

**REQUEST FOR STATEMENT OF INTEREST FOR
A POTENTIAL PROJECT THROUGH
THE COOPERATIVE ECOSYSTEM STUDIES UNITS (CESU) NETWORK**

Prospective Project Title: Leigh and String Lakes Visitor Use Study at Grand Teton National Park

The National Park Service (NPS) is requesting information on your interest and qualifications to provide technical expertise under a cooperative task agreement through the CESU Network. This is not a request for a formal project proposal and budget, nor is it an announcement of a funding opportunity. We will use supplied Statements of Interest (SOIs) to identify a pool of potential CESU partners and available expertise.

SOIs will be evaluated as received and must be received by **September 18, 2016**. If a suitable cooperator is identified, NPS would work with that cooperator to develop a scope of work and budget in collaboration with the selected institutions. The NPS will acknowledge receipt of your SOI and may follow-up with a request for additional information. For more information on the CESU program and links to contact information for NPS Research Coordinators, see: <http://www.cesu.psu.edu/default.htm>

Materials Requested for Statement of Interest/Qualifications

Please prepare a 1-3 page summary of how you would envision such a collaborative project. Include your name, department, university or organization, and contact information, as well as information about any relevant experience, past projects, and staff, faculty, or students who would be available to work on the project. Please submit Statements of Interest by email to **Brendan Moynahan** by **September 18, 2016** (see contact information below).

Background and Overview

String and Leigh Lakes are located within Grand Teton National Park (GRTE). String Lake is a very popular area for recreational paddling, swimming/wading, picnicking, and day hiking. Leigh Lake is popular for recreational paddling, day hiking, and backcountry camping. GRTE staff has observed a substantially large increase in visitation at String Lake over the last several years. With these increases in visitation, park staff has seen an escalation in parking demand and an expansion of resource impacts, especially along the shores of String Lake and areas adjacent to the existing parking lots. The prospective project would focus on the areas surrounding Leigh and String Lakes, but may be expanded to include northern Jenny Lake, Bearpaw Lake, Trapper Lake, Paintbrush Canyon, and Holly Lake.

The NPS is interested in understanding the following issues and opportunities in the study area:

1. When, where, and how people park within and beyond the existing parking areas: The String Lake area consists of three parking lots which accommodates a total of 166 cars, 15 oversized vehicles, and 4 vehicles with horse trailers. Currently, these three

parking areas are frequently beyond their design capacities. Vehicles are parking in undesignated areas in each lot, as well as along the access road between the three parking lots and the primary road leading to the String Lake area. Well over 300 vehicles have been observed during peak visitation periods by park staff and volunteers. Vehicles park in undesignated areas and frequently block traffic entering and exiting the parking lots and along the access roads.

2. Extent of resource impacts associated with increased visitation: With the increase in parking demand, visitors are intensifying impacts on vegetation and soils by creating new and expanding unofficial parking areas and social trails in the String Lake area. Visitors are also expanding impacts to these resources along the shores of String Lake, Leigh Lake, and other smaller lakes and along the area's trail system and backcountry campsites.
3. Visitor access, use, and experience: Visitor use within the Leigh and String Lakes area has changed over the last several decades. Traditionally, the String Lake area was more known for observing the scenery of the lake with the Teton Range in the background, wildlife viewing, hiking, and horseback riding. Although backcountry and overnight use in the area has remained relatively unchanged, picnicking along the String Lake area has increased. Today, more visitors are swimming, wading, canoeing, kayaking, and paddle boarding on String Lake, in addition to the traditional activities visitors continue to pursue. The additional activities at String Lake have initiated concerns about overcrowding among visitors, volunteers, NPS staff, and management.

Objectives

The study will provide a clearly defined understanding of the types of resource conditions, visitor experiences, and recommendations needed to best achieve the park's purpose, significance, and fundamental resources and values. More specifically, the study will determine current types and levels of visitor use and the associated visitor-related resource impacts. This study will help park staff to define desired conditions for resources, recreation opportunities, and visitor experiences; identify suitable visitor uses, facilities, and services based on the desired conditions; and determine acceptable levels of impact from visitor use.

Deliverables or Outcomes

The selected CESU partner(s) will provide information to NPS staff on visitor use and experience and visitor-created resource impacts in the Leigh and String Lakes area of Grand Teton National Park. This information will be used to develop a visitor use management plan.

The CESU partner(s) will perform the following:

1. Review existing data and reports related to the study area, including observations and reports provided by park volunteers known as the “String Lakers” and parking lot designs. The purpose of this review is to help define data gaps and to build upon previous data collection efforts.
2. Cooperatively develop a detailed data collection and descriptive summary plan and schedule, including a protocol for collecting descriptive visitor-created resource impacts and visitor use data within the study area. This plan will receive peer review by a third party prior to finalization.
3. Monitor and collect data regarding visitor-related resource impacts and visitor use and experience within the study area. Data will include both quantitative and qualitative data related to parking lot use, visitor use (e.g. recreational activities) and experience (e.g., Office of Management and Budget (OMB)-approved survey instrument, GPS tracking of visitors), and resource impacts (e.g. social trails, lakeshore erosion).
4. Summarize and analyze collected data. This analysis and summary will be used by park staff to define desired conditions; define appropriate visitor activities, facilities, and services; and select indicators and thresholds within the Leigh and String lakes area of the park.

Note to respondents: Any and all data, reports, and products generated through or produced by a CESU Task Agreement will be the property of the NPS and the U.S. Government. The NPS will take delivery of such products by conclusion of the Task Agreement, and will happily work with PIs to preserve desired opportunities to publish data and analyses in peer-reviewed journals. Any forthcoming Task Agreement would be subject to the terms of the Master Cooperative Agreement for the pertinent CESU unit.

Anticipated Timeline

- Late 2016: Complete project agreement
- Late 2016 and early 2017: Develop data collection plan and field data collection schedule.
- Summer 2017: Collect data
- Late Summer/Early Fall 2017: Develop survey for 2018 field season and submit for OMB approval.
- Winter 2018: Summarize/analyze data and provide peer-reviewed summary report (2017 data).
- Spring 2018: Revise data collection plan and field data collection schedule.
- Summer 2018: Collect data
- Winter 2019: Summarize/analyze data and provide peer-reviewed technical report (2017 and 2018 data).

Contact Information

Respondents should send SOIs by email with the subject line “SOI Response: GRTE Visitor Use Study” to:

Rocky Mountain CESU

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Research Coordinator and Science Advisor

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For technical questions regarding the project, sites, or logistics, please contact the Technical Leads for the project:

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