

# **Recommendations for Improving Public Access, Habitat Conservation, and Management of the Lower Yellowstone River Corridor**



Produced by the citizen-based  
**Lower Yellowstone River Corridor  
Advisory Committee**

November 2021

## **Introduction and Background**

The Yellowstone River is the longest, free-flowing waterway in the lower 48 United States. It embodies a wide array of natural, historic, and culturally rich resources that are treasured by the communities who call it home. Yet much of the river system is relatively inaccessible between Hysham, Montana and the North Dakota border, hampering recreation and stewardship along this uniquely remote lower corridor. A desire to share, conserve, and enhance this cherished resource for the benefit of visitors and surrounding communities has inspired grassroots efforts for change.

Building on local initiative, a citizen-based advisory committee was created during the summer of 2021 to help shape future opportunities for improved access, habitat conservation, and sustainable economic development (Appendices A and B). Sponsored by Governor Greg Gianforte and convened by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP), the 12-member Lower Yellowstone River Corridor Advisory Committee (Committee) reflected the diversity of the river corridor itself, capturing the agricultural, recreational, conservation, and economic values so important to the region. Technical advisors from FWP, the Bureau of Land Management, and others provided resource management knowledge and values. And while the Committee and Chair were responsible for generating recommendations, authority to implement lies with FWP.

The Committee was tasked with two overarching goals:

1. Develop a scoring matrix for evaluating Yellowstone River corridor acquisition opportunities aimed at improving public access and habitat conservation;
2. Identify investments needed to maximize habitat conservation and protection while enhancing sustainable public access and recreational opportunities.

Committee deliberations ensured that the rural nature of the region is preserved and maintained while emphasizing sustainable economic development. Recommendations are intended to guide use of a \$4 million spending authority secured by FWP through the 2021 Montana State Legislature. Funds are available until spent within the Lower Yellowstone River corridor downstream of the Bighorn River confluence to the North Dakota border, prioritizing opportunities where access is most limited.

After dividing into three work groups, committee members engaged with local landowners and their communities, considered regional impacts, and conducted site visits to develop recommendations to FWP, to include:

- A scoring matrix for evaluating land acquisitions and other opportunities aimed at improving public access and habitat conservation
- Overall management approaches that maximize diverse recreational opportunities, prioritizing those where access is most limited

- A list of existing or potential future opportunities for public access and/or habitat conservation
- Needed amenities, safety features, and economic growth considerations at access points
- Strategies for securing long-term funding needs

The following report sections detail these recommendations and highlight strategies for investing in the Lower Yellowstone River Corridor (LYRC).

### **Scoring Matrix, Overall Management, and Funding Considerations**

The Committee developed a scoring matrix (Appendix C) for evaluating new river access sites along the LYRC while proposing potential management and funding options for long-term support of river recreation, habitat conservation, and historic, cultural, and scenic sites. Importantly, the Committee also focused on preserving local community values, addressing potential infrastructure needs, and financial sustainability. The following key points and recommendations were developed through group discussions and input from community leaders.

#### **Scoring Matrix: LYRC Project Evaluation Criteria**

Using information from existing FWP forms, input from technical advisors and Committee expertise, a draft scoring matrix was developed to evaluate potential project sites for outdoor recreation on the LYRC. The matrix defines categories and considerations that could be scored to delineate potential opportunities at each site. This draft form is included in Appendix C. The Committee recommends that FWP consider adopting this matrix and subsequently develop an instructional sheet to guide staff when completing the scoring.

#### **Considerations for Overall Management and Funding of the LYRC**

Due to the agricultural nature of the Lower Yellowstone River and its mix of private and public land ownership, an overall corridor management approach should be adopted that protects historic uses and critical habitat along the corridor. Local input noted examples where conventional approaches like Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs), state parks, and fishing access sites (FASs) may limit the flexibility needed to manage various forms of outdoor recreation while addressing diverse needs such as habitat conservation and cultural/historic sites.

A formal management model for this portion of the river corridor (possibly from the Bighorn River confluence to the North Dakota border) could have significant management and economic benefits. A specific management classification could raise awareness of the need to protect critical habitat areas, help promote world-class recreational opportunities of the river, highlight cultural and historic sites, and create economic opportunities for corridor communities. A management designation could support development of friends groups,

private organizations, and community foundations. Staffing and operational needs could be assessed on a corridor-wide basis rather than at a programmatic level. This would allow for funding strategies targeted specifically at the corridor. New recreational planning opportunities such as water-based trails, island campsites, and trail developments could be addressed all along the corridor rather on a site-by-site basis or by separate programs. Economic benefits could be gained through a more broad-based approach that incorporates all corridor communities, FASs, WMAs, state parks, etc. in planning efforts.

Based on this analysis, the Committee recommends that FWP consider the following when establishing an overall management plan for the LYRC:

- Pursue a formal management model for the LYRC to allow for a broad-based, integrated approach within all FWP programs and divisions to address protection of wildlife, habitat, and other conservation and scenic values, outdoor recreation opportunities including public access, cultural and historic resource preservation, and economic opportunities for corridor communities.
  - This model should strive to conserve, protect, and enhance for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations the ecological, scenic, wildlife, recreational, agricultural, cultural, historical, natural, educational, and scientific resources of the LYRC while honoring historic uses of the river.
  - Potential management models could include a state waterway, state scenic area (SSA), state scenic corridor, or a corridor management area (CMA).
- Assess the need for an acquisitions policy which specifically addresses obtaining recreational properties. This policy should include the possibility of targeted land exchanges and conveyances with federal and state land managers. Current policies are primarily directed at fishing, hunting, wildlife/habitat management, or state park designations.
- Formulate a recreation and resource stewardship plan that addresses the stated goals of the overall management area including habitat protection, wildlife and fisheries programs, and river user/visitor amenities. This plan should consider dividing the corridor into three different management sections/units to highlight the uniqueness and differences along the river. Potential sections/units could be: 1) Big Horn confluence to Miles City, 2) Miles City to Glendive, and 3) Glendive to the state line. Each section/unit could be identified by a separate name to be used in tourism and marketing materials and include designated staff to support each section/unit. Implementation phases may be needed to address high priorities versus long-term opportunities.

- Pursue additional staffing such as river rangers for safety and enforcement, site or unit managers to provide on-the ground presence, etc.
- Develop funding strategies that assess future financial needs, prioritize projects that qualify for multiple funding types, and identify future legislative funding support needs.
- Consider developing funding strategies that provide specific support for operation and management of the LYRC such as a designated user permit or sticker system that could be purchased by river users who do not have an FWP fishing/hunting license and/or support development of a LYRC license plate for ongoing operational funding.
- Consider renaming existing FAS and new acquisition sites to welcome all forms of river visitors and more accurately reflect the diverse uses of these sites.
- Develop corridor friends groups or expand the regional Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) to provide more local input, support, and perspective on FWP corridor activities. Representatives from each of the three river sections/units should be selected.

## **Habitat Conservation and Expanded Public Access**

The Committee worked to identify areas for habitat conservation while exploring options for expanded public access to inaccessible river sections within the LYRC. The Committee urges FWP to further explore these opportunities in balance with preserving critical corridor agricultural lands and infrastructure. User safety, site purchase and development costs, and potential impacts to local communities were identified as priorities for investment in new recreational access and riparian habitat conservation. Committee members toured sites, took photos, and shared site visit videos with all members to inform Committee considerations. Data and observations were also gathered through conversations with neighbors, documented past river use, and individual knowledge of river processes and characteristics. In addition, improvement needs at existing sites were evaluated to assure added recreational value and safety throughout the corridor.

### **Habitat Conservation**

Although the Committee primarily focused on identifying new public access along the LYRC, habitat conservation was a significant consideration as properties were examined. Several properties that did not lend themselves to development for public access did present opportunities for habitat protection (including riparian areas) and limited potential for walk-in or watercraft access. Two of these properties were identified in the focal river sections and lack vehicle access. A third opportunity is located near a corridor community and would afford additional local access and recreation opportunities as well as riparian rehabilitation. The Committee recommends that FWP continue to explore options for securing these and other similar properties to provide additional habitat protection along the corridor.

## *Considerations at Existing FWP Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs)*

In addition to new acquisition opportunities, habitat protection considerations were evaluated at existing and highly used FWP properties. Site visits and discussions focused specifically on the Isaac Homestead, Seven Sisters, and Elk Island WMAs. Dispersed camping is currently allowed at each of these sites. Concerns have been raised about visitor safety (hunting is allowed at all sites), habitat impairment by off-road driving and non-managed campsites, damage to signs, etc. Resource and infrastructure



damage was observed by Committee members during fall 2021 site visits. It was noted that as use increases, accelerated damage will likely continue. After discussing various options, members agreed that site changes are needed to ensure protection of critical river corridor habitat and a safe visitor experience in these WMAs. Therefore, the Committee recommends dispersed camping no longer be allowed at these sites. Designated camping areas or directing camping to nearby sites would be the preferred alternative.

### New Recreation Access Points

Committee members put considerable time and effort into this critical task. Members visited sites, studied corridor maps, evaluated property ownership, and assessed topography and river hydrodynamics to identify opportunities and constraints for developing potential new access points. Committee members were motivated to highlight sites that could leverage existing infrastructure and public lands to stretch funding investments and lessen impacts to private landowners. Sites within designated access gaps that provided new access to otherwise inaccessible federal and state public lands were given the highest consideration.

The Committee did not engage in formal negotiations or landowner contacts during their review and privately-owned potential sites are not disclosed to protect landowner privacy. The Committee also acknowledged that new opportunities or property proposals could emerge after their recommendations were developed. Consequently, recommendations are broadly phrased to afford latitude in making final site selection decisions.

Sites were considered by three different zones of the river corridor: 1) Hysham to Miles City, 2) Miles City to Glendive, and 3) Glendive to Sidney. The Committee recognized that each of these zones offers different challenges and/or needs that require separate approaches. The Committee primarily focused on potential new access points where formal public access is lacking and/or where public land could be better utilized. A formal list of these sites has been provided to FWP for consideration. These sites represent currently identified opportunities,

but new opportunities should be considered as they arise. The following sections highlight considerations made by the Committee in the three identified river sections/units.

#### *Zone 1: Hysham to Miles City*

This river stretch has good to adequate access at the up and downstream ends with a 37-mile middle stretch where access is non-existent. This large access gap tends to be relatively fast, braided, and sinuous with numerous islands scattered throughout. Due to these conditions, there are significant concerns relating to user safety, access to isolated public lands, challenges for diverse river users, and limited economic benefits to communities. Group discussions identified eight to ten possible locations that would enhance public access and safety within this stretch. After refining selection criteria and potential best “bang for the buck” locations, some of these sites were removed from consideration. The remaining sites were prioritized further by the Committee to highlight those with the highest value for outdoor recreation investment. Final suggested locations were shared with FWP staff for further exploration. Potential new access locations were all within the designated gaps of public access defined as being from Amelia Island to Forsyth and from Far West FAS to Miles City access points.

Additionally, the Committee recognized that numerous islands in this stretch are likely publicly owned, either by the state or BLM, and these parcels could provide welcome stopover opportunities for boaters, campers, hunters, etc. The Committee also recognized the complexities in verifying the legal ownership status of these islands and therefore did not recommend any specific parcels at this time. However, the Committee recommends that as island ownership is clarified, public lands be clearly marked in maps and onsite for optimal use. In addition, onsite and/or portable camping infrastructure should be considered for island recreational users. This recommendation would also apply to the other river sections/units that contain islands.

#### *Zone 2: Miles City to Glendive*

This river zone marks a transition from the braided, sinuous nature of the upstream stretch from Hysham to Miles City. There are fewer islands within this zone and a generally lower gradient, causing the current to slow and broaden out. There are more badland formations on the horizon and less cottonwood groves along the shoreline. There is limited access in the 36-mile stretch between the communities of Fallon and Glendive. Access points between Miles City and Fallon are difficult to navigate and have site constraints. Public access exists at Powder River Depot where the Powder River joins the Yellowstone River. Current access is limited to one side of the confluence and offers limited infrastructure for accessing the site and visitor amenities. Group discussions of this river zone focused on several private property opportunities as well as improving and developing publicly owned sites. Three to four significant opportunities ranked high for consideration. All were in areas that would improve public access opportunities. These sites were shared with FWP staff for further evaluation.

### *Zone 3: Glendive to Sidney*

The river zone from Glendive to Sidney sees the return of large cottonwood bottoms with a broader, slower-moving current. While there are multiple access points throughout this section, site maintenance and operation has been challenged by flooding, ice scouring, and river hydrodynamics. Discussions about this zone focused on the potential for new locations to replace problematic sites. As with the other two zones, the Committee also identified opportunities where sites were in public ownership. Those opportunities were referred to FWP for further consideration.

#### Improvements to Existing Sites

Group discussions among committee members, landowners, river users, and other stakeholders included strong sentiments about some of the amenities (or lack thereof) at existing FWP-managed access sites. Most commonly, comments related to the need for potable water and additional camping opportunities. Therefore, the Committee recommends that FWP invest in the site improvements identified below.

### *Zone 1: Hysham to Miles City*

#### **Myers Bridge FAS, Howrey Island Recreation Area, and Amelia Island FAS**



Potable water and camping opportunities at this upstream end of the LYRC may be most readily addressed at Myers Bridge FAS, Howrey Island Recreation Area, and Amelia Island FAS. Potential potable water opportunities exist at Amelia Island due to existing public water infrastructure. However, expanded camping opportunities may be most appropriate at Howrey Island, which is currently managed by the BLM. Camping at that location is currently limited to three or four unstructured

sites with limited amenities. There is ample room for the addition of more camping and visitor amenities.



**Far West FAS**

The Far West FAS is a well-developed site with a boat ramp, latrines, camping areas, and picnic shelters, yet it lacks potable water and electrical hook-ups. The day-use and camping area is located off the river shoreline, potentially protecting future developed infrastructure from river dynamics. Therefore, investments that provide these lacking resources are encouraged.



*Zone 2: Miles City to Glendive*

No existing sites within this zone were prioritized for improvement.

*Zone 3: Glendive to Sidney*

**Stipek FAS**

This is a relatively new FAS with limited amenities, although the site footprint is large enough for additional development. This site could support additional camping opportunities as well as potable water infrastructure. Due to high river use near Glendive and Sidney, these improvements could promote community economic development with expanded visitor use and amenities.

**Intake Dam FAS**

A new public water distribution system was recently initiated by drilling a new well for this site. However, additional funds are needed to complete the water system to the designated camping area. This is a shovel-ready project that could be completed to provide potable water throughout the campground. Additionally, this site has strong potential for adding electrical hookups. Later in this report, the Committee recommends a change in designation for this site and any management actions should be done collectively.

**Elk Island WMA and Seven Sisters WMA**

FWP has recently improved Elk Island WMA with a new boat ramp, latrine, and parking area. They have identified ready opportunities for designated camping near these site improvements. FWP should also consider developing camping at the Seven Sisters WMA.

## **Visitor Services, Economic Support, and Cultural/Historical Opportunities**

Lastly, the Committee focused on developing needed visitor services along the LYRC, with an emphasis on community economic support and cultural/historic opportunities. Through group discussions and input from community leaders, the following highlight resulting key points and recommendations.

### **State Parks Considerations**

The LYRC presents gaps in state park sites comparable to the gaps in public access to the river itself. However, the corridor is rich in historical value and potential to educate visitors and residents along its length. These resources present an opportunity to develop a Lower Yellowstone River State Park that would encourage visitors to explore the entire corridor. This management approach has already been successfully applied elsewhere in Montana (e.g., Flathead Lake State Park). Separate units could be identified within the LYRC, providing differing opportunities within all three zones of the river (listed from west to east):

- Howrey Island/Myers Bridge
- Powder River Depot, and
- Intake Dam

These three units provide historical/cultural anchor locations at each break point, described in detail below. These parks should be classified using FWP's state parks classification system while considering visitor and local landowner expectations.

#### *Unit 1: Howrey Island/Myers Bridge*

The existing Howrey Island/Myers Bridge site provides economic support to the community of Hysham and could be expanded to offer additional visitor amenities that leverage local historical, cultural, and recreational resources. Examples include the nearby historic Fort Pease, an existing paved walking path that could be expanded with interpretive information, and other untapped outdoor recreation opportunities. As noted earlier in this report, this site could also offer additional camping opportunities. The site is currently under BLM management as a Special Recreation Management Site (SRMA) and would require collaboration to transfer management authority. This site could be considered for a natural or recreation FWP state parks classification.

## *Unit 2: Powder River Depot*

The Powder River Depot is an iconic location on the LYRC which offers an array of cultural, historic, and recreational resources. Examples include tribal and military activities leading up to and after the Battle of Little Bighorn, historic stagecoach stops, range rider stations, and more. Additionally, the Powder River confluence will soon play a central role in local fisheries recreation and management, showcasing the federally Endangered pallid sturgeon and potentially paddlefish. The presence of both state and BLM land also supports further development of this confluence. Other local opportunities include the Evelyn Cameron heritage centers, Terry Badlands Wilderness Study Area (WSA), and the Calypso Trail. The local community of Terry/Prairie County has invested in this site with interpretive signs, narrative, and trails. This site also offers scenic views of the Terry Badlands and surrounding landscape. The Committee recommends that FWP consider classifying this site as an enhanced heritage state park.



## *Unit 3: Intake Dam*

Intake Dam is currently managed as a FWP FAS; however, it offers resources that could be expanded to provide a wider range of visitor and outdoor recreation opportunities. As with units 1 and 2, there are many historical and cultural resources to showcase. For example, an interpretive trail could be developed to include views of the local irrigation project and Intake Dam, highlighting the historical relationship between local agriculture and the river. Additionally, Intake Dam is focal point of regional fisheries management, offering educational and recreational opportunities. While infrastructure has been recently added (a new well), additional funding is needed to develop a water distribution system throughout the site. Furthermore, proximity to the MonDak Heritage Center (Sidney) and the Frontier Gateway Museum (Glendive) provides partnership opportunities. This site could be considered for a recreation core or enhanced FWP state parks classification.

### Needed LYRC Visitor Amenities

The Committee built on information received from the Lower Yellowstone River Corridor Coalition, local communities, and river users to craft a menu of needed amenities along the LYRC. Amenities include (in no particular order):

### *Potable Water*

Access to potable water along the corridor is limited, especially for river floaters. Opportunities to develop this amenity at multiple sites are described earlier, but FWP should identify all critical locations where potable water can be developed and/or explore community partnerships to supply seasonal refill stations. These opportunities may exist along the river itself or in an adjacent community.

### *American Disabilities Act (ADA) Access Facilities*

Current facilities providing ADA access are limited along the LYRC. Rosebud East FAS in Forsyth is the only exception. The Committee recommends working toward ADA access at additional sites to ensure that opportunities for this user group are provided in each of the three zones.

### *Safety Features*

The Lower Yellowstone River is dynamic, often challenging, and potentially dangerous due to diversion dams, rapids, migrating channels, river debris, etc. These potential hazards should be highlighted to river users, with options for safe avoidance. For example, signage indicating downstream irrigation outtakes or other manmade hazards near FASs would help protect users. Bypasses or portages should be provided for each diversion dam and known rapid. The Committee recommends collaborating on this task with local community educators, emergency response, and volunteer search-and-rescue groups such as the Silver Jackets in Forsyth.



Another safety challenge is posed by dispersed camping occurring within FWP WMAs during hunting season, with numerous accounts of hunter/camper surprise encounters. FWP could address this potential hazard by either creating designated hunting areas within WMAs or by exploring ways to divert campers to nearby camping opportunities. This recommendation can also be implemented to address associated resource damage at these sites.

### *Education*

The Committee recognizes many educational opportunities within the LYRC and recommends the following be included:

- Historical – For example, Father DeSmet met Sitting Bull in the LYRC. The Far West steamer brought wounded soldiers and news of the Battle of Little Bighorn to St. Louis in 1876. Many more examples exist.
- Tribal – The voices of indigenous tribes should be represented.

- Cultural – Representing the local community culture will deepen user experiences and perspectives.
- Place Names – Expanding visitor awareness of site nomenclature.
- Prehistoric and Geological – The LYRC is home to many unique resources, including agates, petrified wood, and fossils.
- Agricultural – As the top industry in Montana, the LYRC offers many opportunities to share related local agricultural values and traditions.
- Astrological – Astrotourism is growing rapidly in eastern Montana.
- Environmental – Many sites are located in riparian areas, which differ greatly from the surrounding prairie landscape and offer unique educational opportunities.
- Sustainable Resources – Water scarcity is a common theme in the West, with opportunities to tell this story along the LYRC.
- Multi-Use – The LYRC offers many examples of diverse use for visitors and residents to see in balance.
- Recreate Responsibly/Leave No Trace – These concepts are foundational to sustainable use of the LYRC.

The Committee recommends that FWP collaborate with tribal historic preservation offices, local schools, county extension services, historical societies and/or museums to leverage both research and resources to provide enriching educational opportunities for present and future generations.

### *Camping Opportunities*

Local communities recognize the need to encourage visitors to spend more time locally, which requires access to area camping. However, access to camping was repeatedly raised as lacking within the LYRC. Opportunities to expand camping along the river corridor including: 1) developing state park locations that offer camping and, 2) developing additional camping opportunities in strategic FAS locations (both current and new), primitive sites on FWP-owned islands, and current WMAs throughout the corridor. Campsite or state park hosts would also provide expanded user services for area visitors.

One camping-related issue includes inconsistency in allowed duration among sites, causing confusion and frustration. Standardized camping limits on all river corridor sites would eliminate this conflict. The Committee also recommends that FWP consider adding electric hookup and charging stations within each of the three state park units to enhance camping amenities.

### *Site Visibility*

It was noted during site visits, conversations with users, and input from community leaders that FWP sites are often difficult to find or use due to inconsistent signage. During site visits by work group members, it was noted site signs are often not very visible, are in disrepair

and/or are not very welcoming. Differences were also noted in the type of signs used. For example, the signs at Isaac Homestead differed from those used at Seven Sisters or Elk Island WMAs. Easily identifiable signage is critical to ensuring that visitors can locate these sites and know what to expect from them. FWP should take steps to make signs more visible, welcoming, and consistently branded throughout the corridor.

### *Future User Services*

The Committee recommends that FWP identify opportunities to expand visitor services and user technologies. For example, providing marker posts along a water-based trail with a QR code could allow visitors to visually see “You are Here,” provide current water hazard conditions, river mile information, and highlight regional narratives (e.g., interpretation of place names like Stipek FAS). Another option includes employing artificial intelligence (AI); for example, users could scan a QR code to “see” buffalo crossing at Buffalo Rapids while a recorded narrator explains the place name. Additional examples include linking a QR code to a short video of the Far West steamship carrying wounded cavalymen along with the news of the Little Bighorn Battle in 1876, or an explanation on how to identify agates. A visitor center at the Powder River Depot could provide guided night sky interpretation or a three-dimensional experience of the bootleggers who crossed the Calypso Trail at night. Serving visitors offers an opportunity to not just educate, but to inspire while telling the story of eastern Montana and the Lower Yellowstone River to residents and visitors alike.

### Community Trails within the LYRC

A priority of this project is to provide additional economic support for the local communities along the corridor, including enhanced health and recreation through walking/biking trail opportunities. These resources can also provide connectivity to the river for both residents and visitors. The Committee recommends that FWP:

- Explore development and expansion of existing trails at river access sites
- Provide community outreach on trail development grant opportunities
- Create designated water-based trails throughout the LYRC

Specifically, the Committee identified several key areas where additional trail opportunities should be considered for development:

### *Land-based Trails*

Howrey Island/Meyers Bridge - The current walking trail has a good surface and amenities but lacks interpretation and highlights of local area history, cultural events, and area wildlife/fauna information.

Forsyth FASs - Forsyth has two fishing access sites that could be connected by a walking trail. This trail could also connect with the downtown area to expand visitor opportunities and support the community.



Miles City/Roche Jaune FAS – This site is located within the limits of Miles City and presents an exceptional opportunity to connect community trails to FWP sites. This site also offers seasonal ADA flush toilets and the Committee recommends that future trails and other developments are ADA compliant.

Terry Badlands Area - There are several opportunities for trail development in the Terry area. Community and business leaders have suggested a trail from the local river bridge to the downtown area. In addition, trails could be developed up to the Terry Badlands WSA if a camping area was developed at Milwaukee Bridge.



Glendive – City-owned/operated Eyer Park and Jaycee West Park provide opportunities to connect river travelers to businesses and attractions in Glendive via the pedestrian-only historic Bell Street Bridge.



Photo credit: Chris Sawicki, Wild Montana

Sidney – Located just 1.5 miles from town, the Sidney Bridge FAS could be connected to the Sidney community by partnering with the MonDak Heritage Center and the local community.

#### *Water-Based Trails*

The LYRC offers several excellent opportunities to develop designated water-based trails, potentially expanding usership. The Committee recommends defining primitive

camping opportunities in designated areas rather than at random locations along the corridor to ensure that visitors respect private property and camp only in designated locations. The goal of defining primitive camping opportunities could be an important step alleviating potential trespassing or landowner conflicts. There are several river sections that lend themselves to this type of designation and other opportunities should be identified as new sites are developed. Current options include Amelia Island to Forsyth, Far West to Fort Keogh, and Stipek FAS to Sidney (with camping on War Dance Island). These trails could offer primitive camping sites on islands that are publicly owned to create a unique experience for low-impact users. The Committee recommends prioritizing the first water-based trail in the river stretch from Glendive to Sidney.



## **Report Summary**

The Committee appreciates the opportunity to serve an integral role in shaping the future stewardship and use of the LYRC, a defining resource of eastern Montana. The Committee has worked hard to fulfill its commitment to identifying how best to direct the legislatively appropriated funds to improve outdoor recreation opportunities, habitat conservation, and regional economic growth. In doing so, the Committee strove to balance all potential opportunities with constraints posed by funding limitations and river processes. By building on opportunities where public land and readily available opportunities exist, the Committee developed recommendations that promote development of outdoor recreation, habitat conservation, cultural and historic sites, and support for all corridor communities.



Photo credit: Chris Sawicki, Wild Montana

## Appendix A

### Lower Yellowstone River Corridor Advisory Committee Membership

**Chair:** Angie Grove, *Helena*

**Members:**

Ruth Baue, *Hysham*

Justin Hoffman, *Glendive*

Lance Kalfell, *Terry*

Joel Krautter, *Sidney*

Robert Lee, *Forsyth*

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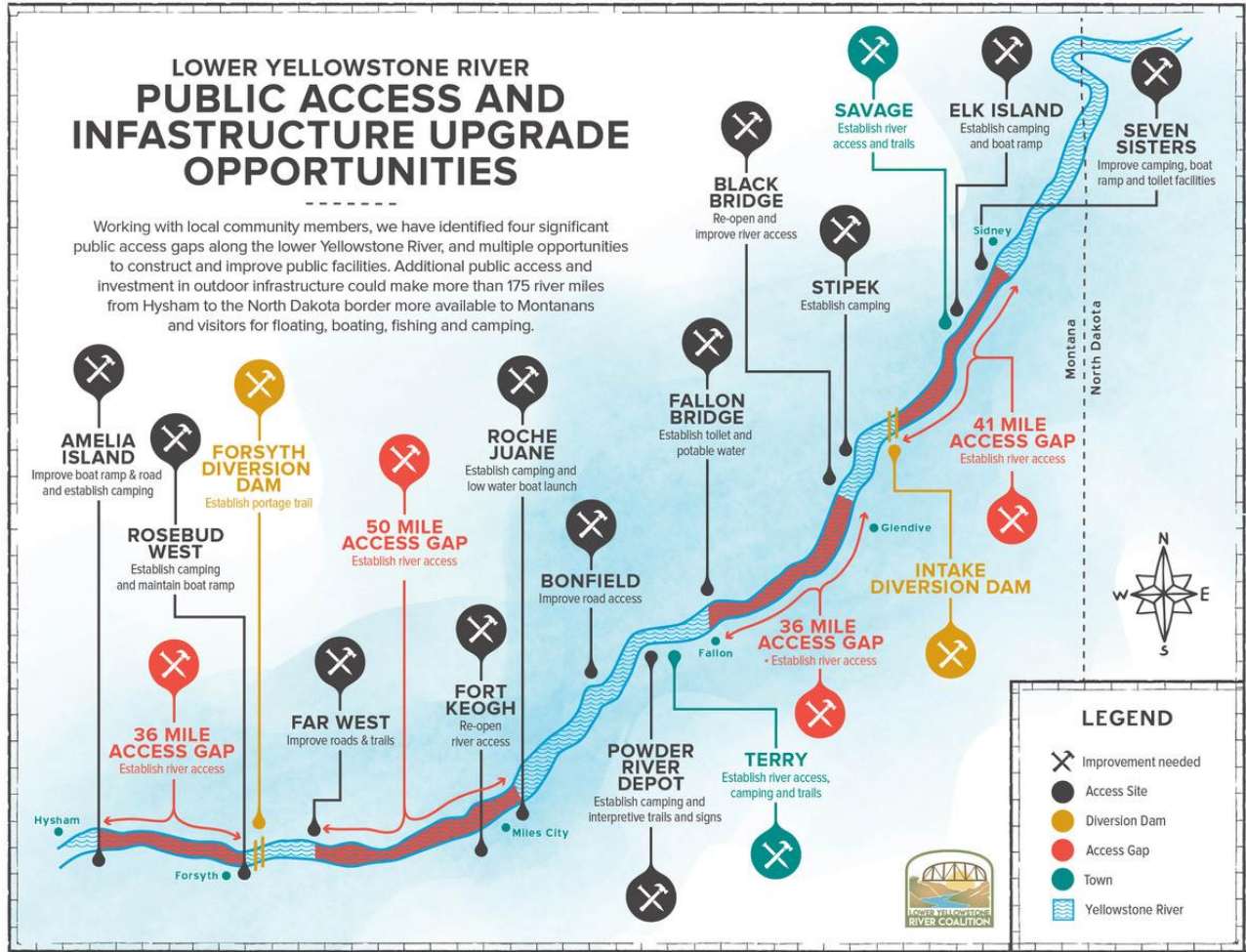
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Christine Whitlatch

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# Appendix B

## Map by the Lower Yellowstone River Coalition



## Appendix C

### Proposal Scoring Matrix

Instructions: Please utilize this form to evaluate all new proposals for Lower Yellowstone River Corridor (LYRC) project sites for potential purchase of outdoor recreational opportunities. Scores and comments should be used to determine which opportunities should be formally considered by the governing bodies involved.

Site/Landowner Name:

Location: FWP Region: Property Ownership (circle one): Federal State  
Private

Project Size:

Project Land Types: Pasture Irrigated Fields Riparian areas

Project Proposal (circle all that apply):

Outdoor Recreation Fishing Hunting Historical/Cultural New Public Access  
Project Type: Fee Title Easement Land Exchange Lease

(Use Parks Classification Policy definitions for next two items)

Proposed Project Classification: Rustic Core Enhanced

Proposed Project Management: Natural Heritage Recreation

Provide a brief description of project proposal and how this proposal fits into the recreational management area and if available, attach sitemaps/descriptions:  
Please score each of the following areas (up to 200 points):

1) Project Recreation Criteria (up to 40 points) Provide a score on how proposal will enhance corridor recreation needs:

- a) 0-10 points for traditional uses (fishing/hunting)
- b) 0-10 points for non-traditional uses (hiking, birdwatching, camping, etc.) c) 0-10 points for increase public access
- d) 0-10 points for falling within critical public access gap areas

2) Project Habitat and Conservation Criteria (up to 40 points)

- a) 0-10 points for critical conservation designation (see instructions)
  - b) 0-10 points for critical habitat elements
  - c) 0-10 points for adjoining habit/conservation protection
  - d) 0-10 points for wildlife/fisheries/vegetation values
- 3) Threat Status (up to 30 points) Potential development, loss of habitat, etc.
- a) Imminent (30 points)
  - b) Probable (20 points)
  - c) Possible (10 points)
  - d) Unlikely (0 points)
- 4) Focal Point (up to 10 points) How does proposal fit into overall planning effort? Potential to replace existing access management/maintenance challenges?
- 5) Geographic Effectiveness (up to 40 points)
- a) How is site currently configured? Potential for site development?
  - b) Is there current legal property access?
  - c) Nearness to other access sites-within identified access gaps?
  - d) River characteristic considerations (flood and ice risks, bank stability, river morphology, nearby river structures, etc.)
- 6) Management Considerations (**subtract** from total up to 40 points)
- a) Initial and ongoing obligations (e.g., taxes, irrigation fees, etc.)
  - b) Infrastructure needs (e.g., latrines, ramps, ADA, parking, trails, camping, etc.)
  - c) Staffing and equipment needs
  - d) Buildings or improvements to maintain or remove
  - e) Weed control issues
  - f) Proximity to other FWP sites for potential management efficiencies
  - g) Railroad crossing considerations
  - h) Existing legal access (road, trail or float-in)
- 7) Funding Considerations (up to 40 points)
- a) Qualify for a mix of federal/state funding sources
  - b) Revenue generation possibilities
  - c) Qualify for possible private funding support
  - d) Other
- 8) Additional Considerations (**subtract** from total up to 10 points)
- a) Nearby sensitive landowner or land use considerations
  - b) Permit and authorization requirements
  - c) Dumping/disposal areas
- 9) **Final Score and Recommendation**