

## Introduction

In its 63<sup>rd</sup> session, the Montana Legislature passed HB 24 creating the Montana State Parks and Recreation Board, and empowered the Board to:

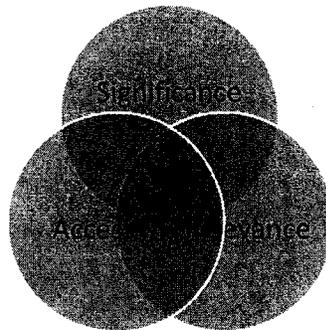
- a) "set the policies and provide direction to the department"
- b) "work with the commission to maintain hunting and angling opportunities"
- c) "establish the rules of the department governing the use of these properties and lands"
- d) "Review and approve all acquisitions or transfers"
- e) "Review and approve the budget for the department"
- f) "Review and approve construction projects"
- g) "Work with local, state, and federal agencies to .....promote recreational opportunities statewide" and
- h) "Encourage citizen involvement in management planning...."

On February 24 and 25, 2014, the Montana State Parks & Recreation Board (Board), joined by senior leadership from the Montana State Parks, participated in a facilitated retreat to identify strategic priorities for the Board over the next twelve to eighteen months, based on legislative direction as outline above. The Board discussed the role and purpose of the State Park system, current challenges in funding and operations, and opportunities in policy, regulation and legislation to improve the State Parks for the benefit of the people of Montana.

## Montana State Parks – A Unique Role and a Unique Opportunity

While Montana is blessed with a tremendous amount of public land, the State Parks are a special resource, unique to the people and culture of Montana. The Montana State Parks are a system of sites intentionally set aside and preserved for public access because they are:

- Significant to all Montanans, representing the unique cultural, historic and recreational legacy of Montana;
- Accessible to all Montanans, offering ease of use regardless of wealth, physical ability, or location in the state; and
- Relevant to all Montanans with a wide range of services, activities and programming that appeals to the unique values and interest of the people of Montana and visitors.



The Board recognizes that there are significant challenges that have been present for more than 25 years as identified by the 1989 Montana Park Futures Committee, the 1998 State Parks Vision 2020, the 2002 Montana State Parks Futures Committee II, and the HJR32 Study of State Parks, Outdoor

Recreation, and Heritage Resource Programs – lack of sustainable operational funding, deferred maintenance, visitor services, variable visitor experience, cultural resources without adequate protection and areas of the state unserved by the State Park system.

To address these challenges, the Board and the agency will need to develop new models for sustainable funding, visitor services, and overall strengthening of the system - new models that reflect the most prudent use of public funds, innovative approaches to public/private partnerships, and the highest sense of accountability to all the citizens of Montana.

The Board believes it has the opportunity to develop truly innovative models for cooperation among state agencies, with local communities and with federal agencies. Just as the vehicle registration program was first developed in Montana and is now being adopted by other states, we believe we can develop additional approaches that may or may not be embraced by other states and other public land managers.

### **Strategy**

The Board considered the range of historic challenges and the opportunities presented by the current economic, political and operational realities, within the context of the law signed by the Governor, and identified three key strategies to pursue:

- First, develop a diversified and sustainable funding model for the State Park system that:
  - Addresses both operational expenses and capital projects to maintain and improve parks;
  - Maximizes appropriate state funding sources, increases earned revenue, and builds a philanthropic revenue stream;
  - Applies commercial best practices to the management of public resources for the public benefit; and
  - Better leverage existing Federal funding opportunities that require a state match.
- Second, deepen existing and build new strategic partnerships with those key agencies and partners who have a shared stake in the operations and the success of the State Park system; and
- Third, build the constituency for the State Parks by engaging stakeholders, user groups, and the general public as partners and as advocates.

## MONTANA STATE PARKS STRATEGIC PLAN

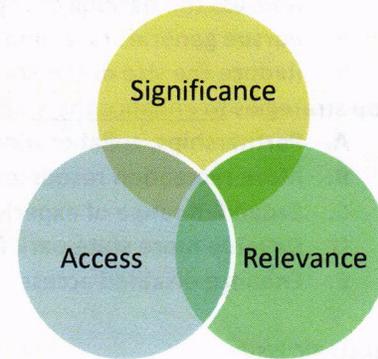
In 2013, the Montana State Legislature established the Montana State Parks & Recreation Board (Board) to set policies and provide direction for the management of state parks and for furthering opportunities for outdoor recreation across the state (MCA 23-1-111).

With the support of the Board, Montana State Parks, a Division of Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, has embarked on a strategic planning process to craft an updated vision for the next 10 years. The strategic planning process will address challenges related to resources and size, and produce effective decisions and an action plan to enhance the State Parks system and recreation programs.

### Board Retreat

In February, the Board developed a strategic framework over a two-day retreat with short-term goals for the Board. The Board identified three overarching factors of the State Parks system:

- Significant to all Montanans, representing the cultural, historic and recreational legacy of Montana;
- Accessible to all Montanans, offering ease of use regardless of wealth, physical ability, or location in the state; and
- Relevant to all Montanans with a wide range of services, activities and programming that appeals to the unique values and interest of the people of Montana and visitors.



Over the next 12 months, the Board will focus on three key strategies to pursue:

1. **Sustainable Funding** - Develop a diversified and sustainable funding model for the State Park system for operational and capital expenses, maximizes state funding sources, and builds philanthropic streams;
2. **Strategic Partnerships** - Deepen existing and build new strategic partnerships with those key agencies and partners who have a shared stake in the operations and the success of the State Park system; and
3. **Engaged Constituents** - Build the constituency for the State Parks by engaging stakeholders, user groups, and the general public as partners and as advocates.

### Staff and Legislative Surveys

The Division conducted two surveys as part of understanding the core challenges of the State Parks system: a staff survey and a legislative survey. The top three key Division-wide needs prioritized by staff and members of the Legislature are:

Staff Priorities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Adequate funding and staffing</li><li>• Enhance visitor experiences</li><li>• Improve resource conditions</li></ul>

Legislative Priorities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Address backlog of capital &amp; maintenance needs</li><li>• Sell, transfer, or donate lands</li><li>• Develop revenue streams</li></ul>

Key attributes identified by respondents that Montana State Parks should stand for are: *family friendly fun, educational, diversity opportunities, affordable, accessible to all, and clean and well-maintained.*

### Community Listening Sessions

In April, Montana State Parks hosted 8 community listening sessions around the state, facilitated by the MSU Extension Local Government Center. Over 117 people attended the sessions and participated in discussion forums on the values, challenges, and opportunities for the future of Montana's state park and recreation programs.

The top five strategies prioritized by participants that the Parks Board and State Legislature should consider pursuing to sustain the system and increase public investment are:

1. **Develop revenue streams**
2. **Pursue more public-private partnerships and private contracts**
3. **Address the backlog of capital maintenance needs**
4. **Pursue general state fund allocation**
5. **Reduce the size of the State Parks system**

Top strategies to enhance the system are:

- A. **Partnerships, collaboration, and constituent building with communities**
- B. **More recreation resources and services**
- C. **Expanded range of experiences and zoning to improve opportunity**
- D. **Develop more state park focused marketing, apps and social media**
- E. **Enhance disabled access**

### Strategic Issues

What makes the park system relevant to your organization?

Defining what is a state park? How many State Parks should there be and where? What is the appropriate distribution of resources within the State Parks system?

What "brand promise" do we give to Montanan's and their guests— experiences, quality, services, amenities?

Are there too many parks and what do we say when the public wants us to take on more lands because no one else will? Who will accept lands should transfer or divestment move forward as a priority?

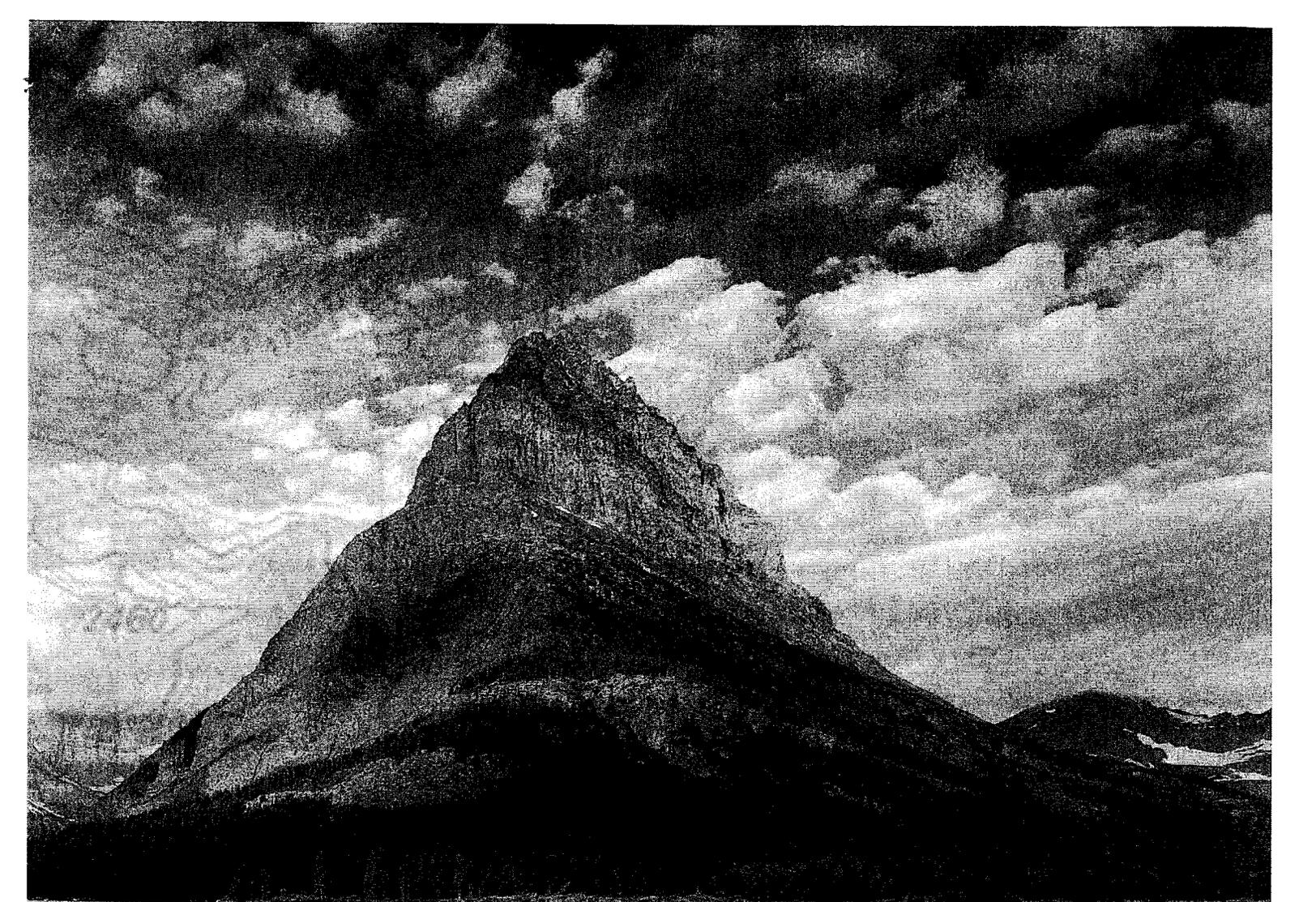
How does Montana State Parks better engage communities, Friends groups, user groups, and other constituents to build awareness of the State Parks system and develop partner-based solutions?

How can Montana State Parks develop and diversify revenue streams to support sustainable levels of funding, given our primary funding sources of the vehicle registration fee, park fees, and the bed tax, and constraints from no general funds or hunting and fishing license dollars?

How might Montana State Parks best address staffing and resource limits to help increase our capacity and improve operations and services?

What is the role of parks and the park board in leading public lands recreation through its grant programs? In supporting tourism and economic development?

- 95% of participants have a positive/somewhat positive view of Montana State Parks
- 81% of participants feel Montana State Parks is very effective/somewhat effective at interacting with families and youth
- 72% of participants feel Montana State Parks is somewhat effective/not effective at engaging local communities
- 78% of participants feel Montana State Parks is very effective/somewhat effective in supporting state and local economies



CREATING A  
VIBRANT  
FUTURE

FOR  
MONTANA'S  
OUTDOOR RECREATION HERITAGE

MONTANA 2014-2018

STATEWIDE COMPREHENSIVE OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN

For more information about the Montana SCORP 2014-2018,  
for additional online resources, or to download the entire  
SCORP document, visit the Montana State Parks website at  
[www.stateparks.mt/gov/about-us/SCORP.html](http://www.stateparks.mt/gov/about-us/SCORP.html).

You may also contact the Montana State Parks office  
by telephone at 406-444-3750.

# EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW

4 *Creating a Vibrant Future for Montana's Outdoor Recreation Heritage*, the Montana 2014–2018 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) serves as the guiding document to promote integrated outdoor recreation management and service provision in Montana in a more holistic and effective manner. The plan serves as a catalyst to enhance the quality of life of all Montanans and support vibrant communities through a growing recreation industry while also maintaining our high quality natural, cultural, heritage, and recreational resources. Through the coordination of federal, state, and local outdoor recreation providers, land managers, and partners, the SCORP sets the stage for recreation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century by describing current supply and trends, growing demands and challenges, and provides a framework for future recreation management and focus.

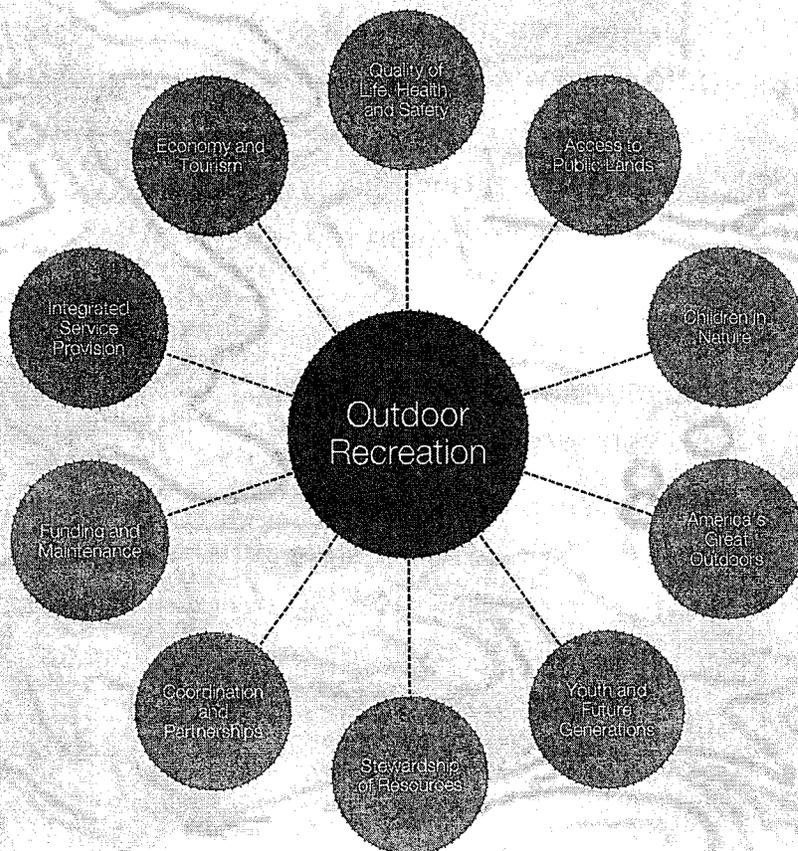
The Land and Water Conservation Act of 1965 (LWCF) provides matching grants to States and local governments for the acquisition and development of community outdoor recreation areas and facilities, as well as funding for federal land acquisition and conservation strategies. As a requirement to be eligible to receive state side funds, each state must prepare a Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan every five years. The stateside LWCF program is intended to create and maintain a nationwide legacy of high quality recreation areas and facilities and to stimulate non-federal investments in the protection and maintenance of recreation resources across the United States. Since 1965, Montana has received close to \$38 million in LWCF state side appropriations.

# PLANNING PROCESS AND CONTEXT

Developing the 2014-2018 SCORP has been a true collaboration at all levels with a wide variety of federal, state, local, and organizational partners. As a requirement to be eligible to receive state side funds, each state must prepare a Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan every five years. Lead by Montana State Parks with the guidance of the SCORP Advisory Committee, the process was a multi-faceted, data-driven approach in order to fully understand the status of recreation in Montana. Data collection consisted of:

- A survey of federal, state, tribal, county and city outdoor recreation areas and facilities;
- Trends and benchmarks analysis of the emerging recreation demands and influences impacting our state;
- Statistically valid public surveys to understand preferences for outdoor recreation activities, and quantify opinions on outdoor recreation resources; and
- Analyzed tourism, industry, and national trends to provide context for recreation in Montana; and
- Advisory committee comprised of federal, state, local, and organizational partners.

When discussed in this 2014-2018 SCORP, outdoor recreation is considered within the context of numerous interconnected initiatives, industries and relevant factors that influence recreation, including quality of life, economy, service provision, and the America's Great Outdoors initiative. Recreation transcends just facility development, and is a dynamic field and industry that provides numerous benefits to Montana citizens, industry, and visitors alike.



# EMERGING CHALLENGES

Outdoor recreation is core to Montana's outdoor heritage. Residents enjoy a diverse array of outdoor recreation opportunities on our 38 million acres of public land. Additionally, more than 10 million visitors each year come to experience Montana's breathtaking landscape and endless opportunities this great state has to offer. However, recreation managers are struggling to reflect this high priority that Montanans and visitors place upon our natural, cultural, heritage and recreational resources.

## RECREATIONAL CHALLENGES:

DECLINING PRIORITY OF OUTDOOR RECREATION  
DECREASED FUNDING AND RESOURCES  
INCREASED MAINTENANCE COSTS  
LACK OF STATEWIDE COORDINATION

Many agencies have seen a decrease in recreation budgets, particularly at the federal level. The U.S. Forest Service's recreation budget in Montana has decreased 48% since 2009. The Bureau of Land Management's recreation budget comprises on average 5% of their total budget, which has decreased 35% since 2008. The National Park Service has seen a 6% decrease in funding, and other agencies are struggling with budget reductions. Stateside LWCF appropriations in Montana has decreased 78% since its highest appropriations level in 1979, and unequal distribution between state and federal funds has placed greater emphasis on land acquisition over development of community recreation parks and facilities. The sequestration in 2013 pushed federal budgets into deeper cuts, and this is impacting the ability of managers to meet many basic services and operations.

Unless recreation is prioritized to a higher level, the capacity of agencies to manage recreation safely and adequately on public lands will continue to diminish. Deferred maintenance in particular is a major challenge among agencies at the federal as well as state and local levels. There is an immense backlog of deferred maintenance needs at all levels, and many land managers indicated this as a top need to be addressed over the next five years. Without regular maintenance and improvements, our recreational, natural, cultural, and heritage resources are vulnerable to damage, and we risk losing the very assets that people come to Montana to enjoy.

Outdoor recreation also lacks guidance and direction on a statewide level, and agencies are challenged to look past their boundaries to assess the overall recreation landscape in Montana. A new vision for outdoor recreation is necessary to ensure that our recreation resources function at a high level and are sustained for current and future generations. Montana residents and visitors expect and deserve more from our public lands.

# INFLUENCING TRENDS

A number of influencing trends emerged throughout the planning process that are shaping outdoor recreation preferences and influencing how agencies and decision makers are thinking about recreation management.

## CHANGING OUTDOOR RECREATION PREFERENCES

Outdoor recreation preferences are changing both at the national and state level. Hunting and fishing, undoubtedly synonymous with Montana, has seen a shift in recent years in participation levels. Hunters and anglers are aging, and fewer youth are taking up the activities. License sales have become static or declined. Still, Montana is a paradise for sportsmen, and nearly two-thirds of Montanans participated in wildlife-associated recreation in 2011, with the majority enjoying wildlife watching.

Walking is continuously the most popular recreation activity. There has been an even stronger increase in walking, hiking and biking activities in recent years, and there is a pronounced need for more trails and paths on public lands. Motorized recreation has also significantly grown in users, with a 300% increase in off-highway vehicle registration and a close to 200% increase in snowmobile registration since 2000. Aquatic facilities continue to be popular among land managers and recreationists, and the greatest recreation facility identified are swimming pools, followed by trails for road bicycling, walking, and mountain biking. Facilities to support youth, seniors, and to meet accessibility standards are also top priorities.

### TOP FACILITY NEEDS

- AQUATIC FACILITIES
- PLAYGROUND
- EXPAND FACILITIES
- DEFERRED MAINTENANCE
- WATER ACCESS

### TOP FACILITY FOR YOUTH

- PLAYGROUNDS
- HIKING/BICYCLING TRAILS
- AQUATIC FACILITIES

### TOP FACILITIES FOR ADULT/SENIOR/ADA

- HIKING/BICYCLING TRAILS
- CAMPGROUND

### KEY SURVEY FINDINGS

95% of Montanans say outdoor recreation is important to their quality of life

75% of Montanans use paths and trails for hiking, walking, jogging, and bicycling

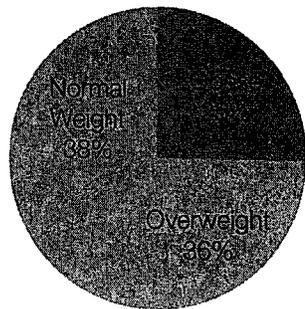
37% of recreation managers reported a decrease in recreation funding over the last five years

61% of Montana adults and 21% of high school students are overweight or obese

Aquatic facilities and hiking and biking trails are top needs to meet growing demands

Youth and future generations is the top influencing issue for recreation management decision-making

## DISTRIBUTION OF MONTANANS BY BODY MASS INDEX (BMI), 2011



## AGING AND GROWING POPULATION

Since 2000, Montana has gone through demographic changes that demonstrate our population is both aging and growing at the same time. The median age of Montanans is increasing and the percent of residents 65 years and older has grown 21% since 2000. Geographically, residents in central and eastern Montana are generally older than residents in western Montana. Projections through 2030 indicate that Montana's population will continue to age and there will be fewer young people that call Montana home. By 2020, the population of 65 years and older is projected to surpass the population of 15 years and under, and essentially one in four Montanans will be over 65 years of age.

Montana is also growing, with a 9.7% increase in population at the 2010 Census. By 2030, the population is projected to grow another 16.7%. Much of this growth is expected to occur in and around population centers, particularly in the Flathead Valley and in Gallatin County. Growth in Eastern Montana is also projected to occur related to the Bakken oil development and other energy development. With these growth and demographic trends, land managers can expect to see an increase in users on public lands, as well as the need for more accessible and universally designed facilities and amenities.

## INCREASING INACTIVITY AND HEALTH PROBLEMS

Compared to national data, Montanans are more active and have lower rates of obesity. Still, trends show that Montanans are increasingly becoming more sedentary and the state is beginning to see an increase in health problems. Nearly a quarter of Montana adults are obese, and another 36% are overweight. More than 20% of high school students are also obese or overweight. Close to 8% of Montanans have diabetes and nearly 35% have high cholesterol.

At a time when obesity rates among adults and children are increasing, the important role of physical activity and access to outdoor recreation resources cannot be underestimated. About a quarter of Montanans do not regularly participate in leisure time physical activity. The highest proportions of inactive Montanans are those with disabilities, with low income or low education, and Montanans over 65 years of age. As Montana grows and becomes more urbanized, sustaining a connection to our natural resources and public lands should be a high priority. Parks and outdoor recreation opportunities provide critically important connections to our natural world and improve the quality of life of residents and the overall health of our communities.

## NUMBERS ON HEALTH COSTS

Reducing the average body mass index in Montana by 5% could lead to health care savings of more \$1 billion in 20 years.

For every \$1 spent on building biking trails and walking paths in Montana, we could save close to \$3 in medical expenses.

## GROWING OUTDOOR RECREATION AND TOURISM INDUSTRY

Outdoor recreation is a growing industry in Montana and provides significant economic contributions and benefits to communities and the state as a whole. Outdoor recreation in Montana generates \$5.8 billion in consumer spending, creates 64,000 direct jobs, and generates \$1.5 billion in wages and salaries. It also contributes \$403 million to state and local tax revenues that go to support public services. Since 2006, consumer spending on outdoor recreation has increased by 132%, the number of jobs created has doubled, and tax revenue has increased 242%. Outdoor recreation is a growing and vitally important sector in Montana that makes up 18% of spending in the state and creates nearly 1 out of every 6 jobs in Montana's workforce.

## CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND FUTURE GENERATIONS

Connecting children with nature continues to be a high priority among recreation providers at the federal, state, and local levels. Although many Montana communities are surrounded by national forests and diverse public lands that support an array of outdoor recreation opportunities, many Montanan children and youth have become disconnected from the landscape. Some school-aged students have as little an opportunity to get outdoors as youth living in dense cities like New York City or Los Angeles. Recreation managers indicated that children and youth are top issues for decision-making, and agencies are focusing efforts to develop programs that get young Montanans outdoors. Further efforts are needed to enhance networks and connections between communities and public lands. Additionally, providing opportunities to engage youth and encourage the next generation of land stewards will ensure Montana's outdoor legacy remains a core value in the state.

# KEY PRIORITIES & RECOMMENDATIONS

It is imperative for local, state and federal recreation managers to work collaboratively with tourism, industry, and Montana citizens to create a vibrant future for Montana's outdoor recreation heritage where Montanans live healthier lifestyles, the economic well being of communities is sustained, and providing high quality recreational opportunities comes second to none. Recreationists do not care who manages the landscape. People care about getting outdoors and experiencing the unique natural, cultural, and recreation resources that Montana has to offer. It is up to recreation providers and partners to collaborate and integrate recreation management to provide high quality service provision and well-maintained resources for current and future generations.

Priorities for the 2014-2018 SCORP reflect the current research and trends on outdoor recreation at the national and state level, connects to initiatives around health, livability, and economic vitality, and addresses strategies to overcome challenges that will elevate Montana as a national leader in recreation with vision, focus, and coordination.

## A. IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF ALL MONTANANS

OBJECTIVE: STRENGTHEN CONNECTIONS BETWEEN OUTDOOR RECREATION, HEALTHY LIFESTYLES, PUBLIC SAFETY AND LIVABLE COMMUNITIES.

### KEY RECOMMENDATIONS INCLUDE:

- 1 Improve access to outdoor recreation resources, facilities, and trails to connect public lands to communities and encourage routine, daily outdoor activity everywhere Montanans live, work, learn, and play.
- 2 Provide priority for Montana State Parks-administered trail grant requests that enhance Montanans' connections to the outdoors, encourage healthy and active lifestyles, and support close-to home trail acquisition and development, as identified through a local or regional planning process.
- 3 Encourage development/expansion of new or existing alternative transportation systems to parks, open spaces, and public lands, including ADA accessible transportation by bus, rail, and non-motorized systems such as pedestrian and bicycle trails.
- 4 Collaboratively develop strategies and initiatives among recreation providers, Montana Trails, Recreation and Parks Association, and partners to engage Montana's youth in outdoor activities and on public lands.

## **B. SUSTAIN ECONOMIC VITALITY**

**OBJECTIVE: ASSESS AND ADAPT TO THE GROWING RECREATION AND TOURISM DEMANDS AND CHANGING PREFERENCES OF RESIDENTS AND VISITORS, AND PROMOTE THE BENEFITS OF RECREATION TO STATE AND LOCAL ECONOMIES.**

### **KEY RECOMMENDATIONS INCLUDE:**

- 1** Coordinate marketing and messaging with community, regional, and state tourism information providers and local lodging associations and chambers of commerce to keep information about facilities and recreation opportunities up-to-date, compelling and relevant for visitors and local users.
- 2** Encourage federal, state, and city recreation providers to share their visitation data on an annual basis to the Montana Office of Tourism, the Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research, and other tourism stakeholders to facilitate a stronger understanding of tourism-related recreation trends.
- 3** Research and understand the impacts of energy development and population growth on Montana recreation providers, communities, and tourism demands and preferences.

## C. PROMOTE STEWARDSHIP AND SUSTAINABILITY

OBJECTIVE: PROTECT AND ENHANCE MONTANA'S NATURAL, CULTURAL, AND HERITAGE ASSETS BY GROWING A RESPONSIBLE RECREATION LAND ETHIC AMONG RESIDENTS AND VISITORS.

### KEY RECOMMENDATIONS INCLUDE:

- 1 Provide priority for urban refuge and wetland conservation grant requests that enhance awareness and connectivity between wetlands and communities through partnerships to increase the urban refuge and wetland presence in Montana cities.
- 2 Promote and support programs that teach about and connect residents and visitors to Montana's diverse natural and cultural heritage. Encourage interagency heritage programming within a larger recreation context to deliver cohesive experiences with other related historic sites and cultural properties.
- 3 Work with outdoor recreation ethics organizations (e.g. Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics and Tread Lightly!) to develop and distribute promotional materials and messages to promote safe and responsible recreational use of public lands. Support educational efforts with public service announcements, signage, and interpretive programs.

OBJECTIVE: DEVELOP CREATIVE SOLUTIONS TO PROVIDE ADEQUATE FUNDS FOR ROUTINE AND PREVENTATIVE MAINTENANCE OF CURRENT FACILITIES, AS WELL AS EXPAND DEVELOPMENT OF FACILITIES TO MEET THE GROWING NEEDS OF RESIDENTS AND VISITORS.

### KEY RECOMMENDATIONS INCLUDE:

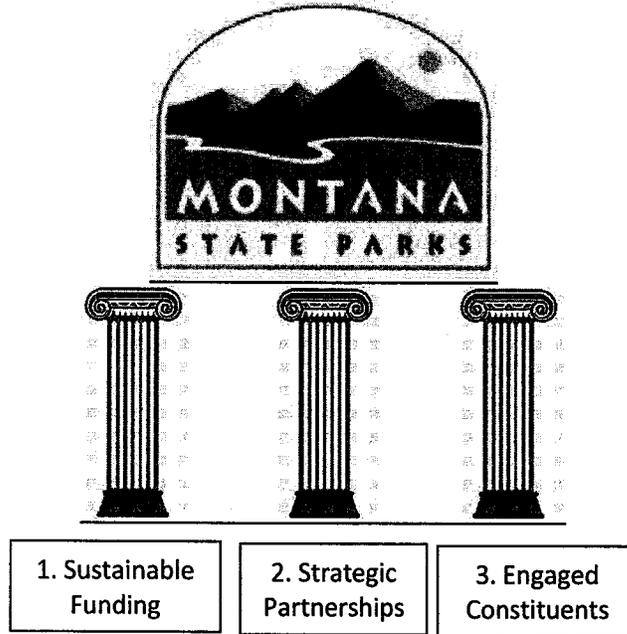
- 4 Explore opportunities to develop a Montana State Parks-administered grant program based on new revenue sources to adequately fund state and local recreation projects and programs that enhance access for all Montanans.
- 5 Establish regional working groups with federal, state, local, and tribal governments and other stakeholders to investigate opportunities for interagency partnerships to share staff, expertise, and resources to reduce operations and maintenance costs.
- 6 Advocate for the reauthorization of the LWCF Act in 2015 to full funding and at equitable levels between federal and stateside apportionments. Encourage broadening the funding criteria to reflect maintenance costs, and to allow communities to more easily repurpose previously funded recreation developments to reflect changes in demand.

## D. ENHANCE AGENCY SERVICE PROVISION

OBJECTIVE: PROMOTE A SEAMLESS SYSTEM OF COORDINATED MANAGEMENT AMONG RECREATION PROVIDERS AND AGENCIES AT ALL LEVELS.

### KEY RECOMMENDATIONS INCLUDE:

- 1 Provide collective leadership on recreation challenges in Montana, promote resources and information exchange, and expand opportunities on public lands.
- 2 Partner on projects that span agency boundaries and link communities to their public lands and provide access from community staging areas to adjacent public recreation opportunities and settings.
- 3 Advocate and develop standards for recreation policies that encourage recreation planning and enhance active living as part of long range planning at the city and county level.



## 1. Diversified and Sustainable Funding

### A. State Funding Sources

1. The largest single source of funds to State Parks is the light vehicle registration fee, which was increased by the legislature in 2011. Operated on an “opt-out” basis, the program currently receives strong participation by Montana citizens (77% of light vehicles registered have paid the fee), an indication of the strong support for the State Parks. Sustaining that high level of participation, and working with those county staff who are not encouraging participation must remain a very high priority.
2. The State Parks also receive 6.5% of the 4% Bed Tax out of the total 7% collected through the Bed Tax. The tourism industry and its stakeholders are mobilizing to increase the investment in Montana’s single largest economic sector by retaining the full 7% for investment in tourism. The Board would like to join that effort in the 2015 Legislative Session.
3. The third area of state funding, the Coal Tax State Parks Trust Fund, also has opportunities to increase above the existing levels of support. In the short term, access to the Long Range Building Program either through a part of the Coal Tax Pie earmarked for Long Range Building or in the legislative bill devoted to the Long Range Building Program would give the State Parks the ability to cover serious capital needs and to leverage additional matching funds. Longer range, the Board will monitor changes in the Trust structure to identify additional opportunities to increase the revenue going into the Coal Tax State Parks Trust Fund.

- B. **Earned Revenue** – The second largest single source of funding is earned revenue (fees from visitor use), which thanks to the introduction of an online campground reservations system has been growing in recent years. The Board believes that the reservation system represents an example of how more business-like systems and policies can bring a higher level of service to Montana residents and out-of-state visitors and raise additional operating funds for the State Parks while at the same time making State Parks even more accessible to the public. The 2012 Concessions Report identified several barriers to increasing private investment in the State Parks, both capital investment and improved visitor services. The Board believes that policy changes can allow improvements in the State Parks without the investment of state funds or an increase in FTE on the part of the agency. The Board would like to pursue these policy changes. The Board would also like to pursue other efforts to increase the revenue potential from both visitor fees and concession contracts.
- C. **Philanthropy** - The Board believes there is significant untapped potential for philanthropic support of the State Parks in concert with broader efforts to build and engage a constituency for the State Parks. The Board will work with the staff to develop a strategy to leverage potential investments by corporate partners and high net worth individuals. First, to be able to capitalize on possible immediate opportunities, the State Parks staff will develop a short list of fundable capital projects ranging from mid five figures to mid six figures in cost. This list will be shared with the Board. Over the balance of 2014, the Board will work with the staff to assess the capacity and interest of potential charitable partners, including the Outdoor Legacy Foundation, Our Montana, and other options. The Board will also develop policies, based on best practices with or without guidance from other public lands agencies, for acceptance of charitable gifts and appropriate donor recognition as well as the development of other private contributions for Montana Parks and Outdoor Recreation.

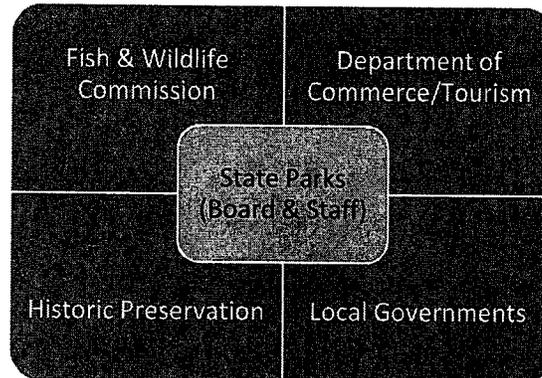
## 2. Strategic Partnerships

To advance the State Parks, the Board and staff will work to deepen existing strategic partnerships and create new partnerships with a number of key partners. The immediate priority will be strengthening those partnerships that are directly tied to the 2015 Legislative agenda. Following the Legislative session these partnerships will be further developed and deepened.

- A. **Fish and Wildlife Commission** – The Board will make a priority of engaging with the Fish and Wildlife Commission in order to integrate strategy and policy across the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks. In particular, the Board will seek to forge common approaches in jointly operated sites and across jointly shared functions to ensure coherent and effective management and customer service.
- B. **Department of Commerce / Tourism Community** – The Board will seek to more closely align the strategy, operations and marketing of the State Parks with the growth of the Montana tourism industry, recognizing the economic impact and potential for greater impact of the State Park system. Working first through the Department of Commerce and Travel Montana, and then through local convention and visitor bureaus where there is a strong State Park presence, and finally with the business interests who are part of the tourism industry, the Board will pursue opportunities for collaboration and cooperation that advance mutual interests.
- C. **Historic Preservation** – Recognizing that there are several key players (i.e. the Montana Historical Society, the Montana Heritage Preservation and Development Commission, the Montana University System) with responsibility for preserving and making accessible the historic and cultural heritage of Montana, the Board will seek to convene these interests, share

perspective and strategy, and facilitate the development of a statewide approach without necessarily assuming management of any additional sites or resources.

- D. **Local Governments** – The Board will build relationships with organizations that represent local governments, including the Montana Association of Counties, the Montana League of Cities and Towns and local Chambers of Commerce. These relationships will help inform Board policy decisions and strengthen the constituency that values state parks.



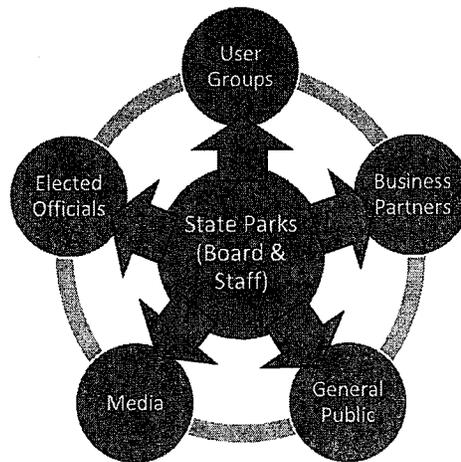
### 3. Building a Constituency for State Parks and Recreation

State Parks and Recreation programs belong to the citizens of Montana, and are managed primarily for their use and enjoyment. To better serve Montana citizens, and to more deeply engage them in the management and growth of the State Parks, the Board will work with the staff to develop systems for regular two way communication with individual constituents as well as a wide range of stakeholder groups.

- A. The Board and the agency will conduct outreach to a wide range of **user groups** and citizens to engage them in the work of the Board. Among the groups are: MTRPA, Montana Mountain Bike Alliance, the Montana Snowmobile Association, Off Road Vehicle organizations, Trout Unlimited, Audubon, Good Sam and other RV Clubs, local and statewide history groups, Bikewalk Montana, Our Montana, and other groups.
- B. The Board and agency staff will more systematically engage with its current and potential **private business partners** -- concessioners, guides and other providers who have contracts or permits to operate within the parks, as well as the private contractors, architects and engineers who conduct our capital projects, and other business partners.
- C. The Board and agency will also begin systematically engaging with the **general public**. Within the limits of privacy laws and state policy, the Board will collect email addresses from public engagement on proposed rules, campground reservations, visitor comment cards, and public participants in the statewide strategic planning effort. We will also connect with the State Park friends groups to improve their effectiveness and support overall. And the Board will utilize any other methods open to them to engage the general public in greater support for and attention to Montana Parks, Montana Heritage Sites, and Outdoor Recreation Programs.
- D. The Board and agency will also regularly engage with **elected officials and opinion leaders** statewide through direct outreach and through the **media**. The Board will develop an OpEd outlining their vision for the State Parks, and asking for support for the policy and legislative steps to achieve that vision. The Board will also respond to significant news coverage or editorials with Letters to the

Editor. The Board will participate in candidate forums this fall, to ensure elected officials are reached at their most receptive moment. And on a targeted basis, the Board will work with the agency to bring legislators to State Parks, to illustrate the promise and the challenges and to otherwise engage legislators in the general needs of Montana's State Parks.

Two key issues must be addressed immediately before beginning a communication program with these constituents. First, the Board and staff will need to collaborate on the development of a simple database that can be used to collect contact information, and then distribute periodic updates to these constituents. Second, the Board and agency will need to develop a communications vehicle, most likely an electronic newsletter that regularly provides constituents with updates on State Park issues, and invites feedback.



### **Implementation - Policy and Legislative Agenda**

The Board will work with the staff, the leadership of FWP, and with the Executive Administration to develop and implement a series of policy changes that will advance this strategy. Given the timing of the Legislative session and the urgency of addressing Pillar 1, Sustainable Funding, the legislative agenda will be focused on that Pillar in 2015. Partnership development and public engagement will be in support of the strategic planning process and the legislative agenda, and will build the foundation for further efforts in 2015 and beyond.

1. In preparation for the expiration of current user fee policies in December 2014, the Board and staff will conduct a thorough review of all camping, non-resident entrance, commercial use and other fees. The Board will develop a proposed fee schedule that uses best practices from other public land managers, that accounts for market conditions including differential pricing of sites by quality and season, and that continues to provide access for Montanans of all incomes but levels the playing field with private operators of similar services and otherwise minimizes potential conflicts with private enterprises.
2. The Board and staff will review the December 2012 Concessions report and identify policy and statutory changes that will increase the opportunity for investment of private capital into state park facilities, that will support additional high quality visitor services at no or reduced cost to the State,

and that will create other opportunities for Montana entrepreneurs to provide service to State Park visitors.

3. Although the Board recognizes that there are significant gaps in the State Park system, including a lack of parks in Eastern Montana, the Board will adopt a moratorium on the acceptance of any new State Parks for the next five years, unless an opportunity presents itself for the state to acquire a site that meets the definition of statewide significance, that can be acquired at no cost to the citizen of Montana, and that comes with resources and/or a business plan for that site's sustainable operation for the foreseeable future.
4. Over the years, the agency has been tasked with managing sites that do not necessarily meet the thresholds of significance, access or relevance to be classified as State Parks. The Board will first develop a working definition of "significance" based on a study of the best practices of the National Park Service, other states, and other important factors. The Board will then work with the staff to identify those sites that do not meet that definition, and pursue a range of potential management approaches that will preserve the outdoor needs of the citizens of Montana while, at the same time, ensuring that the State Park brand continues to have meaning and quality. Among the potential approaches are:
  - a. Divestment outright, where the property is transferred to another agency or entity with the capacity to manage it;
  - b. Co-management with another state or local agency; or
  - c. Continuing management, but without the State Park designation or brand.

In the 2015 Legislative Session, the Board will pursue the following initiatives to secure sustainable funding for park operations and capital needs.

1. The Board will join with the broad coalition of tourism interests, convention and visitors' bureaus and other stakeholders to advocate for the dedication of the full 7% bed tax revenue to tourism promotion activities, instead of just the 4% as is the current system. Within the coalition, the Board will also explore the potential for increasing the State Parks share beyond the current 6.5%.
2. To address the long term capital needs, particularly as they relate to visitor safety and resource preservation, the Board will pursue eligibility for the Long Range Building Program or other mechanisms to provide a long-term source of funding for critical projects, and access to federal funds that require a state match.
3. Currently two State Parks are facing critical issues with life safety systems – Bannack State Park needs a fire alarm system, which is estimated to cost \$1.4 million dollars. Lewis and Clark Caverns, one of the most popular sites in the State Park system, needs a comprehensive upgrade to its electrical system to bring it into compliance with state and federal electrical codes. That is estimated to cost \$2 million dollars. The Board will pursue a one-time appropriation from the general fund or bonding to address these critical issues. This appropriation will be used entirely to purchase supplies and hire private contractors in Montana, and will not add any FTE's to the State Parks payroll.
4. Evaluate and adopt an increase in user fees now scheduled to expire in December 2014 consistent with the concerns set forth above and propose legislation as need to implement these increases.
5. Propose legislation to extend the current seven year limit on concession contracts to allow for major development of improvement to the State Park system and propose other measures that would make such improvements and other beneficial concession activity more attractive to private enterprise.

6. Propose changes in the Coal Tax State Park Trust Fund that will have long range benefits to Montana State Parks as well as possible changes in the Coal Tax Pie that would benefit State Parks.
7. Propose legislation to adopt a moratorium on the acquisition of any new State Parks consistent with the conditions set forth above.
8. Propose legislation that may be necessary to fully implement the above policy of divestiture, co-management, or other arrangements to reduce the management and cost burden of parks that can be better managed in other ways.

### **Next Steps**

To move forward with this agenda as directed in the law with strong support from the Legislature, the Board will identify a strategic policy or management issue to be addressed at each of its coming meetings in 2014, and will advertise those topics so that the public can be aware and can offer input into those deliberations. Each of these strategic discussions will require preparation by the staff and the Board, including research into best practices, policy and management alternatives and their implications, and impact on stakeholders and other constituencies. The proposed schedule is:

- April – Joint Meeting with Fish and Wildlife Commission
- June – User Fee Revisions
- August – Concessions policy / Public Private Partnerships
- October – Finalize Strategic Plan/Vision and Finalize 2015 Legislative Agenda and Strategy
- December – Divestment/Alternate Management Approaches
- 1<sup>st</sup> Meeting 2015 – Budget Review
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Meeting 2015 - Developing State Park Philanthropy
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Meeting 2015 – Post Legislative Session Planning

The strategic planning process underway offers an excellent opportunity for the Board to engage with the public to solicit their input and their support for the State Parks. The Board will work closely with the staff to identify opportunities for Board involvement in the process, to ensure that the learnings from the process are incorporated into the Board's work, and to provide support to complete the process by October 2014.

### **Evaluation**

The Board will adhere to highest standards of accountability and transparency. At the end of each calendar year, the Board will conduct a self-assessment of progress made against this strategy, and will publish that assessment on its website, with the opportunity for public comment.