

106 SUCCESS STORY

Strong Public-Private Coalition Leads to Establishment of Park

Sublette County, Wyoming



“The New Fork River was an oasis after the desert to emigrants 150 years ago, half way along their six-month journey to Oregon or California. During the peak summer months, hundreds of people each day camped here before or after braving the dangerous crossing. After the emigrant era, the crossing was never cultivated, so it remains today much like what the emigrants experienced. The gas development through the Pinedale Anticline could last a generation or two, but the New Fork Crossing Historical Park will now last forever. This is a tremendous legacy Shell, Ultra, PacifiCorp, and the BLM have made possible.”

—CLINT GILCHRIST
Sublette County Historical Society



THE STORY

In the 19th century, an estimated 400,000 emigrants made the 2,000-mile trek from the eastern U.S. to the Pacific Northwest along the Oregon Trail. Built as an alternative to the Oregon Trail, the Lander Trail (also called Lander Road) was the first federally funded road built west of the Mississippi. Engineered and constructed in 1858 by Frederick Lander, it started near South Pass, Wyoming, and ended at Fort Hall, Idaho. The trail saved emigrants up to seven days of travel avoiding both larger desert sections and expensive ferry crossings of the Green River. It is part of the California National Historic Trail which commemorates the greatest mass migration in American history.

THE PROJECT

The first oil well was drilled in Sublette County in 1911, but energy development boomed in the 1990s with the growth in natural gas markets and new technologies. In 2008, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) archaeologists realized two proposed projects on BLM-managed land—a permit to drill additional gas wells and a power line right-of-way—would alter the historic setting of the Lander Trail.

THE 106 PROCESS

BLM determined further gas and oil development would affect part of the 256-mile wagon road, and the transmission line would run parallel to the trail for 16 miles, crossing it twice. BLM was the federal agency permitting these projects and responsible for conducting the Section 106 process under the National Historic Preservation Act. Section 106 requires that federal agencies assess the effects of the projects they carry out, fund, or permit on historic properties. Federal agencies also are required to consult with parties that have an interest in the fate of the property when adverse effects are likely to ensue. BLM initiated Section 106 consultations in 2008 to amend the existing Programmatic Agreement (PA) for the gas and oil development in the Pinedale Anticline in Sublette County. After discussions about acquiring a river crossing were underway in the gas and oil project, BLM initiated the Section 106 process for the proposed transmission line.

Photos: Above, volunteers build a footbridge. Left, a rainbow arches over the archeology crew. Right, volunteers screen dirt looking for emigrant artifacts. (photos courtesy Sublette County Historical Society)

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Photos: Left, emigrant era island at New Fork Park; Right, wagon at New Fork Park (photos courtesy Sublette County Historical Society)

BLM led efforts to offset effects to the trail by permanently protecting another segment of the trail through the acquisition of a historic river crossing in private ownership adjacent to a BLM-managed campsite, thus creating rare public river access. Numerous consulting parties were invited to participate in the two projects, including tribes and the three project proponents: PacifiCorp, dba Rocky Mountain Power; SWEPI, LP (Shell); and Ultra Resources, Inc. Some consulting parties raised early concerns about the challenges of acquisition and implementation that might result from connecting mitigation for the two projects. The consultations were further complicated by the discovery of the Wagner Variant during consultation, a forgotten branch of the historic trail, in an area proposed for additional wells. The Section 106 agreements included a backup plan to ensure that if the acquisition from a willing private seller did not occur for any reason, the documents would spell out next steps without reopening Section 106. Ultimately, the three companies funded purchase of the 82-acre parcel. It is now owned and operated by the Sublette County Historical Society, which intends to create a permanent conservation easement.

THE SUCCESS

The result of creative mitigation, the establishment of the New Fork River Crossing Historical Park is a testimony to BLM leadership, coalition building, and partnerships. It signifies a strong commitment by industry, not only in protecting the land but finding the expertise and labor to develop the park. The setting of the park is very similar to what emigrants experienced 150 years ago and extends along more than a half mile of river, providing visitors with an unrivaled experience at the site.

Including the initial Section 106 participants, more than 20 federal, state, and local government agencies; non-profits; and corporations played a role in the acquisition and development of the park. Contributions included the Wyoming Conservation Corps building new fences and bridges; Utah State University leading archaeological excavations; Sublette County Road and Bridge Department constructing a parking area and accessible overlook; Wyoming Archaeological Society assisting with excavations; Wyoming Game and Fish Department helping with access; and many more. A private donation in 2012 made the purchase of adjacent land possible, protecting more of the trail and river crossing, improving traffic circulation, and increasing the park to 104 acres. Creative mitigation for two energy projects led to this success for Wyoming's history that will make a significant contribution to local economic development through heritage tourism.

Consulting Parties:

- Bureau of Land Management
- ACHP
- Wyoming State Historic Preservation Officer
- PacifiCorp, dba Rocky Mountain Power
- SWEPI, LP (Shell)
- Ultra Resources, Inc.
- Sublette County Historical Society
- Central Wyoming College
- Green River Valley Museum
- Oregon-California Trails Association
- National Park Service National Trails Intermountain Region
- Alliance for Historic Wyoming
- Lander Trail Foundation

For more about Section 106 and the ACHP go to www.achp.gov

ADVISORY COUNCIL ON HISTORIC PRESERVATION

401 F Street NW, Suite 308, Washington DC 20001

Phone: 202-517-0200 • Fax: 202-517-6381 • achp@achp.gov • www.achp.gov



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