

WYOMING

ROUTE

Wyoming has the potential to be an incredible section of the Great American Rail-Trail. Its landscapes are unique in the United States, and Wyoming is already known for its outdoor recreation assets. Because of Wyoming's topography, any route through Wyoming will require sizable grade increases at several locations. Local options including shuttle services could be explored to accommodate trail users who are unable to traverse these grade increases. Currently, there are not significant miles of multiuse trail that could be used to route a trail across Wyoming. However, with the statewide commitment to the project and the exceptional landscapes across the state, the Great American Rail-Trail is a viable project to help Wyoming with its outdoor recreation and tourism economy.

RTC found and reviewed 20 plans in Wyoming to better understand the state's trail priorities. A full list of these plans can be found in Appendix A.



Casper Rail-Trail in Wyoming | Photo by Kevin Belanger, courtesy Rails-to-Trails Conservancy

TABLE 20 GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL STATISTICS IN WYOMING

Total Great American Rail-Trail Existing Trail Miles in Wyo. (% of Total State Mileage)	13.1 (2.6%)
Total Great American Rail-Trail Trail Gap Miles in Wyo. (% of Total State Mileage)	496.4 (97.4%)
Total Trail Gaps in Wyo.	6
Total Great American Rail-Trail Miles in Wyo.	509.5

GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL ROUTE ASSESSMENT WYOMING

TABLE 21 GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL ROUTE THROUGH WYOMING

Existing Trail or Trail Gap Name	Length in Wyo. Along Great American Rail-Trail (in Miles)
TRAIL GAP 62a – Neb.–Wyo. State Line to Douglas	73.2
Douglas Trail System	3.3
TRAIL GAP 62b – Douglas to Glenrock	25.9
Al’s Way	1.2
TRAIL GAP 63 – Glenrock to Evansville	22.2
Casper Rail Trail	3.2
Platte River Trail	1.8
TRAIL GAP 64 – Casper to Shoshoni	95.7
TRAIL GAP 65a – Shoshoni to Thermopolis	50.1
East Bighorn River Trail	0.7
TRAIL GAP 65b – Thermopolis to Greybull	50.2
Greybull Riverwalk	1.9
TRAIL GAP 66 – Greybull to Cody	51.7
Beck Lake Park Bike Trail	1.0
TRAIL GAP 67 – Cody to Wyo.–Mont. State Line	127.4
Total Miles	509.5
<i>Existing Trail Miles</i>	13.1
<i>Trail Gap Miles</i>	496.4

Note: RTC pulled together several potential route options through Wyoming and Montana and held a meeting of state and local officials in the two states in January 2019. The goal of the meeting was to come to a consensus on the best route option, or Preferred Wyoming Route, to connect Wyoming to Montana, weighing all of the opportunities and challenges presented by every option.

The result of the meeting was the Preferred Wyoming Route selected below from Casper, Wyoming, to Livingston, Montana. This was chosen as the Preferred Wyoming Route to accommodate physical constraints and highlight the potential economic development opportunities of a cross-country trail through the rural north-central portions of Wyoming, where the state has prioritized economic development efforts. This route presents several challenges, as described in Trail Gaps 65 to 69 (below and in the Montana chapter).

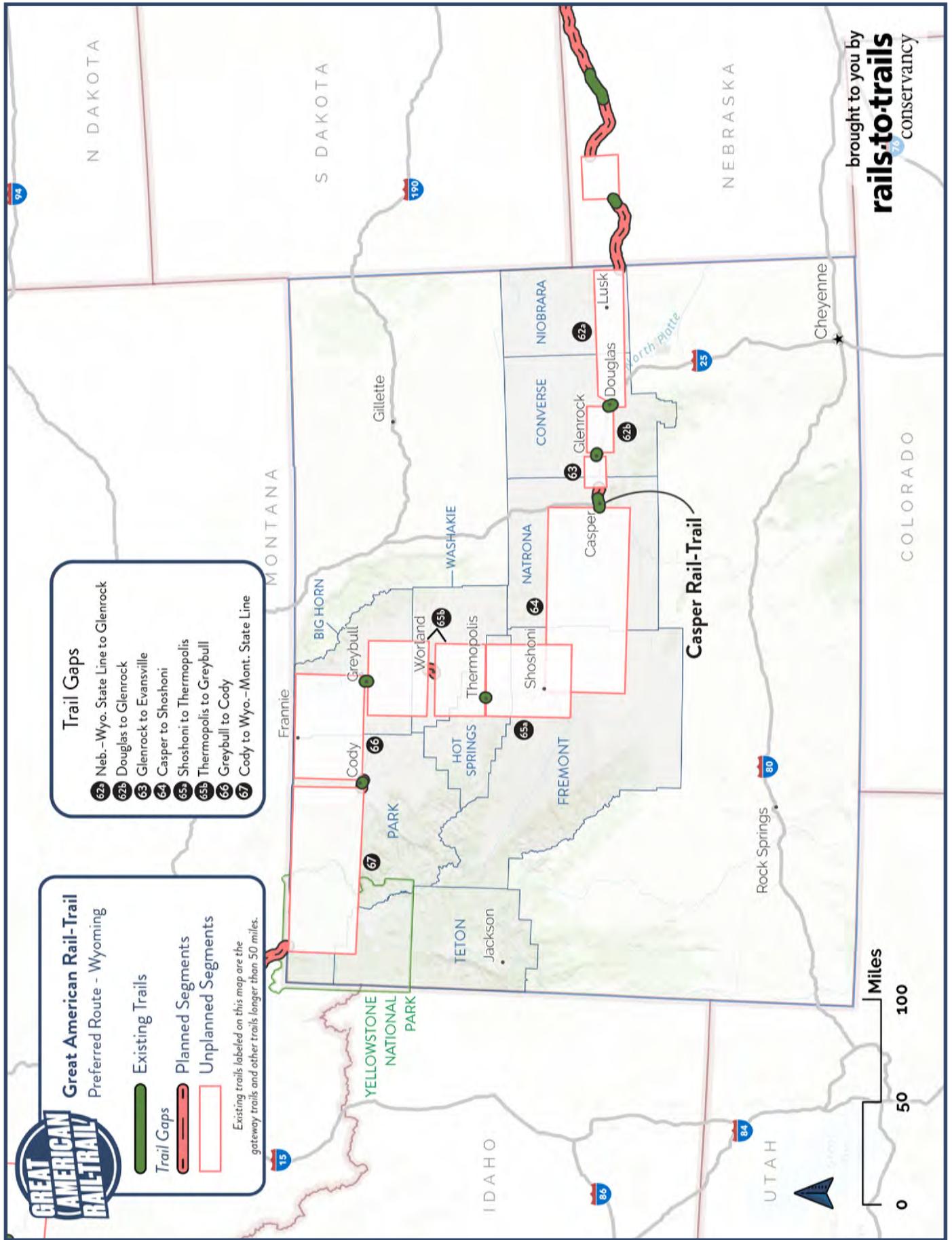
At the meeting, attendees discussed an alternate route heading southwest from Shoshoni, Wyoming, following the Wyoming Heritage

Trail to Lander and heading northwest toward Jackson along U.S. 26, which is also the route of Adventure Cycling Association’s TransAmerica Trail. The alternate route connects with the Greater Yellowstone Trail at Grand Teton National Park and continues approximately 180 miles around Yellowstone National Park on existing and planned rail-trails to West Yellowstone, Montana. The alternate route then travels through Yellowstone National Park and connects with the route as described in this report.

This alternate route is 448 miles total, 140 miles of which are currently existing trail. The alternate route remains available should the Preferred Wyoming Route be determined to be unfeasible. Future iterations of this report will update the status of both route options. The consensus was that RTC and its partners should continue to conduct research on the Preferred Wyoming Route’s feasibility; however, if it is determined that this route is not feasible for a variety of factors, then the official route of the Great American Rail-Trail will move to accommodate the alternate route option.

GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL ROUTE ASSESSMENT

MAP 10: WYOMING



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WYOMING BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN SYSTEM TASK FORCE

In 2016, the Wyoming Bicycle and Pedestrian System Task Force was created and charged with developing a report to better understand the opportunities, benefits and challenges of bicycle and pedestrian pathways and natural surface trails. The highlight of the report for RTC was the strong language encouraging the state and communities to support the development of the Great American Rail-Trail:

"Lead the state effort to develop the Great American Rail Trail through Wyoming; partner with Wyoming communities and the Rails to Trails Conservancy on concept and feasibility plans for the Wyoming section of the trail. Seek and support ways to fund this project using existing or future (proposed) state funds. Encourage the governor and the state legislature to become vocal champions of the project."

Other useful recommendations in the report included:

- Create and fund a \$10 million annual statewide bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure and information initiative.
- Encourage the governor to contact and persuade the Wyoming delegation and federal land agencies regarding the serious federal land trail maintenance backlog and need for continued federal investment in public trails and pathways in Wyoming.
- Create a WYDOT Office of Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation.
- Promote and market long distance bicycling opportunities in Wyoming, and provide information on key bicycle touring amenities for visitors.
- Complete a system-wide non-motorized trail plan for Wyoming State Parks, Historic Sites, & Trails, prioritizing the trail building projects to be completed.

TRAIL GAP 62a – NEBRASKA–WYOMING STATE LINE TO DOUGLAS

This trail gap extends for approximately 73 miles from the Nebraska–Wyoming state line to Douglas. The former Chicago and North Western Transportation Company line that traveled along the White River in Nebraska and Niobrara River in Wyoming was severely damaged in a flood in 1991. Twenty miles of track and 45 bridges were destroyed along the corridor, and rail service was never able to recover after the storm. Local rail advocates were insistent upon the railbed being turned into a trail once it was deemed no longer viable for rail traffic. The remainder of the rail corridor between the Nebraska–Wyoming state line and the town of Lusk, Wyoming, is under the ownership of the Friends of the White River Trail, including approximately 6 miles in Wyoming. The friends group intends to hold on to the ownership of the rail corridor until the resources become available to complete construction of the trail and there is a commitment to help keep it maintained.

From Lusk, a trail would extend west to the city of Douglas. U.S. 18/20 connects Lusk and Douglas, and while there are no confirmed abandoned rail corridors between Lusk and just east of Orin,

Wyoming, there are several active rail lines adjacent to the highway that could potentially be available for rail-with-trail construction. There is a very active Union Pacific Railroad corridor that extends approximately 45 miles between Lusk and Shawnee, a less active 6.2-mile section of Union Pacific Railroad corridor between Shawnee and Orin, and approximately 15 miles of two parallel active tracks between Orin and Douglas—one owned by Union Pacific Railroad and one owned by BNSF Railway. Also, there are documents that describe an abandoned rail line between Shawnee and Orin. Further research should be conducted in Converse County, Wyoming, on the status of this potential corridor for future trail development.

Between Orin and Douglas, the active Union Pacific Railroad line becomes abandoned for approximately 7 miles into Douglas, following Irvine Road. This abandoned line travels a total of approximately 76 miles to a point northeast of the Casper/Natrona County International Airport, roughly paralleling U.S. 20/26, where it convenes with the active BNSF Railway line. A trail heading west could convene with the existing Douglas Trail System. Douglas plans to extend the existing trail system about 0.2 mile from its current southern terminus at Robin Lane to I-25 along the remainder of the abandoned railway portion that the city owns.

GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL ROUTE ASSESSMENT WYOMING

DOUGLAS TRAIL SYSTEM

Total Length (in Miles)	3.3
Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Wyo. (in Miles)	3.3
Trail Type	Greenway
Surface Type	Concrete
Trail Manager	City of Douglas
Website	cityofdouglas.org/192/City-Parks-Trails
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/douglas-bike-path

The Douglas Trail System traces the North Platte River north and south. In 2019, Douglas extended the trail system from Richards Street south to Robin Lane along an abandoned rail corridor using grant funding from the Wyoming Department of Transportation.

TRAIL GAP 62b – DOUGLAS TO GLENROCK

The abandoned line continues into Glenrock, where Al's Way was constructed along the corridor in the 1990s. The town of Glenrock intends to complete the remaining 25.9 miles of trail along the former Chicago and North Western Transportation Company corridor from the eastern town limits at Meadowlark Street to the current eastern terminus of Al's Way at Boxelder Road.

AL'S WAY

Total Length (in Miles)	1.2
Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Wyo. (in Miles)	1.2
Trail Type	Rail-trail
Surface Type	Asphalt, crushed stone
Trail Manager	Town of Glenrock
Website	glenrock.org/?SEC=CA1DCD8A-8CDA-489B-B420-F2D593DAD24E
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/als-way

The town of Glenrock has a long-term goal to connect a trail across the town limits on the former Chicago and North Western rail

corridor, of which 1.2 miles has already been converted to a trail known as Al's Way. The trail was named after Glenrock High School track coach, Al Finch, who has since retired but is well-known in the community. The rail corridor was purchased in 1990, and a trail was constructed in 1994. The trail is currently complete between Boxelder and 3rd streets. The town of Glenrock has secured funding from the Wyoming Department of Transportation and also has submitted a request for funding from the Wyoming Business Council for matching funds to extend the trail an additional 0.9 mile, continuing west to 9th Street and east to Colt Street. Work is anticipated to begin in the summer of 2020 to complete the trail through Glenrock.

TRAIL GAP 63 – GLENROCK TO EVANSVILLE

The town of Glenrock intends to complete the remaining trail along the former Chicago and North Western rail corridor from its current terminus at 3rd Street to the western town limits at state Route 95. The abandoned rail corridor continues 22 miles west from Glenrock to Evansville, a small town just east of Casper, where the trail intersects the existing Casper Rail Trail. Platte River Trails has long-term plans to extend the Casper Rail Trail eastward to Edness Kimball Wilkins State Park, which would add an additional 5.5 miles in length from the current eastern terminus at Walsh Drive and U.S. 20/26. The Wyoming Department of Transportation will complete 0.3 mile of this section from North Walsh Drive east to Curtis Street as part of a project to rebuild the I-25 exit at Wyoming Boulevard. Completing the remaining 5.2 miles is currently under negotiation.²⁶

CASPER RAIL TRAIL

Total Length (in Miles)	3.2
Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Wyo. (in Miles)	3.2
Trail Type	Rail-trail
Surface Type	Concrete
Trail Manager	Casper Parks Department
Website	platterivertrails.com
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/casper-rail-trail

The Casper Rail Trail extends 3.2 miles through the center of Casper, Wyoming, from Hat 6 Road and U.S. 20/26 west to South Spruce Street. The first section of the Casper Rail Trail was constructed in 1998, with additional mileage having been added since then. The city of Casper was granted a Certificate of Interim Trail Use by the Surface

²⁶ The Wyoming Bicycle and Pedestrian System Task Force Report suggests that the Wyoming Legislature “consider a funding initiative to enhance safety and function of long distance bicycle tourism routes ... Example projects could include ... to construct a section of the proposed Great American Rail Trail along the North Platte connecting Casper to neighboring communities.”

²⁷ Union Pacific Railroad still owns the corridor from Ash Street to Edness Kimball Wilkins State Park.

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Transportation Board to permit trail development, and Platte River Trails was the entity created to develop the trail since 2002.²⁷

Operations and maintenance of the trail are the responsibilities of the city of Casper. Platte River Trails reports that the trail is in good condition and that no upgrades to the existing trail are needed in the immediate future.

A new state office building will be constructed near the western end of the Casper Rail Trail at Spruce Street. The city of Casper intends to leverage the momentum behind this new development to complete bicycle and pedestrian upgrades to Midwest Avenue, connecting to the trails along the Platte River.

PLATTE RIVER TRAIL

Total Length (in Miles)	10.0
Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Wyo. (in Miles)	1.8
Trail Type	Rail-trail
Surface Type	Asphalt, concrete
Trail Manager	Platte River Trails
Website	platterivertrails.com
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/platte-river-trail-(wy)

Platte River Trails owns and maintains this 10-mile concrete trail that follows the North Platte River through Casper. The Platte River Trail will host the Great American Rail-Trail for approximately 2 miles, crossing the North Platte River and heading west into Natrona County. This portion of the trail crosses the Platte River at the Tate Pump House, a restored historical building that now houses the offices of Platte River Trails. Portions of the Platte River Trail are approaching 30 years old. Platte River Trails and the city of Casper have plans to rehabilitate the oldest sections of the trail by spending \$500,000 by 2022 on trail resurfacing and rehabilitation.

RTC reviewed a variety of routes to connect the largest expanse of trail gap between Casper, Wyoming, and Livingston, Montana. RTC staff consulted a variety of state and local officials and nonprofit organizations on the best route options through this area, and staff made several visits to scout out locations. Rail-trail conversions have been less frequent in these parts of Wyoming and Montana due to an overall lack of railroads, the relatively rough topography and sparse populations. The few existing railroads are successful due to resource extraction in the area, making them less suitable for a rail-with-trail. Therefore, there is no easy rail-trail route option in the area.

TRAIL GAP 64 – CASPER TO SHOSHONI

There is an approximately 96-mile gap between the end of the Platte River Trail and Shoshoni, Wyoming. U.S. 20/26, a two-lane high-speed road with relatively low volume, connects Casper west to Shoshoni through the small community of Powder River. U.S. 20/26 has wide shoulders that could accommodate bicycle travel while a fully separated trail is explored in more detail.

An abandoned rail corridor connects the end of the Platte River Parkway approximately 14 miles northwest past the Casper/Natrona County International Airport. An active BNSF Railway corridor connects from there into Shoshoni with a medium traffic density. The rail corridor travels through a very remote area of Natrona and Fremont counties that is not ideal for a trail route. A fully separated trail should be explored in more detail to connect Casper and Shoshoni.

TRAIL GAP 65a – SHOSHONI TO THERMOPOLIS

From Shoshoni, the trail will continue 50 miles north to Thermopolis, Wyoming, to connect to the existing East Bighorn River Trail. The 50-mile gap follows U.S. 20 West, as well as an active BNSF Railway line with a medium traffic density.

This gap holds the challenge of traveling through the beautiful Wind River Canyon. Heading north out of Shoshoni, Wind River Canyon begins just north of Boysen State Park and travels 14 miles. The canyon is heavily constricted by the Wind River, the topography of the canyon, the existing highway and an active BNSF Railway line. Both the highway and rail line are funneled through tunnels cut into the adjacent rock with minimal room for further expansion to accommodate a trail. Innovative solutions could include signalization to alert drivers of cyclists traveling through the tunnels, as well as a shuttle service connecting Shoshoni to the nearby town of Thermopolis, which lies just north of Wind River Canyon.

An option exists to bypass Wind River Canyon by traveling over Birdseye Pass along existing dirt roads, connecting into Buffalo Creek Road in Thermopolis. This option trades the constraints of the canyon for a steeper hill traveling over Birdseye Pass. More field research should be done to determine if this option for bypassing Wind River Canyon is feasible.

Trail Gap 65a travels through the western portion of the Wind River Reservation. RTC and local partners should collaborate with the Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho tribes to explore the potential economic development opportunities of a cross-country trail in this area.²⁸

²⁸ State plans indicate a desire to improve coordination with tribes in the Wind River Reservation. The reservation has its own Pedestrian and Walkway Long Range Transportation Plan (2012), which addresses serious pedestrian safety problems on the reservation. The tribe also has a transportation planner with whom RTC and Wyoming partners should coordinate.

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EAST BIGHORN RIVER TRAIL

Total Length (in Miles)	0.7
Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Wyo. (in Miles)	0.7
Trail Type	Greenway
Surface Type	Concrete
Trail Manager	City of Thermopolis

A trail follows the Bighorn River through Thermopolis and provides access to Hot Springs State Park, a major attraction in the Bighorn Basin.

TRAIL GAP 65b – THERMOPOLIS TO GREYBULL

A trail should connect the roughly 50 miles between Thermopolis and Greybull. The trail could follow the active BNSF Railway line, U.S. 20 or another linear feature to be determined. The Bureau of Land Management owns a significant portion of land in the Bighorn Basin that should be explored for additional trail development opportunities. Likewise, a group of public and private volunteers launched the Bighorn Basin Outdoor Recreation Collaborative (BBORC) to promote, enhance and develop sustainable outdoor recreation that encourages responsible use, personal well-being and economic benefit in the Bighorn Basin. BBORC has expressed interest in the Great American Rail-Trail and will be instrumental in helping identify and complete the route through the basin.

Trail Gap 65b also travels through a string of small towns. If a trail route is identified apart from U.S. 20 or the rail line, spurs should be created to take trail users into these towns for food, water and lodging support.

GREYBULL RIVERWALK

Total Length (in Miles)	1.9
Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Wyo. (in Miles)	1.9
Trail Type	Greenway
Surface Type	Concrete
Trail Manager	Town of Greybull
Website	greybull.com/activities.html
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/greybull-riverwalk-

The Greybull Riverwalk travels south to north through the town of Greybull, Wyoming, for 1.9 miles. The trail travels on the east side of Greybull along the Bighorn River. The trail is accessible every five blocks or so throughout town, with a safe crossing provided underneath U.S. 14/Greybull Avenue. The Greybull Riverwalk ends to the north on U.S. 20/U.S. 14/state Route 789/U.S. 16, just north of 13th Avenue.

TRAIL GAP 66 – GREYBULL TO CODY

From the northern end of the Greybull Riverwalk, the Great American Rail-Trail will continue approximately 52 miles west to the city of Cody, Wyoming. The trail could follow U.S. 14, a two- or three-lane highway with an intermittent shoulder that could be used as an interim on-road connector. Additional right-of-way could be available on either side of the highway to construct a separate trail facility to accommodate all trail users between Greybull and Cody.

Another option is to continue north from Greybull to the town of Frannie, following the same highway and rail options as Trail Gap 65. From Frannie, the route could then head southwest into Cody, following U.S. 14 ALT East or an active BNSF Railway corridor with light traffic that parallels the highway. This route option adds significant miles to the trail, but could be a more attractive option should the rail line between Cody and Frannie ever become abandoned and available for a rail-trail conversion.

GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL ROUTE ASSESSMENT WYOMING



Platte River Trail in Wyoming | Photo by TrailLink user ikgatu

BECK LAKE PARK BIKE TRAIL

Total Length (in Miles)	2.0
Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Wyo. (in Miles)	1.0
Trail Type	Greenway
Surface Type	Asphalt
Trail Manager	City of Cody
Website	cityofcody-wy.gov/Facilities/Facility/Details/Beck-Lake-Park-10
TrailLink Map	trailink.com/trail/beck-lake-park-bike-trail

The Beck Lake Park Bike Trail wraps around the perimeter of Beck Lake Park's two reservoir lakes and also parallels a portion of the Cody Canal.

TRAIL GAP 67 – CODY TO WYOMING–MONTANA STATE LINE

At Cody, the trail will travel through town to continue west along U.S. 14 for approximately 127 miles toward Yellowstone National Park and the Wyoming–Montana state line. There are various existing trails and bike lanes in Cody that could help make this transition through town, and additional options should be explored. U.S. 14 West outside of Cody is a two-lane highway with a decent shoulder that can accommodate interim bicycle travel while an off-street trail option is being reviewed further.

Yellowstone National Park presents a unique situation along the Great American Rail-Trail. It is an iconic national park that trail users would be excited to visit along a journey across the country. However, the road system through the park is not accommodating for trail users due to its lack of shoulders, high traffic volumes in the summer and distracted drivers.²⁹ RTC intends to work with its local and federal partners and the administration of Yellowstone National Park to discuss potential options for multiuse trail development through the park. Yellowstone National Park also has a network of existing trails, service roads and sections of historical carriage roads that could potentially be restored and connected to provide a feasible through-route for the Great American Rail-Trail. Further evaluation and research are needed.

The nearby Grand Teton National Park provides a wonderful example of building a multiuse trail to accommodate non-motorized visitors, and the trail has proven itself to be successful. Yellowstone presents unique topographical constraints that may prohibit the construction of a multiuse trail adjacent to the entire road system through the park, but given the well-documented effects of increased automobile travel through the park, a trail could help ameliorate some of those concerns.

Another option to consider in the interim period while an off-street trail through Yellowstone National Park is being explored is a shuttle service. Such a service could shuttle trail users (and their bicycles if applicable) between Cody, Wyoming, and Gardiner, Montana, through Yellowstone. Tour services already exist in those communities, and future services could be tailored explicitly to travelers along the Great American Rail-Trail.

²⁹ The Wyoming Bicycle and Pedestrian Task Force Report recommends that the National Park Service 1) update its standards to ensure 5-foot shoulders on park roads and 2) “evaluate potential bicycle use of additional off-highway pathways and trails” in Yellowstone National Park.