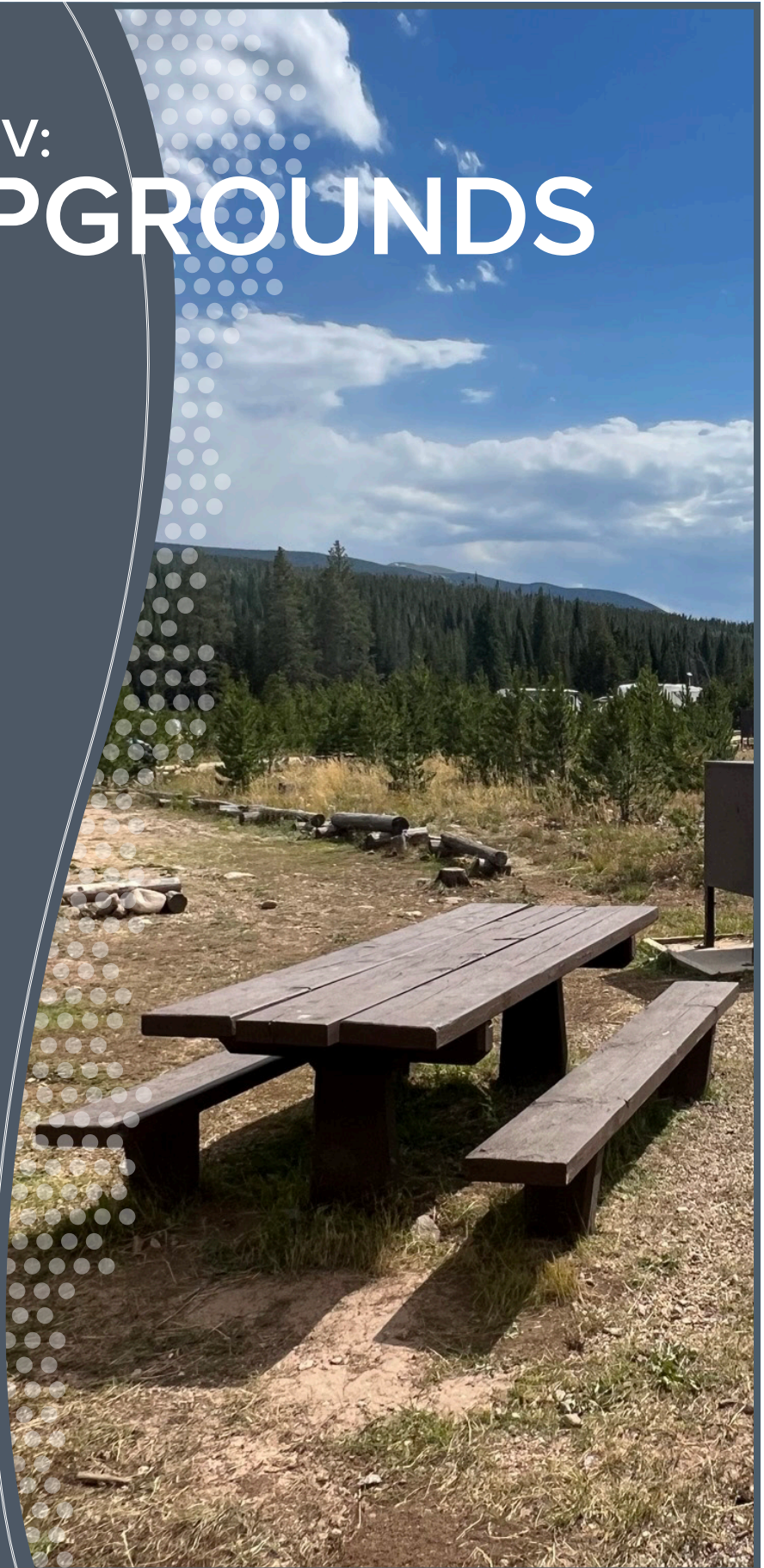


CHAPTER IV: CAMPGROUNDS



CAMPGROUNDS

Introduction

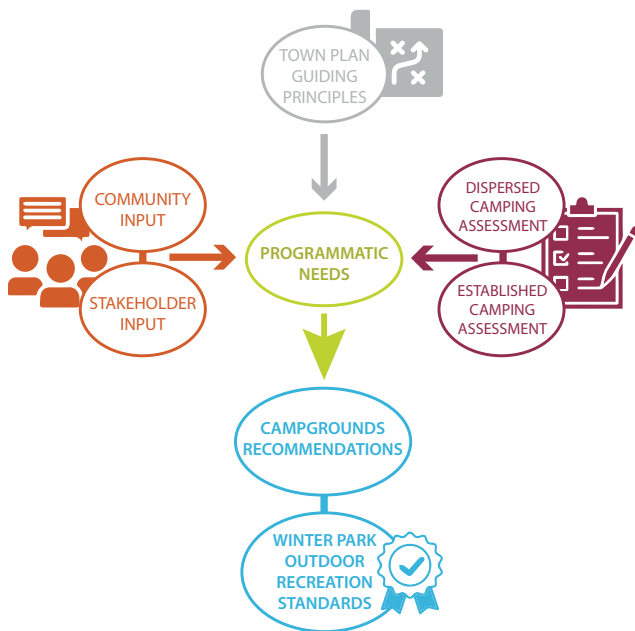
Access to camping areas has been a fundamental part of outdoor recreation for generations. It provides visitors and local residents alike an opportunity to disconnect from their traditional day-to-day lives and reconnect and recoup in nature. Whether staying in the area to bike the world-class trails, fish the Fraser River, or reconnect with friends or oneself, camping is a quintessential part of the Winter Park recreation experience.

The purpose of the Campgrounds chapter of this report is to take a broad look at the camping resources and opportunities surrounding Winter Park. Since the Town of Winter Park (the Town) does not currently have its own managed facilities, this chapter looks at both dispersed and established camping administered by the US Forest Service. This chapter outlines how camping resources can be improved with the assistance of community partnerships to offer continued access to recreational opportunities within and around the Town.

This chapter provides an inventory and analysis of existing resources in dispersed and established camping areas, an assessment of needs and opportunities identified by the community and Town staff, and recommendations for improvements. These recommendations inform **Chapter VI: Outdoor Recreation Standards** and aid Town staff in decision-making and planning for the future.

Existing Campgrounds Standards

They also allow for vehicle-based dispersed camping within 300 feet of the centerline of US Forest Service roads in select areas as long as the road is seasonally open to permitted vehicles. Campers may camp at the same site for no more than 14 days of a 30 day period. Additionally, campsites must be at least 100 feet from any stream or water source. Some areas, like Vasquez Creek Road have been closed to dispersed camping due to overuse and resource damage.



PART IV CAMPGROUNDS FRAMEWORK

- Town Plan Guiding Principles
- Community Input
- Stakeholder Input
- Programmatic Needs
- Dispersed Camping Assessment
- Dispersed Camping Recommendations
- Established Camping Assessment
- Established Camping Recommendations
- See Part VI Winter Park Outdoor Standards

FIGURE 4-1. This chapter is organized using the following visual structure. Color guides on each page indicate if that page corresponds to either Guiding Principles, Community/Stakeholder Input, Assessments, or Recommendations.

Camping Locations

The map below highlights the locations of established campgrounds owned and operated by the US Forest Service as well as popular vehicle-based dispersed camping sites within a 15-minute drive of downtown Winter Park. All of the dispersed camping sites shown are along road corridors. As

of 2024, roads closed to dispersed camping are highlighted below.

Note: The US Forest Service routinely updates their field maps and road closures. Historically, they have opened and closed roads to dispersed camping as needed.

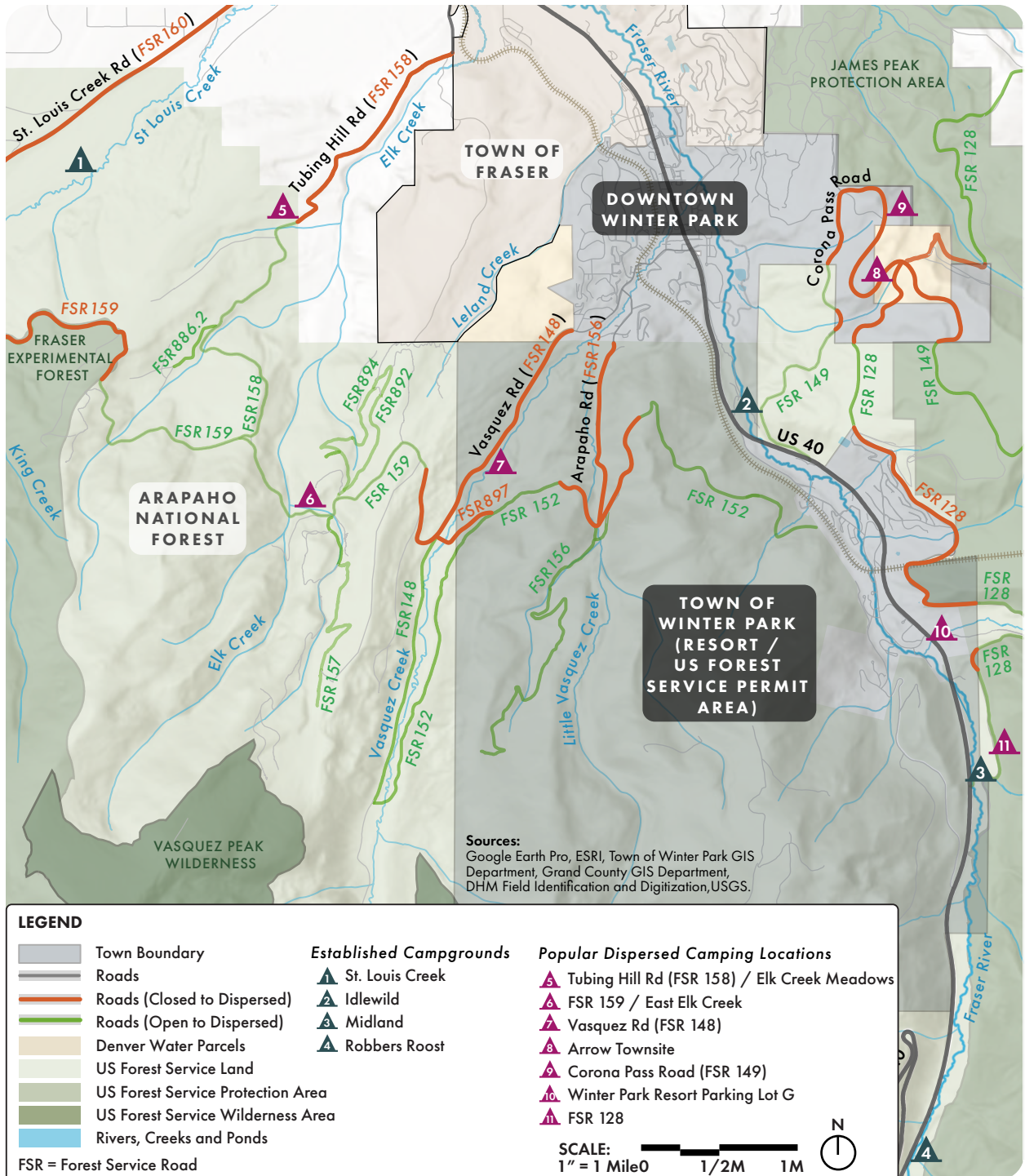


FIGURE 4-2. Established and Dispersed Camping Locations within a 15-minute drive of Downtown Winter Park.

	Strategy	Vision Statement
Character and Culture	CC 2.9	Build on Winter Park’s designations as “Mountain Bike Capital USA” and Colorado’s “Top Adventure Town” as a way to attract growth that supports our recreational heritage.
	OR 2.6	Collaborate with public, private, and non-profit entities to increase recreation opportunities for everyone.
World-Class Outdoor Recreation	OR 3.7	Examine regional solutions when responding to evolving recreational preferences and opportunities (e.g. determining where a facility would fit best).
	OR 3.8	Capitalize on and enhance existing recreational facilities.
	EN 1.1	Protect and increase physical and visual access to waterways within and around the Town.
Healthy and Thriving Environment	EN 1.4	Strengthen the Fraser River and its associated floodplain as a recreational and economic amenity while preserving the riparian habitat.
	EN 1.5	Protect the viability of natural wetlands and watercourses as a key component of our natural and built environments.
	EN 1.7	Restore or enhance degraded or disturbed waterways to improve ecological conditions, aesthetics, and recreation.
	EN 1.9	Promote public safety and protect Town waterways by implementing floodplain regulations.
	EN 2.4	Foster alliances and partnerships with organizations that are working toward a healthy and thriving environment.
	EN 2.5	Promote education and understanding of public lands through appropriate recreational activities, formal and non-formal education, and interpretive programs.
	EN 3.2	Work with the US Forest Service to formalize camping along Vasquez Road to protect Winter Park’s water quality, outdoor experience, and the health and safety of wildlife, residents, and visitors.
	EN 3.3	Proactively plan for disasters and implement mitigation and resilience measures to reduce community vulnerability (e.g. requiring firebreaks).

FIGURE 4–3. The strategies above from the *Imagine Winter Park Town Plan (2019)* plan relate directly to the guiding principles for dispersed and established campgrounds around Winter Park.

Town Plan Guiding Principles

This section builds upon the strategies outlined in the *Imagine Winter Park Town Plan (2019)* and uses them as the foundation for guiding principles to improve dispersed and established camping around Winter Park. Below are some of the recommendations and goals that were developed based on the vision statements from the *Imagine Winter Park Town Plan (2019)*.

Culture

- ▶ Foster a positive camping culture that supports dispersed camping regulations;
- ▶ Promote Leave No Trace (LNT) and Tread Lightly principles within and across the greater community. Foster a sense of stewardship where the community advocates for taking care of the places in which they recreate.

Recreation

- ▶ Collaborate with US Forest Service and community stakeholders to establish a dispersed camping monitoring program and improve existing established campgrounds;
- ▶ Identify locations for designated dispersed camping based on regional/ecological appropriateness (distance from water resources, terrain along forest roads, etc).

Environment

- ▶ Formalize a designated dispersed camping area which aims to concentrate camping to select locations in an effort to limit degradation impacts to existing water sources and/or forest habitat;
- ▶ Establish a program for monitoring camping impact and aim to preserve, protect, and restore ecological resources in degraded or at-risk locations;
- ▶ Continue to invest in established campgrounds along the Fraser River while also prioritizing the stabilization and restoration of disturbed riparian habitat;
- ▶ Establish enforcement programs that work with the US Forest Service to monitor and mitigate risks (public health/safety, fire risks, etc.)

Community Input

Community input was gathered through in-person events and online engagement. In the summers of 2023 and 2024, the Town and the consultant team held three community pop-up events during High-Note Thursdays at Hideaway Park to engage the public on campgrounds. Over 100 participants from the community shared input based on camping opportunities and identified regional issues related to dispersed and established camping. Town staff and the consultant team answered questions, discussed issues, and guided the public to participate in the online survey. The online survey, which received comments from 55 individuals, was available during the summers of 2023 and 2024. Key takeaways from the community input are located on the following pages.

Note: Only 46% of respondents actually camped in the vicinity of Winter Park whereas 37% of respondents were residents of the Fraser Valley who did not camp, but wanted to share opinions on camping in the area.

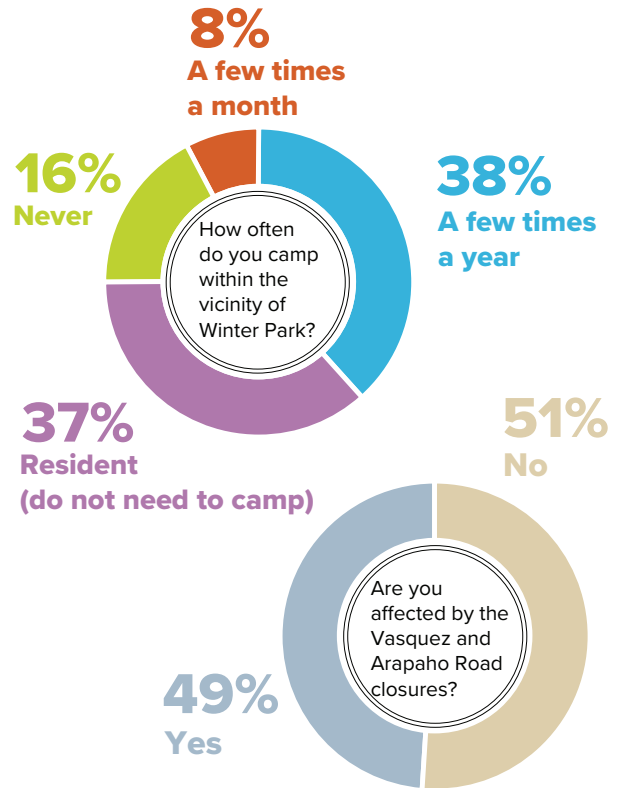
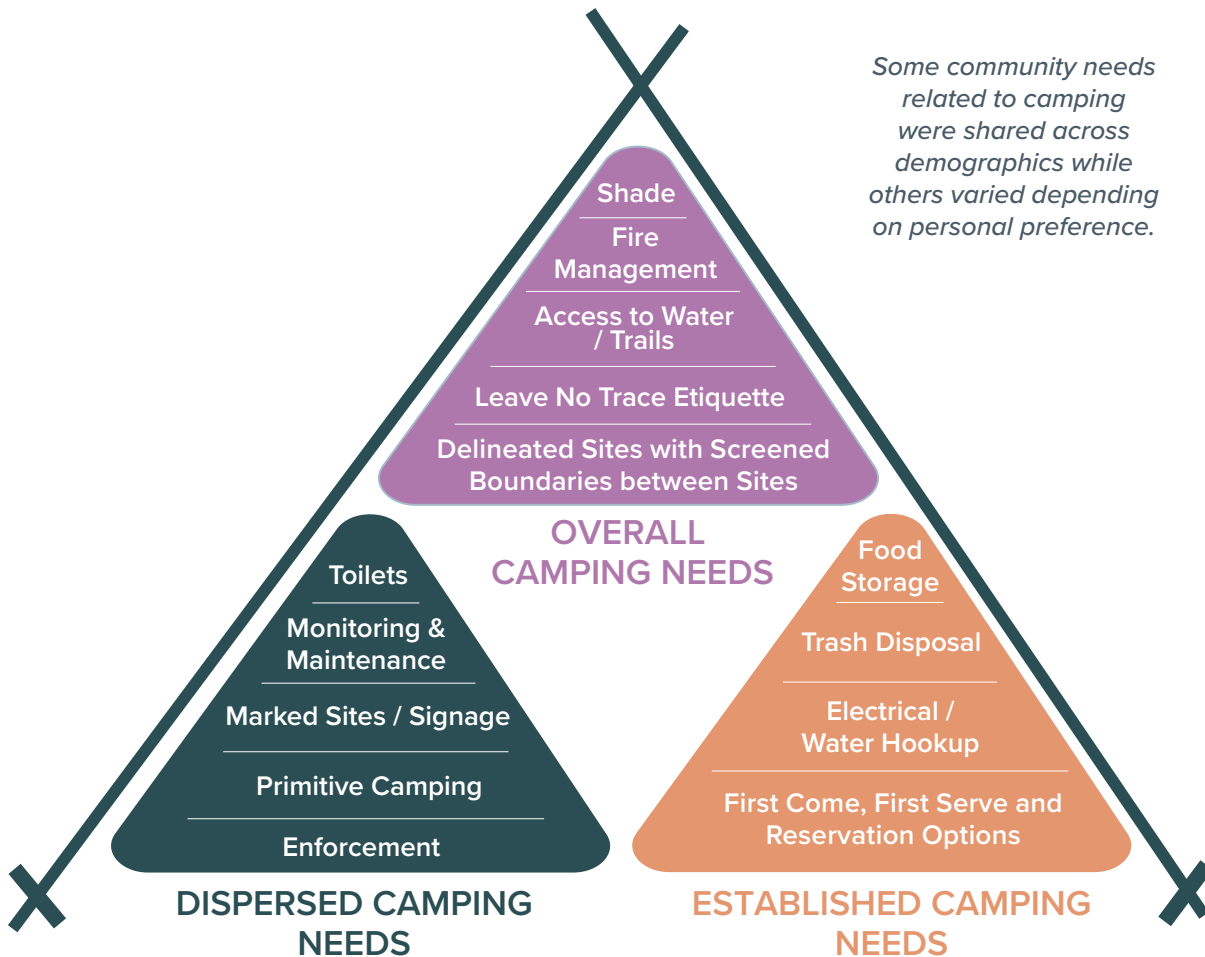


FIGURE 4-4. Participants review and discuss information on boards at community event.

Key Takeaways on Overall Camping

- ▶ Residents are generally favorable of camping within the Fraser Valley as it brings visitors into the area to experience the region's recreational and scenic resources. They wish existing restrictions and regulations were enforced and that visitors were better educated on LNT principles;
- ▶ Respondents wish to see an equal number of first come, first serve camping options as well as reservation-only sites in established campgrounds;
- ▶ Respondents select campsites based on site proximity to trails and water, but would prefer sites to be somewhat distant from developed areas for privacy and solitude;
- ▶ Respondents want to camp within proximity to mountain biking trails for convenience. Feedback noted camping near other campers who are participating in the same type of recreation activities builds community;
- ▶ Respondents use a variety of phone apps and websites that advertise dispersed camping sites; however, the information on these websites is user submitted/non-verified and not always updated with accurate or current closures or fire restrictions;
- ▶ While the majority of respondents camp in tents, they are likely supported by a nearby vehicle and require a parking or pull-off. Those not using a tent use small trailers, teardrop or pop-ups, pickup campers, or modified commercial vans (Sprinter, Ford Transit, etc.) Few respondents were using RVs or motorhomes;
- ▶ 90% of respondents report that they check for fire bans or restrictions online prior to camping in a new area.

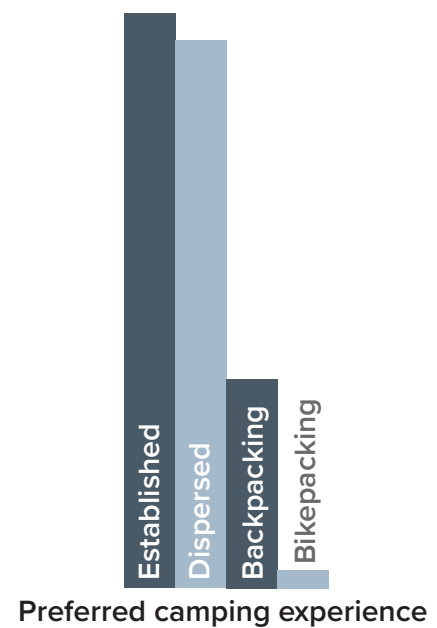
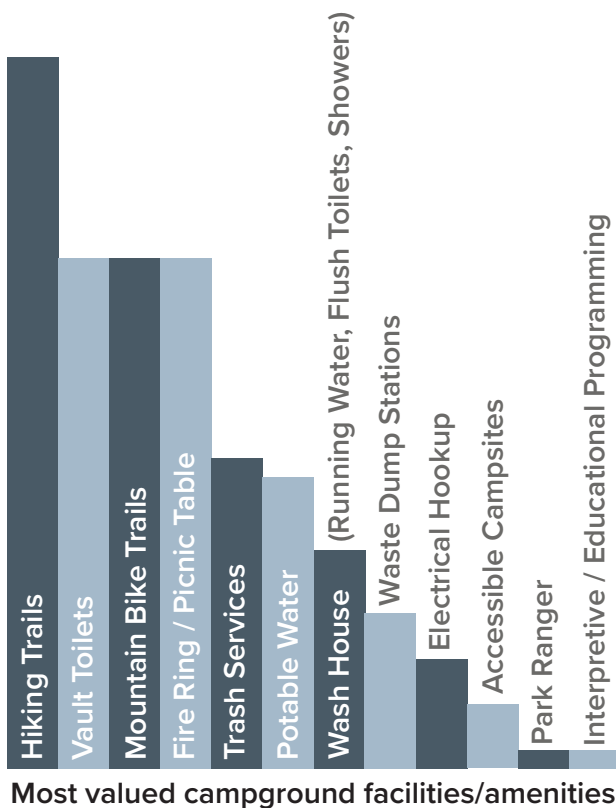


Key Takeaways on Dispersed Camping:

- ▶ Respondents are unhappy with the closure of Vasquez Creek Road since it was a great camping option in close proximity to Town and trails. Despite its closure, people continue to camp illegally along the road corridor;
- ▶ Respondents enjoy dispersed camping because of its convenience, solitude and privacy, options for sites, and access to trails/amenities;
- ▶ While there are likely visitors who practice LNT principles and abide by dispersed camping regulations, some are not abiding by regulations. Common issues include trash dumping, oversized gatherings, human waste in open areas, inappropriate fire rings/unattended fires, and violations of 14-day limits at a site;
- ▶ Respondents would like to see dispersed camping violations be enforced by law enforcement in the Sulphur Ranger District as well as more consistent monitoring at known dispersed camping locations during peak camping seasons and fire ban restrictions.

Key Takeaways on Established Campgrounds:

- ▶ Respondents prefer sites that are clearly delineated with spaces for parking, tent pads, and physical buffers/screening between campsites;
- ▶ Respondents prefer established campgrounds that include access to quality amenities including toilets, trash disposal, fire pits, and optional vehicle hook-ups to water and electric;
- ▶ Over half of the respondents have never camped in Idlewild or St. Louis Creek Campgrounds, citing issues with early seasonal closures or full capacity;
- ▶ Respondents appreciate the proximity of Idlewild Campground to downtown Winter Park, the existing trail network, and the cozy atmosphere/forest cover. They would like to see improvements to access from US 40, more defined space between campsites, and tree clearing to allow for more sunlight;
- ▶ Respondents appreciate the proximity of St. Louis Creek Campground to downtown Winter Park, existing trails, and waterways. They love the views at the campground but would like to see more shade cover/ trees and distance between sites.



CAMPGROUNDS

Stakeholder Input

The Town and consultant team identified stakeholders who have an overlapping interest in campgrounds within the Fraser Valley. Stakeholders include Winter Park and Fraser Chamber, Winter Park Resort, Headwaters Trails Alliance, and the US Forest Service. Stakeholders were interviewed to determine potential partnerships to meet community needs. Notable partnerships and goals for each stakeholder are examined and presented on the following pages.



Winter Park and Fraser Chamber

Feedback on Camping in Winter Park

- ▶ The Chamber believes there should be camping near town, either along Vasquez Road or at the Denver Water parcels, but that camping should be located further from residences;
- ▶ The Town should work with US Forest Service to improve Idlewild Campground. They would like to see access improvements from US 40;
- ▶ The Chamber does not promote dispersed camping to visitors or provide a guidance on where to find dispersed camping sites.



Winter Park Resort

Feedback on Camping in Winter Park

- ▶ Limited overnight self-contained camping is allowed in the upper G-Lot of the Resort for a maximum of 3 days for any 30-day period. This is enforced regularly and security will file trespassing charges against violators. No amenities are provided;
- ▶ The Resort does not currently have an interest in operating or managing campgrounds within the permit area; however, they would support the Town working with US Forest Service to improve camping conditions along Vasquez Road.



Headwaters Trails Alliance (HTA)

Feedback on Camping in Winter Park

- ▶ HTA cited inappropriate and irresponsible dispersed camping behavior prompted the closure of camping along Vasquez Road. E. coli contamination from human waste was a large contributor to the closure;
- ▶ HTA previously worked with US Forest Service to identify appropriate sites with adequate space for parking, tents, and fire rings that were at least 200 feet from water;
- ▶ HTA acknowledged the US Forest Service does not have the ranger capacity to enforce dispersed camping restrictions, maintain sites, or monitor for fires. They believe a third party agreement could be set up, similar to other municipalities, with dispersed camping in their vicinity.



US Forest Service (USFS)

Feedback on Camping in Winter Park

- ▶ US Forest Service supports designated dispersed camping along Vasquez Road and other locations in the vicinity of Winter Park. These sites need to be defined by buck and rail fencing and marked with a carsonite campsite marker. Fire rings would likely not be permitted since they are prohibited outside of developed recreation sites under Grand County Stage One Fire Restrictions;
- ▶ US Forest Service supports expanding and improving campground facilities, but any work would need to be supported by a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process conducted by a third-party before it could enter the design/implementation stage.

Programmatic Needs

Unlike other existing or proposed resources evaluated within this master plan, the Town of Winter Park does not own or manage any campground resources. The Town does not have the land area to build a campground or the staff to manage one as a year-round or seasonal resource for public use. The Town must continue to rely on adjacent US Forest Service established campgrounds and lands for dispersed camping for residents and visitors to use.

The table below incorporates existing camping resources and recommended camping improvements to illustrate the various ways they can help address the Town's collective camping needs. The success of camping resources relies on a continued partnership with the US Forest Service and stakeholders in order for community and visitor needs to be met.

		Improved Dispersed Camping	Designated Dispersed Zone	Improved Established Camping			
				Idlewild	Midland	Robbers Roost	St. Louis Creek
Overall Camping Needs	Shaded Camping Areas	Existing at Select Sites	To Be Determined	Existing			x (After Area Regrowth)
	Fire Management	To Be Improved with Implementation of Programs 1,2, and 3 (see Dispersed Camping Recommendations)					(see
	Access to Water	To Be Regulated	To Be Determined	Existing			
	Access to Trails	To Be Regulated	To Be Provided	Existing	-	-	Existing
	Improved Leave No Trace Etiquette	To Be Improved with Implementation of Program 1 (see Dispersed Camping Recommendations)					
	Delineated Campsites	To Be Determined	To Be Determined	Existing			
Dispersed Camping Needs	Toilets	To Be Determined	Preferred; To Be Determined	Existing			
	Monitoring & Maintenance	Improved with Program 2 (see Dispersed Camping Recommendations)		To Be Improved After Restoration and Campsite Improvements			
	Marked Sites / Signage	To Be Determined	To Be Provided	Existing			
	Primitive Camping	To Be Provided	To Be Provided	-	-	-	-
	Enforcement	To Be Improved with Implementation of Program 3 (see Dispersed Camping Recommendations)					(see
Established Camping Needs	Food Storage	-	-	Existing	To Be Provided with Campsite Improvements		Existing
	Trash Disposal	-	-	Existing	To Be Provided with Campsite Improvements		Existing
	Electrical / Water Hookup	-	-	Existing	-	-	Existing
	First Come Option	To Be Provided	To Be Provided	Existing	-	Existing	Existing
	Reservations	-	To Be Provided	Existing		-	Existing

FIGURE 4-5. The Programmatic Needs matrix for Campgrounds illustrates how needs can be met upon implementation of programs for dispersed camping and improvements to the existing established campgrounds.

Dispersed Camping Assessment

Vehicle-based dispersed camping has long been a cost-effective and convenient option for visitors looking to experience Colorado's public lands and outdoor recreation opportunities. It offers an alternative camping option to visitors who want more primitive or self-sustained experience not offered at developed campgrounds. There is also unparalleled flexibility with dispersed camping as campers are not locked into one location and can easily relocate if they are seeking privacy from others or a better view of the night sky. Dispersed camping is typically free, which appeals to campers looking to experience the outdoors on a tighter budget.

This freedom to choose your own camping experience has its drawbacks. In recent years, the US Forest Service and other public-land agencies have closed popular dispersed camping along US Forest Service roads in order to protect resources. Within the Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forest, thousands of new dispersed campsites were created by visitors outside of developed campgrounds.

These dispersed campsites led to several negative impacts including the following:

- ▶ Trampled vegetation;
- ▶ Noxious weed infestation;
- ▶ Accelerated erosion;
- ▶ Compacted soils and tree roots from humans, tents, and vehicles;
- ▶ Sites in close proximity to the road;
- ▶ Abandoned rock campfire rings and unattended fires;
- ▶ Excessive trash and human waste in dispersed campsites and near trailheads;
- ▶ Large, unregulated group gatherings;
- ▶ Animal encounters due to improper food storage;
- ▶ Contamination of municipal water supplies from human waste and trash in streams.



FIGURE 4-6. The Arrow Townsite features a heavily trampled area with multiple stone fire rings. Camping is not permitted on the Denver Water land outside of their designated campgrounds (none of these are in Winter Park). Dispersed camping restrictions are not enforced, posing a risk to resources at the site.



FIGURE 4-7. Dispersed campsite located along FSR 128, just north of Rendezvous property and the future Ranch Creek Park site. The campsite appears to be popular as it is a heavily trampled and features a collapsed stone fire ring.



FIGURE 4-8. A log barrier was placed by US Forest Service along Vasquez Creek Road (FSR 148) to deter camping in the closure area.

The Town of Winter Park does not have jurisdiction over any dispersed campsites on US Forest Service lands. The closures of dispersed sites along areas like Vasquez Road are essential to protecting at-risk resources. These closures are not permanent solutions and do not solve the myriad of unregulated dispersed camping issues. For dispersed camping to be allowed without jeopardizing natural resources, it must be managed to prevent damaging and irresponsible activities.

The table below summarizes some of the most popular dispersed campsites near Town. Information includes ownership, restrictions, and the current status of use. The locations and distances are generalized, as many of the campsites exist across large stretches of road. The condition of campsites at each location varies, ranging from small, appropriately maintained sites to large, trampled sites.

Name (Primary Road Location)	Approximate Distance and Time to Downtown	Setting	Features	Land Owner / Dispersed Camping Restrictions	Status
Tubing Hill Rd (FSR 158) / Elk Creek Meadows	5 Miles / 13 to 15 Minutes	Forests Creeks Wetlands	Hiking and biking trail access (Elk Meadows) Secluded	US Forest Service (Sulphur Ranger District) 14-day limit for 30-day period; 30-day limit for 365 day period	Open May to Early October
FSR 159 / East Elk Creek	5 Miles / 12 to 15 Minutes	Forests Creeks	Hiking and biking trail access (Elk Meadows / Twin Bridges)		Open May to Early October
Vasquez Rd (FSR 148)	< 3 Miles / 5 to 9 Minutes	Forests Creeks Wetlands	Hiking and biking trail access (Denver Water West / Twin Bridges)		Closed Indefinitely
Corona Pass Road (FSR 149)	3 to 6 Miles / 8 to 15 Minutes	Forests Creeks	Hiking and biking trail access (Rendezvous Trail System)		Open May to Early October
FSR 128	< 5 Miles / 8 Minutes	Forests	Proximity to Resort / US 40		Open May to Early October
Arrow Townsite	< 6 Miles / 12 to 15 Minutes	Forests Open / Exposed	Hiking and biking trail access (Rendezvous Trail System)	Denver Water Camping is not permitted in this area per Denver Water camping guidelines. Camping is currently unregulated	Closed Permanently
Winter Park Resort Parking Lot G	< 4 Miles / 7 Minutes	Open / Exposed	Proximity to Resort / US 40	US Forest Service (Sulphur Ranger District) / Winter Park Resort 3-day limit	At the Discretion of the Resort / Typically Year-Round

FSR = US Forest Service Road; Table based off data collected in Fall 2024. Refer to the US Forest Service website for information on closures and changes in status and regulations.

CAMPGROUNDS

Many of the issues that stem from dispersed camping are the result of visitors not abiding by existing regulations. The table below summarizes some of the existing restrictions and guidance for dispersed camping developed by US Forest Service units across the region.

Note: Not all US Forest Service units publish the same dispersed camping information on their websites. Read about current regulations online and contact the District Ranger office for any forest specific rules.

Feature	Existing Restriction	Source
Location	Dispersed camping is allowed within 300-feet of the centerline of select US Forest Service roads.	Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forest, CO
	Dispersed camping is not allowed within 100-feet of water sources; Dispersed camping is not allowed within the vicinity of developed recreation areas including established campgrounds, picnic areas, or trailheads.	Fishlake National Forest, UT
	Camp on pre-existing dispersed camping sites on barren, flat soil to avoid trampling any vegetation or tree roots. Tents should be sited in level areas with good drainage. Avoid setting up tents in open areas or within view of the road.	Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests & Thunder Basin Grassland, CO
	Avoid driving off road to access dispersed sites and only drive on designated roads.	
Human Waste	All human waste must be properly buried in a hole of 6" minimum and at least 200-feet from a water source. Toilet paper must be packed-out and disposed of in a proper container.	Pike-San Isabel National Forest & Cimarron and Comanche National Grasslands
Trash	All trash must be packed-in and packed-out. There is no trash removal or disposal at sites.	Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests & Thunder Basin Grassland, CO
	Leaving camping equipment unattended for more than 24 hours is not allowed	Pike-San Isabel National Forest & Cimarron and Comanche National Grasslands
Water Access	Water must be properly treated before drinking. Potable water is not available at dispersed sites and most US Forest Service water resources are contaminated with microorganisms, like giardia.	Fishlake National Forest, UT
Camping Duration	14-day limit for 30-day period; 30-day limit for 365 day period.	Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forest, CO
Fires	Campfires must comply with current fire regulations. Refer to the US Forest Service District Ranger Office for current fire bans.	Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forest, CO
	Firewood permits are required before harvesting firewood products.	
	If fires are permitted, use existing, properly established/built stone fire rings.	
	Avoid building new fire rings to minimize scarring of additional rocks and soils. Avoid fires under low over-hanging trees or in wet/dry meadows. Only collect dead firewood for use in fires.	Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests & Thunder Basin Grassland, CO
	Do NOT leave fires unattended. Make sure campfires are completely out and ashes have cooled before leaving a fire/campsite. Stir ashes to make sure embers have cooled.	
Group Size	Groups over 75 people must obtain a special use permit from the US Forest Service District Ranger Office.	Fishlake National Forest, UT

Many of the US Forest Service regulations stem from best practices and etiquette established by non-profit groups such as *Leave No Trace (LNT)* and *Tread Lightly* to reduce the impacts of recreation to public lands. The *LNT* principles are utilized more broadly across all sectors of recreation whereas

Tread Lightly principles are for motorized vehicle-based recreation, including vehicle-based dispersed camping.

The *LNT* and *Tread Lightly* principles that overlap with best camping practices are included below.

LEAVE NO TRACE PRINCIPLES

1. Plan Ahead and Prepare

- ▶ Know the regulations before camping including restrictions and appropriate site use;
- ▶ Identify camping location(s) prior to travel.

2. Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces

- ▶ Use pre-existing sites with minimal vegetation;
- ▶ Camp 200-feet from water, if feasible (100 min);
- ▶ Keep campsites small and impacts isolated to one location.

3. Dispose of Waste Properly

- ▶ Inspect campsite for food and trash prior to leaving and pack-out all trash. Aim to leave site better than it was found by removing trash left by others;
- ▶ Deposit solid human waste in a cathole (6" - 8" deep), 200-feet from water, camp, and trails. Disguise the cathole when finished and pack-out toilet paper;
- ▶ Wash dishes 200-feet away from streams and use biodegradable cleaning products.

4. Leave What You Find

- ▶ Do not build new structures/fire rings or build trenches;
- ▶ Minimize impacts to nature resources.

5. Minimize Campfire Impacts

- ▶ Use established fire rings where they are permitted;
- ▶ Keep fires small and only use sticks that can be broken by hand;
- ▶ Use a stove for cooking and a lantern for light;
- ▶ Put out campfire completely before leaving a site and confirm there are no embers remaining.

6. Respect Wildlife

- ▶ Store food and trash in appropriate containers. Refer to regulations in area about proper food storage;
- ▶ Control pets at all times and avoid letting them off-leash in wildlife areas.

7. Be Considerate of Other Visitors

- ▶ Be courteous of other campers/visitors. Avoid loud music/noise and camping in areas where you may disturb others outdoor experience.

TREAD LIGHTLY PRINCIPLES

T - Travel and Recreate with Minimum Impact

- ▶ When looking for a dispersed camping site for a vehicle, travel/stay only on designated motor vehicle routes and corridors;
- ▶ Do not create new routes. Avoid expanding pull-offs;
- ▶ Only drive on previously disturbed/compacted areas. Avoid sensitive habitats (wetlands, meadows, etc).

R - Respect the Environment and the Rights of Others

- ▶ Be respectful and considerate of other users so that all can enjoy a quality experience in the outdoors;
- ▶ Respect wildlife. Be sensitive to their needs by keeping your distance;
- ▶ Comply with posted signage.

E - Educate Yourself, Plan and Prepare Before You Go

- ▶ Know local laws and regulations for the land you are camping within;
- ▶ Acquire the correct information, maps, and equipment prior to your trip;
- ▶ Know which areas and routes are open for camping.

A - Allow for Future Use of the Outdoors, Leave It Better than You Found It

- ▶ Properly dispose of food, human waste, and trash; Everything you bring must be packed-out;
- ▶ Leave what you find;
- ▶ Minimize use of fire to avoid burn scars on the land and reduce risk of wildfire.

D - Discover the Rewards of Responsible Recreation

- ▶ Do all you can to help preserve the beauty and inspiring attributes of our lands and waters for yourself and future generations.

CAMPGROUNDS

Dispersed Camping Recommendations

Dispersed camping is a great public amenity that should be allowed to continue in the Winter Park / Fraser Valley area under improved conditions and management. There is not one site-scale solution to resolve the issues relating to dispersed camping around Town or throughout Colorado. The Town will need to partner with the US Forest Service and partner organizations to improve dispersed camping conditions and remedy negative impacts to the surrounding forests and resources.

Currently, dispersed camping management falls almost entirely on the US Forest Service. As the owner/manager of the public land where dispersed camping occurs in the region, they are ultimately responsible for developing a dispersed camping/campground management plan to help regulate the camping on their lands.

In 2022, the Salida and Leadville Ranger Districts in adjacent Pike-San Isabel National Forests initiated a project to manage vehicle-based dispersed camping issues. While this plan is still under development, its findings will likely yield data that can help the Sulphur Ranger District to develop a similar plan for the Winter Park / Fraser area. At this time, the Sulphur Ranger District is limited in its capacity to develop or implement a dispersed camping management plan. Additionally, the District does not have the employee capacity to monitor or maintain dispersed campsites and enforce regulations.



FIGURE 4–9. Dispersed camping is one of the many ways to experience the beauty of the Fraser Valley (Photo by: Winter Park and Fraser Chamber).

The recommendations in this section parallel what the US Forest Service and the Colorado Department of Natural Resources are aiming to accomplish with its [Shared Stewardship Program](#). Numerous agencies, stakeholders, and non-profit groups have been identified to assist with stewardship of the state's forest lands. Managing dispersed camping in the region will need to be an on-going project. The **Headwaters Trails Alliance (HTA)**, as the primary outdoor recreation advocacy group in the region, is the best partner to assist with navigating programming solutions and identifying additional partner organizations.



Through *Shared Stewardship*, the US Forest Service, Town of Winter Park, and partner organizations can improve dispersed camping for the long-term benefit of its natural and recreational resources. This master plan presents recommended programs that can help address dispersed camping issues in the area. Each program is briefly outlined on the following pages with an accompanying program matrix. The charts are intended to highlight key responsibilities and partners, but **additional partners, stakeholders, and agencies should be identified as needed.**

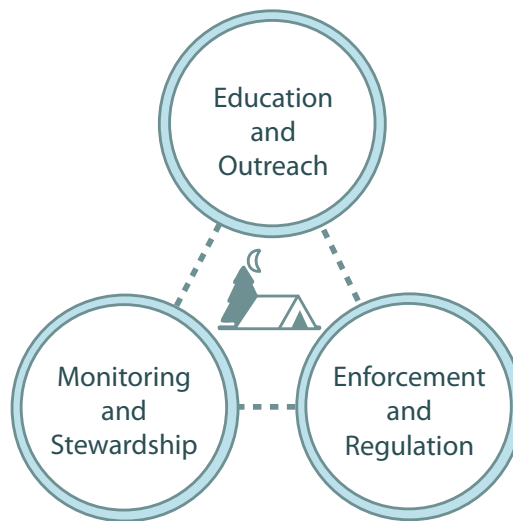


FIGURE 4–10. The three-part system for improving dispersed camping involves equal investment into programs for monitoring and upkeep, education and outreach, and permitting and enforcement.

Program 1: Education and Outreach

This program requires an improvement to existing educational programming and outreach within the Town and the Sulphur Ranger District. Currently, there is limited and mixed information on dispersed camping regulations within the region. The US Forest Service and the Town should work together to publish a joint guidance on regulations and protocols.

The US Forest Service is ultimately responsible for publishing comprehensive guidelines and identifying where dispersed camping is permitted. Some US Forest Service units have examples of guides on their websites, but rules and regulations differ between regions. The management matrix below identifies the roles each organization could take on to assist with education and outreach for dispersed camping.

Program 1: Education and Outreach

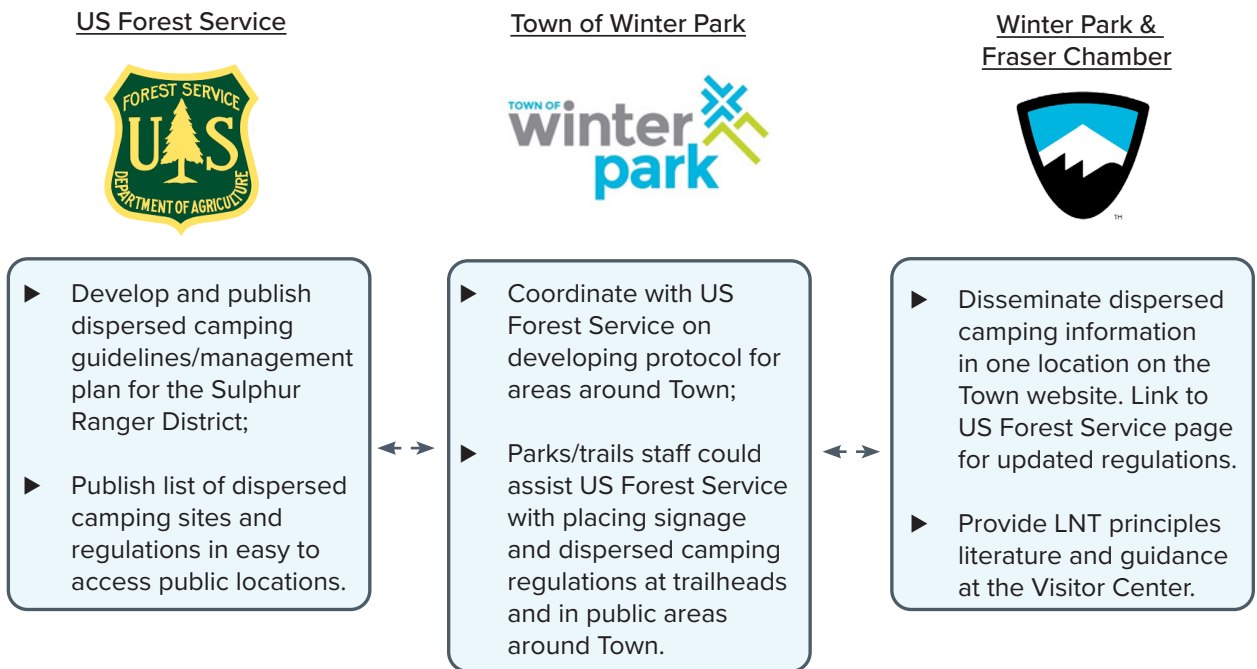


FIGURE 4-11. Clear and consistent signage with camping regulations and informing visitors where they can and cannot camp will likely reduce illegal dispersed camping. The Town and US Forest Service should work together to identify locations for signage between Town and federal properties (Source: US Forest Service, Pumphouse Dispersed Camping Area, Coconino National Forest, Flagstaff, AZ).



FIGURE 4-12. Sharing LNT principles, regulations, and locations of designated dispersed camping sites can help visitors make informed decisions on where it is appropriate to camp near Town. Information sharing can be done both through the distribution of pamphlets as well as in one location online. (Source: National Park Service).

Program 2: Monitoring and Stewardship

This program involves improving monitoring and stewardship of dispersed campsites (existing and future) adjacent to Town. Currently, there is no inventory for dispersed camping sites on US Forest Service lands in this section of the Sulphur Ranger District. The management and stewardship of these sites falls on the US Forest Service, which has limited capacity to monitor and maintain sites. The Town can assist the US Forest Service by partnering with a third-party conservation/recreation organization to help inventory sites and develop a plan to manage and maintain them.

An inventory would help identify focus areas where the majority of dispersed camping occurs. From this inventory, the US Forest Service could select additional locations that need more signage, monitoring, closures, or repairs. The management matrix below identifies the roles each organization could take to help identify, monitor, and maintain dispersed campsites near Town.

Program 2: Monitoring and Stewardship

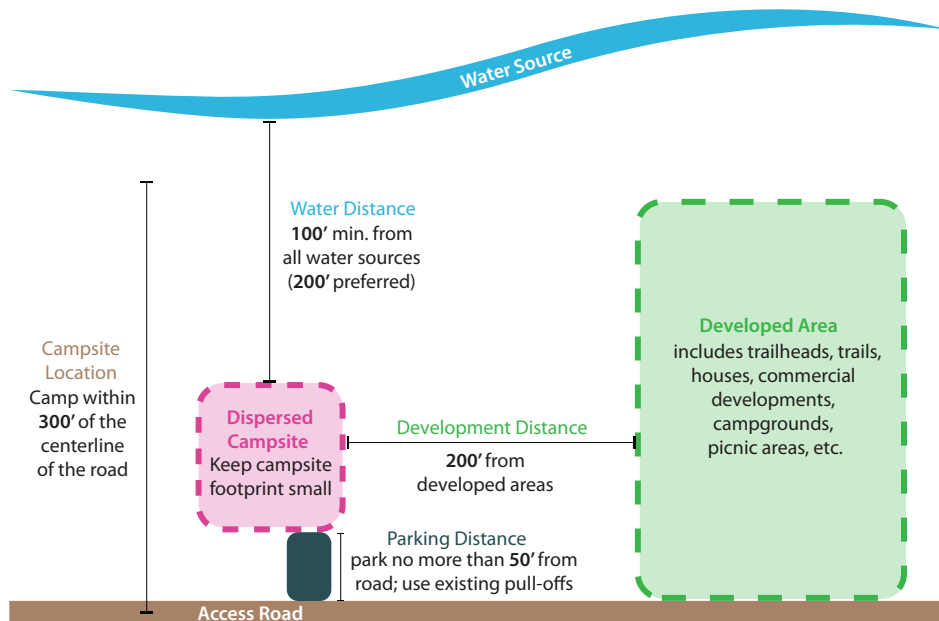
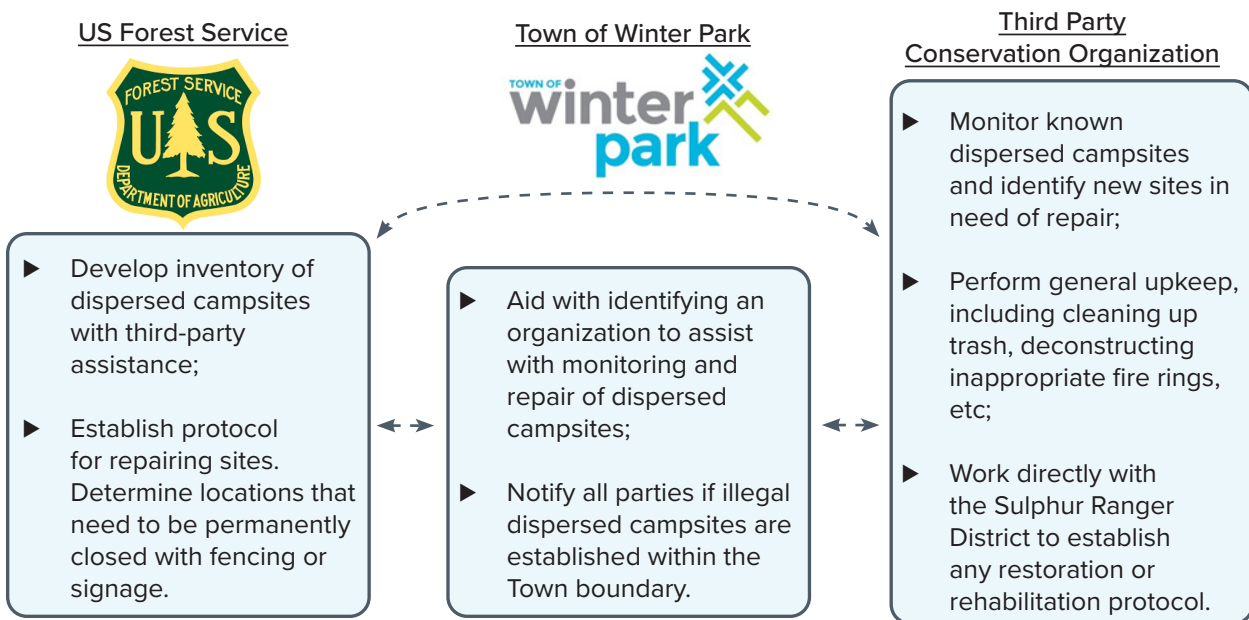


FIGURE 4-13. The diagram above illustrates the baseline location requirements for a dispersed campsite. Any sites that infringe upon these requirements should be removed from dispersed camping consideration and rehabilitated.

Program 3: Enforcement and Regulation

The final recommended program calls for the Town and US Forest Service to improve enforcement and regulation of dispersed camping activity near the Town boundary.

One approach the Town and US Forest Service could use to alleviate dispersed camping issues is for the another law enforcement entity (Town law enforcement, county law enforcement, or a third-party private security) to enter into a cooperative agreement with the US Forest Service to help patrol dispersed camping sites, monitor for illegal activity/ camping in closed areas, douse abandoned fires, and assist in monitoring for fire threats including abandoned campfires, improper fire rings, and infringements during a Stage 1 Fire Restrictions. Similar agreements have been developed with other recreation-focused municipalities to help curb illegal camping activities and help protect against fire threats.

Under a Cooperative Law Enforcement Agreement, law enforcement officers outside of the US Forest Service are granted select authority to help patrol and regulate activities on US Forest Service lands if they pose a threat to Town residents and general well-being. The rules and regulations of the cooperative agreement would need to be drawn up and approved by both parties. For patrols within the Resort Permit Area, the Winter Park Resort should be consulted as they also have security patrolling their property. Similar agreements could be set up with Denver Water to patrol unregulated, illegal camping on these parcels.

In addition to enforcement, this program also advocates for establishing areas where dispersed camping is more heavily regulated. These more regulated sites known as *Designated Dispersed Camping Areas* are covered more on the following page.

Program 3: Enforcement and Regulation



FIGURE 4-14. US Forest Service law enforcement officers patrol the entirety of the Sulphur Ranger District, which extends beyond the Fraser Valley. The Town law enforcement could assist with day-to-day activities including extinguishing fires and patrolling for illegal activity (Source: The Colorado Sun).

CAMPGROUNDS

Designated Dispersed Camping

In other locations within Colorado and across the Western United States, the US Forest Service has had success with developing designated dispersed camping zones for managing dispersed camping in popular recreation areas. Some of these designated dispersed zones allow free camping whereas others are operated by a third-party host organization for a fee. The campsites within these designated dispersed zones are signed and provide additional amenities including fire rings and nearby pit toilets.

For the visitor, designated dispersed campsites offer more amenities than are typically provided in traditional dispersed camping areas, as well as increased camping capacity outside of established campgrounds. For land management agencies and law enforcement, these designated dispersed campsites limit the area of impact to one location and they help identify users camping outside the defined camping area.

In recent years, the Town of Crested Butte has had success implementing a large designated dispersed

camping program. In 2021-2022, they worked with the US Forest Service in the Gunnison National Forest to establish designated zones for camping, effectively removing traditional dispersed camping and most of the issues surrounding it altogether. Previously dispersed/disturbed sites that were deemed acceptable within these zones were signed as designated sites and equipped with metal fire rings. All sites are first come, first serve and have limitations on length of stay, permitted activities, and vehicle requirements. Select sites in high volume recreation areas require an additional fee for use. This model has been successful in protecting natural resources and for law enforcement.

The Town of Winter Park and the Arapaho National Forest could consider implementing a model similar to Crested Butte and the Gunnison National Forest to help protect and manage its natural and recreational resources. The first step in this process would be to establish designated camping zones by evaluating the surrounding land area and existing forest road network.

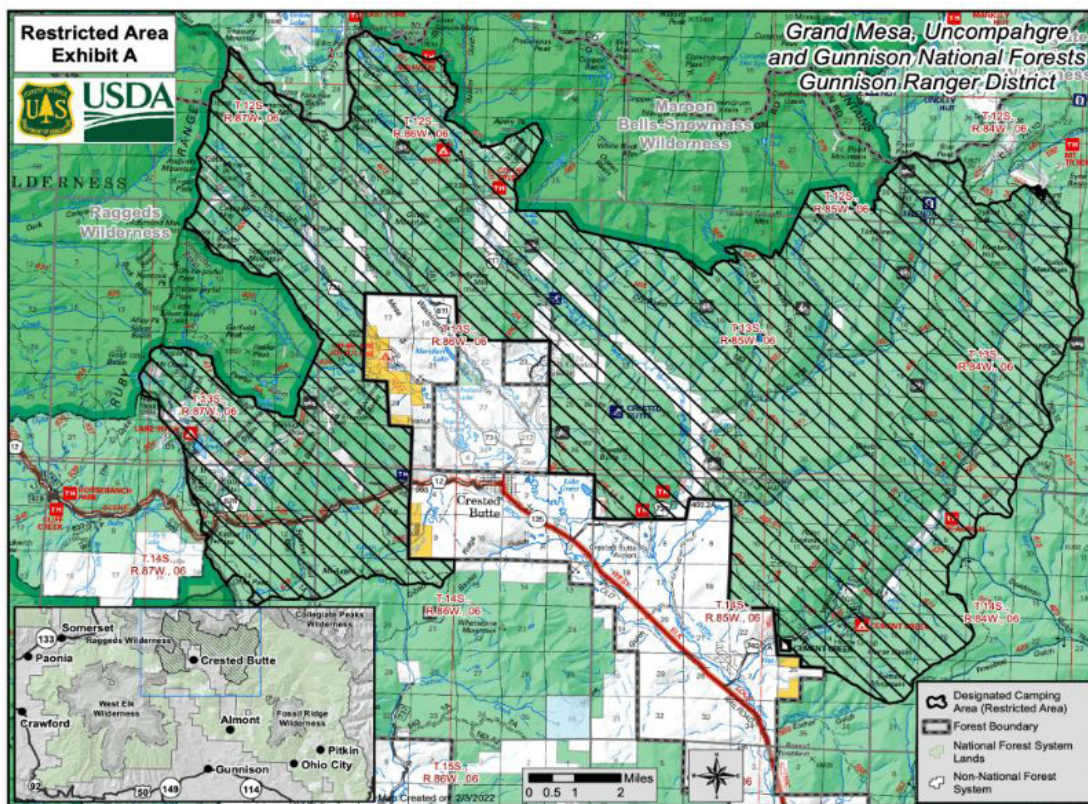


FIGURE 4–15. The map above depicts the designated camping zone the Town of Crested Butte implemented to protect resources. The zones were determined by evaluating existing drainages and resources and designating a few select dispersed sites along existing roads where camping would be appropriate. There are 5 zones established along major forest roads and each has about 40 sites. The Crested Butte Mountain Bike Association established an interactive website that lists the location of each site and nearby amenities. (Source: Crested Butte Mountain Bike Association/ US Forest Service).

Designated Camping Zone Site Selection

Vasquez Road (FSR 148) has been previously considered for designated dispersed camping due to its popularity and proximity to Town and recreational trail/water access. Unlike other popular designated dispersed camping zones in Colorado, such as Rampart Range in the Pike-San Isabel National Forest, Vasquez Road runs parallel to high-priority creek habitat that acts as the Town's source of drinking water. Extensive camping along this corridor and within this watershed poses a risk to this water source in terms of habitat damage and public health.

The analysis map of the Vasquez Creek corridor illustrates the conflict of locating multiple dispersed camping sites within the Vasquez Creek corridor. There are only a few disturbed sites that are located 200-feet from the creek that are also located on acceptable slopes. All sites are located within the watershed drainage boundary. Limiting the number of sites will limit the amount of impact within the watershed and decrease the likelihood of resource degradation and pollution. If reopened to camping, the Town and US Forest Service would need to continue monitoring the corridor for impacts and routinely assess if camping should be permitted within the corridor. Vasquez Road may be an appropriate location for a select few sites, but it will not be able to provide the camping capacity it did before its closure.

In addition to potentially reopening the Vasquez Creek corridor to camping, the Town should consider working with the US Forest Service to designate a larger network of forest roads for designated dispersed camping. Similar to the Crested Butte model, these zones can be scattered throughout the surrounding US Forest Service land, but it may be in the best interest of the Town and agency to increase the capacity and number of camping zones over several camping seasons in order to monitor the impacts and have time to slowly implement the system. Programs 1, 2, and 3 will need to be implemented in order to educate the public about the change in camping protocol, monitor and establish new designated sites, and have the law enforcement capacity to patrol and monitor the designated camping areas.

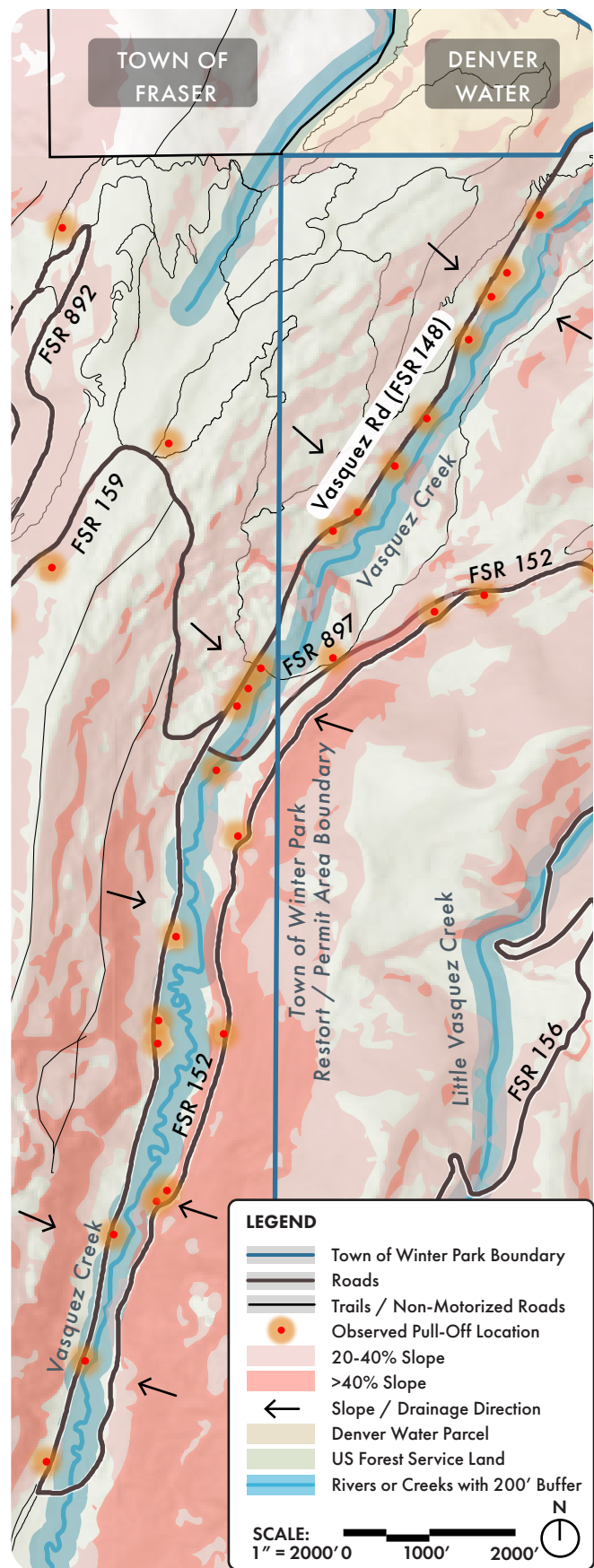


FIGURE 4–16. Analysis map of the Vasquez Creek corridor and areas of disturbance.

CAMPGROUNDS

The most appropriate location(s) for a designated camping zone would need to be determined through a NEPA process/ Environmental Assessment (EA). The ideal designated camping zones should be able to accommodate 20 to 40 vehicle-access campsites on relatively flat ground outside of a sensitive watersheds. These sites would ideally be within a 15-minute drive of Town.

A few potential sites have been identified below based on preliminary mapping and analysis. The final number of sites that could be supported would need to be determined by the EA.

Ideally, the designated dispersed camping area would have access to a pit toilet facility, be within walking or driving distance of a trailhead or water source, have previous disturbance, provide shade, and be managed by a third-party organization who could assist with monitoring and regulating camping activities.

The following roads should be considered for further investigation in a Environmental Assessment process based on this preliminary assessment:

West of US 40:

- ▶ Vasquez Road (FSR 148)
- ▶ Arapahoe / Little Vasquez Road (FSR 156)
- ▶ Tunnel Hill Road (FSR 152)
- ▶ Leland Creek Road (FSR 159)
- ▶ FSR 892, 893, 894.1D, and 2894.2D

East of US 40:

- ▶ Corona Pass Road (FSR 149)
- ▶ Near Midland Campgrounds/FSR 128 (outside of the James Peak Protection Area)

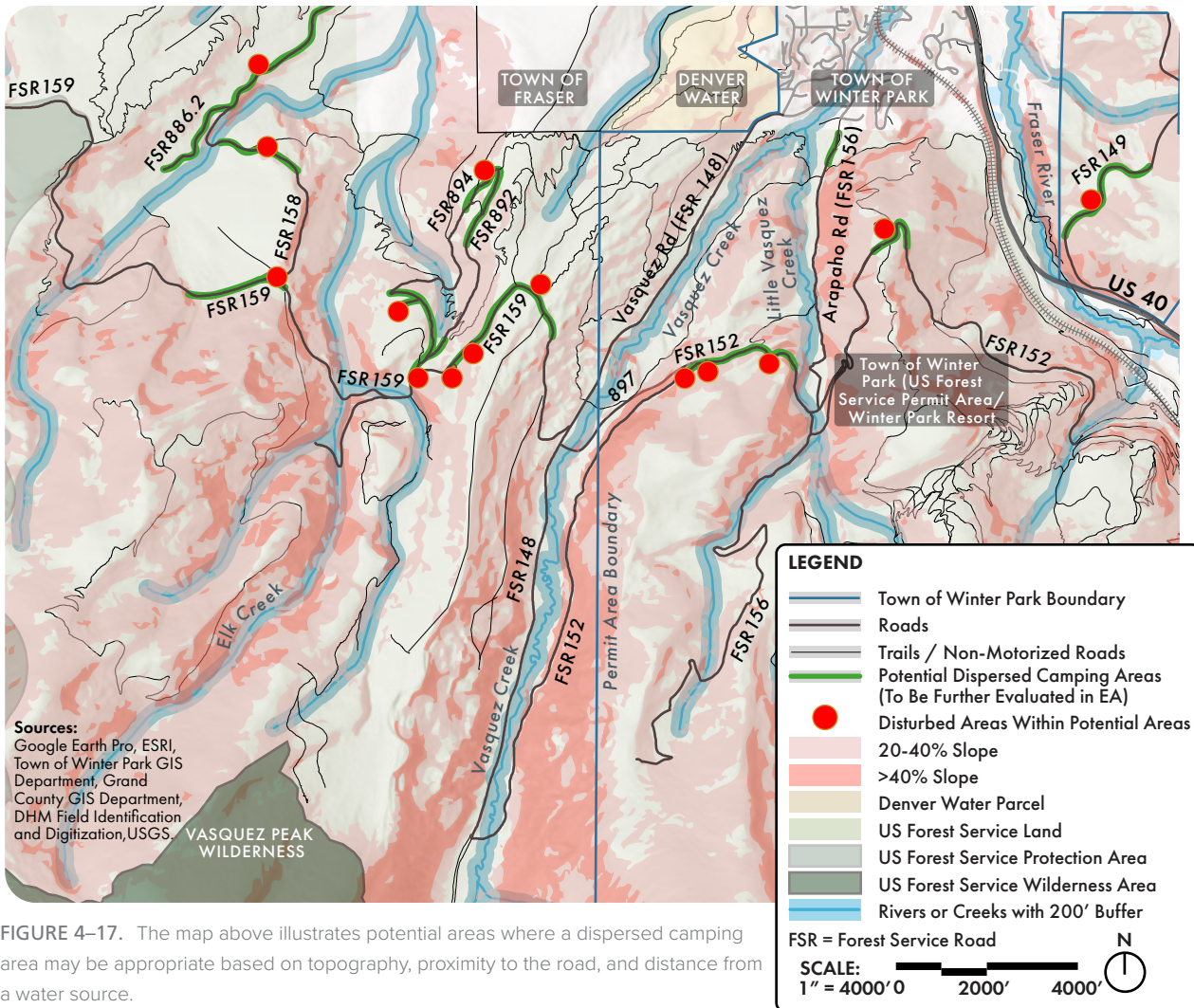


FIGURE 4-17. The map above illustrates potential areas where a dispersed camping area may be appropriate based on topography, proximity to the road, and distance from a water source.

Established Camping Assessment

Established Camping, also known as Developed Camping, was a concept first established in the 1930s to curb the effects of dispersed, unregulated camping on public lands. Federal and state organizations including the National Park Service, US Forest Service, and state parks developed automobile campgrounds in order to consolidate the impacts of camping, vehicles, and foot traffic to one regulated location, thus limiting damage to surrounding natural and cultural resources. These campgrounds evolved to include convenient amenities, including access to potable water and restroom facilities, that further enticed visitors to use them over primitive camping.

As the popularity of these campsites grew, so did the vehicles that utilized them, giving rise to the motorhome with larger clearances for turning and parking. The desire for modern amenities to support extended visits grew as well, with visitors requesting more access to electricity and showers. Established campgrounds often cater to visitors who want to experience the outdoors with some of the comforts of their day-to-day lives. They are ideal for trip planners who want to reserve a location prior to their visit, removing the hassle of trying to find a site during a trip.

The US Forest Service offers four established campgrounds within a 15-minute drive to Town. Based on historic topographic maps, all four campgrounds were built around 1959 and likely have received very few improvements outside of amenity replacements and repaving since establishment. Each campground offers different amenities and experiences for campers wishing to visit and recreate in the Fraser Valley. The Town does not have jurisdiction over any of these campgrounds, however many of the campers using these spaces are camping in these locations to be in close proximity to the Town and its recreation resources.

Note: The US Forest Service also owns Jim Creek Campground which is operated by the National Sports Center for the Disabled. This campground is only open for organized events and reservations through this agency. Similarly, there are private campgrounds within the region that are operated by outfitters. These established camping sites were not evaluated as part of this master plan as they are not public amenities.



FIGURE 4–18. Campsites at Idlewild Campground are typically shaded and have campsite numbers with a parking spur, picnic table, fire ring, and bear-proof food storage. Sites often lack clear boundaries due to excessive root trampling.



FIGURE 4–19. St. Louis Creek Campground offers stunning 360-views of the landscape. The openness does limit privacy at the site and shade is almost non-existent.



FIGURE 4–20. Robbers Roost Campground acts as an alternative to Idlewild Campground. Although it is further from Town and has few amenities, it acts as a great substitute to campers looking for a more secluded experience (Source: Google Images)

CAMPGROUNDS

The table below summarizes the four US Forest Service operated campgrounds closest to Town as well as their features, restrictions, and current use status. The two most popular campgrounds are Idlewild and St. Louis Creek due to their size, reservation options, and amenities. None of the campgrounds below feature electric or water hookups for RVs or camper vans.

Name	Approximate Distance and Time to Downtown	Number of Sites	Setting	Features	Amenities	Reservation Type	Status
Idlewild	< 2 Miles / 4 Minutes	26	Forested / Shaded	River Access Access to Town Close to US 40	Picnic Tables & Fire Ring at Campsites Bear-resistant Food Storage Firewood Available Campground Host (Vista Recreation, and the Fraser River Valley Lions Club) Pay Station Potable Water Multiple Vault Toilets (including Accessible) RV Camping (30-foot max)	Half First Come, First Serve / Half Reservation	Open Mid-May to Late September
Midland	< 5 Miles / 7 Minutes	1 Group Site for 36 people max / 10 vehicles	Forested / Shaded	Group Campsite River Access Close to US 40	Picnic Tables & Fire Rings within site Gate Access with Reservation Portable Toilet Tent Camping Only (Parking area outside of camp site)	Reservation Only	Open Early June to Early September
Robbers Roost	< 7 Miles / 10 Minutes	11	Forested / Shaded	River Access Close to US 40 Close to Berthoud Pass	Picnic Tables & Fire Ring at Campsites Vault Toilets RV Camping (25-foot max)	First Come, First Serve	Does not operate on a regular basis and opens/ closes randomly.
St. Louis Creek	< 6 Miles / 15 Minutes	17	Upland Plains / Open	Views of Byers Peak mountain range Hiking and biking trail access (St. Louis Creek) Further From Highways / Secluded Fishing Access	Picnic Tables & Fire Ring at Campsites Bear-resistant Food Storage Campground Host (Vista Recreation, and the Fraser River Valley Lions Club) Pay Station Potable Water Vault Toilet RV Camping (25-foot max)	Half First Come, First Serve / Half Reservation	Open Mid-May to Late September

Table based off data collected in Fall 2024. Refer to the US Forest Service website for information on closures and changes in status and regulations.

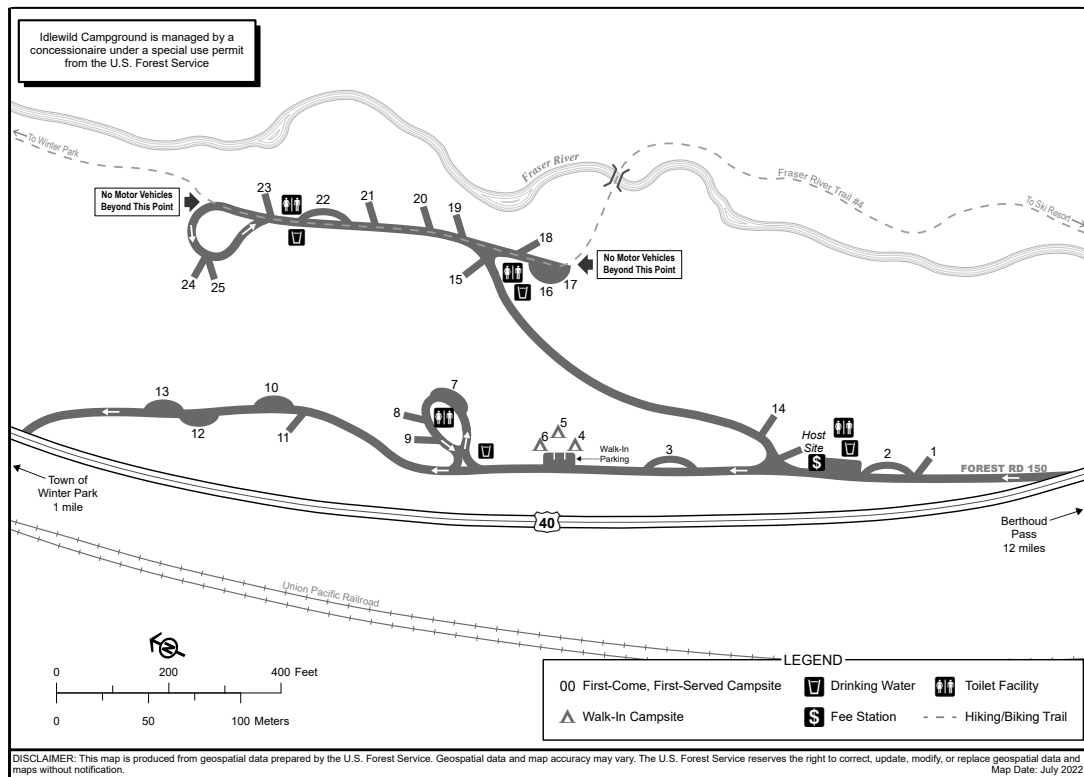


FIGURE 4-21. Idlewild Campground is very popular with visitors, with a beautiful location on the Fraser River in a lodgepole pine forest. The Fraser River Trail runs through the campground, sharing the campground road. This makes it easy and convenient to walk or bike into town from the campground without needing to drive. During peak season, the campground regularly operates at full capacity (Map Source: US Forest Service).

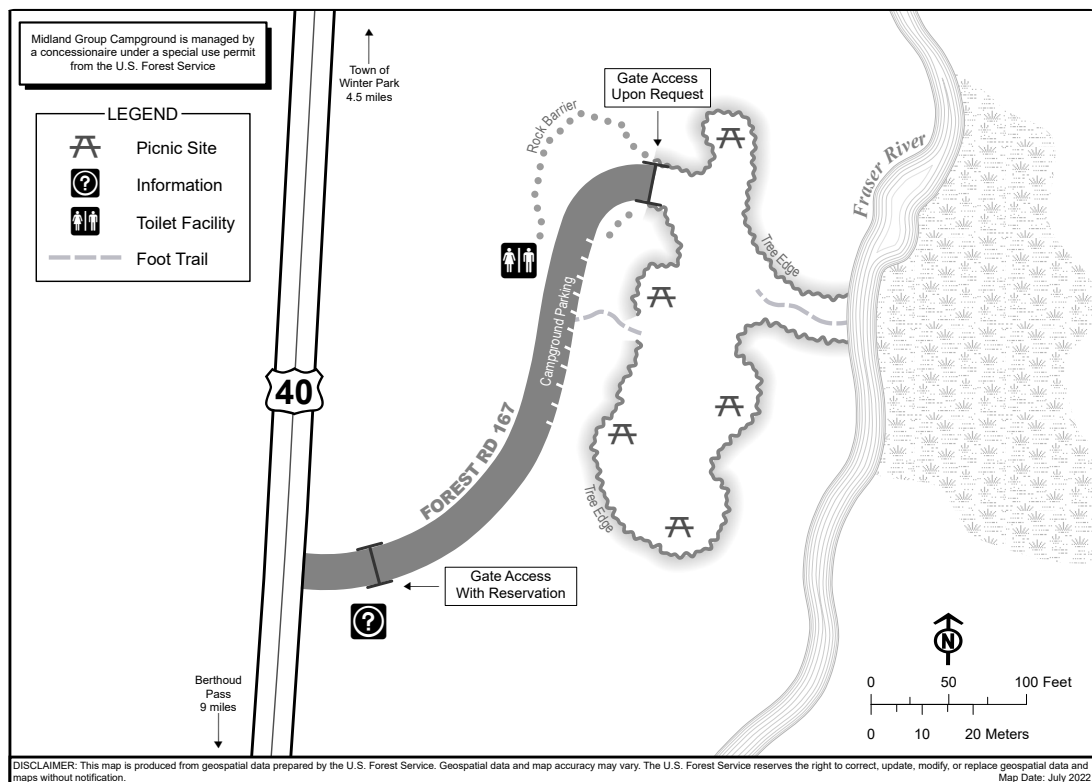


FIGURE 4-22. Midland Campground acts as group site extension of Idlewild Campground, with similar beautiful scenery along the Fraser River. Although close to US 40, the group site is gated and feels relatively secluded and primitive. A high concentration of wildlife frequents the area due to its proximity to the Fraser River (Map Source: US Forest Service).

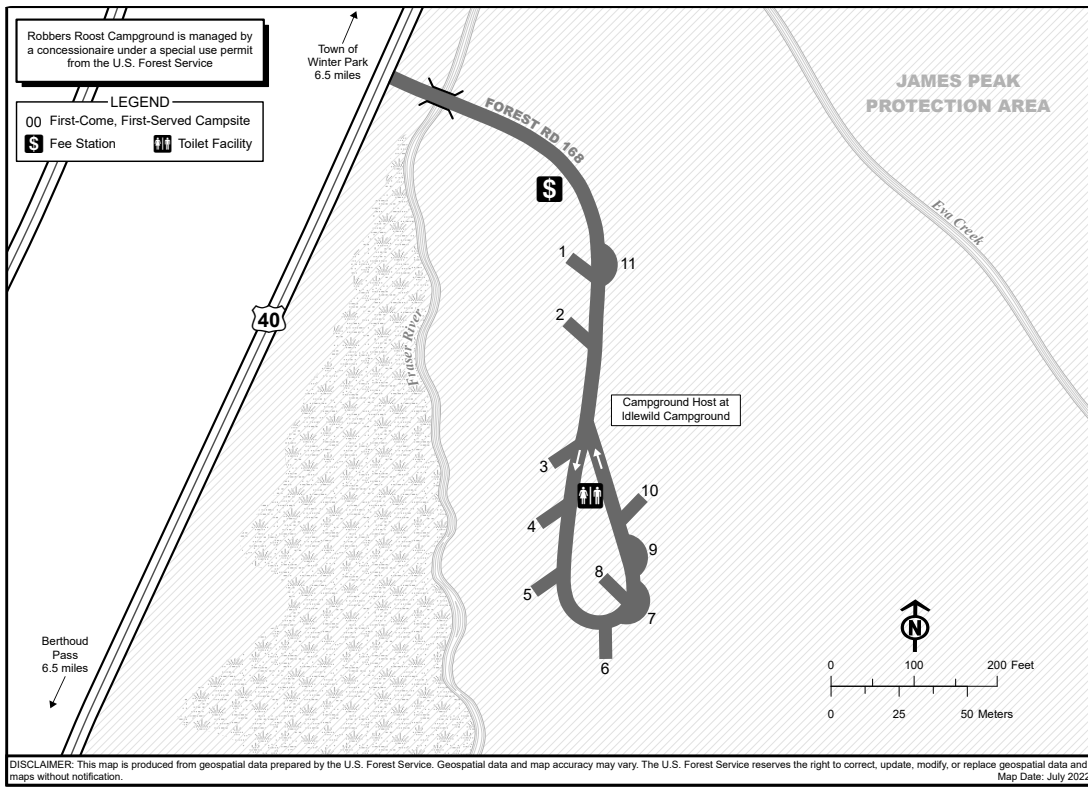


FIGURE 4-23. Robbers Roost Campground is located along US 40, south of Idlewild and Midland Campgrounds. It offers great access to water and wildlife viewing while still offering access to Town (Map Source: US Forest Service).

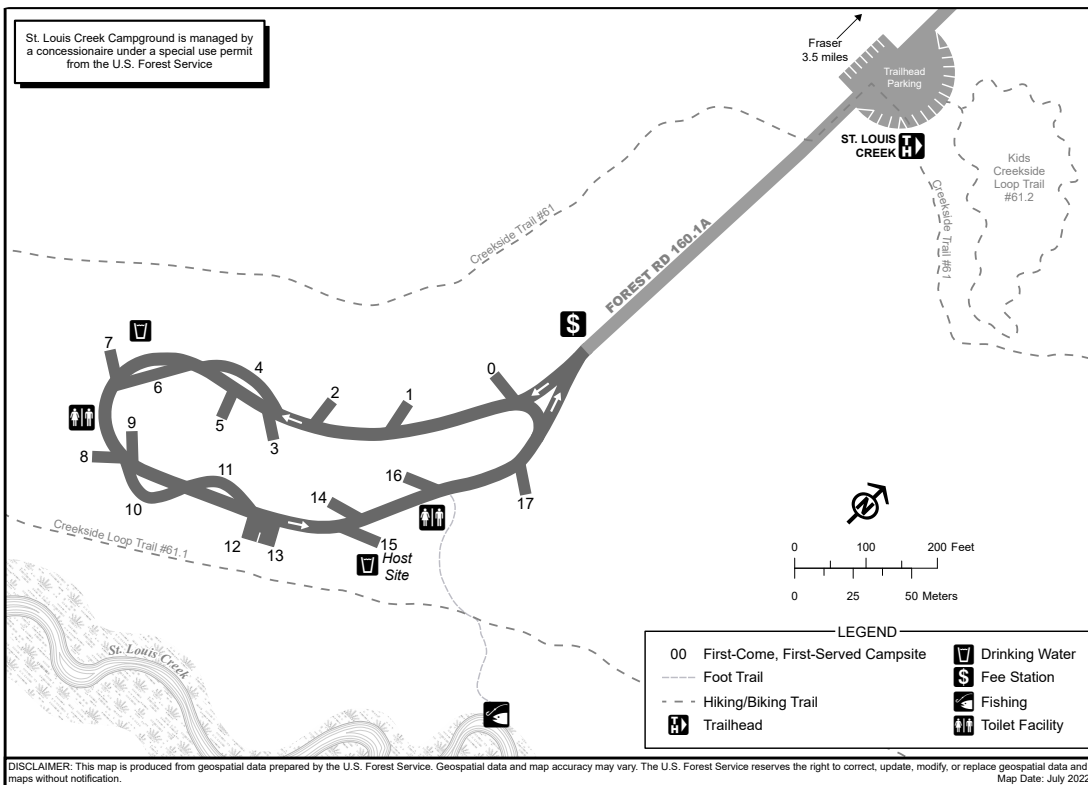


FIGURE 4-24. Unlike other US Forest Service campgrounds in the area, the St. Louis Campground is unshaded and is recovering from a beetle infestation that killed many of the large trees. The lack of trees opens the site to stunning views of the surrounding mountains. The Creekside Trail and the Creekside Loop Trail run through the campground, providing access to other trail networks and to the Town of Fraser. During peak season, the campground regularly operates at full capacity (Map Source: US Forest Service).

Established Camping Recommendations

Improving established campgrounds may indirectly improve some of the dispersed camping issues around Town, as providing improved amenities and increased capacity at campgrounds may alleviate some of the challenges visitors face when trying to find a campsite. A [Camping Industry Trends](#) report published for the National Park Service in 2019 found that the greatest issues visitors faced when camping was locating a site. There are a finite number of existing campsites and many of these at established campgrounds get booked up months in advance, making it difficult to find a place to stay. The trends report also emphasizes that older generations still rely on established campgrounds for comfort and accessibility. Additionally, if the Town is going to invest in improved recreational amenities that will drive more tourism, this will further increase the demand for camping and may exacerbate unauthorized camping activities if the demand is unmet. The lack of investment will likely lead to more dispersed camping issues in the future.

Currently, the US Forest Service is responsible for long-term the management and maintenance of its established campgrounds. Seasonally, they rely on a third-party camp host that acts a liaison to regulate campground activities, provide information, perform light maintenance, and assist with reservations for the campground. While the Town does not currently have the capacity to take over the management of these campgrounds, the Town could provide financial backing and support the US Forest Service in fund-raising to improve existing campground

facilities. Grant programs offered through the **Innovative Finance for National Forests** and/or the **Trust for Public Land** could be utilized to help offset some of the cost of established campsites/campground improvements.

To help facilitate improvements to established campgrounds, the Town could team with the US Forest Service and other stakeholders in prioritizing needs, developing grants and funding sources, and conducting planning, design, permitting, and implementation.

While a detailed assessment of US Forest Service facilities is outside the scope of this plan, high-level recommendations that would provide significant improvements to the Winter Park established camping experience are outlined on the following pages.

Note: New construction or expansion of established campgrounds will likely require a NEPA process and EA.

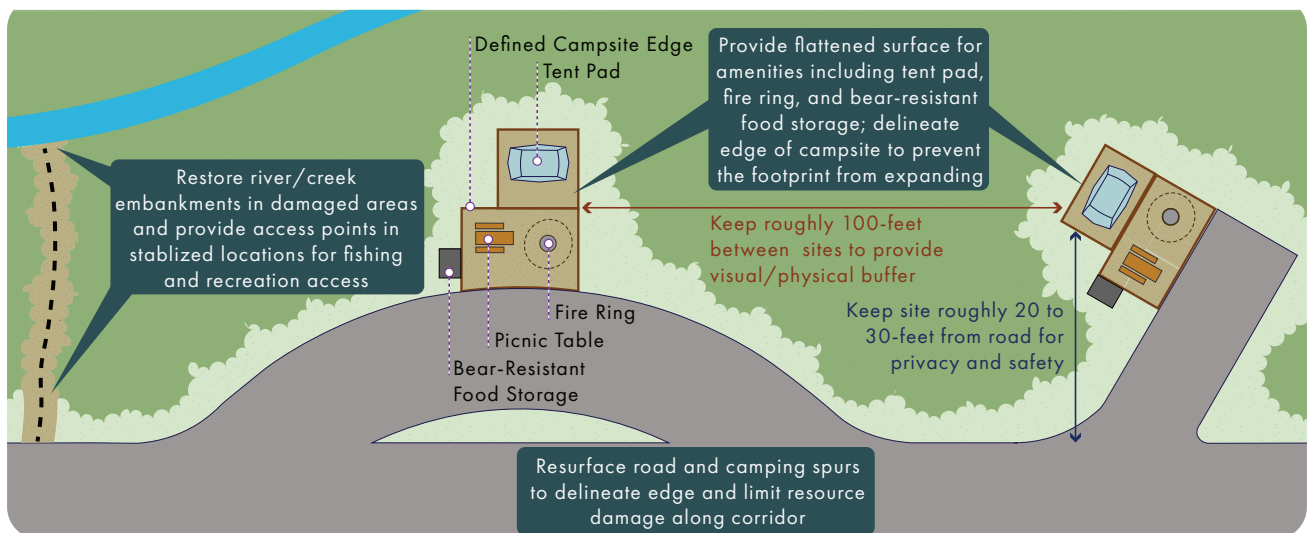


FIGURE 4–25. The graphic above illustrates some of the improvements that have occurred at forested campgrounds across the country to curb resource damage and improve visitor experience. Improving the layout of existing campsites and access to recreation features such as trails and waterways will help alleviate some of the damage to natural resources and improve visitor experience.

Improve Campground Access Along US 40

Idlewild, Midland, and Robbers Roost Campgrounds are all located along the Fraser River and US 40. The access spurs are nearly indistinguishable from the surrounding forested context, making them difficult to identify along the high-speed (50-mph) road. Additionally, all three campgrounds lack monument signs, stable road shoulders, and lanes that allow for deceleration/acceleration when entering or exiting US 40. The lack of wayfinding signage or turning lanes makes these campgrounds difficult to safely access.

Of these campgrounds, Idlewild Campground is the most popular and dangerous to access, as the entrance is located on a blind curve. The campground entrance comes up suddenly and the short visibility allows for limited reaction timing for oncoming drivers. It is highly recommended for the Town, the US Forest Service, CDOT, and highway engineers to develop a solution to alleviate the safety issues at the campgrounds along US 40. A short term solution would be to add more signage and wayfinding along US 40 to help facilitate access. The conceptual plan shown depicts a long-term solution to improve access to Idlewild Campground with acceleration, deceleration, and turn lanes along US 40 to provide safe access to the campground.

After addressing access safety issues, the next priority would be to evaluate potential improvements to campground infrastructure and layout. Many of the sites at these three campgrounds are located in close proximity to the Fraser River, so the carrying capacity of the river sites should be evaluated to determine if sites could be added or if some should be removed to protect the Fraser River as a recreation and natural resource. Additionally, the Town should work with the US Forest Service to keep all three campgrounds along US 40 open for the same seasonal duration.

A long-term goal could investigate improving connectivity and access between the campgrounds via a trail that connects Idlewild to Midland and Robbers Roost to the Resort and Downtown.

CONCEPT PLAN

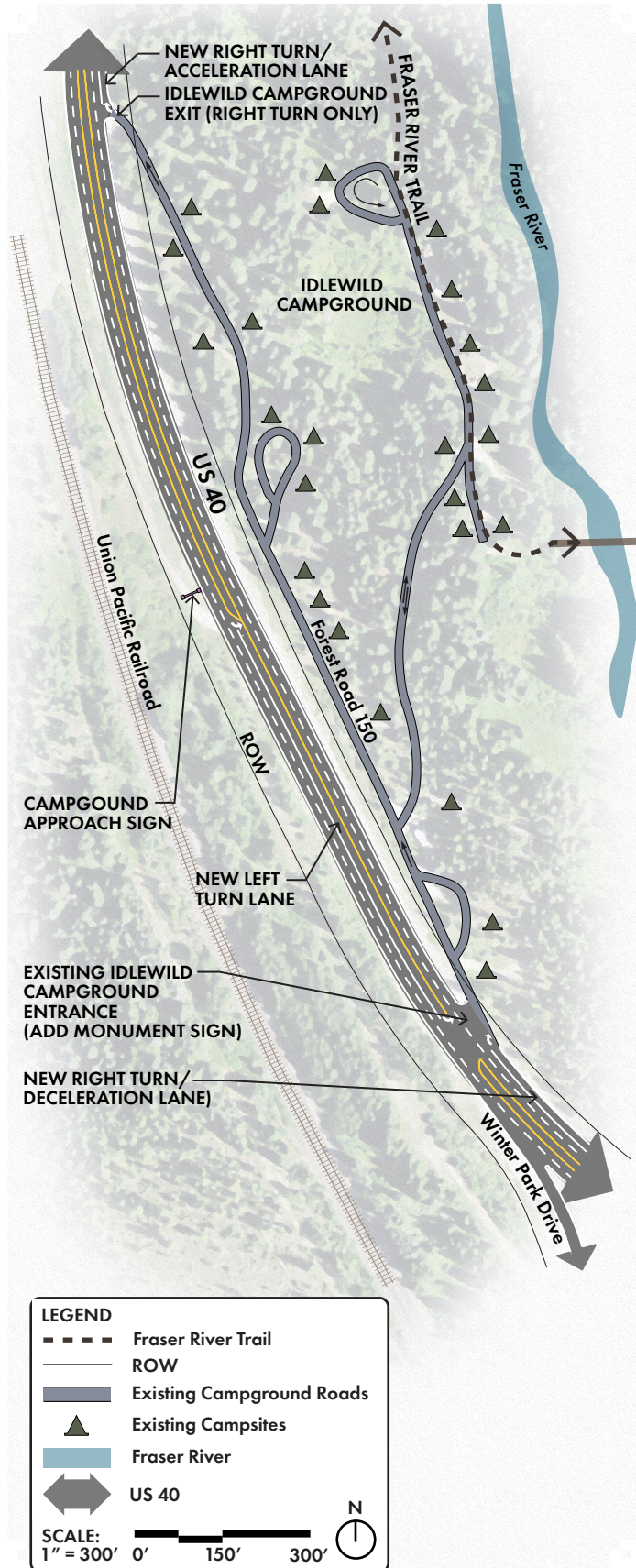


FIGURE 4-26. Concept plan for improved access to Idlewild Campground along US 40.

Campground Expansion

While the expansion of established campgrounds along US 40 may not be feasible due to constraints along the Fraser River, the US Forest Service could consider expanding St. Louis Creek Campground to accommodate an additional camping loop. The terrain around St. Louis Creek Campground is relatively flat and would be easier to develop than most of the land closer to Town.

St. Louis Creek. The loop could be accommodated along a spur road from the existing campground entrance road.

It is recommended that the Town of Winter Park work jointly with the Town of Fraser and the US Forest Service to implement this campground expansion. The final footprint of development would need to be determined through a NEPA process.

The conceptual plan for this expansion is illustrated below. This concept proposes more than doubling the footprint of the existing campground while still remaining outside the adjacent riparian corridor of

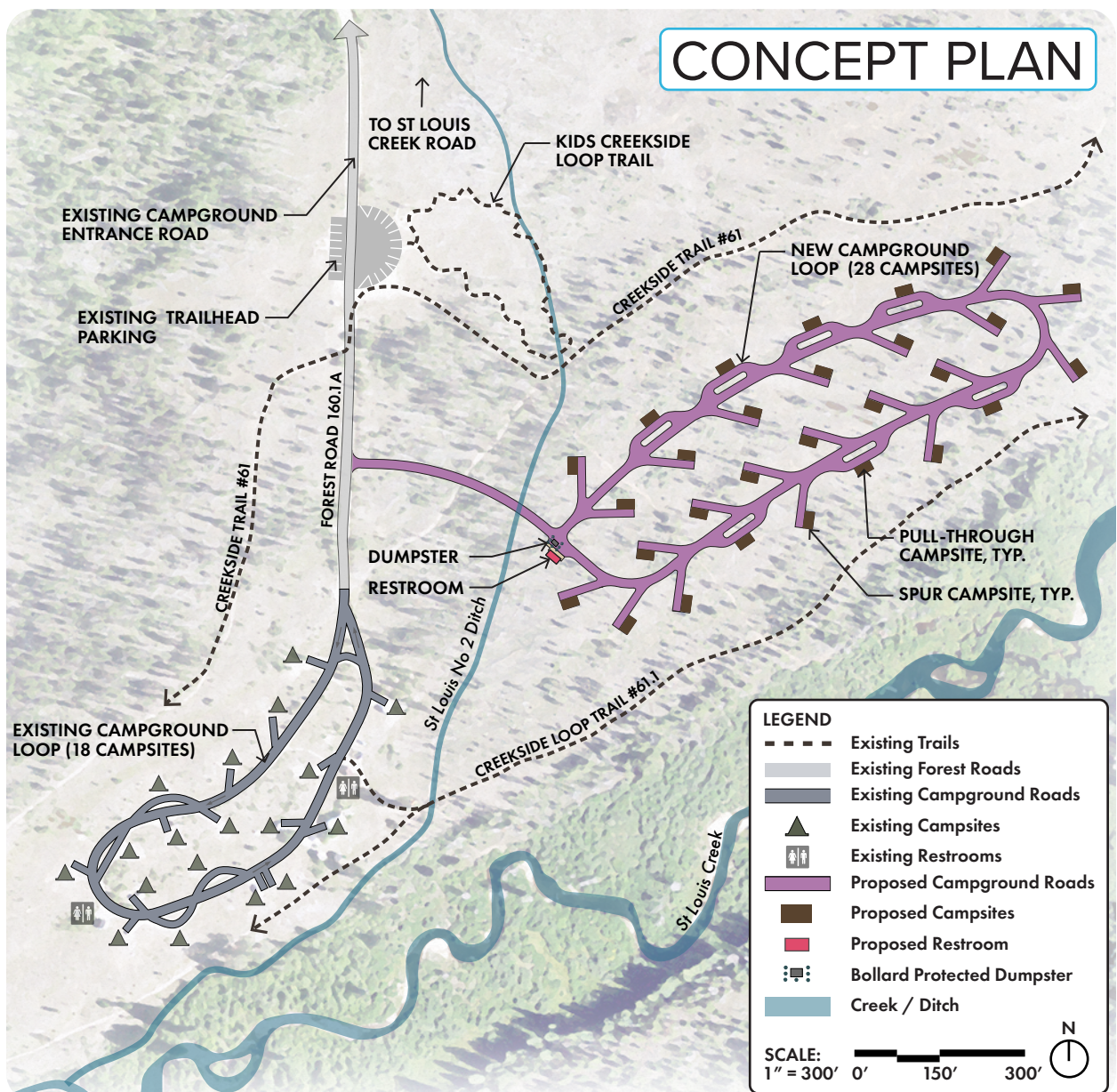


FIGURE 4-27. Concept plan for campground loop expansion at St. Louis Creek Campground.