



Clark Fork River Sustainable Access and Restoration Project Definitions and Criteria for Selecting Access Sites

Summary

This document provides the definitions and criteria used to select user-made access sites along the high use area of the Clark Fork River that are most in need of either being restored to a natural state or improved into a sustainable river access point.

Definitions

River Access Improvements: A user-made river access site that has been selected to be improved with hardened surfaces to minimize erosion, stabilize banks, and provide better access to the river.

Bank Restoration: a user-made river access site or unstable bank that has been selected to be closed and restored to a natural state in order to reduce erosion, stabilize banks, protect infrastructure, and improve riparian health.

Selection Criteria

The following criteria, in no particular order, were used to help determine the preliminary improvement or restoration plan for each user-made access site.

- **Erosion Severity:** All user-made access points were assessed and scored based on the following erosion severity scale (see [Erosion Severity Map](#) and [Bank Erosion Report](#))
 - *1 – Slight Erosion:* narrow, low-angle footpaths devoid of vegetation but with little erosion
 - *2 – Moderate Erosion:* cut-banks less than 4ft high, moderate-angle footpaths, devoid of vegetation with moderate erosion, may threaten public infrastructure eventually
 - *3 – Severe Erosion:* cut-banks greater than 4ft, high-angle footpaths, devoid of vegetation with high erosion, currently threatening public infrastructure
- **Usage Data:** Data regarding the levels of recreational use of the river and access points from the Van Buren Street footbridge to the Orange Street bridge have been collected in 2015 and 2018. These data include counts of river users floating and recreating on the shore as well as surveys of how and where recreationist access the river (see [2015 River User Survey Results](#) and [River Use Report Madison and ShaRon](#))
- **Property Ownership:** The sites for the proposed improvements are owned by the City or the City has long term interest in the lands via easement, license, agreement, or similar.
- **Proximity to Amenities:** Surveys of recreationists highlighted the importance of public amenities such as restrooms, trails, parking areas, and parks in how people choose where to access the river.

- **Threat to Existing Public Infrastructure:** some user-made access sites are so severely eroding that they are threatening the structural integrity of public infrastructure such as commuter trails, bridges, benches, and utilities.
- **Congruence with Existing Management Plans:** multiple management plans, master plans, Urban Renewal Districts, and other planning documents exist and overlap in this area of downtown Missoula.
- **Leverage Opportunity:** Some sites may have opportunities to leverage additional partnerships and/or funding to expand overall number of sites restored or access points installed.
- **Site lends itself to a high level of universal accessibility:** There are very few places along the river that are universally accessible, sites with characteristics that could provide opportunities for universal access should be prioritized.

Potential Access and Restoration Types

Beach Access: a conceptual design of an improved access site consisting of appropriately sloped path(s) that access a naturally occurring cobble or sandy beach with revegetated banks where necessary.

Bridge Access: a conceptual design of an improve access site underneath existing bridges consisting of a completely hardened stair-step slope with an accessible path.

Stair Access: a conceptual design of an improved access site consisting of a simple stair pathway to the river's edge with revegetated banks where necessary.

Rock Terrace: a conceptual design of an improved access site consisting of appropriately sloped path(s) that access a terraced stone and boulder seat wall.

Passive Restored Access: a user-made access site where a passive restoration approach is likely to succeed; for instance, by simply fencing off the area and allowing vegetation to naturally recover.

Active Restored Access: a user-made access site where a more active restoration approach is likely needed; for instance, by actively installing bank stabilizing structures and revegetating denuded banks.