



FISCAL YEAR 2023 RECREATIONAL TRAILS PROGRAM AWARDS
RECORD OF DECISION
May 15th, 2023

Recreational Trails Program Authority and Scope

The Recreational Trails Program (RTP) provides funds for development, renovation, maintenance, and acquisition of land for recreational trails and for trail-related safety, education, and information. Section 206 of Title 23, United States Code, establishes the RTP as a federal-aid program. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) administers this program at the federal level [23 U.S.C. 206 (b)] while Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) is charged with program administration at the state level [23 U.S.C 206 (c)] and as designated by the Governor. After allowing for federal rescissions, overhead, and indirect costs, approximately \$1.5 million was available for grants from Montana's FY 2023 RTP apportionment.

RTP Grant Application Process and Awards

Montana received a federal RTP allocation totaling approximately \$1.5 million for Fiscal Year 2023 RTP projects. Table 1 (attached) reflects the approximate funding amount to be awarded to each subrecipient in FY 2023.

This year, FWP received 48 RTP grant applications with requests totaling approximately \$2.6 million. Of the original applications received, 36 applications are recommended for either full or partial funding based on their application scores and how well the projects adhere to State Trails Advisory Committee and FWP priorities.

The recommended FY 2023 RTP projects were deemed successful based on technical eligibility, application scoring, and funding availability. FWP posted a list of the 36 recommended projects on its website, sent out press releases, and announced a period for public comment. The public comment period ran from April 26th through May 11th, 2023.

Environmental Review of RTP Applications

Each of the 36 recommended projects must satisfy environmental reviews for both the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA). Four (4) of the projects were exempt from completion of an environmental review because they included only education/awareness or the purchase of equipment.

The 32 projects that were not exempt from environmental review included environmental review documents with their applications. Most projects provided adequate documentation, including a MEPA/NEPA Environmental

Analysis Checklist or a Categorical Exclusion Checklist. Those projects that provided insufficient environmental review documentation have submitted the required documentation to the RTP Manager.

The RTP Manager completed an environmental review of each project before the RTP Agreement is issued. All recommended FY 2023 RTP projects qualified for a FHWA Categorical Exclusion under NEPA (23 CFR 771.117(c)(23)) and MEPA (ARM 18.2.261(2)(w)). The major categories for which impacts are being reviewed include the following:

- **Soils:** Maintenance and renovations of existing trails will have immediate short-term negative impacts during the time of on-ground maintenance but will result in long-term positive impacts. Soil erosion will be reduced, and water runoff will be diverted gradually off trail surfaces.
- **Vegetation:** The primary potential impact from trail projects is from import and spread of noxious weeds. There are always potential impacts to threatened and endangered plant species; however, no serious effects were noted.
- **Water Quality, Hydrology, Fisheries:** Maintenance and renovation of existing trails will have immediate short-term negative impacts because of disturbance of soils during the “construction” phase, with potential for localized run-off and sedimentation. However, the long-term impact of projects included in this year’s grant program that reduce or mitigate impacts to soil and vegetation resources should have positive impacts.
- **Wildlife:** Almost any type of unusual or intermittent disturbance, including trails and trail use, can have a negative effect on wildlife species and perhaps wildlife habitat. Environmental reviews completed for grant projects analyzed these potential impacts and the effects were determined to be minimal.
- **Land Use:** Grant projects will not change the existing types of use on those trails affected as noted in applications by the land managers.
- **Economic Impacts:** Numerous studies conclude that public trails benefit local economies. A strong trail system both helps preserve natural amenities and provides greater opportunities for enjoying them. Trails are significant economic generators that attract businesses, draw tourism, create jobs, and increase property values. Trails can also result in negative economic impacts, including the potential spread of noxious weeds. Projects included in this year’s program are anticipated to have generally positive economic impacts.
- **Outdoor Recreation Impacts:** Grant projects will have positive impacts on outdoor recreation. Maintenance and renovation of trail systems will enhance the user’s experience while protecting resources. The opportunity for public comment through the grant application process is intended to reduce the possibility of funding projects of questionable merit or with potential to increase conflict.
- **Cultural Resources:** No negative impacts on cultural resources were identified in the individual project environmental review process or through public scoping.
- **Cumulative and Irreversible Impacts:** No significant cumulative or irreversible impacts are anticipated from FY 2023 RTP grant projects.

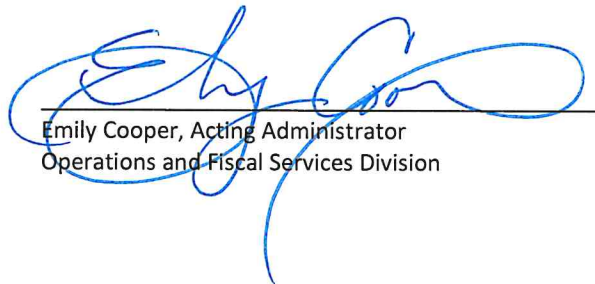
Public Comment Summary

During the public comment period, FWP received one (1) comment. The comment expressed disappointment in the number of awards for motorized RTP projects and asked how many of the projects were for expanding, improving, or maintaining off-road trails and signage other than snow grooming.

FWP Response: RTP is open for applications between November and January of each year. RTP is required to follow a 30-40-30 allocation rule stating that of the appropriated dollars received each year, 30% must be used for Nonmotorized project, 40% for diversified (both motorized and nonmotorized) projects, and 30% for motorized projects. For the FY23 RTP cycle, FWP reviewed 10 eligible motorized project proposals, 9 of which were partially or fully funded based on application scoring, eligibility, and recommendations provided from the State Trails Advisory Committee. Of the 9 funded motorized awards, 1 project was specifically for the improvements and maintenance OHV/ATV trails. In addition to these fully motorized projects, we note that 5 additional projects funded through RTP are for diversified use that include both nonmotorized and motorized (snowmobile and/or off-highway vehicle) trail maintenance.

Decision

The decision of Operations and Fiscal Services, a division of Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, is to approve the FY 2023 Recreational Trails Program grant awards for the projects listed in Table 1 (attached), as recommended by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks staff and the State Trails Advisory Committee.



Emily Cooper, Acting Administrator
Operations and Fiscal Services Division

Table 1 2023 Recreational Trails Program Awards

Organization Name	Project Title	Funding Amount
Absaroka Beartooth Wilderness Foundation	2023 Volunteer Trail Stewardship in the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness	\$28,000.00
Beartooth Recreational Trails Association	Winter Trail Maintenance of the West Fork Road and red Lodge Nordic Center	\$7,560.00
Bike Net DBA Billings TrailNet	Revitalize and Restore Arnold Drain Trail for Multipurpose Use	\$100,000.00
Billings, City of	Rose Park Trail: Enhancing Recreation and Connectivity Phase I	\$100,000.00
Bob Marshall Wilderness Foundation	Volunteer Stewardship Projects in the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex	\$50,000.00
Bridger Ski Foundation	Bridger Ski Foundation Community Nordic Trails Grooming and Operations	\$54,987.00
Five Valleys Land Trust	Confluence Gateway Trail Project	\$90,000.00
Flathead Snowmobile Association	Flathead Snowmobile Association Grooming of Snowmobile Trails	\$92,000.00
Foy's To Blacktail Trails	Herron County Park Drainage Reconstruction	\$26,400.00
Gateway to Glacier	Crystal Cedar Trailhead Construction	\$30,000.00
Glacier Nordic Club	Big Mountain Nordic Trail Grooming	\$22,000.00
Helena, City of	Upper DeFord Universal Access Trail	\$38,885.00
Kings Hill Grooming Association	Kings Hill Grooming Association Snowmobile Trail Grooming and Trail Maintenance	\$70,000.00
Kootenai Cross-Country Ski Club, Inc	Grooming and Maintenance	\$13,560.00
Livingston HealthCare (Billings Clinic Affiliate)	Trail Connectivity and Equitable Access to Outdoor Recreation on the Alpenglow	\$60,000.00
Missoula Nordic Ski Club	Grooming of Cross-Country Ski Trails on Public Lands near Missoula	\$19,540.00
Missoula Snowgoers Snowmobile Association	Lolo Pass Ski and Snowmobile Trail Grooming	\$36,250.00
Montana Vehicle Trail Riders Association	Motorized Trail Maintenance on BLM Trails	\$75,000
Powder River County Weed District	Trails and Noxious Weed Maintenance	\$5,300.00
Powell County	Old Yellowstone Trail Resurfacing and Weed Management, Phase 2	\$100,000.00

Prickly Pear Land Trust	Tenmile Creek Park Trailhead Structure Expansion	\$27,000.00
Seeley Lake Nordic Ski Club	Seeley Lake Nordic Ski Trail Grooming	\$10,200.00
Selway Bitterroot Frank Church Foundation	2024 Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness Volunteer Trail Clearing and Maintenance	\$15,241.00
Silver Crest Trails Association	Silver Crest Trails Nordic Grooming	\$6,560.00
Three Forks, City of	Trail Extension-Headwaters Trail, Phase One	\$75,000.00
Trout Unlimited	Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge Trail and Fisheries Improvement Project	\$69,602.00
USFS-Custer Gallatin National Forest-Bozeman Ranger District	2023 Bozeman RD Year-Round Trail Maintenance and Volunteer Leadership project	\$50,000.00
USFS-Custer Gallatin National Forest-Gardiner Ranger District	Winter Trail Maintenance in the Cooke City Recreation Area	\$25,328.80
USFS-Custer Gallatin National Forest-Hebgen Lake Ranger District	Hebgen Lake RD Trail Crew Summer/Winter Trail Maintenance	\$27,000.00
USFS-Custer Gallatin National Forest-Yellowstone Ranger District	Trail Maintenance in Flood-Affected Areas of the Yellowstone Ranger District	\$23,500.00
USFS-Flathead Avalanche Center	Avalanche Forecasting and Education	\$20,000.00
USFS-Gallatin National Forest-Avalanche Center	Saving Lives through Avalanche Forecasting in SW Montana	\$30,000.00
USFS-Lolo National Forest-Plains/Thompson Falls Ranger District	Four Lakes Area Hiker Bridges	\$33,000.00
West Central Montana Avalanche Foundation	Avalanche Information and Education	\$15,000.00
West Yellowstone Chamber of Commerce	Snowmobile Trail Grooming of West Yellowstone, Montana	\$81,000.00
Whitefish Legacy Partners	Whitefish Trail - Hellroaring Connection	\$50,000.00