

E D I T O R I A L

Team effort saves river land

The 57-acre River Springs property on the west side of the Wilson bridge can be seen as a sort of Jackson Hole microcosm. A gravel pit and crushing plant on the property once provided raw material for the development boom in the previous two decades. Neighbors hated noise and truck traffic from the operation. A road through the property provides important access to the Wilson boat launch and the relatively unregulated stretch of river used by river and fishing guides.

During hot summers, community members have turned the river bank near the launch into the Wilson beach. When the river braids correctly, this Redneck Riviera serves as a community swimming hole, where dogs, children and adults enjoy the riches of Jackson Hole — sun, water, earth and views — without paying an entrance fee. Moose browsed in the property's wetlands. The community also has viewed the land as an ideal site to build a pathway bridge spanning the Snake.

Just like broader Jackson Hole, the needs of developers, tourists, residents and wildlife have been met on the property and the public land immediately to the south. While such demands never balanced perfectly, the property remained an important and enjoyed riverside gateway.

As all of this activity proceeded, Jackson Hole Land Trust led an effort to purchase the land from the family that ran the gravel pit. After Teton County severely restricted gravel operations on the property, the family sold to the highest bidder, a group of private investors. Suddenly, all of the plans — including a voter-backed, multimillion-dollar bridge with a landing on the 57 acres — were suspended. The county was forced to devise a new pathway route connecting town and the west bank. The property appeared to be headed for development and would lose its quasi-public status.

A few people, however, wouldn't let the dream die. They stoked negotiations between the new landowners and community groups. The Jackson Hole Land Trust returned to the bargaining table, and a new entity — the LOR Foundation — offered its financial backing. The Conservation Fund provided a bridge loan to keep the deal alive. The private landowners agreed to sell, and the vision for the land revived.

One day, when the pathway bridge is done and boats are launching from an improved ramp, residents and visitors will find themselves on sunny day enjoying a Recreators' Riviera — thanks to a group who had the stamina and wherewithal to reach a goal.