

# Red Grade Trails Community Conversations

Critiques w/Fact Checks, and Add'l Summaries

5-20-2015



## Project Critiques with Fact-Checks

### 1. There has been a general lack of outreach, public engagement, and transparency through SCLT's trail planning process.

**Fact-Check:** FALSE. SCLT has documented extensive outreach with vicinity landowners and the public on this project, dating from February 2014 through May 2015 with recent news regarding the current public comment period on the BLM Environmental Assessment. SCLT has gone above and beyond any public outreach requirements with this project. Please see the attached outreach details.

### 2. There has been a lack of collaboration and communication in reviewing the cumulative project among land management agencies.

**Fact-Check:** FALSE. The USFS and BLM have been in contact dating back to the project's initial concept regarding how environmental reviews would be handled. Multiple staff members attended SCLT Recreation Work Group meetings prior to and during the project development. They determined early on that each agency would complete its own review of agency-specific trails in addition to each addressing the cumulative impacts of the total project. The State of Wyoming has its own set of procedures in place for addressing these types of proposals which SCLT fully complied with, with tremendous support from existing surface lessee.

### 3. The proposed trail design has changed from initial versions.

**Fact-Check:** TRUE. SCLT initially reached out proposing a conceptual, in-house designed, 17 miles of non-motorized, purpose-built trail in the project area. This outreach was done prior to completing professional trail design, and this was highlighted in the outreach documents to landowners. In June 2014, SCLT engaged with a highly-acclaimed professional trail designer Joey Klein who reviewed SCLT's initial trail concept in coordination with vicinity landowner feedback before professionally designing the current 33.8 mile system. The most significant changes to the design (mileage) show the importance of hiring a professional trail designer to examine the full range of safety, liability, user ability, and public enjoyment of the trails. That said, the project vicinity did not change significantly, nor did the main connection concepts (base to poverty flats, main parking areas.). During the early public outreach period, SCLT heard from roughly 30 people in the project vicinity using in-person interviews, on-site visits, emails, and letters to hear their thoughts and concerns about a trail system on public lands along Red Grade Road. At the time, general feedback was overwhelmingly neutral or positive, with roughly 4 residents voicing opposition to the trails in any form. We interpreted the lack of engagement by the majority of others who received letters as neutral or positive towards the project concept and had the professional trail designer complete the design. We felt that the project represented a greater good for population of Sheridan County knowing that we would never have 100% in support of the project. This design was publicly released in September 2014, and SCLT has had an open door to continued public comments since this time. Furthermore, SCLT has put all the potential cards on the table with our comprehensive trail design. We could have piecemealed the project together, from public outreach to design and build but we have chosen instead to put every potentially beneficial trail line on a master plan for cumulative review and critique from the public and land management agencies.

### Summarized changes from 17-mile initial design to current 33.8 mile design.

-2.21 miles added for an equestrian-dedicated trail from the base parking to Poverty Flats

-2.15 miles to replace/re-route existing hiking trails for sustainable design and maintenance  
-5.02 miles added on the far west section to take advantage of 2 existing parking areas, USFS  
-1.1 mile added for possible Expert-only gravity bike trail – the only Expert-only rating  
-5.28 miles added within the original project area to knit together functioning trail system using best trail design techniques of hubs/clusters, prioritizing safety, function and enjoyment of various trail user types.

#### **4. SCLT has withheld certain phases of the project from public purview.**

**Fact-Check:** FALSE. SCLT's final design of the project hasn't changed since August of 2014 and reflects the full scope of the proposal submitted to the BLM October 29, 2014 and currently in the public comment process. This full scope was highlighted in multiple press pieces, with 17-mile versions in July 2014 and 33.8 mile versions in September 2014.

#### **5. SCLT has withheld construction phase details on the project.**

**Fact-Check:** FALSE. SCLT's construction phasing of the project has changed several times solely based on strategic fundraising opportunities and land management review and authorization timelines. When we first started talking about the project, there were 3 phases (State, BLM, USFS) which changed to 6 phases for logistics and fundraising (State, State/BLM, BLM/USFS, and 3 phases within USFS trails).

#### **6. The current proposal is a trail system designed primarily for downhill mountain bikes.**

**Fact-Check:** FALSE. Of the proposed 33.8 total miles, there is a single Expert gravity trail of 1.1 miles and a 2.7-mile Intermediate gravity flow trail with grades of 7-15% (less steep than Red Grade Road itself!). That's just 11% of the total trail miles dedicated to downhill mountain bike use. These trails are for hikers, joggers, bikers and equestrians...locals.

#### **7. SCLT is negligently building an unsafe trail system, which will cause serious user accidents and invite litigation.**

**Fact-Check:** FALSE. SCLT has hired the best to safely design this trail system. SCLT will be employing best management practices to maintain safe conditions, signing etc. In addition, Wyoming has some of the country's strongest inherent-risk recreation law. Couple this with the fact this project is on State, BLM, and USFS lands and similar to hundreds if not thousands of other trail systems, Red Grade Trails will be well-insulated from litigation if properly managed under guiding best management practices, something SCLT is committing to do.

#### **8. SCLT should be required to post a performance bond to ensure any requirements will be met.**

**Fact-Check:** UNNECESSARY. If approved by the BLM, Sheridan County is the entity ultimately responsible for reclamation of the trail ROW if trails are no longer used or maintained for their original purpose.

#### **9. The BLM did not conduct on-site reviews of the proposed trails.**

**Fact-Check:** FALSE. The BLM received GPS and Shapefile data for the entire proposed trail system as part of SCLT's proposal submitted October 2015, and conducted on-site review using this technology in addition to following flagging where visible on the BLM parcel. The majority of trails were flagged, with few exceptions (equestrian, west USFS).

**10. Water quality for vicinity homes will be threatened by human and pet waste associated with trail use.**

**Fact-Check:** FALSE. SCLT will be providing sufficient human waste facilities during times of major trail use. SCLT will work to enforce dog waste pick-up near trailheads. SCLT is working on other projects to protect and improve water quality and quantity of local streams, we trust management agencies to ultimately decide what if any impacts would occur to groundwater with this project and will respond appropriately.

**11. Cultural resources were not evaluated for the project.**

**Fact-Check:** FALSE. Much care was taken concerning cultural resources. Trails were designed by a professional accustomed to identifying cultural resources in the field. However, BLM archaeologists conducted cultural clearances along the proposed ROW on BLM. SCLT worked with USFS archaeologists to avoid sites on USFS lands during design phase. In addition, SCLT will be conducting formal cultural clearance on State Lands before commencing any trail construction.

**12. The project will create visible scars on the face of the Big Horns, making it look like a ski-resort.**

**Fact-Check:** FALSE. The trails are incredibly well designed and avoid open, steep terrain remaining well hidden within existing stands of timber, vegetation, and topographic folds on the landscape. We're happy to take anyone up for a tour to prove this point. As per the BLM EA, there will be some limited visual impacts from the trails and minimal tree taken. The trails will not be visible from Big Horn, nor Interstate 90. Furthermore, this area already has Red Grade Road cutting through the visual resource, a major power line and multiple homes and outbuildings in the project vicinity. The visual impacts are being grossly exaggerated on this project.

**13. The 10 different parking areas are excessive and unwarranted.**

**Fact-Check:** FALSE. The proposal identifies 7 parking areas to serve the full build-out of the trail system. Of these 7 parking areas, 4 already exist and will be enhanced for safety and usability. 3 new parking areas are proposed, and were located sensitively on the landscape to avoid any viewsheds from homes/cabins in the area. These parking areas will comprehensively improve non-motorized and motorized parking, sanitary conditions, and overall safety of Red Grade Road.

**14. SCLT is “kingdom building” with this project.**

**Fact-Check:** FALSE. SCLT is in fact community building. SCLT's Board of Directors and staff have long histories of participating and investing in the communities of Sheridan County. We balance conservation with recreation and historic preservation to bring maximum benefit to our communities in the county. We have an eye to the future, and view this as an opportunity to choose how our area will grow vs. being reactionary to growth. Making public access easier and more alluring to residents and visitors makes for a healthier community and enhances the economy by attracting tourists and businesses seeking locations with high quality recreation opportunities.

**15. Red Grade access area can't handle an additional 8,000 users per year.**

**Fact-Check:** CLARIFICATION: Red Grade access will continue to see additional public users regardless of the Red Grade Trails project. The 8,000 users/year identified in BLM's EA reflects the full build-out attraction of the trails (33.8 miles), and averages just 22 users/day. The Red Grade trails will see far less than the 8,000 users/year as it is developed and will be developed in-line with user response/needs. In addition, the Red Grade Trails project addresses enhancements to existing parking

areas with multiple types of user (motorized/non). Finally, it improves safety for the public using Red Grade Road to access public lands and in many cases will result in few vehicles using Red Grade Road to reach USFS lands for recreation.

**16. Homeowners in the area will be negatively impacted by hunters.**

**Fact-Check:** FALSE. Homeowners in the area are already impacted by hunters and recreational shooters and this was repeatedly conveyed to us during outreach. As part of the larger project, SCLT has had conversations with vicinity landowners about limited use of firearms on State land. In addition, the BLM EA states that wildlife will disperse from the project vicinity, which may make for less interest in hunting on public lands in the area. Trespassers will continue to trespass, but SCLT will work hard to ensure that anyone crossing from public to private lands will have no excuse for doing so. Furthermore, trails in these areas are likely to reduce hunting and not increase it in the project vicinity.

**17. Trail users and campers will increase wildfire danger on the property.**

**Fact-Check:** CLARIFICATION. SCLT has expressed a willingness to work with landowners and the BLM to restrict camping on the BLM land in the project vicinity, and to limit fire on BLM as well. The BLM considers these as separate management actions apart from the trail proposal but SCLT is equally interested in limiting these public uses. The BLM EA identifies a decrease in wildfire risk with the project, due to trails being fire-breaks and allowing for easier access to much of this difficult terrain in the even of a fire.

**18. There should be a local public hearing on this project.**

**Fact-Check:** CLARIFICATION: SCLT did outreach, revised trail designs based on input, and the BLM public comment period is currently open through June 5, 2015. SCLT will listen and revise designs if appropriate. In addition, the USFS will have a similar process including disbursement of the project's environmental assessment and a public comment period. SCLT will listen and revise if appropriate. Both the BLM and USFS are required to address legitimate and substantive comments related to the proposal before issuing any Decision of Record.

**19. SCLT has ignored local feedback on this project.**

**Fact-Check:** FALSE. SCLT made significant and specific concessions based upon feedback from vicinity landowners as well as other community members which were relayed to the trail designer. These included keeping proposed trails well away from property boundaries, using existing parking areas for trailheads whenever possible, constructing new parking areas to mitigate negative impacts to private landowners from congestion issues on public land, avoiding trail placement on bare and visible slopes, hiding trails within vegetation and topography, designing trails for shared-use among hikers/joggers, bikers and equestrians, moving sections of trail so they would not be visible from specific properties, and more. We have taken great care in being a good neighbor on public lands in the project vicinity, in some cases not even displaying the full ownership of public lands in the area in deference to the existing homes in close proximity.

## **Additional Messaging from SCLT**

### **Red Grade Trails Purpose and Need**

The purpose of this project is to create a 33-mile, purpose-built, non-motorized trail network with easy access at the base of the Bighorn Mountains. This trail system will offer hikers, bikers, runners, and equestrians new and improved opportunities to enjoy State, BLM and US Forest Service lands within 30 minutes of downtown Sheridan. There is a growing desire from Sheridan County communities for non-motorized trail opportunities that restrict motorized use and feature looping stacked trails with a variety

of terrain and ability levels. In addition to the physical creation of trails, this project will also improve safety along Red Grade Road by improving parking areas to better serve both motorized and non-motorized users in the vicinity, while focusing non-motorized recreation away from the roadway to further minimize potential safety conflicts.

The need for this project has been expressed over the past 2 years by the local recreational community through the Sheridan Community Land Trust's (SCLT) Recreation Work Group (RWG). SCLT's RWG works to develop non-motorized trails and new public access in Sheridan County within the larger SCLT mission. The project has broad support in the community, with various entities representative of large swaths of public sentiment having written letters in support of this proposal. These entities include Sheridan County Board of County Commissioners, Sheridan County Chamber of Commerce, Sheridan Travel and Tourism, Sheridan College Learn Outdoor's Program, Bomber Mountain Cycling Association, Forward Sheridan, and more.

### **Vicinity Landowner Feedback**

SCLT has continuously maintained our priority of designing, building, and maintaining the best non-motorized project for Red Grade vicinity. While we have encouraged many of the private landowners in the area to come alongside us to be sure we're addressing all potential legitimate concerns, we have seen a decrease in their interest to truly improve the project. We view the majority of vicinity landowner concerns to stem from a "Not-in-my-backyard" perspective. In reality, every American has an interest in the public lands in this vicinity, and the local community should especially be given the appropriate opportunity with correct processes in place to develop the best project for the greater good on these easily-accessed public lands.

### **Clarifying Construction Timelines**

While SCLT had initially hoped to construct the full 33.8 miles of trail within a five-year time-period, SCLT will only construct trails upon proper authorization and effective fundraising, constructing sections to provide for complete and proper-functioning trails without the need for adding possible future phases.

SCLT will use the community of trail users and partners to determine capacity and timelines for future construction. If a trail isn't getting anticipated use, SCLT will not make additional investments of time, money, and maintenance liability. On the other hand, if trail use is clearly supporting construction of additional trail segments, SCLT will react to raise necessary funds for proximate phases.

### **Article on State Recreation Laws**

<http://www.wyofile.com/enjoy-wyoming-at-your-own-risk-does-state-law-give-too-much-protection-to-outdoor-recreation-providers/>

### **Trail Specifications**

Please keep in mind that we are not building 50' wide roads...we are building 12" – 48" natural-surfaced trail using small trail-specific machinery and hand labor. Below is an example (developed in partnership with the Wyoming State Trails Department) of the level of detail that SCLT will provide throughout the entire trail system for construction, with additional specifications included within formal bid documents.

## **Trail Specifications Detailed:**

### **Trail Name: Lower Loop Trail (IMBA Green rating)**

**Trail Length:** 5,044 feet

**Trail Elevation:** Ranges from 5,726 feet to 5,892 feet.

**Desired Trail Experience:** Smooth and wide rolling contour biking and hiking optimized trail.

**Tread Width:** 36 to 48-inches (trail width may change based upon slope and sideslope conditions)

**Trail Cross Sections:** Where the side-slopes are 0-10% a simple trail tread with outslope of 3-5% will be used. Although unanticipated, when side-slope exceeds 10% a full-bench trail cross section will be used with 5-7% outslipping. The backslope may be appropriate so as to maintain a stable condition. In general, backslopes will be around a 1.5:1 slope ratio.

**Corridor Width:** 48 to 72 inches in width, 72 to 140 inches in height.

**Tread Rugosity:** Native mineral soil with cross slope of 3-7% for sheet drainage. All organic materials shall be removed leaving an even, compacted, uniform surface free of indentations. Organic materials shall be scattered off of the trail on the downhill side. Organic materials are not to be used for cut and fill.

**Average Gradient:** 5% or less

**Maximum Sustained Grade:** 8% or less

**Maximum Grade:** 15% or less

**Grade Reversals:** Grade reversals will be constructed to remove water from the trail tread. Grade reversals can include both grade dips and rolling grade dips. More grade reversals will be needed on steeper sections of trail and less when the grade is under 5%. Water bars will not be used in the construction of the trail.

**Turns:** #11, in-sloped platforms and/or climbing turns depending on site conditions.

**Soil Composition:** See attached soils map data and site pictures.

**Vegetation Composition:** Lower section is alpine meadow while the higher elevation section has scattered ponderosa pine, small maples, willows, and aspens.

**Vegetation Removal:** Cutting and removal of living trees greater than 4" in diameter will be minimized. SCLT will work with the Contractor to address tree removal. Whenever possible, trees in excess of 4" in diameter will be used as anchor trees adjacent to the trail. Tree stumps in the trail tread will be dug up and the hole filled with dirt and compacted to match adjacent trail levels. Trees and brush cut from the corridor shall be removed to distance of at least 30 feet from the centerline on the downhill side of the trail. Cut trees and brush shall be cut up so they lay near the ground, not exceeding three feet in height.

**Trail Construction Standards:** Standards shall be in accordance with the International Mountain Bicycling Association, *Trail Solutions: IMBA's Guide to Building Sweet Singletrack*, 2004.

**Trailhead and Signage:** The trailhead and trail signs will be constructed and installed by SCLT following completion of the trail construction.

### ***Additional Site Condition and Construction Notes***

- There are 3 drainage crossings of intermittent streams which will need rock armoring. While some rocks may be available on-site for armoring, there are commercial gravel pits in close proximity to the project.
  
- Side-slopes for the northernmost 450-feet are extreme, while overall side-slope varies from 10%-30% for the remainder of the trail.

- Contractor shall clear and grub the trail corridor and shape the trail tread to include the construction of backslopes, embankment and backfill, climbing turns, drainage structures, armoring structures etc. leaving an even, compacted, uniform surface free of indentations. Native materials such as rocks, trees, soils, etc. within 100-feet of the general trail corridor can be used to construct trail features/structures when it has been determined that their use will not adversely impact the natural resources on the site based on a field review between Project Manager and Contractor during the field design and layout approval. Native materials from outside of the 100-foot trail corridor may be used with approval from the Project Manager. All trails have been flagged and corridors established. GPS files will be provided upon request at any time during the bidding and award process.
- The general trail corridor has been laid out, field-marked, and GPS'd by IMBA's Trail Solutions designer at least every 30-75 feet. This flagline denotes the desired route. The Contractor shall be allowed to place the actual trail centerline up to 10 feet on either side of the flagline. The contractor shall field layout and wire pin flag the trail using curvilinear design principals to fit the specifications as previously stated while staying within the trail corridor as indicated above. SCLT will approve any changes in location of the general trail corridor in the field. Approval of the trail's field layout and flagging will be contingent on Contractor meeting the specifications of the trail as laid out in this scope of work. SCLT staff will walk the trail centerline with Contractor for final approval of field design prior to construction.
- Visual damage to vegetation, either woody or herbaceous, must be avoided when possible outside of the corridor. Cutting blades shall not exceed 48 inches.
- Equipment must be cleaned prior to commencing construction to ensure that weeds and invasives are not transported from off-site projects.
- Suggested construction method is a trail dozer or mini-x with full cleans in the meadows section, keeping visual disturbance to a minimum.