

Located in the heart of Hayden, Colorado, the Routt County Fairgrounds is a long-standing hub for community gathering. 2023 marks the 109th Annual County Fair and we have big goals for expanding the (year-round) activities, opportunities and amenities at the Fairgrounds. Through key changes, the fairgrounds can remain viable to the community, entice new visitors, attract future events, and continue to build and establish connections with diverse user groups. Through this and other efforts, we strive to improve our community heirloom to be enjoyed for generations to come. Both our immediate and long-term goals and objectives are encouraged and supported by the Town of Hayden, the immediate community and surrounding county and municipalities, as well as the many user groups who routinely visit and utilize the fairgrounds.

Hayden represents one of Routt County's smaller municipalities, though its growth is steadily increasing due to the rapidly rising housing costs of nearby Steamboat Springs. The fairgrounds are nestled in between residential areas of Hayden, near the brand new K-12 School and just blocks up from the bustling Highway 40. Additionally, the fairgrounds are centrally-located between the larger towns of Steamboat Springs and Craig in neighboring Moffat County and within a short drive from the other smaller communities of North Routt, Milner, Oak Creek, Phippsburg, Toponas, and Yampa. Within Hayden, the Routt County Fairgrounds are adjacent to the local skate park, as well as Dry Creek Park which draws visitors to its Frisbee-golf course, extensive playground, hiking/biking/xc-ski trails and year-round events. The fairgrounds are utilized extensively by the neighboring community of West-Routt County as well as by the agricultural community of South Routt County. Due to many of the activities/uses which are offered at little to no cost, this space represents one of the few community assets that is accessible to both small and large groups and is often used by individuals/residents representing the lower than average median incomes of the county.

Over the years, the Routt County Fairgrounds has grown to attract a more diverse user group and as the region continues to grow. In consideration of the sun setting of coal and the closure of two major power plants in the region, future goals are centered on expanding user access and ensuring that access is equitable. Though the coal-related closures have had and will continue to have economic impacts on the community, the opportunity for economic diversity in this expanding community abounds. Fairgrounds events attract visitors from outside the immediate populace of Hayden, stimulating economic activity in the town and benefitting local businesses and the town itself (sales tax). The Town of Hayden (TOH) supports any and all improvements at the fairgrounds as it indirectly benefits from any activity taking place. Routt County has discussed this project at length with the TOH and Hayden has demonstrated its support by providing a financial match to this application. The Routt County Fairgrounds aims to further increase collaboration with the TOH on shared annual events such as Hayden Days, the 4th of July, and the Cog Run. Future plans include incorporating events such as craft shows, food truck Fridays, seasonal events, concerts and more to attract economic growth and local entertainment.

In addition to support from TOH for this project, the fairgrounds are continually supported by numerous volunteer hours from 4-H participants, Fair Board members, community members and local companies and non-profits such as Wagner Rentals, the Granary coffee shop, Girl Scouts, CSU Extension, Soroco FFA, the Yampa Valley Regional Airport, Routt County Emergency Services, Peabody Twentymile Coal, Yampa Valley Water Conservation District and Horizons Specialized Services. The fairgrounds are also utilized as a staging areas for emergency or disaster purposes, as well as for law enforcement trainings or gatherings. It also serves as emergency shelter during major weather incidents. Membership to use the area, rent the exhibit hall (funerals, birthdays, craft fairs etc.) or camping is affordable and equitable.

The overall project for this application is for the purchase and installation of a new arena railing, as well as the replacement of the “North” restroom located next to the grandstand.

- The arena railing was constructed by dedicated volunteers (some who are now on the Fair Advisory Board) using donated materials. The railing has been repaired, re-painted and re-welded over the last 50+ years. At the time of this application, the arena railing has become hazardous to fair patrons, participants, and livestock and users of all types. Replacing the arena railing will not only address an essential fairground component, it will also provide a safer and much more aesthetically pleasing space that will better serve the public. As the main outdoor feature of the fairgrounds, this project has been identified as the #1 priority by the County and is supported by our matching funds. Without this feature, the capabilities of the fairgrounds would be greatly compromised.
 - o Outside of the fair, the arena is subject to frequent use for other (non-fair related) activities. The arena is used for riding lessons, community open riding, and Gymkhanas. The Ag community uses the arena holding pens as a common pick up place for market animals. We work closely with local schools and nonprofits (such as the Yampa Valley Water Conservation District) to coordinate educational fieldtrips.
- The north restroom is currently inoperable and as such, there is no ADA compliant restroom at the fairgrounds other than the restroom located near the fairgrounds entrance. This bathroom services the grandstands, concessions area and participant parking areas and (when operable) was utilized by the nearly 200 people who camp onsite for up to ten days during the annual fair. Upgrades to this restroom will not only make it serviceable, but they will also decrease the added cost and maintenance of portable toilets. ADA restroom upgrades and compliance will allow the fairgrounds to accommodate more of the local community, including residents of The Haven, Hayden’s assisted living facility and Horizons developmentally disabled community.

In 2021, the fairgrounds hired a new director who is eager to address the content outlined in the 2010 Fairgrounds Master Plan. Though the plan is 13 years old, the goals outlined in the plan are still relevant. There are several factors contributing to the delay in these plans, including limited budgeted funds as well as the limited grants available to specifically address fairgrounds’ projects. In 2022, the fairgrounds received a grant to expand the internet services to include fiber optic broadband. This grant funding was received from the Yampa Valley Electric Association through its Operation Round Up. This funding will allow for the expansion of hosted events and user groups. AG Stimulus funds were used to help paint multiple buildings in an effort to maintain and preserve the historical race track railing. Routt County plans on applying for a T-Mobile Hometown grant which would provide \$50,000 for additional projects. USDA funding has been extensively investigated, however, the only funding available to address capital improvement projects is in the form of a loan, which is not an option given the limited amount of revenue currently generated. In 2022, Routt County updated its 2003-era master plan. A survey conducted by the planning department revealed that there is community demand and interest in investing in the fairgrounds, honoring Routt County’s long standing ranching and agricultural heritage. This project works towards addressing the community input surrounding the experience at the fairgrounds and desired improvements.

The long-term goal for the fairgrounds is that the site would evolve into a true hallmark of the community with a diverse array of hosted events and activities which keep people coming back year after year. With plans to upgrade the greenspace with the objective of incorporating landscaping so that the fairgrounds and Dry Creek Park would blend into one continuous and inviting space. These two goals will ensure that more visitors are engaging with the fairgrounds, ultimately creating more revenue and extending the longevity and community impact of the fairgrounds.