



PARK

Construction of Silver Park additions nearly complete; vandalism already a threat



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Construction crews have almost finished the major additions to Silver Park on the site of an old inner-city lumber mill.

And they hope the public will like the place enough to discourage a vandalism trend that has defaced many of the structures there over the past several years.

"That park does tend to get hit harder than others," Missoula Parks and Recreation Director Donna

Gaukler said Wednesday. "Before it became a park, that land was not regularly visited. We didn't get a lot of complaints, because citizens didn't go there. It's got railroad tracks on one side, and no citizens looking in from the other side, so it remained isolated from view. What we really need is a whole bunch of people to use the park – a lot."

The 14-acre space west of the Ogren-Allegiance Park along the Clark Fork River has been under renovation for the past four years. The first three shelters built along the Riverfront Trail in 2008 were damaged the following summer. Parks workers surrounded them with chain-link fencing until the area was more developed.

Vandals have also tried to rip up the irrigation wiring system, steal signs, snap off sprinkler heads and break lights. The completion of Wyoming Street as a public road should allow police to better patrol the area, Gaukler said.

Last year, students from the Missoula College heavy equipment program went to work clearing industrial debris and reshaping the ground for park use. The project turned up a lot more underground hazards than expected, according to Chris Behan of the Missoula Redevelopment Agency.

"We're dealing with a site that comes up with surprises all the time," Behan said. "There've been big concrete slabs and walls you didn't know were there. Then there was the huge concrete cylinder they pulled up. All that takes time."

To speed things up, MRA opted to lay grass sod instead of seeding the ground after learning the cost was comparable – especially considering the several years required for natural seeding to become thick enough cover for park use. A large pavilion, picnic shelter and restroom are nearly complete, and a surfaced trail system is in place.

The trail uses an innovative mix of crushed granite and seed husks. Behan said so much sawdust remains mixed in the ground from the old lumber mills, it makes the surface prone to

shifting and buckling as the seasons change. That would crack traditional sidewalk concrete, and would require constant repairs in asphalt surfaces.

The granite-seed husk surface binds together better than gravel, and should only need to be churned up and re-flattened to repair cracks or ground heaves.

The whole project, including a parking lot, structures, boat ramp and small bridge over an irrigation ditch by the California Street pedestrian bridge, cost \$2.75 million.

Behan said he had hoped to have a grand opening for Silver Park later this month, but the weather and construction have not cooperated. The park may celebrate its completion next spring.