

BLM is studying bridge to future of recreation

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Our view: The prospect of a new pedestrian bridge across the Sacramento shows how trail builders' ambitions have grown

For now, the Bureau of Land Management is only studying whether it would be possible to build a pedestrian bridge across the Sacramento River downstream from Shasta Dam.

The bridge might not be technically feasible, and it's easy to imagine construction costing far more anyone would be willing to pay. Nobody's hiring a caterer for the ribbon cutting just yet.

Still, it's a testament to the rapid development of the BLM's "Interlakes" recreation area in the past few years that planners have leapt from cutting dirt paths in the woods — worthy enough work in its own right — to seriously studying the prospect of a new bridge.

The idea, said Steve Anderson, the BLM's Redding area field manager, is to directly connect the Chappie-Shasta OHV staging area on Coram Road on the river's west side to the new hiking, cycling and horseback riding trail on the east side. The bridge would create new recreational loops and open relatively easy access from the city of Shasta Lake to the far side of the river via the trailhead at the end of Walker Mine Road and a planned new trail from Flanagan Road.

Sure, it's possible to cross the river at Keswick or Shasta dams, but the marathon loop between them isn't for everyone.

The engineering and geological study will be paid for with money from a portion of the Iron Mountain Mine settlement dedicated to river restoration and recreation, and Anderson hopes that by this fall, the BLM will know whether a bridge is possible, what designs might make sense, and how high the price could run.

Until those details are in, it's impossible to know if a bridge is viable.

It's certain, though, that the gang of trail builders at the BLM, other local agencies, and the Redding and McConnell foundations are dramatically expanding recreational access in a broad swath from Clear Creek all the way up to Lake Shasta. And success is feeding their ambitions.