



TO: The Deschutes County Board of Commissioners

FROM: Road Department / Administration

DATE: January 30, 2019

SUBJECT: Harper Bridge Update

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## BACKGROUND

South County's Harper Bridge boat launch is (and has been for years) a popular destination for locals and visitors to access and float the Deschutes River. Its popularity, combined with a lack of established parking, has caused traffic congestion and parking issues on Spring River Road and has sparked concern over pedestrian safety, degradation of the river bank and trespassing on nearby private property.



In June, staff presented the Board with a history of the Harper Bridge site and outlined five potential options for Board consideration. The five options included:

- Maintaining the status quo, including seasonal reduced speed limit adjustments, radar feedback signage and rumble strips.
- Restricting parking at the site by utilizing signage and barriers on Spring River Road and leaving a small loading zone. (Estimated to cost \$10,000).
- Restricting parking on Spring River Road, improving loading zone areas (paved) at the northeast and southeast corners of the bridge, and pursuing the feasibility of a shuttle that would run from a nearby parking lot to the bridge. (Estimated to cost \$50,000).
- Pursuing a lease agreement with the Sunriver Owners Association or Crosswater to build a parking lot near the bridge.
- Widening Spring River Road to accommodate 50 parallel parking spaces along Spring River Road. (Estimated to cost \$210,000).

At the conclusion of the June meeting, the Board requested that staff solicit additional feedback from key stakeholders and that staff bring back additional information on the proposed parking concept.

In August, staff presented an overview of stakeholder feedback as well as additional details on the proposed parking concept. The proposed parking concept (1A) calls for the widening of Spring River Road to accommodate improved parallel parking, which would create more space for cars to park without occupying the adjacent bike and travel lanes. The proposed concept would also provide an additional buffer for pedestrians and cyclists. The estimated project budget for Option 1A is \$210,000.

Since the August 15 work session, staff has also developed a second, alternative option for the Board's consideration (1B) in which the Road Department would widen and improve the existing gravel shoulder and clear roadside vegetation. This would create a more comfortable environment for rural roadside parking without an improved paved surface. The estimated project budget for Option 1B is \$110,000.

At the conclusion of the August 15 work session, commissioners asked staff to work with Commissioner Henderson to investigate alternative options and gather background information on those options from key stakeholders, including neighboring property owners.

## **STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK**

Commissioner Henderson and County Administrator Tom Anderson met with a variety of stakeholders, including:

Sunriver Owners Association (SROA) – Bob Nelson (President) and Hugh Palcic (General Manager)

We discussed the history of conversations between the county and SROA on the scope of the problem, along with potential solutions involving launch facilities. More recently, SROA has constructed its own marina, and has partnered with Sunriver Resort on the transport of floaters from the marina to the Harper Bridge area (dropping off within Sunriver and not on Spring River Rd), and from the Circle 7 takeout back to the marina. SROA therefore believes it has addressed the needs of its owners with respect to river amenities. Due to the impact on neighboring properties, they do not appear to be particularly amenable to the concept of leasing common area land to the county for the construction of a launch facility off of Spring River Rd. They did describe an ongoing concern however with respect to floaters exiting the river and illegally trespassing on privately owned land. This has been an ongoing problem for their owners. They indicated that if the county could help address that issue, they would be more willing to consider the idea of a land lease at Harper Bridge. The only practical way of the county providing help may be to work with the Forest Service on improving access on the west side of the river, thereby decreasing the need for floaters to trespass on the east side.

**In response to a request for review, SROA added the following text:** SROA has long been acutely aware of the safety issues related to this area as well as the growing concerns regarding degradation, traffic, and trespassing on private land. These conditions were exacerbated by the apparent land use failure surrounding the upholding of land use conditions of approval for the initial Crosswater development. Such condition required the dedication of land specifically for a public boat launch area by the Crosswater developer.

These concerns were further compounded by the unilateral closure of a former public river access site at Sunriver Resort's Marina. More recently, SROA has constructed its own boat launch facility, and has coordinated with Sunriver Resort on the transport of floaters from the marina to the Harper Bridge area (dropping off within Sunriver and not on Spring River Rd), and from the Circle 7 takeout back to the marina. SROA therefore believes it has removed the majority of its members and guests from the Spring River roadside parking/safety equation, alleviating some of the congestion within that area.

Due to the adverse impact on neighboring properties and the fact that previous Spring River roadside vehicle counts conducted by SROA have determined a parking demand (not including boat trailers) at more than two times the capacity of any previously proposed footprint for a potential lease area on SROA commons, SROA is not particularly amenable to the concept of leasing common area land to the county for the construction of a launch facility off of Spring River Road.

In addition, SROA has described an ongoing concern with respect to floaters exiting the river and trespassing onto/over privately-owned land within Sunriver miles downstream from Harper Bridge. This has been an ongoing problem for SROA owners, law enforcement and SROA staff. They have indicated that if the county could help address that issue, they could be more willing to consider the idea of a land lease at Harper Bridge.

### Deschutes National Forest - John Allen and Kevin Larkin

John and Kevin were engaged in speaking to the county about the problem. They acknowledged however that the Deschutes River in that area is designated a Wild & Scenic River under federal law, meaning that there are limitations on the number and scope of improved access points on the river. They indicated that that the limit had already been reached, which precludes any new access points on federal land, and limitations on what may be done to expand existing access points. This includes the Besson launch area, which is one of the few alternatives in the area to Harper Bridge. They were skeptical that any improvements could be done at Cardinal Bridge, which is downstream of Besson and serves as an emergency egress road for Sunriver. They said it would likely take at least five years to update the Wild & Scenic River Plan for that area of the Deschutes. They said that they would consider the matter further however, and would visit various formal and informal access points along the river in their research.

### Sunriver Resort – Tom O'Shea

Mr. O'Shea is keenly aware of the public safety issues at Harper Bridge, and is genuinely interested in helping with a solution. He has discussed in the past the possibility of Sunriver Resort contributing financially to a public launch facility. He acknowledged however the limitations with respect to available land for such a facility. He suggested several other sources of information on the history of Harper Bridge usage, as noted below.

- Rob McGowen, Sunriver Resort Recreation Director (Anderson only) - Rob confirmed that the river is a 'hot commodity' these days. He believes at least part of the increase in floaters in recent years is the recent prohibition of alcohol on the popular float near the Old Mill District in Bend. He confirmed that the limited public access points for the general public between Harper Bridge and Circle 7 has contributed to the trespassing problems. The limited public access (beyond resort guests and home owners) has pushed more people to Harper Bridge.
- Robert Bennington – Bennington Properties (Anderson only) – Bennington Properties is one of the largest vacation rental companies in the area. Robert is aware of the public safety issues at Harper Bridge and is interested in a solution. He believes that Harper Bridge is an important amenity for his clients and guests. Although he is open to discussing all options, at this time Mr. Bennington believes making Harpers Bridge a drop off only and developing off-site parking and shuttle service, with regular enforcement to prevent illegal parking, is the best short term solution. Mr. Bennington would like to see a long term solution developed that addresses increasing river traffic with a high capacity public river entry and public river exit in the Sunriver area.

Staff also contacted local rental shops that rent tubes to floaters:

- Staff at Sunriver ToyHouse Toys rents inflatables, life vests, kayaks, canoes and SUPs for

use on the river. They estimate that 50% of their business comes from locals and 50% comes from visitors who are staying at Sunriver. They will trailer inflatables to customers' put in locations but do not conduct transactions at Harper Bridge or other sites. They estimate that their trailer is at the Harper Bridge site 6-8 times per day during the summer.

ToyHouse Toys staff was aware of the parking proposal that was presented to the BOCC earlier this year. They provided feedback that it would be more efficient to do angle in parking (which would fit more cars).

- Staff at Tumalo Creek said their tube rentals in Sunriver are minimal (they only had six tubes available for rent at their Sunriver location this past summer) and that they aren't involved with the Harper Bridge site.

## **PARKING ENFORCEMENT**

Enforcement of Loading Zone Only and No Parking designations associated with several alternatives at Harper Bridge will be critical. Harper Bridge is within the jurisdiction of the Deschutes County Sheriff's Office, and adjacent to the Sunriver Special Service District (Sunriver Police).

Sheriff Shane Nelson has indicated that his office will work with County Administration to make any new restrictions function as intended. The Sheriff's Office is compliance driven, so a range of deputy actions may be used to obtain compliance, ranging from education to warnings to citations as a last resort.

The Sunriver Service District (Debbie Baker, Administrator) indicated that they are willing to have discussions with the County regarding assistance with parking enforcement, but she indicated that SSD would likely require some kind of compensation for their work. There would also have to be a legal mechanism to allow them to work outside of their jurisdiction. Baker said it is important the Board understand that when activity at the bridge is heavy, so is the activity down river within the boundaries of Sunriver. Sunriver's population can increase by 25,000 due to visitors in the summer months, which puts a strain on SSD's resources. Police officers frequently deal with trespassers and parking problems associated with floaters. She says the district wants to be good partners addressing the problem but realistic in its ability to address violations outside of our jurisdiction with existing resources during peak months.

## **NEXT STEPS**

Staff is bringing this summary of follow-up discussions and a summary of the initially proposed options back for further Board direction and discussion.

Staff seeks Board direction on the following options:

- Move forward with proposed parking/safety options. This could include adoption of the initially proposed option (1A) or adoption of a second option (1B).

- Move forward with loading zone improvements only, and prohibit parking elsewhere\*
- Prohibit all parking/loading at the site\*
- Defer a decision on the issue for further consideration / research
- Other

*\*Neither of these options would prohibit pedestrian access to the river.*

### **ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS**

In addition to the options presented above, staff could also pursue the following options to help mitigate the public safety issues at Harper Bridge:

- Develop materials to enhance public education about access points, such as a website, materials for property rental companies and local businesses.
- Spearhead an effort for temporary staff to monitor parking during busy summer weekends.