

Missoula County Media Release

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Missoula County Parks and Trails to Honor Longtime Board Member with Steward Award

The Missoula County Parks and Trails Advisory Board has named Missoula's Sue Brown, a steadfast advocate for public recreation and resource conservation throughout the county, as the 2020 Parks and Trails Steward.

Board members and county commissioners will present the award to Brown, who served on the Parks and Trails Board for more than 25 years, during their meeting at 1:30 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 20, at the Community and Planning Services office, 127. E. Main St. Community members and the news media are welcome to attend, and Brown will be available for interviews following the award presentation.

Brown began serving on the Parks and Trails Advisory Board in 1993. For many years of her term, the county parks program had few paid staff and relied on board members to allocate resources and direct initiatives. For Brown, this included conducting community outreach, inspecting park facilities, implementing projects in the field and overseeing a limited budget.

Brown worked tirelessly to build capacity for the county's park program, especially in securing funding and bringing in new partners. She was instrumental in launching the Parks and Trails' Matching Grant Program, through which organizations can apply for funds to develop and maintain recreation facilities in their communities. The program quickly became a popular mechanism for Missoula County's rural communities to build playgrounds, maintain ballfields and, most recently, build outdoor ice-skating rinks. It typically awards around \$35,000 annually to community groups and organizations, which match the funding through a combination of project expenses, in-kind donations and volunteer service hours.

The tangible results of the Matching Grant Program, which Brown meticulously tracked, helped demonstrate the program's effectiveness when she later campaigned to pass a 1998 mill levy to fund program staff.

"I am so excited for Sue to get this award, as she essentially was the founding member of the parks board, serving for over 25 years," said Martha Yates, former Parks and Trails Advisory Board president. "She saw the program expand from a half-time employee to 4.5 full-time employees. She was adamant that community groups requesting county funds for their neighborhood parks be active participants in their projects, leading to stronger stewardship partners who take pride in their local parks."

While Brown was a remarkable advocate and organizer, she was equally willing to roll up her sleeves to help communities with work projects. Her contributions included helping with construction of Seeley Lake's Cougar Kingdom playground, supporting workshops for the New Meadows Park master plan and participating in numerous invasive weed pulls.

For more information or to schedule an interview with Brown, call Parks and Trails Coordinator John Stegmaier at 406-258-3458 or email jstegmaier@missoulacounty.us.

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