

The University of
Montana



**Montana Resident
Attitudes
Toward Tourism**

Update:

1992 - 1997

Research Note 23

February 1998

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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 related to resident perceptions of tourism and attitudes/opinions about tourism in the state.

From 1991 through 1995, the attitude questions were included in all three polls 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 past 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. 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.

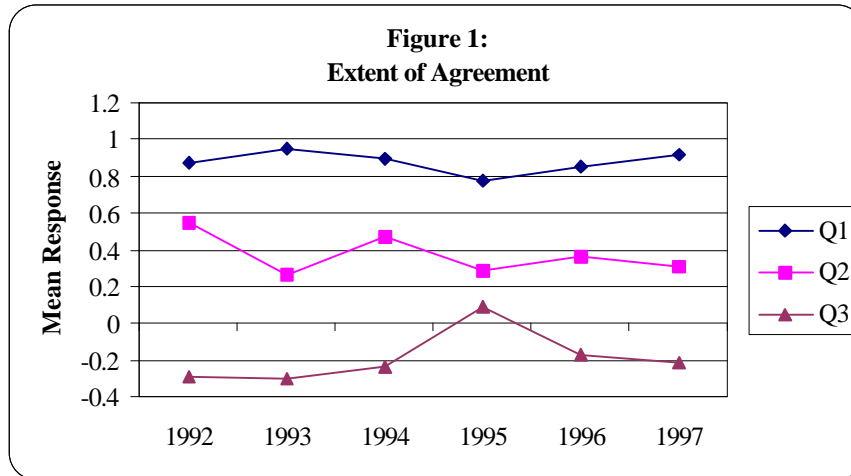
Responses to this question have remained the most stable of all three questions. It appears that Montana residents have agreed with that statement since 1992. The mean response has remained close to 1 with the only noticeable dip in the strength of agreement in 1995. Residents seemingly feel tourism is an overall benefit to Montana.

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 closer to 0 (unsure). This average, however, does not account for the great amount of variation in responses observed throughout the study period. Nonetheless, responses to this question have remained fairly stable since December 1995, indicating that residents feel tourism will increase their quality of life.

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

Responses since December 1993 have remained relatively stable, but the 1995 responses were noticeably different from preceding years. Respondents have indicated slight disagreement with this statement since the 1995 dip, but the mean answers have been close to 0 (unsure). This is another indication that residents perceive tourism to be a positive industry in Montana.

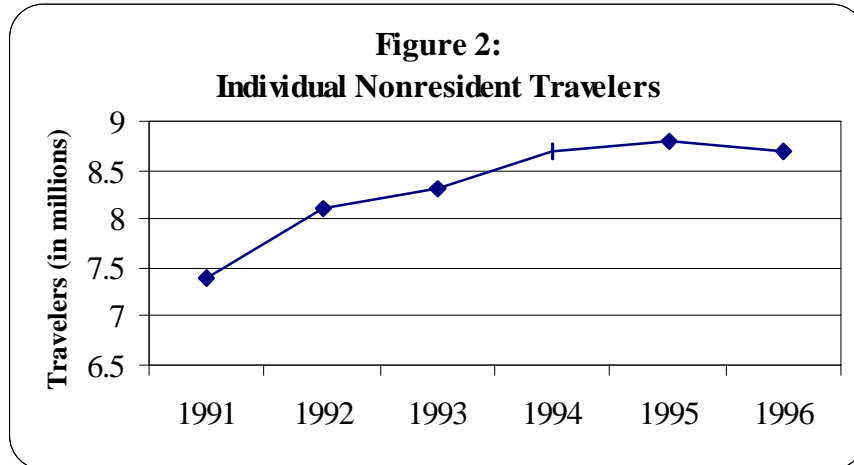


Summary

Overall during the last 6 years, respondents have generally agreed with the statement that the overall benefits of tourism outweigh the negatives. Respondents slightly agree that increases in tourism will improve the overall quality of life for Montana residents, and they slightly disagree that the state is becoming overcrowded because of more tourists.

In general, responses have remained relatively stable through the 6-year period. The main exception was 1995 when responses for questions one and two were less positive, and responses for question three were more negative. These results indicate that something happened in 1995 that caused respondents to view tourism more negatively than in the past and in the years beyond.

By looking at the history of nonresident visitation, perhaps an explanation can be found and applied to future planning. Montana's visitation numbers peaked in 1995. There was an 18-percent increase in visitation numbers from 1991 to 1995 (Figure 2). By 1995, five years of visitation increases had been observed, with no slow-down in sight. This apparently started to wear on the residents. Most people would have difficulty adjusting to such a rapid change in visitor numbers. Therefore, when residents were queried in December 1995, their responses were beginning to show frustration with what appeared to be uncontrollable growth. It is possible that residents were not able to utilize resources in traditional ways due to higher tourist numbers. Perhaps there was difficulty finding campsites or motel rooms, or the roads seemed too crowded. Respondents had more opportunities to run into visitors, and thus may have had more negative experiences. In the minds of the residents, some had had enough by 1995.



Therefore, 1995 could be viewed as a benchmark year demonstrating what residents are able to tolerate in terms of tourism growth over a five-year period. There was a lag period between demand and supply which created frustration for those who “couldn't get in”.

Since 1995, tourism growth has leveled. A decline in visitation was experienced in 1996, with only slow growth in 1997. This allowed residents to experience a “breather”, and adjust to the new level of tourism in the state. Following this, attitudes toward tourism became more positive.

With this in mind, the Montana tourism industry needs to be aware of the growth patterns occurring in the state. Many residents use campgrounds, lakes, and fishing areas in the summer. With no new areas built to accommodate tourism growth, all users are pushed into existing sites. Therefore, attitudes toward tourism are negatively affected by residents' inability to use Montana's recreation amenities.

Recommendations

If the Montana tourism industry desires continued support from the residents of Montana, there needs to be a serious analysis of where the conflicts are occurring, and there must be an attempt made to build the infrastructure necessary to accommodate these demands. For example, if campgrounds are too full on Forest Service lands, the tourism industry should assist the Forest Service in developing new campgrounds or expanding current ones. If the Park Service is closing campgrounds, then the tourism industry should assist with the re-opening of high-demand areas. Such efforts could be as simple as providing support at the national level through letters to Congress or as difficult as deciding to place dollars into an area that is experiencing growth.

Further research is needed to determine the exact reasons why attitudes were slipping after years of visitation growth. The research should answer specific questions concerning outdoor recreation opportunities in the state and degree of satisfaction with each type of recreation activity. It may be possible to then pinpoint the type of recreation related to dissatisfaction. This, in turn, will give guidance for the next step: accommodating increased visitation and correcting the problem of resident dissatisfaction.

Table 1. Extent of agreement that “the overall benefits of tourism outweigh its negatives” among Montana adults by monitoring period, in percent

	Aug-91	Dec-92	May-93	Sep-93	Dec-93	May-94	Sep-94	Dec-94	May-95	Sep-95	Dec-95	Dec-96	Dec-97
Strongly Disagree	4.7	3.8	9.7	7.4	9.7	8.5	9	7.4	10.9	9.7	9.5	8.4	7.7
Disagree	8.7	17.2	8.7	13.6	7.7	10.4	12.2	11.9	9.2	9.2	12	11.3	11.2
Don't Know	13.9	6.4	9.2	13.4	7	6.5	9	6.4	10	12.4	8.5	8.4	6
Agree	54.1	33.1	20.8	30.1	29	28.6	27.5	32.1	25.9	34.3	30.7	31.2	32.3
Strongly Agree	18.6	39.5	51.6	35.6	46.6	46.1	42.3	42.2	44	34.3	39.3	40.8	42.9
Mean Response *	0.73	0.87	0.96	0.73	0.95	0.93	0.82	0.9	0.83	0.74	0.78	0.848	0.916
Sample Size	1128	396	387	424	414	436	411	405	402	411	410	407	403

*Mean response to the 5-point Likert-type scale. Responses range from -2=strongly disagree, 0=unsure, 2= strongly agree)

Table 2. Extent of agreement that “increases in tourism will increase the quality of life” among Montana adults by monitoring period, in percent

	Aug-91	Dec-92	May-93	Sep-93	Dec-93	May-94	Sep-94	Dec-94	May-95	Sep-95	Dec-95	Dec-96	Dec-97
Strongly Disagree	7	13.1	17	22.9	22.2	15.9	20.7	10.6	22.1	22.9	18.5	15.9	17.1
Disagree	23.5	14.1	18	17.7	16.4	16.2	24.3	22	12.9	19.7	16.3	17.8	18.3
Don't Know	23.1	9.3	10.7	11.9	5.3	6.5	6.6	4.2	10.2	9	8.8	7.6	6.3
Agree	39.5	31.4	22.2	26.5	24.9	34.9	29.4	36.5	27.9	32.1	30.5	32.3	33.2
Strongly Agree	7	32.1	32.1	21	31.2	26.6	19	26.7	26.9	16.3	25.9	26.4	25.1
Mean Response *	0.16	0.55	0.34	0.05	0.26	0.4	0.02	0.47	0.24	0.01	0.29	0.355	0.309
Sample Size	1128	396	387	424	414	436	411	405	402	411	410	409	398

*Mean response to the 5-point Likert-type scale. Responses range from -2=strongly disagree, 0=unsure, 2= strongly agree)

Table 3. Extent of agreement that “the state is more crowded because of tourists” among Montana adults by monitoring period, in percent.

	Aug-91	Dec-92	May-93	Sep-93	Dec-93	May-94	Sep-94	Dec-94	May-95	Sep-95	Dec-95	Dec-96	Dec-97
Strongly Disagree	13.3	24.9	42.8	24.4	34.3	21.9	27.7	27.7	27.1	17.3	20.7	27.4	21.5
Disagree	56.6	34.1	22.3	26.1	22.7	28.1	26	27.2	25.4	25.3	24.4	24.2	32.9
Don't Know	8.8	2.8	6	5.2	4.8	4.8	5.6	3	6	7.1	4.9	7.1	6.2
Agree	14.9	20.8	14.2	23.2	15	22.8	20	25.9	20.4	27.5	25.1	20.3	25
Strongly Agree	6.4	17.4	14.7	21.1	23.2	22.4	20.7	16.3	21.1	22.9	24.9	21	14.4
Mean Response *	-0.56	-0.29	-0.64	-0.09	-0.3	-0.04	-0.2	-0.24	-0.17	0.13	*.09	-0.166	-0.223
Sample Size	1128	396	387	424	414	436	411	405	402	411	410	409	404
*Mean response to the 5-point Likert-type scale. Responses range from -2=strongly disagree, 0=unsure, 2= strongly agree)													