



Creating Trails for Everyone: Summit Independent Living's Leadership in Accessible Outdoor Recreation

Montana's outdoors are among the state's greatest treasures, offering opportunities for recreation, connection, and discovery. Yet for many people with disabilities, public trails have historically presented barriers that limit access to these experiences. Through its involvement in recent accessibility projects at Wayfarers State Park and the Rock Creek Confluence near Clinton, as well as past projects at Placid Lake, Mount Dean Stone/Upper Miller Creek, and the Riverfront Trail in Missoula, Summit Independent Living is helping redefine what it means for outdoor spaces to be truly welcoming and accessible for everyone.

At Wayfarers State Park on the northeast shore of Flathead Lake, Summit Independent Living partnered with the Montana State Parks Foundation, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, and Montana Conservation Corps to develop a comprehensive accessibility plan for the park. The project represents a groundbreaking approach to trail development in Montana, placing people with disabilities at the center of the planning process. Guided by the principle of "Nothing About Us Without Us," Summit helped ensure that individuals with lived experience using mobility devices, as well as members of the blind, low-vision, deaf, and hard-of-hearing communities, had a voice in shaping the future of the park.

Summit's assessment identified opportunities to improve access throughout

Wayfarers, including trails, picnic areas, beach access, parking, campsites, and recreation facilities. On the popular Harry Horn Trail, recommendations included widening and leveling the pathway, removing roots and rocks, improving sightlines, and creating passing and resting areas. These improvements go beyond simply meeting accessibility standards; they focus on creating trails that are truly usable and enjoyable for a broad range of visitors.

At the same time, Summit contributed accessibility expertise to the development of the Rock Creek Confluence near Clinton. Working alongside Five Valleys Land Trust, Summit helped guide the design of nearly 1.5 miles of accessible trails that allow more people to experience this restored natural area. The wide, flat, and smooth trail surfaces make it easier for people using wheelchairs, walkers, or other mobility devices to navigate the area safely and comfortably. Interpretive stations with audio descriptions and Salish language translations further expand access, ensuring that visitors with different abilities and backgrounds can engage with the landscape in meaningful ways.

Through these projects and others like it, Summit has been instrumental in providing people with disabilities better access, the opportunity to achieve all benefits that come from being in outdoor spaces and places, and increased independence. However, the impact extends far beyond a single group of trail users. Universally accessible trails support older adults, parents pushing strollers, young children, people recovering from injuries, and anyone who may benefit from a smoother and safer pathway. Wider trails allow family

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Creating Trails for Everyone: Continued

members and friends to walk or roll side-by-side, creating shared experiences rather than separating people based on mobility needs. Accessibility improvements often enhance safety, comfort, and enjoyment for all visitors.

These projects also highlight an important shift in how accessibility is viewed. True accessibility is not simply about meeting minimum requirements. It is about understanding how different people experience outdoor spaces and designing environments that accommodate a wide range of needs. Features such as clearly defined trail edges, accessible viewpoints, gentle grades, resting areas, and inclusive interpretive information create opportunities for participation that might otherwise be unavailable.

The success of the Wayfarers State Park and Rock Creek Confluence projects demonstrates what is possible when conservation organizations, public agencies,

community partners, and disability advocates work together. Summit Independent Living's involvement has helped ensure that accessibility is considered from the earliest planning stages rather than added as an afterthought.

As Montana continues to invest in parks, trails, and outdoor recreation, these projects provide a model for future development across the state. They show that accessible design does not diminish the outdoor experience; it expands it. By helping create trails that welcome people of all abilities, Summit Independent Living is helping to strengthen communities, increasing access to nature, promoting independence and reinforcing a simple but powerful idea: Montana's public lands should be accessible to everyone.

For more information about Trail accessibility and outdoor recreation. Please reach out to Summit Independent Living at 406-728-1630



Photo: Five Valleys Land Trust, Rock Creek Confluence Trail Dedication.

Changing of the Season with a Spinal Cord Injury

The change from summer to fall is absolutely gorgeous in Missoula and this year is no exception. It is currently 78 degrees, sunny, and the leaves on the trees are turning from green to that beautiful shade of yellow only October can produce. The mornings do have that crisp autumn air that lets you know summer has ended and winter is on its way. And I am enjoying this beautiful day next to my fireplace trying to warm up.

I have a spinal cord injury. I broke my cervical spine when I was 17 which left me paralyzed from the chest down. Aside from the known problems that come with quadriplegia (not being able to walk, needing help to get in and out of bed), I also struggle with maintaining my body temperature. As my mom describes it, my thermostat is broken. Because I live up here in Montana, I tend to remain in a constant state of cold. Even though I have lived here in my whole life, fall sneaks up on me every year. I live in denial that summer will last forever because it's not a struggle to stay warm. When denial no longer works, I start making lists of the things I like about fall. Crunchy leaves, bugs go back to the hell from whence they came, I get to wear warm sweaters and cute boots. Plus, we get warm days here and there and there's always a chance to get a good autumn stroll through the changing leaves.

Then, there is winter. In college, I wrote a poem for a class and filled it with the most cliché and beautiful depictions for the descriptions of winter. After several stanzas of imagery, I finished with one line — Crap it's cold. I may have used a different word in that line for the actual poem. Snow is an obstacle for wheelchair users. I have no fear of ice but I do fear being stuck inside from the snow being deep or worse, sticky. Cabin fever is bad enough if you don't have a disability, it's even worse when it's impossible to leave because your wheelchair can't get through snow.

My dream in life is to become a snowbird where I fly south for the winter. Montana has the most beautiful summers so I always want

to be here that time of year. Unfortunately, that kind of lifestyle only works if you have financial freedom and, in my case, caregivers with financial freedom. Until then, I survive the transition to winter a few different ways. Most of them involve finding fun ways to stay warm. As I mentioned before, I have a fireplace but I also have an assortment of blankets and space heaters all throughout my house. Books, movies, and video games can all be enjoyed happily next to a glowing fire. In the age of technology, it's easy to enjoy time with others with weekly game time with friends without having to leave the comfort of your home.

That being said, it's also important to leave your home. One of the best ways I have found to stay warm while also leaving the house is going to the Missoula Butterfly House and Insectarium. That place has been extremely beneficial to my health, both mentally and physically. It's like a patch of summer in the middle of winter. I'm probably the only one in the atrium wearing a sweater yet not dying of heat. Plus, humidity is good for my lungs and you can't tell me otherwise.

They express the importance of getting out for one reason. During the lovely year that was 2020, I had cabin fever pretty bad before winter even rolled around. To say I was lonely and stir crazy it's an understatement. My friend and I created Friday fun day to at least get out of the house for an hour or two. Sometimes all we did was go to a coffee shop for something warm to drink.

One of the main things disability and cabin fever have in common is loneliness. Having both at the same time can cause some pretty dark emotions. Creating dedicated ways to fight the loneliness of the colder months is important to living a fulfilling life. Dedicated time with friends and family or even finding an online community can help. Dream of vacations and never forget that soon the morning spring air will greet you.

~ Robin Zehntner

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Drop-In Vaccination Clinic

**Thursday, October 29,
from 12:00 pm to 3:00 pm**

**Stop by Miss Summit, Missoula's office,
At 3104 West Broadway Street, Missoula,
Montana 59808 to get vaccinated for:**



- Flu
- COVID
- Tdap (tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis)
- Pneumonia

**You must bring a photo ID and insurance card.
Uninsured or underinsured? MPH offers a sliding
fee scale with a maximum out-of-pocket cost of
\$21.32 per vaccine.**

3104 West Broadway Street, Missoula,

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Summit Office Updates

Kalispell Office

Kalispell's YODA group is resuming its normal schedule with meetings on the second and fourth Tuesdays of each month at the office in Kalispell from 4:00p.m.-5:30 p.m. We promote team building with group activities that focus on collaboration, advocacy, and, of course, fun! If you are a young person with a disability who is 14-30ish, we encourage you to join.

The second Thursday of each month from 10 am to 12 pm is Mail and Munchies. We can help with the, sometimes difficult, task of sorting through paperwork from Social Security, Medicaid, and others while enjoying hot coffee and snacks.

Third Thursday Crafternoon, arts and crafts group, continues to meet each month on the third Thursday from 2:00p.m.-4:00p.m. Participants can try a provided project or work on something of their own. Abilities of all kinds are welcome to join the fun!

If you are a person with a disability and consider yourself a positive role model, Summit is hiring for peer advocates. Please reach out to apply.

For more information about workshops, peer group, or employment please contact Dianna at 406-257-0048 ext. 3 or go to www.summitilc.org.

Polson Office

Back in August the Polson YODA group conducted their monthly meeting at the Lake County Courthouse, where county employees attendance. It was a great opportunity for the county to learn about the YODA program.

Youth Opening Doors to Advocacy continues to meet on the third Thursday of each month, Arts and Crafts to meet on Wednesdays, and Mail & Munchies on the fourth Thursday of each month. Summit staff will also assist people with letters from Social Security or Medicaid, etc. on a walk-in basis.

For more information about workshops, peer group, or employment please contact The Polson team at 406-215-1604 or go to www.summitilc.org



Hamilton Office

Dungeons and Dragons groups have taken off and are a great success and 4-6 people are attending regularly. The Dungeons and Dragons group meets every Monday and Tuesday from 3:00 pm to 5:00 pm.

Hamilton People's First Aktion Club meets monthly, if interested in participating or for more information, please reach out.

CHEW nutrition and cooking class class is meeting on the second Monday of every month from 2 pm to 3 pm.

Mail & Munchies is meeting on the 1st and 3rd Thursdays of each month from 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm.

The new Blind & Low Vision group meets on the 4th Wednesday of the month from 5 pm to 6 pm. The group recently received donated Meta glasses.

TGIAF (thank goodness it's activity Friday) is going strong. They recently led an amazing painting project to memorialize 9/11.

If you have any questions about our classes and workshops, please call Darcy Curry at 406-363-5242.

White Cane Day Celebration



Thursday, October 15

Doors: 7 pm

\$13.60 to \$22.80

Zootown Arts Community Center

The Missoula Chapter of the National Federation of the Blind Presents a celebration of Blind People's Achievement Month and White Cane Day, October 15th!

Join us after our river walk as part of the Coast-To-Coast Movement Challenge at the ZACC for live music By

Tephra

The Classics

Clementine and Katko

Stay for the bands featuring blind musicians from Missoula and a brief presentation or two from local leaders in the Blind People's Movement!

For more info about the NFB, please reach out to

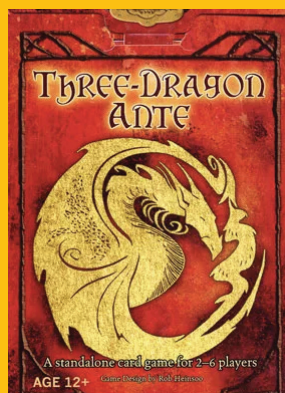
rherbert@nfbmt.org

BASE SCHEDULE

3104 W Broadway

Missoula, MT

For the following activities,
please call BASE for details:



For BASE Schedule Updates and
Additional Events go to:

www.summitilc.org/calendar

or check the BASE Facebook page at

<https://www.facebook.com/base725>

To get involved or to share ideas of new BASE
programs, contact BASE jhoward@summitilc.org.

Contact BASE:

www.basemissoula.org

Phone: 406-215-1080

CLASSIFIED ADS

Power wheelchair

Permobil M5 Corpus, Joystick, power recline, Body link posture control \$2500, in good condition.
Call Jim: 808-347-5694

Walker with Seat

Blue with removable backrest and storage. \$75 obo, in good condition
Call: 406-241-3886

Quantum Q6 Edge Wheelchair

Barely used, needs battery.
Call for a price: 406-282-1263

Standing commode, Adult Symmetry Stander

Each \$300 obo, in good condition
Call: Nancy 406-273-9012

Jazzy Pride Wheelchair

Make offer, only 2yrs old
Call: Linda 406-531-4938

Shoprider power chair

300lb capacity. Needs battery & charger.
Free (406) 728-1630

Symmetry Stander, Quickie Powerchair, Invacare Powerbed, Hoyer lift

Comfortable, easy-to-use seat stander Call/leave message: Tejeanne (406) 865-0221

Power Scooter

\$500 obo. Please contact Adrian:
(406) 263-8650

Adult Tricycle

Schwinn 26" tricycle, bike pump included.
\$500obo (406) 721-1698

Wheelchair Lift

Ricon wheelchair lift model #S1231 G00100100. \$400obo.
Contact: Cory (406) 471-3314

Silver Spring wheelchair ramp 10' L x 36" W

Made of high-strength light weight aluminum. \$297obo. Contact:
tamera144@gmail.com or 406-363-4898

To get listed contact Tyler Stosich at (406) 728-1630 or email tstosich@summitilc.org.

Or, list and find items on the MonTECH exchange: <http://montech.ruralinstitute.umd.edu/mtdb/>

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2026 General Election

Tuesday, November 3 | Ballots due by 8 p.m.

Regular registration deadline: OCT. 5 | Absentee ballots mailed: OCT. 9 | Election Day: NOV. 3

CHECK YOUR VOTER INFORMATION

- Use the official Montana Voter Portal (voterportal.mt.gov) to check your registration, address, polling location, sample ballot, absentee status, and ballot tracking: voterportal.mt.gov
- If anything is missing or incorrect, contact your county election office immediately.

REGISTER OR UPDATE YOUR REGISTRATION

- Regular registration closes at 5 p.m. Monday, October 5. Complete the official voter registration application and return it to your county office: votemt.gov/voter-registration/
- After October 5, register or update in person. Late registration begins October 6, pauses from noon to 5 p.m. November 2, and resumes on Election Day through 8 p.m.

ABSENTEE VOTING

- Any registered Montana voter may vote absentee. Check your absentee status and track your ballot in the Voter Portal (voterportal.mt.gov).
- To request a ballot, submit the official absentee application to your county office. The standard deadline is noon Monday, November 2. During late registration, you may need to apply and receive the ballot in person.
- Your completed ballot must be received by 8 p.m. November 3. Postmarks are not enough. Sign and date the return envelope and include your birth year. Mail it early or deliver it in person.

ACCESSIBLE VOTING AND ACCOMMODATIONS

- **ExpressVote:** Every polling place has an accessible ballot-marking device with audio, a Braille keypad, seated access, and compatibility with rocker switches and sip-and-puff devices.
- **Other options:** Ask for curbside voting if you cannot enter; request help from an election judge; bring a person you choose, except your employer or union agent; or designate an agent using the state form.
- **Electronic Ballot Request System (EBRS):** Eligible voters with disabilities may receive and mark a ballot electronically, then print and return it. Forms and instructions: sosmt.gov/elections/disabilities

- Call the county office early to request specific accommodation. Braille and audio state voter information is available from the Montana Secretary of State.

COUNTY ELECTION OFFICE

To contact your county's elections office, please find your county elections administrator, and their contact information, by visiting the Montana Secretary of State's Election Administrators Contact List webpage at sosmt.gov/elections/election-administrators-contact-list.

ELECTION DAY REMINDERS

- Confirm your polling location before leaving. Most polls are open at 7 a.m.-8 p.m.; some small polling places may open later. If you are in line at 8 p.m., stay in line.
- Bring a current, valid, readable physical photo ID. If you do not have one, ask election staff about other accepted documents or a provisional ballot. Acceptable forms of ID can be found at votemt.gov/voter-identification
- Statewide help: 1-888-884-VOTE (8683) or 406-444-9608 | Accessibility: soselections@mt.gov

Also be sure to check out The Collective Disruption's Disability Voter Guide! This nonpartisan guide is the result of a partnership between Summit and other disability advocacy organizations across Montana. We contacted dozens of candidates for state and federal office and asked them about issues that are important to Montanans with disabilities. This guide provides their responses, allowing voters to compare candidates' positions and make informed decisions at the ballot box.



www.summitilc.org/accessible-voting-2026/

2027 SOCIAL SECURITY CHANGES

Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA):

Based on the increase in the Consumer Price Index (CPI-W) from the third quarter of 2025 through the third quarter of 2026, Social Security and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) beneficiaries will receive a 3.6 percent COLA for 2026.

Social Security Disability Thresholds

Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA):

	2026	2027
Non-Blind	\$ 1,690/mo.	\$ 1,770/mo.
Blind	\$ 2,830/mo.	\$ 2,950/mo.

Trial Work Period (TWP):

\$ 1210/mo.	\$ 1270/mo.
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SSI Federal Payment Standard:

Individual	\$ 994/mo.	\$ 1,029/mo.
Couple	\$ 1,491/mo.	\$ 1,544/mo.

SSI Resource Limits:

Individual	\$ 2,000	\$ 2,000
Couple	\$ 3,000	\$ 3,000



Celebrating Value and Talent

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month.

Each October, National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) celebrates the contributions, talents, and achievements of workers with disabilities while promoting the importance of inclusive and accessible workplaces. Employment provides opportunities for independence, personal growth, and community participation, and individuals with disabilities bring valuable skills, perspectives, and experiences that strengthen organizations and communities alike.

NDEAM is also a reminder that creating equitable employment opportunities benefits everyone. By embracing accessible hiring practices, workplace accommodations, and inclusive policies, employers can build stronger, more innovative teams. As we recognize this month, we celebrate the accomplishments of employees with disabilities and reaffirm our commitment to ensuring that every person has the opportunity to pursue meaningful work and reach their full potential.



BECOME AN ADVOCATE



Scan to sign up for email alerts, view posted alerts, or even see who your candidates are.



The Montana Centers for Independent Living Action Alert system is an email listserv and online portal designed to inform you about current local, state, and national issues that affect the lives of people with disabilities.

This publication is available in alternative format on request. Please call 1 (800) 398-9002.

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