



Envisioning the Future of Marshall Mountain Park

A Shared Community Vision

December 2021

What is a shared community vision?

The community vision provides the overarching goals for how Marshall Mountain Park will be used and developed. It is a high-level “blue sky” vision for the future of Marshall, created by the Missoula community, and includes the shared values, community goals, and beliefs that will guide the future of Marshall Mountain Park.

This report synthesizes and distills the community values about Marshall Mountain Park into a vision that will inform future master planning. The visioning process included four facilitated visioning sessions with key stakeholder groups. In total, 93 persons participated in these online visioning exercises.

In addition, City staff used the Engage Missoula website to refine the vision further and provide a platform for the general public to participate. The website included a 4-week online survey to solicit public feedback which generated over 3,600 page visits and 1,338 survey responses.

A Unique Opportunity in Missoula’s History

The history of Marshall Mountain as a commercial ski area began in 1956. The mountain continued to operate as a downhill ski area until 2003, when it was closed, primarily due to declining business from a lack of snow. Generations of Missoulians learned to ski and appreciate outdoor recreation at Marshall, and there is a strong sense of nostalgia for the mountain.

In recent years, residents have taken to Marshall Mountain for non-motorized, human-powered activities, including backcountry skiing, hiking, and mountain biking. Marshall’s proximity to Missoula, its unique natural features, and established infrastructure have made it an ideal venue for a variety of recreational and educational activities and events. The mountain has become a popular venue for competitive bicycle races (some of which have attracted national attention), Parks and Recreation camps and programs, and other private camps, programs and events.

The “Upper Mountain” is owned by Five Valleys Land Trust and has been open to the public for several years. Through a partnership with Mountain Bike Missoula, several multi-use, and bike-specific trails were constructed and Marshall Mountain has become one of the most popular mountain biking destinations in the Missoula Valley.

“Marshall Mountain Park can help alleviate pressures on other recreation and natural sites.”

-visioning participant

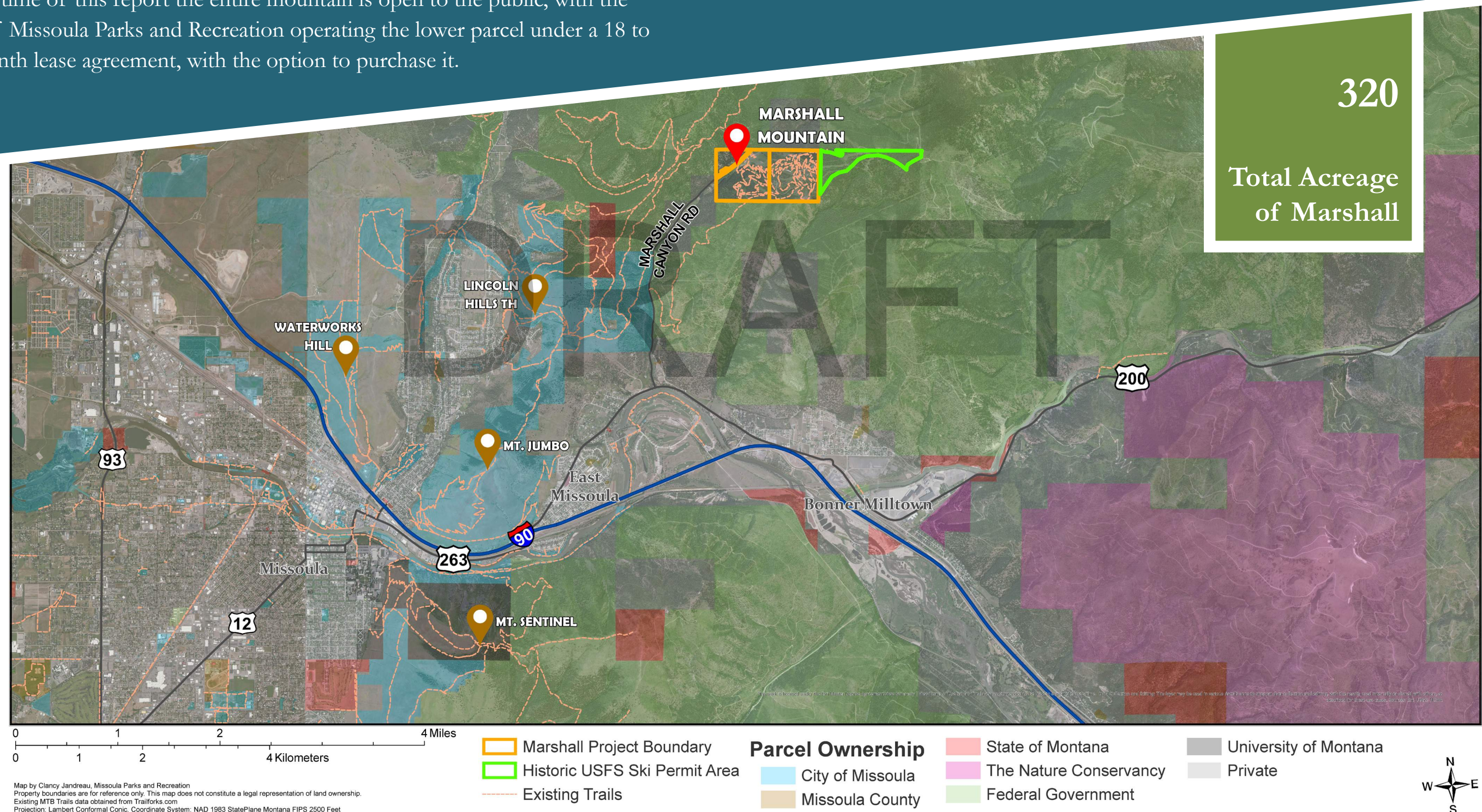


Protecting Marshall for Future Generations

In 2021, local investors doing business as Izzy Dog, LLC purchased the lower parcel with the intent to hold it until the City of Missoula could raise funds to purchase the property for public use.

At the time of this report the entire mountain is open to the public, with the City of Missoula Parks and Recreation operating the lower parcel under a 18 to 24-month lease agreement, with the option to purchase it.

Sample Missoulian Headline from visioning process:
Marshall Mountain Park: The last best place, closest to home



Shared Values

Marshall Mountain Park can/should:

- Provide a full range of outdoor recreation opportunities
- Be accessible to all ages and abilities
- Include options to visit the area without a personal vehicle (public transportation, and regional trail connections)
- Deliver indirect benefits from a healthy and vibrant ecosystem that includes native plants for healing, climate resilience, connectivity, and wildlife habitat
- Provide educational opportunities (outdoor learning lab, space for education groups/classes) for all ages, with an emphasis on youth
- Provide event/community gathering space
- Honor the legacy of the indigenous people who's territory included Marshall Canyon by including them in the process and respecting and caring for the landscape

Community Goals

- Be a high use, all-season, all-access, public outdoor recreation and education area
- Promote responsible land stewardship through active programming, on-site education and access for all
- Be planned in a manner that honors the character and legacy of Marshall Mountain, specifically with nostalgic uses in mind, including but not limited to snow-based sports, mountain biking, and community events
- Continue to provide, as it has done for generations, a place for Missoula's youth to learn responsible recreation and land stewardship principles, a sense of place, outdoor recreation-based sports, and competitive events

**“Create opportunities for indigenous historical interpretation/
storytelling/concepts (medicine, holistic teachings),
indigenous leadership, and collaboration with
indigenous community leaders.”**


-visioning participant

**“Missoulians value Marshall for
it's “low-key” nature... Let's keep it
simple.”**

-Survey respondent

1,338

**The number of
responses to the
on-line survey**



“...Marshall offers such a cool opportunity to really go big when it comes to mtb trails...”

-Survey respondent

Themes across all stakeholder groups:

Accessibility
Coexisting with nature
Connectivity
Education
Events
Gathering space
Inclusivity
Stewardship
Youth engagement

How can Marshall Mountain help fill important community and environmental needs?

It is in the interest of **WHO** to **WHAT**

Missoulians to recreate

Kids to access nature/be outside

All users to have public transportation to Marshall Mountain

Recreationists to have opportunities close to town

All abilities to have access to recreation

Wildlife to have habitat

Specific user groups to have facilities/infrastructure to accommodate their preferred recreation activity.

- A place for education (outdoor education, living lab for natural history/climate change, snow science)
- An event venue for community events, sporting events, and nature-based recreation events
- A location to promote physical and mental health
- A community gathering space (professional development site, outdoor community center)
- Recreation for all (those who need adaptive equipment, all ages, abilities, and socioeconomic levels)

Potential Recreation

Feedback from the online survey was compiled and listed on the following pages. This data represents over 1,300 individual responses and will be used to inform the Master plan for Marshall Mountain Park.

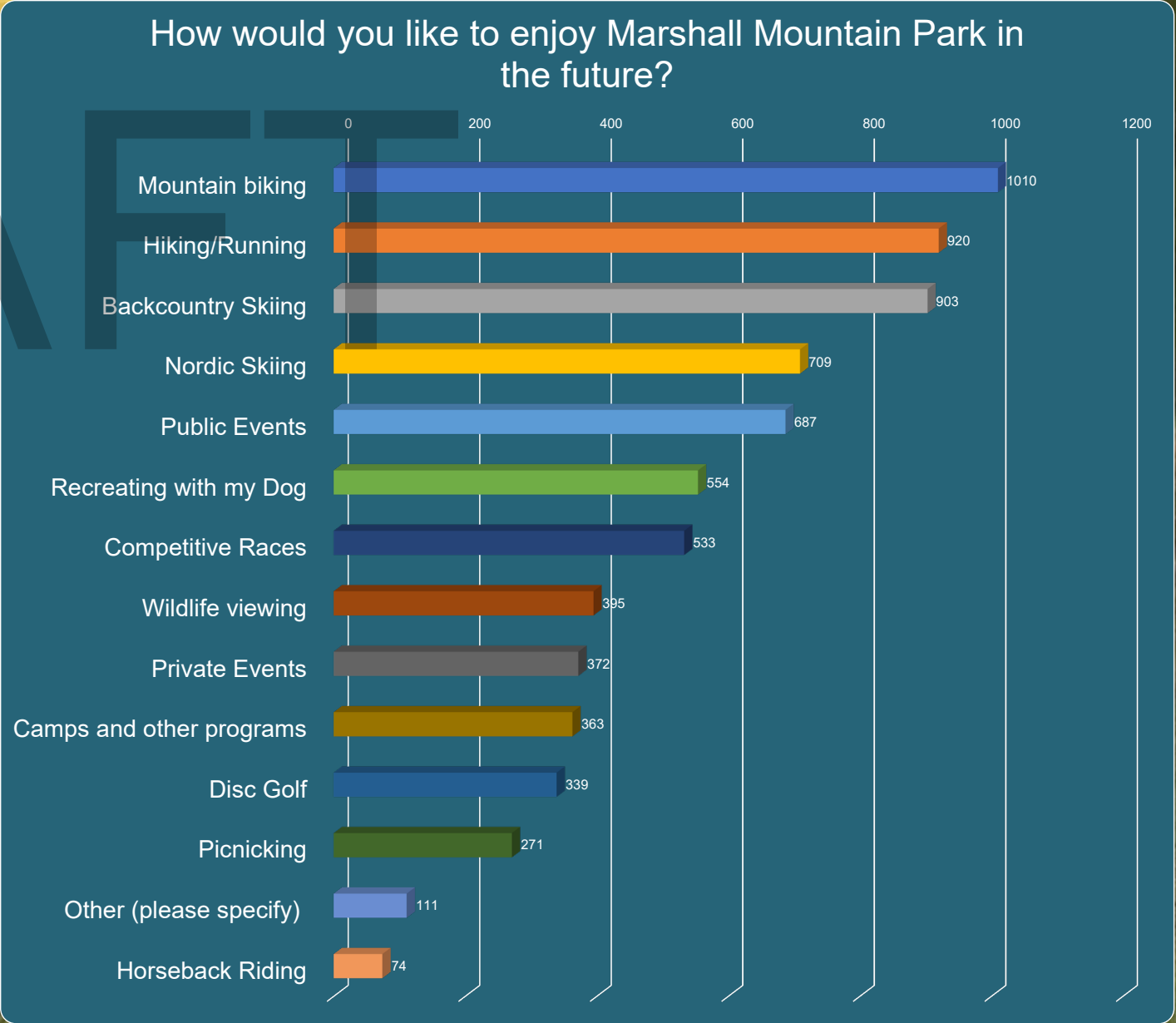
A wide variety of recreational programs are desired at Marshall Mountain. It will be important to develop the master plan in a way that reduces conflict and creates an equitable experience for all users. While some activities may be desired, ultimately the feasibility of these activities at Marshall will need to guide the final plan.

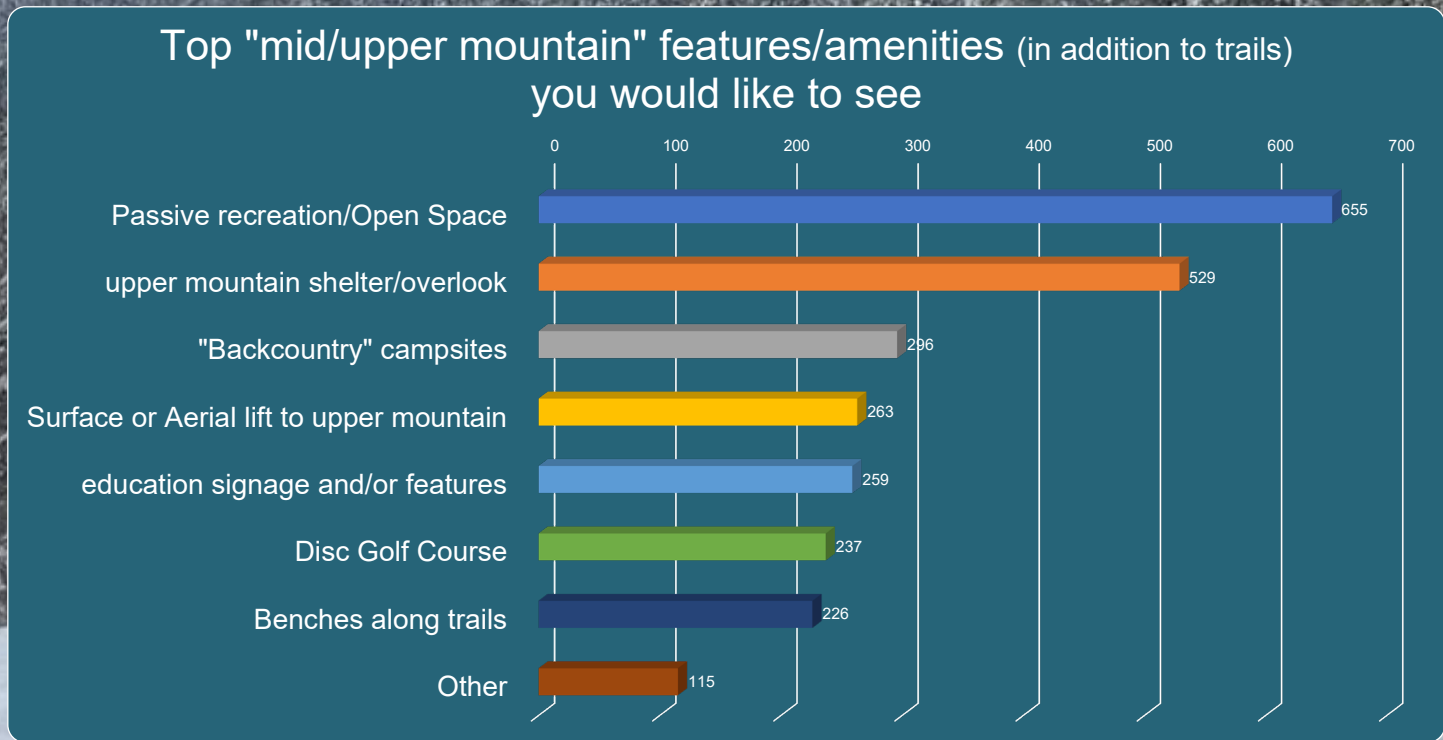
“...the planning should consider how this particular city property can serve uses that other properties do not.”

-Survey respondent

“Know what adaptive sports look like and how those accommodations need to be utilized.”

-Survey respondent



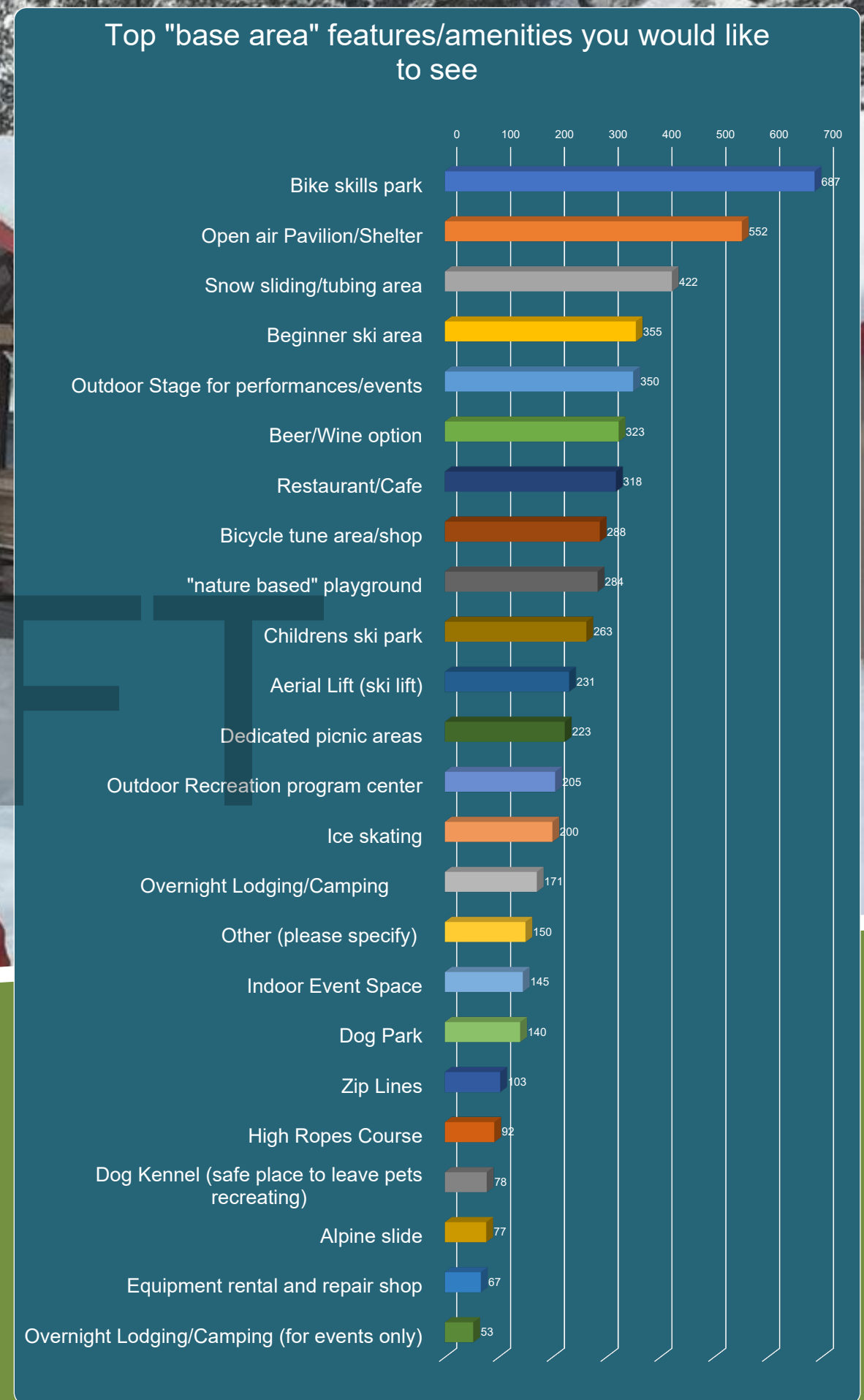


“Keep it simple, keep it quiet, keep it natural.”

-Survey respondent

Potential Facilities/Amenities

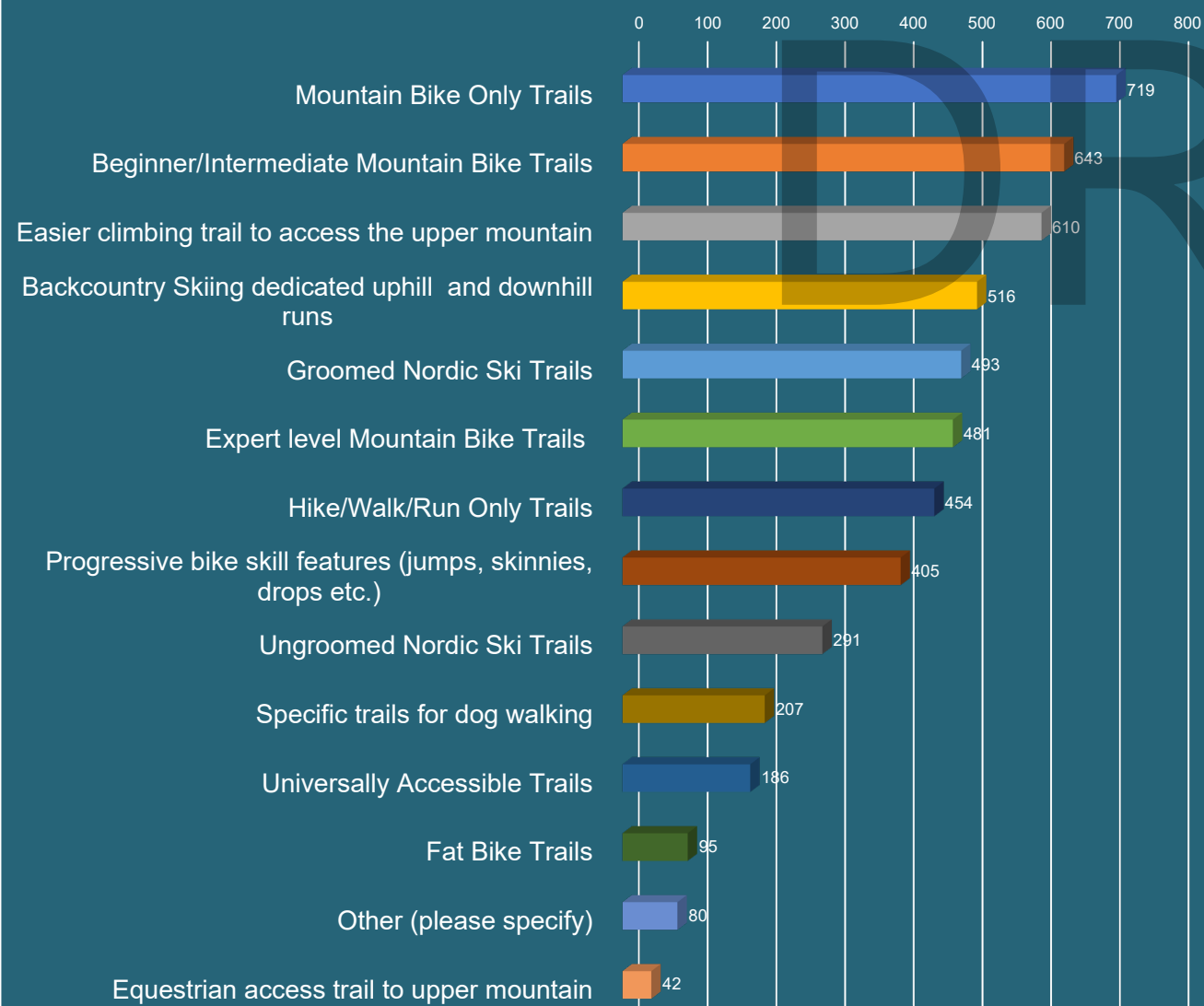
The base area provides a flexible space that could be utilized for a variety of features to support recreation and education across the property. The majority of respondents preferred that the upper mountain development be limited, and an emphasis should be placed on preserving the unique natural character and aesthetic of the mountain.



Trail System

Survey respondents desired a multi-use trail system that includes single-use and directional trails. An easier climbing trail to access the upper mountain is an important component of the trail system. The trail system should accommodate a variety of user abilities from beginner to expert.

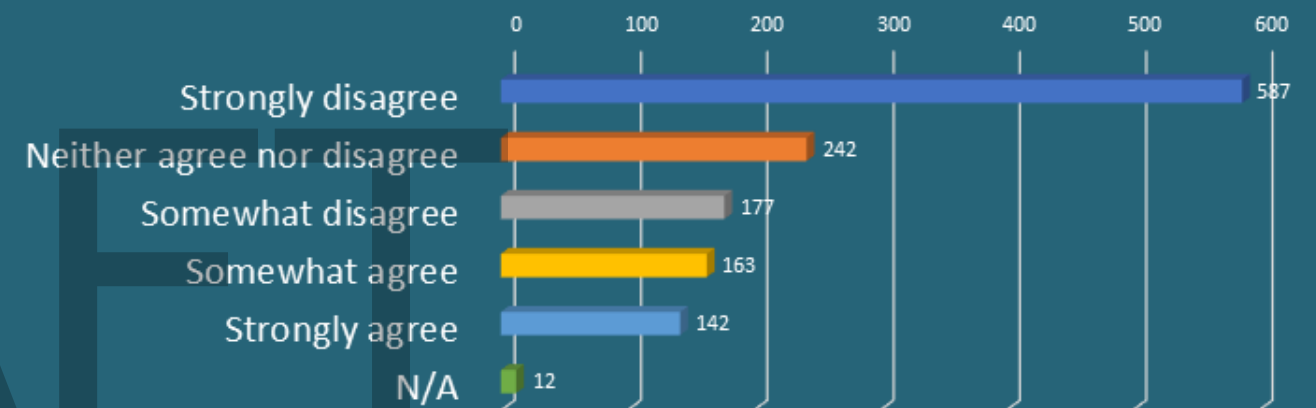
Top types of trails or trail features you would like to see at Marshall Mountain?



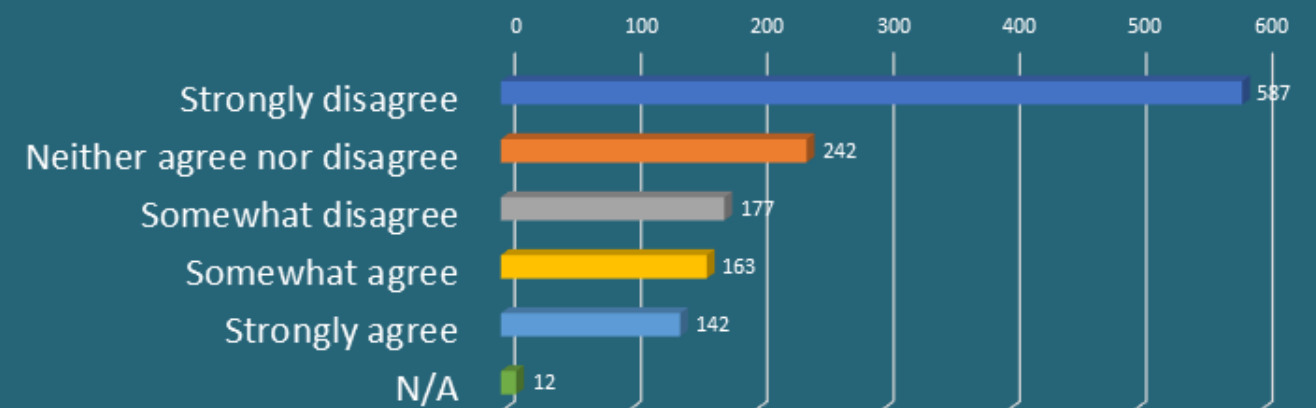
Upper Mountain Access

The majority of respondents preferred human powered access to the upper mountain over aerial or surface lifts. However, as indicated by the shared values accessibility for all abilities is important and accommodations for adaptive and universal access should be explored.

I would prefer to access the upper mountain via aerial or surface lifts or other assisted options.



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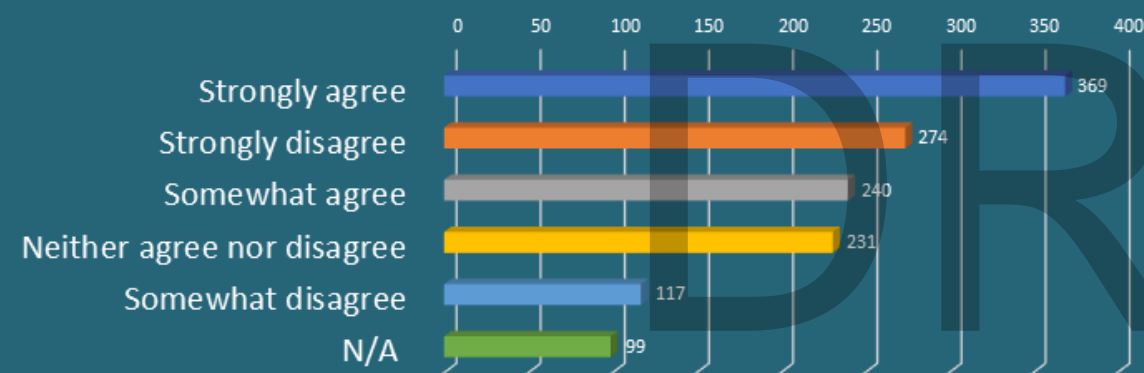
Potential Conflicts

The survey identified several areas of potential conflicts. One potential conflict is recreating with dogs. While the majority of respondents desired to recreate with their dog year-round, respondents also indicated an understanding that dogs create potential hazards and conflicts. Marshall Mountain has unique recreational opportunities, therefore a unique solution to the “dog conundrum” should be devised.

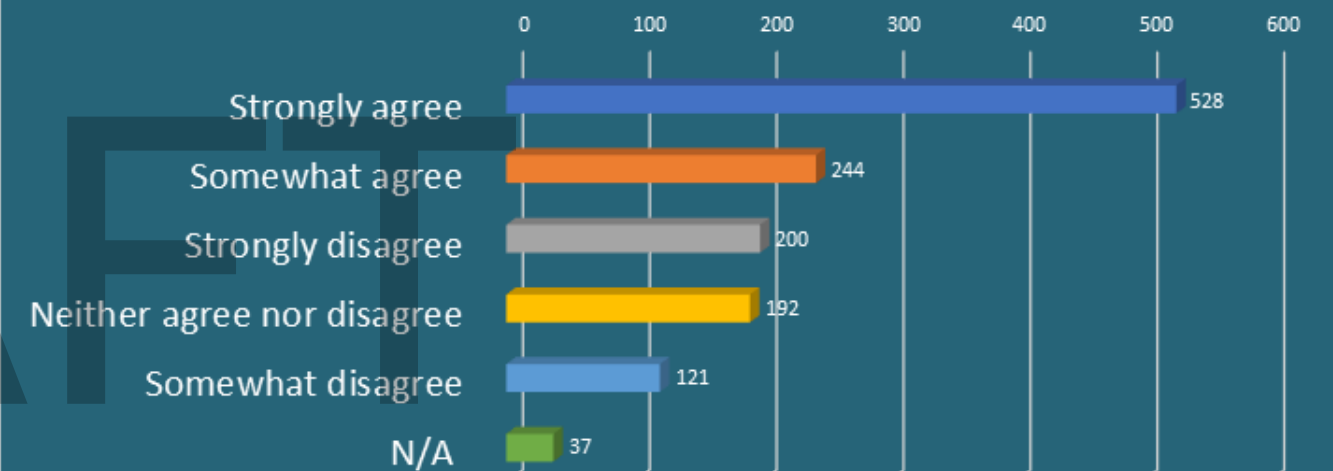
“...it should remain accessible to all, including those with less financial means. I believe paid programs like camps and clinics can generate ample revenue...”

-Survey respondent

It is important for me to be able to recreate with my dog at Marshall in the summer



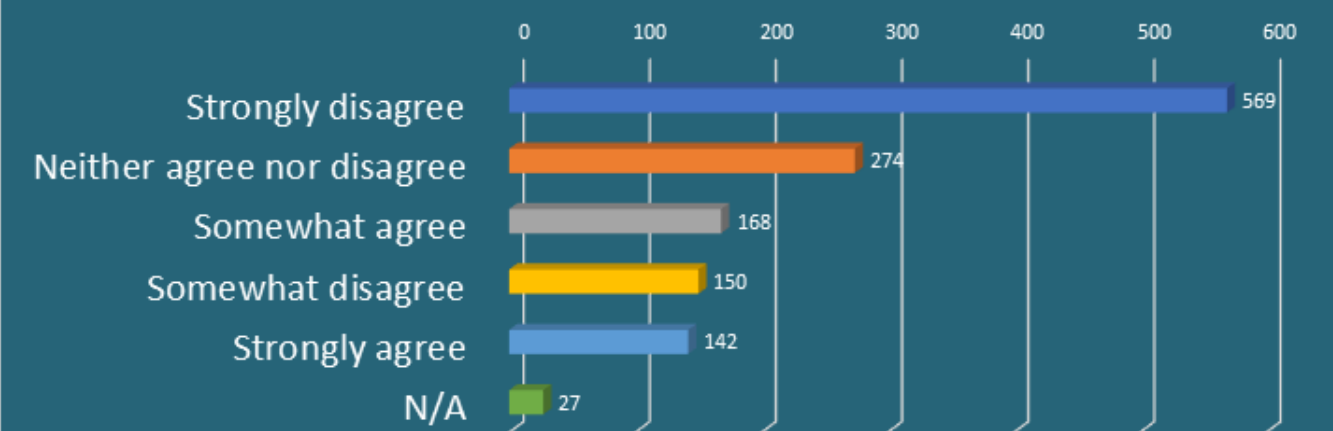
It is important for me to be able to visit Marshall without worrying about encounters with off-leash dogs, or stepping in dog waste.



It is important for me to be able to recreate with my dog at Marshall in the winter



I would like to be able to use e-bikes at Marshall Mountain Park.



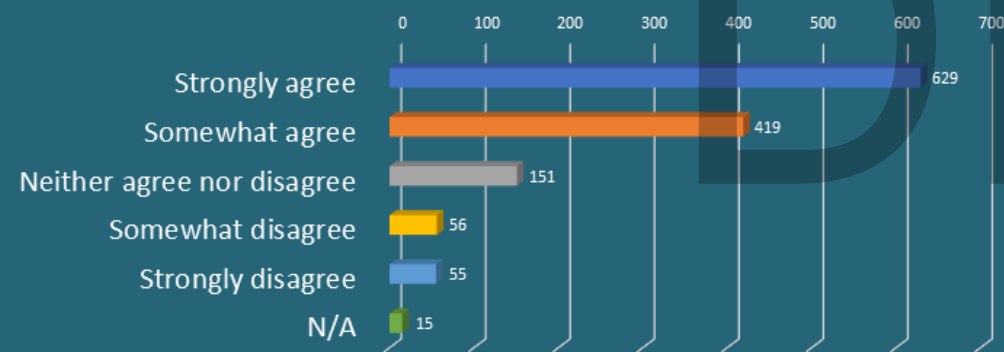
Natural Resources

Respondents indicated an understanding that natural resource protection is a priority, and should be balanced with recreation development and activity. Many indicated that the design should prioritize the natural character of the property.

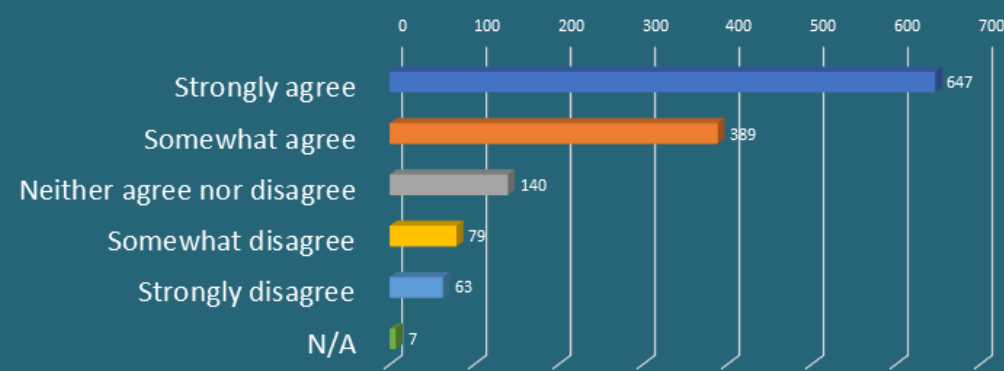
“...there is too much focus on how much the area can be overdeveloped for recreation and not enough focus on protecting the area.”

-Survey respondent

Due to low elevations and climate change, certain activities such as downhill skiing may not be feasible at Marshall Mountain now, or in the future.



Certain activities should be limited to specific areas or seasonal closures implemented in order to protect environmental resources and wildlife.



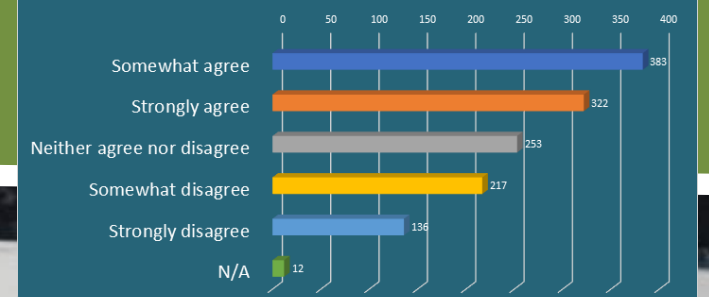
Financing and User Fees

Respondents indicated that options for funding ongoing maintenance and operations should be explored that emphasizes equity, and allows all people to visit regardless of their ability to pay a user fee. The majority of respondents indicated a desire to contribute through volunteer work.

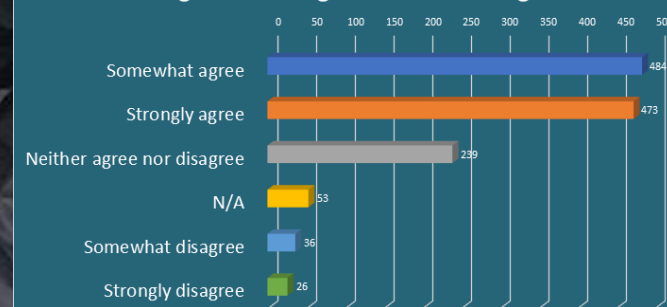
“Creating revenue to maintain this opportunity without making it entirely pay-to-play should be a priority.”

-Survey respondent

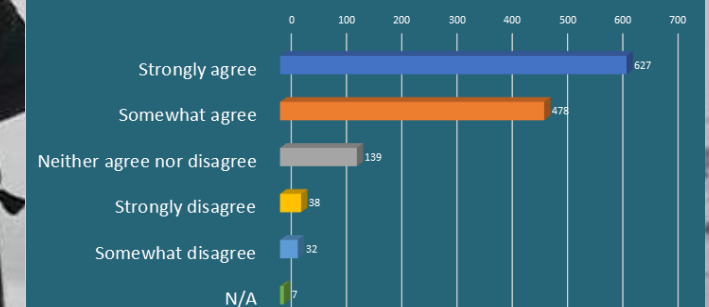
(non-event) Recreation at Marshall Mountain should be tax supported and not require user fees



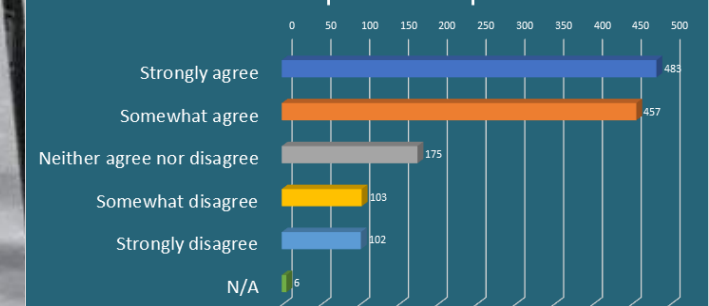
I would be willing to contribute to the project through volunteer work, or assist through securing donations or grants



Events and program fees should be used to recover costs to operate Marshall Mountain.



I would be willing to purchase a user pass to help maintain, and keep Marshall open to the public



Questions that Need to be Answered:

- Who will teach educational programming?
- Do transportation services have capacity to provide transportation from town?
- What partnerships are needed?
- How will the site be accessible for all?
- How do we balance development with natural resource conservation?
- How will we pay for it?
- Is Marshall Mountain large enough to accommodate all user groups?
- How to reduce conflicts between user groups?
- How will the guiding principle of sustainability be incorporated?
- How will you give back to and honor the indigenous people who used to and still do use this land?
- How will the Bonner/East Missoula communities' needs and interests be prioritized in the planning process?
- Can the property handle increased summer and winter usage?
- How can Marshall be connected to adjacent public lands and trail systems?
- How can Marshall be available to families of all levels of financial status?
- How to invite and include participation from undeserved community members?

Next Steps

The City of Missoula will be hiring a design consultant team to lead the master planning effort for Marshall Mountain. This community vision will be used to guide the master planning process. Part of the master planning process includes a market analysis, detailed feasibility study and operational business plan.

Fundraising is ongoing, acquisition of the property is the primary goal, but funding for the desired improvements will be an important component of the fundraising campaign. The non-profit group “Friends of Marshall Mountain” will be leading this effort, and there will be abundant opportunities for individuals, and organizations to contribute to this campaign. Stay tuned!

Recreation areas that could be a model for Marshall Mountain

Beacon Hill, Spokane WA
Kingdom Trails, East Burke, VT
Leavenworth Ski Hill, Leavenworth WA
Duthie Hill, Seattle WA
The Blaine County Recreation District, Hailey ID

-Suggestions made by visioning participants





Appendix

Appendix 1: Draft final report from facilitated community visioning process

Appendix 2: Final survey report

Thanks to all those that participated in the takeholder meetings
and online community engagement.

