



**Fish Creek Recreation Strategy Planning  
Summary of 2024 Stakeholder Meetings  
OHV (2/22- Superior, MT, 9/6 – Missoula, MT) & Paddlers (4/19 - Virtual)**

## **Objectives**

- For FWP to better understand the details of the public comments submitted by paddling and OHV users relating to needs, opportunities, values, and concerns.
- Discuss next steps and additional opportunities for engagement.

## **Participants**

- American Whitewater; American Packrafting; American Rivers; Capital Trail Vehicle Riders Association; Citizens for Balanced Use; Representative Loge - HD14; Mineral County Commissioners; Montana Trail Vehicle Riders Association; Scenic Montana Trails; Western Montana Trail Riders Association
- Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks staff

## **Summary of Stakeholder Meetings**

In a series of stakeholder meetings held to address various recreational activities in the Fish Creek area, topics ranged from paddling practices, off-highway vehicle (OHV) access, to the overall environmental concerns related to these recreational uses. Each meeting brought forth a spectrum of needs, opportunities, concerns, and values shared by community members and organizations from paddlers and OHV enthusiasts. The overarching objective of these discussions was to delve into the details of the public comments submitted by these groups on the draft Fish Creek Recreation Strategy so that FWP could better understand issues raised that had not been previously heard in order to find a balance between recreational access and environmental stewardship, while fostering community engagement.

## **Key Themes and Highlights**

- 1. Collaboration Among User Groups:**
  - There was a strong emphasis on the need for collaborative discussions between different user groups (paddlers, anglers, OHV users). This collaborative approach aims to bridge gaps in understanding and facilitate shared concerns, particularly environmental stewardship and access.
- 2. Concerns Over Regulations:**
  - Significant concern was voiced over the potential ban on paddling in Fish Creek as it appears overly restrictive and could set a dangerous precedent for limiting public access to rivers across Montana.
  - Community members highlighted the necessity for robust data and research before imposing any drastic regulations, with many arguing for a more measured, data-driven approach to manage uses responsibly without premature restrictions.
- 3. Emphasizing Safety and Environmental Stewardship:**
  - The need for safety measures, particularly in OHV activities, was underscored alongside wildlife concerns, such as bear encounters.

- Paddlers expressed similar public safety concerns regarding woody debris management, stressing that a collaborative and educated approach to handling debris is essential rather than outright bans.
4. **Providing Recreational Opportunities:**
- Both paddlers and OHV users called for clearer signage, improved infrastructure, and designated areas for recreational purposes. Suggestions included connectors for better access to USFS lands and a wider variety of trails to accommodate different OHV sizes.
5. **The Economic Impact of Recreation:**  
Participants noted the significant economic benefits that recreational activities bring to Mineral County, emphasizing the need to foster these opportunities while ensuring responsible access and usage.
6. **Community Engagement:** The meetings highlighted the value of community involvement in managing recreational activities and fostered a sense of responsibility for environmental stewardship. Local groups are willing to volunteer to maintain a variety of future trail maintenance.

### Values Expressed in Discussions

- **Connection to Nature:** Stakeholders expressed a profound connection to the rivers and recreational lands in Montana, advocating for access that preserves these natural resources.
- **Multiple Use Advocacy:** A strong belief in multiple-use practices underlined discussions about shared responsibilities and respect among different recreational communities.
- **Community Engagement:** The meetings highlighted the value of community involvement in managing recreational activities and fostered a sense of responsibility for environmental stewardship.

### Queries Raised During Meetings

- How can community members participate in ongoing management and monitoring of recreational access?
- What specific data is currently available that pertains to the impacts of paddling and OHV use on local ecosystems?
- How can environmental assessments be improved to ensure that all user groups have equitable access to the resources while maintaining ecological integrity?

### Conclusion

The series of stakeholder meetings provided a valuable platform for individuals from various user groups to voice their needs, concerns, and ideas on managing recreational access in Fish Creek. The discussions revealed the importance of fostering collaboration between paddlers, anglers, and OHV users, as well as the necessity to adopt a balanced approach to ensure safety, preserve the environment, and promote the area's economic vitality through responsible recreation. Overall, the direction seems poised to steer toward inclusivity, informed decision-making, and adaptive management of recreational resources.