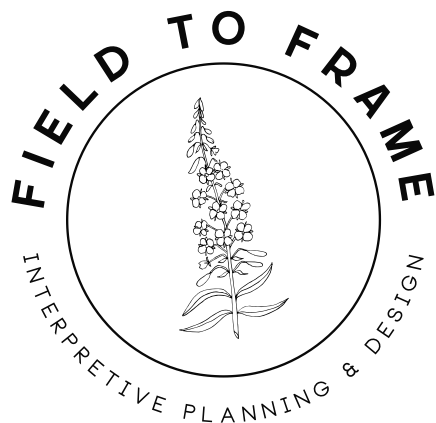




LaLonde Ranch Historic Park Interpretive Plan

OCTOBER 10, 2025





Field to Frame guides organizations and agencies through interpretive planning, media design, and project implementation. FTF helps you tell your story, meet your goals, and grow your impact.

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Section One: Management and Interpretive Guidance

WHAT TO EXPECT IN THIS INTERPRETIVE PLAN

This interpretive plan serves as a flexible guide for creativity in design and implementation, while remaining open to new opportunities and influences. It supports pre-visit, arrival, and on-site experiences at LaLonde Ranch Historic Park with recommended strategies and concepts for planning and design.

The plan includes:

- Goals aligned with Missoula County's management needs and interpretive vision.
- Desired visitor outcomes.
- Key site parameters and target audiences.
- Themes and stories to be shared.
- Concepts for future interpretive strategies.

This plan does not provide finalized interpretive language or formal commitments. Instead, it offers example designs, phased implementation options, and cost estimates. Missoula County can collaborate with design experts to enhance the visitor experience while retaining flexibility and creativity.

OVERVIEW OF PROJECT

Site Overview

The LaLonde Ranch in Missoula, Montana, is a historic site visible from Interstate 90, with evidence of the valley's early agricultural roots. It was established in the late 19th century by French-Canadian settler Adam LaLonde. In 1878, Adam acquired land from the Northern Pacific Railway, building a log cabin before completing the brick house. In 1886, Adam married Lucy Wells Bisson, and they raised eight children while expanding the ranch to 360 acres, specializing in cattle, hogs, and orchards. Adam was active in politics, supporting Populist principles and serving as a trustee for DeSmet School. After Adam's death in 1918, the ranch remained in family hands until 1944. Missoula County purchased it in 1991, designating it as the LaLonde Ranch Historic Park, preserving its legacy as a symbol of early settlement and agriculture.

The LaLonde Ranch site spans 6.8 acres, featuring a prominent nineteenth-century brick Colonial Revival house and three historic outbuildings: a large wood barn, a smaller barn, and a c. 1870 log cabin built by Adam LaLonde as temporary housing. Historic fruit trees, shrubs, and annual plantings surround the buildings, reflecting the original landscaping patterns. A concrete irrigation ditch runs near the back of the house.

The site features open fields and pastures, gently sloping from a high point in the northwest to a lower area in the southeast. While it doesn't look exactly as it once did, the property offers plenty of opportunities to share stories about how its layout shaped ranching life. With historic buildings and views of the valley, there are opportunities for visitors to learn about early settlement and both early and modern farming and ranching in the Missoula Valley. The historic buildings and landscape still reflect the area's rich agricultural past, and the activities of Farm Connect speak to its future.

Currently, access is through the southwest entrance off West Harrier Drive or via I-90 and the Airway Boulevard interchange.

Project Overview

Missoula County owns and manages LaLonde Ranch Historic Park and contracted Field to Frame to create this interpretive plan. Efforts to establish the ranch as a public heritage site began in 2018 with stakeholder meetings that formed the LaLonde Ranch Working Group. This group focused on advancing Missoula County's vision for the site and developed a Strategic Framework in 2019, which included a mission statement, guiding principles, and a vision.

In 2020, county commissioners approved the framework, supporting a National Register of Historic Places nomination and formally establishing LaLonde Ranch as a historic public site.

In 2021, the Strategic Working Group reconvened to revisit previous efforts, review the framework, and discuss a master plan. Key topics included preparing the site for a tenant, "prioritizing preservation before operational costs, and strategies for nominating the property to the National Register. Immediate priorities included creating a master plan by December 2021, streamlining processes using lessons from other county sites, and ensuring the main house was tenant-ready. This required that improvements were made in harmony with the historic character and integrity of the property. The group also identified additional needs such as tribal engagement, forming a 501(c)(3) friends group, cataloging historical research, and a decision to work towards a determination of eligibility of the property for National Register listing.

The group emphasized sustainable strategies to increase public awareness and engagement. Key steps included forming a committed, diverse support group, hosting events to highlight the site's significance, and developing self-guided tours. Educational opportunities were also prioritized, such as creating curriculum-based modules for students and exploring partnerships to broaden the site's reach. Sharing success stories was identified as a way to keep the public informed and connected.

Fundraising strategies focused on increasing public awareness and partnerships. The group proposed exploring diverse funding options, including public and private sources, 501(c)(3) friends groups, corporate partnerships, and grants like the Montana Museum Grants Act. They also considered a large, multi-site grant for Fort Missoula and LaLonde Ranch to address infrastructure and accessibility, requiring a condensed master plan timeline of 12 months to align with funding opportunities.

Several key resources informed this plan, including a 1996 landscape plan by Kent Watson, the LaLonde Ranch Planning & Condition Assessment Report by A&E Architects (2018), and the LaLonde Ranch Historic Park-Historic Overview by Allan Matthews and Steve Adler. The 1993 LaLonde Cultural Resource Inventory and 2009 Historical Archaeological Investigations: LaLonde Ranch Historic Park Data Recovery as prepared for Adler Architects by Western Cultural Inc. (2017) were also consulted.

This interpretive plan outlines a phased approach to site development with cost estimates to support passive visitation. Building on the vision and restoration efforts for LaLonde Ranch, the plan provides a comprehensive roadmap for enhancing both short-term and long-term visitor experiences.

This interpretive plan integrates these recommendations with Farm Connect's current use and future visitor needs. While Farm Connect is described as a current tenant of LaLonde Historic Ranch Park, the document assumes that this may not always be the case. The interpretive plan allows for other partnerships to be established as desired, though it provides recommendations based on the current situation.

KEY SITE PARAMETERS

All key parameters and their impacts are included in [Appendix A](#). The following parameters are highlighted because they significantly impact recommendations in the information network.

Visitor Access

The site provides access to the grounds but no access to buildings for general visitors. Currently, there is no accessible access or parking available. Trails added to the property can approach buildings. However, any trail that approaches the house (which will be of high interest to visitors) risks disturbing any building lessee. Balancing visitor access and use of the property by Farm Connect will be a challenge.

Farm Connect Use of Space

Farm Connect uses the historic house and large barn and seeks access to much of the flat, east field for farm equipment demonstrations. While this use may limit visitor access to certain areas, the organization's presence adds value through property monitoring, crop planting and maintenance, orchard improvements, increased visitation, and relevant programming. While Farm Connect is the current tenant, this plan assumes that this agreement could change and makes no assumption that they will be a permanent facility lessee.

No Public Restroom on the Property

There is currently no public restroom and no accessible restroom available on the property. Signage on the main house entry and the website should indicate no restroom availability.

A portable toilet can provide an option but may present management challenges and might not be heavily utilized by visitors. A vault toilet is a more permanent solution. If public use of the property increases significantly, the use of the site is changed, or the site is designated for larger events, the decision to invest in a restroom with running water can be considered. Without county staff present on the site, a management plan to ensure the restroom meets visitor expectations is required.

Is recommended to engage in an open discussion with Deano's regarding expected visitor increase and possible increased use of restrooms (and parking lot). Though not recommended or encouraged, it is a possible outcome of increased visitor use.

Highway Proximity

LaLonde Ranch Historic Park is a prominent landmark visible from I-90, familiar to many residents and travelers. Its location makes it an ideal spot to attract visitors for gas stops and a quick walk. Nearby small businesses and housing developments add to its growing interest and use. While promotion is needed to raise awareness, the site is well-suited for recreation, preservation and interpretive experiences.

TARGET AUDIENCE AND MARKET ANALYSIS

To develop recommendations for LaLonde Ranch Historic Park, the Interpretive Planning Team considered the following:

- Who are the visitors who currently access LaLonde Ranch or the programs hosted by Farm Connect?
- What user groups are likely to visit LaLonde Ranch Historic Park with the addition of interpretive opportunities and wayfinding?

For the Interpretive Plan, visitors are grouped by age, interests, abilities, and companions, recognizing that individuals may fit multiple groups. Audience profiles in [Appendix B](#) guide us in addressing target groups' preferences without excluding anyone's needs or interests.

The following audiences have been identified for interpretation at LaLonde Ranch to develop the base of support:

- Adult visitors seeking historical learning or heritage tourism experiences.
- Farmers or Ranchers seeking advice or support from Farm Connect that include active farm, ranch and equipment demonstrations.
- Neighbors and out-of-area visitors seeking areas for walking with interest in educational interpretation overall.
- School groups visiting the site for field trips.

ADULT VISITORS SEEKING CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL LEARNING EXPERIENCES

The audience ranges from novices to near experts, interested in interpretive trails, buildings, heritage, tourism, programs, and self-guided tours. They can be grouped into:

- Residents: Local visitors from Missoula or nearby valleys, familiar with the region but new to the site or returning with guests.
- Non-Residents: Travelers, vacationers, or those visiting family with little regional knowledge but relevant experiences from their own communities.

FARMERS OR RANCHERS SEEKING ADVICE OR SUPPORT FROM FARM CONNECT

Farm Connect provides farmers and ranchers with education, business assistance, training, and additional resources to support the region's agriculture and local food production. Farm Connect will bring this audience to the site, and any interpretation that draws their interest can connect them to the history and encourage an extended audience to value historic building preservation.

NEIGHBORS AND OUT-OF-AREA VISITORS SEEKING AREAS FOR WALKING

This group includes visitors interested in educational interpretation, such as travelers on the interstate or local residents. Travelers may be drawn in by promotions highlighting the short trail conveniently located near the gas station.

SCHOOL GROUPS AND FIELD TRIPS

These range in age and grade, though the key audience is primarily elementary schools, including those from the Missoula valley. Review details related to this audience to ensure the site meets their needs in [Appendix B, Audience Analysis](#).

THE MISSION OF MISSOULA COUNTY

Provide quality public service to protect and enhance the well-being of the people, communities and environment of Missoula County.

Core Values:

- Integrity: We are accountable, ethical and transparent.
- Innovation: We choose to develop sustainable solutions that pursue opportunity and foster creativity.
- Teamwork: We are a diverse, interdependent organization that supports collaboration to work effectively.
- Community: We honor diversity and respect people, heritage, culture and natural resources.

Goal Statements:

Healthy, Safe, and Vibrant Communities: Work to ensure public health and protect public safety through outreach, education, service, and prevention. Promote vibrancy through investment in arts, culture, recreation, preservation and the diverse heritage of our communities.

Public Engagement: Proactively provide accurate information, encourage employee accessibility, invite public participation and empower community decision-making.

Quality Workforce: Attract and retain skilled and knowledgeable employees who provide courteous and efficient service.

Resource Stewardship: Responsibly manage financial and physical assets. Engage in partnerships that foster sustainable natural resources.

Economic Development: Engage with partners to retain and attract good paying jobs and encourage a diverse economy in Missoula County.

LaLonde Ranch Mission Statement

LaLonde Ranch preserves Missoula County's history where heritage, culture and sense of place are celebrated for the purpose of education and reflection on our connection to the past. Its location serves as a gateway to Missoula Valley history and helps tell the story of the area — including its thousands of years as part of the homeland of the Salish and Kalispel people, and its remarkable place in the valley's rich agricultural history over the past century.

Guiding Principles

- We believe that Missoula County has stewardship responsibilities for its publicly owned assets and their historic and cultural values.
- We believe LaLonde Ranch is an important public asset and that what's there should be preserved, protected, and interpreted for the benefit of the common good.

- We believe the Ranch offers unique opportunities for hands-on public experiences, conversation, and reflection related to local history, culture, and agriculture.
- We recognize that the LaLonde Ranch has been impacted by adjacent development and we will work to mitigate that impact and preserve the integrity of the site.
- We believe that whatever happens at and on the site should not degrade its heritage and cultural values.
- We believe that local heritage and culture are important parts of citizen education and in strengthening sense of community.
- We believe that partnering and collaborative approaches will be critical to our success with LaLonde Ranch and we are open to exploring a variety of governance structures in the management of the site.
- We accept that this is a long-term commitment.

Vision

LaLonde Ranch is a safe, accessible public place with basic infrastructure for self-guided experiences through signage and educational materials. A strategic plan, sustainable funding, and a functional organizational structure guide site development and management. The public enjoys compatible uses at the site as well as historic and cultural hands-on educational experiences.

LALONDE RANCH MANAGEMENT AND INTERPRETIVE GOALS

Interpretation can support the LaLonde Ranch mission and vision by increasing a visitor's awareness and understanding of concepts important to the organization.

The following goals and objectives complement and support the mission and vision for LaLonde Ranch through interpretation.

Increase awareness of interpretive opportunities at LaLonde Ranch to explore agricultural growth, Missoula's homesteading history, and the Indigenous connection to the land since time immemorial.

Outcomes

- Increased overall attendance to the site.
- The average visitor's stay at LaLonde Ranch is maintained at 1 hour.
- After visiting the ranch, visitors will know that the landscape was part of the homeland of the Séliš and Q̓lispé since time immemorial.
- Visitors will be able to describe events in early settlement of the Missoula Valley.
- After visiting the ranch, visitors will be able to describe how agriculture and ranching supported the early community of Missoula.
- Visitors will be able to describe how agriculture and farming continue to support our community today.
- Visitors to the park can share information about the LaLonde family and the ranch property.
- Visitors can identify how LaLonde fits in with the modern landscape.
- Visitors will learn about Missoula's early construction history, including its brickworks and traditional log building techniques.

Increase awareness of and support for the continued historic preservation of LaLonde Ranch as a site of cultural and historical significance in the Missoula Valley.

Outcomes

- LaLonde Ranch will be listed in the National Register of Historic Places by leveraging a supportive network.
- Through partnerships and grant opportunities, financial support for preservation, site improvement, and programs will increase.
- Local community members will report an increase in appreciation and approval of Missoula County's on-site services related to the preservation of historic buildings, trail systems providing access to open spaces, and access to cultural history information.
- LaLonde Ranch will be used as an example of integrating historic preservation and visitor experiences.
- Visitors will be able to identify the benefits of preserving historical sites.
- Visitors can identify impacts of development on historic sites.
- Visitors will be able to describe the local government's role in preserving historic facilities.
- Visitors will become interested in other historical sites in the region.

Increase opportunities for visitors to engage in passive enjoyment of open space.

Outcomes

- An increase in the awareness of public access to the site.
- An increase in engagement of the site by local residents for exercise and exploration.
- An increase in visitors who walk the full trail and participate in learning opportunities.
- An increase in visitors who report interest in returning or sharing the site with others.

Section 2: Messages

A note on the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives:

It is inappropriate to share another culture's story. It is recommended that the Séliš-Qłispé Cultural Committee be consulted to determine their interest in an interpretive design project prior to initiation.

THEMES AND STORYLINES

A theme is the central message of a place's stories. At LaLonde Ranch, themes guide interpretation by aligning with the site's goals, mission, target audience, programming, and resources. We ensure continuity and relevance by incorporating themes into every interpretive piece and program.

The thematic hierarchy, including one central theme, subthemes, and storylines, will regulate which stories to tell at different points during a visitor's experience at the site.

Stories and resources outside the theme aren't less important. However, keeping interpretation within the themes helps Missoula County focus on its goals and core mission.

Central Theme: This is the main idea visitors will take home after experiencing interpretation at LaLonde.

Subthemes: Ideas that support the central theme. We expect visitors to leave remembering at least one of our subthemes.

Storylines: Stories support the subthemes and are shared through the media options presented in text and images (signs, exhibits, etc.). **Storylines will be researched and developed into messages and text during the design/build phase of the project and only appear as suggested topics for this plan.**

Storylines are based on interpretive opportunities uncovered in our site analysis. **The stories included are not exhaustive but provide examples to help articulate how to use the thematic hierarchy.**

Central Theme: Change comes with time, as seen in the homesteads and ranches that altered Indigenous lifestyles and the industrial growth around LaLonde that continues to affect farming and agriculture.

Review the interpretive project with the Séliš-Qłispé Culture Committee. If interested, the Committee will determine preferred topics and plan for inclusion. Stories can later be integrated into the theme structure based on information provided by the Séliš-Qłispé Culture Committee.

Subtheme 1: The story of settlement in the Missoula Valley is deeply tied to the policies that encouraged westward expansion, shaping the valley into what it is today.

SAMPLE stories:

- This region has been part of the homeland of the Séliš-Q̓lispé people since time immemorial.
- Major legislative acts and westward expansion efforts resulted in the increased arrival of Euro-Americans in the 1860s and 1870s.
- Adam LaLonde arrived in Missoula at the age of 30 in 1869.
- Homesteads, ranches, and farms like LaLonde began to appear on Missoula Valley's landscape in the mid to late 1800s.
- The Northern Pacific Railroad was granted large portions of land on either side of the track to sell or develop to help fund the railroad and bring settlers to the region.
- The LaLonde Ranch was likely purchased through the Railroad land grant.
- Like many men at the time, he was searching for gold but also planned for other opportunities.
- LaLonde Ranch stands today as one of the oldest ranch properties in the Missoula Valley.
- Future restoration work related to the introduction of native plants with tribal partners if completed.

Subtheme 2: From homestead to ranch, the LaLonde family exemplified adaptation in agriculture, offering insights into how farming practices can evolve to meet future challenges.

SAMPLE stories:

- Adam LaLonde's arrival in the Missoula Valley in early 1900s
- A. LaLonde as French-Canadian immigrant, became US citizen in 1881
- A. LaLonde filed a placer mine claim, began farming and raising cattle and filed water rights.
- 1878 purchase of ranch from Northern Pacific Railway (assumed).
- Early homesteading practices.
- History of the buildings (cabin, blacksmith shop, house) and relevant architectural information
- Animals, crops, fruit trees present on initial homestead and ranch (160 acres)
- Early ranch and farming tools in connection to specific ranch stories
- LaLonde Family (who were they)
- Early life on the homestead and ranch (education, medicine, what we know)
- Life for women and kids from the LaLonde family during the homestead and ranch era.
- LaLonde's advocacy for Populist principals with regards to agriculture.
- The transition of the ranch from one family to the next (sold in 1940s)
- Change in ranching operations based on economy, opportunities and regional demands (introduction of different animals, crops over time) and growth to 1200 acres
- Relevant archaeological research to support stories (i.e. square forged nails in cabin)

Subtheme 3: Urban expansion around LaLonde Ranch mirrors a broader pattern of development that has shaped the valley's agricultural and cultural heritage.

SAMPLE stories:

- Railroad boom to the city (including delivery of cattle, supporting grain sale for the Goodan family). In 1883 the railroad was less than two miles to the south of where the LaLonde house would eventually be built (possibly close to brickwork fabrication location).
- Impact of the interstate.
- LaLonde Ranch is one of the last remaining historic ranches in the Missoula Valley, visible from Interstate 90.
- Impacts of urbanization of this part of the valley on agriculture, including industrial growth around LaLonde.
- How the growing community can continue to support agriculture.
- Purchase of the ranch by Missoula County and efforts to preserve its cultural history and agricultural value.

Subtheme 4: LaLonde Ranch serves as a lens to examine the future of agriculture, including regenerative practices, local food systems, and the role of technology in shaping sustainable farming.

SAMPLE stories:

- Draw comparisons between the past and future of farming, emphasizing continuity and innovation.
- Compare the use of local materials in building construction (brick, stone, log, sawn wood)
- Explore how the LaLonde family's early farming methods align with modern regenerative agriculture principles, such as crop rotation and livestock integration. Highlight how these historical practices are being reintroduced today to restore soil health and biodiversity.
- Describe how LaLonde Ranch could contribute to local food systems, such as providing fresh produce to nearby communities
- Link the ranch's history as a self-sustaining operation to modern efforts to build resilient, local food networks.
- Relate how innovations in the past (e.g., the mechanization of farming) shaped agriculture and how modern tools continue that legacy.
- Detail how LaLonde Ranch could host workshops, demonstrations, and educational programs about sustainable farming, engaging both local residents and visitors.
- Showcase how the ranch can bridge historical farming knowledge with contemporary education for a broader impact.
- Connect the ranch's past livestock practices to new approaches that reduce environmental impact while maintaining productivity.
- Highlight how LaLonde Ranch could evolve into an agri-tourism destination, offering experiences like farm-to-table events, seasonal festivals, and interactive farming demonstrations.

Section 3: Visitor Experience and Media Plan

INTERPRETIVE NETWORK AND DESIRED VISITOR EXPERIENCE

An interpretive network includes the messages, signage, wayfinding, and interpretation guiding a visitor's experience from pre-trip planning to exit. It encompasses marketing, arrival, interpretive activities, and departure, all aligned with outlined goals.

The network is based on current visitor services and expanded with design suggestions, including:

- Media Recommendations: Strategies to enhance the visitor experience and meet interpretive goals.
- Possible Storylines: Stories from the thematic hierarchy are tailored to each part of the visitor's experience along the trail, incorporating their view, historic buildings, and other important site characteristics.

Images throughout the document support recommendations and assist designers in implementation.

PRE-TRIP VISITOR EXPERIENCE: WEBSITE

This is the experience provided to visitors before they arrive. Information here helps visitors discover the site, plan their trips, and know what to expect.

Objectives

- Visitors will arrive at the ranch prepared for their visit.

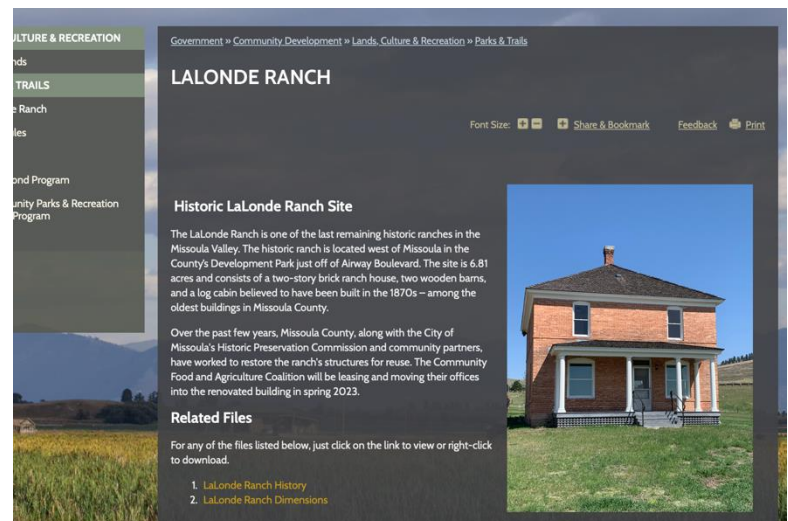
Planning the trip to LaLonde Ranch Historic Park is essential to the visitor experience. This helps a visitor know what and what not to expect. Consider adapting the current landing page to a visitor information page with details that address your audience's key expectations and needs.

The following information may be helpful for visitor planning.

- Open hours
- Specific accessibility accommodations.
- Information about use of site by Farm Connect.
- Map with trails and related accessibility information (some trails will be steep).
- Recommendations for families with children to enhance their visit.
- Information on facilities available (restrooms) and facilities not available (no access to historic buildings).
- Information on who to contact with questions.

The current landing page is only accessible through a Google search for “LaLonde Ranch.” Consider updating the full park name on a county park website and adding the park icon. Linking the park to other sites may improve its visitation as well:

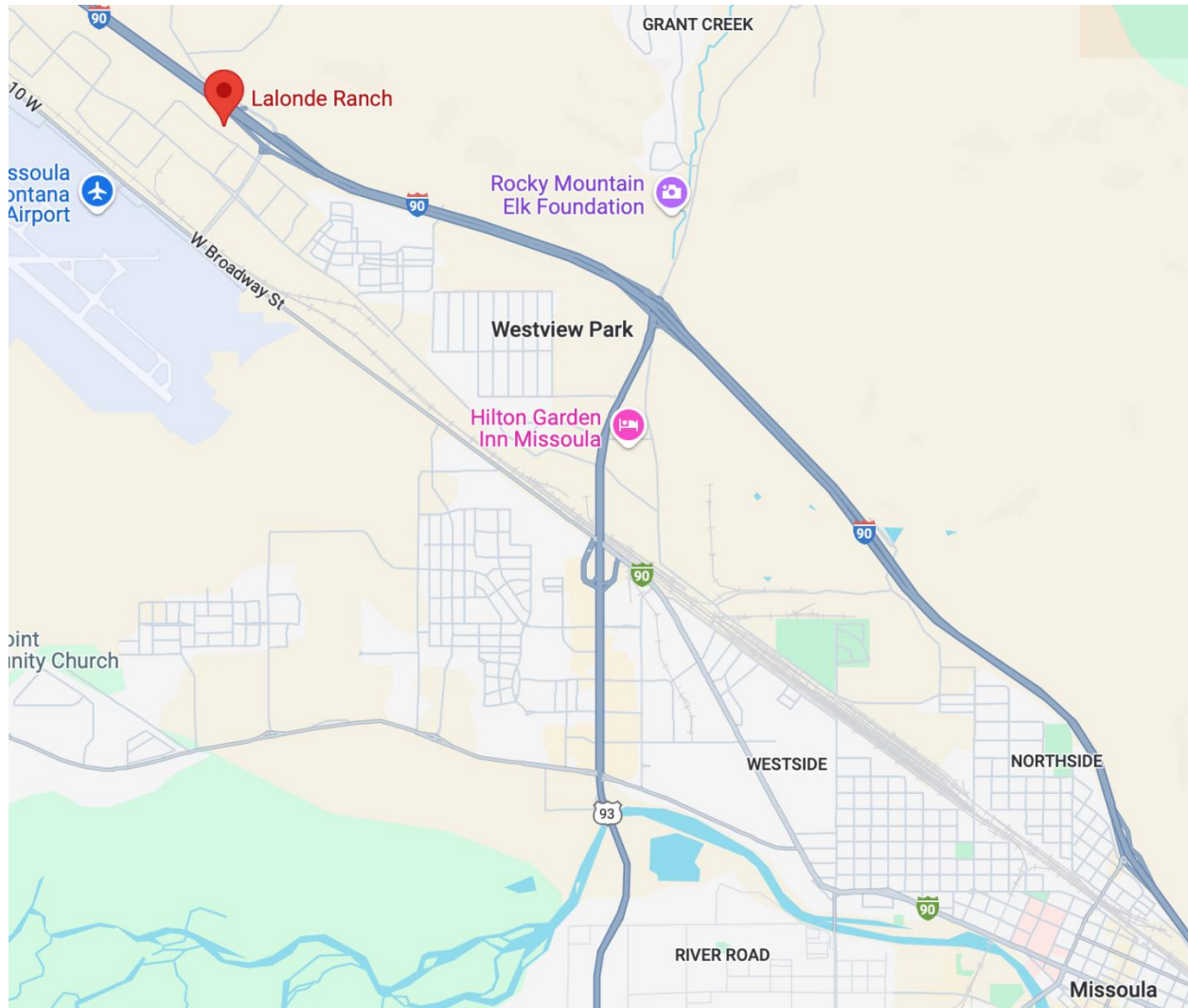
- Historical Museum at Fort Missoula
- All Trails
- Destination Missoula
- Preserve Montana’s mobile app, Explore Montana
- Montana Historical Society
- Historic Montana mobile app



VISITOR ARRIVAL EXPERIENCE: SIGNAGE, WAYFINDING

Overview

LaLonde Ranch Historic Park is located off the Airway Blvd Exit 99, just west of Downtown Missoula. The site is near a gas station, close to hotels, and within walking distance of a housing development and several businesses. The ranch house is prominently visible from both east and westbound lanes of I-90.



The arrival experience aims to guide visitors from major travel routes to the parking area and help them transition from their cars to the trail entrance. This requires travelers who arrive to know where to park and where to go when they exit their vehicles.

Objectives

- Visitors will find the LaLonde Ranch Historic Park and will be able to identify the trail entrance.
- Visitors will know where the ideal visitor experience begins and how to navigate the planned interpretive experience.
- Visitors will know which entrances are public and which entrances are for Farm Connect.

Design Recommendation

The site currently lacks directional signs. Adding historic marker signs near the interstate and sharing location details on the website can improve wayfinding. CLEAR ENTRY POINTS AND LIGHT historically aligned landscaping can guide walk-in visitors. Entry kiosks can serve as attractants, offering information on hours, regulations, the site layout, and preservation efforts.

PLANNED INTERPRETIVE EXPERIENCE: INTERPRETIVE SIGNAGE & WAYFINDING

Overview

The LaLonde Ranch Historic Park invites visitors to explore over six acres of open space, historic buildings, and former ranchland.

New trails and interpretive features will provide a flexible, self-guided tour experience, with options tailored to visitors' time, interests, and abilities. While visitors will have access to most of the grounds, immediate entry into the historic buildings will not be available.

Initially, trails will focus on the area surrounding the historic buildings, with plans to gradually expand access to the hillside on the western section of the property. The eastern section, characterized by flat, open land, may include a small parking lot while keeping most of the area undeveloped. This open space can serve multiple purposes, such as hosting Farm Connect machinery demonstrations or accommodating large events. It also offers long-term flexibility for potential development, should future plans require it.

A preliminary map is included for reference and will be replaced with a finalized version once the interpretive planning committee finalizes trail decisions.

BROAD DESIGN TREATMENTS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The LaLonde Ranch Historic Park Interpretive Plan recommends prioritizing key elements to connect with visitors while meeting interpretive goals.

The following media and design strategies are recommended in the interpretive plan:

- Park identification sign on site.
- Small trail kiosk at each trailhead.
- Interpretive panels that visually represent the character and history of the ranch.
- Smaller panels on relevant historic buildings.
- Development of extended materials for visitors needing more information on detailed topics using QR codes.
- Original artwork throughout the garden's interpretive signage.
- Overall improvements in keeping with the era.



Park Signage

Identification signage that aligns with county park design standards will identify LaLonde Ranch Historic Park as a public open space accessible to visitors.

Information Kiosk

A kiosk with information about open hours, park rules, and a trail map is recommended at each trailhead. Interpretation of Missoula County's role in historic site preservation can be included here. Connections to other historic sites, if feasible, can also be included here. A small, vertical kiosk will be easily seen and not obtrusive to the site.



Wayfinding

While wayfinding along the trail may not be essential due to the open, visible layout, it can offer benefits:

- Trail length and grade details
- Highlights to encourage exploration
- Multiuse trail indicators

To evaluate the need for and optimize wayfinding:

- Experience the trails and consider what questions need to be answered at trail intersections.
- Have staff or volunteers observe visitor behavior and gather feedback to assess needs.
- Start with temporary signage, such as laminated signs or corrugated plastic on posts secured with zip ties, to test effectiveness.
- Once visitor patterns are clear, design and install permanent wayfinding signs based on this data.



Outdoor Interpretive Panels

Inside the property, up to six (6) panels are recommended to feature stories that focus on topics related to the four sub-themes identified. Traditional 36" w x 24" h, 1/8" thick, full color, exterior, high-pressure laminate interpretive panels will be mounted to bases at a 45-degree angle.

If the budget permits, interpretive panel bases reflecting the LaLonde Historic Ranch's history can enhance the visitor experience. These are ideal for a limited number of signs, phased into the project. Included images offer design ideas for main panels or wayfinding bases.



Frames will be set into the ground based on ADA recommendations provided by the sign fabrication company.

An interpretive panel should engage visitors in the view just beyond it. It should not stand as a book on a stick. Instead, it should interpret something within the visitor's field of view beyond the panel, bringing the visitor into the landscape and making the place more tangible.

Once listed on the National Register, a State of Montana National Register sign can be installed which is a narrative summary of the property's significance.

Smaller, full-color exterior high-pressure laminate signs, approximately 12 inches wide by 18 inches high, are recommended for use on historic buildings where appropriate. To save costs, these signs can be ordered with predrilled holes and mounted directly to the buildings.



QR Codes

QR codes can provide additional information about the ranch, connections to other stories in the region, or more in depth information about the site without overwhelming general visitors. Consider these recommendations:

- Plan for a clean, easy to read in the field landing site for each QR code.
- QR codes could lead to audio content or short image-based exhibit extensions.
- Consider working with partners to create and maintain QR code landing sites and information (ArcGIS Story Maps or Montana History Portal).
- Consider using QR code stickers that can be removed if information changes or maintaining the landing site is not a long-term option.
- If QR code stickers are used as an accessibility consideration, offering audio content, ensure that the sticker or code has a raised sensory edge.
- Monitor QR codes regularly to ensure they are accurate and have not been tampered with.

Original Artwork

Using original artwork in addition to historical photographs adds depth and interest to interpretation. Consider including a custom art piece that illustrates the valley perspective before development. An artist can also recreate relevant artifacts that will be used in interpretation.



Driveway Entrance

Farm Connect staff and constituents currently use the driveway to access the property. This plan includes options for moving the public entry. Depending on how Missoula County proceeds with the site development, there are options for addressing this entrance to discourage pedestrians from using it.

No on-site parking: If Missoula County chooses street parking only, the driveway can be designated for Farm Connect activities. Replacing the chain-link gate with a more formal one is recommended to enhance the appearance of the entrance.

Onsite Parking Lot: If Missoula County adds a parking lot, the Farm Connect sign should be relocated near the driveway, with additional signage directing visitors to the lot and reserving driveway access for staff. Farm Connect (or other tenant) can coordinate with clients needing barn access for heavy equipment on a case-by-case basis.

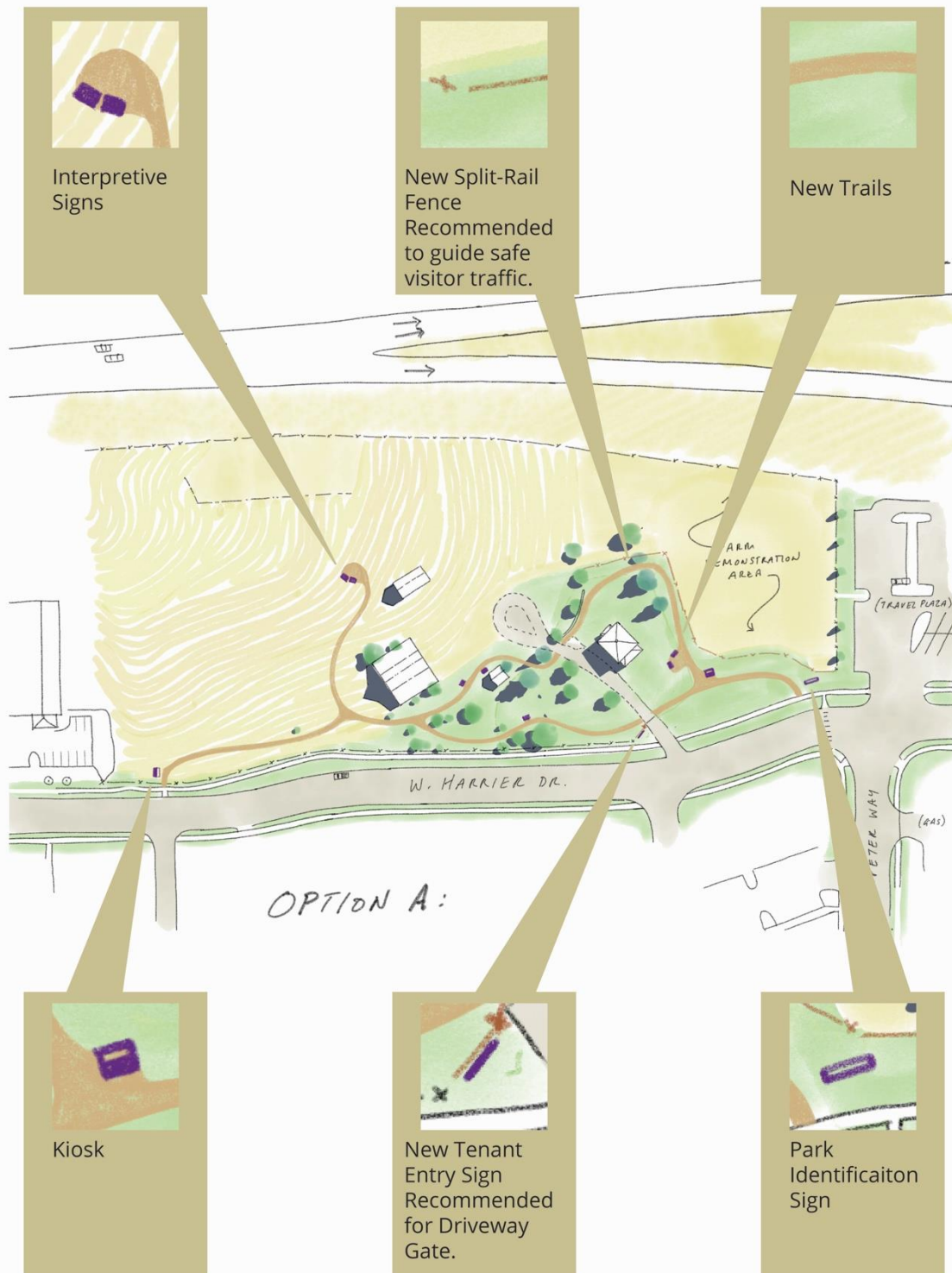


Era-Appropriate Enhancements

LaLonde Ranch can enhance its historical authenticity by focusing on improvements and overall site use that aligns with the era of its early settlement and agricultural use. Modifications should prioritize materials and methods consistent with the late 19th and early 20th centuries, such as reclaimed wood, hand-hewn beams, and hardware that compliments historically accurate restoration onsite. Replanting heritage fruit trees, maintaining traditional fencing styles, and incorporating heirloom gardens can further reflect the period. Interpretive signage and structures, like replicas of historic tools or equipment, should evoke the ranch's historic, operational peak. Any modern additions should remain subtle and unobtrusive, ensuring they blend seamlessly with the historic landscape.

Visitor Experience Plan Options for Site Development

Map Key



Visitors currently park on Harrier to access the site, but there is space to add a small parking lot east of the house while maintaining Farm Connect's demonstration field. A new lot could accommodate a few cars with room to turn around and exit, prioritizing visitor parking. Staff parking (up to two cars) could be located behind the house, with overflow for both staff and visitors directed to street parking.

Option A: No Parking Lot, Walk-In Trail Entrance

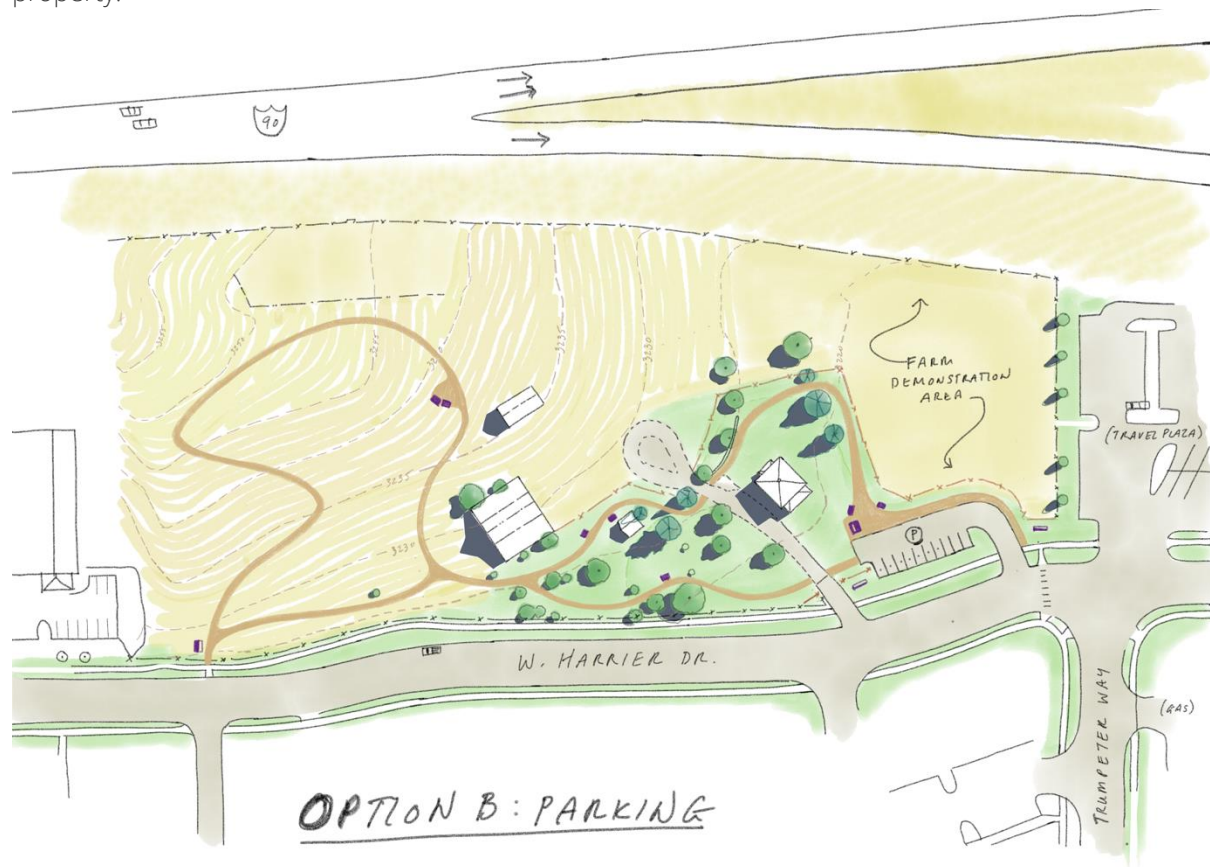
Trail entrances are planned at both ends of the property, with one positioned east of the driveway to discourage visitors from using the driveway. This entrance can be relocated closer to the apple orchard.

Walk-in trail access will make it easy for visitors parking on the street or coming from nearby residences or hotels to reach the trails.



Option B: Add Parking Lot

The site includes two trail entrances: one near the parking lot and another on the west side of the property.



RANCH HOUSE INTERPRETIVE STATION

In front of the ranch house, an interpretive station can be placed near the water and well system. This provides a view of the front of the house while providing an opportunity to use vegetation or other structures to screen and protect the exposed well system.

Media Recommendation: Two Interpretive Signs

Panel #1: Forging a Life on the Land

Settlers like Adam LaLonde built ranches here under laws encouraging westward expansion.

Possible Stories:

- This region has been part of the homeland of the Séliš-Qłispé people since time immemorial.
- Major legislative acts and westward expansion efforts resulted in the increased arrival of Euro-Americans in the 1860s and 1870s.
- Adam LaLonde arrived in Missoula at the age of 30 in 1869.
- Homesteads, ranches, and farms like LaLonde began to appear on Missoula Valley's landscape in the mid to late 1800s.
- The Northern Pacific Railroad was granted large portions of land on either side of the track to sell or develop to help fund the railroad and bring settlers to the region.
- The LaLonde Ranch was likely purchased through the Railroad land grant.
- Like many men at the time, he was searching for gold but also planned for other opportunities.
- LaLonde Ranch stands today as one of the oldest ranch properties in the Missoula Valley.



Stop #2: The Heart of the Ranch

The LaLonde home became a lively center for family life on the ranch.

Possible Stories:

- Adam LaLonde did not initially live in this brick house. Family stories suggest the house was built sometime after Adam married in 1886.
- Adam married Lucy Wells in 1886. She had two children from a previous marriage.
- Together they had eight more children.
- Nine of the children survived, seven of them daughters.
- We can imagine it full of family.
- The bricks used to build the house are likely from a local Missoula Valley brick yard.
- For 30 years, Adam lived in the house with Lucy and family.
- The children attended De Smet School, not far away.
- Lucy LaLonde and her daughters Eva Louise, Sara, Emily and Ruth continued to live on the family ranch after Adam's death in 1918.

- Adam died at the age of 77. He's interred at St Mary's cemetery.
- Lucy lived another eight years, passing away on October 14, 1926.
- In a ranching family, everyone participated in the work, including children.
- Women and girls would participate in household chores, cooking, gardening, caring for chickens or feeding smaller animals. As the children grew older, they likely participated in more difficult ranching tasks.
- It may feel close to town today but in the late 1800s, LaLonde Ranch was isolated from Missoula's urban center.
- The LaLonde family would have to be self-sufficient, growing most of their own food, preserving fruits and vegetables, and raising livestock for dairy, meat, and eggs.
- Families during the homesteading era made their own butter, bread and soap.
- They often sewed their own clothes or made repairs.
- Basic supplies were hard to come by, so they reused or repurposed items wherever possible.

BARN AND CABIN

Visitors can follow a trail around the back of the house to the large barn and cabin, turned blacksmith shop. Here, one large interpretive panel is recommended, and at least one small panel on the cabin is recommended. A small panel can be placed on the barn if there is no concern about visitors approaching the barn (based on Farm Connect's use of the barn). A trail intersection will offer the opportunity to connect to the Valley View Trail or continue to the orchard for the final ranch history loop panel.



Media Recommendation: Two interpretive signs, small panel

Stop #3: From Fields to Farmer's Rights (large interpretive panel)

Adam LaLonde expanded his ranch and became a leader for local farmers' rights.

- Possible Storylines:
- Through the years, the LaLonde Ranch grew to 200 acres.
- Adam specialized in the raising of cattle and hogs.
- Could add information about the barn if that information is available.
- In 1904 the LaLondes acquired another 160 acres of land, increasing their total holdings to 360 acres.
- Cattle ranching demanded resilience and adaptability as tough winters could threaten a herd and risk financial ruin for a rancher.
- The seasons likely shaped their activity with calving in the spring, tending to crops in the summer, preparing the ranch and storing food in the fall, and maintain the ranch and feeding livestock through the winter.
- In 1891, Adam LaLonde was elected treasurer of the Missoula County Farmers Alliance, a progressive organization connected to the National Farmers Alliance with millions of members.
- This movement supported anti-monopoly laws, marketing cooperatives, and "cheap money" policies, favoring silver over the gold standard.
- LaLonde emerged as a passionate advocate for rights and powers of common people.

Stop #4: A Rancher's Simple Start (small panel on cabin)

Adam LaLonde's small cabin tells a story of hard work, simple living, and focus on the ranch.

- The LaLonde family story says that Adam built this small cabin to live in until construction was finished on the brick house.
- The cabin is estimated to be one of the oldest buildings in Missoula in its original location.
- The small cabin would support a bachelor who was more focused on cattle and not the amenities of a house.
- The building's construction, nails and materials are representative of some of the earliest dwellings in the Missoula Valley.
- After the brick house was built, the cabin became a blacksmith shop.
- Metal items found around the shop during archaeological excavations are evidence of its use.

Stop #5: Farming for a Growing Town (panel in orchard area)

Ranches like LaLonde adapted to meet the growing needs of Missoula as it evolved from a small community into a bustling city.

- As the community of Missoula grew into a city, ranches and farms like LaLonde adjusted to provide what the community needed.
- Adam LaLonde planted this orchard, joining the movement popularized by Teddy Roosevelt and his healthy living "back to the land" campaign.
- Western Montana and especially the Bitterroot Valley became well known for fruit production in the early 1900s.
- Information about growing orchards in the early 1900s if relevant.
- After Adam and Lucy's deaths, the ranch stayed in their family until 1944. Henry Keil of Conrad, Montana, purchased the ranch.
- 1948 Henry convinced his daughter, Levene Goodan and her husband, Alvin to take over the ranch.
- The Goodans increased the ranch size to over 1,200 acres during the next half century, making it one of the largest ranching operations in the Missoula Valley.
- The Goodans raised hay, wheat, barley, cattle, and chickens in addition to the orchard and gardens.
- While Alvin worked in the fields harvesting, Levene drove the trucks full of grain to the elevators at Third Street West along the Bitterroot spur line of the Northern Pacific tracks.

VALLEY VIEW TRAIL

A loop or spur trail on the west side of the property will provide visitors with a view of the valley and an opportunity to view LaLonde Ranch in the context of the larger community. Interpretive panels here can explore the valley before the arrival of Euro-Americans as well as the changes in the valley over time that influenced ranchers and farmers and continue to influence them today.



Media Recommendation: Two Interpretive Signs

Stop #5: Fields of Change

Missoula's farmlands gave rise to a city, yet urban growth has come at a cost.

Possible Storylines:

- As you look out into the valley today, you can imagine acres of grassland, pasture fields, and homesteads that once filled the valley.
- Euro-American settlers began arriving in the Missoula Valley in the mid-1800s
- The Mullan Road, a military trading route, was established through the valley.
- The establishment of a grist and sawmill drew people to the center of modern-day Missoula where the city began to grow.
- Grass Valley before you became ranches and homesteads through the late 1800s.
- By 1883, the Northern Pacific Railway had built a line that ran through the valley, less than 2 miles south of where you stand.
- In the early 1880's most everyone with a stake in the Missoula Valley waited for the arrival of the railroad. It would bring a transportation system to deliver cattle and other products to and from Missoula.
- By 1883, the rail service was running and set off a flurry of economic activity. Missoula grew from a village of 400 to the largest city in Western Montana.
- The Federal Highway Act was passed in 1956, which committed the government to subsidizing the construction of a superhighway system to connect America's major cities.
- By the mid-1960s that system was cutting a swath through the property with the construction of I-90.
- From that point on, the ranch became visible to millions of travelers as they passed through the Missoula Valley.

- At this time, the ranch was owned by Leviene and Alvin Goodan.
- Leviene Goodan began to raise peacocks on the ranch. The beautiful birds fanned their incredible plumage as they strutted around the grassy backyard, offering a stunning spectacle for the traveling public passing by on the interstate.
- At its height, during Goodan ownership, the ranch boasted 1,200 acres of hay, wheat, and livestock, making it one of the largest ranching operations in the Missoula Valley.
- As Missoula continued to grow, the ranching operations grew to support the city, but eventually, the land became valuable for another purpose.
- Over time, acreage of agricultural land has been sold for business and residential development as the City of Missoula has grown.
- As Missoula has grown, it is less reliant on local food grown in the valley and more reliant on food imports.
- The land you see before you is fragmented with open space isolated by residential development, industrial land use, and businesses.
- As the city grows, the cost of land nearby increases, making it difficult for farmers and ranchers to afford new land or maintain existing operations.
- Agricultural land provides open spaces, wildlife habitats, and ecosystem services, such as carbon sequestration and soil health. Replacing farmland with urban development increases impervious surfaces, which can lead to higher temperatures (the urban heat island effect), reduced air quality, and decreased biodiversity.
- As farmland decreases, so does the ability to produce local food, which can impact food security and raise food prices.
- This dependency on distant sources can make the food supply more vulnerable to disruptions in transportation or supply chains.

Stop #7: Leave open for review by Séliš-Qłispé Culture Committee.

- Send information about the interpretive project to the Culture Committee for review. If interested, the Committee will determine the preferred topics for this site and preferred approach. The Committee may prefer to design this panel.
- This site offers a full view of the valley.

THE VISITOR EXIT EXPERIENCE

When visitors leave LaLonde Ranch Historic Park, they should support historic preservation, share their experiences with others, and explore other historic sites in Missoula.

Objectives:

- Visitors will recognize the value and importance of preserving historical sites.
- Visitors will gain an understanding of the local government's role in protecting and maintaining historic facilities.
- Visitors will leave inspired to apply at least one gardening or preservation practice learned during their visit.
- Local visitors will be motivated to return to LaLonde Ranch Historic Park for future experiences.
- Visitors will be encouraged to explore additional historical sites and museums in the Missoula area.

Design Recommendations

As visitors exit the site, ensure kiosks at each trailhead provide concise, engaging information on:

- The establishment of LaLonde Ranch as a historic site.
- Nearby historic sites to explore.

Kiosks should feature brief, clear text and high-quality graphics for easy consumption, enhancing visitor engagement and retention. Avoid outdated or cluttered designs; instead, integrate rules, regulations, and interpretive content into an appealing and accessible format.

Cross Promotion of Historical Sites

Explore ways to link Missoula's historic sites to offer visitors extended experiences. Use various media based on each site's resources, space, and parameters, such as:

- Cross-promotional social media posts.
- Recommendations displayed on kiosks.
- Themed programs or tours across sites.

Notes on Accessibility

To create a welcoming trail experience for the community, including people with disabilities, the following considerations have been highlighted for consideration during the planning process. These are recommendations for awareness. As materials, spaces, and experiences are designed, it is highly recommended that members of the disability community are engaged in developing and reviewing materials before they are finalized.

- Road mix and decomposed granite trails can become impassable to heavy wheelchairs when saturated with rainwater or sprinkler water. Consider which trails are inaccessible on very wet days.
- People who are blind, have low visibility, or have difficulty reading traditional interpretive signs can access interpretation differently. For example, consider how to offer alternative information through audio tours or accessible text online (voice-to-text options).
- QR codes added to signs should be on raised stickers that touch can sense.
- Consider developing web resources on accessibility to prepare visitors with disabilities for their visit in advance.
- Wayfinding, that identifies steep trails and flat trail sections will support visitors with different abilities.

Section 4: Implementation Plan

COST RANGE OVERVIEW

The following estimates provide context for the implementation tiers described. Costs are subject to the final design. Therefore, it is **not possible to provide cost estimates with exact accuracy**. However, cost estimates are provided for most design elements based on the design concept.

Interpretive Panels & Exhibit Design

Traditional interpretive panels, 3'w by 2'h, vary in cost based on the use of original artwork, the complexity of writing, the time required to work with a review committee, the time needed to source/create original artwork, and the complexity of the final sign design (single panel, two panels, additional crayon rubbing element, etc.).

Costs can be saved by drafting interpretive text in-house before contracting a sign designer. Sourcing original artwork before the project for interpretive signs will offset costs. In addition, creating all panels in the same contract, allowing a contractor to design multiple panels with the same design style will utilize cost savings.

Original Artwork

This plan recommends the use of original artwork where possible. While this adds expense to project design, it also adds a depth to interpretation and visitor appeal that is unmatched by historic photographs alone.

Media Element and Notes

Estimated Cost Range

ENTRANCE SIGNS

Entrance signs featuring park name: LaLonde Ranch Historic Park and Parks and Open Space design.	\$2500-\$1200
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KIOSK

Groundwork/concrete footing if not already established	\$1000
CHPL Interpretive Panel (recommended)	\$500
Hardware and mounting materials for frame	\$500

Media Element and Notes

Estimated Cost Range

Construction of kiosk

\$1500

Design of Kiosk Panel

\$900

WAYFINDING

Temporary posts and signs

\$5-\$10 ea

Long term posts and signs

\$50-\$200 each

Cost will depend on design and style. Low cost is based on wood post with locally fabricated panels. High cost is based on custom panels with creative design/shape

INTERPRETIVE PANELS

Design, writing and coordination 15hrs/panels with estimated range of \$75-\$90 per hr

\$1,125-\$1,350 ea

Original artwork, estimated at \$500-\$1000 depending on complexity and number of illustrations needed. If art is used across the project, set aside 15% of the budget for artwork.

\$500-\$1000

24"h x 36"w DuraReader panels (exterior CHPL)

\$550 ea

Basic Aluminum Interpretive Frame (not custom), black powder coated, with frame

\$675 ea

Custom interpretive panel bases

\$1,800-\$2,500

SMALL INTERPRETIVE PANELS

Small panels, 12" wide by 18" high, Custom High-Pressure Laminate (CHPL) or similar signs, to be mounted directly to buildings

\$125 ea

Media Element and Notes	Estimated Cost Range
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Design of small panel 5 hrs/panel @ \$75-\$90/hr	\$375-\$450
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Original artwork, estimated at \$250-\$350 per small panel	\$350
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TRIFOLD BROCHURE FOR ADDITIONAL INTERPRETATION*	
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Original artwork for artifacts and historical illustrations	\$800
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Design of Trifold Brochure (5 hrs @ \$75-\$90/hr)	\$450
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Printing of Trifold Brochure (est 250 copies black/white)	\$150
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DRIVEWAY GATE & PARKING	
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Standard, decorative metal gate, not customized	\$8,000-\$10,000
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Directional signage for driveway and parking lot (Nudo board, locally printed)	\$40-\$80
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Sign Design (2 hrs @ \$90/hr)	\$180
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*Based on the amount of interpretive content and the detail associated with the interpretive information, I have included the option of a brochure. Panels, if designed to support an audience that includes school children, will need to focus on limited facts and dates. Information about architecture and some deeper history that is more interesting to history enthusiasts can be made available in a supplemental information piece that is provided inside the house, at events, through the website, or in other ways.

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

The following timeline is recommended based on an optimal visitor experience. It can be adjusted based on funding opportunities, partnership interests, or other site priorities. Phased approach is meant to build site presence based on visitor feedback and usage.

PHASE ONE (1 - 3 YEARS)

- New park sign (standard County Park sign)
- Establish Ranch History Loop
- Add Kiosks with clear visitor information (hours, site map, etc.)
- Reestablish orchard area
- Install new irrigation system to support landscaping upgrades

PHASE TWO (3 - 5 YEARS)

- Explore opportunities to refurbish and allow occasional access to cabin / blacksmith shop for program events
- Design & installation of interpretive signs
- Explore opportunities for prairie restoration

PHASE THREE (5 – 7 YEARS)

- Add Vallet View Loop Trail and/or spur trail
- Install formal wayfinding
- Construct parking lot if deemed necessary
- Construct park pavilion if deemed necessary

Appendix A: Parameters and Implications

Site parameters frame a project and identify where there are opportunities or limitations for interpretive planning. This list of parameters was identified through repeat visits, observation of activities, and partnership with Missoula County staff.

Parameter

Implication

BUDGET	
Design and Implementation Budget	The implementation budget for this project is currently unknown but may require a phased approach depending on decisions.
Fundraising	Farm Connect is working in partnership to fundraise for the project with Missoula County.
SENSITIVE HISTORICAL SITE	
LaLonde Ranch is applying for consideration to be included in the National Historic Register of Historic Places.	This plan assumes that the ranch will receive standing on the National Register of Historic Places.
No standards or guidelines established for working in an archaeological site	There should be a set of procedures for what to do if an artifact is discovered during site disturbance.
Consider Site Disturbance	Interpretive signs and other site improvements may require site disturbance. Prior to determining the design of signs, Missoula County should first confirm if site disturbance will be permitted at the historical site.
Farm Connect Site Disturbance	Farm Connect's use of the east field may impact archaeological remains from/of the original ranch. It may be necessary or valuable to review their planned use to ensure that they address this. Consideration of archaeological investigations from the state or University could provide information that would guide site use.
The region is part of the Séliš-Qłispé homeland and may have cultural history that is sensitive that should be protected	The Séliš-Qłispé Culture Committee should be included in the review of this plan and consulted to determine if they would like to share cultural history at the site.

Parameter	Implication
SITE	
Acreage	LaLonde Ranch is about 8 acres in size
Farm Area	Most of the home, agricultural/ranch buildings and apple trees are concentrated on the east side of the property which would allow for a focused loop trail on that side of the property
Prairie Area	The remaining property on the west side is undeveloped.
Open east section	The farthest east section of the property is open and flat. This area has the potential for future site development if permitted with the greatest benefit for tourist attraction and access.
Parking	Currently there is no onsite parking. All access is through street parking.
No restrooms on site	Any events or programs would require rental toilets and facilities or use of facilities available in the house.
Utility easements	There are utility easements along the back side of the property including gas and fiber.
Well and Pump	The well and pump were recently repaired which will improve irrigation overall. This may change how the site appears to visitors and may impact the plan.
Brewery Property Line	There is an encroachment on the property that is requiring a new property line adjustment. Trails will need to stay away from this new adjustment. Estimate 50 feet from the western end of the property line.
Restoration Opportunity	There is an opportunity for prairie restoration, in partnership with tribal engagement to bring this part of the property back to original prairie landscape.
FACILITIES	
Buildings	Four buildings on site with various levels of access.

Parameter	Implication
Main house	Recently improved. Currently offices for Farm Connect. Likely the most interesting building on site for visitors and likely also not accessible unless visiting Farm Connect. Missoula County maintains the ability to explore a future partnership to jointly use the space. For example, sharing visitor information and historic photos on the main floor where visitors will likely want to enter. This can be where the site and Farm Connect's mission overlap in meaningful ways.
Large Barn	Not entirely accessible. Has potential for large events. May be currently used for storage for Farm Connect. Side open area can be improved for event and program space. The structural report shows that significant work will be required to make it safe for the public. It may not be a high priority improvement in the project scope.
Small Barn	Currently used as storage space for Missoula County. This can change into the future. If Farm Connect can move equipment into the small barn, this could open the large barn for programs, events, and other interpretive space.
Blacksmith Shop	Not accessible. Likely high interest for visitor access.
OPERATIONS AND SUPPORT	
Maintenance	Missoula County provides large/significant site maintenance. Farm Connect manages daily site care (i.e. mowing). The public access and use will need to be discussed in terms of maintenance needs.
Farm Connect on Site	Currently the only staff on site is Farm Connect. Regular staffing is a benefit for security, visitor services, and programming potential.
Farm Connect Agreement	Missoula County maintains a memorandum of understanding with Farm Connect that extends through ----- that will provide use of the LaLonde Ranch for their headquarters.
Rolling Thunder Cyclocross Race	Annual Cyclocross race is held at the Big Sky Brewery and LaLonde Ranch Historical Park each year. Relocation of the race in full or in part is possible. Keeping the race on site exposes LaLonde to a new audience, especially if the site continues to develop. But it also brings with it potential adverse impacts to the site. Site development should not work around the race, but vice versa.

Appendix B: Audience Analysis

An important aspect of planning interpretation is determining the site's target audience and what experiences will bring that audience to the site. By creating profiles, we can better understand what they will need, expect, or look to experience during their visit. This process helps prioritize opportunities for our key audiences.

Needs are the amenities like restrooms, shelter, places to rest, and orientation information to ensure visitors know where they are expected to go.

Expectations will depend on the level of service, or the experience the visitor has been told would be available on-site. Visitors expect interpretive signs to be well maintained, buildings accessible to visitors to be open and physically accessible, and signage to indicate how to navigate trails.

Limitations are the characteristics that may cause a user to forgo an interpretive experience. If signs are in full sun on a hot day or if too many signs require a lot of standing and reading, visitors may bypass the opportunity because it isn't worth their time.

Opportunities are connected to visitors' interests. Interest can be piqued before the visitor's arrival or sparked by elements or activities on site.

Based on discussions during our work sessions, research on similar sites, and experience with other interpretive planning projects and similar topics, the following key audiences are highlighted for LaLonde Ranch. This does not exclude the importance of any other audience. However, the interpretive framework will be developed with these key audiences in mind as the site's primary users.

Missoula County aims to serve the people in Missoula County, specifically people who are interested in local history and historical preservation. Its land use partner, Farm Connect, engages farmers and community members who are learning about local agriculture. The county has identified local neighborhoods, residents, and travelers as future target audiences; however, the base of support for interpretive work is likely to start with visitors interested in the historical nature of the property or services offered by Farm Connect.

The following audiences have been identified for interpretation at LaLonde Ranch to develop the base of support:

- Adult visitors seeking historical learning experiences.
- Farmers or Ranchers seeking advice or support from Farm Connect.
- Neighbors and out-of-area visitors seeking areas for walking with interest in educational interpretation overall.

Adult Visitors Seeking Cultural and Historical Learning Experiences

These range from novice to near expert. They are likely an audience interested in exploring interpretive trails and buildings and will participate in programs or self-guided tours. They may be considered into two subgroups:

- Residents—This includes visitors who live near LaLonde Ranch (Missoula or surrounding valleys). They will have personal connections and knowledge about the region but may be new to the site.
- Non-Residents—This includes all other travelers, such as vacationers, and people visiting family or friends in the area. They may not have any background knowledge about the site or the region but may have experience in their communities related to the subject area.

General Notes on All Audiences

- All audiences arriving at LaLonde will expect to be able to navigate the site efficiently and safely. They will want to know where to park, where to start their experience, and how to proceed through an interpretive experience from start to finish.
- All audiences will likely arrive with expectations of the site and amenities. They expect to find information online and have their site visit align with their research.
- They may arrive with different impairments.
- If they encounter staff (Farm Connect), they expect them to be knowledgeable about the site's amenities and information presented on-site, including natural and cultural history.
- Due to the nature of the site, most visitors will arrive seeking information on the site's history.
- Visitors may travel alone or in groups and displays encouraging interaction and conversation will result in more overall engagement with a group.

Implications

- Online information about the site and its amenities should be clear, including closure information.
- Staff and volunteers should be provided with basic visitor training.
- Signs and exhibits that allow space for small groups to gather would be ideal.
- Offering accessibility options would increase the site's usability for a broader range of visitors with different impairments and likely appeal to many.
- Providing places with shade to rest will benefit a wide range of audiences at a historical site that encourages reflection.

TARGET AUDIENCE CHARACTERISTICS: VISITORS SEEKING CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL LEARNING EXPERIENCES

This is the initial primary audience for building site support. These visitors expect displays and interpretation about the ranch, the family, and the site's cultural and Indigenous history. These visitors are likely intentional, and if interpretive signs are designed to provide information about cultural and even natural history, they will likely read them. If local, they may visit the ranch at different times throughout the year.

Characteristics

- This is likely an adult audience.
- This audience will be seeking opportunities to learn more about local history.
- They may be independent visitors or part of an organized group.
- They may include people with diverse backgrounds with a wide range of experience in the topic area.
- They may find LaLonde Ranch through a specific site search online or a referral (depending on how the site is promoted).
- Their visit is likely part of a planned trip.
- They will likely arrive with some contextual knowledge about history, though the range of experience is wide.
- They will have a range of leisure time, with visitation occurring throughout the week.
- They will have a deeper interest and curiosity in the topics.
- They are likely interested in expanding their interest through programs, events or trips to other historical sites.
- They are most likely to support historical preservation activities.

Obstacle or Opportunities

- Tourism is a growing opportunity in the region, and there are many historical and cultural sites to connect with for extended learning experiences.
- When arriving on site, this audience will need to know where to go. Ensuring the interpretive story is clear from the parking lot through the full path will be important.
- This audience will be interested in the buildings. Ensuring access where possible will provide the best visitor experience. If building access is not possible, provide an appropriate alternative.
- This audience is likely visiting LaLonde Ranch to review available interpretive media. They may be willing to explore extra elements such as QR codes or take brochures for extended travel to related sites.
- Visitors with this background arrive with some previous knowledge of history. Elements like timelines or connections to other historical events will help connect LaLonde's history to stories they are familiar with.
- This audience may be retired or have leisure time, allowing them to plan themed or take side trips. Providing information about extended, relevant opportunities can enhance their learning experience.

- If local, this audience is an ideal target for programs and events. Consider how to encourage engagement beyond the ranch visit.
- This audience can be grown into a stronger support network for this site or future historical preservation sites.

Potential Limitations

- Any misconceptions will cause them to doubt the accuracy of signs and the overall experience of a site.
- Because of their background knowledge, this group can often identify inaccuracies in the information, which, if found, will impact their experience of a site.
- Based on interest, this audience may expect well-maintained quality materials. Poorly maintained sites will reflect badly.
- Standing for long periods will limit their stay.
- Long periods in the sun may also limit their stay.
- Loud or highly interactive exhibits focused on kids may detract from their learning experience and limit their stay.

TARGET AUDIENCE PROFILE: FARMERS OR RANCHERS SEEKING SUPPORT FROM FARM CONNECT

Farm Connect provides farmers and ranchers with education, business assistance, training, and additional resources to support agriculture and local food production in the region. Farm Connect leases LaLonde Ranch buildings for office and program space, bringing this audience to the site.

Characteristics of Landowners seeking advice or support from Farm Connect

- Landowners include ranchers and farmers of any scale from the region.
- They have a specific interest in learning from the skills provided by Farm Connect.
- They may be visiting the tool library, attending a program, or meeting with staff for other needs.
- They have a desire to be part of the agriculture community.
- This audience has some base knowledge or expectation of agricultural practices and lifestyle.

Opportunities and Obstacles

- This audience's singular goal on site is to work with Farm Connect. Their time for interpretive experiences may be limited.
- This audience may not be motivated by topics immersed in historical preservation.
- Interpretation related to agricultural history, stories about the LaLonde Family, and the site may be relevant to this audience, which has a shared, though modern, experience.

Implications

- Creating an interpretation that is easy to digest may provide opportunities to engage this audience in interpretation and capture their attention, allowing for a longer-than-planned visit.
- Creating loop trails that offer options may allow this audience to explore historic buildings and agriculture stories close to their Farm Connect starting point without having to walk a full trail system.

TARGET AUDIENCE PROFILE: NEIGHBORS AND OUT-OF-AREA VISITORS

Visitors seeking areas for walking with an interest in educational interpretation overall

This is a secondary audience of LaLonde Ranch but an audience that will be attracted to the trails. They are not drawn to the site exclusively by the topic but will engage based on interest in learning.

Characteristics

- This audience may be local or traveling through the region, staying at a hotel or stopping at a gas station.
- They may be independent visitors or part of a small group.
- They look for opportunities to explore new places while learning.
- This audience is curious and interested in gathering new information about various topics.
- This audience may discover the site online and will arrive with expectations about the experience based on what they have seen.
- This audience may expect to access buildings and may be disappointed by buildings that are closed without explanation.
- They enjoy interpretive opportunities and will continue along the loop if materials are engaging.
- They are likely to share what they've learned with someone else or speak highly of their experience if they've enjoyed it.
- This audience may travel with children.

Obstacle or Opportunities

- This group likely compares this site's access and material quality to others they've visited.
- Local visitors may become supporters of this and future projects with a positive experience.
- Local visitors can participate in future events or programs if made aware.
- Interactive or discussion-based interpretation engages visitors traveling with children.

Potential Limitations

- If traveling, this audience may not have time for a full trail visit and may only experience part of the site's interpretation.
- Standing for long periods will limit their stay.
- Long periods in the sun may also limit their stay.
- If traveling with children, a site with a lot of interpretation may not be read fully by adults who are often rushed by children moving faster down trails.

TARGET AUDIENCE PROFILE: SCHOOLS

LaLonde Ranch Historic Park, when developed, will offer schools a unique site for field trips. If visiting as part of a Farm Connect program, visits can be extended by walking the trails and engaging in interpretive

content. Interpretive content will need to be designed for a younger audience to ensure this engagement.

Characteristics of All School Groups

- School group participation is based on teacher interest and largely due to curriculum relevance.
- Teachers will need to arrange transportation, which includes bus costs.
- Teachers and schools have specific curriculum requirements that dictate what they must focus on yearly.
- Teachers expect planned programming, knowledgeable staff, and a structured experience.
- Teachers are unlikely to lead field trips independently using provided on-site materials.
- Teachers guide and inspire student engagement, making partnerships with teachers important to program success.

GRADE SCHOOL GROUPS (GRADES K-5)

This is the most common visitor for on-site field trips. This audience has the most flexible school schedules and is most likely to participate in a planned experience. This audience can spend up to a full day on-site, with time to work with Farm Connect and visit the adjacent trail system. The teachers decide what field trips to invest in; therefore, the teacher becomes the primary audience for our focus.

Characteristics of Grade School Groups

- Large groups (20-30) of students ranging in age from 5 to 10, depending on grade level.
- This group will have flexibility in their daily schedule and can likely participate in longer field trips.
- Teachers are eager to share as many opportunities as possible.
- Teachers will provide varying degrees of support during field trips, and young visitors will be more easily engaged through hands-on activities than tour-style sharing.
- Young students are unlikely to remember facts about the site and will primarily focus on interesting stories or unique direct experiences.
- Teachers will bring adult chaperones who will provide a varying degree of support to staff.
- Teachers can offer a lot of pre-trip planning if planned in advance, such as breaking large groups into smaller groups.
- Teachers are enthusiastic about field trips that are well-planned, supported by strong, well-trained volunteers/staff, and full of curriculum-supporting content.

Opportunities and Obstacles

- Students' engagement in field trip experiences helps introduce the LaLonde Ranch Historic Site to a community. Sending teachers a note to forward electronically to parents before or after a field trip would help encourage a follow-up family visit to build more local support. Requesting the inclusion of a site description in materials provided by partner organizations using the site may accomplish this.

Implications

- Outdoor trails with high traffic levels can be noisy and busy for visitors typically used to visit quiet trails. If field trips become common, consider sandwich board-style signage at trailheads to offer advanced warning and field trip times.
- Teachers are only aware of the field trips that have been available to them previously. Outreach will be necessary to encourage engagement.
- Teachers and students will need support services on site. While other audiences are able to leave the site to use restrooms, schools do not have this opportunity.
- Buses require space for parking, loading and unloading. Ensure there is adequate space and reserved "Bus Parking" or "Daytime Only Bus and RV Only" parking. Buses will need room to turn around.

Appendix C

PROGRAM OPPORTUNITIES

As development of the LaLonde site continues, future programming can be considered to support interpretive content.

LaLonde Ranch could offer immersive hands-on programming that brings homesteading and agricultural history to life.

Activities might include but are not limited to:

- Demonstrations of hand-hewn log construction
- Cider pressing from heritage apple trees in partnership with Farm Connect.
- Opportunities to observe or participate in supervised archaeological digs.

These experiences highlight traditional skills and practices, connecting visitors to the past in tangible ways.

Drawing inspiration from similar programs at the Moon Randolph Homestead, LaLonde Ranch could explore partnerships with local experts and organizations to expand its offerings beyond what current resources allow. These programs would engage visitors of all ages and foster a deeper appreciation for the region's homesteading and agricultural heritage.

Appendix D

FARM CONNECT PARTNERSHIP

The following programs Farm Connect offers or considered for the future would add to the visitor experience at LaLonde Ranch Historic Park. Consider how to support these programs at the site:

- Tool Library
- Technical Assistance for Beginning Farmers
- Demonstration of Equipment
- Fundraising or Outreach Events if they maintain a brand that aligns with the site's history and story
- Connecting Beginning Farmers to Available Land
- Farm Connect serving as an Agritourism Hub for new farmers and ranchers
- Farm stand and opportunities to sell local produce at site.
- Montanans Who Cook program, which could have options that align with the historic ranching or homesteading traditions.

As Farm Connect establishes more regular programming, it can consider seasonal sales of local produce. Offering visitors the opportunity to step inside the historic house would add value to the site and benefit the non-profit equally.

Adding historic images to the main floor and applying for grants to improve the visitor experience and overall interpretive experience could support Missoula County's goals while increasing the visibility of Farm Connect's work.

Considerations for Memorandum of Understanding

Farm Connect's presence can enhance the visitor experience. Strengthen the partnership through the MOU to ensure visitors enjoy refurbished historic building exteriors and gain insights into the property's role in Missoula's agricultural history.

- Farm Connect can enhance visitor experiences by using the flat land east of the house to demonstrate farm equipment. Assess property impacts, visitor safety, and other concerns before permitting open use.
- Planting demonstration crops will enrich programs, provide trail screening for safety and privacy, and enhance the visual appeal. Outline expectations for crop use if necessary.
- Consider restoring and maintaining the existing orchard to its historic state as part of Farm Connect's offerings.
- Minimize the visual impact of on-site employee parking by limiting cars behind the house and storing farm equipment in the barn or off-site.
- Preserve the house's historic character by removing modern exterior elements. For events, temporary patio lights are appropriate, but they are recommended to be removed for the remainder of the year. Historically appropriate porch furniture can be added if needed.

- Keep the house perimeter free of debris, trash, and non-historic items to maintain the site's historic integrity and improve visitor impressions.
- The LaLonde Ranch Historic Park (or its buildings specifically) are in the process of exploring a National Register of Historic Places certification. In creating a MOU, ensure that all needs associated with the NRHP are shared with Farm Connect to support the certification.

The following elements may need to be considered based on the certification requirements:

- Preservation of Historical Integrity:
 - Retain the site's essential physical features that qualify it as historically significant.
- For a landscape: Specific trees, pathways, fences, or water features.
 - Maintain the site's authentic appearance by using original materials and techniques whenever possible. Replacement should be done in-kind (using materials and methods consistent with the original).
 - Avoid significant alterations that compromise its historical, architectural, or cultural attributes.
- Compliance with Federal Standards:
 - Follow the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties when performing restoration, rehabilitation, or preservation work.

Regular Maintenance:

- Prevent deterioration through routine upkeep of buildings, landscapes, and other historic elements.

Monitoring and Reporting:

- Notify the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) or the National Park Service (NPS) of any significant changes to the site.

Adherence to Legal and Regulatory Guidelines:

- Ensure compliance with any federal, state, or local regulations associated with historic sites.
- Obtain necessary approvals for modifications, development, or new uses.

Community and Educational Engagement:

- Promote public understanding of the site's significance.
- Maintain visibility and relevance through interpretive programs, signage, or events.

Recommendations for LaLonde Ranch Historic Site Tenant Planning

Moving forward, as Missoula County considers tenants for LaLonde, consider the historic nature of the site and core goals outlined in this plan. Tenants can bring unique partnerships by supporting the educational or management goals outlined by the core planning team. The above-stated needs associated with the NRHP may also provide guidance.

Appendix E

KNOW FEEL DO EXERCISE MEETING NOTES

Core Planning Team members and stakeholders provided the following responses during the Know Feel Do exercise for use in goal setting.

What do we want participants to **Know** after interacting with the interpretation at LaLonde Ranch?

- it is well managed, positive welcoming atmosphere
- History of the land and Indigenous people's history
- Importance of working the land
- issue of farmland development
- when the farm was established
- what was grown on the farm
- the history of the old house and the family within it
- why is there a LaLonde Ranch. Who were they? How did they end up here?
- Human history from pre white settlers to present and the interactions they had with the land
- history of the land centering on Indigenous people's history
- Importance of working agriculture
- Agriculture in the valley now
- Historic homestead
- now home to nonprofit that works to support farmers and ranchers and farmland
- How to access local food
- How this family adapted to growing Missoula
- How did the introduction of the interstate , train tracks and general development affect the working ranch
- the difficulties of ranching in western Montana
- People plants and animals that were a part of the property's past, present and future
- what programs happen on the property
- local agrotourism
- agricultural history
- traditional tribal lands and first people's history
- native ecology and wildlife
- LaLonde's place in Missoula Valley and agriculture history and how it relates broadly to the valley wide
- Public are welcome
- Missoula County's role

- owned by Missoula County
- agriculture history of Missoula Valley
- comparison with Moon Randolph
- the complex evolution of the property from indigenous use to European settlement to present day
- role of women on the ranch
- how and why it is still there today, how did it survive the arrive of I-90
- log work and details
- LaLonde family history
- The partnerships taking care of it now

What do we want participants to **Feel** after interacting with interpretation at LaLonde Ranch?

- inspired
- nostalgic
- welcome
- connection-why do people care enough about this land to have lived there and keep it into the future?
- learned something new about Missoula
- connected to nature
- excitement about the current uses of the property
- welcomed and interested in visiting again
- appreciative of the hardscrabble life of early ranching
- reflective of the farmland that is now interstate and commercial space
- more connected to the place and history
- and understanding of the many different forms of agriculture
- a feel of what role the ranch played in the history and development of Missoula County
- it is being used to support the community
- peaceful/relaxed
- hopeful
- new perspective
- connected to the organization, county and the stories
- like they want to support agriculture
- they better understand Missoula sense of place
- like this land is being stewarded
- that development impact every facet of life for those who have been existing on the landscape
- curiosity fulfilled

- connection to the history of the site
- amazed by what life was like as the ranch developed
- reflective of time and change
- connected to the people who lived long ago
- curious about the history of other Missoula neighborhoods
- that the site is worth preserving
- an appreciation of the work and relevance required to survive on the land
- enriched
- the importance of the site
- value of historic preservation
- sense of the 19th and 20th century life and work

What do we want participants to **Do** after interacting with interpretation at LaLonde Ranch?

- donate money
- support local agriculture
- share with friends and family
- visit again
- volunteer
- Look for other historic ranch sites or homesteads to visit
- further their knowledge of how the Missoula Valley was developed including the role of Indigenous people played, prior to the ranch
- buy local food
- think about their own community's relationship to food
- support beginning farmers
- go to the farmers market
- learn more about the history of agriculture
- grow their own food or native plants
- talk about Farm Connect with other people
- want to learn more about our community
- learn more about development and the impacts and how to mitigate it
- Learn more and visit other history sites in the valley
- Visit CFAC website for more info about Farm Connect
- learn more about the life of early settlers in Missoula County and contemplate how this impacted our indigenous populations
- explore further the field of historic preservation and how it helped keep the ranch available for visitors today (grassroots movement)

Appendix F

2020 LALONDE FOCUS GROUP MEETING NOTES

The following focus group meeting notes were summarized through background research for the interpretive plan. These were reviewed and considered as they provided insight and suggestions from a broader stakeholder audience.

The Lalonde Ranch Focus Group meeting members responded to the following list of questions:

Question 1. Please read the Lalonde Ranch Strategic Framework. What general comments do you have related to the Strategic Framework?

Questions 2. What do you see in the Framework that may cause you to support the project and why?

Question 3. Based on the Strategic Framework, what organizations/entities would you consider to be important partners in the project?

Question 4. Do you/your organization have the capacity to get involved with the project and if so, what are some ways that you might get involved as the project moves forward?

Question 5. From your perspective, what is one thing you would like to see as part of the Lalonde Ranch? What do you think will be necessary to make this happen?

Their specific feedback is not shared here but their responses relevant to this interpretive plan is as follows:

Summary of Focus Group Feedback for the Lalonde Ranch Interpretive Plan:

Relevance and Storytelling: There is a need to connect the ranch's history to its impact from local development and changes over time. Participants suggested emphasizing what makes the site unique to attract interest.

Funding and Revenue: Concerns were raised about funding sustainability, with ideas like incorporating orchards or other revenue-generating elements.

Management and Use: Suggestions included creating an attractive and functional site with diverse uses such as recreation, education, and events. There was support for adaptive reuse and partnerships with local entities.

Visitor Attraction: The ranch could serve as a gateway or visitor center, marketing its historical and educational value while directing visitors to other local attractions.

Next Steps: Participants recommended developing actionable plans, ensuring inclusivity, and identifying clear partnerships to move the project forward.

Support for the Project

- **Economic Development:** Participants saw potential for economic benefits, such as attracting local businesses and contributing to quality of life.

- **Funding Concerns:** Many stressed the need for a comprehensive financial plan, addressing funding fatigue in the community, and exploring mechanisms to generate sustainable revenue.
- **Historic Preservation:** Emphasis on the ranch's role in education and maintaining a sense of place resonated with participants, but some questioned its current relevance without broader public interest.

Potential Partners: Participants identified diverse potential partners, including:

- Local, state, and federal agencies (e.g., Parks and Recreation, Montana Department of Transportation)
- Tourism organizations (e.g., Convention Visitors Bureau, Chamber of Commerce)
- Cultural and historic preservation groups
- Private entities with vested interests (e.g., businesses in Development Park, cider producers)
- Academic institutions like the University of Montana.

Capacity for Involvement

- Many expressed interest but cited limited capacity and the need for a clearer understanding of expectations and alignment with their organizational missions.
- Historic preservation groups indicated a willingness to help form a "friends" group to support the project.

Key Features Desired

- **Funding and Business Plan:** A self-sustaining site supported by a realistic business plan.
- **Public-Private Partnerships:** Ideas such as incorporating a restaurant, orchard, or commercial operations to attract visitors and generate revenue.
- **Management and Education:** Focus on experiences that tell a compelling story, education for all abilities, and compatible site uses like visitor centers or event spaces.

Important Takeaways from Organizing Group Meeting

- There is a need to identify what makes the Lalonde Ranch special and relevant today.
- Prioritizing budget and costs for phased improvements.
- The realization that the site may not become self-supporting.
- Next steps include operational planning, fundraising, educational opportunities, and public engagement to establish relevance and long-term sustainability.

This feedback highlights the importance of strategic storytelling, financial planning, and community involvement in ensuring the success of the Lalonde Ranch project.