



**THE
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
FOR A BETTER BIGFORK**

PO BOX 486 · BIGFORK, MT 59911 · 406-837-5888

August 14, 2017
Sent via U.S. Mail

PacifiCorp
825 NE Multnomah Street
Suite 1700
Portland, OR 97232
E-Mail: jasmine.murphy@Pacifcorp.com

RE: *Community Foundation for a Better Bigfork's Proposal to Improve and Expand the Swan River Nature Trail in Bigfork, Montana*

Dear Ms. Murphy:

Please find the attached Proposal submitted by Bigfork Development Company d/b/a Community Foundation for a Better Bigfork ("CFBB"). We are excited to present to PacifiCorp our Proposal to significantly enhance the existing recreation amenity in the Bigfork Dam Project Area and establish a system of trails to be known as the Bigfork Nature Trails.

Please call me with any questions or concerns regarding our Proposal. We look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,



Paul Mutascio
President

The Bigfork Nature Trails Network Recreation Proposal

Submitted to PacifiCorp

By: Community for a Better Bigfork (CFBB)

August 14, 2017

I. Project Area Information:

Tract Name: PacifiCorp Bigfork Dam Property

**Applicant: Bigfork Development Company d/b/a
Community Foundation for a Better Bigfork (CFBB)**

P.O. Box 486

Bigfork, MT 59911

Project Contact: Paul Mutascio

pmutascio@centurytel.net

p. 406.261.1049

Landowner: PacifiCorp, an Oregon Corporation

825 NE Multnomah St. Suite 1700

Portland, OR 97232

Project Contact: Jasmine Murphy, Property Agent, Real Estate Management

Jasmine.Murphy@pacificorp.com

p. 503.813.6211

Tract Location: Flathead County, Montana Certificate of Survey 14208 Parcels 1-6, 11-13, 15-19 in the NE 1/4 of SE ¼ Township 27 Range 20, Section 36 and Township 27, Range 19, Sections 31 and 32

II. Project Summary

This **Bigfork Nature Trails Network Recreation Proposal** ("Proposal"), submitted for consideration by Bigfork Development Company d/b/a Community Foundation for a Better Bigfork ("CFBB") seeks to expand and enhance the existing recreational amenities in and around the Bigfork Hydroelectric Dam project area: (1) by enhancing and expanding the Swan River Nature Trail to create a connected trail network between Bigfork to the west, the Swan Road Bike Path to the east and trails on the north and south sides of the Swan River, together to be known as "Bigfork Nature Trails" or "Nature Trails;" and (2) to discuss options for permanently protecting the area as open space. The Nature Trail network is located entirely on real property owned by PacifiCorp.

This Proposal outlines the Nature Trails system consisting of 3-4 miles of existing trail and 7.5 miles of new natural surface, multi-use non-motorized 3-4 ft. wide trail, a pedestrian bridge, and a connection from the Nature Trail system to Sliter Park. The multi-use trail will include hiking, biking and running, but will not include equestrian uses. The proposal includes two critical connection points:

1. The Sliter Park Connection is a boardwalk-type structure adjacent but separate from the face of the power plant (or alternative route providing a critical connection from Sliter Park to the Nature Trail network).
2. The Swan River Connection is a proposed pedestrian footbridge across the Swan River near the dam that connects the Nature Trails on the north and south sides of the Swan River. These two elements would provide a critical connection to downtown Bigfork, as well as allow for greater trail access and utilization of the PacifiCorp lands for recreation purposes.

The Project will take place in five phases, as depicted in the Bigfork Nature Trail Network, Trail Phase Plan, Attachment 1. **PLEASE NOTE:** For ease of description, we have designated the trails by color. The actual trail names will be determined at a later date:

Phase	Segment	Description	Projected Start Date
1	River Loops Trails ("Orange")	3.9 miles of new and existing loop trail on the north and south side of the Swan River	2017
1A	North Side River Loops	These "single-track" trails would connect to the Swan River Nature Trail, providing more trail diversity and expanding opportunities for enjoyment of this area north of the river.	2018

1B	South Side River Loop	Improvement and expansion of the existing primitive nature trail to form a loop network along the south shore of the river.	2017
2	North Reservoir Trail (“Red”)	1.7 miles of new loop trail located along the northeastern border of the PacifiCorp land connecting on the east and west end to the existing Swan River Nature Trail.	2018
3	South Reservoir Trail (“Yellow”)	1.25 miles of new trail between the south shore of the reservoir and Highway 209.	2019
4	Swan River Pedestrian Bridge	Pedestrian footbridge at location TBD downstream of dam to provide connection between north and south trail systems, and provide location for whitewater spectators	Subject to available funding and necessary approvals
5	Sliter Park Connection	Boardwalk type structure to provide critical connection between Sliter Park and the Nature Trail system.	Subject to available funding and necessary approvals

III. Regulatory Background

PacifiCorp Power, a Berkshire Hathaway Energy company, currently operates the Bigfork Hydroelectric Project, which is considered a “smaller” development producing approximately 4.15 megawatts of hydropower. Operations began in 1902.

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (“FERC”) originally issued PacifiCorp’s license for the operation and maintenance of its hydroelectric facility in 1976, and relicensed the facility July 25, 2003 for fifty (50) years.¹ With regard to recreation facilities, the Order expressly allowed PacifiCorp to convey title to “recreational development,” and incorporated the Recreation Resource Management Plan (“RRMP”) and the Settlement Agreement (“SA”).² It also authorizes PacifiCorp to allow other entities to propose and fund additional recreation site improvements.

PacifiCorp and various stakeholders (National Park Service, Montana Fish, Wildlife, & Parks, Bigfork Chamber of Commerce, Bigfork Whitewater Festival Organization, Bigfork Development Company (now CFBB), Flathead Lakers, and the Flathead Whitewater Association) negotiated

¹ Order Issuing New License for FERC Project No. 2652-007 (July 25, 2003).

² *Id.* §

the SA in response to PacifiCorp's application to renew its license.³ The SA requires PacifiCorp to lease to CFBB the Swan River Nature Trail, to lease Sliter Park to Flathead County, and to "allow other entities to propose and fund recreation site improvements and maintenance of such improvements on PacifiCorp lands."⁴

PacifiCorp's Recreation Resource Management Plan (RRMP), as required by the 2003 FERC Licensing Order was adopted in 2004 and updated in 2015 (Recreation Resource Management Plan Revision (the "Revision")). The Revision reviewed the progress made on implementing the recreation facility improvements identified in the original RRMP. One key vision in the document is the "recognition that non-motorized trail use is an important recreation activity in the project area . . . and a desire to maintain and/or improve the experience now enjoyed by residents of Bigfork and visitors to the project area."⁵ Additionally, the Revision updated the status of the various recreation improvements PacifiCorp agreed to complete in the original RRMP.

Below is a summary of relevant provisions in various FERC regulatory documents:

- a.** FERC Order (104 FERC No. 62,059) issued July, 2003:
 - i.** Directs the completion of items outlined in the Settlement Agreement (§ 27);
 - ii.** Allows the authorization of other recreation improvements under its delegated authority (§ 29).
 - iii.** Requires a noxious weed control plan (Article 410)
 - iv.** Requires the adoption of a Recreation Management Plan that incorporates the terms of the Settlement Agreement (Article 411);
 - v.** Requires a Historic Preservation Plan for the historic uses, the powerhouse and associated structures, and other cultural resources (Article 412);
 - vi.** Delegates authority to approve certain types of land uses without Commission approval. (Article 414). Under Article 414 (d) of the Order, PacifiCorp has the authority to undertake activities without prior Commission approval, subject to the conditions described in Article 414(e).
- b.** Settlement Agreement. Requires a recreation resource management plan be adopted and authorizes the development, management and maintenance of recreation amenities as described in detail in Section 3, attached hereto as Attachment 2.
- c.** Recreation Resource Management Plan. RRMP incorporates the provisions of the Settlement Agreement and guides the management of the recreation resource. The RRMP states with regards to the Nature Trail system:

³ Bigfork Hydroelectric Project Settlement Agreement (Nov. 7, 2002).

⁴ *Id.* § 3.9.

⁵ 12-Year Recreation Resource Management Plan Revision – Bigfork Hydroelectric Project, § 1.2 (Oct. 29, 2015).

- i. Requires capital improvements and programmatic actions;
- ii. Incorporates the terms of the Settlement Agreement but provides flexibility to implement as necessary;
- iii. Allows consideration of additional recreation projects;
- iv. Adopted by Order Modifying and Approving Recreation Resource Management Plan under Article 411 (111 FERC Sec. 62,335).

IV. Nature Trail Existing Conditions and Future Concepts

Essential to this Proposal is the concept of “connection”—connecting the Nature Trail system to downtown Bigfork, to the north and south sides of the Swan River and to other area recreation trail systems. The following narrative addresses each of the key elements, depicted on the Existing Conditions and Future Concepts map (see Attachment 3) that would be necessary to accomplish the goal of connectivity.

1. Grand Dr. As the main access point to the heavily used Swan River Nature Trail, parking is an issue here and has been for decades. Local landowners, including the Whitney family, and the Bigfork community desire to find additional parking at other locations to decrease congestion in general and to disperse use to other areas to aid in appropriate stewardship.

The eastern portion of the Swan River Nature Trail is located on an abandoned roadway and, per Section 3.5.2 of the 2004 RRMP, is dedicated by easement to the CFBB (formerly BDC) for the life of the FERC license. The western portion of the trail is located on the property owned by Whitney Bigfork LLC and is dedicated by easement to PacifiCorp, as well as leased to CFBB.

2. Sliter Park Connection. Sliter Park, under lease by PacifiCorp to Flathead County, currently lacks connectivity to the Nature Trail system. This Proposal would connect the Nature Trail to Sliter Park by boardwalk located along the front of and adjacent to the Powerhouse Building. There may be other solutions that would connect Sliter Park to the Nature Trail, but the terrain is difficult and the Powerhouse, related flumes, and power generating structures pose a challenge. Creating a connection to Sliter Park would provide another important point of entry to the recreation system which would help alleviate the parking issue at Grand Dr. and would also provide for a connection from the trail to downtown Bigfork, thereby enhancing both business exposure and the trail user’s experience.

3. Swan River Nature Trail East Access. The Swan River Nature Trail East Access currently provides limited and unorganized parking spaces at the eastern end. Under this proposal, CFBB seeks to pursue the capital improvement outlined, but never completed in the RRMP Action Plan for Kearney Rapids overflow and the Swan River East which included 10-15 parking spaces sufficient for trailers. These additional parking spaces would help alleviate the parking issue at Grand Dr. Additionally, the East Access area has potential for connecting to the Bike/Pedestrian Path on the Swan River Road.

V. Connections to Area Parks, Trails, and Public Lands:

The community of Bigfork is surrounded by some of Montana's most significant natural and historic resources, but those resources, while proximate to the community, are not connected safely by non-motorized pathways. See Connections to Parks, Trails, and Public Lands map attached as Attachment 4. This trail proposal could facilitate those connections by creating a solid centerpiece of non-motorized recreation amenities.

1. Wayfarer's State Park. The entrance to Wayfarer's State Park is located approximately one half (.5) mile from Sliter Park. Wayfarers is a sixty-seven (67) acre park with an existing 1.3 mile non-motorized public trail system. The Park received approximately 156,803 visitors in 2016 and has expressed willingness to lend support, technical expertise, and access to statewide grant programs.
2. Bigfork Rotary Bike Trail. The planned bicycle path between Echo Lake and Bigfork would connect the east portion of the Nature Trail system to the county system. The Bigfork Rotary, the trail project lead, has had difficulty with securing an acceptable trail design in the county right-of-way and with private landowners in the area.
3. State and Federal Lands. Efforts have been underway for the last few years to expand "front-country" developed hiking, biking and walking opportunities. In partnership with neighboring landowners, the community is seeking to connect the town with the open spaces and forests of the surrounding public lands.

VI. Current Non-Motorized Trail Use of the Property

- a) North side of river. The existing Swan River Nature Trail is located on the northerly portion of PacifiCorp land north of the Swan River. The Trail is two (2) miles long and was created on the bed of an abandoned county road formerly known as Bigfork Canyon Road. The Trail overlooks the Swan River, the Bigfork dam, and the famous "Wild Mile" section of the Swan River. It provides river access, a vault toilet approximately one (1) mile from the east and west ends of the trail, and several picnic tables. The Trail can be accessed from the Whitney property on the western end of the trail, and from a small trailhead adjoining Swan River Road on the eastern end of the trail, known as the East Connection.

The western portion of the Swan River Trail lies on Whitney Big Fork LLC property and has served as a public trail since the roadway was abandoned as a county road in 1995. At that point, the Whitney family deeded an Easement to PacifiCorp. As part of the Settlement Agreement process, PacifiCorp agreed to allow public access through their Easement for the life of PacifiCorp's FERC license. Additionally, CFBB has a separate lease with the Whitney family entered into in 1989, which allows CFBB to use and maintain the Swan River Nature Trail for a term of ninety-nine (99) years with automatic ninety-nine (99) year renewals.

The eastern portion of the Nature Trail is located within a designated recreation easement area on Parcels 15, 16, 17, 18, and 19 of Certificate of Survey 14208, the northern boundary of which is the northern edge of the abandoned roadway known as Bigfork Canyon Road. The location of the easement is identified in Exhibit G to the Final Recreation and Resource Management Plan dated June 18, 2004, in a document titled "Legal description for

recreation easement along Swan River east of Bigfork, Montana, January 15, 2004.” The portion of the Swan River Nature Trail located on PacifiCorp lands, described in Section 3.6 of the Settlement Agreement, is referred to as a “Leased Property” which terminates upon expiration of the current FERC license.

Under the terms of the governing documents, PacifiCorp’s obligations regarding the Swan River Nature Trail are to:

Grade, gravel and compact the trail as necessary and not more frequently than once annually to help provide a surface relatively free of standing water and potholes; maintain ditches and culverts to minimize standing water and water flow across the Nature Trail; remove fallen trees across the Nature Trail; and provide periodic litter pickup. ⁶

- b) South side of river: Located east of Bigfork on Hwy 209, Pacific Park is a developed recreation site with picnic sites, a vault toilet, parking for seven (7) vehicles, engineered access to the south shore of the Swan River for Whitewater Festival spectators, and access to the South Shore River Trail, an existing fishing access and primitive user built trail. In addition to the existing improvements, more recreation enhancements were identified for Pacific Park during the SA process. The additional enhancements that have not been completed include construction of a group use shelter (sized to cover six picnic tables), an accessible gravel path, and ten (10) additional parking stalls. It may be advisable to revise the development plan for Pacific Park to address current needs.

The South Shore River access, just east of Pacific Park on Hwy 209, provides additional parking, and pedestrian access to the Swan River immediately above and below the dam. There are connections to both sides of the dam for “car top boat access” (kayaks, canoes, SUP’s), as well as a non-motorized connection to Pacific Park via a gated, un-paved maintenance road. There are no toilet facilities at the South Shore River Access. Additional improvements that were identified in the SA, but not completed, include extending an accessible pedestrian path below the dam approximately 250 feet to connect into the existing primitive path.

Sliter Park is immediately downstream of the Bigfork Hydro Power Plant and is currently leased by Flathead County, although CFBB reimburses the County. Sliter Park has a playground, picnic tables, toilet facilities, a stage, and a Memorial Park. The lease was renewed in 2006, and the Park is maintained under a cooperative agreement between Flathead County and CFBB.

Existing primitive trails are located on both the north and south sides of the river, downstream from the dam. These trails have provided historical access to the river for general fishing and recreation.

In 2007, CFBB worked with PacifiCorp and the Whitney family to install ADA compliant concrete picnic tables and pet waste stations in the Swan River Nature Trail area, which are

⁶ SA, Section 3.6

maintained by CFBB. In the last decade, CFBB has also installed four (4) picnic tables in the power house area, installed ADA accessible benches, and repaved the entry road at a cost to the community of more than \$10,000.

VII. Trail Design

The trail will be designed as a non-motorized natural and soft surface trail system comprised of stacked loops and connections to give users variety and choice when using the system. The trail tread will be 3-4 feet wide, will be constructed by hand and by mini-excavator, and will avoid wetlands and wet areas. It will provide appropriate lines of sight for biking, hiking and walking, and other non-motorized uses. Well-designed and constructed trails minimize user conflicts, erosion potential, and maintenance needs.

Many factors go into trail design, including slopes, aspect, vegetation, hydrology, and an understanding of human psychology. A good trail system must be designed “on the ground”, rather than through satellite or topographic imagery. Successful trails utilize micro-topography that doesn’t reveal itself at the satellite level. Small variations in slope, as well as “anchors” such as individual trees, boulders, or other natural features, all are incorporated into the alignment of successful trails. The main tasks of good trail design are 1) keeping water off the trail to the greatest extent possible, and 2) keeping people on the trail to the greatest extent possible. Keeping water off the trail requires an understanding of hydrology, slopes, soil, and drainage. Keeping people on the trail requires an understanding of the conscious and sub-conscious decisions people make while using a trail system. Perceptions of personal *Safety* and *Efficiency* are the core principles people utilize to make decisions about where to travel. For example, if a trail has too many unnecessary bends, people will short-cut the meanders and create social trails. Likewise, if users feel unsafe due to terrain or reckless behavior of others on the trail, they will change routes or create social trails to alleviate potential conflicts. Signage will be designed to reflect the rural, natural feel of the trail, which will coordinate with the community branding. Local architect, George Gibson, prepared several very preliminary design concepts for signage, attached as Attachment 5.

VIII. Recreation Facility Improvement Proposal Phases & Budget

The Project is separated in several phases in order to maximize the viability of the Trail and provide for attainable benchmarks. Subject to available funding and permitting, Phase 1a construction could begin as early as October 2017. Phases 2-5 will commence accordingly as permitting and available resources allow.

All of the proposed trail alignments have been identified on the ground and mapped by Forestoration, a professional trail design company and partner to this proposal. Proposed trails have been mapped with a Garmin Montana 680t GPS unit.

Phase 1: River Loops Trails (“Orange”)

Phase I includes 3.9 miles of natural surface trail on the north and south sides of the Swan River, which will be divided into two segments: North River Loops (Phase 1a) and the South River Loop (Phase 1b).

Phase 1a: North River Loops

The North River Loops, totaling approximately 2.4 miles, are designed to be single-track trails that will branch off from the Swan River Nature Trail, providing a diversity of experience for trail users. These loops climb in elevation to the upper parts of the PacifiCorp land north of the river, offering expansive views of the river below, Flathead Lake to the west, and the Swan Range to the east. These trails have been designed to provide beginner and intermediate bicycling opportunities, as well as enjoyable pedestrian access. Currently, the Swan River Nature Trail offers a linear, out-and-back trail experience on a former county road. The North River Loops will enhance this experience by providing the opportunity for trail users to have a variety of loop trail options, thereby spreading out users and minimizing conflicts between user groups

Phase 1b: South River Loop

The South River Loop (Orange/ White), totaling roughly 1.4 miles, will incorporate and improve the existing maintained (SA, 3.13.1) and primitive trails (SA, 3.13.2) to create a sustainable connection to the east between the dam and Pacific Park, and create a loop to the west from Pacific Park, following the diversion canal and the river, to connect to the downstream terminus of the existing primitive trail as depicted in the SA, Exhibit 4. The proposed segment of new trail construction along the diversion canal will require safety fencing, most likely chain link fence to provide a safe barrier between trail users and the canal.

Pacific Park has the potential to be a major access point into the trail network, providing enjoyable access for a variety of non-motorized user groups. However, in order to be successful it needs to be part of a loop network. Currently trail users are required to use the staircase to access the river. This staircase is only useable by hikers, and does not serve bicyclists or mobility-impaired trail users. In addition, the staircase is unusable in the winter due to snowpack. It is therefore critically important that safe access is secured along the diversion canal, so that trail users are not encumbered by the staircase, but have the ability to use an on-grade natural surface trail system to access the river trail and the connections to the rest of the trail network.

Currently, the unmanaged primitive trail along the river is resulting in an increasing number of braided user built trails which cause erosion and water quality degradation, thereby facilitating the spread of weeds and negatively impacting native vegetation and wildlife habitat. By directing users to a high quality, well designed and constructed trail, the damage to the resource resulting from unmanaged use will be minimized. Due to anticipated use and its northern, shadier aspect, the South River Loop is recommended to be soft-surface, which would mean a gravel "lift" spread and compacted over the natural dirt surface. In conjunction with appropriate grades, this would allow the South River Loop to meet ADA guidelines for recreational trails. A key goal of this proposal is to add accessible trails wherever feasible.

The total length of new trail and reconstructed primitive trail will be approximately 7500 feet (1.4 miles) in length with a primary access from Pacific Park, secondary access from the South Shore Access, and future connections from the Swan River Nature Trail in Phase 4, and Sliter Park in Phase 5.

Trailhead and Parking. The trailhead at Pacific Park is in need of additional and improved parking spaces. In order to serve as a primary trail access point, it needs the ten (10) additional parking spaces that are identified in the SA. The existing parking spaces would also benefit from additional grading, as the current cross-slope is too steep and the lack of adequate drainage results in sediment flowing onto the asphalt ADA parking space and toilet area. The proposed group shelter may not be necessary at this site, but the value of this improvement could be put towards safety fencing and other trail amenities.

Phase 2: North Reservoir Trail (“Red”)

Beginning from the East Connection (trailhead at east end of Swan River Nature Trail), this 1.7 miles of new natural surface trail will connect to the North River Loops and to the Swan River Nature Trail. Natural surface trails utilize existing dirt and do not require any imported materials. This trail will be comparable to the North River Loops with views of the Swan Range and Flathead Lake. Using this trail in conjunction with the existing Swan River Nature Trail will create a 2.7 mile loop that begins and ends at the East Connection, which is an appropriate length for many hikers, families, etc. Due to the “stacked loop” design criteria, those desiring a longer trail experience will have the opportunity to continue on the North River Loops, the Swan River Nature Trail, or cross over the river on the Phase 4 bridge to access the trails on the south side of the river.

Trailhead and Parking. This segment of the trail will be accessed from the East Connection (east access for Swan River Nature Trail). Depending on funding, it would be desirable to improve the trailhead by expanding the parking area to accommodate parking for cars and trailers as overflow for the Kearney Rapids boat launch area. It was anticipated in the 2004 and 2015 RRMP, Exhibit A that PacifiCorp would develop 10-15 parking spaces for vehicles with trailers depending on amount of use, or that PacifiCorp would develop “initial parking capacity for 10 cars and to not perform use monitoring.” To our knowledge, the anticipated parking spaces were not completed.

Phase 3: South Reservoir Trail (“Yellow”)

The South Reservoir Trail (depicted in yellow on the map) would connect the south Shore Access to the Kearney Rapids boat launch and the East Connection (east side Swan River Nature Trail parking area). This phase proposes new trail construction on the area south of the river (reservoir), and would be constructed between the river and Highway 209 to create an outer loop around the reservoir. Two sections of this trail may need to be constructed within Montana Department of Transportation’s right-of-way for Highway 209, which will require working closely with MDT to create a safe, sustainable trail experience.

Trailhead and Parking. This segment will be accessed by the South Shore and East Connection parking areas. There is a highway pullout approximately in the middle of this section that could also provide access to the trail, if it were to receive approval from MDT.

It is estimated that this segment will require approximately 6600 feet (1.25 miles) of new construction and will connect to the Swan River Nature Trail on the east, the South River Loop to the west, and has the potential to connect to the north side trails via the footbridge proposed in Phase 4.

Phase 4: Pedestrian Footbridge and Trail (“Green”)

This single span pedestrian bridge would provide a critical link between trails on the north and south sides of the Swan River. Though in the very early conceptual stage only, the 200 foot +/- bridge would be constructed from steel or glulam arch and trusses to accommodate a 90 psf uniform load that would support heavy bridge use during events such as parades and spectator events like the Bigfork Whitewater Festival. Samples from TD&H Engineering of pedestrian bridge projects are included in Attachment 6 for illustrative purposes only.

The installation of a clear-span pedestrian bridge across the river will be a highlight of the Bigfork Nature Trails. Providing this connectivity between the Swan River Nature Trail and the South Shore Trails will allow access to the entire trail network from each trailhead, thereby spreading out users and helping to relieve congestion at any one parking area. The goal for this project would be to provide an accessible route that meets ADA recreational trail guidelines from the South Shore Access trailhead, to the bridge, and connecting to the Swan River Nature Trail.

Phase 5: Boardwalk Connector (“Purple”)

The Boardwalk connection would provide a critical connector between the trail network and downtown Bigfork, and would enhance opportunities for public appreciation and education regarding the history of the powerhouse, a one of a kind historical resource. By connecting the trail network to Sliter Park, locals and visitors would be able to easily access the trails from an already established downtown park. Because Sliter Park is a popular community destination that already has parking, toilets, and picnic tables, it has the capacity to distribute trail users, reduce the need for vehicular access to the trail system, and provide the necessary amenities that are critical for a successful network. The conceptual plans call for an 8-foot-wide boardwalk that would be installed on steel pilings with 2x8 wood plank decking. ADA accessibility from Sliter Park would be a priority for this highlight of the trail system. Additionally, 4-foot-tall wrought iron railing and 8-foot-tall safety fencing would be sensitive to the historic nature of the powerhouse building, while emphasizing safety and security of all PacifiCorp operations. George Gibson, local architect, has prepared very preliminary concept designs for illustrative purposes only, attached as Attachment 7.

IX. Maintenance Plan

CFBB will develop a maintenance plan with PacifiCorp in conjunction with the existing PacifiCorp obligations and the current third-party maintenance obligations under various leases and

licenses. Maintenance may include gravel trail maintenance, noxious weed abatement, litter pickup, pet waste, and other items.

X. Public Outreach

CFBB hosted a public meeting at Glacier Bank on March 6, 2017. Approximately 100 people were in attendance. The attendees were overwhelmingly supportive of the concept to expand the Bigfork Trail Network. (Please see attached *Bigfork Looks to Extend Swan River Trail Network*, Daily Interlake (Mar. 18, 2017), Attachment 8).

The next public meeting is scheduled for early September at which time CFBB will present this proposal to the Bigfork community.

XI. Supportive Parties

CFBB has been in contact with all of the Settlement Agreement parties, including the National Park Service, Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Bigfork Area Chamber of Commerce, American Whitewater, Bigfork White Water Festival Organization, and the Flathead Lakers (Flathead Whitewater Association is no longer in existence). All comments that have been received have been very positive and supportive of this effort to enhance the trail network. Additional groups that are in support of this effort include Montana Land Reliance, Flathead Land Trust, and Montana State Parks.

XII. Benefit of Proposal to PacifiCorp

The RRMP specifically requires PacifiCorp to allow others to propose and fund recreation improvements on project lands; however, PacifiCorp retains final control in its sole discretion to allow any construction.⁷ The Order specifies that the provision for others to propose and fund recreational improvements on project lands should be “implemented through the life of the license.”⁸

Allowing others to propose and fund recreational improvements on PacifiCorp’s land is not only permitted, but it is required for the “life” of the license. Thus, this proposal will align with the contemplated goals of the RRMP and the SA, which are to “significantly enhance public recreation at the project.”⁹

In addition, PacifiCorp has undertaken to construct and maintain certain recreation amenities which form the “backbone” of this expanded recreation proposal.

⁷ Order Modifying and Approving Recreation Resource Management Plan Under Article 411, p. 4 (June 28, 2005) (“RRMP”)

⁸ *Id.* at 7.

⁹ *Id.* at 6.

VI. Benefit of Proposal to Bigfork

Outdoor recreation nationally is a \$646 billion industry, which is the third largest sector for consumer spending after financial services and insurance, and outpatient health care.¹⁰ In Montana specifically, outdoor recreation generates \$5.8 billion in consumer spending and \$403 million in state and local tax revenue to communities. Recreation directly creates 64,000 jobs and generates \$1.5 billion in wages and salaries. In the last ten years, consumer spending on outdoor recreation has increased by 132%, tax revenue has increased 242% and now makes up 18% of Montana's total consumer spending. Communities in Montana are not fully promoting their recreation amenities and taking advantage of the economic benefits.¹¹ Further, there are numerous studies that have found trails are directly associated to higher property values.¹²

The proposed Nature Trail network will improve quality of life and healthy lifestyles by making the trails more accessible, longer, and more enjoyable. Residents will also be less burdened during the Bigfork Whitewater Festival as the trail network will provide multiple access points and will ease the parking burden on downtown and near the Whitney's property.

XIII. Applicant Contact

Paul Mutascio
Community Foundation for a Better Bigfork
Phone: 406-261-1049
Email: pmutascio@centurytel.net

Consulting Team

Greg Gunderson
Forestation, Inc.
Phone: 406-862-4225 office; 406-261-8407 cell
Email: greg@forestation.com

Doug Peppmeier
TD&H Engineering
Phone: 406-751-5246
Email: doug.peppmeier@tdhengineering.com

Diane Conradi and Lindsey Hromadka
Conradi Anderson, PLLC
Phone: 406-863-9681
Emails:
dconradi@conradianderson.com
lindsey@conradianderson.com

George Gibson
Gibson Architecture
Phone: 406-837-6898
Email: george@gibsonarchitecture.com

¹⁰ Outdoor Industry Association. 2012 Outdoor Recreation Economy Report (Montana)
<http://www.outdoorindustry.org/advocacy/recreation/resources.php>.

¹¹ Rob Chaney, Summit touts economic benefit of trails (Feb. 28, 2017)
http://missoulian.com/lifestyles/recreation/summit-touts-economic-benefit-of-trails/article_53529428-cd3a-5043-95be-333960946b84.html

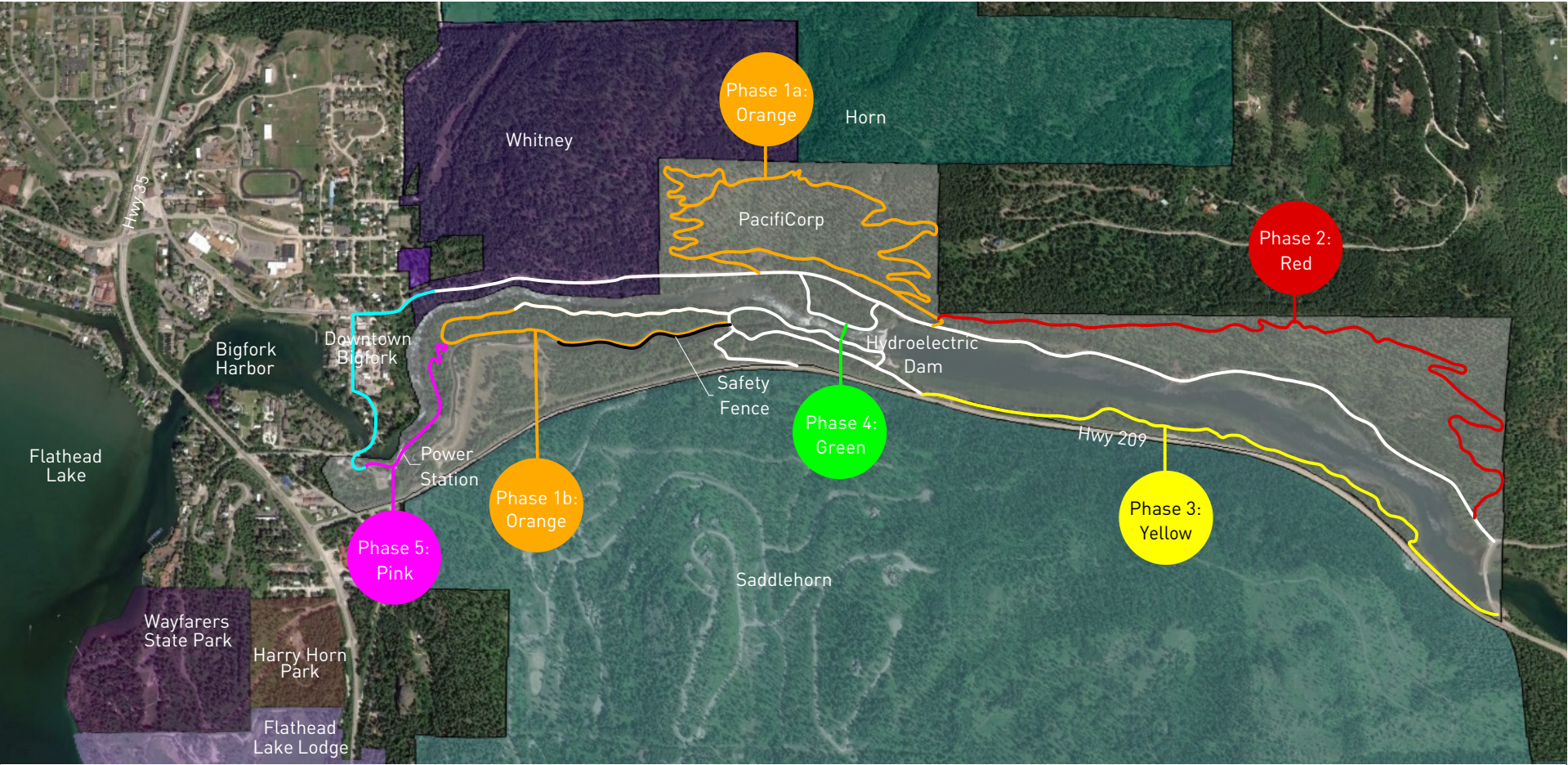
¹² Headwaters Economics, Measuring Trails Benefits: Property Value (Spring 2016)
<https://headwaterseconomics.org/wp-content/uploads/trails-library-property-value-overview.pdf>

ATTACHMENT ONE
BIGFORK NATURE TRAIL NETWORK
Trail Phase Plan

BIGFORK NATURE TRAIL NETWORK

Trail Phase Plan

PROJECT LOCATION:
Bigfork, MT



Key

Phase 1a:
"Orange Trail"
North Side Loops

Phase 1b:
"Orange Trail"
South Side River Loop

Phase 2:
"Red Trail"
North Reservoir Trail

Phase 3:
"Yellow Trail"
South Reservoir Trail

Phase 4:
"Green Trail"
Connector Bridge

Phase 5:
"Pink Trail"
Power Station Boardwalk
and Connector Trail

Existing Trails

Connection to Downtown

N

1"=1500'

ATTACHMENT TWO
SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT
(Section 3 Only)

Bigfork Hydroelectric Project Settlement Agreement

SECTION 3: RECREATION RESOURCE MEASURES

3.1 Recreation Resource Management Plan. PacifiCorp will develop a Recreation Resource Management Plan ("RRMP") in consultation with the Parties, to be implemented upon the New License becoming final. The RRMP will set forth the location of and maintenance standards for the park, trail and recreation facilities. Opening and closing times will be stated. Also included will be schematic designs and implementation time lines for the recreation resource measures provided in this Agreement.

3.2 Access to South Shore. PacifiCorp will provide pedestrian access to the south shore of the Swan River immediately below the dam within three years of the New License becoming final. Implementation of this measure will include a canal crossing downstream of the headgate structure, and a parking area with space for 5 to 7 vehicles south of the canal near the structure. Roads and the parking area will be graveled. Fencing in the area will be reconfigured to allow development of the parking lot, access to the canal crossing, and access to the maintenance road (see Section 3.13). All other fencing will remain. Site opening and closing times will be posted and PacifiCorp will close the site each night.

3.3 White Water Festival. Upon the New License becoming final, PacifiCorp will support the annual White Water Festival by maintaining a minimum of 1,000 cfs or natural inflow, whichever is less, to the bypass reach, as measured at the upper end of the bypass reach during the Festival. PacifiCorp will allow motor vehicle access on the Swan River Nature Trail from the eastern terminus during the Festival in order for Festival organizers, vendors, security personnel, and Festival participants to access the north shore of the river below the dam. This measure assumes that the Festival will be scheduled to run for a period not longer than three days between May 15 and June 15. Festival organizers will give PacifiCorp a minimum of two months notice of the Festival dates. If, for any reason, the Festival is not scheduled or does not occur as provided in the preceding sentence, PacifiCorp is not obligated to provide flows under this Section 3.3.

3.4 Kearney Rapids Boat Launch. Within three years of the New License becoming final, PacifiCorp will improve Kearney Rapids boat launch by extending the end of the paved launch ramp to a depth deemed appropriate by PacifiCorp, in consultation with FWP, to facilitate kayak, canoe and other small motorized watercraft launching below the mean low waterline. If, in consultation with FWP and NPS, PacifiCorp determines that it is feasible, based on available space, PacifiCorp will provide one parking stall consistent with the Americans with Disabilities Act at the boat ramp and sign it appropriately. PacifiCorp will provide a graveled parking lot suitable for five vehicles with trailers in a developed parking area on the north side of the reservoir within three years of the New License becoming final. Upon completion of the parking area, PacifiCorp will post adjacent to the parking lot an orientation map of Project recreation facilities. PacifiCorp will expand the parking area if peak weekend use by boat-ramp users routinely exceeds 100 percent of parking area capacity; provided that the gravel parking lot will not exceed spaces for 10 to 15 vehicles with trailers. Monitoring protocols and expansion triggers will be developed collaboratively and set forth in the RRMP.

3.5 Pacific Park. PacifiCorp will develop a parking area suitable for 5 to 10 vehicles, depending on available space, will gravel the road and parking surface, and will close the steep portion of the loop road at Pacific Park within five years of the New License becoming final. Other potential improvements, such as additional picnic tables, barbeque stands, fire rings, and group picnic shelter,

Bigfork Hydroelectric Project Settlement Agreement

will be evaluated during the development of the RRMP. A schedule for implementation will be established after successful efforts to control the current level of undesirable behavior.

3.6 Swan River Nature Trail. Upon the New License becoming final, PacifiCorp will lease to BDC for \$1.00 per year the Swan River Nature Trail and land between the trail and the mean high water mark of the river or reservoir (together referred to as the "Leased Property"). The Leased Property is described in Exhibit 2 attached hereto and by this reference made a part hereof. The lease shall become effective on the date the New License becomes final, and shall terminate upon expiration of the New License.. The lease shall reserve to PacifiCorp the right to use the Leased Property for Project purposes and for the purposes set forth in this Section 3.6. BDC shall allow public access to the trail without charge for non-motorized public recreation use only, with the exception of PacifiCorp and PacifiCorp contractor vehicles, Quick Response Unit or other emergency and law enforcement vehicles, and for use as noted in Section 3.3. During the lease period, PacifiCorp will perform the following maintenance activities on the portion of the Swan River Nature Trail that is on PacifiCorp lands and included in the Leased Property: 1) grade, gravel and compact the trail as necessary and not more frequently than once annually to help provide a surface relatively free of standing water and potholes; 2) maintain ditches and culverts to minimize standing water and water flow across the Nature Trail; remove fallen trees across the Nature Trail; and 4) provide periodic litter pick-up. The Parties agree that this provision is not necessary for operation of the Project or other Project purposes, and that PacifiCorp is not obligated to include leased lands within the Project boundary.

3.7 Sliter's Park. Sliter's Park is described in Exhibit 3 attached hereto and by this reference made a part hereof. PacifiCorp currently leases Sliter's Park to Flathead County ("FC") pursuant to a July 30, 1981 lease (the "FC Lease"). The FC Lease expires in 2006 and includes an option to extend under the same terms and conditions. Should FC decline to extend the FC Lease or should the FC Lease otherwise be terminated in accordance with its terms prior to the end of the New License term, and provided that PacifiCorp does not plan to sell any portion of Sliter's Park within six months of such termination, PacifiCorp will lease Sliter's Park to BDC for \$1.00 per year ("BDC Lease"). BDC agrees that it will accept such a lease. The BDC Lease period shall be one year, becoming effective upon termination of the FC Lease, and shall renew automatically each year on the anniversary of the New License becoming final. The BDC Lease shall terminate upon expiration of the New License or sale of any portion of Sliter's Park, whichever happens first. The BDC Lease shall reserve to PacifiCorp the right to use the leased property for Project purposes and for the purposes set forth in this Section 3.7. BDC shall allow public access without charge to Sliter's Park for recreation purposes and for use as noted in Section 3.3.

If PacifiCorp determines that it is feasible, based on the availability of space and public utilities and as set forth in the RRMP, PacifiCorp will install an RV site, including utilities and sewer suitable for a single RV unit for a park host, in a location to be determined in the RRMP. PacifiCorp will appoint a volunteer host or, if a volunteer host is unavailable, PacifiCorp may hire a host at its sole discretion, to: (i) occupy the site (either seasonally or year round); (ii) perform maintenance of PacifiCorp recreation facilities in exchange for use of the site; and (iii) provide additional security at Sliter's Park. The Parties agree that this provision is not necessary for operation of the Project or other Project purposes, and that PacifiCorp is not obligated to include leased lands within the Project boundary.

3.8 Use of Grass and Riverbank Area downstream from the Powerhouse. Within eighteen months of the New License becoming final, PacifiCorp will relocate the outer Project gate and fencing to allow non-motorized public access to the grass area and riverbank between the outer and inner gates

Bigfork Hydroelectric Project Settlement Agreement

along the powerhouse road for public recreation purposes. Special use permits will be granted at PacifiCorp's sole discretion for commercial vendors to use the grass area and riverbank.

3.9 **Recreation Site Improvements.** Upon the New License becoming final, PacifiCorp will allow other entities to propose and fund recreation site improvements and maintenance of such improvements on PacifiCorp lands; provided that PacifiCorp shall retain final control, in its sole discretion, over the decision to allow construction of such improvements. A process for review and consideration of proposals by PacifiCorp will be described in the RRMP.

3.10 **Toilets.** PacifiCorp will provide a portable toilet year-round along the Swan River Nature Trail upon the New License becoming final. A permanent vault toilet will be installed east of the midpoint gate within five years of the New License becoming final.

3.11 **Whitewater Boating Flow Feasibility Evaluation and Implementation.** During the first three years after the New License becomes final, PacifiCorp will provide whitewater releases to the bypass channel each Wednesday from July 1 to August 31, between approximately 5 p.m. and 9 p.m.: (1) flows equal to inflow when inflow is 800 to 1500 cfs; and (2) a minimum of 1500 cfs when inflow is greater than 1500 cfs. If implementation of the whitewater boating flows described above are operationally feasible as defined in this Section 3.11, PacifiCorp shall provide such flows after the third anniversary of the New License becoming final and for the remainder of the license term. Such whitewater boating flows will be considered "operationally feasible" if (i) they can be implemented while meeting ramping and other applicable requirements of the New License and the Clean Water Act Section 401 Certification, and (ii) after cessation of each whitewater release event the Project can be downramped to pre-whitewater release conditions in no more than four hours. During any whitewater boating flow release, flows in excess of 1500 cfs may be used by PacifiCorp for power generation purposes provided that a minimum of 1500 cfs is released to the bypass channel. In no event shall PacifiCorp be required to provide whitewater boating flows when inflow is less than 800 cfs.

3.12 **Right of First Refusal and Purchase Agreement.** PacifiCorp shall make a reasonable and good faith effort to enter into a Right of First Refusal and Purchase to sell approximately 480.49 acres of land adjacent to the Project at fair market price to The Trust For Public Land, a California nonprofit corporation, or to BDC, to facilitate public recreation opportunities. The Parties agree that, to the extent the subject lands are not already within the Project Boundary, such lands are not necessary for operation of the Project or other Project purposes, and PacifiCorp is not obligated to include them within the Project Boundary. To the extent that such lands may be within the Project boundary, their sale will be contingent upon any necessary FERC approvals and the reservation of an easement for all uses necessary to maintain and operate the Project.

3.13 **South Shore Trail System.**

3.13.1 **Existing Primitive Trail.** PacifiCorp will allow use of the existing primitive shoreline trail on PacifiCorp lands for non-motorized public recreation. The trail, which begins at the new river access below the dam (see Section 3.2) and ends at a point approximately 3,600 feet downstream, is identified as "Existing Primitive Trail" in Exhibit 4 to this Agreement. Basic maintenance will include removing fallen trees which impede walking and periodic litter control. Plans for the use and maintenance of the Existing Primitive Trail will be included in the RRMP.

3.13.2 **Existing Maintenance Road.** Concurrent with completion of the south shore access below the dam in accordance with Section 3.2 above, PacifiCorp will remove gates and fencing along

Bigfork Hydroelectric Project Settlement Agreement

an existing maintenance road which is located on PacifiCorp lands beginning below the dam, running across the south side of the canal, and ending at Pacific Park, and which is identified as "Existing Maintenance Road" in Exhibit 4 to this Agreement. PacifiCorp will allow use of and will maintain the existing maintenance road on PacifiCorp lands for non-motorized public recreation. Maintenance will include removing fallen trees which block non-motorized access to all or part of the trail, and periodic litter control. Plans for the use and maintenance of the Existing Maintenance Road will be included in the RRMP.

3.14 **Other Uses.** Nothing in this Agreement is intended to prohibit PacifiCorp from granting special use permits for recreation or community programs that do not conflict with the uses set forth in this Agreement.

SECTION 4: EFFECT OF AGREEMENT

4.1 **Resolution of Issues.** The Parties agree that the recreation resource measures contained in Section 3, including those measures implemented pursuant to the RRMP, will fully satisfy all recreation resource issues related to relicensing and state reauthorization of the Project, and that no additional terms or conditions relating to recreation resources will be necessary under the FPA or other federal, state, or local authorities. AW, BWFO, BACC, BDC, and FWA further represent that this Agreement satisfies all of their interests related to relicensing and that they will not comment on the relicensing proceedings other than to support the provisions of this Agreement. Accordingly, each Party agrees that this Agreement supersedes all previously submitted terms, conditions, recommendations, prescriptions and comments of the Parties, except to the extent that Parties have submitted terms and conditions related to resources other than recreation resources which are consistent with the recreation resource measures contained herein. Each Party further agrees that it will not (i) submit to FERC any Final Terms and Conditions which are inconsistent with the Agreement; (ii) petition FERC or file an action in any court seeking measures inconsistent with the Agreement; (iii) administer certifications, permits or other authorizations under its own legal authorities in a manner inconsistent with the Agreement; (iv) petition FERC or seek in any other forum modification of the Project Boundary for any reason; or (v) request or formally encourage any other entity to petition FERC or otherwise seek measures inconsistent with the Agreement or modification of the Project Boundary for any reason. Parties which have not intervened in Project relicensing (designated in Recital paragraph C) further agree not to intervene in Project relicensing proceedings for any reason.

SECTION 5: IMPLEMENTATION OF AGREEMENT

5.1 **Parties Bound.** The Parties will be bound by this Agreement for the term of the New License unless the Agreement is sooner terminated as provided in this section.

5.2 **Reopener or Modification.** During the term of the New License, the Parties agree not to seek to modify or add to the recreation resource measures contained herein or other obligations of PacifiCorp related to recreation, or to seek to amend the New License's recreation resource terms pursuant to standard FERC reopener provisions, except (i) as provided by the state's CWA Section 401 water quality certification; (ii) as required by a statute enacted or amended after the date of the final order issuing the New License; or (iii) if significant new information not known or understood as of the date of issuance of the New License reasonably demonstrates that the Agreement does not continue to satisfy PacifiCorp's obligations under Section 1.1 of this Agreement.

ATTACHMENT THREE

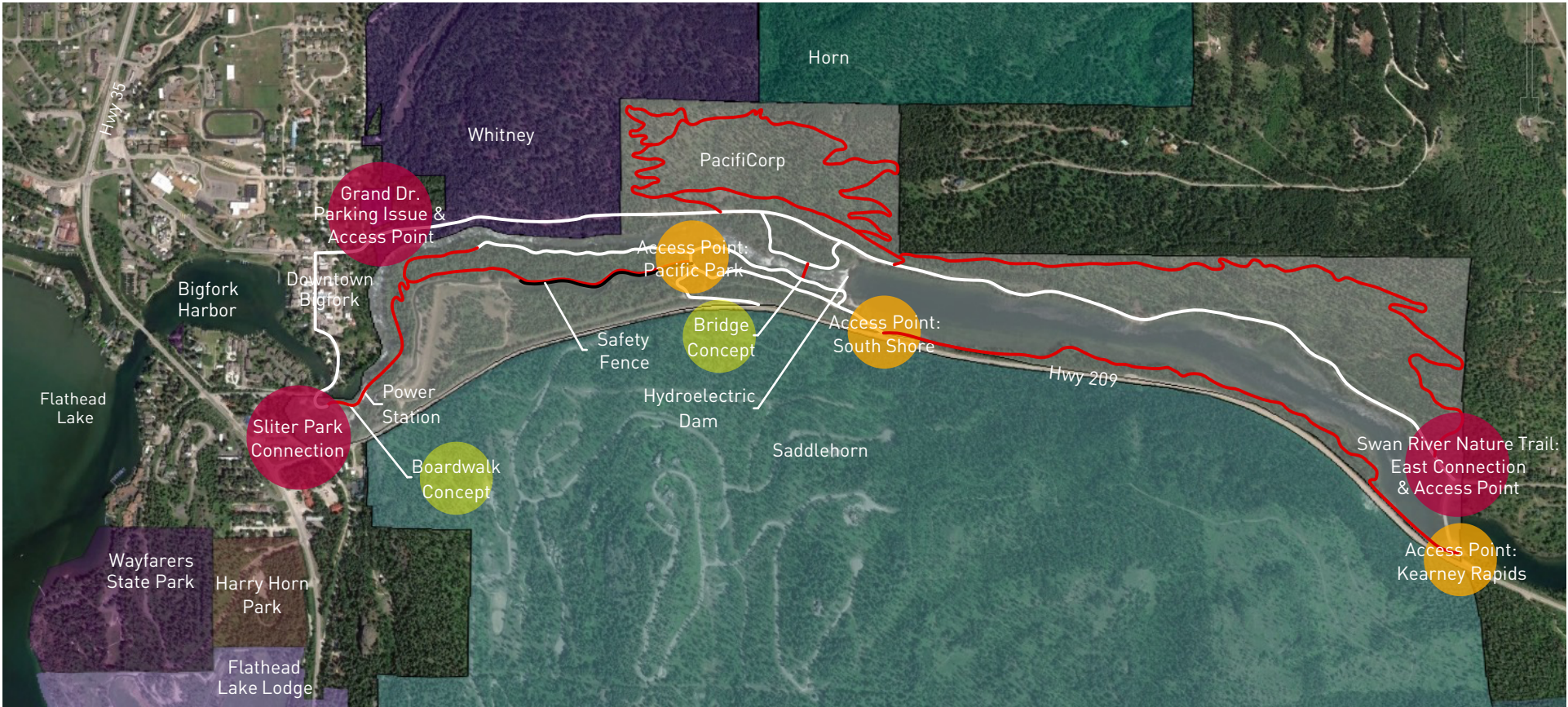
BIGFORK NATURE TRAIL NETWORK

Existing Conditions and Future Concepts

BIGFORK NATURE TRAIL NETWORK

Existing conditions and future concepts

PROJECT LOCATION:
Bigfork, MT



Key



Key Issues



Existing Access Points



Key Infrastructure



Proposed Trails



Existing Trails and Roads

N



1"=1500'

ATTACHMENT FOUR

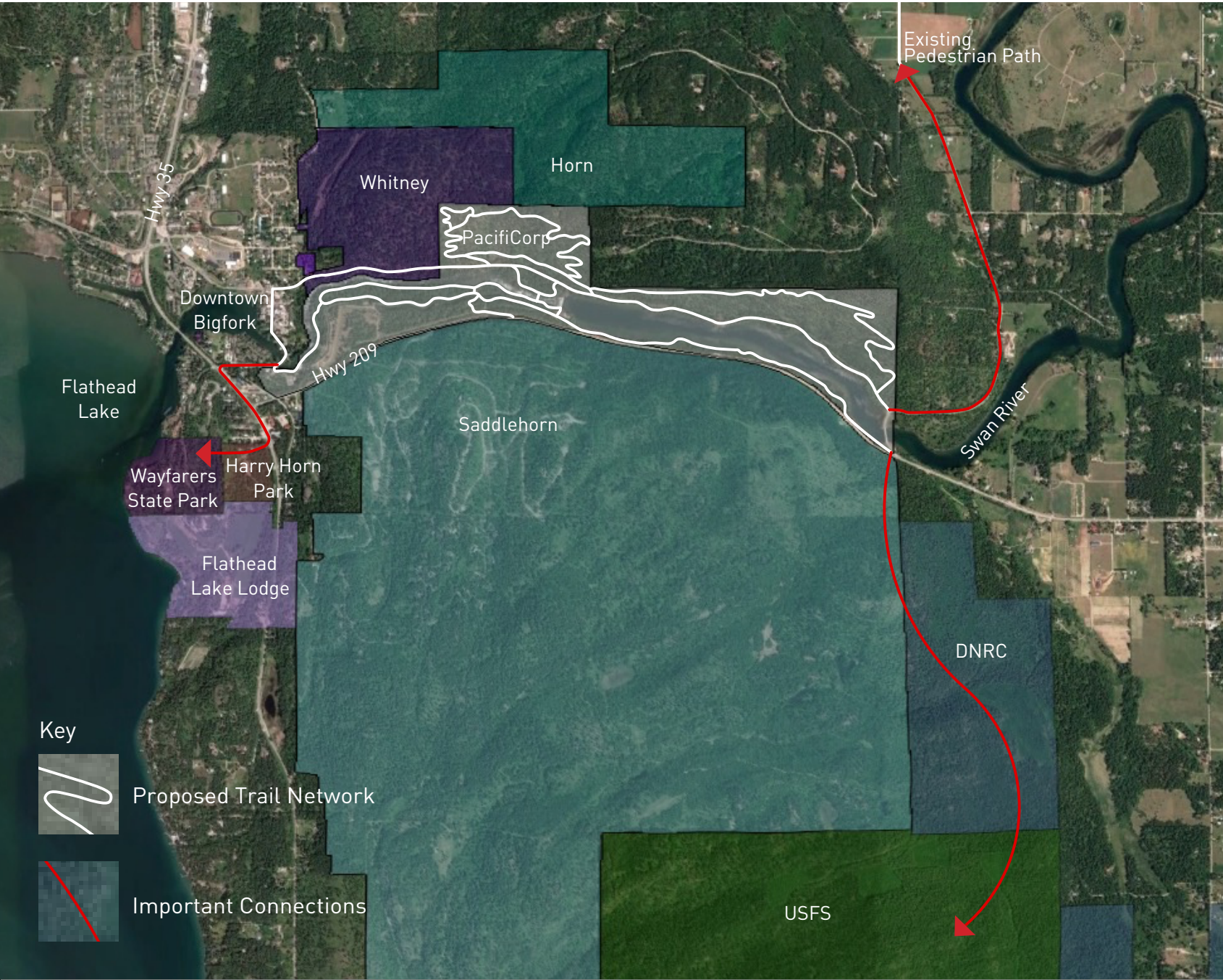
BIGFORK NATURE TRAIL NETWORK

Connections to Parks, Trails, and Public Land

BIGFORK NATURE TRAIL NETWORK

Connections to parks, trails, and public land

PROJECT LOCATION:
Bigfork, MT

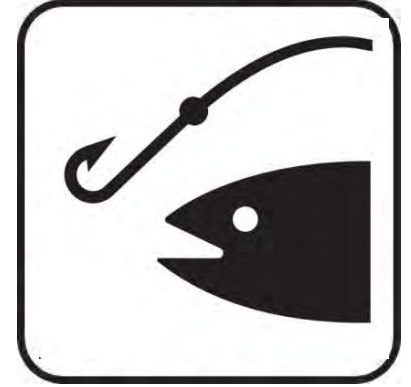


ATTACHMENT FIVE
CONCEPTUAL SIGNAGE
Gibson Architecture



BIGFORK NATURE TRAILS

MULTI-PURPOSE ACTIVITY AREAS
WITH UNIVERSAL SIGNS AT LOCATIONS





NEW INFORMATION SIGN
WITH GREEN METAL
ROOF AND RECLAIMED
8x8 WOOD POSTS



BIGFORK TRAIL SIGNS



EXISTING
BIGFORK
ENTRY SIGN



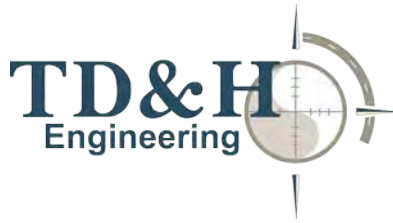
NEW TRAILHEAD
SIGN ON
RECLAIMED 8x8
WOOD POST

ATTACHMENT SIX

PEDESTRIAN FOOTBRIDGE CONCEPT

TD&H Engineering

450 Corporate Drive
Suite 101
Kalispell, MT 59901



406.751.5246
tdhengineering.com

There are several options for single span pedestrian bridges approximately 200ft long. Several types of steel truss bridges are capable of being economically designed for spans between 150ft and 250ft. Steel bridges can be constructed using weathering steel (that develops a protective patina) or can be painted for weather protection. Glulam arch and trusses are also an option. Glulam pedestrian bridges using a combination treated timber, naturally rot resistant materials, and waterproof glue can be used to support pedestrian spans up to approximately 250ft long. Cable-stayed suspension bridges are another option that are typically used for spans between 200ft and 400ft.

The governing design document for pedestrian bridges is the *AASHTO LRFD Guide Specification for the Design of Pedestrian Bridges*. The document dictates certain design criteria such as a 90 psf uniform loading over the entire bridge. A 90psf uniform load over the entire bridge correlates to heavy bridge use during public events such as parades and spectator events.

Steel Truss Bridge Types





Glulam Arch and Truss Bridges





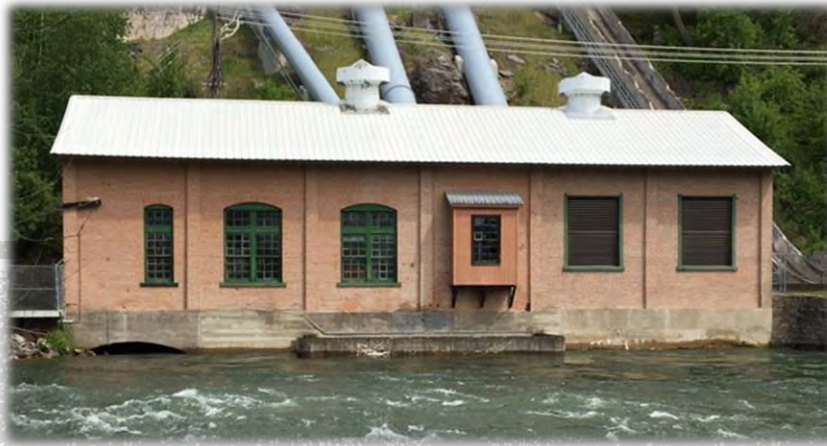
Cable-Stayed Suspension Bridge



ATTACHMENT SEVEN

BOARDWALK DESIGN CONCEPT

Gibson Architecture



EXISTING BRICK POWER HOUSE



BIGFORK POWER HOUSE



EXISTING PICNIC AND
LAWN AREA

EXISTING RIP RAP
FISHING AREA



FUTURE NORTH POWERHOUSE
TRAILHEAD AREA



EXISTING FLUME
AND FENCE

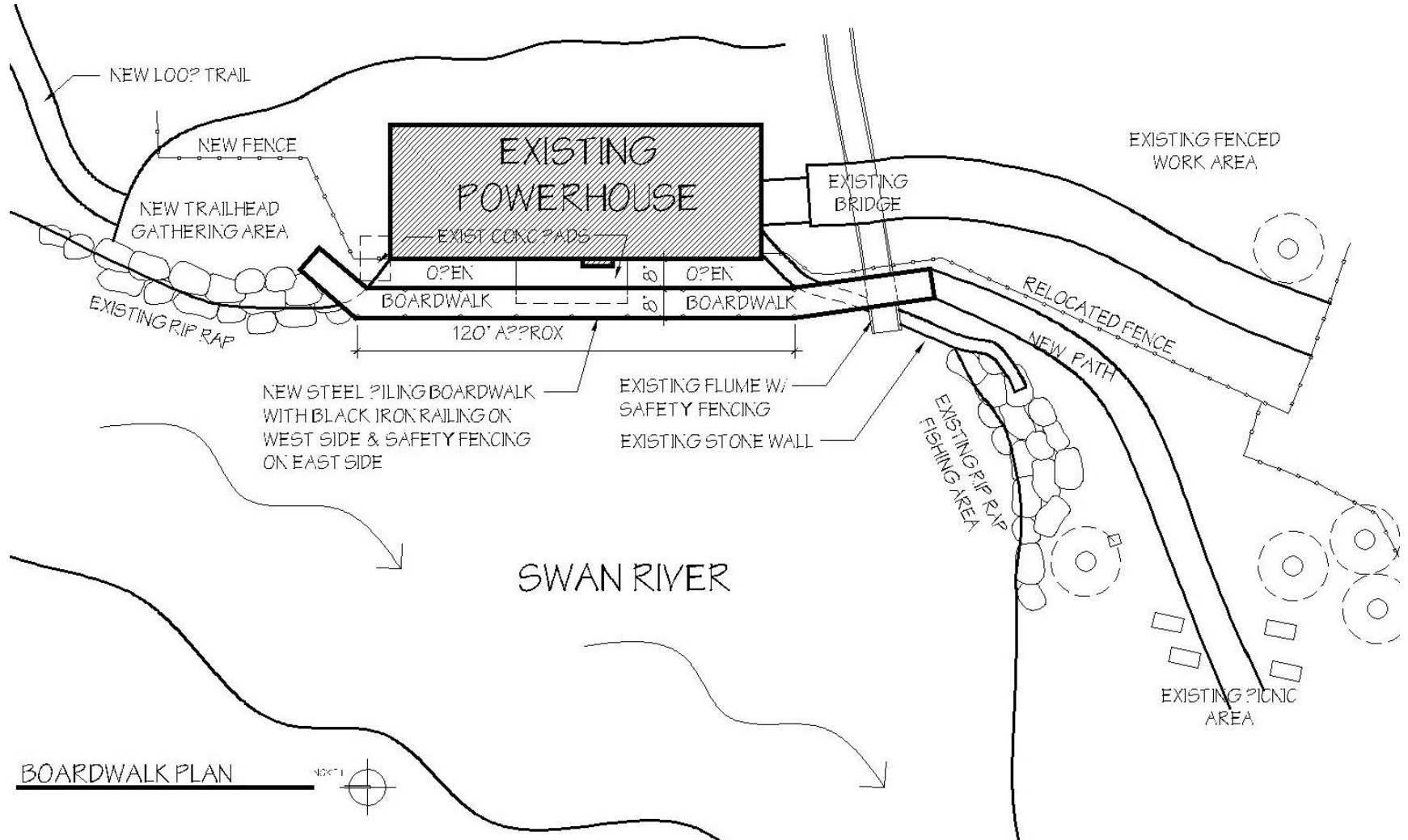


BIGFORK BOARDWALK

NEW STEEL PILING BOARDWALK/BRIDGE WITH
2X8 WOOD PLANK DECKING AND BLACK IRON
DECORATIVE RAILING AND LAMPPOSTS



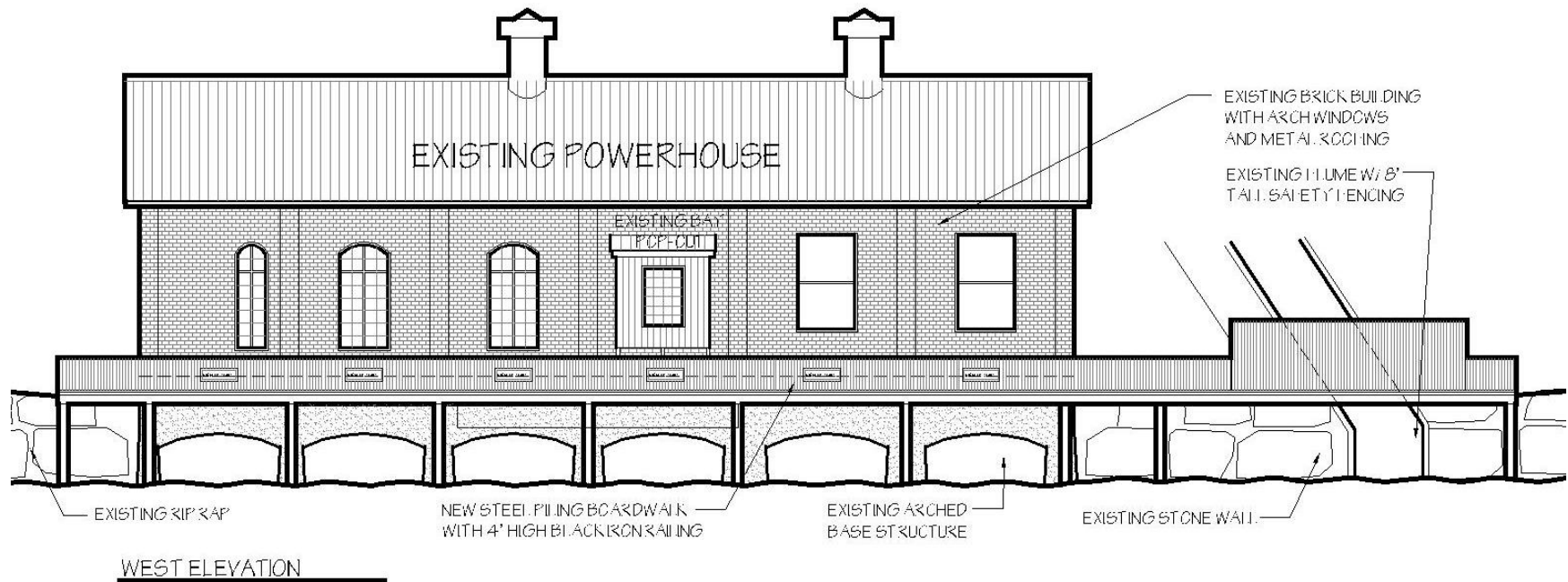
BIGFORK BOARDWALK



NEW 8' WIDE STEEL PILING BOARDWALK/BRIDGE WITH 2X8 WOOD PLANK DECKING AND 4' TALL BLACK IRON RAILING & 8' TALL SAFETY FENCE. SEPARATED FROM THE BUILDING BY 8' OF OPEN WATER AREA.

BIGFORK BOARDWALK

NEW 8' WIDE STEEL PILING
BOARDWALK/BRIDGE WITH
2X8 WOOD PLANK
DECKING AND 4' TALL
BLACK IRON RAILING & 8'
TALL SAFETY FENCE



THE BOARDWALK DESIGN ALLOWS FOR TRAILHEAD ACCESS FROM THE POPULAR BIGFORK SLITER'S PARK AREA AND ALLOWS FOR A LOOP TRAIL SYSTEM. THE WALKWAY DESIGN WOULD BE SENSITIVE TO THE HISTORIC NATURE OF THE POWER HOUSE WITH OLD STYLE 4' TALL IRON RAILING. PUBLIC SAFETY AND SECURITY ISSUES WOULD BE ADDRESSED WITH AN 8' TALL FENCE AS NEEDED.

ATTACHMENT EIGHT

PRESS

BIGFORK LOOKS TO EXTEND SWAN RIVER TRAIL NETWORK

March 18, 2017 at 6:27 pm | By KATHERYN HOUGHTON Daily Inter Lake

A Bigfork community group is working to extend the village's 2-mile Swan River Trail by six miles to create a connected recreational trail network.

The Swan River Nature Trail begins at the north end of Electric Avenue. The 2-mile long trail was created from a former county road that led from Bigfork to the Swan Valley.

The Community Foundation for a Better Bigfork is working to expand that path by 6.2 miles for non-motorized recreational use. March 22 at 6 p.m. the foundation is hosting a Community Kick-off Meeting for the public at Glacier Bank in Bigfork to share its vision for the project.

Paul Mutascio with the Community Foundation for a Better Bigfork said the plans for the trail system are in the early stages.

"The idea of building a better trail network has been talked about for years — but I think we all realize the time has come," Mutascio said.

The goal of the meeting is to get community feedback on the idea of expanding the Swan River Nature Trail by creating a set of trail loops that connect existing and future trails on the north and south sides of the Swan River with Sliter Park, downtown Bigfork and other area trails.

The current path overlooks the Swan River, the village's dam and the popular "Wild Mile" section of the river.

The community foundation's draft plan includes creating a boardwalk along to the village's historic power plant which would connect Sliter Park to the system. It also includes a proposed foot bridge near the dam that would make a 2-mile loop beginning and ending in downtown Bigfork.

Most of the network would be located on the more than 270 acres of PacifiCorp property east of Bigfork along the south and north sides of the Swan River. The land has provided recreation opportunities to generations of Bigfork residents and visitors. In its 2015 Recreation Plan review, PacifiCorp expressed an interest in allowing more community-based recreation proposals.

Mutascio said as Bigfork has grown and tourism has solidified as the driving force in the village's economy, the community has recognized a need for more and better trails.

"So many people use the Swan River Nature Trail, we are afraid it is going to get 'loved to death,'" he said.

Mutascio said to make the system easy to use for guests and locals, there will be trail signs unique to the network. Trails leading outside of town will weave through Bigfork forests. Some trails will hug the side of the Swan River while others will highlight the valley's views.



News & Features

Blazing 'The Bigfork Trail' from Concept to Reality

Community foundation spearheading new trail network in and around downtown

BY DILLON TABISH // MAR 18, 2017



SHOW CAPTION

A few blocks from Electric Avenue in downtown Bigfork, the Swan River Nature Trail saunters along a century-old path through a forest of fir and pine stands, tracing the ravenous ripples of the Wild Mile into the Swan Valley. This two-mile route, one of the original gateways into the village on the bay, was established in 1914 as the main road from the foothills of the Swan Range to the northeast shore of the big lake.

A century after it was created, the classic trail is inspiring new concepts for expanded connectivity throughout the area, similar to other successful local trail projects, such

EDITOR'S PICK

Healing Harvests



[VIEW STORIES](#)



*Subscribe to the
Flathead Beacon
newsletter*

THE EVENT PHOTO GALLERY



[MORE »](#)

as The Whitefish Trail and Foys to Blacktail Trails.

The Community Foundation for a Better Bigfork is spearheading an effort to potentially expand the recreation trail network in and around town, and the organization is hosting a public meeting on Wednesday, March 22 to discuss ideas and gather feedback. The meeting begins at 6 p.m. at Glacier Bank of Bigfork.

The initial vision — dubbed “The Bigfork Trail” — is to create a set of trail loops that would connect with existing and future trails

on the north and south sides of the Swan River and tie into Sliter Park, downtown Bigfork and other nearby trails.

»»» Click [here to view](#) a preliminary design of the potential trail network

Paul Mutascio, president of the foundation, said ecotourism and outdoor recreation are becoming more and more popular, especially in Montana, and the new trail system would benefit residents and businesses while also attracting visitors.

“The idea of building a better trail network has been talked about for years, but I think we all realize the time has come,” Mutascio said. “As Bigfork has grown, and tourism has become a driving force in our economy, the call for more and better trails has become louder and louder.”

A small working group banded together last fall and began devising the preliminary project plan. The group gained the help of Greg Gunderson of Forestoration, a forest management company that specializes in ecological

restoration projects, and Diane Conradi, an attorney in Whitefish who was heavily involved in the development of The Whitefish Trail.

“We decided to take on this project and bring in the best and the brightest,” Mutascio said. “And we want to bring in the community and get input and figure out a road map for moving forward.”

The preliminary concept is to begin with roughly 6 miles of new trail broken into different sections that all connect to the Swan River Nature Trail. One section would travel west from Kearney Rapids adjacent to Montana Highway 200 on the south side of the river and tie into Sliter Park in downtown.

“When I came out to explore the existing trail along the Swan River, I thought to myself, ‘This is like no other place in Montana,’” Gunderson said. “The combination of natural beauty of the river, the nearby open lands, and the unique small town feel of downtown Bigfork makes for a winning combination.”

The proposed new trail would be located entirely on private land owned by PacifiCorp, a Berkshire Hathaway Energy company that operates the Bigfork Hydroelectric Project.

Mutascio describes this week’s meeting as one of the first steps on a lengthy journey, but one that he hopes to see move forward swiftly. He said the goal is to develop a final plan by June and begin negotiating with PacifiCorp to utilize portions of their land for the trail network. Fundraising will also be a big part of the process, he said.

As others have told him, this vision is a worthy cause.

“I’ve seen first-hand what a well-built, well-conceived trail system adds to the community and the economy, both for those who live here and those who visit,” Conradi said.

BIGFORK GROUP MAKES PITCH FOR TRAIL NETWORK

March 25, 2017 at 8:32 pm | By KATHERYN HOUGHTON Daily Inter Lake



Hannah Hostetler walks her dog, Ravenna, with Breanna Torres on the Swan River Trail in Bigfork on Thursday. The Community Foundation for a Better Bigfork is proposing plans to extend the trail network for multi-use, non-motorized recreation. (Aaric Bryan/Daily Inter Lake)

A 1989 blueprint outlines a Bigfork trail system that was never put into reality.

Bordering the village, the trail system had a footbridge crossing the Swan River and led into the surrounding forest. But funding for the community effort was hard to secure and over the years other projects were prioritized.

This month, the Community Foundation for a Better Bigfork announced it was time to try again.

During a community kick-off meeting March 22, roughly 80 people found a place to sit in the basement of Glacier Bank in Bigfork while more filtered through the door.

Greg Gunderson with Forestoration stood before the audience as the man charged with designing the trail.

"These ideas have been out there for decades," Gunderson said smiling toward Chris Moritz, the creator of the 1989 blueprint. "Hopefully now, it's just the stars are aligned or we've got the right energy to come together and really make some more of this happen."

The existing 2-mile Swan River Trail overlooks the village's dam and the "Wild Mile" section of the river.

The community foundation's plan seeks to extend the trail by 6.2 miles for multi-use, non-motorized recreation. The draft plan includes creating a boardwalk along to the village's historic power plant to connect Sliter Park to the system and a proposed footbridge near the dam that would make a 2-mile loop beginning and ending in downtown Bigfork. It also outlines possible new access and parking points throughout the trail system.

Paul Mutascio, with the community foundation, said nothing's final yet. He said the end result relies on two things: the company that owns the land of the proposed network and funding.

"If the community doesn't support it, we can't go forward. It's as simple as that," Mutascio said.

MOST OF THE network would be located on the more than 270 acres of PacifiCorp property, the company that operates the village's power plant, the Bigfork Hydroelectric Project.

When PacifiCorp renewed its license through the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission in 2003, it did so with an agreement to create some recreational opportunities and to allow other entities to propose, fund and maintain recreation site improvements on the land.

In alignment with its license terms, PacifiCorp released a 12-year Recreation Resource Management Plan Revisions in 2015 that identified recreational opportunities and visions for the future.

Diane Conradi with the Whitefish-based law firm Conradi Anderson, said the fact the company hasn't wrapped up its proposed list of projects may leave for some "wiggle room."

"Maybe times have changed, and maybe it makes more sense to do one project over the other," she said. "We'd like to bring [PacifiCorp] in at every step of the way so it's not that they're considering something that's coming in from the outside, but they're part of shaping what they will consider going forward."

She said the group hopes to bring the final proposal to PacifiCorp in June.

Conradi and Gunderson were a part of a group that worked to establish the Whitefish Trail. That group first started looking at the land for the system in 2002. It wasn't until eight years later in 2010 when they finally cut the red ribbon on the first 5 miles of trail. Today, there is 36 miles of trail accessed by 10 trailheads.

"It's a long process. Figuring out what you want, figuring out where you want it and then figuring out how to pay for it. Those are all challenges," Conradi said. "You just have to get it teed up, so you can go to the next funding and the next funding, and sometimes you get it, sometimes you don't."

Outside of getting approval from PacifiCorp, the trail supporters still have to find funding, identify additional parking for trailheads and establish who would be responsible for trail maintenance — from collecting trash to removing debris off the path.

Mustachio said the concerns were valid hurdles. He said that's part of the reason the foundation is looking for advice from the community.

The foundation reached out to possible partners such as Montana Land Reliance, Fish Wildlife and Parks and the Flathead Land Trust.

Dave Landstrom, the regional state park manager for Fish Wildlife and Parks, said it's possible that Wayfarers State Park — which has about 1 mile of trail — could be an extension of the Bigfork trail system.

"Not only are we widely supportive of this idea ... but we could also possibly provide some day-to-day operational advice, experience, help perhaps," Landstrom said.

He said that could also come in the form of helping the foundation apply for recreation grants.

TOM JENKO sat among the crowd Wednesday night and was one of the people who approached the community foundation with the plea to pick up the effort. A Bigfork resident since 1981, Jenko doesn't want the community to wait too long to finalize plans.

"I'm worried if we don't get this in place, there will be development — mansions and commercialization," he said. "But there's so much potential."

Though his 1989 blueprint eventually ended up in storage, Moritz said he traced the route for years.

The funny thing, Moritz said, is there are a lot of similarities between what he envisioned nearly three decades ago and the system in discussion today.

"It's interesting to see this again, to see lots of interest," he said. "Looks like it could happen."