



Metal beams protrude from the water on the Tongue River ahead of an SCLT volunteer's kayak.

## Taking Action, Removing Hazards From Waterways

Thanks to a 2015 grant from the Wyoming State Parks & Cultural Resources' Recreational Trails Program (RTP) **and generous support from members like you**, we have \$50,000 in-hand and are ready to begin work to create the Tongue River Water Trail.

Our vision for the Tongue River Water Trail (TRWT) project is to enhance 90+/- miles of Goose Creeks and Tongue River public waterways for non-motorized water recreation.

The first step toward this goal is to partner with local landowners to remove dangerous, in-stream debris. We cannot and do not intend to remove historic riprap that serves to stabilize the stream banks.

However, we would like to remove any metal and concrete debris in the waterway itself that currently poses a safety risk to boaters, not to mention a liability to landowners.



If you are a landowner that owns land along (or under) reaches of the proposed TRWT (see TRWT extent map on following page), and are interested in having dislodged riprap or other debris removed, please contact us at 673-4702.

With your help, we hope to leverage public and private dollars to begin removing hazards as favorable water levels allow throughout the summer and make progress toward improving the safety and navigability of our local public waterways.



In addition to working with landowners and partners to remove hazardous debris, we are also launching a Boater-Friendly Fence Grant Program for landowners to take advantage of financing opportunities to improve fences and allow for safe boater passage.

Nearly two dozen barbed-wire and electric fences currently cross TRWT stream reaches. These fences can be extremely hazardous to boaters paddling on these public waterways. SCLT is interested in visiting with landowners about constructing boater-friendly fences. Meanwhile, SCLT is seeking permission from individual landowners to place signs at fencing locations to aid boaters with identifying these locations.

**If you are a landowner interested in learning more, please contact us at (307) 673 - 4702 or email Colin Betzler at [director@sheridanclt.org](mailto:director@sheridanclt.org).**

## Boater-friendly Fence Project by Owen Bensel

In 2013-2014 I had the pleasure of planning and building a boater-friendly fence on the Tongue River near Dayton and Ranchester for my Eagle Scout project with Troop 116.



My goal was to replace a barbed wire cattle fence that spanned the river, hazardous to boaters and a maintenance issue for livestock operators. The Sheridan Community Land Trust provided funding to build a steel cable-and PVC fence that



Extent map of the Tongue River Water Trail, excerpted from the TRWT Assessment, available to the public on our website at [www.sheridanclt.org](http://www.sheridanclt.org).

would allow for safe boat passage while keeping cows contained. Home Depot donated much of the supplies and Montana-Dakota Utilities donated used power-poles for fence supports.

Many great volunteers from both my troop and community helped out with the effort. The first time we built the fence, weight load was an issue as it spanned more than 70 feet across the river channel. I had the opportunity to revise the initial design when record runoff in spring of 2014 destroyed what I thought was a heavy duty fence. We salvaged materials and rebuilt the fence, this time with lighter 5/8 inch nylon rope in the center more flexible to higher flows.

Barbed wire fences span many of our local rivers to control cattle, but are hazardous to boaters by their presence or when they wash out each year and are deposited downstream. Through researching designs and building my own boater-friendly livestock fence, I've come to conclude that these fences are a great way to keep rivers open for public recreation while satisfying the needs of landowners for managing livestock.

*Owen Bensel is a 2014 graduate of Tongue River High School and is currently attending the University of Wyoming in Laramie.*

*Sheridan Community Land Trust works to preserve our heritage of open spaces, healthy rivers and creeks, working ranches, wildlife habitat, and vibrant history, while expanding non-motorized recreation opportunities to connect people with the places they love.*

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# Tongue River Initiative

## Intern Partnership with Yale



Leanne Wiess, a first year student at the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, will be spending the summer in Sheridan County working with SCLT on two exciting conservation projects under our Tongue River Initiative (TRI) partnership.

Leanne will use remote sensing to document locations of Russian Olive in the Tongue River watershed. After developing a map, TRI partners hope to work with landowners beginning in the upper reaches of the watershed to remove Russian Olive and replant native species.

In addition, Leanne will be developing a monitoring plan for TRI's riparian fencing project on the Buyok

Ranch near Monarch. This will allow TRI partners to provide landowners with on-the-ground data regarding the pros and cons of incorporating a riparian fencing project into grazing management on their property.



Nate Schmeiser puts the finishing touches on the Buyok fencing project on March 31<sup>st</sup>.

## Turning Lines On the Map Into Trails On the Ground



3-D rendering of Phase I of Red Grade Trails, two looping trails on State Land to be completed this summer.

Thanks to your generous support and a \$50,000 grant awarded by the Wyoming State Parks & Cultural Resources' Recreational Trails Program (RTP), SCLT anticipates completing the first two miles of trail for the Red Grade Trails System by September! We are currently advertising for bids from qualified trail contractors and plan to award a bid in May for construction this summer.

Meanwhile, planning and fundraising continues for subsequent phases of the proposed 33-mile trail project. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) expects to release an Environmental Analysis (EA) of the project in April for a 30-day public

comment period. SCLT encourages interested parties to submit comments to the BLM regarding the project. The BLM expects to issue the Decision Record (DR) in late spring.

SCLT plans to submit a grant to the Wyoming Business Council this June. If awarded, it would fund 50% of our 2016 construction costs to build eight additional trail miles and three trailheads. This grant requires a 50% match from SCLT, so your continued support is critical for us to continue making progress on this exciting project.

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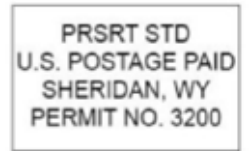
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## Join us for an event!

### Antler Shed Hunt

Saturday, April 18<sup>th</sup>

9 am - 1 pm, includes lunch

Join us at the Vanderhoeffs' Horseshoe Ranch. We've expanded the day to offer guided hikes in addition to antler hunting on the ranch. *RSVP required to [claire@sheridanclt.org](mailto:claire@sheridanclt.org) or 673-4702 by Thursday, April 16<sup>th</sup>. This event is open to current SCLT members and a friend only; space is limited, so sign up now!*



The Thoney family 2014.



### UNPLUG Week

Monday, May 18<sup>th</sup> - Friday, May 22<sup>nd</sup>

**Times and events vary; details available on SCLT's website**

Plan to UNPLUG from technology for a week and attend five FREE fun events hosted by SCLT and local partners that get you and your kids outside! Thanks to a grant from the Wyoming Community Foundation, this year is sure to be extra special.

### Groundbreaking Ceremony - Red Grade Trails System

**Date To-Be-Determined Following Bid Award in May**

Be there to witness the start of trail construction for the Red Grade Trails System that you helped make happen!



### Tongue River Clean-up - Take Out the Trash!

**Saturday, July 11<sup>th</sup> - Save the Date!**

Join us to kick off the Tongue River Water Trail with a campout and river clean-up headquartered at Connor Battlefield in Ranchester. Trash weigh-ins, food, friends, music, and more! Escape to the river during Rodeo!