

NEWS

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FOREST ACCESSIBILITY TOPIC OF DISCUSSION

Rapid City, SD – New facilities at Horsethief Campground are making it much easier for persons with disabilities to camp in the Black Hills National Forest.

Access expert Janet Zeller, National Accessibility Program manager for the Forest Service in Washington, DC, who visited to teach forest staff on accessibility rules and regulations, has a passion for outdoor recreation and loves camping, canoeing, and is a sea-kayaking instructor.

During a half-day field trip in the Black Hills National Forest, Zeller inspected newly reconstructed camping and fishing facilities like Horsethief Lake Campground and day-use area along the Peter Norbeck National Scenic Byway near Mount Rushmore.

The Black Hills National Forest and the South Dakota Department of Transportation provided matching funds for two Federal Highway Administration National Scenic Byway Program grants to design and build the boardwalk with fishing platforms, footbridge, connector trail, day use rest room and parking area.

“There are many site improvements, lots of board walks, and all the support piers and yet when you look at the site, you don’t [really notice the improvements] and yet we have accessibility,” Zeller said. “A person using a wheelchair can pull right next to the bench and have a conversation with a family member or friend that is sitting on the bench and enjoying the same view,” she said.

Forest engineers replaced a dirt trail and a two-lane highway bridge at Horsethief Lake with an accessible pedestrian trail and bridge. The work blends in with the site, said Craig Kjar, Forest engineer. “Things like the roadbed between the day-use site and the campground were transformed into a trail. It really doesn’t look like a road anymore even though it was a two-lane highway.”

The forest will complete additional accessibility upgrades this spring at Cook Lake Campground near Sundance, WY, and Roubaix Campground, south of Deadwood, SD, on Hwy 385.

Zeller asked the public to provide comments to the Forest Service if they see areas that they feel need improvement for accessibility. She encouraged visitors to contact their local ranger district office or the forest supervisor’s office to provide comments.

During the field trip, Glen France, accessibility coordinator from the Forest Service Rocky Mountain Regional Office in Denver, complimented the Black Hills staff for their work. “You’re doing a great job,” he said.

For campground reservations, visit <http://www.reserveusa.com> on the internet or call them at (877) 444-6777.

For more forest news, visit our website at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/blackhills/news/>.

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Sound bite:

Janet Zeller, USDA Forest Service, National Accessibility Program Manager

“There is a great deal of concrete, a lot of board walking and all the support piers and like that and yet when you look at the site, you don’t feel that and yet we have accessibility.”

“They have the width, they have the benches. The benches even have the sufficient space next to them so a person using a wheelchair can pull right next to the bench and have a conversation with their family member or friend that is sitting on the bench and enjoy the same view.”

Craig Kjar, Civil Engineer, Black Hills National Forest

“It doesn’t really become the feature to itself. It becomes part of the landscape part of the experience. Things like the road bed between the day use site and the campground that we have turned into a trail. It really does not look like a road anymore. It was a two-lane highway.

Stephen Keegan, Landscape Architect, Black Hills National Forest

“And so now we are working with those existing sites and so it becomes difficult at times to be able to provide accessibility facilities, but that is what we are trying to achieve here. We are trying to carefully bring about hardened surfaces where people can move more easily.”

Glen France, Region 2 Accessibility Coordinator, Denver, Colorado

“I think you’ve been very sensitive to resources. sensitive to the people and their needs. Provided things that are adequate and in compliance with the guidelines and so from accessibility stand point you’re doing a great job.”

B-roll:

- 1) (WS) Horsethief lake
- 2) (WS) Foot bridge
- 3) (MS) Misc. Sally Collins on boardwalk
- 4) (MS) Sally Collins near bench (Great natural sound for interview)
- 5) (WS) Sally Collins crossing foot bridge
- 6) (WS) Sally Collins on trail
- 7) (WS) Misc. Sally Collins in campground
- 8) (WS) (Right Side) Glenn France, Region 2 Accessibility Coordinator crossing foot bridge
- 9) (WS) Sally Collins on sidewalk near lake
- 10) (WS) Misc. Sally Collins on fishing deck
- 11) (WS) Campground
- 12) (MS) Fire Ring
- 13) (CU) Fire Ring
- 14) (MS) Misc. sloping concrete
- 15) (MS) Accessible picnic table

16) (MS) Curved concrete around trees

17) (WS) Tree canopy

18) (WS) Campground

19) (WS) Misc. foot bridge

Videographer/Reporter Gary C. Chancey, Black Hills National Forest