

To: Montana Recreation & Parks Association

May 31, 2011

From: Jackie Corday, Missoula Parks & Recreation

RE: **Report on Trip to DC May 9-11, 2011**

Previous DC Trip – Oct 2009

Dale Harris, the Chair of Missoula Parks & Recreation Board, travels to DC often to meet with our Congressional members and staff within the Department of Interior for various natural resource issues he works on. In Oct. 2009, he suggested to Donna Gaukler, Director of Missoula Parks & Recreation, that either Donna or I should also be meeting with legislative aides to Senators Baucus and Tester and Representative Rehberg to discuss ways that federal funds are crucial to local parks, trails, and open space. Dale offered to significantly cover the costs of such a trip, and with his financial help and guidance in DC, we had a very productive week meeting with staff from National Recreation & Parks Association (NRPA), Transportation for America (T4A), our Congressional members, and high-level staff in the USFS and National Parks Service (NPS). We focused mainly on LWCF, Transportation Enhancements (CTEP, RTP, SRTS), Complete Streets Act, Livable Communities Act, and No Child Left Inside/Children in Nature.

Prep-work for May 2011

For this second trip to DC, after talking to NRPA and T4A staff and other DC based organizations, I determined that we needed to be much more focused as funding and politics had changed fairly dramatically since October 2009. We narrowed the topics to the Transportation Bill (T-Bill) programs that help to fund non-motorized transportation such as CTEP, RTP, SRTS, and CMAQ since both the House and Senate are currently working on drafting the next T-Bill. We also chose to address LWCF Stateside issues. These conversations also confirmed for me that the timing of an early May trip was very good - everyone I spoke with said that Congress will soon be working on the FY 12 budget and continued funding for LWCF, RTP, SRTS, and CTEP will be at issue and needs strong support.

To help our DC Congressional members and staff understand how those T-Bill programs are making such a difference for Montana citizens in providing safe and enjoyable commuter and recreation routes for bicyclists and pedestrians, I requested contacts from around the state to provide me with photographs of people out using and enjoying shared-use trails. I wanted to show them that it's not just Missoula citizens who are benefitting from this funding. Attached is the photo essay that I provided to Baucus, Tester, and Rehberg staff – my hope was that these pictures were worth a thousand words and told the story of how much these types of trails mean to Montanans. In addition to these photos, Taylor Lonsdale, the Safe Routes to School Coordinator provided me with fantastic one page stories about SRTS funding being used in small MT towns such as Shelby, Dillon, Ronan, and Hardin.

In addition to the many conversations listed above and preparing the photo essay, I also read the 100+ page America's Great Outdoors Report: <http://americasgreatoutdoors.gov/report/> One of the report Action Items was of particular interest: 6.1b "*Increase the number of urban parks and community green spaces by working with partners to develop criteria within NPS's LWCF stateside program for new urban parks and community green spaces.*" My concern was that previous to this statement, the report talks about targeting urban centers and gives examples from large cities such as New Orleans, Chicago, and New

York. Thus, I figured the new criteria could likely exclude rural states such as Montana if their focus is on large urban cities with a population of e.g. 200,000+. Stacy Pine from NRPA also informed me that the Dept of Interior proposal is to use the 60% of the total stateside allocation for this new program instead of the current method of distribution to all states based upon a population formula. Based upon grant applications, the DOI would decide who is awarded the funds, not the states. Currently, in MT, FWP determines who is granted MT's portion of the stateside funds, so control would be taken away from the state partners and given to the DOI.

May 2011 Meetings

- 1) *Congressional staff* - Baucus (Will Sehestedt), Tester (Stephenne Harding, Zach Radford), and Rehberg (Eric Bierwagen) - Met with staff and focused mainly on the importance of Transportation Enhancements (CTEP, RTP, SR2S) and CMAQ are to Montana citizens and communities. I gave them the photo essay of trail and sidewalk projects all across MT that have been funded with TE (see attached). I believe all the staff appreciated the photo essays and both Baucus and Tester staff said that their Senators' understood the importance of the funding for providing bike/ped infrastructure and what that means for communities. Zach in particular said that Tester gets the economic benefits in addition to the health benefits. I also spoke to them about LWCF and how important the Stateside funding is to large and small towns in MT and asked for their support of 40% stateside funding. Will said Baucus did not have immediate plans to introduce another LWCF full-funding bill and has not committed to the 40% stateside idea, but had not ruled it out. Stephenne indicated that it was unlikely that Tester would commit to the 40% stateside funding as she said MT has benefitted greatly from the federal side funding. Stacy Pine from NRPA attended the meetings with Rehberg and Tester staff.
- 2) *National Park Service* - Met with Mickey Fern, Deputy Director, Communications and Community Assistance, to discuss the America's Great Outdoors Report and how the NPS will be working to implement certain goals set forth in the report related to LWCF stateside funding. When I asked about the new criteria that NPS has been tasked to draft, Mickey said he'd rather I ask his staff that are working on this project. I met with them the next day (Joel Lynch, Elizabeth Morgan, and Wayne Strum), which was amazing to me to obtain such access at such short notice. Joel is currently the Acting Chief of LWCF. I asked them what was the shift in the stateside program and they explained that basically the way that the money is currently distributed precludes any big projects from happening. Congressional members and high level staff at DOI want to see the money going towards "signature" projects verses "little projects like bathrooms." The focus will be on 1) "blueways" or waterfronts that connect urban communities to rivers, 2) large "signature" regional parks that serve a large population, and 3) landscape level projects that preserve large natural areas located close to large urban populations. The plan is to have the new criteria drafted by the end of the summer and submit the proposal to Congress in time for potential adoption for use in the FY2012 budget cycle.

After hearing that, I expressed my concerns of cutting out rural states from even having a chance of qualifying and explained that the largest City/County population in MT doesn't top 200,000. I suggested they also look at square miles being served by a large regional park as part of the criteria. For example, if Missoula finally finds a funding source to build Fort Missoula Regional Park, for large tournaments, the park will serve all of Missoula, Ravalli, and most of Mineral County. It was a good meeting with lots of interaction, but I am concerned that rural states such as MT will likely lose out under this new proposed program. We will need to continue tracking this

issue and I plan to keep in touch with Joel. I have already sent another follow-up email asking about the 50/50 match and if there is any chance that might be adjusted to 75/25 to help out cities with smaller budgets. He said that would take a change in the actual LWCF Act, so there are no plans to do that at this point in time.

- 3) *USFS* - Met with Susan Stein to discuss the USFS Open Space Conservation Strategy that was adopted in 2007 in regards to helping local governments implement planning and programs to help conserve open space adjacent to public lands. The program is just barely getting started, so there isn't much yet for local assistance for open space planning or acquisition. Also met with Alice Ewen, National Program Mgr, Cooperative Forestry/Urban & Community Forestry to ask about their program for local urban forestry assistance. Missoula needs help decreasing our pruning cycle from its current ~40 yrs to the recommended 7 yr cycle. Alice informed us that there is no federal funding for that particular need. She suggested that we meet with our local USFS UCF staff to see if there are other ways the program could assist cities.
- 4) *League of American Bicyclists* - Met with Bill Nesper to talk about Missoula going from our current Silver designation for a Bicycle Friendly Community to a Gold designation. The Bicycle Friendly Community designation is a national program administered by the League of American Bicyclists whose headquarters is in DC. This is a great program for receiving recognition that your city cares about providing safe routes for cyclists and pedestrians, including commuter and recreational routes as well as safe routes to schools for kids. Bill was eager to assist Missoula in making recommendations for achieving a gold level status.