



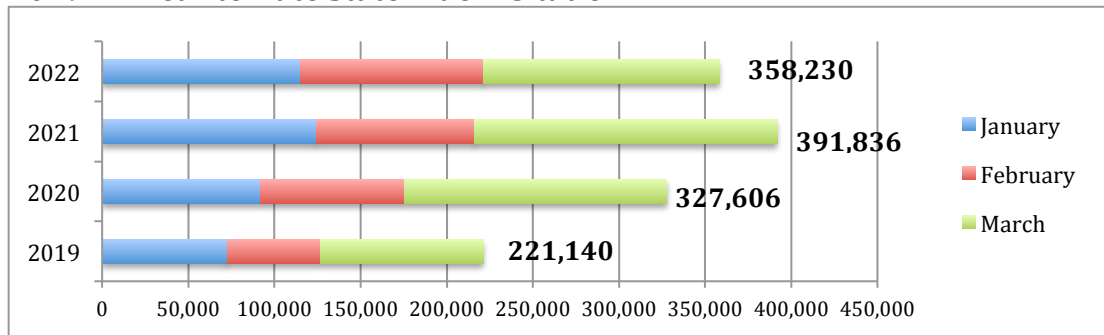
2022 Montana State Parks Visitation for Q1

As of May 6, 2022

Key Takeaways

- There were an estimated **358,230 state park visitors** during the first quarter of 2022. When compared with last year, this represents a decrease of **8.6%**, however compared with 2020 and 2019 it constitutes an increase of **9.3%** and **62.0%**, respectively.

2019-22 Year to Date Statewide Visitation

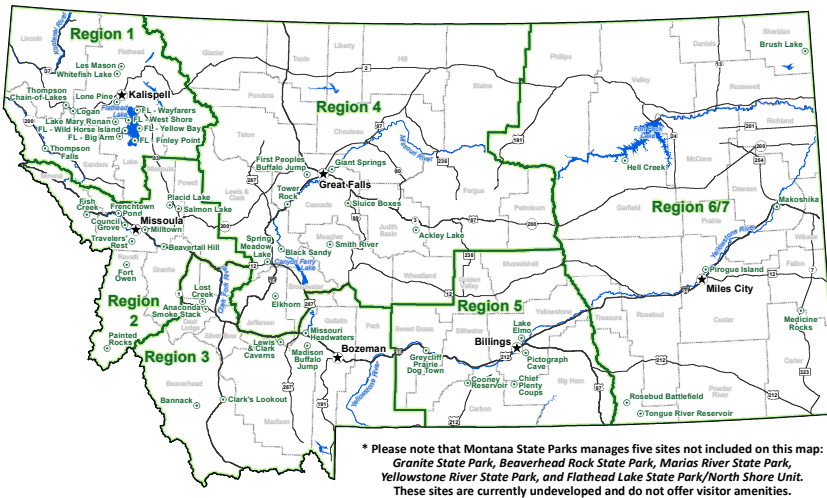


- Weather is a key factor that can impact visitation and in the early months of the year this is particularly evident. Mild weather tends to attract people outdoors and thus can have a positive impact on visitation growth. On the other hand, for parks that provide opportunities for ice fishing or other winter sports, mild weather and visitation can be indirectly correlated. While overall temperatures this winter have been relatively temperate, there were some brief cold spells.
- With an estimated 79,355 visitors, **Giant Springs** was the most visited state park during the first quarter of the year. The next most visited park was **Spring Meadow Lake**, whose visitation was nearly 39,000. **Flathead Lake** and **Cooney Reservoir** each welcomed over 25,000 visitors during this time period, while **Lake Elmo**, **Milltown**, and **Makoshika** saw over 16,000 visitors each.
- Thus far in 2022, ten parks have welcomed **over 10,000 visitors**. Last year at this time there were 11 while in 2020 and 2019 there were nine and six, respectively. It stands to note that 2021 was the second highest visitation year on record, falling just **1.3%** short of the pandemic-fueled visitation levels of 2020. A complete list of parks and their estimated visitation levels can be found at the end of this report.

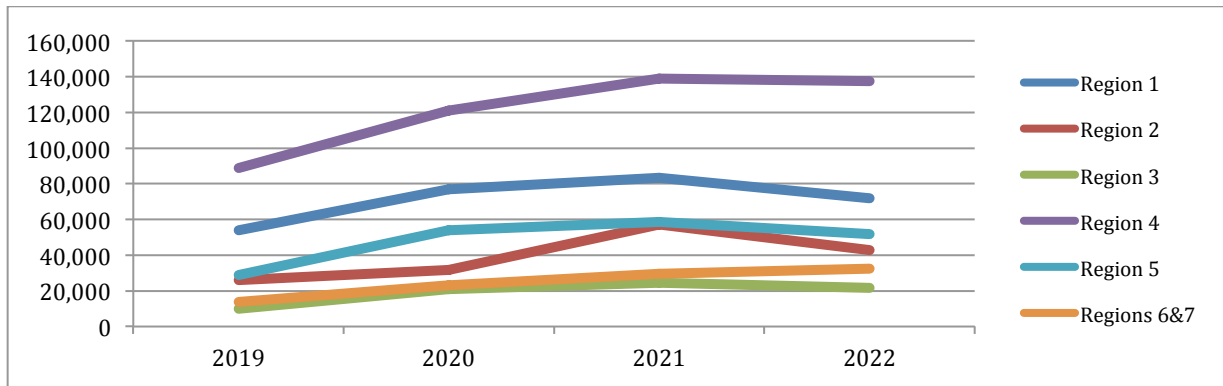
** Please see report notes at the end of this document for information about the state park system's methodological practice and a summation of recent updates to the estimation approach.*

Visitation by State Park Administrative Region (Q1 2019-22)

The Montana State Parks system is sub-divided into six administrative regions with regional headquarter offices located in Kalispell (1), Missoula (2), Bozeman (3), Great Falls (4), Billings (5), and Miles City (6/7). An interesting way to look at visitation data is to see what has happened across each state park administrative region.



The below graph depicts how first quarter visitation has trended since 2019 for each of the state park administrative regions. Collectively, Regions 1 and 4 represented **58.4%** of total visitation for the state.



REGION	Q1 2019	Q1 2020	Q1 2021	Q1 2022	% Of Q1 2022 total
Region 1	53,825	77,042	83,208	71,980	20.1%
Region 2	26,011	31,849	57,316	42,836	12.0%
Region 3	9,962	21,095	24,516	21,755	6.1%
Region 4	88,802	120,820	138,927	137,367	38.3%
Region 5	28,863	53,787	58,418	51,942	14.5%
Regions 6/7	13,677	23,013	29,451	32,350	9.0%
TOTAL	221,140	327,606	391,836	358,230	100.0%

How does this year's visitation compare with recent years?

In comparing 2022 with last year, Regions 6 and 7 were the only ones that experienced growth. Estimates for Regions 1 and 5 in 2022 were below 2020, however there were gains in all other regions when comparing these same time periods. When comparing 2022 with 2019, all regions saw solid gains, with Region 3 and Regions 6 and 7 more than doubling their visitation totals. (It should be noted that beginning in 2020, there were some parks that modified their counting and methodological approaches, and so this may account for some of the growth as noted in previous reports.)

REGION	Q1 2022	% Change with 2021	% Change with 2020	% Change with 2019
Region 1	71,980	-13.5%	-6.6%	33.7%
Region 2	42,836	-25.3%	34.5%	64.7%
Region 3	21,755	-11.3%	3.1%	118.4%
Region 4	137,367	-1.1%	13.7%	54.7%
Region 5	51,942	-11.1%	-3.4%	80.0%
Regions 6/7	32,350	9.8%	40.6%	136.5%
	358,230	-8.6%	9.3%	62.0%

A region-by-region glimpse

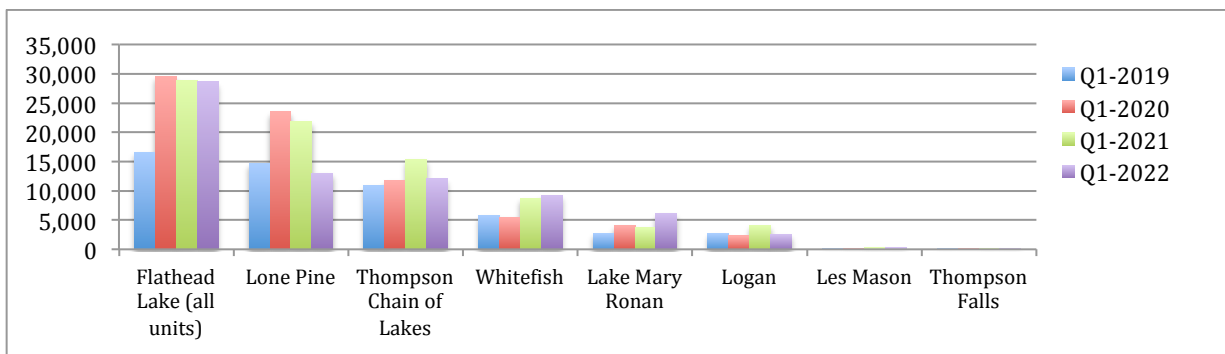
A closer look at visitation for each state park reveals more information about what is occurring. What follows is a region-by-region look at recent estimates and trends.

Region 1

Region 1 saw an estimated **71,980** visitors across its eight parks reporting visitation figures during the first quarter of this year. This represents an estimated **13.5%** decrease in visitation compared with last year, a **6.6%** decrease compared with 2020, and a **33.7%** increase over 2019. Region 1's year to date visitation constitutes **20.1%** of the statewide system total.

Flathead Lake was the third most visited state park during the first quarter of this year while Lone Pine and Thompson Chain of Lakes were the eighth and ninth, respectively.

Visitation for Region 1 Parks (Q1 2019-22)



Region 1 - Park level estimates (Q1 2019-22)

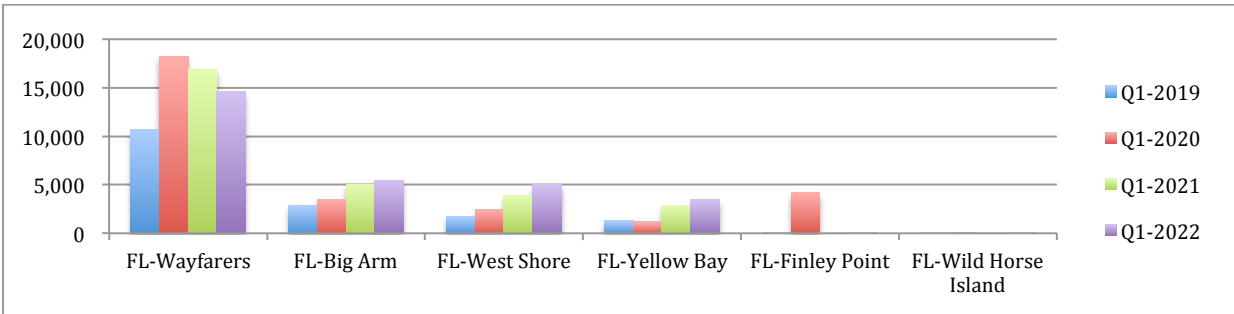
Sorted by highest to lowest Q1 2022 reported visitation estimates

Park	Q1 2019	Q1 2020	Q1 2021	Q1 2022	Change between 2021-2022
Flathead Lake (all units)	16,633	29,619	28,921	28,612	-309
Lone Pine	14,730	23,512	21,933	13,015	-8,918
Thompson Chain of Lakes	10,893	11,750	15,377	12,037	-3,340
Whitefish	5,838	5,482	8,720	9,172	452
Lake Mary Ronan	2,780	4,073	3,714	6,154	2,440
Logan	2,771	2,306	4,123	2,570	-1,553
Les Mason	90	180	240	240	0
Thompson Falls	90	120	180	180	0
	53,825	77,042	83,208	71,980	-11,228

NOTE: Gates at the vehicular entrances of Flathead Lake-Finley Point unit, Les Mason, and Thompson Falls are seasonally closed during early parts of the year. As such, estimates solely reflect walk-in visitors.

Flathead Lake Units (Q1 2019-22)

Sorted by highest to lowest Q1 2022 reported visitation estimates

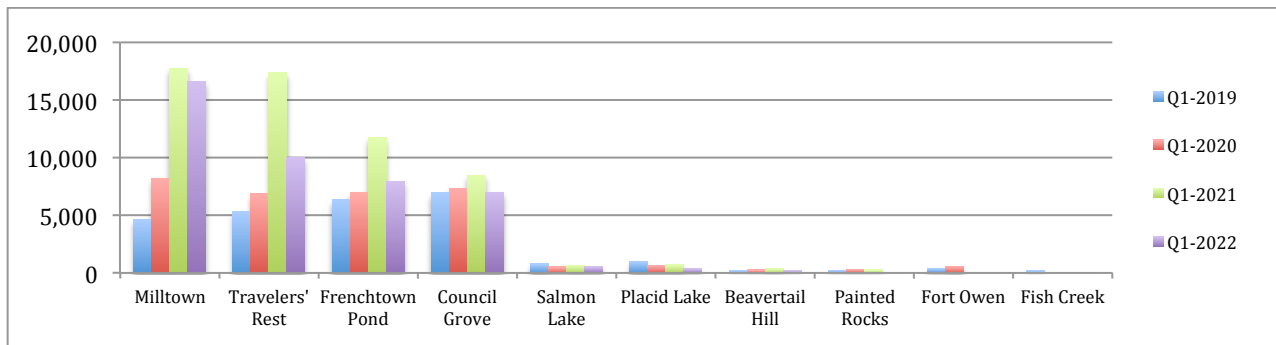


Flathead Lake Units	Q1 2019	Q1 2020	Q1 2021	Q1 2022	Change between 2021-2022
FL-Wayfarers	10,663	18,244	16,915	14,603	-13.7%
FL-Big Arm	2,869	3,526	5,052	5,496	8.8%
FL-West Shore	1,729	2,440	3,912	4,981	27.3%
FL-Yellow Bay	1,272	1,175	2,917	3,441	18.0%
FL-Finley Point	60	4,160	60	60	0.0%
FL-Wild Horse Island	40	74	65	31	-52.3%
	16,633	29,619	28,921	28,612	-1.1%

Region 2

Region 2 saw an estimated **42,836** visitors across its nine parks reporting visitation figures during the first quarter of this year. This represents an estimated **25.3%** decrease in visitation compared with last year, but a **34.5%** increase compared with 2020, and a notable **64.7%** increase over 2019. Region 2's year to date visitation constitutes **12.0%** of the statewide system total. Milltown was the sixth most visited state park during the first quarter of this year while Travelers' Rest was the tenth.

Visitation for Region 2 Parks (Q1 2019-22)



Region 2 - Park level estimates (Q1 2019-22)

Sorted by highest to lowest Q1 2022 reported visitation estimates

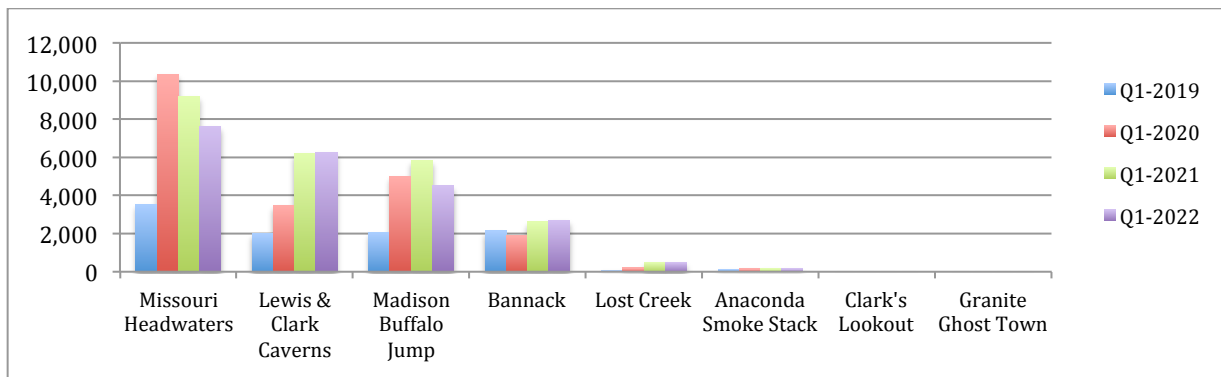
Park	Q1 2019	Q1 2020	Q1 2021	Q1 2022	Change between 2021-2022
Milltown	4,609	8,229	17,786	16,622	-1,164
Travelers' Rest	5,293	6,929	17,358	10,021	-7,337
Frenchtown Pond	6,350	7,005	11,713	7,970	-3,743
Council Grove	6,944	7,361	8,456	7,013	-1,443
Salmon Lake	793	517	661	564	-97
Placid Lake	1,004	652	709	378	-331
Beavertail Hill	199	259	372	211	-161
Painted Rocks	219	323	261	45	-216
Fort Owen	406	574	0	12	12
Fish Creek	194	0	0	0	0
Total	26,011	31,849	57,316	42,836	-14,480

NOTE: Visitation data will be collected at Fish Creek later this year. Additionally, it should be noted that there are seasonal closures at Beavertail Hill, Salmon Lake, and Placid Lake. Vehicular entrance gates to the campgrounds are closed.

Region 3

Region 3 saw an estimated **21,755** visitors across its six parks reporting visitation figures during the first quarter of this year. This represents an estimated **11.3%** decrease in visitation compared with last year, but a **3.1%** increase compared with 2020, and a notable **118.4%** increase over 2019. Region 3's year to date visitation constitutes **6.1%** of the statewide system total.

Visitation for Region 3 Parks (Q1 2019-22)



Region 3 - Park level estimates (Q1 2019-22)

Sorted by highest to lowest Q1 2022 reported visitation estimates

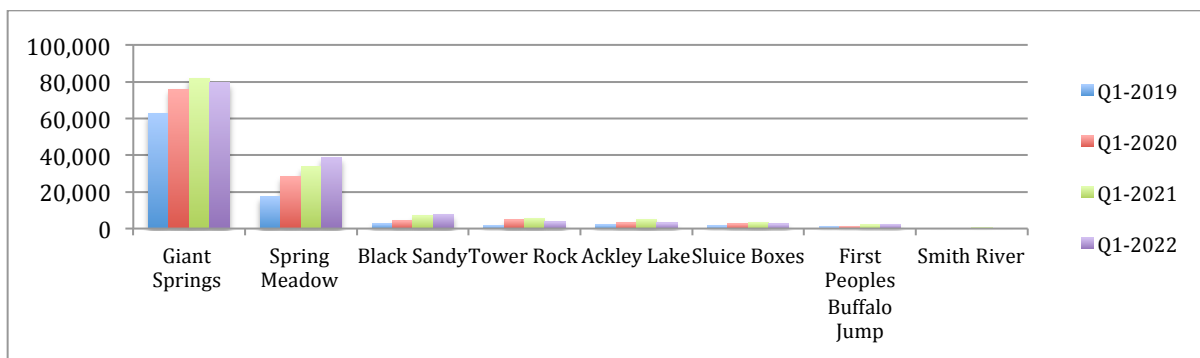
Park	Q1 2019	Q1 2020	Q1 2021	Q1 2022	Change between 2021-2022
Missouri Headwaters	3,525	10,342	9,200	7,642	-1,558
Lewis & Clark Caverns	2,010	3,476	6,198	6,247	49
Madison Buffalo Jump	2,076	5,002	5,836	4,506	-1,330
Bannack	2,143	1,918	2,623	2,698	75
Lost Creek	78	204	498	498	0
Anaconda Smoke Stack	130	153	161	164	3
Clark's Lookout	0	0	0	0	0
Granite Ghost Town	0	0	0	0	0
Beaverhead Rock	0	0	0	0	0
	9,962	21,095	24,516	21,755	-2,761

NOTE: Currently, visitation data is not regularly collected at Beaverhead Rock but will be later this year. Also of note is that Clark's Lookout is seasonally closed during the winter months. Data collection for Lost Creek and Anaconda Smoke Stack has not yet taken place for 2022 and so estimates provided will be updated when possible.

Region 4

Region 4 saw an estimated **137,367** visitors across its eight parks reporting visitation figures during the first quarter of this year. This represents a slight **1.1%** decrease in visitation compared with last year, but a **13.7%** increase compared with 2020, and a notable **54.7%** increase over 2019. Region 4's year to date visitation constitutes **38.3%** of the statewide system total. Giant Springs and Spring Meadow Lake were the top visited parks during the first quarter of this year. Their urban locations attract numerous local residents and their popularity continues to grow.

Visitation for Region 4 Parks (Q1 2019-22)



Region 4 - Park level estimates (Q1 2019-22)

Sorted by highest to lowest Q1 2022 reported visitation estimates

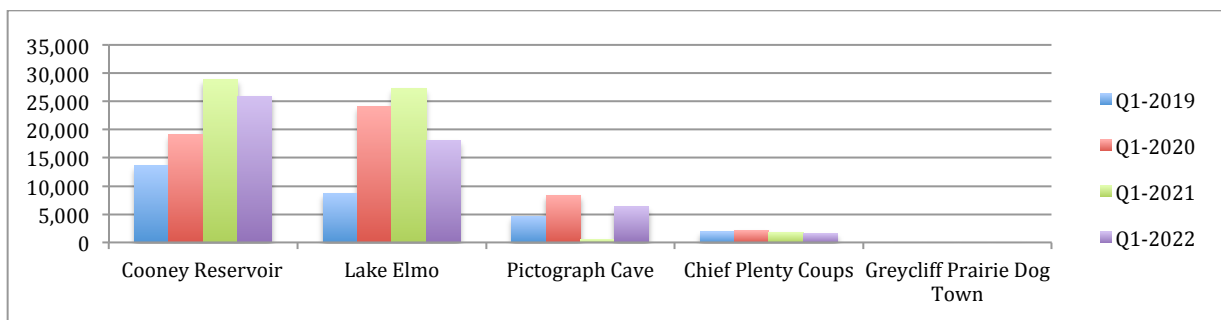
Park	Q1 2019	Q1 2020	Q1 2021	Q1 2022	Change between 2021-2022
Giant Springs	62,433	76,026	81,979	79,335	-2,644
Spring Meadow	17,432	28,441	33,606	38,771	5,165
Black Sandy	2,726	4,348	7,041	7,700	659
Tower Rock	1,598	4,837	5,669	3,690	-1,979
Ackley Lake	2,170	3,166	5,099	3,061	-2,038
Sluice Boxes	1,482	2,698	3,431	2,554	-877
First Peoples Buffalo Jump	961	1,304	2,101	2,256	155
Smith River	0	0	1	0	-1
	88,802	120,820	138,927	137,367	-1,560

NOTE: Currently, visitation data is not regularly collected at Elkhorn. Visitation data for the Smith River is captured using float logs and is not recorded during the winter months.

Region 5

Region 5 saw an estimated **51,942** visitors across its four parks reporting visitation figures during the first quarter of this year. This represents an **11.1%** decrease in visitation compared with last year, a **3.4%** decrease compared with 2020, but a notable **80.0%** increase over 2019. Region 5's year to date visitation constitutes **14.5%** of the statewide system total. Cooney Reservoir and Lake Elmo were the fourth and fifth most visited state parks during the first quarter of the year. In spite of cold temperatures, ice fishing appeared to draw a number of visitors to Cooney Reservoir.

Visitation for Region 5 Parks (Q1 2019-22)



Region 5 - Park level estimates (Q1 2019-22)

Sorted by highest to lowest Q1 2022 reported visitation estimates

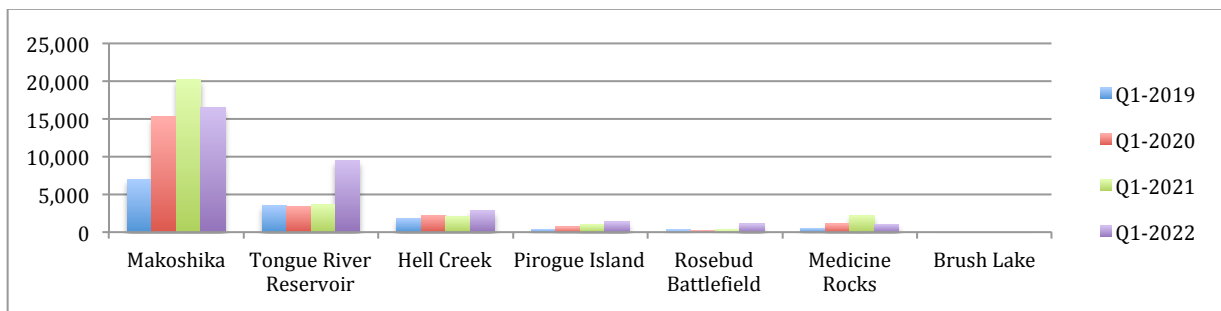
Park	Q1 2019	Q1 2020	Q1 2021	Q1 2022	Change between 2021-2022
Cooney Reservoir	13,577	19,175	28,820	25,935	-2,885
Lake Elmo	8,708	24,092	27,316	18,081	-9,235
Pictograph Cave	4,680	8,364	507	6,300	5,793
Chief Plenty Coups	1,898	2,156	1,775	1,626	-149
Greycliff Prairie Dog Town	0	0	0	0	0
	28,863	53,787	58,418	51,942	-6,476

NOTE: Greycliff Prairie Dog Town is seasonally closed during winter months. Additionally, it should be noted that in 2021 Pictograph Cave was temporarily closed due to a rock fall.

Regions 6 and 7

Regions 6 and 7 saw an estimated **32,350** visitors across their six parks reporting visitation figures during the first quarter of this year. This represents a **9.8%** increase in visitation compared with last year, a **40.6%** increase compared with 2020, and a notable **136.5%** increase over 2019. Regions 6 and 7 year to date visitation constitutes **9.0%** of the statewide system total. Makoshika was the seventh most visited state park in February and continues on its upward trend. There was also strong growth at Tongue River and Rosebud Battlefield, however this can be tied to the addition of new vehicle counting devices that were installed midway through 2021. Nevertheless, for Tongue River the park manager did note that ice fishing and camping activities grew quite steadily.

Visitation for Regions 6 and 7 Parks (Q1 2019-22)



Regions 6 and 7 - Park level estimates (Q1 2019-22)

Sorted by highest to lowest Q1 2022 reported visitation estimates

Park	Q1 2019	Q1 2020	Q1 2021	Q1 2022	Change between 2021-2022
Makoshika	7,040	15,304	20,248	16,553	-3,695
Tongue River Reservoir	3,570	3,465	3,626	9,472	5,846
Hell Creek	1,849	2,230	2,039	2,808	769
Pirogue Island	388	700	1,022	1,358	336
Rosebud Battlefield	299	208	325	1,083	758
Medicine Rocks	531	1,106	2,191	1,076	-1,115
Brush Lake	0	0	0	0	0
	13,677	23,013	29,451	32,350	2,899

NOTE: Brush Lake is now seasonally closed.

Q1 2019-2022 - Monthly State Park Visitation

State parks sorted by highest to lowest Q1 2022 visitation estimates

REGION	PARK	Q1-2022	Q1-2021	Q1-2020	Q1-2019
4	Giant Springs	79,335	81,979	76,026	62,433
4	Spring Meadow	38,771	33,606	28,441	17,432
1	Flathead Lake (all units)	28,612	28,921	29,619	16,633
5	Cooney Reservoir	25,935	28,820	19,175	13,577
5	Lake Elmo	18,081	27,316	24,092	8,708
2	Milltown	16,622	17,786	8,229	4,609
6/7	Makoshika	16,553	20,248	15,304	7,040
1	Lone Pine	13,015	21,933	23,512	14,730
1	Thompson Chain of Lakes	12,037	15,377	11,750	10,893
2	Travelers' Rest	10,021	17,358	6,929	5,293
6/7	Tongue River Reservoir	9,472	3,626	3,465	3,570
1	Whitefish	9,172	8,720	5,482	5,838
2	Frenchtown Pond	7,970	11,713	7,005	6,350
4	Black Sandy	7,700	7,041	4,348	2,726
3	Missouri Headwaters	7,642	9,200	10,342	3,525
2	Council Grove	7,013	8,456	7,361	6,944
5	Pictograph Cave	6,300	507	8,364	4,680
3	Lewis & Clark Caverns	6,247	6,198	3,476	2,010
1	Lake Mary Ronan	6,154	3,714	4,073	2,780
3	Madison Buffalo Jump	4,506	5,836	5,002	2,076
4	Tower Rock	3,690	5,669	4,837	1,598
4	Ackley Lake	3,061	5,099	3,166	2,170
6/7	Hell Creek	2,808	2,039	2,230	1,849
3	Bannack	2,698	2,623	1,918	2,143
1	Logan	2,570	4,123	2,306	2,771
4	Sluice Boxes	2,554	3,431	2,698	1,482
4	First Peoples Buffalo Jump	2,256	2,101	1,304	961
5	Chief Plenty Coups	1,626	1,775	2,156	1,898
6/7	Pirogue Island	1,358	1,022	700	388
6/7	Rosebud Battlefield	1,083	325	208	299
6/7	Medicine Rocks	1,076	2,191	1,106	531
2	Salmon Lake	564	661	517	793
3	Lost Creek	498	498	204	78
2	Placid Lake	378	709	652	1,004
1	Les Mason	240	240	180	90
2	Beavertail Hill	211	372	259	199
1	Thompson Falls	180	180	120	90
3	Anaconda Smoke Stack	164	161	153	130
2	Painted Rocks	45	261	323	219

Q1 2019-2022 - Monthly State Park Visitation

State parks sorted by highest to lowest Q1 2022 visitation estimates

CONTINUED

REGION	PARK	Q1-2022	Q1-2021	Q1-2020	Q1-2019
2	Fort Owen	12	0	574	406
2	Fish Creek	0	0	0	194
TOTAL		358,230	391,836	327,606	221,140

Seasonal Closures

REGION	PARK	Q1-2022	Q1-2021	Q1-2020	Q1-2019
3	Granite Ghost Town	0	0	N/A	N/A
3	Clark's Lookout	0	0	0	0
4	Smith River (floaters)	0	1	0	0
5	Greycliff Prairie Dog Town	0	0	0	0
6/7	Brush Lake	0	0	0	0

Vehicular Entrance Gates Closed/Walk In-Visitor Estimates Only

REGION	PARK	Q1-2022	Q1-2021	Q1-2020	Q1-2019
1	Flathead Lake-Finley Point	60	60	4,160	60
1	Les Mason	240	240	180	90
1	Thompson Falls	180	180	120	90
2	Beavertail Hill	211	372	259	199
2	Painted Rocks	45	261	323	219
2	Placid Lake	378	709	652	1,004
2	Salmon Lake	564	661	517	793
3	Lost Creek	498	498	204	78

Visitation Data Not Collected

REGION	PARK	Q1-2022	Q1-2021	Q1-2020	Q1-2019
2	Fish Creek	0	0	0	194
3	Beaverhead Rock	0	0	0	0
4	Elkhorn Ghost Town	0	0	0	0

REPORTING NOTES:

Visitation data is based on reported estimates from 46 of Montana's 55 state parks. In the winter, some parks and/or campground entrances are seasonally closed. While the system does experience some off-season camping, numbers have traditionally been low. Typically, most campgrounds do not open until May 1 with reservations beginning on May 15.

FWP continues to work with experts at the University of Montana's Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research (ITRR) to gain assistance with revising parks' visitation methodology. Additionally, FWP added counting devices to entrances where either (a) existing counters were nearing the end of their useful life, or (b) there simply were none installed. Prior to 2020, visitation data only included estimates for visitors arriving by vehicle. Since then, walk-in/bike-in visitors have been counted leading to some degree of growth in estimates. It should also be noted that FWP occasionally evaluates its methodological approaches and in turn may determine the need to make slight revisions to a previous month's total to improve accuracy.

For questions about this report, contact Kyan Bishop, Parks and Outdoor Recreation Planner, at Kyan.Bishop@mt.gov or at (406) 444-3364.