



Hanford Area Community Vision Executive Summary

February 18, 2014



In partnership with

MacKay  Sposito

A Vision for Public Recreation Opportunities for the Hanford Reservation

The history of the Hanford area contains many chapters including the ice-age floods, early use by the native peoples, settlement by early European emigrants, the development of the world's first full-scale nuclear reactor, the site's importance to the nuclear arms race during the cold-war, and most recently to Hanford environmental cleanup. These chapters have been documented over many years and their importance to the people and the land leaves a legacy for future generations. As the Hanford Reservation continues to evolve and the site's footprint is reduced, we must begin planning for the next important chapter of the Hanford Reservation. What will the Reservation look like 2 years from now? What about 20 or 50 years? What opportunities lie within the landscape and how does this legacy continue on for the next generations?

In 2010, Tri-City Development Council (TRIDEC) and the Tri-Cities Visitor and Convention Bureau (TCVCB) held a series of public meetings to collect feedback from residents about the community's vision for the future of the Hanford Reservation. Feedback from those meetings can be roughly organized into the following topics:

- economic development
- conservation and preservation
- education
- recreation

Each of these topics is currently being addressed by different community initiatives. For example, 1,641 acres of land is in the process of being transferred from Hanford to the community to help support economic development. In addition there is continuing Congressional legislation requesting National Park designation for several historical sites, including but not limited to the B Reactor and the White Bluffs Town site. The Hanford Reach National Monument was dedicated in 2000 to ensure that the majority of the Hanford site would be set aside for conservation and preservation. Also, construction on the

Hanford Reach Interpretive Center is underway. This Interpretive Center will provide education opportunities to ensure the legacy of the Hanford site is retained for generations.

The public outreach effort also identified community interest in public access and recreation on the Hanford Reservation. However, a number of questions remained unanswered. Some of these included:

- *What does public access and recreation development look like on the Hanford site and how does it relate to the Hanford Reach National Monument?*
- *What other recreation related planning work has been completed by our community?*
- *How might recreation coexist with conserved lands?*

These are good questions that needed to be answered through further engagement with stakeholders and discussions with the general public.

In response, leadership at TRIDEC and TCVCB decided to further explore the public's desire for access and recreation opportunities by developing a high-level "Vision" for future site recreation. Their intent was to create a set of recreation planning exhibits that would be used to solicit feedback, gain consensus, and *start a discussion* about potential recreation opportunities within the Hanford site and adjacent land uses. This site has not been open to the public since 1943!

In early 2013, TRIDEC and TCVCB solicited proposals from several planning and design firms to explore these opportunities and to communicate a vision for recreation and public access on the Hanford reservation. After a thoughtful selection process, a local firm that specializes in recreation development, MacKay Sposito, was selected to assist with the project. MacKay Sposito was tasked with researching previously completed planning work, conducting a series of stakeholder meetings, developing exhibits that depict opportunities for recreation and public access, and communicating these ideas at a series of public open houses.

Early on in the project, goals and objectives were set by the stakeholders. These included:

Goals

1. Increase visibility and tourism, promote the ample recreational opportunities, national park status, high quality of life, and opportunities for economic development;
2. Department of Energy's (DOE) support for the vision of the Hanford Community;
3. Community Education and Support – Encourage advocacy;
4. Develop a vision that can be used to gain congressional and statewide support.

Objectives

1. Ensure that the vision has community and stakeholder support;
2. Develop a plan that is molded by the community;
3. Build credibility;
4. Encourage enthusiasm by telling a story – Strong visual graphics/images.

This was an important step in the planning process as the goals established the guiding principles for the visioning process and the objectives communicated the purpose. Well established goals and objectives ensured that the planning team stayed on track and the final project met the stakeholder's expectations.

Many planning studies and research efforts have previously been completed for the Hanford Reservation and Hanford Reach National Monument. These studies, which are very thorough, address a variety of topics and strategies including public safety, conservation, preservation, land management policies, cultural and historical resources, and recreation opportunities. Two particularly important documents that provided a basis for this planning work were the Comprehensive Lands Use Plan completed by DOE in 1999 and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in 2008. Both documents are the result of extensive public outreach. They provide a solid basis for

future land use and development decisions. As it relates to public access and recreation, these documents establish land management policies and identify where recreation uses could occur. Unfortunately, these documents can be difficult for the general public to digest. This recreation planning effort provided an opportunity to further develop some of the concepts contained in these documents and to communicate them through renderings to establish a vision and evoke enthusiasm for potential projects.

To assist with this recreation planning effort a strategic steering committee was created comprising of leadership from TRIDEC, TCVCB, Benton County, Hanford Communities, CREHST Museum, Washington State University Tri-Cities, WSU TC/PNNL, City of Richland, Port of Benton, City of Kennewick, Hanford Reach Interpretive Center, and the Hanford B Reactor Museum Association. Members of the strategic committee represented years of experience on the Hanford site. They provided context, advice, and early guidance for initial recreation concepts and opportunities. Additional outreach involved a series of three public open houses, held during the month of November 2013, and provided additional valuable input and feedback for the recreation concepts. These meetings not only gained regional but national attention along with legislative support from Congressman Doc Hastings.

The outcome of this engagement process was that in general, there is continued support and interest in public access within the Hanford Reservation along with additional recreation opportunities within the Reach National Monument. The renderings of potential recreation projects worked as intended and helped the public gain a better understanding of how these areas could be developed and what the projects might feel and look like. This process reinforced that much of the general public did not fully understand what recreation opportunities were already available in the Hanford Reach National Monument. It was also clear that the environmental community is very concerned about how public access would be managed so that preservation and conservation would continue within the Reach. But this also begs the question, "How do you have a National Monument that is restricted to the public for which the National Monument was designated?"

There are a number of general conclusions that can be made from the comments received at the open houses.

- 1.) Shoreline trails seemed to be the most desired recreation amenity for the Hanford Reservation site. Approximately 20% of all comments collected related to a desire for these types of facilities and this type of public access.
- 2.) Access to the top of Rattlesnake Mountain was also a high priority expressed by attendees. These comments made up approximately 12% of the total comments collected.
- 3.) Less requested, but still desired facilities included camping sites, equestrian trails, non-motorized boat access, interpretive opportunities, and dinner trains. These comments represented about 5-8% of all comments received.
- 4.) The public also expressed concerns about potential impacts to the environment related to new public access on the site, especially sensitive areas such as the Arid Lands Ecology Reservation and Rattlesnake Mountain. These areas have been specifically set aside for study and research and about 13% of the comments requested that the public should never have access into these areas.

The existing planning documents, stakeholders input, and public comments provided a wealth of information for the planning team. What was clear was that the planning area is extensive and that there are many opportunities to provide recreation and public access while still meeting the other important goals of the site and desire of the community (i.e. conservation, economic development, and education).

The final concepts represented in the vision included six potential recreation development sites linked by a backbone of trails and existing access roads. Vignettes were refined based on the collected input and consistent with existing planning documents. The vignettes depict trails and trailheads, campground developments, interpretive and educational opportunities, and boat launches. These vignettes are contained in exhibits that are available at www.tridec.org, dated November 18, 2013. This collection of exhibits provides a vision for

public access and recreation on the site that is compatible with other site goals and that reflects input provided by the Tri-City community.

As part of this project, we have identified three next steps that require consideration. These are:

- 1.) There is a need for further planning, research, site specific studies and the development of a comprehensive recreation program that addresses potential impacts, and develops a plan for funding and long term operations and maintenance.
- 2.) Site specific studies that include more recreation will require further environmental review and public input as part of a NEPA permitting process. This process will ensure that all impacts are considered and input evaluated.
- 3.) As the “begging of a discussion,” this visioning process does not resolve or consider exhaustively the input of many of the agencies or stakeholders that would be involved in specific site developments. Development within shorelines, culturally significant, and/or environmentally sensitive areas will require sound planning and agency interactions. Agencies such as USFWS, DOE, US Army Corp, U.S. Coast Guard, and The Tribes, just to name a few, will all play important roles in shaping recreation opportunities and ensuring that they meet all permitting requirements and are in line with management policies.

So one can see there is more work in front of us before public access and recreation can be realized. This is typical for all projects and shouldn't hinder the dream for public access. Most importantly it will require continued community education and support to make this a reality.

This MacKay Sposito study, conducted over a nine-month period, provided a clear understanding of the local community's strong desire to have some kind of public access to the area along the Columbia River which has been completely closed to the public for 70

years. As one interviewee said, “I’ve worked out on Hanford for more than 30 years, and never been allowed to take my family out there!”

Based on this study and the public outreach that was completed, MacKay Sposito has provided recommendations for initial recreation opportunities that are compatible with the land uses and the desires of the community. These recommendations are based on not only what we heard, but include the reality of funding constraints and development costs. There is a need to prioritize the implementation of any projects and it is MacKay Sposito’s recommendation to pursue the recreation improvements that are the ‘low hanging fruit’ or projects that can be accomplished within these constraints. Funding for these recommendations will require combination of both private and public resources, grant opportunities and donations. Many public agency budgets for capital improvements, operations and maintenance are currently struggling to maintain their existing recreation facilities let alone developing new facilities.

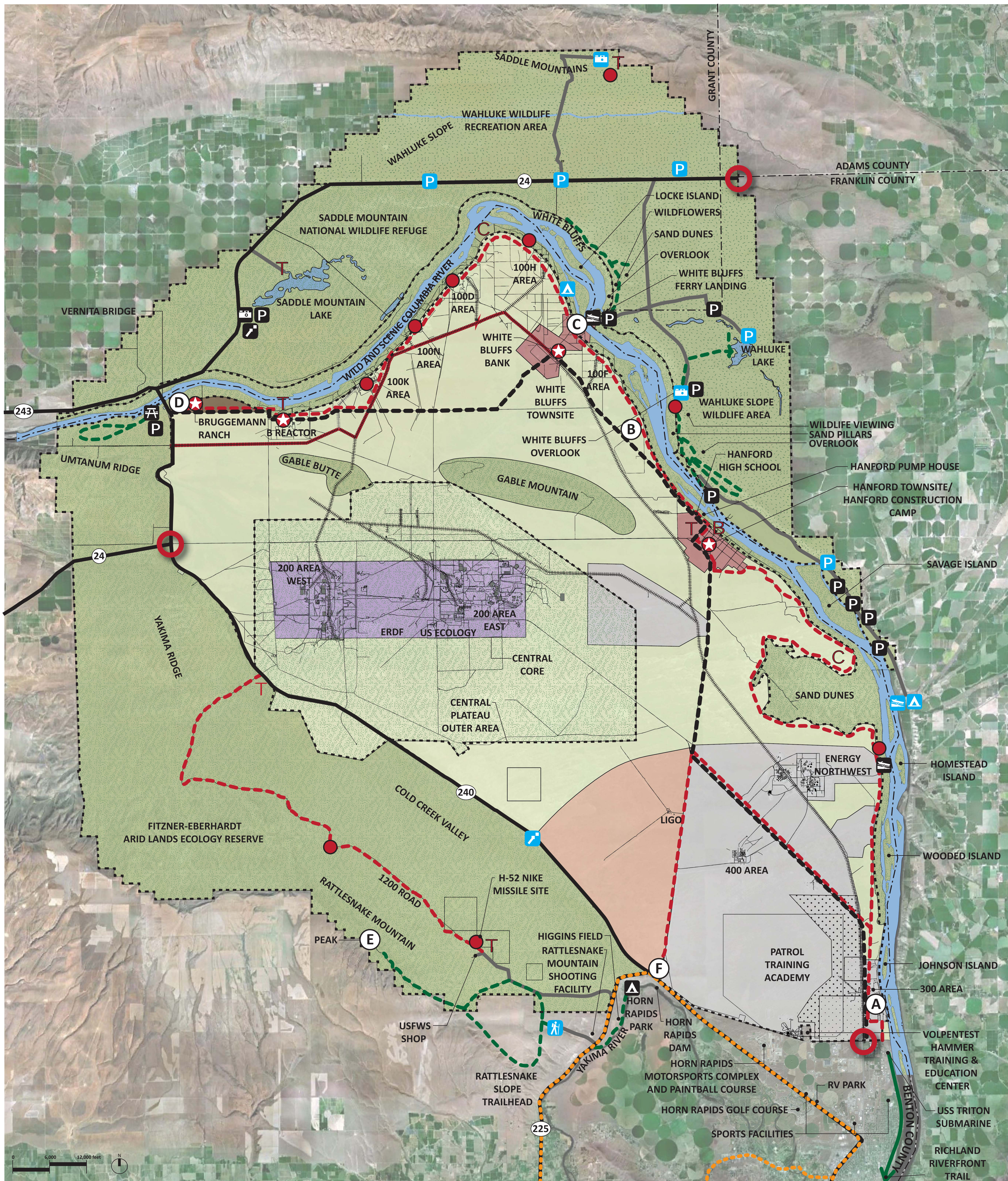
Recommendations:

- **Shoreline trails and trail head development.** The site offers a wide variety of roads and trails as part of the existing infrastructure along the shoreline. These opportunities are readily available for the establishment of trail systems along the shoreline of the Columbia River. It is recommended that all trail systems include trail heads that can accommodate a variety of users such as equestrians, cyclists, walkers, runners and hikers. These trail heads should be located at strategic points that create drop off and pick up points, or preferably a looped trail system. Additional support facilities should include restrooms, trash receptacles, a water source, along with signage such as way finding, rules and regulations, and interpretation. Day use fees could also be charged to help offset management costs.
- **Non-motorized boat access and water trails.** This opportunity is very similar to the trails and trail head development as the sites existing infrastructure could be used such as the roads and existing trails. It is recommended that several access points

along the shoreline are established along the river to provide a variety of experiences and water trail lengths. Trail head development is a necessity for this user group and they should provide similar amenities as what has been recommended as part of the shoreline trail recommendations.

- **Access to Historical Sites and Monuments.** Currently public access to historic sites is limited to the B Reactor and during the outreach it was evident that they are interested in less restrictive access to this Monument along with opening up access to other historic sites such as the cities of White Bluffs, Hanford and the Bruggemann ranch to name a few. The B Reactor would be the logical starting point, as it is already in operation as a tourist destination, but it is also a good choice due to the proximity to the highway and has areas that could be improved and used for public parking. The other sites would require more effort and funding as many of these facilities would need additional site security, visitor amenities and parking improvements to support the public's use. However, these same historic sites and amenities could also be used as trailheads and provide connections to the shoreline trail system.
- **Campgrounds.** As mentioned earlier as part of the DOE comprehensive land use planning effort, there are two areas that have been dedicated as low and high intensity recreation uses. While the high intensity land use allows for more activities it is also the least desirable areas as a first phase recreation development and it is recommended that any development at this location should occur in a later phase. This is mainly due to the proximity to the highway, lack of amenities such as existing trails and safe connections to the Yakima River. The low intensity recreation land use that has been identified is in a much more desirable area due to its proximity to the Columbia River and historic sites, and access to the existing trails and infrastructure. An example of a compatible recreation activity would be a primitive, walk-in style of camping that also offers access to the river for non-motorized boating, shoreline fishing, hiking, and equestrian trails. Trail heads would also be recommended for this type of use to accommodate the users described.

The first step in implementing any of these recommendations is building advocacy and support for any recreation improvements. There also has to be a champion and leadership to be advocates for public access. It is MacKay Sposito's strong recommendation that TRIDEC and TCVCB proceed to inform local elected officials, the Department of Energy and Fish and Wildlife of the public's clear interest in the future of the Hanford Site, and opportunities for public access to the Hanford Reservation and the Hanford Reach National Monument.



DRAFT

- (A) 300 AREA
- (B) WHITE BLUFFS TO HANFORD AREA TRAIL
- (C) WHITE BLUFFS FERRY LANDING
- (D) VERNITA CAMPGROUND AND NON-MOTORIZED BOAT LAUNCH
- (E) RATTLESNAKE MOUNTAIN OVERLOOK
- (F) CAMPGROUND

- PUBLIC USE**
- TRIDEC TRANSFER REQUEST
 - LAND IN EA ANALYSIS
 - CLOSED
 - OPEN
 - OPEN CONTROLLED

RECREATION

- EXISTING FACILITIES**
- CAMPGROUND
 - BOAT LAUNCH
 - OVERLOOK
 - PARKING
 - WILDLIFE VIEWING
 - TRAILHEAD
 - INTERPRETATION
- PROPOSED USFWS FACILITIES**
- CAMPGROUND
 - BOAT LAUNCH
 - OVERLOOK
 - PARKING
 - WILDLIFE VIEWING
 - TRAILHEAD
 - INTERPRETATION

- MAJOR ROAD**
- MINOR ROAD**
- HIKING TRAIL**
- ICE AGE FLOODS TRAIL**
- PROPOSED HIKING TRAIL**
- RAILROAD TRACKS**
- ABANDONED RAIL LINE**
- PROPOSED MANAGEMENT UNIT PER USFWS**
- GATEWAY**
- NATIONAL MONUMENT**
- POTENTIAL INTERPRETIVE AREA**
- POTENTIAL TRAILHEAD AND PARKING**
- POTENTIAL CAMPGROUND**
- POTENTIAL BOAT LAUNCH**
- POTENTIAL MAJOR ROAD**
- POTENTIAL MULTI-USE TRAIL**
- RAIL ALIGNMENT FOR USE**