

City of Helena Open Lands Division Proposed Major Projects

City Recommendations
Calendar Year 2026



Major Projects Definitions

- New trail, or trailhead construction (includes extension of existing trails)
- New or changed trail usage rules (i.e., limiting or changing use on an existing trail, allowing new uses on a trail)
- Trail removal and/or reroute
- Potential for significant public interest
- Substantial project cost (i.e., in excess of \$25,000)



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City of Helena Open Lands Division Proposed Major Projects Recommendations Calendar Year 2026

Projects are evaluated based on alignment with the goals identified in Chapter 7, public feedback received to date, and Helena Open Lands (HOL) needs.

Proposed Major Projects Covered:

1. Deford Trail Improvements

- a. Current Situation**
- b. Recommendation**
- c. Estimated Budget**
- d. Area Maps**
- e. Environmental Analysis**

2. Oakes Street Park Trail Relocation

- a. Current Situation**
- b. Recommendation**
- c. Estimated Budget**
- d. Area Maps**
- e. Environmental Analysis**

3. Nob Hill Park Trail System Improvements

- a. Current Situation**
- b. Recommendation**
- c. Estimated Budget**
- d. Area Maps**
- e. Environmental Analysis**

4. North Benton Trail Improvements

- a. Current Situation**
- b. Recommendation**
- c. Estimated Budget**
- d. Area Maps**
- e. Environmental Analysis**

DeFord Trail Improvement Project

Current Situation

In the spring of 2001, the City of Helena, in cooperation with the Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest, constructed the DeFord Trail and parking area which were located adjacent to Davis St/Dry Gulch Road in the southwestern portion of the city. Please refer to the attached map. The DeFord Trail was originally designed to provide hikers, runners, and bicyclists pursuing recreational opportunities on over 10 miles of adjacent USFS trails with a safe alternative to traveling in the main traffic lane of Davis St/Dry Gulch Road. Located in a rather narrow draw, Davis St/Dry Gulch Road lacks traversable shoulders along the vast majority of its length. At their time of inception, the DeFord Trail and its associated trailhead parking area were both cornerstone additions to Helena's South Hills trails system. During their first decade of use, both the DeFord Trail and its associated trailhead parking area served their intended purpose of facilitating recreational access to both the Mt Ascension and Rodney Ridge areas. Currently, however, substantial increases in vehicular traffic volume on Davis St/Dry Gulch Road have correspondingly decreased safety to the point where numerous near-miss collisions involving pedestrians and/or vehicles departing the DeFord Trailhead parking area have occurred. A portion of the problem involves runners and cyclists who choose to stay on Davis St/Dry Gulch Road rather than utilizing the DeFord Trail. The primary issue, however, involves vehicles backing up blindly into the Davis St/Dry Gulch Road traffic lane when departing from the DeFord Trailhead parking area.

Recommendation

To remedy this situation, the city is proposing to upgrade the condition of the DeFord Trail by resurfacing degraded portions and realigning the trail to lesson gradients. These proposed trail improvements will be focused on improving DeFord Trails' overall functionality. Additionally, the city of Helena proposes realigning the existing DeFord Trailhead by constructing a crescent shaped parking area to effectively remove the need for departing vehicles to back up into the Davis St/Dry Gulch roadway. The revised trailhead parking area will include a northern entry point where the existing DeFord trailhead parking area resides, one way south bound traffic, a paved surface, and 18 paint marked, diagonal parking stalls.

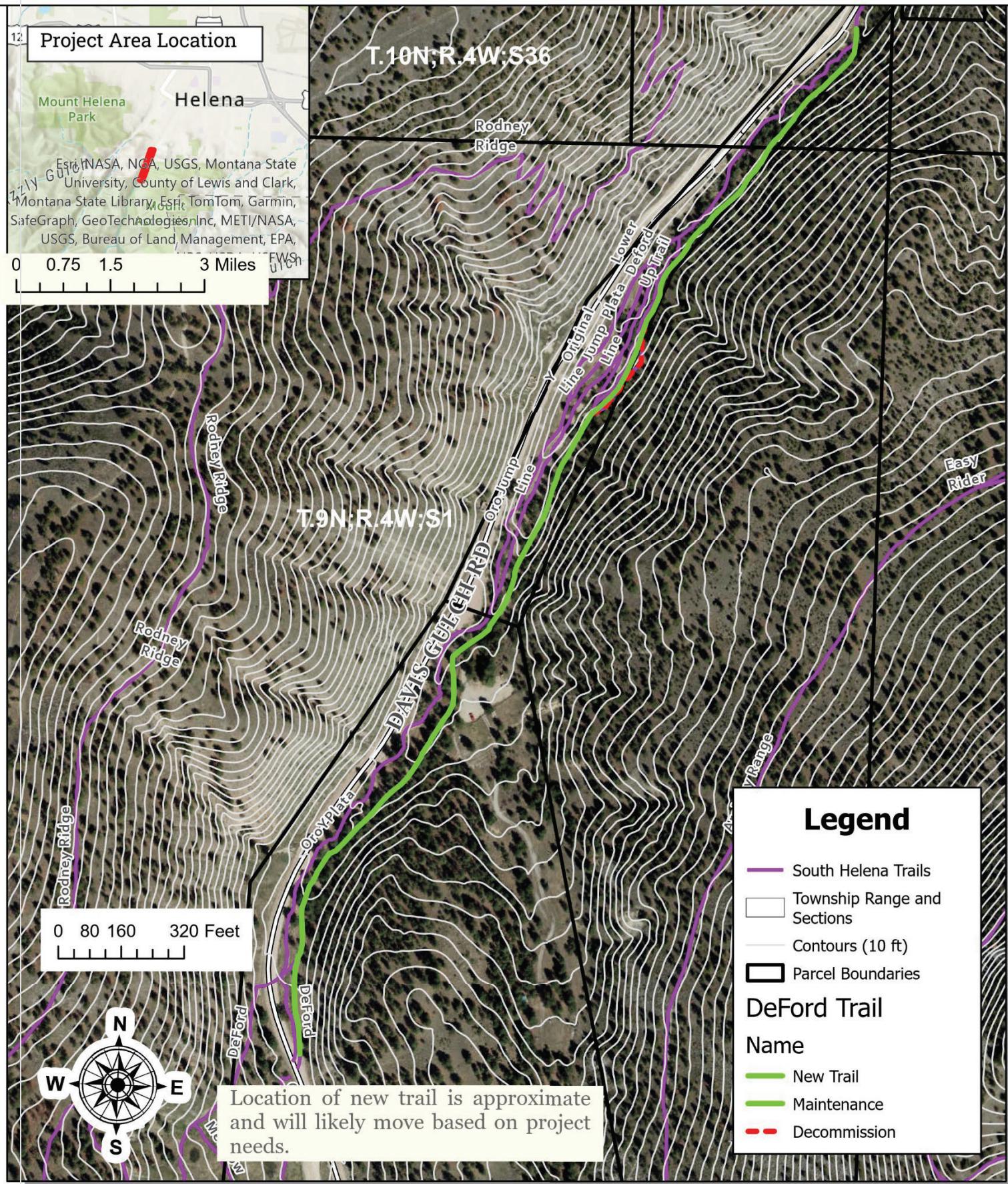
Estimated Budget

- \$70,000.00 (Equipment, Materials, Wages)

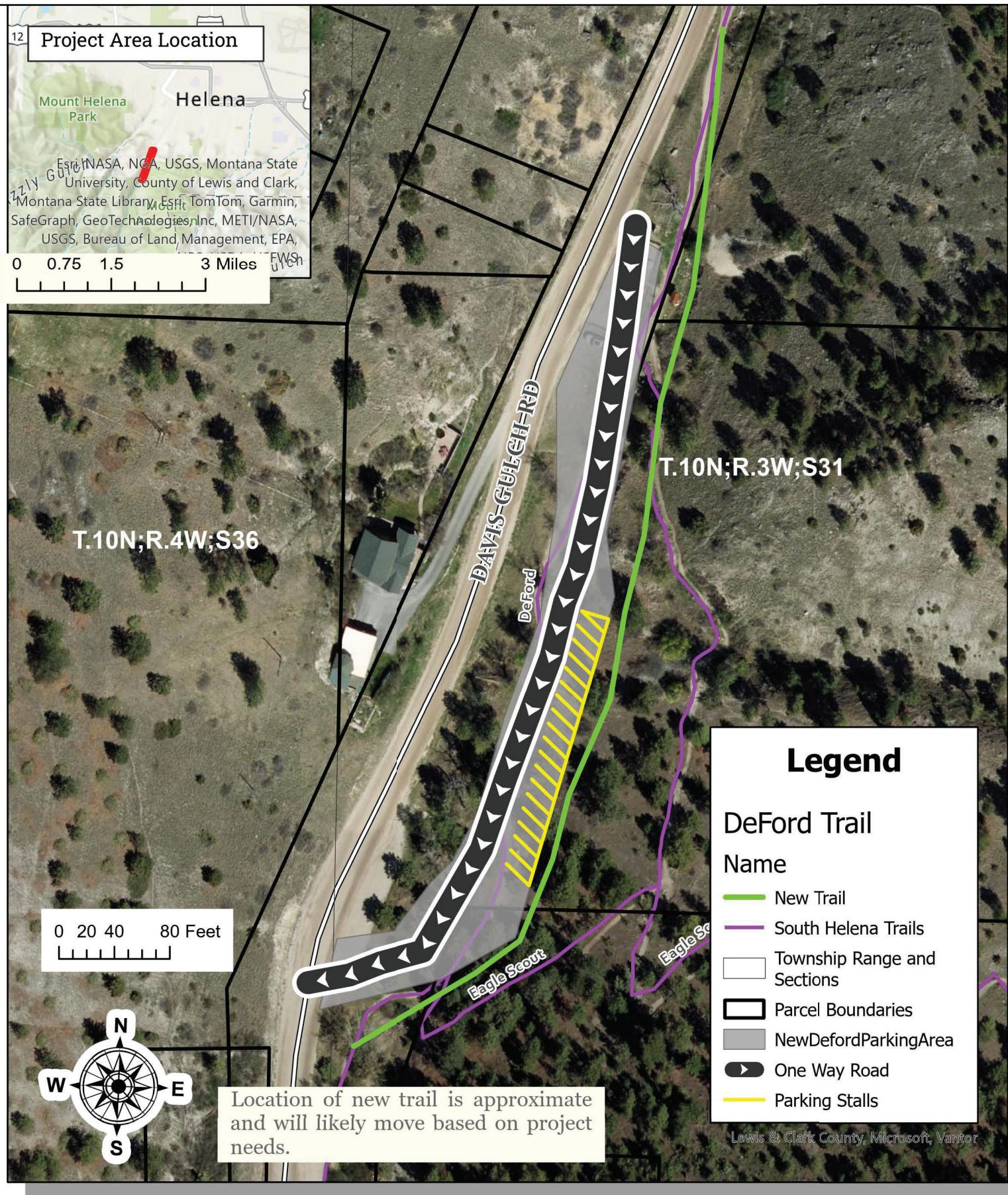
Maps

- Exhibit A

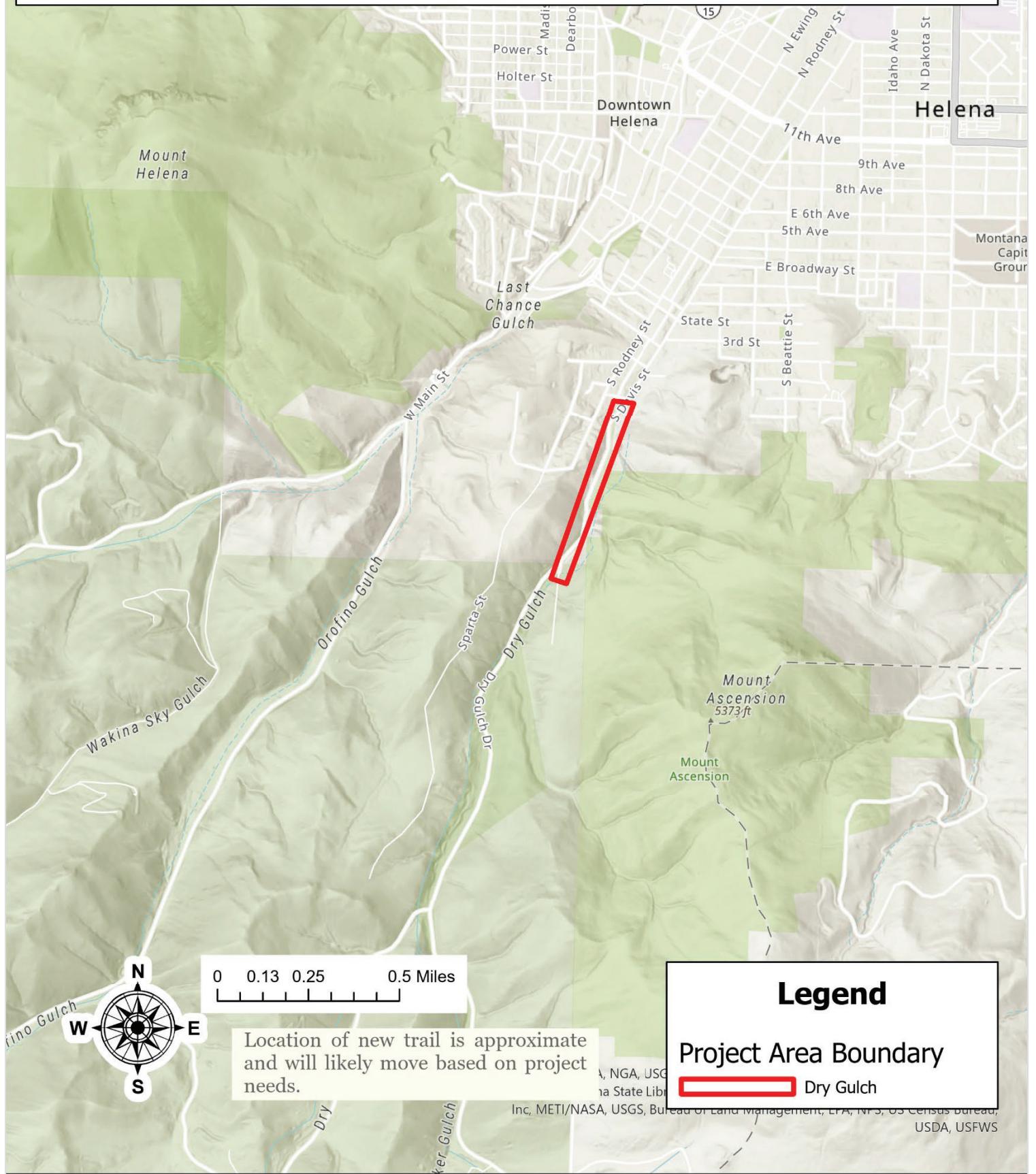
DeFord Trail Improvement Project - EXHIBIT "A-1"



DeFord Trail Improvement Project - EXHIBIT "A - 2"



DeFord Trail Improvement Project - EXHIBIT "A- 3"





Oakes Street Park Trail Relocation

Current Situation

In 1981, the Federal Bureau of Land Management (BLM), through the authority of the Recreation Purposes Act, granted the City of Helena ownership of a 6.69-acre parcel known as the Oakes Street Tract (a.k.a. Oakes Street Park). Oakes Street Park is situated between Virginia Dale Street and Oakes Street near the southern city limits of Helena, MT. The BLM deed restricted the City of Helena's use of the Oakes Street Tract to public green space park only. As the neighborhood developed, area residents walking across the park created a social trail that leads from the Virginia Dale walking path to Oakes Street. Use of the aforementioned Oakes Street Park social trail has commenced, uninterrupted, for a period of over 40 years. In the summer of 2025, the City of Helena Parks Department hired a local survey company that marked the southern and eastern boundaries of the park to facilitate the thinning of coniferous trees occurring on the Oakes Street parcel. The 2025 property line survey of the Oakes Street tract disclosed the fact that several property owners were encroaching onto public property with their back yard landscaping and associated fencing. Adjacent property owners deemed to be encroaching on City of Helena Park property were notified and directed to vacate park property. Additionally, discovered was the fact that the southernmost portion of the aforementioned pedestrian trail resided on private ownership at the point of its departure from the Virginia Dale Walkway.

Recommendation

- To address the situation, the city would like to propose the construction of approximately 190 feet of new trail prism to connect the Oakes Street Trail with the Virginia Dale Sidewalk at a point that accesses the public Right-of Way without crossing private ownership.

Estimated Budget

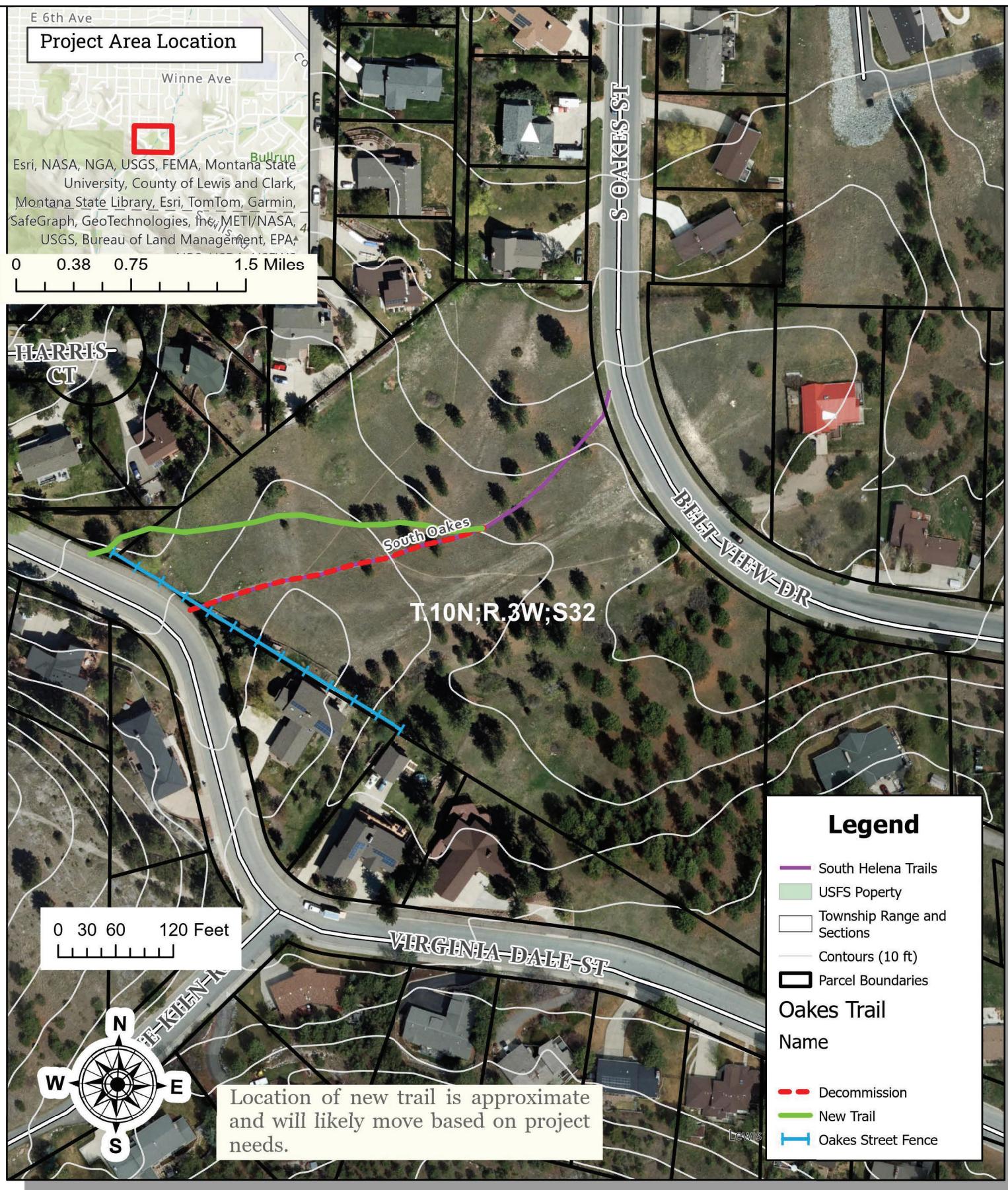
- \$4,532.00 (Equipment, Materials, Wages)

Maps

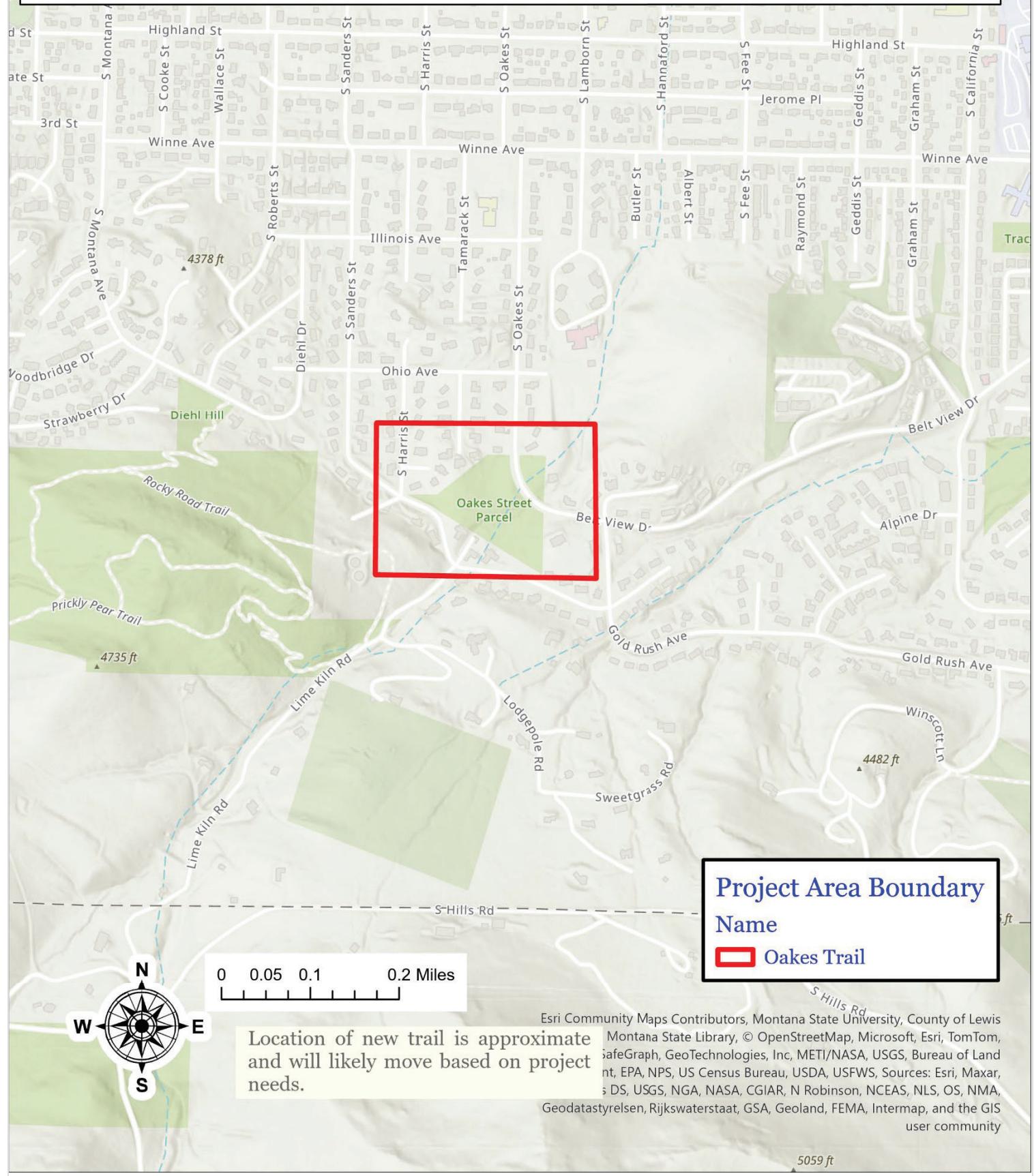
- Exhibit B

Oakes Street Park Trail Relocation

- EXHIBIT "B1"



Oakes Street Park Trail Relocation Map Locator - EXHIBIT "B-2"



Location of new trail is approximate and will likely move based on project needs.

Esri Community Maps Contributors, Montana State University, County of Lewis
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user community

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Oakes Street Park Trail Relocation

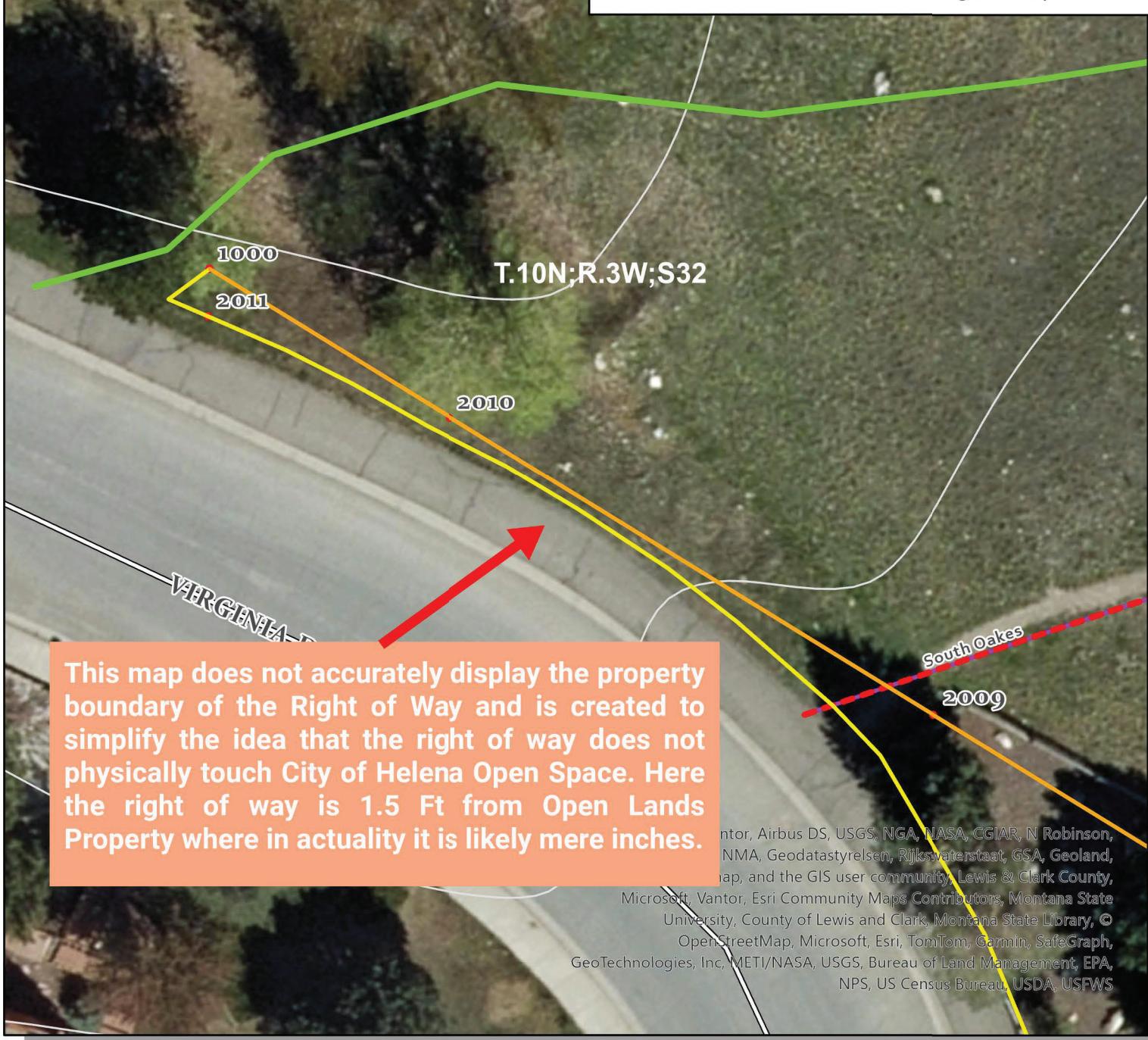
- EXHIBIT "B3"

New trail locations displayed on map are approximate and could move based on project needs.

Legend

South Helena Trails
USFS Property
Township Range and Sections
Contours (10 ft)
0 5 10 20 Feet

Oakes Trail
Decommission
New Trail
Actual Surveyed Property Boundary
Right Of Way Location



Nob Hill Park Trail System Improvement Project

Current Situation

- Nob Hill City Park is a 27-acre island, open space area located approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ mile west of the Saddle Drive/Colonial Drive Intersection near the South Helena Exit on interstate 15. Park amenities within Nob Hill Park currently consist of nearly 1 mile of developed, single track trail and one park bench. Approximately 685 feet of the existing Nob Hill developed trail system was incorrectly constructed on private property. Additional issues are related to a 605-foot remnant jeep trail that climbs straight up to the top of Nob Hill on its northern face. In 2018 the City of Helena was given a .36-acre lot located on Saddle Drive that provides an opportunity for trail connectivity from the northern Saddle Drive Sidewalk to the Nob Hill City Park Trail System. Connecting the Nob Hill Trail System to the Saddle Drive Sidewalk will involve the construction of approximately 550 feet of new trail.

Recommendation

- The city recommends constructing 620 feet of new trail to mitigate the private property encroachment issue. Additionally, the city recommends construction of 1,200 feet of new trail prism to replace 605 feet of old jeep trail that the city proposes to rehabilitate. To facilitate connectivity from the Nob Hill Park trail system to Saddle Drive's northern sidewalk, the city recommends construction of approximately 450 ft of new trail prism.

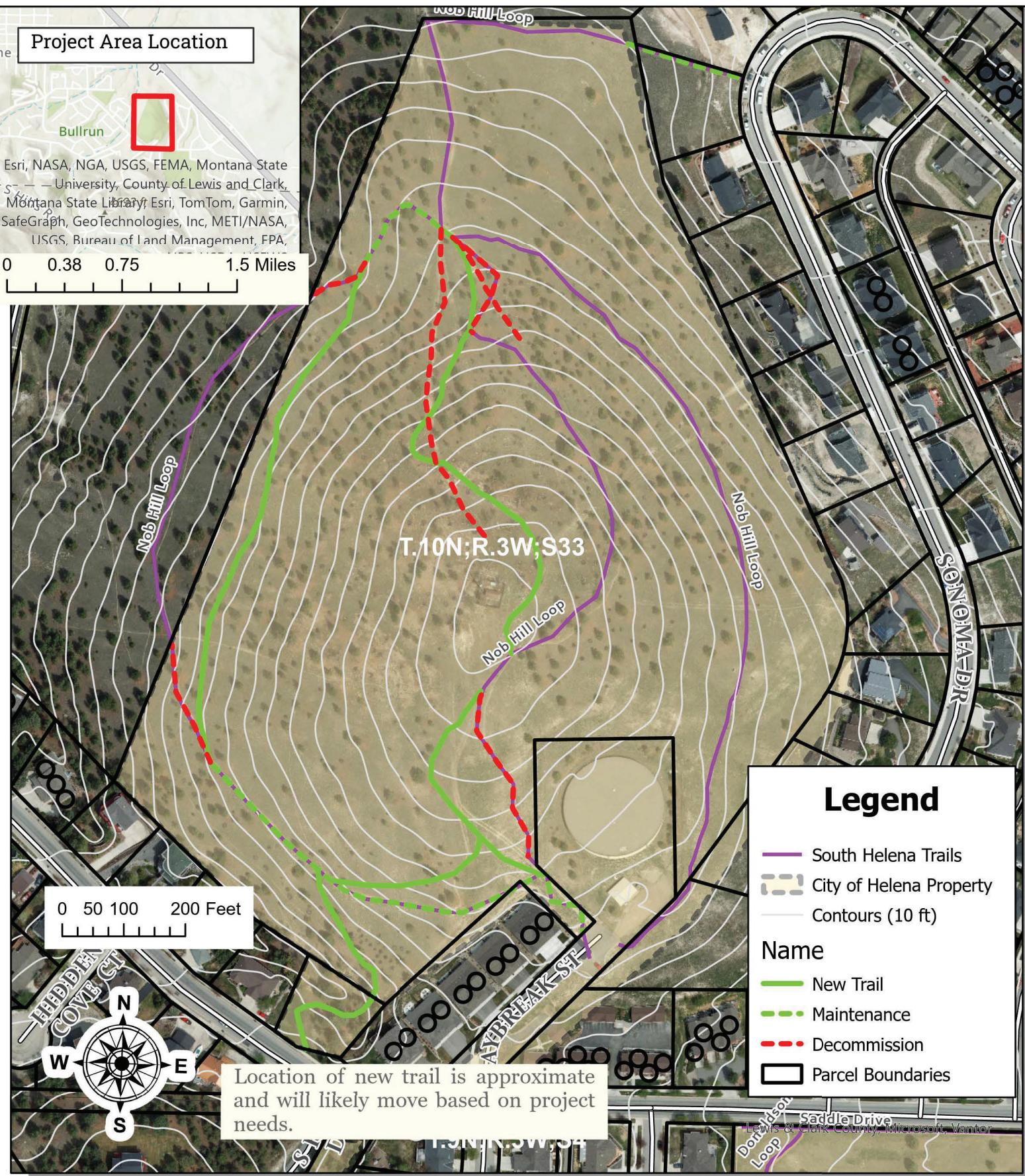
Estimated Budget

- \$16,979.00 (Existing trail maintenance, new trail construction and old trail decommission)

Maps

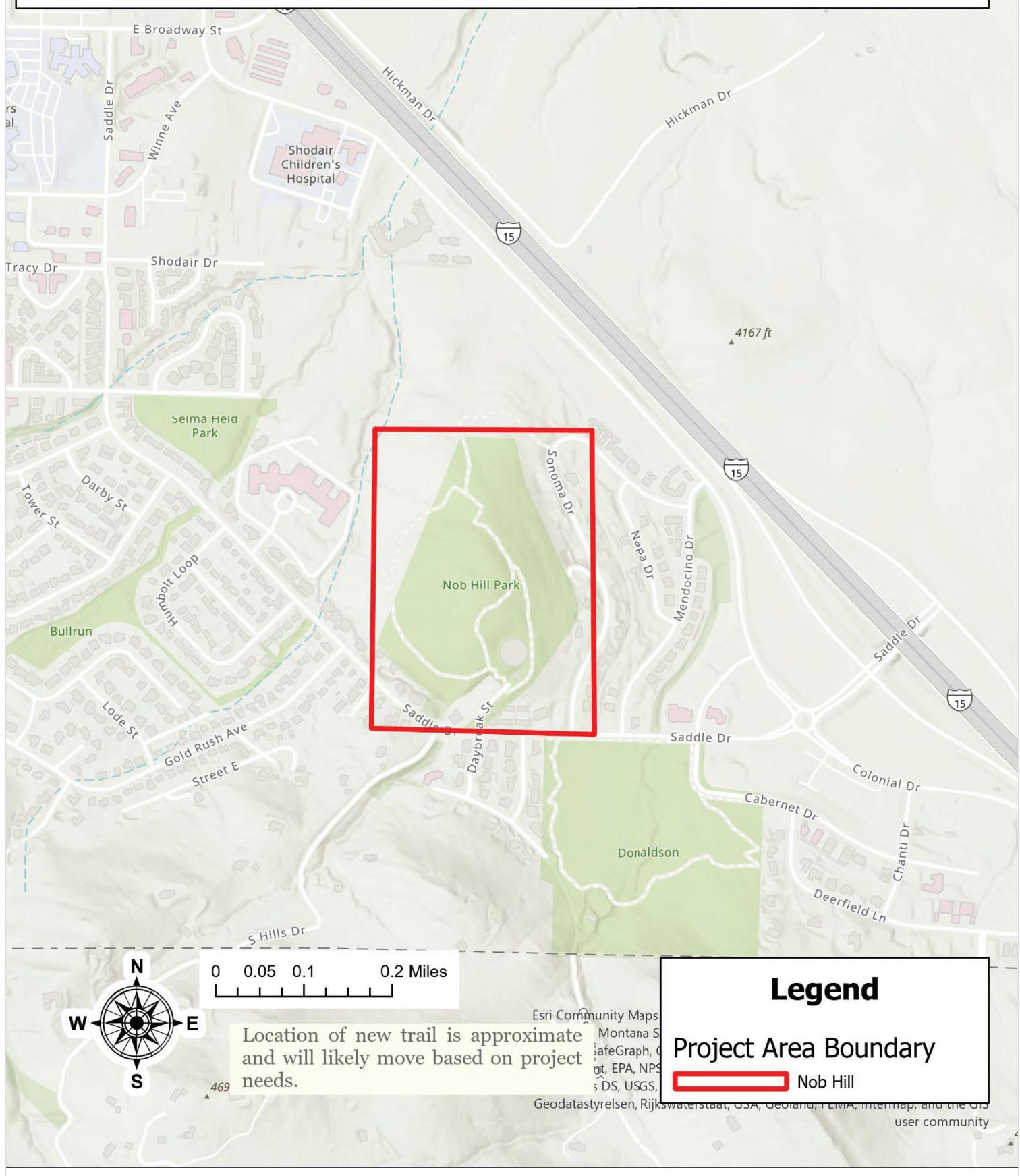
- Exhibit C

Nob Hill Park Trail System Improvement Project- EXHIBIT "C-1"



Nob Hill Reconstruction Project

- EXHIBIT "C-2"



North Benton Trail Improvement Project

Current Situation

- The City of Helena owns and manages approximately 6.65 acres of open lands situated immediately east of the Stone Meadows Subdivision at the northern end of North Benton Avenue. Several “social trails” have developed within the aforementioned City of Helena open land parcels during the past 15 years, and current pedestrian use indicates that installing a more accessible surface and signing the trails would be of great benefit to area residents.

Recommendation

- The city recommends installing crushed rock fine material on approximately 2,120 feet of trail depicted on the attached Exhibit D. The crushed rock surface material would be installed to establish an approximate width of 4 feet. Trail signage would be installed at the appropriate junction points.

Estimated Budget

- \$16,720.00 - (Crushed Rock Surfacing, Materials)

Maps

- Exhibit D

North Benton Trail Improvement Project

- EXHIBIT "D1"



North Benton Project Locator Map - EXHIBIT "D-2"

