

# Garnet Ghost Town Recreation Fee Site Business Plan



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Missoula Field Office  
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2024 – 2029

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>Executive Summary .....</b>   | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>Introduction.....</b>   | <b>5</b>  |
| Regulatory Framework.....  | 5         |
| Purpose of Document .....  | 6         |
| Environmental Justice .....  | 6         |
| <b>Background.....</b>   | <b>7</b>  |
| <b>Garnet Ghost Town Recreation Area Fee Program.....</b>                  | <b>10</b> |
| Season of Use .....  | 10        |
| Fee Site Key Components.....   | 10        |
| Recreation Use .....   | 10        |
| Proposed Modification to Garnet Ghost Town Recreation Area Fee Rates ..... | 11        |
| Operations and Maintenance Costs.....                                      | 12        |
| Revenues .....   | 15        |
| Objectives for Use of Fee Receipts.....                                    | 16        |
| Specific Uses of Fee Receipts for the Next Five Years.....                 | 16        |
| Priorities for Future Expenditures .....                                   | 18        |
| Analysis of Recreation Fee Rates .....                                     | 18        |
| <b>Impacts from Charging and Not-Charging Recreation Fee Rates .....</b>   | <b>20</b> |
| Impacts from Modifying Fees to Recreation Users.....                       | 20        |
| Impacts from Not Modifying Fees to Recreation Users.....                   | 20        |
| <b>Public Outreach .....</b>   | <b>22</b> |

## **Executive Summary**

Garnet Ghost Town is an increasingly popular site located on BLM-administered lands in the Garnet Mountain Range in western Montana. The BLM began managing Garnet in the early 1970s, designated it a Special Recreation Management Area in the 1986 Garnet Resource Area Resource Management Plan and continued that designation through the 2021 Missoula Field Office Resource Management Plan Revision. Known for its well-preserved historic buildings and excellent interpretation, the site now attracts more than 30,000 visitors per year with most visiting during a six-month period (May through October). Throughout the 50 years that the BLM has been managing and preserving this site various funding sources have been used. BLM began charging a fee (\$2 per person 16 and over) in 2004. In 2005, the fee increased to \$3 per person ages 16 and over and has remained the same since then. At that time, the BLM also began collecting fees for two winter rental cabins. The two room Dahl Cabin sleeps 6 people and the one room McDonald Cabin sleeps up to four people. The fees for those cabins are \$30 and \$40, respectively, and also have not changed since 2005.

Operational and maintenance costs have increased greatly as use has nearly doubled in the past 10 years. The site's popularity continues to grow, consistent with broader recreation trends across public lands. Appropriated funding for recreation management in the Field Office has not been consistent from year to year; in fact, appropriated funding has decreased in the past 10 years despite the fact that visitation has increased. Fees are one part of the BLM's comprehensive funding strategy to support recreation sites and services. Other parts of the strategy include appropriated funding, volunteer assistance, interagency cooperation, grants, partnerships with the private sector, commercial operations, and leveraged funding. With the operational and maintenance costs increasing and appropriated monies not stretching as far as they use to, a fee increase is needed in order to help cover costs.

This Garnet Ghost Town Business Plan includes a proposed \$10 per person ages 16 and older fee at Garnet Ghost Town beginning in May 2024 and a proposed increase in cabin rental fees to \$50 for the McDonald and Dahl Cabins beginning in December 2024. These fee increases were determined through comparative cost review of similar public and private facilities in surrounding counties as required by the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act of 2004.

Fees collected will be used for operation and maintenance, with excess monies generated being carried over annually for improving infrastructure and improving amenities such as tour scripts, interpretive displays and signage. Funds could also be used to help offset costs incurred by Granite County from increased law enforcement patrols and emergency responses.

Public outreach for this proposed Business Plan and fee increase includes postings on E-Planning, news releases to local and regional media, social media posts, sharing with partners, posting on BLM website. Comments from the public and citizen-based BLM Western Montana Resource Advisory Council will also be considered prior to the implementation of the proposed recreation fees.

# Introduction

## **Regulatory Framework**

This Business Plan was prepared pursuant to the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA), and the BLM recreation fee program policy manual and handbook (H-2930-1 Recreation Permit and Fee Administration Handbook). FLREA provides the BLM current authority to establish, modify, charge, and collect recreation fees at Federal recreational lands and waters. FLREA authorizes the BLM to locally retain collected recreation fees and outlines how revenues may be used for such things as facility repair, maintenance, facility enhancement directly related to public use, and operating or capital costs associated with the Recreation and Visitor Services program.

Under FLREA, a Standard Amenity fee and an Expanded Amenity fee may be charged for the use of certain facilities or services, which include developed day-use sites and campgrounds. The developed recreational sites must meet the criteria that are defined below. These fees are usually implemented through the issuance of a recreation use permit (RUP), or through a specific annual pass. BLM policy requires that revenue from RUPs be deposited into a separate account (pg. 2-3 of H-2930-1). Doing so allows the BLM to more readily track and report collections and ensures that RUP revenue is spent at or near the site of collection.

In accordance with FLREA, the following are definitions of Standard and Expanded amenities for the area covered under this Business Plan:

- **Standard Amenity Recreation Fees** cover outdoor recreation areas that provides significant opportunities for outdoor recreation; has substantial Federal investments; where fees can be effectively collected, and that has all of the following amenities: (1) designated developed parking, (2) a permanent toilet facility, (3) a permanent trash receptacle, (4) interpretive sign, exhibit, or kiosk, (5) picnic tables, (6) and security services (Sec. 803.(f)(4)(D) of REA).
- **Expanded Amenity Recreation Fees** cover specialized outdoor recreation sites and services including but not limited to developed campgrounds with at least a majority of the following amenities: (1) tent or trailer spaces, (2) picnic tables, (3) drinking water, (4) access roads, (5) fee collection by an employee or agent of the BLM, (6) reasonable visitor protection, (7) refuse containers, (8) toilet facilities, (9) simple devices for containing a campfire (Sec. 803.(g)(2)(A) of REA).
- **Additional Expanded Amenity** recreation facilities or services include rental of cabins, group day-use or overnight sites, binoculars or other equipment (Sec.803.(g)(2)(C) of REA); use of hookups for electricity, cable, or sewer (Sec.803.(g)(2)(D) of REA); use of sanitary dump stations (SEC.803.(g)(2)(E) of REA); and use of reservation services (Sec.803.(g)(2)(G) of REA)

## **Purpose of Document**

BLM Manual 2930, *Recreation Permits and Fees*, requires that each fee program has a Business Plan which thoroughly discusses fees and explains how fees are consistent with the criteria set forth in FLREA. Business Plans are to assist management in determining the appropriateness and level of fees, cost of administering fee programs, and provide a structured communication and marketing plan. The primary purpose of the plans is to serve as public notification of the objectives for use of recreation fee revenues and to provide the public an opportunity to comment on these objectives.

This Business Plan covers a description of the fee site, the proposed fees to the site, associated operating costs, planned expenditures of fee revenue, a financial analysis utilizing regional comparative market study of fees charged for other similar recreation facilities, impacts of proposed fee changes, and public outreach efforts. The data used to analyze and prepare this Business Plan was obtained through internal BLM tracking and accounting mechanisms such as the Recreation Management Information System (RMIS), Collections and Billing System (CBS), Federal Business Management System (FBMS), and other locally generated recreation and visitor use tracking spreadsheets. For more detailed information, please contact the BLM Missoula Field Office (MiFO). Some of the additional data may be subject to Privacy Act requirements.

The BLM strives to manage recreation and visitor services to serve the diversity of public outdoor recreation demands while helping the agency maintain healthy and sustainable resource conditions so the visitors desired recreation opportunities and experiences remain available. The BLM's goals for delivering recreation benefits from BLM-administered lands to the American people and their communities are:

- Improve access to appropriate recreation opportunities;
- Ensure a quality experience and enjoyment of natural and cultural resources; and
- Provide for and receive fair value in recreation.

This Business Plan will assist the Field Office in meeting these visitor service goals. This plan is specific only to Garnet Ghost Town, located on public lands in Granite County, Montana.

## **Environmental Justice**

Consistent with Department of Interior and BLM priorities, the BLM seeks to achieve environmental justice, equity, diversity, inclusion and accessibility and making a difference in Montana communities through expanding recreational access and opportunities and providing for natural resource interpretation. This includes encouraging, facilitating and improving partnership with and access for youth, tribes and underserved communities to public lands through recreation partnerships and collaborations; improving public health and safety at developed recreation sites and areas by updating and modernizing infrastructure (including meeting accessibility standards for people with disabilities); inviting education, interpretation and recreational access for all Americans, especially for diverse populations and those near

urban areas to encourage enjoyment of BLM-managed public lands and waters; collaborating with community members, government organizations, nonprofit organizations, academic institutions, and outreach programs.

## **Background**

The Bureau of Land Management Missoula Field Office (Field Office) is located in western Montana and administers public land in Granite, Missoula, and Powell Counties. Except for the city of Missoula, much of the area is rural in nature with small communities throughout these counties. Elevations range from 3,300 feet to 7,200 feet with several distinct mountain ranges and river drainages. Many of the popular recreation sites are located within the Garnet Mountain Range where recreation opportunities are available year-round. The Garnet Mountain Range and other locations throughout the Field Office provide opportunities for hunting, hiking, horseback riding, whitewater rafting, sight-seeing of historic sites and fishing as well as winter recreation opportunities such as snowmobiling, skiing and snowshoeing.

Travel, tourism and recreation are key industries within western Montana. Visitors from across the United States and from several foreign countries are attracted to the area each year for its outstanding scenery and recreational opportunities. Glacier National Park is 140 miles from Missoula and attracts roughly 3 million visitors per year. Yellowstone National Park is 250 miles from Missoula and averages 4.8 million visitors per year. Many of these same people visit Garnet Ghost Town along their travel to or from the parks.

Garnet Ghost Town is a historic mining site listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The overall goal of the site is to enable visitors to step back in time and experience the townsite as it was around the time of its abandonment. As a living history site, it incorporates interpretive services and programs such as providing tours to school aged youth from all over western Montana. This site provides the following amenities: a Visitor's Center, interpretive signs, interpretive brochures, self-guided and guided tours, walking trails, designated parking, designated handicap parking, three permanent toilet facilities, a potable public water supply, picnic tables, two permanent bear proof trash receptacles, two seasonal bear proof trash receptacles, visitor service and interpretive staff, two winter rental cabins, and a maintained access road.

The Missoula Field Office partners with Garnet Preservation Association, a 501 (c)3 nonprofit organization, to provide educational and interpretive services at Garnet Ghost Town. These services include sales items in the Visitor's Center and hosting a public interpretive event, "Garnet Day" every June. In addition, Garnet Preservation Association has assisted with funding for interpretive signs, building maintenance and stabilization, and educational assistance grants.

The Field Office also partners with other agencies in order to preserve the historic buildings at

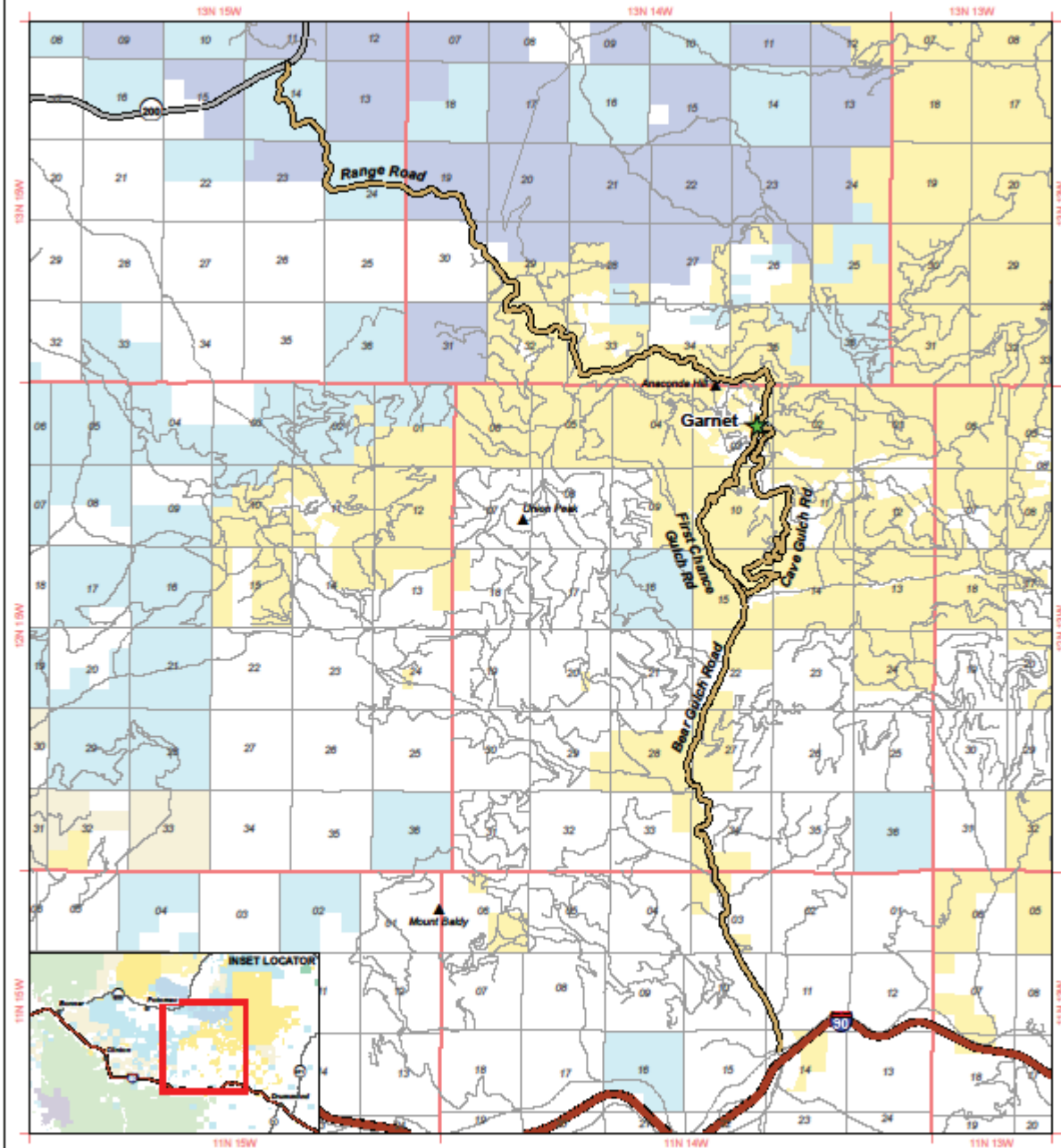
Garnet. Over 25 historic buildings are still standing at Garnet Ghost Town. The Field Office manages these buildings in a state of arrested decay – meaning the buildings are not to be rebuilt or improved but are to be preserved/maintained in their current abandoned state. In addition, any stabilization efforts need to follow the Secretary of Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties (36 CFR Part 68, 1995). Because expertise is needed for historic building stabilization, the historic preservation crew of Glacier National Park conducts most major preservation projects on the buildings. This work is done through an Intergovernmental Order (IGO).

Garnet Ghost Town can receive anywhere between 3 and 8 feet of snow in a year. Therefore, snow must be removed from the roofs of the buildings in order to prevent their collapse. When the snow reaches over 2 feet on the roofs, the Field Office partners with the US Forest Service Missoula Smokejumpers to remove the snow from the buildings. This work is also done through an IGO.





# Garnet Ghost Town Recreation Site



|                   |                  |                                     |         |
|-------------------|------------------|-------------------------------------|---------|
| Garnet Ghost Town | Road Other       | State                               | Private |
| Access Route      | <b>Ownership</b> | State- Lubrecht Experimental Forest |         |
| Interstate        | BLM              | The Nature Conservancy              |         |
| State Highway     | Forest Service   |                                     |         |

No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management as to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of these data for individual or aggregate use with other data. Original data were compiled from various sources. This information may not meet National Map Accuracy Standards. This product was developed through digital means and may be updated without notification.

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# **Garnet Ghost Town Recreation Area Fee Program**

## **Season of Use**

Garnet Ghost Town is open year-round to the public, however, the public has limited access during the winter when snow is on the ground. Fees are charged when Garnet is accessible by motorized vehicles which typically is May through October. This time frame generally coincides with having staff on site and the historic buildings open for touring. Winter staffing is limited, buildings remained locked, and interpretive materials are limited. During the winter season Garnet Ghost Town is only accessible by snowmobile, cross country ski, or snowshoe. Two cabins are available to rent in Garnet Ghost Town during the winter. Twelve miles of trail leading to the site has been designated as a Winter Back Country Byway, and the surrounding area offers over 80 additional miles of winter recreation trails which are groomed through a partnership with a local snowmobile club.

## **Fee Site Key Components**

Garnet Ghost Town is managed and classified as a Standard Amenity Recreation Site. Standard Amenity fees may be charged for sites and services that meet at least 1 of the three following criteria:

1. Designated as a National Conservation Area or National Volcanic Monument.
2. Has a designated visitor center or interpretive center that provides a broad range of interpretive services, programs, and media.
3. Is a developed day-use area that provides significant opportunities for outdoor recreation and includes substantial Federal investments, where fees can be collected, and site contains all the following amenities:
  - Designated developed parking
  - Permanent toilet facilities
  - Interpretive signs, exhibits, or kiosks
  - Picnic tables
  - Security services

The cabin rentals at Garnet are managed under the Expanded Amenity Fee program. Expanded amenity fees cover specialized outdoor recreation sites and services. An Expanded amenity recreation sites and services include the following:

1. Rental of cabins, boats, stock animals, lookout towers, historic structures, trail shelters, audio tour devices, portable sanitation devices, binoculars or other equipment.

## **Recreation Use**

Visitation to Garnet includes local, out of state, and foreign visitors. Between 30,000 and 35,000 people visit Garnet annually. June, July, and August receive most of this visitation, however, shoulder season visitation is trending upwards and winter visitation is also increasing. Foreign visitation dropped during the 2021 season due to Covid, but is beginning to pick back up. In 2023, 37 school tours were given that served 328 youth and 83 adults. The

number would have been higher but unfortunately, due to a shortage in staffing, tours had to be cancelled or declined.

Winter visitation includes snowmobilers, cross country skiers and cabin renters. The main road to Garnet closes to motorized highway vehicles January 1 of each year and becomes a Winter Back Country Byway as well as National Winter Recreation Trail. The road reopens to motorized highway vehicles on May 1 although the snow isn't always entirely gone before then. Between 2000 and 3000 people use this winter trail during this time period. Between 250 and 350 of those are renting the cabins. The rental period is the end of December through March and occasionally into April, depending on demand. The cabins are usually filled every weekend in January, February and March.

Garnet Ghost Town Visitation

| Fiscal Year | Total Visits | Average Visitation |
|-------------|--------------|--------------------|
| 2020        | 29,158       | 31,441             |
| 2021        | 28,625       |                    |
| 2022        | 36,540       |                    |

**Proposed Modification to Garnet Ghost Town Recreation Area Fee Rates**

The Field Office is proposing to raise the existing standard amenity fee and existing expanded amenity fees to levels consistent with other similar amenities in the region. Current and proposed fee rates, in addition to the amenities that are provided, is summarized below:

|                   | Current Fees               | Proposed Fees               | Amenities   |
|-------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| Garnet Ghost Town | \$3/person<br>16 and older | \$10/person<br>16 and older | Visitor Center, interpretive signs, interpretive displays, brochures, guided tours, interpretive staff, walking trails, picnic tables, drinking water, vault latrines, trash, access road |
| Dahl Cabin        | \$40/night                 | \$50/night                  | Wood stove, propane, lights, cookstove, firewood, vault latrine, drinking water, dishes, utensils, cleaning supplies  |
| McDonald Cabin    | \$30/night                 | \$50/night                  | Wood stove, propane, lights, cookstove, firewood, vault latrine, drinking water, dishes, utensils, cleaning supplies  |

The Field Office will use various ecommerce technologies as directed in BLM Instruction Memorandum 2022-010, to provide recreation visitors opportunities to find, reserve and pay for campsites and day use within the field office. Most of these options are provided through the interagency reservation service Recreation.gov. If the Field Office decides to add additional reservation services of other types of e-commerce options available in the future, an expanded amenity fee for reservation services would be charged in addition to any other standard or expanded amenity fees in accordance with 16 U.S.C. 6802(g)(2)(G).

Reservation services fees could range from \$0.50 to \$10.00 depending on the type of service provided. The reservation service is subject to contracting requirements and will be adjusted with contract changes or with future updates to the business plan. For visitors who wish not to pay the expanded amenity fee of reservation services, the field office will attempt to continue to provide a blend of reservation and first come-first served options at each of the campgrounds and day use areas. Other payment options may also be considered in the future as technology and software develops, including onsite credit card payment systems or scan and pay (as examples).

### **Operations and Maintenance Costs**

Garnet Ghost Town is staffed by one permanent BLM Park Ranger. During the summer season, the rest of the staff is composed of seasonal Park Rangers or Interns and BLM Volunteers. The overall staffing goal has been 1 permanent Park Ranger Lead, 3 – 4 seasonal Park Rangers or Interns, and 2 – 4 volunteers per month. Each season the number of staff members varies depending on the availability of funding as well as the availability of people to work.

Recently, the Field Office has been evaluating the staffing needs of Garnet. Much of what the current staffing does is react to immediate needs. No new projects or programs have been developed as a result. Ideally, the BLM would have 2 permanent BLM staff members (a Lead Outdoor Recreation Planner and Career Seasonal Park Ranger) to provide more guidance, consistency and programming, seasonal Park Rangers or Interns to provide programming and a presence, a Maintenance Worker to focus on the grounds, and volunteers to assist.

Most of the workload is tied to getting the site ready for visitors, maintaining the site, getting the site ready for winter and visitor services including interpretation and education. Currently, additional staff support is provided by Missoula Field Office and Western Montana District permanent and seasonal staff including the Outdoor Recreation Planner, Archaeologist, Geologist, Staff Assistants, Archaeological Technicians, Range and Weed Technicians, Forestry Technicians, and the District Engineers and force account staff. They provide support by assisting with interpretation and education including giving tours, providing a presence at Garnet, assisting with and monitoring maintenance on the historic buildings, designing historic building treatments, administering cabin rentals/reservations, handling public information requests, designing and upgrading facilities, grading roads, spraying and pulling weeds, and

miscellaneous maintenance duties.

Day to day operations include public interaction, light maintenance, grounds keeping, trash removal, vault restroom sanitation, vault restroom pumping, firewood collecting, trail maintenance, solar system maintenance, noxious weeds management, signage, fence repairs, and upkeep of tools and equipment. Routine cost to the recreation fee program not listed below include deferred maintenance projects, abandoned mine reclamation projects, weed management, and planning/coordination with cooperating agencies and partners.

The annual costs of site administration and the upkeep of Garnet Ghost Town have been funded through a combination of appropriated funding and the use of collected fee monies. Annual cost of managing and operating Garnet is approximately \$303,746. However, this amount does not include the general support from the Missoula Field Office and Western Montana District staff. Annual revenues from fees collected at Garnet have averaged \$28,576 over the last five years.

The following tables reflect the 3 to 5 year average of Garnet operating costs, labor costs and projected labor costs based on reorganizing the program at Garnet.

#### **Garnet Expenses**

|  |                 |
|--|-----------------|
| Grounds maintenance & supplies   | \$7,500         |
| Building stabilization   | \$30,000        |
| Utility services (garbage, latrine pumping, propane, solar system, water system) | \$12,500        |
| Brochures  | \$1,000         |
| Vehicles   | \$10,000        |
| Winter snow removal  | \$5,500         |
| Fee collection & processing  | \$6,500         |
| Volunteer Reimbursement  | \$10,000        |
| Uniforms for Seasonal Staff & Volunteers   | \$2,000         |
| Garnet Day staffing support  | \$1,500         |
| <b>BLM Garnet Expenses Total</b>   | <b>\$86,500</b> |

**Current average staffing costs to run the Garnet Ghost Town Recreation Area. Staffing costs assume the Field Office can hire all seasonal positions.**

| <b>Position</b>                             | <b>Number of Positions</b> | <b>Workmonth (WM) Cost</b> | <b>Number of Workmonths (WMs)</b> | <b>Centrally funded</b> | <b>Operations funded/fee revenue funded</b> |
|---|----------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|---|
| Outdoor Recreation Planner (GS-11)          | 1                          | \$10,481                   | 3                                 | \$31,443                |   |
| Archaeologist (GS-11)                       | 1                          | \$10,481                   | 2                                 | \$20,962                |   |
| Law Enforcement Ranger (GS-12)              | 1                          | \$10,481                   | 2                                 | \$20,962                |   |
| Engineer (GS-11)                            | 1                          | \$10,481                   | 1                                 | \$10,481                |   |
| Park Ranger (Leader) GS-09                  | 1                          | \$7,552                    | 9                                 | \$67,968                |   |
| Seasonal Park Ranger (Interpretation) GS-05 | 3                          | \$3,635                    | 6                                 |                         | \$65,430                                    |
| <b>Total</b>                                | <b>8</b>                   |                            |                                   | <b>\$151,816</b>        | <b>\$65,430</b>                             |

**Projected future costs based on reorganization of staffing needs at the Garnet Ghost Town Recreation Area**

| <b>Position</b>                                 | <b>Number of Positions</b> | <b>WM Cost</b> | <b>Number of WMs</b> | <b>Centrally funded</b> | <b>Operations funded/fee revenue funded</b> |
|---|----------------------------|----------------|----------------------|-------------------------|---|
| Outdoor Recreation Planner (GS-11)              | 1                          | \$10,481       | 1                    | \$10,481                |   |
| Archaeologist (GS-11)                           | 1                          | \$10,481       | 1                    | \$10,481                |   |
| Law Enforcement Ranger                          | 1                          |                | 2                    | \$20,962                |   |
| *New* Outdoor Recreation Planner (Leader) GS-09 | 1                          | \$7,552        | 12                   | \$90,624                |   |
| *New* Career Seasonal Park Ranger               | 1                          | \$6,175        | 8                    | \$12,350                | \$37,050                                    |

|  |          |         |   |                  |                  |
|--|----------|---------|---|------------------|------------------|
| (Interpretation)<br>GS-07                            |          |         |   |                  |                  |
| Seasonal Park<br>Ranger<br>(Interpretation)<br>GS-05 | 2        | \$3,635 | 6 |                  | \$43,620         |
| *New* Seasonal<br>Maintenance<br>Worker WG-05        | 1        | \$3,774 | 6 |                  | \$22,644         |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>8</b> |         |   | <b>\$144,898</b> | <b>\$103,314</b> |

## Revenues

The Garnet Ghost Town Recreation Area is funded through fees obtained from recreation users at the site (“1232” funds), from a Special Recreation Permit for commercial use of public lands around Garnet Ghost Town and at Garnet Ghost Town, and limited funding from Garnet Preservation Association. In recent years, the Field Office has been allocated \$18,000 of appropriated funding (“1220” funds) for the entire Field Office recreation program. Some of this appropriated recreation program funding provides support by way of staffing at Garnet Ghost Town. In addition, appropriated cultural resources program funding provides for historic building stabilization and additional appropriated funding provides maintenance of facilities through the deferred and annual maintenance program.

### Annual Fee Collection: 2018-2022

| Fiscal Year           | RUPs | Fee Revenue        |
|-----------------------|------|--------------------|
| 2018                  | 3929 | \$26,714.96        |
| 2019                  | 4353 | \$30,208.66        |
| 2020                  | 4034 | \$28,867.17        |
| 2021                  | 4363 | \$31,009.99        |
| 2022                  | 4115 | \$26,081.44        |
| <b>Yearly Average</b> |      | <b>\$28,576.44</b> |

The current fee structure is \$3 per person 16 years and older. The table below reflects a change from the current fee structure to \$10 per person at visitation from 30,000 to 35,000. As a standard amenity site, Garnet Ghost Town must accept the America the Beautiful pass where pass holders may present their pass to receive free entry into Garnet Ghost Town for the pass holder and up to three other individuals (four total visitors). This is estimated at 25% of the visitors for revenue analysis and is understood as reducing the overall collections for Garnet Ghost Town. In addition, Garnet attracts families, schools and youth summer programs. Youth 15 years and younger are admitted free entry. The amount of youth admitted free is estimated at 33% of the visitors and is also understood as reducing the overall collections. Fee collection is done at a fee tube at the main parking lot. Because it is away from the Visitor’s

Center, fee compliance is difficult to enforce. As such it is estimated that 8% of people don't pay. Fee compliance is expected to improve with a new Visitor's Center near the main parking lot. Fee compliance would result in a cumulative increase in fee revenue per year of approximately \$7200 with the current fee structure or \$24,000 with the proposed fee structure.

**Fee Revenue with Fee Structure Differences and Visitation Ranges**

| <b>Structure</b>           | <b>30,000 visitors</b> | <b>35,000 visitors</b> |
|----------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| \$3 per person 16 & older  | \$30,000*              | \$35,000*              |
| \$10 per person 16 & older | \$100,000*             | \$116,600*             |

\*Fee Revenue considers 25% of visitors are under the America the Beautiful Pass which allows for free entry for up to 4 visitors, 33% of visitors are 15 years of age or younger which allows for free entry, and 8% decrease in revenue from lack of fee compliance.

**Objectives for Use of Fee Receipts**

The purpose of collecting fees at Garnet Ghost Town is to ensure that funding is available to preserve the historical value of Garnet, to provide recreational opportunities, to provide education and interpretive programs, and to protect other valuable resources in the surrounding area.

Revenues generated by this fee program will be used primarily for maintenance, visitor assistance, education, interpretation, security, historic preservation, and enhancing recreational experiences for the public. The intent of this program is to provide the public with an enjoyable recreation experience by:

1. Furthering the knowledge about Garnet through oral histories and research and providing the public with that information through publications, brochures, signage, and tours.
2. Increasing opportunities and education for youth through curriculum development, guided tours, and publications.
3. Providing facilities that are maintained according to Historic Preservation Standards.
4. Maintaining constructive and positive partnerships between the managing agency and individual recreational users and local partners.
5. Providing accurate, clear information concerning Garnet history and recreation opportunities around Garnet, resource concerns, and regulatory requirements

**Specific Uses of Fee Receipts for the Next Five Years**

The fees collected at Garnet Ghost Town for the next five years will be used to hire enough staff in order to improve and enhance educational opportunities for youth, provide for health and safety of visitors, maintain historic buildings, have law enforcement support when needed and improve facilities and safety for volunteers. This will primarily be done by hiring staff and volunteers. If additional money is collected over and above that cost, it will be used to maintain facilities, make equipment repairs, replace signs, and ensure resource protection as outlined under Current Operating Expenses. Some of the fees collected from the SRPs will be



used to assist in maintenance around Garnet Ghost Town. Fees will also be used to spray weeds, repair, and replace signs and ensure resource protection.

Specific staffing needs that would be supported with the proposed fee increases include seasonal Park Rangers, a Career Seasonal Park Ranger and a Maintenance Worker (see table below). The Park Rangers would focus on providing quality interpretation and education as well as visitor services necessary at Garnet Ghost Town. The Maintenance Worker would work at addressing the continual maintenance needs that currently are taking up the time of the Park Rangers. At least one of these positions would be a career (permanent) seasonal, who could return season after season, with the associated benefit of reducing annual training costs and ideally improving retention and experience.

**Specific staff needs and costs**

| <b>Position</b>                                    | <b>Number of Positions</b> | <b>WM Cost</b> | <b>Number of WMs</b> | <b>Labor Costs</b> |
|--|----------------------------|----------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| Career Seasonal Park Ranger (Interpretation) GS-07 | 1                          | \$6,175        | 6                    | \$37,050           |
| Seasonal Park Ranger (Interpretation) GS-05        | 2                          | \$3,635        | 6                    | \$43,620           |
| Seasonal Maintenance Worker WG-05                  | 1                          | \$3,774        | 6                    | \$22,644           |
| <b>Total</b>                                       | <b>4</b>                   |                |                      | <b>\$103,314</b>   |

The anticipated annual revenue from the fee increase is approximately \$100,000 which will cover the majority of the staffing needs. The additional funds for staffing will be through appropriated funds and partner contributions.

The field office receives approximately \$18,000 of appropriated funds through 1220 for the operating costs of the recreation program for the entire field office area. With the increasing recreation elsewhere in the field office, the appropriated funding needs to go towards other recreation areas, specifically the Blackfoot River Corridor. As such, the \$18,000 of appropriated funds will be spent on hiring staff for the Blackfoot River Corridor. The field office has recently asked its partner, Garnet Preservation Association (GPA), to financially assist with the operations at Garnet, specifically asking for \$5000 to go towards seasonal help or volunteers. Although it appears that GPA will be supportive of this ask, it is not guaranteed every year.

## Priorities for Future Expenditures

The main priority for future expenditures generated from fee revenue is to ensure adequate staffing in order to provide quality interpretive and educational services at Garnet Ghost Town and to provide for basic upkeep of the town.

## Analysis of Recreation Fee Rates

The BLM is authorized to use either the Cost Recovery Fee Calculation Method or the Fair Market Value Fee Calculation Method to determine appropriate fees at recreation sites. The Cost Recovery Method assumes that fee revenues should cover the recreation site’s operating costs. The Fair Market Value Fee Calculation Method compares fee rates to those charged by other area recreation sites that provide similar opportunities.

The Field Office has chosen to use the Fair Market Value Fee Calculation Method to ensure that reasonably affordable rates for the region while allowing fees to support labor, operations, and maintenance of these sites to the highest extent possible. The tables below summarize recreation fees within the region with amenities like those provided by the Garnet Ghost Town Recreation Area and Cabin Rentals.

### Regional Interpretive Sites

| Recreation Site                    | Fee Structure                                  | Amenities Provided  |
|------------------------------------|--|---|
| World Museum of Mining             | Adults \$12<br>Seniors (65+) \$10<br>Youth \$8 | Parking, public restroom, gift shop, self guided tour, guided tours cost extra (\$18 - \$25 per person) |
| Daly Mansion                       | Adults \$15<br>Seniors (60+) \$14<br>Youth \$8 | Parking, public restroom, gift shop, guided tour  |
| Copper King Mansion                | Adults \$20<br>Seniors \$17.50<br>Youth \$10   | Guided tour   |
| Nevada City                        | Adults \$10<br>Seniors \$8<br>Youth \$8        | Parking, public restroom, gift shop, map, unescorted tour, tour & children’s activities                 |
| Old Montana Prison and Auto Museum | Adults \$18<br>Youth \$10                      | Parking, public restroom, gift shop, guided tours   |

While the proposed fee of \$10 per person 16 years or older appears to be a large increase, the standard amenity fee for Garnet has been \$3 per person 16 and older since 2005 and as such has not kept up with the times as evidenced by the market research. Based on the research, it appears that most historic sites and mining related sites in the region charge anywhere from

\$10 to \$20 per person for a similar experience to Garnet. The proposed fee increase is comparable with these other sites.

### Regional Cabin Rentals

| Recreation Site             | Fee Structure | Amenities Provided  |
|-----------------------------|---------------|---|
| Nevada Creek Cabin (USFS)   | \$45/night    | Drinking water, vault toilet, wood stove, propane stove, dishes, cleaning supplies            |
| Lost Horse Cabin (USFS)     | \$60/night    | Wood stove, lanterns, propane cookstove, firewood, vault toilet, dishes, utensils             |
| Hogback Cabin (USFS)        | \$75/night    | Wood stove, propane lights, propane cookstove, firewood, vault latrine, dishes, utensils      |
| Douglas Creek Cabin (USFS)  | \$45/night    | Wood stove, lanterns, propane cookstove, vault latrine, dishes, utensils                      |
| Cummings Cabin (USFS)       | \$45/night    | Drinking water, wood stove, propane lights, propane cookstove, vault toilet, dishes, utensils |
| Indian Meadows Cabin (USFS) | \$65/night    | Drinking water, wood stove, propane lights, propane stove, vault toilet, dishes, utensils     |

Cabin rental fees at Garnet have been the same since the inception of the cabin rental program. Other cabin rentals in the region with similar amenities range in price from \$45 to \$75 per night. It was determined that increasing the Garnet cabin rental fees to \$50 per night was a fair amount as compared to the other cabins in the region. More probably could be charged, however, access to the cabins is very difficult. Renters have to ski or snowmobile 10 long miles or 3 steep, difficult miles.

## **Impacts from Charging and Not-Charging Recreation Fee Rates**

The primary purpose of the proposed fees is to maintain and preserve the investment that the public has made into Garnet Ghost Town and to provide the educational, interpretive and visitor services that are expected by the public at this site.

The proposed fees and fee increases would help to increase staffing for maintenance and visitor services, commensurate with significant recent increases in visitation and associated needs and pressures, as well as helping to offset the rising costs of operating these sites.

### **Impacts from Modifying Fees to Recreation Users**

Visiting Garnet Ghost Town remains an affordable option within the region for recreation users whether visiting the town in the summer or renting a cabin in the winter. The Field Office considered the cost to run and maintain this site as well as using the Fair Market Analysis to come up with a new proposed fee schedule. The Field Office has proposed fees that are commensurate with other historic sites and cabin rentals around the region. Further, the Field Office has not increased the fee since 2005. The increased revenue will allow the Field Office to hire adequate staff to help ensure educational and interpretive activities are conducted as well as the townsite is maintained.

These fees, like all fees, do have the potential to displace some recreation users during the fee season (typically May through October). The site remains open and free to the public, with reduced services, during the “off-season” (typically November through April).

Additionally, the Missoula Field Office and the surrounding National Forests do offer many areas, with less developed infrastructure and fewer services, for visitors to enjoy their public lands without paying fees. These areas do not require the same level of investment, facilities, maintenance, or services. These sites throughout the Field Office are still available to the public to use for free throughout the year.

This proposed fee increase minimizes the economic impacts to recreation users while still allowing for increased staffing and maintenance activities.

### **Impacts from Not Modifying Fees to Recreation Users**

Maintaining the current fee structure (e.g., no change in fees) at the Garnet Ghost Town would likely result in interruptions to visitor services, decreased user satisfaction and potentially vandalism (removal of artifacts, damage to historic buildings) to the site by having insufficient staffing for continued increase in visitor use. Garnet Ghost Town has been operating on a minimal budget especially in recent years. Instead of being able to provide quality educational and interpretive services and public interaction, the limited staff has to spend most of their time performing basic functions such as toilet cleaning and townsite maintenance. Given

current/recent staffing levels, there is not sufficient time to plan for or implement projects such as updating the Garnet Management Plan, improving tour scripts, learning new history, updating visitor center interpretive displays, creating interpretive trail brochures and signage, repairing trail damage, and repairing, replacing or adding directional signs. In addition, visitation has doubled in the past 10 years. This visitation is putting higher demands on an already stretched staff. As a result, Garnet is beginning to experience significant disruptions in visitor services due to lack of maintenance, lack of staffing, or lack of funding, while also experiencing higher demands due to dramatically increased visitation. The list below provides examples of recent impacts to recreation users:

- Lead BLM Park Ranger took a new job in 2023. Hiring was one of that position's duties and as a result no new seasonals and volunteers were hired this year. Staffing was composed of one returning seasonal, one returning volunteer (who was only there half the season) and 2 Montana Conservation Corps (MCC) interns. The returning seasonal was the only BLM presence at Garnet all season long and had to lead the staff. The MCC interns did not get adequate support.
- Garnet Ghost Town water system is leaking but hasn't been fixed due to lack of maintenance staff.
- A bridge on one of the interpretive trails has been in disrepair for at least 3 years and there are no plans or funding to repair it.
- A tree fell and damaged a metal fence that encloses a mine safety hazard that is part of an interpretive trail (the Sierra Loop) and there isn't adequate funding or staffing to repair it.
- Reduced capability to give tours in the 2023 season due to a lack of staff.
- In 2023 the Visitor Center regularly had to be closed while staff was conducting routine maintenance duties.
- Directional signs are inadequate causing visitors to get lost while driving to Garnet Ghost Town from I-90.
- The Field Office Archaeologist reported that artifacts are being disturbed in a historic trash dump. There isn't adequate staff to periodically patrol around Garnet Ghost Town to ensure visitor compliance with rules.
- Staff turnover has increased over the past few years, ability to support volunteers has become more challenging, and management has more often had to deal reactively with daily emergencies such as cleanliness, maintenance/infrastructure issues, and other challenges based on higher visitation. Like many others in the area, the Missoula Field Office Recreation Program has struggled with inadequate staffing levels and inability to hire short-term (seasonal) employees/ interns, which has limited the amount of routine and proactive maintenance work and projects. Additionally, low staff numbers result in a lack of a consistent BLM presence.

Not modifying the existing fee structure would result in continued lack of maintenance and visitor services provided. Additionally, the Field Office would likely need to reduce the visitor services such as periodically closing the Visitor Center and not providing school tours at Garnet Ghost Town as current operation costs continue to increase over time. Deteriorating amenities due to lack of maintenance and reductions in visitor services would significantly reduce the publics' experiences. Specifically, tours would not be given to groups including local school groups and other local youth programs, new programming to provide updated interpretation and education opportunities would not be done, and information about other local tourist attractions would not be provided. There may also be an increase in conflicts between user groups and damage to this historic site due to limited services and limited presence.

## **Public Outreach**

In accordance with the FLREA, the Field Office will provide the public with an opportunity to review and comment on the proposed fee changes and the intended uses of the revenue from these fees. The fee proposal was presented to Garnet Preservation Association at their monthly board meeting on November 28, 2023. They were supportive of the fee increases. The fee proposal and draft Business Plan will be presented to the BLM Western Montana Resource Advisory Council for its formal review on January 11, 2024. In addition, listed below is outreach that will occur to notify the public of its opportunity and provide comments on this Business Plan:

- Public notices of proposed fee changes with information on how the public can provide comments.
- Online press releases informing the public of the proposed fee changes and requesting public comment.