



Tobacco Valley COUNTRY

2022-2023

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Tobacco Valley NEWS

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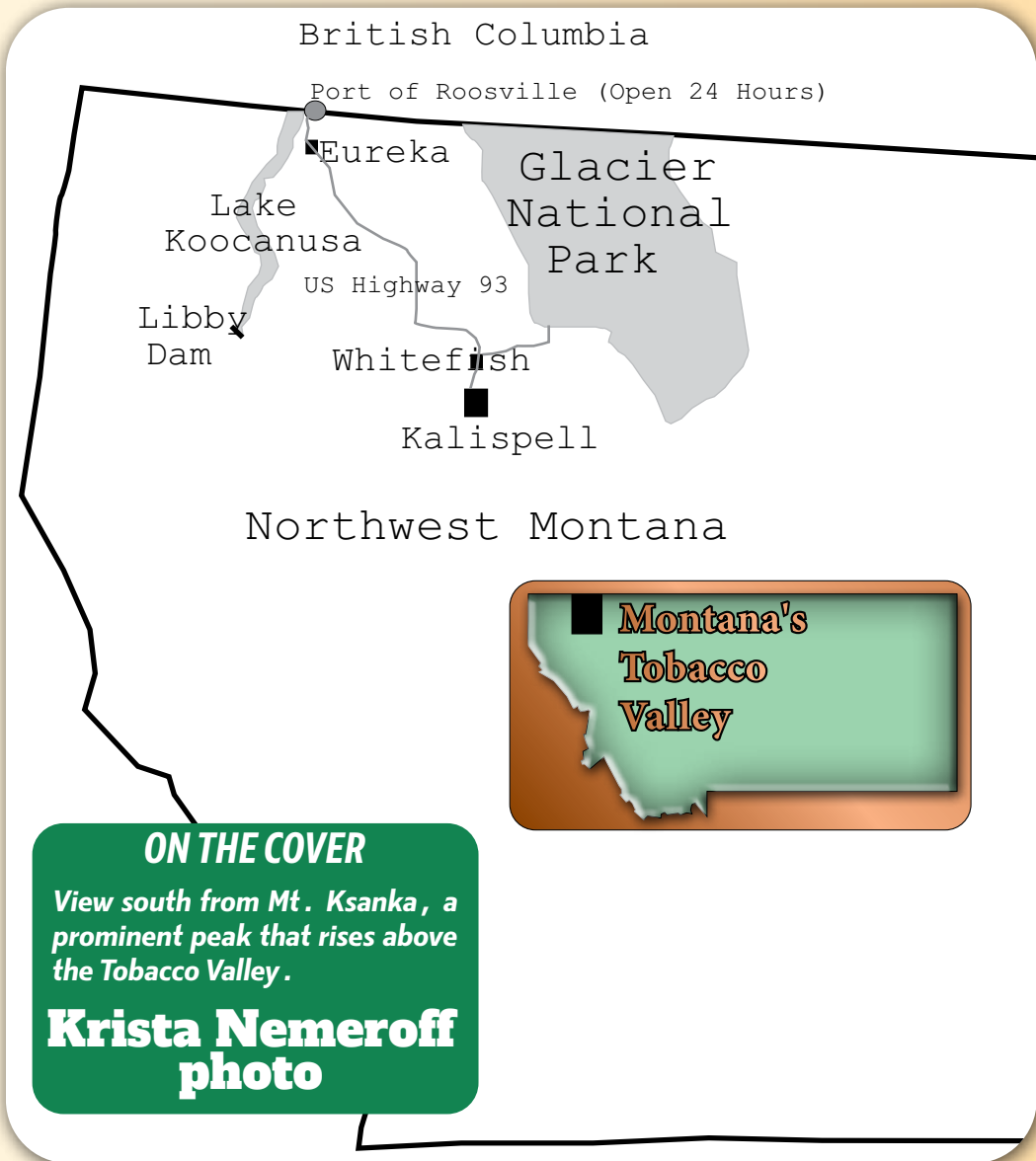
Welcome to Montana's Tobacco Valley Country

Whether true tobacco ever grew in the region now called the Tobacco Valley remains the subject of conjecture. Most attribute the region's English nickname to Canadian explorer David Thompson, who reported that the area's original residents, the Kootenai people, used a smoking plant either found or grown here.

The Tobacco Valley straddles the Canadian border to the north, stretching from the settlement of Stryker in the south to the Whitefish

Mountains in the east and the Purcell Mountains on the western edge.

With many acres of public land available, the area's recreational activities are many and varied. Hunting and fishing remain strong traditions of local residents and draw visitors from around the country. Camping, hiking, paddling and dirt biking or OHV riding are popular too, and opportunities continue to grow with the area's population as others discover the wonders of the Tobacco Valley.



ON THE COVER
View south from Mt. Ksanka, a prominent peak that rises above the Tobacco Valley.
Krista Nemeroff photo

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Randy Miller of Eureka Public Works repaints a sign at the entrance to the town.

Inside the Country



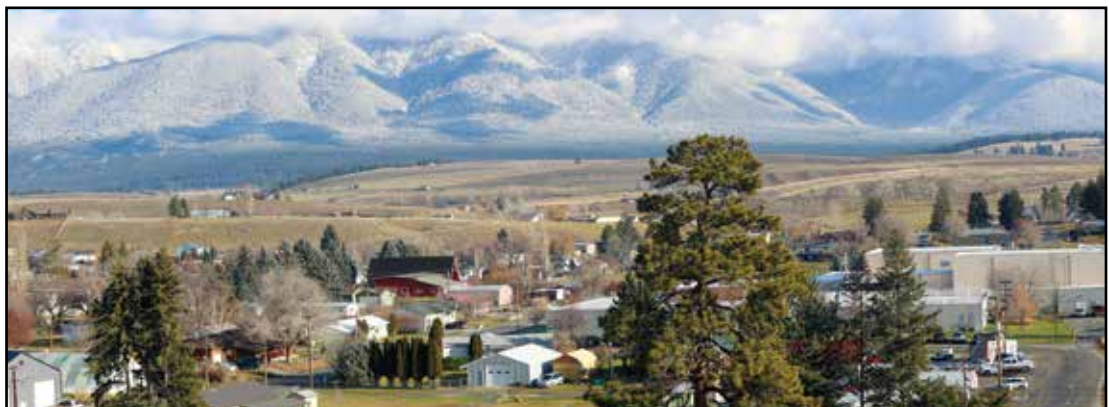
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Fresh snow highlights the flanks of the mountains rising east of Eureka.

Emergency response

Emergency services in the Tobacco Valley are provided by voluntary organizations. Neither the county nor the incorporated towns operate round-the-clock-staffed fire departments or emergency medical services.

In an emergency, dial 911 to reach fire, ambulance or law enforcement.

Most fire and ambulance responders hold day jobs and respond to emergency calls on a voluntary basis.

Three volunteer fire departments serve the valley. The services provide mutual aid to one another as needed, and to wildland fire crews from the U.S. Fire Service.

Eureka Volunteer Fire Department covers the Town of Eureka and outlying rural areas. Firefighters are alerted to calls by both radio page and a town-wide siren. Listen for the daily 7 p.m. double blast of the siren, which serves as a pager check from dispatch to local emergency responders.

Trego-Fortine-Stryker Volunteer Fire Department serves the area south of Eureka, including the three unincorporated settlements in its name and the surrounding countryside. It maintains two fire stations.

West Kootenai Volunteer Fire Department serves the region west of Lake Kooconusa. Some firefighters are trained as emergency medical responders and can take vital signs or offer oxygen on the scene of an emergency until EMTs from the ambulance service arrive.

Eureka Volunteer Ambulance Service provides emergency medical response to the 500 square service miles of the Tobacco Valley. The service typically transports patients to the nearest hospi-

tals in Whitefish or Kalispell, or can meet with the Kalispell-based medical helicopter ALERT.

EVAS has some members and equipment in the West Kootenai region who when available can respond directly to a scene while an ambulance makes its way the 45 minutes from the barn in Eureka.

Voters in the Tobacco Valley voted to found and fund a special tax district for a dispatch center in Eureka. That center answers 911 calls received from within the Tobacco Valley and dispatches emergency services and law enforcement to calls. The dispatch district corresponds with the Lincoln County High School district boundaries.

The Lincoln County Sheriff's Office responds to emergency calls, conducts patrols and criminal investigations, and handles animal control. The county sheriff is elected by voters. LCSO operates the county jail and a central dispatch center in Libby.

The Town of Eureka maintains its own police department. The police chief is an employee hired by the town.

The Montana Highway Patrol is responsible for traffic safety and crash investigations.

The U.S. Border Patrol patrols the U.S. border with Canada, and may assist other agencies as needed.

The U.S. Forest Service employs a law enforcement officer, and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks has a game warden.

The non-emergency number for Eureka Dispatch is 406-297-2121.

The non-emergency number for Lincoln County Sheriff's Office is 406-293-4112.



The setting sun casts lingering light on the sandy shores of Lake Kooconusa during Kooconusa Fun Days, a celebration of bikes, four wheelers, sand, and mud held in early spring.

Annual events

The Tobacco Valley is never a boring place to be. Any season of the year, a fun event is just around the corner. Given the area's natural beauty, many are outdoor focused.

Kick the year off with the Ten Lakes Snowmobile Club annual ride and fund-raiser. The Ray Peterson Fun Run is held mid-winter and includes a route on the club's groomed trails, followed by dinner and an auction.

The Tobacco Valley Animal Shelter's winter warmer fund-raiser is typically held around Valentines Day each year, with a dinner, auction and contests to enjoy.

Easter weekend egg hunts are held at the Trego Civic Center and the LCHS football field on Sunday.

The last weekend in April is Rendezvous Days, a festival celebrating the arrival of spring.

In May, The Creative Arts Dance Studio holds its spring show.

The Eureka Farmers Market runs Wednesdays through the summer at Memorial Park.

The second Saturday of June brings the Amish Auction, held on the West Kootenai and featuring hand-made wares and chow.

The Tobacco Valley Rodeo held July 22-23 at the fairgrounds arena attracts talent from all over the state and region with its friendly atmosphere and big purses.

Touted as the "most colorful day of the year," the Eureka Montana Quilt Show takes over downtown with hundreds of quilts on the first Saturday in August.

The Lincoln County Fair includes exhibits, the 4-H dance and livestock auction, vendors, good food and music, and a Saturday night bull-riding spectacle. It's held Aug. 25-28 for 2022.

The VFW and American Legion hold a service each Memorial Day and Veteran's Day to commemorate soldiers now gone and the contributions of veterans.

On the Saturday following Thanksgiving, Tobacco Valley proprietors promote "Shop Small," an opportunity to support local small businesses.

The first Friday of December, the Eureka Area Chamber of Commerce hosts a parade of lights, followed by a visit from Santa. The weekend sees dozens of bazaars around the valley which offer holiday shopping from crafters, bakers and artists.



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Sunday 10 a.m.

Sunday School & Bible Study

Sunday 11 a.m.

Weekly Worship Service

Wednesday 6:30 p.m.

Bible Study

*We welcome all into our
 community. Summer VBS camp
 held June 28-30, 2022.*

Historical Village: A proud preservation of heritage

As travelers cruise into Eureka from the south - or ramble down Dewey Avenue from the north - a lush park greets them adjacent to the Tobacco River, with grassy lawns and picnic tables shaded by stocky trees.

Placed about the park, local historic buildings are windows in time, enticing visitors to peek within. A newly renovated red caboose beckons, a vintage lookout tower observes the scene. A playground swing set tempts the tykes.

This is the Historical Village, developed and maintained by volunteers and donations for over 50 years.

Some of the village buildings date back to 1890 and include log homesteads, a store from the old Rexford town site that was flooded when Libby Dam was built, a library, a school, a church, and a Forest Service cabin.

The Fewkes Store museum building is staffed seven days a week from May 29 through Labor Day this year and will be open from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. Visitors may take themselves on a self-guided tour through the village to learn how the area was settled, how the native Kootenai people and others moved through the valley, and how the town grew to become present-day Eureka. Each year a new photo exhibit is set up in the library with images pulled from the board's extensive archives.

Near the museum, a sturdy, charismatic box elder tree provides shade during adjacent performances and events.

The Tobacco Valley Board of History is the non-profit or-



Volunteer Rick Smith waters the flowers growing on the deck of the Fewkes Store at the Historical Village in Eureka.

ganization responsible for the upkeep of the village, which requires about \$15,000 per year to keep its lawns green and mowed and its utilities in running order. Then there's the added cost of keeping buildings and boardwalks in good repair. Much of the money for upkeep routinely comes from fund-raisers.

A local quilting group provides a steady trickle of funds. Its members usually gather at the historic schoolhouse each week in fall and winter, hand-stitching quilts for a fee with all profits going to maintenance of the village. The quilters also donate some of their work toward local charities.

And then there are the volunteers. People sign up for an hour to repair a door here, a day to clean the buildings there. Some volunteers sign up to staff the museum store on a weekly basis, where visitors may stop by to ask questions, peruse the displays, or shop for local crafts and books. Projects for 2022 include moving the red caboose to sturdier footings and the repainting of two buildings.

Admission is free; donations are accepted. The Historical Village Museum contact number is 406-297-7654, and more information can be found at www.tobaccovalleyhistory.org.



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Summer tours available in and around Libby Dam

Built and run by the Army Corps of Engineers, the massive Libby Dam offers a visitor center with information on fish, floods, and generating electricity, as well as family-friendly displays, videos and a gift shop.

As of press time, campgrounds and outdoor recreation areas near the dam were open, and the visitor center was aiming to open by Memorial Day once again this year.

The visitor center is reached from the west side of the reservoir at 260 Souse Gulch Rd. From Eureka, head south on Highway 37, cross the reservoir bridge and continue south on the Forest Development Road for a scenic drive of a little over 30 miles, or take Highway 37 nearly to Libby, then head north a few miles on the Road 228.

The visitor center is generally open from Memorial Day to Labor Day. Free guided tours of the dam and power house are offered from the visitor center at 10 a.m., noon, 2 p.m. and 4 p.m. during the summer season. Tours take about an hour, and require check-in at least 15 minutes in advance. Those age 18 and older must have a photo identification in hand. Children must be accompanied by a grown-up. Special request tours may be arranged in advance throughout the year, and day-to-day updates are posted on the dam's Facebook page. Visitors may be wise to call ahead to ensure nothing out-of-the-ordinary on the schedule that day.

As a security measure, the top of the dam is typically closed to visitors. The dam is 422 feet tall and 3,055 feet long, built to withstand an earthquake of up to 6.5 on the Richter scale with no structural

damage.

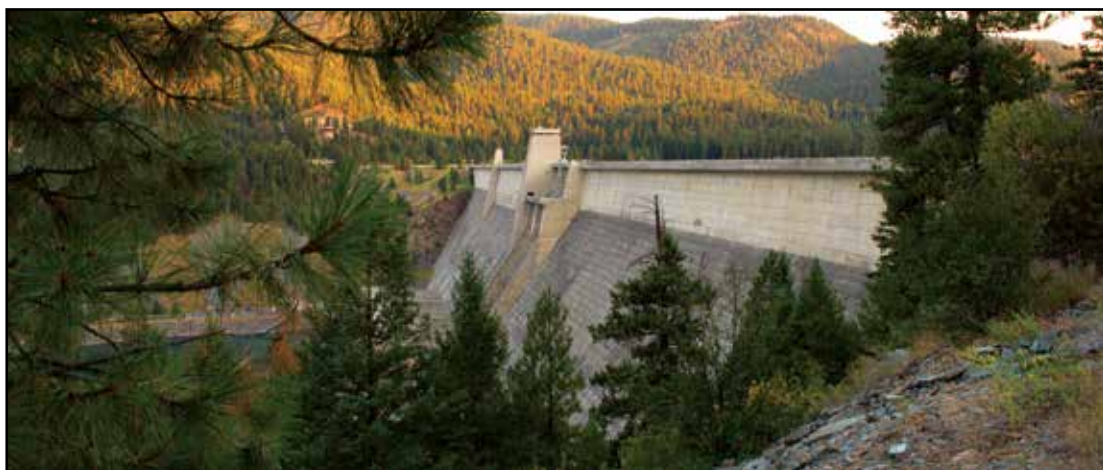
Souse Gulch Day use area, immediately adjacent to the dam visitor center, usually opens after the first week of May with 46 picnic sites, restroom facilities, a volleyball court, horseshoe pits, two playgrounds and a disc golf course.

Three group shelters are available for larger picnics. Each shelter has tables, grills and sinks with running water and electricity. Large groups should call the visitor center to schedule a free reservation. Otherwise, the shelters are offered to the public on a first-come, first served basis.

The Souse Gulch boat ramp and visitor parking are available year round. Visitors planning to camp on their boats can make special arrangements for parking vehicles and boat trailers at Souse Gulch by contacting the park rangers at the visitor center. If you are planning to be on the water, remember your life jacket. There is no cell phone reception in the area.

Just below the dam is a wildlife watching area with bald eagles and osprey. A variety of campsites are available in Dunn Creek and Blackwell campgrounds, both located on the Kootenai River downstream of Libby Dam. Some are pull-through sites, each with a fire ring and picnic table, and are free to stay with a 14-day time limit. Each campground has a boat ramp. The Kootenai River downstream of the dam is considered a "Blue Ribbon" trout stream.

If you have questions or need additional information, contact the Libby Dam Visitor Center, 406-293-5577.



Morning light strikes the ridge above Libby Dam.

Annual Amish auction draws in crowds

Curious visitors and bargain hunters stream to the annual West Kootenai Amish Auction each June for a spectacle of silver-tongued auctioneers holding court against a scenic backdrop of mountain peaks.

The 2022 auction is scheduled for Saturday, June 11.

Bidding takes place in three different arenas, with an outdoor auctioneer cart rolling across the lawn. One large tent shelters larger items such as fine furniture, and another tent shelters quilts.

The hundreds of Amish-sewn quilts are stitched by women locally and in communities nation-wide. They anchor the auction along with the Amish-built cabins.

Second-hand valuables line long grassy aisles, alongside handmade items created for the auction. Handcrafted furniture, gazebos and birdhouses are typically popular items, as are jewel-toned jars of

jam, hanging baskets overflowing with blossoms, and garden starts. Amish and "English" alike are welcome to consign items to the auction.

Proceeds from sellers' commissions go to support the community's Mountain View School, which enrolls students in grades one through eight.

The community will serve up a tasty grilled chicken lunch, as well as baked goods. Food vendors are often on hand to offer other treats including hand-churned ice cream and big sacks of kettlecorn popped on site.

The auction is a scenic 45 minute drive from Eureka, despite being only a few miles across the water as the crow flies. Out of Eureka, head south on Highway 37 and cross Lake Koochanusa at the big bridge. On the west side, head right for a pretty drive north, staying right on West Kootenai Road. Stay with the curve on Whitetail Road and look for signs and parking attendants.



Youngsters enjoy treats at the 2021 Amish Auction.

Tobacco Valley Rodeo

The Tobacco Valley has a long tradition of rodeo behind it. And each summer, people keep coming back for more.

With years of rodeo experience behind them, members of the Tobacco Valley Rodeo Association work every year to produce a great traditional rodeo.

This year's event is set for July 22 and 23 at the Lincoln County Fairgrounds. Rodeo action starts at 7 p.m. both nights. The events include bareback and saddle broncs, bulls, team roping, barrel racing, breakaway roping and others.

The rodeo typically draws competitors and spectators from Canada and across the Northwest. The audience can get in on the fun too with giveaways and spectator games.

The Tobacco Valley's rodeo is known as "The NRA's richest rodeo," organizer Mike Cole noted, with more money given away than any other event in the association.

Back again this year is the teeter totter bullfight, which involves a four-person teeter totter and a fighting bull that attempts to knock audience vol-

unteers from the teeter totter. That hair-raising event last year ended up with 3 million views on social media, Cole said. "We'll see if that translates into tickets."

A vendor village just outside the rodeo arena will offer a variety of goods. The village will open in the hours preceding the rodeo.

The rodeo association also produces the popular Bull Thing, a high-adrenaline night of bull riding. The event is set to take place Saturday, Aug. 27, during the Lincoln County Fair at 7 p.m.

The Bull Thing is sanctioned by the Professional Bull Riders, with up-and-coming superstar riders matching up against top bulls for a heart-stopping show.

This year, the event is part of the PBR's Challenger Series. Chad Berger Buckin' Bulls, the number one bull contractor for PBR, provides the bulls. "He brings the good stuff. It's worth watching," Cole added.

The rodeo arena put on a fresh face in recent years with the additions of a new sky box with six seating units and expanded hillside bleachers.



Young rider Lara Cote cools off with a sweet treat.

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Local rider Leroy Eash competes in the saddle bronc event at the Tobacco Valley Rodeo in 2021.

Climbers can challenge valley's own Stone Hill

With hundreds of routes, solid rock and easy road access, the Stone Hill climbing area south of Eureka on Highway 37 is some of the best climbing in northwest Montana.

The main area is located about three miles south of the Kooacanusa bridge. There is an outhouse here, as well as parking on both shoulders of the road. Climbs are located on several tiers both above and below the road. More climbing can be found on the west side of the reservoir.

Climbing is on outcroppings of hard metamorphic quartzite. Long finger, hand and off-width cracks promise bloody knuckles, while face climbs full of crimpy dime-edge holds guarantee exhausted fingers and forearms. Most climbs are vertical or overhanging.

Room With a View is one of the most dramatic climbs at Stone Hill, located on the south end of a buttress on the west side of the road at the main area. There's an overhang, big exposure and fantastic views of the lake and forest below. Cripple Crack is another classic; the moves are relatively easy but the climb is long. Nearby is Duck Wall, with a handful of easy and moderate routes that are fun to climb, and as a bonus get climbers away from the dust and noise of the highway. About half a mile north of Peck Gulch on the east side of High-

way 37 are a handful of beginner climbs above the highway. Advanced routes below the highway can be reached via a new trail from the Peck Gulch boat launch.

And if there's a line for the most popular spots, Stone Hill offers dozens more hidden crags to those ready to explore.

Most routes are set up with a series of permanent bolts for sport climbing, though many crack climbs remain un-bolted or sparsely bolted; the ethos at Stone Hill is not to bolt climbs that can be protected using removable "trad" climbing gear. Most climbs that are visible from the highway have a walk-around top-rope access, though some of the more distant climbs must be led or rappelled into.

The rock at Stone Hill is hard and cleaves into sharp edges. Many top-rope bolts are set back from the lip of the crag, and only a few have chains. A few older bolts of questionable quality are scattered throughout the area. They're mostly recognizable but it's worth checking before clipping in.

Other climbing in the area includes the uniquely eroded canyon of the Stillwater River near Stryker, accessed by a quirky maze of user trails and misleading cairns. The cliffs near Point of Rocks on Highway 93 also offer dozens of routes, many bolted.



Moriah's Ledge, one of dozens of crags at Stone Hill, offers sweeping views and a belay location on a ledge away from the highway.



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Hikers descend the Hidden Lake Trail to Logan Pass in Glacier National Park on a blustery fall day.

Glacier National Park

Created in 1910, Glacier National Park is a 1 million acre spectacle of nature's most dramatic scenery and wildlife.

Its glaciers are now receding, but the topography of the park still reflects their legacy, from knife-edge ridges to alpine tarns.

The summit of each of Glacier's many peaks is a geological wonder. The sedimentary rock is a billion years old, some of the earth's oldest.

Hikers in the park have access to over 700 miles of backcountry trails, from which many of the park's 762 lakes and 536 streams are visible.

The popular West Glacier entrance to the park is a 90-minute drive from Eureka on paved highways.

This year, between May 27 and Sept. 11, the park is requiring those entering the park at West Glacier, St. Mary, and at the Polebridge entry to purchase a park pass and a vehicle reservation ticket online before entering, or a service reservation ticket for lodging, camping, boat rides, tours and horseback rides. Visitors arriving on foot or bicycle do not need a day-use entry reservation ticket, but are required to have a pass or pay an entry fee. The park is open 24 hours a day, and an entry fee is required even when stations are not staffed. Details are available on the park website.

A must in Glacier National Park is a popular drive over 50-mile long Going-to-the-Sun Road, completed in 1933. On its journey over Logan Pass, the road takes you into the heart of the park, allowing magnificent views of hanging valleys, waterfalls, majestic peaks and wildlife. The Going-to-the-Sun Road is accessible via the West Glacier or St. Mary entrances.

For an off the beaten path approach, try heading just south of Eureka on Highway 93 and up Grave Creek Road instead. Then veer onto Lewis Creek Road, which later becomes Trail Creek Road.

This scenic route will take you over the divide to the North Fork of the Flathead River and the western boundary of Glacier. On a clear day, peak views abound. If it's socked in, the twists and bends of the river, framed by the stark silhouettes of burnt snags or regal larch, can be equally compelling.

Four-wheel drive, decent tires and a higher clearance vehicle may come in handy for this bumpy gravel road adventure. Try it in summer only. The road is typically cleared by early July, depending on the previous winter's avalanche activity and subsequent cleanup required.

From the North Fork of the Flathead, access to Glacier Park may also be gained through the settlement of Polebridge.

Murray Springs Fish Hatchery

As the effects of the oil slowed their wiggling and numbed their fishy senses, deft hands pluck them, one by one from the rows of vats. With a quick snip of scissors, each fish loses its small adipose fin above its tail and is tossed back to its runway.

This is the annual adipose fin clipping day at Murray Springs.

On this day, around 20 Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks fisheries staff from Libby and Kalispell converge each year at the hatchery to aid the four hatchery staff in clipping the adipose fins from every fish to be released into Lake Koocanusa that year.

It takes all day. Volunteers are always welcome. And, "It's pretty efficient," hatchery manager Jason Nachtmann observed as he examined one end of an instrument submerged in a runway, measuring its oxygen levels. Just for today's activity, the fish get an extra dose of oxygen in their water to keep them calm. "We don't want to stress the fish out too much," he explained.

The purpose of the clipping: For anglers to easily identify the hatchery stock.

If a fisherman catches a rainbow in Lake Koocanusa that is missing its adipose fin, he or she knows it's a Gerrard rainbow trout from Murray Springs. Fishing regulations on the lake stipulate that fishermen may only keep that fish if it's larger than 22 inches. If it's smaller, they need to throw it back to grow another year.

The idea is to allow Lake Koocanusa to grow some whopper fish, which Gerrards can become.

They feed on kokanee salmon, reaching sizes of over 20 pounds - some of the largest rainbows in the United States.

The largest Gerrard rainbow caught from Kootenay Lake in Canada was 35.5 pounds. That's the lake Gerrards are native to, just further down the Kootenai River from Lake Koocanusa.

Murray Springs is the only hatchery source of Gerrards in the United States, hatching out 1.9 million eggs each year to stock some 26 area lakes and ponds plus Lake Koocanusa. They also provide eggs for three other Montana hatcheries in eastern Montana.

Those 60,000 Gerrards that end up in Lake Koocanusa each year are sterile, per an agreement with Canadian biologists to prevent interbreeding with other fish strains upstream in Canada.

Murray Springs only raises and stocks out Gerrard rainbow trout. The hatchery historically stocked out other species of trout as well, but once it obtained Gerrard brood stock, the risk of accidental interbreeding was too high to keep other strains on the premises.

These days, the Tobacco Valley area's high mountain cutthroat and other rainbow trout stocking falls to hatcheries in other locales.

The hatchery is located at 5475 Sophie Lake Rd, about 10 minutes northwest of Eureka. The phone number is 406-889-3489 to inquire about tours.

People can also drop by anytime from 10 a.m. until noon, and 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. any day of the week for a tour of the facility. Staff asks that large groups schedule tours ahead of time.



Above, Murray Springs manager Jason Nachtmann marks a yearling Gerrard with a dot behind its eye to classify its age. Below: detail.





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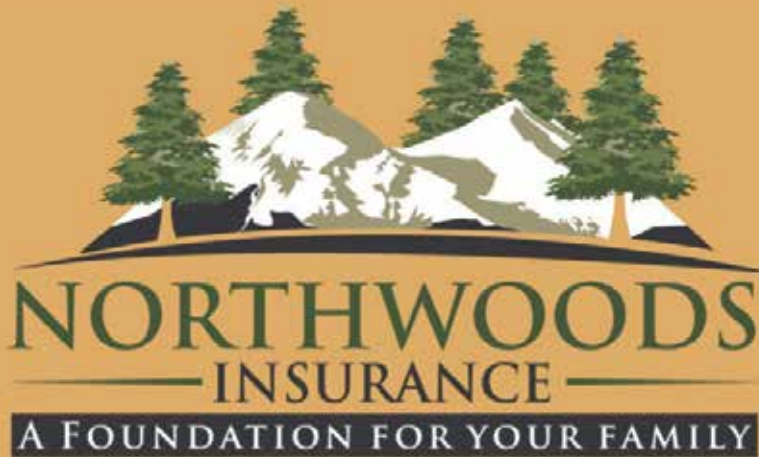
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Meet new and old friends at Lincoln County Fair

The Lincoln County Fair is held each year in Eureka and is known for its well-kept grounds and family fun. The theme for 2022 is "Party With the Animals," and the fair is set for Aug. 25-28.

The fair is known as a traditional, family-friendly country fair where community members go to meet up with friends and catch up on old times.

The fair offers something of interest for one and all: Delicious food stands, garden and art displays, live entertainment, game and vendor booths, livestock shows and auctions, and a kids carnival.

A silent auction of 4-H youth and adult baked goods is also held each year in the new youth barn.

Kidsville is packed all weekend with children enjoying attractions.

The Lincoln County Fairgrounds Fish Pond recently got an upgrade after being dry for six years. Now the pond teems with trout, drawing folks of all ages to fish by the shore or hang out in the nearby

pavillion.

Friday's evening events usually include a family night of games like three-legged races, mutton busting, and a chicken scramble at the arena, followed by a family dance at the fish pond pavilion.

Saturday afternoon is the 4-H livestock auction, which fetches generous prices for local animal project participants.

The community garden operates all summer. Much of the produce is donated to the local food pantry.

Saturday night, Aug. 27, the rodeo stands fill with spectators for one of the fair's biggest attractions, The Bull Thing.

The Lincoln County Fairgrounds are found on Osloski Road in Eureka, stretching from the community garden at one end of the grounds to the fishing pond at the other. Grassy lawn is shaded by mature trees around the property.

The fair office contact number is 406-297-3471.



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Halle Foster participates in the sack races during the Friday Night Games at the 2021 Lincoln County Fair.

Steers, hogs and lambs fetch high premiums at the annual 4-H livestock auction.

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See hundreds of quilts at annual show downtown

On the first Saturday of August each summer, the town of Eureka is bedecked in hundreds of quilts for the annual Eureka Montana Quilt Show.

From Memorial Park to the Historical Village, quilts are hung from storefronts on downtown businesses or displayed on frames in parks.

More quilts drape their cheery patterns and hues from the time-honored buildings of the Historical Village, which provides a hub for the event. Shopping, raffles, and displays are set up on the grounds. A special collection of miniature quilts hangs in one

area. Quilting enthusiasts and admirers come from far and wide to stroll the streets and admire the displays.

This year the Eureka Montana Quilt Show is Saturday, Aug. 6. The quilt show has been running since 2005.

EMQS is an un-judged show and all quilters are welcome to enter and share their work for everyone to enjoy.

Registration forms for quilts, vendor applications, and more information can be found online at eurekaquiltshow.com.



Volunteers help hang quilts on the front of the Eureka Town Hall for the 2020 quilt show.

Sunburst cultural events

Throughout the year, the nonprofit Sunburst Arts and Education brings many arts and cultural events to the Tobacco Valley.

A centerpiece of the Sunburst Arts program is Montana Shakespeare in the Parks, with a free performance staged in the Historical Village each year. Bring a blanket and spread out a picnic for this year's play, "Twelfth Night," a romantic comedy, to be performed at 6 p.m. on Aug. 18.

An outdoor summer performing arts series is back.

This year's lineup includes singing cellist Lee Zimmerman on June 12 at Indian Springs Ranch, a BBQ and music event on Dickey Lake with Poppa Bear Norton on June 23, an evening of Indian music featuring Sunita Bhuyan, Abhinav Sharma and other world-class musicians on July 16 at the LCHS auditorium, and local greats Michelle Rivers and Hannah King on August 14 at Indian Springs Ranch.

Throughout the fall and winter months, Sunburst brings a variety of professional performing groups to Eureka to play its performing arts series.

The 2022-2023 season includes old-time mandolin and banjo/guitar duo Compton & Newberry, Montana-based band the Lucky Valentines, Louisiana band Dr. Daylights Jazz Company, Irish and Scottish folk duo Men of Worth, and clarinet and guitar duo Jâca.

During the school year, Sunburst collaborates with Eureka Public Schools to host the week-long Missoula Children's Theatre residency, with 50 to 60 local students rehearsing and performing a full-scale musical. This year MCT will be in town in November.

Popular fund-raising events for Sunburst include the Toast of the Town, a wine tasting event held in late summer, and the Robert Burns night, a Scottish dinner complete with bagpipes often held in January. A fund-raising walk is held in July on the Rails to Trails path along the Tobacco River, this year featuring live music by local musicians.

For more information, visit Sunburst online at www.sunburstarts.org, or call 406-297-0197.

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Local musician Connie Deebel serenades walkers along the Kootenai Trails at the Sunburst annual "Do the Trail" fund-raiser event.

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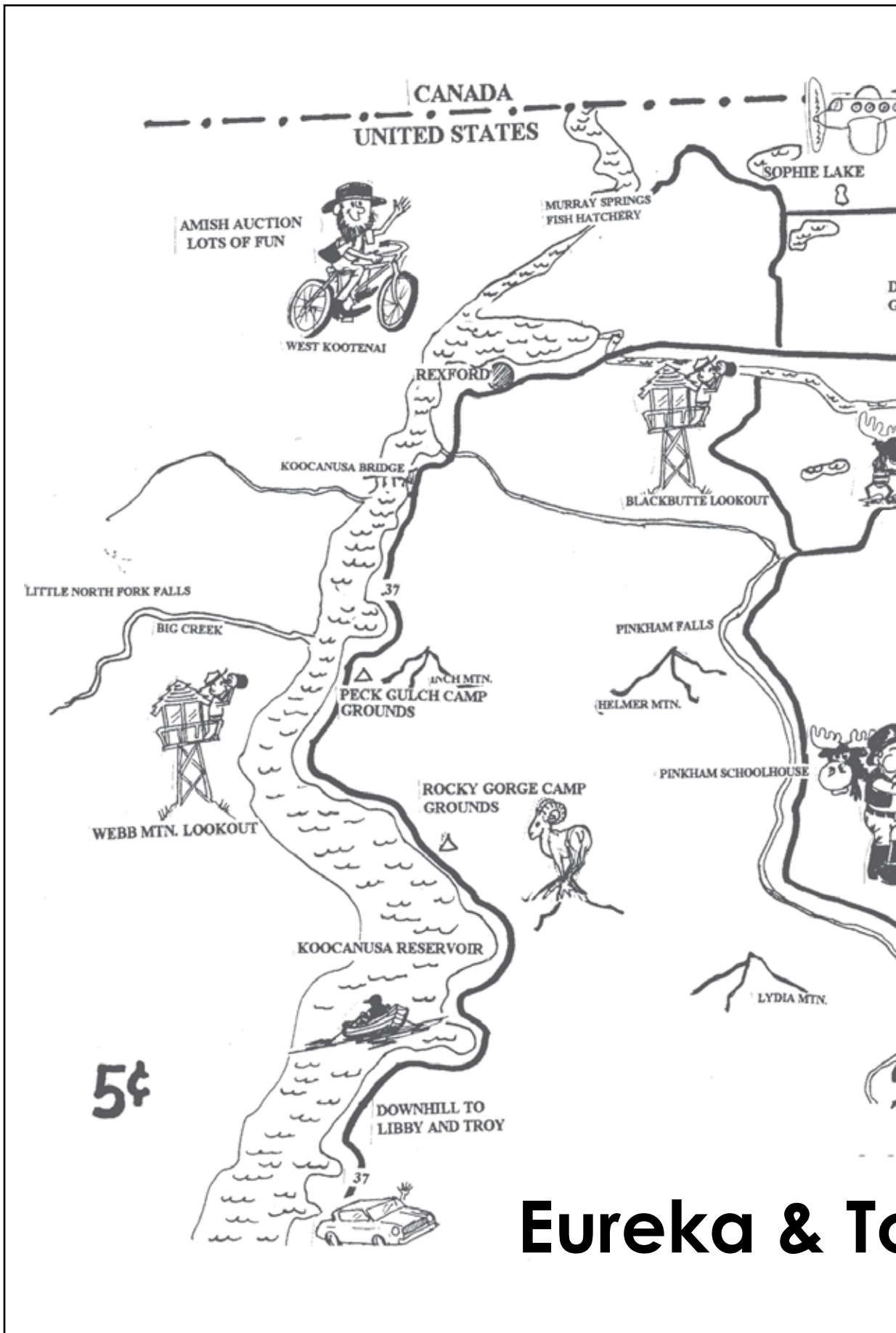
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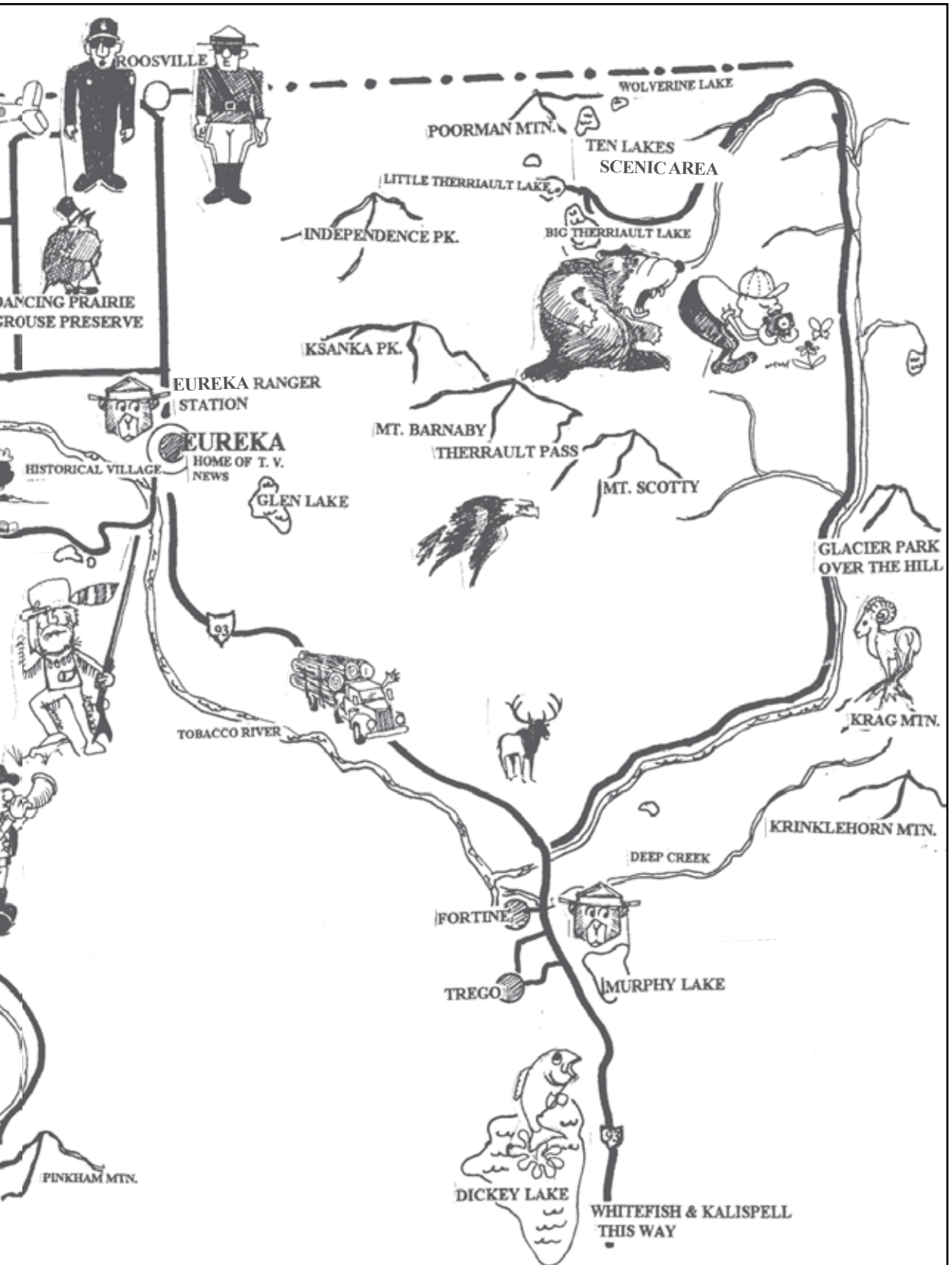
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Ten Lakes Scenic Area has year-round recreation

Way up north, way up high, lies the Ksan-ka District's scenic showpiece. The Ten Lakes area is a patch of wild country full of alpine lakes, sweeping talus fields, and meadows generously scattered with wildflowers - when they aren't buried under snow.

The vicinity includes both a designated scenic area and a larger wilderness study area, but technically excludes two of its most popular attractions, Big and Little Therriault Lakes. Whatever you call it or however you manage it, the area should not be missed. Hiking, fishing and camping are popular in the Ten Lakes and its environs, as is riding - whether that's on board a horse, a snowmobile, or a mountain bike.

Bluebird Lake is a much-frequented five mile roundtrip. Most of the distance to the lake is a steady climb. Not far from Bluebird Lake, the trail first takes you past Paradise Lake, which sits in a serene series of alpine meadows.

A final half-mile trapezoid through a stretch of wildflowers practically begs you to settle down for a picnic.

Bluebird Lake itself delivers on the hue promised by its name. Its shores lap at the edge of a prominent headwall, and provide a few choice boulders perfect for sunning or leaping. Listen for the distinctive whistling of the pika, a short-eared relative of the rabbit.

From Bluebird, it's possible to add an extra 1.5 mile scramble to reach the peak of Mt. Ksanka. User trails peter out but a topo map, compass and some common sense will get you there.

The Bluebird-Wolverine Loop is a classic day hike with no shuttle needed. Head up and admire Bluebird, then take the Highline Trail north out of the basin and up a decent climb to a high, grassy shelf below the ridgeline of Green Mountain. Drop off the plateau through dense coniferous forest to the tranquil Wolverine Lakes and the old Border Patrol cabin there, then make a knee-crunching descent down to the road. Catch the mostly flat cut-off trail that returns to the Bluebird parking area to complete the 11 mile trip.

Therriault Pass is easily visible from Highway 93 south of Eureka. The broad groove was once part of a route used by Kootenai tribes to access the plains east of the mountains, and now provides

easy access to many of the lakes and trails inside the Ten Lakes area.

A round trip to the pass and back down to the road is a scant three miles. The lower portion passes through lush thimbleberry and nettle, then switchbacks up into huckleberry country.

From the pass, it's possible to drop down the back side to Therriault Lakes, passing unnamed, driftwood-matted potholes en route. A swift trail runner might make the traverse quicker than a driver could creep the all the way around on the dusty, frequently washboarded, single-lane route up Grave Creek road. Or stay right from the pass to mount 7,200-foot Stahl Peak, and check out the views into Glacier National Park and the Canadian Rockies from the white clapboard lookout on top.

Eureka Ranger Station is located on Highway 93 heading north out of Eureka, or may be reached by phone at 406-296-2536. Trail maps are available at the station and online.



Glacier lilies bloom on Gibraltar Ridge.

Hunting opportunities

The Tobacco Valley area offers a diverse range of hunting opportunities, as Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks biologist Ethan Lula points out.

A bulk of the hunting occurs in the fall, starting with a six-week archery season. That is followed by a five-week general season and nine-day muzzle-loader season. Season length, timing and license requirements vary by species and hunting district.

Hunting seasons, district boundaries, quotas and licensing requirements may change by the year, so hunters should familiarize themselves with and follow the current year's hunting regulations. The latest Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks hunting regulations can be found online.

The Tobacco Valley offers multiple types of game for hunters to choose from. White-tailed deer are the most abundant game in the area and can be found at all elevations. Mule deer are the next largest population of game animals. Due to lower populations, mule deer hunting is limited to antlered buck and the season is shortened to a three-week rifle hunting season in much of the area.

Small elk populations are spread throughout

the mountain ranges and migratory elk from British Columbia use the valley during the late winter season. Limited shoulder-season antlerless elk licenses are available with applications due by June 1.

Black bears are fairly common throughout the valley. The location of bear populations varies based on the availability of that year's forage. Hunting occurs during spring or late fall. Black bear hunting is monitored and harvesting has a 48-hour reporting requirement. It is unlawful to kill a female black bear with cubs, and it is illegal to utilize hounds to hunt black bears.

Merriam and Eastern wild turkeys are common in the Tobacco Valley. The population is large enough to support a spring and fall hunting season. Males can be hunted in spring, and females can be hunted during the fall.

Northwest Montana has excellent mountain lion habitat. Hunting is controlled via a quota and reporting requirement. Hunting occurs primarily during the winter months using hounds.

Gray wolves exist in reasonable numbers amongst the mountain ranges surrounding the valley. Hunting is monitored with a 24-hour mandatory reporting requirement and inspection.

Ruffed, Spruce and Dusky "Blue" grouse can also be found in the forest areas of the valley.

Due to low populations, moose and bighorn sheep are regulated through limited-draw license with an application deadline of May 1. Moose can be found throughout the Salish and Whitefish Mountain ranges.

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White-tailed deer are abundant in the Tobacco Valley.

Trails for biking & running

Eureka offers plenty of opportunities for a mel- low day trip on foot or bicycle and is a great stopping point for a rest day on a months-long tour.

One easy-to-reach low elevation path for biking, hiking and running is the Kootenai Trail, also known as "rails to trails." The trailhead is right in town, with a parking area just across the Tobacco River from Riverside Park at the south end of Eureka. The trail follows the river, mostly on former railroad grade. It crosses the river at Pigeon Bridge and continues to the mouth where it flows into Lake Koochanusa. From there the trail climbs a short but steep set of switchbacks up a bluff to gain Rexford Bench and reach a Forest Service campground set in the woods. A few more miles of trail follow the edge of the reservoir to the Abayance Bay Marina.

The trail is unpaved. The rail section is mostly gravel, navigable by mountain bikes and hardier touring bikes but less ideal for more lightweight road bikes. Past Pigeon Bridge the surface is mostly dirt.

A loop ride is possible by ducking off the Kootenai Trail at Pigeon Bridge and taking Highway 37 back

to town, using the paved pedestrian-cyclist Ksan- ka Trail on the north side of the highway. A couple miles south on Highway 93's generous shoulders completes the loop. Tack on another mile or two on the Riverwalk, a no-vehicles path that begins at the Historical Village a few hundred yards from the trailhead for the Kootenai Trail.

Indian Springs Ranch maintains several miles of trails, open to walkers, runners, bikers, skiers and dogs. The trails wind along a wooded creek bottom with options to venture up into the drumlin hills above the golf course, and are a great option for a spring walk before higher elevation trails melt out or a quick after work outing.

A campground and trailhead designed for horses is located at Swisher Lake, accessed from Sophie Lake Road north of Eureka. The trails offer unique vegetation and topography, with short out and back trips to the small Swisher Lake or longer loops to the Gateway beach area on Lake Koochanusa and along the border cut.

The Tobacco Valley lies at the intersection of two long routes that are mostly off-road, and is on another two road-based bike touring routes.

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Annual spring Rendezvous marks the end of winter

Muzzleloaders and musicians, valley residents and visitors alike enjoy Rendezvous weekend each spring during the last weekend in April.

Montana and local history combine as the backdrop of the event, which typically kicks off with a Friday concert. The Chamber of Commerce holds free street dance on Friday night, with local and regional musicians playing on an outdoor stage at Riverside Park in Eureka.

Throughout the weekend Eureka turns into a thriving center of activity. Activities include: A craft and vendor area at the Historical Village, food vendors at Riverside Park, quilt show at the county fairgrounds, "Gold Rush" for children, noon parade, arm wrestling tournament, fun run, keg toss,

and mud bog, among other events.

At the black powder shoot north of Eureka, attendees can enjoy the scent of wood smoke and the sound of black powder shooting against the mountain backdrop. The David Thompson Black Powder Shoot draws hundreds of participants and observers for a weekend of competition and camaraderie. The shoot is held throughout the weekend. Visitors are welcome to watch the contests and tour the primitive camp.

Rendezvous is hosted by the Eureka Area Chamber of Commerce and attracts local residents and visitors from north of the border, throughout the state and across the Northwest. Held every year as a celebration of spring, the Rendezvous is an event no one should miss.

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Vendors Billy Day and Carolyn Peterson show off their wares at the 2022 Rendezvous Days.

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A moose enjoys a dip in a cool pond on the Rocky Mountain front.

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Ten Lakes Snowmobile Club

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February: Fun Run

March: Family BBQ Fun Run

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Lake Koocanusa

Lake Koocanusa provides a myriad of boating and fishing opportunities. Major launch sites along the lake include Rexford Bench, Abayance Bay Marina, Peck Gulch, Rocky Gorge and Kooconusa Marina. A small boat launch site also provides access near Murray Springs fish hatchery.

In peak summer months, many sun-loving visitors and residents flock to the docks, water toys in tow.

Broad sandy beaches at the northern-U.S. end of the 90-mile-long reservoir are speckled with colorful encampments of beach umbrellas, and waterskiers carve the more sheltered bays.

Launch sites are considerably quieter outside of July and August, left predominantly to year-long residents and anglers.

The species of fish most sought after in Lake Kooconusa are rainbow trout, kokanee salmon and cutthroat trout. Murray Springs Fish Hatchery raises tens of thousands of rainbow trout annually, stocking Lake Kooconusa and other nearby waters. The trophy Gerrard rainbow trout stocked in Lake Kooconusa feed on kokanee salmon, reaching sizes of over 20 pounds – some of the largest rainbows in the United States.

Local sporting goods store manager Jake Golds-

berry recommends the mouth of the Tobacco river near Rexford Bench for anglers looking to make a catch. There is a handy fishing access point close to that location.

Summer is the busiest time for fishing locally. Lake Kooconusa draws a number of fish-seeking visitors every year from May to September. A fall kokanee snagging season also reels in folks during the fish's spawning run in Kooconusa tributaries like Grave Creek and the Tobacco River.

Of course, even as the ice sets in and the lakes freeze, the fishing doesn't stop. Lake Kooconusa normally doesn't freeze and can be fished through the winter, while other lakes are prime for ice fishing. Sophie Lake, Dickey Lake and Murphy Lake are heavily frequented, as are many tiny lakes hidden throughout the valley.

The Ryan Wagner Memorial ice fishing derby is also held each year on Murphy Lake in February, with growing numbers of people spending the day out on the lake and enjoying various contests and activities that occur.

Fishing regulations vary in the Tobacco Valley and visitors are encouraged to get copies.



Lake Kooconusa offers boating, fishing, paddling and swimming opportunities.

Chamber Visitor Center

The Eureka Area Chamber of Commerce Visitors Center is open for business in its downtown location in the Eureka Town Hall building.

With an office that houses information on area services and events, the visitors center may surprise even the informed local.

The visitors center is located at 11 Dewey Avenue. Staff is on hand Tuesday and Thursday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and Wednesdays from 11 a.m. until 3 p.m. An information kiosk with area fliers, phone books, event lists and real estate information is accessible 24 hours a day, seven days a week in the office vestibule.

The chamber's spotlight fund-raiser and annual community event is the Eureka Rendezvous.

Other Chamber events include a traveling circus, which occurs about every other year and is scheduled for June in 2022, and a golf tournament at In-

dian Springs Ranch most years. In early December the Chamber hosts a tree lighting ceremony, parade of lights, and visit from Santa in Eureka to kick off the Tobacco Valley's holiday bazaar weekend.

One of the ongoing ventures sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce is a Farmers Market, held this year every Wednesday afternoon from June 1 through September 14 at Memorial Park, running 3:30 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. Local growers sell their veggies, flowers and plants. Other vendors sell crafts, jewelry, jams, bread and baked goods. SNAP benefits will be offered at every market, so anyone who uses an EBT card may purchase food from the market. Local musicians serenade the market shoppers.

For further information, the Chamber of Commerce Visitors Center may be reached at 406-297-4636 and via the chamber website, welcome2eureka.com.



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Paddlers drift along the Tobacco River in Eureka.



LCHS student and golf team member Trent Truman competes in spring 2022.

Golfing the Tobacco Valley

Golfers in the Tobacco Valley have their choice of courses to enjoy, from friendly hometown nine-holers to one of the top-rated golf courses in Montana.

Two resort courses offer a full 18 holes of golf, along with lessons, restaurants, pro shops, homes and building sites, and recreational facilities.

North of Eureka on Highway 93 near the historic "69" Ranch, Indian Springs Ranch offers an 18 hole links-style public golf course, designed to fit into the natural landscape with long, narrow fairways and native grass in the roughs. Open season is April 1 to the end of October, weather permitting. Indian Springs provides 6,600 yards of play and a practice facility with a driving range, putting greens, sand trap and suites to stay on site. Indian Springs welcomes walkers and runners on its trail network year-round, and has hosted community events ranging from July 4 fireworks and festivities to fun runs.

Tucked off of Sophie Lake Road is the Wilder-

ness Club gated community and family resort, with an 18 hole championship course which is open to the public and has earned accolades from the press and local golfers alike. Play is characterized by "gently rolling topography" and sprinkled with attractive pine trees "for an interesting mix of woodland and links-style qualities," according to golf champ and co-designer Nick Faldo.

The course was ranked No. 1 in the state by two different golf magazines, and offers scenic and challenging play on its undulating terrain. Off the course, Wilderness Club members and guests can enjoy its many other amenities.

The Tobacco Valley also boasts two "chip-n-putt" courses, one in Eureka and another in Fortine. The Silverado campground and motel offers nine holes, located near the intersection of Highway 37 and Highway 93 in Eureka, while Jerry's Saloon in Fortine presents a nine hole, par-three course.

Snowmobiling paradise

Once winter blankets the Tobacco Valley with a good snowbase, many roads and trails become winter routes for snowmobilers. The Kootenai National Forest and the Stillwater State Forest offer some of the finest snowmobiling in the state. Whether you like cruising ridgetops and open bowls or prefer to stay on the miles of groomed trails available, you'll find a wide array of snowmobiling options for both the novice and the expert rider.

The snowmobiling season generally runs from mid-December to early April, with variations depending on location and snowfall.

Avalanches are always a risk in high country. Carry a beacon, shovel and probe, know how to use them, and be careful. Check the Flathead Avalanche Center website, www.flatheadavalanche.org, for the latest avalanche report and report any avalanches encountered to the center.

Locally a favorite place to ride is the Birch Creek Recreation Area. This area accesses the high country around the Ten Lakes area.

Take Grave Creek Road and follow it for approximately eight miles until the plowing stops and the

trails begin. Many miles of groomed trails lead to ungroomed backcountry riding.

The Ten Lakes Snowmobile Club maintains many trails and hosts three events: the Ray Peterson Annual Fun Run, banquet and auction the last week of January; the February open fun run, and another fun run the second weekend of March that includes a lunch provided by the club.

Mount Marston and the Stryker Ridge area is another popular destination for snowmobilers. Take Highway 93 to the trailhead about 20 miles south of Eureka. Take the turn to Mount Marston at Stryker, then turn right onto Forest Road 900. The trail takes you over the Whitefish Divide to the groomed Upper Whitefish Lake trail.

Unplowed roads in the Pinkham drainage also attract snowmobilers, who often park at the cattle guard about 15 miles southwest of Eureka on Pinkham Creek Road.

Snowmobile trail maps are available at the Forest Service office in Eureka.

A \$10 state land use permit is required for off-trail riding in the Stillwater State Forest.

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Mountain trails provide great cross country skiing

A handful of groomed trails and plenty of DIY adventures await cross country skiers come winter.

The Tobacco Valley Nordic Club maintains a number of trails and gated roads as conditions allow. The club uses a snowmobile to groom snow and set tracks where possible, and also breaks trail on foot in less accessible locations.

The club often hosts group outings throughout the winter. Updates on trail conditions and recent groomings can be found at tobaccovalleynordic.org, and on the club's social media page.

Early season snow can often be found up Edna Creek or Pinkham Creek at higher elevations.

One popular lollipop loop is nicknamed the Still Creek Loop. It begins at the bridge on the west fork of Pinkham Creek Road, heads up FR 7951, then makes a fun descent down FR 7935 back to the stem of the lollipop a few yards from the bridge.

Virginia Hill offers the 9-kilometer exterior "Orbit Loop" trail, with more interior trails within its boundary. From Pinkham Creek Road, the area is reached from FR 7147-K and FR 7147-E. Near the parking area is an info box stocked with maps.

Gated or unplowed road segments off FR 756 (Therriault Pass Road) are also favorites. Also known as Foothills, the area around the junction of FR 756 and FR 7077 is accessed from Glen Lake Road.

At lower elevations in good snow winters, the

club occasionally sets track on the Indian Springs Ranch golf course.

Tobacco Valley skiing is best suited for skiers who use a classic stride. For skiing in deeper snow, especially when exploring areas where tracks have not been set, a wider ski for flotation with metal edges for control on turns is handy.

Other trail systems in the region include Dog Creek Lodge in Olney, where skiers can pay a fee to ski groomed trails winding through woods and around Dog Lake. At Round Meadow north of Whitefish, skiers have free access to trails groomed weekly. Others include Glacier Nordic Center at Whitefish Lake Golf Course, and cross country ski trails at Whitefish Mountain Resort.

Virtually any closed or unplowed road can make for a snowy adventure on skis. Ask where logging is active any given winter to find out which roads will be plowed, and use them to access snowy country otherwise out of reach.



A young skier navigates snowy trails on cross country skis.

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Enjoy the Eureka Riverwalk

Eureka's three-acre Riverwalk Park begins on Critter Lane at the south end of town in the Historical Village and winds upstream along the scenic Tobacco River with a series of connected short loops. Flat and paved, the Riverwalk is an accessible stroll for kids, trikes, dogs or wheelchairs.

Along the way, stop at one of the calisthenic stations for a round of crunches, or pause at one of many well-researched interpretive signs sharing Tobacco Valley stories and natural history. Many original signs were replaced with fresh versions in spring of 2022.

One sign describes the "River Pigs," men who worked for the Eureka Lumber Company, who were responsible for walking out onto log jams in order to break them up. Over 50 million board feet of timber were floated downstream between dams along the Tobacco River before it was diverted to its current channel.

More signs explain the importance of the buffalo, the arrival of the railroad, the introduction of electricity to the valley, and the era when Eureka was known as the Christmas tree capital of the world.

The popular Riverwalk was joined in summer 2016 by the Ksanka Trail north of Eureka, which runs two miles along Highway 37. The paved trail provides off-highway passage for cyclists and pe-

destrians and is enjoyed by morning joggers, commuters, long-distance bikers, dog-walkers, kids on their way to school, and regular folks out for a jaunt. Beware the hearty grade on the Ksanka Trail, which drops steadily from its eastern end as it heads west and provides a side-stitching climb back for round-trippers.

The Riverwalk and Ksanka Trail are handily linked by the gravel Kootenai Trail, which follows the Tobacco River from Riverside Park in Eureka to Pigeon Bridge at Highway 37 and offers river-view benches and an outhouse.

From Pigeon Bridge, a dirt road climbs from the river to Roe Road, just a few yards from the terminus of the Ksanka Trail. The Kootenai Trail continues to the Tobacco River mouth fishing access, then turns to singletrack and proceeds along the cliffs above the reservoir to Rexford.

All dogs must be on a leash; pick-up bags and a trash can are provided.



Interpretive signs along the Riverwalk describe the area's human and natural history.



A jogger takes advantage of the Riverwalk trail in Eureka.

Events and trails for dirt biking, OHVs & more

The Tobacco Valley and surrounding area holds abundant opportunities for those who enjoy motorized recreation.

There are several organized events with varying levels of competition and skill requirements.

Eureka Dunerunners put on the popular Mudbog event at Rendezvous Days every year, and in 2022 have an additional mudbog event scheduled for June 25.

Koocanusa Fundays is a weekend of camping and racing on Lake Koocanusa held in spring, usually the weekend after Rendezvous Days.

Top Dawg Arenacross also puts on several events around the state, including one in Eureka.

An ATV park near Olney hosts the Montana Mayhem Offroad Series. Events for 2022 include the fifth annual Frostbite Frenzy on March 5, Muddy

Madness on May 14, Sawmill Scramble on July 9, and Harvest Havoc on Oct. 8.

Outside of organized events, people can explore different terrain in the valley. Popular areas around Eureka include Douglas Hill and the sand below the high water mark on the Koocanusa Reservoir. Restricted areas at the lake are posted at Rexford Bench.

Stop by the Eureka Ranger Station to get maps and to find out more about places to go, and places that are off limits.

Vehicles must always be road and highway legal to travel on Forest Service or county roads, including up-to-date licensing and working headlights. A good online resource is www.offroad-ed.com for information on certification courses and general safety and etiquette best practices.



Racers soar off a jump in a motocross race held in Eureka in 2021.



Montana Highway Patrol Sgt. Neil Duram, left, helps youngsters at the annual bike safety rodeo.

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Keith Taylor is a fine art photographer and photojournalist residing in Rexford, Mont.



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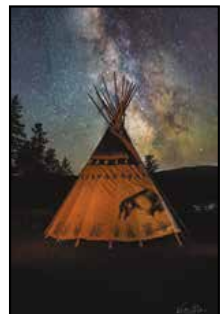
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Border crossing

The international border has become an increasingly vital part of the Tobacco Valley. In recent years, many visitors are Canadians arriving from the north both in summer and winter, and many have second homes in the valley.

Traffic flows north as well, with a number of American tourists on their way to take in the majestic scenes of national parks and hot springs in British Columbia and Alberta.

Following a pandemic closure, the U.S. government reopened the border to fully vaccinated foreign nationals on November 2, 2021.

On April 1, 2022, Canada eliminated a pre-entry test requirement for fully vaccinated travelers. All visitors must still use the ArriveCan online platform within 72 hours prior to crossing the border to provide proof of vaccination or proof of recovery from Covid.

A passport, passport card or enhanced driver's license available from some states and provinces is required to cross the border.

Declare anything you've acquired while in Can-

ada, whether you think it's significant or not, U.S. Port authorities suggest. Keep in mind that rules on hand guns are very strict in Canada, and there are regulations on fruits, vegetables, and meats crossing the border. Limited quantities of alcohol, tobacco, and other items are allowed tax-free.

Visitors to the United States traveling with dogs or cats are required to show a certificate of rabies vaccination for their pet. Pet food must be in its original container and the packaging can be open only if the pet is in the car while entering the U.S. Certain pet food ingredients are prohibited and bag sizes are limited on both side of the entry point.

Bear spray labeled specifically for use against animals is usually allowed; pepper sprays and "mace" designed to be used on human attackers are not.

Call 406-889-3737 with questions on what is allowed when entering the U.S.

For questions about what can or cannot travel north, call Canadian customs at 204-983-3500. Lists of allowed items and restrictions are also posted online.

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Historic cabins popular shelter in back country

Weasel and Wolverine cabins are popular year-round with locals and visitors.

The two-story Weasel Cabin, which is easily accessible just off Grave Creek Road, was built in the early 1950s by the U.S. Forest Service.

Weasel rests in the shade of big old trees along a peacefully babbling Weasel Creek.

To visit the cabin by road, drive about 23 miles up Grave Creek Road until you hit the "Y" at forest road 114. From there, just follow the signs.

The more remote Wolverine Cabin was built in the summer of 1943 by Loy West and volunteers. The cabin was built for the Border Patrol during World War II to guard against potential intruders crossing the border, and was also used as a stop-over between Waterton Park and Roosville. To build the cabin, logs were skidded in by horse from as far away as one-half mile.

Wolverine Cabin sits near the Wolverine Lakes, mountain gems shadowed by the ridge joining Green and Poorman Mountains.

Both Wolverine and Weasel cabins are open for public use, free of rent. They are maintained by the Forest Service, and volunteers pitch in as well.

To get to Wolverine Cabin, take Grave Creek Road toward Therriault Lakes. Watch for the Wolverine Trail and follow the signs to the trailhead. The trail is about 2.5 miles of moderate hiking to the cabin and Wolverine Lakes. Backpackers can also access the cabin and lakes via the Highline Trail. The Highline Trail may be reached at a number of points. It would be advisable to pick up a Kootenai National Forest map at the Eureka Ranger Station north of Eureka on U.S. Highway 93.

A handful of retired fire lookouts are also available to rent for a fee. Spaces fill quickly and may

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be reserved online at recreation.gov. For more information call the Eureka Ranger Station at 406-296-2536.

Each summer the Northwest Montana Lookout Association works in conjunction with the Ksanka

District - and forest districts across the region - to restore old fire lookouts. For 2022, the nonprofit group has projects at the lookouts on Mt. Wam, Mt. Robinson, and Mt. McGuire.



Volunteers work on a restoration project at the Mt. McGuire lookout in the summer of 2021.

Kootenai National Forest offers recreation aplenty

Located in the northwest corner of the state, the Kootenai National Forest surrounds the Tobacco Valley. The forest is bordered by Canada to the north and Idaho to the west. Its 2.25 million acres offer 35 campgrounds, some of which are open all year.

Over 300,000 acres of backcountry are available to recreationists; permits are not necessary. Hiking is popular in the summer, and snowmobiling is a popular winter activity. Hunting, fishing, horseback riding, mountain biking, and boating are also favorites. A handful of retired fire lookouts are typically available for rental atop a few remote mountain peaks.

Two major rivers - the Kootenai and the Yaak - flow through the Kootenai National Forest. More than 100 lakes are found within the forest's boundaries. Lake Koocanusa, a 90-mile long reservoir backed up behind Libby Dam, is formed from the Kootenai River.

The Kootenai National Forest includes the Cabinet Mountains Wilderness, the Ten Lakes Scenic Area, the Northwest Peaks Scenic Area, and the Ross Creek Scenic Area. Forest and trail maps, as well as fire lookout reservations, are available at local Forest Service Ranger Districts. Maps are also posted online.

Forest roads may be accessed from U.S. Highways 2 and 93 and Montana state Highways 200, 56, 37, and 508.

People can reserve a spot in a campground or rent a night atop a mountain by logging onto recreation.gov online. If visitors are without computer access, they can call the local Eureka Ranger Station to make arrangements. Reservations are recommended during the busy summer months.

The front office at the Eureka Ranger Station is also open to walk-in traffic for maps and information.



Mountain ranges stretch to the horizon in a view from a ridgeline hike in the Mt. Marston area.



The sun sets beyond Othorp Lake on a still summer evening.

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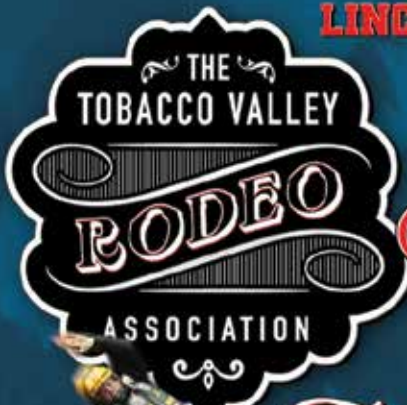
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