

“The Orchard” Information

What is the Orchard Project? The goal is to look at potential restoration, education, and/or recreation opportunities the community would prefer on the 150 acres of Forest Service land across from the Mule Pasture, dubbed “the Orchard.”

Who is leading this? The US Forest Service and Kaniksu Land Trust are leading the community engagement effort. Technical assistance and capacity support is being provided by Sanders County Community Development and Heart of the Rockies Initiative.

What will be the outcome? We hope to create a plan for the future of this site by working through a community planning process. A grant award from the Citizen’s Institute on Rural Design program is providing resources from professionals in planning, landscape design, and ecological restoration to help the community with this vision.

Timeline

October 2020 Sanders County Community Development, with support from the Thompson Falls Mayor (Carla Parks) and Sanders County Commissioner (Carol Brooker), applied for and received a Recreation Economy for Rural Communities (RERC) program grant. This is an EPA program that brings together stakeholders from all levels to identify goals and barriers to boosting rural economies with outdoor recreation opportunities. The program resulted in a Community Action Plan, created with collaboration from Mayor Parks, Commissioner Brooker, USFS, USDA, EPA, Northern Border Regional Commission, NPS, Thompson Falls Chamber of Commerce, Thompson Falls Main Street, local business owners, Thompson Falls Community Trails, and additional local organizations and residents. A Recreation Coordinator position was also identified as a community need, and Kaniksu Land Trust was chosen to hire for the position because of the organization’s community focused mission and 20+ year history of serving Sanders County.

December 17, 2020 Sanders County Ledger published an article about the RERC program. “SCCD Asks County for Support of Recreation Funding Opportunities”

<https://www.sclledger.net/story/2020/12/17/news/sccdc-asks-county-for-support-of-recreation-funding-opportunities/5546.html>

July 2021 Sanders County received a USDA Rural Business Development Grant to contract with Kaniksu Land Trust to work on recreation planning projects from the RERC Community Action Plan. These projects included a Downtown Park Plan, an Online Interactive Recreation Map, a Wayfinding Sign Plan, a Mule Pasture Recreation Plan, and a Community Coordination Plan.

February 2022 The COVID-19 pandemic and related issues extended Kaniksu Land Trust’s hiring process. In February 2022, KLT was able to hire local resident Kayla Mosher to serve as a Recreation & Outreach Coordinator based in Thompson Falls, MT. She was then able to work on the projects within the USDA grant and RERC community plan.

March 10, 2022 Sanders County Ledger published an article about hiring the Sanders County Recreation & Outreach Coordinator position. “Kaniksu Land Trust hires Sanders County coordinator”

<https://www.sclledger.net/story/2022/03/10/news/kaniksu-land-trust-hires-sanders-county-coordinator/7500.html>

May 2022 A survey was conducted within the junior high and high schools in Thompson Falls to capture teens’ perspectives on potential site use for the Orchard. Youth are an important part of any community, and families in Thompson Falls have expressed through conversations and surveys (City Park Assessment) that there aren’t parks or spaces adequate for teens’ enjoyment. This led us to conduct a survey to listen to their ideas about their desires at the Orchard. 168 students responded. Student survey results - <https://www.kaniksu.org/s/student-survey.pdf>

June 2022 Kaniksu Land Trust hosted a public meeting at Limberlost Brewery to inform the community about recreation projects and gather feedback about these projects. Providing a synopsis of the RERC workshop and the Community Action Plan was another goal of this community conversation.

June 23, 2022 Sanders County Ledger publishes an article about the community meeting on recreation. “Group Updates Community on Recreation Projects”

<https://www.sclledger.net/story/2022/06/23/news/group-updates-community-on-recreation-projects/7968.html>

July 2022 Coordination with USFS through the Mule Pasture Recreation Plan resulted in a focus on the unused “Mule Pasture West” and the potential at that site. To mitigate confusion with the existing Mule Pasture trails, the property was instead nicknamed “The Orchard” due to its past use as a ponderosa pine seed orchard. To gain community feedback on wishes and concerns on this property, a public survey was conducted. It was offered online, via paper at the Library and Senior Center, through phone and email, and through door-to-door or mail delivery. 169 responses were collected. Public survey results -

https://www.kaniksu.org/s/Survey_Responses_Report.pdf

July 21, 2022 Sanders County Ledger published an article about the project and survey. “Survey Seeks Input on Local Land Use”
<https://www.sclledger.net/story/2022/07/21/news/survey-seeks-input-on-local-land-use/8073.html>

September 1, 2022 Sanders County Ledger published an article about the results of the survey. “Residents Weigh in on Recreation Possibilities”
<https://www.sclledger.net/story/2022/09/01/news/residents-weigh-in-on-recreation-possibilities/8229.html>

December 2022 Kaniksu Land Trust, USFS, and Sanders County Community Development discussed the survey results and next steps for the project. There was enough interest from the surveys for recreation opportunities on the Orchard property, so the decision was made to pursue further site planning. Kaniksu Land Trust agreed to look for grants to support this planning.

January 2023 Sanders County Community Development reached out to Sanders County Ledger to publish an article about next steps in the Orchard project; the request was denied.

April 2023 Kaniksu Land Trust, with support from USFS, Sanders County Community Development, and Heart of the Rockies Initiative, applied for the Citizen’s Institute on Rural Design program for Local Design Workshops. This opportunity would provide planning and design assistance to awarded communities. This is a helpful skill set that local organizations could not necessarily provide.

June 2023 Thompson Falls was selected as one of eight communities across the United States to participate in Local Design Workshops through the CIRD program. Coordination began with the four applicant organizations listed above and To Be Done Studio, the architecture firm contracted with the CIRD program to provide planning and design services.

July 27, 2023 Sanders County Ledger published an article about the CIRD grant award. “Design Program to Benefit TF Project”
<https://www.sclledger.net/story/2023/07/27/news/design-program-to-benefit-tf-project/9556.html>

October 2023 Public engagement for Orchard planning began with an invitation to a small group of community members who own property adjacent to the Orchard, to seek input directly from those that border this public property and who may be the most affected by potential

opportunities. Adjacent landowners along with some residents from the greater Thompson Falls area attended. The meeting was held on October 17 at the Thompson Falls Elementary School with an optional site visit.

October 26, 2023 Sanders County Ledger published an article about the neighborhood meeting. “Residents tell FS to leave Orchard alone”

<https://www.sclledger.net/story/2023/10/26/news/residents-tell-fs-to-leave-orchard-alone/9945.html>

November 2, 2023 Sanders County Ledger published an editorial about the Orchard. “Setting the record straight”

<https://www.sclledger.net/story/2023/11/02/opinion/setting-the-record-straight/9966.html>

November 2023 Public engagement continues with a 3-day workshop bringing together the greater community with professional resources to further flesh out site ideas and planning. The workshop will take place November 29 - December 1 in Thompson Falls.

December 2023 - December 2024: Pending the Thompson Falls community's identified wishes and needs, ongoing community engagement and planning may occur. This would include developing a document that has a detailed restoration and maintenance plan and/or design for recreation opportunities (if applicable).

What do we need from you?

We need your help in developing a vision for this public land that incorporates constructive community feedback, expert advice, and best practices for management, recreation, and conservation.

1. What makes the Orchard special? What might others not already know about the Orchard?
2. Why do you enjoy living/owning property near the Orchard?
3. As a landowner, what ideas related to the future of the Orchard are circling in your head?
4. When you think about the future. What would you like to see happen on the Orchard property?

The Orchard Location



Orchard Recreation Community Survey

August 1, 2022

Underlined = repeated

Bold and Underlined = repeated many times

Values

- Wild/open spaces
- Wildlife
- **Nature**
- Year-round activities
- Less development
- Multi-use

Opportunities

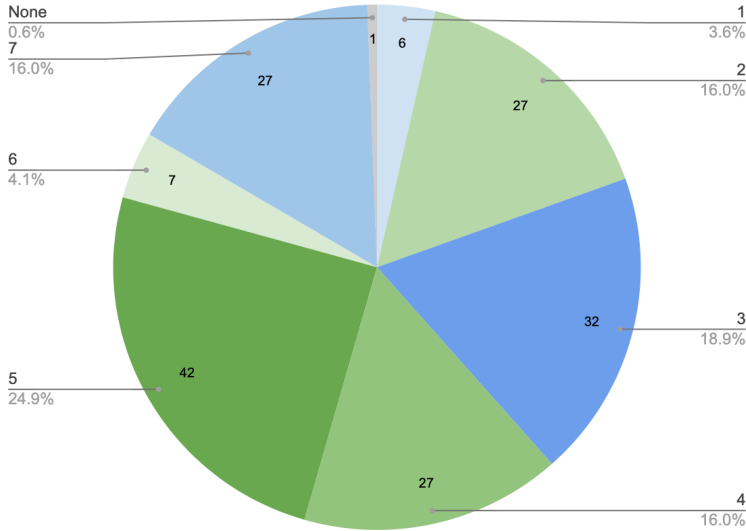
- Disc golf course
- **Outdoor education**
- **Biking trails**
- **Hiking trails**
- Ice skating
- **Cross Country skiing**
- Community garden
- Airsoft field
- **Restoration of the field/orchard to natural forest**
- ADA accessibility
- Horse shoes or corn hole (games)
- Fitness trail with exercise stations
- Dog park
- Skate park
- Archery range
- Soccer, softball, baseball field(s)
- Anything for youth
- Playground
- Ropes course

Concerns

- Wildlife
- **Keep as natural as possible**
- No motorized vehicles
- **Maintenance**
- **Leave the Mule Pasture alone**
- Noise from activities
- Impact to neighbors
- Wildfire danger
- No cost for use
- Trash

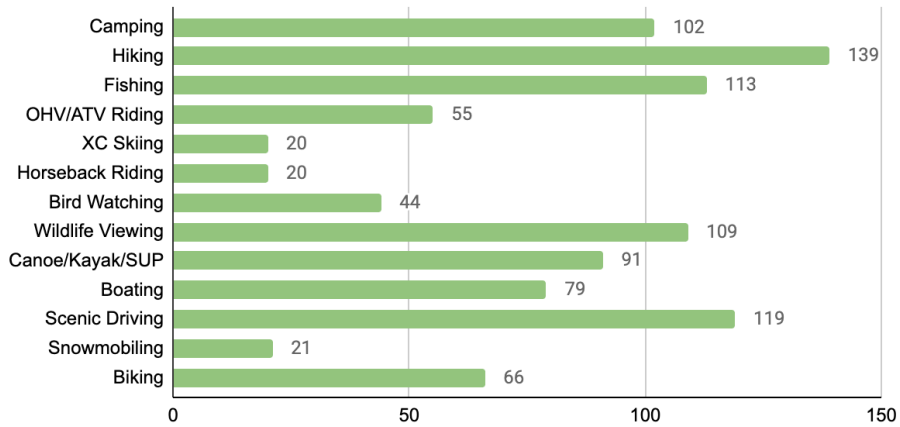
Community Survey Results (169 responses)

How many days per week do you participate in outdoor recreation activities?
169 responses



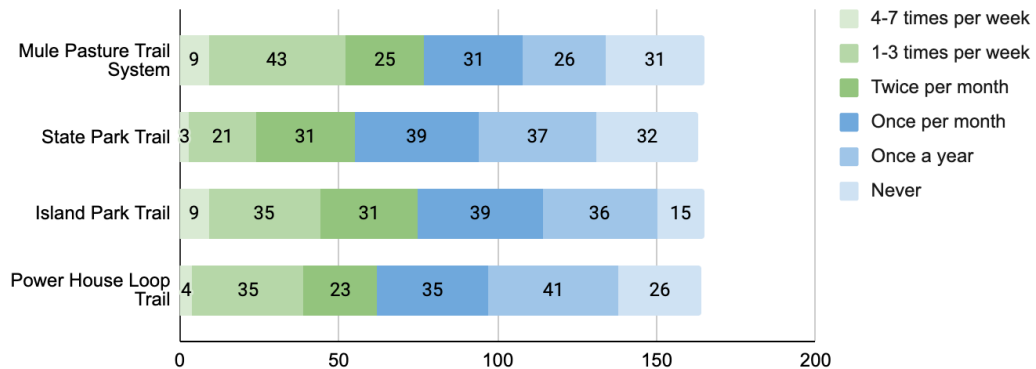
What recreational activities do you engage in around the Thompson Falls area? [Pick all that apply]

169 responses



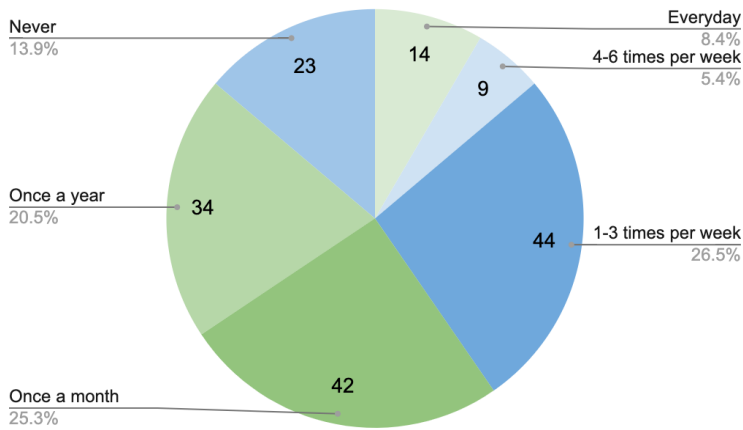
How often do you use the following trails?

166 responses



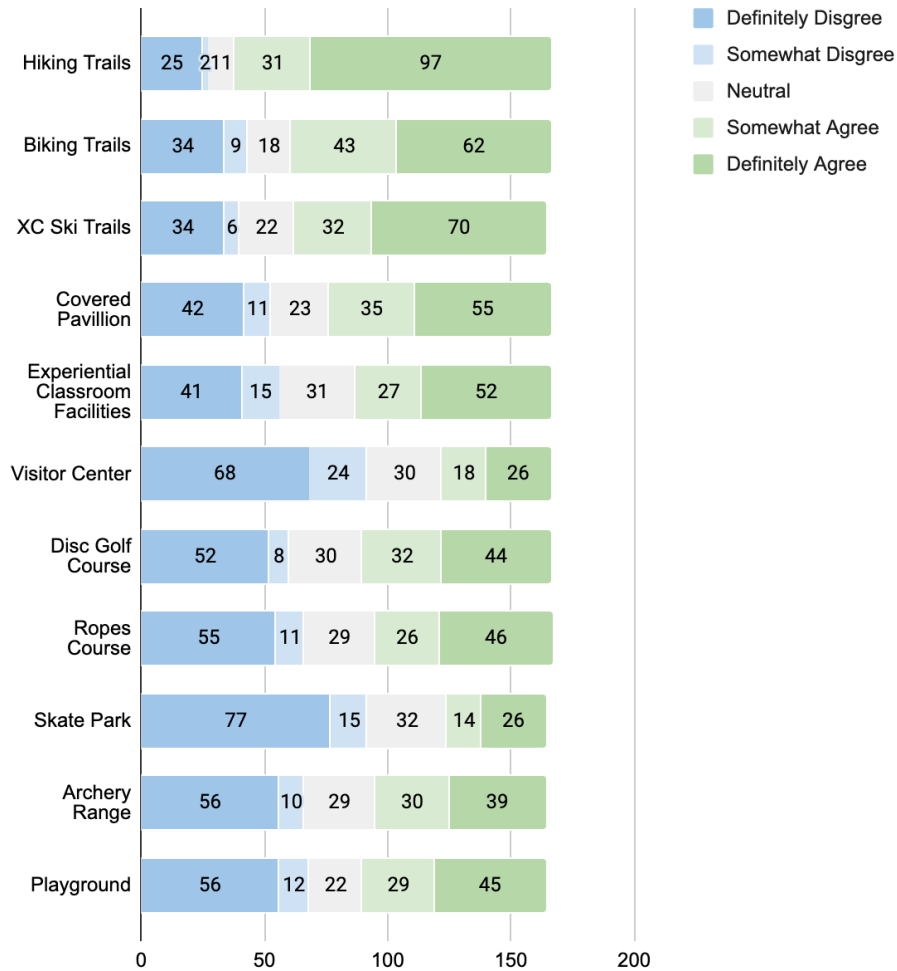
How often do you go to the Mule Pasture?

166 responses



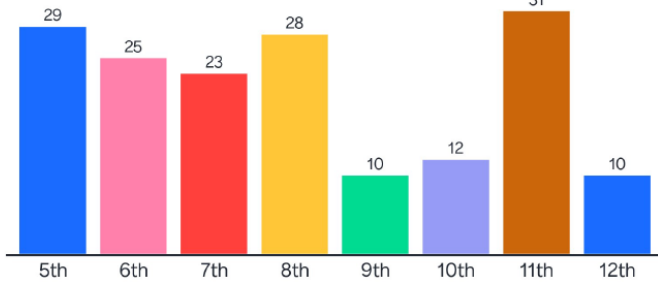
At The Orchard, I would support the construction of...

168 responses



Student Survey Results (168 responses)

What grade are you in?



When I go outside, I like to



I would play outside more if Thompson Falls had



I would like it if the Mule Pasture had



Please rank by what you would like to see added to the mule pasture

