

**STATEMENT OF
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**MEETING BEFORE THE
JOINT TRAVEL, RECREATION, WILDLIFE
AND CULTURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

August 10, 2015

Introduction

Chairman Cooper, Chairman Petroff, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the invitation to appear before you today as you begin work on the Interim Study Priority #3, Bicycle Tourism and Recreation in Wyoming. I wish to provide an update on the needs and benefits of bicycling, walking and trails for Wyoming, and propose a legislative initiative for the Committee's consideration. An appendix section will also highlight some of the exciting new pathway and trail systems underway and planned in Wyoming communities, and provide information with the latest economic benefits and health research on bicycling and walking.

To help generate public discussion, Wyoming Pathways and the Platte River Trails Trust hosted the **Wyoming Bike Walk Trails Summit** June 25-26 in Casper. Approximately 70 people attended from communities around Wyoming, including elected and appointed officials; transportation, planning, economic development, recreation, and health professionals; and private business leaders.

Presenters at the Summit documented that there are three significant benefits to the activities of bicycling and walking: the economic benefits, the improvements to people's physical and mental health, and the enhanced quality of community life – connecting people and places. Not only is access to active transportation and quality recreation to mountain bike and hike critical to the travel and tourism industry, it is a fundamental component to recruiting new businesses, creating jobs, and at the heart of healthy people living in prosperous Wyoming communities.

One of the Summit activities was to discuss the current needs and opportunities around Wyoming, and for participants to help develop an action plan and priorities for bicycling, walking, and trails. Summit participants concluded that active transportation and active recreation facilities should be considered part of the basic infrastructure necessary for Wyoming's communities to thrive and prosper, and that biking and walking are important components of the transportation system, and quality trail systems are necessary for recreation demands. In tandem, programs that encourage more walking, biking and active lifestyles are viewed as beneficial to improve public health outcomes and save on health care in Wyoming.

The Active Wyoming Legislative Initiative proposed in this statement is one of the actions developed. It is based on the principles of "healthy community design" and supported by the transportation, health, economic, and quality of life benefits documented at the Summit.

Committee Recommendation - Sponsor “Active Wyoming” Legislation

Wyoming Pathways recommends that the **Travel, Recreation, Wildlife, and Cultural Resources Committee sponsor a bill to create a new Active Wyoming program**. The bill should be designed to provide investments in community-identified projects and programs through a competitive grant program focused in three categories - transportation, recreation, and health.

An Active Wyoming program at \$10 million a year investment would be an appropriate level to start to address the identified needs of Wyoming communities. This is proposed as State of Wyoming funding, and should include a provision to leverage the state investment with a local match, and to encourage additional public, private, and federal matching funds.

The Active Wyoming program proposed would have three focus areas: Active Transportation, Active Recreation, and Active living/Public Health. Based on a review of the relative costs of these projects and programs, it is recommended that a formula be considered where:

- 70% of the program would be dedicated to active transportation projects (pathways and safe streets, walkable downtowns)
- 20% to active recreation projects (mountain biking and hiking trails), and
- 10% to active living health programs (encouragement, promotion, education).

Thus, using the example of a total Active Wyoming program of \$10 million, funding could be divided with \$7 million dedicated to active transportation projects, \$2 million to active recreation investments, \$1 million to active living health programs. Start with a 2-year effort, and evaluate.

The source of the funding could be from a range of options, including the general fund, and we would ask the Committee and legislators for assistance to determine the source that best fits this need and opportunity. We believe the return on investment would be significant, based on the economic, community, and health benefits identified.

This Active Wyoming program should be managed by Wyoming’s qualified state agencies, the Wyoming Department of Transportation, Wyoming State Parks and Cultural Resources, and the Wyoming Department of Health. Collectively, these three state departments have broad experience with the categories of transportation, recreation and health. In addition they have solid grant and program management expertise to efficiently carry out such a legislative initiative. These agencies have shown a willingness to collaborate on this topic and believe in the potential.

Active Wyoming Legislative Initiative – three focus areas:

1. **Active Transportation** (Managed by WYDOT):
 - State of Wyoming grant investments available for community-sponsored pathways and safe streets projects and programs, open to all Wyoming cities, towns, and counties.

- Build on and enhance WYDOT’s existing programs including Local Government, Safety, Public Affairs, and the five District Engineer offices.
 - Require appropriate level of local match, for example 20%, and where feasible leverage federal funding programs including the Transportation Alternatives, Surface Transportation, and Highway Safety programs.
 - Include sufficient resources for agency overhead costs.
2. **Active Recreation** (Managed by WY State Parks):
- Provide State of Wyoming grant investments for community and land agency active recreation trail projects and programs, open to all Wyoming communities and qualified state and federal public land managing agencies.
 - Build on and enhance State Parks existing Nonmotorized Trail Program.
 - Require appropriate level of local match, in-kind trail volunteers, and leverage federal funding where appropriate such as the Recreational Trails Program nonmotorized category.
 - Include sufficient resources for agency overhead costs.
3. **Active Living & Public Health** (Managed by WY Department of Health):
- Provide state grant investments to local government and health agencies to improve public health outcomes through active living encouragement, education, and promotion programs, with the goal of reducing chronic disease and encouraging more active lifestyles, and to save the State of Wyoming in preventable health care expenses.
 - Build on existing Department of Health programs for chronic disease prevention and promotion of active living.
 - Leverage federal funding where appropriate such as CDC programs and seek to leverage local match and other public and private health grant opportunities.
 - Include sufficient resources for agency overhead costs.

We believe a strong case can be made for this level of investment. Research shows that increasingly, decisions to locate and invest in new businesses and create jobs are driven by the attractiveness of communities as places to live and do business. Pathways, safe streets and access to quality recreational trails are components of these decisions, and they make an important contribution to the economic vitality and quality of life of our communities.

People considering moving here, and our “home grown” Wyoming youth choosing to stay here, will be influenced by the existence and quality of these active transportation and recreation facilities. Communities with walkable downtowns, local pathways and fun nearby trails tend to experience a combination of a public health benefit of an increasingly active population, a more vibrant and resilient economy, and environmental benefits such as reduced traffic congestion and improved air quality. This is often called the triple bottom line: people, prosperity, and planet.

A compelling number of recent studies confirm the high level of these benefits. To help community leaders and elected officials better understand the benefits of pathways and trails, the regional research firm Headwaters Economics recently completed a **Trails Research and**

Searchable Benefits Library. <http://headwaterseconomics.org/trail> The Appendix I section provides a brief summary of several of the studies available online.

This comprehensive resource compiled more than 90 studies on the impacts of pathways, main streets, and trails in a single library, searchable by type of benefit, use, year, and region. An additional 30 studies are being added this year. Four main themes on how pathways and trails benefit communities emerge from this collection of detailed research across the United States.

- Pathways and Trails can generate business impacts and create new jobs by attracting visitors, especially overnight visitors.
- Local trail users often use community trails multiple times per week, and trails are a valuable part of residents' quality of life.
- Trails are often associated with higher property value, especially when a trail is designed to provide neighborhood access and maintain residents' privacy.
- Trails are associated with increased physical activity and improved public health, especially in rural places without other safe places to exercise.

One additional benefit is the fact that Wyoming contractors and construction firms tend to win most pathways and trail contracts for projects built in Wyoming. While major highway contracts frequently go to large out of state firms, local pathways are overwhelmingly designed and built by local Wyoming firms that employ skilled Wyoming workers. Thus an Active Wyoming initiative would be largely reinvested in our communities.

In summary, the time is right to start an Active Wyoming program. The case can be made that there are pressing unmet transportation, recreation, and health needs to be addressed in Wyoming, and that state investments in community-sponsored Active Wyoming projects would yield significant economic, quality of life, and health benefits.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide recommendations to the Committee. I would be pleased to answer any questions or offer any additional help to assist in the discussion of the Interim Study on Bicycle Tourism and Recreation.

Sincerely,



Tim Young
Executive Director, Wyoming Pathways

Attachments:

Appendix I. Research examples of economic and health benefits of pathways and trails

Appendix I.

Rationale for Active Wyoming = Economic, Community, and Health Benefits

When viewed through from a public health perspective, the benefits of an effort to increase active living in Wyoming are significant. Health benefits alone created by more bicycling and walking would amount to a huge savings for individuals and the state with improved health outcomes for Wyoming. Clearly the latest data shows there is a public health problem:

- Wyoming's adult obesity rate is now **27.8 percent**, up from **20.1 percent** in 2004 and from **14.0 percent** in 1995. http://trib.com/news/state-and-regional/wyoming-adult-obesity-rate-jumps-percent-in-new-study/article_6c8f59f4-12ee-57a2-a400-f0cee6c3d8b3.html

Conclusive research shows that obesity and physical inactivity are major risk factors for chronic diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and cancer. Biking and walking are part of the answer to help address the documented health problems of obesity and lack of physical activity currently present in Wyoming. Studies show:

- Adults who bike to work have better weight, blood pressure, and insulin levels.
- Women who bike 30 minutes a day have a lower risk of breast cancer.
- Adolescents who bicycle are 48% less likely to be overweight as adults.
- “Amid calls for health reform, real cost savings are more likely to be achieved through reducing obesity and related risk factors.” [[Read summary](#)]

The following research examples help show that there are significant health and economic benefits that Wyoming could tap into with an Active Wyoming Program. Additional examples are available at: <http://headwaterseconomics.org/trail>. Another source is at: <http://www.peopleforbikes.org/statistics/category/economic-statistics>

Community and Economic Benefits of Bicycling in Michigan

Summary and Interpretation

Year: 2014

Benefits studied: Business impacts, Public Health, User attitudes

Uses studied: Cycling

Overview: This study found that bicycling in Michigan generates \$224 million annually through retail spending, manufacturing, and event and tourism spending. Additionally, the improved health of those who commute to work by bicycle in the state is associated with up to \$256 million in avoided annual health care costs.

Region: Midwest

States: Michigan

Place: Statewide

Citation: BBC Research & Consulting. 2014. Community and Economic Benefits of Bicycling in Michigan. Prepared for the Michigan Department of Transportation.

Link: http://headwaterseconomics.org/wphw/wp-content/uploads/Trail_Study_85-MI-Cycling-Impact.pdf

Assessing the Cost Effectiveness of a Community Rail-Trail in Achieving Physical Activity Gains

Summary and Interpretation

Year: 2012

Benefits studied: Public Health, Trail use

Uses studied: Cycling, Walking

Overview: This study found that a community rail-trail in West Virginia encourages new physical activity among inactive residents and greater physical activity for those who were already active, and that for many community members trail use is their only form of exercise. Trail cost per newly active resident is on the lower end of health interventions aimed at encouraging sedentary individuals to become active, and is likely to reach more people than other common interventions.

Region: South

States: West Virginia

Place: Morgantown

Citation: Abildso, C., S. Zizzi, S. Selin, and P. Gordon. 2012. "Assessing the cost effectiveness of a community rail-trail in achieving physical activity gains." *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration* 30(2): 102-113.

Link: <http://js.sagamorepub.com/jpra/article/view/2655>

Valuing Bicycling's Economic and Health Impacts in Wisconsin

Summary and Interpretation

Year: 2010

Benefits studied: Business impacts, Public Health

Uses studied: Cycling

Overview: This study found that 13 million days of cycling occur in Wisconsin each year, roughly half of which are taken by non-residents who contribute \$309 million to the state's economy. The health benefits associated with increased physical activity for residents could reduce annual healthcare costs in Milwaukee and Madison alone by up to \$320 million, and less pollution due to fewer car trips is associated with as much as \$89 million in benefits.

Region: Midwest

States: Wisconsin

Place: Statewide

Citation: Grabow, M., M. Hahn, and M. Whited. 2010. *Valuing Bicycling's Economic and Health Impacts in Wisconsin*. The Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies Center for Sustainability and the Global Environment at University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Link: http://headwaterseconomics.org/wphw/wp-content/uploads/Trail_Study_75-economic-health-benefits-cycling-wisconsin.pdf

The following two examples include Wyoming data:

Yellowstone-Grand Teton Loop Bicycle Pathway Estimated Economic Impact

This is a new study published in spring 2015 that researched the potential economic benefits of a regional pathway loop in northwest Wyoming and eastern Idaho. Commissioned by the City of

Victor Idaho, the study is available at: <http://victorcityidaho.com/sites/default/files/Yellowstone-Grand%20Teton%20Loop%20Pathway%20-%20Economic%20Impact.pdf>

“Executive Summary: The combined annual economic impact of the proposed 262-mile Yellowstone-Grand Teton Loop pathway would yield a significant impact on the region’s economy. Pathway users would also enjoy a safer alternative to sharing roadways with motorized vehicles.

The pathway would cross through Teton and Park Counties in Wyoming, Teton and Fremont Counties in Idaho, and the southern tip of Gallatin County, Montana. The combined impact of the proposed pathway is estimated to create or sustain over 1,540 jobs within the region and bring over \$48 million in labor income. **Gross regional output would likely increase by over 1.6 percent or \$131.8 million annually.** Value added impacts are expected to reach nearly \$74 million.”

Teton County Trails & Pathways Survey Shows Extensive Local Use

MAY 2015

<http://headwaterseconomics.org/economic-development/trails-pathways/trails-teton-survey>

Survey shows that nine out of 10 respondents use the pathways and trails in Teton County, Wyoming. Teton County has the lowest obesity rate of all counties in Wyoming, in part due to the availability of pathways and trails. Such surveys help community leaders, stakeholders, and citizens plan for the future of pathways and trails systems.

- Nine out of 10 respondents use the pathways and trails in Teton County, Wyoming; with one in two doing so frequently.
- The survey results provide comprehensive information on pathways and trails usage, satisfaction, strengths, weaknesses, and suggestions for improvement to help community decision-makers, stakeholder groups, and interested citizens plan for the future of Jackson Hole’s pathways and trails systems.
- The strong use of trails and pathways demonstrates that public and private funds have been well-invested in creating, maintaining and completing the community’s trails and pathways.