History

The Rattlesnake National Recreation Area and Wilderness (RNRAW) has a long history. The Salish used the area long before European settlers arrived in the 1800s. In 1972, archeologists found human remains 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 settled on the west side of the creek just north of Missoula. By 1890, 12 residents lived in the upper Rattlesnake drainage north of the Mountain Water Company dam. In the early 1900s, there were as many as 19 homes in the upper drainage with amenities such as mail and newspaper delivery. The population of the upper drainage peaked at 139 people by 1910. In 1911, there was a phone line that ran north up to the Franklin Guard Station and over the ridge to Gold Creek. Residents built a school near the confluence of Spring and Rattlesnake creeks and it operated from 1907 to 1930. By 1930, the population of the Rattlesnake Valley declined to 44 residents.

The Montana Power Company built ten dams on eight lakes in the present day Rattlesnake Wilderness between 1911 and 1923 to augment the water supply for the City of Missoula. They sold the dams and the water rights to Mountain Water Company in 1979. 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.

On October 19, 1980, Congress passed a bill that established the Rattlesnake National Recreation Area and Wilderness. At that time, over one third of the area in the RNRAW was in private ownership. In 1983, the Forest Service acquired over 21,000 acres in the RNRAW from the Montana Power Company. The Forest Service built the current main trailhead in 1987 and the horse trailhead 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, "*Kehi-oo-le,*" which means rattlesnake.

The upper RNRAW is less developed today than it was a hundred years ago when the upper drainage contained cabins, farmsteads, mines, a school, a ranger station, motorized use, firewood cutting and outfitters. Today's Rattlesnake NRA and Wilderness offers visitors a chance to recreate, connect to nature and provide the community a beautiful scenic vista.

Trails

The 28,000 acre National Recreation Area (NRA) includes 73 miles of trails. Nearly all of these are multiple use trails open to hikers, horseback riders, mountain bikers, runners, cross-country skiers, and dog walkers. A small area north of the horse trailhead bridge is designated as hiker and horse only. Bicycles are restricted to designated trails shown on the map. Bicycles are also prohibited on the short trail between the horse trailhead and Trail 515. Off-trail bicycling, 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, and discharging firearms 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 information boards for the dog rules at the time of your visit.

How to Find It

From Van Buren Street (Interstate 90 Exit 104), drive four miles north on Van Buren Street / Rattlesnake Drive to Sawmill Gulch Road

•**To get to the pedestrian and bike trailhead**, turn left onto Sawmill Gulch Road, cross Rattlesnake Creek and turn 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 0.75 miles. You will see the horse trailhead sign on your left. Pedestrian and bicycle vehicles are prohibited at the horse trailhead.

Opportunities

-Picnicking	-Hiking
-Mountain Biking	-Hunting
-Fishing	-Running

Food & Attractant Storage Order

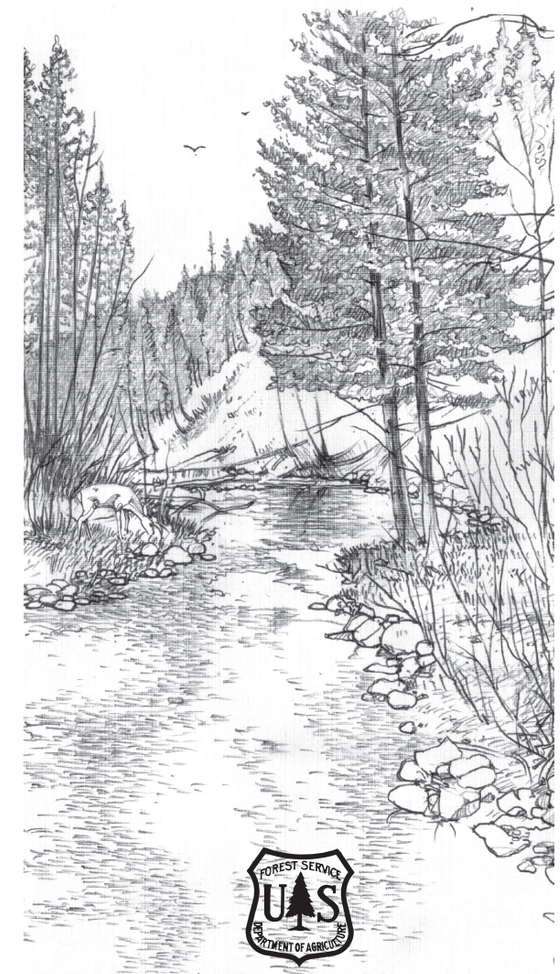
Wildlife food/attractant storage order in effect, April 1– Dec. 1; suspend food/attractants 10 feet off the ground and 4 feet from an upright support, or in a hard sided vehicle or camper, or in an approved bear resistant container. Must be done when unattended and at night.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination against its customers. If you believe you experienced discrimination when obtaining services from USDA, participating in a USDA program, or participating in a program that receives financial assistance from USDA, you may file a complaint with USDA. Information about how to file a discrimination complaint is available from the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights. To file a complaint of discrimination, complete, sign and mail a program discrimination complaint form, available at any USDA office location or online at www.ascr.usda.gov, or write to:
USDA, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20250-9410
Or call toll free at (866) 632-9992 (voice) to obtain additional information, the appropriate office or to request documents. Individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing or have speech disabilities may contact USDA through the Federal Relay service at (800) 877-8339 or (800) 845-6136 (in Spanish). USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer and lender. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).

For further information contact:
Missoula Ranger District
Fort Missoula Bldg. 24
Missoula, MT 59804 • (406) 329-3814

Printed on recycled paper R1-15-15

Rattlesnake National Recreation Area



Missoula Ranger District
Lolo National Forest