

National Park Service
US Department of the Interior

Grand Teton National Park

November 2023



Colter Bay Legacy

Share Your Ideas!

The National Park Service (NPS) is at the beginning of a master planning effort to reestablish Colter Bay as a key destination and central location for all visitors to stay, play and learn in Grand Teton National Park (Park). Colter Bay was constructed in the 1950's through early 1960's and has received little improvement during the last 60-70 years. Increasing visitation, changing visitor and employee needs, and aging infrastructure highlight an opportunity to plan for the next generation of Colter Bay. The primary goals of this planning effort will be to address outdated facilities and how visitors move through and use Colter Bay. Before developing alternatives, the National Park Service wants to hear from you about the issues and opportunities to consider through this planning process.

Background

Colter Bay construction was completed by 1966 as a pilot project in the National Park Service "Mission 66 Program" that spanned 1956-1966. Colter Bay is increasingly unable to accommodate growing and diverse visitation, changing environmental conditions, and staffing required to maintain and operate this area of the park.

The current layout of Colter Bay, including the sequence of visitor services, amenities, recreational, and educational opportunities, was originally designed around the needs of overnight users of the 1960s and 70s. Much has changed since then, and visitation has trended toward day-users as the predominant user type. Visitors who are not staying overnight may find the current layout confusing and have difficulty meeting their needs. Additionally, the circulation design does not support contemporary or future transportation methods used by day and overnight users navigating through the area, resulting in conflicts between vehicles, pedestrians, and cyclists. Changing environmental conditions require addressing how facilities and operations support visitation and recreation in a sustainable, long-term way.

To support administrative operations that are required to operate Colter Bay, changes to utility systems, employee housing, office and administrative space, and maintenance requirements need to be considered within this plan. Addressing these needs is necessary for Colter Bay to be flexible and adaptable to future changes and provide opportunities for high quality visitor experiences for generations to come.



Colter Bay General Store, 1960s. Source: NPS



GRTE Mission 66 Sign, 1960s. Source: NPS

Project Objectives

The NPS identified the following preliminary objectives for this planning effort:

- Reestablish Colter Bay as a key destination and center for a diverse range of users that allows high-quality experiences. Provide adequate infrastructure and services to accommodate commercial tour buses and other large groups.
- Improve overall visitor experience by cultivating a sense of arrival to Colter Bay where visitors intuitively move between different locations within the developed area via pedestrian, bike, and other micro mobility (bikes, rollerblades, skateboard, etc.) methods.
- Create meaningful opportunities and physical places where Tribes can continue traditional cultural practices, engage in tribal business enterprise, and provide visitor education about Tribal culture.
- Provide a wide range of high-quality, year-round land and water recreational opportunities for visitors, all within an approximate 1-mile radius of the main developed area.
- Ensure that infrastructure at Colter Bay maintains a sense of scale, in which the natural environment, including the mountains and lake, are the primary features. Additionally, new infrastructure is Mission 66 compatible while supporting day and overnight visitor needs for the next 50+ years.
- Integrate management of terrestrial, aquatic, and cultural resources into the Colter Bay plan, while prioritizing the needs of day and overnight visitors within the developed area.
- Continue to provide availability to a wide array of overnight accommodation types.

Planning, Process, and Involvement

This planning effort is in the very early stages and this newsletter includes a range of high-level planning concepts. With your input, the NPS will develop alternatives for National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis. The NPS preliminarily envisions assessing impacts on visitor use and experience, recreation, wildlife, and cultural resources. Grand Teton National Park is asking for your feedback about the ideas within these concepts and other problems and opportunities. Please consider the following key questions as you think about your feedback:

- **What are the best and worst parts of your experiences at Colter Bay?**
- **What improvements would make Colter Bay a highlight of your trip to Grand Teton?**
- **How would the ideas within these concepts improve or detract from your experience at Colter Bay?**

The NPS envisions outcomes that meet the needs of both day and overnight users by offering necessary and appropriate visitor services, contemporary facilities, and expanded access to recreational opportunities in an environmentally and operationally sustainable manner. The plan will also identify places where Tribes can continue cultural practices and maintain their longstanding connection to the land.

Improvements may include:

- Roadway and parking reconfiguration
- Pedestrian and bicycle circulation
- Walkway and facility enhancements and construction
- Enhanced wayfinding
- Reestablished viewsheds
- Enhanced access to land- and water-based recreation.
- Expanded connectivity to nearby day-use areas
- Consolidated employee and partner workspace
- Increased housing



Teton Range, 2023. Source: DHM Design

Planning for Environmental Change

In 2021-2022, low lake levels were notable in Colter Bay and impacted recreational opportunities at the marina. While the absence of water in Colter Bay has occurred in the past, Park staff are assessing effects on Jackson Lake and Colter Bay that may come with a changing climate and changes in downstream water use and management. The water levels of Jackson Lake are influenced by water flowing into the lake, primarily the Snake River draining south out of Yellowstone National Park, and by flow releases at Jackson Lake Dam. Jackson Lake serves as a reservoir that holds snowmelt in the spring and can then be distributed to downstream water users throughout the summer. Inflows into the lake are primarily driven by the level of snowpack and melt patterns in the spring and early summer. Because snowpack, melt patterns, and downstream irrigation demand vary annually, the water flowing into and out of the lake fluctuates, and lake levels can be lower during drought years. Other years, snowpack can be high, and lake levels remain high throughout the summer.

Changes in the climate are expected to alter annual patterns of precipitation and the snowpack over the next century. Current projections of change based on global climate models suggest that although total precipitation throughout the year in this watershed is not projected to decrease substantially and could possibly increase slightly, snowpack is expected to decrease with seasonal warming and changes in precipitation patterns throughout the year (i.e. more rain, less snow). These changes have the potential to impact how water is stored and released from Jackson Lake.

During the past three decades, the level of Jackson Lake has occasionally dropped to a level that precludes use of the Colter Bay Marina. This affects boat access, boat slips, and water access within the Bay itself.

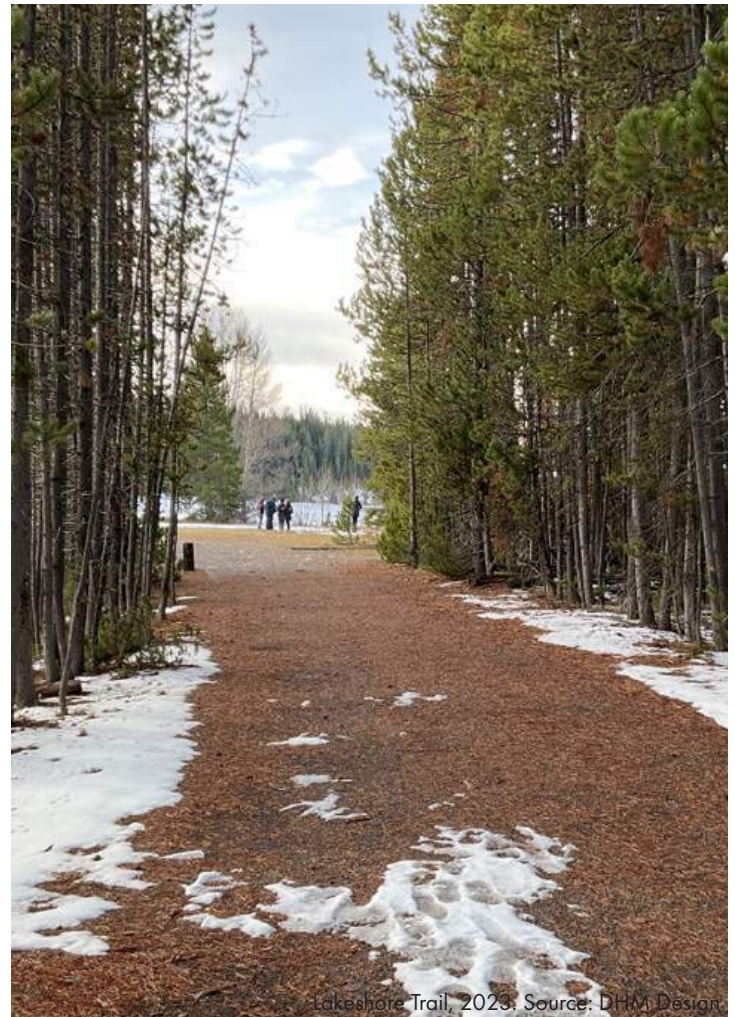
The Park is working with hydrologists and climate experts within the National Park Service, Bureau of Reclamation, US Geological Survey and University of Wyoming to get reliable predictions for how often Jackson Lake would drop below the critical level that allows Colter Bay boat use and water access. This requires understanding how climate change affects precipitation and inflow and projecting how future water demands downstream may change how the system of reservoirs is managed in concert.

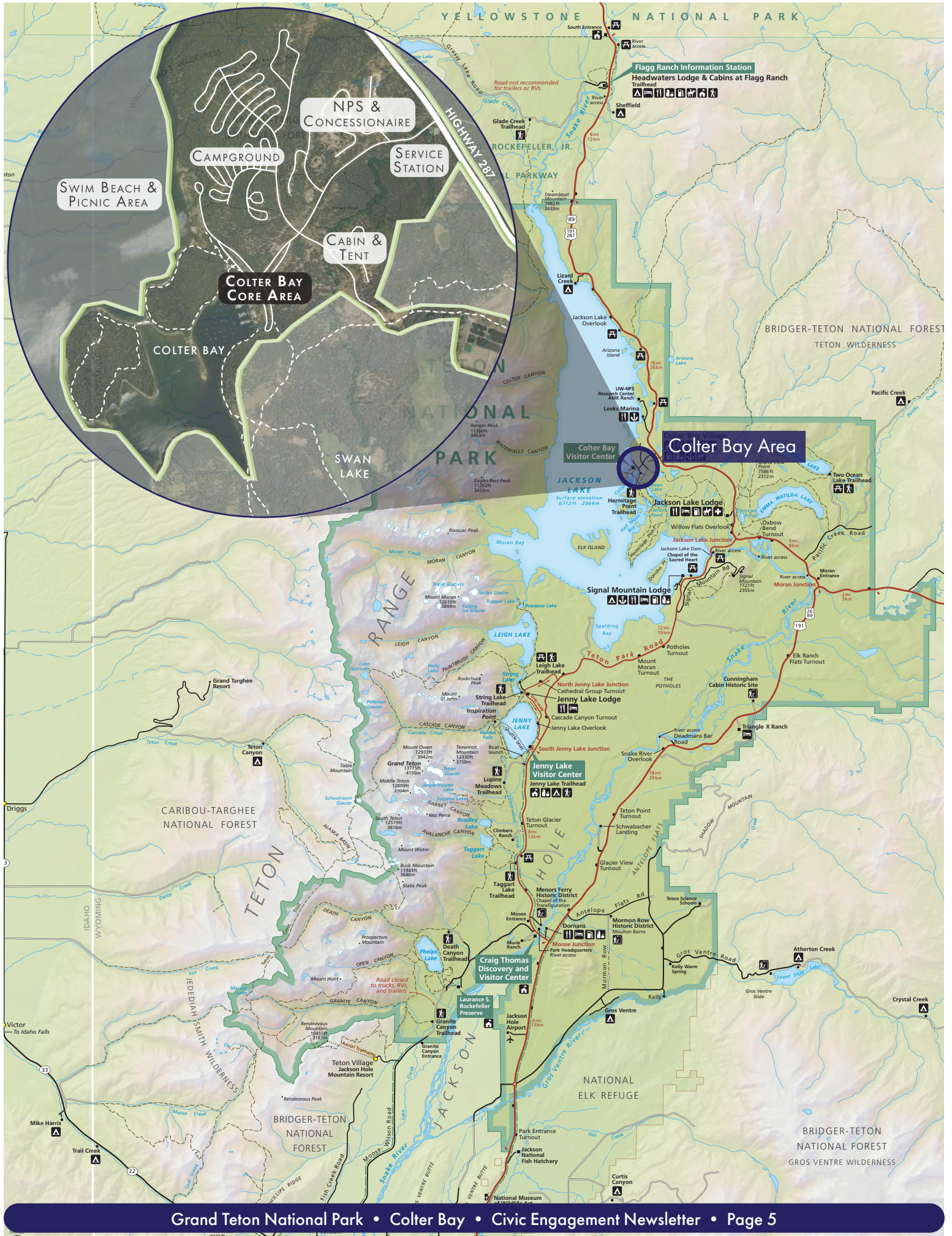
Current projections using climate models indicate that a significant reduction in boat and water access at Colter Bay is not expected, but further analyses are ongoing to incorporate projected changes in downstream drought, water demand and management in this complex water delivery system, which could alter these projections.

Lastly, the above is focused on projected 'average annual' conditions. This type of analysis is not focused on the likelihood, frequency, or severity of extreme events, which are highly unpredictable and often result in more acute localized effects. These and other factors will be considered and incorporated to ensure the most updated and reliable hydrologic and climate projections are available for Colter Bay planning.

Visitor Use & Experience Information

A 2021 study on visitor use indicated that Colter Bay is many things to many people. Visitors use it for hiking, sightseeing, and boating. The Colter Bay campground houses a large volume of visitors looking to swim in the afternoons and try most of the activities across the site. The marina area provides visitors with many options to see Jackson Lake.





SWIM BEACH & PICNIC AREA

CAMPGROUND

NPS & CONCESSIONAIRE

SERVICE STATION

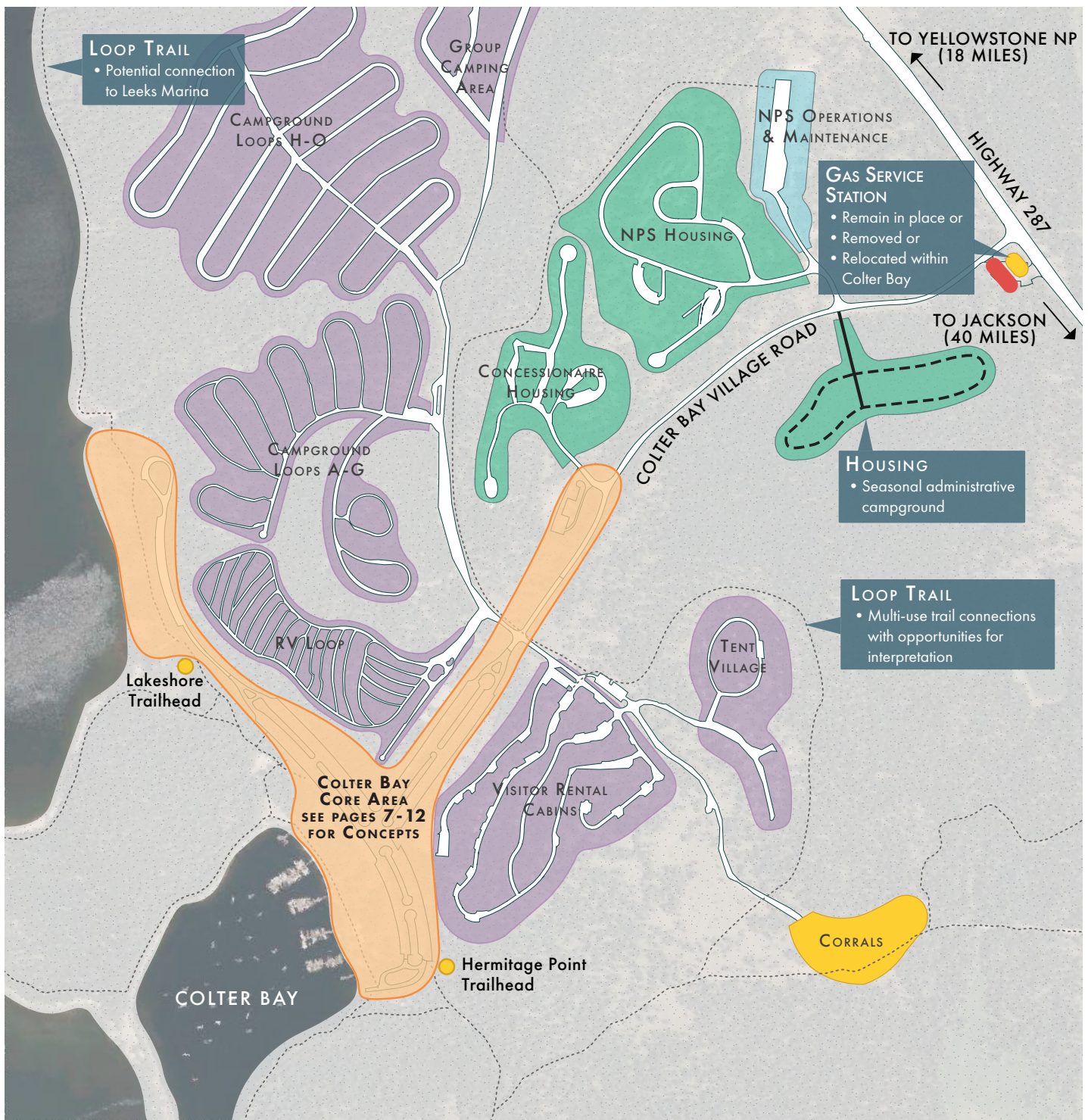
CABIN & TENT

COLTER BAY CORE AREA

COLTER BAY

SWAN LAKE

Colter Bay Area



LEGEND		
Visitor Overnight Lodging (Campground, RV loop, cabins, tent village)	Parking	
Visitor Services & Amenities	Colter Bay Core Area	
Staff Housing	Two-way Vehicular Circulation	
Operations & Maintenance	One-way Vehicular Circulation	
	Trail Connection	

Sources: Graphics compiled using Park provided GIS data, including buildings, road/trail centerline, and pavement areas.

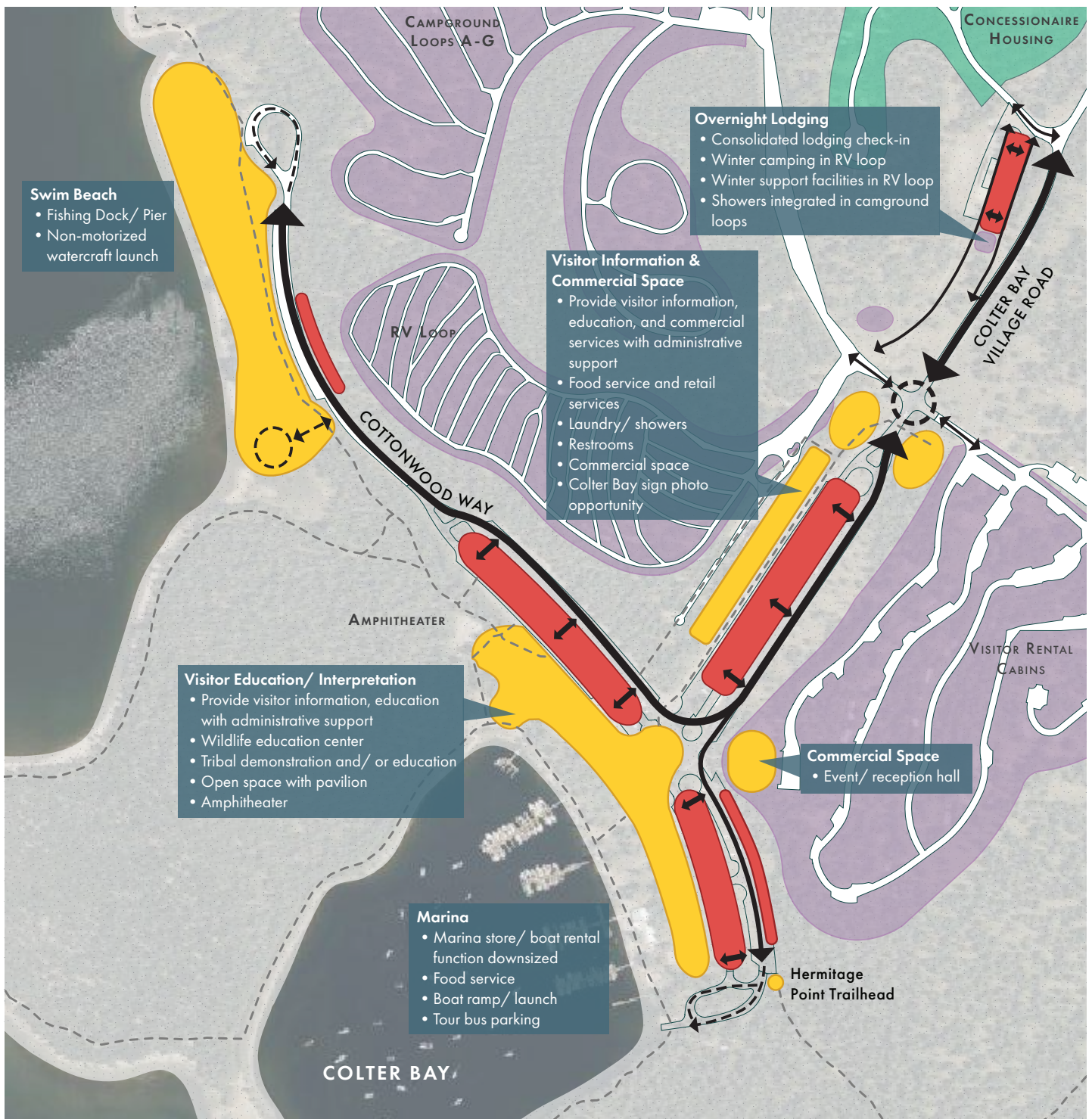
Notes: See pages 6-11 for improvements at the Colter Bay Core Area. Aerial depicts Jackson Lake water levels at full capacity. Water levels vary throughout different seasons and years.



Common to All Considerations

Each concept will consider functional improvements to day use areas, visitor overnight accommodations (campground, RV loop, cabins, tent village), staff housing, and operations and maintenance areas. All concepts consider Tribal gathering space. Concepts provide variations at the Colter Bay Core Area on pages 7-12.

Concepts consider a proposed administrative or concessionaire campground located south of Colter Bay Village Road which varies between concepts. The gas service station may remain in place, be removed, or relocated within the Colter Bay area. Considerations for a proposed loop trail system vary between concepts.



LEGEND

- Visitor Overnight Lodging (Campground, RV loop, cabins, tent village)
- Visitor Services & Amenities
- Staff Housing
- Parking
- Two-way Vehicular Circulation
- One-way Vehicular Circulation
- Trail Connection

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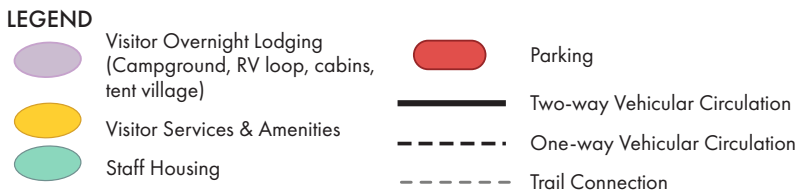
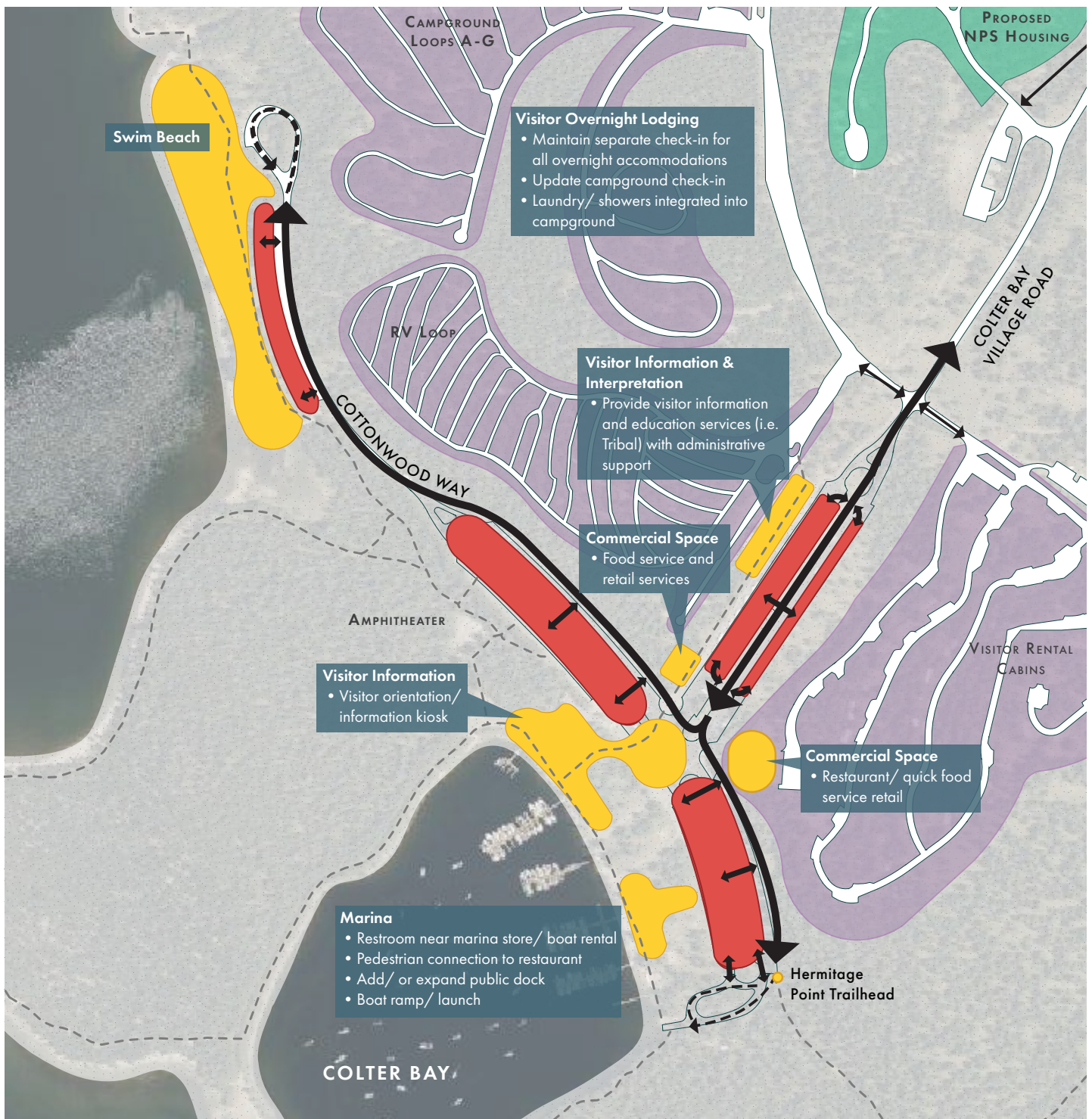
Notes: See common to all considerations on page 5 for improvements at visitor overnight lodging, visitor services & amenities, staff housing, and operations & maintenance. Aerial depicts Jackson Lake water levels at full capacity. Water levels vary throughout different seasons and years.



Concept 1

Concept 1 reimagines Mission 66, an initiative during the 1950s and 1960s in which the NPS revamped our nation's national parks by increasing visitor amenities and services and constructing supporting infrastructure. Today, the Colter Bay developed area reflects much of the original Mission 66 design as a destination area for visitors. Improvements in Concept 1 include consolidating overnight lodging check-in upon entering Colter Bay,

separating parking areas from roadways, and expanding visitors services such as dining options, event spaces, and visitor education and interpretation (e.g., wildlife education and Tribal centers). A non-motorized, formal boat ramp would provide additional water recreational opportunities at the Swim Beach. The Marina boat ramp/launch would remain in place.



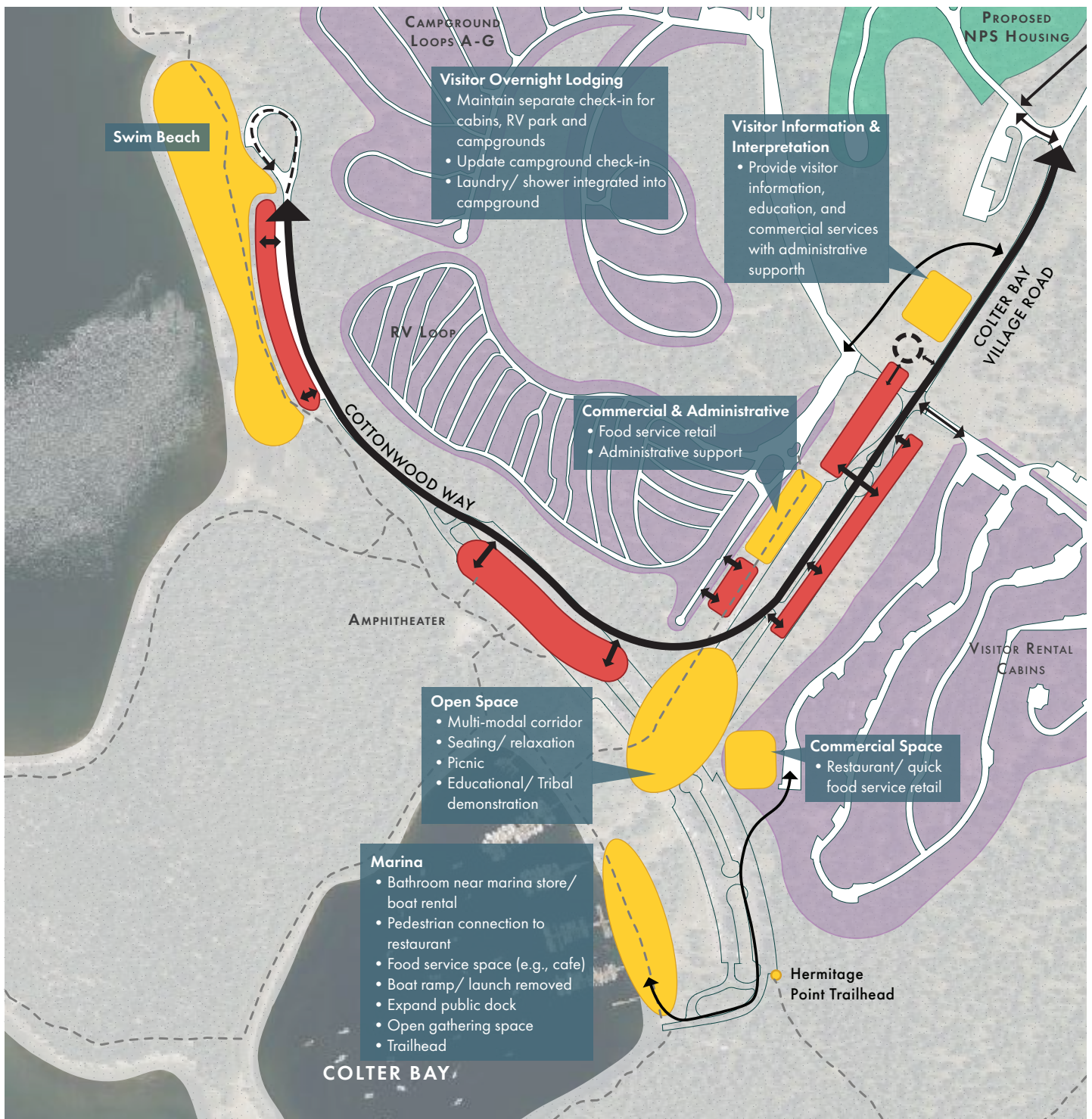
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Notes: See common to all considerations on page 5 for improvements at visitor overnight lodging, visitor services & amenities, staff housing, and operations & maintenance. Aerial depicts Jackson Lake water levels at full capacity. Water levels vary throughout different seasons and years.



Concept 2

Concept 2 aims to disperse visitor services by user type including overnight and day-use visitors. Campground, visitor rental cabin, and tent village check-in locations would remain separated for the different user groups. Proposed infrastructure opportunities includes visitor orientation/kiosks, improvements to restaurant food services, NPS administrative support facilities, and the marina store. The Marina boat ramp/launch would remain in place.



LEGEND

- Visitor Overnight Lodging (Campground, RV loop, cabins, tent village)
- Visitor Services & Amenities
- Staff Housing
- Parking
- Two-way Vehicular Circulation
- One-way Vehicular Circulation
- Trail Connection

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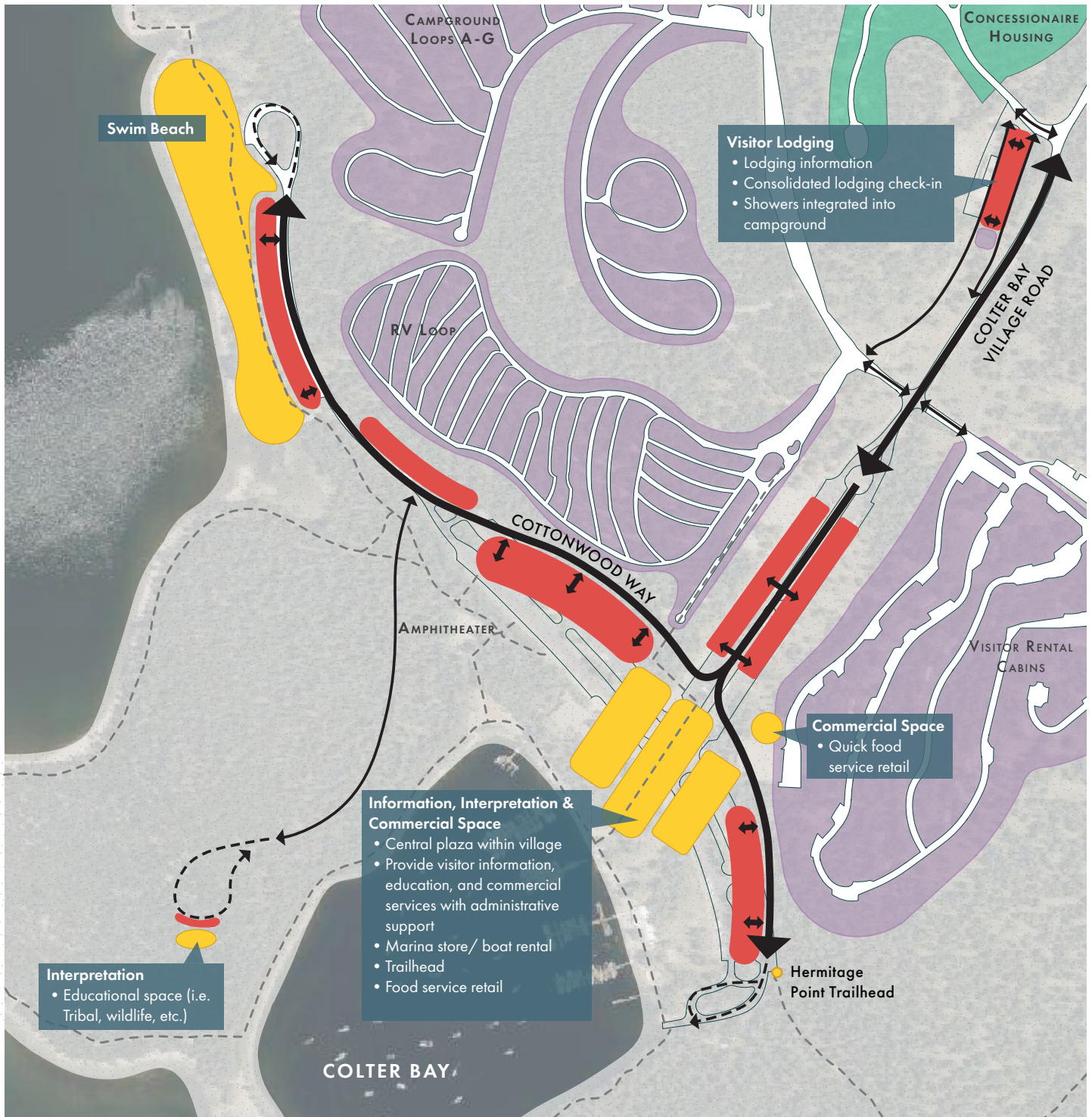
Notes: See common to all considerations on page 5 for improvements at visitor overnight lodging, visitor services & amenities, staff housing, and operations & maintenance. Aerial depicts Jackson Lake water levels at full capacity. Water levels vary throughout different seasons and years.










Concept 3

Concept 3 creates a simplified circulation system which would provide direct access to the Swim Beach area. Proposed additions include visitor information and interpretation facilities at the entrance to the Colter Bay core area. Roads would be separated from parking areas to reduce traffic and congestion issues. Potential new circulation routes have been identified to enhance the visitor experience.

A proposed multi-modal corridor around the Colter Bay Village area would provide increased pedestrian access to the cultural and natural resources in the area. The marina store would remain, however the boat launch would be removed.



LEGEND

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|---|---|---|-------------------------------|
|  | Visitor Overnight Lodging (Campground, RV loop, cabins, tent village) |  | Parking |
|  | Visitor Services & Amenities |  | Two-way Vehicular Circulation |
|  | Staff Housing |  | One-way Vehicular Circulation |
| | |  | Trail Connection |

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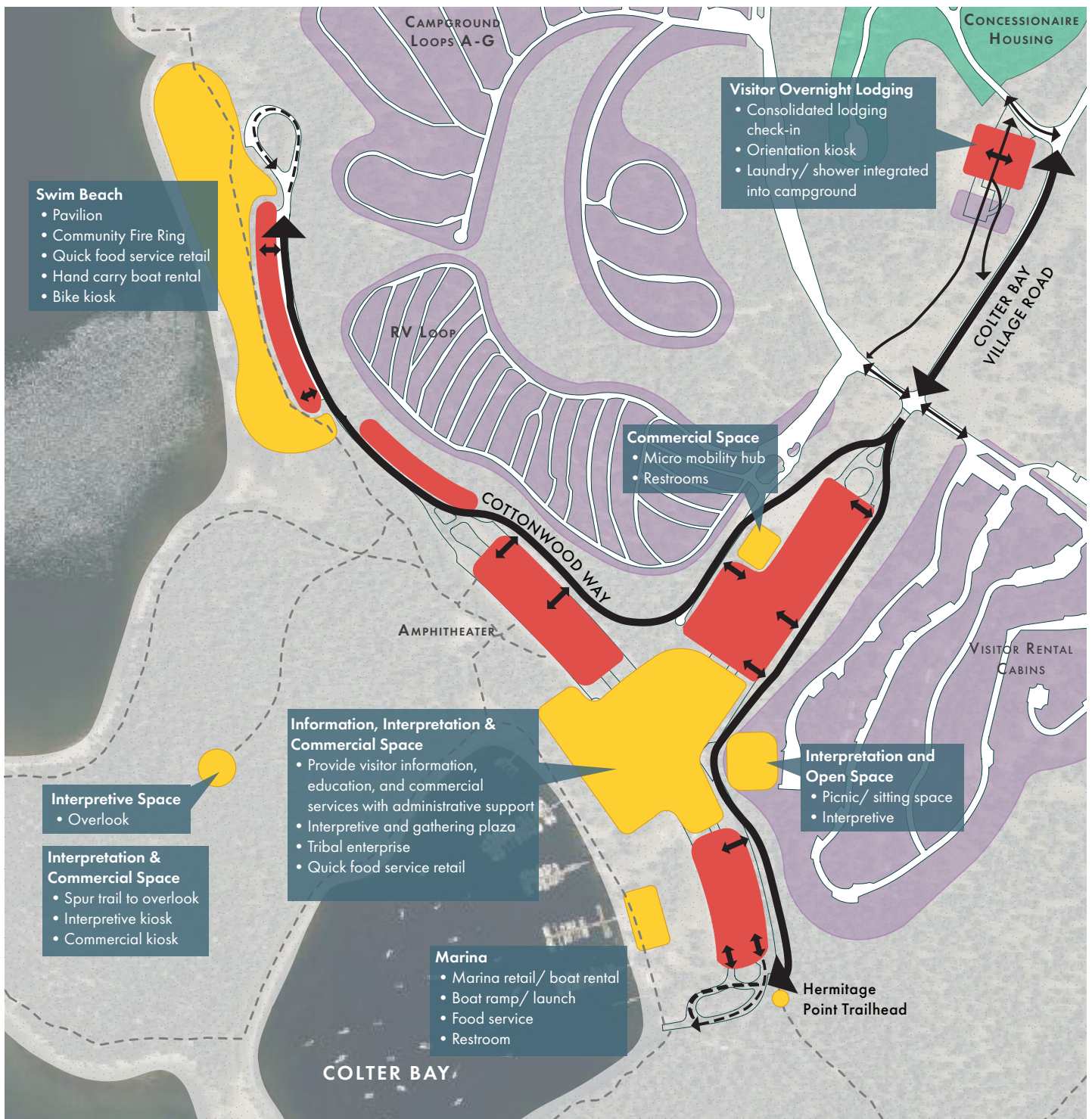
Notes: See common to all considerations on page 5 for improvements at visitor overnight lodging, visitor services & amenities, staff housing, and operations & maintenance. Aerial depicts Jackson Lake water levels at full capacity. Water levels vary throughout different seasons and years.



Concept 4

Concept 4 focuses around a proposed centralized bay village located at the shore of Colter Bay. Visitor lodging services would be consolidated for all campground, cabin, and tent village reservations. Roads would be separated from parking areas to reduce congestion and traffic issues. The proposed bay village would include visitor information, interpretation, and commercial space for day-use and overnight visitors.

A proposed interpretation space would be located on the peninsula west of Colter Bay. Proposed facilities include a wildlife education area and a Tribal center accessed by a service road. The Marina boat ramp/launch would remain in place.



LEGEND

- Visitor Overnight Lodging (Campground, RV loop, cabins, tent village)
- Visitor Services & Amenities
- Staff Housing
- Parking
- Two-way Vehicular Circulation
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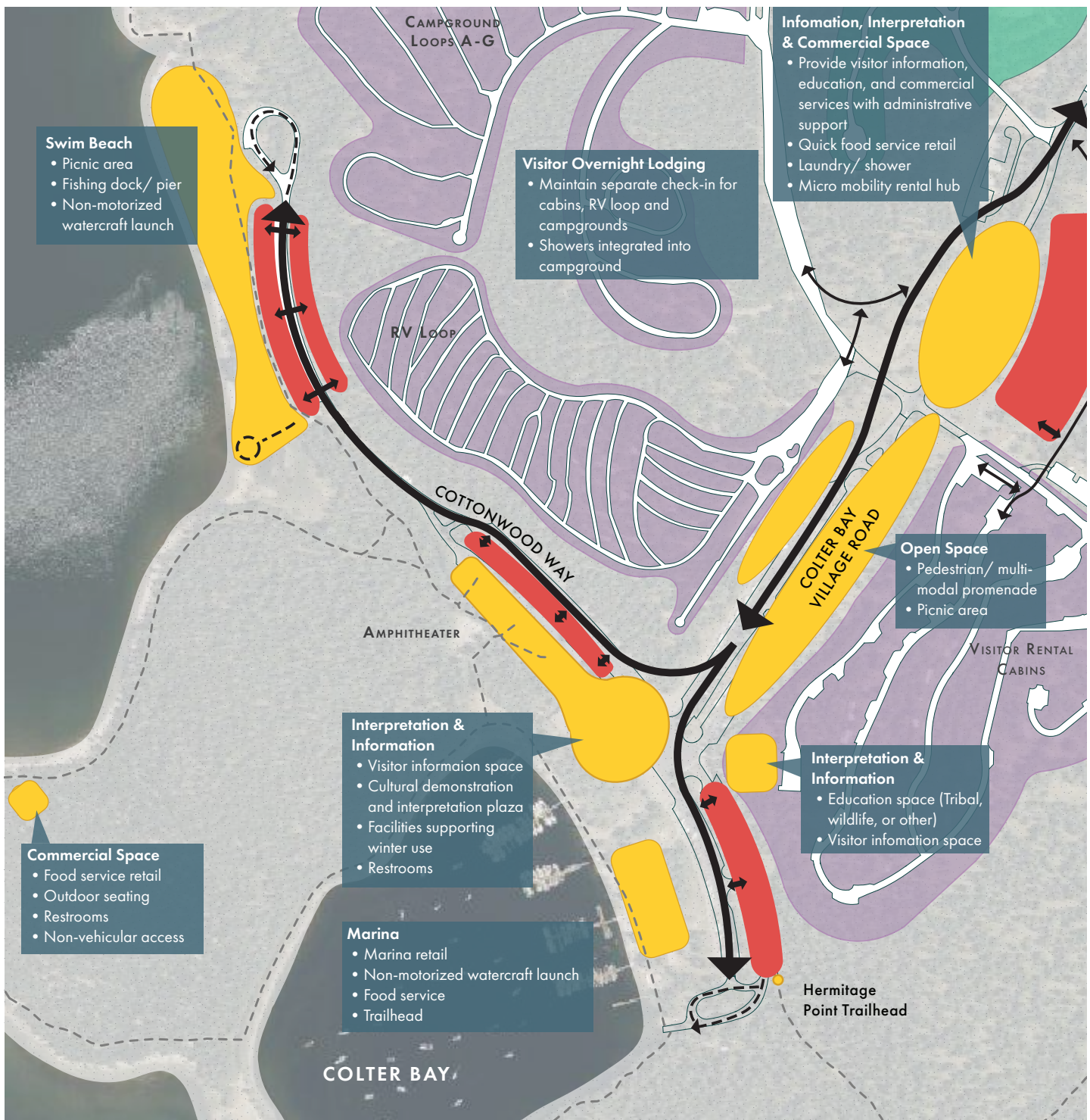
Notes: See common to all considerations on page 5 for improvements at visitor overnight lodging, visitor services & amenities, staff housing, and operations & maintenance. Aerial depicts Jackson Lake water levels at full capacity. Water levels vary throughout different seasons and years.



Concept 5

Concept 5 provides visitors with a choice upon entering Colter Bay: the road towards Swim Beach or the road towards the Marina boat ramp/launch. Visitor overnight lodging would be consolidated for campground, cabin, and tent village users. Proposed improvements at Swim Beach include added visitor amenities, group gathering spaces, food service area, and boat/bike kiosk rentals.

Proposed improvements at the Marina would include expanded food services opportunities and boat rentals. The concept calls for expansion of interpretation and open space opportunities for visitors. A proposed interpretive space/overlook on the peninsula would provide visitors with views of the Teton Range and would be accessed by a proposed trail. The Marina boat ramp/launch would remain in place.



Concept 6

Concept 6 establishes a pedestrian promenade, emphasizing improvements at Colter Bay which increase visitor access and safety. Visitor overnight lodging remains dispersed between the campground, cabins, and tent village. Proposed information, interpretation, and commercial spaces would be located along Colter Bay Village Road as one of the first stops for visitors in the area.

Visitors would have the opportunity to experience large open spaces including pedestrian and multi-modal trails for recreational activity. The marina store would remain in place with an adjacent non-motorized watercraft boat ramp/launch. Swim Beach opportunities would include a potential fishing dock/pier and second non-motorized launch. A commercial food service area on the peninsula west of Colter Bay would be accessed by a trail.

HOW TO COMMENT

Your input will help us plan for the next generation of Colter Bay, continuing its legacy in Grand Teton National Park. Please comment on the planning concepts within the 60-day comment period, from November 13-January 11, 2024. Consider the above questions and tell us about other problems or opportunities you think are important to improve the visitor use and visitor experience at Colter Bay. To learn more about Colter Bay Legacy planning and submit comments online, please visit the NPS Planning, Environment and Public comment (PEPC) website:

<https://parkplanning.nps.gov/colterbaylegacy>

You may also submit comments by mail to:

Grand Teton National Park
Attention: Planning Office - Colter Bay Legacy
P.O. Box Drawer 170
Moose, WY 83012

Before including your address, telephone number, electronic mail address, or other personally identifiable information in your comments, you should be aware that your entire comment (including your personally identifiable information) may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us to withhold your personally identifiable information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

WHAT TO EXPECT NEXT

A virtual meeting for the public will be held November 29th from 4:30 pm – 6:30 pm (MST). Details for the meeting including access will be provided on the project website <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/colterbaylegacy>

Additional opportunities to comment will be available during future phases of the planning process, anticipated late spring 2024. We look forward to hearing from you!

