

Bend Park & Recreation District
DESCHUTES RIVER TRAIL - SOUTH STUDY

OPEN HOUSE SUMMARY
APRIL 2026



Prepared for Bend Park & Recreation District



Bend Park & Recreation
DISTRICT

Prepared by JLA Public Involvement



Overview

The Deschutes River Trail (DRT) includes 28.5 miles of built trail between Tumalo and Sunriver. While sections of this trail are well-used, it's currently not possible to travel the full distance today. Completing the full trail system has been a long-standing community goal.

This project is focused on exploring opportunities to complete the gap in the southern portion of the trail, including the possibility of a new pedestrian bridge over the Deschutes River.

This study will explore the following things:

- Is a bridge possible?
- What would need to be done to build a bridge?
- Where would be the best place to put a bridge?
- Are there other things BPRD could do to improve access to the DRT through this part of Bend?

The intent of this study is to provide the district, the public, and other stakeholders with more detailed and accurate information about the project to inform future community conversations and project design.

Goals

At this Open House, our goals were to:

- Explain what this project is, and what it will not do (i.e. design and build a bridge).
- Share information about the project, including the purpose, background information, and existing conditions of the site area.
- Inform and engage the community in the process, answer questions, and record concerns.
- Build positive relationships with the community.

The Open House was an opportunity to gather feedback from the community to confirm the existing conditions and potential alignment opportunities and better understand how this connection would support public use of the Deschutes River Trail.

Format

This was an in-person Open House style drop-in event held at Elk Meadows Elementary School, near the project area, and fully accessible to wheelchairs and other forms of mobility aids. Stations were set up around the room with displays for the different project considerations. Staff were available to explain details and answer participant questions. Snacks and kid activities were provided to encourage more broad attendance.

An online version was available with the same information and survey questions as the in-person event.

Open House Details

- **In-person event:** April 2, 2026, from 6:30 – 8:00 P.M. at Elk Meadows Elementary School, Gym
 - 195 people signed in but we estimate over 200 people attended
 - 75 comment forms or notes were submitted
- **Online open house:** open from April 2 to 23 on Storymaps, [available here](#) with comment functionality removed.

- 175 people submitted a response to the survey questions
- 735 views of the site were made at least one page of the site during this time

Outreach & Promotion

Promotions for the Open House were accomplished by BPRD, with support from the project team. This activity was amplified by an opinion article that was published in a local newspaper as well as substantial word-of-mouth promotion among neighbors.

- 96 contacts – An email announcing the open house was sent to the BPRD’s project contact list, and the project’s stakeholder advisory group which includes representatives from neighborhood districts and other stakeholder interest groups.
- The project website (hosted by BPRD) announced the event and hosted the virtual participation link.
- A press release was distributed to local media on March 11.
- 2 Social media posts – These posts received 153 likes, 31 comments, and 9 shares.

Word-of-Mouth and Interest Group Promotion

Prior to the event, [Dogpac](#), a local group advocating for off-leash dog areas, sent a letter to their membership expressing concern that a bridge located near the Good Dog Park could disrupt the current off-leash status of the area and might increase the number of trail users through the area, which could increase the number of conflicts between dogs and people and result in more restrictions.

[Connect Bend](#), a community group that supports filling the trail connections gap in the Deschutes River Trail within the study area, promoted the open house to their interested parties list and encouraged trail advocates to attend.

Many who attended the Open House or responded online appeared to arrive with predetermined positions, such as an assumption that the location of a new trail or bridge was predetermined. Additionally, property owners at the Sunrise Village neighborhood were adamant that a new trail not be placed through that area. Many participants who arrived with such perspectives did not respond directly to the questions that were asked, they simply stated their existing concern. The results for each question have been calculated including the unrelated comments, but this feedback has been compiled in the “Additional Comments” section. Comment counts, when compared to the actual comment themes shown, may seem off.

Feedback Summary

There were multiple opportunities for participants to leave feedback:

Online: a survey was provided with several question prompts seeking feedback on desired destinations, accessibility needs, and desired crossing locations.

In-person: participants could add notes or stickers to indicate areas of agreement on displays and maps (matching the same questions as online). There was also a comment form with several open-ended questions for additional feedback.

Feedback received: 75 comment forms were submitted in-person, 175 were submitted online, and one email was received directly with feedback. Each display board had dual input methods, dots and comments. Specific comments provided on the boards were utilized to develop feedback themes and were included in the count of comments received. Dots provided on maps have been recorded and used to inform general feedback.

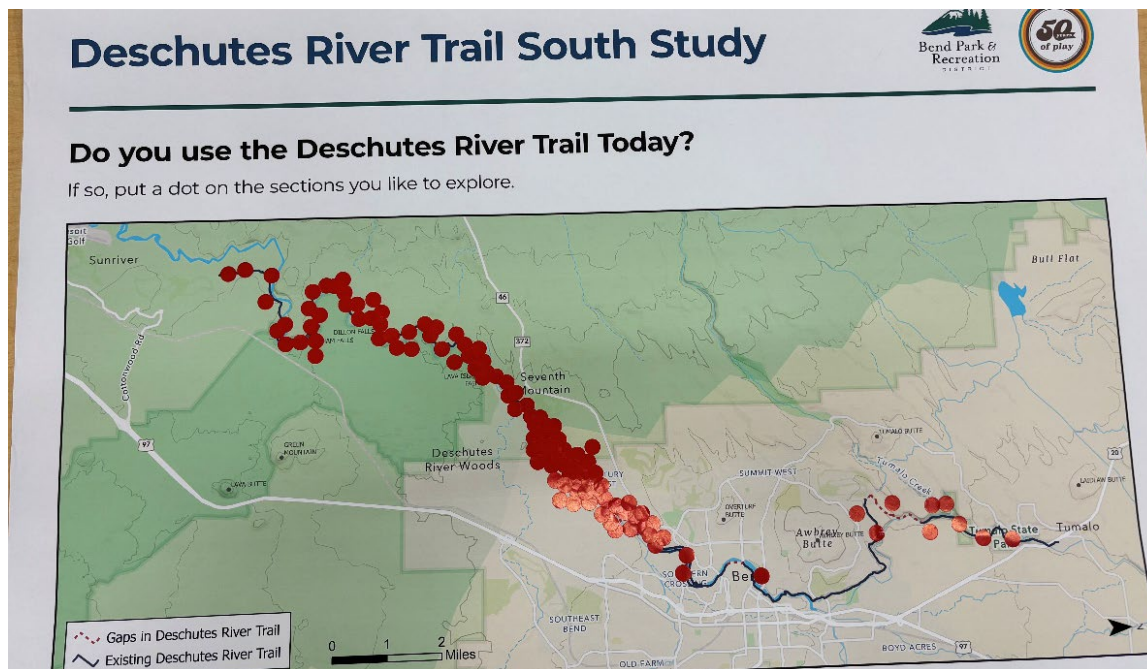
All these methods of input are combined in the summary of feedback below. When possible, a count of comments or entries received for a particular question is included.

USING THE TRAIL

Do you use the Deschutes River Trail Today?

If so, put a dot on the sections you like to explore.

This question was presented only in-person, and on a display board (not on the comment form). Stickers were used to indicate a participant's favorite locations.



The majority of stickers were placed to the south of the project area, and many are clumped between the existing trail gap extending as far as the Seventh Mountain area. A few participants indicated they use the DRT near the Tumalo State Park area, and some closer to Sunriver.

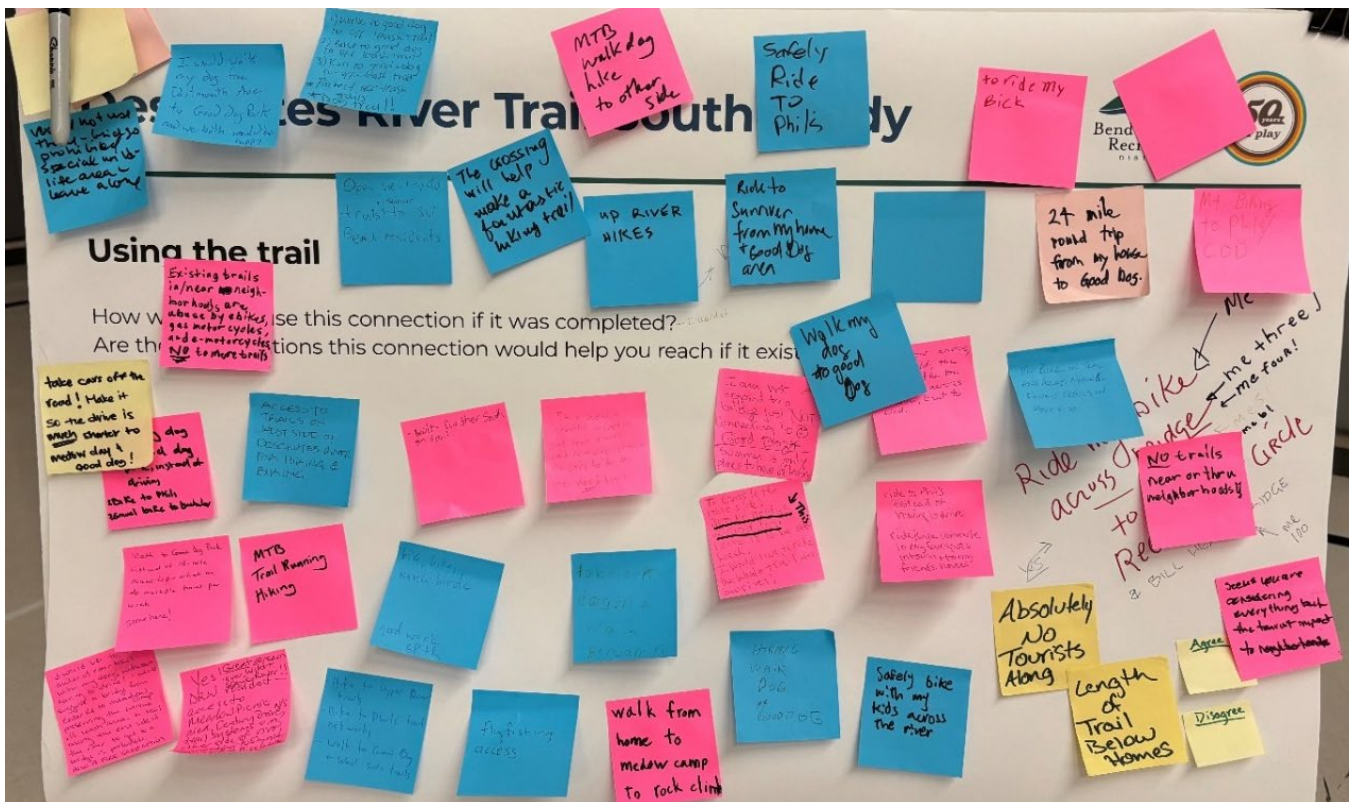
How would you use this connection if it was completed? Are there destinations this connection would help you reach if it existed?

- 162 responses online
- 64 comment forms

This question was provided on a display board, comment form and online. All three response methods are combined here and may be duplicative from the same person.

Participants mentioned using the new connection for:

- **Walking, hiking or running** (75)
- **Biking/mountain biking** (66)
- **Walking their dog** or accessing **Good Dog Park** (off-leash access was mentioned frequently among this group) (65)
- **Improved access** to other sites such as parks, the national forest, Deschutes River Woods, or simply accessing the river and being able to enjoy nature (27)
- **Better access** to SW or SE Bend (the other side), this was referenced in terms of seeing friends, reaching activities, or just better travel options (27)
- Trail access or **connections to other trails** (16)
- **Commuting** (6)
- **Fly fishing** (2)



Many respondents stated they **would not use a new connection**, they prefer the current condition of trails, or simply, they do not want a new bridge. (116)

- A few stated they are happy to use the Bill Healy Bridge (Reed Market Road), and a new bridge is not needed. (11)
- Others mentioned the Haul Road Trail (via the Bill Healy Bridge) as a suitable alternative or potential way to connect the DRT. (12)

Less driving - several people mention that a better connection across the river would enable them to use the trails without needing a car to get there. (32)

Others stated that this connection would **increase their use** of the trail system by making it more convenient. (17)

Specific locations mentioned as being more accessible with a new river crossing include:

- Phil's trail system (12)
- Sunriver (5)
- Tumalo
- Big Eddy
- Deschutes National Forest
- Deschutes River Woods
- Meadow Camp (4)
- Rimrock (5)
- "Upriver"

NEW CONNECTION

Identifying crossing and trail options: What locations do you see as potential for future trail connections or a river crossing?

- 147 responses online
- 33 comment map marks

In-person this option was provided as a map on the comment form and as an open text box online. Text descriptions have been interpreted for identifiable locations.

Some specific locations listed include:

- Good Dog Park vicinity (51)
 - Happy with the previously identified location at the northern end of the National Forest boundary (8)
 - Southern end of UGB (1)
 - Rimrock (2)
 - Some are against the idea of a bridge near Good Dog Park (10)
- River Rim Park (13)
- Buck Canyon Road/River Bend Drive (13)
 - Someone mentioned a potential property on Buck Canyon that may be willing to donate an area for parking.
- End of Bachelor View Road (12)
- Near the Central Oregon Irrigation District diversion (7)
- Mammoth Drive on north side connecting to Hollygrape Street on south (7)
- Near Meadow Day Use Area and Baker Road (6)
- "Upstream" (4)
- Pave the Aspen Day Use Area instead of a bridge (4)
- Forest Service Road 4600/Seventh Mountain area (3)
- At Sunrise Village (2)
- At Lava Island Falls (2)

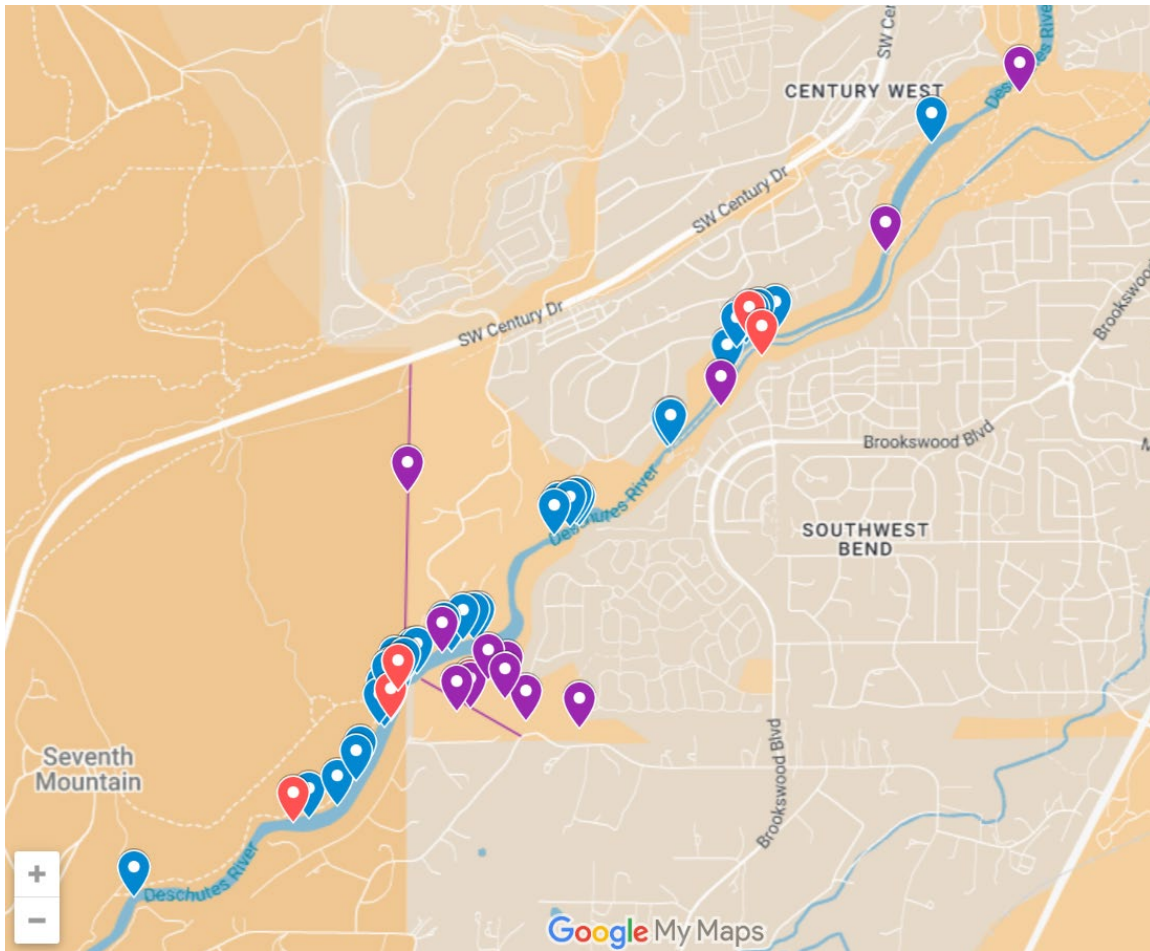
Many participants said that a new trail should not connect through private neighborhoods, many indicated specifically the Sunrise Village area. (49)

- Any new trail needs to be along the river, and should not pass near homes (3)
- Similarly, several participants stated a new bridge should be built on public land (rather than private property) (27)

Some respondents are against the idea of a new bridge in general, with some comments mentioning the Wild and Scenic Waterway designation as a reason, or wildlife, more generally. (41)

- Some indicated they prefer to use the Bill Healy Bridge or the pedestrian bridge near Mt. Bachelor Village (5)

There was mention that a new bridge should serve all modes, including vehicle travel. (3)



Map showing locations selected by in-person participants.

In the map above, the dots have the following meaning:

- Blue dots represent preferred locations for a new river crossing
- Red dots represent potential obstacles to a new crossing. Those providing feedback did not specify what obstacle was being referenced when placing a red dot.
- Purple dots represent other areas participants wanted to draw attention to. The references provide by users when placing purple dots include:
 - Location for potential parking
 - Easement with COID
 - Bridge and trail to Hael Rd
 - Note for need of fenced area to prevent conflicts with dogs near off-leash park
 - Wildlife corridor
 - Private property

This map can be accessed on [google maps](#).

ENSURING ACCESS

What things may prevent use of a trail to its full extent?

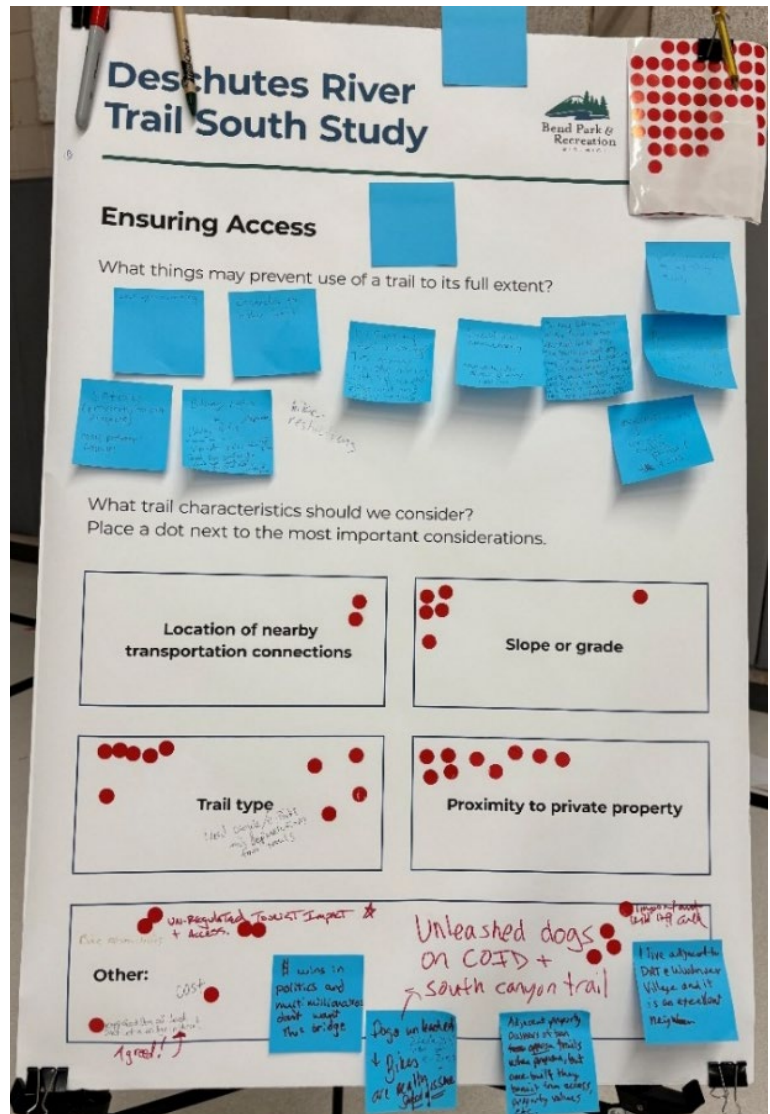
- 148 responses online
- 59 comment form responses

This question was shown on the comment form and on a display board. Online it was an open comment option. All three response methods are combined here which could include duplicative responses from the same person.

- Some participants stated that they don't see anything that would prevent their use. (10)

Some specific suggestions for what might prevent people from using a new connection include:

- **Location or proximity**, if the new bridge is out of the way for travel (24)
- Lack of **parking** (29)
- If the trail is not **accessible to all** (all ages, all modes, all abilities) (21)
 - Specifically, steep terrain or use of stairs (makes it especially hard for bikes) (17)
- It's likely to get **too crowded** and experience higher **human impacts** such as litter, camping or creation of "goat trails" (some of these were also presented as a reason not to build a new trail) (22)
- Concern with **mixing biking and pedestrian uses** on one trail can cause additional stress, which may limit people's enjoyment. Some would prefer separate trails for bikes and a separate area for **off-leash dogs**. (22)
 - High level of concern for e-bikes or motorcycles using the trail
- Angry neighbors that may make it difficult for people to use the trail in the future (signs, security cameras, etc.) (11)
- Lack of connectivity or access (trailheads) (9)
- Concerns for safety (such as steep sides or a bridge near rapids) or maintenance of the trail long-term (6)
- Inadequate wayfinding (4)



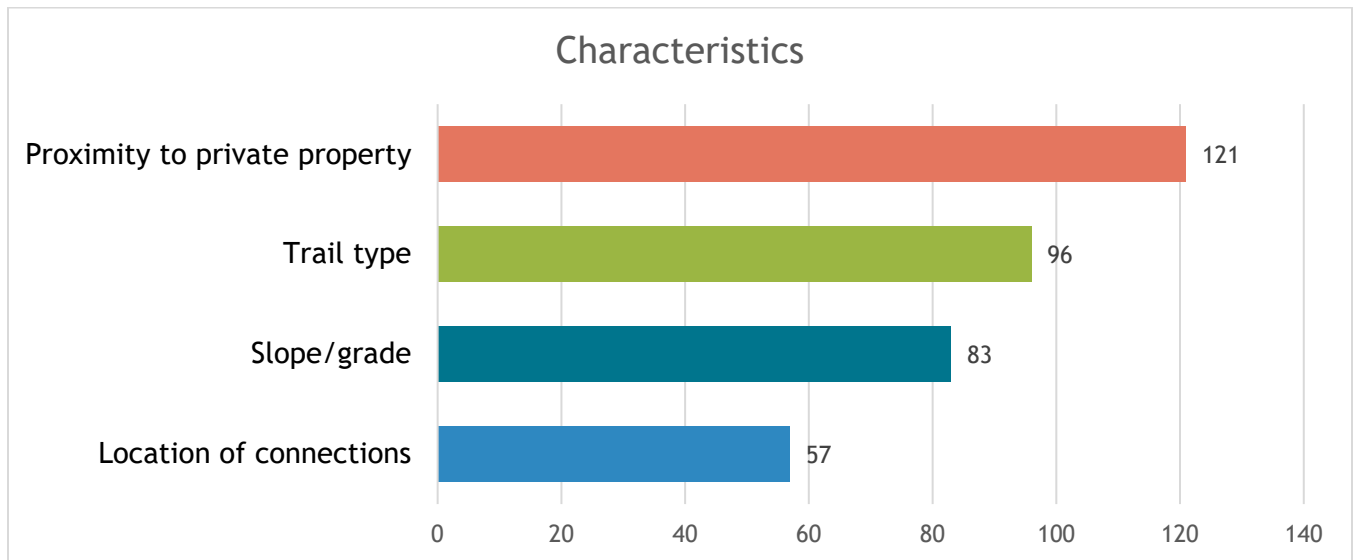
What trail characteristics should we consider?

Place a dot next to the most important considerations.

This question allowed online participants to select all options that applied and the option to add an “other” write-in comment. In-person, responses were gathered from a display board and the comment form.

- 137 responses online with 272 selections made
- 42 comment form responses with 93 selections made, 31 additional selections on display board

Proximity to private property (121), trail type (96) and slope or grade (83) were the most selected considerations for future trail characteristics.



Other write-in options include:

- **Location**, such as:
 - Impacts to private property or neighborhoods (16)
 - Using public lands (4)
 - Keep trail close to river / not through neighborhoods (2)
- Access to **parking** (10)
- **Connectivity**, especially with the larger Forest Service system (10)
- **Safety or maintenance** opportunities (9)
- Navigating all the requirements to build this connection, fear that it can't be completed due to bureaucracy and cost (9)
 - Several people mentioned the need to “just get this project completed” (3)
- Potential to separate cyclists and pedestrians (4)

Additional Comments

Some participants both online and in-person left comments about considerations that did not directly respond to a project question. These comment themes have been summarized here.

- **General opposition to project** or building a bridge, concerns over cost (43)
- **Opposition based on loss of private property** or disturbance to privacy (many of these comments mention Sunrise Village specifically) (57)

One participant online described the situation like this:

"I want everyone to enjoy the trail experience. My concern is that IF this new trail system is set to generate substantial foot traffic and all the extras that brings along with it, any private property owner will be nothing but frustrated and angry, looking for ways to limit activity and increase security and simply hinder others enjoyment of that space. That is not the purpose of the river trail, so don't let it overwhelm those neighborhoods."

- Concerns that a new bridge and trail connection would have a **negative impact on fish and wildlife** and infringe on the Wild & Scenic Waterways protections. (34)

One participant summed this up:

"I think we should focus on a route that is both on and off the river. Fish and wildlife are the only user group we should be considering "full extent" use."

Another was among several who mentioned potential legal implications:

"Any potential option or loophole to abrogate existing OR State Wild & Scenic Waterway designations (i.e. no bridges allowed in Wild & Scenic) would fly against public sentiment and I believe would result in significant lawsuits."

- Concern for the **potential loss of Good Dog** off-leash access and impacts to dog owners. (17)
- Concerns related to increased **fire risk**, which may be due to the increased number of visitors or campers. Some also mention potential use of new trail connection for evacuation purposes. (18)
- Concerns for the impacts from increased tourism if the trail is improved. (6)
- Suggestion to improve roads instead of building a new trail.
- Suggestion to use board walks in wetland areas.



Detailed AI Comment Analysis of Online Feedback

Additionally, an AI analysis of the online results shows that, although the negative comments were very forceful, there was more support for the project than not. Additionally, many respondents simply answered the questions but did not provide a for or against argument.

Category	Number of comments	Percent
Strong opposition	30	17%
Conditional opposition	9	5%
Total opposition (strong + conditional)	39	22%
Support	42	24%
Neutral / unclear	94	54%
Total comments analyzed	175	

Each of the **175 comments** was reviewed programmatically across **all text fields** and classified using **explicit language cues** commonly accepted in public-process analysis:

30 people expressed strong opposition with **clear rejection language**, such as:

- “absolutely not,” “never,” “stop”
- “do not build,” “no bridge”
- “waste of money,” “terrible idea,” “bad idea”
- “oppose/opposed,” “sham”

Opposition is vocal but not dominant numerically, only 17% are strongly opposed, though those comments tend to be longer and more emphatic. Opposition comments frequently raise **legal, safety, wildfire, and private property concerns**.

9 people expressed conditional opposition based on specific conditions, such as:

- “only if...,” “as long as...”
- “not through [Sunrise Village / private neighborhoods]”
- “would support if...”

Conditional opposition is policy-relevant. Most conditional comments hinge on routing through Sunrise Village or private neighborhoods.

42 people expressed support for the project with affirmative language, such as:

- “support,” “in favor”
- “would use,” “excited,” “love”
- “great addition,” “100% in favor,” “benefit”

Support comments are often **shorter**.

94 comments conveyed a neutral or unclear position on the project.

- Provide information or suggestions only
- Express uncertainty
- Do not clearly support or oppose
- Discuss unrelated priorities

The **largest group (over half)** is neutral or mixed — **a sign that project framing, routing clarity, and alternatives could substantially influence opinion**.