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PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release through Saturday, October 28

Missoula welcomes first state high school soccer tournament since 1995

Sixteen high school teams from around the state will have a chance to break in the new turf fields at Fort Missoula Regional Park this weekend as they compete for the state AA soccer title, the first time the playoffs have been held in Missoula since 1995.

This isn't the largest tournament hosted at the new park, but it's by far the most anticipated. "We've had our eye on hosting this tournament for quite a while," says Recreation Specialist Ryan Yearous. "As soon as the bond passed, teams from all over the region started asking about playing here. We're proud and excited to be able to host the State AA soccer championships at FMRP." The new park was funded by a county-wide general obligation bond approved by voters in 2014 and is a joint City-County project.

The 16 boys and girls varsity soccer teams are coming from Billings, Great Falls, Helena, Kalispell and Bozeman. Play begins Thursday on the natural turf fields, which were designed to provide an ideal playing surface for competitive soccer. "These fields were designed specifically for Missoula's climate to provide a durable, resilient turf that athletes appreciate," Yearous says. The Bella Vista Pavilion and Overlook Shelter will serve as tournament headquarters.

Destination Missoula and the Missoula Tourism Business Improvement District (TBID) worked with the Montana High School Association to bring the tournament to Missoula. "We are extremely excited to be able to host the 2017 MHSA State AA Soccer Tournament in Missoula," said Barbara Neilan, Director of Destination Missoula and the Missoula Tourism Business Improvement District. "The beautiful new fields at FMRP will make it a one-of-a-kind experience for all the teams. Destination Missoula/Missoula TBID annually budget monies and work hard to bid for and bring events like this to Missoula. We also head up hospitality and volunteers to insure that events held in Missoula are the best possible experience for participants and spectators. Over a few days an event of this size will mean an economic impact of approximately \$325,000 to the community. Not only that, but our kids have the opportunity of hometown pride."

Joanne Austin of the Montana High School Association agrees the outstanding new facilities at FMRP and the TBID partnership made Missoula a top choice for the tournament. “The MHSA Executive Board appreciates all the tournament invitations received from Missoula in recent years, as well as the enthusiasm and assistance provided by Destination Missoula. Qualifying teams are looking forward to playing in this state soccer event, which is the first MHSA soccer tournament to be held in Missoula since 1995. The number of schools participating in MHSA soccer has grown significantly since that time as has the size of the event,” Austin said.

Hellgate High School assistant principal and activities director Nick Laatsch says local high schools are pleased to host the tournament at home. “We are very excited to host this tournament and feel fortunate to have such a wonderful facility in our backyard,” Laatsch said. Missoula County Public Schools is looking forward to hosting more statewide athletics in the future. “MCPS has enjoyed a long history of hosting state events in our school facilities. Now that the City and County have completed this incredible community facility, we are able to do even more to host state level athletic events. It helps us to increase our engagement with the community beyond the walls of our schools and out into our beautiful valley,” said Hatton Littman, MCPS Director of Communications.

Tournament play began Thursday and continues Friday and Saturday, with the boys and girls championship games at 12:30 p.m. on Saturday. Yearous hopes residents will stop by to check out the exciting soccer action on the new fields. “It will be a great weekend of soccer and a chance to see some outstanding young athletes,” he said. “We are pleased to provide a wide variety of quality recreation opportunities. Since our April opening, events at FMRP have been well received and clearly meet our goals of something for everyone and “Generations At Play.” Our best to all of the athletes taking part in the tournament.”

Tickets through the Montana High School Association are \$7 for adults and \$6 for students for one day, and \$17 and \$14 for the entire tournament. View the tournament play-off schedule here: <http://www.mhsa.org/page/show/2173381-post-season>. Learn more about Fort Missoula Regional Park at www.atthefort.org.

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Media Note – Please see “Fast Facts about FMRP” on the next page.

FAST FACTS ABOUT FMRP

- FMRP Phase 1 opened in April, 2017. Phase 2 to open in 2018.
- The new park is a joint City-County project, and is funded by the county-wide 2014 Parks and Trails Bond. The voter-approved \$42 million measure allocated \$38 million for Fort Missoula Regional Park; \$3 million for the Missoula County trails program, and \$1 million for new and improved playgrounds throughout the City.
- Phase 1 construction includes the Bella Vista events pavilion, a 5000-sq. ft. timber and stone structure with a fireplace, skylight and portable dance floor, the Bella Vista synthetic turf lighted multi-sport field, up to 10 (depending on the sport) multi-sport natural turf fields, an additional pavilion, two playgrounds, historical interpretation, plus trails, restrooms and parking.
- The new turf fields feature a climate-specialized mix of soils, grass and maintenance standards that provide athletes with a reliable, forgiving, fast play surface which is ideal for sports.
- The new entrance of the park, located at South Avenue and 33rd St., features a bronze statute commemorating the Fort's history as headquarters of one of the country's largest Civilian Conservation Corps districts in the 1930s and '40s.
- Phase 2 will open in 2018. Construction includes playgrounds, a dog park, seven new softball diamonds, new tennis and pickleball courts, volleyball and basketball courts, public event spaces, picnic shelters and areas for bocce ball, horseshoes, croquet and more.

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