



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

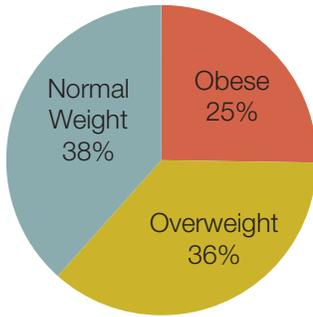
37% of recreation managers reported a decrease in recreation funding over the last five years

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.