Lake County Parks & Trails Plan

Lake County parks & trails plan

Acknowledgements

The Lake County Parks and Trails Plan was made by the effort, dedication and insight of lots of people. Chief among them are Lake County Parks Board members who generously offered their time and expertise. Current and former Parks Board members who contributed to the project include Chairman Mike Roberts, Jennifer Rolfsness, Tom McDonald, Cindy Doll, Janet Sucha, Grant Holle, Kaye McCreedy and Lake County Commissioners Ann Brower, Bill Barron, Gale Decker and Paddy Trusler.

Lake County citizens have played a large role in the development of this plan, submitting 587 surveys and comments that helped to guide the plan's direction and focus.

Other participants include Polson Parks Director Karen Sargent, former Polson City Manager Todd Crossett, Maren Murphy and David Lindstrom of Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Flathead County Planner Alex Hogle, Steve Lorch and Anne Moran from the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Andrew Johnson of the USFS Swan Ranger District, Gary Decker and Mary Stranahan of the Arlee Trails Committee, Janet Camel of the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes, Una Rose Graham of Polson Fairgrounds, Inc., the St. Ignatius Planning Board, and Rose Leach of the Tribal Safety of Dams program.

Thanks also go to Lake County Planning Department staff LaDana Hintz, Joel Nelson, Robert Costa and Karl Smithback for carrying out over 100 assessments of county-owned properties and providing countless hours of property records research and data compilation. The maps in this plan were produced by Lake County GIS Department Technician Mike Rave under the direction of Warren C. Fahner and Wendy Largent. The text, graphs and many of the ideas in this plan were produced by Dave DeGrandpre and Andrew Hagemeier of Land Solutions, LLC.

LAND SOLUTIONS, LLC

Table of Contents

Executive Summary 1
Chapter One: Purpose and Vision 3
Purpose 4
Vision Statement 5
Chapter Two: Goals, Objectives, Policies and Recommendations 6
Chapter Three: Implementation Strategy 45
Introduction 46
Implementation 47
Implementation Table 48
Implementation Recommendations 50
Chapter Four: Planning Area, Setting and Plan Administration 53
Planning Area and Setting 54
Plan Administration 58
Chapter Five: Community Profile 61
Demographics 62
Chapter Six: Existing Conditions 70
Overview of Park and Trail Management 71
Organized User Groups 79
Trails and Paths 80
Lake County Land Inventory 83
Land Inventory Findings 87
Lake County Parks / Trails Management 89
Chapter Seven: Issues and Needs Analysis 93
Introduction 94
Community Survey Summary 94
National and State Trends in Recreation 106
Parks and Trails Management 107
Appendices 110

Appendix A - Site Survey Form..... 111
Appendix B - Community Survey Form..... 117

Table of Figures

Figure 1. A small community park in Charlo 7
Figure 2. Vicinity map: Swan Sites No. 2 Swan River Access 9
Figure 3. Site map: Swan Sites No. 2 Swan River Access 9
Figure 4. Signage at Swan River Access (left) and bank erosion from over use 10
Figure 5. Vicinity map: Mellett Point Unit 12
Figure 6. Site map: Mellett Point Unit Parklands 12
Figure 7. Looking toward Flathead Lake through the forest at Georgia Road / Finley Pt Villa Site North 14
Figure 8. Vicinity map: Alson Villa Site 16
Figure 9. Site map: Alson Villa Site 16
Figure 10. Vicinity map: Burrows Tracts, Dixon Park 18
Figure 11. Site map: Burrows Tracts, Dixon Park 18
Figure 12. The pavilion and dock at Dixon Park 19
Figure 13. Vicinity map: Pablo Ball Fields 20
Figure 14. Site map. Pablo Ball Fields 20
Figure 15. Ball field and sign in Pablo. The overgrown baseball diamond is on the right 21
Figure 16. Vicinity map: Polson Fairgrounds 22
Figure 17. Site map: Polson Fairgrounds 22
Figure 18. Views looking toward the river from the Polson Fairgrounds 23
Figure 19. Site map: Dayton Community Park 24
Figure 20. Recommended Park Classifications 25
Figure 21. Recommended Park Standards 28
Figure 22. Lake County Planning Area trails map, current and planned 30
Figure 23. Northern portion of greater Polson area trails, existing and priority 31
Figure 24. Southern portion of Polson area trails, existing and priority 31
Figure 25. Pablo area trails, existing and priority 32
Figure 26. Ronan area trails, existing and priority 32
Figure 27. Charlo area trails, existing and priority 33

Figure 28. St. Ignatius area trails, existing and priority 33
Figure 29. Arlee area trails, existing and priority 34
Figure 30. Ferndale and Woods Bay trails, existing and proposed 34
Figure 31. Recommended Trail Classifications 35
Figure 32. Connector trail from Polson to Ronan 36
Figure 33. Pedestrian paths in Pablo along Old Highway 93 (L) and Clairmont Road (R) that need to be re-striped as in the example below 36
Figure 34. Example of a striped on-street bikeway 36
Figure 35. Recommended Parks Board Management 40
Figure 36. The three general phases of plan implementation and success. 46
Figure 37. Lake County Parks and Trails Plan Planning Area 54
Figure 38. Map of the physical settings in Lake County 56
Figure 39. Map of the population density Lake County 57
Figure 40 The distribution of age in Lake County in comparison to Montana and the U.S. 63
Figure 41. A Comparison of Race in Lake County to Montana and the U.S. 64
Figure 42 Percentage of people in specific age classes with disabilities in Lake County, Montana and the Country. 65
Figure 43 Household income distribution in Lake County, Montana and the Country 67
Figure 44. Comparison of employment by industry 68
Figure 45. Map of land ownership in Lake County 71
Figure 46. Map of the Flathead Reservation boundaries in Lake County 72
Figure 47. USFS facilities in Lake County are primarily located in the Swan Valley. This photo of the Swan River and Swan Mountain Range was taken from Lake County's Rainbow Park Swan River Access site. 73
Figure 48. Map of USFS facilities in the Lake County portion of the Swan Valley 74
Figure 49. Sign at Big Arm State Park 75
Figure 50. Map of State Parks and Wildlife Management Areas 76
Figure 51. Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks has teamed up with local partners to help stop the spread of invasive species, a serious threat to recreation and fisheries in and around Flathead Lake 77
Figure 52. Path linking the community of Big Arm to Big Arm State Park 80

Figure 53. Currently mapped trails and paths in Lake County. Does not include trails into the Mission Mountains Tribal Wilderness 81
Figure 54. Existing paved trails and paths in Lake County 82
Figure 55. Existing land uses of surveyed properties 87
Figure 56. Parks and trails management flow chart 90
Figure 57. Question #1: gender of survey respondents 95
Figure 58. Frequency in which survey respondents use parks 95
Figure 59. How important survey respondents feel county funding is for parks recreation and trails versus other expenditures 97
Figure 60. How survey respondents want to fund development, improvement or maintenance of parks, recreation and trail facilities 97
Figure 61. How survey respondents want funding on parks, recreation and trails spent 98
Figure 62. What activities survey respondents are interested in participating in 100
Figure 63. Type of parks that survey respondents felt were very important 101
Figure 64. Most popular locations of where survey respondents want facilities 102
Figure 65. Most popular types of facilities survey respondents want 102
Figure 66. Most popular locations where survey respondents want trails 104

List of Tables

Table 1. Park Inventory: Number of properties by acreage 84
Table 2. Park Inventory: Properties with legal access 84
Table 3. Park Inventory: Properties with physical access 84
Table 4. Park Inventory: Properties that currently have parking 85
Table 5. Park Inventory: Properties with that are handicap accessible 85
Table 6. Park Inventory: Properties with access for Emergency Medical Services 85
Table 7. Park Inventory: Properties with access to lakes, rivers or streams 86
Table 8. Park Inventory: Adjacent land use to surveyed properties 86

Executive Summary

Lake County is an area with exceptional natural resources and recreational opportunities. Outdoor recreation is a valued part of our lifestyle and heritage and also a vital part of our local economy. In Lake County 10 federal, state, local and tribal governments and agencies manage land and recreation facilities, but none has the resources or mandate to serve all of the residents and the visitors. The Lake County Parks and Trails Plan provides a strategy to help capitalize on park and recreational opportunities in an area with exceptional natural resources but limited financial and staffing resources.

The Parks and Trails Plan has five main goals:

1. A park system that serves as many and diverse a group of users as possible
2. A trail network providing safe transportation routes and recreational opportunities, promoting health and fitness and providing a connection to the outdoors
3. Capitalize on park and recreation opportunities through effective collaboration
4. Effective and efficient management of park properties
5. Parks and trails that are adequately funded

To achieve these goals, this plan proposes several potential parks and trails projects; policies for park and trail development; recommendations for working with public, tribal and not-for-profit groups; recommendations for management with limited staff and volunteer resources, and an implementation strategy---how the plan is expected to be carried out.

Chapter 1 includes the purpose and the community vision statement that guides the plan. Chapter 2 is the main focus of the plan and includes goals, objectives, policies and recommendations for action. Chapter 3 is the implementation strategy. Chapter 4 discusses the legal basis for the plan and its relation to other planning documents. Chapter 5 is a community demographic profile. Chapter 6 includes a discussion of how parks and trails are currently managed and also a summary of Lake County's land inventory. Chapter 7 provides a needs analysis based primarily on a community survey carried out for this plan.

Key recommendations are:

1. Be opportunistic – Be poised to take advantages of opportunities for park and trail project funding, labor, site management and other assistance that may arise

2. Be collaborative – Work with other land and facility managers to help provide and maintain parks and recreation facilities

3. Engage the public – Our citizens have great ideas for park and trail development and also can help provide cost-effective maintenance

4. Be persistent and enjoy the results – Even a small stretch of a new trail provides lasting positive impacts to a community.

Chapter One: Purpose and Vision

Purpose

Lake County has impressive natural resources and an amazing amount of recreational potential. Shifting population demographics and changes in recreation preferences over the next 20 years will impact the number of people using parks and trails and the way people use them. In order to allocate Lake County's limited financial and human resources in a way that provides the highest level of service possible, planning, cooperation and a sound decision making process are required.

As Lake County continues to grow as a regional recreation center, the need for quality parks, trails and recreation facilities will increase. Recognizing that change is constant, the focus of this plan is to:

- Complete a detailed inventory of county-owned properties with either existing or potential recreational facilities
- Understand the community's desires for parks, trails and recreation facilities
- Identify potential short-term and long-term park, trail and facility projects
- Develop a classification system and management guidelines for different types of county parks and trails
- Create a blueprint for expanding park management capacity
- Identify potential funding sources and partnerships
- Develop an action plan

Vision Statement

The crystal clear lakes, turquoise rivers and winding creeks, towering mountains, forests and green fertile valleys provide the foundation for the world class recreational opportunities enjoyed both by Lake County residents and visitors from afar. It is the shared values, unique to our towns and people, this plan intends to grow and encourage. Following this document as a guide, Lake County aims to build trails connecting communities, ensure citizens have access to the lakes, rivers and outdoors, find opportunities to build and improve facilities, and provide people with a connection to sport and nature.

The vision statement is what this plan is intended to achieve; what the goals, objectives, policies and implementation strategy work towards.

A word cloud is a tool used to visually demonstrate ideas or values people have expressed as being important. The word cloud to the left was developed using over 9,600 words taken from the long form answers received in a survey that was used to help develop this plan. The larger the word, the more commonly it was used in the survey answers.

Trails, lakes and community connections were the most important values to those responding to the survey, and those ideas are reflected in the plan's vision and recommended actions.

Chapter Two: Goals, Objectives, Policies and Recommendations

Goal #1: A park system that serves as many and as diverse a group of users as possible

Objectives

- Identify and prioritize park improvements
- Apply park classifications based on who the parks are intended to serve

  (Examples: regional park, neighborhood lake access)
- Apply service standards for each park that is to be developed

  (Example: The service standard for a neighborhood lake access could include a picnic table, garbage can, boundary fence, port-o-potty or pit toilet, basic signage and a small dock)

Policy Considerations

- Parks should serve different geographic areas and user groups
- Priorities for park improvements should be based on demand for facilities, underserved areas, likelihood of development and ongoing maintenance, and available funding
- Park classifications and standards should provide some consistency to guide park development and maintenance but ensure flexibility for parks throughout county

Figure 1. A small community park in Charlo

Recommendations

Parks Projects Priority List

The Parks Board will develop and maintain a parks projects priority list. The list will be designed to keep track of what upgrades, additions, and maintenance needs are a priority for the County. It is intended to be an evolving list. As projects are completed and removed, new projects will be added. As priorities change, projects will be added or dropped. As funding opportunities present themselves, the list will be adjusted.

What is on the list should be based on policy. These are the policies that should be considered when creating and updating the list:

- Parks should serve different geographic areas and users groups
- Priorities for park improvements are based on demand for facilities, underserved communities, likelihood of development and ongoing maintenance, and available funding

After examining the parks inventory and numerous site visits by the Parks Board, Planning Department Staff and Land Solutions, the following list has been developed for the Parks Board to use as a starting point in setting priority projects. According to the policies listed directly above, these are the considerations used to develop this list:

- Based on demand, public access to Flathead Lake, Swan Lake and Swan River is needed.
- Based on the geographic distribution of parks and population densities, underserved communities appear to be Ferndale, Arlee, Ravalli and Pablo.
- Funding is limited. The County will not be able to approach large-scale or expensive projects with its current budget. Outside funding and assistance will be necessary to complete most projects. Funding sources sometimes dictate how monies may be spent, and therefore the types of projects the county can implement. However, having projects listed as a priority as part of an adopted plan will help the Parks Board be competitive when applying for certain types of funding. The order in which projects on this list are implemented will largely be opportunistic, based on the availability of funding.

Below is a description of high priority projects, but not listed in order of priority. Some of the projects are achievable in the short term, others may take 20 years to accomplish. Having a list to choose from will provide options as opportunities arise.

PRIORITY PROJECTS

Swan Sites No. 2 Swan River Access

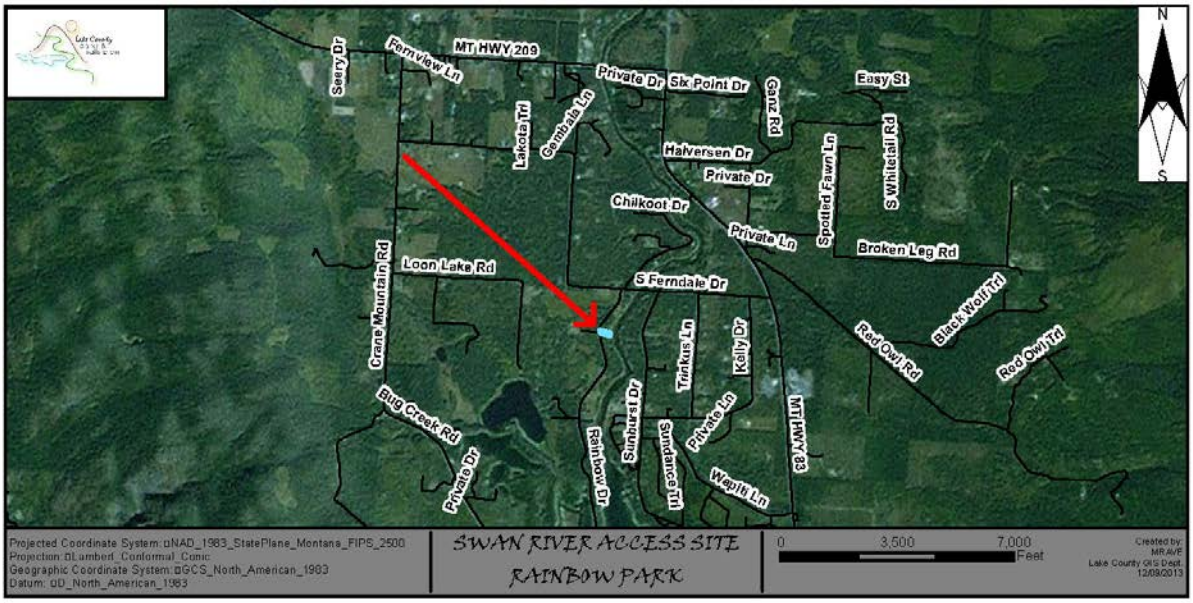

Figure 2. Vicinity map: Swan Sites No. 2 Swan River Access

Figure 3. Site map: Swan Sites No. 2 Swan River Access

This site, located off of Rainbow Drive in Ferndale, provides access to the Swan River. Used by boaters (non-motorized) and fishermen from Lake and Flathead Counties, the site receives extremely heavy use in the summer months. Facilities at the site are limited to a vehicle turnaround and parking area. Due to the size of the parcel (0.55 acres), the amount of parking does not come close to accommodating the demand during the peak season. As a result, cars are parked for hundreds of yards up and down Rainbow Drive.

In addition, heavy foot traffic up and down the banks of the river at the put-in point is resulting in erosion of the bank. This park is under designed for the use it receives. However, it provides a critical recreational function because it is one of only two developed access points for floaters on the river below Swan Lake. Addressing the issues at this site is a high priority.

Issues

- Size of parcel prevents needed expansion
- Parking is inadequate to meet demand
- Bank erosion is occurring
- Parking along county road is a safety issue

Figure 4. Signage at Swan River Access (left) and bank erosion from over use

Recommendation

As the population in this area increases, the problems at this site will worsen. Parking will become even more difficult, erosion will continue, and conflicts between users and neighbors will increase in frequency and severity. MT Fish, Wildlife and Parks typically develops and maintains river accesses. The Parks Board should work with this agency for funding and design assistance.

Four options have been provided. It is recommended that Option 1 is not the preferred option. It is further recommended the launch site be upgraded soon to prevent further erosion. In the long term, either Option 3 or 4 should be pursued.

Option 1: No change

The site would continue to function way over capacity, conflicts would increase, erosion would continue and the site would deteriorate.

Option 2: Upgrade the launch site on the existing property and control erosion. No other changes.

Option 3: Expand Existing Site

Purchase adjacent property and increase the parking, include sanitary facilities, install a watercraft "slide" or stair landing for launching boats and control erosion.

Option 4: Develop a New River Access

To release pressure on the existing access, the Parks Board could identify and purchase a larger property in the same vicinity that can accommodate the use, and develop a new river access with adequate facilities. Again, the Parks Board could work with MTFWP. The existing site would continue to be used. Therefore, the bank erosion and management issues would still need to be addressed.

Recommended Classification

Special Use, due to the type of use (a river boat access is unique for county management) and because the service area is large. An expanded site would probably require a medium level of development and maintenance.

The Mellett Point Unit

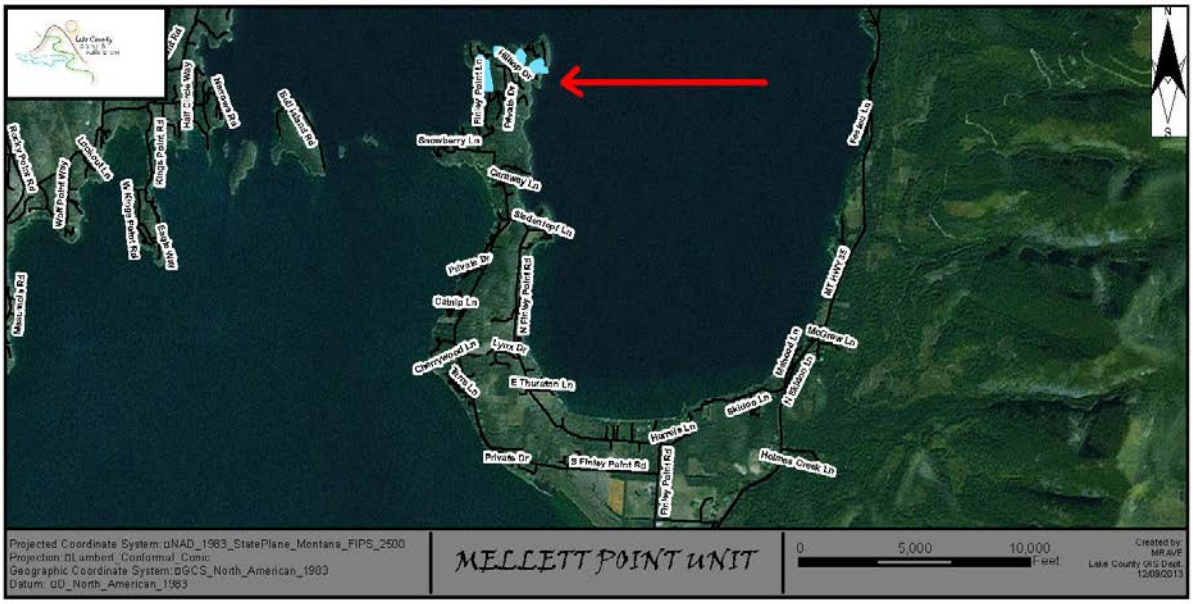

Figure 5. Vicinity map: Mellett Point Unit

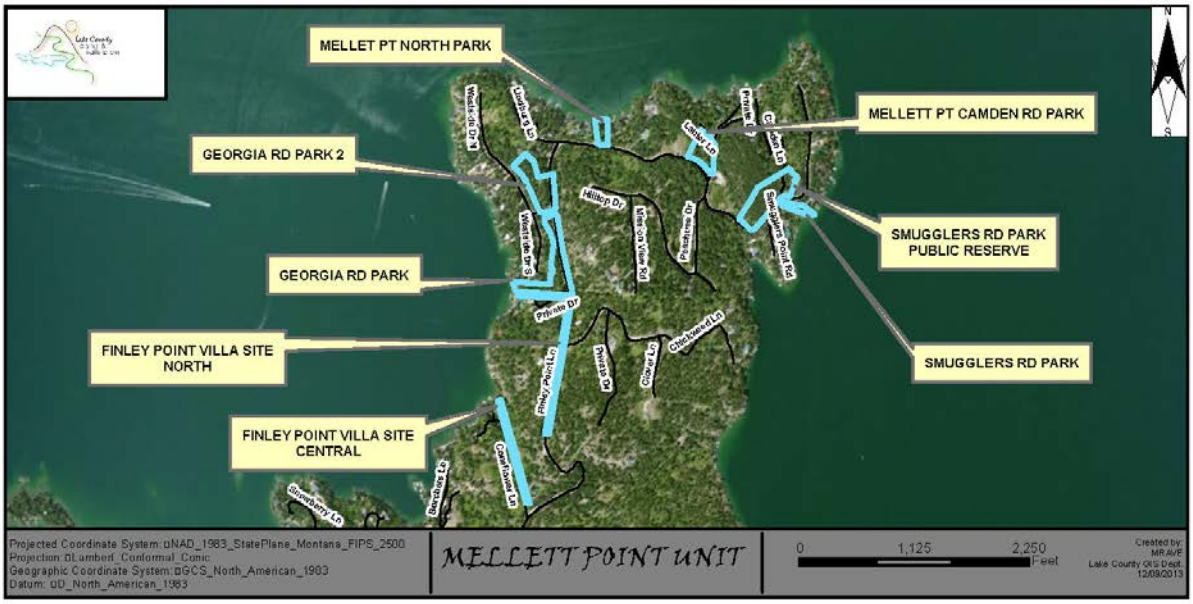

Figure 6. Site map: Mellett Point Unit Parklands

On the north end of Finley Point are several county-owned properties located a relatively short distance from each another. These properties have different characteristics and opportunities. When considering future development or disposition, this unit should be considered one project. Although all of the parcels have constraints, four provide access to Flathead Lake, which is a resource in high demand. Having more than one parcel with access to Flathead Lake creates the possibility of meeting different needs of the public.

The Mellett Point North lakefront property is used the most heavily. This property is accessed from Finley Point Lane across a relatively steep (about 10%) easement on private land. A car or ambulance could get down to the site and turn around, but there is no space for parking. The lakefront is roughly 120 feet wide, with a gravel beach and mildly sloped, grassy area. The park can accommodate approximately 20 people at a time but parking on the county road above is limited. There are no restrooms, garbage bins or developed facilities.

The park has a history of conflict with neighboring property owners including trespass and the public using private landowners' docks. Neighbors have reportedly used the property for private storage. The county built a fence along the eastern property boundary and intends to build one along the west boundary. Signage is posted along Finley Point Lane and at the park to inform visitors of the rules.

Another property with lake access is Finley Point Villa Site North Park, which connects to Mellett Point Georgia Road Park. The lakefront is 95 feet wide and consists of a low, west facing rock shelf that drops into deep clear water. A small fishing dock could easily be located here. Landward (east) from the rock shelf is forest consisting of mild terrain that could accommodate picnic tables. (Currently this area has a subsurface drainfield leased to a neighbor. The lease expires after 2018.)

Access to the lakefront would have to be walk-in only due to a drop in terrain toward the county road, but the site could accommodate a footpath. Residential development exists relatively close on both sides of the lakefront so improvements should be minimal to reduce conflicts. At the abutting Georgia Road Park on Finley Point Lane, a pit toilet or port-o-potties could be installed.

Parking for both lakefront parks could also be created at Georgia Road Park, as could a few camp sites at some point in the future if demand is strong enough and maintenance and conflicts can be adequately addressed. Also nearby west of Cornflower Lane is another property that could be developed with a boat ramp that would complement the other small parks in this area.

Figure 7. Looking toward Flathead Lake through the forest at Georgia Road / Finley Pt Villa Site North

The other parks in the Mellett Point Unit do not offer much in the way of public value. Camden Road Park is 1.45 acres and would make a nice lakeview lot. Its sale could generate funds to help develop the lakefront sites and parking. Smugglers Road Park is 3.38 acres of mostly hillside which has limited value.

Issues

- Small size of parcels with lake access limits use
- Challenging topography
- Neighbor conflicts
- The county road is not built to accommodate large volumes of traffic
- Parking is currently limited
- Lake accesses will probably not be ADA compliant

Recommendation

The Mellettt Point Unit is an opportunity to increase lake access and recreation opportunities on Flathead Lake but only to a limited degree due to park sizes, neighboring residences and road and terrain limitations.

- Mellett Point North

  This site should remain walk-in only, open to the public but with limited facilities at a scale for the use of local property owners who do not have lake access. The vehicle access should not be improved. The top priority for this site is to address the issues with the neighbors, which should include additional fencing along the west boundary, developing a few parking spaces in Mellett Point 2 Georgia Road Park, and regular policing and maintenance.

  In terms of management, the park should meet, and not exceed, the development and maintenance standards for a "Pocket Park." This means a picnic table, fire ring and vehicle access limited for property maintenance, emergency services, handicap access and possibly to drop off and to pick up non-motorized watercraft. Garbage cans could be placed on-site or 'pack-it-in, pack-it-out' could be the policy, depending on staffing.

- Mellett Point Georgia Road/Finley Point Villa Site North

  This property is a boot shaped property providing access to Flathead Lake on the west side of the point. This is similar to the Mellett Point North property in terms of shoreline, neighboring development and terrain but it is not developed except for a subsurface drainfield. The lakefront area has only 95 feet of frontage. This site should classify as a special use park, with a low intensity of use and limited facilities. Improvements for this site could include:

  - A fishing dock or pier on the lake
  - 2-3 picnic tables near the lake
  - Pit toilet or similar and parking on upper end of property
  - Walk-in only via an internal park trail
  - Signs explaining rules

Alson Villa Lake Access

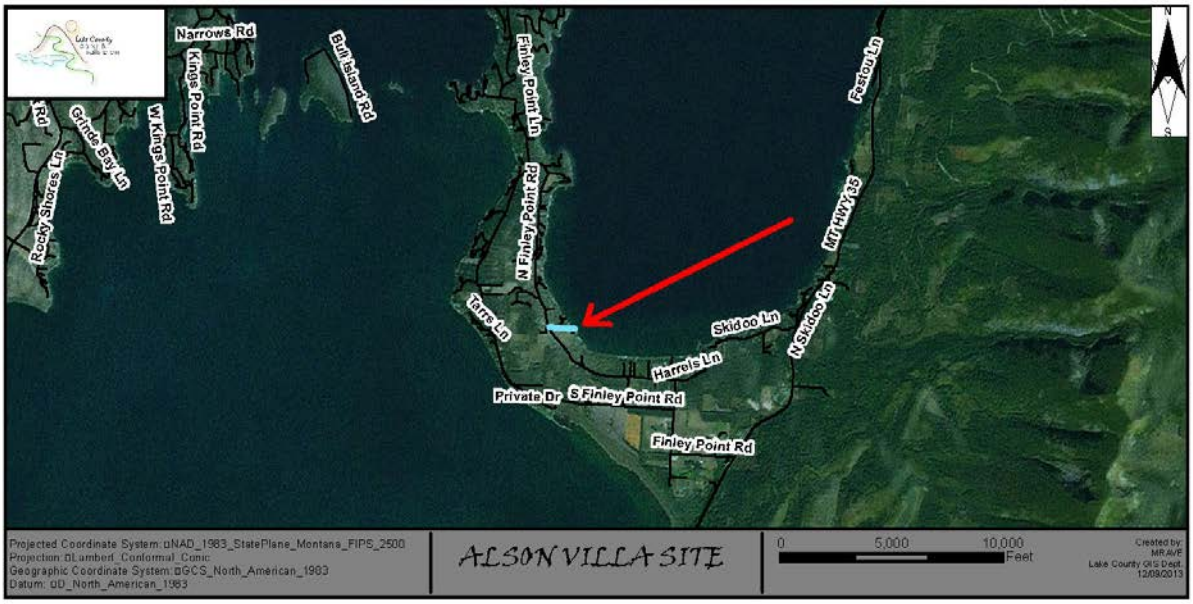

Figure 8. Vicinity map: Alson Villa Site

Figure 9. Site map: Alson Villa Site

The Alson Villa Lake Access is located on Finley Point. This 40-foot wide strip of land extends to Flathead Lake from North Finley Point Road. Despite its constraints, improvements to this site are recommended because the site already has a developed boat launch. The boat launch, originally installed by Polson Outdoors, is a concrete pad that extends into the water during summer lake levels. It provides a launch for small water craft. Parking is limited to the access strip along the road. There is erosion occurring around the launching pad that will need to be addressed. The site is narrow with no turn around, and vehicles launching boats need to back a considerable distance to launch.

Issues:

- Limited parking
- Erosion on shore
- No turnaround

Recommendation

It is recommended the erosion occurring on the shore be addressed to prevent damage to the launch. Signage is old and needs to be upgraded. "No parking" signs may be needed along the road in specific locations to limit neighbor conflicts. Because of the limited parking capacity, use should be kept to minimum and additional facility improvements that may increase use should be discouraged unless parking and the turnaround are improved. Seek to partner with MT Fish, Wildlife & Parks for design assistance and funding.

Recommended Classification

Pocket Park, due to the low intensity of use, limited size and parking constraints. This level of development and maintenance is also appropriate for several other strips that are being used to access Flathead Lake such as access strips in Grinde Villa, Armo Villa and Half Circle Harbor.

Burrows Tracts Dixon Park

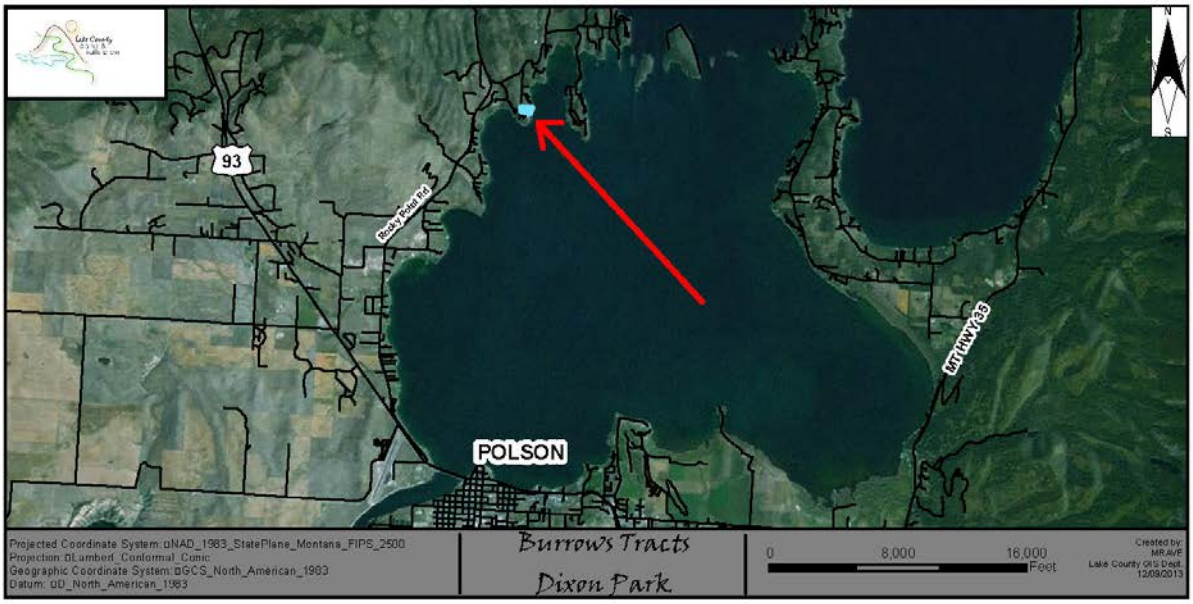

Figure 10. Vicinity map: Burrows Tracts, Dixon Park

Figure 11. Site map: Burrows Tracts, Dixon Park

This park is the most developed county-owned site on Flathead Lake. It has a formalized parking area, picnic tables, restroom, pavilion and dock. The majority of the park is located on top of a hill and there is a well-constructed path extending to a long dock out into the lake. A second restroom is located near the dock.

Issues:

- Restroom at the dock needs to be moved away from the lake
- the dock needs general repair and maintenance
- Property boundaries aren't clear
- Rules are not posted at the dock

Recommendation

This site has a maintenance backlog that needs to be addressed.

- The dock needs repair.
- The outhouse by the dock needs to be moved away from the lake.
- Rules should be posted, including a sign indicating no long-term mooring at the dock.
- Fencing could be used along the north property boundary to distinguish the property line.
- This site should be the focus of providing ADA accessibility to the lake, existing dock, restrooms, picnic area and pavilion.

Recommended Classification

This site should be classified as a Community Park due to the types of facilities and the number of people it can accommodate.

Figure 12. The pavilion and dock at Dixon Park

Pablo Ball Fields

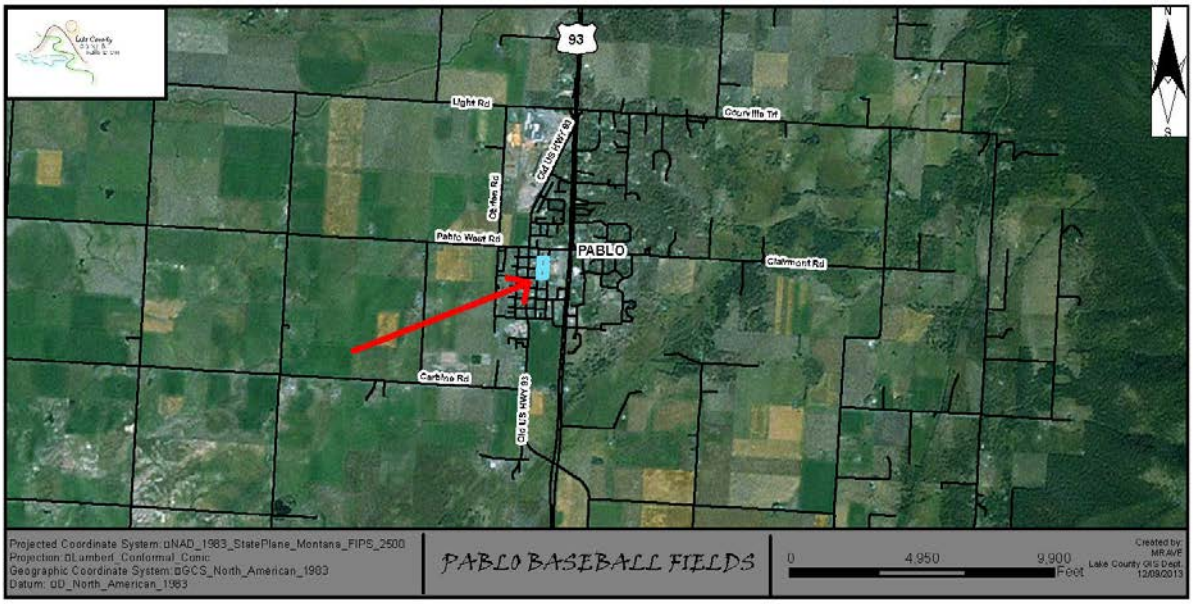

Figure 13. Vicinity map: Pablo Ball Fields

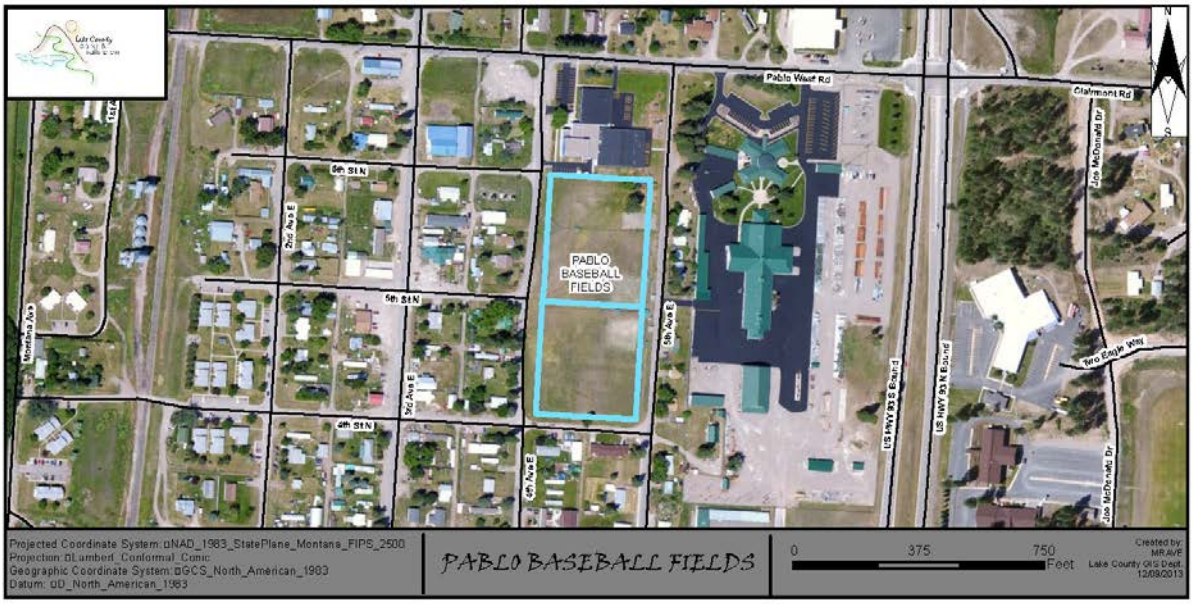

Figure 14. Site map. Pablo Ball Fields

Pablo has been identified as a potentially underserved community based on the population density and relative lack of outdoor recreational facilities. The elementary school playground, a football field at Salish Kootenai College, Stimson Park and the Silver Fox Golf Course are the available sites in the community for play and recreation. However, Lake County has a large, already developed site with two youth baseball / softball fields, dugouts, a concession stand, bleachers and fencing. The fields are currently overgrown and the structures have fallen into disrepair. The site is adjacent to Pablo Elementary School and has great potential for use.

Issues

- The site has a maintenance backlog

Recommendation

Work with the community, local sports groups and school district to understand if there is significant demand for use of the fields. If so, seek out local volunteers to help upgrade and maintain them. The fields could be used for baseball or other uses, depending on the needs of the community. The concession stand, bathroom and seating should also be serviced and painted, garbage cans could be provided. If demand for use is limited at this time, hiring someone to simply mow the fields 4-5 times per year would provide a nice place for Pablo residents to relax and play.

Figure 15. Ball field and sign in Pablo. The overgrown baseball diamond is on the right.

Polson Fairgrounds

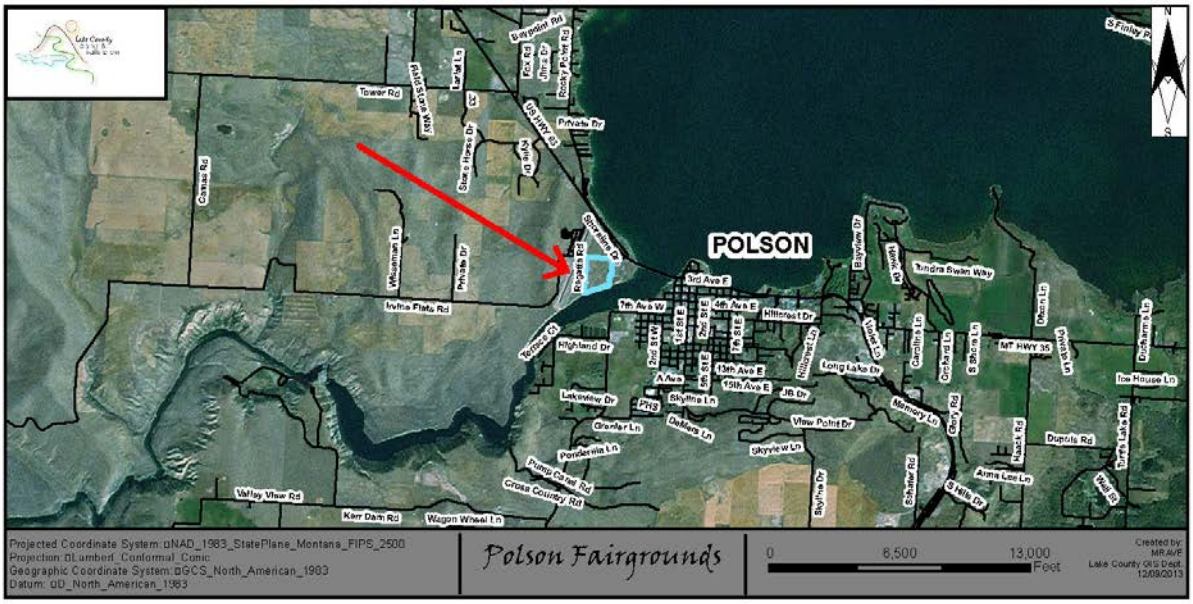

Figure 16. Vicinity map: Polson Fairgrounds

Figure 17. Site map: Polson Fairgrounds

Lake County owns a 46.8-acre parcel of land within the city limits of Polson. This property was donated to the county for the purpose of a rodeo grounds. It has 1,300 feet of water front with limited access to the river. The property is currently developed with rodeo grounds, stables, grandstands, a boat ramp, parking areas and public safety facilities. The boat ramp is not currently open to the public due to its unsafe condition and is being used for emergency services only at this time. The property has been used for rodeos, horse races, concerts, float plane fuelling depot and a staging area for speed boat rallies.

The public has stated that more and better lake and river access is one of its highest priorities. The terrain and size of the property make it suitable for continued multiple uses.

The photo on the top shows the mild terrain abutting the Flathead River. The photo on the bottom shows the large concrete boat ramp.

Figure 18. Views looking toward the river from the Polson Fairgrounds

Recommendation

Develop a site plan in concert with Polson Fairgrounds, Inc. that includes extensive community input that will promote expanded public access. The property should be maintained and developed for multiple uses.

Townsite of Dayton

Figure 19. Site map: Dayton Community Park

The Townsite of Dayton was created in 1909 by the U.S. Department of the Interior General Land Office. Lake Street to the south, and First Street and Front Street to the east, provide a public access strip bordering Flathead Lake. Some of this area is seasonally under water. The lakefront area is not used for widespread public access and much of it is used as private land by adjacent landowners with instances of encroachment. A small swimming access is located at the south end of 3rd Street. A two-acre public reserve is located near the center of the townsite. It is used for parking and a traditional park / green space.

In 2007 a site plan was developed that includes a pedestrian boulevard along all of the lake frontage, as well as recommendations for swimming, docks and parking locations. Community members seem divided on plans for use of the public reserve and ideas for public access.

Recommendation

Maintain the swimming dock and boat ramp. Provide parking and a restroom at the public reserve site. Post rules at the lake accesses. Work with volunteers to maintain the sites.

Park Classifications

It is recommended the Parks Board use the classifications below to classify all current and future lands that are to be used as parks within the county's land inventory. Assigning park classifications will help the Parks Board determine how the properties should be developed and maintained. In this system, parks are classified by how they are intended to be used and the area they will serve. Not all of the classifications below will apply to parks in Lake County at this time --- some classifications may be appropriate as conditions change and opportunities emerge. All of the developed park properties in the county should generally fit into one of these classifications.

Park Classifications

Park Classification	Description	Service Area	Size	Example
Pocket Park	Used to address limited, isolated or unique recreational needs	A few blocks or ¼ mile	Very small less than 1 acre	Walk in access to a water body
Neighborhood Park	Basic unit of park system, focuses on informal and passive recreation	A few miles or more	Generally small 1 to 5 acres	Picnic areas, playgrounds etc.
School Yard	When open to public, provides playing fields, sports facilities, playgrounds	School District	Generally small 1 to 5 acres	Elementary or middle school playground
Community Park	Serves community needs and provides special recreational opportunities	Large portions of the County	Small to large 1 to 20 acres	Town park, beach
Regional Park	One of a kind facilities providing a special use for all county residents	Whole County	Generally large 5 to 20 acres	Fairgrounds, rodeo grounds
Sports Complex	Concentrated set of facilities for organized sports	Whole County	Generally large 5 to 20 acres	Soccer fields, softball fields
Natural Resource Areas	Areas with natural resource significance or provides natural passive recreation	A few miles or whole County	Varies upon resource	Wetlands, bird-watching area
Special Use	Covers a broad range of uses, usually provides one specific use	A few miles or whole County	Varies upon intended use	Boat ramps, swimming pool
Private Park	Private but open to public, could be similar to Neighborhood Park or Special Use	A few miles or whole County	Varies upon intended use	Subdivision park, private marina

Figure 20. Recommended Park Classifications

Park Standards

Park standards are another tool to assist in setting priorities and maintenance plans. The standards are tied to the park classifications. Each park classification has general standards which are intended to be used as a guideline for park development and maintenance. The standards will help the Parks Board determine the types of equipment or facilities needed for different parks, as well as assist in setting priority projects. It is recommended the Parks Board assign classifications to all developed parks in the county's park land inventory. Once this task is complete, park standards will also be assigned by association.

Park Standards

Park Classification	Level of Development	Type of Use	Maintenance Needs	Distribution
Pocket Park	Low	Passive	Low	Sporadic
Neighborhood Park	Low	Passive	Low	In Towns
School Yard	Medium	Passive or Active	Medium	In Towns
Community Park	Medium	Active	Varies	Sporadic
Regional Park	High	Active	High	Limited
Sports Complex	High	Active	High	Limited
Natural Resource Areas	Low	Passive	Low	Sporadic
Special Use	Varies	Passive or Active	Varies	Varies
Private Park	Varies	Passive or Active	Varies	Varies

Definitions

Level of Development	
Low	Few or no developed facilities. Little to no parking necessary.
Medium	Some developed facilities including picnic tables, restrooms, shelters, non-competitive athletic facilities and boat access. Some parking may be necessary. Limited engineering or architectural considerations necessary. ADA compliance should be considered at some facilities.
High	Large developed facilities including pools, developed beaches, marinas, restrooms, concessions, and competitive athletic facilities. Parking is most likely necessary. Engineering and architectural considerations likely. Parts of facilities should be ADA compliant.
Varies	The level of development depends upon the specific facility and the intended use. Could be either low, medium or high.

Type of Use	
Passive	Passive recreation requires limited developed facilities. Activities include bird watching, picnicking, un-organized or pick-up sports, walking or hiking.
Active	Active recreation generally requires some developed facilities. Activities include organized sports, biking and motorized travel, developed swimming areas.

Park Standards

Definitions Continued

Maintenance Needs	
Low	The site and facilities need occasionally service during the high use season. Seasonal maintenance may include trash pickup, facility inspection. Yearly maintenance may include painting, signage, weed control.
Medium	The site and facilities need routine service during high use season. Routine maintenance may include trash pickup, lawn care, facility inspection. Yearly maintenance may include painting, facility and infrastructure up-keep, facility winterizing, servicing bathrooms, signage, weed control.
High	The site and facilities need frequent routine service during high use season. Routine maintenance may include trash pickup, lawn care, servicing bathrooms, maintaining sports facilities, lawn care, facility inspection. Yearly maintenance may include painting, facility and infrastructure up-keep, facility winterizing, servicing bathrooms, signage, weed control.
Varies	The level of maintenance depends upon the specific facility and the intended use. Could be either low, medium or high.

Distribution	
Limited	These sites are unique, they serve large portions of or the whole county. There is likely only one facility of this Classification in the whole county, located centrally to the population.
Sporadic	These sites are generally serving specific needs, or are larger community facilities and may have comparable parks in other parts of the county. They are located at a special feature, or near a populated area depending upon the parks use.
In Towns	These sites represent some of the more common Classifications, and likely have comparable parks in other parts of the county. They are generally located near or in community centers, and near or at schools.
Varies	The level distribution depends upon the specific facility and the intended use. They could be widespread throughout the county, or concentrated near a specific resource.

Note: These standards and definitions are intended to be loose and general in order to provide flexibility in the type and placement of facilities while allowing the Parks Board to set priorities for maintenance, upgrades and expansions.

Figure 21. Recommended Park Standards

Goal #2: A trail network providing safe transportation routes and recreational opportunities, promoting health and fitness and providing a connection to the outdoors

Objectives

- Prioritize the development of trail projects
- Develop a trail classification system based on trail types and user groups

Policy Considerations

- Trails should connect communities, parks and recreation areas and schools
- Multi-purpose connector trails should be the highest priority
- The ability to maintain trails should be addressed as the trail system expands
- Trail types should be classified based on surface type and intended user groups
- Trail access points should provide parking

Recommendations

Trail Project Priorities

Establishing trail priorities will assist the Parks Board in pursuing trail projects with agencies and other partners. Like the park priorities, the trail priorities should change over time. Priorities will change when trails are complete and new opportunities emerge. In addition to park-specific trail projects described under Goal #1, based on the policy considerations listed above, the maps below show priorities for trails in Lake County.

As a general rule, when a trail is proposed along a federal or state highway such as US Highway 93 or MT 35, the trails are recommended to be separated, paved, multipurpose paths. Trails along county roads are generally recommended to be on-street, striped bikeways. In terms of setting priorities, separated multipurpose paths and upkeep of existing paths are at the top of the list, but other projects may receive higher priority due to opportunities that emerge.

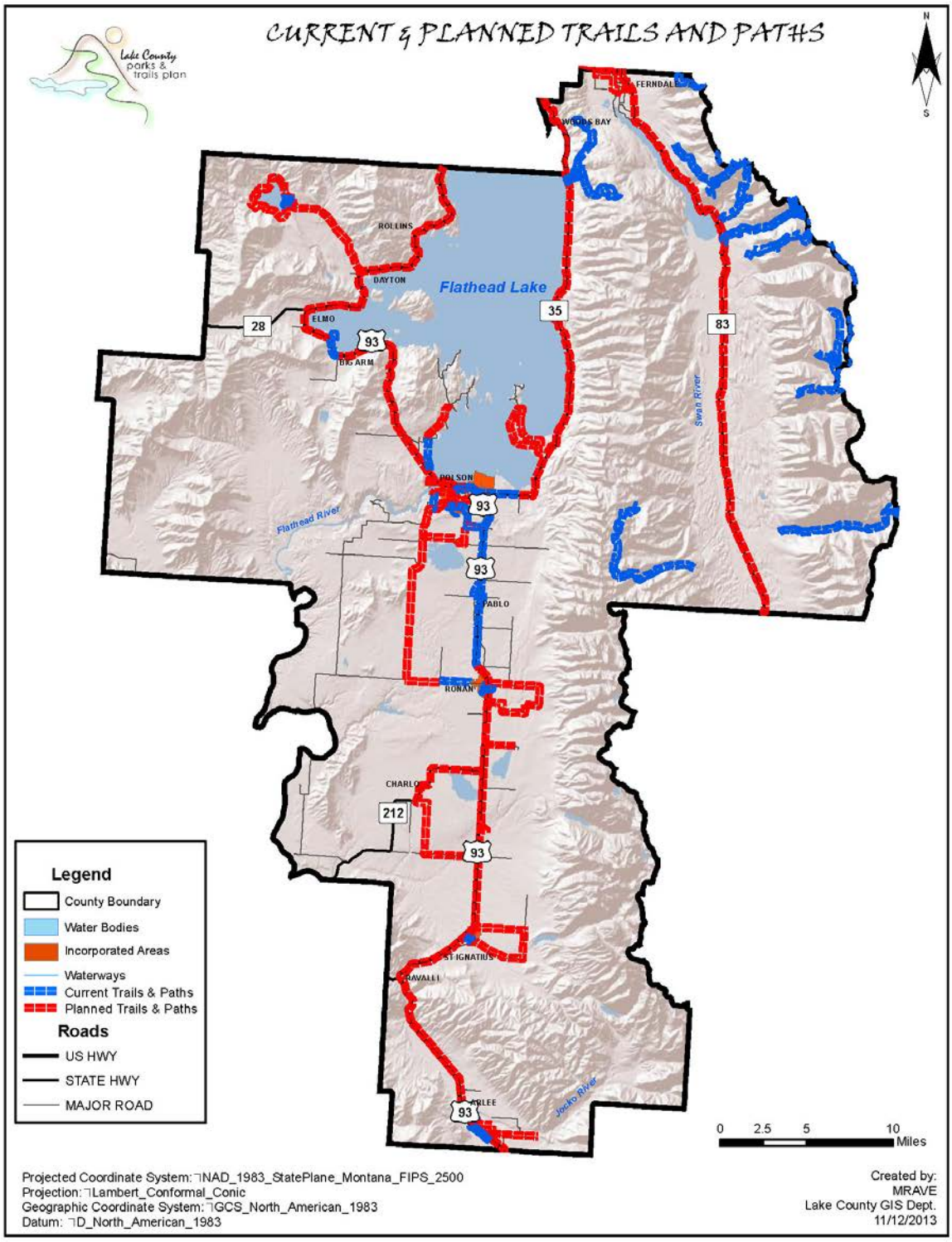

Figure 22. Lake County Planning Area trails map, current and planned

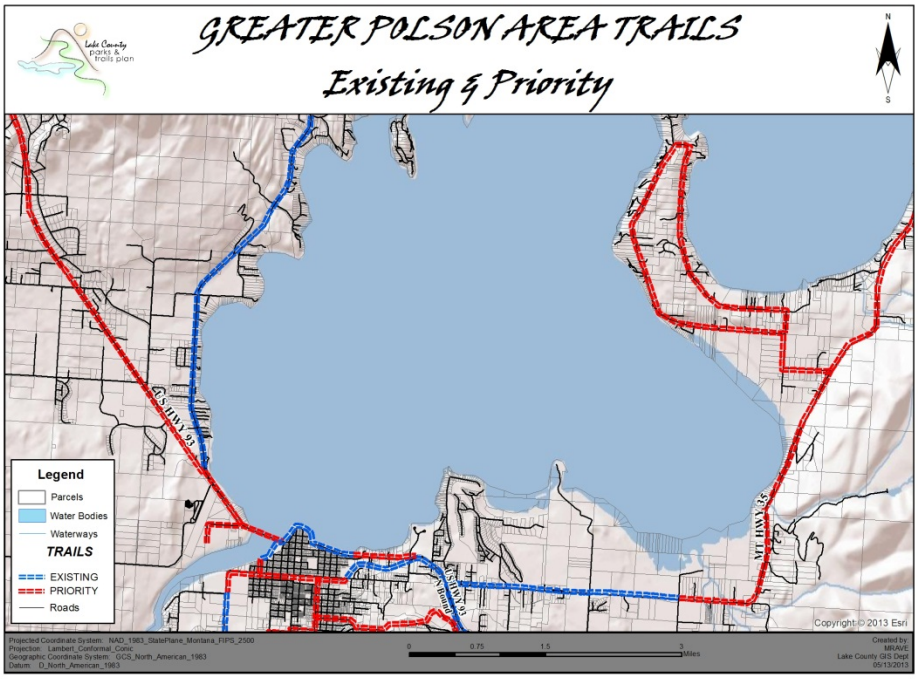

Figure 23. Northern portion of greater Polson area trails, existing and priority

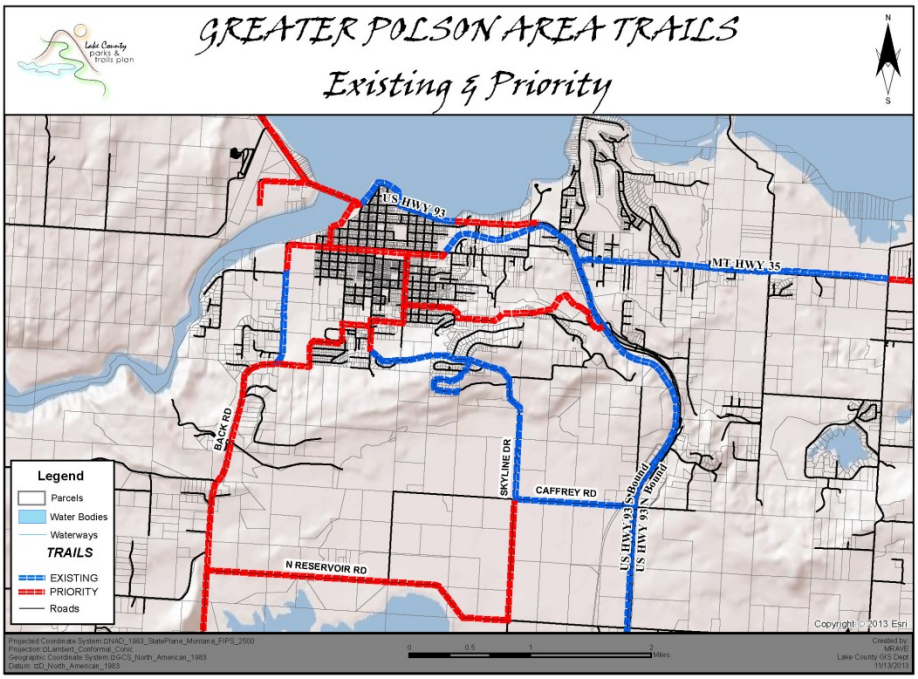

Figure 24. Southern portion of Polson area trails, existing and priority

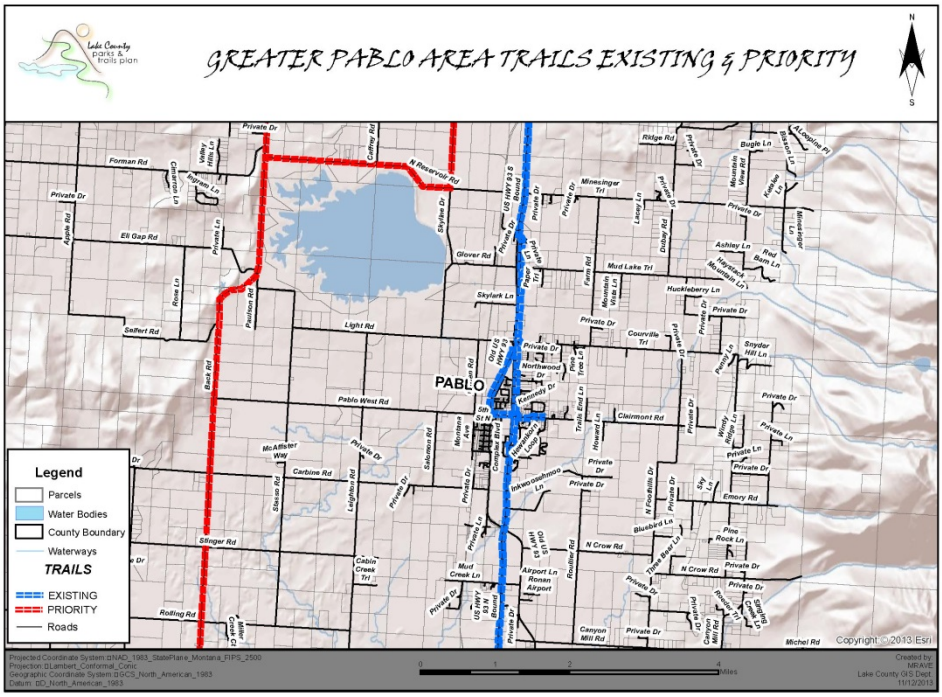

Figure 25. Pablo area trails, existing and priority

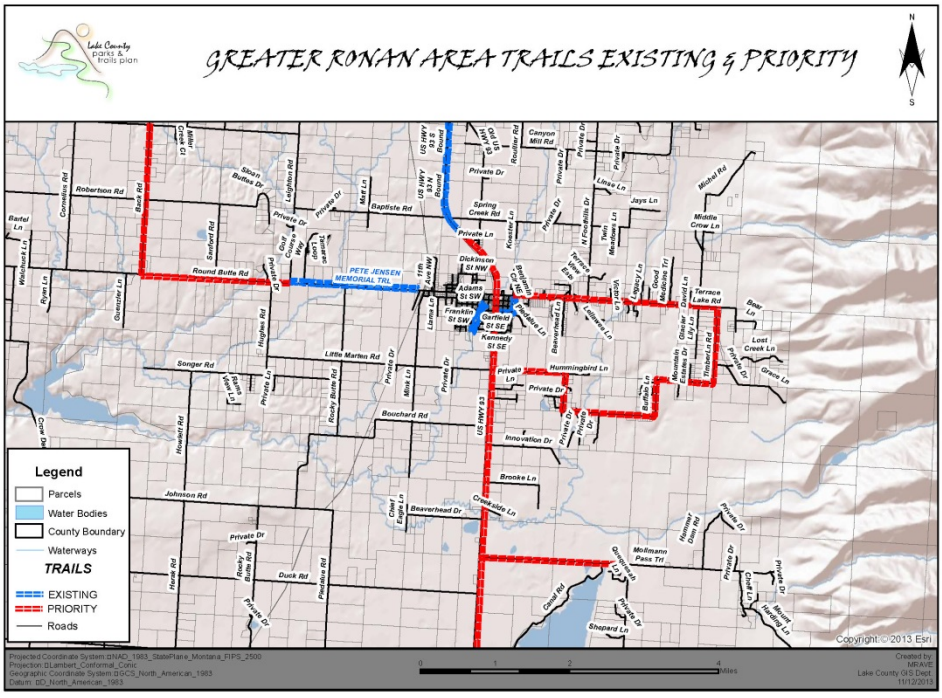

Figure 26. Ronan area trails, existing and priority

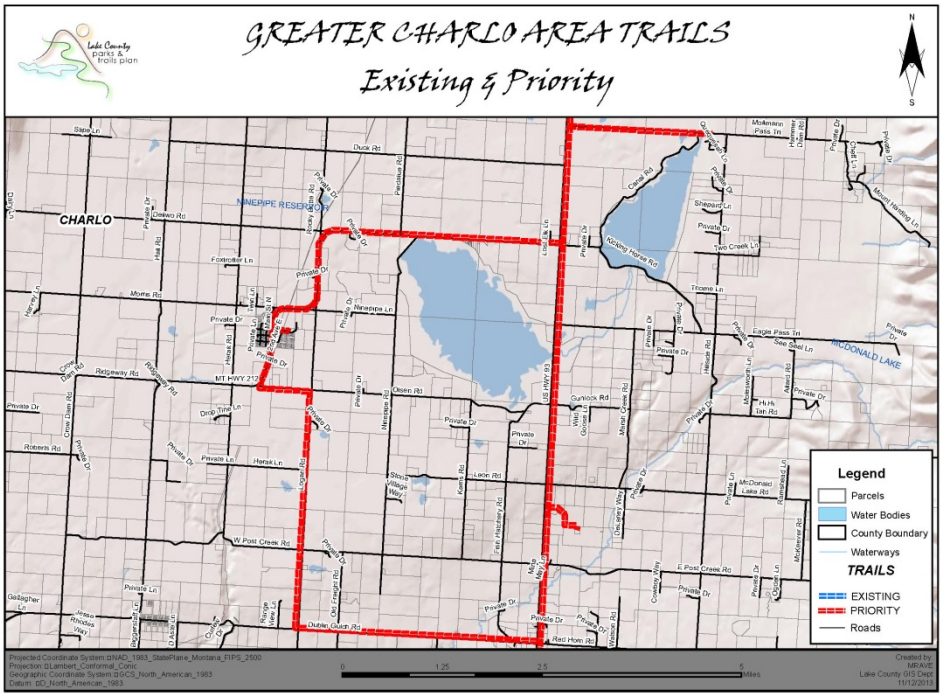

Figure 27. Charlo area trails, existing and priority

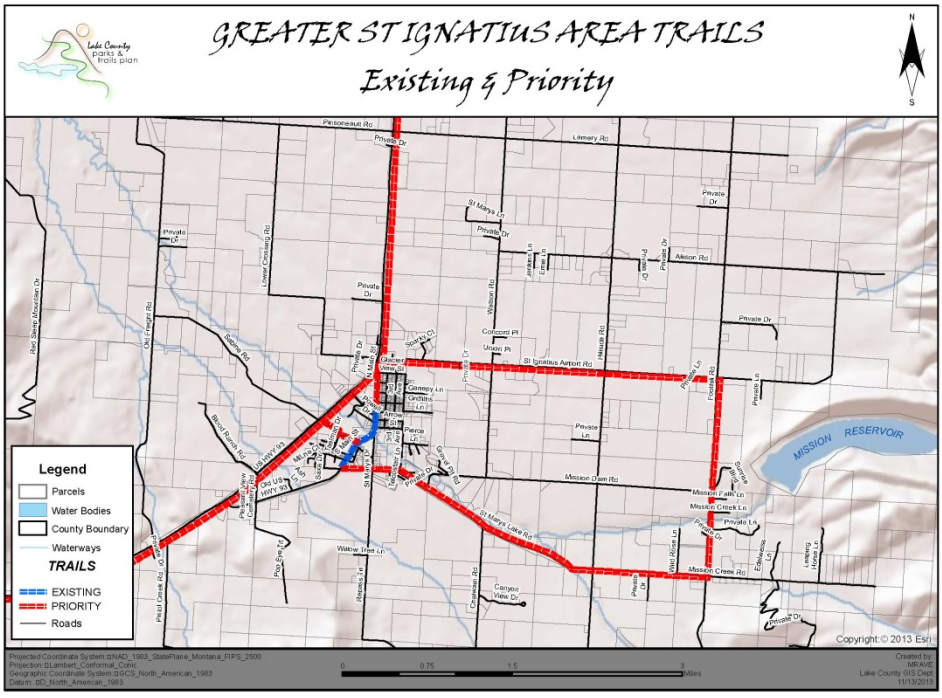

Figure 28. St. Ignatius area trails, existing and priority

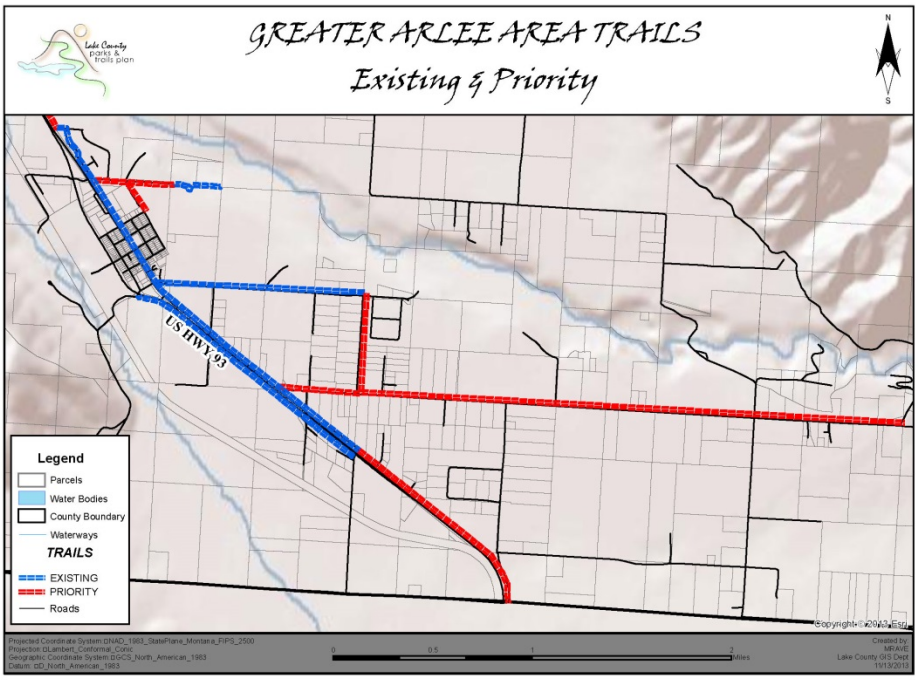

Figure 29. Arlee area trails, existing and priority

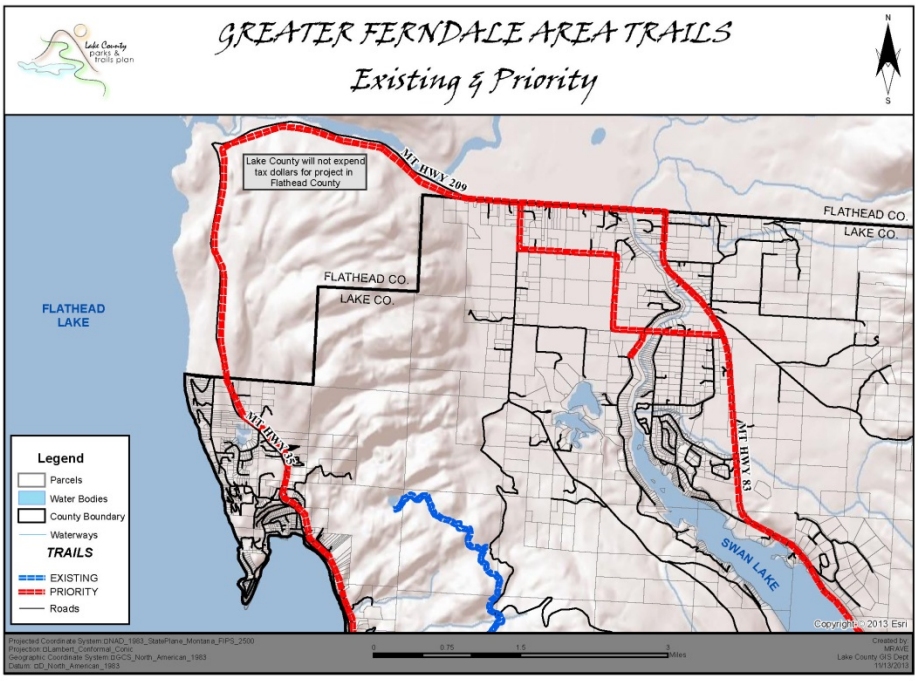

Figure 30. Ferndale and Woods Bay trails, existing and proposed

Trail classification system

The Parks Board will apply a simple classification system to the trails managed by the County. A classification system will assist the Parks Board in management, maintenance, setting priorities and securing funding. The system is organized by surface types and user groups. The categories are broad to allow room for flexibility.

Trail Classifications

Trail Classification	Description
Park Trails	Trails located completely within a park. Focus is on resources within the park. Usually used for walking.
Connector Trails	Multipurpose trails that emphasize safe travel for pedestrians and bicyclists from point to point. Focus is on transportation and recreation. Used for walking and biking.
On-Street Bikeways	Paved section of a road that is separated by painted lines or other means. Focus is on transportation. Used for biking.
All-Terrain Trails	Multi-purpose unpaved trails in a natural setting. Usually for walking, biking or horseback riding but motorized use may be acceptable on some trails.
Ski Trails	Trails maintained in the winter for Cross-County skiing. These trails serve another purpose in the summer.
Equestrian Trails	Trails developed for horseback riding.
Motorized Trails	Trails developed for off-road ATV and motorcycles use

Figure 31. Recommended Trail Classifications

Figure 32. Connector trail from Polson to Ronan

Figure 33. Pedestrian paths in Pablo along Old Highway 93 (L) and Clairmont Road (R) that need to be re-striped as in the example below

Figure 34. Example of a striped on-street bikeway

Goal #3: Capitalize on park and recreation opportunities in Lake County through effective collaboration

Objectives

- Improve communication on recreation projects between city, county, tribal, state and federal authorities
- Foster relationships that support park and trail development, maintenance, health and recreation

Policy Considerations

- Lake County should lead an effort to create an inter-local agreement between city, county, tribal, state and federal recreation mangers to establish a consistent and formal communication process, such as a quarterly roundtable
- Support efforts of others to build regional recreation facilities in Lake County, such as a multipurpose trail around Flathead Lake
- Support local volunteer groups who are trying to develop and maintain recreation programs and facilities in their communities
- Support private endeavors and public-private partnerships that develop recreation infrastructure that is open to the public
- Support efforts of community groups working to host events that will attract participants from outside the county, contributing to the local economy
- Support park and trail projects that have the potential to increase tourist visits
- Support public health efforts to combat cardio vascular disease and obesity with parks and trails
- Limit the impacts of park development on park neighbors

Recommendations

Potential Inter-local Framework

Lake County truly has exceptional recreation opportunities, but they are managed by many different entities. This fact isn't a bad thing, it actually represents an opportunity. The Lake County Parks Board plans to organize an inter-local agreement between the governmental entities that manage recreation facilities in Lake County. Having a formal platform for the movement of ideas and information between the different governments and agencies could result in efficiencies and resource sharing. An inter-local agreement would be non-binding,

with no decision making authority. The purpose would be to foster consistent and open communication and share resources when possible. Entities included would be Lake County, CSKT, US Forest Service, US Fish & Wildlife Service, Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks, Montana Department of Natural Resources & Conservation, Montana Department of Transportation, the City of Polson, the City of Ronan and the Town of St. Ignatius. The public would be welcome and encouraged to attend.

Widen Parks Board Membership

Include representatives of each incorporated community and the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes on the Lake County Parks Board.

Work Directly with Park Neighbors and Park / Trail Users

Prior to park development, improvement or sale, consult with park neighbors and trail users to minimize impacts and conflicts.

Work with neighbors and users to build and maintain parks and trails such as the Jocko Valley Trails group or Back County Horsemen.

Community Outreach through Communications

Develop a “friends of parks” E-newsletter for informing public and generating support. In the current management system, this would be a task for the Parks Board or a volunteer. If a position was ever created for the management of parks, this responsibility could be passed onto staff.

Goal # 4: Effective and efficient management of park properties

Objectives

- Increase capacity to maintain and manage parks and trails
- Focus the duties of the Parks Board
- Improve administrative functions
- Develop guidelines for working with outside groups
- Work cooperatively with area landowners to balance public access while mitigating impacts

Policy Considerations

- The Parks Board should focus on the long-range management of the parks and trails system as opposed to day-to-day management
- A staff member should be assigned to work with the parks board, attending meetings and providing technical assistance (minutes, grant writing, letters, mapping)
- How the Parks Board interacts with outside groups should be easy, flexible, straightforward, yet consistent

Recommendations

Divert Day-to-Day Management to Staff

The Parks Board currently spends a significant amount of time dealing with the day-to-day management of parks. As the County's recreation resources grow, the popularity of the parks and trails as a destination will also increase. More users will make day-to-day management more complex. 'Putting out fires' will drain the Parks Board's resources and time and not allow for proper long-range management. It is recommended that at some point in the future, the county prioritizes funding to create a position whose responsibility will be the day-to-day management of parks and trails. The figure below is a flow chart demonstrating how parks would be managed once a position was created.

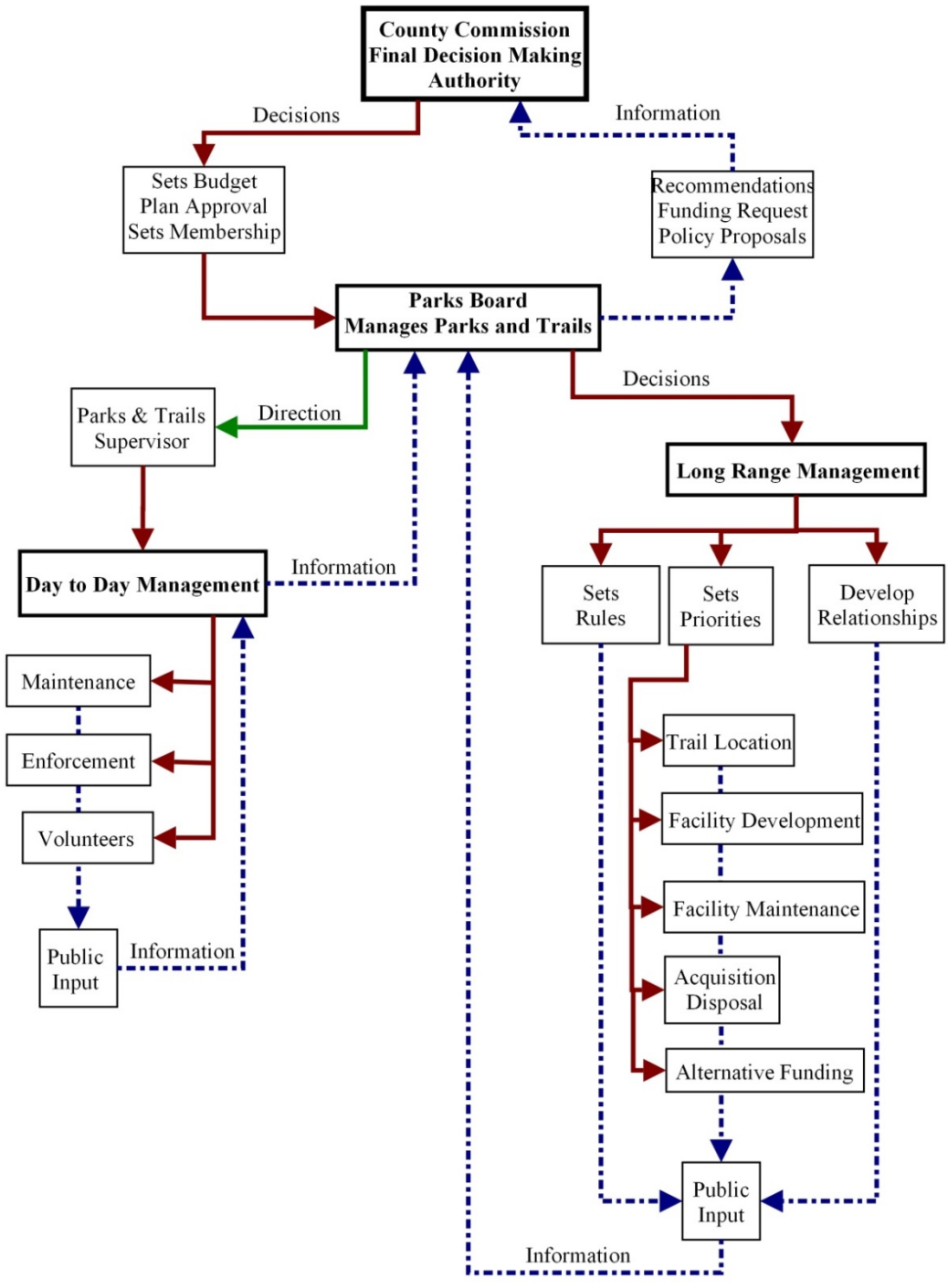

Figure 35. Recommended Parks Board Management

Improve Staff Support of the Parks Board

It is recommended a Lake County staff member assist the Parks Board. An assigned staff member will greatly improve the organization of the board, helping schedule meetings, preparing agendas, record keeping. In addition to administrative support, the staff can provide technical assistance on things like grant writing and mapping.

Operate by Work Plan

The Parks Board should develop and approve a work-plan for each fiscal year. The work plan should be kept simple and allow flexibility, yet help provide direction for the Parks Board and assist them in working towards meeting the objectives of this plan. Under the direction of the Parks Board, staff would help develop a work plan for the Board that focuses on:

- Projects the board will work on over the course of fiscal year
- Schedule, including deadlines for grant and other funding applications

Goal # 5: Parks and trails that are adequately funded

Objectives

- Increase the involvement of volunteer groups and outside sources
- Increase funding from outside sources (not county tax dollars)
- Improve park and trail maintenance

Policy Considerations

- Volunteering should be an important source of labor, ideas, and support of parks and trails
- Funding from outside sources should be vigorously pursed for the purpose of facility improvements and new facilities
- Parks and trails improvements should be included in capital improvement plans
- Funding for parks and trails from county property tax assessments is a legitimate county expenditure, but should not increase unless support from the public can be demonstrated
- Develop memoranda of understanding (MOUs) and leases with non-governmental organizations for operation and maintenance of parks
- The ability to provide for the long term maintenance of new facilities should be considered during their planning stage
- For new subdivisions where state law requires parkland dedications, the county should accept cash-in-lieu payments rather than park land dedications unless the park land would provide exceptional protection of natural resources or recreational opportunities to subdivision residents
- The Parks Board and County Commission should consider selling excess property after exploring other funding options and if:
    1. The money generated from the sale is earmarked specifically for upgrades or expansions to parks or trails, or for new parks or trails
    2. The property being sold has very little or no potential recreational value for the public, or is undeveloped and the expense of developing is not acceptable
    3. If the property being sold has legal and physical lake access, there must be a nearby county owned public lake access serving that immediate area, or the money must be used to create a better county owned public lake access in the immediate area

4. That the decision to sell the property be publicly noticed, adjacent property owners notified, and the public has an opportunity to comment prior to a decision

- Lake County will give an option for purchase to government agencies before putting property on the open market and may require limitations on future use and a requirement to keep the land in fee status
- The Parks Board and County Commission should consider leasing excess property only if it is in the public interest. Examples of what might be considered in the public interest are:
    1. The lease will allow for public access
    2. The money generated from the lease is used for expenditures directly related to parks and trails including maintenance or staffing
    3. If to be leased for private purposes, the property being leased does not receive significant use from the public
    4. The decision to lease the property be publicly noticed, adjacent property owners notified, and the public given an opportunity to comment prior to a decision
    5. The lease provides for maintenance

Recommendations

Volunteer Coordinator

One method to minimize the costs of a park and trails system is to utilize volunteers. The survey demonstrated members of the public may be willing and able to volunteer for their county parks. People love their parks. However, building and maintaining an active volunteer base is a lot of work. The Parks Board might not be able to effectively do this and may require staff assistance. Having a volunteer coordinator to build and manage a volunteer work force would help build a support base for park projects.

Grant Writing

Lake County, if it does not already, should investigate purchasing a subscription to a service that allows grant writers to search a data base of grants and foundation gifts by specific purpose. With the plan adopted, and priorities set, Lake County will become more competitive for funding. This would also benefit other departments besides parks.

Sale of Excess Property

The sale of property should not be taken lightly. Once a property is taken out of the county's inventory it is gone forever. There is lost opportunity when a property is sold, and the monetary benefit is a one-time shot in the arm. Therefore the policy considerations regarding the sale of property listed above should be taken seriously. The optimum situation for selling parks would be when the money is used to develop a new park in an area of the county that is underserved. Using the above policy statements as a guide, the Lake County Parks Board plans to develop a list of properties for potential sale in 2014. The sale, lease or exchange of dedicated park lands must follow the requirements of 7-16-2324, MCA.

Leasing of Excess Property

The benefit of leasing property over selling property is that the property stays in the county inventory and there is a consistent revenue stream for the life of the lease. Because there is not as much lost opportunity cost with leasing, it would be more acceptable to use the money for a maintenance budget, or funding a staffer. Prime examples of leasing opportunities include sites where adjacent property owners have encroached onto the county property, or private access to a lake for off-lake property owners where public access may be complicated, or even public-private partnerships where a private funder develops facilities on a public property much like how state school trust land leases work.

Friends of Parks Group

County Governments can't advocate and raise money for parks in the way a non-profit can. The Parks Board should explore building relationships with existing groups, or work with volunteers to create a new group, that can raise money and advocate for the park and trail system in Lake County.

Chapter Three: Implementation Strategy

Introduction

The vision, goals, objectives, and policies found in this plan are nothing but words if action is not taken. This chapter should not be overlooked: It is the guide on how to achieve the goals of the community.

The life of this Plan is intended to be 20 to 25 years. Use this timeframe as a guideline during implementation. The life of the plan can be extended if it is updated over time.

The Big Picture

In the big picture, the implementation of this plan will help lead to the development of a functioning and enjoyable parks and trails system for Lake County residents and visitors. The implementation of this plan could generally fall into three phases. In Phase I, the Parks Board should focus on addressing immediate needs. This may mean catching up with maintenance, improving existing facilities, developing a few new sites, and instituting work plans.

The second phase could be considered building capacity. As the population of Lake County and western Montana grows, the recreational facilities in Lake County will see increased use. At some point in the future, Lake County will need to develop greater ability to manage the facilities and people. This includes re-focusing the Parks Board's priorities away from day-to-day management, hiring staff, and increasing or securing new funding sources.

Once capacity is built, the third phase will be growing and maintaining the system. In the long term, new parks and trail opportunities will be identified and developed, corresponding with the community's recreational demands.

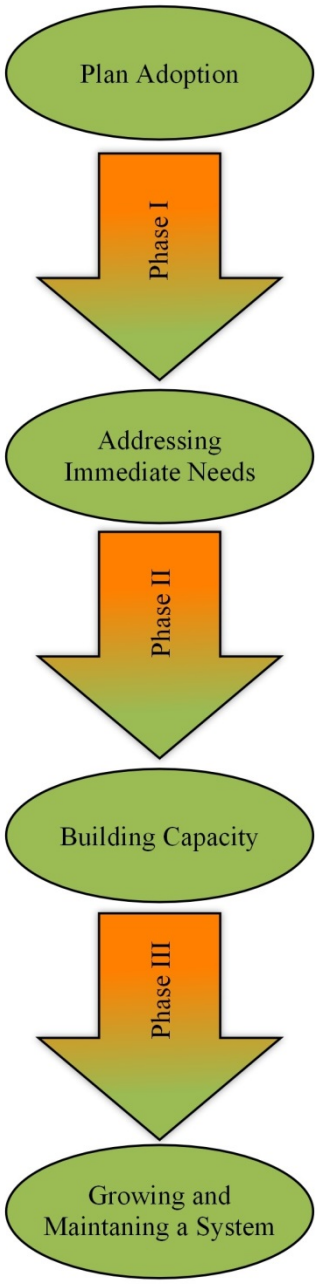

Figure 36. The three general phases of plan implementation and success.

Implementation

Timing

The timing of implementation actions are organized in the following manner:

- **Immediate**: These tasks are implemented or completed generally within 1 to 2 years from the adoption of the plan
- **Mid-Term**: These tasks are implemented or completed generally within 2 to 10 years from the adoption of the plan
- **Long-Term**: These tasks are implemented or completed generally 10 years or longer after adoption of the plan
- **Life of the Plan**: These tasks occur continually

Responsibility

For a plan to be successful, it has to be implemented. It is the charge of the Parks Board to carry the plan forward, but with any board made up primarily of volunteers, implementation often fades to the background as board members change and/or the focus of the group changes. To prevent this plan from collecting dust on a shelf, a Lake County staff member should serve as the facilitator of the implementation process. Every year, staff should review this implementation strategy and work with the Parks Board to create a work plan that identifies the tasks the Board will focus on for that year.

How this Works

The table below has six columns. The first column corresponds to a recommendation in Chapter Two. The second column is a page number that refers the user back to the page where the recommendation is made to see its full context. Column three is the Timeline, or in other words, when the recommendation should be implemented. The forth column is who is responsible for accomplishing the task. The fifth column is a brief description of the action needed to be taken. The last column is a way to measure success of the task. The planning staff should review this table with the Parks Board every year to measure progress and identify tasks to accomplish.

Implementation Table

Implementation Strategy					
Recommendation	**Page #**	**Timeline**	**Who is Responsible**	**Action**	**Measurement of Success**
Park Priority List	9	Life of Plan	Parks Board	Make priorities, adjust over time, implement projects	Parks dropped off the list because upgrades have been made and parks added as new opportunities arise
Park Classifications	25	Immediate	Parks Board	Classify parkland	All the existing and potential parks have been classified according to the plan
Park Standards	25	Immediate	Parks Board	Classify parkland	Management standards have been applied
Trail Priority List	29	Life of Plan	Parks Board	Make priorities, adjust over time, implement projects	Trails dropped off the list because they have been built, other trails added as opportunities arise
Trail Classifications	35	Immediate	Parks Board	Classify all trails	All the existing trails have been classified, classifications are applied to future trails
Potential Inter-local Agreement	37	Short Term	Parks Board and Commission	Develop the framework for an interlocal	If the interlocal agreement has been initiated and meetings are taking place
Widen Parks Board Membership	38	Short Term	Parks Board and Commission	Amend Resolution No. 96-50, appoint members	The parks board membership represents a wider range of interests
Work Directly with Park Neighbors & Trail Users	38	Life of Plan	Parks Board and staff	Contact neighbors regarding park projects	A policy is in place on how and when to contact neighbors. Interactions with neighbors is preemptive and positive
Community Outreach through Communications	38	Life of Plan	Parks Board and staff	Regularly write and distribute an E-newsletter	If the newsletter is being sent or not, and how many people or organizations receive the letter.

Recommendation	Page #	Timeline	Who is Responsible	Action	Measurement of Success
Divert Day-To-Day Management To Staff	39	Mid term	Parks Board	An employee is assigned to park maintenance, day-to-day affairs	Parks Board receives updates from staff, focuses on policy and long-range planning and management
Improve Staff Support of Parks Board	41	Immediate	Parks Board and Commission	A county staff member is assigned to the Parks Board	Parks Board organization, record keeping and dissemination of info. to the public improves
Operate by Work Plan	41	Immediate	Parks Board and Planning Department	A work plan is developed for the Parks Board at the beginning of each fiscal year	Priorities for the year are clear. Recommendations are being implemented. Targeting of grants and other funds improve.
Volunteer Coordinator	43	Mid Term	Parks Board	Recruit and organize volunteers to build and maintain facilities	A volunteer or employee is coordinating the efforts of volunteers
Grant Writing	43	Life of Plan	Parks Board and Commission	Purchase a subscription to a searchable grant data base	Grant applications are focused on specific needs where the county is competitive. More applications made. More grants secured.
Sale of Excess Property		Life of Plan	Parks Board and Commission	Park properties are sold according to policies in the plan and state law	Facilities are built or improved upon due to the sale of property
Leasing of Excess Property	44	Life of Plan	Parks Board and Commission	Park properties are leased according to policies in the plan and state law	Facilities are built or improved upon due to the leasing of property
Friends of Parks & Trails Group	44	Mid terms	Parks Board	Solicit support from park & trail advocates	Group is created and works on projects

Implementation Recommendations

Often times, a plan will make some specific and key recommendation of projects to implement in the first few years following plan adoption. These key recommendations focus on more readily attainable goals, but also identify one or two projects that are high profile, marque projects with a good chance of success. Implementing a significant project that is high profile is important for three reasons:

1. To build momentum for the plan's support and success
2. To demonstrate to key stakeholders and the public the importance of the plan's implementation and the value of the plan's recommendations
3. To create a culture of accomplishment within the board implementing the plan

Readily Attainable Goals

Any of the recommendations in the Implementation Strategy whose timing is "Immediate" should be considered readily attainable. It is recommended the Park Board, with some staff support, implement these items immediately. Another readily achievable project would be to re-stripe the pedestrian pathways in Pablo shown in figure 33 on page 36.

Funding Possibilities

In addition to volunteer labor and contributions from public and private sources, the following is a list of funding options for parks and trails projects.

- Parkland Dedication and Cash in-Lieu

  The Lake County Subdivision Regulations and Section 76-3-621, MCA require major subdivisions (generally subdivisions of 5 or more lots) creating residential lots to provide a dedication of parkland or cash in-lieu of parkland. This is discussed in Chapter Four.

- User Fees

  The county can assess user fees for the use of parks. These funds can be returned to the general fund for parks and trails and used in any way the Parks Board sees fit. However, this requires staff resources and policing to be effective.

- Sale or Lease of Property

  Using the policy recommendations in Chapter Two as a guide, the Parks Board plans to develop a list of properties for potential lease or sale in 2014 - 2015. The sale, lease or exchange of dedicated park lands must follow the requirements of 7-16-2324, MCA.

- Impact Fees

  Section 7-7-1601, MCA authorizes a county to assess a one-time fee for new development to help address the impacts of new growth; this includes an impact fee for parks.

- Bonds

  The county can sell either general obligation or revenue bonds to fund parks and trails. G.O. bonds require voter approval. Revenue bonds do not, but they require a revenue source such as user fees from the bonded facility to pay back the bond.

- Special Improvement District

  Section 7-12-4101, MCA allows the creation of a special improvement district, which is an assessment on property taxes, for the acquisition or maintenance of parks within that district.

- Park Maintenance District

  Section 7-16-2411 of the MCA allows the creation of a parks maintenance district, which allows for a mill levy on property taxes to fund facilities and maintenance of parks within that district.

- Levy

  Section 7-16-2102, MCA authorizes a board of county commissioners to assess an annual levy or a tax for the purpose, "… of maintaining, operating, and equipping parks, cultural facilities, and any county-owned civic center, youth center, recreation center, recreational complex, or any combination of purposes, parks, and facilities."

Federal, Tribal and State Funding

There are a number of programs administered by federal and state agencies that can be used to develop parks and recreation facilities. Below is a list of some well-known programs used to fund recreation projects.

- Community Transportation Enhancement Program (CTEP)
- Statewide Land and Water Conservation Fund
- FWP Recreational Trails Program
- Federal-aid Highway Congestion Mitigation & Air Quality Improvement Program (CMAQ)
- DNRC cooperative funding efforts with tribes

Private Funding

The Parks Board can actively pursue funding from private sources. The limitations on what the funding can be used for would depend upon the source.

- Home Owner Associations:

  When parks are dedicated to the public in a subdivision, the maintenance of that park can be the responsibility of a HOA. The HOA can independently maintain the park, or forward the money to the Parks Board for maintenance.

- Fundraising

  The Parks Board can solicit money from individuals or groups. This typically is spearheaded by a non-profit organization.

- Private Donations

  Donations of cash, land, labor and equipment can be accepted by the Parks Board.

- Foundations

  There are many foundations whose charitable giving includes monies for the development of recreation facilities.

Chapter Four: Planning Area, Setting and Plan Administration

Planning Area and Setting

At over 1,654 square miles, Lake County stretches from the Jocko Valley northward through the Mission Valley, encompassing the southern half of Flathead Lake and the northern Swan Valley. The county is a patchwork of private, public and tribal lands in addition to three incorporated cities. Lake County's planning jurisdiction is comprised of private lands outside of the incorporated cities that are not tribal.

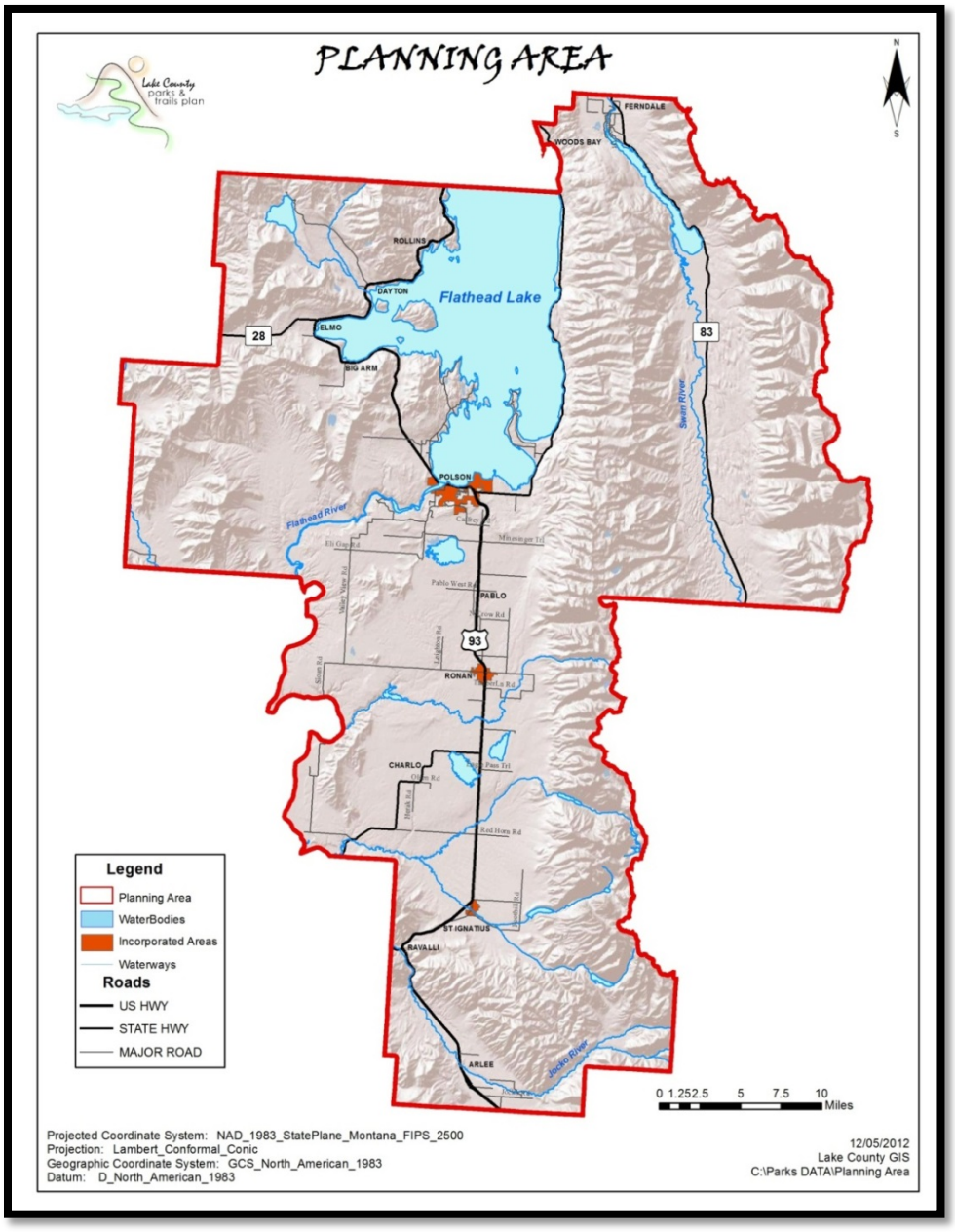

Figure 37. Lake County Parks and Trails Plan Planning Area

Geography and Physical Characteristics

Lake County is fortunate to have world class natural amenities within its borders. Notable features are:

- Flathead Lake: One of the largest and cleanest freshwater lakes on the planet. People use the lake for fishing, boating, watersports, wildlife viewing, sailing, swimming and summer homes. Having a natural amenity of this quality is an incredible asset to Lake County, improving quality of life and providing a huge economic boost.
- Mission Mountains: Jettisoning from the east side of the Mission Valley, the peaks tower nearly 7,000 vertical feet off the valley floor. The range was the first tribally designated wilderness area in the country.
- Ninepipes Wildlife Management Area: The glacial potholes and irrigation reservoirs in the Mission Valley provide habitat for wildfowl populations, attracting hunters and bird watchers from around the region.
- The Swan Valley: East of the Mission Mountains, the Swan Valley is known for its wildlands and clean waters.
- Flathead River: The rapids below Flathead Lake are Class III+ whitewater, attracting rafting enthusiasts from throughout the region. The lower Flathead is a popular summer floating and fishing river with undeveloped vistas.
- The National Bison Range Complex: Consisting of the 18,500-acre Bison Range as well as the Ninepipe and Pablo Wildlife Refuges and Waterfowl Production Areas, these lands and waters provide exceptional and accessible opportunities to view American bison, elk, bighorn sheep and black bear, as well as over 200 species of birds.

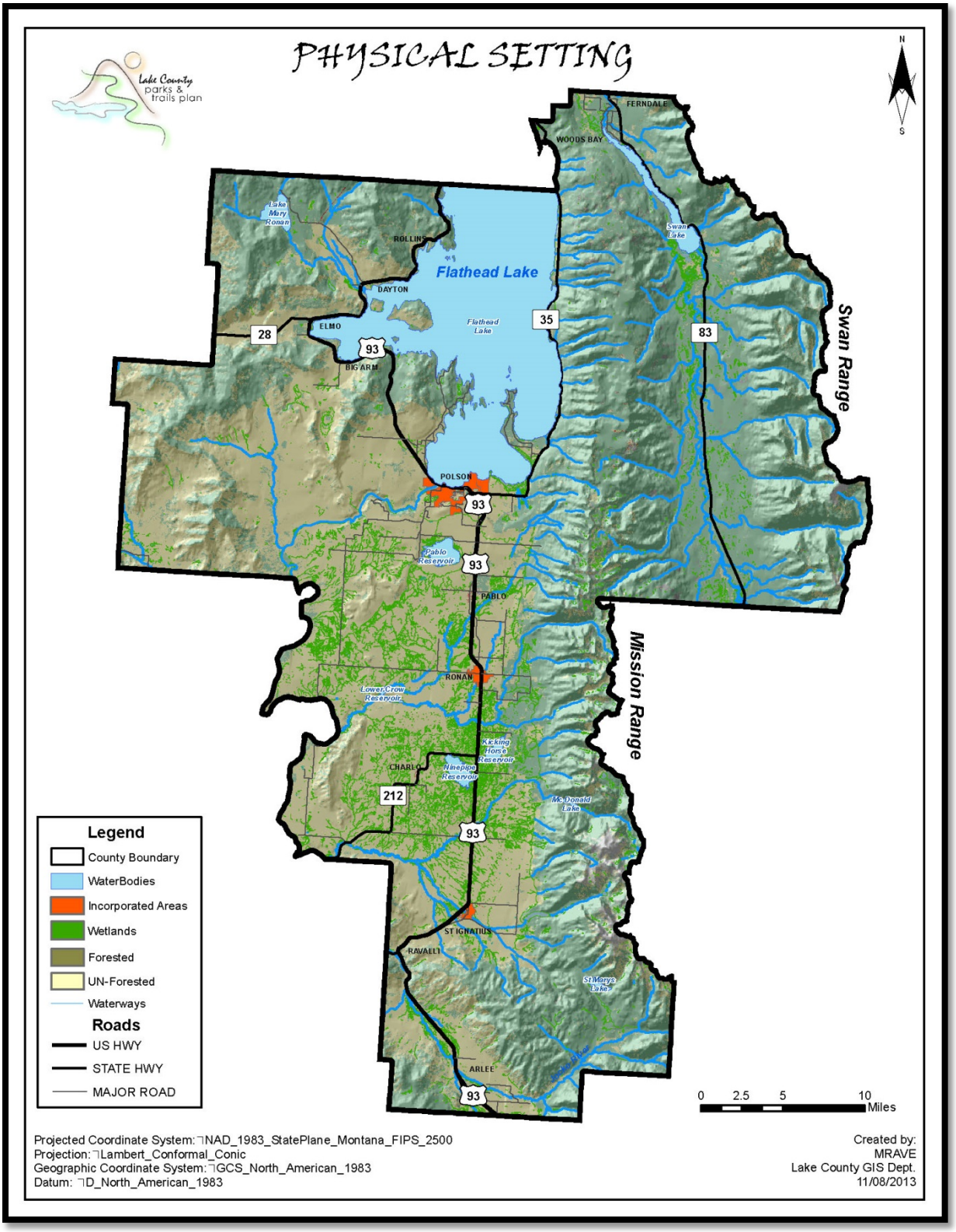

Figure 38. Map of the physical settings in Lake County

Development Patterns

Lake County's population of roughly 29,000 residents is congregated primarily in the Mission Valley along the Highway 93 corridor. In 2012 the county had a population density of fewer than 20 people per square mile. About 75% of Lake County's population lives in unincorporated areas. In 2005 the county adopted a density zoning that provides a level of predictability for where growth will occur in the future. Based on the rules in effect today, this population distribution pattern is likely to continue.

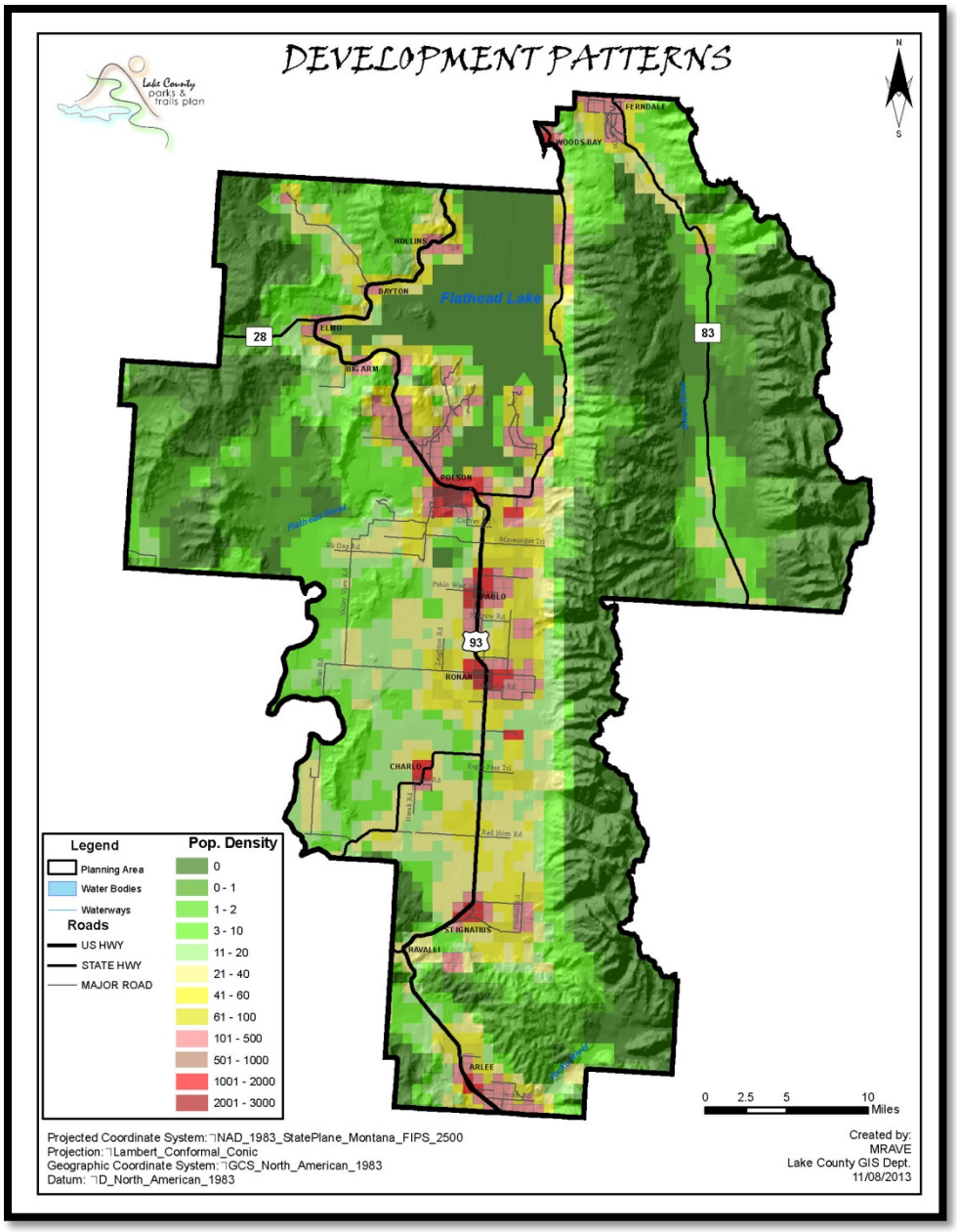

Figure 39. Map of the population density in Lake County

Plan Administration

Lake County Board of Parks Commissioners

The Lake County Board of Parks Commissioners (the Parks Board) consists of the Lake County Commissioners and appointed volunteers. The board's role is to make recommendations to the County Commissioners on issues related to parks and trails owned by Lake County. The Lake County Parks Board served as the steering committee for the development of this planning document and will be its chief implementation agent.

The Mission Statement of the Lake County Parks Board is:

> *To provide for an enjoyable recreational experience for present and future generations by maintaining park properties with adequate public access and with sensitivity to impacts on adjoining properties and the environment.*
>
> *In order to achieve this mission the Board will strive to:*
>
> 1. *Listen to the citizens of our county and involve them in decisions affecting the future of their parks and recreation system;*
> 2. *Establish a relationship with public schools, government agencies, community based organizations, and private businesses through joint planning, shared use of facilities, and supportive programing; and*
> 3. *Develop an evaluation instrument to be used in determining the best use of properties.*

Relationship to Other Adopted Planning Documents

Growth Policy

The Lake County Parks and Trails Plan is an addendum to the Lake County Growth Policy. Under the umbrella of a Growth Policy, Lake County can develop plans specific to certain areas such as transportation, housing or parks. These specific plans provide a greater level of detail and direction for individual topics than the more general Growth Policy.

Chapter 7 of the Growth Policy provides a foundation for the development of the Lake County Parks and Trails Plan. Section I. of Chapter 7 lists tools that can be implemented to meet the objectives and reach the goals stated throughout the document. One of these tools is listed as recreation planning. On page 115 of Chapter 7 is a specific section on Recreation Planning. This section specifically calls for a comprehensive recreation plan to:

> *"Assess current conditions, identify opportunities and limitations, and pursue solutions that give the public greater access opportunities."*

In addition to the quote above, the Growth Policy specifically directs the comprehensive plan to include non-motorized trails linking businesses, schools, neighborhoods and recreational resources into a planning document.

Subdivision Regulations

When a division of land is proposed, Lake County reviews the proposal with standards set in the Lake County Subdivision Regulations to ensure impacts to public health, safety and the general welfare are sufficiently mitigated. The State of Montana has enabled local governments to consider how land divisions will impact parks, and in certain instances the governing bodies can require the dedication of parkland or an equal value of money in lieu of parkland. This is referred to as a parkland dedication.

Section X.A.A. of the Lake County Subdivision Regulations is the section that addresses parkland dedication. The regulations cover the following topics:

- How much of a dedication is required
- The type of subdivision that is required to dedicate parkland based on the size of the lots and in some cases the location
- Standards for waiving the parkland dedication
- Some general guidance on the type and location of parkland to be dedicated and who is involved in making those decisions
- Other issues involving maintenance and administration of the parkland dedication

The intersection between the Lake County Subdivision Regulations and this plan is found in Section X.A.A. number 4 of the subdivision regulations. It states:

> *"The governing body, in consultation with the subdivider and the planning board or park board that has jurisdiction, may determine suitable locations for parks and playgrounds and, giving due weight and consideration to the expressed preference of the subdivider, may determine whether the park dedication must be a land donation, cash donation, or a combination of both. When a combination of land donation and cash donation is required, the cash donation may not exceed the proportional amount not covered by the land donation. The land dedicated for park use may be inside or outside the boundaries of the proposed subdivision."*

This section of the regulations gives authority to the Lake County Park's Board to work with subdividers to determine the type and location of parks and how cash in lieu of parkland is to be spent. Lake County intends to require cash-in-lieu payments rather than parkland dedications unless the parkland dedication would provide exceptional protection of natural resources or recreational opportunities to subdivision residents.

Transportation Planning

When planning transportation projects, the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) tries to minimize and mitigate impacts to park and recreational lands, wildlife and waterfowl refuges and historic sites [commonly referred to as 4(f) properties]. MDT also considers plans adopted by local governments. The trails component of this plan will be considered by MDT in planning projects on state roads and highways.

Amendment Procedures

From time to time this plan will need to be amended or updated. Suggested amendments may be raised by the County Commissioners, Lake County Planning Department, the Parks Board or the public.

The Lake County Parks Board is the advisory board that makes recommendations to the County Commissioners on parks and trails. The Parks Board is the starting point for any amendments. The Parks Board, during a public meeting, will hear any amendment considerations and pass recommendations onto the Lake County Planning Board. The Lake County Planning Board also holds a public hearing on any amendments, and passes the recommendations along to the County Commissioners. The County Commissioners then adopt a resolution to adopt, adopt with revisions or reject the amendments.

Chapter Five: Community Profile

Demographics

The People of Lake County

Having an understanding of the demographic makeup of a community is an important element of any planning process. Different age groups, races or income levels may have different views of recreation, and therefore may have different preferences for parks and trails. It is also relevant to have some comparisons to understand what the demographics mean in context. In this plan, comparisons between Lake County and the State of Montana are generally provided in addition to some comparisons to greater United States.

Demographic data were acquired from the 2010 US Census and the 2011 American Community Survey.

Population

Lake County, By the Numbers: Demographics

- Lake County Population in 2010: 28,746
  - Male: 14,223
  - Female: 14,523
- Growth Rates: 2000 to 2010
  - Lake County: 7.5%
  - Montana: 7.9%
  - U.S.: 8.0%
- Population Centers:
  - Polson: 4,488
  - Ronan: 1,871
  - Saint Ignatius: 842

The population in Lake County as of the 2010 US Census was 28,746. The county has been growing, albeit at a slightly slower rate than the rest of the state or the country as a whole.

Lake County's Growth Policy, adopted in 2003, projected growth of about 1.8% annually for the past decade. This did not materialize, likely because of the economic downturn.

The majority (75%) of Lake County residents live in unincorporated areas. There are three incorporated communities in Lake County: Polson, Ronan and Saint Ignatius. Incorporated communities have a separate government making decisions about their own parks and trails. However, residents of these vote in county elections and use county parks.

Age

The age distribution in the county may also be a factor in how parks get used, and provide insight into what facilities may be needed. For example, Lake County's population of ages 20 to 34 is about 4,500 people. Organized sports programs that tend to be popular in this age bracket may not be as successful in Lake County as they would be in a college town that has a larger and younger population. In Lake County, the median age is higher than in the state and the counrty as a whole.

Lake County, By the Numbers:

Median Age

- Median Age:
  - Lake County: 41.3
  - Montana: 39.7
  - U.S.: 36.9

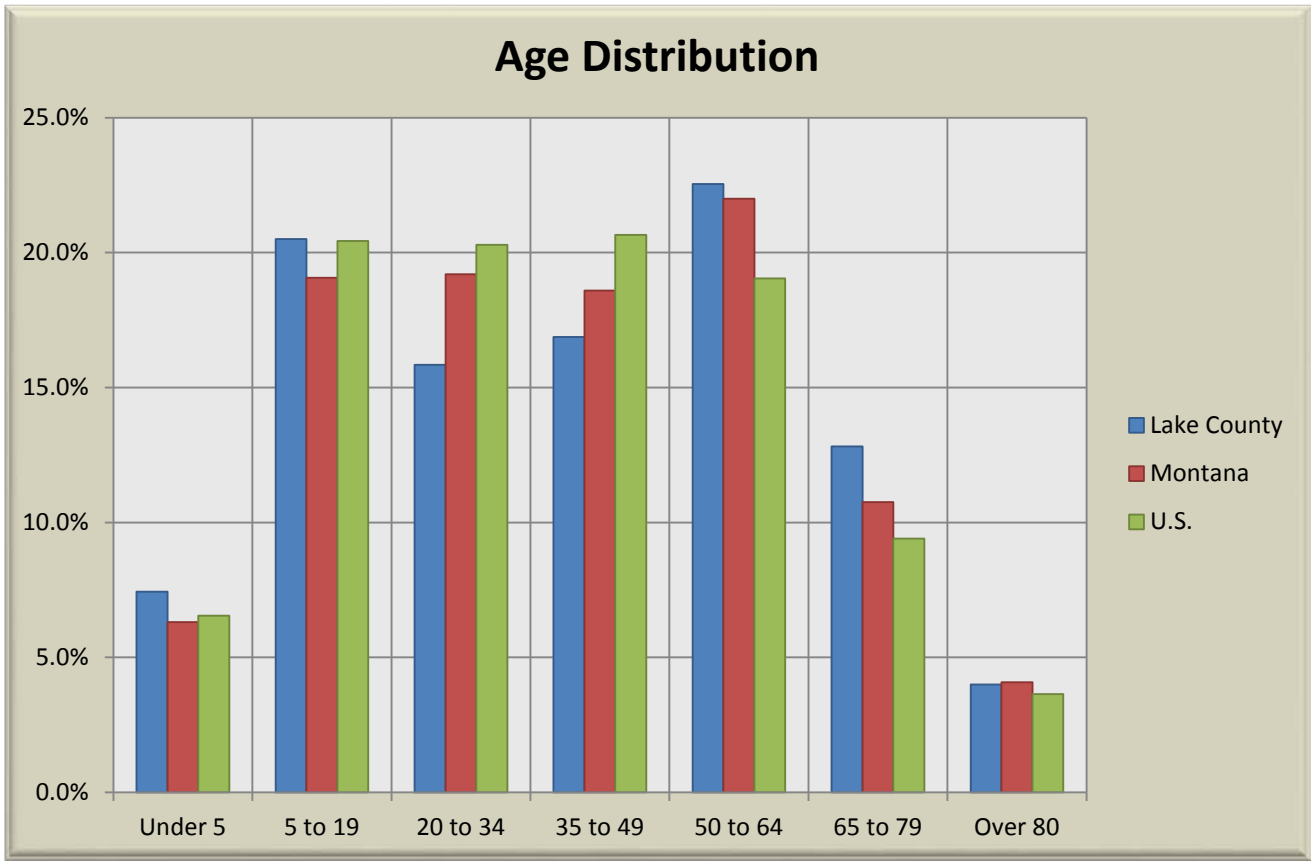

Figure 40 The distribution of age in Lake County in comparison to Montana and the U.S.

Race

Lake County is racially diverse for the State of Montana and the U.S. as a whole. The boundaries of the County are similar to the boundaries of the Flathead Indian Reservation. Native Americans, many of whom are members of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, are the largest minority in the county. Different racial groups, like different age groups, may also use parks and trails differently and this diversity is important to acknowledge.

Lake County, By the Numbers: Diversity

- Diversity
  - White: 70%
  - Native American: 22%
  - Two Races: 7%
  - Other: 1%

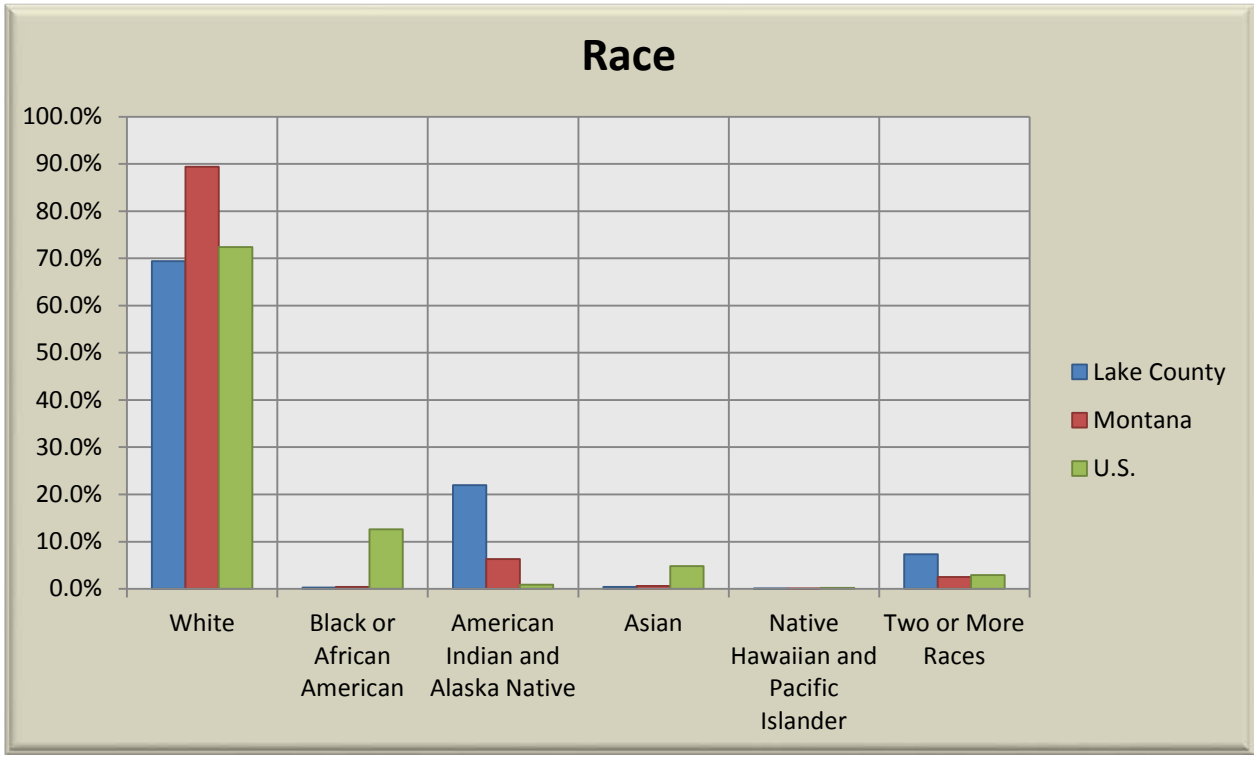

Figure 41. A Comparison of Race in Lake County to Montana and the U.S.

People with Disabilities

People with disabilities may require special facilities to use some parks. Lake County has a slightly higher percent of the population with disabilities than the state or the country, but not by an alarming amount. What is notably different are the age groups that have disabilities: Higher percentages of younger populations have disabilities in Lake County than the state or the country. Kids love to play, and having some facilities for kids with disabilities may be important to serve this population.

Lake County, By the Numbers: Disabilities

- Percent of the Population with Disabilities
  - Lake County: 13.8%
  - Montana: 13.1%
  - U.S.: 12%

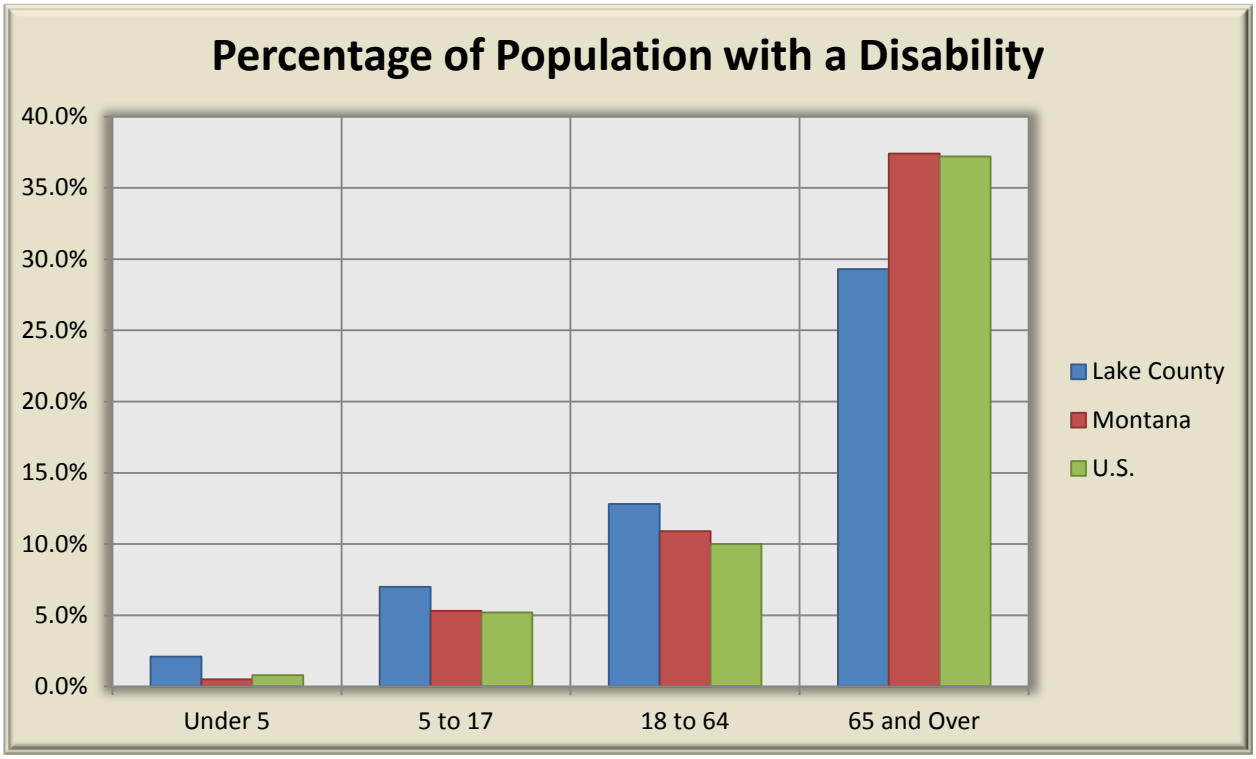

Figure 42 Percentage of people in specific age classes with disabilities in Lake County, Montana and the Country.

The Economy of Lake County

Income

As with the basic demographic information, an understanding of Lake County's income distribution may help with parks planning. Different economic groups may use parks, trails and recreational facilities in different ways. In addition, understanding income levels in the county will provide some insight into methods of available funding.

A quick glance at data available from the U.S. Department of Commerce reveals that Lake County has below average income levels. Lake County lags behind the State of Montana in per capita income (if you take the total income and divide it by the total number of people) and in median household income.

When analyzing the distribution of income, it becomes apparent that Lake County has a higher percentage of people living below the poverty line and a smaller upper class than the state and the country as a whole.

- The Growth Policy identified the following issues, which still hold true:
    - Low personal income
    - High unemployment
    - High percentage of seasonal employees
    - High percentage of people below the poverty line

Lake County, By the Numbers: Income and Poverty

- Per Capita Income:
    - Lake County: $20,164
    - Montana: $23,836
    - U.S.: $27,334
- Median Household Income:
    - Lake County: $37,274
    - Montana: $43,872
    - U.S.: $51,914
- Families Below the Poverty Line
    - Lake County: 15.4%
    - Montana: 9.7%
    - U.S.: 10.1%

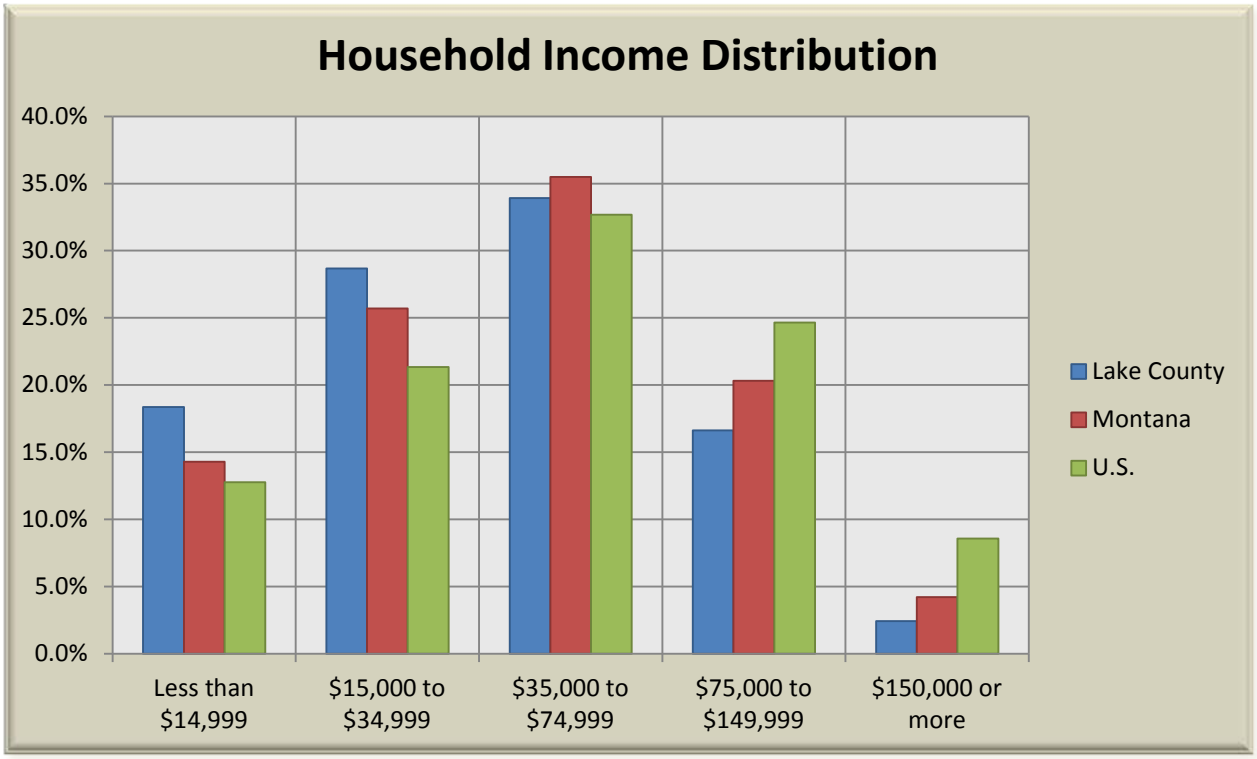

Figure 43 Household income distribution in Lake County, Montana and the Country

Lake County's economic challenges are important to acknowledge in this planning process. For example, because Lake County has a high percentage of families below the poverty line and with low household incomes, establishing fees at parks may exclude segments of the population from using those facilities. In addition, segments of the population with lower income levels may not have the ability to drive long distances to use parks, and may instead choose only to use parks close to home.

Lake County, By the Numbers: Employment

- Percent of population in the labor force
  - Lake County: 59.4%
  - Montana: 65.3%
  - U.S.: 65%

Employment

What people do for work, and when they do it, may provide some insight into how people will use parks other recreational facilities in Lake County. Some context on how Lake County compares to the state and the rest of the country may prove useful.

The figure below shows U.S. Department of Commerce data detailing the number of people employed per industry in Lake County

in 2010. This data communicates how people in Lake County are employed. The largest employment sectors are in education, health care and social assistance.

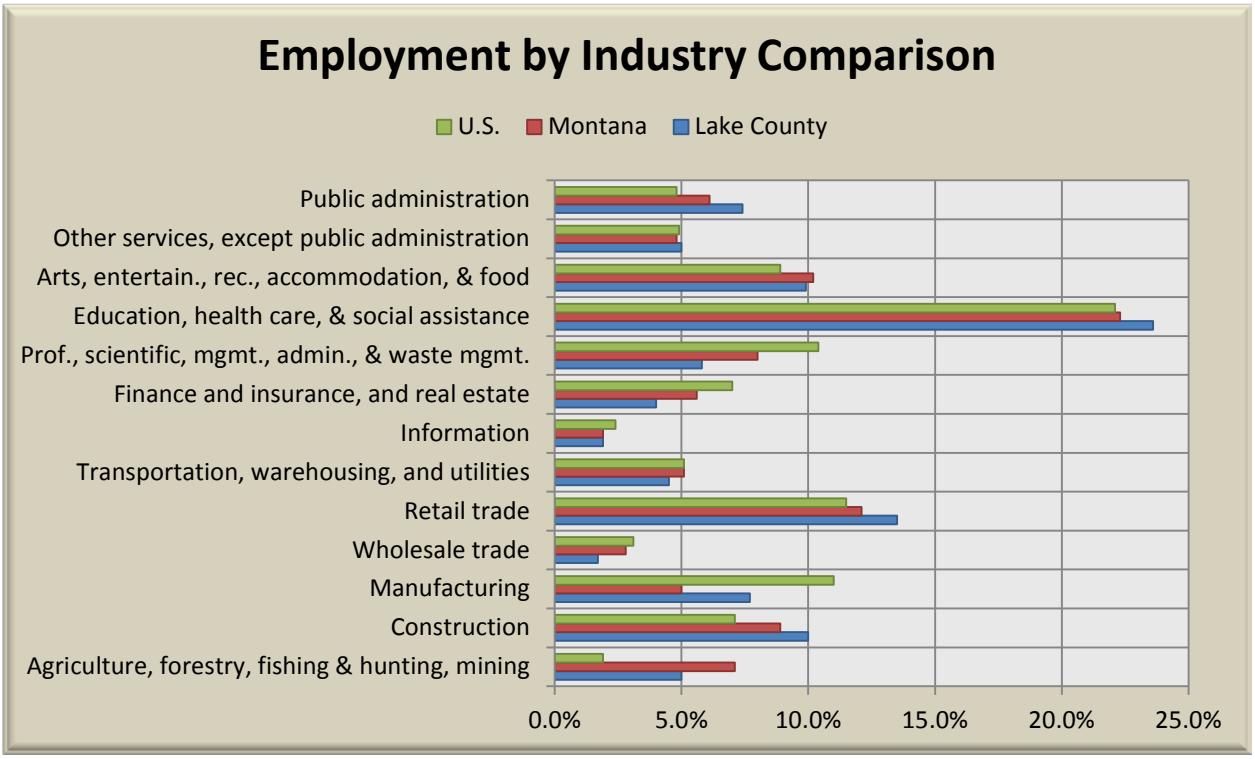

Figure 44. Comparison of employment by industry

An interesting statistic in Lake County is the duration of employment. A significant portion of the workforce in Lake County is not employed year round. Based on the strength of the agricultural and construction sectors, the months of peak employment are likely to be in the summer months. How this affects recreation use is not clear, but perhaps this population would be better served by winter sports and indoor recreation.

Lake County, By the Numbers: Duration of Employment

- Percent of population age 16 to 64 who worked 52 to 50 weeks in a year
  - Lake County: 45.4%
  - Montana: 55.1%
  - U.S.: 54.7%
- The Growth Policy identified the following issues, which still hold true:
  - High unemployment
  - High % of seasonal employees

Seasonal Housing

Seasonal housing, and corresponding recreation patterns, is a factor that cannot be ignored in Lake County. Flathead Lake has become a national destination for summer homes and as a result, portions of Lake County have a notable influx of seasonal residents during the summer months. Unfortunately, the U.S. Census does not provide an estimate for the number of seasonal residents, but does count seasonal housing units. In Lake County, there are 3,963 seasonal housing units*. That comes out to roughly 24% of the county's total housing units*. In comparison, the percentage of seasonal housing in the State of Montana is about 8%. Using the national average for numbers of individuals per housing unit of 2.58, Lake County's population of seasonal residents is estimated to be 10,000.

Summary

- Lake County has a higher percentage of older residents, people with disabilities and seasonal workers than the state or nation.
- Lake County is racially diverse, with American Indians constituting more than 25% of the population.
- There is a high percentage of seasonal residents concentrated around Flathead and Swan Lake.
- Lake County faces challenges to develop and maintain parks and recreation facilities due to financial constraints.
- Lake County's population is spread out, meaning some segments of the population may have to travel inconvenient distances to use parks and trails. There are several unincorporated communities with local recreational demands.
- Lake County has a wealth of natural features that attracts recreationists from throughout the region and beyond.

Chapter Six: Existing Conditions

Overview of Park and Trail Management

Lake County is not alone at managing parks and trails within the County's borders. There are tribal, federal, state and city facilities in addition to Lake County's. Below is a map showing land ownership patterns in Lake County.

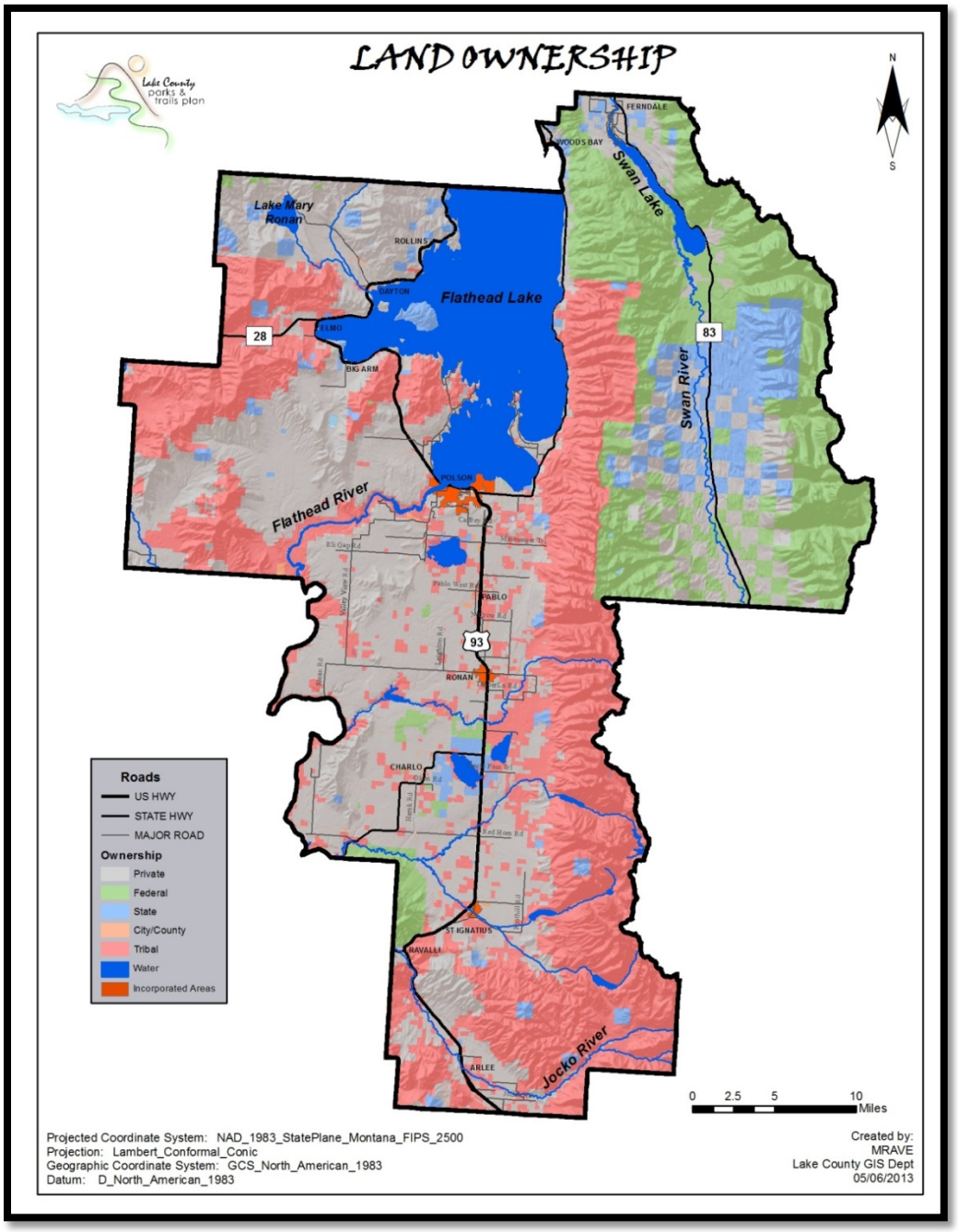

Figure 45. Map of land ownership in Lake County

Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes

More than two-thirds of Lake County overlaps with the boundaries of the Flathead Indian Reservation. Founded in 1855 by the Hellgate Treaty, the Flathead Indian Reservation is home to three confederated tribes: the Bitterroot Salish, Upper Pend d'Oreille and the Kootenai. Today, tribal lands are governed by the Tribal Council. The Tribes have a wildland recreation program and have developed several facilities including powwow grounds in Arlee and Elmo, the Blue Bay campground, campgrounds and trails in the Mission Mountains and Salish Point in cooperation with the City of Polson. Many tribal lands and programs are open to tribal members and non-members through the purchase of a recreation permit.

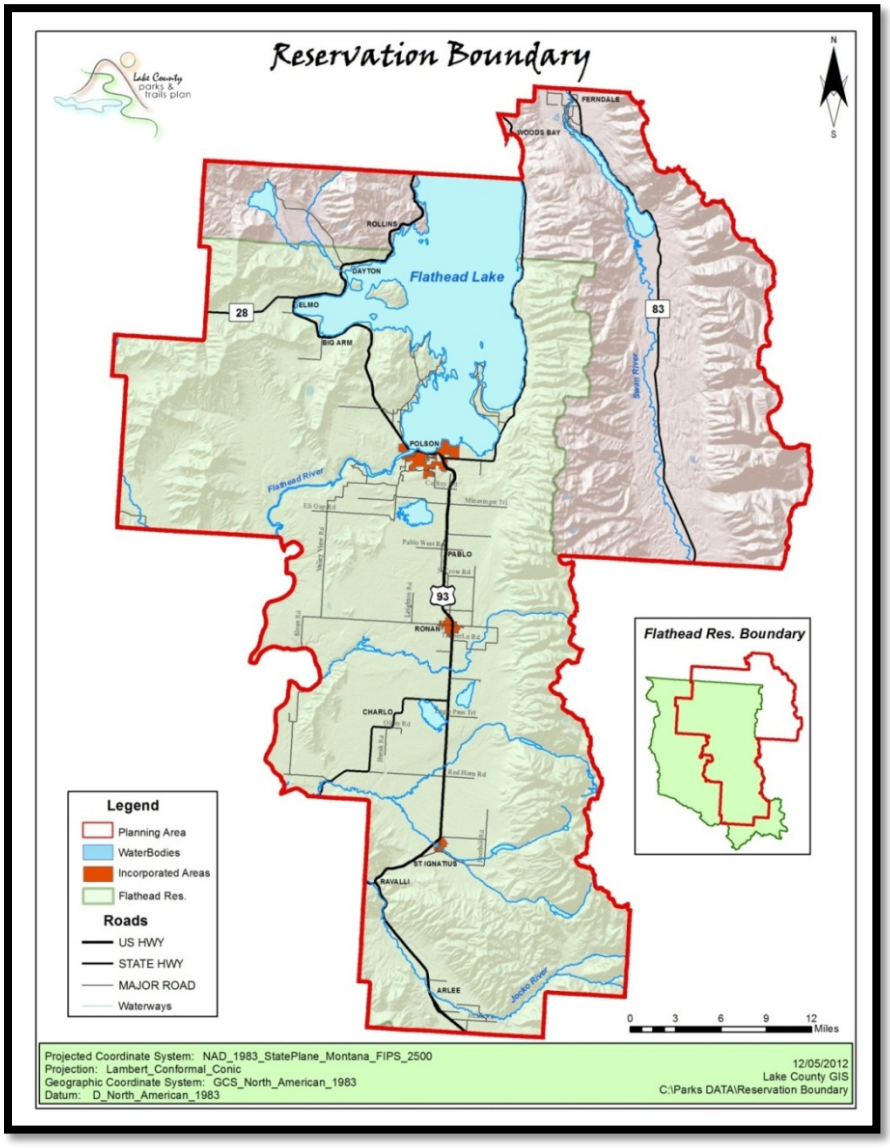

Figure 46. Map of the Flathead Reservation boundaries in Lake County

United States Forest Service

Large portions of Lake County in the Swan Valley are managed by the United States Forest Service. While the Forest Service does not manage all of their acreage specifically for recreation, all forest land is open to the public and can be recreated upon depending upon how you plan to play. Some areas are managed specifically for recreation, some not. Some areas are managed for motor vehicle use; in some areas travel only by horse or foot is permitted. Regardless of your choices, access to national forest land for hunting, fishing and recreation is a critical component of the recreational opportunities in Lake County.

The Flathead National Forest is the primary forest in Lake County. The Forest Service lands in the Swan Valley offer a wide range of less developed opportunities such as campsites, snowmobiling, huckleberry picking and backcountry wilderness. The area referred to as the Island Unit, in Northwest Lake County near Lake Mary Ronan, allows motorized recreation.

Figure 47. The Swan River and Swan Mountain Range as seen from Lake County's Rainbow Park Swan River Access site.

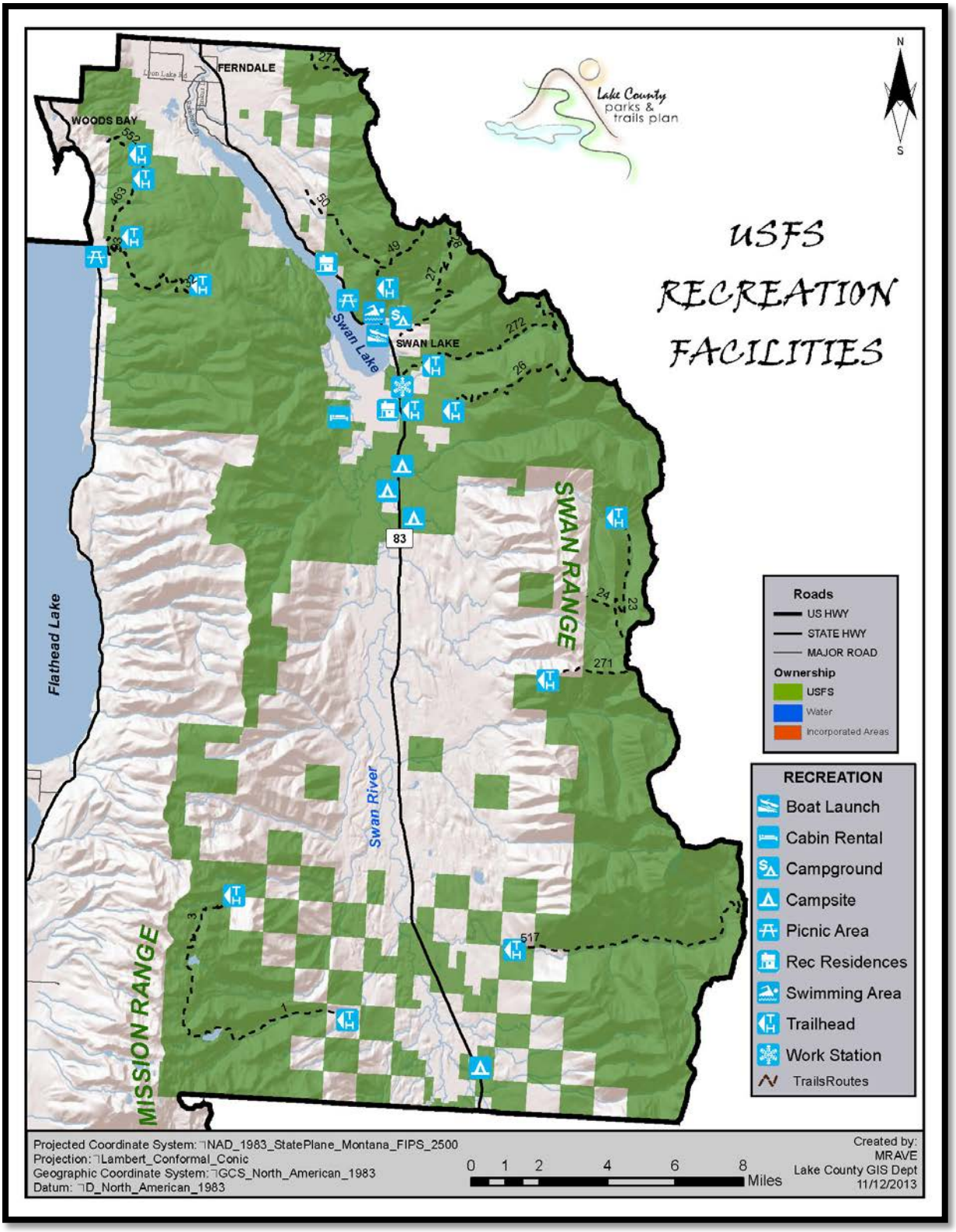

Figure 48. Map of USFS facilities in the Lake County portion of the Swan Valley

State of Montana

State Parks

Primarily known for its wildlife management responsibilities, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MTFWP) is also the primary state agency involved in managing the state's recreation facilities, including the Montana State Park System.

Figure 49. Sign at Big Arm State Park

STATE PARKS IN LAKE COUNTY
Lake Mary Ronan
120 acres
27 campsites
Boat launch
West Shore
129 acres
31 campsites
Boat launch
Wild Horse Island
2,160 acres
Big Arm
217 acres
48 campsites
Boat launch
Finley Point
28 acres
18 campsites
Boat launch
Yellow Bay
16 acres
4 campsites
Boat launch

Wildlife Management Areas

There are two Wildlife Management Areas within the MTFWP's system in Lake County: Pablo and Ninepipes. Wildlife Management Areas are managed with the specific purpose of wildlife and wildlife habitat conservation. However, they are also open to some types of recreation including fishing, bird hunting and bird watching. MTFWP also manages the 7,200-acre North Swan Valley Conservation Easement and a small Wildlife Habitat Protection Area on Swan Lake.

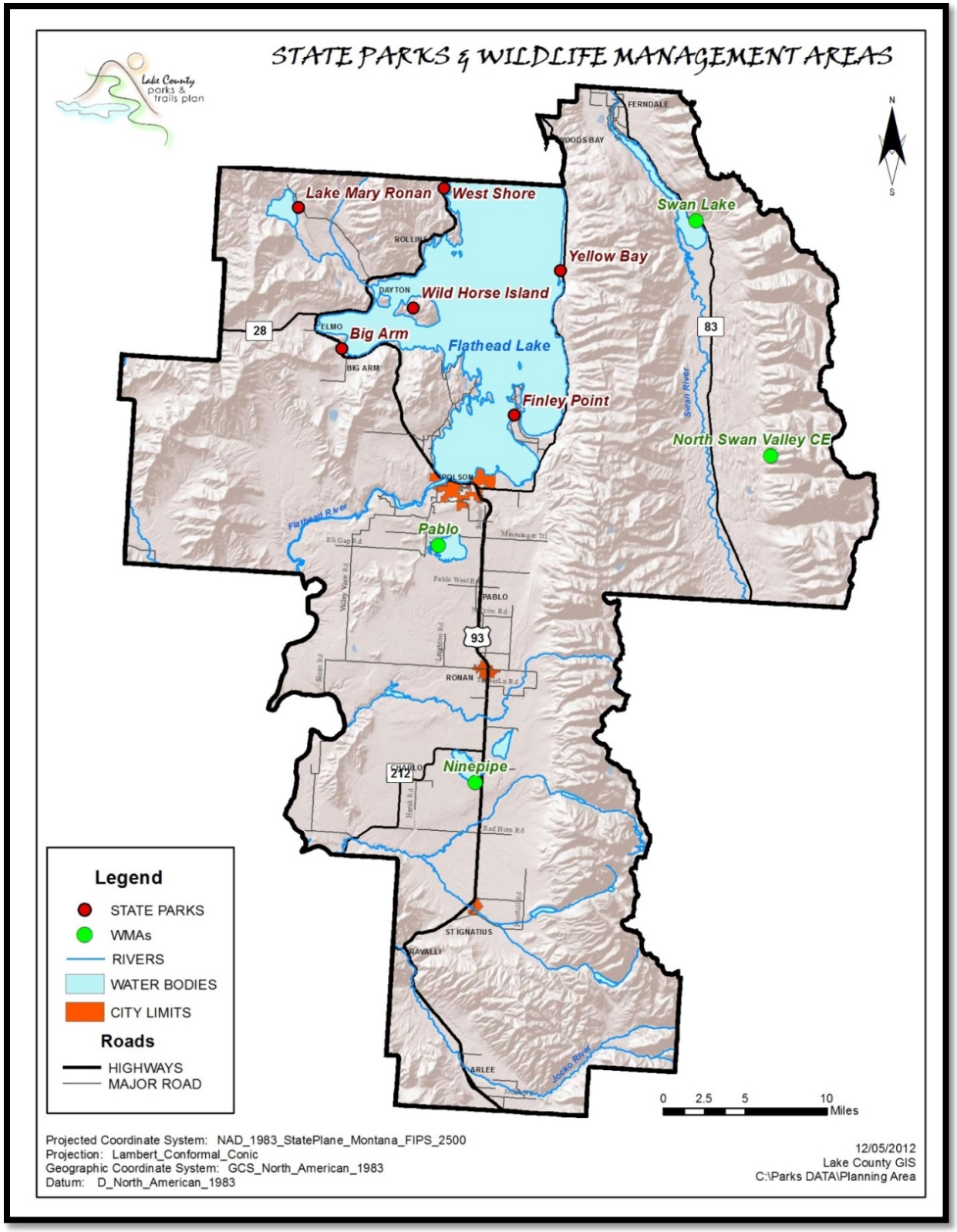

Figure 50. Map of State Parks and Wildlife Management Areas.

School Trust Lands

Managed by the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC), school trust lands are state owned properties that are managed to generate revenue for Montana's public schools system. The public is generally allowed and encouraged to recreate on most school trust lands with the purchase of permit, but these lands are managed to maximize revenue, and recreation is typically not their primary purpose.

Figure 51. Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks has teamed up with local partners to help stop the spread of invasive species, a serious threat to recreation and fisheries in and around Flathead Lake

Incorporated Communities

There are three incorporated communities in Lake County with the jurisdictional authority to develop and maintain their own parks and trails system.

Polson

Polson, the largest of the three communities has the most developed parks and trails with about 173 acres of parkland. Facilities in Polson include:

- Baseball Fields
- Soccer Fields
- Skate park
- Sacajawea Park
- Boettcher Park
- Riverside Park
- Ducharme Park
- City Dock / Salish Point
- Polson Golf Course

Boettcher, Sacajawea and Riverside all have developed facilities. Boettcher has a swimming area, playground, picnic shelters, toilets and concessions. Sacajawea Park has picnic and swimming areas. Riverside Park has a boat launch, restrooms, picnic shelters and a swimming area. The City Dock has a boat launch, a dumping station and restrooms.

Ronan

The City of Ronan's flagship park is located near the downtown along Spring Creek. The park has nearly a half-mile path, bridges crossing the creek, playground equipment, picnic tables, shade trees, a pavilion, and parking. The City also maintains baseball fields. Softball fields along Mink Lane are maintained by users with the City sharing costs.

Ronan's school district maintains many sports facilities including tennis courts, basketball courts, softball and baseball fields.

St. Ignatius

The smallest of the three incorporated communities, St. Ignatius has two parks and one park managed by CSKT:

- Elders Park (managed by the CSKT)
    - Picnic area, playground, baseball and fields and a walking track
- Memorial Park
    - Picnic area
- Taelman Park
    - Two tennis courts, a skateboard park, picnic area and restrooms

Organized User Groups

Within Lake County there are a number of organizations that have a direct interest in parks, trails and recreation. Some are involved with organized sport or are only somewhat recreation orientated. Other groups are community organizations that support parks and trails. Others still are for-profit ventures like golf courses and shooting sports facilities. Many other organizations may have a strong connection to parks and trails and a complete list of organized user groups is likely much larger than the one below.

Arlee Community Development

Boys & Girls Club

Dayton Proctor Park Association

Flathead Lakers

Greater Polson Community Foundation

Jocko Valley Trails

Lake County Community Development Corp.

Mission Mountain Country Club (golf)

Mission Mountain Garden Club

Mission Valley Aquatics

Mission Valley Backcountry Horsemen

Mission Valley Mariners

Mission Valley Soccer Association

Mission Valley Softball Association

Polson Fairgrounds Inc.

Polson Chamber of Commerce

Polson Shooters Association

Polson Youth Soccer Association (PYSA)

Ronan Chamber of Commerce

Silver Fox Golf Course

Skate Ignatius

Swan Ecosystem Center

Swan Lakers

Trails and Paths

There are at least 141 miles of mapped trails in Lake County, and many more that are unmapped. Trails and paths provide a low cost, low impact form of recreation and also safe routes for pedestrians, bicyclists and more. Trails are also increasingly becoming a low cost economic development strategy in communities throughout the country by increasing quality of life. It is to no surprise then, that multiple agencies are building trails and a variety of funding sources are available to build them.

In Lake County, the USFS and CSKT own and maintain the majority of trails. They are primitive, often in the backcountry, suitable for hiking, horses and, in some cases, small motorized vehicles. When Highway 93 between Ronan and Polson was rebuilt, MDT included a paved, separated path linking the communities. MDT plans to extend the path to the south end of Ronan as a part of a future improvement project. MDT also built a path along Highway 35 near the south shore of Flathead Lake from Polson to Ducharme Landing, a fishing access site. Another path was constructed in the summer of 2013 along Highway 93 south of Arlee. These paved paths parallel the highway, and are open to foot and bicycle travel.

In addition to backcountry trails and trails along the highway, there are trails in Polson, Pablo, Ronan, St. Ignatius and Arlee.

Figure 52. Path linking the community of Big Arm to Big Arm State Park

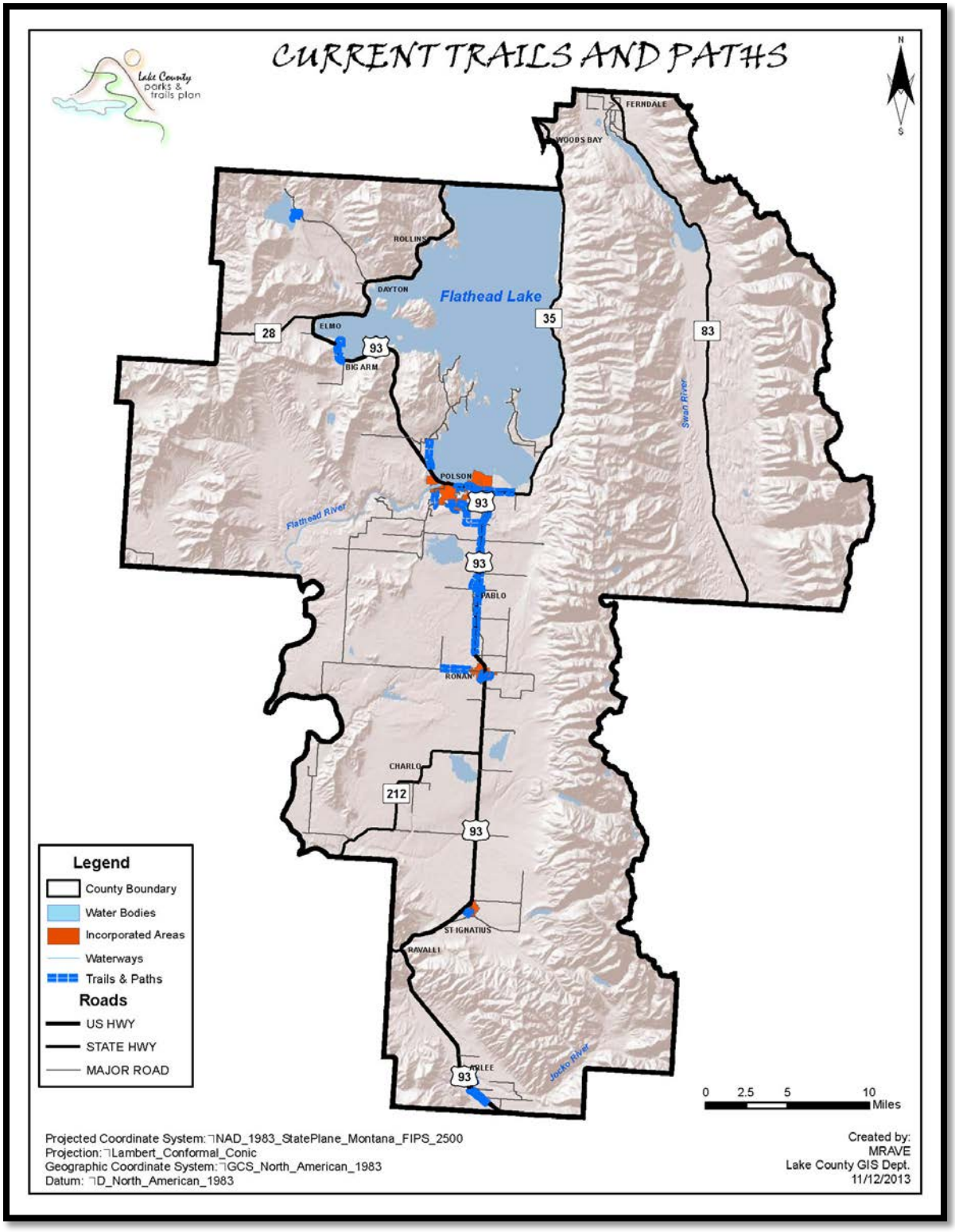

Figure 53. Currently mapped trails and paths in Lake County. Does not include trails into the Mission Mountains Tribal Wilderness

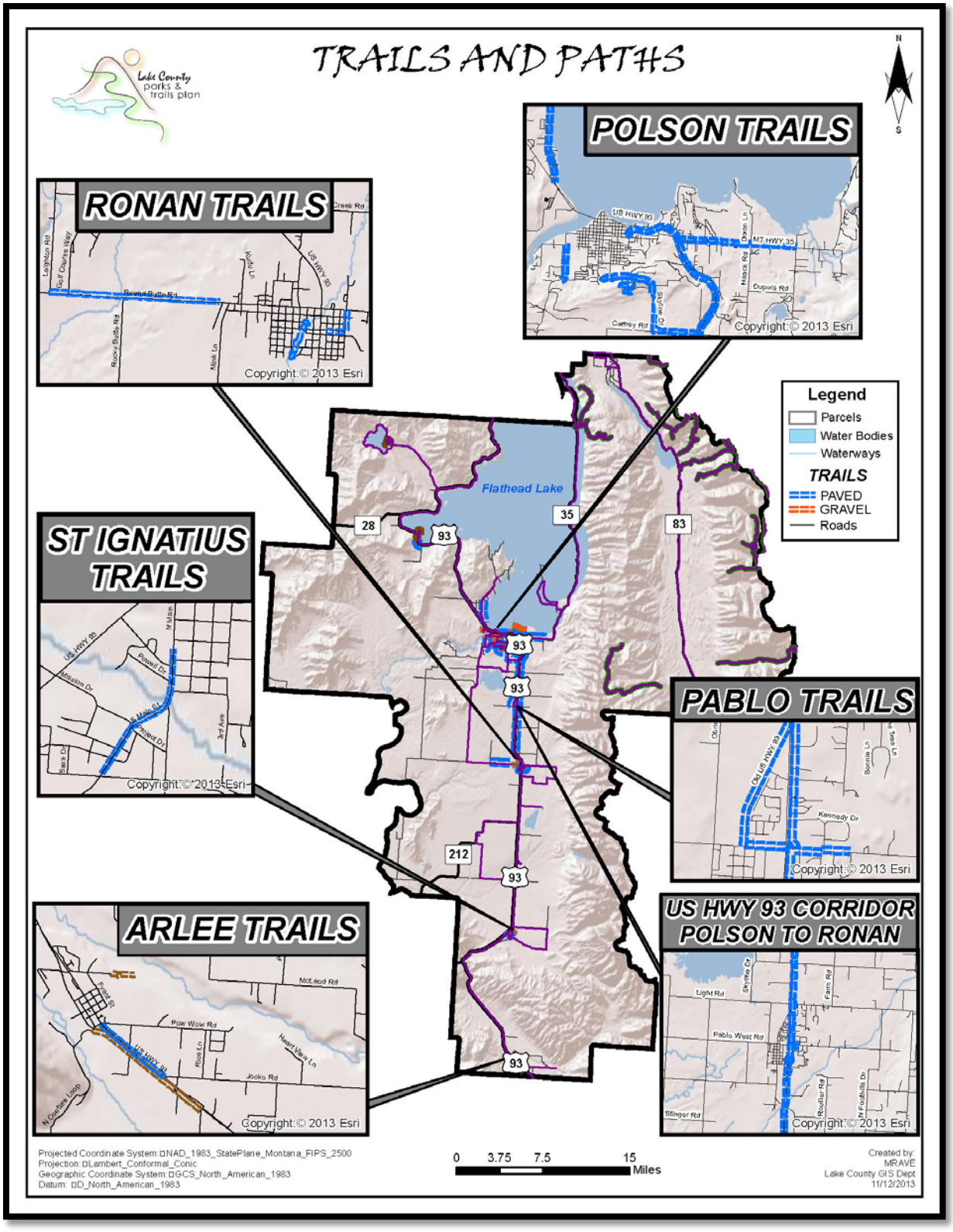

Figure 54. Existing paved trails and paths in Lake County

Lake County Land Inventory

Over the course of calendar year 2012, the Lake County Planning Department conducted a detailed inventory of over 100 county-owned properties. The objective of the survey was to gain an understanding of the condition of the properties and their potential for recreation and other uses.

To carry out the inventory, the Lake County Parks Board, planning department and planning consultant Land Solutions developed an inventory form. The Lake County GIS Department generated the list of properties and planning department staff visited each site, recording information in a consistent manner. The survey form can be found in Appendix A and the full results can be obtained from the Lake County Planning Department.

Park Land Inventory Summary

Below is a list of items addressed in the inventory:

- Property Size
- Zoning
- Legal and physical access, access type and condition, potential for improvement
- Parking availability
- Emergency services accessibility
- Handicap accessibility
- Terrain, slope, vegetation, soils
- Access to water, shoreline characteristics
- Surrounding land uses
- Existing facilities
- Potential for recreational use, other uses, and potential conflict with adjacent landowners
- Conservation value
- Recommendations

To summarize the inventory within the text of this plan, the information has been grouped into three general topics. The topics are size, access and compatibility.

Size

The size of the property is a critical component. Most of the properties surveyed were small, 40-foot wide strips of land (Villa strips), but sizes ranged all the way up to 40 acres.

Table 1. Park Inventory: Number of properties by acreage

NUMBER OF PROPERTIES BY ACREAGE	
Size Class	**Number of Properties**
Less than 1 Acre	15
1 to 2 acres	10
3 to 5 acres	6
6 to 10 acres	5
Greater than 11 acres	3
Strips and Roads	51
Unknown	11

Access

Having legal access to the property is critical. Having current physical access, or at least the ability to create physical access, is also very important. A number of properties inventoried don't have legal access. Without legal access, the public cannot reach the property. In some cases establishing legal access could prove difficult and costly. Some of the properties without legal access could not be reached to inventory. In general, most of the properties without physical access have legal access, but need roads or trails built in order to reach the property.

Table 2. Park Inventory: Properties with legal access

LEGAL ACCESS TO PROPERTIES	
Legal Access	**Number of Properties**
Yes	76
No	15
Unknown	13

Table 3. Park Inventory: Properties with physical access

PHYSICAL ACCESS TO PROPERTIES	
Physical Access	**Number of Properties**
Yes	51
No	48
Unknown	8

Some properties already have developed or undeveloped parking at the site, most however do not. Of the properties with parking, 19 have fewer than 7 spaces.

Table 4. Park Inventory: Properties that currently have parking

PROPERTIES CURRENTLY WITH PARKING	
Parking Present	**Number of Properties**
Yes	36
No	67
Unknown	1

The inventory surveyed for properties that are handicap accessible. Handicap accessibility does not mean the facilities are American with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant. ADA compliance is required on many new and renovated facilities.

Table 5. Park Inventory: Properties that are handicap accessible

HANDICAP ACCESSIBILITY	
Access	**Number of Properties**
Yes	11
No	86
Unknown	7

Access for emergency vehicles is important. Most developed recreational activities will need access for emergency vehicles. The ability for EMS access is evenly split.

Table 6. Park Inventory: Properties with access for Emergency Medical Services

EMS ACCESS	
EMS Access	**Number of Properties**
Yes	52
No	51

The final access consideration, and one that was shown to be very important to people who responded to the Parks and Trails Survey, was if the property has access to water.

Table 7. Park Inventory: Properties with access to lakes, rivers or streams

ACCESS TO WATER	
Physical Access	**Number of Properties**
Yes	54
No	48
Unknown	2

Compatibility

The Parks Board spends a lot of time trying to find solutions to compatibility issues between park properties and adjacent land uses. How compatible adjacent land uses are to a park, and how compatible a park would be to adjacent land uses, are very important considerations to make when determining what types of facilities could go where.

Table 8. Park Inventory: Adjacent land use to surveyed properties

TYPE OF ADJACENT LAND USES	
Adjacent Land Uses	**Number of Properties**
Mixed	12
Residential	79
Transportation	6
Undeveloped	5

Most of the properties inventoried are not currently developed as a park, in fact a small minority are. Most properties surveyed were undeveloped. Some of the undeveloped properties had informal recreation use, such as a campfire ring or a trail down to the lake. Some properties have a use currently not compatible to general recreation, like private development on the property, or use as a gravel pit.

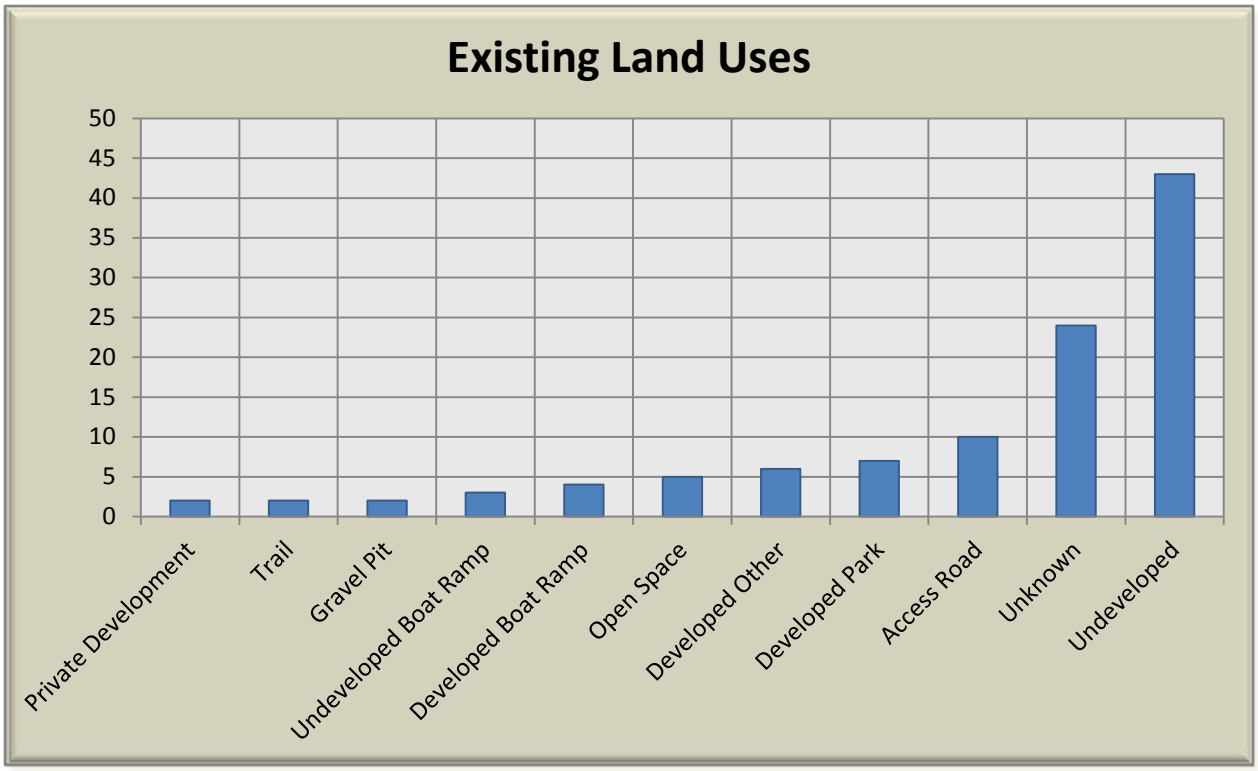

Figure 55. Existing land uses of surveyed properties

Land Inventory Findings

Prior to conducting the inventory, the Parks Board knew there were dozens of properties throughout the county that due to their location or purpose of deed had the potential to be considered parkland. Most of these properties are not viable for development and some are already developed. But it was important to know what properties are out there and whether they have recreational or other value. Can they be sold to generate funds? Can they be leased? Can they be developed into a park? These are the questions the Parks Board set out to answer when they initiated this project.

What was found is that there are essentially three types of parcels: those with lake access, villa strips, and those that are land locked.

Access to Water

Access to water was one of the most desired recreation opportunities identified in the community survey (see Chapter Seven). Fifty-four of the properties surveyed are adjacent to a water body. But that does not translate to public access, or mean they should be advertised as

having public access. The vast majority of those 54 parcels are strips of land, usually 40 feet wide. These strips are mostly Villa Strips (discussed below), or remnants of townsites platted a century ago and never fully developed. Other strips are abandoned roads, still owned by the county. Some don't have legal access, others don't have physical access and some are being used by the adjacent landowners or neighborhood as lake access points.

Of the 54 properties abutting a lake, 9 have some sort of recreation development potential with room to park at least a few cars or build a path and provide at least limited lake access.

- Mellett Point Georgia Road Park/Skidoo Villa East Park
- Mellett Point North Park (swimming area already developed)
- Shore Acres
- Safety Bay Villa Burrowes Tracts (Dixon 4H park)
- Marie's Drive Sunrise Estates
- Swan Sites #2 Rainbow Park (river access park)
- Dayton Townsite
- Elmo Townsite
- Polson Fairgrounds

Villa Strips

Both Lake County and the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes have ownership claims over about 4 dozen strips of land that provide lake access. This makes capitalizing on certain sites complex, but not impossible. Some could potentially be sold to adjacent landowners, some could be leased for private use to generate funds for parks, and some could either be developed or kept as undeveloped local public access to Flathead Lake. It is beyond the scope of this plan to address the ownership issue. Nonetheless, many of the strips provide informal and valuable public access to Flathead Lake.

Land Locked Parcels

Many of the land locked parcels have usable space and fewer physical constraints than lake access properties. Many of the parcels are undeveloped. While not providing lake access, the land locked parcels may still prove to be of high value to the county's park portfolio. Some of the sites have the ability to meet the parks demands of Lake County residents at a lower cost. Some also have potential for sale or lease, although some are small and isolated and have terrain or access limitations, resulting in limited recreational and monetary value.

ADA Compliance

The parks inventory did include an evaluation of handicap accessibility, but this should not be taken to mean these facilities are currently ADA compliant. Because Lake County has a higher percentage of people with disabilities than the state average, an effort should be taken to ensure the higher use facilities are ADA compliant.

Lake County Parks / Trails Management

Parks and Trails Management

Lake County does not have a parks department to manage the parks and trail facilities owned by the county – in fact there are currently few developed parks and trails managed by the county. The management of Lake County's park properties is the responsibility of a parks board. The Lake County Parks Board is made up of the three County Commissioners and citizen volunteers appointed by the Commissioners.

On the following page is a flow chart displaying how parks are managed in Lake County. There are essentially three parts to the management system: the relationship between the Parks Board and the Commission, the day to day management of parks, and the long range management of parks.

Commissioners and Parks Board

The Commissioners are the final decision making authority at the county level. They approve budget and spending requests, policies or plans developed by the board and they establish the board membership. In return, the Parks Board supplies the Commissioners information such as proposed budgets or spending requests, plans and policies or nominations for the board.

Day-to-Day Management

Day-to-day management of parks and trails is the physical maintenance of land and facilities and the enforcement of park rules. There is not currently a person facilitating this. Instead, the Parks Board sends management decisions to county employees who implement the action. The employees in turn send information on park conditions up to the Parks Board, either from their own observations or information passed on from the public. In addition, members of the public can pass information on day-to-day needs directly to the board at its monthly meeting.

Long Range Management

The long range management of parks and trails is a circular relationship. The Parks Board sets management priorities, which they present to the public, who comment on those priorities back to the board. The Parks Board will then make policy proposals to the Commissioners, who make the final decisions, subject to public input. This includes setting rules for parks and trails, establishing priorities for facility location, development, maintenance, acquisition and disposition, and finding alternative funding such as grants or donations. The Parks Board also works on developing relationships with community groups, landowners, or other agencies with the will or ability to assist in reaching the boards management priorities.

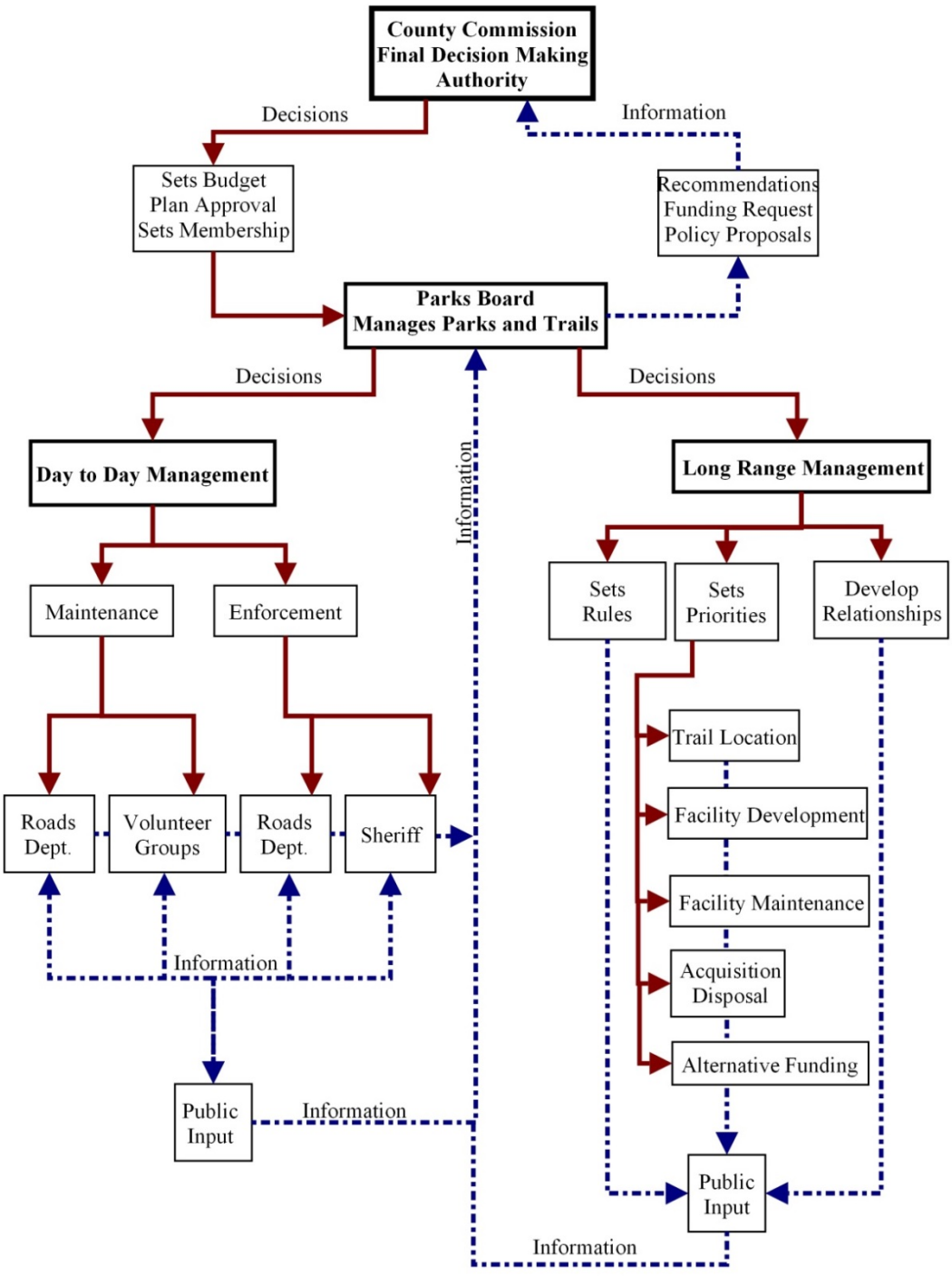

Figure 56. Parks and trails management flow chart

Parks and Trails Standards

Facility Standards

The County does not have adopted standards for parks and trails. That does not mean parks and trails are not built to some standard in some cases. For example, trails or other facilities built using state or federal funds must meet state and federal standards. It can be assumed that some new facilities would meet the requirements of the American with Disabilities Act. Outside of the standards in place by other agencies, the day to day maintenance of parks, the type and style of facilities, the size and width of trails, and other aspects of new parks and trails are made on a case by case basis.

Management Standards

The county does not currently have formalized administrative standards specifically for the management of parks. Administrative standards for all county functions would apply to the Parks Board. For example, standards for signing contracts, leases or other agreements would apply to parks and trails. Standards that would likely only apply to the management of parks and trails; for example, the management of signage, volunteers, HOA management, fencing etc. have not been developed.

Parks and Trails Classification

The county does not have a system to classify the types of parks and trails within its inventory. A classification system can help with long range park planning and management.

Funding

Funding for parks and trails in Lake County could come from a number of different sources.

County General Fund

This is money allocated by the County Commission out of the county's general fund. This money is typically discretionary money, and can be used by the Parks Board to meet any priority they establish, from maintenance to acquisition. Currently the parks and playgrounds budget is very small, typically only about $2,000 per year allocated for maintenance. Labor comes from other departments such as the roads and bridges department.

County Specific Funds

The county has a number of options to generate revenue for park and trails including levies, bonding, impact fees, park districts, user fees and cash in lieu of land for the subdivision parkland dedication. Currently, none of these funding sources, minus the parkland dedication

cash-in-lieu requirement and small user fees from Dixon Park, are being implemented in Lake County. The potential funding sources are discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three, Implementation.

Chapter Seven: Issues and Needs Analysis

Introduction

The issues and needs analysis in this chapter focuses on three topics: the community survey, national and state recreation trends, and parks and trails management. For each topic there is a discussion of issues, needs, opportunities or challenges identified through the research and writing of this document. Following the discussion is a set of conclusions, which summarizes the discussion, and sets the foundation for the goals, objectives and policies in Chapter Two.

Community Survey Summary

In the spring of 2012 the Lake County Parks Board, Planning Department and Land Solutions distributed a survey on parks and trails to the community. The survey was available online and forms were distributed at community events. This survey was part of the Board's overall strategy to engage the public in the planning process.

The survey had three objectives:

- Assist the board in understanding the opinions and needs of Lake County residents
- Assist the board in identifying issues and opportunities
- Encourage people to become involved in the planning process

The survey consisted of 18 questions. Questions 1 through 4 where demographic in nature, intended to understand what segments of the population were responding. The remaining questions focused on the conditions of parks and trails, what types of facilities are desired, and where parks and trails should be located. Questions 10 and 11 were open ended questions where the respondent had the ability to say whatever they pleased. A copy of the survey form is in Appendix B. The full results of the survey can be obtained from the Lake County Planning Department.

Survey Highlights

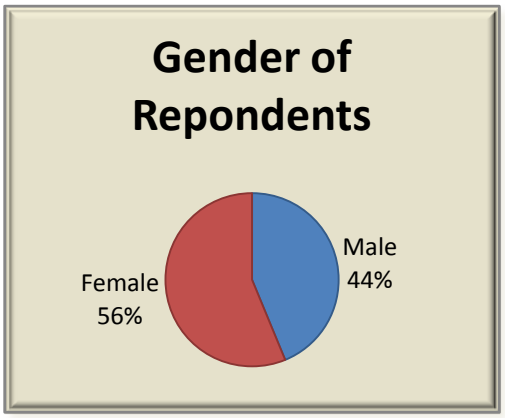

Figure 57. Question #1: gender of survey respondents

Lake County received 587 online and hard copy responses to the survey, although not every respondent answered every question. It is important to note that surveys such as the one used in this planning process do not use random sampling and therefore are not a true representation of the values of all Lake County residents, but are more of a reflection of the attitudes of those taking the survey. The main benefit of online and volunteer-issued survey is the enormous cost savings. This plan recognizes that while this survey is not necessarily an accurate depiction of the attitudes of all Lake County residents, the results are meaningful.

1. Question #5: Of survey respondents, 51.6% use parks, trails and recreational facilities either daily or weekly and 8% use parks and recreational facilities rarely or never.

   What does this mean? Many people who responded are park, trail and recreational facility users.

2. Question #6: Of survey respondents, almost 75% are satisfied with the parks and trails facilities in Lake County but more than 25% are unsatisfied with the parks and trails facilities.

   What does this mean? Survey respondents feel the facilities are in decent condition, but there is room for improvement.

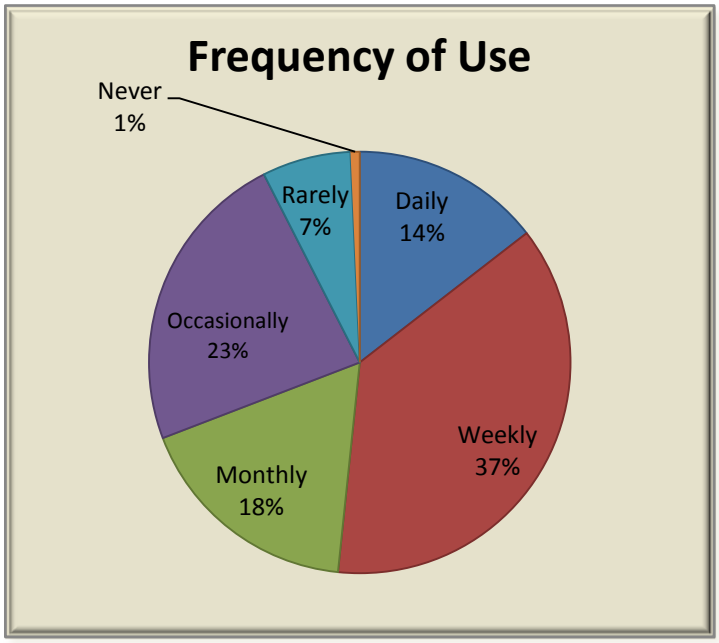

Figure 58. Frequency in which survey respondents use parks

3. Question #9: Of survey respondents, 83.7% would like to see new or upgraded facilities near their home.

   What does this mean? Survey respondents feel access to local parks is important.

4. Question #12: When asked what types of recreational activities people want, 40% or more of survey respondents identified the following activities as one of their top three choices (there were 16 choices):

   - ✓ Walking/Running/Jogging Trails - 60%
   - ✓ Fishing - 47%
   - ✓ Boating - 45%
   - ✓ Mountain/Road Biking – 41%
   - ✓ Swimming - 40%

5. Question #12: When asked what types of parks are needed, survey respondents identified the following:

   - ✓ Walking/Biking Trails In Or Near Towns – 59%
   - ✓ Lake Access – 58%
   - ✓ River Access – 48%
   - ✓ Camping Sites – 48%

   What does this mean? There is a correlation between what people want to do and what types of facilities people want. Walking and biking on trails are two of the top four activities people want to do, so it's no surprise that trails are the type of facility people want the most.

   Access to water is the same way. Fishing and boating are two of the four most popular activities, and lake access and river access are two of the types of parks people want the most. So it's safe to say among people who responded to the survey, trails and water access are the two highest priorities.

6. Question #17: When asked how the respondents prioritize county funding for parks, recreation and trails among other county expenses, 43.9% thought it was very important and 41.9% thought it was important.

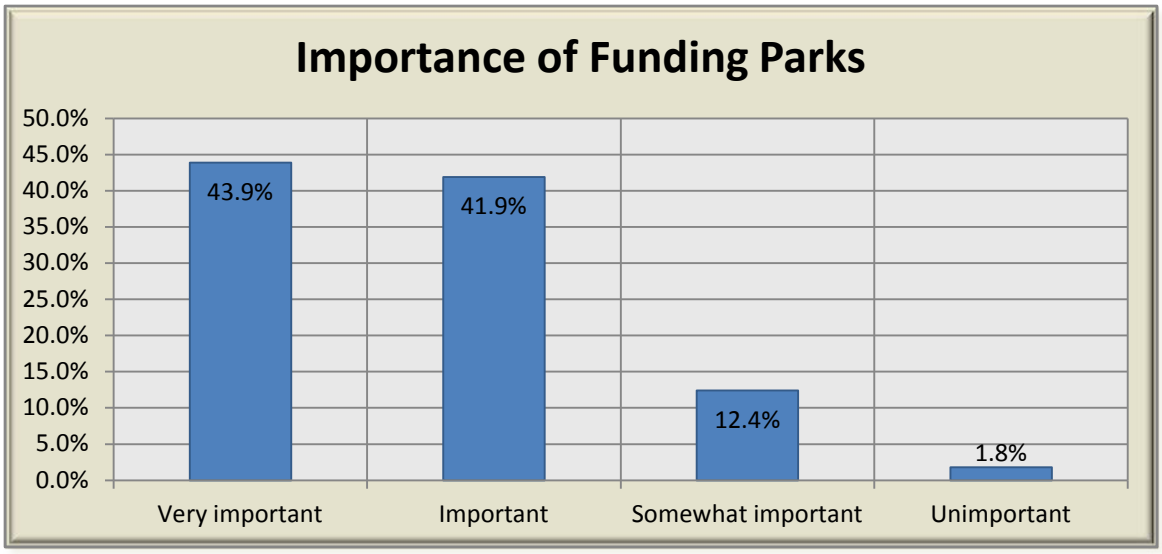

Figure 59. How important survey respondents feel county funding is for parks recreation and trails versus other expenditures

What does this mean? Survey respondents, who are likely park and trail users, believe park funding is an important county expenditure**.**

7. Question #18: When asked where funding for parks should come from, 53.3% of respondents said using current tax dollars, 37.8% said using new tax dollars, and 39.9% said user fees.

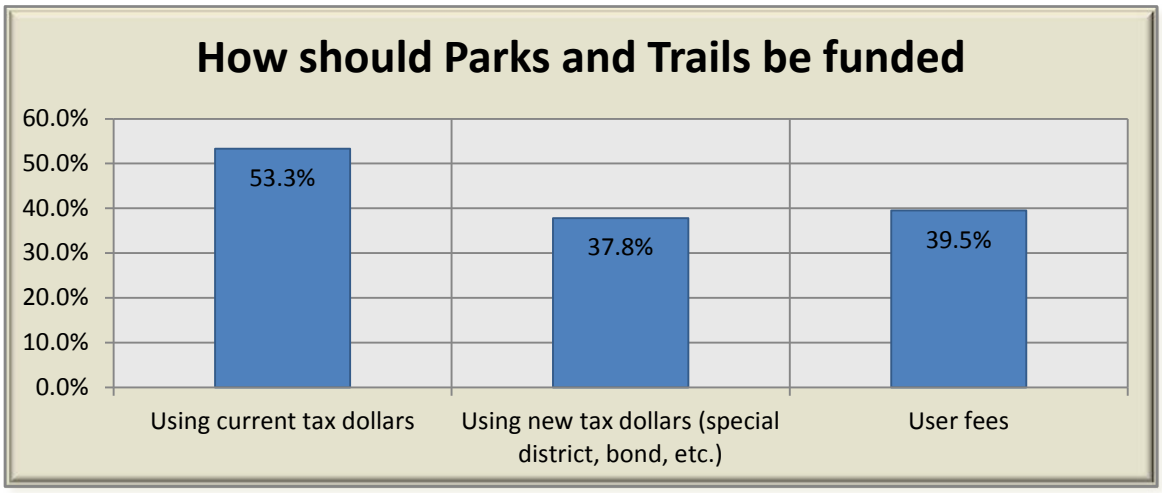

Figure 60. How survey respondents want to fund development, improvement or maintenance of parks, recreation and trail facilities

What does this mean? There are no easy answers for parks funding. Survey respondents, who are likely park users, believe park funding is an important expenditure relative to other demands, but most do not want to raise taxes to fund parks and trails. A combination of current tax dollars, user fees and other sources of revenue must be found to develop and support parks and trails.

8. Question #16: When asked what funding should be spent on, the following graph shows what people thought was important.

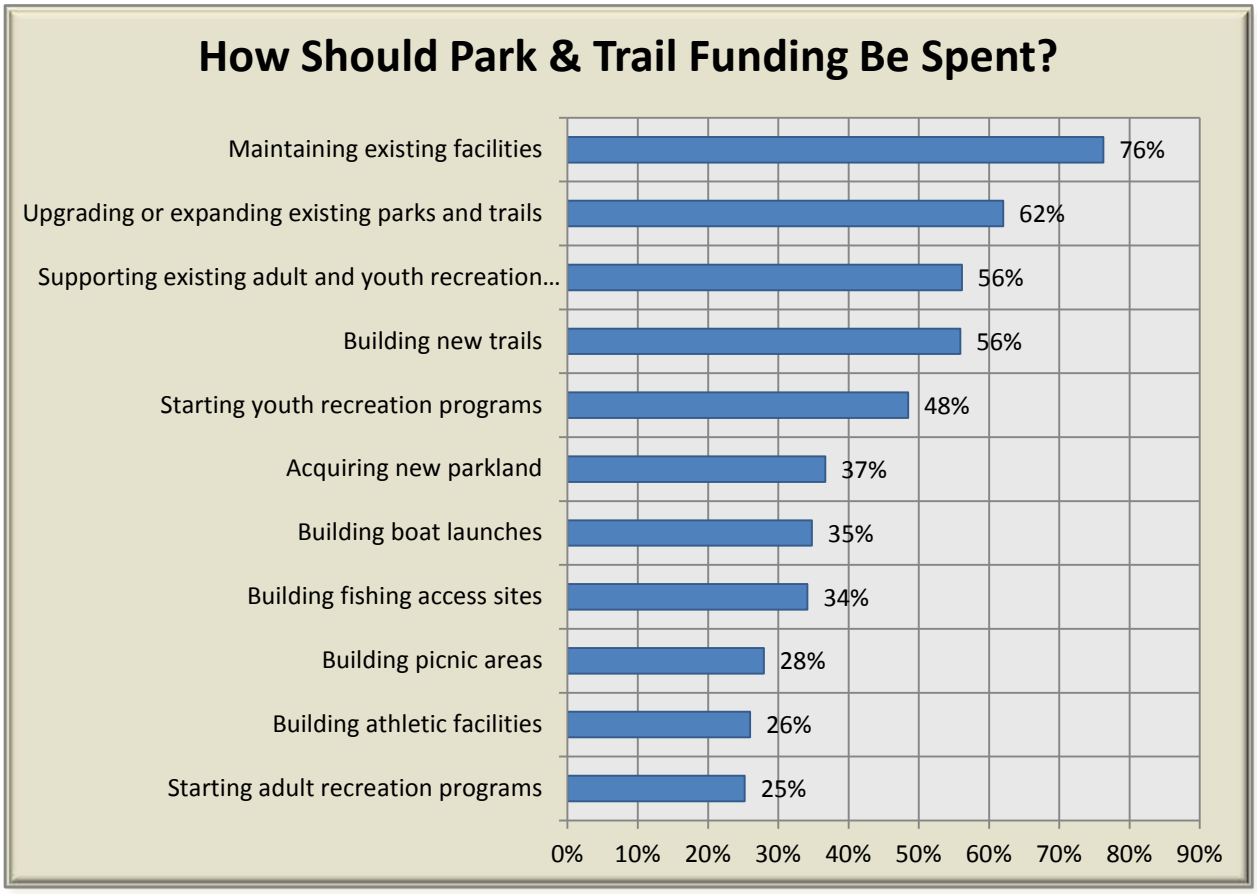

Figure 61. How survey respondents want funding on parks, recreation and trails spent

What does this mean? People who responded place a high priority on maintaining existing facilities and programs and also building or expanding new ones. This also tells us that respondents who want access to water are split between boat launches and fishing access, or they were unclear of the difference between the two.

9. Question #19: When asked if they would like to be made aware of parks and trails planning updates, 141 respondents (24%) indicated they would like to be contacted.

   What does this mean? There is a sizeable group of people who want to be kept up to date on park and trail issues and who may be willing to donate their time and effort to parks projects.

Comparing Answers: Notable Trends

Comparing how people answered by demographics

- ✓ Almost 50% of respondents were above the age 50. When comparing how these two age groups (50+ and less than 50) answered differently, there was very little variation for the overall results of the survey.
- ✓ Native Americans who answered the survey felt camping sites are the most needed type of park facilities, and rated natural areas as the most important type of parks.
- ✓ Women stated they prefer trails, while men preferred lake access.
- ✓ Men tended to be less satisfied with the overall state of parks in Lake County than women.
- ✓ Question 12 asked the respondents to weigh a list of recreational activities on a scale of 1 to 16, with 1 meaning they had the most interest in the activity, and 16 meaning they had the least. The graph below shows what activities were most commonly in respondents' top three.

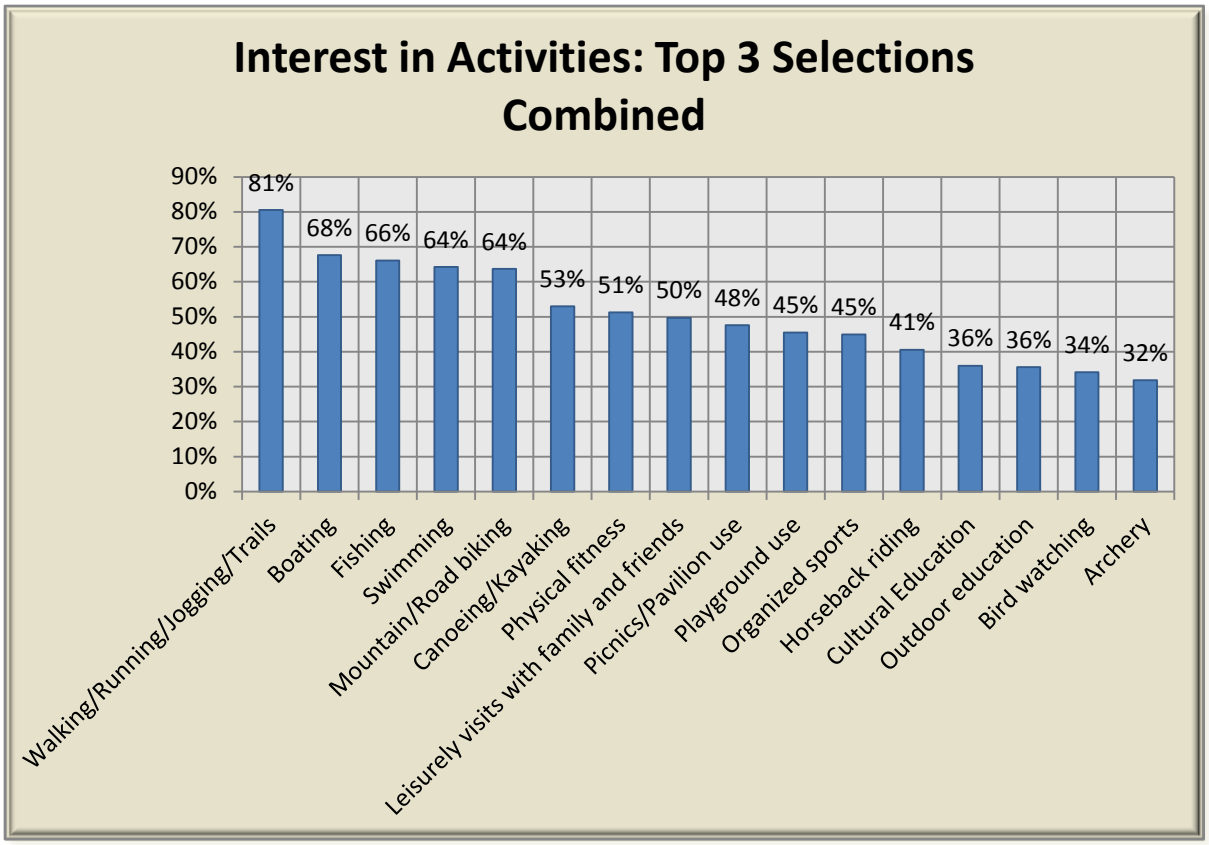

Figure 62. What activities survey respondents are interested in participating in

- ✓ Question 14 asked respondents how important they felt different types of parks were. The following graph illustrates the types of parks respondents felt were very important.

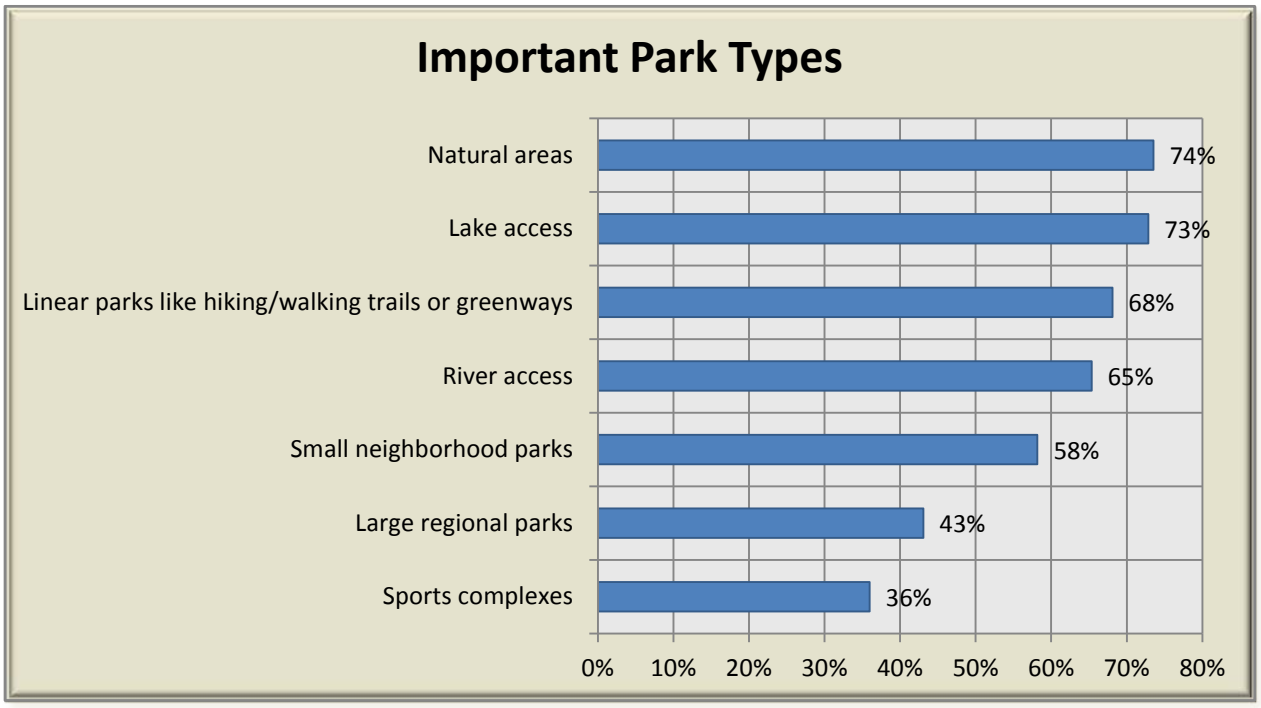

Figure 63. Type of parks that survey respondents felt were very important

Analyzing Long Form Responses

A challenge with long form responses is the difficulty of creating hard data from them. Quite literally if you have 500 responses to a question, you could have 500 different answers. However, that does not mean data cannot be extracted or trends cannot be identified. The two long form response questions essentially asked people where would they like trails built, and what types of parks do they want and where do they want them? The following is an analysis of the responses.

Question 10 asked survey takers if they would like to see new or expanded parks, where would they want them. Figure 28 is a chart that displays where people would like to see efforts directed, and figure 29 displays how they would like to see efforts directed.

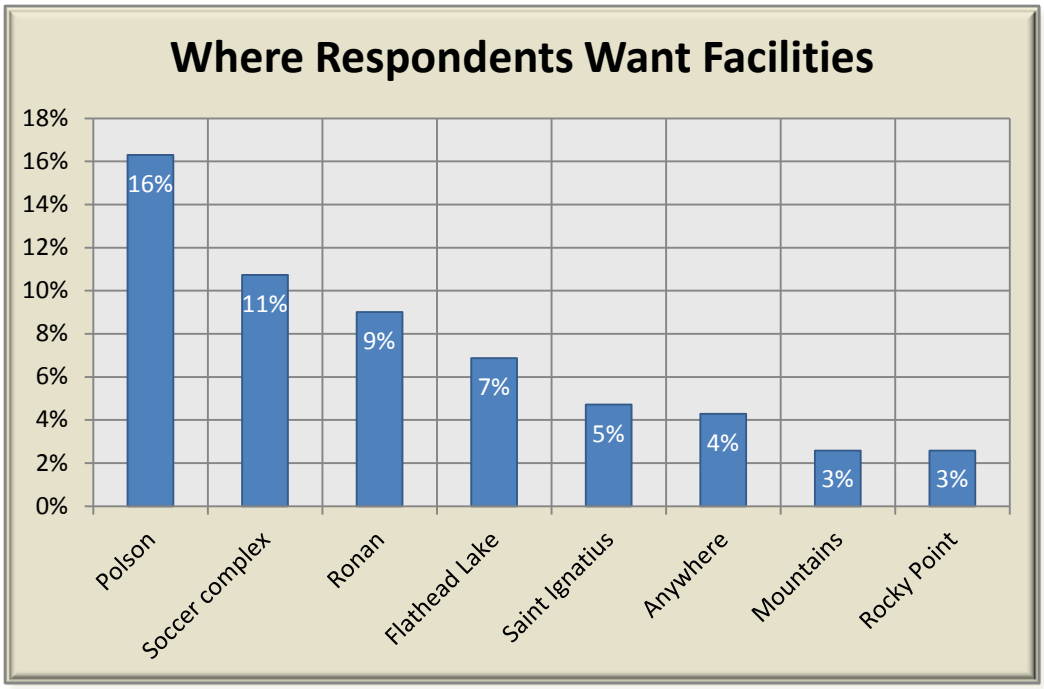

Figure 64. Most popular locations of where survey respondents want facilities

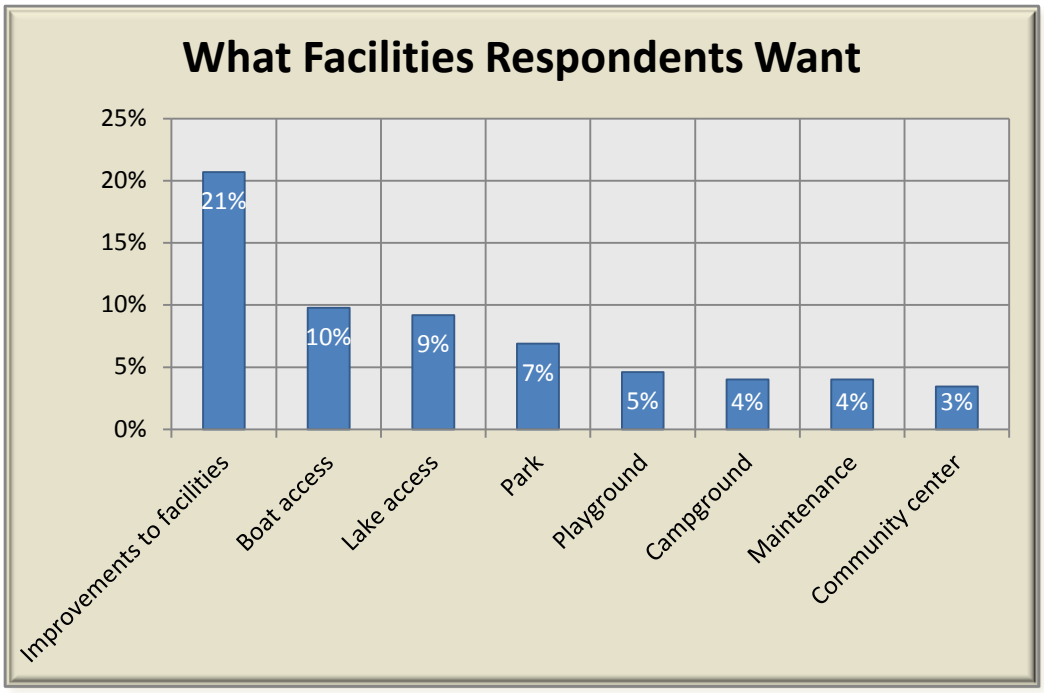

Figure 65. Most popular types of facilities survey respondents want

The most common response for where people would like to see parks was Polson and the athletic fields, specifically the soccer fields at the Kerr Dam complex. In general, towns and natural areas were where respondents suggested Lake County focus its efforts.

There were many suggestions for what people thought should be done. The most common response was improvements to the soccer fields at the Kerr Dam complex (inside the Polson city limits). New or improvements to boat ramps and lake access was also a very common response.

Question 11 asked survey takers where they would like to see new or expanded trails. There was a very wide variety of suggestions. Below are some general trends:

- The most popular response was "anywhere."
- In general, the Polson area received the most suggestions. Popular suggestions included:
    - Polson in general
    - Polson to Ronan
    - Skyline Drive
    - To the Aquatics Center
    - Airport Road (St. Ignatius)
- A popular theme was to connect communities. Almost every community was mentioned once or twice, the most popular specific suggestions included Polson to Ronan and Ronan to St. Ignatius. A number of respondents suggested connecting communities without specific suggestions.
- A common suggestion was trails around lakes and rivers. Specifically the most common was Flathead Lake and Flathead River, but the Swan River, Swan Lake, Lake Mary Ronan, and Mission Reservoir were also mentioned more than once.
- Expanding existing trails and connecting existing trails was another popular suggestion.
- The Mission Mountains was a common suggestion. Some wanted more trails in the mountains; others wanted trails to the mountains. Much of the Mission Mountains is in other jurisdictions.

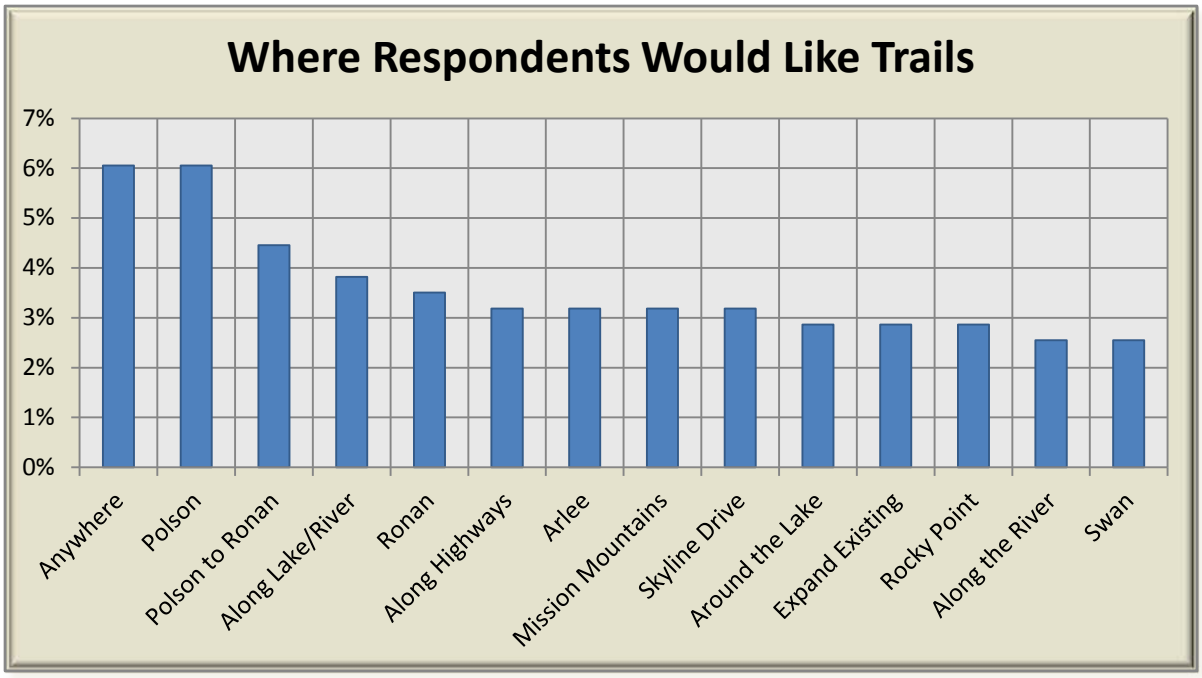

Figure 66. Most popular locations where survey respondents want trails

Survey Conclusions

Paths and trails, lakes and rivers

It is clear from the survey responses that paths and trails and access to lakes and rivers are the most desired types of facilities. While it is clear people want paths and access to water, the types of trails and types of water accesses differ. Some people want paved paths along the roads, some want to stay away from the highways. Some people want developed boat ramps and swimming areas, others want a campground along the shore. The survey identifies the general types of facilities people expect their county to provide such as trails and water access, but at the same time they would like diversity in the facilities.

Where should these trails go?

In general people want connectivity in the trail system: trails connecting town to town, town to parks, and town to water and mountains. Specifically, people wanted communities along the Highway 93 corridor from Polson to Arlee connected. There was a strong desire to connect the Kerr Dam Sports Complex to downtown Polson, and from Polson to popular places on Flathead Lake like Rocky Point and Finley Point.

For access to water, the priority was clearly access to Flathead Lake, with the area around Polson being the most popular. But Flathead Lake was not the only water body people wanted access to. The Flathead River was very popular as well, and many people just want access to any water body, whether that is Flathead, Swan, or Lake Mary Ronan.

Improvement and expansion

When specifically asked, people are satisfied with the existing facilities, but in the long form responses it was clear some facilities need improvements. What appears to be the difference is people are not satisfied with the facilities at highly developed high use facilities, such as the Kerr Dam Sports Complex and high use boat ramps. These facilities are used in a way where many people converge on the site at specific times, say for a soccer tournament or at the lake for an especially hot day, and on those days the sites are likely over capacity.

People also clearly want expansion of facilities. Trails need to lead somewhere, they need a destination, and people want the Lake County trail system expanded to do that. People also want expansion of access to water, for boats and swimming.

Funding

Funding is a very important component of the survey. It is the bottle neck for all of the maintenance, improvements and expansions people want. While people value the expenditure on parks and trails, there was not overwhelming support to spend additional tax dollars for their needs. People want improvement and expansion, but to make that happen either other budget items drop to the bottom of the priority list or outside resources must be acquired from other sources.

Support

What can't be overlooked is the survey demonstrated people are interested in parks and trails. Volunteers can be a source of labor, funding, security and for ideas to improve parks.

National and State Trends in Recreation

Nationally[1]

- Almost 50% of Americans participate in outdoor recreation
- Overall, the popularity of outdoor recreation has remained steady or increased
- 61% of people in Rocky Mountain States recreate outdoors, more than any other region in the nation
- Passive recreation such as picnics, kite flying and unstructured play time are still popular
- Walking for exercise and pleasure has become much more popular over time
- Running, jogging or trail running is the most popular outdoor activity
- Hunting and fishing have become less popular nationally
- Wildlife viewing and photography has recently surged in popularity
- Younger populations are becoming more active than previous generations, however fewer young people get outdoors than in the more distant past
- People recreate to relax, meet with friends and family, exercise and be outdoors
- People living near outdoor recreation facilities are more likely to recreate than people who have to travel
- Children prefer playing or "hanging out" outdoors
- Young adults prefer more challenging outdoor activities like climbing or motor sports
- 60% of people 18 to 44 use technology to find information on recreation

[1] Sources for this data set include:
Outdoor Recreation Trends and Futures: A Technical Document Supporting the Forest Service 2010 RPA Assessment. H. Ken Cordell. http://www.srs.fs.usda.gov/pubs/40453
Outdoor Foundation. Outdoor Recreation Participation 2012. Boulder, Co. http://www.outdoorfoundation.org/research.participation.html
Trends in Parks and Outdoor Recreation. Michigan State Parks and Outdoor Recreation Blue Ribbon Panel. ND. https://janus.pscinc.com/parkandrecpanel/panel_materials/National%20Recreation%20Trends%20White%20Paper.pdf

Statewide[2]

- Trends are similar to national trends, except nature related recreation such as hunting, fishing, and wildlife watching are more popular
- Montana's population is older than the national population, so passive recreational activities are becoming more important
- Montana is a destination for people travelling to recreate: Out of state recreationists are attracted to mountains and forests, open space and un-crowded places, and rivers and lakes
- Recreational tourism is an important part of our state's economy

Recreation Trends Conclusion

Lake County's unique natural features shape the way residents use parks and trails, but the county is not immune from national and state recreation trends. New sports and changing preferences will influence how park users will use Lake County's facilities. Demographic trends will also shift how and why people use facilities as an aging population seeks recreational opportunities for the health benefits. It is likely that if current trends continue over the life of this planning document, less rigorous recreation such as walking, hiking and wildlife viewing will become increasingly popular in Lake County.

Parks and Trails Management

Communication / Coordination Among Park Managers

Within Lake County nine public entities manage recreation facilities: Lake County, the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes, US Forest Service, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks and Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, the US Fish & Wildlife Service and the incorporated communities of Polson, Ronan and St. Ignatius. All of these entities are working on managing or developing recreation facilities to some degree. This is an amazing opportunity. Currently, there is little formal communication between them, but that can be changed. Communication could lead to some strategic coordination, which could lead to better recreation opportunities for Lake County residents and visitors. It is likely many people are not concerned with who provides the recreation opportunities, only that high quality recreation opportunities are being provided. Given the relative lack of tax dollars for county and municipal programs, communication and coordination will become even more necessary over time.

[2] Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks website on Recreation and Tourism. State of Montana http://fwp.mt.gov/doingBusiness/reference/montanaChallenge/reports/tourism.html

Parks and Trails Management

With few resources, the Parks Board strives to accomplish what it can from the tools at its disposal. Efficiency is critical. The board spends a significant amount of their time dealing with the day to day management of park facilities. When focusing on neighbor disputes or vandalism, the board is not working on developing funding sources or planning new facilities. As a result, some local groups have taken the lead in planning for facilities and fund raising for parks and trails in their individual communities. This shouldn't be discouraged, but it is reflective of how the board spends its time and effort. There likely would be efficiency benefits that may translate into improved funding and better long range planning for the entire Lake County parks system if the day to day management responsibility of the Parks Board was simplified, reduced or eliminated.

Parks and Trails Standards

The level of complexity of Lake County's parks and trails system does not require detailed and rigid standards for facilities and administration. Facilities developed using state and federal funds already require detailed standards, which usually falls to professional engineers to ensure standards are met. However, some generalized standards for park and trail development and maintenance would be beneficial. These standards could address signage, general requirements for park development, standards for how facilities could be operated and maintained, parking and trail design.

Parks and Trails Classifications

One of the challenges in developing a park system that provides for diversity of recreational opportunities meeting the needs of a rural population is having a system in place that can deliver various opportunities. The types of parks and their locations can be measured to determine where gaps in service exists, and identify priorities for locating new facilities.

Funding

Funding for the parks and trails facilities has been kept low in Lake County. The county's budget is capped by the state legislature. The survey indicated that while funding for parks and trails is a valid and important county expenditure, respondents want to keep taxes down. Most of the funding mechanisms the county can assess affect property taxes and would not be the most popular options to raise funds for parks and trails. For significant funding to be obtained, voters would have to pass a parks bond or demand general funds be used to pay for parks instead of other budget items. However, it is important that a portion of the parks and trails budget does come from the general fund. General funding is typically unrestricted dollars. In other words, it can be used for keeping the lights on or the grass cut, build a new toilet or pay

for an employee. Most other funding sources are restricted funds which can only be spent on a specific task, generally not maintenance.

While raising funding levels through property taxes is not the preferred method, there are options available to the parks board to raise funds in order to develop and renovate facilities. These funding sources include federal and state dollars, selling or leasing land from Lake County's inventory to generate parks dollars, and private funding.

Parkland Dedication and Payment in Lieu

As discussed in Chapter Four, residential subdivisions are another source of parkland or funds. This source should be used whenever possible.

Management Conclusions

As the demand for parks and trails continues to grow in Lake County, the Parks Board will need to focus less on the day-to-day management of parks, and more on planning, policy and funding. Either finding funding outside of the county's general fund will be necessary or the public's attitude towards funding parks out of the general fund will need to change – or the demands will not be met.

Appendices

A - Site Survey Form

B - Community Survey Form

Appendix A - Site Survey Form

LAKE COUNTY

SITE INVENTORY AND EVALUATION FORM

12/22/11

Instructions
Visit, GPS locate (if necessary), describe and evaluate Lake County-owned sites for potential use or disposition. All Lake County owned parks, recreation sites, and lands, except those used exclusively for road purposes, should be evaluated.

---

1. **Site ID (Township, Range, Section, Letter [A,B,C]):**

2. **Date of Site Survey:**

3. **Name of Evaluator:**

4. **Name to Identify Parcel of Land:**

5. **Parcel Size (acres):**

6. **Deed or Other Ownership Information**

    a. **Known relevant document numbers associated with the property:**

    b. **Dedication information:**

    c. **Is the property listed as public reserve land?:**

    d. **Plat name or certificate of survey number associated with the property:**

    e. **Other pertinent information:**

7. **Zoning Designation:**

8. Access and Connectivity.

a. Is the site legally and physically accessible to the public? Describe the condition and type of access (asphalt, chip seal or gravel road, foot path, width, steepness, etc.). Are difficult or substandard access factors evident?

b. If the access is currently substandard, could access be reasonably improved without major cuts and fills, retaining walls, etc.?

c. Is parking available? How many parking spots are available? If parking is not available, where is the nearest location for parking?

d. Is the site readily accessible to emergency service providers?

e. Is the site handicap accessible?

9. Terrain.

a. Describe the terrain and site features.

b. Circle the applicable slope rating for the majority or developable portion of the site.

0% - 5%	**(level to nearly level, max. wheelchair accessible)**
6% - 10%	**(mostly level, max. for normal road grade)**
11% - 25%	**(lightly to moderately sloped, may need to be excavate to develop)**
26% - 50%	**(somewhat steep, must excavate to develop)**
51% - 99%	**(steep, must excavate to develop)**
100%+	**(very steep, 1-foot rise per 1-foot run)**

10. Vegetation.

a. Circle the major type(s) of vegetation found on the property.

Grass lawn / deciduous trees / coniferous trees / deciduous shrubs

coniferous shrubs / grasses / wetland plants / noxious weeds / other weeds

other vegetation (list type)

b. Circle the amount of vegetation that is currently present on the property:

denuded / landscaped / lawn or grass with no trees or shrubs

lawn or grass with a few trees or shrubs (park-like) / mostly trees

mostly shrubs / mix of trees and shrubs

c. Circle the health of the existing vegetation that is currently present on the property:

healthy / overgrown / managed / unmanaged / thinned

weed infestation / invasive / heavily wooded

11. Soils. Indicate the soil type(s) located on the property. Does the USDA soils survey indicate major constraints for development? If so, why (slope, high groundwater, erosion hazard, etc.)

12. Water access. If applicable,

a. Describe the type of terrain present along the shoreline. What is the approximate water depth in this area (shallow, deep, etc.)?

b. Describe the site's physical suitability for water access for various uses (swimming / fishing dock, boat ramp, canoe or kayak landing, etc.)

13. Utilities. Are utilities on site or readily available? If yes, name the utilities that are available.

14. Current Land Use and Existing Facilities

a. **Describe the land use in the vicinity of the property (highway, undeveloped, residential, etc.)**

b. **Is the site used for anything at this time (formal or informal)?**

c. **Is any development encroaching on the property?**

d. **Describe all existing facilities.**

15. **Development Potential**

a. **Describe potential recreational uses for the site based on site conditions, location, and topography. Why would these be good uses?**

b. **Describe other potential uses for the site other than recreation. Why would these be good uses?**

c. **Could the site be used to provide access (motorized or non-motorized) to a water body, population center, neighborhood, school or other area?**

d. **Will there potentially be any significant or unusual impacts to adjacent landowners if the site is developed? Describe the potential impacts.**

e. **If the site is not readily developable, does it have potential value to neighboring landowners?**

16. **Conservation Value. Does the site have significant environmental or conservation value? If so, describe why (wetlands, floodplain, important wildlife habitat, open space, green belt, etc.).**

17. **Additional observations and notes.**

18. Please make a recommendation to sell, develop or hold the property for the future and cite reasons for recommendation.

19. Attach photos of the site, especially unique features, or things that cause concern or opportunities. Also attach maps and property records as appropriate.

Appendix B - Community Survey Form

Parks & Trails Plan Survey

Lake County is developing a parks and trails plan. An important part of this effort is to understand the community's priorities. Please answer the following questions:

1. What is your gender? ○ Male ○ Female

2. What is your age?
   ○ 17 or younger ○ 18 - 20 ○ 21 - 29 ○ 30 - 39 ○ 40 - 49 ○ 50 - 59 ○ 60 or older

3. How many people live in your household?
   ○ 1 to 2 ○ 3 to 4 ○ 5 to 6 ○ 7 or more

4. What race and ethnicity best describe you?
   ○ African American ○ Caucasian ○ Asian/Pacific Islander ○ Latino/Hispanic
   ○ Native American ○ Other (please specify) _____

5. How often do you and members of your household use a park, trail or recreational site in Lake County? (This includes sites owned by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, CSKT, U.S. Forest Service, City of Polson, etc.)
   ○ Daily ○ Weekly ○ Monthly ○ Occasionally ○ Rarely

6. Check the circle that best describes your view of the existing parks, trails and recreation facilities in Lake County?
   ○ Very Satisfied ○ Somewhat Satisfied ○ Somewhat Unsatisfied ○ Very Unsatisfied

7. What ZIP code is your home in Lake County located in? _____

8. Do you live within the *city limits* of Polson, Ronan or St. Ignatius?
   ○ Yes ○ No If yes, please circle which one: Polson Ronan St. Ignatius

9. Would you like to see new or upgraded parks, recreation areas or trails developed near your home?
   ○ Yes ○ No

10. If you would like to see the development or expansion of *parks or recreation areas*, where would you like to see them developed or expanded? (Please be as specific as possible.)

_____

11. If you would like to see the development or expansion of a *trail system*, where would you like to see it built or expanded? (Please be as specific as possible.)

_____

12. What types of activities would you or a member or your household be interested in participating in? Please rank your answers in order of preference (1, 2, 3, 4,...) with 1 being the activity in which you and your household members are most interested.

○ Boating	○ Road Biking	○ Cultural Education
○ Bird Watching	○ Running/jogging	○ Horseback riding
○ Swimming	○ Organized sports	○ Playground use
○ Canoeing/kayaking	○ Physical fitness	○ Mountain Biking
○ Fishing	○ Picnics/Pavilion use	○ Outdoor education
○ Walking/trails	○ Archery	○ Leisurely visits with family & friends
○ Other, please specify: _____		

13. What types of parks and recreational facilities are most needed? (Check all that apply.)

- O Lake access
- O River access
- O Camping sites
- O Playing fields
- O Walking/biking trails in developed areas (in or near towns)
- O Hiking/horseback riding/mountain biking trails in undeveloped areas
- O Other, please specify: _____
- O Walking/trails
- O Cultural education
- O Physical fitness
- O Playgrounds
- O Cultural education sites
- O Fishing docks
- O Running/jogging
- O Shelter use
- O Basketball courts

14. How important would you rate the following types of parks?

	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Fairly Unimportant	Unimportant
Small neighborhood parks				
Large regional parks				
Sports complexes				
Natural areas				
Lake accesses				
River accesses				
Linear parks like hiking/ walking trails or greenways				

15. Would you prefer to have many small parks throughout the county or a few larger, centralized parks?
    O Many small parks O A few large parks O A combination of both O Neither

16. When prioritizing how to spend resources dedicated to parks and recreation, how important would you rate the following:

	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Fairly Unimportant	Unimportant
Acquiring new parkland				
Building new trails				
Building boat launches				
Building fishing access sites				
Upgrading or expanding existing parks and trails				
Building athletic facilities				
Starting youth recreation programs				
Supporting existing adult & youth recreation programs				
Building picnic areas				
Maintaining existing facilities				

17. In general, how important do you rate *funding* for parks, recreation & trails among other county expenses?
    O Very important O Important O Somewhat important O Unimportant

18. If you support the development, improvement or maintenance of parks, recreation and trail facilities, how do you suggest they be funded?
    O Using current tax dollars O Using new tax dollars (special district, bond, etc.) O User fees
    O Other, please specify: _____

19. If you would like to be made aware of project updates or would like to find out more information, please provide your name and email address, phone number or mailing address to add to the contact list: _____. **Please return to the Lake County Planning Department, 106 4th Ave. E. Polson, MT 59860.** Thank you!