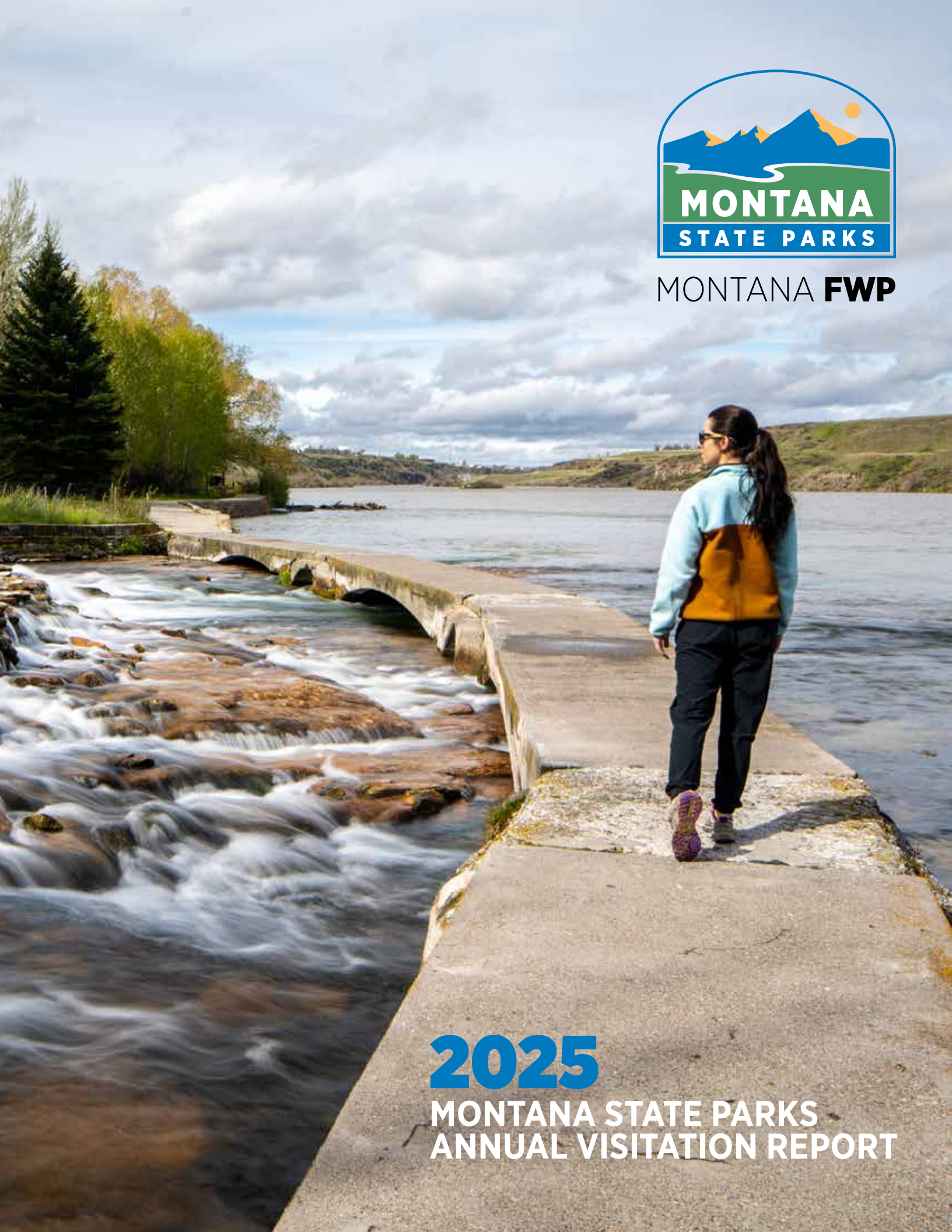




MONTANA **FWP**



2025

**MONTANA STATE PARKS
ANNUAL VISITATION REPORT**

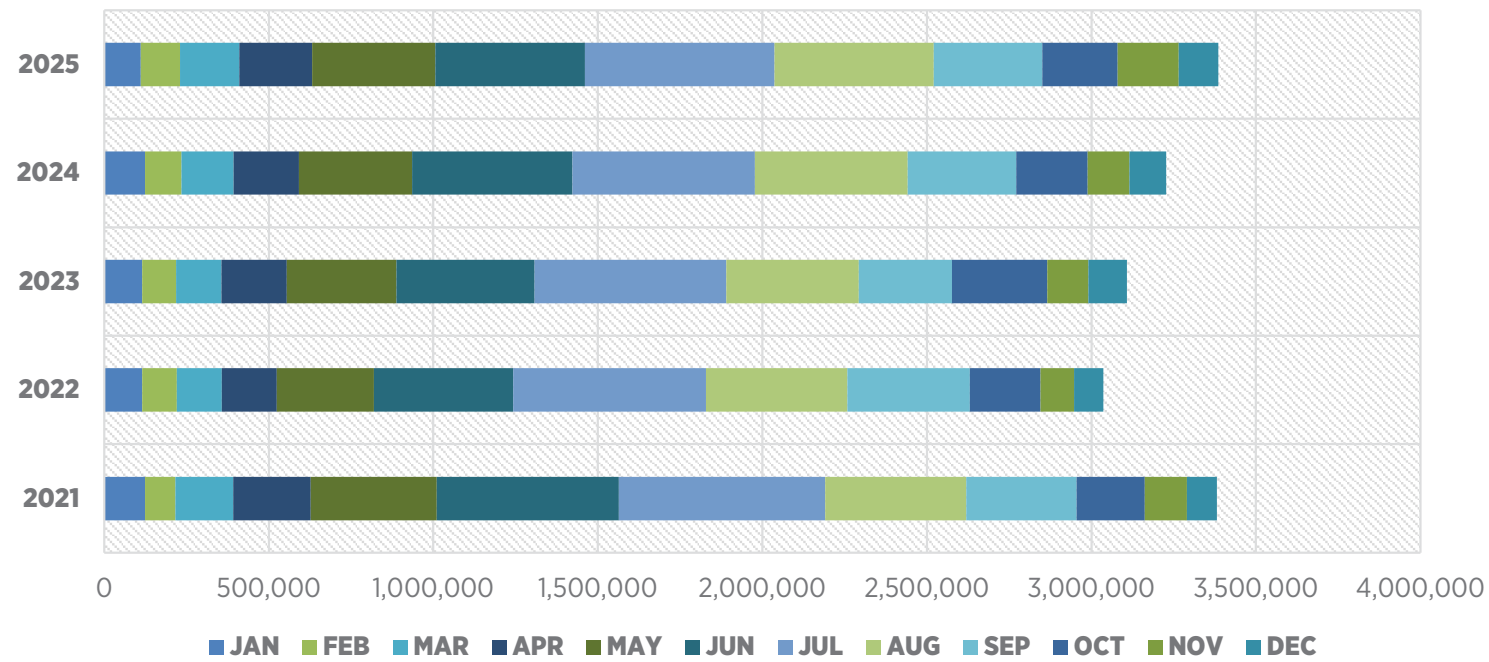


THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

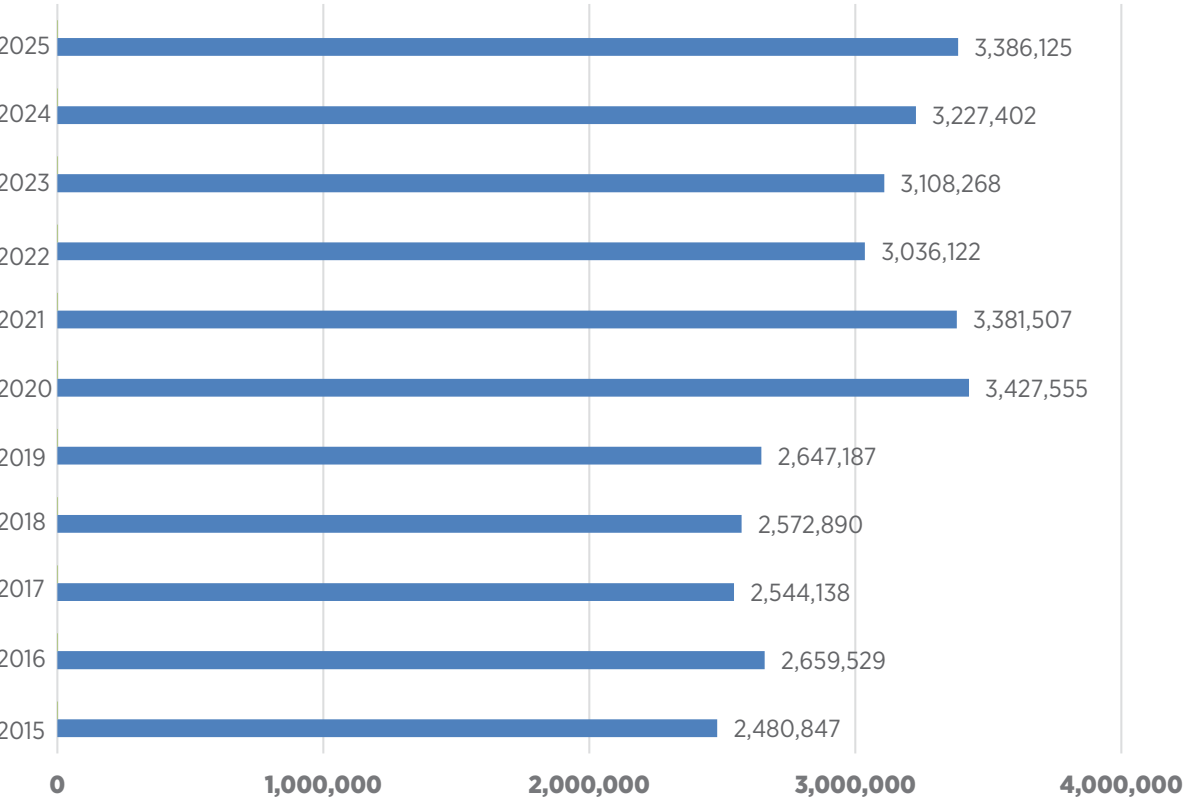
THE MONTANA STATE PARKS SYSTEM WELCOMED
AN ESTIMATED **3.38 MILLION VISITORS IN 2025.**

THIS NUMBER IS A 4.9% INCREASE FROM 2024,
AN 11.5% INCREASE FROM 2022, AND A 27.3%
INCREASE OVER THE LAST 10 YEARS.

STATE PARK 2021-2025 | VISITATION ESTIMATED TOTALS BY MONTH



STATE PARK 2015-2025 | TOTAL VISITATION ESTIMATES



The table depicts visitation estimates by month from 2021 to 2025. While May through September accounts for the largest portion of visitation, the remaining months show fairly consistent visitor numbers.

The chart above illustrates how visitation across the state park system has evolved over the past decade. Since 2015, total visitation has increased by more than 725,000 visitors, representing a 27.3% rise. Over this period, reservations have generally followed an upward trend in line with overall visitation, although there was a slight dip in 2025. While total occupied nights decreased slightly by 2.5% from 2024 to 2025, they are still up 24% compared to 2015.

STATE PARK 2021-2025 | VISITATION ESTIMATED TOTAL COUNTS BY MONTH

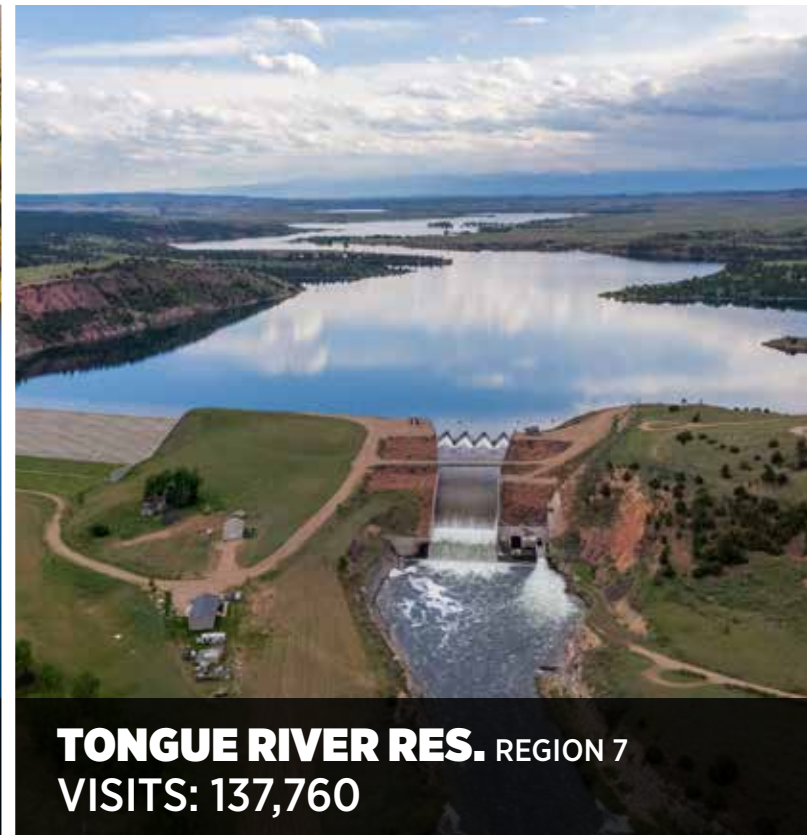
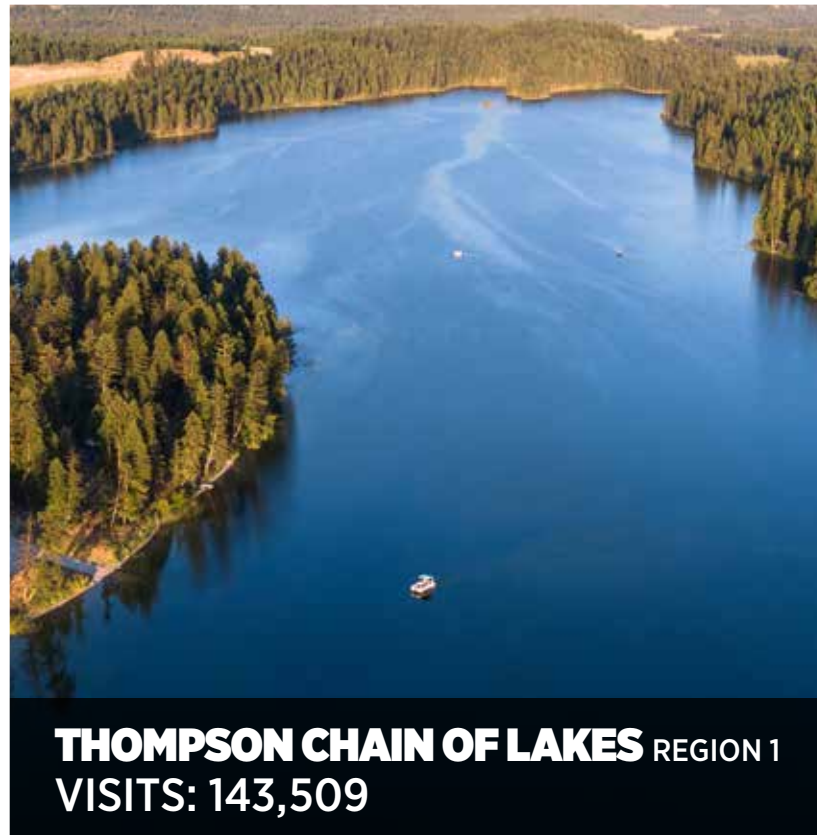
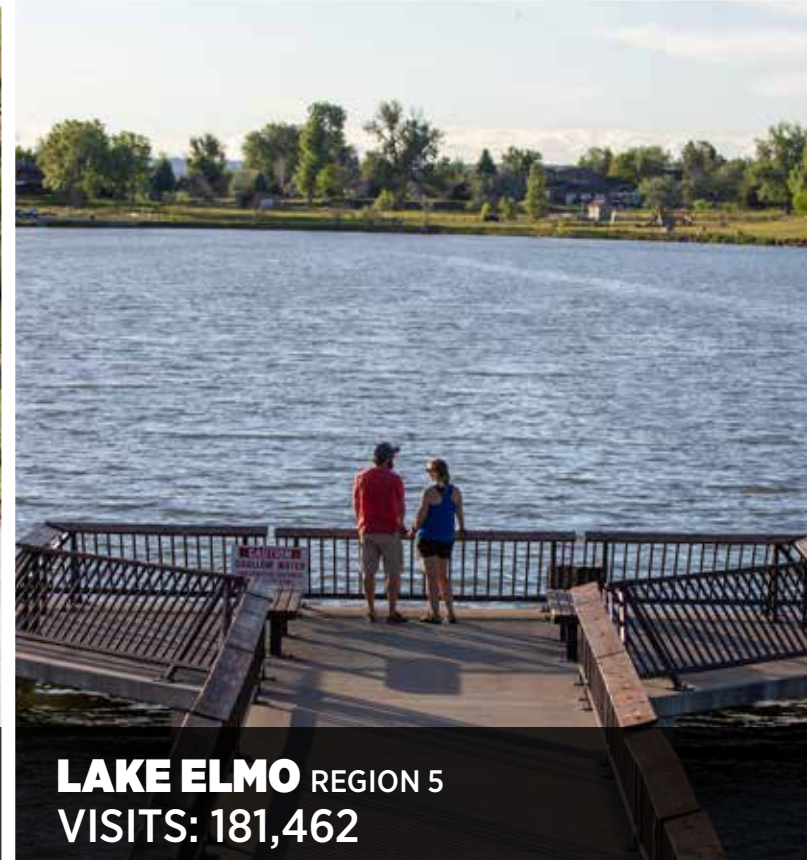
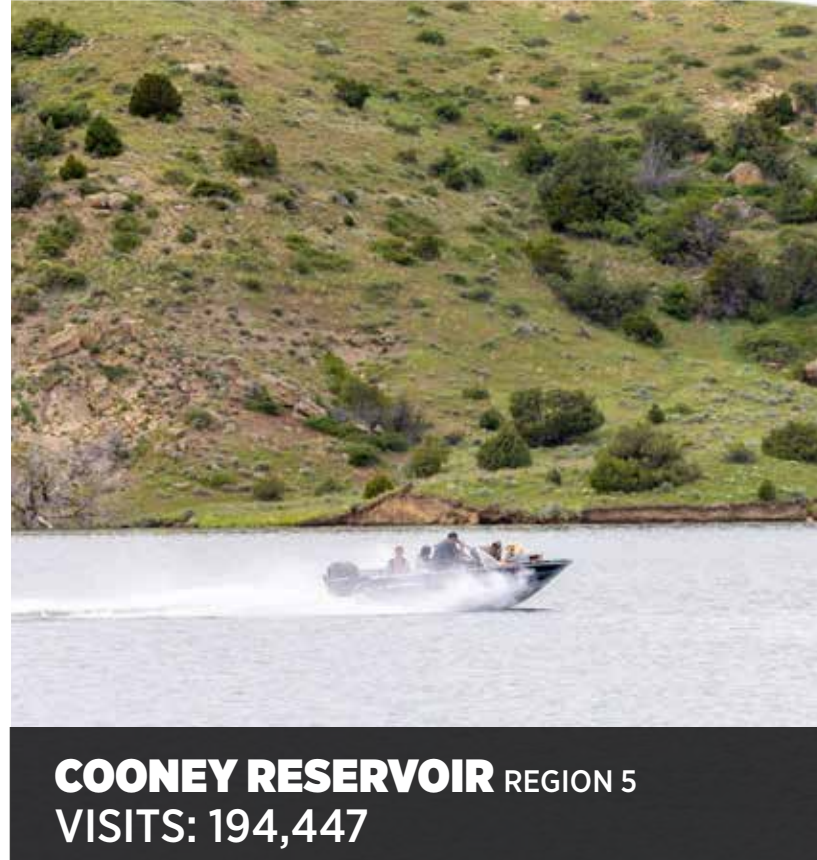
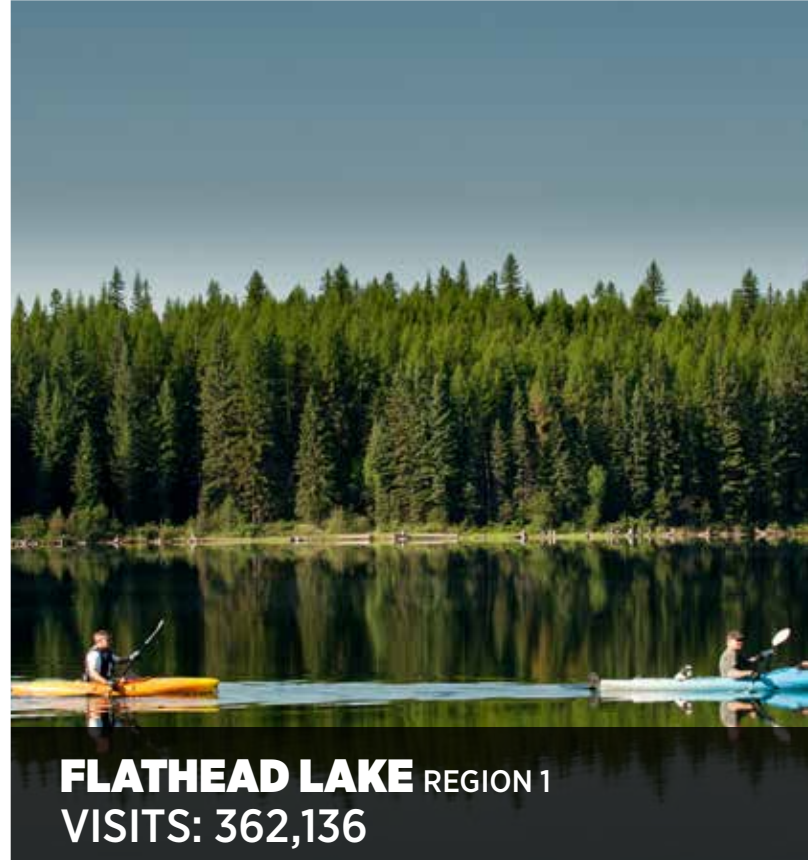
YEAR	JAN.	FEB.	MAR.	APR.	MAY	JUN.	JUL.	AUG.	SEP.	OCT.	NOV.	DEC.
2021	124,361	91,749	175,726	235,605	383,052	553,824	626,315	428,996	335,084	207,789	127,324	91,682
2022	114,993	105,553	137,023	166,989	295,263	422,988	585,960	429,003	372,233	215,667	101,124	89,316
2023	115,140	103,659	137,360	198,699	332,822	419,621	583,564	401,616	283,684	289,923	124,966	117,214
2024	124,005	110,851	158,545	197,985	344,584	486,259	554,996	464,253	330,226	217,181	126,973	111,544
2025	110,846	119,568	180,463	220,616	375,027	454,285	576,590	483,147	330,116	229,221	185,205	121,042

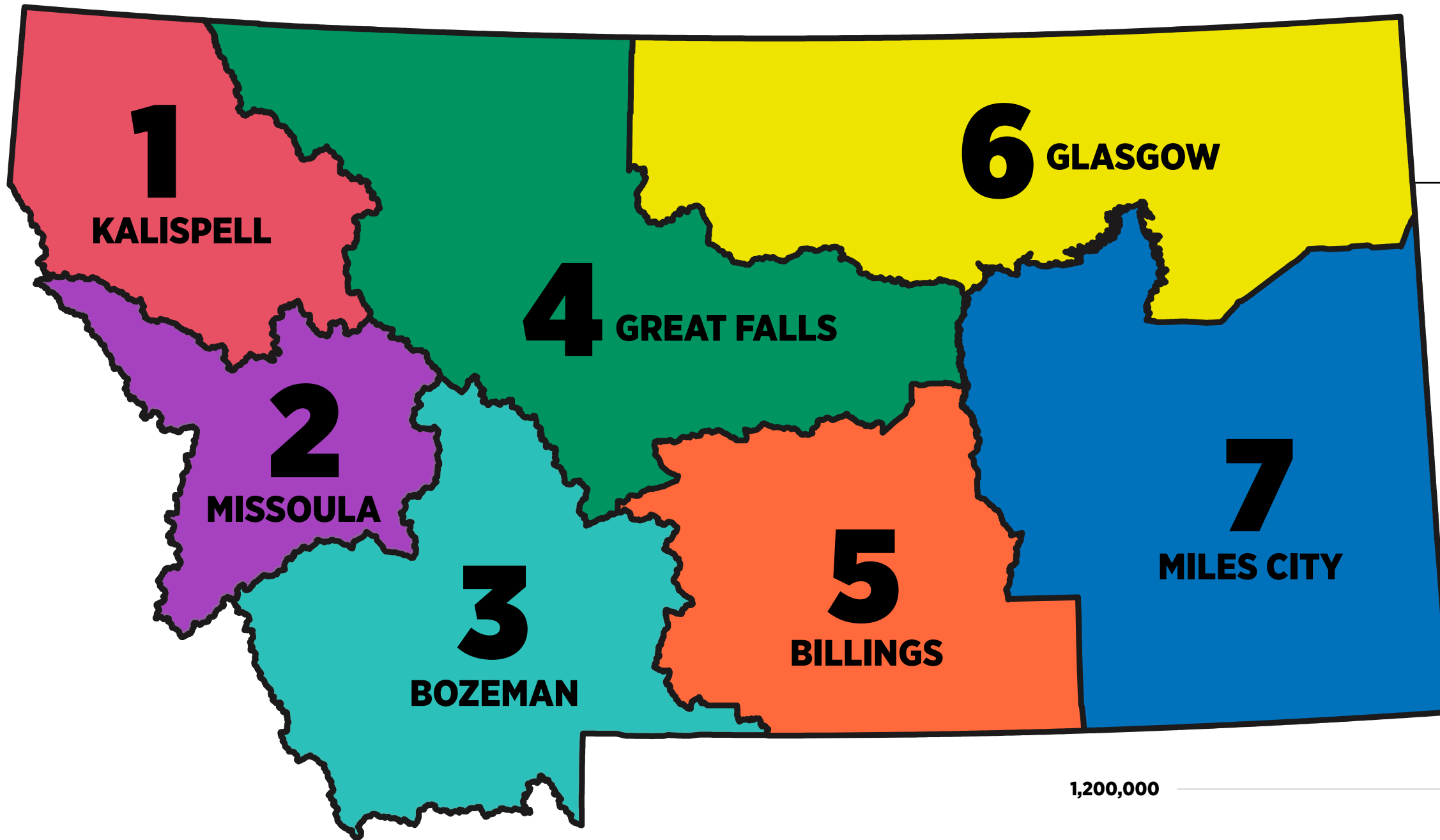
YEAR	TOTAL VISITATION
2021	3,381,507
2022	3,036,121
2023	3,108,268
2024	3,227,402
2025	3,386,125

STATE PARK 2025

TOTAL VISITATION ESTIMATES FOR PARKS OVER 100,000 VISITORS

In 2025, there were eight parks whose visitation exceeded 100,000. A full list of state parks and their visitation estimates for 2021-2025 can be viewed in this report as well as regional breakdowns.





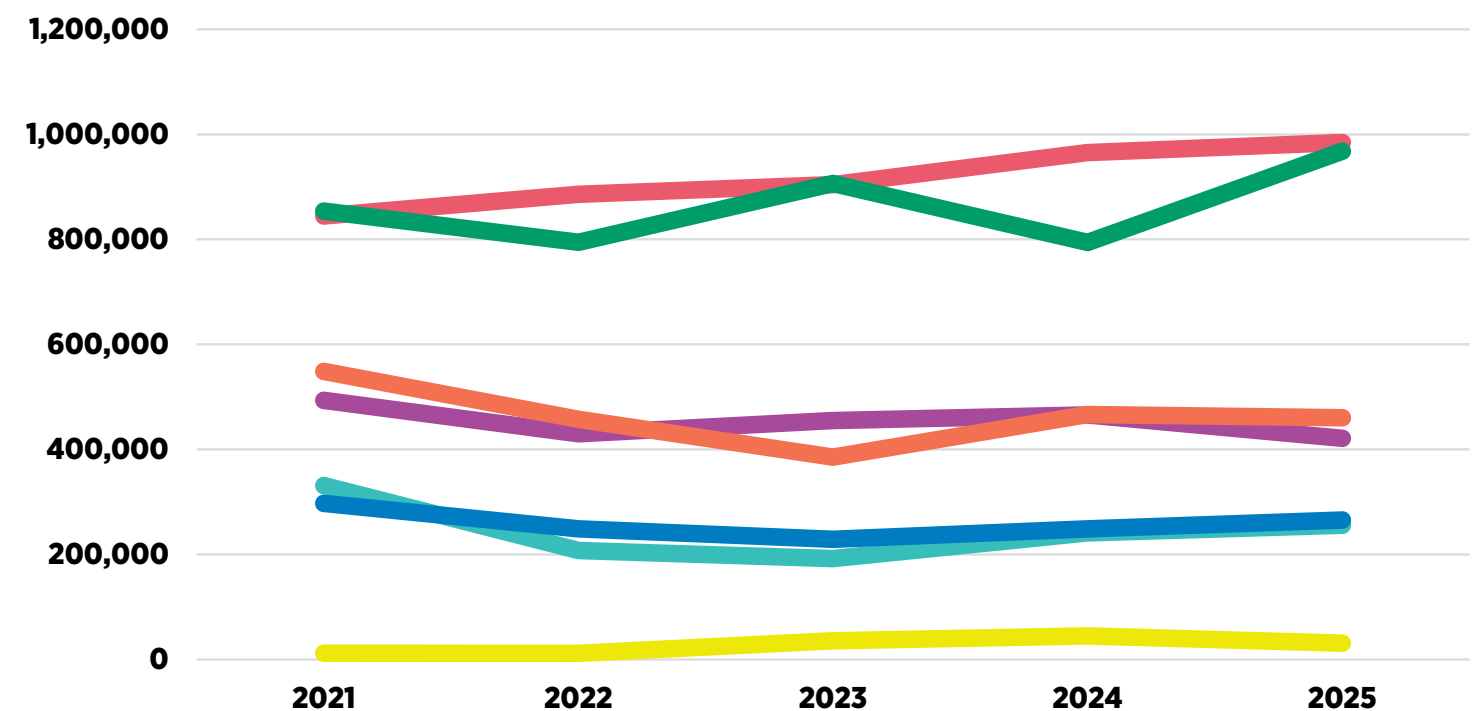
MAP OF MONTANA STATE PARKS ADMINISTRATIVE REGION BOUNDARIES

The Montana State Parks system is sub-divided into seven administrative regions with regional headquarters 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.

STATE PARK 2021-2025 | TOTAL VISITATION BY REGION

INTRODUCTION

This report has been developed utilizing 2021-2025 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. An average of five to ten parks are selected annually to update multipliers used in estimating visitor numbers so that the most appropriate data is reported. 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.

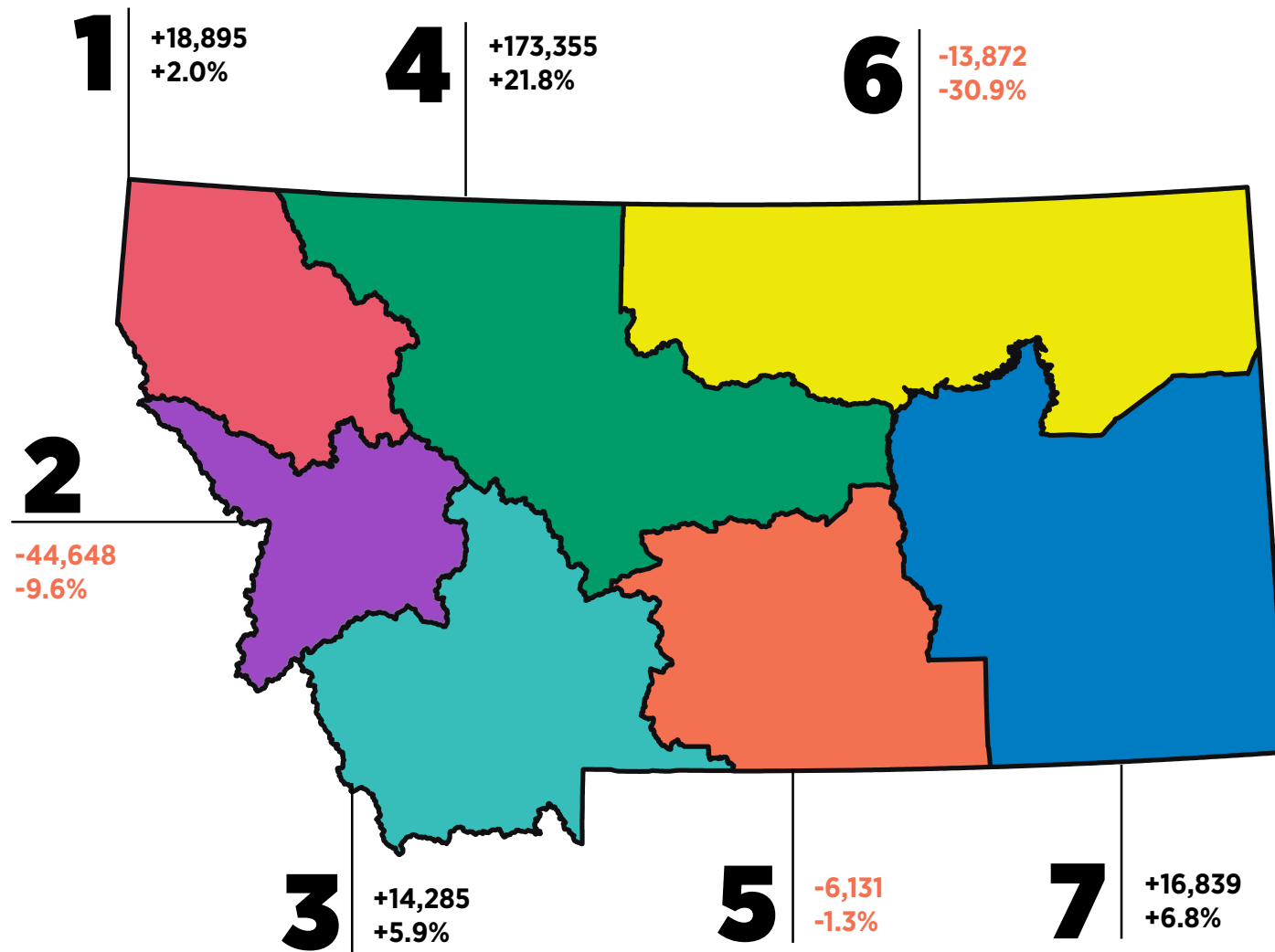




In 2025, Regions 1 and 4 cumulatively accounted for over half (57.7%) of the state's overall visitation, which has been the case throughout the last few years. Region 1 has seen the most consistency in visitation region-wide in the past 4 years. Region 2 saw a slight decrease (2%) from 2024 to 2025 as a percentage of the overall visitation. Region 3 saw a decline in 2023 for percent of visitation but has since stabilized at 7.5%. Region 5 visitation decreased as a percentage of overall visitation (0.9%) from 2024 to 2025. Region 6 represents just one park which also saw a decrease in 2025. Region 7 holds a steady percentage of the total estimate at 7.8% in 2025.

STATE PARK 2024-2025 | COMPARISON

TOTAL
+158,625 est. visits (+4.0%)



Reports in recent years made many comparisons to visitation during the COVID-19 pandemic. A look back at historical data for the system illustrates an increase in park use post-pandemic and continued growth through 2025. 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. Across the outdoor recreation industry, we have seen market correction and stabilization with slight increases Year-Over-Year from 2022 to 2025 up to 2021 levels. The bulk of comparisons in this report, therefore, will showcase data from 2021 to 2025, focusing primarily on 2022-2025 metrics. The chart below offers some further comparisons for the last two reporting periods.

In comparing 2025 with the previous year, Region 6 saw the largest decline of all regions. Both Region 2 (-9.6%) and Region 5 (-1.3%) also saw declines. Regions 1, 3 and 7 saw increases in visitation estimates while Region 4 saw the largest increase of 21.8% from 2024 to 2025. Further in the report, you can find notes under each region's visitation breakdown that can help explain any anomalies in counter data reporting such as operational issues with counter devices which could impact total numbers.

STATEWIDE VISITATION ESTIMATES (2022-2025)

Visitation at state parks increased for 23 state parks in 2025 compared with last year (2024), and since 2022 it has increased at 27 state parks. In examining this time period, 2022 provides a stable comparison of change, while many parks experienced explosive growth during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-2021. The table below provides annual estimates for all parks in order of descending 2025 visitation values and the percentage change from 2022.

Region	Park	2022	2023	2024	2025	% change 22-25
4	Giant Springs	465,367	584,810	463,724	645,978	38.8%
1	Flathead Lake (all units)	311,875	332,063	363,024	362,136	16.1%
5	Cooney Reservoir	208,960	148,344	186,672	194,447	-6.9%
5	Lake Elmo	165,530	165,041	198,655	181,462	9.6%
1	Lone Pine	122,494	132,054	143,796	170,467	39.2%
4	Spring Meadow	181,851	169,348	173,998	164,731	-9.4%
1	Thompson Chain of Lakes	131,622	134,990	140,014	143,510	9.0%
7	Tongue River Reservoir	107,978	99,232	109,454	137,760	27.6%
7	Makoshika	103,999	93,150	104,021	96,321	-7.4%
1	Les Mason	69,575	92,596	86,283	92,705	33.2%
1	Whitefish	151,072	84,409	84,854	82,577	-45.3%
1	Milltown	89,170	80,208	72,516	63,746	-28.5%
2	Fish Creek	20,792	54,525	59,381	59,538	186.4%
2	Travelers' Rest	75,048	69,908	60,254	57,766	-23.0%
3	Missouri Headwaters	53,669	33,436	67,698	56,849	5.9%
2	Salmon Lake	59,098	47,737	58,923	54,218	-8.3%
3	Bannack	52,356	50,565	46,831	52,407	0.1%
2	Placid Lake	39,989	60,579	60,816	50,725	26.8%
1	Somers Beach	7,939	34,268	49,171	50,393	534.8%
2	Frenchtown Pond	51,479	47,256	43,734	46,330	-10.0%
3	Lewis & Clark Caverns	50,015	46,893	48,621	45,170	-9.7%
5	Pictograph Cave	50,160	43,779	42,498	43,219	-13.8%

Region	Park	2022	2023	2024	2025	% change 22-25
4	Sluice Boxes	29,273	31,498	32,434	38,305	30.9%
4	Black Sandy	43,285	43,966	33,848	36,827	-14.9%
4	Ackley Lake	29,712	27,428	39,391	35,504	19.5%
3	Madison Buffalo Jump	19,518	35,466	38,115	35,288	80.8%
2	Council Grove	33,765	35,395	33,861	34,947	3.5%
2	Beavertail Hill	37,936	37,934	52,957	32,346	-14.7%
4	First Peoples Buffalo Jump	28,352	34,195	36,074	31,736	11.9%
1	Lake Mary Ronan	31,674	32,144	30,124	31,196	-1.5%
1	Logan	41,894	26,054	33,581	31,185	-25.6%
6	Brush Lake	11,820	35,510	44,916	31,044	162.6%
5	Chief Plenty Coups	22,681	27,097	18,063	20,797	-8.3%
5	Greycliff Prairie Dog Town	9,984	1,167	20,712	20,544	105.8%
1	Thompson Falls	18,129	36,059	34,843	20,418	12.6%
2	Painted Rocks	16,161	16,747	18,814	18,178	12.5%
3	Lost Creek	12,883	12,606	17,099	18,027	39.9%
3	Anaconda Smoke Stack	13,833	0	8,445	17,462	26.2%
7	Medicine Rocks	13,678	21,224	21,447	16,535	20.9%
3	Granite Ghost Town	0	6,878	9,733	12,275	N/A
3	Elkhorn	N/A	N/A	N/A	10,255	N/A
4	Tower Rock	12,757	9,333	9,869	9,610	-24.7%
7	Pirogue Island	9,692	7,115	6,709	8,744	-9.8%
7	Rosebud Battlefield	13,605	8,207	6,846	5,958	-56.2%
3	Clark's Lookout	4,120	5,179	2,723	5,690	38.1%
4	Smith River	3,952	6,106	5,254	5,255	33.0%
2	Fort Owen	6,491	4,612	4,619	3,434	-47.1%
3	Beaverhead Rock	888	1,157	1,986	2,114	138.1%
4	Judith Landing	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

SPOTLIGHT: Why is visitation information important?

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks has experienced consistent increases in visitation at state parks and other recreation sites over the last decade. That trend mirrors the growing importance of outdoor recreation across Montana's economy, communities, and way of life. In 2024, Montana's outdoor recreation industry produced \$3.8 billion in value-added economic output, represented 4.9% of the state's gross domestic product, and supported about 32,000 jobs along with approximately \$1.87 billion in wages and salaries. Nationally, Montana ranked third in the share of state GDP generated by outdoor recreation ([U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis](#)).

The 2026–2030 Montana Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, titled From Peaks to Prairies: Montana's Outdoor Recreation Roadmap, provides a strategic framework for responding to this growth while maintaining access, protecting natural and cultural resources and supporting long-term investment in recreation infrastructure. The SCORP serves as both a federal compliance document for the Land and Water Conservation Fund and a living blueprint for Montana's recreation future. It fulfills LWCF planning requirements, including public involvement, assessment of recreation supply and demand, statewide priorities and Montana's Open Project Selection Process. It also guides planning and investment among local, tribal, state and federal partners.

The SCORP was developed through an inclusive, data-driven process that included more than 2,300 responses to the Public Outdoor Recreation Use Survey, input from 98 recreation facility and land managers, nine public workshops and a 45-day public review and comment period. Survey results show that outdoor recreation remains deeply important to Montanans: 97% of respondents said outdoor recreation is important to their quality of life, 96% said maintaining existing outdoor recreation facilities is important and 90% said preserving natural habitats and wildlife in recreation areas is important.

Survey findings also show that Montanans recreate across a wide range of public lands and facilities. The most commonly used facilities include hiking trails, walking, jogging and biking paths, river access points and boat launches, natural or wild areas and fishing areas. National forests receive the highest level of use by Montana households, followed by city parks, rivers and streams, Bureau of Land Management lands, county parks and state parks.

As recreation participation and visitation continue to grow, the SCORP highlights several priorities directly related to visitation management and long-term system sustainability. These include enhancing trail networks and recreation connectivity, expanding access and inclusivity, repairing and modernizing recreation infrastructure, conserving natural and cultural resources, supporting economic vitality and fostering education, stewardship and collaboration. Together, these priorities reinforce the importance of coordinated planning, investment and stewardship to ensure Montana's outdoor recreation system remains accessible, sustainable and resilient for residents and visitors alike.

WHAT MONTANAN'S SAY ABOUT OUTDOOR RECREATION :



Montanans indicated their most frequently used amenities include hiking trails, walking and biking paths, and river access points.



984,685 VISITORS

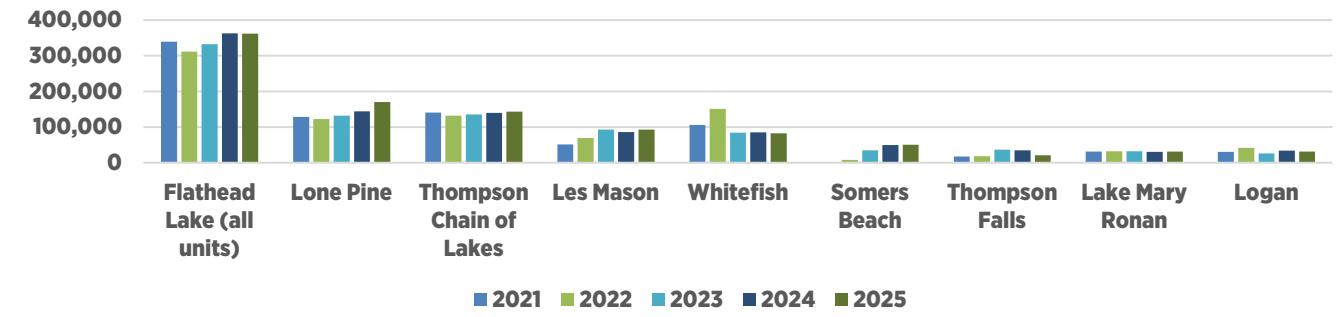
REGION 1

Region 1 served approximately 984,685 visitors in 2025, representing an estimated 2.0% increase compared to the previous year. Visitation in Region 1 accounted for just under 30% of total use across the state park system (29.1%), a share that remains consistent with prior years.

As in 2024, three of the state’s parks with visitation exceeding 100,000 in 2025 are located in Region 1: Flathead Lake (all units), Thompson Chain of Lakes, and Lone Pine. Their continued high use underscores the importance of public access in this area, particularly as the Flathead Valley’s population grows. Lone Pine experienced a notable increase in visitation (18.5%) from 2024 to 2025, while Thompson Falls saw a substantial decrease (41.4%).

ESTIMATED 2021-2025 VISITATION

REGION 1 STATE PARKS SORTED BY HIGHEST TO LOWEST YTD 2025 VISITATION



STATE PARK	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	% Change (2024 - 2025)
Flathead Lake (all units)	339,631	311,875	332,063	363,024	362,136	-0.2%
Lone Pine	128,640	122,494	132,054	143,796	170,466	18.5%
Thompson Chain of Lakes	140,659	131,622	134,990	140,014	143,510	2.5%
Les Mason	51,396	69,575	92,596	86,283	92,705	7.4%
Whitefish	105,648	151,071	84,409	84,854	82,577	-2.7%
Somers Beach	N/A	7,939	34,268	49,171	50,393	2.5%
Thompson Falls	17,236	18,129	36,059	34,843	20,418	-41.4%
Lake Mary Ronan	31,055	31,674	32,144	30,124	31,196	3.6%
Logan	30,355	41,894	26,054	33,581	31,185	-7.1%
TOTAL	844,620	886,273	904,637	965,690	984,585	2.0%

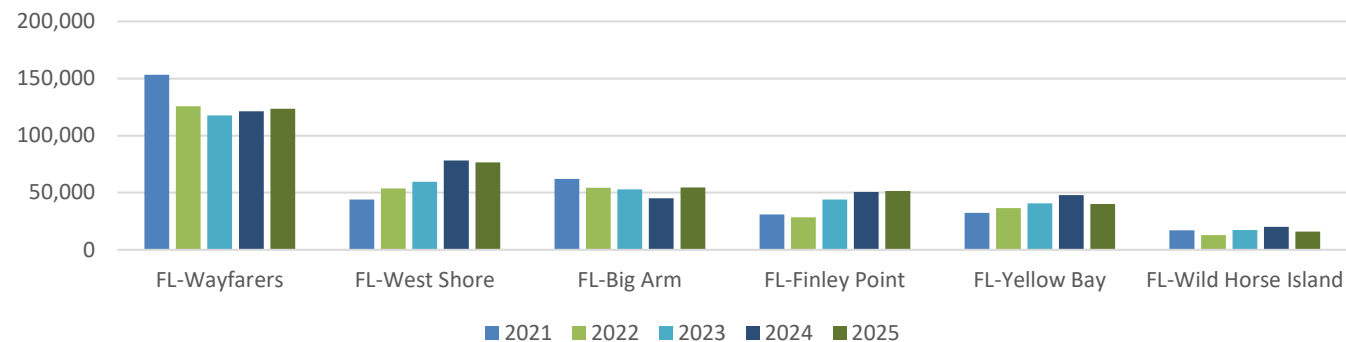
NOTE: Includes Flathead Lake being counted as one park, comprised of six units. Somers Beach was established as a park in 2022. Lake Mary Ronan noted ice was good in January creating high winter use but then in November counts were down by around half due to ice not yet forming. Lone Pine noted higher visitation in May due to warmer weather.

REGION 1



Flathead Lake (all units combined) appears to have stabilized in overall visitation, though individual parks experienced some variation. The Big Arm unit saw a 21.2% increase in visitors, while Yellow Bay experienced a decline, possibly due to ongoing construction at the site in 2025.

ESTIMATED 2021-2025 VISITATION
REGION 1 FLATHEAD LAKE ALL UNIT ESTIMATE



STATE PARK: FLATHEAD LAKE	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	% Change (2024 - 2025)
Wayfarers	153,155	125,861	117,562	121,189	123,503	1.9%
West Shore	44,097	53,733	59,516	78,180	76,470	-2.2%
Big Arm	62,168	54,441	52,930	45,001	54,555	21.2%
Finley Point	30,930	28,362	44,011	50,698	51,492	1.6%
Yellow Bay	32,251	36,488	40,634	47,968	40,213	-16.2%
Wild Horse Island	17,030	12,990	17,409	19,988	15,903	-20.4%
TOTAL	339,631	311,875	332,063	363,024	362,136	-0.2%

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. Big Arm also experienced an issue with counter data reporting as some weekend counts were not attributed to the total counter data for an undetermined amount of time. FL- Yellow Bay was under construction from March 17th through June. FL- Westshore noted a closure of Loop A in the campground in April.

421,227 VISITORS



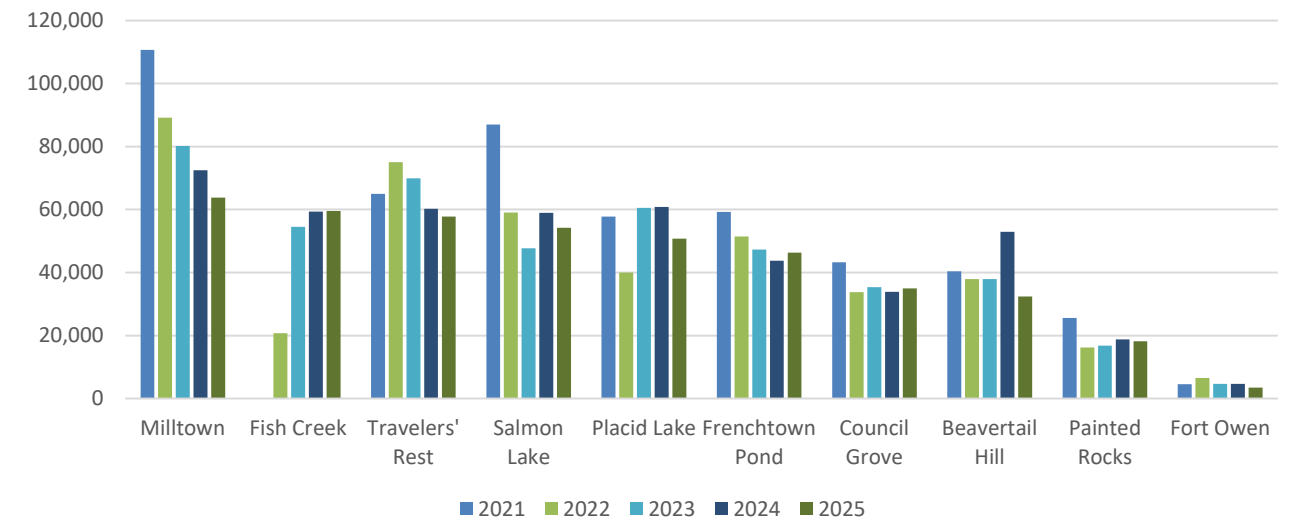
REGION 2

With an estimated 421,227 visitors in 2025, Region 2 experienced a 9.6% decrease compared to 2024. Visitation in the region accounted for 12.4% of the system's total use in 2025, continuing a downward trend observed in recent years.

Several parks in Region 2 saw notable shifts in visitation. Beavertail Hill, Fort Owen, Placid Lake, Salmon Lake and Milltown all experienced declines, while Frenchtown Pond recorded the largest increase at 5.9%. Visitation to other parks remained relatively stable in R2.

ESTIMATED 2021-2025 VISITATION

REGION 2 STATE PARKS SORTED BY HIGHEST TO LOWEST YTD 2025 VISITATION



STATE PARK	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	% Change (2024 - 2025)
Milltown	110,732	89,170	80,208	72,516	63,746	-12.1%
Fish Creek	N/A	20,792	54,525	59,381	59,538	0.3%
Travelers' Rest	64,933	75,048	69,908	60,254	57,766	-4.1%
Salmon Lake	86,987	59,098	47,737	58,923	54,218	-8.0%
Placid Lake	57,752	39,989	60,579	60,816	50,725	-16.6%
Frenchtown Pond	59,240	51,479	47,256	43,734	46,330	5.9%
Council Grove	43,249	33,765	35,395	33,861	34,947	3.2%
Beavertail Hill	40,393	37,936	37,934	52,957	32,346	-38.9%
Painted Rocks	25,625	16,161	16,747	18,814	18,178	-3.4%
Fort Owen	4,563	4,563	4,612	4,619	3,434	-25.7%
TOTAL	493,474	429,929	454,901	465,875	421,227	-9.6%

NOTE: Visitation data at Fish Creek was not regularly reported in 2020 or 2021. Staff began to collect data at Fish Creek in 2022 with an additional counter and visitation observations in 2023. However, no data was submitted for Surveyor Creek entrance during all of 2025 due to the counter being stolen. Milltown and Frenchtown Pond both experienced counter malfunction for a time during 2024. Milltown noted that the Confluence was closed to vehicle traffic during October-December due to BNSF construction. Travelers Rest experienced lots of snow and cold in February; the main vehicle counter was covered for a time and did not record counts.

255,537 VISITORS



REGION 3

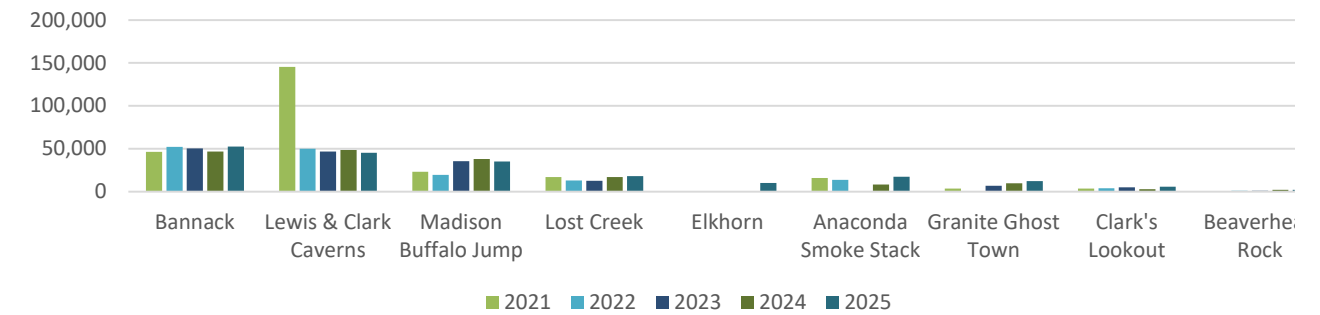
With an estimated 255,537 visitors in 2025, Region 3 experienced a 5.9% increase compared to 2024.

The region accounted for 7.5% of the system’s total visitation, consistent with its share in 2024.

Some of this increase may be attributed to the installation of additional counters at Missouri Headwaters State Park, along with year-over-year improvements in counter functionality and overall population growth in the Region 3 area. Visitation estimates at other parks in the region have similarly been influenced in recent years by changes in the number and performance of counting equipment.

ESTIMATED 2021-2025 VISITATION

REGION 3 STATE PARKS SORTED BY HIGHEST TO LOWEST YTD 2025 VISITATION



STATE PARK	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	% Change (2024 - 2025)
Missouri Headwaters	75,699	53,669	33,436	67,698	56,849	-16.0%
Bannack	46,583	52,356	50,565	46,831	52,407	11.9%
Lewis & Clark Caverns	145,637	50,015	46,893	48,621	45,170	-7.1%
Madison Buffalo Jump	23,192	19,518	35,466	38,115	35,288	-7.4%
Lost Creek	16,992	12,883	12,606	17,099	18,027	5.5%
Elkhorn	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	10,255	N/A
Anaconda Smoke Stack	15,796	13,833	0	8,445	17,462	106.8%
Granite Ghost Town	3,599	0	6,878	9,733	12,275	26.1%
Clark's Lookout	3,750	4,120	5,179	2,723	5,690	109.0%
Beaverhead Rock	0	888	1,158	1,986	2,114	6.5%
TOTAL	331,248	207,283	192,180	241,251	255,537	5.9%

NOTE: Visitation data collection began at Beaverhead Rock in June 2022 and at Elkhorn in 2025. The counter at Granite Ghost Town was not fully operational during 2020 and 2022, while the Anaconda Smoke Stack was inactive in 2023 and experienced large demographic use shifts in the area since 2024, leading to increased use. At Clark's Lookout, adjustments to counter settings between 2024 and 2025 shifted from dividing entries by two to recording one-way entries, likely explaining the significant percentage increase. Missouri Headwaters added two new counters in 2024, contributing to higher recorded visitation. The site also saw increased hunter use in October, which likely reduced general public visitation, and experienced unusually warm conditions in December. Beaverhead Rock is missing data for April 2025 due to a broken and replaced locked container. Lewis and Clark Caverns likely saw higher visitation in March due to warm weather, and December was also unusually warm during the Candlelight tour season.



967,946 VISITORS

REGION 4

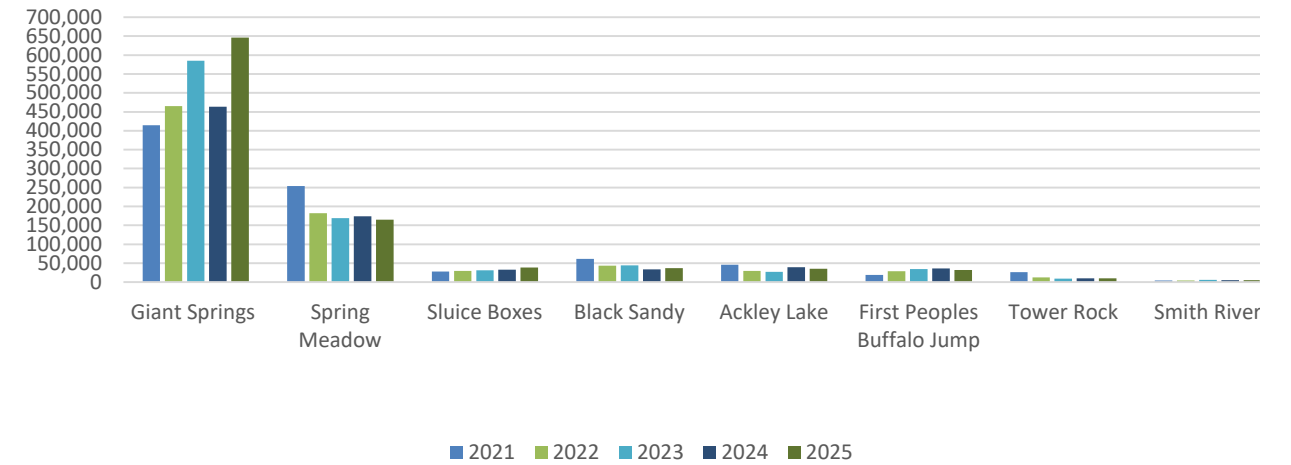
With an estimated 967,946 visitors in 2025, Region 4 experienced a 21.8% increase compared to 2024. The region accounted for 28.6% of the system’s total visitation, representing a 4% increase in its share from the previous year.

Overall visitation in the region is largely driven by Giant Springs State Park, which remained Montana’s most visited state park and saw a 39.3% increase in visitation from 2024 to 2025. The park continues to serve as a major destination for the City of Great Falls. Visitation trends across the remaining parks in Region 4 were mixed, with some experiencing increases and others declines compared to the previous year.

A new state park, Judith Landing State Park in Region 4, was added in 2025; however, visitation estimates were not recorded for the year 2025.

ESTIMATED 2021-2025 VISITATION

REGION 4 STATE PARKS SORTED BY HIGHEST TO LOWEST YTD 2025 VISITATION



STATE PARK	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	% Change (2024 - 2025)
Giant Springs	414,889	465,367	584,810	463,724	645,978	39.3%
Spring Meadow	254,141	181,851	169,348	173,998	164,731	-5.3%
Sluice Boxes	27,767	29,273	31,498	32,434	38,305	18.1%
Black Sandy	61,518	43,285	43,966	33,848	36,827	8.8%
Ackley Lake	45,715	29,712	27,428	39,391	35,504	-9.9%
First Peoples Buffalo Jump	19,286	28,352	34,195	36,074	31,736	-12.0%
Tower Rock	26,532	12,757	9,333	9,869	9,610	-2.6%
Smith River	4,150	3,952	6,106	5,254	5,255	0.0%

NOTE: Visitation data for the Smith River is captured using float logs and is not recorded during the winter months. Sluice Boxes had vandalism to the trail counter which resulted in fewer reported counts.

First Peoples Buffalo Jump had the upper walk-in access blocked by snowfall in January. Judith Landing has opened as a new park; however, no data has been captured yet. Sluice Boxes experienced counter issues including battery failure and vandalism. Spring Meadow had vandalism to a counter in April which could have impacted counts.



460,469 VISITORS

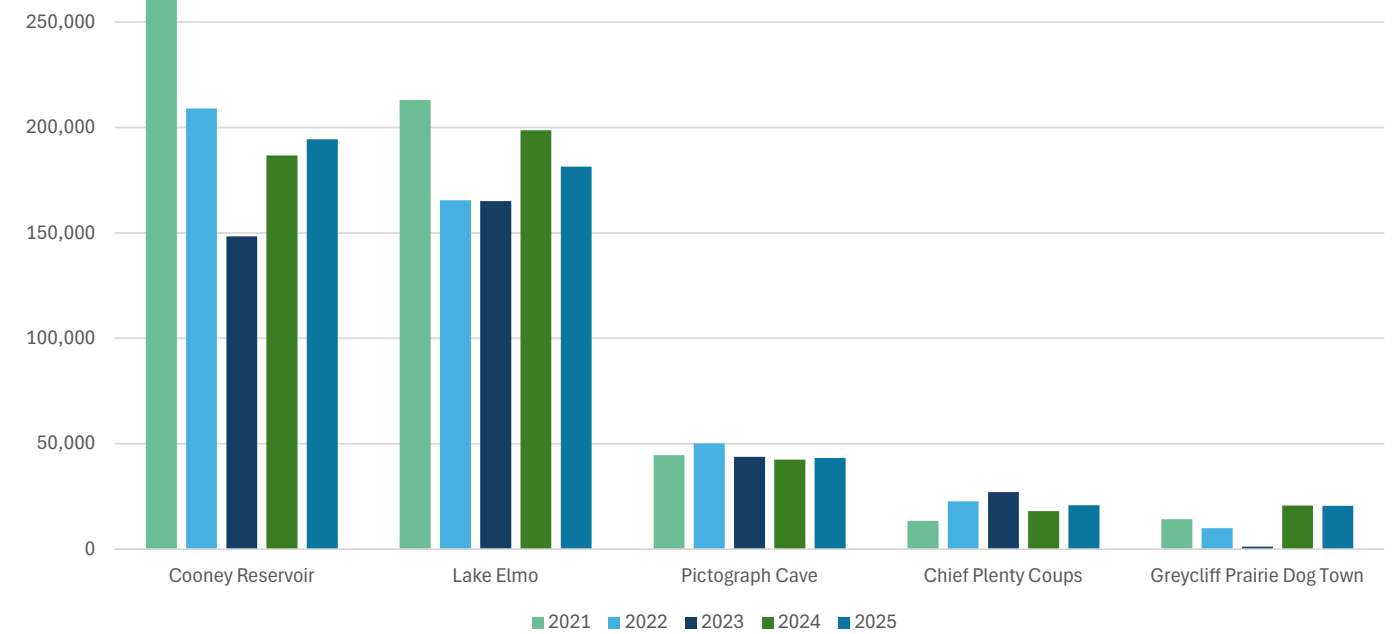
REGION 5

With an estimated 460,469 visitors in 2025, Region 5 experienced a 1.3% decrease compared to 2024. The region accounted for 13.6% of the system’s total visitation, a slight decline from the previous year.

Overall visitation in the region is largely driven by Cooney Reservoir and Lake Elmo, each of which recorded more than 100,000 visitors in 2025. The decrease in visits to Lake Elmo was likely the primary factor contributing to the region’s overall decline.

ESTIMATED 2021-2025 VISITATION

REGION 5 STATE PARKS SORTED BY HIGHEST TO LOWEST YTD 2025 VISITATION



STATE PARK	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	% Change (2024 - 2025)
Cooney Reservoir	263,691	208,960	148,344	186,672	194,447	4.2%
Lake Elmo	212,916	165,530	165,041	198,655	181,462	-8.7%
Pictograph Cave	44,569	50,160	43,779	42,498	43,219	1.7%
Chief Plenty Coups	13,352	22,681	27,097	18,063	20,797	15.1%
Greycliff Prairie Dog Town	14,151	9,984	1,167	20,712	20,544	-0.8%
TOTAL	548,678	457,315	385,428	466,600	460,469	-1.3%

NOTE: Some decline in visitation early in 2023 may be attributed to significant snowfalls and low temperatures in the region. The Greycliff Prairie Dog Town counter was inactive for most of 2023. Staff updated multipliers for Greycliff Prairie Dog Town in 2024, which more accurately captured visitation numbers.

In 2025, Chief Plenty Coups had mixed weather which could have led to lower visitation. Much of the data for Cooney was missing for 2025 resulting in averages of either two or three years of data where available. Greycliff Prairie Dog Town had a counter malfunction in July resulting in the loss of 7 days worth of data. Lake Elmo experienced counter issues in June which likely led to lower counts during a typically busy month.

REGION 5

44,916 VISITORS

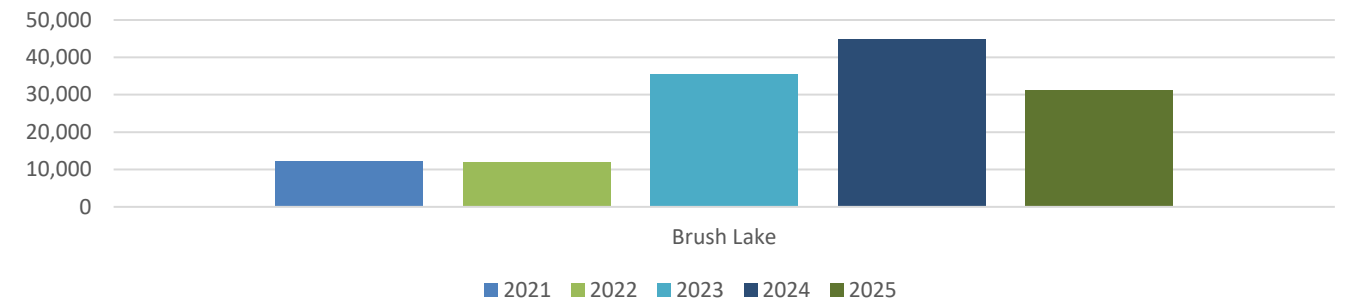


REGION 6

For many years, Regions 6 and 7 were combined into a single administrative unit. Beginning in 2022, they were separated, with Region 6 consisting solely of Brush Lake State Park. With an estimated 31,044 visitors in 2025, Region 6 experienced a 30.9% decrease compared to 2024. The region accounted for approximately 0.9% of the system’s total visitation in 2025, a decline from the previous year.

ESTIMATED 2021-2025 VISITATION

REGION 6 STATE PARKS SORTED BY HIGHEST TO LOWEST YTD 2025 VISITATION



STATE PARK	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	% Change (2024 - 2025)
Brush Lake	12,181	11,820	35,509	44,916	31,044	-30.9%
TOTAL	12,181	11,820	35,509	44,916	31,044	-30.9%

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

REGION 6



265,317 VISITORS

REGION 7

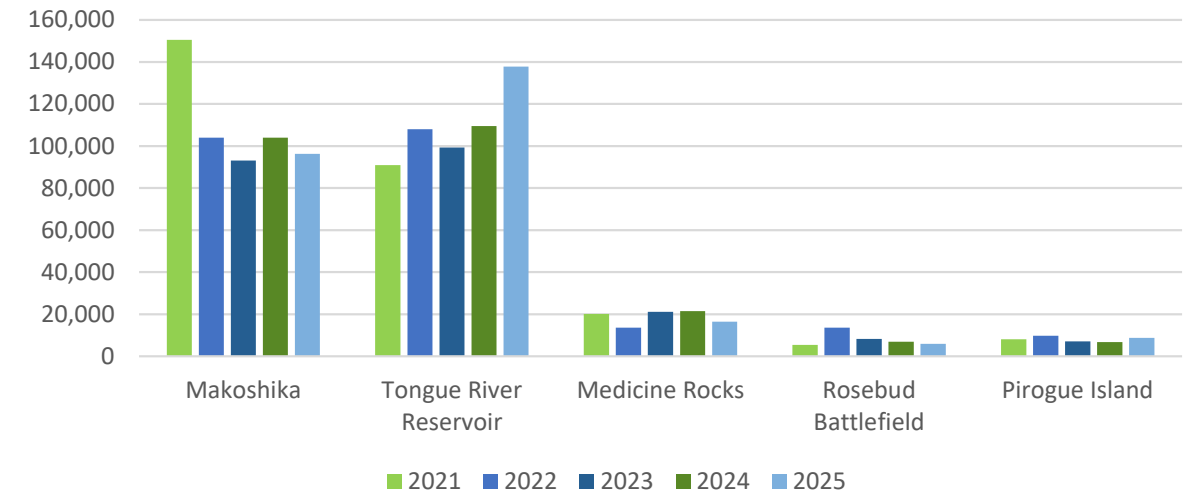
With an estimated 265,317 visitors in 2025, Region 7 experienced a 6.8% increase compared to 2024. The region accounted for 7.8% of the system’s total visitation, consistent with its share in the previous year.

Makoshika State Park and Tongue River Reservoir State Park continue to drive overall visitation in the region, with each exceeding 100,000 visitors in 2025. Makoshika experienced a wildfire during the year, which may have contributed to a decline in visitation. In contrast, Tongue River Reservoir has continued to see strong growth, reaching its highest recorded visitation in 2025.

In March 2022, management of Hell Creek State Park was transferred to the Little Shell Tribe of the Chippewa Indians of Montana. As a result, the park is no longer included in state park system visitation estimates.

ESTIMATED 2021-2025 VISITATION

REGION 7 STATE PARKS SORTED BY HIGHEST TO LOWEST YTD 2025 VISITATION



STATE PARK	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	% Change (2024 - 2025)
Tongue River Reservoir	90,859	107,978	99,232	109,454	137,760	25.9%
Makoshika	150,484	103,999	93,150	104,021	96,321	-7.4%
Medicine Rocks	20,140	13,678	21,224	21,447	16,535	-22.9%
Pirogue Island	8,016	9,692	7,115	6,709	8,744	30.3%
Rosebud Battlefield	5,460	13,605	8,207	6,846	5,958	-13.0%
Hell Creek	22,349	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
TOTAL	297,308	248,952	228,927	248,478	265,317	6.8%

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

In 2025, Rosebud experienced mild weather in the fall potentially impacting hunter visits. Tongue River had a warm December 2024 and early January 2025 with slow formation of ice. Mild weather through November with daily fishermen and boats until Thanksgiving. December stayed warm and impacted ice fishing and boating.

POST-STAY SURVEY AND RESERVATIONS

Each year, Visitors to State Parks who reserve campsites or facilities receive a post-stay survey to share feedback about their experience. In 2025, a total of 2,002 survey responses were collected from visitors across 26 State Parks. Based on these responses, the average length of stay was 2.57 nights and 84% of respondents felt they were able to reserve the site they wanted.

HELPFULNESS AND COURTESY OF PARK STAFF

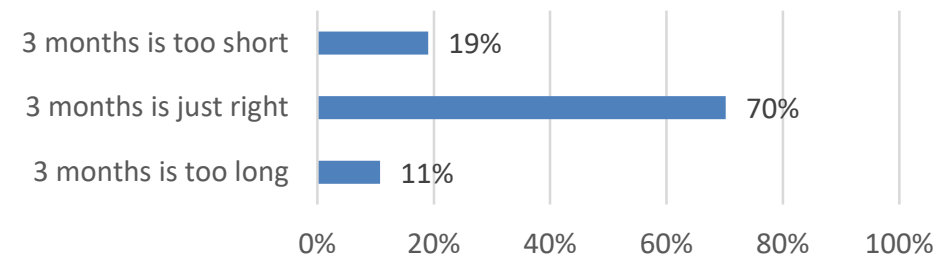
The survey also assessed perceptions of visitor services, with particular focus on the helpfulness and courtesy of park staff, an important factor in overall satisfaction. Results were highly positive: 92% of respondents rated staff interactions as “good” or “very good,” and the average rating was 4.67 on a five-point scale (1 = very poor, 5 = very good).

These findings suggest that visitors not only value the natural and recreational opportunities provided by State Parks, but also consistently experience high-quality customer service. The strong ratings reflect positively on staff performance and indicate that efforts to foster welcoming, helpful interactions are making a meaningful impact on visitors’ satisfaction.

THREE MONTH SITE-RESERVATION WINDOW

Visitors are allowed to make reservations up to three months in advance of their planned stay, reflecting a recent change in 2024 from the previous six-month booking window. To evaluate visitor perspectives on this adjustment, a survey question was included to gauge satisfaction with the updated timeframe.

A total of 1,797 responses were recorded, with 70% of respondents indicating that the three-month reservation window is “just right.” This suggests that a clear majority of visitors view the current booking window as reasonable and appropriate for their planning needs. However, 30% of respondents expressed differing opinions, indicating that the window is either “too short” or “too long,” highlighting an opportunity for further consideration.



Open-ended responses provided additional context and a range of perspectives. Visitor comments on the three-month reservation window highlighted a clear divide in preferences and travel styles. Many respondents who favored a longer window noted they typically plan trips six months to a year in advance, especially when coordinating multi-destination travel. They indicated that aligning with other systems that allow four- to six-month reservations would make planning easier.

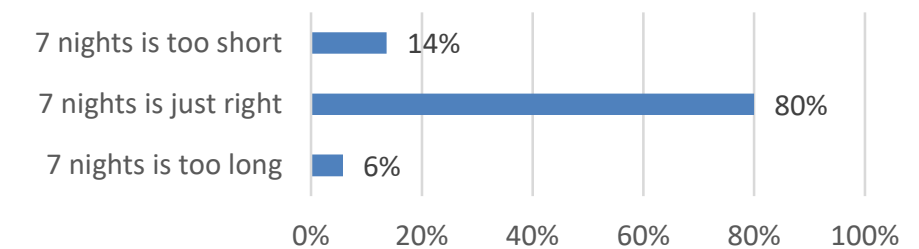
In contrast, others preferred a shorter window, suggesting one month or even one to two weeks, to better support spontaneous trips and improve access for local visitors. Concerns were also raised that longer booking windows contribute to no-shows and unoccupied reserved campsites.

Availability and fairness were recurring themes. Respondents frequently recommended holding back a portion of sites for first-come, first-served use (HB 440 already establishes that no more than 80% of campsites at state parks can be reserved ahead of time and that at least 20% must remain first-come, first-served), or releasing reservations closer to arrival dates to reduce unused sites. Some advocated priority access for Montana residents, while others emphasized maintaining equal access for all visitors. Overall, feedback suggests that while the current three-month window works for many, a more flexible or hybrid approach could better accommodate both advance planners and spontaneous travelers.

7 NIGHT/MONTH STAY LIMIT

The 7-night stay limit per site was implemented in 2024 to increase campsite turnover and improve access for a broader range of visitors. Under this policy, visitors may stay at a site for up to seven nights within a 30-day period, after which they become eligible to reserve the same site again for an additional seven nights once the monthly window resets. A total of 1,828 respondents answered the question, “Which statement most aligns with your view on the 7-night/month stay limit?”

Overall, 80% of respondents indicated that the 7-night limit is “just right,” while 20% felt it is either “too short” or “too long,” demonstrating generally strong support with some notable differences in preference.



Open-ended responses provided additional context and revealed a clear division in user experiences and expectations. Many respondents who opposed the change emphasized the value of longer stays, noting that 7 nights can be limiting for those traveling long distances or relying on limited vacation time. Some explained that they previously planned longer, multi-week trips and feel the reduced limit constrains their ability to fully enjoy Montana’s short recreation season.

In contrast, other respondents supported the 7-night limit, stating that it improves campsite availability and increases opportunities for more visitors to access high-demand locations. Some also noted that shorter stays help reduce instances of sites remaining underutilized for extended periods.

Additional feedback included suggestions for compromise options, such as a 10-night or 10 to 14-night limit or applying different rules depending on season or campground type. Others raised concerns about fairness and access, expressing that extended stays by the same users may limit opportunities for others to secure reservations.

Several comments also highlighted issues related to clarity and communication, including confusion about the rules, inconsistencies across reservation platforms through FWP (e.g., phone, online, in-person) and other agencies (e.g., NPS, USFS, BLM), and concerns that stay limits were not always clearly communicated.

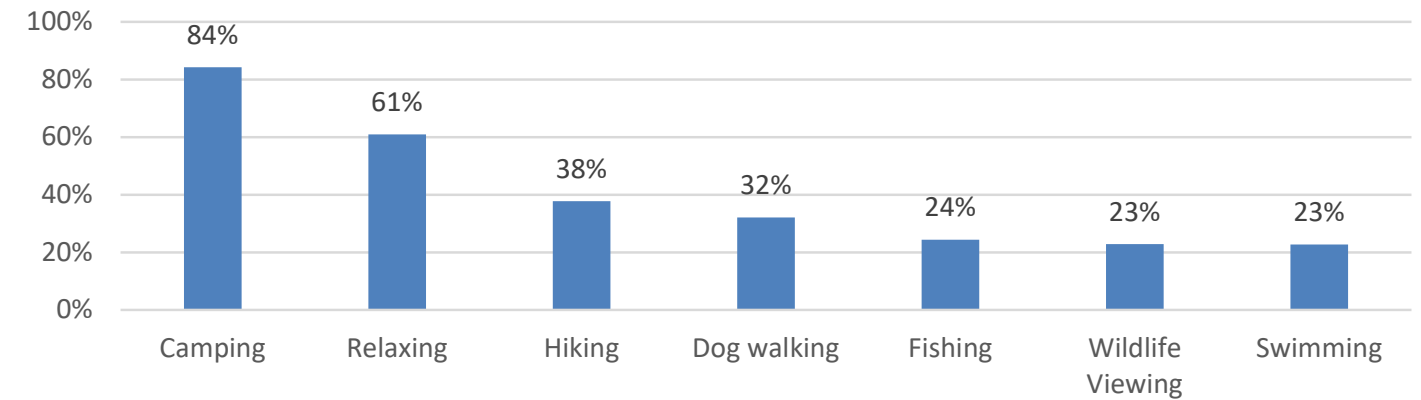
Overall, the feedback reflects a clear divide between visitors who prioritize longer, less frequent camping stays and those who prefer shorter limits to increase turnover and improve access for a broader user base.

ACTIVITY PARTICIPATION AND PRIMARY ACTIVITY

Visitors to State Parks engaged in a wide range of recreational activities during their stay. Because this was a post-stay survey distributed to guests who camped or reserved facilities at State Parks, it is important to note that 84% of respondents reported camping during their visit. Among those who camped, 59% identified camping itself as their primary activity, underscoring the central role that overnight stays play in shaping the overall park experience.

In addition, 61% of respondents reported participating in “relaxing,” with 95% of those respondents identifying it as a primary activity. Taken together, camping and relaxing represent the dominant forms of engagement and are considered passive recreational activities. This indicates that for many visitors, State Parks function not only as destinations for structured recreation, but also as places for rest, restoration, and time spent outdoors in a low intensity setting.

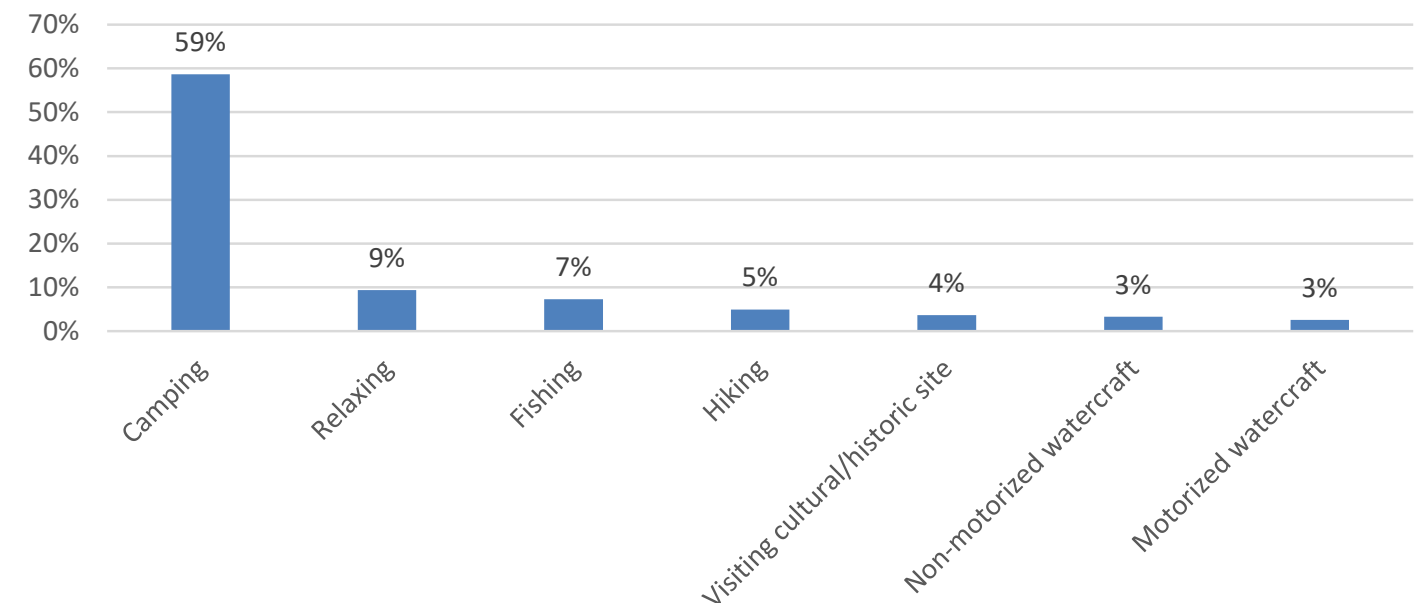
MOST PARTICIPATED ACTIVITIES

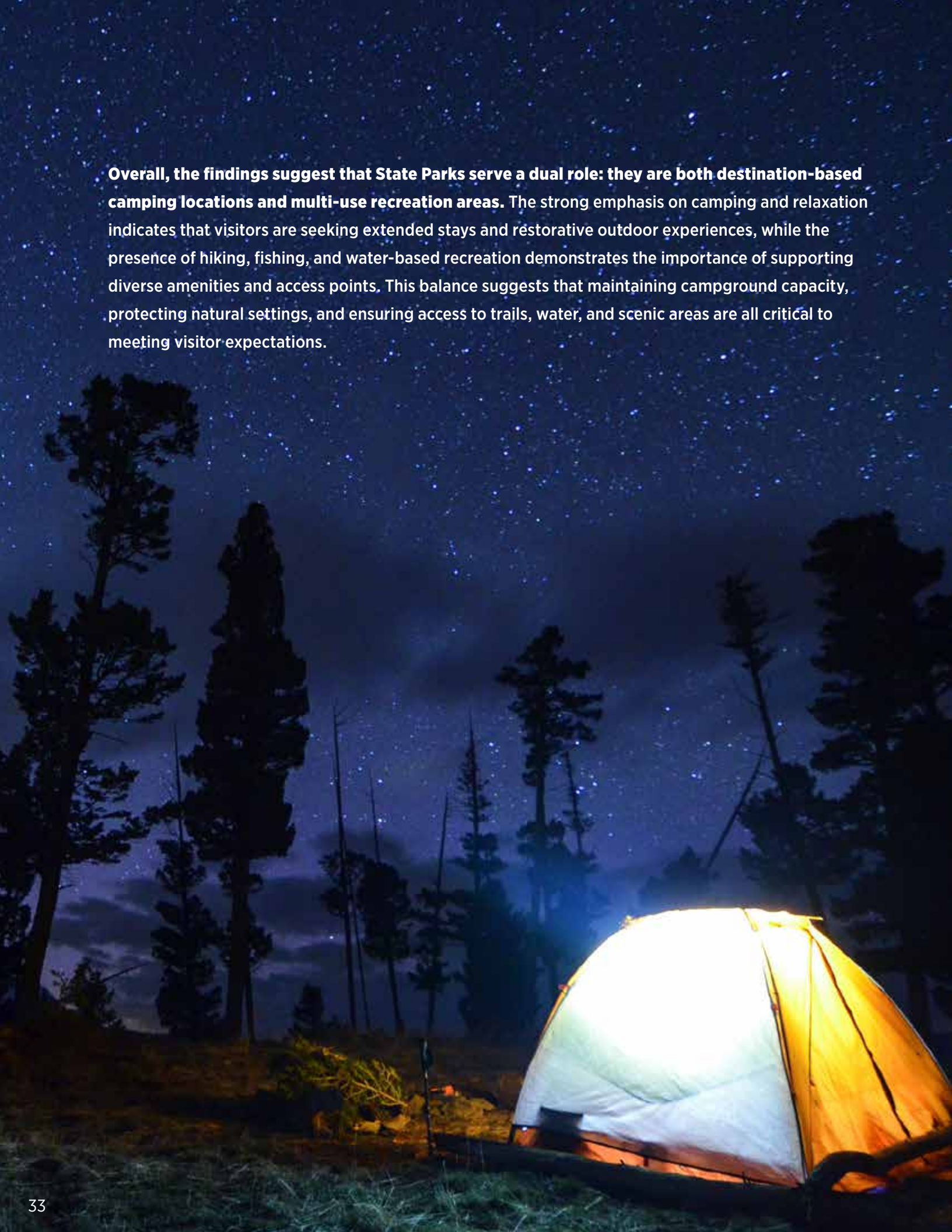


To better understand the full range of visitor behavior, additional activities were examined. Other commonly reported activities included hiking (38%), dog walking (32%), and fishing (24%), while 23% of respondents participated in swimming or wildlife viewing. These results highlight that while passive recreation is most prevalent, many visitors also incorporate active and nature-based experiences into their stay, often combining multiple activities within a single trip.

Although visitors may participate in several activities, identifying their primary activity provides clearer insight into what motivates travel decisions. Beyond camping and relaxing, smaller proportions of respondents identified other primary motivations, including fishing (7%), hiking (5%), and visiting cultural or historic sites (4%). Approximately 3% indicated that non-motorized or motorized watercraft use was their primary activity.

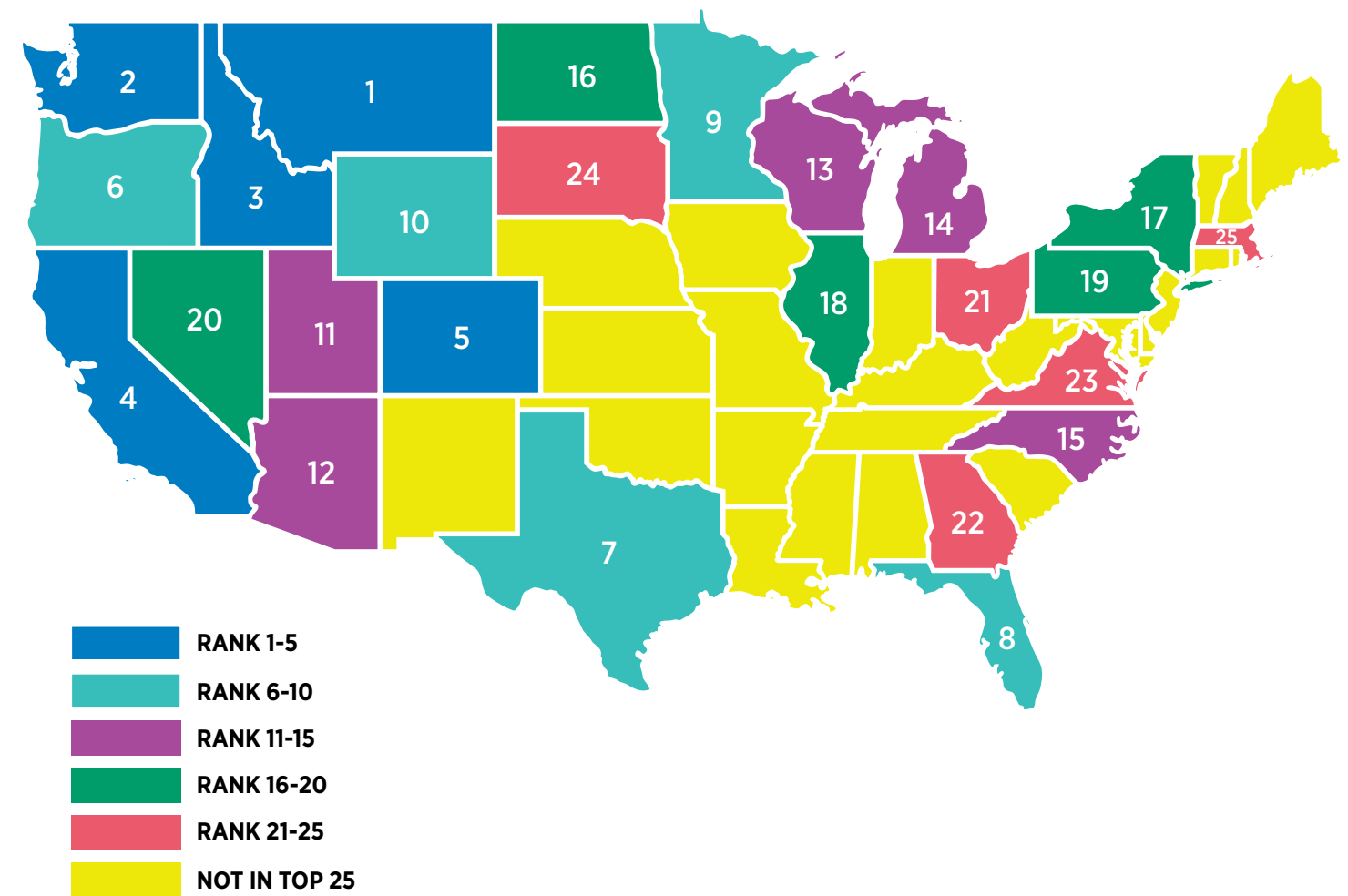
PRIMARY ACTIVITY





Overall, the findings suggest that State Parks serve a dual role: they are both destination-based camping locations and multi-use recreation areas. The strong emphasis on camping and relaxation indicates that visitors are seeking extended stays and restorative outdoor experiences, while the presence of hiking, fishing, and water-based recreation demonstrates the importance of supporting diverse amenities and access points. This balance suggests that maintaining campground capacity, protecting natural settings, and ensuring access to trails, water, and scenic areas are all critical to meeting visitor expectations.

TOP 25 VISITOR ORIGIN STATES (2025)



VISITOR ORIGIN AND GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION

Montana State Parks attracted visitors from across the United States, and reservation data provides valuable insight into the geographic distribution of users. The map below illustrates the lower 48 states and the origin for visitors based on 2025 reservation records.

As expected, Montana residents account for the highest number of reservations. Nearby states such as Washington (2) and Idaho (3) also represented significant sources of visitation, reflecting the influence of geographic proximity. Notably, several non-bordering states also ranked highly, including California (4) and Colorado (5), indicating that Montana State Parks draw visitors well beyond the immediate region.

Other states such as Texas (7) and Florida (8) also contributed notable visits, which is likely influenced in part by their large populations and overall travel volume.

Overall, visitation patterns suggest that both geographic proximity and state population size play important roles in driving demand for Montana State Parks, with strong regional use complemented by substantial national interest.



i Reporting notes:

Visitation data is based on reported estimates from 48 of Montana's state parks with Flathead Lake sites being lumped in as one unit. 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 and a seven-night stay limit in a 30-day period.

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 to update visitation multipliers, 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.



MONTANA **FWP**

