

OPINION

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 24, 2008

Equestrians also deserve trail access

By TAMZIN BROWN
Guest columnist

There are those among us who remember riding across the floor of Gallatin Valley into the nearby foothills to gallop in the stubble fields, or ride up to the higher slopes to visit a fresh mountain spring. It was safe for kids to ride the valley's unpaved roads for miles because everyone with a vehicle knew about horses, and drove slow and wide to carefully pass riders. We live in different times now.

In our valley, as in other parts of the United States, land values have risen steadily and housing developments — the new cash crop — have eroded the agricultural landscape and infrastructure. Our rural roads are paved, traffic speeds and volume increase, and overnight the shared roads we knew have become the sole domain of motorized vehicles, and we have lost our local riding and harness driving terrain.

The public draft of the Greater Bozeman Area Transportation Plan (2007 Update) has just been released. The Gallatin Equestrian Partnership (GalleP) needs your help convincing planners that equestrians should have access to shared-use paths. We are not asking for separate, special equestrian facilities; we are asking to maintain equestrian use of a few remaining rural roadways.

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Planners should recognize that the Gallatin Valley is home to many equine enthusiasts who recreate and also earn their livelihood from the horse industry, whether they be trainers, farriers, veterinarians, breeders, saddle makers or hay and grain farmers. The equine industry is part of the growth in the valley and is an important part of the Gallatin Valley economy. There are new large-animal veterinary clinics, new equestrian organizations and more horses and ponies in the Gallatin Valley than ever before, according to the USDA.

An enormous positive economic gain could be realized by restoring Bozeman to an equestrian-friendly community, as it has been for other communities across the country. With the tough economic times ahead, it will be a continuation of the "Montana Experience" that will keep people coming here to the "Last Best Place," not a community stripped of its heritage that has become "Anytown, USA."

There are approximately 10 horse boarding/training facilities within the Greater Bozeman Transportation Planning Area boundaries that stretch from Springhill Road in the north to South Cottonwood Road in the south, east from Bridger Canyon and west to the Gallatin River. Now is the time to plan for continued and connecting access by horse and horse cart between these destinations and the two main public equestrian facilities: the county fairgrounds and MSU.

The Greater Bozeman Transportation Plan will guide the next 20 years of road planning in our area. You can help us preserve our western heritage by sending your comments in support of GalleP's proposal by email to www.rpa-hln.com/bozemantransplan.htm, or in writing to Robert Peccia & Associates, att.: Bozeman Transportation Plan, P.O. Box 5653, Helena, MT 59604. Comments are due before Friday, Dec. 5, at 5 p.m.

To view GalleP's proposed text for the Plan Update and map showing equestrian access, visit our Web site at www.gallepmt.org and go to the updates tab. A petition with this information is also available at area equine vets and retailers.

Tamzin Brown is a member of the Gallatin Equestrian Partnership and lives near Four Corners.



LETTERS

To all: Pay attention when in school zones

I enjoyed reading the article on the "Vigilante Granny" who was walking her grandson to school with a 15 mph sign to remind motorists to slow down. I live on Baxter Lane and since Chief Joseph Middle School opened up we have a slough of people speeding in a hurry to get their kids to school. I do feel for the parents and how kids are on their own time in the morning which may mean leaving later than usual, but what about putting the kids on the bus? And then lowering the traffic impact, their cost for gas, etc.?

I plead to anyone speeding through school zones — it's not just the parent, I've seen my neighbors do it — to pay attention.

lante Granny Week and do this in all school zones as a reminder to slow down.

Melissa Dulin
Bozeman

Film Festival alive, needs your support

For those of you who have been around Bozeman for more than a few years and still recall the days of the weekly Bozeman Film Festival screenings at the Rialto Theater, please don't forget that the BFF is alive and well and needs your support. I'd like to extend my sincere thanks to Lisa McGroby and the other board members for their hard work at keeping the film festival a vibrant program in Bozeman. The movies I've seen in the past few years have been amazing in their depth, scope and originality, and I know that Lisa and the board work very hard at researching, renting and publicizing these films.

Keep in mind that there are various levels at which one can support the BFF: you can purchase a Patron Pass or you can become a "Cheap Seat Pass" holder. Attending the films cer-

tainly helps support the program too, but remember that these season and patron memberships ensure financial support for this series and help guarantee that the Bozeman Film Festival will stay alive. See their Web site, www.bozemanfilmfestival.org, for information about upcoming shows and ways you can become involved.

Thanks to all those serving on the board for working so hard to keep this excellent program going. With all the vapid movies being made these days, I know the prospect of no longer having the BFF is an incredibly bleak one for many of us.

Betsy Danforth
Bozeman

Temporary policy

The economic crisis created by deregulation coupled with the laissez-faire attitude of the Bush administration and the greed of Wall Streeters playing fast and loose with other people's money has hit many people hard. Some of the hardest hit groups are those who are losing their homes, jobs and healthcare, and retirees, who in good faith, prepared for retirement so they would not be a burden on their children or the government. Washington was quick to provide billions for the villains but as yet has done little for Main Street, including retirees.

Retirees over 70 living on Social Security and qualified retirement plans have watched their life's savings decline by 40-50 percent while at the same time they are required by law to continue withdrawing distributions from devastated accounts. On top of that there is a heavy tax on withdrawals. There needs to be a temporary change in policy until the economy has recovered.

There should be a moratorium on mandatory withdrawals from qualified retirement plans and tax relief on withdrawals. Individuals should be given the

option to withdraw none of their distribution for their needs. Tax relief also will not protect individuals in hopes of sustained distribution.

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