



MONTANA STATE PARKS
KEY COMMITMENTS AND STRATEGIC
PRIORITIES FOR 2021 - 2022



MONTANA **FWP**



Flathead Lake State Park

INTRODUCTION

BETH SHUMATE, STATE PARKS DIVISION ADMINISTRATOR



Montana is a state that provides opportunities for numerous recreational, inspirational, and world-class experiences. Throughout the year, the public enjoys access to the lands we manage at FWP - principally, our state parks, wildlife management areas, and fishing access sites - to enjoy a multitude of outdoor pursuits that are quintessential components of our state's heritage and legacy. In doing so, visitors find a place to sleep, eat, at times hire outfitters and guides, and make use of other local services that are all part of our state's vibrant tourism and outdoor recreation industry.

By serving as a land steward, resource manager, and by providing access to outdoor recreational opportunities, FWP plays an important role in both the economic and financial activities of Montana. The agency also helps to foster the many non-financial gains in human health, social connectivity, and a more holistic awareness that co-exists when people pursue outdoor activities. There is a plethora of research that directly correlate time spent outdoors and in nature with positive gains in mental and physical health through participating in even minimal levels of outdoor activity, be it alone or amongst friends and neighbors.

Montanans love their state parks, as do out-of-state visitors. State park visitation has nearly reached three million visits annually in recent years, and it grew significantly in 2020. Our 55 state parks offer adventure, recreation, history, and culture. We steward much of what makes Montana, Montana. Widespread, regular use of parks and public lands characterize us as Montanans, and these protected lands convey to visitors what is so special about our state.

Furthermore, we recognize that not only is the outside in us all, the outside connects us all—to each other, to the natural world, and ultimately, to our shared past. For many of us, our earliest connections to nature are most often

close to home—on a trail, in a park, under the stars, or around a campfire. State parks provide those early, close-to-home experiences that can help us form connections to the natural world—connections that in turn can foster improved environmental stewardship and a greater appreciation for our natural surroundings.

We wholeheartedly embrace the concept that the resources and the public benefit from a more unified and efficient approach to doing business and providing customer service. Collectively, we recognize that we need to embrace a new way of doing business, in alignment with our brand and mission, becoming more strategic and focused, relentless in our pursuit of enhancing the visitor experience.

We also understand the importance of fostering a strong partnership culture with partners who significantly enhance our Division's ability to improve the state park experience. This broad set of advocates help us to promote and champion the benefits of parks and recreation. This plan sets the stage for how we intend to be more proactive and move away from a reactive management mode while remaining responsive to our key partners, especially our state parks' friends groups. It is our desire to have a plan that helps us remain strategic while developing a system that can remain fluid and nimble. It is also our strong desire to respond to changing times while remaining practical in augmenting what we already have. Additionally, we want to emphasize the importance of our best practices...our guiding principles for the work that we do each and every day across our park system to provide the best customer service and maintain impeccably clean and safe facilities.

Our love of the outdoors is what unites us all, whether inside or outside the agency. We have an incredible team, our parks and trails are beloved, and the demand for outdoor recreation opportunities likely will continue to grow. Our future rests on us, and on our willingness to step up to the challenges we face. Our time spent now will be instrumental in setting forth by using this roadmap we have created to achieve our vision of a healthy and resilient park system, and to continue to be responsive land stewards and recreation managers.

WITH THANKS

A very special thanks goes out to the following individuals for serving on our strategic planning Advisory Committee and Sounding Board. We are very grateful for their time, effort, and feedback and appreciate their contributions in this process. This planning document is the result of input from these individuals along with many others who offered their important perspectives and ideas along the way.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Rhea Armstrong	FWP Region 3 State Park Manager (Lewis and Clark Caverns)
Barb Beck	FWP Region 5 Supervisor
Rebecca Cooper	FWP Technology Program Coordinator
Pat Doyle	FWP State Parks Marketing and Communication Manager
Ron Jendro	FWP Legislative Liaison
Aaron Kind	FWP Region 5 State Park Manager (Chief Plenty Coups)
Jason Kool	FWP Hunting Access Bureau Chief (Wildlife Division)
Maci MacPherson	FWP Region 2 State Park Manager (Fort Owen, Painted Rocks, and Travelers' Rest)
Michelle McNamee	FWP Outdoor Recreation Program Manager
Kacie Miller	Colorado State Parks Planning Manager
Derrick Rathe	FWP Region 1 State Park Ranger (Flathead Lake - West Shore Unit, Lake Mary Ronan, and Lone Pine)
Rachel Reckin	FWP State Parks Heritage Program Manager
Eileen Ryce	FWP Fisheries Division Administrator
Sara Smith	FWP Program Coordinator, Becoming an Outdoors Woman (BOW) and Boating Education (Communication and Education Bureau)



Bannack State Park



SOUNDING BOARD MEMBERS

Randy Arnold	FWP Region 2 Supervisor
Jessica Bush	Montana State Historical Preservation Office State Archaeologist
Elizabeth Covelli Metcalf	W.A. Franke College of Forestry and Conservation Associate Professor, University of Montana
Lesa Evers	Tribal Relations Manager, Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services Director's Office
Coby Gierke	Montana State Parks Foundation Executive Director
Jess Haas	Montana Outdoor Science School Executive Director
Dave Holland	FWP Region 4 Warden Captain
Mike Jetty	Montana Office of Public Instruction Indian Education Specialist
Dr. Alan Leftridge	Interpretive consultant and former editor of Legacy magazine, issued by the National Association of Interpretation
Rachel Schmidt	Montana Office of Outdoor Recreation Director
Jan Stoddard	Montana Office of Tourism and Business Development Industry Services and Outreach Bureau Chief
Mandi Zanto	Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services Health Lifestyles Section Supervisor

PRIMARY CONTRIBUTORS

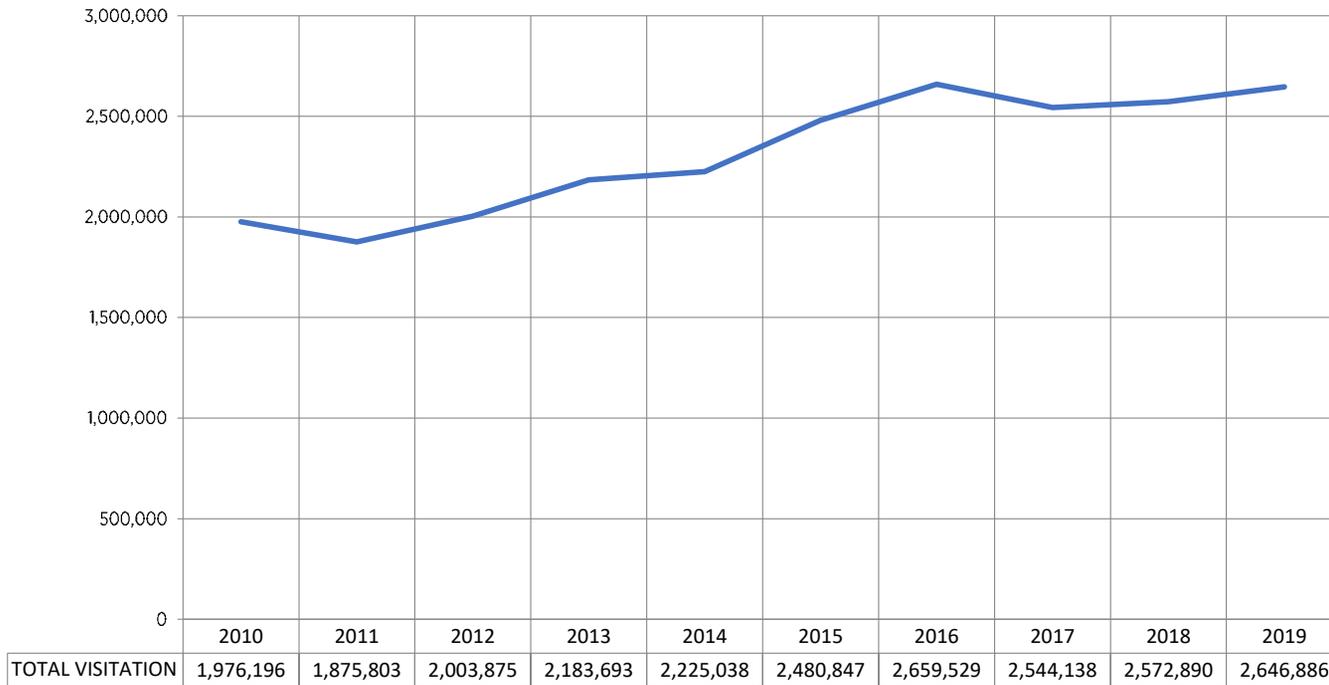
Beth Shumate	FWP State Parks Division Administrator
Kyan Bishop	FWP State Parks and Recreation Planner
Deb O'Neill	FWP Responsive Management Unit Legislative Liaison (facilitator)

KEY DIVISION FACTS AND RECENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Painted Rocks State Park

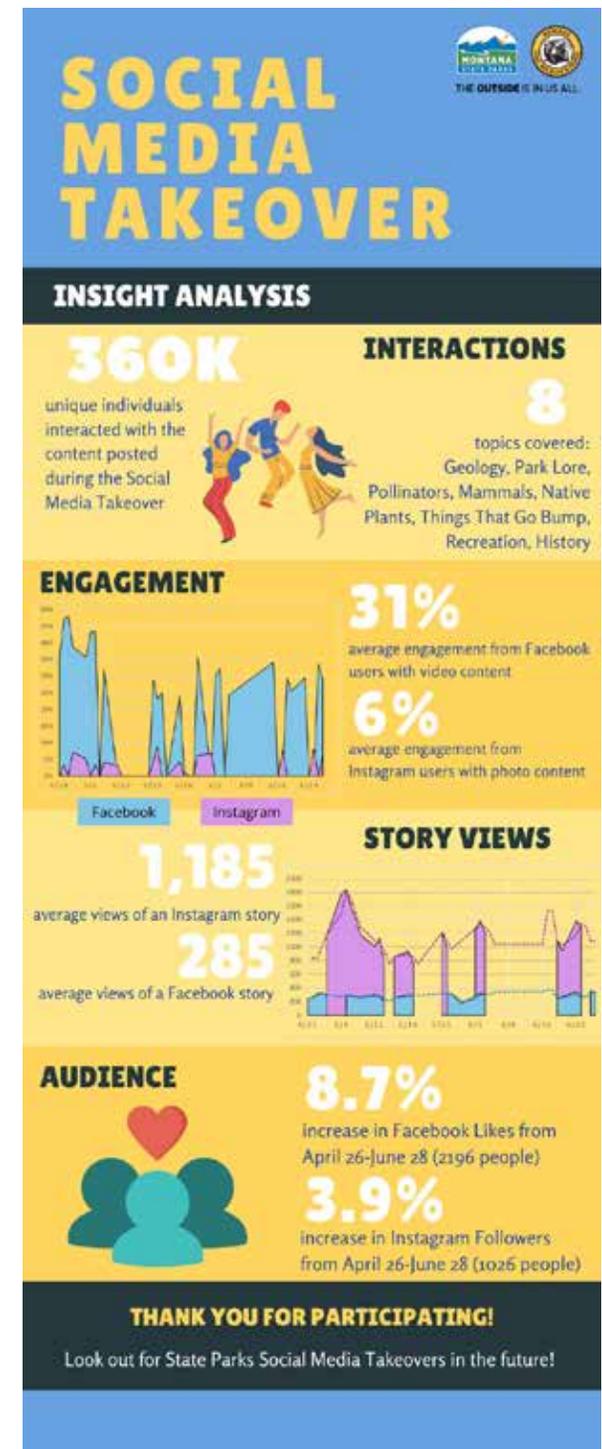
STATE PARK VISITATION

Over the past ten years, Montana's state park visitation has generally been on the rise. In 2020, the State Parks Division will have welcomed over three million visitors, representing a record-breaking year. State parks are an important part of the fabric of a community, not just helping to boost local economies but also offering an important escape from daily life. They help to foster positive mental and physical health benefits while also providing a window for learning about a wide variety of topics, and often growing one's appreciation of their natural surroundings. State parks also provide access to recreational pursuits such as hunting, fishing, and simply enjoying Montana's world-class scenery.



EDUCATION AND INTERPRETATION

With many state park educational and interpretive programs cancelled in 2020 due to the COVID-19 health pandemic, staff and volunteers across Montana's state park system developed and launched an innovative "social media takeover" campaign. This effort resulted in the creation of a diverse set of digital resources that offer new ways for visitors to learn about the history, culture, and important natural resources showcased by the State Parks Division. Much of this was done in partnership with local school districts and partner organizations. By autumn, over 360,000 unique users interacted with content posted on social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook.





First Peoples' Buffalo Jump State Park

GRANT PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

The State Parks Division is adding two new grant programs to its existing four programs to provide around \$5 million annually in support of outdoor recreation. The Montana Trail Stewardship Grant Program (MTSGP) is one of the Division's new programs. It provides funding for the development, renovation, and maintenance of motorized and non-motorized recreational trails and trailside facilities. The program is estimated to award approximately \$1.25 million annually for community, front-country, and backcountry trail projects across Montana. The MTSGP was authorized during the 2019 legislative session through Senate Bill 24; the program is funded from \$1.37 of Montana's \$9 light-vehicle registration fee. Additionally, the Summer Motorized Trail Grant Program resulted from the passage of HB 355. It is estimated to provide approximately \$300,000 for trail maintenance and rehabilitation projects.

STEWARDSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

The goal of the State Parks Division's Stewardship Development Program is to support individual park units efforts to more deeply engage the public in park resources and seeks to promote a sense of public ownership of these places. One example of this is the volunteer program. More than a thousand individuals volunteer over 40,000 hours in Montana State Parks, annually. Their services have a direct impact on the public's experience and have a substantial impact on our system's capacity. They can often be found:

- hosting parks and campgrounds
- educating the public about park resources in visitors centers, around the parks, and during programs
- planting trees, removing noxious weeds, improving trails, painting and staining structures, and supporting maintenance efforts

Additionally, civic groups partner with parks to improve our landscapes. These groups often include Scouts, school classes and clubs, mountain biking and disc golf organizations, Lions and Kiwanis clubs, and more.

A HUGE THANKS TO OUR FRIENDS GROUPS

Citizen associations, or "friends" groups, and various other organizations are a critical source of support for state parks across Montana. They work on special projects, develop and promote special events, serve as visitor center attendants, and volunteer as park naturalists, photographers, and website developers. Their contributions of time and funding help to:

- **Preserve, restore, and enhance natural and cultural resources;**
- **Provide improved services and facilities for visitors;**
- **Increase public awareness and support of individual parks and the state park system; and,**
- **Enhance educational and interpretive activities.**

Ackley Lake Club

Bannack Association

Masons of Bannack Historic Lodge

3-7-77

Friends of Anaconda Stack

Friends of Fort Owen

Friends of Hell Creek

Friends of the Madison Buffalo Jump

Friends of Makoshika

Montana State Parks Foundation

Travelers' Rest Connection

SECTION I.

KEY COMMITMENTS OF THE MONTANA STATE PARKS DIVISION



Black Sandy State Park

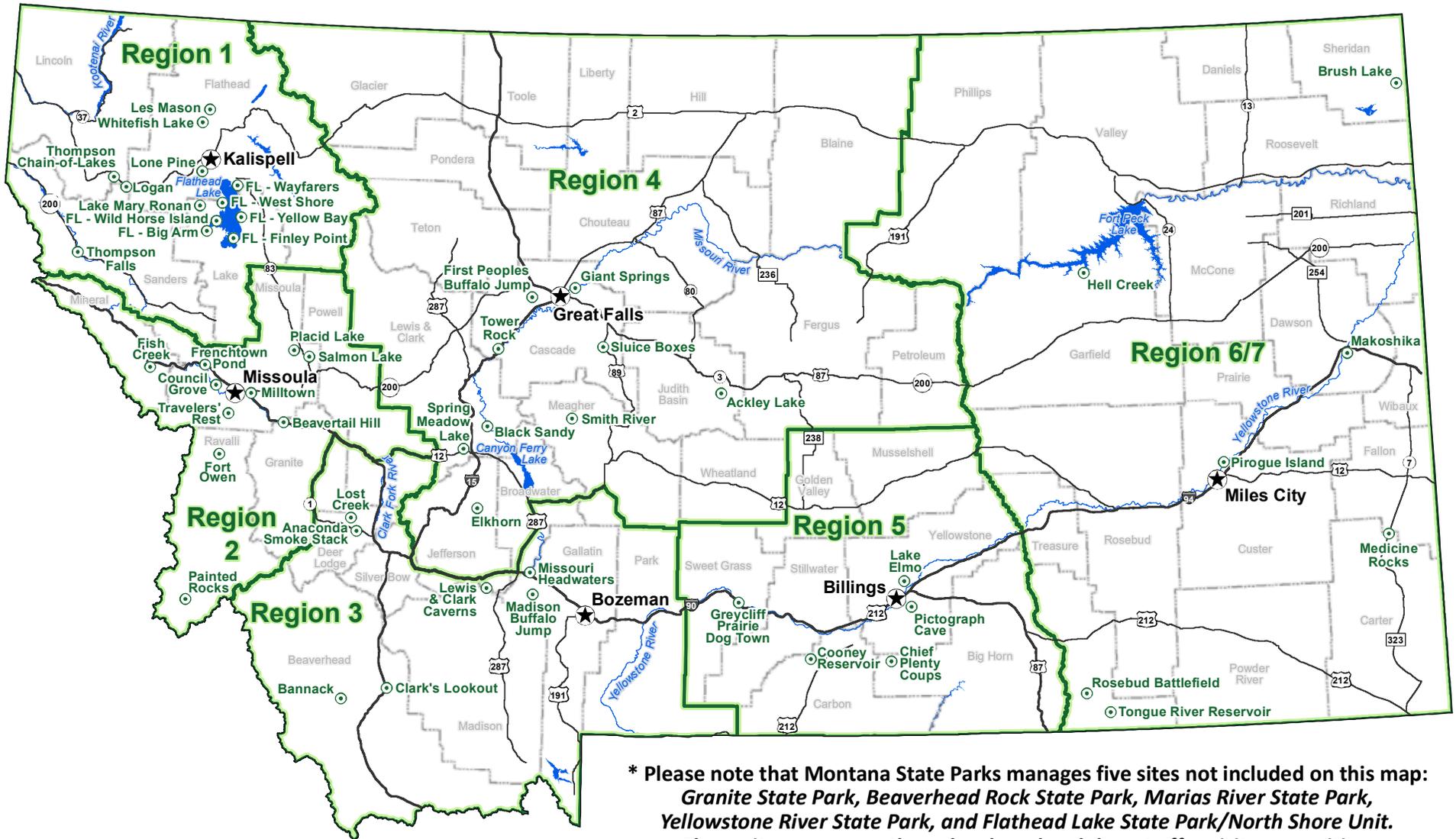


Through its employees, citizen Fish and Wildlife Commission, and State Parks and Recreation Board, the **mission** of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) is to provide for the stewardship of the fish, wildlife, parks, and recreational resources of Montana, while contributing to the quality of life for present and future generations.

We do this guided by **four core beliefs**:

1. we perpetuate *OPPORTUNITY OUTSIDE*
2. we strive toward *BALANCE*
3. we focus on *INTEGRITY*
4. and, with a steady eye on *INCLUSION*, we bring people together.

MONTANA STATE PARKS AND STATE PARK ADMINISTRATIVE REGIONS



* Please note that Montana State Parks manages five sites not included on this map: Granite State Park, Beaverhead Rock State Park, Marias River State Park, Yellowstone River State Park, and Flathead Lake State Park/North Shore Unit. These sites are currently undeveloped and do not offer visitor amenities.

Perhaps more than ever before, 2020 was a year in which the public turned to the outdoors. Correspondingly, the critical role the State Parks Division plays at FWP in holding true to these core beliefs has never been more important.

These commitments offer the State Parks Division a framework for both discussing recent examples of how we have effectively carried out our work, as well as articulating specific priorities for the near future.

What follows is a summary of our core commitments, or in other terms, important practices, behaviors, and activities that will be carried out in perpetuity. While the approach for each of these commitments may change slightly from year to year, they will always undergird our strategic operations, planning, and oversight.

THREE KEY COMMITMENTS THAT FWP HAS ARTICULATED IN ITS TEN-YEAR VISION AND GUIDE INCLUDE:

1

Serving the public

2

Managing the resources

3

Building capacity for effective management

MONTANA STATE PARKS AND STATE PARK ADMINISTRATIVE REGIONS

MAP LEGEND

 Park Regional Headquarters	 Park Administrative Region
 State Park	 County Boundary

Disclaimer & Credits: State Parks and Parks Administrative Regions data from Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Helena, MT. All other data from Montana State Library, Helena, MT.

		<p>Map Produced by: Geographic Data Services Bureau, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, 1420 E 6th Avenue, Helena, MT 59620 JEM - 11/24/2020 - ISR 0044920 - DRAFT</p>
--	---	--

PUBLIC SERVICE

- In 2020, the State Parks Division served over three million visitors. Montana's was one of few state park systems in the country that did not close. Instead, state parks remained almost completely open through the incorporation of COVID-19 health and safety measures and with the knowledge of the important role that being outdoors plays for individuals and communities.
- We continue to work with partners to promote outdoor access and opportunity for all. We strive to ensure that everyone feels welcome at our state parks and managed lands. Furthermore, we are taking a comprehensive look at where we may have additional opportunities to help visitors feel safe, recognized, valued, and included throughout the state park system.
- We are proactively expanding our understanding of the interests of the public we serve. We are using what we learn to better meet visitor expectations, provide relevant and meaningful opportunities and services, and plan for the resiliency of our statewide system. This includes gaining insights from colleagues in other FWP divisions and state agencies, as well as from residents of local communities, tribal government partners, and outdoor recreation constituents.
- Through the State Parks Division's outdoor recreation programs, we administer six grants aimed at improving recreational access across the state. These grant programs provide critical funding for outdoor recreation. Funding can support a new playground, swimming pool, or improvements to an already existing trail system. It can also assist with the maintenance of trails for snowmobiles or off-highway vehicles, as well as for interpretive exhibits that help enrich the outdoor experience. We are proud to collaborate with grantee organizations around the state that improve the health, safety, and quality of life of Montana residents through outdoor recreation.
- We continue to strengthen our ability to work effectively with partners such as friends groups, tribal governments, and local communities both large and small, to address outdoor recreation planning and resource management. We also regularly contribute to planning processes led by others, such as local, state, and federal land managers, by offering important perspectives and thought leadership on principles related to outdoor recreation, conservation, and resource protection.

In 2020, the State Parks Division issued the 2020-2024 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) which is Montana's five-year guiding framework for outdoor recreation and conservation management. The document was formulated in part by incorporating input from several public outreach meetings held across the state. It is aimed at helping all levels of public land managers and private recreation providers meet needs pertaining to outdoor recreation.

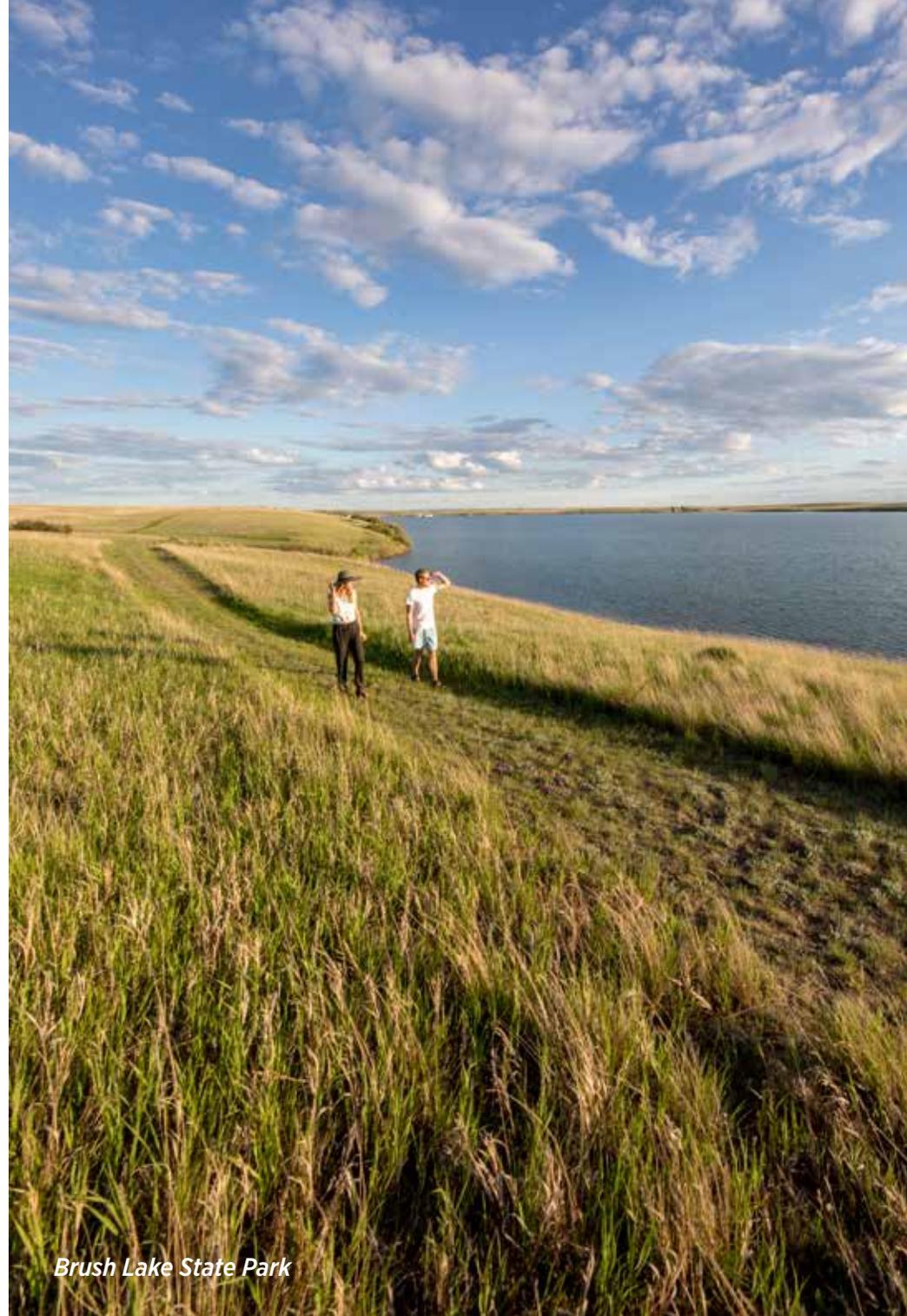
As we begin to evaluate and prioritize management planning for parks across the state—such as Missouri Headwaters, Fish Creek, or the Flathead Lake Islands—we recognize casting a wide outreach net and gathering feedback from a diverse array of individuals will be essential. Similarly, we are looking forward to working more closely with local economic developers and tourism entities to deepen understanding of the social benefits and economic impacts of recreational opportunity and access represented by state parks for communities across the state.



Giant Springs State Park



Chief Plenty Coups State Park



Brush Lake State Park

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

- Montana's state park system provides stewardship for more than 350 historic and archaeological sites, including seven National Historic Landmarks, and 11 sites currently listed in the National Register of Historic Places. We recognize that it is critical that we both promote and protect these important cultural and heritage resources.

To help carry out our cultural and heritage resource responsibilities, the State Parks Division is in the process of establishing a Heritage Leadership Group. The Group will provide thought leadership and programmatic expertise to help identify and implement heritage program priorities. Additionally, we are creating a centralized database of state park artifacts and exploring options for making appropriate items within the collection available online for the public. Although this is a long-term project that likely will be conducted in phases it is an exciting one that already has garnered interest by many in the heritage and historic preservation community.

- We are leveraging data to better inform park policies, planning, and management approaches. By conducting applied research and partnering with universities, think tanks, FWP staff, and other experts, we are strengthening our ability to make evidence-based decisions.

In an effort to improve the accuracy of our visitation estimation the State Parks Division has developed a renewed partnership with research staff from the Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research at the University of Montana. Gaining an accurate read on visitor entries to our parks informs site-specific planning, helps us to effectively allocate resources across the state, and is an important factor in the management and operations of our system.

- To promote stewardship principles, the State Parks Division has been developing a suite of outreach campaigns, educational opportunities, and interpretive programs to increase awareness of and appreciation for state parks, outdoor recreation, and public lands. Such efforts have also been used to boost public awareness of conservation issues and to illustrate the role we all play in restoring and caring for our environment.

There are numerous examples of the Division's work in this area. We have worked collaboratively with Fisheries staff to help prevent aquatic invasive species. Additionally, we have supported programs such as Leave no Trace and Tread Lightly for several years. With many new visitors to state parks and recreating outdoors, these efforts are of the utmost importance.

- We continue to partner with FWP enforcement staff to improve compliance with state park rules and regulations. Such collaboration has yielded effective responses to unlawful activities such as vandalism, non-compliance with fees, and resource abuse around the state. The renewed relationship with game wardens and others has provided an important enforcement presence in parks when needed. This was particularly important for the health, safety, and wellbeing of park staff and visitors during the busy 2020 season.

CAPACITY BUILDING FOR EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT

- Historically, the State Parks Division has operated without sustainable funding for personnel. We are therefore taking a careful look at current and future operations to inform such needs and in turn develop a plan of action for filling gaps. It is only with additional resources that we will be able to meet the challenges ahead, especially with state park visitation growing in our state.
- We also recognize that to address the challenges of tomorrow, a well-trained and professional workforce is needed today. As such, we have been seeking ways to improve and expand on existing training opportunities. The work of managing state parks is multi-faceted and demands a wide range of professional skills — from addressing maintenance issues to educating visitors, all while providing a high level of customer service.

The State Parks Division is developing a set of regular training plans for staff, volunteers, and seasonal workers. For maintenance staff, training will include routine certifications for tasks such as weed management, heritage resource identification and preservation, and water quality sampling. For park managers and rangers, training modules will be comprised of topics such as GIS mapping, interpretive methods, heritage data management, and more regularized Indian Education for All (IEA) training.

- The State Parks Division is working with agency colleagues to identify strategies for recruiting and retaining the best workers possible, particularly with an eye toward measures that consider diversity, equity, and inclusion. We recognize the importance of attracting individuals of different backgrounds, perspectives, and identities to the outdoor recreation profession and especially for a park system as diverse and vast as ours.

- We continue to strategically complement staffing needs through the AmeriCorps program, FWP's internship program, job corps placement programs, and through partnerships with local schools, colleges, universities, and workforce development agencies. Though we know these programs do not offer us a sustainable strategy that addresses our staffing needs, they represent an important resource for our Division.

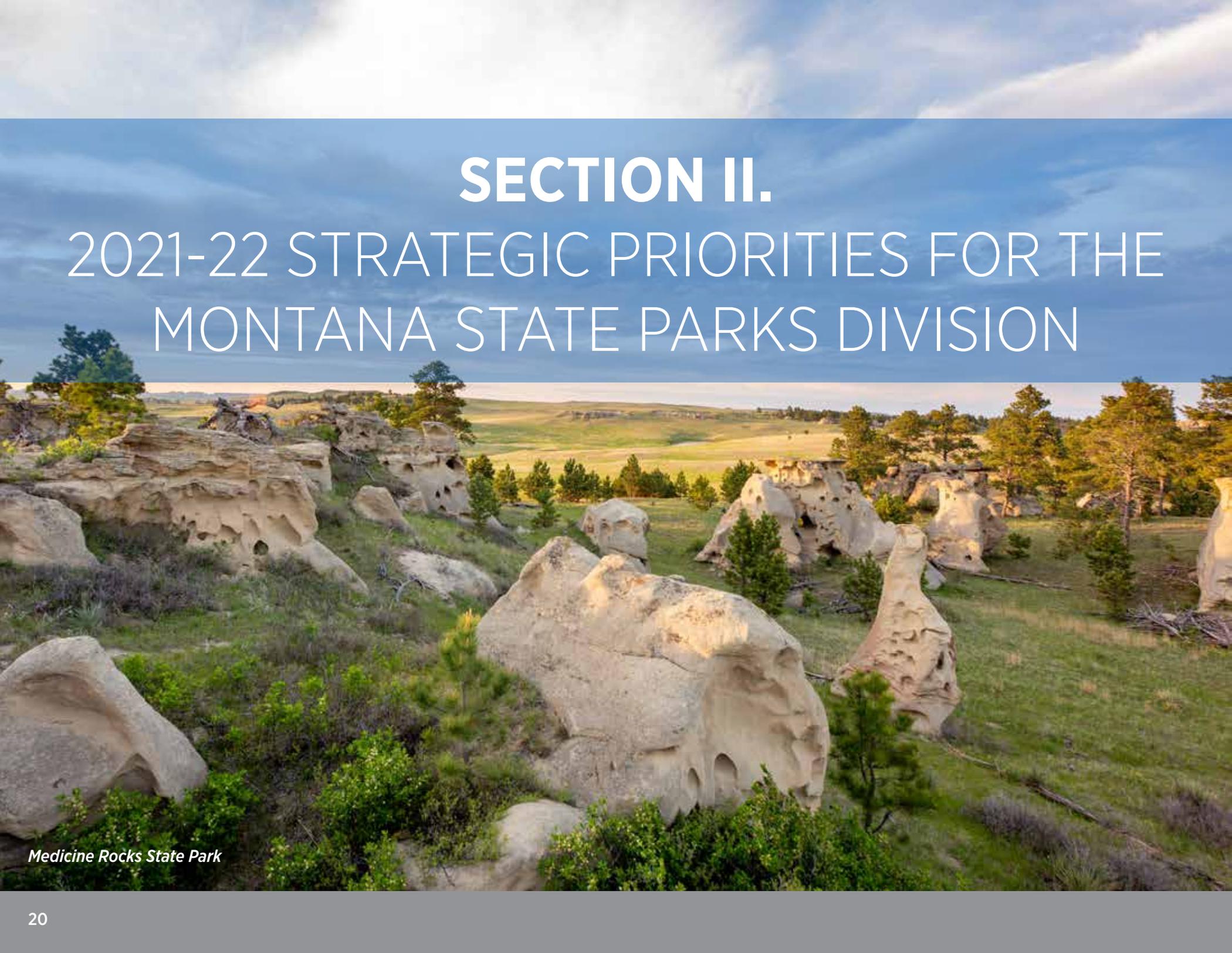
We also are working with friends groups and other key partners to evaluate how they might provide funding to support more staffing resources. Such alternative models and approaches can benefit us, especially during our busiest times.

- We recognize the important role that technology and communication tools play in our work and are identifying and prioritizing key needs and opportunities across the Division. We do this with a focus on maximizing cost efficiencies and efficacy in our operations. Given the remote nature of several state parks, communication challenges certainly exist; but, with technological advancements, we are hopeful we can leverage such capabilities in new ways.

We are currently undertaking an assessment of Wi-Fi options that could improve Internet access at a select number of state park sites. This could bear benefits both for staff working at these sites as well as for visitors.



Elkhorn State Park



SECTION II.

2021-22 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES FOR THE MONTANA STATE PARKS DIVISION

Medicine Rocks State Park

The State Parks Division's efforts are inextricably woven together with other areas of the agency as we strive toward carrying out FWP's vision. This section outlines five key strategic priorities for the next two years, including activities that we seek to begin, continue, or complete.

Why is such a road map helpful for us to have in place? We know that as an agency that seeks to perpetuate *OPPORTUNITY OUTSIDE*; strives towards *BALANCE*; focuses on *INTEGRITY*; and, promotes *INCLUSION*, there are inherent challenges. These challenges include:

- **Identifying and obtaining sustainable funding to meet increasing public demands;**
- **Improving access to state park resources and facilities for all while protecting natural and cultural resources;**
- **Enhancing education and interpretive programs, as well as their delivery channels, to enrich the visitor experience;**
- **Providing visitor amenities and services that can satisfy an increasingly diverse public who is interested in engaging with the outdoors in new ways;**
- **Ensuring we have a well-trained, diverse, and high-quality workforce;**
- **Investing in state park facilities meaningfully while trying to address a longstanding backlog of repair and maintenance issues; and,**
- **Understanding the effects of climate impacts on state park resources, such as drought, flooding and extreme weather events, and adapting to a changing environment.**

While these challenges are significant, they are not insurmountable, and we realize we are not alone. Over recent years the State Parks Division has more fully re-integrated itself into the agency, and will continue to do so. Although we know the outdoor recreation landscape will change over time, we are confident we can demonstrate leadership and build a healthy state park system for visitors to enjoy for years to come.

FWP'S VISION:

Montana is a place where people have abundant opportunities to connect with the world-renowned fish, wildlife, and state parks resources that define our state, and where a responsive and relevant FWP has the resiliency and public support it needs to lead the way in making sure these resources remain an essential part of Montana's culture, economy, and high quality of life.

I. FUNDING AND PARTNERSHIPS

It is critical that State Parks Division staff continue working with agency leadership to increase funding to meet short-, medium-, and long-term needs. Although ready sources of sustainable funding can be difficult to come by, there are several tactics that staff members identified as short-term priorities. They include:

- Pursuing state, local, and federal funding opportunities to support park and program needs.
- Identifying strategies to generate more revenue through diverse mechanisms such as expansions in enterprise sales and concessions, as well as reviewing the State Parks Division's commercial use permits and fees.
- Establishing a systematic approach for working more effectively with the Montana State Parks Foundation to help address funding and stewardship opportunities.
- Developing appropriate agency-wide protocols for articulating the roles, responsibilities, and other terms of agreement with partners, sponsors, donors, and others by working with agency leadership.
- Improving fee collection at state parks by:
 - a) Working with Communication and Education Division staff to increase public awareness of both the source of fees and how they are utilized;
 - b) Working with Technology Services Division staff to identify solutions for improving communications, capturing revenue more efficiently, and identifying further cost-saving measures in our operations; and,
 - c) Working with Enforcement staff who often provide support for fee compliance issues in our parks.



Frenchtown Pond State Park

II. STAFF TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

Building the capacity of State Parks' Division staff, volunteers, and others to strengthen knowledge, skills, and abilities across all job categories is critical to improving employee retention and attracting effective workers for tomorrow. To do so, we have identified the following priorities, many on which we will collaborate with FWP's Human Resources staff, and in some cases, others:

- Developing a suite of informal training opportunities that focus on strengthening professional development, fostering soft skills, encouraging diversity and inclusion in the workforce, and enabling staff and volunteers to network with and learn from one another more frequently.
- Ensuring that all staff, volunteers, and others have a consistent understanding of health and safety programs, and operational protocols and procedures for their own benefit and that of visitors. Similarly, ensuring that all understand the communication and coordination tools and practices that should be utilized in cases of emergencies (e.g., wildfire, flooding) and, at times, in consideration of the remote nature of several state park sites.
- Participating in agency-wide succession planning efforts to develop clear career tracks or a 'step system' that addresses Division-specific needs. (This is seen to be particularly valuable for seasonal workers, as well as better retaining individuals who demonstrate high potential.)
- Assessing the Division's volunteer program to identify where there may be opportunities for enhancement, while also recognizing that an over-reliance on volunteers is unsustainable. Additionally, providing staff with more training on implementing effective volunteer programs at their parks.



Lone Pine State Park

III. ASSET MANAGEMENT

Assessing and managing park assets is paramount in the State Parks Division's efforts toward effective and efficient cost management. With well over \$22 million dollars of deferred maintenance needs, we have embarked on a course that allows us to evaluate the current condition of our assets, track and review maintenance work performed in each park, and store critical operation documents in a repository accessible to pertinent staff. Our approach provides important analysis of our infrastructure and maintenance systems, creates efficiencies in maintenance responsiveness, and allows for fact-based maintenance and asset management decisions. Key priorities include:

- Continuing to develop a GIS-based Asset Management Tool to introduce cost and time efficiencies statewide. This tool has allowed us to geo-locate and photograph over 5,000 pieces of park infrastructure statewide to date. Additionally, it has provided park maintenance staff an “in-the-field” reference of infrastructure type and location, reduced staff travel times, helped to retain institutional history, and importantly improved communication and coordination between maintenance staff, contractors and FWP Design and Construction staff. In correlation with this effort, park maintenance supervisors are also collecting and storing critical park maintenance instructions and manuals in a centralized database.
- Developing and field-testing a Task Tracking program that specifies the various types of maintenance operations being performed by park staff along with the time undertaken to complete such tasks. This information will aid managers in assessing and better understanding staff and training needs, make better resource allocation decisions, and help to provide a clear statewide assessment of important infrastructure issues.
- Continuing to create a Facility Condition Inventory tool and approach aimed at helping to track the numerous projects we know we need to address across the state. The tool will help to determine project prioritization based on important factors such as public health and safety, need, cost, and urgency.



Lewis & Clark Caverns State Park

IV. EDUCATION AND INTERPRETATION

Revitalizing our education and interpretation efforts is yet another important opportunity for the State Parks Division. Key priorities on which the Division will focus, often in collaboration with Communication and Education Division colleagues and several other partners around the state, include:

- Updating the State Parks Division's 2015 Education and Interpretive Services Plan to guide interpretive planning for each park and to provide a framework for updating and/or developing interpretive plans for each site.
- Conducting an inventory of staff interpretive skills, proficiencies, and expertise to guide training needs and programmatic opportunities.
- Building on the results of a recent statewide assessment of state park visitor centers, interpretive signage, and visitor exhibits to develop a plan for short-, medium-, and long-term improvements and investments.
- Reviewing the Division's suite of public programming by cataloguing the wide array of interpretive programs and educational opportunities that are currently being provided across the state. In connection with this effort, reviewing lesson plans to identify improvements and needed changes to align with Montana's educational content standards and Indian Education for All requirements.



Pictograph Cave State Park

V. PUBLIC OUTREACH

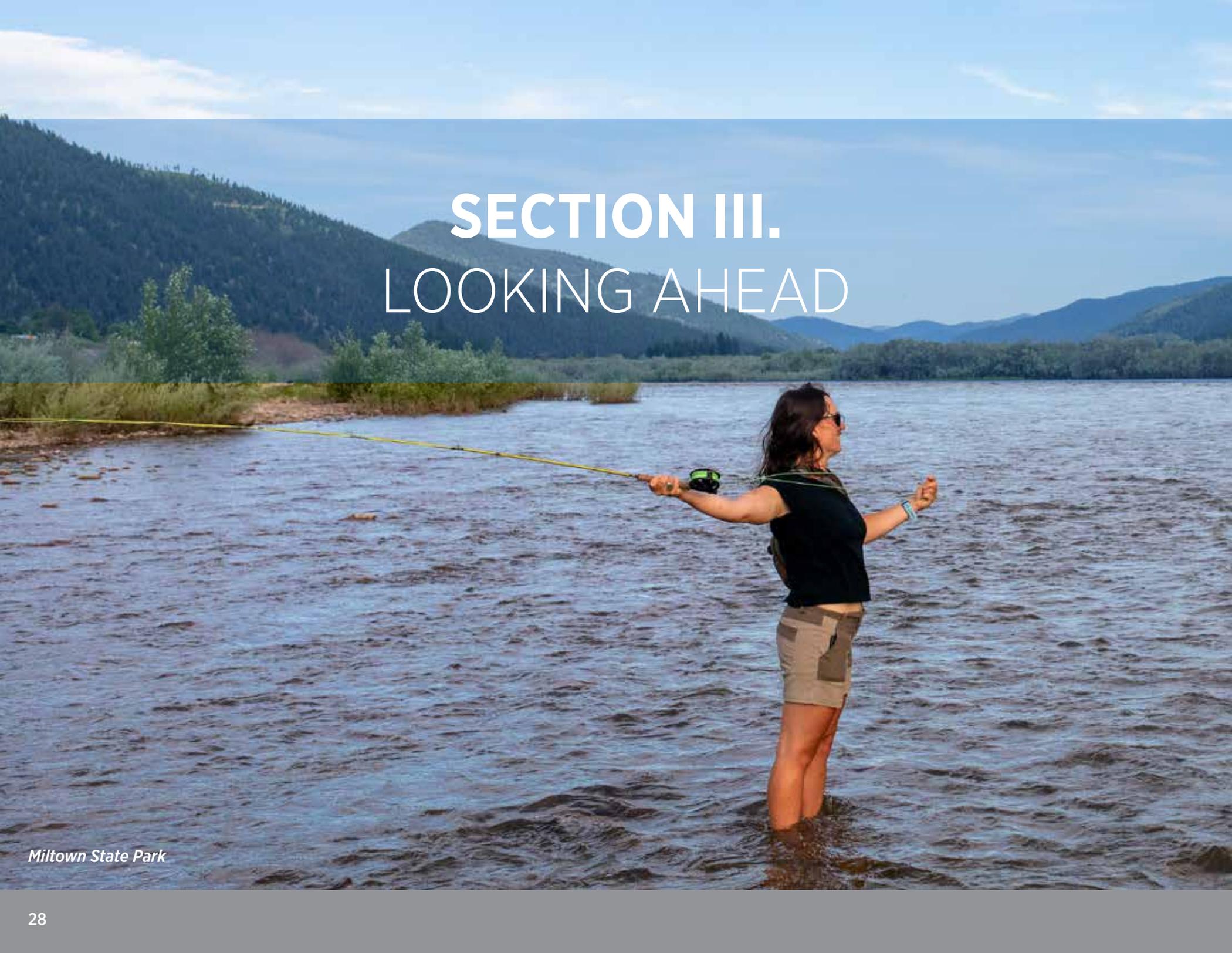
Expanding public appreciation of state parks and their significance to Montana's history is a primary focus for the State Parks Division. Short-term priorities include:

- Working with the Communication and Education Division to expand and develop print and digital resources that are innovative, culturally-sensitive, and help to enhance visitor connections with cultural and heritage resources.
- Continuing to raise awareness of outdoor recreation program funding opportunities and working with FWP staff to develop an annual report summarizing key programmatic activities and successes.
- Working with FWP's sign and exhibit specialist to revitalize state park signage, graphics, and branding to improve the consistency of print, web, and digital products.
- Continuing to work with other land management agencies, local communities, tourism and economic development groups, and others on outdoor recreation planning efforts, while also raising awareness of the 2020-2024 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan.





Cooney Reservoir State Park

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a black t-shirt and khaki shorts, stands waist-deep in a river. She is holding a fishing rod with a yellow line, looking towards the right. The background features a wide river, a grassy bank, and a range of forested mountains under a blue sky with light clouds.

SECTION III. LOOKING AHEAD

Miltown State Park



In recent years, the State Parks Division has focused on building sustainable funding, maintaining strategic partnerships, and engaging constituents in a manner that is transparent and supportive of the system's most significant, relevant, and accessible sites. Looking ahead, the Division will continue to build on these efforts while taking a comprehensive look at its core assets and management objectives.

A principle way in which State Parks Division staff members have been doing this has been through the implementation of the **2019 Classification and Investment Policy**. At its core, this policy is foundational to the way we now approach issues and opportunities for each park. Furthermore, it is instrumental in setting the stage to achieve our vision of creating a healthy and resilient park system. The policy also embodies the important belief that a holistic state park system is one that offers a diverse range of experiences and services. The long-term goal of the policy is to build a portfolio of investment strategies and resource allocation tools to ensure the Division can continue to offer the public a diverse range of high-quality experiences.

SERVICE LEVEL DESIGNATIONS AND EXPERIENCE CATEGORIES

In phase one of its policy implementation efforts, the Division organized parks into service-level designations and experience categories. Service-level designation refers to one of three categories: *Rustic*, *Core*, or *Enhanced*. This categorization will help visitors better anticipate the level of services and amenities that may be offered at each site. Similarly, the Division has identified three “experience” categories: *Natural*, *Heritage* or *Recreation*. Therefore, the Division has categorized its fifty-five parks based on their predominant assets and historical precedence.



Tongue River Reservoir State Park

ABOUT SERVICE LEVEL DESIGNATIONS

- **Rustic:** Parks that attract visitors who expect a self-directed experience with limited developed amenities.
- **Core:** Parks that provide moderate amenity and service levels.
- **Enhanced:** Parks that have a high amenity level and offer a number of options for enhanced visitor experiences.

ABOUT EXPERIENCE CATEGORIES

- **Natural:** Parks that connect visitors with nature in ways that may cause them to learn, reflect, and appreciate. Such experiences may provide the opportunity for solitary reflection in the presence of Montana’s scenic beauty, or they may engage the visitor with others as they explore natural processes related to exceptional geologic, wildlife, botanical, paleontological, riparian and riverine environments.
- **Heritage:** Parks that 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.
- **Recreation:** Parks that encourage play in adult and child alike through a variety of options for outdoor activity. A park may provide a specific type of outdoor recreation – e.g., fishing, camping, hiking, boating – or a mix of diverse outdoor opportunities ranging from active to passive and from solitary to social in nature.



Missouri Headwaters State Park

STATE PARK SYSTEM CLASSIFICATION

NATURAL	HERITAGE	RECREATIONAL
Fish Creek	Anaconda Stack	Ackley Lake
Greycliff Prairie Dog Town	Beaverhead Rock (P)	FL - Wild Horse Island unit (P)
Lost Creek	Clark's Lookout (P)	Painted Rocks
Medicine Rocks (P)	Elkhorn	Smith River
Pirogue Island (P)	Granite	Thompson Chain of Lakes
Sluice Boxes (P)	Tower Rock (P)	
Beavertail Hill	Council Grove	Black Sandy
Milltown	Fort Owen	Brush Lake
	Madison Buffalo Jump (P)	Cooney Reservoir
	Missouri Headwaters	Frenchtown Pond
	Rosebud Battlefield	Lake Elmo
		Lake Mary Ronan
		Logan
		Placid Lake
		Salmon Lake
		Spring Meadow
		Thompson Falls
		Whitefish Lake
		Les Mason
Giant Springs	Bannack	Flathead Lake (except WHI)
Lewis and Clark Caverns	Chief Plenty Coups	Hell Creek
Lone Pine	First Peoples' Buffalo Jump	Tongue River Reservoir
Makoshika	Pictograph Cave	
	Travelers' Rest	

GUIDE:			
Rustic Service Level	Core Service Level	Enhanced Service Level	(P) = Primitive Park



Rosebud Battlefield State Park

FOUNDATION DOCUMENTS

Phase two of the State Parks Division's policy implementation has been to begin developing a foundation document for each park. Foundation documents are an integral tool in helping managers determine the direction of planning and informational needs in these park units. The documents identify the reason why the park was added to the Montana State Parks system and the fundamental resources and values that support the parks inclusion. The narrative provided in the foundation documents also assists others in understanding the challenges, opportunities and threats that are unique to each park and situation.

The Division will finalize these documents by the end of December 2021 and is completing them in two phases:

- The first phase will provide a high-level overview of each park which will include a description of the park, its purpose, significance, fundamental resources, and values. It will also focus on each site's core components; interpretive themes; special mandates; and include a list or description of administrative commitments.
- The second phase will identify planning efforts that have been completed as well as a summary of additional plans and/or studies that will be needed to address future challenges and opportunities each site faces.

Developing foundation documents for each of our system's 55 parks in a consistent and thoughtful way takes time. However, we recognize that this effort is not just important for informing our management decisions, but also for the public to gain an understanding of the future vision and possibility that each site holds. Moreover, we consider undertaking such work as instrumental to being able to effectively carry out our Division's four core goals:

MONTANA STATE PARKS GOALS

Service

We provide high-quality services to visitors and recreationists. We provide strong and efficient program leadership to local Montana communities and agencies via education and grants programs. We provide camping, interpretive, and other recreational opportunities across Montana.

Stewardship

We promote the stewardship of natural, cultural, paleontological, and recreational resources for current and future generations.

Sustainability

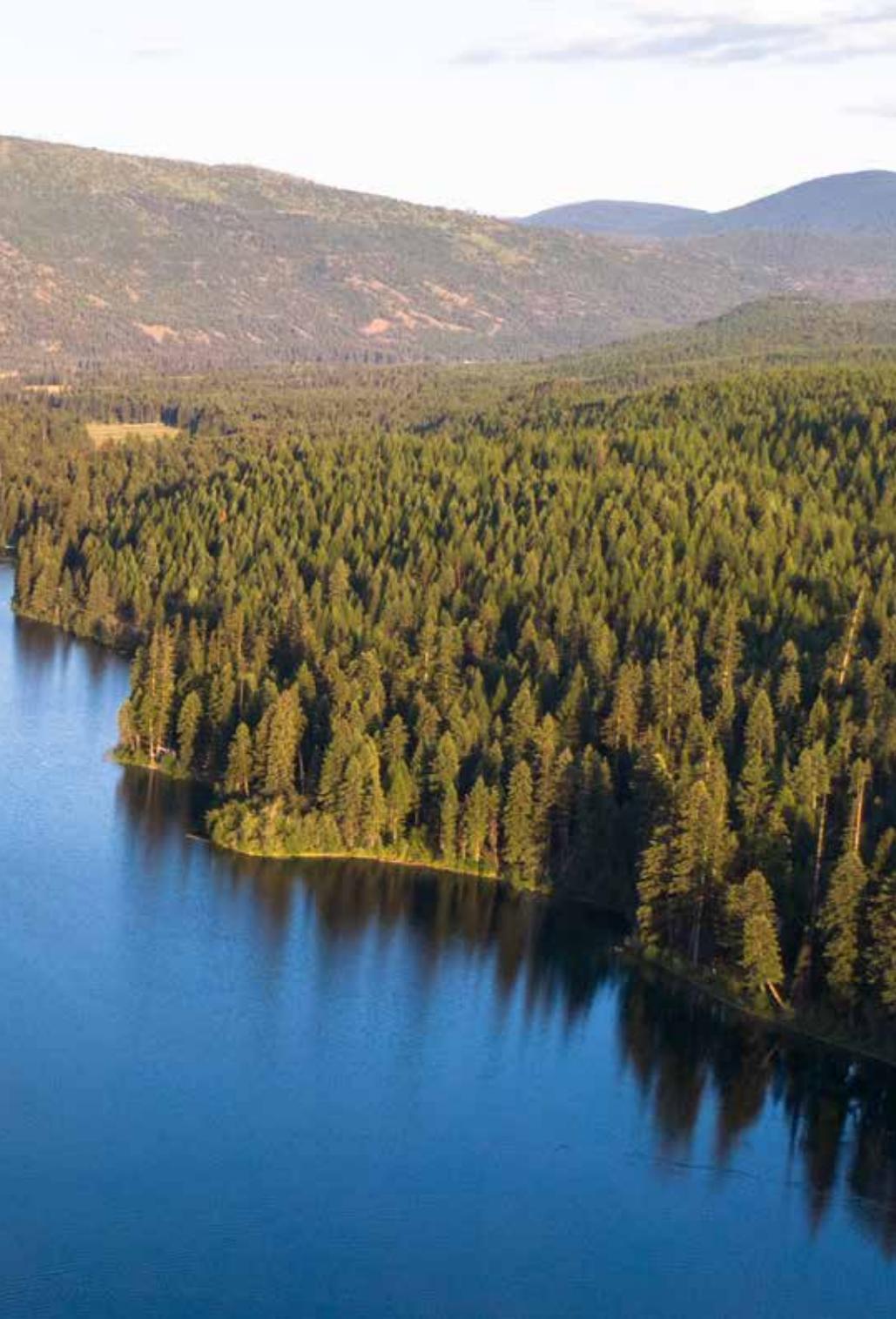
We strive to enhance the sustainability of the state parks system and recreational resources in a manner that promotes long-term resource conservation.

Safety

We provide a safe environment for employees to innovate, explore, and improve the state parks system and programs overall. We improve public safety and reduce exposure to liability by improving management practices, critical incident responses, hazard reductions, and visitor experiences.



Thompson Chain of Lakes State Park



IN CLOSING

By identifying the State Parks Division's key commitments and short-term strategic priorities, we are proactively seeking to address and implement solutions to many long-standing challenges. We recognize that the priorities identified in this plan will only be successful with the continued collaboration of agency colleagues, partners, and key constituents.

As we forge ahead in implementing these priorities, we will continue to identify key partners and others who may be able to assist us. We will also develop a plan for receiving input, as well as for sharing our progress and providing updates to the public and the State Parks and Recreation Board.

Forthcoming reports and plans will offer a renewed look at our efforts to protect the state park system's abundant cultural and historic resources. We will also use such plans to articulate a set of short-term priorities to continue advancing our work.



Madison Buffalo Jump State Park