

# Fact Sheet & FAQ

## Blue Mountain Region Trails

### What was the project?

The goal of the project was to develop a blueprint for a regionwide non-motorized trails and transportation network throughout the Blue Mountain Region. Our region for this project included Columbia and Walla Walla counties and northeastern Umatilla County. The resulting BMRT Plan aims to connect many of our natural and cultural treasures, recreational areas, and centers of economic activity. The Plan can be used to unlock federal and state grant opportunities. In the long run, this planning effort will increase outdoor recreation opportunities, improve walking and biking options, enhance health and mobility, and promote a higher quality of life in our region.

### How did this project come about?

Inspired by citizen input and Community Council's 2015 study on "Enhancing Outdoor Recreation Opportunities", local planners met and convened interested key partners and stakeholders to brainstorm this regional planning project. Bolstered by widespread support and through extensive collaboration, the group of planners submitted a successful application for project support from the National Park Service's Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program. This National Park Service grant focused on technical support, public outreach, and plan production.

### Who led this planning process?

This project was a regionwide planning effort that connected stakeholders and members of the public with the planning team consisting of staff from Blue Mountain area cities, counties, tribes, health departments, ports, and transportation and natural resource management agencies. Jointly, we mapped out a network of walking, biking, hiking, and equestrian connections and support infrastructure. Everyone in the region was invited to provide input into this planning effort. The National Park Service's Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program provided technical assistance.

### What was planned?

Developing a seamless network of non-motorized transportation and trail connections called for a multi-layered approach that integrated -

- Walking and cycling within communities for various purposes (e.g. work, school, shopping),
- Recreational travel within and between communities, and
- Hiking, cycling, and horseback riding trails throughout the region.

### What is the purpose of the plan?

The overall goal of the project was to have a regionwide plan. The jurisdictions and stakeholders invested staff and volunteer hours, as well as other resources, to make this happen. Once adopted, the Plan will leverage private and public funding opportunities, including state and federal grants, which will allow for the phased implementation of the non-motorized trails and transportation recommendations.

### What lands were looked at for potential trails?

The planning team focused on publicly owned land and existing public right-of-ways, and will also consider the land of willing landowners.

### Who will be able to use the non-motorized network?

Once built, the network of non-motorized trails and transportation connections will be public and available to all. It is likely that the network will serve different types of uses (e.g., walking, biking, hiking, horseback riding) and will accommodate people with mobility limitations or disabilities at different locations. It is also likely that some trails will include locations where motorized uses (e.g., motorbikes, snowmobiles) are allowed.

### Will the development of a trail affect farming practices?

Many trails around the nation have been developed adjacent to working farms with no adverse effects either to trail users or to the farmers' ability to manage their farms.

### Will there be an increase in trespassing, littering, vandalism, and other illegal activities?

The vast majority of multi-use paths and trails have experienced a decrease in unwanted activities, such as those listed above. The reason is that people tend to perform illegal activities in places where there are no citizens frequenting the area. In many trail projects, people have seen corridors transformed from places that are unkempt to valued amenity areas that showcase the region's natural beauty and heritage. Multi-use paths and trails will be managed by the respective local government, trail association, or public-private partnerships, and will be subject to locally adopted rules and regulations.

### How will the project enhance public safety?

At present, many of our region's roadways provide accommodations for pedestrians and bicyclists, but a complete community-wide network - designed for users of all ages and ability levels - has not yet been established. This planning effort focused on providing safe transportation corridors by taking into account anticipated user needs, unique features, community values, and resources; and balancing safety, access, mobility, and efficiency. Particular consideration was given to how we might connect our schools and parks, so that children have safe routes to travel by foot or bike. Furthermore, where separate trails cross paved or unpaved roadways, appropriate trail design along with placement of signs and other markers will alert motorists and trail users to use caution at these crossings.

### How will the project enhance health?

Making walking, biking, and hiking a convenient option for all would improve health impacts and promote mental wellbeing.

- Well-connected streets with safe pedestrian and bicycle paths can reduce collision risks, prevent injuries, and promote a healthy and active lifestyle for everyone.
- People who live near trails are physically more active by about 150%.
- Active lifestyles are directly related to a reduction in stress, depression, arthritis, Type 2 Diabetes, and obesity in both children and adults.
- Outdoor activities and recreation provide increased opportunities for social interaction and yield stronger social cohesion in neighborhoods and across communities.

### Who will pay for, construct, and maintain the network?

Potential options for construction and maintenance will be analyzed in the planning process. One of these options is the creation of public-private partnerships. Money for construction will likely come from federal, state, local government, and private funding sources (grants and donations). In general, each jurisdiction and/or public-private partnership will be responsible for the construction and maintenance of the sidewalk, bike route, path, or trail that passes through their jurisdiction.