



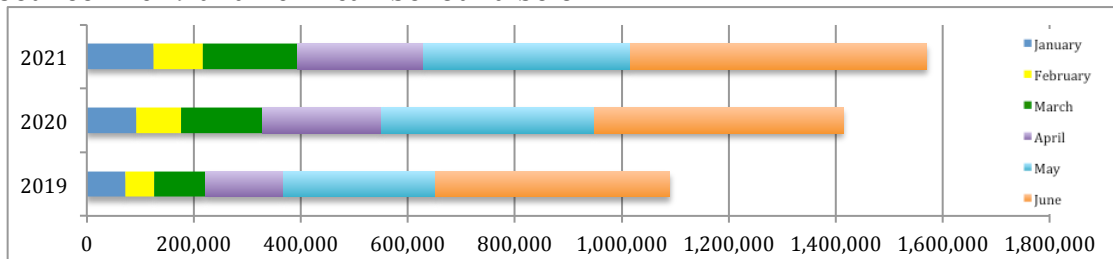
MONTANA FWP

2021 Midyear Montana State Parks Visitation Report

As of July 29, 2021

Key Takeaways

- There were an estimated **1,570,134** state park visitors during the first half of 2021. When compared with last year, this represents an increase of **11.1%**, or a net gain of an estimated **156,391** visitors. When compared with 2019, this represents an increase of **44.1%**, or an estimated **480,804** more visitors.
- Last year was a record-setting one for the Montana State Park system in spite of some initial shutdowns and temporary closures promulgated by COVID-19. Notably, this year has been even busier for many parks as travel and tourism across the state have grown and the public continues to turn to the outdoors. A similar trend is being experienced across many public lands, including for those managed by FWP, such as fishing access sites, according to staff anecdotes.
- A summary of month-by-month visitation estimates for all Montana state parks between 2019 and 2021 can be found below.



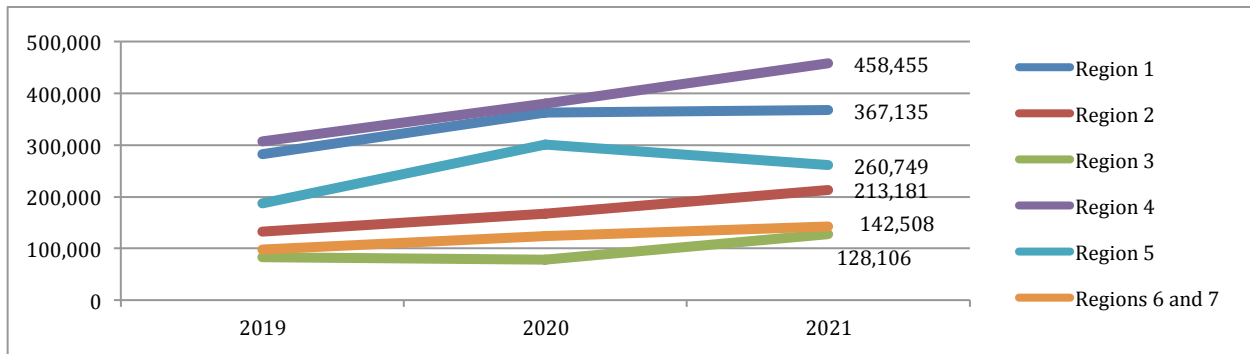
Year	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	YTD Total
2019	72,608	53,884	94,648	146,589	284,340	437,261	1,089,330
2020	92,121	83,506	151,979	224,062	396,508	465,567	1,413,743
2021	125,018	92,194	176,503	236,463	385,264	554,692	1,570,134

- Of the 45 state parks that were seasonally open during the first half of the year, 27 experienced an increase in estimated visitation compared with last year. Meanwhile, 16 experienced a decline, albeit small in some instances, and two were temporarily closed - Fort Owen (due to construction) and Pictograph Cave (due to a rock fall).
- Reserved overnight stays for 2021 are **0.2%** higher than last year and **26.9%** above estimates for 2019. There have been **27,461** reserved nights at state park campgrounds this year as compared with **27,399** in 2020 and **21,635** in 2019.

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

2019-21 YTD Estimates By State Park Administrative Region (Jan.-Jun.)

The below graph depicts how visitation during the first half of the year has trended since 2019 for each of the state park administrative regions. Collectively, Regions 1 and 4, headquartered out of Kalispell and Great Falls respectively, represented **52.6%** of total visitation for the state.



Admin. Region	Jan-Jun 2019	Jan-Jun 2020	Jan-Jun 2021	% of statewide total
Region 1	282,130	363,225	367,135	23.4%
Region 2	132,029	167,175	213,181	13.6%
Region 3	83,528	78,280	128,106	8.2%
Region 4	306,844	380,276	458,455	29.2%
Region 5	187,172	300,892	260,749	16.6%
Regions 6/7	97,627	123,895	142,508	9.1%
TOTAL	1,089,330	1,413,743	1,570,134	

When comparing year-to-date estimates for 2021 with the last two years, there are some interesting trends:

- Compared with 2020, growth was most significant in Region 3, headquartered in Bozeman. This could be attributable to last year's temporary closure at one park (Bannack) in that region and the suspension of cave tours at Lewis & Clark Caverns.
- Compared with 2019, there was double-digit growth in all regions with Region 2, headquartered in Missoula, leading the way at an increase of **61.5%**.

Admin. Region	Comparison with 2020		Comparison with 2019	
	# Visits	%Change	# Visits	%Change
Region 1	+3,910	1.1%	+85,005	30.1%
Region 2	+46,006	27.5%	+81,152	61.5%
Region 3	+49,826	63.7%	+44,578	53.4%
Region 4	+78,179	20.6%	+151,611	49.4%
Region 5	-40,143	-13.3%	+73,577	39.3%
Regions 6/7	+18,613	15.0%	+44,881	46.0%
TOTAL	+156,391 est. visits		+480,804 est. visits	

A look into the regions

A closer look at visitation for each state park administrative region reveals further insights into what is occurring. What follows is a region-by-region glance at midyear visitation for 2021 compared with estimates from the past two years. A detailed look at month-to-month data for each park is available upon request.

Region 1

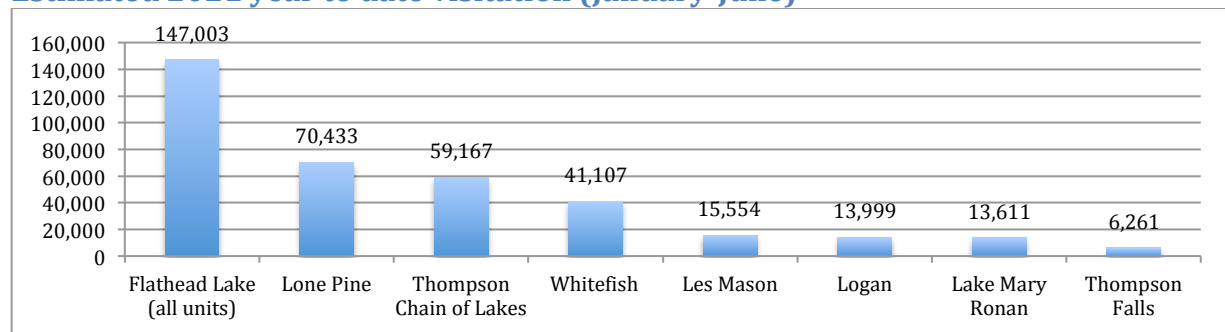
Region 1 saw an estimated **367,135** visitors across its eight parks reporting visitation figures during the first half of the year. This represents a slight **1.1%** increase in visitation (or **3,910** more visitors) compared with last year, and **23.4%** of the state's total visitation. Compared with 2019 levels, this represents an estimated **85,005** more visitors, or a **30.1%** increase.

Flathead Lake was the third most visited park in the state during the first half of the year; Lone Pine was seventh; and, Thompson Chain of Lakes was eighth. Of the state park administrative regions, Region 1 experienced the second highest level of visitation thru the second quarter of this year. Whitefish Lake and Logan have both seen significant spikes in growth - both offer access to water recreation and camping opportunities.

It stands to note that one factor that heavily influenced growth in the region's visitation last year was closures at nearby Glacier National Park. (The park was closed until June 8.) This pushed many visitors to the region's state park campgrounds as well as to other public lands. While these conditions have subsided, visitors are still learning to navigate Glacier's ticketed entry system, and so there is still some continued spillover. (Glacier is experiencing its second busiest year on record.) The Big Arm and Yellow Bay units of Flathead Lake have experienced the most growth compared with last year.

It also should be noted that new trail counting devices were installed at the Flathead Lake units of Wayfarers and West Shore and at Lone Pine, which could be attributable to some growth.

Estimated 2021 year to date visitation (January-June)



NOTE: Includes Flathead Lake being counted as one park, comprised of six units. Currently, visitation data is not regularly collected at the N. Shore unit of Flathead Lake. Also of note is that the gates at the vehicular entrances of Les Mason and Thompson Falls were seasonally closed during earlier parts of the year, thus estimates solely reflect walk-in visitors.

Region 1 - State park estimates (Jan.-Jun.)

State parks sorted by highest to lowest Q2 2021 visitation figures

State Park	Q2 YTD 2019	Q2 YTD 2020	Q2 YTD 2021	2020 vs. 2021	2020-21 % change
Flathead Lake (all units)	123,140	160,403	147,003	-13,400	-8.4%
Lone Pine	52,443	67,594	70,433	2,839	4.2%
Thompson Chain of Lakes	42,887	60,154	59,167	-987	-1.6%
Whitefish	28,082	28,732	41,107	12,375	43.1%
Logan	8,236	12,518	15,554	3,036	24.3%
Lake Mary Ronan	10,835	12,791	13,999	1,208	9.4%
Les Mason	11,293	15,320	13,611	-1,709	-11.2%
Thompson Falls	5,214	5,713	6,261	548	9.6%
	282,130	363,225	367,135	3,910	1.1%

Region 1 - Flathead Lake Unit estimates (Jan.-Jun.)

State parks sorted by highest to lowest Q2 2021 visitation figures

Flathead Lake Unit	Q2 YTD 2019	Q2 YTD 2020	Q2 YTD 2021	2020 vs. 2021	2020-21 % change
FL-Wayfarers	16,953	21,226	31,387	-23,359	-25.2%
FL-Big Arm	6,938	16,770	11,019	10,161	47.9%
FL-West Shore	73,647	92,556	69,197	2,564	17.4%
FL-Yellow Bay	12,588	14,767	17,331	3,184	30.0%
FL-Wild Horse Island	5,171	4,457	4,258	-5,751	-34.3%
FL-Finley Point	7,843	10,627	13,811	-199	-4.5%
	123,140	160,403	147,003	-13,400	-8.4%

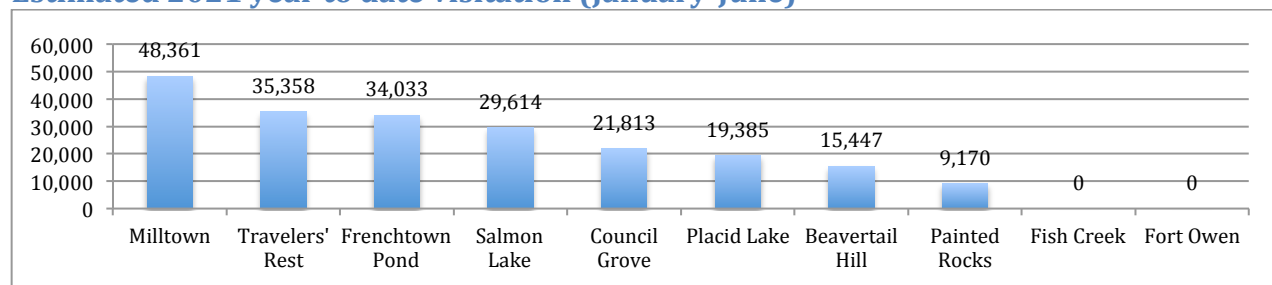
NOTE: The entrance gate is seasonally closed during much of the winter at the Finley Point unit of Flathead Lake.

Region 2

Region 2 saw an estimated **213,181** visitors across its nine parks reporting visitation figures during the first half of the year. This represents an estimated **27.5%** increase in visitation (or **46,006** more visitors) compared with last year, and **13.6%** of the state's total visitation. Compared with 2019 levels, this represents an estimated **81,152** more visitors, or a **61.5%** increase.

Nearly all parks in Region 2 experienced an increase in visitation during the first half of the year. Milltown was the tenth most visited park in the state during this time period, while Travelers' Rest and Frenchtown Pond were not that far behind. The spike in visitation at Milltown may be attributable to the addition of counting devices installed at two entrances that heretofore had not been included in the region's visitation data. There were also counters added to the Salmon and Placid Lake Day Use areas, as well as on two trail locations at Travelers' Rest. The overall regional increase in visitation for 2021 is particularly notable, nonetheless, considering there are three parks that are seasonally closed in the winter - Beavertail Hill, Salmon Lake, and Placid Lake; and, that there has been a temporary construction closure at Fort Owen all year.

Estimated 2021 year to date visitation (January-June)



NOTE: Visitation data at Fish Creek was not regularly reported in 2020 or 2021.

Region 2 - State park estimates (Jan.-Jun.)

State parks sorted by highest to lowest Q2 2021 visitation figures

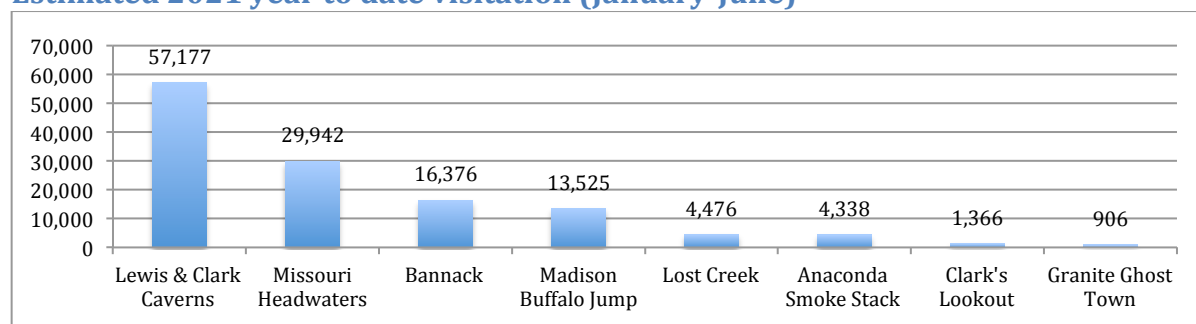
State Park	Q2 YTD 2019	Q2 YTD 2020	Q2 YTD 2021	2020 vs. 2021	2020-21 % change
Milltown	16,201	25,712	48,361	22,649	88.1%
Travelers' Rest	19,872	21,084	35,358	14,274	67.7%
Frenchtown Pond	26,831	30,149	34,033	3,884	12.9%
Salmon Lake	17,415	24,274	29,614	5,340	22.0%
Council Grove	16,715	21,652	21,813	161	0.7%
Placid Lake	19,450	26,193	19,385	-6,808	-26.0%
Beavertail Hill	8,017	8,960	15,447	6,487	72.4%
Painted Rocks	3,972	6,841	9,170	2,329	34.0%
Fish Creek	1,407	0	0	0	N/A
Fort Owen	2,149	2,310	0	-2,310	N/A
	132,029	167,175	213,181	46,006	27.5%

Region 3

Region 3 saw an estimated **128,106** visitors across its eight parks reporting visitation figures during the first half of the year. This represents an estimated **63.7%** increase in visitation (or **49,826** more visitors) compared with last year, and **8.2%** of the state's total visitation. Compared with 2019 levels, this represents an estimated **44,578** more visitors, or a **53.4%** increase.

There were significant gains at two parks in the region in the first half of 2021 compared with last year - Lewis & Clark Caverns and Bannack. Both were impacted by COVID-19 precautions, and so their uptick in visitation this year is not surprising. (Last year cave tours were cut back due to COVID-19 and there was a temporary closure at Bannack.) With its uptick in visitors, Lewis & Clark Caverns was the ninth most visited park in the state in 2021. By contrast, three of the region's day use sites have experienced declines this year - Lost Creek, Anaconda Smoke Stack, and Clark's Lookout. Madison Buffalo Jump, also a day-use site, continues to attract a growing number of visitors, perhaps due to its proximity to the I-90 interstate and to Bozeman. It should be noted that a counting device at Granite Ghost Town was installed in June for the first time. Staff members at Lost Creek, Missouri Headwaters, and Beaverhead Rock are also adding, or in some cases replacing, counters.

Estimated 2021 year to date visitation (January-June)



NOTE: Currently, visitation data is not regularly collected at Beaverhead Rock. It was collected for the first time at Granite Ghost Town in June of 2021. Also of note is that Clark's Lookout is seasonally closed during the winter months.

Region 3 - State park estimates (Jan.-Jun.)

State parks sorted by highest to lowest Q2 2021 visitation figures

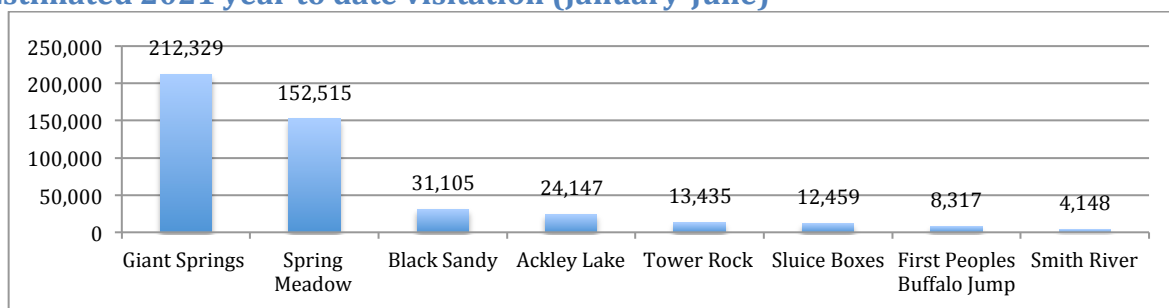
State Park	Q2 YTD 2019	Q2 YTD 2020	Q2 YTD 2021	2020 vs. 2021	2020-21 % change
Lewis & Clark Caverns	33,408	15,761	57,177	41,416	262.8%
Missouri Headwaters	17,679	29,541	29,942	401	1.4%
Bannack	14,173	9,071	16,376	7,305	80.5%
Madison Buffalo Jump	7,382	12,103	13,525	1,422	11.7%
Lost Creek	4,396	5,013	4,476	-537	-10.7%
Anaconda Smoke Stack	4,475	5,260	4,338	-922	-17.5%
Clark's Lookout	2,015	1,531	1,366	-165	-10.8%
Granite Ghost Town	0	0	906	906	N/A
Beaverhead Rock	0	0	0	0	N/A
	83,528	78,280	128,106	49,826	63.7%

Region 4

Region 4 saw an estimated **458,455** visitors across its eight parks reporting visitation figures during the first half of the year. This represents an estimated **20.6%** increase in visitation (or **78,179** more visitors) compared with last year, and **29.2%** of the state's total visitation. Compared with 2019 levels, this represents an estimated **151,611** more visitors, or a **49.4%** increase.

Giant Springs was the state's most visited park during the first half of the year while Spring Meadow Lake came in second. Their urban locations to Great Falls and Helena, respectively, attract numerous local residents seeking to get outdoors. It stands to note that some of Spring Meadow Lake's growth can be attributed to the addition of counting devices installed at three trail entrances that heretofore had not been included in the region's visitation data. This also holds true for First People's Buffalo Jump, where three new counting devices were added in 2021. This notwithstanding, the increased level of public programs and school field trips also helped to contribute to this park's growth. Black Sandy, a park that provides access to water recreation and camping opportunities also continued to experience growth.

Estimated 2021 year to date visitation (January-June)



NOTE: Currently, visitation data is not regularly collected at Elkhorn or Marias River. Also of note is that the Smith River was seasonally closed for earlier parts of the year and then due to low water conditions in June.

Region 4 - State park estimates (Jan.-Jun.)

State parks sorted by highest to lowest Q2 2021 visitation figures

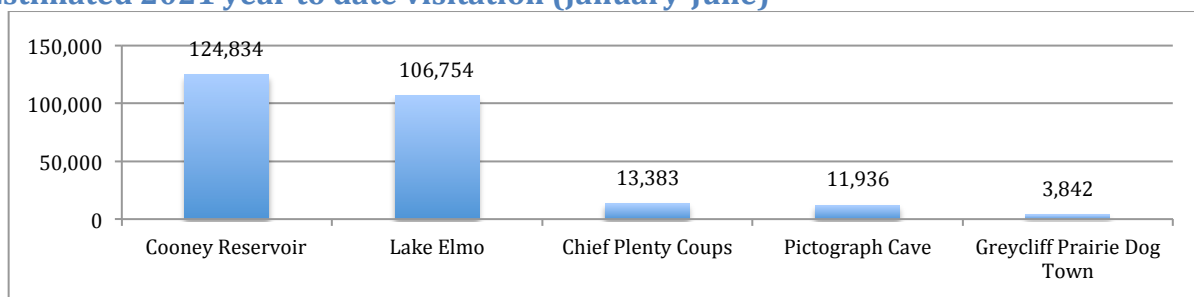
State Park	Q2 YTD 2019	Q2 YTD 2020	Q2 YTD 2021	2020 vs. 2021	2020-21 % change
Giant Springs	186,605	199,774	212,329	12,555	6.3%
Spring Meadow	61,506	79,659	152,515	72,856	91.5%
Black Sandy	19,614	28,779	31,105	2,326	8.1%
Ackley Lake	12,977	33,217	24,147	-9,070	-27.3%
Tower Rock	5,171	14,090	13,435	-655	-4.6%
Sluice Boxes	9,326	14,997	12,459	-2,538	-16.9%
First Peoples Buffalo Jump	7,218	5,343	8,317	2,974	55.7%
Smith River	4,427	4,417	4,148	-269	-6.1%
Elkhorn Ghost Town	0	0	0	0	N/A
Marias River	0	0	0	0	N/A
	306,844	380,276	458,455	78,179	20.6%

Region 5

Region 5 saw an estimated **260,749** visitors across its five parks reporting visitation figures during the first half of the year. This represents an estimated **13.3%** decrease in visitation (or **40,149** less visitors) compared with last year, and **16.6%** of the state's total visitation. Although visitation estimates were higher last year than in 2021, compared with 2019 levels, there were an estimated **73,577** more visitors, representing a **39.3%** increase.

Compared with last year, visitation declined at three key parks in the region - Cooney Reservoir, Lake Elmo, and Pictograph Cave. It should be noted that Pictograph Cave was closed for almost all of 2021 due to a rock fall that occurred in January. The park re-opened on April 14. In spite of this year's declines at Cooney Reservoir and Lake Elmo, they were the fourth and fifth most visited parks in the state. Both offer residents in the Billings area, and beyond, important access to water recreation and camping opportunities. Visitation at Chief Plenty Coups has grown substantially during the first half of this year compared with last year. The health pandemic had a significant impact on the Crow Reservation, where the park is located, and this year has brought back many group activities once again.

Estimated 2021 year to date visitation (January-June)



NOTE: Currently, visitation data is not regularly collected at Yellowstone River. Also of note is that Greycliff Prairie Dog Town is seasonally closed during winter months.

Region 5 - State park estimates (Jan.-Jun.)

State parks sorted by highest to lowest Q2 2021 visitation figures

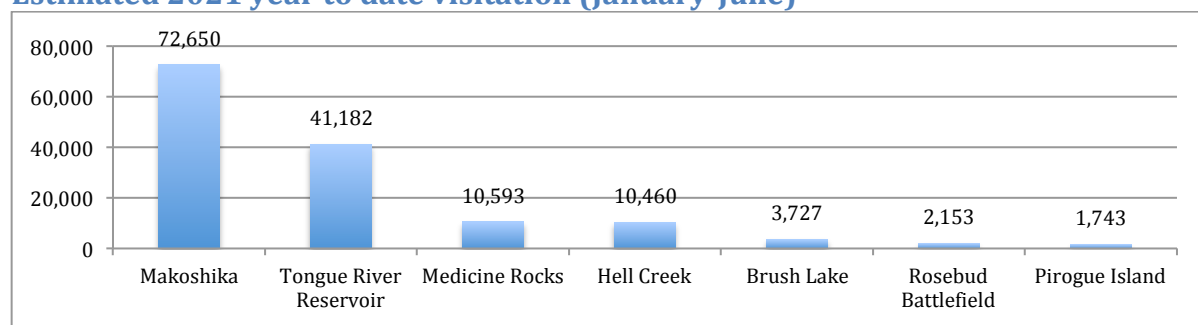
State Park	Q2 YTD 2019	Q2 YTD 2020	Q2 YTD 2021	2020 vs. 2021	2020-21 % change
Cooney Reservoir	69,892	149,650	124,834	-24,816	-16.6%
Lake Elmo	80,147	120,747	106,754	-13,993	-11.6%
Chief Plenty Coups	7,025	5,491	13,383	7,892	143.7%
Pictograph Cave	26,585	22,083	11,936	-10,147	-45.9%
Greycliff Prairie Dog Town	3,523	2,921	3,842	921	31.5%
Yellowstone River	0	0	0	0	N/A
	187,172	300,892	260,749	-40,143	-13.3%

Regions 6 and 7

Regions 6 and 7 saw an estimated **142,508** visitors across its seven parks reporting visitation figures during the first half of the year. This represents an estimated **15.0%** increase in visitation (or **18,613** more visitors) compared with last year, and **9.1%** of the state's total visitation. Compared with 2019 levels, this represents an estimated **44,881** more visitors, or a **46.0%** increase.

Over half of the state parks in Regions 6 and 7 experienced an increase in visitation during the first half of the year as compared with last year. Makoshika was the sixth most visited park in the state in 2021 while Tongue River Reservoir was the eleventh. Makoshika offers a number of public programs and camping opportunities while Tongue River Reservoir offers access to water recreation and camping. Both experienced double digit percent growth in the first half of this year over last year's estimates. Increased visitation also occurred at Brush Lake and Rosebud Battlefield. By contrast, there were declines in visitation at Hell Creek, Pirogue Island and Medicine Rocks. It should be noted that new counters were added at Makoshika and Tongue River Reservoir earlier this year, which could have contributed to some of the growth at these parks. Staff members are looking to add or replace counters at other parks where the existing devices are nearing the end of their useful life.

Estimated 2021 year to date visitation (January-June)



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

Regions 6 and 7 - State park estimates (Jan.-Jun.)

State parks sorted by highest to lowest Q2 2021 visitation figures

State Park	Q2 YTD 2019	Q2 YTD 2020	Q2 YTD 2021	2020 vs. 2021	2020-21 % change
Makoshika	36,713	58,470	72,650	14,180	24.3%
Tongue River Reservoir	31,568	30,732	41,182	10,450	34.0%
Medicine Rocks	7,227	11,346	10,593	-753	-6.6%
Hell Creek	15,092	16,141	10,460	-5,681	-35.2%
Brush Lake	2,125	2,770	3,727	957	34.5%
Rosebud Battlefield	3,529	1,871	2,153	282	15.1%
Pirogue Island	1,373	2,565	1,743	-822	-32.0%
	97,627	123,895	142,508	18,613	15.0%

2019-2021 Year to Date Visitation (January - June)

Parks sorted by highest total 2021 visitation

REGION	STATE PARK	Q2 YTD 2019	Q2 YTD 2020	Q2 YTD 2021
4	Giant Springs	186,605	199,774	212,329
4	Spring Meadow	61,506	79,659	152,515
1	Flathead Lake (all units)	123,140	160,403	147,003
5	Cooney Reservoir	69,892	149,650	124,834
5	Lake Elmo	80,147	120,747	106,754
6/7	Makoshika	36,713	58,470	72,650
1	Lone Pine	52,443	67,594	70,433
1	Thompson Chain of Lakes	42,887	60,154	59,167
3	Lewis & Clark Caverns	33,408	15,761	57,177
2	Milltown	16,201	25,712	48,361
6/7	Tongue River Reservoir	31,568	30,732	41,182
1	Whitefish	28,082	28,732	41,107
2	Travelers' Rest	19,872	21,084	35,358
2	Frenchtown Pond	26,831	30,149	34,033
4	Black Sandy	19,614	28,779	31,105
3	Missouri Headwaters	17,679	29,541	29,942
2	Salmon Lake	17,415	24,274	29,614
4	Ackley Lake	12,977	33,217	24,147
2	Council Grove	16,715	21,652	21,813
2	Placid Lake	19,450	26,193	19,385
3	Bannack	14,173	9,071	16,376
1	Les Mason	8,236	12,518	15,554
2	Beavertail Hill	8,017	8,960	15,447
1	Logan	10,835	12,791	13,999
1	Lake Mary Ronan	11,293	15,320	13,611
3	Madison Buffalo Jump	7,382	12,103	13,525
4	Tower Rock	5,171	14,090	13,435
5	Chief Plenty Coups	7,025	5,491	13,383
4	Sluice Boxes	9,326	14,997	12,459
5	Pictograph Cave	26,585	22,083	11,936
6/7	Medicine Rocks	7,227	11,346	10,593
6/7	Hell Creek	15,092	16,141	10,460
2	Painted Rocks	3,972	6,841	9,170
4	First Peoples Buffalo Jump	7,218	5,343	8,317
1	Thompson Falls	5,214	5,713	6,261
3	Lost Creek	4,396	5,013	4,476
3	Anaconda Smoke Stack	4,475	5,260	4,338
4	Smith River	4,427	4,417	4,148
5	Greycliff Prairie Dog Town	3,523	2,921	3,842

6/7	Brush Lake	2,125	2,770	3,727
6/7	Rosebud Battlefield	3,529	1,871	2,153
6/7	Pirogue Island	1,373	2,565	1,743
3	Clark's Lookout	2,015	1,531	1,366
3	Granite Ghost Town	0	0	906
2	Fish Creek	1,407	0	0
2	Fort Owen	2,149	2,310	0
		1,089,330	1,413,743	1,570,134

Seasonal Closures During Winter Months

REGION	STATE PARK	COMMENTS
1	FL - Finley Point unit	Gates closed; walk in estimates only
1	Les Mason	Gates closed; walk in estimates only
1	Thompson Falls	Gates closed; walk in estimates only
2	Beavertail Hill	Seasonal closure
2	Placid Lake	Seasonal closure
2	Salmon Lake	Seasonal closure
3	Clark's Lookout	Seasonal closure
4	Smith River	Seasonal closure
5	Greycliff Prairie Dog Town	Seasonal closure
6/7	Brush Lake	Seasonal closure

State Parks Where Data Is Not Regularly Collected

REGION	STATE PARK	COMMENTS
1	FL - N. Shore unit	No data collection
2	Fish Creek	No data collection for 2020 or 2021
3	Beaverhead Rock	Will begin collecting data in July 2021
3	Granite Ghost Town	Began collecting data in June 2021
4	Elkhorn Ghost Town	No data collection
4	Marias River	No data collection
5	Yellowstone River	No data collection

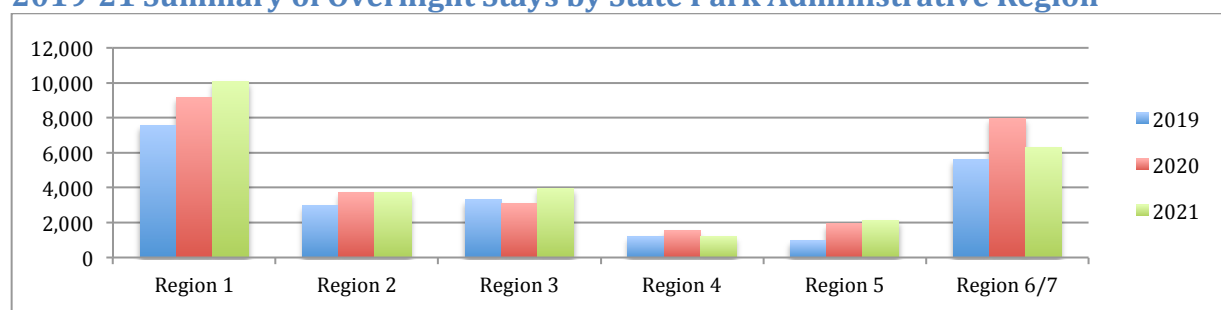
Montana State Parks Overnight Reservations

The Montana State Parks reservation system helps visitors plan for their overnight stays by providing the assurance that a campsite (and at times a cabin or yurt) will be awaiting them upon arrival. As use of public lands and an interest in camping have grown, this convenient option allows visitors to plan ahead. Visitors can make their reservation online or by phone.

Not all Montana State Parks campsites are available for advance reservations. In fact, many operate on a first come, first service basis. However, over time staff members have increased the number of 'reservable' sites across the state.

For 2021, reserved overnight stays are **0.2%** higher than last year and **26.9%** above estimates for 2019. There have been **27,461** reserved nights at state park campgrounds this year as compared with **27,399** in 2020 and **21,635** in 2019. It should be noted that these estimates only represent overnight stays made through the reservation system and not the totality of overnight stays.

2019-21 Summary of Overnight Stays by State Park Administrative Region



REGION	Q2 YTD 2019	Q2 YTD 2020	Q2 YTD 2021	2021 vs. 2019	2021 vs. 2020
Region 1	7,576	9,152	10,099	33.3%	9.4%
Region 2	2,990	3,710	3,710	9.5%	0.0%
Region 3	3,301	3,089	3,970	8.8%	8.7%
Region 4	1,180	1,541	1,227	0.6%	-3.1%
Region 5	955	1,927	2,145	15.7%	2.2%
Region 6/7	5,633	7,980	6,310	8.9%	-16.5%
	21,635	27,399	27,461		

REGION	STATE PARKS WITH RESERVABLE OVERNIGHT ACCOMMODATIONS
<i>Region 1</i>	<i>Flathead Lake - Big Arm, Finley Point, Wayfarers, W. Shore and Yellow Bay Units, Lake Mary Ronan, Logan, Thompson Falls, and Whitefish Lake</i>
<i>Region 2</i>	<i>Beavertail Hill, Painted Rocks, Placid Lake, and Salmon Lake</i>
<i>Region 3</i>	<i>Bannack, Lewis & Clark Caverns, and Missouri Headwaters</i>
<i>Region 4</i>	<i>Black Sandy</i>
<i>Region 5</i>	<i>Cooney</i>
<i>Region 6/7</i>	<i>Brush Lake, Hell Creek, Makoshika, and Tongue River Reservoir</i>

REPORTING NOTES:

Visitation data is typically based on reported estimates from 45 of Montana's 55 state parks. In the winter, some parks and/or campground entrances are seasonally closed. While the system does experience some off-season camping, numbers are generally low.

Staff members are currently working with experts at the University of Montana's Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research (ITRR) to gain assistance with revising the system's visitation methodology. Additionally, park staff members are in the process of adding counting devices to entrances where either existing counters were nearing the end of their useful life, or there simply were not counters installed. a

It should also be noted that occasionally staff might determine the need to make slight revisions to previous month totals to improve accuracy.

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