

## **HELENA HUNTERS & ANGLERS ASSOCIATION INVENTORIED ROADLESS AREA MONITORING PROJECT**

### **Activity Report for March 29, 2026 Flight**

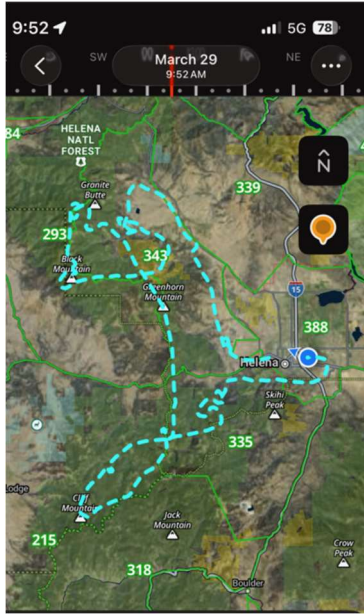
Pilot and HHAA board member Doug Powell, and HHAA board member Gary Ingman, flew several local Helena area Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs) on March 29, 2026 for the purposes of examining boundary conditions, motorized intrusions, wildlife, snowpack, and to conduct a second preliminary overflight of the Electric Peak IRA - which will be fully assessed in 2026. Included in the flight were Nevada Mountain, Jericho Mountain, Electric Peak, and Lazyman IRAs. Adjacent lands covered in the 1.9-hour flight included the Grady Ranch, Fort Harrison and Colorado Gulch.

We rented a Cessna 172 airplane from Dramstad Flying Service and departed the Helena Regional Airport at 7:35 am on March 29. The wind was calm at the airport with mostly clear skies, following several days of high winds. We logged our route with OnX tracker and Avenza maps and followed our flight path on a Samsung tablet. Gary took pictures with his Cannon PowerShot SX730 HS pocket camera and Doug took a few photos with his phone.

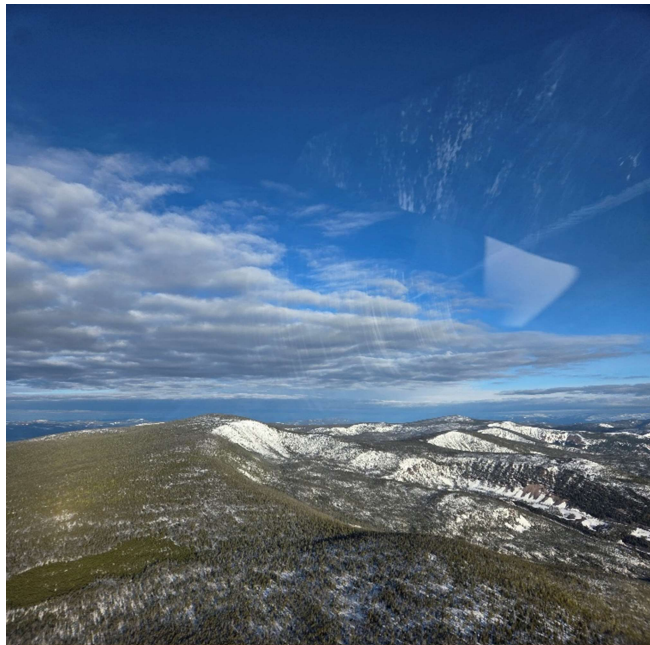
Our flight path proceeded west over the Fort Harrison ARNG training area. We then proceeded northward along Birdseye Road to the Lincoln Road. We observed two mixed herds of wintering elk on Fort Harrison and one small group of bachelor bull elk west of the Birdseye Road halfway between the Austin Road and Silver City. We then entered the Grady Ranch conservation easement winter range area north of the Canyon Creek Store. We observed multiple mixed groups of elk totaling 100 or more on the winter range in the vicinity of Gravelly Range Lake and the lower Marsh Creek Road.

We attempted to climb up to the Continental Divide from Canyon Creek to Nevada Mountain, though the winds aloft were too strong to fly up the main Canyon Creek drainage. So we diverted to an east-west ridge leading to Marysville, and crossed the Divide above Great Divide ski area. We observed a number of mule deer on the east side of the Divide near Marysville. We approached Black Mountain within the Nevada Mountain IRA from the south, re-examined a formerly documented (3-1-26) snowmobile use area with new snowmobile tracks within the IRA above a private inholding in Georgia Creek. We then continued northward to Nevada Mountain. Significant snow had fallen since our March 1 flight. New snowmobile tracks were documented in the IRA above Georgia Creek, including some tracks that continued all the way to the summit of Black Mountain. No motorized vehicle tracks were observed continuing northward on the Continental Divide past Black Mountain.

We continued flying north almost to Marsh Creek and looked for snowmobile tracks on the Helmville-Gould Trail #467, finding none. We continued eastward down into the Little Prickly Pear Creek drainage encountering increasing westerly downdraft turbulence.



Flight Route (Incomplete) for March 29, 2026 event.



Nevada Mountain. View from Meyers Hill looking NW.



Nevada Mountain (background) and more of the the IRA (foreground).



Snowmobile tracks documented within the Nevada Mountain IRA on March 29, 2026.



Looking west towards the Continental Divide and the Nevada Mountain IRA on March 29, 2026.



Panoramic view of the Continental Divide and the Nevada Mountain IRA looking west, March 29, 2026.

We then flew south to the Jericho Mountain IRA. There were no snowmobile tracks on the Divide north of the gate near Bullion Parks. Large areas were logged within the IRA along both sides of the CDNST. These areas were more visible since the last flight with receding snow.



Jericho Mountain IRA, logging unit and the Jericho Mountain 2025 wildfire.

We then flew southwest into the Electric Peak IRA following Monarch Creek to Bison Mountain. No motorized vehicle tracks were visible anywhere in Monarch Creek, Bison Mountain, Larabee Gulch, Connors Gulch, or the Little Blackfoot Meadows. We flew as far west as Cliff Mountain, looking for snowmobile activity within the IRA. We observed some evidence of motorized intrusions a few hundred yards into the IRA leading in an easterly direction towards No Grass Creek from Gunsight Pass.



Bison Mountain, view to the west.



Gunsight Pass, view to the south.

We flew a portion of the Lazyman IRA beginning with Blackhall Meadows, continued north one mile to the recent placer mining area, then west over Black Mountain, down Moose Creek towards the Rimini Road and private land, then back east over Lazyman Pass, and into the West Fork of Colorado Gulch Creek.

No motorized vehicle tracks were observed in the placer mining area in Colorado Gulch, Moose Creek, or the area around the water tanks west of the top of Colorado Gulch. Next, we flew north down Colorado Gulch and followed the formerly identified E-bike trail through BLM land to private land, finding the trail forked leading to two different private properties.



Lazyman IRA, view to the south, Black Hall Meadows top left corner.

Returning to the airport, we observed a herd of pronghorn antelope east of Helena near the Montana Department of Transportation office building.

We took approximately 50 photos, but early morning sunlight against the hazy plastic aircraft window resulted in mostly poor quality photos.

The flying cost billed to Helena Hunters and Anglers Association was \$237.50. We logged over 220 air miles.