



Ruckelshaus Institute
of Environment and
Natural Resources

Pinedale Community Trail Charrette Summary Report



September 2023

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**Wyoming
Pathways**

INTRODUCTION

Pinedale, Wyoming is a 2,000-person community known as a gateway to the Wind River Range, a popular destination for alpine and wilderness experiences. Although widely known for backcountry access, Pinedale also has unique frontcountry recreation opportunities in the sage steppe of the Pinedale Anticline and the aspen forests of the Wind River foothills. Residents expressed a desire to develop this potential in a way that benefits the community and aligns with Pinedale's small town character and motto of "All the Civilization You Need". In response, Wyoming Pathways and the Ruckelshaus Institute convened and facilitated a trail charrette in June of 2023.

A trail charrette is a public meeting designed to engage residents in community recreation planning. Charrettes serve as a way of quickly generating a design solution while integrating the aptitudes and interests of a diverse group of people. Although the structures of charrettes vary, the general idea is to create an innovative atmosphere in which local stakeholders come together to collaboratively generate visions for the future. In this case, Pinedale stakeholders were asked for their input on improving and potentially expanding frontcountry, non-motorized recreation opportunities. Wyoming Pathways previously worked with the Ruckelshaus Institute to host trail charrettes in Laramie in 2016 and Lander in 2019, which provided templates for this event. The need for this conversation was driven by the increasing popularity of outdoor recreation, growth in visitation, and an improved understanding of the community wellness benefits that local trails provide. Charrettes are an opportunity to proactively respond to these circumstances.

The charrette and a site visit occurred on June 9th and 10th, 2023 in Pinedale. Both were open to the public. The charrette's scope included summer use, frontcountry, non-motorized trails in two specific geographic areas: Upper Skyline and Tyler Draw.

Wyoming Pathways and the Ruckelshaus Institute outlined six desired outcomes for the event:

1. Introduce the public to trail planning and the purpose and goals of the charrette.
2. Provide an opportunity for participants to discuss and develop desired goals and management objectives for the trail systems around Pinedale.
3. Gather feedback from participants about trail features and places in the Pinedale area that are important to them, as well as places that need management attention.

4. Generate ideas for potential management prescriptions—including trail systems for non-motorized use and trail management, access, construction and reconstruction, signage, etc.—and record these aspects on base maps of the area.
5. Generate ideas for improved and new partnerships that could assist land managers in trail system improvements, maintenance, education, stewardship, and funding.
6. Prioritize recommendations to land managers for trail management, access, construction and reconstruction, signage, etc.

BACKGROUND

About the Partners

Partnerships are critical to planning and implementing trail charrettes. The Ruckelshaus Institute, Wyoming Pathways, the Sublette Trails Association, and Friends of the Bridger-Teton were the primary groups involved in planning the charrette. Key contacts at the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Pinedale Field Office and United States Forest Service (USFS) Pinedale Ranger District provided land manager expertise.

Wyoming Pathways' mission is to inspire, motivate and unite a strong community of public, business, and political leaders to improve active transportation and people-powered recreation opportunities in Wyoming, including bicycling, walking, hiking, cross-country skiing, and fat-biking. The Ruckelshaus Institute, a division of the Haub School of Environment and Natural Resources at the University of Wyoming, advances the understanding and resolution of complex natural resources challenges through stakeholder driven processes.

Sublette Trails Association's (STA) mission is to improve, maintain, and develop sustainable multi-use trail networks in Sublette County. STA has a formal organizational agreement with the United States Forest Service Pinedale Ranger District to perform trail maintenance on certain sections of forest. STA organizes stewardship days and acts as an information resource for the community.

Friends of Bridger-Teton (FOBT) is a non-profit group interested in minimizing impact and addressing increased use on the forest. FOBT work includes improving recreation infrastructure and signage and encouraging responsible recreation. Their Ambassadors for Responsible Recreation Program promotes visitor education and offers an informational presence at campgrounds and on

trails. Furthermore, FOBT ambassadors serve as a critical point of contact for emergency services (such as law enforcement and search and rescue) and are often the first on site to extinguish escaped or abandoned campfires and secure food and trash storage violations.

Management & current conditions

Based on input from project partners, the Pinedale charrette focused on the trail systems at Upper Skyline and Tyler Draw. The selection criteria included access points and trailheads within 20-30 minutes from Pinedale and the existence of non-motorized trails. These zones are on public land, managed by USFS and BLM, respectively. In the overview map (below), Upper Skyline is northeast of Pinedale and Tyler Draw is southwest.

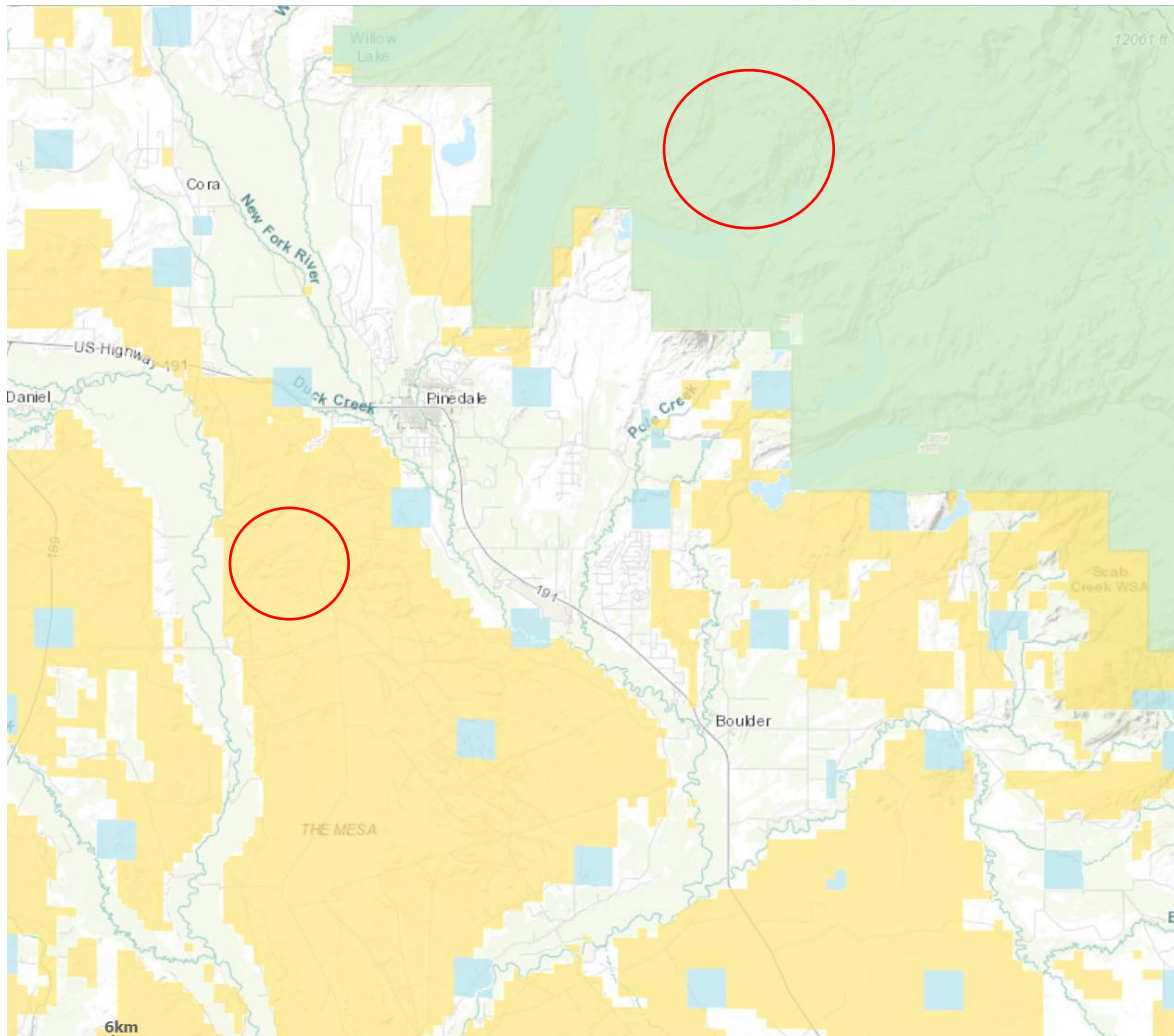


Figure 1 Public land surrounding Pinedale, green is USFS, yellow is BLM, blue is state land

Pinedale's status as a gateway community impacts current management conditions. Gateway communities are defined by their close proximity to natural amenities on public lands. Due to impacts from the increased popularity of outdoor recreation on these public lands, residents of gateway communities "are worried about losing their small town feel and community character" (Stoker, 2020). This is true for Pinedale, where a common refrain is "We don't want to end up like Jackson". The short distance to Jackson Hole, Wyoming and Grand Teton and Yellowstone National Parks also makes Pinedale a "spillover" community. To manage rising visitation to these popular destinations, tourists are often directed to Pinedale and the surrounding public land as an overflow area. This impact is evident on the Bridger-Teton National Forest, particularly since 2020, when numbers of dispersed campers on the forest rose significantly. The Bridger-Teton National Forest is 3.4 million acres and extends to the borders of Pinedale. While Pinedale is not yet facing the level of impact Jackson is experiencing, the time is right for recreation planning and management.

Upper Skyline

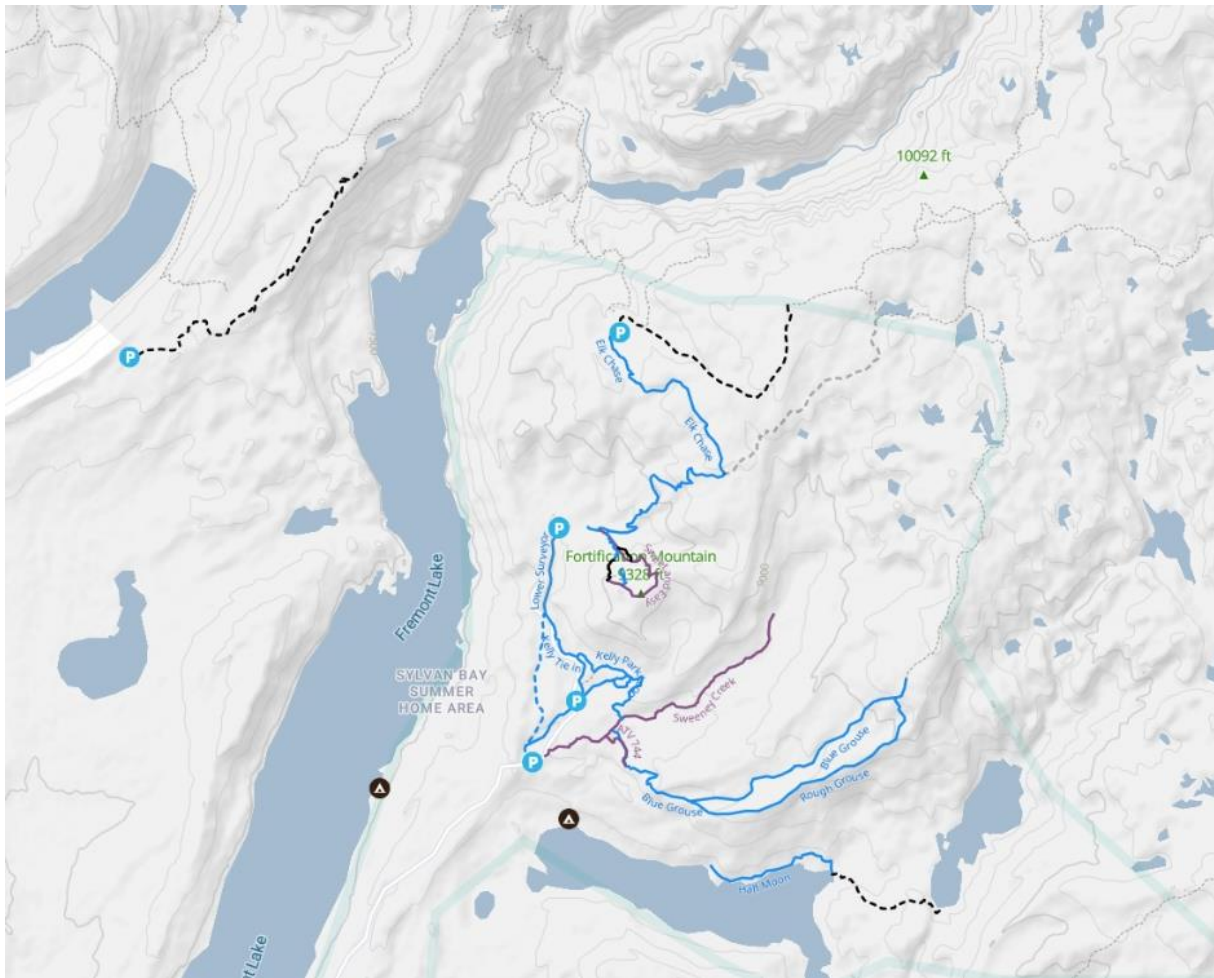


Figure 2 Upper Skyline trails, Trailforks

The Upper Skyline area is on the Bridger-Teton National Forest and is managed by the USFS Pinedale Ranger District. The Pinedale Ranger District's current management focus is the maintenance of backcountry, wilderness trail systems and developed campgrounds. The Pinedale Ranger District, like many national forests, faces a maintenance backlog and is overextended maintaining existing system trails. Forest Service "system" trails are included on official maps and receive seasonal maintenance. Non-system trails are not officially recognized and are excluded from agency efforts. There are some frontcountry system trails at Upper Skyline, but they are not an agency maintenance priority. STA formed in 2020 in large part to address frontcountry trail stewardship gaps.

Upper Skyline is 25 minutes east of Pinedale, characterized by open meadow and sub-alpine forest. Access to the trail system is located at the White Pine Ski Resort parking area and the adjacent Nordic ski parking area. The ski resort holds a special use permit to operate within the bounds of the Forest. STA is included on that permit. The resort is mostly non-operational in the summer, but services may expand if use increases. A change of ownership may occur in the near future. The Pinedale Ranger District is amenable to trails on the ski resort and adjacent lands because it is already a developed, well-used area.



Figure 3 Elk Chase Trail Alex Artz photo

Elk Chase is one of the existing feature trails at Upper Skyline, and mountain bikers are the primary user group. Elk Chase is described as “fast and flowy” (Trail Forks). Sweeny Creek and Grouse Mountain are other existing flagship trails that feature views of Half Moon Lake and the Green River Valley. Although only a couple miles apart, the Elk Chase and Sweeny Creek trails do not currently connect. STA’s goals for this area, informed by a survey on their website, include

developing an enjoyable and accessible summit trail for additional user groups and skill levels. Challenges include steep, forested terrain and trails that are not beginner friendly. Fallen trees are a significant maintenance issue.

Tyler Draw

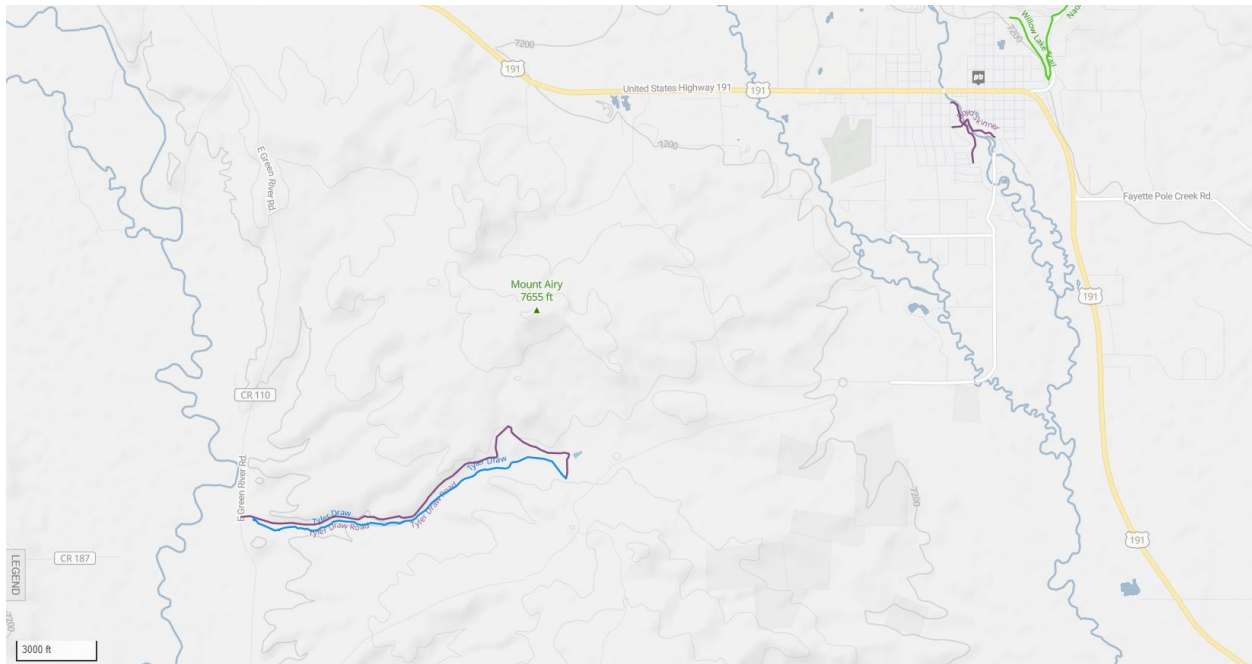


Figure 4 Tyler Draw, Trailforks

Tyler Draw is managed by the BLM Pinedale Field Office. The Pinedale Field Office is awaiting a proposed trail system from STA before the BLM conducts a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis. Trail building is typically considered a significant action and requires agency approval.

Access to the existing Tyler Draw trail is a parking area about 15 minutes south of town. There is a non-motorized, three-mile, single-track loop on a feature colloquially referred to as “The Mesa”. Although the single-track loop is intended for non-motorized use, there is dispersed multi-use recreation across the area. These multiple uses currently coexist without much conflict, although charrette participants noted occasional interactions with cattle. Grazing allotments and oil and gas

leaves exist on the eastern edge of The Mesa. Due to its gentle terrain, this area suits a range of skill levels and there is opportunity to build on this characteristic.



Figure 5 Tyler Draw singletrack, TrailForks J Longwell photo

Tyler Draw's comparatively low elevation offers a longer season for non-snow recreational use than Upper Skyline. The access is convenient and close to town, making it a popular after-work destination. The habitat is sage steppe and much of it is within the bounds of a Sage-Grouse Core Area. Pronghorn and mule deer migration occurs on The Mesa and is crucial winter range for both species. Visitors are asked to adhere to seasonal wildlife closures.

Other

Considerations just outside the scope of the charrette but relevant to recreation planning include additional geographic areas bordering Upper Skyline and the development of a Pinedale Transportation Master Plan.

Located at the end of Skyline Drive, Elkhart Park trailhead is proximate to the Upper Skyline area and is a popular access point to the Wind River Range. Although not included in this conversation, this trailhead is a location where frontcountry trails could connect with backcountry trails. Both the Elkchase trail and Sweeny Cutoff trail end at Elkhart Park.

The town of Pinedale and Jorgensen Engineering are developing a Transportation Master Plan, which includes the Pine Street Long-Term Conceptual Plan. This is relevant to the charrette due to high community interest in public land and municipal connectivity. Pine Street is Pinedale's main thoroughfare, so there are potential impacts to existing bicycle routes to Tyler Draw. The master plan process provides opportunity to address and plan for other gateway community concerns such as traffic flow and safe routes to recreational destinations.

CHARRETTE DESIGN & SITE VISIT

The Pinedale Trail Charrette was a community based collaborative discussion intended to produce a stakeholder generated list of consensus issues and needs for Pinedale area trails. The field site visit and charrette were open to the public and focused on generative group learning and group work. The purpose of the charrette was not to make decisions, but to gather input from a range of perspectives. The planning and decision processes remain the responsibility of each land management agency. Discussing specific alternatives and implementation solutions is a next step for the community and decision-making entities to build on the outcomes of the charrette.

The planning team identified key stakeholders prior to the meeting. These including land management agencies, recreational groups, local government officials, and conservation non-profits. The success of the meeting depended on the participation and involvement of all these affected parties. Likewise, successful follow-up actions will require participation of these same government agencies and involved citizens.

Stakeholders included (but were not limited to):

- Federal land management agencies: USFS and BLM
- Local recreation groups: Backcountry Horsemen, Teton Adaptive
- Local government: Sublette County Visitor Center, Sublette County Commissioners
- State agencies: Wyoming Game and Fish
- Local businesses: Half Moon Lake Lodge, Jorgensen Engineering
- Local non-profit groups: Jackson Hole Land Trust, Pinedale Chamber of Commerce
- Local educators: Sublette County School District
- National forest lessees and neighboring private landowners

The planning team shared a Save the Date email with the stakeholder list two months prior to the charrette. The Ruckelshaus Institute followed up with an official event invitation and Pathways conducted a social media campaign. STA and FOBT printed posters and got the word out in the community. Information about the event was shared on the charrette website (link in resources section). Future charrettes should include a press release well in advance of the event for use by federal agencies and local news outlets.

The readiness of the Pinedale community and the specific geographic context shaped the trail charrette agenda. The charrette included a site visit to facilitate on the ground discussions and allow participants to experience destinations of interest together. Research identifying field experiences as potentially improving idea retention and furthering relationships informed this decision.

Site Visit

STA board members Alex Artz and Ryan Grove led 12 participants on short hikes from the Upper Skyline and Kelly Park access areas to illustrate positive characteristics as well as shortcomings of existing trails. Several Wyoming Game and Fish representatives, land managers, and Pinedale area locals participated. Viewing a section of the Grouse Mountain Loop showed off a previous project STA led that improved trail sustainability through grading and switchbacks. A stream crossing highlighted potential infrastructure needs and an unsigned junction demonstrated the need for way-finding signage.

Acting Pinedale District Ranger (at the time of the charrette) Gary Hayward reminded the group of the need to coexist with grazing lessees and their cattle, another significant user group of the Kelly Park area. The current (September 2023) Acting District Ranger, Blaine Johnson, pictured below, also attended.



Figure 6 STA Board member Ryan Grove on Sweeny Creek trail, Birch Malotky photo

CHARRETTE RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Thirty participants signed in to the Saturday trail charrette. The day started with presentations from BLM and USFS representatives outlining management priorities and constraints. STA and FOBT then presented their respective missions and recent projects. After a break, participants completed

two breakout activities: a values generation exercise and a trail needs assessment. Volunteer facilitators from Pathways and the Ruckelshaus Institute led the small group activities.

The purpose and desired outcomes of the Saturday meeting included:

- Crafting a long-term community vision
- Building and strengthening relationships
- Identifying specific access and trail improvements

Community Values Generation

The purpose of this exercise was to generate a set of consensus goals for the Pinedale area trail systems that will help guide future planning and funding activities. Participants completed a values exercise and then were asked how they might shift those values into actionable trail system goals.

The overwhelming top value from this activity was “ease of access”. Participants value the ability to get from town to trail swiftly and safely. Multi-use trail systems—the opportunity for a variety of user groups and a variety of trail experiences—was the second most noted value. Opportunity for solitude and beautiful scenery were a close tie for third.

These themes translated into several, broad goals:

- Maintain and develop trail systems for a variety of uses, including hiking, biking, equestrian, pets, etc.
- Make trail systems convenient and available to all abilities.
- Preserve aesthetics and promote opportunities for solitude through a sustainable and dispersed trail system.
- Encourage and foster partnerships between user groups and land managers.
- Prioritize connectivity among frontcountry trails and connectivity to the town via public pathways.

These values undergird a long-term community vision for Pinedale’s frontcountry, non-motorized trail systems.

Needs Assessment Summary

The needs assessment enabled participants to articulate the current conditions of Pinedale's frontcountry, non-motorized trail systems, then generate desired conditions. A needs assessment is a list of things that need to change or be done in order to meet goals. System-wide needs covered four categories: planning, data and info, education and use management, and other. Ideas that generated significant discussion in breakout sessions are summarized below.

Tyler Draw Needs Assessment Summary

One of the most discussed themes during Tyler Draw conversations was the area's unique potential to be accessible for a spectrum of user abilities. As mentioned in the management background, a BLM trail assessment process is getting off the ground for the Tyler Draw area and there is strong community interest in follow-through. Needs included:

- Prioritize official trail system designation through recognition from BLM through NEPA assessment.
- Plan a cohesive Tyler Draw area trail system layout with connectivity in mind.
- Conduct recreational use analysis.
- Include wildlife data and sensitive areas in any trail planning process.
- Address high potential for variety of trail systems to meet accessibility needs (youth, ADA trails, adaptive use) in any trail planning process.
- Address parking but maintain minimal infrastructure.
- Preserve openness and address concern about development on the boundaries of the area.
- Encourage the coexistence of multiple uses: grazing, motorized and non-motorized recreation, and oil and gas infrastructure.
- Create printed educational resources and maps for Tyler Draw.
- Come to consensus on place names and trail names.
- Improve stewardship and trail etiquette education on stewardship for all user groups.

Upper Skyline Needs Assessment Summary

A desire for a formalized trail network emerged in Upper Skyline breakout discussions. Participants and managers noted that a plan for maintaining the current system needs to be in place before additional trails are built. However, attendees want more trail options. A next step is to discuss and decide on the number of trails the Upper Skyline area can sustainably support. Charrette participants mentioned this area is a good candidate for an interpretive trail to achieve user-education goals. Charrette participants also noted the high-quality aesthetic value of the terrain such as wildflowers, creeks, and aspen groves. Needs included:

- Conduct use assessment to better understand different uses and user experiences.
- Plan for connectivity. Ideas include linking Pinedale to Upper Skyline, lower Fremont to Sweeny, and Half Moon to Grouse Mountain.
- Plan for ungulate migration.
- Identify specific trail surface and infrastructure sustainability needs.
- Assess need and viability of Sweeny and Half Moon Inlet water crossings or bridges.
- Officially designate trailheads such as Half Moon.
- Address frontcountry to backcountry interface and the potential for trail link-ups.
- Anticipate a rise in e-bike use and potential management or user conflict concerns.
- Improve trail marking, trailhead signage, and wayfinding signage and boundary information, e.g. Sweeny and Blue Grouse junction.
- Explore restroom installation and maintenance.
- Improve parking areas and ensure room for horse trailers.
- Explore opportunities for increased education, such as trail ambassadors encouraging positive behavior.
- Coordinate a “wise advertisement” campaign at community visitor centers and gear stores to share consistent responsible recreation and trail information.
- Share live trail conditions on STA or agency websites.



Figure 7 Charrette participants, Birch Malotky photo

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations summarize the conversations at the charrette. The level of attention ideas and areas received—such as duplicate comments or a high number of comments on a specific theme or trail—informed the recommendations.

Recommendations

- Assess current trail systems and trail use. Focus on identifying gaps in trail accessibility for different skill levels. Gather recreational use data for decision making and funding projects.
- Focus on Tyler Draw master trail plan. Identify new trails that are sustainable, enjoyable, and accessible for adaptive recreation.
- Emphasize maintenance and establishment of existing trails at Upper Skyline.

- Formalize existing trail networks with signage and name standardization to make trails more known and navigable to residents and visitors.
- Plan for and prioritize frontcountry trail connectivity. Identify connector segments between existing frontcountry trails and potential linkages between frontcountry public land and town.
- Continue STA partnership and FOBT partnerships. Learn from FOBT's Ambassadors for Responsible Recreation program in Sublette County.
- Explore funding opportunities such as the National Park Service Conservation and Outdoor Recreation Division Assistance Programs and for International Mountain Bike Association (IMBA) Trail Count Grant Program.
- Publicize migration corridors and winter closures and educate users on the importance of coexistence with wildlife as a unique aspect of the Pinedale area.

These planning actions may help the community and land management agencies prepare for, and respond to, increasing pressure on Pinedale's frontcountry trail systems while expanding opportunities for local residents.

The charrette and site visit demonstrated that the Pinedale community cares deeply about their public lands and trails. Participants readily engaged in proactive planning. Local-level recreation planning is critical for gateway communities to chart desired future conditions for their community. The Ruckelshaus Institute and Wyoming Pathways would like to sincerely thank all the participants, land managers, engaged citizens, and volunteers that made this event possible. A special thanks goes to our small group facilitators, Birch Malotky, Emma Carlson, Grace Templeton, Pete Skram and Jenn Burton.

Resources

- International Mountain Bike Association [Trail Count Grant Program](#)
- [Pinedale Community Trail Charrette Website](#)
- Trail Forks [Pinedale Region](#)
- Wyoming Office of Outdoor Recreation [Outdoor Recreation Collaboratives](#)
- [Wyoming Public Lands Initiative Resource Mapping Tool](#)

Citations

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