



Grant Details

125123 - FY24 DMO Plan

128721 - FY24 Missouri River Country DMO Plan

DOC Office of Tourism

Grant Title: FY24 Missouri River Country DMO Plan
Grant Number: 24-52-OOT-DMO-003
Grant Status: Underway
Comments:
Applicant Organization: Montana's Missouri River Country
Grantee Contact: Carla Hunsley
Award Year: FY24
Program Area: DOC Office of Tourism

Amounts:
Contract Dates: Contract Sent: 06/13/2023, Contract Received: 07/01/2023, Contract Executed: 06/30/2024
Project Dates: Proposal Date: 06/13/2023, Project Start: 07/01/2023, Project End: 06/30/2024

Grant Administrator: Barb Sanem
Contract Number: 24-52-OOT-DMO-003
Award Year: FY24

Contract Dates

Contract Sent Contract Received Contract Executed Contract Legal

Project Dates 07/01/2023
 06/30/2024

Project Start Project End

Comments
Amendment Comments

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 FY24 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 North Dakota to the east and Canada to the north. According to Destination Analysts, Americans love to travel. Their travel excitement and desire for inspiration is coming back up after 3 years. ITRR survey indicated residents demonstrate a balanced attitude and understanding of the tourism industry within the state. A majority of respondents agree that promotion of the tourism industry by the state benefits their community economically. Furthermore, we are thrilled to welcome even more visitors from across the Canadian border as we embark on a newfound, international partnership with South Saskatchewan Ready. Our regions aim to conceptually create and promote a "gateway" between our unique destinations, and showcase local attractions, community events and the many ways visitors can explore and enjoy each landscape.

High Value Audience

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 and continue 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.

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 size 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 2022 ITRR report, 8% 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 Bighorn 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 2022 ITRR report, 33% 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 2022 ITRR report, 8% 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-sized model of “Peck’s Rex,” a skeleton of a Tyrannosaurus rex found near Fort Peck in 1996. The Fort Peck PowerHouse 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 ATVing 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 2022 ITRR report, 30% 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, 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 six 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 2022 ITRR report, 70% 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. With support of the EMI grant, Missouri River Country has successfully partnered with other eastern Montana regions to create *Trail to the Stars*. This project includes a website, interactive map, event schedule, tips and programming to highlight 45+ excellent night sky viewing areas in the region. In April 2023, we were honored to receive the Marketing Campaign of the Year award at the Montana Governors Conference on Tourism for Montana Trail to the Stars. We are thrilled and grateful for this recognition, and we are committed to further supporting and expanding this remarkable trail that showcases the best of Montana’s natural beauty and big, dark skies. We continue to expand this program and are close to putting Brush Lake State Park on the map as a designated International Dark Sky Park.

Events

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 fair, complete with concerts and rodeos, and lively cowboy competitions like the Match Bronc Ride in Jordan. The PRCA Rodeo Circuit comes through Northeastern Montana this time of year too, and we celebrate the iconic Wolf Point Wild Horse Stampede, the oldest rodeo in Montana. This year marks Wolf Point’s 100th annual Wild Horse Stampede, which will be a primary focus of our summer events. Tribal members from the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation head to Dodson in the summer to celebrate their annual Indian Relay—a horse race involving people switching horses (while in motion) for the chance at winning cash prizes. 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. Exciting fishing tournaments, like the Annual Governor’s Cup Walleye Tournament on Fort Peck Lake in July, attracts sportsmen and women from all over the world, who know there are trophy-worthy fish in our waters. What’s more, these events aren’t restricted to a single season; fishing is a year-round activity in Montana’s Missouri River Country, and those who partake in the sport understand just how special this makes our region. Missouri River Country is also home to multiple hockey teams—a popular sport in the region. Along

with their indoor and outdoor rinks for public use, people can attend lively games during the playing season. For trip agendas and planning ideas, visitors can easily view Missouri River Country's full events calendar on our updated website, and local businesses can add their events directly to the calendar as well.

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, 76% of visitors to Missouri River Country came in a truck or a car, and 17% of visitors were only passing through. 48% were coming for vacation/recreation/pleasure. We must continue to educate travelers about the many activities and points of interest throughout the region. We will continue to use billboards as a marketing technique to draw the attention of travelers coming through our region and encourage them to stay longer. This method is also geared towards attracting millennial travelers (dubbed "Anywhere Travelers") to the region, whose primary travel focus falls on less obvious or off-the-beaten-path destinations for authentic and immersive local experiences.

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. Neither Malta nor Glasgow currently offer car rental services, leaving Wolf Point and Sidney as the only towns with car rental options available to visitors.

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 2022 ITRR report, 56% 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. It is also worth noting that the Residents Attitude Towards Tourism survey, taken by Missouri River Country residents over the past two years, has shifted from a sentiment of not seeing the full value of tourism promotion, to an increase in understanding the benefits of destination marketing for their communities. This is encouraging for our future outreach strategies within the region and shows that education is crucial for residents to understand the positive effects of responsible tourism promotion.

Gas Prices

Unstable gas prices present challenges for all travelers. We know that people are eager to get out and explore whenever they get the opportunity, 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 en 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. With that in mind, we believe it is worth exploring the potential of tour guide opportunities from these Amtrak terminal points to nearby attractions. This approach could promote overnight visits to local communities. We plan to research transportation options (such as Lyft, Uber, and other driving services) that may be viable candidates for excursions with the Amtrak launching point.

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. With the recent success of eastern Montana's collaborative project, Trail to the Stars, we believe there is huge potential in positioning Missouri River Country as a must-go destination for astrotourism. Trail to the Stars has garnered attention from media outlets across the state, as well as regional publications throughout the Pacific Northwest. In April 2023, we were honored to receive the Marketing Campaign of the Year award at the Montana Governors Conference on Tourism for Montana Trail to the Stars. We are thrilled and grateful for this recognition, and we are committed to further supporting and expanding this remarkable trail that showcases the best of Montana's natural beauty and big, dark skies.

Medicine Rock State Park was listed as a designated International Dark Sky Sanctuary in 2020, though the pandemic stifled much of the coverage around this tremendous event. Luckily, with the Trail to the Stars campaign in full swing, we are focusing our efforts into certifying Missouri River Country's Brush Lake State Park as a designated International Dark Sky Park. These incredible locations showcase cosmic events like the Northern Lights, meteor showers and all-around breathtaking views of the Milky Way and other galaxies—which many travelers might not realize can be seen with the naked eye from Montana. Marketing these dark sky marvels presents opportunities to inform visitors of potentially unknown experiences in the state, and provide a compelling reason to plan a trip 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. The Cottonwood Inn & Suites in Glasgow is an excellent option for large gatherings, with most event needs accessible in a single facility. The Cottonwood operates as a hotel, and houses an impressive restaurant, lounge and casino, pool and spa, as well as a fitness center. The convention center can accommodate up to 200 guests and contains multiple meeting rooms equipped with helpful technological amenities.

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 2022 ITRR report, 3% 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 2022 ITRR report, 2% of nonresident visitors who spent at least one night in Missouri River Country entered Montana by motorcycle. In addition, 2% of visitors to the region participated in motorcycle touring, while 45% 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 2022, 86% 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. It also has a fascinating history, adding another set of demographics to appeal to. The springs were discovered by accident in the early 1900s and have seen many changes over the years, acting as a sort of reference point for the history of the area. The facility has info online, photographs, and other assets that follow the story of the springs for inquisitive guests.

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 2022 report, 15% of visitors to the state visited a local brewery. Missouri River Country is home to six craft breweries: Blue Ridge Brewing in Malta, Busted Knuckle Brewery in

Glasgow, Docz Missouri River Breaks Brewing in Wolf Point, Meadowlark Brewing Company, 1035 Brewing in Sidney and newest addition, Pleasant Prairie Brewing in Scobey. 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.

South Saskatchewan Ready and Missouri River Country International Partnership

This brand new international partnership between South Saskatchewan Ready in Canada and Missouri River Country has the potential to build a tourism trail between each of our destinations. We plan to create compelling campaigns that showcase the unique beauty of each other's location. An emphasis will be placed on our similarities; impressive and highly noted night skies, our scenic stretches of prairie fields, and rock formations that seem to be composed of "living art." As we play on the similarities of these distinct regions, we will also point out attractions that can only be found in one another's destinations. We will encourage travel to our regions by creating engaging itineraries for visitors. This partnership will primarily focus on targeting vehicle travel between our destinations, as we continue to find ways to address our ongoing concerns of limited air terminals in our region. We are incredibly excited about this budding partnership and hope to welcome many more Canadian travelers into Missouri River Country as this opportunity unfolds.

Eastern Montana Initiative

Missouri River Country is so appreciative to have received support from the Eastern Montana Initiative to increase visitation through projects like our Trail to the Stars campaign, which received press coverage state and regionwide. With 45+ dark sky viewing destinations throughout Eastern Montana available on an interactive map (trailtothestars.com), viewers can easily create their own personalized dark sky adventure. In April 2023, we were honored to receive the Marketing Campaign of the Year award at the Montana Governors Conference on Tourism for Montana Trail to the Stars. We are thrilled and grateful for this recognition, and we are committed to further supporting and expanding this remarkable trail that showcases the best of Montana's natural beauty and big, dark skies. Moving forward, we plan to continue promoting and developing Trail to the Stars, as well as applying for certification for Brush Lake State Park to become a designated International Dark Sky Park. We hope this will drive astro-enthusiasts to this

location in Missouri River Country. We were recently awarded yet another EMI grant, allowing us to initiate “Talking Trail”—a straightforward, user-friendly app, designed to function as a self-guided tour platform. The app utilizes handy features such as interactive maps (showcasing points of interest in MRC), expert-led interpretive information for sites, interesting bits of history and stories, and internal admin tools to easily track progress and report analytics. We look forward to applying this new marketing strategy to reach the modern-day, digital nomad traveler.

Three Phases of Travel

It is easy to fall in love with Missouri River Country. Our rolling sea of prairie stretches for miles below big blue skies that come to life with stars at night. Missouri River Country will follow the State’s three phase travel strategy of *inspiration*, *familiarity*, and *action* to provide world-class experiences and unforgettable memories.

Stunning photography of our landscape *inspires* people through advertising and social media. It is hard to see bright green landscapes and giant blue skies and not want to learn more (or come see it for yourself!). Our open spaces and abundance of wildlife and recreation activities will draw interested visitors and make people want to learn more about Missouri River Country.

Once we have hooked people into wanting to learn more, we will *familiarize* them to our region with information about activities, lodging, events and opportunities. Using print marketing, trade show opportunities, social media outlets (ie: Twitter, Facebook and Instagram) and informational blog posts, we will provide information to our interested visitors. We recently built a state-of-the-art website which is responsive to mobile devices and will serve as an immeasurable tool in delivering the message about opportunities in Missouri River Country to the public.

We will spark *action* by informing potential visitors of unique experiences in our region, using exciting campaigns to pique their interests. Through genuine and personalized hospitality—a strong suit of smaller communities—we encourage travelers to return year after year. From the moment of interest to their last day of vacation, Missouri River Country staff and marketing teams will provide nothing but excellent information, service and resources. The new website is proving to be a huge asset in ensuring that visitors have an encore experience in our region, and our informational print materials such as travel guides, hunting and fishing guides, brochures and maps will help visitors experience all that Missouri River Country has to offer. In addition, promoting traffic to the visitor’s center will enable us to have a hands-on approach to facilitating the experience of our visitors.

2. Align with Montana Brand

Briefly describe how your destination aligns with the Montana Brand.

Missouri River Country'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.

- **Pristine, Natural Landscapes:** 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.

- **Small-Town Charm and Western Welcome:** 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.
- **Extraordinary Adventures and Genuine Hospitality:** 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. Washington ranked first for nonresident visitors to Missouri River Country in 2022.

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. 8% 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. 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 attraction to Montana.

Couples

This group includes adults 30+ years of age without children. 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 traveling with children. 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 traveling with or without children. 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 who are traveling with or without children. They enjoy participating in outdoor activities such as camping, hiking, biking, fishing, hunting, birding, wildlife watching, dinosaur activities, ATViing, 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.

3b. What research supports your DMO strategy?

- ITRR
- Destination Analysis
- Skift Megatrends
- Montana Residents: Attitudes Toward Tourism 2022

- Institute for Tourism & Recreation, University of Montana, 2022
- "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
- Will have access to reports from Zartico and Visa Vue this coming year

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 2022 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 putting a strong emphasis on promoting this feature of our region for astrophotographers, star enthusiasts and outdoor recreationalists. With the recent success of eastern Montana's collaborative project, Trail to the Stars, we believe there is huge potential in positioning Missouri River Country as a must-go destination for astrotourism. Trail to the Stars has garnered attention from media outlets statewide and regionally. We plan to use this momentum to highlight the trail and our region. We are also continuing to focus efforts into certifying Missouri River Country's Brush Lake State Park as a designated International Dark Sky Park. 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.

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 attraction for Digital Detox Travelers, a group of people looking to get away from the over-stimulus of our digital world. According to the 2022 ITRR report, 70% 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.”

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. **Provide information to travelers about available attractions within the region, how to access those attractions, and ways they can fully immerse themselves and explore the area.**

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 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. We have also evaluated our billboard contract for this upcoming year and have decided to renew and utilize this marketing angle as well.

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 inform visitors of ways they can access the region and enjoy all of its existing community attractions and outdoor recreation opportunities. 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 utilize our newest EMI grant to showcase points of interest in MRC using "Talking Trail—a self-guided tour app, equipped with expert-led information, unique stories and interactive maps.

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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 23 • Build photo/video library by 5 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 • Participate in at least 2 joint venture opportunities 		
<p>Objective #2: Enhance our digital presence and offerings.</p>	<p>Increase metrics by % listed from FY23</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase social impressions by 10% • Increase website visits by 3% • CTR of 1% or above • Increase email opens by 1% • Expand website content for niche markets (i.e., reaching out to tribal communities to map out ways to recreate responsibly and respectfully on or near reservation land) 		
<p>Objective #3: Engage with business owners, community leaders and stakeholders about the impact of tourism.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend at least two chamber meetings and/or leadership classes in the region. • Create/update and deliver educational materials to all 8 counties, including the Fort Peck Reservation, outlining funding and economic impacts of tourism • Attend Governor's Conference and TAC meetings and implement one or two ideas or best practices learned from these meetings 		
<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. • Badlands to Breaks to Beartooth and Talking Trail - regional partnership campaigns • Continue to partner with other communities across eastern MT through the EMI grant • Continue to develop Montana's Trail to the Stars • Use our recently awarded EMI grant to showcase points of interest in MRC via a self-guided, expert-led, interactive "Talking Trail" tour app 		

DMO Budget

Allowable Methods	Amount Budgeted	% of Budget Allocated	Amount Expended	% of Budget Expended
Administration	\$43,549.00	20.0	\$0.00	0
Agency Services	\$12,000.00	5.51	\$0.00	0
Cooperative Marketing	\$5,000.00	2.3	\$0.00	0
Earned Media/Tourism Sales	\$2,000.00	0.92	\$0.00	0
Education/Outreach	\$4,000.00	1.84	\$0.00	0
Joint Venture	\$10,000.00	4.59	\$0.00	0
Opportunity Marketing	\$1,199.00	0.55	\$0.00	0
Paid Media	\$40,000.00	18.37	\$0.00	0
Marketing Personnel	\$33,000.00	15.16	\$0.00	0
Product Development	\$7,000.00	3.21	\$0.00	0
Travel/Trade Shows	\$8,000.00	3.67	\$0.00	0
Visitor Services	\$40,000.00	18.37	\$0.00	0
Website Development (Online, Website, Mobile)	\$12,000.00	5.51	\$0.00	0
	\$217,748.00	100.00	\$0.00	0.00

Narrative Evaluation

DMO Plan Attachments

Description	File Name	File Size
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Reg/CVB Required Documents

Description	File Name	File Size
FY24 Certificate of Compliance, Minutes of BOD meeting motion approving the DMO Plan, copy of current bylaws.	FY24 Required Documents (2).pdf	5.8 MB

