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Montana Trails Create Greener, Healthier Communities

Mention the words Montana and trails in the same sentence and most folks will immediately think of Big Sky country's miles of hiking opportunities. While hiking in Montana's local, state, and national parks can be a wonderful outdoor experience, walking and biking on city trails is fast becoming the Treasure State's way to encourage both family fitness and greener communities.

"Community trails, like *Bozeman's Main Street to the Mountains* (www.gvlt.org/trails.html), give residents an easy, active way to connect with nature, as well as with our friends and neighbors," says Ted Lange, Community Trails Planner with the Gallatin Valley Land Trust. "Urban trails are places to relax and exercise; to ride a bike or walk to work, school, or the store; or just enjoy being outside with friends and family. For fun and recreation, as well as greener transportation and public safety, Bozeman's trails have become an essential element of the community's quality of life."

Like Bozeman, cities and towns across Montana are developing and improving their trails. Here are a few examples of the rapidly expanding system, with sites for online information and maps:

Billings - Bike Net: Trails for People - www.bikenet.org/

Great Falls - River's Edge Trail - www.thetrail.org/

Kalispell - Great Northern Historical Trail - www.railstotrailsofnwmt.com/

Missoula - Area Trail Guide - www.missoulia.com/specials/hikebike/index.html

Shelby - Roadrunner Recreation Trail - www.shelbymt.com/roadrunner_trail.htm

Eat Right Montana urges all Montana families to use these easy trail tips for summer fun:

- **Get a map and go play:** Think of a trail walk or bike as a mini-vacation - close to home, cheap, and good for the planet too! See how many miles of trails you can explore before school starts again.
- **Support your local trail organization:** Most in-town Montana trails are a public-private partnership and they need your help to succeed. Check the web site for trail work days or fundraising events.
- **Take time for a trail on your next trip:** Traveling around the state this summer for work, shopping, or family visits? Take an hour to get some fresh air and discover an unexpected trail treasure.

Cathy Costakis, Physical Activity Coordinator for Montana's Nutrition and Physical Activity Program (NAPA @ www.montananapa.org), also supports in-town trail use as a win-win-win strategy.

"Walking or biking along one of Montana's urban trails is a fun way to improve personal health and community health at the same time. Using your legs instead of your car enhances your fitness level, while reducing dependence on fossil fuels and improving the quality of our air and water."

Past and current issues of Eat Right Montana's monthly packets can be downloaded for free at www.eatrightmontana.org/eatrighthealthyfamilies.htm