

National parks get stimulus help



A visitor to Grand Teton National Park captures a photo of a herd of bison beneath the Teton Range in this file photo from October. (Mark Gocke/Star-Tribune correspondent)

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CHEYENNE -- Grand Teton National Park will hire 25 seasonal employees this summer to work on the popular Historic Lower Granite Canyon Trail, a spokesman said Wednesday.

The Grand Teton park rehabilitation project is one of about 800 totaling \$750 million approved by Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar from economic stimulus money available through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

The National Park Service announced Wednesday that Wyoming will receive \$32.26 million, most of it for the state's two national parks, Grand Teton and Yellowstone.

Grand Teton will receive \$18.8 million while Yellowstone's share for the part of the park in Wyoming is \$13 million.

Jackie Skaggs, public affairs officer for Grand Teton park, said the projects had to be "shovel-ready," create new jobs, address deferred maintenance, be energy efficient and engage youths.

The park hopes 30 percent of the 25 seasonal employees can be hired locally.

The project will rehabilitate the entire trail from the trailhead on the valley floor to the upper reaches that border the Jackson Hole Mountain Resort at Teton Village.

The park will hire young people for the work.

This is in keeping with the effort of the national parks to engage young people "in the natural world, and becoming future stewards of our national park system," Skaggs said.

The large construction projects will be contracted out to local and regional construction companies. Skaggs said she does not know how many jobs these projects will stimulate.

The construction industry, she said, has been suffering locally and regionally and the projects will offer opportunities

for companies and contractors to get part of the stimulus money.

One of the big projects is the rehabilitation of the Moose complex, making it more energy efficient, and to consolidate some of the buildings and uses to reduce the building's "footprint," she said.

Also approved was the park's other top project -- replacement of the Colter Bay maintenance shop, which collapsed two winters ago.

"This is welcome news. It's unprecedented in its scope. And Grand Teton National Park is grateful to have been selected for a portion of this federal funding," Skaggs said. "We are one of 391 national park units that had hoped to get a portion of the funding for national parks."

Yellowstone received a total of \$14.7 million when the portion of the park outside Wyoming is included, said Al Nash, a park spokesman.

The money will go for a slew of renovation and rehabilitation projects.

Nash said he did not know how many jobs the work will generate.

The main work will be a \$9 million project to demolish and replace the Madison wastewater treatment plant built in 1959.

Park officials, recognizing that the aging plant has the potential to fail, completed planning for a replacement in 2006, Nash said.

The project is "shovel ready," he said.

"We expect to start sometime this summer," Nash said.

Devils Tower, Fossil Butte and Fort Laramie also received smaller amounts of stimulus money.

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