



Grant Details

118486 - FY23 DMO Plan

122512 - FY23 Missouri River Country DMO Plan

DOC Office of Tourism

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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.

Introduction

The FY23 Montana's Missouri River Country DMO Plan will lead us on a path to promote our region as a destination for visitors and, in turn, increase overnight stays at our motels and support for our local businesses and communities. We serve eight counties including the Fort Peck Indian Reservation, and our region borders ND to the east and Canada to the north. While Covid-19 still exists, we are moving forward with more people getting vaccinated and less getting infected. According to Destination Analysts, Americans love to travel. Their travel excitement and desire for inspiration is coming back at record-breaking levels. ITRR surveys report that residents are less concerned about visitors in their communities, and just under half agreed they were more likely to travel within Montana than out of state. We are looking forward to the Canadian border restrictions lifting so we can once again welcome them into the region to attend our events, explore our landscapes and visit our communities.

We are a destination for outdoor adventurers, geotourists, history buffs, families, Native American culturists, dinosaur trail followers, fishermen and women, and overall recreationists. Here visitors will find spectacular nature, charming small towns, exceptional wildlife watching, and breathtaking experiences. Missouri River Country is home to Fort Peck Lake, four national wildlife refuges, a Montana state park, and 27 charming communities. Visitors come here to experience perfect solitude in nature, gain opportunities to spend genuine, uninterrupted time with their loved ones, and take advantage of more room to roam. We believe that in the 21st century, as people become more and more engulfed in the hustle and bustle of daily life, what visitors now crave from their vacation is a chance to unplug and reconnect. Less people and less traffic means more time to focus on real experiences, so we have chosen to take advantage of our amazing open spaces in our marketing campaign: More Room To Roam. More Room To Roam holds many meanings to us. It means that there are more opportunities to have an authentic, meaningful experience in Montana. It means there is more room to connect and more space to explore. We are proud of our campaign because it allows our target audiences to reflect: what would more room mean to me? Maybe that means time with family or friends, or more moments to sit still and observe the incredible biological diversity on our prairies and waters. Maybe it means getting lost— on purpose. We know that it means something different to everyone, but the message is clear: you can find whatever you are looking for in Missouri River Country, and we want to help you along the way. We continue to see this campaign resonate with visitors of all demographics, and throughout all four seasons. We'll continue to incorporate this messaging in our marketing efforts throughout FY23.

Less people and less traffic means more time to focus on real experiences.

Identity

Montana is an incredibly diverse state that is synonymous with the West. Our history is vast, same as our landscapes, and wide-open spaces surround our friendly, small communities. This is a side of our state that few see, but all who experience it fall in love with Montana all over again. We understand that many visitors who come to Montana come to experience the two national parks in our state, and for that reason much of our visitation comes from drive-through travel. However, Missouri River Country has many attractions that bring in visitors directly to our towns, waterways, and wide-open spaces. Missouri River Country is a hub for outdoor recreation including hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, photography, hiking, boating, ATVing, and ice fishing, cross country skiing and snowmobiling in the winter. Thanks to the remoteness of the region, the best show in Montana can be seen each night in Missouri River Country's beautiful night skies, unpolluted by light from large cities and towns. The Missouri River, which was an integral part of the Lewis and Clark route, runs through our district and attracts history and culture buffs. Uniquely, dinosaurs once roamed this vast landscape and the remains of these giants can be seen at museums throughout the region, including some of the full-sized fossils discovered in Northeast Montana. A distinct region unto itself, this place of the Great Plains harbors unique landforms. Grand scenes intermingle with smaller bits of geologic wonder. Space, much of it undisturbed, is our greatest commodity, and an unending sky delivers a feeling of freedom with no borders or confinement. Missouri River Country is truly the land of wide-open spaces

—of opportunity and spectacular nature. You can see for miles, stretch your arms, breathe the fresh air, and sleep under the starry night sky. It's not the destination but rather the experiences had in Missouri River Country that are truly breathtaking.

Strengths

Hunting

Visitors here spend less time hunting for open space and more time hunting! According to the 2021 ITRR report, 5% of nonresident visitors who spend at least one night in Missouri River Country participated in hunting activities, and we believe that this is thanks, in large part, to our less-populated nature. No matter where you go in Northeast Montana, you are surrounded by wildlife, from trophy elk on the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge to Big Horn Sheep South of Malta. Hunters come from all over the US to bow hunt and/or rifle hunt for big game. The skies above are filled with upland gamebirds and waterfowl. Our wide-open spaces are home to pronghorn, mule deer and whitetails. Our corner of Montana is not only an exciting place for hunting adventures, but a land of unrivaled beauty and wonder.

Fishing & Fort Peck Lake

In the summer, marinas are filled with fishermen and women looking to wet a line and pass the day on the water. Defined by sandstone formations, fields of grain and fertile river bottoms, Missouri River Country is a place where shorelines go on for more than a thousand miles and fish grow to more than 100 pounds. This is the land where men built a dam across the mighty Missouri River and created the largest body of water in Montana. This is the land of Fort Peck Reservoir, which boasts over 1,600 miles of shoreline (more than the California coast!) and an impressive variety of fish. According to the 2021 ITRR report, 37% of nonresident visitors who spent at least one night in Missouri River Country visited Fort Peck Lake on their trip, which shows how immense of an attraction Fort Peck Lake truly is during all seasons. In the winter, Fort Peck Lake freezes over and makes way for some great ice fishing fun, which makes fishing a four-season activity in our region and opens up outdoor activities all year long for visitors. Summer water activities include fishing, tubing, water skiing, wake boarding and swimming, and during spring and fall, fishing and boating opportunities still abound. In addition to Fort Peck Lake, many rivers and dams in Missouri River Country provide fishing opportunities, such as Nelson Reservoir, the Missouri River, Milk River, and Yellowstone Rivers.

Fort Peck Reservoir is over 1,600 miles of shoreline (more than the California coast!)

Dinosaurs

Millions of years before the formation of the Missouri River in Montana, dinosaurs made this once lush wetland their home. Northeast Montana has provided a wealth of world class fossil discoveries and according to the 2021 ITRR report, 17% of nonresident visitors who spent at least one night in Missouri River Country participated in activities related to dinosaur attractions. Visitors can experience dinosaur digs at the Great Plains Dinosaur Museum in Malta and learn about the prehistoric nature of our dramatic landscapes. At the Fort Peck Interpretive Center & Museum visitors can view a life-size model of "Peck's Rex," a skeleton of a Tyrannosaurus rex found near Fort Peck in 1996. The Fort Peck Power House Museum has a Triceratops skull on display, along with numerous fossils that were discovered during the digging of the Fort Peck Dam. The Phillips County Museum features fossil discoveries from the nearby Judith River Formation including a late Brachylophosaurus, one of the best articulated dinosaur skeletons ever found. The Great Plains Dinosaur Museum offers the public an intimate look into a working paleontological institution. Their Brachylophosaurus fossil, "Leonardo" is in the Guinness Book of World Records "best preserved dinosaur," and the museum has the best growth series of this dinosaur anywhere. The Garfield County Museum displays a full-scale model of a Triceratops, which was found about 35 miles from Jordan in 1964

History & Culture

Our history is just as vast as the rolling landscape in Missouri River Country. Lewis and Clark history buffs come here to experience the landscape that has remained virtually unchanged since the days of westward expansion. Lewis and Clark may have been early visitors to Missouri River Country, but when they arrived the region was already home to the Assiniboine people. Members of the Sioux nation also call our corner of Montana home, and their cultural heritage continues to be celebrated today through such events as pow wow and dancing ceremonies. Annual pow wows are held on the Fort Peck

Reservation, where traditional dance, song, and tribal ceremonies can be experienced. Missouri River Country has many museums, cultural centers, visitor centers and historic downtown regions that attract history and culture buffs to our corner of Montana.

Outdoor Recreation & Wildlife

While we are most known for our hunting and fishing, there is a plethora of outdoor recreation opportunities in Missouri River Country. Hikers can enjoy total trail solitude in the Little Rocky Mountains, birders will be amazed by the uninterrupted views, wildlife viewing is plentiful, and boating and ATViing opportunities abound. RV and tent campers make their way to Northeast Montana to take part in a Montana adventure found only here. According to the 2021 ITRR report, 27% of nonresident visitors who spent at least one night in Missouri River Country participated in wildlife watching, and scenic drives attracted 58%. Between four national wildlife refuges, the American Prairie Reserve, Fort Peck Lake and other riparian areas, and the elk rut areas, visitors have vast opportunities to participate in wildlife viewing and scenic drives. Slippery Ann Elk Viewing Area is one of the best places to view elk in the fall, and visitors are consistently enamored with the raw nature found in Missouri River Country.

Bikers can stop in Glasgow at the Bike Bin at Smith Park, featuring a bicycle repair stand and bike wash station conveniently located near camping and showers at the adjacent Shady Rest RV Park.

In the winter, visitors can bring their cross-country skis and explore our wide-open prairies on the snow, which is a fun and unique experience for locals and visitors alike.

Charming Communities

27 charming, small communities dot Missouri River Country, offering visitors authentic Montana character. Museums, outfitters and shops offer a taste of our history and culture. Visitors can pan for gold or go on a dinosaur dig based out of our communities, and then return to spend the night in our motels and cabins. We have five microbreweries in the region and many wonderful dining options serving up delicious burgers, steaks, locally grown produce and so much more. Visitors have the chance to experience local farmers markets in the summer and festivals throughout the year. One of the best parts of our region is the people who call Missouri River Country home and get to share our beloved landscape with visitors.

Affordability

Compared to other vacation destinations, Missouri River Country offers affordable options for travelers. Lodging, food and drink is less expensive in Missouri River Country than our neighboring regions. Affordable and free activities like wildlife watching, hiking, museums, fishing and dinosaur digs are more abundant compared to other areas in the state, and we offer a family-based mentality. We know that our affordability is a great resource for travelers and plays a role in our attraction to visitors as they choose where to spend their hard-earned vacation dollars.

Wide Open Spaces

There is more room to roam in Missouri River Country, and this is a huge draw for our visitors. According to the 2021 ITRR report, 58% of nonresident visitors who spent at least one night in Missouri River Country were very satisfied with our open space/uncrowded areas. Oxford University scientists used population data and analytics to find the true “middle of nowhere,” and their results determined that the top three spots were all in Missouri River Country: Glasgow took the top spot with Scobey and Wolf Point coming in second and third, respectively. The Washington Post published an article on Glasgow being “in the middle of nowhere.” From that article, Glasgow gained momentum in the press with an NBC article that interviewed community members, airing on the NBC Nightly Newscast. The American Prairie calls Northeast Montana home as well, and it's a great place to view the plains and the animals who thrive here, including the national mammal, the American Bison. We believe that our being in “the middle of nowhere” is exactly what certain tourists are looking for in a vacation—a place to escape from the city, get away from traffic, and find themselves in the middle of nowhere (or in the middle of everything, depending on how you look at it).

Dark Skies

Missouri River Country is one of the most remote regions in the country, with the closest major city being 4 ½ hours away. For this reason, our skies remain unpolluted by light and allow visitors to have a truly out-of-this-world experience beneath some of the darkest night skies and brightest cosmos in the lower 48. We believe that our dark skies are a huge strength and provide visitors with a unique, star-studded experience that is fun for families, couples and retirees alike.

Events Calendar

Our charming communities host a wide variety and large quantity of events each year which provide visitors with an authentic taste of our region, all while boosting our local economies. In the summer, each of our eight counties host a county fair, many complete with live concerts and rodeos. Additionally, the PRCA Rodeo Circuit comes through Northeastern Montana, including the Wolf Point Wild Horse Stampede, the oldest rodeo in Montana, and the Match Bronc Ride in Jordan, along with several other PRCA rodeos during the warm season. Pioneer Days in Scobey is a huge annual event where visitors can experience what life was like in the years of the pioneers, and local pow wows provide insight into Native American culture and traditions. Fishing tournaments (in the summer and winter months!) attract sportsmen and women from all over. Visitors can easily access our events calendar and plan their visit through the events page on our newly redesigned website, and businesses can add their events directly to the calendar.

CHALLENGES

Drive-Through Status

Missouri River Country has historically been and continues to be a drive-through region, meaning that visitors are “just passing through” to destinations with more widely recognized icons. Last year, 59% of visitors to Missouri River Country came in a truck or a car, and 17% of visitors were only passing through. 65% were coming for vacation/recreation/pleasure. We must continue to educate travelers about the many activities and points of interest throughout the region.

Accessibility

While being located in “the middle of nowhere” is a strength of ours in terms of providing visitors with uninterrupted solitude with nature, this continues to be a challenging factor for Missouri River Country. Some of our towns are 4 ½ hours driving distance from any major city and accessing our region by air service is difficult. We are fortunate to have Essential Air Service in Sidney, Wolf Point, and Glasgow, but while these flights are beneficial, our challenge is getting them to connect with other flights. They are small planes that can only accommodate 9 passengers and fly solely into Billings. Rental cars are also a challenge here in Missouri River Country. Malta and Glasgow currently has no rental car locations and the only other towns with car rental service is Wolf Point, and Sidney.

Infrastructure

Infrastructure is one of Missouri River Country's biggest challenges. In certain months, roads to attractions like U.L. Bend National Wildlife Refuge and Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge are impassable or closed, and ruts in roads can deter tourists from visiting certain areas. Maintaining motels, cities, and roads will continue to be an issue in our region with limited funding. Lack of revenue from camping on Federal property and primitive camping also remains a challenge.

Access to Information

We know that once people are in Missouri River Country, they fall in love with our wide-open spaces, friendly communities and access to outdoor recreation. However, compared to other parts of Montana, information about Missouri River Country is harder for potential visitors to get a hold of. With limited funding and numbers of people, getting the proper representation can be challenging. According to the 2021 ITRR report, 46% of nonresident visitors who spent at least one night in Missouri River Country used information from search engines, 19% used no sources, and 19% used friends or relatives living in Montana. Our redesigned website is working to combat these gaps in information by adding pages specific to activities, events, and accommodations as well as updated blogs to inspire visitors. We also know that word of mouth from friends and family living in Montana is important to visitors, so increasing awareness of Missouri River Country to the people who live in Montana is also important for spreading information about the many opportunities found in our region. Residents Attitudes Towards Tourism 4th Qtr. Report, our own Missouri River Country residents don't see the full value and benefits that tourism promotion brings to our communities, which shows that more education is needed through local outreach as well.

Gas Prices

Rising gas prices present challenges for all travelers. We know that people are eager to get out and explore after the COVID-19 pandemic, but this could be a challenge they face when planning. At this time we don't know the impact that it will have on travel to Montana, and specifically Missouri River Country, but it is a concern.

OPPORTUNITIES

Amtrak

Missouri River Country is fortunate to have Amtrak stops in Wolf Point, Glasgow and Malta. We believe that a unique opportunity lies in attracting visitors to stop over in Missouri River Country on their way from the Chicago and Minneapolis areas on route to Glacier National Park. We also believe that there is untapped potential for families from cities to the east who can easily access our charming communities and have authentic Montana experiences with less train-time than riding all the way towards Glacier National Park.

Dark Skies

Missouri River Country has some of the darkest skies in the continental United States. With our distance from major cities, most of our region is considered “dark sky” country, and we believe that this presents a big marketing opportunity. We believe there is huge potential in positioning Missouri River Country as a place for astrotourism and eventually designating an International Dark Sky Park at Brush Lake State Park. The Northern Lights and amazing views of the Milky Way can be seen here and marketing these dark sky opportunities presents a unique opportunity to draw visitors to our region.

Conventions

Conventions and meetings have not been a focal point for our region, but we do acknowledge that these events are a huge economic boom to communities. For this reason, marketing and outreach from communities in Missouri River Country to host these events is a worthwhile endeavor that we will strive to support and assist as needs arise. For instance, Sidney is a great location to promote conventions due to their new motels and added capacity for visitors.

Close Proximity Visitors

We believe that Missouri River Country can become a weekend destination for close proximity travelers, including flight traffic from Billings. According to the 2021 ITRR report, 15% of our non-resident visitors are coming from ND. Our region offers a unique and affordable escape for families, couples and individuals looking to experience a different side of Montana, wide-open space and the authentic West. Visitors have the chance to attend new events, take part in outdoor recreational opportunities such as hunting and fishing, experience truly dark skies, and so much more, all in a long weekend for those living in close proximity.

Motorcyclists

We believe that the wide-open spaces and wide-open roads of Missouri River Country are a natural attraction to motorcyclists. This combined with friendly communities, expansive natural areas, wildlife viewing opportunities, and attractions along the way make our region a perfect fit for motorcycle tourism. According to the 2021 ITRR report, 2% of nonresident visitors who spent at least one night in Missouri River Country entered Montana by motorcycle. In addition, 3% of visitors to the region participated in motorcycle touring, while 58% said they were interested in scenic driving. Each year, the Big Muddy Motorcycle Rally in Plentywood brings in many motorcyclists, and the Sturgis, SD Rally is an excellent chance for motorcyclists to pass through, or make their way towards, Missouri River Country on either end of their trip. For this reason, we developed specific travel itineraries for motorcyclists on our website, which allows for ease of planning and opportunities for multiple trips for visitors traveling by bike.

Video

In this age, video is the best way to catch the eye of visitors and encourage them to spend their hard-earned vacation dollars here rather than anywhere else. We believe that better focusing on and integrating video into our marketing campaigns and social media presence is a fantastic way to increase interest in, and visitation to, Missouri River Country.

Repeat Visitation

ITRR indicates that in 2021, 85% of visitation to Missouri River Country comes from repeat visitors. This leads us to believe that awareness of our activities and attractions is lacking. When visitors experience our hunting, fishing, history, open spaces, nature and culture, they want to come back. We strive to

attract first time visitors, and once they experience our region, we believe they will spread the word to their home communities and come back again and again.

Missouri River Country has some of the darkest skies in the continental United States.

Sleeping Buffalo Hot Springs

A very exciting opportunity lies in the newly developed Sleeping Buffalo Hot Springs and Resort. ITRR indicates that state visitors ranked “hot springs” as a reason for visitation to Montana, and we believe that spreading awareness of our remote hot springs has the potential to increase visitation to our region overall.

Brewery Tour

The craft beer industry has been rapidly growing over the past decade, and many tourists incorporate craft beer tours and tastings into their vacations. According to ITRR’s 2021 report, 23% of visitors to the state visited a local brewery. Missouri River Country is home to five craft breweries: Blue Ridge Brewing in Malta, Busted Knuckle Brewery in Glasgow, Docz Missouri River Breaks Brewing in Wolf Point, Meadowlark Brewing Company and 1035 Brewing in Sidney. By marketing our breweries as an option for travelers and encouraging visitors to visit all breweries in the region, Missouri River Country can open our region to a new type of tourist market.

Rockhounding

Rockhounding and gold panning are two activities for which Montana is known for, and Missouri River Country provides opportunities for visitors to have an authentic experience in both. Gold panning kits are available for rent in Zortman, where visitors can explore the Little Rocky Mountains and search for gold nuggets in the waters outside of town. Missouri River Country provides access to the Yellowstone River for rockhounding as well. We believe spreading awareness about these activities is a huge opportunity for garnering interest in our region.

Dinosaur Digs

In Missouri River Country, visitors not only have the opportunity to learn about the paleontological history of Montana and to see fossils and replicas of dinosaurs, they also have the chance to be real-life excavators at the Great Plains Dinosaur Museum where they can accompany experts on dinosaur digs. This opportunity is unique to a very limited number of places in North America, and we believe spreading awareness about this fun activity is a great promotion of our region.

Fort Peck Reservation-Turtle Mound Buffalo Ranch

When the Missouri River Country Board of Directors toured the Turtle Mound Buffalo Ranch, we were very impressed with the ranch and the possibility of creating a partnership between the Fort Peck Tribes and Missouri River Country. We will explore options to help both entities and bring more visitation to Northeast Montana.

Eastern Montana Initiative

Missouri River Country is excited and confident in the potential for new and increased visitation to Eastern Montana through the Eastern Montana Initiative. Missouri River Country is so appreciative to have received an EMI Grant to develop our dark sky trail. Trail to the stars trailtothestars.com

2. Align with Montana Brand

Briefly describe how your destination aligns with the Montana Brand.

Montana's Brand

Missouri River Country is a distinct region unto itself. The wealth of opportunities for adventure amidst the spectacular, unspoiled nature can't be overstated. We offer big water recreation, wildlife viewing, prairie topography, wild country paleontology, and uncluttered views that go on forever. On top of outdoor recreation, we have 27 vibrant and charming small towns, some of the darkest skies and brightest stars in the lower 48, and sprawling landscapes that give you more fresh air to breathe and more room to roam.

- **Spectacular, Unspoiled Nature:** Missouri River Country has some of the most spectacular river breaks, badlands and unspoiled landscapes. If Lewis and Clark traveled through today as they did 200 years ago, they would still recognize much of what they viewed back then.
- **Vibrant and Charming Small Towns:** Our small towns are filled with friendly, welcoming people. Expect a hand wave as you drive through each community, and make sure to save time to stop in for some of our signature hometown hospitality.
- **Breathtaking Experiences by Day and Relaxing Hospitality at Night:** Whether it's hiking the badlands, visiting our museums or spending time on the lake, Missouri River Country has what it takes to have a breathtaking experience. In the evening, visitors can hang out with friendly locals at one of our breweries and enjoy Missouri River Country's hospitality

3. What is the strategic role of your DMO?

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

Destination Marketing, Destination Management, Destination Development

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

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

GEOGRAPHIC

Strategically targeting certain geographic markets will enable Missouri River Country to stretch the impact of our marketing dollars. Missouri River Country will target the following geographical markets, which provide our current base of visitors and potential for increased visits by high-value, low-impact tourists: Minnesota, Washington, California, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Wyoming, Idaho, Colorado, South Dakota, North Dakota, Texas, Oregon, Michigan, Ohio, Saskatchewan, Canada, Alberta, Canada. We also know that many Montanans visit Missouri River Country as a close-to-home, quick trip in our state. When it comes to Montana residents, we market the chance to fall in love with Montana all over again in a fresh, new region of the state. North Dakota ranked first for nonresident visitors to Missouri River Country in 2021.

PSYCHOGRAPHIC

Missouri River Country will target the visitors that present a high impact and opportunity, such as history and culture buffs, hunters and anglers, and the families or couples that are interested in the many things Missouri River Country has to offer. Many visitors seek hunting and fishing opportunities here and bring their families to visit museums and/or to recreate around the lakes, rivers and streams. Other families follow the Montana Dinosaur Trail throughout our region. The 50+ permanent RVer's are becoming popular in our area as well, as these travelers love to get away to wide-open spaces and stay in our campgrounds. When the state "Montana" is mentioned, people get excited—we see this consistently at our trade shows and in reactions through social media. The beauty of Missouri River Country is in the expansive outdoors, authentic charm, and quiet, peaceful solitude.

DEMOGRAPHIC

In addition to geographic targeted marketing, Missouri River Country strategically targets prime demographic groups who have an inclination and reason to visit our region. Strategic marketing includes social media posts, ad placements, and trade shows.

Hunters & Anglers

This group includes hunters and fishermen and women from Montana and other states who would visit Missouri River Country for specific recreational opportunities. This demographic is heavily skewed as an affluent male audience. Census statistics suggest that 15% of the general US population 16+ years of age go fishing, and 10% of that same demographic hunt. These people most likely come into the region to recreate and do not travel elsewhere in the state once they are here. 5% of visitors to our region listed hunting as an attraction while 17% listed fishing.

History & Culture Buffs

This group includes adults 30+ years of age who are traveling with or without children with a household income of \$60,000+. These travelers are interested in a variety of history, arts and culture and are likely to visit at least one historical site during their vacation. They will most likely pair their trip to include other historical regions of Montana. 18% of visitors to our region listed Lewis and Clark as an attractant to Montana.

Couples

This group includes adults 30+ years of age without children who have a household income of \$50,000+. These people are interested in history, culture, arts, museums, soft adventure, wildlife viewing and birding, dinosaurs and scenic attractions.

Traditional Family Travelers

This group includes adults 35+ years of age traveling with or without children whose household income is \$60,000+. These travelers participate in scenic driving, nature photography, camping/hiking, museums, wildlife viewing and birding and dinosaur activities. They are interested in creating a relaxing and memorable experience together.

RV & Camping Travelers

This group consists of adults 35-65 years of age traveling with children or adults 55-64 years of age without children. They usually have a household income of \$75,000+. These travelers participate in camping, hiking, visiting historic sites, sightseeing, photography, wildlife viewing, birding, outdoor recreation and dinosaur activities.

Outdoor Enthusiasts

This group consists of adults 35-65 years of age who are traveling with or without children. They have a household income of \$60,000+. They enjoy participating in outdoor activities such as camping, hiking, biking, fishing, hunting, birding, wildlife watching, dinosaur activities, ATVing, motorcycle riding and water recreation.

Sports Travelers

This group consists of adults 25+ years of age traveling with children to sporting events such as basketball, baseball, hockey, football and track and field. They have a household income of \$50,000.

3b. What research supports your DMO strategy?

- Destination Analysis
- Skift Megatrends
- Montana Residents: Attitudes Toward Tourism 2021
- Institute for Tourism & Recreation, University of Montana, 2021
- “Stairway to the heavens: astro-tourism on the rise worldwide.” LonelyPlanet.com
- Amtrak Train Routes. Amtrak.com
- Agritourism is growing in America. SustainableAmerica.org
- 80 Percent of Americans Can't See the Milky Way Anymore. NationalGeographic.com
- Local Food Trend Keeps Farms at Center of Tourism Strategies. Skift
- Tourism on Tap: Beer Related Travel. Travel Weekly

3c. What are your emerging markets?

Missouri River Country has isolated the following emerging markets that we believe are a perfect fit for our attractions. We plan to market directly to their travel desires and needs.

Young Outdoor Enthusiasts

This market includes young travelers between the ages of 18-30 who are interested in traveling for outdoor adventure. These travelers are more likely to camp at least one night of their trip, and they are looking for access to hiking, climbing, water sports, wildlife viewing, photography and camping experiences. These users are also highly active on social media, so we believe that targeting these audiences within our drive markets through social media channels will be an impactful way to reach this group.

Retirees

According to the 2021 ITRR report, a high number of couples ages 65-74 are traveling through Missouri River Country. We believe that retirees are a great group to target, as they are traditionally financially stable, traveling without children and looking to engage in soft adventure and historical and cultural experiences.

Amtrak Riders

Missouri River Country has three Amtrak stops in Wolf Point, Glasgow and Malta. We believe that a unique opportunity lies in attracting visitors to stop over in Missouri River Country on their way from the Chicago and Minneapolis area on route to Glacier National Park. We also believe that there is untapped potential in families from cities to the east who can easily access our charming communities and have authentic Montana experiences with less train-time than riding all the way to Glacier National Park.

Craft Beer Enthusiasts

Craft beer tours are becoming increasingly common, with some larger breweries serving as the single reason visitors take trips to specific areas. The Brewers Association found that 18% of craft beer drinkers visit three or more out-of-town breweries each year. Montana has the third most breweries per capita of any state in America, and we believe that promoting Missouri River Country as a brewery destination to the craft beer market would increase visitation to towns where craft breweries are present.

Montana MADE Shoppers

Local, sustainable crafts and products are on the rise, and visitors appreciate the pride of local craftsmen and women. We believe that by promoting the Montana Made artisans and goods in our region, we can attract visitors to seek out our fairs, markets, and shops.

Compared to other vacation destinations, Missouri River Country offers affordable options for travelers.

Astrotourists

80% of Americans can't see the Milky Way anymore due to light pollution according to a 2016 study, and astrotourism is on the rise worldwide as city dwellers or people living in condensed population areas long to see the uninterrupted night sky. Since Missouri River Country has some of the darkest night skies in the country, we should be directly promoting our region as a destination for dark sky enthusiasts and photographers alike. We have long-term aspirations to create International Dark Parks. We plan to use target campaigns to show off our dark skies and grow awareness around the astrotourism options in our region. We are more than halfway through the application process of Brush Lake State Park becoming an IDSP. We also believe that promoting visitation to Hill Ranch Oasis, a bed and breakfast near Mosby, will allow for visitors who would prefer to sleep indoors the chance to take in the uninterrupted skies—an opportunity specific to this particular place as opposed to other accommodations in towns. Efforts continue to develop a "Night Sky Trail" in Eastern Montana, a partnership with Central MT and SEMT. We have named that trail: *Montana's Trail to the Stars*.

Agritourists

Agritourism centers around tourists who come from cities and want to get a taste of rural farming and ranching communities. Agritourism is one of the fastest-growing forms of global tourism with an economic impact of more than \$1 billion in many US states and countries, and we believe that Missouri River Country is a no-brainer for agritourism activities in the state of Montana. Agritourism activities that can be found in Missouri River Country include farmers markets, horseback riding, and shopping for local honeys, breads, and other handcrafted items. We believe our small, charming rural communities make us an ideal travel option for agritourists. All eight counties in Missouri River Country are home to an annual county fair, where opportunities for agritourism abound, from rodeos, 4H competitions, petting zoos, live music and dancing, and so much more.

Digital Detox Travelers

We are living in the age of technology overload, and we believe that promoting our "no cell service, no worries" attitude towards travel can be a huge attractant for Digital Detox Travelers, a group of people looking to get away from the over-stimulus of our digital world. According to the 2021 ITRR report, 58% of nonresident visitors who spent at least one night in Missouri River Country said that they were very satisfied with Montana's open space and uncrowded areas. With more room to roam and more time to disconnect, Missouri River Country is a natural fit for these visitors. Here in Missouri River Country, you can "unplug and reconnect."

Canadian Traveler

In July of 2021 Missouri River Country signed a Memorandum of Understanding with South Saskatchewan Ready to do a cross border project. We are looking forward to this great opportunity to promote our region and South Saskatchewan as a travel destination. The restrictions are gradually lifting so we can welcome Canadians back into our destination.

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.

- 1. Increase year-round visitation**

- 2. Raise awareness through Outreach about the benefits of tourism among Missouri River Country residents**

- 3. Develop new ways for visitors (non-residents and Montana travelers/visitors) to explore and enjoy the region**

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

Our first goal is to increase year round visitation by marketing Missouri River Country and everything the region has (including shoulder season activities and attractions) to offer. As an organization with a strong focus on Destination Marketing, a large portion of our budget will be allocated to this goal. We'll use a range of tactics to market MRC and increase visitation, from traditional paid media to social media and website maintenance, to joint ventures and cooperative marketing. We'll continue to work on building our photo/video library to support all marketing methods, and collaborate with community leaders and DMO's on future opportunities. When our billboard contract expires in November, we'll reevaluate and decide whether it's beneficial to renew our contract or use those funds for other methods that support this goal.

In response to the ITRR study on Montana resident sentiments, our second goal is to raise awareness through education/outreach about the benefits of tourism, and we'll do this by engaging with our community business owners, leaders and stakeholders throughout the year. Tactics for this goal rely heavily on community involvement and education. We'll create and distribute educational materials, attend chamber meetings (and encourage board members to do the same), and attend the Governor's Conference and TAC meetings.

Our third goal goes hand-in-hand with our first goal—in addition to increasing visitation year-round, we want to develop new ways for our visitors to experience the region. These projects fall under our role as a Destination Development organization. Tactics will include product development, website development for niche markets, further work on the Montana Trail to the Stars, trip itineraries and promotion geared toward our Canadian travelers, and research into the possibility of creating an app specific to the region.

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Objectives/Metrics/Evaluation

Objectives	Measurable Metrics for Success	Report the Metric Achieved	Evaluation of Measurable Metrics for Success
<p>Objective #1: Market Missouri River Country and everything the region has (including shoulder season activities and attractions) to offer.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase overall bed tax by 2% from FY 22 • Build photo/video library by 3 photos • Advertise on the Montana Outdoor Radio Show and reach 26 stations across 75 cities • Attend at least 2 trade shows • Receive at least 10,000 leads • Print 30,000 travel planners • Participate in at least 2 joint venture opportunities 	<p>Overall bed tax increased in FY 23 by 3% over FY22</p> <p>Photos and video from Jason Mitchell Outdoors</p> <p>Advertised on Montana Outdoor Radio 5 times in FY23 to 26 stations and 75 cities</p> <p>Attended only 1 Travel and Adventure Show in Dallas, TX</p> <p>Received 11,070 leads</p> <p>Printed 30,000</p>	<p>Bed tax revenue increased by 3 % from FY22 to FY23. Yes we met this objective successfully and we will strive to continue to increase our revenue.</p> <p>Jason Mitchell Outdoors Television came to MRC late February. We did a partnership with FWP for Ice Fishing safety.</p> <p>MRC successfully advertised on the Montana Outdoor Radio Show 5 times throughout FY23. This is a successful project and yes we will continue to advertise in the future to get the word out to the outdoor enthusiasts.</p> <p>This was the first year since Covid that MRC has done a trade show. We exhibited at the Travel and Adventure Show in Dallas, TX due to the impact TX has had on MT. Attendance for the show was up. 2023 had 7,956 attendees vs. 5,380 in 2022.</p> <p>MRC received a total of 11,070 leads. Our top leads came from our Glacier Country ad and Yellowstone Journal ad.</p> <p>MRC printed 30,000 travel planners in September 2022. Since we printed a year ago we have distributed 12,000 guides. Due to the demand we will go back to printing the guide every other year rather than every three years. https://missouririvermt.com/interactive-travel-guide</p> <p>MRC's Joint Ventures consisted of Sojern, Jun Group, and Pinterest. MRC also did a JV partnership with several other DMO's on Lewis and Clark, which is always successful.</p>

		<p>travel planners in September 2022</p> <p>Participated in 4 Joint Ventures</p>	
<p>Objective #2: Enhance our digital presence and offerings.</p>	<p>Increase metrics by % listed from FY22</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase social impressions by 15% • Increase website visits by 3% • CTR of 1% or above • Increase email opens by 1% • Expand website content for two niche markets 	<p>Social impressions declined in FY23 by 57.2% compared to FY22</p> <p>Website visits declined in FY23 by 87% compared to FY22</p> <p>CTR was 1.33% in FY23 compared to .26% in FY22</p> <p>Email opens in FY23 were 31% and in FY22 30%</p> <p>MRC expanded website content in 5 niche markets.</p>	<p>In FY22 social impressions were higher than usual. We dropped in FY23 but we expect to maintain or increase in FY24.</p> <p>Since our 2018 web redesign the newness has worn off so site visitation is declining.</p> <p>Our CTR was up in FY23. We careful chose the right placements.</p> <p>Our email opens improved by 1 point. This is up from previous years so we do see the value of our email newsletters and will continue to send them.</p> <p>MRC expanded 5 niche markets in FY23. https://missouririvermt.com/horseback-riding https://missouririvermt.com/atv https://missouririvermt.com/camping https://missouririvermt.com/boating https://missouririvermt.com/gold-panning</p> <p>Yes our website is successful and we will continue to add content.</p>
<p>Objective #3: Engage with business owners, community leaders and stakeholders about the</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend at least two chamber meetings and/or leadership classes in the region. 	<p>MRC attended two chamber meetings and met with the Sidney</p>	<p>Presentations were given to the Wolf Point Chamber of Commerce and the Glasgow Chamber of Commerce. The Executive Director met with the Sidney Herald Editor and presented information about MRC.</p> <p>A one sheet educational page was created and distributed to all eight counties. It provided information on what MRC's role is in the tourism industry and lodging tax statistics.</p> <p>The Governor's Conference was attended by the Executive Director and one board member. All TAC meetings were attended either in-person or virtually. One idea we learned at the Governor's Conference was on Destination Analysts's presentation talking about their research</p>

<p>impact of tourism.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create and deliver educational materials in all eight counties. • Attend Governor's Conference and TAC meetings and implement one or two ideas or best practices learned from these meetings. 	<p>newspaper editor</p> <p>A one sheet educational page was created and distributed.</p> <p>The Executive Director and 1 board member attended the Governor's Conference and the Executive Director has attended all the TAC meetings either in-person or virtually. Ideas and best practices were learned.</p>	<p>indicating that while there is interest in visiting the state, the key lies in maintaining consistent and engaging communication.</p>
<p>Objective #4: Create and promote products that enhance visitor experience.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner with Southern Saskatchewan to do a cross-border promotion and create three trip itineraries. • Continue to develop components, advertising, collatereal, etc. for Montana's Trail to the Stars. • Research the possibility of creating an app with MRC points of interest. 	<p>No trip itineraries were created in FY23.</p> <p>Montana's Trail to the Stars needs funding to continue to develop.</p> <p>The MRC Talking Trail App was created.</p>	<p>MRC and South Saskatchewan Ready have been staying in communications. In the Spring of 2023 MRC and South Saskatchewan Ready contributed each a small amount of funding to start creating a landing page and itineraries. We have developed a name. Beyond the 49th Parallel (More room to roam) We will continue to seek funding and have a successful campaign.</p> <p>MRC submitted an application to the National Extension Tourism Collaboration award for Montana's Trail to the Stars and we received notice that we were the successful applicant. MRC and Visit SEMT went to the convention and accepted the award. We continue to seek funding to expand Montana Trail to the Stars. MRC includes it in their marketing efforts.</p> <p>MRC received an EMI grant and started developing the Talking Trail App with plans to have it completed in early FY24. talkingtrail.com Montana's Missouri River Country</p>

DMO Budget

Allowable Methods	Amount Budgeted	% of Budget Allocated	Amount Expended	% of Budget Expended
Administration	\$42,605.00	13.44	\$28,128.97	66.02
Agency Services	\$12,000.00	3.79	\$11,000.00	91.67
Cooperative Marketing	\$12,000.00	3.79	\$2,876.50	23.97
Earned Media/Tourism Sales	\$5,000.00	1.58	\$0.00	0
Education/Outreach	\$6,000.00	1.89	\$3,565.12	59.42
Joint Venture	\$20,000.00	6.31	\$14,264.71	71.32
Opportunity Marketing	\$1,320.00	0.42	\$0.00	0
Paid Media	\$63,554.00	20.05	\$41,424.05	65.18
Marketing Personnel	\$33,000.00	10.41	\$29,742.25	90.13
Product Development	\$7,000.00	2.21	\$5,612.50	80.18
Travel/Trade Shows	\$12,000.00	3.79	\$9,161.23	76.34
Visitor Services	\$90,500.00	28.53	\$48,416.86	53.5
Website Development (Online, Website, Mobile)	\$12,000.00	3.79	\$11,000.00	91.67
	\$316,979.00	100.00	\$205,192.19	

Narrative Evaluation

- Bed Tax Collections:** A 3% increase in bed tax collections for FY23 is a positive sign, indicating growth in the tourism sector. The fact that our Average Daily Rate (ADR) at motels and hotels didn't change much suggests that the increase in collections is likely due to increased visitation rather than price changes.
- Photo/Video Library:** Jason Mitchell Outdoors Television came to MRC late February 2023. When he came to MRC the fishing was unfavorable along with the ice conditions. It wasn't satisfactory for filming. He offered to come back next year at no cost to MRC or FWP. We have worked with Jason in the past and have always been pleased with his work and we trust that he will get us an Ice Fishing video and safety messaging the winter of 23/24. Yes, we will continue to work with JMO in the future.
- Radio Advertising:** Advertising on the Montana Outdoor Radio Show is a valuable way to reach our target audience. We were successful in placing 5 months of advertising to 26 stations and 75 cities in Montana. The Captain talks about events, fishing, hunting, and mentions to stay in a motel when in MRC. He knows and recreates in MRC so he knows our area well. This is a successful project and yes we will continue to advertise in the future to get the word out to the outdoor enthusiasts.
- Travel Shows:** This was the first year since Covid that MRC has done a trade show. We exhibited at the Travel and Adventure Show in Dallas, TX due to the impact TX has had on MT. Attendance for the show was up. 2023 had 7,956 attendees vs. 5,380 in 2022. We handed out all our travel guides, (420), but since it was a Travel and Adventure Show our Hunting/Fishing guides didn't go quite as well at only 150. While we only exhibited at 1 show we felt it was successful for MRC. We were constantly engaging with potential visitors. We will continue to do shows in the future.
- Digital and Print Advertising:** Using digital and print advertising to promote the region is an effective marketing strategy with always following Rules and Procedures to insure Montana is noticeable to viewers. MRC received a total of 11,070 leads. Our top leads came from our Glacier Country ad

and Yellowstone Journal ad. Our CTR was up 1.33% in FY23. We carefully chose the right placements. We met our goal and consider this to be successful and we will continue to place ads in top publications and online.

6. **Travel Planners:** MRC printed 30,000 travel planners in September 2022. Since we printed a year ago we have distributed 12,000 guides. Due to the demand we will go back to printing the guide every other year rather than every three years. We will take note the next time we print we will pay more attention to the amount the printing company puts in a box. The current boxes have 60 to a box and are very heavy and hard for people to handle. The high demand for travel planners and brochures is a positive sign, and our distribution strategy is effective using a Group Home in Plentywood. Yes travel guides are a successful project that we will continue to do in the future. <https://missouririvermt.com/interactive-travel-guide>
7. **Joint Ventures:** Successful joint ventures, especially with Brand MT, provided access to better marketing opportunities, and exposure in great markets. Leveraging matching funding opportunities is a smart strategy to maximize our budget and resources. Our FY23 JV's consisted of Sojern, Jun Group, and Pinterest. MRC also did a JV partnership with several other DMO's on Lewis and Clark, which is always successful. Our overall JV with the state received 1,830,318 impressions, 19,076 clicks, 1.00% CTR CPC \$2.41 in FY23. vs. 2,005,134 impressions, 3,030 clicks, CTR .015% and CPC \$3.88 in FY22. FY23 JV's were successful and yes we will continue to do them with the State. Thanks to the State for offering these with matching funds.
8. **Social Media:** Engaging social media with posts and photos is a cost-effective way to reach a broader audience. In FY22 social impressions were higher than usual. We dropped in FY23 but we expect to maintain or increase in FY24. Yes this project is successful and we will continue to do social media.
9. **Website:** Since our 2018 web redesign the newness has worn off so site visitation has been declining. Despite a recent drop, maintaining and updating the website is essential. An upward trend is expected in the future with our continually adding of content.
10. **E-newsletter:** An increasing open rate for our e-newsletter indicates that it's an effective marketing strategy. Our opens improved by 1 point in FY23. This is up from previous years so we do see the value of our email newsletters and will continue to send them. Yes this project is successful.
11. **Education and Outreach:** Using education and outreach to support locals and educate residents about tourism has been a great way to build community support and engagement. Presentations were given to the Wolf Point Chamber of Commerce and the Glasgow Chamber of Commerce. The Executive Director met with the Sidney Herald Editor and presented information about MRC. All information was well received and it's important that we continue to inform our residents. A one sheet educational page was created and distributed to all eight counties. It provided information on what MRC's role is in the tourism industry and lodging tax statistics. The Governor's Conference was attended by the Executive Director and one board member. All TAC meetings were attended either in-person or virtually. One idea we learned at the Governor's Conference was....The Destination Analysts' presentation showed that there is still a robust market for visitors to explore Montana. Their research indicates that while there is interest in visiting the state, the key lies in maintaining consistent and engaging communication. The data suggests that potential visitors need to continue hearing about Montana and gaining a vivid understanding of what a trip to this beautiful state entails. Fortunately, the research indicates that Montana's message is not yet over-saturated, offering ample opportunities to capture the attention of prospective travelers and inspire them to embark on their Montana adventure. Yes Education and Outreach is important and beneficial for MRC. We support Voices of Montana.
12. **Product Development Funds:** Funds were used for the Talking Trail App and partnering with Saskatchewan for Beyond the 49th Parallel which are all new projects that benefit our region. **Beyond the 49th Parallel:** MRC and South Saskatchewan Ready have been staying in communications. In the Spring of 2023 MRC and South Saskatchewan Ready contributed each a small amount of funding to start creating a landing page and itineraries. We have developed a name. Beyond the 49th Parallel (More room to roam) We will continue to seek funding and have a successful cross-border campaign. **Talking Trail App:** Talking Trail is an app designed to respond to the actions, commands, etc. of an adventurer, or someone who appreciates learning and having fun whenever and wherever possible. The app is free, downloadable and will connect you with rich stories from different locations (42 in MRC). Visitors are able to experience the whole story with the interactive Talking Trail mobile app or dial-in-platform. It captivates the visitors attention with an audio or video recording that shares the story of our destinations. Visitors and potential visitors can explore locations throughout MRC with the app or dial in feature located on the signs at the designated locations. 42 locations throughout MRC have been designated. MRC believes that this will be a great marketing tool. www.talkingtrail.com Montana's Missouri River Country
13. **Administration Budget:** Staying within the 20% administration budget is a prudent financial practice, ensuring that a significant portion of the budget goes into marketing and tourism efforts.
14. **Cooperative Marketing:** Collaborating with the Glasgow Chamber of Commerce on cooperative marketing projects was an effective way to pool resources and extend the reach of their events. Ensuring compliance with rules and procedures is essential for consistency.
15. **Marketing Personnel:** Tracking and reporting the hours spent on administrative tasks vs. marketing tasks by the Executive Director is a transparent way to show how resources are allocated. A payroll summary showing the breakout of hours worked on administrative tasks vs. marketing tasks along with a report of duties performed is attached to the payroll summary.
16. **Billboard Advertising:** Billboard advertising has been effective in generating impressions and promoting the Montana Dinosaur Trail facilities. 1.1 M impressions were received over the past year.

17. **Supporting Local Businesses:** Our collaborating with local businesses and Chambers of Commerce demonstrates a commitment to the local community and its economy.
18. **Montana Trail to the Stars:** We take pride in the achievements of Montana Trail to the Stars, which has received two awards in the past year. We will continue to seek funding to expand Montana Trail to the Stars that has received National Extension Tourism Collaboration recognition.
<https://trailtothestars.com/>

Overall, MRC has a well-rounded and successful approach to marketing and promoting tourism in our region. The continued collaboration with Brand MT and our local organizations with a focus on both digital and traditional marketing channels should help maintain and increase visitation to our area. We anticipate ongoing success with all our projects and marketing strategies, and we plan to persistently pursue and continue to implement them.

Reg/CVB Required Documents

Description	File Name	File Size
Certificate of Compliance, Minutes approving FY23 DMO Plan, MRC By-Laws	FY23 Required documents.pdf	5.6 MB
Certificate of Compliance, Minutes approving FY23 DMO Plan, MRC By-Laws	FY23 Required documents.pdf	5.6 MB

