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Ravalli County Commissioners

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June 2014

Dear Friends and Partners:

Montana State Parks is pleased to share with you Montana's latest outdoor recreation plan, titled *Creating a Vibrant Future for Montana's Outdoor Recreation Heritage*. The plan is the state's comprehensive resource for recreation planning, and provides a roadmap to enhance opportunities and service provision across the state. We expect this document to provide helpful information and action items to guide recreation managers and communities in connecting projects to statewide goals and initiatives. Key to this latest report we find that Montanans are looking for expanded opportunities to recreate close to where we live, work, learn, and play. Trails and paths in particular are critical to getting Montanans outdoors and connecting families and youth to our natural, cultural, and recreational resources on public lands.

Outdoor recreation is vital to supporting the exceptional quality of life enjoyed by Montana residents. These opportunities help attract new business to our state, encourage young families to live here, and draw visitors that support enhanced economic development in our communities. Many studies show that outdoor recreation also helps overcome health issues, refreshes our spirits, and improves our physical strength and mental wellbeing. Furthermore, our public lands and state parks are the outdoor classrooms for educating Montana youth about our history and fostering the next generation of stewards.

Our recreation programs provide even more places and ways to enjoy the outdoors. Montana State Parks works with the Federal Highway Administration to provide close to \$1.5 million annually for trail projects on local, state, federal, and Tribal lands with the Recreational Trails Program. In a partnership with the National Parks Service, the Land & Water Conservation Fund program has distributed over \$38 million to communities for acquisition and development of outdoor recreation projects. Every county in Montana has benefited from these grant programs, and it is up to Montanans to advocate keeping these resources fully funded now and into the future.

2014 is an exciting year for us as Montana State Parks celebrates our 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. We have just kicked off a fun giveaway campaign with SUBWAY restaurants that includes special events planned in our state parks this summer. Iconic Montana artist Monte Dolack also completed a special painting of the Smith River State Park that is supported by generous funding from the Lee and Donna Metcalf Charitable Foundation, with 100% of proceeds from prints sold benefitting our state parks. In addition to these events, the Montana State Parks & Recreation Board continues their inaugural work on behalf of our state parks and recreation programs. We are currently updating a strategic vision for the state parks system, and staff recently completed a series of community listening sessions around the state. We look forward to additional public engagement later this year.

We hope you will find the Montana outdoors plan to be a valuable guide for creating expanded outdoor recreation opportunity through collaborative planning efforts and integrated service provision. A printed copy is provided to you, with additional copies available to download on our website. For any questions or information about the plan, please contact Maren Murphy, Parks Planner at 406-444-3364 or [marenmurphy@mt.gov](mailto:marenmurphy@mt.gov). Thank you to all those who participated in producing this vision, and we hope that you take charge in answering the challenges set forth in this plan. Most of all, we hope to see you outdoors this summer and beyond!

Sincerely,

Chas Van Genderen  
Administrator and LWCF State Liaison Officer