



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Pioneer Mountains National Scenic Byway

Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest

Shows the west they way it used to be...

On the 49 mile Pioneer Mountains Scenic Byway in the Beaverhead–Deerlodge National Forest, you can travel the length of the Pioneer Mountain range. Granite peaks topping 10,000 feet in elevation are to the east, and gentler, forested terrain stretches out to the west.

You'll see mountain meadows, lodgepole pine forests and broad willow bottoms. The road gently ascends a 7,800 foot divide between Wise River, flowing north and Grasshopper Creek, flowing south.

Designated a Scenic Byway January 10, 1989, it extends south from State Highway 43 at Wise River, Montana, to State Highway 278, between Dillon and Jackson. Interpretive sites along the Scenic Byway tell travelers about the natural scenes and the history of the Pioneer Mountains.

Travel along the byway will take you by nine Forest Service campgrounds. The area offers a wide array of hiking and riding trails. Driving north to south, you first come to Wise River, a ranching community along the Big Hole River. Fishing “fanatics” arrive seasonally to try their skill on the Big Hole’s blue-ribbon trout fishery.

On the edge of Wise River, the byway takes you south, through the Wise River valley. In this scenic valley, fields of sagebrush on the high ground give way to willows on the river bottoms. Lodgepole pine and Douglas fir cover the adjacent hillsides. You can catch on occasional glimpse of moose, elk, mule deer, black bear, coyotes and beaver. Early ranchers, miners and trappers used this northern section of the road.

As the valley narrows, you can see the old railroad bed of the Montana Southern Railway, the last narrow-gauge railroad built in the United States. The railroad served the Elkhorn mine, one of the largest ore-mill structures in the United States, and the town of Coolidge that grew up around the mill. Elkhorn and Coolidge offer an interesting side trip from the byway.



Crystal Park attracts rock hounds of all ages and is accessible during the summer and fall. Picnic tables and restrooms are great for picnicking and several campgrounds are close by for weekend camping trips.



View from Grand Vista Interpretive Site, 18 miles south of the community of Wise River. Peaks of the east Pioneer Range are in the background.

At the head of Wise River, the byway climbs to the broad meadows of Moose Park and Crystal Park. Rock hounds come to Crystal Park in the summer to search for quartz crystals. The area is open to the public for a \$5 parking fee. South of Crystal Park, the Byway drops into the Grasshopper Creek valley and past Elkhorn Hot Springs, where visitors can enjoy hot outdoor pools. You pass Maverick Mountain ski area before you leave the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest.

Beyond the Forest boundary, Grasshopper Creek valley widens to spectacular views. Cattle ranching has been the economic mainstay of this area for more than 100 years. The scenic valley is dotted with “beaverslides” and several large ranch headquarters.

The Byway takes you through the small community of Polaris, with its rural school house and post office, and on to State Highway 278.

The road is officially closed from December 1 through May 15 between Pettingill parking lot to the north and Elkhorn Hot Springs to the south. During that time, the Scenic Byway is a National Recreation Snowmobile Trail, offering great snowmobiling opportunities.

To obtain your forest visitor maps and information, stop by one of the following offices Monday through Friday 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Beaverhead-Deerlodge NF Headquarters and the Dillon Ranger District

420 Barrett Street
Dillon, MT 59725
(406) 683-3900

Wise River Work Center

PO Box 100
Wise River, MT 59762
(406) 832-3178
*Open May–Late November

Wisdom Ranger District

PO Box 238
Wisdom, MT 59761
(406) 689-3243

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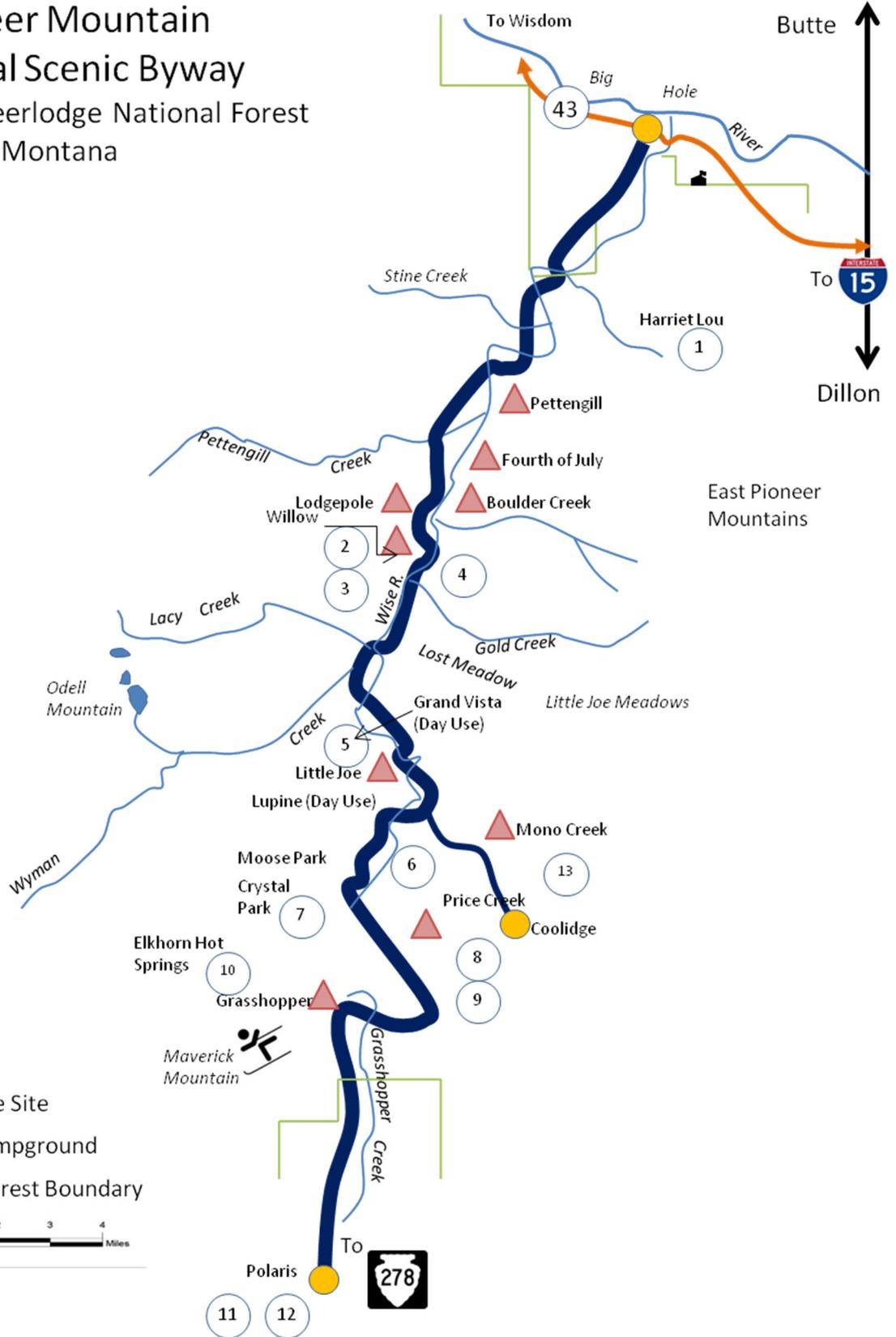
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Montana



West Pioneer Mountains

East Pioneer Mountains



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