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PROJECT PROPOSAL

Sumpter Valley Railway *Mainline Trail*

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Description

The historic Sumpter Valley Railway, the *Stump Dodger*, as it was commonly referred to, was a significant factor in the development of Eastern Oregon. It traversed the terrain from Baker City to Prairie City hauling harvested timber to mills for processing. The colorful history of the Sumpter Valley Railway began in 1890, when the narrow-gauged, steam-powered line began in

Baker City. Construction of the mainline continued up until 1910 when it reached Prairie City. At its height, the mainline stretched for over 80 miles and was a vital part of the settlement and development of the area. The narrow gauge train used the route up until 1947 when business declined and the track was abandoned.

In 1971 a dedicated group of volunteers set out to save what was left of the beloved icon of Eastern Oregon. A non-profit organization now offers excursions to tourists and train buffs as it travels from McEwen to Sumpter. The popular outings are a key attraction in our local community.

The tourist train utilizes a fraction of the original mainline for its current operation. The skeleton of the remaining line is clearly evident and offers an opportunity to highlight the rich history and beautiful scenery of this area.

The proposal is for a “Rails to Trails” program that will utilize natural surfaces and service non-motorized use; hiking, biking, horseback riding, wildlife viewing, cross country skiing and snowshoeing.

The Objective

The *Mainline Trail* will be a cooperative community project, highlighting the rail grade of the historic Sumpter Railway. The intent is to preserve the history and allow access from Sumpter Valley Dredge State Heritage Area to Bates State Park. The 40-mile trail will bring visitors to, and through, the surrounding communities, giving local businesses an opportunity to highlight and promote this unique area to new visitors, long time residents, and returning travelers.

The Goal

This project will enlist support from a cross section of partners. Outreach will be the first step in the development process. Stakeholders that have been identified include the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest, Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, Baker County, Sumpter Valley Railroad, Baker Loves Bikes, as well as other interested groups/individuals.

A trail plan for the pathway will be developed, involving a diverse group of stakeholders and agencies dedicated to the success of this project.

The County proposes holding a permit/agreement for the property that falls under federal jurisdiction. The majority of the mainline crosses U.S.F.S. managed lands.

Funding

Opportunities for grant funding may include, but are not limited to, Oregon Parks and Recreation Department's Recreational Trails Program (RTP). The RTP is a federally funded reimbursement grant program designed to help fund motorized and non-motorized recreational trail projects, including new trail construction. Eligible applicants include non-profit organizations, municipal, state and federal agencies, and other government entities.

Private donors and countless volunteer labor hours will support the overall outcome of the development.

Maintenance and Operations

Maintenance of the *Mainline Trail* will be addressed under the permit/agreement with the Forest Service. As the proposed permit holder, Baker County would have the responsibility of maintenance oversight. Trail work would most likely occur on a bi-yearly schedule. Members of the Sumpter Valley Railroad, Baker Loves Bikes and Baker County are committed to the maintenance and upkeep of the trail. The rail bed is extremely stable and has withstood the test of time with very little degradation.

It is anticipated that the spring maintenance will follow the seasonal snowmelt. The objective, will be to address any trail tread issues such as drainage and/or erosion problems, clearing windfall, trimming vegetation, removing loose rocks and debris. The general condition of the trail will be examined and any issues will be addressed.

The fall maintenance will occur at the end of the season and address any user created trail issues such as widening and “spur” trails, wash boarding and rutted areas. Other sessions and work parties will be scheduled as needed.

The non-motorized designation of the trail and creative design will minimize the need for intense yearly maintenance.

Economic Benefits

The *Mainline Trail* would be a tourist draw for hiking, biking, wildlife viewing and overnight trips. The 40-mile trail is a desirable distance that would be inviting for races and historic tours. The potential to showcase the history and surrounding communities could draw participants from hundreds of miles away.

The snow covered trail would be paradise for cross country skiing and snow shoeing for the winter adventurer.

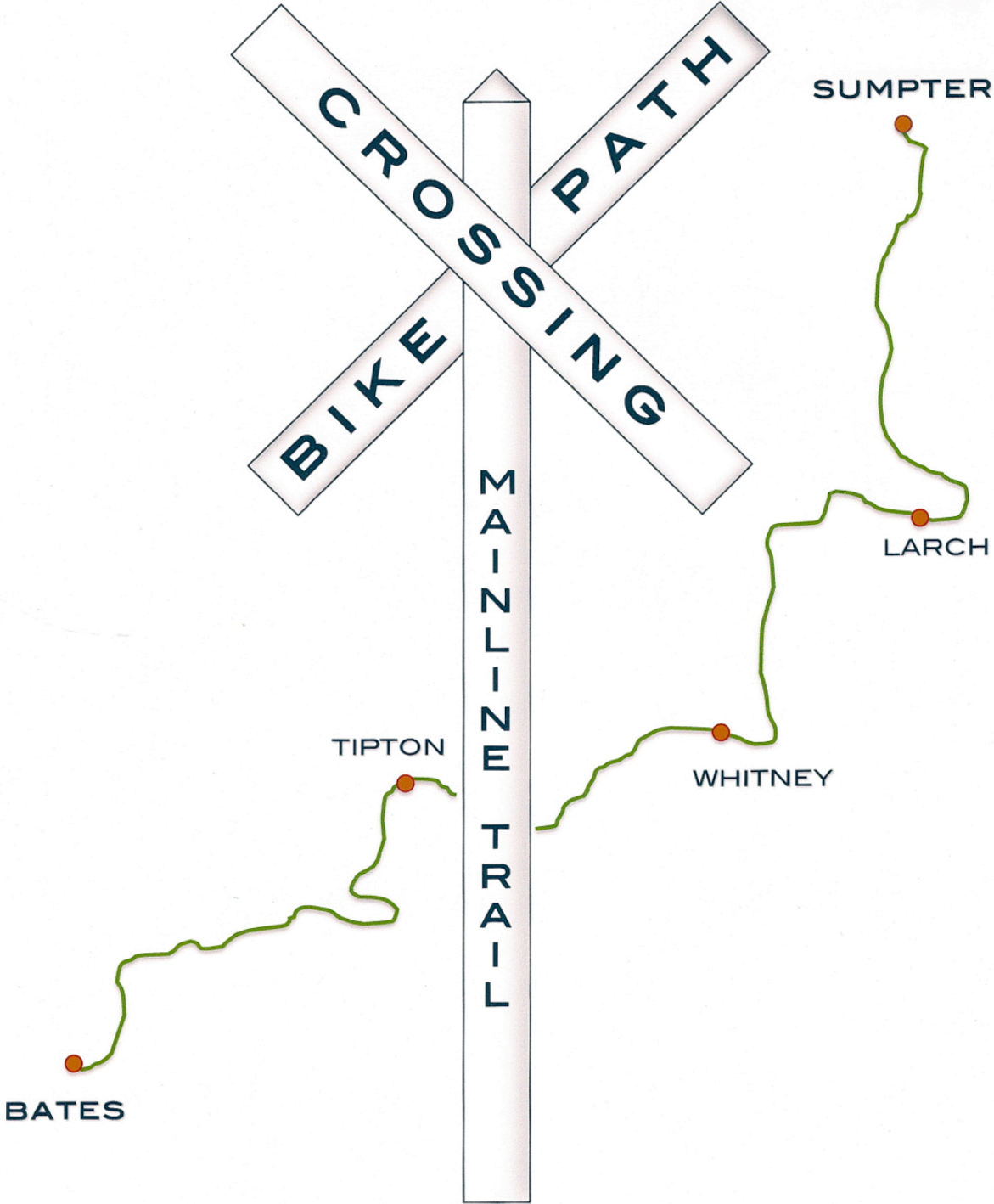
The trail would be a positive addition to the attractions of Eastern Oregon. Baker County Marketing will be involved in the advertising and roll out of the Mainline Trail.

The Need

It has been identified in the State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan that more trails and outdoor experiences are needed in Eastern Oregon, specifically indicating opportunities for the aging population. The maximum grade of the rail bed is just over 4%, making this a user-friendly trail for families and older hiker/bikers. The gradual grade changes and unique history is desirable for all user groups.

Interpretation

An Interpretation Plan will be desired. A logo has been designed for the project and can be used for trail markers and interpretive panels. The Sumpter Valley Railroad has extensive history documented that would be of interest to trail users on strategically placed interpretive panels.



Summary



There has been thoughtful discussion over converting the former Sumpter Valley Railway mainline from the Bates State Park to the town of Sumpter into a hiking and biking trail. The *Mainline Trail* would run close to forty miles with potential to include sections of the Baker White Pine and Oregon Lumber Company grades to create an interconnected network of trails. The vast majority of the mainline between Bates and Sumpter is intact, some areas remarkably so, and is largely on National Forest land. Initial inspection was extremely positive with

many areas requiring only a small bit of tree thinning and surface grooming to be ready for foot traffic and bikes. The current plans do not call for the design of the trail to accommodate motorized vehicles on any sections that are not already in use as a road or ATV trail. By limiting access to lower impact use, it should be possible to preserve sections of the line that still have many of the original railroad ties and other pieces of infrastructure. Plans also call for the reinstallation of mile markers, signboards, and eventually information kiosks at points of interest that will be modeled after line side structures from the original railway.

Baker County Parks and Recreation, Baker County Board of Commissioners, Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, Baker Loves Bikes, Sumpter Valley Railroad and the Baker County Chamber of Commerce have already shown positive support for the project.

While many would enjoy traveling the route behind a steam locomotive, the *Mainline Trail* may be the best adaptive reuse of the original grade to promote long-term preservation as well as increasing awareness of what a spectacular railway the Sumpter Valley truly was.





