

CHAPTER II. INVENTORY OF MONTANA'S TRAIL SYSTEM cent), totaling 167 miles (on the content of th

This chapter provides a summary of Montana's trail system, including the location, number and miles of trails managed by various federal, state, and local agencies, as well as trail elevations, elevation changes, lengths, types of recreation opportunities, and restrictions on types of use.

Montana is a vast and geographically diverse state, containing a total area of over 145,300 square miles (380,850 square kilometers, 94,109,400 acres). The state is over 500 miles wide from east to west, and up to 320 miles from north to south. Elevation ranges from 1,820 feet above sea level in Lincoln County in the northwest corner of the state, to 12,799 feet at the summit of Granite Peak, in the Beartooth Mountains in south-central Montana. The mean elevation is 3,400 feet. Physiography generally consists of the Rocky Mountains in Western Montana, and the Great Plains to the east.

Over 29 percent of the land base in Montana is federal, with almost eighteen percent (16,752,700 acres) of the land in the state managed by the USFS (see Figure II-1). Approximately six percent of the land area is owned by the state, with less then one tenth of one percent owned by cities and municipalities.

According to the 1994 inventory, Montana contains 2,294 public trails, totaling more than 14,633 miles; the trails are located throughout the state, but are concentrated in the western mountainous areas. The Forest Service is by far the largest provider of trails in Montana, managing 2,075 trails (90 percent of state total) and 13,496 trail miles (92 percent of the state total)—see Figures II-2 and II-3. The National Park Service is a distant second, managing 148 trails (6 percent), totaling 826 miles (6 percent), with the BLM accounting for only nine trails (one per-

cent), totaling 167 miles (one percent). It is worth noting that since 1994, the number of trails managed by the BLM, in particular, has increased; by 1999 the agency reported 49 designated trails, totaling 397 miles (BLM 1999). These federal agencies account for more then 96 percent of the total trails, and 99 percent of total trail miles (ITRR, 1994a).

None of the other trail managing agencies or organizations in the inventory account for more than one percent of the state's total trails or trail miles. Nonetheless, trails managed by the other agencies represent a very important part of Montana's trail system, particularly trails closest to the urban areas where most Montanans live.

The majority of the information summarized here was obtained from The Montana Trail Inventory, a comprehensive inventory of Montana's trails undertaken by the University of Montana's Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research (ITRR 1994a).

Trail Inventory Methods and Definitions

The trails inventory study was the first (and to date, only) systematic review of the entire public trails system in Montana. While the trail system has inevitably changed since the inventory was completed, it still provides a good overall picture of the state's trail system. Data for the 1994 trails inventory was compiled from the following sources:

Maps and data bases produced by the U.S. Geological Survey, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), the Federal Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and the National Park Service (NPS).



Figure II-1. Montana Land Ownership Patterns

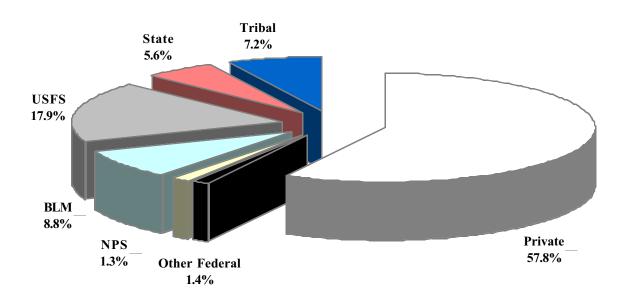


Figure II-2. Number of Trails in Montana By Managing Agency

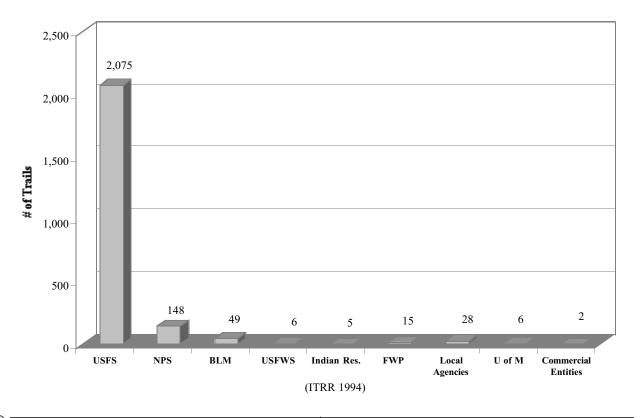
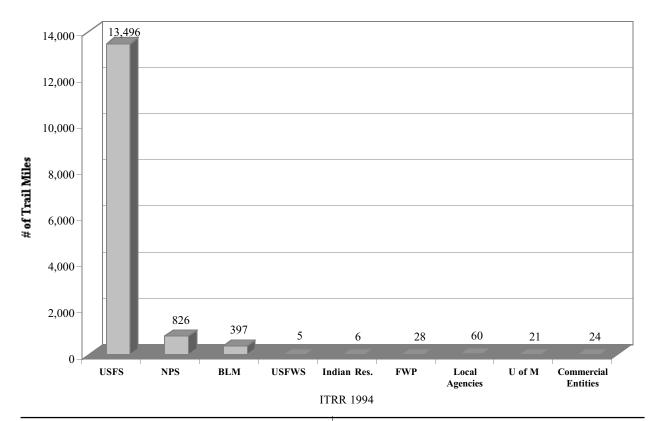




Figure II-3. Miles of Trails in Montana By Managing Agency



* Interviews and survey information from city, county, state, tribal, and federal officials, as well as private recreation providers.

A fairly specific definition of "trail," (similar to the one formerly used by the USFS, the major provider of trails in the state) was used to focus the parameters of the inventory. In order to be included in the inventory, a route had to have the following characteristics:

- * The trail had to be a regularly maintained recreation or transportation pathway.
- * The trail had to be typically used by hikers, cross-country skiers, equestrians, bicyclists, or motor vehicles less than 50 inches wide; this would include motorcycles and allterrain vehicles (ATVs), but not 4x4s.
- * The trail had to be purposefully planned and constructed for trail use (rather than being a game trail or informal fisherman's path, for example).

Overview of the Montana Trail System The Evolution of Montana's Recreational Trail System

The Montana recreational trails seen on the ground today do not represent a comprehensively planned system as much as a network that has evolved over time. Many trails in Montana began as game trails or Indian paths; as Europeans settled Montana, many of these routes continued to be used because, in many cases, they were the best routes over the terrain (see chapter 4 of the Trails Plan for more details on historic trails).

While most of today's trails are used mainly for recreational purposes, pre-twentieth century trails mainly served economic, political, or social ends. Some of the most critical early trails—especially those following major river valleys—eventually





became wagon roads, highways, and/or rail lines (Wyss 1992).

In addition to trails that gradually evolved from earlier, pre-European routes, others were deliberately planned and constructed. Earlier in the twentieth century, many trails were cut as fire suppression routes. Others were built to service lookouts, access guard stations, get to hunting camps, and for other purposes. These early trails were mainly designed to accommodate foot traffic and/or pack stock. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, 25,000 young men between the ages of 18 and 23 were employed in Montana, working on trails, roads, and other infrastructure and natural resource projects (Wyss 1992). Over time, many of these routes became part of Montana's present-day managed recreational trail system.

As the twentieth century progressed, increasing leisure time, financial well being, and mass adoption of the automobile provided Montana residents and non-residents alike with the means to participate in trail-related recreational activities. Promotion of the national parks by railroads helped create an image in the minds of many Americans that Montana was a prime recreation destination, helping to stimulate interest in trail-related recreation.

One of the biggest trail-related changes that has occurred during the past fifty years has been a substantial loss of mileage in Montana's extensive backcountry trail system. Fire suppression trails that were no longer needed often reverted back to a natural state, or became informal routes no longer managed or maintained. Other trails were lost to road building, logging, or other activities.

During the past twenty-five years, a major change on Montana's trail system has been growing mechanized use (e.g., bicycles, motorcycles, ATVs, and snowmobiles) on federally-managed trails, which in some cases has resulted in wider trails, as well as conflicts between various types of users. In many cases, mechanized use grew gradually over time, and was

eventually recognized as a legal, managed use on the affected trail(s) through travel management planning processes. In other cases, these and other processes determined that mechanized uses were not an appropriate activity (e.g., in federally-designated wilderness areas). Like other types of decisions made on federal lands, trail planning processes must comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Because of NEPA and other federal rules and regulations; trails are no longer looked at in isolation, but things which are closely connected to and influence the larger natural, cultural, and social environment.

In recent years, there has been growing concern about cross-country motorized use, as well as the illegal construction of routes by users. In addition to illegally constructed routes, many non-system routes have taken shape gradually over time through use, with no conscious efforts at construction. One of the major debates among various users today is the extent to which user-created trails should become part of the designated trail system, on the one hand, or closed and returned to a natural condition, on the other.

Increasingly, planning and public involvement are critical determinants of Montana's future trail configuration. Recreation has become a major industry, and a significant component of the mission of federal land management agencies. Urban trails, in particular, have been the big growth area in the trail system, and there is increasing interest in assuring that these routes are connected to trails on surrounding federal lands. In Montana's backcountry, on the other hand, there is recognition by some users and managers that there are a limit to the number of designated and informal trails a particular area can support before adverse impacts become intolerable.





Federal Trail Managing Agencies United States Forest Service

Montana's ten national forests contain 2,075 trails, totaling 13,496 miles, accounting for 90 percent of the total trails in Montana (see Table II-1, ITRR 1994a). Lolo National Forest contains 348 (17 percent) of the trails managed by the USFS in Montana, while the Flathead National Forest manages 327, sixteen percent of the total; these are the Montana national forests with the largest number of trails. Custer National

Forest manages 48 trails, the least number of trails among Montana national forests, with the remainder of the forests lying somewhere in between (see Figures II-4 through II-12).

Of the 13,496 total miles of trails within Montana's national forests, Flathead manages 2,223 miles (16 percent), while Custer National Forest, the only national forest in eastern Montana, manages only 300 miles, less then two percent of total. The rank of forests by miles of trails is generally consistent with their rank based on the number of trails.

Table II-1. Number and Total Miles of Trails in Montana's National Forests (ITRR 1994a).

National Forest	Number of Trails	<u>%</u>	Miles of Trails	<u>%</u>
Lolo	348	17	2,066	15
Flathead	327	16	2,223	16
Lewis and Clark	301	15	2,119	16
Gallatin	272	13	2,128	16
Kootenai	227	11	1,148	9
Beaverhead	175	8	1,089	8
Bitteroot	145	7	812	6
Deerlodge	119	6	750	6
Helena	113	5	861	6
Custer	<u>48</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>300</u>	<u>2</u>
Total	2,075		13,496	







Figure II-4. Lolo National Forest

MAPS

In the Montana State Trails Plan, pages 21 through 38 contain map figures. Due to a constantly changing trail system, most of these maps are already outdated. The maps are intended to be general representations only and are not be be used as trail guides.

Map Index:

Fig 11-4

Fig 11-5

Fig 11-6

Fig 11-7

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National Park Service

The National Park Service manages 148 trails (6 percent of inventoried trails), totaling 826 miles, in Montana. Glacier has 121 trails totaling over 700 miles of trails, Yellowstone (the Montana portion) has 16 trails totaling 110 miles, while the other park units manage less than five miles of trails (see Table II-2, Figures II-13 and II-14).

The majority of the National Park Service's trails are located in wilderness settings. Of Glacier's 1,013,595 acres, 96 percent are managed as wilderness, the same percentage as Yellowstone's 2.2 million acres (including most of the portion

within Montana). In addition to trails located within administrative units, the NPS also administers the Nee-Me-Poo National Historic Trail (a.k.a. the Nez Perce National Historic Trail) and the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail.

Bureau of Land Management

Although only five of the seven BLM field offices in Montana reported having trails, all of the offices offer opportunities for informal hiking and other trail-related activities (see Table II-3, Figures II-15 through II-22).

Table II-2. Number and Miles of Trails in National Park Service Administrative Units (ITRR 1994a).

Administrative Unit	Number of Trails	<u>%</u>	Miles of Trails	<u>%</u>
Glacier N.P.	121	82	704	85
Yellowstone N.P. ¹	16	11	110	13
Bear's Paw Battleground	5	3	2	<1
Big Hole National Battlefield	3	2	4	<1
Bighorn Canyon N.R.A.	1	1	4	<1
Grant-Kohrs Ranch N.H.S.	1	1	1	<1
Little Bighorn Battlefield N.M.	1	1	1	<1
Total	148		826	

¹Refers only to the Montana portion of the Park.

Table II-3. Number and Miles of Trails on Bureau of Land Management Field Offices, 1999.

Field Office	Number of Trails	<u>%</u>	Miles of Trails	<u>%</u>
Billings	_	_	_	_
Butte	11	22	249	63
Dillon	32	66	125	31
Lewistown	1	2	4	1
Malta	-	-	-	-
Miles City	2	4	12	3
Missoula	3	6	7	2
Total	49		397	

Note: These numbers have been updated from the 1994 statewide trails inventory.









Figure II-13. Glacier National Park

MAPS

In the Montana State Trails Plan, pages 41 through 61 contain map figures. Due to a constantly changing trail system, most of these maps are already outdated. The maps are intended to be general representations only and are not be be used as trail guides.

Map Index:

Fig 11-13

Fig 11-14

Fig 11-15

Fig 11-16

Fig 11-17

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Fig 11-21



United State Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)

The 1994 trails inventory found only six trails totaling five miles in length, located on three of the five USFWS management units included in the survey (see Table II-4). However, six other USFWS units, including the million-plus acre Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) and the 31,457 acre Medicine Lake NWR were not represented in the survey. It is likely that the number and miles of trails on FWS land is much more then indicated. In addition to designated trails, there are many informal trail opportunities on USFWS land.

State Trail Managing Agencies

Although FWP and the University of Montana were the only state entities that reported managing trails in the trails inventory, the state owns thousands of acres of additional land with the potential for trail opportunities, particularly school trust lands, which are managed by the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation.

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

The seven regions of Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) manage over 400,000 acres of land throughout Montana, consisting of State Parks, Wildlife Management Areas, and Fishing Access Sites (see Table II-5 and Figure II-23).

In the 1994 trails inventory, five of the seven FWP regions reported managing fifteen trails, totaling 28 miles in length, mostly in state parks. Region Three in southwestern Montana had the most trails, with six trails totaling over seven miles in length. Statewide, the number of state park trail opportunities is growing, a significant planned expansion of the trail system at Lewis and Clark Caverns State Park being just one example.

Although FWP-managed trails represent a small component of the overall state system, the agency manages thousands of acres with numerous informal trail-related opportunities throughout the state, often in areas with few public trails. Additionally, a number of the state park trails, particularly in urban areas, are very heavily used.

As discussed elsewhere in this document, FWP's three trail grant programs play a major role in the development and maintenance of trails managed by other agencies.

Table II-4. Number and Miles of Trail on USFWS Administrative Units (ITRR 1994).

Administrative Unit	Number of Trails	<u>%</u>	Miles of Trails	<u>%</u>
Lee Metcalf N.W.R	4	67	4	80
National Bison Range	1	17	.5	10
Ninepipe N.W.R.	1	17	.5	10
Bowdoin National N.W.F	₹. —		_	_
Red Rock Lakes N.W.R.	_	_	_	_
Total	6		5	





Table II-5. Number and Miles of Trails on FWP Managed Property by Region (ITRR 1994a).

<u>Region</u>	Number of <u>Trails</u>	<u>%</u>	Miles of <u>Trails</u>	<u>%</u>
One	2	13	2	7
Two	3	20	4	15
Three	6	40	7	25
Four	2	13	1	4
Five	-	-	-	-
Six	-	-	-	-
Seven	2	13	1	4
Total	15		28	

State School Trust Land

Montana owns 5.1 million acres of State School Trust Land, generally consisting of sections 16 and 36 per township, although these sections have sometimes been consolidated into larger parcels. Managed through the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, State School Trust Land managers reported no designated trails in the 1994 Trails Inventory (ITRR 1994a). However, these lands support a tremendous amount of recreational use, as authorized by House Bill 778 during the 1991 State Legislative Session: School Trust Lands are accessible to public recreational use with the purchase of a Recreational Land Use Permit (MCA 1997). In many cases, State School Trust Land contains roads and trails that are closed to motorized use. but utilized for trail-related activities. Motorized use is generally prohibited off designated roads.

University of Montana

In the 1994 inventory, the University of Montana in Missoula reported managing a one mile trail that is connected to the larger city and county trail system. Even though this is a small fraction of the state's total, it is likely among the most heavily used trails in the state, with a nearly constant stream of students and others during nice weather.

The University also manages a trails system located on the Lubrecht Experimental Forest. Lubrecht consists of 28,000 acres situated on the divide between the Potomac and Ninemile Valleys, in the Big Blackfoot River drainage of western Montana.

Lubrecht has approximately 20 miles in its formal trail system and well over 100 miles of old logging roads on the remainder of the forest. Non-motorized use is available on the trails and roads most of the year; the predominate use of the designated trail system is cross-country skiing. Motorized use of the trail system is not permitted, although two roads may be used by snowmobiles as part of the BLM's Garnet Range snowmobile trail network. The designated Lubbrecht trail system has approximately 1000 feet of elevation difference (3800 to 4800).

Local Trail Managing Agencies

Local governments, nine cities and Flathead County, reported 28 trails totaling 60 miles in length, but since the trail inventory was completed in 1994, a number of new trails have been completed (see Table II-6). Many of the local trail systems listed below, while predominantly city trails, include county, state, and federal land.

Figure II-23. Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, State Parks

MAPS

In the Montana State Trails Plan, pages 63 through 64 contain map figures. Due to a constantly changing trail system, most of these maps are already outdated. The maps are intended to be general representations only and are not be be used as trail guides.

Map Index:

Fig 11-23



Table II-6. Number and Miles of Trails Managed by City/County Departments (ITRR 1994a)

Departments	Number of Trails	Miles of Trails
Helena	7	9
Missoula	5	12
Bozeman	4	10
Kalispell	3	10
Butte	5	8
Colstrip	2	2
Great Falls	1	7
Havre	2	2
Billings	1	4
Total	30	67

Note: Butte numbers updated in 2000.

Billings

Although Billings reported only one trail in the 1994 survey, since then a number of new trails, including a three and a half mile railtrail, have added to Billing's park and trail system, consisting of over 2,500 acres of land (see Figure II-24). In addition to locally-managed trails, Lake Elmo State Park provides trail opportunities for Billings residents.

Bozeman

Trails include Burke Park (a.k.a. Pete's Hill), the Gallagator Trail, and the new Hyalite View Trail (see Figure II-25). Ultimately, the city, Montana State University, and the Gallatin Valley Land Trust (GVLT) would like to complete the "Main Street to the Mountains" trails project linking the city of Bozeman to the mountain ranges that surround it.

Butte/Silverbow

Butte/Silverbow's trail system includes the Blacktail Creek Restoration Project (see Figure II-26). In partnership, Butte and Anaconda are working together to develop the 26-mile Silver Bow Creek Greenway Corridor for recreational use. This is one of a number of adaptive reuse projects occurring in areas that were impacted by years of mining.

Additional trails in Butte include the Alice Park Trail (.3 miles); Mineyard Trail (1.6 miles); Blacktail Creek Trail (3.0 miles); Maude S. Canyon Trail (2.0 miles); and the Continental Trail (1.8 miles), which is a dedicated pedestrian/bike lane. Butte has an aggressive vision for its trail future, with many more miles of routes planned.

Colstrip

Formal trails-related recreational opportunities are offered primarily at the Castle Rock Recreation Area, including a trail along the perimeter of Castle Rock Lake. The trail has three separate access points, and is approximately three miles in length. It is paved and accessible to disabled users. Mileage markers are placed at 1/2 mile intervals around the lake, and are color coded to each access point. Trail maps, promotional brochures, and park guides are available to assist users.

Great Falls

The primary trail in Great Falls is the River's Edge Trail, which follows the Missouri River (see Figure II-27). The trail is a multiple-use, non-motorized route which is mostly paved and accessible to wheelchairs.

The River's Edge Trail passes through or skirts a number of parks (including Giant Springs State





Park), a municipal pool, tennis courts, playgrounds, and a series of dams and falls. In the process, it crosses a number of bridges and moves from open areas into narrow corridors between the river and rocky overlooks above. The trail's variety of environments, views, and recreational opportunities, not to mention solitude, make it one of Great Falls most attractive recreational amenities.

In the future, Great Falls hopes to build additional trails (including an equestrian loop) along the Sun River dikes west of town, as well as extensions of the River's Edge Trail further east along the Missouri.

Havre

The Havre Parks and Recreation Department manage two park areas that include approximately one and one-half miles of trails, and are otherwise undeveloped. In addition, Beaver Creek County Park (one of the largest county parks in the country) is located south of town, offering a range of recreational opportunities, including opportunities for cross-country hiking.

Helena

The first trail in the Helena parks system came about when the expansive Mount Helena City Park was established in 1902. Much of the present Helena trail system (including numerous hiking and mountain biking trails) is concentrated around this park (see Figure II-28).

The Mount Helena trail system is also connected to the Mount Helena National Recreation Trail, which is located outside the city limits on forest service land. Additional informal trail opportunities exist in the Scotch Gravel Hills, which are managed by the BLM on the outskirts of town.

Spring Meadow Lake State Park, which is managed by FWP, provides another popular trail opportunity for Helena residents, with a trail that circles the lake. There is also a short rail trail near the lake.

An Open Space Bond was passed by Helena voters in November of 1996. Although the Open Space Bond did not specifically propose new trails, it provides funding which can be used for the acquisition of open space and potential trail routes, as has already happened in the South Hills/Mount Ascension area above town. The Prickly Pear Land Trust has also been active in securing open space in the Helena area.

Kalispell and Flathead County

Flathead County Parks and Recreation began trail development in 1991 (see Figure II-29). Ultimately, the county would like to provide a network of trails throughout the valley.

The Rails-to-Trails of Northwestern Montana is a major partner with the local governments in this area. The group provides assistance, funds, and ideas for county rail-to-trails projects.

On the outskirts of Kalispell, FWP's Lone Pine State Park provides trail opportunities for local residents.

Missoula

Missoula's trail system consists of approximately seven miles of developed trails, two miles of informal foot paths, and two miles of undeveloped greenway corridor in the Rattlesnake Valley (see Figure II-30). Included are paved and unpaved trails, multiple and single use trails, bike lines and routes, and portions of the sidewalk system. A large portion of the trail system follows the Clark Fork River corridor through downtown Missoula, continuing east through Hellgate Canyon as the Kim Williams Trail.

In the 1990s, Missoula voters passed and open space initiative, which enabled a cooperative, inter-governmental purchase of Mount Jumbo, which provides trail opportunities and important wildlife habitat.



Figure II-24. Billings Urban Trails

MAPS

In the Montana State Trails Plan, pages 67 through 80 contain map figures. Due to a constantly changing trail system, most of these maps are already outdated. The maps are intended to be general representations only and are not be be used as trail guides.

Map Index:

Fig 11-24

Fig 11-25

Fig 11-26

Fig 11-27

Fig 11-28

Fig 11-29

Fig 11-30



Other Trail Providers

In addition to the agencies mentioned above, there are a number of other trail providers in Montana. The seven Indian reservations in Montana account for over seven percent of the state's land area, but only the Blackfeet Indian Reservation reported managing trails in the 1994 inventory (five trails totaling approximately six miles in length). However, a number of reservations are expanding outdoor recreation opportunities such as trails, and there are clearly some major trail systems that didn't show up in the inventory (e.g., trails in the Salish-Kootenai portion of the Mission Mountains). It is safe to say there are a large number of tribal trails in Montana, but no comprehensive inventory of how many or where they are located.

Private sector trail providers were also underrepresented in the inventory, but in some areas provide significant trail opportunities. Private sector cross-country ski opportunities are especially important in some areas; some of the better known places include the Lone Mountain Ranch at Big Sky, the Bohart Ranch near Bozeman, the Izaak Walton Inn at Essex, and Alice Creek near Lincoln.

In addition to formal private trail opportunities, a significant amount of informal trail use occurs on private land at the edge of urban areas. In many cases, trail users aren't even aware the paths they are using are privately owned. This issue will be discussed in more detail later in the Plan.

Selected Land and Recreation Management Classifications

The types of experiences offered by a particular trail are intrinsically related to the character and management of the land surrounding it. In fact, many people select the trail they want to use based on the way the landscape is managed. A

Montana trail user seeking a completely nonmotorized trail experience, for example, might choose to hike in Yellowstone National Park, or the Bob Marshall Wilderness. Conversely, a motorized trail user will be looking for areas that are managed to allow motorized use on trails. In inventorying Montana's trail system, it is useful to examine two different classification schemes: One involves the way certain lands are managed (e.g., roadless and/or wilderness areas), while a second scheme used by recreation managers (known as the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum, or ROS) categorizes areas according to the kinds of experiences they offer recreationists. The classification schemes are related; an area managed as wilderness, for example, would fall under the primitive, non-motorized ROS category. The primary focus of this section is federally-managed lands.

Wilderness Areas and other Roadless Lands

Designated wilderness areas and other roadless lands have a significant impact on the overall nature of Montana's trail system, in part because this is where many trails are located, and where many (non-motorized) trail users prefer to go when they recreate. In designated wilderness areas, *mechanized travel* (this includes motor vehicles, as well as non-motorized mechanical devices such as mountain bikes) is prohibited. To understand Montana trails and the experiences they offer, it is important to understand where wilderness areas and other roadless lands fit into the overall land management picture in the state.

This topic is inherently confusing because Congressionally-designated wilderness areas are only one subset of the overall roadless area picture in Montana. In addition to Montana's sixteen federally-designated wilderness areas (see Table II-7), some lands are designated wilderness study areas, and may be recommended for wilderness status by the managing agency. Other lands that are neither designated wilderness or wilderness study areas may be managed as "roadless" by the agency. Additionally, there are





Table II-7. Wilderness Areas in Montana

<u>USFS Wildernesses Areas</u>	Size (acres)	Managing Entity
Absaroka-Beartooth	920,000	Custer/Gallatin
Anaconda-Pintler	158,000	Beaverhead-Deerlodge/Bitteroot
Bob Marshall	1,009,000	Flathead/Lewis & Clark
Cabinet Mountains	94,000	Kootenai/Kaniksu (Idaho)
Gates of the Mountains	29,000	Helena
Great Bear	287,000	Flathead
Lee Metcalf	259,000	Beaverhead-Deerlodge/Gallatin
Mission Mountains	74,000	Flathead
Rattlesnake	33,000	Lolo
Scapegoat	240,000	Helena/Lolo/Lewis & Clark
Selway-Bitterroot	251,000	Bitteroot/Lolo
Welcome Creek	28,000	Lolo
BLM Wilderness Areas		
Bear Trap Canyon	6,000	Dillon Field Office
USFWS Wilderness Areas		
Medicine Lake	11,000	Medicine Lake W.R.
Red Rock Lakes	32,000	Red Rock Lakes W.R.
<u>UL Bend</u>	21,000	Charles M. Russell W.R.
TOTAL	3,452,000	

Note: Individual figures rounded to nearest 1,000.

lands that remain roadless, but are open to future roadbuilding, logging, and other activities based on current management. Overlaying all this, there have been various pieces of federal legislation introduced to Congress over the years—as well as proposals generated by public interest groups—that identify various configurations of Montana's federal lands as future wilderness, the maps of which aren't necessarily congruent with the classifications mentioned above.

At this writing, the Forest Service is taking public comment on a *Draft Roadless Area Conservation Environmental Impact Statement* that lays out several alternatives for future management of Forest Service inventoried roadless lands throughout the country. According to the draft EIS, an inventoried roadless area is defined as follows:

Undeveloped areas typically exceeding 5,000 acres that met the minimum criteria for wilderness consideration

under the Wilderness Act, and that were inventoried during the Forest Service's Roadless Area Review and Evaluation (RARE II) process, or subsequent broad scale assessments, or forest planning (USFS 2000b).

In the draft EIS, the Forest Service utilizes five classifications in depicting its roadless area inventory information (USFS 2000b):

- Inventoried roadless areas identified in forest plans or other completed assessments adopted by the agency, and allocated to a prescription that allows road construction or reconstruction.
- Inventoried roadless areas identified in forest plans or other completed assessments adopted by the agency, and allocated to a prescription that does not allow road construction or reconstruction.





- Inventoried roadlesss area identified in forest plans or other completed assessments adopted by the agency, and allocated to a prescription that does not allow road construction or reconstruction, and the forest plan recommends future wilderness designation.
- Designated areas such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, wild and scenic rivers, and national monuments.
- National Forest System lands outside of inventoried roadless areas.

Nationwide, the Forest Service estimates that 22 percent of all its lands are in special designation categories (e.g., wilderness areas, national monuments, wild and scenic rivers, etc.) that restricts or prohibits roads. Another 28 percent (2 percent of the total land area in the U.S.) encompasses inventoried roadless areas that are the focus of the EIS, while the remaining 50 percent of National Forest lands are managed for a wide range of uses and activities (USFS 2000b).

According to the draft EIS, the preferred alternative proposes the following:

To conserve roadless areas, the...Forest Service is proposing to prohibit road construction and reconstruction in inventoried roadless areas within the NFS, unless they are needed for public health and safety, for reserved or outstanding rights, or for other specified reasons. No roads or trails would be closed because of these prohibitions (USFS 2000b).

Wilderness areas and the management of remaining roadless lands are controversial topics, sparking many different and strongly held opinions. Whatever one's opinions may be, it is important that they based on accurate information; the following information helps place wilderness and other roadless areas within the

larger context of Montana's overall land management patterns (USFS 2000b; MWA 2000):

- Montana's total land area encompasses 94,100,000 acres, 29 percent (27,400,000 acres) of which is federal public land.
- Approximately 38 percent of Montana's federal land consists of roadless lands (including designated wilderness, wilderness study areas, and inventoried roadless areas).
- Roadless lands (including designated wilderness, wilderness study areas, and inventoried roadless areas) comprise 11 percent (10,400,000 acres) of Montana's total land area.
- Less than 4 percent (3,452,000 acres) of Montana's total land area is designated wilderness, 98 percent of which is managed by the Forest Service.
- A majority of Montana's trails are located within designated wilderness and other roadless areas, although the percentage has been declining due to road construction and other factors. Currently, approximately 44 percent (6,000 of the 13,500 miles) of the trail miles in Montana's national forests are located in undesignated (e.g., non-wilderness) roadless lands (Madej 1999)

Remaining roadless lands in Montana can be further broken out as follows (USFS 2000b; MWA 2000):

• Forest Service: Montana has 3,400,000 acres of designated Forest Service wilderness, and an additional 5,800,000 acres of inventoried roadless areas, out of a total of 16,900,000 acres of Forest Service land in the state. Based on the above acreage, approximately 20 percent of Montana's National Forest land is designated wilderness, with close to 35 percent in the inventoried roadless category. Montana ranks third in the Nation in the amount of inventoried roadless areas, after Alaska and Idaho. Forest Service inventoried roadless areas in Montana represent nearly 11 percent of the national total.





- <u>BLM</u>: There are 6,000 acres of designated BLM wilderness, and 470,000 acres of wilderness study area in Montana.
- <u>National Park Service</u>: There are 1,037,000 acres of roadless backcountry in Glacier and Yellowstone National Park (Montana's portion only).
- <u>U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)</u>: There are 65,000 acres of designated wilderness managed by the USFWS in Montana.

In spite of the designation of official wilderness areas, the amount of roadless land in Montana has declined significantly during the last fifty years. Closely related to that decline has been a long-term loss of backcountry trails. Between 1945 and the present, for example, an estimated 9,000 miles of trails disappeared from Montana's national forests as a result of logging, road building, abandonment, and lack of maintenance (Madej 1988, 1999). Some of these vanishing trails were originally built as fire suppression routes, supply paths, and for other purposes, but they still represent a significant net loss of backcountry recreational opportunities.

During the same post-war period, Montana's national forest system road miles climbed from an estimated 8,600 miles in 1945 to 32,900 miles in the late 1990s (Madej 1988; USFS 1997). Forest road construction in Montana averaged 800 miles of new roads every year between 1962 and 1982 (Aderhold 1982). Nationwide, the Forest Service transportation system now includes 386,000 miles of roads (plus an additional 60,000 miles of unauthorized roads), with an estimated maintenance backlog of \$8.4 billion; annual budget allocations are less than 20 percent of what is needed for annual maintenance on the Forest Service road system (USFS 2000b).

National forests in northwestern Montana illustrate the trends that have occurred on a larger scale throughout the West. The amount of roadless areas in the Kootenai, Flathead, and Lolo National Forests decreased by 3.6 million acres from 1945 to 1994 (with 2 million acres lost since 1975), leaving 3.3 million roadless

acres, 1.3 million of which is already protected in wilderness areas. The remaining 2.0 million acres of roadless lands are fragmented into 106 parcels, with similar patterns occurring on Forest Service and BLM lands throughout Montana (MWA 2000). Roads are essential to access trails and other recreational opportunities, but when road networks reach certain densities, they can have an adverse impact on trail systems, the experience of many trail users, and natural resources.

In recent years, environmental concerns (e.g., impacts on endangered species such as grizzly bears) has prompted the Forest Service, in particular, to close or obliterate roads in some areas, one impact being reduced motorized access. Additionally, declines in timber harvesting on Forest Service land during the last decade has reduced the demand for new roads. Nationwide, road construction in the National Forest system declined by 85 percent during the last decade, from a high of 1,315 miles a year in 1991 to 192 miles in 1999. During the same period, approximately 2,660 miles of Forest Service road were decommissioned across the country (USFS 2000b). It is important to realize, however, that these relatively recent developments have emerged in the shadow of longer-term trends that have significantly changing the character of Montana's public land base since the Second World War. Additionally, increased OHV use has had varying impacts on many of Montana's remaining roadless areas, penetrating areas which were previously inaccessible to motorized traffic, and in some cases making them less desirable places to visit for non-motorized users.

In addition to the roadless area EIS, the Forest Service is working with the BLM on an EIS on cross-country motorized use in Montana, North Dakota, and portions of South Dakota (U.S. Departments of Agriculture and Interior 1999b). The study was prompted by concern about increasing cross-country motorized travel on federal lands. There are currently large tracts of federal land where particular roads or trails may be closed to motorized traffic either seasonally or permanently, but the surrounding landscape is



subject to no such closure. With the advent of increasingly powerful ATVs, cross-country motorized travel is now possible in areas that would have been physically off-limits twenty years ago. The preferred alternative in the draft EIS would prohibit motorized cross-country travel in the study area, but allow for some limited exceptions for particular activities (e.g., game retrieval, camping, disabled access).

The issues of cross-country motorized travel, roadless land management, and wilderness area designation are germane to this plan but transcend its jurisdiction, which is largely advisory. However, the results of the pending decisions made by the federal land managing agencies will likely have an important long-term impact on Montana's trail system. For close to two decades, Congress has been unable to resolve the controversial question of whether additional wilderness should be designation in Montana. At the same time, federal agencies have encountered mounting concerns about cross-country motorized use. At this writing, it is unclear what decisions will emerge from the roadless lands/ OHV EIS processes, or the degree of resolution they will bring to these important Montana issues.

Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Classifications

As part of the Montana Trails Inventory, managers were asked to evaluate the general character of the area traversed by trails under their respective jurisdictions. The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) classification system (a tool widely employed by recreation resource agencies, including the Forest Service) was used to

Classification

categorize the responses (1991a). The intent of this evaluation was to get a general sense of the kinds of opportunities that are available in the Montana trail system. The ROS spectrum includes six classifications, ranging on a continuum from urban to primitive (see Table II-8). If a trail passed through more than one ROS zone, the predominate category along the route was used.

Trails in the primitive non-motorized category are characterized as occurring in remote roadless areas, generally over 5,000 acres in size, with a high degree of naturalness, and a low amount of development (Zinser 1995). On the other end of the spectrum, trails in the urban category generally have easy access, high development levels, and low naturalness. The other categories are aligned between these two extremes.

The ROS classification information indicates that the majority of Montana's trails fall at the wilder, more remote end of the spectrum, with 27 percent primitive non-motorized, 26 percent semiprimitive non-motorized, and 28 percent semiprimitive motorized. Comparatively few opportunities in more developed, urban-like settings occur, with only one percent of trails in urban settings, and less then one percent rural, although these percentages have likely increased since the inventory was completed. At the time of the study, only five miles of trail in the entire state fit the rural classification, suggesting a relative lack of trail connections between urban areas and the large tracts of federally-managed public land where most of Montana's trails are located.

Of the trail miles included in the 1994 inventory, 53 percent were explicitly closed to motorized trail use, falling in either the primitive or semi-

Table II-8. Recreational Opportunity Classification (ROS) Spectrum (ITRR 1994a)

Percent of Montana's Trails

Primitive non-motorized	27%
Semi-primitive non-motorized	26%
Semi-primitive motorized	28%
Roaded natural	18%
Rural	<1%
Urban	1%





primitive, non-motorized categories. While many of the remaining trail miles are open to motorized use, this is not true in all cases (e.g., urban trails tend to be non-motorized). In addition, there may be case-by-case closures in areas generally open to motorized trail use. The zones where the majority of motorized trail recreation occurs—roaded natural and semi-primitive motorized—includes 46 percent of the total Montana trail miles in the inventory.

The Forest Service, National Park Service, and BLM are the primary providers of trail-based recreation at the more primitive end of the spectrum, while local park and recreation departments, along with FWP, manage the majority of trails in more urban settings. The comparative lack of trails and trail miles in and around urban settings, where the majority of the population lives, is a major weakness in Montana's trail system that is addressed in the following chapters. Alternatively, although a large percentage of trails are in the primitive end of the continuum, the supply of these trails has declined significantly in the last five decades; this issue will be discussed in more detail later.

Use Restrictions

An important goal of the trails inventory was to gather information on the many types of use restrictions utilized throughout the state. Restrictions on various types of trail use are implemented for a variety of reasons, including federal regulations (e.g., designated wilderness areas), resource and wildlife protection, and user conflicts.

The inventory consolidated and tallied related restrictions in order to help determine the state-wide prevalence of certain types of broad restrictions. Because some of the responses to the prohibited use portion of the inventory were vague, only broad trail use restriction patterns can be discerned.

The most commonly mentioned restrictions pertained to motorized vehicles. The specific

restriction mentioned most frequently was a prohibition on vehicles over 40 inches wide, a rule which bans vehicles such as cars, trucks, jeeps, and dune buggies, and ATVs, but allows bicycles, motorcycles, snowmobiles (unless otherwise restricted).

Since the inventory was completed, it is important to note that Forest Service policy on trail and vehicle widths has changed, and that a 50 inch maximum width is now more the standard than the 40 inch maximum used at the time the inventory was completed. The Forest Service has summarized their current policy as follows:

The current Forest Service Manual Direction for what determines a Forest System Road is anything greater than 50 inches wide. This is not a prohibition, only a definition. Forest Supervisors have been delegated authority to manage OHV use on trails up to 50 inches wide. Some Forest Supervisors have closed trails of varying width; however, a 40 inch closure is not a universal Forest Service closure (USFS, 2000a).

It is worth noting that the 50 inch limit only applies to designated Forest Service system trails, not cross-country travel. The change to a 50 inch limit made it possible for most ATVs to use trails where the limit is in place, but still precludes larger vehicles such as trucks and jeeps.

Trails inventory restrictions data—which includes responses from all trail managing agencies in Montana—is summarized below (ITRR, 1994a):

Motorized

- Vehicles greater than 40 inches wide are prohibited from 33% of trails (because of the new Forest Service rules mentioned above, this percentage is now probably less).
- All motorized vehicles including snowmobiles are prohibited from 30% of trails
- All motorized and mechanized (bicycles) vehicles are prohibited from 12% of trails (e.g., in designated wilderness areas, national parks, etc.).





• Motorized vehicles less then 40 inches wide (motorcycles and most ATVs, but not 4X4s) are unrestricted on over 60% of trails for at least a portion of the year, and all year on over 40%.

Nonmotorized

- Bicycles are prohibited during the (May-September) primary use season, on 256 Montana trails, constituting eleven percent of the statewide total.
- Stock animals are restricted on nine trails, less than one percent of the state total. It is possible that restrictions on stock animals and possibly bike use were under-represented in the inventory, for undetermined reasons.
- Urban trails are generally closed to motorized vehicles

In respect to the non-motorized list, it is possible that restrictions on stock animals and possibly bike use were under-represented in the inventory, for undetermined reasons. Looked at more generally, however, it is clear that the use of bikes and stock animals are permitted on the majority of Montana trails.

The inventory data indicated that ATV and motorcycle use is unrestricted on 1,045 trails, 46 percent of all Montana trails. The general validity of this statistic is supported by the ROS classification data, which indicates that 46 percent of inventoried trails are located in ROS zones where motorized uses are typically permitted, mainly semi-primitive motorized areas and roaded natural areas. According to a recent study completed by the Sierra Club, 42 percent of the trails managed by the National Forest Service in Montana, Wyoming, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Nebraska, and North and South Dakota are open to OHV traffic. A spokesperson for the Forest Service, however, said he believed this number was too high (Helena IR 2000a).

It is worth noting that under current federal policy, cross-country OHV use is often allowed, even in areas where designated trails and roads may be closed to motorized use. As of 2000, a

joint Forest Service/BLM draft EIS is examining a variety of OHV management alternatives for Montana, North Dakota, and portions of South Dakota (USDA/USDOI 1999b). Cross-country motorized travel management in the study area can be broken out as follows:

Open Yearlong: 11.2 million acres (Areas open all year to cross-country motorized use, with no restrictions.)

<u>Designated Intensive Use:</u> 3,710 acres (Intensive use areas include special OHV areas, which in Montana include sites located near Billings, Glendive, Terry, Glasgow, and Havre.)

<u>Limited/Restricted Seasonally:</u> 4.7 million acres (These areas have seasonal closures to motorized cross-country travel.)

<u>Limited/Restricted Yearlong:</u> 5.6 million acres (These areas are closed to cross-country motorized travel, but contain open roads and trails within them.)

Closed Yearlong: 5.0 million acres (These areas are closed in their entirety to motorized travel. Designated wilderness areas are an example of this type of management.)

Of the 26.6 million acres of Forest Service and BLM land in the study area, approximately 16 million acres are open at least seasonally to motorized cross-country travel, with less than half (10.6 million acres) closed to all cross-country motorized travel. The draft EIS addresses a variety of concerns related to the growing impacts of cross-country motorized travel on federal lands (USDA/USDOI 1999b).





Trail Elevations and Elevation Range

Most of Montana's trails are located at mid to high elevations, with the highest trail in the state reaching 11,489 feet in the Beartooth range. The elevation data reflects the fact that most Montana trails are concentrated in mountainous terrain in the western portion of the state.

Approximately 90 percent of the state's trails are located at elevations above 5,000 feet, while only two percent of the trails are located at less than 3,500 feet. Only eight percent of the trails occur between 3,500 and 4,900 feet, while 27 percent occur between 5,000 and 6,499 feet, and 63 percent at greater than 6,500 feet. Since the majority of the population lives below 5,000 feet, accessing these trails requires traveling outside the communities where most people live.

The elevation range of a trail refers to the difference between the highest and lowest points along the route. The percentage of trails in various elevation ranges includes the following:

- range of zero—one percent
- range between one and 1,000 feet—36 percent
- range between 1,001 and 2,000 feet—34 percent
- range between 2,001 and 3,000 feet—22 percent
- range greater than 3,000 feet—eight percent.

The trail with the greatest elevation range — 5,000 feet— is the Hellroaring Trail, located in the Gallatin National Forest.

Not surprisingly, the Forest Service and—to a lesser extent—the NPS, are the major players in both high elevation trails and trails with large elevation ranges. The elevation range data indicates that there is a considerable array of opportunities, although there may be a relative

lack of very easy trails with little or no elevation change.

Trail Lengths

Information on trail length was also gathered during the inventory. The usefulness of the trail length data is limited because it doesn't indicate whether a particular trail is part of a larger system. A trail that appears to be very short, for example, might be connected to a much larger network, but this connection wouldn't be indicated in the inventory. In addition, some agencies provided information on systems rather than individual trails, but there is no way to distinguish between these.

The inventory created four trail length to summarize the data:

- three miles or less—34 percent
- between three and five 5 miles—26 percent
- between five and ten miles—28 percent
- more than ten miles—thirteen percent.

The majority of Montana's trails fall in the middle range, with 54 percent ranging between three and ten.

In spite of the limitations in the trail length data, the information highlights a comparative lack of longer trails managed by local governments, which are the principal trail managers in the urban areas where most Montanans live. At the time of the inventory, for example, only five trails managed by local governments were longer than three miles, with no trails longer than ten miles being reported. While these numbers have most likely changed since the inventory was completed, they suggest a need for additional longer urban trail opportunities.



Conclusions from Inventory Information

Several major themes emerged from the inventory information. First, the Forest Service dominates the Montana trail picture, managing 92 percent of the state's trails. When the NPS trail mileage is added 98 percent of the state's trail mileage is managed by two federal agencies. This leaves the majority of the state's system vulnerable to the budgetary, political, and institutional trends in these agencies. As a result, it is important to develop and utilize potential trail resources on lands managed by other agencies, and with the help of other funding sources, including non-profit organizations, and the private sector.

Secondly, the majority of Montana's trails are not located in or directly adjacent to urban areas, where most Montanans live. At the time of the inventory, for example, local park and recreation departments in Montana managed just 60 miles of trails, less than one percent of state total. While other agencies manage trails in and around urban areas, the inventory reveals very few trails, especially longer trails, in the lower elevation areas where most Montanans reside. Only ten percent of Montana's trails are located at an elevation below 5,000 feet, where the majority of Montana's cities are located.

A third theme that emerged was that most of the designated trails in Montana are located in the mountainous, western portion of the state. Because most USFS land is located in western Montana, and because the USFS is the dominant trail manager, there is a comparative lack of designated trails in eastern Montana. Custer National Forest contains just two percent of the trails and trail miles in Montana. A considerable amount of federal BLM and USFWS land, as well as Montana Department of State Lands, occurs in eastern Montana, but the designated trail system on these lands is relatively undeveloped. In order to take full advantage of

Montana's diverse natural and cultural environments, especially in the eastern portion of the state, more trail opportunities need to be provided in many parts of the state.

Fourth, there has been a long-term decline in backcountry trails in Montana. Although the greatest need for new trails is in and around urban areas, Montana's system of backcountry routes represents a nationally significant trail resource, an important part of the state's heritage that should be sustained and enhanced.

Finally, only eight of Montana's trails were reported to be disabled accessible at the time of the trails inventory. While this number has grown since 1994 (recent Forest Service information places that agency's total at 30—USFS, 2000a), there is still a need for more accessible trails and other recreational facilities. More detailed information on Forest Service accessible trails in Montana is available in the publication, *Outdoors for Everyone* (USFS 1996).





