



Bigfork Area Outdoor Recreation Plan | 2024

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We acknowledge and appreciate the efforts of the Bigfork Outdoor Recreation Alliance (BORA) who dedicated their time, local knowledge, and expertise to this planning process.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	4	Chapter 6 – Sub-Area Analysis	31
Chapter 1 – Overview	9	Planning Framework	31
Purpose	9	Recreation Evaluation Framework	32
Location	9	Bigfork Sub-Area	33
Planning Process	10	Bigfork Vicinity Sub-Area	39
Study Area	10	North Shore Sub-Area	49
Relevant Planning Documents	12	Jewel Basin – Echo Lake Vicinity Sub-Area	55
Chapter 2 – Goals and Objectives	13	Crane Mountain – Woods Bay Vicinity Sub-Area	63
Chapter 3 – Bigfork Area Inventory and Analysis	15	Chapter 7 – Implementation	71
Recreation Systems Approach	15	Foundational Actions	71
Bigfork Area Outdoor Recreation Classification – Inventory	17	Project Evaluation	72
Recreational Use Patterns	20	Priority Projects	75
Recreation Character	21	Appendices	76
Chapter 4 – Community Context	22	Appendix A – Relevant Funding Resources	76
Jurisdiction – Land Ownership Patterns	22	Appendix B – Community Survey Results	80
Demographic Profile	25		
Economic Trends	25		
Chapter 5 – Community Engagement	28		
BORA Advisory Committee	28		
Community Meetings	28		
Community Surveys	29		
Webpage/Social Media Outreach	30		

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Surrounded by forests, rivers, Flathead Lake, and exceptional wildlife habitat, the Bigfork community relies on access to outdoor recreation for economic vitality, health and wellness, and overall quality of life. However, few opportunities exist to plan for recreational experiences at a meaningful level: the landscape scale. This enlarged scope allows thoughtful planning in an interdisciplinary manner, including a variety of land managers, governmental entities and community members.

The Bigfork Outdoor Recreation Plan is a community-led, multi-jurisdictional outdoor recreation plan designed to guide decision-makers, land managers, and community leaders for years to come to develop and sustain places for residents and visitors to get outdoors every day.

ABOUT THE PLAN

In order to develop this plan, community leaders representing private landowners, state and federal land managers, private businesses, and community organizations formed the Bigfork Outdoor Recreation Alliance (BORA). They met from the fall of 2022 to August 2023 to: 1) identify the community “recreation-shed” – places the community uses to get outdoors every day, every week, or every month, 2) inventory and assess the area recreation assets by use and function, 3) develop community inspired goals and objectives, 4) identify the area-specific needs and opportunities, and 5) prioritize the top projects and identify the resources needed to accomplish them.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

With numerous land management entities in the study area, the Bigfork Outdoor Recreation Plan acts as an important tool for coordination among potential partners, offers a cohesive vision for sustainable outdoor recreation that benefits the community, and increases the community’s competitiveness for public and private funding and other resources.

WHO IS BORA

BORA includes representation from community organizations, public agencies, local businesses, landowners, and recreation groups that seek to enhance outdoor recreation experiences in and around Bigfork. Members of BORA include representatives from the U.S. Forest Service, PacifiCorp, Flathead Lake Lodge, Community Foundation for a Better Bigfork, Bigfork Chamber of Commerce, Bigfork Rotary, Whitney Family, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Flathead Land Trust, Montana Land Reliance, and Trust for Public Land.

ABOUT BIGFORK

Bigfork is an unincorporated community at the confluence of the Swan River and the northeastern shore of Flathead Lake. The primary employment sectors are health care, retail, and accommodations.

Of note:

- It is growing at a higher rate than Flathead County and twice the rate of the state of Montana;
- The age group of 65+ making up 30% – higher than both the state and Flathead County rates;
- The housing affordability gap is significant – an affordable home for a family at median income would cost \$225,000 while the average home price is \$486,600 – a gap of 46%;
- 72% of homes are directly exposed to wildfire risk and 26% of homes are indirectly exposed.

BIGFORK AREA AND SUB-AREAS

The multi-jurisdictional study area, identified by the BORA committee as the “recreation-shed” for the Bigfork community, encompasses land in the Bigfork area in both Flathead and Lake Counties. It extends from the west side of Flathead Lake at Somers to include Swan Lake in the southeast portion of the study area.

BORA identified sub-areas within the overall study area based on geography, land ownership, and recreation character. Those sub-areas are: Bigfork, Bigfork Vicinity, North Shore of Flathead Lake to the west, Echo Lake/Jewel Basin to the north, and Crane Mountain/Woods Bay to the south.

INVENTORY AND ASSESSMENT

The plan classifies the area assets identified by the committee by use levels, functional characteristics, recreational character, and public benefit. The classification categories include: local

and neighborhood parks such as Sliter Park and Potoczny Field, regional parks such as Wayfarers and Somers Beach State Parks, water recreation sites such as Bigfork Bay Public Dock, Loon Lake Fishing Access site, and PacifiCorp sites, conservation priority sites such as Harrell Forest and Osprey View, forest/nature-based recreation such as Jewel Basin and DNRC State Trust Lands, linear parks/connectors/greenways such as Swan River Nature Trail and Holt Drive, and special interest such as Eagle Bend Golf Course (private) and the Nordic trails.

COMMUNITY GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The top community goals are:

- Sustainable outdoor recreation opportunities for the enjoyment of present and future generations.
- High-quality outdoor recreation activities that are safe for users of all ages and abilities.
- Quality outdoor recreation experiences balanced with the needs for conservation and wildlife protection.
- Interconnected outdoor recreation system of parks, trails, and open space that reflect community character and livability.

Top 3 priorities for investment/planning for recreation infrastructure:

- Connected paved paths
- Improve natural surface trails
- Trailhead facilities

Top 3 most important aspects of outdoor recreation to quality of life:

- Exercise and an active lifestyle
- Ability to experience quiet, solitude, and restorative benefits

- of nature
- Safe, bikeable, and walkable connections between Bigfork and places to recreate

Top 3 concerns related to outdoor recreation impacts:

- Overcrowding at recreation areas
- Degradation of resources from overuse/pollution
- Wildlife impacts (loss of habitat, human/wildlife conflicts, etc.)

SUB-AREAS

The approach used to analyze the sub-areas is called “H3C” (Hub, Connection, Cluster, Corridor) to characterize and examine the relationships among the recreation assets with consideration of compatibility, conservation, design, and user expectation in the recommendations.

Bigfork:

- About: Bigfork is the outdoor recreation hub in the study area. With sites like the popular Swan River Nature Trail, Wayfarers Unit of Flathead Lake State Park, Bigfork Bay, and Bigfork parks, combined with in-town visitor information, retail, lodging, dining, commercial outfitting, and other services, Bigfork serves as the “hub” daily or multi-day outdoor experiences.
- Key Issues: Traffic congestion, lack of adequate parking for trails and water recreation sites; safety issues for pedestrians and bicyclists along Holt Drive and highways; insufficient wayfinding; and the need for funding and maintenance for improvements.

- Key Recommendations: More parking; improved connections among recreation assets; improved and safer walkable in-town routes like sidewalks and crosswalks; improved bike and pedestrian routes as part of highway projects; dedicated local and grant funding mechanisms to leverage state and federal funds; partnerships for development and maintenance.

Bigfork Vicinity:

- About: Bigfork Vicinity surrounds the Bigfork hub to the north, west, and east and is bordered by Highway 83 to the north, and is bisected by Highways 35, 209, and 83. This area contains many of the most popular and well-used recreation access points in the Bigfork area such as the Swan River Nature Trail, Swan River Corridor, Flathead River Corridor, the Harrell Forest Trail System, Sportman’s Bridge, Osprey View, and other key connections.
- Key Issues: Traffic and safety issues for pedestrians and cyclists; long-term maintenance of established paths, trail, and park systems; water-related erosion, litter, AIS, noise, and pollution; land-related user conflicts, trespassing, dogs, weeds, user-created trails; parking and congestion at trailheads and fishing access sites; limited all-age, all-abilities recreational access.
- Key Recommendations: Dedicated shared use paths on highways; dedicated bike route Holt/Hanging Rock to Sportsman’s Bridge; increased river access; improve safety and maintenance at river access sites; connected Swan Road bike path; partnerships to maintain and sustain user experience at key access point and trail systems.

North Shore:

- **About:** North Shore is the area between Highway 82 and Flathead Lake and extends from Highway 93 to the west to the Flathead River to the east. The community of Somers serves as a mini-hub on the west side of the area with a level of service and development. The area is book-ended by Montana's newest state park, Somers Beach State Park, and nearby recreation assets (Somers Cluster) to the west and the Flathead River corridor to the east with key conservation lands and wildlife habitat in between.
- **Key Issues:** Heavy use and parking issues; limited water access; roadways with high-speed traffic that lack safe pedestrian/bike routes; water-based problem behaviors (noise, litter, resource damage, aquatic invasive species (AIS)) in shallow waterways adjacent to wildlife protection areas; land-based problem behaviors with dogs, litter, wildlife conflicts, and ignoring seasonal closures.
- **Key Recommendations:** Enhanced management to protect wildlife values; improve Somers Beach State Park to accommodate increased use; explore opportunities to increase river access at Oldenberg Road per Flathead County Parks and Recreation Plan; enhanced education, outreach, and enforcement; dedicated shared use path along Highways 82 and 83.

Echo Lake/Jewel Basin

- **About:** The Echo Lake/Jewel Basin is an important frontcountry and backcountry recreation area in the northern portion of the study area. It includes heavily used areas like Echo Lake,

seasonal assets like the Bigfork Community Nordic Trails, and important natural areas such as Jewel Basin and Krause Basin.

- **Key Issues:** Echo Lake overcrowding and management issues; safety issues for non-motorized travel along Highways 209 and 83; increased potential human-wildlife conflicts as more recreation occurs in backcountry areas; need for additional recreation infrastructure (e.g. trails, trailheads, and signage) to minimize impacts to water quality; additional recreation opportunities on area state trust land.
- **Key Recommendations:** Partnerships to promote responsible recreation; intentional design and management to minimize wildlife conflicts; improvements in the Echo Lake area (e.g. signage, parking, management); improve safety and dedicated connections along key transportation routes; manage user conflicts.

Crane Mountain/Woods Bay

- **About:** This forested area is located in the southern portion of the study area. It extends south along Flathead Lake to the Beardance Trailhead in both Flathead and Lake counties and includes the popular Estes Lake and Swan Lake/Swan River Corridor as well as the Flathead Lake Lodge.
- **Key Issues:** Crane Mountain and State Trust land user conflicts, unauthorized motorized, camping, and other use, congestion, human-wildlife conflict, and unsustainable trail creation; Flathead Lake water quality, boater safety, AIS, behavior (litter, dogs, etc.), congestion, trespass; private and public land connections.

- Key Recommendations: Explore public-private partnerships for maintenance and licensing among landowners (e.g. recreation trail licensing with DNRC) in the area recreation system; improvements to water access sites to increase access, protect water quality, boat safety, erosion, user experience, education, etc.; secure additional developed access on state trust lands; improve sustainability of designated trail systems; education and enforcement.

IMPLEMENTATION

In order to successfully implement the recommendations of the plan, the BORA committee identified foundational keys to success and then categorized and prioritized project-based recommendations into four categories:

	LOW COSTS	HIGH COSTS
EASY	<p>MOMENTUM PROJECT</p> <p><i>Low-hanging fruit. These projects have a quick time frame, keep the public engaged, and provide momentum by creating concrete accomplishments that can help build community support and capacity.</i></p> <p>Priority: Install bear-proof trash cans in parks and at trailheads.</p>	<p>OPPORTUNITY PROJECT</p> <p><i>The action results in projects that are shovel ready with completed designs and authorizations but lack funding. Examples are infrastructure projects, restoration projects, and construction projects.</i></p> <p>Priority: Seek funding and complete a priority and safety study that will identify improvements and funding sources for a connected and safe pedestrian/bike network (e.g. Holt/Highway 35 to Harvest Foods) within the study area. (e.g. Grants - Federal Highway Administration, MDT, MT Commerce Tourism)</p>
DIFFICULT	<p>CHAMPION PROJECT</p> <p><i>These projects are relatively low cost, but they may lack the authorizations, have multiple partners or need design work to proceed. They need a champion to navigate through the MOUs, permitting and design processes. ADA upgrades and projects in sensitive environments are examples.</i></p> <p>Priority: Work with landowners/managers to sustain existing or planned trail systems (e.g. Harrell Forest) by minimizing resource damage, creating a safe user experience, and decommissioning dangerous/unsustainable user-created trails. (e.g. USFS, Pacificorp, DNRC, Flathead Land Trust, FWP)</p>	<p>LEGACY PROJECT</p> <p><i>These projects have a long-term time frame for completion but are signature projects that will be around for future generations and provide maximum public benefits. Conserving lands, land acquisition for public access and building a connected trail system are examples of these projects.</i></p> <p>Priority: Explore options for expanding public access to water-based recreation identified in the plan. (i.e Bigfork Bay, Flathead River, Swan River, Flathead Lake)</p>

CHAPTER 1 – OVERVIEW

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this plan is to provide the Bigfork community with a road map for a safe and sustainable recreation system that promotes health and wellness, economic vitality, and quality of life. The plan recommends goals and objectives for a connected system that balances recreation and conservation, promotes partnerships, and identifies funding resources to support adequate recreation infrastructure. It is intended to be a dynamic, long-term plan for the next 10 to 20 years and is designed to integrate with existing and potential planning processes such as local land use plans, resiliency plans, and agency plans.

It is anticipated that the plan will be periodically updated to reflect new opportunities and trends.

II. LOCATION

The study area that surrounds Bigfork, an unincorporated community in Flathead County, is located on the northeastern shores of Flathead Lake and includes areas that extend along the north and east shorelines as well as nearby USFS national forest lands. Flathead and Lake counties are located in northwest Montana. Both counties are characterized by large tracts of public and private forests, mountainous terrain, and expansive water recreation. Many areas within the region are classified as prime wildlife habitat. The regional climate has seasonal variations with harsh, snowy winters and moderate summers. Exceptionally hot, dry summers can be conducive to wildfires.



Source: Wikipedia

III. PLANNING PROCESS

This plan was developed under the guidance of the Bigfork Outdoor Recreation Alliance (BORA). BORA includes representation from community organizations, public agencies, local businesses, and community groups that seek to enhance outdoor recreation experiences in and around Bigfork. Members of BORA include representatives from the U.S. Forest Service, PacifiCorp, Flathead Lake Lodge, Community Foundation for a Better Bigfork, Bigfork Chamber of Commerce, Bigfork Rotary, Whitney Family, Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Flathead Land Trust, Montana Land Reliance, and Trust for Public Land. Starting in the fall of 2022, BORA worked with the consulting firm of Montana Access Project (MAP) to undertake the following planning process.



IV. STUDY AREA

The multi-jurisdictional study area, identified by the BORA committee as the “recreation-shed” for the Bigfork community, encompasses land in the Bigfork area in both Flathead and Lake Counties. It extends from the west side of Flathead Lake at Somers to include the neck of Swan Lake in the southeast portion of the study area. Lands in the study area include public and private lands, with the majority of public lands owned by the United States Forest Service in the Jewel Basin area to the north and as far south as the Crane Mountain/Woods Bay area. Major state highways include Highway 82, Highway 35, Highway 83, and Highway 209. The unincorporated town of Bigfork is the population center in the study area.

Due to the large and diverse geographic study area, the plan identifies five sub-areas. The boundaries of the sub-areas generally follow roadways and township lines. These sub-areas, as identified by the BORA committee, provide a more refined analysis of transportation networks, spatial relationships between recreation assets, common character elements, and potential collaborations.

The following sub-areas allow for targeted strategies based on issues and opportunities specific to certain geographical areas: Bigfork, Bigfork Vicinity, North Shore of Flathead Lake to the west, Echo Lake/Jewel Basin to the north, Crane Mountain/Woods Bay to the south.

Maps are only to be used for study document. Data may not be current. Sources include USFS, FWP, DNR, MT Cadastral, NHD, Flathead Land Trust, Trust for Public Land, Trailforks, Bing, Google.



BIGFORK OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN
STUDY AREA OVERVIEW MAP WITH FIVE SUB-AREAS

KALISPELL

ECHO LAKE/JEWEL BASIN

SOMERS

NORTH SHORE

BIGFORK VICINITY

BIGFORK

BIGFORK

Flathead
Lake

CRANE MOUNTAIN/WOODS BAY

BIGFORK OUTDOOR RECREATION ALLIANCE
OVERVIEW MAP

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Map 1.1

V. RELEVANT PLANNING DOCUMENTS

With numerous land management agencies in the study area, the Bigfork Outdoor Recreation Plan acts as an important tool for coordination among potential partners and offers a cohesive vision for sustainable outdoor recreation that benefits the community. This plan integrates multiple initiatives as indicated by the following list of relevant planning documents that were consulted as part of this planning process.

- [Bigfork Neighborhood Plan \(2009\) \(scheduled for update\)](#)
- [Flathead County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy \(2017\) \(in process of update\)](#)
- [Flathead County Growth Policy \(Updated 2012\)](#)
- [Flathead National Forest Land Management Plan \(2018\)](#)
- [Flathead County Parks and Recreation Master Plan \(2009\)](#)
- [North Shore WMA Management Plan \(2019\)](#)
- [PATHS - Flathead County Trails Plan \(Draft – Prepared by PATHS Advisory Committee\)](#)
- [Montana Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan \(2020 – 2024\)](#)
- [Somers Beach State Park Environmental Assessment \(2021\)](#)
- [Montana Dept. of Transportation – MT 35 Environmental Assessment and Project Info for Highway 82](#)
- [Flathead County Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plan \(2014\)](#)
- [Glacier Country Tourism – Destination Stewardship Plan \(2022\)](#)
- [PacifiCorp Recreation Resource Management Plan \(RRMP\) \(2015\)](#)



Swan River Nature Trail – West Access

CHAPTER 2 – GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goals and objectives are the heart of this plan. They are derived from BORA and public comment on key outdoor recreation-related issues. Collectively, they describe a shared vision for where and how residents and businesses seek to engage with the outdoors in the Bigfork area. Goals provide the basis for evaluating recommendations and establishing priorities and are general statements that set forth an ideal that the community is striving to obtain. Objectives identify more specific topics and policy areas related to each goal.

GOAL 1: Develop sustainable outdoor recreation opportunities for the enjoyment of present and future generations.

OBJECTIVES

1. Recognize the interconnectedness of outdoor recreation with the whole ecological system including conservation lands, open spaces, rivers, and lakes.
2. Design and manage recreation opportunities and improvements to coordinate capacity with anticipated use levels.
3. Support sustainable recreation that mitigates impacts on local services, natural resources, emergency services, and infrastructure.
4. Plan for ongoing maintenance and management of outdoor recreation improvements.
5. Evaluate the cost benefits and funding of recreation improvements as part of the decision-making process.

6. Evaluate the suitability of the land for recreation as part of the decision-making process.

GOAL 2: Provide high-quality outdoor recreation activities that are safe for users of all ages and abilities.

OBJECTIVES

1. Develop a recreation network that provides diverse experiences from convenient to remote from active to passive and from age friendly to skilled recreationist.
2. Design outdoor recreation facilities considerate of safety, mobility, and hazard mitigation needs.
3. Adopt design, education, and enforcement techniques to address problem behaviors and user conflicts that degrade resources and user experience.
4. Improve walkability with upgrades such as crosswalks, signage, lighting, sidewalk improvements, line of sight, ADA-compliant sidewalk ramps, and striping.
5. Improve connectivity and safety with shared-use paths and designated bike routes to accommodate pedestrians, bicyclists, and people with disabilities.

GOAL 3: Support a recreation balance between quality outdoor experiences with the needs for conservation and wildlife protection.

OBJECTIVES

1. Identify priority conservation areas with high natural resource values such as ecological diversity, wildlife connectivity, and important habitat to determine appropriate levels of public use.
2. For those areas suitable for recreation improvements, mitigate potential outdoor recreation impact on these areas and coordinate with other planning processes and stakeholders.
3. Design projects with low-impact development principles of water conservation, native plants, reduced storm water runoff, preservation of natural areas, and other concepts to minimize development impacts.
4. Protect water resources from potential recreation impacts such as erosion, pollution, and aquatic invasive species.
5. Preserve critical wildlife habitat and corridors.
6. Support initiatives to reduce human-wildlife conflicts.
7. Collaborate with management agencies and user groups on potential partnerships for stewardship activities involving outdoor recreation sites.

GOAL 4: Incorporate livability principles and reflect community character in developing an outdoor recreation ecosystem.

OBJECTIVES

1. Engage stakeholders such as recreation user groups, local governments, land managers, conservation groups, tribal entities, civic organizations, residents, and businesses in the planning and design of recreation assets.
2. Foster community vitality through investment in outdoor recreation that supports the quality of life and enhances the visitor experience.
3. Preserve small town and rural community character through recreation development that is in scale with the built environment and mitigates impacts such as noise, congestion, and litter.
4. Partner with healthcare providers to promote the health benefits of outdoor recreation.
5. Integrate outdoor recreation planning with land use and community planning efforts.
6. Mitigate impacts on neighboring land uses and promote good neighbor policies to discourage trespassing.

CHAPTER 3 –BIGFORK AREA INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS

As part of the planning process, the group identified recreation assets throughout the Bigfork area, irrespective of ownership, and classified those places by use type, functional characteristics, public benefit, and general recreation character. While “character” is difficult to define, the group assigned general attributes such as “in-town,” “frontcountry” and “backcountry” to each of the recreation asset types in order to guide future decision-making, user expectation, and management.

I. RECREATION SYSTEMS APPROACH

The inventory and analysis is based on a ‘Recreation Systems Approach’ (Approach) that focuses on a comprehensive and interrelated system of public parks, recreation, open spaces, natural areas, and connecting pathways. This approach responds to locally based needs, values, and conditions and protects the integrity of the surrounding natural systems. Following is a summary of the approach.

Outdoor Recreation Classification System – The recreation asset classifications reflect the unique aspects of the study area regarding the multi-jurisdictional components, the large natural landscapes, the visitor economy, and the rural character.

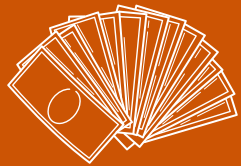
The classification categories are: Local and Neighborhood Parks, Regional Parks, Water Recreation Sites, Conservation Priority Sites, Forest/Nature-based Recreation, Linear Parks/Connectors/

Greenways, and Special Interest.

The classification system considers:

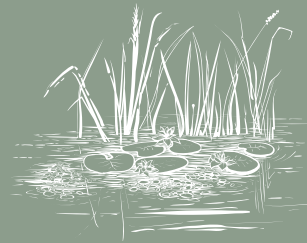
- Use levels – Examination of use level is helpful for determining if current or future sites are suitable for proposed use levels. Advanced planning for facilities to accommodate the intended use will help ease overcrowding as well as mitigate impacts from heavily used facilities.
- Functional Characteristics – Analyzing the intended function of the recreation asset provides a way to assess if the outdoor recreation system meets the range of recreational needs in the community. This analysis also helps evaluate if the asset is functioning as intended.
- Public Benefits – The Approach acknowledges that the outdoor recreation system should promote the public benefits as identified in the goals and objectives. Identifying these public benefits indicates management strategies and potential collaboration between partners interested in achieving similar outcomes.

ECONOMIC



- Supports local businesses
- Economic impact from visitation
- Natural resource economy

ENVIRONMENT



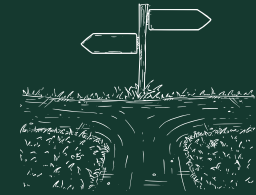
- Open space
- Water quality
- Forest health
- Wildlife habitat

SOCIAL



- Community events
- Health and wellness
- Quality of life
- Educational

RECREATION



- Sports
- Youth activities
- Play areas
- Trails
- Passive recreation

II. BIGFORK AREA OUTDOOR RECREATION CLASSIFICATION – INVENTORY

The inventory and classification of parks, recreation sites, conservation areas, and state and federal public lands provides the basis to identify gaps, determine system-wide issues, and propose projects to address these needs.

Local and Neighborhood Parks	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less than 15 acres – Moderate use (may be high use during special events) • Local, neighborhood service area • Play equipment, sports facilities, group shelters, picnic tables, etc. • Primary recreation character – In-Town • Benefits – Social, health and fitness, recreation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sliter Park • Potoczny Field • Lake Hills Park • Aero Lane Park • Bigfork Neighborhood Park – Holt Drive
Regional Parks	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large parks over 25 acres • Multiple recreation facilities, heavy to moderate use with seasonal variations • Draws from outside of sub-area and may attract visitors county-wide and from outside of area • Primary recreation character - Frontcountry • Benefits – Social, health and fitness, economic, environmental, recreation, quality of life, visitation economy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wayfarers Unit of Flathead State Park • Somers Beach State Park • Carlyle Johnson Park

Table 3.1

Water Recreation Sites	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Variable sizes • High seasonal use in summer • Primary users are from local vicinity but some sites may attract visitors from outside of study area • Fishing, boat ramps, boat docks, swimming, parking • Primary recreation character - Frontcountry • Benefits – Social, health, quality of life, economic, recreation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beardance Trailhead • Bigfork Bay Fishing Access • Bigfork Public Dock • Echo Lake Fishing Access • Flathead Lake • Horseshoe Lake Fishing Access • Loon Lake Fishing Access • PacifiCorp recreation sites on Swan River • Powerhouse Park • Somers Fishing Access • Somers Beach State Park • Sportsman Bridge Fishing Access • Swan Lake • Swan River Fishing Access • Woods Bay Fishing Access
Conservation Priority Sites	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generally larger landscapes for wildlife habitat, conservation, and watershed that are at risk of development • Natural surface trails, low use, limited improvements • Primarily local hikers for wildlife viewing, dog walking, etc. • Primary recreation character - Frontcountry • Benefits – Environmental services, wellness, wildlife, water quality, open space, forest health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harrell Forest • Osprey View Fishery • Flathead Lake Waterfowl Production Area • North Shore Wildlife Management Area

Table 3.1 cont.

Forest – Nature Based Recreation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Forest and State Public Lands – Large landscapes • Trailheads, natural trails, camping, hunting, dispersed recreation, primitive improvements • Low to moderate use compared to in-town sites. Seasonal pressure during summer. • Primary recreation character - Backcountry • Benefits – Environment, economic, health, forest health, wildlife, open space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jewel Basin • Camp Misery Trailhead (*Focused Recreation Area) • Krause Basin (*Focused Recreation Area) • Crane Mountain (*Focused Recreation Area) • DNRC managed State Trust Lands
Linear Parks – Connectors – Greenways	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linear connections • Improvements include paths and trail amenities • Low to moderate, primarily for local use • Primary recreation character - In-town and frontcountry • Benefits – Health, social, recreation, quality of life, economic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Swan River Nature Trail • Great Northern Historic Trail • Echo Lake Rd/Swan River Rd. - Shared-use paved path
Special Interest	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Variable sizes and uses, may include privately owned recreation areas • Typically single function sites (skiing, golfing, dog park, heritage site, formal garden) • Use level varies by function • Benefits – Varies based on site 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bigfork Community Nordic Trails • Eagle Bend Golf Course (Private) • USFS Ranger Station – Walking trails and Open space

*Focused Recreation Area – Focused recreation areas typically feature certain types of recreation activities that take place near or at a large lake or reservoir, developed ski area or year-round resort, large campground, or trail system. Recreational use is already occurring in many of these areas, but in some cases the use would be enhanced through an emphasis on trail, road, and facility maintenance; increased visitor contact, education; and/or, the development of additional recreation opportunities such as mountain bike trails, hiking trails, or boat ramps. These areas would accommodate existing as well as additional recreation growth and are intended to benefit local economies by having robust recreation settings that are responsive to changing conditions and changing use patterns and demands. This management area provides a focal point for not only existing recreation but also for new and/or enhanced recreation activities.

(Source: Flathead National Forest Land Management Plan)

III. RECREATIONAL USE PATTERNS

Online recreation tracking programs can provide insight into user behaviors. For example, Strava is an internet application for tracking physical exercise which incorporates social network features. Used primarily by runners and cyclists, users can record their activities using Global Positioning System data.

The Strava “heatmap” to the right shows usage patterns that are made by aggregated, public activities over the last year. This map is an indication of the level of recreation use in the Bigfork study area. The map indicates where there is bicycling in the Crane Mountain area and the popularity of the Swan River corridor and Swan River Nature Trail.

Also, the map shows significant activity along the north shore area of Flathead Lake, west of Flathead River. This includes people who are walking in the conservation areas as well as kayakers and paddle boarders on the lake. In the summer months, there is often a congregation of boats in the shallow waters which can negatively impact the nearby conservation lands which may be showing up.



Source: Strava (<https://www.strava.com/heatmap>)

IV. RECREATION CHARACTER

This section expands on the attribution of “character” included in Table 3.1. The study area has a variety of recreation assets with different user expectations. The table below identifies three general types of recreation character that distinguishes between intensity of use, types of services, and supporting infrastructure. Each designation identifies common features of each recreation type and is a guide to help communities craft policies and programs consistent with the character type. The table is a high-level tool to evaluate whether proposed recreation improvements align with the recreation character. Sometimes recreation amenities are proposed that do not align with area recreation character and user expectations (for example, restrooms, emergency response, etc.)

Character Type	Description
In-town	Developed recreation sites are located in town and used for organized activities, events, and community gatherings. Amenities may include playgrounds, sports fields, shelters, kiosks, and other amenities. Walkability and bicycling on paved trails are important in-town features. In-town sites have convenient access to visitor and cell phone services as well as lighting, trash cans, signage, public restrooms, and utilities. Users can expect frequent maintenance and staffing of facilities and nearby commercial or emergency services.
Frontcountry	Frontcountry recreation assets are typically located a convenient day trip distance from town, and are characterized by nature-based activities. These include transitional rural areas with a mix of public and private lands that often have wildlife corridors and habitat. Amenities may include wayfinding, trailheads, information kiosks, bathrooms or parking areas that can accommodate small groups. Trails are usually natural surface and can be rugged in certain locations. Users can expect routine maintenance of facilities but with less frequency than in-town. Cell phone service is inconsistent and commercial services are limited. There may be longer response times for emergency services.
Backcountry	Backcountry recreation areas are farther removed from town and sometimes are inaccessible to low-clearance passenger vehicles. They are primarily located on USFS and other public lands with high natural resource values and critical wildlife habitat. Outdoor recreation such as hiking, camping, hunting, and bicycling are dispersed and facilities, if present, are primitive. Preparation for severe terrain, changing weather conditions, and emergencies is advised. Users can expect designated wilderness areas that prohibit motorized access. Communication services are limited. Recreationists may have to hike significant distances to locate help in emergencies.

Table 3.2

CHAPTER 4 – COMMUNITY CONTEXT

I. JURISDICTION – LAND OWNERSHIP PATTERNS

There are multiple jurisdictions in the study area due to varied ownership of public lands and recreational assets. Understanding the various planning and decision-making processes will lead to more collaboration and coordination among agencies and land managers. It also will result in citizens being more engaged in these processes.

United States Forest Service – The United States Forest Service (USFS) comprises the largest landowner throughout the entire study area. USFS land in the study area is located within the boundaries of the Flathead National Forest in the Swan Lake Ranger District. The Flathead National Forest Land Management Plan, which provides guidance on management decisions, was adopted in 2018.

United States Fish and Wildlife Service – The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) also manages conservation lands within the study area.

Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation – The Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) has management responsibility for the School Trust Lands within the study area. When Montana was accepted into the Union, the Congress of the United States granted certain sections to the state for the support of public schools and universities. While Trust Lands are generally open for public

recreation with a permit, these lands remain working lands that are managed to produce revenues for trust beneficiaries while also considering environmental factors and protecting the future income-generating capacity of the land. Income from recreation may be generated through individual recreation use licenses, commercial recreation licenses, and permanent recreation easements.

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks – Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) manages state parks, fishing access sites, and conservation lands within the study area.

Montana Department of Transportation – The Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) is responsible for state highways and shared-use paths along these highways. A maintenance agreement for shared-use paths defines maintenance responsibilities between the MDT and local jurisdictions.

Flathead County – Most of the study area is located in Flathead County. The County has adopted a Growth Policy that provides guidance on development, land use, transportation, parks, open space, natural resources, and infrastructure. The Bigfork Neighborhood Plan is adopted as an element of the Flathead County Growth policy and is the basis for the zoning in and immediately around Bigfork.

The Bigfork Land Use Advisory Committee (BLUAC), an advisory board appointed by the Flathead County Commission, conducts

hearings on zoning/subdivision applications and is responsible for updating the neighborhood plan. BLUAC is hoping to initiate the Neighborhood Plan update process in 2023.

Flathead County Parks and Recreation Department owns and manages several county parks within the study area. Flathead County also has jurisdiction over most local roads in the Bigfork area, with the exception of private roads in some of the newer subdivisions.

Lake County – Most of the Crane Mountain – Woods Bay sub-area is located within Lake County. Lake County has an adopted Growth Policy which addresses parks and recreation.

PacifiCorp – PacifiCorp is a private utility based in Oregon that owns and operates Bigfork Hydroelectric Project. PacifiCorp provides recreation opportunities in Bigfork, including the Swan River Nature Trail, as part of its license with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC). The development of recreation assets must be consistent with the FERC license.



Private Lands – There are also private lands within the study area that allow public access for recreational purposes. The Swan River Nature Trail and the adjoining Harrell Forest trails are located on private lands that have conservation easements allowing public access. The development of trails must comply with the provisions of the easement.

MAP LEGEND


Public Land Ownership/Status

-  County Government
-  Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP)
-  Montana State Trust Lands (DNRC)
-  United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)
-  United States Forest Service (USFS)
-  United States Government







Private Land Ownership/Status

-  PacifiCorp Recreation Assets
-  Conservation Easements (private land)

Boundaries

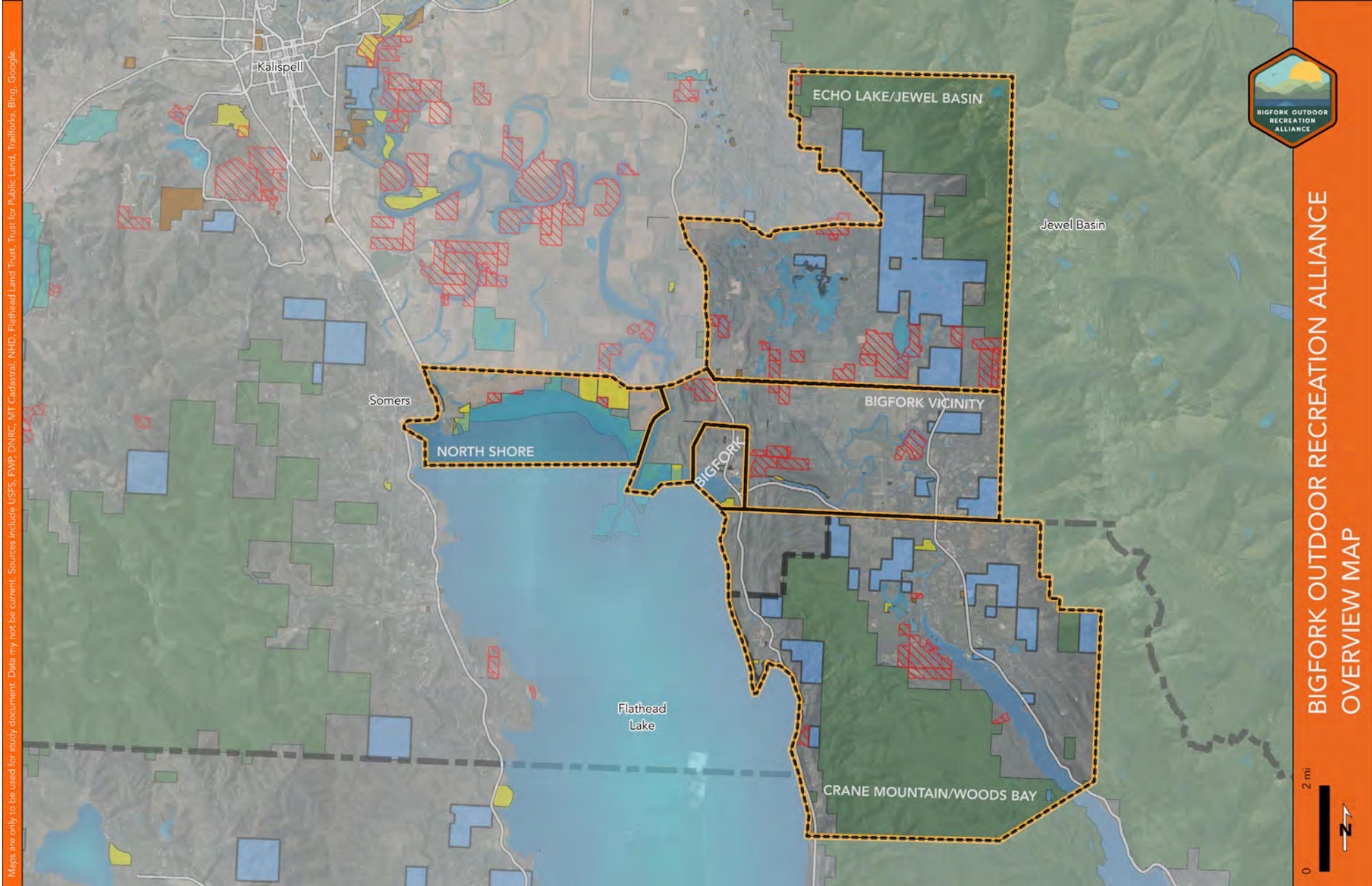
-  County Boundary

Corridors, Trails, Roads, Paths and Routes

-  Corridor
-  Main/Improved Roads (MT DOT)
-  Existing Bike Routes
-  Proposed Bike Routes
-  Existing Shared Use Paths
-  Proposed Shared Use Paths

Points of Interest

-  Trailheads (non-USFS)
-  Bigfork Nordic Trails Area Parking/Trailhead
-  Potential County River Access Site
-  FWP: Fishing Access and Boat Launch Sites
-  USFS Trailhead
-  FWP: Wildlife Viewing Locations
-  USFS Day Use Area



Map 4.1

II. DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

A. Population Trends

As indicated by the Census data below, since 2010, Flathead County is one of the fastest-growing counties in the state. The Bigfork area is growing at an even faster rate than the overall county population growth. This population growth is increasing the use of recreation assets and putting more demand on local services. It is significant to note that the age group in Bigfork of 65 years and older exceeds the county and state percentages. This will influence recreation preferences and have implications in planning for mobility and other age-related issues.

	Bigfork CDP	Flathead County	Montana
2010 Population	4,270	90,928	989,415
2020 Population	5,118	104,357	1,084,225
2010 – 2020 Population Increase	20%	15%	10%
% increase from 2020 - 2022	--	7.2%	3.6%
Persons age 65 years and over	30.3%	20.5%	19.6%

Table 4.1

Source: U.S. Census of the Population and American Community Survey

B. Housing Trends

The high rate of owner-occupied housing units in Bigfork and Flathead County, compared to the rest of the state, is an indicator that there is a limited rental supply to meet workforce housing needs. Additionally, a 32% vacancy rate for homes in Bigfork is more than double the county-wide average. This is likely due to the high number of seasonal units and short-term rentals. It also suggests that second homeowners are a significant component of the peak summer population.

As indicated by a comparison of housing costs, Bigfork typically has higher home values and rents than the rest of the county and is among the highest in the State. The most recent census data for housing costs is calculated as a 5-year average from 2017 to 2021. Local real estate listings for the county indicate that there has been an upward trend in housing costs. The Northwest Montana Association of Realtors multi-listing service indicated that the average home sale price in March of 2023 was \$585,000 for Flathead County.

Typically, an affordable housing price is estimated as three times the household income. As indicated in the table below, an affordable home for a household earning the median income would be around \$225,000. With a median value of \$486,600 in the Bigfork area there is a substantial affordability gap.

	Bigfork CDP	Flathead County	Montana
Owner-Occupied Housing Units	76.9%	75.0%	69.1%
Vacancy Rate	32%	15%	--
Median Value Owner-Occupied	\$486,600	\$333,700	\$263,700
Median Gross Rents	\$962	\$910	\$886
Median Household Income	\$75,125	\$63,582	\$60,560

Table 4.2

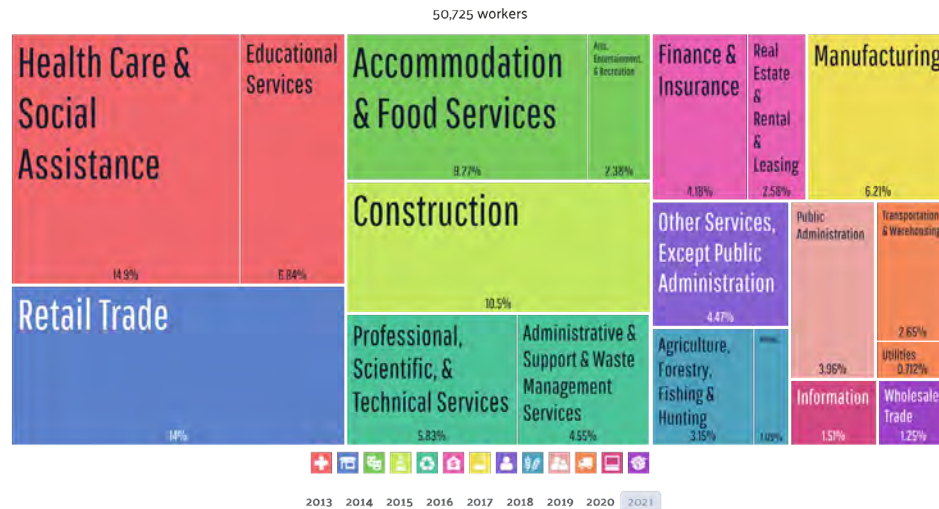
Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey 2017-2021

III. ECONOMIC TRENDS

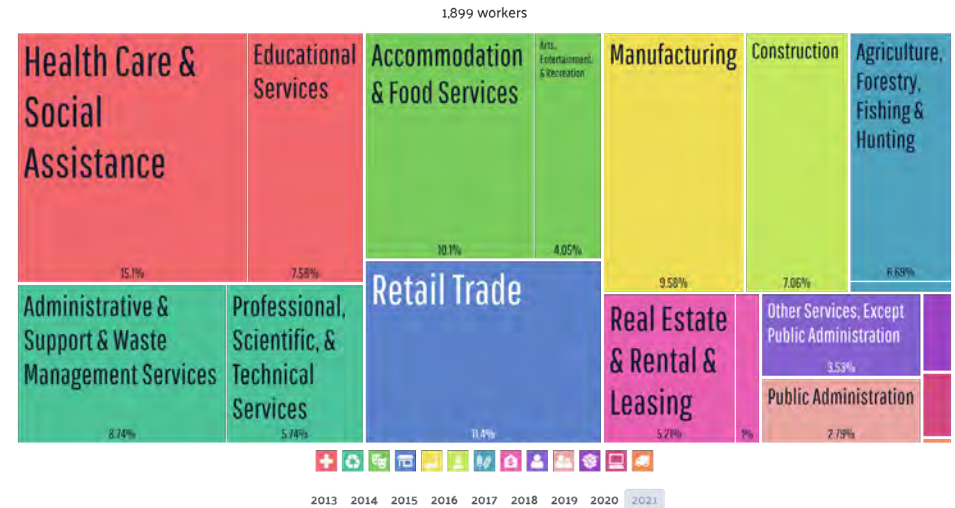
Montana’s outdoor recreation economy constitutes 4.4% of the state’s GDP (2021) – the second highest in the nation. Access to outdoor recreation and nature offers a well-documented competitive advantage for making a community a great place to live, work, and play.

A. Flathead County and Bigfork Economic Data

According to [Data USA](#), the largest employment industries in Flathead County are retail trade, healthcare and social assistance, and accommodation and food services. The employment breakdown in the Bigfork area is similar with the largest industries being healthcare and social assistance, retail trade, and accommodation and food services, respectively.



Flathead County Employment Sectors



Bigfork Employment Sectors

B. Economic Vitality

Outdoor recreation in Montana generates roughly 2.6 billion dollars in consumer spending and 27,584 jobs (5.4% of the state’s employment) ([Outdoor Industry Association](#)). According to the Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research, visitors to Montana in 2022 spent \$1.5 billion on food and beverage, \$1.9 billion on transportation, \$1 billion on lodging, \$513 million on shopping, and \$560 million on outfitter/guiding services ([ITRR, 2022](#)). Additionally, 1-in-13 Montana workers are supported by out-of-state travel ([ITRR, 2022](#)).

An outdoor recreation-based economy attracts and fosters investment to support small businesses and attracts workers. For entrepreneurs who value outdoor lifestyles, Montana’s public lands provide opportunities to attract a highly skilled workforce while service businesses can offer a workplace culture that values the

outdoor lifestyle. According to a survey conducted by Business for Montana's Outdoors, 70% of businesses state that the "Montana outdoor lifestyle" is factored into the decision-making process to locate or expand their business in Montana ([Business for Montana's Outdoors](#)).

Additionally, in a 2020 report prepared by the Institute of Tourism and Recreation Research, "Quality of Life" is the number one reason entrepreneurs "start, relocate and keep their businesses and jobs in Montana." Access to "outdoor recreation/parks/open spaces" is ranked as the highest attribute of quality of life (26.2%) above cost of living, public safety, health care, education, and culture ([ITRR, 2020](#)).

The term "Brain Drain" refers to the phenomenon of young individuals leaving rural communities to pursue education or employment opportunities in larger cities. In contrast, "Brain Gain" characterizes the movement of individuals in their 30s and 40s who relocate to rural communities ([Winchester](#)). This influx of new residents is vital for the well-being of rural areas as they bring with them valuable expertise, education, financial resources, and other assets.

CHAPTER 5 – COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

I. BORA

Bigfork Outdoor Recreation Alliance members served as advisors for this planning process. As previously stated, BORA includes wide representation from community organizations, public agencies, local businesses, and recreation groups that seek to enhance outdoor recreation experiences in and around Bigfork. Members of BORA include the U.S. Forest Service, PacifiCorp, Flathead Lake Lodge, Community Foundation for a Better Bigfork, Bigfork Chamber of Commerce, Bigfork Rotary, Whitney Family, Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Flathead Land Trust, Montana Land Reliance, and Trust for Public Land.

The advisory committee met monthly throughout the planning process. These meetings served as check-ins with the MAP consultant team to discuss plan progress, share BORA member updates, communicate group needs, address comments and concerns, and provide feedback.

II. COMMUNITY MEETINGS

A. Process

Two community meetings were held to gather community feedback on the planning process, answer questions, and gather data for the development of the Plan. The in-person meeting was held on November 16, 2022 at Bigfork High School and the virtual

community meeting was held on November 21, 2022 via Zoom. Outreach for these meetings was conducted via the BORA Facebook page, project website, email, local newspaper, and flyers posted around the Bigfork area.

Both virtual and in-person attendees were guided through each of the four sub-areas to answer to following prompts:

- What are the key recreation destinations in this area?
- What recreation experiences are missing in this area?
- How are the current facilities functioning?
- What would make current facilities better?

Additionally, attendees were asked about their overarching community recreation “vision” for the Bigfork area for the next 5-10 years, what’s missing, and what the challenges are.

B. Community Meetings Key Findings Summary

Key recreation destinations: Potoczny Park, Swan River Nature Trail, Harrell Forest Trails, Swan River, Flathead Waterfowl Production Area, Osprey View, Echo Lake, Swan Lake, Loon Lake, Estes Lake

What’s missing: Connected trails, recreation opportunities for all ages and abilities, bikeable/walkable path along Flathead Lake, signage, year-round recreation opportunities

Challenges: Funding, close-to-town recreation access, partnerships, land availability

Recreation vision: Network of trails/paths leading to recreation and key community assets (e.g. parks, schools, beaches), safe paths for kids around/leading to schools, safe pedestrian crossings, bike paths connecting all attractions in Bigfork.

III. COMMUNITY SURVEYS

A. Process

To gather supplemental data, a survey was deployed to collect additional community feedback from those in the greater Bigfork area. The online survey engaged a more significant number of participants and was more representative of the community. The online survey was not designed as a statistically valid instrument; instead, it provided a means for interested parties to provide public input at their convenience. The survey link was promoted through the project website, BORA Facebook page, local newspaper, e-mails, list-serves, and flyers around the Bigfork area. Paper copies were available upon request and available for pickup at various locations in and around Bigfork. The survey was open during the month of December 2022 and 209 respondents completed the survey.

B. Community Surveys Key Findings Summary

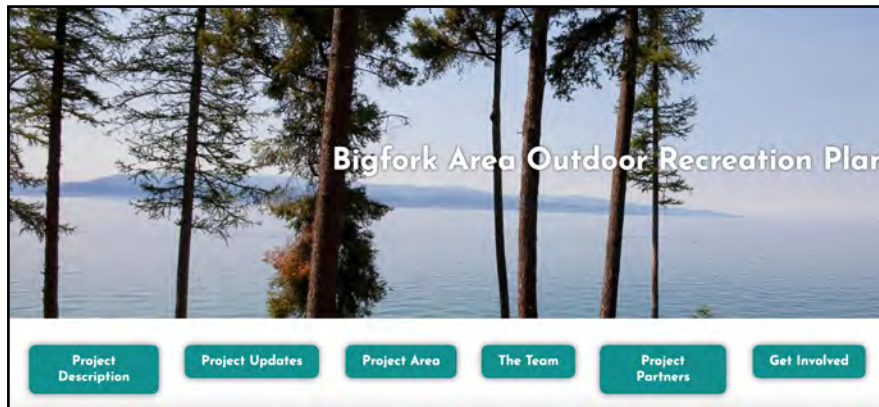
- Top 3 priorities for investment/planning for recreation infrastructure:
 1. Connected paved paths
 2. Improve natural surface trails
 3. Trailhead facilities

- Top 3 most important aspects of outdoor recreation to your quality of life:
 1. Exercise and an active lifestyle
 2. Ability to experience quiet, solitude, and restorative benefits of nature
 3. Safe, bikeable, and walkable connections between Bigfork and places to recreate
- Top 3 concerns related to outdoor recreation impacts:
 1. Overcrowding at recreation areas
 2. Degradation of resources from overuse/pollution
 3. Wildlife impacts (loss of habitat, human/wildlife conflicts, etc.)
- Specific strategies, policies, or programs that should be included in the plan:
 - » Connectivity and expansion of existing trails and pathways
 - » Safe routes to travel in town and beyond
 - » Improved parking throughout the Bigfork area
 - » Improved enforcement/management at existing recreation sites
 - » Improve/maintain existing recreation assets

IV: WEBPAGE/SOCIAL MEDIA OUTREACH

A project page was developed and located on the Montana Access Project website. The page contained project information, links to surveys, a contact form to join the mailing list, and project updates.

Social media outreach and engagement was done via the [BORA Facebook](#) page. The page was used to post meeting announcements, project updates, survey links, and redirection to the project page.



CHAPTER 6 – SUB-AREA ANALYSIS

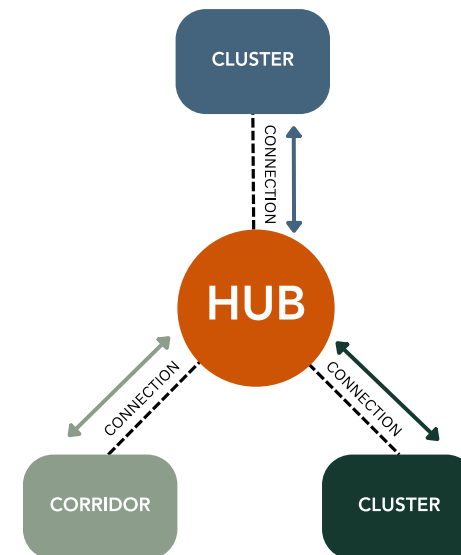
I. PLANNING FRAMEWORK

A more detailed analysis of the plan goals and objectives was conducted in the sub-areas. The plan uses a model that identifies outdoor recreation assets as “Hub”, “Clusters”, “Connections”, and “Corridors” (H3C) and explores the relationships and connections among these recreation asset types. This classification system provides a framework to enhance outdoor recreation, manage user expectations, and prioritize action items.

- “Hub” is the center of activity that is the launching point for exploring the vast array of recreational opportunities in the area. The hub has a concentration of population and includes commercial areas, emergency services, and hospitality services. Centralized wayfinding and information services at a visitor center are an important feature. Hubs are also the point in the transportation network that interconnects the streets, trails, and paratransit to the recreation assets.
- “Clusters” represent popular recreation activities in close proximity to one another. Clusters may include multiple types of recreation and often involve recreation sites managed by different jurisdictions within a geographic area. Identifying common issues, overlapping policies, and potential collaborations in these clusters is an important aspect of this plan.
- “Connections” in the model connect these recreation clusters to the hub and connect recreation destinations within a cluster.

Wayfinding is an important element to assist users in finding these activity clusters. Safety, accessibility, and mobility are important factors to consider in order for these connections to operate effectively and serve all user groups.

- “Corridors” represent a type of recreation where traveling the corridor is the recreation experience. Boating along a river corridor is the most common example. Certain types of travel corridors, such as the “Going-to-Sun Road” in Glacier National Park, have unique scenic value, over and above the connection from Point A to Point B, for wildlife viewing, overlooks, geographic features, and interpretive centers that contribute to a recreational travel experience.



II. RECREATION EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

Recommendations should also consider the following factors:

1. **Compatibility** – Recommendations for projects and policies should be compatible with the surrounding recreation character. This includes minimizing incompatible uses, mitigating noise and congestion, preserving scenic views, and maintaining areas of solitude. Defining recreation character will help evaluate the appropriateness of proposed uses and policies.
2. **Conservation** – Areas with high conservation values should include recommendations to preserve these areas through restoration, education about the resource values, and limiting projects to low-impact recreation uses.
3. **Design** – Design for recreation infrastructure will vary depending on the type of use, user expectations, visitor levels, and natural resource values. Heavily used in-town facilities, for example, will have a larger footprint than recreational uses in remote backcountry areas. Cost for construction and maintenance are also important design considerations.
4. **User Expectations** – It is important to manage user expectations so recreationists can adequately prepare for conditions they may encounter and understand the time and skill levels required to explore certain areas. Proper preparations will help avoid human-wildlife conflicts, preserve resources, and prevent emergency situations. Education is an important part of user expectations.



III. BIGFORK HUB SUB-AREA

A. SUB-AREA DESCRIPTION

Bigfork is the in-town hub for outdoor recreation in the study area. Sliter Park and the Wayfarers Unit of Flathead Lake State Park provide a diverse array of in-town recreation amenities. Bigfork is the service center in the study area with visitor information, retail establishments, lodging, dining, commercial outfitters, and other services. There are scheduled events throughout the year that attract local, county, and out-of-state participants. The population in Bigfork fluctuates with a peak in the summer. Whether choosing from convenient day trips or launching multi-day back-country adventures, recreationists gather in Bigfork to plan their activities, purchase supplies, launch their boat, and celebrate their outdoor experience.

Sliters Park/Powerhouse Park – Sliter Memorial Park and Riverbend Stage is a neighborhood park located within walking distance of the Bigfork downtown area at the end of Bridge Street. Flathead County leases Sliter Park from PacifiCorp. Facilities include public restrooms, playground equipment, and a paved parking lot. The park hosts community concerts and a farmer's market. Adjacent to Sliter's Park is Powerhouse Park which is owned and managed by PacifiCorp. It includes a picnic area and river access for bank fishing.

Swan Nature Trail – West Trailhead – The west trailhead for the Swan River Nature Trail is within this sub-area at the end of Grand Street. The trailhead is within walking distance of downtown. There is limited parking and often spillover parking in the surrounding residential neighborhood.

Wayfarers Unit of Flathead Lake State Park – The Wayfarers Unit of Flathead Lake State Park is a 67-acre park located near Bigfork on the northeast shore of Flathead Lake. The forested area, nature trails, and rocky shoreline and cliffs are popular with photographers, hikers, and swimmers. There are 30 campsites in the park, including a shared hike-bike campsite with 9 tent pads that are convenient for cyclists traveling the nearby Continental Divide route. The campground has a camp host and provides showers and one fully ADA-accessible site. Other amenities include boat ramp, picnic tables, group shelter, and ranger station.

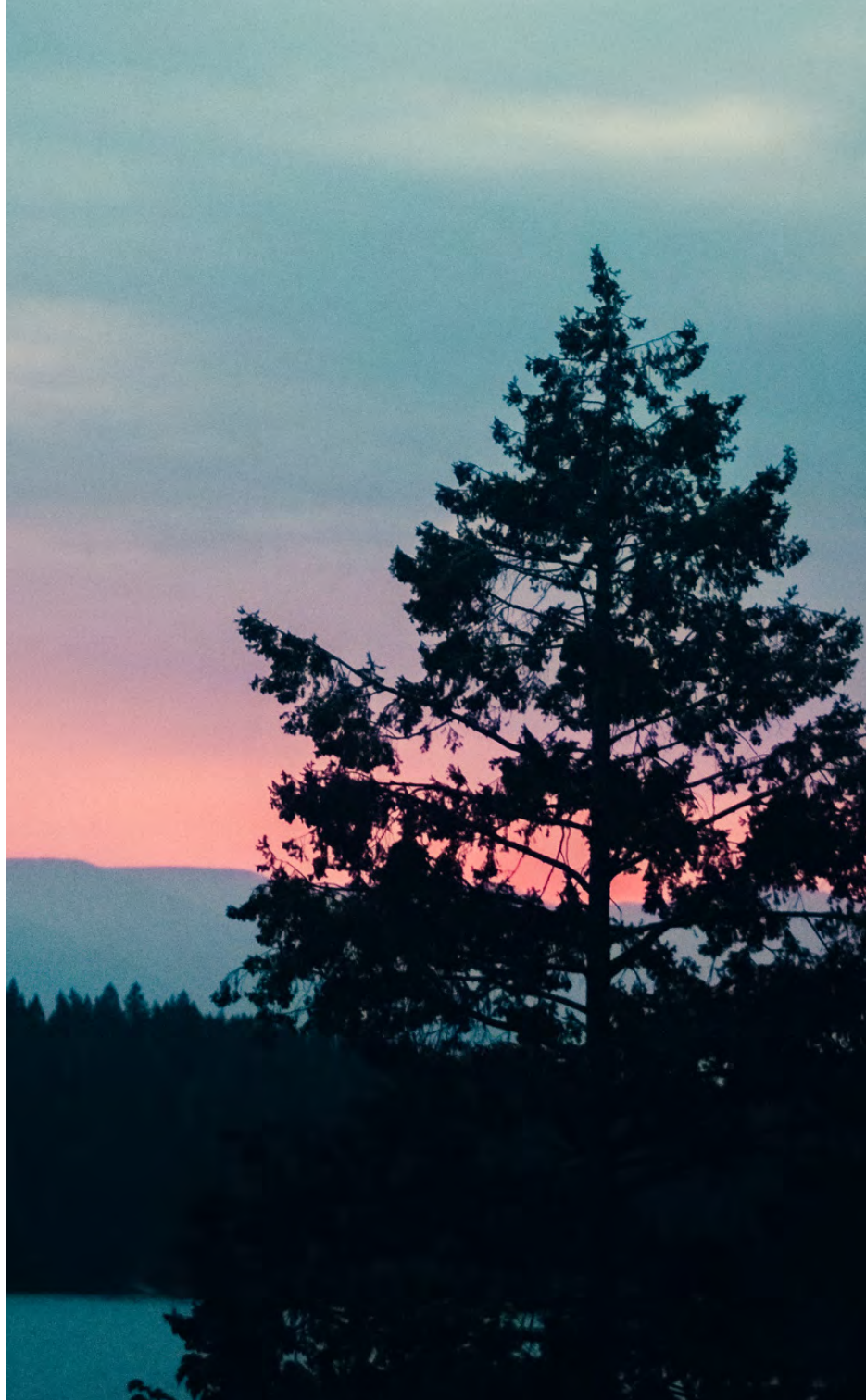
Bigfork Bay Fishing Access – This 1.6-acre site on the south side of Bigfork Bay includes a boat launch, dock, vault toilet, and paved parking.

Bigfork Bay Dock – This public dock off of Grand Avenue near downtown Bigfork is part of the Flathead County park system and provides public access to Bigfork Bay. On-street parking only.

Potoczny Field – This is a 3-acre neighborhood park owned and managed by Flathead County Parks Department. The park includes a restroom, playground, ballfield, and picnic tables.

Other Parks – There are several small pockets in the Bigfork area including Lake Hills Park and the USFS ranger station.

Connections – There is a partial shared-use path along Holt Drive. The Community Foundation for a Better Bigfork has received grants to improve sidewalks in the downtown area.





MAP LEGEND


Public Land Ownership/Status

-  County Government
-  Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP)
-  Montana State Trust Lands (DNRC)
-  United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)
-  United States Forest Service (USFS)
-  United States Government







Private Land Ownership/Status

-  PacifiCorp Recreation Assets
-  Conservation Easements (private land)

Boundaries

-  County Boundary

Corridors, Trails, Roads, Paths and Routes

-  Corridor
-  Main/Improved Roads (MT DOT)
-  Existing Bike Routes
-  Proposed Bike Routes
-  Existing Shared Use Paths
-  Proposed Shared Use Paths

Points of Interest

-  Trailheads (non-USFS)
-  Bigfork Nordic Trails Area Parking/Trailhead
-  Potential County River Access Site
-  FWP: Fishing Access and Boat Launch Sites
-  USFS Trailhead
-  FWP: Wildlife Viewing Locations
-  USFS Day Use Area



Map 6.1

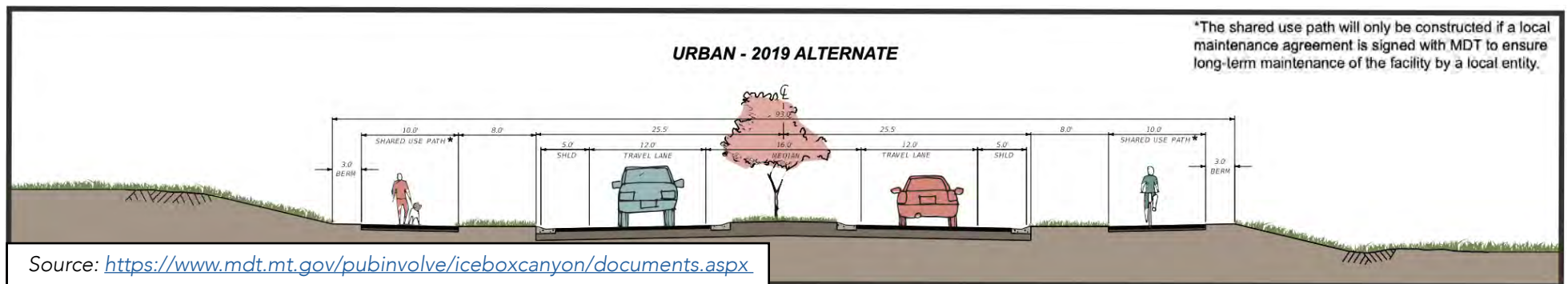
B. BIGFORK SUB-AREA H3C

NAME	ISSUES	OPPORTUNITIES/PARTNERS
HUB		
Bigfork downtown and commercial areas are the major hub for the study area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traffic congestion during peak season • Need better signage - sidewalks - paths-crosswalks to improve walkability • Wayfinding • Lack connectivity to rec assets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CFBB Downtown Sidewalk Project • MDT Bridge Street replacement • Bigfork Neighborhood Plan • Safe Routes to Schools • MDT Vision Zero
CLUSTERS AND CORRIDORS		
Downtown Area Cluster Sliters Park Powerhouse Park Swan Nature West Trailhead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bear-proof trash cans • Parking • Maintenance • Limited parking at trailhead • Problem behavior (dogs, noise,...) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CFBB funding for trash cans • Flathead County management agreement for Sliter Park • PacifiCorp Recreation Resource Management Plan • Work with local stakeholders on parking issues at trailhead
Water Access Sites Wayfarers Unit of Flathead Lake State Park Bigfork Bay Fishing Access Bigfork Dock	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Congestion during peak season • Poor pedestrian access • Limited parking at all sites • Bigfork Dock has limited access – should expand • Invasive Aquatic Species 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential land sale adjacent to Bigfork Dock
Neighborhood Parks Potoczny Field USFS Ranger Office Lake Hills Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pedestrian safety/biking on Holt Drive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flathead County Parks and Rec Plan • Flathead County PATHS Plan

NAME	ISSUES	OPPORTUNITIES/PARTNERS
CONNECTIONS (PROPOSED)		
Highway 35 Bigfork to Wayfarers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No walking or bike path Safety issues for pedestrians/bikers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MDT Highway 35 EA Flathead County PATHS Plan MDT Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan
Highway 35 Bigfork to Highway 83	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Safety issues for bikes/pedestrians 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flathead County PATHS Plan MDT Highway 35 Reconstruction Ice Box Canyon MDT Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan
Holt Drive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Safety/walkability are issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flathead County PATHS Plan
Sliters Park connection to Swan River Trailhead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wayfinding these two assets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CFBB Downtown sidewalk project
All paths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintenance costs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MOU, Grants, RSID, TIF, Fundraising

C. BIGFORK SUB-AREA RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Coordinate with Bigfork Neighborhood Plan update to include strategies for walkability, connections, and maintenance.
2. Support recommendations in the [Flathead County PATHS Plan](#) and identify potential partners for trail construction and maintenance (e.g. Holt Drive, Bigfork State Rd, Highway 35, Highway 209).
3. Support recommendations in PacifiCorp Recreation Resource Management Plan.
4. Support efforts for CFBB downtown sidewalk project. <https://bigfork.org/downtown-sidewalks/>
5. Work with other stakeholders to develop a common, comprehensive signage theme and coordinate wayfinding strategies.
6. Pursue funding sources for projects related to pedestrian safety, walkability, and wayfinding. (e.g. Safe Routes to School, Montana Tourism Grant program, MDT, philanthropy)
7. Work with MDT, Flathead County, and stakeholders such as the Flathead Trail Association to explore options for long-term funding of construction and maintenance for a shared-use path on state highways. (e.g. Special District, TIF, resort tax, RSID)
8. Coordinate with MDT planning on Highway improvement planning for Highway 35 to implement EA recommendations for a shared-use path from Woods Bay through Ice Box Canyon.
9. Work with Flathead County, PacifiCorp, and CFBB to review management options for Sliter's Park and install bear-proof trash cans.
10. Coordinate with FWP on education and outreach for Aquatic Invasive Species and support for AIS check stations. <https://fwp.mt.gov/conservation/aquatic-invasive-species/watercraft-inspection-stations>
11. Explore options for expanding public access at Bigfork Dock through land acquisition.
12. Work with stakeholders to address overflow parking issues at Swan River Trailhead on Grand Dr.



V. BIGFORK VICINITY SUB-AREA

A. SUB-AREA DESCRIPTION

This study area is adjacent to the Bigfork hub and offers an array of frontcountry outdoor recreation experiences. The sub-area is bordered on the north by Highway 83 and on the south by Highway 209. The Flathead River represents the western boundary with the boundary of the USFS Flathead Forest as the eastern boundary. Highway 35 and Highway 82 are major roadways. Recreational opportunities include:

Swan River Corridor – PacifiCorp Recreation Area – The Swan River is a popular recreation river corridor with multiple access sites managed by PacifiCorp as part of the Bigfork Hydroelectric Project. Water flows capable of supporting whitewater boating in the Swan River Class IV Wild Mile is released during July and August. Providing these flows is a requirement of the PacifiCorp federal license to operate the Bigfork Hydroelectric Project. Boaters need to be cognizant of water safety practices,



especially near the dam. In addition to the PacifiCorp sites, there are potential river access sites on Highway 83, a county park with river frontage and an undeveloped State Trust land parcel along the river.

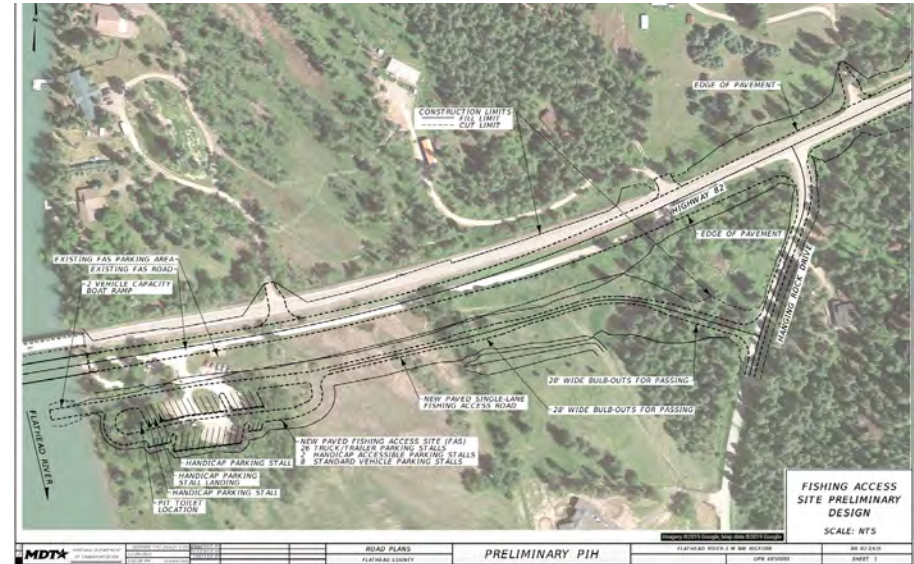
Swan River Nature Trail – A popular 2+ mile trail with trailheads at Grand Ave. and the Swan River Road on the east end. The east part of the trail is part of the recreation assets owned and managed by PacifiCorp as part of the FERC license. Amenities include parking, vault toilet, and river access. The western part of the trail is on an easement granted by the Whitney family and maintained by the Community Foundation for a Better Bigfork. The west trailhead has limited parking.

Harrell Forest Trails – Flathead Land Trust is working with [The Trust for Public Land](#) and [Montana Land Reliance](#) on a partnership to create over four miles of new community trails and permanently protect 236 acres of forestland north of the Swan River Trail with a trailhead on Bigfork Stage Road. Public input indicated strong support for connecting the Swan River Nature Trail with the Harrell Forest Trails. Connection would require partnerships with adjacent landowners and a long-term maintenance plan that includes funding for the project.



Harrell Forest Trails

Source: Flathead Land Trust



Source: Montana Department of Transportation, <https://www.mdt.mt.gov/pub-involve/flathead/docs/FAS-Preliminary-Map.pdf>

Sportsman Bridge Fishing Access – The Sportsman’s Bridge fishing access site on the Flathead River and Highway 82 is a popular launch site for boaters. The existing site includes two boat ramps and a parking area. The Montana Department of Transportation is rebuilding the bridge and the new design proposes that Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) grant a narrow strip of land on the north end of the fishing access site. The proposal means FWP’s riverfront would be reduced by 70 feet and there would only be one boat ramp. To mitigate this reduction in river access, MDT proposes to reconfigure the fishing access site to exit onto Hanging Rock Drive and build a new paved parking lot with a new boat ramp. An easement from the adjoining homeowners association is necessary to provide access to Hanging Rock Drive.



Sportsman’s Bridge Fishing Access Site

Bike/Pedestrian Routes – There are limited shared use paths and bike routes in the study area. The only shared-use path is an off road segment on Swan River Road that connects to Echo Lake Road on the north and ends at Riverbend Road on the south. The Echo Lake Road and Swan Road are part of Adventure Cycling’s “Great Divide” bike route. A shared-use path is recommended as part of the EA for Highway 35 through from Woods Bay to the intersection with Highway 83 but there are no immediate plans to build the path. Holt Drive and Hanging Rock Drive are local county roads that provide connectivity to recreation assets in the study area. Designating these roads as bike routes with signage would improve safety and wayfinding. The County PATHS plan recommends bike paths for Highway 82 and Highway 209. As part of the rebuilding for Sportsman Bridge on Highway 82, MDT plans indicate there will be 10’ shoulders that can be converted to a future multi-use path.

Conservation Areas – The State of Montana FWP manages the Osprey View Fishery on the north shore of Flathead Lake. The access is a short distance from downtown Bigfork on Holt Drive. It is adjacent to the federal Flathead Lake Waterfowl Production Area and is a popular area for walkers. The Flathead Lake shoreline area is also popular for kayakers and water recreation. The access to this area is from Holt Drive which has limited parking.





MAP LEGEND


Public Land Ownership/Status

-  County Government
-  Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP)
-  Montana State Trust Lands (DNRC)
-  United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)
-  United States Forest Service (USFS)
-  United States Government







Private Land Ownership/Status

-  PacifiCorp Recreation Assets
-  Conservation Easements (private land)

Boundaries

-  County Boundary

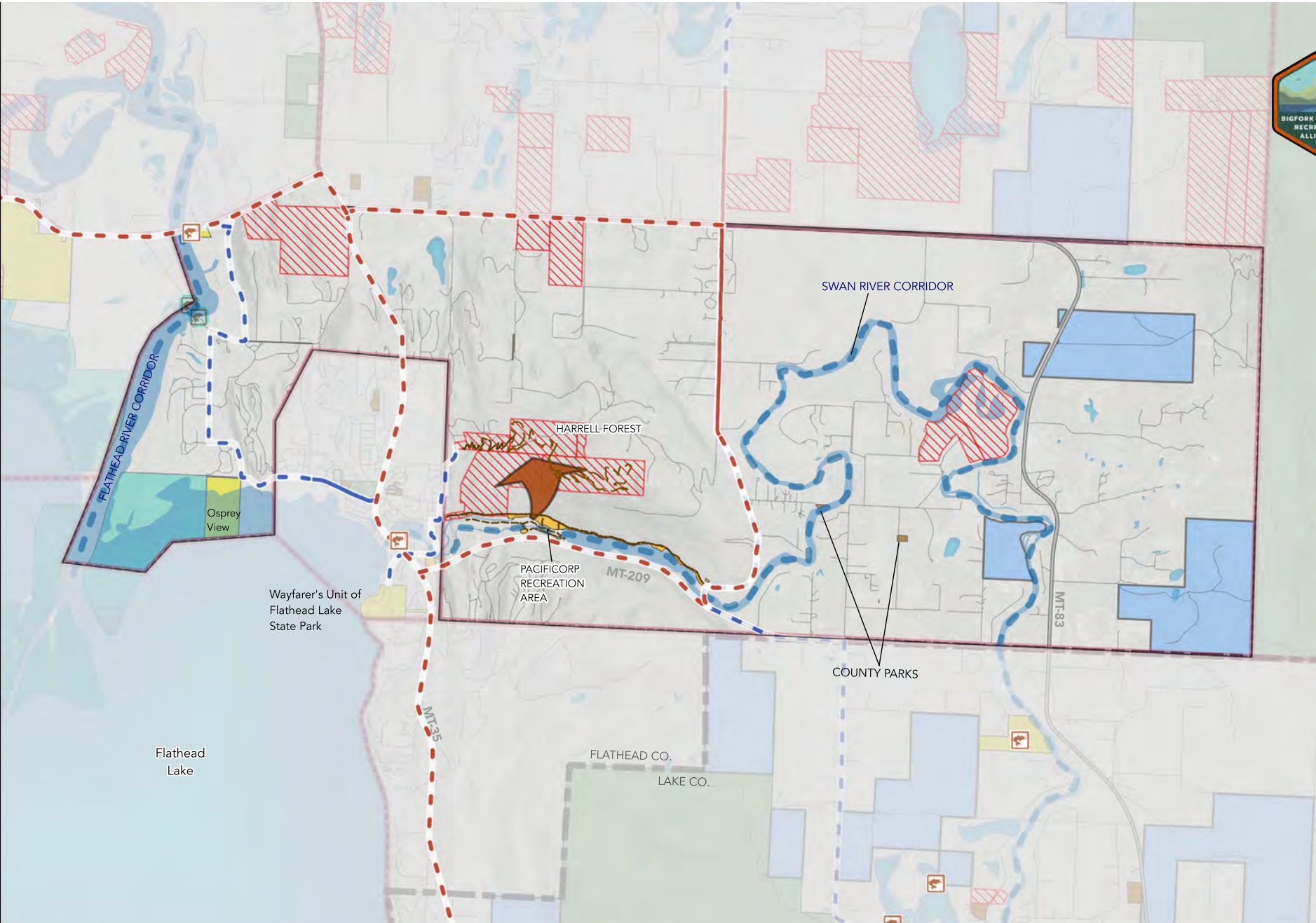
Corridors, Trails, Roads, Paths and Routes

-  Corridor
-  Main/Improved Roads (MT DOT)
-  Existing Bike Routes
-  Proposed Bike Routes
-  Existing Shared Use Paths
-  Proposed Shared Use Paths

Points of Interest

-  Trailheads (non-USFS)
-  Bigfork Nordic Trails Area Parking/Trailhead
-  Potential County River Access Site
-  FWP: Fishing Access and Boat Launch Sites
-  USFS Trailhead
-  FWP: Wildlife Viewing Locations
-  USFS Day Use Area

Maps are only to be used for study document. Data may not be current. Sources include USFS, FWP, DNRC, FWP, DNRC, MT Cadastral, NHD, Flathead Land Trust, Trust for Public Land, Trailforks, Bing, Google.



BIGFORK OUTDOOR RECREATION ALLIANCE
BIGFORK VICINITY



Map 6.2

B. BIGFORK VICINITY SUB-AREA H3C

NAME	ISSUES	OPPORTUNITIES/PARTNERS
HUB		
Adjacent to Bigfork Hub	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See Bigfork sub-area discussion 	
CLUSTERS AND CORRIDORS		
Swan River Nature Trail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited parking/congestion at west trail-head • Problem behavior (Dogs, noise, trespassing) • Connections to other trails • Maintenance (Weeds, informal social trails) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PacifiCorp • CFBB • Local Partners
Harrell Forest Trails	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordination with conservation easement • Funding for trail construction and maintenance • Connection to town and other trails 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flathead Land Trust • Montana Land Reliance • Partnerships
Swan River Corridor PacifiCorp river access sites County park access sites Highway 83 access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • User created social trails • Maintenance • Boater safety • Highway 209 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PacifiCorp • Flathead County • MDT • Local partners

NAME	ISSUES	OPPORTUNITIES/PARTNERS
CLUSTERS AND CORRIDORS		
Sportsman's Bridge Fishing Access Site (FWP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crowding at boat ramps and parking area • Will lose a boat ramp and reduce shoreline as part of proposed bridge rebuild • Easement needed to reroute FAS access drive to Hanging Rock Road • AIS and water quality • Lack of recreation amenities (e.g. tables, shelter) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MDT Rebuild of Sportsman Bridge and Fishing Access Sites will include paved parking and drive plus new vault toilet and rebuild of boat ramp
Flathead River Corridor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water safety • Erosion, AIS, water quality • Pollution/pollutants from motorized recreation and upland run-off • Increased pressure at water access sites from boaters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conservation District • FWP • County R.O.W on Holt and Oldenburg roads • Various non-profits
Conservation Cluster Osprey View Fishery Flathead Lake WPA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Users not respecting seasonal closures • Off-shore activity increasing and impacting habitat • Problem behavior 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FWP • USFWS • Flathead River Steward Program

NAME	ISSUES	OPPORTUNITIES/PARTNERS
CONNECTIONS (PROPOSED)		
Highway 35	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traffic safety issues • Need to identify maintenance funding responsibilities for future path 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MDT • County • Local Stakeholders
Highway 82 – Sportsman Bridge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of pedestrian/bike path • No bike/pedestrian connection to proposed FAS site • Traffic safety for existing FAS site 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MDT Bridge Rebuild will reroute FAS traffic to Hanging Rock Dr.
Hanging Rock Drive – Holt Drive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can provide connectivity from FAS to town if designated as bike route with signage and safety improvements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flathead County
Oldenburg Road	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local county road with access to river, could be a bike route with signage. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MDT • County
Swan Road Bike Path	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partially completed from Highway 83 to Riverbend Drive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • County • Local Stakeholders
Harrell Forest – Swan River – Nature Trail – Town connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify potential connections Harrell Forest to town and Swan River Nature Trail 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flathead Land Trust • PacifiCorp • CFBB • Stakeholders

NAME	ISSUES	OPPORTUNITIES/PARTNERS
CONNECTIONS (PROPOSED)		
Highway 209	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traffic safety at river access sites • No bike path/route 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MDT • PacifiCorp • Lake County • Flathead County
Highway 83 (Pull-outs between Highway 209 and Bear Creek Rd.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parking area pull-outs provide informal river access • Lack of signage • Safety with congestion around high-speed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MDT • Preserve river access

C. BIGFORK VICINITY SUB-AREA RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Explore education and outreach efforts to promote trail etiquette and reduce problem behaviors on trails.
2. Explore improvements to the Swan River Nature Trail, including addressing trailhead parking, with PacifiCorp and local partners.
3. Explore connections with Swan River Nature Trail in the area with neighboring landowners and Harrell Forest Trails.
4. Support the development of the trails on the Harrell Forest conservation easement.
5. Work with the County and stakeholder groups to extend the bike path on Swan River Road to create a complete connection between the Swan River Nature Trail and Echo Lake Rd.

C. BIGFORK VICINITY SUB-AREA RECOMMENDATIONS

6. Recommend MDT to include a pedestrian walkway/multi-use path as part of the Sportsman's Bridge rebuild that has a wider path on the south side of the bridge that will connect directly to a pathway leading to the improved fishing access site.
7. Recommend MDT expand and enhance the Sportsman Bridge fishing access site to mitigate for the reduction in shoreline and loss of a boat ramp to include additional recreation opportunities.
8. Explore the feasibility of additional river access sites on the Flathead River where the county has road right of way and where there are potential easements from willing landowners.
9. Explore the feasibility of additional river access sites on the Swan River where there is public land with frontage on the river.
10. Work with MDT to include a multi-use path on future plans for Highway 35 and Highway 209.
11. Work with Flathead County, stakeholder groups, and MDT to designate Holt Drive and Hanging Rock Road as a designated bike route with appropriate signage.
12. Coordinate with PacifiCorp to improve trail and river access sites on the Swan River to enhance user experience, minimize resource damage, improve maintenance, and promote safety.
13. Explore education and outreach efforts to promote water/boating safety, protect water quality from recreation activities and reduce problem behaviors.
14. Work with MDT to preserve river access on Highway 83 and to make access more sustainable.
15. Identify revenue sources for on-going maintenance cost for multi-use paths on county and state roads.
16. Throughout sub-area, reduce wildlife conflicts through design of facilities, education and enforcement.
17. Improve access to trails and river for people with mobility challenges of all ages and abilities.
18. Coordinate with conservation groups on stewardship issues for the Flathead River corridor and Flathead Lake north shore conservation areas.

IV. NORTH SHORE SUB-AREA

A. SUB-AREA DESCRIPTION

The North Shore sub-area includes the land between Highway 82 and Flathead Lake and extends from Highway 93 to the Flathead River. The small unincorporated town of Somers located just off Highway 93 is a mini activity hub with some commercial services, residential development, a school, and fire department. There is agricultural land mixed with conservation areas in the study area. Recreational assets include:

Somers Beach State Park – In October 2021, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) acquired the 106-acre Somers Beach property on the northwest shore of Flathead Lake. The park provides access to nearly a half-mile of shoreline that is comprised of a wide sandy beach from fall to spring when Flathead Lake is below full pool. There is a trail providing walk-in access to the beach through grassy areas, wetlands, and riparian area. The park also has a large parking area and a proposal for future development.

Somers Fishing Access/Somers Park – The FWP fishing access site on Highway 93 south of Somers is a popular boating site. There is a boat launch, public restroom, and a large paved parking lot. It is open from ice-off until November 15. The FAS is located adjacent to Somers Park, a small county-maintained park that is primarily a grassy area.

Flathead Lake Waterfowl Protection Area – The majority of the north Flathead Lake shoreline is protected with the 2,362-acre Flathead Lake Waterfowl Protection Area (WPA) managed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service. There are several access points to

the WPA along Highway 82.

North Shore Wildlife Management Area – Adjacent on the north boundary of the WPA is the 426-acre North Shore Wildlife Management Area managed by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. It is a mix of cultivated grain fields, seasonally flooded grasslands, and wooded uplands that provides habitat for migratory waterfowl. Public opportunities for outdoor recreation are primarily in the form of hunting and birdwatching.

Flathead River Corridor – The Flathead River represents the combined flow of the North, South, and Middle forks of the Flathead River which merge together near Columbia Falls. The river then flows down a gentle, south-sloping gradient until it empties into Flathead Lake. The river is popular with recreational boaters and anglers. Flathead County has road right-of-way that provides undeveloped river access at Oldenburg Drive and Holt Drive.







MAP LEGEND


Public Land Ownership/Status

-  County Government
-  Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP)
-  Montana State Trust Lands (DNRC)
-  United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)
-  United States Forest Service (USFS)
-  United States Government







Private Land Ownership/Status

-  PacifiCorp Recreation Assets
-  Conservation Easements (private land)

Boundaries

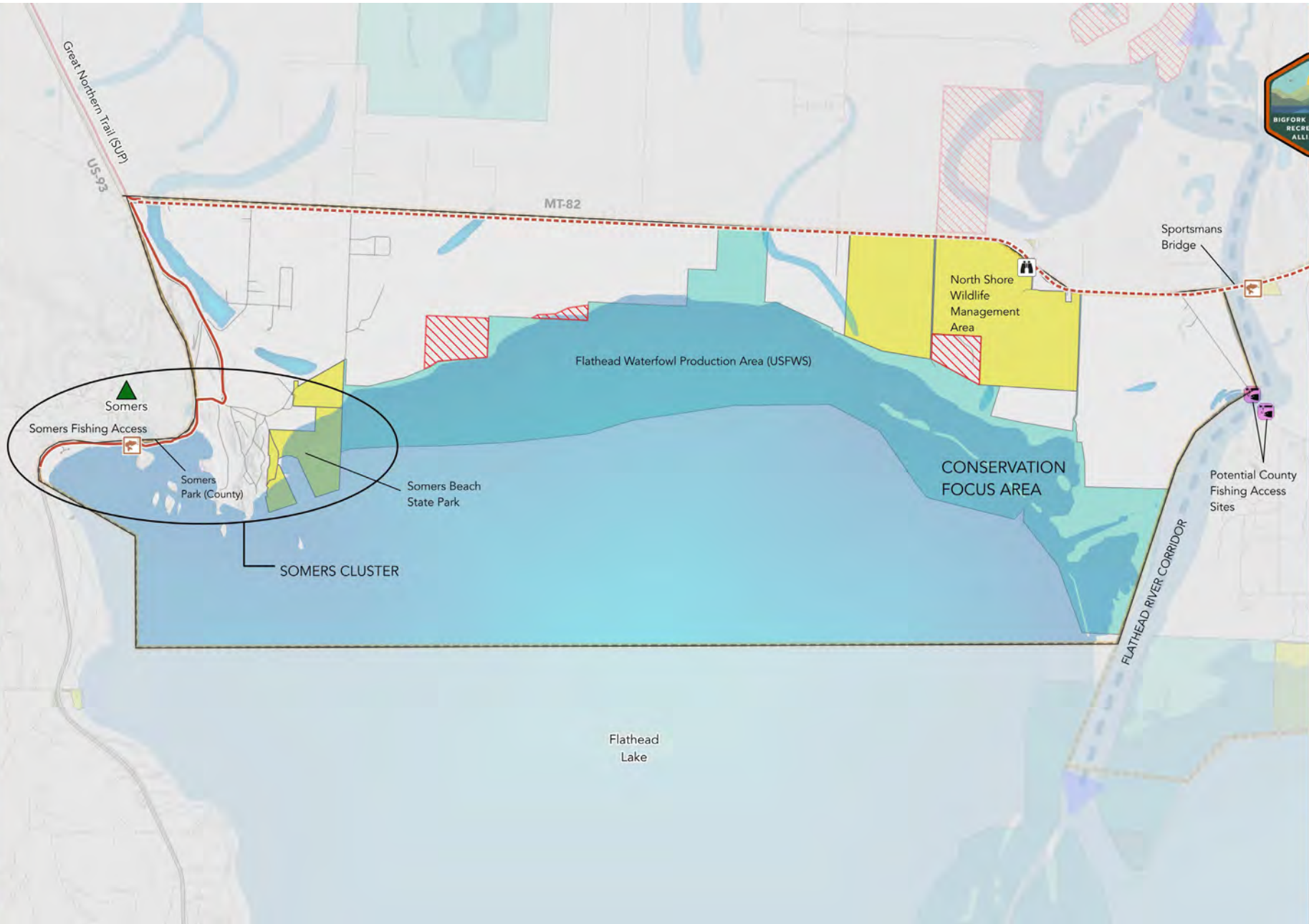
-  County Boundary

Corridors, Trails, Roads, Paths and Routes

-  Corridor
-  Main/Improved Roads (MT DOT)
-  Existing Bike Routes
-  Proposed Bike Routes
-  Existing Shared Use Paths
-  Proposed Shared Use Paths

Points of Interest

-  Trailheads (non-USFS)
-  Bigfork Nordic Trails Area Parking/Trailhead
-  Potential County River Access Site
-  FWP: Fishing Access and Boat Launch Sites
-  USFS Trailhead
-  FWP: Wildlife Viewing Locations
-  USFS Day Use Area



**BIGFORK OUTDOOR RECREATION ALLIANCE
NORTH SHORE**



Map 6.3

B. NORTH SHORE SUB-AREA H3C

NAME	ISSUES	OPPORTUNITIES/PARTNERS
HUB		
Somers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small hub with limited commercial services • Residential development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lakeside-Somers Chamber of Commerce • Somers Schools - Safe Route to schools
CLUSTERS AND CORRIDORS		
Somers Beach State Park Somers Fishing Access Somers Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Somers Beach is recent acquisition • Parking and heavy traffic at fishing access site on US 93 • Noise and problem behavior with boaters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Somers Beach State Park EA • MDT • FWP • Flathead County • Stakeholder groups
North Shore WMA Flathead Lake WPA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preserve conservation values – avoid overuse by public • Problem behaviors (Ignoring seasonal closures, dogs, litter, wildlife conflicts, ..) • Problems with boating off-shore of WPA (erosion, noise, water quality....) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flathead WPA Management Plan • Conservation stakeholders • FWP Lease for North Shore WMA renewed in 2021 • USFS • Stakeholder groups
Flathead River	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Borders east side of sub-area • Oldenburg Drive has river access 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flathead County Parks • See Bigfork Vicinity sub-area

NAME	ISSUES	OPPORTUNITIES/PARTNERS
CONNECTIONS		
Great Northern Historic Trail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connects to Somers to Kalispell, crossing at Highway 82 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MDT
US 82 Highway between Somers and MT 35	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Heavily traveled – high speed highway lacking a shared path for pedestrians/bikes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MDT EA for Highway 82 improvements

C. NORTH SHORE SUB-AREA RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Collaborate with land management agencies to preserve the conservation values of the North Shore WMA and Flathead WPA by minimizing use and enforcing seasonal closures.
2. Conduct outreach through stakeholder groups to build support for the protection of critical habitat along the north shore (e.g. citizen scientists, presentations, weed pulls).
3. Address problem behaviors impacting WPA/WMA (e.g. no-wake zone, education, enforcement).
4. Support the development of appropriate lake access sites near Somers to reduce pressure on WPA and WMA.
5. Support Somers Beach State Park improvements that preserve beach access, address safety and sanitation, design amenities to have a low environmental impact on surrounding habitat/neighbors, and prevent trespassing/user-created trails.



FWP Somers Fishing Access Site

C. NORTH SHORE SUB-AREA RECOMMENDATIONS CONT.

6. Support collaboration between County Parks and Recreation, community groups, and FWP on management issues around Somers Fishing Access and Somers Park.
7. Explore river access site on Oldenburg Road per the County Parks and Recreation Plan.
8. Support recommendations in the [Flathead County PATHS Plan](#) to connect the Great Northern Trail to a shared-use bike path on Highway 82 and to have a path on Somers Rd.
9. Work with MDT to incorporate shared use path as part of reconstruction projects for Highway 82.*

Note: “There are currently no plans for a dedicated bike lane or pedestrian walkway. However, a shared-use path connecting MT Highway 82 and MT Highway 83 is in Flathead County’s long-range transportation plan. If the shared-use path is constructed, the substantial 10-foot shoulders on the new bridge will be able to accommodate pedestrian and bike traffic with minor alterations, such as striping and installing a protective pedestrian rail to separate the path from the travel lanes.” <https://www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/flathead/faqs.aspx>



VI. ECHO LAKE/JEWEL BASIN VICINITY SUB-AREA

A. SUB-AREA DESCRIPTION

The Echo Lake/Jewel Basin sub-area lies in the northern part of the study area. It is a mix of frontcountry and backcountry assets that is bordered by Highway 83 on the south and Highway 35 on the west. After heading north on Highway 35, the boundary cuts over on LaBrant Road to Foothill Road. It follows Foothill Road until it intersects with USFS land. Major recreational opportunities include:

Echo Lake Fishing Access Site – This 695-acre lake is three miles northeast of Bigfork, at the end of Echo Lake Road. Private land with residential and seasonal homes comprises most of the land frontage on the lake. Montana FWP has a permanent easement from DNRC to maintain a 4.7-acre fishing access site on the lake. This is the only public access point. This site has a boat launch, dock, and parking area. It is popular with motor boats and receives high seasonal use in the summer months.

Bigfork Community Nordic Trails – Bigfork Community Nordic Center (BCNC) is located on Montana State Trust Land at the corner of Foothills Road and Jewel Basin Road. The North Shore Nordic Club has a “Land Use License” with the DNRC and grooms over 10 kilometers of trails for skiers and snowshoers from December through March 31. In other months of the year, the trails are open to hikers and mountain bikers. Users must have a license from DNRC.

Carlyle Johnson Park – This 14-acre county park is located off Highway 83 just east of the intersection with Highway 35. The

facility includes 4 baseball and 3 soccer fields, restrooms and playground equipment, restrooms, and paved parking lot.

State Trust Lands – State Trust Lands are scattered throughout this sub-area. The parcels are managed by the DNRC and provide opportunities for dispersed recreation, as long as the individual has a license. There are also potential partnerships with local stakeholders for licensed recreation activities or to secure public access with permanent recreation easements. Unauthorized motorized use is an issue.

Flathead National Forest – Jewel Basin – “The Camp Misery trailhead, is a very popular access point to the Jewel Basin Hiking Area. The Jewel Basin hiking area is an approximately 15,300-acre area maintained exclusively for hiking and camping, characterized by high alpine meadows, lakes, and forests.” (Source: Flathead National Forest – Land Management Plan) Other key findings in the Land Management Plan include:

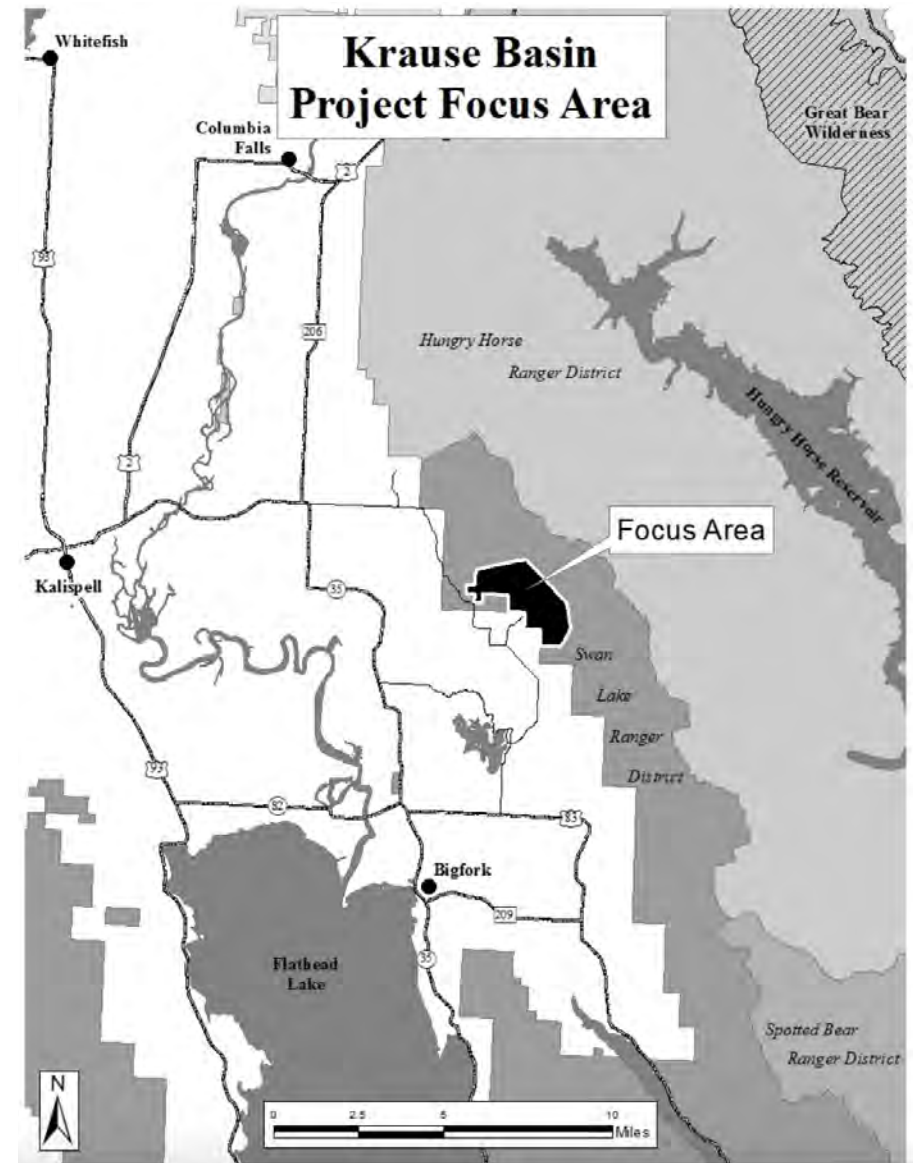
- Outstanding opportunities for primitive recreation included hiking, backpacking, horseback riding, hunting, fishing, snowshoeing, and cross-country and backcountry skiing.
- There is a very high opportunity for solitude in this area although mainline trails within the Jewel Basin Hiking Area have high levels of use on weekends and holidays.
- This area contributes to habitat connectivity for wolverine, grizzly bear, and lynx as well as a continuous band of high-quality habitat for mountain goats.
- The Camp Misery Trailhead is a “Focused Recreation Area”. Recreational use in this area would be enhanced through an emphasis on trail, road, and facility maintenance.
- USFS has a permanent easement on DNRC lands for the Echo-Broken leg trail.

- Commercial logging and forest management activities occur in this area.

Flathead National Forest – Krause Basin comprises 1,566 acres and is located in the Swan Lake Ranger District in the foothills of the Swan Mountains near Bigfork. The USFS Land Management Plan classifies the area as a “Focus Recreation Area”. This focused recreation area reflects natural conditions with some development in the form of trailhead, trail markers, and trail signing. The area provides both motorized and nonmotorized opportunities such as biking, hiking, horseback riding, snowmobiling, and off-highway vehicle use. There is also a short handicap-accessible trail.

The plan states that management focus will be on frequent site visits by forest employees, obliterating user-created trails and focusing use on designated trails through use of trailhead signage, and additional facilities (such as a toilet), if needed to protect resources. In response to objections on the 2018 Flathead National Forest Management Plan, the Forest committed to starting a collaborative effort within 3 years of the Record of Decision. “This collaborative group is requested to come together in assisting the Forest in developing a management strategy for the Krause Basin area.” The next step is creating a recreation management strategy that would identify potential projects.

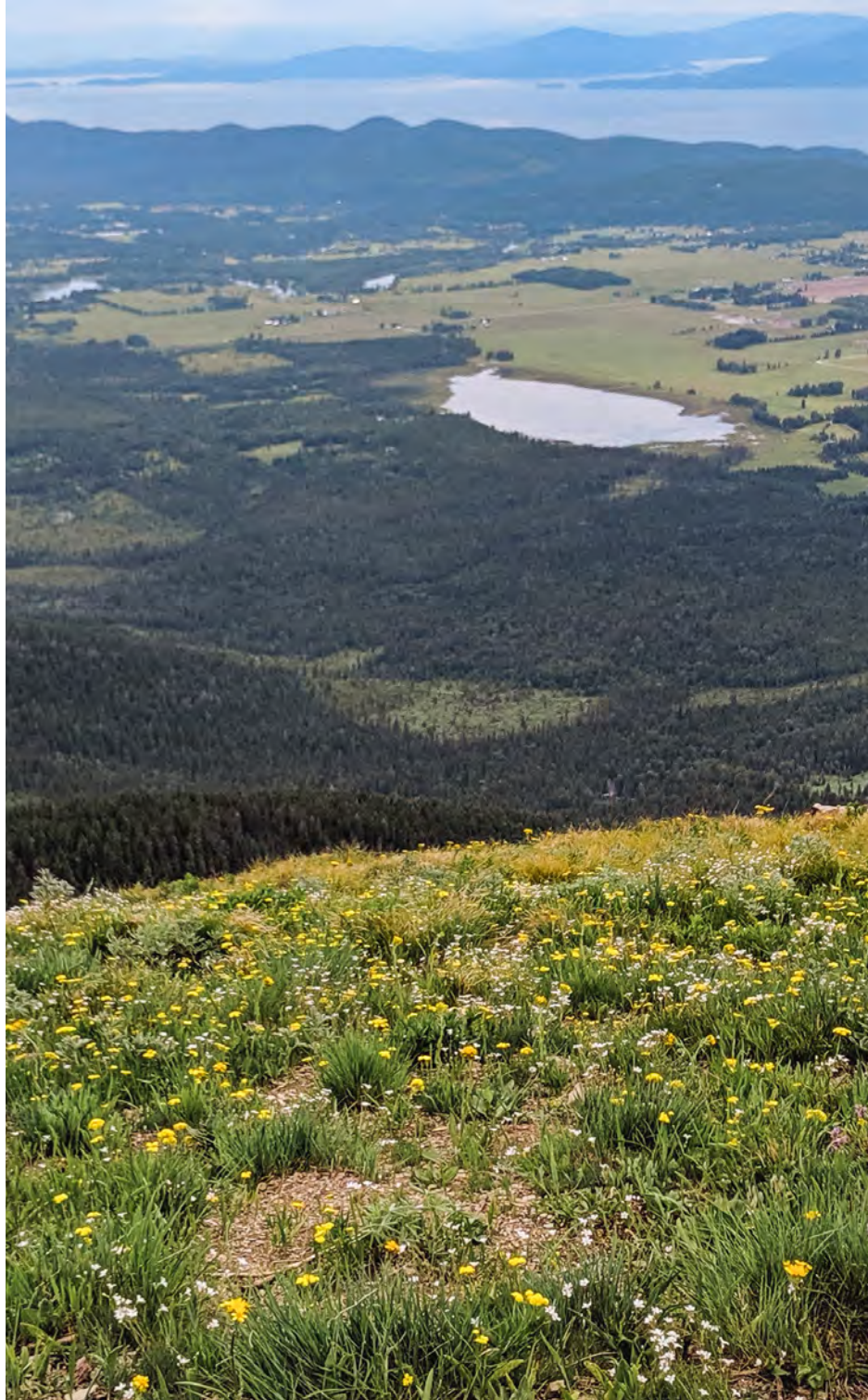
Source: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/detailfull/flathead/landmanagement/projects/?cid=fseprd977802&width=full>



Echo Lake Bike Path – Foothill Road – There is a paved bike route along Echo Lake Road starting at the Echo Lake School and heading north for a length of about one-mile. This path, and the Foothill Road is a segment of the Adventure Cycling cross-country, “Great Divide Mountain Bike Trail” that goes from Canada to Mexico.



Echo Lake Road Bike Path





MAP LEGEND


Public Land Ownership/Status

-  County Government
-  Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP)
-  Montana State Trust Lands (DNRC)
-  United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)
-  United States Forest Service (USFS)
-  United States Government







Private Land Ownership/Status

-  PacifiCorp Recreation Assets
-  Conservation Easements (private land)

Boundaries

-  County Boundary

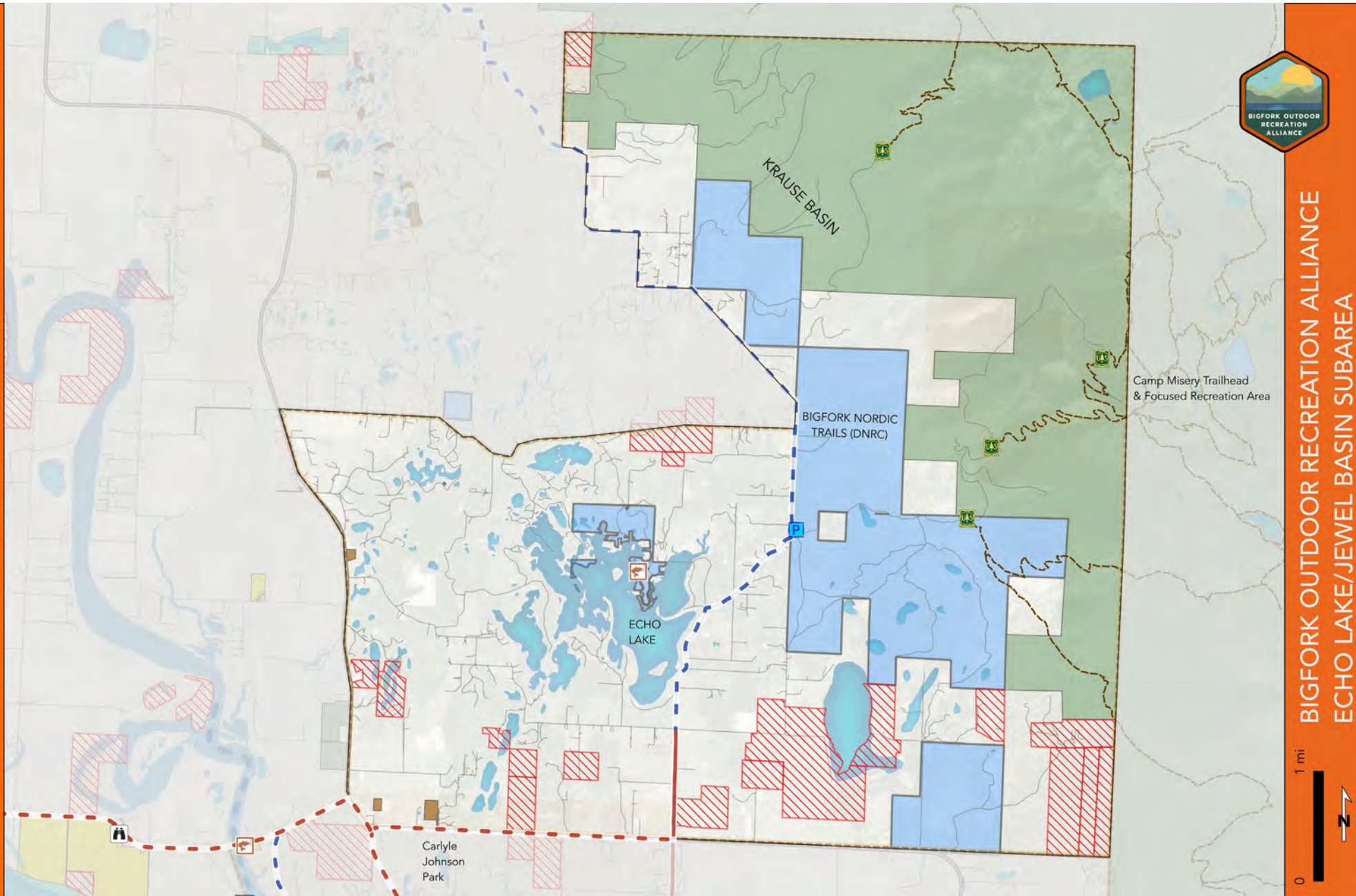
Corridors, Trails, Roads, Paths and Routes

-  Corridor
-  Main/Improved Roads (MT DOT)
-  Existing Bike Routes
-  Proposed Bike Routes
-  Existing Shared Use Paths
-  Proposed Shared Use Paths

Points of Interest

-  Trailheads (non-USFS)
-  Bigfork Nordic Trails Area Parking/Trailhead
-  Potential County River Access Site
-  FWP: Fishing Access and Boat Launch Sites
-  USFS Trailhead
-  FWP: Wildlife Viewing Locations
-  USFS Day Use Area

Maps are only to be used for study document. Data may not be current. Sources include USFS, FWP, DNRC, MT Cadastral, NHD, Flathead Land Trust, Trust for Public Land, Trailforks, Bing, Google



Map 6.4

B. ECHO LAKE/JEWEL BASIN VICINITY SUB-AREA H3C

NAME	ISSUES	OPPORTUNITIES/PARTNERS
CLUSTERS AND CORRIDORS		
Echo Lake	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Congestion at fishing access site • Lakeshore erosion • Water quality issues • Noise • Problem behavior with boating • Limited public access • Safety issue on water 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FWP • DNRC • Private landowner involvement • Stakeholder involvement
Jewel Basin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parking congestion at Camp Misery trailhead • Road to Camp Misery in poor condition • Human-wildlife conflicts • Concerns for overuse, litter, problem behavior • Forest health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • USFS Flathead Forest Plan • Stakeholder involvement
Krause Basin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • User created trails • Human-wildlife conflicts • Forest health • Problem behavior 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • USFS Flathead Forest Plan • Stakeholder involvement

NAME	ISSUES	OPPORTUNITIES/PARTNERS
CLUSTERS AND CORRIDORS		
Carlyle Johnson Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desire for pedestrian/bike connectivity to town 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flathead County
Bigfork Community Nordic Trails State Trust Lands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey preference for trails on lands south of Nordic club • Dogs and people walking on groomed trails • Users lack recreation licenses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • North Shore Nordic Club • DNRC
CONNECTIONS		
Echo Lake Road Shared-Use Path	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey preference to extend trail north to Jewel Basin Road or LaBrant Road 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flathead County • Flathead Trails Alliance • Regional Bike Route
Regional Bike Routes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bike safety issues on rural roads • Lack of connectivity for bike routes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flathead County • Flathead Trails Alliance • Regional Bike Route

C. ECHO LAKE/JEWEL BASIN VICINITY SUB-AREA RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Work with FWP to explore education, outreach, and enforcement efforts to promote water safety, responsible boating, and reduce problem behaviors on Echo Lake.
2. Work with USFS, DNRC, and local partners to explore education, outreach, and enforcement efforts to promote trail etiquette and leave no trace principles.
3. Work with FWP to explore improvements to the Echo Lake Fishing Access Site to enhance the user experience, minimize resource damage, improve maintenance, and promote safety.
4. Engage local stakeholders, landowners, and public agencies to identify potential opportunities for additional public access sites on Echo Lake.
5. Support the Bigfork Community Nordic Trails and work with MT DNRC to identify additional recreational opportunities on nearby school trust lands.
6. Monitor USFS planning for the Flathead Forest to identify opportunities for collaboration and to submit comments related to outdoor recreation in the study area that are consistent with the goals and objectives of this plan.
7. Promote efforts to protect water quality from the threats of recreational boating, erosion, aquatic invasive species, and development at recreational sites.
8. Work with Flathead County and stakeholder groups to extend the bike path on Echo Lake Road up to Foothill Drive and explore signage on Foothill Drive to alert motorists to bike traffic on this regional route.
9. Work with MDT to include a multi-use path along Highway 209 and the segment of Highway 83 from the intersection with MT 35 to Shawnee Drive (Carlyle Johnson Park).
10. Identify revenue sources for ongoing maintenance costs for multi-use paths on county and state roads.
11. Support efforts to minimize human-wildlife conflict through education as well as design and habitat protection.
12. Work with community groups, local stakeholders, and outfitters to develop a signage plan addressing wayfinding, information, and safety concerns.

VII. CRANE MOUNTAIN/WOODS BAY VICINITY SUB-AREA

A. SUB-AREA DESCRIPTION

The north edge of this sub-area borders on the Bigfork Hub and Bigfork Vicinity sub-areas. It extends south along Flathead Lake to the Bear Dance Trailhead and covers the area east of Highway 83 to the Flathead Forest boundary. The sub-area is split between Flathead County and Lake County. Major travel corridors include Highway 35, Highway 209, and Highway 83. Outdoor recreation assets include:

Flathead National Forest – Crane Mountain – The Crane Mountain “Focused Recreation Area” is 1,023 acres in size located in the Flathead Forest about 5 miles south of Bigfork. The area faces west to Flathead Lake above Woods Bay and can be accessed by car from Crane Mountain Road. This is a popular area for mountain bikers and dispersed recreation such as hiking. Additionally, there are approximately 43 miles of motorized over-snow vehicle trails, which are also available for Nordic skiing and snowshoeing. Dispersed camping is allowed throughout the area.

USFS approved the “Bug Creek Integrated Resource Management Project” which will create or designate approximately 17 miles of non-motorized trail and add two new trailheads. In addition to providing new recreational opportunities, this project will reduce fuels and fire intensities in the WUI and improve the diversity and resiliency of vegetative communities and associated wildlife habitat. Primary trailheads within or near the sub-area include:

- Estes Lake Trailhead – Accessed from Crane Mountain Road, the trail leads to Estes Lake. The trail is located on State Trust Land. There are no facilities at the lake.

- Phillips Trailhead – Access by car from Crane Mountain - April through November.
- Crane Creek Trailhead – Accessed from Beardance Trail
- Bear Dance Trailhead – Parking area is located on the east side of MT Highway 35 south of Woods Bay. Hikers must cross the highway to access the trail.

For portions of the sub-area within the Mission Mountains Wilderness, the Forest Plan guidelines suggest coordinated management and consultation with the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. Commercial logging and forest management activities occur in this area. (Source: *Flathead Forest Land Management Plan*)

Flathead Lake – At over 100,000 acres in size, Flathead Lake is the largest natural freshwater body of water west of the Mississippi. The Lake is over 30 miles in length. Since most of the land surrounding the lake is in private ownership, the few public access points on the lake often experience overcrowding during peak summer months. The following access points are within or directly adjacent to the sub-area.

- Wayfarers Unit of Flathead Lake State Park – Located directly north of this sub-area adjacent to recreation activities at Flathead Lake Lodge. There may be opportunities to expand the trail system at the park with cooperating private landowners within the sub-area.
- Woods Bay Fishing Access – Access from Highway 83. Main activities are fishing, boating and beach.
- Beardance Trailhead – The parking area is located on the east side of Highway 35 south of Woods Bay. There is walk-in access to Flathead Lake parking area.

Averill's Flathead Lake Lodge – Averill's Flathead Lake Lodge is a third-generation family-owned and operated dude ranch that sits on the shore of Flathead Lake in Bigfork, Montana which offers horse, water, and other outdoor recreation activities at the Lodge and on nearby recreation areas. The Lodge operations are seasonal and the Lodge has expressed interest in exploring public-private partnerships that would improve connections to area recreation infrastructure.

State Trust Lands – State Trust Lands in this sub-area are managed by the MT Department of Natural Resources and Conservation and provide opportunities for dispersed recreation, as long as the individual has a recreation use license. There are also potential partnerships with local stakeholders for licensed recreation activities and/or to secure public access with permanent recreation easements. Estes Lake is on Trust Land and gets heavy use. A license held by a stakeholder would provide for better management. There is an opportunity to provide another access to Crane Mountain through State Trust Land on Highway 209, or Swan Lake access through Trust Land on Highway 83.

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) Fishing Access Sites –

Following are several smaller lakes in the sub-area area where FWP maintains fishing access sites:

- Horseshoe Lake Fishing Access Site – Access is 3 miles south of Ferndale on county roads. A dock is available from ice-off to September 15. Activities are fishing and boating.
- Loon Lake Fishing Access Site – Site is located on State Trust Land but is managed by Fish, Wildlife and Parks. It is located 2-miles south of Ferndale from Loon Lake Road. There is a gravel boat ramp but no other facilities.

Swan River Corridor – Swan Lake – Swan Lake is a popular boating area. The lake is 3,269 acres and about 8 miles in length. The northern 7 miles of the lake are within the study area and Highway 83 along the lake is a scenic drive with highway pull-offs. The USFS – Swan Lake recreation area is located just outside of the study area boundaries on Highway 83 and offers a boat ramp, parking, picnicking, and camping.

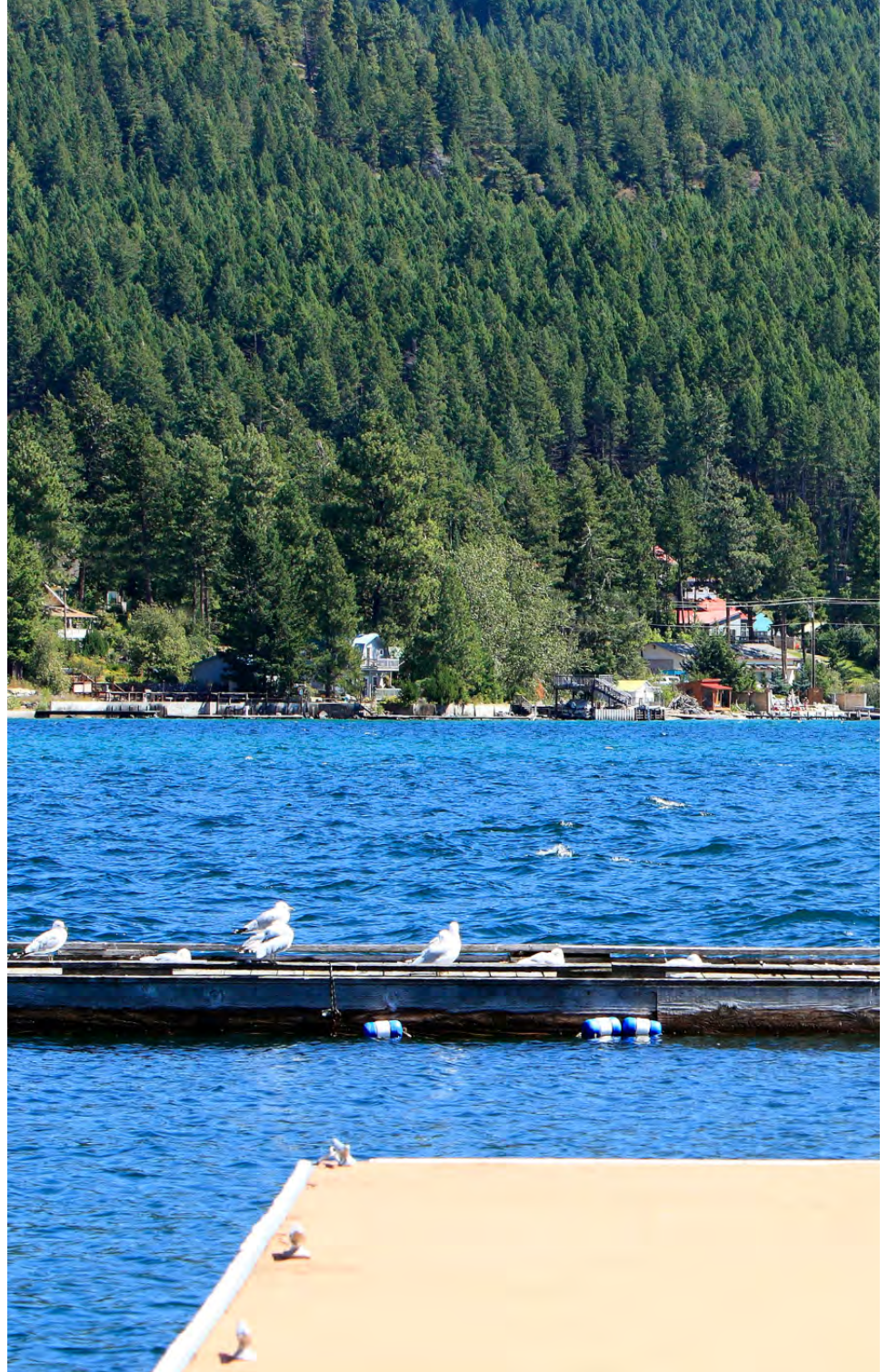
The Swan River corridor extends through the study area from Swan Lake. The Swan River Fishing Access Site is maintained by Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks and is located 2-miles southeast of Ferndale on South Ferndale Drive. River access is from a hand boat launch with difficult accessibility. Floaters can put in at this site and float to sites along the Swan River corridor.

MT Highway 35 – A top priority for the community is a shared-use path along Highway 83 from Bigfork to Woods Bay. Currently, the shoulder width along this route is less than 2 feet. Although the MDT Environmental Assessment for the highway recommends such a path, there are no plans for construction. Construction of the path will depend on establishing a maintenance agreement with the County. Highway 35 along Flathead Lake is noted as a scenic drive. In the late summer, during the cherry harvest, there is additional traffic along this corridor especially around the fruit stands.

Regional Bike Routes – Although there are no shared use paths in the sub-area, several organizations have mapped regional routes in the study area. Adventure Cycling, a non-profit in Missoula, provides touring information and has mapped several routes in the area. The "Great Divide Mountain Bike Trail" is a route from Canada to New Mexico and is routed through Ferndale on Coun-

ty Roads. The “Great Parks Route”, from Jasper, AB to Durango, CO has segments along parts of Highway 209 and Highway 83. Highway 83 is a high-speed highway with shoulder widths of less than 2 feet.

(Source: <https://www.adventurecycling.org/>)







MAP LEGEND


Public Land Ownership/Status

-  County Government
-  Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP)
-  Montana State Trust Lands (DNRC)
-  United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)
-  United States Forest Service (USFS)
-  United States Government







Private Land Ownership/Status

-  PacifiCorp Recreation Assets
-  Conservation Easements (private land)

Boundaries

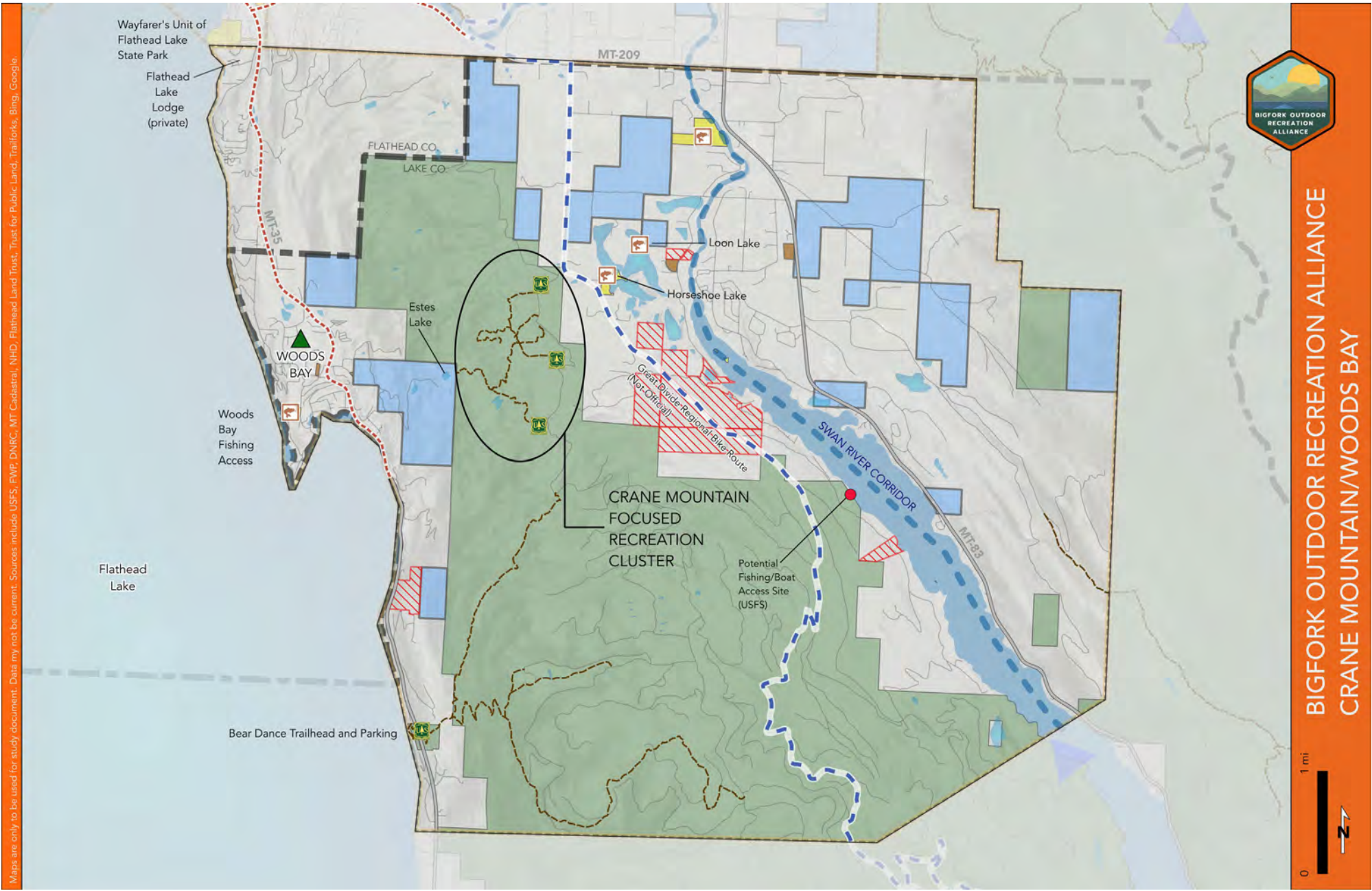
-  County Boundary

Corridors, Trails, Roads, Paths and Routes

-  Corridor
-  Main/Improved Roads (MT DOT)
-  Existing Bike Routes
-  Proposed Bike Routes
-  Existing Shared Use Paths
-  Proposed Shared Use Paths

Points of Interest

-  Trailheads (non-USFS)
-  Bigfork Nordic Trails Area Parking/Trailhead
-  Potential County River Access Site
-  FWP: Fishing Access and Boat Launch Sites
-  USFS Trailhead
-  FWP: Wildlife Viewing Locations
-  USFS Day Use Area



Maps are only to be used for study document. Data may not be current. Sources include USFS, FWP, DNRC, MT Cadastral, NHD, Flathead Land Trust, Trust for Public Land, Trailforks, Bing, Google

Map 6.5

B. CRANE MOUNTAIN/WOODS BAY VICINITY SUB-AREA H3C

NAME	ISSUES	OPPORTUNITIES/PARTNERS
CLUSTERS AND CORRIDORS		
Crane Mountain Focused Recreation Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • User conflicts • User created mountain biking trails • Illegal camping at trailheads • Forest health • Human-wildlife conflict • Wildlife habitat fragmentation • Motorized use in unauthorized areas • Congestion at parking areas • More access for people with disabilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • USFS • DNRC • Stakeholder groups
Flathead Lake Wayfarers Unit of Flathead Lake State Park Woods Bay FAS Beardance Trailhead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Congestion at lake access sites • Boating safety • Water quality • Trespassing on private property 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FWP • USFS • Neighboring land owners • Stakeholder groups
Fishing Access Sites Horseshoe Lake Loon Lake Estes Lake	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water quality • Boater safety • Problem behavior (litter, dogs, ...) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FWP • USFS
Swan Lake – Swan River Swan River FAS Swan Lake – USFS Scenic pull-offs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water safety • Need more access sites • Water quality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FWP • USFS • MDT • Stakeholder groups

NAME	ISSUES	OPPORTUNITIES/PARTNERS
CLUSTERS AND CORRIDORS		
MT State Trust Lands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problem behaviors • Users lack recreation licenses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate DNRC and FWP fishing – hunting licenses • Stakeholder groups
Averill’s Flathead Lake Lodge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnership opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adjacent landowners • FWP • USFS • Recreation groups
CONNECTIONS		
Highway 35	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrow shoulders not safe for biking • Pedestrian crossing at Bear Dance • Congestion during peak summer season • Maintenance of future shared paths 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MDT • Flathead County • Lake County • USFS (Beardance parking area)
Highway 209	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of shared-use path between Bigfork and Ferndale • Maintenance of future shared paths 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MDT • Flathead County • Lake County
Highway 83	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrow shoulders not safe for biking • Traffic safety • Congestion during summer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MDT • Lake County
Regional Bike Routes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bicycle safety on major routes • Lack of signage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MDT • Lake County • Stakeholder groups

C. CRANE MOUNTAIN/WOODS BAY VICINITY SUB-AREA RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Work with USFS, FWP, and local partners to explore education, outreach, and enforcement efforts to promote trail etiquette and leave no trace principles, including discouraging off-trail and user-created trail activities.
2. Support USFS efforts to designate a mountain bike trail system while decommissioning user-created trails to reduce resource damage.
3. Work with FWP to explore education, outreach, and enforcement efforts to promote water safety, responsible boating and reduce problem behaviors at fishing access sites.
4. Work with FWP to explore improvements to fishing access sites to enhance the user experience, minimize resource damage, improve maintenance, and promote safety.
5. Monitor USFS planning for the Flathead National Forest to identify opportunities for collaboration and to submit comments related to outdoor recreation in the study area that are consistent with the goals and objectives of this plan.
6. Promote efforts to protect water quality from the threats of recreational boating, aquatic invasive species, erosion, and development at recreational sites.
7. Engage local stakeholders, public agencies, and landowners to identify potential opportunities for additional public access opportunities on Flathead Lake and Swan Lake.
8. Promote partnerships between land management agencies, county, and stakeholders to address issues related to illegal camping activities on public lands.
9. Work with MDT, Flathead County and Lake County to develop a shared-use path along Highway 35 between Woods Bay and Bigfork.
10. Identify revenue sources for ongoing maintenance costs for multi-use paths on county and state roads.
11. Support efforts to minimize human-wildlife conflict through education as well as design and habitat protection.
12. Work with community groups, local stakeholders, and outfitters to develop a signage plan with a common design that will address wayfinding, information, and safety concerns.
13. Support stakeholder groups to work with DNRC to establish managed recreation through licenses or permanent easements that would increase access to Crane Mountain, Estes Lake, and Swan Lake.

CHAPTER 7 – IMPLEMENTATION

This chapter contains a general framework to achieve the goals of the plan. Action items are derived from recommendations in the sub-area sections and will require an ongoing commitment from the community and partner agencies. The section provides the framework for clear communication, assigning responsibilities, and establishing priorities.

I. FOUNDATIONAL ACTIONS

The first type of action focuses on building a foundation for the Bigfork Recreation Outdoor Alliance (BORA) to continue its work and undertake the initiatives and projects identified in this chapter. These foundational actions include the following:

- 1. Establish Organizational Framework** – BORA is an informal alliance that developed this plan. Upon completion of this effort, BORA should adopt an organizational framework that will allow for continuing the work identified in the plan. Alternatives for proceeding include:
 - Identify a lead partner to administer and support the group. If funding is identified, the lead partner could potentially hire staff dedicated to working on implementation projects.
 - Contract for services. Contact an independent contractor to assist with implementation tasks on an interim basis.
 - Incorporate as a non-profit to act as the lead agency for the purpose of fundraising, hiring staff, and contracting for services.
 - 2. Coordinate with Other Planning Processes** – Many of the sub-area recommendations include monitoring planning efforts, coordinating with stakeholder groups, and supporting local planning processes. It is important to be proactive in requesting local jurisdictions to integrate recommendations into planning documents such as the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, Flathead County and Lake County Growth Policies, Bigfork Neighborhood Plan, and federal/state agencies' land management plans. Coordinating recreation initiatives with other initiatives will broaden the reach of the plan and demonstrate strong community support to funding agencies.
 - 3. Outreach and Engagement** – Continuing public engagement throughout the implementation stage is critical to keep community members informed, build support for projects, and solicit volunteers/donations. Outreach efforts may include a website, social media, events, promotional materials, community meetings, signage, and other engagement techniques.
- Continue as an informal, all-volunteer, organization. With this option, there would be limited resources to pursue recommendations in the plan.

4. **Funding** – A funding plan is a key step for long-term success. While the appendix includes grant resources these are usually targeted for one-time capital projects or programming. On-going staffing, operational, and maintenance expenses require a reliable revenue source. Funding could come from a combination of sources such as fundraising, special taxing district, endowment, member contributions, and philanthropy. A funding plan will determine the appropriate mechanisms to develop these revenue sources.

- **Easy** – A project is easy if there is a single stakeholder or simple partnership and the project requires little design work with existing authorization to proceed.
- **Difficult** – A complex or difficult project has multiple partners, with a combination of funding sources, and requires approvals or authorizations from a land manager/permitting agency. There are multiple actions required such as land acquisition, design, engineering, environmental assessments, permitting, and other steps before construction can proceed.

II. PROJECT EVALUATION

The sub-area recommendations for projects and strategies vary in degrees of cost and complexity. Determining which strategies to pursue depends on the availability of funding, staff needs, partnerships, opportunities, and other factors. In order to provide flexibility to account for these factors, this plan contains a decision matrix to help evaluate projects. The project classification, based on this matrix, will indicate the feasibility and priorities for various action items. The decision matrix is based on the primary factors of cost and difficulty as defined below:

- **Low Cost** – Low costs projects are relatively inexpensive enhancements to existing recreational assets. This may include kiosks, signs, benches, playgrounds, beautification, landscaping, trail clearing trail closures, public art, repairs, and informational materials.
- **High Cost** – These projects typically represent the creation of new recreation assets with investments in land acquisition and construction. It may also include expensive infrastructure upgrades/repairs or restoration projects.

Based on these two criteria, the following matrix includes the following four project types:

	LOW COSTS	HIGH COSTS
EASY	<p>MOMENTUM PROJECT Low-hanging fruit. These projects have a quick timeframe, keep the public engaged, and provide momentum by creating concrete accomplishments that can help build community support and capacity.</p>	<p>OPPORTUNITY PROJECT The action results in projects that are shovel ready with completed designs and authorizations but lack funding. Examples are infrastructure projects, restoration projects, and construction projects.</p>
DIFFICULT	<p>CHAMPION PROJECT These projects are relatively low cost, but they may lack the authorizations, have multiple partners or need design work to proceed. They need a champion to navigate through the MOUs, permitting and design processes. ADA upgrades and projects in sensitive environments are examples.</p>	<p>LEGACY PROJECT These projects have a long-term timeframe for completion but are signature projects that will be around for future generations and provide maximum public benefits. Conserving lands, land acquisition for public access and building a connected trail system are examples of these projects.</p>

MOMENTUM PROJECTS

Strategy: Pursue the low-hanging fruit projects that can be completed in the near term to build momentum and engage the community.

1. Install bear-proof trash cans in parks and at trailheads.
2. Develop an education campaign regarding recreating responsibility, sustainability, safe boating, wildlife interactions, aquatic invasive species, and avoiding problem behaviors.
3. Support USFS initiative for sustainable mountain bike trails in the Crane Mountain area.
4. Collaborate with stakeholder groups on wayfinding and signage.
5. Organize community trail/river maintenance events such as weed pulls, river clean-ups, trail clearance and other similar projects.

OPPORTUNITY PROJECTS

Strategy: Support projects that can advance to a shovel-ready stage and identify grants or other resources to fund the projects. Form partnerships to assist with projects as necessary.

1. Apply for a grant to complete a safety study that will identify improvements and funding sources for a connected and safe pedestrian/bike network within the study area. (i.e. Grants - Federal Highway Administration, MDT, Tourism grant,...).
2. Collaborate with FWP on Somers Beach State Park to construct improvements per EA.
3. Work with partners to identify ADA improvements for trails, fishing access and other recreation assets secure funding sources for construction.
4. Work with FWP to identify and secure funding for shoreline restoration and fishing access site improvements to protect natural resources.

CHAMPION PROJECTS

Strategy: Identify a champion to navigate these projects through the various processes needed to get approvals and funding.

1. Work with land managers to promote a sustainable trail system by minimizing resource damage, creating a safe user experience, and decommissioning dangerous/unsustainable user created trails. Coordinate with creating connection between Harrell Forest Trails and Swan River Nature Trails. (USFS, Pacificorp, DNRC, Flathead Land Trust)
2. Work with legislature to identify funding and policies for maintenance of shared-use paths along county highways.
3. Work with Flathead County to designate bike routes on Holt Drive, Hanging Rock Drive, Foothills Road, and Swan River Road. (Coordinate with Safety Plan.)
4. Work with County Parks and Rec to develop a plan for establishing Flathead River access sites at Oldenburg Rd. and Holt Drive and Swan River sites at county owned parks.
5. Work with MDT to include a shared-use path on Sportsman's Bridge with access to fishing access site.

LEGACY PROJECTS

Strategy: Prioritize the highly visible projects with strong community support, identify partners, complete a feasibility analysis/preliminary engineering and develop a multi-year funding strategy to complete.

1. Explore options for expanding public access for water based recreation identified in the plan. (i.e Bigfork Bay, Flathead River, Swan River, Flathead Lake)
2. Work with Flathead Land Trust, PacificCorp, CFBB, and private landowners to create a connection between the Harrell Forest Trails and Swan River Nature Trail. (Coordinate with priority option for sustainable trail network.)
3. Work with MDT to develop plans and funding for construction of shared-use path along Highway 35, Highway 82, Highway 83, Highway 209.
4. Work with county to extend shared use paths on Echo Lake Road and Swan River Road.
5. Work with community and stakeholder groups to conduct a feasibility study for creating either a rural improvement district or trail maintenance district for shared-use paths along state and county highways.
6. Work with DNRC and stakeholder groups to identify opportunities for recreation licenses or easements on School Trust Lands to secure public access and provide for improved management. (Bigfork Nordic Trails, Estes Lake, Highway 209 access).

III. PRIORITY PROJECTS

Within each category of projects, the Bigfork Outdoor Recreation Alliance has identified the top priority. These projects include:

Momentum Project: Install bear-proof trash cans in parks and at trailheads.

Notes:

1. Discussions between the County, PacifiCorp and Community Foundation for bear proof trash cans at Sliter Park are underway.
2. See sub-area plans for specific recommendations for recreation assets within the sub-area.
3. Coordinate with FWP educational efforts to reduce human-wildlife conflict.

Opportunity Project: Apply for a grant to complete a safety study that will identify improvements and funding sources for a connected and safe pedestrian/bike network within the study area. (e.g. Grants from Federal Highway Administration, MDT, MT Commerce Tourism grant).

Notes:

1. A connected and safe pedestrian/bike network was the top priority for public input.
2. A safety study should be coordinated with MDT in order to be consistent with their safety standards.
3. Public agency such as a county government or local school district would need to be the lead agency applying for a FHA grant for the Bigfork Area.

Champion Project: Work with land managers to promote a sustainable trail system by minimizing resource damage, creating a safe user experience, and decommissioning dangerous/unsustainable user created trails. (USFS, PacifiCorp, DNRC, Flathead Land Trust, FWP)

Notes:

1. In order to avoid trespassing and creation of user created trails, this project should be coordinated with creating a connection between Harrell Forest Trails and Swan River Nature Trails. (Flathead Land Trust, PacifiCorp, private land owners)
2. See sub-area plans for specific recommendations for trail improvements within the sub-area.
3. Partner with community stakeholders and user groups to identify funding opportunities and provide education on sustainable trails.

Legacy Project: Explore options for expanding public access for water based recreation identified in the plan. (i.e Bigfork Bay, Flathead River, Swan River, Flathead Lake)

Notes:

1. See sub-area plans for specific recommendations for water recreation assets within the sub-area.
2. This action item may require land acquisition to implement.
3. Coordinate with FWP to ensure new expansions include shoreline restoration and improvements to protect natural resources.
4. Partner with community stakeholders and user groups to identify funding opportunities and provide education on water safety, boating regulations and protecting water resources.

APPENDIX A – RELEVANT FUNDING SOURCES

FUNDING OPPORTUNITY	SUPPORTS	CONTACT	LINK
Recreational Trails Program (RTP)	Parks and trails (construction and acquisition)	Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks	https://fwp.mt.gov/aboutfwp/grant-programs/recreational-trails
Summer Motorized Trail Pass Grants	Enhancing and maintaining OHV recreational opportunities for the benefit of OHV enthusiasts in Montana	Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks	https://fwp.mt.gov/aboutfwp/grant-programs/summer-motorized-trail-pass
Montana Trail Stewardship Grant	Development, renovation, and maintenance of motorized and non-motorized recreational trails and trailside facilities	Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks	https://fwp.mt.gov/aboutfwp/grant-programs/trail-stewardship
Tourism Grant Program	Development and enhancement of the State's tourism and recreation industry	Montana Dept. of Commerce	https://brand.mt.gov/Programs/Office-Of-Tourism/Tourism-Grant-Program
Big Sky Economic Development Trust Fund	Economic development	Montana Dept. of Commerce	https://business.mt.gov/Business-Assistance/Big-Sky-Economic-Development-Trust-Fund-Program/
Land and Water Conservation Fund	Community recreation infrastructure	Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks	https://fwp.mt.gov/aboutfwp/grant-programs/land-and-water-conservation-fund

FUNDING OPPORTUNITY	SUPPORTS	CONTACT	LINK
America the Beautiful Challenge	Habitat, connectivity, outdoor access in underserved communities	National Fish and Wildlife Foundation	https://www.nfwf.org/programs/america-beautiful-challenge/america-beautiful-challenge-2022-request-proposals
Conservation and Outdoor Recreation Cost Share Grants	Outdoor recreation access, land and water conservation projects	National Park Service	https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1837/index.htm
Community Facilities Direct Loan & Grant Program in Montana	Community infrastructure	USDA	https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/community-facilities/community-facilities-direct-loan-grant-program/mt
Rural Community Development Initiative Grants	Housing, community facilities, economic development	USDA	https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/community-facilities/rural-community-development-initiative-grants
Rural Business Development Grant	Technical assistance and training	USDA	https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/business-programs/rural-business-development-grants/mt
People for Bikes	Biking infrastructure	People for Bikes	https://www.peopleforbikes.org/grants
The Trail Fund	Trail maintenance, research, stewardship training	American Trails	https://www.americantrails.org/apply-for-the-trail-fund
Trail Trust	Trail infrastructure and maintenance	Trail Trust	https://www.trailtrust.com/

FUNDING OPPORTUNITY	SUPPORTS	CONTACT	LINK
Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee Funding Program	Bear Aware support	Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee	https://igbconline.org/programs/bear-education/funding/
Surface Transportation Block Grant Program	Transportation infrastructure	Federal Highway Administration	https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/specialfunding/stp/
Transportation Alternatives Program	Transportation infrastructure, trail construction	Montana Department of Transportation	https://www.mdt.mt.gov/mdt/ta-application.aspx
Federal Lands Access Program (FLAP)	Transportation improvements	Federal Highway Administration	https://highways.dot.gov/federal-lands/programs-access
Safe Routes to Schools Program	Safe transportation alternatives	U.S. Dept. of Transportation	https://www.transportation.gov/mission/health/Safe-Routes-to-School-Programs
Safe Streets and Roads for All	Safety action planning	U.S. Dept. of Transportation	https://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/LRSPDIY/
Transportation Alternatives	Transportation	Federal Highway Administration	https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/transportation_alternatives/
Pedestrian and Bicycle Funding Opportunities	Pedestrian and bicycle	Federal Highway Administration	https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/bicycle_pedestrian/funding/funding_opportunities.cfm

FUNDING OPPORTUNITY	SUPPORTS	CONTACT	LINK
Endowment	Maintenance	Private	https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/running-nonprofit/fundraising-and-resource-development/endowments Endowments may generally be described as assets (usually cash accounts that are invested in equities or bonds, or other investment vehicles) set aside so that the original assets (known as the "corpus") grow over time as a result of income earned from interest on the underlying invested funds. The corpus may also be added to over time. National Council of Nonprofits
Local Government Funding Districts	Planning, design, construction and maintenance	Local	Examples include: Rural Improvement Districts (MCA 7-12-2101); Parks and Trails Special Districts (MCA 7-11-1101); Resort Tax (MCA 7-6-15); Business Improvement District (MCA 7-12-1101); Economic Development and other districts.

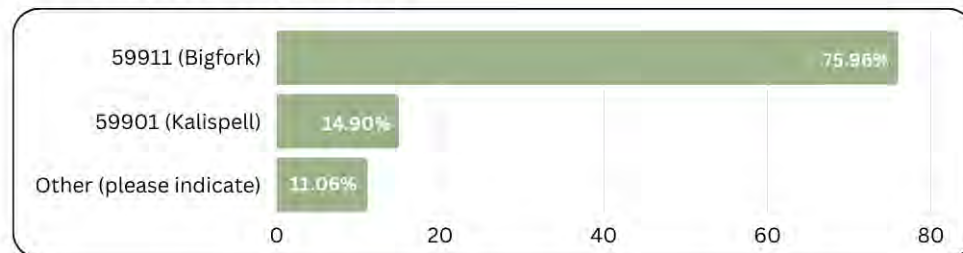
APPENDIX B – COMMUNITY SURVEY RESULTS

Purpose and Methodology:

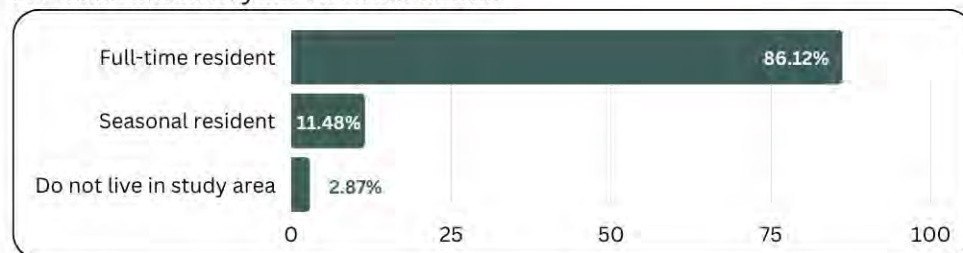
The purpose of the survey was to provide community members with another option to provide input on the plan. The online survey engaged a more significant number of participants and was more representative of the community. The online survey was not designed as a statistically valid instrument. Instead, it provided a means for interested parties to provide public input at their convenience. From December 1 through December 31, 2022 community members were invited to take an online survey. The survey link was posted on the project website and Facebook pages. MAP sent an email to a mailing list of contacts that were compiled for the project and advisory committee members sent the web link for the survey to e-mail lists for their respective agencies. Email reminders to take the survey were sent out every week. Community members were encouraged to share the link with interested parties while printed copies of the surveys were available on request. Additionally, a press release was distributed to local media outlets and the Bigfork Eagle printed a front-page article on December 7. In total, we received 209 survey responses.

Survey Results:

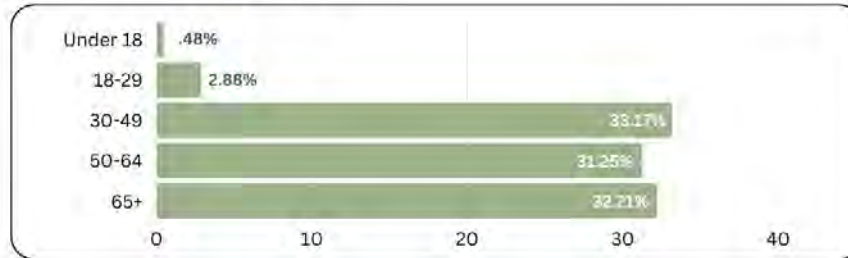
1. Which zip code do you live in?



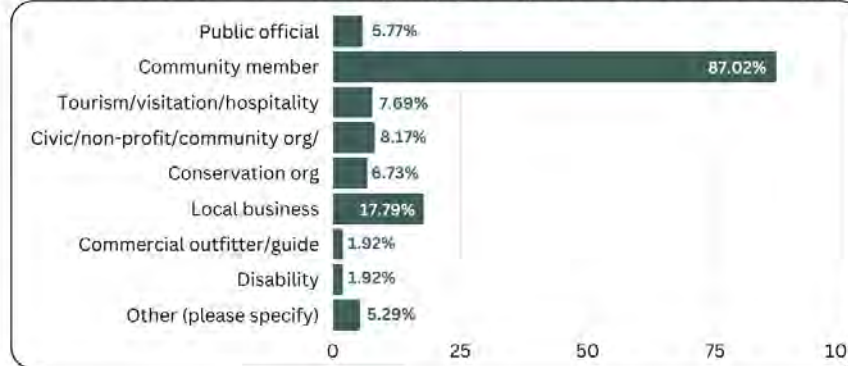
2. Please indicate your resident status.



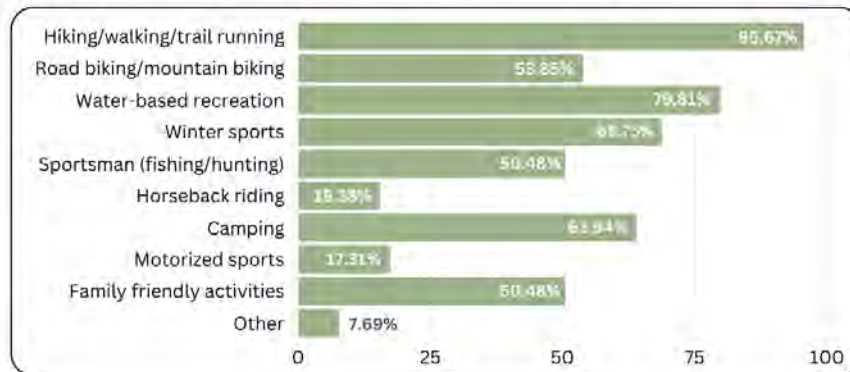
3. Please check your age group.



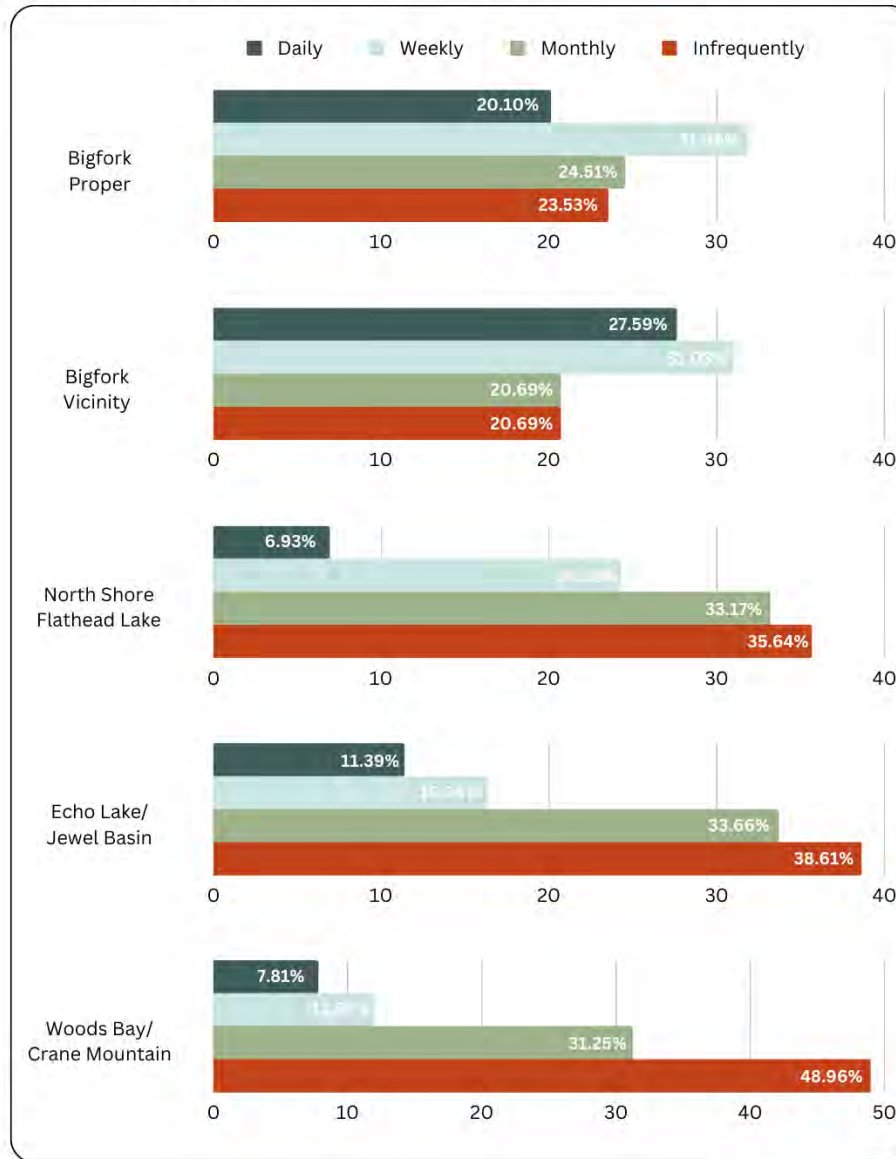
4. Please indicate which interest group you represent (check all that apply).



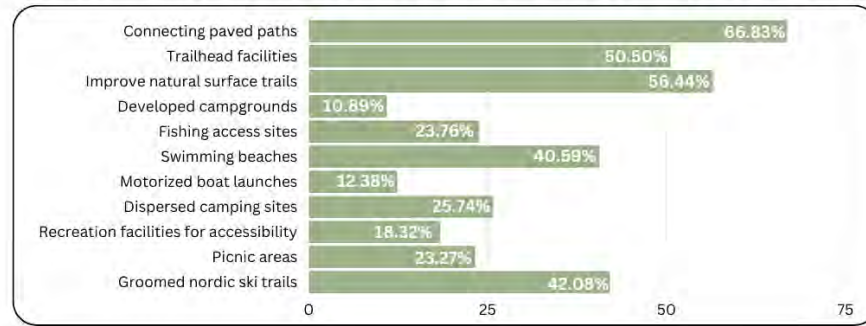
5. Please indicate which outdoor recreation activities you participate in (check all that apply).



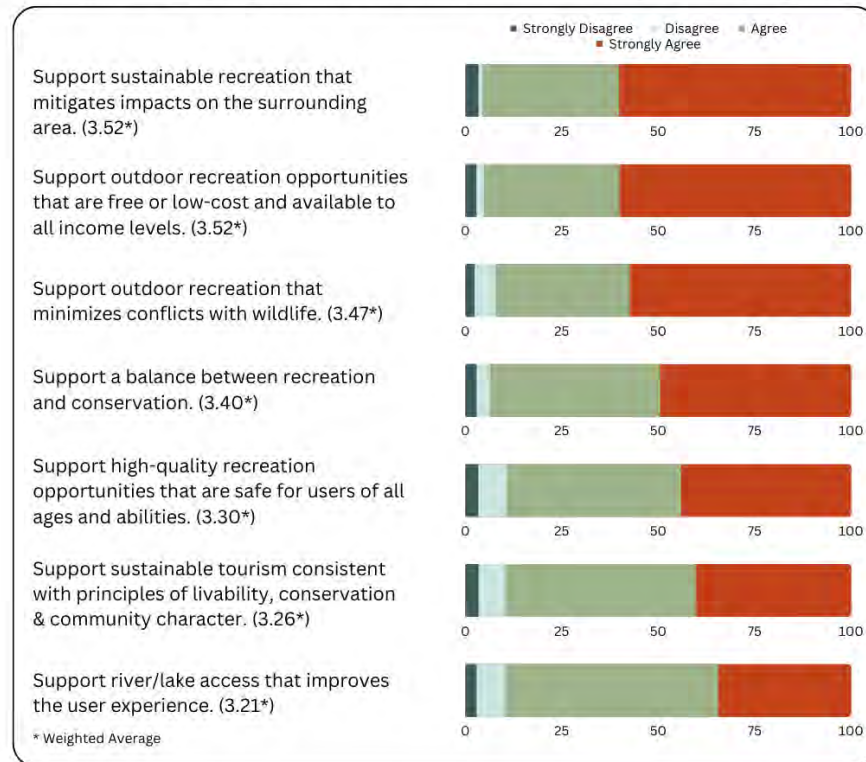
6. The study area includes five sub-areas as described below. Please indicate the frequency you recreate in the following areas.



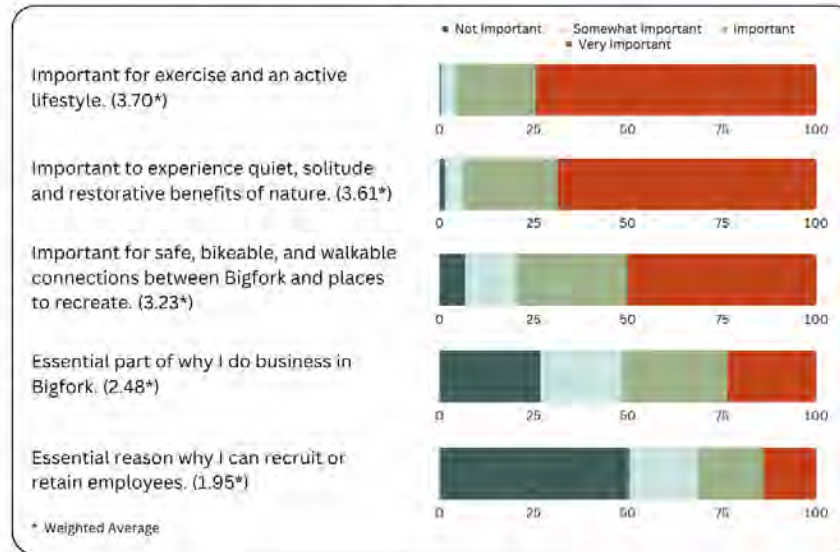
7. Within the entire study area (comprising all five sub-areas), please indicate your priorities for investment/planning for recreation infrastructure (check all that apply).



8. Rank the level to which you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding outdoor recreation values in the Bigfork study area.



9. How important are the following aspects of outdoor recreation to your quality of life?



Supplemental Analysis: How important are the following aspects of outdoor recreation to your quality of life? (* weighted average)

ALL RESPONSES	BUSINESS ONLY
Important for exercise and an active lifestyle. (3.70*)	Important for exercise and an active lifestyle. (3.70*)
Important to experience quiet, solitude and restorative benefits of nature. (3.61*)	Important to experience quiet, solitude and restorative benefits of nature. (3.51*)
Important for safe, bikeable, and walkable connections between Bigfork and places to recreate. (3.23*)	Important for safe, bikeable, and walkable connections between Bigfork and places to recreate. (3.17*)
Essential part of why I do business in Bigfork. (2.48*)	Essential part of why I do business in Bigfork. (3.14*)
Essential reason why I can recruit or retain employees. (1.95*)	Essential reason why I can recruit or retain employees. (2.46*)

10. Indicate your level of concern with the following issues related to outdoor recreation impacts.

VERY CONCERNED	#1. Overcrowding at recreation areas
	#2. Degradation of resources from overuse/pollution
	#3. Wildlife impacts (loss of habitat, human-wildlife conflicts...)
	#4. Impacts on the community (i.e. traffic, local services and housing)
	#5. Not enough funds/resources for maintenance
	#6. Bicycling/pedestrian safety
NOT CONCERNED	#7. Lack of accessible recreation facilities

11. Indicate your level of concern with the following issues related to the outdoor recreation user experience.

VERY CONCERNED	#1. Problem behavior (trespassing, vandalism, littering, illegal activities...)
	#2. Impacts from boating (erosion, aquatic invasive species, pollution, noise, overuse...)
	#3. Inexperienced hikers/boaters create safety issues
	#4. Problem behavior with dogs
	#5. E-bikes (user conflicts, safety, intrusion in backcountry, degrading trails...)
	#6. User conflicts on trails and at recreation sites
NOT CONCERNED	

12. Describe any specific concerns or recommendations for each of the following sub-areas.

Bigfork Proper Key Themes:

- Bicycle/pedestrian paths needed
- Sidewalks and crosswalks needed
- Need for connectivity in town and beyond (school to downtown, Woods Bay to Somers, etc.)
- Safe routes for kids
- Concerns with overcrowding and tourism
- Increased public access

Bigfork Vicinity Key Themes:

- Need for trail connectivity
- Need for bicycle/pedestrian paths for safety and alternative transportation
- Concerns regarding traffic during peak season
- Desire for more biking/hiking trails

North Shore Key Themes:

- Issues with parking (not enough, inadequate to accommodate use)
- Wildlife and habitat conservation should be high priority
- Existing issues with improper use (littering, dogs off leash, speeding)

Echo Lake/Jewel Basin Key Themes:

- Improper visitor use and lack of enforcement/management
- Lack of parking/capacity issues (specifically Camp Misery/Misery Ridge)
- Overuse, crowding, and user conflict

Woods Bay/Crane Mountain Key Themes:

- Concerns with illegally built mountain biking trails (some in favor of establishing as designated trails, some not in favor)
- Desire for safe path from Woods Bay to Bigfork
- Concerns with inappropriate use (camping, trash dumping, etc.)

13. Please recommend specific strategies, policies, or programs that should be included in the recreation plan.

Key Themes:

- Connectivity and expansion of existing trails and pathways
- Safe routes to travel in town and beyond
- Improved parking throughout Bigfork area
- Improved enforcement/management at existing recreation sites
- Improve/maintain existing recreation assets

