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# **Montana Poll: Resident Attitudes Toward Tourism 1992 - 1999**

Research Note 26

March 2000

Funded by the Lodging Facility Use Tax

**Montana Poll:  
Resident Attitudes Toward Tourism  
1992 - 1999**

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## Introduction

One goal of Montana's 1998-2002 Strategic Plan for Travel and Tourism is to monitor resident attitudes toward tourism. The Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research (ITRR) is a stakeholder in this goal.

The Bureau of Business and Economic Research (BBER) conducts its poll of Montana residents three times per year (in May, September, and December). ITRR commissioned BBER to add three tourism-related questions to those polls. These questions relate to resident perceptions of tourism and attitudes/opinions about tourism in the state.

From 1991 through 1995, the tourism attitude questions were included in BBER's polls in May, September, and December each year. In 1995, December was chosen as the best time to ask tourism-related questions because it resulted in the most objective answer. In May, residents appeared to respond to questions in a more positive manner perhaps due to the economic stress of the shoulder season or the lack of visitors seen over the preceding months. September respondents may have been tired and weary of visitors from the summer tourism season, and those feelings could have biased the responses negatively. As a result, December was selected as the most unbiased timeframe for the questions to be added to the survey.

## Results

Residents were asked their level of agreement with three statements. Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from -2 (strongly disagree) to 0 (unsure) to +2 (strongly agree). A score of -1 could be interpreted as disagree, and a score of +1 could be interpreted as agree. The following section outlines the average responses of participants interviewed during December of each year. Figure 1 is a graphical illustration of responses. Refer to tables 1, 2, and 3 at the end of this document for a summary of responses.

### **Q1: The overall benefits of tourism outweigh the negative impacts.**

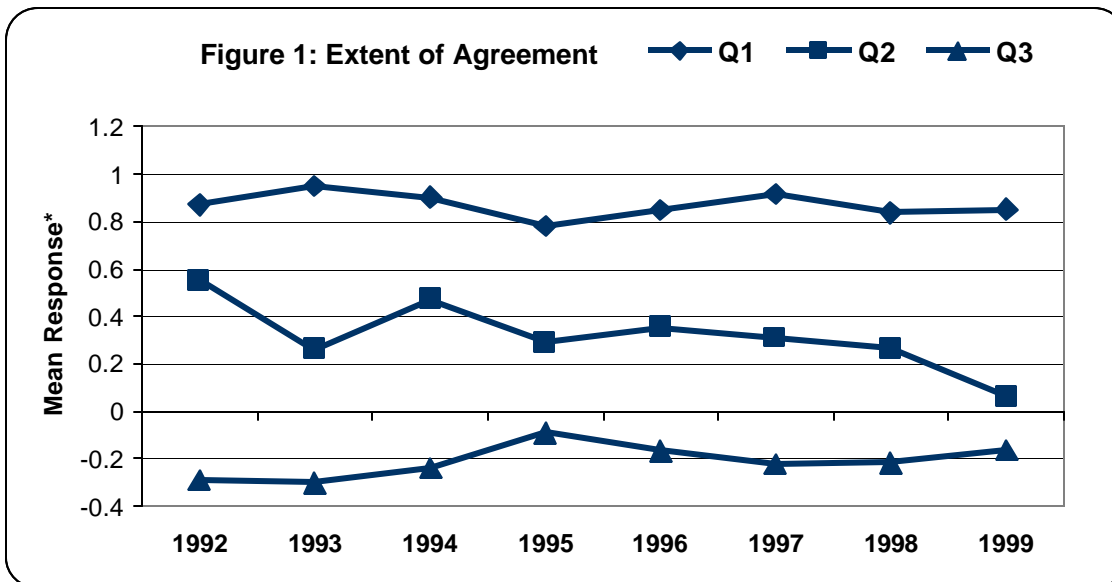
Responses to this question have remained the most stable of all three questions. It appears that Montana residents have agreed with that statement since 1992 and feel tourism is an overall benefit to Montana. The mean response has remained close to 1, with the only noticeable dip in the strength of agreement occurring in 1995 following years of rapid growth in nonresident visitation to Montana. While 1998 responses resulted in the first decline since 1995, 1999 responses were slightly more positive, indicating that a drastic decline in Montanans opinions regarding the benefits of tourism is unlikely.

**Q2: If tourism increases in Montana, the overall quality of life for Montana residents will improve.**

Responses have been less positive to this question as compared to question one. Although still slightly positive, the mean responses have been approaching 0 (unsure) in recent years and came the closest of all years in 1999. The mean, while easy to graph (Figure 1), does not necessarily indicate that residents are "unsure" about tourism's influence on quality of life in Montana. Instead, table 2 shows that there is a polarization among residents regarding opinions about tourism and quality of life. Since 1995, the amount of Montana residents that feel tourism increases quality of life has been approaching the amount of residents that feel tourism does not increase quality of life. In 1999 only 47 percent of residents felt that tourism increases quality of life, compared with 73 percent in 1992. The downward trend indicates that residents agree less and less that increased tourism will increase the quality of life in the state. 1999 responses came in as the lowest of all study years and should alert policy makers and tourism planners to the perceived effects of tourism on quality of life.

**Q3: In recent years, the state is becoming overcrowded because of more tourists.**

In this case, a negative response is a positive perception. Respondents have indicated slight disagreement with this statement since the 1995 dip (indicating that the state does *not* seem to be overcrowded because of more tourists), but the mean answers have been close to 0 (unsure). 1999 responses continued this trend but were less positive than the past three years, indicating that as Montana continues to experience steady growth in nonresident visitation each year (about 2% annually), the state is becoming more crowded little by little.



\* Mean response on a scale of -2 (strongly disagree) to 0 (unsure) to +2 (strongly agree).

## Implications

Overall, respondents agree that the overall benefits of tourism outweigh the negative impacts. However, Montana residents are showing concern for the overall quality of life in Montana should tourism increase. Similarly, residents are less positive in 1999 than in 1996, 1997, and 1998 about crowding in the state due to tourists.

The issues of tourism's impact on quality of life and crowding should be of concern to the state. There are three possible explanations for the declining responses in relation to quality of life. First, tourism could genuinely be having a less positive affect on the quality of life in Montana compared with years past. Quality of life issues that may be influenced are community conditions such as services, safety, cleanliness, infrastructure and roadway conditions, cost of living, crowding and congestion, and job opportunities. The condition of roads and highways, community appearance, and infrastructure are generally viewed as the community condition most likely to be adversely affected by tourism. However, a second explanation could be that there is a general lack of awareness among Montana residents of community factors that are positively impacted by tourism. Residents may be more likely to dwell on the negative aspects of tourism without fairly weighing those against the positive aspects of tourism. It is possible that Montana's residents are not able to identify the benefits of tourism in their communities or at the local level. Assessing resident awareness of the tourism industry and its impact on the state has become an important point of discussion in recent years and should be addressed by the tourism industry.

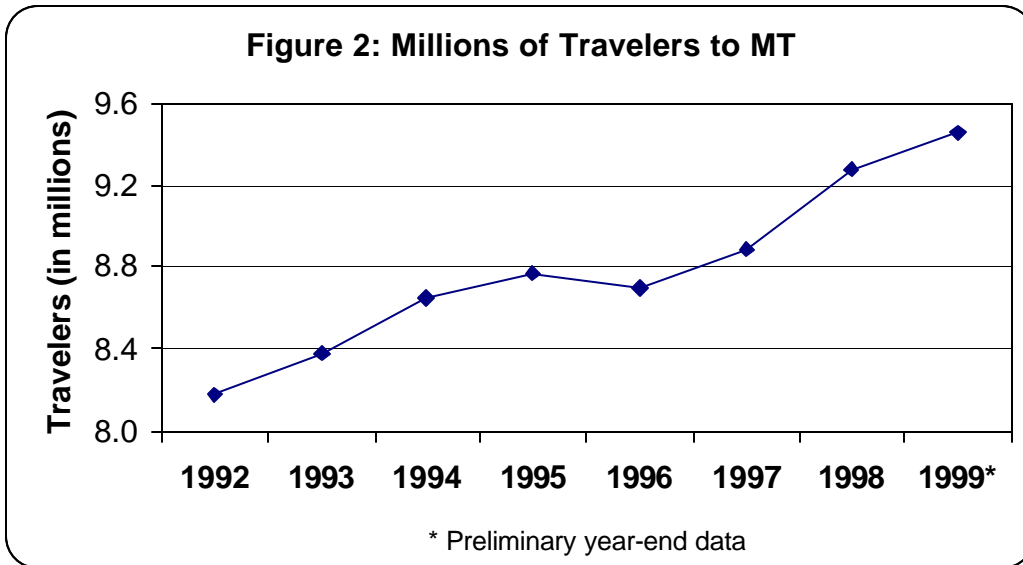
In addition to quality of life issues, overcrowding is becoming a more serious concern for Montana's residents. Use levels at recreation areas and crowding on highways should be examined and ways to disperse use should be explored.

## A Benchmark

Previous *Montana Poll* reports<sup>1</sup> have identified 1995 as a benchmark year, demonstrating the amount of growth residents are able to tolerate over a five-year period. In 1995, drastic declines in resident attitudes toward tourism were experienced following an increase of seven percent between 1992 and 1995 in nonresident visitation to the state. Between 1995 and 1999, Montana has experienced an increase of eight percent, indicating that the declines in resident attitudes in 1999 are not only warranted but were predictable.

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<sup>1</sup> *Montana Resident Attitudes Toward Tourism: Update 1991 - 1998*. ITRR Research Note 25, June 1999. Kim McMahon, ITRR, [www.forestry.umt.edu/itrr](http://www.forestry.umt.edu/itrr).



### Recommendations

With the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial Observance approaching, it will be increasingly important for Montana's tourism industry to take resident concerns into account. There may be potential for drastic increases in tourism for the Bicentennial. If this increase is not managed properly, the state may see a drastic decline in resident attitudes.

There needs to be an in-depth analysis of which elements of residents' quality of life are most affected by tourism in Montana. As noted earlier, resident agreement that tourism increases quality of life has declined drastically the past few years. This phenomenon needs to be further explored.

Further research would aid in determining the exact reasons why attitudes fall during years of visitation growth. Research should answer specific questions concerning recreation opportunities in the state, degree of satisfaction with each type of recreation activity, and issues related to quality of life. It may be possible to then pinpoint the type of impacts creating dissatisfaction, which would in turn give guidance for accommodating increased visitation and relieving resident dissatisfaction.

<b>Table 1: Extent of agreement that "the overall benefits of tourism outweigh its negatives" among Montana adults by monitoring period, in percent</b>								
	<b>Dec-92</b>	<b>Dec-93</b>	<b>Dec-94</b>	<b>Dec-95</b>	<b>Dec-96</b>	<b>Dec-97</b>	<b>Dec-98</b>	<b>Dec-99</b>
<b>Strongly Disagree (-2)</b>	3.8	9.7	7.4	9.5	8.4	7.7	4.5	6.1
<b>Disagree (-1)</b>	17.2	7.7	11.9	12.0	11.3	11.2	13.0	10.3
<b>Don't Know (0)</b>	6.4	7.0	6.4	8.5	8.4	6.0	10.1	10.6
<b>Agree (+1)</b>	33.1	29.0	32.1	30.7	31.2	32.3	39.2	38.5
<b>Strongly Agree (+2)</b>	39.5	46.6	42.2	39.3	40.8	42.9	33.2	34.5
<b>Mean Response *</b>	0.87	0.95	0.9	0.78	0.85	0.92	0.84	0.85
<b>Sample Size</b>	396	414	405	410	407	403	404	426

<b>Table 2: Extent of agreement that "increases in tourism will increase the quality of life" among Montana adults by monitoring period, in percent.</b>								
	<b>Dec-92</b>	<b>Dec-93</b>	<b>Dec-94</b>	<b>Dec-95</b>	<b>Dec-96</b>	<b>Dec-97</b>	<b>Dec-98</b>	<b>Dec-99</b>
<b>Strongly Disagree (-2)</b>	13.1	22.2	10.6	18.5	15.9	17.1	11.5	19.3
<b>Disagree (-1)</b>	14.1	16.4	22.0	16.3	17.8	18.3	21.6	20.5
<b>Don't Know (0)</b>	9.3	5.3	4.2	8.8	7.6	6.3	13.0	12.9
<b>Agree (+1)</b>	31.4	24.9	36.5	30.5	32.3	33.2	36.6	29.4
<b>Strongly Agree (+2)</b>	32.1	31.2	26.7	25.9	26.4	25.1	17.2	17.9
<b>Mean Response *</b>	0.55	0.26	0.47	0.29	0.36	0.31	0.26	0.061
<b>Sample Size</b>	396	414	405	410	409	398	404	425

<b>Table 3: Extent of agreement that "the state is more crowded because of tourists" among Montana adults by monitoring period, in percent.</b>								
	<b>Dec-92</b>	<b>Dec-93</b>	<b>Dec-94</b>	<b>Dec-95</b>	<b>Dec-96</b>	<b>Dec-97</b>	<b>Dec-98</b>	<b>Dec-99</b>
<b>Strongly Disagree (-2)</b>	24.9	34.3	27.7	20.7	27.4	21.5	18.0	21.4
<b>Disagree (-1)</b>	34.1	22.7	27.2	24.4	24.2	32.9	32.2	30.5
<b>Don't Know (0)</b>	2.8	4.8	3.0	4.9	7.1	6.2	163.9	7.5
<b>Agree (+1)</b>	20.8	15.0	25.9	25.1	20.3	25.0	25.4	24.2
<b>Strongly Agree (+2)</b>	17.4	23.2	16.3	24.9	21.0	14.4	10.5	16.4
<b>Mean Response *</b>	-0.29	-0.3	-0.24	-0.09	-0.17	-0.22	-0.22	-0.16
<b>Sample Size</b>	396	414	405	410	409	404	404	426

\* Mean responses to the 5-point Likert-type scale.  
 Responses range from -2 (strongly disagree) to 0 (unsure) to 2 (strongly agree).