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PRESS RELEASE

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Parks and Recreation staff and volunteers honored for service, contributions

Local parks, trails and open space advocates Bert Lindler and Kevin Verlanic, and Missoula Parks and Recreation staffer Meg Whicher were honored for their service and contributions to the parks and recreation movement at last week's annual meeting of the Montana Trails, Recreation and Park Association.

The association is a statewide organization of trails, parks and recreation professionals. Lindler received the Outstanding Citizen Volunteer award, and Verlanic received a Citation of Merit, which are awarded to exceptional community volunteers and advocates. Whicher received the Professional Award, which honors individuals who provide leadership and make significant contributions to the parks and recreation profession.

Lindler, who currently serves on the city's Open Space Advisory Committee and the formerly served on the Conservation Lands Advisory Committee, has been a tireless supporter of trails, open space and wildlife conservation efforts in key areas of Missoula, including the Grant Creek Trail and Missoula's North Hills. Parks and Recreation Open Space Program Manager Elizabeth Erickson says Lindler is a vital force in the local conservation community. "Bert will always step up when there is a need for committed volunteers to advocate for Missoula's open lands, whether it's pulling weeds in the North Hills, counting elk on Mount Jumbo or advocating for open space conservation before a public body, he is there with a smile and sense of humor," Erickson said.

Verlanic, UM Campus Recreation's Business Manager, served on the city's Parks and Recreation Advisory Board for over four years, and has served on the city's Open Space Advisory Committee since 2014. Verlanic has also volunteered on Parks and Recreation's Conservation Lands Advisory Committee since 2011.

“Kevin’s strategic vision has been invaluable to open space conservation and conservation lands management efforts throughout the City and County,” said Parks and Recreation Director Donna Gaukler. “His vast knowledge and experience in park maintenance, recreation program delivery, budgets, and policy permit him to be remarkably effective in facilitating positive change for the community,” Gaukler added.

Recreation Specialist Meg Whicher received the MTRPA’s Professional Award for her success in developing Parks and Recreation’s Outdoor Recreation program and greatly expanding local recreation opportunities for people with disabilities. Whicher, who has worked with Missoula Parks and Recreation since 2013, has become a nationally recognized expert on inclusive and adaptive recreation programming. Earlier this year Whicher was voted one of the Missoulian newspaper’s “20 Under 40” — “top young professionals who excel in entrepreneurship, leadership, creative vision, innovation and dedication to the community,” according to the Missoulian.

Gaukler says Whicher’s hard work has improved the quality of life of many throughout the community. “Meg is an exceptional recreation professional engaging all the necessary tools and adding a huge dose of passion and enthusiasm to truly make Missoula better place to live and play through high quality programming for all citizens,” Gaukler said.

Members of the Montana Trails, Recreation and Park Association (MTRPA) are affiliated with local, county, state and federal agencies throughout the state, and work to improve the quality of life of all Montanans. MTRPA Executive Board President Chad Fincher is the director of the Kalispell Parks & Recreation Department. For more information, visit <http://www.mtrpa.info/>.

(end)

*Media Note: MTRPA award nominations attached.

MTRPA Award Nomination – Outstanding Citizen Volunteer

Bert Lindler is a long-standing member of, and volunteers countless hours to, the City's Open Space Advisory Committee and Conservation Lands Advisory Committee. Bert is also a huge supporter of trails, land and wildlife conservation efforts in key areas of Missoula, including the Grant Creek Trail and Missoula's North Hills.

Bert has served on multiple Boards and Committees to better his neighborhood and the community at large. As a member of the Grant Creek Trail Association (GCTA) Bert worked for years to advocate the need for a 3-mile bike/ped trail linking multiple neighborhoods, where no sidewalk or safe connectivity existed.

Bert provides leadership, inspiration and humor to all of his endeavors and continues to leave his mark in Missoula open space and trails conservation through his tenacious efforts. He has been recognized for his volunteer work in conservation, community, and neighborhood and most, if not all of these projects are directly related to or consistent with the Missoula Parks and Recreation Mission and Goals.

Lindler news coverage:

[NBC Montana news report, May 2012](#) [Missoulian newspaper, September 2012](#) [NBC Montana news report, July 2013](#)

*Submitted by Donna Gaukler, on behalf of the Missoula Parks and Recreation Department and Board
September 2017*

MTRPA Award Nomination – Citation of Merit

Kevin Verlanic is a long standing member and supporter of Missoula's Parks and Recreation Board, Conservation Lands Advisory Committee and Open Space Advisory Committee. Kevin was key in the creation of the Conservation Lands Management division and the Management Plan for Parks and Recreation. Kevin has been volunteering his time in open space conservation and conservation lands management for many years, and provides a consistent strategic vantage point and countless hours helping direct these efforts in Missoula.

Kevin was instrumental in the restructuring of Parks and Recreation including the many advisory groups, both formal and ad-hoc, to create a more holistic view and management for the many areas the Department touches. His individual efforts, including numerous meetings, have built tremendous trust among Missoula residents and stakeholders.

Kevin is the Business Manager of the University of Montana's Campus Recreation. He served on the Parks & Recreation Advisory Board from February, 1996 to April, 2010; the Conservation Lands Advisory Committee from 2011 to present, and the Open Space Advisory Committee from 2014 to present.

*Submitted by Donna Gaukler, on behalf of the Missoula Parks and Recreation Department and Board
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MTRPA Award Nomination – Professional of the Year

Meg Whicher is the Outdoor Recreation Specialist with the Missoula Parks and Recreation Department. Meg began working with the Missoula Parks and Recreation in November 2013. She manages the Missoula Outdoor Recreation and Education (MORE) Program which includes managing the High and Low Adventure Ropes Course and MOBASH Skatepark along with a plethora of Outdoor Recreation programs. Meg has exceptional collaboration skills and routinely works with every other section of the Department providing coordination for all MORE programs, facilities, and Special Events. One of Meg's first goals with the Department was to revamp the MORE program to include opening the door for more inclusive recreation opportunities in our community. She has increased participation in the MORE program by more than 60 percent in the past 4 years.

Meg has provided leadership and professional development training for every MORE program employee and volunteer here at the Missoula Parks and Recreation, in addition to running First Aid and CPR training courses for other programs when needed. There is no job too big or too small for Meg to lead or assist. In addition, she is routinely called by other Recreation Professional around Montana as well as nationally to assist with inclusive program staff training, program building, or to speak on the subject at conferences.

Meg's formal training is in Therapeutic Recreation, this along with her genuine passion to provide inclusive adventure programming has opened up recreational opportunities to many people who were previously unable to participate in these activities. She was instrumental in developing a partnership with MonTech to provide a home and management service for use of adaptive recreation equipment. This collaboration has provided an avenue for people with disabilities from around the State to check out well maintained equipment that allows them to experience maximum enjoyment of their adventure recreation pursuits.

Meg's positive attitude and enthusiasm is infectious and she's a true asset to Missoula Parks and Recreation and the community.

Missoulian newspaper, June 2017: [20 Under 40: Whicher opens outdoor opportunities for Missoulians](#)

*Submitted by Shirley Kinsey, on behalf of the Missoula Parks and Recreation Department and Board
September 2017*