

Refuge starts projects funded by recovery act

From Staff Reports, Jackson Hole, Wyo.

April 29, 2010

Three American Recovery and Reinvestment Act projects on the National Elk Refuge are now under way, with construction on two of them — a new irrigation system and a pathway to Grand Teton National Park — beginning this month.

The first project, an irrigation expansion project, was approved by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service in 2009 as part of a comprehensive plan to improve the production and management of winter forage for elk and bison.

Officials say the increased forage will benefit the long-term health of wintering wildlife by reducing reliance on supplemental feeding and reducing the risk of disease transmission by dispersing concentrations of bison and elk.

The National Elk Refuge received \$3.2 million in economic stimulus funding for the project in April 2009, with an additional \$1.1 investment allocated in October.

Yerba Buena Engineering and Construction was selected as the contractor, with locally owned Westwood Curtis Construction hired as the subcontractor to install the main underground pipeline that is central to the irrigation system.

Crews have taken advantage of recent favorable weather by beginning to move large-diameter piping to a staging area closer to the head of the project, a process that was scheduled to start Monday.

Delivery of smaller diameter pipe will begin soon, with heavy truck traffic expected on the Refuge Road for most of May. All pedestrians, bicyclists and motorists are asked to use extra caution when using the roadway.

The second project under way this summer is a bicycle pathway along North Highway 89, with ground-breaking scheduled in early May on a section of the pathway connecting Jackson to Grand Teton National Park, a project that received \$1 million in federal funding through the Wyoming Department of Transportation.

The project will be divided into two phases. Phase one includes construction of the pathway on the east side of Highway 89 from Jackson to Grand Teton National Park's south boundary turnout. Phase two will continue the pathway north from the turnout to the Gros Ventre River, joining the approved Grand Teton National Park pathway system now being designed.

While stimulus funds will be used for construction of phase one, funding through the Federal Transit Administration's Transit in the Parks Program will be used for design and construction work on the entire project. Two locally owned businesses, Evans Construction and Westwood Curtis Construction, were selected as contractors for the two phases.

The third project will enhance the Jackson Hole and Greater Yellowstone Visitor Center exhibits. The refuge received \$211,000 in stimulus funding in April 2009 to develop a conceptual design plan for new exhibits in the Jackson Hole and Greater Yellowstone Visitor Center and the surrounding outdoor area. The funds will pay for the design, fabrication and installation of a portion of the interpretive panels and exhibits outlined in the plan.

Formations Inc., a Portland, Ore.-based firm specializing in interpretive exhibits and thematic interiors, was awarded the contract.

The exhibits are scheduled to open to the public in April 2011.