

**Montana Poll:**  
**Resident Attitudes Toward Tourism**  
**1992 - 2000**

Research Report 2001-5

March 2001

Funded by the Lodging Facility Use Tax

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**Resident Attitudes Toward Tourism**  
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By Kim McMahon

University Travel Research Program  
The University of Montana  
32 Campus Drive #1234  
Missoula, MT 59812-1234  
(406) 243-5686  
[www.forestry.umt.edu/itr](http://www.forestry.umt.edu/itr)

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## Introduction

Montana's 1998-2002 Strategic Plan for Travel and Tourism cites monitoring resident attitudes toward tourism as one goal for the travel industry. The University Travel Research Program has supported this goal by polling Montana residents about their attitudes and opinions regarding tourism since 1991.

The Bureau of Business and Economic Research (BBER) at The University of Montana was commissioned to add three tourism-related questions to their poll of Montana residents each year beginning in 1991. These questions relate to resident perceptions of tourism and attitudes/opinions about tourism in the state.

The 1991 Montana Poll was conducted in August, while the 1992 poll was conducted in December. During 1993, 1994, and 1995, polling was conducted in May, September, and December. Following the 1995 polls, December was chosen as the best time to ask tourism-related questions because it resulted in the most objective answers. In May, residents appeared to respond to questions in a more positive manner, perhaps due to the lack of visitors seen during the preceding months. In September, respondents may have been weary of visitors from the summer tourism season, and those feelings could have biased the responses negatively. Therefore, polling was conducted in December each year beginning in 1996 as it represented the most unbiased timeframe to ask tourism questions. Since the tourism questions were asked in August of 1991, those responses have been excluded so that the timing of the questions is constant over the polling years.

## Results

Residents were asked their level of agreement or disagreement 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 is interpreted as disagree, and a score of +1 is interpreted as agree. The following section outlines the average responses of participants from 1992 to 2000. Figure 1 provides a graphical illustration of mean responses to each statement. Please refer to Tables 1, 2, and 3 at the end of this document for more detailed responses.

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

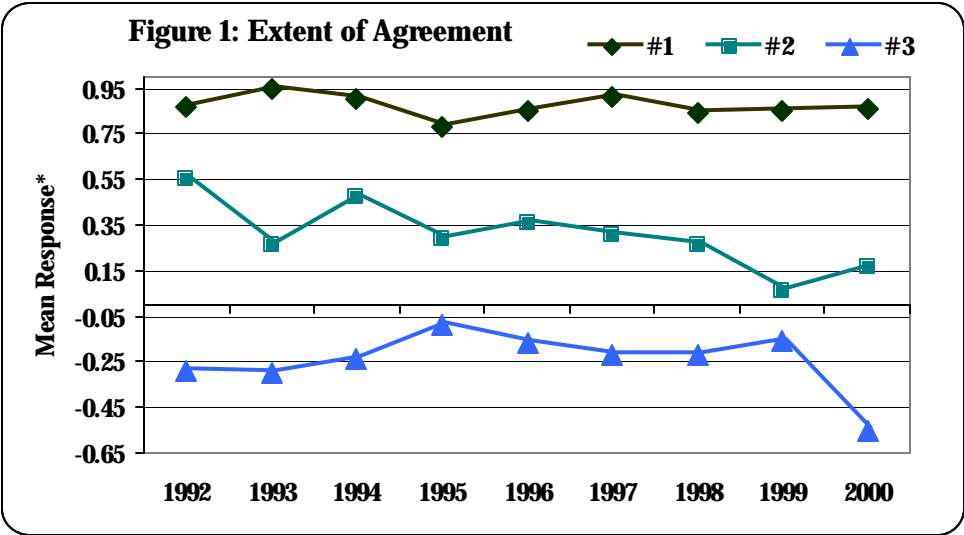
Responses to this statement have remained the most stable of the three. It appears that Montana residents have agreed with that statement since 1992 and feel tourism is an overall benefit to Montana. The mean response has remained close to 1, with the only noticeable dip in the strength of agreement occurring in 1995, following years of rapid growth in nonresident visitation to Montana. 1998 responses resulted in the first decline since 1995, but 1999 and 2000 responses have been level.

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

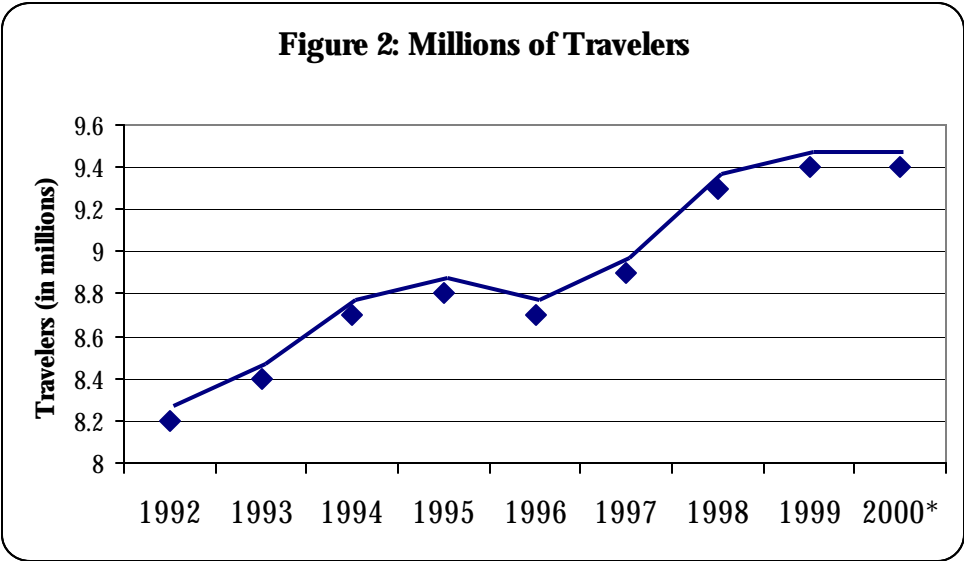
Through 1999, the mean responses to this statement had been approaching 0 (unsure). The mean graphed in Figure 1 makes it appear as though residents are relatively "unsure" about tourism's influence on quality of life in Montana. However, Table 2 shows that there is a polarization among residents regarding opinions about tourism and quality of life. In 2000, only 49 percent of residents felt that tourism increases quality of life, a decline of 14 percentage points from 63 percent in 1992. At the other end of the scale, 36 percent of year 2000 respondents felt that tourism does not increase the quality of life in Montana, an increase of 9 percentage points from 27 percent in 1992. Five percent that were in support of the statement in 1992 reported being "unsure" in 2000. While year 2000 responses to this statement rebounded from 1999, policy makers and tourism planners should be aware that there is increasing polarization of opinions regarding tourism's influence on quality of life.

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

In this case, a negative response reflects a positive perception or attitude. Respondents have historically indicated slight disagreement with this statement, indicating that the state does *not* seem to be overcrowded because of more tourists, and the mean answers have been close to 0 (unsure). However, 2000 responses were substantially more negative, numerically speaking, indicating that although Montana continues to experience steady growth in nonresident visitation each year (about 2% annually, Figure 2), residents do not feel the state is becoming overcrowded as a result of that visitation.



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



\* Preliminary year-end data.

## Implications

Respondents generally agree that the overall benefits of tourism outweigh the negative impacts and do not feel the state is becoming overcrowded because of tourists. However, Montana residents show concern for the overall quality of life in Montana should tourism increase.

The tourism industry appears to be doing a good job of dispersing some of the negative impacts of tourism - such as crowding - throughout the state. New marketing campaigns focused on the less-visited parts of the state appear to be paying off, as crowding is apparently becoming less of an issue for Montana residents. Likewise, Montana residents perceive the overall benefits of tourism to outweigh the negative impacts. Consistent responses to this statement are good in light of the fact that nonresident visitation to Montana has continued to increase.

The issue of tourism's impact on quality of life is a difficult topic to address. There are two possible explanations for increasingly negative responses to this statement. First, tourism could genuinely be having a less positive effect on the quality of life in Montana compared with years past. Quality of life issues include 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 conditions 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, such as funding for roads and highways, as well as state parks and recreation areas. It is possible that Montana's residents are not able to identify the benefits of tourism in their communities. This could partly be due to media exposure that focuses on problems with the industry while failing to fairly represent its benefits.

Findings from the year 2000 Community Tourism Assessment Program resident attitude survey<sup>1</sup> supports this explanation. A random sample of Montana residents was surveyed about attitudes and opinions regarding tourism. One section of that survey focused on how informed residents are about the tourism industry in general, as well as economic, environmental, and quality of life issues. Results of the survey show that less than one third of respondents (31%) considered themselves to be more than "somewhat" informed about Montana's travel industry in general. Similarly, only 26 percent of respondents said they had been exposed to more than "some" information regarding the economic impacts of the travel industry, 28 percent indicated they had been exposed to more than "some" information regarding tourism's influence on environmental conditions. Also, less than one fourth (22%) of residents indicated they had been exposed to more than "some" information regarding tourism's influence on quality of life. Based on the evidence that Montanans are becoming more unsure about tourism's influence on quality of life and the fact that most are not well informed about the tourism industry or the industry's influence on quality of life, it is reasonable to conclude that residents simply lack the information necessary to determine whether or not increased tourism will impact their quality of life.

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<sup>1</sup> Dillon, T. Exploring Tourism Development Potential: Resident Attitudes in Montana. University Travel Research Program, Research Report 2001-4, March 2000.

## **Recommendations**

First, the travel industry needs to launch a public awareness campaign geared toward educating its residents about the benefits of tourism. Resident knowledge of the industry will become increasingly important as legislative efforts to fund elements of the tourism industry are put to public vote. Without knowledge of the current benefits of tourism, residents are unable to make the connection between improved quality of life and a higher bed tax, for example.

In addition, the upcoming Lewis and Clark Bicentennial Observance makes it very important for Montana's tourism industry to take resident concerns into account. There is potential for dramatic increases in visitor numbers for the Bicentennial. If this increase is not managed properly, the state may see a drastic decline in resident attitudes toward tourism.

**Table 1: Extent of agreement or disagreement that "the overall benefits of tourism outweigh the negative impacts" among Montana adults by monitoring period, in percent**

	<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>Dec-00</b>
<b>Strongly Disagree (-2)</b>	4%	10%	7%	10%	8%	8%	5%	6%	8%
<b>Disagree (-1)</b>	17%	8%	12%	12%	11%	11%	13%	10%	12%
<b>Don't Know (0)</b>	6%	7%	6%	9%	8%	6%	10%	11%	10%
<b>Agree (+1)</b>	33%	29%	32%	31%	31%	32%	39%	39%	28%
<b>Strongly Agree (+2)</b>	40%	47%	42%	39%	41%	43%	33%	35%	43%
<b>Mean Response *</b>	0.87	0.95	0.90	0.78	0.85	0.92	0.84	0.85	0.86
<b>Sample Size</b>	396	414	405	410	407	403	404	426	410

**Table 2: Extent of agreement or disagreement that "if tourism increases in Montana, the overall quality of life for Montana residents will improve" among Montana adults by monitoring period, in percent.**

	<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>Dec-00</b>
<b>Strongly Disagree (-2)</b>	13%	22%	11%	19%	16%	17%	12%	19%	18%
<b>Disagree (-1)</b>	14%	16%	22%	16%	18%	18%	22%	21%	18%
<b>Don't Know (0)</b>	9%	5%	4%	9%	8%	6%	13%	13%	15%
<b>Agree (+1)</b>	31%	25%	37%	31%	32%	33%	37%	29%	28%
<b>Strongly Agree (+2)</b>	32%	31%	27%	26%	26%	25%	17%	18%	22%
<b>Mean Response *</b>	0.55	0.26	0.47	0.29	0.36	0.31	0.26	0.06	0.17
<b>Sample Size</b>	396	414	405	410	409	398	404	425	410

**Table 3: Extent of agreement or disagreement that "in recent years, the state is becoming overcrowded because of more tourists" among Montana adults by monitoring period, in percent.**

	<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>Dec-00</b>
<b>Strongly Disagree (-2)</b>	25%	34%	28%	21%	27%	22%	18%	21%	33%
<b>Disagree (-1)</b>	34%	23%	27%	24%	24%	33%	32%	31%	32%
<b>Don't Know (0)</b>	3%	5%	3%	5%	7%	6%	14%	8%	7%
<b>Agree (+1)</b>	21%	15%	26%	25%	20%	25%	25%	24%	15%
<b>Strongly Agree (+2)</b>	17%	23%	16%	25%	21%	14%	11%	16%	14%
<b>Mean Response *</b>	-0.29	-0.30	-0.24	-0.09	-0.17	-0.22	-0.22	-0.16	-0.55
<b>Sample Size</b>	396	414	405	410	409	404	404	426	410

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