects are anticipated. See the “Wetlands, Floodplains, Municipal Supply Watershed, Impaired Waters CE Checklist (Robertson 2014) for further analysis.
- Congressionally designated areas such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas – None present (Natural Resource Specialist Woods 2014).
- Inventoried roadless areas or potential wilderness areas – The proposal does not include any additional motorized use; therefore no increased effect on inventoried roadless areas or potential wilderness areas is expected. (Natural Resource Specialist Woods 2014).
- Research natural areas – None present (Natural Resource Specialist Woods 2014).
- American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites – No American Indians religious or cultural sites are known to be present (Archaeologist Schubert 2014).
- Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas – No historic properties present in the area of potential effect. The project will have no effect to historic properties (Archaeologist Schubert 2014).

APPLICABLE LAWS AND REGULATIONS

This action is in compliance with applicable laws and regulations including the following.

- Clean Water Act, Executive Order 11988 (Floodplains), and Executive Order 11990 (Wetlands) – This decision will not adversely affect water quality, floodplains or wetlands.
- National Forest Management Act (NFMA) – This decision is in compliance with the NFMA.
- Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act (MUSYA) - This decision is in compliance with the MUSYA.
- National Historic Preservation Act - This decision is in compliance with this Act.
- Clean Air Act - This decision will not adversely affect air quality.



ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW

As a result of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2014 and the Agricultural Act of 2014, the Forest Service no longer offers notice, comment and appeal opportunities pursuant to 36 CFR 215 for categorically excluded projects. The Forest Service offered the public and opportunity to comment on this project pursuant to 36 CFR 220. Comments received through the scoping process for this project were considered in making the decision.

IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation of this decision may begin immediately starting with the development of an agreement among the Forest Service, Town of Star Valley Ranch and the Star Valley Ranch Association. Ground-disturbing activities will begin in the summer of 2015 and is expected to be completed within the next 2 years.

CONTACT

For additional information concerning this decision, contact: Anita DeLong, Environmental Coordinator, Greys River Ranger District, 671 N. Washington, Afton, WY 83110, akdelong@fs.fed.us or (307)886-5329.

Richard P. Raione

12-11-14

Richard P. Raione

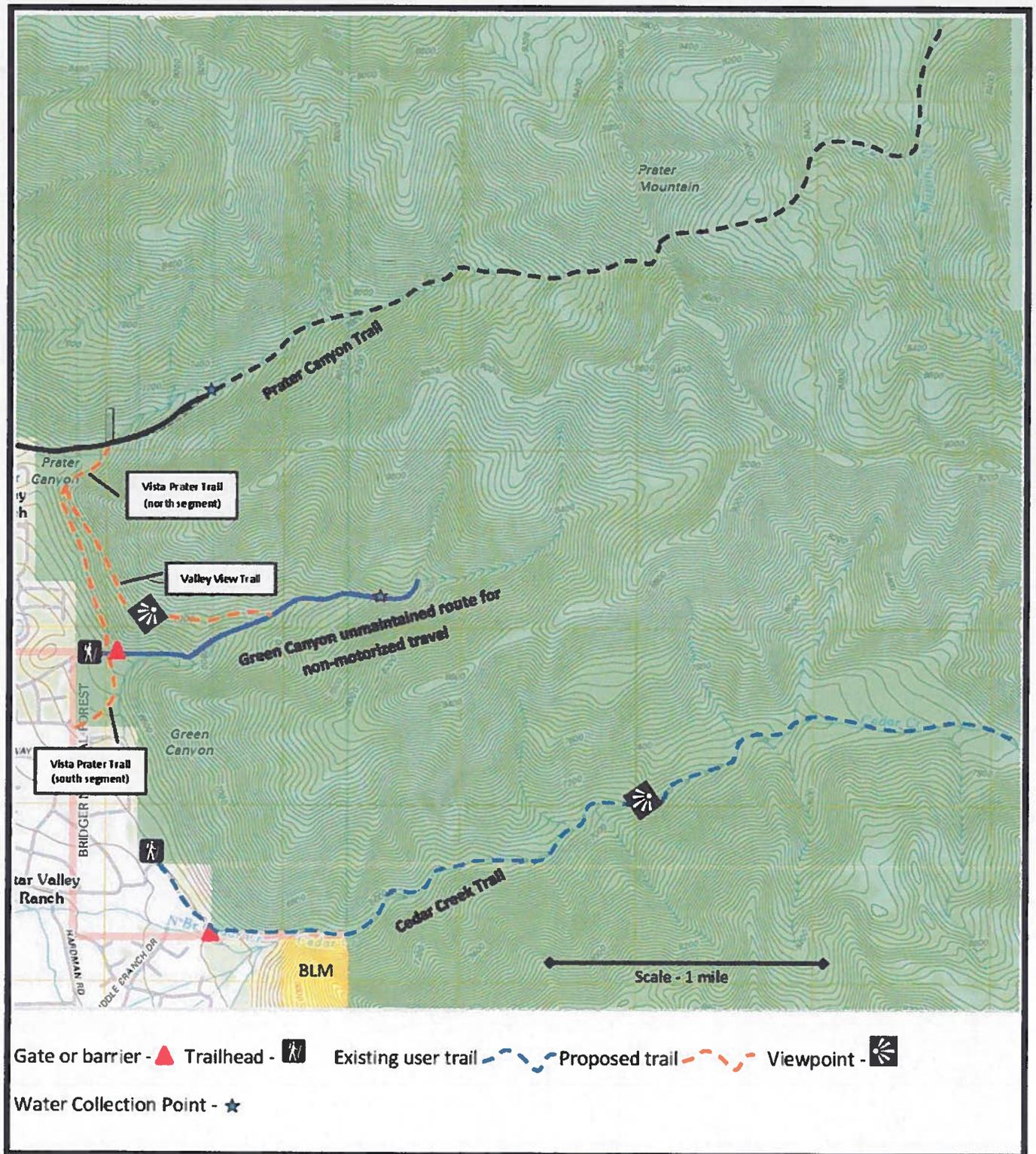
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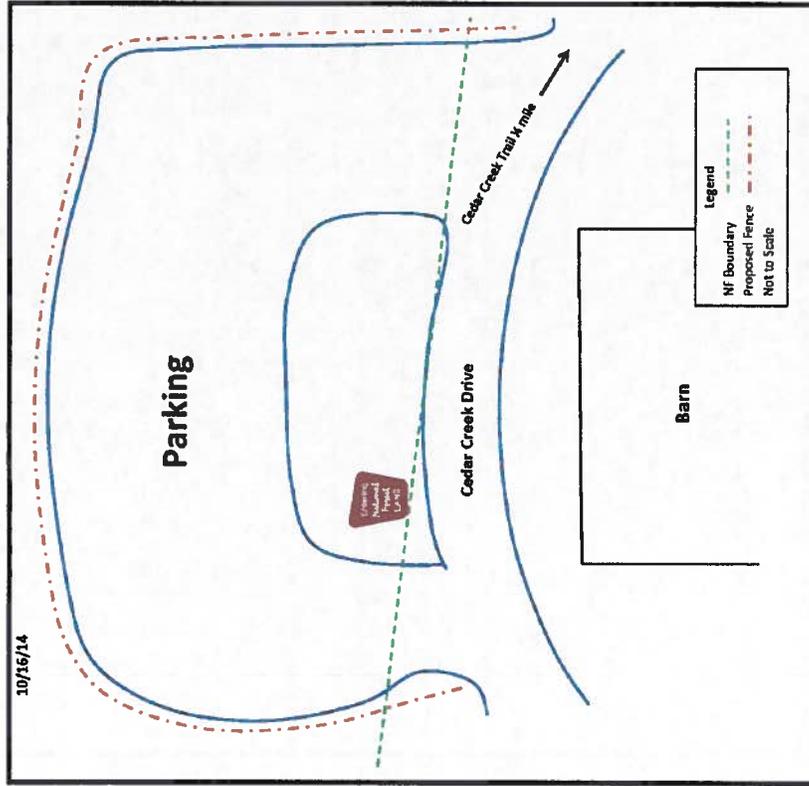
Greys River Ranger District

Bridger-Teton National Forest

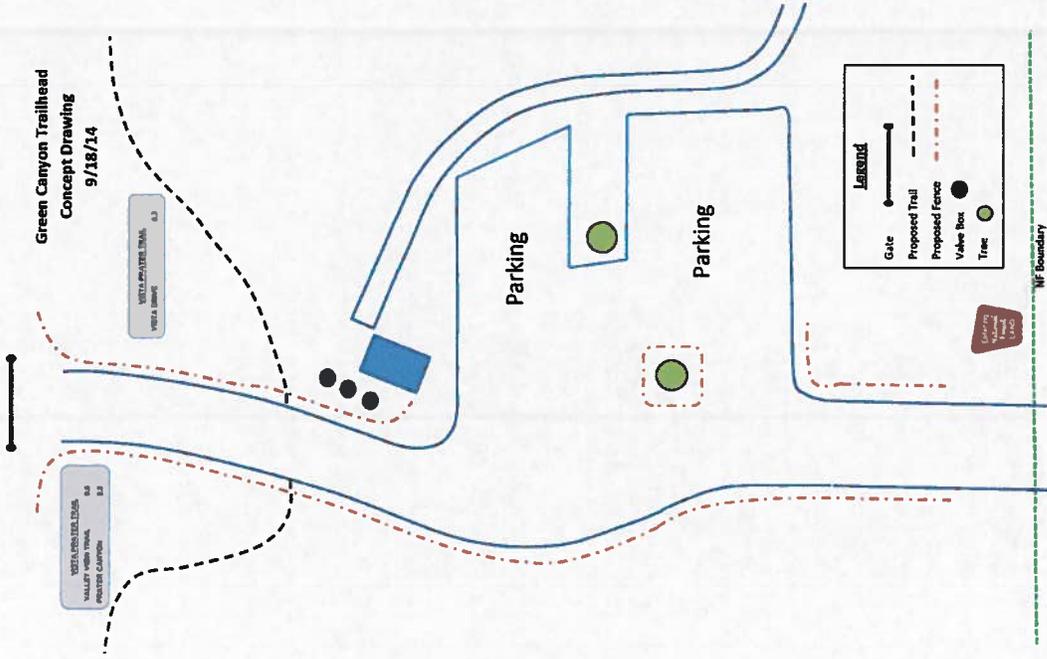
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Map 1. Project area, Greys River Ranger District, Bridger-Teton National Forest and Proposed Action



Map 2. Cedar Creek trailhead and parking area.



Map 3. Green Canyon trailhead and parking area.