

PARKS, TRAILS, AND OPEN SPACE

INTRODUCTION

Physical activity and outside recreation is part of an overall healthy lifestyle. As the number of seniors increases and negative health effects of sedentary lifestyle are increasingly understood at a national level, more people are looking for safe and scenic places to walk, bike and recreate outdoors.

HOT SPRINGS STATE PARK

Hot Springs State Park is an integral part of Thermopolis. A large portion of the state park comprises approximately one-fifth of the entire municipal zoned area. The mineral hot spring waters surface in the park and flow over colorful mineralized terraces into the Big Horn River at the rate of 8,000 gallons per day. (Hot Springs State Park and Thermopolis Zoning Map)



Photo courtesy of Hot Springs State Park website

The park has many uses, some of which are directly tied to the mineral hot springs. Hot Springs is a day-use park. These include two hotels, two hot springs-water park concessions, state bath house, hiking trails, boat docks, fishing access, gardens and picnic facilities. Other uses include Thermopolis County fairgrounds, Hot Springs County Memorial Hospital/Gottsche Rehabilitation Center, Wyoming Pioneer Home, and Thermopolis High School and Elementary School. (Hot Springs County Real Estate Guide). Gottsche Rehabilitation Center and the County

hospital, and the Wyoming Pioneer Home, were built in the state park to take advantage of the hot mineral springs water (Hot Springs County Natural Resources Plan, p 22). The park also is the home of the Wyoming State Parks bison herd. (Hot Springs State Park).

The Department of State Parks and Cultural Resources collects visitor use statistics at 34 sites in Wyoming. Hot Springs State Park is the giant in terms of visitation among these sites. With 1.2 million visitors counted in 2009, Hot Springs accounted for 45% of total visitation at all 34 sites. (Division of State Parks) Visitor numbers in Hot Springs State Park are tracked with traffic counters placed in the central area of the Park. Counts may thus include some persons travelling to/from the hospital. Visitors who drive directly to the two hotels in the park would not be included in the counts. The fairgrounds, public schools, and other facilities on the west side of the Park are not close to the traffic counters and do not likely affect the total count. (Skates)

A random sample survey of 652 Hot Springs State Park visitors in May-October 2009 indicated that this was the first-time visit for 63% of all visitors. The other 37% indicated they visit the park on average six times per year. It was the main destination for 28% of the visitors. Forty-one percent of all visitors include an overnight stop as part of their visit. (Wyoming State Parks)

THERMOPOLIS MUNICIPAL PARKS

The town of Thermopolis has two municipal parks. Bicentennial Park is located in the downtown retail area. Candy Jack Park is located on the west end of the town near the Thermopolis Middle School. Both have picnic areas and Candy Jack has new tennis courts.

The town owns the nine-hole golf course at the north end of town, but leases operations to the Legion Town and Country Club, Inc. The ten year operating agreement expires in May 2010. (Stansill)

OPEN SPACE AND TRAIL SYSTEMS

In the southwestern portion of the town, there are five different areas zoned as open space. These non-contiguous parcels fall within drainages that carry stormwater. There are similar open space areas on the south side of Round Top Mountain and generally surrounded by agricultural zoned area.

Louis Freudenthal County Park includes Round Top Mountain just north of Thermopolis. The 2002 Hot Springs County land use plan identifies Round Top Mountain as well-used hiking area and recommends it continue to be used as such and that surrounding lands remain agricultural and open rather than developed as residential. (Hot Springs County Land Use Plan)

The trail system in Hot Springs State Park extends along the east side of the Big Horn River into East Thermopolis. Currently there are no municipal plans to develop or extend trail systems in Thermopolis. (Stansill)

The Hot Springs County Natural Resources Plan addresses non-motorized trails in two different goals - one promoting hiking trails on public lands to improve overall health of residents and visitors and another recommending bicycle-pedestrian trails along state highways and county roads. (Hot Springs County Natural Resources Plan, pgs. 74 and 79)

CONCLUSIONS

Thermopolis includes the mineral hot springs area of Hot Springs State Park, which provides unique opportunities for health-related outdoor recreation, as well as manicured lawn and flower gardens that rival those of parks in large metropolitan areas. The State Park is a significant and large tract of land with many trails, but trails along the Big Horn River extend only a short way outside of the park south along the eastern side into East Thermopolis. The County has goals for promoting/developing trail systems. The town has linear areas designated as open space that might have potential for incorporation into larger trail systems, but at this time there is no comprehensive municipal trails plan to coordinate trail efforts in and outside of Thermopolis.

SOURCES:

Division of State Parks, Historic Sites & Trails. Wyoming Department of State Parks and Cultural Resources. "Visitor Use Program: 2006-2009."
<http://wyoparks.state.wy.us/PlanningDocs/VisitorUse/2009/VISITOR%20USE%20PROGRAM2009.pdf>

Hot Springs County Land Use Plan. 2002. http://www.hscounty.com/Upload/File/20080811_538_land_use_plan_1.doc

Hot Springs County Natural Resources Plan for State and Federal Lands, An Addendum to the Revised Hot Springs County Land Use Plan of 2002. March 17, 2005. http://www.hscounty.com/Upload/File/20080811_780_Hot_Springs_county_LUP_1-5-05.doc

Hot Springs Real Estate Guide. July 2009. The Advertiser, 417 E. Main, Riverton, WY 82501. Page 8.

Hot Springs State Park website. Wyoming Department of State Parks and Cultural Resources. Accessed March 19, 2010.
<http://wyoparks.state.wy.us/Site/SiteInfo.asp?siteID=9>

Skates, Kevin. Hot Springs State Park Superintendent. Personal communication. March 22, 2010.

Stansill, Dan. Assistant to the Mayor. Town of Thermopolis. Personal communication. March 17, 2010.

Thermopolis Zoning Map. Accessed March 19, 2010. <http://www.townofthermopolis.com/maps/zonemap.pdf>

Wyoming State Parks and Cultural Resources. "Wyoming State Parks and Historic Sites: Visitor Survey 2009."
http://wyoparks.state.wy.us/PlanningDocs/parks_visitor_survey.pdf