



### Grant Details

#### 118486 - FY23 DMO Plan

#### 122508 - FY23 Visit Southeast Montana DMO Plan

DOC Office of Tourism

**Grant Title:** FY23 Visit Southeast Montana DMO Plan  
**Grant Number:** 23-51-039  
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#### DMO Plan Narrative

##### 1. Describe Your Destination

*Describe your destination (who you are, who you wish to attract and why they would come) addressing your strengths, opportunities, and potential challenges.*

##### We're Big Out Here

That is what a visit to Southeast Montana promises. Wide-open spaces. Historical stories. Deeply-rooted traditions. And, adventures as varied as stars in the vast night skies.

Out here, Big Sky meets big adventure. It's the kind of place to slow down and fall in love with Montana. It's the kind of place where cowboys still ride horses across the open plains. It's the kind of place where dinosaur fossils are waiting to be discovered and history is rooted in the land. It's the kind of place where visitors can steep in the myriad colors of a prairie sunset and feel the drum beat that nourished the indigenous tribes for generations.

##### A Brief History

Originally called "Custer Country," Visit Southeast Montana began in 1984 as an organization charged with helping bring tourists to the region. It was named for one of its most famous attractions, the Little Bighorn Battlefield. In 1987 the Montana Legislature enacted a 4 percent Lodging Facility Use Tax to fund tourism promotion organizations. At that time, Custer Country became one of six state-funded tourism regions in the state.

This organization continued to market the 13 counties and two Indian Reservations of Southeast Montana until 2010. In

2012, the Custer Country Board of Directors voted to change the name of the region to "Visit Southeast Montana." Since then, the Billings Chamber of Commerce, via the Montana Department of Commerce, has managed Visit Southeast Montana.

## **The Organization**

Visit Southeast Montana is a private, nonprofit organization managed by the Billings Chamber of Commerce. We serve as a voice for Southeast Montana's tourism and hospitality industries, seeking to promote the region's many attractions, events and communities while ensuring that tourism is recognized as one of the region's top economic drivers, especially when changes to local and state-wide legislation are considered. Visit Southeast Montana consists of two full-time staff members under contract with the Montana Department of Commerce and is directed by a board consisting of no more than 21 members from across the region.

Visit Southeast Montana partners with the region's three Convention & Visitors Bureaus (Billings and Miles City; Glendive regains CVB status starting July 1 of FY23) along with hoteliers, chambers of commerce and other tourism-related entities including state parks, county and federal organizations, plus private businesses ranging from coffee shops and restaurants to guide services, art galleries and private tour operators. The stakeholders and tourism partners of Southeast Montana provide the essence, flavor, identity and unique character of the region.

## **MISSION**

The mission of Visit Southeast Montana is to increase tourism to Southeast Montana by increasing the awareness of our region, showcasing our cultural heritage, developing memorable experiences and educating our residents about the economic benefits of tourism.

## **VISIT SOUTHEAST MONTANA VISION STATEMENT:**

Southeast Montana will become the trusted source for free-spirited travelers to achieve their legendary life experiences.

## **Strengths of the Visit Southeast Montana Region:**

This vast region, with its a diversity of people, geography and cultures, prides itself on connecting with visitors who enjoy several very distinctive characteristics:

## **OUTDOOR RECREATION**

There is no doubt that opportunities for outdoor recreation abound across Southeast Montana – many exist on public lands and waterways. Fisherman will appreciate the world-class fishing opportunities available along the Bighorn and Musselshell Rivers, Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area (BCNRA) and the along with an emerging catfish and bass fishery on the Yellowstone River. Hunters continue to pay premium prices to travel to the Powder River area to bag trophy deer and antelope. The Bull Mountains near Roundup are a rising star for elk hunters, and Eastern Montana is becoming known throughout the surrounding states for being great bird hunting country, allowing hunters to stretch their hunting season with pheasant, grouse, chukers, ducks and geese.

Hiking and camping enthusiasts will relish the freedom and solitude of the Custer National Forest, Chalk Buttes, Terry Badlands and Medicine Rocks State Park. Makoshika State Park, Montana's largest state park, features some of the nation's most spectacular badlands scenery while the Terry Badlands Wilderness Study Area remains pristine. Montana FWP (at the time of publication) continues work to create a water-based trail along the lower Yellowstone River, from Hysham to the North Dakota border. This initiative pursues public-private partnerships, allows for more access to boating and camping, and emphasizes conservation along the Lower Yellowstone River. In May of 2022, Yellowstone River Adventures opened to provided custom tours near the Glendive area.

The wide-open prairies of Southeast Montana region also boast some of the darkest night skies – ideal for stargazing and planet observing – in the high plains of the inner Rocky Mountain region of the U.S. Medicine Rocks State Park earned designation as an International Dark Sky Sanctuary – that means the park is the darkest of the dark. This international designation is only one of two IDSA sites in the state of Montana and elevates the Southeast Montana region in the eyes of star-gazers.

## **WESTERN AUTHENTICITY**

Many states and regions like to think they possess true western culture, but in SEMT's rural communities, as well as the cities such as Billings and Miles City, visitors can get a true picture of the Old West. From Montana's largest state fair in Billings to feel-good, small-town rodeos, Southeast Montana communities have kept western hospitality alive. Standout Western events include the Bucking Horse Sale in Miles City, the NILE and Chase Hawkes Rodeos in Billings and Little Bighorn Days in Hardin – from ranch rodeos to larger circuit Professional Bull Riders, the region hosts a rodeo almost every weekend of the warm season, plus plenty in other months. Authenticity is the key word when listing this strength. Simply traveling across the region solidifies that experience when a visitor may have to wait for cowboys to herd their cattle across the road or they experience the western lifestyle while visiting Southeast Montana's small communities and businesses.

In 2022 we melded the ranching and ag community (#1 industry in MT) into tourism (#2 industry in MT) with the Visit Southeast Montana Burger Trail, which features unique burgers in nearly every small community across the region, most of which have ranching roots.

## **HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE**

Southeast Montana contains a wealth of historical sites which are internationally known and are of great significance to the story of America. The Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument, site of Custer's Last Stand, Indian Memorial and the nation's most famous Native American victory, is located in Big Horn County and is the third most-visited destination in Montana behind Yellowstone and Glacier National Parks. Pompeys Pillar National Monument bears William Clark's signature and is one the only remaining in-the-field, physical evidence of the Lewis and Clark Expedition.

Many other state parks, museums and historic sites tell their own stories of pioneer life on the prairie, the American Plains Indians' struggle to leave behind their nomadic way of life and the impact of the cattle trade on the American West. From large and well-known to more intimate, all are part of the story of the American West and can be experienced in Southeast Montana.

## **ACCESSIBILITY**

Southeast Montana is fortunate to contain two of the state's busiest highways, Interstate 94 and Interstate 90 that funnel drive-traffic directly into Southeast Montana, converging in Billings. Montana Highway 212, also called the Warrior Trail, cuts from Belle Fourche, SD, to Crow Agency, and offers a two-lane alternative into the region.

Located within a day's drive from the major metropolitan areas of Denver, Seattle and Minneapolis-St. Paul, plus all of Montana, Wyoming, North Dakota and South Dakota, the Southeast Montana region is truly accessible for a vast drive-market. Billings Logan Airport, which boasts United, Delta, American, Alaska/Horizon and Allegiant Airlines direct service to eight destinations, including seasonal direct service to/from Chicago, San Diego and Los Angeles, will continue a \$55 million expansion and remodel which will increase gate capacity from five to eight. Cape Air also transports Montanans to/from rural communities including Glendive, Sidney, Wolf Point, Glasgow and Havre.

Regional shoppers are also drawn to Billings, the state's largest city, for boutiques, burgeoning downtown district and major shopping centers. Lodging opportunities in Southeast Montana are incredibly diverse, including everything from 4-star hotels, to charming bed and breakfasts, RV parks, rustic camping, hunting and fishing lodges.

## **DINOSAUR ADVENTURE**

The plains, prairies and buttes of Southeast Montana are dinosaur country. Famous dinosaurs taken from the Southeast Montana area of the Hell Creek Formation include Tyrannosaurus Rex, Maiasaura and Triceratops. Walk with the dinosaurs in Makoshika State Park and visit three museums and facilities that are active members of the well-established Montana Dinosaur Trail. The museums showcase the many paleontological treasures which have been discovered in Eastern Montana. Museums of particular interest to dinosaur enthusiasts include the Carter County Museum, Glendive Dinosaur & Fossil Museum, Frontier Gateway Museum and the Makoshika State Park Interpretive Center. Individuals and families can also opt for a private fossil dig or experience a paleo adventure in Makoshika State Park. This broad category includes fossil and rock collectors.

## **NATIVE AMERICAN CULTURE**

Southeast Montana is fortunate enough to play host to Crow Fair, one of the last great Native American cultural events, held annually on the Crow Reservation plus the Cheyenne Victory Days celebration held on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation.

These events gives visitors the opportunity to witness how Native American culture has evolved and the importance the tribes continue to place on their history and traditions. While the historical significance is important, visitors also have opportunities purchase hand- made gifts and educational experiences presented by local tour guides and artisans. The history of the region is inseparable from the history of the tribes who live in it to this day.

## **CHALLENGES FACING THE REGION**

### **UNKNOWN POST-PANDEMIC TRAVEL**

As we move into the post-pandemic world, while keeping one eye on COVID across the globe, we are still in a transition phase of understanding what the post-pandemic travel looks like, what motivates him/her, how has his/her needs and wants changed. Data does suggest that travelers are still likely to prefer outdoor recreation and open spaces for their travel. We will continue to monitor traveler sentiment, mostly via Destination Analysts' reports and adjust accordingly, especially using data collected from 2022 warm season.

### **PERCEPTION THAT MONTANA IS FAR AWAY AND DIFFICULT TO TRAVEL TO & FUEL PRICES**

According to the 2016 Montana Destination Brand Research Study by Destination Analysts, Montana is perceived as challenging to access with associated time and cost that prohibits visitation. Conversely, Colorado (the top regional competitor) was cited as the best destination in regard to scenic beauty, potential for vacation road trip, family-friendly environment, national parks, winter recreational activities and places "I most want to visit." However, Montana as a whole and Southeast Montana specifically are well-positioned to capitalize on Colorado's weaknesses: crowded attractions; lack of or losing authenticity; high costs and over-development. However, in the post-COVID crisis environment, this "far away" concept could prove to make Southeast Montana more desirable than other travel locations.

In addition, fluctuating and increasing fuel prices (\$4.09/gal in May, 2022) may impact both fly/drive and road tripper markets.

### **"REGIONS" ARE CONFUSING**

Tourists typically do not travel via regions, but rather travel to destinations. That is where the identity starts. A marketing campaign that weaves destinations with geographic location will enhance the brand. Additionally, regional partnerships will help strengthen the brand within both the state and four-state region. While the Montana brand should, and does, include Southeast Montana, it is easy for the individuality of the region to be lost within the greater whole. The challenge is to be distinctive while still intertwined within the Montana brand.

### **DISTANCES BETWEEN SERVICES AND FRAGMENTED CELLULAR COVERAGE**

Today's traveler has higher expectations in terms of cellular service and connectivity to a global network. While the distance between towns and services are a challenge to Southeast Montana, that very element may appeal to those who wish to be "off the grid," as long as travelers know what to expect.

### **UNDERDEVELOPED TOURISM PRODUCT**

Research from both Destination Analysts and the Institute of Tourism and Recreation Research has identified outdoor recreation as a top activity for Southeast Montana's target audience. Despite the wealth of unspoiled nature available, little infrastructure exists for many areas. For example, the Calypso Trail within the Terry Badlands is a primitive, minimum maintenance road operated by Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

Strengthening partnerships within the region will help identify tourism products that need assistance for wayfinding, signage and potential promotion. Additionally, working with these partners to secure tourism grants from the Montana Office of Tourism and Business Development may help overcome the funding obstacles. Tribal Tourism is also a key partner, as tribal tourism products lack in development and maturity but are in high demand.

Lastly, we anecdotally hear that visitors want a "Western" experience, yet the region lacks tourism products like trail rides, guided tours/agri-tourism and the like. These types of products greatly enhance the visitors' understanding of the West.

## **2. Align with Montana Brand**

***Briefly describe how your destination aligns with the Montana Brand.***

Visit Southeast Montana seamlessly aligns with the Montana Brand:

1. More spectacular, unspoiled nature than anywhere else in the lower 48;
2. Vibrant and charming small towns that serve as gateways to our natural wonders; and
3. Breathtaking experiences by day relaxing hospitality at night.

For example, Makoshika State Park (largest state park) features MT's badlands, which are stunning especially the colors of the rocks change during a sunrise or sunset. Glendive serves as a gateway to Makoshika and we highlight local establishments with projects like the Visit Southeast Montana Burger Trail to emphasize the "relaxing hospitality" across the region.

## **3. What is the strategic role of your DMO?**

***Select all that apply: Destination Marketing, Destination Management, Destination Stewardship, Destination Development).***

Destination Marketing, Destination Development

**Based on the strategic role you serve, provide the following information.**

**3a. Define your audience(s) (demographic, geographic, and psycho-graphic).**

In FY23, we will continue to collaborate with Brand MT's target market, as identified here:

According to the 2016 Montana Destination Brand Research Study by Destination Analysts, the High-Profile Visitor (HPV) is not only attracted to Montana, he/she sees the destination as more attractive and competitive when compared to its regional competition. The HPVs are:

- City dwellers (not rural and not suburban)
- Married with children
- Well-educated
- Affluent (>\$80K)
- Younger (average age 36.4)
- Frequent travelers
- Male-oriented (54.3% male vs 45.7% female)
- Strongly attracted to and familiar with Montana's tourism offerings
- Likely repeat visitors
- Outdoor-oriented travelers (psychographic index)

The HPV's desired activity on a Montana trip relates directly to their psychographic profile of being outdoor-oriented travelers with these favored activities. In fact, 10 of the 12 desired activities align with Visit Southeast Montana's pillars.

**NICHE MARKETS**

Additionally, Destination Analysts identified two niche markets: Family travelers and history buffs. Both niches align with Southeast Montana's strengths, with history buffs fitting a cross-section of SEMT's historical significance, western authenticity and Native American culture.

Research conducted by the Institute for Tourism & Recreation Research supported a premise that many in the tourism industry have repeatedly stated: We – residents of Montana – love this vast, complex state and travel extensively throughout it. In fact, according to the 2018 Resident Travel in Montana report, including both resident and nonresident travel spending, total travel industry spending in Montana is \$6.23 billion dollars; 54 percent contributed by nonresidents and 46 percent by resident travel within the state.

**ROAD-TRIPPERS**

Also identified in the 2016 Montana Destination Brand Research Study by Destination Analytics, Inc., the road-tripper market includes travelers from Midwestern states who drive through the Southeast Montana region on the way to Yellowstone and Glacier national parks. We include RVers and campers in this niche market.

In the post-pandemic landscape of FY22, we will focus on the road tripper/geomargets identified on page 8. Visitation data from Makoshika State Park notes that North Dakota and Minnesota are the top non-resident states-of-origin at Montana's largest state park.

According to Destination Analysts traveler sentiment surveys during the COVID Crisis, American travelers will seek beaches (38%), then small towns and rural communities and attractions (30%). Only 20% cited national parks as their first trip post-pandemic. At this time (April 2021), air travel is starting to rebound. Even as that increases, the road-tripper market will be incredibly important to the Southeast Montana region.

**HISTORY BUFF**

With the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument averaging approximately 250,000 visitors per year and Pompeys Pillar National Monument matching the "Visit Lewis & Clark historical sites" as the number 5 Desired Activity on a Montana Trip (according to Destination Analysts 2016 Montana Brand Study), plus the soon-to-be-developed Trail to the Little Bighorn, Visit Southeast Montana will continue to market to the history buff in FY23.

**INTERNATIONAL**

The Montana Travel Trade office identifies the United Kingdom, Germany and Australia as top three target markets and Visit Southeast Montana will continue building these relationships, as this is low-cost investment for a higher-than-average return spend.

According to ITRR's 2018 Nonresident Visitation, Expenditures & Economic Impacts study, overseas visitors averaged \$1,186 per trip with an average stay of 5.5 days, compared to \$726 total per trip for an average of 4.59 days for domestic visitors. Therefore, aligning with the Montana Travel Trade Office's focus on UK, Germany and Australia makes sense. We are excited to welcome international visitors back to Southeast Montana and will also adjust as needed when warm season 2021 data is available.

### **3b. What research supports your DMO strategy?**

The Montana Brand Study supports our target markets (as noted above). In addition, we will also use Visit Southeast Montana's FY22 data from website analytics, travel guide requests, e-blasts and social media (collected by Visit Southeast Montana at the end of FY22), to refine the geo-targets for FY23's target markets. Waiting for FY22 data allows us to analyze and use the most recent data.

Lastly, we will continue to monitor data from Destination Analysts to further understand traveler's behavior. For example, an April 4, 2022 survey indicates that 56% of travelers prefer places they have not been before and 42% are more interested in outdoor destinations. We've watched travelers' behaviors and desires change in the post-pandemic world; it is likely that it will continue to evolve rapidly. We will monitor and adjust as necessary prior to finalizing the media plan for FY23.

### **3c. What are your emerging markets?**

Our Emerging Markets include:

- Water-based recreationists like kayaking and rafting (related to developing FWP Lower Yellowstone River water-based trail)
- Mountain Bikers
- Night Sky Observers/Astrotourism (related to Montana's Trail to the Stars)

## **4. Define and describe your overall goals.**

***A goal is an idea of the future or desired result that a person or group of people envisions, plans and commits to achieve.***

Visit Southeast Montana wants to increase awareness of and visitation to the Visit Southeast Montana region as a destination for outdoor recreation, historical significance and dinosaur adventures along with Western authenticity plus Crow and Northern Cheyenne culture, as desired by each tribe.

We also strive to increase online content on website, social media channels and other online outlets. By focusing on these goals, we will increase the "value" of visiting Southeast Montana while bolstering community and Montana pride and identity within the region.

### **4a. Describe proposed tactics and projects as related to overall goals and controlled by the organization in its financial statements.**

We will dedicate a large portion of staff time and energy to building website content, including potentially recycling existing content, creating new content (for example, information on where to travel with pets or more routes for motorcycles) and enhancing visuals with new/more images and videos.

New content will be used on the following:

- website;
- social media;
- earned media;
- paid media/advertising;
- presentations; and
- e-newsletters.

This tactic provides a multi-pronged approach to reaching our target markets.

In regard to Visit Southeast Montana's role as in destination development, we may consider a project on the Lower Yellowstone River Corridor. This would include strong collaboration with FWP; Miles City & Glendive CVBs; Chambers of Commerce, Missouri River Country/Sidney and other partners.

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**Objectives/Metrics/Evaluation**

Objectives	Measurable Metrics for Success	Report the Metric Achieved	Evaluation of Measurable Metrics for Success	Add'l Attchmnt
<b>Objective 1:</b> Increase visitation to Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument and visitation to Makoshika State Park.	<b>Metrics:</b> We will compare visitation numbers from Jan 1 - Oct 31, 2022 to those in Jan 1 - Oct 31, 2023 for LBBNM & Makoshika State Park to measure increases with the goals of increase LBBNM by 3% and Makoshika by 5%.	To be reported in November 2023.	To be reported in November 2023.	
<b>Objective 2:</b> Create more online content for owned (southeastmontana.com, social channels) and non-owned (other websites, blogs, social channels).	<b>Metrics:</b> We will use Google Analytics to track, modify and measure traffic at <i>southeastmontana.com</i> with goal to increase by 10% from FY22 to FY23.	To be reported in November 2023.	To be reported in November 2023.	
<b>Objective 3:</b> Develop a new "destination" product(s) and/or leverage existing/new tourism product(s) (i.e. Montana Trail to the Stars) to increase lodging tax during a specified time period in FY23 compared to the same benchmark in FY22 (exact date range TBD when destination development product is determined.).	<b>Metrics:</b> We will track lodging tax collection metrics with goals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop at least (1) new "destination" and/or leverage existing tourism product, and</li> <li>Increase lodging tax by 3% in at least (3) counties specific to the destination product.</li> </ul>	To be reported in November 2023.	To be reported in November 2023.	
<b>Objective 4:</b> Increase advertising impact by engaging in joint ventures with tourism partners: Brand MT; CVBs, other regions and/or regional chambers.	<b>Metrics:</b> Double our advertising investment by spending entire \$25,000 budget on joint venture advertising for a \$50,000+ impact.	To be reported in November 2023.	To be reported in November 2023.	

**DMO Budget**

Allowable Methods	Amount Budgeted	% of Budget Allocated	Amount Expended	% of Budget Expended
Administration	\$155,066.00	13.63	\$0.00	0
Agency Services	\$105,000.00	9.23	\$0.00	0
Cooperative Marketing	\$20,000.00	1.76	\$0.00	0
Earned Media/Tourism Sales	\$26,000.00	2.29	\$0.00	0
Education/Outreach	\$20,000.00	1.76	\$0.00	0
Joint Venture	\$37,217.00	3.27	\$0.00	0
Marketing Resources	\$16,000.00	1.41	\$0.00	0

Opportunity Marketing	\$80,000.00	7.03	\$0.00	0
Paid Media	\$294,400.00	25.88	\$0.00	0
Marketing Personnel	\$120,400.00	10.58	\$0.00	0
Product Development	\$44,865.00	3.94	\$0.00	0
Research	\$20,100.00	1.77	\$0.00	0
Travel/Trade Shows	\$12,500.00	1.1	\$0.00	0
Visitor Services	\$66,000.00	5.8	\$0.00	0
Website Development (Online, Website, Mobile)	\$120,000.00	10.55	\$0.00	0
	\$1,137,548.00	100.00	\$0.00	0.00

## ***Narrative Evaluation***

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To be completed after FY23 is done.

## ***Reg/CVB Required Documents***

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<b>Description</b>	<b>File Name</b>	<b>File Size</b>
Minutes from 4.27.22 Board meeting, at which FY23 DMO Plan & Budget was approved	4.27 Meeting Minutes.docx	521 KB
FY23 Certificate of Compliance	FY23 Certificate of Compliance_Signed.pdf	414 KB
Bylaws for Visit Southeast Montana	SEMT 2016 Bylaws FINAL.docx	41 KB



