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PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release through October 16, 2011

Grand Opening of New River Road Neighborhood Trail Set For October 16

Citizens are invited to the grand opening celebration of the River Road segment of the Milwaukee Trail on Sunday, October 16 from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. at Bentley Park, located at Davis St. and Bentley Park Loop.

The new trail, constructed by the City of Missoula and its partners with state and federal transportation funds, links the River Road Neighborhood to the rest of Missoula's trail system via a 1-mile paved trail from Russell to Reserve. The project was initiated at the request of neighborhood residents and has been a part of the community's non-motorized transportation plan for nearly two decades.

"We've worked closely with the neighborhood to close this gap in the City's non-motorized transportation network. The new trail provides connectivity from areas west of Russell to the Riverfront Trail, the Bitterroot Branch trail and the numerous park facilities along both routes. It extends the City's main east-west "commuter trail" and makes getting around town by bike or on foot much easier," says Dave Shaw, Parks and Trails Development Manager at Missoula Parks and Recreation.

River Road neighbors agree that the new trail makes commuting easier. "The completion of this trail connection makes biking or walking to work or the grocery store that much easier and safer for all ages—and sometimes faster than driving a car," says River Road Neighborhood Council representative Jeremy Flesch. "I've been amazed at the level of interest and excitement from neighbors—both in the River Road Neighborhood and beyond."

The new trail creates a dedicated bicycle/pedestrian route from Russell Street near the Home ReSource building to the Reserve Street pedestrian underpass at Bentley Park Loop. It features improvements like safety-enhanced street crossings, landscaping, benches, Mutt Mitt stations and other amenities.

Shaw says the new trail may even increase property values in the River Road neighborhood. "Studies have shown that people are often willing to pay more for a home or business with a multi-use trail in the neighborhood. Trails have become an important amenity that many folks look for when choosing where to live," he says. "People have come to realize that neighborhood parks and trails are important to our quality of life, to our health and to our economy." Several community-minded property owners along the trail route granted easements, at significant discounts, to make room for the trail. Easements and acquisition costs were funded by the 2006 Open Space Bond.

The trail segment is part of a long-distance trail system linking several Pacific Northwest states along the former Milwaukee Road railroad corridor—which stretched 1,000 miles from Chicago, Illinois to Puget Sound, Washington. The Kim Williams Nature Trail and the Ron MacDonald Riverfront Trail here in Missoula are built on the Milwaukee Road corridor, as are the Route of the Hiawatha Trail at Lookout Pass and the 72-mile Trail of the Coeur d'Alenes in northern Idaho. The history and artwork of the original Milwaukee Road railroad line is represented in signage and interpretation along the new trail.

Sunday's celebration will feature live music from Tom Catmull and the Clerics, a bike parade, refreshments, and an appearance by UM Grizzly mascot Monte. Because parking is limited at Bentley Park, attendees may want to ride or walk to the event or park a few blocks away and take the new trail to the event. For more information, visit www.missoulaparks.org.

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Media Note:

Schedule of Events for Sunday, October 16:

3:00 pm - Start of Event

3:30 pm - Opening Remarks & Recognitions

4:10 pm - Bike Parade starting at Davis Street

4:30 pm - Pictures with Monte

4:30 pm - Live Music by Tom Catmull & The Clerics

6:00 pm - End of Event