Missoula County Parks and Trails Advisory Board
April 16, 2026
Meeting Minutes – Approved

Parks and Trails Advisory Board		County Staff	Guests
Present	**Absent**		
Jeff Koch, President Ron Schlader, Vice President Juanita Vero, Commissioner Jane Plummer, first alternate Ria Overholt, second alternate Paige Judnich Jessica Glebke Ian Rufe	Steve Snyders Jennifer Thomsen	Bethany Gunther Nick Zanetos Kelsey Phillips Dede Lienau Silas Phillips Jackson Lee	Sarah Moore

1) CALL TO ORDER

President, Jeff Koch, called the meeting to order at 1:31 p.m.

2) APPROVAL OF MINUTES

a) March 19, 2026

Ron Schalder made a motion to approve the minutes as written. Paige Judnich seconded the motion. All members voted in favor and the motion passed.

3) PUBLIC COMMENT AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no public comments or announcements.

4) ITEMS INVOLVING GUESTS AND ACTION ITEMS

a) Parks and Trails Advisory Board Bylaw Workshop and Recommendation

The board conducted a detailed review and revision of its bylaws, beginning with the Parks Board bylaws before addressing the Big Sky bylaws because changes to one could influence the other. Staff clarified that the referral form had not been updated and noted that any amendments to the Big Sky committee bylaws may require additional approval from that committee. Members worked through the document section by section, focusing on simplifying language, improving clarity, and reinforcing that the board's role is advisory rather than policymaking. Significant attention was given to Article 3 concerning powers and duties, where members agreed the board should be described as working in conjunction with county staff to make recommendations to commissioners, rather than independently establishing county policy. Additional edits clarified that policies referenced in the bylaws apply only to the board's own operations and improved wording related to staff liaisons and commission expectations.

The discussion then shifted to board structure and the role of alternate members. Members debated whether alternates should be eliminated in favor of a fixed number of regular members, citing confusion about when alternates vote, how quorum is calculated, and what responsibilities alternates hold during meetings. Staff explained that many county advisory boards are moving toward a “seven regular members plus two alternates” model, and after discussion the board leaned toward retaining alternates while improving procedural clarity. Proposed improvements included notifying alternates at the beginning of meetings whether they are serving as voting members and adding a quorum or roll-call check to meeting agendas. Members also supported a clearer succession process in which Alternate 1 automatically fills a vacant regular member seat, Alternate 2 moves into the Alternate 1 role, and commissioners appoint a new Alternate 2 member.

The board also reviewed attendance, resignation, and termination procedures. Members expressed concern that undefined terms such as “just cause” for absences could create ambiguity and enforcement issues. The group favored simplifying the language and adding a procedure requiring the president to contact members after repeated absences to confirm their continued interest before recommending termination. Resignation language was softened from mandatory wording such as “will” to more flexible wording like “should,” recognizing that some members may stop participating without formally resigning in writing.

Additional refinements focused on committee structure, officer responsibilities, and meeting procedures. Members discussed whether standing committees and subcommittees should have designated chairs or presidents responsible for conducting meetings and reporting back to the full board, similar to practices used by other county advisory boards. The board also reviewed whether the president’s authority to discuss and vote on motions needed to be explicitly stated and concluded that those rights are already covered under Robert’s Rules of Order. Minor edits clarified terminology such as “regular meetings” and improved consistency throughout the document.

Quorum and voting language received additional attention, with members debating whether quorum should be defined numerically or as a majority of current standing members. Staff explained that using a majority-based definition provides flexibility when vacancies occur, while some members preferred explicit numbers for simplicity. The group ultimately agreed that the revised wording was workable after discussing how alternates and vacancies would affect voting calculations. ***Paige Judnich made a motion to approve the updated bylaws as amended in the April 16, 2026, meeting. Jessica Glebke seconded the motion. All members voted in favor and the motion passed.*** Staff will now prepare a clean version incorporating all approved edits, circulating them electronically for signatures, and forwarding them for final consideration.

b) **Big Sky Stewardship Committee Bylaw Recommendation**

Board members agreed that, unless there were major concerns, the Big Sky committee should largely retain control over its own bylaws while incorporating a few consistent updates made during the Parks Board review. Suggested edits included clarifying staff liaison language, updating resignation wording, and removing ambiguous "just cause" language related to member termination. Staff indicated those changes could likely be recommended without requiring a full rewrite by the Parks Board. ***Jeff Koch made a motion to recommend that the Parks and Trails Advisory Board return to the Big Sky Stewardship Committee proposed amendments in their bylaws for consideration. Ron Schlader seconded the motion. All members voted in favor and the motion passed.***

5) **OLD BUSINESS**

a) **Marshall Mountain Update**

Staff provided a two-year update on public ownership and development at Marshall Mountain, highlighting significant progress in trails, restoration projects, accessibility improvements, and recreation programming. About five miles of new trails have been added, including beginner and adaptive-friendly routes such as Izzy Up and Mission to Mars, largely funded through grants and partnerships with the Missoula Mountain Bike Coalition. Additional work included forestry treatments, stream restoration planning with Trout Unlimited, removal of old ski infrastructure, utility upgrades, and environmental cleanup of aging lodge buildings in preparation for demolition.

Staff also updated the board on an $838,000 Land and Water Conservation Fund grant that will support additional trail development and base area improvements. Visitor use data collected by the University of Montana showed strong community engagement, with most users visiting frequently and the majority identifying as mountain bikers. Usage at Marshall has continued to grow, with beginner trails receiving especially positive feedback.

A substantial portion of the presentation focused on e-bike discussions. Survey results showed mixed opinions, with strong support and opposition both represented, though many respondents supported e-bike access if it improved accessibility for others. Staff emphasized that no decisions have been made and that any potential pilot program for Class 1 e-bikes would require a public process, coordination with other land managers, and additional study of trail etiquette and impacts.

The board also heard updates on the new Mountain Line recreation shuttle service, which successfully connected downtown Missoula to Marshall Mountain during a pilot season and will expand through the full 2026 recreation season. Staff noted that the shuttle increased access for university students, families, and other new users. Finally, staff reviewed a busy 2026 event schedule featuring bike races, running events, youth programming, concerts, and regional cycling competitions, reflecting Marshall Mountain's growing role as a major community recreation hub.

6) **NEW BUSINESS**

a) **Community Parks and Recreation Grant Application Workshop**

The board reviewed proposed updates to the Community Parks and Recreation Grants program, focusing on improving efficiency, clarity, and accessibility before formal approval next month. Staff proposed moving the grant process from email-based administration to an online grants portal already used by other county grant programs. The new system would streamline applications, automate communication, centralize records, and allow board members to score applications directly within the platform. Staff also presented a revised application structure with clearer instructions, built-in eligibility screening questions, and a new scoring rubric that breaks evaluation criteria into more specific categories for consistency and transparency.

Additional proposed changes included setting a $30,000 maximum grant request, increasing the volunteer labor match rate from $20 to $30 per hour to align with state grant standards, and clarifying project eligibility rules. Projects at Big Sky Park would become ineligible due to its separate funding source and limited public access. Staff also proposed modest timeline adjustments to avoid quorum issues during December meetings by moving funding recommendation votes to January.

Board members generally supported the revisions and appreciated the clearer scoring structure and improved organization. Discussion focused on whether increasing the volunteer labor rate effectively lowers matching requirements too much, and whether the application process may still feel burdensome for smaller organizations with limited administrative capacity. Staff acknowledged those concerns but noted the online portal should make the process easier and more accessible while helping staff better assist applicants. Members also discussed balancing accessibility for small community groups with maintaining enough application rigor to fairly evaluate increasingly competitive funding requests.

7) **STAFF REPORT**

Staff shared several updates on upcoming parks and recreation projects and issues. The board was reminded that nominations for the upcoming Park Steward Award will open soon. Staff also highlighted the successful statewide parks and recreation conference hosted in Missoula in partnership with the city and the University of Montana, noting it was a valuable opportunity to showcase local parks and facilities.

Additional updates included progress on the Seeley Lake Trail project, changes underway at West Riverside Park, and ongoing planning for a new playground after the removal of an existing unsafe structure. Staff also reported continued delays in addressing remediation issues at the barn facility, which was closed due to structural deterioration and mold concerns, though the park pavilion remains available for events.

Board members asked about two public concerns. Staff explained that a grant related to trails near Seeley Lake is temporarily paused while the county reviews public opposition and consults with partners before deciding how to proceed. The board also discussed public concerns over ground squirrel mitigation efforts at New Meadows Park. Staff explained that professional contractors are using gas treatments to control expanding ground squirrel colonies that threaten trails, irrigation systems, and other park infrastructure. Members suggested providing more public information about the process and its purpose to improve transparency and address misconceptions.

8) COMMUNICATIONS

There were no communication updates.

9) ADJOURNMENT

Ron Schlader made a motion to adjourn. Paige Judnich seconded the motion. All members voted in favor and the meeting was adjourned at 3:24 p.m.