



**MONTANA TRAIL STEWARDSHIP GRANT PROGRAM AWARDS
RECORD OF DECISION
May 19, 2023**

Trail Stewardship Grant Program Authority and Scope

The Trail Stewardship Grant Program (TSP) provides funds for the development, renovation, and maintenance of land for recreational trails. Part 109, Chapter 2, Title 23, Montana Code Annotated, establishes TSP 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.

TSP 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 **\$955,000** is available for grants in the 2023 cycle. Pursuant to 23-2-109, Montana Code Annotated (MCA), the State Trails Advisory Committee (STAC) met on March 22nd and 23rd, 2023 to review applications and make recommendations to FWP for the 2023 grant cycle.

Grant Application Process and Awards

For 2023, TSP received 51 eligible applications requesting \$2,485,695.73. Of the 51 applications, 16 were selected for full project funding and 15 were selected for partial project funding. Altogether, 31 projects will receive funding from the 2023 TSP grant cycle totaling \$955,000. The TSP application review process considered eligibility requirements, application scoring, environmental review materials, STAC discussion and recommendations, diversity in opportunity type and location, and funding availability. Table 1 (attached) reflects the approximate funding amount to be awarded to each grant recipient in FY 2023.

FWP distributed press releases regarding applications and award recommendations and held a 15-day public comment period between April 27 and May 11, 2023. Grant applications were also made available in the Parks and Outdoor Recreation Division Office in Helena, MT for interested parties to review.

Environmental Review of MTSGP Applications

Each of the 31 recommended TSP projects must satisfy environmental review for the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA). Each proposed project included supplemental environmental review documents within its TSP application to aid in the review process. Projects were categorized to have either Routine Resource Impacts (e.g., clearing of an existing trail corridor) or Unique Resource Impacts (e.g., construction of new trailhead facilities). There were 21 projects with Routine Resource Impacts and those were examined using a checklist review form that was shared with the public during the public comment period. The 10 projects that were

categorized as Unique Resource Impacts were reviewed using an extensive checklist review form that was also posted for public comment.

FWP has approved all recommended 2023 TSP projects for a Categorical Exclusion under NEPA (23 CFR 771.117(c)(23)) and the applicable requirements of MEPA (75-1-101, et. seq, MCA; ARM 12.2.429, et. seq; and ARM 18.2.261(2)(w)). The major categories for which impacts have been reviewed include the following:

Soils: Maintenance and renovations of existing trails will have immediate short-term adverse impacts during the time of on-ground maintenance but, long-term, will result in beneficial 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 significant impacts were identified for any of the approved projects.

Water Quality, Hydrology, Fisheries: Maintenance and renovation of existing trails will have immediate, short-term adverse 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 are expected to have beneficial impacts on the affected environment.

Wildlife: Almost any type of unusual or intermittent disturbance, including trails and trail use, may have adverse impacts on wildlife species and perhaps wildlife habitat. Environmental reviews completed for grant projects analyzed these potential impacts and the effects were determined to be minor.

Land Use: The selected 2023 TSP grant cycle projects will not change the existing types of use on affected trails, as noted by land managers during review of applications.

Economic Impacts: Numerous studies conclude that public trails benefit local economies. A strong trail system helps preserve natural amenities and provides greater opportunities for public recreation. Trails provide economic benefits that attract businesses, draw tourism, create jobs, and increase property values. Trails may also result in adverse economic impacts, including the potential spread of noxious weeds. Projects approved through the 2023 grant cycle are anticipated to have generally beneficial economic impacts.

Outdoor Recreation Impacts: The selected 2023 TSP grant cycle projects will have beneficial 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 the potential to increase conflict.

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

Cumulative and Irreversible Impacts: No significant cumulative or irreversible impacts are anticipated from the selected 2023 TSP grant cycle projects.

Public Comment Summary

FWP held a public comment period for all 2023 TSP proposed awards beginning April 27 through May 11, 2023. The comment period was used to gather comments related to environmental impact concerns. During the public comment period, FWP received 42 comments. Comments were solicited by press release (other forms of public notice? Social media?) and submitted through FWP's website.

The public comments received during the comment 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 overall funding amount for the 2023 grant cycle.

Eleven comments received were in support of trail projects in Fort Benton, Havre, Mineral County, the Bridger Mountains, and the Big Belt Mountains. Many 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 participation and support of the Trails Stewardship Grant Program.

FWP received 30 comments related to the partial funding proposed for Swan Valley Connections towards its application for the Mission Mountains and Swan Front Trails & Backcountry Service project. Comments expressed support for the work Swan Valley Connections performs and asked that the proposed award be increased to support the application. FWP responded to commentors acknowledging receipt and provided the organization with a link to the recording of the March 22nd and March 23rd STAC meeting to learn more about how partial funding was recommended.

General questions about the funding amount for the 2023 cycle were asked. Specifically, why the amount of funding was lower than the two previous TSP cycles. Staff replied by explaining TSP was established in the 2019 Legislative Session and did not have an appropriation at that time. The first appropriation of just over \$3.5 million occurred in 2021 Legislative Session. The previous two TSP grant cycles awarded \$2.6 million, therefore \$955,000 remained for the 2023 application cycle.

Decision

Based on review of the project applications and environmental review materials, eligibility requirements, application scoring, STAC discussion and recommendations, diversity in opportunity type and location, funding availability, and public comments received, it is the decision of Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, to approve the 2023 awards for Trail Stewardship Grant Program, as listed in Table 1 (attached).

Please direct questions to:

Hope Stockwell
Parks and Outdoor Recreation Division Administrator
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

PO Box 200701
 Helena, MT 59620-0701
 406-444-4585

Table 1: 2023 Trail Stewardship Grant Program Awards

Organization Name	Project Title	Award Amount
Backcountry Hunters & Anglers	Trail Maintenance Projects to Benefit Hunters, Anglers and Outdoor Recreators	\$35,660.00
Bitterroot Cross-Country Ski Club	Grooming for Free XC Skiing at Chief Joseph Pass and Lake Como Recreation Area	\$25,000.00
Bob Marshall Wilderness Foundation	Wilderness Conservation Crew Stewardship Projects in the Bob Marshall Wilderness	\$19,500.00
Bridger Ski Foundation	Bridger Ski Foundation Community Nordic Trails Venue Preparation and Facilities	\$15,000.00
Capital Trail Vehicle Association	Big Belts Motorized and Non-Motorized Trailhead Relocation 2023 (M)	\$57,366.00
City of Fort Benton	Fort Benton Levee Trail Restoration	\$75,000.00
City of Glasgow	Sullivan Park Trail Project	\$75,000.00
East Ridge Foundation	Maud S Canyon Rehabilitation & Mining Heritage Trail Project	\$24,900.00
Flathead Snowmobile Association	FSA Grooming and Brushing on USFS Trails (M)	\$20,000.00
Fort Peck Tribes	Pté Bahá Océgu Wamákhá?kaŋ?kaŋ (Buffalo Connections Trail)	\$75,000.00
Foy's to Blacktail Trails	Emmons Ridge Trail Finish Work	\$7,200.00
Friends of Thompson Park	Thompson Park Winter Grooming	\$3,520.00
Gallatin Valley Land Trust	Mainstreet to the Mountains Stewardship Projects	\$28,500.00

Gateway to Glacier	Crystal Cedar Trail Construction - Phase 2 Extension	\$21,000.00
Jackpine Savages Snowmobile Club	Beaverhead Forest Trails Maintenance: Wise River District (M)	\$25,000.00
Medicine Rocks State Park	Night Sky Viewing Project	\$25,500.00
Mile High Nordic Ski Education Foundation	Support for Cross-Country Ski Trail Grooming Expenses, Southwest Montana	\$8,820.00
Mineral County Rails to Trails	DNRC/Great American Rail-Trail Section and Austin/Old Milwaukee RR Scenic Loop	\$39,000.00
Missoula County	Big Sky Perimeter Trail: Universal Trail Access Enhancements	\$58,450.00
Montana State University – Northern	MSU-Northern Campus Trail	\$66,025.00
Scenic Montana Trails	Seeley Garnet Snow Trail Grooming Project (M)	\$25,000.00
Seeley Lake Nordic Ski Club	Seeley Creek Trailhead Electrical Install	\$34,400.00
Swan Valley Connections	Mission Mountains & Swan Front Trails & Backcountry Services	\$22,500.00
Troy Snowmobile Club	Grooming Winter Trails (M)	\$25,000.00
USFS-Beaverhead Deerlodge National Forest Service-Dillon Ranger District	Trail Maintenance to Multiple Heavily Used Lakes	\$10,000.00
USFS-Custer Gallatin National Forest-Yellowstone Ranger District	2024 Winter Motorized Trail Maintenance on the Yellowstone RD (M)	\$18,000.00
West Yellowstone Ski Education Foundation	Rendezvous Ski Trail Nordic Grooming	\$15,000.00
Wild Montana	Wild Montana Volunteer Trail Crew Projects Across Montana	\$15,271.00

Winter Wildlands Alliance	Bridger Mountains Sign and Weed Treatment Project	\$52,751.00
Yaak Valley Forest Council	2023 Blacktail Creek and Dodge Summit Trails Maintenance and Weed Abatement	\$15,239.00
Yellowstone National Park	Coyote Creek Trail Restoration	\$16,200.00