

O P I N I O N

Rendezvous Park a unique opportunity

As the completion of Rendezvous “R” Park nears, I would like to speak to the inspiration for this community park and thank those who had the vision to create it.

I have been a board member of the Jackson Hole Land Trust since 2008 and have been a supporter of Rendezvous Park since it was just an idea on the drawing board. We saw this project as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to create a natural park for the community, a place located right in the core of where the community of Jackson Hole lives, works and plays, where we could all have a chance to experience and enjoy the Snake River riparian corridor.

Every step of the way we have been encouraged by community members and partner organizations that have shared this vision with us. When our first attempt to acquire the land for the park fell through because it was instead sold to a real estate development company, we were asked to try again. We felt fortunate to be able to forge a new partnership with the LOR Foundation to successfully acquire the land in 2011 and turn over its direction to the Rendezvous Lands Conservancy, a nonprofit we jointly created for this purpose.

Community input has been a major component of the planning process as the park has taken shape, and the Jackson Hole Land Trust is pleased to be partners on a park that has kept the community’s interests in mind since its inception and carefully considers the spectrum of activities and uses that will be allowed.

This new park is something to be celebrated. I’ve had the chance to walk the land over the years and see it transform from a barren landscape of gravel piles and artificially created ponds into a place that more closely resembles what would have naturally been found — a clear net gain in veg-

etated areas and habitat and improved function of ponds, wetlands and riparian areas.

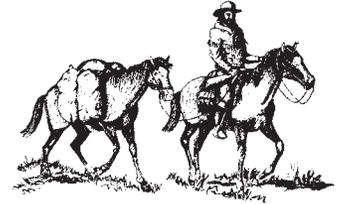
Why a park at this location? As you know, the land trust approaches and evaluates each land-protection project to customize what works best for each property and landowner and what aligns with our mission-based values to protect the open space, wildlife, scenic and ranching values of Jackson Hole. Our strategic plan also directs us to protect properties of high community value so that people from all walks of life and of all ages are able to directly experience protected open spaces. To us a natural park that provides opportunities for passive recreation at this location fits our mission and strategic plan and is a wonderful complement to other well-used areas nearby, like the Snake River levee, the boat launch and the pathway system. It will be connected by the pathway bridge to Emilys Pond, another beloved community park that the land trust helped create. When considering the alternative — two large homesites and associated infrastructure — I know we made the right decision.

As partners and stakeholders in Rendezvous Park, the land trust supports the park design and plan and looks forward to sharing this special place with the community. And personally, as someone who has spent many days on the river and seen my two daughters and countless students grow up to value what is open, beautiful and wild about Jackson Hole, I believe providing the community and young families with this opportunity to get out on the park land and experience nature and the outdoors is a powerful way to foster a sense of stewardship and conservation ethic in the next generation.

Fred Staehr is the president of the board of the Jackson Hole Land Trust.

GUEST SHOT

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