

# MONTANA

## STATEWIDE COMPREHENSIVE OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN

**2026-2030**

***From Peaks to Prairies:  
Montana's Outdoor Recreation Roadmap***

***Outdoor Recreation is defined  
as all recreational activities  
undertaken for pleasure that  
occur outdoors.***



*Developed by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks  
Parks and Outdoor Recreation Division*

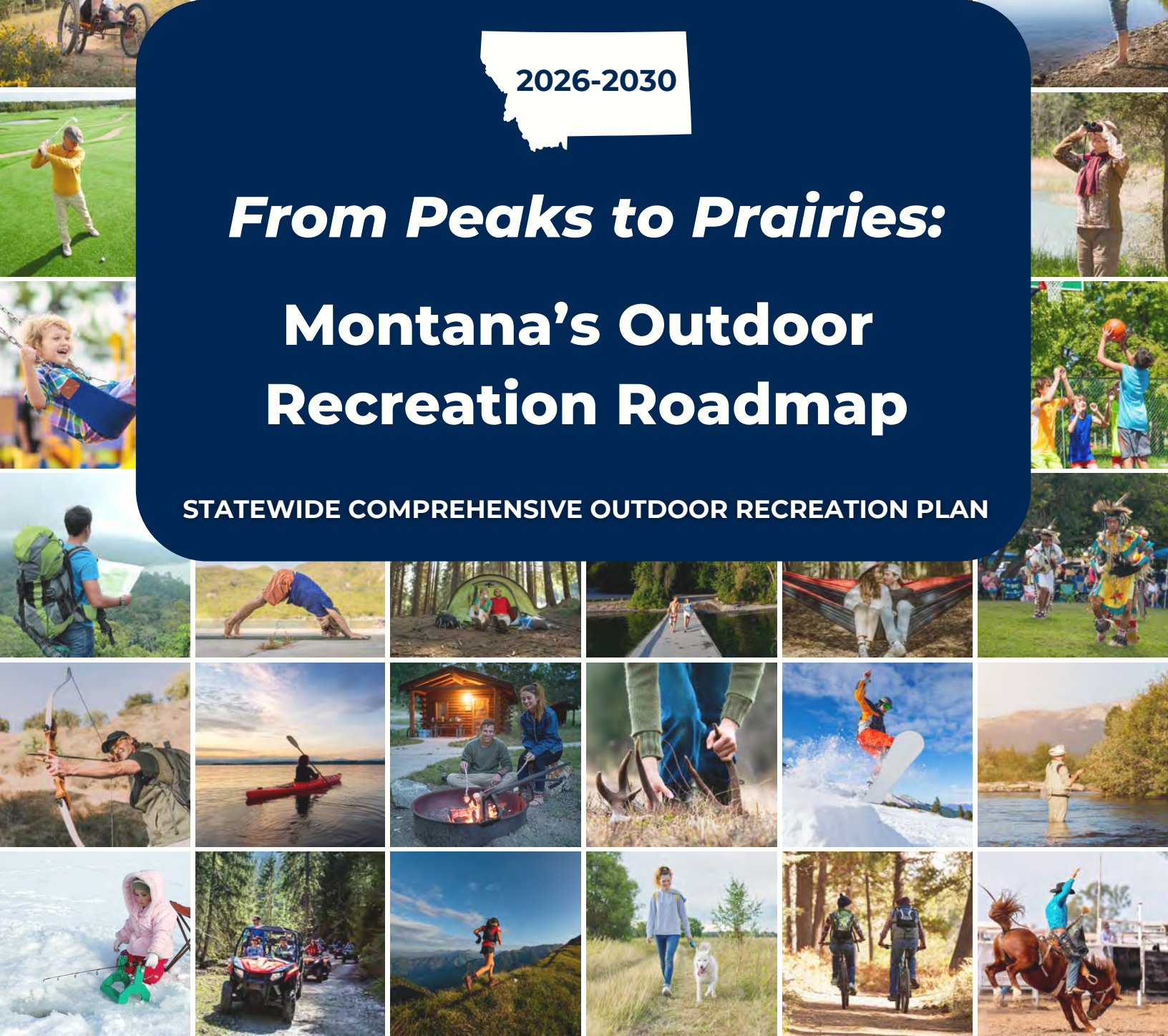
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HELENA, MONTANA 59601



2026-2030

# *From Peaks to Prairies:* Montana's Outdoor Recreation Roadmap

STATEWIDE COMPREHENSIVE OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN



# Glossary of Acronyms

<b>ADA</b>	Americans with Disabilities Act
<b>BLM</b>	Bureau of Land Management
<b>BOR</b>	Bureau of Reclamation
<b>DNRC</b>	Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation
<b>DOI</b>	U.S. Department of the Interior
<b>EPA</b>	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
<b>FAS</b>	Fishing Access Site
<b>FHWA</b>	Federal Highway Administration
<b>FWP</b>	Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
<b>ITRR</b>	Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research
<b>LWCF</b>	Land and Water Conservation Fund
<b>LWCF Manual</b>	LWCF State Assistance Program, Federal Financial Assistance Manual
<b>MDT</b>	Montana Department of Transportation
<b>NPS</b>	National Park Service
<b>OHV</b>	Off-Highway Vehicle
<b>OPSP</b>	Open Project Selection Process
<b>RTP</b>	Recreational Trails Program
<b>SCORP</b>	Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan
<b>TSP</b>	Trail Stewardship Program
<b>USACE</b>	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
<b>USDA</b>	U.S. Department of Agriculture
<b>USFS</b>	U.S. Forest Service
<b>USFWS</b>	U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
<b>WMA</b>	Wildlife Management Area

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
STATE OF MONTANA

GREG GIANFORTE  
GOVERNOR



KRISTEN JURAS  
LT. GOVERNOR

October 10, 2025

Montana is home to the most treasured public lands in the world. From the mountains to the plains to the world-class rivers, our access to the outdoors defines our way of life. They bring families together, strengthen our communities, and remind us of what makes this state special.

Outdoor recreation is not only a part of our heritage, but also a key part of our economy. This sector supports more than 30,000 jobs each year and contributes more than 3.4 billion dollars in economic output. As more people choose to live, work, and raise their families in Montana, we must act thoughtfully to maintain our recreation assets to ensure they remain open and accessible to all for years to come.

Montana's 2026–2030 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), titled *From Peaks to Prairies: Montana's Outdoor Recreation Roadmap*, outlines a long-term vision for outdoor recreation. This plan reflects the voices of thousands of Montanans and provides communities a strategy to meet growing demand, improve access, and care for the places we all treasure. It also ensures Montana remains eligible for support through the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which has helped fund hundreds of projects in communities across our state for over 50 years.

The plan outlines shared priorities that unite us all—expanding access to public lands, promoting the responsible use of our treasured natural resources, and investing in recreation infrastructure that serves both residents and visitors. In doing so, it strengthens local economies while safeguarding the outdoor heritage we'll pass on to future generations.

I encourage every community to use this plan as a tool to improve outdoor recreation, support jobs, and strengthen Montana's quality of life. As we look ahead, let's continue working together to ensure Montana remains unmatched for outdoor recreation and connection.

Sincerely,



Greg Gianforte  
Governor

# Executive Summary

## Montana's Vision for Outdoor Recreation

Outdoor recreation is at the heart of Montana's identity, economy, and quality of life. It connects people to the land, fosters community, promotes health and well-being, and supports thousands of jobs statewide. *From Peaks to Prairies: Montana's Outdoor Recreation Roadmap* charts a clear course for sustaining and enhancing these vital opportunities over the next five years.

Montana's vision is a future where every resident and visitor enjoys equitable access to high-quality outdoor experiences that enrich lives, strengthen communities, and preserve the state's natural beauty for generations to come. This vision reflects Montanans' values and recognizes the essential role recreation plays in shaping healthy people, resilient communities, and vibrant local economies.

## Purpose and Scope of the SCORP

The 2026–2030 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) serves two critical purposes. In doing so, the SCORP functions as both a federal program compliance document and a living blueprint for Montana's recreation future.

## Maintaining Eligibility for Federal Funding

The SCORP fulfills the planning requirements for the LWCF State Assistance Program, including documentation of public involvement, assessment of recreation supply and demand, establishment of statewide priorities, and description of Montana's Open Project Selection Process (OPSP).

## Guiding Recreation Planning and Investment

The SCORP provides a strategic framework to align planning, investment, and management efforts among local, tribal, state, and federal partners. It identifies statewide priorities and actionable strategies informed by public values, regional data, and future needs.

## Planning Process and Context

The SCORP was developed through an inclusive and data-driven process designed to reflect the voices and needs of Montanans. These broad engagement efforts ensure that the plan reflects diverse perspectives and addresses both statewide and regional recreation needs.



The SCORP planning process, including extensive public surveys, recreation manager input, regional data analysis, and stakeholder workshops, revealed a clear set of trends and challenges shaping outdoor recreation in Montana today. These insights reflect the changing needs, expectations, and pressures experienced by recreation providers, communities, and users across the state. The SCORP's goals and strategies were developed in response to these findings. Together, they provide a roadmap to help recreation providers, land managers, and communities meet both current demands and future needs over the next five years.

## **Key Trends**

Montana's outdoor recreation landscape is evolving rapidly. Participation continues to grow across diverse activities, with especially strong interest in trail-based recreation, water access, and community-based recreation opportunities. Emerging pursuits like adaptive sports, pickleball, and e-biking are reshaping demand for infrastructure and requiring recreation providers to remain flexible and forward-thinking. Demographic changes are also influencing recreation patterns. Urban centers and gateway communities are expanding, while rural areas face population shifts. New residents bring diverse interests and expectations, increasing demand on facilities near high-use areas. Across the state, Montanans are prioritizing expanded trail networks and improved connectivity between communities and public lands. Inclusivity and accessibility have become central values. As the population ages and public awareness grows, there is increasing demand for facilities that serve people of all ages and abilities. Recreation providers are responding with new adaptive programs and expanded ADA-compliant infrastructure, working to ensure that Montana's outdoor spaces are welcoming and inclusive for all.

## **Emerging Challenges**

Montana's growing recreation participation also presents complex challenges. Overcrowding is placing strain on trails, waterways, and parks, particularly in western Montana. Increased use is contributing to infrastructure wear, natural resource degradation, and rising conflicts between different user groups. Deferred maintenance and aging infrastructure are compounding these pressures. Providers at all levels face limited funding and mounting backlogs, making it difficult to maintain safety, accessibility, and quality standards while meeting growing demand. Recreation access is also a concern. Geographic disparities, transportation barriers, and land management changes limit opportunities for many residents, especially in rural areas and underserved communities. Finally, Montana's changing environment, including wildfire, drought, and habitat loss, adds uncertainty and risk. These factors require adaptive management and proactive planning to ensure that outdoor recreation remains resilient, sustainable, and accessible into the future.

## SCORP Goals for 2026-2030

Based on extensive public input and analysis, the SCORP identifies six statewide goals to guide recreation planning and investment over the next five years:



### GOAL 1: ENHANCE TRAIL NETWORKS, PATHWAYS, AND RECREATION CONNECTIVITY

- 1.1. Develop and implement a Montana State Trails Plan to guide regional trail investments, connectivity priorities, and long-term stewardship.
- 1.2. Prioritize the planning and design of mapping and wayfinding improvements to enhance trail user experience and connectivity.
- 1.3. Expand and connect trail networks and recreation corridors by utilizing diverse opportunities, such as public-private partnerships and existing corridors.
- 1.4. Support the development and maintenance of trail infrastructure that is durable, accessible, and resilient by applying best practices and working in coordination with trail users, land managers, and local partners.



### GOAL 2: EXPAND ACCESS AND INCLUSIVITY IN OUTDOOR RECREATION

- 2.1. Reduce barriers (physical, financial, social) to outdoor recreation participation.
- 2.2. Prioritize facility and program improvements in underserved and rural communities.
- 2.3. Increase the availability of ADA-compliant facilities and adaptive recreation opportunities.
- 2.4. Strengthen outreach, engagement, and partnerships with underrepresented populations and culturally diverse communities.
- 2.5. Continue expansion and promotion of private land access programs that facilitate recreational use and increase access options.



### GOAL 3: REPAIR, MAINTAIN, AND MODERNIZE RECREATION FACILITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE

- 3.1. Address deferred maintenance across public recreation facilities to ensure safe and reliable infrastructure.
- 3.2. Modernize recreation facilities and infrastructure to accommodate changing recreation patterns and future demand.
- 3.3. Promote resilient and climate-adaptive design in all upgrades and new developments.
- 3.4. Support diverse funding partnerships and community involvement to leverage resources and effectively meet management needs.



## GOAL 4: CONSERVE MONTANA'S NATURAL, CULTURAL, AND RECREATIONAL RESOURCES

- 4.1. Integrate conservation and cultural resource protection into all recreation planning, development, and management.
- 4.2. Mitigate recreation impacts on sensitive environments, wildlife habitats, and cultural resources.
- 4.3. Strengthen Montana's Tribal Nations through outdoor recreation.
- 4.4. Enhance public education on responsible recreation and environmental stewardship.



## GOAL 5: SUPPORT ECONOMIC VITALITY THROUGH OUTDOOR RECREATION

- 5.1. Promote sustainable outdoor recreation tourism that benefits local economies.
- 5.2. Support the growth of outdoor recreation businesses and workforce development initiatives.
- 5.3. Foster partnerships with economic development organizations, tourism agencies, and local governments to maximize recreation's economic contributions.
- 5.4. Track and communicate the economic value of outdoor recreation to stakeholders, decision-makers, and the public.



## GOAL 6: FOSTER EDUCATION, STEWARDSHIP, AND COLLABORATION

- 6.1. Enhance outdoor education, interpretation, and youth-focused engagement across all recreation activities.
- 6.2. Provide opportunities for meaningful public involvement in recreation planning and resource stewardship initiatives.
- 6.3. Strengthen public outreach and messaging that encourages healthy, safe, sustainable, and responsible recreation behaviors.
- 6.4. Cultivate robust volunteerism and citizen science programs that directly support conservation and recreation objectives.
- 6.5. Foster collaborative, cross-sector partnerships to amplify educational outreach, stewardship effectiveness, and community engagement.

## Implementation Approach

To achieve these goals, the SCORP provides a practical, flexible roadmap that supports recreation providers of all sizes and capacities. Each goal is accompanied by recommended strategies and action items categorized by complexity:

- *Basic actions* suitable for smaller organizations or those with limited capacity.
- *Intermediate actions* requiring broader coordination or moderate investment.
- *Advanced actions* for providers with significant resources or multi-agency partnerships.

This tiered structure ensures that recreation providers across Montana, from small rural communities to large federal agencies, can contribute meaningfully to statewide goals while tailoring efforts to their unique circumstances. To further support implementation, the SCORP Implementation Toolkit provides guidance and resources to assist partners in translating recommendations into action. Progress toward SCORP goals will be tracked using performance indicators and reported through LWCF program reporting and partner updates over the life of the plan. The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) will continue to be leveraged alongside state, local, and private resources to support implementation of SCORP priorities.

## Looking Ahead

*From Peaks to Prairies: Montana's Outdoor Recreation Roadmap* charts a bold, collaborative path forward. Through thoughtful planning, strategic investment, and long-term stewardship, Montana will preserve its cherished outdoor legacy and ensure that recreation opportunities continue to thrive. By working together, agencies, communities, recreation providers, and the public can create a future where outdoor recreation is accessible, sustainable, and reflective of Montana's values for generations to come.

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*Welcome*

*to*

**MONTANA**





## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Montana’s 2026–2030 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) lays the groundwork for a vibrant and sustainable future for outdoor recreation across the state. Outdoor recreation is central to Montana’s culture, economy, and quality of life. It connects residents and visitors to diverse landscapes, supports health and well-being, and sustains thousands of jobs in communities large and small.

This SCORP provides a clear framework for addressing both current and emerging recreation needs while safeguarding Montana’s natural, cultural, and recreational resources. It reflects priorities identified through extensive public engagement, data analysis, and collaboration with recreation providers, land managers, and stakeholders. The plan also meets federal requirements under the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), ensuring Montana remains eligible for critical funding that supports recreation projects statewide.

This chapter introduces the purpose of the SCORP, the long-term vision and goals guiding the plan, and the planning process used to develop it. It also highlights Montana’s rich outdoor recreation legacy and the central role that public lands and outdoor experiences continue to play in shaping the state’s identity. Together, these elements establish the foundation for the goals, recommendations, and action items presented in the chapters that follow.

## 1.1 PURPOSE OF SCORP

Montana’s Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan serves as the guiding framework for sustaining, improving, and expanding outdoor recreation opportunities across the state. It provides a strategic vision for managing recreation resources while addressing current demands and preparing for future challenges. Developed through extensive public engagement and data analysis, the SCORP reflects the priorities and values of Montanans and outlines actionable steps for the next five years.

### Compliance with LWCF Requirements

The SCORP fulfills federal requirements under the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965, as amended. States must prepare and regularly update a SCORP at least every five years to remain eligible for LWCF grants. These grants provide essential funding for the acquisition, development, and stewardship of outdoor recreation resources.



Legal authority for the development of the 2026–2030 SCORP is outlined in Chapter 2 of the Land and Water Conservation Fund State Assistance Program, Federal Assistance Manual, Volume 69. This chapter establishes the objectives, eligibility requirements, and guidelines for state and National Park Service (NPS) collaboration in preparing and reviewing the SCORP. The plan is required under Section 6(d) of the LWCF Act, as amended.

Through this SCORP, Montana demonstrates its commitment to using LWCF and other funding sources effectively so that local communities and recreation providers can continue to invest in parks, trails, facilities, and access improvements.

### Importance for Montana’s Recreation Planning and Funding

Outdoor recreation is central to Montana’s identity, economy, and quality of life. It connects residents and visitors to the state’s landscapes, supports physical and mental health, and sustains thousands of jobs throughout Montana’s communities. Activities such as hiking, fishing, hunting, floating, skiing, motorized recreation, and wildlife viewing play a critical role in community vitality and individual well-being.



The SCORP is more than a planning document; it is a strategic roadmap that guides decision-making at the state, regional, and local levels. By consolidating data on public needs, infrastructure conditions, and trends, the SCORP equips land managers, recreation providers, and policymakers with the information they need to:

- Guide resource allocation and prioritization based on public input and data-driven analysis.
- Support grant applications and funding strategies, including eligibility for LWCF and other investment opportunities.
- Strengthen partnerships across federal, state, tribal, local, nonprofit, and private-sector recreation providers.
- Advance equitable access, inclusivity, and sustainability for diverse user groups, including families, older adults, individuals with disabilities, and underserved communities.
- Promote education and stewardship to support long-term care and responsible use of recreation assets.

By aligning statewide goals with local priorities, the SCORP supports a unified approach to outdoor recreation planning. It helps ensure that Montana's outdoor resources remain accessible, resilient, and enriching for future generations while adapting to changing needs and opportunities.

## Role of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP)

The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) is responsible for preparing and updating the SCORP every five years. FWP leads the development of the plan; its successful implementation, however, relies on collaboration with a wide range of partners, including federal agencies, tribal governments, local governments, nonprofits, and community stakeholders.



FWP's leadership ensures the SCORP reflects a balanced approach to outdoor recreation management, integrating public input, data analysis, and professional expertise. The agency works to align the SCORP's goals and recommendations with the needs of Montana's diverse communities while promoting conservation, access, and responsible recreation.

### The FWP Mission

Montana FWP, through its employees and citizen commission and board, provides for the stewardship of the fish, wildlife, parks, and recreation resources of Montana, while contributing to the quality of life for present and future generations.

### The FWP 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 resilience 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.



## 1.2 VISION AND GOALS

Montana's diverse landscapes, from rugged mountains and wild rivers to prairie grasslands and rolling breaks, form the foundation of the state's outdoor recreation identity. These places provide opportunities for adventure, reflection, and connection to nature. Outdoor recreation is not only a valued part of daily life for many Montanans but also a key contributor to the state's economy, health, and cultural heritage.

### **Vision for Outdoor Recreation in Montana**

Montana's vision for outdoor recreation is to ensure that every resident and visitor has equitable access to high-quality outdoor experiences that enrich individual lives, strengthen communities, and preserve the state's natural and cultural heritage for generations to come.

This vision reflects a statewide commitment to collaborative planning, innovative solutions, and responsible stewardship. As demand for recreation opportunities continues to grow and diversify, Montana will prioritize balanced management practices that sustain and celebrate world-class recreation resources while promoting the physical, mental, and emotional health of those who live, work, and recreate here. The state will continue to foster inclusivity and access for people of all backgrounds, ages, abilities, and geographic regions, support local economies and sustainable tourism, and conserve sensitive ecosystems and wildlife habitats to protect outdoor experiences for future generations.



## SCORP Key Goals

Through extensive public engagement, surveys, and collaboration with land managers, several key goals emerged to support Montana's long-term vision for outdoor recreation. These goals reflect both public priorities and the challenges identified by recreation managers across the state. A full list of SCORP goals, recommendations, and action items is provided in Chapter 4.



**GOAL 1: ENHANCE TRAIL NETWORKS, PATHWAYS, AND RECREATION CONNECTIVITY**



**GOAL 2: EXPAND ACCESS AND INCLUSIVITY IN OUTDOOR RECREATION**



**GOAL 3: REPAIR, MAINTAIN, AND MODERNIZE RECREATION FACILITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE**



**GOAL 4: CONSERVE MONTANA'S NATURAL, CULTURAL, AND RECREATIONAL RESOURCES**



**GOAL 5: SUPPORT ECONOMIC VITALITY THROUGH OUTDOOR RECREATION**



**GOAL 6: FOSTER EDUCATION, STEWARDSHIP, AND COLLABORATION**

## 1.3 PLANNING PROCESS

**Information  
Gathering**  
Summer 2023

The SCORP planning process placed a strong emphasis on public participation in the development of the plan, as required by the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Act of 1965, as amended. Throughout the development of the plan, FWP worked closely with stakeholders including other state agencies, local governments, federal recreation management partners, and Montana residents to gather input and feedback at key milestones.

**Data  
Collection  
& Analysis**  
Winter 2023-24

To provide a central hub for communication and transparency, a dedicated SCORP webpage was launched on the FWP website at the start of the planning process. The webpage served as a platform to share updates, provide access to draft materials, and offer opportunities for public engagement. It will continue to serve as the primary location for accessing the final plan, reporting progress, and highlighting accomplishments throughout the life of the SCORP.

**Issue  
Identification**  
Summer 2024

To ensure a comprehensive and accurate understanding of Montana's outdoor recreation landscape, the planning process for the 2026–2030 SCORP relied on robust data collection methods. These methods captured insights from diverse stakeholders, including Montana residents, recreation managers, and public and private entities.

**Draft Plan  
Development**  
Fall 2024

**Public Involvement Summary**  
Over the course of the 2026–2030 SCORP planning process, FWP engaged:

- 75+ participants through nine public workshops (one in each FWP region plus a statewide virtual session);
- 2,385 respondents to the Public Outdoor Recreation Use Survey;
- 98 recreation facility and land managers through the Statewide Facility and Outdoor Recreation Needs Survey;
- Numerous stakeholders providing comments during a 45-day public review and comment period on the draft plan.

**Plan  
Finalization**  
Fall 2025

Together, these efforts ensured the SCORP reflects a broad cross-section of Montana's communities, recreation providers, and public land partners.

## **Stakeholder Workshops**

The primary data collection effort focused on extensive public outreach and engagement. A major component was the facilitation of nine public workshops held in each of FWP's administrative regions, including a virtual session made available to anyone across Montana. These workshops served as open forums where members of the public, land managers, tribal representatives, local officials, recreation organizations, and other stakeholders gathered to discuss trends, needs, and priorities for outdoor recreation across the state. The workshops provided opportunities for Montanans to share their experiences and to help identify both current challenges and opportunities for improving outdoor recreation access, quality, and inclusivity over the next five years. Hundreds of participants from diverse backgrounds and interests contributed to these conversations, ensuring the plan reflected a broad cross-section of public perspectives.

## **Surveys and Data Analysis**

In addition to the regional workshops, two statewide surveys were implemented to gather further input and data. A Public Outdoor Recreation Use Survey was distributed to 10,500 randomly selected Montana households and made available to the public online, ultimately receiving 2,385 completed responses. A Statewide Facility and Outdoor Recreation Needs Survey was also distributed to recreation providers at the federal, state, local, and tribal levels, with 98 managers providing detailed responses about facility conditions, needs, and emerging trends. These surveys were designed to collect primary data on how Montanans recreate, what barriers they face, and what improvements they would like to see.

To provide additional context and support data, the planning team incorporated findings from the 2023 (Quarter 2) University of Montana Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research (ITRR) Residents Report, along with secondary data sources such as regional and national recreation trend reports. These data sources allowed the planning team to identify patterns, compare findings with broader trends, and ensure the SCORP was both locally grounded and regionally informed.



## **SCORP Planning Team**

A multidisciplinary SCORP planning team oversaw the planning process, facilitated the regional workshops, managed data collection and analysis, and drafted the content of the plan. The planning team's role was to ensure that public input and data were integrated into the SCORP's goals, recommendations, and strategies, while providing professional guidance and coordination.

## **Public Review and Comment on the Draft SCORP**

The draft 2026–2030 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan was released for public comment from May 12 to June 26, 2025. During this period, Montanans were invited to review the draft plan and submit written comments through an online comment form and email. FWP shared the draft SCORP and comment opportunity on its website and through outreach to partners, statewide recreation and conservation organizations, and interested stakeholders.

Public comments were submitted by individual residents and organizations representing trails, conservation, local communities, and motorized recreation. Overall, commenters expressed strong support for the SCORP's goals, especially its focus on maintaining recreation infrastructure, improving access and accessibility, and strengthening coordination across agencies and partners. Themes included trail connectivity, clear information about grant programs, the importance of habitat and wetland protection, and balancing recreation growth with resource stewardship. Motorized recreation groups emphasized maintaining opportunities for legal, sustainable riding on designated routes.

Feedback from the public comment period was used to refine the final SCORP by clarifying descriptions of grant programs and funding tools, strengthening language around accessibility, equity, and habitat conservation, and adding or sharpening examples related to trails, public access, and stewardship. This ensured that the final plan better reflects the perspectives and priorities of the individuals, communities, and organizations who rely on outdoor recreation across Montana.

By integrating statewide resident survey data, facility and provider input, and meaningful public comment, the SCORP planning process brings together the perspectives of the people who use, manage, and care for Montana's outdoor recreation resources. This approach ensures that the final plan reflects statewide needs and priorities and provides a clear, actionable roadmap for the future of outdoor recreation in Montana.

## 1.4 MONTANA'S OUTDOOR LEGACY

Outdoor recreation is more than a pastime in Montana—it reflects the state's values, culture, and sense of place. Generations of Montanans have built deep connections with the land through recreation, stewardship, and enjoyment of public spaces. These experiences enrich individual lives, strengthen communities, and help shape the state's identity.

### Historical Overview

Montana's outdoor recreation legacy begins with the Indigenous peoples who have lived on and cared for this land since time immemorial. Tribal nations developed deep cultural, spiritual, and practical relationships with the landscape, relying on its natural resources for sustenance, community, and ceremony. Many of Montana's most significant recreation destinations today remain culturally and spiritually important to tribal communities and are managed through partnerships that reflect both traditional knowledge and modern stewardship practices.

The arrival of non-Indigenous settlers in the 19th century introduced new forms of recreation alongside extractive industries. Hunting, fishing, camping, and exploration became cornerstones of Montana's outdoor traditions. The designation of Yellowstone National Park in 1872, partially within Montana's borders, marked a national commitment to preserving public lands for the enjoyment of all. The creation of Glacier National Park in 1910, along with the establishment of national forests, wildlife refuges, and eventually a statewide system of parks and trails, further solidified Montana's reputation as a leader in conservation and public land access.





Throughout the 20th century, Montana's recreation opportunities expanded to include a wider range of activities and experiences for residents and visitors. Today, Montana's outdoor legacy continues to evolve, shaped by changing recreation trends, increasing participation, and an ongoing commitment to stewardship, inclusivity, and collaboration.

### **Significance to Montana's Culture**

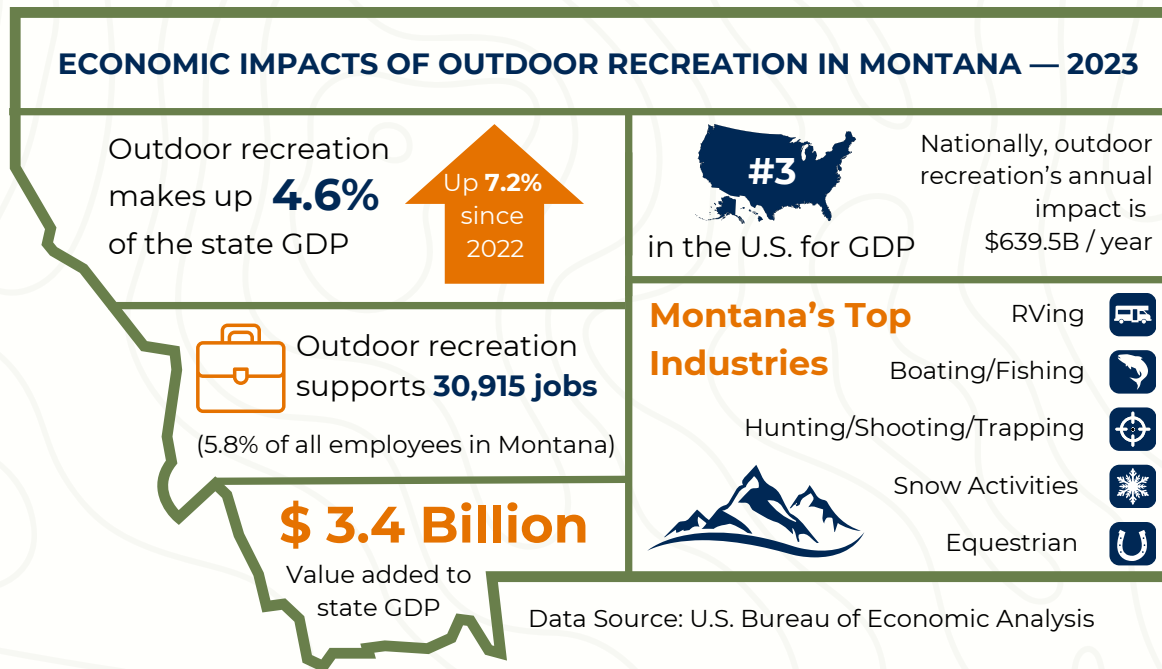
For many Montanans, outdoor recreation is a way of life that supports personal well-being, community identity, and cultural traditions. Activities such as hiking, hunting, fishing, skiing, motorized recreation, wildlife viewing, and paddling are woven into the fabric of daily life, bringing people together and fostering a shared sense of responsibility for the state's natural resources.

Outdoor recreation also plays a vital role in preserving and celebrating Montana's cultural heritage. Indigenous communities maintain strong relationships with landscapes and traditional practices that involve the use and stewardship of public lands. Rural communities continue to uphold long-standing recreation traditions while adapting to new activities and growing demand. Increasingly, Montana's recreation landscape reflects a blend of historical traditions and innovative approaches to access, sustainability, and inclusivity.

### **Economic Significance**

Outdoor recreation is a cornerstone of Montana's economy, contributing significantly to employment, income, and community development across the state. In 2023, the outdoor recreation sector generated \$3.4 billion in value-added output, accounting for 4.6% of Montana's gross domestic product (GDP). This places Montana among the top states nationally for the economic impact of outdoor recreation. The industry supported 30,915 jobs (5.8% of total employment) and contributed 4.4% to total compensation (U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2023).

Figure 1: Economic Impacts of Outdoor Recreation in Montana (2023)



Tourism, which is closely linked to outdoor recreation, further amplifies this economic contribution. In 2023, Montana welcomed an estimated 12.5 million nonresident visitors, whose spending totaled \$5.45 billion. This supported more than 66,550 jobs and generated \$414 million in state and local tax revenue (ITRR, 2024). Montana’s two national parks are especially significant economic drivers. In 2023, visitors to Glacier and Yellowstone National Parks spent approximately \$716 million in nearby Montana communities. This spending supported nearly 10,900 jobs and added \$551 million in value to the state’s economy (National Park Service, 2024). Tourism promotion related to Montana’s outdoor recreation opportunities are led by the Office of Tourism and Business Development, which works to highlight the economic benefits and statewide value of the outdoor recreation industry.

Beyond direct financial impacts, outdoor recreation enhances Montana’s appeal as a place to live and work. Access to diverse recreational opportunities is a key factor attracting businesses, skilled workers, and families, contributing to the state’s economic resilience and community vitality. This connection between quality of life and economic development underscores the importance of sustaining and expanding Montana’s recreation infrastructure and access.

### Public Health and Well-Being

Outdoor recreation contributes significantly to the physical, mental, and social well-being of Montanans. Research consistently shows that time spent outdoors can reduce stress, alleviate symptoms of anxiety and depression, and encourage healthy lifestyles. In Montana, where vast public lands and recreation opportunities are integral to daily life, these benefits are especially important.

Montana residents report some of the highest levels of physical activity in the nation, ranking 10th lowest among U.S. states for adults reporting physical inactivity outside of work (CDC, 2022). Despite these strengths, challenges remain. Approximately 75% of Montana adults and 72% of youth still do not meet recommended physical activity levels, underscoring the need to expand access to, and engagement in, outdoor recreation (DPHHS, 2024).

Access to parks, trails, and natural areas has also been shown to reduce health disparities by providing opportunities for physical activity, social connection, and mental restoration (Outdoor Industry Association, 2023). In Montana, the Parks Rx program highlights these benefits by partnering healthcare providers with public land agencies to prescribe outdoor activity as part of patient wellness plans. These efforts recognize the value of recreation not only for physical fitness, but also as a preventive public health tool (Park Rx, 2024).

Looking ahead, expanding inclusive and accessible recreation opportunities will be essential to addressing health disparities, improving quality of life, and fostering healthier, more resilient communities throughout Montana.

## Looking Ahead

As Montana builds on its long-standing outdoor recreation legacy, the path forward requires balancing increased demand with the need for conservation, stewardship, and equitable access. The 2026–2030 SCORP recognizes the state’s rich history of recreation and public land preservation while addressing new challenges, including population growth, shifting recreation trends, environmental pressures, and aging infrastructure.

Montana’s recreation providers, land managers, tribal governments, and community partners will continue working together to ensure that outdoor spaces remain welcoming, resilient, and sustainable. This SCORP provides a roadmap for expanding access, supporting economic vitality, and promoting physical, mental, and social well-being through outdoor recreation for all who call Montana home, or visit it for the experiences it offers.







## CHAPTER 2: MONTANA'S RECREATION LANDSCAPE

Montana's outdoor recreation resources are as varied and expansive as the landscapes themselves. Millions of acres of public and private lands support hiking, camping, wildlife viewing, hunting, fishing, motorized recreation, water-based activities, and many other pursuits that contribute to the state's economy, culture, and quality of life. These resources sustain long-standing outdoor traditions while also accommodating new and emerging activities that reflect changing public interests and technology. The needs and challenges outlined in this chapter directly informed the statewide goals and recommendations presented in Chapter 4.

Understanding the scope, condition, and trends associated with Montana's outdoor recreation resources is essential for effective planning and management. This chapter provides an overview of the state's recreation assets and summarizes key trends and challenges identified through statewide data collection, including recreation provider surveys, public demand surveys, and stakeholder input.

As Montana's population grows and diversifies, the state's outdoor recreation system faces increasing pressures. Rising participation, evolving recreation preferences, aging infrastructure, environmental change, and user conflicts all present complex challenges. At the same time, they create opportunities to innovate, collaborate, and ensure that Montana's outdoor spaces remain accessible, inclusive, and sustainable for future generations.

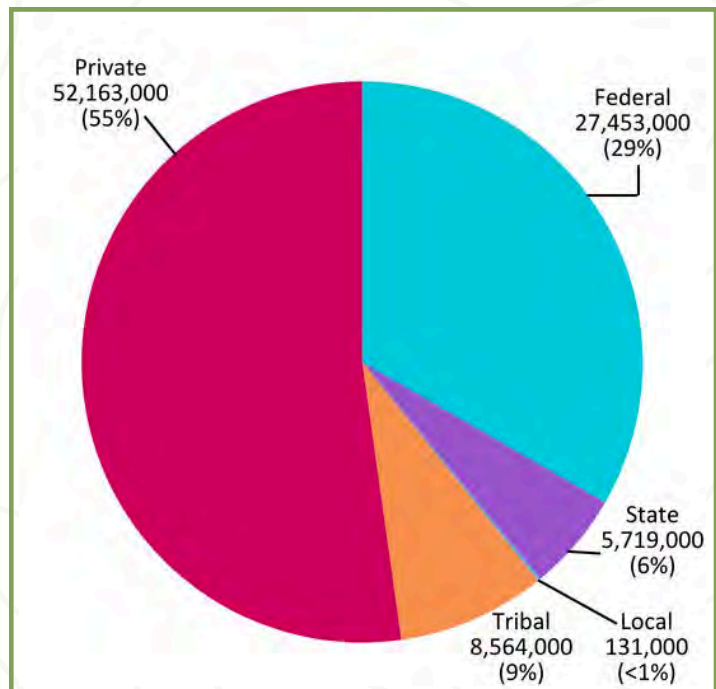
## 2.1 MONTANA'S OUTDOOR ASSETS

Montana's outdoor recreation system is supported by a wide network of landowners and providers, including federal and state agencies, tribal governments, local jurisdictions, and nonprofit organizations. Each plays a distinct role in managing land, water, and facilities that provide recreation opportunities across the state. They shape local and regional identities, support wildlife habitat, provide abundant recreation opportunities, and enhance quality of life for residents while drawing more than 12 million visitors to the state each year.

According to the Montana Natural Heritage Program, public land ownership makes up approximately 36% of Montana's land base, while over 55% is in private ownership and about 9% is tribal lands. Federal agencies manage roughly 29% of the land base in Montana (over 27 million acres). State lands, including Montana State Parks, make up about 6% of the state, and city and county lands account for less than 1%. The acreage of lands specifically managed for recreation at the local level is unknown but is presumed to be smaller than the total city and county land base. In some regions, such as Gallatin County, recreation opportunities also rely heavily on privately managed lands, including resorts and gateway communities, which contribute significantly to the overall mix of outdoor recreation experiences alongside public lands.

In total, Montanans and visitors enjoy more than 33 million acres of public land open to recreation, equivalent to roughly 29 acres of public land per resident. Together, federal, state, local, Tribal, and nonprofit providers form the foundation of Montana's outdoor recreation "supply," as summarized in the public land and provider information in Appendix C.

Figure 2: Land Ownership in Montana



Source: Montana Natural Heritage Program

## Federal Lands

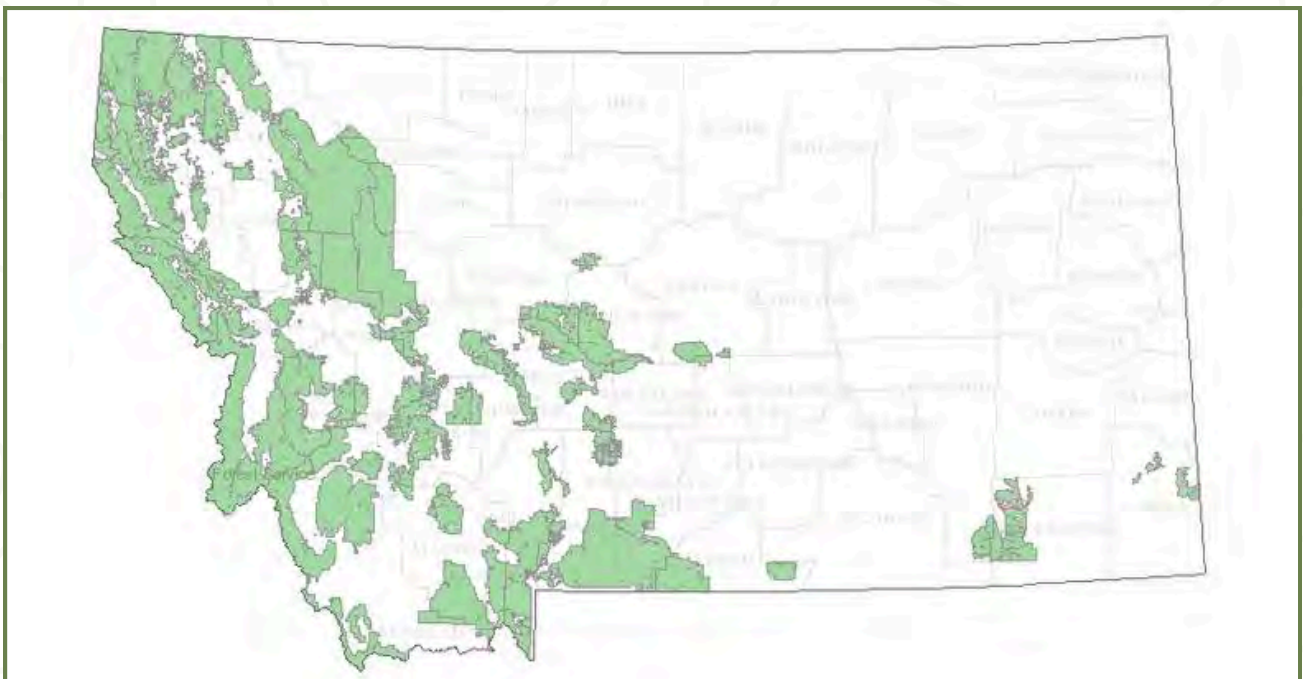
Multiple federal agencies manage large portions of Montana's landscape, providing extensive opportunities for outdoor recreation while balancing other land management priorities. These agencies manage national forests, rangelands, parks, refuges, reservoirs, and river systems that support both traditional and emerging forms of recreation. Key federal agencies (in order of total acreage managed in Montana) include:

- 1. U.S. Forest Service (USFS)**
- 2. Bureau of Land Management (BLM)**
- 3. National Park Service (NPS)**
- 4. U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS)**
- 5. Bureau of Reclamation (BOR)**
- 6. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)**

### U.S. Forest Service (USFS)

The mission of the USFS is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations. Eight national forests cover over 19 million acres of land in the state of Montana. The rivers, mountains, wilderness areas, and vast forests of USFS lands contribute significantly to the state's image and brand of unspoiled nature, spectacular landscapes, vast open spaces, and abundant outdoor recreation.

Map 1: U.S. Forest Service in Montana

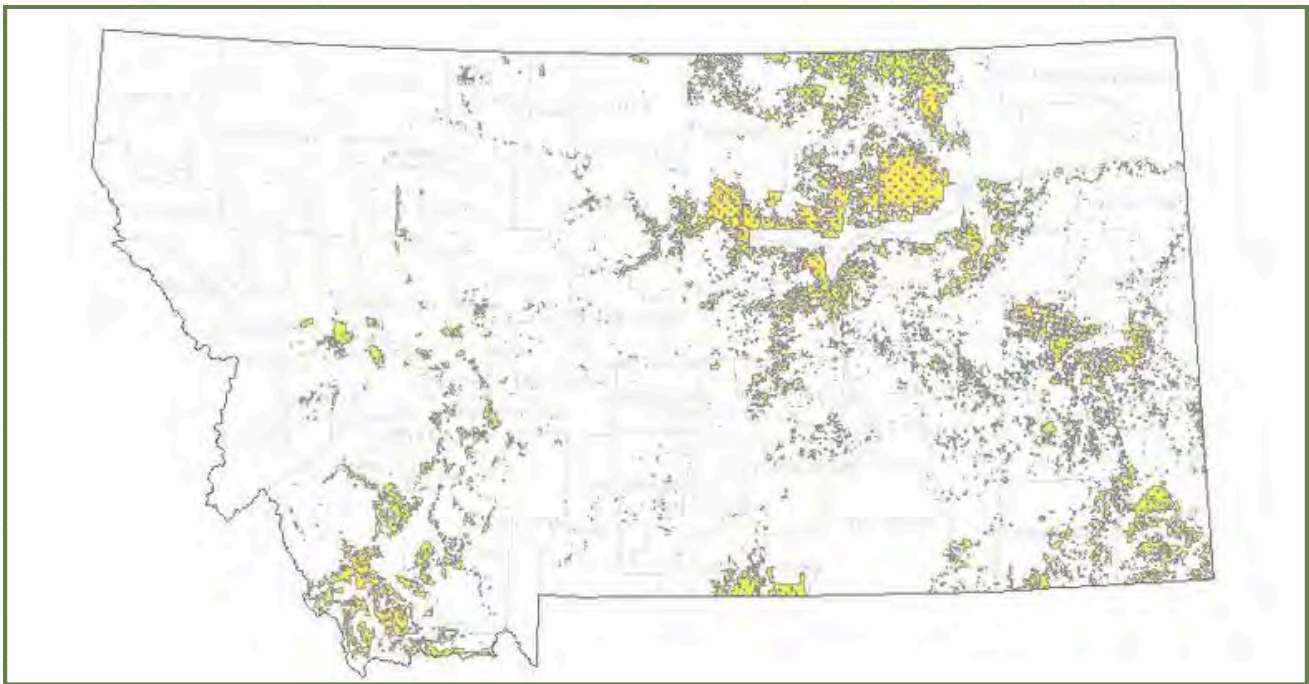


## **Bureau of Land Management (BLM)**

The Bureau of Land Management’s mission is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of America’s public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations. The BLM’s multiple-use mandate, set forth in the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, requires the agency to manage public land resources for a variety of uses, such as recreation, grazing, energy development, and conservation, while protecting a wide array of natural, cultural, and historical resources.

In Montana, the BLM manages more than 8 million acres of public land, much of it concentrated in eastern and central portions of the state. These lands support hunting, fishing, camping, hiking, motorized recreation, and other activities that are central to local economies and community identities.

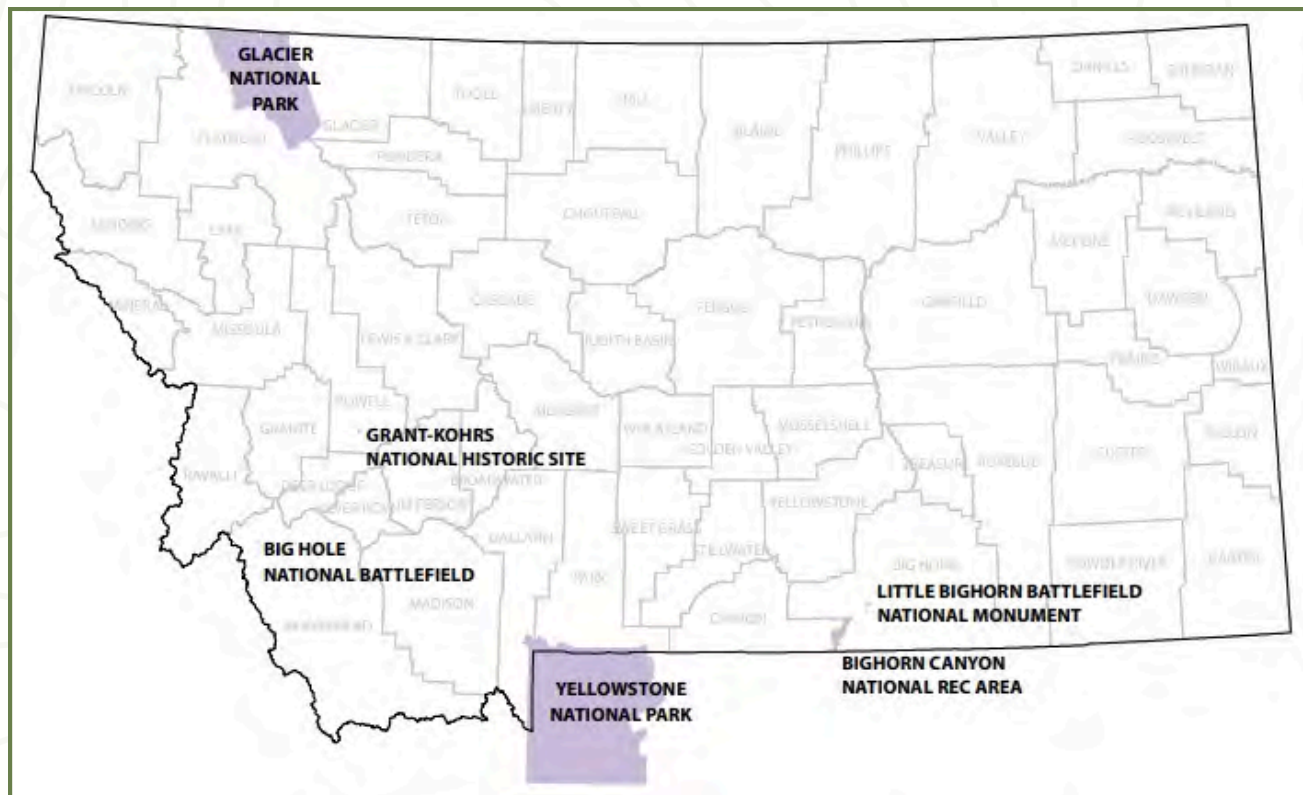
Map 2: Bureau of Land Management in Montana



## **National Park Service (NPS)**

The National Park Service’s mission is to preserve unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the national park system for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of current and future generations. While national park units are the most visible part of the NPS, the agency also administers programs such as the Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program; stateside assistance for Land and Water Conservation Fund grants; and the National Register of Historic Places.

Map 3: National Park Service in Montana



National park units in Montana offer a wide range of outdoor experiences. Visitors can fish and boat at Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area; walk with the spirits at Big Hole, Bear Paw, and Little Bighorn Battlefield; or view grizzly bears, mountain goats, and other wildlife in Glacier National Park. These sites are globally recognized destinations that also play a critical role in Montana’s recreation system and tourism economy.



Map 4: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service in Montana



### **U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS)**

The mission of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service is to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. As both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, USFWS is known for scientific excellence, stewardship of public lands and waters, and a strong commitment to public service.

The National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS), managed by USFWS, is the world's premier system of public lands and waters set aside to conserve fish, wildlife, and plants. In Montana, well-known refuges include the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge and Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge. Federal statute directs USFWS to emphasize wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities, specifically hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, interpretation, and environmental education, making these areas important destinations for both conservation and recreation.

### **Bureau of Reclamation (BOR)**

The Bureau of Reclamation's mission is to manage, develop, and protect water and related resources in an environmentally and economically sound manner in the interest of the American public. BOR owns, operates, and maintains dams and reservoirs throughout Montana. The Montana Area Office is responsible for operating and maintaining BOR reservoirs east of the Continental Divide. At most BOR reservoirs in Montana, recreation is not an authorized project purpose but rather an incidental benefit. Nonetheless, these reservoirs support popular water-based activities such as boating, fishing, and swimming, and often serve as regional recreation hubs.

## **U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)**

Fort Peck Dam and Lake is one of hundreds of projects nationwide managed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers that provide both land- and water-based recreation opportunities. Federal statutes establish the authorized purposes for each USACE project. For example, the Fort Peck Project has eight authorized purposes: flood control, hydropower, irrigation, navigation, fish and wildlife, water supply, water quality, and recreation.

Through these authorized purposes, Congress appropriates funding to develop, manage, and maintain facilities that benefit the nation, individual states, and the public. Recreation at USACE projects like Fort Peck Lake includes boating, fishing, camping, and wildlife viewing, all supported by a network of campgrounds, access sites, and day-use areas.



## **State Agencies**

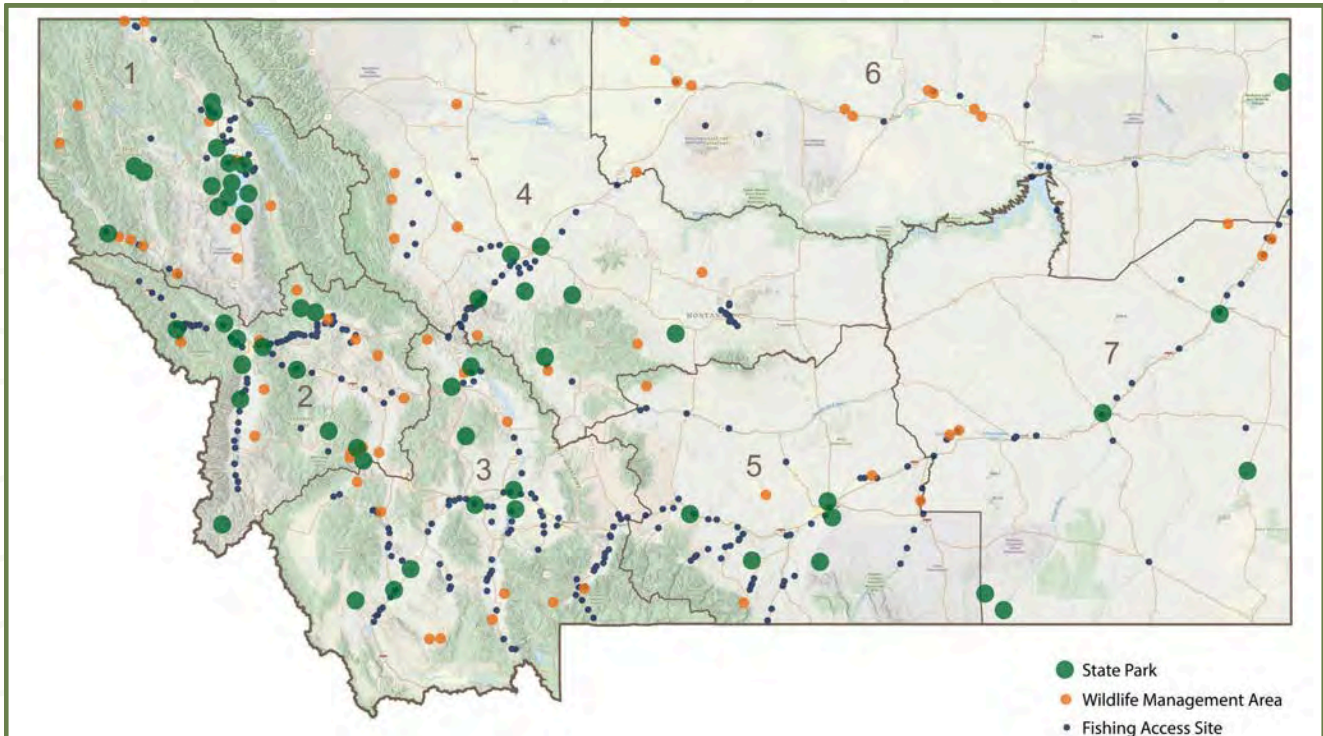
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) is the primary agency responsible for managing parks and recreation at the state level. Other key state partners include the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC), the Montana Office of Tourism (within the Department of Commerce), and the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT). Together, these agencies help provide, support, or promote outdoor recreation opportunities statewide.

## **Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP)**

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) is the lead agency for parks and outdoor recreation at the state level. The Parks and Outdoor Recreation (POR) Division, which includes Montana State Parks, is the primary focus of this subsection. POR is responsible for visitor use, recreation management, maintenance, and heritage preservation at state parks, fishing access sites, and wildlife management areas. The division also oversees river recreation management, works to enhance access for hunting, fishing, and other types of recreation on public and private lands, supports shooting range development, and administers trail and shooting range grant programs.

Core objectives include keeping sites and access open, clean, and safe; balancing recreation opportunities with conservation and preservation of natural and cultural resources; supporting landowners in managing public use on their lands; and enhancing local recreation infrastructure and opportunities across the state.

Map 5: Montana Fish, Wildlife, & Parks Sites



FWP manages 56 state parks totaling more than 38,000 acres. In addition, the agency manages seven National Historic Landmarks and numerous sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Montana State Parks offer a variety of recreation opportunities, including camping, hiking, boating, mountain biking, picnicking, wildlife viewing, and interpretation programs.

To guide management and set visitor expectations, each state park is assigned both a park type and a service-level designation. Park types include natural parks, heritage parks, and recreation parks, reflecting the park's primary resource focus and visitor experience. Service levels—Rustic, Core, or Enhanced—describe the general level of development, amenities, and services visitors can expect and help inform park management and operations decisions.



Table 1: Classification of Montana State Parks

Natural	<p>Natural Parks connect visitors with nature in ways that cause them to learn, reflect, and appreciate. These 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</p>	<p>Beavertail Hill (C)                  Fish Creek (R)                  Giant Springs (E)                  Grey Cliff Prairie Dog Town (R)                  Lewis and Clark Caverns (E)                  Lost Creek (R)                  Lone Pine (E)                  Makoshika (E)                  Medicine Rocks (R)*P</p>	<p>Milltown (C)                  Pirogue Island (R)*P                  Sluice Boxes (R)*P                  Somers Beach (C)</p>
Heritage	<p>Heritage Parks invite reflection on the past by revealing the stories of Montana’s cultures and histories in the very places where they occurred. Heritage parks provide opportunities to view, explore, or learn about the cultural and historic features unique to the site.</p>	<p>Anaconda Stack (R)                  Bannack (E)                  Beaverhead Rock (R)*P                  Chief Plenty Coups (E)                  Clarks Lookout (R)*P                  Council Grove (C)*P                  Elkhorn (R)                  First Peoples (E)                  Fort Owen (C)</p>	<p>Granite (R)                  Judith Landing (R)                  Madison Buffalo Jump (C)*P                  Missouri Headwaters (C)                  Pictograph Cave (E)                  Rosebud Battlefield (C)                  Tower Rock (R)(P)                  Travelers Rest (E)</p>
Recreation	<p>Recreation Parks 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.</p>	<p>Ackley Lake (R)                  Black Sandy (C)                  Brush Lake (C)                  Cooney (C)                  Flathead Lake (6 units)-(E)                  Frenchtown Pond (C)                  Lake Elmo (C)                  Lake Mary Ronan (C)                  Les Mason (C)                  Logan (C)</p>	<p>Painted Rocks (R)                  Placid Lake (C)                  Salmon Lake (C)                  Smith River (R)                  Spring Meadow (C)                  Thompson Chain of Lakes (R)                  Thompson Falls (C)                  Tongue River Reservoir (E)                  Whitefish (C)                  Wild Horse Island (R)*P</p>

**Rustic (R)**

Parks with rustic services attract visitors who expect a self-directed experience with limited developed amenities. Visitors may expect:

- Limited amenities, such as vault toilets
- Campsites without paving or electrical service
- Trail systems that may be unpaved
- Sites without potable water
- Pack in/pack out trash
- Limited on site staffing or active programming

**Core (C)**

Parks with core services provide a moderate amenity and service level. In addition to the amenities at the rustic service level, visitors may expect:

- A combination of vault latrines and flush toilet comfort stations
- Gravel or paved road surfaces
- Campsites or overnight facilities,
- Developed day use facilities: boat ramps, group shelters, picnic areas
- Potable drinking water
- Interpretive signage or programs
- Other services such as small concessions
- Trails – paved and/or unpaved
- Limited, but regular on-site staffing

**Enhanced (E)**

Parks with enhanced services have a high amenity level and offer a number of options for an enhanced visitor experience. In addition to the amenities at the core service level, they will offer some or all of the following:

- A combination of overnight camping options
- Full-service comfort stations with showers
- Visitor center with interpretive exhibits
- Regularly scheduled interpretive and educational programming and special events
- Full-service concessions
- Natural/heritage/recreational experiences that supplement the predominant experience.

\*P indicates primitive parks status under MCA 23-1-116

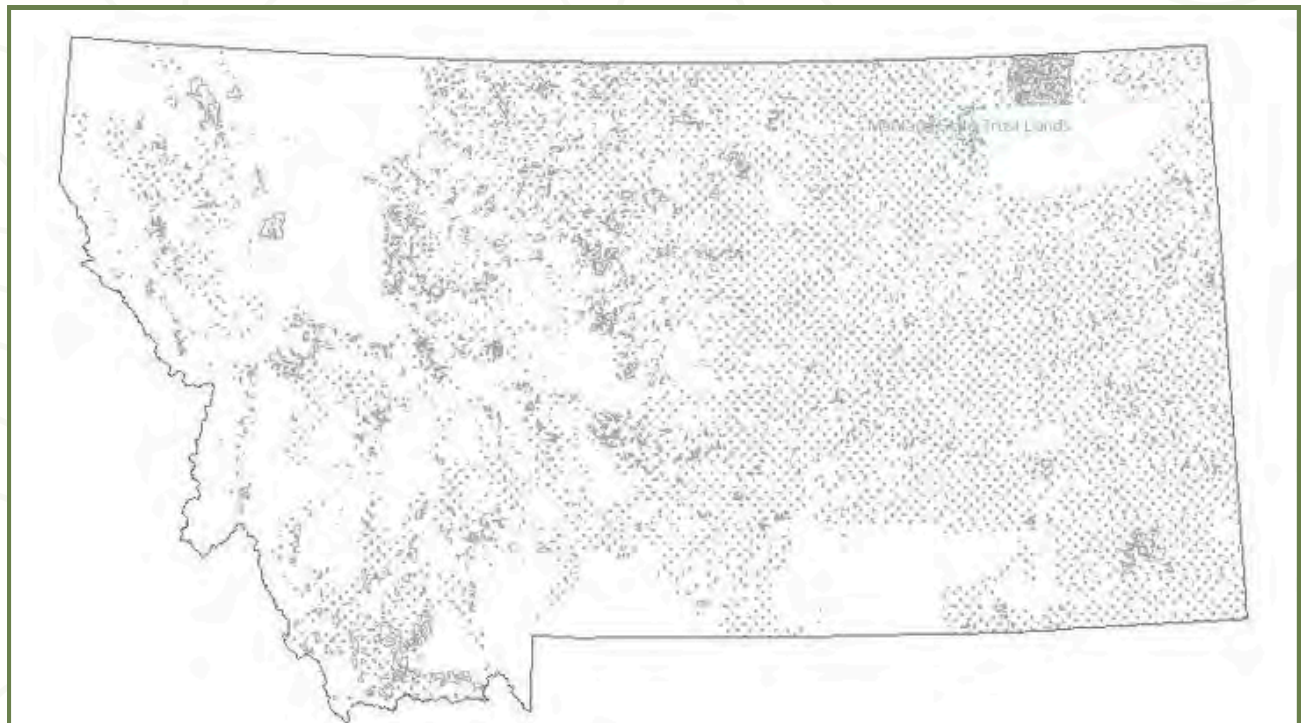


### **Montana Department of Natural Resources & Conservation**

The Department of Natural Resources & Conservation manages more than 5.1 million acres of state school trust land. These lands were granted to Montana by the federal government at statehood to help support public education and originally included Sections 16 and 36 of each township. Since that time, some trust lands have been sold or exchanged, but their primary purpose remains the same: to generate revenue for the state's public schools.

DNRC's mission is to ensure that Montana's land and water resources provide benefits for present and future generations. While hunting is the predominant recreational use on school trust lands, fishing, hiking, and other dispersed recreation activities also occur under various access arrangements and rules.

Map 6: Department of Natural Resources & Conservation Lands



## **Montana Office of Tourism (Department of Commerce)**

The Montana Office of Tourism is the statewide tourism promotion and development program within the Montana Department of Commerce. The office does not directly own or manage recreation facilities; rather, it serves as a key information provider and marketing partner for recreation opportunities across the state.

The Office of Tourism promotes Montana as an attractive destination through electronic marketing (websites, social media, digital publications), print publications, publicity efforts, and visitor information services. It also administers tourism-related grant and loan programs that support projects enhancing visitor amenities, interpretation, and community-based tourism infrastructure. These programs help strengthen the tourism and recreation industry and support positive economic and quality-of-life benefits for Montana communities.



## **Montana Department of Transportation**

The Montana Department of Transportation serves the public by providing a safe, efficient, and environmentally sensitive transportation system that supports economic vitality across the state. MDT's responsibilities include transportation system planning and design, public transportation and rail programs, and long-range transportation planning.

One key program is the Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG) program, which consolidates several funding streams into a flexible source that can support projects such as Transportation Alternatives. These funds assist with active transportation and recreation-related projects, including pathways, sidewalks, and trail connections administered in coordination with FWP and local partners. Such investments directly benefit parks and recreation infrastructure and enhance the health and well-being of Montana residents.

## Local Agencies and Organizations

Local governments, including cities, towns, and counties, play a vital role in providing close-to-home recreation opportunities. While Montana’s rural character means that relatively few counties operate formal parks and recreation departments, many local governments manage parklands, trails, playgrounds, sports facilities, and community recreation programs.

The capacity and scope of local recreation management vary widely. Larger cities, particularly those with populations over 20,000, often have dedicated parks and recreation departments. Smaller municipalities may house park responsibilities within planning or public works departments, or rely on volunteer committees, service clubs, and partnerships to maintain local parks and recreation areas. In many communities, federal and state lands also serve as key recreation assets, helping fill gaps where local resources are limited.

Nonprofit organizations are essential partners in supporting and enhancing outdoor recreation at the local level. Trail associations, land trusts, conservation groups, adaptive recreation organizations, youth-serving nonprofits, and friends groups contribute to trail maintenance, habitat restoration, recreation programming, volunteer engagement, and advocacy. These partnerships extend the reach of local agencies and help ensure that recreation opportunities are accessible, sustainable, and responsive to community needs.



## Tribal Lands

Montana is home to twelve federally recognized Tribal Nations whose homelands span what is now the state, including eight reservations and additional trust and Tribally owned lands. These lands encompass millions of acres of culturally, historically, and ecologically significant areas. Tribal governments manage a variety of outdoor recreation resources, including campgrounds, trails, wildlife viewing areas, boating access sites, and cultural interpretation sites that reflect the priorities and values of their communities.

Recreation on tribal lands reflects both the natural beauty and ecological diversity of these landscapes and the stewardship values, traditions, and governance of Indigenous communities. Some Tribal Nations operate formal outdoor recreation programs, permit systems, or tourism and cultural offices that manage activities such as fishing, hunting, camping, special events, and guided cultural experiences. Opportunities, rules, and expectations vary by Nation and by place, and are shaped by each Tribe's sovereignty, management goals, and relationships with neighboring communities and land management agencies. Together, these tribally managed lands and programs are an essential part of Montana's outdoor recreation landscape and help sustain living cultural connections to the land and water.

### Recreation Spotlight: The Bison Range



The Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) Bison Range is a nationally significant example of Indigenous leadership in both conservation and recreation. Located on the Flathead Indian Reservation, the Bison Range encompasses more than 18,000 acres of grasslands, wetlands, and forested foothills that support a thriving bison herd and diverse wildlife populations. In 2022, CSKT regained full management authority of the Bison Range, becoming the first Tribal Nation to oversee a former National Wildlife Refuge. Today, the Bison Range offers visitors opportunities for wildlife viewing, photography, hiking, and cultural education. CSKT has integrated interpretive programming that shares the area's history, cultural significance, and ecological stewardship practices, providing a richer and more inclusive recreation experience. The success of the Bison Range demonstrates how tribal management can enhance both conservation outcomes and recreation opportunities while honoring cultural heritage. It also highlights the importance of partnerships, shared stewardship, and Indigenous leadership in shaping Montana's outdoor recreation future.

## 2.2 SUPPLY OF RECREATION RESOURCES

Understanding the current state of Montana’s outdoor recreation facilities is critical for identifying opportunities and challenges in meeting the needs of residents and visitors. This section provides an overview of the state’s facilities, evaluates their condition and quantity, and highlights key gaps that must be addressed to enhance recreation opportunities for all.

### Comprehensive Summary of Facilities

In winter 2023–24, FWP conducted the Statewide Facility and Outdoor Recreation Needs Survey, an online survey of local, state, federal, school, and Tribal recreation facility managers across Montana which aimed to better understand the quantity and quality of outdoor recreation facilities and areas, as well as future needs from the manager perspective. A total of 212 managers were contacted by email, and 98 responded, resulting in a 46% response rate. Because of this relatively low response rate, results should be interpreted with caution and are best viewed as indicative of broad patterns rather than statistically representative of all recreation providers in Montana.

Survey respondents were asked to evaluate 64 different types of outdoor recreation facilities and natural areas. They reported whether the quantity of each facility in their jurisdiction was adequate, whether more were needed, or whether they did not have the facility but would like to. Managers also assessed facility condition on a scale from poor to very good. Together, these responses provide a useful snapshot of statewide facility supply, condition, and priorities for improvement.

#### Top Facilities/Areas to Increase

- ADA land-based areas/facilities
- ADA trails/street/road facilities
- ADA/adaptive sports facilities
- ADA water-based facilities
- Walking/jogging/biking paths

#### Top Desired Facilities/Areas

- Graveled roads
- Equestrian trails
- Ice fishing access
- Picnic areas
- Campgrounds with hookups

#### Top Adequate Facilities/Areas

- Horseshoe pits
- Pickleball courts
- Outdoor pools
- Outdoor ice rinks
- Archery ranges

## Assessment of Recreation Facility Quantity and Quality

The survey results offer detailed insight into which facilities managers feel should be prioritized for construction, renovation, or maintenance. Accessibility emerged as a prominent theme. All ADA facility types included in the survey were identified as being in insufficient supply or as facilities that managers did not currently have but would like to provide. At least half of respondents also rated the condition of existing ADA facilities as poor or fair. These findings point to a clear need to both expand ADA-compliant facilities statewide and invest in upgrading those already in place.

### Top Facilities/Areas in Good/Very Good Condition

- Picnic areas
- Playgrounds
- Football fields
- Fishing areas
- Big game hunting areas
- Natural or Wild Areas

### Top Facilities/Areas in Fair/Poor Condition

- Graveled roads
- ADA trails/street/road facilities
- Walking/jogging/biking paths
- Outdoor basketball courts
- Heritage/historic sites

Managers also reported concerns about several facilities in the trail, street, and road category. Bike lanes on roads, walking/jogging/biking paths, and interpretive trails were frequently identified as being low in both quantity and condition, suggesting strong support for directing additional resources toward these facility types. At least 50% of managers identified 12 facilities as being in insufficient supply. In contrast, 26 facility types were more often rated in poor or fair condition than in good or very good condition. This pattern indicates that while some facility types are lacking in number, many others exist but require significant repair or modernization. These are important considerations for providers as they determine where to prioritize limited maintenance and development funds.



## Emerging Needs and Issues

Managers were also asked to identify their top facility needs for the next five years. Responses spanned a wide range of facilities and were grouped into categories for analysis. Campgrounds and outdoor lodging emerged as the most frequently cited need, reflecting ongoing demand for overnight accommodations across the state. Aquatic facilities, sports facilities, ADA accessibility, and addressing deferred maintenance were also commonly identified as high-priority needs.

### Top Facilities Need in the Next 5 Years

- Campgrounds/outdoor lodging
- Trails and paths
- Aquatic facilities
- Sports facilities
- ADA accessibility
- Deferred maintenance

To better understand what shapes decision-making, the survey asked managers how influential various themes and issues are when considering facility improvements. Youth and future generations received the highest average influence rating, followed by aging populations, children in nature, and the health benefits of recreation. These closely related themes underscore the importance of providing recreation opportunities that serve people across the lifespan and support long-term physical and mental health. Issues such as training the future recreation workforce, nonresident users, and providing opportunities for military veterans received lower average influence scores. This suggests they currently play a smaller role in facility-related decisions, though they remain important considerations for some providers.

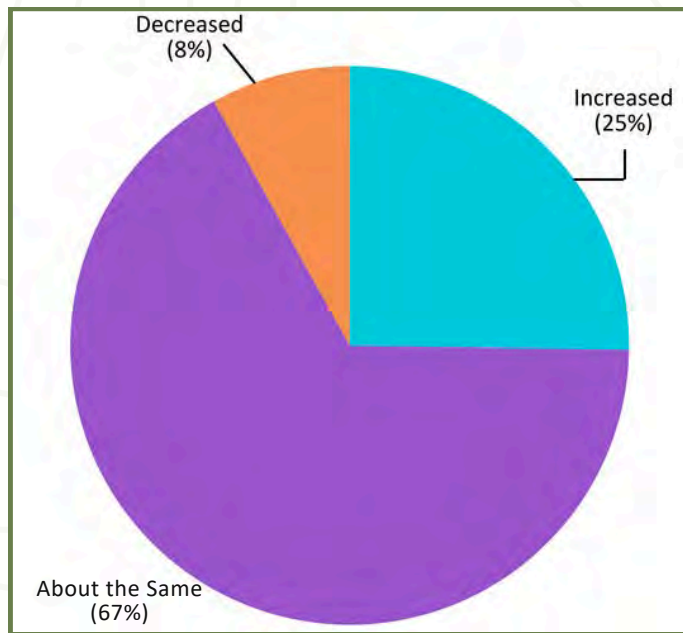
### Most Influential Themes/Issues

- Youth and future generations
- Aging population
- Children in nature
- Health benefits of recreation

### Least Influential Themes/Issues

- Training future recreation workforce
- Nonresident users
- Providing opportunities for military veterans
- Recreation data for justification needs

Figure 3: Funding from Public Tax Allocation over the Past 5 Years



## Funding

Funding for recreation remains a central concern for many providers. When asked to compare their current level of public tax funding to five years ago, a majority of respondents reported that their funding had stayed the same, while more than one-third indicated it had decreased and a smaller share reported increases. These responses highlight the challenges agencies face in maintaining and improving facilities with constrained or declining public funding.

The survey also explored collaboration and diversified funding sources as strategies to address these challenges. More than 70% of managers indicated they were most likely to collaborate in the next five years with nonprofit organizations, state land management agencies, county governments, and municipal agencies. This underscores the important role nonprofits play in providing outdoor recreation opportunities and the extensive coordination that already occurs among public land management agencies at all levels of government.

Managers reported drawing on a variety of funding sources over the previous five years. City fund allocations were the most commonly used source, reflecting the makeup of survey respondents, followed closely by public grants, state fund allocations, and donations from individuals. Many agencies rely on a blend of grants, donations, and local appropriations to sustain operations, maintain facilities, and pursue new projects.



### Top Collaborators over the Next 5 Years

- Nonprofit organizations
- State land management agencies
- County agencies
- Municipal agencies
- Federal land management agencies

Overall, the Statewide Facility and Outdoor Recreation Needs Survey highlights statewide needs for improved accessibility, particularly ADA land-based and water-based facilities, expanded trail and pathway networks, and investments in repairing or upgrading aging infrastructure. These findings directly informed the SCORP's goals related to access, connectivity, and facility modernization in Chapter 4 and provide a foundation for future coordination among recreation providers.



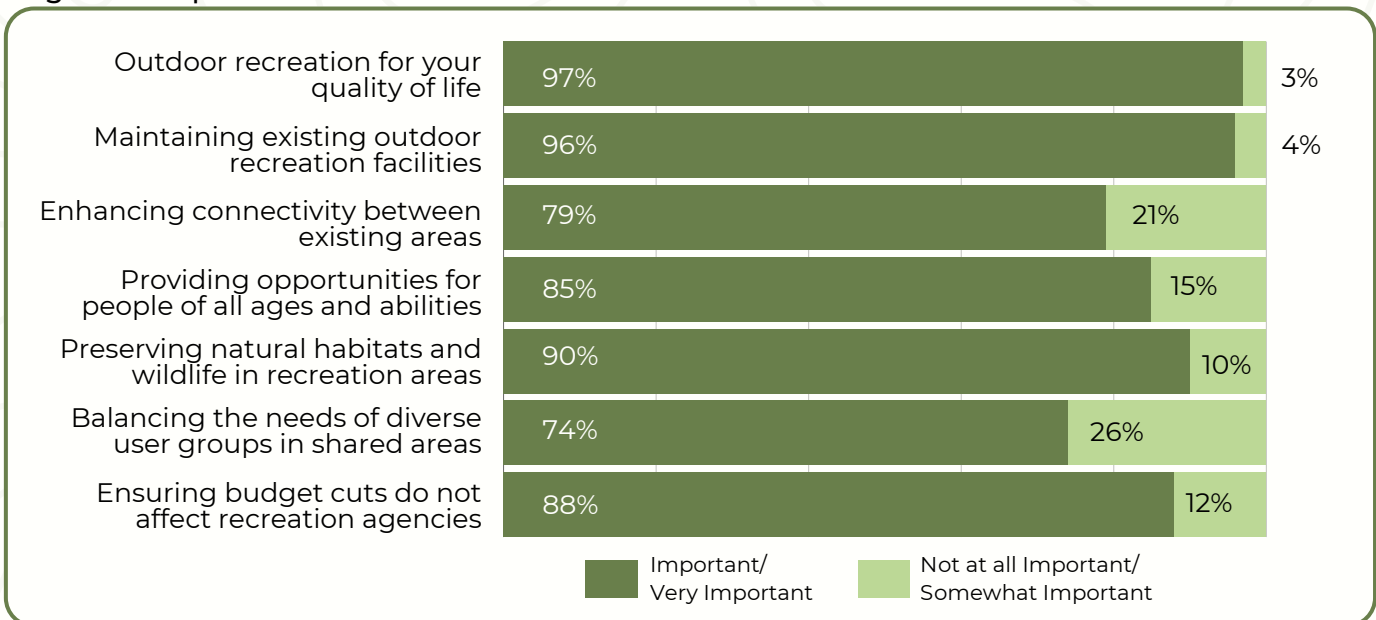
## 2.3 PARTICIPANT USAGE AND PERCEPTIONS

Outdoor recreation preferences among users are continually evolving. To better understand current patterns of use and perceptions, FWP implemented the Montana Public Outdoor Recreation Use Survey, an online survey of Montana residents conducted in winter 2023–2024. The survey was designed to estimate residents’ outdoor recreation activities, measure use of outdoor recreation facilities and areas, assess overall quality of outdoor recreation experiences, and identify resident perceptions of recreation resources across the state.

### Public Outdoor Recreation Use Survey

In winter 2023–2024, FWP administered the Montana Public Outdoor Recreation Use Survey, an online survey of Montana residents. A total of 2,385 residents participated, representing 53 of Montana’s 56 counties and more than 99% of the state’s population. Respondents were asked about the importance of various components of outdoor recreation in their lives. Montana residents reported that outdoor recreation plays a major role in their quality of life, with less than 1% indicating that it is “not at all important.” The survey results show that large majorities view maintaining existing outdoor recreation facilities, enhancing connectivity between recreation areas, providing opportunities for people of all ages and abilities, preserving natural habitats and wildlife in recreation areas, balancing the needs of diverse user groups in shared spaces, and ensuring that budget cuts do not affect recreation agencies as important or very important. Collectively, these findings underscore the central role outdoor recreation plays for most Montanans and highlight broad support for investment in recreation opportunities and management.

Figure 4: Importance Level of Outdoor Recreation



The survey also asked Montanans about their household use of 64 different outdoor recreation facilities and areas over the previous 12 months. Fewer than 1% of respondents reported that their household did not participate in any form of outdoor recreation during that time. The most frequently used facilities included hiking trails, walking, jogging, and biking paths, river access points and boat launches, and natural or wild areas. Specialized facilities such as ADA-accessible facilities, powwow and dance arbors, horseshoe pits, and equestrian trails were used by fewer than 10% of households, suggesting that while these facilities serve important roles for specific user groups, overall use is more concentrated in general-purpose trails, access sites, and natural areas.

### **Top Facilities and Recreation Areas Used by Montana Households**

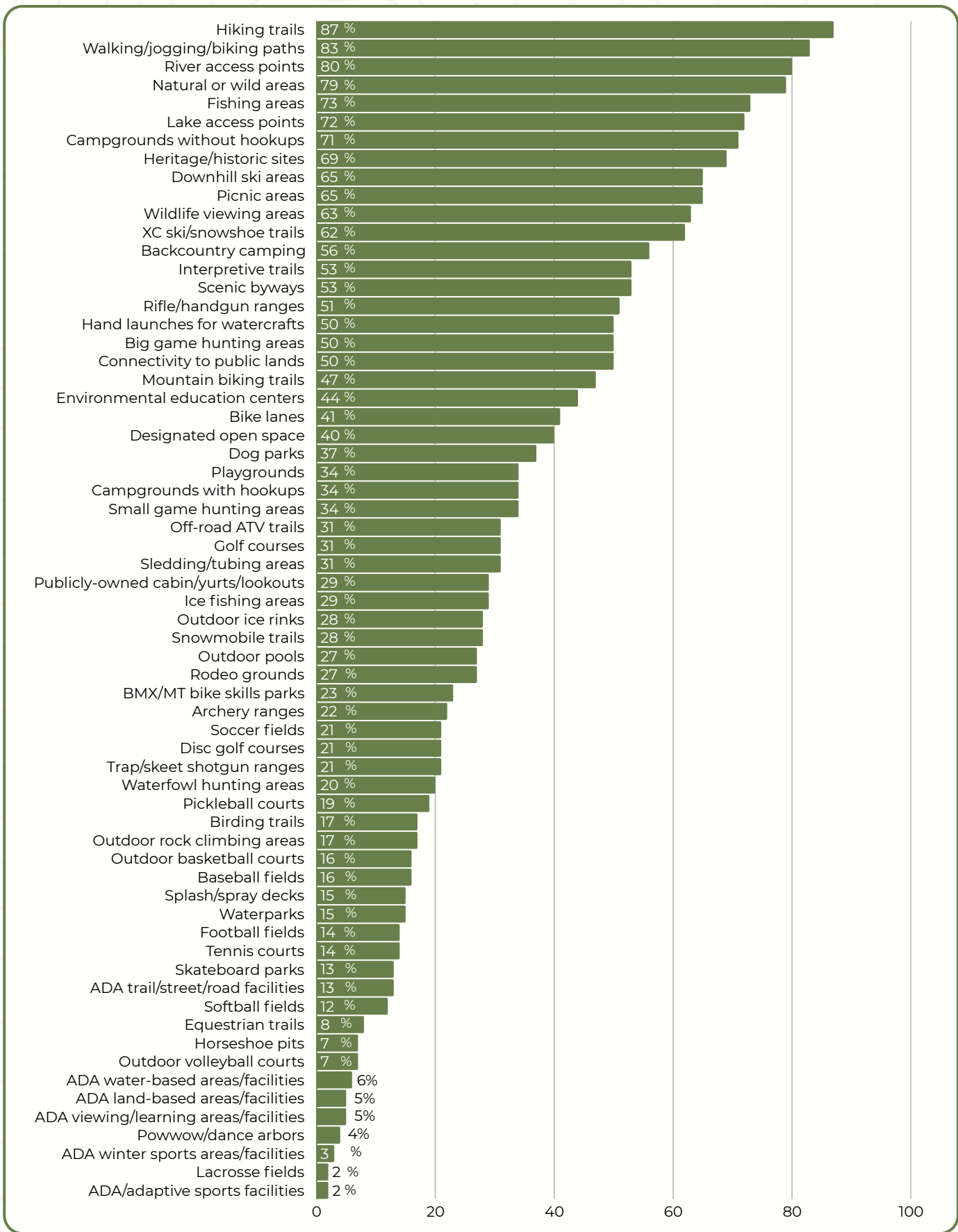
- Hiking trails
- Walking/jogging/biking paths
- River access points and boat launches
- Natural or wild areas
- Fishing areas
- Lake access points and boat launches
- Campgrounds without hookups
- Heritage/historic sites
- Downhill ski areas
- Picnic areas
- Wildlife viewing areas
- XC ski/snowshoe trails

### **Top Public Lands and Waters Used by Montana Households**

- National forests
- City parks
- Rivers and streams
- BLM lands
- County parks
- State parks

Survey respondents were also asked how often their household members use different types of public lands and waters in Montana. The results indicate that Montanans regularly recreate across a wide variety of land types. National forests receive the highest level of use, followed by city parks, rivers and streams, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands, and county parks. Specifically, 85% of households reported using national forest lands at least monthly, 79% reported monthly use of rivers and streams, 69% reported monthly use of city parks, 63% reported monthly use of BLM lands, and 55% reported monthly use of county parks. These findings reinforce the importance of both large landscape-scale public lands and close-to-home local parks in supporting everyday recreation.

Figure 5: Use of Recreation Facilities/Areas by Montana Households (%)



In addition to documenting use, the survey asked respondents to assess the need for more, fewer, or about the same number of each facility type. The top statewide need reported by residents was increased connectivity between communities and public lands, which received the highest share of responses indicating a need to increase. This was followed closely by the need for additional bike lanes, more walking, jogging, and biking paths, and more natural or wild areas. Open space designations, campgrounds without hookups, sledding and tubing areas, and rifle and handgun ranges were also identified as important needs at the statewide level. It is important to note that for many facility types, a substantial number of respondents indicated they had no opinion, which may reflect varying levels of familiarity or use.

### Top Statewide Facility Needs

- Connectivity between communities and public lands
- Bike lanes
- Walking/jogging/biking paths
- Natural or wild areas
- Open space designation
- Campgrounds without hookups
- Sledding/tubing areas
- Rifle/handgun ranges

### Top Barriers to Participation

- Too crowded
- No time
- Ability to obtain permits
- Unclear rules/regulations
- Too expensive

Respondents were further asked about the barriers they encounter when accessing outdoor recreation opportunities. The most frequently identified barrier was crowding at recreation sites, particularly in popular areas and during peak seasons. Other commonly cited barriers included lack of time, difficulty obtaining permits, confusion regarding rules and regulations, and cost. These responses highlight that even when facilities and areas are available, a combination of social, administrative, and economic factors can limit participation for some residents.



Montana residents also expressed a high level of satisfaction with their outdoor recreation experiences. 67% of respondents rated the overall quality of their recreation experiences in the state as excellent. When asked about specific facility types, more than 35% of respondents rated their experiences at water-based, land-based, and snow-based facilities as excellent. In contrast, sports facilities and trail, street, and road facilities received comparatively lower ratings, with 77% and 74% of respondents, respectively, indicating that their experiences at those facilities were less than excellent. These results suggest that while most residents are very satisfied with many outdoor recreation experiences, there is room for improvement in certain facility categories.

Overall, the Public Outdoor Recreation Use Survey shows that Montanans are highly active in outdoor recreation and generally find that the state provides facilities and areas that meet their needs. At the same time, the findings highlight the importance of ensuring continued access to trail systems, national forests, streams, and lakes, which are used by more households than any other types of areas. Supporting multiple use and maintaining access to these lands and waters will continue to benefit Montana residents in the years ahead. Survey results are also analyzed at the regional level in Chapter 3: SCORP Regional Profiles. Although some regions had relatively small sample sizes and caution is warranted when interpreting regional patterns, these breakdowns offer additional insight into local facility use, needs, and perceptions that can inform statewide decision-making.



## 2.4 OUTDOOR RECREATION TRENDS AND ISSUES



This section examines the critical issues and emerging trends influencing Montana’s outdoor recreation landscape. From changing environmental conditions and resource management challenges to the rise of new recreational activities and the integration of technology, these factors are reshaping how outdoor spaces are accessed, used, and cared for. Addressing these trends requires solutions that balance demand for recreation with the need to conserve Montana’s natural, cultural, and wildlife resources. In some areas, increasing visitation is fragmenting habitat, concentrating use in sensitive riparian corridors and wetlands, and heightening the potential for recreation–wildlife conflicts. By understanding these issues, Montana can prioritize sustainable practices, equitable access, and infrastructure and management investments that avoid or mitigate resource impacts while helping ensure outdoor recreation remains a cornerstone of the state’s identity and economy for generations to come.

### KEY OUTDOOR RECREATION TRENDS

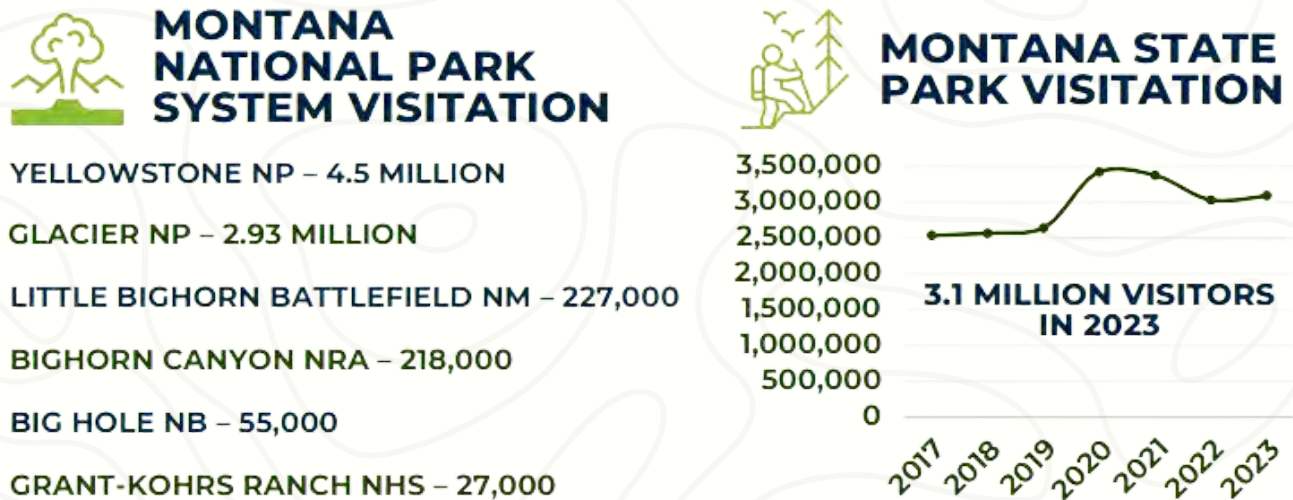
#### **Continued Growth in Outdoor Recreation Participation**

Outdoor recreation participation is increasing across Montana, mirroring national trends while reflecting Montana-specific patterns of use. According to the 2024 SCORP Public Outdoor Recreation Use Survey, 87% of Montana households reported using hiking trails and 83% used walking, jogging, or biking paths. Fishing, river access, camping, boating, and wildlife viewing also remain highly popular activities. Comparisons with data from the 2014–2018 SCORP show steady growth in hiking, biking, and paddle sports participation over time (ITRR, 2018). This increase has been further accelerated by shifts in lifestyle and recreation preferences during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, as more people turned to outdoor spaces for exercise, mental health, and safe social interaction.

At the state park level, visitation trends underscore this growth. The Montana State Parks system welcomed an estimated 3.1 million visitors in 2023, a 2.4% increase from 2022, a 17.4% increase over pre-pandemic levels (2019), and a 42% increase compared to 2013 (ITRR, 2023). Since 2019, visitation has increased at 27 state parks, despite regional fluctuations due to weather, infrastructure maintenance, and visitor capacity limits. Regions 1 and 4 together accounted for just under half of all state park visitation in 2023 and have experienced sustained growth over the past decade (ITRR, 2023).

National Park Service (NPS) sites in Montana continue to drive some of the highest recreation use numbers in the region. In 2023, Yellowstone National Park recorded 4.5 million visits and Glacier National Park recorded 2.93 million visits, keeping both among the most-visited parks in the United States even with crowd management measures such as Glacier’s vehicle reservation system and ongoing recovery from 2022 flood damage in Yellowstone (National Park Service, 2024). Other NPS units in Montana, such as Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument (227,000 visits) and Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area (218,000 visits), also draw substantial visitation annually (NPS, 2024).

Figure 6: Visitation at Montana National and State Parks (2023)



Source: ITRR, 2024

Montana residents also report increased recreation activity across a wide spectrum of public lands beyond state and national parks. Federally managed lands such as national forests and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands are heavily used for hunting, fishing, camping, and trail-based recreation. Water-based areas, including rivers, lakes, and reservoirs, are key destinations as well, particularly in Regions 1 and 3, where river corridors and lake systems support both local use and tourism.

IN 2023,

THE OUTDOOR  
RECREATION  
PARTICIPANT BASE  
GREW 4.1%

TO A RECORD  
**175.8 M**  
PARTICIPANTS:

**57.3%**  
OF ALL AMERICANS  
AGED SIX  
AND OLDER.

These trends align with broader national patterns of rising outdoor participation. The Outdoor Industry Association's 2023 Participation Trends Report found that the U.S. outdoor recreation participant base grew by 4.1% in 2023 to a record 175.8 million participants—57.3% of all Americans aged six and older (Outdoor Industry Association, 2023). The report notes that new participants are generally more diverse and more casual in their engagement, suggesting both opportunities and challenges for recreation providers as they work to maintain quality experiences and encourage long-term participation (OIA, 2023).

### **Rising Demand for Trails and Community Connectivity**

Montana residents consistently prioritize trail development and improved connectivity between communities and public lands. In the 2024 SCORP Public Outdoor Recreation Use Survey, the top statewide need identified by respondents was increased connectivity between communities and public lands (1,191 mentions), followed closely by demand for expanded bike lanes (1,159 mentions) and additional walking, jogging, and biking paths (1,065 mentions). These priorities were highlighted across nearly all regions, particularly Regions 1, 3, and 5, which include many of the state's fastest-growing communities.

This local emphasis mirrors national trends. The Rails-to-Trails Conservancy's 2023 report documents growing national demand for walkable, interconnected trail systems that serve both recreational and transportation purposes, noting that 29% of Americans believe trail networks would make it easier to walk and bike instead of drive and that 82% support the use of tax dollars to fund connected trail systems (Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, 2023).

Beyond community pathways, Montanans also value connections to larger regional and national trail systems. Montana is home to several iconic long-distance routes, including the Great American Rail-Trail and Continental Divide Trail, which provide opportunities for multi-day travel, regional connectivity, and tourism-related benefits. These broader systems complement local sidewalks, paths, and shared-use routes and underscore the importance of planning for both community-scale and long-distance trail networks as part of a cohesive statewide vision.

The economic benefits of trails are also substantial. Nationwide, local spending associated with the country's 2,218 rail-trails is estimated at \$10.6 billion annually, with potential growth up to \$21 billion (Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, 2023). In Montana, Helena's 80-mile trail system attracts more than 63,000 users each summer; visitors alone account for an estimated \$4 million in spending, supporting 60 jobs and generating \$185,000 in state and local tax revenue (Headwaters Economics, 2018).

Beyond economic impacts, trails contribute to physical and mental health. Research summarized by the National Park Service indicates that spending time in nature can reduce stress, calm anxiety, and lower the risk of depression (NPS, 2024). Outdoor exercise has also been linked to improved physical fitness compared to indoor activity, and the health cost savings from increased physical activity due to active transportation are currently estimated at \$20 billion annually, with potential growth to nearly \$92 billion.

These findings support integrating trails into community planning, prioritizing interconnected pathways that link neighborhoods to nearby natural areas, and addressing gaps in active transportation infrastructure. The 2026–2030 SCORP goals explicitly call for enhancing community-to-public-land connectivity, supporting long-distance and regional trail corridors, and expanding active transportation options in response to these needs.

### **Accessibility and Inclusive Recreation**

Enhancing accessibility for individuals with disabilities remains a critical priority for Montana’s recreation providers. SCORP survey data show that concerns about ADA-compliant trails, picnic areas, restrooms, and sports facilities have become significantly more pronounced over the past decade, underscoring the need for comprehensive action in the years ahead. Accessible outdoor recreation benefits people with disabilities, older adults, families with young children, and others with mobility-related needs, highlighting the importance of designing high-quality, inclusive facilities and trail experiences.

Several factors drive this growing focus on accessible recreation. Demographically, Montana’s population is aging; nearly one in four Montanans is projected to be over age 65 by 2030 (Montana Department of Commerce, 2023). As more residents experience age-related mobility or sensory challenges, communities recognize the importance of accessible outdoor infrastructure to support quality of life and active engagement.

Montana’s commitment to equitable and inclusive recreation has also grown. State and local providers are responding to requests from disability advocates and community organizations for greater accessibility. Programs such as Ability Montana’s adaptive skiing and fly-fishing initiatives, DREAM Adaptive Recreation’s mountain biking and watersports offerings, and Missoula’s universally accessible Silver Summit playground illustrate how local providers are expanding inclusive opportunities and fostering a culture of belonging.

Inclusive recreation infrastructure also strengthens economic and social vitality. Accessible outdoor spaces attract a wider range of visitors, including tourists and new residents seeking inclusive communities. These efforts align with statewide public health initiatives that emphasize reducing barriers to outdoor activity as a strategy for improving health outcomes for all Montanans (Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services, 2024).



FWP continues to advance accessibility within Montana State Parks and Fishing Access Sites by expanding adaptive equipment and improving infrastructure. Recent efforts include providing free-to-use all-terrain Action Trackchairs at Lone Pine State Park and Lake Elmo State Park, installing accessible fishing piers and ADA-compliant kayak launches, improving parking, expanding all-abilities trails at sites such as Bannack State Park, and increasing the number of wheelchair-accessible campsites. These initiatives, along with similar work by partners across the state, help ensure that individuals of all abilities can enjoy Montana’s outdoor spaces.

### **Accessibility Spotlight: Action Trackchairs at Montana State Parks**



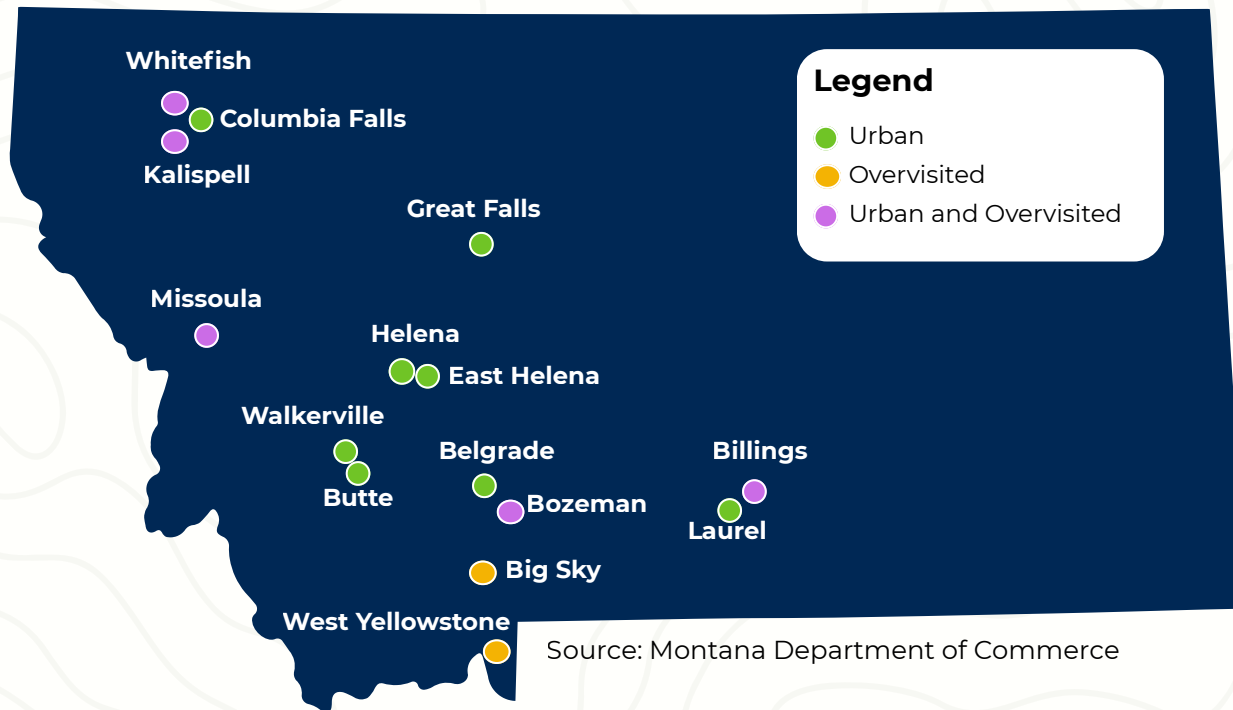
Montana State Parks Foundation’s Park Accessibility Project is expanding inclusive recreation opportunities in state parks across Montana. As part of this effort, free, reservable Action Track all-terrain wheelchairs are available at Lone Pine and Lake Elmo state parks for visitors who need them. These all-terrain chairs provide new ways for people with mobility-related disabilities to explore designated trails and overlooks. FWP aims to make trackchairs available at additional state parks in the future as funding allows. This program is supported by the Montana State Parks Foundation, the Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation, and Hydro Flask’s Parks for All program.

## Demographic Shifts and Urbanization

Montana is experiencing demographic changes that are reshaping outdoor recreation demand. Statewide population is projected to grow by approximately 17% by 2030, with much of that growth concentrated in urban areas such as Bozeman, Missoula, and the Flathead Valley (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023). These population centers face intensified demand on nearby trails, access points, and recreation facilities.

Housing affordability, lifestyle preferences, and the appeal of Montana's outdoor amenities are drawing many younger working-age adults and early retirees to the state's small cities and rural communities. Since 2010, Montana has experienced sustained net in-migration, particularly among adults ages 25–64. ITRR's Montana Expression study found that over 44% of Montana residents had lived at their current address for less than five years, highlighting dynamic population turnover even in rural and small-town communities (ITRR, 2021).

Map 7: Urban and Overvisited Designations in Montana



*The Montana Department of Commerce designated urban and overvisited places in Montana annually. Urban places are defined as either: 1) a census urban area with a population at or exceeding 30,000 people according to the most recent United States census; or 2) an incorporated city/town within 10 miles of one of those large urban areas. Rural is defined as "not urban". The 4% Lodging Facility Use Tax dataset determines if a place is over or undervisited, based on a 3-year average of a CVB's bed tax collection. If a CVB's bed tax collection is above the simple average of all CVBs' bed tax collections, then it is overvisited.*

While urban centers absorb much of this growth, rural communities near recreation hotspots—especially in western Montana—are also seeing population increases and heavier recreation use. Other rural areas, particularly in central and eastern Montana, continue to face population stagnation or decline coupled with aging demographics. For these communities, outdoor recreation and agritourism offer important opportunities for economic diversification. ITRR’s Montana Agritourism Opportunities and Challenges report notes that residents and visitors are increasingly seeking authentic, place-based experiences that connect them to working landscapes and local culture, such as farm stays, horseback riding, U-pick operations, and educational ranch tours (ITRR, 2024).

Only about 53% of Montana’s adult residents were born in the state; the remainder relocated from other parts of the United States or abroad (Montana Area Research Alliance, 2024). New residents frequently cite access to public lands, waterways, and outdoor amenities as a primary reason for moving to Montana, with more than 87% rating this factor as “very important” or “extremely important” in their decision (ITRR, 2021). This influx is contributing to increased participation in a variety of outdoor activities, further straining existing recreation infrastructure in some areas.

To respond to these shifts, recreation providers must plan for increased demand near urbanizing areas, support rural recreation and agritourism ventures, and implement visitor management strategies that mitigate overcrowding and resource impacts.

### **Rise of New Types of Recreation**

Montana’s outdoor recreation landscape continues to evolve as new activities and participant interests emerge. Recreation providers report sharp increases in electric biking (e-biking), pickleball, paddle sports, disc golf, trail running, and adaptive sports. These activities diversify how residents and visitors recreate and broaden the demographics of Montana’s outdoor users.





Electric bikes have seen rapid adoption, propelled by advances in technology, lower costs, and growing demand for inclusive, low-impact transportation options. According to the Outdoor Industry Association's 2023 Participation Trends Report, bicycling experienced the largest increase in participation of any outdoor activity nationwide, with e-bikes driving much of this growth (OIA, 2023). In Montana, e-bikes are increasingly common on urban trails, shared-use paths, and some rural trail systems. Many land managers and providers distinguish between pedal-assist e-bikes, which provide limited assistance while pedaling, and throttle-controlled e-bikes, which function more like other motorized vehicles. Management decisions about where different classes of e-bikes are allowed typically follow federal and state guidance and are tailored to local conditions, safety considerations, and resource protection needs. Their growing presence has prompted discussions around trail capacity, shared-use design, and evolving infrastructure needs. E-bikes are also expanding access for older adults, families, and those with mobility challenges, reflecting a wider societal shift toward accessible recreation.



Pickleball has similarly transformed community recreation. Nationally, participation grew by more than 50% between 2022 and 2023, with particularly strong interest among older adults and families seeking social, low-impact recreation (Sports & Fitness Industry Association, 2024). Communities across Montana are responding by constructing new pickleball courts and repurposing underused spaces to meet demand. This growth aligns with findings from the 2024 National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) Engagement Report, which shows strong public support for facilities that promote wellness, social connection, and multigenerational participation (NRPA, 2024).

## **Wildlife Viewing Spotlight: Montana Field Guide**

The Montana Field Guide is a free online resource developed by the Montana Natural Heritage Program and Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks that provides photos, identification tips, range maps, conservation status, and habitat information for Montana's plants, animals, lichens, and ecological systems. One of its standout features is the ability to build custom, printable PDF field guides: users can select species of interest and create tailored guides for a specific park, trail system, region, or taxonomic group to take



into the field. Recreation providers can use the Montana Field Guide to support wildlife viewing programs, interpretive walks, volunteer trainings, school field trips, and community science projects, helping visitors connect more deeply with local species and encouraging long-term stewardship of Montana's landscapes. Learn more at [fieldguide.mt.gov](https://fieldguide.mt.gov).

More broadly, a shift is underway toward flexible, accessible, community-oriented recreation. The U.S. Forest Service's 2020 Resources Planning Act Assessment forecasts continued growth through 2060 in close-to-home, nature-based activities that require minimal specialized skills or equipment (U.S. Forest Service, 2020). The SCORP Public Outdoor Recreation Use Survey echoes this trend, identifying increasing interest in paddle sports, casual biking, wildlife viewing, and trail-based recreation, particularly among younger residents, newcomers, and diverse participant groups (ITRR, 2024). Adaptive recreation opportunities are also expanding as demand for inclusive outdoor experiences grows.

Technology is both driving and responding to these changes. Mobile apps, digital trail guides, navigation tools compatible with e-bikes, and social media platforms influence how recreationists discover, plan, and share outdoor experiences. For many participants, especially younger generations, technology enhances safety, trip planning, and engagement rather than detracting from time spent outdoors.

These evolving patterns highlight the importance of adaptive planning, flexible infrastructure, and inclusive management approaches. Recreation providers will need to monitor emerging activities, address infrastructure and policy gaps, and create spaces that accommodate both traditional and new forms of recreation.

## EMERGING OUTDOOR RECREATION CHALLENGES

### Overcrowding

Overcrowding has emerged as one of the most pressing outdoor recreation issues in Montana. In the SCORP Public Outdoor Recreation Use Survey, residents identified crowding as the primary barrier to participation, ranking it above cost, transportation, and facility availability. Overcrowding also appeared frequently in open-ended survey responses, underscoring both its prevalence and the intensity of public concern.

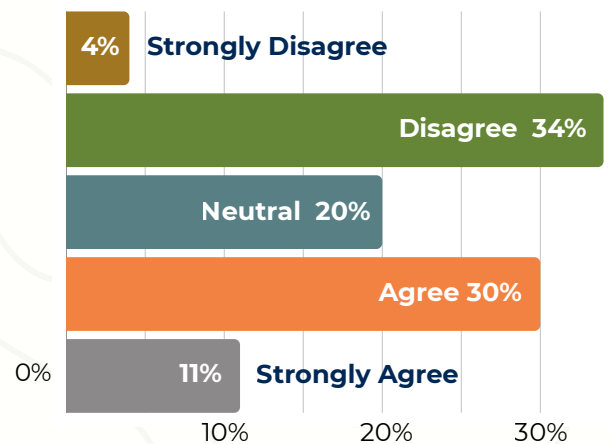
The challenge is especially acute in western Montana, where population growth, tourism, and increased local use converge. Residents in regions such as Glacier Country, Yellowstone Country, and the Flathead Valley report significantly higher concerns about crowding than those in central and eastern Montana, where lower population densities and fewer major recreation destinations result in less pressure on outdoor spaces (ITRR, 2023). Glacier National Park, for example, recorded its second-highest visitation in 2024, surpassing 3.2 million visitors and experiencing record-breaking use during the shoulder seasons of May and September, which placed additional strain on park infrastructure beyond the traditional summer peak (NPS, 2024). Nearby destinations such as Flathead Lake and trail networks around Bozeman and Missoula have also experienced increasing congestion, leading to environmental impacts, higher maintenance needs, and diminished visitor satisfaction.

Perceptions of overcrowding are influenced by experience and expectations. Longtime residents, many of whom recall decades of lower visitation, may perceive even moderate increases in use as significant, while newer residents and visitors, especially those from more densely populated areas, may still view Montana's sites as relatively uncrowded. The Montana Resident Report (2024) found that 39% of residents identified crowding and capacity as their most significant tourism-related concerns, and nearly half believe their communities become overcrowded during the height of the summer recreation season (ITRR, 2023).

Figure 7: Perceptions of Overcrowding Due to Tourists

### STATE BECOMING OVERCROWDED DUE TO TOURISM

Source: ITRR, 2023



Addressing overcrowding requires adaptive strategies that go beyond simply counting visitors. Recreation providers are exploring approaches such as capacity limits, timed-entry systems, infrastructure upgrades, and expanded education and outreach. These tools aim to alleviate congestion, safeguard resources, and maintain the quality of outdoor experiences for all users.

### Deferred Maintenance and Aging Infrastructure

Deferred maintenance remains a critical challenge across Montana’s outdoor recreation infrastructure. SCORP manager surveys consistently identify infrastructure maintenance as a top concern, reflecting widespread recognition among recreation providers that many facilities are aging and in deteriorating condition. According to the U.S. Department of the Interior, Montana faces a

*“Our biggest issue is increasing use of our facilities and not enough money to keep up maintaining or improving them. We are slowly catching up with our maintenance backlog, but it’s hard to anticipate future costs and plan accordingly.”*

—A Montana Public Land Manager

combined deferred maintenance and repair backlog of approximately \$531 million across federal land management agencies, including the BLM and NPS. This backlog spans roads, trails, dams, and a wide range of recreational facilities. The BLM’s Montana/Dakotas region alone allocated more than \$6 million in FY 2024 for recreation, roads, and dam repair projects (U.S. Department of the Interior, 2024). State parks are similarly affected; Montana’s state park system has reported a maintenance backlog of roughly \$23 million, with aging facilities in need of significant repairs and upgrades.

Federal initiatives such as the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) have begun to address these needs. GAOA’s Legacy Restoration Fund has supported projects in Montana including restoration of historic cabins in the Custer-Gallatin National Forest and critical infrastructure repairs in Glacier National Park (NPS, 2024). However, these investments address only a portion of the overall maintenance backlog.

To manage and reduce deferred maintenance, recreation providers are encouraged to pursue dedicated funding streams, prioritize maintenance schedules, and leverage grant programs such as the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and the Recreational Trails Program (RTP). Partnerships with organizations such as the Montana Conservation Corps can also provide valuable volunteer labor and conservation project support. Addressing maintenance needs is essential to ensuring that facilities remain safe, functional, and welcoming.



**13%** of MT  
public land managers identified **deferred maintenance** as their **#1** challenge

## Recreation Access Challenges

While Montana is renowned for its abundant public lands and outdoor heritage, equitable access to recreation opportunities across the state is increasingly challenged by a range of factors. Changes in land management practices, geographic disparities in public land distribution, and evolving patterns of land ownership have complicated what access looks like for many residents and visitors.

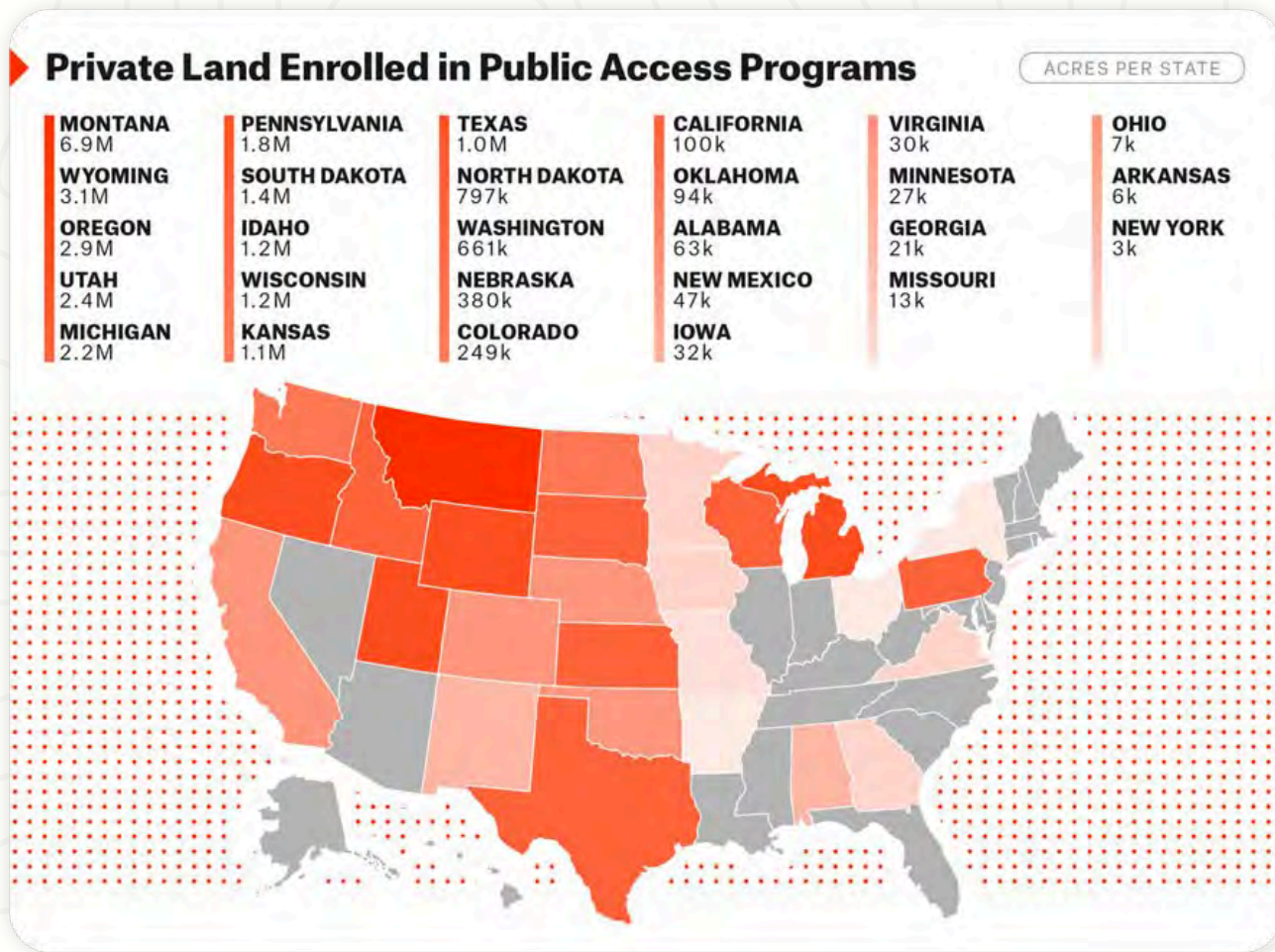
A growing concern among Montanans is the loss of access to public lands that were historically open for recreation. In many areas, roads and trails managed by federal agencies, particularly the U.S. Forest Service, have been closed, gated, or decommissioned due to maintenance backlogs, habitat protection initiatives, or resource management decisions. While these actions often serve important conservation goals, they contribute to perceptions of shrinking access among residents who have long relied on these routes for hunting, hiking, camping, and fishing.

Geographic disparities further shape access. Western Montana is characterized by extensive national forests, wilderness areas, and state parks, offering relatively robust access to public lands. In contrast, eastern Montana's landscapes are dominated by large private holdings. In these regions, recreationists are often dependent on private land access to pursue activities like hunting and fishing.

FWP's access programs play a central role in addressing these gaps. As of 2024, the Block Management Program enrolls more than 6.8 million acres of private land for managed public hunting and provides access corridors to over 618,000 acres of otherwise inaccessible public land. Complementary programs such as Public Access Land Agreements (PALA) and Private Land Fishing Access Agreements (PLFA) have expanded non-hunting recreation opportunities, negotiating public easements across private lands to lakes, streams, and trailheads. These programs demonstrate the essential role of innovative public-private partnerships in maintaining and expanding recreation access.



Map 8: Private Land Enrolled in Public Access Programs (National)



Source: OnX: Private Land Public Access Report

Montana’s leadership in public-private collaboration has received national recognition. OnX’s Private Land Public Access Report highlights Montana as a model for expanding outdoor recreation through access programs such as Block Management, which balance private property rights with public recreation demand (OnXmaps.com, 2024). Ongoing program challenges include uneven awareness of access programs, user confusion about permission systems, and localized concerns about crowding on popular enrolled lands.

Transportation barriers also limit recreation access, particularly for residents of rural areas without public transit or reliable roads to recreation sites. For some communities, recreation opportunities require long travel distances, creating additional inequities even where land access technically exists. As Montana’s population grows and diversifies, ensuring consistent, reliable, and equitable access will be critical to maintaining the state’s outdoor traditions and quality of life.



## Montana's Changing Environment

Montana's outdoor recreation landscape is increasingly influenced by environmental risks that affect the availability, quality, and sustainability of recreation opportunities. Drought, wildfire, reduced snowpack, and habitat changes are presenting complex challenges for both land managers and recreationists.

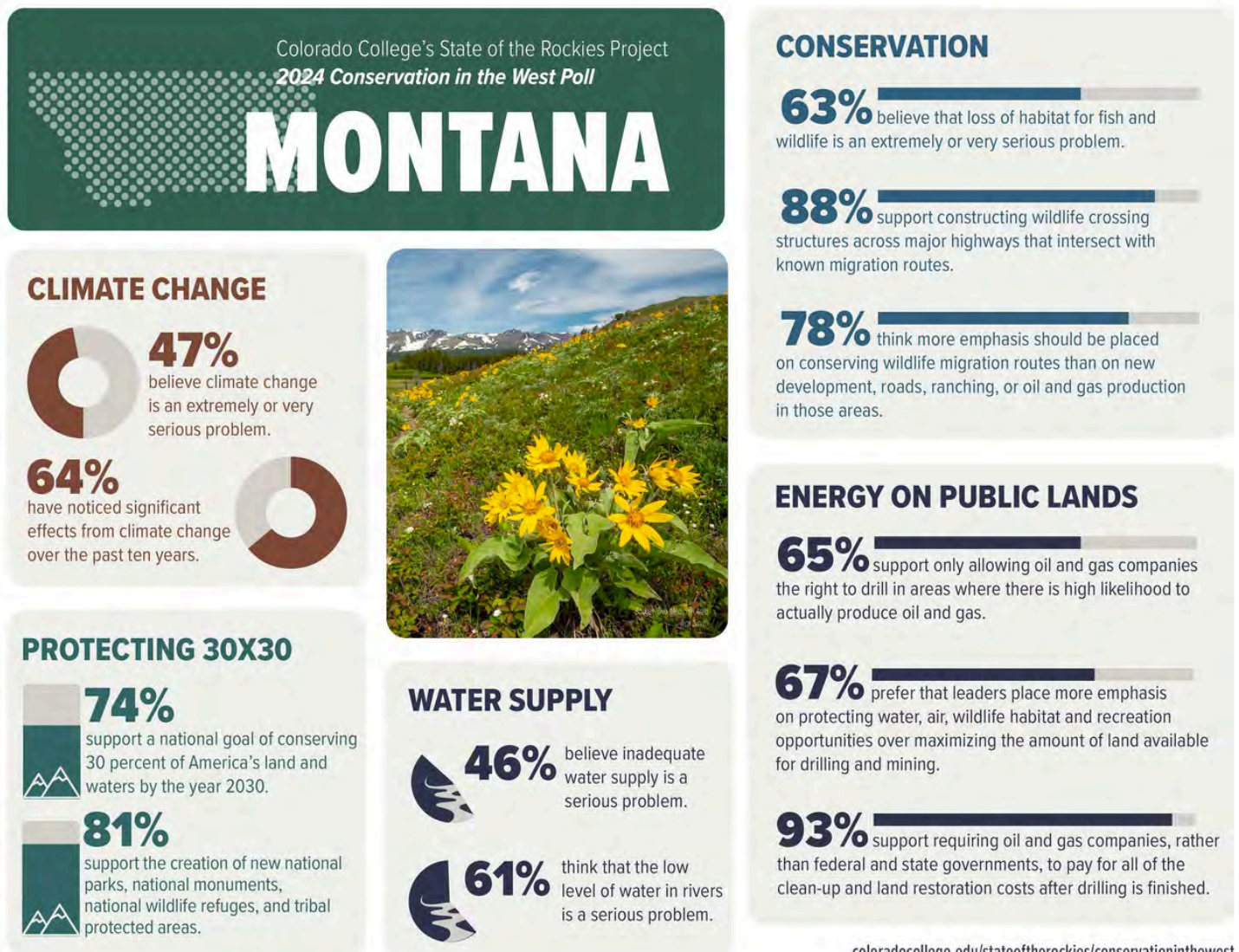
Wildfire seasons have become longer and more intense, resulting in expanded trail and road closures, degraded air quality, and heightened safety concerns near popular destinations. In 2024, more than 2,100 wildfires burned over 157,000 acres across the state, underscoring the growing impact of fire on recreation access and infrastructure (Headwaters Economics, 2024). Smoke has also increasingly reduced visibility and air quality, altering visitor experiences and deterring use during peak summer months.

Drought conditions compound these challenges. Persistent low streamflows and elevated water temperatures have prompted more frequent angling restrictions to protect aquatic species, especially Montana's cold-water fisheries. "Hoot owl" restrictions, which limit fishing to cooler morning hours during periods of high water temperatures, have become a common tool for sustaining fish populations and maintaining long-term angling opportunities. The term "hoot owl" originated in early 20th-century logging, where work ceased in the hottest, driest afternoon hours to prevent forest fires. Today, it symbolizes a growing trend of adapting recreation patterns to environmental realities.

Declining snowpack and shifting precipitation patterns are altering winter recreation. The 2024 statewide snowpack reached record lows, reducing the reliability of skiing, snowmobiling, and other snow-dependent activities and affecting water availability into summer (Montana Climate Assessment, 2024). Wildlife and habitat changes, including shifting migration patterns and altered species distributions, add complexity to wildlife management and recreation planning.

Recreation providers are responding to these risks with adaptive management strategies, including fire-resistant infrastructure, investments in recreation opportunities less dependent on specific seasonal conditions, and participation in forest health and watershed restoration projects. FWP and other land managers also rely on seasonal forecasting and user education to balance conservation needs with recreation access. Public opinion strongly supports these approaches: the 2024 Conservation in the West Poll found that Montanans overwhelmingly support protecting public lands that are essential to the state’s economy and quality of life (Colorado College, 2024).

Figure 8: Resident Opinions on Conservation in Montana



Source: Colorado College's State of the Rockies Project

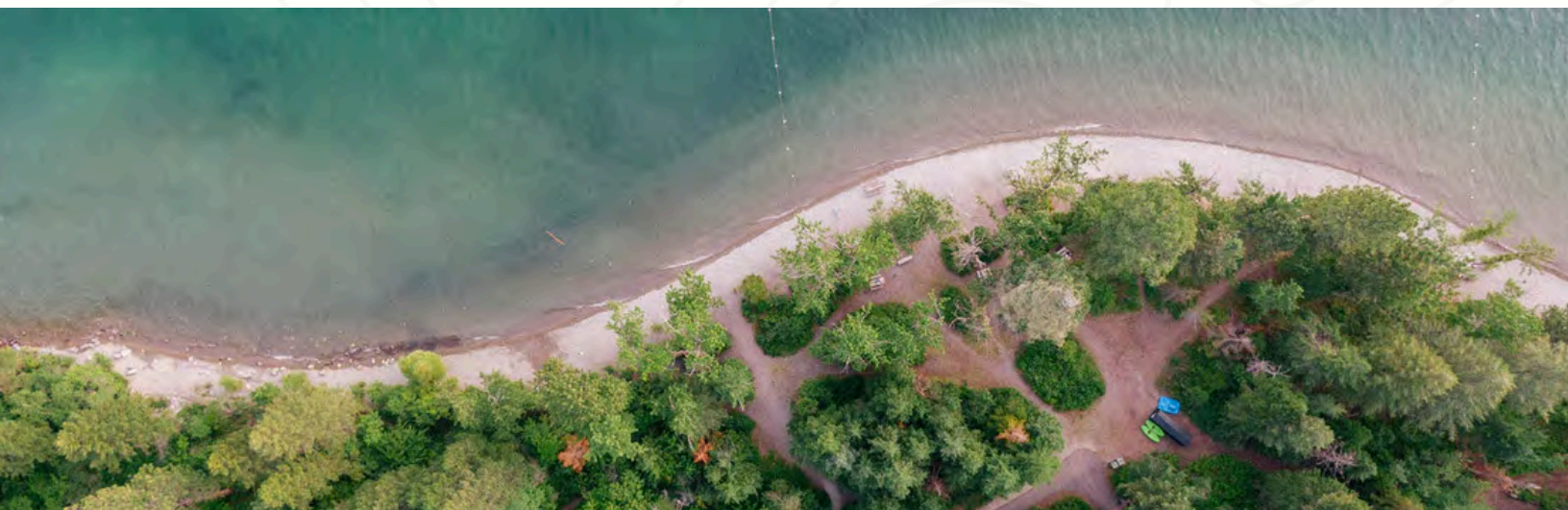
## Conflicts Between User Groups

As outdoor recreation participation and diversity increase, conflicts between user groups have become more common. Multi-use trails are frequent points of tension, where hikers, mountain bikers, horseback riders, and motorized users share routes with differing speeds, expectations, and values. Montana's rivers are similarly dynamic, bringing together anglers, floaters, paddlers, and motorized watercraft and occasionally leading to crowding, safety concerns, and competition for space.

Feedback from SCORP regional workshops highlighted widespread concern about rising recreation-related tensions. Participants noted that while Montana's outdoor spaces have historically accommodated a wide variety of uses, higher participation rates and the rapid expansion of new activities have made misunderstandings and frustrations more common. Many emphasized the need for increased education about responsible recreation behaviors and shared stewardship, and expressed a strong preference for voluntary compliance and outreach rather than restrictive rules whenever possible.

These dynamics add complexity to site management. As use patterns change, maintaining safe, enjoyable experiences increasingly requires thoughtful trail and facility design, clear communication of rules and expectations, and ongoing engagement with diverse user groups. Without proactive efforts to address user tensions, unmanaged conflicts risk escalating into safety concerns, resource degradation, or public pressure for restrictive policies.

As Montana's outdoor recreation continues to evolve, promoting a culture of respect, stewardship, and shared responsibility will be essential to sustaining the quality and accessibility of the state's outdoor spaces. Programs such as Leave No Trace and Tread Lightly! can help foster a common set of principles across diverse user groups. Trailhead signage, public service announcements, and volunteer stewardship efforts reinforce these messages and provide practical guidance for reducing conflicts on trails, waterways, and public lands.



## Collaboration Spotlight: River Recreation Advisory Council



The 2024 River Recreation Advisory Council (RRAC) provides an example of how Montana is addressing user conflict challenges through collaboration. Formed to examine river recreation pressures, the RRAC brought together recreationists, landowners, and agency staff who developed data-informed recommendations focusing on education, outreach, voluntary compliance, and shared stewardship. The RRAC's work underscored that collaborative solutions involving the recreation community can effectively address conflict while preserving the values and access that Montanans care about.



## CHAPTER 3: REGIONAL PROFILES

Montana’s vast size and diverse landscapes mean that outdoor recreation needs, challenges, and opportunities vary significantly across the state. While this SCORP provides a unified vision and set of goals, understanding the unique trends and conditions in each region is essential for effective planning and resource allocation.

The seven regional profiles presented in this chapter highlight key demographic data, recreation preferences, facility needs, and barriers specific to each area. Together, they illustrate how statewide trends play out differently across Montana’s distinct regions and communities. These profiles are intended to help partners apply the SCORP’s statewide goals and recommendations in ways that reflect local conditions, rather than to establish separate regional plans or goals.

By examining these regional insights individually, land managers, policymakers, and partners can tailor strategies that respond to local priorities while still advancing Montana’s broader outdoor recreation goals. Collectively, the regional profiles provide a deeper understanding of Montana’s outdoor recreation landscape and support informed decision-making at both the local and statewide levels.

Map 9: SCORP Regions



## Regional Population and Demographic Trends

Population size and demographic trends play a significant role in shaping outdoor recreation demand. These factors vary widely not only between regions, but also from county to county. Understanding current population distribution and density provides valuable insight into the character of each region, while population projections help estimate future demand for recreation facilities and services.

Region 4 is Montana’s most populous region, home to more than 210,000 residents and including the cities of Great Falls and Helena. Despite its large population, the region’s extensive geographic area results in a relatively low population density. Region 2, which includes Missoula, has the highest population density in the state. Regions 6 and 7, located in eastern Montana, are the least populated. These predominantly rural regions, made up of small towns and communities, each have just over 50,000 residents. Regions 1, 2, 3, and 5 all have population densities higher than the statewide average of 7.93 people per square mile.

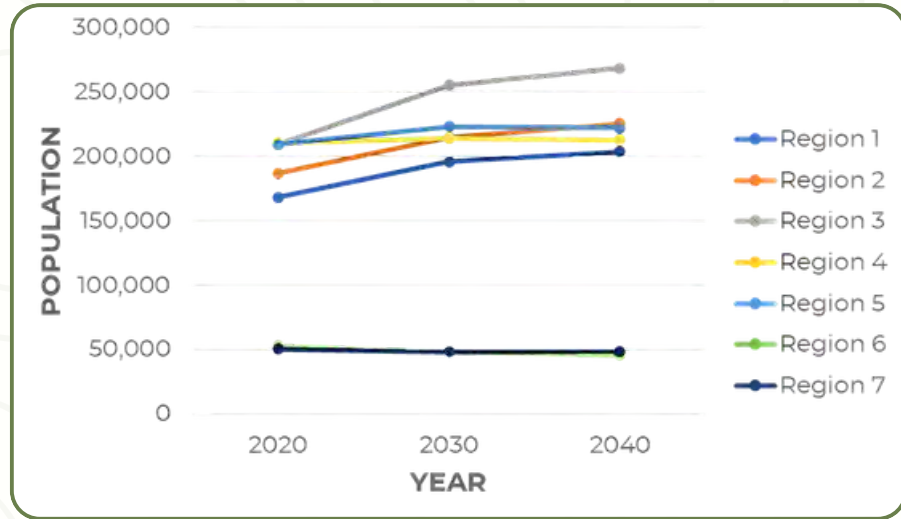
Between 2010 and 2020, Montana’s population grew by 9.7%. Region 1 experienced an 11.7% increase, while Region 3 saw the highest growth rate at 20.5%. All regions experienced population growth during this period, with the slowest increases occurring in Regions 6 and 7. Table 2 summarizes these regional population trends.

Table 2: Regional Population Trends

REGION	2010 POPULATION	2020 POPULATION	% CHANGE 2010-2020	POPULATION DENSITY (PEOPLE/SQ MI)	LARGEST CITY (2020 POPULATION)
STATEWIDE	990,730	1,087,211	9.7%	7.93	Billings
REGION 1	150,743	168,326	11.7%	12.56	Kalispell
REGION 2	173,407	187,000	7.8%	16.93	Missoula
REGION 3	173,483	209,075	20.5%	11.46	Bozeman
REGION 4	200,276	210,198	5.0%	6.81	Great Falls
REGION 5	191,699	209,123	9.1%	11.70	Billings
REGION 6	51,590	52,770	2.3%	2.06	Havre
REGION 7	49,532	50,719	2.4%	1.69	Miles City

Looking ahead to 2040, five of Montana’s seven regions are projected to continue growing. Regions 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 are expected to increase in population at varying rates, with Region 3 projected to maintain its position as the fastest-growing region overall. Region 1 is expected to surpass Region 4 in total population and is projected to grow at the fastest rate statewide, with a 28.4% increase between 2020 and 2040. In contrast, Regions 6 and 7 are the only regions expected to experience population declines. By 2040, Region 6 is projected to have the smallest population in Montana. Figure 9 illustrates projected regional population change over time.

Figure 9: Projected Population Change by Region



### Public Land by Region

Public lands make up nearly 45% of Montana’s total land area, with the remaining 55% under private ownership. Federal agencies manage close to 30% of the land statewide, while state, city, county, and tribal governments collectively oversee the remaining 15%. However, the distribution of public lands varies significantly across regions.

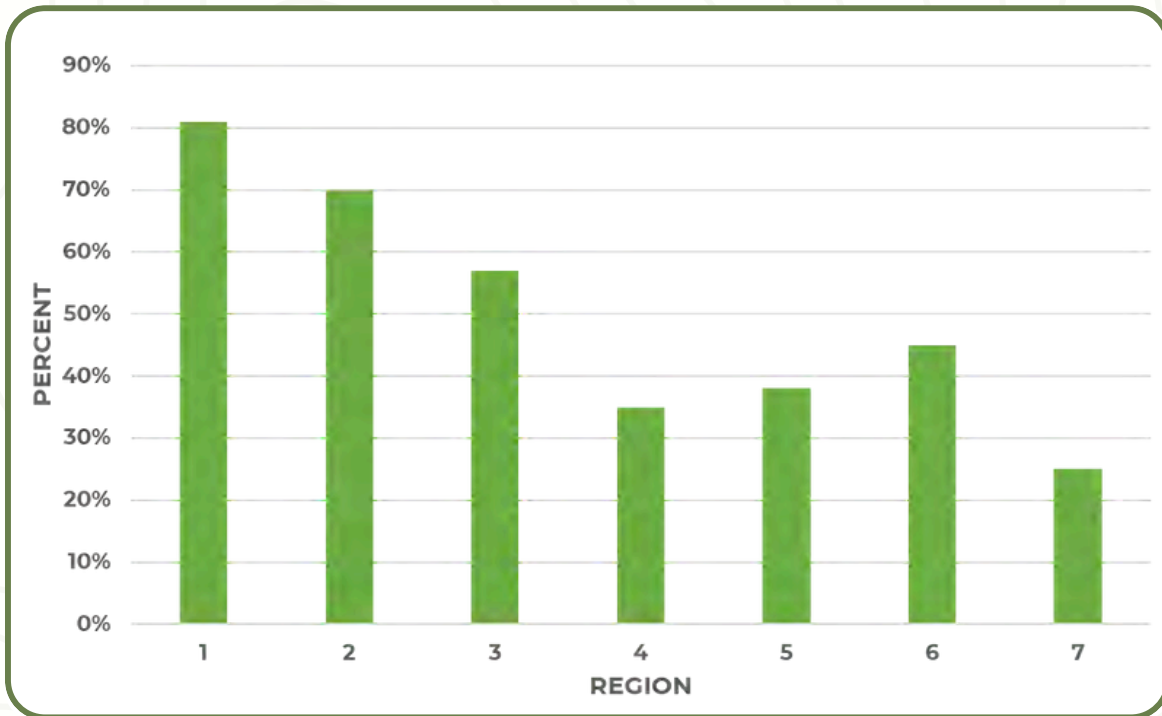
Region 1 contains the highest proportion of public land, with about 71% of its area, approximately 6.9 million acres, designated as public land. More than half of this acreage is managed by federal agencies. Region 2 also has a high concentration of public land, covering about 70% of its area, or roughly 4.9 million acres, again with the majority under federal management. Regions 2, 4, and 6 have the largest shares of state-managed lands, although state holdings still account for only about 7% of the total land area in each of these regions. At the opposite end of the spectrum, Region 7 has the lowest proportion of public land at just 25%.

Tribal lands also vary by region. Region 5 has the highest percentage of tribal lands at 22%, while Region 3 contains no tribal lands. These differences in public and tribal land distribution influence both the types of recreation opportunities available and how access is managed across regions. Figure 3 shows how public lands are distributed by region.

Table 3: Public Land by Region

REGION	TOTAL ACRES	PUBLIC LAND ACRES	% OF TOTAL LAND	% FEDERAL	% STATE	% TRIBAL	% LOCAL
STATEWIDE	94,030,774	41,867,357	45%	29%	6%	9%	<1%
REGION 1	8,553,391	6,904,476	81%	62%	4%	15%	<1%
REGION 2	7,063,096	4,948,331	70%	61%	7%	2%	<1%
REGION 3	11,668,293	6,617,969	57%	50%	6%	-	<1%
REGION 4	19,729,664	6,912,503	35%	20%	7%	8%	<1%
REGION 5	11,428,318	4,382,510	38%	12%	4%	22%	<1%
REGION 6	16,380,076	7,323,374	45%	20%	7%	17%	<1%
REGION 7	19,207,936	4,778,194	25%	17%	6%	1%	<1%

Figure 10: Public Land by Region (%)



Federal and state land ownership patterns also vary widely across Montana. The U.S. Forest Service manages the largest share of federal land, with Region 1 containing more than 4.58 million acres of national forest, followed closely by Region 3 with approximately 4.51 million acres. Region 6 has no national forest lands but contains the largest acreage managed by the Bureau of Land Management, totaling about 2.76 million acres. BLM lands also make up the most significant public landholdings in Region 7, where they cover more than 2.51 million acres. The National Park Service's largest landholdings in Montana are Glacier National Park in Region 1 and Yellowstone National Park in Region 3, which together account for most of the agency's acreage in the state. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service oversees more than 470,000 acres in Region 6, primarily within the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge, which also extends into Regions 4 and 7. The Bureau of Reclamation has the smallest federal land presence, managing roughly 153,000 acres statewide, most of which are located in Region 4.

Among state-managed lands, Region 2 contains the largest acreage managed by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, with more than 190,000 acres dedicated to recreation, wildlife habitat, and public access. State Trust lands administered by the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation are most prevalent in Region 4, which includes approximately 1.2 million acres. Regions 6 and 7 also have significant State Trust holdings, each containing just over 1.1 million acres. Table 4 provides an overview of public land ownership by land management agency.

Table 4: Ownership by Land Management Agencies (Acres)

AGENCY	STATEWIDE	REGION 1	REGION 2	REGION 3	REGION 4	REGION 5	REGION 6	REGION 7
USFS	17,092,630	4,580,079	4,140,571	4,515,094	2,443,708	886,606	-	526,572
NPS	1,188,580	634,723	1,327	159,500	362,723	30,082	209	16
BLM	8,001,320	-	158,415	1,137,260	968,321	456,879	2,761,154	2,519,291
USFWS	933,712	36,155	7,591	47,360	122,710	18,002	470,545	231,349
BOR	153,547	-	-	13,009	80,128	733	58,156	1,521
OTHER FEDERAL LAND	83,672	1,176	18	15,871	6,835	75	3,966	55,731
FWP	424,834	21,882	190,947	78,188	93,581	15,588	7,088	17,560
STATE TRUST LAND	5,185,980	332,983	253,002	619,343	1,243,404	460,570	1,117,354	1,159,324
OTHER STATE LAND	107,279	928	61,985	16,301	3,384	6,700	14,865	3,116

Table 5: Statewide Public Land Acreage 2013 vs. 2024

AGENCY	2013	2024
USFS	17,048,025	17,092,630
NPS	1,188,786	1,188,580
BLM	8,005,646	8,001,320
USFWS	1,042,994	933,712
BOR	250,088	153,547
OTHER FEDERAL LAND	82,057	83,672
FWP	405,817	424,834
STATE TRUST LAND	5,182,439	5,185,980

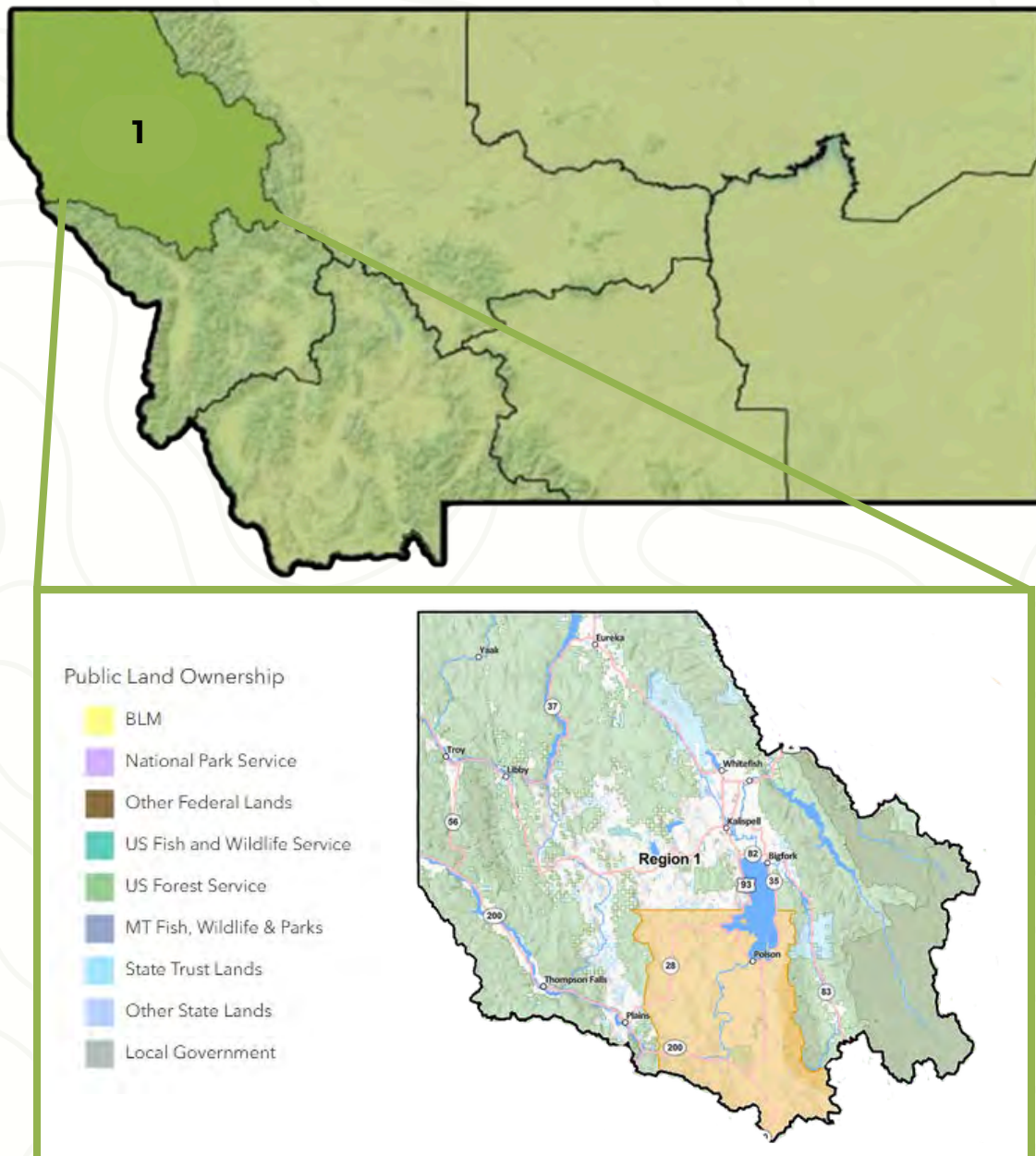
Over the past decade, the amount of federally and state-managed land in Montana has shifted. All federal agencies except the U.S. Forest Service experienced net decreases in acreage. The most significant reduction occurred on U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service lands, which declined by more than 109,000 acres. In contrast, state agencies saw modest increases in land ownership, with FWP adding approximately 19,000 acres and DNRC gaining about 3,500 acres. Table 5 compares statewide public land acreage in 2013 and 2024.



### 3.1 REGION 1: NORTHWEST MONTANA

Northwest Montana, often referred to as the Crown of the Continent, is home to some of the state’s most iconic landscapes and outdoor recreation opportunities. Anchored by Glacier National Park and Flathead Lake, Region 1 attracts millions of visitors each year while serving as a vital recreational area for local residents. The region’s diverse assets, from rugged mountain trails and extensive forestlands to scenic lakes and rivers, support a wide range of activities, including world-class trail systems, fishing, wildlife viewing, and camping.

Map 10: Region 1 Public Land Ownership



## Population

Region 1 contains more than 168,000 people, accounting for approximately 16% of the state's total population. Population density in this region is 12.6 people per square mile, making it the second most densely populated region in Montana. By 2040, the population is projected to grow by about 35,000 people, representing an increase of nearly 21% from 2020. This continued growth is expected to intensify demand for outdoor recreation amenities and services from both residents and visitors. Table 6 presents projected population by county within Region 1.

Table 6: Region 1 Projected Population by County

COUNTY	2020	2030	2040	% CHANGE 2020-2040
FLATHEAD	104,773	127,559	136,145	29.94
LAKE	31,259	35,554	36,482	16.71
LINCOLN	19,731	18,742	17,351	-12.06
SANDERS	12,451	13,888	13,715	10.15
REGIONAL TOTAL	168,214	195,743	203,693	21.09
STATEWIDE TOTAL	1,086,193	1,199,203	1,226,445	12.91

Source: Montana Census and Economic Information Center, 2024

## Public Lands and Recreational Resources

Region 1 is defined by a broad mix of recreation opportunities across its expansive public lands and waterways. Residents participate in long-standing outdoor traditions such as hunting, fishing, and camping, while also engaging in modern pursuits including mountain biking and off-highway vehicle riding. With national forests, rivers, lakes, and state parks readily accessible, the region supports a balance of solitude, family-oriented recreation, and high-adventure activities throughout the year.

Approximately 67% of the land in Region 1 is federally or state-managed public land, 18% is privately owned, 15% is tribal land, and less than 1% is managed by local governments. In total, Region 1 includes more than 6.9 million acres of public land. Of the combined state and federal public land, about 95% is federally managed. The U.S. Forest Service alone manages roughly 82% of the public land in the region, while state agencies manage about 4%, most of which is DNRC State Trust Land. Overall, Region 1 residents enjoy approximately 33.3 acres of public land per person. Figures 11 and 12 illustrate land ownership patterns and public land distribution in the region.

Figure 11: Region 1 Land Ownership (%)

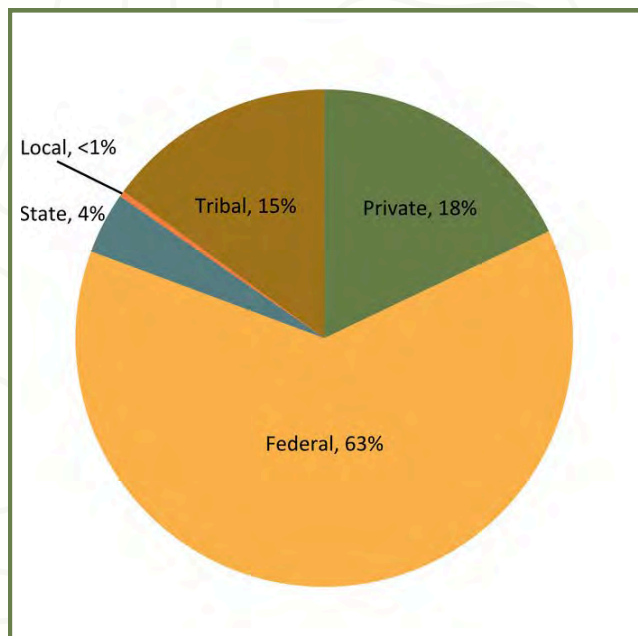
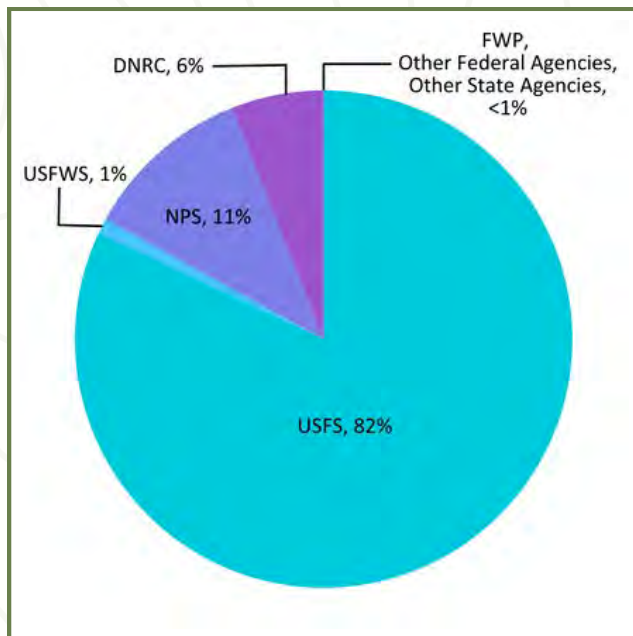


Figure 12: Region 1 Public Lands (%)



### Regional Recreation Trends

Region 1 residents reported some of the highest trail use rates in the state, reflecting the region's exceptional concentration of public land and iconic recreation destinations. Hiking trails were the most frequently used facility, with 92% of respondents reporting use in the past year. Walking, jogging, and biking paths; lake access points; and river access points were also among the most frequently used facilities. Other heavily used resources include picnic areas, natural or wild areas, fishing areas, wildlife viewing areas, hand launches for watercraft, and campgrounds without hookups. Together, these findings highlight the importance of trail systems, water access, and close-to-home natural areas in Northwest Montana, where access to iconic public lands shapes how residents experience the outdoors year-round.

### Top 10 Facilities/Areas (Region 1)

- Hiking trails
- Walking/jogging/biking paths
- Lake access points
- River access points
- Picnic areas
- Natural or wild areas
- Fishing areas
- Wildlife viewing areas
- Hand launches for watercrafts
- Campgrounds without hookups



When asked which outdoor recreation facilities and areas are most needed in their communities, Region 1 residents pointed to bike lanes as their top priority, followed by expanded walking, jogging, and biking paths and more designated open space. Respondents also emphasized the importance of maintaining and enhancing natural or wild areas, improving connectivity between communities and public lands, and expanding opportunities such as campgrounds without hookups, outdoor ice rinks, sledding and tubing areas, and rifle and handgun ranges. These priorities provide clear direction to recreation providers regarding where additional investments and opportunities could best meet the needs of Region 1 recreationists.

### **Top Outdoor Recreation Needs (Region 1)**

- Bike lanes
- Walking/jogging/biking paths
- Designated open space
- Natural or wild areas
- Connectivity between communities and public lands
- Campgrounds without hookups
- Outdoor ice rinks
- Sledding/tubing areas
- Rifle/handgun ranges

### **Emerging Trends in Region 1**

- Crowding at popular sites
- Need for trail and community connectivity
- Focus on conservation ethics
- Year-round use growth
- Demand for improved public land access

Qualitative data gathered through public workshops, surveys, and manager interviews revealed several distinct trends shaping outdoor recreation in Region 1. Public input frequently highlighted increasing crowding at popular sites, with high visitation levels placing pressure on both natural resources and existing infrastructure. Residents and managers alike underscored a strong desire to improve trail and community connectivity, particularly routes that link neighborhoods to nearby public lands and waterbodies.

The growing importance of conservation education also emerged as a key theme. Participants expressed interest in promoting responsible and sustainable recreation practices to reduce resource impacts and support long-term stewardship. Year-round use has expanded in the region, with more people recreating during all seasons. This shift has increased wear on trails and facilities that were originally designed for primarily seasonal use, intensifying maintenance needs. Access to public lands, including streamlining permits and addressing other barriers, was identified as an ongoing priority, especially in areas where demand is high and access points are limited.

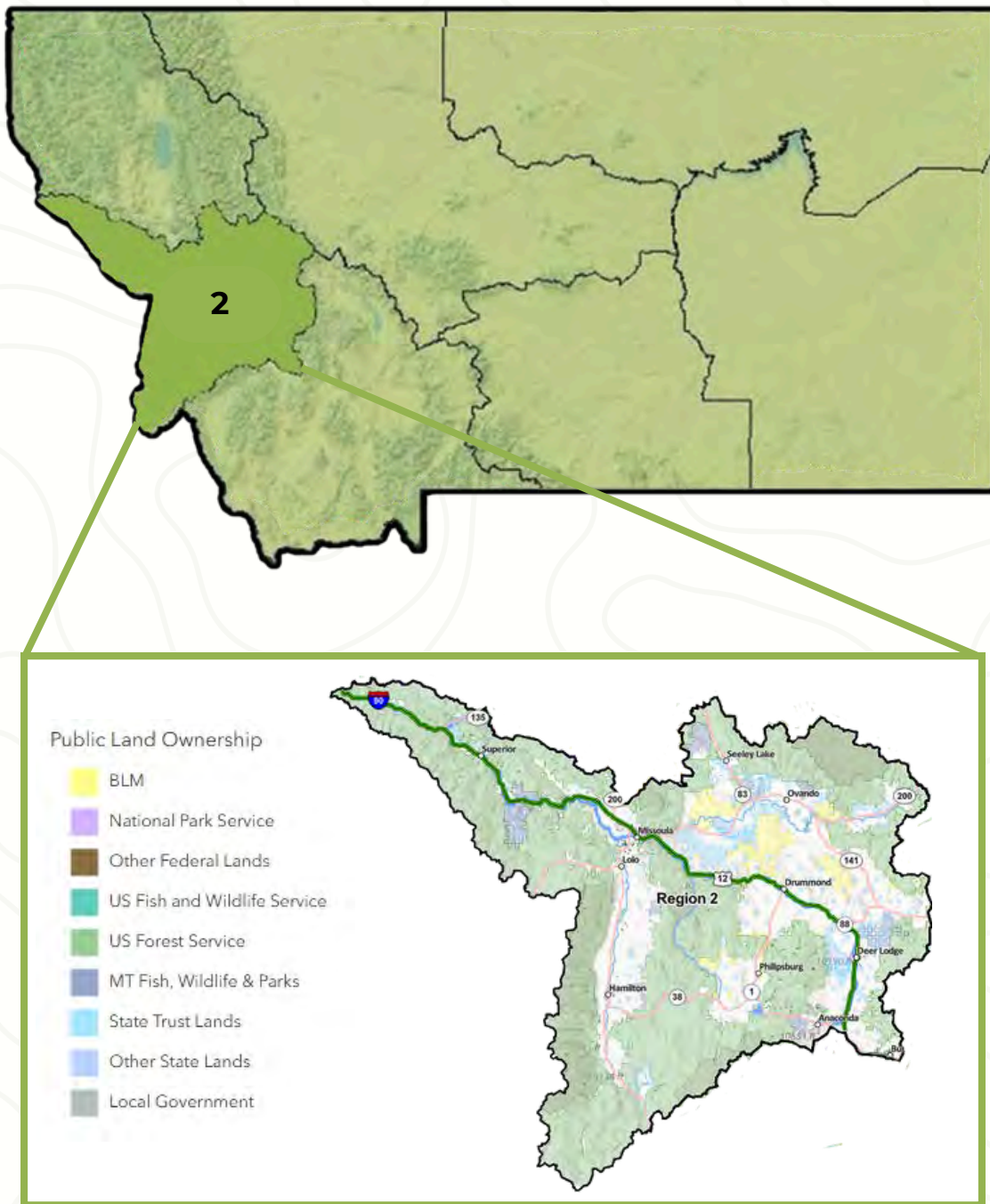
Taken together, these trends reflect both statewide challenges and unique regional dynamics in Northwest Montana. They underscore the need for proactive recreation planning that balances increased demand with conservation, access, and quality of experience. As one of Montana's most-visited recreation landscapes, Region 1 has an especially urgent stake in building the partnerships and investments needed to keep its trails, waterways, and public lands accessible and resilient for residents and visitors alike.



## 3.2 REGION 2: WEST-CENTRAL MONTANA

West-Central Montana, defined by its rivers, rolling foothills, and vibrant communities, offers diverse recreation opportunities that attract residents and visitors year-round. Anchored by the Clark Fork and Blackfoot Rivers, as well as the lively city of Missoula, Region 2 serves as a hub for outdoor activities ranging from water-based recreation to hiking and biking.

Map 11: Region 2 Public Land Ownership



## Population

Region 2 contains more than 186,000 people, accounting for approximately 17% of the state’s total population. Population density in this region is 16.9 people per square mile, making it the most densely populated region in Montana and creating distinct recreation challenges and opportunities. By 2040, the population of Region 2 is projected to grow by about 38,000 people, an increase of 21% from 2020. This continued growth is expected to further influence already increasing demands on outdoor recreation amenities and services from both residents and visitors. Table 7 summarizes projected population by county within Region 2, based on data from the Montana Census and Economic Information Center (2024).

Table 7: Region 2 Projected Population by County

COUNTY	2020	2030	2040	% CHANGE 2020-2040
DEER LODGE	9,413	9,906	10,159	7.93
GRANITE	3,308	3,505	3,517	6.32
MINERAL	4,565	5,252	5,267	15.38
MISSOULA	118,238	134,961	142,130	20.21
POWELL	6,934	7,261	7,540	8.74
RAVALLI	44,351	53,498	56,624	27.67
REGIONAL TOTAL	186,809	214,383	225,237	20.57
STATEWIDE TOTAL	1,086,193	1,199,203	1,226,445	12.91

Source: Montana Census and Economic Information Center, 2024

## Public Lands and Recreational Resources

Region 2 offers abundant water-based recreation along its rivers and streams, complemented by hiking, skiing, and hunting in nearby forests. Residents value the opportunities for solitude, physical activity, and connection with nature that these lands provide. The region’s proximity to both urban amenities and extensive public lands makes it an important area for casual and avid outdoor enthusiasts alike, with high demand for accessible trails, natural areas, and close-to-home recreation opportunities.

Figure 13: Region 2 Land Ownership (%)

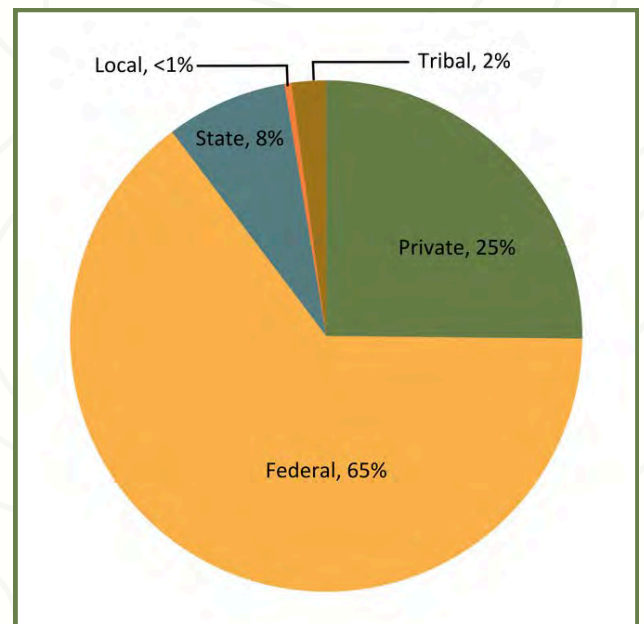
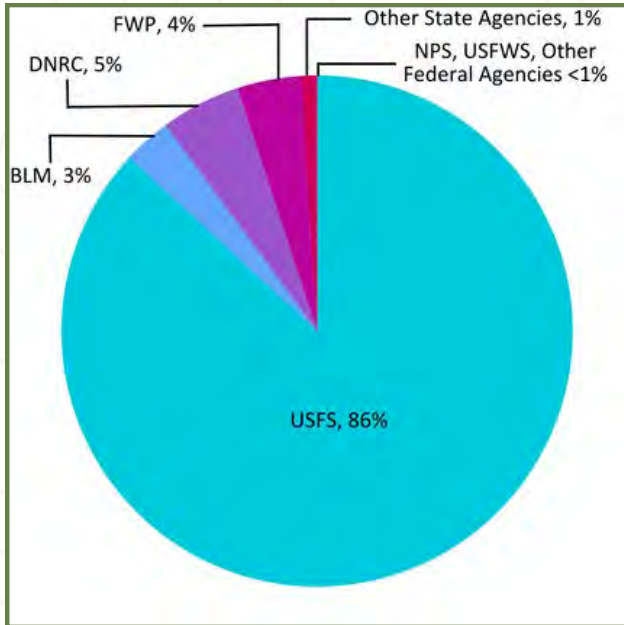


Figure 14: Region 2 Public Lands (%)



Public lands are a defining feature of Region 2. Approximately 73% of the region consists of federally or state-managed public land, about 25% is privately owned, 2% is Tribal land, and less than 1% is managed by local governments. In total, Region 2 has more than 4.9 million acres of public land. Of this public land base, about 91% is federally owned, with the U.S. Forest Service managing roughly 86% of the total.

State agencies manage approximately 9% of the public land in the region, most of which is administered as Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) State Trust Land. Overall, Region 2 residents enjoy about 26.5 acres of public land per person. Figure 13 illustrates the distribution of land ownership in the region.

### Top 10 Facilities/Areas (Region 2)

- Hiking trails
- Walking/jogging/biking paths
- Natural or wild areas
- River access points
- Fishing areas
- Lake access points
- Campgrounds without hookups
- Heritage/historic sites
- Picnic areas
- Wildlife viewing areas

### Regional Recreation Trends

Recreation use in Region 2 reflects the character of a densely populated region with exceptional access to rivers, forests, and public lands. Hiking trails were identified as the most popular recreation facility, with 88% of respondents reporting use in the past year. Walking, jogging, and biking paths, natural or wild areas, and river access points also ranked very high in reported use. Other frequently used facilities included fishing areas, lake access points, campgrounds without hookups, heritage and historic sites, picnic areas, and wildlife viewing areas.



These patterns reflect a community that recreates intensively across a compact but exceptionally diverse landscape of rivers, forests, and urban greenways. The high use of these facilities indicates where recreation demand is most concentrated and where infrastructure may experience the greatest levels of wear and capacity pressure. The figure showing the top-used outdoor recreation facilities and areas provides additional detail about which resources are most heavily used by Region 2 households.

Turning to facility and area needs, Region 2 residents ranked connectivity between communities and public lands as their single most pressing priority, followed closely by enhanced natural or wild areas and additional designated open space. Residents also emphasized the need for more campgrounds without hookups, outdoor ice rinks, and expanded bike lane networks. These priorities indicate that recreation providers can focus on strengthening connections between neighborhoods and nearby public lands, protecting and expanding natural open spaces, and increasing opportunities for both year-round and close-to-home recreation. The “Top Outdoor Recreation Needs (Region 2)” figure highlights these priorities in more detail.

### **Top Outdoor Recreation Needs (Region 2)**

- Connectivity between communities and public lands
- Natural or wild areas
- Designated open space
- Campgrounds without hookups
- Outdoor ice rinks
- Bike lanes

### **Emerging Trends in Region 2**

- Infrastructure strain
- Year-round recreation growth
- Multi-use conflicts
- Public land access concerns
- Stewardship education demand

Public workshops, surveys, and manager feedback identified several key trends that are currently shaping outdoor recreation in Region 2. Participants noted that high demand across recreation types, including motorized use, river recreation, and hiking, is straining infrastructure, particularly during peak seasons. Year-round recreation is also increasing, which contributes to greater wear on trails, access points, and facilities that were not always designed or maintained for sustained, four-season use.

As different types of recreation activities continue to grow, conflicts between user groups are becoming more common and point to the need for improved education and shared-use strategies. Many residents expressed concern about the loss of public land access due to privatization, changing landownership patterns, and regulatory shifts that can limit traditional access points. At the same time, there was a clear call for expanded stewardship education and outreach to encourage responsible recreation, reduce resource impacts, and support long-term conservation.

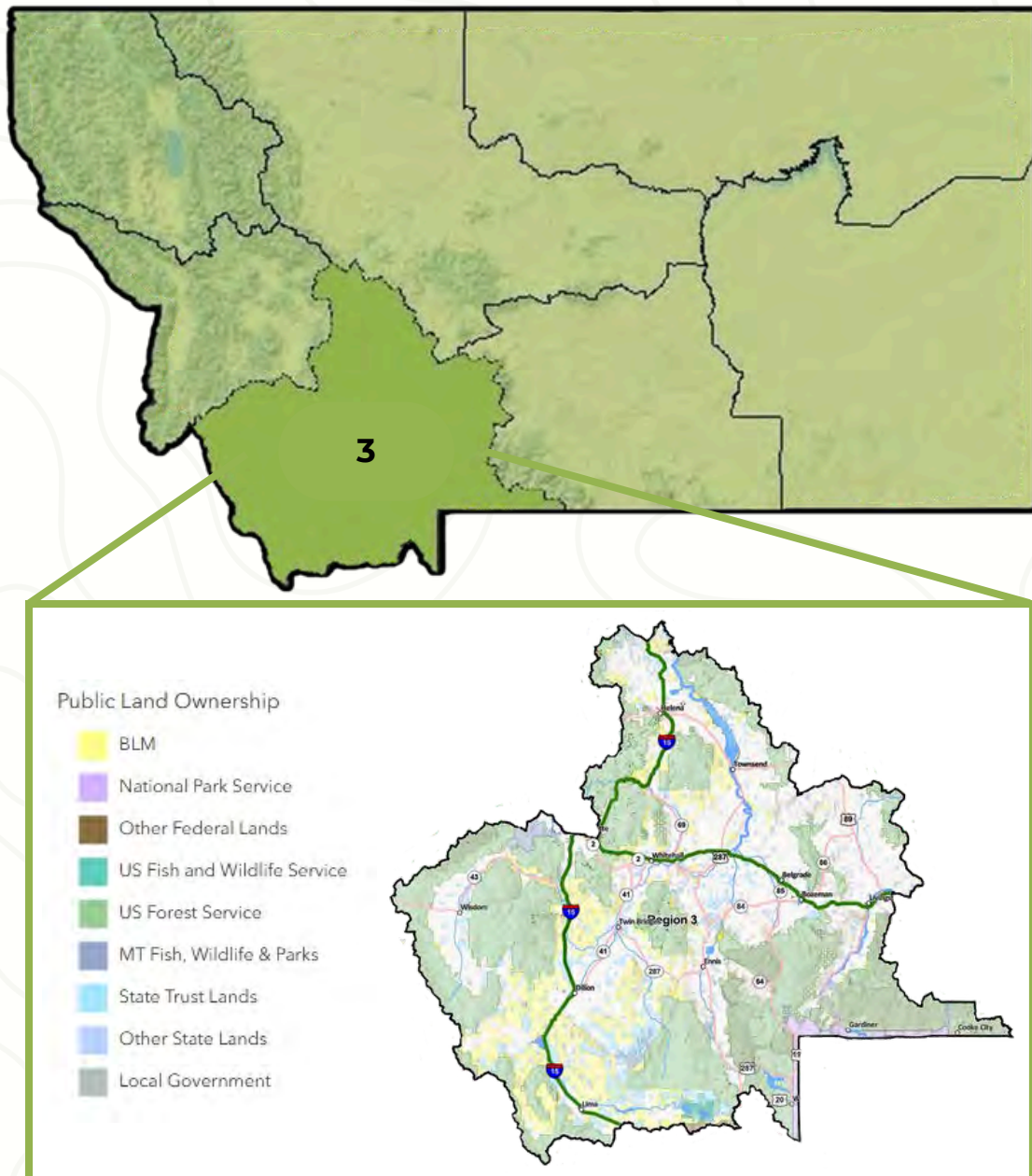
Together, these trends reflect both the opportunities and challenges of a region with a highly engaged and growing recreation community. Partners can use these regional insights to direct investments toward the trail connectivity, river access, and stewardship infrastructure that Region 2's dense and growing population increasingly depends on.



### 3.3 REGION 3: SOUTHWEST MONTANA

Southwest Montana, a region known for its rugged beauty and historical significance, offers some of the most iconic outdoor recreation opportunities in the state. Home to Yellowstone National Park’s northern gateway and a network of pristine rivers, lakes, and trails, Region 3 is both a destination for outdoor enthusiasts and a critical area for Montana’s recreation economy. From blue-ribbon trout streams and backcountry trail systems to ski areas and heritage sites, the region supports a broad array of recreation experiences that draw visitors from across the country while serving the daily needs of local residents.

Map 12: Region 3 Public Land Ownership



## Population

Region 3 is home to nearly 209,000 residents, representing approximately 19% of Montana’s total population. Population density in this region is 11.5 people per square mile. By 2040, the population is projected to grow by nearly 60,000 people, an increase of 29% from 2020. This level of growth is among the highest in the state and is expected to influence the already increasing demand for outdoor recreation amenities and services from both residents and visitors. Communities across Region 3 are already feeling the effects of this growth, as more people seek access to trails, rivers, lakes, and public land close to home. Table 8 summarizes projected population by county within Region 3, based on data from the Montana Census and Economic Information Center (2024).

Table 8: Region 3 Projected Population by County

COUNTY	2020	2030	2040	% CHANGE 2020-2040
BEAVERHEAD	9,372	10,021	9,837	4.96
BROADWATER	6,846	7,307	6,991	2.12
GALLATIN	119,502	155,291	167,528	40.19
JEFFERSON	12,133	13,576	13,665	12.63
MADISON	8,657	11,138	12,116	39.96
PARK	17,193	19,265	19,428	13.00
SILVER BOW	35,168	38,552	38,842	10.45
REGIONAL TOTAL	208,871	255,150	268,407	28.50
STATEWIDE TOTAL	1,086,193	1,199,203	1,226,445	12.91

Source: Montana Census and Economic Information Center, 2024

## Public Lands and Recreational Resources

Region 3 is a popular destination for diverse trail-based and adventure recreation, including mountain biking, off-highway vehicle riding, hiking, trail running, snow sports, and climbing. Traditional activities such as hunting, fishing, and camping remain cornerstones of outdoor life in the region, creating a dynamic mix of uses on public lands. The region’s significant population growth and proximity to Yellowstone National Park contribute to high participation rates and to challenges related to crowding, infrastructure demands, and resource management.

Approximately 60% of Region 3 consists of federal or state-managed public land, about 40% is privately owned, and less than 1% is managed by local governments. In total, Region 3 has more than 6.6 million acres of public land. Of this public land base, about 90% is federally managed. The U.S. Forest Service manages roughly 68% of the public land, making national forests the predominant public land resource in the region, while the Bureau of Land Management manages about 17%.

Figure 15: Region 3 Land Ownership (%)

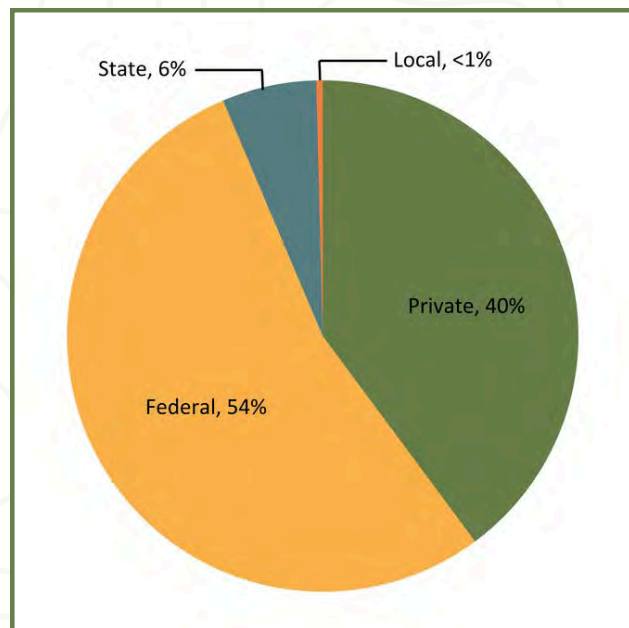
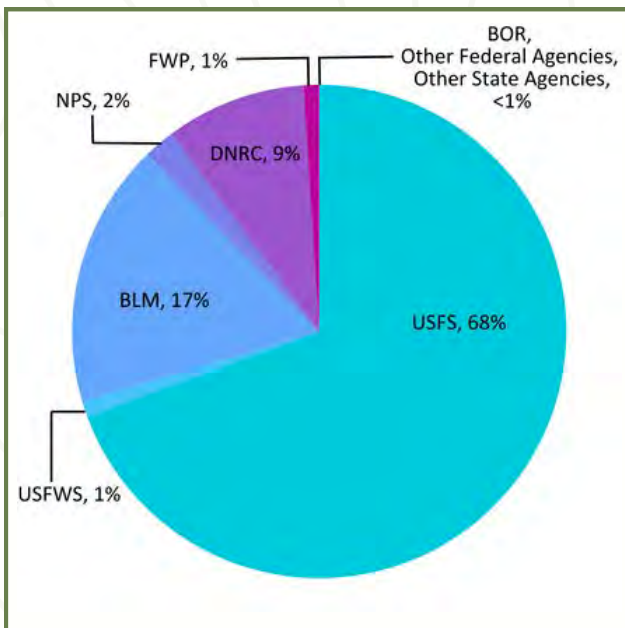


Figure 16: Region 3 Public Lands (%)



State agencies manage around 10% of the public land in Region 3, most of which is administered as Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) State Trust Land. Overall, Region 3 residents enjoy approximately 31.7 acres of public land per person. Figures 15 and 16 illustrate land ownership patterns and the distribution of public lands in the region.

The combination of extensive public land, nationally significant river systems, and the gateway role to Yellowstone National Park makes Region 3 one of the most recreation-rich areas in Montana. In addition to the extensive federal land base, a substantial share of outdoor recreation opportunities in Region 3 is also provided through private resorts and gateway communities, which play an important role in the region’s overall recreation system. These assets require careful management to balance increasing use with conservation and long-term sustainability.



## Regional Recreation Trends

Region 3 households showed one of the most diverse recreation portfolios in the state, reflecting the region's mix of alpine terrain, river systems, and proximity to two national park gateways. Hiking trails were the most frequently used facility, reported by a large majority of respondents in the past year. Walking, jogging, and biking paths; river and lake access points; and campgrounds without hookups were also among the most heavily used resources. Downhill ski areas, mountain bike trails, natural or wild areas, backcountry camping areas, cross-country ski and snowshoe trails, picnic areas, and wildlife viewing areas rounded out many households' recreation patterns.

These use patterns reflect the region's broad recreation portfolio, highlighting how both frontcountry and backcountry opportunities are central to outdoor life in Southwest Montana. High use of these facilities points to where infrastructure may be experiencing the greatest levels of demand, wear, and capacity pressure. The adjacent figure showing top-used outdoor recreation facilities and areas in Region 3 provides additional detail on which resources are most heavily used by households across the region.

On the question of which outdoor recreation facilities and areas are most needed, Region 3 residents were clear: the development of bike lanes. Residents also emphasized the importance of improving connectivity between communities and public lands and expanding walking, jogging, and biking paths. Other frequently mentioned needs included additional mountain bike trails, designated open space, and enhanced natural or wild areas. Campgrounds without hookups, BMX and mountain bike skills parks, outdoor pools, and rifle and handgun ranges were also identified as important needs in some communities.

### Top 10 Facilities/Areas (Region 3)

- Hiking trails
- Walking/jogging/biking paths
- River access points
- Campgrounds without hookups
- Downhill ski areas
- Mountain bike trails
- Natural or wild areas
- Backcountry camping
- XC ski/snowshoe trails
- Picnic areas

### Top Outdoor Recreation Needs (Region 3)

- Bike lanes
- Connectivity between communities and public lands
- Walking/jogging/biking paths
- Mountain bike trails
- Designated open space
- Natural or wild areas
- Campgrounds without hookups
- BMX/MT bike skills parks
- Outdoor pools
- Rifle/handgun ranges

### **Emerging Trends in Region 3**

- Population-driven recreation growth
- Trailhead and facility pressure
- Maintenance and infrastructure needs
- Diverse user overlap
- Responsible recreation education

Together, these responses indicate that recreation providers in Region 3 can focus on strengthening connections between neighborhoods and nearby public lands, investing in non-motorized transportation and trail infrastructure, and protecting and expanding open space and natural areas. These investments can help support both everyday recreation for residents and the tourism economy that relies on high-quality outdoor experiences.

Southwest Montana's rapid growth has given rise to a distinct set of recreation pressures and priorities that emerged consistently across workshops, surveys, and manager conversations. Population growth has significantly increased recreation participation, particularly in trail-based activities such as hiking, biking, and trail running. As more people engage in these activities, trailheads, access points, and popular recreation sites are experiencing heightened pressure. Community members and recreation managers expressed concern about crowding, maintenance needs, and infrastructure capacity as demand continues to rise.

The region's growth has also intensified maintenance and infrastructure needs. Many trails, campgrounds, and access points were not originally designed to accommodate current levels of year-round use, and managers report that existing maintenance capacity is often insufficient to keep pace. This can lead to degraded conditions, safety concerns, and diminished visitor experiences if not addressed through targeted investment and planning.

As the diversity of recreation activities expands, so does the overlap between user groups. Mountain bikers, hikers, trail runners, motorized users, anglers, paddlers, and other recreationists are increasingly sharing the same spaces, which heightens the potential for user conflicts. Workshop participants and survey respondents highlighted a growing need for clear communication, thoughtful trail design, and shared-use strategies to manage these overlapping interests and maintain safe, enjoyable experiences for all users.

Finally, participants underscored the importance of expanding public education efforts to promote responsible recreation practices and shared stewardship. Many residents expressed a desire to see more emphasis placed on topics such as Leave No Trace principles, wildlife awareness, proper trail etiquette, and respectful behavior at busy access points. These efforts are seen as critical to sustaining the region's natural resources, reducing conflict, and preserving high-quality outdoor experiences as use continues to grow.

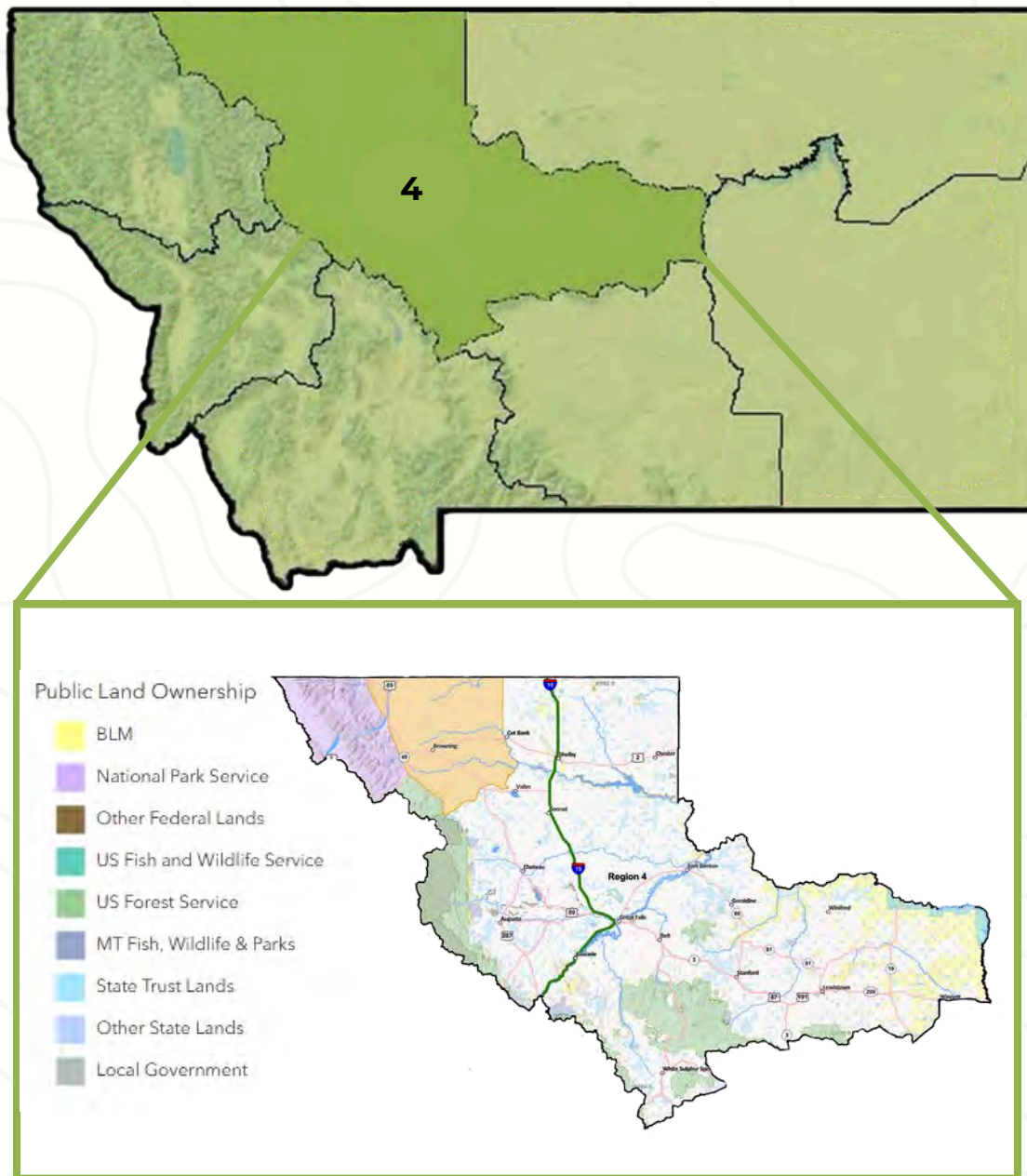


Taken together, these trends highlight both the challenges and opportunities facing one of Montana's fastest-growing recreation regions. Maintaining the quality and accessibility of Region 3's iconic resources — from the Absaroka–Beartooth Wilderness to Yellowstone's northern gateway communities — will require coordinated investment in infrastructure, responsible use education, and shared stewardship among the region's many public and private partners.

### 3.4 REGION 4: NORTH-CENTRAL MONTANA

North-Central Montana is defined by its vast open spaces, rolling prairies, and rich history of outdoor traditions. The region offers abundant opportunities for recreation in solitude, particularly through its expansive public lands, wildlife refuges, and waterways. Known for its hunting, fishing, and cultural heritage sites, Region 4 invites outdoor enthusiasts to explore wide horizons, rural communities, and long-standing outdoor traditions that have shaped the area's identity for generations.

Map 13: Region 4 Public Land Ownership



## Population

Region 4 has a population of more than 210,000 residents, representing approximately 19% of Montana’s total population. Population density in this region is 6.81 people per square mile, which is lower than the statewide average but reflects several population centers, including Great Falls and Helena, embedded in a predominantly rural landscape. By 2040, the region’s population is projected to grow to around 213,000 people, an increase of about 1.2% from 2020.

Although this projected growth is modest compared to other regions, even a small increase is expected to influence the already increasing demands on outdoor recreation amenities and services from both residents and visitors. Communities across Region 4 are likely to see continued interest in access to trails, rivers, wildlife areas, and open spaces close to home, as well as sustained use of regional destinations that attract visitors from across the state and beyond. Table 9 summarizes projected population by county within Region 4, based on data from the Montana Census and Economic Information Center (2024).

Table 9: Region 4 Projected Population by County

COUNTY	2020	2030	2040	% CHANGE 2020-2040
CASCADE	84,328	82,060	81,037	-3.90
CHOTEAU	5,899	5,843	5,722	-3.00
FERGUS	11,457	11,410	10,997	-4.02
GLACIER	13,747	11,926	10,558	-23.20
JUDITH BASIN	2,017	1,940	1,872	-7.19
LEWIS AND CLARK	71,093	78,745	79,925	12.42
LIBERTY	1,960	1,930	2,110	7.65
MEAGHER	1,925	2,159	2,231	15.90
PETROLEUM	498	595	640	28.51
PONDERA	5,882	5,828	5,678	-3.47
TETON	6,242	6,481	6,617	6.01
TOOLE	4,964	5,011	5,213	5.02
<b>REGIONAL TOTAL</b>	210,012	213,928	212,600	1.23
<b>STATEWIDE TOTAL</b>	1,086,193	1,199,203	1,226,445	12.91

Source: Montana Census and Economic Information Center, 2024

Figure 17: Region 4 Land Ownership (%)

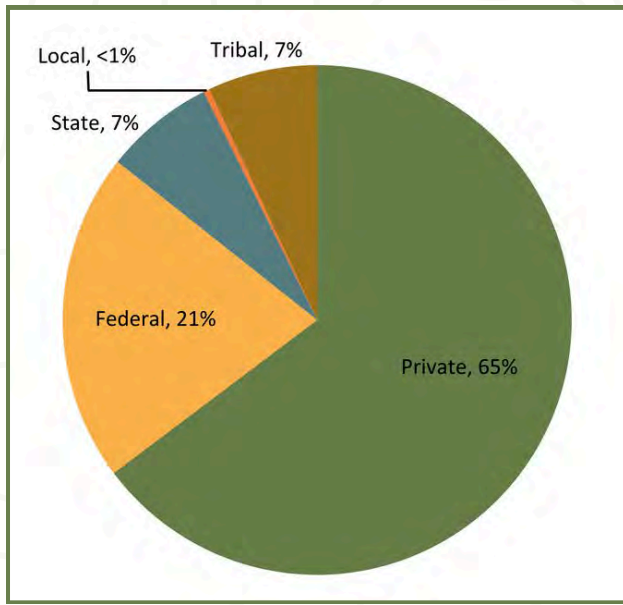
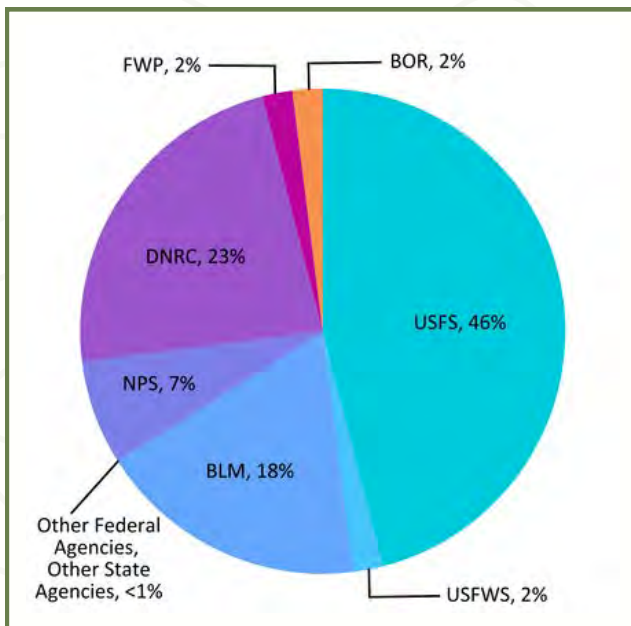


Figure 18: Region 4 Public Lands (%)



## Public Lands and Recreational Resources

Public lands are a defining feature of the Region 4 landscape. Approximately 28% of Region 4 consists of federally or state-managed public lands, about 65% is privately owned, roughly 7% is Tribal land, and less than 1% is managed by local governments. In total, the region includes more than 6.9 million acres of public land. Of this public land base, about 75% is federally owned. The U.S. Forest Service manages the largest share, accounting for roughly 46% of the public land in Region 4.

State agencies manage around 25% of the public land, most of which is administered as Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) State Trust Land. Overall, Region 4 residents enjoy approximately 32.0 acres of public land per person. Figure 17 shows the distribution of land ownership in the region, and Figure 18 illustrates the proportion of public lands by managing agency.

These lands support a mix of working landscapes and recreation destinations, including national forests, wildlife refuges, state parks, fishing access sites, and other public access areas. Hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, OHV riding, hiking, and camping are central to the region’s outdoor recreation identity. In many areas, public lands adjoin agricultural operations and private ranches, reinforcing the close relationship between working lands and recreation in North-Central Montana.



## Regional Recreation Trends

Recreation use patterns in Region 4 reflect the region's rural character and strong traditions of land-based outdoor activity. Hiking trails were the most frequently used facility, though the region's top ten also reflects the importance of water access and motorized recreation across its expansive prairies and river corridors. Walking, jogging, and biking paths; lake access points; and river access points were also reported as being used by a large majority of respondents. Fishing areas, campgrounds without hookups, natural or wild areas, picnic areas, and heritage and historic sites rounded out many households' recreation patterns.

These use patterns point to a region where hunting, fishing, and access to vast open landscapes remain at the heart of the outdoor recreation identity. They also suggest where recreation demand is likely to be concentrated and where infrastructure may be experiencing the greatest levels of wear and capacity pressure. The adjacent figure, "Top 10 Facilities/Areas (Region 4)," illustrates the relative importance of these facilities and areas in greater detail.

When asked which outdoor recreation facilities and areas are most needed in their communities, Region 4 residents identified bike lanes and improved connectivity between communities and public lands as their top priorities, alongside campgrounds without hookups and designated open space. The list also reflects a strong interest in year-round recreation options, with sledding and tubing areas and cross-country ski and snowshoe trails both ranking among the region's most-needed facilities.

### Top 10 Facilities/Areas (Region 4)

- Hiking trails
- Walking/jogging/biking paths
- Lake access points
- River access points
- Fishing areas
- Campgrounds without hookups
- Natural or wild areas
- Picnic areas
- Heritage/historic sites
- Big game hunting areas

### Top Outdoor Recreation Needs (Region 4)

- Bike lanes
- Connectivity between communities and public lands
- Campgrounds without hookups
- Designated open space
- Natural or wild areas
- Sledding/tubing areas
- XC ski/snowshoe trails

### Emerging Trends in Region 4

- Trail connectivity demand
- Maintenance backlogs
- Access reduction concerns
- Need for public outreach
- Youth and family recreation focus

North-Central Montana's wide open spaces and rural communities generate a particular set of recreation challenges that came through clearly in public input and land manager feedback. Participants emphasized that large expanses of public land provide significant opportunities for both motorized and non-motorized recreation, yet increasing use has begun to strain existing infrastructure. Trails, roads, campgrounds, and access points are experiencing higher levels of use than in the past, and many providers report that maintenance capacity has not kept pace. This has contributed to a growing backlog of infrastructure needs, particularly in areas where hunting, OHV use, and other high-demand activities are concentrated.

Access reduction emerged as another key concern. Land use changes, privatization, and regulatory shifts have, in some cases, altered or limited traditional access routes to public lands. Both residents and land managers expressed concern about the cumulative impact of these changes on long-standing outdoor traditions, especially where public road closures, changes in easements, or shifting land ownership patterns restrict access to popular hunting, fishing, and camping areas.

These challenges underscore the importance of clear communication and public outreach. Community members highlighted the need for better education about responsible recreation practices and about access rules and changes in land management policies. Many participants expressed support for expanded efforts to inform users about where and how they can recreate, how to respect private property and natural resources, and how to adapt to new access arrangements.

Finally, there was a strong focus on increasing outdoor recreation opportunities for youth and families. Residents and providers alike stressed the importance of ensuring that younger generations have meaningful opportunities to experience the region's landscapes, learn outdoor skills, and participate in community traditions that center on hunting, fishing, camping, and exploring public lands.

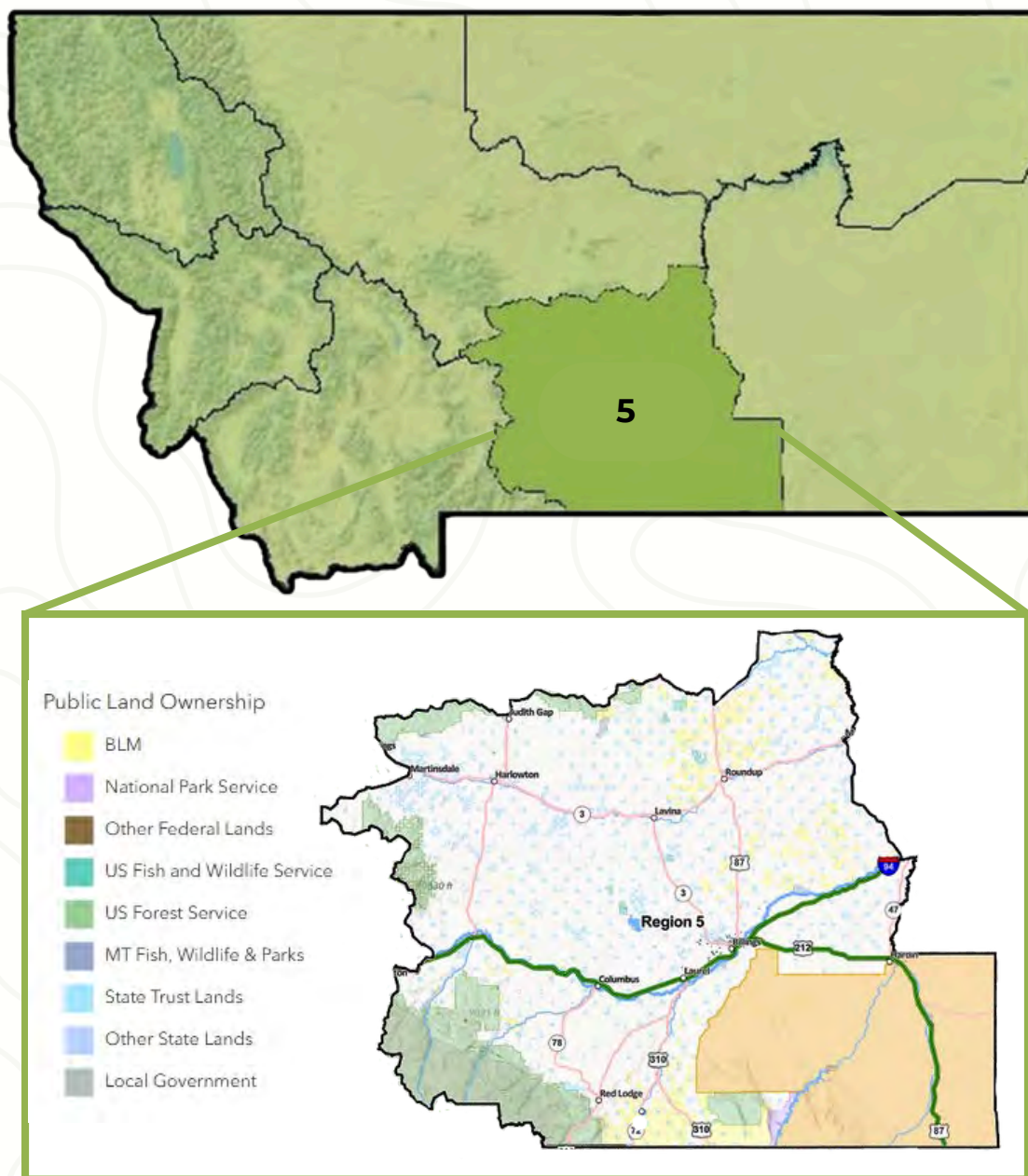
These trends underscore the importance of maintaining and expanding the recreation opportunities that have defined North-Central Montana for generations. Partners can use these regional insights to direct investments toward the trail connections, campground access, and public outreach that will keep the region's prairies, rivers, and wildlife areas accessible and ensure that the outdoor traditions central to this region's identity remain available to youth and families for years to come.



### 3.5 REGION 5: SOUTH-CENTRAL MONTANA

South-Central Montana is a dynamic region offering a rich blend of outdoor recreation opportunities, from the towering Beartooth Mountains to the rolling plains of the Yellowstone River valley. As a gateway to Yellowstone National Park and home to iconic landscapes such as the Absaroka–Beartooth Wilderness, Region 5 attracts residents and visitors year-round with diverse recreation offerings. The region’s mix of mountainous terrain, river corridors, rangelands, and growing communities supports everything from backcountry adventures to close-to-home park use, making outdoor recreation central to local identity and quality of life.

Map 14: Region 5 Public Land Ownership



## Population

Region 5 is home to nearly 209,000 Montanans, representing about 19% of the state's total population. Population density in this region is 11.7 people per square mile. By 2040, the population is projected to grow to around 222,000 people, an increase of approximately 6.2% from 2020. Even this moderate rate of growth is expected to influence already rising demands on outdoor recreation amenities and services from both residents and visitors. Communities across Region 5 are likely to experience continued pressure on trails, river access points, campgrounds, and other high-use recreation sites as the population and visitation increase.

Table 10: Region 5 Projected Population by County

COUNTY	2020	2030	2040	% CHANGE 2020-2040
BIG HORN	13,051	11,522	10,496	-19.58
CARBON	10,512	11,960	11,874	12.96
GOLDEN VALLEY	820	1,001	1,078	31.46
MUSSELSHELL	4,747	4,195	3,780	-20.37
STILLWATER	9,010	9,149	9,089	0.88
SWEETGRASS	3,671	3,767	3,671	0.00
WHEATLAND	2,093	1,896	1,768	-15.53
YELLOWSTONE	165,045	179,726	180,192	9.18
REGIONAL TOTAL	208,949	223,216	221,948	6.22
STATEWIDE TOTAL	1,086,193	1,199,203	1,226,445	12.91

Source: Montana Census and Economic Information Center, 2024



## Public Lands and Recreational Resources

Region 5 residents engage in a wide variety of outdoor activities, including hiking, biking, skiing, camping, fishing, and hunting. Many of these activities are closely tied to prominent regional features like the Absaroka–Beartooth Wilderness, the Yellowstone River, and other local river systems. Recreation is strongly associated with physical well-being, stress relief, and family connection. A blend of city parks, river corridors, and easy access to nearby public lands supports both day-use recreation and extended trips, although crowding and infrastructure limitations are increasingly noted as concerns in some parts of the region.

Figure 19: Region 5 Land Ownership (%)

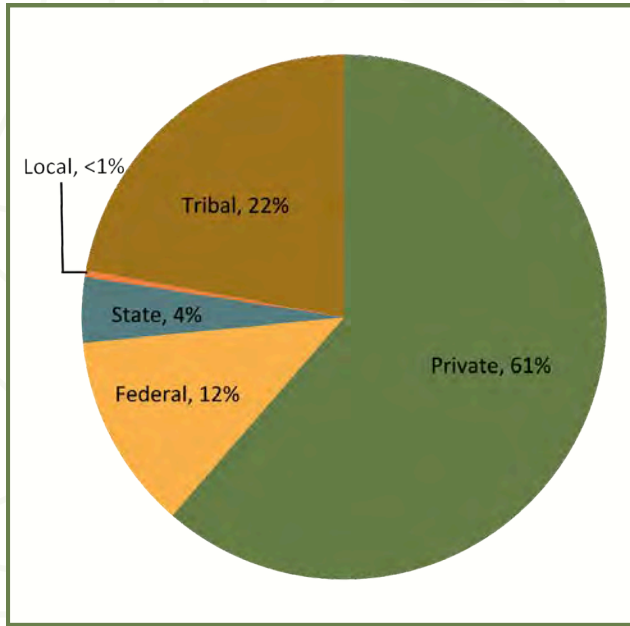
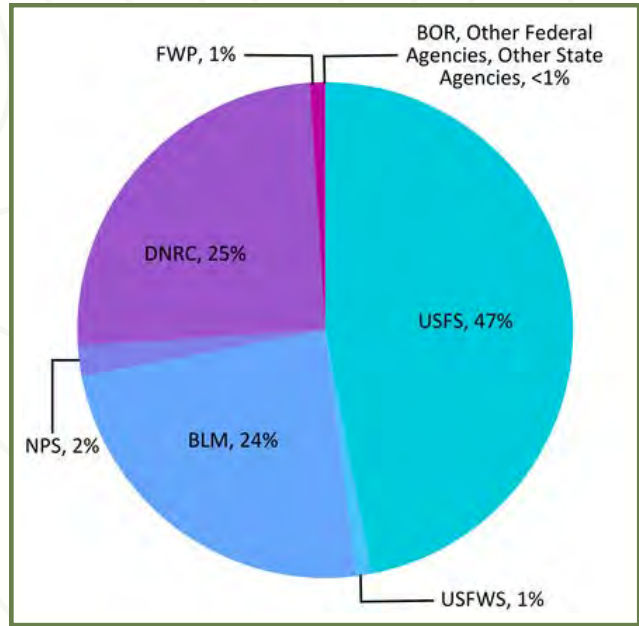


Figure 20: Region 5 Public Lands (%)



Approximately 16% of Region 5 consists of federally or state-managed public land, about 61% is privately owned, 22% is Tribal land, and less than 1% is managed by local governments. In total, the region includes nearly 4.4 million acres of public land. Of this public land base, about 74% is federally managed, with the U.S. Forest Service overseeing roughly 47% of the total. The state manages about 26% of the public land, most of which is administered as Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) State Trust Land. Overall, Region 5 residents enjoy approximately 21 acres of public land per person.

These lands support a mix of recreation destinations, including national forests, wilderness areas, state parks, fishing access sites, and wildlife management areas. They provide opportunities for hiking, hunting, angling, wildlife viewing, motorized and non-motorized trail use, and winter sports. At the same time, the region’s substantial private and Tribal land base plays a significant role in shaping access, particularly for hunting and fishing. Public-private partnerships and cooperative access programs are therefore important tools for maintaining and improving recreation opportunities in South-Central Montana.



## Regional Recreation Trends

Region 5 residents reported a recreation portfolio that spans from trail-based and water-based activities to hunting and shooting sports, reflecting the region's geographic and cultural diversity.

Hiking trails were the most popular facility with 82% of respondents reporting use, but the region's top ten is notably more varied than most other regions. Walking, jogging, and biking paths, fishing areas, and river access points were also used by a large share of households. Campgrounds without hookups and picnic areas, along with lake access points, scenic byways, big game hunting areas, and rifle and handgun ranges, rounded out many households' recreation patterns.

These use patterns underscore the importance of trail systems, river and lake access, and both hunting and shooting sports in the region's recreation portfolio. They also help identify where recreation demand is likely to be concentrated and where facilities may be experiencing the greatest levels of wear and capacity pressure. The adjacent figure, "Top 10 Facilities/Areas (Region 5)," provides additional detail on which resources are most heavily used by households across the region.

Region 5 residents identified a wide range of outdoor recreation facility and area needs, reflecting the region's geographic and cultural diversity. Improved connectivity between communities and public lands emerged as the top recreation need, followed by enhanced natural or wild areas, additional designated open space, and expanded walking, jogging, and biking paths. Residents also highlighted the importance of bike lanes, sledding and tubing areas, river access points, cross-country ski and snowshoe trails, and outdoor ice rinks. Additional campgrounds without hookups, big and small game hunting areas, and rifle and handgun ranges were also mentioned as important needs.

### Top 10 Facilities/Areas (Region 5)

- Hiking trails
- Walking/jogging/biking paths
- Fishing areas
- River access points
- Campgrounds without hookups
- Picnic areas
- Lake access points
- Scenic byways
- Big game hunting areas
- Rifle/handgun ranges

### Top Outdoor Recreation Needs (Region 5)

- Connectivity between communities and public lands
- Natural or wild areas
- Walking/jogging/biking paths
- Bike lanes
- Sledding/tubing areas
- River access points
- Designated open space
- XC ski/snowshoe trails
- Outdoor ice rinks
- Campgrounds without hookups
- Big game hunting areas
- Rifle/handgun ranges
- Small game hunting areas

Taken together, these responses indicate that recreation providers in Region 5 can focus on strengthening connections between neighborhoods and nearby public lands, protecting and expanding natural open spaces, diversifying close-to-home opportunities, and supporting both traditional and emerging recreation activities.

### **Emerging Trends in Region 5**

- Crowding at local sites
- Path and trail development
- Equity and accessibility priorities
- Close-to-home recreation growth
- Winter recreation expansion

Public engagement across Region 5 revealed recreation trends shaped by the region's dual identity as both a destination for visitors and a home for residents with deep outdoor traditions. Residents reported increasing crowding at popular recreation sites, including trailheads and river access points, which is creating pressure on infrastructure and altering the recreation experience, especially during peak seasons. These concerns are particularly evident near fast-growing communities and well-known destination areas that draw both local users and visitors.

There is strong public demand for expanded walking, biking, and multi-use trail networks that improve connectivity within and between communities and provide a broader range of recreation options. At the same time, equity and accessibility emerged as important priorities. Participants emphasized the need to create inclusive opportunities for all users, including people with disabilities, underserved groups, and residents who may lack the time, transportation, or resources to access more remote sites.

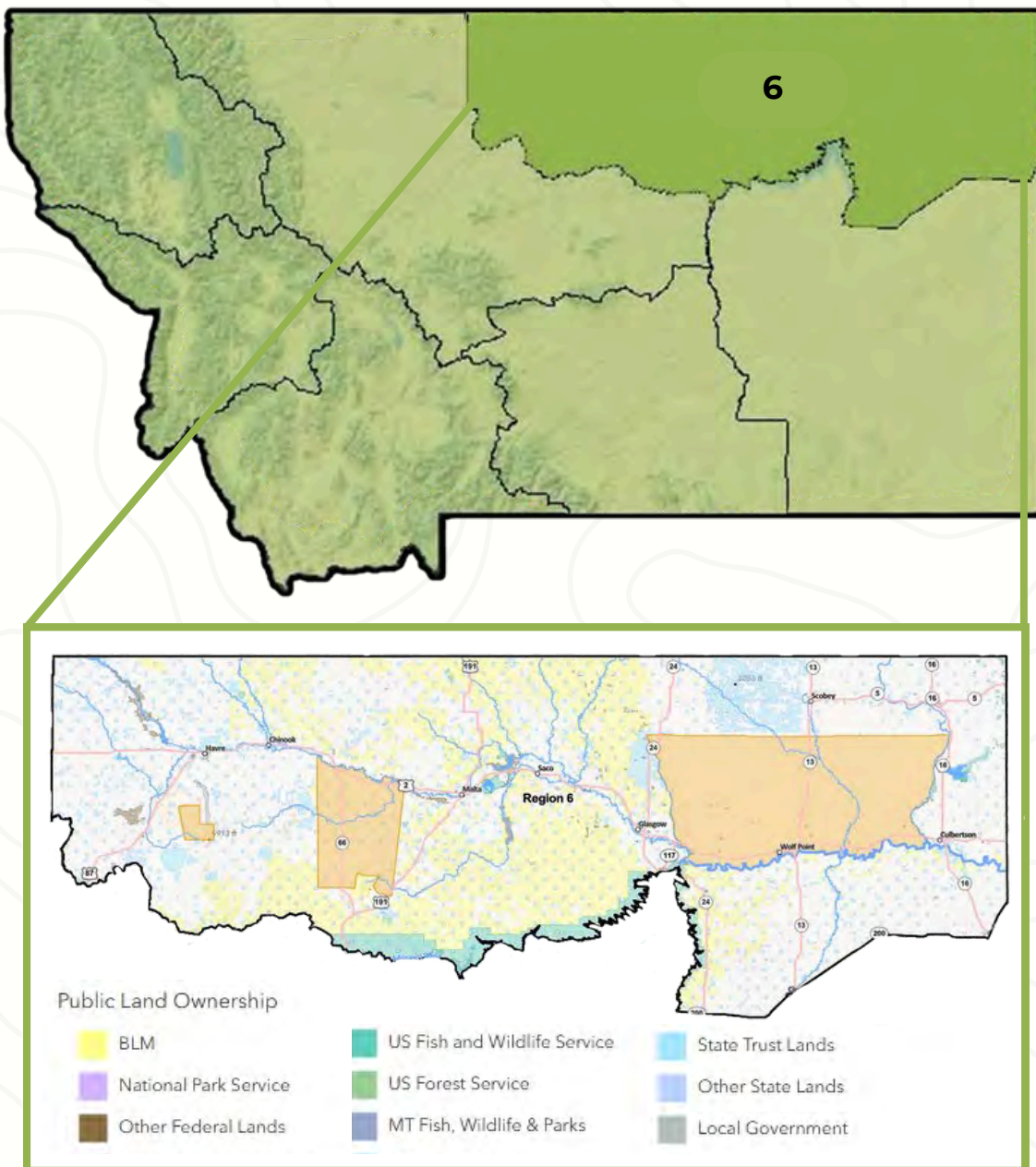
As the region's population grows, there is increasing interest in developing close-to-home recreation opportunities near urban centers. These investments can help reduce pressure on distant trail systems and backcountry destinations while improving everyday access for residents. The region is also experiencing a rise in winter recreation participation, with growing interest in activities such as cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, and other snow-based opportunities that extend the recreation season well beyond summer.

These emerging trends underscore Region 5's balance between long-standing outdoor traditions and evolving community needs. They highlight the importance of coordinated planning, investment in trails and connectivity, and a sustained focus on inclusive and accessible recreation. Partners can use these regional insights to direct resources toward the trail networks, close-to-home recreation opportunities, and equitable access initiatives that will keep South-Central Montana's landscapes — from the Yellowstone River corridor to the Beartooth foothills — accessible and enjoyable for all.

## 3.6 REGION 6: NORTHEAST MONTANA

Northeast Montana is a region defined by its wide-open spaces, remote landscapes, and abundant waterways. Known for its solitude and natural beauty, Region 6 offers exceptional opportunities for hunting, fishing, and wildlife observation. The region's unique geography, including the vast Fort Peck Lake and the Missouri River, makes it a haven for outdoor enthusiasts seeking tranquility and a strong connection to nature.

Map 15: Region 6 Public Land Ownership



## Population

Region 6 is home to approximately 62,000 Montanans, accounting for approximately 5.7% of the state’s total population. Population density in this region is 2.06 people per square mile, reflecting both its large geographic area and predominantly rural character. By 2040, the population is projected to shrink to around 54,000 people, representing an 11.42% decrease from 2020, the largest decrease of any region in the state.

This projected decline contrasts with the anticipated growth in most other parts of Montana and will likely influence future demand for outdoor recreation resources in Region 6. While fewer residents may reduce some localized pressures on recreation sites, shifting demographics may also affect the capacity of communities to maintain infrastructure, sustain volunteer efforts, and support recreation-related businesses. Table 11 summarizes projected population by county within Region 6, based on data from the Montana Census and Economic Information Center (2024).

Table 11: Region 6 Projected Population by County

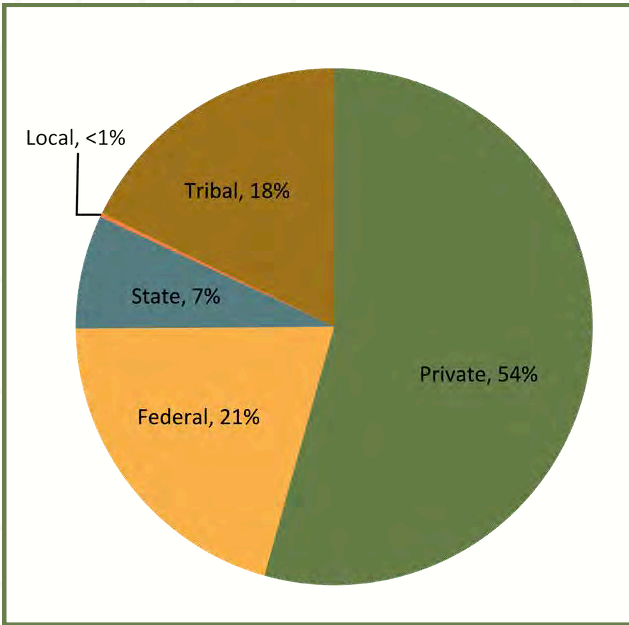
COUNTY	2020	2030	2040	% CHANGE 2020-2040
BLAINE	7,002	6,243	5,616	-19.79
DANIELS	1,658	1,661	1,597	-3.68
DAWSON	8,922	8,466	8,657	-2.97
HILL	16,250	15,311	14,675	-9.69
MCCONE	1,733	1,743	1,851	6.81
PHILLIPS	4,190	3,720	3,540	-15.51
ROOSEVELT	10,780	9,495	8,620	-20.04
SHERIDAN	3,518	3,097	3,002	-14.67
VALLEY	7,551	7,038	7,008	-7.19
REGIONAL TOTAL	61,604	56,774	54,566	-11.42
STATEWIDE TOTAL	1,086,193	1,199,203	1,226,445	12.91

Source: Montana Census and Economic Information Center, 2024

## Public Lands and Recreational Resources

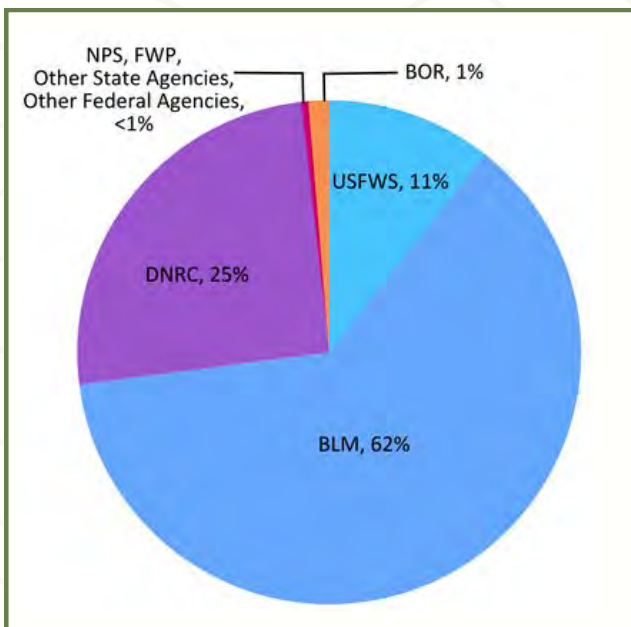
Region 6 reflects the recreation traditions of rural Montana, with strong participation in hunting, fishing, biking, camping, and family outings. Residents prioritize spending time with family and connecting with nature. While access to rivers and public lands remains critical, the region faces challenges related to limited infrastructure and the need to engage younger generations in outdoor activities.

Figure 21: Region 6 Land Ownership (%)



Approximately 28% of Region 6 consists of federally or state-managed public land, 54% is privately owned, 18% is Tribal land, and less than 1% is managed by local governments. In total, Region 6 has more than 7.3 million acres of public land. Of this public land base, approximately 76% is federally managed, with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) overseeing about 62% of the total. The state manages roughly 26% of the public land in Region 6, most of which is administered as Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) State Trust Land. Figure 21 illustrates land ownership in the region.

Figure 22: Region 6 Public Lands (%)



These public lands encompass a mix of rangelands, wildlife habitats, reservoirs, and river corridors that support a wide range of recreation activities. Hunting and fishing, in particular, are central to the region’s outdoor identity and are closely tied to both public and private lands. The Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge and surrounding BLM and state lands provide large, relatively undeveloped landscapes that offer opportunities for solitude, wildlife viewing, and backcountry experiences.



Region 6 residents enjoy about 118.9 acres of public land per person, the most of any region in Montana. This high acreage-per-capita ratio underscores the region’s abundant space and potential for dispersed recreation, even as infrastructure and access points remain limited in some areas. Figure 22 depicts the proportion of public lands by managing agency.

## Regional Recreation Trends

Region 6 stands out statewide for the central role that fishing and hunting play in its residents' recreation lives. Unlike every other region, fishing areas, rather than hiking trails, topped the list of most frequently used facilities, reflecting the region's identity as one of Montana's premier destinations for water-based and wildlife-dependent recreation. Big game hunting areas, walking, jogging, and biking paths, and lake access points were also frequently used. Natural or wild areas, small game hunting areas, river access points, campgrounds without hookups, picnic areas, and rifle and handgun ranges rounded out many households' recreation patterns.

These use patterns highlight the importance of hunting and fishing, trail-based activities, and close-to-nature experiences in Region 6. They also suggest where recreation demand is concentrated and which facilities may be experiencing the greatest levels of wear and capacity pressure. The "Top 10 Facilities/Areas (Region 6)" figure illustrates which outdoor recreation resources are most heavily used across the region.

Region 6 residents also shared which outdoor recreation facilities and areas they feel are most needed in their communities. An increased number of archery ranges emerged as the top recreation need, followed by outdoor ice rinks and enhanced walking, jogging, and biking paths. Residents also emphasized the importance of sledding and tubing areas, interpretive trails, improved connectivity to the region's extensive but sometimes hard-to-access public lands. These priorities indicate that recreation providers can focus on expanding both close-to-home and seasonally diverse opportunities, while also improving connections to existing public lands and underutilized sites.

### Top 10 Facilities/Areas (Region 6)

- Fishing areas
- Big game hunting areas
- Walking/jogging/biking paths
- Lake access points
- Natural or wild areas
- Small game hunting areas
- River access points
- Campgrounds without hookups
- Picnic areas
- Rifle/handgun ranges

### Top Outdoor Recreation Needs (Region 6)

- Archery ranges
- Outdoor ice rinks
- Walking/jogging/biking paths
- Sledding/tubing areas
- Interpretive trails
- Connectivity between communities and public lands

## Emerging Trends in Region 6

- Infrastructure development needs
- Youth and family engagement
- Economic recognition
- Conservation focus
- Promotion of undiscovered areas

Public engagement through workshops, surveys, and manager interviews highlighted several primary trends shaping outdoor recreation in Region 6. Participants repeatedly emphasized the need for improved infrastructure to support both local use and visiting recreationists, especially in rural areas where facilities are limited or aging. Roads, access points, campgrounds, and day-use sites often require maintenance or upgrades, and many communities lack the resources to address these needs on their own.

Community members also underscored the importance of engaging youth and families in outdoor activities to foster future generations of recreationists and stewards. As populations decline or age in many rural areas, there is growing concern that younger residents may have fewer opportunities or less interest in traditional outdoor activities such as hunting and fishing. Expanding youth programs, family-friendly facilities, and school partnerships was frequently cited as a strategy for sustaining outdoor traditions.

At the same time, there is increasing recognition of the economic contributions of outdoor recreation and its potential to support local communities. Residents noted that hunting, fishing, and water-based recreation draw visitors who spend money on lodging, supplies, and services, helping sustain rural economies. However, participants also expressed rising concern about protecting natural habitats and resources as use increases in certain areas. Ensuring that hunting, fishing, and wildlife viewing remain high-quality experiences will require ongoing attention to habitat conservation, invasive species, and responsible recreation practices.



Finally, there was broad support for promoting and developing lesser-known recreation opportunities to help distribute use and stimulate economic growth in underutilized areas. Many community members see potential in highlighting “undiscovered” sites, such as smaller reservoirs, local trails, and wildlife viewing areas, to attract visitors and provide alternatives to heavily used destinations.

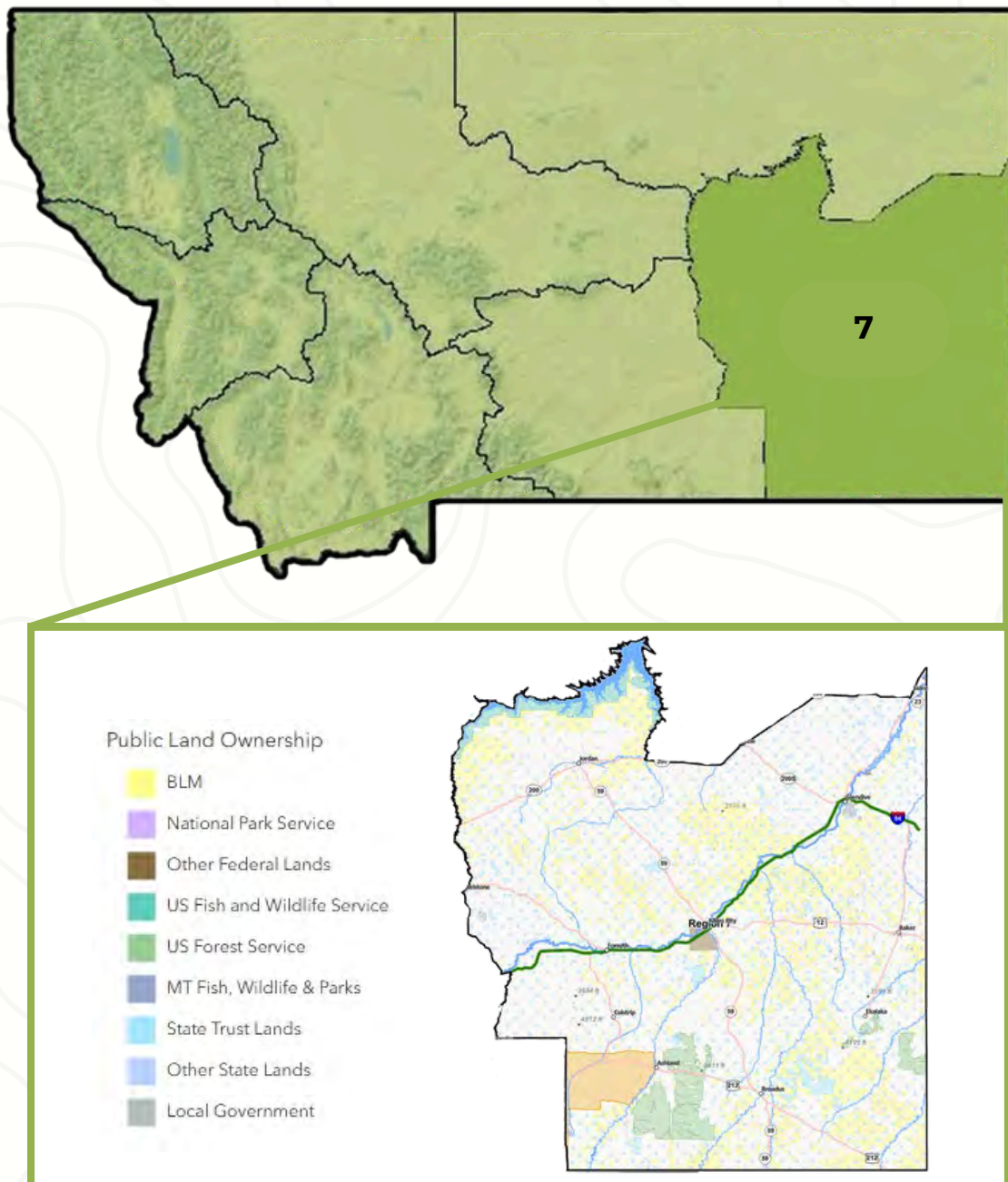
These trends underscore the importance of balancing growth, conservation, and community development in Region 6. Partners can use these regional insights to invest in the infrastructure improvements, youth engagement programs, and promotion of lesser-known destinations that will sustain outdoor recreation as a pillar of Northeast Montana's rural economy and community identity.



## 3.7 REGION 7: SOUTHEAST MONTANA

Southeast Montana is a region characterized by dramatic badlands, expansive plains, and rich cultural history. Known for its dramatic landscapes and opportunities for solitude, Region 7 offers recreation experiences that range from hiking and camping to exploring significant historical and geological landmarks. The region's rugged terrain and wide-open spaces provide a striking contrast to Montana's mountainous landscapes, making it an important part of the state's diverse outdoor recreation system.

Map 16: Region 7 Public Land Ownership



## Population

Region 7 is home to nearly 42,000 Montanans, accounting for approximately 3.8% of the state’s total population. Population density in this region is 1.69 people per square mile, the lowest of all SCORP regions, reflecting its large geographic area and predominantly rural character. By 2040, the population is projected to decrease to around 40,000 residents, representing a decline of roughly 4.2% from 2020.

This projected population loss stands in contrast to the growth anticipated in many other parts of Montana and is likely to influence the demand for outdoor recreation resources in Southeast Montana. Fewer residents may reduce some localized pressures on recreation sites, but shifting demographics and economic conditions may also affect the capacity of communities to maintain infrastructure, sustain volunteer efforts, and support recreation-related businesses. Table 12 summarizes projected population by county within Region 7, based on data from the Montana Census and Economic Information Center (2024).

Table 12: Region 7 Projected Population by County

COUNTY	2020	2030	2040	% CHANGE 2020-2040
CARTER	1,413	1,461	1,365	-3.40
CUSTER	11,859	11,645	11,469	-3.29
FALLON	3,033	3,065	3,299	8.77
GARFIELD	1,172	1,287	1,329	13.40
POWDER RIVER	1,693	2,164	2,233	31.90
PRAIRIE	1,076	1,174	1,163	8.09
RICHLAND	11,501	10,519	11,000	-4.36
ROSEBUD	8,298	7,051	6,528	-21.33
TREASURE	761	803	788	3.55
WIBAUX	928	839	818	-11.85
REGIONAL TOTAL	41,734	40,008	39,992	-4.17
STATEWIDE TOTAL	1,086,193	1,199,203	1,226,445	12.91

Source: Montana Census and Economic Information Center, 2024

## Public Lands and Recreational Resources

Region 7’s recreation character is shaped by a mix of traditional activities such as hunting and fishing and modern pursuits such as hiking and wildlife viewing. Residents value solitude, a strong connection with nature, and family-oriented recreation. At the same time, the region faces challenges related to access, limited infrastructure, and raising awareness of available opportunities, particularly in more remote areas.

Figure 23: Region 7 Land Ownership (%)

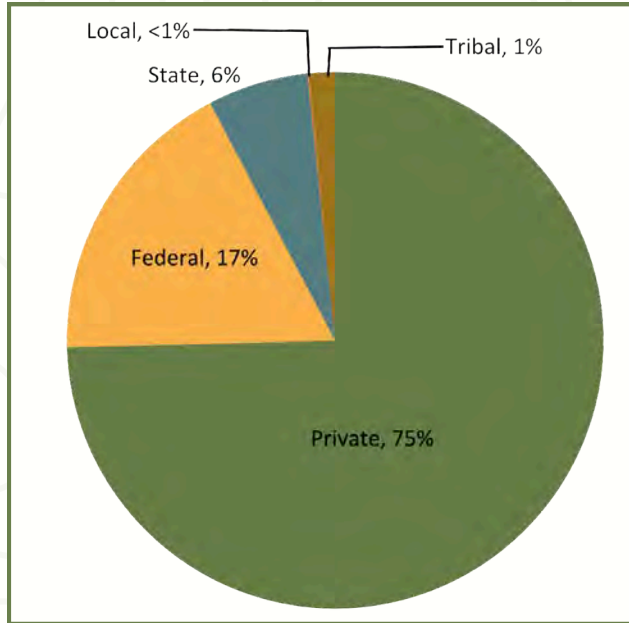
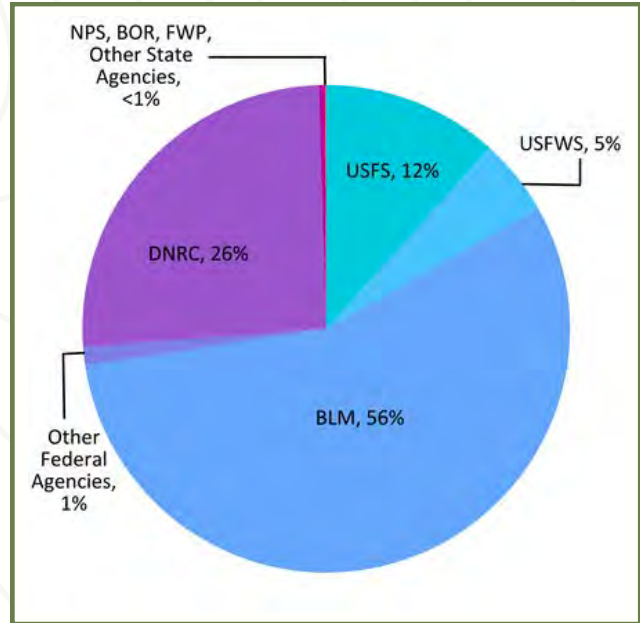


Figure 24: Region 7 Public Lands (%)



Public lands play a significant role in shaping outdoor recreation in Region 7. Approximately 23% of the region consists of federally or state-managed public land, about 75% is privately owned, roughly 1% is Tribal land, and less than 1% is managed by local governments. This makes Region 7 the region with the highest percentage of private land in the state.

In total, Region 7 has more than 4.8 million acres of public land. Of this public land base, about 74% is federally managed, with the Bureau of Land Management overseeing roughly 56% of all public land in the region. The state manages around 26% of the public land, most of which is administered as Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) State Trust Land. Overall, Region 7 residents enjoy approximately 114.5 acres of public land per person. Figure 23 shows the distribution of land ownership in the region, and Figure 24 illustrates the proportion of public lands by managing agency.

These public lands encompass a mix of badlands formations, prairie landscapes, river corridors, and wildlife habitats that support a wide range of recreation activities. Hunting and fishing, in particular, are central to the region’s outdoor identity and are closely tied to both public and private lands. Portions of the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge, extensive BLM holdings, DNRC State Trust lands, and Tribal lands together form the backbone of the region’s public recreation system.

Because communities in Region 7 are widely dispersed and population centers are relatively small, close-to-home recreation opportunities often depend on a combination of city parks, school facilities, and nearby public lands. In many cases, access points, roads, and basic amenities such as parking areas, restrooms, and boat ramps are limited, underscoring the importance of coordinated investment and maintenance to support both local residents and visiting recreationists.



### **Regional Recreation Trends**

Like Region 6, Region 7 residents identified fishing areas as their most frequently used outdoor recreation resource — a distinction shared by only these two regions statewide and a clear reflection of the prominent role that fishing and hunting traditions play in Southeast Montana's outdoor culture. 87 percent of respondents reported using fishing areas in the past year, making them the single most commonly used facility type in the region. Walking, jogging, and biking paths; hiking trails; and river access points were also used by a large share of households. Big game hunting areas, picnic areas, heritage and historic sites, campgrounds without hookups, natural or wild areas, and rifle and handgun ranges rounded out many households' recreation patterns.

These patterns highlight the importance of hunting and fishing, trail-based activities, and close-to-nature experiences in Region 7. They also indicate where recreation demand is most heavily concentrated and which facilities may be experiencing the greatest levels of wear and capacity pressure. The “Top 10 Facilities/Areas (Region 7)” figure provides additional detail on the outdoor recreation resources most used across the region.

#### **Top 10 Facilities/Areas (Region 7)**

- Fishing areas
- Walking/jogging/biking paths
- Hiking trails
- River access points
- Big game hunting areas
- Picnic areas
- Heritage/historic sites
- Natural or wild areas
- Rifle/handgun ranges
- Campgrounds with hookups

Region 7 residents identified a broad set of outdoor recreation facility and area needs, with close-to-home opportunities for families and youth ranking among the highest priorities, including improved campground access and better connectivity to public lands. Community members also expressed interest in more archery ranges, outdoor ice rinks, community gathering spaces, and interpretive trails that highlight the region's historical and cultural sites. These priorities suggest that recreation providers can focus on strengthening everyday opportunities in and near communities while improving access to the region's broader network of public lands and recreation areas.

Public workshops, surveys, and manager input identified several trends that are shaping the outdoor recreation landscape in Region 7. Participants emphasized a strong local interest in hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, and family-oriented outdoor opportunities and expressed concern about ensuring that these traditions remain accessible for future generations. Limited infrastructure, such as roads, campgrounds, and day-use sites, was frequently cited as a barrier, particularly in rural areas where local governments and partners have few resources for maintenance and upgrades.

Residents expressed strong interest in promoting underutilized public lands and recreation areas to help alleviate any crowding at popular sites and to support rural economic development. Many community members see potential in highlighting lesser-known destinations, such as smaller reservoirs, local trail systems, and scenic overlooks, to better distribute use and attract visitors in ways that benefit local businesses while minimizing pressure on heavily visited areas.

### **Top Outdoor Recreation Needs (Region 7)**

- Sledding/tubing areas
- Connectivity between communities and public lands
- Environmental education centers
- Campgrounds with hookups
- Campgrounds without hookups
- Interpretive trails
- Outdoor ice rinks
- Bike lanes
- Wildlife viewing areas
- Dog parks
- Waterparks

### **Emerging Trends in Region 7**

- Facility and infrastructure improvements
- Diversification of recreation destinations
- Inclusive access priorities
- Conservation and resource management
- Recreation information outreach

There was also a clear focus on ensuring that recreation opportunities are accessible and inclusive for all users, reflecting the region’s commitment to equitable access. Participants discussed the importance of providing opportunities for people of different ages, abilities, and backgrounds, including youth, older adults, and residents with limited transportation options.

Conservation and responsible resource management emerged as important priorities, especially as recreation use continues to grow in certain locations. Community members expressed concern about protecting wildlife habitat, preventing resource damage, and safeguarding the natural and cultural features that make Southeast Montana unique. Many emphasized the need to balance increased promotion of recreation opportunities with careful stewardship of sensitive landscapes.

Finally, participants identified a need for improved outreach and education to better inform residents and visitors about available recreation opportunities and responsible use practices. Many felt that clearer communication about access rules, seasonal conditions, and stewardship expectations would help reduce conflicts, support resource protection, and enhance the quality of recreation experiences across the region.

These trends reflect Region 7’s focus on enhancing outdoor recreation opportunities while preserving the natural and cultural resources that define the area. Partners can use these regional insights to invest in the outreach, infrastructure, and stewardship programs needed to make Southeast Montana's badlands, river corridors, and wide-open spaces more accessible and better known, supporting both quality recreation experiences and the rural communities that depend on them.





## CHAPTER 4: GOALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Montana's Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) provides a strategic framework to guide outdoor recreation priorities across the state. Each of the six goals responds directly to the recreation needs, trends, and issues identified in Chapters 2 and 3 and reflects long-term objectives informed by data analysis, public surveys, and extensive engagement with recreationists, land managers, and community partners. Under each goal, recommendations highlight key focus areas, and action items outline specific, practical steps that agencies, organizations, communities, and individuals can take to advance this plan's priorities.

To accommodate a wide range of partner capacities and resources, action items are organized into three categories:

### Basic Actions

Simple, low-cost steps that can typically be achieved with minimal resources or expertise. Suitable for individuals, volunteers, or small organizations.

### Intermediate Actions

Initiatives requiring moderate levels of planning, coordination, funding, or technical knowledge. Often led by local governments, nonprofits, or regional partnerships.

### Advanced Actions

Large-scale or complex efforts requiring significant resources, specialized expertise, long-term planning, or multi-partner collaboration. Typically pursued by state or federal agencies, large organizations, or formal partnerships.

By selecting action items that match their capacity and resources, individuals, communities, and organizations across Montana can each contribute to the SCORP's vision of a vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable outdoor recreation future.

## GOAL 1: ENHANCE TRAIL NETWORKS, PATHWAYS, AND RECREATION CONNECTIVITY

Montana's vast landscapes and outdoor opportunities are closely tied to the state's trail networks and recreation pathways. From local walking trails and community bike paths to backcountry routes, designated motorized trails, and access points that support OHV riding or dispersed camping, these connections shape how residents and visitors experience the outdoors. In recent years, trail-based recreation has grown dramatically. However, demand is outpacing the availability and quality of established routes, and gaps in connectivity prevent many communities from accessing the broader public land system.

Public input gathered through the SCORP Public Outdoor Recreation Use Survey and regional engagement consistently emphasized the importance of expanding and improving trail systems. Montanans called for new trail development, enhanced maintenance, and stronger connections between neighborhoods, public lands, and waterways. Stakeholders expressed a desire for accessible routes that serve a wide range of users, including seniors, youth, families, people with disabilities, and those who recreate using motorized equipment. Participants also highlighted the role of trails in supporting active transportation, economic vitality, public health, and meaningful connections to nature.

As Montana grows and changes, thoughtful trail planning and investment will be essential. Montana's trail system includes non-motorized trails, designated motorized routes, and access points that support an array of trail-based recreation opportunities, and planning decisions should reflect the diversity of experiences these systems provide. Enhancing trail networks and recreation connectivity not only creates more recreation opportunities but also helps address broader challenges such as traffic congestion, habitat fragmentation, and equitable access. This goal focuses on building a more connected outdoor recreation landscape that meets public demand, promotes environmental stewardship, and strengthens the social, economic, and cultural fabric of Montana's communities.





## GOAL 1: ENHANCE TRAIL NETWORKS, PATHWAYS, AND RECREATION CONNECTIVITY

1.1. Develop and implement a Montana State Trails Plan to guide regional trail investments, connectivity priorities, and long-term stewardship.

1.2. Prioritize the planning and design of mapping and wayfinding improvements to enhance trail user experience and connectivity.

1.3. Expand and connect trail networks and recreation corridors by utilizing diverse opportunities, such as public-private partnerships and existing corridors.

1.4. Support the development and maintenance of trail infrastructure that is durable, accessible, and resilient by applying best practices and working in coordination with trail users, land managers, and local partners.

### Basic Actions

- Inventory existing trails and recreation corridors to identify connectivity gaps and maintenance needs.
- Assess and update existing trail signage and wayfinding systems.
- Promote trail etiquette and responsible use education for diverse user groups.
- Engage local stakeholders, user groups, and landowners to identify potential trail connections or expansions.
- Ensure that trail planning processes include considerations for accessibility and multi-generational use.
- Identify designated wildlife viewing opportunities along trail systems.

### Intermediate Actions

- Develop or update local/regional trail and connectivity plans with a focus on linking urban centers to recreational opportunities.
- Collaborate with adjacent jurisdictions to coordinate cross-boundary trail development and maintenance.
- Implement mapping upgrades, including digital platforms and GIS-based tools, to enhance trail visibility and navigation.
- Pilot innovative trail design solutions that improve durability and reduce maintenance needs.
- Engage local historical societies in developing interpretive trails highlighting Montana's cultural heritage.

### Advanced Actions

- Complete, adopt, and implement the Montana State Trails Plan, guiding statewide trail investments and connectivity priorities.
- Secure and develop complex trail corridors utilizing rail-trails, utility easements, and long-distance linkages.
- Develop large-scale mapping and wayfinding initiatives that integrate multiple jurisdictions and trail types.
- Establish volunteer stewardship programs to assist with trail maintenance and public education.
- Implement monitoring programs to assess trail use, condition, and impacts, informing adaptive management.

## GOAL 2: EXPAND ACCESS AND INCLUSIVITY IN OUTDOOR RECREATION

Montana's outdoor spaces offer extraordinary opportunities for recreation, relaxation, and connection to nature, but these opportunities are not equally accessible to everyone. While some Montanans enjoy convenient access to public lands, trails, and waterways, others face physical, geographic, financial, or cultural barriers that limit participation. The SCORP Public Outdoor Recreation Use Survey and stakeholder engagement efforts revealed strong public interest in breaking down these barriers and ensuring that outdoor recreation is welcoming and available to people of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities.

Access and inclusivity extend beyond physical improvements. They include ADA-compliant facilities, accessible trail and water access points, adaptive programming, and thoughtful design that considers the diverse needs of all users. They also involve addressing geographic disparities, providing recreation opportunities in underserved rural and urban areas, and offering affordable or free programming for individuals and families with limited financial means.

Inclusivity further means recognizing and engaging historically underrepresented groups, including Indigenous communities, veterans, new Montanans, and people from culturally diverse backgrounds. Creating safe, welcoming, and culturally responsive spaces supports individual well-being and helps foster a broader stewardship ethic and public support for Montana's recreation and conservation goals.

This goal reflects Montana's commitment to expanding access and inclusivity by removing barriers, increasing opportunity, and promoting equitable participation. By doing so, the state can help ensure that the benefits of outdoor recreation, including improved physical and mental health, social connection, and a deeper appreciation for natural and cultural resources, are available to everyone.





## GOAL 2: EXPAND ACCESS AND INCLUSIVITY IN OUTDOOR RECREATION

- 2.1. Reduce barriers (physical, financial, social) to outdoor recreation participation.
- 2.2. Prioritize facility and program improvements in underserved and rural communities.
- 2.3. Increase the availability of ADA-compliant facilities and adaptive recreation opportunities.
- 2.4. Strengthen outreach, engagement, and partnerships with underrepresented populations and culturally diverse communities.
- 2.5. Continue expansion and promotion of private land access programs that facilitate recreational use and increase access options.

### Basic Actions

- Conduct baseline assessments of barriers to access in local and regional recreation areas.
- Review existing facilities for ADA compliance and prioritize low-cost improvements (e.g., signage, seating, entryways).
- Develop multilingual materials and signage to improve inclusivity.
- Establish relationships with community organizations serving underrepresented groups.
- Promote awareness of existing private land access opportunities through public outreach and partnerships.
- Provide training for front-line staff on inclusive customer service and ADA best practices.

### Intermediate Actions

- Upgrade priority facilities in underserved communities to meet or exceed ADA standards.
- Implement targeted outreach and recreation programs for youth, seniors, veterans, and low-income populations.
- Develop adaptive recreation programming in partnership with specialized organizations.
- Form regional coalitions to align equity goals across multiple recreation providers and partners.
- Develop low-cost family-oriented recreation events at parks and urban outdoor spaces.
- Partner with Tribal Nations and rural communities to co-design culturally relevant programming.

### Advanced Actions

- Complete and maintain a statewide outdoor recreation access and equity assessment.
- Integrate universal design principles into all new facility and program development.
- Establish dedicated funding streams for adaptive recreation and access equity initiatives.
- Expand private land access agreements and create new programs modeled after successful efforts like PALA.
- Launch statewide marketing campaigns promoting inclusive recreation opportunities and access programs.
- Develop an Inclusive Recreation Toolkit for planners and providers with design templates, checklists, and engagement guides.

## GOAL 3: REPAIR, MAINTAIN, AND MODERNIZE RECREATION FACILITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE



Montana’s outdoor recreation infrastructure provides the essential foundation for safe, enjoyable, and sustainable experiences. Campgrounds, trails, water access sites, restrooms, trailheads, signage, and parking areas support a wide variety of activities and are often the first point of contact between the public and public lands. Much of this infrastructure, however, is aging, heavily used, or in need of critical repair. Deferred maintenance has become a growing concern across Montana’s recreation landscape, with many agencies and land managers struggling to keep pace with increasing use, limited budgets, and expanding public expectations.



Throughout the SCORP planning process, Montanans consistently voiced the need to prioritize maintenance and upgrades to existing facilities. In many regions, public input emphasized maintaining and improving what already exists before expanding or developing new amenities. Concerns about deteriorating infrastructure, outdated facilities, and insufficient maintenance staffing were common themes.

At the same time, modernizing recreation infrastructure is essential to meet changing needs. Demographic shifts, evolving recreation trends, and increased demand call for updates that improve accessibility, safety, sustainability, and user experience. Montanans also expressed strong support for integrating climate-resilient design, sustainable materials, and energy-efficient technologies into facility improvements.



This goal addresses the urgent need to repair and maintain existing infrastructure while also planning for thoughtful modernization. Investments in core facilities will enhance the quality of recreation experiences, support public safety, protect natural and cultural resources, and improve long-term cost efficiency. By taking a proactive approach, Montana can ensure that its recreation infrastructure continues to serve both current users and future generations.



## GOAL 3: REPAIR, MAINTAIN, AND MODERNIZE RECREATION FACILITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE

- 3.1. Address deferred maintenance across public recreation facilities to ensure safe and reliable infrastructure.
- 3.2. Modernize recreation facilities and infrastructure to accommodate changing recreation patterns and future demand.
- 3.3. Promote resilient and climate-adaptive design in all upgrades and new developments.
- 3.4. Support diverse funding partnerships and community involvement to leverage resources and effectively meet management needs.

### Basic Actions

- Conduct facility condition assessments to identify deferred maintenance priorities.
- Complete minor repairs and maintenance within available resources.
- Train staff and volunteers in basic maintenance and safety practices.
- Review facilities for ADA compliance and prioritize low-cost improvements.
- Establish or strengthen volunteer maintenance and stewardship programs.
- Post visible signage at facilities encouraging users to report maintenance issues.
- Standardize facility inspection checklists to ensure consistent tracking of safety, accessibility, and maintenance needs.

### Intermediate Actions

- Develop facility repair and modernization plans that incorporate sustainability and resilience principles.
- Pursue diverse funding sources, including grants, philanthropic partnerships, and cost-sharing agreements.
- Upgrade priority facilities to meet or exceed ADA standards and address anticipated user demand.
- Adopt technologies that improve facility monitoring, maintenance scheduling, and cost efficiency.
- Integrate universal design features into planned renovations and upgrades.
- Develop targeted maintenance plans for historical recreation sites.

### Advanced Actions

- Implement large-scale deferred maintenance reduction initiatives across multiple facilities or jurisdictions.
- Secure long-term funding mechanisms for infrastructure maintenance and modernization.
- Develop and implement climate-adaptive design standards for recreation infrastructure.
- Launch cross-agency or regional infrastructure partnerships to pool resources and coordinate projects.
- Expand and institutionalize volunteer and stewardship programs as integral components of facility management.
- Encourage the integration of interpretive elements in facility upgrades.

## GOAL 4: CONSERVE MONTANA'S NATURAL, CULTURAL, AND RECREATIONAL RESOURCES

Montana's natural beauty, abundant wildlife, and rich cultural heritage form the foundation of the state's outdoor recreation identity. These resources are deeply valued by residents and visitors and are central to the quality of recreation experiences across the state. Rising visitation, development pressures, changing environmental conditions, and invasive species are placing increasing strain on Montana's lands, waters, wildlife, and cultural sites. In some locations, unmanaged recreation or facilities developed without adequate environmental review can fragment habitat, disturb wildlife during critical seasons, and degrade riparian and other sensitive areas.

Throughout the SCORP planning process, Montanans expressed strong support for protecting natural, cultural, and recreational resources. Public input consistently highlighted concerns about overuse in popular areas, loss of wildlife habitat, threats to water quality, and degradation of scenic landscapes and quiet recreation settings. Many participants also emphasized the importance of conserving cultural resources and honoring the histories and traditions of Montana's Indigenous peoples and other cultural communities.

Balancing access and conservation is essential to sustaining outdoor recreation opportunities into the future. Responsible planning and management practices, such as sustainable trail design, habitat restoration, visitor education, and adaptive resource management, can help protect sensitive areas while still allowing for public enjoyment. Integrating conservation values into recreation planning also supports biodiversity, climate resilience, and the long-term health of Montana's ecosystems.

This goal reflects Montana's commitment to safeguarding the natural and cultural resources that make outdoor recreation possible. By prioritizing conservation alongside access and development, the state can ensure that these irreplaceable assets continue to inspire, educate, and provide for future generations.





## GOAL 4: CONSERVE MONTANA'S NATURAL, CULTURAL, AND RECREATIONAL RESOURCES

- 4.1. Integrate conservation and cultural resource protection into all recreation planning, development, and management.
- 4.2. Mitigate recreation impacts on sensitive environments, wildlife habitats, and cultural resources.
- 4.3. Strengthen Montana's Tribal Nations through outdoor recreation.
- 4.4. Enhance public education on responsible recreation and environmental stewardship.

### Basic Actions

- Identify and document sensitive natural and cultural resource areas within recreation sites.
- Incorporate resource protection messaging into existing signage and visitor materials.
- Provide training for staff and volunteers on cultural sensitivity and resource stewardship.
- Engage with local Tribal representatives and cultural organizations to inform recreation planning.
- Promote Leave No Trace and similar responsible recreation principles through community outreach.
- Share information about available grant programs (including LWCF) with Tribal and cultural partners.
- Create habitat-friendly wildlife viewing guidelines to minimize disturbance and educate the public.

### Intermediate Actions

- Develop resource management plans that balance recreation access with conservation goals.
- Implement trail and facility design modifications to protect sensitive areas and minimize habitat fragmentation.
- Establish formal partnerships with Tribal Nations, conservation nonprofits, and local landowners for site management and education efforts.
- Monitor and assess recreation impacts on wildlife, vegetation, and cultural sites to inform adaptive management.
- Include Tribal Nations in early stages of planning for significant recreation projects.
- Assist Tribal partners in identifying and applying for grants supporting recreation and tourism development.

### Advanced Actions

- Complete comprehensive natural and cultural resource inventories in high visitation areas to inform conservation planning.
- Restore or rehabilitate areas degraded by recreational use in collaboration with partners and volunteers.
- Develop co-management agreements with Tribal Nations for sites of shared significance.
- Design and implement advanced public education initiatives, including technology-enhanced interpretation and citizen science programs.
- Integrate climate resilience strategies into resource management and recreation planning.
- Collaborate with Tribal Nations to develop culturally significant recreation tourism initiatives.

## GOAL 5: SUPPORT ECONOMIC VITALITY THROUGH OUTDOOR RECREATION

Outdoor recreation is more than a source of enjoyment and well-being for Montanans; it is also a powerful driver of economic growth and community vitality. Recreation-related spending supports local businesses, creates jobs, attracts visitors, and strengthens both rural and urban economies across the state. From guiding services and gear shops to campgrounds, breweries, and tourism-based enterprises, outdoor recreation contributes to the prosperity of diverse industries and communities.

Montana's recreation economy has grown rapidly in recent years, reflecting both increased participation and the state's reputation as a premier outdoor destination. The SCORP Public Outdoor Recreation Use Survey and regional profiles underscored the significant role recreation plays in supporting gateway communities, sustaining rural livelihoods, and attracting new residents and businesses. With this growth comes the need for thoughtful planning and investment to ensure that economic benefits are sustainable and balanced with resource protection.

Public and stakeholder feedback called for expanding workforce development opportunities, supporting small businesses, and investing in infrastructure that meets the needs of both residents and visitors. Many participants also emphasized the importance of diversifying local economies and reducing over-reliance on a single industry or visitor base. Strengthening public-private partnerships and aligning recreation planning with broader community and economic development goals will be key strategies moving forward.

This goal recognizes that fostering a vibrant outdoor recreation economy requires collaboration, innovation, and a commitment to maintaining the quality of the experiences and resources that make Montana unique. By supporting recreation as both a cultural and economic asset, Montana can enhance community resilience and prosperity for years to come.





## GOAL 5: SUPPORT ECONOMIC VITALITY THROUGH OUTDOOR RECREATION

5.1. Promote sustainable outdoor recreation tourism that benefits local economies.

5.2. Support the growth of outdoor recreation businesses and workforce development initiatives.

5.3. Foster partnerships with economic development organizations, tourism agencies, and local governments to maximize recreation's economic contributions.

5.4. Track and communicate the economic value of outdoor recreation to stakeholders, decision-makers, and the public.

### Basic Actions

- Develop or update marketing materials promoting local recreation opportunities.
- Provide information to local businesses and tourism operators about recreation events and trends.
- Share success stories highlighting the positive economic impacts of recreation in rural and gateway communities.
- Promote job opportunities in recreation and tourism sectors through local job boards and community partners.
- Distribute visitor education materials that promote Montana's outdoor recreation ethics and responsible use practices.

### Intermediate Actions

- Host workshops or networking events for recreation-based businesses and economic development professionals.
- Establish partnerships with tourism agencies to promote sustainable recreation tourism.
- Develop visitor readiness assessments for communities seeking to expand recreation tourism.
- Collaborate with education and workforce development entities to offer training in outdoor recreation management, guiding, and interpretation.
- Gather and publish regional economic data related to recreation spending and job creation.

### Advanced Actions

- Launch regional or statewide marketing initiatives that promote sustainable recreation tourism.
- Develop and implement workforce training programs in collaboration with educational institutions and industry partners.
- Establish funding or grant programs to support small recreation businesses and entrepreneurs.
- Conduct comprehensive economic impact studies to quantify the contribution of recreation and inform policy.
- Integrate recreation-based economic strategies into regional and statewide economic development plans.

## GOAL 6: FOSTER EDUCATION, STEWARDSHIP, AND COLLABORATION

Montana’s outdoor recreation legacy depends not only on providing access and infrastructure but also on cultivating a shared sense of responsibility for caring for the state’s natural and cultural resources. As visitation grows and recreation trends evolve, education and stewardship have become more important than ever. Public input throughout the SCORP planning process underscored strong interest in fostering a stewardship ethic, improving visitor education, and enhancing collaboration among land managers, recreation users, and community partners.

Effective education helps visitors and residents understand responsible recreation practices, including Leave No Trace principles, “Clean, Drain, Dry” steps to prevent aquatic invasive species, wildlife-safe behavior, cultural respect, and resource conservation. Stewardship programs that engage volunteers, youth, and diverse user groups build lasting connections to the land and increase community capacity for conservation. As challenges become more complex, from environmental change to increasing demand, innovative education strategies are needed to reach new audiences and address emerging issues.

Collaboration is equally essential. Montana’s outdoor recreation landscape is shaped by a diverse network of partners, including public agencies, Tribal governments, nonprofit organizations, businesses, volunteers, and local communities. Successful recreation management depends on ongoing coordination, shared resources, and joint problem-solving. Public-private partnerships, citizen science initiatives, and community-based planning processes can strengthen recreation outcomes and expand stewardship.

This goal reflects Montana’s commitment to not only providing recreation opportunities but also fostering an informed, engaged, and collaborative recreation community. By investing in education, promoting stewardship, and supporting partnerships, Montana can help ensure that its outdoor spaces remain healthy, accessible, and meaningful for generations to come.





## GOAL 6: FOSTER EDUCATION, STEWARDSHIP, AND COLLABORATION

- 6.1. Enhance outdoor education, interpretation, and youth-focused engagement across all recreation activities.
- 6.2. Provide opportunities for meaningful public involvement in recreation planning and resource stewardship initiatives.
- 6.3. Strengthen public outreach and messaging that encourages healthy, safe, sustainable, and responsible recreation behaviors.
- 6.4. Cultivate robust volunteerism and citizen science programs that directly support conservation and recreation objectives.
- 6.5. Foster collaborative, cross-sector partnerships to amplify educational outreach, stewardship effectiveness, and community engagement.

### Basic Actions

- Provide educational signage at recreation sites highlighting stewardship principles and safe recreation practices.
- Host community clean-up or trail maintenance days with volunteers.
- Develop partnerships with local schools and youth groups to promote outdoor learning opportunities.
- Encourage public comment and participation in recreation planning efforts.
- Share recreation safety and stewardship messaging through existing social media and outreach channels.
- Promote low-impact recreation opportunities, such as wildlife viewing, that foster appreciation of Montana's natural resources.

### Intermediate Actions

- Establish formal volunteer stewardship programs with clear training and safety protocols.
- Collaborate with local and regional education providers to integrate Montana's outdoor heritage into educational curricula.
- Develop culturally relevant interpretation in partnership with Tribal Nations and cultural organizations.
- Launch community-based citizen science initiatives focused on monitoring resource health.
- Conduct recreation safety and stewardship workshops for both residents and visitors.
- Establish youth mentorship programs focused on outdoor leadership and conservation.

### Advanced Actions

- Develop and implement comprehensive outdoor education and interpretation plans at the regional level.
- Establish multi-agency or multi-organization stewardship collaboratives to coordinate resource management and public engagement.
- Implement long-term citizen science programs that inform adaptive management.
- Secure dedicated funding streams to support youth engagement, education, and volunteer programs.
- Create formal advisory groups including youth representatives, Tribal leaders, and community organizations to guide recreation planning and stewardship initiatives.





## CHAPTER 5: IMPLEMENTATION TOOLKIT

The Montana Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) provides a vision and a set of goals that reflect the values and priorities of Montanans. Achieving these goals will require the collective effort of state and federal agencies, local governments, nonprofit organizations, private businesses, and community groups across the state. This Implementation Toolkit is designed to serve as a practical resource to help recreation providers and partners translate the SCORP's vision into meaningful action.

Montana's diverse landscapes, communities, and recreation opportunities mean that a one-size-fits-all approach will not be effective. The Toolkit offers flexible guidance that can be adapted to meet the unique needs and capacities of different recreation providers, from large municipal park systems to small volunteer-driven organizations. It recognizes that while some providers may have extensive staff and funding, others may rely heavily on community partnerships and creative problem solving to meet their recreation goals.

The Toolkit outlines strategies and actions that align with the SCORP's goals and offers resources to help providers identify funding opportunities, build partnerships, and evaluate progress. It is intended to be used not only as a planning guide but also as a means to foster collaboration and coordination across sectors and jurisdictions. By working together and using the tools provided in this chapter, Montana's recreation providers can enhance the quality, accessibility, and sustainability of outdoor recreation opportunities for residents and visitors alike.

This chapter provides a starting point for turning ideas into action. It invites all recreation providers and partners to play an active role in shaping Montana's outdoor recreation future and to share in the responsibility of creating a vibrant, inclusive, and resilient recreation system that benefits current and future generations.

## 5.1 PARTNERING FOR SUCCESS

### Example Partnership Models

#### **Public-Nonprofit Partnership:**

*Southwest Montana Mountain Bike Association (SWMMBA) and the U.S. Forest Service*

SWMMBA collaborates with the U.S. Forest Service to maintain and improve sections of the Continental Divide Trail, combining volunteer efforts with federal land management to enhance trail sustainability and user experience.

#### **Public-Private Partnership:**

*Marshall Mountain Park, Missoula*

When a former ski area closed to the public, conservation organizations and private donors purchased and held the land for two years while the City of Missoula and Missoula County secured public open space bond funding for permanent acquisition. Friends of Marshall Mountain, Five Valleys Land Trust, and the Missoula Mountain Bike Coalition contributed private fundraising alongside public dollars to preserve the 480-acre site as a year-round community recreation park.

#### **Cross-Sector Collaboration:**

*East Helena Greenway Trail Project*

A decade-long partnership among the City of East Helena, Prickly Pear Land Trust, and multiple state and federal agencies transformed 322 acres of a remediated Superfund site into an 8-mile public trail system, connecting East Helena to Montana City and turning a former industrial liability into a community recreation asset.

The successful implementation of this SCORP depends on collaboration across a broad network of partners. While Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks will continue to lead as the primary steward of the SCORP and administer key funding programs, no single agency or organization can achieve these goals alone. Montana's diverse landscapes, growing recreation demands, and evolving community needs require a coordinated approach that brings together the expertise, resources, and leadership of federal, state, and local agencies, nonprofit organizations, community groups, and private partners.

Each partner has a unique role to play, from managing public lands and administering grants to developing recreation facilities, engaging volunteers, and supporting conservation and education initiatives. Effective partnerships will not only maximize the impact of limited resources but also help ensure that recreation projects address multiple community priorities including health, connectivity, economic development, and stewardship.

To support effective collaboration, the following checklist offers practical steps for identifying partners, defining roles, and building strong, sustainable partnerships.



## Collaboration Checklist

Use this checklist when planning and implementing recreation projects to ensure strong partnerships and shared success.

### Identify Key Partners

- Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP):** Alignment with SCORP goals, funding guidance
- Federal Agencies (NPS, BLM, USFS, USFWS):** Technical assistance, funding, public lands coordination
- Other State Agencies:** Infrastructure planning, grant administration, conservation alignment
- Local Governments:** Community priorities, facility development, public engagement
- Nonprofit & Community Groups:** Volunteer coordination, youth engagement, conservation education
- Private Sector Partners:** Sponsorships, in-kind support, tourism and business collaboration

### Define Roles and Responsibilities

- Outline each partner's role early in the process
- Formalize agreements as needed (e.g., MOUs or contracts)

### Align Broader Goals

- Incorporate community health, transportation, education, and economic development goals where possible
- Ensure the project reflects diverse community needs and equitable access

### Plan for Communication and Coordination

- Establish regular check-ins or updates
- Designate a point of contact for each partner

### Leverage Strengths & Resources

- Identify what unique assets each partner brings (funding, staff, equipment, volunteers, outreach capacity)
- Maximize efficiency by sharing resources and expertise

### Build for Long-Term Success

- Consider how partnerships can extend beyond the current project
- Plan for maintenance, future funding, and continued collaboration

## 5.2 RECREATION FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

Accomplishing the goals outlined in this SCORP will require more than just the use of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). While LWCF remains an essential source of support, funding continues to be a consistent challenge for recreation providers across Montana. Grant funding often enables important projects to move forward that would otherwise be out of reach due to limited local or agency budgets.

A variety of grant programs exist at both the federal and state level to help recreation providers develop, improve, and maintain outdoor recreation opportunities. These funding sources can support everything from trail construction and park development to conservation and access projects.

The following pages provide an overview of grant programs available in Montana that can help implement your outdoor recreation projects and advance the priorities identified in this SCORP.

### Tips for Successful Grant Writing

- **Review all available information about the grant**, including eligibility requirements, application guidelines, and evaluation criteria.
- **Contact the grant administrator early in the process.** Asking questions or requesting feedback on a draft application can provide valuable insights into the program's priorities and the competitiveness of your proposed project.
- **When preparing your application:**
  - **Be concise and clear** when describing the project and its need. Avoid jargon and focus on the project's benefits and alignment with SCORP goals.
  - **Understand grant requirements.** Be aware of any conditions attached to federal and state grants, including reporting obligations and post-project responsibilities. When in doubt, consult the grant administrator.
  - **Detail your matching funds.** Identify and describe all sources of matching funds, such as local budgets, state grants, or private donations.
  - **Stick to requested information only.** Avoid including unnecessary materials and ensure you allocate sufficient time in your project timeline to complete the grant application process, which can be lengthy.

## OUTDOOR RECREATION GRANT PROGRAMS ADMINISTERED BY FWP

### Land and Water Conservation Fund Program

LWCF matching grants help local communities provide open spaces and healthy recreation places for Montana families. The LWCF Program is administered by FWP. This federal grants program was established by the Land and Water Conservation Act of 1964 and encourages a full partnership between national, state, local, and Tribal government agencies in the planning and funding outdoor recreation projects. It provides matching grants for the acquisition, development, and planning of outdoor recreation facilities. Examples of eligible projects include: ball fields, public parks, outdoor swimming pools, playgrounds, picnic facilities, walking trails, and more.

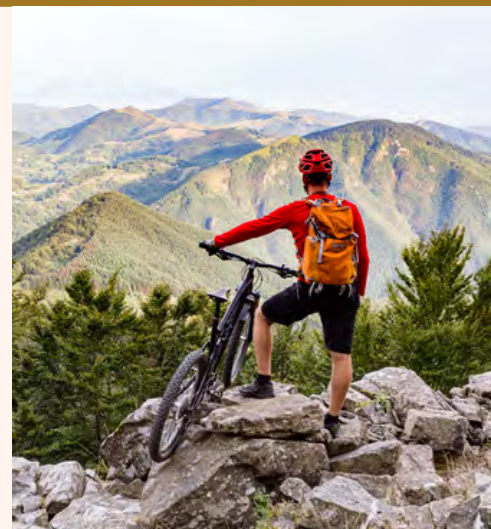


### Recreational Trails Program

The Recreational Trails Program (RTP) funds the development and maintenance of recreational trails and related facilities across Montana. Funded through the Federal Highway Trust Fund, RTP revenue comes from fuel taxes paid by off-highway recreational vehicles such as snowmobiles, ATVs, and motorcycles. Eligible applicants include federal, tribal, state, county, and city agencies, as well as nonprofit organizations, private associations, and trail clubs. Projects can include trail construction and maintenance, restoration of damaged areas, development of trailside facilities, and trail-related education and safety initiatives.

### Trail Stewardship Program

The Trail Stewardship Program (TSP) provides funding for the development, rehabilitation, maintenance, and stewardship of trails and trail-related facilities throughout Montana. Established to support both motorized and non-motorized trail projects, the program helps enhance access, safety, and user experiences while promoting sustainable trail management practices. Eligible applicants include federal, tribal, state, county, and city agencies, as well as nonprofit organizations, trail user groups, and other community-based partners. Projects may include new trail construction, trail maintenance and repair, improvements to trailheads and supporting infrastructure, restoration of areas impacted by trail use, and trail safety and education efforts.





## Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Program

The Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Program provides grant funding for safety and ethics education, as well as projects that enhance and maintain OHV recreational opportunities for enthusiasts. FWP administers the OHV Program with funds appropriated by the state legislature. The program includes the OHV grant program and safety, ethics, and education efforts. Eligible applicants typically include federal, tribal, state, county, and city agencies, as well as nonprofit organizations and motorized user groups. OHV grant program projects can include maintenance of existing OHV trails, signs, ethics education, noxious weed control, safety and mapping efforts, and related projects. The OHV Advisory Committee, comprised of OHV users and land managers, advises FWP on the expenditure of grant funds. OHV-generated revenue also helps maintain some shared-use routes that serve a range of recreation users on designated trails.

## Montana Snowmobile Program

The Montana Snowmobile Program provides grant funding to support snowmobile trail grooming and education so enthusiasts can ride safely in Montana. This state grant program supports snowmobile trail grooming, the purchase and repair of grooming-related equipment, safety education, public outreach, and law enforcement. This grant funding is available to snowmobiling clubs, nonprofit organizations, and public land-managing agencies. Funds typically help maintain safe, well-signed snowmobile routes and support education and enforcement that promote responsible riding.



## Summer Motorized Trail Pass Grant Program

The Summer Motorized Trail Pass (SMTP) Grant Program provides funding for the maintenance, enhancement, and stewardship of Montana's summer motorized trail systems. Funded through the sale of Summer Motorized Trail Passes, the program supports projects that benefit off-highway vehicles (OHVs) such as dirt bikes, ATVs, and side-by-sides. Eligible applicants are nonprofit organizations that support the maintenance and management of designated motorized trails and routes. Funding can be used for trail maintenance, signing, mapping, safety improvements, noxious weed control, and other trail-related projects. SMTP funds are intended to support sustainable motorized trail opportunities and complement existing volunteer and partner contributions.



## OTHER PROGRAMS AND RESOURCES FOR OUTDOOR RECREATION FUNDING

For specific information regarding these grant resources, contact the lead agency.

### **Montana Department of Commerce**

Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) — This federally funded program provides assistance to communities with development needs such as housing, public facilities, economic development, planning, and neighborhood renewal, including neighborhood parks. Eligible applicants include cities, towns, and counties with populations fewer than 50,000 residents; the Montana Department of Commerce administers CDBG funds on behalf of the state.

*<https://comdev.mt.gov/Programs-and-Boards/Community-Development-Block-Grant-Program/>*

Economic Impact and Destination Event Grant Program — This program assists Montana communities in developing destination events designed to increase tourism, promote Montana's unique attributes, and generate additional community revenue. Eligible applicants include nonprofit organizations and community groups working to elevate local events to destination event status.

*<https://commerce.mt.gov/Business/Programs-and-Services/Tourism-Marketing/Tourism-Grant-Program/Economic-Impact-and-Destination-Event-Grant-Program>*

Montana Tourism Development Grant Program — This state-funded program supports communities across Montana in cultivating regional visions, developing tourism strategies, and enhancing tourism assets and infrastructure. Eligible applicants are rural communities or groups of communities that have prioritized tourism as an economic development strategy; urban and overvisited locations as defined by the Department of Commerce are not eligible. *<https://commerce.mt.gov/Business/Programs-and-Services/Tourism-Marketing/Tourism-Grant-Program/Montana-Tourism-Development-Grant-Program>*

*Tourism Development and Enhancement Revolving Loan Fund — This program awards grants to eligible economic development organizations to establish revolving loan funds that support tourism-related businesses and infrastructure, with the goal of creating jobs, expanding existing tourism businesses, and promoting long-term economic growth in Montana's tourism economy. <https://commerce.mt.gov/Business/Programs-and-Services/Tourism-Marketing/Tourism-Grant-Program/Tourism-Development-and-Enhancement-Revolving-Loan-Fund>*



### **Montana Department of Transportation**

Transportation Alternatives Program — This program consolidates funding from several former programs, including Safe Routes to School, Recreational Trails, and Transportation Enhancements, into a single flexible funding source supporting active transportation and recreation-related projects such as pathways, sidewalks, and trail connections.

<https://www.mdt.mt.gov/business/grants.aspx>

### **National Park Service**

Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program (RTCA) — This program connects communities to their parks, trails, rivers, and other special places through professional planning, design, and technical expertise. NPS-RTCA does not provide monetary grants but assists community groups, nonprofit organizations, tribal governments, and local, state, and federal agencies with conservation and outdoor recreation planning at no cost.

<https://www.nps.gov/orgs/rtca/apply.htm>

### **U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service**

Sport Fish Restoration Program — This program provides grant funds to fish and wildlife agencies of the states, the District of Columbia, and U.S. territories for fishery projects, boating access, and aquatic education. Created in 1950 through the Sport Fish Restoration Act (Dingell-Johnson Act), the program has generated over \$12 billion for the conservation and restoration of sport fish species and their habitats.

<https://www.fws.gov/program/sport-fish-restoration>

### **U.S. Coast Guard**

Recreational Boating Safety Program — This program provides federal funds to support state recreational boating safety programs, including education, enforcement, and public outreach activities.

<https://uscgboating.org/grants/state-grants-rbs-program.php>

## 5.3 LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND: OPEN PROJECT SELECTION PROCESS

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) is a key source of support for developing and improving outdoor recreation opportunities across Montana. As the State Lead Agency for LWCF, FWP is required by NPS to maintain an approved Open Project Selection Process (OPSP). The OPSP describes how LWCF applications are solicited, reviewed, scored, and selected, ensuring that funding decisions are transparent, equitable, and aligned with the statewide priorities identified in this SCORP.

The OPSP serves as the formal connection between the SCORP and the use of LWCF funds. It ensures that LWCF investments advance Montana's most important outdoor recreation needs, especially those related to access, facility improvements, inclusion, community health, and long-term stewardship.

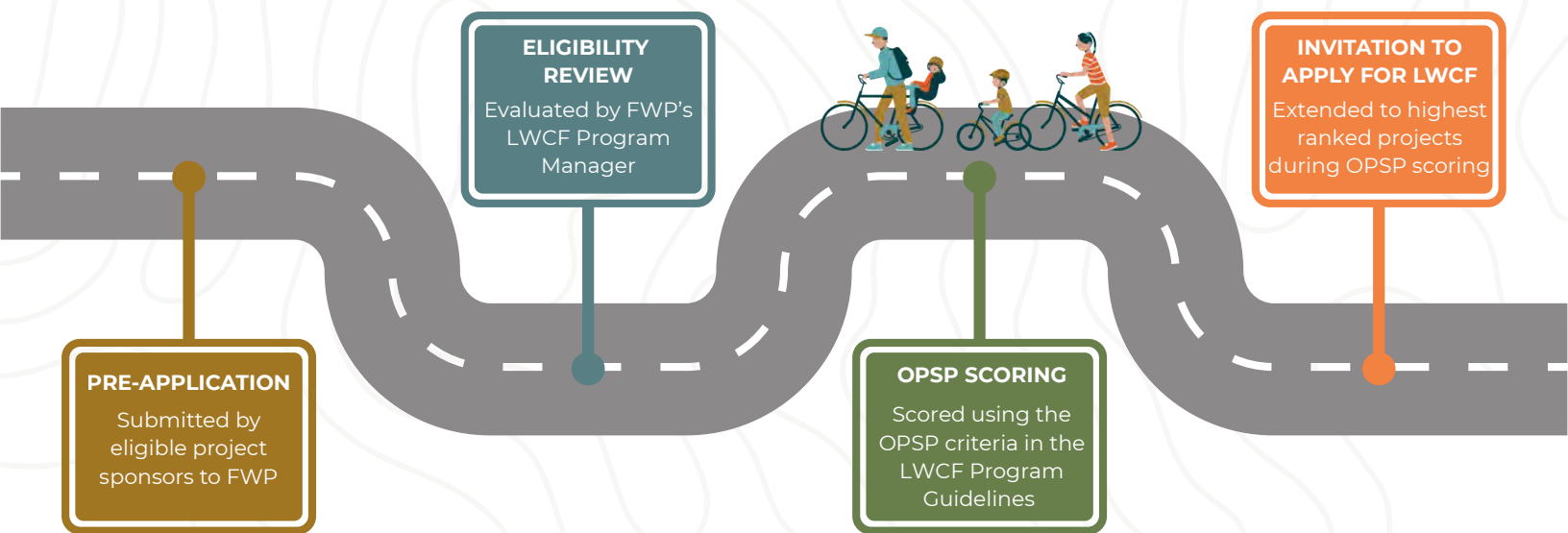
### **Purpose of the OPSP**

The National Park Service requires every state to maintain an OPSP that:

- Provides a fair and open competitive grant process
- Uses objective, published criteria tied to statewide outdoor recreation priorities
- Demonstrates clear alignment between SCORP goals and LWCF funding decisions
- Ensures opportunities for public awareness and participation
- Distributes funds in a nondiscriminatory and equitable manner

Montana meets these requirements through the Montana LWCF Program Guidelines, which are reviewed periodically and published on the FWP website.





## How Montana's OPSP Works

FWP administers a competitive selection process for LWCF grants. These steps provide consistent and transparent evaluation across all eligible project proposals.

### Pre-Application Phase

Eligible project sponsors submit brief project summaries describing project need, SCORP alignment, readiness, and community support. FWP reviews each pre-application to confirm:

- Eligibility and land control
- Outdoor recreation use consistent with LWCF requirements
- Matching fund commitments
- Long-term operations and maintenance
- Federal accessibility and nondiscrimination compliance

Eligible pre-applications proceed to scoring.

### OPSP Scoring and Ranking

A multi-disciplinary FWP review team scores each eligible proposal using the OPSP criteria outlined in the LWCF Program Guidelines. Scoring reflects:

- Type and quality of the proposed project, including accessibility improvements, seasonal use, and renovation versus new development
- Evidence of statewide or community-level recreation need
- Alignment with the goals and priority actions of this SCORP
- Project readiness, including permitting, feasibility, and long-term stewardship

Top-ranked project sponsors are invited to submit full LWCF applications for refinement and submission to the National Park Service.

## OPSP Checklist for Recreation Providers

Use this checklist to navigate Montana's Open Project Selection Process and prepare a competitive LWCF project proposal.

### Before Applying

- Review Montana LWCF Program Guidelines and OPSP scoring criteria
- Confirm project eligibility, land control, and matching funds
- Identify how the project aligns with SCORP goals and priorities
- Engage the community, partners, and stakeholders early
- Prepare a clear, feasible project budget and timeline

### During Pre-Application Phase

- Clearly describe the need and community benefit of the project
- Highlight planned accessibility, safety, and/or stewardship improvements
- Demonstrate project readiness and feasibility
- Document community engagement and local support

### If Invited to Submit a Full LWCF Application

- Coordinate directly with FWP's LWCF Program Manager
- Finalize project design elements, cost estimates, and permitting needs
- Confirm long-term operations and maintenance commitments

### After Grant is Awarded

- Comply with all federal and state grant requirements
- Maintain all LWCF-funded facilities for public outdoor recreation in perpetuity
- Track progress, document outcomes, and support SCORP performance reporting

## 5.4 RESOURCES FOR RECREATION PROVIDERS

Resource	Description	Category
American Trails	Provides training, design guidance, funding resources, and technical information for planning, building, and maintaining trails and greenways nationwide. <a href="http://americantrails.org">americantrails.org</a>	Planning Tools & Best Practices
Backcountry Hunters & Anglers	Provides resources and advocacy efforts focused on responsible hunting, fishing, and outdoor ethics across Montana. <a href="http://backcountryhunters.org/montana">backcountryhunters.org/montana</a>	Stewardship, Advocacy, & Education
Bureau of Land Management	Provides information on BLM-managed lands, including recreation permits, trails, and amenities. <a href="http://blm.gov/montana-dakotas">blm.gov/montana-dakotas</a>	Public Land Management
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention	Provides public health data and resources relevant to outdoor recreation safety and community health initiatives. <a href="http://cdc.gov">cdc.gov</a>	Research & Data Resources
Children & Nature Network	Offers research, tools, and initiatives that help professionals engage youth in nature-based programs. <a href="http://childrenandnature.org">childrenandnature.org</a>	Stewardship, Advocacy, & Education
Climate Smart Missoula	Provides climate-related information and tools to help communities understand and plan for climate impacts on outdoor recreation. <a href="http://missoulaclimate.org">missoulaclimate.org</a>	Planning Tools & Best Practices
Environmental Summary Reports (Montana Natural Heritage Program)	Provides site-based ecological summaries, including species of concern and habitat information, to support recreation and conservation planning. <a href="http://mtnhp.mt.gov/requests">mtnhp.mt.gov/requests</a>	Research & Data Resources
Every Kid Outdoors Program	Provides free public-land access opportunities for fourth graders and their families to encourage outdoor experiences. <a href="http://everykidoutdoors.gov">everykidoutdoors.gov</a>	Planning Tools & Best Practices
Great American Rail-Trail	Provides information on the Great American Rail-Trail route through Montana to support trail planning and connectivity efforts. <a href="http://railstotrails.org/greatamericanrailtrail/route/montana">railstotrails.org/greatamericanrailtrail/route/montana</a>	Stewardship, Advocacy, & Education
Headwaters Economics	Provides research and data on outdoor recreation, land use, and economic impacts to support local and statewide planning. <a href="http://headwaterseconomics.org">headwaterseconomics.org</a>	Research & Data Resources
iNaturalist	Global community-science platform where users can record and identify wildlife observations, supported by expert review. Useful for tracking species, invasive species, and biodiversity. <a href="http://inaturalist.org">inaturalist.org</a>	Research & Data Resources
Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research	Provides visitor surveys, tourism research, and economic impact data for recreation planning in Montana. <a href="http://umt.edu/tourism-recreation-research">umt.edu/tourism-recreation-research</a>	Research & Data Resources
Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics	Provides research-based outdoor ethics education, training, and resources built around the Leave No Trace Seven Principles to help reduce recreation impacts on land and water. <a href="http://Int.org">Int.org</a>	Stewardship, Advocacy, & Education
Missoula Prescription (Rx) Trails Program	Engages healthcare providers and participants in outdoor activities as part of health-based trail prescriptions. <a href="http://ci.missoula.mt.us/2409/Rx-Trails">ci.missoula.mt.us/2409/Rx-Trails</a>	Planning Tools & Best Practices
Missoula YWCA GUTS Program	Empowers girls and young women through outdoor experiences and leadership development programs. <a href="http://ywcamissoula.org">ywcamissoula.org</a>	Stewardship, Advocacy, & Education

Resource	Description	Category
Montana Climate Assessment	Provides scientific assessments of climate change impacts in Montana to support adaptation and planning. <a href="http://montanacclimate.org">montanacclimate.org</a>	Research & Data Resources
Montana Climate Office	Provides climate data, analysis tools, and monitoring resources for planning and management. <a href="http://umt.edu/climate">umt.edu/climate</a>	Research & Data Resources
Montana Community Wildfire Protection Plans	Provides community-level wildfire protection and mitigation plans to support safe recreation and land management. <a href="http://dnrc.mt.gov/Forestry/Community-Local-Government/community-wildfire-protection-plans">dnrc.mt.gov/Forestry/Community-Local-Government/community-wildfire-protection-plans</a>	Planning Tools & Best Practices
Montana FWP – Aquatic Invasive Species	Offers guidelines and best practices for preventing the spread of aquatic invasive species. <a href="http://fwp.mt.gov/conservation/aquatic-invasive-species">fwp.mt.gov/conservation/aquatic-invasive-species</a>	Planning Tools & Best Practices
Montana FWP – Hunt Planner	Provides hunting season information, regulations, and maps for trip planning and recreation coordination. <a href="http://fwp.mt.gov/gis/maps/huntPlanner">fwp.mt.gov/gis/maps/huntPlanner</a>	Planning Tools & Best Practices
Montana FWP – LWCF Recreation Grants	Provides information on Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) grants for community-based outdoor recreation projects. <a href="http://fwp.mt.gov/aboutfwp/grant-programs/land-and-water-conservation-fund">fwp.mt.gov/aboutfwp/grant-programs/land-and-water-conservation-fund</a>	Planning Tools & Best Practices
Montana FWP – Parks and Outdoor Recreation Division	Provides information on Montana State Parks, Fishing Access Sites, and Wildlife Management Areas, including amenities and recreation opportunities. <a href="http://fwp.mt.gov/stateparks">fwp.mt.gov/stateparks</a>	Public Land Management
Montana FWP – Recreation Grants	Provides information on statewide recreation grant programs, including RTP, Trails Stewardship, OHV, Summer Motorized Trail Pass, and Snowmobile grants. <a href="http://fwp.mt.gov/grant-programs">fwp.mt.gov/grant-programs</a>	Planning Tools & Best Practices
Montana FWP – Recreation Programs	Provides information on recreation programs and activities across Montana's recreation system, including hunting, fishing, and outdoor education. <a href="http://fwp.mt.gov/activities">fwp.mt.gov/activities</a>	Public Land Management
Montana FWP – Waterbody Search	Interactive online tool for exploring Montana waterbodies, fishing access, and aquatic recreation opportunities. <a href="http://myfwp.mt.gov/fishMT/explore">myfwp.mt.gov/fishMT/explore</a>	Public Land Management
Montana Field Guide	Provides species accounts, habitat descriptions, and distribution information for Montana's plants and animals. <a href="http://fieldguide.mt.gov">fieldguide.mt.gov</a>	Research & Data Resources
Montana Governor's Office of Indian Affairs	Supports communication and coordination between state agencies and Tribal Nations, including guidance on Tribal lands and cultural considerations. <a href="http://tribalnations.mt.gov">tribalnations.mt.gov</a>	Public Land Management
Montana Office of Tourism	Supports communities and businesses with tourism and recreation development grants, technical assistance, and marketing resources to grow sustainable outdoor recreation economies. <a href="http://commerce.mt.gov/Business/Programs-and-Services/Tourism-Marketing/Office-of-Tourism">commerce.mt.gov/Business/Programs-and-Services/Tourism-Marketing/Office-of-Tourism</a>	Planning Tools & Best Practices
Montana Outdoor Science School (MOSS)	Provides outdoor and environmental education programs that support youth programming and field-based learning. <a href="http://outdoorscience.org">outdoorscience.org</a>	Stewardship, Advocacy, & Education
Montana Public Health Information System	Provides health and demographic data to support recreation planning related to health outcomes. <a href="http://dphhs.mt.gov">dphhs.mt.gov</a>	Research & Data Resources

Resource	Description	Category
MSU Billings – Outdoor Adventure Leadership Program	Offers educational opportunities and partnerships related to outdoor leadership, programming, and recreation. <a href="http://msubillings.edu/chps/hshp/outdoor-adventure-leadership/">msubillings.edu/chps/hshp/outdoor-adventure-leadership/</a>	Stewardship, Advocacy, & Education
Montana Trails Recreation Park Association	Supports the development, maintenance, and promotion of trails and recreation parks in Montana. <a href="http://mtrpa.info">mtrpa.info</a>	Stewardship, Advocacy, & Education
Montana WILD	Offers wildlife education programs, workshops, and outdoor skills opportunities for the public. <a href="http://fwp.mt.gov/education/montana-wild">fwp.mt.gov/education/montana-wild</a>	Stewardship, Advocacy, & Education
National Park Service – Glacier National Park	Provides visitor information, trail updates, camping guidance, and management resources for Glacier National Park. <a href="http://nps.gov/glac">nps.gov/glac</a>	Public Land Management
National Recreation and Park Association – Greener Parks Initiative	Provides green infrastructure strategies and resources to support sustainable park design and management. <a href="http://nrpa.org/our-work/partnerships/initiatives/greener-parks/">nrpa.org/our-work/partnerships/initiatives/greener-parks/</a>	Planning Tools & Best Practices
National Recreation and Park Association – Healthy Aging in Parks Initiative	Provides evidence-based tools and resources to design park programs that support healthy aging and active lifestyles. <a href="http://nrpa.org/our-work/partnerships/initiatives/healthy-aging-in-parks/">nrpa.org/our-work/partnerships/initiatives/healthy-aging-in-parks/</a>	Planning Tools & Best Practices
onX	Provides detailed land ownership, trail, and off-road navigation maps to support outdoor recreation planning and wayfinding. <a href="http://onxmaps.com">onxmaps.com</a>	Research & Data Resources
Outdoor Industry Association	Provides outdoor recreation industry research, economic data, and trend analysis to support planning and advocacy. <a href="http://outdoorindustry.org">outdoorindustry.org</a>	Stewardship, Advocacy, & Education
Outdoor Recreation Roundtable	National coalition that provides data, reports, and policy resources on the outdoor recreation economy and supports development of recreation infrastructure and policy. <a href="http://recreationroundtable.org">recreationroundtable.org</a>	Research & Data Resources
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation	Supports conservation and public access efforts for elk habitat and outdoor recreation. <a href="http://rmef.org">rmef.org</a>	Stewardship, Advocacy, & Education
Society of Outdoor Recreation Professionals	Provides networking, training, and best practices for outdoor recreation professionals. <a href="http://recpro.org">recpro.org</a>	Stewardship, Advocacy, & Education
Tread Lightly!	Promotes responsible motorized and mechanized recreation through outdoor ethics, education, and stewardship projects on public lands and waters. <a href="http://treadlightly.org">treadlightly.org</a>	Stewardship, Advocacy, & Education
Trout Unlimited	Conserves and restores coldwater fisheries, offering partnership opportunities for aquatic recreation and watershed projects. <a href="http://montanatu.org">montanatu.org</a>	Stewardship, Advocacy, & Education
Trust for Public Land	Supports conservation, land acquisition, and community recreation planning projects nationwide. <a href="http://tpl.org">tpl.org</a>	Stewardship, Advocacy, & Education
U.S. Access Board	Provides accessibility guidelines and standards for recreational facilities and outdoor environments. <a href="http://access-board.gov">access-board.gov</a>	Planning Tools & Best Practices
U.S. Green Building Council – LEED	Provides sustainability standards and guidance for designing energy-efficient and environmentally responsible recreation facilities. <a href="http://usgbc.org/leed">usgbc.org/leed</a>	Planning Tools & Best Practices
USFS Accessibility Resources	Provides guidance and resources for designing accessible recreation facilities and trails on national forests and grasslands. <a href="http://fs.usda.gov/managing-land/national-forests-grasslands/accessibility/resources">fs.usda.gov/managing-land/national-forests-grasslands/accessibility/resources</a>	Planning Tools & Best Practices

Resource	Description	Category
USFS National Visitor Use Monitoring Program	Provides national forest visitor-use data to inform recreation planning, trail management, and investment decisions. <a href="https://fs.usda.gov/hvum">fs.usda.gov/hvum</a>	Research & Data Resources
USFS Tree Search	Provides access to research publications related to forestry, natural resource management, and outdoor recreation. <a href="https://fs.usda.gov/research/treesearch">fs.usda.gov/research/treesearch</a>	Research & Data Resources
United States Forest Service – Region 1	Provides recreation, trail, permit, and forest management information for national forests in Montana and the Northern Region. <a href="https://fs.usda.gov/r1">fs.usda.gov/r1</a>	Public Land Management
University of Montana Rural Institute	Provides research and resources supporting accessible recreation for individuals with disabilities. <a href="https://umt.edu/rural-institute">umt.edu/rural-institute</a>	Research & Data Resources
University of Montana W.A. Franke College of Forestry and Conservation	Provides research, educational resources, and expertise related to forestry, conservation, and outdoor recreation management. <a href="https://umt.edu/environment">umt.edu/environment</a>	Research & Data Resources
Warriors and Quiet Waters Foundation	Provides therapeutic fly fishing programs for veterans recovering from trauma. <a href="https://warriorsandquietwaters.org">warriorsandquietwaters.org</a>	Stewardship, Advocacy, & Education
Wild Montana	Provides conservation information, volunteer opportunities, and advocacy for responsible wilderness recreation. <a href="https://wildmontana.org">wildmontana.org</a>	Stewardship, Advocacy, & Education
Wounded Warrior Project – Project Odyssey	Offers outdoor-based therapeutic programs for veterans dealing with combat-related stress. <a href="https://woundedwarriorproject.org/programs/project-odyssey">woundedwarriorproject.org/programs/project-odyssey</a>	Stewardship, Advocacy, & Education



## 5.5 MONITORING AND MEASURING PROGRESS

To ensure that the goals and strategies of this SCORP lead to real-world outcomes, it is essential to establish clear, consistent methods for tracking progress. Monitoring and evaluation provide accountability, highlight successes, and help recreation providers adjust to new challenges and opportunities over time.

FWP will continue to track SCORP implementation through its grant programs, the LWCF OPSP, partnerships, and statewide data collection efforts. At the same time, the diversity of recreation providers across Montana — Tribal, federal, state, local, nonprofit, and private — means that a shared and adaptable approach is critical. This SCORP encourages all partners to participate in tracking outcomes, using common performance indicators tied to the plan's priorities. By working together to document results, providers can demonstrate the value of their work, support future funding decisions, and build public and political support for outdoor recreation across Montana.

Effective monitoring does not require complex systems. FWP recommends that recreation providers report on SCORP-aligned outcomes as part of their existing planning, grant reporting, and program evaluation cycles wherever possible. The Recommended Performance Indicators on the following page identify specific metrics that recreation providers across Montana are encouraged to track. These indicators are organized around the SCORP's core outcome areas — access and infrastructure, use and participation, visitor experience, stewardship and sustainability, economic and community impact, and collaboration and capacity — and are designed to be flexible enough to apply at the local, regional, or statewide level.



## Recommended Performance Indicators

Based on the SCORP Goals and Recommendations, recreation providers are encouraged to track indicators such as:

### Access & Infrastructure

- Miles of new or improved trails (motorized and non-motorized).
- Number of new or renovated recreation facilities, especially those supporting walking, biking, river access, and natural area access.
- Number and type of accessibility upgrades (e.g., accessible routes, restrooms, picnic areas) that improve inclusive access.

### Use & Participation

- User counts or visitation data (e.g., trail counters, program participation, facility reservations).
- Participation by youth, older adults, people with disabilities, and other underrepresented groups.

### Visitor Experience

- Visitor satisfaction survey results, including perceptions of access, crowding, connectivity, and facility quality.
- Public feedback on recreation experiences, priorities, and areas for improvement (e.g., comments, listening sessions, open houses, online surveys).

### Stewardship & Sustainability

- Volunteer events and hours contributed to trail work, maintenance, education, or stewardship projects.
- Resource conservation outcomes (e.g., erosion control at access points, habitat restoration near recreation sites, reduced damage to sensitive areas).

### Economic & Community Impact

- Economic benefits such as tourism-related spending, local business activity, or event revenues where data are available.
- Health and wellness outcomes, particularly for projects that promote active lifestyles, trail connectivity, and time spent outdoors.
- Contributions to community resilience and quality of life (e.g., new or improved close-to-home recreation opportunities, safer routes to parks and schools).

### Collaboration & Capacity

- Number and type of partnerships (e.g., Tribal Nations, local governments, nonprofits, health and education partners) involved in recreation projects and programs.
- Grants and other funding sources pursued and secured for SCORP-aligned projects.
- SCORP-related projects or action items initiated and completed over time.

Recreation providers can adapt these indicators into simple internal checklists, dashboards, or periodic summaries that match their capacity and local priorities.

## 5.6 A SHARED COMMITMENT TO MONTANA'S OUTDOOR RECREATION FUTURE

Montana's outdoor recreation system has long been shaped by the shared commitment of agencies, communities, organizations, and individuals who understand the importance of access to nature, the value of healthy landscapes, and the power of recreation to enrich lives and strengthen communities. This SCORP provides a vision for the future that reflects these values and the priorities expressed by Montanans across the state. Turning this vision into reality will require the continued dedication of all partners.

The goals and strategies outlined in this plan offer a roadmap for enhancing recreation opportunities, supporting economic vitality, promoting public health, and conserving the natural and cultural resources that make Montana unique. The Implementation Toolkit in this chapter provides practical guidance and resources, including funding programs such as LWCF, the OPSP framework, technical tools, and data sources, to help recreation providers and partners translate these goals into meaningful actions that respond to local needs and opportunities.

All recreation providers and partners are encouraged to review the SCORP goals and consider how their current and future projects align with these priorities. By using the strategies, funding opportunities, technical resources, and performance measures outlined in this Toolkit, providers can ensure that their efforts contribute to the broader statewide vision. Recreation providers are also encouraged to foster partnerships, engage community members, draw on tools such as the Montana Natural Heritage Program and other data resources, and share successes and lessons learned with other practitioners and with Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks.

As Montana's population and recreation demands continue to grow and change, collaboration and adaptability will be essential. By working together and staying focused on shared goals, Montana's recreation community can expand access to quality outdoor experiences while preserving the natural and cultural treasures that define the state.

***FWP invites all recreation providers, partners, and community members to join in this effort. Together, we can shape a future where outdoor recreation continues to improve the quality of life for Montanans and visitors alike, supports vibrant local and regional economies, and protects the landscapes and traditions that are at the heart of Montana's identity.***



## **APPENDIX**

**Appendix A: Figures, Tables, and Maps**

**Appendix B: References**

**Appendix C: Public Land by County**

**Appendix D: Population Projections by County, 2020 to 2050**

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# APPENDIX C: PUBLIC LAND BY COUNTY

County	Total Public Land	BLM	BOR	USFWS	NPS	USFS	Other Federal Land	DNRC School Trust Land	MT Fish, Wildlife & Parks	Montana State Parks	Local	Tribal Land
Beaverhead	2,464,217	664,027	4,415	45,412	665	1,376,497	15,847	335,085	20,734	1,630	1,271	0
Big Horn	100,089	27,248	231	0	2,616	0	10	60,280	3,710	3,802	1,466	2,264,152
Blaine	637,635	448,649	81	2,891	200	0	512	183,444	0	0	945	512,260
Broadwater	292,006	71,282	8,594	0	0	187,975	0	22,786	237	5	900	0
Carbon	618,674	220,557	0	270	27,466	326,427	1	40,525	1,548	343	936	0
Carter	740,098	504,520	0	0	0	90,512	0	144,492	322	322	564	521
Cascade	309,137	24,634	1,360	7,140	0	178,407	3,307	78,465	12,179	7,183	3,160	0
Chouteau	426,595	111,018	15,503	2,420	0	30,677	8	264,519	1,393	0	1,057	0
Custer	551,031	332,986	151	0	0	0	55,729	155,890	564	0	2,856	0
Daniels	215,240	200	0	1,088	0	0	361	213,158	4	0	403	145,519
Dawson	164,085	61,734	1,363	0	0	0	0	87,104	11,612	11,499	2,146	0
Deer Lodge	288,613	5,264	0	0	0	209,564	0	7,470	60,526	513	3,640	0
Fallon	193,257	115,885	0	0	0	0	0	70,570	359	0	6,443	0
Fergus	663,379	347,666	0	49,981	0	94,226	68	160,643	6,824	0	3,646	0
Flathead	2,544,396	0	0	12,503	634,723	1,757,278	13	133,582	3,428	502	2,840	29,822
Gallatin	793,514	7,253	0	174	64,570	652,432	7	49,839	11,410	1,268	5,116	0
Garfield	878,978	493,249	0	231,279	0	0	0	153,761	0	0	689	0
Glacier	403,228	1,061	0	94	362,723	28,793	22	8,297	0	0	2,238	1,371,463
Golden Valley	80,722	7,829	0	760	0	23,841	0	48,222	0	0	38	0
Granite	722,089	38,534	0	0	0	662,773	0	19,780	31	0	966	0
Hill	217,214	14,384	26,836	459	0	0	402	154,392	5,369	0	12,742	77,794
Jefferson	590,794	92,136	0	1,612	0	460,071	1	32,128	2,530	2,914	640	0
Judith Basin	418,692	11,998	0	0	0	298,481	33	99,138	8,557	154	131	0
Lake	273,041	0	0	13,551	0	174,933	0	72,368	9,706	2,639	1,683	796,200
Lewis and Clark	1,257,371	77,985	8060	0	0	994,477	2553	132,810	35,906	99	3,654	0
Liberty	113,042	7,395	19193	0	0	0	115	85,509	0	0	668	0
Lincoln	1,801,030	0	0	0	0	1,726,234	1163	65,741	5,420	18	1,982	0
Madison	1,225,232	249,141	0	162	0	809,778	0	133,350	21,968	117	611	0
McCone	344,882	200,606	0	47,626	0	0	1,043	94,008	0	0	1,577	4,253
Meagher	577,807	8,052	0	0	0	476,946	0	89,263	3,327	269	219	0
Mineral	708,328	0	0	0	0	639,061	0	26,863	41,382	0	391	0
Missoula	1,038,682	19,795	0	0	0	852,982	16	96,251	39,757	429	8,106	119,313
Musselshell	190,204	101,024	0	11,643	0	0	0	76,208	0	0	1,277	0
Park	991,468	8,233	0	0	94,265	846,536	6	33,397	5,466	0	2880	0
Petroleum	451,806	330,799	0	56,329	0	0	0	63,791	191	0	696	0
Phillips	1,574,243	1,081,042	29875	259,799	0	0	357	190,201	1,083	0	1,246	135,475
Pondera	168,225	1,145	0	640	0	107,346	203	56,581	1,295	0	958	0
Powder River	739,840	256,136	0	0	0	340,324	0	142,985	0	0	379	0
Powell	900,849	94,822	0	4,745	1,327	650,119	1	72,440	40,180	0	819	0
Prairie	527,019	447,218	0	0	0	0	0	79,554	8	0	239	0
Ravalli	1,170,457	0	0	2,846	0	1,126,072	1	30,198	9,071	24	1,240	0
Richland	138,641	51,108	7	0	16	0	2	82,471	3,721	0	1,316	2,400
Roosevelt	26,120	3,954	0	1,242	9	0	0	19,170	59	0	1,596	1,123,856
Rosebud	499,680	229,864	0	0	0	95,736	0	172,871	42	0	1,048	241,721
Sanders	997,711	0	0	10,101	0	921,634	0	61,292	3,328	38	1,183	462,276
Sheridan	78,443	255	0	31,046	0	0	244	44,997	310	310	1,587	131,510
Silver Bow	260,738	45,188	0	0	0	181,805	10	12,758	15,843	0	4,625	0
Stillwater	253,981	5,514	0	5,329	0	193,133	0	45,581	3,762	0	506	0
Sweet Grass	342,715	15,817	0	0	0	278,205	0	47,431	524	97	692	0
Teton	404,828	19,336	22806	1,764	0	234,355	60	107,628	17,856	0	960	0
Toole	150,502	27,232	13206	4,342	0	0	466	96,760	6,053	0	2,431	0
Treasure	40,939	533	0	70	0	0	0	35,772	1,244	0	3,320	0
Valley	1,380,169	1,012,064	1364	126,394	0	0	1047	217,984	263	0	20,513	718,761
Wheatland	141,985	1,306	0	0	0	65,000	18	72,356	1,619	0	1,035	0
Wibaux	59,984	26,058	0	0	0	0	0	33,854	0	0	72	0
Yellowstone	159,645	77,584	502	0	0	0	46	69,967	4,425	4,082	6,830	230,343

Source: Montana Natural Heritage Program, 2024.

# APPENDIX D: POPULATION PROJECTIONS BY COUNTY, 2020 TO 2050

County	2020	2030	2040	2050	# Change 2020-30	# Change 2020-40	# Change 2020-50	% Change 2020-30	% Change 2020-40	% Change 2020-50
Statewide	1,086,193	1,199,202	1,226,445	1,237,910	113,009	140,252	151,717	10%	13%	14%
Beaverhead	9,372	10,021	9,837	9,661	649	465	289	7%	5%	3%
Big Horn	13,051	11,522	10,496	10,144	-1,529	-2,555	-2,907	-12%	-20%	-22%
Blaine	7,002	6,243	5,616	5,275	-759	-1,386	-1,727	-11%	-20%	-25%
Broadwater	6,846	7,307	6,991	6,530	461	145	-316	7%	2%	-5%
Carbon	10,512	11,960	11,874	11,599	1,448	1,362	1,087	14%	13%	10%
Carter	1,413	1,461	1,365	1,310	48	-48	-103	3%	-3%	-7%
Cascade	84,328	82,060	81,037	79,744	-2,268	-3,291	-4,584	-3%	-4%	-5%
Chouteau	5,899	5,843	5,722	5,673	-56	-177	-226	-1%	-3%	-4%
Custer	11,859	11,645	11,469	11,612	-214	-390	-247	-2%	-3%	-2%
Daniels	1,658	1,661	1,597	1,591	3	-61	-67	0%	-4%	-4%
Dawson	8,922	8,466	8,657	8,963	-456	-265	41	-5%	-3%	0%
Deer Lodge	9,413	9,906	10,159	10,106	493	746	693	5%	8%	7%
Fallon	3,033	3,065	3,299	3,384	32	266	351	1%	9%	12%
Fergus	11,457	11,410	10,997	10,956	-47	-460	-501	0%	-4%	-4%
Flathead	104,773	127,559	136,145	139,643	22,786	31,372	34,870	22%	30%	33%
Gallatin	119,502	155,291	167,528	176,862	35,789	48,026	57,360	30%	40%	48%
Garfield	1,172	1,287	1,329	1,309	115	157	137	10%	13%	12%
Glacier	13,747	11,926	10,558	10,309	-1,821	-3,189	-3,438	-13%	-23%	-25%
Golden Valley	820	1,001	1,078	1,057	181	258	237	22%	31%	29%
Granite	3,308	3,505	3,517	3,430	197	209	122	6%	6%	4%
Hill	16,250	15,311	14,675	14,690	-939	-1,575	-1,560	-6%	-10%	-10%
Jefferson	12,133	13,576	13,665	13,250	1,443	1,532	1,117	12%	13%	9%
Judith Basin	2,017	1,940	1,872	1,831	-77	-145	-186	-4%	-7%	-9%
Lake	31,259	35,554	36,482	35,693	4,295	5,223	4,434	14%	17%	14%
Lewis and Clark	71,093	78,745	79,925	80,307	7,652	8,832	9,214	11%	12%	13%
Liberty	1,960	1,930	2,110	2,313	-30	150	353	-2%	8%	18%
Lincoln	19,731	18,742	17,351	16,221	-989	-2,380	-3,510	-5%	-12%	-18%
Madison	8,657	11,138	12,116	12,537	2,481	3,459	3,880	29%	40%	45%
McCone	1,733	1,743	1,851	1,857	10	118	124	1%	7%	7%
Meagher	1,925	2,159	2,231	2,130	234	306	205	12%	16%	11%
Mineral	4,565	5,252	5,267	5,231	687	702	666	15%	15%	15%
Missoula	118,238	134,961	142,130	145,663	16,723	23,892	27,425	14%	20%	23%
Musselshell	4,747	4,195	3,780	3,443	-552	-967	-1,305	-12%	-20%	-27%
Park	17,193	19,265	19,428	19,560	2,072	2,235	2,367	12%	13%	14%
Petroleum	498	595	640	621	97	142	123	19%	28%	25%
Phillips	4,190	3,720	3,540	3,469	-470	-650	-721	-11%	-16%	-17%
Pondera	5,882	5,828	5,678	5,483	-54	-204	-399	-1%	-3%	-7%
Powder River	1,693	2,164	2,233	2,127	471	540	434	28%	32%	26%
Powell	6,934	7,261	7,540	7,577	327	605	643	5%	9%	9%
Prairie	1,076	1,174	1,163	1,141	98	87	65	9%	8%	6%
Ravalli	44,351	53,498	56,624	56,287	9,147	12,273	11,936	21%	28%	27%
Richland	11,501	10,519	11,000	11,545	-982	-501	44	-9%	-4%	0%
Roosevelt	10,780	9,495	8,620	8,789	-1,285	-2,160	-1,991	-12%	-20%	-18%
Rosebud	8,298	7,051	6,528	6,153	-1,247	-1,770	-2,145	-15%	-21%	-26%
Sanders	12,451	13,888	13,715	12,944	1,437	1,264	493	12%	10%	4%
Sheridan	3,518	3,097	3,002	2,998	-421	-516	-520	-12%	-15%	-15%
Silver Bow	35,168	38,552	38,842	38,334	3,384	3,674	3,166	10%	10%	9%
Stillwater	9,010	9,149	9,089	8,842	139	79	-168	2%	1%	-2%
Sweet Grass	3,671	3,767	3,671	3,481	96	0	-190	3%	0%	-5%
Teton	6,242	6,481	6,617	6,490	239	375	248	4%	6%	4%
Toole	4,964	5,011	5,213	5,325	47	249	360	1%	5%	7%
Treasure	761	803	788	743	42	27	-18	5%	4%	-2%
Valley	7,551	7,038	7,008	7,110	-513	-543	-441	-7%	-7%	-6%
Wheatland	2,093	1,896	1,768	1,688	-197	-325	-405	-9%	-16%	-19%
Wibaux	928	839	818	789	-89	-110	-139	-10%	-12%	-15%
Yellowstone	165,045	179,726	180,192	182,092	14,681	15,147	17,047	9%	9%	10%

Source: Montana Census and Economic Information Center, 2024.

## APPENDIX E: WETLANDS

### **Purpose and Federal Requirements**

Since the passage of the Emergency Wetlands Resources Act (EWRA; Public Law 99–645, S. 303) in 1986, the National Park Service has directed each state to include a wetlands component as part of its SCORP. Under this act, each state must address the following through the SCORP Wetlands Component:

1. Be consistent with the National Wetlands Priority Conservation Plan, prepared by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service;
2. Provide evidence of consultation with the state agency responsible for fish and wildlife resources;
3. Contain a listing of those wetland types which should receive priority for acquisition; and
4. Consider outdoor recreation opportunities associated with its wetlands resources for meeting the state's public outdoor recreation needs.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) program provides funding that can be used for wetland mitigation under Section 6(f) of the LWCF Act when public outdoor recreation facility development will impact existing wetlands, and in cases where a community or eligible agency seeks to acquire (through fee title or conservation easement) wetlands for public outdoor recreation purposes.

This section of the SCORP:

- summarizes the types and classes of wetlands in Montana;
- highlights significant programmatic efforts aimed at wetland protection and management;
- highlights the outdoor recreation and economic values of wetlands; and
- provides a prioritized list of attributes to guide wetland acquisition in Montana.

### **Wetlands in Montana: Status and Management**

Montana has lost approximately one-third of its naturally occurring wetlands since settlement. Wetlands are valuable for providing flood and erosion control, enhancing water quality, sustaining baseflow in headwater streams, providing opportunities for outdoor recreation, and supporting wildlife and fish habitat. The Federal Clean Water Act requires mitigation for some wetland filling projects; however, wetlands continue to be impacted and lost as roads are expanded, land is developed, and cumulative effects accrue from activities such as draining, changes in land management, and landowner preference for open-water ponds.

Wetlands are vitally important for habitat and ecosystem function. Less than 3% of Montana is comprised of wetlands (and roughly 1% is riparian habitat), yet about 50% of bird species depend on these areas. In addition to being critical habitat for birds and other wildlife, wetlands play key roles in water purification and flood control. In the prairie pothole region of northeast Montana, for instance, more than 225 bird species use these declining wetland areas for nesting. Included in this number are piping plovers and bald eagles. These areas are also of critical importance to several endangered species during migration, including the whooping crane, interior least tern, and peregrine falcon. Wetland areas adjacent to rivers act like a sponge, absorbing water during spring runoff, capturing it, and releasing it later in the year. This not only reduces the damage of flooding, but also reduces erosion and supports baseflows and water quality.

The Montana Department of Environmental Quality's (DEQ) Technical & Financial Assistance Bureau is responsible for coordinating and providing leadership to wetland conservation activities statewide. One of its key roles is to staff and provide leadership to the Montana Wetland Council, which acts as a forum for all stakeholders to participate in wetland issues and collaborate on conservation strategies. FWP's Migratory Game Bird Program, including the Migratory Bird Wetland Program, also plays a key role in conserving, restoring, and enhancing wetland habitats across the state using dedicated hunting license revenue. The Wetlands Protection Advisory Council (WPAC), established in 1985 (MCA 2-15-3405), reviews and advises on funding proposals for this program, helping ensure that investments support priority wetland habitats and migratory bird needs.

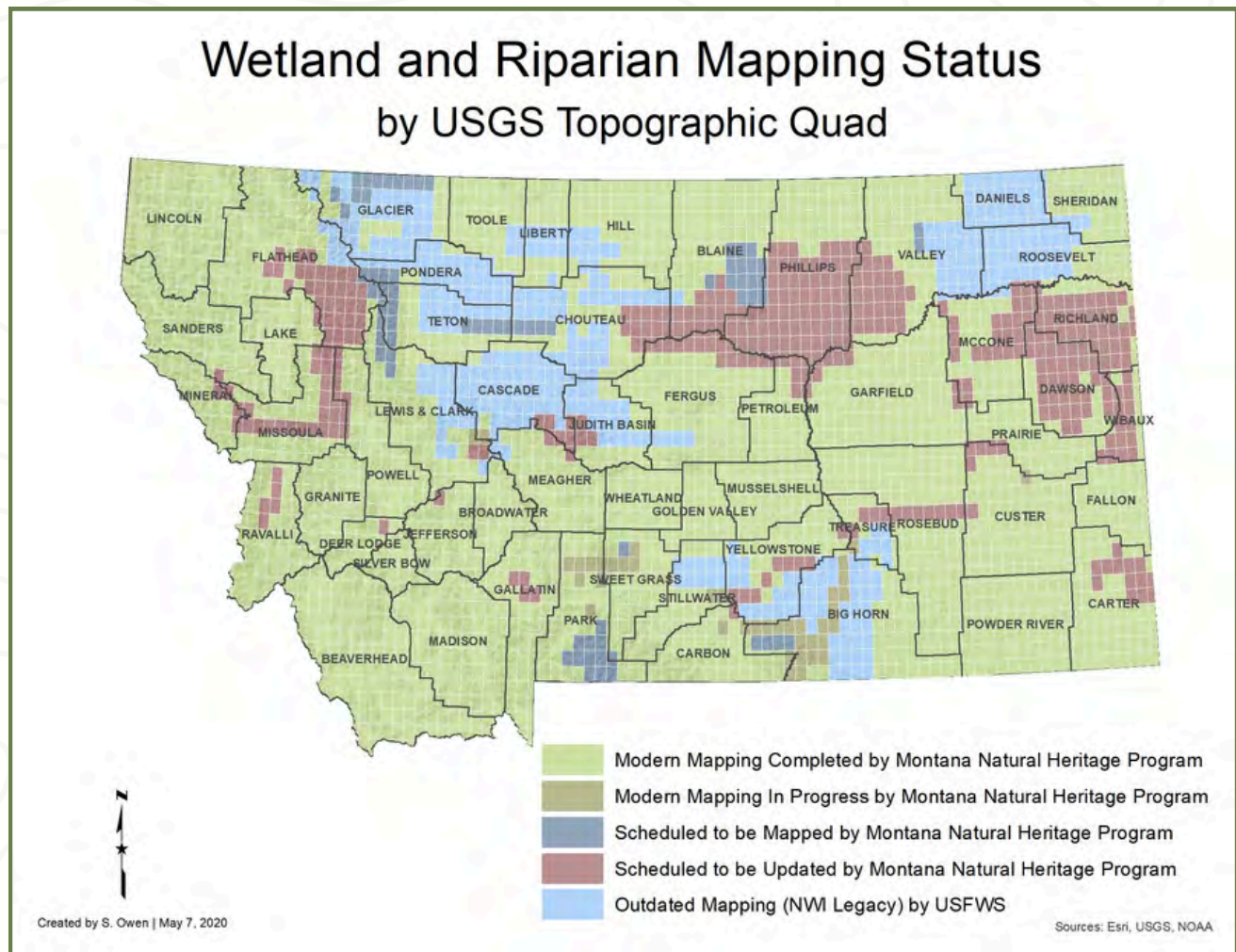
### **Planning Framework, Priorities, and Mapping**

With DEQ leadership and extensive public involvement, the Montana Wetland Council developed "Priceless Resources: Strategic Framework for Wetland and Riparian Area Conservation and Restoration in Montana 2020–2030", which guides the Council, and all involved in wetland issues, in pursuing wetland conservation activities and establishes priorities for managing wetlands over the 2020–2030 planning period. The Strategic Framework was approved by the Governor and the Directors of DEQ, the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC), and FWP as the state plan for wetlands and riparian areas.

Montana's wetland priorities, as outlined in the 2020–2030 Strategic Framework, are consistent with the National Wetlands Priority Conservation Plan and guide how LWCF investments support wetland conservation. Several working groups are being formed to help implement the Strategic Framework. This SCORP references the 2020–2030 Strategic Framework as the main guiding document for wetland conservation priorities in Montana. The plan can be found on the Montana DEQ Wetland Program website.

Wetland conservation priorities in Montana are funded in part through the competitive U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Wetland Program Development Grant program. At the time of this SCORP, there are approximately twenty active grants involving state and local governments in Montana. These projects range from evaluating wetland impacts at the state scale, to providing education and information about Montana wetlands through the Montana Wetland Council, to developing technical resources for land use planning.

Since 2008, the Montana Natural Heritage Program (MTNHP) has been highly successful in advancing digital mapping for wetland and riparian areas in Montana. Prior to 2007, only about 43% of Montana had digital wetland mapping, largely created from 1980s-era aerial imagery. Currently, 100% of the state has wetland mapping, but approximately 13% of that mapping is outdated. Since 2007, 86% of the state has been mapped or updated with modern wetland and riparian mapping using aerial imagery from 2005–2017. An additional 1% of Montana is funded for updates to modern mapping. These mapping and planning efforts provide the technical foundation for identifying priority wetland types and locations for conservation and acquisition.



## **Outdoor Recreation and Economic Values of Wetlands**

Wetlands are significant components of Montana's outdoor recreation landscape. They provide opportunities for many popular activities, such as hiking, boating, hunting, fishing, bird-watching, photography, interpretation, and environmental education. Many people enjoy being on or near the water, and the presence of diverse plant and animal life makes Montana's wetlands especially rich places for outdoor experiences.

Wildlife-related recreation is also an important part of Montana's economy. A recent analysis of Montana's outdoor recreation sector estimates that wildlife viewing in Montana supported about 11,100 jobs and \$295 million in salaries and wages in 2021, while sport fishing in 2020 supported roughly 6,282 jobs and \$205.3 million in wages; big game hunting is estimated to support about 3,300 jobs and \$366 million in annual expenditures (Power, 2023). Many of these activities depend on healthy rivers, lakes, wetlands, and riparian habitats.

In addition to recreation, wetlands provide important settings for outdoor learning. Many Montana public schools take students on wetland field trips to learn about habitats and wildlife, monitor water quality, and participate in other stewardship projects.

Clean water goes hand in hand with a strong economy. Montana farmers, ranchers, and commercial operations rely on water to produce crops, livestock, and manufactured goods. Healthy aquatic ecosystems also attract tourists and recreation spending. Recent research from the Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research (ITRR) finds that nonresident visitors spent an estimated \$5.45 billion in Montana in 2023 and supported about 66,550 jobs statewide (Grau, 2024). ITRR visitor studies have shown that natural attributes such as clean waterways, clean air, wildlife viewing opportunities, scenic vistas, open space, and access to public lands and waterways are among the key reasons nonresidents choose Montana as a travel destination (Brown, Grau, & Schultz, 2023).

Maintaining clean water in Montana is therefore vital both for providing critical habitat and for sustaining visitor spending.

Wetlands also add economic value to communities as key components of parks, open space, trail systems, and wildlife habitat, contributing significantly to quality of life for area residents. Private property values can benefit from the protection of these areas: ponds, streams, and lakes can increase the value and marketability of nearby parcels. As property values increase, this can translate into increased local tax revenue to support public services. Although it is difficult to calculate the full monetary value provided to communities by protecting wetlands and riparian areas, the importance of these resources is clear.

### Priority Attributes for LWCF-Supported Wetland Acquisition

DEQ and the Montana Wetland Council are the primary entities responsible for prioritizing wetland conservation strategies in Montana. While statewide wetland and riparian mapping has now been completed, portions of the mapping are still being updated and refined with modern imagery and classification. Specific parcels have not been identified in this SCORP for priority acquisition.

Working in consultation with the DEQ Wetland Coordinator and the Montana Natural Heritage Program during the SCORP planning process, a set of priority values has been identified to guide wetland acquisition and protection efforts using LWCF funding. During the establishment of project priorities under Montana’s Open Project Selection Process (OPSP), projects under consideration for LWCF funding that meet these values and criteria will receive higher priority.

CRITERIA	DESCRIPTION
Remnant Ecological Wetlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Acquisition, protection, and restoration of historic wetlands</li> </ul>
Urban Areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Montana cities with urban populations over 10,000 residents</li> <li>Close proximity to urban core and residential areas</li> </ul>
Community and Organizational Partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collaborative partnerships to support acquisition and long-term protection and stewardship</li> </ul>
Public Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Include public access and opportunities for recreation, interpretation, and education</li> </ul>
Multiple Uses/Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support multiple benefits and uses, including ecological, recreational, heritage, cultural, and educational</li> <li>Supports floodplain functions (flood abatement and storage) that protect human health and safety</li> <li>Headwater wetlands that support baseflows of Montana’s streams and rivers</li> </ul>
Landscape Connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enhances/improves connections to larger protected lands</li> </ul>

### Additional Information and Resources

Information related to wetlands and wetlands management in Montana is available at the following websites:

- Montana DEQ Wetland Program**  
<https://deq.mt.gov/Water/Programs/wetlands>
- Montana Wetland Council**  
<http://montanawetlandcouncil.pbworks.com/w/page/132750144/Montana%20Wetland%20Council>
- Montana Natural Heritage Program Wetland and Riparian Mapping Center**  
<http://mtnhp.org/nwi/>

## APPENDIX F: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The development of Montana's 2026–2030 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) reflects the shared commitment of many individuals and organizations who care deeply about the future of outdoor recreation in Montana.

### **Public Participants**

Thank you to the residents of Montana who completed surveys, joined workshops, and provided comments on the draft plan. Your input provided invaluable insights into the challenges and opportunities shaping our recreation system. Your voices are at the heart of this plan, ensuring it reflects the needs and aspirations of our communities.

### **Agency Partners**

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks extends appreciation to our federal, state, and local partners whose work and coordination inform this plan. Federal agencies, including the U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, play a critical role in stewarding public lands and waters that support outdoor recreation across the state. State agencies, local governments, and parks and recreation providers in communities large and small continue to invest in close-to-home opportunities and infrastructure that are essential to Montana's recreation system.

### **Tribal Nations**

We acknowledge and honor the sovereign Tribal Nations whose homelands shape Montana's outdoor landscape. Their knowledge, perspectives, and ongoing stewardship of land and water enrich this plan and contribute to a deeper understanding of the places where people live, work, and recreate.


### **Stakeholders and Partners**

Nonprofit organizations, recreation and trail groups, conservation organizations, private landowners, businesses, and community groups all contributed in various ways, whether by sharing data and insights, coordinating outreach, or supporting recreation and access on the ground. Their ongoing efforts to balance recreation, conservation, and community needs are integral to implementing this plan.

## Planning Team

Special thanks to the members of the SCORP planning team for their leadership, collaboration, and commitment throughout the development of this plan:

- Colby Anton
- Stephanie Clemen
- J.D. Douglas
- Drew Henry
- Liam Harry
- Marc Kloker
- Kqyn Kuka
- Kendra McKlosky
- Spencer Morris
- Amber Lopatine
- Ryder Paggen
- Kasey Pierce
- Tony Powell
- Alex Sholes
- Beth Shumate
- Thomas Woolf



***Finally, we recognize the landscapes, waters, wildlife, and communities of Montana as the true foundation of this plan. Their enduring resilience and character are the reason outdoor recreation in Montana remains central to the state's identity and quality of life.***

# APPENDIX G: NPS APPROVAL LETTER



## United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

1849 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20240

I.1.B(2225)  
(via email)

December 29, 2025

The Honorable Greg Gianforte  
Governor of Montana  
1301 E 6th Avenue  
Helena, MT 59601

Dear Governor Gianforte:

We are pleased to report that we have reviewed and approved the 2026-2030 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan or SCORP for Montana. We wish to commend the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks staff for their efforts during the planning process and their achievement in producing a high-quality document.

The Montana SCORP showcases a strong commitment to public engagement and fully aligns with the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Act's requirements for outdoor recreation planning and engagement. With approval of this SCORP, Montana's eligibility for the LWCF State Assistance Program is extended through 2031, paving the way for new opportunities to enhance outdoor recreation statewide.

We look forward to continuing our valuable partnership with the State in implementing the SCORP and in administering the LWCF financial assistance program.

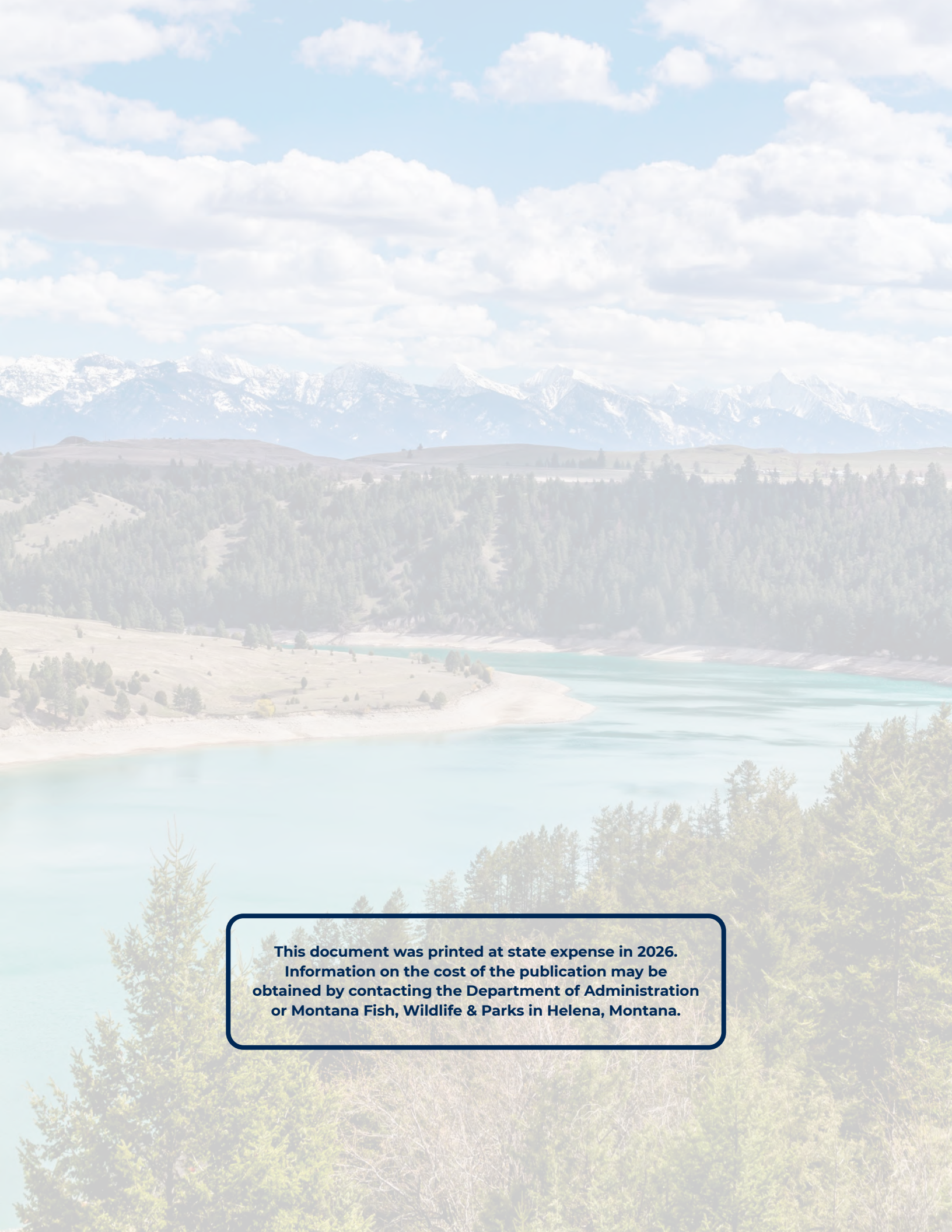
Sincerely,

**STEPHAN  
NOFIELD**

Digitally signed by STEPHAN  
NOFIELD  
Date: 2026.02.23 13:44:50  
-05'00'

Stephan Nofield  
Acting Associate Director, Partnerships and Civic Engagement  
National Park Service

cc:  
Adam Brooks, State Liaison Officer  
Olivia Hollis, Alternate State Liaison Officer



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Information on the cost of the publication may be  
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