



CHAPTER 6

PRIORITIES

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With over 38 million acres of public land in Montana, recreation opportunities are limitless in the Big Sky state. Opportunity exists at the local soccer field in the small town, and in our unique 54 state parks. Opportunity exists to connect our communities to national forests, and to use the outdoors as an extension of the classroom. Opportunity in Montana is abundant and diverse, and recreation activities bring Montanans and their families and friends together through a common thread that is rooted in the outdoors. Recreation is not just a pastime but a way of life. It is integral to the quality of life for residents, to the livelihoods of our communities, and to preserving our resource assets today and for generations to come.

This section provides an overview of the most significant issues and influences affecting outdoor recreation in Montana identified throughout the SCORP planning process. The issues identified provide a framework for the four overarching themes of the SCORP discussed in this chapter, and the accompanying statewide goals and recommendations in Chapter 7.

INFLUENTIAL ISSUES

In the Facility and Resource Area Needs Survey, recreation managers indicated the following issues as the top influential issues for decision making over the next five years (in priority order):

- YOUTH AND FUTURE GENERATIONS
- CHILDREN AND NATURE
- HEALTH BENEFITS OF RECREATION
- CONNECTING PEOPLE WITH NATURE
- AGING POPULATION
- INCREASED CONNECTIVITY BETWEEN TRAILS
- RECREATION DATA FOR JUSTIFICATION NEEDS

These issues indicate that recreation managers are thinking beyond just facility management and looking towards the larger picture of what recreation can address on a societal level. The top two issues reflect the ongoing need to engage youth in outdoor recreation and grow their connection with nature, something Richard Louv wrote about in his 2005 book *Last Child in the Woods*.¹

While Montana may be synonymous with the outdoors, recreation managers still feel there is a great deal of work to do to pass that along to the younger generations. Many school children in Missoula and Billings have never been to Glacier and Yellowstone National Parks, let alone to the national forest a short distance for their home. Connecting children with nature and preparing youth to become the next stewards of Montana is a monumental task, but also a vitally important issue that recreation managers at all levels must work together to address.

¹ Louv, R. 2005. *Last Child in the Woods*. Algonquin Books.

Related to this is a growing recognition of the health benefits of recreation. Enhancing the connection of all Montanans with nature helps enhance the physical, mental, emotional, and social wellbeing of our residents. The health of Montanans is increasingly becoming more important, as nearly a quarter of the population is obese, while another third are overweight. Montanans are generally more active than national levels, but that does not mean we are immune to many of the national trends related to increasing inactivity and sedentary lifestyles. While many Montanans spend a great deal of time outside working on ranches, farms, and other land-based jobs, this does not mean they are necessarily healthy. The prevalence of obesity and other chronic diseases such as diabetes and arthritis is limiting many Montanan's abilities to get outdoors and live a healthy and active lifestyle. Public health and safety is an important aspect of recreation management that we must embrace in order to improve the quality of lives of Montanans and create livable communities. Recreation trends and usage patterns have demonstrated that more people are getting outdoors, however there is still much work to be done to encourage communities that support healthy lifestyles.

Montana is also a mix of contrasting trends, where the population continues to grow, and citizens are aging. Two-thirds of households in Montana do not have youth under 18, and the median age of Montanans is increasing to close to 40 years old, which is older than the national median age of 37.2 years. The aging population is as much of a focus in Montana as youth. Facilities like trails have the opportunity to meet the needs of all ages and abilities, and this theme was strong throughout the surveys and data collected for SCORP. Trails also provide important connections within communities and between communities and public lands—another top issue identified by managers. Planning for youth as well as the aging population will help Montanans at all stages of the lifecycle, and will continue to further Montana’s recreation heritage among the young and the senior.

A final top influencing issue is the need for more and better Montana-specific data. Many national reports do not address Montana, perhaps due to our low population numbers or the difficulty of getting sufficient sample sizes; the availability of data is a challenge for policy makers, resource staff, recreation managers, and decision-makers when conducting data collection and analysis. Additionally, recreation data is dispersed and not centralized, particularly at the local level. Cities and counties maintain their own data, but there is not a statewide method to collect and share data for statewide analysis. Currently, we cannot ask questions about how many Montanans live within a quarter mile of a park, or how many miles of trails should a community have. This kind of baseline data is not available to develop Montana-specific metrics to help develop and improve policies and programs. Recreation managers identified a stronger need for data, not just recreation but also health, social, economic and other types of data for justification needs.

In addition to the influencing issues identified by recreation managers, a number of themes are also influencing recreation management in Montana, including population growth, the economy, funding and maintenance challenges, and poor coordination among recreation providers. Montana is growing in population, with a projected population increase of 17% by 2030 to over 1.17 million residents. Some regions are experiencing high rates of growth and development, while others are declining or are being changed by a new influx of residents. Eastern Montana near the Bakken oil development in particular is facing a dynamic and quickly changing population base that could bring new preferences and attitudes towards outdoor recreation.

Outdoor recreation is also important to our economy, both at the state and community level. Recreation is a significant contributor to the tourism industry in Montana. Recreation creates jobs and supports local economies, generates tax revenue to be used towards essential services, and stimulates economic growth that helps to create vibrant communities. Outdoor recreation opportunities and public lands access also attracts businesses and employees to live in Montana. Creating opportunities to enhance the economic benefits of recreation, as well as communicate them effectively to citizens, businesses, and decision makers will help promote outdoor recreation and further its contributions to our economy.



Recreation providers are increasingly being met with challenges to maintain and improve recreation facilities, amenities, and lands. The stateside Land and Water Conservation Fund only funds the development and acquisition of new facilities. Over time, many facilities at the community level have fallen behind on scheduled maintenance due to costs of labor and equipment and required resources. As such, there is no dedicated funding to address these challenges, which could ultimately impact the recreation experience on the ground. Protection and enhancement of these assets is necessary to keep Montana's outdoor recreation opportunities accessible and enjoyable as well as sustainable.

In order to overcome these challenges, the 2014-2018 SCORP is proposing a new model of recreation management in Montana to encourage a seamless system of coordinated management, whereby management does not stop at agency boundaries and partnerships are developed and strengthened across jurisdictions at all levels. The public does not pay attention to who manages recreation. Montanans simply want to get outdoors, and it is up to the recreation managers to provide a high-quality experience regardless of whether a visitor is recreating on national forest land, camping at a state park, visiting a national wildlife refuge, or playing softball at an urban park.

The strategic directions of this plan will focus on the critical role of outdoor recreation in ensuring Montana's outdoor heritage continues for generations to come.

A

IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF ALL MONTANANS

B

SUSTAIN THE ECONOMIC VITALITY OF MONTANA COMMUNITIES

C

PROMOTE STEWARDSHIP AND SUSTAINABILITY

D

ENHANCE AGENCY COORDINATION,
COOPERATION, & SERVICE PROVISION

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A. IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF ALL MONTANANS

Montanans take pride in the abundant natural landscapes that make this state the last best place. The outdoors are core to our recreation heritage as are the unique experiences and benefits offered by our state's natural, cultural and recreational assets. Montana's 2014-2018 SCORP affirms and advances the critical role of outdoor recreation in the fabric of Montana's identity. By protecting and enhancing our cherished quality of life, unparalleled resources and the amenity-based aspects of our economy, this plan celebrates Montana lifestyles and guides sustainable recreation management and priorities.

Recreation providers have a critical role in connecting children and all residents to the outdoors. A quarter of Montanans are inactive and do not participate in regular physical activity, a number that has increased significantly from 2002 when 19% of Montanans were inactive, according to the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System Survey (BRFSS).² Many Montanans are faced with a diverse set of challenges that prevent participation in outdoor activities, like lack of time, cost of participation, poor health and physical disabilities, and lack of child care. Over 30% of Montanans feel that lack of time in particular keeps them from getting outdoors.

There is also a difference in ages among those who do and do not participate in outdoor recreation. Information provided by the Region 1 National Forest indicates that youth ages 16-19 years old only account for 3.5% of the entire NF visitors in Montana. According to the Montana Youth Behavior Risk Survey in 2013, about 10.7% of adolescents were physically inactive, nearly a quarter watched three or more hours of television a day, and close to 30% used video games or computers for non-school work three or more hours a day.³ Getting youth engaged in recreation and on public lands is important to ensuring they develop a lifelong commitment to a healthy lifestyle.

It is necessary for recreation providers, city and county planners, schools, and other partners to help overcome these barriers by providing access to outdoor recreation everywhere that Montanans live, work, learn, and play. Increased trail connectivity is one of the top issues identified among recreation managers. We must be more successful at connecting communities to public lands by integrating trails and paths into local and regional planning efforts and maximizing the potential of transportation projects to develop access points and build networks.

According to the Public Recreational Use Report produced for the SCORP, three-quarters of all Montanans used trails and paths for walking, jogging, hiking, or bicycling in 2011.⁴ The BRFSS survey results also indicate that walking is the most popular primary outdoor recreation activity, and also the most universal activity. More than 51% of recreation managers in the Facility Manager Report indicated that facilities to support walking and bicycling is the number one need based on supply and demand.⁵ Yet of the facilities that currently exist, 48% of managers rated walking and bicycling paths in fair to poor condition. About 40% also rated mountain biking trails and hiking trails in fair to poor condition as well. Increasing the availability of trails and paths, as well as improving the quality of current facilities, is paramount to meeting the growing desires for Montanans to walk, jog, run, hike, and bike.

² A.L. Metcalf et al. 2013

³ Office of Public Instruction. 2013. Montana Youth Behavior Risk Survey: High School Results. <http://opi.mt.gov/Reports&Data/YRBS.html>.

⁴ N.P. Nickerson et al. 2013.

⁵ E.C. Metcalf et al. 2013

Cities and counties need to proactively develop trails and paths in the right locations that enhance community connections and make it easier for Montanans to walk out their front door and onto a path or trail. Although distances are far in Montana, trails and paths at the local level provide an alternative mode for citizens to get to community places. Other important connections can be provided through enhanced bus services and shuttles to recreation trailheads and staging areas. Close to home trail development also improves the ability for motorized recreation users to access trail systems and engage in the mental and social benefits of outdoor recreation.

Montana's public lands are seeing increased use during the summer months, meaning more Montanans and visitors are getting out and enjoying the outdoors. It is also important to encourage outdoor recreation activities in the winter, which can be more challenging with shortened daylight, snowy conditions, and potential safety hazards. Physical activity in the winter is still vitally important to boost the immune system, reduce seasonal depression, anxiety and stress, improve sleep, and help maintain a healthy weight. Cross country skiing in particular is rated as one of the most vigorous winter activities, and is also low impact on resources. A quarter of Montana households used sledding/tubing hills in 2011, 21% used cross-country ski/snowshoe trails, 18% used snowmobile trails, and 14% used outdoor ice rinks. Twenty-seven percent of land managers surveyed for the SCORP indicated that sledding/tubing areas and cross-country ski/snowshoe trails should be increased, while over 20% of managers indicated they did not have but would like outdoor ice rinks. These needs are also reflected by the public, which identified these facilities among the top statewide needs for recreation. It is important for federal and state land managers, cities, and counties to encourage outdoor winter activity, and provide for facilities, programs, and amenities to support activities like skiing, snowshoeing,

hockey and ice skating, sledding, snow play, and snowmobiling. Partnerships with public health officials, schools, tourism regions, and private sector businesses can also help raise the awareness of the importance of winter activity, and promote the expansion of these opportunities, particularly for youth.

The link between spending time outdoors and physical and mental health, youth development, social well-being, and livable communities is undeniable. Increased physical activity and access to recreation opportunities are important aspects of lifestyle solutions that combat the upward trends in health-related diseases.

Almost two-thirds of Montana adults are either overweight or obese, with 25% identifying as obese. Adult obesity has increased from 19% in 2002 to 25% in 2011. Similarly, 22.3% of adolescents in grades 9 through 12 were overweight or obese in 2013. Additionally, the percentage of Montana adults who have diabetes, pre-diabetes, and borderline diabetes has increased from 6%

HIGHLIGHT: SEELEY LAKE CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING PROGRAM

In 2011, Seeley Lake, Montana—a rural and forested community in western Montana along Seeley Lake—embarked on an innovative and proactive program to outfit every school student in the community with cross-country skis. With support of the local community, the Seeley Lake Elementary School purchased new Nordic ski equipment for every fourth grade student, with the goal of outfitting every student between fourth and eighth grade with equipment to make Nordic skiing a part of the children's exercise curriculum. The community of Seeley Lake is located in the midst of the Lolo National Forest, and only a short drive to numerous trailheads in the famed Bob Marshall and Scapegoat Wildernesses. Yet, as the school principal and district superintendent says, many of the kids in Seeley Lake had no more connection to the outdoors than a child living in New York City.

For years, teachers in Seeley Lake have incorporated snowshoeing and cross-country skiing into school activities. A winter science project may include Nordic skiing to the test site, for example. Using the local trails, students can leave from their school and ski directly onto National Forest land. This connection makes it easier for students to get outside and for teachers to incorporate outdoor education into the curriculum all year around. It also gets students active and builds a skill set that students can continue to do as they grow older. Being able to leave directly from the school on community trails reduces the need to bus students around in order to get out to nature. The sport also has low impact on the environment, promotes stewardship and a sense of respect for nature, and it is essentially free after the equipment is purchased. In recent years, the town of Seeley Lake has also taken a reinvigorated look at Nordic skiing as an opportunity for economic prosperity, using its gateway location into the Lolo National Forest and close to wilderness areas as an asset for outdoor enthusiasts to use the local trails and visit the town at the same time.

HIGHLIGHT: SHELBY'S SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL PROGRAM

In 2007, Shelby School District #14's Safe Routes to School Task Force assessed that even though nearly one half of Shelby's elementary student population lived within one mile of the school complex, very few students walked or biked to school and there were a number of physical barriers preventing students from safely walking or biking to school. After an assessment of the built environment surrounding the school, Task Force members obtained funding; constructed missing sidewalks and ADA-compliant ramps; replaced gravel alleyways with paved alley aprons; implemented traffic slowing measures; persistently used local radio and newspapers to relay safety information to community residents; created Walk 'n Wheel Wednesdays, walking school buses, and child incentives for walking or biking to school at least twice in a month; and sponsored Bicycle Fairs to educate area children on bike care, safety, and maintenance.



in 2002 to 8% in 2011. A quarter of Montanans also suffer from arthritis, including rheumatoid, gout, lupus, and fibromyalgia. A 2012 report by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation found that reducing the average body mass index in Montana by 5% could lead to health care savings of more than \$700 million in 10 years and \$1 billion in 20 years.⁷

Health related diseases are very real in Montana. Health care costs and lost productivity, as well as reduced quality of life of Montanans will only continue to grow as the rates of chronic health problems and diseases continue to increase in the state. Recreation providers have a critical role in helping to combat these diseases by enhancing recreation facilities, improving opportunities for recreation, and engaging Montanans in non-traditional ways. Developing partnerships with health care professionals, schools, transportation agencies, non-profit organizations, decision-makers and other stakeholders is one way to build a stronger commitment to improving the quality of life for all Montanans. In doing so, we can create more vibrant, healthy, and equitable communities and encourage social interactions that establish a sense of place, expand opportunity, and bring people together in the outdoors.

Participation in outdoor recreation must be made easily accessible for all Montanans, and emphasis should be given to reaching out to those who have trouble accessing and participating in recreation. When looking at access limitations due to disabilities or health-concerns, Montanans with arthritis (15.3%) and diabetes (8.6%) had higher rates of access limitations than the general population as a whole (5.8%). Physical disability was the highest reason for non-participation for those with arthritis and diabetes. Access limitations were also higher among parents (12.0%). Recreation providers need to ensure that some of the opportunities

offered for outdoor recreation are easily accessible by people of all ages and abilities as well as income levels, as cost was also among the top five reasons for non-participation by gender, parental status, and health variables. Seniors, people with disabilities and low-income individuals are some of the most vulnerable in terms of health disparities and managers need to make extra efforts to be more inclusive in the design and promotion of outdoor recreation facilities and programs. Additionally, health and safety signage and facilities can provide helpful reminders and safe environments for people with disabilities to engage in outdoor activity, including shaded recreation areas, air quality updates, and trail use safety.

Parks and recreation are essential services for communities that contribute to overall community health, provide a sense of public pride and cohesion, and demonstrate a tangible reflection of Montana's high quality of life. For every \$1 spent on building biking trails and walking paths, we could save approximately \$3 in medical expenses. For every \$1 spent in wellness programs, companies could save \$3.27 in medical costs and \$2.73 in absenteeism costs.⁸ It is important now more than ever for partners to make a coordinated and comprehensive connection between outdoor recreation management and public health initiatives, land use planning, and natural resource conservation. An integrated approach will allow organizations to better work together toward improved outdoor recreation management and create more effective and efficient decisions for communities that support an improved quality of life. Growing partnerships and fostering connections to our cherished landscapes by getting people offline, outside, and active will ensure our outdoor heritage continues to grow through current and future generations.

⁸ Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2012.

⁷ Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. 2012. Bending the Obesity Cost Curve in Montana. Issue Brief. <http://www.rwjf.org/content/dam/farm/reports/reports/2012/rwjf401478>.

B. SUSTAIN THE ECONOMIC VITALITY OF MONTANA COMMUNITIES

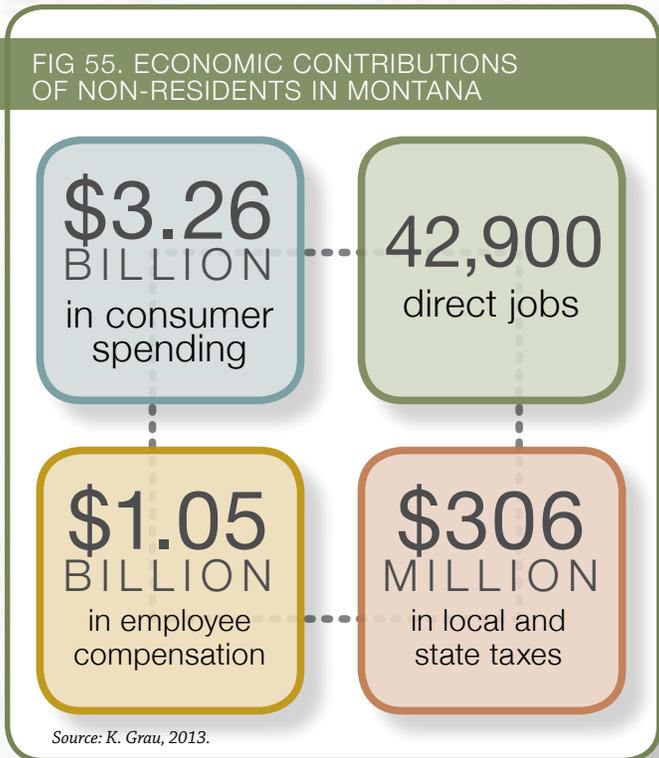
Montana is a collection of some of the world's greatest landscapes coming together to create more spectacular unspoiled nature than anywhere else in the lower 48 states. Opportunities to explore millions of acres of public lands and recreate in our state and local parks add to the tremendously rich recreation landscape. Likewise, vibrant and charming small towns serve as gateways to the outdoors and offer a strong sense of place and community, further rooted by Indians Nations that have called this place home for millennia.

This rugged individuality that makes up Montana's landscape and identity keeps families around for generations while also attracting visitors from far and wide. Montana's 1 million residents and over 10 million visitors a year participate in recreation by enjoying Montana's rivers, trails, and landscapes. This in turn drives a diverse and vibrant spectrum of economic activity in the process. Parks and recreation services, programs, and opportunities improve

the local tax base and support communities and the tourism regions. Outdoor recreation in Montana generated \$5.8 billion in consumer spending in 2012, creating 64,000 jobs, \$1.5 billion in wages and salaries, and \$403 million in state and local tax revenue. This is an increase of 132% in spending over 2006 numbers, and an increase of 242% in tax revenue. Nonresident visitors in Montana make a strong economic contribution to the state. Nonresidents spent over \$3.26 billion in Montana during 2012 on restaurants, hotels, gasoline, retail, outfitter and license fees, and other service-oriented expenditures.⁹ This spending supported 42,900 jobs, \$1.05 billion in employee compensation, and \$306 million in local and state tax revenue. When combined with resident travel, the total economic impact is \$4.3 billion in economic activity. Outdoor recreation is a growing a vibrant industry in Montana that must be recognized for its contributions to the quality of life of Montanans and our communities.

⁹ K. Grau, 2013.

FIG 55. ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTIONS OF NON-RESIDENTS IN MONTANA



Source: K. Grau, 2013.

In addition to generating tourism dollars, outdoor recreation also improves the economic tax benefits of communities at a very local level. Numerous studies over the past 30 years have found a direct relationship between the value of a given property and its proximity to parks and greenways, resulting in higher property values, improved aesthetics, and higher tax revenues. One study by the Trust for Public Land on economic benefits of parks and open spaces in rural counties in New York found that parks and open spaces reduce costs of government services and increase the value of nearby residential properties.¹⁰ Parks and open space were found to reduce stormwater management costs by \$23.9 million annually by capturing precipitation and/or slowing its runoff. Trees and shrubs remove air pollutants that endanger human health and damage structures, and such spaces were found to reduce Long Island's pollution control costs by \$18.9 million per year.

Parks and open spaces are also found to increase the value of nearby residential properties because people like living close to those areas and are willing to pay more for the privilege. Parks in the counties studied by the Trust for Public Land raised the value of nearby residential properties by \$5.18 billion and increased property tax revenues by \$58.2 million a year. According to the National Recreation and Park Association, properties abutting or fronting a park are 20% higher than similar properties not situated near a park. This positive impact on property values is found in upwards of 600 feet from parks.

¹⁰ The Trust for Public Land. 2010. *The Economic Benefits and Fiscal Impact of Parks and Open Space in Nassau and Suffolk Counties, New York*. A Report by The Trust for Public Land for the Long Island Community Foundation and the Rauch Foundation. <http://cloud.tpl.org/pubs/ccpe--nassau-county-park-benefits.pdf>

HIGHLIGHT: FOOTLOOSE ECONOMY

Parks, open spaces, public lands, and trails help attract and retain new residents and businesses who desire communities with leisure and recreation amenities close by. A 2012 study conducted by the National Parks Conservation Association titled *Paths to Prosperity* highlights the economic success of businesses and communities in the Crown of the Continent.¹¹ The study details a new economic term “footloose” that refers to the new technologies and global economic shifts that have enabled employers, employees, and entrepreneurs to choose where to put down roots. The Flathead Valley, which is generally considered the population center of the Crown of the Continent, is the fastest growing region in Montana with a 40% increase in population since 2000. It also has the highest population density in the state at 14 people per square mile. Many people are moving to the Crown to be close to places such as Glacier National Park and Flathead Lake. The communities are set in a spectacular natural environment alive with recreational opportunities—hunting and fishing, clean water, wildlife, and scenic beauty. The Crown's unique appeal has emerged as one of the region's most important economic assets. As “footloose” businesses and new residents look for a place to live and work, quality of life is as key to their decisions as are tax rates, labor costs, and broadband networks. A growing number are looking toward the Crown and the Flathead Valley as an ideal place to live and work, and the economic benefits of these businesses are beginning to show. Continued investment in the Crown's natural capital represents a down-payment on the shared economic future to ensure that our wildlands stay wild, our rivers flow clean, and our communities sustain their traditional roots even as Montana moves into a new economy.

¹¹ National Parks Conservation Association. 2012. *Paths to Prosperity*. <http://www.npca.org/news/reports/pathways-to-prosperity.html>

The economic impact of facilities like trails is also growing. In a 2011 study on the economic benefits of the trail system in and around Jackson Hole, Wyoming found that trails generated an estimated \$18 million in economic activity in Teton County.¹² Approximately \$1.1 million was generated by local trail users and \$16.9 million by non-local trail users. Employment and wages relating to the trail system in Teton County totaled \$3.6 million with approximately 213 workers employed in the summer and fall of 2010. The economic benefits and community well-being provided by outdoor activities in Teton County are measurable, and suggests that future trail development in communities throughout Montana could help spur economic activity, particularly among destination trail systems like the Whitefish Legacy Trails system in northwestern Montana.

Effective partnerships will also lead to an improved understanding of demands and trends in order to capitalize on and foster participation in recreation on our public lands and through activities events, and programs. Managers must work together with the tourism community and other partners to make the case for recreation and enhance decision-makers' understanding of its contribution to the economy. The combined efforts will produce more opportunities for residents and visitors, stronger economic benefits, and more sustainable economic vitality for Montana.

Efforts should be made to maintain resources and facilities to maximize the provision of recreation opportunities and the tourism potential as a keystone for economic opportunities in Montana and in local communities. Coordinated marketing and messaging efforts with community, regional, and state tourism information providers will enhance the outdoor recreation experience for both visitors and residents. Highlighting opportunities with effective and easy-to-access information will ensure that people can locate recreation amenities within a given area, which helps to enhance the authentic and local experience that many visitors are looking for in Montana.

¹² Kaliszewski, Nadia, E., The Jackson Hole Trails Project Economic Impact Study, MP/ENR, August, 2011. http://www.friendsofpathways.org/assets/291/kaliszewski_JHTP_final-1.pdf.

C. PROMOTE STEWARDSHIP AND SUSTAINABILITY

Stewardship of Montana's cherished recreational, cultural and natural resources is vital to protecting and enhancing our assets, diversifying public and private partnerships, and growing a new generation of environmental stewards. As Montana's population continues to grow, recreation managers will need to work proactively to encourage a strong recreation ethic that promotes safe and responsible use of public lands. Likewise, managers will need to address the growing deferred maintenance needs that impacting the ability to provide high quality recreation experiences on public lands.

Managers are currently faced with diverse challenges like vandalism to facilities and public lands, unauthorized roads and trails development, and adverse resource impacts related to inappropriate use of public lands. Ensuring that our recreational, cultural, and natural resources are properly enjoyed will help preserve our resources and facilities for future users to come.

Engaging users as stewards of the land through volunteer opportunities, internships, citizen science programs and other innovative methods will grow their capacity to advocate for public lands and encourage responsible use and care among friends, family, and communities. Education is also an important and critical ingredient to aid in outdoor recreation and open space conservation. Parks, open spaces, and wild lands provide an outdoor classroom for students and adults alike, whether it is a school field trip, a campfire discussion, or a volunteer project on public lands. Parks and recreation managers are critical partners in building a strong educational awareness of Montana's natural, cultural, recreational, and heritage resources, and managers should be proactive and innovative in delivering education in a variety of methods.

In addition to promoting a sound recreation ethic, sound land use decisions and recreation planning will also preserve our natural environment, making our cities and towns more

livable. From urban parks and greenspaces to cultural sites and rural areas, coordinated planning efforts that integrate recreation management principles with land use planning will ensure strategic conservation and enhancement of our cherished landscapes. In turn, this will help protect our resources and unique assets by combating air pollution, improving water quality, preserving heritage sites, and providing recreational opportunities for residents and visitors. Recreation managers are encouraged to build partnerships with local planning agencies and commissions to identify smart growth policies and encourage incorporation of parks, open spaces, and trails into long term planning efforts. For urban communities in particular, connecting residents to urban wetlands and refuges will raise awareness of these important landscapes and the amenities they provide to our ecosystem.

The quality of many recreation resources on Montana's public lands and in our communities has diminished over the years. The stateside LWCF funding has decreased 88% since 1979, yet the fund is still a crucial contributor to sustaining and enhancing outdoor recreation throughout the state through voluntary grants. Still, stateside LWCF only funds new acquisition and development, and as such a result has created a long list of deferred maintenance needs throughout the state. For each outdoor

HIGHLIGHT: THOMPSON PARK

Thompson Park is a congressionally designated Municipal Recreation Area on the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest, located nine miles south of Butte. The park was officially designated as a park in 1915. In 1922, an act of Congress combined the donated property with National Forest lands to form one of the first municipal recreation areas. The 3,500 acre park is managed cooperatively by the Forest Service and City-County of Butte-Silverbow. Thompson Park also has a disc golf (folf) course, which is the only authorized folf course in the park and surrounding National Forest.

Thompson Park has functioned as Butte's backyard playground since its 1922 designation. During the Great Depression in 1935, more than 250 Works Progress Administration (WPA) workers cleared the ground and built the infrastructure within the park. Roads, picnic areas and trails were built. The WPA constructed the setting with a style of architecture both rustic and modern, for example, represented by the art deco font on the Park's heavy wooden signage. Some construction of roads, trails, and recreation sites has occurred over the last 90 years; however, the last round of construction occurred in the 1960s. Heavy use over the years and little capital for maintenance or updates resulted in facilities that were outdated and in disrepair. Recreation features, including toilets, tables, and benches had fallen into disrepair and were removed or destroyed. Roads and trails were also not maintained and began causing resource damage to the watershed and native fishery as a result of erosion and sedimentation.

In response, the city, county, Forest Service, and several local partners and volunteers worked together in securing grants, matching funds, and volunteers. In 2007, Butte-Silver Bow received a grant from the Natural Resource Damage Program in the amount of \$988,000 to address resource issues associated with roads and trails and provision of developed recreation opportunities. Approximately \$300,000 was identified for developed recreation improvements. The Beaverhead-Deerlodge NF provided in-kind contributions to the project in the form of planning and design, as well as \$250,000. Six new recreation day-use areas have been re-constructed and built for public day-use. A campsite was also constructed to accommodate an on-site host.

In addition to the folf area, Thompson Park also offers 25 miles of non-motorized trails that provide loop trail opportunities and connections to the Continental Divide Trail. About 1.5 miles are open to motorized use. Many of the park's trails are popular for cross-country skiing in the winter. The abandoned Milwaukee Road line is the showpiece part of the trails network, now a Rails-to-Trails route. In 2011, \$117,000-worth of work was completed on stabilizing two tunnels on the Milwaukee Road to the top of Homestake pass, and \$224,000 was spent on installing cable railing, repairing tower footings, removing old gravel ballast, and adding bridge decking on the impressive trestle spanning over Roosevelt Drive.

Today, Thompson Park is once again, a backyard playground for residents and visitors to the Butte area, thanks to the numerous partners involved in the project. The efforts to improve Thompson Park are a product of an ongoing partnership between the Beaverhead-Deerlodge NF and the City-County of Butte-Silver Bow government, with contributions made by a number of other partners such as Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, AmeriCorps St. Lewis, Montana Conservation Corps, Highlands Cycling Club, Mile High Backcountry Horsemen, Mining City Trail Riders, Boy Scouts of America, Butte Exchange Club, Lewis & Clark N.F. and Beaverhead-Deerlodge N.F. fire personnel. Private contractors also supported the improvement of recreation sites, road construction signs, trail improvements, and interpretive signage. The Milwaukee Road trail improvements were accomplished with grants from the Natural Resource Damage Program; the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks Recreation Trails Program; Rails to Trails Conservancy, and the Southwest Montana Resource Advisory Council.

pool that is built, there is another that is deteriorating. Recreation managers need to work together and with partners—including volunteers, friends groups, service groups, and private industry—to develop creative solutions to provide adequate funding for not just development of new facilities to meet growing demand, but also for maintenance needs to take care of what we have. If the LWCF is reauthorized in 2015, it will continue to be a critical source of community funding, but other revenue sources and innovative solutions need to be developed to enhance Montana’s recreation at all levels.

The immense deferred maintenance backlog at the federal, state, and local level continues to be a challenge for agencies to overcome, and impacts the ability for land managers to keep up with basic operations and maintenance. In order to continue to grow the recreation and tourism industry in Montana and ensure the public lands are available for future generations of residents and visitors, we need to ensure there are well-maintained facilities and amenities for people to come and see, experience, and enjoy. Agencies need to proactively work together to address maintenance challenges, using shared resources wherever necessary.

Sustainable operations are also critical to enhancing recreation opportunities. Sustainability in the sense of resource management and fiscal responsibility will help managers proactively address operational challenges, and reduce costs and increase savings where appropriate. Just as important, managers need to be open to discussions about distribution of recreation facilities, and if the current and expected needs of users are being met at the correct locations. Through education and programming, recreation providers have the ability to foster and grow stewardship among users. Increased public engagement and volunteerism will nurture a new generation of citizen stewards that can support and advocate for conservation and outdoor recreation opportunities. Identifying critical data needs and expanding access to information will help further the discussion around recreation and promote stronger management principles at the local, state, and federal level. Together with wise planning and an educated public, we can ensure the continuation of our legacy of public lands, protect unique and important resources, and maintain vital recreation access and connections.

D. ENHANCE AGENCY COORDINATION, COOPERATION, AND SERVICE PROVISION

Montana has a diverse base of recreation managers, with six federal agencies managing 27 million acres and two state agencies managing another five million acres, in addition to the hundreds of communities with local parks, open spaces, and trails. In addition, Montana's Indian Nations offer a number of diverse recreation opportunities in pristine locations they manage like the Mission Mountains Tribal Wilderness Area. Montanans and visitors have the opportunity of choosing to go off-roading at Pipestone OHV Recreation Area, backpacking in the Lee Metcalf Wilderness, learning about Montana's mining history at Bannack State Park, fishing along the Madison River, or boating on Fort Peck Reservoir. Montanans can hike on the Helena trail system or float on the Clark Fork River through Missoula, swim at the Sidney Pool, or ski at Bridger Bowl outside of Bozeman. Recreation opportunities are found in every corner of the state.

In getting outdoors, Montanans and visitors are looking for the highest quality of experiences, and recreation managers should ensure that is possible regardless of the land manager. Following the charter of the Federal Interagency Council on Outdoor Recreation (FICOR), this SCORP integrates a new system of seamless management and service provision that encourages collaboration and partnerships across all levels regardless of agency. The goal of FICOR is to promote better coordination and collaboration among Federal agencies in providing outdoor recreation and conserving or managing natural and cultural resources. The principles include the support of information exchange, coordination of recreation management across agency boundaries, streamline of policies and procedures, and improve access and engagement in outdoor recreation.

The FICOR is a significant step in the management of federal lands to create a seamless system of recreation management. This model is embraced within the SCORP to encourage the same level of collaboration among Montana's federal, state, local, and Tribal recreation providers. With budgets decreasing or stagnate, and maintenance costs rising, agencies and users will benefit from coming to proactively address challenges and encourage sharing of resources where applicable. The SCORP planning process is the first step in stronger cooperation and coordination, and agencies and partners involved throughout the planning process have demonstrated it is possible to develop better communication and integration for recreation management.

With a more coordinated approach also comes sharing of knowledge and information. Data gaps for recreation services and standards are significant at the community level, making it hard to conduct analysis of recreation fundamentals and answer basic questions, like how many Montanans live within a quarter mile of a community park. Many Montana communities do not have recreation departments, and some do not even have planning departments. Developing a system to build that knowledge base will allow managers to critically analyze their park and recreation systems, and make more informed decisions about recreation development and usage needs based on sound data. Likewise, an up-to-date and dynamic statewide inventory of all outdoor recreation facilities, amenities, and trails on public lands will help managers at the federal, state, and local level make connections and integrate management objectives across boundaries.

Sharing resources and coming together for the benefit of Montanans everywhere, as well as visitors, will create a higher quality recreation experience. The 2014-2018 SCORP encourages managers to manage recreation not just by unit, but also by opportunities and experiences. Putting customer service at the forefront along with resource protection will prove to be good for residents, good for visitors, good for the economy, and good for all Montana.