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Analysis of Business Leaders' Attitudes Toward Conservation, Public Lands, and Urban Growth

April 2004

by
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B.A. History, Whitman College, 1994
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ABSTRACT

Lathrop, Jason, April 2004

Environmental Studies

Committee Chair: Neva Hassanein (NH)

"Analysis of Business Leaders' Attitudes Toward Conservation, Public Lands, and Urban Growth"

Because of its abundant natural amenities, the Flathead region has experienced rapid population increases and changes in its economic structure over the last decade. As the regional economy's relationship to natural resources evolves, the interests of the business community will continue to interact with public resource policy. This study sought to understand the attitudes of business leaders in Flathead County toward Glacier National Park, change in the region, and environmental conservation.

Business leaders were chosen at random from area Chamber of Commerce member lists and a direct marketing database produced by InfoUSA. A total of 80 business leaders from seven broadly defined sector groups participated in the study. A total of 80 business proprietors and managers were interviewed in Flathead County during the summer of 2002. These individuals were asked about their attitudes toward Glacier National Park, conservation, growth in the region, and growth management. Interviews were conducted using qualitative research methods: one-on-one, in-depth interviews generally at the respondent's places of business. Interviews were tape recorded and entered into an Access database for coding and analysis.

With near unanimity, these business leaders say they live in the Flathead because they value the outdoor recreation opportunities and the community of people around them. About a quarter of these business leaders expressed support for the environmental movement, while others called for "balance." About half of these business leaders voiced strong expressions of frustration with elements of the environmental movement, expressing particular concern about reduced timber harvest, road closures and to a lesser extent wolf recovery efforts. About half believe sprawl and haphazard growth could in the long run begin to act as a drag on the economy. Many expressed concern about loss of open space and farmland. Many cannot identify any current leaders they believe represent their interests regarding how growth should be managed in the valley.

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2002, the National Parks Conservation Association Glacier Field office initiated an informational campaign and series of studies called "Healthy Parks, Healthy Communities." This project was intended to foster a new understanding of the region's economic relationship to Glacier National Park among its principal audience, the Flathead business community.

To support this campaign, I conducted a qualitative study examining the opinions of the Flathead Area business community toward Glacier National Park, conservation generally, and the region's economy. I conducted interviews with 80 business owners and managers during summer 2002 and summarized these findings during the fall. This summary provided analysis pertinent to the NPCA's "Healthy Parks, Healthy Communities" project and was cited as a principal investigative source for their document, "Gateway to Glacier: The Emerging Economy of Flathead County."

Because the report furnished to the NPCA was intended for public release, it avoided specific message and strategy recommendations. This professional paper will take this extra step, developing recommendations for how the Flathead conservation community can make its message more effectively communicated.

The Flathead region's economy and the nearby wild lands including Glacier National Park are interdependent. The high-quality natural amenities

attract visitors and in-migrants who fuel the region's dynamic construction, retail, and tourist trades. Defense of the amenities depends in part on advocacy by the industries benefited. However, the success of the economy also threatens the relationship. Glacier National Park—like other natural areas bordered by fast growing communities—faces threats to its ecological health related to the rapid, unplanned growth just beyond the park boundaries. Proposed subdivisions, coal mines, retail development, and highway expansion projects near the park threaten water and air quality and wildlife populations. The Flathead County economy—like other economies dependent on natural amenities—faces risks related to the deterioration of the natural amenities. In addition to degraded ecological conditions, traffic congestion, commercial development unsuited to the aesthetic character of the region, and overtaxed park infrastructure also threaten the visitor experience. Activists hoping to address issues related to this interdependence will be served by a clearer understanding of the local business community's attitudes toward park and conservation in general.

Qualitative research of this kind cannot be generalized to the population as a whole. It provides an in-depth examination of the beliefs and thought processes of *these* 80 respondents. This can be used to develop language and messages that would likely resonate favorably with the respondents.

II. METHODS

A. Overall approach and rationale

The goal of this study was to develop an in-depth understanding of the business community's attitudes toward conservation, Glacier National Park, and urban growth issues in the Flathead region. A quantitative opinion poll could have furnished some insight about attitudes toward specific questions, but the NPCA hoped to discover new attitudinal trends and develop a better understanding of the common language used by participants to describe issues in their valley. Qualitative interviews served these goals best. A relatively high number of respondents (n=80) was considered desirable in this case as the NPCA wanted to make some comparisons among a variety of industry groups.

Interviews were conducted using open-ended questions from a structured discussion guide. Questions when first asked were read verbatim from the discussion guide, attempting to gauge the respondents' initial reactions to the same question stimulus. Probing was then gradually narrowed to make sure the answer received was on-topic. The four main topic areas covered included:

- ❖ Personal background and attitudes toward life in the Flathead
- ❖ Business background, description, and attitudes toward business
- ❖ Attitudes toward change in the valley over time and government responses
- ❖ Attitudes toward Glacier National Park and conservation activities

In addition, respondents were asked to react to a series of five statements on the topics discussed. These statements were read and presented as similarly as possible to each respondent (see Appendix B).

B. Sampling

The population of interest – business leaders in the Flathead region – was determined by the NPCA’s priorities. Some arbitrary decisions had to be made about whom to include in this group, given the relatively high percentage of small-businesses and self-employed workers in the region. The intention of the study was to understand the opinions of those operating “businesses” in the traditional sense, having an influence in the community and at least some non-family employees.

Ideally, respondents would have been recruited from a comprehensive database of individual proprietors in the region, using screening criteria to exclude those who did not fit the client’s definition of interest. However, given cost and data source constraints, we were forced to use lists that contained at least some information allowing us to screen prior to contact. The business leaders interviewed were chosen at random from all area Chamber of Commerce member lists and a direct marketing database produced by InfoUSA. The Chamber listing provided a well-maintained list of medium to large employers biased toward civic involvement. In this, it represented a group of businesses

well matched to the clients needs. Half of our respondents were drawn from the Chamber listings. The other half were taken from the direct marketing database so that the final total group would include a substantial group of both Chamber and non-chamber members.

A total of 80 business leaders from seven broadly defined sector groups participated in the study. Respondents were recruited with an introductory letter (see Appendix A) and follow-up phone call. No compensation was paid for participation. A total of 340 letters were mailed over the course of the summer, in twice weekly batches of 20 or 40, depending on the number of interviews currently scheduled (and therefore the urgency of scheduling more in the near term). During follow-up calls to these 340 letter recipients, 38 individuals contacted by phone refused to participate. Twelve of those contacted agreed to the interview but did not meet the interviewer at the appointed time. The vast majority of failed recruitment attempts were due to reasons such as the following:

- repeated messages went unreturned
- number no longer in service
- manager no longer employed at business

These varied reasons why the recruitment process did not always net an interview complicate somewhat the calculation of a non-response rate. Based on letters sent, the response rate was 23% (340 letters/80 completed interviews).

Based on appeals for an interview made to the potential interviewee by phone, the response rate was 67%.

C. Data-gathering methods

Interviews averaged 40 minutes, none shorter than 20 minutes and several lasting over one hour. The majority, 68 interviews, was conducted at the respondents' places of business, the remaining 12 by phone.

Nearly all conversations were tape recorded with the informed consent of the respondents (one respondent refused and several were not successfully recorded due to technical problems or ambient noise). Notes, taken by hand during the interviews on pre-printed discussion guides, served as the primary source for entry of data into the Access software. Tapes were used as a backup where note taking proved unreliable due to environmental or personal factors in each interview (e.g. awkward seating, interview conducted over a meal).

D. Data analysis procedures

All interviews were summarized and coded in a Microsoft Access database. In general, respondent comments were summarized comprehensively using abbreviation and outlining techniques. When comments were particularly germane or insightful, verbatim quotations were inserted into response fields for later use.

Following entry of all response codes, respondents were separated into groups based on a variety of specific characteristics for the purpose of making

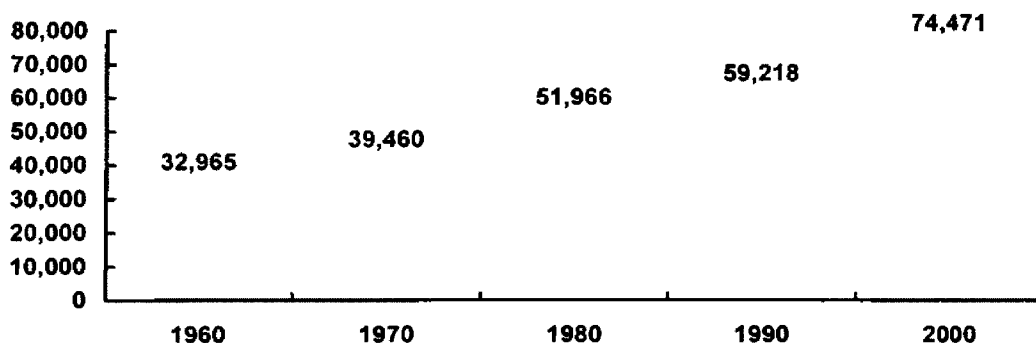
comparisons between types of respondent. For example, seven industry categories were chosen to encompass all potential employers, with the expectation that differences of opinion would likely exist between them. It was supposed that representatives from the manufacturing sector would express more resistance to conservation than those in visitor services. In addition, "duration of residence in the Flathead" was determined in advance to be a variable of possible notable influence on environmental outlook. In addition, as the interviews were summarized other categories were created. For example, life migration history (e.g. "returned Flathead native" or "amenity migrant") was found to be a characteristic with some explanatory value regarding environmental attitudes. These groupings were used in an attempt to understand tendencies in various subsets of respondents and develop an understanding of how life circumstances and attitude toward the environment interact.

III. CONTEXT: GROWTH IN THE FLATHEAD REGION

Like other areas graced with desirable natural amenities and quality of life, Flathead County is growing rapidly. This growth has created favorable economic conditions for many of the business leaders interviewed in this study. It has also, as in other fast-growing regions in the Rocky Mountain West, brought sometimes-undesirable change to the valley – declining open space, increasing traffic congestion, increased commercial sprawl. It is in this context – a desirable region undergoing growth faster than anyone can quite make sense – that this study was conducted.

Growth in the region over the past few decades has been sustained and rapid. U.S. Census data also demonstrates this doubling in population since 1960, from about 33,000 residents to nearly 75,000 in 200:

Flathead County Population



Source: U.S. Census Data

As Larry Swanson notes, “Flathead County and the larger Flathead Valley are is one of Montana’s principal ‘pockets’ of population growth and the county is one of the fastest growing counties in Montana. During the last decade the county’s

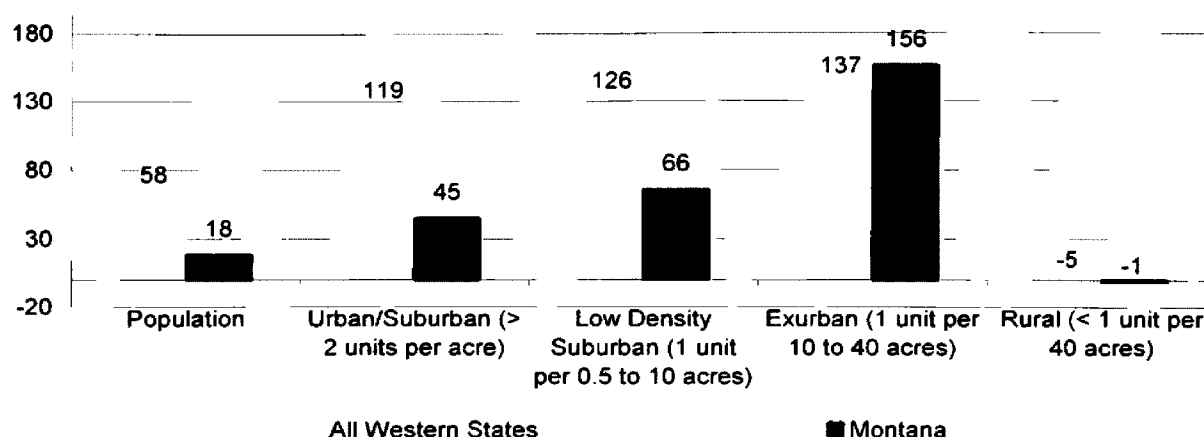
population grew by 26 percent, ranking it the 6th fastest in growth among Montana's 56 counties" (Swanson, 2002).

The sheer numbers of individuals moving to the region belies the nature of this growth in changing the face and culture of the valley. Most of the growth comes from net in-migration, newcomers seeking a quality of life in an area that prides itself on its distinctive local culture:

The principal source of recent population growth in Flathead County is net migration. Net in-migration for the county, which totaled only 2,800 during the 1980s, increased to over 12,000 during the 1990s. (Swanson, 2002).

These growth trends are well documented to be afflicting the entire west, if more intensely in certain highly desirable locations near natural amenities. However, in Montana, the increase in population is associated with a more greedy use of undeveloped land. As seen in the chart developed from Western Futures project data below, Montana has seen its greatest increases in exurban land uses, one unit per 10 to 40 acres. While this state's total and percentage population growth has been less dramatic than other Western state, its use of open, generally formerly agricultural land has been more intensive.

Figure 2: Percent population change, 1960-1990 (various land uses)



Source: Western Futures Project data

Surveys have shown resident dissatisfaction with the level of open space and the rate of development, among both tourists and residents. According to data from the University of Montana's Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research, only 42% of Kalispell residents believe "there is adequate undeveloped space in my community," compared to 58% statewide. More significantly, 76% of Kalispell residents agree with the statement "I am concerned with the potential disappearance of open space in my community." A poll of Kalispell area Chamber of Commerce members showed that 55% of them believe there should be more land use planning in the region (A&A Research, 2001).

Despite this lack of support for the current approaches to land use planning in the Flathead, it is not clear that this frustration inspires them to support the conservation agenda. Focus groups conducted by Belden, Russonello, & Stewart Research and Communications reinforce the findings that residents of the Flathead Valley, both city and county dwellers, are generally not

supportive of the environmental movement. While they are guardedly in favor of city planning, they are reluctant to compromise their own rights and feel the current processes do not include them. "Anxieties about growth are compounded by voters' distrust of public officials to make wise decisions. Nearly every person in the groups had a story about a local planning or political decisions that was corrupt or stupid or both." (Belden, Russonello, & Stewart, 2002).

Despite this dissatisfaction, also evidenced in this report's findings below, some measures of quality of life in the region are positive. For example, Swanson shows that per capita income in inflation-adjusted dollars has steadily increased over the last few decades, despite popular conception of a local economy that has been "hollowed out" with the loss of high-paying natural resource wages. "Per capita income in Flathead County has risen from less than \$15,000 in 1975 (measured in 1996 inflation-adjusted dollars) to more than \$21,000 today. Per capita income in the area is roughly commensurate with per capita income levels in other areas of the West other is similar in population size" (Swanson, 2002). Swanson's findings are consistent with comments made by individual business leaders interviewed for this study, all of whom report at least steady, if not improving, business fortunes.

Growth in the Flathead has created a challenging set of conditions, for the valley's leadership and citizens. The region stands at a critical juncture as it decides how to grapple with the economic and demographic forces at work. As

this new century plays out, Flathead County must choose whether to retain some piece of their essential character or join most of the rest of the country in surrendering their character to outside forces.

III. KEY FINDINGS

A. Summary of observations

- ❖ With near unanimity, these business leaders say they live in the Flathead because they value the outdoor recreation opportunities and the community of people around them. Every one of them cherishes the region as a uniquely wonderful place to live.
- ❖ They also cherish Glacier National Park. A majority report using it at least several times a year, many as often as weekly. They consider it a regional treasure and largely praise park management.
- ❖ On the whole, they do not conduct business in the Flathead for the money. They believe they have “given something up” economically for the amenities and community they so highly value.
- ❖ Despite this, business is good for most of them. Growth has brought increased prosperity for many business owners. At worst, they describe their incomes as “stable.”
- ❖ Most believe city and county planners have not adequately responded to the increased development in the valley. While they do not agree on *what*, they do believe more action is needed.

- ❖ Many cannot identify any current leaders they believe represent their interests regarding how growth should be managed in the valley.
- ❖ About half believe sprawl and “haphazard” growth could in the long run begin to act as a drag on the economy.
- ❖ About half of these business leaders voiced strong expressions of frustration and opposition to the environmental movement. Only about a quarter expressed support. Others called for “balance.”
- ❖ Reduced timber harvest, road closures, and to a lesser extent wolf recovery efforts have inspired particularly strong frustration and resentment.
- ❖ Many who dismiss virtually all claims of environmentalists articulated a clear sense that ongoing development in the county could threaten water quality.
- ❖ Employers from sectors offering higher pay or more rewarding work seem more likely to describe the Flathead area workforce as excellent, attributing this to the lure of the region’s amenities.
- ❖ Some respondents clearly articulated a “purpose” for wild country near and in the Flathead in the course of the interviews. Those who did generally characterized these lands as “for” human purposes, such as economic benefit or recreation. It is likely that messages emphasizing the

benefit to people of responsible conservation will resonate better than messages targeting the inherent benefits of unspoiled landscapes.

IV. SUMMARY OF RESULTS

A. Respondents' backgrounds

1. Who are the respondents?

The participants in this study include 80 business leaders from Flathead County. Most are business owners. One-third are general managers or in a few cases department managers. Their average age is 50, ranging from 28 to 72.

The large majority of respondents conduct business in Kalispell or its outskirts. About a quarter of the respondents conduct business near or in Whitefish, Columbia Falls, Somers, or Bigfork.

Respondents are broadly representative of overall industry¹ in the Flathead Valley. For the purposes of this study, respondents were grouped and recruited by sectors including:

- ❖ **Manufacturing (11 respondents):** All goods-producing firms, including the wood products industry.
- ❖ **Local Retail (14):** Retail firms primarily catering to non-tourists.
- ❖ **Construction/Real Estate (12):** Including architecture, engineering, and related services firms.

¹ These sectors were based on SIC codes with some recombination to reflect functional relationship to growth, conservation, tourism, and Glacier National Park. For example, construction and real estate share many of the benefits of population growth, though they are in separate SIC categories. This was done to generate a number of sector categories appropriate to the scope of this study, yet still encompassing all employers in the valley.

- ❖ **Visitor Services (11):** All non-goods producing and retail firms primarily catering to tourists.
- ❖ **Health Care (11):** Including massage therapists, dental professionals, and health care firm support services.
- ❖ **Business Services (11):** All non-goods producing firms primarily catering to other firms.
- ❖ **Services (10):** All non-goods producing firms primarily catering to non-tourist households.

It is crucial to note that these sectors are approximations. Many firms cater to both other firms and households, for example. In these cases, for the purpose of categorizing, they were included in whichever grouping best describes the largest share of their business (self described).

Recruiting participants from extractive industry was problematic for this study. Only two representatives from the wood products industry were interviewed and neither was particularly representative of the mainstream timber industry. This should be kept in mind while interpreting the findings here.

In many situations, the sector a respondent works in says something about how he or she perceives the issues addressed in this study. Throughout this document these sector names will be used in discussing this association.

These group sizes are not intended to reflect the overall size of the sectors relative to one another in the actual economy. With qualitative research of this kind, it is appropriate to speak with enough representatives, about 10-15, to get an overall sense of how each sector feels about a certain issue.

Three quarters (60) of these respondents are members of one of the area Chambers of Commerce. The remaining 20 are not. Chamber members exhibited somewhat greater willingness to participate, a selection bias likely related to civic mindedness and the overall quality of the Chamber member mailing data. In comparing the Chamber members and non-Chamber members, there are no notable differences in response. While there are certainly some categorical differences between Chamber and non-Chamber members, neither group appears to perceive differently the issues addressed by this study.

2. A large majority of participants are migrants to the Flathead

These participants told a wide variety of stories in explaining how they came to live in the Flathead Valley. The bulk of them (67 of 80) relocated to the Flathead at some point, either from elsewhere in the country or elsewhere in Montana. Twenty-two respondents are originally from some other part of Montana (Return Montanans and Native Montanans). Only thirteen were born and raised in Flathead County.

Broadly they can be divided into five groups:

- ❖ **“Amenity Migrants:”** These respondents, 23 total, came to live in the Flathead Valley seeking the natural amenities and lifestyle of the region, typically having no previous ties to Montana.
- ❖ **“Return Montanans:”** These nine participants grew up in Montana, spent a long duration of time away, then returned, typically for the lifestyle and to be nearer family.
- ❖ **“Native Flatheaders:”** Thirteen of the 80 respondents were born and raised in the Flathead and have remained.
- ❖ **“Native Montanans:”** Another thirteen of these participants are native to some other region of Montana, but relocated to the Flathead. In this regard they tend to share some characteristics with both in-migrants and Native Flatheaders.
- ❖ **“Other Migrants:”** In all, 22 participants moved to the region from somewhere outside of Montana for reasons other than amenities, such as a job opportunity for themselves or a spouse.

Many of the attitudes expressed by the participants are closely matched to their relationships to the Flathead Valley. These terms will be used to describe the participants when their beliefs seem related to how they came to live in the valley.

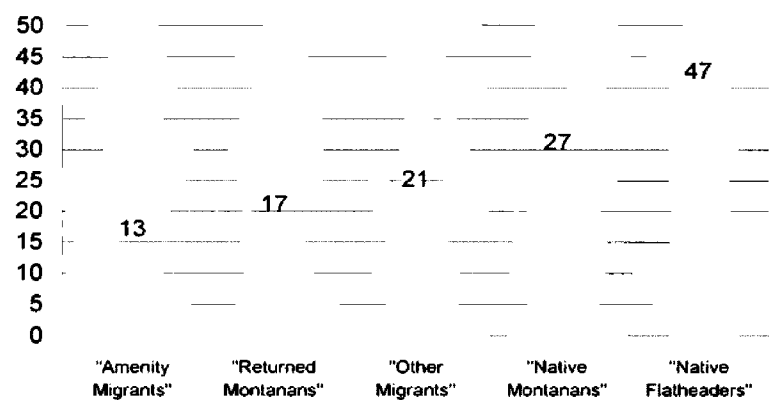
It is also useful to note that these categories underestimate somewhat the lure of the Flathead’s amenities. While 23 can be described as Amenity Migrants,

a large number of Return Montanans and Native Montanans were also, at least in part, drawn to the region by its amenities.

3. Those who came for the amenities have been in the valley the shortest time

Amenity Migrants are, on the whole, the newest to the region. This group has lived in the valley for an average of 13 years. Other migrants have lived in the valley an average of 21 years.

Average years lived in Flathead



Native Flatheaders have lived in the region for an average of 47 years, far longer than the next group, Native Montanans (27 years).

B. Attitudes toward Glacier National Park

1. Overwhelmingly, they value and treasure Glacier National Park

These participants consider the park very important to them personally, often expressing a clear fondness or feeling of ownership. Even those few who say they never go to the park personally usually characterized its mere existence as at least somewhat important to them. "Even if you just like to go through it and visit it, it's important. It's just the beauty of driving through, if that's all you do," said the manager of a Kalispell financial services firm.

As a Kalispell real estate firm manager explained, "Why do I go to Glacier Park? It's the prettiest place I know of on planet earth. It always makes me very, very proud to live in northwest Montana. It's a very unusual park. You've got to get on foot to enjoy it... The simplicity of hiking and being able to see the beauty and stop where you want and go where you want."

"I like that there are no people. The hiking is spectacular. I like that there's nothing ostentatious about the park. I like the wildlife, how accessible it is. There isn't anything I don't like about the park," said a health care manager from Kalispell.

In their use of the park they vary widely, from dedicated, several-times-weekly users to rare exceptions who consciously avoid going to the park.

- ❖ 27 participants are frequent users of Glacier – typically recreating there at least weekly, sometimes year round

- ❖ 37 are users of the park, hiking, camping, or picnicking in Glacier 3-10 times a year
- ❖ 13 avoid the park, either preferring to recreate on less-restrictive public lands or simply not recreating outdoors at all. One of the most common reasons to avoid Glacier Park was the Park Service ban on firearms, which makes many uncomfortable in bear country.

While nearly all participants are likely to highly value Glacier Park, relative newcomers to the valley are more likely to use it often.

"I don't know that anyone can adequately explain what led them to Montana. There is a magic here. I know the first time I set eyes on Glacier Park, I was absolutely awestruck. I had never seen anything so magnificent in all my life. I vowed right then and there to come back and sure enough. It took a few years... I told my wife very simply. You're my wife. Glacier Park is my mistress. I think she understood."
(Amenity migrant, manufacturing facility, Kalispell)

Nearly half of Amenity Migrants and Other Migrants say they use the park very often and most of the rest use it occasionally.

In contrast, the large majority of Native Flatheaders and Native Montanans only use the park occasionally or avoid it altogether (21 out of 26).

"Honestly I grew up in Big Fork, and I've found for the people who have moved here, it's much more of a draw for them. Obviously it's an amazing place and we really value it, but I spend more time at the lake and doing that. So I'd say Flathead Lake for me personally is just as big an asset," said a visitor services

owner in Whitefish. Or, as a tourist services manager and Flathead natives aid more succinctly, “the Going to the Sun Road is a great shortcut to some of my favorite fishing area.”

Reasons for this vary. Some Native Flatheaders own recreational property on Flathead Lake or along the North Fork Road and prefer to recreate there. Others stressed the restrictions in the park. “I don't go in the park, mostly because I don't like their bear policy. If I go back into the wilderness it's to get away from people, I don't want to be subjected to all their negative signs and people telling you what to do. It's a beautiful place, a great place for tourists,” explained a bank president.

Those participants from all groups who say they only use the park occasionally tend not to pursue highly active outdoor pastimes, such as hiking or climbing, at all. They more often car camp or drive through to enjoy the scenery, typically when out-of-area relatives or friends come to visit.

Overwhelmingly, the people say they like the park for its scenic beauty. Others named the wildlife and historical values, but scenic value dominated as the most important aspect across all participants.

2. They tend to consider the park “safe”

Glacier National Park is a very non-controversial issue for these participants. As noted, they value the park highly. They also tend to consider the park as “safe.” Participants often used words like “unchanging” and “preserved”

to describe the park. "It's part of the magic of the park. It's a place where change occurs so slowly. My parents honeymooned in a cabin there and I can still walk by it. It's a place where people can go to deny the passage of time, explained a Columbia Falls realtor.

Most believe development outside the park would not have much affect on the park itself. Those few who do perceive a threat tended only to name the erosion of the aesthetic character in the canyon area. Just a few participants noted effects such as the compromise of travel corridors or grazing land used by resident wildlife.

This may imply a certain complacency, which could have some implications for advocacy organizations attempting to influence park policy.

3. Going to the Sun Highway dominates current concerns

When asked what they believe the major issues facing Glacier are, a clear majority first named the Going to the Sun Highway's current state of disrepair. The road, Going to the Sun Road is a real treasure and I think we should do whatever we need to do to fix that road. I hope that that road will continue to be used by people," explained the manager of a staffing service in Kalispell.

With near unanimity, those who expressed an opinion believe the Park Service should not close the road completely to traffic during any part of the season, but should spend whatever it takes to repair the road.

“The biggest issue with Glacier?” asked a health care administrator in Kalispell. “The federal government giving them enough money to maintain the park. For everything... road maintenance, hiring enough biologists and botanists to keep non-native plants out, restoring the lodges, everything.”

Following this, the participants most often cited the lodges, backcountry chalets, and general infrastructure as in need of maintenance attention. Very often they described the crowding as an increasing problem, but most do not see it as something that needs to be addressed by increased infrastructure.

4. Overall, sector and “reason for living in the Flathead” do not influence park beliefs

No clear patterns emerged when comparing these participants’ attitudes toward Glacier National Park to their business sector or reason for coming to the Flathead. This seems largely because of the broad consensus that the park is a well-managed regional treasure merely in need of repair. As a result, any other attitudes toward Glacier and park management do not come up sufficiently often to draw conclusions about what type of respondents feel this way.

5. Most believe park funding is currently insufficient

To the extent that these participants know anything about park funding, they tend to believe it is insufficient to maintain the current infrastructure. Many describe this as a condition persisting throughout the National Park system.

Only a small minority believes the Park Service currently funds Glacier sufficiently. Even fewer believe the park does not efficiently spend the money currently given to it.

6. Glacier Park plays a large role in the success of their businesses

It is difficult for nearly all of these respondents to imagine life in the Flathead Valley without the presence of Glacier National Park. When asked about the importance of Glacier to their businesses, many simply had trouble responding. As a local retail owner explained, “The way I look at it [Glacier] is the anchor for everything around here. So much of everything that's going on around here wouldn't be the way it is if it wasn't next to the park. It's that one entity that's there that's completely different from everything else, even the Bob.”

“Glacier Park is imperative to the regional economy. You've got real estate. Because of its natural beauty, you've got a natural growth in the valley,” said a business services owner in Whitefish.

A Kalispell tourist services firm owner explained, “Even in Germany they can understand Glacier Park. In New York, the western states all blur. But when they start looking up national parks, Glacier is something they can key in on. They understand that.”

On the whole, only those businesses that experience a spike in sales volume during the summer months could quantify the effect of Glacier. While

this group included all of the obviously affected Tourist Services, a surprising range of other businesses experiences a direct benefit from tourist traffic.

For example, an optical retailer described a 20% increase in business during the summer merely from tourists losing their glasses, usually dropping them in a lake. Employers across the sectors – including a dairy distributor, grocery wholesaler, auto parts distributor, and others – described similar large increases in sales directly attributed to the influx of people during the summer.

7. Construction/Real Estate most strongly report Glacier's benefits to business

While they do not experience a summer volume increase directly attributable to tourist traffic, respondents in Construction/Real Estate articulated very clearly the importance of Glacier.

Broadly speaking, these participants described a Flathead economy *largely driven* by in-migration and the associated strength in the building and real estate industries. They believe Glacier to be a key amenity in attracting this migration. Big Mountain, Flathead Lake, and the other public lands were also described as playing a significant role.

Most respondents in Construction/Real Estate further reported that the presence of Glacier and the surrounding wild country improves their ability to find and hire quality workers.

8. A small minority believe the park should be managed more for "people"

A handful of participants believe the park should be managed with less emphasis on wilderness values and more on accommodating people. These respondents tended to advocate substantial expansions of the park's infrastructure, including adding new blacktop road and paving of existing dirt roads.

9. A small minority desires a public transit system

A small minority of these participants expressed strong enthusiasm for the development of a public transportation system in Glacier. While only a handful voiced this desire, the commitment with which they expressed it bears some mention.

As one dentist practicing in Kalispell explained, "It would be nice if they had some kind of central transportation, at some point basically negate the use of cars in the park. I'm not talking about locking up the park. I'm talking about you can go through the West Gate and you can get on a monorail or a bus, whatever you want, you can go hiking, get off wherever you want, go hiking and get back on. "

Even one general contractor, who was generally opposed to conservation, believes there is merit in the idea, noting "I rode the buses in the Grand Canyon and it probably made my experience better than it did driving my car on that part of it."

10. Other thoughts on the park

A few miscellaneous attitudes toward the park were expressed only a few times. These include:

- ❖ Leadership is unresponsive to the needs of the valley
- ❖ Park employees are lazy and inefficient
- ❖ Park spends too much money
- ❖ Condition grizzly to fear people with a limited hunt
- ❖ Park should not be expanded
- ❖ Park should work harder to open the road in the spring
- ❖ The superintendent should stop changing so often
- ❖ Park should increase marketing efforts

C. Life and business in the Flathead

1. Participants like living in the Flathead

Without exception, these business leaders characterized the Flathead as a region uniquely worth living in. The majority had moved to the area in their lifetimes for the amenities it offers and were not disappointed. Not a single respondent talked of plans to leave the area. Most characterized it as “home.” No doubt such sentiments would be typical of a group of mostly successful, well-established business leaders anywhere. However, these responses are notable in their unanimity. As a manager at a business services firm in Whitefish explained, “Because I'm home. This is home. For me to have this job in this area is a complete bonus as far as I'm concerned.”

“The simple life. The way life used to be” is what a staffing services manager says her family sought in coming to Kalispell.

“My mother would kill me if I tried to move,” said a contractor from Kalispell.

As the manager of tourist services firm explained, “I fell in love with the Flathead when I came here when I was 14 years old. As soon as I graduated from college in eastern Montana I got in my '69 Chevy pickup and went to Kalispell, Montana.”

2. Recreation opportunities and community are the reasons they live in the valley

Overwhelmingly, these business leaders consider the *recreation opportunities* and the *people* in the community as the most important reasons to live in the Flathead region. This is among the clearest findings in this study.

A total of 47 respondents volunteered outdoor recreation when explaining what they like about the region and 44 said either the people, rural culture, or in some cases family relations. A great many said both. Nearly all reported one or the other. "I saw the Mission Mountains and there was no going back," said a Kalispell local retail owner.

"I like the lifestyle. You got millions of acres of recreational area... The people. The people are friendly," explained a Whitefish amenity migrant from the east coast.

Only 10 named job opportunities as a reason to live in the region. Only seven named natural beauty specifically, though this characteristic was very often implied in descriptions of the natural recreation.

3. Disadvantages of life in the Flathead region vary

In contrast to the broad consensus about what is *good* about life in the Flathead, there was a wide diversity of opinion on what is *not* good about life in the Flathead.

The most often named disadvantage of living in the Flathead is the difficulty in earning income, cited by 17 respondents. (This particular finding becomes more clear later during discussion of the business environment.) “Financially personally it's more expensive to live here. Wages are lower and costs are higher, compared to a lot of areas,” said a business services operations manager.

Other complaints cited included the lack of retail services and cultural amenities. “I'd like to see a quality venue for quality entertainment. It'd be nice to see a show or musical entertainment and not have to go to Seattle,” said a Kalispell manufacturing facility manager.

Others see the growth in the valley as chief, if recent drawback. As a local retail owner explained, “This is a garden of Eden. The problem is the valley is growing so rapidly. The problems I see is they're not coming for the beauty, they're coming to escape. And they're bringing their big city problems with them.”

However, 17 respondents said there are *no* disadvantages to living in the Flathead. Other disadvantages cited include:

- ❖ The lack of cultural opportunities (theater, music, dining, etc.).
- ❖ The long, gray winters.
- ❖ Rapid population growth.
- ❖ Lack of transportation (air service, Interstate access).
- ❖ Lack of shopping

- ❖ An excessive number of “greenies”
- ❖ “Local ignorance”.

4. Business is good

Not a single respondent reported declining business volume. At worst, they described business as “stable.” The majority of respondents who addressed this said their businesses are growing.

- ❖ The Business Services, Construction/Real Estate, and Manufacturing sectors were notably more likely than the other sectors to report growing business.

This finding tends to match other data available on the state of the Flathead economy. However, reporting bias may play a larger role here than in other sections, as some respondents would be reluctant to acknowledge difficult times.

5. Few conduct business in the Flathead for the income

These participants do business in the Flathead region because they want to live there, not because of the financial opportunities or the business climate. “The quote to use is ‘poverty with a view.’ I took a 50% pay cut to come here,” said the owner of a computer services firm in Whitefish.

This finding is reinforced in other areas of the study, notably, the discussion of downsides to living in the area, among the most common of which

was “lower income.” Whether it is true or not, these respondents overwhelmingly believe they have “given something up” in order to live in the Flathead Valley. Many believe they could make more money in a larger city, even relative to the greater cost of living in these areas. “Wages are low so you know,” said a business services manager in Kalispell, “a lot of people live here and take a lower paying job because of Glacier Park in their back door. I know that's why my husband and I moved here. We took a 50% cut in pay to be here. They valley is pretty and I like our valley. But I don't camp in our valley. I camp in Glacier Park.”

Interestingly, this is often true of those who reported that they came to the area specifically for a job opportunity. This suggests that even in these cases the job opportunity was only a part of the reason they came.

6. There is mixed opinion about the quality of the Flathead workforce

Respondents from various sectors described very different situations with respect to the quality of the workforce in the Flathead Valley.

About a quarter of the respondents consider the quality of employees in the Flathead to be very high. Overwhelmingly, they attribute this to the lure of the Flathead’s outdoor recreation and lifestyle amenities. An architect from Kalispell explained, “I think you can draw quality people to this region compared to the rest of Montana. I think it's a destination for new graduates,

really qualified people. I think Western Montana, and especially the Flathead valley, has a better lure for quality employees."

Another quarter complained of "lazy employees" and a "declining work ethic." This apparent disconnect may be related to the types of jobs the employers are trying to fill.

For example, respondents from the Local Retail and Business Services sectors were among those most likely to complain about the workforce quality. Those in Construction/Real Estate and Visitor Services tend to be very pleased with the quality of their employees. "It is a bonus. Quite often that's the reason people want to live here and the reason they are willing to accept a lesser wage," said a manager at an engineering firm.

Participants from the Manufacturing sector were evenly split in their response. One manufacturing facility owner said the quality of life improves the quality of the local workforce because they have "solved some of their emotional distresses about not being where they want to be and are able to focus more clearly on the tasks at hand...Employees are less materialistic and therefore more focused and content. In the larger cities there's a much greater occupation with the material world."

This may imply that there is a high-quality pool of workers in the Flathead seeking jobs that pay well or are highly rewarding. They may simply be reluctant to take jobs in retail or business services. This study did not attempt to measure worker preferences.

Several participants reported that the labor market became noticeably tighter as soon as Stream Corporation began operations in Kalispell.

7. The region's amenities contribute to higher quality health care

Repeatedly, physicians and non-physician leaders in the Health Care sector said the high-value recreational amenities in the Flathead play a key role in attracting top MDs to the region. While physicians in the Flathead regularly complained of the reduced income they receive to practice in the region, they generally praised the quality of life as fair compensation. “For a community this size we have always been at the forefront of medical technology,” said a Kalispell physician. “And that's one of the things that brought me here—to be able to practice in a small town that has specialty coverage and a hospital that's as advanced as they are.”

This benefit does not strongly influence recruiting of non-physician health care professionals, however. Nurses, clerical staff, and technicians are characterized as largely “local.”

In general, all Health Care respondents characterized the Flathead's medical resources—personnel and facilities—as exceedingly good for an area of its size.

8. Local Retail feels strong competitive pressures

Business leaders in the Local Retail sector were most likely to cite competition, particularly competition from companies outside the region, as a drawback to doing business in the Flathead.

D. Change in the Flathead

1. Growth in the valley has expanded their businesses

As the valley has grown, business has increased for about half of these respondents. This is the clearest finding from the discussion of growth. Even many participants who bemoan changes in the region often admitted it has enriched them at least somewhat.

- ❖ About half of these respondents said the growth has increased their business volume.
- ❖ Participants from the Construction/Real Estate sector are notably more likely to say growth has increased their business volume.

2. Growth has compromised the character of the Flathead Valley

Other than increased prosperity for themselves, these participants see few benefits in the changes that growth has brought to the Flathead. Overall, they believe the valley has lost and is continuing to lose some of its unique characteristics. "I think so... Yes, definitely. That's because of unplanned growth. Every road you take a right on there's a million dollar house up here, up some backcountry road right up on top of the hill. You think you're in the middle of nowhere, hunting even. All of a sudden you see a big old house plastered on the side of the mountain."

“Yard lights, 20 acre ranches, no trespassing signs. It’s a joke,” said the owner of a tourist services firm.

Among the changes they most lament:

- ❖ Loss of open space, farm land
- ❖ Increase of sprawl
- ❖ Loss of rural character
- ❖ Increased traffic density, “road rage”
- ❖ Increase in urban attitudes, anger
- ❖ Increase in customer service demands
- ❖ Decline of traditional job base
- ❖ Increase in wealth disparity
- ❖ Decline of central Kalispell retail area

Some of these changes are of greater concern to some groups compared to others.

Some are fairly universal concerns.

After increased traffic, the most frequent lament is the loss of rural character, cited by respondents across all groups. Native Montanans and Native Flatheaders were more likely to describe this loss of rural character in terms of the attitudes of newcomers, demise of the logging industry, and increasingly demanding customers. “For me there's a great deal of sadness,” said a tourist

services manager. "Because my friends were the loggers who don't have any work anymore. . . I understand why all that happens but it certainly changes the community. It's a different ballgame."

One fairly common complaint by business leaders was the increasing sophistication and demands placed on them by new customers. As a general contractor explained, "Also for us it's customer service. A lot of people move in from California, Oregon, Washington elsewhere in the United States and their expectations for available products and customer service are very different from what and how the valley has traditionally defined it. They want it today. Home Depot in some ways represents that change. We're seeing a real shift, too, from mom and pop. We had to make a shift from a company that was run out of a house to one that was run out of an office. There's a real shift going on from mom and pop operations that have been in the valley forever and now we've got corporations coming in and challenging what was formerly their turf."

Migrants to the area tend to see the commercial sprawl and influx of national chain stores as the signs of "declining rural character." Loss of farmland tends to be lamented by all groups.

Change in the valley has not been all for the worse, however. Native Montanans, in particular, sometimes positively associated the decline in rural character with increased shopping and improved air travel to the region.

Improvements most often cited include:

- ❖ Increased shopping, restaurant availability
- ❖ Greater cultural diversity
- ❖ Increased economic opportunity
- ❖ Improved passenger air service
- ❖ Arrival of, profit from high-end clientele

3. Most agree government has not handled the growth well

Among these business leaders there is a widespread sense that the city and county governments have not responded adequately to growth. Most agree the county and city need better zoning, though what kind they would support varies. “Negative things I see--I want to word this properly--because it has to do with growth, but it's that we aren't taking care of the growth the way it should be done. I believe that there are opportunities to enhance this area even more, to do it right. For example, I hate to see the town of Kalispell split up all over the place, when we've got valuable land right in Kalispell that can be utilized.” said a bank manager from Kalispell. Four broad groups emerged with respect to attitudes toward planning: Anti-Sprawl, Pro-Infrastructure, Pro-Property rights, and Moderates.

Anti-sprawl

Most often, these respondents express frustration that planning leaders have not sufficiently contained the commercial sprawl. The valley, as a result, appears “haphazard” or “junky.” Over half of these respondents believe city and

county planners have not done enough to contain sprawl. "I haven't actually seen any growth management, its just more sprawl. I see us eventually looking like Missoula. And eventually probably even like Spokane. I don't think it's inevitable . . . If there were some good growth management policies in place it wouldn't be inevitable," said a tourist services owner, from Somers.

A manufacturing facility owner echoed this, saying "I wish Montana or Flathead County particularly had effective zoning. It doesn't. I wish it did. I don't know that it ever will. We're going to look like West Virginia. Trailers everywhere. But that seems to be the way it is here. More so the people who've always been here than the people who come, but I'm not sure of that either. There's just a real 'leave me alone' attitude and that's you know good in some ways, but I think it hurts the overall appearance of the area."

"We need to have planning, number one," said the owner of a Kalispell visitor services firm. "And we need to have a plan that city governments and county governments are invested in and committed to. And consequently, in order to have that happen we have to elect people with enough backbone to do it. Or that believe in doing that. And I think that right now we do have city government that believes in doing that. Unfortunately we have three county commissioners who are real strong property rights activists. And planning and planning for growth doesn't really fit very well with their property rights beliefs. That's what puts us on the horns of the dilemma we find ourselves in. We had a wonderful master plan in 1993 that was voted down by the citizens. That

community leaders spent literally thousands of hours on. It was one I personally supported strongly. But there wasn't support among citizens of the valley."

Very often, participants who express frustration with the sprawl have lived somewhere other than Montana in their lifetimes; most of them are Amenity Migrants or Return Montanans. In general, they voiced support for Citizens for a Better Flathead's vision for the valley's planning.

Chief complaints include:

- ❖ Loss of open space and farmland
- ❖ Loss of the Flathead's traditional, rural character
- ❖ Erosion of the local retail base

Pro-Infrastructure

About a quarter of these business leaders believe the planning leaders have failed the valley by not developing sufficient infrastructure, such as roads, sewer, and utilities. These participants tended, though with many exceptions, to come from the Native Flathead and Native Montanan groups. "I'd sure like to see them build the mall and the things that bother me about it seem to be changing, like getting a Home Depot. I get tired of going to Spokane or Missoula to purchase something. In fact, we got an expression around here: 'Welcome to Montana,' which means you got to wait a week to get anything you want. We don't even have an electronic boutique! If you want a piece of software, take a ride and go to Missoula. But that's changing," said the owner of a Kalispell business services firm.

They favor the current growth, but believe the city and county should respond in a more organized way to facilitate traffic patterns and development. They typically believe that:

- ❖ The increased retail has helped the area. They prefer increased shopping options.
- ❖ The growth has benefited businesses and the welfare of valley residents
- ❖ The infrastructure is adequate now, but will not be in the near future
- ❖ There is currently an excess of regulation confronting developers, that zoning is too restrictive

Pro-Property rights

Eight participants expressed very strong opposition to zoning of any kind as a violation of the rights of private property owners. They tended to express opposition to the city-county Master Plan, often citing support for County Commissioner Dale Williams.

Moderates

A handful of participants expressed the belief that the public process is excessively dominated by extremes on both sides. They tend to believe the valley's growth planning has been adequate or, in rare cases, good, but criticized the rancor that characterizes public process.

3. Many believe sprawl, unchecked, could harm the economy in the long run

Nearly half of these participants reported believing that the unplanned growth in the area could one day begin to act as a drag on the region's economy, particularly for those sectors dependent on tourism and in-migration. "If you don't have the wildlife and resources and clean water, not only will the people who are visiting here stop coming, the people who live here will leave," said a local retail owner from Kalispell.

- ❖ Amenity Migrants and Return Montanans were the most likely to express the belief that unplanned growth could harm the economy.
- ❖ Other Migrants and Native Flatheaders were divided on the issue.
- ❖ Native Montanans tended *not* to think unplanned growth poses an economic threat.

Participants who have lived in locations other than the Flathead seemed to rate this threat from unplanned growth more strongly. A few specifically identified their fears of the Flathead becoming like the place they moved from.

Not all who had lived elsewhere believe sprawl poses a threat, however. A handful drew the opposite conclusion. Typically, they acknowledged the Flathead is growing too fast, but added, "Compared to what?" These participants believe the tourists, lifestyle refugees, and wealthy in-migrants fueling the region's growth do not have any other place to turn.

For the most part, those who believe growth could harm the region's economy cited more planning as the appropriate solution. A sizeable minority however expressed resignation to the inevitability of the growth's effect.

4. Hostility to "California attitudes," while lamenting loss of rural character

One very typical complaint of long-time residents concerned the influx of out-of-state residents who "bring their big city attitudes with them." Often this attitude was attributed to progressive groups, usually Citizens for a Better Flathead. This complaint invariably went hand-in-hand with a lament at the loss of the region's rural character. "I like the lifestyle here," explained the owner of a business services firm, "but it's changing quite rapidly. I'm not as happy here as I used to be. The people from big cities moving in with their attitudes and they want to change everything. You ask them why they move here and they say 'we like how it is.' But the first thing they do is they come with a lot of money and they get on a lot of boards and stuff and they want to change everything and make it like it is where they came from. And if they liked it so much, why didn't they stay there? There's ways we did things here, right or wrong, that was part of the flavor of the Flathead Valley. And a lot of these people from bigger cities, especially like from California, they move here and they immediately want to start changing stuff and making it the way it was in California."

As the owner of a local services firms described it the change in attitudes is an inevitable part of the growth in the region. "How do you have growth at the

rate we've had growth and maintain that attitude that the locals had? You can't you're going to lose it. People are moving here because of what we have, but when they come here they bring that attitude. And the same day I read that in the paper I'm at the stoplight in Whitefish heading home and heaven forbid I didn't move the second the light turned green and this guy behind me is blasting his horn. It's like, that never used to happen here. How do you maintain an attitude that people move here for when you got people moving here from all over the world?"

The problem with the newcomers, according to the owner of a guest ranch that formerly was a working cattle operation, is "a lack of respect for the values that made them move here in the first place. They like the friendly people and the first thing they do is put up no trespassing signs. They like the friendly wide open spaces and the first thing they do is build fences. They like the neighborliness, then they get lawyers involved in access lawsuits. They brought their values with them from the pressure cooker from which they got their money and ability to escape. But they don't value what they came here for."

5. Double standard in zoning is frustrating to some

A number of respondents cited frustration with what they describe as a double standard in zoning. While small, local businesses cannot afford to comply with even the simplest zoning rules, they believe, wealthy out of state developers

can afford the lengthy appeals required to get essentially any variance they want. “It seems like every time they have zoning, the rich people flourish and the people who don't have a lot of money struggle, because we don't have the time or the money to fight it. Or get the thing done,” said the owner of a business services firm.

The extent to which this is in fact the case is beyond the scope of this report. However, advocating “fair” zoning may present an opportunity to reach otherwise resistant individuals.

6. There is a leadership vacuum in the Flathead

More than half of these participants, across all groups, reported that *no* leaders in the region reflected their outlook on how growth should be managed. They very often expressed pessimism about the quality of individuals willing to run for public office. They also believe that most who are willing tend to have an extreme position on some topic.

Still, nearly half were able to cite some leaders they believe represent their views somewhat, though even this was typically qualified agreement. The most frequently cited leaders include:

- ❖ Citizens for a Better Flathead (CBF)
- ❖ Montanans for Multiple Use
- ❖ Chris Kukulski, Kalispell City Manager

- ❖ Whitefish and Kalispell Chambers of Commerce

CBF and Dale Williams were the two most frequently named as groups respondents specifically *disagree* with. At the time of this study, both were lightning rods for opinion in the valley.

Other clear findings regarding community leadership include:

- ❖ Amenity Migrants were somewhat more likely to favor Citizens for a Better Flathead.
- ❖ Not a single Native Montanan or Return Montanan was able or willing to name leaders with whom they agree on planning issues.

7. Native Montanans place value the opinions of other Montanans

Very often in this survey, Native Montanans and Native Flatheaders discounted the opinions of individuals not born and raised in Montana. This suggests that advocacy organizations may find advantage in using a “native” as their public voice. “People are evaluated on the basis of whether or not they're natives. My belief is that whether or not you're a native Montanan grants you any superiority... We're a sixth generation Montana family and that gets us in the door better than any qualifications we might have,” explained a Kalispell business services firm owner and native Montanan.

E. Attitudes toward the conservation movement

1. Generally speaking, this group does not agree with environmentalists

On balance, more members of this group do not sympathize with the conservation movement than do. Nearly half consider themselves opposed. "I am not supportive of environmental radicals. I consider that a godless religion," said the owner of a manufacturing facility.

"I think [environmentalists] need to be done away with. I think most of them are not the people who have been around here for a long time. The majority of them, from my experience, are newcomers, that want to see it, this place left just like they found it," explained a visitors services owner, from Kalispell.

"In my opinion some of the groups go way overboard. They get way too radical. They get to worshipping the earth instead of looking at things objectively. I have a real problem with that. That's basically where I'm at," said a visitor services operations manager.

An extreme perspective was expressed by a business services owner in Whitefish, who said:

"It's out of hand. The conservationists (sic) have moved very hard to cut off snowmobile trails, access to public lands, to have private property condemned and/or annexed. We've got more fires here than ever. A tree has a lifespan and it needs to be harvested. Let the guys in the woods manage the woods. There's a few bad apples out there. But generally the loggers are a good group of guys that know how to take care of a forest."

Only about one quarter do support the environmental movement. "I think it's getting a bad rap from people who don't understand the issues. I think that good work is being done and I think that particularly people who are unemployed loggers and forest products industries workers are mad at the people in the conservation movement because of policies that have nothing to do with the conservation movement. They have to do with the fact that Plum Creek primarily has bought up all the land it can possibly buy up and put the small independently owned mills and the private loggers out of business. If you're not working for Plum Creek, you're not working in the woods. It's the same issue. But the conservationists and the environmentalists are a real easy mark," said a local retail owner from Kalispell.

The remainder tended to say there should be a balance between the two opposing forces. "Two such enormous opposing views, they both go in different directions and nothing much gets accomplished. The Sierra Club would like to ban people from our natural resources, but at the same time if you believe everything should be done for the almighty dollar, that's wrong too," said a Kalispell real estate firm owner.

"When I see my [customer] having to [stop coming in] because they lost their job, then I become less of a conservationist. I think the movement has gotten a little bit too radical. If there's a timber sale they just automatically file. And they automatically fight it whether there's rhyme or reason to it or not. There's

enough snags, loopholes, things to hang your hat on to delay those things,” said the owner of a local service firm.

Which business sector respondents represent did not turn out to be particularly predictive of how they feel about the environmental movement. Clear majorities of participants from the Business Services and Services sector expressed opposition to the environmental movement. However, all other sectors were fairly mixed.² Even Visitors Services, which might reasonably be supposed to support conservation efforts, was evenly divided.

In this study, it turned out that how respondents came to live in Montana was more predictive of how an individual feels about the environmental movement than what industry they represent. On the whole, Native Montanans, Native Flatheaders, and Return Montanans tended to more likely oppose environmentalism. This was reinforced by many comments made by these natives themselves, accusing new arrivals of being “green.”

2. The valley tends to be highly polarized on the specific issues

Unlike responses to planning, change, and Glacier National Park, very few areas of agreement emerged with respect to environmental conservation. On the whole, participants either support all current environmental efforts (wolf and grizzly recovery, forest management, etc.) or *none* of them. This suggests a very

² A judgment *could* be made about what types of business leaders support or do not support environmentalism. For example, in the category of Visitor Services, fishing outfitters might tend to support conservation but hotel operators might tend not to. More interviews focused on this question would be required to validate this.

challenging environment for environmental advocacy groups in the Flathead region.

A majority of respondents tend to consider the conservation debate in the Flathead dominated by extremes on both sides. A small handful of respondents who can only be described as actually *belonging* to these extremes do not believe there is polarization – instead they describe the other side as unreasonable. “I think it's two extremes,” said a general contractor from Kalispell. “It's one that wants to lock everything up and make the whole valley a National Park and the other end that wants to clear-cut Glacier National Park. I don't see a lot of in-between ground and I think it's the in-between ground we need to hit.”

On conservation issues there is a notable lack of agreement on the most basic facts. “I'm a very positive person and when I hear negative things like that, like ‘things are getting worse,’ I'm real suspicious. Then why the hell are they coming back? Obviously they came for some reason. And there's way more people coming, by an obscene amount.” said a business services firm owner, from Kalispell.

“The way the park and the national forests are being managed may sound good to somebody who doesn't know the timber industry around here or may sound good to somebody who doesn't know the weather patterns around here. It has made the forest more dangerous and increased fire damage,” said a Kalispell retail owner.

There exists a clear fog of uncertainty in the valley, (though it is beyond the scope of this report to assert from where). Consensus will remain elusive so long as many residents variously believe that, for example, roads harm/ do not harm wildlife, that some logging does/ does not improve forest health, or that conservation easements are/ are not a U.N. plot to seize American land.

3. Roads, timber, and wolves inspire frustration

Road closures, timber harvest levels, and to a lesser extent wolf recovery efforts have angered many respondents to a level that is difficult to overstate. Those opposed to conservation expressed emotions ranging from mild frustration to raised-voice outrage at the current handling of these three issues.

The vein of frustration associated with these issues seemed strongest when they described their belief that forces from outside the valley, usually federal agencies, are imposing these policies upon them. They feel the policies are arbitrary, not supported by data or common sense.

Road closures

Road closure frustration took two distinct forms: Those frustrated at the idea and those frustrated at the actuality. Many who expressed outrage over road closures were not able to identify actual areas where they once had access and no longer do. Others could identify specifically places they had once recreated that now are closed. "You cannot go from the North Fork over to Highway 93 any more... There's entry points, but you cannot go through where

when I first moved here you could go through numerous places,” said the owner of a construction supply retail firm in Kalispell.

These participants generally do *not* believe road closures do anything to protect wildlife. Again they characterize them as arbitrary and indefensible.

Timber harvest

Collapse of the timber economy, increased fire danger, and forest health dominated arguments in favor of increased timber harvest. Respondents strongly voiced frustration at the cultural changes in the valley that have accompanied the decline of the timber industry. Very few of these respondents attributed this to any factor other than out-of-state environmentalists shutting down the forest.

Wolves

Those most frustrated with wolf reintroduction were in most cases hunters. They see the presence of wolves as directly contributing to a decline in large game populations. Many see the wolf through an historical perspective. As one owner of a property management firm noted, “Our founding fathers discovered 200 years ago that wolves and civilization are not compatible. It's that simple. That's why they put a bounty on the damn things.”

4. Water quality arguments may convince the resistant

Those respondents who oppose environmental protection tended to share a very common set of beliefs about the movement – notably, opposition to road closures, support for increased logging, and disdain for “extremism.”

"Water quality is the one part of the conservation movement I think needs to be addressed. Without good drinking water, without good quality water, Flathead Lake is not Flathead Lake. It's an algae pond. That's going to have quite an affect on tourists," said the owner of a local retail shop in, Kalispell.

However, a notable number of these participants did identify pollution of the Flathead Valley's aquifer as a real threat. This suggests a strong opportunity to build support for conservation policies if argued on behalf of water quality.

"I see the environmental movement as being a 'shutdown of anything' and not doing anything with natural resources. To me the environmental movement is negatively impacting our area," explained a manager at a fuel systems engineering firm in Kalispell. "But the plus side of EPA regulation has to do with water quality. The one issue they're facing with the mall for instance is how is that going to negatively impact our water quality."

5. Even pro-environmentalists support some sustained timber yield

Support for logging runs deep in the Flathead region. Many who sympathize very strongly with the environmental movement believe there could be more timber harvest without exceeding sustainable level.

6. They do not agree about the influence of environmentalists

Those participants with the most extreme opinions on environmental issues demonstrated little agreement on the actual level of influence the conservation movement has in the valley. Those who most strongly support

environmental organizations tended to characterize the Flathead's conservation community as small, marginal, and sometimes in fear of physical harm. "There isn't much environmentalism. Whatever there is gets opposed," said a Somers Dentist.

As the owner of a masonry supply firm in Kalispell explained, "In this valley, it's just stupid. There's so much division. There isn't a conservation movement. The word environmentalist has been such a catchall word, nobody can talk about it with any sense." Those who strongly oppose the environmental movement tended to characterize it as extraordinarily powerful and destructive of traditional ways of life. "Conservation is fine but it's gone too far – the timber industry has been brought to their knees," said the owner of a property management firm in Kalispell.

7. While polarized, most see groups who are too extreme on both sides

Interestingly, the groups these participants say they "trust or tend to agree with" do not always seem reflective of the polarization described above. Many business leaders tended to identify groups they believe are too extreme on *both* sides.

For example, many participants who express a strong pro-conservation bias singled out groups like the Sierra Club or EarthFirst! as not reflective of their views. They also fairly often qualified their support for local groups suggesting they sometimes "go too far." Similarly, some participants opposed to the

conservation movement cited the John Stokes and militia-type sentiment in the valley as too extreme, in some cases “crazy.”

In addition, many ended their discussion of environmental groups with a plea for “balance” or “compromise.” This may suggest an opportunity to effectively use “calls for balance” in strategic communication.

F. Reactions to statements

The participants were read a series of five statements and asked to respond to each.

1. *"There is good reason to be optimistic about the future of the Flathead"*

Despite their frustrations with how the valley is changing, this group remains optimistic. Virtually all agree with this statement, though they explain their optimism in various ways. The most common reasons for optimism included:

- ❖ Growth will bring more prosperity.
- ❖ I believe we will solve our problems.
- ❖ I believe city planning will improve.
- ❖ We still have all the outdoor opportunities.
- ❖ This will always be a great place to live.
- ❖ I am just an optimistic person by nature.
- ❖ We will open our forests again to multiple uses.
- ❖ There are more sophisticated people coming all the time.

These respondents' reasons for optimism in the majority of cases closely matched their perspectives on growth, planning, and the environment. Those optimists

who believe the area should have stronger, more progressive urban planning tended to think the county will overcome its differences and find solutions. Those frustrated by the current forest management policies believe timber harvests will increase at least somewhat. “It seems like some of this [forest fires] will get things turned around and soon we will be harvesting timber again,” said the owner of a local retail store.

The nearly unanimous optimism might be attributable to the population being studied here, successful entrepreneurs. While this cannot be asserted conclusively, it is likely such a group tends to think positively.

A small minority disagreed, reporting pessimism about the future of the Flathead. Almost invariably, this pessimism stemmed from the population growth and development in the region – and severe doubts the valley will ever be able to manage it.

2. “Natural amenities like wildlife, clean water, and Glacier National Park are very important to the economic health of this region”

All but one believe the natural amenities of the Flathead Valley are the main reason for the economic success and population growth. This highlights a key challenge for progressive advocacy organizations: Everyone agrees that the natural amenities are essential. They do not at all agree on what kinds of policy decisions will best protect these amenities.

For example, those opposed to environmentalism tend to believe the reduced timber harvest on public lands has created a situation in which

catastrophic fire is more likely and disease has crept in. They frequently assert that this, as well as reduced ORV access to forest areas, threatens the tourist economy created by the public lands.

3. *"The Flathead's economic health is being harmed by environmental policies"*

There is substantial agreement that environmental policies have harmed the timber industry, but, on the whole, most respondents do not believe the Flathead's *overall* economic health has been harmed by environmental policies. A Kalispell physician summed this up, noting "environmental polices harm portions of the economy, but the overall economy, and the long term economic outlook for the area would be enhanced through proper environmental controls."

Even those participants who express strong frustration or anger about the collapse of timber often expressed the belief that this does not mean the policies have had a net negative affect on development in the region. On the other hand, many participants who support conservation frequently acknowledged harm to the timber sector.

Frequently, participants struggled to answer, though for different reasons. Some, frustrated by the decline in the timber industry, paused before acknowledging it has not affected the economy overall. Others, in favor of conservation, also sometimes paused, reluctant to acknowledge the losses experienced by timber workers.

However, there were exceptions on both sides of the spectrum. Some believe environmental policies have created a substantial and persistent drag on development and commercial activity of all kinds. Others attribute the decline in logging to factors other than the environment.

4. "The tone of public debate in the valley is harsh. This harshness is bad for the business climate"

More than half of these participants believe the tone of public debate in the Flathead Valley is harsh. However, only about a quarter of these respondents believe this harshness has any affect on business. "The political values up here are just strange," said a Kalsipell engineer. "There's people up here so far left side and so far right side. My first county commissioner meeting up here there was almost a fight between the mayor and the city attorney. It's just a lot of left wing and a lot of right wing and it's counterproductive in the community because you really don't know who to believe and who to trust."

Characterizations of this harsh tone vary. Most attribute it to entrenched parties with "extreme" viewpoints on both sides of seemingly every debate. Others – usually those with strong opinions themselves – point to one side or the other as responsible for the tenor of the valley's debate.

- ❖ The strongest supporters of the environmental movement tend to blame the radio host John Stokes of KGEZ for inciting the extreme right-wing sentiment.

- ❖ Those most strongly opposed to environmental protection blame what they characterize as the inflexibility of “extreme environmentalists.”

In general, however, they do not believe the debate has all that substantial of an effect on business. Many describe the business community as too busy to concern itself with the polarization. Tellingly, many of these participants supported this by explaining it certainly has no affect on their business.

However, a sizeable minority does believe the harshness has a negative affect on the business community. They divide into two groups:

- ❖ Those who believe the “weird” or “redneck” attitudes in the valley create bad publicity that scares off potential developers. They sometimes point to the Montana Freeman or Project Seven as examples of this kind of publicity.
- ❖ Those who blame progressive environmental groups for unfairly interfering with development of all kinds. They very often cited the proposed Glacier Mall as an example of this.

5. *“The business community, conservationists, and public land managers such as Glacier National Park should develop closer partnerships to maintain natural, economic, and community values.”*

This statement did not elicit particularly notable results. About half of the participants surveyed believe these three communities – conservationists, public land managers, and the business community – should in fact work more closely together.

However, many of these responses were fairly non-committal. Many seem to believe increased partnerships are never really a *bad* thing. As a result, this section probably conveys a distorted sense of these respondents’ attitudes toward the current state of partnership in the valley.

Still, some notable findings did emerge:

- ❖ A sizeable minority disputed the premise of the statement, saying these three communities work as well together as they reasonably could.
- ❖ Many respondents in the Local Retail and Visitors Services sectors noted that the park has worked much more effectively with the local business community recently, notably during the Going to the Sun Highway decision-making process.
- ❖ A few argued that there is no reason for the National Park Service to consider the needs of the local community, that they should manage Glacier with the best interests of the park in mind.

F. Respondents' attitudes toward the purpose of natural country

The debate between environmentalists and extractive constituencies is often framed in terms of “preservation” versus “economic utilization.” In the exaggerated stereotypes of each broad group, one side wants to prevent all human activity in all natural areas and the other side wants to rapaciously devour all available resources. At best, only the most extreme individuals fit these descriptions. Most people – and certainly nearly all of the respondents for this study – maintain more nuanced, or at least more moderate, beliefs.

Over the course of these interviews, respondents gave wide-ranging opinions about how the public lands adjacent to the Flathead Valley should be managed by public agencies. Some expressed support for preservation and conservation activities and others said they would prefer policies that favored active use, whether recreational or industrial. Individuals' conception of the “purpose” of natural areas underlies, to a large degree, what public lands policies they would support (whether they are aware of this base of belief or not). It is difficult in some cases to describe the core values of these respondents, amid their explanations of the “rational” reasons for why they support various policies.

However, in some cases comments made by particularly candid respondents' comments came very close to revealing the core values supporting their perspectives. An understanding of these core values can inform the

development of effective environmental advocacy campaigns better than appeals to rational argument. Core values motivate support for public policy at a deeper level than “arguments.”

Large numbers of respondents advocated various specific policies, or expressed opposition to certain groups. However, of 80 respondents, only 21 offered assertions, directly or by implication, characterizing the *purpose* of natural lands. Determining when a statement *implied* a sense of purpose for nearby wild land was sometimes difficult. In general, respondents were considered to have characterized the *purpose* of public lands where they expressed one of the following formulations:

- ❖ the land is there *for* this X reason
- ❖ the land is *not* there for this X reason
- ❖ X should be done on the land or Y (an assumed good or value)
will no longer be viable

Of the respondents who articulated one of these, the greatest majority believe that the lands exist for the benefit, either economic or recreational, of the human inhabitants of the region. Only three of these 21 did not characterize wild lands as principally for the benefit of people. The overall attitudes can be grouped into roughly four categories:

- ❖ “Economic Anthropocentrism” – 12 respondents
- ❖ “Recreational Anthropocentrism” – 9 respondents
- ❖ “Pristine Inherent Value” – 1 respondent
- ❖ “Antagonism” – 2 respondents

(These do not add to 21 respondents because three people generally characterized wild lands as principally for *both* recreational and economic benefit. Rather than create a separate grouping, they are counted once in each.)

Unfortunately, the number of respondents who made comments clearly characterizing the purpose of wild country was not sufficient in number to reliably draw conclusions within groups. With a larger study, patterns might have emerged with respect to how long these people have lived in the valley, their overall attitude toward the environment, or their business type.

1. “*Economic Anthropocentrism*”

Twelve respondents out of this subgroup of 21 argued that the nearby wild lands exist primarily for the economic enrichment of people. In the context of fostering economic growth in the valley, the owner of a local retail enterprise said, “In the long run, I truly believe that it is worth more undeveloped than developed.”

- ❖ “Without good drinking water, without good quality water, Flathead Lake is not Flathead Lake. It’s an algae pond. That’s going to have quite an affect on tourists,” owner, garden supply store, Kalispell
- ❖ “You’ve got have a balance between hunters and loggers and conservationists. If you don’t, you won’t have anything left to hunt or log,” manager, western wear store, Kalispell.
- ❖ “I’m a multiple use person. Let’s use the forests for what it’s used for and not let it choke itself and die and burn up,” said a business services owner.

These 12 individuals could potentially be divided into two additional groups, those who favor conservation because the recreation-based economy in the region depends on a healthy natural endowment for its strength and those who favor extraction because they believe the region’s economy and employment depend on the availability of resources. While both see the land as principally an economic resource, one group favors its preservation and the other its exploitation. There could certainly be some gray area here among hunting outfitters or other recreation-based industries involving significant impact.

This makes this category somewhat problematic for conservation professionals. Any message advocating preservation as a way to support recreation-based businesses would, by implication, advocate a policy that could

be interpreted as undercutting the extraction-based business among these respondents.

The divide between these two ways of seeing the land as principally an economic resource is at the heart of the “golden goose” question that the NPCA sought to understand better by commissioning this study.

2. “Recreational Anthropocentrism”

Nine respondents out of the 21 described the wild lands around the Flathead as existing primarily for the recreational benefit of people.³ This group was, on balance, sympathetic to conservation advocacy goals and agenda. However, a few asserted that some wild lands exist principally for the benefit of people. Examples of this include:

- ❖ “My personal belief is that Glacier National Park is a people’s park. It’s not a naturalists’ park. It was developed for the common person... Prior to the Depression the plans were in place to create an experience for the common man to bring his automobile, which was fairly new to America, to bring families to the park in automobiles and let them experience the opportunity of driving through the park in their individual, private automobile e with their family. I still feel that is the

³ While 47 respondents report participating in and valuing highly recreational activity, only these nine offered a conclusive statement attributing human enjoyment as the *purpose* public lands.

primary mission that should be conveyed by Glacier Park,”
construction engineer, Kalispell.

- ❖ “Have you been up to Banff National Park? The Canadians run their parks for people. They have a residential development right in the park. It’s beautiful,” owner, manufacturing facility, Kalispell.
- ❖ “Human activities are just as important as wolves and grizzly bears,” manager, bank, Kalispell.

These statements reflect what many in the valley consider the “traditional” values and recreational habits of the region. There are too few people in this group to draw any particular conclusions about whether these people’s recreationally anthropocentric perspective is any way related to how they came to the Flathead or their overall environmental perspective. However, its clear that some highly value activities, such as motorized travel to huckleberry picking areas or hunting, that are regarded as traditional local pastimes.

Given this, any message intending to persuade citizens to support conservation based on preservation of recreational opportunities will have to be carefully formulated. Many respondents perceive conservation policies as actually *restricting* their recreational access. This is particularly true of

respondents who engage in motorized-recreation. Road closures – while a routine part of wildlife security policies--- have been particularly difficult for many respondents to accept.

3. *"Pristine Inherent Value"*

Only one respondent of the 21 believes the land does not exist primarily for some form of human benefit. This respondent, a prominent health care administrator noted:

- ❖ "The environmental movement is good. In every way and all the things they try to do. Buy up land, preserve things, get more money for the park. Keep things pristine as they should be. I don't care how radical they are either."

Other participants in this survey would probably agree if asked. However, the fact that only one explicitly said as much suggests efforts to promote environmental policies should not emphasize the pristine character of preserved land. While appeals to keeping land in its natural state might resonate well in other regions or in the memberships of existing environmental organizations, it does not appear to be a broadly compelling concept to these respondents.

One respondent, an architect, explicitly noted he believes this difference in values is what distinguishes environmentalists from himself. He noted:

- ❖ “I believe it’s differing values. It’s a value which believes there is true advantage to leaving much land utterly untouched by humans. I believe that’s wrong. There is the divide.”

4. “Antagonistic”

While not explicitly an effort to characterize the purpose of the wild lands nearby the Flathead Valley, two respondents’ comments were characterized by an overall tone of antagonism toward the natural environment. These comments were of sufficient strength to merit some description, though the implications of these comments are probably of minimal actionable use.

One individual, a construction supply retailer, believes conservation efforts have increased the level of danger faced by his family, noting:

- ❖ “I think they’ve done a good job of getting this grizzly bear recovery going—and that’s a bad thing... Let’s put it this way. Three weeks ago I had a sow and two cub grizzlies in my backyard three times. Now I won’t let my kids outdoors,”

G. Respondents' attitudes toward "sprawl"

Among the issues touched on during these interviews, "sprawl" was the topic that inspired the strongest opinions and usually the lengthiest responses. Rapid population growth in the Flathead Valley has touched the life of every respondent – and done so in a way overwhelmingly characterized as negative, by respondents of all general background and political inclination. This general consensus that the valley is losing something as its population base grows rapidly should be of interest to environmental advocacy agendas. Unlike many of the other issues discussed in the course of this research, accelerated population growth and development has the potential to unify individuals not otherwise disposed to agree with each other very much.

Defining "loss of character"

As discussed previously, the most common complaint articulated about the growth in the valley addresses the effect it has had on the character of the region. Many believe as the valley's unique character has suffered as its population has grown. However, which aspects of this change they regret varies widely. Developing sub-groupings of respondents based on similarities in attitudes always involves approximation of belief and some generalization. The language used to describe and define the "loss of character" these respondents mourn proved among the most difficult sets of attitudes to develop broad categories for analysis. Broadly, the complaints and frustrations expressed were

all variations on a few themes. In grossly general terms, these complaints can be associated loosely from the top of the list toward the bottom with overall perspectives on conservation issues.

- ❖ “Sprawl is harming our environment”
- ❖ “We’re becoming like the rest of the country”
- ❖ “Growth has brought inconvenience”
- ❖ “Out-of-staters are moving and changing the culture”

Those most disposed to support conservation advocacy groups were most likely to note that sprawl is having an adverse effect on wildlife. Those least favorable to conservation groups were also more likely to argue that the problem with growth is the influx of out-of-state residents who bring their “California” attitude with them.

However, it is much more difficult to find relationships between the attitudes generally in the middle of this list – those mourning the loss of uniqueness or growth-related inconvenience. Attempts to count or quantify these attitudes based on overall attitude toward conservation or public-land use issues were inconclusive. Perhaps more importantly, there were numerous examples of very strong supporters or very strong antagonists of the conservation movement expressing similar beliefs regarding these downsides of growth in the region. For example, a retail store owner adamantly in favor of increased timber harvest and very vocal in her frustration at what she regards as a “greenie” takeover of the U.S. Forest Service, said this:

“That's what I think we should keep is the little country flavor, little diversity, something that's not... You know if you go from one town to another and every mall is the same it makes it uninteresting. And I think that's why our shop does so well. We don't have what everyone else has.”

Another respondent, also a local retail shop owner, used very similar language to describe the problems with growth and the loss of unique character:

“Year by year this town is turning into any-freaking-town anywhere. It's turning into franchise central. . . .If everything's just McKenzie River Pizza and City Brew why come here? It's the uniqueness in these towns that makes Whitefish what it is. It's the small, unique places that make people come back to this place.”

However, this owner was among the strongest proponents of environmental protection interviewed. This suggests that appeals to these centrist perspectives could be broadly appealing – or at least not predictably alienating – to a coalition of individuals not inclined to agree with each other on very many other issues related to growth management.

Many business leaders interviewed made appeals to balance in how they believe growth in the region should be managed. For example, the owner of an athletic club, argued that there are two sides to the issue of growth. He appealed to the need to plan for growth and protect the valley's key characteristics.

However, he believes these efforts can be misguided:

"I've been on both sides of that. I'm really, really in favor when it comes to maintaining the quality of life here, water quality, air quality. Haphazard growth where you've got one house for every fifteen acres. I'd rather see really high density development, where the houses are jammed right next to each other. On the other hand, when they tell you

how much parking to put out, and how many trees to put around your property, when they tell you how to use your own property, that pisses me off."

Unfortunately, this quote also highlights a theme that emerges repeatedly throughout the discussions of growth in the valley. This respondent is in favor of *other* people living in high density housing but bristles when he is told what he can do with his own property.

This particular contradiction, as noted previously, would likely prove problematic to any effort to develop an advocacy message that appeals to these respondents' frustrations with growth in their valley. Essentially, everybody agrees there is a problem with growth, but few agree with exactly how to handle it. Nevertheless, the commonality of belief that the Flathead Valley is losing something as population and commercial enterprise continue to expand is a clear finding of this report and likely a fertile topic for the development of an effective and broadly-based advocacy campaign.

Fortunately, appeals to balance were also repeatedly stated. A real estate professional in Kalispell, also suspect of conservation groups, argued that the extremes are the problem:

"One of our biggest problems is there's a group that wants to stop anything and one group that wants to restraints, no restrictions at all. . . . What we need to do is compensate and allow each side some part of the decision so what we end up creating is something we all are proud about.

In favor of growth and change, with controls

Other attitudes toward growth management were uncovered however. In general, those responses were less critical of growth. A small number of respondents seemed resigned to growth, even to the loss of regional character, as an inevitable outcome of population increases and the passage of time. A few others believe the growth has been good for the valley. However, even many of those who expressed generally pro-growth attitudes often asserted the need for more effective planning:

- ❖ “I think it's always good to grow some, but you have to control that too. If you get too big, especially in an area like this, that would ruin the atmosphere”
- ❖ “Can't stop it. You should certainly try to learn from the lessons others have had about urban sprawl. There's a right and wrong way to proceed.”
- ❖ “Well, there's definitely more development. There's a lot less open space, but what are you going to do. I mean that's happening everywhere. We got to have development. We got people breeding. People are going to breed. People are going to have kids. The population is just getting bigger, what are you going to do? You've got to have development. You can't have them all slammed into a little city”

Some others believe that the growth in valley has been good for the region. Generally, these respondents were strongly pro-business and not in favor of most of the conservation advocacy community's work. This was not true in all cases, however, two respondents who expressed broadly pro-conservation attitudes also believe the growth in the region has been healthy. "I wouldn't have moved back here if it hadn't grown," said one Return Montanan. "There's more culture and services now. It wasn't particularly livable, in my opinion before."

Opposed to regulation of private property

In developing the discussion guide for this research project, NPCA employees speculated that a fair number of respondents would be encountered who are openly hostile to growth controls and zoning. To be sure, some of this attitude was uncovered. However, it was, on the whole, not expressed in radical terms. For example, a manager of a consumer publication in Kalispell, generally unsympathetic to environmental advocacy causes, said the following, regarding planning:

"That's a difficult question. I wouldn't begrudge anyone trying to make a go of something [of starting a business], but I do think the growth is highly disorganized. I just wish it were more planned."

A few others, however, did express sentiment that was fairly opposed to growth management or regulation of any kind. For example, a manager of a financial planning firm went so far as to express sympathy for the developer of the proposed Glacier Mall:

"As far as the growth goes, every city needs to have planning. I just think they plan more than they accomplish, like this poor fellow that's trying to build the shopping center. They've been jerking him around 2-3 years. And we also in our family had a little experience with, wanting to do a development, a housing development and it took 2-3 years."

On the whole, however, these respondents are exceptions. Most accept that some level of planning and growth management is important to the region.

Unconcerned with the growth

Some are generally unconcerned with the level of growth in the valley. They either do not see the growth as a problem, see it as benefiting the region, or tend to approach the growth with a sense of resignation to the inevitable.

"I'd say the only thing that you see that's different is there's more people. I don't think Glacier Park has become less of a beautiful place, I don't think Big Mountain has. I don't think any of the golf courses have. There's still an abundance of trails to track, there's still rivers to run," said an operations manager at a Kalispell manufacturing facility.

"My feeling is the area will never become a Seattle or Los Angeles," said a health care service manager.

"The average visitor, which was me seven years ago. I was here three times in one year, paid no attention to it. I paid no attention to it because I wanted to see things. I wanted to see the reservoir and the dam. I wanted to see

Glacier National Park. I wanted to head up to Banff. I was vacationing,” said a business services firm owner.

“It depends on what you want. As far as I'm concerned, I enjoy economic growth because it helps me in business. On the other hand, I'd like it to stay small and quaint, but I know that's not going to happen. It will grow. It is growing,” said the manager of a local retail firm in Columbia Falls.

“Well, of course we'd all like to be unique, but I don't know if that can happen. Business is business and you can't keep things out. It's just going to happen whether we like it or not,” explained the manager of a Kalispell financial services firm.

A local services firm owner tended to downplay the threat posed by the growth comparing it to other areas favorably, where growth has progressed even further. “I don't know. If people haven't been here before, do they see that? If you come from the big city, we're still not big. That's pretty relative.”

H. Implications/Recommendations

The primary goal of this research was to discover to what extent the business community in Flathead County, Montana, associate the environmental amenities of their area with its recent robust economic and population growth—and, if so, do they regard protecting these environmental characteristics as key to continued economic success. On balance, these findings are mixed. Some members of the community clearly associate the economic success of the region with its environmental quality of life. Others do not particularly see this association or believe the Flathead will always be comparatively cleaner. While the overall attitudes expressed by these respondents turned out to be somewhat mixed, it is clear that most associate the growth in the region with their continued economic success. (This finding should be interpreted cautiously, as there is almost certainly some self-selection bias inherent in the study, favoring the participation of successful business leaders and owners.)

Given this relationship between growth and economic vitality in the region, it seems likely that some kind of persuasive argument on behalf of sensible protection of the valley's amenities could be developed. Such an argument would have to be carefully formulated to avoid either the appearance of "stealth environmentalism" (which would provoke a negative response from conservative members of the community) or the appearance of "green washing"

(which could prompt a negative response from more conservation-minded members of the community).

Fortunately a number of key areas of common belief emerged from this research, around which a moderate, broadly appealing campaign could potentially be developed. The main points among these include:

- ❖ These respondents value life in the Flathead. Messages built around the premise of preserving community and recreational opportunities could resonate well.
- ❖ Concerns about water quality cut across all sectors and attitudes toward other environmental issues. Credibly argued proposals to protect the aquifer and lake may draw broader support.
- ❖ A lack of faith in the valley's current leadership often seems related to perceived "extreme positions." Appeals emphasizing moderate, centrist leadership might successfully speak to this frustration.
- ❖ Business leaders of all attitudes toward planning and environmentalism lament the loss of farmland. Calls to preserve the region's agricultural heritage should resonate well with many.

Hostility to Californian attitudes

A number of respondents, most of them native Montanans or natives to the Flathead region, voiced concerns about the insidious affect of outsiders on the culture in the Flathead. Often these comments were linked to efforts made

on part of activist groups, most often Citizens for a Better Flathead, to affect the political response to ongoing commercial development pressures in the region. Some long-time residents see progressive efforts to limit sprawl and national chain commercial development as actually *taking away* the rural character, rather than preserving it. As one typical business owner noted:

“I think the person who comes here from California to get away from that lifestyle, but ends up dragging it with them, you know, wanting to change our place when they get here, that person is severely outnumbered. The problem is they bring their friends and then they form little groups like Citizens for a Better Flathead.”

This, among all the attitudes expressed by those resistant to growth management or conservation, is among the most common and among those most contradictory. Other findings in this research have shown that those who have lived elsewhere in the United States, whether raised in Montana or not, are the most likely to perceive the urban sprawl as a problem in need of addressing by growth management. Many respondents mourn the loss of established, local businesses to competition by larger, multi-state chains stores. Many respondents mourn the loss of open, pastoral farmland when it is replaced by subdivisions. But only those respondents who have spent time elsewhere are most likely to favor the effort to save these characteristics through the application of laws intended to direct development.

While at once mourning the very economic changes that make the Flathead look much more like other parts of the country, native Montanans and native Flatheaders freely dismiss the efforts of those from elsewhere to actually

restrain these changes. This is a grave contradiction for those in favor of a smarter approach to city planning in the region. To address it one must further attempt to understand it. I see two potential explanations, which could explain this contradiction.

First, the question may come down to a lack of legitimacy. The people most interested in restraining the growth of the commercial and residential land uses on the periphery of the Flathead's towns, as noted, are most often the same people who have lived in other areas of the country. Having seen what can happen to an area facing unchecked growth, they seem to exhibit a greater willingness to consider regulation of this growth. The Flathead region, like many other places, is populated by people with a strong sense of regional pride and a clear sense of how they culturally differ from others. However, those who have never lived elsewhere lack firsthand experience with runaway growth. In short, they are people who know who they are, know what they wish their valley would continue to look like, but have no tools of their own to grasp the change and do something about it. However, the mere lack of their own tools does not, by itself, imply a willingness to borrow or accept the tools brought by others.

This explanation posits a competition between the native Flatheader and Montanan's desire to resist the faceless, out-of-state economic forces that are rapidly reshaping their valley and their unwillingness to accept as "legitimate" the policies of people from outside the region, whose difference to them is keenly felt. Many, given the choice, would prefer the sprawl than would accept or adapt

to the ideas offered by organizations such as Citizens for a Better Flathead, whose style, sophistication, and progressive outlook are distinctly not homegrown in the Flathead region.

A principal tragedy of this particular competition is the fact that not all “outsiders” are regarded as such, and not all “locals” are hostile to imported ideas or methods. For example, the radio talk show host John Stokes is as clear an example of an opportunistic outsider that could be found in the region. A charlatan and demagogue, Stokes came to the region in the 1990s, fleeing a bankrupt real estate development in Washington. However, his rhetoric and personal style or “culture” are intentionally geared to appeal to the lowest-common-denominator nativist sensibilities of the listeners in the Flathead.

A second explanation for the apparent contradiction is the competition between core values internal to the individuals. The Westerner citizen’s fascination with freedom and individualism is a well-documented cultural characteristic. A disdain for government interference in their lives is a particularly common manifestation of this core value, and one that was repeatedly blamed during this research for the failure of the city-county master plan in Flathead County.

In this explanation, there are two ways in which the Flathead is becoming like California, both objectionable to long time residents. First, the area is becoming increasingly built over with commercial and residential sprawl. Second, more and more people from other parts of the country are coming to the

area and changing the local culture in a variety of ways, among them the a greater tolerance for and advocacy for a greater role for government in their lives. The local, the native, is faced with a choice: On one hand, they can live in an area that increasingly *looks* like California. On the other hand, they can live in an area where their individual lives are more directly affected by their local government. Given this choice, this competition between core values, it is not that surprising that many choose to diagnose the problem as Californians.

Neither of these explanations particularly well accounts for the cognitive dissonance so abjectly apparent in some of these individuals' quotes. For example, this comment, made by a long-time Flathead resident and native:

But the first thing they do is they come with a lot of money and they get on a lot of boards and stuff and they want to change everything and make it like it is where they came from. And if they liked it so much, why didn't they stay there? There's ways we did things here, right or wrong, that was part of the flavor of the Flathead Valley. And a lot of these people from bigger cities, especially like from California, they move here and they immediately want to start changing stuff and making it the way it was in California.

This quote was made in response to direct questions about sprawl and commercial development in the region. In critiquing the policies advocated by individuals attempting to prevent the Flathead from looking like California, he explicitly accuses them of trying to *make the region more like California*. Note that his language expresses things as “the way we did things, right or wrong” and “making it the way it was” do not necessarily speak directly to the actual results on the ground, but the procedures used to achieve these results. In the previous

quote it is the “lifestyle” that outsiders want to bring along with them that the respondent finds objectionable. In addressing the problems with sprawl, in the same breath that the mourn the loss of rural character, they mourn the loss of a “way of doing things.”

While on the surface disheartening, this could pose an opportunity for local advocates to develop sprawl control mechanisms that, in some way, reflect and respect the traditional way of ordering their political and economic lives that the long time residents fear they are losing. Some possibilities present themselves readily. First, the bulk of the residential and particularly commercial development that progressives in the valley find objectionable is perpetrated on the region by well-financed out-of-state interests. There seems an obvious opportunity to target a support for zoning campaign that explicitly demonizes these larger forces. At minimum, this would emphasize the threat to the development poses to the competing values of “locals.” Second, any advocacy campaign that seeks to control or limit the adverse impact of economic development should make a strong effort to exhibit that their way of “doing business” is suited to the Flathead’s traditional way of doing business.

Water Quality

The attitudes of native Flathead residents and Montanans toward the ideas and political actions imported by those from other parts of the country showed an unnerving level of conflict and dissonance. The issue of water quality

emerged in this study as an area of surprisingly strong agreement. As discussed in the summary of main findings, even many respondents otherwise highly disposed to oppose the environmental movement voiced at times strong concern about water quality issues in the Flathead. "I see the environmental movement as being a 'shutdown of anything' and not doing anything with natural resources. To me the environmental movement is negatively impacting our area," explained a manager at a fuel systems engineering firm in Kalispell. "But the plus side of EPA regulation has to do with water quality. The one issue they're facing with the mall for instance is how is that going to negatively impact our water quality."

Another respondent provided an even starker example, at one point decrying the proposed expansion of the Waterton Lakes Peace Park, saying, "The expansion of the so-called Peace Park? Glacier and Waterton? That scares me. Those are international agreements that are now having a say so over my United States lands." The same respondent earlier had pointed out that:

You have to have healthy water systems, for fish to spawn, etc. etc. If you allow that to denigrate and you know and the silt flow etc. I think if Glacier as a source for clean water, but it comes down and sits in his gigantic beautiful natural lake. If that is abused or the waters coming out of Glacier or the Swan valley here are abused and what feeds this lake and the lake itself is abused, the healthy quality of life here is going to go away completely, the birds the wildlife, you name it.

There is a clear contradiction inherent in the statements of these individuals, who, on one hand, expressing frustration or outright resentment toward the environmental movement, while, on the other, hand declaring the importance of

preserving water quality. Two possible explanations for this contradiction seem plausible.

First, the quality of the water in the Flathead aquifer has a universal effect on the lives of these respondents, all of whom, presumably, at least drink it, if not also shower and groom with it. Thus, efforts to protect the quality of the water supply will have a relevance to these respondents' lives that wolf or lynx recovery might not. It is also a fairly common effect, unlike other environmental policies, in that nobody is *benefited* by degraded water quality, per se. Unlike this, some see the presence of increased numbers of wolves as an undesirable, even dangerous outcome. This is not to assert, however, that water quality protections are universally supported. Some individuals opposed to the environmental movement were equally dismissive of efforts to protect the aquifer.

A second possible explanation is that, in the tug of war between competing, deeply felt values, water quality creates less conflict than do the others. In repeated opinion polls, most Americans regard themselves as favoring environmental protections. However when support for specific policies is measured, other priorities—economic growth or personal freedom—tend to weigh as heavily if not heavier. However, in general, the measures required to protect water quality—sprawl control, sewage extensions—may be perceived as somewhat less intrusive or restrictive than other measures.

Whichever explanation is more accurate, it is clear that an opportunity exists here to develop broader support for various measures to determine the

outcome fate of development on the valley floor. To some extent, this suggestion has already been successfully implemented in the citizen-driven campaign to prevent the location of the proposed Glacier Mall – which would be the largest shopping complex in Montana – in Evergreen. In this area, a commercial strip between Kalispell and Columbia Falls, the aquifer is particularly close the surface level. Activists opposed to the mall succeeded in delaying the construction and eventually forcing the developer to relocate his proposed site to higher ground. A main theme of their message, was protection of water quality.

I. Personal statement

I began this research intending to find out about a community of interest's attitudes toward conservation and the language they used in discussing it. The results presented in this document reflect this main goal and the scope of work agreed upon by myself, Steve Thompson, and Tony Jewett of the National Parks Conservation Association. To the extent that I executed that scope of work to their satisfaction (at least that's what they told me) I believe this study was a success. However, the results presented here leave out quite a bit of the personal experience.

First and foremost, these results do not mention what a pleasant, rewarding experience it was to spend a few months in the NPCA's Whitefish office. Working with Steve and Kootenai was always a pleasure. Steve is a lesson in professionalism and good humor – and a pleasure to backpack with. Dawn Oehlerich across the hall always provided pleasant end of the day conversation.

Second, the experience of conducting a study of this kind in a community as blessed and colorful as the Flathead is difficult to describe. The best I've got is "hyper-tourism." A Missoulian conducting an academic study, asking formal questions with the appropriate emotional distance, cannot be said to have "moved to" the Flathead. Nevertheless, there was an intimacy involved in examining a community so closely that exceed a mere "visit." I spent hours driving around the county, getting to know its back roads, in search of distant

home-based or rural business (special thanks to maps.yahoo.com). I spoke with the 80 respondents, plus numerous employees, family members who happened by, even a customer or two. On the whole this was a deeply rewarding experience in which I felt I had the opportunity to engage in a crash course in Flathead culture.

Most importantly, my interests as a graduate student were uniquely addressed by this study. I am as fascinated by the people of the intermountain West as I am in support of our maintaining a sustainable relationship with its public lands. Too often in the work of advocating on behalf of “wildness” we accept the tired canard that environmental protection and the interest’s of humans are in some way opposed. They are not. In the long run, they are one.

This study and the ongoing work with the National Parks Conservation Association served in a small way this worthy goal: The cultivation of an understanding among the “community of interest” that our fate and the fate of land we live on are bound together.

I believe a person should first seek to understand others, and then second seek to have themselves understood. This is equally true of movements and organizations. Too environmental movement, I submit, might be spending too much time trying to persuade others to understand their perspective, and neglecting their obligation to understand. This study – indeed the whole worldview Steve Thompson and Tony Jewett bring to their “Healthy Parks,

Healthy Communities Project” – represents a worthy attempt to focus on the need to understand.

APPENDIX A: DISCUSSION GUIDE

ID _____ / H.C. _____

National Parks Conservation Association

Pilot Qualitative Study with Business Leaders on Conservation/Planning Issues

April 2002

Respondent Name	Business
Title	Phone
Start time End time	Date
Industry	Region
Address	Log

Good Morning/Afternoon _____ (NAME), this is Jason Lathrop calling for our interview on behalf of the National Parks Conservation Association. Thanks again for agreeing to speak with us. This interview should take about 30-45 minutes.

A. Personal Attitudes (5 minutes)

1. How long have you lived in the Flathead? ____ Why did you move here or why do you continue to live here? (PROBE: Is it the region itself? Personal relationships? Employment opportunities?)

2. Personally, what are the best aspects of life in this region?

3. How important to you personally is Glacier National Park. Do you and your family visit the park regularly? (Probe: importance of wildlife, clean water, uncluttered views, mountain hikes, driving Going-to-the-Sun Road?)

B. Business attitudes (5 minutes)

1. How long have you been in your current industry in the Flathead? ____ Why do you conduct business in this area? (PROBE: Business climate, improving/worsening?)

2. What are the good aspects of doing business in the Flathead?

3. What are the major economic challenges to the region?

4. How important is the presence of Glacier National Park and surrounding wild lands, rivers, lakes and wildlife for attracting good workers and customers? How important for growing your business and the regional economy?

C. Attitudes toward change/planning (8 minutes)

1. Has the Flathead region changed since you first came here? ____ How has it changed?

2. How has that change affected you personally?

3. How has the change affected your business? Other businesses in the region?

4. Describe how you want the Flathead region to look in 50 years? How do you expect it will look?

5. What do you think of efforts to plan growth of communities? Do you think there is enough, too much, or not enough emphasis on planning in Flathead County? Why?

6. Do you think land-use planning and development affect park values such as wildlife, scenery and the quality of the visitor experience?

7. What group or community leaders best represent your interest in their approach to dealing with change in the valley? Who do you look to for leadership in the community? If a group, are you a member or somehow affiliated with it?

D. Attitudes toward Glacier Park and conservation (8 minutes)

1. What do you see as the biggest issues facing the park? (Probe: Is funding for the park sufficient to maintain park infrastructure, provide adequate visitor services and protect park resources such as wildlife? Does development outside the park affect park values such as wildlife, water and scenery? Is traffic congestion and parking a current or future concern?)

2. Overall, what do you think of the conservation movement in the Flathead valley? How does it affect your life personally, your business and the region? Which conservation organizations or leaders do you trust the most? The least?

3. I would like to read you a couple statements from a report about visitor attitudes in Montana, and then get your reaction. The survey and report were prepared by the University of Montana Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research.

a) "The top attractions to Montana have remained the same. Mountains/forests, Yellowstone and Glacier National Parks, rivers/lakes, and open space/uncrowded areas continue to be the top attractions to Montana."

b) "A continuing trend is emerging from all travel seasons. When repeat visitors were asked to tell us what has changed, open space and the condition of the natural environment have received the most ratings of a 'worsened' condition.... If the environment is why people come and why people live here, yet it appears to some that it is deteriorating, there is a potential problem down the line."

Do you agree that this is a potential problem? Do you think the problem is real or is it just a perception? Any suggestions on how we in Montana should address this problem or perception?

E. Statement testing (5 minutes)

1. I'm going to read you five statements. After each, I'd ask you to briefly tell me whether you agree or disagree with the statement and why.

Statement	Comments
There is good reason to be optimistic about the future of the Flathead region.	
Natural/amenity values like wildlife, clean water and Glacier National Park are very important to the economic health of this	

region.	
The Flathead's economic health is being harmed due to environmental policies.	
The tone of public discourse in the valley is harsh and counter-productive to a healthy business climate	
The business community, conservationists and public land managers such as Glacier National Park should develop closer partnerships to maintain natural, economic and community values..	

F. Classification (3 minutes)

1. What is your age? _____
2. How long have you lived in Montana?
3. What town/neighborhood do you live in?
4. Do you currently plan to retire in Montana?

APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT INSTRUMENT

April 26, 2002

NAME AND ADDRESS

Dear NAME,

I am a graduate student at the University of Montana conducting a study this summer with business leaders in the Flathead region, researching the relationship between the Flathead economy and Glacier National Park. I am working with the National Parks Conservation Association, a national conservation group focused on protection of the national park system.

We believe that a healthy economy is an important underlying condition for maintaining a healthy National Park. We also suspect that Glacier and the region's natural amenities have something to do with the Flathead's strong population and economic growth. But we want to understand this better by listening to the people who know the local economy best – those actually leading businesses. To this end, I am conducting a series of one-on-one conversations with key local leaders.

I am writing to you today to request that we get together, either by phone or in person, to talk about your work at BUSINESS NAME, the Flathead economy, and Glacier National Park. Would you have about 30 minutes to speak with me informally and anonymously about these issues?

I will follow up with you by phone in the coming week to discuss your possible availability.

Thanks for your consideration,

Jason Lathrop
PO Box 4485
Whitefish, MT 59937
406-327-1501

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