

Reimagining the Taggart Lake Experience

Grand Teton National Park, Wyoming

October 2024

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Taggart Lake Trailhead is a place where people, from both near and far, come to start their visit at Grand Teton National Park. This popular year-round trailhead supports a range of recreational pursuits from an early summer hike to a mid-winter snowshoe. Taggart Lake is also a place where visitors of varying physical abilities and hiking familiarity have an opportunity to experience the backcountry. For years, we've seen growing visitation in the park with impacts to the visitor experience at Taggart Lake in the form of overflow parking, deteriorated trail tread, trail crowding, vegetation loss, and insufficient trailhead facilities. We've also heard from you about the changing experience at Taggart. A planning process is underway, and we are looking to have a conversation with you about the Taggart Lake experience so that we continue to preserve park resources and provide opportunities for high quality experiences for you, the visitor.

This newsletter provides background information about the existing experiential and resource conditions, the issues we perceive as impacting the desired visitor experience, and potential improvements that we are considering. We would like to understand what you see as issues whether you are driving past Taggart Lake Trailhead on the Teton Park Road, parking at the trailhead, or out on the trail. Also provided are high-level concepts of what a reimagined parking lot and trailhead could look like. Please take a few minutes to review the information in this newsletter and submit your suggestions and comments. We greatly appreciate your interest and participation.

Chip Jenkins

Superintendent
Grand Teton National Park



Project Background

The Taggart Lake Trailhead, a popular year-round trailhead, serves as a starting point for a range of visitor opportunities including hiking, skiing, snowshoeing, biking, and backcountry camping. A trail system leading to picturesque lakes at the base of the Teton Range lends itself to beginner-level and family-friendly excursions, while also providing access to more remote experiences that require higher-level skill and self-sufficiency. The park's non-motorized multiuse pathway, which is open spring, summer, and fall, goes past both Taggart Lake Trailhead and nearby Cottonwood Creek Picnic Area. In the winter months recreationists predominately use Taggart Lake Trailhead when the Teton Park Road is closed to motorized vehicles and groomed between Taggart Lake Trailhead and Signal Mountain Lodge.

Year-round visitor use at the Taggart Lake Trailhead has increased in the past 10 years and the existing facilities, including the trail system to Taggart

Lake, do not adequately support quality year-round visitor experiences and have led to negative impacts to resources, visitor experiences, and park operations. Roadside parking in designated and undesignated areas on the Teton Park Road potentially impacts scenic driving and the ability for visitors to park and transition to the trailhead. The Reimagining the Taggart Lake Experience planning effort focuses on improving resource conditions and opportunities for high-quality visitor experiences through improvements to year-round parking and facilities, accessibility, the summer trail system, shoreline destinations, viewsheds, wayfinding, and interpretive information.

While this newsletter focuses on the Taggart Lake summer experience, Cottonwood Creek Picnic Area faces similar challenges. The picnic area is a smaller component of this project due to its proximity to the Taggart Lake Trailhead and its current use for winter parking when the Teton Park Road is closed.

Purpose and Need for the Project

The purpose of the Reimagining the Taggart Lake Experience planning effort is to provide opportunities for high-quality visitor experiences by creating a welcoming sense of arrival and improved recreational access to meet the needs of a greater range of physical abilities and hiking experience in the project area.

This planning effort is needed to address challenges visitors experience while scenic driving on the Teton Park Road or transitioning from their vehicle to their recreational objective as well as deteriorated and insufficient trail and trailhead infrastructure, and associated resource impacts.

Planning objectives are to:

- address roadside parking,
- address visitor arrival and transition to recreational opportunities,
- provide family-friendly experiences and minimize constructed barriers that impede accessibility, and
- minimize impacts to soil, vegetation, and riparian areas.


Planning for Visitor Experience and Resource Conditions

We have been engaging the public on a parkwide effort to understand challenges and opportunities for visitor use and experience, as well as desired resource conditions and visitor experiences. We have developed desired conditions parkwide and for specific management areas within the park. Desired conditions are statements of aspiration that describe resource conditions, visitor experiences and opportunities, and facilities and services that the National Park Service strives to achieve and maintain in a particular park or area. They help park managers answer the question “what are we trying to achieve?” Desired conditions describe what conditions, outcomes, and opportunities are to be achieved and maintained in the future, not necessarily what exists today. A story map describes the development of the parkwide and management area desired conditions ([Story Map](#)). We are also developing more specific desired conditions for the Taggart Lake area.

Through this process, we are identifying key aspects within the project area (see Figure 1) that are not meeting the desired conditions for the Taggart Lake area. While each potential issue is interconnected in the area, the discussion is divided into two focus areas: Teton Park Road and Taggart Lake Trailhead parking lot; and Taggart Loop Trail and Taggart Lake lakeshore. While these focus areas are discussed separately, it is important to remember that they function together.

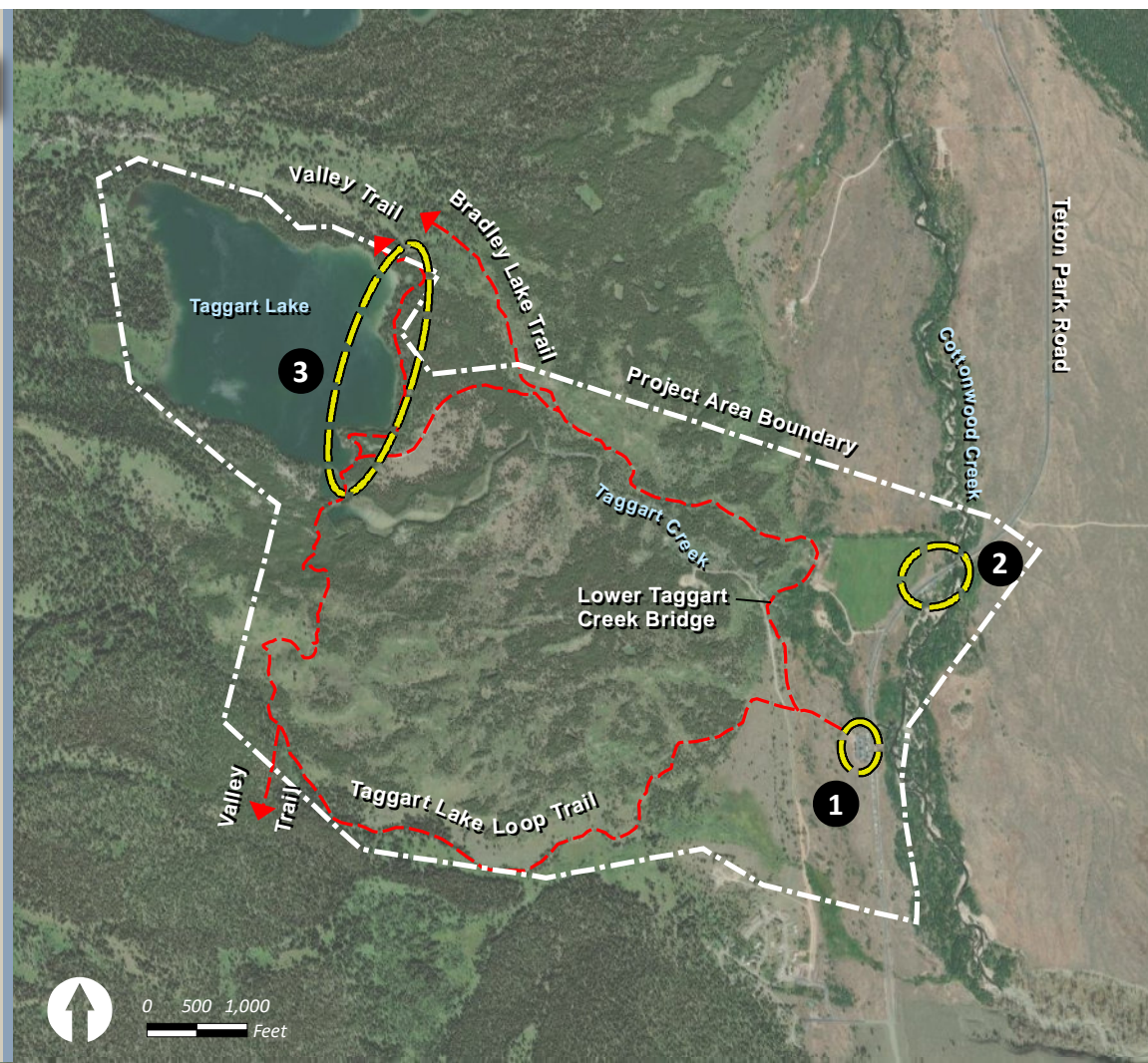
The purpose of this newsletter is to describe the desired conditions, the issues impacting these conditions, and potential action scenarios we are considering within the two focus areas. With this information and your own experiences, we would like to hear your insights on issues within the project area. Additionally, to understand your thoughts about parking lot and trailhead improvements, this newsletter also provides high-level concepts of what a reimagined parking lot and trailhead could look like.

Figure 1. Project Planning Area

 Project Area Boundary

 Trail

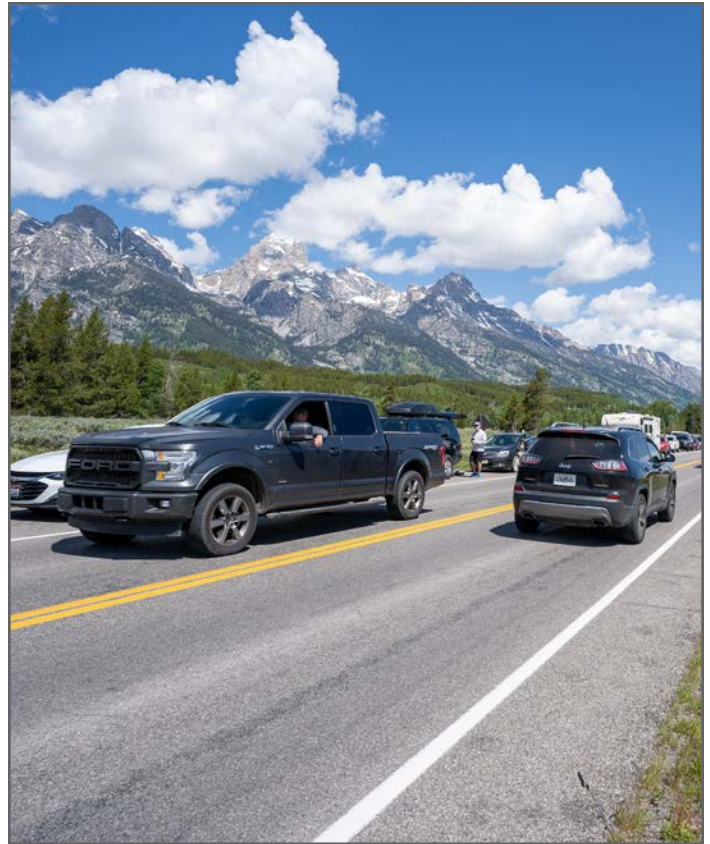
-  Taggart Lake Parking Area and Trailhead
-  Cottonwood Creek Picnic Area
-  Primary Lakeshore Viewing Area



Teton Park Road and Taggart Lake Trailhead Parking

Desired Conditions: Whether visitors are driving on the Teton Park Road or to the Taggart Lake parking lot, visitors experience a scenic drive, with free-flowing traffic and unobstructed views of the Teton Range and surrounding landscape. Upon arrival at the trailhead, parking is within the parking lot and convenient to the trailhead. After parking, visitors experience a clear transition from the parking lot to the trail, and when returning to the parking lot, visitors can reflect on their experience without feeling hurried. Additionally, visitors experience an area that is free of vehicle-related vegetation impacts, invasive plants, user-created trails, and soil compaction.

Existing Conditions: The Taggart Lake parking lot is often full during high use periods in both summer and winter. Overflow parking occurs along Teton Park Road in both designated and undesignated roadside parking areas (see Figure 2). During peak summer months (July and August), an average of over 6,000 vehicles drive past the Taggart Lake Trailhead each day (2023). When vehicles are parked along the roadside, drivers and passengers navigating this section of Teton Park Road experience obstructed views of the Tetons and surrounding landscape. Additionally, there are safety concerns regarding roadside parking as it blocks sightlines at the Beaver Creek administrative area entrance and the multiuse non-motorized pathway road crossing. Undesignated roadside

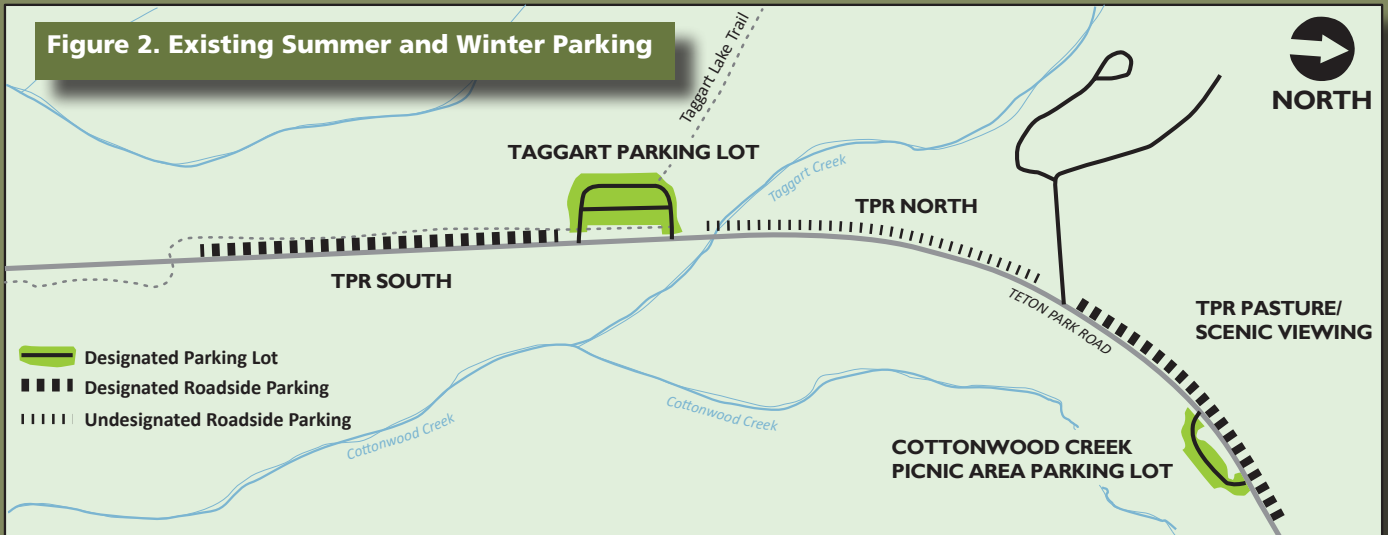


parking has led to soil compaction and vegetation loss beyond the constructed road edge.

Overflow parking on the Teton Park Road and inadequate trailhead facilities have resulted in user-created trails and impacts on soils and vegetation. Both Taggart Lake and Cottonwood Creek Picnic Area parking lots are situated adjacent to riparian areas, and foot traffic on user-created trails along the steep banks of the creek also results in vegetation loss and erosion.



Figure 2. Existing Summer and Winter Parking



Designated Parking Lot: Parking lots with striped parking spaces.

Designated Roadside Parking: Road shoulder is level with a paved parking apron. Intentionally designed for vehicles to park.

Undesignated Roadside Parking: Gravel shoulder that slopes down from paved road edge. Road shoulder was not constructed for parking.

Opportunity: We have an opportunity to take action and align the existing condition with the desired conditions. To provide opportunities for both high quality driving and parking experiences, we are considering relocating summer roadside parking to a parking lot. The reconfigured parking lot would accommodate more vehicles than the current parking lot. To ensure desired conditions are being met, the design would consider flexibility needed to implement a variety of management strategies. A certain amount of roadside parking may continue to be appropriate in the winter and shoulder seasons when scenic driving is not a primary activity in this area.

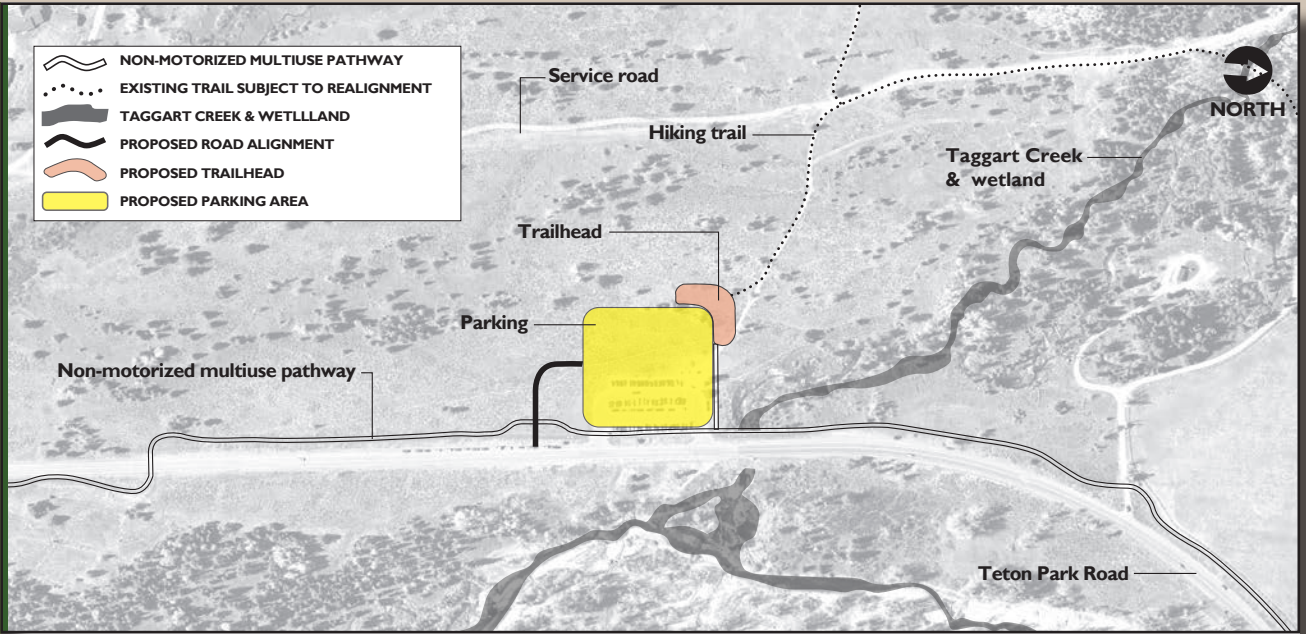
In addition to relocating summer roadside parking, options under consideration include:

- Reconfigure, enlarge and potentially shift the Taggart Lake parking lot to relocate roadside parking off the Teton Park Road.

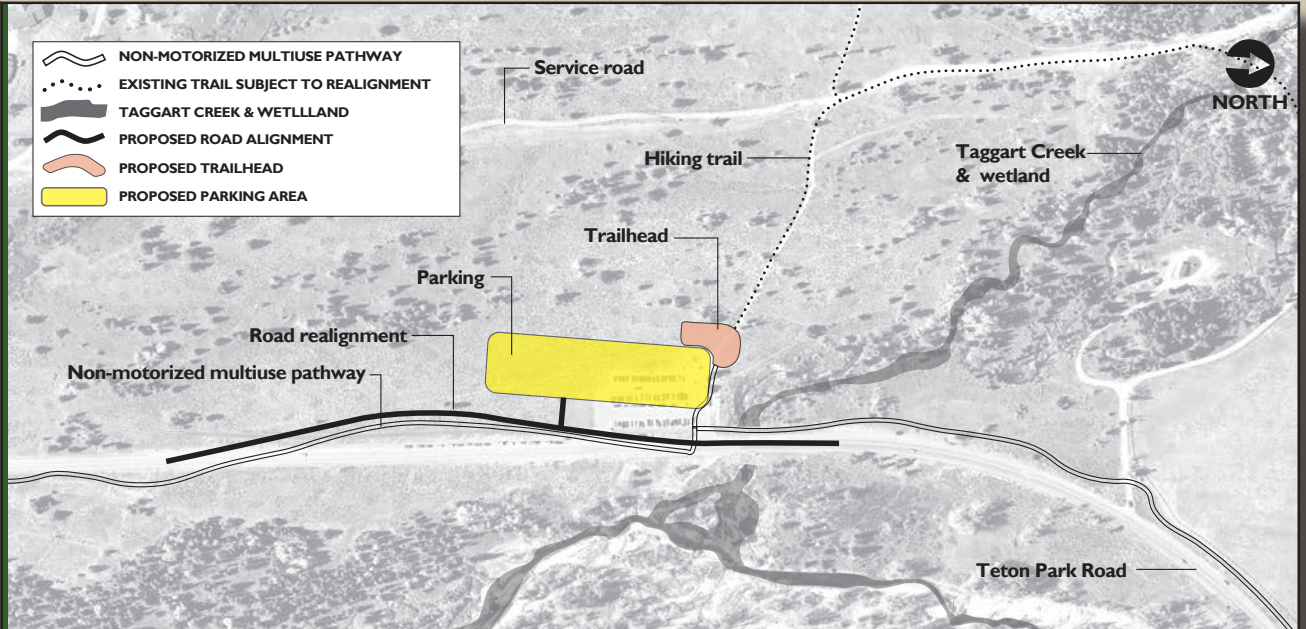
- Reconfigure the multiuse path, Teton Park Road, and the entrance to the Taggart Lake Parking area to improve safety and reduce conflicts between non-motorized multiuse pathway users and vehicles.
- Define the trailhead and associated facilities to reduce resource impacts.
- Redesign the area to comply with accessibility standards.
- Cottonwood Creek Picnic Area would be redesigned to comply with accessibility standards, reduce riparian impacts and update available facilities.

The following high-level conceptual designs show what a reimagined parking lot and trailhead could look like:

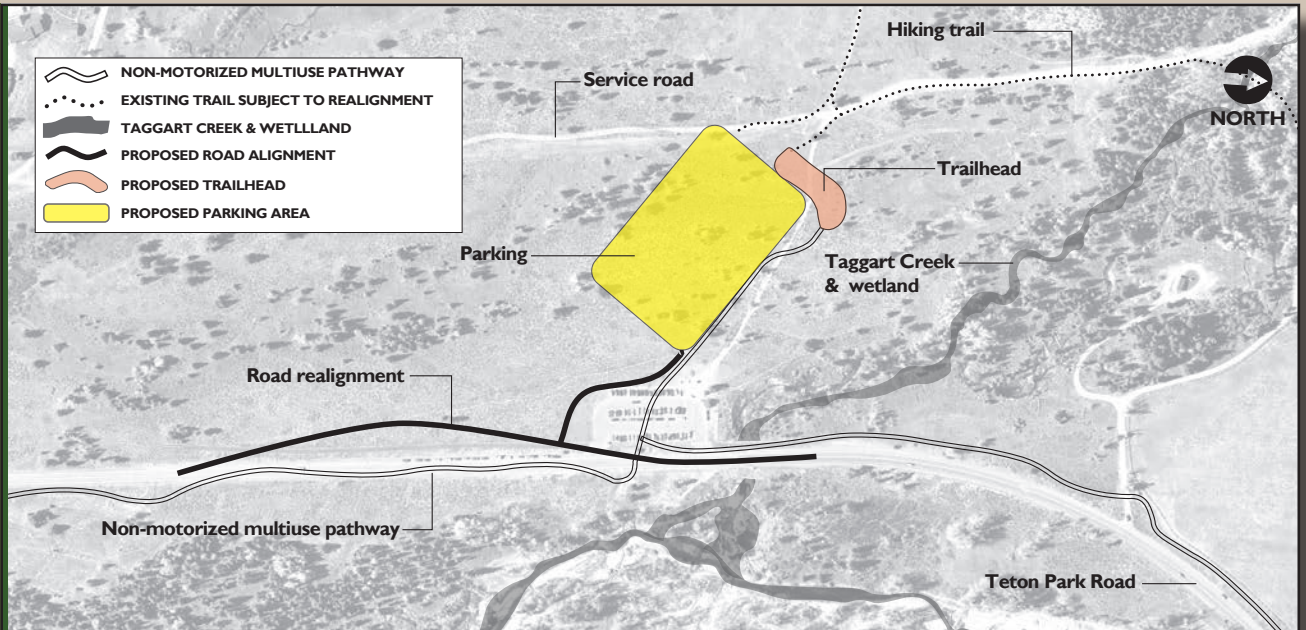
Option 1 expands the existing parking area toward the west, establishes a single entrance/ exit drive, and retains the existing Teton Park Road and multiuse path alignments.

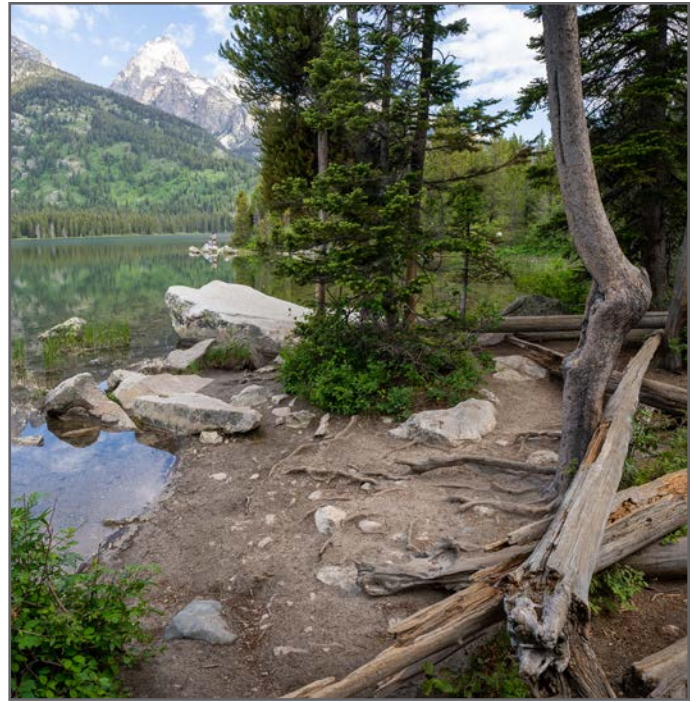


Option 2 expands the existing parking area toward the south, establishes a single entrance/ exit, realigns the multiuse path to the east side of the Teton Park Road, and adds a slight curvature to the Teton Park Road alignment.



Option 3 relocates the parking area to the west, establishes a single entrance/ exit drive, realigns the multiuse path to the east side of the Teton Park Road, and adds a slight curvature to the Teton Park Road alignment.





Taggart Loop Trail and Taggart Lakeshore

Desired Conditions: A fluid transition from a vehicle-based experience (i.e. driving along the Teton Park Road, parking) to a human-powered experience (i.e. hiking or skiing) is important to a visitor's overall experience of the park. After arriving and parking at Taggart Lake trailhead, visitors experience a transition from developed and densely visited areas to more rustic, wild-feeling, and contemplative settings. Visitors have an opportunity to experience nature, have a feel for wilderness, and enjoy scenic vistas. Visitors have a sense of discovery and exploration, while user-created trails are kept to a minimum, and human disturbances to wildlife are limited and minimized.

Existing Conditions: Summer use (June – September) on the Taggart Lake Loop Trail has increased more than 100% in the past 10 years. Heavy use has resulted in deteriorated trail tread, trail drainage issues, excessive soil compaction and vegetation loss. Some segments of the trail are too narrow and rocky resulting in barriers to use by visitors with varying physical abilities. Bare ground, soil compaction and vegetation loss exist in areas along the lakeshore. Additionally, evidence of toilet paper and human waste is present along the trail system.

Opportunity: To adjust the existing conditions to be more in accordance with the desired conditions, we have several opportunities we are considering. Potential options to improve the visitor's summer trail experience include:

- Construct a switchback or stairs to address the steep eroded slope on the south portion of the loop.
- Construct an accessible route to the Lower Taggart Bridge.
- Construct a backcountry toilet along the Taggart Loop Trail.
- Add a horse hitch near the trail on the west side of the Taggart Lake outlet.
- Construct dry stone masonry trail tread along Taggart Creek to enhance accessibility.
- Add trail to enhance accessibility information at trail intersections.
- Delineate viewing areas along the Taggart Lake lakeshore.

Relationship Between Parking and the Trail and Scenic Driving Experience

While it can be helpful to think about the issues and opportunities on the Teton Park Road/Parking and Trail/Lakeshore separately, these are two parts of one trip and are inextricably linked. We know from observations, and have confirmed with research, that as the number of vehicles increases in the parking areas, so does the number of people in the Taggart trail system. To achieve

desired conditions for the trail and lakeshore areas of the project such as opportunities to experience pockets of solitude, scenic vistas, and a sense of discovery and exploration, the maximum number of vehicles or people in the parking lot must be considered. With more vehicles parked in the Taggart Lake area, there will be a higher density of use on the trail system and at lakeshore areas. This higher density results in higher encounter rates between visitors and increased perceptions of crowding, and decreased opportunities to experience pockets of solitude and achieve other desired experiential conditions.



Next Steps

Key milestones in the pre-National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and NEPA process:

Pre-NEPA Civic Engagement Meeting	October 2024	
Pre-NEPA Public Engagement Comment Period	October 18 through November 21, 2024	
Pre-NEPA Virtual Public Meeting	November 13, 2024	
Prepare Pre-NEPA Documentation	Winter 2024-2025	
Publish NEPA document (assumes EA) for public review with Virtual Public Meeting	Summer 2025	
Publish Document Decision	Summer 2025	

How to Comment

Your input will help the National Park Service (NPS) understand how to achieve the desired conditions for the Taggart Lake area. Please provide comments within the comment period, from October 18 to November 21, 2024. Consider the questions below and tell us about other problems or opportunities you think are important to improve the visitor experience at Taggart Lake. To learn more about the Reimagining the Taggart Lake Experience planning and to submit comments online, please visit NPS's Planning, Environment and Public Comment (PEPC) website:

<https://parkplanning.nps.gov/taggartlakeexperience>

Some things to potentially consider in your comments include:

- What have been the best parts of your experiences at Taggart Lake? What have been the worst parts?
- What gets in the way of you enjoying or visiting Taggart Lake?

- Are there types of experiences and opportunities at Taggart Lake not represented that should be?
- How do the desired conditions for each area align with your experiences and expectations in that area?
- Are there other ideas, or changes to listed ideas, that should be considered in this process for the Taggart Lake area beyond what is presented in this newsletter?

Before including your address, telephone number, email address, or other personally identifiable information in your comments, you should be aware that your entire comment (including your personally identifiable information) may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us to withhold your personally identifiable information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

Comments will not be accepted by phone or e-mail. We strongly encourage you to submit your comments through PEPC.



Thank you for your interest and participation.