

# Norman Maclean Trail

## Connecting Communities and People

**So everyone can share Norman Maclean's feelings when he wrote,  
“ . . . a little of the love I have for the earth as it goes by.”**

Norman Maclean lived in Missoula but, as you know, did much of his writing in the family cabin on Seeley Lake. Norman and his brother Paul reportedly hiked from Missoula to Seeley Lake to write, relax, and fish.

So, when the Missoula Community Foundation and the Seeley Lake Community Foundation were looking for ways to better connect, creating a trail that connects the two communities in the manner Norman and Paul did decades ago seemed like the perfect project. As word spread about the possibility of connecting Seeley Lake and Missoula with a trail inspired by Norman and Paul Maclean, momentum began to build. The more outdoor enthusiasts talked, the more possibilities became apparent. Excitement about the trail became contagious.

Hiking and riding long trails is growing in popularity. The Appalachian Trail, Pacific Crest, and in our back yard the Continental Divide trails draw millions annually for the challenge, scenery, local history, and wildlife. Shorter routes such as the Route of the Hiawatha west of Missoula has become a regional destination for residents and tourists.

Now Seeley Lake and Missoula hope to create a unique trail inspired by Norman and Paul Maclean that will connect the two communities. The Missoula and Seeley Lake Community Foundations have joint responsibility for the planning and implementation of the project. A committee of stakeholders and interested citizens has been working on routing and other issues during the past year.

The vision of the trail is to link communities while connecting individuals with the natural and cultural history of the area. This project has the potential to bring communities together in a variety of ways. It can link Missoula and Seeley Lake, forming urban-rural partnerships. It will honor a great American author. It will likely become a popular trek, tempting both locals and guests. It will rally communities around a positive cause.

On the trail users will enjoy plants, animals, streams, mountains, and fellow humans who live today, while learning about those that lived before us through a written tour guide and map. The trail will attract local and regional hikers, bikers, skiers, equestrians, and ultra distance athletes. Local economies will be stimulated. The mind, body, and soul of participants will be enriched.

A critical first step has been to identify a route that approximates the path the Maclean brothers took and stays on established roads and trails as much as possible to minimize land disturbance, expedite the process and reduce costs. To this end, the steering committee has been convening and consulting with key stakeholders, including members of each

community foundation, government officials, potentially impacted landowners, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, the Maclean Family, nonprofit and business leaders and local historians.

The Norman Maclean Trail is a collaborative effort. While the Missoula Community Foundation and the Seeley Lake Community Foundation launched the effort, Backcountry Horsemen, United States Forest Service, Run Wild Missoula, Montana Wilderness Association, Missoula County, Seeley Lake ROCKS!, and Adventure Cycling have joined the team to help create an attraction and a connection for residents and guests.

This summer volunteers scouted about 55 miles of possible routes. They looked for features that will enhance the appeal of the trail while avoiding conflict with sensitive areas. That effort will continue this winter via cross country skis and again next summer. Dozens of good options that meet the criteria of maximum appeal and minimum disturbance already have become apparent.

Right now the Norman Maclean Trail is a compelling idea. 20 years from now it will be another reason people want to visit and live here. This trail will be a legacy to be treasured by future generations, and has the potential to join the Continental Divide, Hiawatha and Pacific Crest in regional and national significance.

Benefits of the Norman Maclean Trail include:

**Spiritual Replenishment**

Strengthen connections with community, nature, heritage, and others

**Improved Health**

Walking a portion of the trail or the entire trail will enhance physical and mental health

**Economic Development**

Trails lead to activity, which generates local consumption of goods and services.

**Education**

Printed trail guides will include information regarding human history, plants, animals, and geology of the area.

Volunteer Opportunities:

Individuals and organizations interested in participating are encouraged to contact either Meredith Printz in Missoula at 406-552-7347 or Lee Boman in Seeley Lake at 509-521-3646.

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