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MISSOULA PARKS AND RECREATION PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release through March 11, 2022

Residents invited to comment on management plan for new North Hills open space

Missoula Parks and Recreation invites residents to view and comment on a [draft management plan](#) for a new public open space parcel in the North Hills through March 11.

Missoula's newest addition to the Conservation Lands system, the Bluebird Preserve, is perched above Grant Creek and overlooks the Missoula valley. The 124-acre Preserve adds much-needed open space and recreational access to the Grant Creek, Captain John Mullan, Westside, and Northside neighborhoods, says Conservation Lands Manager Jeff Gicklhorn. The City [purchased the parcel in 2019](#) with 2006 Open Space Bond funds and contributions from Five Valleys Land Trust.

Gicklhorn says the property also provides seasonal public access to trails on an adjacent 304-acre conservation easement owned by Republic Services. "The draft management plan guides the recreational infrastructure development and natural resource management priorities for the entire 428-acre parcel comprised of the Bluebird Preserve and Republic Services Conservation Easement," he added.

The Bluebird-North Hills Project builds on decades of conservation work in the North Hills and provides significant recreational and scenic values. The property also provides habitat for grassland species, including the endemic Missoula phlox, bitterroot, elk, birds of prey and bluebirds. In addition, the project provides open space access for residents in the rapidly growing area west of Reserve Street, which is underserved by the Conservation Lands system.

Trailhead access to the new open space will be located just north of the Grant Creek Conoco, [adjacent to the Snowbowl shuttle parking lot](#). This project would not be possible without the strong partnership of Montana Snowbowl and their collaboration in locating the public access easement and trailhead across their lower Grant Creek lot.

The draft management plan proposes roughly four miles of new moderate-grade trails for pedestrian and equestrian users with year-round access to the Bluebird Property and seasonal access to the adjacent Republic Services Conservation Easement. In addition, it outlines strategies to protect and enhance Missoula Phlox populations and native grassland communities and prescribes non-native invasive vegetation management strategies.

The anticipated opening date of the area is Fall 2022. Residents can view the plan and take a brief public comment survey at www.engagemissoula.com through March 11.