



NATURAL ASSETS & RECREATION

WHY IT MATTERS

Wyoming's economy is disproportionately dependent on extractive industries, which creates low economic diversification. This dependency results in a cyclical economy; therefore, Wyoming's tourism and recreation industries are increasingly important to the economic stability of the state. Recreational opportunities and the natural environment contribute to a community's quality of life and can help counteract decreasing health trends. These amenities not only attract visitors to an area but are often key factors in determining where to live or locate a business. Also, the City needs to be proactive to make land use decisions that support healthy lifestyles. In turn, contributing to lower health care costs, reducing childhood obesity and attention disorders, and increasing social connections. This section includes a review of the parks, trails and other natural assets, and recreational tourism attractions that could boost the economic vitality of the region.

KEY POINTS + ASSUMPTIONS

Fishing is a major recreational attraction. Blue ribbon trout fishing is available in the city and, in some cases, a few steps from your door.

The North Platte River is the "centerpiece" of recreation in Casper. Fishing, trails, water recreation, and parks are available along the River.

Approximately 45 miles of trails are found throughout the City of Casper.

Casper Mountain, with its associated trail network, and Hogadon Ski Area, provides a scenic backdrop as well as a recreational amenity.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Wildlife

The City of Casper resides in the midst of some of the most important fish and wildlife habitats in North America. More pronghorn antelope (*Antilocapra Americana*) exist within a one hundred mile radius of Casper than anywhere else in the world. Within the city limits, it is not uncommon to view a variety of small to large mammals. The city boasts many parks, where a visitor may spot small mammals such as prairie dogs (*Cynomys ludovicianus*), cottontail rabbits (*Sylvilagus floridanus*), coyotes (*Canis latrans*), red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*), bobcat (*Lynx rufus*) a variety of bat species, or skunks (*Mephitis mephitis*). Near riparian areas one may spy beavers (*Castor Canadensis*), muskrats (*Ondatra zibethicus*), raccoons (*Procyon lotor*), or mink (*Neovison vison*). Many larger mammals call Casper and its environs home. Larger mammals present within or close to Casper include mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*), elk (*Cervus elaphus*), white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*), and pronghorn antelope.



Due to the diversity of landscapes, numerous bird species can be viewed in or near Casper. Horned Larks, Lark Buntings, Black-capped and Mountain Chickadees, multiple sparrows, and finches are among the smaller birds that call Casper home. In riparian areas, Red-winged Blackbirds, Killdeer, Yellow Warblers, Double-crested Cormorants, American White Pelicans, Common Mergansers, Canada geese, Wood Ducks, and Mallards can be found. Occasionally, Sandhill Cranes passing over or feeding in nearby agricultural fields

may be seen. Casper and surroundings also has a vibrant population of Wild Turkey. Bald and Golden Eagles, Osprey, Red-tailed Hawk, Ferruginous Hawk, Great-Horned Owl, Eastern Screech-Owl, and Northern Saw-whet Owl are among some of the raptors who live in the area.



Supplementing this list of bird species is a number of sensitive and non-sensitive species known to inhabit the area. The iconic Greater Sage-Grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) performs its spring mating rituals at many leks close to town. The piping plover (threatened) is a species listed under the Endangered Species Act that may use the Platte River Corridor during migration. The North Platte River is one of the largest migratory corridors between the Rocky Mountains and the Missouri River! Activities in this area may affect these and other threatened or endangered species.

The North Platte River, its tributaries and reservoirs provide the region with diverse aquatic habitats supporting a large number of game and nongame fish. The North Platte River is a blue ribbon trout water managed for wild trout. Anglers from all over the world come to Casper to enjoy this world-class fishery. Wild rainbow, brown, and cutthroat trout are common game fish. Natural spawning and nursery habitat for spring-spawning rainbow trout and fall-spawning brown trout are present in the North Platte River drainage. Reservoirs are actively managed to provide both trout and walleye fisheries. The aquatic habitats also support a diverse assemblage of native nongame fish and amphibian species.

Recreation

Over 2,000 acres of parks and open space are available within the city. These parks range from undeveloped lands and/or natural areas to formal parks and developed recreation areas (such as athletic complexes, skate parks, a shooting complex, pools, etc.). Compared to similar communities across the nation, Casper boasts more than double the acres of parks per 1,000 residents (**Figure 2-22**). Parks are generally dispersed throughout the city, though some gaps have been identified in the Casper Park and Open Space Improvement Plan (**Map 2-5**).

Park acreages:

- Athletic parks: 120 acres
- Developed/formal parks: 235 acres (includes city parks, rail trails, fairgrounds, public plazas, etc.)
- Natural parks: 435 acres
- Specialty parks: 510 acres
- Undeveloped land: 775 acres

Casper offers a full recreation center, four outdoor pools, an aquatic center, four golf courses (both private and public) and an events center.

FIGURE 2-22. PARKS AND TRAILS COMPARED TO SIMILAR CITIES



Level of service for parks and trails is commonly expressed in the number of acres or miles, respectively, per 1,000 residents."

Atop Casper Mountain, just south of city limits, exists an abundance of recreational opportunities from a biathlon course and training center, to cross country trails, mountain biking, and festivals. Hogadon Ski Area is owned and operated by the City of Casper. The City also owns Rotary Park, Casper Mountain Park, the biathlon course, and Beartrap Meadow. These parks are managed by Natrona County and offer hiking, camping, picnicking, snowmobiling, snowshoeing and Nordic skiing opportunities. The County owns and operates Ponderosa Park and Crimson Dawn on Casper Mountain.

Casper offers many other recreational activities and serves as a staging area for activities in the region such Air Modelers Facility, shooting ranges, BMX track, Motocross track, car racing, and rockhounding (the Jade State), snowmobiling, and much more.

Hunting opportunities are another major draw for tourists and residents alike. Pronghorn, elk, mule deer, pheasant, and duck hunting are also common game for hunters.

Not only does the North Platte River offer exceptional fishing opportunities, but is also claimed to be the "scenic centerpiece of Casper." Approximately ten miles of trails follow the river, along with multiple parks and other recreational opportunities. The Casper Whitewater Park, located just west of Poplar Street on the North Platte River, provides unique opportunities for whitewater kayaking and urban river play sports.

Due to the abundance of game and fish, hunting and fishing are two high-quality – and highly touted – recreational opportunities in Casper. The fishing opportunities within and surrounding Casper are praised for their trophy-sized rainbow and brown trout. While the internationally known Miracle Mile is located just 30 miles from Casper, there is great fishing in the urban core. Dubbed “urban fly fishing,” sections of the North Platte River that cut through town offer an estimated 2,200 trout per mile (or approximately 2,400 pounds per mile), providing blue ribbon

quality fishing close enough for one’s lunch break. Catching 20-30 inch trout is not a rare occurrence within town, making this river a unique and influential recreational opportunity. Several fly shops and 60 to 70 guides rely on high quality fishing to make a living, and the North Platte’s reputation draws anglers from outside Wyoming’s borders. About 35% of the fishing licenses in Natrona County are sold to out of state residents (Casper River Project Highlights Confluence of Economy and Ecology, Wyoming Business Council, 2015).

Trails

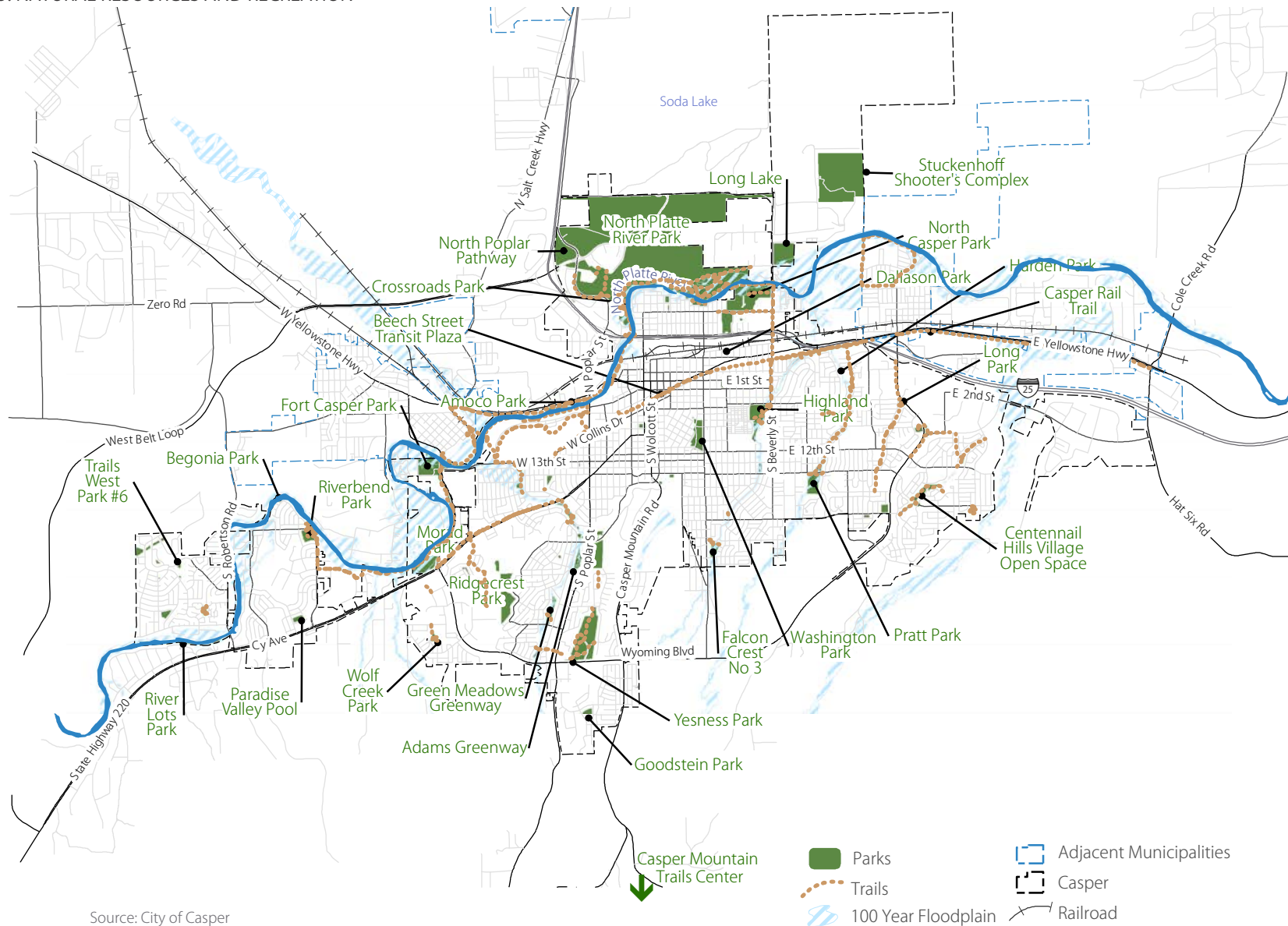
A total of approximately 45 miles of trails are found throughout the City of Casper, with a total 64 miles of bicycle facilities (bike lanes, paved shoulders, and pathways) throughout Casper. The Casper Rail Trail is a multi-use, paved trail built upon the abandoned Chicago and Northwest Rail line. Apparent gaps in the trail network include:

- North-south connections in Downtown (river as north boundary, Beverly Street as east boundary, Poplar Street as west boundary, and continuing south); as well as east-west connections in this area.
- South of 220 and generally west of Poplar Street.
- Between 220 and river, west of the BLM regional headquarters.

The Platte River Trails Trust is a citizen-led non-profit organization with a mission to develop a river pathway system. In addition to connecting to Casper Mountain, their most recent work is to add to the river oriented parks, the existing trail system, and the overall pedestrian infrastructure.



MAP 2-5. NATURAL RESOURCES AND RECREATION



CITIZENS' PERSPECTIVE

Casper residents expressed that they think the City should prioritize completing and connecting local trails in Casper, such as connecting the Rail Trail to the River Trail. Residents have also told us that they would like to see more local trails and more programming along trails in general, such as an aerobic or interactive and educational component.

Stakeholders are interested in seeing the City embark on a transformation of the North Platte riverfront. Residents feel that redeveloping and improving the river will help Casper become a great outdoor recreation destination. And, as young professionals continue to gravitate to urban environments with great public places and natural features, a well-designed river front can help Casper become the Millennial-friendly city that stakeholders envision. Residents want to see the Hogadon Ski Area redeveloped into a modern winter resort and a great summer recreation destination as well. A more modernized local ski resort is a much desired amenity for Casperites and regional residents alike, which residents believe could increase tourism and brand Casper as a great destination year round.

Community members expressed a desire for more neighborhood-sized parks throughout Casper, with a focus on making each park unique, either through its design or its programming. Residents feel the parks need to be better maintained to make them more welcoming and enjoyable. When asked what residents want for Casper in 10 to 20 years, many residents express a vision for Casper to be a great outdoor lifestyle city. Community members feel that preserving the city's surrounding natural areas and open space, and increasing outdoor recreation options will help promote this "outdoor lifestyle" form of tourism. Regarding other forms of recreation, Casperites agree that there is a demand for more pools. Some residents need a pool for competitive swimming, and others want more recreational pools. Additionally, younger children and their parents wish there were more youth-oriented year-round activities in Casper. These requests included indoor activities, more entertainment venues, amusements parks, and water parks.