



**FISCAL YEAR 2023 MONTANA TRAIL STEWARDSHIP GRANT PROGRAM AWARDS
RECORD OF DECISION
June 23, 2022**

Montana Trail Stewardship Grant Program Authority and Scope

The Montana Trail Stewardship Grant Program (MTSGP) provides funds for the development, renovation, and maintenance of land for recreational trails. Part 109, Chapter 2, Title 23, Montana Code Annotated, establishes the MTSGP as a trails and recreational facilities grant program administered by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP). The Parks and Outdoor Recreation Division administers the program on behalf of FWP.

The MTSGP was authorized by Senate Bill 24 in the 2019 Legislative Session. Funding for the program comes from \$1.37 of Montana's \$9.00 light vehicle registration fee, as well as tax revenue from recreational marijuana sales. Approximately **\$1,670,000** is available for grants in FY 2023. Pursuant to 23-2-109, MCA, the State Trails Advisory Committee (STAC) met on April 7, 2022, to review applications and make recommendations for grant awards to FWP for the 2022 grant cycle.

Grant Application Process and Awards

This year, the MTSGP received 37 applications requesting \$1,667,611.10. Of those, four projects also applied to the federal Recreational Trails Program and will be funded through that program. The remaining applications, except one that opted not to submit requested supplemental materials, are recommended for full funding (\$1,476,865.10 combined) based on meeting MTSGP eligibility requirements, application scoring, STAC discussion and recommendations, and funding availability. Table 1 (attached) reflects the approximate funding amount to be awarded to each grant recipient in FY 2022.

FWP sent out press releases regarding applications and award recommendations and held a 30-day public comment period between April 26 and May 26, 2022. Grant applications were also made available in the Parks and Outdoor Recreation Division Office for interested parties.

Environmental Review of MTSGP Applications

Each of the 32 recommended FY 2022 MTSGP projects must satisfy environmental review for the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA). Each project included environmental review documents within its MTSGP application. Each project's file contains adequate environmental review documentation, consisting of either a MEPA/NEPA Environmental Analysis Checklist or a Categorical Exclusion Checklist.

FWP completed the environmental review of each proposed MTSGP project and approved all recommended FY 2022 MTSGP projects for a 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. Projects will use best practices to mitigate potential impacts. No significant impacts to threatened and endangered plant species 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, long-term positive impacts that reduce or mitigate impacts to soil and vegetation resources are expected after projects are completed.

Wildlife: Environmental reviews completed for grant projects analyzed potential impacts to wildlife species and wildlife habitat and determined impacts would not be significant.

Land Use: FY 2022 MTSGP 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.

Outdoor Recreation Impacts: The FY 2022 MTSGP grant projects will have positive impacts on outdoor recreation. Maintenance and renovation of trail systems will enhance the user’s experience while protecting resources.

Cultural Resources: No negative impacts on cultural resources were identified in the individual project environmental review process or through public scoping.

Cumulative Impacts: No significant cumulative impacts are anticipated from FY 2022 MTSGP grant projects.

Public Comment Summary

FWP held a Public Comment Period for all 2022 MTSGP proposed awards April 26 through May 26, 2022. During the public comment period, FWP received nine comments. Comments were invited and submitted through the FWP website.

The public comments received during the 30-day period ranged in subject matter and length. A handful of comments provided notes of support for specific trail projects listed, while others presented

questions about the grant review process. There was also a pair of inquiries addressing the absence of projects involving tribal organizations and communities in eastern Montana.

Notes of support addressed trail projects in the Flathead Valley, Bitterroot Valley, and the City of Lewistown. Many of the comments emphasized support for the collaborative nature of these projects, as well as the increased connectivity to existing trail systems that will result from project implementation. FWP responded by thanking the commentors for their involved and support of the Trails Stewardship Grant Program.

General questions regarding the grant review process sought additional information about scoring criteria and standards of review in relation to the applicant pool. FWP responded by providing specific information about the application review process and links to the FWP website where documentation of grant guidelines can be accessed by potential applicants and the public to review.

Multiple comments asked why tribal organizations and communities in eastern Montana were not included in the list of proposed awards. FWP informed the commentors that applications from those respective stakeholder groups were not received for the 2022 grant cycle. Additionally, FWP responded by providing specific information about how the agency's Tribal Liaison is working with the grants program to raise awareness about the funding opportunities available to tribal stakeholders, as well as plans to conduct a targeted outreach effort to communities in eastern Montana to increase applications for the 2023 grant cycle.

Decision

Based on review of the applications, environmental review documents, STAC discussion and recommendations, and public comment received, it is the decision of Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, to approve the FY 2022 Montana Trail Stewardship Grant Program grant awards as listed in Table 1 (attached).

Please direct questions to:

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Hope Stockwell". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Hope" and last name "Stockwell" clearly legible.

Hope Stockwell
Parks and Outdoor Recreation Division Administrator
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
PO Box 200701
Helena, MT 59620-0701
406-444-4585

Table 1: 2022 Montana Trail Stewardship Grant Program Awards

Organization	Project Description	Award Amount
Mineral County	Upgrades to infrastructure at multiple trailheads with the St. Regis Park	\$47,593.00
Helena Snowdrifters	Helena Snowdrifters Groomed Snowmobile Trail Signage	\$9,767.00
Scenic Montana Trails	Seeley Lake-Garnet over snow grooming	\$65,000.00
Montana Trail Vehicle Riders Association	Continuation of Statewide Motorized Trail Maintenance BLM	\$75,000.00
USFS-Custer Gallatin National Forest-Yellowstone Ranger District	Winter Motorized Trail Maintenance on the Yellowstone Ranger District	\$35,580.00
Great Burn Conservation Alliance	Great Burn Trail Stewardship	\$69,150.00
Bitterroot Backcountry Cyclists	Trail maintenance in the Bitterroot National Forest	\$46,880.00
USFS-Beaverhead Deerlodge National Forest Service-Dillon Ranger District	2022 Dillon District Trail Stewards	\$31,481.10
Missoula Snowgoers Snowmobile Association	Lolo Ski and Snowmobile Trail Grooming	\$20,000.00
Capital Trail Vehicle Association	Picnic Pavilion Project	\$62,340.00
Flathead Land Trust	Bigfork-Harrell Forest Community Trails	\$75,000.00
Foy's to Blacktail Trails Inc.	Emmons Ridge Corridor Clearing	\$40,392.00
Whitefish Legacy Partners	Maintenance Projects on the Whitefish Trail	\$50,000.00
USFS-Lolo National Forest-Superior Ranger District	Thompson Creek Trail Improvement Project	\$74,220.00
Missoula County	Rural Shared Use Trails Preservation Project	\$74,970.00
USFS-Custer Gallatin National Forest-Beartooth Ranger District	Beartooth RD Trail Maintenance	\$55,000.00
City of Billings	City of Billings Riverfront Park Trail Extension Paving Project	\$75,000.00

USFS-Beaverhead Deerlodge National Forest-Madison Ranger District	Indian Creek Trail Revitalization	\$32,000.00
USFS-Lolo National Forest-Plains/Thompson Falls Ranger District	Completing the Falls Flats Trail	\$41,520.00
West Yellowstone Ski Education Foundation	Grooming and Maintaining the Rendezvous Trails System	\$70,700.00
Swan Valley Connections	Mission Mountains & Swan Front Trails & Backcountry Services	\$48,150.00
Echo Lake Trails Association	Midway Trailhead Vault Toilet	\$19,000.00
City of Lewistown	Lewistown City Trails Hard Surfacing A Street to H Street	\$73,000.00
USFS-Custer Gallatin National Forest-Gardiner Ranger District	Wounded Man Trail #309 Restoration Project	\$44,975.00
Bob Marshall Wilderness Foundation	Wilderness Conservation Crew Stewardship Projects in the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex	\$36,000.00
City of Three Forks	Headwaters Trail Rehab-Crack Sealing and Seal Coat	\$54,000.00
Bitterroot Trail Preservation Alliance	BTPA Mileage markers	\$24,500.00
USFS-Beaverhead Deerlodge National Forest-Pintler Ranger District	East Deerlodge Trail Reconstruction and Relocation	\$28,000.00
Great Falls, City of - Parks Department	River's Edge Trail Bike Repair Stations	\$4,870.00
Bridger Ski Foundation	Facilities Preparation and Groomed Winter Trails in Gallatin County	\$16,777.00
Summit Snowgoers	Skyline Trail System Improvements	\$45,000.00
Great Falls Trail Bike Riders Association	Southwest Castle Mountains ATV Trails Phase 3	\$31,000.00