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PRESS RELEASE

Land trust and City collaborate to protect North Hills wildflowers

Fast Facts

- A short section of trail on Waterworks Hill will be under construction from October 25 through approximately November 15.
- The Waterworks Hill Trailhead will remain open during construction, but hikers can expect short detours and temporary trail closures while the new access is being constructed.
- The trail is located on a conservation easement granted in the 1990's by the Peschel family of Missoula.
- The new trail will protect delicate cushion plants and wildflowers, and help prevent erosion.

Missoula Parks and Recreation, the Rattlesnake Land Trust and the Northern Rockies Chapter of Wildlands Restoration Volunteers (NRWRV) are collaborating to protect delicate native wildflowers and cushion plants on the North Hills.

The project will re-route a half-mile portion of the Ridgeline trail to direct hikers away from the rare Missoula phlox, a variety of pink, blue or white phlox which is only found in Montana. Its tiny low-growing blossoms are ranked as a "sensitive" species by the U.S. Forest Service, which means the plant's numbers are on the decline and its survival is in jeopardy. The North Hills are home to one of the most spectacularly beautiful, but delicate, cushion plant communities in Missoula.

Work on the trail re-route will begin Monday, October 25 and continue for two to three weeks. The Waterworks Hill Trailhead will remain open during construction, but hikers can expect short detours and temporary trail closures while the new access is being constructed.

Rattlesnake Land Trust (formerly Save Open Space) has been awarded a \$5,000 grant from REI to help fund the project. The trail re-route is located on the Land Trust's conservation easement, about 0.2 miles from the Waterworks Hill trailhead off of Greenough Drive. The new trail will cut across the south face of Waterworks Hill below the existing trail and re-connect with the Ridgeline trail just east of the radio towers. It replaces short sections of steep, eroded and heavily over-used hiking trail and road. The new route provides continued access for hikers to the North Hills Open Space and will also allow for a limited number of maintenance vehicles driving up to service radio towers on the hill. Overall, the project will replace over ¼-mile of trail and ½-mile of heavily eroded road with ⅓-mile of new combined road and trail.

The trail runs through a 108-acre conservation easement that was granted to Rattlesnake Land Trust (RLT) by the Peschel family in the 1990s. The easement allows public access to more than 800 acres of City-owned open space on the North Hills via the Ridgeline and Cherry Gulch trails. Hundreds of hikers and runners enjoy these two trails each week, thanks to the Peschel family's generosity in allowing public access over their private property.

"Partnerships with private land owners allow Missoula to conserve open space in a cost-efficient way and provide more recreational access to areas like the North Hills, Mount Sentinel and Mount Jumbo," says Conservation Lands Manager Morgan Valliant. "This project will help balance recreation use with conservation goals on City and private property."

The total project cost is about \$19,000, much of which will be covered by in-kind donations and additional grants. Parks and Recreation's Conservation Lands Management program is contributing labor, some materials, technical expertise, and plants from the City's conservation lands greenhouse. Rattlesnake Land Trust and Wildland Restoration Volunteers are providing volunteer labor valued at about \$10,000. Both RLT and NRWRV need additional funding to support volunteers and complete restoration of the old trail. Citizens and businesses may make donations to either NRWRV or the Rattlesnake Land Trust to support stewardship efforts on the popular Waterworks Hill trail. For more information about Rattlesnake Land Trust, email ssproull@montana.com.

Northern Rockies Wildland Restoration Volunteers (NRWRV) will be hosting a volunteer work day on Saturday, November 6, to re-vegetate the area with native plants and grasses. Tools and treats will be provided. Citizens can register to volunteer for the project at www.wrv.org/nrockies or by calling chapter director Graham Roy at 493-6634.

For a map of the project and more information, visit www.missoulaparks.org.

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**Media, please note: Morgan Valliant will be out of town beginning the afternoon of Oct. 26. He can be reached by cell, 214-2692, or phone Rebecca Goodrich at 552-6254.*