



**TRAIL PLAN**

## **Planning Process**

Thompson Falls Community Trails (TFCT) was formed in 2008 with representation by individual citizens, the City of Thompson Falls, Sanders County, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Avista Corporation, PPL Montana, as well as other private and non-profit organizations invested in a common goal to create pedestrian-safe infrastructure in and around Thompson Falls. Under the guidance of the Plains, MT District Ranger of the US Forest Service, the committee is in the process of developing the foundation for a five-year strategic Trails Plan.

The planning process has included: reviewing past trails efforts; developing goals and policies; defining existing conditions; creating base maps; meeting with consultants; and analyzing trail plans from other communities.

Steps in the planning process include: gathering input from the public as well as trail users, defining a proposed trail network; developing a strategy for administration and implementation of a trails program, including strategies to secure funding for construction and maintenance; and incorporating this information into a Trails Plan.

## **Vision and Goals**

Thompson Falls Community Trails is organized exclusively with a not-for-profit purpose to enhance quality of life in the Thompson Falls area of Sanders County, Montana, by building, maintaining, and improving trails that provide transportation ways, connectivity, and recreation opportunities.

The TFCT committee envisions a safe and convenient network of non-motorized trails connecting existing recreation areas, as well as key locations within the community such as schools and downtown Main Street. These connections will benefit our residents, our economy and our environment.

The goals in no particular order or priority of the TFCT are to:

- Develop trail systems that provide recreational opportunities and access for a diverse group of users to local parks, waterways, schools, public lands, community event centers and the retail/business district. Access for mobility-impaired users will be a high priority.
- The trail system will provide safe, alternative routes to schools and other locales which will result in decreased vehicular traffic and increased use of non-motorized modes of transportation.
- The trails will promote community health and wellness and add to the quality of life as well as contribute to an overall healthier environment. Where possible, trails will be constructed in natural settings that are pleasing to the senses.
- Trail systems will provide positive economic impacts to the community, contribute to the enhancement of the community as a destination point, and foster community pride.
- Implementation of trail systems will consider visibility, ease of access and needs for parking, and will include adequate signage and maps. Trails will be constructed in such a way to not only minimize resource damage and be low maintenance by design, but contribute to

resource protection and sustainability. They will serve to foster partnerships with user groups, private landowners, governmental entities and business owners. Trails will provide opportunities for interpretive development (historical, cultural, natural, etc.).

- Long-term management of a trail system will include development of a collaborative trail maintenance plan as well as strategies to identify and utilize various sources of funding for construction and maintenance of the trail system.

### **Proposed Trail Network and Connectivity**

A comprehensive trail network will include connectivity to existing trails, recreation areas, and key locations within the community. These trails or connections are broadly defined and refer to a variety of facilities for non-motorized users, such as shared-use pathways, sidewalks, single-track trails, backcountry roads, and also routes along shared roadways, where bicyclists and pedestrians are directed and accommodated. While many elements of this network have been in place for some time, some segments were recently constructed or improved while others are planned segments to be constructed in the future. On-the-ground identification of existing connections and designated routes (sidewalks, etc.) will make these connections apparent and easy to find by users.

Some shared roadways may need no special facilities other than signage identifying them as bike routes due to low traffic volumes and slow speeds. For others, wider shoulders or bike lanes may be needed to provide an acceptable margin of safety.

### **Priority Projects**

Proposed future trail construction and improvement projects will be based upon a defined set of criteria in no particular order:

- Provides needed safety improvement
- Provides safe pedestrian and bicycle access to schools
- Provides safe connection between communities and parks/public lands
- Services large proportion of population and/or anticipated demand
- Connects and clearly identifies existing trail segments (enhance utility through trail network continuity)
- Provides trailhead facilities
- Provides a high quality recreational experience

### **Primary Community Points of Connection**

- Downtown
- High Bridge, Island Park and Thompson Falls Fish Ladder
- Outlying Community Area (Ace Hardware/Harvest Foods)
- Powerhouse Loop Trail
- Thompson Falls State Park
- Wild Goose Landing Park

## **Secondary Community Points of Connection**

- Schools
- Mule Pasture recreation area
- Public access areas on north shoreline of Thompson Reservoir

## **Outlying Connections**

- Weber Gulch Trailhead (USFS)
- Ashley Creek Trailhead (USFS)
- Upstream Clark Fork River Access
- Mt. Silcox (USFS)
- Water Trail –Cherry Creek Boat Launch to Wild Goose Landing
- South shoreline (NorthWestern Energy) to Flat Iron FAS (MTFWP) to Birdland Bay (Shared ownership, Avista and private)
- Thompson Falls State Park (MTFWP) to Golf Course (Privately owned)

## **Opportunistic Trail Development**

Opportunities for trail development will arise as priorities are defined and partners become involved, including the City of Thompson Falls, Sanders County, Montana Dept. of Transportation, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, US Forest Service and private landowners.

This process will parallel active efforts to complete priority projects, which includes the current proposed trail segment that will connect Thompson Falls State Park to the existing 2.3 mile Powerhouse Loop Trail that runs along Hwy 200 and the Clark Fork River between Power Park and the Rimrock Lodge.

A Trails Plan that is incorporated into all pertinent planning and regulatory documents used by the City and the County will help ensure that new trail segments are considered within future land development and transportation projects, which can contribute many new miles towards the envisioned Thompson Falls Trail Network.

## **Trail Maintenance**

Historically, the responsibility for trails maintenance has not been formally clarified, budgeted, and delegated to a specific government agency or cooperating entity. It has recently been managed by volunteers and with resources from NorthWestern Energy (formerly PPL Montana) and Avista. Trail maintenance requirements vary depending upon the type of trail and the source of funding. Typical trail maintenance includes debris sweeping, winter snow removal or grooming, mowing/weed control, and surface repair as needed, in addition to maintenance of facilities such as restrooms, benches, etc.

For a well-planned and efficient trails program to be actualized, a reasonable and effective maintenance plan should be developed with maintenance responsibilities clarified, budgeted, and delegated to specific agencies or separately funded committees/organizations. Consideration for launching a program similar to Adopt-A-Trail will be explored to engage more volunteers and program stakeholders. TFCT will assess maintenance needs on an individual project basis.

A comprehensive field assessment of the condition of all existing trails will be performed to identify maintenance needs for the various sections of trail and will prioritize those needs within the context of the trail network. This inventory will become the basis for a Maintenance Plan, which will also incorporate maintenance measures for all future proposed connections and segments.

Priority maintenance responsibilities are:

- Spring and Fall weed maintenance
- Action plan to perform larger scale maintenance (removing downed trees, etc.)
- Coordinate regular volunteer “work days” to address debris and litter sweeps
- Winter snow removal/grooming along high traffic routes

TFCT Maintenance Plan finalized in November 2017:

	<b>Powerhouse Loop Trail</b>	<b>State Park Trail</b>	<b>Mule Pasture Loop Trail</b>
<i>January</i>	-Check for fallen trees & remove <i>Note: For downed trees on NWE or Rimrock property call for permission</i>	-Check for fallen trees & remove <i>Note: Notify State Park of downed trees on State Park land</i>	-Check for fallen trees <i>Note: Notify the Forest Service about downed trees</i>
<i>February</i>	-Check for fallen trees & remove <i>Note: For downed trees on NWE or Rimrock property call for permission</i>	-Check for fallen trees & remove <i>Note: Notify State Park of downed trees on State Park land</i>	-Check for fallen trees <i>Note: Notify the Forest Service about downed trees</i>
<i>March</i>	-Check for fallen trees & remove <i>Note: For downed trees on NWE or Rimrock property call for permission</i> -Check for weed growth -Check trail tread and prep for repairs -Check signage for damage *Develop Work Plan for Beautification Days	-Check for fallen trees & remove <i>Note: Notify State Park of downed trees on State Park land</i> -Check for weed growth -Check trail tread and prep for repairs -Check signage for damage *Develop Work Plan for Beautification Days	-Check for fallen trees <i>Note: Notify the Forest Service about downed trees</i> -Check trail tread <i>Note: Notify the Forest Service of tread issues</i> -Check signage for damage <i>Note: Notify Forest Service of damage</i> *Develop Work Plan for Beautification Days
<b>APRIL- BEAUTIFICATION DAYS - ANNUAL VOLUNTEER WORK DAY</b>			
<i>April</i>	-Check for fallen trees & remove <i>Note: For downed trees on NWE or Rimrock property call for permission</i> -Pull noxious weeds, bag if developing buds -Pick up trash -Trim shrubs and trees -Drag graveled trail surface materials *Schedule Weed Maintenance for May with Sanders County	-Check for fallen trees & remove <i>Note: Notify State Park of downed trees on State Park land</i> -Pull noxious weeds, bag if developing buds -Pick up trash -Trim shrubs and trees -Drag graveled trail surface materials *Schedule Weed Maintenance for May with MT State Parks	-Check for fallen trees <i>Note: Notify the Forest Service about downed trees</i> -Pull noxious weeds, bag if developing buds -Pick up trash

May	-Check for fallen trees & remove <i>Note: For downed trees on NWE or Rimrock property call for permission</i> -Depending on weather, spray weeds the second week of May	-Check for fallen trees & remove <i>Note: Notify State Park of downed trees on State Park land</i> -State Park and Avista sprays weeds	-Check for fallen trees <i>Note: Notify the Forest Service about downed trees</i> -Forest Service sprays weeds
June	-Check for fallen trees & remove <i>Note: For downed trees on NWE or Rimrock property call for permission</i> -Check weed growth and pull & bag if developing buds	-Check for fallen trees & remove <i>Note: Notify State Park of downed trees on State Park land</i> -Check weed growth and pull & bag if developing buds	-Check for fallen trees <i>Note: Notify the Forest Service about downed trees</i> -Check weed growth and pull & bag if developing buds
July	-Check for fallen trees & remove <i>Note: For downed trees on NWE or Rimrock property call for permission</i>	-Check for fallen trees & remove <i>Note: Notify State Park of downed trees on State Park land</i>	-Check for fallen trees <i>Note: Notify the Forest Service about downed trees</i>
August	-Check for fallen trees & remove <i>Note: For downed trees on NWE or Rimrock property call for permission</i>	-Check for fallen trees & remove <i>Note: Notify State Park of downed trees on State Park land</i>	-Check for fallen trees <i>Note: Notify the Forest Service about downed trees</i>
September	-Check for fallen trees & remove <i>Note: For downed trees on NWE or Rimrock property call for permission</i> -Spray perennial weeds if missed spraying in the Spring -Pick up trash	-Check for fallen trees & remove <i>Note: Notify State Park of downed trees on State Park land</i> -Pick up trash	-Check for fallen trees <i>Note: Notify the Forest Service about downed trees</i> -Pick up trash
October - Dec	-Check for fallen trees & remove <i>Note: For downed trees on NWE or Rimrock property call for permission</i>	-Check for fallen trees & remove <i>Note: Notify State Park of downed trees on State Park land</i>	-Check for fallen trees <i>Note: Notify the Forest Service about downed trees</i>

**Maintenance Partner Contacts:**

Northwestern Energy – Noel Jacobsen, [noel.jacobson@northwestern.com](mailto:noel.jacobson@northwestern.com), 406.360.5926  
 Sanders County Weed Dept. – Judson Shively, [weeddept@co.sanders.mt.us](mailto:weeddept@co.sanders.mt.us), 406. 826.3487  
 Avista Utilities – Jason Pignanelli, [jason.pignanelli@avistacorp.com](mailto:jason.pignanelli@avistacorp.com), 406.847.1283  
 USFS-Plains District – Scott Palmer, [scottpalmer@fs.fed.us](mailto:scottpalmer@fs.fed.us) , 406.826.3821  
 Rimrock Lodge – 406.827.3536

**Recommendations for Trails Program Administration/Implementation**

The Thompson Falls Community Trails Committee will take the lead responsibility for the established trails program. They will continue to have vested participation by current stakeholders including: Avista Corporation, NorthWestern Energy, Sanders County, The City of Thompson Falls, US Forest Service and Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, other land management agencies, as appropriate, Sanders County Community Development Corporation, and local residents. A main goal of the Trails Committee is to consistently coordinate with other groups or agencies that have existing or proposed trails in the area, which will strengthen our core trail network and mission.

The committee will continue to solicit fiscal support and develop partnerships throughout trail development activities. Residents of all ages and abilities will have easy access to recreational, no-cost activities. Promotional programs and events will highlight benefits of resident health and wellness opportunities from accessible trail systems. Information will be shared to encourage individuals to utilize non-motorized transportation. Additional features for trails will include bicycle racks, benches at scenic vistas, signage and information kiosks.

Main Street businesses will be positively impacted from the development of a community trail network. Recreation trails provide a well-rounded and welcoming atmosphere for visitors. Trail systems bring people together through recreation, business and enjoying the great outdoors, and they add to the authentic experience visitors have when they travel to or through the community.

The goal of the Thompson Falls Community Trails group is to encourage people to participate in non-motorized activities by creating facilities that provide opportunities to commute and exercise on bicycle or by foot. As pathways that provide these opportunities are developed, alternative transportation becomes more viable, and overall community health and wellbeing will increase.

<b>Thompson Falls Community Trails Project List</b>			
<b>Project Name</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Year Completed</b>	<b>Funding Source</b>
Highway 200 Section	Construction	2012	RTP /Avista
Powerhouse Loop	Construction	2013	PPL Montana
State Park Trail	Construction	June 2017	RTP-MT FWP, Avista, NWe, Frisbee Morbella
Rimrock Section	Construction	October 2017	Frisbee Morbella
TFCT Signage	Wayfinding/Signage	In progress	RTP-Avista, MHF
Eastward Extension Trail	Feasibility Study	In progress	LOR Foundation

Local Contractor Bob Taylor, Taylor Services has provided a significant investment in the Trails System construction. Local procurement of services is an important objective of TFCT.