

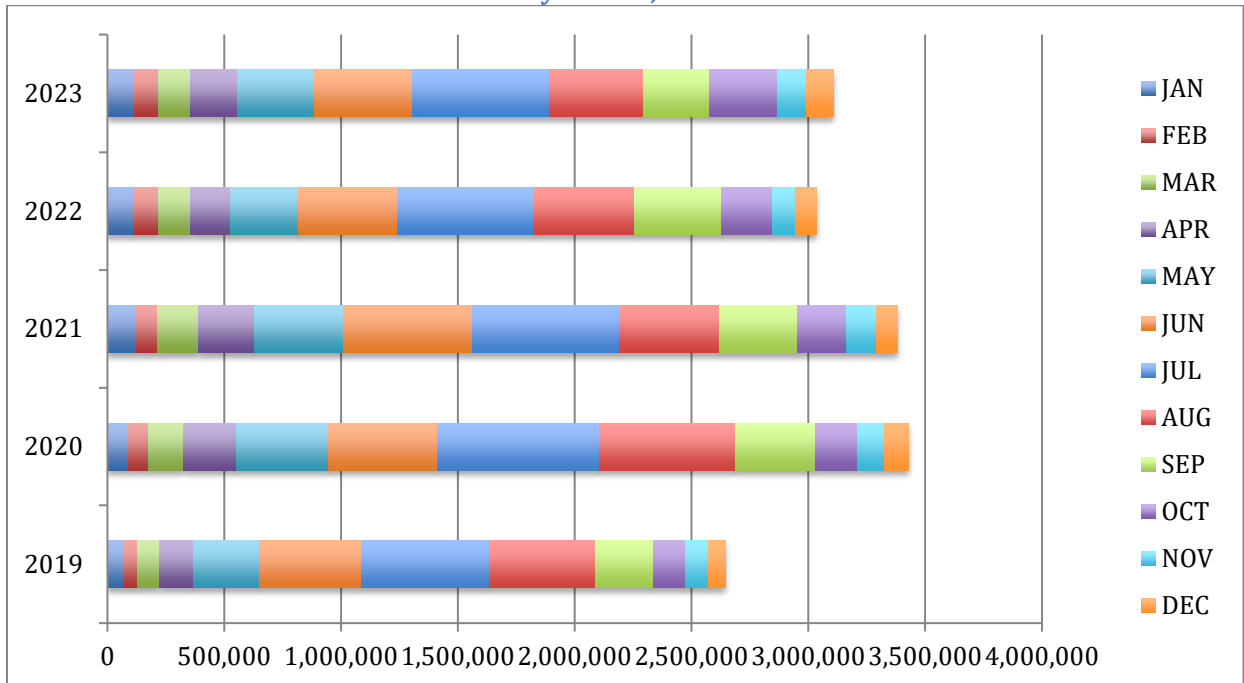


2023 Montana State Parks Annual Visitation Report

May 6, 2024

The Montana State Parks system welcomed an estimated **3.1 million** visitors in 2023. This number is a 2.4% increase from 2022, a 17.4% increase from pre-pandemic levels in 2019, and a 42% increase over the last 10 years.

State Park Visitation Estimated Totals by Month, 2019-2023



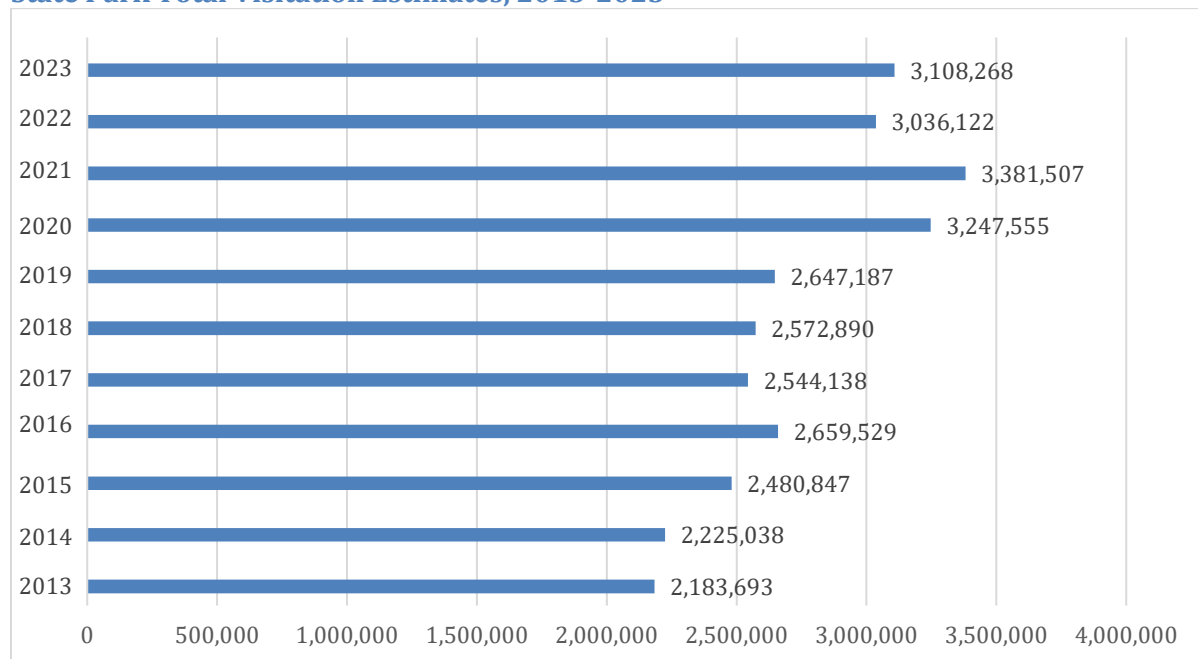
State Park Visitation Estimated Total Counts by Month, 2019-2023

Year	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.
2019	72,608	53,884	94,648	146,589	284,340	437,261	545,156
2020	92,121	83,506	151,979	224,062	396,508	465,567	691,549
2021	124,361	91,749	175,726	235,605	383,052	553,824	626,315
2022	114,993	105,553	137,023	166,989	295,263	422,988	585,960
2023	115,140	103,659	137,360	198,699	332,822	419,621	583,564
	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Total Visitation	
2019	452,339	248,866	138,170	99,648	73,678	2,647,187	
2020	582,160	342,403	182,221	112,466	103,013	3,427,555	
2021	428,996	335,084	207,789	127,324	91,682	3,381,507	
2022	429,003	372,233	215,667	101,124	89,316	3,036,121	
2023	401,616	283,684	289,923	124,966	117,214	3,108,268	

The table above depicts visitation estimates by month from 2019-2023. Throughout 2023, there was a rise in visitors compared to 2022 in January, March, April, May, October, November, and December. However, these months had fewer visitors than in 2021, except for October and December, which experienced the highest visitor numbers reported for those months in the past five years.

The graph below presents a historical look at how visitation for the state park system has changed over the last ten years. Since then, overall state park visitation has grown by just under 1 million visitors. By comparison, Yellowstone National Park has seen a steady increase over the same time minus a slight decrease in 2022 due to flooding and road closures. Glacier National Park's visitation has increased by 33.4% during the same period of time with some recent leveling off with a vehicle reservation system.

State Park Total Visitation Estimates, 2013-2023



In 2023, there were 7 parks whose visitation exceeded 100,000, which is similar to 2019. A full list of state parks and their visitation estimates for 2019-23 can be viewed on page five of this report.

2023 Total Visitation Estimates for 2019 Parks with over 100,000 visitors

Region	State Park	Total 2023 Visitation
4	Giant Springs	584,810
1	Flathead Lake (all units)	332,063
4	Spring Meadow	169,348
5	Lake Elmo	165,041
5	Cooney Reservoir	148,344
1	Thompson Chain of Lakes	134,990
1	Lone Pine	132,054

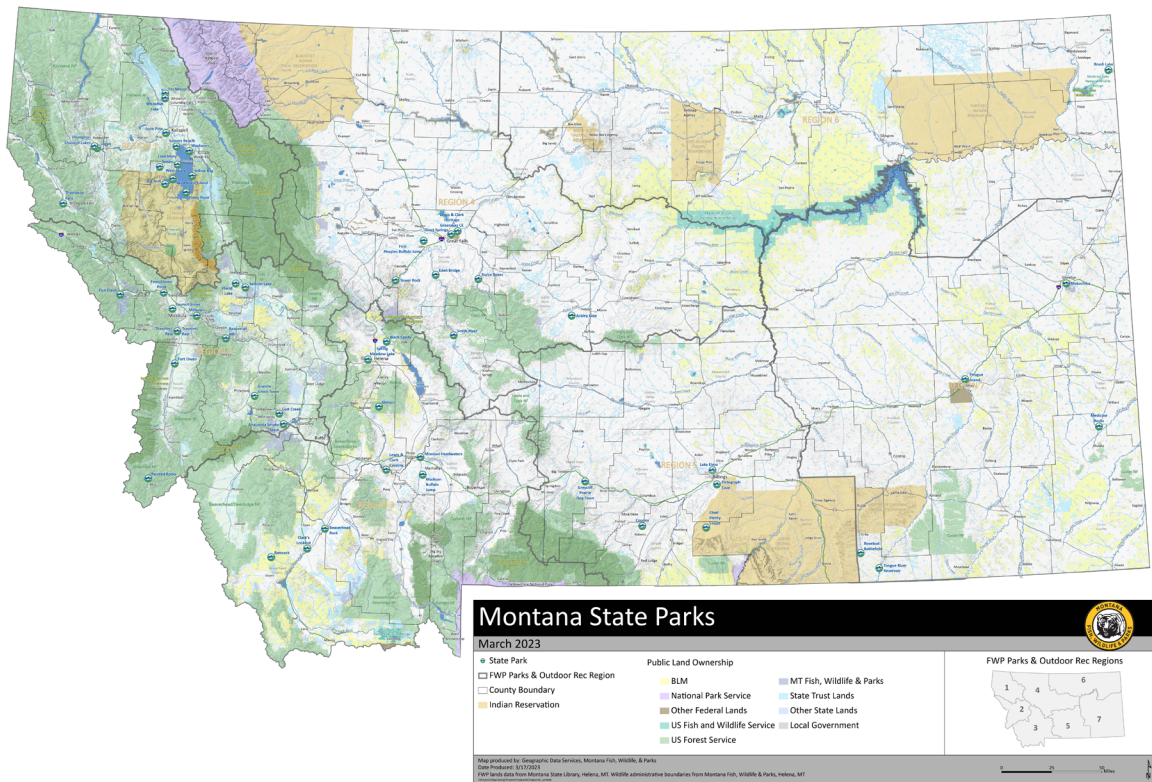
Introduction

This report has been developed utilizing 2019-2023 visitation estimates reported by state park managers. Visitation is a term used to describe the number of individuals visiting a state park. The system's visitation methodology did not substantially change during this time. However, reporting practices by staff members were updated, and minor adjustments to visitation calculations have occurred to enhance reporting efforts. Additionally, staff are continually examining ways to improve accuracy. Please see the reporting notes at the end of this summary for further clarification on such efforts, as well as some clarifying points on factors impacting visitation.ⁱ

A region-by-region glimpse

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

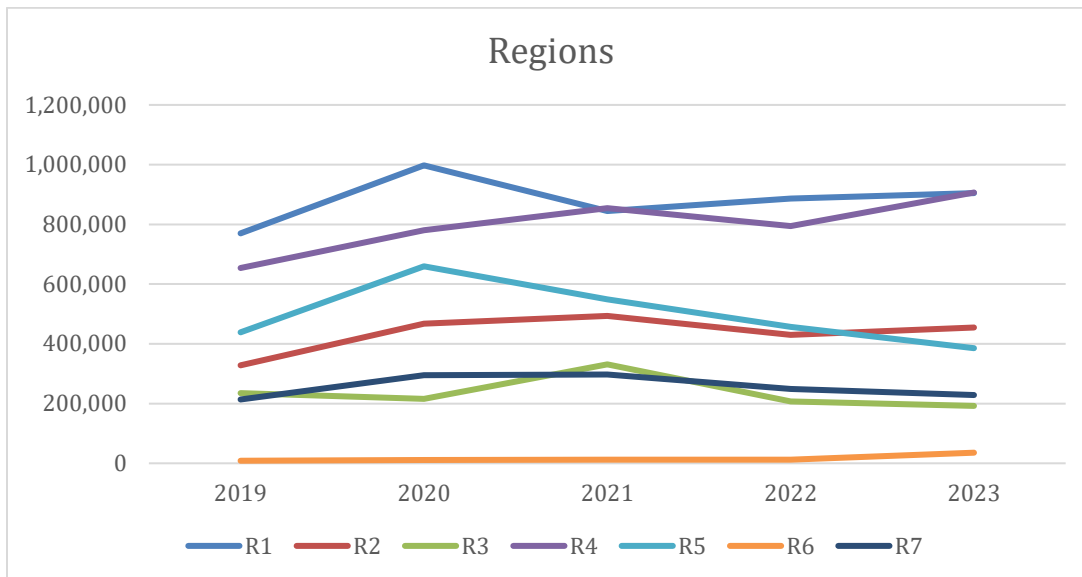
Map of Montana State Parks and Administrative Region boundaries



State Park Visitation 2020-2023 and percentage of state park system visitation by region

	2020	% Of 2020 total	2021	% Of 2021 total	2022	% Of 2022 total	2023	% Of 2023 total
Region 1	997,581	29.1%	844,620	25.0%	886,272	29.1%	904,637	29.1%
Region 2	467,906	13.7%	493,474	14.6%	429,930	14.2%	454,901	14.6%
Region 3	215,287	6.3%	331,248	9.8%	207,283	6.8%	192,180	6.2%
Region 4	780,899	22.8%	853,998	25.3%	794,549	26.2%	906,685	29.2%
Region 5	659,559	19.2%	548,678	16.2%	457,315	15.1%	385,428	12.4%
Region 6	11,270	0.3%	12,181	0.4%	11,820	0.4%	35,510	1.1%
Region 7	295,004	8.6%	297,308	8.8%	248,952	8.2%	228,927	7.4%
TOTAL	3,427,555		3,381,507		3,036,121		3,108,268	

In 2023, Regions 1 and 4 cumulatively accounted for just under half of the state's overall visitation. Region 1 saw a slight uptick from 2022 (4.7%) after a year of decline in 2021 (15.4%), and Region 4 has seen an increase over the past few years. Regions 3, 5, and 7 showed slight declines while Regions 2 and 6 saw increases over 2022.



Total visitation (2019-23) and proportions of statewide totals

The chart below offers some further comparisons. Between 2019 and 2023 Regions 1, 2, 4, 6 and 7 experienced double-digit growth with both Regions 2 and 4 growing by **38.7%**. Regions 3 and 5 declined by **18.1%** and **12.1%** respectively. A look back at historical data for the system illustrates an increase in park use prior to the pandemic and continued growth through 2023. This data corroborates anecdotal evidence of the overall growth of outdoor recreation participation and use of public lands in Montana as well as recent surveys that have been undertaken from several industry perspectives.

Region	2023 comparison with 2019		2023 comparison with 2022	
	# Visits	% Change	# Visits	% Change
Region 1	+107,715	+13.5%	+18,365	+2.1%
Region 2	+126,809	+38.7%	+24,971	+5.8%
Region 3	-42,533	-18.1%	-15,103	-7.3%
Region 4	+252,746	+38.7%	+112,136	+14.1%
Region 5	-52,850	-12.1%	-71,877	-15.7%
Region 6	+26,954	+315.0%	+23,690	+200.4%
Region 7	+15,240	+7.1%	-20,025	-8.0%
TOTAL	+434,081 est. visits (+16.2%)		+72,147 est. visits (+2.4%)	

In comparing 2023 with the previous year, Region 5 saw the largest decline of all regions. During this same time period, declines in the other regions could be attributed to an overall market correction that is being seen across the outdoor recreation industry after the height of visitation and use during the COVID-19 pandemic. Since 2019, Region 1 has added a new park (Somers Beach) which could contribute to overall visitation increases. As will be noted under each region's visitation breakdown, some parks have experienced operational issues with counter devices which could impact total numbers.

Statewide visitation estimates (2019-23)

Visitation at state parks increased for **23** state parks in 2023 compared with last year, and since 2019 it has increased at **27** state parks. Between 2019 and 2020 visitation increased for **36** state parks. In examining this time period, many parks experienced explosive growth during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, even with the absence or sharp decline in school field trips and other group activities that could not take place. The table below provides annual estimates for all parks in order of descending 2023 visitation values.

State Park Visitation by Park 2019-2023, percentage change

RE-GION	PARK	TOTAL 2019	TOTAL 2020	TOTAL 2021	TOTAL 2022	TOTAL 2023	% Change (2019 and 2023)
4	Giant Springs	384,023	384,309	414,889	465,367	584,810	52.3%
1	Flathead Lake (all 6 units)	354,826	471,709	339,631	311,875	332,063	-6.4%
4	Spring Meadow	134,992	178,156	254,141	181,851	169,348	25.5%
5	Lake Elmo	182,022	231,388	212,916	165,530	165,041	-9.3%
5	Cooney Reservoir	175,870	359,607	263,691	208,960	148,344	-15.7%
1	Thompson Chain of Lakes	123,682	169,296	140,659	131,622	134,990	9.1%

RE-GION	PARK	TOTAL 2019	TOTAL 2020	TOTAL 2021	TOTAL 2022	TOTAL 2023	% Change (2019 and 2023)
1	Lone Pine	114,132	129,747	128,640	122,494	132,054	15.7%
7	Tongue River Reservoir	64,504	92,492	90,859	107,978	99,232	53.8%
7	Makoshika	85,272	128,288	150,484	103,999	93,150	9.2%
1	Les Mason	35,898	50,638	51,396	69,575	92,596	157.9%
1	Whitefish	72,573	86,398	105,648	151,072	84,409	16.3%
2	Milltown	36,387	72,433	110,732	89,170	80,208	120.4%
2	Travelers' Rest	39,851	49,545	64,933	75,048	69,908	75.4%
2	Placid Lake	67,695	90,179	57,752	39,989	60,579	-10.5%
2	Fish Creek	6,281	N/A	N/A	20,792	54,525	N/A
3	Bannack	43,804	38,085	46,583	52,356	50,565	15.4%
2	Salmon Lake	50,754	72,709	86,987	59,098	47,737	-5.9%
2	Frenchtown Pond	51,272	83,670	59,240	51,479	47,256	-7.8%
3	Lewis & Clark Caverns	86,077	40,591	145,637	50,015	46,893	-45.5%
4	Black Sandy	43,241	69,288	61,518	43,285	43,966	1.7%
5	Pictograph Cave	54,273	42,870	44,569	50,160	43,779	-19.3%
2	Beavertail Hill	22,201	29,104	40,393	37,936	37,934	70.9%
1	Thompson Falls	15,675	19,240	17,236	18,129	36,059	130.0%
6	Brush Lake	8,556	11,270	12,181	11,820	35,510	315.0%
3	Madison Buffalo Jump	15,649	24,715	23,192	19,518	35,466	126.6%
2	Council Grove	35,868	46,757	43,249	33,765	35,395	-1.3%
1	Somers Beach	N/A	N/A	N/A	7,939	34,268	N/A
4	First Peoples Buffalo Jump	16,202	15,376	19,286	28,352	34,195	111.1%
3	Missouri Headwaters	51,898	70,917	75,699	53,669	33,436	-35.6%
1	Lake Mary Ronan	23,086	34,625	31,055	31,674	32,144	39.2%
4	Sluice Boxes	22,085	31,847	27,767	29,273	31,498	42.6%
4	Ackley Lake	32,522	66,480	45,715	29,712	27,428	-15.7%
5	Chief Plenty Coups	15,907	13,017	13,352	22,681	27,097	70.3%
1	Logan	30,050	35,928	30,355	41,894	26,054	-13.3%
7	Medicine Rocks	16,819	27,527	20,140	13,678	21,224	26.2%
2	Painted Rocks	12,987	19,014	25,625	16,161	16,747	29.0%
3	Lost Creek	15,346	18,633	16,992	12,883	12,606	-17.9%
4	Tower Rock	14,777	29,172	26,532	12,757	9,333	-36.8%
7	Rosebud Battlefield	6,563	5,973	5,460	13,605	8,207	25.0%
7	Pirogue Island	4,340	6,209	8,016	9,692	7,115	63.9%
3	Granite Ghost Town	0	0	3,599	0	6,878	N/A

RE-GION	PARK	TOTAL 2019	TOTAL 2020	TOTAL 2021	TOTAL 2022	TOTAL 2023	% Change (2019 and 2023)
4	Smith River	6,097	6,271	4,150	3,952	6,106	0.1%
3	Clark's Lookout	5,630	5,559	3,750	4,120	5,179	-8.0%
2	Fort Owen	4,796	4,495	4,563	6,491	4,612	-3.8%
5	Greycliff Prairie Dog Town	10,206	12,677	14,151	9,984	1,167	-88.6%
3	Beaverhead Rock	0	0	0	888	1,158	N/A
3	Anaconda Smoke Stack	16,309	16,787	15,796	13,833	0	N/A

NOTE: Includes Flathead Lake being counted as one park, comprised of six units. Visitation data collection commenced at Beaverhead Rock in June 2022. The counter at Granite Ghost Town was not operational for the years 2019, 2020, and 2022, and the Anaconda Smoke Stack is presently inactive. Somers Beach was designated as a park in 2022. Elkhorn and Hell Creek were not included in the table due to lack of data available for analysis.

SPOTLIGHT: Why is visitation information important?

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks has seen steady growth in park and other site visitation over the past decade and due to the lengthy seasons in which the agency's sites are open and used by visitors. Growth and evolution in the outdoor recreation industry has played a role in parlaying gear and equipment into the marketplace, and thereby converting year-round outdoor participation into a reality for many. This growth has important implications for the "outdoor recreation economy." Montana was third in the nation in 2022 for the percentage that outdoor recreation value added to the state's gross domestic product.¹

Other considerations surrounding growth in visitation include how public land managers can more openly attract and engage individuals of diverse cultural experiences and backgrounds, both as visitors as well as part of the workforce and how to best protect and preserve natural, cultural, and recreational resources for the long term. Education of 'new' park visitors has become a critical focus, echoed by the national "Recreate Responsibly" campaign. Meanwhile, infrastructural needs mount, as systems are put to the test, and staff retention and housing challenges are exacerbated.

[Montana's Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan](#)² which is being updated in 2024, offers a framework for examining these issues, as does the application of measured studies and analytical reports that consider visitor use and important recreation management principles. Further evaluation and careful monitoring of visitation trends help to inform key decisions about planning, operations, and upholding stewardship principles.

¹ <https://www.bea.gov/data/special-topics/outdoor-recreation>

² https://files.cfc.umt.edu/humandimensionslab/SCORP_2020-2024.pdf

REGION 1

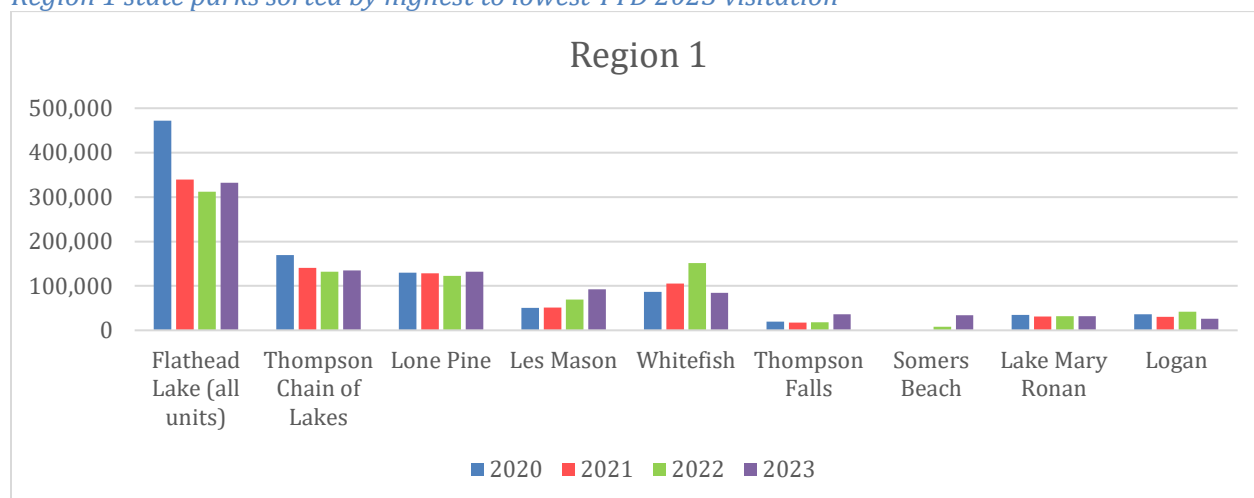
Region 1 served approximately **904,637** visitors in 2023. This represents an estimated **2.1%** increase compared with last year. While the pace of growth softened since 2020, the region's visitation was still **17.5%** higher than 2019. Visitation for Region 1 represents **29.1%** of the system's total visitation for 2023 (which is the same percent as 2022).

Significantly, of the ten parks in the state that saw visitation levels exceed 100,000, three are in Region 1 - Flathead Lake (all units), Thompson Chain of Lakes, and Lone Pine. The important public access these parks provide is underscored by their continued visitation, especially as the Flathead Valley grows in population.

Interestingly, Flathead Lake, known for its beauty and access to camping and water recreation, welcomed fewer visitors across its six units since 2020, however it still was the second most visited state park this year. Another decline in visitation in 2023 to Flathead Lake could be due to record low water levels in the lake impacting recreation. As previously mentioned, Somers Beach State Park is now open with visitation being recorded and development projects underway.

Estimated 2020-2023 visitation

Region 1 state parks sorted by highest to lowest YTD 2023 visitation

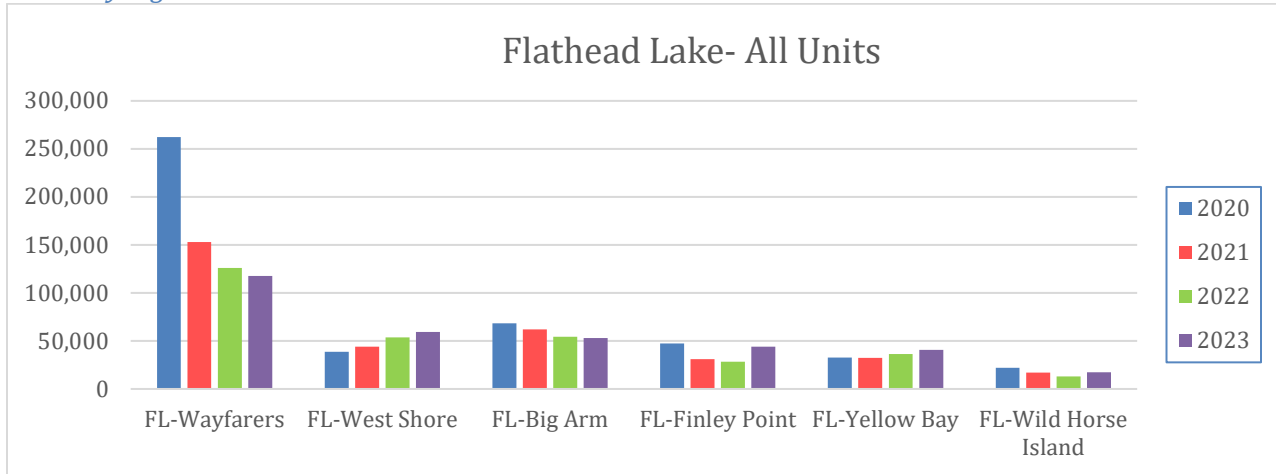


PARK	TOTAL 2020	TOTAL 2021	TOTAL 2022	TOTAL 2023	% Change (2022 and 2023)
Flathead Lake (all units)	471,709	339,631	311,875	332,063	+6.5%
Thompson Chain of Lakes	169,296	140,659	131,622	134,990	+2.6%
Lone Pine	129,747	128,640	122,494	132,054	+7.8%
Les Mason	50,638	51,396	69,575	92,596	+33.1%
Whitefish	86,398	105,648	151,071	84,409	-44.1%
Thompson Falls	19,240	17,236	18,129	36,059	+98.9%
Somers Beach	N/A	N/A	7,939	34,268	+331.6%
Lake Mary Ronan	34,625	31,055	31,674	32,144	+1.5%
Logan	35,928	30,355	41,894	26,054	-37.8%
TOTAL	997,581	844,620	886,273	904,637	+2.1%

NOTE: Includes Flathead Lake being counted as one park, comprised of six units. Somers Beach was established as a park in 2022.

Region 1 - Flathead Lake Unit estimates (2020-2023)

Sorted by highest to lowest YTD 2023 visitation



FLATHEAD LAKE UNIT	TOTAL 2020	TOTAL 2021	TOTAL 2022	TOTAL 2023	% Change (2022 and 2023)
FL-Wayfarers	262,402	153,155	125,861	117,562	-6.6%
FL-West Shore	38,839	44,097	53,733	59,516	+10.8%
FL-Big Arm	68,264	62,168	54,441	52,930	-2.8%
FL-Finley Point	47,443	30,930	28,362	44,011	+55.2%
FL-Yellow Bay	32,811	32,251	36,488	40,634	+11.4%
FL-Wild Horse Island	21,950	17,030	12,990	17,409	+34.0%
TOTAL	471,709	339,631	311,875	332,063	+6.5%

NOTE: The entrance gate is seasonally closed during much of the winter at the Finley Point unit of Flathead. Additionally, Wild Horse Island counters are not accessed in the winter and data will be updated in spring.

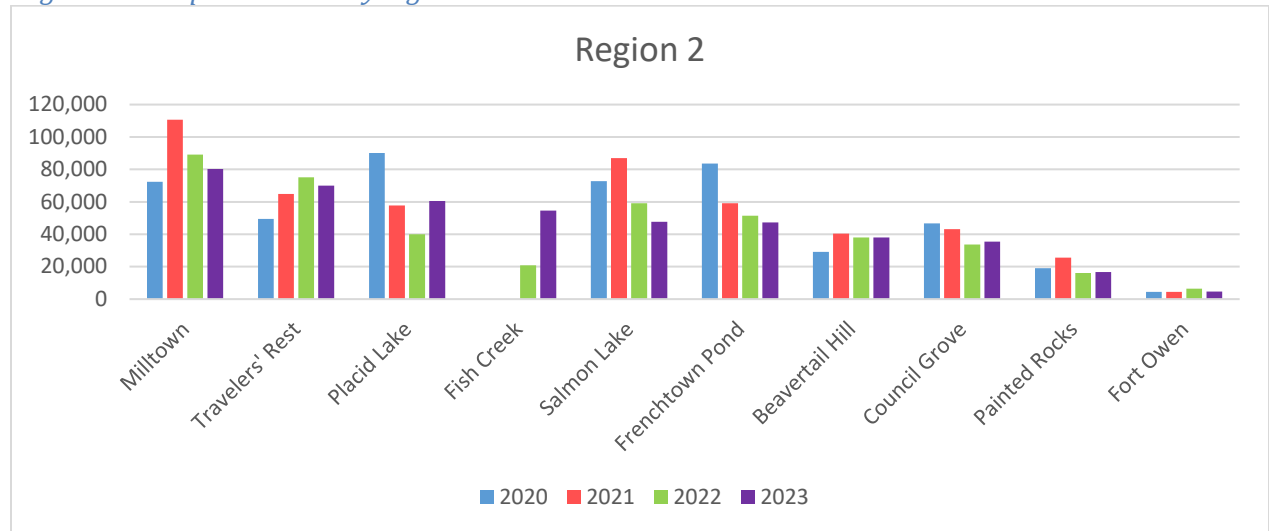
REGION 2

With an estimated **454,901** visitors in 2023, Region 2 experienced a **5.8%** increase from 2022. Visitation in Region 2 represents **14.6%** of the system's total visitation for 2023, roughly the same as 2022.

Fish Creek now has two counters installed to capture increasing visitation. Additionally, Fish Creek is undergoing a process to develop a management direction document to address increased use. Despite a decrease from 2022, half the parks in region 2 are still showing increases in visitation after record numbers during 2020 and 2021.

Estimated 2020-2023 visitation

Region 2 state parks sorted by highest to lowest YTD 2023 visitation



PARK	TOTAL 2020	TOTAL 2021	TOTAL 2022	TOTAL 2023	% Change between 2022 and 2023
Milltown	72,433	110,732	89,170	80,208	-10.1%
Travelers' Rest	49,545	64,933	75,048	69,908	-6.9%
Placid Lake	90,179	57,752	39,989	60,579	+51.5%
Fish Creek	N/A	N/A	20,792	54,525	+162.2%
Salmon Lake	72,709	86,987	59,098	47,737	-32.1%
Frenchtown Pond	83,670	59,240	51,479	47,256	-8.2%
Beavertail Hill	29,104	40,393	37,936	37,934	-0.0%
Council Grove	46,757	43,249	33,765	35,395	+4.8%
Painted Rocks	19,014	25,625	16,161	16,747	+3.6%
Fort Owen	4,495	4,563	4,563	4,612	-28.9%
TOTAL	467,906	493,474	429,929	454,901	+6.0%

NOTE: Visitation data at Fish Creek was not regularly reported in 2020 or 2021, however staff began to collect data there in 2022 with an additional counter installed and visitation observations conducted in 2023.

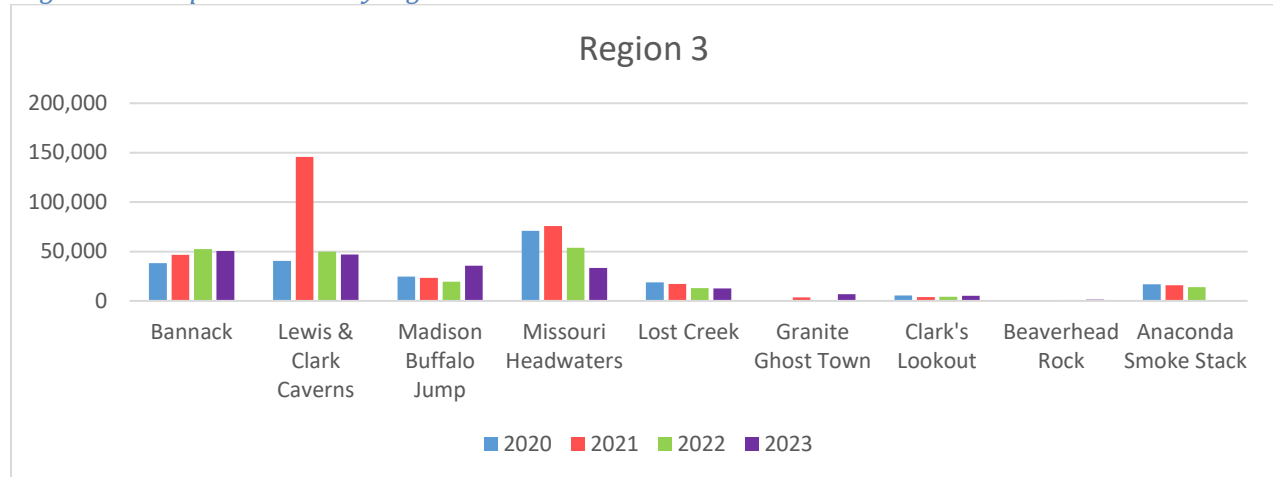
REGION 3

With an estimated **192,180** visitors in 2023, Region 3 experienced a **7.3%** decrease since 2022: however, just a small decrease since 2019 (down by just 23,000 visits). Region 3's 2023 visitation represents **6.2%** of the system's total visitation, which is on par with 2022. It should be noted that some of the decline in visitation could be contributed to inactive counters in the region as well as a few instances of missing data due to counter error.

Bannack has seen steady numbers over the last few years. Madison Buffalo Jump has experienced year over year increases. Though Missouri Headwaters shows a decline in visitation, there were counter issues throughout 2023. This park is undergoing a planning effort as well as potential expansion of the park area. Anaconda Smoke Stack did not have any counter data for 2023 and Beaverhead Rock counters are inaccessible during winter months. Data will be adjusted once retrieved.

Estimated 2020-2023 visitation

Region 3 state parks sorted by highest to lowest YTD 2023 visitation



PARK	TOTAL 2020	TOTAL 2021	TOTAL 2022	TOTAL 2023	% Change (2022 and 2023)
Bannack	38,085	46,583	52,356	50,565	-3.4%
Lewis & Clark Caverns	40,591	145,637	50,015	46,893	-6.2%
Madison Buffalo Jump	24,715	23,192	19,518	35,466	+81.7%
Missouri Headwaters	70,917	75,699	53,669	33,436	-37.7%
Lost Creek	18,633	16,992	12,883	12,606	-2.2%
Granite Ghost Town	0	3,599	0	6,878	-100%
Clark's Lookout	5,559	3,750	4,120	5,179	+25.7%
Beaverhead Rock	0	0	888	1,158	+30.3%
Anaconda Smoke Stack	16,787	15,796	13,833	0	-100.0%
Elkhorn	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
TOTAL	215,287	331,248	207,283	192,180	-7.3%

NOTE: Currently, visitation data is not regularly collected at Elkhorn. Visitation data began being regularly collected at Beaverhead Rock in June 2022. The counter at Granite Ghost Town was not operational for all of 2020, and 2022, and Anaconda Smoke Stack is presently inactive.

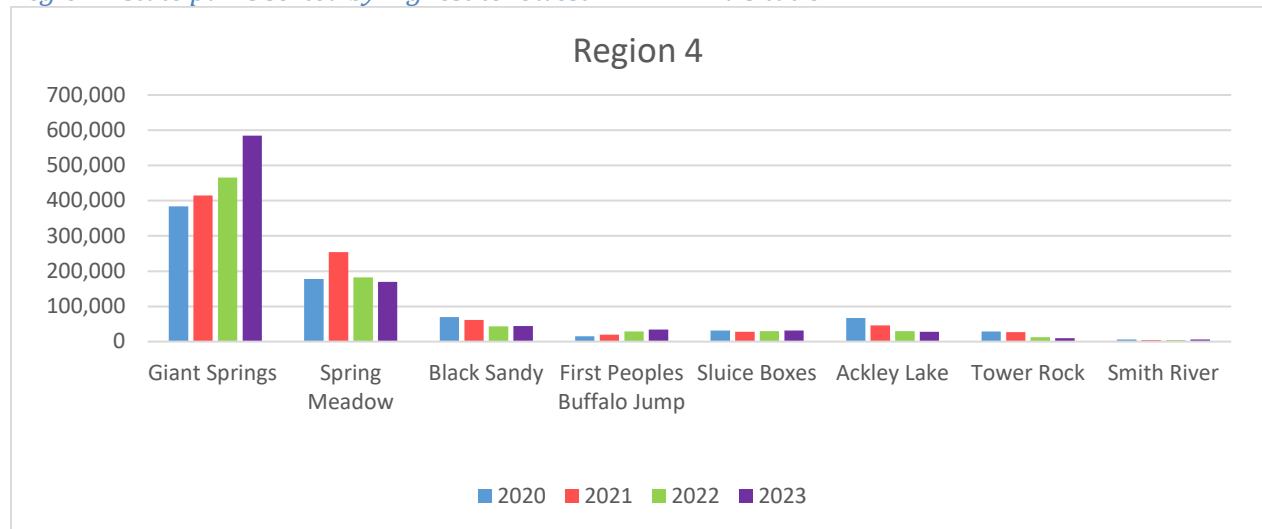
REGION 4

With an estimated **906,685** visitors in 2023, Region 4 experienced a **14.1%** increase from 2022. Region 4's 2023 visitation represents **29.2%** of the system's total visitation, which is up from 2022.

The region's overall visitation is largely driven by Giant Springs visitation, which was Montana's most visited state park again for 2023 and reported over 100,000 for 2022. It attracts numerous visitors and is a true destination for the city of Great Falls. Black Sandy, First People's Buffalo Jump, Sluice Boxes, and Smith River also saw gains in visitation for 2023.

Estimated 2020-2023 visitation

Region 4 state parks sorted by highest to lowest YTD 2023 visitation



PARK	TOTAL 2020	TOTAL 2021	TOTAL 2022	TOTAL 2023	% Change (2022 and 2023)
Giant Springs	384,309	414,889	465,367	584,810	+25.7%
Spring Meadow	178,156	254,141	181,851	169,348	-6.9%
Black Sandy	69,288	61,518	43,285	43,966	+1.6%
First Peoples Buffalo Jump	15,376	19,286	28,352	34,195	+20.6%
Sluice Boxes	31,847	27,767	29,273	31,498	+7.6%
Ackley Lake	66,480	45,715	29,712	27,428	-7.7%
Tower Rock	29,172	26,532	12,757	9,333	-26.8
Smith River	6,271	4,150	3,952	6,106	+54.5%
TOTAL	780,899	853,998	794,549	906,685	+14.1%

NOTE: Visitation data for the Smith River is captured using float logs and is not recorded during the winter months.

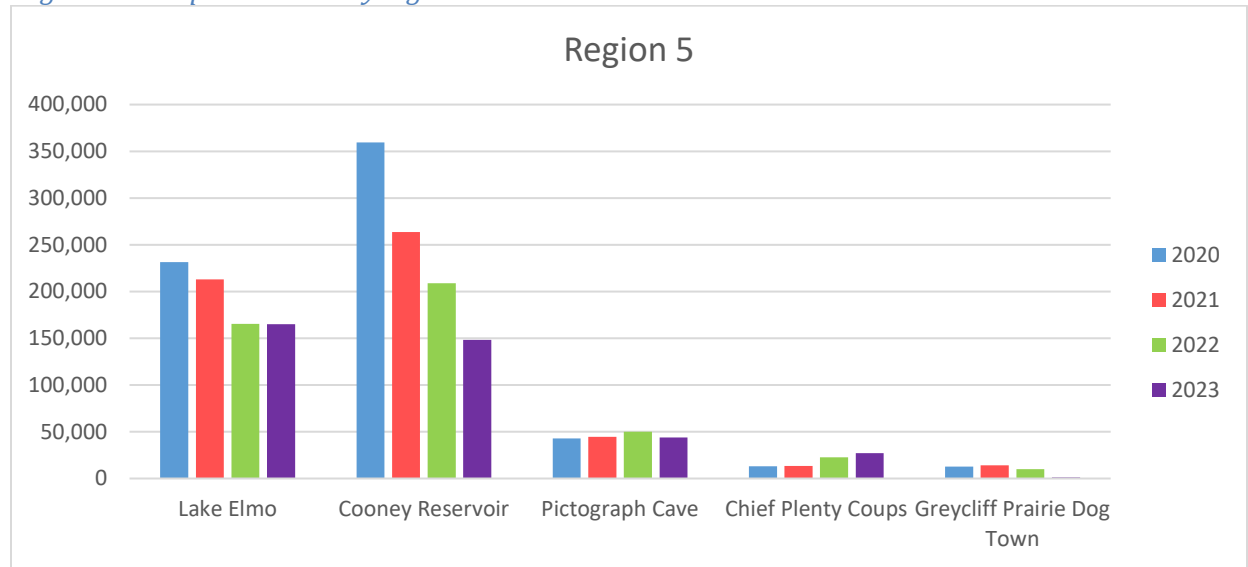
REGION 5

With an estimated **385,428** visitors in 2023, Region 5 experienced a **15.7%** decrease from 2022. This represents a decrease year over year since 2020. Region 5's 2023 visitation represents **12.4%** of the system's total visitation.

There are two parks that largely drive the region's overall visitation - Cooney Reservoir and Lake Elmo. Cooney has seen over 100,000 visitors annually since before the pandemic. Both experience frequent use by residents of the growing Billings community.

Estimated 2020-2023 visitation

Region 5 state parks sorted by highest to lowest YTD 2023 visitation



PARK	TOTAL 2020	TOTAL 2021	TOTAL 2022	TOTAL 2023	% Change (2022 and 2023)
Cooney Reservoir	359,607	263,691	208,960	148,344	-29.0%
Lake Elmo	231,388	212,916	165,530	165,041	-0.3%
Pictograph Cave	42,870	44,569	50,160	43,779	-12.7%
Chief Plenty Coups	13,017	13,352	22,681	27,097	+19.5%
Greycliff Prairie Dog Town	12,677	14,151	9,984	1,167	-88.3%
TOTAL	659,559	548,678	457,315	385,428	-15.7%

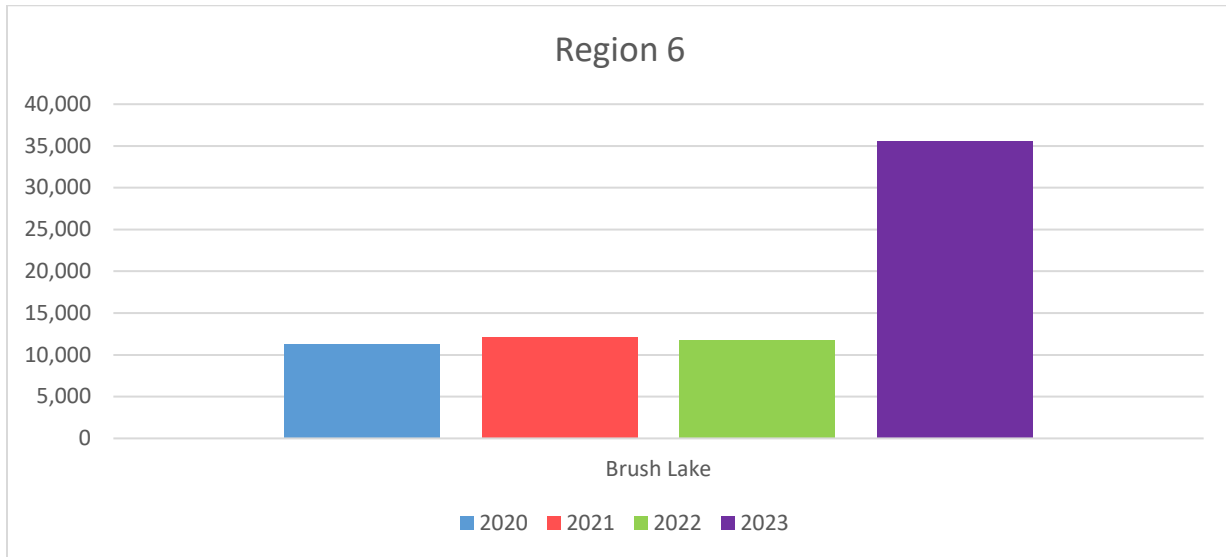
NOTE: Some decline in visitation early in 2023 may be attributed to significant snowfalls and record low temperatures in the region. Greycliff Prairie Dog Town counter was inactive for most of 2023.

REGION 6

For many years, Regions 6 and 7 were combined into one administrative region. Starting in 2022, they have been broken back out into two with only Brush Lake State Park in Region 6. With an estimated **35,509** visitors, Region 6 experienced a **200%** increase from 2022. This could be due to updated visitation calculations based off observations of persons per vehicle at the entrance throughout 2023. Region 6 visitation represents less than **1.1%** of the system's total visitation for 2023, which is an increase from 2022.

Estimated 2020-2023 visitation

Region 6 state parks sorted by highest to lowest YTD 2023 visitation



PARK	TOTAL 2020	TOTAL 2021	TOTAL 2022	TOTAL 2023	% Change (2022 and 2023)
Brush Lake	11,270	12,181	11,820	35,509	+200.4%
TOTAL	11,270	12,181	11,820	35,509	+200.4%

NOTE: Brush Lake is seasonally closed in the winter months.

REGION 7

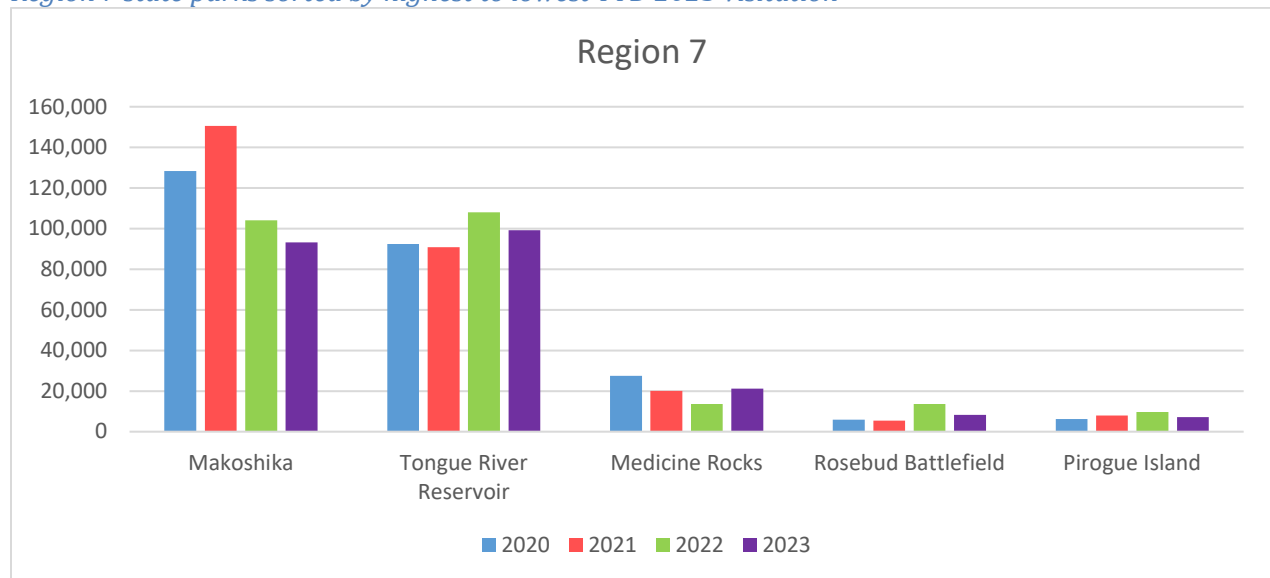
With an estimated **228,927** visitors, Region 7 experienced an **8.0%** decline from 2022, which saw a slight increase over its 2020 visitation and was an estimated **17.5%** higher than in 2019. Region 7 visitation represents **7.4%** of the system's total visitation for 2023.

Two parks - Makoshika and Tongue River Reservoir - largely drive the region's overall visitation. In 2023, they were both in the top 10 most visited parks in the system with Tongue River visitation surpassing Makoshika for the second time.

In March of 2022, Hell Creek management was transferred to the Little Shell Tribe of the Chippewa Indians of Montana and therefore is no longer included in visitation estimates for the state parks system.

Estimated 2020-2023 visitation

Region 7 state parks sorted by highest to lowest YTD 2023 visitation

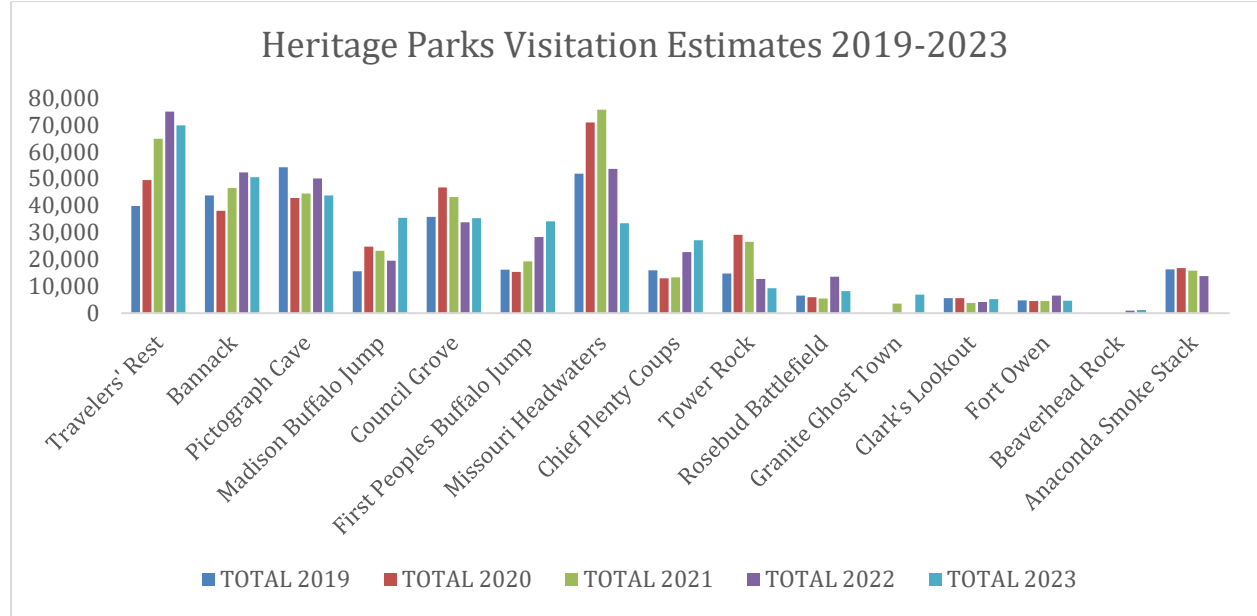


PARK	TOTAL 2020	TOTAL 2021	TOTAL 2022	TOTAL 2023	% Change (2022 and 2023)
Tongue River Reservoir	92,492	90,859	107,978	99,232	-8.1%
Makoshika	128,288	150,484	103,999	93,150	-10.4%
Medicine Rocks	27,527	20,140	13,678	21,224	+55.2%
Rosebud Battlefield	5,973	5,460	13,605	8,207	-39.7%
Pirogue Island	6,209	8,016	9,692	7,115	-26.6%
Hell Creek	34,515	22,349	N/A	N/A	N/A
TOTAL	295,004	297,308	248,952	228,927	-8.0%

NOTE: Hell Creek is no longer part of the Montana State Parks system.

Visitation Showcase: Heritage Parks

These parks invite reflection on the past by revealing the stories of Montana’s cultures and histories in the very places where they occurred. Heritage parks provide opportunities to view, explore, or learn about the cultural and historic features unique to the site. There is 16 Heritage Parks across five regions in the Montana state park system. In 2023, Heritage parks accounted for 8.5% of the total state park system visitation, compared to 7.8% in 2022. About half of the heritage parks have seen a percentage change increase since 2019. Both the Madison Buffalo Jump and First Peoples Buffalo Jump have experienced a 111.1% and 126.6% increase in visitation since 2019 respectively.



Region	PARK	TOTAL 2019	TOTAL 2020	TOTAL 2021	TOTAL 2022	TOTAL 2023	% Change (2019 and 2023)
3	Anaconda Smoke Stack	16,309	16,787	15,796	13,833	0	N/A
3	Bannack	43,804	38,085	46,583	52,356	50,565	15.40%
4	Beaverhead Rock	0	0	0	888	1,158	N/A
5	Chief Plenty Coups	15,907	13,017	13,352	22,681	27,097	70.30%
3	Clark's Lookout	5,630	5,559	3,750	4,120	5,179	-8.00%
2	Council Grove	35,868	46,757	43,249	33,765	35,395	-1.30%
4	First Peoples Buffalo Jump	16,202	15,376	19,286	28,352	34,195	111.10%
2	Fort Owen	4,796	4,495	4,563	6,491	4,612	-3.80%
3	Granite Ghost Town	0	0	3,599	0	6,878	N/A
3	Madison Buffalo Jump	15,649	24,715	23,192	19,518	35,466	126.60%
3	Missouri Headwaters	51,898	70,917	75,699	53,669	33,436	-35.60%
5	Pictograph Cave	54,273	42,870	44,569	50,160	43,779	-19.30%
7	Rosebud Battlefield	6,563	5,973	5,460	13,605	8,207	25.00%
4	Tower Rock	14,777	29,172	26,532	12,757	9,333	-36.80%
2	Travelers' Rest	39,851	49,545	64,933	75,048	69,907	75.40%
Total		321,527	363,268	390,563	387,243	365,207	

NOTE: Currently, visitation data is not regularly collected at Elkhorn and therefore was not included in the table.

ⁱ Reporting notes:

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 three months ahead of arrival dates.

FWP is working with experts at the University of Montana's Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research (ITRR) to gain assistance with revising parks' visitation methodology. The reporting of Montana State Parks visitation data is partially supported by ITRR's budget through the lodging facility use tax for recreation monitoring statewide. 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 and boat-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. Additionally, some counters are inaccessible in winter months and data will not be retrieved until spring. At that time, numbers will be revised. Multipliers such as persons per vehicle and administrative traffic are based off annual observations made during the 2020 and 2021 years for 42 parks. Five parks within the system have updated estimates based off 2023 data collection. Going forward, five to ten parks will be annually selected, and these calculations will be updated on a rotating basis throughout the state parks system.

For questions about this report, please contact administrative staff with the Parks and Outdoor Recreation division of Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks at their headquarters: 406-444-3750.