IF YOU SEE SARAH JAEGER on a trail, chances are you’ll see her dogs bounding beside her. “Since I was a little kid, I would walk in the woods with my dogs,” Sarah said. “It feeds my soul — it’s trite sounding, but it’s true.” The dogs have come and gone over the years. There’s been Fred the Dachshund. There’s been Ivy the Wheaten terrier. Now, Archie and Oona, also Wheaten terriers, accompany Sarah on her walks. Fred became a local celebrity for raising pledges for PPLT’s Don’t Fence Me In trail run. For several years he earned top-dog honors as top pledge-earner, one year he raised more than $1,500. Ivy helped Sarah through a rough time. “I was really close to my mother,” Sarah said. “During the process of her dying, I walked out my grief with Ivy.” Oona and Archie have a different responsibility — to make sure Sarah continues her walks in the woods. A neurological disease has slowed her pace and limited the distance she can go, but Sarah still answers the dogs’ pleas to expend their energy. She takes them to the flat trail system at PPLT’s Tenmile Creek Park, near Fort Harrison.

Tenmile Creek Park is part of PPLT’s Peaks to Creeks Initiative and is a thriving example of community conservation, one of PPLT’s core focus areas. Community conservation is an approach to conservation that strives for inclusivity and providing outdoor access to a broader segment of a community. Sarah has been on PPLT’s board of directors since 2005. It shouldn’t be surprising that the dog walk event of Don’t Fence Me In was her idea. She’s seen the work of PPLT evolve from establishing the Mount Ascension Natural Park for hikers and mountain bikers to providing outdoor access to those with limited mobility. “My perspective was broadened when I got the neurological disease,” she said. “I want wide, flat trails so I want to help make them happen.” And by broadening outdoor access to people of all abilities, PPLT is broadening the community that benefits from its work. “The types of people I see there, they are so diverse,” Sarah said. “I see people who would never be on the South Hills trails, and they are so grateful to have a place to go. I see people visiting the V.A. from out of town, and they are so happy to have a place to walk. I’ve seen a couple out there riding recumbent bikes. I’ve seen tiny, little kids on bikes — they can bike safely. There is such a broad array of people out there.” And, of course, she sees dogs. “My dogs love the creek. They can run. There are regulars out there. They know the dogs, and they know the people.” “I’ve even seen a three-legged dog out there,” Sarah said.
TRAVIS VINCENT traveled a long road to get back home to Montana. Before becoming PPLT’s newest project staff member, Travis lived in Russia, Italy, California, Namibia and Washington, D.C.

Travis grew up on the shores of Flathead Lake in Bigfork, camping, hiking and with his family. He continued to explore western Montana while pursuing his undergraduate degree in international affairs, Travis did research on an annual backpack trip to the North Fork Crossing Lodge on the beautiful Blackfoot River. Enjoy a gourmet dinner and breakfast! The top individual pledge-getter gets to choose between brewing E-Trail beer for next year’s race with Blackfoot River Brewing OR working with the owner of Big Dipper to create your own ice cream flavor that will be featured for a whole week!

If you raise $500 in pledges, you’ll receive a handmade Happy Trails ceramic cup. If you raise at least $1000 in pledges, you will receive a Happy Trails growler.

Why did you return to Montana?
I had always planned on returning to Montana someday. I knew we had something special here, but after living in a handful of places around the world, I realized just how special. Living in the city, it was difficult to escape just to go on a run or swim, let alone backpack. Here, in 20 minutes, I can be really out of town in over directions. I run up a mountain behind my house every other day. There’s something to be said about all the opportunities at our doorstep to camp, fish and hike in dramatic and remote landscapes. And I might be a little biased, but Montanans are a genuinely kind and fun group of people.

Why do you think open space is important?
Where do I begin? Personally, I need open space to feel free and connected to the natural world. I need to know that there are places in the world that are still wild. In an economic sense, protecting open space is just wise financial planning. It’s funny, Montana is a small state in so many ways, but when it comes to open space and the environment, we’re a big deal.

H ave you REGISTERED for Don’t Fence Me In yet? Don’t worry; there is still time! Visit pricklypearl.org to register. The race this year is May 12. As usual, there are the 30k, 12k, 5k and 5k dog walk — all taking place on Helen’s fabulous South Hills trail system. The run/walk begin and end at Pioneer-Heritage Park (aka Anchor Park) located at the south end of the Downtown Helena Walking Mall, next to the Lewis & Clark County Library.

Overall male and female winners in each distance will win Salomon shoes. First place male and female finishers in each age group in each event will also be awarded a prize. The dog walk is non-competitive.

PPLT WELCOMES NEW PROJECT ASSOCIATE TRAVIS VINCENT

World-renowned for our fishing, biking, camping, hiking, skiing and just looking around. Economies at its core is the allocation of scarce resources — our open space is a huge resource and we can use it in a renewable way or we can let it go waste, but we can’t get it back. Why should people care about private land conservation? We are so fortunate to have the level of public land and access in Montana that we do, but we often take private land conservation for granted. If not for concerted, thoughtful efforts by individual Montana landowners, natural waters and ecosystems cannot function, and wildlife cannot thrive. Conservation easements and other creative tools and programs that support private land conservation have allowed us to expand wildlife habitat, recreation opportunities and scenic space — all things valued by Montanans. It is such a great feeling to meet our ranchers and landowners, who will do whatever it takes to make sure their land remains as open forest, crop and grazing land. We need to double down on our support for the tools and funding sources that make conservation on private lands a more competitive option, so landowners can stay afloat and protect the land that benefits us all. Otherwise, the Big Sky will be a big suburb.

What's your favorite trail? (This is a question everyone gets)
I hesitate to give away one of my family’s favorite backpacking spots, but the loop up to Glacier, Turquoise and Lace lakes in the Missions is pretty idyllic. You can do a little bit of everything there — get some scrambling in, catch a few cutthroat, pick hucks and even try a 30-second “swim” in the glacial water. Since middle school, my dad and I have gone on an annual backpack trip to the Missions, it’s one of my favorite traditions.

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REPORT: HELENA RESIDENTS CONSIDER TRAIL SYSTEM VERY IMPORTANT TO QUALITY OF LIFE

ACCORDING TO A REPORT issued by the University of Montana’s Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research (ITRR), more than 63,000 hikers, runners, walkers and bikers recreated in the South Hills trail system in the summer of 2017. ITRR’s report was based on survey data it collected between May and September last year. Surveys with ITRR intercepted 950 trail users between May and September 2017 to inquire about their trail use and any spending in the Helena area. Combining the survey information collected with both manual and electronic counts of users entering the trail system, ITRR estimated that more than 63,000 users took part in outdoor recreation. Of these numbers, 17,428 were on mountain bikes and 45,602 were on foot. Just over a quarter of all mountain bike activity was from users outside the local (Lewis and Clark, Jefferson and Broadwater counties) area, and one in five users on foot were nonlocal.

PPLT LAUNCHED

The new map offers:
• Recom mended routes for users new to hiking, running and biking;
• The ability to turn on and off certain layers to customize your viewing experience;
• Other recreational points of interest (i.e. blow downs, fire, construction, etc.)

PPLT would love to get feedback from users. The map is fully editable and PPLT would like to be proactive in meeting map-users’ needs.

NEW WEB-BASED TRAIL MAP AVAILABLE NOW ON THE PPLT WEBSITE

BASIC ETIQUETTE MAKES THE TRAILS A HAPPY PLACE

Note: This ran as a guest editorial in the Independent Record on March 20. We wanted to share it here in case anyone missed it.

KEEP THE TRAILS HAPPY!

With spring finally here, we know folks are itching to get out on the trails. Here are a few trail etiquette reminders to consider as you head to the South Hills to hike, run and bike.

1. Get dirty. If you find yourself encountering a muddy spot or puddle on the trail, go right through the middle of it. Stepping off the trail and going around muddy and wet spots widens the trail, damages natural resources and makes the problem worse. If you are unsure if the trails are too muddy to use, check the Prickly Pear Land Trust Facebook page for most up to date details on trail conditions.

2. Always stay on the trail. Going off trail creates “social trails” that degrade natural resources and causes unnecessary resources to be expended to reclaim these trails. Some trails in the South Hills cross private property, and the generous landowners who provide this access appreciate when we keep our impact concentrated on the trail surface.

3. Keep an ear open. When listening to music or podcasts on the trails, keep one ear free so you can hear approaching hikers, bikers and runners.

4. Yield to other trail users with a smile. In general, bikers should yield to hikers and runners. When wanting to pass someone on the trail, a friendly “On your left!” is the best way to get someone’s attention. Assuming you don’t have two earbuds in, hearing those magic words is a nice indicator to calmly step off the trail to allow the faster moving trail user to pass. A smile and “Thank you” go a long way to keeping trail users happy when passing.

5. Be pet proactive. Leash your dog in the parking lot and have your pet’s (cats and puppies too!) under voice control on the trail at all times. Pick up after your pet and be sure to pack the trash out with you.

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Our trail system is a source of community pride and a place where all are welcome and valued. No matter your mode or speed of recreation, everyone has a part to play in keeping our trails a happy and positive place to be.

Evan Kulesa, Prickly Pear Land Trust
Andrea Opitz, Bike Helena
Eric Sivers, Montana Bicycle Guild
John Tietz, Helena United Cycling
Jesse Zenia, Vigilante Runners
Michael Jacobson, Helena Ultra Runners League

ACCORDING TO A REPORT

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The new map offers:
• Descriptions of all trails and trailheads
• A larger area of coverage than our paper map can provide
• Other recreational points of interest such as the disc golf course, rock climbing, etc.
• Live updates to show trail closures and other information if there is an issue on the system (i.e. blowdowns, fire, construction, etc.)

The map is accessible through the PPLT website and through partner group sites that share the link.

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WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Welcome to our new members and thanks for joining us! These members joined between November 1, 2017, and March 23, 2018. We’re so glad you share our vision of connecting land and people. Together we will continue our work in private land conservation, trails and community conservation.

We warmly welcome:
Ron & Char Aasheim
Elizabeth Andrews
Bill Avey & Crystal Coffey-Avey
Sue Bartlett & Gene Fenderson
John & Nina Baucus
Dr. Erik & Monica Bergquist
Mary Blake & Keith Alltucker
Al & Marti Bledsoe
Broadwater Hot Springs & Fitness
Breana Buettner
Dennis Burgard
Mike & Trudy Burke
Allan & Mary Chronister
Joshua Collins
Tammy Copenhaver
Bruce and Catherine Day
Kristin Drees
Lu Diessen & Scott Harris
Elizabeth Eites
Steve Fahrenby
Neil & Jodi Fasteen
Pat & Becky Foster
Becky Garland
Malcolm Gilbert
Edward Glowenka
Doug & Carolyn Hagan
Gretchen & John Hannon
Amanda Harrow
Montana and Adam Hein
Frank & Billie Houle
Dave Hunter
Cathy Kendall
Roger Kieeling
Jasmine Lamb
Ben Lamb
Ryan & Jess Lindsay
Jamie Mashek
Perni P May
Jennifer McKee
Terry & Paul Melvin
Megan Moore
Lon Moore
Heidi O'Brien
Ryan & Brie Oliver
Bill & Jan Orsello
George Parish
Kyle Perkins
Thomas & Channa Fay Richardson
Mike Rieger
Karla Ritten & Lawrence Dolan
Bill Roberts
Laura Sanders
Gerald Scheetz
Jeff Shirley
Paul Shiller
Stahly Engineering, Byron Stahly
Christina Staten
Galen Steffens
Bob and Peggy Stringer
Steve & Kim Turkiewicz
Eugene Walborn
Arthur Walsh & Susan Pfann
Jim & Shelley White
Ron Whitmoyer
Barry Wootten

MARK YOUR CALENDAR FOR THESE EXCITING EVENTS

April 23: Trail Work Day
May 12: Don’t Fence Me In
May 21: Trail Work Day
June 2: National Trails Day
June 2: Grand Opening of Tenmile Creek Park
June 18: Trail Work Day
July 16: Trail Work Day
Sept. 17: Trail Work Day
Sept. 29: Harvest Moon

springs 2018

A WALK ON THE MILD SIDE
DON’T FENCE ME IN COMING MAY 12
TRAILS ETIQUETTE

WE THANK OUR DON’T FENCE ME IN SPONSORS

RODNEY RIDGE SPONSORS

SPRINGHILL MEADOW SPONSORS

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connecting land and people

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Lanie White
Development Manager
Claudia Davis
Administrative Services
Evan Kulesa
Trails Coordinator
Nate Kopp
Project Manager
Travis Vincent
Project Associate
Breana Buettner
Membership and Outreach Coordinator

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