Teton Waterways Recreation Advisory Committee

Thursday, February 23– 4:00-5:30pm

Commissioners Room – Teton County Courthouse

committee meetings can be accessed using the standard Board of County Commissioners Zoom meeting ID #: **818 5476 8477**

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**Minutes- 02.23.23**

* Welcome (4:00-4:15)
  + Attendance: Rob Marin, Amy Verbeten, Boots Allen, Brett High, Joe McFarlane, Kyle Ellison, Charlie Woodward, Jeff Klausmann, Orion Hatch.
* River Ambassadors/Rangers scope of work (4:15-5:20)
  + Orion Hatch from SRF – Guest Speaker, overview of SRF recreation management
    - SRF has worked with FS in the past for river management on the Snake River in Wyoming.
    - SRF has run River Ambassador Program, partnering with Teton County, Wyoming.
    - Ambassador program was focused on Wilson Boat ramp. 2010-2015
      * Ambassadors were paid 22/hr 13-15K yr, SFR funds and WY Game and Fish grants
      * Role: education – voice for SRF and Snake River itself
      * 2021 county asked if SRF was willing to take up ambassador program in the future. SRF board was not in support of running this program.
    - Joe gave update on status on Teton County, Idaho river management
    - SRF started the river ambassador program with Wy Game and Fish support
    - (JM) Was ambassador program successful? (OH) Yes, many people saw the program as positive, was run by one employee. Often there is conflict inherent in this role, but when the main focus is in education and there is no enforcement, you can largely avoid conflict.
    - (OH)The river ambassador had a deep local experience, skills on water, connection to river culture.
    - What were some of the issues the ambassador program was designed to address? (OH) Proper recording of commercial guides on the water, flow of traffic on boat ramp, friendly help with boat rigging unloading watercraft, source of education for safety on the water. Mostly about urging folks to use best practices to access water.
    - How many hours a week, what was season? May25-sept 15th, ~28 hours a week, ambassador drove his own vehicle and shuttles were paid for. ~1000K for shuttles during season.
    - Private Philanthropy was a key component of funding. 2-3K per season
    - Teton County WY management plan identified county as lead manager and SFR was no longer lead on program.
    - County often had multiple employees, presence @ Wilson boat ramp and South Park
    - What was the focus of Game and Fish Grant monies? Grant was written to focus on river stewardship and boat ramp efficiency. Avoiding conflicts between users primarily.
    - Wyoming Game and Fish trust fund to be used for hiring one seasonal employee. 5,000K was granted
    - How is the role of ambassador from SRF and Teton County ambassador similar or different? SRF Ambassador has more presence on the water and county less so. Teton County had more of an enforcement vibe.
    - What kinds of employees is county hiring? Some years employees had a deeper understanding but more recent years less experienced employees (college students/age)
    - Fringe Benefits? Season pass for parking, gear for on the water pro-deals, ski pass, boat for the summer.
    - Was commercial use or general public driving the need for ambassadors? Primarily run as a source of education and keeping boat ramps running smoothly.
    - What did you do in the event of a law enforcement situation? (OH) did not have specific example to answer this question.
  + Park Link: (precise park link?) Kyle has researched some parking system infrastructure that can log fees and give passes to the folks who already have fishing licenses, etc. The also offer infrastructure for license plate recognition, systems for parking fee management.
  + Ambassador Program discussion:
    - Joe: likes the idea of ambassadors, couple of employees, focusing time at bates, south bates, big eddy. Details of hiring, training, scope of work.
    - Boots: Ideal candidate is retired or semi-retired river guides. Funding?
    - Recruitment? Is the most valuable use of time to network and identify potential candidates, instead of targeting college age folks.
    - Rob would appreciate starting a list of potential candidates. Both for river ambassador and camp host. Possibility of Camp host / river ambassador.
    - Housing is another issue on par with funding
    - Hiring Kyle: no interest early in the season, more interest in May. Higher Pay is worth the quality of applicant. ~20$/hr
    - Rob would like a bullet list of priorities to shape job description.
    - Education, Focus on Boat ramps, Presence at the boat ramp is priority,
    - Large groups from out-of-state are the main issue. anecdotal
    - Orion: work into the budget trainings, First Aid, Swiftwater, AIS, look into “Workforce Training Development Fund”
    - Start with hours, season,
    - How do we get more $?, add 10K to budget if possible
    - Reach out to Clerk Keeley- How much more can we get out of vessel funds. Can we make a formal request to get a report on Vessel funds to see what is available?
    - Dates: end of May Memorial Day- September Labor Day- 16 weeks – 40 hrs a week @20$/hr = 14,100 payroll cost.
    - Make sure to be flexible to get one employee
    - Recommendation – Hire one person full time, then look for a second person if funds are available.
    - One person who is well trained, could possibly manage volunteers.
    - Need for support from law enforcement for employee.
    - Should the ambassador float the river?
    - Stronger presence on the weekend when traffic is higher
    - River management Society – do they offer a non-enforcement based education ambassador training? Has county signed up for RMS membership?
  + Funding:
    - Committee could request for more $
    - 15K plus, 7.5K in rec fund, vessel funds pot unknown
    - Recommend requesting more funds from vessel fund, save recreation fund monies for future grant seed money, launching other programs/initiatives.

**Recommendation from Committee**

The Teton Waterways Recreation Advisory Committee makes the following recommendations to Teton County, Idaho, to be considered when designing and staffing the river ambassador program.

**Hiring**: focus efforts to hire one river ambassador as a full-time, seasonal employee for the summer of 2023. Once a successful hire is made, assess budget resources and hire a support ambassador to work during high traffic times (weekends and holidays).

**Scope of work:** River ambassador will focus on education around river access etiquette, on water etiquette, river safety, wildlife, and river stewardship. Ambassador will not engage in enforcement of County Waterways Recreation Ordinance.

**Season**: River ambassador will be employed from the end of May to early September. Budget will include roughly 30-40 hours a week with a focus on presence at river access points during weekends and holidays.

**Pay**: 20$/hour is recommended as rate of pay. 16 weeks x 40 hours a week @ $20/hr = $12,800 + $1,280(payroll cost) =$14,080 for seasonal staff salary. Budget should be increased to provide training (detail below), transportation costs, uniform, and other necessary equipment. The committee recommends that Teton County, Idaho release additional vessel funds to increase the budget for the river ambassador program, ensuring a successful impact on river recreation during a foundational period in summer 2023. $10,000 is requested to allow for hiring part-time support and funding necessary equipment and resources.

**Support:** The river ambassador should have direct access to assistance from Teton County, Idaho Law enforcement in the event of an emergency. This structure should be created and agreed upon before hiring.

**Training:** The river ambassador should have access to appropriate training to allow for successfully handling unexpected situations. Suggested training is wilderness first aid/CPR, swiftwater rescue, aquatic invasive species, Teton River wildlife and potentially river ranger training through the River Management Society.

* Public Comment (5:20-5:30)
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