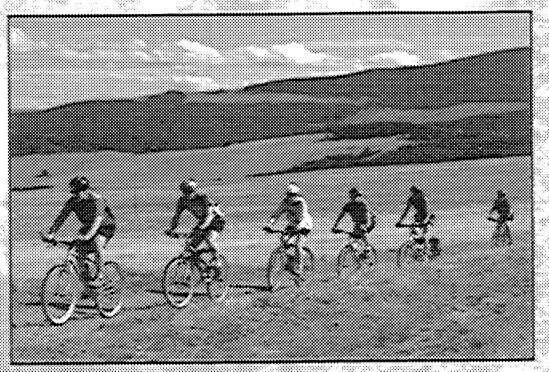
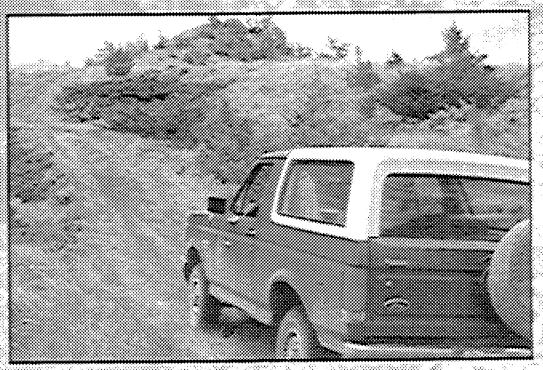
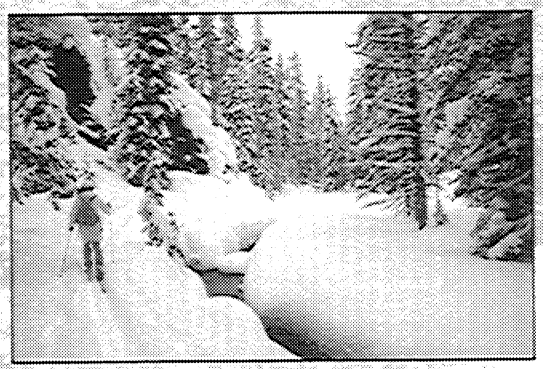
Montana State Trails Plan

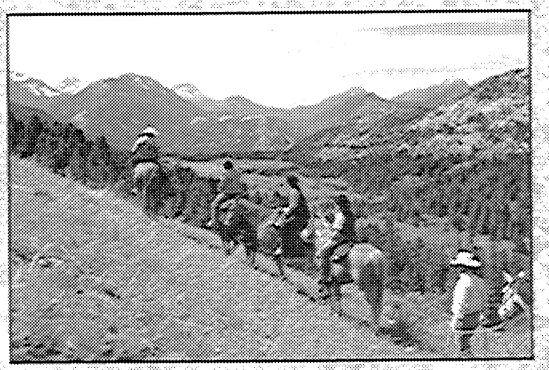
Draft Executive Summary

August 2000









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State Trails Program

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HOW TO COMMENT

Questions and comments about the *Montana State Trails Plan* and *Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS)* are encouraged. If you you have questions, please contact either Jeff Erickson (406-444-3818) or Bob Walker (406-444-4585) at the FWP office in Helena. If you would like to comment on either document, send your thoughts to Jeff Erickson by Monday, September 25, 2000, at the following:

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PREFACE

Public participation has been an integral part of developing both the *Montana State Trails Plan* and the *Trails Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS)*. Additionally, consultation has occurred with other trail managing agencies in Montana throughout the planning process. Without the active involvement of hundreds of members of the public, representatives from trail organizations and other non-profit organizations, and trail managers from a variety of agencies, the *Trails Plan* and *PEIS* would not have been possible.

The *Trails Plan* and *PEIS* were coordinated by Jeff Erickson and Bob Walker, out of the Helena Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) Office. Considerable assistance was received from Jeff Copeland, who worked on the Plan and PEIS over several years in three different capacities—first as an intern, then a temporary employee, and finally as an independent consultant. Two other interns spent parts of their summers at FWP working on the Trails Plan—Bryan Smith and Kathleen Curd Rau.

In addition to the above, past and present members of the State Trails Advisory Committee (STAC), the Trails Plan/PEIS Technical Advisory Committee, and the FWP Internal Trails Advisory Committee played important review and comment roles. Members of the FWP Committee, in particular, spend many hours reviewing and discussing both the *PEIS* and *State Trails Plan*. Members of the FWP committee included:

- Lee Bastian: Regional Parks Manager, Missoula
- Ray Paige: Motorized Trail Program Coordinator, Helena
- Steve Gilbert: Non-Motorized Trail Program Coordinator, Helena
- John Ramsey: Enforcement Training Officer, Helena
- Heidi Youmans: Chief, Small Game Bureau, Helena
- Gayle Joslin: Region 3 Wildlife Biologist, Helena
- Dick Ellis: Regional Supervisor (retired), Billings
- Mark Lere: Fisheries Habitat Restoration Program, Helena
- Martha Williams: Legal Unit, Helena
- Rich Clough: Chief of Operations, Helena
- Jeff Erickson: Parks Program Planner, Helena
- Bob Walker: State Trails Program Coordinator, Helena

Many other FWP staff were involved in various phases of the planning process. Doug Monger, Parks Division Administrator, reviewed earlier drafts of both the *Trails Plan* and *PEIS*. Ken Soderberg, Jeffrey Tiberi, and many FWP regional staff members assisted with public involvement efforts. Chas Van Genderen offered good advice on process issues. Debbie Mcrae and Chine Strobel from the Helena Parks Office provided valuable editing and computer assistance.

Digital mapping for both the *Trails Plan* and *PEIS* were done by present and past members of FWP's Information Services Unit staff, including Janet Hess-Herbert, Angie Schmidt, Lydia Bailey, and Jeff Hutten. FWP's mapping efforts were assisted by

Kristina Gurrieri, Dave Highness, and Ed Madej from the Natural Resources Information System, part of the Montana State Library. Staff from the Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research (ITRR) at the University of Montana helped with some of the initial trails inventory and survey efforts.

Also, special thanks, in particular, to the following Technical Advisory Committee members for their comments and ideas: Jack Potter (National Park Service, Glacier National Park); Wendell Beardsley (U.S. Forest Service, Retired Region 1 Trails Coordinator); Gary Garthwait (U.S. Forest Service, Former Acting Region 1 Trails Coordinator); John Favro (U.S. Forest Service, Region 1 Trails Coordinator); Charlie McKenna (U.S. Forest Service, Helena National Forest); and Darrell McDaniel (BLM, Recreation Planner, Butte Office). Many other people from various branches of government and non-profit organizations made contributions during the planning process, as did a large number of interested trail users.

Finally, Ross Campbell, Straight Arrow Designs, did the layout and design of both the Plan and PEIS, under a tight timeline. Jay Lightbody and Mel Vetsch from FWP's Print Shop arranged the printing with their usual helpfulness. Thanks to everyone listed (and anyone inadvertently omitted) for the help!

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MONTANA STATE TRAIL PLAN: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Montanans are passionate about trails, and for good reason. Montana's trails are a passport to some of the most beautiful places in the world, threads that link special places together, creating memories. Trails require effort, but they often reward it richly. They get people from one place to another, but on a more human scale than roads; trails are utilitarian, yet nearly synonymous in the minds of many with pleasure, joy, and adventure.

Residents and visitors alike place a high value on Montana's outdoor recreation, open space, natural areas, and historic sites. In Montana and throughout the country, trails are an increasingly important component of the public's enjoyment of outdoor resources and activities. Trails produce multiple benefits and significantly enhance quality of life by providing opportunities for outdoor recreation, protecting natural and cultural resources, and creating economic opportunities. Trails also provide alternative transportation routes that reduce pollution, as well as encourage participation in outdoor social, fitness, and educational activities.

Montana already has an impressive network of public trails, but it could be substantially improved. The *Montana State Trails Plan* is a first attempt to provide long-term, inter-agency direction for the statewide public trail system, including both motorized and non-motorized trails. The focus is on statewide, rather than local or trail-specific issues, with a primary emphasis on common values shared by most trail users, and areas of agreement within and between managing agencies and other interested parties.

The *Montana State Trails Plan* was coordinated by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) because it is the agency with statewide recreation management responsibilities. The *Trails Plan* is not intended to usurp the management plans and planning processes used by the various federal, state, and local agencies which manage the state's trails. Rather, the Plan is meant to provide trail managers with information about the trail system and the people who use them, and produce strategic recommendations on trail issues and needs. The *Trails Plan* aims to enhance Montana's trail network by improving cooperation among agencies, organizations, and individuals; increase availability of funds; and provide a foundation for better meeting the needs of trail users.

In addition to the *Trails Plan*, a separate but related *Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS)* was also completed for FWP's Trails Program. The *Trails Program PEIS* was done concurrently with the *Trails Plan*, with the intent of drawing on its recommendations to help analyze and improve two trail grant programs administered by FWP. The programs include motorized and non-motorized trail funding available through the federal Recreational Trails Program (RTP), and the State Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Grant Program. Neither the *Trails Plan* nor the *Trails Program PEIS* address snowmobiling or the FWP Snowmobile Grant Program, as these were covered in a separate PEIS completed in 1993. Additionally, water-based trails are not addressed in the Plan or PEIS, as this form of recreation is distinct enough to be dealt with separately.

For the purposes of this executive summary, "trail" will be defined broadly, as a public path, right-of-way, or other linear corridor used for outdoor recreation or alternative transportation; a more detailed definition is included in the complete Plan. The types of uses examined in the Plan are also broad, but the user groups represented on the State Trails Advisory Committee (STAC) and listed below reflect the types of recreation that are currently in highest demand. It is worth remembering that trail-based recre-

ation is constantly changing, and uses that were virtually unknown twenty years ago have become extremely popular in some areas (e.g., in-line skating). Trail uses represented on the STAC are as follows:

- Hiking
- Off-road motorcycling
- ATV riding
- Cross-country skiing
- Bicycling
- Back-country 4x4 driving
- Horseback riding
- Snowmobiling (not covered in this plan)

Many of the recommendations included in the *Trails Plan* were initially derived from comments received during the public scoping period. A total of 315 written comments were received, and more than 400 people attended one of the 18 public scoping meetings in Montana. A summary of the scoping period comments is included in the appendix of the full document.

In analyzing the information from the scoping period, an effort was made to capture all of the major issues and concerns that emerged. The scoping comments were condensed from an initial list of more than 90 issues to the fifteen issues included in the Plan. These issues were also used in helping develop the *Trails Program PEIS.*

Following the scoping meetings, a "workbook" was compiled for review by the STAC and a second technical advisory committee composed largely of staff from trail managing agencies. The workbook contained preliminary issues, goals, and strategies 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. The recommendations which emerged from the public review workbook became the framework for the long-term direction included here.

The most recent step in the planning process was a series of reviews of the full draft Plan and PEIS by an interdisciplinary FWP team, as well as representatives from other trail managing agencies. Following review of public comment, the documents will be revised and finalized.

Questions and comments about the *Montana State Trails Plan* and *PEIS* are encouraged. If you have questions, please contact either Jeff Erickson (406-444-3818) or Bob Walker (406-444-4585) at the FWP office in Helena. If you would like to comment on either document, send your thoughts to Jeff Erickson by Monday, September 25, 2000, at the following:

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A Vision for Montana's Trail System

The long-term vision for future trail-based recreation in Montana is as follows:

Maintain and develop a trail system that is an integral component of outdoor recreation in Montana; that meets or exceeds user expectations; that provides a variety of readily accessible public trails, in a wide range of settings; and maximizes opportunities for a wide range of trail uses, while minimizing conflict and protecting natural and cultural resources.

More specific components of this vision (which is based on the primary concerns, issues, and goals derived from the public scoping process) are summarized as follows:

* **DIVERSITY OF OPPORTUNITIES:** The trail system should offer sustainable recreation opportunities for a wide range of user types and abilities.

* **VARIETY OF SETTINGS:** The Montana trail system should reflect the spectacular diversity of the state's natural and cultural environments, from urban to wilderness, forest to prairie, mountaintop to river valley, and ghost town to busy city center.

* **MINIMAL CONFLICT:** The trail system should be managed in a way that reduces conflicts between users. Where there are conflicts, trail users and managers are encouraged to work together to solve them in an open and fair manner.

* **INTERPRETATION AND EDUCATION:** The system should allow users to experience and learn more about a wide variety of the state's natural and cultural features. Trails can and should provide a means for interpreting Montana's natural and cultural heritage.

* **NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCE CONSERVATION:** The Montana trail system should be designed and managed in a way that conserves and enhances Montana's natural and cultural resources. Trails that are improperly placed or occur too frequently across the landscape can create both social and natural resource impacts.

* **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM:** The Montana trail system should enhance the economic vitality of Montana's communities.

* **ACCESSIBILITY:** Montana trails must be readily accessible to users. The Montana trail network shall include enhanced trail recreation opportunities within a short distance of where most Montanans live. More disabled accessible trail opportunities are also a priority.

* **INFORMATION:** Montana trail users (as well as potential users) need to have better information about trail opportunities in the state, as well as information about safety, ethics, conflict reduction, and minimizing environmental impacts.

* **TRANSPORTATION LINKS:** The Montana trail system should be closely integrated with the primary transportation network in the state and—where appropriate—provide alternatives to vehicular transportation.

* **COOPERATION:** Planning and management of Montana's trail system should be a cooperative endeavor between local governments, state agencies, the federal government, private landowners, and trail users and user groups. This Plan is intended to stimulate discussion between managers and the full spectrum of trail users, helping them to organize more effectively, find common ground, gain a joint sense of purpose, recognize and act upon new opportunities, and collectively work together to improve and maintain Montana's trails.

Overview of Trails Plan Issues

The issues listed below represent the major problems or opportunities identified by the public and agency staff, as well as through research and surveys. A more detailed discussion of the issues, goals, and strategies is included in the last chapter of the *Trails Plan*.

1) **Access:** Loss of access to public trails and failure to secure key corridors across various types of land ownership was one of the most important issues to emerge from the scoping meetings. In order to address this issue, federal, state, and local governments need to cooperate in officially documenting public easements and rights-of-ways, and purchasing land or easements where necessary.

2) **Urban Trails:** Urban areas have the greatest need for new trails, because most Montanans live in and around cities and towns. There is a strong demand for convenient recreation opportunities which people can enjoy on short notice. An important related issue is integrating trails with land use and transportation planning in urban areas. Rail-trails, greenways, and creating connections to surrounding public lands are important needs related to urban trails.

3) **Resource Protection:** Direct and secondary impacts on natural and cultural resources from trails and trail-related activities is a primary concern of trail users, as well as resource managers. Many users are concerned about the integrity of wild areas, and how they are impacted by trail activities. Impacts on wildlife resources are a critical concern (particularly during hunting season), as are noxious weeds. Resource impacts resulting from motorized trail-related use is a growing concern, particularly cross-country travel, use in off-limits areas, and illegal trail construction. Finally, the roadless areas where many of Montana's trails are found have been dramatically reduced in size during the past fifty years.

4) **Trail Supply and System Configuration:** The supply and configuration of Montana's trail system was an issue that came up in a variety of ways during the initial scoping process. Trail data suggests that while the demand for trails has been increasing, the total number of backcountry trail miles in Montana has been declining for decades due to abandonment of old fire trails, road building, and other factors; there must be no further net loss of these routes. Because most Montanans live in towns and cities, meeting growing urban trail demands is critical. Other needs identified included additional loop and connecting trails, ensuring interesting trail-related destinations, and more trails in eastern Montana. A major challenge will be to provide adequate and varied trail opportunities for both motorized and non-motorized trail users throughout Montana, while minimizing environmental impacts and conflicts.

5) **Funding:** There is insufficient funding to meet current demands, which are growing. There is an especially great need for improved non-motorized funding due to the large and increasing amount of non-motorized trail use, especially in and around urban areas. Motorized users have successfully pursued dedicated OHV and snowmobile funding sources through the Legislature, but there is no equivalent non-motorized source.

6) **Maintenance:** There is a backlog of maintenance needs throughout Montana, an issue closely related to insufficient funding. The biggest need in the backcountry is maintenance and completing loops and key connections, rather than a significant number of new trails. In the last decade, there have been substantial new trail projects in Montana's towns and cities, and these facilities will need to be maintained on an on-going basis. Volunteers will likely play an increasingly important role in meeting maintenance needs.

7) **Management and Enforcement:** Many trail users who attended scoping meetings or submitted written comments believe enforcement of trail regulations needs to be improved. Trail users also had a wide variety of

concerns about how trails are managed, often centered around motorized trail restrictions (e.g., loss of motorized access, resource impacts, etc.). Information and signing are important in ensuring compliance with restrictions and regulations. Design, construction, and maintenance of trails should complement management goals and trail use restrictions.

8) **User Conflict and Compatibility:** Trail users have differing opinions on what trail uses are compatible. Conflicts generally result from feelings of incompatibility, but can also result from the perception that a trail user is unsafe or displaying poor etiquette. Most conflicts are between mechanized and non-mechanized trail uses. A key to reducing conflicts is ensuring that users have accurate information about what uses are permitted on particular trails.

9) **Safety and Liability:** The need to design trails to improve safety and reduce liability is increasing with the growing amount of recreation-related litigation. Safety and liability are of special concern for urban trails and other high use trails, especially trails along rail lines and utility corridors. Providing current information on safety concerns and informing trail users of the risks inherent in trail use are key to addressing this issue.

10) **Communication, Coordination, Information, and Education:** In an era of tight budgets, managers will increasingly need to work more collaboratively with both each other and their constituents. Trail users would like improvements in a variety of trail-related information and education materials. As types of trail use and use levels increases, the likelihood of conflict increases. Improving trail ethics is an important concern that can be addressed by improved information and education.

11) **New Linear Corridor Alternatives:** Abandoned/underused railroad lines and utility corridors are examples of linear land ownership patterns offering potential for trails. These patterns occur throughout Montana, including areas where few other trail opportunities exist. 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 ten 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.

12) **Alternative Transportation:** Providing safe, accessible alternatives to automobiles benefits individuals, society, and the environment. Trails encourage exercise and non-motorized commuting. This in turn provides mental and physical health benefits, a social outlet that unites neighborhoods and communities, and reduces congestion and air pollution associated with automobile use.

13) **Disabled and Elderly Access:** Montana has a need for more trails and trail access for the elderly and disabled, especially in and around urban areas. Providing this type of access not only fulfills federal and state mandates, but promotes the health, welfare, and happiness of a large group of Montanans and visitors. As the population continues to age, this issue will become increasingly important.

14) **Trailheads:** Trailheads should be planned, designed, and maintained to reflect the type and amount of use, and as an integral part of management. Facilities, road access, parking, and educational information should reflect the management goals of the trail, as well as accommodate use, educate users, protect resources, and reduce costs.

15) **Research, Planning, and Design:** As trail use increases and activities become more varied, the need for timely and accurate information on use, user preferences, conflicts, environmental impacts, and other pertinent information becomes increasingly important, as does the need for sharing of information among key agencies and individuals. Improved research, planning, and design can help alleviate conflict, protect

resources, and provide a wide range of educational and recreational opportunities, in a safe and accessible manner.

Montana's Trails and Public Lands

Federal agencies manage 29 percent of the land base in Montana and 99 percent of the State's trail miles (see Figure E-1). Montana's ten national forests contain approximately 16.8 million acres of land, while the seven BLM field offices in Montana manage over eight million acres of land, mainly in the eastern and south-western parts of the State. The National Park Service (NPS) administers six sites in Montana, including Glacier National Park, and a portion of Yellowstone National Park, totaling over one million acres. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service manages ten National Wildlife Refuges in Montana, as well as the National Bison Range, totaling more than 1,330,000 acres. Federal agencies also manage the designated units of the National Trail System in Montana (e.g., the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail).

At the time of the 1994 trail inventory, Montana contained 2,294 public trails, totaling more than 14,633 linear miles (ITRR 1994a). The U.S. Forest Service (FS) managed 2,075 trails (90 percent of Montana's total) and 13,496 trail miles (92 percent of total), concentrated in western Montana (see Table E-1). The National Park Service (NPS) managed 148 trails (six percent of State total), totaling 826 miles (six percent of total). In the inventory, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) accounted for only nine trails (less than one percent of total), totaling 167 miles (one percent of total miles); by 1999, the BLM reported 49 trails, totaling 397 miles. Finally, National Wildlife Refuges constitute an important part of Montana's federal lands, but offer relatively few formal trail opportunities (less than one percent of the trails and trail miles in Montana).

Although the majority of public lands and trails in Montana are managed by the federal government, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP)

Table E-1: Montana's Trail Inventory

Agency	Number of Trails	%	Miles of Trails	%
USFS	2,075	90	13,496	92
National Park Service	148	6	826	6
Local Park and Rec. Depts.	28	1	60	<1
FWP	15	<1	28	<1
BLM	9*	<1	167*	1
USFWS	6	<1	5	<1
Univ. of MT	6	<1	21	<1
Indian Reservations	5	<1	6	<1
Private	2	<1	24	<1
Total	**2,294**	**100**	**14,633**	**100**

**** Note: Data compiled in 1994 (ITRR 1994a). Although the comparative values remain generally similar, actual numbers have changed since 1994; by 1999, for example, the BLM reported 49 trails, totaling 397 miles. The trails and trail miles in the local parks and recreation departments category have also likely increased substantially since 1994, but updated numbers have not been compiled. Indian reservations and private trails are significantly under-reported because of incomplete responses to the survey. Abbreviations are as follows: USFS is the U.S. Forest Service; FWP is Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks; BLM is Bureau of Land Management; USFWS is U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.***

manages over 400,000 acres of land throughout Montana, consisting of Wildlife Management Areas, State Parks, and Fishing Access Sites. Additionally, FWP has purchased conservation and recreational easements on thousands of acres of private land in Montana. Most of FWP's formal trail opportunities are located in state parks. Overall, FWP manages less than one percent of the trails and trail miles in Montana (ITRR 1994a).

The State of Montana also owns 5.1 million acres of School Trust land, managed by the Trust Land Management Division, in the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC). School Trust land generally consists of Sections 16 and 36 per township; in other cases these sections have been consolidated into larger parcels. Recreational use of school trust land was established in 1991, although trail use is informal. DNRC also owns a variety of recreation sites around the state associated with dams and reservoirs, some of which are leased and managed by FWP. At the time of the trails inventory, DNRC reported managing no formally designated trails.

Cities and counties reported managing one percent of the trails and less than one percent of the trail miles in Montana. Although none of the non-federal trail managing agencies or organizations in the inventory accounted for more than one percent of the State's total of either total trails or trail miles, they represent an important component of Montana's trail system, particularly trails closest to the urban areas where most Montanans live (ITRR 1994a).

Other trail managing entities in the statewide trails inventory included Indian reservations, the University of Montana, and private entities. Each of these categories totaled less than one percent of Montana's trails and trail miles (ITRR 1994a).

Trail Settings and Use Restrictions

The majority of Montana's trails occur in relatively natural and primitive settings, with a significant portion located on the roadless public lands that comprise 11 percent of the State. The framework used to evaluate trail settings included six categories, ranging on a continuum from urban to primitive. The categories are based on the recreational opportunities spectrum (ROS) classification system, which is widely used by recreation managers in the Forest Service and other federal land managing agencies. Trails in the primitive category are generally in roadless areas over 5,000 acres, with a high degree of naturalness and a low level of development (Zinser 1995). Trails listed in the urban category, on the other hand, comprise a very low percentage of the total, but they are extremely important because they tend to be among the most heavily used trails. A summary of the trail setting for Montana's trail system is as follows, based on the 1994 trails inventory and the ROS classification system:

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

(Source: ITRR 1994a)

The majority of use restrictions on Montana trails pertain to motorized trail activities. Of the trail miles included in the 1994 trails inventory, 53 percent were explicitly closed to motorized trail use, falling in either the primitive or semi-primitive, non-motorized categories. While many of the remaining trail miles are open to motorized use, this is not true in all cases (e.g., urban trails tend to be non-motorized). In addition, there are seasonal and case-by-case

closures in areas that are generally open to motorized trail use.

The zones where the majority of motorized trail recreation occurs—roaded natural and semi-primitive motorized—includes 46 percent of the total Montana trail miles in the inventory. The inventory data on use restrictions supports this figure, indicated that ATV and motorcycle use is unrestricted on 1,045 trails, 46 percent of all Montana trails (ITRR 1994a). It is important to note that there have been significant changes in the type of restrictions since the inventory was completed (e.g., a 50 inch maximum width limit is now more typical on Forest Service land, for example, than the 40 inch rule common at the time of the inventory).

Under current federal policy, cross-country OHV use is often allowed, even in areas where designated trails and roads may be closed to motorized use. As of 2000, a joint Forest Service/BLM draft EIS is examining a variety of OHV management alternatives for Montana, North Dakota, and portions of South Dakota (USDA/USDOI 1999b).

Some of the other trail use restrictions which were derived from the 1994 trail inventory are as follows (ITRR 1994a):

- All motorized and mechanized (bicycles) vehicles are prohibited from 12 percent of trails (e.g., in designated wilderness areas).
- Bicycles are prohibited from 11 percent of statewide trails.
- Stock animals are restricted on 9 trails, less than one percent of the state total. It is possible that restrictions on stock animals and possibly bike use were under-represented in the inventory, for undetermined reasons.

Montana Trail Use Patterns

Two statewide studies were completed during the 1990s that were intended to obtain comparative information on the popularity of various types of trail-related activities among Montanans. The two studies summarized below were designed differently, which helps explain some of the differences in responses.

Trail-related Activities

Participation rates were obtained from *The Montana Trail User's Study* (ITRR 1994b), which surveyed adult Montanans about their involvement in pre-selected trail-related activities during a six-month period in 1994. The questions in the survey asked respondents whether they had engaged in the activity, but did not specify that it actually had to occur on a trail (e.g., walking could have occurred on a sidewalk, for example).

- 70.0 percent of adult Montanans went dayhiking or walking for pleasure, by far the most popular type of trail-related activity in Montana
- 20.2 percent bicycled (conventional)
- 19.6 percent went four-wheel driving
- 19.4 percent went jogging
- 17.5 percent went horseback riding
- 15.3 percent went snowmobiling
- 14.4 percent went backpacking
- 14.4 went cross-country skiing
- 14.4 percent went mountain biking
- 11.6 percent used ATVs
- 9.1 percent went off-road motorcycling

Another portion of this survey attempted to gauge what additional activities Montanans engaged in while on trail-related trips. According to the results, respondents said they did the following activities while on a recent, summer season (April 1-September 30) trail trip:

- 61.2 percent—wildlife viewing
- 44.1 percent—photography
- 40.8 percent—picnicking
- 24.0 percent—nature study
- 23.8 percent—fishing
- 23.8 percent—camping
- 14.5 percent—hunting
- 7.5 percent—swimming

Trail Use

Trail use rates were obtained from FWP's *Montanan's Assessment of Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Programs* (1998), which asked respondents if they had used a trail during the previous two year period, and if so, what activities they engaged in. Unlike the 1994 survey, the questions were linked specifically to trail use, although "trail" was not explicitly defined.

Survey results indicated that 56 percent of adult Montanans had used a trail during the two-year sample period (FWP 1998). Of those trail users, participation by activity was as follows:

- 90 percent went hiking
- 11 percent went horseback riding
- 6 percent went bicycling
- 4 percent went cross-country skiing
- 2 percent used ATVs
- 2 percent used 4X4s
- 2 percent used off-road motorcycles

User Days

Another way of examining resident participation in trail-related activities are user days, which are based on the average number of days spent engaging in a specific activity. The average number of days participants engaged in various activities during the six-month sample period varied widely (ITRR 1994b):

- Jogging—20 days
- Walking and hiking—19 days
- Off-road motorcycling—9.5 days
- Horseback riding—9 days
- Mountain biking—9 days
- Cross-country skiing—5.5 days
- ATV—5 days
- Backpacking—4 days

Trends in State and National Trail-related Participation

The limited amount of available trends data suggests that most trail-related recreation is increasing in popularity among Montanans. Non-motorized trail activities such as walking, hiking, and cross-country skiing increased substantially since the 1960s, although horseback riding declined during the 1970s and 1980s (FWP 1993).

Off-highway vehicle registration trends in Montana also affirm the growing popularity of motorized trail activities. Between 1990 and 1998, for example, ATV and motorcycle registrations increased by 156 percent, rising from 7,399 to 18,953 (DOA/DOI 2000b). A survey conducted by University of Montana researchers estimated that 100 percent of registered ATVs and nine percent of registered motorcycles are used in off-highway situations (Sylvester 1995).

Truck registrations in Montana also increased between 1990 and 1998, although not nearly as dramatically as OHVs. During that period, registrations climbed 13 percent, rising from 268,466 to 304,696 (DOA/DOI 2000b). According to the University of Montana, approximately nine percent of trucks registered in Montana are used off-highway (Sylvester 1995).

Non-resident visitation data also suggest increased participation in trail activities. Montana attracted two and a half million more visitors in 1995 than in 1983 (ITRR 1997). Between 1990 and 1994, nonresident visitors to Montana increased by 30 percent, an annual average increase of six percent. By 1998, over nine

million tourists visited Montana, many of whom participated in trail-related outdoor recreation. The small amount of data available on non-resident participation rates confirms the popularity of day/nature hiking by visitors to Montana. Over 30 percent of nonresident visitors to Montana National Forests participated in day/nature hiking, and 5 percent went backpacking or mountain biking (ITRR 1991).

Nationally, outdoor recreation is exploding in popularity, with trail use and trail-related activities among the fastest growing categories of use. In 1995 over 94 percent of Americans participated in some form of outdoor recreation at least once, up from 89 percent in 1982-83 (Cordell, Teasley, and Super 1997).

Hiking, among the most popular trail-related outdoor activities, is also among the fastest growing in the country, with over 47.5 million participants in 1994, a 94 percent increase since 1984 (Cordell, Teasley, and Super 1997). Off-highway driving grew by 44 percent, with over 24.5 million participants by 1994. Mountain bike use has also grown explosively at the national level, while cross-country skiing has grown at slower rates, and horseback riding has experienced declines in participation.

Other outdoor activities engaged in by millions of Americans that often involve trail use include hunting, fishing, and nature watching. Slight declines in the total number of hunting and fishing participants were more than made up for by the 54 million Americans engaged in bird watching by 1994, a 155 percent increase since 1982. Outdoor adventure sports such as rock climbing, ice climbing, back country skiing and snowboarding, are also experiencing rapid gains in participants, many of whom use trails as travel routes to desirable recreation sites.

Trail User Attitudes

The following section summarizes Montana trail user attitudes on a number of significant issues, including trail supply, access to trails, trail use and management, conflict and compatibility, and trail preference (ITRR 1994b and FWP 1998).

Attitudes About Montana's Trail Supply

Need For More Trails Statewide

- 20 percent of respondents in the *Montana Trail Users Study* (1994b) indicated that there were enough trails in the state.
- 43 percent of respondents felt there were not enough trails.
- 36 percent of respondents were either neutral or didn't know.

Need For More Trails Locally

- Nearly 50 percent of respondents agreed that more trails were needed in their communities, compared to 20 percent that disagreed. Strong support for urban trails, alternative transportation and commuter routes, and greenways was also expressed during the Plan public scoping period.
- Strong support was expressed for increasing trails near urban areas, including quiet, non-motorized trails.

Rail-Trails

- Nearly 69 percent of respondents supported using abandoned railroad grades as trails, with five percent opposed.

Access to Trails and Public Land

- Access to trails and public land was the most often identified statewide trail issue during the public scoping period, as well as the second most often identified local trail issue.
- Conversely, only 14 percent of Montana residents reported being dissatisfied with access to public land for recreation in the 1994 survey, while 79 percent indicated they were satisfied.

Attitudes About Trail Use and Management

In general, Montanans are satisfied with their most recent trail experiences, with 95 percent expressing satisfaction, four percent dissatisfied, and only one percent with no opinion. However, many trail users have strong opinions on trail use and management, as summarized below (ITRR 1994b and FWP 1998).

Crowding

Montana trail users have some sense of being crowded while using trails, but from a statewide perspective the situation does not yet appear to be at a crisis level. For example, 24 percent of the respondents in the 1994 survey agreed that too many people are using their favorite trails, 30 percent disagreed, with 46 percent either neutral or having no opinion. The survey was not designed to identify particular trails or locations where there may be severe localized crowding.

Trail Preference

- A majority of the respondents in most of the trail user categories expressed a preference for "backcountry" trails, including 60 percent of the largest group of trail users—walkers and dayhikers. (It is important to stress that while there is a high preference for backcountry trails, urban trails are more likely to get heavily used because of their close proximity to where people live. The need for more urban trails was mentioned frequently during the scoping period.)
- Approximately 62 percent of the cross-country skiers preferred groomed trails.
- During the Plan scoping period, preserving quite, non-motorized trail opportunities was one of the most important issues, with 216 of the 315 (69 percent) of the written comments addressing this perspective.
- Alternatively, strong support for keeping existing motorized trails open was expressed during the eighteen public scoping meetings held in cities throughout the state.

Trail Etiquette

- 51 percent of Montana trail users agreed that poor trail etiquette is a problem, 19 percent disagreed, and 30 percent were neutral or didn't know.

Trail Information

- 55 percent of respondents felt trail location information could be improved, 19 percent of the respondents disagreed, while 26 percent were neutral or didn't know.

Attitudes About Conflict and Compatibility

While conflicts between trail users do not appear to be especially severe when examined from a statewide perspective, the perceived lack of compatibility between motorized and non-motorized users, in particular, suggests a potential for much greater conflict in the future if use levels continue to increase, and trail supply and management remain relatively constant. In Montana, the expressed lack of compatibility between motorized and non-motorized trail users has likely not yet led to greater conflicts due to the state's numerous trail opportunities and low population.

Results from the 1994 and 1998 surveys are summarized below (ITRR 1994b and FWP 1998):

Conflict

In general, trail users expressed some concern about conflicts on trails, but there was not strong agreement on the severity of the problem.

- 35 percent of the respondents agreed that conflicts between users occurred on their local trails, 24 percent disagreed, and 41 percent were neutral or didn't know.
- 45 percent agreed that trail conflicts were relatively minor, 15 percent disagreed, 40

percent had no opinion or didn't know.

- Over 9 percent of the responding trail users reported experiencing some sort of conflict on their last trail trip.
- Of those reporting conflicts, nearly 80 percent said they involved mechanized forms of trail use (this includes motorized and non-motorized uses such as mountain bikes).

Compatibility

- In general, Montanans have relatively strong opinions about motorized trail use: 28 percent of Montanans strongly disapproved of legal motorized trail use, 13 percent disapproved, 22 percent strongly approved, 31 percent somewhat approved, and 6 percent had no opinion.
- Survey results indicate that non-motorized users do not find motorized uses to be compatible with their type of trail activities. The percentage of non-motorized users who felt motorized use was compatible with their activity never climbed above 25 percent.
- Only 12 percent of backpackers felt motorcycles or four-wheel vehicles were compatible with their types of trail activity.
- In a break from the overall trend, 25 percent of the cross-country skiers felt snowmobiling was a compatible activity. Interestingly, fewer than 13 percent of snowmobilers said cross-country skiing was compatible with snowmobiling.
- Motorized users who felt non-motorized uses were compatible, ranged between 25 percent and 60 percent, depending on type of motorized use.
- Horseback riders generally feel non-mechanized trail use is more compatible with their sport than mechanized uses. For example, 72 percent of respondents rated walking as compatible, but only 33 percent felt similarly about mountain biking.
- Motorized vehicles were judged to be even less compatible; only 16 to 18 percent of horseback riders felt motorized uses were compatible.

Trail Access and Linear Corridor Alternatives

Access to Trails and Public Land

Public access disputes are increasing in Montana. Millions of acres of public land have inadequate access or are completely closed off by surrounding private land. There is no legal access to an estimated 13 million acres of the 23 million acres of public land lying east of the Continental Divide in Montana (10.2 million acres of National Forest, 8.1 million acres of BLM land, and 5.2 million acres of state land), 56 percent of the total.

Federal, state, and local agencies have attempted to address the access problem by documenting, signing, and acquiring numerous accesses since the 1970s, although usually on a case-by-case basis. Federal land managing agencies have the authority to acquire access to public land by purchase, exchange, donation, eminent domain, or litigation, and first gained standing to sue on the public's behalf for access in 1993.

Documenting public right-of-ways requires that the route existed when the land was still in the public domain, or was formally created under Montana law. An important legal tool in this process is a 1866 federal law known as R.S. 2477, which creates a public easement across private land when existence of an historical public road can be proven. It is worth noting that R.S. 2477 has also been used by some local governments and interest groups as a legal tool for opening or building motorized roads across public land.

The public can acquire an easement by prescription by showing open and continuous use for at least five years, and repair or maintenance by the state or county. Easements created by prescriptive use are the most significant legal mechanism in the creation of public right-of-ways in Montana. The Public Trust Doctrine has also been

used recently by some courts of law in exerting a federal interest in access to public land. Courts have also held that the land managing agency can manage the use of the public access or easement to protect natural and cultural resources.

Until counties formalize ownership of roads and trails not already included in the county records, many roads and unofficial trails commonly used by the public are subject to closure landowners. Once a road is physically closed by a private landowner, it takes expensive negotiations, litigation, purchase, or condemnation to restore the public access.

Linear Corridor Alternatives

In Montana, the traditional, stereotypical trail is a public path through the mountains surrounded by forest, but this is only part of the trails picture. Some of the greatest trail needs in Montana are in areas where there is not much public land; a variety of creative solutions will be needed to meet Montana's trail demands in the twenty-first century. Informal trails in urban areas, for example, are often heavily used by residents who don't realize the land is privately owned until fence posts are painted orange. Identification of potential routes as early as possible in comprehensive plans and other documents is an important first step toward preserving these opportunities.

Alternative linear land ownership and land use patterns that could be utilized to help implement some of the goals in this plan include railroads and abandoned railroad lines, agreements with corporate land owners, utility corridors, and historic trails. Additionally, there are a variety of tools being used in urban areas (e.g., recreational easements, prescriptive use documentation) to work out agreements with landowners to preserve informal trail rights-of-ways on private land.

The creation of trails and access from the various land use patterns discussed below is not necessarily easy or simple, in part because infrastructure corridors such as pipelines, for example, were often established for very specific, non-recreational purposes. The intent here is to inform readers of some of the potential trail corridor and access alternatives that might be available.

Rail lines

Currently, Montana is served by seven railroads with over 3,400 miles of track. Between 1979 and 1992, over 1,370 miles of railroad line were abandoned, while a number of short lines faded from use earlier in the century. Unfortunately, the majority of abandoned rail road miles in Montana are already in private hands since ownership reverted to adjacent landowners upon abandonment. The potential for creating rail-trails from remnant segments still exists in some places, especially in urban areas or where ownership reverted to public entities. Existing rail lines that are unused or used only occasionally also offer opportunities for trails.

Corporate Timber Lands

Forest industry firms own millions of acres throughout western Montana, often interspersed with public land in a checkerboard pattern. Much of this corporate timber land has been used historically by the public for recreation.

As timber resources are depleted and land becomes more valuable broken up into residential parcels, many historical trails and access to trails in corporate timber lands are in danger of being lost. For example, Plum Creek officials recently announced plans to sell up to 150,000 acres of land in northwestern Montana for residential development. A more positive aspect of this trend from a recreational perspective is the opportunity for public acquisition of land and/or conservation easements.

Utility Corridors

Public utilities, along with irrigation easements, are the most common linear land ownership pattern in the state, and include oil and natural

gas pipelines, sewer lines, electrical transmission lines, telephone, and fiber optic cable. The safety, legal, and cost issues of utilizing these corridors for public recreation are challenging, but there may be specific instances where an easement of this type may provide a solution to a trail problem.

Historic Trails

Montana has a number of prominent historical trails, including the Lewis and Clark and the Nee-Me-Poo (Nez Perce) National Historical Trails. Other historical routes in the state have been largely ignored for trail purposes, or have received attention only at a local or regional level (e.g., the Bozeman Trail). Although historic trails are now often both indiscernible and privately owned, important cultural and physical landscape features remain that offer opportunities for historical interpretation and education activities at specific sites along the route where access is available. In other cases, there may be opportunities for hiking or other trail activities along certain route segments open to the public.

Montana Trail Supply and Demand

Montana's trail supply has not kept pace with increased use, in part because of the access issues discussed above. Additionally, growth in population and tourism, combined with expanding participation in outdoor recreation, is putting pressure on the current trail system and increasing the demand for more trail opportunities.

Amidst this growing demand, Montana's overall supply of trails has declined, with trail creation eclipsed by the loss of existing trails. This decline has occurred mainly in the backcountry, due road building, logging, abandonment, lack of maintenance and other factors. Between 1945 and the late 1990s, at least 9,000 miles of trails disappeared in the national forests of Montana, as forest system road miles climbed from an estimated 8,600 miles to approximately 32,900 miles (Madej 1988 and USFS 1997). While many some of these trails were not originally built specifically for recreational purposes, they still represent a net loss of recreational opportunity.

During the past ten years, there has been growing interest in providing more trails in Montana's urban areas, where a significant portion of the State's residents reside. Changes in land ownership and land use have often resulted in subdivisions, suburban sprawl, different attitudes, and a changing sense of community. One consequence of this has been a loss of unofficial (often privately owned) trails and access to adjacent public lands, especially in the rapidly growing counties concentrated in western Montana. Conversely, funding for and interest in urban trails has increased during the last decade, and there have been some spectacular success stories throughout Montana.

Although Montana trail users generally prefer more primitive settings when they have time to get away from home, they tend to use urban trails on an every-day basis, which results in heavy, regular use. An ideal situation—and one that is emerging in a number of Montana cities—is a well-developed urban trail system, with good connecting links to more primitive trail systems on surrounding federal lands. In both urban and rural parts of Montana, the majority of the demand is for non-motorized trails, although motorized use has been increasing rapidly as well, with motorized users facing a diminished range of opportunities due to environmental concerns and social conflicts.

Geographically, eastern Montana has comparatively few trail opportunities. In addition to providing recreational opportunities for local residents, more trails in eastern Montana would help support efforts by some communities in this part of the state to increase tourism.

Trail Funding

Funding for new trail maintenance and construction is a critical Montana trail issue. Trends during the 1990s indicated decreasing federal funding for trail construction and maintenance in Montana, with a growing backlog of maintenance needs. Forest Service estimates show that maintenance funding decreased approximately twenty percent from fiscal year (FY) 1995 to FY 1997, for example, with construction funds decreasing by approximately forty percent during the same period. Limited federal funding is the primary factor preventing agencies from reaching their trail-related goals.

A number of federal, state, local, and private sources of funding and assistance are available to governments and private organizations. Private sources of trail funds include non-profit organizations, as well as corporate and business sponsors. The major federal and state funding sources are summarized below.

Federal Funding Sources

Federal programs constitute the largest funding source for trails in Montana; some are specifically dedicated to trails, while others are primarily aimed at reducing pollution, promoting alternative transportation, preserving open space, or protecting natural resources. The most important programs were created by the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA 21); these include the Surface Transportation Program, the National Recreational Trails Program, and the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program (CMAQ). Other programs include Community Development Block Grants, the Entitlement Program, and the Small Cities Program.

The Montana State Trails Grant Program

The Parks Division of FWP administers three trail grant programs: the federally-funded Recreational Trails Program (RTP); the state-funded Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Program; and the Snowmobile Grant Program. The Snowmobile Grant Program provides for groomed snowmobile trails and related facilities, as well as snowmobile education, safety, and enforcement.

The RTP is intended to enhance Montana's trail system and trail-related outdoor recreation. This program, funded by federal gas taxes paid on non-highway recreational fuel used in off-highway vehicles, provides states with funds for trails and trail-related projects. The funds may be used for both motorized and non-motorized trail development, renovation, maintenance, acquisition, safety, and interpretation.

The purpose of the OHV Program is to renovate and maintain off-highway vehicle trails and riding areas. The OHV Program, funded by OHV decal sales and a portion of the Distributor's Gasoline Tax, devotes ten percent of the money to promote OHV safety; up to ten percent to repair areas that are damaged by OHV use; and the remaining funds to develop and maintain free public trail facilities. A much more detailed description and analysis of the State RTP and OHV Grant Programs is found in the *Trails Program PEIS*.

Montana Trail Issues, Goals and Strategies

Summarized below are the long-range goals and strategies developed for resolving the fifteen major trail issues addressed in this plan; a more complete discussion of each issue is found in the full Plan. Goals represent broad statements that describe the desired end result for each issue area. The strategies are alternative approaches or courses of action that can be used to help resolve the issue and achieve the stated goal. The strategies can be regarded as a menu of options that can be drawn from to attack a particular issue. Because the plan is general and advisory in nature, it does not contain specific timeframes

or quantifiable objectives for achieving the goals. However, many of the recommendations have already been incorporated into the *Trails Program PEIS*, and will be implemented through the FWP grant programs.

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.

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.

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").

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.

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.

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.

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).

I) **INCENTIVES:** Trail managers may be able to use incentives such as property tax breaks to encourage landowners to grant easements.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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

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.

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.

F) **SECURING TRAIL EASEMENTS:** Secure public use easements across common area park lands dedicated to homeowners associations as part of the subdivision process.

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 specific funding mechanisms pertinent for urban areas are discussed in the full Plan.

3) ISSUE: RESOURCE PROTECTION

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

STRATEGIES:

A) **NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCE IMPACT ANALYSIS:** Public input during the Plan scoping process emphasized the importance of examining environmental impacts early in the planning process, and involving the public while doing so.

B) **NOXIOUS WEED MANAGEMENT:** Noxious weeds are an increasingly serious trail-related issue. Managing agencies should work cooperatively, and involve volunteers and interest groups, including 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.

C) **ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION:** Education has a major role to play in addressing many environmental issues associated with trail use. Cooperation between managing agencies—and between agencies and educational institutions—is essential to improving and coordinating environmental-related education efforts.

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.

E) **TRAIL DESIGN:** Proper design of trails can play a major role in reducing environmental impacts such as erosion. In general, negative effects can be reduced by building new trails in areas where there are already human impacts on the landscape. Inter-agency communication and mutual sharing of information is an important means for assuring that good design 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.

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.

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.

H) **MONITORING RESOURCE IMPACTS:** Agencies should carefully monitor trail-related environmental 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.

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. 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. 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.

K) **PROTECTING HISTORICAL TRAILS:** A number of historical trails have already been designated as part of the National Trail System, or received attention in other ways. However, there are many lesser-known trails with important cultural and physical landscape attributes that could be the focus of historical interpretation and education activities.

4) ISSUE: TRAIL SUPPLY AND SYSTEM CONFIGURATION

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

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. Managers and trail advocates need to be involved early in all plans for new roadways, developments, and utilities corridors which might provide trail potential.

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 statewide 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 would 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.

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.

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.

F) **PRESERVING PRIMITIVE OPPORTUNITIES:** Managers need to remember the value of retaining a diversity of primitive and unpublicized routes for hikers who prefer them. 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. Loops provide an alternative route back for trail users and help disperse use.

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.

I) **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. Managing agencies need to also work closely with tribal governments and private providers on trail issues.

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.

K) **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.

L) **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.

5) ISSUE: FUNDING

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

STRATEGIES:

A) **INVESTIGATE POTENTIAL NEW FUNDING SOURCES:** The Montana State Trails Advisory Committee (STAC) should work on maintaining existing funding sources as well as developing new and creative ways to improve funding, particularly for non-motorized trails (a complete list of various ideas is included in the complete Trails Plan). 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.

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. 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. 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 reflects the type of experience trail users desire.

STRATEGIES:

A) **EFFECTIVE USE OF VOLUNTEERS:** Use volunteers more effectively in maintenance activities (a list of specific suggestions is included in the full plan).

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.

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.).

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.

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.

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 available.

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 appropriate for heavily used trails.

H) **CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES:** Explore contracts with corrections facilities, juvenile offender programs, and courts to perform trail maintenance activities as part of community service.

I) **THE MONTANA CONSERVATION CORPS (MCC):** The MCC is a resource managers can use for both trail maintenance and construction activities.

J) **MAINTENANCE DISTRICTS:** Another strategy for improving maintenance would be establishing 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.

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.

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 all 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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

I) **NOISE, AIR, AND SPARK ARRESTOR CHECKS:** There is a need for more aggressive checking of spark arrestors, and potential noise and air quality violations. One way of ensuring compliance would be to require an inspection before stickers are issued. A random check at trailheads is another tool that could increase compliance.

J) **REDUCING ILLEGAL TRAIL USE/CONSTRUCTION:** Illegal trail use in off-limit 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.

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 would not be able to write citations or make law enforcement contacts; the intent would be to provide monitoring and information.

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.

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 permits for heavily used areas) to preserve the quality of the experience and protect the environment. 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.

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 activities of particular users.

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.

C) **SEPARATING AND DISPERSING USE:** Managers may want to 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 should work with motorized trail users to look at the feasibility of establishing designated 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.

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.

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?

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.

STRATEGIES:

A) **INFORMATION AND EDUCATION:** 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.

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 in locations where there have been problems.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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 State Trails Advisory Committee (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.

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.

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.

E) **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT:** Managing agencies should continually work to refine and expand their trails-related public involvement programs. 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 presently important avenues for exchanging Montana trail information between groups, and should be continued and expanded.

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.

INFORMATION STRATEGIES

A) **DIRECTORY OF TRAIL ORGANIZATIONS:** Produce and periodically update a comprehensive directory on trail organizations, groups, and managing agencies.

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.

C) **PUBLIC INFORMATION GAPS:** Agencies, user groups, and tourism officials should work to improve information and maps for trail activities that presently lack necessary material.

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.

E) **TRAIL SIGNING:** Trail users expressed a strong interest in improved trail signing during the Plan scoping process (a complete list of potential improvements is listed in the full Plan).

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.

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 perform.

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.

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.

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.

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).

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.

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.

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, particularly in cases where nothing else is available.

E) **STATE RAIL-TRAIL SYSTEM:** Managing agencies and trail organizations should explore the long-term possibility of establishing a state-managed rail-trail system. 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.

STRATEGIES.

A) **TRAILS, TRANSPORTATION, AND LAND USE PLANNING:** Trails and trail-related issues need to be fully integrated into local and statewide transportation plans, subdivision and development plans, and comprehensive planning

B) **MARKETING AND INCENTIVES FOR NON-MOTORIZED COMMUTING:** User groups, trail managing agencies, and transportation authorities need to work cooperatively to promote urban non-motorized transportation, and improve opportunities. People need more information about the benefits of non-motorized commuting, and better incentives to try it.

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.

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.

STRATEGIES.

A) **ACCESSIBLE TRAIL GUIDE:** Compile an inter-agency, statewide guide to disabled/elderly accessible trails opportunities, with location maps and brief route descriptions.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

B) **PARKING:** Where necessary, improve parking at trailheads. 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 turnaround 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.

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.

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).

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.

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 rationale for management decisions is more clearly understood.

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). 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.

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. 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.

G) **LANDSCAPE DIVERSITY:** 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:** 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:** Some of the best trails are linear corridors which 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. 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:** 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.

K) **TRAIL PLAN UPDATES:** In order to remain current, the State Trails Plan will need to be updated; 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. 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.

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 are outside the scope of the *State Trails Plan*, but water trails are an important issue, which 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.

View from the End of the Trail

There is a considerable amount of information to digest in the *State Trails Plan*, and many recommendations that form a general map for Montana's trails future. 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.

As with many other things that generate passion, Montana's trails also produce disagreement, sometimes leading to conflict and controversy. It is worth reminding ourselves that disagreement is natural, entirely American, very Montanan, and even healthy—if done respectfully with an ear toward listening and learning. That is the spirit we hope this Plan approaches its subject. It is unlikely many people will agree with everything in this document, but there should be a fair amount that is common ground. So, in your tour through Montana's trail system, please *do* disagree and debate, but don't forget all that is shared and how lucky we are to share it, in the context of a political system that allows for and even encourages differences in perspective.

When all is said and done, there are a number of philosophical themes woven through the Plan that are worth stating explicitly:

- In spite of their differences, trail users will accomplish far more working together than separately.
- 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 accomplished, 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!

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GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS

AARP: American Association of Retired Persons

ADA: Americans with Disabilities Act

ATV: All-terrain Vehicle

BLM: Bureau of Land Management

CARA: Conservation and Reinvestment Act

CMAQ: Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program

CTEP: Community Transportation Enhancement Program

DNRC: Department of Natural Resources and Conservation

EIS: Environmental Impact Statement

4WD: Four-wheel Drive Vehicle

FWP: Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

FY: Fiscal Year

GIS: Geographic Information Systems

GPS: Global Positioning System

ISTEA: Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act

LWCF: Land and Water Conservation Fund

MDT: Montana Department of Transportation

MEPA: Montana Environmental Policy Act

MOU: Memorandum of Understanding

MPO: Metropolitan Planning Organization

NEPA: National Environmental Policy Act

NPS: National Park Service

NRTA: National Recreational Trails Act

OHV: Off-highway Vehicle (includes ATVs, off-road motorcycles, and off-road 4x4 use)

ORV: Off-road Vehicle (same as above)

PEIS: Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement

RTP: Recreational Trails (grant) Program

STAC: State Trails Advisory Committee

STIP: Statewide Transportation Improvement Program

TIIP: Tourism Infrastructure Investment Program

TIP: Transportation Improvement Program

TIPMONT: Turn in Poachers—Montana

USFS: United States Forest Service

USFWS: United State Fish and Wildlife Service