



# Managing Public Lands for All

ASSESSING INTERESTS AND NEEDS ON MULTI-USE TRAILS AT POLE MOUNTAIN RECREATION AREA

ENR 5900 Capstone Project  
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## INTRODUCTION

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Happy Jack Recreation Area and Pole Mountain Open Space are home to a popular trail system near Laramie, Wyoming. Adjacent to Interstate-80 and a quick ten-minute drive from town, the trail network is where many residents and visitors get outside and recreate. It is managed by the Laramie Ranger District of the Medicine Bow-Routt National Forest and accommodates for multiple uses year-round, such as hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding, fat-biking and nordic skiing.

Trail issues at Happy Jack Recreation Area and Pole Mountain Open Space can best be described as ambiguous. They originate in a conflict of social or cultural values between users and/or management. Since the issue is on public land, there are bound to be differing values and preferences regarding land use, and perhaps different interpretations of regulations intended for the public and trail groups

Multi-Use Trails (MUT) systems have the potential to cause conflict and safety issues among different user groups. Because of the growing popularity of the trail system and personal experiences on these trails, we set out to talk to user groups of the trail network to help understand what issues exist in the MUT system at Happy Jack and Pole Mountain Recreation Area and to determine potential next steps for stakeholders and the US Forest Service.

## METHODS

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To conduct our exploratory needs assessment, we first identified stakeholders in the Laramie community that represented key user groups. Nearly all of the groups we reached out to expressed interest in the project and willingness to share their insights. The local running group, the High Plains Harriers, is the only stakeholder we were not able to connect with despite various outreach efforts.

We developed interview questions that would illuminate shared values, concerns, and management preferences about the Pole Mountain recreation area. During the interviews, we asked the

stakeholders questions about trail involvement, key management concerns, personal experiences of conflict, and perceptions of user volume, public-facing information, and access.

We conducted interviews in person, by phone, or over Zoom with each stakeholder representative or group. Interviews lasted 25–45 minutes with one interview lasting over an hour. Some interviews were recorded and transcribed, while others relied on note taking. We then compiled all interview responses in a spreadsheet and analyzed them to see which themes emerged among the different user groups.

### PROJECT OBJECTIVE

Identify key issues and interests of users at Happy Jack and Pole Mountain Recreation Area.

## INTERVIEWED STAKEHOLDERS & USER GROUP AFFILIATIONS

Laramie Bikenet .....	Mountain bikers, fat-bikers & trail maintenance
Laramie Ranger District .....	Trail network managing agency
Pilot Hill Board Member .....	Mountain biker, hiker, climber, nordic ski, fat-biker
Wyoming Conservation Corps .....	Trail construction & maintenance
Pilot Hill Board Member .....	Equestrian, hiking, camping
Pedal House Bike Shop .....	Local cycling business, cycling advocacy
Seniors on the Go .....	Hiking & snowshoeing group
Medicine Bow Nordic Association .....	Nordic skiing , ski instructing, trail grooming

## RESULTS & RECOMMENDATIONS

*Key takeaways are ranked by how frequently they came up during interviews.*

*Recommendations are suggestions stakeholders offered.*

### Key takeaways

- 1 Inadequate signage at trail junctions in the summer, including maps
- 2 Inadequate signage reminding users about trail etiquette, especially bikers yielding to other users
- 3 There is an inherent potential for conflict between horses and mountain bikers
- 4 Parking areas can get overwhelmed during events, especially in the winter
- 5 Common perception that summer trails are designed for mountain bikers more than other users

### Recommendations

- 1 Increased summer signage at trail junctions including maps and etiquette reminders
- 2 Increased summer signage at trailheads with etiquette and reminders that trails are for all
- 3 Increased education for all users on how to safely encounter horses and wildlife
- 4 Designate parking areas for different user groups (e.g. horses and mountain bikes) to minimize conflict potential
- 5 Increased education on sustainable trail design, potential alternative routes around mountain bike features for horses and hikers

### TOP TAKEAWAY:

*There is a need for more education and information-sharing in the form of trail signage and other means at the Happy Jack/Pole Mountain trail network*

# MOVING FORWARD

## Capacity for collaboration

These conversations illustrate potential for future collaboration between the Laramie Ranger District and local user groups. When asked about witnessed or second-hand conflicts, several interviewees pointed to conflicts between nordic skiers and other winter user groups as a model of successful conflict resolution at Pole Mountain Recreation Area that did not require management changes on the part of the Forest Service. Rather, with permission of the Forest Service, Laramie Bikenet and Medicine Bow Nordic worked together to establish a winter multi-use trail system and maintenance structure that fell within the MBNA's existing Forest Service use permit. The success of this endeavor was highlighted by many interviewees and speaks to the collaborative capacity of local stakeholder groups to problem solve and devise management solutions that make Pole Mountain Recreation Area an enjoyable place for all users. Collaboration between stakeholders of multi-use lands is shown to create a sense of shared ownership and eliminate user conflicts (Godtman Kling et al., 2019)

## Actionable steps and outcomes

The majority of user groups expressed that there is inadequate signage for summer trail use. Developing more signage is an accessible First Order action that could have additional Second Order and Third Order outcomes. According to Innes and Booher (1999), successful consensus building results in three tiers of outcomes. First Order Effects occur directly during the consensus process, Second Order Effects may show up while a collaboration is underway and will show themselves outside of the immediate scope of the project, and Third Order Effects may be felt well after the project is complete and will have a lasting impact. If agency and stakeholder collaboration were to proceed on the issues raised in these interviews, we see the potential effects listed below. Stakeholders have clear ideas about simple changes that could make the Pole Mountain Area enjoyable for all users. A consensus process could open the door to put those ideas into effect and have positive, lasting impacts.

### First Order Effects

Signage developed and installed at summer trail junctions that include trail maps and etiquette reminders for hikers to yield to horses and bikes to yield to all users

Additional signs placed at trailheads how bikers should conduct themselves when they encounter horses

Additional signs reminding users that the area is for all to enjoy

### Second Order Effects

Coordination among stakeholders and managing agency

Joint learning about trail system and ethics that extends to local and distant communities

Changes in perception that summer trail system caters primarily to mountain bikers

Changes in practices when users encounter each other that makes a safer, more enjoyable experience for all

### Third Order Effects

New collaborations among local user groups

Increased adaptive capacity for increased numbers of users

New norms and heuristics about the way different user groups respond to each other at Pole Mountain Recreation Area

## CONCLUSION

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A goal of this project was to better understand the conflicts that occur on multi-use trails at Happy Jack and Pole Mountain area. Some findings were shared widely amongst stakeholders while others were unique. A specific issue echoed in the winter sports community is how some fat bikers and trail runners impact the groomed trails during un-ideal conditions. Another key concern across summer and winter use was off-leash dogs. A unique result from an interview was concern about shooting, hunting, and trapping in high density recreation areas like Happy Jack. Many of these issues come back to users lacking knowledge of responsible recreation and factors specific to the Pole Mountain area.

Trail conflicts aside, some great strengths of this trail network were revealed. A valued community resource is the Laramie Trail Conditions Facebook page where users share trail information on a regular basis. One stakeholder acknowledged that the more trail users the area attracts, the more people there are to serve as stewards of the trails. And emphasized by a bike community member, the MUT network is what makes the trail experience and access so great. Overall, it was widely agreed that major user conflicts are rare. This project revealed that the multi-use trails at Happy Jack and Pole Mountain allow for ample access and experiences which is highly valued across the entire trail community. We hope that these insights will help trail user groups realize areas of common ground, and what interests should be addressed when moving forward with future management actions in the area.

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*We would like to thank our stakeholders for participating in this project.*

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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Godtman Kling, K., Dahlberg, A., & Wall-Reinius, S. (2019). Negotiating Improved Multifunctional Landscape Use: Trails as Facilitators for Collaboration Among Stakeholders. *Sustainability*, 11(13), Article 13. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su11133511>

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Ruckelshaus Institute. (2021). Pole Mountain Gateway Public Engagement Summary Report. University of Wyoming. <https://pole-mountain-gateways.wygisc.org/>