



City of Helena Parks, Recreation, and Open Lands Departments  
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<https://www.helenamt.gov/parks.html>

## **City of Helena Open Lands Division Proposed Major Projects – City Recommendations Calendar Year 2022**

**Projects are evaluated based on alignment with the goals identified in Chapter 7, public feedback received to date, Helena Open Lands (HOL) needs, available resources and guidance from HOLMAC.**

### **Upper DeFord trail (North of the Old Shooting Range parking lot) – Brad Langsather, Presenter**

#### **Current Situation**

There is an existing, unmanaged bike skills area located between the DeFord trail and Davis Street that has numerous, unsigned entry points and no outflow trail. Additionally, bike traffic descending down the DeFord trail, from its southernmost intersection with Davis Street to its northern intersection with Davis Street, adds to trail congestion and creates safety concerns for some trail users.

#### **Recommendation**

The City recommends implementation of the following items:

1. Improve DeFord trail from the Old Shooting Range parking lot to the Archery Range parking lot (suggested: widen and improve surface – decomposed granite or other such option; pedestrian lights/signage as it crosses Davis Gulch Road).
2. Designate DeFord trail as defined in 1 as a Shared-Use-path although downhill bike traffic will be discouraged.
3. Create a directional bike trail from where the DeFord trail begins after crossing Davis Gulch Rd to the Archery Range parking lot and develop signage to encourage downhill bike traffic to use the directional trail.
4. Improve DeFord trail from where the trail begins after crossing Davis Gulch Rd to Eagle Scout Trailhead to include, where appropriate, signage, fencing, and high mark remediation. Signage recommendations include speed-related signage, and community norm-related signage, such as “take care of everyone”.
5. Improve directional bike skills course from north of the Archery Range parking lot to where the DeFord Trail joins Davis Gulch Road to include a sessioning trail to encourage bike traffic to stay on the skills course.
6. Consider the creation of ADA parking in the Archery Range parking lot.
7. Explore the possibility of completing a feasibility study to explore options for increased accessibility from the Archery Range parking lot to Eagle Scout Trailhead.

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### **Upper DeFord trail (South of the Old Shooting Range parking lot) – Brad Langsather, Presenter**

#### **Current Situation**

The topography in the Dry Gulch bottom south of the Old Shooting lends that portion of the DeFord trail residing on this landscape to improvement/modification with regards to slope width, slope, and surface thereby making it more accessible. Additionally, there is currently a lack of adequate signage to discourage pedestrians and/or bikes from traveling uphill within the Upper Davis Bike Skills Course. Finally, in the event that the Upper DeFord Trail becomes an accessible trail, there is currently no opportunity for the disabled community to access a charging station to power their electric assist devices.

**Recommendation**

The City recommends we implement the following items:

1. Improve DeFord trail (suggested: widen; improved surface-decomposed granite or other such option, raised trail where needed to prevent erosion).
2. Improve signage at the entrance and exit of the DeFord and Bike Skills Course trails.
3. Designate the DeFord trail as a Shared-Use path although downhill bike traffic will be discouraged.
4. Explore the feasibility of installing a charging station for wheelchairs at the Old Shooting Range parking lot.

**Estimated Budget**

- \$37,400.00 (Trail Construction, Fencing and Decomposed Granite/road mix)

**See Upper DeFord Improvement Project and Lower DeFord Improvement Project**

**CITY RECOMMENDATION(S): Based on alignment with the goals identified in Chapter 7 (community access and use, future needs and growth), public feedback received to date, Helena Open Lands (HOL) needs, and available resources, City staff recommends that this project move forward as proposed.**

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**Mount Helena ADA Trail Construction Project – Brad Langsather, Presenter**

**Current Situation**

The current Mount Helena ADA trail terminates at its intersection point with the Ambrose Trail thereby preventing a portion of the disabled community from exploring the western reaches of Mount Helena City Park.

**Recommendation**

The City recommends implementation of the following items:

1. Widen Approximately 6,780 feet of the existing Ambrose trail & surface with decomposed granite.
2. Construct approximately 4,610 feet of new trail to an eventual intersection with the West LeGrande Cannon Boulevard Trail & surface with decomposed granite.
3. Construct a pedestrian bridge capable of free spanning approximately 30 feet across a dry draw.

**Estimated Budget**

- \$95,000.00 (Decomposed Granite & Lumber/Hardware, Staff Wages)

**CITY RECOMMENDATION(S): Based on comments received on this project, and available resources, this project will be removed from consideration in the 2021 City of Helena Open Lands Major Projects evaluation process.**

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**Whyte Acquisition Trail Improvement Project– Brad Langsather, Presenter**

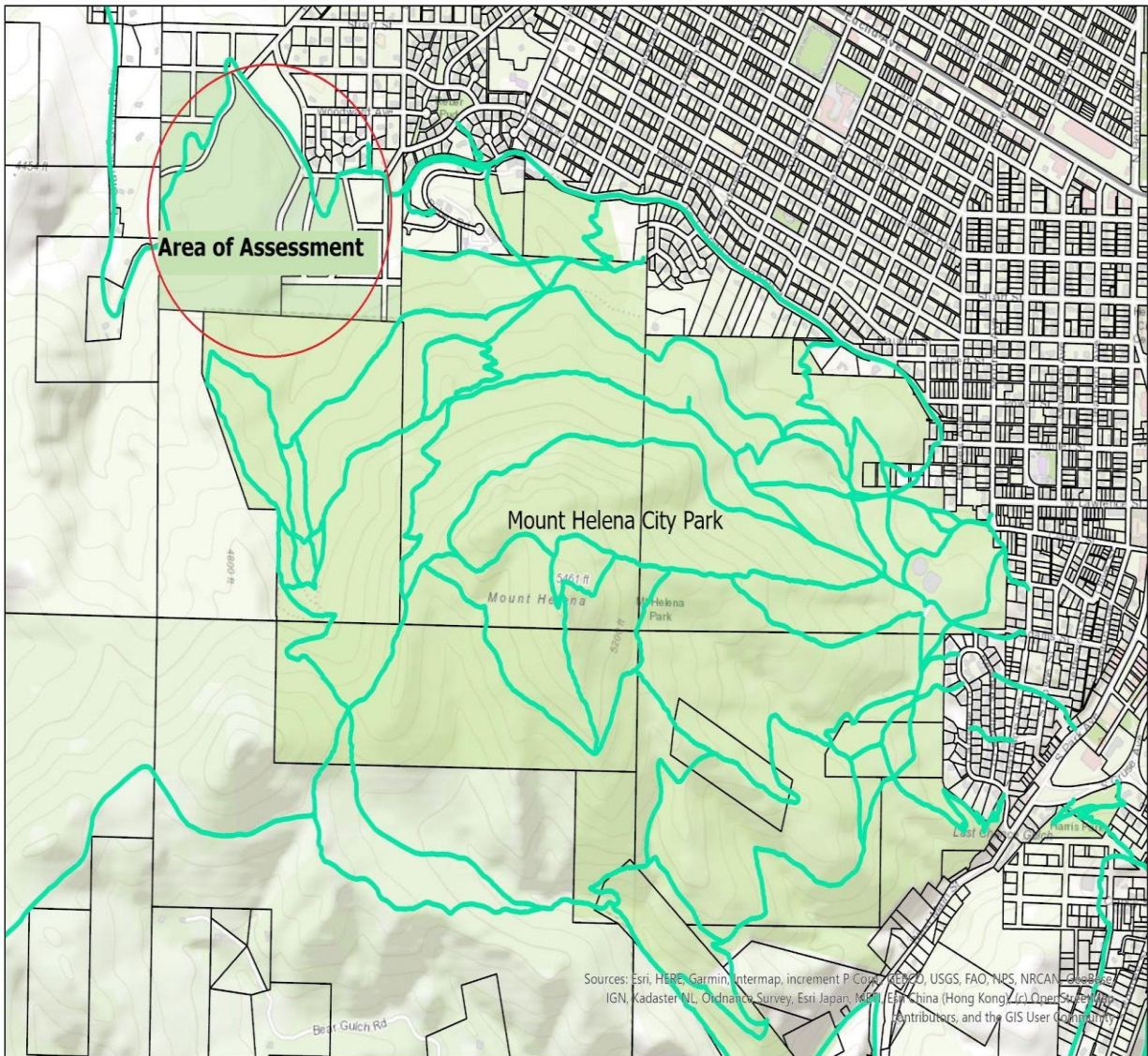
**Current Situation**

The Whyte property was acquired by PPLT and subsequently donated to the city of Helena in 2019. The property comprises 90 acres primarily located to the south of the LeGrande Cannon trail west of the intersection between LeGrande Cannon Boulevard and Silverette Street (See Figure 1). The terrain generally gains elevation as it heads south towards the Mount Helena trail system and comprises grasslands as well as areas of Ponderosa Pine. There are a number of gullies and drainages within the area. Existing trails are primarily historic jeep, motorcycle, and game trails and a number of them connect to trails within the Helena Open Lands system. There are no intentionally designed trails within the area and many trails do cross private property boundaries. A number of trails are located on unsustainable grades and are candidates for closure or rerouting. It is challenging to come to an exact figure but PPLT estimates that there are approximately 4 miles of existing trails on the 90 acre property.

## EXHIBIT "A" – COMBINED TRAIL PROJECTS 2021-2022

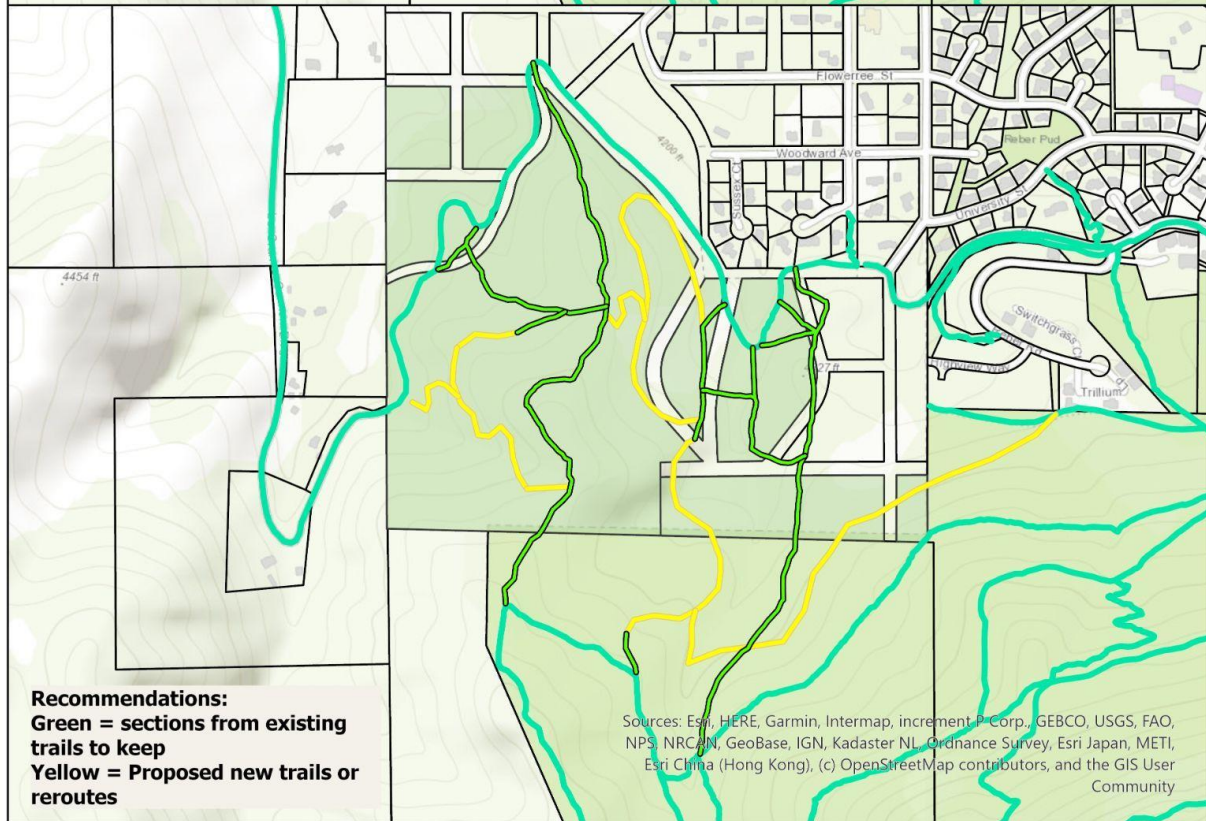
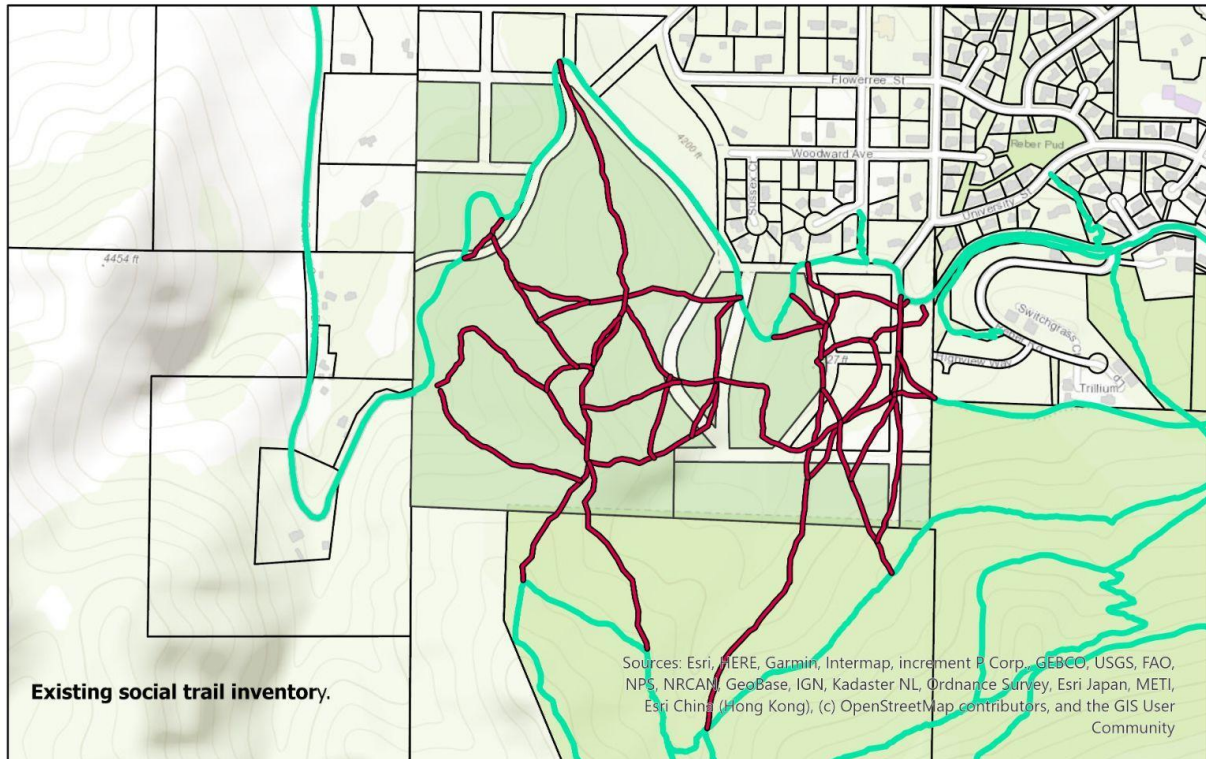
The LeGrande Cannon trail has an informal parking area located on either side of the trail that is managed by the City of Helena. Much of the LeGrande Cannon trail itself, as well as the western parking area, are located on Lewis and Clark County ownership.

There are two main north/south trails that anchor the trails on the property: Road to Mars to the east and Seven Sisters to the west. Between these trails lies the bulk of the remaining intersecting trails and access points. Notably there are existing trails west of Seven Sisters that connect to the western parking area and trails to the east of Road to Mars that exist almost entirely on private land. For the purpose of this assessment PPLT will reference three distinct areas: Road to Mars, Seven Sisters, and "the Meadow". The Meadow is a centrally located area of relatively gentle topography to the east of Seven Sisters that comprises a number of existing trails.



Recommendations

Reference Maps:

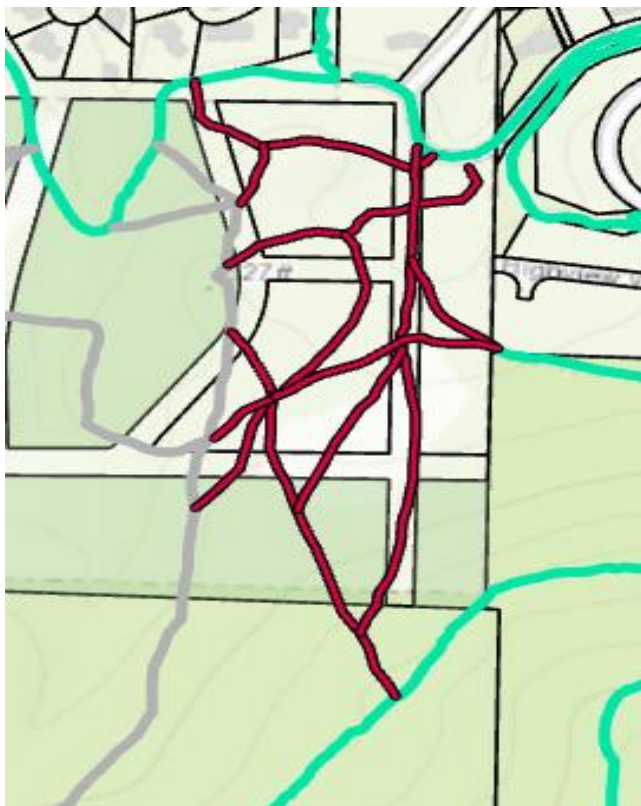


**Recommended Closures, Designated Unmaintained Non-system Trails, and Reroutes:**

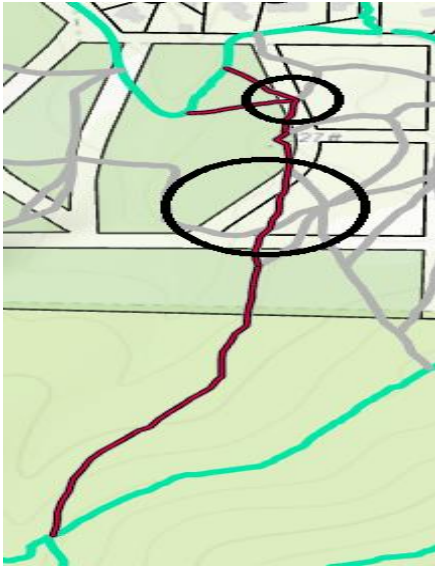
**Introduction:**

Many trails on the Whyte property exist on unsustainable grades or on private property and as such should be closed or rerouted. This assessment includes three categories: recommended closure, designate unmaintained non-system trail, or reroute. A number of the trails identified within this assessment recommended for closure may be appropriate for use as access roads for fire suppression or weed and forestry management. City staff will review this assessment and determine which trails may be kept for access purposes. For the purposes of this assessment trails recommended as closure mean that these routes will not be included on any future maps and full obliteration of the existing trail is recommended. Trails that meet the "designate unmaintained non-system" trail are either trails where full obliteration would not be possible or are candidates for use as access routes, these would also not be shown on maps. It is challenging to get trail users to respect trail closures, this category is also for trails that PPLT staff believe changing existing behavior patterns will be exceedingly difficult. Any trail with this designation will be signed as such and will not be a part of PPLT's annual trail maintenance. Reroutes are proposed to improve existing trails to fix an existing issue. These issues include unsustainable existing routes and private property encroachment. Note that all reroutes and proposed new routes shown on the maps are approximations and these routes would need to be formally laid out, flagged, and, ultimately, approved by city staff.

**Road to Mars Area:**



*All trails east of Road to Mars located on private property were not assessed and should either be closed formally or signed and fenced appropriately to notify trail users of private property trespass.*

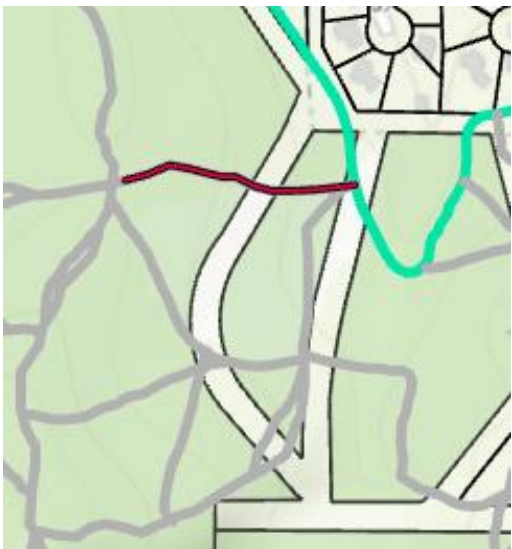


*Reroute Road to Mars in two locations to relocate trail off of private property.*

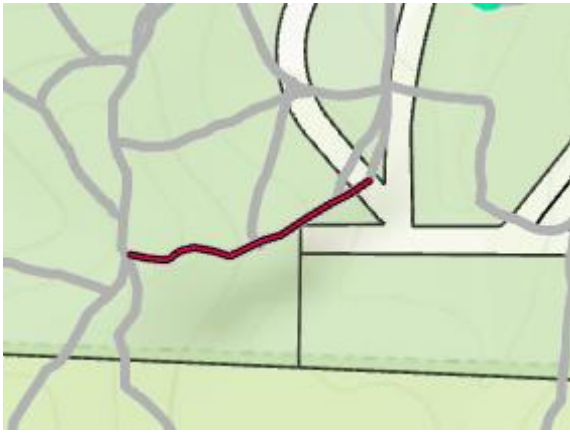


*Reroute small section of trail west of Road to Mars to improve trail sustainability. Reroute trail connecting to the Meadow.*

**The Meadow Area:**

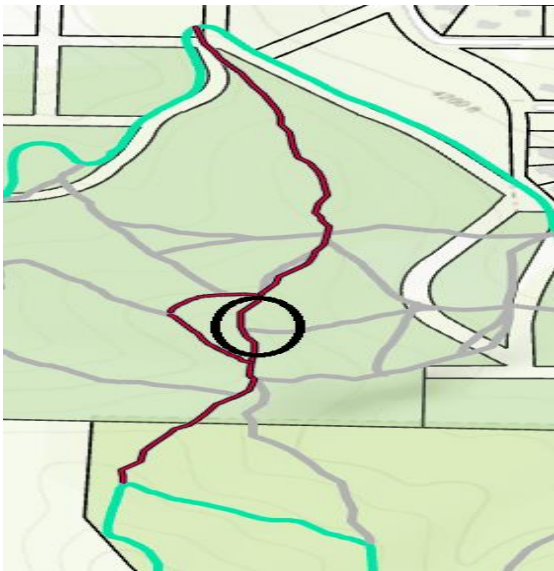


*Close and obliterate trails exiting the Meadow that go directly up the fall line.*

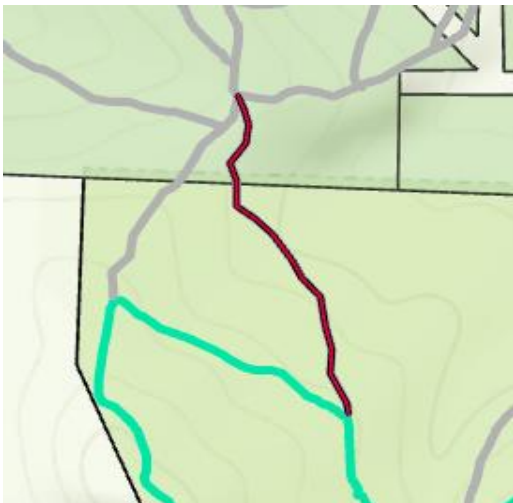


*Designate the southern trail as an unmaintained non-system trail due to fall-line nature and suitability as an access road.*

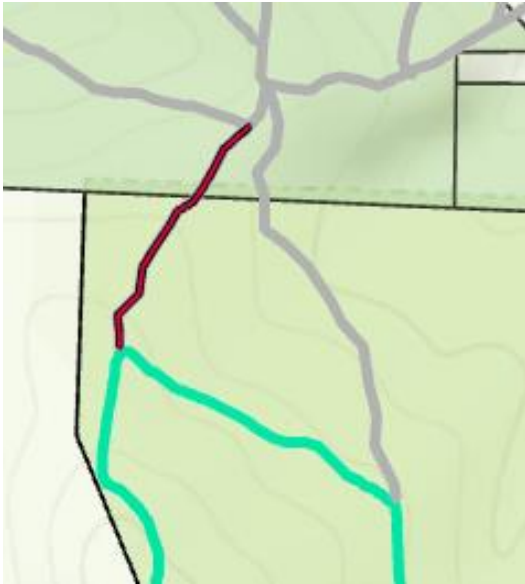
**Seven Sisters Area:**



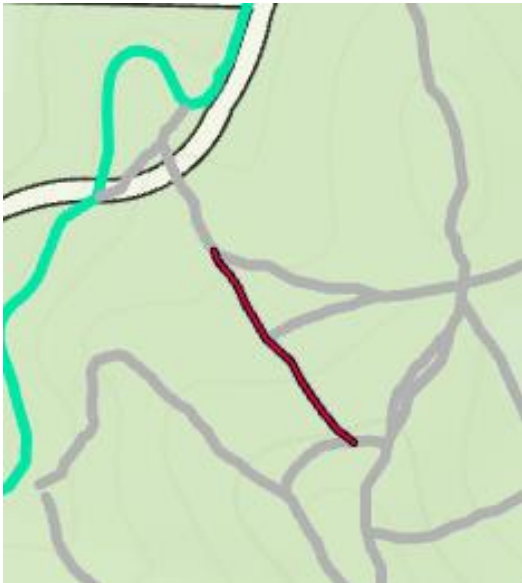
*Close and obliterate the unsustainable Seven Sisters "alternate".*



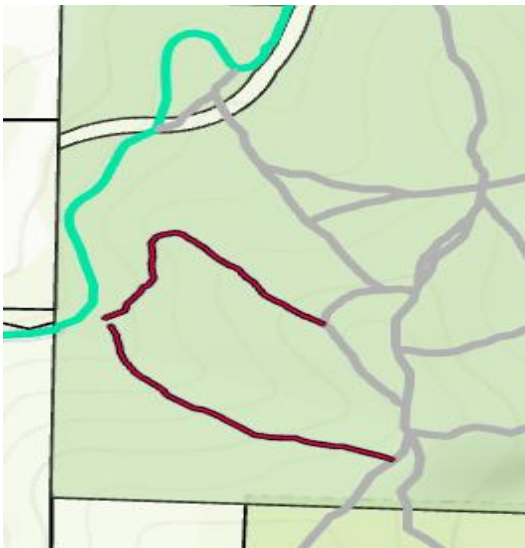
*Designate the "Old Chevy connector: as an unmaintained non-system trail due to trail unsustainability and suitability as an access road.*



*Note that this assessment preserves the Seven Sisters/Andy's Trail connection as shown on the map. If the city elects to assess the adjacent Graham property for trail potential this trail would be a candidate for a reroute utilizing the land to the west and south.*



*Close and obliterate Seven Sisters connector to northwest.*



*Close and obliterate the two trails connecting to the western parking area.*



**Trail obliteration considerations:**

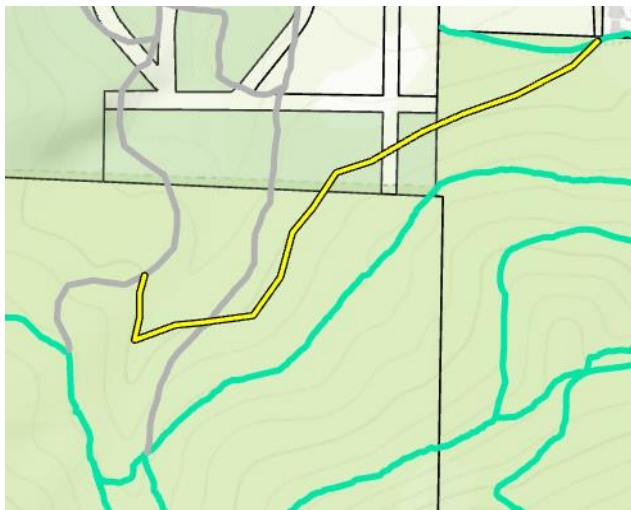
Given the high difficulty of getting trail users to respect trail closures in the South Hills PPLT recommends that, where possible, obliterations are accomplished through mechanical means and signed appropriately. While traditionally trail closures have occurred in the springtime to take advantage of favorable conditions it may be time to consider fall closures, trying to time obliteration before snow falls with the hope that usage may be less in the wintertime and thus lessen the possibility of users reopening the trail.

**New Proposed Trails:**

**Introduction:**

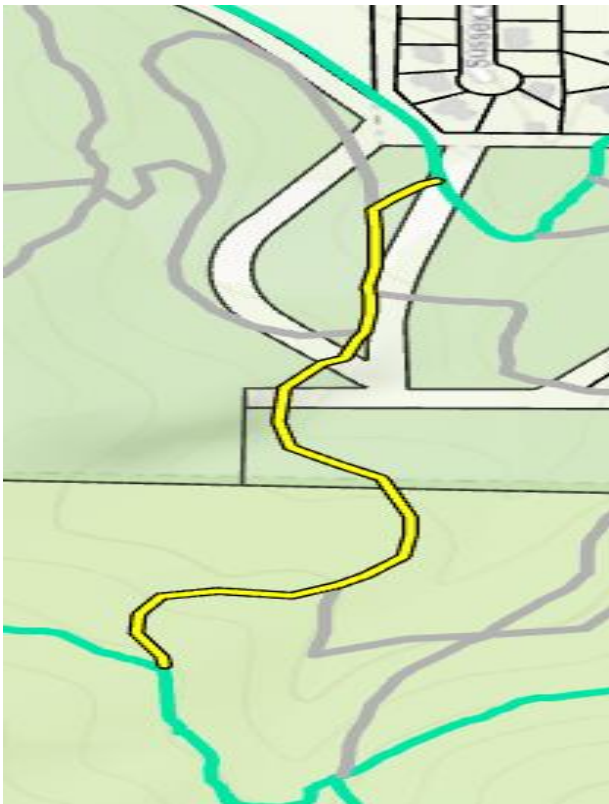
As the Whyte property comprises trails that were historically created by the use of jeeps and motorcycles or by local wildlife, there is an opportunity to create new intentional trails and connections that meet community recreational needs. This assessment looked at ways the landscape may add value to the existing open lands trail system and improve the existing trail footprint. Factors that influenced the inclusion of proposed trails include loss of trail access due to private property location, opportunities for logical connector trails and the fact that the LeGrande Cannon trail is one of the more accessible locations and is heavily used by families, children, and individuals with mobility issues. Note that all reroutes and proposed new routes shown on the maps are approximations and these routes would need to be formally laid out, flagged, and, ultimately, approved by city staff.

*Northwest Passage reroute and new trail construction:*



*Northwest Passage has long since terminated at private property and as such should either be formally closed adjacent to private land or rerouted to serve a more logical purpose. The proposed route leaves from the trail's connection to Reber Road and generally follows the contour crossing Road to Mars and ultimately connects with the Old Chevy area. If Ambrose were to become the preferred route for an ADA trail this development of Northwest Passage would maintain a single track contour trail on the lower north side of Mount Helena.*

Old Chevy new trail:



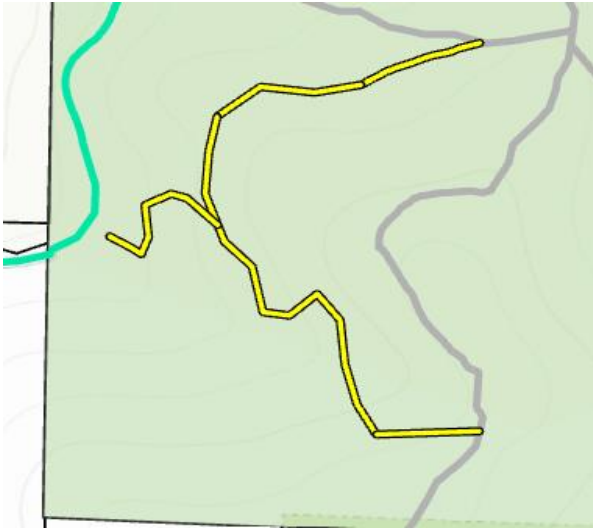
*This proposed trail would take advantage of some favorable terrain to create a new access off of Mount Helena down to LeGrande Cannon. This trail would be the 3rd north/south trail in the area and provide numerous options for users to create different trail loops in the area. The terrain in this area lends itself to more interesting and varied trail building and would be a more interesting alternative to the much more direct routes of Road to Mars and Seven Sisters. Would also be able to connect directly to the Meadow and any new trails located here.*

The Meadow Loop(s)



*The Meadow offers up a unique opportunity to create a novice, entry level trail experience that much of the South Hills system lacks. Given the accessible nature of LeGrande Cannon, it is already a natural place to provide some "easy" trails for recreationists. This area could include one main loop or a "stacked loop" system that provides the ability for people to choose trail loops of varying length. Included in these proposed trails are access points connecting this novice zone to the Seven Sisters trail.*

Westside parking trail:



*The proposed new trail would replace the unsustainable existing trails that currently exist from the parking area. The trail would climb up the steep ridge using a series of turns and then split with one trail splitting to Seven Sisters north and the other to Seven Sisters south. This trail would preserve access to the parking area and improve trail sustainability.*

### Signage and Trail Names:

#### Introduction:

Formalizing the existing routes and the addition of any new trails and reroutes will necessitate the addition of wayfinding signage. Based on the proposed trail routes considered in this assessment it is estimated that there will be a need for approximately 22 new sign posts and trail markers. This number is subject to change based on trail closures, new trail approvals and their ultimate locations on the landscape. That number does not include any estimates for signs needed to notify users of trail closures.

Additionally, any new trail construction will necessitate the creation of new trail names for some trails. Per the deed of transfer to the City of Helena, PPLT has reserved the right to name the trails on the property and the City retains the right to approve any names selected by PPLT. Additionally, PPLT has retained the right to recognize the roles of PPLT and the Whyte family in the conservation of this open space. See deed language below:

“Recognition of Grantor, William Whyte, and the William Whyte family. This Servitude reserves to Grantor, and its successors and assigns, the right at Grantor’s discretion and Grantor’s expense to do any or all of the following:

- a. Place, maintain, repair, and replace signage or monumentation on the Property recognizing the roles of Grantor, William Whyte, and/or the family of William Whyte in conserving the Property as open space property. Grantee shall have the right, which shall not be unreasonably withheld, to approve the siting and design of any such signage or monumentation; and
- b. Name the park or open space area(s) within the Property. Grantee shall have the right, which shall not be unreasonably withheld, to approve the name(s) selected by Grantor.”

The following trail parameters will guide PPLT’s naming of the new trails and there will be the opportunity for individual as well as public naming opportunities.

1. Must fit the character of the trail (i.e. no naming the rolling meadow trail “Cliff’s Edge”)
2. Should be easily pronounced and identifiable
3. Should easily fit on a trail signpost
4. Preference is to name a trail after natural features or geographical location rather than individuals. (i.e. Meadow Loop, Rocky Point, Old Mine trail, LeGrande Ridge, etc.)
5. If naming after a person try to make the trail evocative rather than static (i.e. “Tim’s Climb” or “Rachel’s Ramble” rather than the “Tim Lawrence trail” or “Rachel’s” trail)

6. Bonus Points for creativity and/or incorporating Helena's history or natural characteristics in the name

There are a number of existing trail names which PPLT recommends retaining including Seven Sisters, Road to Mars, and Northwest Passage. Anticipated trail naming opportunities include the trail(s) west of Seven Sisters, the Meadow, and the proposed trail continuing north from Old Chevy. Naming opportunities for minor connectors may be considered on a case by case basis. Naming opportunities cannot be finalized until proposed new trails and reroutes are approved.

### **Conclusion:**

There is great opportunity to improve the recreation opportunities in this area. The family friendly and accessible nature of this area is one of its most important features and that lens guided much of the content of this assessment. Depending on how many and to what extent new trails and substantial reroutes are approved as well as trail obliteration needs the implementation of this assessment could be a multi-year project that is accomplished in phases.

### **Estimated Budget**

- \$55,000.00 (trail construction, trail closure, signage design & installation)

**CITY RECOMMENDATIONS: Based on alignment with the goals identified in Chapter 7 (community access and use, future needs and growth), public feedback received to date, Helena Open Lands (HOL) needs, and available resources, City staff recommends that this project move forward as proposed.**

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### City Of Helena Open Lands System Major Project – Tony Jewett, Presenter

#### **Current Situation**

Currently our trail system on HOL is an increasing spider web of miles of approved system trails and non-system, illegally-created trails. There is no true, accurate baseline of the growth rate of the trail system over the past decade or more, or whether that expansion is necessary, problematic or a part of a longer and larger vision established by those who are the stewards of this area. The current base of understanding is in need of greater detail and a deeper look, and then a discussion among city managers and the public needs to establish a framework for the future that answers pressing questions, such as: a) how to establish annual budget to reach a proper balance of conservation and recreation, b) how do we invest in a trail system that lasts, that is stable and that is safe, c) how do we build public awareness of behavioral rules and expectations for various users.

Without answers to these and a number of other core questions, city decisions on appropriate budgeting, new major project proposals, and general but essential maintenance needs will be, 1) ungoverned by a framework that should be based on need and 2) without a broad foundation of information that that provides a basis for informed public input and overall project priority setting.

Over the annual work plan cycle of 2021 the city's Department of Parks and Recreation has largely chosen to do projects that are expansion and 'infrastructure based' as opposed to maintenance and rehabilitation of the existing trail system and conservation of the associated landscape. This is evidenced by projects such as DeFord Trail, the Mt Helena ADA trail construction, and new parking areas and area improvements on Lime Kiln and the Archery Range. This inclination to 'build out' rather than maintain and rehab what is currently in place continues into 2022 as the city offers up two new major projects to finalize the construction related to DeFord and extend the Mt Helena trail across the face of hill.

In the 2020 adopted re-write of section 7 of the Helena Open Lands Management Plan under Goal 2 "Stewardship", it is stated: "Using stewardship as the guiding principle, manage Helena's Open Lands to balance

environment and recreational use" and "Stewardship is the guiding principle that informs our decisions and actions".

Our proposal here is a request to the city to reframe its priorities and begin to create a roadmap that invests in trail maintenance, management strategies, trail upgrades, user information and etiquette, and a structured, long term plan that de-emphasizes unnecessary trail and infrastructure expansion and establishes clear goals and directions around balancing recreation and conservation in its chosen projects.

**Recommendation**

This Major Project seeks to build from the trail information foundation produced by the Prickly Pear Land Trust (PPLT) in their 2020 Helena Open Lands Trail Inspection Report ('Report'). This Report by PPLT provided a summary review and assessment of trail conditions within the HOL trail complex.

We propose an expansion of this foundational effort that: a) provides a more detailed and comprehensive trail condition information base and data-driven assessment, b) utilizes this expanded information base to establish a predictable and targeted framework for the city and general public to scrutinize trail system needs and to set annual work plan and budget priorities that emphasize the city's HOL conservation mandate, and 3) expands and provides stable permanency to a trail etiquette program that builds a culture of respect among diverse trail users and broad literacy about trail rules. These products would provide much needed information that would increase the life of our trails, help with on-going safety issues, build rapport and cooperation among diverse user groups, and help protect the natural resources for which our HOL lands have been set aside.

This project would include, among other associated products:

- a. an assessment and measurement of the growth and expansion of the HOL trail system over the past decade or more – a baseline for looking ahead
- b. a compilation of the miles of approved system trails and of non-approved, non-system trails (also termed 'social trails')
- c. specific measurements of factors related to trail condition to include trail width vs. target, trail grade/slope against desirable conditions, cost of annual maintenance needs, cross-slope range, potential for erosion, and other associated factors considered central to rehabilitation and construction of stable trail design.
- d. an inventory of deferred maintenance needs, prioritized and monetarily assessed, to serve as a roadmap for annual work
- e. a prioritized listing of non-system, illegally created trails that should be removed and rehabbed
- f. a listing of existing system trails and the work needed to bring segments of those trail into structural compliance with adopted trail stability standards set by the city
- g. the establishment of a permanent and greatly expanded signage system and public education program that focuses on proper user etiquette and trail rules and that seeks to establish commonality of behavior and commitment to our trail system among all users.

**CITY RECOMMENDATIONS: Based on alignment with the goals identified in Chapter 7 (community access and use, future needs and growth), public feedback received to date, Helena Open Lands (HOL) needs, and available resources, City staff recommends that this project move forward with the following requirements:**

- **The aforementioned associated products list will be subject to city staff modification and/or addition, over multi fiscal years, as funding becomes available.**

**Alternative Proposal to the City’s 2021 DeFord Improvement Project, Joel Peden - Presenter**

**Introduction:**

On behalf of the Montana Independent Living Project, and for citizens of the Helena area with mobility/sensory challenges needing and desiring a safe and enjoyable experience, I am submitting the following alternative to the City’s 2021 DeFord Improvement Project for consideration by HOLMAC and the City of Helena:

**Recommendation:**

**Upper DeFord trail (South of the Old Shooting Range parking lot)**

1. Designate the upper 1,600± feet (approximately 1/3 mile) of the DeFord Trail, from the Archery Range parking lot to the southern terminus of the trail at Dry Gulch, as a Universal Access Trail consistent with Universal Access guidelines. This would become: *“A route designed, designated, and constructed for recreational pedestrian use”* and open to pedestrians and mobility/sensory-challenged individuals—a slower-user trail.
2. Improve this segment of the DeFord Trail to standards and guidelines consistent with a Universal Access Trail, including:

The U.S. Access Board’s manual recommends that non-federal agencies use Chapter 1017’s best management practices (BMPs) for designing and maintaining UA Trails, including the following sustainable trail design principles:

- Paths that traverse along the side slope
- Sustainable grades
- Erosion resistance
- Out-sloped tread
- Positive user experience
- Low maintenance needs

Technical Specifications:

- Tread surface that is clear, firm, and stable with a minimum width of 36” (5-ft min. proposed)
- Tread obstacles of 2” high
- Cross slopes 5% max
- No more than 30% of the total trail length exceeding a running grade of 8.33% (with other specs, including resting intervals if necessary)
- Passing spaces of 60” wide at suggested intervals
- Signage outlining trail specifications

Additional Specifications:

- Requirement that dogs be leashed for purposes of user safety
  - At least two turnout spaces with benches for rest and enjoyment along the trail
3. Designate and sign a bicycle lane on Davis/Dry Gulch Roads, between the Old Shooting Range parking lot and the entry of the Upper DeFord bike skills course, to route bike traffic off the UA Trail for this short distance.
  4. Provide ADA-compliant parking at the Archery Range parking lot.
  5. Provide an electric wheel-chair charger and solar charging station at the Old Shooting range parking lot, alongside the City’s proposed ADA-compliant improvements.

**Justification for this alternative:**

Helena’s 75-mile trail system has extensive opportunities for both hikers and bicyclists; however, there currently exists not one trail on our Helena Open Lands built consistent with Universal Access standards, standards we rely on for safety and quality-of-experience.

Members of the disability community were active within the DeFord Working Group, attending four out of five of the meetings. There was no outreach on behalf of the City to include individuals from this community in the

## EXHIBIT "A" – COMBINED TRAIL PROJECTS 2021-2022

discussions, and when we requested to be included on the working group at the second meeting, we were told that wasn't possible.

The ability to enjoy the outdoors must be shared by all. For someone with a mobility disability, a mental health disability, dementia and other sensory disabilities, sharing a trail with bicycles can lead to traumatic experiences. The compromise which was put forward during the working group sessions was completely shut down. I find it difficult to understand how asking for a small portion of the DeFord trail upgrade to be set aside for pedestrian traffic only is so controversial. The Working Group said it was in favor of the idea of a Universal Access trail, just not at this location. Frankly, there simply is not another location we can identify that is as level and accessible, and also provides an equally attractive natural setting and experience, as the DeFord Trail.

**CITY RECOMMENDATIONS: Based on alignment with the goals identified in Chapter 7 (community access and use, stewardship, future needs and growth), public feedback received to date, and available resources, City staff recommends the following:**

- **Parks staff does not recommend prohibiting bike traffic; however, does recommend installing signs discouraging downhill bike travel at the southern terminus of the DeFord Trail and at that point that the DeFord Trail intersects Davis Street.**
- **Parks staff does not recommend amending the leash ordinance; however, does recommend installing signs at several points, encouraging pet owners to leash their dogs while utilizing the DeFord Trail.**