

History

The Rattlesnake National Recreation Area and Wilderness (RNRAW) has a long and interesting history. The area was used by the Salish long before settlers arrived in the 1800s. In 1972, human remains were found along Rattlesnake Creek that dated back to around 1460 A.D. The first known permanent white settler in the drainage was Bill Hamilton who settled near the mouth of Rattlesnake Creek in 1858 and operated a trading post until 1864. By the 1870s a neighborhood known as *Shacktown* was located on the west side of the creek just north of Missoula. By 1890, the upper Rattlesnake drainage (north of the Mountain Water Co. dam) had 12 residents. The population of the upper drainage skyrocketed and peaked at 139 people by 1910. In the early 1900s, there were as many as 19 homes in the upper drainage with amenities such as mail and newspaper delivery. In 1911, there was a phone line that ran up to the Franklin Guard Station and up over the ridge to Gold Creek. A school was built near the confluence of Spring and Rattlesnake creeks and operated from 1907 to 1930. The population had declined to 44 inhabitants by 1930.

The Montana Power Company built 10 dams on eight lakes in the present day Rattlesnake Wilderness between 1911 and 1923 to augment the water supply for the City of Missoula. These dams and the water rights were sold to Mountain Water Company in 1979 and are still operated and maintained today as a backup water supply for the City of Missoula. By 1937, Montana Power Company had purchased all the private land in the upper drainage on the west side of Rattlesnake Creek to protect the watershed.

The National Recreation Area and Wilderness was established by an Act of Congress on October 19, 1980. At that time over one third of the area in the RNRAW was in private ownership. In 1983, over 21,000 acres in RNRAW were acquired by the Forest Service from the Montana Power Company. The main trailhead you see today was built in 1987. The horse trailhead was built in 1992.

There are at least two stories about how Rattlesnake Creek got its name. According to one account, a man was bitten by a rattlesnake and died in the 1800s while gathering firewood along the creek. Another version suggests the name came from the Salish word, "*Heh-oo-leh-wh*" which means rattlesnake.

The upper RNRAW is less developed today than it was a hundred years ago when the upper drainage included cabins, farmsteads, mines, a school, a Ranger Station, motorized use, firewood cutting and outfitters. The Rattlesnake is a restoration success story. Today the main issues on the creek are recreation, noxious weeds and fuels management.

Trails

The 28,000 acre National Recreation Area (NRA) includes 73 miles of system trails. Nearly all of these are multiple use trails open to hikers, horseback riders, mountain bikers, joggers, XC skiers and dog walkers. A small area north of the horse trailhead bridge is designated as hiker and horse only. Mountain bikes are restricted to designated system trails shown on the map. Off-trail mountain biking, construction of jumps and/or other structures and user-built trails is prohibited.

Most of the use in the NRA occurs in the South Zone, which is the area *generally* within three miles of the main trailhead. Camping, fires, discharging firearms

and fishing are prohibited in the South Zone. Dogs are prohibited year round in Sawmill and Curry Gulches. Dogs are allowed unleashed year round in Woods Gulch. Dog regulations vary by area and time of year for the rest of the NRA, so please check the bulletin boards for the dog rules at the time of your visit.

How to Find It

From East Broadway at Interstate 90 Exit 104, drive four miles north on Van Buren Street and Rattlesnake Drive to Sawmill Gulch Road (6300 Rattlesnake Drive).

- To get to the **pedestrian and bike trailhead**, turn left onto Sawmill Gulch Road, cross Rattlesnake Creek and bear right at the intersection after Rattlesnake Creek. Horse trailers are prohibited at the Main Trailhead.
- To get to the **horse trailhead**, proceed north on Rattlesnake Drive (past Sawmill Gulch Road) about three quarters of a mile. You'll see the horse trailhead sign on your left. Pedestrian and bicycle vehicles are prohibited at the horse trailhead.



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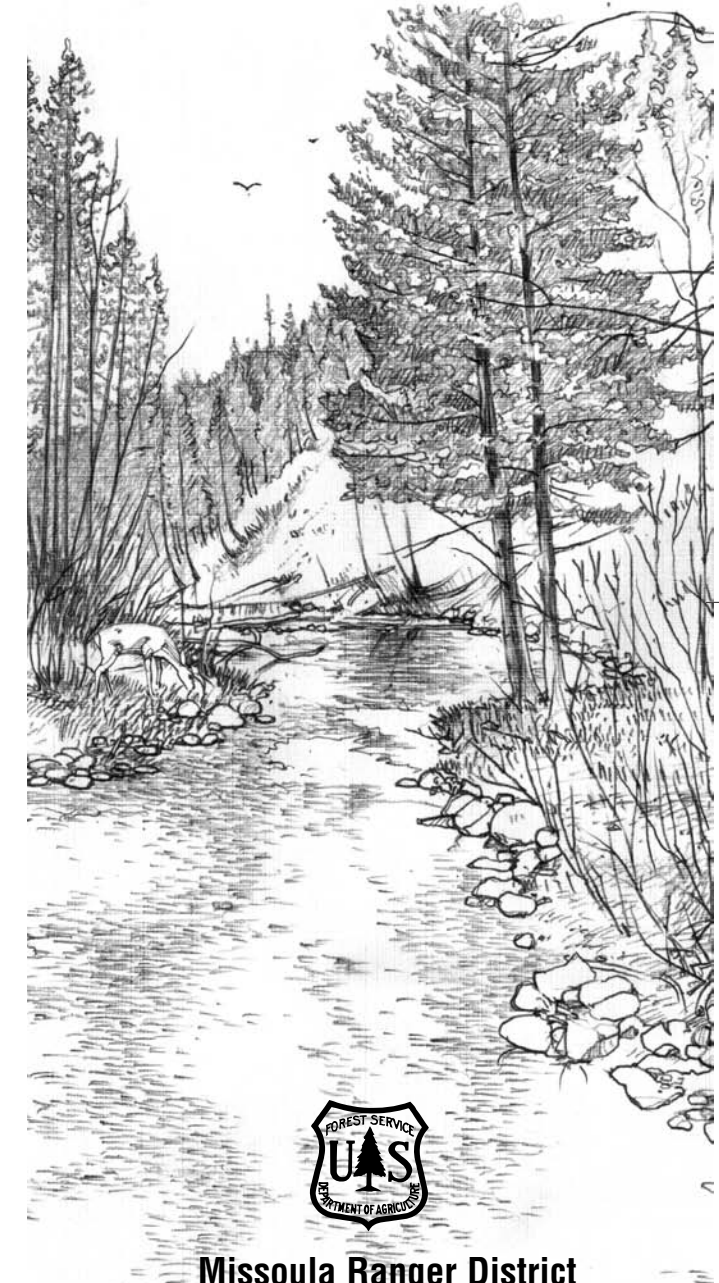
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**For further information contact
Missoula Ranger District
Building 24A, Fort Missoula
Missoula, MT 59804 • (406) 329-3814**

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Rattlesnake National Recreation Area



**Missoula Ranger District
Lolo National Forest**

Give back to the land

You can help prevent weeds if you:

- Learn to identify local weeds
- Pull 10 weeds every time you visit
- Check yourself and pets for weed seeds
- Prevent vegetation or soil damage
- Keep yourself and dogs on trails in heavily weed-infested areas

You can help reduce user conflicts if you:

- Are courteous, friendly and respectful to other visitors
- Keep your bike on designated open routes
- Do not build structures or new trails
- Slow your bike when passing others
- Control your dog
- Pack out your dog's manure
- Pack out more garbage than you brought
- Use public restrooms
- Keep off private property and out of closed areas

Restrictions

- Mountain bikes prohibited off designated open trails
- Unauthorized trail and structure construction prohibited
- No motorized use
- Shooting firearms and fireworks prohibited in the South Zone
- No camping, fires in the South Zone
- Fishing downstream of Beeskove Creek prohibited
- Dog restrictions apply – Check posted regulations
- No horse vehicles at main trailhead / no pedestrian vehicles at horse trailhead

