

WYOMING



Casper Rail Trail in Wyoming | Photo courtesy Platte River Trails Trust

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 the state 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.

TABLE 20 GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL MILEAGE IN WYOMING

Total Great American Rail-Trail Existing Trail Miles in Wyo. (% of Total State Mileage)	17.2 (3.4%)
Total Great American Rail-Trail Trail Gap Miles in Wyo. (% of Total State Mileage)	492.2 (96.6%)
Total Trail Gaps in Wyo.	6
Total Great American Rail-Trail Miles in Wyo.	509.4

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 – White River Trail Extension (Neb.–Wyo. State Line to Van Tassell)	2.0
TRAIL GAP 62b – Van Tassell to Douglas	70.7
Douglas Trail System	3.3
TRAIL GAP 62c – Douglas to Glenrock	25.9
Al’s Way	2.1
TRAIL GAP 63 – Glenrock to Evansville	18.5
Casper Rail Trail	6.4
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	509.4
<i>Existing Trail Miles</i>	<i>17.2</i>
<i>Trail Gap Miles</i>	<i>492.2</i>

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.

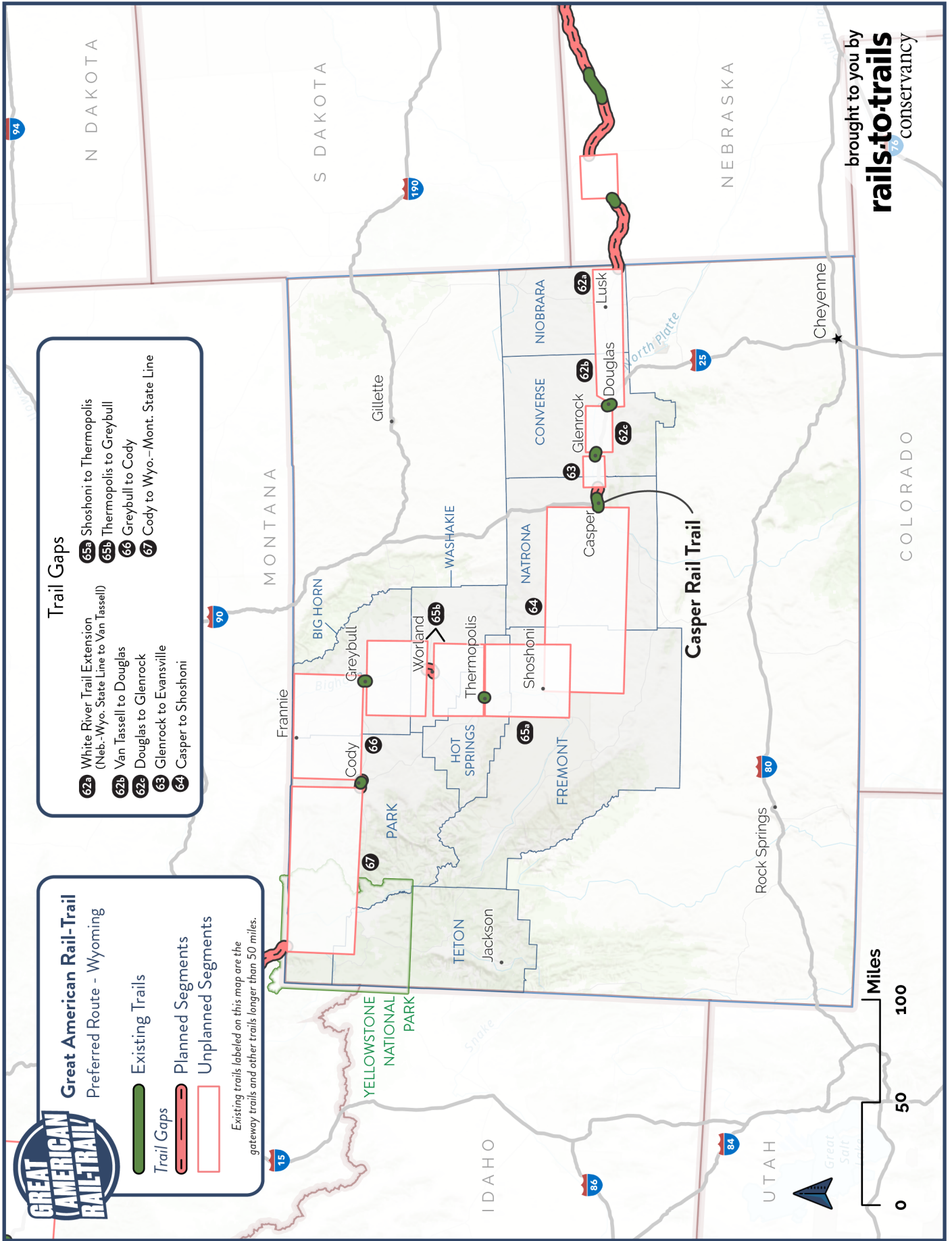
The result of the meeting was the Preferred Wyoming Route selected below from Casper, Wyoming, to Livingston, Montana. This was chosen as the Preferred Wyoming Route to accommodate physical constraints and highlight the potential economic development opportunities of a cross-country trail through the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

At the 2019 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 to 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 to 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 unfeasible. 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, then the official route of the Great American Rail-Trail will move to accommodate the alternate route option.

GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL ROUTE ASSESSMENT 2023

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 systemwide non-motorized trail plan for Wyoming State Parks, Historic Sites, & Trails, prioritizing the trail-building projects to be completed.

TRAIL GAP 62a – WHITE RIVER TRAIL EXTENSION (NEBRASKA–WYOMING STATE LINE TO VAN TASSELL)

In addition to 34 miles of the future White River Trail in Nebraska, the Friends of the White River Trail also maintains ownership over 2 miles of abandoned rail corridor from the Nebraska–Wyoming state line west to the small town of Van Tassell. The group intends to hold onto ownership of the rail corridor until resources become available to complete construction of the trail and keep it maintained.

TRAIL GAP 62b – VAN TASSELL TO DOUGLAS

From Van Tassell, a trail would extend west approximately 70 miles 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/Yellowstone Highway, where it converges with the active BNSF Railway line. A trail heading west could converge 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.

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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 62c – DOUGLAS TO GLENROCK

The abandoned line continues 25.9 miles into Glenrock, where Al's Way was constructed along the corridor in the 1990s. In the summer of 2020, the town of Glenrock completed Al's Way east to the town limits at Meadowlark Street. Work remains to determine ownership of the former Chicago and North Western Transportation Company's railroad corridor connecting Douglas to Glenrock and its potential for a rail-to-trail conversion. A group of local partners has recently submitted a request to the National Park Service Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program to support planning work to identify a corridor and the necessary stakeholders to complete the trail gap between Douglas and Casper, which is a catalyst project of the Great American Rail-Trail.

AL'S WAY

Total Length (in Miles)	2.1
Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Wyo. (in Miles)	2.1
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 2.1-mile Al's Way 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 initially constructed in 1994. In 2020, Al's Way was extended to the eastern and western limits of Glenrock with the assistance of grant funding from the Wyoming Department of Transportation and the Wyoming Business Council.

TRAIL GAP 63 – GLENROCK TO EVANSVILLE

The abandoned rail corridor continues nearly 20 miles west from Glenrock to Evansville, a small town just east of Casper, where the trail intersects the existing Casper Rail Trail. In the summer of 2021, the Casper Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) worked with Platte River Trails to complete a study of the developing rail-trail extension from Edness Kimball Wilkins State Park (in Evansville) west to state Route 256/Hat 6 Road (also in Evansville). The extension would add roughly 2.4 miles of trail eastward from Casper. Following construction of this trail segment, discussions can begin on the best ways to connect the trail eastward to Glenrock.

CASPER RAIL TRAIL

Total Length (in Miles)	6.4
Total Length Along Great American Rail-Trail in Wyo. (in Miles)	6.4
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 6.4 miles through the center of Casper, from state Route 256/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 Transportation Board to permit trail development. Platte River Trails was the entity created to develop the trail since 2002.

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

A new state office building will be constructed near the western end of the Casper Rail Trail at South 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 North Platte River.

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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 further 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 on trail resurfacing and rehabilitation.

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/Yellowstone Highway, 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/Yellowstone Highway has wide shoulders that could accommodate bicycle travel while a fully separated trail is explored in more detail.

The Casper Area MPO is considering a study of an extension of U.S. 20/26/Yellowstone Highway that could include a trail connection heading west out of Casper. An abandoned rail corridor connects the end of the Platte River Trail 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 just over 50 miles north to Thermopolis, Wyoming, to connect to the existing East Bighorn River Trail. The 50-mile gap follows U.S. 20, 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 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.

RTC reviewed a variety of routes to connect the largest expanse of trail gap between Casper, Wyoming, and Livingston, Montana. RTC staff consulted 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.

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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 is needed to 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 citizens, in conjunction with the Wyoming Office of Outdoor Recreation, 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
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 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 Gaps 65a and 65b. From Frannie, the route could then head southwest into Cody, following U.S. 14 ALT 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. There is also enthusiasm in the city of Powell for a trail that could connect into Cody. Similar to BBORC in the Bighorn Basin, the Park County Outdoor Recreation Collaborative (PCORC) was created in 2022 and has expressed interest in helping to identify and complete the route in Park County, Wyoming.

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Platte River Trail in Wyoming | Photo by Mike McLemore

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	codywy.gov/facilities/facility/details/beck-lake-park-10
TrailLink Map	traillink.com/trail/beck-lake-park-bike-trail

Just minutes from downtown Cody, 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

In 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 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.⁶ 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 successful multiuse trail to accommodate non-motorized visitors. 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.

⁶ The 2018 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.