

# Summary of Research



MONTANA FWP

Estimating Fishing, Boating & Hunting Use at State Parks in Montana

HD Unit Research Summary No. 45

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**Abstract:** *In 2018, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) conducted a study to learn more about how many park visitors are participating in the activities of fishing, boating, and hunting during their trips to Montana state parks. Both fishing and boating at state parks was identified as an important activity undertaken by many park visitors during the peak use season (early spring, summer, and early fall). Hunting use was also identified for Black Sandy, Hell Creek, Medicine Rocks and Thompson Chain of Lakes State Parks during the primary hunting season (early September thru late November). This study has important implications for the funding of state parks in Montana.*

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) recently conducted a study to get a better sense about how many park visitors are participating in the activities of fishing, boating, and hunting during their trips to Montana state parks. A total of 25 state parks across Montana were included in the study which has implications for funding of state parks in the state.

### Methodology

At each of the parks studied, groups of park visitors were systematically surveyed onsite in the park on sample days that were selected to represent park use throughout the study period identified for each park. At 21 of these parks, the study was conducted during the peak use season (late spring, summer, and early fall). At the four additional parks (where hunting was a possibility), the study period was extended to include sample days thru late November. Weekend time periods were sampled more heavily than weekends—recognizing that most use at Montana state parks occurs on weekends (including on holiday weekends).

Group interviews generally occurred between 8:00 AM and 8:00 PM on each sample day. The interviews took place with someone in the group who was an adult and could identify how many people were in their group, and how many of those people were fishing, boating, and/or hunting during their visit to the park. Interviews were conducted at a variety of different park locations to ensure all types of park visitors were contacted. And, the groups of park visitors interviewed were generally representative of the types of users who happened to be in the park on each sample day. For example, park interviewers didn't just focus on one type of park visitor (e.g., campers) when there might have been a variety of both campers and day-use visitors. Furthermore, park interviewers didn't just focus on a single park activity (e.g., fishing or boating) when there might have been a variety of other park activities going on (e.g., fishing, boating, picnicking, camping, hiking, swimming, picnicking, hiking). It was important that park interviewers

interview groups of park users in the general ratios in which they appeared to be within the park on the sample day. At some parks this included conducting a census of all groups of park visitors entering the park at the park's entrance station during each sample day.

For the purposes of this study, fishing, boating, and hunting were defined as follows:

1. **Fishing.** Fishing in any waters found within or adjacent to the park.
2. **Boating.** Boating in any waters found within or adjacent to the park. Boating includes motorized or non-motorized boats, pontoons, sailboats, personal watercraft (e.g., jet skis, wave runners, etc.), canoes, kayaks, rowboats, rafts, drift boats, personal pontoons, float tubes, stand up paddle boards, etc.
3. **Hunting.** Hunting in the park or staying at the park as part of a hunting trip in the general area of the park.

Of note, the fishing and boating results of this study apply only to the peak use season for state parks in Montana (late spring, summer, and early fall). As such, they do NOT consider fishing and boating use that occurs during the shoulder seasons as well as winter ice fishing. The hunting results of this study apply only to the peak hunting season (early September thru late November).



# RESULTS

Table one provides estimates of fishing and boating use at the 24 Montana state parks studied that offer both fishing and boating opportunities. The estimates below apply only to the peak use season for state parks in Montana (late spring, summer, and early fall).

**Table 1.** Estimates of the percentage of park visitors who fished and/or boated during their visit to each of 24 Montana state parks that were studied from late spring thru early fall in 2018.

<u>Name of State Park</u>	<u>% Fished</u>	<u>% Boated</u>
Ackley Lake	53	64
Big Arm	22	58
Black Sandy	50	69
Brush Lake	0	74
Cooney	26	84
Finley Point	20	68
Frenchtown Pond	24	17
Giant Springs	25	2
Headwaters	20	45
Hell Creek	88	90
Lake Elmo	9	15
Lake Mary Ronan	48	62
Logan	42	33
Placid Lake	22	54
Salmon Lake	18	58
Smith River	80	100
Spring Meadow	23	26
Thompson Chain of Lakes	56	67
Tongue River Reservoir	46	84
Travelers Rest	3	0
Wayfarers	9	26
Westshore	24	69
Whitefish Lake	6	51
Yellow Bay	13	55

Table two provides estimates of hunting use at four state parks that were thought to offer hunting opportunities. The estimates below apply only to the peak hunting season (early September thru late November).

**Table 2.** Estimates of the percentage of park visitors who hunted during their visit to each of four Montana state parks that were studied during the peak hunting season in 2018.

<u>Name of State Park</u>	<u>% Hunted</u>
Black Sandy	13
Hell Creek	17
Medicine Rocks	42
Thompson Chain of Lakes	52

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