

CHAPTER VI. THE DIRECTION FROM HERE: TRAIL ISSUES, GOALS AND STRATEGIES

Introduction

A number of important issues emerged from the state trails plan and PEIS public scoping period, as well as from surveys and research. This chapter summarizes these issues, and recommends goals and strategies to address the goals. These are intended as recommendation to provide guidance for trail managing agencies and trail-related organizations. In conjunction with the PEIS, this plan will help guide FWP trail-related activities and programs, most importantly the Montana State Trails Program.

Many recommendations included here were initially derived from public comments received during the plan scoping period. A total of 315 written comments were received, and more than 400 people attended one of the 18 public scoping meetings held across Montana. The results of the written comments and meetings were tallied and combined (see Appendix for more details).

Following the scoping meetings, a “workbook” was compiled for review by the two advisory committees (composed of agency staff and user group representatives) which assisted in developing these recommendations. The workbook contained issues, goals, and strategies that were derived from the scoping sessions, with space for writing in comments and suggestions. The initial workbook was revised based on advisory committee comments, and released for public review in March 1996.

In analyzing the information from the scoping period, an effort was made to capture all the major issues and concerns which emerged. The top local and statewide issues from both the written comments and scoping meetings, as well as many of the other less often mentioned trail issues, are addressed below, and were also used

to help develop the issues identified for analysis in the PEIS.

The fifteen trail-related issues listed below were developed and consolidated from more than ninety issues identified during the scoping period.

- 1) Access
- 2) Urban Trails
- 3) Resource Protection
- 4) Trail Supply and System Configuration
- 5) Funding
- 6) Maintenance
- 7) Management and Enforcement
- 8) User Conflict and Compatibility
- 9) Safety and Liability
- 10) Communication, Coordination, Information, and Education
- 11) New Linear Corridor Alternatives
- 12) Alternative Transportation
- 13) Disabled Accessibility
- 14) Trailheads
- 15) Research, Planning, and Design

Goals and Strategies

The following section discusses long-range goals and strategies for addressing and resolving the fifteen major trail issues addressed in this plan. In some cases, similar strategies may appear under different issues, although an effort has been made to reduce redundancy. Implementing many of the following strategies will require increased funding and personnel, as well as redefining roles for the various agencies, interest groups, and individuals involved.

1) ISSUE. ACCESS

GOAL: *Improved access to public trails and lands.*

EXPLANATION: Access problems were the most frequently mentioned statewide issue at the Trail Plan scoping meetings. Often, the only access to public trails and other recreational resources is across private land. Unless there is a public road or trail easement, the public can legally be locked out. Not only are these de-facto accesses decreasing, the incidences of closure of historically established public accesses, generally by new landowners, is increasing. Improved cooperative management and planning between public agencies, non-profit organizations, trail users, and private landholders is necessary to improve access problems.

Generally, the decrease in public access is the result of land use and land ownership changes, as well as increased pressure and problems caused by increased use. Access difficulties may also occur when different public agencies don't cooperate effectively. Access problems sometimes result from irresponsible behavior on the part of recreational users, which provides a powerful incentive for private property owners to close access. In other cases access has been abandoned as the result of decreased budgets and personnel constraints by the BLM and USFS.

Tools to open accesses could include a mix of education, incentives, leases, purchases, alternative routes, land management plans, legal and policy changes, and other means. As informal access to public land across private land decreases, it is crucial to secure access to public land. Priorities should be on areas with increased use and /or decreasing access.

For more details on trail access, see the discussion in chapter IV.

STRATEGIES.

A) IDENTIFY, MAP, AND EVALUATE

ACCESS PROBLEMS: Managing agencies and user groups should identify, prioritize, and map trails which are currently (or likely to become) blocked because of land access problems. Depending on the situation, various alternatives should be identified and evaluated. Particular attention needs to be paid to lower elevation "front" country trails which often provide access to large areas of federally-managed backcountry, and to urban trails and greenways where critical linkages are threatened. Accesses that can be protected or restored without legal challenges or purchase should be emphasized in order to limit costs. Research is important in proving the existence of an historical public access through the RS 2477 federal statute, or in demonstrating that an easement by prescription has been created under state law.

B) INFORMATION ON ACCESS: Agency staff, trail user groups, private property owners, and other interests should work together to develop better information about access issues. The information should be compiled in one or more publications, or added to existing brochures (e.g., "Montana Access Guide to Federal and State Lands"). Potential areas to work on include the following:

- 1) Develop a pamphlet describing and defining various types of access, and the means for ensuring access rights, or restoring and increasing access where current access is inadequate. The notebook should recommend specific changes and improvements (e.g., legal, agency policies, plans, etc.) which should be pursued to improve access.
- 2) The leasing or purchase of easements should be encouraged by offering a range of incentives. Information should include general and agency-specific guidelines, as well as contact names and numbers.
- 3) Develop an information package for landowners and managers that discusses liability and other issues associated with permitting

access across their land. Many landowners and agency staff may have an inaccurate understanding of liability risk and other issues associated with access.

- 4) Develop better information for the public explaining their responsibilities when legally crossing private land to access a public trail. Landowners will be more receptive towards trail easements if litter, vandalism, and trespassing were less common. Focusing “adopt a trail” clean-up and maintenance efforts along stretches of trail where landowners have granted access may be one way of addressing litter and other problems. A group of local users who use a particular stretch of trail frequently can be effective in helping to monitor and look after the trail.
- 5) The potential for problems with private landowners can be reduced by clearly marking property boundaries.

C) ACCESS FUNDING AND COORDINATION: Agencies and user groups should work toward securing better funding and improved coordination for purchasing trail easements and rights-of ways (see funding section). Montana trail advocates may want to consider establishing a non-profit foundation specifically dedicated to resolving access issues and other trail-related problems. The resources of a larger, statewide organization or coalition would be especially helpful in dealing with major landowners on significant corridor issues, particularly in cases where local groups and/or governments are overwhelmed.

D) PUBLIC LAND CONSOLIDATION: Trail managers and users should work with appropriate staff in resource agencies to continue the process of consolidating small, isolated blocks of public land into more manageable units, where this is beneficial. It is important that trail interests be represented during land exchange negotiations with private landholders; maintenance of public access must be a primary consideration in evaluating all land exchanges. Where appropriate, trail easements might be attached to public land being traded to private landowners.

E) URBAN-RURAL CONNECTIONS: Local governments in Montana need to work closely with other managing agencies to ensure that local trail systems are connected with trails in more primitive settings on state and federal land. In some cases, non-profit land trusts may be able to provide assistance in securing recreational easements across private lands.

F) INTER-AGENCY COMMUNICATION: Trail managing agencies should consider writing a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to facilitate communication and cooperation on access issues. Managing agencies may want to consider establishing a central contact person for access issues.

G) LIMITING LIABILITY AND RISK: Agencies, user groups, and other interested parties should work cooperatively to support legislation and other means that clearly define and limit the liability of landowners along trails. Landowners need to know the extent to which liability is a risk for them. In some cases, temporary easements may be a way for landowners to test whether they are comfortable granting access on a more permanent basis.

H) TRAIL EASEMENTS: The provision of trail access across private land should be a consideration when private landowners are negotiating with public land managers over grazing or other types of leases. Trail access issues also need to be considered when conservation easements are being purchased primarily for other purposes (e.g., wildlife habitat). Local governments should consider (if they haven’t already) maintaining or creating access to public land as part of the dedication of park land (or the equivalent in money) required for subdivisions (MCA 1997).

I) INCENTIVES: Trail managers may be able to use various financial incentives to encourage landowners to grant easements. Agencies and non-profit organizations negotiating for conservation easements should consider including public access and trail easements and working with trail managing agencies and non-profit

organizations to include access and trails as part of the easement.

J) MAINTAINING EXISTING ACCESS:

Managers need to ensure that existing easements remain open to trail users, and be willing to take legal action in cases where landowners close them illegally. Conversely, more aggressive enforcement of trespass, vandalism, littering, and other violations may help maintain access across private property.

The determination of what constitutes a county road, public right-of-way, or prescriptive easement is a very fact-specific inquiry. This area of the law is very convoluted and there is no single rule, statute, or case that determines the issue one way or the other.

2) ISSUE. URBAN TRAILS

GOAL(S): *1) More local trails, greenways, and trail connections for recreation and transportation in, around, and between Montana's populated urban areas; 2) Develop urban trail linkages between residences, parks and other recreational facilities, schools, historic and cultural sites, open space, shopping areas, and other important community destinations.*

EXPLANATION: Montana is comparatively well-endowed with back-country trails, but suffers from a relative lack of trail opportunities closest to where most Montanans live—in cities and towns. In general, the need for new trails is greatest in and around urban areas. Trends in Montana and throughout the country (e.g., growing urbanization, less free time due to longer workweeks and both spouses working) have increased the importance of recreational opportunities close to where most people reside.

Some Montana cities are situated near large amounts of public land, but lack good trail access to the edge of town. A number of Montana cities are actively improving their trail network, and are providing outstanding models for other towns.

At the same time, however, many excellent urban trail opportunities are being lost due to development and other factors. Many informal trails used by urban residents are often private, and users may assume these are public routes until the land is posted, or bulldozers suddenly appear.

STRATEGIES.

A) OPEN SPACE, RECREATION, AND LAND USE PLANNING: Potential (summer and winter) trail corridors should be integrated with local and regional open space, recreation, and land use plans. Good open space planning is a key to providing an excellent urban trail system. Critical land inventories done at an early stage in the planning process are a valuable means for identifying key corridors and open space areas. Potential trail corridors should be identified and mapped as a part of local comprehensive plans, with enough specific details so that plans remain intact through shifting political tides.

Cities which currently don't have an open space, outdoor recreation, or trails plan (or lack the resources to produce one) may want to consider using University students in a landscape architecture, planning, geography or other relevant program to produce a plan as a class project.

B) URBAN TRANSPORTATION PLANNING: Since many urban trail system linkages include on-street segments, bicycle and pedestrian-friendly plans need to be more actively considered and incorporated into local street and roadway planning and design. Trails and bicycle and pedestrian friendly roads and streets need to become a more integral part of Montana's urban transportation planning. Utility corridor planning is another area that could be better integrated with trail needs. Good urban trail systems should be democratic; they should connect all parts of the city and provide non-motorized transportation opportunities for people of all income levels.

C) TRAIL INFORMATION FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS: Ensure that local governments have access to the tools and information they need to improve their trail systems. In

rapidly growing areas, local governments may need to act quickly to preserve rights-of-ways for future trails, and having access to good information will increase their chances of success. The Internet may be one vehicle for helping accomplish this. Information on easements, design, maintenance, volunteers, liability, takings, rails-to-trails, trail use trends, new technology, use of utility corridors, planning, and ways of working cooperatively with developers would enhance the ability of local governments to improve their trail systems.

Managing agencies and user groups need to work together to educate developers about the value of trails (e.g., how they can increase property values and the desirability of a location). The State Trails Conference and State Trails Newsletter are valuable forums for discussing new trends and developments in urban trails. Information programs at meetings of the Montana League of Cities and Towns, the Montana Association of Counties, and other organizations would be useful. Furthermore, local public works and planning departments, chambers of commerce, and politicians need to need to be brought in more closely to the statewide trail information network.

D) COOPERATION BETWEEN LOCAL AND FEDERAL GOVERNMENT: Improve working relationships between local governments and the federal agencies that manage large quantities of land surrounding many Montana cities. Better cooperation is needed to complete connecting trails between cities and the trail networks on surrounding public land. Securing routes through the lower elevation “front” country is particularly important, as these areas are developing rapidly around a number of Montana cities. Selected memorandums of understanding (MOUs) between federal trail managers and local governments on trail coordination might be place to start.

In some cases, establishing a regional trails organization or parks district may be worth considering. In the Missoula Area, for example, an organization called Feet First (under the auspices of the City of Missoula, Missoula

County, the University of Montana, the Lolo National Forest, and FWP) is coordinating trail efforts among various trail interests in the region. The groups are reinforced by the efforts of the others in funding applications, publicity, and information sharing. These groups—when allied—can create powerful forces to move trail projects forward. Similarly, establishing a parks district could be a useful way to coordinate and focus resources, possibly across political boundaries (e.g., a district which includes both a city and the county it is located in).

E) SETTING ASIDE OPEN SPACE AND TRAIL CORRIDORS: Requiring new residential, commercial, and industrial developments to set aside space for trails and open space is one mechanism that has been successful in various communities across the country. Ideally, public access corridors for trails should be part of the right-of-way dedication within subdivisions, similar to roads. Open space and trail needs should be a consideration when reviewing local planned unit development (PUD) applications.

F) SECURING TRAIL EASEMENTS: Secure public use easements across common area park lands dedicated to homeowners associations as part of the subdivision process. Commonly used public access through common areas can be legally restricted by homeowners at any time. The public walkway easement is a good means to achieve trail access, especially in circumstances where the open space in the subdivision is a common area not specifically dedicated for public use.

G) FUNDING FOR URBAN TRAILS: The greatest funding needs are for non-motorized urban trails, although there is also a demand for more motorized opportunities near Montana’s cities. A variety of funding mechanisms pertinent for urban areas are discussed elsewhere in the plan.

In cases where funding is not immediately available, being in a position to claim “first right of refusal” enables local governments or other organizations time to mobilize financial resources before a property is sold to another buyer.

3) ISSUE. RESOURCE PROTECTION

GOAL: *Reduced trail-related impacts on natural and cultural resources through avoidance and mitigation.*

EXPLANATION: Montana's trail network bisects some of the state's most spectacular natural resources, as well as providing access to important cultural features. In more remote areas, in particular, trails may be the only access to these resources; construction, maintenance, and use of trails can result in adverse impacts. Some of the resource concerns mentioned at the Trails Plan scoping meetings include the following: wildlife; noise and air quality; streams and fisheries; vegetation destruction; erosion; historical and archaeological features; and unauthorized trails built by trail users.

In certain areas, the sheer number of users—however well-intentioned—may be creating adverse impacts, not only to trails, but sensitive areas around them such as high altitude lake shores. In some areas, these “secondary” impacts resulting from trail use may be more significant than impacts, which occur, when people are actually on the trail. (One example of a secondary impact would be wildlife impacts resulting from a new trail, which provides access to a previously inaccessible hunting area.) Trail-related environmental impacts can never be entirely eliminated, but elimination of severe damage and abuse should be a priority.

Historical and cultural resource issues are often overlooked in respect to trail use. Trails can function as a valuable management tool in areas with important historical and cultural resources; they can help route people through an area in a way that has the least impact on resources (the same principle holds for natural resources). It is worth noting that many of the trails included in the current state trail system are more than fifty years old and could themselves be considered historic trails, although most have not been researched or evaluated in a preservation framework.

STRATEGIES.

A) NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCE IMPACT ANALYSIS: Public input during the Trails Plan scoping process emphasized the importance of examining environmental impacts early in the planning process, and involving the public while doing so. Various state and federal laws (e.g., the National Environmental Policy Act) typically require that agencies do this routinely. Agency staff should work to ensure they are complying with both the letter and spirit of these requirements. Because secondary impacts are often major trail-related impacts, it is important that they be considered during the environmental review of trail projects. A detailed analysis of the environmental impacts associated with two of FWP's trail grant programs are found in the Trails Program PEIS, which was done in conjunction with this plan. The PEIS discusses a number of changes to the programs to reduce their resource impacts.

B) NOXIOUS WEED MANAGEMENT: Noxious weeds are an increasingly serious trail-related issue. Exotic weed species have become especially troubling for native vegetation, wildlife, and agriculture. Weed infestations at trailheads provide a reservoir of seeds that can be transported into the backcountry while soil and vegetation disturbances associated with trails provide opportunities for weed establishment. Managing agency staff should work cooperatively, and involve volunteers, user groups, schools, 4-H groups, conservation districts, agricultural industry to effectively address this issue. A noxious weed plan was included as part of the Trails Program PEIS, and grant applicants are required to consider how their proposed project will affect the spread of weeds. Weed issues will be important determining factors in assessing proposed projects.

C) ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION: Education has a major role to play in addressing many environmental issues associated with trail use (e.g. Tread Lightly and Leave No Trace programs). Cooperation between managing agencies—and between agencies and educational institutions—is essential to improving and

coordinating environmental-related education efforts. There may be potential for integrating discussion about trails and other recreational resource issues into pre-existing environmental education curriculums.

D) IMPROVED ENFORCEMENT: A theme which emerged from public comments was that enforcement of trail regulations needs to be improved, in part to reduce environmental impacts. Illegal uses on existing trails, illicit off-trail use, and construction of unauthorized trails are examples of problems where improved enforcement has the potential to reduce environmental impacts. While tight agency budgets preclude hiring large numbers of new enforcement personnel, trail-managing agencies should jointly consider and discuss additional ways of improving enforcement (see discussion in management/enforcement section).

E) TRAIL DESIGN AND LOCATION: Proper design and location of trails can play a major role in reducing environmental impacts such as erosion. Inter-agency communication and mutual sharing of information is an important means for assuring that good design and locational information gets to the agency personnel and volunteers who need it. More widespread use of inter-agency design and monitoring standards might also be helpful. Development of standards with a range of improvement levels can be an effective discussion tool in cases where there may be conflicts between resources and trails. Reliance on non-agency experts can help agency staff in many ways—finding the best route for a new trail, avoiding critical natural and cultural resources, etc. Designing and locating trails in a way that avoids impacts should be the first priority. In general, negative effects can be reduced by building new trails in areas where there are already human impacts on the landscape.

From this perspective, trails can be an important tool for managing recreational use, helping focus human activity in areas where resource damage can be minimized. Properly designed and located trails can keep people (and their pets) away from sensitive resources, while allowing them to pass through the area without fragmenting habitat.

Directing human activity to well-located trails can help reduce disturbances to wildlife because human encounters become much more predictable—they are largely confined to routes where animals expect them to occur. Of course, there are some areas which are so sensitive that *no* recreational activity should occur, on trails or otherwise.

F) PRESERVING TRAIL VIEWSHEDS: Working together, agencies and non-profit organizations should utilize creative tools such as conservation easements to help protect resources on private land adjacent to trail corridors. Preserving key trail viewsheds can also help promote important resource conservation goals.

G) EDUCATING VOLUNTEERS ABOUT RESOURCE PROTECTION: Regular maintenance is an important factor in minimizing the environmental impacts of trails. Because of tight agency budgets, volunteers will likely need to be tapped for an increasingly important contribution to trail maintenance in Montana. To be effective, volunteers must be familiar with techniques that protect trail integrity and reduce environmental impacts. A period of intensive, well-designed field training with agency trail staff would be useful. For agencies that do not have them, a volunteer trail maintenance and construction manual and/or video would be helpful; there may be value in assembling an inter-agency manual to reduce duplication of effort.

H) MONITORING RESOURCE IMPACTS: Agencies should carefully monitor trail-related environmental impacts. Various procedures have been developed to categorize different resource areas, establish baseline standards, and monitor for changes over time (e.g., Recreation Opportunity Spectrum, Limits of Acceptable Change, etc.). Soil loss, vegetation damage, and other environmental (and social) factors can be monitored and managed using these techniques. In areas where resource impacts are significant, management changes may need to be implemented. Trail segments requiring frequent maintenance and producing unacceptable levels of environmental damage should be redesigned,

relocated, or closed. Seasonal restrictions and other types of temporal management may also reduce natural resource impacts.

One area of growing concern is the impact of increasing ATV use during hunting season, both in terms of wildlife impacts as well as affects on the hunting experience. This is an issue that has rapidly become a significant one, and needs to be closely monitored by resource management agencies.

As just one example, excessive motorized access can have a negative impact on elk security, making them much more vulnerable to hunting pressure. The 1992 FWP *Elk Management Plan* states the following:

...DFWP will promote maintenance of key unroaded areas that provide important elk security and offer backcountry or roadless recreation. Where elk security has already been reduced, FWP will...coordinate with land managers to regulate distribution of hunting pressure through use of road closures or other motorized vehicle restrictions (FWP 1992).

I) COOPERATE TO REDUCE MOTORIZED

IMPACTS: Agencies should work with motorized user groups to help reduce impacts from both legal and illegal motorized trail use, including ensuring that regulation mufflers and spark arresters are used. Agencies, user groups, and industry representatives in Montana and from throughout the country need to continue working on reducing motorized sound and air pollution impacts.

Currently, the Forest Service and BLM are evaluating cross-country OHV travel in Montana, North Dakota, and portions of South Dakota (U.S. DOI/DOA 1999b). Because of significant increases in the number of OHVs as well as improvements in their performance, many areas which previously had little or no motorized traffic are being impacted. It is important from a resource protection standpoint—as well as from the perspective of managing conflicting uses—that cross-country motorized use be more strictly controlled than it has in the past.

J) PROTECTING SIGNIFICANT NATURAL

RESOURCES: The integrity of significant natural resource areas must be protected from illegal and improper trail use, and other types of environmental damage. Areas of concern include impacts on designated wilderness areas; wilderness study areas and other backcountry lands; water quality; and habitat for threatened, endangered, or sensitive plant and animal species. During the past fifty years, there has been a substantial decline in the number of areas where Montana trail users can have a backcountry experience; backcountry opportunities for all trail users need to be preserved, since these experiences are an important part of what makes Montana a special place to live and visit. Agencies need to actively enforce existing regulations pertaining to federal Wilderness Study Areas and other areas with restrictions. Good education efforts are necessary to improve self-policing by trail users in these and other areas.

K) PROTECTING HISTORICAL TRAILS:

Although historical trails are for the most part indiscernible on the modern landscape, the trail corridors in many cases remain relatively undeveloped, preserving natural landscape features linking the past. A number of historical trails have already been designated as part of the National Trail System or received attention at a local level, while for other trails important cultural and physical landscape features remain that could be the focus of historical interpretation and education activities.

L) ADOPT A LANDSCAPE APPROACH TO

PROJECT EVALUATION: Trail projects should not be planned and designed in site-specific terms, in isolation from their surrounding environment. A landscape context is necessary to accurately identify potentially affected natural and cultural resources within the “zone of influence” of the project, as determined by the uses and users that it accommodates. In addition, a landscape view fosters consideration of all land uses and recreational activities occurring simultaneously within a geographic area, as well as the synergistic relationships among them. Thus, a landscape approach to project planning and evaluation is key to ensuring that proposed

projects are compatible with natural and cultural resource values, and that they will not result in inadvertent conflicts among recreational uses and users.

4) ISSUE. TRAIL SUPPLY AND SYSTEM CONFIGURATION

GOAL: *A diverse trail system, for a wide variety of uses, in all parts of Montana.*

EXPLANATION: In some locations, and for some user groups, the demand for trails and trail-related facilities exceeds the supply. Motorized users, on the one hand, are concerned about a continuing loss of opportunities due to conflicts and environmental concerns. Conversely, some non-motorized users believe they are losing opportunities because motorized use is making areas they have traditionally used less desirable. During the scoping process, the public identified a particular need for more and/or improved urban trails, urban-rural connections, rail trails, greenways, interpretive trails, loop trails, long-distance trails, trail system linkages, and trails connected to a variety of recreational opportunities.

Montana has long had a large and impressive backcountry trail system, with an improving network of urban trails. Due to budget constraints and the large size of the existing system, a substantial increase in the amount of backcountry trail mileage in the near future is unlikely. In fact, Montana’s backcountry trail mileage has been declining for decades and, if current budget trends continue, it will be increasingly difficult to maintain the current system. With a growing number of residents and tourists, many of whom participate in trail-based recreation, maintaining the current base—as well as opening strategically located new trails and linkages—will be important to help disperse use and minimize crowding and conflicts. A key aim of the Montana State Trails Plan is maintaining and improving opportunities for all types of trail uses. This is not to say that Montana’s trail system can or should be expanded indefinitely; maintenance capabilities and environmental

factors place constraints on how many new trails should be built. Ultimately, the system must be economically and environmentally sustainable.

The usefulness of Montana’s trail system is sometimes limited by trails that don’t offer an alternative return route and/or provide access to a larger network of trails. Loops and connecting trails are an excellent means for maximizing the effectiveness of Montana’s existing trail system.

Managing agencies must continue to work with user groups to improve long-distance trails in Montana, as these opportunities are something which many other states can not offer. Designated historical routes such as the Lewis and Clark Trail also offer the potential for longer opportunities with an interpretive theme.

STRATEGIES.

A) NEED FOR URBAN TRAILS: As discussed under the “urban trails” issue, trail users and managers need to collectively work to improve the network of trails closest to where most Montanans live—in cities and towns, where only about 1 percent of Montana’s trails are currently located. Managers and trail advocates need to be involved early in all plans for new roadways, developments, and utility corridors which might provide trail potential. Non-motorized trails in urban areas are the greatest need, although there is a demand for more motorized opportunities near cities as well.

B) THE MAINTENANCE CHALLENGE: New trails should not be considered unless there are solid plans and funding for long-term maintenance. If present federal budget trends continue, simply maintaining the network of trails already in place will be a tremendous challenge for both agencies and user groups, aside from additions to the system.

C) IDENTIFYING KEY LINKS IN THE SYSTEM: Trail managing agencies, local governments, and user groups should utilize state-wide trail mapping as a tool to identify and assess potential connections and circuits which would significantly improve the overall trail

network. Based on user interest, it might be worth investigating the possibility of establishing a statewide, long-distance “backbone” trail system to ensure that key segments are identified and appropriate links and connections are made, especially to major routes such as the Continental Divide Trail. Perhaps a “10 most wanted list” could be developed annually to highlight top priority urban and rural segments in need of completion. Montana’s trail system should include an extensive series of networks in all parts of the state, well-connected to urban centers, and linked as appropriate by long-distance trails.

D) MAKING CONNECTIONS ACROSS

BOUNDARIES: Montana trail-managing agencies should work closely with each other (and their counterparts in neighboring states) to ensure that logical connections between trail systems are made across agency and/or state boundaries. A statewide, inter-agency working group could be one vehicle for helping coordinate this. In some cases, important trails which cross regional, agency, or state boundaries may require special kinds of information (e.g., a single map that has the entire trail system on it, even though it may be on land managed by several entities).

E) USING OTHER CORRIDORS TO COMPLETE CONNECTIONS:

In cooperation with the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) and other transportation authorities, local governments should strive to complete appropriate connections between various local trail systems. In some cases, wide roadway shoulders, utility corridors, or other alternatives might be used to provide trail system linkages which might not otherwise be possible. One key to doing this successfully is ensuring that there is opportunity for early input on all state, county, and city roadway and other public works projects.

F) PRESERVING PRIMITIVE OPPORTU-

NITIES: Many backcountry paths are tough to find, poorly signed, and difficult to follow, but they provide primitive opportunities for hikers willing to seek them out. In general, these opportunities occur on animal routes,

unmaintained and/or undesignated trails, or off-trail entirely. Because of liability and other factors, agencies should strive to provide adequate signing and information for system trails. However, managers need to remember the value of retaining a diversity of primitive and unpublicized routes for hikers who prefer them. For those so inclined, there need to be opportunities to discover things on their own.

A related issue is the long-term loss of backcountry trails in Montana. Remaining backcountry trails are an essential component of Montana’s heritage, and it is vitally important that these valuable resources are preserved, along with the aesthetic and biological integrity of the landscapes which surrounds them.

G) LOOP TRAILS: Managing agencies should consider adding loops to trails whenever possible (and environmentally acceptable). Loops provide an alternative route back for trail users and help disperse use. The availability of an alternate route also provides agencies with a greater range of options for managing conflicting uses. However, the addition of a loop route in a wild setting needs to be analyzed in the context of the surrounding landscape, as loops can increase trail density and fragment habitat.

H) OHV ROAD CONNECTIONS: Motorized trail users riding vehicles which are not registered for road use sometimes have difficulty legally completing loops which may include a primitive road. Managing agencies should continue to investigate whether certain segments of lightly traveled roads might be opened to OHVs trying to make a connecting link. A related issue is the need for OHVs to travel short distances on roads from campgrounds to reach trails opened to motorized use. While progress has been made on this issue, managing agencies should examine whether additional changes would be helpful in addressing OHV road use issues. In general, more effective utilization of primitive public roads for OHV use may help to take some of the pressure off trails, reducing conflicts with non-motorized users.

D) STATE SCHOOL TRUST, TRIBAL AND PRIVATE LANDS: Trail managing agencies and user groups should work together to better utilize State School Trust lands for trail access and trail uses. Legislation may be required to more fully incorporate recreational values into the mission of the School Trust Lands. Managing agencies need to also work closely with tribal governments on trail issues. Additionally, agencies need to work closely with private providers of trails. While a very small percentage of the overall trail system, privately owned and operated trails need to be considered as part of Montana's overall recreation picture. Private trails are especially important for providing groomed cross-country ski opportunities.

J) TRAILS IN EASTERN MONTANA: More attention needs to be focused on providing additional trails in eastern Montana, to offer more opportunities in this region for residents and visitors, and help disperse use from more heavily-used western areas of the state. Because USFS land is more limited in eastern Montana, the BLM, FWP, and local governments will likely have proportionately larger roles to play than in the western portion of the state. Additional trail opportunities may be available on land managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (e.g., C.M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge). In part because of Travel Montana's focus on increasing tourism in the eastern portion of the state, there may be opportunities for managing agencies to work closely with tourism organizations and chamber of commerce officials. In addition to eastern Montana, agency officials need to focus on other regional gaps in trail coverage, across the whole spectrum of trail uses.

K) CROSS-COUNTRY SKI TRAIL SYSTEM: Federal, state, and local officials should work with winter trail groups to improve funding for cross-country ski trails and grooming. Currently, cross-country skiers lack a funding mechanism (e.g., park and ski fee) to enhance opportunities commensurate with what snowmobilers have done (e.g., they helped establish allocated fuel tax and registration receipts for trail program improvements). When

work is done maintaining or developing summer use trails, consideration should be given to potential winter ski use.

L) LONG-DISTANCE TRAILS: Agencies should continue to work with user groups to ensure that Montana has one of the best long-distance backcountry trail systems in the country, a well-balanced network which provides opportunities for all types of users. The opportunity to take long-distance trips through wild country is one of the attributes that make Montana's trail system special.

S) ISSUE: FUNDING

GOAL: *Improved trail-related funding at all levels of government; the demand for enhanced non-motorized funding is especially great.*

EXPLANATION: There is insufficient funding for developing and maintaining trails in Montana. FWP's State Trails Program currently has OHV and snowmobile grant programs, funded through registration decal fees and a percentage of gas tax receipts. Another trails funding source is the Recreational Trails Program (RTP), which provides funding for both motorized and non-motorized trails.

Montana is also the recipient of federal Transportation Enhancement dollars available through TEA 21, which can be used to fund trails related to transportation. In addition to the above, trail managing agencies at the federal and local levels also have their own internal funding sources for trails.

Currently, the biggest funding need is for non-motorized trails in Montana, especially those not eligible to receive Transportation Enhancement funding. Unlike motorized users, non-motorized users lack a state-generated funding source (RTP funds come from the federal government). The majority of Montana's non-motorized trails are managed by the USFS and National Park Service (NPS), agencies that have greater trail-related demands than they can meet with their own budgets. Trail users and the groups they belong

to need to take an aggressive role in working to see that trails are adequately funded at all levels of government.

It is worth noting that, although trail funding is currently insufficient, the demand for new trails in Montana is not infinite, and that the capacity of the land to support them in a sustainable manner has limits. Montana's backcountry trail system is now largely in place, and most funding needs in these areas are related to maintenance, rather than the construction of new facilities.

STRATEGIES.

A) INVESTIGATE POTENTIAL NEW FUNDING SOURCES: Montana trail groups and managers should continue to work on maintaining and improving existing funding sources as well as developing new and creative ways to improve funding, particularly for non-motorized trails. Possible local and statewide options to debate and consider could include a mix of the following (these are listed as ideas only, not formal proposals):

- 1) Develop a trails income tax checkoff, where taxpayers could elect to donate income specifically for trail-related work.
- 2) Implement a bicycle registration/license fee, a portion of which would be dedicated to bike trail construction and maintenance.
- 3) Establish a general user fee program such as a statewide trail user license, the proceeds of which would be available for trail-related work.
- 4) Establish a Montana Park and Ski program to help fund cross-country ski trails. Another option would be a statewide cross-country ski pass, the proceeds from which would be used to develop and maintain ski trails.
- 5) Support adequate funding of the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), which traditionally has funded a wide range of local and state recreation projects, as well

as federal land purchases. The federal Conservation and Reinvestment Act (CARA) of 2000—which included an LWCF component—failed to pass, but may resurface again in Congress. This legislation would provide enormous benefits for trails and many other types of outdoor recreation.

- 6) Work to ensure that TEA 21 Enhancement funding continues to be reauthorized by Congress, and that the federal RTP receives adequate funding.
- 7) Work to organize lobbying efforts for improving Federal agency trail budgets. The health of the Forest Service trail budget, in particular, is critical to the overall health of Montana's trail system. Maintaining the USFS trail budget as a separate line item (rather than being combined with other types of activities) makes it easier to track the amount of funding actually flowing into trail work.
- 8) Establish an inter-agency network of vandal-resistant donation collection boxes at heavily used trailheads. Funding should go directly to the agency's trail program, or inter-agency trails funding source.
- 9) Develop special public funding and marketing campaigns for work on selected, high profile trails. Local user groups could combine marketing and fund-raising efforts by selling trail-related t-shirts, coffee mugs, postcards, and other items.
- 10) Establish a state trails trust fund as a conduit for estate, corporate, and private donations for trails projects throughout the state. In conjunction with the trust fund, it would be useful to investigate the establishment of a statewide non-profit foundation dedicated to the advocacy of trails and possibly other related outdoor recreation issues.
- 11) Work to implement subdivision parkland dedications (or dollars in-lieu-of parkland) for trails. Another option used in a growing number of communities is the establishment of development impact fees, where new developments pay in advance for impacts

new residents will have on local services and infrastructure. A portion of this fee could be used for trails and other recreational facilities. Local governments should develop a list of prioritized needs, so that when developers request subdivision review, the best use of trail-related land donations or dollars can be determined in a methodical way.

- 12) Develop a statewide campaign to solicit donations for trail construction and maintenance. Private sector donations could be targeted for certain key, high-profile trail projects. Donations could be in the form of either money or materials.
- 13) Produce user-friendly information for local governments about various options for funding trails.
- 14) Local trail organizations should investigate the possibility of getting a trails/open space funding initiative on the ballot. The chance of voters approving a trails/open space initiative is likely to be enhanced if the proposal is framed broadly (e.g., everything from baseball fields to nature preserves could be eligible for open space funding), and supported by a diversity of interest groups. Passage also tends to be enhanced by having a specific, high profile trail corridor or land parcel to help focus interest and generate support. This was the approach taken in Missoula (and later in Helena), which passed an open space bond initiative in the 1990s. Missoula's initiative allows for both trail acquisition and development costs. This was designed to address situations where land might be available, but funding for trail development is not. The bond money can be an important vehicle for matching federal funding sources that require matching funds.
- 15) Some states utilize a portion of lottery funding for trails and other resource-related projects. Trail users might explore the potential of utilizing a portion of this funding source.

- 16) Work with equestrian groups to explore the viability of a trails-related tax on horse trailers, which could vary according to the size of the trailer.
- 17) Work towards establishing a statewide trails/recreation funding source through legislation or the initiative process.
- 18) Work closely with land trusts to explore ways that local trail needs can be integrated with other land protection objectives these organizations may have in a particular area.
- 19) In urban areas, funding generated through tax-increment finance districts could be a source of funding for trails and other amenities.
- 20) Cooperate with local government officials in investigating the potential of developing tax incentives for developers to preserve trail right-of-ways and other types of open space in their projects.
- 21) Continue and possibly expand the federal Fee Demonstration Project; ensure that some of the funding gets used for trail projects.

The STAC and other organizations and agencies should work together to keep trail constituents informed about the need to improve funding and possible opportunities for doing so. Unless trail users are effective in making their voices heard in the political process, chances for increased trail-related funding are poor. Hikers, in particular, are currently not well organized in Montana, although various conservation and environmental groups represent some of their interests. The Montana State Trails Newsletter and State Trails Conference are two vehicles that might be used to discuss various funding options.

B) VOLUNTEERS: As discussed under the maintenance section, the strategic use of volunteers can partially compensate for funding shortfalls for both construction and maintenance in some situations (e.g., adopt-a-trail programs). Volunteers can also provide valuable assistance with fund raising.

C) GRANT APPLICATION PROCEDURES:

Agencies responsible for distributing trail grants should periodically review their application procedures to make sure the information and processes are as simple and easy to understand as possible. Grant programs are of little value if many potential applicants lack the resources to complete the applications. As part of the Trails PEIS process, FWP revised the grant application processes for the OHV and RTP programs.

FWP Trails Program staff—in cooperation with the STAC—should continue to monitor RTP expenditures and application criteria to ensure they are adequately addressing Montana's greatest trail needs. Currently, the highest priorities in the state are non-motorized urban trails, followed by non-motorized rural trails.

D) PUBLIC INFORMATION ABOUT FUNDING:

Trail managing agencies need to work harder to inform their constituents about where trail funding comes from and how it is used. A basic problem throughout many areas of government is that citizens do not see a clear connection between funding they supply through taxes and other sources, and results on the ground. It is important that managing agencies effectively communicate to trail users and groups how trail funding is spent and the rationale for doing so. Budget trends are another piece of information which agencies need to share with users and groups.

6) ISSUE. MAINTENANCE

GOAL: *A Montana trail system that is maintained in a safe, attractive, and environmentally sound manner, with no net loss of mileage due to lack of maintenance or other causes. Maintenance levels should be appropriate to the amount and type of use the site receives, and reflect the type of experience trail users desire.*

EXPLANATION: Government funding to maintain the current network of trails is not sufficient. In Montana's National Forests, for example, one result of inadequate budgets has been the loss and abandonment of many trails,

and an accumulation of a multi-million dollar backlog of needed rehabilitation work on existing trails. Because it is doubtful that traditional sources of maintenance funding can be significantly increased at any level of government—or even maintained at current levels, in some cases—the long-term viability of Montana's trail system depends upon finding alternative solutions to trail maintenance problems. In the immediate future, maintaining the current Montana trail system will be one of the biggest challenges facing users and managing agencies.

In this context, maintenance is repair of existing trails to accommodate current use patterns, (and reduce impacts to soil, vegetation, and water resources), and does not include changing trails to accommodate different types of users, including the widening of trails.

STRATEGIES.

A) EFFECTIVE USE OF VOLUNTEERS:

Use volunteers more effectively in maintenance activities. Suggested ways to accomplish this are as follows:

- 1) Compile and distribute a booklet that lists organizations with an interest in trail-related volunteer work.
- 2) Promote, publicize, and reward volunteerism more actively. An inter-agency newsletter, or regular column in the existing State Trails Newsletter on volunteerism, are two ways to publicize successful volunteer projects and generate more interest in volunteering. Agency trails staff should track which groups do the most work, and recognize and reward them annually. A television promotional piece by the Governor praising trail volunteers and explaining their value might be worth pursuing; there is also an annual Governor's Conference on Community Service and Volunteerism which agencies and trail groups might want to actively participate in. An occasional article on volunteer trail projects in Montana Outdoors magazine and

other publications would be useful, possibly timed to coordinate with National Trails Day. In addition, more programs on volunteerism at the State Trails Conference would be helpful, along with an award program for outstanding volunteers.

- 3) Produce educational material that includes information on the status of federal trail maintenance budgets, and how volunteers can work to partially offset shortfalls.
- 4) Work to ensure that all trail-managing agencies have staff who are knowledgeable about volunteer issues, and have the leadership skills to effectively manage volunteers. Consider joint funding for an inter-agency volunteer coordinator position, which would promote volunteer trail activities throughout the state, and at all levels of government. A non-profit organization established to coordinate volunteer efforts between the agencies and user groups might be another option. Periodic training workshops for volunteer coordinators would be useful; agencies might want to jointly develop a standardized training curriculum and reference material package, and award a certificate of completion for agency staff and others who complete the course. The STAC may be able to help initiate some of the statewide volunteer activities. A concise booklet about how to use volunteers effectively could help local governments, in particular, tap into this resource.
- 5) Identify user groups who are not actively participating in volunteer trail maintenance and target them for information material. It is important that all major trail user groups participate actively in volunteer programs. Programs which use integrated teams of various types of trail users are good vehicles for establishing a sense of commonality among recreationists with different interests.
- 6) Promote “adopt-a-trail” programs more widely. Under this approach, an individual or group assume responsibility for specific maintenance tasks along a particular trail segment. Adopt-a-highway programs have

been very successful in many states; this concept has the potential to be more widely used for trails. Corporate sponsorships of adopt-a-trail activities could be promoted more widely. There are many companies and non-profit organizations who have employee groups involved in adopt-a-highway programs; there is potential for doing more of this with trails.

It is important that adopt-a-trail programs be established for trails located on easements crossing private property. Trail maintenance is often part of the trail easement agreement, and maintaining good relations with land-owners is critical to the future success of trail easements.

- 7) Address insurance and liability issues involving volunteer maintenance activities.
- 8) Organized groups dedicated to maintaining and improving a particular trail or trail systems are encouraged. In addition, organizations aimed at assisting with trails in a particular management area (e.g., the Bob Marshall Foundation) can provide key assistance to managers.

B) MAINTENANCE FUNDING: The Montana State Trails Advisory Committee (STAC), along with the State Trails Coordinator, should continue to act as catalysts to push for and explore innovative and improved maintenance funding sources at the federal, state, and local levels. Trail users need to be regularly informed about funding shortfalls, potential new funding sources, and ways to become involved in the effort to maintain and improve trails funding.

C) INFORMATION ON DESIGN AND MAINTENANCE: Because trail design can have a powerful impact on future maintenance, all trail managing agencies should have access to good maintenance resources (e.g. an inter-agency maintenance standards manual, a bibliography of publications on trail design, etc.). A collection of videos on trail construction and maintenance would be helpful too, particularly for briefing volunteers on proper maintenance techniques,

trail location guidelines, and other topics. Agencies may want to work together to produce videos which fill information gaps in their programs. A well-designed trail may cost more initially, but could save many thousands of dollars in long-term maintenance and liability costs. A poorly designed or located trail, on the other hand, may eventually need to be relocated because of environmental damage and high maintenance costs. Good information about urban trail design and maintenance is especially important because of the complexity of routing and maintaining trails in heavily populated areas.

Information material on proper trail maintenance procedures (e.g., in brochures and on maps) for users could be worthwhile. Many hikers will spend some time cleaning up their camp or clearing debris from a trail; this behavior should be encouraged, and education material could help ensure that it is done properly.

D) AVOIDING/MINIMIZING IMPACTS TO TRAILS: Each trail managing agency should ensure that work along or around trails (e.g., timber harvesting, road building and repair, etc.) does not result in long-term damage or loss of a trail or its immediate surroundings, without replacement. Repair and enhancement of trails to specified standards should be stipulated as part of all relevant permits, when damage is unavoidable.

E) VANDALISM: Agencies should try to repair vandalized signs and other trail facilities promptly, as a deterrent to additional vandalism. Depending on the location of the facility, resistance to vandalism should be an important criterion when selecting materials for interpretive signs and other trail-related amenities.

It is a good practice to consult user groups when replacing signs, or installing new ones. In addition to providing a potential pool of volunteer labor, users may have valuable ideas about placement, wording, and other sign-related issues.

F) PRIORITIZING MAINTENANCE

NEEDS: Current federal budget trends are making it increasingly difficult to meet maintenance needs for many of Montana's trails. Consequently, it is essential that managing agencies have clear priorities for the limited maintenance funds that are available. Having prioritized maintenance needs available will help agencies tap into volunteer efforts, particularly if they arise on short notice.

G) MAINTENANCE STANDARDS: Within the broad context of the Montana trail system, there is room for a range of different maintenance standards; all trails do not need to be maintained to the high standards which may be appropriate for heavily used trails. Agencies should make sure that designated trails they have been unable to maintain are appropriately signed at the trailhead, so users have some sense of what to expect. New facilities should not be built where there is no ability to maintain them.

H) CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES: Explore contracts with corrections facilities, juvenile offender programs, and courts to perform trail maintenance activities as part of community service. Convicted vandals should be required to spend a certain number of hours maintaining and repairing the types of facilities they damaged.

I) THE MONTANA CONSERVATION

CORPS (MCC): The MCC is a resource managers can use for both trail maintenance and construction activities. In addition to taking on projects themselves, the MCC can help provide leadership to volunteer efforts. In some cases, for example, the MCC can be used as classroom resources when schools are involved in various kinds of trail projects. The MCC has also provided supervision for juvenile offenders on projects.

J) MAINTENANCE DISTRICTS: Another strategy for improving maintenance would be the establishment of a park, open space, and trails maintenance district. Within the district, maintenance responsibilities for particular segments of trail would be assigned to various parties, with

overall coordination assumed by a government agency or other party. For some commercial, industrial or residential properties within the district, a condition of development could be agreeing to cover maintenance of trails passing through their property.

7) ISSUE: MANAGEMENT AND ENFORCEMENT

GOAL(S): *1) Trail management processes that consider all important issues, actively involve the public throughout the process, and entertain a range of management alternatives; 2) Improved enforcement of trail regulations, and a reduced need for enforcement by improving the behavior of all trail users.*

EXPLANATION: Results from the Plan scoping process demonstrated that a portion of the trail-using public is dissatisfied with the way trails are sometimes managed. Some people, for example, feel that there should be more trail restrictions for various kinds of uses. Others feel there are too many restrictions on trail use, that the processes used to determine restrictions aren't fair or based on accurate information, or that restrictions—if they are implemented—should pertain to all users.

Opinions differ among trail users, trail and resource managing agencies, and other concerned individuals and groups on trail restrictions and related regulations. As the demand for trails and associated resources continues to increase, so will the debate over regulations. The role of commercial activities on public trails will also become a more important issue.

From the perspective of managing agencies, restrictions must remain an option, and sometimes may be necessary to comply with legal mandates. Restrictions on various types of trail use may be prompted by a number of factors, including preventing or minimizing resource damage, preserving trail settings, reducing user conflicts, maintaining safety, and other reasons.

Many trail users feel that there is not sufficient enforcement of existing trail-related rules and regulations (e.g., motorized and mechanized use in wilderness areas, trespassing, etc.). Improved enforcement of existing laws would likely make a major contribution to reducing conflicts between trail users on both urban and backcountry trails.

As with many other trail issues, limited budgets make it impossible that the full burden of enforcement improvements can fall on agencies alone. If trail users want to see improvements in the way trail regulations are enforced, they must be willing to work closely with managers in reporting violations and problem areas.

STRATEGIES.

A) CONSIDER ALL REASONABLE OPTIONS: Ensure that agency planning processes thoroughly consider all reasonable alternative management options before restricting particular uses.

B) INVOLVE PUBLIC IN DECISION-MAKING: Ensure that the public is involved in travel management discussions. Interested parties of all types should be notified as early as possible about what the issues are, what the decision-making process will be, and what their opportunities are for participating in the process. Agencies, trail users, and organizations need to work cooperatively to ensure that trail restrictions and other regulations adequately reflect the opinions of trail users, to provide the best possible trail experience for users while protecting natural resources.

C) PROVIDE INFORMATION ABOUT RESTRICTIONS: Provide better information and notification about restrictions after they occur. The rationale behind management changes should be clear, supportable, and available to the public. Signs should be posted at trailheads after a restriction occurs explaining the reasons the agency took the action. A phone number and address should also be posted so trail users know

whom to contact if they have questions or want more information. Agencies should also make it clear both through the information they provide and their actions that they intend to enforce restrictions once they are imposed.

D) CONSIDER ALTERNATIVE OPPORTUNITIES: When trail use is restricted, managing agencies should try to ensure that alternative opportunities are available in appropriate areas if there is sufficient, documented demand for that type of activity. Impacts of restrictions need to be monitored to see if they are working.

E) CONSISTENT DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES: Trail managers should work together to ensure that processes used to implement restrictions are as consistent as possible between regions and across agencies.

F) PREVENTION THROUGH EDUCATION: The best way to address a potential enforcement problem is to prevent it from occurring. Improved education materials and information about trail use will reduce the potential for honest mistakes. Better information will also decrease instances where users will mistakenly believe a violation has occurred.

G) VIOLATION REPORTING PROCEDURES: When violations do occur, they are much more likely to be observed by trail users than agency staff. Users need good information on proper procedures for observing and reporting a violation; sheriff and agency phone numbers, as well as comment/reporting boxes at trailheads would help address this. Better reporting will increase the likelihood the information will be helpful to investigative authorities, and reduce the chances of direct conflict between users over perceived violations. Agencies should consider establishing an 800 number for reporting trail-related violations, similar to FWP's TIPMONT number. A reward for the person who reported a convicted violator would increase the incentive. This type of program could be self-supporting if the reward money was drawn from a certain percentage of the fine.

H) EXAMINE CURRENT PENALTIES: Some support exists for increased penalties for trail violations, particularly for repeat offenders. Fine schedules for trail violations should be examined to see if they are providing a sufficient disincentive for violators. Revocation of relevant permits, licenses, and stickers as part of the punishment could function as an additional disincentive for repeat violations.

I) NOISE, AIR, AND SPARK ARRESTOR CHECKS: There appears to be a need for more aggressive checking of spark arresters, and potential noise and air quality violations. Noise issues associated with motor vehicle trail use are significant in some areas. One way of ensuring compliance would be to require an inspection before stickers are issued. Random checks at trailheads are another tool that could increase compliance.

J) REDUCING ILLEGAL TRAIL USE/ CONSTRUCTION: Illegal trail use in off-limit areas (e.g., motor vehicles or mountain bikes in wilderness areas) was an issue frequently mentioned by trail users during the Plan scoping period. Managing agencies should encourage trail users to submit the license plate numbers of violators (or other identification) to authorities. Illegal off-trail use and construction of new trails is also an issue that needs greater enforcement attention. Agency staff need to work with club members to educate them about these issues, and help them work with authorities to stop illegal use and apprehend violators.

K) VEHICLE REGISTRATION: There is concern among some trail users that a significant number of snowmobile and OHV operators are failing to register their vehicles. FWP, in cooperation with the STAC, should examine this issue and—if there appears to be a serious problem—come up with a list of recommendations (e.g., more aggressive enforcement, greater publicity about the registration requirement, etc.) for improving compliance. Managing agencies and user groups should seek appropriate legislation requiring easily visible license plates on all OHVs and snowmobiles.

L) USING VOLUNTEERS TO INCREASE ENFORCEMENT PRESENCE: Because of significant public concern about enforcement issues, trail managing agencies need to cooperatively and creatively examine how this service can be improved. Hiring more staff is likely to be difficult, in many cases, but alternatives such as using volunteer trail “stewards” to patrol heavily used trails could be a partial solution in some areas. Volunteers are in no sense a replacement for professional law enforcement staff, as they can not write citations or make other law enforcement contacts.

In urban areas, neighbors and other users might be organized to patrol local trails, providing a presence and means for observing problems before they become severe. Developing a committed core of users on particular trails can increase the chances that users will largely be able to police themselves.

Ultimately, it is important that trail users of all types feel a collective responsible for what occurs on trails, taking the initiative to model good behavior as well as reporting those who are violating rules, creating conflicts, and/or causing resource damage.

M) COLLECTING DATA ON VIOLATIONS: Agencies need to develop and maintain good, standardized data bases on trail use violations, so problem areas can be targeted for additional enforcement attention and information is easy to share and compare.

N) COOPERATING WITH LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES: Managing agencies need to work closely with local and state law enforcement, as well as fire departments; “cross” authority needs to be developed, allowing local law enforcement personnel to enforce state and federal regulations. Good coordination between the various branches of law enforcement is especially important during hunting season, when there is heavy activity at some trailheads.

Routine police bike patrols along popular urban trails have proven successful in a variety of

locations, and are a means for officers to maintain a presence in a relatively unobtrusive fashion.

O) PRESERVING QUALITY BACKCOUNTRY EXPERIENCES:

Montana’s backcountry trail system is one of its most valuable resources. If use of backcountry continues to grow, managers will be forced to take more aggressive management action (e.g., issuing a limited amount of camping permits for heavily used areas) to preserve the quality of the experience and protect the environment.

In many cases, the most serious impacts from heavy use will not be on the trails themselves, but secondary impacts on sites people are accessing from trails (e.g., campsites, high altitude riparian areas, etc.). Rapidly changing types of use (e.g., growth in commercially guided trail trips) will also force managers to more effectively anticipate issues before they become problematic. Well-designed public involvement programs can help determine appropriate thresholds for triggering more stringent management.

A related issue is the significant loss of backcountry areas and trails that has occurred during the past fifty years due to road building, abandonment, and other factors. Backcountry trails are only going to become more valuable as the U.S. population continues to grow and become more urbanized, particularly as these special opportunities have largely disappeared in many locations outside Montana.

8) ISSUE. USER CONFLICT AND COMPATIBILITY

GOAL: *Reduced user conflicts and increased compatibility between trail users.*

EXPLANATION: Conflict or lack of compatibility between trail uses often results when users’ expectations or goals for a particular experience are not met. In trail conflicts between two user groups, it is not unusual for only one type of user to experience most of the conflict (often, this is non-motorized users), while the other group may

not even be aware there is a problem. In addition to direct conflicts between types of users, conflicts can also be indirect (e.g., trail expectations are not met because of litter or other impacts).

If a user group experiences enough conflict on a particular trail, they may be gradually “displaced,” and move to areas where their expectations are more readily met. The degree to which conflict occurs may be partially influenced by “cross-over” between users; if a person engaged in one type of trail use on a particular day also participates in the other types of uses encountered on the trail, he or she may be less likely to experience conflict with them.

One way to reduce conflicts is to make sure that trail users have accurate information about what to expect on a trail (e.g., what other types of uses are permitted). Educating users is a good first step toward reducing conflict. On certain trails, however, serious conflicts may be unavoidable unless some type of management change is implemented. And the potential for conflict is likely to increase over time as types of uses continue to proliferate.

Managers must weigh the severity of the conflicts being experienced by users (along with possible resource damage), against the negative impacts of more complex and stringent regulations. Ultimately, trail users need to understand and accept that managing agencies will never be able to completely eliminate trail-related conflicts; part of the responsibility rests with users to reduce conflict to an acceptable level through working together.

STRATEGIES.

A) DETERMINING CONFLICT SEVERITY AND MANAGING CHANGES: Agency managers have a responsibility to accurately and fairly determine the severity of conflicts being reported on a particular trail before proposing a management action which restricts the use of particular users. Some suggestions include the following:

- 1) Complaints or suggestions from users, for example, should be accurately recorded and monitored. Trailhead boxes with comment cards are one means for encouraging user comments.
- 2) Managers need good data about the types of users on particular trails in order to help inform their management decisions. Making greater use of volunteers to administer trailhead surveys is one alternative to explore. Managers need to be aware that trail surveys will not accurately reflect the views of users who have already been displaced to other areas due to conflicts.
- 3) Restrictions on a particular kind of trail use because of conflict should be proposed only after other alternatives have been seriously examined and perhaps experimented with on a trial basis.
- 4) Trail managers at all levels of government should make an effort to develop understandable and defensible processes for making conflict management decisions, and be able to clearly explain the rationale behind their decision to the public. Managers need to actively involve the trail using public both in developing general management decision-making processes, and in dealing with particular, case-by-case issues. If there is public support and understanding of the decision-making process, there is likely to be less controversy when a particular management decision is made.
- 5) In cooperation with trail user groups, agency staff needs to work at becoming more skilled at employing a variety of conflict resolution techniques. Courses in consensus building and other methods should be essential parts of every trail managers’ continuing education; the Montana Consensus Council is one organization that may be able to provide assistance. Excellent trail management involves good people and process skills, just as much as it requires technical resource knowledge.

6) Agencies should utilize advisory committees composed of various user groups and individuals to address conflicts and other issues, and make recommendations to managing authorities. The STAC may be one forum for addressing issues at a statewide level. Managers dealing with conflicts at a local or regional level are encouraged to establish advisory committees to help make recommendations on how to address conflicts. The STAC may be able to play a role in establishing local and/or regional advisory committees.

B) INFORMATION ABOUT PERMITTED AND PROHIBITED USES: Improved signing and other information materials can play an important role in reducing conflicts. If people know in advance which types of uses are allowed on a particular trail, they are less likely to experience conflicts. It is the responsibility of the managing agency to clearly indicate at every trailhead the types of uses that are permitted and prohibited. Whenever possible, the reasons for prohibiting particular uses should be explained.

C) SEPARATING AND DISPERSING USE: Managers should consider separating or dispersing users in areas where serious conflicts are occurring. In some cases, separating non-compatible uses for the first several miles beyond a trailhead can reduce the chance of conflicts.

D) MULTIPLE USE EDUCATION: Education about safe and courteous trail use in multiple use settings is a key means for reducing conflicts. Often, conflicts are caused by ignorance or lack of courtesy.

E) FEASIBILITY OF MOTORIZED “PARKS”: Managing agencies may want to work with motorized trail users to look at the feasibility of establishing public or privately owned “parks” for high intensity motorized use, particularly near urban areas. These facilities should include training opportunities for young riders and other types of educational programs. These parks would not replace motorized opportunities on public land, but they might provide

better and more appropriate facilities for certain types of motorized recreation such as motocross training, and reduce motorized use in off-limit areas. Concentrating some motorized use in appropriate, carefully planned areas has the potential of reducing use in more sensitive areas. The State of Minnesota recently opened an OHV facility laid out in an old iron ore mine.

F) ENCOURAGING POSITIVE INTERACTIONS BETWEEN USERS: Trail managers and user groups should consider planning events which enable different types of trail users (as well as non-users) to try trail activities they do not regularly participate in. The chance to try something new and interact with other types of trail users has the potential to increase appreciation for the diversity of trail modes. While conflicts can never be entirely eliminated, positive interaction between user groups lessens the polarization that can occur when groups are isolated.

G) EFFECT OF IMPROVEMENTS ON VARIOUS TRAIL USERS: When planning improvements to a trail, managers must consider how the changes will affect the dynamics and potential for conflict between user groups. If a particular kind of work is mainly benefiting a certain user group, for example, what effect will that have on other user groups? Will they benefit, not be affected, or end up being displaced because the improvements have attracted more of the other users, increasing conflicts?

H) EVALUATE NEW TYPES OF TRAIL USE: The increasing pace of technological change is resulting in a growing number of new uses on Montana trails. Managing agencies need to take a proactive approach in evaluating the impacts of new types of trail uses before they become a problem. Just because a certain technology exists does not mean it is appropriate to be used on Montana’s trails.

I) PRESERVING MONTANA’S HUNTING HERITAGE: In recent years, there has been growing concern about the impact of motorized vehicles (ATVs, in particular), on Montana

hunting opportunities. The FWP Hunter Behavior Advisory Council released a report in 1998 that, among other things, made a number of recommendations pertaining to motorized vehicles and hunting, including the following (FWP 1998c):

- 1) Designate “walk-in,” motor vehicle and pack-in areas on hunting district maps with symbols; provide a legend.
- 2) Integrate hunter behavior and fair chase considerations into FWP’s motorized recreation programs. Create an ATV citizens’ advisory group to explore and address problem behaviors. (Note: FWP is already moving in this direction, and held an “OHV/Hunting Summit” in 2000 in order to help begin developing inter-agency educational materials on this issue.)
- 3) Encourage federal land managers to address hunter behavior and “fair chase” considerations in travel management programs.

9) ISSUE. SAFETY AND LIABILITY

GOAL: *A safe and diverse Montana trail system in which liability concerns among managing agencies and private landowners are reduced.*

EXPLANATION: Nationwide, liability and safety issues have become very important for the managers of trails and other recreational facilities, and are affecting their ability to provide services people want. The issue affects not only trails on public lands, but also trail accesses across private land, and is critical for both urban and backcountry trails.

STRATEGIES.

A) INFORMATION AND EDUCATION: One aspect of the liability issue is the extent to which managing agencies provide current information about serious hazards to trail users. Agencies should consistently use the media, newsletters, trailhead information sources, and other methods to make sure that trail users have access to important risk information in a timely manner.

Winter sports such as snowmobiling and cross-country skiing present special safety and liability concerns because of extreme weather and continuously changing trail conditions. Accurate information about avalanche conditions—such as that supplied by the avalanche warning system—is essential. Managing agencies need to work closely with winter trail users to enhance safety.

Finally, it should be made clear to trail users that unpredictable conditions can easily occur on a trail, and that they must accept a certain degree of risk themselves. Education and the promotion of self-responsibility can help reduce liability risk.

B) TRAIL SECURITY: Where crime is a problem, trail users need to know about it. Warning signs should be posted at trailheads with severe break-in problems. Agencies may want to look at volunteer monitoring or patrols in locations where there have been problems. At heavily used trailheads—particularly those near campgrounds—it may be feasible to make use of volunteer “hosts.” In addition to providing security, hosts can help provide information to users and provide managers with useful data about users, although volunteers would not be used in a law enforcement capacity.

C) HAZARD POSTING: On mechanized trails, curves, cliffs, and other potential hazards should be signed. Severe hazards should be systematically noted and, if possible, corrected when funding is available.

D) VOLUNTEER LIABILITY: The importance of voluntary trail work is likely to increase in the future. Consequently, liability concerns affecting volunteers need to be thoroughly addressed to ensure that use of this critical resource can be maximized. The development of standardized, inter-agency liability statements for common trail work practices might help agencies deal with this issue more efficiently.

E) EMERGENCY RESPONSE PROCEDURES: It is recommended that trail managing agencies—in cooperation with county search and rescue organizations and other entities—produce and frequently update a trails emergency services plan if one does not already exist. Response procedures and lines of authority must be clearly understood to assure rapid response to trail emergencies, particularly those that occur away from roads. Procedures should be tested periodically in the field.

F) LIABILITY LEGISLATION AND WAIVERS: Trail managers and users need to work cooperatively to support legislation that limits liability to both public and private landowners along trail corridors. On backcountry trails where permits are required, requiring hikers or climbers to sign a liability waiver might be considered. Accurate and concise information on liability issues and law should be available to trail users, landowners, and other interested parties.

G) DESIGN AND MAINTENANCE: Utilizing good design and maintenance standards can help reduce the liability problem. A consistent system of standards for each level of development and maintenance—which are communicated to users—can give people a better idea of what to expect and reduce the chance that they will mistakenly get into situations they are not prepared for.

10) ISSUE: COMMUNICATION, COORDINATION, INFORMATION AND EDUCATION

GOAL(S): *1) Improved trail-related communication, coordination, and mutual understanding within and between trail managing agencies, trail users, local governments, private landowners, tourism agencies, and other organizations and groups; 2) Trail users have ready access to trail-related information, maps, and signs; 3) Improved trail-related training and education opportunities in order to diminish conflicts, reduce resource impacts, and improve ethics and safety.*

EXPLANATION: The need for improved communication and coordination was an issue that was mentioned frequently during the Trails Plan scoping period. Because of the large number of agencies, diverse user groups, and varied issues connected with trails in Montana, good communication and coordination is critical, especially when managing agencies such as the Forest Service are under severe budget constraints. Cooperative agreements have already proven effective at maintaining and creating access to public land and creating trails and trail opportunities.

Trail-related information, maps, and signs are a key factor shaping user safety and enjoyment of the Montana trail network. If people have a good idea about how to find a trail and what to expect once they get on it (e.g., type of terrain, degree of difficulty, permitted uses, other recreational opportunities, etc.), the chances that they will have a rewarding experience are enhanced. The amount of information available on particular trails will necessarily vary, in order to help provide a diversity of experiences for users. A remote, little-known wilderness trail, for example, is likely to attract users who require relatively little information to have a rewarding experience.

It is important that managing agencies and groups work with local governments, chambers of commerce organizations, tourism groups, and policy makers to promote the social and eco-

conomic benefits of trails. Trails are an important component of Montana's tourism industry, and the benefits they provide need to be documented and discussed, in order to help increase support and funding for trails. Recreational resources need strong constituencies who know how to communicate to decision-makers.

An excellent trail system can have a powerful positive influence on an area's quality of life. Agencies and users can not afford to take for granted that everyone fully understands and appreciates the significant positive impact trails have on the social, economic, and environmental vitality of Montana's cities and regions, and the state as a whole. Managing agencies, user groups, local governments, social and health organizations, and other interested parties need to work more effectively together to ensure that the social and economic benefits of trails are documented, discussed, widely distributed, and publicized.

Managing agencies and user groups should work together to improve trail-related ethics and behavior for all types of trail use through education. Education can be an effective tool to reduce behavior problems, which sometimes result in user conflicts, vandalism, and environmental impacts. At an early age, in particular, education can have an important influence on forming a code of ethics among young trail users that will help reduce conflicts. Where information and education are not effective, improved enforcement may be necessary.

STRATEGIES.

COMMUNICATION AND COORDINATION STRATEGIES

A) ORGANIZING AND ASSISTING TRAIL GROUPS: The State Trails Advisory Committee (STAC) and trail managing agencies should continue to assist trail user groups when requested, particularly those which are poorly organized in Montana. Local and regional groups are important vehicles for monitoring trail issues in an area, and provide an organized body

that managing agencies can work with, in addition to interested and active individual trail users. An additional advantage of local groups is that they are a useful means for organizing volunteers.

In addition to a strong base of local and regional trail groups, organizing a statewide coalition of trail organizations would be beneficial. This coalition could help resolve conflicts, establish priorities, and otherwise work cooperatively with managing agencies towards improving trails and addressing key local, statewide, and national trail issues.

B) COMMUNICATION BETWEEN TRAIL GROUPS AND AGENCIES: Trail user organizations need to be routinely updated on the status of Montana's trail system, and the important issues affecting it. The STAC is an existing vehicle that should continue to provide leadership in efforts to improve communication between different trail user groups, and between agencies and groups. The STAC needs to continue informing local groups about trail issues of state and national importance, and involve them in campaigning for improved trails funding.

The STAC should also help coordinate the inter-agency implementation of the State Trails Plan. In combination with the STAC, it would be useful to establish a permanent inter-agency trails committee, similar in composition to the Trails Plan/PEIS Technical Advisory Committee. Periodic joint meetings between these two committees would be useful in establishing and addressing a priority agenda for statewide trail issues, and specific trail programs and projects.

The composition of the STAC will be periodically reviewed to ensure that it is adequately representing Montana's trail users, including the disabled.

C) COOPERATION ACROSS ADMINISTRATIVE BOUNDARIES: Communication within and between agencies is especially important where trails cross agency or regional boundaries. Managing agencies should strive to

provide users with seamless and coherent trail experiences that are not disrupted by administrative boundaries. Agencies may want to establish a committee to review existing policies and practices, and investigate whether more standardization in trail design, signing, maintenance, regulations, and management throughout the state would produce benefits without making the system too homogenized. An important aspect of this issue is defining the role and responsibilities of managing agencies to ensure efficient use of trail resources and avoid creating inter-agency conflicts.

D) TRAIL USER DATA COLLECTION:

Managing agencies must continually work to improve the mechanism (e.g., trailhead registers, surveys, etc.) through which trail users communicate with them. Collectively, users have the most detailed and comprehensive knowledge of what is happening on trails. A statewide database to consolidate data that is now dispersed across a number of agencies, departments and individuals could tap this rich source of knowledge.

E) PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT: Involving area residents, businesses, trail users, affected local governments, and other organizations are an important part of trail planning and management. Managing agencies should continually work to refine and expand their trails-related public involvement program. Involvement processes should be designed to solicit public input in a meaningful way, rather than merely meet minimum legal requirements.

F) TRAILS NEWSLETTER AND CONFERENCE: The State Trails Newsletter and Trails Conference (part of FWP’s Trails Program) are one of the few avenues for exchanging Montana trail information between groups. The newsletter should be expanded and more widely distributed. Ideally, the Trails Conference should be held at least once every two years. Incorporating periodic updates from trail groups and managers on notable projects, funding sources, and other issues from around the state in both these venues might be a good way to help share information and experiences.

G) SPECIAL EVENTS: Managers and trail groups are encouraged to cooperate in holding special events. These can be a very effective method for making people more aware of trails, generating funds, and bringing diverse groups of trail users together. For example, National Trails Week could be promoted statewide by a coalition of agencies and organizations.

INFORMATION STRATEGIES

A) DIRECTORY OF TRAIL ORGANIZATIONS:

Produce and periodically update a comprehensive directory on trail organizations, groups, and managing agencies. The directory should include contact names, addresses, and phone numbers; it would be a source people could turn to when they need more information about Montana trails and trail-related matters, including how to volunteer or “adopt” a trail. The directory would also include contact names and numbers to report trail-related issues such as bear problems, vandalized signs, illegal trail use, etc.

The directory, or some other related publication, could also contain basic contact information about who local trail groups should consult when they are interested in working to establish a trail, perhaps with some basic guidelines on how to get started. The directory could be published on a periodic basis as part of the State Trails Newsletter, or distributed in some other manner.

B) TRAIL MAPS: Managing agencies at all levels of government should strive to produce accurate maps of significant trails and/or trail systems; information about how to find trailheads is also important. In addition, managing agencies should consider the following:

- 1) To the extent possible, managing agencies and especially regions within the same agencies should strive to produce consistent, standardized maps and other trail information (e.g., similar map symbols, terminology, etc.) to avoid confusing trail users. All maps should be dated so that users know how

current the information is. Agencies should make sure that all marked trails exist as indicated.

- 2) Work to ensure that a map of the trail or trail system is posted at major, high-use trailheads, along with other pertinent information (e.g., closures, hazards, degree of difficulty, additional recreation opportunities, etc.). Posting a topographic map of the area would also be of value to trail users.
- 3) Managing agencies should work to improve the extent to which property boundaries and private lands are identified on maps and along trails. In order to reduce trespassing and other private property impacts, trail users need to know where public-private boundaries are located.
- 4) It is important that primitive areas without established, signed or publicized trails continue to be available for users who prefer a more primitive experience or to find their own routes through the backcountry. However, this does not condone illegally established roads or trails, or illegal off-road or off-trail uses.
- 5) In some cases, there may be a need for more user-specific maps, in part because the increasing amounts of information on USFS travel plan maps.

C) PUBLIC INFORMATION GAPS: Agencies, user groups, and tourism officials should work to improve information and maps for trail activities that presently lack material available. Horseback riding, bicycling, cross-country skiing, ATV riding, off-road motorcycling, and 4WD use, in particular, are activities which should be considered for improved information. Currently, people can plan backroad 4WD trips, for example, using USFS travel plans and other agency maps, but there is a lack of more general statewide information. Promoting private sources of educational material would reduce costs for public agencies.

D) COMPUTER TECHNOLOGY: Managers should work with each other and other groups to better utilize new technology such as the Internet and geographic information systems (GIS) to help provide information for trail users. Development of a Montana State Trails Web site could be an excellent means for linking geographically dispersed trail users with many different interests; it could include a variety of trail-related information, including closures, educational materials, and grant applications. The site could also be a vehicle for users to discuss and comment on trail-related matters, and relay comments and concerns on to managers. Trails GIS data could also be made available on the Internet.

An additional technology is a system of computerized, tourism information kiosks developed by Travel Montana. The system has the capability of quickly providing a wide range of information about various recreation opportunities and tourist attractions, including maps, photos, descriptions, and other attributes. The kiosks are located at key tourist information centers around the state.

E) TRAIL SIGNING: Trail users expressed a strong interest in improved trail signing during the Plan scoping process. Some of the sign-related issues trail users would like to see addressed include the following:

- 1) Better signs along roads marking trailhead locations.
- 2) More consistent, standardized signs.
- 3) Improved interpretive signing, on a range of topics from history to wildlife.
- 4) Include mileage, closures, permitted uses, and degree of difficulty on trailhead signs. Also, in some cases there is a need for more signing marking the boundary between public and private lands.
- 5) Improved sign maintenance.
- 6) A rating system indicating degree of difficulty on trailhead signs.

- 7) Agencies might explore working with high school shop classes, prisons, volunteer groups, or other organizations to produce certain types of signs. In particular, working with high school students in areas where there are sign vandalism problems could be a way of helping make young people more aware of this issue.
- 8) Managing agencies need to make an effort to raise the consciousness among staff about the importance of both urban and backcountry trail signs, and the need to routinely evaluate the adequacy and condition of signs when they visit sites. Similarly, users need to contact agency personnel when they see inadequate or damaged signs, or have suggestions about new signing needs. Periodic trailhead surveys can be used to help determine what types of improvements—if any—are desired by trail users.

F) OTHER TRAIL INFORMATION: Trail managing agencies need to work closely with Travel Montana and the various “tourism countries” to ensure that trail information in tourist publications is accurate and regularly updated. Highway rest areas and tourist information centers are other places where information on trails could be made more widely available.

Managing agencies and tourism officials can cooperatively use tourism information as a management tool (e.g., to disperse use, provide information about socially and environmentally responsible behavior, ensure that heavily-used or environmentally sensitive trails are not promoted, etc.).

Managing agencies, tourism organizations, and user groups should consider jointly producing and funding trail-related maps and information materials to reduce redundancy, increase efficiency, and improve quality.

G) PROMOTING THE BENEFITS OF TRAILS: Trail managers need to work more closely with local governments, social and health organizations, tourism offices, and chambers of commerce to increase awareness of the important economic and social roles urban and backcountry

trails play. Managers and advocates alike need to do a better job of advocating trails and adequate levels of funding and support. The STAC, FWP, and other managing agencies should continue to use the State Trails Newsletter, the annual Trails Conference, and National Trails Day as forums for increasing awareness about the positive quality of life and economic impact of trails in Montana. More active, broad-based citizen and political support for Montana’s urban and backcountry trails would be a powerful force for preserving and improving the system. Because the quality of Montana’s trail system is heavily dependent on Forest Service budgets, Montana trail users and organizations—along with their counterparts across the country—need to better advocate the importance of trails-related funding to members of Congress. The issue transcends funding however; it is critical that the importance of trails is adequately recognized when decisions involving natural, recreation, and transportation resources are made.

EDUCATION STRATEGIES

A) REVIEW AND COORDINATION OF EDUCATION MATERIALS: Establish a committee with a diversity of representation to review existing information and education programs to determine gaps, overlaps, and recommend improvements and ways to standardize the information. Topical areas to look at should include (but not necessarily be limited to) the following: backcountry and urban trail safety education; low impact trail use; weed education; fire prevention; vandalism; access issues; reducing conflicts on multiple use trails; trails etiquette and courtesy; wildlife; and sanitation and waste disposal.

In some cases, well-developed existing information programs (e.g., the USFS and BLM “Leave No Trace” and “Tread Lightly” campaigns) might be adopted by other agencies which lack such educational campaigns. Courses on some of these topics are already available through facilities such as the USFS Ninemile Wildlands Training Center. Opportunities for coordination and cooperation should be explored; having

several partners share education program and facility costs is an excellent way to demonstrate cooperation and produce better results more efficiently.

Trail managing agencies should work closely with clubs, schools, and other groups and organizations interested in trails to promote good trail behavior through education, particularly with young users. Staff should work to integrate trail information (e.g., trail ethics, courtesy, etc.) into other natural resource education programs. Education efforts in schools should be coordinated through the State Office of Public Instruction. National Trails Day provides a useful vehicle for various trail-related educational programs.

B) EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS AT PROBLEM AREAS: Trail managing agencies should develop systematic methods to track areas which have high levels of behavior-related complaints and conflicts, and target them for additional educational materials at trailheads and other appropriate locations.

C) DISPUTE RESOLUTION TRAINING: Trail managers and other resource specialists and planners should pursue dispute resolution and consensus building training. Managers may also want to work with educators to investigate offering dispute resolution courses in public schools. Resource managers and other affected parties could be brought in as guest speakers to discuss successful case studies in which diverse groups worked together to solve problems. Demands on trails and other resources will likely be even more acute in the future. Students will have a better chance of resolving resource conflicts if they are exposed to these important tools at an early age.

11) ISSUE: NEW LINEAR CORRIDOR ALTERNATIVES (e.g., rail trails, etc.)

GOAL: *More effective trail-related use of Montana's existing linear corridors (e.g., rail trails, utility corridors, etc), which were originally laid out for non-recreational purposes.*

EXPLANATION: Across the country, there has been an explosion of interest in utilizing old rail grades for trails, with thousands of miles of old rail bed converted to trail use over the last 10 years; the rails-to-trails movement has become one of the most notable trail success stories in the country. Unfortunately, Montana has lagged behind the leading rail-to-trail states, and has lost some exceptional opportunities as key rail lines have reverted to private use. Montana needs an inter-agency mechanism and funding source that can react quickly to abandonments; the window of opportunity for preserving old rail lines for public use is often very narrow. In addition to abandoned rail lines, using selected utility corridors, dike/irrigation systems, and other creative opportunities offer additional options for expanding and improving Montana's trail system.

STRATEGIES.

A) RAIL-TRAIL MAPPING AND DATA COLLECTION: User groups, managing agencies, and other interested parties need to work together to compile, produce, and periodically update a publicly available map and descriptive information of existing and planned Montana rail trails (a list of potential options is include elsewhere in this plan). A joint publication with neighboring Western states might also be worth pursuing.

B) PLANNING FOR RAIL ABANDONMENT: Work to assemble an inter-agency plan which can help interested parties assess the viability of utilizing various types of linear corridors for trail use, including unused or rarely used rail lines, with a particular focus on those likely to be abandoned in the future.

As the agency responsible for multimodal transportation planning in Montana, MDT monitors rail line abandonment issues and routinely provides information to interested parties. Beyond this, however, it would be useful to establish an inter-governmental committee to periodically review and make recommendations on potential rail trails, including mapping and analyzing rail routes (as well as other linear land ownership and land use patterns) for possible trail use.

C) RAIL-TRAIL ORGANIZATIONS: Various groups have formed around the state to address rail-trail issues at local and/or regional levels. It would be helpful for the STAC or some other group to work with these groups and other interested parties more actively, and select representatives to form a larger steering committee or group that can deal with statewide rail-trail issues.

A coordinated statewide effort to communicate and collaborate with existing railroad and utility companies is recommended. Trail groups working collectively with companies and utilities which own linear corridors will accomplish more than an individual group working toward the same end.

D) UTILITY CORRIDORS AND OTHER RIGHTS-OF-WAYS: Utility corridors and other linear routes such as irrigation ditches offer some potential as trails, although these rights-of-ways were often established for very specific purposes, and may be unavailable for recreational use. In spite of their overall limited utility for trail purposes, these routes may offer options for completing vital connecting links, in cases where nothing else is available. Assembling maps of utility corridors and ditches and assessing them for trail potential would be a useful initial step in understanding how these rights-of-ways might benefit Montana's trail system. Most of the required maps have probably been produced by utilities and irrigation ditch companies and associations.

E) STATE RAIL-TRAIL SYSTEM: Managing agencies and trail organizations should explore the long-term possibility of establishing a state-managed rail-trail system. While cities, counties, or federal agencies may be in a position to manage trails that fall entirely within their boundaries, longer trails passing through a number of jurisdictions may need a different kind of state-coordinated management. Successful models for this type of management exist in other states, where some rail-trails are managed as linear units of the state park system.

12) ISSUE. ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION

GOAL: *More non-motorized transportation trails, especially in urban areas. Trails need to be regarded as essential to a community's infrastructure as roads and sewers, not a luxury to be addressed after everything else is completed.*

EXPLANATION: Montana is a large state, and non-motorized transportation over vast distances is not a viable option for most people. Nonetheless, there are still significant opportunities for improving non-motorized transportation opportunities within and between Montana's communities; trails are both recreation and transportation infrastructure. The incorporation of trails along road corridors helps communities connect with alternative transportation options. Bike and pedestrian transportation provides significant personal and social benefits such as improved health, reduction of fossil fuel consumption, reduced air pollution, and diminished traffic congestion. Urban trails can be an important element in community spirit and revitalization. Montanans are strongly in favor of urban trails, especially rail-trails, as well as trails linking urban areas with the more primitive trail networks which often surround Montana cities.

Non-motorized transportation can be a dangerous undertaking in Montana and throughout the country. According to a recent study by the Alternative Energy Resources Organization (AERO), 144 pedestrians and bicyclists were killed by cars in Montana between 1989 and

2000, while more than 3,695 were injured (Helena IR 2000b). According to a national study by the Surface Transportation Policy Project (STPP), pedestrians in the United States are 36 times more likely to die in a collision than drivers, based on per mile traveled. Although Americans take less than six percent of their trips on foot, thirteen percent of all traffic deaths are pedestrians. While driving in the U.S. continues to increase, the number of trips taken on foot has declined by 42 percent in the past 20 years—in part because walking has become dangerous and inconvenient—contributing to growing congestion on roads and poorer health. Overall, states use less than one percent of all federal transportation dollars for pedestrian facilities. Based on these trends, the STPP recommended the following in their report (STTP 2000):

- Spend on pedestrian safety in proportion to pedestrian deaths.
- Retrofit new streets with traffic calming devices.
- Design new streets and neighborhoods for walking.
- Collect more information on pedestrian safety.

During the last 10 years, MDT and many local transportation agencies have begun to place more of an emphasis on making roads safer for bicyclists and pedestrians (e.g., adequate shoulders, sidewalks, rumble strips which don't interfere with cyclists, etc.). Many of Montana's major highways were reconstructed decades ago, and the present network is the result of hundreds of construction projects, completed over many years. These projects were built according to standards and policies at the time; in most cases, these standards and policies didn't take into account bicycle and pedestrian facilities because the demand for them didn't exist. More fully integrating the needs of bicyclists and pedestrians into Montana's transportation infrastructure will necessarily be an incremental process, based on the demand for these facilities, the programming of projects based on transportation demands and priorities, and the availability of transportation funding.

STRATEGIES.

A) TRAILS, TRANSPORTATION, AND LAND USE PLANNING: Trails and trail-related issues need to be fully integrated into local and state-wide transportation plans, subdivision and development plans, and comprehensive planning. Improvements to non-motorized transportation need to be incorporated into the analysis of transportation project benefits. There needs to be an emphasis on making streets and roads safer for bicyclists and pedestrians. At a local level, planners should be working with developers to ensure that necessary trail connections can be incorporated into designs before construction. In congested areas, more attention needs to be paid to making trails safer by constructing underpasses or bridges across busy thoroughfares, as well as less costly techniques.

B) MARKETING AND INCENTIVES FOR NON-MOTORIZED COMMUTING: Trail managing agencies and user groups need to work with MDT and local transportation agencies to promote the benefits of non-motorized commuting; better incentives are needed to encourage people to try it. Good information on safe non-motorized commuting opportunities needs to be made available through a well-designed information campaign, including programs for schools. The State Office of Public Instruction should be used as a partner in helping develop educational materials for schools.

Various programs exist to fund projects that reduce automobile commuting, air pollution, and traffic congestion at the state and local level. Offering information and incentives should be an element of these programs. The MDT can provide technical assistance for helping design projects and applying for funding.

C) EARLY PLAN REVIEW AND COORDINATION: Trails advocates and managers need good mechanisms to enable early review of all street, highway, bridge, and subdivision plans to assure that trail opportunities are considered before it's too late in the planning process to make changes. Where possible, trail managing

agencies should investigate coordinating trailhead and other recreation improvements such as grading, paving, and signing with programmed transportation projects in the adjacent area. If MDT or other public works departments are planning a highway resurfacing project at about the same time the USFS needs work done on a trailhead parking lot, for example, it is possible that a combined project would be more economical, efficient, and better designed than if the work had been done separately. MDT and metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) provide advance notice of upcoming projects through efforts such as the annual update to the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) and the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), offering an opportunity to coordinate interagency planning efforts. Transportation agencies, and local and statewide planning and licensing agencies (e.g., county planning boards, Montana Department of Environmental Quality, etc.) need to be involved in order to inform trail planners and advocates of new projects with the potential to affect the trails system.

13) ISSUE. DISABLED AND ELDERLY ACCESS/TRAILS

GOAL: *A Montana trail system which offers a diversity of trail options for elderly and disabled trail users, with good information available on the opportunities.*

EXPLANATION: The federal Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) has focused attention on providing opportunities for a portion of the population which previously was often not considered during facility planning. Trail managing agencies have been in the process of implementing ADA for a number of years, resulting in some notable improvements in accessibility. Standards relating to accessibility have been developed by the Forest Service, the National Park Service, the American Association of State Highway Transportation Officials (AASHTO), and other groups and agencies.

In some locations, there is a need for more trails accessible to elderly and disabled trail users. It is essential that managers recognize that providing for people with disabilities means more than simply making trails accessible to wheelchairs: Mobility impairment is only one of a number of types of disabilities (e.g., sight, hearing, etc.) that must be considered. A related issue is facilities for elderly people; a large, aging baby-boom population will increase the importance of planning for elderly needs in the future. It is worth noting that not all trails can or should be accessible to all users. Agencies have a degree of flexibility as to how and where they provide for disabled access, and need to carefully evaluate comparative demand for these facilities at different sites.

STRATEGIES.

A) ACCESSIBLE TRAIL GUIDE: Compile an inter-agency, statewide guide to disabled/elderly accessible trails opportunities, with location maps and brief route descriptions. The guide should be available at key locations, at agency offices, and through Travel Montana.

B) ACCESSIBLE TRAIL PLANNING: Even though not all trails are suitable for the elderly or disabled, trail managers should routinely consider how to incorporate the needs of this part of the population into their trail planning. Accessible trail opportunities should be available in every portion of the state.

Coordinated interdisciplinary planning can help maximize accessible trail opportunities. At fishing access sites along the Jemez River in New Mexico, for example, the Santa Fe National Forest has incorporated accessible fishing platforms into trail design; staff worked with fisheries biologists to create habitat improvements in the river adjacent to the platforms, enhancing opportunities for successful fishing at these accessible sites.

C) ACCESSIBLE TRAIL SIGNING AND INFORMATION: Trail managing agencies should investigate how they can more effectively sign trails that are suitable for the disabled or elderly. Users should be able to determine the degree of accessibility of a particular trail before they leave the parking lot, and not have to find out for themselves part way through that a trail that looked accessible when they started is in fact not. The type and degree of accessibility should be noted at the trailhead, and in any additional information such as brochures. Trail managers need to work closely with different groups of elderly and disabled trail users to determine what kind of information is most useful.

D) SPECIAL ACCESSIBILITY EVENTS: User groups and trail managers may want to work together to sponsor more special days and events oriented around trail activities for people with disabilities. There may be opportunities to integrate more trail-related activities into the State Special Olympics.

E) DONATIONS FOR IMPROVING ACCESSIBILITY: Managers and user groups could work to design mechanisms for estate giving and bequests from elderly trail users which would be used to help improve accessibility for older and disabled trail users. This program could be a special component of a new, statewide trails trust fund. The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) and similar groups should be involved.

14) ISSUE: TRAILHEADS

GOAL: *A Montana trail system which is marked by a strategically located and well-designed trailhead network, in which development is appropriate to the type and volume of use.*

EXPLANATION: Appropriately designed and located trailheads are an essential part of Montana's urban and backcountry trail system. In general, the primary purpose of a trailhead is to provide a place where trail users can transfer

from one mode of transportation or experience to another. Trailheads are access areas, first of all, but they can also key points for disseminating trail and resource information. What is appropriate for a trailhead will vary substantially from site to site, depending on the amount and type of use.

STRATEGIES.

A) TRAILHEAD DATA COLLECTION: Work to ensure that there is sufficient data collection at sites to accurately estimate the type and amount of use; in some cases, volunteers can help collect this information. The provision of facilities such as outhouses, water, and additional parking should be solidly grounded on user data collection and use projections. In some cases, limits may be placed on specific forms of development (e.g., parking) to intentionally manage use.

B) PARKING: Where necessary, improve parking at trailheads. Vehicles occasionally have trouble turning around at trailheads, for example, especially if they are pulling a trailer. Parking problems can occur when a trailhead is simply a locked gate across a road, with little space to pull off. Managers need to utilize basic trailhead use data to help design turnarounds that are appropriate to the type of use (e.g., trailheads which receive heavy horse use may need more turn-around space than areas which are primarily used by hikers).

C) ROADWAY SIGNING: Every trail managing agency needs to pay close attention to whether trailhead locations are properly signed from roadways. When trail users have difficulty finding a trailhead or feel a trailhead is otherwise poorly signed, they should notify the managing trail agency.

D) TRAILHEAD INFORMATION AND MAPS: Accurate information about trail conditions, closures, animal problems, weed control, and permitted uses needs to be routinely posted at trailheads and kept current. Maps of the trail or

trail system should also be posted and updated. Good information can help users select the opportunities that are most appropriate for them, increasing the likelihood of an enjoyable experience, minimizing agency liability risk, and reducing the chance of conflict. Phone numbers for agency contacts should be posted. Comment boxes would be useful additions to all heavily used trailheads. Managers should try to reply to all comments—however briefly—where a response is warranted.

E) WINTER PLOWING: Managing agencies should work with users and state and local transportation authorities to improve plowing at selected winter use trailheads. A pay-to-park plan or some other type of user fee could be used to help pay for plowing.

15) ISSUE. RESEARCH, PLANNING AND DESIGN

GOAL(S): *1) Research and data collection systems which efficiently gather and provide pertinent, timely, and accurate facts about trail use, conflicts, user preferences, environmental conditions, and other important information to the people who can utilize it; 2) Trail networks which are planned and designed to be interesting to travel, integrated with each other, and offer access to a wide range of other trail-related outdoor recreation activities, in geographically varied settings. Where practicable, trails should be integrated with interpretive and educational opportunities, and made accessible to the elderly and disabled (see accessibility section for more details).*

EXPLANATION: Trail research, planning, design, construction, and monitoring are part of an on-going process, involving both users and managers. The effectiveness of this process can powerfully shape the quality of the experience people have on trails. Excellent data collection systems are essential if trail managers are to adequately monitor environmental impacts, provide for current trail uses, and plan for the future. Agencies need to routinely share data, and devise collaborative mechanisms to increase

data collection efficiency. Key elements of the data collection systems need to be simple and adaptable enough to be readily used by volunteers.

Part of the challenge for trail managers is that recreational technology is changing rapidly; types of trail uses, which are unheard of today, may be common in 20 years. Managers need to stay abreast of trends, monitor impacts, and—with accurate supporting information—be able to evaluate and react more quickly to new trends than they have in the past. In addition to information about changing technology and types of uses, managers need to monitor basic demographic information, to help ensure that trail systems provides a well-balanced set of opportunities, and management reflects changes in demand.

Another issue is user displacement: In some areas, particular kinds of users may gradually decide to avoid certain areas because of conflicts with other users. These users will not show up on trailhead surveys because they have gone elsewhere, but it is important that managers devise methods to determine when and where this might be occurring.

Montanans want a diverse and interesting backcountry and urban trail system. Many trail users are interested in participating in other outdoor recreation activities while using trails; for some trail users, trails are a means to another end. Wildlife viewing, hunting, fishing, natural and cultural resource interpretation, camping, photography, and other activities are all closely connected to trail use for many people. Good trail design and management needs to consider the other activities which people participate in while using trails. Conversely, the design and management of other recreational facilities (e.g., campgrounds, day use sites, etc.) must consider trails and trail issues.

For some trail users, simply having some kind of “destination” (e.g., scenic waterfall, a lake, historical site) at the end of the trail adds significantly to their enjoyment. In addition, trail layout and design can have an important impact

on how interesting the trail is for users, and how easily they can engage in other activities. It is important that Montana's trail system be varied enough to meet a wide range of abilities, and enable residents and visitors to explore all of the state's environments, from alpine tundra, to river valley, to eastern Montana grasslands, to urban greenways.

STRATEGIES.

A) RESEARCH AND DATA COLLECTION:

Agencies need to design data collection systems which provide good, current information on user preferences, participation rates, and other topics. Each trail managing agency should periodically examine how it is collecting trail use data, and determine whether the type and extent of data collection are adequate. In some instances, it may be helpful to establish baseline standards, against which changing conditions might be monitored and compared (e.g., Limits of Acceptable Change, etc.).

Regular access to statewide and national trail data is also important. It would be helpful if managing agencies would collaborate on a statewide trail user survey every five years. Similarly, a statewide study on the economic impacts of Montana trail use (similar to the one done for snowmobiling in 1995) would be beneficial.

B) COMMUNICATING INFORMATION:

Improve communication between trail managers throughout the state, so that key trail research and data collection results are widely disseminated across regional and agency boundaries, and reaches trail crews and other staff who can use it. In addition, agencies need to effectively communicate to the public key research and trends, so that the rationales for management decisions are more clearly understood. The Internet will become an increasingly important tool for managers to share research results with the public.

C) INPUT FROM TRAIL USERS: It is essential that trail users communicate to managers significant things they are observing (e.g., particular kinds of resource damage, weed infestations, overflowing parking lots, new types of uses). While managers are not in a position to change management every time they receive a comment or suggestion, frequent input from users is essential if managers are to provide and maintain an excellent trail system. Installing a comment box at more trailheads might be one way of soliciting more user comment. Implementing a free 800 number and using the Internet for trail-related comments are other options.

D) COMPUTERIZED GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION:

Managing agencies at all levels of government should investigate establishing a jointly funded, statewide trails geographic information system (GIS), which eventually would be accessible through the Internet. The statewide trails GIS would be a comprehensive trails database and mapping tool, which would help improve inter-agency coordination and provide better information to trail users. Much of the data needed for the GIS has already been collected by the individual agencies; the state trails inventory compiled by the University of Montana in 1994 is another data source that could be added to the system. As part of this effort, selected abandoned trails, old logging roads, primitive roads, possible rail trails, utility corridors, and other routes should be identified, mapped, and assessed for potential future trail use in high priority areas where additional mileage or linkages are needed. Because of the importance of urban trails, local governments need to ensure that trails are well integrated into all statewide data collection and planning efforts.

E) CULTURAL INTERPRETATION: Montanans have a strong interest in their history and culture, and trails are often an excellent vehicle for connecting and interpreting sites (e.g., Native American, European settlement, etc.). Agency trail managers need to be aware of the connection between trails and culture, both in terms of using historic trails for interpretive and educational purposes, and using trails to interpret particular sites or events. Conversely, in some cases trail

access to particular historic or cultural sites should be avoided to reduce the potential for impacts such as vandalism.

F) NATURAL RESOURCE INTERPRETATION: Using trails for natural resource interpretation and education is not a new concept, but it may be one which could receive even more emphasis from trail managers. Wildlife viewing, for example, is a very popular activity among trail users, and well-designed interpretive information can enhance the experience. Designing trails in a manner that affords trail users an opportunity to view wildlife in a non-disruptive manner is also important. Signs stating trail use restrictions (e.g., seasonal restrictions in elk calving areas, grizzly bear recovery areas, etc.) are likely to be more effective if they also attempt to educate users about the reason for the rules.

G) LANDSCAPE DIVERSITY: Montana's trail system should fully utilize the state's varied landscapes. While many users tend to focus on trails in the mountainous, western part of the state, the eastern portion of Montana affords some interesting trail opportunities, and has the potential to offer much more. Urban and backcountry trails alike can and should be a way of exposing trail users to the distinctive geographic regions of the state, fostering a greater appreciation and understanding of Montana's natural and cultural diversity. Trail managers and designers need to carefully integrate trails into the natural and cultural environment, so that resources are protected, yet part of the overall trail experience.

H) TRAIL VARIETY: Many trail users (both motorized and non-motorized) like a wide range of terrain types and challenges along a trail. Montana's trail managers need to work to ensure that individual trails are interesting and varied, and adequately reflect user needs and interests. While not all trails can or should offer something for every type of user, the system as a whole should offer opportunities for all types of users, from expert to beginner, motorized to non-motorized, developed facilities to primitive, horse use to wheel chair accessible.

I) DESTINATIONS AND CONNECTIONS:

Many trail users like to have the feeling that they have "gotten somewhere," either as part of a loop or one-way trail system. Some of the best trails are linear corridors that connect a series of interesting places or features such as overlooks, campsites, or ghost towns. In urban areas, trails can be used to connect parks, playgrounds, museums, schools, and other features which otherwise would be isolated from each other. Utilizing abandoned rail corridors for trail routes can be an excellent way to connect towns. Managers need to think of trails not only in terms of their inherent characteristics (e.g., grade, topography, surface), but as recreational and transportation routes which connect places in an interesting, safe, and enjoyable manner.

J) THEMATIC TRAIL INFORMATION: It is important that people are able to find trails and obtain accurate information about them. Trail managing agencies should work together, and with tourism organizations, tour operators, outfitters, and other groups, to produce information on thematic types of trail opportunities (e.g., historical trails, wildlife viewing, geology, etc.) so that people with particular kinds of trail interests know where to go. Care needs to be taken to not duplicate what is already available through the private sector and other venues.

K) TRAIL PLAN UPDATES: In order to remain current, the State Trails Plan will need to be updated. Ideally, updates will occur every five years; ten years should be the absolute limit on the time between updates.

L) 4WD ROUTE PLANNING: Agencies and user groups should explore the advisability of doing a future statewide plan focused exclusively on backcountry 4WD use. This type of recreational activity is different enough from the other types of trail uses discussed in this Plan to warrant some additional, in-depth analysis, in part because much 4WD use occurs on primitive roads rather than trails. Much of the needed information is already available in USFS Travel Plans.



Agencies may also want to consider a special designation for certain outstanding 4WD routes of varying lengths, possibly using the BLM's "backcountry byways" model. Such routes would not involve new trails or roads, but would mainly link together existing primitive roads (where 4WD use is currently legal) in a more coherent fashion. These routes would be designed to offer a variety of user experiences, including opportunities for camping, fishing, hiking, and other activities, and would be carefully designated to minimize social and environmental impacts.

M) RIVER RECREATION CORRIDOR

PLANNING: In Montana, rivers are often used as linear corridors for camping and day trips, in much the same way that land-based trails are used. Water corridors, in particular, are outside the scope of State Trails Plan, but water trails are an important issue that should be addressed under a different context. It is recommended that Montana resource agency staff begin a statewide water corridor recreation plan, in order to better coordinate management and the provision of access, campsites, and other amenities. The 1999 legislature granted the FWP Commission authority to manage social conflicts on Montana Rivers, increasing the need for river recreation planning.

Final Thoughts

There is considerable information and many ideas in the Trails Plan. It is up to trail users, organizations, and managers to sort through what is presented, and apply recommendations they feel will be helpful. From the perspective of FWP's involvement in trails, the main implementation vehicle for the plan is the State Trails Grant Program; based on what is in this plan, recommended changes to the Program are detailed in the Trails Program PEIS. Ultimately, trail projects must be socially, fiscally, and environmentally sustainable over the long-term, and commensurate with FWP's resource conservation and protection responsibilities.

When all is said and done, there are a number of themes woven through the plan that are worth explicitly stating here. It is worth remembering that, in spite of their differences, trail users will accomplish far more working together than separately. It is also worth reiterating that all trail users have a place somewhere on the system. We must accept that every use won't necessarily be allowed everywhere, but that all the uses covered by this plan are legitimate trail-related activities. There are a growing number of trails success stories throughout Montana; be inspired by what others have done, and build on their good work in your area.

Finally, don't ever forget that trails are supposed to be fun, and that trail users of all types, sizes, and shapes are generally fun people to be around, and are on the trail for many of the same reasons you are. Go out and enjoy Montana's great trails!